

# SHMITAH AND CHEATING

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

*This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape 192, Making Shabbos Early. Good Shabbos!*

### **Behar - What Is The Connection Between Shmitah and Cheating? (Mah Inyan Shemita Eitzel Issur Ona-ah)**

Parshas Behar contains the mitzvah of Shemita - the Sabbatical year. All agricultural work in the Land of Israel must stop during every seventh year in the Shemita cycle. The laws of Shemita require that the land must remain fallow. One can imagine that in an agrarian society this mitzvah has a major impact on people's lives.

However, right in the middle of the laws of Shemita, the Torah teaches us the following halacha: "When you sell an item to your fellow man, or buy from the hand of your fellow man, one man should not cheat his brother" [Vayikra 25:14].

It seems peculiar, to say the least, that the Torah taught this particular halacha [law] of "Ona-ah" (cheating) right in the middle of the halachos of Shemita. The halachos of "Ona-ah" apply primarily to moveable property. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as overcharging (or underpaying) for real estate. Why is "Ona-ah" located in the middle of the halachos of Shemita?

The Beis Av says that the Torah is teaching us a lesson. The fundamental concept that underlies the mitzvah of Shemita is that one's livelihood comes from G-d. If a person works long enough and hard enough and is successful enough in his business, he usually becomes lulled into thinking, "it is ME who is making all this money". People attribute their successes to their own wisdom, skill, acumen, diligence, etc.

There is a wonderful concept -- the Mitzvah of Shemita -- that unfortunately only exists in Eretz Yisroel and only applies to farmers, but G-d teaches us an important lesson through this concept: "You must remember something -- I give you your livelihood." A person's sustenance is determined yearly on Rosh Hashannah. Of course, one must exert the appropriate amount of effort, but the amount and the success that one enjoys when it comes to Parnassah (livelihood) is provided by G-d. The proof to that is the Sabbatical year.

During the entire Shemita year, we do not do any work -- and somehow or another, we have a livelihood. This Sabbatical makes us stop and think that it is not we who provide for ourselves. The Ribbono shel Olam [G-d] provides our livelihood. That being the case, it becomes eminently clear why the commandment against cheating is right in the middle of the portion of Shemita.

As an oversimplification, if a person steals an extra \$1000, he will go home and his air-conditioner will break, costing him his new \$1000. It all works out in the end. If a person honestly believes that G-D is the One who ultimately writes and signs all the checks, there is absolutely no motivation for cheating -- not a friend, not a business, not the Federal Government, not the State Government -- no one.

If a person truly believes in what Shemita is all about -- that G-d provides us with our livelihood -- then why would he cheat his fellow man? Such an attitude can only come from one who thinks that HE is making the livelihood himself. That is why "Ona-ah" is located in the middle of Shemita.

### **Bechukosai - Rains of Blessing: Getting The Most When The Farmer Can Do The Least**

The Beis Av points out this same concept in Parshas Bechukosai. The pasuk [verse] there says "I will give you your rains in their proper time" [Vayikra 26:4]. Rash"i explains the term "proper time" to mean Friday night (leilei Shabbosos). We can then sit cozily in our houses and say "let it rain".

Today's modern society considers a rainy weekend to be a minor calamity. "There goes the barbecue, there goes the sailing trip. Nebach, we have to go rent a video." That is terrible! But the Torah teaches that such rains are a blessing. On Friday night it can pour. We are safe in our homes.

The Beis Av points out a deeper insight into this idea. In the agrarian economy, the farmer can work six days a week, putting in backbreaking hours sowing, fertilizing, plowing, and harvesting. However, all of the farmer's effort will be for naught if he does not have one thing -- rain. Without rain, the farmer is powerless.

When rain falls on the very day when the farmer does absolutely nothing (Friday night - the Shabbos), the farmer is sent a precious message. That which the farmer needs the most, he receives on the very day when he can do the very least. This is the lesson. Ultimately, the farmer needs to depend on G-d, not on himself.

### **A Time For Faith and A Time For Heresy**

I would like to share one final insight. It is true that in the area of earning one's living, we must rely on faith (bitachon). However, we should never forget that this is a concept that we must apply to ourselves, but never to others.

I heard a comment in the name of the Brisker Rav. It is hard for me to believe he said it, but we would in fact need a Brisker Rav to say such a thing. Every attribute, no matter how bad, has its place in the world -- even anger, haughtiness, jealousy, and argumentativeness. These are generally bad attributes, but there are times when one needs to become angry. There are times when it is appropriate to stand up for one's honor. There is even a time when it is right to make a machlokes - an argument.

There is another bad attribute called 'kefirah', heresy. A person who knows Torah, but rejects G-d -- a 'kofer' -- possesses such an attribute. Where is the proper place for this attribute of 'kefirah'? The Brisker Rav explains, "When your friend needs a favor, that's when you should be a 'kofer'".

In other words, when someone else has a problem, do not have the attitude that G-d will take care of him, G-d will find him a job, G-d will give him the loan. At such times, the Brisker Rav says, a person should "not believe" in G-d. A person should feel that G-d will not take care of him. Rather, a person must take the responsibility upon himself. That is no time for faith. It is a time for rolling up one's sleeves.

I do not need to tell you about the "workplace". I do not need to tell you that it is too often "not what you know, but who you know". I do not need to tell you about how many jobs are found through "connections". When it comes to your livelihood, you must be a believer. But when it comes to someone else's livelihood, you must be an activist. In the words of the Brisker Rav, that is the appropriate situation for all of us to apply the attribute of 'kefirah'.

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## Glossary

**kofer** - denier (of G-d)

**kefirah** - denial; heresy

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Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

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