

## Two Lessons: Shmitah, and Yovel

R' Aaron Lopiansky

This week's *parsha* starts with two *mitzvos* that are very central to reinforcing the belief of Hashem being in our lives. Just as *shabbos* serves to ingrain in us the sense that Hashem is the creator of the world and nothing exists without His creating it, so too do we mark the *shmitah* year as a "*shabbos*". On *shabbos* we demonstrate, via the cessation of all our mundane activities, that on the day that Hashem stopped creating new things in the world nothing further came into being. *Shmitah* is very similar; it is the cessation of all agricultural activity in *Eretz Yisroel*, letting the land lie fallow. The *passuk* (*Vayikra* 25:4) connects these *mitzvos* by saying that *shmitah* is a "*shabbos* for Hashem". Rashi explains that "*shabbos* for Hashem" teaches us not to think that we let the land lie fallow because it helps increase productivity (as is usual in many agricultural settings), rather we do so to emphasize that Hashem is the creator of all. He is the one who apportions out the land and causes all to grow. When He "rests", so to speak, everything ceases to grow. That is the message of *shmitah*, and it parallels the message of *shabbos*.

After seven *shmitah* cycles we arrive at the fiftieth year, known as *yovel*, which has both the *halachos* of *shmitah* as well as many other *halachos* which pertain to it that go far beyond those of *shmitah*. The laws of all slaves returning home and of all fields that were sold returning to the original owner are the core laws of *yovel*, which is also some sort of *shabbos* but includes an extra dimension that we're not familiar with from the weekly *shabbos* or the *shmitah shabbos*. What is the extra dimension of *yovel* which, like the other two *shabbosos*, is a reminder of a core belief in Hashem, but is also different than *shmitah*?

When we believe in Hashem, there are actually two stages or phases of what we believe in. Hashem is described as "*kadmon*", which means prime, for it is He who brought everything into existence and nothing could exist without Him. This means that all that is produced, regardless of how, ultimately comes from Hashem. On *shabbos* and *shmitah* we demonstrate that when Hashem has finished acting or doing, everything ceases, thereby establishing the concept of Hashem's existence being primary and bringing all else into being.

There is a deeper belief that must be ingrained in us, which is that Hashem created the world for a purpose and gave us the opportunity to realize that purpose. We have free will so that we can implement what Hashem wants in this world and be credited for that implementation. But even if we do not choose to do what's right, even if we fall short of being the ones to complete the world and be a vehicle for achieving Hashem's ultimate goal in the world, the goal will nonetheless be reached. Hashem's will, in the sense of the destiny of the world, will come to be either with our help or despite our hindrance.

The Ramchal speaks a lot in *Da'as Tevunos* about the two parallel dynamics which operate in the world at all times. There is the dynamic of *mishpat*, which means justice, law, and so on, which means that we are allowed to make choices and act based on our choices, and the results and consequences of our actions become reality around us. There is a second dynamic and that he calls the *derech ha'yichud*, which means Hashem's oneness or exclusiveness. It means that when viewed from the perspective of *yichud*, nothing is helping or hindering the world, rather everything is coming to its *tachlis*, its destination. He explains that we at this time cannot reconcile these two dynamics, all we can do is examine each one separately, but at the end of days the two will come together.

The central feature of *yovel* is that everything reverts to what it was meant to be at the very beginning. Every person's portion of the land in Israel comes back to him; all *Yisroelim* who were slaves go back to becoming the freeman that they're meant to be. This is why *yovel* is referred to as, "*olamo shel yovel* - the world or universe of *yovel*". Specifically, when the *passuk* says that a Jewish slave who declares that he wishes to remain with his master remains with him until *yovel*, the duration of his stay is called, "*l'olam* - forever". "Forever" in our eyes stretches until the *yovel*, which marks a self-contained bubble of time having come to its destination. A person may go through many trials and tribulations to the point that he became a slave, but when *yovel* arrives he comes back to being who he was meant to be. Land that was sold may pass through many owners, but at the end it comes back to the person that Hashem had designated it for. Thus, all comes back to the place that Hashem meant it to be.

Hashem is referred to "first" and "last" - "*Ani rishon, Ani acharon* - I am the first I am the last". "First" means creator and initiator, while "last" means destination. Our first fundamental belief in Hashem is that He created everything and everything came into being because of His say so and is sustained by His will. We celebrate this and mark it on every *shabbos* and every *shmitah*. When the designated time for creation and work has come to an end, nothing is happening - work has ceased and the land is fallow. But then, over an entire *olam*, meaning an entire universe of time, we come to a point where we understand a much more profound truth of Hashem which has to do with *hashgacha* or Divine Providence. No matter how far something has strayed away, in the end it inevitably comes to the point that Hashem had destined for it. In all that a person does, he can be a partner in helping reach Hashem's goals. But if he does not contribute towards achieving the goals or, even worse, if he has hindered the process, at the end of days it matters not for all comes back to where Hashem had destined it to. "I am the first I am the last".