

CHEATERS NEVER PROSPER!

PARSHAS BEHAR – BECHUKOSAI

There was once an Emperor who had no children and needed to choose a successor.

Thousands of children from across the kingdom came to the palace. The Emperor gave each of them a seed. He told them to plant the seed in a pot and tend to it for a year. When they return in a year, the Emperor would judge their efforts and choose his successor.

After a few months, some pots had trees starting to grow, some had flowers, and some had leafy shrubs. One boy, Ling, still had nothing growing in his pot, despite watering his seed every day. The other children made fun of Ling, yet he continued to water his pot every day.

After a year had passed, it was time to return to the palace. Ling was anxious as his pot still showed no signs of life. "What if they punish me? They won't know that I've watered it every day." His mother looked him in the eye and explained that whatever the consequences were, he had to return and show the Emperor his barren pot.

Ling and the other children entered the palace gates. By now, some of the plants were looking magnificent and the children were wondering which one the Emperor would choose. Ling was embarrassed as other children looked at his lifeless pot and laughed.

The Emperor came out and started to make his way through the crowd, looking at the many impressive trees, shrubs and flowers that were on display. Then the Emperor came to Ling. He looked at the pot then he looked at Ling. "What happened here?" He asked. "I watered the pot every day, but nothing

"When you sell to your friend or buy from your friend, do not cheat each other." (Vayikra 25:16)

ever grew." Ling muttered nervously. The Emperor moved on to see the rest of the pots.

After a few hours, the Emperor finally finished his assessment and congratulated the children on their efforts. He called Ling to come to him.

The Emperor held up the pot for all to see and the other children laughed. Ling was embarrassed. The Emperor continued, "A year ago, I gave you all a seed. I told you to go away, plant the seed, water it, and return with your plant. The seeds that I gave you all were boiled until they were no longer viable and wouldn't grow, but I see before me thousands of plants and only one barren pot. That is an indication of your dishonesty, for the seeds which grew these plants were not the ones that I had provided to you. Integrity and courage are more important values for leadership than proud displays. The only honest one among you is Ling. Therefore, Ling will become your new Emperor".
(The Emperor's Seed — A Story About Integrity by Rafael Magaña)

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

The Torah discusses the mitzvah of *Shemita*. Farmers who owned land in *Eretz Yisroel* were instructed not to do any work on their land during the 7th, or *Shemita* year. They were forbidden to weed, plant, or harvest their field. The produce of their fields was free for anyone to take.

In the middle of this topic, the Torah seems to briefly go on a tangent, indicating that it is forbidden to cheat one's friend by overcharging on a sale. Why does the Torah teach the prohibition of cheating one's friend, in the middle of the laws of *Shemita*? Furthermore, the laws of overcharging involve portable items whereas the laws of *Shemita* involve land. What is the connection between the two? **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** brings a beautiful idea from **Rabbi Elyakim Schlesinger**, the Rosh Yeshiva of Harama of London, and the author of Sefer Bais Av. He says that the basic idea of following the laws of *Shemita* is to help one develop a strong faith in Hashem, understanding that **everything comes from Hashem**. A farmer will seemingly have no income since he cannot do any work on his field.

Yet Hashem will provide for him.

This was also the lesson of the *mann*. The *mann* was the miraculous food that fell from the heavens, providing for the Jews in the desert. Some Jews spent much time gathering the *mann*, while others spent less time. When they returned home, they all ended up with the same amount. The lesson was that our sustenance comes from Hashem. A person should not think that the harder he works, the more he will earn.

Rabbi Frand continues that once one understands that his sustenance is totally from Hashem, he will not feel the need to cheat others. He will realize that Hashem will provide him with all that he needs. He won't have to overcharge on his sales. He will realize that any "ill-gotten gains" won't be permanent because that is not what Hashem wanted to provide him with. Any "gains" will be taken away by an unexpected cost such as a repair bill or medical expense.

This is the message of *Shemita*.

We should be honest in all our dealings for, as we know, cheaters never prosper!

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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