

Parashat Behar-Bechukotai – May 4, 2013

The Sabbatical year teaches us to connect our material and spiritual life.

Our Parasha, Behar-Bechukotai, begins with the subject of the Shemittah, the seventh year in a cycle that runs seven times and that reaches its high point during the Yovel or Jubilee year, which is the fiftieth year of the cycle.

The Shemittah or Sabbatical year implies a prohibition to work the Land of Israel. As an agricultural society this law can be understood as a tremendous burden to the economy of the country. The Shemittah year is called in the Torah “a Shabbat” and just as the seventh day of the week must be observed with this form of a prohibition against working, so too the Shemittah year has this same form of regulations against working the land.

We could think that a person would never accept this type of laws because of its economic implications for a society, but if that is the case we could say the same about Shabbat every seven days. Both of these “Shabbatot” require a demonstration of true faith in God and a commitment for our tradition. We normally attribute economic success to our own diligence and we often forget the role that God has as a guidance and source of inspiration.

Maybe that is the reason why our Parasha begins telling us that these laws of Shemittah were given at Mount Sinai. We could ask: Were not all laws given at Mount Sinai? The Torah could be telling us that these laws, and actually all of them, depend on us as we are together as a nation, united, accepting the yoke of heaven.

The way we conduct ourselves in life, and in particular in our professional life, providing the Parnasah (maintenance) for our families, is filled with a commitment to the traditions of our People and with the way Judaism understands the will of God.

Shabbat Shalom!

