

Do not oppress a stranger; you know the feelings of a stranger... six years shall you sow your land... and in the seventh, you shall leave it unattended and unharvested. (23:9,10,11)

The juxtaposition of the laws of *Shemittah* upon the admonishment not to treat the *ger*, convert, in a lesser manner than we would treat anyone else is enigmatic. What relationship exists between these two seemingly disparate *mitzvos*? Furthermore, how is the admonishment concerning the proper treatment of the *ger* linked to the fact that we were strangers in the Land of Egypt? Had we not once been Egyptian slaves would it in any way diminish the responsibility to act appropriately with the *ger*?

Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, quotes *Rashi*, who explains, “For you were strangers in the land of Egypt” as a lesson concerning the empathy we must manifest towards the *ger*. We know what it feels like to be a stranger, to be an outcast, to stand out in a community where everybody is different than we are. It is specifically because of our “acquired” sensitivity, due to our own dismal history in Egypt, that we can relate best to the plight of the *ger*. The *Rosh Yeshivah* posits that, in order to maintain the proper attitude towards the *ger*, one must internalize what it meant to be a stranger in a strange land – Egypt.

Therefore, the Torah juxtaposes the laws of *Shemittah* which declare the land free to *evyonei amecha*, the poor of your nation. During the *Shemittah* year, everybody is considered to be an *ani*, poor man, since he has had to relinquish his field. Now, the wealthy landowner relinquishes his status. This is taught to us by the laws regarding the *ger*, to whom we cannot properly relate unless we put ourselves in their shoes by remembering Egypt. Both *Shemittah* and *geirus* teach us that true empathy can only be derived when the person actually lives the predicament of the other person.