

Be an Illuminator Not a Consumer: Leave Your Mark

Bava Metzia Mishna 9:1

Arisut (sharecropping) is when a person “rents” the right to work on another’s field and benefits from what he harvests in exchange for giving the owner of the field a contractually agreed upon percentage (e.g. 25% of the yield).

Chachirut (tenant farming) is the same as arisut except the renter gives a contractually agreed upon amount (e.g. 500 bushels of berries).

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הַמְקַבֵּל שָׂדֵה מִחֵבְרוֹ, מִקּוֹם שֶׁנֶּהְגוּ לְקַצֵּר, יִקְצֹר, לְעֵקֵר, יַעְקֹר,¹
לְחָרֵשׁ אַחֲרָיו, יַחְרֹשׁ. הַכֹּל כַּמְנַהֵג הַמְדִינָה. כְּשֵׁם שֶׁחֹלְקִין בְּתַבּוּאָה,
כִּף חֹלְקִין בְּתֵבֹן וּבְקֶשׁ. כְּשֵׁם שֶׁחֹלְקִין בֵּינוֹ, כִּף חֹלְקִין בְּזִמּוּרוֹת
וּבְקִנִּים. וְשִׁנִּיהֶם מְסַפְּקִין אֶת הַקִּנִּים:

Regarding one who rents [“receives”] a field from his friend [via arisut or chachirut]: in a place where the local custom is to cut [the produce when harvesting it], he must cut. [In a place where the local custom is] to uproot, he must uproot. [If they were accustomed to] plow after [harvesting], he must plow [after harvesting]. Everything goes according to the local custom. Just as they “split” [i.e. proportionally divide based on the specified percentage or amount] the grain, they also “split” the straw and stubble. Just as they “split” the wine, they also “split” the branches [pruned from vines] and poles [that are used to hold up the vines]. And both provide the poles.

HASHKAFIC RELEVANCE

Although we aren’t sharecroppers in a halachic sense, every single one of us is a sharecropper in a hashkafic sense.

This world is Hashem’s field, and He lets us cultivate and partake of the crops in it. However, when we leave this world, Hashem is going to ask us for our share of the “fruits” we “harvested” as our “payment.” What will YOU have for Him?

The entire ninth perek of Bava Metzia is not only about learning the laws of arisut and chachirut, it’s also there to remind us of our duty to produce “fruits” in this world and to have something to “give” Hashem at the end of our lives.

Our way of giving back is by being illuminators, not consumers.

ILLUMINATORS VS. CONSUMERS

An “illuminator” gives over to others; he brightens one’s day and life; whatever strengths and talents he has, he uses to help others and the world – he gives his proper share of “fruits” back to Hashem; he makes this world a little more beautiful than when he entered it. Some illuminators shine brighter than others, but they all proactively give over light.

A “consumer” takes without really giving; he’s happy to be the recipient of someone else’s chessed without caring to give back (or is unaware of his obligation to do so) – he eats up most of the ‘fruit’ in the “field” without repaying Hashem; he makes the world a bit more barren. Some consumers take more than others, but they all take way more than they leave behind.

EXAMPLES OF ILLUMINATORS

Avraham Avinu: The pasuk tells us, “And Avraham was old; he came with his days” (Bereshit 24:1, parashat Chayei Sarah) – he came before Hashem with his days – “Hashem, here are the days of my life! This is what I spent my time doing! Here are the fruits from Your field that I harvested for You – look at the chessed I did; look how I brought You out to the world! I’m not coming empty handed!”

Yosef HaTzadik: Kli Yakar on why “ish matzliach” is in the causative form – everywhere Yosef went, he used his talents and power to make others successful (Bereshit 39:2, parashat Vayeshev).

HOW WE CAN BE BETTER ILLUMINATORS

- 1 - When a WhatsApp message is sent out from someone in need, answer the call and help out as best you can.
- 2 - When people need assistance moving furniture, making a minyan for someone who can’t make it to shul, building a sukkah, etc. volunteer—even if you don’t want to.
- 3 - Rabbi Yosef Lynn’s game-changing “heed the call” message: make the shift from receiver/consumer to giver/illuminator.

POINT OF CHIZUK

Every one of us has unique talents and abilities that Hashem has given us to utilize to the fullest.

With real effort, we can discover these strengths, cultivate Hashem’s field with them, and proudly “come with our days” like Avraham and help others be successful like Yosef HaTzadik.