

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Mighty Men

RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER

SHMITTA. PERHAPS THE MOST DAUNTING COMMANDMENTS in the Torah. For six years a farmer works and tends to his fields, but on *shmitta*, the seventh year, he may not plant. Rather, he sits back and watches as people take the now ownerless produce.

In the words of the *Tanchuma*, “He sees his field ownerless and his trees ownerless, and the fences breached, and sees his fruit being eaten, and he subdues his (evil) inclination and doesn’t say anything.”

Midrash Rabba (*Vayikra* 1:1) quotes the verse in *Tehillim* (103:20): *Giborei koach osei divaro*, the strong warriors who do His bidding, as referring to those who observe the laws of *shmitta*. The *Midrash* says that this is a *mitzvah* which lasts not just for a day or a week or even a month, but lasts for a full year. Not easy.


Rav Gedalia Schorr understands from this *Midrash* that the main theme of *shmitta* is *bitachon*—trusting in Hashem by just watching his ownerless field and keeping quiet. We’re not talking about one who remains silent while sulking and feeling helpless, but rather, one who is silent with tranquility, perfectly calm with what’s going on. *He* is the one whom the *Midrash* calls *gibor*, mighty.

This man fulfills Hashem’s commands, trusting in Him that he won’t lose out, but will get the blessing of bounty that the Torah promises to those who keep this *mitzvah*.

The *mitzvah* of *shmitta*, Rabbi Schorr explains, is primarily to practice *bitachon* the other six years. The individual can draw from this year of practicing *bitachon* to the other years when he works, harvests, and eats from his fields, and he will realize that even when he works, his successes are completely due to Hashem.

Midrash Rabba (*ibid*) also applies the verse of “*giborei koach*” (*Tehillim*, *ibid.*) to the Jewish nation when they stood before Mount Sinai and said “*na’aseh vinishma*,” we will do and we will listen to the commandments of the Torah. Accepting the Torah necessitates *gevura* too; just as *shmitta* requires strength to remain silent, full acceptance of the Torah also requires strength and silence—silencing one’s worldly desires to submit one’s self entirely to it. This explains why the verse specifically mentions *shmitta*, and no other commandments, in relation to Mount Sinai.

We too can incorporate this lesson of *bitachon* into our daily lives, recognizing that *everything* that we do and all that happens to us is attributed to Hashem. We can be like the guy rushing to work, and on the way to the subway station, a car drives by him through a huge puddle, completely drenching him. Without a word, he calmly spins around, walks home to change his clothes, and sets out again. This man has *bitachon*, knowing that whatever happened was supposed to happen. A man like this lives a tranquil life.

This is true might. 

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER FROM ME’AH SHE’ARIM BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

During the holocaust, a once wealthy Jew was dying from hunger, and he announced that he was prepared to give up his mansion to whomever provided him with some bread to sustain him. Another Jew nearby responded that he would be ready to make the deal, and they proceeded to (halachically) finalize the sale: a piece of bread for the mansion.

The next day, the Allied armies arrived and liberated the Jews. The buyer came to claim his house. The wealthy man responded that since the circumstances coerced him into making the sale, as he was at death’s door, the sale should not be valid.

Q Which party triumphs?

A The Talmud (*Bava Kama* 116a) rules that one who was jailed unjustly and escaped and approached a river, may promise a ferrier a large sum of money to take him across, and afterwards give the ferrier the normal fee, claiming “I was only joking with you. I never intended to pay you that amount; I just wanted to make sure I get across.” This ruling is codified in *halacha* (*C.M.* 264:7).

Similarly, Ramban rules that a sick person who needs a certain medicine that his friend has, and because of the extenuating circumstance, he promised to give him much more than it was worth, need only to give his friend the cost of the medicine.


In our scenario, may the wealthy

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A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

What group of items discussed in this week’s parasha is comprised of a number, of which six of these items are different than the rest?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer! 

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GLIMPSSES OF THE KOLLEL

ISRAELI CONNECTIONS

Nothing makes local Israelis feel more “at home” than a Lag ba’Omer bonfire! A “special-for-Israelis” medurah, Sfardi/Israeli High holiday services, Sukkah and

Chanukah celebrations are among the popular programming the Kollel provides Israelis of all ages and religious affiliations.



IT HAD TO BE HASHEM

Rabbi Tuvia Goldstein, a well-known halachic authority, would tell of when he was a young yeshiva student in the town of Kamitnetz. When the Nazis entered Poland, he, along with the rest of his yeshiva, fled to a town in Lithuania. His yeshiva was taken in by the Jewish residents of the town but, according to government regulations, as refugees they were required to register themselves with

local officials. Rabbi Goldstein complied with the law and did register himself although most of his yeshiva did not as they were afraid of attracting too much attention from the usually anti-Semitic local government officials. Rabbi Goldstein would soon regret his decision to register himself, for when Russia invaded Lithuania, they exiled all the yeshiva students they knew about to Siberia, which were only the ones who had registered. Rabbi Goldstein went through five-and-a-half years of hard la-

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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person who desperately needed food also claim, “I was only joking with you”? Seemingly, this claim wouldn’t work. To the people suffering in the holocaust, the price of a mansion truly is worth a piece of bread.

The Talmud (*Gittin* 56a) recounts that the fabulously wealthy Marta bas Baisus, who lived in Jerusalem during the Roman siege, sent her servant to buy her food. When he reported that there was nothing left, she threw all her silver and gold in the street saying that she has no need for it, since she was dying from hunger. A piece of bread really can be worth a fortune. The *Rema* (C.M. 109:3) rules that during wartime, houses are worth less than they would be other times of year.

Ultimately, however, there are strong grounds to say that the sale is void, because the mansion may not be considered owned by the wealthy man because the Nazis took possession of it. Since it’s not in his possession, nor can he reclaim it in court, it’s not considered his (see *Nesivos Hamishpat*, 363:1), and the sale may not be valid. 🕊

bor in Siberia but survived. Once the war was over, though, he found out what happened to those that had remained behind. They were wiped out. His registering himself had been his ticket to Siberia, but had been his ticket to life as well. 🕊

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

Rabbi Yaakov Yosef’s arrival in New York was met with high expectations—which, unfortunately, would not come to fruition. As new Chief Rabbi of New York City, Rabbi Yosef quickly confronted an issue that would confound many rabbis across the country as well—*kashrus!* He began by supervising many of New York City’s butchers and affixing metal tags to meat processed in those facilities. Two issues cropped up: One was the decision made by lay leaders of the association of synagogues that hired Rabbi Yosef to put the cost of the supervision on the consumer so that each piece of meat would cost an extra penny. This “tax” outraged housewives who, with the help of non-religious Jewish newspapers, disparaged it like the “*karobka*” tax levied by the czar on kosher meat. Other opposition was from rabbis who made their living supervising kosher meat, and who vociferously opposed anyone moving in on their livelihood. The situation degenerated from there. Within a year, Rabbi Yosef’s authority had eroded and his position was little more than an honorary title. The stress of his failures sent him to the grave; by 1897 he was bedridden, and he passed away in 1902. A positive result of Rabbi Yosef’s move to America was that it opened the possibility of immigration for many European rabbis who before would never have considered it. It indeed led to the beginnings of the Jewish infrastructure we enjoy today. 🕊

SOURCE: Rakeffet-Rothkoff, Aaron. “The Silver Era.” PP 25-27. Feldheim. 1981.