



KINDER TORAHTM

PARASHAS BEHAR

SHMITTA

"Yaakov, may I water our garden during the *Shmitta* year?"

"Yes Rachel. We live here in Eretz Yisrael and we are observing the *Shmitta*. Therefore, you may water it enough to keep the grass alive."

"How do I know how much water it needs to stay alive?"

"Experiment and see. If you see it drying out too much, then water it."

"That may not be so easy."

"Do your best, Rachel dear, and Hashem will help."

Rachel did her best, but most of the grass withered and died. The garden, which had been lush and green, was now mostly dirt.

"Now that the *Shmitta* is over, what shall we do about the garden, Yaakov?"

"I phoned a gardener, and he wants a lot of money to plant new grass."

"Oy, I feel so badly that I let it all die."

"Don't feel badly, Rachel. You observed *Shmitta*. That is more important than the grass. Let us wait until after the winter to phone the gardener. We don't use the garden much during the winter, anyway."

That winter was a year of great blessings of rain in Eretz Yisrael. Yaakov and Rachel watched in elation as their garden began to sprout with beautiful green grass. By the end of the winter, all of the grass had grown back. "When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbos rest for Hashem" (Vayikra 25:2).

"Yaakov, look at our beautiful garden."

"A gift from Hashem."

Kinderlach . . .

The Torah promises that those who observe Shmitta will never lose. The same is true about honoring Shabbos, Yom Tov, lending to poor people and giving tzedaka. Keeping the Torah is the best investment. You never lose.

HE'S TAKING CARE OF US

"Chaim, you're not going to believe this."

"Believe what, Avi?"

"Believe what my teacher taught us today about the *Shmitta* (Sabbatical) year."

"Is that the year where the farmer is forbidden to work the land?"

"Correct, Chaim. Once every seven years the land is allowed to rest."

"What's so unbelievable about that? Crop rotation is supposed to be a good thing."

"My teacher quoted Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva."

"What did he say?"

"Those who observed the *Shmitta* year

were like heavenly angels. Their strength was unfathomable. How can it be that a person can achieve such great things from the mitzvah of *Shmitta*?"

"Let's think about this a minute, Avi. Let us try to imagine ourselves back in the days of the *Beis HaMikdash*."

And so, Chaim begins to tell a story.

"Abba, thank you so much for taking such good care of us. Boruch Hashem, we have a nice farm, and every day you go out and work the fields. You plow, plant, and tend to the crops. When they are fully grown, you pick them and bring them to Imma to cook into the delicious meals that we eat. We are so fortunate that we have such a farm and that it is able to provide food for our family."

"Kinderlach, do you know what next year is?"

"What, Abba?"

"The *Shmitta* (sabbatical) year. Next year I take a big vacation – no plowing, planting, cultivating or working the land. We will see what will grow by itself. Even those crops will not be ours. They are *hefker*



(ownerless) and free for anyone to take."

"But Abba, what will we have to eat next year? If you do not work the land, and anyone can take what grows by itself, we will have hardly any food."

"Kinderlach, the Torah asks the exact same question in Vayikra, chapter 25, verse 20. The answer is that Hashem will provide for us. This year He will give us enough food to last until after the *Shmitta* year."

Kinderlach . . .

That is the way it was. There are no records of any famine ever occurring amongst the Jewish people in Biblical times as a result of keeping the Shmitta year. In the times of the Beis HaMikdash, farming was the main occupation of the Jewish people. Without the crops of the farm, there would be literally no food to eat. Observing the Shmitta was therefore a very big test of one's trust in Hashem. That is why Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says that those who observe Shmitta were compared to heavenly angels who have no desire to go against Hashem's will. That is the strength of their trust in Him.

THE HOLY LAND

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying, '...the land shall rest for Hashem'" (Vayikra 25:1-2). Rashi asks the famous question, "How is *Shmitta* (the Sabbatical year) related to Har Sinai?" The Keli Yakar has a novel answer to this question. *Shmitta* and Har Sinai are similar in many ways. Moshe Rabbeinu went up to Har Sinai after counting seven weeks (49 days) from Yetzias Mitzraim. So too, *Shmitta* is once every seven years, and *Yovel* is after seven *Shmittas* (49 years). Har Sinai became holy, and it was forbidden to plow and plant there. Similarly, these *melachos* are forbidden during the *Shmitta* and *Yovel* years, due to the holiness of the Land of Israel. The Shofar sounded during the *Yovel* year just as it sounded during the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. At that time, Hashem taught Moshe Rabbeinu about the *Shmitta* and *Yovel* years. They were imbued with holiness just as Har Sinai was. The air of the Land of Israel imparts wisdom, just as Har Sinai did. There is no Torah like the Torah learned in the Land of Israel. So too, there is no Torah like the Torah learned at Har Sinai.

We are in the midst of the *Shmitta* year, and we are approaching Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah. We know how holy Har Sinai was. There we were shown that Hashem is G-d and there is no One besides Him (Devarim 4:35). All of the heavens opened for us. The Keli Yakar is telling us that the Land of Israel has the same holiness. Let us all try to appreciate that holiness.

Kinderlach . . .

Many Jews are very fortunate to live in the Land of Israel. Let us all try to appreciate its holiness. We can learn the halachos of Shmitta. We can learn the halachos of other mitzvos that can only be performed in the Land of Israel, such as trumah and maaser. We can strengthen the observance of these mitzvos. And we can prepare ourselves for the giving of the Torah this Shavuot.

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