



## Parshat Behar Bechukotai – Living with Compassion in a Competitive Society

### Opening Questions:

- How does this Torah portion, which brings closure to the book of Vayikra, teach us about the global crisis we are currently facing?
- In our Torah portion, we are still back at Sinai. It is there that the Torah speaks about the Land of Israel, which the Israelites are being given as an inheritance. How and why - does the Torah instruct us to take the extremely challenging risk of not working our fields every 7 years?
- How do the 7 year Shemita and the 7X7 Yovel Jubilee cycles challenge us to think differently about our 6 day week and Shabbat?
- What would you do if you had an all expense paid Sabbatical from your current obligations?

2. We Don't Own the Land; The Land Owns Us – Rabbi Dr. Bradley Shavit Artson, Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, Vice President of American Jewish University in L.A. <https://www.929.org.il/lang/en/page/115/post/45993>

3. The Suspension of Hierarchies of Wealth and Power – Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. Former Chief Rabbi of the Commonwealth, International 929 president. <https://www.929.org.il/lang/en/page/115/post/45990>

4. A POEM: **Jubilee** - Yakov Azriel, modern Israeli poet

Where is the key that You had given me,  
O Lord, which could unlock the prison gate  
And open all its doors, to liberate  
Deaf prisoners who wait impatiently  
To hear the orchestra of liberty?  
They wait inside, not knowing that they wait  
In vain, not knowing that it is too late,  
Not knowing that I cannot find the key.

The key is lost, so we are doomed to stay  
Behind the prison walls where we were born —  
Unless Your music comes to set us free  
From deafness of the heart, unless You say  
Which key to play, unless we sound the horn  
You've handed us, proclaiming jubilee.



5. Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff : Why do we not make requests in our prayers on Shabbat? <https://www.yeshiva.co/midrash/24017>
6. Reading the list of rebukes / punishments / consequences in an undertone – various customs and reasons, for and against  
<https://www1.biu.ac.il/indexE.php?id=15022&pt=1&pid=14423&level=0&cPath=43,14206,14374,14423,15022>

## 7. FOR REFLECTION:

1. This Shabbat: Take a deep breath when you sit down to your Shabbat meal. Notice your blessings. Talk about them. Be vulnerable enough to feel them. Be brave enough to put aside whatever you wish you had, or you plan to have, on Shabbat. Talk about what you do have. Ask others to do the same. And give special attention to someone who needs what you have to share. Whether food. Or a listening ear. Or a joyful countenance.
2. Shemita comes to teach us to trust God all the time. In order to give others my hard earned blessings, I must be able to trust that I have / or will have whatever I truly need. Do you ever experience worry on Shabbat that because of Shabbat observance you will not have what you need?
3. It was customary during the Sabbatical year, that some of the farmers would go to Jerusalem to study Torah. Studying Torah would hopefully strengthen their trust in God, and their commitment to **living with compassion in a competitive society**. If you had an unpaid Sabbatical year, would you take it? If you did take it, how would you imagine or dream of spending your time? What might you do to strengthen your commitment to a value that you believe in (or alternatively, one that you would like to believe in more)?
4. Think of an experience of pain or suffering where you and your community, or others came together to give of yourselves. Did it bring about unprecedented blessing for you as a community?