

## What will we eat? (*Behar*)

This week's parsha includes the commandment that we cease working the land every seven years for *Shmitta* so the land can grow in its fertility, and so that farmers can then dedicate time to serving God through studying of Torah. But of course, this then raises a question: what will the farmers and their families eat during the *Shmitta* year?

This question is pre-empted by the Torah when we read (Vayikra 25:20): *And if you should say, "What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!", to which God replied: I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years.*

In general, the Torah does not pre-empt the questions which Bnei Yisrael will ask in response to a given mitzvah. However, it does so here. The question is: why?

The Noam Elimelech answers by saying that Hashem created the world with a network of channels which provide us with what we need. However, when our faith in God's provision, our *bitachon*, slips, and we ask questions like, "*What will we eat?*", then those channels cease to be effective.

At such moments, and in response to this momentary weakening of faith, God realizes that we need an extra injection of faith. Consequently, He refreshes these channels and provides in abundance what we thought we were unable to receive. And so we are told: *I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield produce for three years*

With this in mind I would now like to discuss some of the recent events in Israel. As you may know, I live in a Yishuv in the south of Israel called Even Shmuel. Sderot and Ofakim are 30 minutes from my house, and when there is fighting in Gaza, my house shakes as we destroy the Hamas terror tunnels or as the iron dome intercepts the many rockets that continue to be shot towards Israel.

Of course, the events of October 7th shook the whole Jewish people to its core, and especially as someone living in the region which Hamas had plans to attack, it was and remains a scary time.

In the weeks and months after that fateful day, the IDF set up impromptu army bases in the towns, kibbutzim and yishuvim in the south of Israel from where soldiers would travel into Gaza to fight, and to where they would then rest between battles. And from the days after October 7th, my Yishuv became a location for two such army units.

To be clear, there is no hotel where I live. Instead, each unit moved into a basic local hall, without any meaningful catering facilities and very little washing facilities, where soldiers slept on basic mattresses while they were expected to rely on basic army food supplies.

Ordinarily, this alone would have been hard. But these soldiers were fighting morning and night. In fact, as one of the many people who frequently did guard duty in the middle of the night, I would wave our soldiers out as they left at night, and wave them back in as they returned at 3 or 4 in the morning.

Given such a situation, you may have expected that these soldiers also ask the question referenced in our sedra of: "*What will we eat?*"

However, not once did they ask the question. And do you know why? Because every morning and every evening, women and men from my Yishuv would cook food and bring it to those halls so our soldiers could enjoy a home-made breakfast.

And what happened when our soldiers would come back, at 3 or 4 in the morning, looking exhausted and wearing, after a night of battle?

The women of my Yishuv would wake up in the middle of the night and prepare fresh hot couscous with vegetables so that our soldiers could enjoy something warm before they went to sleep. Could there be any greater expression of the words of *Eshet Chayil* (Mishlei 31:6): *She gets up while it is still nighttime, and gives food to her household and portions to her maidservants.*

But here's the question: why did these chayalim not ask the question of: "*What will we eat?*". To answer, I would like to return to the insight of the Noam Elimelech.

As you may recall, he explains that in response to this momentary weakening of faith, Hashem realizes that we need an extra injection of faith. Consequently, Hashem refreshes these channels and provides in abundance what we thought we were unable to receive.

In the months prior to October 7th, there were many Jews in Israel and beyond who weakened in the faith they had – not so much towards Hashem, but instead, towards their fellow Jewish brother and sister. There was a sharp decline in *Emunah B'Am Yisrael* and *Achdut shel Am Yisrael*.

The horrific and evil events of that dark day continue to haunt us. But just like the response to *Shemitta* and the weakening of faith in Hashem is an abundance from Hashem, so too, in response to the weakening of faith in Am Yisrael was a sharp surge in the unity of *Am Yisrael*. And how do I know this? Because when the soldiers were coming back from battle – these same soldiers who, perhaps some months before, had strong views directed towards religious communities such as mine, they

did not ask "*What will we eat?*". Instead, their faith in *Am Yisrael* grew as *Am Yisrael* provided for them in abundance - just as Hashem provides for the farmers observing *Shmitta* in abundance.

As a spiritual coach, there are times when people seek my guidance when they have questions relating to *Eemunah B'Hashem*. And before October 7th, there were even times when people sought my guidance relating to *Eemunah B'Am Yisrael*.

Admittedly, there are those in the post October 7th era who still have questions relating to *Eemunah B'Hashem*. But especially in response to the swell of love and unity amongst the Jewish people, no one now doubts the bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood within the Jewish people.

Please God, we hope for a time when we are all strengthened and uplifted in both realms of *Eemunah*. But what I can tell you is that each time our soldiers went out to fight, they did so not only with great faith in Hashem but also, as a result of the stunning gestures of love and kindness that were performed by many men and women who literally fulfilled the words of *she gets up while it is still nighttime*, they did so with great faith in *Am Yisrael* as well.