

# Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



**B'HAR-B'CHUKOTAI**

## **The Sinai Factor**

When someone points out a non-sequitor to a speaker, they tend to ask: What's that got to do with the price of tea in China? Besides informing that speaker that they've lost the thread of their presentation, we're also declaring that tea is indeed dear in China. That final point is important and we'll return to it later, but first let's discuss our famous Jewish declaration that the speaker has lost their way:

What has SH'MITA (the Sabbatical Year) got to do with Har Sinai? (Midrash Sifra, B'har 1:1 and Rashi, Vayikra 25:1).

The Midrash is screaming: But weren't all the Mitzvot given on Har Sinai? Well, yes and no. But that's not the point. The Midrash and, later, Rashi are demanding to know the connection between the Mitzvot of Sh'mita and Revelation at Sinai, which we will be commemorating in a couple of weeks.

There are a plethora of responses to this query. Rashi, himself, gives the famous explanation that, indeed, all the Mitzvot were transmitted at Sinai

with all their general rules and minute details.

There is a school of thought (led by the Ibn Ezra) that our material is a case of 'There isn't always chronological order in the Torah.' We are bringing this material which was taught before all the other material in Vayikra here, because: Until now Vayikra has discussed the sanctity of the Mishkan and the KEDUSHA that people must draw from it. From here on, it will discuss the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael (Da'at Mikra).

The S'forno, on the other hand, explains that the Torah mentions Har Sinai here because this Mitzva was mentioned before (Sh'mot 23:11), but only the barest of outlines was given. So, now that we are returning to this Mitzva for the purpose of filling in all the details, we mention that all the rules and regulations of this precept were given at Sinai.

So, if that's true, why wait? Why did the Torah wait until the end of the next book of the Torah to finish describing these Mitzvot about the sanctity of agriculture in Eretz Yisrael?

Well, the S'forno explains, because we are all assuming that the Jews would very soon be entering the Land, and we had to know these laws of how to farm in the Holy Land. We are being taught the details of the laws of Sh'mita and Yovel as the Jews

were preparing to depart from the shadow of Har Sinai, theoretically just a few weeks away from entering the Land. It's so sad to contemplate what could have been.

But the Chassidic Masters of the nineteenth century saw profound symbolic ideas embedded deep in these agricultural laws. Let's take a look at two of these imaginative thinkers.

The Meor V'Shemesh (Rav Kalonimus Kalman HaLevi Epstein, 1751-1823) states that to understand these laws we must go back to the week of Creation. 'Then God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds." And it was so.' (B'reishit 1:11)

The vegetation brought forth all the produce the world would need on their own. But then humanity sinned. Our sin had ramifications for the entire world, including the vegetation. From now on, the earth would only produce the crops required to sustain humanity by the 'sweat of our brow'.

At Mt Sinai, the Jewish people reached a spiritual level which equaled Adam's before the Sin. We had removed the evil ramifications of that Sin. The plants would produce without our labor, again. But, alas,

like in the Garden, it didn't last. Sin returned. We would have to work, but not during SH'MITA! Eretz Yisrael would produce sufficiently to support the nation without our labor. A hint to how our world should be, and will be when Mashiach arrives.

This is a truly beautiful idea and a great expectation! Yitzchak Avinu briefly experienced this phenomenon when his crops produced ME'AH SHE'ARIM ('one hundred fold', B'reishit 26:12). We expectantly await that time when we will be able to survive solely on the bounty provided by the plants themselves, as planned by our beloved Creator.

Another extraordinary idea about the profound significance of Sh'mita is presented by the S'fat Emet. The second Gerer Rebbe suggested that 'Sh'mita is like Shabbat, in that it is equivalent to all the other Mitzvot together. All the other Mitzvot depend upon it.' Cool!

The Rebbe goes on to explain that when the Torah informs us that this command is 'when you come to the Land that God has given you', it means that we must elevate all of our efforts in the Land to God. Just like on Shabbat, when we refrain from our weekday labors, it is for the greater glory of God, so, too during the Sh'mita year. As the Rebbe explains: We nullify our wants and desires to God's Will!

**The primary purpose of both Shabbat and Sh'mita is to testify, declare and demonstrate that God, with infinite largesse, continually sustains Creation!**

**What is the connection of Sh'mita to Har Sinai? Nothing less than our constant connection to our Creator. The more we invest in the laws of Eretz Yisrael, the more God will provide for us. The connection of Sh'mita to Har Sinai is the symbiosis between us and our Creator! Therefore it is indeed at least as important as tea is to the Chinese, and then some!** 