

This Also Is From Sinai

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Rashi begins his commentary on this week parsha with the famous quote MA INYAN SH'MITA EITZEL HAR SINAI, why is HAR SINAI specifically connected to SH'MITA? All mitzvot came from Har Sinai? And the answer presented is that it is to teach us that both the general and specific aspects of each and every mitzva were all given at Har Sinai. One of the more popular questions on this Rashi relates to why the Torah needs to emphasize this important principle specifically here, at the beginning of Parshat Behar? There are a myriad of p'sukim in which this idea could be embedded.

The Menachem Zion, Reb Menachem Sacks, offers a deeper insight into this phrase.

Throughout Parshat Behar, the Torah stresses the significance of maintaining equilibrium between all the social strata of society. Below is a brief outline of the laws discussed in the parsha:

[1] Sh'mita - Any individual who wants to walk onto my field can enter. The poor person is like the owners. In addition, all loans are canceled. No more creditor/debtor relationship. Equilibrium between individuals in the financial arena is restored.

[2] Yovel - In the fiftieth year, servants go free. Someone who had been in dire straits, who had to sell himself, can go free. All lands revert back to their original owners. It's a rebooting of society.

[3] Tzedaka - Somebody who had been indigent, who had to sell his possessions, now receives an opportunity to redeem it back. The buyer has no right to keep it forever. Help him achieve his former status.

[4] Ribit - the prohibition of charging interest. This, of course, protects individuals in difficult financial straits from onerous repayments.

[5] Ona'a - misleading others. One must be open and honest when transacting. One cannot overly work an employee or overcharge a purchaser.

All of these mitzvot promote equality, the feeling that we are all equal in society. At the beginning of the parsha, it says B'HAR SINAI. The Torah is hinting to us that this concept, that all Jews are equal in the eyes of God, was transmitted at Har Sinai. As Chaza"l teach us at the end of Masachet Menachot (110b), "As long as one's kavana is directed heavenward, the quantity of each is equal in the eyes of God.

This parsha, with all the bein adam l'chaveiro mitzvot, opens up with the announcement that it was said at Har Sinai, to emphasize that not only are

all mitzvot bein adam laMakom rooted in Sinai, but all the mitzvot bein adam lachaveiro as well.

This idea is also echoed in the first Bartenura in Pirkei Avot. He asks, why is the first Mishna in Avot, Moshe kibeil Torah miSinai (that Moshe received the Torah at Sinai)...? Wouldn't this statement be more appropriate to appear at the beginning of Shas – as the first Mishna serving as a transition from the written Torah to the oral Torah. Moshe received the Torah at Sinai and passed it all along to Yehoshua who transmitted it to the elders and so on. The Bartenura explains that one does not need such a Mishna to introduce Maseches Shabbat, Nazir, and Menachot. Those obviously have a divine author. The chidush is that the ethical principles that appear in Pirkei Avot also come from the same source. One might have thought that these were formulated solely by the Rabbis to whom such statements are attributed. The first Mishna teaches us that all these precepts relating to ethical behavior among people were in fact transmitted at Sinai as well.

This is also perhaps the reason that Rabbi Akiva emphasizes that the commandment to love your neighbor is an important principal in the Torah:

“Rabi Akiva stated: Love your neighbor as you love yourself, is an important principal in the Torah”

Why is it necessary to state that it is a

klal gadol baTorah? Just say that it is a klal gadol? The answer is because yes, it is a major thesis, but maybe it came from Rabi Akiva's genius, his unfathomable human intuition. No he teaches us, this principle is also in the Torah.

During this time period of preparation for Kabbalat HaTora, let us recommit ourselves to not only improving our relationship with the One Above, but also with the ones down the street! 