

# KushnerComments

## Parshat Behar/Bechukotai

Friday, May 19, 2017

כד אייר תשע"ז

### From the Lower School

1. In what number year is *shemita*?
2. After going through 7 *shemita* cycles, what is the year after that called?
3. What is done to show that this special year has begun?
4. Why can't a person sell his land to someone else forever?
5. What is the reward for keeping the *mitzvot*?

— 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 can't afford to pay it, but if one profits from the loan and can afford to pay the interest why is

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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

### Recognition

The opening of this week's *parsha* discusses how the life of a Jewish farmer living in Israel has the obligation of "*shemita*" every seventh year. This requires him to stop working the land for one year. The fiftieth year, which is the seventh set of seven years, is called *yovel*, or a jubilee year. In this time, all slaves are freed and all lands are returned to their original owners. The *parsha* then goes on to explain that Jews may not harass or mislead another Jew. God tells the Jewish people that if they fulfill the requirements of *shemita* correctly, He will supply for them and make them fruitful. He also warns the Jewish people of the consequences of not listening to His commandments.

A lesson we can take away from this *parsha* is simply the idea of believing in God. We sometimes think that we are the ones in control of situations but are proven wrong many times. In the story of Kayin and Hevel, we see this same idea. Kayin, a farmer, thought that he was the one who was in control of his plants and how and when they grow. This was in contrast to Hevel, who was the shepherd and knew that if one of his cattle dies, it was

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## From the High School

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God who did it. My class and I learned with Mrs. Gerson last year about the dangers of being a farmer. If one becomes too involved in one's work as a farmer, one may believe that it was the "sky," for example, that did not provide enough water for his plants to grow. One may not realize that ultimately everything comes from God and without Him, there would be no plants in the first place. When one then follows the *halachot* of *shemita* it not only shows one's ability to keep such a difficult mitzvah, but it shows the person's tremendous trust and faith in God. When addressing those who thought that keeping *shemita* would leave them without an adequate supply of food, the Torah says that Hashem tells the Jewish people that in their sixth year of farming, He will provide them with enough produce to last them three years, even through the year of *shemita*. As for relating this idea to today's society, most of us are not farmers, but we can sometimes miss the big picture. We have to remember that everything ultimately comes from God. An example is when we study hard for a test and we get a good grade. The grade does come from our studying but we have to remember that Hashem was helping us too. My question to you is, how can we have more trust in God? Whether it be in grades or any normal day scenario, we always have to remember that He is always helping us in everything we do.

"Why are we learning this anyway?" "What does it have to do with my life?" "Isn't this stuff all outdated anyway?" These are but a few of the frustrated, confused thoughts that go through the head of yeshiva high school teens as they work through the often difficult topics of Torah learning in school. Indeed, so often so many of the ideas of the Torah appear to us to be far removed from our reality that it can indeed seem difficult to connect ourselves to them.

— Nicole Gruenzweig is a sophomore at RKYHS

## 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 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

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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 as 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

### Answers to questions on page 1

1. Seventh
2. Yovel
3. Blowing of the shofar
4. Because the land really belongs to Hashem
5. Rain at the right time of year