

Behar - Rabbi Lerner - May 8, 2011

Houses that are in Walled Cities.

25:29-34: *If a man sells a house in a walled city, he can redeem it for a full year from the sale. If he doesn't redeem it in the course of that full year, then that house that is "not" [Hebrew word lo] in the walled city is gone forever; he shall not get it back at Yoveil.* (There is a kri and kesiv of the word lo - it is spelled with an aleph which would imply that it is not a walled city, but it is read as if it had a vav). **Abarbanel**: this statement that it should be a full, complete year - shana temimah - it means a solar calendar year (365 days), rather than lunar (354 days). **Rashi**: the cities had to be walled from the time of Yehoshuah. **Rashi**: there is a difference though with fields - any field that is sold cannot be redeemed for the first two years - it is for the buyer to use; after that time, it can be redeemed by the seller; at yoveil, the land reverts back to the original owner - if he wants it back sooner, he has to pay the buyer. The buyer will figure in to the purchase price how close the purchase is to yoveil.

Why do we have this difference based on an ancient wall around a city? A field is for parnassa, so the buyer was depending on it for a livelihood and it cannot be pulled out from under him too quickly. **Abarbanel**: The reason there is a difference is that the plot of land for a home is small; a house is for living in and for protection from the elements; it is like buying a garment for protection from the cold. It is not like a field. If one sells a house it is assumed that the seller has another place to go - therefore, there should not be a need for redemption of the house. Fields are different - a field is all about livelihood, and only after a minimum of two years one can go back to purchase it. **Meshech Chachmah**: the key difference is that it is a walled city. These are walled cities to protect against the enemy; the reason it has to be present from the time of Yehoshuah was to tell us how the Canaanite nations defended the land - this was a critical issue. We find the following halachah - if a city is close to the border, even if the gentiles are attacking just for hay or straw, we have to desecrate the Shabbos to stop them. Normally, when the goyim are attacking a city on Shabbos and we know it is purely monetary, for minor items, for that we do not desecrate the Shabbos. If there is a doubt that they are attacking perhaps to kill Jews, then we do everything to fight against them, even on Shabbos. But, if it is a border town, even if not coming to kill and they are only interested in plundering provisions, we go out against them even on Shabbos - we have to stand firm because maybe they will change their minds and want to conquer the land - it is a national security issue. The walled cities in the time of Yehoshuah were key cities in the defense of the land. With these cities we are concerned that if the houses return at the time of yoveil, it would not be good - during the span of 50 years many homes turn over ownership - if we now bring back descendants of the original owners of the land there will be many people who are strangers to each other, with no connection or bonds, with no strength to the community - it would be endangering the defense of the city; you need a tight social bond to defend a city; large numbers of new residents would endanger the city; the Torah wants to maintain stability of these cities for defense of the land.

Oznayim LaTorah: why have the kri ukesiv? To tell us that if it had a wall in the time of Yehoshuah but not now, it has the same law regarding sale of a house. How does this make sense? When the city had a wall at the time of Yehoshuah, he sanctified those cities to have a higher level of kedushah; those cities retain that kedushah, even though they don't have walls now. Why is that? When Moshe tells the spies to see how the Canaanite people live, he told them to look to see if they are in fortified cities or not. When they returned, they said that the

Canaanites live in huge walled cities - they were dependent on the presence of these walls; the greatest wall of all was that around Yericho; these walls were the symbol of their security. The spies feared this. When the land was ultimately captured, those walls were a symbol for the Jews to never put faith in the walls that man builds, but in belief in God. So Yehoshuah sanctified them to remember the miracles and to always remind the Jews about having faith in God. The regular unwalled cities were captured normally; but these special cities were sanctified from that time because the walls were a symbol of faith in God; it was the walls at that time that gave them the kedushah.

25:35-37: *If your brother is becoming impoverished and he is falling economically in your presence, you should take hold of him and strengthen him, the ger and toshav, so that they can live with you. You should not take from him Neshech or Ribis* [two different kinds of interest]. **Rashi**: even if one is a ger **or** toshav, not a *ger toshav* (these are non-Jews living in the land or who move in later on - they have to live on an ethical basis, following the seven mitzvos of Noach). A ger is a righteous convert who accepted Judaism completely, with all of the laws. So, the simple read of the pasuk is any citizens of the land, and not the non-Jew living there. What is not controversial is that the ger tzedek is supported; but we see here that even the non-Jew who keeps the seven laws must be supported; they get loans that are free of interest.

Ramban: what is the difference between neshech and ribis? They both mean getting more back than you loaned. Neshech means to bite; Ribis just means more, as in the root word rabah. Ribis implies getting more back at the *end* of the loan, a certain percentage. Neshech however structures a payment that pays back extra every year of the loan - it is ultimately a much steeper interest.

Oznayim LaTorah: it says that when your brother is slipping and your hand slips with him, it implies that even when the wealthy are having problems, when there is a general recession; you are hurting too, but even so, you must help him; you must still give tzedakah and strengthen your neighbor. When you feel that things are contracting and you don't have as much, you need to get God's help by opening your hand to help others; then God will be good to you as well.

25:38: *I am Hashem who took you out of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and be a God to you.* The simple meaning is that God was able to discern the difference between who was a Jew and who was not, and He will punish those who charge interest. **Meshech Chachmah**: there is no other place we were we find this language, where it says to give **you** the land of Canaan. When all of the 12 tribes are living together, there is a yoveil; when there is no yoveil, there is no halachah of Ger Toshav. That is why it says when I give you the land - there is only the din of Ger Toshav when they are all living in the land. **Oznayim LaTorah**: yoveil corrects the economic distortions that happened during the 50 years in between.

Ramban: the concept of saving another person is from these pasukim - not just in an economic manner; you have to bring life to your fellow Jews, physically and economically. We must go all out to save one another.