

## Minors and Majors

The opening of this week's double portion, Behar–Bechukotai, deals with the mitzvah of Shmitah. Every 7<sup>th</sup> year, the land in Israel must remain fallow; it cannot be worked or seeded. This is a mitzvah that modern day Israel experiences, actively. Even today, the Sabbatical cycle is enforced and, every 7<sup>th</sup> year, the land of Israel faces the challenge of sustaining its growing population. All this is interesting, but the question posed by Rashi is a more fundamentally relevant problem: What is the relevance of teaching about the Sabbatical year at the foot of Sinai? All the laws in the Torah are taught in Sinai. (See Rashi, Leviticus 25:1)

One way to read Rashi's question reminds the reader of the nagging question in our hearts; the question we often ask ourselves or others when we face a confounding idea in our faith: What sense is there in such a mitzvah? Or, Why would our tradition encourage such a thing? Or, isn't the Torah anachronistic? So, we wonder, why is the mitzvah of the Sabbatical year being presented to the Jewish people while they sit in the barren Sinai desert?

To this skeptical attitude, the Rashi answers that when the mitzvah of Sabbatical year was taught every detail, every nuance and every law attached to the mitzvah of the 7<sup>th</sup> year was directly tied to Sinai. This is the answer we must fire back at the cynical, skeptical, sometimes, scoffing voice in our heads – it all goes back to Sinai. Every detail and every mitzvah and every law emerge from the energetic core of Sinai.

In the opening statement to his followers in his book of commands, the Baal Shem Tov, the Besh't, founder of the Hasidic movement, teaches the words from the Mishna in Avot: Be diligent, *Zahir*, with an easy mitzvah as though it were a severe mitzvah. This would be an important message to his fledgling movement. The Hasidic community was formed in a reaction to the elite talmudists. For the average Jew, the realm of the spiritual life was unknown. Literacy levels were low and if you couldn't read you couldn't – meaningfully – participate in Jewish communal life. (Tzavaat Harivash, Opening words)

The Besh't came along and said the opposite – even an insignificant mitzvah can have great meaning. And taking it further, *Zahir*, diligence, can also mean illuminate (The book of light is called the Zohar). Thus, a minor mitzvah can illuminate a person's soul like a major mitzvah. In this radical shift, the gravity of the social moved from the select few to the average Jew.

What is the 7<sup>th</sup> year doing at Sinai?! No, it all goes back to Sinai. It all has the potential transformative power that we felt at Sinai. Don't denigrate and don't mock. That attitude is a plague on the Jewish soul. Too often we try to outsmart the system, when really we are deflating the Jewish spirit. Rather, maybe these minor details strike a deep truth; if only we would treat the minor mitzvah like a major mitzvah, we might find great light there. If only we would treat minor people like major people, we might find great light there. If only we would treat, minor moments like major moments, we might find great light there.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach and *Yom Yerushalayim Sameach*; we celebrate the reunification of the Jerusalem,

Rabbi Menashe East