



FROM SINAI

THE TORAH IS DIVINE WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION IMPARTED to humanity through Moses our Teacher. But how exactly did this process take place? The Sedra¹ gives us an insight.

The Sedra tells us the laws of the Sabbatical Year (Shemittah). This passage is prefaced by the statement that G-d imparted these instructions to Moses “at Mount Sinai.” Why should this be mentioned here?

The Jewish people were indeed camped in the Sinai desert while the teachings in this Book of Vayikra (Leviticus) were being imparted to Moses. But he did not climb Mount Sinai again. The teachings from G-d came to him within the Sanctuary, and this was now the spiritual focus for the Jewish people, not the mountain. The statement that the laws about the Sabbatical Year were told to Moses “at Mount Sinai” seems strange.

Rashi tells us that these words help us understand something about the nature of the Torah in general. The law of the Sabbatical Year is mentioned briefly earlier in the Torah², following the account of the Ten Commandments. In our Sedra this week, further details are provided about the operation of this law. By stating that these details were taught to Moses at Mount Sinai the Sedra is telling us something about the Torah in general. The law of the Sabbatical Year and in fact all Torah law was taught in detail at Mount Sinai.

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The emphasis of Rashi's comment, quoting the Midrash, is that not only the general concepts of the Torah were given to Moses at Sinai, but also its details. This in fact is a topic of discussion in the Talmud: one opinion is that only the general principles were given at Sinai, and the details were communicated to Moses later on in the Sanctuary. But Rabbi Akiva's view is that both the general principles and the details were all transmitted to Moses at Sinai. This is the view endorsed by the Midrash quoted by Rashi.

This means that in a remarkable way, every single Torah concept was communicated by G-d to Moses during the forty days and nights on the mountain.

After coming down the mountain, Moses spent the rest of his life expounding what he had learnt on the Mountain to the Jewish people. Those Divine instructions which are recorded later in the Torah were really a repetition of ideas which Moses had already learnt earlier.

As we know, much of Jewish teaching is expressed in terms of discussions by the Sages who lived many centuries after the Giving of the Torah. However, these ideas too were included in G-d's original teaching to Moses on Sinai. The Sages tell us³ that every single detail of Torah, in the widest sense of the word, including rabbinic statements in our own time about uniquely modern situations, was part of G-d's mystical transmission to Moses, alone on the mountain, without food or drink, without sleep...

This means that although Jewish teaching is presented to us by our Sages in a clear, logical and highly organised form, its origin is the intensity and spiritual illumination of Moses' contact with G-d on the mountain. This intensity is there not only in the general concepts of Jewish law, but in every detail. This helps us understand the force and importance of every tiny facet of Jewish teaching guiding our lives⁴.

I. Leviticus 25:1-26:2. 2. Exodus 23:11. 3. See Jerusalem Talmud Pe'ah 2:4. 4. Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 17 p.283.

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SEDRA BEHAR

SIX YEARS SHALL YOU PLANT...

"Mummy, I've dug up all that ground behind the cherry tree, in the sunny patch. It's ready for planting," Dina called to her mother, who was sitting on the patio drinking tea.

"That's fantastic," her mother exclaimed. "I've got the spring onion seeds here, and you can sow them - but why don't you stop for a break first, and have something to eat. You've been working for a long time, and it's hot."

"No, I want to carry on." Dina insisted. "I don't need to take a rest."

"Of course you do. Everyone needs to take a rest once in a while. In fact, even some of the commandments in the Torah are about taking a rest, for example, Shabbat and Shemitta."

"I know what Shabbat is, of course, but what's Shemitta?" Dina asked.

"Oh, Shemitta is the seven year cycle which the Torah tells us to keep when we grow produce. Just like every week, when we work for six days, and then rest on the seventh - Shabbat - so it is with growing produce on a farm. G-d told us that we should work in the fields for six years and then rest in the seventh year."

"Wow, that's really interesting Mum. But then what should people eat if they cannot grow anything?"

"Aha, for that G-d gave us a special guarantee. If you keep Shemitta you are rewarded with plentiful crops in the sixth year, which more than make up for the loss."

Dina was struck by a thought. "Oh no! I hope it's not the Shemitta year this year - I won't be able to grow any vegetables, and you already bought all those seeds."

Her mother laughed. "Don't worry, Dina. It's not the Shemitta year this year, and anyway, as far as planting seeds is concerned, the Mitzva of Shemitta only applies in the land of Israel. It shows how holy the land is."

"When will the next Shemitta year be?" asked Dina. Her mother thought for a moment, and counted on her fingers.

"I think the next Shemitta year will begin in about three years' time, 5775 (2014-5). You'll be Bat Mitzva by then!"

"Yes" said Dina. "It's not for ages. Meanwhile, let's try and get these spring onion seeds planted. I can't wait to watch them grow..."

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