

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha begins with the word that defines its name - b'har - on the mountain. The mountain naturally is Sinai and the Torah's emphasis is to reinforce Judaism's core belief that our Torah is G-d-given and not the work of a committee over centuries. This basic belief lies at the heart of many of the contentious disputes that have marked Jewish life over the ages.

While original splinter groups within the Jewish , such as the Saducees and the Karaites, did not openly deny the validity of the Written Torah as being G-dly in origin, they strenuously denied the holiness of the Oral Law of Sinai and denigrated its rabbinic interpretations and decrees. This led to serious splits within the Jewish people and to bitter recriminations that lasted centuries. In all of these instances the divinity of Torah and of its Oral Law always eventually won out. Deviant movements eventually fell away from the main body of the Jewish people, both individually and as a potent group in influencing Jewish life and mores.

The "mountain" referred to is the one at Sinai where the Torah was given to Israel. It is a difficult mountain to ascend, The Psalmist asks: "Who can ascend the mountain of G-d?" But as difficult as it is to ascend the mountain it is even more difficult to remain there. The Psalmist again intones "and who can maintain one's self in the holiness of G-d's place?" The struggle about maintaining the Jewish people on the mountain of G-d in belief and faith has been the hallmark of Jewish life over millennia. It has not abated in our time.

Jewish secularism comes in two different and divergent forms. One is simply that the Torah's way of life and value system does not harmonize with modern society and its demands. Shabat, kashrut, etc. are all too restrictive to be functional in today's world. The Jewish people cannot afford to be so different from the

rest of the world. The mountain may have had its purpose at one time but that time has now passed. New ideologies and circumstances have rendered it obsolete. So, for them the mountain no longer exists.

A second group denies the existence of the mountain altogether. There never was a mountain - it is all an urban legend fostered by the rabbis over the ages. In effect, our grandfathers were all liars or naïve believers in legends and stories for which there is no current historical scientific evidence. Aside from these two groupings there are groups who wish to be included in the religion of Judaism and who do not see themselves as being secular. But, in varying degrees, they follow the ideas of the Saducees and the Karaites though they essentially also deny that the mountain has anything to do with G-d and divine origins.

History shows that in the long run such philosophies and movements give way to the pressures of time and circumstance and eventually lose their influence and power. At the end of the day only the mountain remains as it always has, challenging us to ascend it and maintain ourselves upon it. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reinforces the notion of our eternal relationship with our homeland, Eretz Yisroel. In the midst of a heavy Babylonian siege against Yerushalayim, the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to make amost puzzling transaction. Hashem informed Yirmiyahu that his cousin Chanamel was interested in selling his field and that Yirmiyahu should take full advantage of the opportunity. Although Yirmiyahu realized that the Jewish exile was imminent and that the Babylonians would soon take full possession of Eretz Yisroel he followed Hashem's direction and arranged for the purchase. Yirmiyahu wrote a legal contract and paid a large sum of money for the land. Yirmiyahu then preserved the document in an earthen vessel to secure its existence until such evidence would be useful.

The prophet then directed his words to Hashem in bewilderment and questioned, "Since the Babylonian

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war machines are in full gear and the Jewish exile is already on its way, of what purpose is this sale?" Hashem responded, "I am the Master of all; is there anything beyond My capabilities? The Jewish people will return and re-engage themselves in such purchases and the land will be resettled." The dialogue seems to besome what understood; however the purchase remains a mystery. Hashem had sent many prophets to the Jews regarding their eventual return from the Babylonian exile. Why was it necessary to demonstrate their return through this tangible experience? It is certainly fair to assume that Yirmiyahu would not derive any personal benefit from this purchase. After all, he was on the way to a long and hard exile of seventy years without any indication of personally returning to Eretz Yisroel. Why then was he instructed to waste his money in securing what, for him, was a seemingly useless transaction?

In response it can be suggested that this purchase taught the Jewish people a very meaningful lesson. One can easily imagine the feelings of the Jewish people during that era. They were finally confronted with the reality that they would soon be forced to leave their homeland. Although they had enjoyed the privilege of dwelling in the palace of the king for nearly one thousand years this privilege was now drawing to a close. Their minds were now focused on their unfortunate plight and they dreaded severing their ties with Eretz Yisroel. Although this painful thought surely tormented them but the reality was that their association with Eretz Yisroel was slowly beginning its decline.

At that exact moment the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to secure the purchase of a plot of land. Through this visible demonstration, the Jews were being told to rise above their inevitable predicament and to realize that their painful exile would only be temporary. They were encouraged not to despair and never to break their ties with their homeland, Eretz Yisroel. To reinforce this point their prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to demonstrate his total faith in the Jewish people's return. Yirmiyahu began setting his sights on the future and purchased property in preparation for the return. In Yirmiyahu's mind this upcoming exile was but a passing phase and he rightfully preoccupied himself in life after the brief

Babylonian stay. Yirmiyahu taught the Jews that the Jewish people never really leave Eretz Yisroel and that they are always bound to their homeland. He taught them that they truly belong to Eretz Yisroel and that Eretz Yisroel would always belong to them.

A similar lesson regarding our relationship with Hashem is revealed to us at the end of this week's parsha. The Torah warns the Jews to adhere to all of Hashem's mitzvos even after their exile from Eretz Yisroel. The Sforno explains the reason for this general warning which encompasses mitzvos that don't specifically relate to Eretz Yisroel. He states that the Jews in exile could easily present the argument of rejection. After all, Hashem expelled the Jews from His land, indicative of His lack of interest in the Jewish nation. If so, what binds the Jewish people to the mitzvos, considering that Hashem severed His relationship with His people!? The Torah therefore reminds us that its obligations remain forever and that Hashem is forever concerned about His people. The Sforno notes that even after the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed the Divine Presence remains amongst the Jewish people. This phenomena is felt in our Bais Haknesses, synagogue and Bais Hamidrash, Torah study hall which continue to embody the Divine Presence at all times. (see Sforno's comment to Vayikra 26:12) We learn from this that Hashem never forsakes His people and remains amongst them always because Hashem will always be our G-d and we will always be His chosen nation. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The first part of this week's portion, Behar, begins with the laws of Shemitah, ordaining that every seventh year the land must rest for a complete year. We plant and sow and harvest the fields for six years, but during the seventh, the land must lie fallow, its fruits available to all as if they were ownerless... In effect, the land is actually returning to itself, to a kind of primordial state, similar to the seventh day of the week when man as creative spirit returns to himself, ceases from creating and re-creating and takes a back seat to G-d as the sole Creator of the universe.

The Torah then tells us that at the end of seven such sabbaths, the 50th year is declared a "jubilee" year. During this time, slaves are freed even if they don't want to be freed and property sold in the past 50 years is returned to the original owners, i.e. the descendants of those families who inherited portions when Joshua conquered and divided the land into tribal possessions.

"And you shall hallow the 50th year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee to you, and you shall return every man unto his family" (Lev. 25:10)

The Hebrew word used in the above cited Biblical verse "liberty" is dror, a word so rare in the Pentateuch that it appears but one other time, as the compound word "mor-dror," meaning "flowing or pure myrrh," an ingredient in the incense that was presented in the Sanctuary (Exodus 30:23), an obvious reference to the sweet succulence of freedom.

The Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashana, 9b, tells us that the word dror means freedom. R. Yehuda connects it linguistically with the word for dwelling the Hebrew dar or gar: "What is the significance of the word dror? The freedom of one who dwells (medayyer) where he likes and can carry on trade in the whole country." Rashi (loc. cit.) phrases it, "a person who can live wherever he wants to."

Dror is also the Hebrew word for sparrow, and according to the Torah Temimah compilation (Rabbi Baruch Epstein 1860- 1942), citing from Tractate Betza 24a, the reason why a sparrow is called dror is because it accepts no authority or direction, and even "...in the house it lives like in the field," flying, dodging, doing whatever it wants to do. Thus, this bird more than any other, symbolizes freedom. And because it doesn't fly south (or north, east or west) for the winter, it controls the skies rather than the skies controlling it.

The Talmud understands that the use of the word dror in the context of proclaiming "liberty" casts light on the true nature of liberty. In other words, a truly free person can live wherever he wants, and earn his living anywhere as well. In assessing the different rungs of the liberty ladder, we see that a person may live in Beverly Hills, but if he really wants to live in Efrat, and cannot arrange to do so, then he isn't yet free. On the other hand, someone else may be hovering just above the poverty level in Jerusalem, but he may be freer than his friend in California, since the individual in Jerusalem is precisely where he truly wishes to be.

Freedom means mobility, physical as well as psychological, and all the laws of the seventh year of the jubilee year are intended to return that freedom of mobility to every citizen of Israel. Moreover, the Jubilee year frees everyone from slavery, even against his/her will. And debts are cancelled as well: "At the end of seven years you shall make a release... every creditor shall release that which he lent to this neighbor..." (Deut. 15:1-2). Just as the land returns to itself, so does a slave and so does a debtor, since a person in debt is not complete, and so not free.

The jubilee year acknowledges that the passage of time can play havoc on people's lives, bringing them to the brink of despair. The Bible gives them the opportunity to have their debts rescinded, their anchored homesteads returned; the Jubilee puts them back on their feet and back on their land!

And lest we mistakenly equate freedom with aimless wandering, the Jubilee teaches that only someone who has roots can truly feel free; once those

roots are waiting for you, you can travel the world and still retain a sense of belonging and existential comfort.

In a similar vein, if we manage to hold on to our living tradition of Torah, we truly remain free, even as free as the dror, and no authority can ever limit our spirit. Jews suffer as Jews when circumstances force us to 'sell' off our own tradition, so that we end up languishing as hired hands in the spiritual fields of others, forgetting where we came from, so that we become spiritually homeless, without a real anchor in history, anchor in psyche. There is a magnificent midrash that when the Almighty first created the world, the dove - representing the bird kingdom - came with a complaint. "We birds are so small and puny, the other larger animals can easily overtake and overwhelm us." The Almighty accepted the complaint, and fashioned wings for the birds. The following day, the dove returned, even more disgruntled than before. "Yesterday we birds were puny, but we were also light and nimble, now we have these two heavy appendages, which weigh us down and severely limit our mobility." G-d laughed, and taught the dove how to use the wings; he explained that when used properly, they grant the birds, the power and ability to soar far above the other animals, to fly close to the Almighty Himself." It is the gift of rootedness, - in history, in traditions and in homestead - which enables the individual to wander the globe and still have a home!

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's prophetic portion, Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction of the First Temple. G-d commands Jeremiah to leave Jerusalem and travel to Anatot to buy a field from his cousin Chananel (Jeremiah 32).

It can be suggested that when G-d told Jeremiah the Temple was doomed, Jeremiah clung on to the city. While he knew the word of G-d was true, his love for the Temple was so great that he felt that he did not want to leave. Part of him may have felt that by remaining nearby, he would be able to infuse his very life, his very spirit, his very breath, into the Temple to keep it standing.

Jeremiah obeyed G-d's word and leaves to buy a field. This truly was an act of faith for it showed that even in the midst of doom, one must always believe that the Jewish people will prevail. Jeremiah certainly did what he knew he had to do. Still, by leaving Jerusalem, he broke the umbilical cord between himself and the Temple, and the Temple was destroyed.

This interpretation was offered by Rav Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik after the death of his wife Tonya. He explained how the circumstances of his wife's death corresponded to the Jeremiah story.

The Rav often spoke of his wife in the most romantic terms. He pointed out that she was his bayit, his home, his Temple. When doctors told the Rav that Tonya was terminally ill, he knew the prognosis was bleak. But like Jeremiah, he felt if he remained with her constantly he could keep her alive and infuse part of his being into her.

And so it was. For months, the Rav remained at his wife's side. He prayed, studied, and conducted his business there. One day, Tonya urged him to travel to New York to finalize a contribution made by a generous philanthropist to Yeshiva University, Rav Soloveitchik's yeshiva. The Rav hesitated, but in the end, the doctors assured him that Tonya was not in danger that day. He flew to New York and was successful in securing the gift. As he stepped off the plane in Boston, he was notified that Tonya had lapsed into a coma. Entering his wife's hospital room, the Rav found her unconscious. A short time later Tonya Soloveitchik died.

While it is true that none of us has the power to keep alive everything we love forever, our physical presence sometimes has the ability to comfort and heal. Staying close to the people and places we cherish helps infuse them with life. This Shabbat let us remain close to those we love. Let's resolve to connect ourselves powerfully to Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem.

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Adapted by Zev Frimer

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“You shall not defraud each other, and you shall fear your G-d, for I am the Lord your G-d.” (Vayikra 25:17)

Rashi, quoting Chazal, comments as follows: "Here [the Torah] warns concerning ona'at devarim (hurtful speech): a person should not vex his fellow, nor give him inappropriate advice that reflects the ways and interests of the advisor. And if a person should say, 'How can anyone know if my intentions were bad?'-for that reason [the Torah] says, 'You shall fear your G-d.' The Knower of all thoughts will know."

Sefer Ha-chinukh (commandment 338) likewise interprets this verse as a warning against ona'at devarim, and explains what this prohibition includes:

"This mitzva includes several warnings and exhortations enumerated by our Sages, of blessed memory, so as not to cause pain to others in any way, and not to shame them. They go so far as to teach that a person should not eye merchandise at a time when

he has no money. And it is proper that one take care that his speech contain no hint of contempt towards people, for the Torah is very strict about verbal abuse, since it is something that people take strongly to heart. In fact, many people are more concerned about [having people speak to them in a dignified way] than they are about money matters... It is not possible for the Torah to list all those actions that may cause anguish to others, therefore each person must take care in accordance with his understanding..."

As with any other commandment, after listing some of the laws that this mitzva entails, the Sefer Ha-chinukh defines who the mitzva applies to and what punishment awaits a person who transgresses. While the discussion of the commandment usually concludes at this point, in the case of ona'at devarim the Sefer Ha-chinukh elaborates further, noting its extreme importance:

Seemingly, this does not mean that if one Jew comes and starts castigating his fellow with harsh words, that the listener should not answer back. For it is impossible for a person to be like a stone, remaining unmoved. Furthermore, if he remains silent, it is as if he acknowledges the [truth of the] insults. In truth, the Torah does not command that a person be like a stone, retaining the same equanimity in the face of those who insult him and those who bless him. However, [the Torah] does command us to distance ourselves from this trait, such that we do not come to argue with and insult people. In this way a person is saved from all this, for one who is not argumentative will not be insulted by others, except for fools, and one should not pay attention to fools.

And if some person, by his insults, forces one to answer back, then it is appropriate for one who is wise to answer back sweetly and pleasantly, and not to be excessively angry, for anger is a trait of the unwise. He thereby distinguishes himself, before the listeners, from the insults, and casts the burden upon the one who does the insulting. This represents the conduct of the best among men.

We learn, then, that it is permissible to answer a fool, just as the Torah permits one to kill in defense when thief enters one's home stealthily. Unquestionably, a person is not required to suffer damage inflicted by his fellow; rather, he is permitted to save himself from him, and likewise from the words of his mouth, if they are full of deceit, in any manner necessary to protect himself.

However, there are certain people whose piety is of such a degree that they do not include themselves in this license to answer back insults, lest their anger overcome them and they become carried away. Concerning them, our Sages said (Shabbat 88b): "Those who are insulted but do not insult in turn, who hear themselves humiliated and do not answer back..."

concerning them it is written, "And those who love Him are like the sun rising in its splendor."

From the above we learn a fundamental principle in the Torah's perception of man: the Torah does not ignore a person's natural tendencies. It does not require that a person suppress his feelings in order to fulfill the commandments. The Torah knows, for example, that it is difficult for a person who is being insulted to maintain his equanimity and not to react, and therefore it does not require a person in such a situation to remain silent. Rather, a person should try to avoid such situations, and in the event that he nevertheless finds himself being verbally abused and insulted, it guides him as to how to respond.

Obviously, it is an added measure of piety if a person hears insults but does not respond to them. However, the Torah does not oblige a person to behave in this way; rather, it takes his human needs into consideration. Furthermore, even with regard to those pious individuals we are not told that they do not feel any anger. Anger, in such a situation, is a natural, human inclination. Those pious people manage to conquer their anger and refrain from replying.

In this context we recall the words of Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, concerning the verse, "You shall be people of sanctity unto Me" (Shemot 22:30). The Holy One, blessed be He, is not looking for angels, devoid of desires and inclinations. He has enough of them. What He wants is for us to be people-mortal, material creatures with earthly desires, but "people of sanctity"- such as those who succeed in overcoming their urges and directing their inclinations towards sanctity and purity.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

It took a real act of faith for Jewish farmers to leave their lands fallow during the Sabbatical year. For six years they had planted and harvested their crops, and now in the seventh year, Hashem commanded them to sit back and do nothing. What were they supposed to eat? How were they supposed to support their families?

The Torah addresses this question in this week's reading. "And if you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year since we cannot sow or gather produce?' do not fear. I will command My blessing for you during the sixth year..." Hashem promised to deliver such large bumper crops during the sixth year that there would be plenty left over for all their future needs until they could reap another harvest.

But let us take a closer look at the question. "What will we eat in the seventh year?" Surely, they meant the eighth year, not the seventh. Everyone knows that each year's harvest provides the food for the following year. The sixth year's harvest thus assured them of food for the seventh year. The seventh

year's harvest would have provided the food for the eighth year, and therefore, leaving the land fallow placed the eighth year in jeopardy, not the seventh. Why then did they express concern about what they would eat in the seventh year?

The answer touches on the very fundamentals of faith. A person who has faith in Hashem is not concerned about the future. Fully aware that he does not control his own fate, that everything is in Hashem's hands, he lives by the dictates of the Torah and relies on Hashem to do the rest. Once this attitude becomes truly integrated into his thinking, he discovers a new serenity in his life, a feeling of peace and security. A person without faith, however, is under the impression that he is the master of his own fate, that his entire future depends on his own efforts. He puts inordinate pressure on himself by thinking that he alone stands between his family and starvation. Understandably, this gives rise to anxiety and insecurity. Ultimately, it leads to an irrational drive to work unnecessarily hard and long just to keep the wolf from the door.

This is the attitude the Torah was anticipating among the farmers enjoined not to plant in the seventh year. Those of weaker faith might worry irrationally about the seventh year, even though the granaries were still full from the sixth year's harvest. The Torah reassures these people that there would be so much grain in the sixth year that even they would not need to worry.

A fabulously wealthy man once complained to a great sage about the pressures of running his vast financial empire. "Tell me," said the sage, "why don't you just sell all your holdings and relax? Don't you have enough to last you for the rest of your life?"

"Certainly I do," replied the rich man. "But by amassing all this wealth I can secure the financial future of all my children and grandchildren as well."

"Indeed?" said the sage, raising his eyebrows. "So when your grandchildren grow up and come into possession of all the wealth they inherit from you, will they live a life of leisure or go to work as well?" The rich man thought for a moment. "I expect they will go to work."

"Why?"

"To ensure that their own grandchildren are also taken care of."

"Aha!" said the sage. "And so on. And so on. I would certainly like to see that one grandchild for whose benefit all these generations have been working so hard. No, my friend. That is not the reason why you work so hard. The real reason is that no matter how much money you have you do not feel secure. Deep in your heart, you feel that the more money you pile up the greater your guarantee of being wealthy for the rest of your life. You are living in a fantasy."

In our own lives, it is undoubtedly prudent to save a little for a rainy day. But what happens when we

suddenly see the future as a series of endless rainy days and plunge into a frenzy of work? At times like these, we need to reaffirm in our own minds that everything comes from Hashem and that there are no rainy days for Him. If we relegate the final responsibility for our lives to Hashem, we will enrich our lives with tranquility, prosperity- and rationality. © 2008 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

TIt is wrong to live by rote. Living as mechanical robots contradicts spiritual growth. We need to know why we are Jewish and why we believe what we believe. Every now and then, it behooves us to spend time and effort comprehending and cementing our belief in Torah and Judaism. Parshat Behar affords us such an opportunity.

The Torah portion of Behar begins with: "G-d spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai, saying..." (Vayikra 25:1) It then describes the laws of shemitta, letting the land lie fallow during the sabbatical year. Rashi there asks the obvious question: Usually, G-d introduces a set of laws with a statement of His speaking to Moshe without mentioning where Moshe heard it. Why here does the verse say that G-d spoke these words to Moshe at Mount Sinai? Besides, weren't all the laws stated at Sinai?

Rashi answers that this unique method of writing teaches us that just as all of the laws of the sabbatical year were said at Sinai, so too, all of the Torah's laws, in all detail, were said at Sinai. But the question remains, just re-framed: Why then were the laws of Shemitta chosen to teach this concept? Couldn't G-d have used any of His Mitzvot to convey this lesson?

The answer leads us to a most relevant discussion as to why we should believe that G-d authored the Torah and gave it to us at Sinai. The laws of Shemitta go a long way in showing that a human being could not have invented Judaism and could not have written the Torah. The laws of Shemitta seem to be irrational and are indicative of their Divine origin. Would any human being write laws that seem impossible to accept and observe? The laws of Shemitta command the Jewish people to desist from all agricultural work every seventh year (see Vayikra 25:1-24). Every 50th year, there is an additional year called Yovel, Jubilee, in which they cannot engage in working the land either. This means that both the 49th and 50th years are off limits to any and all farming.

Why would a human being write such a ridiculous law? It is akin to commanding the people to starve to death every 7th year. Yet, the author of the Torah goes further. The people will be bothered and worried when they hear of these laws. They will ask, 'How will we survive in the 7th year?' (see 25:20). The

author, consequently, makes a guarantee. He promises that every 6th year they will receive a special blessing of a double crop (25:21) which would suffice for both the 6th and 7th years.

Could a human being guarantee such an occurrence? The very first time the 6th year comes without yielding a double crop, the people will see that it was a lie! They will see that G-d could not have written the Torah and it was made up by a human being. If a human being did invent the Torah, why would he devise a law that risks destroying his concocted religion? Is there a law such as this in any other religion that exposes itself to falsehood and absurdity? Only G-d could have authored the laws of Shemitta.

There is another law that similarly proves that only G-d could have written the Torah and not a human being. Three times a year, ALL Jewish male adults are commanded to travel to Jerusalem to visit the Temple. This law is called 'Shalosh Regalim', the 'Three Festivals' pilgrimage.

This sets up a very scary phenomenon. The Moabites were waiting along Israel's borders to wipe out the Jewish nation. The Ammonites, Philistines, Amalekites, were also looking for their chance to invade. How is it rational to command all men to simultaneously leave their homes, exposing their cities to the possibility of total and utter destruction by their enemies?

The author of the Torah says the people shouldn't worry. He guarantees that while they are in Jerusalem, nothing will happen to their homes, their crops, their animals, and all their possessions (see Shemos 34:24). What human being can produce such a guarantee? After the enemies do indeed attack the first time, the law and most likely the entire religion is finished. Why would any human author create a law that feeds the Jews into the hands of their enemies?

But if G-d wrote it, it does make sense. He could give the guarantee that enemies will not come to destroy. Can a reasonable person, using his reason, believe that a human being wrote the laws of the sabbatical year and the 'Three Festivals' pilgrimage? Only if G-d wrote them can the existence of these laws be understood.

Traditional Jews have claimed for 3000 years that G-d revealed Himself at Mount Sinai and presented the Jews with the Torah. An honest study yields many factors that indicate the clear plausibility of this traditional belief. The explanation of the laws presented in this essay are a few of these factors.

We don't take a leap of faith when we choose to believe the Torah as truth. Our belief in the Divine authorship of the Torah makes rational sense. We need only investigate and we will see what makes Judaism's claims to truth unique and compelling. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff and aish.com

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**Haftorah**

This week's haftorah reinforces the notion of our eternal relationship with our homeland, Eretz Yisroel. In the midst of a heavy Babylonian siege against Yerushalayim, the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to make almost puzzling transaction. Hashem informed Yirmiyahu that his cousin Chanamel was interested in selling his field and that Yirmiyahu should take full advantage of the opportunity. Although Yirmiyahu realized that the Jewish exile was imminent and that the Babylonians would soon take full possession of Eretz Yisroel he followed Hashem's direction and arranged for the purchase. Yirmiyahu wrote a legal contract and paid a large sum of money for the land. Yirmiyahu then preserved the document in an earthen vessel to secure its existence until such evidence would be useful.

The prophet then directed his words to Hashem in bewilderment and questioned, "Since the Babylonian war machines are in full gear and the Jewish exile is already on its way, of what purpose is this sale?" Hashem responded, "I am the Master of all; is there anything beyond My capabilities? The Jewish people will return and re-engage themselves in such purchases and the land will be resettled." The dialogue seems to besome what understood; however the purchase remains a mystery. Hashem had sent many prophets to the Jews regarding their eventual return from the Babylonian exile. Why was it necessary to demonstrate their return through this tangible experience? It is certainly fair to assume that Yirmiyahu would not derive any personal benefit from this purchase. After all, he was on the way to a long and hard exile of seventy years without any indication of personally returning to Eretz Yisroel. Why then was he instructed to waste his money in securing what, for him, was a seemingly useless transaction?

In response it can be suggested that this purchase taught the Jewish people a very meaningful lesson. One can easily imagine the feelings of the Jewish people during that era. They were finally confronted with the reality that they would soon be forced to leave their homeland. Although they had enjoyed the privilege of dwelling in the palace of the king for nearly one thousand years this privilege was now drawing to a close. Their minds were now focused on their unfortunate plight and they dreaded severing their ties with Eretz Yisroel. Although this painful thought surely tormented them but the reality was that their association with Eretz Yisroel was slowly beginning its decline.

At that exact moment the prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to secure the purchase of a plot of land. Through this visible demonstration, the Jews were being told to rise above their inevitable predicament

and to realize that their painful exile would only be temporary. They were encouraged not to despair and never to break their ties with their homeland, Eretz Yisroel. To reinforce this point their prophet Yirmiyahu was instructed to demonstrate his total faith in the Jewish people's return. Yirmiyahu began setting his sights on the future and purchased property in preparation for the return. In Yirmiyahu's mind this upcoming exile was but a passing phase and he rightfully preoccupied himself in life after the brief Babylonian stay. Yirmiyahu taught the Jews that the Jewish people never really leave Eretz Yisroel and that they are always bound to their homeland. He taught them that they truly belong to Eretz Yisroel and that Eretz Yisroel would always belong to them.

A similar lesson regarding our relationship with Hashem is revealed to us at the end of this week's parsha. The Torah warns the Jews to adhere to all of Hashem's mitzvos even after their exile from Eretz Yisroel. The Sforno explains the reason for this general warning which encompasses mitzvos that don't specifically relate to Eretz Yisroel. He states that the Jews in exile could easily present the argument of rejection. After all, Hashem expelled the Jews from His land, indicative of His lack of interest in the Jewish nation. If so, what binds the Jewish people to the mitzvos, considering that Hashem severed His relationship with His people!? The Torah therefore reminds us that its obligations remain forever and that Hashem is forever concerned about His people. The Sforno notes that even after the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed the Divine Presence remains amongst the Jewish people. This phenomena is felt in our Bais Haknesses, synagogue and Bais Hamidrash, Torah study hall which continue to embody the Divine Presence at all times. (see Sforno's comment to Vayikra 26:12) We learn from this that Hashem never forsakes His people and remains amongst them always because Hashem will always be our G-d and we will always be His chosen nation. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER**Taking a Closer Look**

“Rabbi Yishmael says the general [concepts of the commandments] were said at Sinay and the details were said in the Mishkan. Rabbi Akiva says the general [concepts] and the details were said at Sinay and repeated in the Mishkan and said a third time by the Plains of Moav" (Zevachim 115b). Although everyone agrees that all of the details of the Torah's commandments were taught to Moshe in the Mishkan, there is a dispute regarding whether or not the details had previously been taught on Mt. Sinay, or if only the general idea of each commandment was explained to him there. Rashi, based on the Sifra, tells us that the beginning of our Parasha, where the details

of Shemita (the Sabbatical year, when we are forbidden to work the land) are taught, is Rabbi Akiva's source that the details of every commandment were taught at Sinai. After all, the Torah says explicitly (Vayikra 25:1) that G-d told Moshe these laws at Mt. Sinai.

There is much discussion about how Rabbi Akiva learned from here that the details of every commandment, and not just those of Shemita, were taught at Sinai (see Ramban and the commentaries on Rashi, for starters). However, there is little (if any) discussion about how Rabbi Yishmael could say that details were not taught at Sinai if, at least regarding Shemita, they were. Some (see Sefer Hazikaron), in the process of trying to explain Rabbi Akiva's position, say that the laws taught in our Parasha are also called "generalities," not "details." If so, there is no contradiction between Moshe being taught many "general" laws regarding Shemita on Mt. Sinai and his first being taught the full details in the Mishkan. Nevertheless, most consider the numerous laws taught in our Parasha to be "details," with Shemita being the example of a commandment having its details taught at Sinai from which we learn that the same is true of all the other commandments. Why, according to Rabbi Yishmael, were the details of Shemita taught at Sinai, if G-d waited until the Mishkan was built to teach Moshe the details of the rest of the commandments?

This question becomes even stronger if we consider the fact that the laws of Shemita were not relevant at Sinai, and would not become relevant until the nation entered the Land of Israel. (See www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/behav.pdf, where I suggested that this is how Rabbi Akiva knew that every commandment must have been taught in its entirety at Sinai, as otherwise G-d would have waited until they were closer to entering the land to teach it; if even the laws of Shemita were taught at Sinai, everything must have been!) If there was any commandment that could have waited until the Mishkan was built (or later) to be taught, it should have been Shemita. Doesn't Shemita being taught in its entirety at Sinai indicate that everything was? How can Rabbi Yishmael say otherwise?

Another issue discussed is why the Torah reverts to teaching us what had been taught at Sinai, before the Mishkan was built, after telling us about the Mishkan and the laws that were taught to Moshe in it. Understanding the Torah's sequence may provide us with some insight into the dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael.

After the Children of Israel accepted upon themselves to follow G-d and His commandments, a covenant was made between the nation and G-d (Shemos 24:8). This covenant was broken when the golden calf was idolized, necessitating a new covenant (34:10). The Mishkan was then built, proving that the relationship between G-d and His "chosen people" had

been restored. At the same time, the building process itself served as a vehicle to restoring that relationship (i.e. the gold donated for the Mishkan atoning for the golden calf). The Torah therefore told us of its being built (in detail), as well as the service that was done in it and the commandments taught there regarding the service (and other laws taught in the Mishkan). Afterwards, the Torah tells us more details about the now-restored covenant, namely the consequences of keeping it or, G-d forbid, breaking it (see next week's Parasha). Since one of the consequences of breaking the covenant is exile, whereby "the land will make up its lost Sabbaticals" (Vayikra 26:43), i.e. the years of Shemita that had not been properly observed when we were living there, the Torah had to first tell us about keeping Shemita before telling us the consequences of not keeping it (see Ibn Ezra on 25:1).

We can now understand why, according to Rabbi Yishmael, even though the details of most of the commandments were not taught until the Mishkan was built, the details of the laws of Shemita had to be taught at Sinai, where the covenant was made with (and explained to) the nation. They needed to know what they were getting themselves into, what would be required of them, before being told that they would be exiled if they didn't follow them.

But what about Rabbi Akiva? How can the details of Shemita being taught at Sinai prove that the details of every commandment were, if these had to be taught there? The commandment to keep Shemita (in general) had already been taught at Sinai, as part of the first covenant (Shemos 23:10-11), so they already knew about it. Did they have to have it repeated as part of the restored covenant? Even if they did, did they have to have every detail explained to them before being told of the consequences for not keeping it properly? It would seem that although Rabbi Yishmael was of the opinion that they did (hence the exception of Shemita being taught in detail at Sinai despite the other commandments only being explained in general terms), Rabbi Akiva felt that this was not necessary. They knew they had to keep Shemita, and that was enough (for now). Therefore, if G-d taught Moshe the details of Shemita at Sinai (well before they could be put into action), it must be that the details of every commandment were taught at Sinai. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer



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