

This week's *Parashah* opens with the *Mitzvah* of *Shemittah*/the Sabbatical year, when the land of *Eretz Yisrael* may not be worked. The goal of this *Mitzvah* is not so much for the land to rest, as it is for the farmer to be free, as R' Moshe Zvi Neriah z"l (1913-1995; founder and *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Bnei Akiva *yeshiva* network) explains:

We read (*Mishlei* 12:11), "He who works ("Oved") the soil shall be satiated with bread." The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 58b) comments: "If one 'enslaves' himself to the soil, he will be satiated with bread. If he does not, he will not be satiated with bread." And, yet, the Torah tells this "enslaved" person that he is emancipated for a full year, since he may not work the soil!

This emancipation is not for nothing, R' Neriah writes. It serves an important role. Just as a person can become a slave to his work during the six days of the workweek, so a person can become a part of the earth during six consecutive years of farming--*i.e.*, he can become like the clump of earth that man was before G-d blew a spiritual soul into his nostrils. We read (*Tehilim* 115:17), "The earth, He has given to mankind." But, if a person has lost his soul and become reunited with the earth, he no longer qualifies as "mankind." What right, then, does he have to rule over the earth? This is the fear that the sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai expressed when he said (*Berachot* 35b), "If man plants in the planting season, harvests in the harvest season, threshes in the threshing season, etc., what will be with the Torah?" Therefore, we were given the *Shemittah*, an opportunity for man to detach himself from his enslavement to the earth and regain his humanity. (*Ner La'maor*)

Shabbat

One could think, writes R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim), that the world will attain its fulfillment in the future, and that the present epoch has value only because it leads to that future era. In every generation, this way of thinking goes, our *Shabbat* observance, our Torah study, and our *Mitzvot* bring the ultimate redemption closer and thereby elevate our existence.

While the foregoing is true, continues R' Thau, there is a deeper perspective: The reason the present has value is not only because it is the pathway to the future, but also because the future good, the light of *Olam Ha'ba*, already illuminates it. This is what we mean when we say that *Shabbat* is "M'ein Olam Ha'ba" / "a little bit of the World-to-Come." *Olam Ha'ba* is not just something we envision being in the distant future, it is a reality that exists now. Just as *Hashem* is not subject to the bonds of time, and there is no difference to Him between past, present, and future, so the so-called "World-to-Come" already exists in all its glory. We just need to go through this world and all of its challenges in order to reveal its existence.

The first aspect of *Shabbat* mentioned above--the *Shabbat* that originates in our world and leads to the World-to-Come--is reflected in our meticulous observance of the laws and customs of the day, in how we delight in it and honor it, and remember through it G-d's act of Creation, explains R' Thau. The second aspect of *Shabbat*--the illumination that comes from the World-to-Come already now--is reflected in the holiness that we sense enveloping us on the seventh day. In this light, R' Thau writes, we can understand a phrase in the extra paragraph ("*Retzei*") that we add to *Birkat Ha'mazon* on *Shabbat*: "For this day is great and holy before You." "This day" refers to the tangible aspects of *Shabbat* that we can point to with our finger. Then, there is the more concealed aspect of *Shabbat*, "Great and holy before You," *Hashem*.

(*Am Mekadshei Shevi'i* p.38)

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“The land will give its fruit and you will eat your fill, and you will dwell securely upon it.” (25:19)

R' Moshe Cheifetz z"l (Italy; 1664-1711) writes: If the earth gave its produce without man's intervention, as was *Hashem's* original plan for Creation, that produce surely would have been tastier and more healthful than it is now. The fact that this is not so is why people sometimes get stomachaches or indigestion after eating fruits or vegetables. Therefore, the Torah promises us: If you do *Hashem's* will, you will be able to eat your fill of fruits and vegetables and not get sick. Rather, you will dwell securely on the Land. *(Melech Machshevet)*



“If your brother becomes impoverished and his means falter in your proximity (literally, ‘with you’), you shall strengthen him--convert or resident--so that he can live with you.” (25:35)

R' Meshulam Feish Segal Lowy z"l (1921-2015; the *Tosher Rebbe* in post-War Hungary and, from 1951, in Montreal, Canada) asks: What is added by the expression, “with you”? He explains:

As is well-known, the *Tosher Rebbe* writes, the souls of all the Jewish People were encompassed within Adam Ha'rishon, and together we form one unit. Just as a person cannot function at his best if one of his physical limbs or organs is ailing, so we all suffer if one among us falters. We say (in *Shabbat Mincha*), “You are One, and Your Name is One, and who is like Your people *Yisrael*, one nation on earth.” Just as *Hashem* is One and His Name is One--a reference to the Torah (see *Ramban's* introduction to his Torah commentary), whose 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments make up a unified whole--so the Jewish People are one unit with many limbs and organs.

This, continues the *Tosher Rebbe*, is the idea behind the statement, “All *Yisrael* are responsible for each other.” (This is why, for example, one person can recite *Kiddush* for another.) Just as it is in the interest of every limb of a person's body to protect the other limbs, so it is in every Jew's interest to look out for every other Jew. This is why, as well, the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 86b) teaches, “When an individual repents, the whole world is forgiven.”

Now, concludes the *Tosher Rebbe*, we can understand our verse's use of the expression, “with you.” When one Jew becomes impoverished, he falters “with you”--every other Jew falters with him. And, when he is strengthened by others, he lives “with you”--every other Jew lives a better life because of this Jew's improved condition.

(Avodat Avodah: Pitgamei Kodsh)

“Hashem spoke to Moshe on *Har Sinai*, saying, ‘Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them: “When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for *Hashem*”.” (25:1)

Rashi z"l cites the *Midrash Torat Kohanim*, which asks: What is special about *Shemittah* that the Torah notes that it was taught at *Har Sinai*? All the *Mitzvot* were taught at *Har Sinai*!

The *Torat Kohanim* answers: Our verse is teaching the following comparison--just as in the case of *Shemittah*, its general rules and its minute details were taught at *Har Sinai*, so in the case of all the commandments, their general rules and their minute details were taught at *Har Sinai*. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Avraham David Wahrmann z"l (1771-1840; rabbi of Buchach, Poland; influential *Halachic* authority) suggests another answer to the question asked by the *Midrash*: At *Har Sinai*, all of *Bnei Yisrael* experienced prophecy. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 92a) teaches that one of the qualifications for prophecy is to be wealthy. *Bnei Yisrael* had the requisite wealth because of the gifts they received when they left Egypt.

However, there is another way to be “wealthy,” *i.e.*, to be happy with one's lot (as we learn in this week's chapter of *Pirkei Avot*). Being happy with one's lot is one of the lessons of *Shemittah*, notes R' Wahrmann (for without such an attitude one would be unable to open his fields and allow others to take the produce free of charge, as the laws of *Shemittah* dictate). Thus, observing *Shemittah* can be an alternative path to experiencing prophecy as *Bnei Yisrael* experienced at *Har Sinai*. *(Machazeh Avraham)*

“If you will say, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold! we will not sow and not gather in our crops.’ I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three-year period.” (25:20-21)

R' Ovadiah Seforno z"l (1470-1550; Italy) explains: If you will be in doubt and will not trust that the little bit of produce I (*Hashem*) have given you can satisfy your needs because it is of a higher quality, I will multiply the produce so that it satisfies your eyes, *i.e.*, so that its quantity will satisfy you.” [Until here from the *Seforno*]

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005; a pre-eminent figure in the *Mussar* movement) elaborates: There are times when one is called upon to have *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*, whether he ready to be on that level or not. *Shemittah* is such an occasion, for one cannot live by natural means without planting and harvesting. One should trust that whatever *Hashem* provides in the sixth year will suffice for three years, *i.e.*, until the harvest of the year after *Shemittah*. Our verse, explains the *Seforno*, is addressing the person who fails that test of *Bitachon*. *(Shiurei Chumash)*