

The two *Parashot* that we read this week speak, among other topics, of the *Mitzvah* of *Shemittah* / the Sabbatical Year and the punishment of exile that follows when the *Shemittah* is not observed. In this week's chapter of *Pirkei Avot* we learn, likewise: "Exile comes to the world because of idolatry, adultery, murder, and not observing the *Shemittah*."

Why do these sins in particular have exile as their consequence? R' Shlomo Halevi z"l (Salonika, Greece; 1532-1600) explains: *Eretz Yisrael* is *Hashem's* land, and it is given only to those who know His ways. In particular, R' Shlomo writes, a Jew is defined by three beliefs: (1) That *Hashem* exists, (2) that He gave the Torah, and (3) that He rewards and punishes. One who denies any of these has no place in the Holy Land, R' Shlomo writes, and he is liable to be exiled.

Idolatry is the denial of the first principle and everything that follows from it--that *Hashem* exists, that He alone controls the world, etc. Adultery is the denial of the second principle--that Torah is from Heaven--for the Torah sets the boundaries that make us a special people. Lastly, murder is the denial of the third principle--that we are rewarded and punished for our deeds. (R' Shlomo notes that the Torah (*Bereishit* 9:6) uses murder to illustrate the principle that *Hashem* punishes measure-for-measure. Similarly, earlier in *Pirkei Avot*, Hillel is quoted as commenting upon seeing a murder victim: "The one who drowned you will be drowned.") One who denies these attributes of *Hashem* has no right to be in His land.

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## Shabbat

R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (1437-1508; Portugal, Spain and Italy) writes: The Torah uses two verbs in connection with *Shabbat*: One is "Zachor" / "Remember," as in (*Shmot* 20:8), "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it." The other is "Shamor" / "Safeguard," as in (*Devarim* 5:12), "Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it." The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 27a) states: "'Zachor' and 'Shamor' were said as one," as we read (*Tehilim* 62:12), "Elokim spoke one [word]; I heard two."

The reason, writes R' Abarbanel, is that *Hashem* intended two things with the commandment to refrain from work on *Shabbat*--one is the quiet and tranquility experienced by each individual, and the other is the absence of work [in society as a whole on that day]. He explains: The benefit to a person from having quiet and tranquility is that it enables him to delve into and understand the Torah of *Hashem*, as our Sages say (*Yerushalmi Shabbat* 15:3), "*Shabbat* and the Festivals were given to the Jewish People only so that they can study Torah on those days." The benefit of having a day when no work is performed that it reminds us of the wonders *Hashem* did when He took us out of from persecution in Egypt (see *Devarim* 5:15), which demonstrates that *Hashem* is all powerful. [Perhaps R' Abarbanel means that the absolute stillness of *Shabbat* reminds us that there is someone other than us--*Hashem*--running the world.]

(Commentary to *Shmot* 31:12 [p.306])



R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pressburg, Hungary) writes: There are three *Mitzvot* that our Sages call "signs": *Brit Milah*, *Tefilin*, and *Shabbat*. The role of *Shabbat* is to give us an opportunity to rejoice in our service of *Hashem* amid gladness and goodness of heart, recognizing the abundance He has given us (paraphrasing *Devarim* 28:47). If a person is capable of doing this, it is a sign of his attachment to *Hashem*. In contrast, if a person worries about workday matters on *Shabbat*, it is a sign of the opposite.

(*Derashot Chatam Sofer: Zayin Adar* 3)

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**“When you make a sale to your fellow or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow, each of you shall not wrong his brother . . .**

**“Each of you shall not wrong his fellow, and you shall fear your Elokim--for I am Hashem, your Elokim.” (25:14, 17)**

R' Chaim Michael Biberfeld *shlita* (*Zlatipoli-Tchortkov Rebbe* in London, England) asks: Why does verse 14 forbid wronging one's "brother," while verse 17 speaks of wronging one's "fellow"?

He answers: Perhaps the Torah is not prohibiting blatant over-charging or under-paying, which borders on theft. Rather, the Torah is prohibiting taking advantage of a seller who desperately needs money or a buyer who desperately needs merchandise and offering him a less-than-good deal.

One sometimes excuses offering less than the market price for an item by saying, in one case: "He is my brother, so the item will remain in the family," and in another case: "He is a stranger doing business, and all is fair in business." Therefore, says R' Biberfeld, the Torah addresses both scenarios--"brother" and "fellow"--and commands us, in both cases, never to use another person's difficulty as an excuse for over-charging or under-paying.

(Emailed *D'var Torah* from R' Biberfeld 5782)

**“I will provide your rains in their time.” (26:4)**

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 25b) relates: The sage Rabbi Eliezer once led the prayers on a fast day that had been declared due to drought. He recited the prayers that are recited on such a fast day, but he was not answered. Then, Rabbi Akiva prayed, "*Avinu Malkeinu* / Our Father, Our King! We have no king other than You; *Avinu Malkeinu!* Have mercy on us for Your sake," and rain began to fall. People started to ridicule Rabbi Eliezer, until a *Bat Kol* / Heavenly Voice proclaimed, "Not that Rabbi Akiva is greater than Rabbi Eliezer. Rather, Rabbi Akiva is "*Ma'avir al midotav*" (loosely translated: He does not stand on ceremony and is forgiving), and Rabbi Eliezer is not." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Eliyahu E. Dessler *z"l* (1892-1953; rabbi in London, England, head of the Gateshead, England Kollel and *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) asks: If Rabbi Akiva was *Ma'avir al midotav* and Rabbi Eliezer was not, then was not Rabbi Akiva indeed greater than Rabbi Eliezer?

R' Dessler answers: Greatness is not measured by looking at one attribute in isolation. While there was an area--being *Ma'avir al midotav*-- in which Rabbi Akiva surpassed Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Eliezer undoubtedly excelled over Rabbi Akiva in other areas.

Why then did rain fall for Rabbi Akiva and not for Rabbi Eliezer? R' Dessler explains: Rabbi Akiva had the attribute that was needed at that moment. Specifically, at a time when the Jewish People were asking *Hashem* to overlook their wrongdoings and give them rain, they needed someone to lead the prayers who exemplified the trait of overlooking others' wrongdoings.

(*Machshevet Eliyahu* p.76)

**“You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it shall be the Yovel / Jubilee Year . . .” (25:10)**

*Rashi z"l* writes: This year is distinguished from all other years by its special name. What is that name? "*Yovel*"--referring to the sounding of the *Shofar* on *Yom Kippur* of that year. ("*Yovel*" is another word for "*Shofar*"--see *Shmot* 20:13). [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Nosson Yehuda Leib (Leibel) Mintzberg *z"l* (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: The name given to something should identify what makes it special or unique. What makes the fiftieth year unique is that freedom is proclaimed throughout the land and, *Rashi* is pointing out, the means of making this proclamation is by blowing the *Shofar*. Thus, it is through blowing the *Shofar* that we fulfill the commandment in our verse, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year."

R' Mintzberg continues: R' Moshe ben Nachman *z"l* (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) understands the word *Yovel* differently. According to *Ramban*, the word "*Yovel*" comes from the root that means "to travel." On the fiftieth year, fields that were sold return to their ancestral owners, allowing those owners to travel to their families' fields after they had moved away. Likewise, slaves are freed, and they travel home. Thus, according to *Ramban*, the year is named after the consequences of the *Mitzvot* that make it unique.

Another possible interpretation, R' Mintzberg writes, is that the word "*Yovel*" means "beginning," as in the verse (*Yirmiyah* 17:8--in this week's *Haftarah*), "He will be like a tree planted near water, which will spread its roots alongside a *Yuval* / brook." (The *Yuval* is the "beginning," the water source, for the tree.) The *Yovel* year is a new beginning for farmers who regain their ancestral lands and for slaves who are freed. Notably, the first inventors--people who made "beginnings"--in the Torah were named *Yaval*, *Yuval* and *Tuval* (see *Bereishit* 4:20-22). (*Ben Melech Al Ha'Torah*)

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*Shemittah*, continues R' Shlomo, alludes to all three of these fundamental beliefs. By not working the Land, we acknowledge that it is *Hashem's*, because He created it--which, necessarily, is preceded by an acknowledgment that He exists, is all powerful, etc. Also, when we observe the *Shemittah*, we acknowledge that *Hashem* gave the Torah. Lastly, unlike most of the *Mitzvot*, whose reward is in *Olam Ha'ba*, the reward for keeping the *Shemittah* can be verified by everyone, as we read (in our *Parashah*--25:21), "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period."

(*Lev Avot* 5:14 [p.342])