



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 17 | Behar | Sichah 2  
& Siyum Mesechta Sheviis

### **The Dilemma:**

There are three central *mitzvos* of *shemittah* {the sabbatical year}:

- 1) “To desist from performing agricultural work... in the Sabbatical year, as it says (*Vayikra* 25:2): “The land will rest {like} a Sabbath unto G-d,” and it further says (*Shemos* 34:21): “You shall rest with regard to plowing and harvesting.” (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Shemitah* 1:1)
- 2) To renounce ownership of any produce from the earth that grows in the Sabbatical year.
- 3) To renounce all debts and to refrain from pressuring a debtor.

The first two of these *mitzvos* can be defined in two ways:

- a) Regarding the *mitzvah* to desist from agricultural work: Is this an obligation of the individual landowner, requiring him to abstain from work, or is it an obligation concerning the field itself, requiring the landowner to ensure that it lies fallow? The practical ramification would be in a scenario where a gentile works the field. If it is an obligation of the Jewish landowner, then he has not transgressed this command. But if the obligation requires the landowner to ensure that no work is done in his field, then he transgresses no matter who does the agricultural work.

b) Regarding the *mitzvah* to renounce ownership of produce: Is it the owner who must personally renounce ownership of that year's produce? Or is the produce "declared ownerless" by the Torah unilaterally? The practical ramification would be in a scenario where an owner does not renounce his ownership of his produce: If it is an obligation of the owner, then the produce would remain his, and if a person were to take it, he would be stealing. If the Torah unilaterally considers the produce ownerless, then it would be free for anyone to take.

### **The Resolution:**

The Talmud equates the *mitzvah* of desisting from agricultural work with the *mitzvah* of renouncing all debts. Citing the verse that discusses renouncing debt — "And this is the manner of the release; to release the hand of every creditor from what he lent his friend" (*Devarim* 15:2) — the Talmud concludes that the repetition of the word "release" refers to two types of release: One is the release of land and one is the renunciation of monetary debts. (*Gittin* 36a)

From a careful reading of the following *Mishnah*, it is evident that it is the individual lender's renunciation which cancels the debt, not the decree of Torah law.

The *Mishnah* says: "In the case of one who repays a debt after the seventh year, the creditor must say to the debtor: 'I remit it.' But the debtor should say: 'Even so (I will repay it).' The creditor may then accept it from him, because it says: 'And this is the word of the release....' Regarding one who repays his debts after the seventh year — the Sages are pleased with him. (*Shevi'is* 10:8-9)

If Torah law unilaterally cancels all debts, how can the *Mishnah* speak of "debtors" and "lenders," and even praise "one who repays his debts?" If the Torah nullified the debt, then there is simply no debt?!

If, however, the *mitzvah* is for the individual creditor not to demand payment, then it is possible to say that the debt still exists, as does a lien on the debtor's property — and yet, there is no collector of this debt. In other words, the relationship between the creditor and debtor is dissolved by the creditor's renunciation, but the debt theoretically still exists. Therefore, if the lender insists, he can pay the debt, and our Sages even laud such behavior, for the lender goes beyond the letter of the law to show appreciation to the creditor.

And because of the *Talmud* linking these *mitzvos*, it follows that the same definition applies to the *mitzvah* of refraining from agricultural work and renouncing ownership of the *shemittah* year's produce: The obligation devolves on the individual landowner, requiring him to refrain from work and to renounce his ownership of his produce.

### **The Deeper Dimension:**

There is a paradox in the mechanics of the cancellation of debt on the *shemittah* year: On the one hand, it is a passive obligation — to refrain from pressing the debtor. On the other hand, as the *Mishnah* describes, it sometimes must be verbalized by the lender: "I remit it."

This aligns with the Kabbalistic definition of *shemittah*. Chassidus explains that *Shemittah* is synonymous with *malchus*, the Divine attribute that translates G-d's creative energy into action. In this role, *malchus* performs two opposite tasks. It receives the Divine creative energies, selflessly absorbing them into herself. And it then "speaks" and reveals these energies in the form of creative acts.

Thus, *shemittah* mirrors both of the roles of *malchus*: The person passively refrains from collecting the debt, but sometimes, he must also verbalize this renunciation of debt.