

Kehillah #20



THE PERTINENT PARASHA

A Slavery That Frees

Rabbi Yeshoshua Pfeffer | Rav of Kehillat Ohr Chadash, Ramot, Jerusalem

There is only one place in the entire Torah where we find a reference to the Jewish People as slaves of Hashem. This occurs at the end of Parashas Behar: "For they are my slaves, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold in the manner of a slave" (*Vayikra* 25:42). After listing a range of instructions constraining Jewish slavery, the pasuk repeats the message: "For the Children of Israel are slaves unto me; they are my slaves, whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt – I am Hashem, your G-d" (*Vayikra* 25:55).

Two simple questions spring to mind. First, why is it that such a central theme – the idea of our subjugation to Hashem – occurs only once in the entire Torah. Should this seemingly central concept not occupy more Torah volume? Second, why does our subjugation to Hashem preclude our slavery to others? Though he works hard, a slave can nonetheless keep

the Torah's mitzvos and refrain from transgression. Why are the two incompatible?

We marry for love and relationship and not for the Ketubah obligations, and, in the same vein, Hashem desires our mitzvos in the context of an intimate relationship and not as mere compliance.

These simple questions deserve a simple answer. The explanation is that Hashem desires our *relationship* and not our *slavery*. Of course, part of being in relationship with Hashem involves performing Torah mitzvos, just as being in relationship with one's spouse involves fulfilling the rights and obligations delineated in the Ketubah document. Yet, we marry for love and relationship and not for the Ketubah obligations, and, in the same vein, Hashem desires our





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THE PERTINENT PARASHA



mitzvos in the context of an intimate relationship and not as mere compliance.

This is the reason why servitude to Hashem is not highlighted by the Torah. Although the concept is true – Moshe is praised as Hashem’s faithful servant – emphasizing it runs against the grain of the connection between Hashem and His people, a connection that lends itself far more to a king-subject model than one of master-slave. A subject trusts his king, loves him and relishes his closeness, while a king loves and is devoted to his loyal subjects, always considering their betterment. The same cannot be said of the connection between slave and master.

Why, then, does the Torah make a sole mention of our slavery to Hashem in our parasha? The answer is clear: to negate enslavement of the Jewish People, which the Torah does not tolerate.

In the fullest sense of the word, a slave loses all semblance of independence. His work, his time, his marriage, his childre and all else about him belong to his master. He cannot engage in relationship with others, for even his relationships “belong” to his master. Slavery of the Jewish People thus precludes their ability to be in relationship with Hashem. The Torah prohibits such “total slavery,”

While the risk of total slavery is distant, there remain countless “small serfdoms” – from damaging relationships to cellular phones, from workaholism to a host of negative habits – that deny us the freedom of being in relationship with Hashem.

and plays, just once in the entire Torah, the slavery-to-Hashem card. We cannot be slaves to others. We are already taken.

In other words, there is only one reason why the Torah notes our slavery to Hashem: to guarantee our liberty; to ensure we are free to be in relationship with Him.

Most of us are privileged today to live in a world without slavery, certainly not of the ancient type. Yet, the Torah lesson ought to resonate in our deepest core. While the risk of total slavery is distant, there remain countless “small serfdoms” – from damaging relationships to cellular phones, from workaholism to a host of negative habits – that deny us the freedom of being in relationship with Hashem.

Even today, it remains incumbent upon us to ensure our freedom and our capacity for true relationship. Whenever needed, we even have a special “mastercard” to play – the card of slavery to Hashem that urges us to be free.



Land Ownership and Yovel in the Land of Israel

Rabbi Asher Meir

The Yovel requires returning land to the original owner in the Yovel year in Eretz Yisrael. Hence any "sale" of land is effectively just a long-term lease. Furthermore, even before the Yovel year, the "seller" has the right to redeem the land. Today we call this a buy-back provision. Interestingly,

"When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another."

some jurisdictions today have a similar law prohibiting prepayment penalties on mortgages, thus empowering the borrower – who, in effect, sold his house to the bank for a period of time – to pay the current outstanding balance on the mortgage at any time and acquire the house outright.

The Torah stipulates that the price for buying back the land must be prorated to the price at which it was sold. For example, if the lease was for forty years and cost four hundred

thousand shekels, then the rate is 10,000 shekels a year. If after thirty years the seller/lessor decides to redeem the land, thereby reclaiming ten years of the lease, he must pay 100,000 shekels even though a standard ten-year lease would cost much less. (A long-term lease paid in advance costs more per year than a corresponding short-term lease, because the buyer forgoes interest on the money for more time.)

The Rules of Onaah

"When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the Yovel; and in selling to you, that person shall charge you only for the remaining crop years." (Vayikra 25 14-15)

The Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 49b) teaches that this prohibition, called *onaah*, is a general one and has a specific shiur or amount: overcharging or underpaying one sixth of the true market value of the item (not a sixth of the selling price) gives the misled party the right to



cancel the transaction. Another Mishnah (*Bava Metzia* 56a) mentions that land transactions are actually exempt from the rules of *onaah*.

There are some differences of opinion regarding the scope of these laws. The Ramban rules that knowingly overcharging or underpaying less than a sixth is not actionable, but it is still forbidden. According to the Chinuch (237), it is permissible. (Both opinions are mentioned in *Shulchan Aruch* CM 227.)

The Rambam categorically exempts real estate from *onaah* as brought down in *Shulchan Aruch*; Rabbenu Tam rules that it merely has a larger margin of error – half the value, rather than a sixth as mentioned in the Rema.

The price that serves as the basis for *onaah* is the "going market price." It is clear from the halachic literature that in earlier generations it was common that in any given area there was a single going market price for any commonly bought commodities. So the prohibition of *onaah* was generally

well defined. Today, there is much more differentiation in products (a typical U.S. superstore stocks over 100,000 distinct items) and in seller amenities (comfort, help from salespeople, location). Consequently, today *onaah* questions are not common. They do, however, definitely arise.

The Ramban rules that knowingly overcharging or underpaying less than a sixth is not actionable, but it is still forbidden.

Used cars are a good example. They are generally priced according to a standard catalog based on model, condition, mileage and more, sometimes with a well-known premium or discount. It is quite unusual for cars to be knowingly sold for a sixth more or less than the *mechiron* (list price). Hence, if someone offers you more than a (halachic) sixth more than the *mechiron* for your used car, or if someone offers to sell you one for more than a (halachic) sixth less, it is proper to mention the *mechiron*





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price, or at the very least to bring to their attention that there is such a thing.

Canceling a Sale

An analog in secular law is the “implied warranty of merchantability,” which empowers a purchaser to cancel the sale if what he bought does not meet general expectations for merchandise of the given description *and the given price*. Someone who is greatly overcharged can often cancel the sale by pointing out that the widget he bought is substandard given the price he paid.

Many commentators discuss the paradox that the laws of *onaah* are learned from the sale of land, yet land sales are exempted. Many answers are given. The Ibn Ezra understands that the Torah itself gives the answer: “That person shall charge you only for the remaining crop years.” In this understanding, the exemption of land actually reinforces the message of the verse: during Yovel, nobody owns any land; it all belongs to Hashem.

The Sefas Emes (5638) connects the laws of shemita and Yovel to

onaah in the following: the word *onaah*, here meaning “fraud,” is the same root used a few verses later meaning to mock or deride. This shows that the laws of *onaah* are meant to emphasize the special unity of the Jewish people. (Unlike the core monetary laws such as theft or fraud, *onaah* deals do have a basic level of informed consent and are not forbidden in transactions between Jews and non-Jews. Hence, the *onaah* prohibition really implies a positive duty to look out for the interests of the other party. Thus, neglecting them is an affront.)

“Many commentators discuss the paradox that the laws of *onaah* are learned from the sale of land, yet land sales are exempted.”

When will the laws of Yovel apply again? When “all of its residents dwell there.” (*Erkhin* 32b). When the Jewish people all settle in the Land of Israel, we will experience the heightened sense of national unity which will make Hashem’s sovereignty over the land palpable.



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PARASHA AND PARNASSAH

The Reward for Torah: Abundance?

Rabbi Tzvi Broker | Career Coach and Director of Pilzno Work Inspired

One of the explanations of the teaching in *Pirkei Avos* (4:2) states that the greatest reward for performing a mitzvah is the opportunity to perform another mitzvah. It’s not just because a mitzvah is a more valuable reward over materialistic alternatives; rather, one who is seeking growth in Avodas Hashem is given the means to achieve his goal by being given another mitzvah. As Chazal explain, “In the way a person wishes to go, in that way he is led.”

If so, then the beginning of Parashas Bechukosai can be confusing: “If you will follow my decrees and observe my commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce, and the land will give its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your bread to satiety and you will dwell securely in your land.”

The Torah describes the ideal intended spiritual state of Bnei Yisrael following the Torah. What’s the hoped-for achievement?

Perhaps we may have expected to find descriptions of reaching a heightened level of Torah understanding and *dveykus*. Instead, as the Torah continues, we find a description of material abundance. A similar description, with even greater detail, is found in Parashas Ki Savo.

“The greatest reward for performing a mitzvah is the opportunity to perform another one.”

It’s understandable that having our needs met enables us to keep the Torah, but why the abundance? We find throughout the Torah warnings about how the materialistic world leads to *aveiros*. In our own time, we’re able to see how too much materialism leads people away from Hashem. Why then is the reward of material abundance given to us for our success in following the Torah?

We can gain insight through a parable of how an army general delegates assignments to his troops. Simple guard-duty tasks





PARASHA AND PARNASSAH



are given to beginners, while special missions are assigned to the most experienced and reliable soldiers.

Hashem's intention for man is to uplift all aspects of the material world towards their elevated spiritual purpose. The question is who Hashem can rely on to achieve this without getting distracted and losing focus of the goal. Hashem understands that an inexperienced soldier won't succeed. It's better to send him on a safer mission involving a lower level of materialism. Yet it's crucial that this soldier doesn't think this is the ideal. Such a misunderstanding creates an incorrect mindset that the Torah encourages a life disconnected from materialism.

It's specifically the more experienced soldiers whom Hashem entrusts with the mission involving material abundance because He knows they can succeed. Therefore, the parasha teaches that it's

specifically when Bnei Yisrael are succeeding in serving Hashem in an ideal way that we receive material abundance. This reward is a sign that Hashem trusts we have the ability to succeed in His special mission.



We find throughout the Torah warnings about how the materialistic world leads to aveiros.



The message of this teaching calls for us to check in with our own belief system regarding materialism. Do we view it as an opportunity or as a danger to our service Hashem? This is more relevant than ever as we are living in a generation of tremendous material abundance. Developing the right mindset empowers us to step into the material world feeling Hashem's belief in our capabilities to succeed.



BIOGRAPHY & LEGACY

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of Piaseczna

Rabbi Dov Loketch

Previous installments described the Rebbe's early years, his remarkable combination of talent and personal greatness, his passion for aliyah to the Land of Israel, his groundbreaking educational vision, his relationship with his wife, the tragic loss of his family and the early phase of the Warsaw Ghetto. This fourth installment focuses on his time in the Warsaw Ghetto.

prayers. Our fathers and mothers, all the prophets and prophetesses, all the righteous men and women are not at rest, they are not silent while we suffer. They are surely turning the whole Garden of Eden and all the holy places upside down, on account of our suffering. It is certain they take no consolation in saying, "Despite everything, one way or another the Jewish people will survive."

Rebbe of the Ghetto

In one particularly powerful derasha, the Rebbe expressed with raw emotion the pain and torment the Jewish People were suffering: *"The truth is, it is a marvel how the world exists after so much screaming. When the Ten Rabbis martyred by the Romans were suffering, the ministering angels cried out, "Is this Torah, and this its reward?" A voice from heaven responded, "If I hear one more cry I will turn the whole world back to water." Yet now, immaculate children, purest angels, together with the greatest, holy Jews, are murdered and butchered just because they are Jews, [...] filling the whole vast emptiness of the universe with their screaming, and the world does not turn back into water? It remains standing, steadfast, as though G-d is untouched by events, G-d forbid?*

In a different derasha, the Rebbe acknowledged that European Jewry's suffering at that time was entirely unprecedented in the annals of Jewish history: *"Only such torment as was endured until the middle of 1942 has ever transpired previously in history. The bizarre tortures and the freakish, brutal murders that have been invented for us by the depraved, perverted murderers, solely for the suffering of Israel, since the middle of 1942, are, according to my knowledge of the words of our sages of blessed memory, and of the chronicles of the Jewish people in general, unprecedented and unparalleled. May G-d have mercy upon us, and save us from their hands, in the blink of an eye."*

On one occasion, the Rebbe addressed the humiliating experience that many boys and men in the ghetto experienced - the cutting of their

[...] We are certainly not alone in our



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beards and peyos - citing Yeshayahu 27:13: "Those who are lost in the land of Assyria, and those who are dispersed in the land of Egypt, shall come." The Rebbe explained the difference between *ovdim* (the lost) and *nidachim* (the dispersed):

"The dispersed" refers to one who is displaced to a distant locale yet remains distinct and recognizable. This is in contradistinction to "the lost," who is neither distinct nor recognizable. For when the hardships are presently so compounded that they even cut off the beards of Jews which make them outwardly unrecognizable, and due to unimaginable persecution and unbearable afflictions, they are no longer recognizable internally, such a person loses himself, he ceases to recognize himself. How did he feel a year ago, on a Sabbath, or on a weekday prior to prayers, or during prayers, etc.?

Now he is trampled and crushed, such that he no longer senses if he is a Jew or not, or a human being or not, or an animal which has no capacity to feel. This is the nature of one who is lost, yet, "They will come, those who are lost."

The Rebbe concluded that the lost are the possessions of G-d, and based on the Gemara in *Kiddushin* whereby owners seek their lost property, he ended with a prayer: "May the Owner of the lost return to find us."

Every week, after Shabbos, the Rebbe wrote down the derasha delivered that Shabbos, and he later reviewed and edited them. One editorial addition is particularly noteworthy. In late 1942, reviewing a derasha presented the previous year imploring his followers to strengthen their religious commitment despite the suffering, he made the following note on the margin:

Only such torment as was endured until the middle of 1942 has ever transpired previously in history.

"The above was said and written in 1941. Then - however bitter were the troubles and suffering, as is apparent from the text above - it was at least possible to lament, [...] to worry about the survivors. [...] We still had the wherewithal to admonish. This is no longer the case, now at the end of 1942, when the holy congregations have been annihilated in a radical excision. Those individuals who survive, pitiful and few, are [...] downtrodden and terrified for their lives. There exist no words with which to lament our woes. There is no one to admonish, and there is no heart to awaken to worship and to Torah. How many trials must one undergo as the price of a prayer? There is certainly no spirit or heart left to grieve for what the future holds."



Talking to Today's Teenagers

Rebbetzin Ilana Cowland

Relationships coach and author of *The Moderately Anxious Everybody*.

Do you remember being a teenager and wondering how it was that your parents managed to become adults without being teenagers first? They so misunderstood this stage that surely they skipped it? And then at some point you discover, (especially if your parents happened to be teenagers in the 60s) that they were more teenager than you were?

Well, that's no longer true. Because there have never been teenagers like those of today. No teenagers of yore had to contend with the kind of confusion, fast pace, available disorders, twisted conditioning, cyber pressure, everything dysmorphia, rampant anxiety and general chaos like today's teenagers. So, no matter how cool or rebellious you once were, you never went through what they're going through.

Even our older teens are complaining that they can't relate to the "generation" below them, even when that generation may be no more than two years earlier than their own. So what chance do we stand?

It's an unprecedented challenge.

Never mind the idea that these poor kids are hitting their teenage years at about the age of 8. And that's if they're delayed. So here's a novel suggestion.

It's not a particularly brilliant one. Until you actually try to do it.

We have to treat these teenagers like foreigners. Because that's what they are. They are immersed in a culture that we have never visited. So, what do you do when you want to understand someone from a totally alien culture?

1. Be real with the fact that, when it comes to their cultural experience, we are ignorant. You don't start a conversation with a Korean sumo wrestler by telling him how much you know about his life from your own experience. We begin with a humble admission of ignorance.

2. Be curious. Now be careful here. There's a very small gap between curious and interrogative. Curiosity conveys, "I'm genuinely interested in understanding this better." Interrogative conveys, "I seek to control and/or judge."





3. Don't be too vague: "So son, what's it like to be you?" is an unhelpful question. Son has no idea what it's like to be anyone else, so he has no good way to convey what it's like to be him. Maybe find a more specific question. What's trending on social media? Is it hard to do school work when so many things want your attention? Do you see a big difference between kids your age and kids from the year below? Questions should be specific, open ended and without a parental agenda.

4. Ask questions about areas your teenagers are experts in. If they love a particular video game, ask them how they win. If they're interested in a particular author (Halevai! That would imply they read), find out about the genre or storyline. Let them become your teachers in the areas they have expertise.

5. If they spend three minutes engaging with you, mission accomplished. We have a touchdown. Resist the urge to ruin it by displaying some form of subtle disapproval. Shut them down now and they won't give you another chance so quickly

6. Keep it light. Make sure they enjoy the interaction, but quit while you're ahead. It's not about getting into deep and drawn out conversations.

Short. Sweet.

We have all had successful conversations with strangers. Success is as simple as they felt we were interested in them and we learned something new about what it's like to be them.

It's a horrible feeling admitting that there's a gap between us and our kids. But once we see it is a reflection of the interesting times

If they spend three minutes engaging with you, mission accomplished. We have a touchdown.

we live in rather than our lacking as parents, we can remove some of the guilt and angst and do what we humans do best. Because we are connectors. We use conversation all the time to bridge gaps and form connections.

And while our teenagers may be unlike any teenagers that came before them, it's also true that never have teenagers so badly needed to have their parents "in" on their lives. So apologies if these ideas are basic. That's exactly what they are. The depth is not in the complexity but rather in the application.



A Boy's Encounter with the King of England

Rabbi Shmuel Kimche

Mashgiach Ruachni at Netzach Yisrael Elementary School, RBS.

I come from London. As everyone is aware, last Shabbos was the Coronation of King Charles III of England. Grand pomp and display were the order of the day, which reminds us of Rav Yochanan's statement in the Gemara (*Brachos* 58) "We should always try to make sure that we appreciate the display of power in order to appreciate true malchus in the future."

soon. Wolff, especially, had a very hard time with this, and he simply stopped speaking. He didn't speak with his friends. He didn't speak with his teachers. He simply shut down.

Suddenly, Wolff pushed his way to the front of the crowd, jumped over the railing and started running towards the royal carriage!

I'm reminded of a story about King Charles' grandfather King George VI that we heard around 12 years ago. An elderly man named Mel called into an Israeli radio show and told his story. When he was a young boy with his family in Germany, life for Jews was becoming dangerous. So Mel's parents sent him away to safety on the famous Kindertransport that brought thousands of children to England. Their parents would try to join them as soon as they could.

The Day of the Royal Parade

One day, the children were told that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth would be riding in their royal carriage very near the school. They were told to dress in their finest Shabbos clothes and wave the Union Jack - the British flag - on the day that the King would pass by. It is hard to imagine the boys' excitement. For the weeks leading up to the day of the Royal Parade, the boys could think (and talk!) about nothing else.

Mel and Wolff were placed in a school together with many other children. Everyone got to know each other and enjoyed their new school. But Mel and Wolff were different. They knew that England was at war with Germany, and there was very little chance they would see their parents anytime

But one very strange thing happened. From the day he heard about the parade, Wolff - who had been so quiet and reserved - became a different person. He started speaking and joking with the other children. He





STORIES THAT INSPIRE



began to smile again. Finally, the day came. The tension mounted as the royal carriage could be seen from afar. No one noticed, but as the King's carriage came closer and closer, Wolff started getting more and more nervous. He started sweating and breathing heavily. Suddenly, Wolff pushed his way to the front of the crowd, jumped over the railing and started running towards the royal carriage! Within five seconds, the guards jumped on him and stopped him.

The King told the guards to stop the carriage so he could speak to the boy. After a few minutes – no one knew what he had said to the King or what the King had asked him – Wolff was escorted back to his shocked friends and his fuming (embarrassed) teachers. The Head of School asked Wolff to explain, but he was silent.

Escape to England

A week passed. Hoping against hope, he started to feel that the incident had been forgotten. Suddenly, little Wolff was called into the headmaster's office. The headmaster was sitting and waiting with a smile on his face. "Please tell me what you asked the King that day." The boy answered, "I just asked the King and Queen to help find my parents. I miss them more than I

For a few moments – an eternity for Wolff – the headmaster stood frozen. Finally, he opened the door to his office.

can say. Surely, the King, the most powerful man in the land, could help me? Surely, he could help them escape to England just as he had helped me?"

For a few moments – an eternity for Wolff – the headmaster stood frozen. Finally, without saying a word, he opened the door to his office. Standing in the doorway were Wolff's parents. Our shy little Wolff shrieked in joy as he leaped into his parents' embrace.

There was a long silence on the radio. Finally, the elderly man started crying as he finished telling the story. "We all laughed at Wolff. We thought him crazy. But we also had an opportunity to speak to the King and didn't take it."

This is a powerful story of tefillah, of jumping over the railing and asking the King. It is a story of emunah in the King who can do anything. And it is an opportunity to see the coronation here on earth as a means to appreciate the true coronation of our King.



PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

My Fruits, Your Fruits

Josh and Tammy Kruger

The silly boy in this story makes at least four mistakes. Can you find them? Can you think of how the story is connected with the parasha?

The Story:

In the land of Israel, in the city of Balagan, on a street named Gevalt lived the Mevulbal family. They were nice and funny and very, very, very mixed up. Seven years had passed, and once again shemitah had arrived.

"Reuven, what are you up to?" asked Mrs. Mevulbal, as her son busily worked with his paintbrush and colors. "Our teacher taught us that when shemitah arrives, we should put a sign in front of our home. Mine is going to say, 'Dear people of Balagan, your fruits no longer belong to you. Please bring all of them to my house immediately.'" (1)

"How kind of you," smiled Mrs. Mevulbal. "By the way, I wasn't able to enter our backyard. It seems the gate is stuck. "It's not stuck," said Reuven. "I found a very strong lock in the basement and used it to lock the gate. The fruit in our backyard may not belong to us anymore, but I don't think anyone is going to be able to

get to it," he chuckled. (2)

"Have you seen the fruit in the Rosen's yard?" asked his mother.

"They have beautiful pomegranates." "I love pomegranates," said Reuven with excitement. "They make lovely stains on my clothing!" Reuven ran down the street and arrived at the Rosen's home. He entered their backyard and began picking all the pomegranates he could find. (3)

"Hey, Reuven," shouted his classmate Yossi. "What are you doing in my backyard?" "This is everyone's backyard now, Yossi," said Reuven. "I'm going to make pomegranate juice, and it looks like I'll have enough to last a year! Don't worry. I'll share with you." (4)

"Excuse me boys," said Rabbi Oyvey, who was also picking a pomegranate. "I think I had better clarify the laws of shemitah with you."

Answers

1) If someone has fruit in his backyard, then he should create a sign before Rosh Hashanah that informs the passersby of the fruit and declares that they can enter





PARASHA HALACHA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



the backyard and help themselves (Mishpetei Eretz Sheviis, 10:9).

2) It is forbidden to block others from entering your backyard (Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah Veyovel, 4:24).

3) The Rosen's fruit belongs to "everyone," and they cannot deny Reuven permission to take fruit. But it is still proper for Reuven to request permission (Rav Kook, Shabbos Ha'aretz 6:15:1).

4) We are only allowed to take the fruit we need now. Reuven is taking enough pomegranates to last him

many months, and this is definitely forbidden (Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah Veyovel) 4:1 and 4:24).

What is the connection between our story and the parasha?

A: Parashas Behar begins by discussing the laws of shemittah (Vayikra 25:1-7)

Based on the following: Katif Sheviis by The Institute for Torah and the Land and Gateway to Shemittah by Rabbi Dovid Marchant.

Written in collaboration with Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer le'ilui neshama Frumit Bat Yosef, Edith Nusbaum a"h.

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