

TORAH WEEKLY

ת"ב

19 - 25 May, 2019
14 - 20 Iyar, 5779

Torah: Leviticus 25:1-26:2
Haftorah: Jeremiah 32:6-22
PARSHAT BEHAR

CALENDARS

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

CAPITALIST OR COMMUNIST? Karl Marx may have been the pioneer, but many other Jews were also involved in the struggle for communism, particularly in the early days of the Russian revolution. Personally, I don't think that we have any apologies to make for this phenomenon. Having suffered unbearably under successive oppressive regimes, many of those political activists genuinely thought communism would be better for the people than czarist corruption. Their sense of idealism fueled hopes for a better life and a more equitable future for all. On paper, communism was a good idea. The fact that it failed—and that the new leaders outdid their predecessors' oppression—may reflect the personalities involved as much as the system they promoted. What is Judaism's economic system? Is there one? I would describe it as "capitalism with a conscience." In promoting free enterprise, the Torah is clearly capitalistic. But it is a conditional capitalism, and certainly a compassionate capitalism.

Winston Churchill once said, "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings. The inherent vice of communism is the equal sharing of miseries." So Judaism introduced an open market system, where the sharing of blessings was not left to chance or wishful thinking, but was made mandatory. Our Parshah gives us a classic example.

Shemittah, the Sabbatical year, was designed to allow the land to rest and regenerate. Six years the land would be worked, but in the seventh year

it would rest and lie fallow. The agricultural cycle in the Holy Land imposed strict rules and regulations on the owner of the land. No planting, no pruning, no agricultural work whatsoever in the seventh year—and whatever grew by itself would be "ownerless" and there for the taking for all. The owner could take some, but so could his workers, friends and neighbors. The landowner, in his own land, would have no more right than the stranger. For six years you own the property, but in the seventh you enjoy no special claims.

This is but one of many examples of Judaism's "capitalism with a conscience." There are many other legislated obligations to the poor—not optional extras, not even pious recommendations, but clear mandatory contributions to the less fortunate. The ten percent tithes, as well as the obligation to leave to the poor the unharvested corners of one's field, the gleanings, and the forgotten sheaves are all part of the system of compassionate capitalism.

Judaism thus presents an economic system which boasts the best of both worlds—the advantages of an unfettered free market, allowing personal expression and success relative to hard work, without the drawbacks of corporate greed. If the land belongs to G-d, then we have no exclusive ownership over it. G-d bestows His blessings upon us, but clearly, the deal is that we must share. Without Torah law, capitalism fails. Unbridled ambition and the lust for money and power lead to monopolies and conglomerates that leave no room for the next

guy and widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The Sabbatical year is one of many checks and balances that keep our capitalism kosher and kind.

Some people are too businesslike. Everything is measured and exact. Business is business. If I invited you for Shabbat, then I won't repeat the invitation until you reciprocate first. If you gave my son \$50 for his bar mitzvah, then that is exactly what I will give your son. We should be softer, more flexible, not so hard, tough and businesslike. By all means, be a capitalist, but be a kosher capitalist. What a person is "worth" financially should be irrelevant to the respect you accord to him. Retain the traditional Jewish characteristics of kindness, compassion, *tzedakah* and *chesed*, generosity of spirit, heart—and pocket.

May you make lots of money, and encourage G-d to keep showering you with His blessings by sharing it generously with others.

by Rabbi Yossy Goldman

THE HUMBLE MOUNTAIN PARADOX Parshat Behar begins: "G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai . . ." There is a well-known Midrash that explains that Mount Sinai was the lowest of all the mountains, and so G-d chose it to teach us a lesson in humility: If you want to be a vessel for the Torah, you must feel yourself to be lowly and humble. This, however, leads to the question: If G-d wanted to teach us a lesson in humility, why give the Torah on a mountain in the first place? Wouldn't a valley be a better representation of humility? The

answer is that we need both: the greatness of a mountain, but the humility of Sinai. This dichotomy is expressed beautifully in the Parshah itself. One of the main mitzvahs featured in the Parshah is the Yovel (Jubilee). Every 50 years, the figurative reset button is pressed. All Jewish slaves are set free, and all land that was sold since the previous Yovel is automatically returned to its original owners. What is the point behind this reset? Why did the Torah institute such a mechanism, where all transactions become undone and everything reverts back to its original status? There are two very different and profound answers found in the works of the Rishonim (early commentators).

The Lesson in Humility. According to the Chinuch (an anonymous 13th-century commentary on the mitzvahs), G-d wants us to remember that everything belongs to Him and is controlled by Him. As a person goes about conducting his business and acquiring wealth, he can begin to develop a sense of self-importance. He can start to feel like he controls his own destiny and that he alone is responsible for his great successes. So every 50 years, G-d reminds him that He is in control. Whatever this person may have acquired is returned to its original owner, and he realizes that only G-d can control who ends up with what. The Yovel, then, is a lesson in humility. It reminds the person of how small he is and how little power and influence he has over destiny. It's G-d who runs the world, and only He will decide who gets what.

The Lesson in Pride. Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon) approaches the Yovel from another angle. A person who needs to sell himself as a slave or sell his property is generally from the ranks of the poor and destitute. Such a person can easily lose all hope of ever becoming successful again, and his life can spiral downward until he feels like he has nothing left to live for. To prevent this from happening, G-d instituted the Yovel. Even if a man becomes so desperate as to have to sell himself as a slave and sell his home, he need not despair. There is light at the end of the tunnel, and hope for a better future. Come the Yovel, he will automatically regain his freedom and have his home and property returned to him. This knowledge keeps his spirits up even while he is in his difficult state, and gives him a reason to keep persevering for a better future. The Yovel, then, is a lesson in pride. It reminds a person to remain strong and hopeful even when things are looking down. It tells him that he will never be truly defeated, and that he always has the ability to turn things around again.

The Paradox. The Yovel speaks of strength, pride and perseverance, and at the same time of humility and human fragility. It is thus the mitzvah which best captures the paradox of Mount Sinai, the mountain of humility. The lesson is clear: In life, a person must assume both attitudes. He must constantly juggle his humility and pride. There is great danger in exaggerating one attitude at the expense of the other. A person who focuses too much on his frailty and smallness can become stagnant and unmotivated. Why work hard and persevere, when he has so little say regarding his success in life? One needs self-belief and strength of character to stay motivated and keep persevering. On the other hand, if a person gets too caught up in himself, it could lead to a false sense of power and invincibility. Strength of character can easily turn into arrogance, and he could forget about G-d. One needs humility as well. He needs to keep in mind that ultimately G-d runs the world, and we must therefore submit ourselves to His will. We must aspire to be like Mount Sinai—the quintessential humble mountain.

By Rabbi Sholom Kesselman

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, May 19, 2019 - 14 Iyar, 5779
"Second Passover" (1312 BCE)

A year after the Exodus, G-d instructed the people of Israel to bring the Passover offering on the afternoon of Nissan 14, and to eat it that evening, roasted over the fire, together with matzah and bitter herbs, as they had done on the previous year just before they left Egypt. "There were, however, certain persons who had become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, and could not, therefore, prepare the Passover offering on that day. They approached Moses and Aaron ... and they said: '...Why should we be deprived, and not be able to present G-d's offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel?'" (Numbers 9). In response to their plea, G-d established the 14th of Iyar as a "second Passover" (pesach sheini) for anyone who was unable to bring the offering on its appointed time in the previous month. The day thus represents the "second chance" achieved by teshuvah the power of repentance and "return."

In the words of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, "The Second Passover means that it's never a 'lost case.'

Tuesday, May 21, 2019 - 16 Iyar, 5779
The Manna (1313 BCE)

Manna, the "bread from heaven" which sustained the Children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering through the desert, began to fall on the 16th of Iyar of the year 2448 from creation--one month after the Exodus.

Thursday, May 23, 2019 - 18 Iyar, 5779
Plague among R. Akiva's Disciples Ends (circa 120 CE)

In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague decimated 24,000 students of the great sage Rabbi Akiva--a result, says the Talmud, of the fact that they "did not respect one another." The plague's cessation on Iyar 18--the 33rd day of the Omer Count or "Lag BaOmer"--is one of the reasons that the day is celebrated each year

Shabbat, May 25, 2019 - 20 Iyar, 5779
Journey From Sinai (1312 BCE)

On the 20th of Iyar 2449 (1312 BCE)--nearly a year after the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai--the Children of Israel departed their encampment near the Mountain. They resumed their journey when the pillar of cloud rose for the first time from over the "Tabernacle--the divine sign that would signal the resumption of their travels throughout their encampments and journeys over the next 38 years, until they reached the eastern bank of the Jordan River on the eve of their entry into the Holy Land.