



Yeshiva University High School For Boys
Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy



שמע קולנו

“יתגבר כארי לעמוד בבוקר לעבודת בוראו”

Parshas BiHar

פרשת בהר

The Miracle of Shemitah

Mr. Murray Sragow
Yeshiva College '87
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Parshas BiHar discusses the rules of Shmita and Yovel, in which no agricultural labor may occur (*ed. There are certain Heteirim for this, but that is not the purpose of this article, so they are not included here*). This would seem to be a very challenging Mitzva, as we are expected to deliberately fail to provide food for ourselves, and somehow avoid starvation. This is particularly frightening in the case of Yovel, because Yovel is the 50th year, which means that we do not plant for two consecutive years, as the 49th year is Shmita (the 7th Shmita of the Yovel cycle) and the 50th is the Yovel year. Additionally, the planting for the next year will only begin in the harvest season, meaning there would be no food for the three consecutive years! So even if we can survive a regular Shmita, and somehow stretch the food over two years, how can we be expected to ration food over THREE years!

The Torah anticipates this concern, and addresses it quite directly, saying: “ViChi Somru ‘Ma Nochal?’” - and if you’ll say ‘what will we eat?’. One would expect the Torah to continue and say “have faith and Hashem will provide”, but that’s NOT what the Torah says. Instead, the following pasuk provides a very different answer – “ViTzivisi es Birchasi Lachem BaShana HaShishis ViAsa es HaTvua Lishlosh HaShanim” - I (HaSheim) will provide you with a Bracha in the sixth year, so that there will be a crop that can last for three years.”

This means that Hashem’s promise of a bumper crop will come true BEFORE the farmer is obligated to restrain himself from planting. There never needs to be a leap of faith, where the Jew allows the field to lay fallow and relies on a miracle to avoid starvation. Instead, his storehouses would already be full and the farmer would already know he would have enough for three years BEFORE you take the year off.

This is an important principle in Judaism. Hashem does not expect leaps of faith. He

does not expect us to rely on miracles. In fact, we are specifically told (Gimara Shabos 34a) that “Ein Somchim Al HaNeis, we should NOT rely on miracles.

The lesson is clear. Hashem does not expect us to do anything that is beyond our ability. If He has given us a Mitzva to do, then by definition we are capable of accomplishing it. This should give us tremendous self-confidence. This is much more than the coach who tells you he has faith that you can hit the shot. He’s just guessing. But if Hashem, who is omniscient, tells you that you can do the Mitzva, He’s not just guessing. He KNOWS you can do it. He’s telling you “I gave you the skills, talent and knowledge to accomplish this. Now go do it.” As the Pasuk says in Parshas Nitzavim (Dvarim 30:14):
“Ki Karov Eilecha HaDavar Miod; BiFicha UViLvavicha Laasoso”–
“For this thing is very close to you; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it”

Yovel and Har Sinai *Moshe Inger (’20)*

Parshas BiHar begins, as the name of the Parsha suggests, by telling us that all of the laws to follow were delivered to Moshe “BiHar Sinai,” at Mount Sinai. RaShI explains this seemingly unnecessary detail as follows: the Torah did not want to add that the laws came from Har Sinai every time laws are discussed. Therefore, it’s mentioned once here. Just as the laws discussed in this Parsha came from Har Sinai, similarly, every other law in the Torah came from Har Sinai. This creates an interesting question: why in the Parsha specifically is the Torah letting us know that all the laws came from Har Sinai? What

about the laws discussed here made it the most fitting place to mention this major detail, a major tenet of our faith?

To answer this question, we must first expound on its context. The laws immediately following this statement are those describing the laws of the Shmita year, the Sabbatical year for agriculture, and the Yovel year, a Jubilee with special laws in addition to the laws of Shmita. Some of those laws include the mere concept of a Sabbatical for one’s agriculture, minimally working the ground for that year, freeing one’s slaves, forgiving one’s loans, and others of the like.

Here we need to define two character types within the realm of those who spend their life in service of G-d. There’s a theocentric believer, one who serves HaSheim in His name and in the name of the service itself, and an egocentric believer, one who serves HaSheim, but only as it displays itself most convenient to them. The laws described in Parsha BiHar are of great caliber and require great faith in G-d: great faith that one can minimally till their land and still receive a profit, great faith that one can free their slaves and keep their farm afloat, great faith that one can forgive their loans and stay financially well, and the list goes on. An egocentric believer would never follow these financially intensive laws. It’s here that the Torah reminds us that all the laws came from Har Sinai; it’s here that HaKadosh Baruch Hu reminds us to Whom, and for what purpose, we serve; it’s here the Torah reminds us, even for laws as intense as Shmita, to always strive to be the theocentric believer.

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