



## Radical Reliance • Parshat Behar

In *Parshat Behar*, the idea of the Sabbatical year, both its restrictions and aspirational values, are delineated in detail. The verses convey psychological attunement to the fact that not working the land for an entire year would engender anxiety. How would individuals and the broader society be economically sustained? Anticipating this mindset, the verse states, “And should you ask, “What are we to eat in the seventh year, if we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?” (Lev. 25:20). The Torah validates, accepts, and expects the natural human desire for financial security and predictability. God, in turn, makes a guarantee in the next verse that there will be enough produce.

Even with this assurance, Rabbi Yitzhak applies the verse in Psalms that blesses the “mighty of strength who perform his bidding” (103:20) to those who observe the sabbatical year (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:1). That midrash continues: “The way of the world is that a person performs a commandment for one day, for one week, for one month. But does one do so for the rest of the days of the year? Yet this one sees his field fallow, his vineyard fallow, and pays his land tax and remains silent. Is there anyone mightier than that?” Commitment, connection, and dedication to religious goals often ebb and flow through the course of the calendar. It is the consistent and constant necessity to maintain active faith, throughout the sabbatical year that is worthy of praise. Mere lip service or theoretical allegiance will not suffice. Those who observe the sabbatical year have genuine trust in God.

*Betach*, safety and security, is a key word within the narrative. In three successive verses, God assures that the Israelites will dwell safely in the land if they perform the requisite laws (Lev. 25:18-20). While the literal meaning indicates that God will provide physical security, there is also a sense of aspirational psychological safety embedded in the language. According to *Sefer HaChinuch*, one of the pedagogical goals of the sabbatical year is to inculcate a sense of *bitachon*, trust in God. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz elaborates on the importance of trusting in God to provide during the sabbatical year, noting that the verse quoted in the midrash above begins: “Bless the Lord, you angels of His, you mighty of strength who perform His bidding.” Those “mighty of strength” who observe the sabbatical year are called angels. Generalizing this to all aspects of life, Rabbi Shmuelevitz inspires readers to accept an almost angelic trust in God’s plan.

A key component of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) is radical acceptance. When we can’t change ourselves, others, or our circumstances, we are encouraged to accept reality as is, in its totality. This mindset could decrease emotional turmoil and allow us to focus our energies on attainable goals. In spiritual and religious terms, we might call this “radical reliance.” We seek to place our faith completely in God’s hands.

One strategy used by DBT to inculcate radical acceptance is called willing hands. When we are tense, anxious, or angry, we often clench our hands

together tightly. Willing hands is the conscious decision to change our body posture to foster a different attitude physically and emotionally. By unclenching and consciously opening our hands in a calming and relaxing manner, we welcome acceptance of our circumstances.

In her book, *The Hidden Order of Intimacy*, Dr. Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg regards the sabbatical year as a symbol of relinquishing control. She notes that the sabbatical year in Hebrew, *shemittah*, means “release, remission, the relaxing of tension.” Building off the description of the sabbatical year

in Deuteronomy, she states that “the physical imagery of clenching and relaxing is repeatedly evoked.” Our hands are supposed to be open, not tightened or hardened. This encourages a “phenomenology of *openness*” to counteract “rigid emotional muscles” that would otherwise “have the power to abort blessing.”

*Shemittah* serves as a model for working on opening our willing hands and increasing our trust in God. Inculcating this value can assuage our anxieties and leave us emotionally open to connect meaningfully to God and to others.

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**Character Challenge:** Identify an area of your life that you are worried about. Open your hands, take a deep breath, and say: “I trust in You, God, that everything is in your hands.”

**Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt”l:** “[T]here is a Hebrew word, which means two quite different things. And it’s usually pronounced in two quite different ways. The word *bitachon*, sometimes pronounced *bitochon*. *Bitachon* means security and *bitochon* means faith or trust. And the connection between those two meanings and that one word is, I think, very significant.... how do we deal with insecurity? And the answer is contained, or at least the Jewish answer is contained, in that one word: *bitachon*, the word that means security on the one hand and faith on the other. How do you cope with insecurity? By faith.... And yet Jews never, ever, ever lost faith. And that *bitochon* was their *bitachon*. That faith was their security” (“Faith & Insecurity,” *Elul 5780 Lecture Series*).