

How did the week get to be a week? We take for granted that a week is seven days. But as David Henkin argues in his book, *The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms that Made Us*, the week has a long history of its own as the defining unit of days. Our week originates with the ancient cultures that organized units of days into seven corresponding to the seven heavenly objects - the sun, the moon, and the five planets - that were visible to the naked eye, and with whom several gods were associated. Each day is named for one of them, and that remains part of our non-Hebraic heritage. The Bible, on the other hand, sees the week as a unit that is defined by God. God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh. None of the days are named for anything or anyone, except for their ordinal place in the weekly cycle, (1st day, 2nd day etc.) The week, as constructed by the Bible, therefore, is a theological statement. One God, no other gods; celestial objects are beholden to God. No need to ascribe any identity to them or name any day after anything. When God ceases activity on the seventh day, God blesses it and sanctifies it, and thereby designates it as a holy day. The phrase, **שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה** doesn't occur in the creation story but we find it in several other contexts, such as Moses' instruction to the people not to collect manna on Shabbat (Exod. 16:23, 25), the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:9, Deut. 5:13), prior to the building of the mishkan (Exod. 35:2), in last week's parasha as part of the calendar of sacred times (Lev. 23:3), and here, referring not to the seventh day, but the seventh year. The implication is clear: just as God has a seventh day, God also has a seventh year. Just as the seventh day limits human activity, because it is God's day, the seventh-year limits land use because the land is God's land. **כִּי לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ - for the land is mine.** (25:23) S.D. Luzzatto (who has become a bit of a favorite lately) makes the following observation: *The commandment of the Sabbatical year resembles the commandment of the weekly Sabbath, for just as the purpose of the Sabbath is to reinforce in the hearts of the people the belief that they are a holy nation, so the commandment of the Sabbatical year will induce the belief in their hearts that their land, too, is a holy land, since it rests during this year as God rested on the seventh day.* Nice. But then he adds this fascinating note: *Just as God, when the people were in the wilderness would give them a two-day supply of food on the sixth day, so also, when they were in their land, He would order his blessing for them in the sixth year so that its produce would suffice for the Sabbatical year...Since the produce of that year would be ownerless, this would provide compassion for the poor, and would equalize the rich and the poor, bringing low the rich person's pride and reminding that person that all human beings are equal.* In other words:

Lev. 25:2 | **שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה** | **A Sabbath to God**

The weekly Shabbat of God	The 7-year Shabbat of God
7 days	7 years
Human activity	Land use
Because God rested	Because the land is God's
2-day supply of manna on the 6th day	3-year supply of produce on the 6th year
A human life punctuated by the weekly experience of freedom and peace.	A national life punctuated by a septennial experience of equality.
The sign God's covenant with God's holy people.	Signifying God's relationship with God's holy land.

וְסָפַרְתָּ לָךְ - *and you shall count for yourself...* (25:23) In the biblical world-view, God imprints the seven-day rhythm onto reality, and we experience that rhythm directly in a way that is immediate. We don't have to think about it too much. If we all have our wits about us, we tend to know what day of the week it is. But consider this: we are presently in the Omer period. While it takes a split second to figure out where we are in the week, it takes an extra second to figure out where we are in the Omer (today is day 37 btw). It takes an additional moment to figure out where we are in a 7-year cycle. That information is not always immediately accessible to us. In order to locate ourselves in the septennial cycle, we have to count. We have to use a more elaborate calendrical system to record time. (This year, 5783, is year 1 of a new cycle. 5782 was a *shmitta* year). In our culture, we are constantly resorting to calendars and tools to remind ourselves what year it is in a particular cycle. A Presidential cycle is 4 years. But it will take us a second or two to locate ourselves in the present Presidential cycle. (The next election is 1 year, 5 months, 3 weeks and 2 days away). How long is it until the next decade? (6 years, 7 months and 19 days). We are one week into the reign of a new a British monarch. But come back in a few weeks, and we won't be able to tell how long it has been since the coronation without consulting a calendar. So the assumption that is operating here in the words, **וְסָפַרְתָּ לָךְ**, is that while the week is an easily accessible divine construct imprinted on reality, the counting of years necessitates human activity. Therefore, *you shall count for yourself...* ie. you shall create a system of calendaring so as to effectively measure time for the purpose of commemorating the septennial cycle.

25:9	וְהֶעֱבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה	Then you are to give-forth a shofar blast...
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The Hebrew *ha'avarta* translated here is *give-forth* is an unusual word for sounding. We would have expected a different term. It means literally *you shall have it pass* which gives it a lovely kind of physicality. The sound of the shofar in the seventh year is something that you will not only experience as sound, but you will feel it viscerally.

25:10 ויקראתם דרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל־יִשְׂבֵּיהָ *You shall proclaim throughout the land to all of its inhabitants...*



Long before the Liberty Bell was known by that name, and almost a quarter century before the Declaration of Independence was signed, colonists who became part of the Pennsylvania government had already been thinking about an enduring symbol of American freedom befitting the character of the provincial residents. Isaac Norris, Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly was among several assemblymen who led a move to have a bell hung from



the newly constructed State House in Philadelphia to call the citizens of the colony together for important functions and events. "There is a building coming out of the sweat and toil of free men," Norris wrote. As the finely crafted materials were molded into the building's

facade, Norris and two other close associates in the Assembly, Edward Warner and Thomas Leech, decided that despite the craftsmanship displayed by the carpenters and bricklayers, the bell for the cupola of the building should be purchased from England, where it was agreed the best bells were made. On the bell itself, which was to be large enough and ring loudly enough to be heard by Philadelphians as well as residents in the surrounding countryside, Norris, a Quaker, asked that the bell carry a Bible inscription that would reflect the inspirations of freedom-loving members of the colony. In the Book of Leviticus (25:10), Norris found the passage: **"Proclaim LIBERTY throughout all the Land unto all of the inhabitants thereof."** This was a particularly apt selection because William Penn's charter, which became Pennsylvania's constitution, spoke of personal and religious freedom, Native American rights, and the rights of citizens to be part of the process of enacting laws. There was not universal agreement on the appropriateness of the bell's message, with some wealthier colonists feeling it suggested dissatisfaction and rebellion. But for the common citizen, the message seemed very appropriate. Neither was there universal agreement on how to spell the name of the colony, as it turns out, because also inscribed on the bell was, "By Order of the Assembly of the Province of Pennsylvania for the State House in Philada." This inscription remains intact. The bell would ring many times in the years following its final hanging in what is now Independence Hall (then, the State House). For many years, the bell rang as the new American government came to be located in Philadelphia. As decades passed, the bell became a different symbol. Abolitionists, adopting the bell's inscription, used the words as a central focus of their cause—to abolish slavery. In fact, the first reference to the "Liberty Bell" is attributed to the Anti-Slavery Record, published in 1835 for the American Anti-Slavery Society. A paragraph leading with the words "The Liberty Bell(.)" written by R. G. Williams, says the bell's inscription was considered "a sort of prophecy," and

yet, "the bell has not obeyed the inscription; and its peals have been a mockery, while one-sixth of 'all inhabitants' are in abject slavery." The bell, which rang for American freedom from powers without, now was symbolic for freedom and justice within. That struggle, for many Americans, is still ongoing. The Liberty Bell rang its last note (in E-flat) in 1846, almost a century after it was hung in the Pennsylvania State House. It later made many trips throughout the country, returning to Philadelphia in 1915. Even as the Bell hangs mute, its message continues to resound throughout the land. From the National Science Foundation



25:39 לֹא־תַעֲבֹד בּוֹ עֲבַדַת עֶבֶד: *you are not to make him serve the servitude of a serf—*

Life has its ups and downs. In economic terms, one day you can be flying high and the next day you don't have what to eat. The Torah understood that people were susceptible to economic realities and that an unpaid debt could lead to disastrous consequences for everyone. The Torah enables a person who owed money to another person, to work it off through indentured servitude. But there were some very specific provisions to that servitude, as this verse indicates. Understanding that every individual has dignity, the Torah permits the servitude but it prohibits slave-like treatment of the person who is working for you. To wit, as Rashi says:

רש"י	Rashi
עבדת עבד.	i. e. thou shalt not make him <u>do</u>
עבודת של גנאי	<u>degrading work</u>
שיהא נכבד בה קעבד	<u>by which he is recognized as a slave —</u>
שלא	this might come out <u>that</u>
יוליך כליו	<u>he shall not</u> , for instance,
אחריו	<u>carry his</u> (the master's) <u>clothes</u>
לבית המרחץ	<u>after him</u>
ולא יעזיל לו מנעליו	<u>to the public baths</u>
(עי' ספרא):	<u>nor help him on with his boots</u>
	(cf. Sifra, Behar, Chapter 7 2).

The examples of bathhouse attendant and shoe-person are interesting. Elsewhere, in Sifra, there is another example used - being carried around in a sedan chair. The reasoning behind these rules is stated in a subsequent verse: כִּי־לִי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם - *For it is to me that the Children of Israel are servants; my servants are they* (25:55).



Herein lies the key to the biblical perception of human dignity. To be a slave to another human being is the worst possible indignity. To be a servant of God, the highest possible dignity. Nothing demeans more than slavery, and nothing gives greater grandeur than being a servant of God.

וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאֶרֶץ - *And I shall give peace to the land* (26:6) During a week that witnessed over a thousand rockets projected at Israel, the promise of this verse is our fervent prayer.

This parasha sheet is sponsored by Gittel Footerman and family to commemorate the yahrzeits of Justin Footerman and Rubin J. Gruman, z'l.

Shabbat Shalom!