

# RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Behar-Bechukosai for your Shabbos Table

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## DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

### Stop Worrying

Parshas Behar begins with the *mitzva* of *shemita*, which forbids performing agricultural work during the seventh year. For an entire year, all farmers must leave their fields alone, refraining from plowing, planting, and large-scale harvesting.

The Torah anticipates the concern that people will have suspending all farming activity for entire year: *וכי תאמרו מה* – “And if you say: What will we eat during the seventh year, if we will not plant and not gather our grain?!” (25:20).

God responds that He will have the land produce extra food during the sixth year, to provide a surplus that will sustain the people: *וציויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית, ועשת את* (התבואה לשלוש השנים) (25:21).

Rav Elimelech of Lizhensk, in *Noam Elimelech*, cites his brother, Rav Zusha of Anipoli, as raising the question of why the Torah presents this promise in the form of a response to the people's question. Why did God not simply assure us that we will be cared for despite not planting during the *shemita* year? Why is this promise first prefaced with the question that the Torah anticipates people asking – *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*?

From the Torah's presentation, Rav Zusha noted, it appears as though this promise is made only in response to the people's question. If the people would not ask this question, then God would not send a special blessing providing extra produce during the sixth year. How is this possible? Why would God grant His special blessing only because the people worriedly ask, *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*?

Rav Zusha answered that Hashem created the world with “pipelines” through which His blessing descends into the world. Constantly, at all times, He is sending

us our sustenance, providing us with what we need. However, Rav Zusha explained, a deficiency in our *bitahon*, our trust in Hashem, interferes with this system. When we start worrying, when we are afraid that maybe we won't have what we need, it is as though we puncture holes in the pipes that bring us blessing, such that the blessing “leaks” from the pipes and thus cannot reach us.

When the people ask *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*, they damage the pipelines, so-to-speak. God, in His infinite mercy, announces, *וציויתי את ברכתי לכם* – that He will repair the damage so that His *beracha* can descend despite our deficient faith. If we hadn't asked this question, if our faith had been firm, and we hadn't entertained any doubts about our financial security during and after *shemita*, the pipelines would have continued functioning normally, and so there would have been no need for a special *beracha*. It is only because of our deficient faith, our unnecessary anxiety, that this blessing is necessary.

We have to stop worrying about our *parnasa*, and about what the future will bring. Of course, we need to be responsible and put in the work, fulfilling our duty of *hishtadlus*, investing effort and taking the initiative to secure a livelihood. Concomitantly, however, we must place our trust in Hashem, remembering that He is caring for us and providing our needs at all times. We don't ever need to ask *מה נאכל בשנה בשביעית*, worrying about how we will pay our bills. Instead, we should remain confident that Hashem is looking for out for us and ensure that we always have precisely what we are supposed to have.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

### Yir'as Shamayim

אל תיקח מאתו נשך ותרבית ויראת מאלוקיך (25:36).

The Torah forbids charging a fellow Jew interest on a loan. Certainly, there is nothing immoral about charging interest – after all, extending a loan denies the lender the opportunity to invest it and earn money until the loan is repaid. Indeed, it is entirely permissible to lend non-Jews on interest, and the Torah would of course not endorse such a practice if charging interest were considered unethical. The Torah forbids charging a fellow Jew interest because, as the *pasuk* concludes, *והי אחיך עמך* – “so that your brother shall live with you.” We are all brothers. When somebody’s brother needs help, he will extend a free loan. No decent person would charge his brother interest. We are to treat our fellow Jews as brothers, and so we may not charge them interest when lending them money.

Rashi, commenting on this *pasuk*, notes that the Torah here emphasizes, *ויראת מאלוקיך* – “and you shall fear your God.” In the context of this prohibition, the Torah found it necessary to urge us to have *yir'as Shamayim*, fear of Hashem. Rashi explains:

שדעתו של אדם נמשכת אחר הריבית וקשה לפרוש הימנו, ומורה לעצמו היתר בשביל מעותיו שהיו בטילות אצלו.

A person is prone to allow himself to lend money on interest because, as mentioned earlier, there is nothing inherently immoral about expecting something in return for the lost investment opportunities. The Torah therefore emphasizes *ויראת מאלוקיך* – that we must have *yir'as Shamayim*, and submit to Hashem’s will. Only this sense of fear and submission will lead us to yield to the Torah’s authority when we are instinctively driven to be *מורה היתר*, to find a justification for violating the Torah.

Rashi’s comments bring to mind a remark I heard made by a prominent rabbi at a rabbinic conference that I once attended. This rabbi said about a certain segment of Orthodox Jewry that they approach *halacha* in all situations as a *שעת הדחק* (extenuating circumstance). There is a halachic principle that *שעת הדחק כדיעבד דמי* – under extenuating circumstances, we can permit things which are normally acceptable only *בדיעבד*, after the fact. This rabbi felt that those in the specified demographic treat all situations as a *שעת הדחק* in this respect, always looking for loopholes and leniencies. He explained that they consider all *mitzva* observance difficult; in their minds, Shabbos observance is difficult, keeping kosher is difficult, the Yamim Tovim are difficult, *tznius* is difficult, and so on. Therefore, since from the outset they feel overburdened and inconvenienced, they are going to be always on the lookout for leniencies, for a basis to make an exception and allow things which really should not be allowed.

At the time, I was deeply offended by this remark.

Now, however, while I still cannot approve of the generalization, I agree with the observation that this attitude is too prevalent. Too many Jews are willing to be *מורה היתר*, to justify that which is forbidden, because they are looking for leniencies and excuses. Some people, for example, go and find on the internet a rabbi who says it’s ok, or come up with some rationalization, because they are on the lookout for leniencies. If we live with genuine *yir'as Shamayim*, then we are interested not in finding loopholes, but in doing the right thing, in fulfilling Hashem’s will. We are not *מורה היתר* for the sake of convenience, but rather listen to and accept what the Torah tells us, even when it is not convenient. We need to increase our *yir'as Shamayim* to ensure that we are not *מורה היתר*, allowing ourselves to do things which should not be done.

## DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

### The Land’s Prayer

Parshas Bechukosai features the *תוכחה*, the list of dreadful calamities that Hashem warns will befall *Am Yisrael* if they disobey His commands. This section ends on an encouraging note, assuring us that even if God is forced to exile us from *Eretz Yisrael* and subject us to oppression on account of our wrongdoing, ultimately, He will remember His covenant with the avos and will bring us back:

וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב, ואף את בריתי יצחק, ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכור, והארץ אזכור.

*I shall remember My covenant with Yaakov, as well as My covenant with Yitzchak, and I shall remember as well as My covenant with Avraham; and I shall remember the land. (26:42)*

The *Chasam Sofer* raises the question as to what Hashem means when He says that He will remember the land. We understand that He will remember the promises made to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and rescue us from exile on account of those assurances. But in what sense does God “remember” the land?

The *Chasam Sofer* offers a fascinating answer, explaining that Hashem here tells us that He will hear the land’s prayers. *Eretz Yisrael* itself weeps, as it were, when the Jewish Nation is in exile. It cries, “I am waiting for you, I am longing for you, I want you back here.” The connection between *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* is so strong that the land in a sense feels and is saddened by our absence. Not only are we incomplete without the land – the land is incomplete without us.

Whatever our reasons are for not living in Israel, *aliya* must always be a question of “when” and not a question of “if.” We must remember that we all belong there, and that even if we have valid reasons for living in the Diaspora, we are to hear the land’s cries and resolve to return when the right time comes.