

THE BIRTHDAY CARD

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, when you come to the land which I give you, the land shall be at rest - a Shabbos for Hashem." (Leviticus 25:1-2)

What's the special connection between the Sabbatical Year and Mount Sinai? Weren't all the commandments given at Mount Sinai? Rather, just as the laws of the Sabbatical Year were said with all their generalities, details and specifications on Mount Sinai, so all laws were given generally and specifically from Sinai. (Rashi)

The laws of the Sabbatical Year were chosen as the model for all the commandments that were given on Mt. Sinai. Why? And still what is the connection between the Sabbatical year and Mt. Sinai?

At a birthday party there is sometimes the ceremonious moment when the gifts are opened. Everyone sits around with piqued interest to see what's inside the boxes wrapped so carefully and decoratively. The birthday girl or boy is excited to see what will be added to his or her collection of new things. Each individual waits for the moment their gift will be revealed, anxious as to what the reaction will actually be. Will it be appreciated or not? Such is the drama built into the gift giving ceremony.

When that magic moment finally arrives, the wrapping paper is swiped off the box, the sweater is violently torn from it and held up to see if it's a near fit before the birthday boy or girl is running hungrily to the next gift. The wise parent overseeing the event will inevitably intervene, understanding that the feelings of the giver of the gift are being trampled in a feeding frenzy of selfish greed. We can hardly blame the child but he or she must be made to slow down before moving onto the next gift to do one or two things first.

That good parent will then remind the little child that there is something he forgot to do handing them the envelope that came flying off when the gift was being ravaged from the box. The pace of the party now slows to a precious and poignant punctuation. The envelope is opened. The beautiful card is revealed and the words are read slowly and aloud for all to hear. "To our favorite nephew/niece Larry/Carrie Happy birthday. With love, your Uncle Bob and Aunt Helene." A tear wells up in the eye of the recipient. There's an embrace. The gift is temporarily forgotten. The giver and the receiver are united. The gift is understood to be a means of connecting the two and for even a brief moment or two, this aspect of the process is clear to all.

The Ohr HaChaim says that the connection between Mt. Sinai and the Sabbatical year is to remind that the Torah, which was given on Mt. Sinai, is the key to successfully living in "the land that I give to you". The connection goes the other way as well. When the Sabbatical Year is properly observed, the entire nation is to engage in Torah study as when the whole of the Jewish nation were miraculously cared for in the desert. Resting the land and ceasing from working it puts us back at Mount Sinai - the experience of Mount Sinai - the experience of re-receiving and properly appreciating the Torah.

The Torah is like that birthday card. It expresses the deepest wishes of the giver and connects the giver to the receiver of the land, which is the gift. Only when one is forced to step back from being so aggressively involved with opening the precious gift and its continuous unfolding bounty and beauty can one be brought to look with sincerity into the heart of the card. True, also, is the fact that the card is that much more meaningful when the gift is open before us. What happens next is nothing less than a loving mutual embrace, which is the fulfillment of the gift, the goal of the card, and for both the giver and recipient their deepest desire.

Good Shabbos!

Text Copyright © 2000 [Rabbi Dovid Green](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**
