



THE RABBI BINYAMIN KAMENETZKY
TORAH LEGACY FOUNDATION
לזכרון של הרב בנימין קמנצקי זצ"ל

אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאנצרו של
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

*A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky*

5780 - Parshas Behar-Bechukosai – Lessons in Humility

Parshas Behar begins with the commandment of shemitta. Every seven years, we are commanded to let the land in Israel lie fallow, as Jews in Israel refrain from doing both agricultural work on the land, and commerce with its produce.

But before the Torah tells us the actual laws, the passuk says (Vayikra 25:1) “And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying...” The Torah deems it necessary to record the setting where Hashem taught these laws to Moshe - on Mount Sinai. Why is that?

Rashi explains, “Just as the general laws and fine points of shemitta were all said at Sinai, also the previous mitzvos, their general laws and fine points, were said on Sinai.”

Perhaps there is another lesson as well.

My father wrote this story in his book, Parsha Parables.

In the last decade of his life, my great-grandfather, HaGaon Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l, would visit Toronto, the city in which he was once chief Rabbi, annually. He was once in the Clanton Park Synagogue and stopped into a small celebration which was hosted by a simple Jew named Yankel. Yankel had just completed a masechta (Talmudic Tractate). Reb Yaakov wanted to congratulate the young man and took a seat. All of a sudden, the Gabbai, referring to the celebrant, announced. "and now our good friend Reb Yankel will say the Hadran, the closing paragraph, and thus finish the Masechta."

Rav Yaakov, not realizing that the Gabbai was referring to a man almost 50 years his junior, stood up and apologetically objected; "I did not do the learning, I should not render the closing ceremony."

Though he was the oldest and one of the most revered sages of our generation, Rav Yaakov, in his immense humility, still responded when he thought he heard himself addressed as “Reb Yankel,” a name affectionately used for a younger, unscholarly man.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky, zt"l would repeat the explanation of Rav Aryeh Leib Charif, zt"l. The phenomenon of “Matan Torah - the giving of the Torah” was surreal. The entire creation was silent as Hashem descended on the mountain, with all his glory, and gave the Torah to the Jews.

But one aspect was not so grand. The mountain of Sinai was not, and is still not, an especially tall or grand mountain. It is rather a simple, low-key mountain in the middle of the desert.

Hashem chose Sinai specifically for this reason. One must learn from Sinai to be humble. The only way to properly learn and internalize the Torah is with humility and a self-awareness that he is not so grand, after all.

The laws of Shemitta, like Sinai, teach us this lesson as well. The Gemara (Shabbos 31a) quotes the passuk in Yeshaya (Isaiah), “The faith of your times will be the strength of your salvation.” “The faith your times” refers to the laws of “zera'im” – agriculture, for in order to be a successful farmer, one needs complete faith that Hashem will provide proper rainfall, climate, and nourishment to the ground. This faith can come only with humility. When a person knows that his livelihood is solely in the hands of Hashem – then he can be successful.

The laws of shemitta teach this to us as well. One must put away his own ego and self-pride for a complete year, as he sits beside his field, watching it deteriorate and ruin. He must build a stronghold of unwavering faith in Hashem in order to survive and thrive during that year of economic catastrophe, and that stronghold is fueled by pure humility. The Torah teaches the laws of Shemitta at Mount Sinai because their messages are one in the same. Learn humility from Sinai and use it to fuel a life of growth – both during shemitta and in the years that follow.

Good Shabbos!

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