



Behar

VaYikra (Leviticus) 25:1 - 26:2

When the Jewish people reached the Land of Israel, they were to let their land lie fallow every seventh year. For six years, they could grow crops and gather produce, but the seventh year was to be "a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath unto the Lord." They were to eat only what grew naturally during that year.

In the fiftieth year, after a cycle of seven sabbatical years, a jubilee year was proclaimed by the sounding of the Shofar on Yom Kippur. Similar laws applied to the land and in addition, Israelite slaves were set free and all land reverted to its original owners. A family's portion of land in Israel which was sold to another (to pay off debt, for example) could never be held by the second party in perpetuity. This was a way to insure that intergenerational poverty, caused by successive generations having no real access to economic resources (in this case land) would be unknown among Israel.

During the fifty-year period, the price of land bought and sold was affected by the number of years remaining until the jubilee. Additionally, land that was sold due to financial hardship could be redeemed before the jubilee year by a relative of the original owner, since it was preferable that the land remain in the family.

Parsha Behar teaches that loans to fellow Israelites were to be made without interest; that an Israelite forced through poverty to become a slave was to be treated leniently and set free at the jubilee; and that an Israelite who sold himself as a slave to a stranger (i.e. a non-Israelite) could be redeemed at any time on payment of an agreed sum or, in any event, in the jubilee year.



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