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FREE RENDITION

By the Grace of G-d
6th of Tishrei, 5733
Brooklyn, N. Y.

To the Sons and Daughters of
Our People Israel, Everywhere,

G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

Following up the previous letter for the New Year, the main topic of which was the special significance and teaching of Rosh Hashanah that occurs on Shabbos, as it did this year,¹

I wish to dwell here on another facet which distinguishes this entire year, and consequently also the Rosh Hashanah of this year, from most Rosh Hashanahs. It is the fact that this year's Rosh Hashanah ushered in a Shemittah Year. Since Rosh Hashanah is the "head" (Rosh) of the year, as mentioned in the previous letter, this added dimension, too, must assert itself in each and all the days of the current year, including such days which have no direct bearing on the observance of the Shemittah laws (because no agricultural work is then done in any case).

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The Shemittah Year is known as the "Shabbos" of the seven-year cycle (or the so-called "Sabbatical Year"). Insofar as work, in particular, is concerned,² what Shabbos is in relation to the other days of the week in terms of cessation from work and sanctified rest, the Shemittah year is in relation to the other years,³ with this difference: On Shabbos all work is prohibited, whereas in the Shemittah year only agricultural work is prohibited,⁴ as the Torah declares: "The land shall rest a Shabbos unto G-d ... thy field thou shalt not plant, and thy orchard thou shalt not prune."⁵

Although the lessons we learn from the Seventh Day and from the Seventh Year are similar in many respects, there is a difference in the main concepts which they stress:

Shabbos emphasizes mainly that G-d is the Creator of the world ("For in six days G-d made the heaven and the earth"⁶); the Shemittah Year accentuates mainly the fact that G-d is the Master of the world, now as at all times. Man must attest by his actions that he "Owns^{6*} nothing; but that everything is in the possession of the Master of all."⁷

In the Seventh Year the owner of a field or orchard renounces his ownership to these properties, in fulfillment of the Torah injunction: "And the (spontaneous produce of the) resting of the land shall be for food unto you (alike with) thy servant and thy maid,"⁸ etc. Commenting on this verse, Rashi explains: "G-d says I have not excluded these from your use or food, rather that you should not act as their proprietor, but everyone shall have equal right to them."

In other words: The Shemittah year emphasizes the concept that although the Creator has given the earth to man, for food and use, he must remember that the real and permanent proprietor is G-d, as it is written, "To G-d belongs the earth and everything contained therein, the world and those that dwell in it."⁹ In order to emphasize and reinforce this awareness at all times, so that it be actualized and implemented into the daily life, G-d set aside the Seventh Year as a Shabbos-like ("Sabbatical") year, when all work in the field and orchard ceases for the duration of the entire year, during which period the proprietor no longer claims possession of these properties, but is on par with his servant, maid, etc. Or, as the Midrash puts it: "His field is derelict (Hefker); his trees are derelict; the fences are breached, and he sees his produce devoured,"¹⁰ etc., yet he accepts it all - this is how a Jew attests to the fact that the true Master of the world is G-d.

The concept that G-d is the Master of the world with all that is in it, is an idea which a Jew espouses every day of the year and expresses it in actual fact by making a Brocho (benediction) over everything which he uses¹¹ for "food and use" (to quote Rashi), thereby declaring that G-d is King of the Universe, Creator of everything, etc. However, in the year of Shemittah this concept is accentuated with the utmost emphasis, as mentioned above.

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And this is one of the most edifying instructions of this year's Rosh Hashanah: It is not enough to acknowledge that the Supreme Being is the Creator of the universe; it behooves us to remember also what logically follows from this acknowledgment, namely that the Supreme Being is also, and at all times, the Master of the world; and the constant awareness of it must be expressed in terms of the daily conduct throughout the year.

And although the laws of the Seventh Year do not apply outside of the land of Israel,¹² its spiritual content and instruction are applicable everywhere.

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The concept that the Supreme Being is the permanent Master¹³ of the world with all that is in it, as this concept is expressed during the Seventh Year, finds a most conspicuous practical application in the matter of Tzedakah, an all-embracing Mitzvah,¹⁴ which requires of every Jew¹⁵ to give away part of his hard-earned money to a poor man who did not toil for it, and to a Torah institution or other institution which cares for the needs of the needy. Comes the Seventh Year and teaches a special concept in the matter of giving Tzedakah: a) A person does not give away his own, but only that which G-d has temporarily entrusted him as His agent¹⁶ to the poor; b) Through sharing his possessions with others, a person justifies that which he keeps for himself.

Needless to say, the practice of Tzedakah is not limited to money, but includes "money, body and soul,"¹⁷ spiritual Tzedakah, which obligates every Jew to help another Jew who is "poor" in Torah and Mitzvoth. However much a person values his time and efforts to use them for his own Torah edification and the practice of the Mitzvoth, he is told that he must not consider himself as the exclusive proprietor, but must devote of his time and efforts to the dissemination of the Torah and Mitzvoth among those who are "poor and needy" in these matters.

This is also one of the major aspects and resolutions of Yom Kippur, characterized by Teshuvah, prayer and Tzedakah, as is also emphasized in the Haftorah of the day: "This is the fast I choose ... share thy bread with the hungry ... when you see a naked person, clothe him,"¹⁸ etc. Our Sages explain¹⁹ that in addition to the plain sense of these words, they also mean spiritual Tzedakah: To feed the "hungry" person who is starving for spiritual sustenance, namely Torah, and bedeck with Mitzvoth the one who is "naked" of Mitzvoth.

Then there is the Divine Promise: Asser t'asser²⁰ (the Torah-reading for Shemini Atzeres), as explained by our Sages²¹ of blessed memory, that through giving tithes and Tzedakah, a person will not only not reduce that which he has, but, on the contrary, it will be greatly increased,²² to the degree of riches. And although the Mitzvoth in general (including Tzedakah²³)

must be fulfilled not for the sake of the reward, but because G-d, the Creator and Master of the world, commanded them, nevertheless G-d has given the assurance of a generous reward (Asser t'asser), both materially and spiritually.

With the blessing of
Chasimo u'Gmar Chasimo
Tovo

(Signed) Menachem Schneerson

(1) עוד ענין מיוחד בשנה זו שהיא מעוברת (וחסרה - מ"ח וכסלו שניהם חסרים), אבל כיון ש"אני מאמין בביאת המשיח.. אחכה לו בכל יום שיבוא" ועד - בנוגע להלכה למעשה (עירובין מג, א) ואז יקדשו ב"ד ע"פ הראי' - אין מוחלט שיהי' מעוברת (וחסרה) עד בוא חדש אדר (ומ"ח וכסלו). (2) כי יש עוד ענינים שדומים בהם כמו בהוספה בלימוד התורה (ספורנו בהר כה, ד. ועוד). וראה ג"כ חינוך מצוה פד. (3) ויקרא רבה ספכ"ט. וראה רמב"ן בהר כה, ב. (4) הטעם ע"פ קבלה וחסידות ראה לקוטי תורה (טעמי מצות) להאריז"ל פ' בהר, שער המצות שם ועוד. לקו"ת בהר ד"ה את שבתותי ועוד. (5) בהר כה ב-ד. (6) יתרו כ, יא. (6א) חינוך מצוה שכת. (7) ומראה זה בשדהו כו' - עיקר נכסיו של אדם. וראה יבמות סג, א. (8) בהר כה, ו. וראה ספר טעמי המצות להצ"צ סוף מצות שביעית: אדם ובהמה שווים כו'. ועייג"כ סוד"ה כי תבואו גו' ושבתה - תרס"ו. (9) תהלים כד, א. (10) תנחומא ר"פ ויקרא. ויק"ר שם. (11) ראה טושו"ע או"ח סמ"ו ס"ג ושו"ע אדה"ז שם. ברכות (לה, סע"א). (12) הביאור ע"פ קבלה ראה ליקוטי לוי יצחק-אגרות ע' רמז. (13) יומתק ביותר ע"פ תורת הבעש"ט אשר העולם ומלואו דבר ה' "מהווה אותו תמיד ומוציאו מאין ממש ליש" (שער היחווה"א פ"א, ג). (14) ראה וירא (א, יט) יצוה.. לעשות צדקה ומשפט. ו"בכל תלמוד ירושלמי היא (צדקה) נק' בשם מצוה סתם כי כך הי' הרגל הלשון לקרוא צדקה בשם מצוה סתם" (חניא פל"ז - מח, ב). וראה ג"כ סד"ה אני בצדק (סי' עם דא"ח). (15) אפילו עני המתפרנס מן הצדקה (טושו"ע יו"ד ר"ס רמח). (16) חינוך מצוה סו. ועיי' ד"ה תקעו בחדש (בסו"ס תורת שמואל תרכ"ז). (17) אורחות צדיקים פי"ז. בארוכה - ראה ד"ה אשר ברא ואילך תרפ"ט (ס' הקונטרסים). (18) ישעי' נח, ו-ז. (19) תנדב"א רבא פכ"ז. (20) ראה יד, כב. (21) תענית ט, א. (22) להעיר מתורת הה"מ במאמר הזהר (נשא קמ, ב) אית חסד ואית חסד (לקו"א קרוב לסופו ד"ה במדרש ואהרן מה הוא). (22א) אבות פ"א, מ"ג. (23) ואף שנאמר ובחנוני נא בזאת (ראה שו"ע יו"ד סו"ס רמז) פשוט שמובחר נתינתה שלא על מנת לקבל פרס - ראה רמב"ם הל' תשובה בסופן.