

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Behar

“THE LAND SHALL NOT BE SOLD PERMANENTLY, FOR THE LAND BELONGS TO ME, FOR YOU ARE STRANGERS AND SETTLERS WITH ME.” (VAYIKRA 25:23)

The king warns us to be ready to leave at a moment's notice

FORTY NINE YEARS, or seven cycles of *Shmittah* – the seventh-year Sabbath of rest for fields – have passed, and now *Yovel* - the fiftieth year Jubilee – arrives, and all land is returned to its original owner. No parcel of the Land of Israel may be sold permanently. Why? The above *pasuk* tells us: We are not the real owners of any property, ultimately Hashem owns everything and we are mere transients. This outlook, Rashi (ibid.) explains, will make it less painful to give the land back since it's not ours anyway. The Chovos HaLevavos (Cheshbon Hane-fesh 3:30) cites this verse as a basis for an allegory to our life in this world: He tells us to view ourselves as strangers in a foreign land. We know no one. Yet the king who rules the land (Hashem) takes us in, feeds us, teaches us right from wrong and, finally, warns us to be ready to leave at a moment's notice.

How can Rashi say that they ease the pain?

Rashi tells us that realizing we are strangers who do not own the land will ease the pain of losing these fields which we have been working for so many years. But how does this thought console us? The concept of being transient, as explained by the Chovos HaLevavos, means that we have no right to feel secure in anything we have. As sojourners on this earth, we lack ownership, not merely of this piece of land, but of all our possessions, and even our very lives. As in the allegory, the king may decide at any moment to terminate our stay. These thoughts hardly seem consoling or reassuring. If anything, these thoughts of helplessness and transiency should bring us to a sense of depression and vulnerability. How can Rashi say that they ease the pain of losing our field?

Knowing we have nothing of our own allows us to truly feel that Hashem is giving us everything we need

The only way we can feel safe from any harm, whether it be to our health, our families or our assets, is if we firmly believe that everything we have is in the hands of a Higher Power, who truly knows and does only what is best for us. The more we realize that we are in the caring and capable hands of Hashem, the more secure we will feel. The allegory of the Chovos Halevavos helps us appreciate how puny and feeble we are, so that we can break through our false reliance on the idols of money and human power. If we place our trust in human abilities, we will be racked with fear and uncertainty. We can never feel secure in our own abilities, or those of any mortal human being, because deep down we know that we are not in charge. Hashem ultimately makes the decisions and calls the shots. When we realize this – and we realize that Hashem has cared for us with great compassion from the moment we were born until today – then, and only then will we feel truly secure.

Knowing that we are transient, strangers on a temporary visa in a foreign land, brings us to the greatest levels of *bitachon* and *simcha*, because we let go of our silly misconceptions and foolish trust in our bank accounts, stock portfolios, and real estate holdings. We stop clinging to our faith in physical might, political power, medicine and technology. Certainly, we must make proper efforts to achieve results in this world, but everything is in the all-powerful and loving hands of our Father, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We have nothing to fear, because knowing we have nothing of our own allows us to truly feel that Hashem is giving us everything we need. There is no greater joy, confidence or security that we can experience than that of absolute trust in Hashem.