

The Path To Follow

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The Foundations Of Faith And The Shmita

It is written, "Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying..." (Vayikra 25:1). The Sages ask, "What does the subject of the *Shmita* [seventh year] have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments given from Sinai? However just as with the *Shmita*, its general principles and its smallest details all being given from Sinai, likewise all of them were given – their general principles and their smallest details – from Sinai" (*Torat Kohanim, Behar* 1). In reality, we need to ask why the Torah reveals this in the passage on the *Shmita*, rather than elsewhere.

To answer this question, let us first cite a statement made by the Ramban: "The six days of Creation represent the days of the world, whereas the seventh day is a Sabbath to Hashem your G-d.... It is for this reason that Scripture was more stringent regarding the *Shmita* than with respect to those guilty of violating all other negative commandments.... Whoever denies it does not acknowledge the work of Creation and the World to Come" (Ramban on Vayikra 25:2). This is difficult to understand. Why is Scripture so stringent for the *mitzvah* of the *Shmita*, to the point that if anyone neglects it, it is as if they were denying G-d? We find no such concept in regards to any other Torah *mitzvah*, with the exception of idolatry.

Let us try to explain this according to what our Sages have said: "It is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said: 'But the *tzaddik* shall live by his faith' [Habakkuk 2:4]" (*Makkot* 24a). From here we learn that faith in Hashem is the foundation of the entire Torah. A person who possesses faith can accomplish all the *mitzvot*, for if he believes in Hashem he will do everything that He commands him to do. Hence the opposite is also true: One who does not possess faith cannot fulfill *mitzvot*.

That being the case for all the *mitzvot*, how much more does it apply to the seventh year! That is, whoever does not have faith in Hashem will not observe it, and whoever has faith in Him will observe it. This is because all the power of the *Shmita* comes from faith. In fact a person will be certain that G-d will keep His promises to those who observe it, as it is said: "If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? See, we will not plant or gather in our crops!' I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it shall yield a crop for three years. You will plant in the eighth year, but you will still eat from the old crop until the ninth year" (Vayikra 25:20-22).

Faith is the Foundation of Man

The Sages have said, "Come and see how severe are the results of [transgressing] the seventh year" (*Kiddushin* 20a). They explain that a man who sells his produce during the seventh year will eventually be forced to sell his moveable property. If he ignores this punishment, he will be forced to sell his fields, followed by his home, and even his own daughter. In the end, he will even sell himself to idolatry!

Whoever fails to respect the *mitzvah* of the *Shmita* denies Hashem and will eventually come to worship idols, by also selling himself. This is why Sinai is mentioned in regards to the *mitzvah* of the *Shmita*, in order to tell us that the entire Torah was given on Mount Sinai along with all its great principles and all its details. This is said only in regards to the *mitzvah* of the *Shmita* because it is the essence of the Torah. Since this principle is written in regards to what is essential, it teaches us that the same applies to all the *mitzvot* of the Torah.

One may ask, "Is it only the *mitzvah* of the seventh year that depends on faith? Don't

all the *mitzvot* depend on faith, as King David said: 'All Your *mitzvot* are faith' [*Tehillim* 119:86]?" The answer is that a *mitzvah* that does not incur a financial loss cannot be compared to a *mitzvah* that does incur a financial loss, and no *mitzvah* implies a greater potential for financial loss than does the *Shmita*. When a person has a field, but neither works nor plants it during the entire year because he is observing the *Shmita*, this demonstrates that he has faith in Hashem and trusts in His promises.

A person in this world is like a builder constructing a house. How does he go about this task? He first lays the foundation, and then he starts building a house upon it. How does he lay the foundation? He takes sand and earth, adds water to it, and with this mixture he prepares the foundation. If he is missing water, he will not be able to lay the foundation, and whatever he builds will end up collapsing.

Along the same lines, the Torah and faith are two basic ingredients of man. If one of them is missing, there can be no foundation, and it will be impossible to build anything. Even if something were to be built, in the end it would not endure. We may therefore say that it is for this reason that the passage on the *Shmita* was given on Mount Sinai, for it alludes to faith, telling us that faith cannot exist without Torah. When a person studies Torah, he must precede it with faith. Without faith, it will not endure, even before the slightest wind.

Faith Mixed with Torah

Furthermore, whoever has faith, this faith leads him to love others, and he will especially not be jealous of their possessions. He will not covet them or try to take their money, for because he has faith, he believes that all his sustenance comes from G-d, and he will obtain nothing that has not been given by G-d.

When a person possesses faith in G-d and a love for others, he can devote himself to Torah, which was only given when there was faith and peace among Israel, as it is written: "They had faith in Hashem and in Moshe His servant" (*Shemot* 14:31). The Sages have said, "The Children of Israel were only delivered from Egypt as a reward for their faith" (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 6). Peace reigned among them at that point, as we read: "Israel encamped before the mountain" (*Shemot* 19:2) – "like a single man with a single heart" (*Mechilta, Beshalach* 1). What does this mean? If it were just to teach us that there was peace among them, the Sages could have said "like a single man." Why add "with a single heart"? However the expression "like a single man" alludes to the fact that there was peace among them, and "with a single heart" alludes to the fact that they had a single faith, which depends on the heart.

This is why the *mitzvah* of the seventh year was given on Mount Sinai. It teaches us that it is impossible for a man to study the Torah that was given on Sinai unless he possesses faith and a love for others. Whoever does not love others, this shows that he does not have faith. And since he does not have faith, he does not have the right to study Torah. Hence we find both concepts – Torah study and faith – through the juxtaposition of *Parsha Bechukotai* (dealing with Torah study) and *Parsha Behar* (dealing with faith). In fact Torah study is impossible unless it is mixed with faith in Hashem and a love for others. Instead, he must study solely for the sake of Heaven and to teach the Jewish people. This is what Rabbi Akiva did, as the Gemara tells us: "The evil [Roman] government once issued a decree forbidding Jews from learning and practicing Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva publicly gathering people together and teaching them Torah. He said

to him, 'Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?' He replied, 'I will explain this to you with a parable: A fox was once walking alongside a river when it saw fish swarming from one place to another. He said to them: "From what are you fleeing?" They replied, "From the nets cast for us by men." He said to them, "Would you like to come up on dry land so that you and I can live together, just as my ancestors lived with your ancestors?" They replied, "Are you the one they call the smartest of animals? You are not smart, but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!" So it is

Concerning the Parsha

The Blessings of Observing the Shmita Year

The following account is given by David Chassid, a farmer from Moshav Revaha who observed the Shmita year according to the Halachah, and who reaped its blessings.

Each year I would plant wheat in my parcel of land, although I wouldn't take care of it. I would just let it grow until the harvest, at which point I would harvest it. The land produced 4,000 kg of wheat in the first year, but in the following years the output diminished because I was content on just buying seed and planting it, nothing else. What would be would be, and on average the entire parcel of land produced a maximum of 3,000 kg of wheat.

With the arrival of the *Shmita* in the year 5747, I wanted to fulfill this *mitzvah* at all costs. Whatever the results, I truly wanted to merit this *mitzvah*. In previous years, I had worked the land during the *Shmita*, for we would sell our parcel of land through the rabbinate with a *heter mechira*.

That year I told myself, "It's finished. I'm not going to do this any more. I'm going to let my land lie fallow. I want to merit the *mitzvah* in its entirety, as best possible." Although I didn't plant anything, I purchased seed because my wife was constantly telling me: "You need to buy seed. We sold the land. Plant, plant!" So I bought seed, but I left it in the warehouse. I constantly put off planting.

By the time the *Shmita* year arrived on Rosh Hashanah, I still hadn't planted anything. I left my parcel of land as is, empty. I constantly rejected my wife's demand to plant wheat, not allowing her to convince me otherwise. Thank G-d I was able to fulfill the *mitzvah*, for I left the land empty throughout the *Shmita* year. As for the seed, it remained in the warehouse. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to let the land rest, and I let it rest, whatever would happen.

"Nothing Will Come of It!"

When the *Shmita* year ended, I went to inspect the seed, and I discovered that half of it was worm-infested. It seemed to me that of the three bags of seed, which all together weighed about 150 to 200 kg, only half of it was still good. I decided to use it.

Now whenever I used to plant, I would never work the earth. I would just make a small furrow in the ground with a harrow, which would till the ground over an area of about ten centimeters, or something close to that, along with all the wild grass that was growing there.

I paid someone to do the work, and I gave him the seed. He placed it in a sower and began to plant. He said to me, "Listen, nothing will come of this, so why are you bothering to plant? It's not worth the trouble!" As it turned out, when the growing season came, I went into the field from time to time, but there was nothing growing. Really, there was nothing growing there except for maybe a little patch here or there, very little in any case. The wheat, which should have been at least a meter high, was no higher than 30 or 40 centimeters. Anyone going into the field could have avoided walking on any ears of grain, because we could really see the ground, so little wheat had grown! Perhaps half of what had been planted.

When the time came for the harvest, I called some Arab merchants who were wheat experts. Yet everyone who came to see it immediately said: "You're joking! Do you think that I'll buy something like this? It's not even worth the trouble of bringing in a

with us. If such is our state when we sit and study Torah – of which it is written, "For it is your life and the length of your days" – how much worse shall it be for us if we neglect it!" (*Berachot* 61b).

How did Rabbi Akiva reach such a level that he did not fear for his life and studied Torah without any ulterior motives? It is because during his entire life, he waited for an opportunity to fulfill the words "with all your soul." All that he did was for the sake of Heaven, not for a reward. This is why he did not fear the government or death. He feared only G-d throughout his entire life, not man, and he gave his life in order to sanctify G-d's Name.

combine, because you pay for a combine based on land area, not by the hour or by the amount you harvest."

I didn't know what to do, and in the end I decided not to harvest my field. However my wife said to me, "Harvest and good will come of it." I continued looking for merchants, until I found one who said to me: "You know what? I bought the field of your neighbor, and I will come see your field."

When he saw my field, he said to me: "It's not worth it." I replied, "Harvest it, and I'll pay for the combine." He told me that the combine could hold enough for the entire field, and that there was no need for more, especially since the ground in the middle of my field was covered with thistles. Now these people were expert evaluators. I said, "What does it matter? Leave me that!" He was okay with it, and we agreed that he would begin with my field, since in any case the combine would not be filled by what my field would produce. He would then continue with the field of my neighbor in order to fill the truck.

"This Comes from Allah!"

The combine arrived, and the driver was also an Arab. When he saw the field, he said to me: "Are you crazy? It's a waste to use a combine for this. You have no reason to harvest, because you're going to pay more than what you're going to make!"

I said to him, "How does that affect you? You'll get your money, so start harvesting!"

He began to harvest. He started with a small row, but before he could get through half of it, wheat started falling out of the combine's reserve! He cried out to me, "Chassid, get over here! It's impossible for the combine's reserve to be full. I must have left some wheat in it from the field that I worked on earlier. I didn't check if there was any wheat left inside, and I don't think that it could have been filled here because your entire field couldn't fill the machine. I didn't finish even half of the first row, and it's already full? That's impossible."

I said to him, "Okay, maybe you're right. Empty the reserve into the truck and continue."

He hadn't finish the first row, and yet the machine was again full! He got down, looked at the field, and slapped his hand upon his head. He said to me, "I don't know what's happening here. Tell me what's going on. What have you done here?" I was also stunned!

He said to me, "This comes from Allah! This comes from Allah! I've harvested a lot of wheat in this region, but I've never seen anything like this." In the meantime, he continued harvesting, and the Arab owner of the combine – who was supposed to charge me in terms of the surface area of my field, and only because I had convinced him to take the job – couldn't believe his eyes either. He also said, "This comes from Allah – from Allah!" He added, "You are beloved of Allah."

The harvest had ended, and the truck was filled to the brim. The Arab merchant was left wondering: "I don't know what to do. I can't arrive with such a heavy truck to the weighing station at Kiryat Gat!" He was trembling as he drove, and I was driving behind him. When the truck got on the scale, nobody could believe their eyes: It weighed 13,700 kg! Every other year, it may have weighed 3,000 kg! The Arab was stunned, and he did not stop praising the Holy One, blessed be He, for this miracle. I explained to him that we Jews observe the *Shmita* year, and the Holy One, blessed be He, has said that if we observe an entire year of *Shmita*, He will give us double. The Arab said to me, "Jews are the chosen people," and he began to praise Hashem. It was truly a great *Kiddush Hashem*.

Man Before Animal

It is written, "The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat, for you, for your male and female slave, and for your hired worker and resident who live with you. And for your animal and for the beast that is in your land, shall all its crop be to eat" (*Vayikra* 25:6).

In the passage *Vehaya im shamo'a* we read, "I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satiated." From here the Sages explain that a person is forbidden to eat before his animals do. That being the case, why does the present verse say that food shall first "be yours to eat," and only afterwards shall it be "for your animal"?

The Chatam Sofer answers this by saying that there are two reasons for the *mitzvah* of giving animals to eat first, as mentioned in *Sheilat Ya'avetz*:

1. Animals work for man, and it is therefore fitting that they should eat first.
2. There is a prohibition against making animals suffer.

In regards to the first reason, it is forbidden to work the field with animals during the seventh year, and therefore there is no reason to give them to eat first. Hence in the passage on the seventh year, the Torah mentions man's sustenance first.

Considering the Poor

It is written, "This fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you" (*Vayikra* 25:11).

In his book *Tzror HaMor*, Rabbi Avraham Sabbah *Zatzal* writes that the *Shmita* and Jubilee years are deep foundations upon which the world rests. According to the revealed Torah, it is the root of the entire Torah and the foundation of the whole world. This is because the world cannot endure without rich and poor people, as it is written: "The poor shall eat with you." Now we know that the life of the poor is painful, for they do not have enough to eat. Their eyes are constantly turned to Heaven, and they live in uncertainty. As for the wealthy, their lives are spent in joy, contentment and celebration, to the point that because of their wealth and pride, they forget the poor and do not reflect upon their problems.

This is why the Torah placed the *Shmita* and Jubilee years next to one another, such that they will be two holy years together. During that time, even the wealthy will raise their eyes to Heaven, for they will neither plant nor reap, and they will say: "What will I eat and drink?" In this way, they will remember the suffering of the poor, whose entire lives are spent amid suffering and worry.

Hence the wealthy will raise their eyes to Heaven for two or three years and say, "With what shall I feed my family, since I can neither plant nor reap? What will the poor do, whose entire life is marked by suffering and need?" As such, they will remember what they endured during the *Shmita* and Jubilee, and they will think: "For two years of the *Shmita* and Jubilee, I did not know what I was going to do for my family, and I was immersed in suffering and worry. What will the poor do, whose entire lives are lived amid suffering? They are never well off, their eyes are constantly turned to Heaven and men, and their children ask for bread and yet they have none to give!" As such, the rich will remember the poor and show them compassion.

Equal Lives

It is written, "You shall not take interest or increase from him, and you shall fear your G-d and your brother shall live with you" (*Vayikra* 25:36).

What connection is there between not taking interest and the promise that "brother shall live with you"? This question is raised by Rabbeinu Moshe Alsheich.

He notes that in every transaction involving a loan made with interest, the lender wants the days to pass quickly, for the interest increases with each passing day. As for the borrower, he wants the days to pass slowly so that his debt does not inflate and he is forced to pay more.

It is here that the Torah warns us: "You shall not take interest or increase" followed by, "your brother shall live with you." That is, your lives should be equal, for one should not have long days and the other short days.

Seven Prerequisites

It is written, "If you despise My statutes" (*Vayikra* 26:15).

At the beginning of this week's *parsha*, the Torah promises that blessings will occur if and when we "walk in My ways." This is the only prerequisite for, "I will give your rains in their time, and the earth will give its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit" (*Vayikra* 26:4). When the Children of Israel fulfill this prerequisite, they immediately receive a reward.

As for the curses, the Torah is not quick to describe the punishment associated with them. Rather, it first lays out seven prerequisites: "But if you will not listen to Me, and will not perform all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, and if your soul loathes My judgments, so that you will not do all My commandments, thus breaking My covenant" (vv. 14-15). Rashi states that these constitute seven sins, one leading to the other. Only when the full measure of sin has been reached, once all these prerequisites have been fulfilled, will we be severely punished.

– From *Kanfei Nesharim*

In the Path of the Fathers

The World was Created with Ten Utterances

We may say that the reason why the world was created with ten utterances, since it could have been created with but one, is to teach man that the Holy One, blessed be He, will give a great reward to the *tzaddikim* in the future. The world endures because of them, and it is impossible for man to know their reward in advance, as the prophet states: "No eye has seen G-d, except You" (Isaiah 64:3).

Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world with several utterances, despite being able to combine them into one, the same applies to the reward of the *tzaddikim*. There may be a *mitzvah* for which they receive an immense reward, for sometimes it includes many things, something that is known only to Hashem. Everything depends on the difficulty of the *mitzvah* and the devotion of the one who performs it, as well as what results from it.

Take, for example, the case of a wealthy man who gives a poor man some money as *tzeddakah*. The poor man goes and buys bread with this money, and when he comes home he washes his hands to eat, as does his family. They recite the blessings over the washing of the hands and the bread, and after eating they recite *Birkat Hamazon*. All this was possible only because of the money that the wealthy man gave him.

The opposite is also true. If a wealthy man gives a thousand gold coins as *tzeddakah*, while a poor person gives only a small coin, the gift of the poor is as important to G-d as that of the wealthy man. Why? Because the poor man gave with all his heart, whereas the wealthy man gave reluctantly. Now the Sages have said, "Commensurate with the effort is the reward" (*Pirkei Avot* 5:21).

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, is extremely strict with those who are close to Him (*Yebamot* 121b), and yet He is patient with evildoers. Although they greatly irritate Him, He closes His eyes to their deeds, for the good deeds of the *tzaddikim* give Him satisfaction at all times. In fact when they stumble in a small matter, Hashem immediately realizes that the light has diminished, and He punishes them. On the other hand, the wicked commit many sins, which is why they are not punished for minor things. However they will have to give an accounting for all the sins they have not repented of, and everything will be taken into account.

The Parable and its Meaning

The Palace of Equal Rights

It is written, “Yet for all this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away or loathe them” (*Vayikra* 26:44).

The era of French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte brought real optimism to many Jews, for his reign gave them great hope for a better future. These Jews believed that if Napoleon would completely abolish the numerous decrees that had threatened them for so many years, and if he were to also grant them privileges and equal rights, it would clearly indicate that the Final Redemption was near.

Not everyone viewed what the French Emperor was doing for the Jewish people with such favor, despite the great advantages that he was granting them. In fact the sages of Israel saw this as the very reason for concern. According to them, it indicated just how long the exile was going to be, an exile whose end could not be seen.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer *Zatzal*, the author of *Chatam Sofer*, greatly contributed to tearing down the hopes that these naïve Jews had placed in Napoleon. Each time that Rabbi Moshe Sofer spoke in public, he constantly supported and encouraged the people to study Torah and observe *mitzvot*, since it was the only way to break the yoke of the exile and to gather Jews from the four corners of the earth for a complete redemption through *Mashiach* the son of David.

To make this concept more real, the Chatam Sofer recounted a story that made a lasting impression on them. It goes as follows:

The son of a king, who was loved and pampered in the royal palace, suddenly strayed from the right path and rejected the good education that he had received from his father and the teachers assigned to him. Each day, the king's son rejected the rules of the kingdom and committed deeds that did not benefit the royal family.

At first, when the young man conducted himself with pride and insolence, the king and royal ministers tried speaking with him, reprimanding him so he would return to the right path. Yet when he began to associate with scoundrels and starting emulating their despicable practices in public, the king decided to punish him in such a way that he would understand his mistake. He would then automatically repent and better himself, as befits the son of a king.

What did the king do? He ordered his servants to bring his son to a remote village, where they sold him into the service of a poor farmer for virtually nothing.

The prince, who had never lacked anything, experienced a hard life with the farmer. He made him work without pity, giving him harsh tasks that he had never done before, and he rewarded him with only dry bread and water.

In this way, the king hoped that his son would learn about everyday life, to appreciate freedom and want to return to the royal palace. He would then no longer pursue his questionable ways, and thus when the time would come for him to succeed his father on the throne, he would be worthy.

The son of the king did not rebel against the farmer, his new master, and he lovingly accepted the afflictions that his father the king decreed for him. In his heart, the son of the king had a single and unique desire, one that filled his entire world: That his father would soon summon him back to the royal palace.

The son therefore lived in the village with the fervent hope of the day that he longed for. Each day he would tell himself, “Maybe today the king will come and deliver me from these afflictions and this exhausting work.” During the day he reflected, waited, and hoped,

and at night he dreamed that the king and his attendants would arrive in the remote village in magnificent carriages to bring him back to the palace.

Time passed – day after day, week after week, month after month – and yet the king did not appear. His ministers and servants were not to be seen either, and the sound of the king's regal carriage was not heard. Nevertheless, the son of the king constantly waited and hoped for the day when he would return to live in the royal palace as before.

One day he saw a group of builders coming to the village, something that drew his attention. He decided to watch them closely, and after a few days he realized that they were laying the foundation for a magnificent edifice in the middle of the village.

He was very curious as to what they were building, as well as why. To construct such a large edifice in the middle of a remote village was not something commonly seen, and so he approached the builders, who were working without respite, and asked them what they were doing.

They did not hide anything from him: “The king ordered us to build a magnificent palace for you, the son of the king!”

The workers were completely stunned to see that, instead of rejoicing over their work, the prince burst into tears!

“Does the building not please you, Your Highness?” they asked.

Between his tears, the prince replied: “The palace is absolutely stunning, which is precisely why I'm crying.”

“For this?” the workers asked with surprise. “But why?”

“As long as I was living with the farmer,” the son of the king explained to them, “I would work like a slave and eat dry bread, but I knew that the day was near when my father would take me from here and return me to the palace. Yet now that he has sent you here to build a magnificent palace for me, who knows how long he wants me to stay here, far from his palace in a remote place!”

The Jews who heard the Chatam Sofer's parable lowered their heads, for they had understood the lesson. The Rav stressed that although the Jewish people have been suffering in exile for numerous years, a ray of light still shined in all this darkness, namely the hope of the coming deliverance.

“Yet now that the Holy One, blessed be He, has sent us the French Emperor in order to build a beautiful palace in exile,” he explained, “the palace of equal rights, who knows how long the shame of the exile will last? We have nothing for which to rejoice, and on the contrary we have every reason to regret it and weep.”

Guard Your Tongue!

Praise that Causes Harm

A person must also be careful not to praise others in a way that will harm them. For example, if a guest were to go into the streets and publicize the kindness of his host – describing the abundant food and drink he received, as well as the great efforts made by his host on his behalf – unscrupulous people would take advantage of the host and ruin him. Of such things it is said, “He who blesses his friend in a loud voice early in the morning, it will be considered a curse for him” (*Mishlei* 27:14). From here we also learn that when someone receives a loan from his friend, he should not publicize how kind he has been to him, for this will simply cause other people to ask him for a loan.