

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine; For you are sojourners and residents with Me. (25:23)

One who delves into the *mitzvos* of *Shemittah* and *Yoveil* will infer that their motif is to teach man that he lacks ownership of the land – and, for that matter, of anything. Man is temporary; life is as fleeting as the moment. We are here by the grace of G-d, and we had better live our lives like that. The Torah wants us to acknowledge that *L'Hashem ha'aretz u'meloah, teival v'yoshvei vah*, “To Hashem (belongs) the earth and its fullness, the inhabited land and those who dwell in it” (*Tehillim* 24:1). Man walks the earth thinking that it is all his. Hashem sends him subtle reminders, “It is not yours; it is Mine.” We make plans, some grandiose, others simple, thinking that their achievement rests in our hands. We forget the famous dictum concerning the “best laid plans of mice and men.” There is a famous anecdote, related by *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, which underscores this verity. A *din Torah*, litigation between two disputants, once took place in Volozhin, and its venerable *Av Bais Din*, **Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl**, presided over the proceedings. The dispute concerned a parcel of land, with each of the men claiming that the land belonged to him. These men were obstinate, refusing to brook any form of compromise. Each one sought complete ownership over the land.

Rav Chaim asked to see the land in question. The litigants accompanied the *Rav* to the land that seemed to obsess each of these men. The *Rav* bent down to the ground, placing his ear directly on it, as if he was listening for something. It must have looked quite strange to see the venerable *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, resting his ear on the ground. A few moments went by, and *Rav Chaim* arose, and said, “Gentlemen, I wanted to hear what the actual ground had to say concerning your disagreement. After all, it supposedly belongs to one of you. Do you know what the ground said concerning your dispute? It said, ‘Why are they fighting over me? Who really cares who owns me? What does it really matter? At the end of the day, they will both belong to me.’”

The men took the hint and realized that worldly disputes are foolish. We are here as visitors for the short duration of our mortal lifespan. Nothing is forever. When our time is up – it is final. There are no reprieves. Regrettably, while we acknowledge this, it is a belief that most people fail to incorporate into their lifestyle and *weltanschauung*. We live as if there will always be a tomorrow, when, in fact, the “tomorrows” decrease with each day.

It all boils down to how we view life. Does it have meaning, or is it nothing more than an aggregate of fragments, bits and pieces, some meaningful, most not, with no connecting thread to bind them together? Living a disjointed life without focus and without purpose will lead us, when we get older and have a few moments to focus, to ask the searing question: What did I do with my life?

While everyone clearly wants to live a meaningful life, we forget the most important aspect of such a life: every minute, every hour, every day is precious. We ignore the constant messages from

Above, as we focus on that “great opportunity,” that chance of a lifetime, when we will make a difference. It just does not happen that way. To have a successful life, one must make use of every moment, every opportunity – never knowing which one will be “that” moment, “that” opportunity.

We are placed on this world for a purpose: to refine ourselves. This applies to every aspect of one’s life – both physical and spiritual. When everything in one’s life unites towards attaining that one goal of *kavod Shomayim*, the glory of Heaven, he has discovered the connecting thread that binds all the moments and opportunities together. By connecting to one’s *neshamah*, soul, focusing on his spiritual dimension and living life with purpose, he adds meaning to his life.

The day begins with *Modeh Ani*, recognizing the Creator and offering our gratitude. It ends with *Shema Yisrael*, affirming our faith in His Oneness. These are the day’s “bookends.” Everything in between is the life we “write.” We are the authors of our Book of Life. The best writer needs a competent editor. So, too, do we need *rebbeim*, mentors, to guide us on the path of life, to “edit” our “book,” so that it becomes a best seller, a success, describing a wholesome life lived with meaning and purpose. If we live like that, we will no longer worry concerning who owns the land. As part of the bigger picture, that question has very little bearing.