

## Torah Talk – תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

Parashot Behar-Bechukotai  
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פרשות בהר-בחקותי  
כ"ז באייר תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 25:1-27:34

In these *parashot*, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct the people in the laws of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, as well as how to relate to those in the community who become impoverished. Hashem then enumerates the rewards for keeping the commandments and the punishments for violating them; the laws of tithes are listed.

*Parashat Behar* begins with no fewer than six references to the number “seven” (25:1-13):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת ה': שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךָ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרֶמֶךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת לֵה' שְׂדֶךָ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכְרֶמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר: אֵת סִפִּיחַ קִצִּירְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֲנָבֵי נִזְיָרְךָ לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שַׁבְּתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ: וְהִיְתָה שַׁבַּת הָאָרֶץ לָכֶם לֶאֱכֹלָה לָךְ וּלְעֶבְדְּךָ וּלְאִמְתְּךָ וּלְשִׁכִּירְךָ וּלְתוֹשֵׁבְךָ הַגֵּרִים עִמָּךְ: וּלְבַהֲמֹתֶיךָ וּלְחִיָּה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרְצְךָ תִּהְיֶה כָּל־תְּבוּאָתָהּ לֶאֱכֹל: וְסַפַּרְתָּ לָךְ שֵׁשׁ שַׁבָּתֹת שָׁנִים שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים שֵׁשׁ פְּעָמִים וְהָיוּ לָךְ יָמֵי שֵׁשׁ שַׁבָּתֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשַׁע וְאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה: וְהָעֶבְרֶת שׁוֹפֵר תִּרְוְעָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים תַּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפֵר בְּכָל־אֲרָצְכֶם: וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם אֵת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרַאתֶם דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל־יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יוֹבֵל הוּא תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם וְשַׁבְּתֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אֲחִיזָתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל־מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תִּשְׁבוּ: יוֹבֵל הוּא שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת־סִפִּיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת־נִזְרֶיהָ: כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: בַּשָּׁנָה הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת תִּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל־אֲחִיזָתוֹ:

And Hashem spoke to Moshe in Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath to Hashem. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in the produce thereof.

But in the **seventh** year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Hashem; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. That which grows by itself of your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. And the sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you: for you, and for your servant and for your maid, and for your hired servant and for the settler by your side that resides with you; and for your cattle, and for the beasts that are in your land, shall all the increase thereof be for food. And you shall number **seven** sabbaths of years for yourself, **seven** times **seven** years; and there shall be for you the days of **seven** sabbaths of years, even forty-nine years. Then shall you make proclamation with the blast of the horn on the tenth day of the **seventh** month; in the Day of Atonement shall you make proclamation with the horn throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee for you; and you shall return every man to his possession, and you shall return every man to his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; you shall not sow, neither reap that which grows of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. In this year of jubilee you shall return every man to his possession.

*Shmittah* (the fallow year) occurs once in seven years. After seven cycles of *shmittah* are completed, the *Yovel* (Jubilee) year is commemorated. It is announced during the seventh month.

The number seven is mentioned 595 times in the Bible, as contrasted with the numbers six and eight, which appear 308 times and 175 times, respectively. Seven appears over and over again in Jewish law and Jewish thought. Some of the many examples, in no particular order, include:

- We are currently in the middle of the *Omer* period – the count of seven weeks between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*.
- There are seven *aliyot* blessings in the Shabbat morning Torah reading.
- The *menorah* in the Temple had seven branches.
- There are seven days of *Pesach* and *Sukkot* when celebrated in Israel.
- There is a seven-day period of intense mourning after the loss of a loved one, which is known as *shiva* (seven).

- Seven blessings are recited under the *chuppah* (canopy) during a Jewish wedding ceremony, and the bride and groom are feted with seven days of festive meals. Both of these are known as *sheva brachot* (seven blessings).
- Seven is the number of times Kayin (Cain) will be avenged by God if he is murdered.
- Noach waited seven days after he saw dry land before sending the bird out of the ark.
- The Bnei Yisrael circled the city of Jericho for seven days during the time of Yehoshua and then “the walls came tumbling down.”

Aside from Jewish tradition, the number seven occurs frequently in nature:

- With very few exceptions, all mammals have seven bones in their necks.
- Seven is the neutral pH value between acidity and alkalinity.
- There are seven periods (horizontal rows of elements) on the periodic table.
- Seven is the number of stellar objects visible to the naked eye: the sun, the moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn.
- And of course, there are seven games in many professional sports playoffs.

What is the reason for the ubiquity of the number seven? The mystics would answer that God created the world in seven days, and therefore seven is the number which symbolizes completion. It is interesting that anthropologists have found few current cultures that have anything other than a seven-day week. (The Hebrew word for “week,” *shavua*, is derived from *shivah*, the Hebrew word for “seven.”) Perhaps the notion of completion is why some people consider seven to be a lucky number.

The Jewish people are certainly fortunate that for us, every seventh day is the Shabbat, when we get to renew ourselves emotionally and spiritually.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- Where else does the number seven appear in Jewish thought or in life in general?
- Can you explain how the concept of completion applies to each of the examples given above?