



A Taste of Torah

Look to the Mountain

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

The name of the first of this week's two *parshios*, Parshas Behar, means "on the mountain." This is a reference to Mount Sinai, where the Torah was given. The name of the parsha is based upon the opening verse, which states (Vayikra 25:1), "And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai." The Torah continues by elaborating the laws of the *shemita* year. The Torah teaches that every seventh year is a *shemita* year in Eretz Yisrael; planting, pruning, and most other types of agricultural work are prohibited, and the land is to rest. In addition, one may not act as the owner of his fields; any produce that does grow on its own is *hefker*, ownerless, and may be taken by all who please.

Rashi is bothered by an obvious question: What is the connection between the *shemita* year and Mount Sinai? Rashi explains that the Torah wishes to teach that just as the general and specific details of the mitzvah of *shemita* were given at Sinai, so, too, the general and specific details of all mitzvos were handed down at Sinai.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) points out that Rashi does not seem to have fully answered his question. The Torah could have chosen any mitzvah to teach us the lesson that the details of all mitzvos were given on Sinai - why was the mitzvah of *shemita* chosen above all other mitzvos? Rabbi Schwab explains that

the mitzvah of *shemita* is unique, as it was clearly given by G-d at Sinai, for one who wishes to deny the Divine origin of the mitzvos will have a very hard time explaining why an entire nation would agree to abandon their fields completely for an entire year. It is clear that this mitzvah was given by G-d at Sinai, and reveals this truth about all other mitzvos, as well.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) infers a crucial lesson from this idea, as well. Just as Jews observe the mitzvah of *shemita* as a decree from Hashem, for the logical rationale of the mitzvah is difficult to understand, so, too, all mitzvos should be fulfilled because they have been decreed by Hashem, and not because one understands the reasoning behind the mitzvah. Rabbi Feinstein elaborates that this approach ensures Jewish continuity. If people keep the mitzvos because they resonate with their own values, there is genuine concern that future generations with different outlooks and ideals will discard the practices of their ancestors. If, however, we observe and transmit the message to our children that we are doing the mitzvos because it is a decree from Hashem, unchanging for all time, not subject to society's morals, then our children will continue to observe the Torah even when the values of the surrounding culture do not line up with those of the Torah.

Stories for the Soul

Sleepless Solution

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899-2001) was a frequent visitor of the Brisker Rov, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959), after both had arrived in Eretz Yisrael from Europe. The two would speak in learning for extended periods of time, immensely enjoying each other's company.

One night, quite late, the Brisker Rov summoned his son Reb Berel and instructed him to go tell Rabbi Shach that he had discovered the answer to a question they had left unresolved earlier that day.

Reb Berel asked how he could go knocking on Rabbi Shach's door at such a late hour.

"Don't worry," replied the Brisker Rov, "he is still awake. As long as he has no answer for this question, he will be unable to sleep."

"But perhaps he has already discovered the answer and has gone to sleep?" wondered his son.

"If that were the case," replied the Brisker Rov, "he would have come straight to me to tell me the answer!"

Sure enough, Reb Berel arrived at Rabbi Shach's home and saw that the lights were on. He informed Rabbi Shach that his father had an answer to the question, and Rabbi Shach accompanied Reb Berel back to his father, who explained his solution to the delighted Rabbi Shach.

At the start of Parshas Bechukosai, Hashem tells the Jewish People of the goodness they will receive if

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Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL 22ND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION: EMERGING STRONGER - A VIRTUAL EVENT

Spend an hour celebrating the unstoppable power of Torah on Tuesday, June 2, 7 pm, just a few days after Shavuot, the time of the Giving of the Torah. Honoring Kerry and Mindy Berman for their steady and unswerving commitment to Torah and the Denver Jewish community. Join the community as we continue to grow and emerge stronger. To place an ad and for more info, visit denverkollel.org, email journal@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855

TORAH FOR TYCOONS VIA ZOOM ON MAY 20 - CLE CREDITS AVAILABLE

Torah for Tycoons resumes on Wed., May 20 via Zoom. Join Steven Zansberg, Senior Counsel at Ballard Spahr LLP, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for *Give Me Privacy or Give Me Death: Privacy vs. Pandemic Containment*. CLE credits - one ethics, one general - available. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

THE BIG PICTURE

Join a multi-part series of your choice via Zoom (online or on the phone) and discover The Big Picture of a section of Torah. Choose from an array of different Torah topics throughout the week. Classes run through 5/28. An initiative of the Denver Community Kollel in partnership with Aish of the Rockies and JOI. Visit denverkollel.org for full details.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1) Yom Kippur | 4) Peace above all |
| 2) Four years' worth | 5) Broken bread |
| 3) Catch him before he falls | 6) Bubby is better than Zaidy |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part IV

In Amsterdam, the young Menashe became a student of Rabbi Yitzchak Uziel, a native of Fez, Morocco, who had opened a yeshiva in Amsterdam. Another student of Rabbi Uziel who later rose to great prominence was Rabbi Yitzchak Abohav (better known as the Mahari Abohav).

Rabbi Uziel spoke out against the laxity that some in the Amsterdam Jewish community displayed toward Torah observance. (It seems that some of the Jews who had settled in Amsterdam, having lived as conversos, were slow to completely re-adopt Jewish life.) His speeches were a major factor in a number of community members leaving the main congregation and founding a new congregation called Neveh Shalom. (Some sources indicate that the opposite occurred - Rabbi Uziel's outspoken views spurred some of the members of Neveh Shalom to leave and found their own congregation.) Although Rabbi Yitzchak Uziel was not initially the rabbi of the new congregation -

he headed the yeshiva and was also engaged in commerce - he eventually became the head upon the departure (other sources say death) of the first rabbi of Neveh Shalom, Rabbi Yehuda Vega.

Rabbi Uziel passed away in 1622, and his young student Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael succeeded him as the rabbi of Neveh Shalom at the ripe old age of eighteen. In 1623, at the age of nineteen, he married Rachel Abarbanel, a descendant of the famed Don Yitzchak Abarbanel, who had served as treasurer to King Ferdinand before leaving Spain with his brethren in 1492.

Despite his position as a rabbi and teacher in the community, Rabbi Menashe was not making ends meet. To that end, he opened the first Hebrew printing press in Amsterdam in 1627. His first products were a *siddur* (1627); an index to the Medrash Rabbah (1628); and a work on Hebrew grammar written by his teacher Rabbi Uziel (1628).

Stories for the Soul

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"you will go in the way of My statutes." Rashi explains this means toiling in Torah. It is not sufficient to simply

study Torah; one must put one's entire self into the learning of Torah.

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| 1) Yom Kippur, not Rosh Hashana 25:9 s.v. <i>biYom Hakippurim</i> | 3) Catch him before he falls 25:35 s.v. |
| 2) Four years' worth 25:22 s.v. <i>ad</i> | 4) Peace above all 26:6 s.v. <i>vinasati</i> |
| 3) Catch him before he falls 25:35 s.v. | 5) Broken bread 26:26 s.v. <i>viheishivim</i> |
| 4) Peace above all 26:6 s.v. <i>vinasati</i> | 6) Bubby is better than Zaidy 27:7 s.v. <i>vi'im</i> |

Parsha Quizzers - Answers