

BOSTONER TORAH INSIGHTS

BOSTONER 'CHASSIDUS' TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

PARSHAS BEHAR BECHUKOSAI – 26 IYAR 5781

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“You shall count for yourself seven cycles of sabbatical years, seven years seven times; the years of the seven cycles of sabbatical years shall be for you forty-nine years” (Vayikra 25:8). Rashi comments, “and the simple understanding of the Torah is that the calculation of the Shmittah years should reach the number forty-nine”. The super-commentaries of Rashi struggle with what his comments add to our own understanding of the text and suggest various nuances.

My uncle, the Alsh Tayter Rav zt”l, cited the Orach Chaim HaKadosh, who pointed out another apparent redundancy in the text. First, we find, “You shall perform My decrees...then you will dwell securely in the land” (Vayikra 25:18). Then in the very next Pasuk, we find again, “you will dwell securely upon it” (Vayikra 25:19). The Alsh Tayter Rav explained that there are two separate blessings here and each one is dependent upon the level of Bitachon and Emunah that one has in HaKadosh Baruch Hu. For one who asks, “What will we eat in the seventh year” (Vayikra 25:20 if we do not work the land for an entire year. To that Hashem responds, “I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period” (Vayikra 25:21). However, a higher level of trust in Hashem is one who has a firm belief that Hashem will always provide him with his sustenance no matter what the circumstances. For a person like this, Hashem not only provides additional blessing during the years following Shmittah, but Bracha for all forty-nine years of the Shmittah cycle as well.

Accordingly, the first blessing of ‘you will dwell securely in the land’, as a result of observing the laws of Shmittah, corresponds to one who believes that if Hashem is commanding us not to work the fields, then he will also assure that we have what to eat. This person will dwell in security in the land for that limited period of time surrounding Shmittah. However, ‘you will dwell securely upon it’ is a broader blessing that is not defined by a particular time, corresponding to the faith of this person in Hashem’s abilities to always provide Parnassah. This is why the number forty-nine is specifically highlighted earlier, as our goal is not just to live in security during the years of Shmittah, but also the rest of the years as well.

Just as one should have faith that Hashem will provide parnassah even if they let the fields lie fallow during the Shmittah and Yovel years, so too, one must have Bitachon that if one devotes his time to studying Torah it will not compromise his ability to make a parnassah. This might be another answer to Rashi’s famous question: ‘What is the connection between the laws of Shmittah and Har Sinai’ on the opening Pasuk, “And Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai saying” (Vayikra 25:1). One answer may be that Shmittah and Har Sinai share this idea in common, that learning Torah and observing Shmittah will not cause one to lose out on the sustenance and blessing that Hashem has reserved for that individual.

The Chidushei HaRim explained on the Pasuk, “Hungry as well as thirsty, their soul grew faint within them” (Tehillim 107:5), that when one eats according to Halacha and L’Shem Shamayim, one uplifts his food to a higher level of Kedusha. Accordingly, the Chidushei HaRim explains that the Generation of the Desert were often dissatisfied with the Maan, even with all its accompanying miracles and wondrous traits, because the food was already hyper-spiritual. The people were unable to uplift themselves through the process of eating the way they could with more natural foods.

Accordingly, he understands the question posed in Parshas Behar in a similar way, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year’, should be understood as, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year to uplift ourselves through eating’, since all of the produce that grows in the seventh year will be endowed with Kedusha. As we know, all the performative Mitzvos of separating Terumos and Maaseros during the other six years of the cycle do not apply to produce that grows during the Shmittah year. The need for the blessing upon the food from the previous years to last until the ninth year was not necessarily a question of sustenance and/or hunger, but the need for us to be able to uplift ourselves spiritually through our eating activities.

May it be His will that we should merit blessing and livelihood constantly, so that we may have the time to learn Torah and fulfill all the Mitzvos, so that we may merit the coming of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, speedily in our days.