

# Make the Year Holy

*In The Sabbath, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously frames Jewish perceptions of holiness as holiness in time rather than in space: “The quality of holiness is not in the grain of matter. It is a preciousness bestowed upon things by an act of consecration and persisting in relation to God.” He describes Shabbat as a “palace in time ... made of soul, of joy, and reticence.”*

*Our weekly Shabbat practices give us access to this holy time, tapping into the holiness of the work and rest of creation. But the rhythms of holy time are also larger. Holidays punctuate each year, giving time a wider sacred rhythm. And parallel to the seventh day for human beings, the seventh year becomes a year of holy rest for the land. Yovel constitutes an entire holy year, which follows seven sets of seven years. Following seven sets of seven years, we are to create a holy year:*

## Leviticus 25:8-12

(ח) וְסִפַּרְתָּ לָךְ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת  
 שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים  
 וְהָיוּ לָךְ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת  
 הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעַת וָאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה :  
 (ט) וְהֶעֱבַרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה  
 בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂרֵי לַחֹדֶשׁ  
 בְּיוֹם הַכִּפָּרִים תִּעְבְּרוּ שׁוֹפָר  
 בְּכָל אֲרָצְכֶם : (י) וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת  
 שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וְקִרְאתֶם  
 דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יוֹבֵל  
 הוּא תִהְיֶה לְכֶם וְשַׁבְתֶּם אִישׁ  
 אֶל אֲחֻזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ  
 תֵּשְׁבוּ : (יא) יוֹבֵל הוּא שְׁנַת  
 הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תִהְיֶה לְכֶם  
 לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת  
 סְפִיחֶיהָ וְלֹא תִבְצְרוּ אֶת  
 נִזְרֶיהָ : (יב) כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קֹדֶשׁ  
 תִּהְיֶה לְכֶם מִן הַשָּׂדֶה תֹאכְלוּ  
 אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ :

<sup>8</sup>You 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. <sup>9</sup>Then you [singular] shall sound the horn loud [literally, pass the sound of the shofar]; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you [plural] shall have the horn sounded [literally pass the shofar] throughout your land <sup>10</sup>**and 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 your holding and each of you shall return to your family. <sup>11</sup>That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, <sup>12</sup>**for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field.**

*The biblical text prescribes and describes making the year holy at it begins, including a process of release and return; and the practice of abstaining from agricultural labor as core to living the year in holiness, all detailed in other sections of this volume. Here we investigate the concept of a holy year itself: What does it mean for a year to be holy? Who is this holy year for? How do we begin it? And what do we do to create and foster this larger holy time—how do we make an entire year holy?*

*There is a sense of some confusion in these sources about how to mark the yovel year: Does it begin at Rosh Hashanah with the new year, or does it begin at Yom Kippur with blowing the shofar for release and return? Is it the fiftieth year, or somehow also the forty-ninth or the first year of the next cycle? For our own purposes, marking fifty years since 1967—the expansion of municipal Jerusalem, the beginning of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza—we also wonder about the best way to note this year. Are we marking a fiftieth anniversary in 2017, or the entire fiftieth year (which would have begun a year earlier)? Did the fiftieth year begin on Rosh Hashanah—or on June 10, or on the 28th of Iyar (the dates on the Gregorian and Hebrew calendars when the Six-Day War ended)?*

*As you study the sources in this section, consider what it would mean for us to mark this contemporary fiftieth year as holy. For some, this is a time of celebration; for others, of somber reflection; for yet others, it is both. How do you relate to the range of reactions in your own community, or even within yourself? How do you see the roles of holiness and the sacred as a container for all this experience? What do you imagine you could do, as an individual or as part of a community, to make this year holy?*

# I. Sanctifying the Beginning (and Ending on Time)

## A. Rosh Hashanah begins a celebration: Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 8b

יובלות באחד בתשרי הוא? יובלות בעשרה בתשרי הוא! דכתיב (ויקרא כה) ביום הכפרים תעבירו שופר!—  
הא מני—רבי ישמעאל בנו של רבי יוחנן בן ברוקא היא. דתניא: (ויקרא כה) וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה, מה תלמוד לומר? לפי שנאמר ביום הכפרים, יכול לא תהא מתקדשת אלא מיום הכפורים ואילך—תלמוד לומר וקדשתם את שנת החמשים, מלמד שמתקדשת והולכת מתחילתה.  
מכאן אמר רבי ישמעאל בנו של רבי יוחנן בן ברוקא: מראש השנה עד יום הכפורים לא היו עבדים נפטרים לבתיהן ולא משתעבדין לאדוניהם, אלא אוכלין ושותין ושמחין ועטרותיהן בראשיהן. כיון שהגיע יום הכפורים—תקעו בית דין בשופר, נפטרו עבדים לבתיהן, ושדות חוזרות לבעליהן.

Does the *yovel* year begin on the first of Tishrei [on Rosh Hashanah]? Surely the *yovel* year begins on the tenth of Tishrei, as it is written (Leviticus 25), “on Yom Kippur you shall sound the shofar”!

What authority is followed here? Rabbi Ishmael the son of Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka, as it has been taught: “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year.” What is the point of these words? [It is this:] Since it says, “On Yom Kippur” [you shall make proclamation], I might think that the year is sanctified only from Yom Kippur onwards. Therefore it says, “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year.” This teaches that it is sanctified from its inception.

On this basis, Rabbi Ishmael the son of Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka laid down that from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur slaves were neither dismissed to their homes nor subjected to their masters, but they ate and drank and made merry, wearing garlands on their heads. When Yom Kippur came, the *beit din* sounded the shofar; slaves were dismissed to their homes and fields returned to their original owners.

- » *Sanctifying a holy year requires knowing when it begins, that is, being able to distinguish ordinary from sacred time. How does Rabbi Ishmael read the Torah text to derive yovel beginning at Rosh Hashanah?*
- » *In order to figure out what happens between the beginning of the sanctification of the year and its actual proclamation, Rabbi Ishmael imagines a liminal, transitional period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in the yovel year. What is the nature of that time? What do you think people would experience at the beginning of this holy year, as they leave aside one reality but don't yet enter another? Have you had or observed any contemporary time periods that serve as a kind of transition between one kind of time and another? If so, what were they, and how did they function as an in-between time?*

- » *What feels like the most appropriate beginning point for the observance of this fiftieth year, and why?*

**The Talmud** is a compilation of law, narrative, folk wisdom, and more. It consists of the *Mishnah*, probably compiled around 200 CE, and the *Gemara*, compiled around 500 CE or later.

The Talmud is divided into 63 tractates, each mostly focused on one subject (but often including much material on other subjects as well).

When we refer to “The Talmud,” we usually mean the Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), codified in Babylonia. There is also a second Talmud, known as Talmud Yerushalmi (Palestinian Talmud), codified in the Land of Israel somewhat earlier. The latter is less complete and has been less central to the development of law.

## B. End on time: Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 8b

תניא אידיך : יובל היא, מה תלמוד  
לומר? לפי שנאמר וקדשתם את שנת  
החמשים, יכול כשם שמתקדשת והולכת  
מתחילתה כך מתקדשת והולכת בסופה,  
ואל תתמה, שהרי מוסיפין מחול על  
קדש—תלמוד לומר (ויקרא כה) יובל  
היא שנת החמשים—שנת החמשים  
אתה מקדש, ואי אתה מקדש שנת  
החמשים ואחת.

Another early rabbi taught: “It is *yovel*.” What is the point of these words? — Since it says, “And you shall hallow the fiftieth year,” I might think that, just as it is sanctified from its inception onwards, so it remains sanctified [for a time] after its termination. And there would be nothing at which to be surprised in this, seeing that we [regularly] add from the profane on to the holy. Therefore it says, “it is a *yovel* to you, the fiftieth year,” [to show that] you are to sanctify the fiftieth year, but not the fifty-first year.

- » *Marking holy time means being clear about not only when it begins but when it ends—for example, using havdallah to end shabbat. What do you think would be some appropriate ways to end the marking of this contemporary fiftieth year? What kinds of ritual or ceremony, study, or experiences would properly facilitate the transition from noting this fiftieth year back into “regular” time and the continued evolution of history? Are there different things that would be appropriate for different groups of people?*

### C. Making holiness with our words: Ramban on Exodus 20:7

זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ : “Remember the Sabbath day to make it holy.”

לרבותינו עוד בו מדרש ממלת לקדשו, שנקדשהו בזכרון, כענין וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה (ויקרא כה י), שהוא טעון קדוש ב"ד לומר ביובל מקודש מקודש, אף כאן צוה שזכור את יום השבת בקדשנו אותו. וכך אמרו במכילתא (כאן) לקדשו, קדשהו בברכה, מכאן אמרו מקדשין על היין בכניסתו.

Our Rabbis have an explanation of “make it holy”—that we make it holy with our remembering. This is like [Leviticus 25:10] “and you shall hallow the fiftieth year,” which requires the *beit din* (court) to make it holy, to say on the *yovel* “it is holy, it is holy.” Here, too, we are commanded to remember the Sabbath day as we make it holy—this is what the *Mechilta* [one of several similar works of scriptural exegesis] says about “to make it holy”—to sanctify it with a blessing—this is the source of making a blessing over wine as Shabbat begins.

- » *At the beginning of the yovel year, the beit din, the court of law and keepers of Jewish time, would pronounce it “holy”. Ramban draws a parallel here to how we sanctify Shabbat with our words, making kiddush as Shabbat begins. What are the words you might use to make our contemporary fiftieth year holy? How would you want to announce its beginning as sacred time? Can you imagine what a “kiddush” for marking this 50th year would look like?*

**Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi (Spain, 1194–1270)**, known as Nahmanides or Ramban, was a prominent philosopher, mystic, and biblical commentator. His commentary on the Torah includes mystical elements, along with explanations of the basic meaning of the text and references to *midrash* (rabbinic interpretation).

## D. Setting and realizing intentions: *Hidushei HaGryz*, Parashat Behar

ולכאורה כפל לשון יש כאן דמאחר שכתב "וקראתם דרור בארץ" דהיינו חירות, הרי שחרור עבדים בכלל, א"כ מדוע נכתב שוב ושבתם וכו', ועוד מאי לשון "איש אל משפחתו".

ומעתה מיושב היטב כל הפסוק, "וקדשתם את שנת החמישים שנה וקראתם דרור בארץ" זהו הפקעת השיעבוד התלויה בר"ה בלבד, "ושבתם איש אל אחוזתו ואיש אל משפחתו תשובו" היינו ביוהכ"פ דאז תוקעים בשופר, דכדי לצאת לגמרי בעיני תקיעת שופר, ולכך גם נקט הכתוב לשון "איש אל משפחתו תשובו" דהיציאה ביוה"כ אינה כקריאת הדרור של ר"ה שאינה יציאה גמורה לחרות, אלא ביוה"כ הם יוצאין לגמרי מבית אדוניהם ושבים "איש אל משפחתו".

It seems there is a doubling of language here. Given that it says "proclaim release throughout the land," which is freedom, freeing the slaves entirely, why does it say again "each of you shall return to your holding and each of you shall return to your family"?

The resolution comes from this: "Sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim release throughout the land"—this means the release from slavery depends only on Rosh Hashanah. But "each of you shall return to your holding and each of you shall return to your family"—that is, on Yom Kippur, when the shofar is sounded, the departure would be complete. This is why the text holds onto the language "each of you shall return to your family"—the going out on Yom Kippur is different from the proclamation of release on Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah the release towards freedom is incomplete; only on Yom Kippur do they depart completely from the house of their masters and return to their families.

- » *How does the Gryz resolve the apparent doubling in the biblical text—in his reading, to what does each verse refer? How is this text similar to, and different from, the first Talmud text above? What does each contribute to our view of the yovel's beginning?*
- » *What meaning might you make of the fact that holiness (sanctification) is associated with the proclamation at Rosh Hashana of the release of the fiftieth year, even though the action has not yet taken place? How can plans and intentions be holy? Would the year be holy if the release did not ultimately take place?*
- » *What intention would you like to set for yourself personally in this fiftieth year since 1967? What would you like to see as an intention for the Jewish people this year? The state of Israel and its citizens and residents?*

**Rabbi Yitzchok Zev HaLevi Soloveitchik (Belarus and Jerusalem, 1886-1959)**, known as the Brisker Rebbe or the Gryz, was the head of the Brisker yeshiva, first located in Belarus and reestablished in Jerusalem after the Holocaust, and the teacher of a methodical style of Talmud study known as the Brisker method.

## II. For Whom is the Fiftieth Year Holy?

*Rabbinic conversations about holiness often carry connotations of exclusivity—something is holy because it is separate, or separate because it is holy. It is not surprising, then, to find texts that investigate the boundaries defining the holiness of yovel.*

### A. Just for Israel: Exodus Rabbah, Parashat Bo, 15:23

ד“א החדש הזה לכם, הה“ד  
(משלי ה) יהיו לך לבדך ואין  
לזרים אתך, אמר הקב“ה  
... הצדקה שלכם שנאמר  
(דברים כד) ולך תהיה צדקה,  
הרחמים שלכם שנאמר (שם)  
דברים יג) ונתן לך רחמים  
ורחמך והרבך, ושמיטים  
ויובלות שלכם שנאמר  
(ויקרא כה) וקדשתם את  
שנת החמשים שנה, ואומר  
יובל היא קדש תהיה לכם ...

“This month is for you [plural]” [Exodus 12:2]—as it is written, [Proverbs 5:17] “They will be yours alone, others having no part with you;” The Holy Blessed One said ... *tzedakah* is for you, as is written, [Deuteronomy 24:13] “*tzedakah* will be yours”; compassion is for you, as is written, [Deuteronomy 13:18] “God will give you compassion, and in that compassion will make you great”; *sh'mitah* and *yovel* years are for you, as is written, [Leviticus 25] “and you shall hallow the fiftieth year ... That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you ...” [The passage continues along these lines, referencing verses that say “for you” regarding *mitzvot*, tithing, sacrifices, blessing, the land of Israel and surrounding lands, Torah, *tzitzit*, holidays, Yom Kippur, *lulav*, *sukkah*, *Rosh Hodesh*, and *Pesach*.]

- » *Why do you think that the text emphasizes that yovel is “for you”? What impact might this observance have on the community?*
- » *With whom do you want to be in community in marking this yovel? For whom is this yovel year that we now commemorate? What does it mean for you to commemorate it?*

*Exodus Rabbah* is a collection of *midrashim* on the Book of Exodus, probably compiled between the ninth and eleventh century. It seems to be a combination of two different works: a line-by-line commentary on the first ten chapters of Exodus, and a series of homilies on most of the rest of the book.

## B. Special for God: Numbers Rabbah, *Parashat Bemidbar*, 3:8

א"ר לוי את מוצא דברים הרבה ברא  
 הקב"ה בעולם ובירר לו אחד מהם ברא  
 ז' ימים ובחר הקב"ה בשבת שנאמר  
 (בראשית ב) ויברך אלהים את יום  
 השביעי ויקדש אותו, ברא שנים ובירר  
 לו אחד מהם שנאמר (ויקרא כה) ושבתה  
 הארץ שבת לה' ברא שבועות ובירר  
 לו א' מהם שנאמר (שם ויקרא כ"ה)  
 וקדשתם את שנת החמישים שנה, ברא  
 ארצות ובירר לו אחד מהם א"י שנאמר  
 (דברים יא) תמיד עיני ה' אלהיך בה ...

Rabbi Levi said: There are things that the Holy Blessed One created in the world as many, but chose one among them for Godself. The Holy Blessed One created seven days and chose Shabbat, as it says [Genesis 2], "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." God created years and chose one, as it says [Leviticus 25], "the land rested, a Shabbat for God." The Holy Blessed One created weeks [of years] and chose one, as it says [Leviticus 25], "you shall sanctify the fiftieth year." The Holy Blessed One created lands and chose the Land of Israel from among them, as it says [Deuteronomy 11], "the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it ..." [The passage continues along these lines, referencing verses about a layer of heaven, the people Israel, and the tribe of Levi, each chosen by God].

- » *This an entirely different way of looking at the exclusivity of holiness. How do you understand the idea that something could be particularly holy for God?*
- » *How might human actions have any impact on something being especially holy for God? What actions might we take that would make our contemporary "yovel" holy in God's eyes, as it were? What would enhance, and what would diminish, its holiness for God?*

*Numbers Rabbah* is a collection of *midrashim* on the Book of Numbers. The first half of the book, which consists of commentary on Numbers 1-7, may have been compiled in the eleventh or twelfth century. The second half may date to the fourth century.



### III. What Does it Mean for the Yovel Year to be Holy?

*As you read the texts below, consider which dimensions of holiness in the fiftieth year might be available to us now, and what actions we might take to access them.*

#### A. Don't work the land: Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Commandment 136

והמצוה הקל"ו היא שצונו לקדש שנת החמשים. כלומר לבטל העבודה בה כמו השמטה. ומשפטי שנת יובל ושנת שמטה שוים בבטול עבודת האדמה והפקיר מה שיצמח. ושני אלו הדברים יכללם אמרו וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה. וכבר באר הכתוב שמענין הקדושה בה שיהיו פירותיה ותבואתה מופקרים, אמר (שם יב) כי יובל היא קדש תהיה לכם מן השדה תאכלו את תבואתה.

The 136th *mitzvah* is that we are commanded to sanctify the fiftieth year, that is, to annul labor that year as we do during *sh'mitah*... The laws of the *yovel* and *sh'mitah* years amount to annulling agricultural work and making freely available anything that grows. These two things are included in the commandment "you shall sanctify the fiftieth year." The Torah already explained that we recognize its holiness by making its fruits and harvest freely available, as it says "for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field."

- » *Maimonides identifies two essential actions that sanctify the fiftieth year—one a non-action of refraining from labor, the other the action of making any growing thing freely available. How do you see these two actions creating an experience of holiness? What about these embodies holiness for you? How would you describe the kind of holiness that is created by these actions?*
- » *In marking this contemporary fiftieth year, what types of unusual non-action and action could help mark it as holy? What underlying principles need to be surfaced in this year (that might otherwise be submerged), and which actions would embody and emphasize those principles?*

**Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, known as the Rambam or Maimonides (Spain/Egypt 1135-1204),** was one of the most influential Jewish philosophers and legal authorities, as well as a doctor and community leader. *Sefer HaMitzvot* is his enumeration of, and commentary on, the 613 commandments.

## B. Sanctify yourselves: Abravanel on Leviticus 25

ולפי שבמתן תורה צוה יתברך שיתקדשו  
 כמו שאמר וקדשתם היום ומחר לכך  
 אמר ביובל וקדשתם את שנת החמשים  
 שנה קדש היא קדש תהיה לכם.

Just as at the giving of the Torah the Blessed One commanded that they sanctify themselves, as it says “Make yourselves holy today and tomorrow”, so too it says of *yovel*, “You shall sanctify the fiftieth year”—the year is holy; “it shall be holy to you”—the holiness will be yours.

- » *What does it mean to “make yourselves holy” in preparation for a sacred experience? Abravanel seems to be reading the idea that the yovel “shall be holy to you” not just descriptively but prescriptively, as in the case of preparing for the giving of the Torah. What do you imagine might have been an appropriate way to personally take on and prepare for the holiness of the yovel year in ancient times?*
- » *What would it mean to make ourselves holy in preparation for our contemporary fiftieth year? In what do we need to immerse ourselves—figuratively or even literally—to be ready to approach it properly?*

**Rabbi Isaac Abravanel (Portugal 1437-1508)** was a biblical commentator and philosopher, who often addressed the everyday concerns of his Jewish community, living under persecution.

### C. Holiness comes from our inner work: *Netivot Shalom* on Parashat Behar

והנה מצינו בתורה בנוגע לשנת היובל שנקראת קדש, וכדכתיב כי יובל היא קדש תהיה לכם. בשמטה לא נזכר הלשון קדש אלא שבת לה' שבת שבתון וכו' ורק שנת החמישים נקראת קדש ששנה שלמה מתקדשת, כדכ' וקדשתם את שנת החמישים, וכלשון רש"י, בכניסתה מקדשין אותה בב"ד ואומרים מקודשת השנה, שב"ד מקדשים אותה באמירתם מקודשת השנה ועי"ז חלה קדושה על כל השנה.

קדושה היא מדרגה העליונה, וכמו שמבאר הרמח"ל במסלת ישרים שיש מדרגת טהרה ויש מדרגת קדושה, טהרה היא רק בשלילה להטהר ולהתנקות מהרע, אבל קדושה היא מדרגה עליונה שאת כל הענינים הגשמיים מרים למדרגה הגבוהה ביותר להיות קדש לה', ואחת לחמישים שנה ישנה שנה שלמה במדרגה זו.

ויש לבאר זאת ע"פ מד"א בתורת אבות על שאלת חז"ל מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני, הלא כל התורה ניתנה מסיני. דענין הר סיני הוא כמאחז"ל [שבת קמו]. כיון שעמדו ישראל על הר סיני פסקה זוהמתן, שהיו משוקעים במ"ט שערי טומאה ובסיני נסתלקה מהם הטומאה, ואז היו מסוגלים לקבל מצות שמטה.

וכאמור שיסוד מצות שמטה הוא בהירות האמונה שיש ליהודי שמאמין כי לי כל הארץ ואין שום נפק"מ אם יעבוד או לא, והכל תלוי רק בברכת ה' כמש"נ וצויתי את ברכתי, ולכן רק לאחר שפסקה זוהמתן מסוגלים הם לבהירות האמונה.

ועפ"ז י"ל שוקדשתם את שנת החמישים בא אכן רק מכח שבע שמיטות, אחרי שישראל חדורים באמונה בהירה מכל ז' השמיטות, אז אפשר להגיע לקדושה.

We find that in Torah the *yovel* year is called holy, as it is written: "for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you." The language of holiness is not used for *sh'mitah*—there it says instead "Shabbat for God," "Shabbat of Shabbats," etc. Only the fiftieth year is called holy—the entire year is sanctified, as it is written "you shall sanctify the fiftieth year"—as Rashi [the great medieval commentator] writes, "As the year begins, the *beit din* sanctifies it and they say, 'the year is sanctified.'" This is how holiness falls on the entire year.

Holiness is a high rung. As Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzatto explains in *Messilat Yesharim*, there is the rung of purity and the rung of holiness—purity is the negative, to purify oneself and to cleanse from evil, but holiness is a high rung that raises all physical matters to the highest rung to be holy to God. Once in fifty years there is an entire year at this level.

We can explain this through a teaching responding to our sages' question, "What does *sh'mitah* have to do with Mount Sinai?" [That is, why does the section of laws about *sh'mitah* begin with the verse, "And God spoke this to Moses on Mount Sinai?"] Our sages taught [Talmud, *Shabbat* 146a]: "When Israel stood at Mount Sinai, their immorality ended"—that is, they had been steeped in the 49 gates of impurity, and at Sinai their impurity fell away, and then they were fit to receive the commandment of *sh'mitah*.

The foundation of *sh'mitah* is clarifying a Jew's faith that the land belongs to God—that it makes no difference whether or not they work, that everything depends on God's blessing. But it is only after their immorality ends that they are able to clarify their faith.

And so we might say that sanctifying the fiftieth year comes only through the power of seven *sh'mitah* years. After Israel is renewed in pure faith through seven *sh'mitah* years, then it is possible to arrive at holiness.

- » *The Netivot Shalom sees the holiness of the fiftieth year as something that we can arrive at only after a process of clarifying, over and over again, the core faith principle that the land belongs to God. What do you think needs to be cleared away to believe that wholeheartedly? How would you describe the kind of holiness that would emerge from clearing away what we need to let go of and engaging fully with the notion that the land is God's? In what way would you describe that mindset as "holy"?*
- » *In our contemporary "yovel", what core principles do you think we have committed to through our actions over the past fifty years? (Who is the "we"?) What patterns have we established? What have we let go of, and what have we embraced? For what kind of fiftieth year have we been prepared by these patterns? Which patterns do we need to deepen, and which do we need to let go of? What should take their place?*
- » *What practices can you imagine taking on in a cyclic way as an individual or with a community, that might help you internalize the principle of the land belonging to God—so that fifty years from now, you might be prepared for the kind of holiness this text describes?*

**Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky (Belarus and Israel, 1911–2000)**, known as the Slonimer Rebbe, led the reestablishment of this Hasidic sect after its near elimination in the Holocaust. *Netivot Shalom* is his commentary on the Torah.

*This text refers to an idea, from the Lurianic Kabbalah of the sixteenth century, that the creation of the world included the shattering of vessels that proved too fragile to hold divine emanation. The original human being had one week to repair this broken world. The failure to do so constituted the original sin and the reason for the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.*

#### D. Taste of the world to come: *Pri Tzadik, Kedushat Shabbat, 3*

וכשנברא אדם הראשון נכנס ליום השבת מיד שאצלו היה זה השבת שבלב שלפני ימי המעשה. כי הוא עדיין לא זכה לזה בפעולתו רק מצד קדושת ה' יתברך דקביעא וקיימא.

וזה ענין שבת מעין העולם הבא שהוא יום שכולו שבת שאין בו אכילה ושתיה רק נהנין מזיו השכינה. ודוגמתו הוא יום הכפורים בעולם הזה שנקרא מפני כן שבת שבתון שיונק משבת העליון בינה שבלב דלבבו יבין ושב וגו', שהוא תרעא דחירו נגד יובל הגדול כנודע. דעל כן תוקעין ביובל ביום הכפורים שאז הוא זמן הדרור.

ואלמלא חטא אדם הראשון היה זוכה שאותו שבת היה בקדושת שבת שבתון. ומכל מקום גם אחר שחטא זכה לשוב ביום השבת מחטאו ולטעום בו קצת מעין עולם הבא. וזהו מצד שורש ישראל הגנוז בו שהקב"ה לבן של ישראל כמו שאמרו ז"ל (שיר השירים רבה ה', ב') על פסוק (תהלים ע"ג, כ"ו) צור לבבי וגו' ועל ידי זה היה יכול להרגיש בלבו קדושת ה' יתברך דקביעא וקיימא ביום השבת ...

After being created, the first human being entered immediately into Shabbat, which was a Shabbat within the heart before any days of labor. The human being had not done anything to deserve this Shabbat—it was simply because of the holiness of the Blessed One, eternally present.

And this is the idea of Shabbat as a taste of the world to come—which is a day that is all Shabbat with no eating or drinking, just taking pleasure in the shining Presence (*Shechinah*). Yom Kippur is a model for this in our world, and therefore called *Shabbat Shabbaton*, which suckles from the upper Shabbat, *binah*, which is in the heart, for our hearts understand [*yavin*, from the same root as *binah*] and do teshuvah [repent]. This is the gate of freedom, corresponding to the Great Yovel. Therefore we sound the shofar of *yovel* on Yom Kippur, because that is the time of liberation.

If the first human being had not transgressed, they would have merited to spend that [first] Shabbat at the [even higher] holiness of *Shabbat Shabbaton*. In any case, even having transgressed, the human being repented on Shabbat and tasted a bit of the world to come. This is the root hidden within Israel—that the Holy Blessed One is the heart of Israel, as it says [Psalm 73:26], “Rock of my heart”—this is how a person can feel in their heart the holiness of the Blessed One, eternally present, on Shabbat. ...

» *In this depiction, holy time is more a divine creation than a result of human actions. How do you relate to these images of being invited into—even suckling from—holy time? Yovel is being associated with this high level of holiness—how might you characterize the ways that yovel is especially holy? What is so holy about doing nothing?*

- » *Which human actions are identified here as helping us access holiness? What do you imagine is important about each of these? How would you describe them in the abstract (e.g. what kind of action is blowing the shofar)?*
- » *What roles do you identify for transgression and repentance in finding holiness in this fiftieth year? What kinds of teshuvah (which we might also translate as “reflective self-transformation”) do you think we might need to do to be able to participate in this year with a sense of it as holy time?*
- » *In what other ways can this year become holy, even if it is not perfect or perfectly holy?*

**Rabbi Tzadok HaCohen Rabinowitz (Lublin, Poland, 1823-1900)**, was born into a *mitnagdish* (non-Hasidic) family, and eventually became a Hasidic leader. He composed most of his work in solitude, and only became a community leader near the end of his life.

## Final questions

- » *Do you see holy time more as something we access or as something we create? Why, and how?*
- » *What do you draw from these ideas of the holiness of the biblical fiftieth year that you can apply to the fiftieth year we are marking now? How would you describe the holiness you hope for? What actions might our community take in order to come closer to your vision?*