

The Torah of Wealth

1. Wealth

Genesis 1 ²⁷And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.” ²⁹God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.

Deuteronomy 8 ¹¹Take care lest you forget the LORD your God and fail to keep His commandments, His rules, and His laws, which I enjoin upon you today. ¹²When you have eaten your fill, and have built fine houses to live in, ¹³and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you own has prospered, ¹⁴beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget the LORD your God—who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; ¹⁵who led you through the great and terrible wilderness with its serpents and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it, who brought forth water for you from the flinty rock; ¹⁶who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—¹⁷and you say to yourselves, “My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me.” ¹⁸Remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to get wealth, in fulfillment of the covenant that He made on oath with your fathers, as is still the case.

2. “Pe’ah” -- The Corners of Your Field

Leviticus 19 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ²Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy...⁹When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God....

Leviticus 23 ²²When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger, I the Lord am Your God.

3. “Leket” -- The Fallen Gleanings

Deuteronomy 24 ¹⁷You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pawn. ¹⁸Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment. ¹⁹When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. ²⁰When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²²Always remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

4. Shabbat

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; you shall not do any work -- you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements so that your male and female slave may rest as you do. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

5. “Sh’mittah” -- The Seventh Year

Exodus 23 ¹⁰Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but in the seventh you shall let it rest and lie fallow. Let the needy among your people eat of it, and what they leave, let the wild beasts eat. You shall do the same with your vineyards and your olive groves.

Leviticus 25 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai: ²Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD. ³Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. ⁴But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. ⁵You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your untrimmed vines; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. ⁶But you may eat whatever the land during its sabbath will produce—you, your male and female slaves, the hired and bound laborers who live with you, ⁷and your cattle and the beasts in your land may eat all its yield.

Deuteronomy 15 Every seventh year you shall practice remission of debts. ²This shall be the nature of the remission: every creditor shall remit the due that he claims from his fellow; he shall not dun his fellow or kinsman, for the remission proclaimed is of the LORD. ³You may dun the foreigner; but you must remit whatever is due you from your kinsmen.

⁴There shall be no needy among you—since the LORD your God will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion—⁵if only you heed the LORD your God and take care to keep all this Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. ⁶For the LORD your God will bless you as He has promised you: you will extend loans to many nations, but require none yourself; you will dominate many nations, but they will not dominate you.

⁷If, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen [*acheecha*, lit: your brother] in any of your settlements in the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. ⁸Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs. ⁹Beware lest you harbor the base thought, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is approaching,” so that you are mean to your needy kinsman and give him nothing. He will cry out to the LORD against you, and you will incur guilt. ¹⁰Give to him readily and have no regrets when you do so, for in return the LORD your God will bless you in all your efforts and in all your undertakings. ¹¹For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land.

Sefer HaHinuch, (13th Century, Spain) Mitzvah 84 This is to teach us the attribute of renunciation of ownership and the resultant generosity that flows from this attribute. God wanted the Jews to develop charitable characteristics, that they should become used to helping others and to become accustomed to giving away something that actually belongs to them.

6. “Yovel” -- The 50th Year

Leviticus 25 ⁸You shall count off seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. ⁹Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land ¹⁰and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family. ¹¹That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, ¹²for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.

¹³In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. ¹⁴When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. ¹⁵In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee; and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: ¹⁶the more such years, the higher the price you pay; the fewer such years, the lower the

price; for what he is selling you is a number of harvests. ¹⁷Do not wrong one another, but fear your God; for I the LORD am your God.

¹⁸You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security; ¹⁹the land shall yield its fruit and you shall eat your fill, and you shall live upon it in security. ²⁰And should you ask, "What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?" ²¹I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. ²²When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

²³But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. ²⁴Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

...³⁵If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side: ³⁶do not exact from him advance or accrued interest, but fear your God. Let him live by your side as your kinsman. ³⁷Do not lend him your money at advance interest, or give him your food at accrued interest. ³⁸I the LORD am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

Sefer HaHinuch, (13th Century, Spain) Mitzvah 430 God wished to teach His people that all wealth belongs to Him, and that ultimately all would be transferred [from the present owners] to those to whom He wished to give it in the first place. This mitzvah (Yovel) requires the counting of the years [in the 50-year cycle] will prevent people from coveting their neighbor's land and stealing from it.

Rav Avraham Kook (1865-1935), Shabbat Ha-Aretz The individual recovers from the influence of the material and mundane at regular, frequent intervals every Shabbat. What the Shabbat achieves for the individual, the Yovel achieves for the society as a whole. This temporary, periodic suspension of the normal economic routine raises the People spiritually and morally...a year of peace and quiet without oppressor or tyrant, when there is no private property and no privilege and the peace of God reigns. Sanctity is now not profaned by the struggle for private accumulation of all the year's produce, while the covetousness of the wealth stirred by business is not forgotten.

7. The Case of Sodom

Genesis 18 The Lord said, "The outrage of Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave! I will go down to see whether they have acted altogether according to the outcry that has reached Me...."

Ezekiel 16:49 This was the sin of your sister Sodom – arrogance! She and her daughters had plenty of bread and untroubled tranquility; yet she did not support the poor and the needy.

Pirke Avot 5:12 There are four human characters: One who says, what is mine is yours and what is yours is yours, this is righteousness. One who says, what is yours is mine and what is mine is mine, this is evil. One who says, what is yours is mine and what is mine is yours, this is foolish. The one who says, "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is yours," – this is the ethic of the ordinary, or it may be said to be the ethic of Sodom.

Genesis Rabbah 49:6 Taught R Levi, There was the case of two girls, who went down to draw water from the well. One said to her friend, Why are you pale? The other said, All the food is gone from our house and we are ready to die. What did the other do? She filled the jug with flour and exchanged it for her own. Each took the pale of the other. When the people of Sodom found out, they took the girl (who had shared the food) and burned her. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, Even if I wanted to keep silent, the requirement of justice for a certain girl will not allow me to keep silent.

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 109a The men of Sodom grew arrogant because of the good which the Holy One, blessed be He, had lavished upon them...They said: Since bread comes out of (our) earth, and it has the

dust of gold, why should we tolerate strangers who come to us only to deplete our wealth. Come, let us abolish the practice of travelling in our land...