

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Man works for 6 days and on the 7th day, the day of Shabbat, he rests - this divinely ordained pattern was ingrained into our existence from the very beginning of Creation. This week's parsha teaches us that a similar rhythm pertains to the Holy Land as well: Six years the Land is worked and it brings forth its produce, and then on the 7th year the Land rests as it too needs a Sabbath- Shabbat Ha'Aretz

The Sefer HaChinuch (84) points out that just as we rest on the 7th day in order to inculcate the idea that the Almighty is the Lord of the universe - that He alone is its Creator, so, too, when we allow the Land to rest in the 7th year a similar lesson is being taught. During the six years that the farmer tills the land, he, the land-owner naturally develops a deep connection to the land, feeling that this land is entirely his. The lesson of the Sh'mita year is that above and beyond the fact that the land's fertility and bounty is subject to the wishes of Hashem, the Land itself is entirely His. Thus, on the 7th year we are to renounce our ownership proclaiming that "L'Hashem Ha'aretz"!

This mitzva is not experienced today to the same extent that as it was back then. Living in the 21st century as part of the technological age, we are far removed from the life experiences of

Biblical Man. We can barely even imagine how tremendously difficult the performance of this mitzva would have been at a time that agricultural concerns served as the central focus of one's life. If this was not hard enough, once every fifty years, the difficulty of letting one's fields lay barren was doubled as the Sh'mita year would be followed by the Yovel. During the Jubilee year, the land could not be worked for a second consecutive year. In effect during the Sh'mita and Yovel, one was called upon to deposit one's life into the hands of the Almighty, the ultimate provider for His people.

Appreciating the great difficulty involved in fulfilling this mitzva, we can understand the commentators' disagreement as to the meaning of blessings and curses found in the Torah's next chapter (Perek 26): "Im b'chukotai teilechu" - Were these blessings connected to the fulfillment of the mitzva of Sh'mita or are they to be understood as blessings for all other mitzvot? I understand Chapter 26 as referring to blessings connected to Sh'mita. As this was the test of the Jewish farmer's faith in Hashem .

In Vayikra 25:20-21 the Torah answers the people's concerns as the Sh'mita year approached, saying that if we are to ask "what shall we eat in the 7th year as we may not sow or gather in one's increase". We learn that Hashem promises "Then I will command My blessings upon you in the 7th year and it shall bring forth produce for three years".

The Torah promises us that The Almighty will concern Himself with the people dwelling in His land, and that the produce of the 6th year will be plentiful enough to provide sustenance for the 7th and even the 8th year. Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch compares this promise to the Manna that fell in the desert on Friday and lasted also for Shabbat as well, pointing out that the Holy Land merits Hashem's special providence. Although normally we are expected not to rely upon miracles of any sort, here we are commanded to build upon the expectation of these miraculous events taking place.

Just as the Mitzva of Shabbat strengthens our belief that we are Hashem's Holy people, so too does the Mitzva of Sh'mita instill in our hearts that this "Holy Land" is holier than other lands!

What is true for the Sh'mita year, is also true 24/7 for the People who dwell in His Land. They will always be vouchsafed with special, added, Hashgacha Pratit, Divine protection.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness, Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh