

And you shall plant during the eighth year. (25:22)

Shemittah observance tests one's spiritual devotion, as well as his emotional stability. It is difficult to observe the farmers around you planting and harvesting (either they are non-observant, or they rely on various dispensations), while your field lays fallow. It is hard to subsist on contributions from others who understand, respect and admire your commitment. One who is patient, who rises to the *Shemittah* challenge, who perseveres despite the taunting of others, however, will be blessed with extraordinary *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance. Not only will he not lose out as a result of his commitment to *Shemittah*, it will also be the source of newly-found wealth which might not have occurred had he denied Hashem's ownership of the Land. Indeed, this is the crux of *Shemittah* observance. Does one acknowledge Hashem's sovereign ownership of the Land (and everything else for that matter), or does he think that it is his? It is difficult to part with something for which one has worked hard to earn and purchase. Judaism is all about obedience to Hashem. This mitzvah is a test of one's obedience.

The fact that one who observes *Shemittah* receives enormous *siyata diShmaya* is supported by a plethora of stories attesting to this verity. The following is one related by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein* in his *Mitzvos B'Simchah*. A recent *baal teshuvah*, penitent, lived near the Jordan Valley and was a successful farmer who owned an enormous amount of land. Since he was a recent *baal teshuvah*, the *Rav* of his community was hesitant to relate to him all of the stringencies involved in observing *Shemittah*.

This sincere *baal teshuvah* did not wait to be told about a *mitzvah*; he was on a path of discovery, seeking out every opportunity to serve Hashem in any way. When he heard about *Shemittah*, he studied everything he could about the *mitzvah*; its philosophy, its ethical and spiritual underpinnings, and its *halachos*. When he was informed that his many fields would have to lie fallow, he embraced the idea and even complained to the *Rav* for not informing him of this special *mitzvah*. The *Rav* justified his reluctance, saying, "I figured when you would hear that your fields would have to shut down for *Shemittah*, you might balk. I am proud to say that I was wrong!"

The man observed *Shemittah* with every stringency. He supported himself with investments that he had made. Once *Shemittah* ended, and it was *Rosh Hashanah* of the eighth year, he approached the agricultural department and asked for seeds, so that he could now plant his fields. They looked at him incredulously, "Now you come for seeds? The planting season was months ago. All the farmers (apparently they had not observed *Shemittah*) came months ago to pick up their seeds. Why did you not come earlier?" they asked.

"I observe *Shemittah*, followed by *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Succos*. Today is the first day that I am able to plant my field."

"We understand. Nonetheless, it does not alter our response. We have only one type of seed remaining: celery. If you want to plant celery, you are welcome to take home the celery seeds."

“Fine,” he said. “I will take whatever you have available.”

No one needs acres upon acres of celery. Yet, he planted celery wherever he had land. Hashem did the rest. That year he had a bumper crop, with the celery growing unusually large. Farmers from all over came to stare at the amazing celery that was growing in his fields. Obviously, it was a miracle. So what? They asked. Who needs so much celery?

Hashem had other plans. That winter, Europe was struck by an unusual freeze that destroyed, among others, the celery crop. This created a serious problem for those Europeans who loved to partake of a hot soup in which celery was a primary ingredient. This was especially true during the cold winter months. After exhausting all available sources for celery, the European wholesalers contacted the Israeli agriculture department and asked if they had celery. At first, they said, “No,” but then one of the inspectors remembered the observant Jew who had planted his fields with celery, producing enough celery to feed all of Europe.

The reader can imagine what happened. Our observant farmer, who had “invested” in the *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* and relied on Hashem to take care of him, sold every last stalk of celery. Hashem’s promise to bless those who observe *Shemittah* was realized. The man took his profits, sold his fields, and moved to the city. He opened up a textile factory which was equally blessed – all due to his *Shemittah* observance.