

If you will say: "What will we eat in the seventh year?" ... I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year. (25:20,21)

Shemittah is a *mitzvah* which infuses *emunah* and *bitachon*, faith and trust, in a Jew. Each *Shemittah* (Sabbatical year), a Jew turns his back on what seems to be the source of his sustenance, and he does not work his field for an entire year. Living through a *Shemittah* provides one with an incredible test of his faith in Hashem. One who emerges triumphant from this test has indeed strengthened his *emunah* in the Almighty. Imagine an individual walking off the job that has been his source of support for the past six years, saying, "I am not working this year. It is *Shemittah*, and everything will be good." It takes a special person to do that. That is what *shomrei Shemittah*, those who observe the *Shemittah* year, are. Their conviction must be strong at the beginning of the year, but it is nothing compared to what they must feel at its conclusion. They have passed the test, and have emerged as better people and more committed Jews.

How did they do it? Apparently, it was not easy, nor was everyone filled with confidence. Indeed, the Torah approaches this issue head-on when it writes: "If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year?'" Obviously, some people were nervous about the upcoming 'adventure' in austerity. The Torah reassures them, "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year." The commentators wonder why the Torah asked the question in the first place. It could simply have stated that the sixth year would be blessed. We would have understood that such a blessing was necessary, to allay any fears that the *Shemittah* participants might have.

The *Noam Elimelech* quotes his brother, *Horav Zushia, zl*, who posits that indeed, one who is a master of *emunah* neither needs a blessing, nor does he have any questions. Faith in Hashem courses through his veins. It is concerning the one whose trust in Hashem is not so certain that the blessing is needed. He believes – but he is still quite nervous. The Torah tells him to "walk off the job" at the beginning of the seventh year. He does it, but not with an abundance of confidence.

It is to him that Hashem says, "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year." This blessing is an accommodation of sorts, that will reassure him to persist in his faith. Veritably, this is true of our everyday quest for *parnassah*, livelihood. Especially during the present period of economic crisis, we see on a regular basis how the guiding hand of the Divine provides for each one of us in His special way.

There is an inspirational *mashal*, parable, from the *Rizhiner Rebbe, zl*, which illustrates clearly to the individual who is willing to just open his "eyes" to see that after all is said and done, it is Hashem Who sustains and provides for our livelihood. A poor man, who earned his meager living via the time-honored vocation of soliciting charity from whoever would help him, heard about a very wealthy philanthropist who was very generous with his contributions. Indeed, anyone who came to his door left a very happy man. He traveled to the town where this philanthropist lived, but by mistake knocked on the door of the town's miser. The poor man requested food. The miser did not

identify himself and instead said, "I will give you food for work. I need some things done around my house, and I will be happy to reimburse your time." *Nu*, what could the poor man do? He labored all day. At the end of the day, he asked the man for a meal. The miser had no shame (they never do), and he proceeded to send the poor man next door to the philanthropist. His generous neighbor would provide him with a meal!

This, explains the *Rebbe*, is the story of earning a livelihood. In the end, we are all sustained by the Almighty. Regrettably, some of us knock on the wrong door. We turn to various venues which we think will provide for us, but, at the end of the day, it is Hashem Who supports us. This is the lesson of *Shemittah*. It is not about the land. It is about realizing that the land is merely Hashem's vehicle. The support always comes from Above.

The *Be'er Mayim Chaim* approaches the question from a different perspective. He views the questioner not as one who doubts, but rather as one who truly believes that Hashem will provide. He is filled with *emunah* and *bitachon*. So, why is he questioning? He wonders not if Hashem will provide, but **how** will He do it? What miracle will Hashem bring forth to sustain him? After all, if there is no agricultural effort then there will be no harvest, and therefore no food. Hashem replies that He has no need for miracles, and we should not depend on them. The Almighty has sufficient latitude within His control of nature to provide sustenance, and it is unnecessary for Him to perform a miracle. He will bless the sixth year, and it will provide more than enough to sustain His believers.

Shemittah is more than a lesson in earning a livelihood. It is a primer for life. It is an attitude that a Jew should manifest throughout his life's endeavor.