



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

וידבר ה' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר:

The Torah introduces the mitzvah of shemita by prefacing that we heard its instruction at Har Sinai. Rashi asks what later became the Jewish version of "what does this have to do with the price of tea in China?" - mah inyan shemita eitzel har Sinai?. The answer, explains Rashi, that just as all the detailed halachos of shemita were taught at Har Sinai, so too was the rest of the Torah. An important lesson indeed. However, this does not really explain why the Torah singled out the mitzvah of shemita to teach this fundamental principle. It would seem that the Torah could have picked any number of detailed mitzvos to teach us this lesson. What, is so special about shemita?

HaRav Gedaliah Schorr zt"l explains as follows: Shemitah is the paradigm for emunah. Chazal tell us that the farmers who let their fields lay fallow are termed "giborei koach" - men of great strength. Clearly, they are not referred to as such because they are forced to do so because the Torah has banned working the field; one who is imprisoned is not termed a gibor for following his captor's instructions. Rather, the gevurah here lies in the farmer's attitude. For a farmer to see his land that he put so much into developing, lie hefker (ownerless), is a difficult thing. Naturally, he is overcome with desire to at least protest if not protect his land. Yet he puts aside his feelings for the sake of the Ribono shel Olam who commanded him otherwise. He is mevatel retzono mi'pnei ratzon Hashem - Completely ignoring his own desires, he focuses only



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

on the will of Hashem. This is why those farmers are called giborei koach - men of strength. This, explains HaRav Schorr, is a fundamental lesson for Torah study and observance thereof. On one level or another, Torah necessitates putting aside one's own interests for luxury and pleasure. It is an enticing world out there. Even that which is not a direct contradiction of Torah principles cannot coexist simultaneously with diligence and total devotion to Torah and mitzvos. Dedicating oneself to pursuit of olam ha'zeh precludes complete dedication to spiritual pursuits. When we suppress our drives for physicality, this is true gevurah. Indeed, Chazal (pirkei Avos) define strength in these terms, and while the farmers get to show their strength once every 7 years, every Jew has a daily opportunity to absorb this lesson of shemitah as he approaches Har Sinai every single day!

במספר שנים אחר היובל תקנה מעמיתך במספר שני תבואת ימכר לך:

In the Yovel year, all fields return to their original owners. All properties sold since the previous Yovel revert back to their sellers. The message, however subtle, is clear; ultimately, property is not bought, rather it is leased.

As if to emphasize this point, the Torah mandates that the seller has the right to 'redeem' his land at any point before the Yovel by returning the prorated purchase price to the buyer (this figure is calculated by counting the years that



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

have already elapsed from the date of purchase). In short, fields in Eretz Yisroel are not sold but rather are leased until the Yovel.

One detail, however, seems to defy logic. The land cannot be redeemed within the first two years of the 'sale' even if both parties are in mutual agreement (imagine a store policy customer satisfaction or your money back but only after 30 days!).

HaRav Moshe Feinstein zt"l contends that the Torah wants to drive home the point that we are not ba'alim over our possessions. While we may view ourselves as owners of our property, we must bear in mind that everything belongs to Hashem, and it is only entrusted to us as He wills it and when He wills it. Thus, the Torah forbids the return of a sale within the first two years, something that is contrary to logical business sense. This lesson is not restricted to the real estate of Eretz Yisroel. It equally applies in chutz la'aretz, and to all of our belongings.

שבת ושמיטה לה'

Out of all the mitzvos of the Torah, only with regards to two of them - Shabbos and shemita - are we commanded that they should be done "for Hashem". HaRav Yitzchok Sorotzkin shlit"a posits that the nature of these two mitzvos differ from all others in that one must observe them with the purest of



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

intentions. To illustrate, R' Yitzchok cites Chazal who say that even someone who gives money to tzedaka so that his ill child should be cured, has fulfilled the mitzvah of tzedaka on a high level. This is true of all other mitzvos and one who eats matza because he enjoys it, for example, fulfills the mitzva nonetheless. Mitzvos done with the purest of intentions are definitely on a higher level, but not an integral requirement. Only Shabbos and shemita must be observed without ulterior motives. Why?

We would like to suggest the following approach: Shabbos is not a list of restrictions of what we cannot do. It is also not an obligation to make kidush and eat three meals. Rather, it is an opportunity to connect with Hashem yisborach. The halachos of the day is a vehicle to achieve this relationship. Once a week we close our businesses and subsist from all worldly pursuits in an attempt to strengthen the bond to our Creator. This does not mean that one should seclude himself in a room for twenty-five hours and talk to the Ribono shel Olam, depriving himself of the pleasures of this world. This approach is actually very much not a Jewish way of thinking. Hashem actually commands us to fulfill His will by enjoying Shabbos food and relaxation, using the opportunity to develop the relationships with our families. This is how we connect with Him, but if we don't realize that this is the goal and instead focus on the physical enjoyments, we have lost out on the opportunity that Shabbos presents.

Shemita, is one long Shabbos. For an agricultural society to give up working the land for an entire year requires tremendous emunah. This is true,



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

but beyond realizing that Hashem is in control, the shemita year presents us with an opportunity to immerse

ourselves in more spiritual pursuits. If one fails to realize this, he has demoted the shemita year into no more than a sabbatical vacation taken from work and has lost the opportunity to connect to Hashem.

אל תקח מאתו נשך וכו':

Chazal tell us that one who charges his friend interest will not merit to be resurrected during techiyas ha'meisim. The K'sav Sofer explains as follows: Chazal tell us that a poor person is considered "dead". When the Torah tells us to lend him money, it says "v'chei achica imach"; give life to your brother... The message is clear: You have the ability to give him life, by offering him a loan. Taking such a tremendous opportunity and using it instead for his own financial gain only aggravates his situation and is tantamount to murder. Someone who can do that doesn't deserve to be a part of techiyas ha'meisim.

We would like to extend this one step further. Poverty is not limited to lack of funds. Anyone who is downtrodden or going through a difficult situation is in a sense close to death. Anything others can do to alleviate his situation is an opportunity to give him life. Often a nice comment or even a smile is enough to give this individual life. This is funding we all can offer.



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

אל תקח מאתו נשך וכו':

Chazal have some very harsh things to say regarding one who lends his fellow Jew money and charges him interest. (See for example Bava Metziah 61b where the Gemara categorizes such an action as being akin to murder.) While the actions of someone who withholds a loan are certainly far from noble and are furthermore forbidden, Chazal's reaction seems rather extreme.

HaRav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l understands that a lender's actions represent a distorted approach to mitzvos in general: Ultimately, we strive to do mitzvos l'sheim shomayim. Since for most people, altruism is not a natural tendency, Chazal recommend that we do mitzvos even if we have other (but not sinister) motives. The hope is that by engaging in performing mitzvos sheh lo lishmah, even if not for the most lofty reasons, eventually we will come to the level of doing mitzvos l'sheim shomayim.

Naturally, our ulterior motives include others' perception of us and honor we may receive. This is natural and part of our lifelong avodah is overcoming this. A person who charges interest however, has taken a pure mitzvah of chesed and transformed it into something for his own personal benefit. Indeed, lending money to someone in need is one of the greater forms of tzedaka. By charging ribis, the lender has put his own interests first.

Perhaps with this we can understand why Chazal compare charging ribis to murder. The Gemara (Berachos 17a) says that one who does mitzvos sheh lo



# Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת ב ה ר

lishmah would be better off had he not been born. The Rishonim explain that this only refers to one who does so for negative intentions (and not one whose intention falls short of altruism). It would seem that this statement in the Gemara applies to the one who charges interest and it is the "murder" of himself for which he is liable. This is indeed implied by the words of the navi which the Gemara cites as its source: (Yechezkel 18:13) "He gave on interest, and interest he charged, live he shall not..."