

"The Shabbos/Shemittah growth of the land shall be yours to eat." (25:6)

In the *Talmud Avodah Zarah 62a*, *Chazal* infer that we may eat that which grows during the *Shemittah* year. The produce, however, may not be bought and sold commercially. *Chazal* expound upon the stringency of the command prohibiting any form of commerce with the fruits of *shviis*, the seventh year. What is so unique about this prohibition is that there seems to be such an anathema about it? Indeed, *Chazal* teach us that one who buys or sells *peiros sheviis* will ultimately lose all of his possessions. He will be compelled to beg for his sustenance, to the point that he will sell himself to a pagan as a slave in order to support himself!

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebenzthal, Shlita, offers three insights which shed light upon this enigma. First, the admonishment that the soil "rest" during the seventh year is similar to the idea of *Shabbos*. We are enjoined to rest on the seventh day. The observance of *Shabbos* and *Shemittah* attests to Hashem's role as Creator of the world. We rest because we believe Hashem "rested" from the six days of Creation. One who does not rest on the seventh day, by default, denies that Hashem "created" on the first six days. This is a concept that leaves no room for discussion. Consequently, the *Shemittah mitzvah* is one that affirms our belief in the very foundation of our faith.

Second, *Shemittah* reinforces the belief that *Eretz Yisrael* is sacrosanct. What *Shabbos* asserts in terms of time, *Shemittah* asserts concerning *Eretz Yisrael*. It proclaims its sanctity and uniqueness. Thus, the punishment for non-observance of the *Shemittah* laws is exile from the Land. When a guest misinterprets his position, when he begins to think and act like the owner, he is asked to leave. This sanction demonstrates to all as to who is the real owner and master of the land.

A third idea offers a realistic insight into human nature. During *Shemittah*, for one entire year, the rich man becomes like everyone else. No longer does he have his enormous estate that is roped off from the public. All property owners are equal during *Shemittah*. What a remarkable opportunity to learn how the other half lives. What a wonderful chance to feel the deprivation of the poor man, to experience his helplessness as everyone walks through his field taking whatever he wants. *Shemittah* is an educational experience that infuses us with sensitivity and compassion towards our fellow man. *Shemittah* is more than a *mitzvah*; it is a testimonial to the Creator which signifies the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, while it imbues us with compassion for our fellow man.