

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat B'Har - The Redemptive Secret of the *Yovel* Year

Personal Plot of Land for Expressing Spiritual Essence

ספר ויקרא פרק כה

(י) וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יוֹבֵל הוּא תְהִיָּה לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתֶּם אִישׁ אֶל אֶחָדָתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשׁוּבוּ:

“You shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants: it shall be a jubilee for you; each of you shall return to his estate, and each of you shall return to his family” (*Vayikra* 25:10).

Although I have returned to what I believe is my personal estate in Israel, I have still not returned to my family. The challenge of being far away from family is an unnatural painful situation. When we reach the final redemption, all family members will live close to one another, even within our extended families, as we all come from the same soul group and our destinies are intertwined. During my childhood in Denmark, I was also separated from family, as my maternal grandparents made Aliyah to Israel. Wherever we lived, I enjoyed being surrounded by pleasant gardens. I remember, as a child, planting my own vegetable garden, and praying to Hashem that the seeds would grow and show the way to freedom and peace, chasing away all evil and hatred. This was my debut connecting gardening and spirituality. After my two sisters and I left the nest, my parents moved into an apartment with only a balcony for flowers. Meanwhile, my husband and I received a nice piece of land in the heart of Israel – the Judean hills.

The laws of *Yovel* (jubilee) Year, which only applies to the Land of Israel when the majority of Jews live here, teaches us that each family had an allotted plot of land in Israel that they would return to every fifty years during biblical and temple times. Even if they had sold it or rented it out in the meantime, when *Yovel* Year kicked in, each family was to return to their own inherent land, and this is called “liberty” in the Torah. Actually, people would know in advance to sell their land only until the *Yovel* Year, the value of the land would decrease based on the proximity to the *Yovel* Year. “In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the *Yovel*, and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. The more such years, the higher the price you pay, the fewer such years, the lower the price, for what he is selling you is a number of harvests (*Vayikra* 25,15-16). This implies that when all Jews return to live on the land of Israel, we are bound to our particular plot of land, and can never sell it for good.

Why is this principle called “freedom” in the Torah? It seems like the rules of being unable to sell one’s land is a limitation rather than a freedom. When the land of Israel was originally conquered in the time of Yehoshua, it was divided between the tribes and within the tribes, each family had their own particular plot to call theirs. This plot would be like their extended self an indivisible part



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of themselves, which would outlive them and extend their memory as we learn from *Megillat Ruth* 4:5 “To establish the name of the dead upon his inheritance.” Just as every person has a body and soul, and the body encases the soul and helps it ambulate within this world, a Jew has a body to his body, which is his piece in the Land of Israel. This plot is his extended self through which he can truly manifest the essence of his soul. Actualizing and manifesting ourselves in full by means of our personal piece of land is the true expression of our freedom.

The *Yovel* Year and Counting the Omer

There are several parallels between counting towards the *Yovel* Year and counting the Omer. Both Mitzvot are introduced with the directive to count *וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם* /*u'sefartem lachem* – “You shall count” (*Vayikra* 23:15), *וְסָפַרְתָּ לָּךְ* /*u'sefarta lecha* – “You shall count” (*Vayikra* 25:8). In both cases, we count seven sets of seven in connection with Shabbat. We count seven shabbatot in counting the Omer, whereas the count of seven Shabbat years leads us to the *Yovel* Year. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch notes that by counting the Omer, *Am Yisrael* highlights a major difference between Judaism and other religions. Upon leaving Egypt, *B'nei Yisrael* have accomplished physical liberty, and when entering into *Eretz Yisrael* they have the opportunity to achieve prosperity. The annual celebration of Pesach would therefore seem to be the celebration of having accomplished our ultimate goal. However, for Israel, this only represents our starting point, from which we begin to count towards our true goal of receiving the Torah. It is the ethics and morality of the Torah, which creates the foundation of our nation, independent of material needs.

This counting includes the seven-fold reference to Shabbat, which bears the message of refraining from work, thus freeing us from the materialistic demands that the drive for prosperity places upon us. By constantly referring us back to Shabbat, we are reminded of the basic message of Shabbat, the fact that G-d created the world and that He is intimately involved in its workings. The aspiration to individual greatness implicit in the counting of the Omer parallels the counting of the *Yovel* on the national level. After fifty years, we reach a level of social perfection, characterized by the release of slaves and the return of land to its original owners. Once again, we see a seven-fold counting of Shabbat, but this time the Shabbat of *Shmitta* (sabbatical year), when we acknowledge that the land is not ours but G-d's. We are to disengage ourselves from a more materialistic outlook, and focus on building our moral status. In our time when most of us live in relative prosperity, this message of counting is more relevant than ever. The counting reminds us that physical freedom is not an end goal in itself; it is only the means to receive the spiritual freedom that the Torah and the *Yovel* Year engenders (Based on, Rav Michael Sussman, <<http://harova.org/torah/view.asp?id=982>>).

The Secret of the Torah and the Land

We count the Omer in order to reach the fiftieth gate from where the Torah was given. It consists of five books corresponding to the five parts of our soul. There are forty-nine gates of understanding created in the physical world, and all of them were given to Moshe Rabbeinu, as it states, “You have made him a little less than Divine” (*Tehillim* 8:6). Yet, the fiftieth gate has not been handed over to any human being, since this world is created in seven days, and when you

complete the seven by squaring them, they amount to forty-nine, but the fiftieth gate is not attributed to this world (Maharal, *Orh Chadash* p. 174). Just as number eight corresponds to the miraculous level being beyond the seven days of creation, number fifty being beyond seven times seven is associated with the supernatural realm. The secret of the fiftieth is very deep we can only scratch the surface of what the Kabbalist have to say on the topic. The reason for the counting until fifty both of the Omer and towards the *Yovel Year* is one. The counting of the forty-nine corresponds to the seven lower *sefirot*, whereas the fiftieth corresponds to *Binah* (understanding). It is through *Binah* that we are sent into freedom, and it is from that same *Binah* that we received the Torah. Therefore, this number is sanctified (*Torah Ohr of Maharam Paparish, Parashat Emor*). Whenever it mentions counting in the Torah, it centers around arriving at the fiftieth Gate which correspond to *Binah*. Therefore, it also states that Israel rose through the fiftieth from Egypt (*Shemot* 13:18). Likewise, the redemption from Egypt is mentioned fifty times in the Torah. The goal is to arrive at the *Yovel Year* when each person returns to his estate (*Vayikra* 25:13). “He will be redeemed, and in *Yovel* he will emerge” (Ibid 24), (*Sha’arei Orah, The Eight Gate, The Third Sefirah*). Each step that we count towards freedom brings us closer to our ultimate redemption. True redemption is to return to our essential element – to the root of our creation – the place of the emanation of Torah completely beyond nature. We are created within the seven dimensions of the physical world in order to perfect it and then eventually surpass it. Both receiving the Torah and returning to our inherent plot of land are interconnected sides of one coin in the ultimate goal of redemptive freedom for every Jew. True freedom is not necessarily the ability to do whatever we feel like as the term is understood in the Western world. True freedom is the ability to return to our essential abode both spiritually and physically, as an individual and as part of the entire unified nation. Our redemptive freedom warrants the ability to express the Divine Torah within the physical framework of the Holy Land. We will ultimately return to this land, divinely designed to encompass the Torah of our soul as a glove fits the hand. When we count the Omer, we are not just counting towards receiving the Torah. Super-consciously, we are counting towards the Final Redemption, when we will all return to complete actualization of the Torah in the Land of our Soul.