



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

SINAI REVISITED

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Parshat Behar begins with the Torah telling us that Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, and then continues to detail the mitzvah of שמיטה. Rashi notably asks:

מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני?

To which he explains that just as the principles and particulars of the mitzvah of שמיטה were given at Har Sinai, so too, all of the principles and particulars of all mitzvot were given at Har Sinai.

Despite this clarification by Rashi, we still have no understanding as to why of all mitzvot Hashem chose

שמיטה to be the paradigmatic mitzvah through which we learn that all mitzvot were told to us at Har Sinai.

At Har Sinai the Jewish people united with God in a historic, inimitable experience. Never before had the Jewish people connected to God in such perfect union, with such absolute faith and complete trust. The only national mitzvah that comes close to **reenacting the perfect faith experienced at Har Sinai is the mitzvah of שמיטה**. The required abandonment of one's fields, negation of his source of income and relinquishment of one's livelihood necessitates complete faith in God for one's life and sustenance. A level of spirituality reminiscent of and paralleled at Har Sinai. That is why God chose to juxtapose the mitzva of שמיטה with his commandments at Har Sinai.

Whereas this close connection to God and heightened holiness engendered through the mitzvah of שמיטה is obvious, it is less apparent **though equally**

true regarding all mitzvot. The purpose of each and all mitzvot is to remind us and connect us to God. The details and minutiae of each mitzva are designed to interrupt our daily routine, focus us on our relationship with God and our need to reach out to Him, rely on Him and connect to Him as we did at Har Sinai. That is the message of Rashi. Just as שמ"ט generates in us a Sinai-like experience so too must we understand that all mitzvot have the quality and ability to engender in us that Sinai-like, perfect relationship with our Creator.

FAITH IN THE FIELD

DANIELLA KAMINETSKY ('19)

PARSHAT BEHAR DISCUSSES THE TOPIC OF SHMITA, the commandment to let the land in Israel lay fallow every seventh year. The year following the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash was the first year of this seven year cycle. During the shmita year, farmers are forbidden to plow, plant, prune and harvest their fields. Farmers may water and mow the fields, but not improve the growth of trees or other plants. In addition to the agricultural restrictions, shmita annuls all debts between Jews.

These seemingly strange halachot raise many questions: What are the farmers supposed to do with produce that grows by itself in the year of shmita? Should they just leave it all in the field? If someone owes his neighbor \$500,000, does shmita really negate this loan? The answer to these questions is yes.

Technically, the halacha is that whatever produce grows on its own is considered hefker, ownerless, and is communal property, free for anyone to take. Technically, the \$500,000 loan need not be repaid. These restrictions seem rather harsh at first glance. However, when a person begins to understand the depths of what Hashem is asking from us, it is actually a beautiful mitzvah.

Hashem created the shmita year for us to understand that everything ultimately comes from Him. Just when a person believes that his success is due to only himself, Hashem inserts Himself in one's life and says, "STOP, remember your success requires My partnership." Hashem promises us that He will bless the land and provide enough sustenance in the sixth year to "yield enough for three years." When it comes to loans, Hashem would never want a person to lose his money, but He does not want a person to feel so self important either. As such, the rabbis created a process called pruzbul, by which a person gives over all of his loans to the Beit Din to collect in his name. This works because the shmita does not nullify loans to the Beit Din.

The lesson we learn from this is that Hashem will always provide for someone as long as they truly believe that He is the ultimate provider.

GOD KNOWS ALL

CHAYA COHEN ('16)

THIS WEEK'S PARSHA CONTAINS 24 commandments.

The pasuk states:

וְיִרְאֵת מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ
כִּי אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק, אֱלֹהֶיכֶם

"Do not abuse one another and you should have fear of your God, for I am HASHEM your God!"
(Vayikra 25:17)

Rashi takes this pasuk and splits it into two. The first part is a warning for man that he should not belittle people by speaking. This commandment deals with the power of speech, which is one of the main differences between man and animal. As we know, animals are referred to as "chai" (living) and man is referred to as "medaber" (speaking). Man is created in the image of God to use this power of speech like

God. We have to use our power to create good; cheating and harming others through selfish and callous speech is the ultimate perversion of man.

Rashi then interprets the second part of the pasuk by saying that man should not cheat people in business. Rashi explains that the Torah is cautioning us regarding verbal abuse and that one should not annoy his fellow or give him advice that is not appropriate for him or his needs but rather benefits the one giving the advice. And if the person giving advice thinks to himself that no one really knows whether he had true intentions when giving the advice, he should remember to fear God. God knows your thoughts and feelings. This subject has broad implications and daily applications in all business and personal relationships. The person giving agenda-driven advice may not even be fully aware of how distorted his opinion has become. Caution is therefore pertinent for recipients and for givers of advice as well.

THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Yael Attias ('16)

THE FAMOUS MITZVAH OF SHMITA, THE COMMANDMENT FOR A PERSON to refrain from harvesting or benefiting from his land during every the seventh year, is found in this week's parsha. This is a mitzvah that, like many others, is very difficult to understand. However, it teaches many valuable lessons that are vital to the existence of the Jewish people. The pesukim leading up to this mitzvah repeatedly use language that indicates that it is our land. For example, the pasuk says:

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם... שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע
שָׂדֶךְ, וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרֶמֶךְ; וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ

“When you come to the land I will give to you,” and it says, “For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard and you may gather in its crop.” (25:2-3)

The mitzvah of shmita seems to contradict this exact point. If it is completely our land as these pesukim suggests, why are we forced to leave it every seven years?

Dovid Manson provides a beautiful answer to this exact question. He explains that the fruits of the field are ours, not because we plant and grow them, but because we leave them every seven years. By not working in the field during the seventh year, we have completed our part in the partnership with Hashem, and He therefore allows us to have the fruits during the other six years. Just like Hashem rested the seventh day, so too we rest on the seventh day of every week and on the seventh year to testify that Hashem runs the world.

The seventh year serves as a reminder that despite all the work we do and all the effort we put into everything, at the end of the day it is Hashem who controls our lives. Hopefully this recognition will allow us to better appreciate everything Hashem does for us and thereby improve our relationship with Him.

I HAVE NO INTEREST

Leora Keehn ('19)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT BEHAR, HASHEM tells the Jewish people that if one Jew becomes poor, not only should other Jews help him by lending money, but they should make sure that they do not give the money with an expectation of being paid back with interest.

There are a few powerful messages that we can learn from Hashem's decree. The first message is to recognize that all blessings, including how much money a person has, come directly from Hashem. So, when you lend money to someone, you are giving

some of the money that Hashem has provided for you. Therefore, since it was technically Hashem's money, Hashem has the right to tell the Jewish people to not make their fellow Jews pay interest.

The second message we can learn from Hashem's decree is that this ban on charging interest is actually designed so that we never forget the first lesson. Unfortunately, we live in a selfish world, and people often do things solely for themselves. People check out the pros and cons of a situation to see if it makes sense for them, or they avoid doing things because they get nothing or not enough out of it.

Hashem wants to make sure that when we do something for a fellow Jew, we do it entirely for that person. Lending money to our fellow Jew makes it all about their needs and nothing about our own.

Hashem wants to instill in our hearts that the ultimate form of giving is when we give entirely for the other person and have no thought of getting anything in return.

If you give something to someone who is in need, whether it's physical or emotional, and make it all about that person, you actually feel great pleasure in your actions. You will experience something remarkable and know that we are doing the right thing for the right reasons. The more selfless you are, the more reward you will receive.

We want to thank our entire staff for all their hard work this year.

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