

SEVENS

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Parshios Behar & Bechukosai

Sevens

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Today's Learning:
Nach: Tehilim 41-42
Machshirin 6:3-4
O.C. 468:4-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 85
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 11

The Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parashah opens with a comment on the verse (25:14), "And, when you make a sale to your fellow or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow, do not cheat one another." The midrash says: Regarding this, it says (Mishlei 28:22), "One overeager for wealth has an evil eye, he does not know that want will befall him." This verse speaks of many people (or types of people). "One overeager for wealth" refers to Kayin. Hashem said to him, "You were overeager to inherit the world. I swear! The loss is yours." This is what the verse means, "He does not know that want will befall him." What happened? He was effectively removed from the world, as it is written (Bereishit 4:12), "You shall become a wanderer and a vagrant on earth." [The midrash next interprets the verse as referring to Efron, who sold Me'arat Ha'machpelah to Avraham for an exorbitant price, and also about one who lends money with interest.]

The midrash continues: Another interpretation -- "One overeager for wealth" refers to those who conduct business for profit with the fruits of the seventh year (i.e. the shemittah). They are overeager

to get rich; therefore they don't observe the sabbatical year, thinking that that will make them wealthy. However, Hashem says, "I swear! You will lose from this." When one does not observe the shemittah, a curse rests upon his assets and he is forced to sell them. What does it say above? It says (25:2), "The Land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem." And afterward it says, "When you make a sale to your fellow." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) writes: The midrash was bothered by the order of the verse, "When you make a sale . . . or make a purchase." Ordinarily, we attempt to open with something positive, not negative. Here, the midrash understands the verse to be speaking of a person who is selling his personal property because of financial difficulties, and this leads the midrash to wonder why the verse did not say, "When you make a purchase . . . or make a sale," thus putting the fortunate person before the unfortunate person. Also, why does the verse begin with "And"? The midrash answers both of these questions by explaining that our verse is describing the consequences of violating the preceding verse regarding shemittah. Incidentally, as is the midrashic style, the midrash interpreted the verse in other ways as well. (Beur Ha'amarim)

"Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow." (25:17)

R' David Kimchi (the Radak; Provence; 1160-1235) writes: This verse does not mean to say that one is permitted to aggrieve someone who is not his "fellow," for example a stranger or a non-Jew. Rather, it is the style of the Torah to speak about common situations. One is more likely to have an opportunity to aggrieve someone with whom he interacts regularly. Other verses in which we find the same style include (Shmot 20:13), "Do not bear false witness against your fellow," and (Tehilim 15:3), "[Who may dwell on Your mountain?] One who has done his fellow no evil."

Radak continues: One is prohibited to cheat, rob or steal from a non- Jew. Why then is it permitted to lend money to a non-Jew with interest, whereas one may not lend to a Jew with interest? Radak explains that giving an interest-free loan is a chessed / act of kindness. Performing kindness for a Jew is an obligation, whereas performing kindness for a non-Jew is not. Typically, the non-Jewish world is not known for its kindness toward Jews. Nevertheless, Radak writes, if a non-Jew initiates chessed towards a Jew, the Jew is obligated to reciprocate with chessed toward the non-Jew. (Commentary to Tehilim 15:3, 5)

"Sevens"

The midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 29:9) states: All the seventh ones are beloved always. Above, there are seven worlds, and the seventh is the most favored. These worlds are: shamayim, shmei ha'shamayim, rakia, shechakim, zevul, maon and aravot. We read (Tehilim 68:5), "Extol He Who rides

upon the highest heavens / aravot with His Name, 'Kah'."

There are seven terms for "land," and the seventh is the most favored. These terms are: eretz, adamah, arka, geh, tziyah, neshiyah and tevel. We read (Tehilim 9:9), "And He will judge tevel in righteousness; He will judge the regimes with fairness."

Among generations, the seventh was favored. They were: Adam, Shet, Enosh, Keinan, Mahalalel, Yered and Chanoch. We read (Bereishit 5:24), "Chanoch walked with the Elokim."

Among patriarchs, the seventh was favored. They were: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Levi, Kehat, Amram and Moshe. We read (Shmot 19:3), "Moshe ascended to the Elokim."

Among sons, the seventh was favored, as we read (Divrei Hayamim I 2:15), "David, the seventh [son]."

Among kings, the seventh was favored. [The first seven kings were:] Shaul, Ish-Boshet, David, Shlomo, Rechavam, Aviyah and Asa. We read (Divrei Hayamim II 14:10), "Asa called out to Hashem, his G-d."

Among years, the seventh is favored, as we read (Shmot 23:11), "In the seventh [year], you shall leave it untended and unharvested."

Among shemittah cycles, the seventh is favored, as we read (in our parashah--25:10), "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year [i.e., the yovel]." [See below.]

Among days, the seventh is favored, as we read (Bereishit 2:3), "Elokim blessed the seventh day."

Among months, the seventh is favored, as we read (Vayikra 23:24), "In the seventh month [Tishrei], on the first day [is Rosh Hashanah.] [Until here from the midrash]

R' Shmuel Yafeh Ashkenazi z"l (Turkey; 1525-1595) writes: There is no doubt that this midrash contains a secret, but I do not know what it is. Perhaps, he continues, these sevens allude to the World-to-Come, which will be in the seventh millennium of existence. [See Sanhedrin 97a]

Regarding the yovel, R' Ashkenazi writes: How does the yovel, which is the fiftieth year, demonstrate that Hashem favors sevens? If it is because the yovel is the culmination of seven cycles of seven years (i.e., 49 years), why does the midrash not include the holiday of Shavuot, which also is the culmination of seven sevens (i.e., the 49 days of the Omer)? The answer is that this midrash holds like the halachic opinion there is no mitzvah of yovel unless it was preceded by the observance of seven shemittot. [In contrast, the observance of Shavuot is not dependent on having counted the Omer.] (Yefeh Toar)

"If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and not gather in our crops!' I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the

three-year period. You will sow in the eighth year, but you will eat from the old crop; until the ninth year, until the arrival of its crop, you will eat the old. The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; for you are sojourners and residents with Me." (25:20-23)

R' Yosef Chaver z"l (Poland; 19th century) writes: The mitzvah of shemittah, coming as it does every seven years, reminds us that G-d controls the universe; not, as idolators believed, that the universe is controlled by the seven primary heavenly bodies (the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn). To emphasize that the "land is Mine" (i.e., Hashem's), our verses teach us another mitzvah as well, i.e., that land in Eretz Yisrael cannot be sold in perpetuity.

R' Chaver continues: Contrary to the beliefs of astrologers, the Jewish People do not get their sustenance from the heavenly bodies. Rather, we are sustained in the merit of seven pillars on which the world rests: Torah, prayer, chessed, justice, truth, peace and, above all, emunah. [The shemittah is an expression of our emunah, for as the above verses indicate, we must have faith in G-d that He will sustain us while the entire Land lies fallow.]

R' Chaver continues: When the Torah describes the unique wonders of the Exodus, it states (Devarim 4:34), "Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation, with challenges, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with greatly awesome deeds, such as everything that Hashem, your G-d, did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" Notably, there are seven displays of G-d's strength listed here: challenges, signs, wonders, war, a strong hand, an outstretched arm, and greatly awesome deeds. These parallel the Ten Plagues, which were really seven punishments and three lessons. (Blood, Wild Animals, and Hail were lessons about G-d's dominion, not punishments, as the verses indicate.) (Haggadah Shel Pesach Zera Netuyah p.5)

Pirkei Avot

Seven traits characterize an uncultivated person, and seven a learned one. A learned person (1) does not begin speaking before one who is greater than he in wisdom or in years; (2) does not interrupt the words of his fellow; (3) does not answer impetuously; (4) questions with relevance to the subject and replies accurately; (5) discusses first things first and last things last; (6) about something he has not heard he says, "I have not heard"; and (7) acknowledges the truth. The reverse of these characterize an uncultivated person." (Chapter 5)

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (the Maharal of Prague; died 1609) writes: I have already stated many times [Ed. note: Maharal was a prolific author] that one should never interpret the words of our Sages as being casual statements. Rather, if they said that seven traits characterize a learned person, it must be because this number is fitting; no more and no less.

Maharal continues: The mishnah is teaching that intellect, which is the hallmark of a learned person, must be orderly. The number seven represents order, for order requires equilibrium. The reason that seven represents equilibrium is that something that is at equilibrium is: (1) in just the right place, not (2) too high, (3) too low, (4) too far out front, (5) too far behind, (6) too far to the right, or (7) too far to the left.

Maharal continues: The last of the seven traits listed in our mishnah also demonstrates the importance of order and equilibrium. The word "emet" / "truth" is made up of three letters that appear in the word in alphabetical order, one letter from the beginning of the alphabet, one from the middle, and one from the end. Thus, the word "emet" is an orderly word that stands on solid foundations. The opposite is the case with the word "sheker" / "falsehood." (Derech Chaim)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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