

## Parshas Behar

### PRESERVING FREEDOM

The Ramban says that Shmita and the Yovel cycle are fundamental mitzvos. Something is lost on us today – slavery has mostly vanished from earth, and Shmita and Yovel have long been missing large chunks of their key halachos for thousands of years.

Consider the fact that when the Ramban classified it as fundamental, Yovel hadn't been properly marked for centuries. What about it is fundamental when the laws associated with it seems so antiquated, archaic, and arguably irrelevant?

The Pnei Yehoshua explains that Yovel is not just a time when slaves go free – it is a Yom Tov that celebrates freedom and liberty. The Sfas Emes notes that the nation was born by being liberated from the crucible of Egypt.

After millennia of exiles, restrictions on movement, bans, pogroms, genocide, and general oppression, society has developed to give all people human and civil rights; Jews can now practice Judaism relatively freely, to the extent that younger people today have little idea of what not being free means. While progress is undoubtedly a good thing, we must be vigilant not to take our rights for granted.

One of the brachos said daily is שלא עשני עבד – perhaps this alludes the principle that we do not take our unprecedented liberties for granted.

Yovel was dedicated to displaying our gratitude that we are always able to serve God – indicated by the shofar being blown. It becomes abundantly clear why it is classified a foundational mitzva; freedom is a wonderful thing that we are very grateful for. But moreover, perhaps it shows that even under oppression, slavery, and exile, we are nonetheless subjugated exclusively to God.

The soul always remains free.

### HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

The Torah enjoins us to keep it's laws, and good will come of it:

אם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם – If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them... (26: 3)

It is curious that the Torah predicts that good outcomes follow good actions, given that we are not meant to act for personal gain when performing mitzvos.

Rav Shach explains that it is not a reward, so much as it is a reality. הליכות עולם לו – the ways of the world are Hashem's (Chabakuk 3: 6). We say this when we say korbanos at the end of davening, and we quote the ma'amar Chazal that expounds אלא הליכות אלא הליכות אל תקרי הליכות – Read it not as ways, but as laws. The הלכות, the Torah, that we bring in to the world, dictates the הליכות, the ways, of Hashem's world.

Our actions are significant, and have a very real effect on the world – the extent to which we push ourselves influences how Hashem's instructions trickle, filter, and amplify, ultimately developing into אִם בְּחֻקֵי תֵלְכוּ; that וְנִתְּתִי גִשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם; that וְחָרַב לֹא תֵעָבֵר. In this way, our actions affect our outcomes.

The Torah instructs us with verbs – תֵּלְכוּ – we must follow the path, and then וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם. Judaism cannot be carried out passively.

The Alter of Slabokda would lament that people lack clarity and belief in this. He said that in the same way that people are certain that crop growth results from rain, they should be equally certain that rain is sent when society is dignified and kind. וְנִתְּתִי גִשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם results from וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָה, as much as וְנִתְּתִי גִשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם is a result of אִם בְּחֻקֵי תֵלְכוּ.

We are in the driving seat – הליכות עולם לו.

The Chafetz Chaim would scold his students when they requested his blessing. We should be have enough faith that if we do the right thing with enough frequency, good will ultimately come of it.

If we are not performing our duties as Jews to the best of our abilities, do we have the right to complain? By taking care to speak to everyone gently and politely, is there any doubt that everyone you come in contact with will be politer and gentler for it? That's how you begin to change the world. (edit)

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