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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מוריננו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת בהר-בחוקתי

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבַתָּה הָאָרֶץ שְׁבֹת לַיהוָה. (ויקרא כה, ב)

When you come into the Land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem. (Vayikra 25:2)

This week's *Sidrah* begins with the *mitzvah* of Shemittah. For six years, a person may sow and harvest their fields, but in the seventh year, they must completely abstain from all agricultural work. The Torah promises that when the nation adheres to these laws, they will be rewarded with security in Eretz Yisroel, where the land will provide abundant food for everyone.

The Meforshim provide various reasons for the *mitzvah* of allowing the land to lie fallow during Shemittah. One reason is that this practice helps the soil to replenish itself, resulting in a greater yield in the following years. However, the Kli Yakar raises several objections to this explanation. First, he questions why the Torah describes the seventh year as *שְׁבֹת לַיהוָה*, a *Sabbath rest for Hashem*, when it would be more fitting to describe it as *שְׁבֹת לָאָרֶץ*? Additionally, if Hashem's sole purpose for this *mitzvah* was to bless the land, why wouldn't He have simply promised abundance without requiring the land to rest?

Moreover, the punishment for failing to observe Shemittah is *גלות*, and the *posuk* states: *אֲז תִרְצָה אֶת הָאָרֶץ אֲתָּה שְׁבֹתָתֶיהָ כָּל יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיכֶם*, *then the land will be appeased for its sabbaticals during all the years of its desolation, while you are in the land of your foes (26:34)*. This raises the question: what purpose does it serve for the land to lie idle if there is no one living on or cultivating it?

Rather, the Kli Yakar explains, the purpose of this commandment is to instil in everyone the understanding that Hashem is the primary force in the universe, rather than the laws of nature. Hashem was concerned that when Klal Yisroel settled in the land and began to cultivate it, they might forget Him and start relying solely on their physical strength and the land for their needs. Therefore, Klal Yisroel are commanded to leave their fields unguarded and untended for a year, which serves as a demonstration that Hashem is the source of all blessings. Additionally, in contrast to the laws of nature, the sixth year is meant to produce an exceptionally bountiful harvest, providing sustenance for three years. This serves as a true symbol of Hashem's orchestration of goodness.

Accordingly, the punishment for not observing Shemittah is exile. When an individual fails to recognise that the land does not truly belong to them, it will be taken away as a form of atonement. This harsh experience serves to emphasise the fundamental lesson that Hashem is the true owner of the land and has the authority to manage it as He sees fit.

This lesson of placing one's trust in Hashem and not relying on one's own resources is emphasised multiple times in the *Sidrah*. Concerning the laws of ancestral fields, the Torah specifies that such land can only be sold until the Yovel year and not permanently. The Kli Yakar highlights that this directive reinforces the lesson that we are not the true owners of the land; rather, we are visitors in Hashem's world, bound to His commands.

Additionally, the Kli Yakar explains that teaching *bitachon* in Hashem is also the reasoning behind the prohibition of charging *ribbis* (interest) on loans to fellow Yidden. In most business ventures, there is uncertainty about the outcome, which naturally leads individuals to rely on Hashem for success. However, in the case of loans with interest, a person may fall into a false sense of security. Since no additional work is required after setting up the loan and profits seem guaranteed, there is a risk that the individual will forget about Hashem and not daven for ongoing assistance. Therefore, the Torah prohibits interest from being charged between Yidden. (This concern does not extend to loans from non-Jews, as there remains a real risk that the borrower may shirk responsibility and default on the loan – an issue that does not apply to a Yid, who is always held accountable before the Beis Din.)

In essence, the concept of *bitachon* emphasises that this world serves merely as a bridge to the next. True life is achieved when a person shifts their focus from seeking material wealth to dedicating themselves to spiritual growth and fulfilling the will of Hashem.

In line with the above lesson, the Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* references an insight from R' Leib *zatzal* to clarify a commonly misunderstood Mishnah (*Pirkei Avos* 6:4). The Mishnah states: פת תאכל, ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן, וחסה צער תהיה, ובתורה אתה עמל *This is the way of Torah; you shall eat bread with salt, drink measured amounts of water, sleep on the ground, live a life of hardship, and toil in Torah.* At first glance, the Mishnah seems to imply that living a Torah life involves abstaining from all physical comforts and enduring a painful existence. R' Leib questions this interpretation, noting that the Gemara (*Nedarim* 10a) refers to the Nazir as a sinner for self-inflicting pain. While the Torah does not encourage indulgence in physical pleasures, it does advocate for moderate material benefits. This raises the question: how does the teaching of the Mishnah align with the Gemara?

R' Leib clarifies this by examining the phrasing in the Mishnah. When it discusses the “ideal” food, drink, and lifestyle, the Mishnah uses the future tense. However, it describes the toil of Torah in the present tense. What accounts for this difference? R' Leib explains that this distinction reveals the answer. The Mishnah is not demanding that a person live a life of self-flagellation and hardship. Instead, it addresses someone who is not currently in a difficult situation but is concerned about their financial future. They fear that if they dedicate themselves to the study of Torah without engaging in commerce, they may end up living in hardship, relying on only the basic necessities. To such a person, the Mishnah advises: *עמל אתה עמל*, *toil in Torah now*, and do not let future worries restrict your spiritual growth.

He concludes that the concerns of this individual are unfounded. Anyone who truly dedicates themselves to Torah will be assured of the teaching: *כל המקיים את התורה מעני, סופו לקיימה מעשר*, *Whoever fulfils the Torah in poverty will in the end fulfil it in wealth (Pirkei Avos 4:9).* A person should not seek guarantees that their material needs will be met comfortably. Instead, trusting in Hashem is essential for a life rooted in Torah.

Let's reflect on the lessons from this week's *Sidrah*: Hashem is the true source of prosperity. By striving to understand that this world does not belong to us, we can place our trust in Hashem and focus on what truly matters – spiritual growth.

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