

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Behar**  
**May 28, 2016**

**פרשת בהר**  
**כ' באייר תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 25:1-26:2

In this *parasha*, God tells Moshe to instruct the people on the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, as well as on how to relate to those in the community who become impoverished.

Anyone who has visited the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia (including all those who have passed through our fifth grade) knows that it contains a verse from this week's *parasha* (chapter 25, verse 10): וְקִרְאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ – “proclaim liberty throughout the land.”

This is one of many examples of a verse taken out of context and used for a different purpose. The verse refers to the Israelites proclaiming the Jubilee year, during which all land reverts back to its original owners, all those in servitude go free, and the land lies fallow for a second consecutive year.

The verse itself is quite interesting. It does not feature the usual words for “liberty” or “freedom,” חֵירוּת (*cheirut*), שְׁחִרּוּר (*shichrur*) or חוֹפֵשׁ (*chofesh*). Rather, the Torah chooses the word דְּרוֹר (*dror*) to indicate the special quality of the liberty experienced at the beginning of the Jubilee year.

*Dror* is a fascinating word. Besides “liberty,” it has two other seemingly disparate meanings. It refers to myrrh, an ingredient in incense (*Shmot* 30:23): וְאַתָּה קֹחַ-לֶדֶד, בְּשָׂמִים רָאשׁ, מֵר-דְּרוֹר חֲמֵשׁ מְאוֹת, וְקִנְמֹן-בְּשָׂם מִחֲצִיתוֹ חֲמֵשִׁים וּמְאוֹתִים; וְקִנְהַ-בְּשָׂם, חֲמֵשִׁים

גם-צפור מצאה בית, ודור קן לה-- אשר-שתה אפרחיה : את- - ומאתים. "Take for yourself also the chief spices, of fine myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty." It also refers to the type of bird we call a swallow (*Tehillim* 84:4): מְצֹרֶת מִצְּבֻרֶיהָ, ה' צָבָא-אוֹת-- מֶלְכִי, וְאֵל-לֵהִי -- "Yea, the bird has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; Your altars, Hashem of hosts, my Sovereign, and my God."

The Midrash (Babylonian Talmud *Rosh Hashana* 9b) relates these three definitions to each other in an interesting way. It tells us that a swallow is one of the avian species that can live in either a field or a house. It states further that the fine myrrh used for the incense is of a consistency that allows it to fly around while being mixed. Further, "R. Judah said: What is the significance of the word *dror*? [The freedom of] one who dwells [*medayyer*] where he likes and can carry on trade in the whole country."

The Torah seems to be telling us that true freedom rests in freedom of movement, freedom in commerce, and freedom from living in ghettos. Perhaps the quote on the Liberty Bell does not come as much out of context as it first appeared. We are blessed that the United States showers upon us these freedoms in addition to others which appear in the Bill of Rights.

Next time you are in Philadelphia, you can share this knowledge rooted in Jewish texts with the other tourists.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What freedoms are listed in the Bill of Rights?
- Are these consistent with Jewish thought?
- How do each of the definitions of *dror* indicate "liberty?"