



“What will we eat in the seventh year?!”

The Magnificent Lesson Learned from Working the Fields and Vineyards: Man Sows in the Depths of the Earth and Believes in the Eternal One

In this week’s parsha, parshas Behar, it behooves us to explore the mitzvah of shemithah (Vayikra 25, 20): **“וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית, הן לא נזרע ולא נאסוף את תבואתנו, וצויתני את ברכתי לכם”**—If you will ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year, for, behold, we will not sow and we will not gather our crop?” I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years.

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to the well-known explanation of the holy Noam Elimelech. He cites his holy brother, Rabbi Zusha, zy”a, who wonders why the Torah elaborates here with the question: **“What will we eat in the seventh year?”** Usually, the Torah opts for brevity; it would have sufficed to merely say: **“I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year.”** Then, the question of what they would eat in the seventh year would have been unnecessary. Here is Rabbi Zusha’s answer:

It appears that when the Blessed One created the world, He created benevolently conduits to provide abundantly for human beings’ needs. The abundance was designed never to cease. Yet, when man declines spiritually and does not trust the Creator, blessed is He . . . with those impure thoughts, that man creates a defect, chalilah, in the heavenly realms; the power of the heavenly family is diminished, G-d help us, and the delivery of the bounty is interrupted. Then, the blessed One must ordain once again for the bounty to proceed as it did from the beginning of creation.

This is the implication of the question: **“If you will ask.”** The Torah is teaching mankind the ways of Hashem. A person should have complete trust in his G-d and should

not question what he will eat. For, when his trust wavers, chalilah, prompting him ask what he will eat, he creates a defect, chalilah, in the delivery of the bounty. Thus, he bothers the Almighty to ordain the matter anew. “If you will ask” means that if you think this way, then you will cause Me to do the following: **“I will ordain My blessing for you.”** Rather, do not behave this way; trust Hashem with all of your heart. Then, the bounty will be delivered without any interruption; nothing will ever be lacking.

Emunah Is the Conduit that Keeps the Bounty Flowing from Above

It appears that we can expand on his sacred notion by introducing what the Ohev Yisrael presents in the name of great Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Zlotshov, zy”a:

The term “emunah” has two meanings. Firstly, it simply means believing with certainty that something will happen. Additionally, we can suggest that “emunah” derives from the language (Esther 2, 7): **“And he brought up (“omein”) Hadassah.”** This implies drawing forth and bringing up. For, emunah has this power; with emunah, this thing will be drawn from its source and delivered. That is, by believing in Hashem, the blessed One, and trusting Him with complete emunah regarding any matter, then the matter will be ordered and delivered fully.

Based on this introduction, Rabbi Michel, zy”a, interprets the following passuk in parshas Noach (Bereishis 7, 7): **“ויבוא נח”**—Noach . . . to the ark because of the waters of the mabul. Rashi comments: **“Because of**

the waters of the mabul”—this teaches us that even Noah lacked emunah; he was ambivalent as to whether or not the mabul would come; hence, he did not enter the ark until the water forced him to. Seemingly, this comment is very surprising. After all, HKB”H attests to Noah’s righteousness (ibid. 1): **”כי אותך ראיתי צדיק לפני בדור הזה”—because it is you that I have seen to be righteous before Me in this generation.** So, how can we suggest that Noah lacked emunah and did not believe fully what HKB”H had told him? This, however, is how Rabbi Michel explains the matter in the sacred words of the Ohev Yisrael:

Now, Noah certainly believed wholeheartedly everything that the Almighty had told him—with his entire heart and soul, without question, as was his good nature always. However, he was reluctant to believe this thing wholeheartedly, lest he would perhaps be the cause of the mabul. For, his unqualified emunah would bring on the mabul with certainty. Hence, he did not know what to do. This is what Rashi, z”l, meant when he commented that he (Noah) lacked faith, believed and didn’t believe. He meant that, in truth, he believed; he simply feared to believe completely that the Blessed One would bring the mabul, because perhaps he would then be the cause of it, as explained, until the water forced him to.

Thus, we learn an important principle from him. **Emunah** functions as a conduit facilitating the delivery of bounty from above. Therefore, when the emunah is defective or lacking, the delivery of the bounty is interrupted. For, without the proper conduit, the bounty cannot be delivered from above. This is the message of the passuk (Tehillim 32, 10): **”והבוטח בה’ חסד יסובבנו”—one who trusts in Hashem will be surrounded by chesed.** Due to his trust in Hashem, the bounty he believes in is delivered.

We can now comprehend Rabbi Zusha’s insight very well. HKB”H created the world such that it would not lack for anything; however, for the bounty to descend to the world without interruption, emunah is required; for, it is the conduit that enables the delivery of the bounty. Thus, if they wouldn’t have inquired: **”What will we eat in the seventh year,”** the bounty would have continued to descend from above, providing each individual all his needs. However, in the event they did inquire: **”What will we eat in the seventh year,”** it constituted a blatant defect in their emunah resulting in an interruption

of the bounty. Nevertheless, since they fulfill the mitzvah of shemita properly: **”I will ordain My blessing”—I will have to renew the delivery of the bounty.**

Those Who Trust Hashem Completely Also Ask ”What will we eat in the seventh year”

In truth, we know from our sacred sefarim that the entire Torah is applicable and pertinent to every Jew according to his “madreigah”—spiritual level. Everyone can find clues in the Torah as to how to better serve Hashem—every Jew according to his madreigah. Applying this concept, the Yismach Moshe (Lech Lecha) provides us with a wonderful interpretation of an expression found frequently in the Gemara (Berachos 31b, Yevamos 71a, Kesubos 67a): **”דברה תורה כלשון בני אדם”—the holy Torah employs common, everyday parlance; it speaks to every person in keeping with his spiritual level. The Torah was given to all of Yisrael, regardless of an individual’s madreigah. Thus, it employs language that speaks to each and every individual, regardless of his madreigah. This is the implication of the phrase ”כלשון בני אדם”. This is a fascinating concept and is a vital principle regarding Torah-study.**

Now, with this concept in mind, how does the inquiry—**”what will we eat in the seventh year”—**apply to proper, upstanding Jews, whose emunah in Hashem is not lacking in any way? We are speaking about Jews who do not doubt for a second that HKB”H will provide them with their parnasah, as He does for all living creatures. Clearly, the question **”what will we eat”** and the answer **”I will ordain My blessing”** also contain a valuable message for them apropos the service of Hashem.

Therefore, as it is the nature of the Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, we will suggest a practical interpretation of the profound question: **”מה נאכל בשנה השביעית”**. Let us refer to an elucidation in the Gemara (Shabbas 31a): **”מאי דכתיב והיה: אמונת עתיך חוסן ישועות חכמת ודעת וגו’, אמונת זה סדר זרעים, עתיך זה סדר מועד, חוסן זה סדר נשים, ישועות זה סדר נזיקין, חכמת זה סדר קדשים, ודעת זה סדר טהרות.”** The Gemara inquires: **What is the significance of that which is written (Yeshayah 33, 6): “The faith of your times will be the strength of your salvations, wisdom, and knowledge; fear of Hashem, that is man’s treasure”?** It answers that each of the six words: **אמונת עתיך חוסן ישועות חכמת ודעת**—alludes to one of the six orders of the Mishnah.

Tosafos explain: **The term “emunat” refers to the order of “Zeraim.”** For, emunah in Hashem and sowing seeds go hand in hand. Tosafos explain the reason for this phenomenon: **“מפרש”** “בירושלמי שמאמין בחי העולמים וזורע” **—the Yerushalmi explains that the person places his emunah in G-d (the Eternal One) and plants (sows seeds).** It is worth noting that this quote does not appear in our versions of the Talmud Yerushalmi; however, it does appear in the Midrash as follows (Bamidbar Rabbah 13, 15): **“סדר זרעים שאדם מאמין בחייו של עולם וזורע”.**

In truth, the commentaries find Tosafos’s comment difficult to comprehend. Does only a true believer in G-d sow seeds? Even non-believers and heretics sow seeds in the ground. For, they know that that is how nature works; seeds are planted in the ground and they grow.

Planting in the Depths of the Earth Strengthens One’s Emunah in Hashem

Let us begin with the simple, straightforward explanation. In truth, even the goyim who do not believe in Hashem will not believe in him even after they plant things in the ground. Here, however, we are talking about Jews who believe fully in Hashem with “emunah sheleimah.” They are besieged by the yetzer hara like everyone else. So, when they are engaged in matters of Olam HaZeh, the yetzer tries to make them forget Hashem’s presence and influence, and attribute their success to their own efforts and initiative. The Torah cautions us regarding this phenomenon in parshas Eikev (Devarim 8, 11):

“השמר לך פן תשכח את ה’ אלקיך, פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת, ובקרך וצאנך ירביון וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה, ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה’ אלקיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים, ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה’ אלקיך כי הוא הגותן לך כח לעשות חיל”.

Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His commandments, . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase—and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, you G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery, . . . And you may say in your heart, “My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!” Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.

Thus, we have explicit proof that the Torah is not cautioning us here about simple emunah in Hashem. For, every Jew who believes in Hashem and His Torah believes with “emunah sheleimah.” The caution here relates to man’s handiwork. When a person does something with his own hands and experiences great success—amassing great wealth and property, luxurious houses, cattle and flocks—a great danger arises. The more he succeeds through his own handiwork, the greater the likelihood that the yetzer hara will infect him with the misguided, false belief: **“כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה”—My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!**

This then is how to understand Chazal’s statement: **“אמונת זה”** “סדר עולמים שמאמין בחי עולמים וזורע”. From the moment a person sows seeds in the earth and covers them up with dirt, he can no longer observe the process taking place beneath the ground. First, the seeds decay; then, they form roots that extend outwards and begin to grow. The entire process depends on the goodwill and favor of the Creator above Whom he strongly believes in. He prays to Him to deliver rain at the proper, most opportune time; he prays that the seeds will yield healthy, abundant produce; he prays that they will not be affected by some plague or pests that can ruin them very easily; he prays that they will not be damaged by inclement weather conditions.

So, when tens of thousands of seeds are spread out across a man’s field, in the depths of the earth, and must develop like a fetus in its mother’s womb before they reveal themselves to the outside world, there is no danger that a Jew with “emunah sheleimah” in Hashem will fall prey to the yetzer’s persuasive, subversive argument of: **“כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה”**. For, under those circumstances, it is impossible to forget even for a moment how much he depends on heavenly goodwill and supervision.

In fact, I have heard many farmers, who are “ba’alei teshuvah,” who have fields and vineyards, describe how they grew closer to Hashem. After plowing and planting seeds in the ground, they felt powerless to ensure the success and yield of their produce. They could not avoid raising their eyes toward the heavens and entreating HKB”H, the Master of the Universe, to send the rains at the proper time. In this manner, their emunah in Hashem grew and became stronger, because they realized just how much they relied on His goodwill and supervision.

Berachah Is Only Found in Something that is Hidden from the Eye

With this in mind, we can readily comprehend the teaching in the Gemara (Ta'anis 8a): "אמר רבי יצחק אין הברכה מצויה אלא בדבר יצו ה' אתך את הברכה באסמיק. תנא הסמוי מן העין, שנאמר (דברים כח-ה) יצו ה' אתך את הברכה באסמיק. תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל אין הברכה מצויה אלא בדבר שאין העין שולטת בו. שנאמר Rabbi Yitzchak said: **Berachah is not found except in something hidden from the eye, as it states (Devarim 28, 8): "Hashem will order the berachah to be with you in your granaries." It was taught in a Baraisa of the academy of Rabbi Yishmael: Berachah is not found except in something that is not visible to the eye, as it states: "Hashem will order the berachah to be with you in your granaries."**

Let us explain based on our current discussion. When a person's possessions are not visible, it is easier to overcome the yetzer of "כוחי ועוצם ידי"—and avoid attributing one's success to one's own efforts and abilities. In this situation, his emunah in Hashem, which is an auspicious portent for berachah, can grow. As we have learned from the great Rabbi of Zlotshov, zy"א, "emunah" means drawing forth. However, when a person's property and possessions are always visible, it is extremely difficult to overcome the yetzer that opposes emunah. Therefore, berachah is not present.

This is why the Gemara cites as proof the passuk: "יצו ה' אתך את הברכה באסמיק". For, an "אסם" is a granary, a place where grain and produce are stored. As long as the seeds were in the depths of the earth, the yetzer of "כוחי ועוצם ידי" did not pose a significant threat; however, when the produce became visible above ground, and the farmer sees the bountiful yield with his own eyes, he is liable to fall prey to the malevolent yetzer of "כוחי ועוצם ידי".

Therefore, it is advisable to move all of the grain or produce into a storage facility, so that it will be out of sight. This is the message conveyed by the passuk: "יצו ה' אתך את הברכה באסמיק". They deduced from this passuk that berachah only rests on something that is hidden from the eye. David HaMelech conveys this fact in the passuk (Tehillim 126, 5): "הזורעים בדמעה—ברנה יקצורו"—those who sow in tears will reap in joyous song. They sow in tears, knowing that their success depends totally on the Almighty; they beseech him to provide them with ample,

well-timed rain. Hence, they are assured that they will reap with joyous song, because their emunah will bring berachah to all of their handiwork.

The Cheit Eitz HaDa'as Stemmed from a Lack of Faith in the Eternal One

I was struck by a wonderful idea. We can apply this knowledge to explain the "cheit Eitz-HaDa'as." As a result of the cheit, HKB"H imposed the penalty of death upon Adam HaRishon and all of creation, in keeping with His caution (Bereishis 2, 17): "ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל ממנו כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות"—but from the Eitz HaDa'as Tov VaRa you shall not eat thereof; for on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die. Additionally, HKB"H punished him with regards to his parnasah; he would have to toil and work the land (ibid. 3, 17):

"ולאדם אמר כי שמעת לקול אשתך ותאכל מן העץ אשר צויתך לאמר לא תאכל ממנו, ארורה האדמה בעבורך בעצבון תאכלנה כל ימי חיך, וקוץ ודרדר תצמיח לך ואכלת את עשב השדה, בזעת אפך תאכל לחם עד שובך אל האדמה כי ממנה לקחת כי עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב".

To Adam He said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree about which I commanded you saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' accursed is the ground because of you; through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread. For you are dust, and to dust shall your return."

Now, we have a fundamental principle that that the Creator, blessed is He, is the source of good and does not treat His creations cruelly. So, when mankind is subjected to suffering it serves a beneficial purpose—such as alerting him to improve his ways. This concept is articulated in the following passuk (Devarim 8, 5): "וידעת עם לבבך כי כאשר ייסר איש את בנו ה' אלקיך—מיסרך—you should know in your heart that just as a father will chastise his son, so Hashem, your G-d, chastises you. With this in mind, we must endeavor to explain how the punishment for the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as" was consistent with the principle of "midah k'neged midah"—measure for measure.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on that which is written prior to the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as" (Bereishis 2, 15): "ויקח Hashem G-d את האדם ויניחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה"—

the man and placed him in Gan Eden to work it and to guard it. Chazal explain in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 12):

“ויניחהו בגן עדן לעבדה ולשמרה, ומה עבודה היה בתוך הגן שאמר לעבדה ולשמרה, שמא תאמר יש מלאכה בגן עדן, שיזמור לכרמים, ולחרוש ולשדד את האדמה, או לעמר או לקצור, והלא כל האילנות נצמחין מאליהן. שמא תאמר יש מלאכה בגן עדן להשקות את הגן, והלא נהר מושך ויוצא מעדן, שנאמר (בראשית ב-י) ונהר יוצא מעדן [להשקות את הגן]. ומהו לעבדה ולשמרה, אלא לעסוק בדברי תורה ולשמור את דרך עץ החיים, ואין עץ חיים אלא תורה, שנאמר (משלי ג-יח) עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה.”

We learn from this Midrash that prior to the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as,” man was not required to work the fields or vineyards or tend to them; everything grew on its own without any effort from man. **“To work it” and “to guard it”** meant to occupy oneself with Torah-study and to preserve the ways of the Torah. Furthermore, the Gemara explains (Sanhedrin 59b): **“אדם הראשון—Adam HaRishon would recline in Gan Eden and the ministering angels would roast meat for him and strain wine for him.** Seeing as everything was prepared and ready for him, he did not have to exert any effort or pray to Hashem. Consequently, the condition of **“מאמין בחי העולמים וזורע”** was lacking.

Thus, we can suggest that this is why Adam and Chava were easy prey for the nachash hakadmoni—the serpent in Gan Eden. Their emunah in Hashem was challenged, and they fell victim to heresy, as indicated by the passuk (Bereishis 3, 4): **“ויאמר הנחש אל: האשה לא מות תמותון, כי יודע אלקים כי ביום אכלכם ממנו ונפקחו עיניכם והייתם.”** The nachash said to the woman, **“You will not surely die; for G-d knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like G-d, knowing good and bad.”** Rashi explains: **“כי יודע, כל אומן שונא את בני אומנתו, והייתם כאלקים, יוצרי עולמות”**—The nachash argued: **“Every craftsman hates others of his craft; G-d ate from the tree and created the world.** So, by eating from the tree, **you will be like G-d, fashioners of the world.”**

Consequently, HKB”H punished them accordingly to teach them a valuable lesson: **“Accursed is the ground because of you; through suffering shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread.”** It was imperative that they develop a keen sense of emunah in Hashem. They would no longer receive their nourishment without any effort on their part. It would

become necessary for man to plow, sow, and remove thorns and stones from the field. This would fortify their emunah in Hashem by fulfilling the condition of **“מאמין בחי העולמים וזורע”**.

In What Merit Will We Eat in the Seventh Year if We Don't Sow

We now have cause to rejoice. We can finally shed some light on the subject and explain the pesukim so that they apply even to those whose emunah is complete: **“וכי תאמרו מה נאכל”**—**“If you will ask, What will we eat in the seventh year, for, behold, we will not sow and we will not gather our crop?”** They understood that the tikun for the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as” required man to exert himself—to plant and have emunah in Hashem that his efforts would be productive. That was fine and well during the first six years of the cycle during which working the fields was permitted. During those years, man planted and demonstrated his emunah in the Eternal One. In the merit of his emunah, his labor was imbued with berachah.

But what of the seventh year? **“מה נאכל בשנה השביעית”**—**“What will we eat in the seventh year?”** They are asking: In what merit, will we draw and deserve berachah in the seventh year? **“For, behold, we will not sow and we will not gather our crop.”** That being the case, we will not qualify as **“מאמין בחי העולמים וזורע”**; hence, we will not have the segulah to draw the berachah from above. HKB”H responds to this inquiry with incredible advice: **“I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years.”**

Let us explain. As pointed out, we are discussing proper, kosher individuals who want to express their strong emunah in Hashem by sowing their seeds and relying on the Eternal One. Therefore, HKB”H assures them that their sixth-year plantings will yield enough produce for three years. Consequently, they will be required to triple their level of emunah in the sixth year. In the merit of that heightened emunah, they will be blessed with three years of berachah—the sixth year, the shemita year during which they are prohibited from working the fields, and the eighth year, during which there is no produce from the shemita year.

Let us add another insight based on the commentary of the Kli Yakar. He writes that the purpose of observing the shemita-

year is to instill in Yisrael the attribute of “bitachon”—trust—in Hashem. Here are his sacred words:

I say that the reason for this mitzvah is to instill in Yisrael the trait of emunah and bitachon in Hashem. HKB”H was concerned that when they came to the land, they would occupy themselves with working the land in the customary, natural way. When they would succeed, they would forget Hashem and abandon their trust in Him. They would think that their own efforts and the strength of their hands produced this success, and the world operates according to the laws of nature. They will think that the land is theirs, they are the owners and there is no one else. Therefore, Hashem removed them from the natural order entirely . .

Thus, Hashem said: The opposite will happen. During the sixth year, it will receive so much additional power prompting the statement: “I will ordain My blessing (for

you) in the sixth year, and it will yield a crop sufficient for the three years.” As a result of all these feats that I perform on your behalf, you will realize that the land is Mine. As a result, your eyes will be raised to Hashem, as was the case with the daily falling of the mahn; so that your eyes will always be directed toward Hashem, and you will always place your trust in Him . . . This is the correct and clear-cut reason, more so than what is mentioned in the commentaries regarding this subject.

Let us summarize. We have the planting in the sixth year with tremendous emunah in the Eternal One, believing that He will cause the field to yield enough to sustain them for three years. Additionally, we have the observance of the mitzvah of shemitah that fortifies and enhances one’s emunah and bitachon in Hashem. The overall result is stronger emunah in Hashem. This constitutes a magnificent tikun for the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as,” upon which the complete geulah depends—swiftly, in our times!

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