

PARASHAS BEHAR

Small Coincidences

Fire and thick clouds descended on Mount Sinai as millions of Jewish people trembled in awe at the foot of the mountain. And then the voice of the Almighty spoke directly to all the people, the first and last time that such an incredible divine revelation would occur in all the history of mankind. What did the Almighty say to the Jewish people on that historic day at Mount Sinai? He gave them the Ten Commandments.

But what about the rest of the Torah? Where and when was that given to the Jewish people? In fact, all the rest of the Torah was also given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. The encampment remained at the foot of the mountain for over a year, and during this time, Moses taught the entire Torah to the Jewish people, and the process of study began.

This week's portion, however, when presenting the laws of the sabbatical year, opens with a strange statement. "And Hashem spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying . . ." What is the connection between Mount Sinai and the sabbatical year? wonders the Talmud. After all, wasn't the entire Torah taught at Mount Sinai. Why make particular mention of Mount Sinai with regard to one commandment?

The Talmud explains that this we are meant to draw a parallel from this commandment to all the other commandments in the Torah. Just as the laws of the sabbatical year, which require that the land be left fallow every seventh year, were taught in full at Mount Sinai so too were all the laws of the Torah taught there.

The question remains: Why were the laws of the sabbatical year singled out as the example which all the other laws follow?

The commentators point to an interesting passage a little deeper into the Torah portion we are reading this week. "And if you shall say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we cannot plant nor gather in our produce,' then I will command My blessing for you in the sixth year, and it will yield enough produce for three years."

What an amazing statement! Here is clear proof (among many others) of the divine origin of the Torah. First of all, do laws of the sabbatical year sound like something people would make up? And even if we could conjure up some motivation for instituting such laws, how exactly did they plan to deliver on the three-for-one crop in the sixth year? This was not written by men. It couldn't have been.

This, the commentators explain, is the point the Torah is making here. Just as the sabbatical laws were formulated by the Almighty and not by men, so too are all the other laws of the Torah from Mount Sinai, divine in origin and not the product of human imagination.

A man, who had business in a distant city, bid his wife farewell, left his apartment and went out to the street to find a taxi. To his delight, a taxi was standing at the curbside. At the airport, he found a skycap waiting to take his luggage just as he opened his door. His ticket was waiting for him at the counter, and once again, he was delighted to discover he had been assigned his favorite seat. What wonderful coincidences, he thought.

The coincidences continued throughout his trip, and he marveled at his good fortune. Finally, he arrived at the hotel in the city of his destination and found that a delicious meal had been prepared for him. Moreover, the food was prepared and arranged exactly as he preferred it!

Aha! he thought. This is too much to attribute to coincidence. Now I clearly see my wife's loving hand. She made sure that I was happy and comfortable every step of the way. I must thank her not only for the meal, but for every convenience I have so fortuitously encountered on my trip.

In our own lives, most of us can easily think of at least one or two times when we saw clearly the Almighty's hand leading us through difficult times. But think about it. Doesn't it stand to reason that all the other good things that have happened to us in the normal course of events, all the little coincidences that we are so accustomed to taking for granted, all of these were also engineered by the loving hand of the Almighty? Once we come to this realization, our relationship with Him will rise to a new level and will be forever spiritually enriched.