

PARSHAS BEHAR

תשפ"ב

In Parshas Behar we begin with the mitzvah of shmittah, which is probably one of the most unusual mitzvos of the Torah. It has a strong connection to the mitzvah of bitachon. Rav Avrohom ben HaRambam makes an interesting point about bitachon. Bitachon is not an optional level for those who want to reach it, and it is not a metzius that either you have it or you don't have it. It is an absolute obligation to acquire a sense of bitachon. All those who count the number of 613 mitzvos, include having bitachon in their list of mitzvos

What does bitachon mean? It is deeply connected with the idea of hashgocho protis – the belief that Hashem is the direct and willful cause of anything and everything that happens in this world. Nothing happens by accident. We like to imagine we are in charge of this world. The mitzvah of bitachon commands us to believe that Hashem is controlling everything that happens to me through Hashem's intricate calculation of reward and punishment. If I succeed in my endeavors or don't succeed, it is a result of Hashem's unfathomable cheshbon.

But this doesn't mean I just go to sleep, and everything I need will just materialize without any effort. The verse in Tehillim tells us that you need to hire architects and builders to build the houses of the city, and you need watchmen to guard it. Only their success or failure is not up to them. The mitzvah of bitachon is that we believe Hashem controls the outcome of our efforts, and we must rely only on Hashem to bring success to those efforts. I am not allowed to expect Hashem to just make miracles to provide me with what I need.

There are two criteria that must be met before one has permission to rely on an open miracle. One is that one must be a novi, and the other is that Hashem explicitly guaranteed that a miracle will happen to provide what you need. Once those two conditions are fulfilled, the novi is obligated to anticipate with absolute confidence that the miracle will occur, and he may not make any effort on his own to achieve what Hashem promised will happen. An example of this is Eliyahu Hanovi who was told that Hashem will provide for his needs supernaturally, and he was told in advance that a fire will come down from heaven to consume the sacrifice on his mizbeiach on Har Carmel.

We find that Yaakov Ovinu was afraid of what Eisov might do to him and his family. And he took elaborate precautions to protect himself. Why? Where was his bitachon in Hashem? The answer is that Hashem never gave Yaakov an explicit guarantee that a miracle would happen and he would not be harmed by Eisov. So he was afraid and needed to take precautions. Shmuel Hanovi was afraid of Shaul Hamelech and took precautions to protect himself. Why? Hashem never told him a miracle will be done to protect him. So he had no right to rely on a miracle and was required to take precautions. At that point, the mitzvah of bitachon is to take precautions and rely on Hashem – to trust that He will see to it that your precautions will succeed.

There is one exception to this rule of putting in normal effort and relying on Hashem for success. The mitzvah of shmittah is a command to do nothing at all to work the land to grow food. We must rely on Hashem's guarantee that food will somehow be available. This requires tremendous mesiras nefesh.

There are two types of mesiras nefesh in bitachon. One is the kind where Avrohom Ovinu was willing to be thrown into the fiery furnace with no reason to expect that Hashem will do a miracle to save him. He was willing to die for his belief in Hashem and for defying avodo zoro. Horon didn't have that level of mesiras nefesh. He only agreed to be

thrown in after he saw that Avrohom was saved by a miracle – and he expected to be saved as well. This is why he wasn't saved. Horon wasn't really willing to die for his convictions in the first place. He was only being pragmatic after seeing how Avrohom was miraculously saved.

The other type of mesiras nefesh is where Hashem tells you in advance that He will save you, and you risk everything in your absolute trust that Hashem will keep His word. This is the mesiras nefesh involved in the mitzvah of shmittah.

At Yam Suf, Hashem told Klal Yisroel to go into sea and Hashem will take care of them. But Klal Yisroel didn't know in advance how they will be saved – they didn't know if and when it would split. But they went into the water anyway, and it came up till their nostrils. They almost drowned! This was a demonstration of their bitachon – they had absolute confidence in Hashem's promise that He will somehow save them – even though it looked completely hopeless at the moment they went in.

Shmittah has a number of different aspects to it. What is at the root of it all? The land is Hashem's land. Sometimes farmers leave their land fallow in order to regenerate the nutrients in the field so it will grow better afterward. But this is not the goal of shmittah. The verses are explicit that shmittah is a Shabbos to Hashem. Why?

There are two things that are working in parallel. There is a lesson about the nature and purpose of our lives in general and a lesson about the nature and purpose of Eretz Yisroel in particular.

Eretz Yisroel wasn't given to Klal Yisroel merely to be a national homeland. The verse in Tehillim says quite clearly that Eretz Yisroel originally belonged to other nations. It was someone else's homeland before we came. But Hashem took it from them and gave it to us as a gift for a reason – in order that we fulfill Torah and mitzvos in this land. Eretz Yisroel is uniquely suited for Klal Yisroel to keep the Torah while living in it. That is its purpose.

Hashem gave us Eretz Yisroel as a gift, but there are serious strings attached. Hashem tells us: It is still Mine and you only have a right to live in it when you comply with the rules of living on it. Avrohom said to the Bnei Ches, I am both a ger and a toshav. I am acting as though I belong here. But, it doesn't really belong to me. So too during the year of shmittah, we are reminded that we aren't the real owners of this land. For six years we pretend it is ours but then we give up the illusion on the seventh year.

There are different aspects of hilchos shmittah which reflect that we don't own the land. One is the inability to plant, to cultivate the land. Another is even on things that don't need to be planted – when trees grow fruit by themselves, the fruit is not yours. It is hefker. Even though you invested so much time and effort to develop this orchard or vineyard, but this year, the fruit it produces isn't yours. It is hefker and it has kedushoh. You need to develop a strong bitachon that Hashem will provide you with food without making any effort to grow food. This demand to have bitachon on shmittah is an open challenge to take our beliefs in hashgocho protis seriously and put them into practice.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries when masses of Jews migrated from Eastern Europe to the West, they faced many difficult tests regarding shemiras Shabbos. Ultimately, the test came down to one of bitachon. Jews had to make repeated, practical decisions to not

work on Shabbos and trust that Hashem will provide for them despite the loss of a job or income. In the end, those who were moser nefesh, Hashem took care of them. But it didn't happen automatically. People went through great nisyonos before they saw a yeshuoh – after they showed their bitachon and were moser nefesh.

But you have to put in the effort first. You can't sit back and do nothing and expect Hashem will simply deliver what you need. That is not bitachon. For six days a week, you need to work for a living. Six years before the shmittah year, you work the land.

The mitzvah of shmittah is recognizing Eretz Yisroel is a total gift by stepping back every seven years and refraining from any cultivation – any sense of ownership.

Then we have the mitzvah of Yovel.

If I own a piece of property, I have the full power to give up my ownership completely to someone else. And I lose all connection to it once I hand it over. But if it is land I inherited in Eretz Yisroel, I am not allowed to give it over permanently to someone else. It needs to come back every Yovel. Why? It is to remind us and make us appreciate how we got the land in the first place. We inherited it from our ancestors who first conquered and settled Eretz Yisroel when they came from Egypt. It was a gift that Hashem originally gave to that generation which we are still benefitting from.

There is an interesting mitzvah of bikkurim. A farmer spends three years of effort planting trees and cultivating them until it finally produces its fruit. And after three years, we can't just pick the fruit and enjoy it. We don't just give it to a Kohen. We bring it in person to the Beis Hamikdosh and make a whole declaration! We make a short summary of our national history – starting all the way back from the Ovos to the present. We are continuing that initial gift. We explain and appreciate how it is we are standing today on this land that Hashem gave us, bringing these fruit that Hashem caused to grow.

So too, on Yovel, we get the land back. It is not ours to give away permanently. We periodically need to recognize that Hashem owns everything. He gave everything we have as a gift in order that we use it properly and not misuse it. Everything we put in our mouth needs a brochoh. Once we make the brochoh, we can enjoy it. Everything in the world we can possess and it becomes ours completely. Except for the land of Eretz Yisroel. It always goes back to the original heirs. I cannot sell it permanently because our entire right to live on this land comes from the fact that Hashem promised this land to the Ovos and gave it to the generation that came from Egypt. We can never forget the history of Eretz Yisroel.

If you want to appreciate the impact of a single individual, read up

on the story of the Chazon Ish and heter mechiroh. Because of him, a major part of the country now keeps shmittah on a very high level. Many people are unhappy with this because it shows how much religious Jews have impacted the economic reality and the social fabric of the State of Israel.

In Parshas Behar we are told over and over that the land belongs to Hashem. In Parshas Bechukosai the tochocho tells us that when we don't recognize that the land belongs to Hashem, we will be banished from the land. It will become desolate from any habitation, and then all the missing shmittos will be observed. Hashem will take the land back.

For those of us who aren't farmers, it doesn't mean these lessons don't apply to us as well. The lesson is clear, everything we have is a gift from Hashem and we have to treat it as such. We have to use Hashem's gifts in a way He wants them to be used.

Bitachon isn't just a madreigoh. It is an absolute obligation. Rav Avrohom ben HaRambam writes that if we don't have sufficient bitachon, we are obligated to work on ourselves until we obtain it. Bitachon is a deep recognition that Hashem is in charge of our success and our failures. Everything that happens is because Hashem caused it to happen for a reason. It is not our place to assume that human beings are the cause of what happens to us.

One example of this is the prohibition to take revenge or bear a grudge. The Rambam writes that the reason we may not take revenge is because if someone victimizes you in particular, it wasn't by chance. Hashem is sending you a message through this particular person's bad middos. It certainly doesn't excuse what the person did, and that person will be punished for exercising his bechiroh in a way that harmed others. But it was Hashem's hashgocho which explains why he victimized you and not someone else. You have no right to take personal revenge or bear a grudge against that person.

Another example comes from Yosef Hatzaddik. The brothers were very concerned that after Yaakov died, Yosef would take revenge on his brothers for how they treated him. Yosef responded that they have nothing to fear. He believes in hashgocho protis. He knows that Hashem allowed this to happen to him for a specific reason – to bring his family down to Egypt. He tells them: Hashem merely took your bad middos and my kibbud Ov to make this happen. It would have happened anyway. So why should I take revenge? It's between you and Hashem. This was Yosef's way of looking at the world.

Yosef achieved a great level of emunoh and bitachon. No one is born on that level. Our job is to strive to reach those levels and internalize it by recognizing that everything that happens to us in this world is due to Hashem's direct hashgocho over our lives.