

Parshas Behar talks about shemittah and yovel.

In many ways, it parallels what is happening to Klal Yisroel in the midbor between Pesach and Shavuot. The posuk praises Klal Yisroel for leaving behind the security and stability of being a slave, having all his basic physical needs provided for by his master, and going out into the unknown. These people have been used to a sense of total dependence on their Egyptian masters. Now they are gone—they are not going to give them food and shelter anymore. They suddenly have to depend on Hashem for everything. They are entering a barren desert with no natural resources.

It is one thing to be dependent on a human being who you know has a vested interest in your welfare. It's a whole other thing to be reliant on an invisible force with no way to anticipate how you will be provided. The mon made tremendous demands on people's bitachon—you couldn't get more than a single day's supply of food—besides Shabbos. There was no security outside your feeling that Hashem is going to take care of you

At the end of their journey in the midbor, Hashem instructed that they keep a container of mon for posterity—to show Klal Yisroel for all time that even after they leave the midbor and start to make efforts to provide for themselves, they are not in control. The Torah wants us to remember that we shouldn't fool ourselves—our efforts are not what gives us parnossoh.

But there was another way Hashem arranged that we constantly maintain our bitachon. Eretz Yisroel is not Egypt. The Nile is always flowing year-round in Egypt because it is fed by the jungles and the rain forests deeper down south in the continent of Africa. It doesn't need any rain to fall in Egypt. The large rivers of the United States are always flowing year-round. Eretz Yisroel was picked because it relies completely on rain—and rain is something no-one can predict. The rivers fill up in the winter and dry up in the summer. Eretz Yisroel just had a drought for six years straight, and this year it kept on raining. No-one knew why—totally unpredictable. We cannot understand how it works and we have to rely on Hashem alone. All the scientists can't figure it out because Hashem set up the climate in Eretz Yisroel to be responsive to our mitzvos and aveiros.

Then we have another mitzvah which enforces our bitachon. We have shemittah.

Really, Shabbos is also a mitzvah which makes us act on our belief that Hashem is in control of creation. But to refrain from working the fields in an agricultural society for an entire year creates a whole different level of vulnerability. In addition, anything that grows wild is hefker—anyone can come it and take it. It engenders a tremendous level of emunoh and bitachon and forces the farmer to relinquish control over his parnossoh.

In Josephus' account of the war with the Romans, he records that the invading armies expected the land to have food resources readily available to sustain their armies. They couldn't imagine that the Jews would not be planting for an entire year before they invaded!

And every 49 years, the Torah demands we don't plant for two years straight! It is quite natural to get nervous—what are we going to eat? The Torah reassures us that Hashem will make the sixth year produce a supernatural amount that will last three years.

The Torah doesn't just require abstract belief. It demands from us to

display our belief and faith in Hashem's hashgocho with action. And not just with symbolic actions. Actions that could potentially place our entire existence in jeopardy.

The first agricultural settlement in Eretz Yisroel 200 years ago kept shemittah with tremendous mesiras nefesh. The second shemittah was even a greater nisayon because more people were living in Eretz Yisroel and more people's lives depended on the productivity of the land.

There were two groups of settlements at the time battling for domination—the secular settlements and the religious ones. The secular establishment was afraid that if shemittah was kept this year, it would be make a strong, lasting statement that Eretz Yisroel is going to be run according to halacha. They did everything in their power to avoid this. They make sure it would not be viable to keep shemittah with imported food, and then convinced the rabbinic establishment that it was pikuach nefesh to keep shemittah and they must issue a heter mechiroh. The result was that shemittah became relegated to yechidei seguloh for decades to follow. It all started to change when the Chazon Ish arrived and turned the tide singlehandedly. Today there is an impressive number of yishuvim who keep shemittah.

The Torah demands concrete displays of our bitachon and complete reliance on Hashem. It's not just a theory.

The Jews who immigrated to the United States and Canada at the end of the 19th and first half of the 20th century faced a similar nisayon over working on Shabbos. It was either work on Shabbos or get fired and face the threat of starvation. Yet, many Jews decided that they are keeping Shabbos come what may and Hashem will make sure we survive. Their emunoh was deep and strong. They didn't have it easy—not every story had a quick and happy ending. You have to be in for the long haul. Hashem never promised that it's going to be easy to keep the Torah.

There is a Shulchan Aruch about how to conduct your business. Hashem says He will be in charge of the success of your ventures. Don't expect a dishonest deal to work. Even honest deals can fail. See how deep our emunoh is—and the reward is at the end.

Hashem often makes it difficult in order to bring out our latent potential for sacrifice—to test our resolve and see how much we are willing to put on the line for mitzvos. Just like the Yam Suf—it didn't split in advance—before they came. It didn't split until Klal Yisroel walked in to the water up to their noses! One midrash says it was made difficult the entire way through—the water receded gradually with every step—to increase the nisayon. But in the end, their emunoh was boosted for all history.

And this translates into nisyonos about keeping Shabbos or for nisyonos in keeping halacha and honesty in business nowadays. In most Jews' lives, business halacha is the realm that is most challenging on a regular basis. You can come up with a million excuses and rationalizations to go through with a lucrative but ethically questionable deal, but the answer is no. And it puts you to the test—put your bitachon into practice.

Give tzedakah and you are faced with a nisayon—do you think you lost money? If all Jews really believed that giving tzedakah doesn't take away from one's parnossoh, and that giving ma'aser makes you richer, there wouldn't be any poor people in Klal Yisroel. The problem

is we don't really believe in Hashem's promise. We only give when we expect something tangible immediately in return.

There are countless mitzvos where Hashem says: "It's not enough to say you believe. You have to show it with action." You need to stop working for an entire year and make your field hefker. The land is not yours!

When we go shopping and bring food home to eat, we first need to make a bracha. Why? The gemara says there is a contradiction between two pesukim—does the world belong to Hashem or to human beings? The answer is that before I acknowledge that everything comes from Hashem, I have no right to enjoy what He made. Once I acknowledge it, I get permission to enjoy it. But this only works if we mean what we say and not just mumble some incoherent Hebrew phrases! What are we thinking when we say a bracha? It only belongs to us when we accept that it all comes from Hashem and not from us.

The Torah didn't let us off easy with just reciting a string of ani ma'amins in the morning and then going about our day as if we are in charge. It all belongs to Hashem and we have to show that we are just visitors here, living on planet Earth as guests and not as owners. That is the fundamental principle of all these mitzvos—Shabbos, brachos, shemittah and yovel.

Parshas Behar is an appropriate preparation for Shavuos. At Har Sinai, Hashem introduced mattan Torah with an all-encompassing statement: we are special and different. We are a mamleches kohanim vegoy kadosh. There are laws of history and economics and political theory, but they don't apply to Klal Yisroel—we are His people and He runs our affairs hands-on with different rules. We have to put ourselves in Hashem's hands and show that we aren't really in charge, and that our emunoh and bitachon are not just abstract ideas and platitudes.