

THE PRICE OF TEA IN CHINA

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"HaShem spoke to Moshe at Mt. Sinai, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them that when they come to the land which I am giving them, they shall let the land rest, a Sabbatical for HaShem. Six years you will seed your field, and six years you will prune your vineyard, and gather its produce. And in the seventh year will be a Sabbatical for the land, a Sabbatical for HaShem - you will not seed your field, and you will not prune your vineyard... And the land will give forth its fruit, and you will eat to satisfaction, and dwell securely upon it. And if you will ask, 'what will we eat in the seventh year? Behold we are not seeding nor gathering our crop!' I have commanded my blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will produce a crop to last three years." [25:1-4, 19-21]

Here *Rashi* (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) asks a question, which has been repeated countless times as the paradigm for "what has one thing to do with the other?" "*Ma Shmitta Etzel Har Sinai?*" - What do the laws of *Shmitta*, the Sabbatical of the Land, have to do with Mt. Sinai more than any other *Mitzvah*? The entire (Oral) Torah was given to *Moshe* at Mt. Sinai - so why the emphasis on *Shmitta*?

Many answers are given, including that which *Rashi* quotes from the *Midrash* - that it is indeed a paradigm: just as all of the various complex laws of *Shmitta* were given at Sinai, so too all of the various *Mitzvos* were given, in their full complexity, at Sinai.

The *Chasam Sofer* offers the possibility that *Shmitta* has a unique relationship, for it tells us something about the authenticity of the Sinai experience. Why? Because *Shmitta* offers a guarantee that the land will produce in the sixth year to cover not merely the sixth and seventh, but the eighth year as well.

The *Torah* promises the nation of Israel that they will see a triple crop! The *Chasam Sofer* asks a simple question: "What person would have the gall to make such a promise as 'I have commanded my blessing upon the land, and it will produce a crop to last three years?'"

If we were to sit down and write a Bible, would we make this promise? How long would we last if we did? At the very least, let's promise the triple crop in the eighth year... then we can claim that people didn't follow us, and thus didn't get the blessing! The *Torah* insists that the triple crop will come in the sixth year, no ifs, ands or buts. The *Chasam Sofer* says that the very audacity of this claim... is the

best verification of Who made it. [To some this may look like a refutable assertion, but I've yet to hear a plausible theory on this. Any ideas?] benefit together.

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