



Fair Trade Values in Parshat Behar-Behukotai ***

Collective Responsibility	The Pursuit of Equality	Connection with the Land
<p>Concern for and attention to the most vulnerable members of society is a trending theme in Parshat Behar, backed by the laws outlined showing a legal and moral concern for the most vulnerable. Effectively, the laws of Shmitta turn society upside down on behalf of those who are destitute.¹</p>	<p>Shabbat is regarded as a time for healing, renewal and restoration – symbolic with principles of sustainability and Fair Trade. Shmitta, Yovel and Shabbat can be understood to act as a social equalizer: “Just as the 7th Day frees us from the enslavement and mastery of the workweek, so too the seventh year enables us to escape a flawed reality and indulge in the idealism of complete equality.”²</p>	<p>The Children of Israel are reminded during Shmitta every 7 years and Yovel every 50 years, that it is God that owns all land, and that we are mere temporary occupants of the land. Shmitta mirrors the state of creation when the land was ownerless.³</p>
<p>Perhaps slavery wasn’t the Israelites’ greatest challenge, but freedom; not poverty but affluence, not homelessness but home. While our people are great in a time of crisis, are we in greater need of laws like Shmitta or the framework of reward and punishment in Behukotai?⁴</p>	<p>Shmitta explicitly emphasizes equality for all, going so far as to listing men, women, the poor, maidservants, slaves, etc.</p>	<p>A case can be made that fate & destiny are interlinked, as demonstrated in the reward and punishment framework that God presents in Parshat Behukotai. For Jews in Israel, all are implicated in one another’s fate. In today’s age of Diaspora, there remains a mutual social accountability, similar to other periods in time of citizens of any nation.⁵</p>
<p>These sections of the Torah build for us a social scaffolding, pushing us to examine how we might build for the long term, for our children & our children’s children?; In doing so, community leadership is encouraged to move from being a community proud of its achievements in the past to a community focused on its future. A leadership angle on Behar’s core message is to believe in the long</p>	<p>“The Torah presents us with the idea that existing social norms are temporary, that we can change them in order to better our lives economically and spiritually.”⁷</p>	<p>Rabbi Joseph Telushkin ponders what the role of the Diaspora Jew is as they relate to Shmitta & the foundations of what is at stake in the reward/punishment proposition of Behukotai.⁸</p> <p>The core concept of free will offers a critical link to today’s Fairtrade movement, as we demonstrate a connection to ALL of God’s land</p>

¹ Brous, Rabbi Sharon & Hammer, Rabbi Jill. P. 241

² Brous, Rabbi Sharon & Hammer, Rabbi Jill. P. 240

³ Brous, Rabbi Sharon & Hammer, Rabbi Jill. P. 239

⁴ Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. P. 171

⁵ Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. P. 176

⁷ Brous, Rabbi Sharon & Hammer, Rabbi Jill. P. 242

⁸ Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph.



Fair Trade Judaica

Crafted with Jewish Values

<p>game; count the 7 years (for shmitta, <i>Shabbat Shabbaton</i> - a collective experience), not the days 7 (Shabbat – a personal experience); keep faith with the past and present, and keep your eyes firmly fixed on the future.⁶</p>		<p>around the world, and the people who are caring for it, including us.</p>
<p>The premise of free will and reward & punishment, both the core of Behukotai’s message from God to the Children of Israel, were set in the context of living in the Land of Israel, collectively. The implications for a covenant to a people localized offers one framework. However, since the destruction of the First Temple, Jews have been spread all over the world. This dramatically changes the framework for collective responsibility. Galut (Diaspora), and geulah (Redemption), both key factors in this week’s double Torah portion offer a link to other key commandments of hesed & acts of kindness⁹</p>	<p>Parshat Behar suggests that <i>geulah</i> (redemption) is the ultimate meaning of life and a means to acknowledge that other people’s misfortunes are our own problem. “You shall love the stranger” Deut.10:19. (p. 243) demonstrates a concern for others, and an acknowledgement that we are all children of God; “This parasha reminds us how much our kinsfolk need us to further their redemption”. Behar teaches us in Lev. 25:14 “You shall not do evil to one another”... or translated slightly differently “you shall not wrong one another”. <i>Shmitta</i> and <i>Yovel</i>, which demand the redemption of our neighbors challenge us to liberate ourselves as well from the current socio-economic structures that promote inequality.¹⁰</p>	<p>If we follow God’s commandments, we will benefit from the land; if we disobey or dismiss God’s commandments, we will feel the consequences through the land.</p>

Sources:

- Parshiot Behar & Behukotai – English translations from Eitz Chaim and Artscroll editions.
- Goldstein, Rabbi Elyse. (2000) The Women’s Torah Commentary: New insights from women Rabbis on the 54 Weekly Torah Portions:
 - Brous, Sharon & Hammer, Jill. *Proclaiming Liberty throughout the Land.*
 - Bolton, Rabbi Elizabeth. *We Are Here.*
- Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. Lessons in Leadership: A weekly reading of the Jewish Bible. Chapters on Behar & Behukotai.
- Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph. (1997) Biblical Literacy: The Most Important People, Events & Ideas of the Hebrew Bible.

***** Thanks to Tamara Rebick for pulling this resource together.**

⁶ Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. P. 173

⁹ Sacks, Rabbi Lord Jonathan. P. 179

¹⁰ Brous, Rabbi Sharon & Hammer, Rabbi Jill. P. 243