

Parshiyot Behar/Bechukotai

Friday, May 11, 2018

כה אייר תשע"ח

From the Lower School

1. On what day of the year does Yovel start?
2. What happens to all land during the Yovel year?
3. In the sixth year, how many years-worth of food will grow?
4. If Bnei Yisrael follows the mitzvot, what reward will they receive from the sky?
5. If Hashem is blessing the Jewish people, how many people will it take to chase away 100 enemies?

— Rabbi Aron Srolovitz, JKHA Assistant Principal
Answers can be found on the last page.

From the Middle School

Our Caretaker

Parshat Behar begins with the Mitzvah of *shemita*, while emphasizing that this commandment was told to Moshe on Har Sinai. Rashi famously asks what is the connection between *shemita* and Har Sinai? He answers that just like all the details of *shemita* were taught at Har Sinai, so too all the details of all the *mitzvot* were taught at Har Sinai. R' Rudinsky asks why was *shemita* chosen to be the paradigm example? Further, he notes that the Mitzvah of *shemita* is given before the commandment to work the land for 6 years, which is seemingly out of order.

To answer these questions R' Rudinsky examines another commandment in this week's *parsha*; the commandment not to take interest, *ribit*. He quotes the Kli Yakar who says that it is understandable why the Torah forbids taking interest from one that

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can't afford to pay it, but if one profits from the loan and can afford to pay the interest why is it prohibited? He explains that in every business deal both parties aren't sure if they will earn money. Therefore, they must always look to Hashem 'for help in business. This wouldn't be the case for one who loans with interest. He knows that he will be receiving a set payment and he will be okay. R' Rudinsky explains that the Torah connects interest, cheating in business, and *shemita* because they all revolve around the same thing: belief in Hashem. It's the person who doesn't think Hashem has given him enough that feels the need to loan with interest. It's the person who feels as if he needs more than he was given that feels the need to resort to lending with interest.

He goes on further to say that this is why the *shemita* year is listed before the 6 working years. The point of *shemita* is to instill within us that all of our success is due to Hashem. We must realize that the success of the 6 working years is from Hashem, as well. There is no better way to do this than by seeing Hashem take care of us during *shemita*. This is why this Mitzvah was chosen as the example for Har Sinai. It's a key foundation for receiving the Torah. We need to have faith that Hashem takes care of us and knows what is best for us.

— Rabbi Adam Hertzberg — JKHA Director of Educational Programming

From the High School

More than Just a Free Sample

Jacob Cohen walks into his local ice cream shop on a summer Tuesday afternoon to treat himself to some ice cream. The owner welcomes him with a friendly smile, and offers him a free sample. Jacob accepts and decides to try some Mint Chocolate Chip. Then Cookie Dough. Then Triple Truffle Chocolate. After Jacob finishes sampling all 31 flavors, he turns to the owner and asks the owner to try them all again. The owner responds, "I'm sorry, but it was only free the first time. After that, you have to pay for more."

This *mashal* was given by the *Ba'al Shem Tov* to explain a *passuk* in this week's *parsha*: "*Im bechukotai telechu*," "If you go in the way of my laws" (*Vayikra* 26:3). Regarding this *passuk*, Rashi asks, "How do we "go in the way" of Hashem's laws?" and he then responds,

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“She’tihyu amelim baTorah,” “That you should labor yourself with Torah.” However, the next question is obvious; what does it mean to “labor oneself in Torah”?

The *Siftei Chachamim* begin to clarify this issue for us; they say that since the Torah says *“telechu,”* that you should go after Hashem’s laws, as opposed to *“tilmad,”* that you should learn Hashem’s laws, we learn that the pursuit of Torah is not just one in which one learns all day. It is a process in which one tries to take one’s life and add some holiness to it.

This is a difficult task to try to accomplish in the modern day world. We are surrounded by schoolwork, gadgets, social media, friends, and more. The Torah doesn’t expect us to abandon these pursuits. They are part of human nature. The *Gemara* in *Masechet Ta’anit* 21a relates the story of Rabbi Yochanan and Ilfa, two great Torah scholars, who took a break from learning to go work and earn a living. It is great to learn some Torah every day, but that is only our free sample. After that, we need to pay for more. We need to work, we need to survive in the world as it is today, instead of isolating ourselves from it. In an article by *Time* entitled “Does Spirituality Make You Happy?” Bryan Walsh writes that “scientists have found, again and again, that those with a spiritual practice or who follow religious beliefs tend to be happier than those who don’t.” However, this happiness doesn’t come naturally. We may not notice the immediate effect of making a *bracha* on our lunch or davening on a Sunday morning, but it does have an impact. Science says so. In order to gain the happiness that we’re all seeking, why don’t we all try to do one thing to infuse some spirituality into our daily lives.

May we all merit to work for and earn our ice cream, and make a *bracha* before eating it.

- Eli Novick is a Freshman at RYKHS

Reliving Har Sinai

Just imagine for a moment the times when struggles of adhering to the words of the Torah meant more than our “first world problems” of learning a dual curriculum, putting away one’s phone for shabbat, and being stuck with Lay’s instead of Tostitos. For generations, as well as for many in Israel to this very day, the Torah’s demands mean taking

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one year off from farming and relying solely on Hashem for our crops and sustenance, the *mitzvah* of *shemita* that is described in the *parsha*. For one year we do not know where our food will come from or how we will feed our family - and we are asked to do this with complete trust that Hashem will provide. Suddenly studying for a gemara test doesn't seem so bad.

Perhaps the way the Torah addresses this struggling farmer facing a daunting task can help us in our struggles as well. The Torah begins its description of this *mitzvah* with our experience at Har Sinai some 3300 years ago. Many question why Har Sinai is mentioned at this point (“*Mah inyan shemita etzel Har Sinai*”) and perhaps we can suggest an approach to help solve this anomaly. That fateful moment in the desert, one can easily argue as the most important for the Jewish people and perhaps even for all of humanity, is one that shapes every aspect of our day-to-day lives. At that moment, all doubts and questions about faith and commitment to Hashem were lifted, and we were able to feel His presence intimately. At that moment no one would debate the presence or promises of Hashem; His absolute dominion and goodness were clear as day for all to see. And so, as the Torah begins its description of our obligation to keep the laws of *shemita*, resting on the seventh year, in anticipation of the normal angst this would cause the farmer to feel, it goes out of its way to stress the connection to Har Sinai.

This being the case, perhaps our frustrated yeshiva high school student can follow a similar line of reasoning. If Torah is another subject in school, then, yes, it certainly can be seen an added burden and bother. But if we are able to take the lesson of *parshat “Behar Sinai”*, then we will recognize that in fact every *pasuk* in *chumash* and every line of *gemara* are nothing less than our link back to that great moment at Har Sinai. So next time we sit down to learn, let's see if we can recognize the great honor we have in carrying the legacy of Har Sinai, picturing the moment of Matan Torah, imagining the farmer with full faith that Hashem will care for all his needs, and appreciating that great opportunity that learning Torah is for us.

- Rabbi Yaakov Mintz — HS, Talmud Chair

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1. Yom Kippur
2. It goes back to the original owner
3. Three
4. Rain
5. Five