



Text and Questions Relating Fair Trade to Parashat Behar for Fair Trade Shabbat

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- The laws of *shmita* and *yovel*, in which the land lies fallow, and debts are forgiven, strive to create a communal structure that is just. How do the concepts of Fair Trade align with the concepts of Shmita and Yovel explicated in this week's Parasha?
- Rashi, the 11th century commentator, famously asks about the first verse of Parashat Behar: "*mah inyan shmita ezel har sinai?*" What do the laws of Shmita have to do with Har Sinai? He goes on to answer that just as the 10 commandments were given on Sinai, so too were all of the mitzvot. Why do you think this particular mitzvah is used to make the connection between all of the commandments and the emblematic experience of receiving the "Big 10?" And what might it teach us about the Jewish perspective on Fair Trade?
- Chapter 25 verse 35-36 states: "And if thy brother grow poor, and his means fail with thee, then thou shalt relieve him, though he be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with thee. Take though no usury of him, or increase, but fear thy God, that thy brother may live like thee." What does this verse teach us about the nature of our economic relationships? How do you interpret the last phrase of verse 36? How does it impact the way in which you perceive of your obligations to engage in buying and selling goods in today's market?

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T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

Behar, the second-to-last parashah in the book of Leviticus, is one long chapter with two verses tacked on to the end. It deals with two themes: the *shmita* (sabbatical) year and what to do with a fellow Israelite who falls on hard times.

- During a *shmita* year (every seventh year), the land of Israel must lie fallow, and everybody is equally entitled to enjoy whatever produce grows on its own. How do fair trade practices enable farmers to benefit from their own land?
- Leviticus 25:20 acknowledges the very human question, "If you say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we may not sow nor reap our harvest?'" This speaks to our common anxieties about scarcity. Do you feel this concern when contemplating buying fair trade?
 - The answer, given in the next two verses, is that God will bless the land and it will produce a sufficient crop. How does this answer strike you? Does it ease your own anxieties?
- The rest of the chapter commands that no Jew ever fall so deep into debt that s/he be sold as a slave; at most, they may undergo temporary servitude to pay off a debt, and must be treated as kinsmen. Twice, including in the last line of the chapter (verse 42, 55), God asserts that the Jews are God's slaves, whom God brought out of Egypt, and therefore they cannot be slaves to anyone else. In our postmodern, enlightened world, we readily extend these protections to people of all nations and religions. How do fair trade practices prevent slavery?
- The two verses that end the parashah, Lev. 26:1-2, repeat the commands not to make idols and to observe Shabbat. Why are these included as a coda? What do they have to do with freedom? With fair trade?

You can learn more about Shmita [here](#).