

Parshas Behar

In this week's Parsha- Behar we are taught the laws of Shmita, Yovel, and laws of lending (usury, interest etc.) and release from debt. The first Rashi on the Parsha answers a simple question, which is why at this section of the Torah-does the posuk specifically state these laws were stated at Har Sinai. Weren't all the laws stated at Har Sinai?

Rashi answers that- even though all the laws including these, were in fact heard at Har Sinai, they are stated "as said at Har Sinai", because when Moshe repeats the Torah in Devarim, and with it all the mitzvos, (in Arvos Moav-as Rashi specifically details-differentiating the location from Har Sinai)- he doesn't state the laws of Shmita.

In order to confirm and state for the record so to speak, the posuk tells us these are the laws of Shmita as heard at Har Sinai.

In posuk beis, the posuk says, "when you enter the land which I give you, the land shall observe a Shabbos- rest for Hashem..." Rashi explains on the words "Shabbas L'Hashem" – that it is for the sake of Hashem, just as it is said with Shabbos of Mayseh Bereishis. Rashi is explaining to us that the choice of the words 'Shabbos' for the land, parallels actual Shabbos.

By actual Shabbos- Rashi explains- it is the day we recognize every week as the day Hashem rested from creating the universe on the preceding 6 days. Rashi perhaps could have just said that this Shabbos is like Shabbos of the week, instead, He chose to state, Shabbos of creation.

I think the reason for this is because of what the laws in this parsha are. They are laws of leaps of faith. Just as the whole reason we

keep Shabbos is to recognize the kingship of Hashem over us and the universe. Shabbos merely as a "day of rest" is a colloquial nicety to rationalize 'closing off of the craziness of our week'. But what if, like someone recently asked me, I want to participate in a restful activity, something I enjoy doing, that is assur on Shabbos, I cannot break the laws of Shabbos. Because rest, is not our rest we are recognizing, rather it is us acknowledging the day as the day that Hashem ceased creating and let the world's purpose culminate (ultimately La'sos Lo Dira Bitachtonim).

Therefore, by us, and for that matter, every single part of the world that recognizes "Saturday" as a day that is different from the rest of the week, that person (Jewish or not) inadvertently and or directly recognizes Hashem dominance as the Master of the Universe. For us, who have the obligation to keep Shabbos, we must remember that the day is a day of Faith.

This is pertinent to our parsha, because the laws (shemitta, usury, debt payments etc.) are all based on faith that the outcome of adhering to the rules of the Torah will have positive results for us.

First with Shemitta, in the 6th year (the equivalent of Friday) we must plant, and harvest produce for 2 years (to sustain us in the 6th and 7th years when the land is resting). This takes a huge amount of faith. Just as Shabbos is central to recognizing that Hashem is in control, so to, keeping Shemitta, is the equivalent of recognizing that Hashem is the Master of the Universe.

In regard to debt- charging interest is an enticing business. But not doing so, takes faith to honor Hashem's law against charging interest.

Similarly, just as the land in the Jubilee goes back to its original owners, the land has value

that changes depending where on the shemitta and yoivel cycles a sale is taking place. This mode of commerce takes faith to believe that eternal, intrinsic, and inherent value of land (which produces our livelihood- remember shema where we say m'tar artzechem etc.that Hashem controls the outcome of produce, and even as we move from an agrarian culture and society this parlays into our livelihood of all natures. Although we still rely on produce to be farmed in the right time and at the right yields- something our modern society takes for granted.) belongs in the hands of Hashem (based on the cycle instituted in our laws) as opposed to us ascertaining arbitrary value to things.

What is fascinating is that the transactions of interest, and land sales (land leases) has not fundamentally changed for all these years. Therefore, making our requirement of faith in Hashem ever so relevant to us, even all these years later and in Golus.

The Haftora from Yirmiyahu begins on posuk 6 up to posuk 27. In the section we read about a transaction of a purchased field. (The first few pesukim of the perek provide context to the prophecy Yirmiyahu spoke, from jail¹.) A lot of what is referenced in the Haftora are about the nature of transactions and witnessing the sale. What it shows me is the applicability of the ancient transactions to today. Yirmiyahu shows us the partnership we take with Hashem when we conduct business- which is also a theme in the parsha.

Good Shabbos

¹ Side note that on Posuk 7 it references a law from our Parsha perek 25 posuk 25- on which Rashi teaches us to hold onto property unless there is a pressure of poverty