



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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**Behar Bechukotai / בהר בחוקותי**

## SERMON TITLE:

***You Can Do It***

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל  
Emil W. Herman  
who loved and supported Torah learning.

# Behar - Bechukotai

## *You Can Do It*

This time of year is the anniversary of the Six-Day War, in which miracles happened for Israel and the biblical Yehudah and Shomron regions were liberated from non-Jewish hands. However, Israel never declared that these territories are part of sovereign Israel. Instead, they labeled them "occupied territories," a name that sticks to this day, and thus, any construction there is labeled a "settlement" in a territory that doesn't belong to us.

In recent years, there has been a dispute over a certain neighborhood in these liberated territories called Givat Ulpana. The Israeli Supreme Court ruled that Givat Ulpana was built upon private "Palestinian" land and therefore, the State is obligated to bulldoze the entire neighborhood and return the parcel of land to its "Palestinian" "owners."

(For some reason, they all prefer to forget the fact that Tel Aviv University is also built on land that once "belonged" to Arabs and was liberated from them during the War of Independence in 1948.)

When Binyamin Netanyahu heard the Supreme Court's verdict, he said that we must find a solution for it because "this is a decree that the public cannot abide by."

And that brings us to this week's Torah portion.

In the Parshah of Behar, we read about the mitzvah of Shmitah right at the beginning: "When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the L-rd." Just like a Jew needs to rest from his or her work once a week and make "a Sabbath for the L-rd," so too in the Holy Land must the land rest in a "Sabbath for the L-rd" once every seven years.

The concept of a Sabbatical year is one of the many things the Torah gave the world. But Shmittah itself is not an easy mitzvah. A farmer who has a field or vineyard which is his entire source of income, and in which he invests all his energy and money over six straight years, is not only forbidden to work the earth when the Shmittah year arrives, but also loses ownership of the land in the first place.

That's because in a Shmittah year, a farmer must abandon his fields, and throughout the entire year, he has no ownership over the fields. Anyone can come along and take whatever is growing in the field—and even the person who had been the owner of the field last year has the "right" to come and take food from the field just like anyone else.

All through the Shmitah year, the owner must support himself from reserves collected in previous years, and in place of working, he should dedicate himself to the study of Torah.

Just like with every week, Shabbos is the one day on which we rest from work and dedicate the day to our spiritual needs like Torah and prayer, and to generally use the time a little more spiritually, so too is the goal of “Earth Shabbos” (Shmitah) to have those who work the soil—and in the times of the Tanach, pretty much everyone worked the soil—use the time for Torah study.

After that, the Torah continues to teach us another concept that we are all familiar with, but one that not too many people know comes from the Torah: Yovel, or the Jubilee Year.

Everyone’s heard of jubilee parties and jubilee celebrations. Some organizations or individuals celebrate their jubilee year after 25 years. Some do it after 100 years. But the concept can always be traced back to our Parshah, where the Torah says that after the mitzvah of Shmitah is kept seven consecutive times—“Seven Shabbosos of years”—after 49 years, we then get to the 50<sup>th</sup> year, at which point “You shall make holy the fiftieth year... a Yovel it shall be unto you...”

We now find ourselves in the days of the Sefiras HaOmer, the counting of the Omer. And just like we count seven weeks, which are 49 days, then get to the 50<sup>th</sup> day which is the holiday of Shavuos, the day of the Giving of the Torah, so too do we have the same concept in years—after 49 years, we arrive at the 50<sup>th</sup> year and celebrate the Yovel year.

And just like with a Shmitah year, sowing and plowing is forbidden in the exact same way during the Yovel year. On top of that, slaves would be freed and fields would go back to their owners.

Thus, if Shmitah is meant to remind us of Shabbos, and of the Creation of the Universe, then Yovel is meant to remind us of Matan Torah, of the Giving of the Torah.

But when the Yovel year arrives, the test is seven times as hard—because during a Yovel year, one must abstain from working the fields not for one year but for two consecutive years. After all, the 49th year is Shmitah followed by the 50th year, the Yovel year.

Now, all of that would happen when the Temple stood, during which the Jewish Nation was obligated by the Torah to keep the mitzvah of Shmitah.

After the Destruction of the Temple, however, the Torah does not require us Jews to observe the mitzvah of Shmitah. Rather, the Sages instituted that the Shmitah year continue to be observed simply so that the mitzvah of Shmitah not be forgotten by the Jewish Nation. And so even nowadays, when the Shmitah year arrives, many farmers in modern-day Israel keep the Shmitah year to every letter of its laws.

However, the mitzvah of Yovel nowadays is not kept at all. The Sages did not institute a remembrance for Yovel the same way they instituted a remembrance for Shmitah. (For more on all this, see *L'Or HaHalacha*, pg. 105, "*Shmitah in These Times*.")

But now we can ask the question: Why indeed did the Sages not institute that the mitzvah of Yovel also be continued every 50 years just like they ordered that Shmitah be kept every seven years?

"Mah nishtanah?" What's different about the law of Yovel than the law of Shmitah? Why did Shmitah enjoy a better fate, such that everyone knows about it and keeps it? But Yovel is now just a thing we learn about in the Chumash—not a mitzvah that we keep at all...

In the Talmud (Tractate Gittin 36b), the Tosafos commentator answers the question with the same answer that Bibi Netanyahu provided with regards to the modern-day Israeli Supreme Court: "Because the majority of the community would be unable to abide by it in its banning of working the soil for two consecutive years."

The Sages did not institute rules that people would not likely be able to bear—such as not working for two consecutive years, something very hard to keep. And so the Sages chose to institute only the mitzvah of Shmitah and not Yovel.

And we find something similar in connection to the holidays.

We now find ourselves standing before the holiday of Shavuot, which in the Holy Land is only celebrated for one day but outside the Land of Israel is marked by two days.

Why is this so? Because the Sages established "the Diaspora Second Holiday Day," and not just for Shavuot but for other Torah holidays, too.

For example, in the Holy Land, there is only one Seder night on Passover—but anywhere else in the world, there are two. And the same is true for Sukkot—there are two days, not one, outside Biblical Israel.

However, there is only one Torah holiday which is celebrated for just one day regardless of where you're located. Can anyone guess what it is?

Yom Kippur! Why is this so? For the same reason we mentioned: Because it would be a decree that most of the community would not be able to handle. It's next to impossible to fast for two days. And so, when it came to Yom Kippur, "the Sages established the matter upon Torah law" (*Encyclopedia Talmudis*, Vol. 23, pg. 94, "Yom Tov Sheini shel Galuyot").

And we learn one clear thing from this—that when the Torah instructs you to do a mitzvah, it's definitely going to be something that you'll be capable of doing. After

all, if it's something that you aren't likely to be able to do, then the Torah and the Sages would not instruct you to do it.

As the Rebbe would always quote from the Midrash, "G-d does not ask except according to their strength" (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:3). Because if G-d would ask of the Jew to do something, then He would also give him the powers and the possibilities to fulfill them. If G-d has blessed you with children, then He also has given you the capacity to send them to Jewish schools, and also promises you that you'll have enough money to raise them to Torah life, to marriage and to good deeds. Why? Because G-d does not ask except according to their strength" (Likutei Sichos Vol. 25, pg. 36).

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