

## **This Week in Torah *B'Har***

Looking ahead, our ancestors are told by God to remember from where they came. At the base of Mount Sinai, they are commanded that when they enter the land of Israel and settle there, they should not be so stiff-necked as to say as to be arrogant, myopic and self-centered. Every 7 years, there is a sabbatical year [*Shmita*] where the land must be given a rest and every 50 years there is a *Yoval* or Jubilee year where territories return to original owners, debts are forgiven and slaves/indentured servants are emancipated. God's plan is restored and our mindset is rebalanced.

Let's not view this as a Biblical version or of MAGA or revising history to retell it thru a different narrative focus. It is not locking us in to the way the world worked back during ancient times. No—it is a type of restorative justice. It creates balance and harmony where equanimity is primary as people look beyond socio-economic strata to see the face of God in another. But there are risks--- why make loans if in a short period of time it will be nullified? Why buy property if the deed will be cancelled? These are important questions—Jewish scholars will teach us not to focus on financial loss or gain, but societal balance and human dignity instead.

In the Talmud [*Yevamot 62b*], there is a story that stated: “Rabbi Akiba had 12,000 pairs of students. All of them died over a 32 day period between Passover and Shavuot because they did not show respect toward each other.”

How true is that *mashal*? Don't worry about that! Instead focus on the number 32 which is the number of days during the counting of the *Omer* before the Romans lifted siege of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. The 33<sup>rd</sup> day was a holiday—*Lag B'Omer*, a day dedicated as a student holiday to celebrate with study, parties and bonfires. The notion is that 32 days our ancestors suffered as supplies were cut off and they were treated as if they were dead. The same way that when we are cruel to another [as the Chasidic master Rabbi Schneur Zalman taught] the presence of God “is treated as missing from the soulless existence of a being.” Understanding it this way—*Yoval* and *shemita* compels us to pull back to acknowledge the dependence we should have on God and the sense of Divine Providence.

Add to this the teaching of Rabbi Bachya ibn Pakuda [who lived in Spain from 1050-1120]. He wrote: “the essence of a person of faith is equanimity.” In the chapter of his book on this, he describes the need for economic conquest and/or growth is rooted in a discontent with one’s lot. He sees that greed or financial exploitation of another is not about money nor is it about power—rather it is about the lack of sense of self. Equanimity is rooted in self-confidence and faith that the divine plan is right.

Turning back to the Torah narrative, examine the mindset of our ancestors in the wilderness of Sinai. They still had a slave mentality. They yearned not just for freedom from their task masters, but to be free to do what they choose to do. But the patterns they have experienced for nearly 400 years was that freedom meant enslaving another to exploit to do their business. God desired to reestablish a new pattern but knowing the human mindset, it had to be restarted every 50 years as a reminder of the original intent—we need God!