

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the *drasha* sponsors:

- Terry and Sheila Klein, in memory of Terry's mother, Harriet Klein, Chana Aliza bas Aryeh HaLevi, whose yahrtzeit is 27 of Iyar, and Sheila's step-father, Harry Irom, Tzvi ben Yisrael Dovid, whose yahrtzeit is 1 of Sivan. May their *neshamos* have an *aliya*.
- Daniel and Phyllis Sykes, in memory of Daniel's father, Melvin Sykes, whose yahrtzeit is 26 of Iyar. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Ellie Ziffer, in honor of her parents, Larry and Flo Ziffer, in appreciation of their love and support, and wishing them many more years of health, simcha, and bracha together.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and good health.

This Monday is 28 Iyar, **Yom Yerushalayim**, which marks the 54th anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, as part of Israel's 1967 victory. It is a day to celebrate the recapture of Jerusalem after 2,000 years of bitter exile. It is a day to celebrate the important milestone, when Lt. General Motta Gur famously announced "*har habayit b'yadenu*." It is a day to recognize and thank Hashem for the process of *geula* that continues to unfold before our eyes. May we be *zoche* to celebrate together in *Yerushalayim habenuya, bimhera viyamenu*...amen.

This past week, Efraim Gordon, a 31 year old Israeli visitor to the Baltimore Jewish community, visiting for a wedding, was murdered outside the home where he was staying. This senseless and heinous crime is very painful and disturbing. We express our deepest sympathy to his family and offer a tefilla that Hakadosh Baruch Hu help comfort them and keep our community safe.

Our Parsha begins with the *Mitzva* of *Shmitta*.

ויקרא (פרשת בהר) פרק כה פסוק א - ב

(א) וידבר יקנוק אל־מִשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר:

(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לִיקְנוֹק:

(ג) שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶה וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמֶךָ וְאַסַּפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָה:

(ד) וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת שְׁבַת שְׁבֹתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לִיקְנוֹק שְׂדֶה לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמֶךָ לֹא תִזְמַר:

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai:

Speak to the Jewish people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of Hashem.

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield.

But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of Hashem: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

Rashi quotes a famous *midrash* in **Toras Kohanim**

רש"י ויקרא (פרשת בהר) פרק כה פסוק א

(א) בהר סיני - מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני, והלא כל המצות נאמרו מסיני, אלא מה שמיטה נאמרו כללותיה ופרטותיה ודקדוקיה מסיני, אף כולן נאמרו כללותיהן ודקדוקיהן מסיני, כך שנויה בתורת כהנים.

What does the matter of the Sabbatical year have to do with Mount Sinai that the Torah felt compelled to expressly state where it was commanded? Were not all commandments given on Sinai? But this statement is intended to suggest the following comparison: Just as the case of the law of Shmitta, its general rules, [its specific prescriptions] and minute details were ordained on

Mount Sinai. So, also, were all commandments with their general rules and their minute details ordained on Mount Sinai. Thus is taught in Toras Kohanim (Sifra, Behar, Section 1 1).

This raises a follow up question—why did Hashem choose *Shmitta* to teach this lesson?

Wouldn't any Mitzva have been sufficient for this purpose?

The **Ksav Sofer**, Rabbi Avraham Binyamin Shmuel Sofer, (1815-1871), the son of the famed Chasam Sofer, writes the following:

עוד נ"ל דברי רש"י מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני וכו' ואקדים לפרש הא דאיתא בש"ס שבת שבא גר להלל ואמר גייריני ע"מ שאקיים כל התורה על רגל אחד, ואמר לו מי דסני לך לחברך וכו' ועיי' פי' רש"י ועיי' מהרש"א וי"ל שאלת הגר ע"פ שכתבו המפרושים הא דלא נתנה התורה עד הר סיני משום שהיו אז באגודה אחת כאיש אחד, כדכתיב ויחן שם ישראל וכו' ומקודם שנעשו כאיש אחד לא היה אפשר לקבל התורה דהאיך יקיימו כל אחד מישראל תרי"ג מצות שבהם מצות השייכות רק בכהנים ומצות שהם בישראל ולא בכהן וכדומה דברי הרבה, ואי אפשר שיקיים איש אחד כל המצוות עליו, אבל אם כל ישראל באגודה אחת ואיש את אחיו אוהב בנפשו אז מתקיימת התורה בכללה בכל ישראל יחד וכאלו עושה כל אחד הכל עכ"ד, ולפ"ז הכל תליה במצות ואהבת לרעך כמוך דאם אוהבים זה את זה וחביב חבירו עליו כגופו אז יש לו חלק בעשות חברו ממצות השם ויש לפרש דאמר ר"ע ואהבת לרעך וכו' זה כלל גדול בתורה דהיינו זה כלל גדול לקיים התורה דלולי זה אי אפשר שתתקיים התורה ע"י שום אחד מישראל אלא ע"י ואהבת לרעך וכו',

The Gemara in Shabbos describes how a potential convert came to Hillel asking to be converted with an explanation of how to keep the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel responded—do not treat others as you would not wish to be treated.

What exactly was the question and answer here?

Ksav Sofer explains that the Torah was not given to the Jewish people when they left Mitzrayim until they reached Har Sinai, because it was not until that point that they became unified and one cohesive unit. Before that point, they could not accept the Torah, because the Torah can only be accepted by a group. No one individual can keep the entire Torah. If Jews are connected to one another, everyone has a share in each other's Mitzvos. The very essence of Mitzva observance is dependent upon connection to one another. If people are not connected to one another—the Torah cannot be kept properly.

ולפ"ז י"ל כי הגר הזה חשקה נפשו לדבק בישראל ולכנוס תחת כנפי השכינה ולקיים כל מצות ה' והבין כי זה א"א לכל האדם, ובפרט כי הוא היה בגיותו כמה שנים, והאיך קיימים מעתה כל התורה, לכן אמר למדני שקיימם כל התורה על רגל א', שיאמר לו דבר יסוד אשר נכללו בו כל המצות כדי שיהיה מקיים כל הורה כולה, והשיב לו הלל מאי דסי לך וכו' שהוא מצות ואהבת לרעך כמוך ועי"ז יהיה באגודה אחת עם כל ישראל ויהיה נפשו קשורה בנפשם ובוזה יקיים כל התורה כנ"ל.

This potential convert had been studying for a while and wanted very badly to keep the entire Torah, and his question was--how? (No one person can fit into each and every category and perform every Mitzva.) What is the key to keeping the entire Torah? Hillel responded, do not treat others as you would not wish to be treated—which is the Mitzva of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This attitude creates the entity called “Am Yisrael,” through the connection between people, which allows each person to have a share in every Mitzva and allows the Torah to be kept in its entirety by the Klal.

והנה מצוה דואהבת לרעך אינו רק בלב אלא שיראה לחבירו את האבתו בפועל ע"י שמעזרו ומושיעו בשעת דוקח ומפנסהו משלו בעת שפרנסתו מצומצמת ואז נראה כי דבוק בלבו וקשור אליו בעבותות האהבה, והנה בשנה השמיטה שאין חורשים וזורעים וקוצרים וצריך להסתפק במה שיש לו, ולפעמים על שלש שנים ובודאי מצמצים כל מה דאפשר, ואם אז יפקיר הכל שיהיה העני שוה לו ליטול כל מה שירצה, אין לך ואהבת לרעך יותר מזה, ולכן פרט כאן בהר סיני לומר מה שמיטה כללותיה ופרטותיה נאמרו מסיני אף כל וכו' דהיינו לאחר שקבלו שמיטה בסינה וקיימו וקבלו עליהם ואהבת לרעך כמוך כל כך אז אף כל נאמרו בסיני והכל תלוי המצות שמיטה לעשות כראוי וק"ל.

Ve'ahavta le'reiacha kamocha is not just a theory—it must be kept in practice—it is crucial for Jews to be invested in one another, to be committed to help one another, even if it is difficult. The Shmitta year is the ultimate expression of that connection to one another. It was a year where people were dependent on their fields producing enough to eat without work. And on top of the stress and unknown of depending on his own field to feed his own family, every farmer had to let anyone who was hungry come and take crops as well—the ultimate expression of ahavas Yisrael.

The Ksav Sofer explains why *Shmitta* is used to highlight *Mitzva* observance in general—to demonstrate that all *Mitzvos* were given at Sinai. *Shmitta* is the ultimate expression of *ahavas Yisrael*—creating a society that looked out for one another--which is the key to accepting and observing the Torah.

This explains why 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva who failed in this one mitzva לא נהגו כבוד זה לזה (they did not treat each other properly) could not be the ones to transmit Torah to the next generation.

And it explains why Rabbi Akiva taught ואהבת לרעך כמוך זה כלל גדול בתורה—loving your fellow as yourself is the fundamental law of the Torah--and why Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, one of Rabbi Akiva's five new students, when he rebuilt after the tragedy, taught the importance of Jewish unity through the famous *mashal* of the people sitting in the same boat---and how one person's actions affect everyone else.

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) (פרשת ויקרא) פרשה ד סימן ו

תני רשב"י משל לבני אדם שהיו יושבין בספינה נטל אחד מהן מקדח והתחיל קודח תחתיו אמרו לו חבריו מה אתה יושב ועושה אמר להם מה אכפת לכם לא תחתני אני קודח אמרו לו שהמים עולין ומציפין עלינו את הספינה

A group of people were sitting in a boat. One person pulled out a hand-drill and proceeded to drill a hole beneath his seat. The other passengers screamed at him and asked, "What do you think you're doing?!" The hole-driller dismissed the question and responded, "What do you care? Am I not drilling under my seat?"

They replied: "Because you are sinking the boat with us in it!"

This is the fundamental attitude of seeing yourself, not simply as an individual, but—more importantly--as part of a nation.

Later in the Parsha, we learn about *issur ribbis*, the prohibition to lend money to fellow Jews with interest. **Rav Shimon Schwab** asks the following (*Rav Schwab on Chumash*, p. 379):
"What is behind the Torah's commandment against lending money on interest to a fellow Jew? Why is a money lender prohibited from charging interest, yet permitted to require remuneration from a person who rents something from him? Furthermore, if charging interest is morally repugnant, why aren't we prohibited from charging interest to a non-Jew as well, just as we are prohibited from stealing from a non-Jew (Bava Kamma 113b)?

Obviously, charging interest is an appropriate and moral method of earning a livelihood within the business world. There is not a shred of impropriety attached to it. It is similar to charging a rental fee. However, while permissible in the marketplaces of the world, it has no place in family relations. Discussing the prohibition against interest, the Torah repeatedly accentuates the brotherhood of the Jewish people, as it says "If your brother becomes impoverished...and your brother shall live with you." Evidently, lending money without interest is a special favor that Jews should be able to expect from one another. It is part of the brotherhood that exists among the Jewish people, designed to create brotherly love within the family.

This interconnectedness is illustrated by a very moving story, published in the wake of the tragedy at Meron. (theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/1971171/like-a-malach-the-post-that-moved-thousands-of-israelis.html)

Yakir Asaraf, a secular Israeli, who like many others was shocked by the immensity of the Meron tragedy, decided that he had to do something to share in the families' pain, and he and a friend went to pay a shiva call to the Englard family of Jerusalem, who lost their two sons, Moshe Nosson Nota, z'l, 14, and Yehoshua, z'l, 9.

He wrote a Facebook post about his experience, which quickly went viral.

"It could be that I just experienced one of the most significant moments of my life," Asaraf wrote. "I just left the shiva of the Englard family, who lost their two sons at Meron. And my heart is simply bursting with mixed emotions, my eyes are filled with sad tears, but my heart is full of simcha.

"The father noticed us and quickly stopped speaking in Yiddish with the other menachamim and turned to me and Maor in Hebrew.

"I'm happy you came,' he said, and his eyes are wet with tears but his face is radiant. "When are we already zocheh to meet together – you and I?" he said.

"Maor and I looked at him with sparkling eyes as if he's a malach talking to us.

"You should know that what's happening here is the truth,' he said. 'You and I are both pained by the great loss. We're giving chizzuk to each other. It doesn't matter if you're chilonim (secular) or Chareidim – we're Jews."

"Everyone else in the room – in eerie silence – is quietly listening to Menachem Mendel talk to us.

"I want you to invite me to your simchos!" I say.

"And I'll invite you to my simchos!" he responds.

"A few minutes of silence, and he looks down and mumbles; 'Mi K'Amcha Yisrael.'

After the tefillah, we approach him and before we had a chance to say words of comfort, he says, 'Thank you for coming. You were mechazeik me.'

"Maor and I leave the house, looking at each other, but unable to speak. We can't process what just happened, and while I'm writing these words, I still can't process it.

"This meeting represents the truth of our Am, the endless Ahavas HaChinam we have for each other, our shared pain, the tremendous emunah that continues to unite us.

"I'll end with a tefillah l'Yoshev Ba'Meromim – for Ahavas Chinam between us, and for besuros tovos, and for all the families of the victims to be zocheh to true nachas, and that I'm zocheh to be invited to the smachos of the wonderful Menachem Mendel."

May we strengthen our *ahavas chinam* (baseless love), and *ahavas Yisrael* during this challenging time. May each of us do our part in reaching out to others, assisting others, and feeling the pain of others during this time leading up to *Kabbalas HaTorah*. May we all merit to see the day when we will be *oleh la-eregel* as a nation, *bimhera viyamenu*, amen.