

Parshat HaShavuah

**BEHAR—
BECHUKOTAI**
בהר-בחקותי
MAY 19, 2012
כ"ז אייר תשע"ב

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

7:43

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:58

Sunset

8:01

Motzei

Shabbat

8:40



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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BECAUSE HE SAID SO!

RABBI ALLAN HOUBEN

Parshat Behar begins with Hashem informing us that He spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, followed by the mitzvah of *shmita*. Rashi famously asks, “*Ma inyan shmita etzel Har Sinai,*” why specifically here by the mitzvah of *shmita* does the

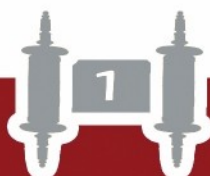
Torah feel the need to tell us that Hashem communicated it to Moshe on Har Sinai? Hashem gives Moshe EVERY mitzvah on Har Sinai, so why does it have to be spelled out again here? Rashi answers that just like every detail of *shmita* is told to Moshe at Sinai, so too every detail of every mitzvah is told to Moshe at Sinai. What seems glaringly absent from Rashi’s explanation, however, is why the Torah specifically decides to teach this lesson with this mitzvah of *shmita* specifically.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, in his *Drash Moshe*, offers a different explanation for this pasuk. He posits that this pasuk is here to teach us that the reason we do mitzvot is because they are commanded through Moshe at Har Sinai. This, says Rav Moshe, is a critical understanding. We would not be obligated in the mitzvot that Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael earlier in the Torah (eg. *pru u’rvu* and *brit milah*) had they not been repeated to Moshe at Sinai. In fact, the Talmud points out, “*Nitna Torah, nit Chadsha halacha,*” that when Hashem gives the Torah on Har Sinai, halacha is not only renewed but in some cases also changed.

What is the significant change between the mitzvot commanded before Sinai and those commanded after Sinai that the Torah thought it so crucial to teach this lesson?

Rav Moshe explains that the mitzvot commanded to Adam and Noach are given based on a specific logic, and it is therefore not simply because Hashem commands them that they followed the mitzvot, but because of the logical explanation provided.

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FEAR NOTHING EVAN DOLGOW ('13)

Parshat Bechukotai, infamous for the chilling threats from Hashem that we read, set the tone for this Shabbat.

Throughout this week's parsha, Hashem warns the Jewish nation of the potential atrocities that will occur if and when they sway from the proper *derech*, from Hashem and His mitzvot.

To the naked eye this may seem as a reoccurring theme of Orthodox Judaism; but to the experienced eye, it is not. There is deeper meaning behind Hashem's threats.

Some may say that the real meaning behind these threats revolves not around fear. Rather, it is the morals and values that one takes away from the harsh threats from Hashem. Hashem is persistent by maximizing on the idea of "you shall fear your God" (25:43).

Then again, "fear[ing] your G-d" is not the equivalent to 'being afraid of your G-d.' Fearing your G-d means walk in His footsteps, to flaunt the goodness that you represent.

Although one may enter this Shabbat prepared to absorb the harsh verses, this Shabbat should be only another reminder to straighten your path, and define the true depiction of a Jew.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN WHAT MEETS THE EYE ZEVI LITWIN ('13)

This week's parsha opens with the laws of *shmita*, of leaving the land fallow every seventh year. In relating this mitzvah the Torah states, "For six years you may sow your field ... but the seventh year shall be a complete rest" (25:3-4).

Likewise, when the mitzvah of Shabbat is given at Har Sinai, we find a similar sentence structure. The pasuk states, "Six days may you work and perform all your labor, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Hashem" (Shemot 20: 9-10).

The Torah, in both instances, does not merely state that in the seventh year, or in the case of Shabbat the seventh day, you should rest; but rather it precedes the Shabbat of the years and the Shabbat of the days with a positive commandment to work for the other six.


Why does the Torah have to specify that in the first six years we should work and then in the seventh year the land should rest? Would it not have been enough just to say the latter?

As we know, the Torah does not waste any words; everything that is written in the Torah is meant to teach us an important lesson. The Torah relays the mitzvah of *shmita* in this way to teach two crucial ideas.

Firstly, from here we learn that work is not degrading, but rather it is a prerogative of freeborn, creative men. Unlike the Roman and Greek cultures, in which work is viewed as a sign of lowly status, Judaism glorifies the inherent dignity in working. Therefore, the mitzvah of *shmita* is not only to rest during the seventh year, but also to work during the first six years of the cycle.

Continued page 3





Litwin continued

Secondly, just as we observe both the laws of *shmita* and the laws of Shabbat in a holy manner, so too we must conduct ourselves in business in a holy manner, and in accordance to laws of the Torah. We must strive to integrate the laws and lessons of the Torah into our daily lives, whether it be in the way we conduct ourselves in business, or even in our own general behavior.

The brilliance of the mitzvah of *shmita* is that it reminds us that from every mitzvah in the Torah we can learn important lessons of how to conduct our daily lives.

SHMITA, YOVEL AND SHABBAT—A SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

JOSH FIRESTONE ('13)

If you are planning on growing a fruit or vegetable... STOP if it is the seventh year of a cycle in which you cannot grow foods from the ground, regardless if farming is your sole source of income, or if you rely on your harvest to feed your family.

This is what Hashem tells Bnei Yisrael in Parshat Behar. Behar is highlighted by the introduction to two somewhat peculiar mitzvot in the Torah, *shmita* (the cycle of leaving the land fallow every seventh year) and *yovel* (an uber-*shmita*, taking place after every seventh *shmita* year).

I am struck at the conceivability that Hashem, yes the One who swept us out of Egypt with an outstretched arm, commands His people, His "chosen" people, to endanger their economy and their lives. How could this be?

Well, although at first glance these mitzvot seem to possess the ability to make the most devout Jew wonder, in reality, the message behind *shmita* and *yovel* is quite complementary to Shabbat. Parallel to Shabbat, *shmita* and *yovel* are a renewal of both the mind and body, spirit and nature. While Shabbat exists as an individual experience, *shmita* is a communal undertaking. We are given the opportunity to contemplate the significance and the role of kedusha within our families and communities. During a *shmita* year, Bnei Yisrael lay down their plows and hoes to reject the demands of the land and commerce in order to reflect on their spirituality as a people.

Even more so, *yovel* represents a renewal for an entire generation of Am Yisrael. During *yovel* debts are canceled, lands are returned to their original owners, and servants return to their families in a revival which constructs a clean-slate and rejuvenates the kedusha of a generation.

In summation, it is our task to acknowledge kedusha as individuals, communicate it to others in our community, and transmit its powers for generations to follow.

Rabbi Houben continued

In stark contrast, the mitzvot commanded to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai are not linked to any reason, logical or otherwise, but are to be followed simply because Hashem commands us.

Based on this explanation, Rav Moshe provides the information that Rashi omits. He says that the mitzvah of *shmita* is in fact best suited to teach us this lesson. While it may be agriculturally beneficial to leave part of one's land fallow every year or two in order to replenish the nutrients in the soil, no farmer would be crazy enough to leave ALL of his land fallow for a year. Thus the mitzvah of *shmita* cannot be linked to any logic or reason; it is clearly a mitzvah to be followed simply because Hashem said so.



“מדור לדור”

TORAH FROM OUR ALUMNI

WALK IN HIS WAY MATT FIRESTONE ('08)

“Rav” Steven Tyler of Aerosmith taught the world to “Walk This Way” in 1975 in his hit song that topped the billboard charts at number ten and has made an imprint on the world of classic rock and roll.

As seen through this example, the world of rock and roll and the Torah are very connected. We see this idea of “walking this way” right here in our very parsha, Parshat Bechukotai.

Of course, in the parsha, “this way” is referring to the ways of Hashem. The parsha starts off by explaining that if we walk in Hashem's ways then all will be fine, but as we continue reading, we find a whole slew of horrible curses that will befall the Jews if we go against His ways. We see there is no middle ground, that you are either with Hashem or against Him, similar to what “Harav” Bob Dylan taught us when he sang that “it may be the devil or it may be the Lord. But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”

As we see from “Rav” Dylan's words and from our parsha, a person is either blessed for growing in his service to Hashem, or is, G-d forbid, cursed for not doing so.

We also see this idea portrayed in the Gemara Megillah when Zeresh, Haman's wife, tells Haman that the nation of Israel is like the sand and the stars in that they are either blessed and are raised up like the stars, or they are cursed and brought down like the sand.

If we do not keep moving towards Hashem, in the way of blessing, then we are moving away from Him. In essence, the message of this week's parsha can be found in Bob Marley's line, “Gotta keep on moving... got to keep on grooving.”

Matt is learning at the Yeshiva Hesder in Sderot and will be joining Tzahal this year.

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