

BEHAR (LEVITICUS 25:1-27:34)

The Price of Tea in China

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

The Nation of Israel traveled throughout the Sinai dessert for forty years. Over the course of those forty years, they were given many commandments. Although they stood at Mount Sinai at the beginning of that forty year period, and many commandments weren't told to the People until many years later, the Torah assures us that ALL of the Mitzvahs were given at Sinai, not fabricated later:

G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, 'When you will come into the Land that I am giving you, the Land will observe a Sabbath rest for G-d. For six years you may sow your field, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and you may gather its crop. But the seventh year will be a complete rest for the Land, a Sabbath for G-d; you may not sow your field, and you may not prune your vineyard.' " Leviticus, 25:1-5)

The Talmud is bothered by the expression, "*G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai...*" "What," asks the Sifra, quoted by Rashi, "is the topic of the Sabbatical year doing next to a mention of Mount Sinai?" (The Talmudic equivalent of the question, "What does that have to do with the price of tea in China?!" :-)) Of all the Mitzvahs, why is the Sabbatical year singled out for mention as being given at Mount Sinai?

The answer, writes the Sifra, is that the Torah wants to teach us that "*... just as all of the details of the Sabbatical year were taught at Mount Sinai, so too were the details of ALL the Commandments taught at Mount Sinai.*" Rashi explains that this Mitzvah, that was not taught to the People during the later years in the desert, was obviously taught at Sinai. So too, says Rashi, all of the Mitzvahs that were taught later were also given at Sinai.

I heard a beautiful explanation of this thought from a hitchhiker I picked up. (We have very learned hitchhikers in Monsey!! :-)) He sat down in my car and proceeded to quote to me from "*Avodas Yisroel*," by the Kozhnutzer Maggid.

The Sabbatical year is about faith. A farmer works his field for six years, trying his hardest to produce an income to support his family. Now we tell him to take a year off.

Take a year off?! How am I gonna eat?!

Good question:

If you will say, “What will we eat in the seventh year? We can’t sow or harvest our crops?!” I will bless you in the sixth year, and it will yield a crop sufficient for three years... (Ibid. Verses 20-21)

Shabbos works the same way. G-d tells us to work for six days and rest on the seventh. But what about business? Saturday is a great day to run a sale!

G-d says, “Take it easy. Have faith. I am going to watch over you and provide for you. You’ll earn more during a six-day work week than you would during a seven-day work week.”

There are six hundred thirteen commandments in the Torah. Some of them we understand; some of them we do not.

The Torah is giving us a means of understanding every Mitzvah. Sabbatical laws we understand; G-d wants us to trust Him and rely upon Him. The Sifra told us “... *just as all of the details of the Sabbatical year were taught at Mount Sinai, so too were the details of ALL the Commandments taught at Mount Sinai.*”

There is a connection between the Sabbatical laws and all of the laws. It is the “Sinai Connection.” It is the “Faith Connection.” ALL laws are to teach us to have faith.

You don’t understand what’s wrong with eating clam chowder? Have faith. You have a problem with the Torah’s prohibition against shaving with a blade? Follow the law anyway; it will strengthen your faith.

Remember the “Sinai Connection.” G-d is there to watch over us. He sends us our livelihood. He heals the sick. He gives us commandments that help to strengthen our faith.

He even sent me a hitchhiker to give me material for this week’s Torah Talk!! :-)

Have a great Shabbos.

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