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maskil Le'David

Shemittah is One of the Most Difficult Mitzvot

"Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying ... the land shall observe a Shabbat rest for Hashem" (Vayikra 25:1-2).

Rashi writes, "Why is Har Sinai mentioned in connection to the mitzvah of *shemittah*? Weren't all the *mitzvot* given at Har Sinai? This reference teaches us that just as *shemittah*, with all its details and particulars, was commanded at Sinai, so too the details of all the *mitzvot* [not only the broad outlines] were given at Sinai."

However, the question still remains. Why did the Torah specifically choose the mitzvah of *shemittah* as an example for the other *mitzvot*? What is special about this mitzvah that it was chosen to represent the giving of all the *mitzvot* at Sinai?

I think that this question can be answered based on an explanation of a verse in last week's *parsha*, Parshat Emor. The verse says (Vayikra 21:1), "Say to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon, and tell them: Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a [dead] person among his people." I would like to suggest, with *siyata diShmaya*, that the description of *כהנים*, *kohanim*, in the above verse is not used as an expression of *כהונה*, priesthood, but rather as an expression of authority and greatness. As the verse says (Shemot 19:6), "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers (*כהנים*) and a holy nation." Rashi explains the word *kohanim* to mean ministers, as we find (Shmuel II, 8:18), "And David's sons were *כהנים* – senior ministers."

It is possible that Hashem needed to address Aharon's remaining sons, Elazar and Itamar, using an expression of affection and honor, so as to elevate their self-regard and lift their spirits. This was because they felt that they were on a lower level of holiness and purity than their holy brothers, Nadav and Avihu, who were burned alive in the Mikdash. Elazar and Itamar did not feel it was fitting for them to take the place of Nadav and Avihu in the service of the Mikdash. As Rashi explains on the verse, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me" (Vayikra 10:3), Moshe said to Aharon, "I knew that the Tabernacle

would be sanctified through someone in whom G-d's glory reposes, but I thought it would be one of us. Now I know they were greater than either of us."

Therefore, Elazar and Itamar did not have the courage to assume a position of greatness and take part in the holy and exalted service with their father Aharon the Kohen Gadol. Their hearts were filled with great modesty and they were not capable of considering themselves as *kohanim*, holy servants of G-d.

In order to raise their esteem and inspire them with feelings of elevation, Hashem referred to them with an expression of importance "the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon," *kohanim* being an expression of authority, greatness, and importance, implying that they were certainly fitting to stand and serve before Hashem in the Mikdash just like their brothers. Even the attribute of modesty must sometimes vacate its place for a slight feeling of importance and greatness, since a person must be aware of his greatness and thereby fulfill "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem." Although it is true that Nadav and Avihu were greater than Moshe and Aharon, now Elazar and Itamar became extremely important in Hashem's eyes and He considered them as *kohanim*, elevated above the rest of the nation.

A faithful servant is one who is prepared to fulfill his master's directives with joy no matter what is imposed on him, and even if he is required to sacrifice his soul to fulfill his master's will, he does not consider it difficult. Rather he willingly obeys due to his love of his master and desire to please him.

Now we can understand why especially the mitzvah of *shemittah* is said in conjunction with Har Sinai. The reason is because *shemittah* is one of the most serious *mitzvot* in the Torah. It is no simple matter to command a person to completely abstain from working on his land for an entire year. Not only this, but he is also commanded to hand over his produce to any passers-by. This is something that requires enormous self-sacrifice.

Even the angels expressed their amazement at Yisrael for observing this command, by describing them as, "... strong warriors who do His bidding" (Tehillim 103:20). The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 1:1) clarifies this: "What is the verse referring to? Rabbi Yitzchak says, 'the verse is referring to those who observe *shemittah*. The normal way of the world is that a mitzvah is performed for one day or one week or one month. But the mitzvah of *shemittah* applies for an entire year. Is there any greater warrior than this?!"

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26 Iyar 5785
24 May 2025

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Behar-Bechukotai

Shabbat Mevarchin



Hilula

26 Iyar
The Mekubal Rabbi Chaim Vital, zy"ta

27 Iyar
Rabbi Yerachmiel Yehuda Meir Kalish, Admor of Amshinov

28 Iyar
Ta'anit Tzadikim on the petirah of Shmuel Hanavi

29 Iyar
Rabbi Ben Tzion Atton, one of the Porat Yosef *chachamim*

1 Sivan
Rabbi Meir Halevi Horowitz

2 Sivan
Rabbi Yisrael of Vizhnitz

3 Sivan
Rabbeinu Ovadiah of Bartenura





IN OUR FATHER'S PATH

The Baba Sali Complimented the Tasty Dishes

A significant allusion is brought by Rabbeinu Yaakov Ba'al HaTurim, on the opening verse in Parshat Bechukotai, "אם בחקתי תלכו" – If you will follow My decrees." The first letter of each Hebrew word spells אבתי, fathers, which teaches us the important lesson of "following in our fathers' footsteps."

Rabbi Ezriel Tauber related that on one occasion when he went to visit the Baba Sali, *zt"l*, the tzaddik said to him: "I want you to join me for lunch tomorrow."

Rabbi Tauber continued: "I did not understand why, but of course I rejoiced at the invitation. The following afternoon I returned to his house in Netivot.

"The Rabbanit opened the door and said, 'My husband is waiting for you. You can enter his room.' I went inside and the Baba Sali immediately rose to wash his hands, inviting me to do the same.

"The Rabbanit served the first course, spiced with the delicious taste of Moroccan dishes. Her husband, the tzaddik, famous for his devout, spiritual conduct, started discussing the food with his wife. He talked about each and every dish, praising its delicate taste, chuckling in Arabic, with his wife joining him, smiling and laughing.

"Several minutes passed and the Baba Sali did not stop showing an interest in the different dishes, without uttering even one word of Torah. The most perplexing thing was that he did not talk to me at all; he did not even glance my way.

"Taking this in from the side, I could see how delighted the Rabbanit was and how much pleasure she derived from this conversation with her husband, the tzaddik.

"The second course followed the same pattern, and so the meal went on. The Rabbanit served each course, the Baba Sali expressed his enjoyment, and the Rabbanit laughed with delight. I was sitting with them at the table, yet the tzaddik did not even look at me.

"I did not understand even half a word of the Baba Sali's conversation with his wife, since it was all in Arabic, but even more than that, I could not understand why he had invited me to join him.

"A whole hour passed and during the entire sixty minutes, all talk around the table revolved around the food. The beautiful presentation, the tasty dishes, the fruit that the Rabbanit served as refreshment at the end of the meal. No other topic was discussed.

"The Baba Sali finished eating, recited the appropriate blessings and bid me goodbye. Only once I left this great and holy house, did I figure out why this tzaddik had invited me, and what lesson he wished to impart to me during the meal I spent with him.

"The Baba Sali knew I spend a lot of time helping spread marital harmony in Jewish homes throughout the world. Therefore, he wished to instill in me this important understanding that one of the essential foundations for maintaining marital harmony is to talk to one's wife about things that interest her, namely her culinary skills. And not just to talk about it, but to praise one's wife for the tasty food and compliment her for all she does for him. It is of such importance that the Baba Sali 'wasted' a whole hour on this, and no doubt he did this every day. This is what he wished to demonstrate to me, so I could give over this message to those who seek my advice," finished Rabbi Tauber.



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust
penned by Moreinu
v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi **David
Chananya Pinto, shlita**

Spiritual Rectification

A man came to me, all shaken up. His wife had awoken in the night in a fright. In her sleep, she had felt a woman press her eyes very hard. She was extremely traumatized by this experience and asked what she was supposed to do.

I thought long and hard about this. Suddenly, I remembered reading about a similar incident the past Shabbat. A certain tzaddik was approached by people who complained that unknown figures had disturbed their sleep. The tzaddik asked whether these Jews had recently uprooted a tree, to which they answered yes. He then explained that the tree may have contained a *gilgul* of a previous *neshamah*. With the destruction of the tree, the *neshamah* was prevented from receiving its *tikkun*. It had now come to scare those responsible.

I told this story to the man who stood before me. I asked whether he or his wife had recently uprooted a tree. He answered yes, and added that recently, a few family members had met their demise.

I sank into thought, and then said, "Listen, I can't be sure, but it may be that the *neshamah* of one of your family members found refuge in that tree in order to find a *tikkun*. By chopping down the tree, you caused that *neshamah* untold pain. This is why it came to disturb your wife."

I advised the man and his wife to make a *tikkun* for this *neshamah* according to a method prescribed in a sefer. I hoped that this would lay the matter to rest.

I have no idea whether or not he did as I said. But sadly, I heard that a few days later, one of his family members fell asleep with a lit cigarette in his hand. The cigarette fell upon the blanket and ignited it, causing a terrible fire, in which the smoker died.



FROM THE TREASURY

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David
Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

The Correct Path to Spiritual Growth

The mitzvah of *shemittah* was chosen to represent the other *mitzvot*, since it is a mitzvah that is difficult to fulfill and demands great self-sacrifice. Fulfilling this mitzvah is a way of paving a path for oneself to fulfill the other *mitzvot*, since it is so great and powerful that it can be used as the foundation for all the other *mitzvot*. This is because inherent in the mitzvah of *shemittah* is self-submission; one must permit whoever wishes to enter his field undeterred and partake of his produce. Until now this field was the owner's source of income but now his entire yield is free for all. Additionally, through this mitzvah he merits doing good for others. With this he merits fulfilling the mitzvah "You shall love your fellow as yourself" which is a great principle for the entire Torah.

That is why this mitzvah is the foundation and path for all the other *mitzvot*. If a person seizes this mitzvah and performs it properly, he fulfills the words of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai who said, "Go out and discern which is the proper way to which a man should cling," through which he merits elevating himself greatly and so paves a path for himself to fulfill the other *mitzvot*.

From this we learn the opposite as well; if man does not establish a proper path for himself and instead lives his life without thought and calculation, his descent and deterioration from the correct way of life is not far off.

When a person sits and studies Torah without interruption and keeps going even though his phone is vibrating in his pocket or other matters compete with his attention, he is demonstrating self-sacrifice, which is the way a Kohen Gadol conducts himself. This is also the case when a person gets up in the morning with alacrity to serve Hashem and does not listen to his evil inclination which tempts him to continue sleeping. This too is a form of self-sacrifice and is comparable to the behavior of a Kohen Gadol, since he overcame his personal desires for Hashem's sake. With this, one merits establishing the correct path for spiritual growth and for the service of Hashem.



PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

Hashem Repays in Place of the Poor

"Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase" (Vayikra 25:37).

Shlomo Hamelech said in *Mishlei*: "One who is gracious to the poor has lent to Hashem, and He will pay him his reward" (19:17). This implies that if one is gracious to the poor by giving him charity, it is considered as if he has "lent" to Hashem and not only will He repay the loan, He will also reward him for his good will. As it says, "Test Me if you will with this [in this matter of giving charity] says Hashem Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end" (*Malachi* 3:10).

The question is, since Hashem fulfills the entire Torah, repaying this act of charity with endless blessing seems to be "transgressing" the prohibition of paying back with *ribit* (interest). Why is this permitted? Rabbi Baruch Yerushalmi, *zt"l*, answers this question in his *sefer Baruch Mibanim*. The verse itself reconciles this question. We are told "Do not give him your money for interest, and do not give your food for increase." Rather you should lend to the poor without interest, and then this act will be considered a charitable act for which Hashem promises, "I will pour out upon you blessing without end."

If you query how Hashem can "transgress" this prohibition of *ribit*, the verse answers that the intention of "One who is gracious to the poor has lent to Hashem," is not that one who lends to the poor is considered as if he lent to Hashem, Hashem is not the "borrower" who may not return the loan with interest. Rather, only in terms of Hashem being the One who will repay is it considered as if one lent to Hashem. And since the Torah only forbids interest that is paid by the borrower to the lender, if so Hashem can reward the lender without any *ribit* concerns.

The end of the verse alludes to this explanation, as it says, "I am Hashem your G-d." I am Hashem, faithful to pay reward, and since I pay in place of the poor man, this is not considered *ribit*, for *ribit* is a transaction between the borrower and the lender.

Mentioning the Avot Rescinds the Claim

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember" (Vayikra 26:42).

The *sefer Matza Chaim* explains the reason why the Avot are mentioned in this section which contains the curses. Chazal tell us (*Sanhedrin* 38a) that the reason why Adam Harishon was created on his own is that had two people been created, the righteous would say: "We are righteous, the sons of a righteous one, and we do not have to distance ourselves from sin for we will not stumble," while the wicked would say: "We are wicked ones, sons of a wicked one, and we cannot repent since it will not help us for we are descendants of a wicked person." Therefore, Hashem created Adam alone so as to reject these claims.

Additionally, the wicked son of a tzaddik will not have any claim at all, since if his father was righteous, he too could have chosen to be righteous.

Therefore, mentioning the Avot is a way of intensifying the rebuke. Had your forefathers been wicked, then the *yetzer hara* could have come with a false claim that you cannot repent, but since the verse mentions the Avot who were righteous, it invalidates this false claim.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

The Power Of Torah



Small Change is Detectable

On the verse in this *parsha* “If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them,” Rashi famously writes: “If you will follow My decrees,” refers to “Engage in intensive Torah study.”

Chazal tell us that when Rabbi Akiva was still an ignoramus, he passed by a fountain and noticed a stone through which water had bored out a hole. Rabbi Akiva asked, “What is this? How can water create a hole in stone?” They replied, “Akiva, do you not know that water flowing over a stone erodes it?”

The question is asked, how could it be that Akiva did not know that water can make a hole in stone? And what did their answer clarify?

Let us take careful note of the wonderful words of the Maggid, Rabbi Shalom Schwadron, *zt”l*, who sheds light on the matter:

Rabbi Akiva pondered this natural phenomena deeply and contemplated, how *does* water create a hole? After all, the first drop that falls on the stone certainly does not drill a hole and seemingly makes no impression at all. If the first drop does nothing, then the second drop, which is like the first, also does not make any impression. If the second drop has no effect, then the third drop is also considered like the first, and even the hundredth or thousandth drop can be considered like the first. This being the case, how come we eventually see a hole?

They told him, this is not the case. The resulting hole proves that the first drop also made some impression in the stone; granted it is hidden from the eye, but something it does! The imprint may be as small as a billionth, but it is there.

When they built the *beit kneset* in Sha’arei Chessed, Harav Schwadron relates, the *gabbai* asked the architect to construct the floor of the women’s section without pillars underneath, so they would be able to use the underground level for praying. The architect agreed. In those days it was most uncommon to erect such a large building without pillars. Therefore, when the work was finished, the *gabbai* was apprehensive and asked the contractor, “How can you guarantee that the ceiling will not collapse over the years? Maybe in another thirty years it will cave in?”

The architect answered: “You don’t have to worry. Look at this.” He took out a special, small device and showed it to him. “I will attach it to the ceiling, the underside of the floor of the women’s section. If over the next hundred years, the floor that we constructed will sink even a tiny bit, this machine will detect it now. Do you understand what this means? Now, today, the machine can pick up a very minute reaction. It may be only the slightest of the slightest impression, but this change is detectable.”

A person goes to study Torah and at the end of the *shiur* thinks to himself, “**The Torah made no impression on me, I studied yet remained the same.**” **The truth is that this is *not* so. You are not the same; some impression has been made on you!**

This is the great proclamation being made at the beginning of Parshat Bechukotai. “If you will follow My decrees – engage in intensive Torah study!” One is obligated to toil in Torah, for this is the gift that is bestowed upon us, with which we merit both this world and the Next.

The Power of Torah Can Change a Person’s Nature

The Gemara (*Baba Basra* 16a) says that Iyov wished to exempt the entire world from judgement. What did he say? “Master of the world, You created the ox with split hooves, You created the donkey with closed hooves, You created the righteous, You created the wicked, You created Gan Eden for the righteous, Gehinom for the wicked. Who can do anything different than what You decree?”

In this Chazal lies a great foundation for life. What was Iyov’s message?

Iyov, the *tzaddik*, was a great philosopher. He looked around the entire world and noticed that most people die as they were born. For example, a person who was born hot-tempered, from the day of his birth until the day he dies, treads on the same path. He was born as a young, hot-tempered baby and dies as an aged, hot-tempered elderly man.

With a sharp, discerning eye one can notice the implication of certain hand and leg movements made by a baby while still in the

cradle. This little one is a hot-tempered baby! The child grows up and goes to kindergarten. The teacher hands him a toy, he holds the doll or ball in his hand ... whoever dares approach him is awarded with a kick ... everything belongs to him! Nu, he grows a little older, goes to school ... whoever touches his pen, woe to him!

“He got up on the left side” onlookers say to themselves, as if to say, we don’t know why, that’s how he is. He lives in the same fashion as he was born, and in that fashion he passes away from the world: angry, angry, angry, until the very last minute. Even as he lies on his death bed he is angry ... with the Angel of Death.

If so, says Iyov, if man cannot change his nature, he is no different than an animal. Can an ox, for example, one clear day decide to become a donkey? No! Can a donkey become an ox? No. “You created an ox with split hooves,” this is a sign of purity. “You created a donkey with closed hooves,” this is a sign of impurity. In the same way, “You created the righteous, You created the wicked.” You created people who by nature are good, and conversely, those who by nature are evil, they cannot change.

What did Iyov’s friends answer him?

They said, “So too, you have undermined awe” meaning, if it is as you say, why did Hashem command man to have fear of G-d if it does not help? The Gemara continues, “**Hashem said, I created the evil inclination but I created the Torah as an antidote**” –for if a person studies Torah it will change his nature.

Rabbi Simcha Zissel, a *talmid* of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, stresses and explains: Their answer is correct but occurs only with the acquisition of Torah! But without Torah, Iyov is correct, for in the absence of Torah it is impossible to change one’s nature. We see this in the world; the majority of people do not study Torah and so cannot change their nature. A person can study biography and geography, zoology and psychology, any profession at all, yet his character remains unchanged – as he was born so he will die.

Torah is the only “vocation” that indeed refines man.

cont. from p. 1 >>>

Since this mitzvah is very difficult to observe and it is possible that maybe, G-d forbid, a person might be negligent in its fulfillment, therefore, the Torah gave special importance to this mitzvah by putting it adjacent to Har

Sinai. This serves to awaken our nation to be particularly cautious regarding the mitzvah of *shemittah* – all its details, particulars, and laws. It is a decree from Hashem and one does not have permission to ponder it.

However, we must extrapolate that just as this mitzvah was given on Sinai, so too the rest of the *mitzvot* in their entirety were given on Sinai, and it is incumbent upon us to fulfill all of them.