

THREE FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

Describing the effects of leaving the entirety of the Land of Israel fallow during the shmita year (every seventh year, when - per the mitzvah in the Torah - no proactive efforts are made to grow, or improve the growth of, crops), the Torah promises the Jewish nation, "The land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill; you will dwell securely upon it." (Vayikra/Leviticus 25:19) Rashi explains that the blessing of shmita observance will extend to the appetites of the masses, that no matter the actual yield of produce during that year, it will suffice to satiate the needs of the people. The Torah then continues, "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." (Ibid. 20-21) If enough crops will grow in the sixth year to last for three years, then why is there a need for the first promise, to be satiated by a lesser amount of food? Furthermore, why does the Torah first mention the blessing of satiation, then the query and then the blessing of the extra crops? If both answers to the query are needed, does it not make more sense to ask the question "What will we eat in the seventh year?" and then respond with both blessings?

Malbim (acronym for [Rabbi] Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel; 1809-1879; Rabbi in Germany, Romania and Russia, he was one of the leading Torah scholars and preeminent Bible commentators of modern times; his commentary demonstrates how the oral tradition is implicit in the Biblical text) expounds that the two blessings pertain to two different types of people. Those who trust in G-d and believe that He will keep his promise to the Jews during the shmita year do not need to receive extra crops. They will harvest the normal yield in the sixth year and trust that G-d will take care of them through the fallow year. Thus, G-d miraculously makes this regular yield suffice for three years' consumption. Many in the population, though, are not so strong. They would become concerned if they would see the sixth year's crops the same as every other year's one-year-yield. It is they who will wonder, "What will we eat in the seventh year?" For these people, the miracle of satiation is not the answer; G-d allows them their normal consumption habits and provides them with three years' crops in one harvest. Of course, with the additional crops comes additional work: more to harvest, more to put into storage, more to worry about. One with more faith and trust in G-d merits a greater miracle.

It could be said that G-d utilizes the same system for us with our livelihoods. Some people genuinely appreciate that G-d ultimately provides - that our toil is merely a requisite effort that goes back to the sin of Adam (see Beraishis/Genesis 3:19) - and therefore expend less effort and manage to run

their households with less resources. Others have difficulty exerting only minimal effort and trusting that G-d will take care of the rest. For them, more effort becomes a necessity to provide more bounty from which they will receive the same level of comfort and satisfaction. Ultimately, though, both types must understand that no matter the effort and energy utilized, the sustenance comes from the same source.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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Kol HaKollel is a publication of the Milwaukee Kollel Center for Jewish Studies 5007 West Keefe Avenue; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 414-447-7999