

## PARSHAS BEHAR

תשפ"ד

This week's parsha contains one of the most unusual mitzvos of the Torah.

As a rule, the Torah gives us demands and constraints regarding every aspect of life – without exception. In the clothes we wear, and in the business we conduct – there are mitzvos and aveiros associated with every part of life. The Raavad in Baalei Hanefesh writes that every aspect of life is subject to the will of Hashem, so every aspect of life has to have mitzvos and aveiros that regulate them. Farming is yet another aspect of life that has mitzvos and aveiros, but every seven years, the Torah goes way beyond the normal set of rules and restrictions that we are used to.

In our frum society today, most mitzvos have been worked out so everything is made to be super easy and convenient. You can eat virtually whatever you want with the best hashgochos. There will soon come a day where you can eat bosor b'cholov in a kosher way because the meat will be grown in a laboratory having the identical properties and taste of real meat, but it will be pareve. Everything can be made artificially. But the one mitzvah which still interferes with our desire for total freedom is Shabbos. Shabbos says the whole world stops and these 25 hours are dedicated to Hashem.

There are three aspects to Shabbos. One is that it is a testimony that Hashem created the world in exactly six days with 24-hour days and 60 second minutes – as the Ramban says explicitly. (See my book for an explanation how this does not contradict the idea that the world can be billions of years old.) We cease all creative activity to show that the whole universe was created by Hashem alone and He completed it and ceased His creative activity at the arrival of Shabbos. Hashem wants us to acknowledge that it all belongs to Him and He lets us use it. This is also the concept of making a brocho on food. On Shabbos we refrain from all creative activity to give testimony that Hashem created everything from absolutely nothing.

It is also a yom kodosh – we declare the day as a time to dedicate to avodas Hashem – with tefilloh and limud Torah as a tzibbur. It is not just a day to connect socially with the community.

The third aspect of Shabbos comes from the Aseres haDibbros in Parshas Vo'eschanon:

ּיָגּן שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל מְלַאַכְתָּרְ: {יוּד} וְיוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי שֵׁבָּת לי' א' לא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל מְלָאָכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְרְ וּבְתֶּרְ וְעַבְדְּך וַאַמָתֶרְ וְשׁוֹרְךְ וְחַלְרְ וְכָל בְּהֶמְתֶר וְגַרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרִיךְ לְמַעַן יָנוּים עַבְדְךָ וַאֲמָתֶרְ כָּמוֹרְ: {טוּ וְזָכְרְתָ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִית בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצְאַך י' א' מִשֶׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה עַל כָּן צַוְךָ '' א' לעֲשוֹת אֵת יוֹם הַשַּׁבַּת:

There is a mitzvah of menuchoh. Why? To remember yetzias Mitzrayim? What does one have to do with the other? The Rambam says that a Jew has to actively show the fact that he is free from the slavery of Egypt through a cessation of labor for a certain period of time. A slave has no time of his own. He cannot decide that he wants to rest and take a day off from work. So Shabbos has to demonstrate that Hashem freed us from slavery and we have the freedom not do work – resting on Shabbos has to demonstrate this concept of freedom from slavery.

When Jews came to America and England from Eastern Europe, their biggest nisoyon was keeping Shabbos – not going to work and risking your job, week after week.

Shmittah is the same thing – we leave the land alone and without being at all concerned about where our food will come from. We give

it all back to Hashem and we are confident that He will take care of us.

Just imagine what this meant to Klal Yisroel when they came to settle Eretz Yisroel. They were given this land to grow crops and prosper, and they farmed it for six straight years. Suddenly, they can't farm it for an entire year! It is a big nisoyon for a farmer to just stop working his land for such a long time. Hashem tells the farmer: "Don't worry – have bitochon in Me, and I will make sure you won't be lacking."

But the point of Shmittah is to illustrate the fact that the land is not ours. We don't own it. We are temporary residents on this Earth and Hashem granted us the opportunity to live on it. We don't have any guaranteed rights. As Avrohom Ovinu said to the Bnei Cheis, he is a  $\pi$  $\pi$   $\pi$   $\pi$   $\pi$  among them – which is really a contradiction. We pretend that we are in control and that we are here to stay, but in reality, it is only because Hashem is letting us live here temporarily. This message is delivered to us in a very extreme manner. Don't plant! Don't cultivate anything! You must rely on Hashem to survive!

My grandfather came to the United States from Romania. Before he came, he trained himself as a tailor in order to have some kind of parnossoh when he arrived. When he landed in the U.S., he managed to get a job as a tailor but was fired each Friday for keeping Shabbos. After this kept happening week after week, he realized he needed to become self-employed if he wanted to keep Shabbos. He slowly started an egg business and went door-to-door selling eggs, and eventually he had a large egg business and he earned an income that far surpassed what any tailor being mechallel Shabbos would earn by deciding to keep working on Saturday. He had a deep emunoh that his parnossoh comes from Hashem and he will not lose by keeping Shabbos – and he was not let down.

The mitzvah of Shmittah demands from this farmer to declare that his parnossoh comes directly from Hashem and that he will survive – and even thrive – even though he isn't touching his field for an entire year. Even if the fruits grow by themselves, he has to leave them hefker for anyone to take – he can't sell them. He has to make an incredible statement that Hashem is taking care of his parnossoh and he will live in security.

There is a very interesting history to Shmittah in this country. The first agricultural settlements in the late 1870's and early 1880's were all frum, and they all kept the first Shmittah in 1882. But as more agricultural settlements sprang up, the Shmittah of 1889 was already problematic. The secular Zionists understood that if this Shmittah was kept according to halacha, the precedent will be set for all the Shmittos in the future, and the entire Yishuv will revolve around Torah and mitzvos. They fought bitterly to stop it. Baron Rothschild was willing to support the entire Yishuv for a year in order to keep Shmittah lehalocho. But then the concept of a heter mechiroh was conceived and signed on by four major rabbonim led by Rav Yitzchok Elchonon – who later realized that he was fooled into supporting it. This meant the idea of keeping Shmittah was forgotten.

Now we see the power of a single individual to change history. The Chazon Ish came to Eretz Yisroel and made it his goal to make Shmittah a reality. He began with a number of yishuvim of Poalei Agudas Yisroel who began to keep Shmittah, and from there he kept pushing and pushing and persevering until Shmittah gets back on the national agenda. Little by little, farm after farm, more and more farmers started keeping Shmittah. And this last Shmittah was the first time since the churbon habayis where Shmittah was kept on a majority of farmland here in Eretz Yisroel. The Chazon Ish persevered and persevered until his goal to bring Shmittah back was realized.

And all the farmers have reported that they had tremendous brocho and they didn't lose out by keeping Shmittah! Hashem keeps His promises.

Shmittah is a statement of absolute bitochon – an open recognition that we don't own anything in this world and all parnossoh comes from Hashem. Most of the time we blend our bitochon with hishtadlus and we have to keep in mind that Hashem is behind our efforts and our success. But Shmittah demands that we have bitochon without any hishtadlus whatsoever and rely completely on Hashem. Treat Hashem's promise like you would treat the promise of a multi-billionaire to support you. You need to have the same level of confidence and tranquility as if a wealthy human being made this promise.

## Then we have the mitzvah of Yovel.

When Klal Yisroel initially came into Eretz Yisroel, it was very apparent that each shevet was receiving a gift directly from Hashem. They were each apportioned an area of land that was designated especially for that shevet. But as decades and decades pass by, that initial feeling that this portion of land is a gift to me directly from Hashem begins to fade. You naturally start to feel that you have total rights to this land to do with as you please. Every property owner has near absolute rights to do with his property whatever he wishes. He can sell it, give it away for free, and even destroy it.

But Eretz Yisroel is not that way. Every 50 years, the original chaluka is returned to the original family it was bestowed to. The ancestor received a gift from Hashem, and no matter what his descendants did with it, it comes back at Yovel. So if they sold it to someone outside the family, and the buyer cultivated it and invested all his time and effort in making it fertile and valuable, when Yovel arrives, it simply goes back to the seller. It isn't his to keep. It reminds us that this land belongs to Hashem, He gave it to us as a gift, and it remains a gift to each family for all time. Then we have another halacha. Not only do you have to careful to sell the land for a limited number of years and not mislead the buyer into thinking that he is owning it for good, you have to be honest and upfront about the defects of any item you sell. It is not limited to land. Even the shoes you sell or the computers you sell are not fully yours. They are all Hashem's property and He is letting you receive the profits on condition that you avoid deception and dishonesty in your business. And Hashem guarantees financial success – not only to farmers who keep Shmittah – but to anyone who is making an honest parnossoh and doesn't cheat others.

This theme goes through many mitzvos in the parsha. The reason why Behar with its consistent message is read during Sefiroh, is because this message is an integral part of kabbolas HaTorah. A true kabbolas HaTorah demands that we recognize that we don't run the world and we are living purely out of Hashem's kindness.

We are living in incredible times. Hashem is sending clear messages to us every day and you have to be blind not to see it. Hashem is shouting at us to wake up. We were miraculously saved from a massive attack over the entire country before Pesach. Our greatest enemies are getting killed without our having to lift a finger! Hashem is telling us He is completely in charge of what happens in the world!

In this week's parsha we are given extreme reminders that the world is not ours. The Torah makes incredible demands to force us to recognize that everything belongs to Hashem and He guarantees that by keeping the Torah we will not lose out. Although it was difficult to give up a secure steady employment and go out on his own and rely on Hashem, my grandfather had to make a decision about who is running the world. And he decided that since Hashem is running the world, all he has to do is follow what He wants me to do, and He will take care of me. And Hashem saw to it that he had a much greater parnossoh because of his commitment to shmiras Shabbos, much more than if he had decided to remain a tailor and be mechallel Shabbos.

This is how we prepare for kabbolas HaTorah.