

# UNDERSTANDING WE DON'T UNDERSTAND

*by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch*

## Parshas Behar

### Understanding We Don't Understand

**By Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig**

"G-d spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying, '...For six years you may sow your field...and you may gather in its crop, but the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for G-d.'" (Vayikra/Leviticus 25:1-4) Rashi cites the question of the Toras Kohanim that asks why, of all mitzvos (Divine commandments), was it emphasized that the laws of the fallow seventh year, the mitzvah of shmita, were particularly related at Mt. Sinai?

The Toras Kohanim explains that just as the general rules, details, and fine points of shmita were related at Sinai, so too all the facets of all the other mitzvos were given at Sinai, even though they may not actually be recorded in the Torah until a later point in time. Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1) explains that the construct of the mitzvah of shmita itself indicates it is Divine in origin. No human would command the nation to leave their entire land fallow for the complete seventh year: how would the masses be fed? G-d promises abundant produce in the sixth year to feed the nation until the eighth year crops arrive, a promise irrational for a human being to make. Although the land is reinvigorated for future productivity when it is left fallow, a human author would sooner suggest leaving one seventh of the land fallow every year. No human being would ever have created such an illogical mitzvah.

Following the detailed rules of shmita the Torah continues, "You shall perform my decrees and observe my ordinances and perform them; and you shall dwell securely on the land." (ibid v 18) "Decrees" refers to mitzvos like shmita that we would not perform had G-d not so commanded; "ordinances" refers to rational mitzvos, such as not stealing or killing, instituted to maintain a healthy society. Even though these mitzvos are logical the Torah gives us an additional mandate to observe them. Unlike shmita, which we do not understand but we accept as a commandment from G-d whose infinite wisdom comprehends what our finite minds cannot, the mitzvos of not killing or stealing have reasons that seem evident to us. Thus, we could excuse transgressing these

commandments when our reason for the mitzvah no longer seems to apply. One could present very compelling arguments to allow theft in order to provide for the needy or murder to end the suffering of a terminal patient. Therefore, the Torah must tell us to observe these mitzvos as well. Just as the laws of shmita were given at Sinai, so were these, and we must appreciate that we do not fully understand any mitzvah. Our observance of all of them must possess the same diligence because they all come from the same infinite source.

*Have a Good Shabbos!*

This issue is dedicated in honor of Rabbi Michael and Denise Stern. We welcome Rabbi Stern as the Kollel's new Director of Outreach and Mrs. Stern as one of our new Women's Program Co-coordinators.

(1) 1908-1995; student of the great Mirrer Yeshiva and Rabbi of congregations in pre-war Germany and Baltimore, he is renowned for his leadership of the German-Jewish community in Washington Heights, Manhattan from 1958 through the end of the 20th century

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