

A Taste of Torah - Nourishment in the Parasha

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Parashat Behar, Bechukotai: Underlying Spiritual Lessons of Agricultural Laws

How Does the Mitzvah of Shemitah Ingrain Trust that Hashem Provides?

How Does the Sabbatical Year (Shemitah) Teach Us to Share Our Food?

Being a second-generation Holocaust survivor and perhaps even carrying the soul-memory of one of its victims, I suffer from a certain anxiety around the subject of food and nourishment. This is perhaps why I'm particularly careful not to waste food. When I explored the deeper roots of some of my fears through EmunaHealing, a recurring realization emerged: I'm afraid there is not enough.

Ironically, I'm actually overwhelmed by abundance and by the burden of caring for it all. There are many more fruits in my garden than I can possibly pick and process. Even the hens lay more eggs than we can share. It seems that Hashem is showering me with this abundance precisely to help heal my underlying fear of not having enough.

I believe I'm not alone in this fear. Generations of our ancestors have died of starvation throughout the nearly 2000 years from the destruction of the Temple until the Holocaust, leaving behind generational trauma and an underlying fear of scarcity and lack. The Torah anticipated this fear by giving us the laws of Shemitah, which teach us to overcome our anxiety around food and trust that Hashem provides. One of the central lessons of Shemitah is exactly this - recognizing that our sustenance depends upon Hashem's blessing rather than our own hard work.

The same principle underlying our primary nourishment - mother's milk - applies to all nourishment: the more the baby suckles, the more milk is produced in the mother's breasts. Likewise, the more we share, the more we receive.

How Does Shemitah Teach Us to Trust in Hidden Nourishment?

One of the deepest anxieties surrounding nourishment is the fear of the future. We may have enough for today, yet still feel unsettled by uncertainty about tomorrow. Parashat Behar directly addresses this fear through the mitzvah of Shemitah.

The Torah anticipates the anxious question:

ספר ויקרא פרק כה פסוק כ וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מָה נֹאכֵל בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נִקְטַף אֶת תְּבוּאֹתֵינוּ:

“What will we eat in the seventh year?” (*Vayikra* 25:20).

In response, Hashem promises that the sixth year will produce enough sustenance to carry the people through the seventh year and beyond:

ספר ויקרא פרק כה פסוק כא-כב (כא) וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעָשִׂתָ אֶת תְּבוּאָהּ לְשָׁלֹשׁ הַשָּׁנִים: (כב) וְזָרַעְתֶּם אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁמִינִית וְאָכַלְתֶּם מִן הַתְּבוּאָה יָשֵׁן עַד הַשָּׁנָה הַתְּשִׁיעִת עַד בּוֹא תְבוּאָתָהּ תֹאכְלוּ יָשֵׁן:

“Then I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will produce enough crop for three years. You will sow in the eighth year while still eating from the old crop. Until the crop of the ninth year arrives, you will continue eating from the old crop” (*Vayikra* 25:21-22).

Rashi explains that the blessing of the sixth year sustained the people through three separate periods: the remainder of the sixth year, the entire seventh year of Shemitah, and the beginning of the eighth year until the new crops could grow (Rashi, *Vayikra* 25:21). Rashbam extends this even further, explaining that the

produce would continue nourishing them until the crops planted in the eighth year became fully available in the ninth year (Rashbam, *Vayikra* 25:21).

This reveals that nourishment in the Torah is never limited to the present moment. Hashem's sustenance stretches far beyond what our eyes can presently see. The food itself becomes a vessel of emunah, teaching us that Divine nourishment is already being prepared long before we perceive its results. Just as the manna in the wilderness trained the Jewish people to rely daily upon Hashem's provision, Shemittah similarly teaches that nourishment flows from a continuous Divine source even when we cannot yet see how tomorrow's sustenance will arrive. Shemittah trains us to loosen our desperate grip on control and to trust that our Divine nourishment emanates from beyond our own efforts.

How Does the Power of Blessing Affect Abundance?

Yet how could the produce of a single year realistically sustain the people for several years? Rabbi Chayim Attar explains that the miracle was not necessarily that the land produced dramatically larger quantities of crops. Rather, the blessing rested within the food itself, causing it to become miraculously sufficient (Ohr HaChayim, *Vayikra* 25:21). He compares this to the miracle of the widow of Tzarfat, whose tiny amount of flour and oil continued sustaining her throughout the famine through the blessing brought by the prophet Eliyahu (I *Melachim* 17:8-16). This transforms our entire understanding of nourishment. We often measure abundance externally - by volume, possessions, or visible resources. Yet the Torah teaches that nourishment flows primarily through blessing. A small amount infused with Hashem's blessing can nourish far beyond its natural ability. Without blessing, even abundance can leave us feeling empty and unsatisfied. The Midrash about Ruth becoming satisfied by the small amount of roasted grain Boaz offered her beautifully illustrates how the power of blessing affects nourishment. Boaz gave Ruth a small amount of roasted grain that fit between his two fingers. "Rabbi Yitzchak said, this can be interpreted in two possible ways: either a blessing rested in the fingers of that *tzaddik* (righteous man), or a blessing rested in the innards of that *tzaddeket* (righteous woman)." From the verse, "She ate, and she was satisfied, and she left over" (*Ruth* 2:14), it stands to reason that the blessing rested on the innards of that righteous woman (*Midrash Ruth Rabbah* 5:6).

Rabbi Yosef Patzanovsky deepens this idea by explaining that blessing cannot rest upon emptiness. There must first be a vessel through which the blessing can flow (Pardes Yosef, *Vayikra* 25:21). Human beings are therefore asked to participate in the process of nourishment by preparing vessels through effort, responsibility, and emunah. Yet once those vessels are prepared, abundance itself comes from Hashem, since nourishment emerges through a partnership between human effort and Divine blessing.

Why Does the Greatest Flow of Blessing Emerge through Letting Go?

Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz notes that this extraordinary blessing emerged specifically in the sixth year, after the land had already been worked continuously for years and must have been depleted (Panim Yafot, *Vayikra* 25:21). The fact that it is precisely when the land appeared exhausted that the greatest abundance emerged is not merely an agricultural observation. It is a spiritual principle. Often, the deepest nourishment enters precisely when we reach the limits of our own strength. As long as we rely entirely upon ourselves, we remain confined within the limitations of human effort. But when exhaustion humbles us and forces us to release our illusion of self-sufficiency, we create space for a higher flow to enter.

How often do we struggle endlessly to solve a problem through our own strength, only to discover that precisely when we finally admit, "I cannot do this alone," unexpected help, clarity, healing, or blessing suddenly begins to emerge? Sometimes we spend years desperately trying to hold together a difficult relationship, overcome an emotional wound, or carry overwhelming responsibilities entirely by ourselves. Yet it is often specifically in the moment of surrender - when we finally turn fully toward Hashem and open

ourselves to receiving help beyond our own abilities – that the greatest breakthroughs begin to unfold.

From Which Secret Channels Does Divine Nourishment Flow into the Physical World?

Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzchak Dancyger reveals that the sixth year corresponds to the sefirah of Yesod, the spiritual channel through which Divine abundance flows into the world (Yismach Yisrael, *Vayikra* 25:21). Rabbi Moshe Sofer further explains that the seventh year corresponds to the spiritual dimension of Shabbat – the hidden reservoir into which all blessing gathers – while the sixth year channels that blessing outward into the years that follow (Chatam Sofer, *Vayikra* 25:21).

The expansion of produce during the sixth year, therefore, reflects the spiritual expansion of Yesod itself. Nourishment is not merely physical food emerging from the soil. It is Divine flow descending through hidden spiritual channels into physical reality. By refraining from working the land during Shemittah, the Jewish people reconnect to the higher source from which all nourishment truly emerges. Physical food is merely the outer garment of a deeper Divine abundance constantly flowing into creation.

We often imagine that our nourishment comes exclusively from our paycheck, business success, savings account, or personal efforts. Yet life repeatedly reminds us that something deeper sustains us. A mother may somehow continue finding strength to care for her family despite exhaustion beyond her natural capacity. After experiencing doubt and insecurity, we may suddenly experience renewed clarity, hope, or inner strength that cannot be explained logically. These moments remind us that material channels may carry the blessing, but the true source of nourishment flows continuously from Hashem through deeper spiritual channels that sustain all of creation.

How Do We Overcome the Fear that Constricts the Flow of Nourishment?

Rabbi Shammai Ginzburg, quoting Rebbe Elimelech and Reb Zusha, explains that the Torah intentionally includes the anxious question, “What will we eat?” because fear itself can constrict the flow of blessing (Imrei Shamai, *Vayikra* 25:21). When we become consumed by anxiety and distrust, we narrow the inner vessels through which Divine abundance flows.

If nourishment depended solely upon visible quantity, fear would be inevitable, because material resources always appear limited. But once we understand that nourishment flows from a deeper Divine source, trust itself becomes part of the vessel through which blessing continues to flow.

Rabbi Yosef Patzanovsky adds that perhaps the blessing was actually present throughout all the years, gradually accumulating, but people simply failed to recognize it as Divine (Pardes Yosef, *Vayikra* 25:21). Much of the nourishment in our lives may already be miraculous, yet familiarity blinds us to it. We become accustomed to the constant flow of blessings and begin mistaking it for ordinary nature.

Shemittah therefore retrains our perception. By suspending ordinary agricultural activity, it forces us to confront the deeper truth that all nourishment has always come from Hashem. The land, the crops, the rain, the strength to work, and even the feeling of satisfaction after eating are all expressions of an ongoing Divine flow sustaining creation at every moment.

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