

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Betty Reader.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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26 IYAR

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BEHAR-BECHUKOSAI

Mi Field Es Su Field

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying... (25:1)

Parshas Behar begins with an in depth discussion of the laws of *shemittah*. Rashi (ad loc) famously asks: Why is the discussion of the laws of *shemittah* juxtaposed with "Mount Sinai"? In other words, why are the laws of *shemittah* specifically attributed to being given on Mount Sinai when all the other *mitzvos* were also given at Mount Sinai?

Rashi answers that it is to teach us that just as *shemittah* was taught at Mount Sinai, with all of its general rules and specific rules, so too all the *mitzvos* were given at Mount Sinai with their accompanying general and specific rules. Yet Rashi does not explain why *shemittah* is chosen as the representative example of this concept. Why was *shemittah* picked as the specific *mitzvah* to teach us what was taught at Mount Sinai?

When the Torah relates the events leading up to *Kabolas HaTorah*, Rashi comments on the verse "and there Yisroel camped before the mountain" (*Shemos* 19:2). Rashi explains that a remarkable change had come over the Jewish people; "It was like a single man with a single purpose."

There are two methods in which groups of people can come together. The first way is when a disparate set of personalities unite because they have a singular purpose; this is how Rashi describes Pharaoh rallying his Egyptian nation to chase down the Jewish people who were escaping Egypt – "a single purpose, a single man" (*Shemos* 14:10).

The second way is when people come together and unite as individuals and merge their identities into "a one," and afterwards find a common purpose to fulfill the desires of the merged identity. This second method is what happened at Mount Sinai. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the encampment at Mount Sinai was without any fighting or bickering. In a similar fashion, a person's left hand doesn't feel imposed upon by the right hand nor is the right hand jealous if the left hand is being massaged, because they both serve the greater "whole." So too, at Mount Sinai Bnei Yisroel achieved a oneness that allowed them to live together in absolute harmony. This is how Bnei Yisroel received the Torah.

This kind of oneness applies to the family unit as well. Upon entering your parents' home, you feel perfectly comfortable going into their fridge or taking food from their pantry. However, the biggest challenge of keeping the *mitzvah* of *shemittah* is that of letting others come into one's field and take whatever they desire. The first *Midrash Tanchuma* on this week's *parsha* describes the violators of *shemittah* (those who profited by selling the fruits in their field instead of letting whomever wanted to enter their field and collect it for free) as having a "begrudging eye." Meaning, instead of feeling that we are all one big family and that we need to take care of each other, each landowner felt imposed upon by



other Jews. We were NOT a united whole. *Shemittah* is the one *mitzvah* where we need the unity that we attained at Mount Sinai. That is why it is the representative *mitzvah* chosen to convey what happened at Mount Sinai.

Unfortunately, this "begrudging eye" was an epidemic of epic proportions. Rashi, in the second half of this week's double *parsha* (26:35), makes the calculation that NOT A SINGLE *SHEMITTAH* was observed once the Jews entered Eretz Yisroel. In fact, our first exile, after the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, lasted for seventy years – exactly one year for every *shemittah* that Bnei Yisroel failed to keep. Of course our current exile, which led to the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash, was because of *sinas chinom* – baseless hatred between Jews.

Nevertheless, *shemittah* is the representative *mitzvah* for all that ails the Jewish people because it represents the loss of the lesson that we learned on Mount Sinai. The Torah is teaching us that the only way to ever recover from our painful and way-too-long diaspora is to start treating all Jews as family and begin caring and looking out for each other. When we recognize that we are all cells of a single body there will be no more fighting or disagreements and this will bring the ultimate redemption.

Here and There

If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them... (26:3)

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the *possuk* would first list “statutes” (*chukim* in Hebrew) and then use the catch-all phrase of “commandments” (*mitzvos* in Hebrew) in the second half of the *possuk*. After all, the Torah’s statutes are all included in the commandments of the Torah; so why mention statutes at all? Rashi answers that the word “*chukim*” here refers to the concept of being immersed in Torah study. That is, each person has an obligation to become seriously involved with the study of Torah.

Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (ad loc) is seemingly bothered by the same question, but he takes a different approach: “*chukim*” refers to those laws that are given without a discernible (or an accompanying) reason for doing them, the way a *chok* is commonly understood, whereas the word “*mitzvos*” refers here to *dinnim* (laws of social justice). But Targum Yonason’s understanding of the word *mitzvos* seems a bit problematic, after all the word *mitzvos* is all encompassing as there are many types of *mitzvos*; why should it be limited to the laws of social justice?

The Mishna in *Peah* (1:1) reads: “...These are things the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the World to Come: Honoring one’s father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all.”

Maimonides, in his commentary to this Mishnah, states a very interesting principal of how a person is rewarded for doing the *mitzvos*: “There are two types of *mitzvos*; 1) those *mitzvos* that are between an individual and Hashem such as *teffilin* and *tzitzis*, observance of Shabbos, and the prohibition against idol worship, and 2) those that are between an individual and his fellow man, such as the prohibition against stealing and otherwise hurting another, the obligation to love others, and honoring one’s parents.”

Maimonides continues: “Those *mitzvos* that are between man and Hashem are rewarded in the next world. *Mitzvos* that are between an individual and his fellow man are rewarded both in this world and in the next.” Maimonides is explaining a basic principal of reward; *mitzvos* as they relate to the development of the human

soul, in general, are an eternal concept. Therefore, their proper reward is in the next (eternal) world. But there are also *mitzvos* that have substantive benefits to others in this world. These *mitzvos* are also rewarded in the next world, but because they have positive effects in this world, the “interest” on the “principal” is paid to the individual in this world as well. This is what the Mishna means by the “fruit” is enjoyed in this world but the principal remains for the World to Come.

This week’s *parsha* is introducing all the benefits in this world of keeping the *mitzvos*. The reason Targum Yonason Ben Uziel translates *mitzvos* as the commandments related to social justice is because he agrees with Maimonides that those are the only *mitzvos* that are rewarded in this world as well as the next.

Fascinatingly, the Mishna equates the study of Torah to all the *mitzvos*. In other words, there are tangible benefits to this world through the study of Torah. Perhaps this is what the Gemara (*Brachos* 64a) means when it says “Torah scholars increase peace in the world.” The Gemara in *brachos* ends with the statement explaining that those scholars are builders of the world and increase the peace within it. This might also explain why Rashi understands “*Bechukosai*” to mean immersion in Torah study.

Did You Know...

This week’s *parsha* contains many important themes that were often repeated in the Jewish people’s history. *Bechukosai* opens with a *bracha*, a very generally-termed promise of the good things that will happen if we do what we are supposed to do (studying Torah and keeping certain *mitzvos*). Then, it tells of the bone-chilling *tochacha*, the five stage admonition that tells us in very specific and certain terms what will happen to us if we fail to earn the *bracha*, each more severe than the last.

Finally, we learn of Hashem’s promise to preserve us, even when we are at our lowest.

The Mishnah, in *Megillah* 31a, relates that we are to read the *tochacha* on fast days (not our custom) and that one may not divide the *tochacha* (according to Rashi referring to that of *Parshas Bechukosai*) into more than one *aliyah*. Interestingly, the *halacha* not to break up the *tochacha* only applies to the one in *Vayikra*, not to the *tochacha* in *Devarim*. This is also taught in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 428:6). The Gemara there gives two reasons for this rule. One is based on Mishlei 3:11, “My son, don’t be disgusted

with Hashem’s *mussar*.” Rashi explains that if we divide the *tochacha*, it will appear as if we stopped in the middle because the person receiving the first *aliyah* was disgusted with it.

The second reason is offered by Reish Lakish, who explains that one should not recite a *bracha* on punishments. Therefore, we begin the *aliyah* a few *posukim* before the *tochacha* and don’t stop reading until a few *posukim* after it is completed. If we would separate it, the second *aliyah* would invariably have to recite a *bracha* on punishments.



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