

# BEHAR

*You shall perform my decrees and observe my ordinances and perform them; then you shall dwell securely on the land.*

Vaykira 25:18

Jews go into exile for failing to observe *Shmitta*.<sup>591</sup> This is not simply on the national level. On a personal level as well, the Talmud<sup>592</sup> tells us that as a result of violating the “dust of *Shmitta*,”<sup>593</sup> a fellow can be sold into slavery.

Rabbi Akiva taught,<sup>594</sup> “The way to grow wise is silence. The way to become wealthy is to tithe.” A once-wealthy young woman, whose family grew impoverished, lamented, as recorded in the Talmud,<sup>595</sup> “[T]hey say in Jerusalem that the way to preserve one’s money is to give that money away [to charity].” But all this sounds somewhat counter-intuitive. How can it be that giving money away will cause one’s portfolio to grow? Wisdom, it would seem, would be acquired best by speaking things out, and asking many questions. If so, asks Rabbi Avraham Azulai,<sup>596</sup> how is it that silence can, in fact, create wisdom?

In Koheles,<sup>597</sup> we are taught that there is “a time to speak and a time to remain silent.” Rashi<sup>598</sup> teaches us that “there are times that one remains silent and is rewarded for it. Aaron was silent when his children died, and his reward was that Hashem spoke to him personally.” Fascinatingly, the reward for silence was speech. One who learns to be silent grows wise, and hears what others are saying. If he is silent enough, he can even hear what G-d is saying to him. But it is only when we value silence that we can truly value the questions and speech that will bring us to the wisdom that we need.

When a person is capable of giving things up, he can then appreciate them. If one’s life revolves around money, he can never truly enjoy it. It will consume him, and he can never be truly wealthy. The fellow who knows when it is time to let money go is the fellow who truly deserves to be wealthy. If one wants G-d to bestow wealth upon him, he must display that he also knows when to give his money away. The fellow who wants wisdom needs to know what the value of it is. One only may speak once he can truly value silence. One only can stay on his land if he can give it up for the *Shmitta* year. The nation can only keep their country if

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591 Rashi to Vaykira 25:18. See the fascinating comments of the *Sefer Hatzioni* to Parshas Behar for his detailed explanation of why this is.

592 Kiddushin 20a

593 See *Ben Yeboada*, ad loc., for the significance of this unusual expression.

594 Avos 3:13

595 Kesuvos 66b

596 *Chesed LiAvraham* to Avos, ibid.

597 3:7

598 Ad loc.

they understand their place. If they cannot, they will be exiled.

“If you starve your passions, they will be satisfied, but if you satisfy them, they will feel starved,” teaches the Talmud.<sup>599</sup> One who feeds his passions too much only adds fuel to the fire. Paradoxically, one can only feel satisfied in the most physical of arenas when he can give up in that same area. For only when one’s life is not about the physical can the physical truly occupy its rightful place in enhancing one’s life.

The firefighter who rushes into a building with the deep fear of losing his life will likely not save many lives. It is the hero who is prepared to risk his life – the fellow who can give up – who is the fellow who will most likely save the lives of others.

The story is told<sup>600</sup> that one year, there was not a single esrog in all of the city of Berditchev. R. Levi Yitzchak was terribly distraught that he would not be able to fulfill the mitzvah of taking an esrog on Sukkos, so he asked his followers to be on the lookout for someone coming to the Berditchev market who might have one. Two days before Sukkos, R. Levi Yitzchak was told that a merchant traveling through Berditchev had an esrog. R. Levi Yitzchak summoned him and pleaded with him to remain in Berditchev for Sukkos. “Think of it!” he said. “You will give hundreds of Jews the opportunity to fulfill this precious mitzvah. What a great merit you will have! I will promise you long life and great prosperity.” However, the merchant refused, saying that he has been away from home on a long business trip, and that he wanted to be with his family for the festival. No amount of cajoling, or money, could make him change his mind.

In desperation, R. Levi Yitzchak said, “If you remain here for Sukkos, I promise you a place near me in *Gan Eden*.” Now, this man was no fool. He could recognize a bargain. He agreed to remain in Berditchev on the condition that he share *Gan Eden* with the Rebbe. R. Levi Yitzchak then sent messengers all through Berditchev ordering everyone to absolutely not permit the merchant to enter their Sukkah. On Sukkos night, when the merchant sought to eat in a Sukkah, he found all doors closed to him. People explained that by order of the Rebbe, they were not permitted to allow him into the Sukkah. Enraged, the merchant confronted R. Levi Yitzchak. “Is this how you repay a favor? I sacrificed being with my family for the festival, and you refuse me the mitzvah of Sukkah!” But R. Levi Yitzchak stood his ground. “Only on one condition can you enter the Sukkah. You must release me from my promise that you will share *Gan Eden* with me.”

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599 Sanhedrin 107: “A small organ is found on a man; if he feeds it, it grows ravenous, but if he starves it, it remains satisfied.” Rashi explains that this means that the man desires more physical gratification. The same is found in Raavad’s *Baalei Hanefesh*. See, however, Rashi to Sukkah 52b, where he offers an alternative explanation: “if he feeds it, by satisfying his passions, he grows weak in his old age.” But that explanation cannot apply to the passage in Sanhedrin where the Talmud uses this principle to explain King David’s desire for Batsheva as being a result of his having fed his desires earlier that day. Thus, Rashi may be simply offering an additional dimension to this expression in his commentary to Sukkah, rather than an alternative.

600 R. Abraham J. Twerski, *A Taste of Nostalgia*, p. 142

The merchant was in a quandary. He had sacrificed being with his family only because of the Rebbe's promise to share *Gan Eden* with him, and now, he stood to be a loser both ways. He was not with his family, nor would he share *Gan Eden* with the Rebbe. After due consideration, he said, "I release you from your promise. At this moment, fulfilling the mitzvah of Sukkah is more important to me than *Gan Eden*." R. Levi Yitzchak welcomed the merchant into his Sukkah and embraced him. "Now you will, indeed, share *Gan Eden* with me," he said. R. Levi Yitzchak continued, "*Gan Eden* cannot be acquired so easily. You did not have sufficient merits to warrant *Gan Eden*. However, now that you were willing to give up your *Gan Eden* in order to fulfill the mitzvah of Sukkah, you have, indeed, earned it, and you will be close to me in *Gan Eden*."

Just like everything else, when it comes to *Gan Eden*, it is only when we are willing to give it up that we discover what its place is in the grand scheme of things, and that way, we can truly earn it!