

דברי מנחם

Diarei Menachem

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To our modern way of thinking, several laws underscored in the Torah may, at first glance, appear anachronistic, if not somewhat irrelevant. As irreverent as that sounds, the distinction drawn between property to be redeemed in the Jubilee year in walled cities and un-walled cities, respectively, seems illogical. What difference does it make where the property is situated and, in any event, of what relevance are the distinctions in our time when the laws of Yovel no longer apply?

In reality, the difference lies in the variations of the lifestyle of city dwellers and rural citizens, the former more likely to rebuild or sell their homes (thus changing ownership of the property), such that the requirement to return properties to their ancestral owners becomes null and void. Such eventualities among dwellers in un-walled rural areas are relatively few such that the properties pertaining to them have the same ruling as open-fields (Vayikra 25:29-31).

While the status of walled vs. non-walled cities in biblical times also had consequences for lepers and the dead, today, perhaps, the main question to be considered is when Purim should be celebrated in what were once walled cities. As small as they were, Yoel Elitzur, the biblical researcher, has reckoned that there were hundreds of such "walled cities" all over Eretz Yisrael, including those mentioned in Sefer Yehoshua and the Talmud.

And now, with the increasing possibility that the majority of the world's Jews will live in Eretz Yisrael in the foreseeable future, we might well contemplate that once again the Yovel will become a Halachic reality, speedily and in our days, Amen.