

CHAIM'S DIARY OF SHEMITTA

Take a look at the diary of Chaim, a 10 year old boy who lived on a farm with his family 2000 years ago.

The shemitta year started last week. This is my first shemitt ever and I'm not sure how much I'm going to like it. I usually wake up at 5 am every day to go out to the farm with my Abba and work the fields. It is really hard work and we want to get started before it gets too hot outside. It's kind of cool that now I can get up really late (I even slept to 8:30 one day!!) but I'm also really bored. I have nothing to do, I'm not used to having free time. I know it sounds strange but I like having a set schedule of what I need to do every day. Also, I'm kind of nervous. How are we going to live without farming? What will we eat every day? How will we make enough money without having produce to sell? It's going to be one long year.....I don't even understand why we need to do this!!

Now look at Chaim's diary entry half a year later, as he gets used to keeping

shemitta and begins to recognize the benefits.

It's been shemitta now for almost six months and I must say I am beginning to see a lot of good in it. Our family has been spending a lot of quality time together and it's been a lot of fun (though we do still fight once in a while). I've been spending a lot of time learning - I'm almost finished learning my first masechet of mishna with my father! We have put up big signs announcing to all the poor people that the fields are open to them to take whatever they want. It feels really good to help other people!

I am a bit worried that our food supply is going down. But my mother keeps telling me to trust in Hashem, and that the Torah promises that we will have enough food. I am trying to learn that lesson, and even now, I have become much more happy with what I have - I don't need the newest tractor or the most in-style overalls. I have what I need. Life is good!!

- ▶ What challenges did Chaim have during shemitta? What did he eventually gain from it?
- ▶ What ideas can you get from Chaim about how to spend your vacation time productively?

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PARSHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI



PARSHA SUMMARY

In *Parshat Behar*, the Torah introduces the mitzva of shemittah, the seventh year, during which the Jewish people may not work the land (in Eretz Yisrael) and must allow it to rest. Some of the activities that are not allowed include planting, plowing, or harvesting.

Hashem also gives a special promise that although the people are not planting crops, they will have enough to eat during that year and the year afterward. In *Parshat Bechukotai*, the Torah presents a list of *berachot* that we will receive if we fulfill the mitzvot and a list of *kelalot* (curses) that will befall us (God forbid) if we do not follow the Torah properly.



THE INSIDE SCOOP

Look at the following pesukim describing the mitzvah of shemitta.

VAYIKRA 25:2-4

ויקרא פרק כה, פסוקים ב-ד

...When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the Lord. You may plant your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce. But in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath to the Lord; you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard.

...כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם--וְשַׁבְּתָה הָאָרֶץ, שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה. שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תַּזְרַע שְׂדֶךָ, וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כִּרְמְךָ; וְאָסַפְתָּ, אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ. וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית, שַׁבַּת שְׂדֵתוֹן יְהוָה לְאָרֶץ--שַׁבַּת, לַיהוָה; שְׂדֶךָ לֹא תַזְרַע, וְכִרְמְךָ לֹא תִזְמֹר.



LET'S DISCUSS

- ▶ Look carefully at the way that the Torah talks about shemita. What special day during the week does it remind you of?
- ▶ What do you think might be one of the reasons for the mitzva of shemita? What benefit did the people get from it? Do you get the same benefit from Shabbat?
- ▶ What do you think it was like to be a farmer and keep shemita? What challenges did they have to deal with?
- ▶ Suggest one lesson you think we can learn from shemita for our lives.

PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS:

- ▶ Did you ever take a year off from work (called a "Sabbatical" in English, named after shemita!)? What was it like? What did you do during that time?
- ▶ If you had a year off from work and responsibilities, what would you do with your time?



BONUS

Below are two of the reasons for shemita given by the commentaries.

SEFAT EMET

Because shemita comes to show that everything comes from Him, may He be blessed.

שפת אמת

כי השמיטה באה להראות כי הכל מאתו יתברך.

SEFER HACHINUCH

To teach our souls about important character traits: Being generous and helping others, and instilling within our hearts great faith in God, blessed is He.

ספר החינוך

ללמד נפשנו במידות מעולות: מידת הנדיבות ועין טובה ולקבוע בלבבנו הביטחון הגדול בד' ברוך הוא.

- ▶ What are the two explanations given by the Sefat Emet and Sefer HaChinuch? How exactly does shemita teach us these two lessons?
- ▶ Have you had any experiences in your own life that you feel have taught you the lessons shemita is supposed to teach us? If so, what were those experiences?

MORE ON THE PARSHA FOR GROWNUPS

Why does the Torah suddenly introduce a new set of commandments at the end of Sefer Vayikra (specifically shemita and yovel)? Rabbi Yoni Grossman argues that perhaps this odd placement of these laws allows us to view them through the prism of the Temple and its sanctity. Shemitah and yovel's placement is meant to teach us that the three central elements of place, time and the individual are meaningful not only in the Temple. They are meaningful everywhere



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