

PLANT AND HARVEST

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Behar & Bechukosai

Plant AND Harvest

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Today's Learning:
Beitzah 5:1-2
O.C. 554:6-8
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shekalim 3
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 15

The second of this week's two parashot begins: "If you will walk following My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them; then I will provide rain in its time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." Rashi writes: "Observe My commandments" clearly refers to keeping the Torah's laws. What then is meant by "walk following My decrees"?

He answers: "Walk following My decrees" is a reference to toiling in Torah study. "Perform them" is a reference to studying the laws of the Torah in order to know how to live. [There are two components to Torah study: studying the laws in order to be able to observe them and studying for study's sake.]

R' Eliezer Zusia Portugal z"l (the "Skulener Rebbe") elaborates: One who studies Torah is likened to one who plants seeds. One who also applies what he has learned and observes the commandments is likened to one who harvests what he has planted. If, G-d forbid, a person were to study the Torah but not live a Torah way of life, he would be like a foolish farmer who plants but never harvests.

In light of this metaphor, we can understand the reward that the Torah promises for the one who walks following Hashem's decrees and observes Hashem's commandments - i.e., he studies Torah and applies what he has learned. "I will provide rain in its time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." If we plant spiritual seeds and harvest them, Hashem will see to it that the physical seeds that we plant also will bear fruit. (Noam Eliezer)

"The seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land..." (25:3)

R' Moshe ibn Chaviv z"l (1654-1696; "Rishon Le'tzion" and author of several halachic works) writes: The laws of shemittah, as well as the laws of terumah and ma'aser, did not take effect until 14 years after Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, specifically, after they completed their conquest of the Land. Why? The purpose of the agricultural laws is to remind us that G-d is the Master of the Land, not we. As long as Bnei Yisrael did not yet control the Land, they did not need that reminder.

He adds: Why is shemittah only one year in seven? Why should we not be reminded more often that the Land is G-d's? There are two answers: First, G-d has mercy on us, so He lets us work our Land for six years. In addition, it is not unusual for farmers to leave their fields fallow every third year or so in order to let the land rejuvenate. In order to make clear that this is not the purpose of shemittah, the Torah commanded that shemittah be observed only once every seven years.

(Derashot Maharam Chaviv)

Pirkei Avot

"Ten miracles were performed for our ancestors in the Bet Hamikdash: . . . (8) the people stood crowded together, yet prostrated themselves in ample space; . . . (10) no man ever said to his fellow, 'The space is insufficient for me to stay overnight in Yerushalayim'."

(Chapter 5)

R' Yisrael Dan Taub shlita (the Modzhitzer Rebbe) observes that we find a similar phenomenon in connection with other aspects of the Bet Hamikdash as well, for example, in the Kodesh Hakodashim / Holy of Holies. Our Sages say that the Aron Hakodesh / Holy Ark took up no space; it stood in the center of a room 20 amot / cubits wide, but if one measured from each side of the Aron to the nearest wall, the resulting measurement would be 10 amot.

We find that Eretz Yisrael has the same characteristic. The Gemara (Gittin 57a) teaches that the Land of Israel is called Eretz Tzvi / the land which resembles a gazelle. One characteristic of a tzvi, the Gemara says, is that its hide shrinks when it is removed from the animal so that it seems too small to have come off of the animal. So, too, Eretz Yisrael appears too small to hold all of the Jewish people, yet it seems to expand to accommodate all who settle there.

Why is this? R' Taub explains that wherever one finds holiness, there he will find a blessing that allows him to be satisfied with less. This is reflected many times in the Torah, for example, in Devarim (12:7), "You shall eat there [in Yerushalayim] before Hashem, your G-d, and you shall rejoice with your every undertaking, you and your households, as Hashem, your G-d, has blessed you." When you eat "before Hashem," your happiness is guaranteed.

This is reflected also in the construction of the Mishkan, where the gifts went so far that Moshe had to announce that no more should be brought. The more one connects himself to Hashem - the "Ein Sof" / "Limitless One" - the more one finds that his belongings are not bound by ordinary limitations. (Yad Le'banim)

[Ed. note: This idea is alluded to in our parashah as well. We read (25:20-21), "If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! We will not sow and not gather our crops.' (Hashem answers:) 'I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period'."

Commentaries ask: And if we do not say, "What will we eat in the seventh year?" then Hashem will not bless us? They answer: A triple- sized harvest is a curse as well as a blessing, for it must be harvested and processed. If we place our trust in Hashem and do not ask, "What will we eat?" then He will not multiply the harvest. Instead, He will bless our stomachs so we will be satisfied with less food.]

"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah" ("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794), whose primary theme is improving one's concentration in prayer. In Sha'ar Ha'ashmoret, ch. 8, the author writes:

How majestic it is, and how it makes an impression in the Upper Worlds, if one leaves his home for shul already wrapped in the tallit and crowned with tefilin! [The Zohar speaks the praises of one who does this and also has a mezuzah on his home.] If one is unable to don his tallit and tefilin at home because he lives too far from shul, then at least he can fulfill one of the three mitzvot just mentioned in the ideal way, i.e., that when one leaves his house, he should reflect on the simple meaning of the mitzvah of mezuzah. What is that meaning? The Zohar says: "This mitzvah is so that a person will never forget G-d." As one leaves the house, he should place his right hand over the mezuzah and accept the "Yoke of Heaven" and the "Yoke of Mitzvot." (These are the subjects of the two paragraphs written on the mezuzah, i.e., the first two paragraphs of Shema.) At the same time, a person should think to himself with great joy, "You [G-d] are the only One and the unique One, and I accept upon myself to perform all of Your holy commandments."

R' Yitzchak Kanpanton z"l

R' Yitzchak ben Yaakov Kanpanton, known as the Gaon / Sage of Castile (Spain), was born in 1360 and died in 1463. He headed a yeshiva that produced many great scholars, including R' Yitzchak de Leon, R' Shmuel of Valencia, and R' Yitzchak Abohab II (teacher of the Torah commentator, R' Yitzchak Abarbanel, and the historian, R' Avraham Zacut, and of R' Yaakov Bei Rav, whose student, R' Yosef Karo, wrote the Shulchan Aruch.) After the departure of R' Yitzchak ben Sheshet ("Rivash") from Spain and the death of R' Chisdai Crescas II (in 1415), R' Yitzchak Kanpanton remained the outstanding authority of the Spanish rabbinate.

It is said that R' Yitzchak knew his students so well that he could assign a Talmudic problem to them and send them out of the room to work out a solution, and when they returned, he could predict, "So- and-so [one student] resolved it this way and so-and-so [another student] resolved it this way."

Other than his being an important link in the chain of Torah transmission, the only significant fact known about R' Yitzchak Kanpanton is that he authored Darkei Ha'gemara, a manual for studying Talmud. R' Yitzchak's instructions in that book include:

Pay attention to every word and phrase and ask yourself why that word was used and not a similar word.

Bear in mind that every question and every answer in the Talmud [even if later rejected by the Talmud itself] has logic to it. No participant in the Talmud's discussion was a simpleton, and every question represents a position on the issue being discussed.

Always ask yourself what Rashi's comments add to the discussion, how one might have interpreted the Talmud's words intuitively if not for Rashi's comments, and why Rashi implicitly rejected the intuitive interpretation.

It is not enough to read something once, for each time you read it, you will see new meaning in it.

As important as hard work and review are to success in one's Torah studies, praying to Hashem for that success also is essential.

(Sources: Artscroll Rishonim; Artscroll Early Acharonim; Darkei Ha'gemara)

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