



THE GREAT EQUALIZER

The Torah tells us that when we come to the Land, “for six years we may work the fields and gather the crops, and on the seventh year, a complete rest there shall be for the Land, a Shabbat for G-d” (Vayikra 25:2-5).

What of the produce that grows naturally, on its own, during the seventh *shmitta* year? Rashi explains that although working the Land is forbidden during this year, we are permitted to eat from the fruits of the Land that grow on their own. However, one may not act as the landowner (of the land that is “his” during the other six years), rather, all should be equal, and have equal rights, to the produce of the seventh year.

The bounty of the Land during the seventh year is ownerless, and belongs to the landowner (who is not the landowner this year) and his workers, to animals, other citizens, paupers, and any who may desire to take from the fruits. In essence, the *shmitta* year reminds us that there is truly only One Owner, One Master, One Provider, and One Sustainer.

“The land and its fullness are G-d’s; the world and those who dwell therein” (Tehillim 24:1). For six years, man lives with the illusion that he is the owner and provider. Then he comes to the *shmitta* year – and his illusions are shattered, his pride is diminished, as he abruptly remembers that his land is not really his. For G-d is the Owner and Provider, and now those very fields belong to man, animal, servant, maidservant, rich and poor alike. Isn’t that the message of *Matan Torah* given to us on *Har Sinai*?

In the open vastness of the Wilderness of Sinai, at the foothills of one small mountain, on land in no man’s land, G-d betrothed *Knesset Yisrael* and gave us the Torah. For just as the Land ultimately belongs to all, so too, does the Torah belong to us all.

As we stood there, at the foothills of *Har Sinai*, on the cusp of spiritual freedom, ready to accept the Torah, G-d charged us with the task to be a holy nation to Him, to be a kingdom of priests, and to always remember that the whole earth is His.

For six days – and for six years – we may work the Land, till and sow the Land, plant and harvest the Land... But on the seventh day, and in the seventh year, we take a step back and remember: None of this is mine – it is all a *Shabbat laHashem* (Vayikra 25:2,4).

Reuven and Shimon came to Rav Chaim Volozhin (1749-1821) arguing over a piece of property each claimed belonged to them. After listening to both sides present their cases, Rav Chaim said, “Come, let us go to the field. I would like to see for myself the actual property in question to better understand your arguments.”

Reuven and Shimon were puzzled. What would looking at the property help, they wondered. Once there, Rav Chaim said, “Ok, Reuven, let me hear what you have to say.” Reuven re-told his side of the story. Rav Chaim then turned to Shimon and asked him to present his side of the story. After they had both presented their cases, Rav Chaim said, “Now let me hear what the field has to say.” As Reuven and Shimon looked on in astonishment, Rav Chaim Volozhin bent down

and put his ear near the ground to listen! When he stood up, Shimon was smiling and asked, “Nu, so what does the ground have to say?”

With a serious look, Rav Chaim replied, “The ground said, ‘This one claims that I belong to him for this reason, and that one claims that I belong to him for that reason. The truth is, in no time at all, they will both belong to me!’”

Lest we forget Who is in charge, it behooves us to step back, and, as the prophet tells us, “Lift your eyes to the heavens and see Who created this” (Yeshayahu 40:26).

For the beloved, unique, and Holy Land that is His, we give thanks; for the cooling, life-giving waters of Torah that is His, we give thanks; and for our very lives, and the bounty within and all around us, for all of this, we give thanks upon thanks.

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