

5782 – Leviticus 25:26 - B'har (On Mount [Sinai])

¹The LORD said to Moses **on Mount Sinai**, ²"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, **the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD**. ³For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. **But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. ⁵Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.** ⁶Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, ⁷as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

1. וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר:

- a. By naming this *parashah* with the single word *Behar* ("at the mountain") rather than with the full phrase *Behar Sinai* ("at Mount Sinai"), **Jewish tradition has chosen to emphasize the fact that the Torah was given on a mountain, rather than emphasize what mountain it was given on.**

Yet, we are told in the Midrash that God chose to give the Torah on Mount Sinai because it was the *lowest*—i.e., humblest—mountain.¹ But **if God meant to teach us humility, logic would insist that He give the Torah in a valley, or at most on level ground. What is the paradox implied in the lowest of mountains?**

Although the importance of humility and self-abnegation before God's will cannot be overemphasized, integral to serving God is also a certain measure of pride.² **A totally selfless person will feel powerless when he encounters the challenges, doubts, cynicism, and mockery of a world that obscures Godliness.** After all, what credibility does he have to stand up against these and oppose them? Hence, we must all be "mountains"—we must master the art of asserting ourselves as the representatives of God on earth. This lesson is so fundamental, so important, that the *Shulchan Aruch*,³ the Code of Jewish Law, opens with it, as if to imply that our fulfillment of all

the laws that follow depends upon internalizing the awareness that we must never be ashamed in the face of scoffers, but boldly assert our commitment to God's laws at all times.

1) 2Corinthians 12:11-11

¹¹I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, **for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing.**

2. כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ—*When you come into the land.* According to our Sages, this law came into force only after the land had been conquered and divided, that is, fourteen years after it was first occupied (*Zevachim* ["Sacrifices"] 11b). Therefore, **the first seven year *Shemittah* ("to release") cycle began in the fifteenth year after the people of Israel entered the land.** The twenty-first year was the first *Shemittah* year. Accordingly, since the festival of Succos ends on the twenty-first day of Tishrei, we may view the celebration of the *Shemittah* and the subsequent *Yovel* year as additional items in the list of festivals presented in the previous *sidrah*.⁴

3. וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ—*The land shall observe a Sabbath rest.* The laws concerning the *Shemittah* and *Yovel* ("Jubilee") **are specially fitted to the ideal circumstances that existed for a limited time in the Land of Israel.** Indeed, when Hashem proclaims that there will be sufficient harvests for the three coming years, it implies a spectacular and miraculous set of circumstances occurring every seven years in the Land of Israel.

It seems doubtful that these special conditions occurred for longer than just a few centuries, because the Torah states in regard to the *Yovel* year, **proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants (v. 10). The condition that the Jewish people live throughout the land came to an end once the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Menashe were driven from their territories in the time of Senacherib (Arachin 32b). Only when the majority of the Jewish people are reunited in their land will the mitzvos of *Shemittah* and *Yovel* come into effect again.** Indeed, because of their exceptional significance from the religious, social, and economic points of view, **these laws are applicable only to a nation-state that is totally prepared to be shaped and molded by the will of God.**

- a. Worldwide Jewish population—15.2 million: 6.9 million in Israel, 8.9 million outside Israel.

1 *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel*, Judges 5:5, Psalms 68:17; *Midrash Tehillim* 68:17; *Likutei Torah* 3:15b ff.

2 See *Sotah* 5a; *Shabbat* 67a ("Every Jew is a prince/ss" [i.e., God's child]); *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *Orach Chayim* 1:1.

3 The *Shulchan Aruch* ("Set Table"), is the most widely consulted of the various legal codes in Judaism. It was authored in Tzfat Joseph Karo in 1563 and published in Venice two years later. Together with its commentaries, it is the most widely accepted compilation of Jewish law ever written.

4 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Vayikra*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd), pp. 296-314.

b. As soon as the Jews settled in the Holy Land,⁽¹⁾ they began to count and observe seven-year cycles. Every cycle would culminate in a Sabbatical year,⁽²⁾ known as *Shemittah*,⁽³⁾ literally: “to release.”⁵

c. **The year following the destruction of the second Holy Temple was the first year of a seven-year Sabbatical cycle.** In the Jewish calendar, counting from Creation, this was the year 3829 (68–69 CE on the secular calendar). **By counting sevens from then**, we see that the next *Shemittah* year will be the year 5782 after Creation, which runs from September 7, 2021–September 25, 2022.

(1) The first cycle started after the years of conquering and dividing the land, in the fifteenth year after they crossed the Jordan River (1258 BCE).

(2) While the Torah ordinarily counts months starting from Nissan (in the spring), the years of this cycle—and the *Shemittah*, too—begin with Rosh Hashanah, at the start of the autumn month of Tishrei.

(3) When all the twelve tribes lived in Israel, in their ancestral estates, the year following seven complete *Shemittah* cycles—the fiftieth year—was observed as *Yovel*, the Jubilee year. During *Yovel*, too, the land was not worked, as during *Shemittah*. In addition, during the *Yovel* year all slaves were freed, and all fields and houses sold during the past fifty years were returned to their original owners. Unlike *Shemittah*, however, **the Yovel year is no longer observed.**

d. When Is the Next Jubilee Year? By Baruch S. Davidson⁶

In short, the answer to your question is that **the Jubilee year is currently not observed or commemorated.** The reasons for this are complex and involve many different opinions on the matter. In the following lines I will attempt to briefly relay the relevant issues.

According to biblical law, **the Jubilee is only observed when all twelve tribes of the Jewish nation are living in Israel**, as is derived from the verse, “*And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live on it*” (Lev 25:10), which implies that **the Jubilee is only sanctified when “all who live on it”—meaning, all who are meant to be living there—are in the Land of Israel.** Furthermore, **the Jubilee is only observed when every tribe is living in the specific part of the land which it was allotted when the Land of Israel was divided.** However, some are of the opinion that the Jubilee is observed as long as there is a partial representation of each tribe, even if most of the tribe is not in Israel.

In the 6th century BCE, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and sent the majority of its population into exile ...

We are certain that before that point in time the Jubilee was regularly observed. We also know that, **with the destruction of the**

Second Temple and the disbandment of the Sanhedrin (supreme rabbinical court), we ceased to mark the Jubilee year in any form ...

According to the opinion that partial representation of each tribe is sufficient to fulfill the scriptural requirement, biblically mandated Jubilees were fully observed throughout the (Biblical period ... even when) there remained a small representation of each tribe in Israel.

However, according to the first opinion mentioned above, with the exile of the Northern Kingdom the required condition for the Jubilee to be sanctified was lost. Thus, **the last time there was a biblical requirement to observe the Jubilee was about 150 years before the destruction of the First Temple.**

The question remains, however, whether according to this opinion Jubilee years were designated or observed during this time by rabbinic injunction. This is the subject of debate amongst the sages.

As mentioned above, though, today the Jubilee year is neither designated nor observed.⁽³⁾

And now for the answer to your question: “When is the next Jubilee year?”

We eagerly await the day when G-d will bring our entire nation back to our homeland—including the (“lost members” of the) ten (northern) tribes—and we will again resume observing the Jubilee year, as well as so many other mitzvot which we are incapable of performing until that awaited day.⁽⁴⁾

(3) **Although the laws of *shemittah* are observed in Israel to this very day, the Jubilee year is not designated or observed.** There are many reasons for this. Some of them: a) The Jubilee only affected the *shemittah* cycle when the *shemittah* was established and declared by the Sanhedrin, **as opposed to today when it is automatically programmed into the perpetual Jewish calendar.** b) The observance of *shemittah* today is only a rabbinic decree, and therefore the Jubilee year does not affect its cycle. c) **No commemoration is in order when there is no Sanhedrin**, whose participation in the declaration of the Jubilee year was integral. In fact, it was the Sanhedrin’s blast of the *shofar* (ram’s horn) on Yom Kippur which signaled the entry of the Jubilee year.

(4) The information in this response is taken from *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, vol. XXII, “Yovel.”

The *Shemittah* year is first of all characterized as a Sabbath of Hashem. The idea implied by the institution of *Shemittah* is immediately evident: **it is a tribute from the Jewish people who periodically give back their homeland to the One from Whom they received it.** This expresses the conviction that the country can become the complete property of the people only insofar as God grants it to them. **The weekly Sabbath and the Sabbatical Year are on the same plane; they both reveal the eminently Jewish concept of God as the absolute Master of Creation. God is not only at the origin of all things; he re-**

5 https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/562077/jewish/What-Is-Shemittah.htm

6 https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/513212/jewish/When-Is-the-Next-Jubilee-Year.htm

mains the absolute Owner of the Universe. To give back to Him the tithes to our week's accomplishments or our year's produce signifies our recognition of God as the One Who forever holds all the power of productivity and Who alone is the source of all blessing.

4. *God ... remains the absolute Owner of the Universe*

a. Deuteronomy 10:14

¹⁴To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it.

b. Psalms 24:1

¹Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it ...

c. Psalms 50:7-12

⁷Listen, my people, and I will speak; I will testify against you, Israel: I am God, your God. ⁸I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. ⁹I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰for **every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.** ¹¹I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. ¹²If I were hungry I would not tell you, for **the world is mine, and all that is in it.**

d. Matthew 6:24-27

²⁴No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. ²⁵Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶**Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.** Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

5. שְׁבִיטָה לְאֶרֶץ—*A complete rest for the land ... Shemittah* and

Yovel have great significance ... including the moral, agricultural, national, spiritual, **and even messianic or cosmological (perspective).** (Each of these is described below.) Nevertheless, this great mitzvah is valid only when all its inhabitants live in the land (v. 10). As long as this is not so, Israel's ideal of unity cannot be achieved.

Some of the moral aspects of this mitzvah are described by *Sefer HaChinuch*⁷ (84) in the following terms: Hashem has commanded us

not only to let the land rest for this year **but to abolish all ownership rights over its produce.** **This is to remind man that the properties of the soil alone are not sufficient to enable it to put forth its bounty.** The land has an ultimate Master Who alone makes everything possible. As evidence, when He so desires, He commands those who are in possession of the land to abandon its produce.

The practice of this mitzvah has other advantages as well, continues *Sefer HaChinuch*. Because **the mitzvah consists essentially of giving to others without hope of reward, it develops generosity of spirit.** It also increases trust in God—indeed, the person who has the courage to forsake the produce of his land and the inheritance of his fathers every seven years, and manages to do this all his life, will surely never succumb to greed or to distrust in God's word.

a. Luke 6:30-36

³⁰Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, **do not demand it back.** ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴And if you lend to those **from whom you expect repayment,** what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and **lend to them without expecting to get anything back.** Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

1) Psalms 37:26

²⁶The (righteous) are always generous and lend freely; their children will be a blessing.

2) Proverbs 19:17

¹⁷Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done.

*Kli Yakar*⁸ tells us that the *Shemittah* year also has in it an element of peace and goodwill. In that year, no one, not even the poorest person,

reasons behind them. In his introduction, the author explains that he wrote the book to “awaken the hearts” of his teenage son and his peers, hoping to foster in them a sense of connection to the commandments. For each commandment, the author cites a biblical source, addresses the philosophical underpinnings of the commandment, presents a brief overview of the details of its observance, and summarizes the commandment's applicability. The work remains popular today, especially in educational settings.

8 Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550–1619) was a rabbi and Torah commentator, best known for his Torah commentary *Keli Yekar* (“Precious Object”).

7 The *Sefer HaChinuch* (“Book of Education”) is an anonymous work written in 13th-century Spain that clearly details the 613 commandments and explains the

sows or harvests. **No one has directly contributed to the produce of the seventh year and, accordingly, no one has any rights of ownership over it.** That surely provides a reason for peace and understanding since most quarrels originate from the instinct for ownership, an instinct that makes one person after another say, "All that belongs to me." During the seventh year, at least, **everyone is equal and that is the secret of peace.**

b. Exodus 30:12—from *Ki Tissa* (When you take [a census])

¹²"**When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted.**

1) "People differ in their intellect, character and talents, in the quantity of their material resources and the timbre of their spiritual sensitivities. **But all are equal in the very basis of their bond with G-d:** the intrinsic commitment to Him that resides at the core of their souls. **So while every man contributed to the making of the various components of the Sanctuary in accordance with their individual capacity, all gave equally of the silver of which its foundation was made.** As regards the *foundation* of the relationship between man and G-d, the "rich man" cannot give more, and the "pauper" cannot give less (The Lubavitcher Rebbe).

c. Galatians 3:28

²⁸**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,** for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.

From the agricultural viewpoint, Rambam holds that the *Shemittah* year contributes to the physical productivity of the land (Guide for the Perplexed 339). During the year that the land lies fallow, its fertility is restored. However, there are many Sages who strongly oppose this view, in particular Abarbanel.⁹ Ibn Ezra¹⁰ writes (Deuteronomy 31:12) that the purpose of *Shemittah* is to **enable the people to study Torah for an entire year out of every seven**, in the same way that the Sabbath permits them to study Torah for an entire day in the week ...

R' Kook,¹¹ in his introduction to *Shabbos HaAretz*, focuses on the spiritual perspective. Thus, he sees various means of purifying the soul in the halt that is imposed on the usual working conditions during the *Shemittah* year. The normal pursuit of one's livelihood and business

transactions [including paying back debts] are all interrupted at this time in a renunciation of the "sacrilege of excessive worry about individual property." Thus, in the seventh year the supernatural quality of the Jewish soul is allowed to blossom once more.

For both the people and the land, *Shemittah* brings a year of complete rest and tranquility, a year without quarrel or hostility. *He shall not demand payment from his neighbor because Hashem's release has been proclaimed (Deu 15:2).* During this year the right of ownership with its insistent claims is subdued; a supernatural peace descends over every living thing. *The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat, for you, for your slave and for your maidservant; and for your laborer and your resident who dwell with you; and for your animal and for the beast that is in your land, shall all its crop be to eat (vs. 6-7).* The usual impositions and greed of commerce fade away; to eat, says the text, not to sell.

Generosity rules, as well as gratitude for the Divine blessings. **The produce of the land must not be wasted; it must be to eat and not to waste** (*Pesachim* 52b). Man returns to his natural healthy state, no longer needing remedies for illnesses that result principally from the imbalance between his spiritual and physical nature: *to eat* and *not to take medicines* (*Succah* 40a). A spirit of holiness and nobility pervades, a complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for Hashem (v. 4).

For the messianic and cosmological concept of *Shemittah*, we look to Ramban who speaks of the world coming to an end, followed by a new beginning. In this he differs with Rambam who asserts (in chapters 28 and 29, in Book Two of the *Guide for the Perplexed*) that this world is eternal and without end. In support of his view, Rambam refers to the words of David and Solomon, e.g. וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת, *the world exists forever* (Eccl1:4). In contrast, Ramban focuses on the teaching of our Sages that human history unfolds in three epochs of 2,000 years each, **followed by the seventh millennium, which is a thousand years of total Sabbath and peace**—the Messianic era (*Avodah Zarah* 9a) ...

Ramban argues further that this circumscribed concept of existence goes back to Moses, who heard it from God, and **that is the reason for the *Shemittah* and *Yovel* years.** The view of Ramban is supported by the words that we say in our morning prayers, וְאַחֲרֵי כָּלֹת הַכֹּל *after everything will have ended, God will still reign in His grandeur.*

d. Revelation 20:1-15

¹And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ²He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, **and bound him for a thousand years.** ³He threw him into the Abyss, and locked

⁹ Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel (1437-1508), commonly referred to as Abarbanel was a Portuguese Jewish statesman, philosopher, Bible commentator, and financier.

¹⁰ Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (c. 1090-c. 1168) was one of the most distinguished Jewish biblical commentators and philosophers of the Middle Ages..

¹¹ Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), known as Rav Kook, and also by the acronym HaRaAYaH, was an Orthodox rabbi, and the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine.

and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore **until the thousand years were ended**. After that, he must be set free for a short time. ⁴I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Yeshua and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life **and reigned with Messiah a thousand years ...** **they will be priests of God and of Messiah and will reign with him for a thousand years.**

e. Daniel 7:25-28

²⁵(The Anti-Messiah) will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time. ²⁶"But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. ²⁷Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. **His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom**, and all rulers will worship and obey him.' ²⁸"This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

f. Micah 4:1-4

¹In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ²Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. **They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks**. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. **Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid**, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

1) 1Kings 4:25

²⁵During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree.

^{25:8}"Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. ⁹Then have

the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.

¹⁰Consecrate the fiftieth year **and proclaim liberty throughout the land** to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. ¹¹The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines.

1. וְקִרְאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאַרְץ יִשְׂרָאֵל—**Proclaim freedom throughout the land**. Because the word yng designates both the land and the earth (*Kiddushin* 38b), it follows allegorically that freedom will reign over the earth only when it becomes a driving force in the Holy Land. Freedom on earth is dependent on freedom in the Land of Israel: as long as Jews cannot bring peace and liberty to Israel, the other nations can have no hope of seeing a lasting resolution to their own economic and social problems.

a. Isaiah 61:1-2

¹The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, **to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness** for the prisoners, ²to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn ...

b. Luke 4:15-21

¹⁵(Yeshua) was teaching in their synagogues, **and everyone praised him**. ¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, **as was his custom**. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me **to proclaim freedom for the prisoners** and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began by saying to them, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"