**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF *SHEMITTA***

**By Rav Binyamin Zimmerman**

**Shiur #17: The *Neshama Yetera* of Shabbat and *Shemitta***

**The Year of Shabbat**

In last week's lesson we examined *shemitta's* identity as *Shabbat ha-aretz*. The connection between Shabbat and *shemitta* goes beyond the lexical; *shemitta* first appears in the Torah, in *Parashat Mishpatim,* alongside Shabbat. Additionally, according to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva (see lesson 2), *shemitta* appears next in the Torah in a verse that explicitly mentions only Shabbat. The sabbatical themes of *shemitta* dominate the longest passage about it, in *Behar*, where the root “*shavat”* appears a fitting seven times.

We also saw that *shemitta* is a yearlong Shabbat which takes the spiritual aspects and perspective that are usually limited to once a week, and inculcates them in one's very personality over an entire year. This challenge of putting one's work aside for a year is rewarded by those who find the strength of character to be *gibborei khoach,* embracing a year of social and spiritual growth that can do wonders for any society which manages to implement it. Fittingly, this is how Rav Kook describes the atmosphere of the *shemitta* year:

A year of quiet and serenity, during which there are no tyrants or taskmasters: “he shall not exact from his friend or his brother, because the time of release for God has arrived” (*Devarim* 15:2). A year of equality and relaxation, of expansion of the soul in the expanse of the upright of God who sustains the living with kindness. There is no individual private property, nor are there exclusive rights rigorously guarded; rather the godly peace pervades all that possesses a soul…

Rav Kook then goes on to explain how the laws of *shemitta* enable this reality, something we will keenly feel as we analyze the *halakhot*.

To better understand the impact that *shemitta* can have on society it pays to begin with an analysis specifically of the passage in *Parashat Mishpatim*, in which *shevi'it*, the seventh year, is first mentioned, in association with Shabbat. This will allow us to better understand both the *neshama yetera* (extra soul) of each Sabbath as well as how *shemitta* impacts the years before and after it.

***Shemitta* in *Parashat Mishpatim***

And six years you shall sow your land and shall harvest its fruits. But [in] the seventh (*shevi'it*), you shall release it (*tishmetenna*) and let it lie fallow (*u-ntashtah*), and the poor of your nation will eat, and what they leave over the beasts of the field shall eat. So you shall do with your vineyard and with your olive grove. (*Shemot* 23:10-11)

After describing the seventh year as a period of “*tishmetenna u-ntashtah”* and mentioning the benefits for the poor of the nation and even the animals, the Torah follows this with a description of Shabbat.

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest (*tishbot*) in order that your ox and your donkey shall repose (*yanuach*), and your maidservant's son and the stranger shall be refreshed (*ve-yinafesh*).

This is in turn followed by a description of the three pilgrimage festivals. We might have connected Shabbat to them, but the fact that both *shemitta* and Shabbat talk about the implications of rest for the landowner, the underprivileged and the animal connects them not only in context, but in content as well.

It is worth noting that at this point in the Torah, not too much is known about Shabbat itself. Shabbat initially appears in the Torah as the pinnacle of creation, later appearing in *Parashat Beshalach* in the context of the unique rules in relation to the manna which falls during the nation's sojourn in the desert (possibly alluded to at Mara as well). Shabbat also appears in the Ten Commandments in *Parashat Yitro*, but there is much to know about Shabbat that has yet to be explained as of *Parashat Mishpatim*.

The relationship in these verses between *shemitta* and Shabbat goes beyond the numerical similarity: after six units, the seventh is holy. Additionally, the prohibitions of Shabbat and *shemitta* are not mentioned in the negative form, as in both cases (although using different words, *tishmetenna* and *tishbot)*, the Torah requires ceasing one's usual affairs.

As mentioned in the last lesson, commentators like Rav Hirsch note the relationship between Shabbat and *shemitta:* both recognize God's rule over the world and seek equality on the social plane. Similarly, Rav Hirsch elsewhere (*Vayikra* 25) writes:

The Sabbath of the land – *shemitta* – and the Sabbath of creation – Shabbat – are similar, except that one relates to the Land of Israel and the other to the entire world. Shabbat expresses subordination to the Creator and King of the world, while *shemitta* expresses subordination to the One to Whom the Land belongs... The antithesis of both is *avoda zara* (idol worship). Acknowledging Shabbat is an affirmative rebuttal of the heresy which is *avoda zara*. So too, *shemitta* is an affirmative rebuttal of *avoda zara*, as it expresses the rule of G-d over the Land of Israel, while *avoda zara* is a denial of G-d’s exclusive rule...

However, it is the idea of rest which characterizes a good deal of their unique shared quality. Shabbat doesn't merely sanctify time; it sanctifies the Jew as well. The same is true for *shemitta*.

**The *Neshama Yetera* of Shabbat**

The concept of some form of expanded soul being afforded the Jew during the weekly Shabbat already appears in the Talmud (*Beitza* 16a), where Resh Lakish states:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, gives man an additional soul on the eve of Shabbat, and at the end of Shabbat He takes it back, as it says (*Shemot* 31:17): “*shavat va-yinafash*” — once *Shabbat* ends, woe (*vai*) to the spirit (*nefesh*) which is lost.

Resh Lakish derives from the phrase “*shavat va-yinafash”* that after Shabbat ends, one loses a little part of one's soul, referring to the additional soul that accompanies the Jew on Shabbat. *Nefesh* literally means spirit, but here it is a verb. It refer to some internal form of refreshment and even restoration that affects the inner part of one's personality.

A number of issues, however, remain unclear. Firstly, what is the nature and purpose of this expanded soul? Secondly, the terminology of the Talmud is a little confusing. On the one hand, it calls the additional soul *neshama,* yet it cites a verse which references the *nefesh.*

In fact, both *nefesh* and *neshama* are terms for the soul, but the fact that they are often used in different contexts indicates that they are not completely interchangeable. Both terms are used at the beginning of *Bereishit* in the context of the creation of man, but differently. God blows into man a *nishmat chayim* and he becomes a *nefesh chaya* (a term also used for animals).

God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils a breath of life (*nishmat chayim).* Man [thus] became a living creature (*nefesh chaya*). (Bereishit 2:7).

In fact, Kabbalistic thought states that the human soul, which is what differentiates humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom, is actually made up of three parts, from the aforementioned *verses*.

*Nefesh* refers to the "animal soul" that man has contained in his blood, as he shares many of biochemical life processes with the animal kingdom, and is therefore represented by the term *nefesh,* as the Torah says, "The spirit of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11). Man might have a unique *nefesh*, but the entire animal kingdom possess some version of it.

The *neshama*, however, is unique to man; it comes directly from God's innermost Essence, His "breath".

Rav Aryeh Kaplan summarizes the three elements of man's soul thusly:

The soul consists of three parts which are called by the Hebrew names, *nefesh, ruach* and *neshama*. The word *neshama* is a cognate of *nesheema*, which means literally "breath." *Ruach* means "wind." *Nefesh* comes from the root *nafash*, meaning "rest," as in the verse, "On the seventh day, [God] ceased work and rested (*nafash*)" (Exodus 31:17).

God's exhaling a soul can be compared to a glassblower forming a vessel. The breath (*neshama*) first leaves his lips, travels as a wind (*ruach*) and finally comes to rest (*nefesh*) in the vessel. Of these three levels of the soul, *neshama* is therefore the highest and closes to God, while *nefesh* is that aspect of the soul residing in the body. *Ruach* stands between the two, binding man to his spiritual Source. It is for this reason that Divine Inspiration is called *Ruach HaKodesh* in Hebrew.

Yet, if this is true; the term *va-yinafash* should logically be a reference to an expanded *nefesh* rather than an expanded *neshama.* It is not just semantics, as this issue lies at the heart of the dispute between the commentators as to the nature of this expanded soul: is it primarily a physical endowment, much more suited for the term *nefesh;* or a spiritual one, much more appropriate for the term *neshama?*

**A Physical or Spiritual Addition?**

Rashi (*Beitza* 16) focus on the heightened physical elements of one's soul on Shabbat, as he explains that the *neshama yetera* provides *rochav lev (*a heightened consciousness), *menucha (*repose), *simcha (*joy), and tranquility, including the ability to eat more and not find one's soul disgusted by it.

In *Shitta Mekubbetzet,* Rav Betzalel Ashkenazi explains this differently, noting that the added soul on Shabbat is actually a spiritual addition, “a godly abundance and additional intelligence to be able to occupy oneself in Torah, and analyze the acts of God.”

These two explanations differ as to whether the expanded soul is a heightened physical capability to eat with an expanded appetite, etc. or a more spiritual frame of mind.

In fact, the Shela takes serious issue with the understanding that the *neshama yetera* allows man to eat more, although he does not mention Rashi specifically. He disputes the idea that the *neshama yetera* is rooted in the physical.

Some commentators explain that Rashi believes that the expanded soul is a spiritual addition; however, the simple understanding of hiss view is supported by others, e.g. Rabbeinu Chananel (*Taanit* 28a) and Daat Zekenim *(Shemot* 16:22).

In truth, a careful reading of Rashi's comment indicates that there are both *nefesh* and *neshama* aspects to this Shabbat addition; i.e., a physical component and a spiritual one, which are meant to be merged. This may help us understand another mystery, how a reference to God, “*va-yinafash,”* can describe man’s experience on Shabbat; some explain that it refers to refreshment, obviously unnecessary for God, but also a greater connection to the spiritual. Rashi himself writes (*Shemot* 31:17):

Now every expression of *nofesh* (rest) is an expression of *nefesh,* for one regains one’s soul and one’s breath when one rests from the toil of work. He about Whom it is written: “He neither tires nor wearies” (*Yeshayahu* 40:28), and Whose every act is performed by speech [alone, without physical effort], dictated rest in reference to Himself [only] in order to make it understood to the [human] ear with words that it can understand.

Essentially, Rashi and Ibn Ezra too explain that this phrase is to be understood to mean that physical resting can cause spiritual rejuvenation as well.

Some commentators even explain *va-yinafash* in the verse not as a reference to God but as a reference to the world. It was only on Shabbat that the entire world was equipped with a purpose. Alshikh takes this a step further and explains that the world’s creation was not complete until Shabbat, as it did not yet have a “soul.” The infusion of sanctity from Shabbat gave the universe a soul, which allows it to continually exist.

Essentially, the more we understand the *neshama yetera* as a reference to the purpose of Shabbat, the more we can understand how Shabbat is a period of enhanced spirituality, even for one's physical endeavors, let alone its heightened opportunity for spiritual growth.

Rav Hirsch explains that this term is ideal because *nefesh* denotes the individuality of the personality, the personal being of the individual.

Therefore, *nafash* means: to withdraw into one's own personality, the opposite of outwardly directed activity. By extension, it also means: To rest after exertion, literally, "to return to oneself."

Additionally, as Rav Chanan Porat explains, *nefesh* is a reference not only to resting from physical exertion but spiritual rest, which involves dreaming about achieving the purpose of existence.

In fact, the final stanza of the powerful Shabbat song *Kah Ekhsof,* composed by Rav Aharon the Great of Karlin, discusses the inner sublimity that one experiences on Shabbat and makes reference to all three areas of one's soul, as he calls Shabbat the pleasantness of *neshamot,* the delight of *ruchot* and the Eden of the *nefashot*.

Resting on Shabbat and setting aside daily activities allows one to find oneself, to dream about inner spiritual longings, and to recognize the deeper meaning and spiritual purpose of all of physical existence while in possession of an expanded *nefesh, ruach* and *neshama,* asonly Shabbat can provide.

**The *Neshama Yetera* of *Shemitta***

While this is true regarding the weekly Shabbat, there is also good reason to believe that during the entire year of *Shabbat ha-aretz,* the Jew is privileged to be blessed with an expanded soul.

In fact, the word *nefesh* is used as a verb only twice in the Torah. Even before the aforementioned verse, in *Parashat Mishpatim,* after mentioning *shemitta,* the Torah describes Shabbat and uses a similar verb*.*

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest (*tishbot*) in order that your ox and your donkey shall repose, and your maidservant's son and the stranger shall be refreshed (*ve-yinafesh*).

Alshikh understands this verse is a reference to the *neshama yetera* not only of Shabbat, but of *shemitta* as well:

Should you think that the legislation is designed to give man a year's vacation, this is not so. Just as it had been decreed to abstain from work every Shabbat as a reminder of the fact that God imbued the Shabbat with sanctity already at the time of Creation, so the seventh-year legislation is also rooted in similar considerations, i.e., that both on the Shabbat and during the seventh year a person acquires an additional spiritual dimension, *neshama yetera*.

The aspect of physical rest mentioned here applies not only to beasts of burden and labor, but all humans as well, even non-Jewish slaves; they too have to fulfill part of the Torah’s precepts in order to benefit from *ve-yinafesh*, this additional soul. There is no need to mention again the fact that this concept applies in an even greater measure to the Jew.

This idea is mentioned elsewhere by Alshikh as well, yet he is not the only one speaks of the *neshama yetera* of the *shemitta* year, as similar ideas are mentioned by Rav Tzaddok and the Sefat Emet, among others.

In at least three places (*Vayikra,* pp. 200, 203; *Bereishit,* p. 148), the Sefat Emet describes vividly the *neshama yetera* that accompanies the individual through the entire *shemitta* year. He explains that in general, the physical existence of the world has an inner spiritual power which goes beyond the limitations of the physical realm. Both the Land of Israel and Shabbat are referred to as *nachala*, which generally refers to an area with very definitive boundaries. Israel is the *nachala* without real limitation in the dimension of space, while Shabbat is its counterpart in the dimension of time. For man to be able to appreciate this inner quality he needs the proper tool, *neshama yetera*. This enables residents of the land of Israel to be given a special *neshama* and a unique *ruach* (*Yeshayahu* 42:5) allowing the inhabitants to arise above the materialism of society, and to recognize within themselves the power to merge the physical and the spiritual and sanctify one's existence even beyond the period of Shabbat.

It is this unique opportunity that the *neshama yetera* of *shemitta* provides, through an entire year of Shabbat in the Land.

**The Lasting Effect**

The fact that *shemitta* provides a *neshama yetera* for the Jew for an entire year allows its impact to be life-altering rather than temporary. Rav Kook (Introduction, *Shabbat Ha-aretz*) also makes reference to the question of how a septennial escape from routine will be sufficient to impact society every year:

In this year, the divine character of the nation will be revealed in its complete glory, in its godly, spiritual, core. This illumination, which comes once every seven years, will carry an afterglow of divine ideals that will gradually shape our ethical characters, with a slow refining of our souls in a way that will continue to deepen and control their place in life, until the outlook on life which stems from it will become more and more entrenched in our actions; until a more extended, significant period will come, which will succeed in not only raising up individuals, and not even the entire generation, but all the generations of the nation.

Rav Kook continues by describing this ideal as a central aspect of *yovel*, which is not only supposed to impact one generation, but the entire metaphysical stature of the nation as a whole, vertically as well as horizontally.

**The End, Beginning or Middle?**

This outlook allows us to see Shabbat and *shemitta* as both launching point and destination. HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein notes that the sabbatical element of *shemitta* can be expressed on two different planes, just as Shabbat can be seen as the beginning of the week or as its culmination.

… Shabbatserves the weekdays, while the days of the week also lead up to Shabbat (in the sense of “a taste of the world-to-come” and “a day that will be all Sabbath and rest in life everlasting”). In *Bereishit*,the *Rishonim* dispute the meaning of “*shevita*,” rest. On the one hand, *shevita* denotes resting today with the intention of returning to work tomorrow – a sort of recess. According to this, the *shevita* of Shabbatis necessary to enhance the next days’ work...

The two understandings of *Shabbat* are reflected in this disagreement. And perhaps we can see these two aspects alluded to in the two rationales: “And God ended” (*va-yekhal*), which sets *Shabbat* as the pinnacle of creation. “And He rested” (*va-yishbot*), a temporary recess.”

HaRav Lichtenstein continues by explaining how the parallelism between Shabbat and *shemitta* carries through all these aspects.

There is a dialectical relationship between Shabbat and the weekdays; Shabbatenhances the mundane weekdays, refreshes man, and recharges his batteries, but, on the other hand, weekday activity is performed for the sake of those Divine spiritual values which Shabbatsymbolizes and represents. This dialectical relationship applies to the sabbatical year as well. On the one hand, the sabbatical year allows repose, a year of solemn rest. On the other hand, the *shemitta* year parallels the seventh millennium, God’s rest. It is not an introduction to the six years that will follow in the next cycle, but rather a year toward whose values of spiritual awakening and uplifting man must always stride…

Regarding the rest and repose of Shabbat, we find a parallel in *shemitta*: what we may not do, from what we are liberated, over what we must elevate ourselves. But what aspect of *shemitta* parallels the positive content of Shabbat? What do we do; with what do we occupy ourselves; on what plane do we act? Here there is a certain halakhic vacuum.

HaRav Lichtenstein goes on to explain that this is the meaning of Rav Kook's statement that the same effect which Shabbat has on the individual, *shemitta* has on the nation as a whole, allowing "its Divine light to reveal itself in its full splendor, so that the mundane life of society with its burdens and worries not extinguish it … so that the purity of its soul in its entirety be able to reveal itself within it." Based on this, HaRav Lichtenstein concludes:

If we accept this transition from the individual to the collective, we can view *shemitta* as attempting to create an ideal society. In the society of the *shemitta* year, equality reigns, produce has no owners, there is no employer and no employee, but rather all share the same status. Such a society acquires new and revolutionary qualities that can change the nature of that society, at least during the *shemitta* period.

The *shemitta* year should be seen, then, not only as a rest stop along the way to the years that will follow, but also as an existence of a different nature within a society that is headed as a whole toward the actualization of a grand and exalted moral idea.

It is specifically this Shabbat element of *shemitta* that gives it its quality as a year which can transform society and refocus energies on what the ultimate goal really is. With that in mind, there is good reason to believe that many of the ways in which we fall short of the vision which Rav Kook had for the nation upon its return to the land may be rooted in our lack of connection to the observance of the Shabbat elements of *shemitta*.

**Coming up…**

In the next few lessons we will take each *parasha* of *shemitta* separately and analyze its unique message. We will begin with *Parashat Mishpatim*, analyzing the relinquishing of one's produce and seeing how the social focus of the *parasha* helps us understand *shemitta's* powerful year-long Shabbat.