

PTDT

PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Before we get to the PTDT, let me share with you what I found on WIKIPEDIA. The well-known question on the opening p'sukim of B'har is MA INYAN SH'MITA EITZEL HAR SINAI. That question asks - What does this have to do with that? Remembering that we English speakers (just American or others too) say: What does that have to do with the price of tea in China, I decided to look up that expression on the internet.

Here's what I found:

"What's that got to do with the...?" is an expression denoting an irrelevance or non sequitur in the current discussion.

A common form, what does that have to do with the price of tea in China?, is a retort to an irrelevant suggestion. This facetious usage implies that the topic under discussion might as well be the price of tea in China for all the relevance the speaker's suggestion bears on it.

Skipping down a bit, look what it says:

A related expression in Hebrew can be found in a commentary on the Biblical commandment of the septennial Shmita or sabbatical year. Leviticus 25:1 specifically states that God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai; while this was a common location for God to speak to Moses, the text's explicit reference to it is very rare. Accordingly, Rashi's

commentary begins with the question "What does Shmita have to do with Mount Sinai?" The question in rabbinic culture took on a general meaning equivalent to that of the "price of tea in China" expression.

I just wanted to share. I found it pretty cool.

Do/don't, if & if not

Okay; let's get serious.

Parshat B'har has 24 mitzvot of the 613, including the four prohibitions of Sh'mita (it also has the positive command of Sh'mita - resting the land in the seventh year, but that had been counted already in Mishpatim). Then we find six mitzvot related to Yovel, a number more about proper business practices and our treatment of our fellow Jews, a mitzva related to Avoda Zara, and a reminder of proper respect and reverence for the Mikdash and a reminder to keep Shabbat.

B'har is a relatively short sedra and relatively mitzva-dense. The mitzvot address BEIN ADAM LAMAKOM and BEIN ADAM LACHAVEIRA - between G-d and us and interpersonal; Eretz Yisrael and all over. We can sum up the content of B'har as G-d's

commands and reminders to follow Him and keep His Torah.

It would be nice if that is all G-d has to tell us. We should be sincere, G-d-fearing and G-d loving Jews, who heed His Word just because of Who He is and because of our relationship and covenant with Him.

Then comes the partner sedra - B'chukotai. In a relatively short portion, we find His promises of reward for keeping His Torah and Mitzvot. Bountiful crops, peace and security in our Land. Beautiful reminder of Reward for keeping mitzvot. It would be nice if we didn't need these p'sukim to motivate us - knowledge of Reward is part of our belief-system, but we should be serving G-d as "servants who serve their Master not just to receive rewards" - to paraphrase Antigonus.

Obviously, the first part of the sedra is nice to hear. But it also tells us that we need to be incentivized by reward to be more serious about our observance of mitzvot.

There is even a commentary who discusses the question and answer in the sedra - If you will wonder what you will eat for the three years of Sh'mita, Yovel, and the following year until new crops can be harvested - then G-d says He will provide for

those three years. He says that a person whose level of trust and confidence in HKBH is very high, will not ask that question, nor will he need that answer. The answer is given and a certainty to the high-level believer.

Most of us need the reassurance.

But then comes to large section of the Tochacha. If we don't keep the mitzvot, then...

Very harsh threats, promises, rebuke, admonitions from G-d. Too terrible to listen to. Do we need to hear that to toe the mark?

Sadly, the answer is apparently, Yes we do. Otherwise the sedra of B'chukotai (and Ki Tavo) would be a lot shorter.

The fact that the Tochacha exists is, in and of itself, a TOCHACHA.

We all said NAASEH V'NISHMA as we stood at the foot of Har Sinai. G-d promised us that we will be a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation.

That should be enough to solidify our commitment to G-d and the Torah.

Obviously, it isn't enough. Jewish history has demonstrated that repeatedly.

Let's make the Tochacha obsolete.