



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר ויקרא
פרשת בהר-בחקותי

SERIES 2: ISSUE 30

AN ALLEGORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE SHEMITTAH PASSAGE

Chapter 25

2) *Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving to you, the land shall rest, a Shabbos for Hashem.*

(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לָהּ.

3) *For six years you shall sow your field and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and you shall gather in its produce.*

(ג) שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ
אֶת־תְּבוֹאָתָהּ.

4) *And in the seventh year, there shall be a Shabbas Shabbason for the land, a Shabbos for Hashem. You must not sow your field nor prune your vineyard.*

(ד) וּבַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן יְהִי לָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לָהּ
שְׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר.

Part of the greatness of Torah is that it is meant to be interpreted on higher and higher levels, beyond that of the simple *peshat*. These higher levels are: *remez* (hinted meanings), *derash* (Midrashic expositions), and *sod* (hidden, Kabbalistic meanings). Generally speaking, we have concentrated in this commentary on the *peshat* meaning. Occasionally, we have also interpreted according to *remez* in order to teach people the correct path of serving Hashem. We will do so here as well.

Hashem tells the Jewish people (verse 2), “*When you come to the land, etc.*” This refers to the higher, spiritual land Above, which is the place of the *Shechinah* and thus represents It. Hashem is saying that when your soul leaves this world and ascends to the world Above, make sure that you have prepared yourself in such a way that when you arrive, *the land shall rest, a Shabbos for Hashem* – that is, the spiritual land Above (the *Shechinah*) shall rest and rejoice in its unification with the Great Name of Hashem (יה-ו-ה). Thus we see in the Zohar (*Vayechi* 248b) this Kabbalistic concept that when a *tzaddik* leaves this world, this causes a unification Above between the Name associated with the *Shechinah* and the Great Name of Hashem. (This idea is familiar to us from the introductory prayer we say before performing various *mitzvos*: לשם ייחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה, *for the sake of the unification of HaKadosh Baruch Hu and His Shechinah.*)

This unification is akin to the happiness of the *chasan* and *kallah* on their wedding day. In fact, the Zohar often refers to the departure of a *tzaddik* from the world as a celebration (“*hilula*”) because it causes a wedding-like event to occur in Heaven.

Hashem then sets out how we are to conduct ourselves in this world in order to avoid the painful snares of the *yetzer hara* and bring about the Divine happiness that ensues *when you come to the land*, i.e., when a *tzaddik* ascends to the world Above: The next verse tells us: *For six years you shall sow your*

field. The six years represent the [first] sixty years of a person's life, and the verse is saying that if a person is like a barren field — i.e., if he has not cultivated himself spiritually — he should spend his years “sowing his field” with Torah and mitzvos. The verse continues: *six years you shall prune your vineyard*. This means that if a person is not like a barren field but rather like a vineyard that already has grapes that grew on their own — i.e., if he has already acquired Torah and mitzvos — he can still benefit from improvement. That is, just as it is necessary to remove the bad branches and leave the good in a vineyard, so too such a person must remove those imperfect elements of his service of Hashem and leave only the good.

The verse concludes: *and you shall gather in its produce*. The comparison between the sowing of the field and the “sowing” of Torah and mitzvos continues into the phase of gathering as well. When a person gathers in the crop of the field, he has to separate the chaff and the stalks from the seeds by threshing and winnowing before the seeds can be used. Similarly, when a person does mitzvos, it is difficult to avoid the elements of pride and superiority that can get interspersed with his service of Hashem, which can be compared to the undesirable chaff, and elements of animal-like desire and pleasure, which may be compared to the stalks. A person needs to cleanse his deeds of both these negative elements, leaving the fruits of his Torah and mitzvos (his “*produce*”) cleansed of their “chaff” and their “straw.” Thus one shall do during the sixty years of service of Hashem, when a person is still in the realm of action, before he is removed from the world.

The next verse continues: *And in the seventh year there shall be a Shabbas Shabbason for the land*. In the seventh decade of a person's life he should not place his hopes on the deeds he will perform during this period, because he may not live that long. He may die and go to “the world of Shabbos,” i.e., the place where we are rewarded for our mitzvos, and no longer be in this “world of action” with its opportunities to do good deeds. Indeed, as our Sages say (*Avodah Zarah 3a*): “He who has toiled on Friday will eat [the fruits of his labor] on Shabbos.” The phrase “*a Shabbas Shabbason for the land*” hints that when a righteous person passes away during the seventh decade of his life, there will be a Shabbos for the spiritual land Above, i.e., for the *Shechinah*, and the person will receive the reward that he has earned. However, he may not *sow [his] field nor prune [his] vineyard*. That is, once Shabbos (the time to receive his reward) has arrived he will no longer be able to “sow” (i.e., acquire) more mitzvos or “prune” away the imperfect elements of his character.

The general message is that a person should never delay correcting his deeds or accumulating mitzvos and good deeds, since no one knows when his destined time will come.

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.

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