

# MISERY LOVES COMPANY

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Misery Loves Company

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 416, Supporting Jewish Merchants. Good Shabbos!

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Parshas Behar contains both the mitzvah of the Shmitah [Sabbatical] year and the mitzvah of the Yovel [Jubilee] year. The Yovel year follows seven of the seven-year Shmitah cycles. This 50th year was basically an extra year of Shmitah, an extra year of "rest" for the land.

In addition to the standard agricultural restrictions of Shmitah, there is a positive command to blow a "Tekiah" blast from the Shofar on the Yom Kippur (10 Tishrei) of the Yovel year. This shofar blast announces: "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants; it is a yovel year for you, and you shall return, each man to his ancestral heritage and you shall return, each man to his family." [Vayikra 25:10].

The halachik import of this last pasuk [verse] (which happens to be inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia) is that all Hebrew indentured servants go free during the Yovel year. When the Shofar was sounded on Yom Kippur of the 50th year, it signaled the time for all the indentured servants to leave their masters and return to their homes.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 331) offers a psychological reason for the blowing of the shofar on this occasion. The Sefer HaChinuch writes that it was very hard for the owners to give up their long-time servants. Imagine a business owner who has a dedicated worker who has been with the company for many years or decades. All of a sudden, he must let the worker go. It is not so easy to do.

It is common for a close attachment to develop with a maid or nanny who is with a family for many years. Sometimes we go to a Bar Mitzvah or wedding and we see someone there who does not look like part of the crowd, for obvious reasons. It's the nanny! She knew the kid when he was born. Now,

20 years later, he's getting married. Of course she'll be invited to the wedding -- she's part of the family!

Picture the situation with the Hebrew servant. He might have been part of the family for forty-nine years -- since right after the last Yovel. Now he has to be let go. It is very difficult for the master to send him away. Therefore, writes the Chinuch, to arouse the owners concerning the importance of the matter and to give them strength of conviction to do what needs to be done, the Torah requires universal blowing of the shofar on that Yom Kippur. This will help the masters realize that their sacrifice is something that they are sharing with other masters throughout the land. The knowledge that everyone else is experiencing the same financial and emotional self-sacrifice is a powerful psychological aid in arousing a person to do what he is required to do.

If I recognize that everybody is in the same boat, that everyone has to give up their servants, their trusted employees, then it is much easier for me to handle my own need to give up my servant. Tzaras rabim, chatzi nechama. [The problems of the masses are half a measure of consolation.]

Perhaps we can better appreciate this idea if we think about the difficulties of "making Pesach". Preparing for Passover is one of the most difficult challenges of an observant Jewish household. The house has to be cleaned, things have to be koshered, the kitchen has to be changed over, and meals have to be prepared. It is tremendously stressful, tiring and bothersome.

As one stands there cleaning his oven, his nails are raw, his back is sore, and he thinks to himself "this is crazy!" But what does he then think to himself? "At least we are all crazy together! Everyone needs to do this!" [Of course, it's not that we are all crazy -- we are faithful Torah observant Jews!]

This is the meaning of the Chinuch. When one hears the shofar on Yovel, he realizes that everyone is in the same boat regarding freeing his servants, and that makes it easier.

Everyone faces challenges at different stages of life. Some people have money challenges. Some people have health problems. Some people have problems with their children. That is life. Life is unfortunately a series of challenges or problems, and how we deal with them and cope with them. Many times we think to ourselves, "Boy, do I have problems! No one else has challenges like mine!" We look around at others and see that they are happy. They look fine. They act fine. We think "only I have problems".

We have to remember the sound of the silent shofar that isn't sounded but should be sounded: Everybody is in the same boat. The next person may not be facing the same type of problems, but we should not fool ourselves into thinking that we are so unique. Life is full of a myriad of problems, but the universality of challenges and problems can be half the consolation.

## **G-d Provides Extra Attention To Those Who Need It**

The Torah teaches: "The land will give its fruit and you will eat to satisfaction; and will dwell securely upon it. If you will say: What will we eat in the seventh year? -- behold! We will not sow and we will not gather our crop! I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years." [Vayikra 25: 19-21].

The Sforno infers that G-d only promises to bestow the blessing on the land following the question "What will we eat?" This implies that when this question is not asked, the blessing is not forthcoming.

The Sforno comments that there are two types of Jews. The first kind of Jew is the Jew who knows that Shmitah and yovel are approaching. He knows that he will not be planting any seed for two whole years, but he doesn't ask any questions. He does not fret "What's going to be? How will we survive?" The Sforno says that for such a Jew, the supernatural bountiful crop will not be provided on the year preceding Shmitah. Rather, a different type of miracle will occur -- he will not need more than is provided by the regular sixth year crop.

Some people can live on \$50,000 a year. Some people need \$100,000 a year to live. The amount that a person needs depends on his expenses. The Sforno says that the Jew who is the real believer and who does not ask the question "How will we ever be able to manage?" will not need the bountiful crop. To use the Sforno's own expression, that which he does receive "will be blessed within his bowels." He will not need the money. His landlord will come to him and say "Guess what? Don't bother paying me the rent this month -- you are such a nice guy!" The bank will suddenly lower his mortgage rate; instead of paying 8 percent, he will be paying 2 percent. It will happen like that. He will not receive any more income. The crops will not miraculously triple, but he will manage financially. The miracle will not be triple the income; it will be one-third the expenses!

However, says the Sforno, the second type of Jew does not have that level of trust in G-d. He is frightened by the idea that he will not be able to plant in the seventh year and in the Jubilee year. A miracle will occur for him in the sixth year to calm his anxiety. G-d will perform a miracle for him and hold his hand, so to speak, so that he will not be a nervous wreck for the next two years.

This scenario of the Sforno, however, does not seem fair. We would think that the bigger Tzaddik is the person who does not question. He should be the one deserving of the more open miracle up front. Why does the one who is lacking in faith receive the bumper crop in the sixth year? Why should only the questioner deserve G-d's special treatment?

I saw a very interesting insight on this question from Rabbi Zev Leff: just like we have different children, some of whom need a little more help and attention and soothing and encouragement

than the others, so it is with G-d and His children.

G-d looks at His nation and He looks at his children and says "this kid needs a little more." The Jew who does not ask any questions will certainly be taken care of. But he is on a higher level. He does not need the "tender loving care" that is needed by the frightened Jew who does not understand how he will possibly survive if he keeps the Torah. "This is the child who always needs the 'arm around the shoulder.'" He needs a little extra attention. He has to sit on My lap a little longer than the other children. I will provide that attention for him, even though he is not on the level of the other child. Since he NEEDS it, I will provide it."

The lesson to derive from this is the following: G-d has an infinite amount of patience with us. Even though we are not on the level that we should be on, and even though we should be beyond this, G-d takes care of us. So too, we should emulate G-d in the way that we treat our spouses and our children and even ourselves (Mah Hu, af ata). Even if he or she or they or we should be "beyond this," we must have patience and provide whatever care and attention and endurance the situation might require.

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This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

1. Tape # 011 - Rationing Medical Care
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