

5) One of the possible penalties for failing to observe the Mitzvot (26:14-44) is exile from the land. What will be (one of) the results of exile (vv.33-35)? Why might exile seem to be an appropriate punishment for not observing this Mitzvah?

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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Behar & Behukkotai

Shabbat Mevarekhim Hahodesh

May 14 – 20, 2017 • 24 Iyyar 5777

Annual (Leviticus 25:1-27:34): Etz Hayim p. 738-757; Hertz p. 531-550

Triennial (Leviticus 25:1-38): Etz Hayim p. 738-743; Hertz p. 531-536

Haftarah (Jeremiah 16:19-17:14): Etz Hayim p. 762-765; Hertz p. 551-553

What's Shmita have to do with Mount Sinai?

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, CY Faculty and Coordinator, Torah Sparks

“And the Lord spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai,” Parshat Behar begins, enumerating the laws of *shmita*, the release of the land every seven years. That sounds quite simple, but Rashi here makes perhaps the most famous of all his comments on the Torah - *Mah inyan shmitah etsel Har Sinai?* “What is the connection of the laws of *shmita* to Mount Sinai?” Rashi's comment has become a coin of Hebrew parlance for a *non-sequitur*, “what does this have to do with that?” But Rashi did not mean it in a casual fashion, and he answers himself – just as the laws and rules about *Shmita* came from *Har Sinai*, so did all the *mitsvot* come from *Har Sinai* (i.e. from God).

At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I suggest that Rashi's question might be better than his answer. The book *Vayikra*, which we finish this Shabbat, begins 9 months *after* the revelation at Mount Sinai. *Vayikra* opens with God speaking to Moshe *me'ohel mo'ed*, at the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle) which the children of Israel built at the end of the book of

Shmot (Exodus). So Rashi is calling attention to a discrepancy of time/place in the text - why does the Torah note that the *shmita* laws were given at a location the people had left almost a year earlier? But he himself does not address this chronological issue.

Ibn Ezra (12th Spain) does. He says *shmita* was actually told *before* what's told in *Vayikra*, and that this verse shows that events in the Torah are not told in chronological order (*ein mukdam u'me'uchar b'torah*), a matter about which the commentators have heated debates. Rashbam (12th C, Ashkenaz, Rashi's grandson) agrees, it was given "before the Tent of Meeting was erected." These commentators focus on the literal meaning of the text in the verses which mention locations when God speaks.

Rashi, who said (in his comment on Gen 3:8) that he was just explaining "the simple meaning of the text" (*v'ani lo bati eleh l'pshuto shel mikra* - sounds like "I'm just a country lawyer..."), is commenting here on the level of *authority* – the Torah was given at Sinai *complet*, and *shmita* is the classical example of this. Ramban (Spain 13th century), citing other cases where a law was given expressly at Sinai and then expanded on later, takes sharp issue with Rashi on this. After quoting Rashi's comment in full, he says *v'eino nachon b'ainai dal* - "I think this is all wrong."

I'll suggest two possible reasons for Rashi's focus on the ideological importance. Historically, since Rabbinic times, the rabbis have had to deal with factions which denied the Divine authority of *Torah sh'bichtav*, the Oral Torah. The Pharisees, our rabbinic ancestors, were challenged by the Sadducees on this issue, and the Karaites claimed that only the Written Torah was authoritative, with significant success in the Middle Ages, so Rashi comment here could be related to that.

Yehuda Nachshoni, a Torah commentator in the 20th Century (*Studies in the Weekly Parashah*) says Rashi's choice of *shmita* as the classic example of the essential character of the Divine Revelation to Moses at Sinai is conceptual and tied to the special character of *Shmita*. *Shmita*, he says, was revolutionary – it introduces to the world the concepts of *tikun olam*, social equality, and faith and confidence in God. In Nachshoni's view, there is no other *mitsva* as "value packed" as *shmita*, and this is why Rashi chose it. Nothing better represents the Sinai legacy.

A Vort for Parashat Behar & Behukkotai

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, CY Faculty

Lev. 25:17 commands us *lo tonu ish et amito* - "not to wrong/cheat one another; I the Lord am your God." The Alsheich said the rule applies "even if your fellow is a cheater." Several Hasidic masters said that if one is commanded to deal honestly with one's fellow (*amito*), *a fortiori* (how much more so) we should deal honestly *with ourselves*. The *Dvash HaSadeh* (Shlomo Zalman Rappaport, 1846 - 1906) "puns," using an *aleph* for the *ayin* in *amito* – one must not "wrong one's truth," echoing Polonius, "This above all: to thine own self be true." The Sforno says "I'm *your* (plural) God" reminds us that God is concerned for both parties to the transaction, whether we are buyer or seller.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

This week is yet another double Parasha that will bring us to the end of the book of Vayikra. The Parasha begins with laws pertaining to the land. Then we read about the rewards that we will receive if we observe the Mitzvot and the horrors that will befall our people if we fail to observe them.

- 1) Every 7th year is a year when we may not work the land [of Israel]. What does the Torah call this year (25:1-7)? What does it have in common with a day that goes by a very similar title? What do both come to teach us?
- 2) Land that is sold [in the land of Israel] is done so temporarily, until the 50th, Jubilee (Yovel), year. What happens to the land at that point (25:13)? What message does it teach us about land as a human possession?
- 3) Should a fellow person become poor and borrow from us, we are restricted in what we can demand for providing financial help (25:35-36). Why do you think that the Torah put on this restriction? How does the Torah want us to view the person to whom we lend (notice what he is called)? Why does the Torah remind us here to fear God?
- 4) The Torah promises rewards for keeping the Mitzvot (26:3-13). What are the first rewards that we are told that we will receive (vv.3-5)? Why do you think that the Torah opened with these? Do you think that this would convince people today? Why?