

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT BEHAR**

**Between Sabbath and Sanctuary  
By Rav Chanoch Waxman**

Parashat Behar begins with the command of the Sabbatical year. Upon entering the land, the Children of Israel are to work the land for six years at a time, ceasing their labors during the seventh year.

When you come to the land which I shall give you, the land shall rest (ve-shavta ha-aretz) a Sabbath to the Lord (shabbat la-Shem). Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a Sabbath of complete rest (shabbat shabbaton), a Sabbath to the Lord (shabbat la-Shem); you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest nor gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a Sabbatical year of complete rest (shenat shabbaton) for the land. But you may eat the produce of the Sabbath of the land (shabbat ha-aretz)... (25:2-6)

Even the most casual reading of the verses above should be enough to make us realize that Torah is interested in emphasizing the term "shabbat" and the verb stem sh-b-t. The term appears seven times in the text (25:2, 2, 4, 4, 4, 5, 6), the very number of Shabbat itself.

Moreover, factoring in the doubling of the stem in the phrase "a Sabbath of complete rest" (shabbat shabbaton) (25:4), the six

phrases containing the stem sh-b-t form an interlocking chiasmic structure of the following form:

Type Hebrew phrase Verse

A	Ve-shavta ha-aretz
B	Shabbat la-Shem
C	Shabbat shabbaton yiheyeh la-aretz
B	Shabbat la-Shem
C	Shenat shabbaton yiheyeh la-aretz
A	Shabbat ha-aretz

While this may be just another way of emphasizing the stem, a mere demonstration of literary artistry, this kind of structure may also possess conceptual significance.

The point seems to be the emphasizing of the "interior" of the "A" frame. The agricultural Sabbath, the resting of the land (A), finds its import in the intertwining of the "shabbat shabbaton" of the land (C) and the concept of "shabbat la-Shem" (B).

Interestingly enough, these are the exact phrases used previously in the Torah to command the Children of Israel to rest upon the seventh day. In the fourth commandment, the Israelites are told that the seventh day is a "sabbath to the Lord" (shabbat la-Shem, [Shemot 20:10](#)). Likewise, Chapter Thirty-five of Shemot, the other central mention of the Sabbath day, refers to a "sabbath of complete rest to the Lord" (shabbat shabbaton la-Shem, 35:2). In other words, just as the seventh day Sabbath is both "shabbat shabbaton" and "shabbat la-Shem," so too the seventh year Sabbath is "shabbat shabbaton and "shabbat la-Shem."

But is this more than word games? After all, it seems more than logical to utilize the language of the seventh day Sabbath, the Sabbath of creation, to formulate the seven-year agricultural cycle. Both involve working six units and resting on the seventh. The term "shabbat" seems to be the biblical word for cease, desist, rest and the like. Why claim that the language and structure of [Vayikra 25:2-6](#) possesses any special significance?

In fact, I would like to argue that the language is striking, especially in comparison to the previous mention of the seven-year agricultural cycle, back in Sefer Shemot. Chapter Twenty-three of Shemot states the following:

And six years you shall sow your land, and shall harvest its fruits. But the seventh year you shall let it rest (tishmetena) and lie fallow, and the poor people of your nation may eat, and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. So you shall do with your vineyard and with your olive grove. Six days you shall do your work and on the seventh day you shall rest (tishbot)... ([Shemot 23:10-12](#))

Shocking, isn't it? In its very first mention of the seven-year agricultural cycle, the Torah refrains from utilizing any "shabbat" imagery. Despite the logical structure and literary form of "six 'x' shall you... and on the seventh you shall not," despite the immediate mention of the seventh day Sabbath immediately afterwards, the Torah does not term the seventh year a "Sabbath." In place of the term "shabbat" for cease, rest and desist, the Torah utilizes the term "shamot," the stem sh-m-t. In other words, as of Chapter Twenty-three of Shemot, the seventh year is not a "shabbat." It is just "shemita," the ceasing of work during the seventh year.

If so, the text of the beginning of Behar appears in a new light. [Vayikra 25:2-6](#) performs a radical transformation of the image and nature of the seventh year. The language and structure that we may have been wont to dismiss seem to be a

deliberate attempt to link the seventh year with the Biblical concept of the Sabbath.

This leads to a dual question. First of all, what's the connection? Beyond the level of language, what in fact comprises the philosophical link between the Sabbath of the seventh day and the Sabbath of the seventh year? Secondly, why here and why now? Why does the Torah connect the imperative to leave the land fallow in the seventh year with the concept of Shabbat here in this place, near the end of Sefer Vayikra? What is the connection between the Sabbath of the land and Sefer Vayikra?

## II

At first glance, some of the standard conceptions of Shabbat should help extricate us from our difficulty. The fourth command follows its definition of the seventh day as "Sabbath to the Lord" (shabbat la-Shem) with an explicit imperative and an explanation:

...you shall not do any work - you, your son or daughter, your manservant or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day... (20:10-11)

In the case of the weekly Sabbath, working six days and resting on the seventh echoes the divine act of fashioning the world. As such, the Israelites' resting on the seventh day constitutes testimony to God's creation of the world.

Moreover, the requirement to refrain from "working" on the seventh day entails refraining from providing for one's existence, i.e. food, clothing and shelter. The Israelites in the desert were prohibited from gathering manna on the Sabbath and forced to depend upon the "miracle" of the non-decaying double portion of the sixth day provided by God (see [Shemot 16:22-29](#)). By this

means they developed a consciousness of their dependence upon God and the miraculous quality of even their daily existence. Likewise, not working on the seventh day, not providing for one's own sustenance, symbolizes dependence upon God. It emphasizes the "miraculous" quality of even our daily sustenance and builds consciousness of dependence upon God.

These themes should help explain the usage of "shabbat" imagery for describing the seven-year cycle. Just as resting on the seventh day echoes God's rest and testifies to creation of the world in six, so too ceasing agricultural labor in the seventh year serves as witness to God's "working" six and resting on the seventh. In a similar vein, the seven-year agricultural cycle picks up on the "dependence" theme implicit in the Sabbath. He who leaves his field fallow in the seventh year depends upon divine mercy and the divinely promised bounty of the sixth year to make it through (see 25:20-22). He depends upon God's goodness rather than the labor of his own hands.

But this is insufficient. Admittedly, the thematic overlap between not working on the seventh day of the week and the cessation of agricultural labor in the seventh year does resolve the problem of the philosophical link between the weekly Sabbath and the seventh year Sabbath. Nevertheless, it does little to resolve the issue of the connection to Sefer Vayikra. We are still left wondering as to why the Torah chooses only here, near the end of Vayikra, to introduce the "shabbat" imagery and explicate the philosophical overlap between the seventh day and the seventh year.

In point of fact, the latter part of Vayikra seems almost obsessed with the image of "shabbat," introducing it at rather surprising junctures. Starting in Chapter Twenty-three, almost every segment contains the term. For example, Chapter Twenty-three, "parashat ha-moadot," the delineation of the holidays, opens with the commanding of the Sabbath of the seventh day (23:1-3). But since when is the Sabbath a festival day?

Moreover, throughout the parasha, the term "shabbat" is used in conjunction with every single holiday mentioned (see 23:24, 23:32, 23:38-39). In fact, it seems to be this predilection that leads to the usage of the obscure phrase "on the morrow of the Sabbath" (mimacharat ha-shabbat) in the dating of the waving of the first cuttings and the calculation of the date of the holiday of Shavuot (23:15-16). In short, the Rabbinic position identifying "the morrow of the Sabbath" as the day after the holiday of Passover, rests on good literary foundations.

But this is just part of the story. The next parasha found after the holiday segment, the donation of oil for the lamp and flour for the showbread (lechem ha-panim, 24:1-9), also mentions shabbat. The bread is switched weekly, on the Sabbath day (24:8). In fact, except for the mention of shabbat, there appears to be no good reason for the citation of a "donation" or "mishkan functioning" parasha at this point. Shemot would be the more logical option.

Shifting from Parashat Emor to Behar and Bechukkotai further highlights the emerging trend. As already discussed, the main body of Parashat Behar (25:1-54), best thought of as the sabbatical year-jubilee cycle and associated laws, opens with the defining of the fallow seventh year as a Sabbath to the Lord and a complex literary emphasis of the term "shabbat" (25:2-6). Likewise, in the other half of Parashat Behar, a short two verse segment at the end of the parasha states the following:

You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up carved images... in your land... for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary; I am the Lord.  
(26:1-2)

Of all possible precepts, the Torah once again mentions Shabbat.

Finally, the obsession theory under development also "explains" the strange conjoining of the horrible punishments of Bechukkotai with one particular sin. By logic and according to

indicators in the text, the terrors of war and exile should hinge upon general abrogation of the covenant with God. The punishment section opens with an "if" clause:

But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments, if you reject My laws, and spurn My rule, so that you do not observe all My commandments and you break my covenant... (26:14-15)

The punishments result from general abrogation of the covenant.

Yet later on, after the starvation, plagues and exile, the Torah teaches that all the punishment has come for a particular purpose:

Then shall the land make up for its Sabbath years throughout the time that it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; then shall the land rest and make up for its Sabbath years. Throughout the time that it is desolate, it shall observe the rest that it did not observe in your Sabbath years while you dwelt upon it. (26:34-35)

The exile comes in virtue of having violated the Sabbatical year. It allows the land to make up the lost Sabbath years. Once again, and rather unexpectedly, the Torah chooses to utilize and emphasize the term and concept of "shabbat."

This must be more than just style, and this must be more than just a literary frenzy.

### III

Let us return to very first mention of the term "shabbat" in the latter part of Vayikra. As mentioned above, "shabbat" first crops up as the first "moed," the first festival (23:2-3). Although this

seems rather mysterious, our previous discussion of Parashat Emor should help clear things up.

In analyzing "parashat ha-moadot," the detailing of the holidays, and its connection to the preceding portions of Sefer Vayikra, I argued that "moed" should not be understood so much as "festival," but rather literally as a "holiday," i.e. a holy day. The "moadim" are sanctified times. As examples of holiness, they fit right into the theme of Sefer Vayikra.

The weekly Sabbath constitutes the arch-paradigm of time-based sanctity. The Torah introduces the Sabbath of the seventh day with the following text:

Thus the heaven and earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased (va-yishbot) on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy... (Bereishit 2:1-3)

While the Torah of course mentions the cessation of "work" on of the seventh day and alludes to the contrast between the previous six days and the seventh, the primary thrust of the text is upon blessing and sanctity. God's blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day constitutes the conceptual crescendo of the origins of the Sabbath.

If so, we need no longer wonder why the Sabbath appears as the first holiday. If the Torah wishes to discuss the sanctity of time, the meeting with God in time, then the Sabbath is the obvious place to begin. Likewise, we need no longer wonder as to why the Torah utilizes the term "shabbat" as a recurring motif throughout "parashat ha-moadot," and as a means of referring to the various holidays (23:24, 23:32, 23:38-39). In a parasha that is really about the sanctity of time, the term "shabbat" is a way not just to say "a day on which work is forbidden," but also to allude

to the essence of the parasha. The symbol of "shabbat" constitutes the natural choice.

All of this can be phrased far more radically. It is not just that Sefer Vayikra wishes to discuss the sanctity of time and hence introduces "parashat ha-moadot" and its Sabbath preface. Rather, Sefer Vayikra initiates a fundamental shift in its concern. Until the beginning of Chapter Twenty-three and the introduction of the holidays, Vayikra has been about matters related to the holiness of place, meeting God in space, and hence dealt with the sanctuary, sacrifices and priests. But from here on, Vayikra is about the holiness of time and its literary symbol, the "shabbat." The latter part of Vayikra deploys the term "shabbat" not just out of literary motivations, but as signaling a shift in focus, a new general theme and a concentration on a different type of holiness than previously elaborated.

To close the circle, by now we should no longer need to wonder about the two problems we began with. Both the conceptual connection between the seven-year agricultural cycle and the weekly Sabbath, and the link between Sefer Vayikra and the Sabbatical year should fall into place.

In utilizing the phrases "the Sabbath of the land," "a Sabbath to the Lord" and "shabbat shabbaton," the beginning of Parashat Behar (25:2-6) telegraphs that we have stumbled upon another example of the sanctity of time. Like the weekly Sabbath and the holidays, the seventh year constitutes a case of holiness in time. In the worldview of Sefer Vayikra, it is another opportunity, just like sanctuary and Shabbat, for meeting with God. Hence the Torah, here in Sefer Vayikra, links the laws of the seventh year with the symbol of "shabbat" and defines the Sabbatical year.

#### IV

Yet this is not exactly right. Earlier I listed six seemingly problematic contexts in which the Torah utilized the term "shabbat" in the course of the latter part of Vayikra. The chart below should help provide a recap.

#### Context Problem Verses

Laws of the holidays	Mention of Shabbat as the first fest
Laws of the holiday	Utilization of term "shabbat" for ea
Donation of oil and flour	Inclusion of the parasha in Vayikra
The Sabbatical year	"Shabbat" imagery and transforma Sabbath
Segment of laws at the end of Behar	The mention of the precept of Sha
The curses of Bechukkotai	Exile seems connected to the viol Sabbatical year

While the theory propounded until this point, the shift to the sanctity of time and hence the symbol of "shabbat," easily handles the first five contexts, the last one is not so simple. To put this a little bit differently, it still seems unclear why exile hinges upon violation of the Sabbatical year.

But this is only part of the problem. A quick review of the fifth context mentioned above, the tail end of Behar, raises a more fundamental problem. The text preceding the covenantal promises and punishments of Bechukkotai reads:

You shall not make idols for yourselves, or set up carved images... in your land... for I am the Lord your God. You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary; I am the Lord (26:1-2)

Apparently, the sanctity of place, the holiness of fixed space, has not completely faded out of the story line of Sefer Vayikra. Here, as a preface to the "If-Then" and "If not-Then" covenant of Bechukkotai (see 26:3-4, 14-16), the Torah presents the obvious prohibition of idol worship, the now obvious precept of Shabbat,

and the now slightly surprising and vague requirement to "venerate the sanctuary." But what is the sanctity of space doing here in the part of Vayikra that has already shifted to the sanctity of time?

The answer lies in realizing that the shift in Sefer Vayikra from the sanctity of place to the sanctity of time comprises not so much a revolutionary movement, but a dialectical motion culminating in synthesis of the two types of holiness.

To put this in plainer and more concrete terminology, the Torah recognizes two distinct types of holiness. After focusing for most of Sefer Vayikra on the first type, namely the sanctity of space and sanctuary, the Torah then introduces the second, the holiness of time, beginning in Chapter Twenty-three. While the former, the sanctity of place, is symbolized by the term "sanctuary," the latter, the sanctity of time, is expressed in the term "shabbat." As a preface to the covenant that closes the book of holiness, the Torah links the two ways of finding holiness and meeting God. It conjoins "shabbat" and "mikdash," and places them after the prohibition of idol worship, i.e. the requirement of loyalty to God. In this succinct summary, the Torah reminds the Israelites what it is all about.

V

To close, let us return to the last unresolved detail, the connection of the punishments of Bechukkotai with the violation of the Sabbatical year.

In reality, the synthesis of holiness of time and holiness of place happens not so much in the fifth context, the preface to the covenant, but back in the fourth, the introduction of the Sabbatical year. Let us take one last look at the text.

When you come to the LAND which I shall give you, the LAND shall rest (ve-shavta ha-aretz) a Sabbath to the Lord (shabbat la-Shem). Six years you may sow your field and

six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the LAND shall have a Sabbath of complete rest (shabbat shabbaton), a Sabbath to the Lord (shabbat la-Shem); you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a Sabbatical year of complete rest (shenat shabbaton) for the LAND. But you may eat the produce of the Sabbath of the LAND (shabbat ha-aretz)... (25:2-6)

The segment begins with the phrase, "when you come to the land" (25:2), and mentions the term "land" six times. As pointed out earlier, it is "the land" that "rests," and the "A" frame of the chiasmic structure previously outlined consists of the conjoining of the term "shabbat" and the term "aretz" (land). In sum, the Sabbatical year is not just about time, but also about place. It already fuses the holiness of place and the holiness of time together. It is only in the Holy Land that the seventh year is holy.

Put differently, the Sabbatical year contains within it both "mikdash" (sanctuary) and "shabbat." It in fact constitutes the expansion of each type of holiness to the largest possible units of each dimension. The holiness of time expands from the standard unit of one day, a single day out of a cycle of seven, to fill an entire year. Likewise the holiness of place expands beyond its normal and assumed parameters. It also exists beyond the walls of the sanctuary, it in fact fills the entire Land of Israel. The entire land is a holy place.

This puts us in position to resolve the textual and symbolic connection between violation of the Sabbatical year and exile. Like the covenant preface of "shabbat" and "mikdash" (26:1-2), the Sabbatical year is also about the holiness of time and the holiness of place. Like the covenant preface, it is about the opportunity for encountering sanctity and meeting with God. Like the preface, it succinctly contains the religious ideal of Sefer

Vayikra, and the goal of entry into the Land of Israel. But if the Children of Israel violate the Sabbatical year, if they fail to understand and exploit the sanctity of time and place, if they fail to encounter God, what is the point? Hence the punishments and exile of Parashat Bechukkotai. The Children of Israel have understood neither the sanctity of time nor the sanctity of place, and have violated the meanings of both "mikdash" and "shabbat." Exile is the result.

NOTE: While the development of last week's and this week's shiurim is solely my own responsibility, I am indebted to the teacher of my teachers, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l, for explaining the distinction between the sanctity of place and the sanctity of time. The dual theory of holiness is presented in an article entitled "Sacred and Profane."

On a more personal note, the shiur above is my last. I would like to thank Yeshivat Har Etzion for this opportunity and the staff of the VBM, especially Rav Reuven Ziegler and Rav Ezra Bick. Most importantly, I would like to thank all of you, the readers, for your comments, criticisms, encouragement and enthusiasm. But most of all, thanks for reading.

#### For Further Study

1. Read 25:1 and 26:46. See Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Seforno and Ramban on 25:1. i) When was the parasha of 25:1-26:46 told to Moshe? Contrast the opinion of Ramban with that of the other commentaries on this issue. ii) What seems to be Rashi's opinion regarding the chronology? iii) If the parashiyot are not in order, or even if they are in order, why is 25:1-26:46 mentioned at this point? Try to utilize the thesis of the shiur above to sharpen the opinions of Ibn Ezra and Seforno on this issue.
2. Read 27:1-8. Now scan 27:9-34. See Ibn Ezra and Ramban 27:1. Try to formulate both the problem and their respective solutions. Can an alternative solution be devised utilizing the ideas in the shiur above? Might there be a third type of holiness, originating in human rather than divine fiat?
3. Reread 25:2. Does the land need to rest? What impression is given by 26:34-35 and Rashi 26:34? Now see Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Seforno 25:2. How do Ibn Ezra and Ramban resolve the problem of "shabbat la-Shem"? How does Seforno's solution differ from that of Ibn Ezra and Ramban? Does the explication of "shabbat la-Shem" developed in the shiur provide a third distinct solution?

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