

D'var Torah by Rabbi M. Jaroslawicz for Parshas Behar-Bechukosai 5775 (2015)

At the beginning of this week's Parshios, Behar / Bechukosai, the Torah teaches us a law that seems totally displaced. The Pasuk says:

"When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem. For six years you may sow your field and for six years you may prune your vineyard; and you may gather in your crop. But on the seventh year a complete rest there shall be for the land, a Sabbath for Hashem; your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune."

Rashi here asks what might be one of the most quoted of Rashi's questions in all of the Torah. Rashi asks:

"Mah inyan shmittah etzel Har Sinai?"

"What is the matter of shmittah doing next to Mount Sinai." Why does the Torah say, "on Har Sinai" specifically with respect to the laws of shmittah as opposed to other laws?

Rashi gives his most famous of answers, which basically says: Just as all of the laws of shmittah -- its general rules, its details and its finer points -- were all given at Sinai, so, too, were all of the general rules, details and finer points of all commandments stated at Sinai.

Rashi bases his answer on the fact that the laws of shmittah were NOT repeated later on, in the Book of Deuteronomy, before the Jews went into Eretz Yisroel, as were practically all of the other Mitzvos. Therefore, all of its details MUST have been previously given at Sinai. Using the homiletic rule called a "Binyan Av," we conclude that, just like all the rules of shmittah were given at Sinai with all of their details, so, too, the other Mitzvos given at Sinai were also given with all of their details as well.

The real question is WHY? Why is it that, of all the mitzvos in the Torah, the laws of shmittah were the ones that were NOT repeated before entering into Eretz Yisroel? Why not some other mitzvah? Rashi could then make his logical deduction from that mitzvah? Nobody seems to be addressing why it had to be the mitzvah of shmittah?!

I was inspired by a comment that I saw in the sefer "Aitz Hadas Tov" that propels me to offer the following answer to our question.

The Torah once again shows an unprecedented sensitivity and knowledge of human nature.

Imagine traveling through the desert for forty years. Finally, the day for which you have so long been waiting . . . arrives! You are about to enter into the Holy Land, Eretz Yisroel. Before you enter, G-d looks at you and says: "When you get into the land that you have been waiting to enter, you will no longer be getting manna from heaven, you will be on your own. Don't worry; it's a good thing. Oh, yeah, by the way: You can't work the land every seventh year. Leave it fallow."

Human nature is such that, when I finally get something for which I have been waiting so long, I don't want restrictions. I do not want to be told that the new home over which I am going to war has planting restrictions. I am going out there now to fight for this land. Now is NOT the time to try to get me to commit to shmittah laws that sound like they will hurt my bottom line even before I begin my new life venture.

However, at Har Sinai, having just left Egypt with the promise of a future land and desired dream, we would gladly and wholeheartedly promise anything just to have the assurance that the dream will come true. Then and there was the only appropriate time to have the Jewish people commit to the laws of shmittah. At that time, when they would be happy to hear it, rather than later when it would be looked upon as a burden.

This is also the lesson for us, the Jews in the Diaspora 2015. There was a time when we were grateful that Hashem allowed us to be "His" people. There were times that we welcomed His mitzvos and sincerely desired the opportunity to be able to fulfill them someday. And then there are the NOW times, in this day and age, that so many of us can sadly fall into the state of mind that views the mitzvos as a burden, chas v'shalom.

That's when we need to remember:

"Mah inyan shmittah etzel Har Sinai?"

Shmittah was specifically chosen to be taught only at Sinai and not again later, to remind us of the fact that we accepted ALL of these rules willingly, with all of their details and fine points, and that we need to try to keep these mitzvos with the same love and commitment that we had when we accepted them, before our human-nature distractions kicked in.

Have a great Shabbos.