

YOU BETTER BELIEVE!

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Behar begins with the mitzvah of shemitah, which requires that any Jew owning land which he cultivates for produce allow his land a year-long rest once in every seven years, during which all types of land-related work are forbidden. This one-year rest period, which was observed simultaneously by all Jews in the Land of Israel, could presumably create a potential shortage of produce in Israel. Indeed, the Torah addresses this question [25:20]:

"And if you will ask: 'What will we eat during the seventh year? Behold - we will not sow [our fields], nor gather in our crops!'"

In anticipation of this question, Hashem answers [v. 21]: *Do not worry!* -

"For I will command My blessing for you during the sixth year, and it [the sixth year] will yield a crop [sufficient] for the entire three years." [Rashi explains that the produce of the sixth year was used over a three year period: the second half of the sixth year, the seventh year, and the first half of the eighth year.]

We know that not even one word of the Torah is unnecessary or superfluous. Why does the Torah give the promise of abundant crops in the sixth year only in answer to an anticipated question which Jews may or may not ask? Why doesn't the Torah simply promise a berachah, a blessing, to the crops of the sixth year - thereby resolving all potential difficulties?

The Rebbe R' Elimelech of Liezensk zt"l, in answer to this question, quotes his brother, the holy Rebbe R' Zusia of Anipoli zt"l. Hashem created the world, says R' Zusia, in such a manner that every creature has its needs taken care of. In the words of the Mishnah (Kiddushin 4:14):

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: "Have you ever seen an animal or a bird with a 'profession?' Yet they all receive their sustenance without great effort!"

The ant sustains itself without great effort. The birds, the animals, and the insects; all manage to survive comfortably. So, too, the world was created that man should be able to support himself with relative ease. Were we, says R' Zusia, to truly and wholeheartedly believe that Hashem provides for us, and that that which we do to earn a living is merely the minimal effort required on our behalf, then we would indeed be blessed with a life of relative ease, and all our needs would be taken care of without having to extend great effort.

When, however, we doubt Hashem, when we question His ability to provide for us, this "ruptures" the

spiritual paths through which our sustenance reaches us from Above. We find ourselves unable to earn a living and sustain ourselves without great effort and exertion.

This, he says, is alluded to in the above passage. And if you will ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year..." Asking is an expression of doubt. By asking, instead of simply placing our trust in Hashem, we damage the "paths of sustenance." It should have been easy, but now it can not be easy because failed trust with conviction. Even so, Hashem will not forsake you. I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year... A special blessing will be given to repair the damage done by our lack of simple faith.

Mefarshim (Torah commentators) note that it is strange that the question asked is, What will we eat in the seventh year? Normally in the seventh year, the Jews of Israel would eat the crops of the sixth year, which was a standard year of planting and harvest. What were they concerned about in the seventh year? If anything, their concern should have been over the eighth year, which would normally be sustained by the crops of the seventh year!

A wealthy businessman once sunk most of his considerable assets into a lumber venture. The lumber was to be transported by floating it down the Dneiper River, an economical but somewhat risky process.

The man came to the Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tvi Berlin zt"l for a berachah (blessing) that all should go well. The Netziv told him to have bitachon (faith) in Hashem, Who will certainly help him.

"Of course I know that I should have bitachon," the man said. "But what can I do - I am still extremely nervous!"

"You know," said the Netziv, "now I understand a passage in the Torah that has always bothered me. The Torah says the Jews will ask, 'How can we keep Shemitah? What will we eat on the seventh year?' One wonders: Why were they so concerned over the seventh year? Didn't they prepare for it in the sixth year? They should have been concerned over the eighth year!

"Let us consider, however, to whom the Torah is speaking - instructing them not to worry and to have bitachon. Certainly it is not to the poor, firstly because they are already used to relying on bitachon, and secondly because they own no land. Rather, the Torah must be speaking to the wealthy landowners, who are used to 'earning their own living,' and are not connected with bitachon on a regular basis. They can't believe they can survive without their active participation, without 'doing it themselves!' This is why they are already nervous, even for the seventh year.

"Don't worry," concluded the Netziv. "Have true bitachon, and all will be well!"

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