



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Behar | Sichah 1

The Verse:

Hahsem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying. (*Vayikra* 25:1)

The Rashi:

On Mount Sinai — What does the subject of *shemita* [the “release” of fields in the seventh year] have to do with Mount Sinai? Weren’t all the commandments articulated at Sinai? However, this teaches us that just as was the case regarding *Shemita* — its general principles and its finer details were all stated from Sinai — similarly all of the commandments, including their general principles and their finer details, were given on Mount Sinai. This is what is taught in *Toras Kohanim* (25:1).

It appears to me that the explanation is as follows: [*Devarim* relates that at the plains of Moav, Moshe reiterated the majority of the Torah’s laws to the Israelites before their entry into the land of Israel. Now,] since we do not find the laws of *Shemita* reiterated on the plains of Moav in *Devarim*, we may infer that its general principles, finer details, and explanations were all conveyed at Sinai. The Torah says this [phrase, “on Mount Sinai,” even though it seems superfluous] here in order to instruct us regarding every Divine command that was spoken to Moshe: In every case, their general rules and finer details originated at Sinai; they were only repeated again in “the fields of Moav.”

The Conventional Understanding of Rashi:

Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva disagree on what was taught at Mount Sinai: Rabbi Yishmael maintains that only the general principles of the *mitzvos* were taught at Sinai; the particulars were taught by Moshe at the

Mishkan throughout the desert journey. Rabbi Akiva maintains that both the principles and the particulars were taught at Sinai. (*Chagigah* 6a-b)

Rashi, citing *Toras Kohanim*, understands the seemingly unnecessary mention of “Mount Sinai” in the verse as supporting Rabbi Akiva’s position — that **all** *mitzvos* were given in **full** at Sinai, just like *Shemitah*.

The Question:

If Rashi means to demonstrate that the details of the *mitzvos* were conveyed at Sinai, and not at the *Mishkan*, what does he gain by saying that the laws of *shemitah* were not said at the “plains of Moav?” That is an inadequate proof. Just because the laws were not taught at the plains of Moav does not mean that they were taught at Sinai. They very well could have been taught at the *Mishkan*, and not at Sinai, as Rabbi Yishmael says.

The Explanation:

Rashi is bothered by the very appearance of the wording, “Mount Sinai” in the verse. Once the *Mishkan* was erected in the book of *Shemos*, G-d only communicated to Moshe there. Why, then, would Sinai appear here?

Rashi’s answer is that “Mount Sinai” in this verse does not refer to G-d’s communication to Moshe on the mountain, but rather, to the *Mishkan* when it was located at the foot of Mount Sinai, after the Giving of the Torah.

He arrives at this understanding through the following reading of the *Toras Kohanim*: *Toras Kohanim* says that the phrase, “Mount Sinai” is unnecessary, because we already know that the law of *shemitah* was given fully at Sinai, as the Torah does not mention *shemitah* at the plains of Moab. The phrase “Mount Sinai” serves some other purpose, namely, to teach us that all of the *mitzvos* were given fully at Sinai.

Now, if the phrase “Mount Sinai” in the verse means the **actual mountain**, then writing it is necessary. For if *Shemitah*

was not mentioned at the plains of Moav, our next assumption would be that it was mentioned at the *Mishkan*. So, if the verse means to say that Shemitah was in fact communicated on the Mountain itself, then this is a novel idea, and the words “Mount Sinai” are absolutely necessary. Thus, these words would not be able to serve as the basis for the *Toras Kohanim*’s exposition that all the *mitzvos* were taught at Sinai.

For *Toras Kohanim* to be able to expound upon these words, “Mount Sinai” must refer to the *Mishkan* during its journey through the Sinai desert.

In that case, both Rashi and the *Toras Kohanim* learn that all the *mitzvos* were communicated by Moshe in full detail at the *Mishkan* throughout the desert journey — a position that is still compatible with Rabbi Yishmael’s position.

In this new formulation, Rashi does not reject Rabbi Yishmael’s position. Rather, he rejects the interpretation that the *mitzvos* that were said at the plains of Moav were conveyed fully for the first time there. Rather, every *mitzvah* was already given completely at some point in the desert — at the Mountain according to Rabbi Akiva, or at the *Mishkan* in the desert according to Rabbi Yishmael.

The Spiritual Origin of the Dispute:

Rabbi Yishmael’s opinion that the details of the *mitzvos* were given throughout the desert journey is more compatible with the literal reading of the verse. When a new detail of a *mitzvah* appears, it is safe to assume that it was conveyed by Hashem for the first time upon its first appearance in the Torah.

Yet, a guiding *halachic* principle states that the law follows Rabbi Akiva in his disputes with colleagues.

What is the deeper meaning of this?

Rabbi Yishmael is the prototypical *tzaddik* — one whose devotion to G-d is steady and unchallenged. Rabbi Akiva is the prototypical penitent. He was constantly longing for G-d, searching for the opportunity to give his life for Him.

Sinai was a place of spiritual longing. The Jews' souls expired at every Divine utterance. The *Mishkan*, on the other hand, is a place of rhythm and order.

Thus, Rabbi Yishmael says that the “general principles,” the foundational aspects of Divine service, were given at transcendent Sinai. However the “particulars,” the details of a person's day-to-day life as a Jew, were given in the orderly, down-to-earth atmosphere of the *Mishkan*.

Rabbi Akiva disagrees. The general and the particular were both given at Sinai. The stormy passion of Sinai must imbue all of a Jew's divine service, down to the smallest detail of a *mitzvah*.

The simple meaning of the verse, given by G-d and untarnished by human experience, follows Rabbi Yishmael's logical, serene path.

But the law, which is born out of human interaction with the real world, follows Rabbi Akiva's path of passionate repentance.