

דרכים בפרשה בהר-בחוקותי

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In this week's parsha, we learn all about the *shmitah* year. For six years, we are told to work on our lands. We sow the fields, prune the vineyards, and gather in the produce. Some years yield better crops and some years worse. Then when we finally get a rhythm going, fully focused and perhaps consumed with what we are doing, we are told to stop and let it all go for a full year, only to start from scratch all over again. It probably doesn't help that during that year, we must tolerate others walking through our fields, taking whatever they would like, and acting as if they own the place. For some, this may be a daunting process, and yet, the Torah mandates this from all of us.

For those of us living in *chutz la'aretz*, this mitzvah will not seem that applicable, and we may even have trouble relating to it. Many of us may go as far as "buying in" to the mitzvah by helping to support farmers or even buying a small amount of land there. Not to minimize it in any way, but that is just another form of giving *tzeddaka* and doesn't necessarily convey the message of the mitzvah and how it may relate to us.

The Torah calls the year of *Shmitah* by the name, "Shabbos". Shabbos as we know it also carries similar aspects. ששת ימים -תעבד ועשית כל מלאכתך וביום השביעי שבת לה' אלוך. For six days we are told to do our work, getting everything done, and then, stopping on the seventh day. In both cases, the Torah states that the time off shall be a "Shabbos for HaShem". It would seem from here that the Torah is giving us an insight into what that time off is supposed to accomplish. Taking it a step further, if the Torah wants us to spend the day in this manner, it is entirely possible that the Torah understands that the nature of man is to draw away from HaShem during the week and therefore it is necessary to recalibrate over Shabbos.

Six years of working in a job fully focused, may cause one to forget that the sole purpose of existence is to connect with HaShem in all our actions. ואתם הדבקים בה' אלוכיכם חיים כלכם -היום. By doing so, one is truly living a life of purpose. So the Torah tells us to take a Sabbatical and remember why we are working.

Similarly, throughout the week, we work our jobs. The days of working 9-5 are long since gone for most, especially with technology in our pockets allowing us to bring our work with us everywhere we go. And then, Shabbos comes along, inviting us inside to spend time with HaShem. Shabbos brings with it a reprieve from the preceding six days; a chance to exhale, revive, reinvent and move forward feeling completely refreshed and getting back into the proper mindset. For all intents and purposes, Shabbos is a mini *shmita* that can be experienced by any *Yid*, wherever they are.

I once saw a decorative sign in a store that said, "Wash, dry, fold. Repeat". At times, life can feel that way, but it is not meant to. The Torah keeps telling us to take a break to remember *why* we do what we do.

There is another idea that I would like to mention. Throughout the week, our pace tends to be quick, running from place to place, barely stopping to catch a breath. In Parshas Vayigash, we find that Yosef told his brothers, ויאמר אליהם אל תרגזו בדרך, *Do not become agitated along the way (45:24)*. In one interpretation of the *possuk*, the *gemara* says "אל תפסיעו פסיעה גסה"

don't take large steps". Presumably, they were rushing to get home to Yaakov Avinu to bring him the good tidings that Yosef is alive. Yosef knew that they would want to go as fast as possible. Therefore, Yosef told them not to take such large steps, because large steps cause a loss of 1/500th of one's eyesight (*Masechta Taanis (10b)*).

When we are on the run, we tend to lack *yishuv hadaas*, peace of mind. Yosef was asking them why they judged him while on the road, without clarity. Should it not have been brought back to the *beis medrash* to be discussed at length, perhaps with Yaakov?

Furthermore, Yosef tells them that they "took large steps", meaning, they were hasty to judge him. Don't Chazal warn us that, "*hevai mesunim badin*," be patient when passing judgment? What happens when things are done too quickly? Hastiness can result in a lack of clarity.

Accordingly, when the *Gemara* says that large steps cause a loss of vision, this means that making quick decisions causes blurriness; a loss of the ability to see things clearly.

In truth, we all act as a judge when we see things happening. At times, when people act in certain ways, we may be quick to render a judgement, and at times, when questionable things happen to us, we may *chas v'shalom* be quick to pass judgment on HaShem. But if only we would wait patiently, we would see a different picture! *Hevai mesunim badin!*

For six days we work hard and at times even question the way things seem to be going. But is this assessment based on clarity, or perhaps in a rushed manner?

Interestingly, the *Gemara* in *Mesechta Brachos (43b)* tells us that the remedy for this loss of vision is the wine of Kiddush on Friday night. Rashi understands this to refer to the drinking of the Kiddush wine, but the Meiri and Maharsha explain that this refers to the effect that Shabbos has on a person. Perhaps the reasoning behind this remedy is that Shabbos is a time when "large steps" are forbidden. For most of us, Shabbos is the first time in the week that we have a chance to actually stop for a moment, look at ourselves, and contemplate the different happenings and occurrences. Suddenly, after the *menucha* of Shabbos hits us, we start to see a much clearer picture, and we understand things differently than the way we perceived them during the week.

On numerous occasions I have heard from colleagues that they envy the "Jewish Sabbath", because it forces everyone to stop and catch their breaths. When I ask them what stops them from taking a break, I always get more or less the same basic response- "you know, life happens at a million miles per minute, and once you are running the rat race you just can't stop".

For many people, 2020 was a year that will preferably be forgotten. But the truth is, as difficult as the lockdowns were, it was a great opportunity to spend as one big Shabbos reset button. We were all forced to stop what we were doing; to get down from that hamster wheel that goes in circles, around and around, ultimately leading to the middle of nowhere. The "Shabbos" of Corona offered each person, from the comfort of their very own home, a chance to actually "take a peek" in the mirror and try and remember why we were placed here and what the *tachlis* is.

Shemitah, Shabbos and any downtime for that matter is truly a gift which, if used wisely, one may experience the greatest gains possible that would otherwise not be available.

מרדכי אפפאל, Good Shabbos