

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parsha Behar

In this weeks Parsha, the Torah describes the *Mitzvot of Shmita*, the Sabbatical year, and *Yovel*, the Jubilee. G-d commands that we rest our land every seven years and in the fiftieth year as well. After the Jews entered the land of Israel they were told to count a cycle of both seven years and fifty years. Upon close inspection, this commandment seems similar to the commandment of counting the Omer. There, too, one has an obligation to count units of seven and fifty, though there it is seven days and fifty days.

Although not immediately obvious, there is, in fact, a strong correlation between the counting of the Omer and the counting of the Shmitah/Yovel cycle. When the Torah introduces the *Mitzvah* of *Shmitah* and *Yovel*, the verse states, "And G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai saying." (Leviticus 25:1) The Midrash, quoted by Rashi, is puzzled by the verse's reference to the fact that this statement was made by G-d on Mount Sinai, when in fact all the laws of the Torah were told to Moses by G-d on Mount Sinai. The Midrash concludes that this reference teaches us that just like the laws of the *Shmita* and *Yovel* were clearly taught on Mount Sinai, the same is true for the other Mitzvot as well. However, the Midrash doesn't explain why it is so clear that these specific Mitzvot came from Sinai. One who wishes to deny the authenticity of the Torah and its origin from G-d at Sinai, could easily deny these Mitzvot as well.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer (1762-1839) also known as the Chasam Sofer, points out that a thorough study of the laws of Shmita leaves no room to deny the claim that they were given by G-d. The verse states "And if you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!' I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years. And you will sow in the eighth year, while eating from the old crops until the ninth year; until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old." (Leviticus 25:20-22) This, Rabbi Sofer points out, is a statement that can only be made by G-d. If a human being wanted to start a religion, he/she would never write such a statement in his/her book of laws. If he/she did the religion would likely last no longer than seven years, as they would be unable to make it happen. At that time, the followers of the religion would see the falsehood of the book of laws and leave the religion. However, in the 3000 years since we stood by Mount Sinai and received the Torah, no one has yet to challenge this statement. This is undeniable proof that the Torah and all its laws can be traced back to the word of G-d Himself, and nobody else.

The Sefer Hachinuch (published 1532, author unknown) explains that one of the reasons for these Mitzvot is to strengthen our hearts and minds regarding the idea



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that G-d created the world. By leaving the land barren for a full year we are reminded that the ability of the land to produce year after year is only a result of G-d's will. The *Yovel* year can demonstrate a similar concept. When lands are returned to their original owners and slaves are freed, the message is reinforced that there is no true human everlasting ownership. The only genuine ownership is that of G-d Himself.

Throughout the fifty year *Yovel* cycle we have the opportunity to constantly strengthen and improve our faith in G-d. This is the reason why there is an obligation to count the years of the Sabbatical and the Jubilee. It symbolizes that these years are all part of one big process. The goal of these years is not a one-time action, rather it is a constant growth and strengthening of faith. Each year must be looked as the opportunity and a responsibility to continue down this path toward perfection in this area. Furthermore the obligation to count both the years of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years represent the need to have both short-term and long-term goals. A person has to make sure that each year, each Sabbatical, and each Jubilee cycle are ones of accomplishment.

A similar idea can be applied to the counting of the Omer. The Torah obligates us to count seven weeks and forty-nine days from Passover until Shavuot when we received the Torah. These days are far more than a mere countdown to an exciting event. These days are a time of growth and introspection in preparation of receiving this heavenly work. When the Jews left the land of Egypt the two hundred and ten years they had spent there had taken its toll on their spirituality. They were not ready for the Torah without the spiritual growth they would achieve during this period of counting. As a result we must do the same so we can re-accept the Torah every year on the holiday of Shavuot. Each day and each week must be counted separately, each with its own goals toward self perfection, on both a short-term, and long-term scale. Through this process one will be prepared to accept, learn and live by the holy Torah and follow all its laws that were all received at Mount Sinai.

Shabbat Shalom!

