

In This Issue

- **Ancient Wisdom & Modern Psychology** by Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman
- **Shraga's Weekly** by Rabbi Shraga Simmons
- **Torah for Your Table** by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis



Portion Control

Most of us are under the impression that we know when we are full. We can accurately determine based on internal cues that we are satiated and do not need to eat any more. Most of us, however, are wrong. In a series of studies, Dr. Barbara J. Rolls from Penn State University, has demonstrated that people's overall consumption of food and internal feelings of satiety are easily manipulated based on portion sizes. If my levels of being satisfied were based just on internal feelings, whether my sandwich is 6, 8, 10, or 12 inches shouldn't influence how much of it I eat. However, studies show that whether eating subs, potato chips, macaroni and cheese or salads, people tend to eat more and need more food to feel satisfied, when there is more food present.

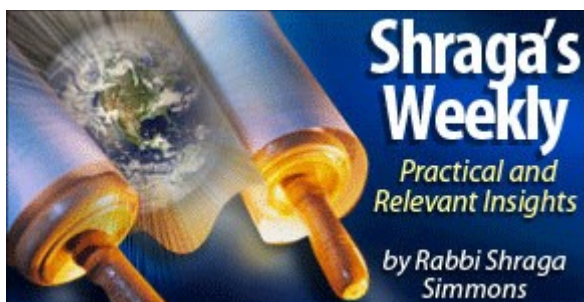
In this week's Torah portion we read about the mitzvah of Shemittah, where we are informed that every seventh year, the land must rest. Even though we won't be able to work the land, the Torah tells us (Vayikra 25:19) that God will provide nourishment and that we will eat to the point of satiation ("ve-achaltem lasova"). However, the verses continue with what seems to be a redundancy. "And should you ask, what are we going to eat if we can't sow the field and gather our crops?" To this the Torah answers that God will bless the produce of the sixth year, so that it will yield enough produce for three more years (Vayikra 25:20-21). But didn't it just say in the previous verse that we will eat to the point of satiety? Why does it then say that if you are nervous, don't worry - there will be enough food for three years?

Rabbi Ovadia Sforno explains this perceived repetition is really reflecting two potential blessings offered by God. The first, and what seems to be the ideal situation, is that God will bless the food's potential for satiety. The nutritional value will increase, and a smaller dose of food will keep us satisfied longer. This is similar to what the Sages tell us about the manna, which despite its size, was able to provide adequate nutritional and satiation value. This is the ideal blessing – smaller portion sizes; longer lasting satiation. The Torah then adds a contingency blessing. If our belief is lacking and we are nervous that we won't be filled by the smaller portions, then God will increase the quantity of the food as well. Our eyes will perceive the vastness of the food and we will feel more comfortable

and more satisfied.

Sforno is highlighting the subjectivity of satiation. The first blessing would have been enough. The only impediment to it taking place would be our own nervousness about how small the portions looked. In order to avoid any anxiety related to keeping Shemittah, God is willing to give in to this human frailty and give us bigger portions just so we would feel better. Yet, the ideal would be for us to be satisfied with the smaller portion.

If we can expand from Shemittah to our normal eating habits, the message is clear. Our ability to feel satiated isn't entirely biological. There are psychological processes as well. Our portion sizes and the environmental cues as to how big our plates and cups are, affect how much we eat before we feel full. If we can train ourselves in a healthy way, perhaps with the guidance of a nutritionist or a psychologist, we may be able to eat less while still obtaining important nutrients and feeling just as satisfied.



Sabbatical and Sinai

Every week, we open our email and read from the Torah portion nice ideas about relationships, spirituality, success and joy. We appreciate the Torah for its relevance,

rationality and wisdom. But there's one question we haven't asked: How do we know the Torah is true? Did God really give the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai?

To help answer our question, let's try looking at the reverse argument: that the Torah was written by a committee. In fact, let's imagine that we're the rabbis assigned to write the Torah. Of course, we're not going to tell anyone that we're writing this or else they won't accept it. Instead, we're going to say God gave this book – and hope people believe us.

Now remember, we're starting from scratch. There's nothing yet written – no Garden of Eden, no Ten Commandments. So what would be a good law to include in our Torah? How about "Thou shalt not steal?" That's very practical – let's include it.

"Thou shalt not murder?" Okay, we'll put that in, too.

Now I'd like to propose the following law:

Every seventh year, the entire Jewish people must cease working the fields. They may not plant, plow or harvest – for an entire year, once every seven years.

Do you think this is a good law to put in the Torah?

Sure! We've all heard of "crop rotation." Letting the land lie fallow helps replenish the nutrients, yielding better crops than if you'd use the soil year after year.

One problem, however. If we're an agrarian society (as the early Israelites were), then we live off what we plant. So if we don't

plant for an entire year, we'll have nothing to eat!

But there's a solution: Let's store up one-sixth of the harvest in each of the first six years, and then eat from that in the Sabbatical year. Or alternatively, we could divide the country into seven regions; each year, a different region will let their fields rest and borrow food from all others. Simple enough.

Alternative Option

Now imagine that our committee proposes a far more radical idea: No dividing the land, no storing up grain. Rather, we **simply promise to deliver a triple crop** in the sixth year.

Absurd! Obviously we can't guarantee that the sixth year will yield a triple crop. If we're pretending to be God, and promise something we can't deliver, we'll be exposed as frauds!

How long do you think this religion will last if we make this promise?

About six years! As soon as the triple crop doesn't come, we're out of business. The religion's a sham.

So our imaginary rabbinical Torah-writing committee shoots down the triple-crop idea as an impossible option.

No Excuse

Now let's see the Sabbatical year as described in the actual Torah (Leviticus 25:3-21):

"For six years you may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the

seventh year is a sabbath for the land. During that year, you may not plant your fields nor prune your vineyards. Do not harvest crops that grow on their own. Do not gather the grapes on your unpruned vines since it is a year of rest for the land...

*...And if you ask, what will we eat in the seventh year? We have not planted nor have we harvested crops. I will direct my blessing to you in the sixth year and the land will produce **ENOUGH CROPS FOR THREE YEARS.**"*

What is the Torah's proposal? Divide up the land? Store the grain? No! The Torah promises that "The sixth year will produce enough crops for three years."

The Torah could have written, "Keep the Sabbath law in the seventh year. It's going to be a terrible year, everybody's going to be starving. But as a great reward, you'll get a triple crop in the eighth year." That would have been smart, because then, if it didn't happen, the excuse could always be, "Well, some people were cheating in the seventh year. So God punished us and didn't give us the triple crop."

But no. Our author promises a triple crop in the sixth year, before we even observe the law. There is no possible excuse should there fail to be a bumper crop.

Why would the author – who wants people to believe in the divinity of this book – make a ridiculous promise he cannot possibly fulfill and thereby expose himself as a fraud? Why take such a far-out risk when

there are so many other options?

Sinai Direct

So who wrote the Torah? Who would make such a promise?

This week's parsha, "Behar," begins as follows:

*"God spoke to Moses **on Mount Sinai**, saying, Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, **the land shall observe a Sabbatical year of rest**. For six years you may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the seventh year is a Sabbath for the land."*

Why does the Torah, in relating the mitzvah of the Sabbatical year, specify that God is speaking on "Mount Sinai?"

Because the Sabbatical year is one mitzvah which proves that no human being would ever write this law. Only God could be the Author Who gave the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Learn the Book

Soon we will be celebrating the holiday of Shavuot – the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Jewish tradition tells us that the soul of each and every Jew – past, present and future – stood that day at Mount Sinai. When God's Voice tore through the Heavens, the Torah was engraved on the stone tablets... but was first engraved on the heart of every Jew. The Voice spoke and we heard.

Is the Torah true? This is the time of year to investigate the evidence. Jewish belief needs to be built upon a rational foundation, not a leap of faith. The commentators say that the very reason God instituted the Sabbatical year was in order to give everybody time off to study Torah!

What can we do? Make the commitment to learn. Attend a Torah class in your area. Other ideas:

- Attend a [Discovery seminar](#)
- Subscribe to [Torah email lists](#)
- Read a [good Jewish book](#)
- While commuting, listen to [audio classes](#)
- Try out [one-on-one Jewish learning](#), by phone or in person

In "Shema Yisrael," the Jewish Pledge of Allegiance, we begin with the word *Shema* – "listen." Carefully and calmly, we listen. To the beauty, depth and relevance of our Torah. Intuitively, deep down we know the truth. And the mitzvah of the Sabbatical year invites us to rediscover it once again.



Total Trust in God

Our *parashah* begins with the commandment of *shemittah* (the Sabbatical year), which means that every seventh year in Israel, the land must lay fallow.

Interestingly, the Torah introduces this commandment by stating that God commanded this mitzvah at Mount Sinai, which, at first glance, appears rather enigmatic, for we know that every mitzvah - *all* the commandments - were given at Sinai, so why should the Sabbatical year be singled out for special mention? In the answer to this question is to be found the foundation upon which our Jewish faith is built, and that is total trust in God.

Ancient Israel was an agricultural society. The nation's survival was totally dependent upon the produce of the land, but the laws of *shemittah* required that after every seven-year cycle, the land be allowed to rest; no tilling, no planting, no harvesting of the earth was to take place, which in essence meant that the harvest of the sixth year had to last for three years (the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth, since no work was done in the seventh). For an entire nation to come to a standstill demanded complete and utter trust in God. Just try to visualize what would happen if, in our contemporary world, we were told that we had to shut down our businesses, our farms, etc. every seventh year and *rely upon income from the sixth year to sustain us for three years!* There would be total and utter chaos. Panic would break out, and this, despite the fact that many of us have some savings and our government has reserves to fall back on, and we have the wherewithal to preserve food, so that famine would not become an issue. Therefore, the very fact that our forefathers accepted this mitzvah unquestioningly testifies that it had to come from Sinai, for

such a demand could only be made by God, Who sustains us in all seasons. Hence, that is the reason for the mention of Sinai in connection with the Sabbatical year.

Additionally, when we observe *shemittah*, we declare to the world that the true owner of the land is God, and it is only with His permission that we till the soil and reap the harvest. Such an admission makes us keenly aware that it is our Heavenly Father Who is in control and not we who are in charge - an admission that renders us humble and compassionate, mindful of that which is of paramount significance in life.

NO EXPLANATION REQUIRED

From the very genesis of our history, it is this *total trust* that shaped our relationship with God. At Sinai, we proclaimed, "*Na'aseh v'nishma* - We will do and we will obey,"[1] without really knowing what would be demanded of us. Our unequivocal response was based totally on *trust*, and it is this trust that is the basis for the observance of all our 613 mitzvos. More than logic and reason, our commitment is rooted in the knowledge that God is there, that it was He who spoke, so no commandment can be too difficult, even if at times the challenge might appear to be so. We rely totally upon God, trust Him implicitly, and know that, since He created us, if He commanded it, we have the ability to deliver.

The Jew who is imbued with this faith does not need any explanation as to why he should observe a mitzvah; the very fact that God spoke is reason enough, and he does not need any better rationale than that.

Over the years, we have seen science catch up to us and substantiate many of our commandments, pronouncing them medically sound. Society has also come to appreciate the wisdom inherent in our ethical and moral laws, but whether science or conventional wisdom verify our commandments is irrelevant. Ours is a commitment of *total faith and trust*, for the voice of God forever reverberates in our hearts. This faith and trust are at the root of our survival. We are a minuscule minority and by every law of logic, we should have long ago disappeared.

Nor is our situation different today. Our brethren in Israel are surrounded by a sea of hostile nations who seek her destruction. How can we possibly survive? The Passover Haggadah gives us the answer: In every generation our enemies seek to annihilate us, but the Almighty God always saves us.

TAKE CARE NOT TO INFLICT PAIN

Our *parashah* coincides with preparations for the holiday of Shavuot, when God gave us His Torah. Therefore, most appropriately, this *parashah* imparts mitzvos that teach us how we may best prepare ourselves for this awesome day. Not only are we called upon to intensify our faith and place our trust in the Almighty God, but we are also reminded how to be more sensitive toward our fellow man:

"Each of you shall not aggrieve his fellow,"^[2] meaning that we must be very careful with our *words* and with our *comments* so as not to embarrass or hurt others. The use of derogatory language or

offensive nicknames is not permissible under any circumstances, nor are we allowed to remind people of their past misdeeds, even if we claim that we are just joking.

In our society, "ranking out people" and "telling it like it is," regardless of how much pain is inflicted, has become the "norm." Taunting, hurling insults, name-calling start at a very young age, and many children are psychologically destroyed by their peers in school or in summer camp. The use of abrasive, cutting words continues throughout life. It mars our marriages and our relationships; it is at the root of our broken homes and our angry, bitter personal lives. Our *parashah* speaks to us with great urgency and reminds us that basic to a stable, harmonious society and family life is the art of communicating with kindness and love.

1. Exodus 24:7.
2. Leviticus 25:17.

See more great
parsha essays at:
www.aish.com/tp/