

Behar, Shemittah and Har Sinai

- Nisson Shulman.

Shmittah and Har Sinai; a study in true relevance. At Mt. Sinai agriculture, Shmita, Yovel, was furthest from our minds and hearts. The Almighty emphasized that Shmita, seemingly to irrelevant, is really the symbol of all that is really relevant, as has been demonstrated by the resurgence of learning lishma, as the way to Hashem's throne. The Daf Yomi Siyum was the clearest illustration of this.

Behar, Shemittah and Har Sinai

Rashi, in Behar, quotes our sages' famous question, Ma inyan shemita etzel Har Sinai?

1. The Torah wants to teach us a fascinating lesson. At Mount Sinai, we had just set out in the desert. At the outset, nothing was further from the mind of the people than tilling the soil, shemita, Yovel, it was as if it were a million miles away. Our main concern, at first, was – “Where would the next drop of water come from? Would the next meal materialize? Would it drop from the sky?

2. The Almighty emphasizes Shemita, a law that seems irrelevant for the moment, to teach that nothing in the Torah is irrelevant; The entire Torah given at Sinai applies at all times.

Within recent memory there was a time when our people were overwhelmed, saturated, with a cult of relevancy. Often the call came to learn about only that which had “relevance”. To many it seemed the Torah was not relevant to immediate experience. And then, before our eyes, in our time, there developed the concept of Torah lishmah, an old idea given much more immediate meaning by the growth of the study of the daf yomi. From Johannesburg to Israel, to Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Florida, Chicago and even Omaha Nebraska, Zurich London and Gibraltar, shor shenagach et haparah, or sugyot in Kodshim are studied without regard to the catchword of relevance, because they are all relevant to one united theme, service to Hashem, dedicating heart and mind to study of His word and command, Torah Lishma. And the international Siyum Hashas we just experienced embodies that message. Shmita from Mount Sinai is as relevant as Lo tignov, because all lines of communication are directly to heaven, everything at Sinai, everything as relevant as life itself and all its details.

3. The connection of kelaloteha uprateha miSinai means that we are to make the midbar the desert of life, into a Sinai. We are to see even in a desert, a potential Sinai. The potentially irrelevant is, through Torah, the key to Hashem's service; service through Mount Sinai.

4. Ukratem dror baaretz ulechal yoshveha. Yovel, the Jubilee, the Shofar declaring freedom, did not happen suddenly or by itself. Counting was required year by year till the fiftieth year, like the Omer is counted day by day till the fiftieth day standing at Har Sinai.

5. Shmita teaches that we are guests. The earth is the Lord's. We have no personal ownership, except that which Hashem gives and permits.

But this is the lesson of the first Rashi in Humash. Why did the Torah start with Bereshit and not with our birth as a nation, from Hachodesh Haze Lachem? Mishum koach maasav.... The whole earth is the Lord's. Nothing is irrelevant. Everything leads to Him and His service.

6. When shall this lesson be taught? Once every fifty years? Every year with the counting? In fact every day of every year. What does counting do? For Shabbat, for the Omer, for the Yovel? It links every day to the goal, to Sinai, to Hashem. It links each of us to Sinai. And it connects all the days of the years and the centuries together, and points to the future and to our destiny. Limnot yamenu ken hoda venavie levav chochma.