



Shemitta at Har Sinai?

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“**H**ashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: ‘When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of Hashem’” (Vayikra 25:1-2).

Rashi famously asks *Mah inyan Shemitta aytzel Har Sinai*, “What special connection does *Shemitta* have to Mount Sinai?” Rashi offers a perplexing answer: “Just as the laws of *Shemitta* were given at Mount Sinai, so too all of the *mitzvot* and their details were given at Sinai.” However, the question remains: Why was *Shemitta* chosen to teach this foundational principle of Jewish belief? Ostensibly, any *mitzvah* could have been selected to teach us that all of the *mitzvot* and their details were given to our people at Mount Sinai.

The Netivot Shalom explains: “The general root of all the *mitzvot* is a matter of faith. Additionally, each *mitzvah* has something special and specific that no other *mitzvah* has... But the *mitzvah* of *Shemitta*, which demands the highest levels of faith, is special... This *mitzvah* requires a Jew to abandon his field – the source of his livelihood – for an entire year, even though he does not know where his food will come from. All this is only possible because of his faith in Hashem...”

Faith in G-d is the root of all the *mitzvot*. Although each *mitzvah* possesses unique meaning, *Shemitta* is the apex of faith. Its laws convey belief in G-d in the most significant way: the ability to trust in G-d and depend on Him entirely for our existence.

Generally, the Torah does not require us to refrain from working and to do what is necessary to not only survive but also thrive. On the contrary: We are required to make every effort toward our livelihood. Man was created “to work and preserve” the land. The Torah repeatedly emphasizes the need for physical labor to ensure the world’s continued existence. Even the laws of *Shemitta* begin with the need to work the land throughout the first six years: “Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield” (Vayikra 25:3).

Similarly, when describing Shabbat, the Torah first states: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Shemot 20:9). The Rabbis explain that for six days each week we must work for our livelihood and the building up of the world, while on the seventh day we must rest and remember Hashem Who sustains us. Similarly, for six years we work the land and cultivate our bread, while in the seventh year we remember that the land belongs to G-d and trust in Him to give us what we need. “And should you ask, ‘What are we to eat in the seventh year, if

we may neither sow nor gather in our crops?’ I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years” (Vayikra 25:20-21).

While faith is critical to the *Shemitta* year, we do not rely on faith alone but instead prepare for *Shemitta* with six years of hard work and preparation. In general, G-d does not want us to abandon work and to regularly rely on miracles. Instead, we must balance human effort with trust in G-d.



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At the same time, the faith that we strengthen during the *Shemitta* year is the proper basis for our hard work during the other six years. Those who allow the land to rest during *Shemitta* develop faith and confidence in G-d, knowing that the land and its fullness belong to our Father in Heaven.

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