

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Behar, 5782

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
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Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
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 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח"י
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Behar

WHEN-THEN

What are the people to eat during the year of Shemittah and the one that follows? During Shemittah, the sabbatical year, one may not sow, or reap, or gather. This question the Jewish people will surely ask. But it does not indicate a lack of faith. Rather, when they ask it, then the response will come from Above: I will command My blessing upon you. We ask the same question regarding Moshiach: when we are at the last stage of exile, when we have no strength to sow mitzvahs, how shall we sustain ourselves spiritually? G-d promises, I will command my blessing and bring the Redemption.

This week's Torah reading begins with the laws of Shemittah, the seventh or sabbatical year when the land lay fallow. During Shemittah, the sabbatical year, one may not sow, or reap, or gather.

This raises the question, what are the people to eat? The Torah apparently anticipates the question, for it states: "When you will ask, what shall we eat in the seventh year? We may not sow, nor gather in our increase. Then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth produce for the three years." That is, when G-d commands His blessing, the land will produce enough for the sixth, seventh and eighth years. The harvest will be sufficient for the normal crop, the year when the land lies fallow, and into the eighth year, until the new crop can be harvested.

Of course, this also alludes to Moshiach. As is well known, the "six years" refer to the six thousand years of the world, and the seventh or Shemittah year refers to the seven thousandth, or Sabbatical, millennium – the era of Moshiach. So the question,

“what shall we eat in the seventh year?” refers not just to the past, to the times of the first Two Temples, but to the future, the time of the Third Temple, as well.

The Rebbe points out that the passage is phrased in an unusual manner. It assumes that at some point the Jewish people will question G-d. The phrase reads, “When you will ask.” The question is not conditional; the emphasis is on **when**, not **if**. The Jewish people will surely ask, “What shall we eat in the seventh year?”

This seems to indicate a lack of faith. After all, if G-d has commanded us to observe a Sabbatical year, to let the land lie fallow every seventh year, surely G-d knows we still must eat. Our faith in G-d demands we assume that he will find a means to provide for our needs.

Also, the question has already been answered, even before it was asked! In the preceding verse, G-d promises that the land will yield its fruit and there will be enough to eat. The Torah states, “You shall perform My statutes and My ordinances you will observe and do them; and you will dwell in the land in safety. The land will yield her fruit and you will eat until satisfied and dwell securely on it. And when you will ask, what shall we eat in the seventh year . . .”

G-d has just promised that observance of the laws of Shemittah produces security and an abundant harvest, yet the Torah says, “When you will ask . . .” Clearly, the difficulty lies with the definitive **when**. That word assumes and guarantees the question will be asked. Yet the passage seems to indicate there’s no need to ask it, since G-d has already promised us and assured us what will happen: “I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth produce for three years.”

But why should there be a need to ask “what shall we eat in the seventh year” when we’ve just been told “The land will yield her fruit and you will eat until satisfied and dwell securely on it?”

We must conclude that when the Torah assures us a question **will** be asked, it also tells us **why** the question will be asked. That is, the grammatical construction of **When-Then**, of **When** you will ask, **Then** there will be such-and-such a response, indicates the nature and appropriateness of the question.

For example, the Torah uses the same construction elsewhere, in regard to redemption of the first born. It says, “When your son will ask, what is this?” and we are told to answer him in a certain way. Later, the Torah advises us regarding a different situation. There it says, “When your son will ask, what are these testimonies, statutes and ordinances?” There, too, we are to answer according to his motivation and mental capacity.

We see, therefore, that there are different types of questions, each with a different motivation. The grammatical construction of When-Then tells us the type of question and the nature of the response. That a particular question must and will be asked doesn’t necessarily indicate a lack of faith. Rather, it indicates the relationship the questioner has with G-d.

Let’s look at the verse in question with this in mind. It states: ““When you will ask, what shall we eat in the seventh year? We may not sow, nor gather in our increase.” The details – “We may not sow, nor gather in our increase” – may seem superfluous, but they’re not. They are part of the question. So, the question is not really about **what** we will eat, but **how** we will eat. (This is reminiscent of the wise son, one of the four sons discussed on Passover. He, too, asks about details – “When your son will ask, what are these testimonies, statutes and ordinances?” The details indicate that his question is not **if** we should observe the laws, nor even **what** laws should be observed, but rather, **how** should we observe them.)

In other words, since G-d has already promised that the land

will be fruitful and that there will be plenty to eat, we are only asking, how will that happen? What method will G-d use to provide us with our needs during the Shemittah year? Will it be natural or miraculous? Will it be manna, as in the desert? To this G-d answers that the land itself will produce enough for three years. The sixth year will be bountiful beyond measure, beyond nature, beyond reason.

G-d's statement that "I will command my blessing in the sixth year, and it will provide produce for three years" is not only a situation beyond nature, it's the opposite of nature. According to nature, the land becomes weaker each year. This fact is one of the reasons for Shemittah, to give the land a rest and allow it to renew itself. And precisely when the land is weakest does G-d promise it will produce three times as much! This is why the Jewish people will certainly ask, "What shall we eat" – because the answer goes beyond reason and logic.

The question applies not only to the past, to Shemittah during the years when the Temple stood, but to the future as well, to the times of Moshiach, that of the Third Temple. We are in the sixth year, the sixth millennium, that which precedes Moshiach. Since our sustenance in the era of Redemption depends on our actions now, what shall we eat? G-d has promised Redemption if we observe the mitzvos. "But we can neither sow, nor gather in our increase." We cannot even maintain the level of Torah and mitzvos of previous generations, much less increase it. How can we bring Moshiach? We are the weakest generation. The strength of our observance has decreased from generation to generation. The ability of Torah and mitzvos to sustain us seems depleted.

G-d answers **and promises** "I will command my blessing." Let the Jewish people perform the work of the sixth year, the mitzvos of the time of exile. Let them act with self-sacrifice and a devotion

beyond reason and logic. Then G-d will give a blessing from Above; that which is sowed in the sixth year will be blessed threefold. Regardless of the weakness of the land – of the generation – its efforts will bring about revelation after revelation. The produce of the 'sixth year' will provide the spiritual sustenance for the seventh – the era of Moshiach.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 27:183-190)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FATHER
Reb Tzvi Hersh ben Reb Shmuel ע"ה Goldstein
Passed away on 14 Iyar - Pesach Sheini, 5735

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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DEDICATED BY HIS CHILDREN שיחיו

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. Chana (Carrie) bas Reb Meir ע"ה Greenberg
Passed away on 9 Sivan, 5781

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