

PARASHAS BEHAR

Enough I s Never Enough

It took a real act of faith for Jewish farmers to leave their lands fallow during the Sabbatical year. For six years they had planted and harvested their crops, and now in the seventh year, Hashem commanded them to sit back and do nothing. What were they supposed to eat? How were they supposed to support their families?

The Torah addresses this question in this week's reading. "And if you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year since we cannot sow or gather produce?' do not fear. I will command My blessing for you during the sixth year . . ." Hashem promised to deliver such large bumper crops during the sixth year that there would be plenty left over for all their future needs until they could reap another harvest.

But let us take a closer look at the question. "What will we eat in the seventh year?" Surely, they meant the eighth year, not the seventh. Everyone knows that each year's harvest provides the food for the following year. The sixth year's harvest thus assured them of food for the seventh year. The seventh year's harvest would have provided the food for the eighth year, and therefore, leaving the land fallow placed the eighth year in jeopardy, not the seventh. Why then did they express concern about what they would eat in the seventh year?

The answer touches on the very fundamentals of faith. A person who has faith in Hashem is not concerned about the future. Fully aware that he does not control his own fate, that everything is in Hashem's hands, he lives by the dictates of the Torah and relies on Hashem to do the rest. Once this attitude becomes truly integrated into his thinking, he discovers a new serenity in his life, a feeling of peace and security.

A person without faith, however, is under the impression that he is the master of his own fate, that his entire future depends on his own efforts. He puts inordinate pressure on himself by thinking that he alone stands between his family and starvation. Understandably, this gives rise to anxiety and insecurity. Ultimately, it leads to an irrational drive to work unnecessarily hard and long just to keep the wolf from the door.

This is the attitude the Torah was anticipating among the farmers enjoined not to plant in the seventh year. Those of weaker faith might worry irrationally about the seventh year, even though the granaries were still full from the sixth year's harvest. The Torah reassures these people that there would be so much grain in the sixth year that even they would not need to worry.

A fabulously wealthy man once complained to a great sage about the pressures of running his vast financial empire.

“Tell me,” said the sage, “why don’t you just sell all your holdings and relax? Don’t you have enough to last you for the rest of your life?”

“Certainly I do,” replied the rich man. “But by amassing all this wealth I can secure the financial future of all my children and grandchildren as well.”

“Indeed?” said the sage, raising his eyebrows. “So when your grandchildren grow up and come into possession of all the wealth they inherit from you, will they live a life of leisure or go to work as well?”

The rich man thought for a moment. “I expect they will go to work.”

“Why?”

“To ensure that their own grandchildren are also taken care of.”

“Aha!” said the sage. “And so on. And so on. I would certainly like to see that one grandchild for whose benefit all these generations have been working so hard. No, my friend. That is not the reason why you work so hard. The real reason is that no matter how much money you have you do not feel secure. Deep in your heart, you feel that the more money you pile up the greater your guarantee of being wealthy for the rest of your life. You are living in a fantasy.”

In our own lives, it is undoubtedly prudent to save a little for a rainy day. But what happens when we suddenly see the future as a series of endless rainy days and plunge into a frenzy of work? At times like these, we need to reaffirm in our own minds that everything comes from Hashem and that there are no rainy days for Him. If we relegate the final responsibility for our lives to Hashem, we will enrich our lives with tranquility, prosperity - and rationality.