

THE GIFT OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. The Gift of the Land of Israel

The Torah tells us that during the Sabbatical year (seventh year) the Land must remain fallow. All agricultural activity must come to a halt. During the seventh year of the Sabbatical Cycle, one is not permitted to exercise any degree of ownership rights over the land. It must remain in an ownerless state regarding the produce of the seventh year. On the fiftieth year, which is the Jubilee year (Yovel), all properties that were sold during the seven Sabbatical Cycles of seven years, must revert back to their original owners. The Torah states as a negative commandment, "The land may not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine (G'd); for you are sojourners and residents with Me." Because the Jew is only a resident and not an owner of the Land, he has no right to exercise full ownership rights.

The Torah tells us that despite the financial and labor investment of an owner in his land, he has no right to withhold anyone from partaking of its produce every Sabbatical year (every seven years). In effect, he is only leasing the land with certain stipulations set forth in the Torah. All produce in the Land of Israel is subject to numerous tithes - to the Kohen, the Levy, the poor and other times one must take 10% and consume it in Jerusalem. The many laws that pertain to the produce of Israel are a continuous reminder that one is only a beneficiary of its bounty when one abides by the stipulations of the true owner who is G'd. Thus, when one lives in Israel, especially within an agricultural context, one is able to maintain a continuous cognizance of G'd's dominion.

When the Jewish people failed and believed that their success was attributable to themselves, they violated 70 Sabbatical years. Because of this disregard, the Jewish people were displaced (exiled) to Babylon for a period of 70 years.

King David states in Tehillim (Psalms), "As for the heavens- heavens are Hashem's, but the earth He has given to mankind..." Sforno explains that the words of King David are referring to the world at large and not the Land of Israel. The earth was given to the nations of the world but the Land of Israel/ the holy land was designated for the Jewish people to be there only to observe the Torah.

Maharal of Prague explains that each of the 70 root nations received a location in the world that is suited for its own level of spirituality. For example, the prophet Yechezkel refers to the Egyptian people as "donkeys" (chamor). He states, "Their flesh is the flesh of donkeys." Maharal explains that the word "chamor" (donkey) is derived from "chomer" which means material. Of all the 70 nations of

the world, the Egyptian people have the least relevance to spirituality. Thus, the land of Egypt was the most appropriate location for them since it was a location devoid of spirituality.

In contrast, the Land of Israel is the holy land - thus it is suited for the Jewish people who are a holy people. Since this is the reality of the Jew, G'd does not want him to forget that his existence is only a means and not an end. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos explains that what King David states in Psalms, "...the heaven is for G'd and the earth was given to mankind" is true only after man acknowledges that G'd is the Creator of the earthly existence. This acknowledgement comes about through the recitation of blessings. The Rabbis enacted the recitation of a blessing before partaking of a food item or experiencing other benefits in order for one to be continuously cognizant that man is only a beneficiary of G'd's Goodness. As the Torah states after recognizing "the land is for Me (G'd) you will dwell in the land securely." Only after one recognizes that all emanates from Him, is one truly secure.

2. The Supporting Beam of the Jewish People

The Torah states, "If your brother becomes impoverished (and he is weakened (moch)) and sells part of his ancestral heritage, his redeemer who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale..." It is a Positive Commandment that if one becomes impoverished and is forced to sell part of his inheritance in the Land of Israel, it must be redeemed by his closest relative. If one does not have such a redeemer, he should do so himself if at some later time he attains the means. If he is not able to do so, then it will remain in the hands of the buyer until the Jubilee year/Yovel.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Torah is alluding to something other than the literal understanding of the verses. The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that the reason the decree of Haman (to annihilate every Jewish man, woman, and child) came about was that "as the result of the laziness the supporting beam became weakened." Because of the Jewish people's lack of involvement in Torah and mitzvos during the period of Haman, the supporting force of existence, G'd became weakened. Chazal explain that because the Jewish people were not worthy, they caused G'd to withdraw His blessing from their midst. As it stated by Chazal, "When the Jewish people veer from the proper path they remove the spiritual influences that bring blessing to the world and the Pillar of Holiness is weakened. Everything which comes from above is influenced by how (the Jewish people) behave from below." If there are difficulties that come upon the Jewish people, it is only because they are not properly engaged in mitzvos; this causes a retraction of Divine Protection and blessing.

Ohr HaChaim continues, "Because the Jewish people were impoverished (in mitzvos) they needed to sell their portion (the Bais HaMikdash), which is their inheritance.

Due to their sins, it was sold to the nations of the world. As the verse states, 'The nations came into our portion...' The redeemer who is closest to the Jewish people is the one who can rectify the situation. Who is this redeemer? G'd states, 'With those who are closest to Me, I will sanctify Myself.'

G'd is referring to the tzaddikim (righteous) among the Jewish people. The tzaddik brings about the redemption by arousing his fellow to do teshuvah. He should ask his fellow, 'How does it feel to be living outside (a life of materialism)? He should give his fellow an understanding of what it means to be exiled from the table of one's Father. What is the value of existence without being able to be at one's father's table? The tzaddik must elucidate how baseless and detestable are the material pursuits for the sake of lust and desire. He must arouse his fellow to spirituality. This is how the redemption will come about. Those who have the ability to influence others and do not, there will be a reckoning and a judgment. They will be held culpable for the disgrace of the G'd and His location."

The Torah tells us that in the plains of Moav the entire Jewish people entered into a covenant with G'd that every Jew is responsible for his fellow (aavvus). If even the most simple Jew could influence his fellow, he must do so because it is his obligation. One need not be a Torah Sage to be obligated in this mitzvah.

When we beseech G'd to resolve and remove our difficulties, do we see those who are not involved in Torah Judaism as part of our responsibility? Do we only focus on our own personal issues, which we consider as primary? In actuality, the basis for all difficulty is because "the beam has been weakened." We must secure the "beam" by strengthening and involving the Jewish people to a greater degree in Torah and mitzvos. This is only possible if G'd will give our fellow Jews a sensitivity and a capacity to appreciate their Jewish heritage. Within the Jewish people, each individual is responsible for his fellow. We must be concerned for our fellow no less than for ourselves. Thus, we will bring about the reinstatement of the Jewish people in their proper location - the Land of Israel.

3. Possession is Rooted in Ego

The Torah tells us that during the seventh year of the Sabbatical Cycle (Shmita), all agricultural activities must cease and all produce of the seventh year are considered ownerless. Despite the level of capital and physical investment, the owner of the field is not permitted to exercise any ownership over the produce of the Shmitta year. All are permitted to enter his land and partake of the produce of Shmitta with impunity.

If in fact, all the produce of the Sabbatical year is left ownerless and the owner is not permitted to engage in any agricultural activities, how is one to survive the future without any level of preparation? The Torah itself addresses this issue. As it states, "If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? - behold we will not sow and not gather in our crops! I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period...." The Torah is guaranteeing the Jew financial security in advance so as not to be concerned that his future is in jeopardy. Chazal tell us that the reason the Jews were exiled to Babylon for a period of 70 years was that they had violated and not observed 70 Shmita years. Since they had violated the tenant agreement with G'd 70 times, measure for measure, they were displaced from the Land for 70 years. If G'd provided for their needs in advance without exception, why would they not observe the

Shmita?

The Midrash Tanchumah at the beginning of the portion of Vayikra cites the words of King David in Tehillim (Psalms), "Bless Hashem His angels mighty in strength (geborei koach) who do His bidding to obey the voice of His word." One interpretation cited by the Midrash is that the geborei koach are those who observe the mitzvah of Shmitta (Sabbatical year) (Shomrei Shveeis). The Midrash explains, "Why are they considered geborei koach (people of enormous strength)?" The one who remains silent as he sees the fences protecting his fields being taken down, the produce of his field considered ownerless and taken by strangers, is considered a gebor koach. As it is stated in Pirkei Avos, "Who is considered the strong person - One who subdues/suppresses his inclination." The individual who remains silent under these circumstances is identified as one with enormous strength. The reason for this is it requires unusual control to subjugate one's own feelings and inclination to allow the fruits of one's labor to be taken from him without any consideration.

The reason the Jewish people violated 70 Shmita years was not because they were not compensated by G'd (because they were), but rather, they were not able to contain themselves when they witnessed their hard-earned accomplishments being taken from them by anyone who wished to do so. They had no say in the matter. The only one who is able to witness this and not react is considered a gebor koach.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia states, "A person prefers his own kav (small dry measure) more than multiple portions of his fellow." Although he is able to have multiple times (quantitatively) more than that which he created himself, one prefers less because it is the expression of his own efforts. One prefers something of his own rather than that which belongs to another. This was the basis for the difficulty of the Jewish people in relinquishing their ownership rights, despite the compensation they received. Their difficulty was not the loss of value, but rather it was "their" crop that they were not able to control.

One is endowed with ability, success, and blessing only because G'd Wills it so. One's accomplishment emanates totally through G'd's blessing and does not depend on one's own abilities. If this is one's reality in life, then experiencing the Shmita will not cause him any anguish because he understands that all that he has was given to him by G'd - and he must dispense it as He wishes. However, if one does not fully appreciate this, then he will be inclined toward wanting to exercise his ownership rights - as the Gemara states, "A person prefers his own (kav)..." The issue is rooted in humility. If one is willing to forgo his own glory for the sake of G'd then he is able to meet the challenge of Shmita without difficulty. However, if one's perception of life is that his success is contingent on his own ability, then he must struggle with his ego.

King David writes in Tehillim, "Bless Hashem His angels mighty in strength (geborei koach)..." The angel only acts for the sake of G'd. He has no ego or conflict of interest because of his level of clarity. He understands that his purpose is only to do the will of G'd. Thus, one who is able to subdue

his ego/inclination and do the Will of G'd is comparable to an angel.

We say every day in the Amidah (Silent Prayer), "You are holy and Your Name is holy and holy ones (kiddoshim) praise You every day..." The angels and the Jewish people are the "kiddoshim" who praise G'd every day because they are the ones who are removed from the mundane. The Jew has the ability to transcend his physical circumstance and like the angel has relevance to spirituality.

4. The Mission of the Jew

After the Torah discusses the prohibition of lending money with interest it concludes, "I am Hashem, Your G'd who took you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your G'd." Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Kesubos that states, "If you (the Jewish people) live in the Land of Israel, it is the location where I am your G'd, but if you leave it to live in another location - it is as if you are engaged in idolatry." Ramban explains that every part of the world is under the influence of an archangel representing one of the 70 root nations of the world. The archangel is designated for that location. All sustenance that one receives in those locations is transmitted through the archangel of that particular location. The Land of Israel has no archangel associated with it because G'd has a direct relationship with the Land. Thus, all sustenance that has relevance to the Land of Israel emanates directly from G'd with no intermediary. Therefore, when one lives outside of the Land, sustenance is dependant on the archangels and has a semblance of engaging in idolatry.

G'd gave the Land of Israel to the Jewish people because it is the optimum location to accomplish their purpose, which is the fulfillment of the Torah. Since the Land was given to the Jew primarily to develop his spirituality, what would be the consequence if he chose to live a life of physicality devoid of spirituality- rejecting the Torah? Not only would the value of the Land of Israel not have any relevance to their existence, it would be considered a desecration of that location.

The Torah tells us that if one dwells in the Land and does not adhere to the Torah, "The Land will spit you out." Since the Land of Israel is the location of holiness/spirituality, one must adhere to the Torah in order to remain there. Shalah HaKadosh writes that throughout history the Land of Israel did not tolerate pagan behavior. Any pagan people that established itself in the Land were ultimately cast out. It is only the Jew and the Arab that has remained and occupied the Land since the destruction of the Second Temple. They are both monotheistic people. The reason the Arab remains in the Land until this day is only that he is partially circumcised. However, the Arab will be ultimately removed from the Land. G'd promised Avraham, our Patriarch, that the Land would be his and his progeny until the end of time. The sign that established this covenant (the giving of the Land) was the circumcision. The circumcision of the Jew differs from that of the Arab because it has two elements - meelah (cutting of foreskin) and priyah (peeling it back). The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos states, "meelah without priyah is not considered circumcision for the Jew." The Arab, on the other hand, as a descendant of Hagar (Ketura), the wife of Avraham, only has the first element (meelah) without priya. Thus, they will ultimately be removed from the Land.

The Jew was only given the Land of Israel so that he can live as a G'd's people. As the Torah states, "I am Hashem, Your G'd who took you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your (la'chem - in the plural) G'd. Sforno points out an interesting fact that the verse uses the word "la'chem (your in the plural) to indicate that the Torah itself could not be adhered to and fulfilled properly unless there is communal interaction. Thus, there are many laws that pertain to relationships between man and man in order to establish that proper community.

5. The Inherent Value of the Species that Qualify as Offerings (from Emor)

According to the Midrash, the species that qualify to be brought for offerings were chosen in the merit of the Patriarchs. The ox (shor) was chosen in the merit of Avraham. As it states regarding Avraham's hosting of the angels, "Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf tender and good, and gave it to the youth who hurried to do it..."

It is interesting to note that when the Midrash cites this verse regarding Avraham's act of hospitality, it could have only said "Avraham ran to the cattle..." in order to reveal the manner in which Avraham performed chesed (kindness). As the Gemara tells us every aspect of hospitality that Avraham provided for the angels, G'd rewarded the Jewish people in the desert in kind (measure for measure). Any aspect of hospitality that Avraham performed himself, G'd directly provided for that particular need of the Jewish people Himself. For example, in the merit of providing the bread to the angels, G'd provided the Manna in the desert. In the merit of offering the shade of his tree to the angels, the Jewish people merited the Clouds of Glory, which protected them throughout the 40 years in the desert.

Yet, we see that the Midrash cites the above verse in its entirety - which seems to have no relevance to his hospitality - "...and gave it to the youth who hurried to do it..." Why did the Midrash cite the entire verse?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that those particular words refer to Ishmael, the son of Avraham. Although Avraham was in the midst of hosting his guests, he took the time to educate his son in the mitzvah of hospitality. Thus, the ox not only represents the merit of Avraham's chesed, but also encompasses the merit of him educating his son.

The sheep (kesev) was chosen to be an offering in the merit of Yitzchak. As the verse states regarding the Akeidah (binding of Yitzchak), "And Avraham looked up and saw- behold a ram - after it had been caught in the thicket..." The species of the ram reminds G'd of the special act of the Akeidah, which was the ultimate sacrifice to Him. G-d values every aspect of the sacrifice of the ram as if Avraham had sacrificed his son Yitzchak.

The goat (eiz) was chosen to be an offering in the merit of Yaakov. As the Torah states regarding Rivka, our Matriarch, telling her son Yaakov to take the blessing from his father Yitzchak, "So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch from there two good goats..." These goats were meant to be prepared by Rivka as delicacies through which Yaakov

would receive the blessings from Yitzchak. The Midrash explains that the goats brought about two positive results. Firstly, Yaakov received the blessings. Secondly, in the merit of the goats, his descendents, the Jewish people, would be atoned through the goats that would be brought on Yom Kippur. One goat was for G'd and the other was for L'Azazel.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, "The world stands on three principles - Torah, Avodah (service of G'd), and acts of kindness." G'd chose the ox to qualify for an offering because it represents the chesed (kindness) of Avraham. The sheep was chosen because it represents the sacrifice and service of Yitzchak. However, what is the value of the goat, which was chosen in the merit of Yaakov? Was it because Yaakov heeded the word of his mother, thus fulfilling the commandment of honoring one's parents?

If Yaakov had not taken the blessings when his mother instructed him to do so, there would have not been a Jewish people. Rivka understood that if Esav had received the material blessings, the Jewish people would not have come about. Yitzchak, being unaware of Esav's evil nature, believed that Esav would act as the Zevulun, i.e. supporting the Torah/spirituality of Yaakov (Yissachar). Thus, she instructed Yaakov to take two goats through which he would receive the blessings from his father. The ultimate fulfillment of the purpose of existence, which is the Jewish people accepting and fulfilling the Torah, was able to come about only through the goats that Yaakov had taken. Had it not been for the goats, the world would have ceased to exist, since there would be no Jewish people. Therefore, the goat represents the basis for all Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G'd's Name) that will come about until the end of time.

It is interesting to note that the goat qualifies as a sin offering. The ox and the sheep do not provide absolution from sin. Since the goat is the species that has relevance to Kiddush Hashem, regarding atonement, it silences prosecution and allows the person to be atoned. Text Copyright © 2005 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and Torah.org.

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