

DIVINE GIFTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Behar - Bechukosai

Divine Gifts

Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Fourteen parshas have passed since the Jewish Nation received the Torah, but this week's reading opens, *"Hashem (G-d) spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem"* (Vayikra/Leviticus 25:1-2). This mitzvah, called Shmita, mandates letting the entire Land of Israel lie fallow every seventh year. But within the maxim that there are no extra letters, no less any extra words, in the Torah, why does the Torah need to tell us the location of this conversation between G-d and Moshe? Rashi explains that just as broad parameters and fine details of Shmita were given at Sinai, so, too, all of the 613 Commandments of the Torah were related at Sinai, although many of them are presented within the written Torah at other points in the travels of the nation. Rashi continues that the aforementioned "Sabbath for Hashem" is to sanctify the name of G-d, just like the Sabbath of creation.

Rashi explains why Mount Sinai needs to be referenced, but he does not explain why Shmita had to be its reference point. Could not the Torah have chosen any of the commandments within and stated that G-d told it to Moshe at Mount Sinai? What is special about Shmita? Additionally, what is Rashi's basis for connecting a Sabbath for the land and G-d's Sabbath of creation? What of their essences are really in common?

Rabbi Michel Barenbaum (Mashgiach/Spiritual Mentor of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City) clarifies that the mitzvah of Shmita is actually a fundamental statement of faith. For forty years the Jewish people traveled through the wilderness and had everything provided: manna (their form of bread) and meat came from the heavens, and they always had exactly one omer of manna no matter how much they actually took; water came from a traveling well; their clothing never wore

through. All of the nation's needs came miraculously. But upon their entry to Israel, all of these miracles came to a halt and they had to expend effort plowing, planting and harvesting, the mirror image of their prior existence. The spiritual danger of this new lifestyle was the sense of *"my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!"* (Devarim/Deuteronomy 8:17) Therefore, they were given the a sign by which they would remember that the Holy Land was a gift from G-d, captured by the grace of G-d. Similarly, our observance of the Sabbath of creation is a demonstration of our faith in G-d as the master of the universe: our working for six days and refraining from creative acts on the seventh emulates the way of G-d. These two mitzvos sanctify G-d's name in the same vein.

And, continues Rabbi Barenbaum, there is special significance to Shmita being taught at Sinai. To compensate for the impact of the produce lost from the absence of seventh year planting, the Torah promises to give three years worth of produce in the sixth year to cover the sixth, seventh and eighth years, until production resumes to its prior levels. Relying on a blatant miracle that would display G-d's absolute control of "nature" was an enormous expression of the faith of the masses. The Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839, acknowledged leader of Hungarian Jewry of the time) wrote that the promise of this miracle is a clear demonstration of the Divine origin of the Torah, as no human being would be so foolish as to include such a promise. Thus, this mitzvah, like no other, illustrates that the Torah was a Divine gift given at Sinai, in all of its breadth and all of its detail.

Have a good Shabbos!

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