

Parshas Behar – R. Jonathan Shooter (reprint)

כ אייר תשע"ו – 28th May 2016 – שבת פ' בהר

Whose is it anyway?

Rav Moshe Feinstein says that the following lesson can be learned from shemita. By releasing his land every seven years he shows that really ones ownership on the land is limited and that it is ultimately Hashem's. During the shemita he has to open his gates and let everyone in to enjoy the fruits of his fields. Then in the Yovel year (occurring every 50 years) certain fields and houses are returned to their ancestral heritage. This shows Hashem's will and control over everything "And the land shall not be sold forever, for the land is Mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with Me" (Vayikra 25 :23).

Two people once came to Reb Chaim Volozhin, each claiming that they owned a piece of land. Much to their astonishment he bent down to the ground. Seeing their surprised expressions, he said to them "Each one of you is claiming the land, so I decided to see what the land had to say. Do you know what it said? That both of you belong to Him".

Well, anyway...

The Torah says "And if you will say "what will we eat in the seventh year...and I will command My blessing to you in the sixth year" (Vayikra 25:20). Rav Yaakov Naiman asks that surely the Torah only needs to write that Hashem would give his blessing and then there would be no room for the question of "what shall we eat", why does it have to mention the question as well? He says that really it is inappropriate to ask the question "what shall we eat". This is because even without the promise of extra blessing one would still have to observe the mitzvah of Hashem, since Hashem has commanded, it has to be fulfilled. Rather the question of "what shall we eat" is regarding one who has not taken upon himself the yoke of Torah and mitzvos and belief in Hashem. Therefore it is said to him "and I will command My blessing". The proof of this is that nowadays, since the exile, many are of the opinion that shemita is rabbinical in nature, and the promise of extra blessing does not apply, yet we are still obligated to observe it and endure the hardships it entails. Therefore it emerges that those who observe the shemita are testifying to the kingship of Hashem, prepared to do the will of the King even without the promises. If one would have been lacking in faith (during the times when the shemita was biblically ordained), the answer to him is prepared "and I will command My blessing to you in the sixth year". However to ask such a question in the first place demonstrates a lack of faith.

Rav Moshe Feinstein says that in fact the question is totally inappropriate. The verse says that they are asking what they would eat in the seventh year, but the truth is that in that year they would still have what to eat from the crop of the sixth year. The question would only be appropriate to ask in the eighth year when they would really be lacking. Rather, the verse is indicating that their request is inappropriate as they are asking what they will eat when they still have food in front of them. Since they see the food they should know that it comes from Hashem and that He can provide them with everything even should nothing sprout. Therefore the question is based on a lack of faith.

Maybe not bad?

I saw another explanation of the question "what shall we eat" which does not interpret it as a criticism. Througho ut the other 6 years the people would be involved in many land related mitzvos, leket, shikchah, peah, terumos and maaseros. By the farmer doing these, the holiness in his work would be increased, which would lead to blessing from Hashem. However in the seventh year, they were lacking all these mitzvos which would lead to an absence of holiness and they would not receive the resultant blessings. Therefore the question "what shall we eat" is from the lack of these mitzvos, they would think that they would not receive blessing. Therefore the Torah says "and I will command My blessing to you", that what would come in the sixth year would suffice for the next 3 years.

In his other volume, Rav Moshe comments on the connection between the mitzvah of shemita and the commandment "a man shall not cheat his brother" (Vayikra 25:14) which is mentioned right in the middle of the portion dealing with shemita. He says that one refrains from cheating, lying and robbing his fellow man because one believes that his parnassa is ordained from heaven and is not due to any more or less effort on his part. Should he rip someone off successfully, he will lose that money some other way. He cannot increase the amount set for him on Rosh Hashana. Therefore one will have no interest in what ones fellow has as there will be no point cheating him anyway. As we have mentioned, shemita is a mitzvah which also needs great strength in order to succeed. Therefore should he have this level of faith, he will not stumble by cheating.