BS"D
May 30, 2025
Friday is the 47th day of the Omer (Lag B'Omer). Count the next day for Shabbat.

**Potomac Torah Study Center**
Vol. 12 #32, May 20-31, 2025; 4 Sivan 5785;Bemidbar 5785
Shavuot is Sunday evening through Tuesday
Note: Following many Devrei Torah, my focus this week is Shavuot; next week for Bemidbar - Naso

**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.**

---

**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

---

**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. We continue to mourn for Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, murdered May 21 outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. For more, see the outstanding tribute by Bari Weiss:** https://www.thefp.com/p/welcome-to-the-global-intifada

---

Rabbi David Fohrman and Rabbi Menachem Leibtag both start their discussions of Shavuot by mentioning that it is the only holiday whose date the Torah does not mention in Emor. As Rabbi Leibtag demonstrates (in his shiur attached to my email submission), one can calculate that Shavuot must be on either the 6th or 7th of Sivan (depending on whether the month of Sivan in the year 2448 was 29 or 30 days).

The Torah mentions that Shavuot is a chag hakatzir, a harvest festival, and a yom habikkurim (day to bring first fruits, in particular two loaves of bread (chametz) from the new crop of wheat. (Before bringing the loaves as first fruits, one may not eat from the new crop of wheat.) The only other korban that includes loaves of bread (chametz) is the korban todah, or thanksgiving offering (Vayikra 7:13). The laws of most types of korbanot specifically require only matzah, not chametz (see, e.g., Vayikra 2:11).

While the Torah focuses on Shavuot (without naming the holiday) as a joyous harvest festival, time of bringing first fruits of wheat, and time to remember our slavery in Egypt, the Rabbinic focus of the holiday is staying awake to learn Torah all night and observing the anniversary of receiving the Torah. Unlike Pesach (Seder and matzot), Sukkot (residing and eating in the Sukkah), and Rosh Hashanah (shofar), Shavuot does not have a specific ritual for the holiday.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that each generation of Jews does not merely inherit the Torah. We must engage with the Torah and struggle to learn its seventy layers of meaning on our own. To understand the meaning of the Torah is a journey that requires constant renewal and personal investment. Only by engaging with the Torah daily can we sweeten the Torah for ourselves and for future generations. Rabbi Brander observes that Shavuot has no specific ritual mitzvah because it transcends ritual. Rather, Shavuot is a holiday of remembering our receiving the Torah and probing its meaning daily. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, adds that God identifying Himself as the "God of our fathers" connects us to our ancestors and gives all Jews a sense of family history. Our history includes both the high points (such as the Revelation and Temples) and unparalleled times of courage, suffering, and escapes from suffering over thousands of years.

Shavuot always comes as we turn to Sefer Bemidbar in our annual Torah cycle. God gives us the Torah in the Midbar, because a desert is hefker (ownerless) – free and available to everyone. God presented His words of Revelation simultaneously in 70 languages, because it contains messages for all the nations of the world. People from every nation can learn from the Torah, whose messages reach every person at his or her own level.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Shavuot Samaich,

Hannah and Alan

---

**Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

---

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Shavuot Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

---

## Shavuot: From Inheritance to Partnership – The Power of Torah Blessings

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

*This week's article is dedicated in memory of Tzeela Gez z"l, beloved alumna of the Jennie Sapirstein High School in Ramot, Jerusalem, and her baby Ravid Chaim z"l, whose life began and ended in heartbreak. May their souls be bound together in eternal peace.*

As we gather on Shavuot to celebrate the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the moment that forever transformed the Jewish people into a nation of destiny and covenant, we often focus on the awe of revelation — the thunder, the fire, the awe of the transformative moment. But beyond the display lies a quieter, more enduring covenantal act that we perform every day: Birkat HaTorah, the blessings we recite before learning Torah. The way we bless the Torah every morning — what we say and how we frame the experience — reveals the transformative nature of Torah and its role in our lives.

The Rambam, in Hilchot Tefillah )7:10(, records that before learning Torah each day — whether written or oral — one must recite three blessings.

The first acknowledges God who “sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about the words of Torah,” )“Asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu al divrei Torah”(

The second is a request, “Please Hashem our God make sweet the words of your Torah” )“V’ha’arev na Hashem Elokeinu et divrei Toratecha…”(.

And the third maintains that God “chose us from among all the nations and gave us His Torah” )“Asher bachar banu mikol ha’amim v’natan lanu et Torato”(.

The Rambam’s approach is distinctive. While most other Rishonim count only two requisite blessings – viewing the first two as a single unit – the Rambam separates them into three independent blessings, each with its own purpose.

For the Rambam, the first blessing is historical and communal. It acknowledges the divine origin of Torah and our eternal relationship with it. The phrase “al divrei Torah,” subtly implies receptiveness; we received something sacred, and that created an unbreakable bond between us and Hashem. This is the Torah as it was given at Sinai — our national inheritance.

But that inheritance alone is not enough.

The second blessing, beginning “V’ha’arev na” — a plea for sweetness and engagement— introduces a critical shift. This standalone blessing reflects an internal, personal relationship with Torah. It’s the voice of the individual learner, not the nation. Strikingly, it uses active language: “v’nih’yeh anachnu v’tze’etza’einu…oskei Toratecha lishmah” – “may we and our descendants…be those who engage with Your Torah for its own sake.” We are not merely inheritors of Torah — we are its builders, active partners. This blessing reflects a core Jewish truth: Torah has no continuity without chiddush — without renewal. Torah must be not only received but reimagined in each generation.

The third blessing then fuses these two dimensions. “Asher bachar banu mikol ha’amim” emphasizes our chosenness — echoing the first blessing — but continues with “v’natan lanu et Torato,” compelling us toward active ownership. Torah is simultaneously a divine gift and a personal responsibility. Only once both elements unite — historical connection and personal engagement — can Torah become a living, eternal force in our lives.

This idea emerges from a Talmudic discussion )Berachot 11b( about when one is obligated to recite Birkat HaTorah. Rav Huna requires blessings only for the study of Mikra )written Torah(, while Rabbi Elazar extends this to include Midrash. Rabbi Yochanan includes Mishnah on the list, as Rava goes furthest, saying that even the study of Talmud requires a blessing.

This debate reflects more than legal technicalities— it’s a vision of how we define Torah. Is Torah only the literal word of God? What about rabbinic interpretation? What about human conversation about sacred texts?

The Rambam rules like Rava: even human discourse — the dialectics of the Talmud — require a blessing. Why? Because the sugya, even when it seems to stray from the biblical text, remains sacred. The divine voice reverberates through human debate. As the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, often taught: the very act of wrestling with Torah is itself a form of divine communion.

This may explain why Shavuot is the only holiday that has no specific ritual mitzvah . There is no sukkah to build, no matzah to eat, no shofar to blow. Shavuot transcends ritual; it celebrates the beginning of a journey that requires constant renewal, sweetness, and personal investment.

As we stand again at Sinai this Shavuot, may we hear not only the thunder of revelation, but the quiet daily call to engage with Torah in the everyday activities of our life. Let us commit not only to study Torah, but to wrestle with it so that it can navigate our lives and shape our world. May we become the active partners that the Torah demands – sweetening the Torah for ourselves and for future generations.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

---

## Shavuos: Thunder and Lighting

By Rabbi Naftali Reich © 5767

The world had never seen anything like it, nor would it see anything like it ever again. As the Jewish people gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai watched with breathless awe, a thick layer of clouds descended over the mountain. Jagged streaks of lightning rent the heavens asunder, and the sounds of crashing thunderbolts were so earsplittingly loud that the people trembled uncontrollably. Sheets of fire suddenly engulfed the mountaintop, and the entire mountain quaked and discharged thick smoke like a colossal furnace. The eerie blast of a ram's horn grew louder and louder. And then God spoke from the mountaintop and pronounced the Ten Commandments.

What was the purpose of this spectacular display of special effects? Wouldn't the experience of actually hearing God speak have been awesome enough? Didn't God's voice in itself inspire sufficient fear and reverence in the hearts of the people without the addition of artificial external stimuli?

The commentators explain that the spectacle at Mount Sinai was meant to serve as a metaphor for the future conditions under which the Jewish people would often attempt to study Torah and live by it. It would not take much courage to study the Torah and observe its commandments during tranquil and prosperous times. Who would turn away from the ultimate spiritual fulfillment in the absence of distractions and obstructions?

But rarely if ever does humankind experience such placid times. The world is always in upheaval, torn by wars and migrations, plagued by poverty and deprivation, struggling under oppression and exploitation and, in the best case, distracted by the material mirages of prosperity.

Where does a person find the presence of mind to study Torah and live by it under such daunting conditions? In the memory of the stand at Mount Sinai when the voice of God penetrated through the cacophony of the thunder and lightning and the raging fire, and the people heard His words. This is the only way Torah is absorbed, by the extreme effort to overcome external distractions and internal emotional turmoil, by a dedicated perseverance to penetrate to the divine essence of the Torah and through it to connect with God.

A young man traveled to a distant city to study with a famous sage. After many days on the road, he arrived at his destination, a large white building on a sun-drenched street. He walked up to the front door and tried to open it, but it was locked. He knocked and knocked for a few minutes, but there was no response. He walked around to the side of the building where he found another door. It too was locked. Here too his loud knocking elicited no response.

Through the open windows high up on the wall, he could hear the sounds of excited young voices engaged in heated arguments and discussions. He called out to them, but no one heard him. He smelled cooking food and followed the trail of the odors to another window, which was surely a kitchen. Here too he called out at the top of his lungs, but no one came to the window.

Under the kitchen window, he noticed a coal grate. He pulled at it, and it came away in his hands. Gingerly, he lowered himself through the coal grate into the cellar. Covered with soot, he groped his way through the shadows and found the stairway to the upper floors.

The sage was waiting for him at the top of the stairway.

*"Welcome, my son,"* he said. *"We have been waiting for you. I am happy to see that you have found your way here."*

*"If you were waiting for me,"* said the young man, *"why was the door locked? Why didn't anyone respond to my knocking or my calls?"*

The sage smiled. *"It was a test, my son. If you had not discovered the coal grate and clambered through the cellar, you could not have been a worthy member of our group."*

In our own lives, the pressures of everyday life often force us to forgo the opportunities to study or perform various other good deeds. Someday, when things settle down, we tell ourselves, we will devote more time to our spiritual growth, but the time is not yet right. But if we wait for this tranquil time, it may never come. Distractions are never lacking. Life is always full of thunder and lightning. It takes perseverance to penetrate to the truth.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/legacy-5767-shavuos/

---

## Does Torah Ever Take a Sleep Break?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer and Rabbi Avram Schwartz * (May 27, 2020)

Rav Menashe Klein zt"l, also known as the Ungvarer Rav, was a survivor of the Shoah and served as a communal leader and rosh yeshiva in Boro Park and in Jerusalem. The author of the 17-volume responsa *Mishneh Halakhot,* as well as many other books, he was renowned for his depth and breadth of knowledge.

In the following teshuvah (Mishneh Halakhot 6:14), Rav Klein discusses a question that arises every Shavuot morning – should someone who stayed up all night learning Torah recite the Torah blessings before davening that we recite every morning? This question is debated already in the Rishonim (not in the context of Shavuot) and its resolution hinges on whether one sees the Torah blessings as mitzvah-blessings or praise-blessings, like all the blessings we say in the morning prior to Psukei diZimra. If they are mitzvah-blessings, they would remain in effect until the person would go to sleep and interrupt the performance of the mitzvah, i.e., his Torah learning. This is the position of Rosh, who states that in such a case that a person is up all night, no new blessing should be made. Rabbenu Tam states, in contrast, that a new blessing must be made, since the Torah blessings are like all the other praise-blessings which we offer each day.

The general practice is in accordance with Rabbenu Tam and following this, those who were up all night would recite the Torah blessings on Shavuot morning. Rav Klein goes further and states that even according to Rosh, one can make the blessings if he specifically intends that the scope of the Torah blessings that he makes on erev Shavuot should not extend into Shavuot morning. This is possible because on the one hand we interrupt our Torah study throughout the day to take care of all our mundane needs, and on the other hand, in principle we should always be involved in or going back to our Torah learning. Because our learning is both made up of discrete units and also continuous, our intention to separate the learning of one day from the next, even if one has been learning all night, is meaningful and defines the learning on Shavuot day as something new.

As we enter into Shavuot, we should reflect on what it means to think of one's Torah learning as continuous and as discrete units. On the one hand, many of us should be striving for a mindset of continuous Torah learning – that Torah is not something that we have to make special time for during the day, but rather that it defines our day, and it is all the other things – work, shopping, eating – that we need to find time to squeeze in. But this is not possible, and perhaps even not to be desired, of everyone. Jewish society is not, and perhaps should not, be seen as consisting of scholars and would-be scholars. For most people, their primary contribution to a society based on Torah and Torah values comes through the work that they do, the Jewish homes that they build, and the contributions that they make to the larger world.

It is thus significant that on Shavuot, the day commemorating the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, the custom is to learn all night – reflecting the ethos of continual Torah study – and to make a new Torah blessing in the morning, reflecting the

ethos of Torah learning as a discrete activity, one that should take place every day and be integrated into every day, but one that – for most people – is not expected to be a continuous, unbroken activity throughout the day.

On this Shavuot let us celebrate Torah's centrality to our lives, and appreciate the roles that we all play in living our lives and creating a society based on Torah.

* Rabbi Dov Linzer is the President and Rosh HaYeshiva of YCT Rabbinical School. Rabbi Avram Schwartz learned at Yeshivat Hahesder Yerucham in Israel and received semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School in 2017.

https://library.yctorah.org/lindenbaum/does-torah-ever-take-a-sleep-break/

---

## Are We Still Listening? Thoughts for Bemidbar and Shavuoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When the Israelites gathered around Mount Sinai to experience the awesome Revelation of God, each of them heard the same words — but in different ways! The Midrash teaches (Shemot Rabba 29:1) that God *spoke "bekoho shel kol ehad ve-ehad,"* according to the individual abilities of each listener. The universal message of Torah was made direct and personal. The miracle at Mount Sinai was not only the Revelation of God to the nation of Israel, but the individualized Revelation to each and every Israelite man, woman and child.

I think the message of this rabbinic teaching goes further. It does not merely refer to the receptivity and ability of Israelites at the moment of Revelation at Mount Sinai. It also recognizes that each individual's koah — strength of understanding — is not stagnant. As we grow, deepen our knowledge, expand our sensitivities and open our minds and hearts — our koah evolves. In a sense, we receive the Revelation anew at each stage in life — actually, every day and every moment of life.

This is the wonder and glory of Torah: it speaks to us directly and personally throughout our lives. The great Hassidic master, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, taught: *"There are those who hear the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah and keep hearing that Shofar throughout the year. There are others, on a higher level, who heard the Shofar at Mount Sinai and keep hearing it every day of their lives."*

Religiosity is not confined within a neatly sealed package. Faith is not something that can be totally attained and put on auto-pilot. Religiosity and faith are dynamic, fluid, developing. There are ups and downs, high moments and low moments. Sometimes we hear the Shofar of Sinai loud and clear, and sometimes we strain with all our might and we still can't hear it. The Revelation at Sinai was not merely a gift — but a challenge. We are called upon to draw on our koah, our inner strength and courage, in order to maintain the teachings of Torah.

Throughout the generations, Jews have exhibited incredible loyalty to the Torah's commandments and ideals, sacrificing so much in order to stay true to the challenge received at Sinai. It has not been — and is not — easy to stand up for truth, compassion, justice. It is so much easier to sit quietly on the sidelines or go along with the crowd.

People frequently complain about corrupt or self-serving leaders — in politics, communal life, religious institutions. Yet, these very leaders have been chosen or maintained in power by the very people who are complaining! Why indeed is society afflicted with so many leaders who are autocratic, conniving, bullying? Why are leaders of nations and institutions able to endanger their own constituents and undermine their well being? The answer basically is: the public lets them get away with their corruption and ruthlessness. People are either cowed, or passive, or feel themselves too weak to stand up in protest.

Nations, societies and institutions ultimately have the leadership they deserve. If they do not demand more, they have little right to complain. If they do not draw on their individual koah to combat governmental, religious and social evils, then they are accomplices to the evil.

The Revelation at Sinai reminds us that we each have koah, we each can find our voice and our courage to stand up for what is right. This is a persistent plea to us that began at Sinai and continues every day of our lives. Edmund Burke pointed out: *"All that the forces of evil need to succeed is for enough good men to do nothing."* Those who *"do nothing"* have no right to expect anything. Those who *"do something"* are those who validate their own lives and bring blessing to the world. The Revelation at Sinai continues to prod us to a life of koah. Are we still listening?

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

https://www.jewishideas.org/are-we-still-listening-thoughts-shavuoth

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

---

## Mountains to Ascend

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Two mountains are of special significance in our religious tradition. Mount Sinai was the site of the Revelation of God to the people of Israel. This was the place where the Torah was given, where our religion was established. Yet, we do not actually know where Mount Sinai is! Some claim to identify this mountain, but we do not have a clear, unbroken tradition as to its real location. We don't have major tours and excursions to this holiest of locations. We don't pray facing toward Mount Sinai.

Mount Moriah is identified in our tradition as the site of the *"binding of Isaac."* Jacob is described as having had his wondrous dream — with a great ladder connecting heaven and earth, and with angels ascending and descending it — at *"the place"* — identified by rabbinic tradition as Mount Moriah. We know exactly where Mount Moriah is, and we visit it often. It is better known today as the Temple Mount, the place in Jerusalem where the ancient Temples stood, and where the Western Wall remains as a reminder of the sanctity of the place. When we pray, we face toward Mount Moriah.

Why is Mount Sinai — the place of the ultimate Revelation of God to the Israelites — so insignificant as an ongoing religious site, whereas Mount Moriah has continued to be a central feature of our religious life over all the centuries? In the case of Mount Sinai, the place of the Revelation is not the essential thing: the message is. The voice of God is everywhere and for all time, and is not limited to a particular mountain. Rabbinic teaching has it that each day a divine voice calls out from Sinai, reminding us to study Torah and be loyal to its words. **We do not know where Mount Sinai is, because it is in fact a symbol of every place. We do not have tours to Mount Sinai, because the voice of God is everywhere.** [emphasis added]

Mount Moriah — the location of the Akedah and of Jacob's dream — represents a different religious reality. If Mount Sinai symbolizes God speaking out to humans, Mount Moriah symbolizes frail human beings reaching out to God. Whereas the Revelation at Mount Sinai was witnessed by hundreds of thousands of Israelites, the Akedah and Jacob's dream were experienced privately, without public fanfare. If the Torah had not recorded these stories, we would never have known about them. Mount Moriah gained its sanctity and centrality not as the place where God dramatically spoke out to humans as at Sinai; but from the quiet, pious, sacrificial, and sturdy faith of lonely human beings crying out to God. The site of the Temple Mount was sanctified by memories of the devotion, faith and frailty of our forefathers. The Temple was where humans reached out to the Almighty, where they brought their first fruits in thanksgiving, where they brought sin offerings. The measure of the sacrificial service was determined by the sincerity of the people, by their joy and/or contrition —

known only to themselves and to God. Mount Moriah is of eternal significance to us because it reflects our inner religious life and aspirations. It is symbolic of our reaching out to God in good times and bad.

Our tradition speaks of a third mountain: the Mountain of God. Psalm 24 asks: *"Who shall ascend the Mountain of God, and who shall stand in His holy place?"* It answers*: "The clean of hands and pure of heart, who has not taken His name in vain nor sworn deceitfully."* Each one of us climbs his/her own mountain. Each of our lives is an attempt to ascend closer to the Lord, closer to personal fulfillment.

Some people climb mountains that seem wonderful and strong — but are essentially hollow. Others climb mountains that seem quiet and un-extraordinary, but they are strong and lasting. The measure of our success is not our wealth, fame or popularity; the measure is being clean of hands, pure of heart, sanctifying God's name, being honest and trustworthy.

Mount Sinai reminds us that God speaks to us. Mount Moriah reminds us that we long for God. The Mountain of God reminds us that we have lives to lead, mountains to climb, things to accomplish. These three mountains together help us structure our lives and our religious imaginations.

> *"I lift my eyes unto the mountains, whence comes my help? My help is from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth."* [Ps. 121]

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

**The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.**

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3357

---

## Reframing

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

The book of Rus, which we read on Shavuos, could easily be seen as a book of tragedy. The book starts by telling us of a terrible famine. Then, a righteous woman, Naomi, is bereft of her husband and two sons. Rus, a princess, becomes a widow. She tries so hard to do the right thing, while she collects alms in the field of her deceased husband's relative, Boaz. When things start looking up for Rus, and Boaz agrees to marry her, they wed, and Boaz dies by the next morning (Medrash, Rus). Many certainly viewed the death of Boaz as divine retribution for marrying Rus the Moabite. Their son Oveid grows up as an orphan. Indeed, the book of Rus could easily be viewed as a book of tragedy.

Yet, our tradition regarding the book of Rus is very different. The Medrash states: The book of Rus is a story of kindnesses. It is the story of a woman who only wanted to do good and see the world with benevolence. Although she could easily have become bitter with her lot, she looks to Boaz with only the greatest gratitude. (Rus 2: 10,13) To her, Hashem bestows the greatest of kindnesses. Hashem guides her to the family of Yehuda from which royalty is destined to come, has her marry Boaz, and she becomes known as the mother of royalty. She is the great-grandmother of Dovid, the

author of Tehillim. She is the matriarch of the Davidic dynasty, the woman from whom Shlomo descended and from whom Moshiach will come.

One of the pivotal moments in the book of Rus is when she goes out to find a field in which she can collect the fallen grain stalks together with the poor. For a former princess like Rus was, this could be seen as a tear-jerking moment, where she, a woman of wealth, was reduced to poverty. Yet, the story is recorded with great excitement, an excitement which Rus in her fortitude and emotional wisdom undoubtedly felt. The verse (2:3) records: "And her happenstance placed her" in the field of the benevolent Boaz. As Rav Matisyahu Salomon z.l. observed, everyone has a happenstance, things that look like chance or nature, but are actually carefully orchestrated by Hashem. Often, it is at what appears to be the worst of moments that Hashem is actually doing great kindnesses for us, closing certain doors and opening others as He guides us to a destiny of blessing.

When distressing events occur to a person, as they occurred to Rus, we could slip into thinking that Hashem is distant from us. The reframing approach is to realize that on the contrary, Hashem is moving pieces to help us get where we need to be.

The challenges that Rus experienced and the impact that her faith and optimism created are the foundations for the life of Dovid and through him and the Tehillim he wrote, the entire Jewish people. The Talmud (Brachos 7) connects the name Rus to the Tehillim of Dovid and to the ability of humankind to stay close to Hashem in all situations. The hardships she overcame were required for her destiny and she was wondrously successful.
The book of Rus is read on Shavuos because it is related to this Yom Tov on so many levels. It is the story of a convert who accepted Torah, as we all accepted Torah on Shavuos. It is the story of how Halacha is guided by the tradition of the Sages who maintained that Rus was permitted to marry into the Jewish people, despite naysayers and dissenters. But on a very personal level it is the story of an individual who felt Hashem's loving hand in her life, persevering through difficult times, knowing that every happenstance was tailor made by a loving G-d who was intent to guide her to her destiny.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos and Yom Tov.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

---

## Shavuos & Receiving the Torah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer* (2020)

There is a beautiful and powerful Rash"i at the beginning of the Torah reading on Shavuos morning. Noting the singular verb "ויחן – and he camped" )Shemos 19:2( used to describe our nation's arrival in the Sinai Desert, Rash"i quotes the Medrash that we arrived in the desert "as one man with one heart." We approached the acceptance of Torah with a unified excitement, a sense of oneness which was indeed a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. The Kli Yakar takes note of the fact that this phrase is said twice in this verse. The verse opens saying "and they camped in the desert" and only then continues "and he camped… opposite the mountain". It appears that when we originally arrived at the Sinai desert, we had not yet achieved this great level of unity. What was it that happened as we camped at Mount Sinai itself which enabled this great unity.

Perhaps one of the most famous Medrashim surrounding the revelation at Sinai is the Medrash )Bamidbar 13:3( discussing why Mount Sinai was chosen. The Medrash describes how other mountains haughtily declared that due to their height Torah would surely be given on them. Yet, Hashem chose Har Sinai instead specifically because it was humble and lowly.

The Kli Yakar explains that this lesson was at the root of our unity. When we first arrived at the Sinai Desert, we each had our own ambitions of grandeur. These personal ambitions prevented our ability to achieve true unity. It was only when we saw the mountain which G-d had chosen as the site for His Revelation and for the giving of the Torah, only once we saw with our own eyes the lowly and simple mountain that G-d had chosen were we able to fully understand that G-d has no desire or interest in grandeur or significant positions. G-d measures one only based on who we are vis-à-vis ourselves. With this recognition we were finally able to fully remove those personal ambitions of grandeur from our collective psyche. Once those ambitions were removed, peace and unity followed naturally. We no longer focused only on our own achievements. We were now able to look beyond ourselves and see each other as true partners and not as competitors. We were able to seek Torah and a relationship with G-d "as one man with one heart."

This explanation also gives us a deeper understanding of true humility. When we arrived at Mount Sinai we continued to yearn for personal greatness and achievement. However, we no longer yearned for status or external measures of perfection. As the great Tanna Hillel says in Pirkei Avos )1:14( "If I am not for me, who will be? And when I am for myself, what am I?" True humility is a delicate balance. We must yearn for our own growth and recognize our own talents and responsibilities. Yet, our own status and achievements cannot become our purpose and goal in life. Our goal must always remain to fulfill our responsibilities.

When I live for my status and achievements, then the measuring stick for my own worth will be my friends and associates. They quickly become my competitors. When I understand that my status is not relevant to G-d, I no longer take pride in my status and I begin to focus on using my talents and skills appropriately. At that point, I can only measure my achievements against myself. My friends and acquaintances all become inspirations to help me maximize my own talents. We can then live as one nation, rejoicing in each other's successes, feeling each other's pain and inspiring each other ever forward.

One of the first steps to humility, leading to unity and ultimately to a proper commitment and acceptance of Torah, is the recognition of my own personal responsibility in my own private world. How fortunate we are this year. We have had weeks of isolation. We have had to daven alone, to study Torah on our own, to practice and maintain our commitment to all of Torah and mitzvos when no one was watching. In the merit of our struggles may we merit true humility, true unity and the gift of G-d's Torah and of being His nation.

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

---

## Shavuot

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]Ed. note: Rabbi Ovadia has a beautiful and extensive discussion of the book of Ruth – far too long to include in this forum. To give a flavor of his analysis, I am including his epilogue. Hopefully Rabbi Ovadia will make his interpretation more widely available soon.[

## The Book of Ruth: Epilogue

The Rabbis said in the Midrash )Bava Batra 14:2( that Ruth's name is derived from רוה – to satiate thirst – because she was the grandmother of David, who satiated God's thirst for songs and praises. According to the interpretation I suggest here ]in his full text[, Ruth was the first one to satiate thirst. Ruth helped Naomi, who became so embittered that she renamed herself Mara, like the bitter lake the Israelites encountered in the desert, to find the sweetness of life. Just as Moshe threw into the water of Mara a piece of wood without special qualities, to enable the Israelites to find the

sweetness of the water, so Ruth threw away any selfishness or special character traits she had, so Naomi could re-discover, as if it were through her own efforts, the sweetness in her life. Perhaps because David had the merit to sit on his grandmother Ruth's knees, and hear from her how one could always find the strength to see good and never give up, he was able to open his book with Ashray and seal it with Hallelujah, despite all the tragedies and difficulties of his life, which he does not fail to mention between those two joyous bookends.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** **https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.**

---

## Chalav and the Power of Permission

By Rabbi Moshe Rube * (5780)

It seems that with every Shavuos that comes around, the same arguments repeat themselves. Jews start dreaming about the cheesecake and blintzes they will feast on, and various rabbis raise the alarm that according to halacha, meat remains the only legitimate form of simchas Yom Tov. The opinions fly back and forth, but at the end of the day, everybody does what they wish. I have eaten at many meals of my rabbonim during Shavuos and have experienced dairy meals, meat meals, and of course meals that have faithfully followed the Rama where they serve dairy first, clear the table and then serve meat. With the argument settled and the minhag of eating dairy on Shavuos so well entrenched among the Jewish people, the best reason I can think of for continuing these arguments is that it makes our dairy at our Yom Tov meals taste sweeter knowing there are some rabbis who forbid. *"The inclination only desires that which is forbidden"* )Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:1(.

Since people will follow their custom anyway, I seek here not to give a reason why we eat dairy meals. Rather, I offer a meditation as to what our chalav can signify to us on the night we receive the Torah, whether you have it as nosh, or as a part of your meals.

Although we don't usually think about it, milk occupies a special place as the most purely kosher food there is. Unlike plants that we must separate Terumos and Maasros and meat that must be shechted, milk needs neither to be kosher. There never is a time that milk milked from a kosher animal is not kosher.[1]

This observation may be the pshat of a famous Gemara that states *"One who shows his friend the whites of his teeth, is like giving him a cup of milk to drink."* I am sure the Gemara knows that people have varied dietary preferences -- so why the emphasis on milk? I propose that the Gemara spotlights milk specifically because it signifies heter and freedom from worries about Kashrus.

Now to people who )like me( study or who have studied in Yeshiva, such a conjencture may fill you with utter horror. Why would the Talmud associate joy when we receive a psak lekula? Should we not reflect the cool and collected attitude of Reb Nechunia Ben Hakaneh who prayed before every learning session *"That I not declare what is impure, pure and not*

[1] Excluding rabbinic gezeiros of Chalav Yisrael

*what is pure, impure"?* The truth of the Torah is simply the truth, and we should strive to eliminate from ourselves any inclination to enjoy going lekula.

I do not wish to casually cite various "go-to" Talmudic guidelines for psak that seem to encourage us to rule leniently e.g., *"Torah Chas Al Mamonan Shel Yisrael"* )The Torah takes pity on Israel's money( or *"Koach Diheteira Adif"* )The power to give permission is stronger(. They are not necessarily a basis for making sweeping generalizations about psak.

But one inarguable truth I can state is that it takes more knowledge to permit than to forbid. As a communal Rav, I can testify to the truth on the ground that Jews who wish to keep the Torah tend to forbid more on themselves than they need to. Typically, they spend money and cause themselves stress unnecessarily. It has been my responsibility, more commonly, to assure people that something is permitted more than forbidden. For instance, not seeing an official hechsher on a package in a grocery store )that doesn't need one( can be enough to send someone into a worrisome frenzy and declare Assur )forbidden(. It then becomes my distinct pleasure to teach them that not everything requires a hechsher and they can permit many of the items that they forbade on themselves. Although this is frequently over the phone, I can hear their enhanced joy in their actually trying to live a Jewish life when I give them their proverbial cup of milk.

Milk is something the Torah explicitly permits when it calls the Land of Israel *"A land flowing with milk and honey."* It is not just a plain heter that makes a person smile, it is the heter in the context of the knowledge and confidence that it is valid and based on halachah. This, I believe, was the motivation for Rav Ovadia Yosef's long teshuvos full of every opinion under the sun. As he wrote, Koach Diheteira Adif -- I believe that he was reluctant to forbid anything without foraging through the vastness of Torah knowledge.

With all of the above in mind, and with the anticipation of our milk on Shavuos, let me propose a new prayer for Torah teachers, rabbis and poskim to say during the year-and especially on Shavuos, as we behold milk in all its forms.

> *"May it be your will, God, the God of our forefathers, that we merit to know your Torah and make it our own in all its vastness, beauty and light. May we learn so much of your Torah that whenever a Jew asks us to declare something pure or impure, we may have the knowledge to grant a heter that will cause him the happiness of milk to drink if that is where the truth guides us. And if we must forbid something and cause a Jew loss of money, or a burden, may it never be based on ignorance but on knowledge and necessity."*

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

---

## Rav Kook Torah
## BaMidbar & Shavuot: The Holiness of Sinai

**Transient Holiness**

Our sense of holiness and closeness to God is not constant; there are times when we experience a heightened spiritual awareness. These moments reflect a transient holiness — kedushat sha'ah.

Also in the life of the nation, there are special times of kedushat sha'ah. This is the central theme of Sefer Bamidbar )the Book of Numbers(, which recounts Israel's unique experiences during their forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert - a time when bread fell from the heavens and water spouted from rocks, a time of Divine protection and unparalleled prophetic revelation.

The book of Bamidbar opens with the words:

*"God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert in the Communion Tent."* )Num. 1:1(

The terms 'Sinai Desert' and 'Ohel Mo'ed' )Communion Tent( are motifs repeated throughout Sefer Bamidbar. They call our attention to the special kedushat sha'ah of that generation.

Unlike Jerusalem's permanent holiness, the holiness of Mount Sinai was temporary, lasting only for the duration of Matan Torah, the Revelation of the Torah at Sinai. Unlike the permanence of the Temple — a durable structure — the Tabernacle was provisional — a portable tent. And unlike the 613 mitzvot that apply in all ages, the special mitzvot that God commanded the Israelites in the desert - how to encamp, the signal blasts, the order of transporting the Tabernacle — only obligated that generation.

One should not think that kedushat sha'ah is on a lower level than permanent holiness. On the contrary, it is precisely because of its loftiness that this holiness cannot last forever. The deficiency is not in it, but in we who experience it. We are unable to maintain this level of holiness on a continual basis.

One example of the temporary holiness of Sefer Bamidbar was the Israelites' use of special banners for each tribe in the encampment. The Midrash explains that these flags were given to Israel due to their desire to emulate the angels. Angels appeared at Matan Torah in chariots bedecked with flags, and the Israelites wanted to have similar flags. These flags correspond to the temporary holiness of Mount Sinai and Matan Torah. They reflect the special holiness of angels, a holiness beyond the reach of the human soul.

**Moses and Aaron**

The dichotomy between temporary and permanent holiness also existed in that generation's leaders: Moses and Aaron. Moses served as the kohen during the Tabernacle's dedication — a priesthood of kedushat sha'ah lasting only one week. Aaron, on the other hand, commenced a lineage of kohanim for all generations. Even today, kohanim emphasize their connection to Aaron's permanent holiness in the blessing they recite, *"Who sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron."*

The founding of the Jewish people required both types of holiness. They needed both Moses and Aaron, both kedushat sha'ah and kedushah la-dorot. The events recorded in Sefer Bamidbar took place during an era of miracles and unique Divine providence, the historic revelation at Sinai, and Moses' unparalleled prophetic vision in the provisional Ohel Mo'ed. But it was also the time to establish the foundations for Israel's permanent holiness, to set down the Torah and mitzvot that would guide all future generations.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel.* Adapted from *Shemuot Haah Re'iy 5689* )1929(.(

https://ravkooktorah.org/BEMIDBAR-71.htm

---

## Shavuot: We Are What We Remember

Originally for Ki Tavo (5776, 5783)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

One reason religion has survived in the modern world despite four centuries of secularisation is that it answers the three questions every reflective human being will ask at some time in his or her life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live?

These cannot be answered by the four great institutions of the modern West: science, technology, the market economy and the liberal democratic state. Science tells us how but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use that power. The market gives us choices but does not tell us which choices to make. The liberal democratic state as a matter of principle holds back from endorsing any particular way of life. The result is that **contemporary culture sets before us an almost infinite range of possibilities, but does not tell us who we are, why we are here, and how we should live.** ]emphasis added[

Yet these are fundamental questions. Moses' first question to God in their first encounter at the burning bush was *"Who am I?"* The plain sense of the verse is that it was a rhetorical question: Who am I to undertake the extraordinary task of leading an entire people to freedom? But beneath the plain sense was a genuine question of identity. Moses had been brought up by an Egyptian princess, the daughter of Pharaoh. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from the local Midianite shepherds, they went back and told their father, *"An Egyptian man delivered us."* Moses looked and spoke like an Egyptian.

He then married Zipporah, one of Jethro's daughters, and spent decades as a Midianite shepherd. The chronology is not entirely clear but since he was a relatively young man when he went to Midian and was eighty years old when he started leading the Israelites, he spent most of his adult life with his Midianite father-in-law, tending his sheep. So when he asked God, *"Who am I?"* beneath the surface there was a real question. Am I an Egyptian, a Midianite, or a Jew?

By upbringing he was an Egyptian, by experience he was a Midianite. Yet what proved decisive was his ancestry. He was a descendant of Abraham, the child of Amram and Yocheved. When he asked God his second question, *"Who are you?"* God first told him, *"I will be what I will be."* But then he gave him a second answer:

> *Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, the name you shall call Me from generation to generation.* Ex. 3:15

Here too there is a double sense. On the surface God was telling Moses what to tell the Israelites when they asked*, "Who sent you to us?"* But at a deeper level the Torah is telling us about the nature of identity. The answer to the question*, "Who am I?"* is not simply a matter of where I was born, where I spent my childhood or my adult life or of which country I am a citizen. Nor is it answered in terms of what I do for a living, or what are my interests and passions. These things are about where I am and what I am but not who I am.

God's answer – I am the God of your fathers – suggests some fundamental propositions. First, identity runs through genealogy. It is a matter of who my parents were, who their parents were and so on. This is not always true. There are adopted children. There are children who make a conscious break from their parents. But **for most of us, identity lies in uncovering the story of our ancestors, which, in the case of Jews, given the unparalleled dislocations of Jewish life, is almost always a tale of journeys, courage, suffering or escapes from suffering, and sheer endurance.** ]emphasis added[

Second, the genealogy itself tells a story. Immediately after telling Moses to tell the people he had been sent by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God continued:

> *Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites — a land flowing with milk and honey.'* Ex. 3:16-17

It was not simply that God was the God of their ancestors. He was also the God who made certain promises: that He would bring them from slavery to freedom, from exile to the Promised Land. The Israelites were part of a narrative extended over time. They were part of an unfinished story, and God was about to write the next chapter.

What is more, when God told Moses that He was the God of the Israelites' ancestors, He added*, "This is My eternal name, this is how I am to be recalled ]zichri[ from generation to generation."* God was here saying that He is beyond time – *"This is My eternal name"* – but when it comes to human understanding, He lives within time, *"from generation to generation."* The way He does this is through the handing on of memory: *"This is how I am to be recalled."* Identity is not just a matter of who my parents were. It is also a matter of what they remembered and handed on to me. Personal identity is shaped by individual memory. Group identity is formed by collective memory.]1[

All of this is by way of prelude to a remarkable law in today's parsha. It tells us that first-fruits were to be taken to *"the place God chooses,"* i.e. Jerusalem. They were to be handed to the priest, and each was to make the following declaration:

> *"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great, powerful and populous nation. The Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labour. Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our suffering, our harsh labour and our distress. The Lord then brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with great fearsomeness and with signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. I am now bringing the first-fruits of the soil that You, Lord, have given me."* Deut. 26:5-10

We know this passage because, at least since Second Temple times it has been a central part of the Haggadah, the story we tell at the Seder table. But note that it was originally to be said on bringing first-fruits, which was not on Pesach. Usually it was done on Shavuot.

What makes this law remarkable is this: We would expect, when celebrating the soil and its produce, to speak of the God of nature. But this text is not about nature. It is about history. It is about a distant ancestor, a *"wandering Aramean,"* It is the story of our ancestors. It is a narrative explaining why I am here, and why the people to whom I belong is what it is and where it is. There was nothing remotely like this in the ancient world, and there is nothing quite like it today. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi said in his classic book *Zachor,*]2[ Jews were the first people to see God in history, the first to see an overarching meaning in history, and the first to make memory a religious duty.

That is why Jewish identity has proven to be the most tenacious the world has ever known: the only identity ever sustained by a minority dispersed throughout the world for two thousand years, one that eventually led Jews back to the land and state of Israel, turning Hebrew, the language of the Bible, into a living speech again after a lapse of many

centuries in which it was used only for poetry and prayer. We are what we remember, and the first-fruits declaration was a way of ensuring that Jews would never forget.

In the past few years, a spate of books has appeared in the United States asking whether the American story is still being told, still being taught to children, still framing a story that speaks to all its citizens, reminding successive generations of the battles that had to be fought for there to be a *"new birth of freedom,"* and the virtues needed for liberty to be sustained.]3[ The sense of crisis in each of these works is palpable, and though the authors come from very different positions in the political spectrum, their thesis is roughly the same: If you forget the story, you will lose your identity. There is such a thing as a national equivalent of Alzheimer's. Who we are depends on what we remember, and in the case of the contemporary West, a failure of collective memory poses a real and present danger to the future of liberty.

Jews have told the story of who we are for longer and more devotedly than any other people on the face of the earth. That is what makes Jewish identity so rich and resonant. In an age in which computer and smartphone memories have grown so fast, from kilobytes to megabytes to gigabytes, while human memories have become so foreshortened, there is an important Jewish message to humanity as a whole. You can't delegate memory to machines. You have to renew it regularly and teach it to the next generation. Winston Churchill said: *"The longer you can look back, the further you can see forward."]*4[ Or to put it slightly differently: Those who tell the story of their past have already begun to build their children's future.

**FOOTNOTES:**

]1[ The classic works on group memory and identity are Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* University of Chicago Press, 1992, and Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory,* Columbia University Press, 1992.

]2[ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory.* University of Washington Press, 1982. See also Lionel Kochan, *The Jew and His History,* London, Macmillan, 1977.

]3[ Among the most important of these are Charles Murray, *Coming Apart,* Crown, 2013; Robert Putnam, *Our Kids,* Simon and Shuster, 2015; *Os Guinness, A Free People's Suicide, IVP, 2012*; Eric Metaxas, *If You Can Keep It,* Viking, 2016; and Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic,* Basic Books, 2016.

]4[ Chris Wrigley, *Winston Churchill: a biographical companion,* Santa Barbara, 2002, xxiv.

**Around the Shabbat Table**:

1. Why is story-telling important?

2. How do you know the Jewish story? Who told it to you?

3. In which ways does the Torah seek to ensure that the Jewish story is never forgotten?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tavo/we-are-what-we-remember/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

---

## Underneath the Mountain

Adapted by Yanki Tauber © Chabad 2025

On the sixth day of Sivan in the year 2448 from creation )1313 bce(, the entire nation of Israel assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai. There G d chose us as His people and we committed ourselves to observe the laws of life as outlined in His Torah.

The Talmud )Shabbat 88a( points out, however, that nearly one thousand years were to pass before our covenant with G d was sealed. As formulated at Sinai, the contract between G d and Israel contained certain vulnerabilities; in fact, its very validity was contestable. It was only nine-and-a-half centuries later, with the events of Purim, that our acceptance of the Torah was established upon an unshakable foundation.

The Torah tells us that prior to the revelation at Sinai, the people of Israel *"stood beneath the mountain"* )Exodus 19:17(. How does one stand beneath a mountain? The Talmud interprets this to mean that *"G d held the mountain over them like a jar and said to them: If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, here shall be your grave."* But a most basic rule of Torah law is that a contract entered into under duress is not binding; hence, concludes the Talmud, there was a standing contest to the legality of our commitment to observe the Torah.

But during the events of Purim, the Jewish people reaffirmed their acceptance of the divine law without any hint of coercion from Above. In the words of the Book of Esther )9:27(, they *"established and accepted"* — meaning, says the Talmud, that they established as valid and incontestable that which they had accepted a millennium earlier at Sinai.

The Dark Ages

At Sinai, G d revealed His very essence to man. As the Torah tells it, *"G d descended upon Mount Sinai"* and we *"saw the G d of Israel."* On that day, we were *"shown to know that G d is the Supreme Being; there is none else besides Him"; "Face to face G d spoke to ]us[, on the mountain, from within the fire"* )Exodus 19:20 and 24:10; Deuteronomy 4:35 and 5:4(.

In terms of any open signs of the divine presence in our lives, the events of Purim were the diametric opposite of the revelation at Sinai. G d's home on earth, the Beit HaMikdash )Holy Temple( in Jerusalem, lay in ruins, its rebuilding, ordered fourteen years earlier by the emperor Cyrus, halted by Achashveirosh's decree. The era of prophecy — G d's direct communication to man — was coming to a close. We were in exile, at the mercy of our enemies, and G d seemed oblivious to the fate of His chosen people. Even the miracle of Purim was so completely clothed in natural events, that G d's guiding hand in all that occurred was shrouded by the illusion of fortunate coincidence. This is most powerfully demonstrated by the fact that in the entire Book of Esther, there is not a single mention of G d's name!

How did this spiritual blackout affect our commitment to G d? It spurred us to what can be described as the greatest demonstration of our loyalty to Him in our history. For eleven months, a decree of annihilation hung over the entire community of Israel. As the Book of Esther relates, even after Haman had fallen out of favor with the king and was hanged, the decree he initiated remained in effect; the only thing that Esther was able to achieve was to prevail upon Achashveirosh to issue a second decree, in which the Jews were given the right to resist those who came to kill them. The first decree, calling upon all citizens of the realm to annihilate the Jewish minority in their midst on the 13th of Adar, remained in force until that date, when the Jews were victorious in their war against their enemies, killing 75,000 of their attackers.

For that entire year, when being a Jew meant that one's life was free for the taking by imperial decree, not a single Jew broke ranks from his people to seek safety by assimilating into the pagan populace. In fact, the Book of Esther records that that period saw many conversions to Judaism! So strongly did the Jews radiate their faith in G d and their confidence in His salvation, that many of their neighbors were motivated to join a people with such a powerful and immutable relationship with G d.

Therein lies the deeper significance of the "coercion" to accept the Torah at Sinai and the validation of our covenant with G d achieved on Purim.

At Sinai, we had no choice. Faced with such an awesome revelation of the divine truth, one could hardly doubt or dissent. In effect, we were forced to accept the Torah; overwhelmed and completely enveloped by the divine reality *)"the mountain held over them like a jar"(,* we could not but commit ourselves to our divinely ordained mission and role.

But a thousand years later, we reaffirmed this commitment under entirely different conditions. The divine presence did not hover over us, compelling us to recognize its truth. On the contrary: the divine face was hidden. We were on our own, our commitment to G d deriving wholly from within, from an inner choice to cleave to Him regardless of how invisible He remained to us.

So Why the Coercion?

This is not to say that on Purim a new, valid contract replaced the original, contestable one. If that were the case, what was the point of the revelation at Sinai? Certainly, the Torah was a binding commitment between ourselves and G d for the 950 years from Moses to Esther. If we look closely at the Talmud's interpretation of the verse from the Book of Esther, it says that the people of Israel *"established what they had already accepted"*: Purim was the fulfillment and corroboration of a truth that had already been implemented at Mount Sinai.

That truth is that our relationship with G d is not bounded by reason. It is not dependent upon our understanding of it, or even upon our conscious awareness of its existence. It transcends our conscious self, residing in the very core of our souls.

This was why we were compelled to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. Not because we would not have freely chosen to do so on our own, but because a consciously chosen commitment could not begin to express the true extent of our acceptance of the Torah.

Our covenant with G d extends beyond the finite world of our conscious desires, embracing the infinite expanses of our supra-conscious self — the supra-conscious self that always sees G d and is unequivocally aware of His truth. At Sinai, this supra-conscious self was revealed. Our conscious self, comprising but a minute corner of our soul, was completely overwhelmed and its choice-making mechanisms were completely silenced.

This was the true significance of what occurred when we stood beneath the mountain. But for many centuries, the events at Sinai were open to misinterpretation. In our own minds, we remembered the event as a time when we were overwhelmed by the divine truth and compelled to accept it. Did this come from within, from a place in our souls not accessible by the conscious self? Or perhaps it came from without, from an external force which coerced us, against our own true will, into our covenant with G d?

Then came Purim, with its total eclipse of all perceivable G dliness. To remain a Jew, to remain loyal to our covenant with G d, was a choice uninfluenced by any supra-conscious revelations. By choosing to accept the Torah under such circumstances, we affirmed that this is the true will of the Jew. We affirmed that our "coercion" at Sinai was not against our

will, but in complete harmony with our true desire.

* Hasidic scholar, rabbi, writer and editor; chief content editor for Chabad.org 1999-2013.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2786/jewish/Underneath-the-Mountain.htm

---

## Bemidbar: The Jewish Army

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

Numbers, the fourth book of the Torah, describes the journey of the Jewish people from the foot of Mount Sinai to the threshold of the Land of Israel. The first section begins as G-d tells Moses to take a census of the adult Jewish males in the desert )Bemidbar, in Hebrew(. The purpose of the census is to form the adult males into an army, should it be necessary to fight the non-Jewish occupants of the Land of Israel. )Numbers 1:1 - 4:20(

### Love and Family

> *G-d told Moses, "take a census of all the congregation of the Israelites by families:"* )Numbers 1:2(

The Torah records only the total number of men, and not the number of families, in each tribe. Nevertheless, G-d had the families counted, in order to stress the centrality of the family in Judaism.

Our individual and national goals are certainly important, but the Torah also demands of us the selflessness necessary to forge the family unit.

A husband and wife are two separate people, with their own natures, desires, and even missions in life; yet each must work for and work with the other, completing and complementing each other and merging into one harmonious, loving unit.

The strife and breakdown of communication from which the world suffers stem from selfishness — i.e., viewing others merely as means to be exploited for personal ends. In contrast, the Torah commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves. The primary setting in which this commandment is fulfilled is that of our families. Inasmuch as loving our fellow Jew is an expression of our love of G-d, loving our fellow Jew enhances our love of G-d. Love of G-d, in turn, brings us to love His Torah and study it — not merely out of our obligation to do so, but out of love. This threefold love of our fellow Jew, of G-d, and of the Torah ripples outward from the family setting and affects the entire world for the better.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #1

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

# Likutei Divrei Torah

**Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet**

Sponsored by the Friedman and Klahr families
on the occasion of the thirteenth yahrzeit of
their father, grandfather, and great grandfather,
Dr. Carl Klahr, a"h, (Nosson Karpel ben Shmuel Zanvil Tzvi),
on the fifth of Sivan

**Volume 31, Issue 31** **Shabbat Parashat Bemidbar – Shavuot Issue Attached!!** **5785 B"H**

**Covenant and Conversation**
**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l**

In English, the book we begin this week is called Numbers, and for an obvious reason. It begins with a census, and there is even a second count toward the end of the book. On this view, the central theme of the book is demography. The Israelites, still at Sinai at the beginning of the book, but on the brink of the Promised Land by its end, are now a sizeable nation, numbering 600,000 men of an age to embark on military service.

Within Jewish tradition however, this book has become known as Bamidbar, "in the wilderness," suggesting a very different theme. The superficial reason for the name is that this is the first distinctive word in the book's opening verse. But the work of two anthropologists, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, suggest a deeper possibility. The fact that Israel's formative experience was in the wilderness turns out to be highly significant. For it is there that the people experience one of the Torah's most revolutionary ideas, namely that an ideal society is one in which everyone has equal dignity under the sovereignty of God.

Arnold Van Gennep, in his The Rites of Passage, argued that societies develop rituals to mark the transition from one state to the next – from childhood to adulthood, for example, or from being single to being married – and they involve three stages. The first is separation, a symbolic break with the past. The third is incorporation, re-entering society with a new identity. Between the two is the crucial stage of transition when, having said goodbye to who you were but not yet hello to who you are about to become, you are recast, reborn, refashioned.[1]

Van Gennep used the term liminal, from the Latin word for threshold, to describe this second state when you are in a kind of no-man's-land between the old and the new. That is clearly what the wilderness signifies for Israel: liminal space between Egypt and the Promised Land. There Israel is reborn, no longer a group of escaping slaves but "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The desert – a no-man's-land with no settled populations, no cities, no civilisational order – is the place where Jacob's descendants, alone with God, cast off one identity and assume another.

This analysis helps us understand some of the details of the book of Exodus. The daubing of the doorposts with blood (Ex. 12:7) is part of the first stage, the separation, during which time the door through which you walk as you leave your old life behind has special symbolic significance.

Likewise the division of the Red Sea. The division of one thing into two, through which something or someone passes, is a symbolic enactment of transition, as it was for Abraham in the passage in which God tells him about his children's future exile and enslavement (Gen 15:10-21). Abraham divides animals, God divides the sea, but the movement between the two halves is what signals the phase-change. Note also that Jacob has his two defining encounters with God in liminal space, during his journey from his home towards the dwelling of Laban (Gen. 28:10-22, and Gen. 32:22-32).

Victor Turner added one additional element to this analysis. He drew a distinction between society and what he called communitas. Society is always marked by structure and hierarchy. Some have power, some don't. There are classes, castes, ranks, orders, gradations of status and honour.[2] For Turner what makes the experience of liminal space vivid and transformative is that in the desert there are no hierarchies. Instead, there is "an intense comradeship and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenised." People cast together in the no-man's-land of the desert experience the "essential and generic human bond." That is what he means by communitas, a rare and special state in which, for a brief but memorable period, everyone is equal.[3]

We now begin to understand the significance of midbar, "wilderness," in the spiritual life of Israel. It was the place where they experienced with an intensity they had never felt before nor would they easily again, the unmediated closeness of God which bound them to Him and to one another.

That is what Hosea means when he speaks in God's name of a day when Israel will experience, as it were, a second honeymoon:

> "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her . . .There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. "In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call Me 'my husband'; you will no longer call Me 'my Master.'"
> Hos. 2:14-16

We also now understand the significance of the account at the beginning of Bamidbar, in which the twelve tribes were encamped, in rows of three on the four sides of the Tabernacle, each equidistant from the holy. Each tribe was different, but (with the exception of the Levites) all were equal. They ate the same food, manna from heaven. They drank the same drink, water from a rock or well. None yet had lands of their own, for the desert has no owners. There was no economic or territorial conflict between them.

The entire description of the camp at the beginning of Bamidbar, with its emphasis on equality, fits perfectly Turner's description of communitas, the ideal state people only experience in liminal space where they have left the past (Egypt) behind but have not yet reached their future destination, the land of Israel. They have not yet begun building a society with all the inequalities to which society gives rise. For the moment they are together, their tents forming a perfect square with the Sanctuary at its centre.

The poignancy of the book of Bamidbar lies in the fact that this communitas lasted so briefly. The serene mood of its beginning will soon be shattered by quarrel after quarrel, rebellion after rebellion, a series of disruptions that would cost an entire generation their chance of entering the land.

Yet Bamidbar opens, as does the book of Bereishit, with a scene of blessed order, there



**What Does Judaism Say About … Podcast** with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is: **Underlying Values and Concepts of Shavuot**
- Next week: 78. How Tzedaka-Charity is Different from Every Other Commandment & Other Related Issues
Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:
Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays
Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

natural, here social, there divided into six days, here into twelve (2×6) tribes, each person in Bamidbar like each species in Bereishit, in his or her rightful place, "each with his standard, under the banners of their ancestral house" (Num. 2:1).

So the wilderness was not just a place; it was a state of being, a moment of solidarity, midway between enslavement in Egypt and the social inequalities that would later emerge in Israel, an ideal never to be forgotten even if never fully captured again in real space and time.

Judaism never forgot its vision of natural and social harmony, set out respectively in the beginnings of the books of Genesis and Numbers, as if to say that what once was could be again, if only we heed the word of God.

[1] Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, University of Chicago Press, 1960.
[2] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process, Transaction Publishers, 1969.
[3] Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, Cornell University Press, 1974.

## Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

### Desert, Divine Word, and Divine Habitation

**Rabbi Dr. Shlomo**

"And God spoke unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the Land of Egypt." (Numbers 1:1)

Bemidbar, or "In the Desert," is the name by which this fourth of the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch) is most popularly known – an apt description of the forty years of the Israelite desert wanderings which the book records.

Indeed this desert period serves as the precursor of – as well as a most apt metaphor for – the almost two thousand years of homeless wandering from place to place which characterized much of Jewish history before the emergence of our Jewish State in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert, midbar, is also pregnant with meanings and allusions which in many ways have served as a beacon for our Jewish exile. The root noun from which midbar is built is d-b-r, which means leader or shepherd. After all, the most ancient occupation known to humanity is shepherding, and the desert is the most natural place for the shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man's land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations. And perhaps d-b-r means leader-shepherd because it also means word: the shepherd directs the flock using meaningful sounds and words, and the leader of people must also have the ability to inspire and lead with the verbal message he communicates; indeed, the "Ten Words" (or Ten Commandments, Aseret HaDibrot) were revealed in the Sinai desert, and they govern Israel – as well as a good part of the world – to this very day.

Moreover, it must be noted that wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert Mishkan, or Sanctuary, which is derived from Shekhina, Divine Presence. However, God was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:27). It was rather God's word, dibur, which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the "Ten Words" on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of God which He would speak (vedibarti, Exodus 25:22) from between the cherubs on the ends of the Kapporet above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these divine words that even the desert, the midbar – a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water which is the very elixir of life – can become transformed into sacred space, the place of the divine word (dibur). And indeed those words from the Desert of Mount Sinai (diburim) succeeded in sanctifying the many Marrakeshes and Vilnas and New Yorks of our wanderings! God's word can transform a desert – any place and every place – into a veritable sanctuary; indeed the world is a midbar waiting to become a dvir (sanctuary) by means of God's dibur, communicated by inspired leaders, dabarim.

Postscript: A Story

Allow me to share with you a story from my previous life (in the exile of the West Side of New York City) which taught me how the word can bring sanctity to the most unlikely of places. In the early 1970s, a disco opened up in a window storefront building on 72nd Street and Broadway. Despite the fact that it was called the Tel Aviv Disco and was owned by

Israelis living in New York, it remained open every night of the year, even Kol Nidrei night. I must have placed at least two dozen calls to the owners to try to persuade them to close at least on the night of Yom Kippur, only to have finally received a message from their secretary informing me that the owners would not speak to rabbis!

During this period, Rabbi Yitzchak Dovid Grossman – a beloved and respected friend who is the rabbi of Migdal HaEmek – spent Shabbat with us at Lincoln Square Synagogue. A recipient of the Israel Prize, he is a charismatic religious leader who is well-known for the many prisoners and other alienated Jews whom he has brought back to religious observance. After a delightful Friday evening meal at my home, replete with inspiring Hasidic melodies and words of Torah, he suggested that we go for a "shpatzir" (Yiddish for leisurely walk).

I tried to explain that the general atmosphere of the West Side streets of Manhattan were hardly conducive to Sabbath sanctity – but to no avail. His steps led us in the direction of 72nd Street and Broadway, right in front of the window revealing the frenzied disco dancers. "Did you ever see a mosquito captured in a glass jar?" he asked me in Yiddish (our language of discourse). "The mosquito moves with all sorts of contortions, and appears to be dancing. In reality, however, the mosquito is gasping for air. That is the situation of those 'dancers 'in the disco. They are really gasping for air, struggling in their search for a real Shabbos. Let's go in and show them Shabbos."

Before I could say "Jackie Robinson," he was inside the disco – and as a good host, I felt obliged to follow him. He sported a long beard and side-locks, and was wearing a shtreimel (fur hat) and kapote (silk gabardine), and I was dressed in my Sabbath Prince Albert, kippa and ritual fringes out. As we entered the disco, the band of Israelis immediately stopped playing. I recognized three young men from the synagogue, who seemed totally discombobulated; two ran out covering their faces, and the third tried to explain to me that he wasn't really there, that his mother had had some kind of attack and he thought that her doctor might be at the disco…. Rabbi Grossman began to sing Sabbath melodies. Almost miraculously, the men danced on one side, the women on the other. After about twenty minutes he urged me to speak to them in English. I told them of the magical beauty, the joy, and the love of the Sabbath, and they listened with rapt attention. Rabbi Grossman led them in one more song – and we left.

I cannot tell you that the miracle continued; it didn't take five minutes, and we could hear the resumption of the disco band music. However, before the next Yom Kippur, the Tel Aviv Disco closed down. I don't know why; perhaps because the owners wouldn't speak to rabbis. And for the next two years, at least a dozen young singles joined Lincoln Square Synagogue because they had been inspired by our disco visit, because God's words had the power to transform even a disco into a sanctuary, if only for twenty minutes of eternity…

## The Person in the Parsha

**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

### Elite by Commitment

Scholars have had a lot to say about the role of aristocracy in the course of human history. Those of us who grew up in the United States

of America were taught about the advantages of democracy and thus developed a prejudice against the very word "aristocracy." We were convinced that aristocracy meant government by a select group of people who earned their right to govern by virtue of their birth.

Along with the virtues of democracy, we were taught to value meritocracy. Individuals should be granted positions of authority on the basis of their merit. If they prove themselves to be expert in business, they should be given control of the economy. Those who successfully prove their administrative experience should run the government.

As our formal education proceeded, we learned about the danger of another philosophy; namely, elitism. Somewhere in our attic storage room, there remains a copy of a paper I wrote as a sophomore in college. It was based upon a book by the eminent sociologist C. Wright Mills, entitled The Power Elite. In it, the author cautions against the development of a small group, or "inner core," controlling all the institutions in power in a given society. A more recent book by David Rothkopf makes a similar point and speaks of a "super-class" that dominates contemporary American society. Personally, I suspect that we can detect in the present presidential elections a revolt, by a substantial portion of the populace, against "the power elite" or the "super-class."

In my rabbinic teaching experience, I have found that students tend to question, or at least wonder about, the existence of aristocracy or elitism in the society prescribed by our Torah. This tendency is especially common among students who have been raised to value "the American way." I have discovered that it is this week's Torah portion, Parashat Bemidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20), which evokes these questions more than any other.

This week's parasha begins with an enumeration of the leaders of each tribe. The leader of the tribe of Reuben is named Elizur son of Shedeur, and so are named the leaders of every tribe. That is, every tribe but Levi. The Torah then proceeds with the details of the results of the census that Moses conducted. The total population of each tribe is listed, beginning with Reuben and ending with Naphtali. Again, the tribe of Levi is not recorded. The Torah itself remarks, "The Levites, however, were not recorded among them by their ancestral tribe." Indeed, the Almighty specifically commands Moses: "Do not on any account enroll the tribe of Levi, or take a census of them, with the Israelites," (Numbers 1:47-48).

The Torah continues to describe the configuration of the tribes as they marched through the wilderness: Three tribes in the north, three tribes in the south, and three tribes, each in the east and west. The glaring omission from this formation is the tribe of Levi.

It is only when we reach the third chapter of this week's Torah portion that we learn of the special treatment that the tribe of Levi is to receive. It is then that we learn that the Levites are to substitute for the firstborn Israelites and will serve in their stead in the special roles of maintaining the Holy Tabernacle. Finally, the Torah describes the division of the tribe of Levi into three and names the leaders of each of those three divisions. It is only at this later point in the parasha that we are informed about the central position of the Levites in the nation's march through the wilderness.

It is no wonder that students often ask about elitism. Their question is usually phrased along these lines: "Aren't the Levites being designated by the Almighty Himself as a "power elite" or "super-class?" Are we not to be concerned that the rest of the Israelites will experience the resentment typical to victims of discrimination? Wasn't the Levites 'special position in this parasha accorded them only because they were born Levites, having done nothing to merit their special distinction?"

The Sages of the Talmud and Midrash respond emphatically to these questions. Here is an especially poetic example, to be found in the Midrash Bemidbar Rabba, chapter 3: "It was the tribe of Levi who were heroes and blossomed forth with their deeds at the time that the Israelites crafted the Golden Calf. It is written, 'Moses stood up in the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come here!"' And all the Levites rallied to him. Therefore, the Holy One, Blessed Be He raised them above the Israelites. Like the cedar which is taller and higher in the forest of Lebanon than all other trees, so too are they elevated above all of Israel. Thus, it is written in the book of Psalms (92:14), 'Planted in the house of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God.'"

The point of this Midrash, and of many similar rabbinic passages, is this: The elite position of the Levites was not merely a function of their privileged birth. Rather, they earned their position because of their firm commitment to God. They merited their special role because of their courage and dedication.

In the classes that I have led, however, these rabbinic passages do not suffice. Questions persist: "What about nowadays? Can any person not born a Levi gain access to that tribe's privilege by virtue of his commitment and courage? Or, is membership in this special group closed to non-Levites forever?"

The response to such questions was given centuries ago by none other than Maimonides: "It is not just the tribe of Levi alone, but each and every person from all of the world's inhabitants, if his spirit but moves him and his intellect matures, can distinguish himself from the masses and stand before God to serve Him and to worship Him. He can come to know God, and if he walks upright in the manner in which God fashioned him and is willing to discard all the many considerations which other humans naturally seek, such a person is sanctified as the holiest of holies. He too can become God's special portion and heritage forever and ever." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, concluding paragraph of the Laws of the Sabbatical Year and Jubilee)

Simply put, Maimonides is teaching us that every human being can become a Levite.

Not many of us are familiar with Maimonides' astonishing remarks.

But there is a statement, spoken daily by every regular synagogue attendee, which symbolically transforms each of us into a Levite. For near the conclusion of the morning service every day of the year, weekday or Sabbath or Festival, we recite a psalm. The psalm differs from day to day, but there is a brief prelude that we all utter: "Today is the first day of the week (or second, or third day, as the case may be) on which the Levites used to say this psalm in the Temple."

Why do we recite this formula? The customary answer is that we want to retain some memory of the Holy Temple in our religious consciousness. But I like to think that we recite it to connect in some fashion to the Levites in the Temple of long ago. And we recite it whether we are Levites by birth or not. We assert that in some sense we can all become Levites.

Maimonides insists that in Judaism elites are made, not born. Authentic elites are not about power. They are about courage and commitment. And conviction.

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Pagiel and Achira Took on Aliases to Remind Themselves They Were in a Bad Neighborhood**

In Parshas Bamidbar, the Torah not only specifies the census of Bnei Yisrael when they came into Eretz Yisrael, it also specifies the "seder hadegalim" – the configuration in which they would travel. The twelve shevatim (tribes) were divided up into four "machanos" (camps), which were all positioned around the Mishkan.

Each machaneh (camp) included three shevatim. Machaneh Don (the camp of Don) included the shevet (tribe) of Don and also the shevet of Asher, led by Pagiel ben Achran and

the shevet of Naftali, led by Achira ben Einan. These two princes, from the shevatim of Asher and Naftali, had rather strange names. We have never come across anyone named either Pagiel, Achira, Achran, or Einan! None less a personage than Rabbeinu Ephraim (one of the Ba'alei Tosefos) comments that these four rather strange names were not the names given to either of these princes or their fathers at their respective brissim. He says that they were all adopted names.

Why did they adopt these names? Rabbeinu Ephraim explains that Machaneh Don was situated at the north side of the travel configuration. It is known that Shevet Don brought along an idol, known as Pesel Michah, from the time they left Mitzrayim, until they entered Eretz Yisrael (and even after they entered Eretz Yisrael). Thus, there was an Avodah Zarah in Machaneh Don! The unfortunate neighbors of Shevet Don were Shevet Asher and Shevet Naftali. These two shevatim were none too pleased that they had a neighbor who was travelling with an idol!

Consider a situation where you know that your next-door neighbor is a drug dealer. How will that make you feel? It is not like they had the option to pick up and move because Hashem put them there! The princes of Shevet Naftali and Shevet Asher were very afraid that this proclivity for idols would rub off on them and their shevatim. Therefore, they changed their names to remind themselves of the fact that they were living in a very hostile spiritual environment.

The prince of Asher called himself Pagi-el, which is a short form of the statement "Pagah bi El" (G-d put me in a bad situation). Son of Achran – Achran means a person who corrupts Bnai Yisroel. He wished to announce "I am Pagi-el ben Achran: Hashem put me in this situation where I am in proximity to the people of Shevet Don, who are ocher es Yisrael – they corrupt the rest of Klal Yisrael. He gave himself this name to constantly remind himself and others "I have very bad neighbors and if I don't watch myself, I am going to wind up like that." The prince of Naftali called himself Achi-Rah, literally "My Bad Brother," as if to say "I am next to my bad brother." Son of Einan – etymologically related to the anan (cloud), which expelled sinners.

In other words, in order to make sure that their defenses would not slip, they changed their names. This is how they called themselves and had other people call them – to remind them all that they had to be on their toes and be constantly aware of their spiritually corrosive environment, so as not to be influenced by their neighbors.

There are three lessons to be learned from this teaching of Rabbeinu Ephraim:

The first lesson is that a person is affected by his neighbors and his neighborhood. A person can live in the best of cities but if his particular neighbors or neighborhood is not up to snuff, it eventually affects him.

The second lesson is that a person should take action when he realizes that he finds himself in a challenging spiritual position. A person should not have the attitude "Okay. Too bad. I am in a bad neighborhood." These two princes changed their names as a constant reminder. Time will tell whether such action will be effective or not. But at least they were not passive about it. They made an attempt to build up their spiritual defenses.

The third very important and powerful lesson is brought out by a famous schmooze from Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, zt"l:

The Gemara [Sanhedrin 19b] notes that a certain person in Tanach is called both Palti and Paltiel. Rabbi Yochanan says that his real name was Palti but he was also called Paltiel because G-d removed him from doing an aveira (Palto Kel min ha'aveira). What did Palti do? He implanted a sword between himself and his wife (who was really previously given as a wife to Dovid) in their bedroom and said 'Whoever will engage in this matter shall be pierced with this sword."

Without going into the halachic lomdus here, King Shaul had previously promised his daughter Michal to Dovid, but Shaul held that she was not really Dovid's halachic wife. He felt free to give her in marriage to Palti. Palti was in no position to reject the king's offer to marry his daughter, but he felt that he was now living with a married woman! He recognized that this was a nisayon (temptation) that would be hard to withstand over the course of time. Thus, on the night of his marriage he dramatically stuck a sword between their two beds as if to say "If I touch this woman, I deserve to be killed". Therefore, the entire time he remained with her, he never touched her.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks: What did sticking the sword in the ground accomplish for him? Just as he stuck it in the ground, he could pull it out of the ground next week or next month! Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that Palti was a very smart man. He knew that on this first night, he was fully conscious that he was in a bedroom with an eishes ish (a married woman) and someone who commits adultery with a married woman is deserving of death by the sword. But he also knew that with the passage of time, a person can easily start rationalizing: Maybe Shaul is in fact correct! Maybe halachically she is not married to Dovid. Therefore, maybe I am just torturing myself for nothing.

That is human nature. After a while, we begin to rationalize. So Palti ben Layish placed a permanent symbolic reminder in his bedroom of how he felt the first night when he knew what was right and what was wrong. The sword represented how he felt when he was not overcome with temptation by any ulterior motives to rationalize and reason. Palti knew that without such a symbol, his Yetzer HaRah, after many days and weeks and years, could very well wear him down. The sword was his reminder: "This is how I felt THEN and that is the TRUTH."

We can say the same thing regarding Pagiel ben Achran or Achira ben Einan. They called themselves these names as a reminder: We are next to Shevet Don. Shevet Don has this Pesel Micha. I don't really want to be in their neighborhood. They were afraid that after a while, they would succumb to the bad influence of Pesel Michah. So as soon as they moved into the neighborhood, they changed their names: We knew the emes when we entered the situation, and we want to have a perpetual reminder for the rest of our time in that situation!

**The Lesson of a Census Anomaly**

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, zt"l, once noted a strange fact in the census of Klal Yisrael, which demographically does not make any sense. Shevet Don had an adult male population of 62,700. They were the largest tribe. Shevet Binyomin, on the other hand, had a population of 35,000. When we look back to Parshas Vayigash and see the number of grandchildren Yaakov had from each of his sons, Binyamin had ten sons and Don had a single son. Not only did Don have only one son, but he was disabled. Chushim ben Don, Chazal say, was deaf. If we were to have taken bets regarding who would be the bigger tribe upon the Exodus from Egypt 210 years later, any sound statistical prediction would of course predict that Binyomin would be the larger of the two shevatim.

And yet, at the end of the day, Don had 62,700 adult male descendants in this census and Binyomin had 35,000. Rav Chatzkel derived the following lesson from this: A person like Don, who knows he has only one child, and a handicapped one at that, turns to the Ribono shel Olam and asks: "How am I going to survive? How am I going to see future generations?" In such a situation, a person goes to the Being who controls everything and pours his heart out. A person with ten sons will be confident and say "Let's do the math!" My grandchildren and great grandchildren will increase exponentially! Such a person does not daven as much. When someone feels confident, he feels that he can rely "on the data". There are times, however, that the "data" does not yield the projected result.

That is the lesson of this census anomaly. The lesson is that we never know!

There is a similar story mentioned by the Chofetz Chaim: In Galicia, the custom was that on Motzai Shabbos (right before Ma'ariv), they would recite Tehillim. A fellow from outside of the city came into shul then and saw that the people were saying Tehillim. He noticed one fellow in particular, in the corner of the shul, pouring his heart out. As he recited his Tehillim, he was crying and banging on the wall. He was literally in a different world! The visitor was so inspired by this scene that he also started saying Tehillim with great inspiration and intensity. After Ma'ariv, he went over to this fellow in the corner and said to him, "I saw you saying Tehillim. It was very inspiring to me. You were crying your eyes out. Do you have a problem?"

The fellow in the corner responded, "Yes. I have a problem. I have a daughter who is not married. The whole week, I am on the road doing business and I am not at home (as was common in many parts of Europe). When I am on the road, my daughter's situation is "out of sight, out of mind." But when I come home for Shabbos and I see how broken my daughter is, it really hurts me. That is why I pour my heart out, because I don't know how I can make a shidduch for her. I have no money!" I don't have any idea how I can make it happen, so automatically I turn to the Ribono shel Olam!"

The visitor said, "Do you know what? I also have no money. But I have a son. Listen – you have no money and I have no money. Let's make a shidduch between our children." And so it was. The daughter of the fellow in the corner married the visitor's son. That shidduch produced four sons. One of them was Rav Aryeh Leib HaKohen Heller (author of the Ketzos HaChoshen, the Avnei Miluim, and the Shev Shmaytza). The second son was Rav Yehuda Heller Kahana (author of the Kuntres HaSefeikos). The third son was Rav Mordechai Heller, who was a Rav in Chodorov. The fourth son was Rav Chaim HaKohen Heller. So, from this poor shidduch came, among others, the Ketzos HaChoshen. People do not study the Talmudic masechtos in Seder Nezikin without the Ketzos, and people do not learn Seder Nashim without the Avnei Miluim and people do not learn Yoreh Deah without the Shev Shmaytza. Likewise, people do not learn Seder Nezikin without the Kuntres HaSefeikos.

This goes to prove the old maxim: We never know!

## Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why the wilderness? Surely the Torah didn't need to use that term 'Bemidbar' and yet at the commencement of this week's portion which is at the beginning of a new book of the Torah, we are told 'Bemidbar Sinai'.

It was not just 'in Sinai', but 'in the wilderness of Sinai' that the tent of meeting was constructed and where the Torah was given.

Indeed, nearly every single year Bemidbar is read on the Shabbat prior to the festival of Shavuot, which recalls the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

So why is the wilderness of such great significance for us?

So many of our commentators give beautiful reasons and I want to share with you just two.

The first is that a wilderness is a symbol of humility, it doesn't contain much to boast about, and similarly for us to acquire Torah, to appreciate it, to be able and responsible representatives of a Torah way of life, we need to have humility.

We need to walk in the footsteps of Moses, our greatest teacher, who was 'anav mikol adam' – he was more humble than anyone else.

Then there is a second message conveyed by Bemidbar.

A desert is 'hefker', it belongs to the entire nation. There is no private property within it, it is there for everybody, and so too the Torah was given in a wilderness to let us know Torah belongs to everyone. It's not the exclusive property of any one segment or group of Jewish people.

And that is such a strong message at this time of the year as we approach the festival of Shavuot.

Just as at the Seder of Pesach, we recognise that the Torah is given to four different types of Jewish people, those who are wise, those who let us down, those who are simple, those who do not even know how to ask – we include everybody.

So too, at this time, we recognise that Torah is there for absolutely every one of us.

So therefore, as we approach Shavuot this year, let us always remember to maintain that deep sense of humility and never to forget that Torah is there for absolutely every one of us.

'Vetein chelkeinu b'toratecha' – let every single person say 'I want my portion in the Torah which belongs to us all'.



## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

### Every Person is an Entire World

**Rabbanit Rivky Yisraeli**

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Bemidbar, opens the Book of Numbers, also known as the Book of Counting. Indeed, at the very beginning of this portion, the great census conducted by Moshe and Aharon is described:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers 'houses, according to the number of names, every male, by their polls; from twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: ye shall number them by their hosts, even thou and Aharon." (Bemidbar 1:1-3)

Immediately following this section, in the continuation of Chapter 1, the stages of the census are detailed meticulously, enumerating the count for each tribe as well as the total number of those registered.

Why is it so crucial for the Torah to detail these numbers so precisely, especially since this is not the first census conducted in the desert? Only a few chapters earlier, another count was taken before the construction of the Tabernacle (Shemot 30).

The Rashbam addresses this question in his commentary: "For now they must set out for the Land of Israel, and those who have reached the age of twenty years are fit to go out to war… Therefore, the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded that they be counted at the beginning of this month."

The Rashbam explains that the reason for the census is ultimately a practical one: the people of Israel are on the verge of entering and conquering the land, and the proper course of conduct would be to find out the exact number of men above the age of twenty, i.e., those eligible for fighting in Israel's wars.

The Ramban offers three distinct reasons for the census described in the Torah. His third reason aligns with the Rashbam's explanation: "For this was done in the manner of kingdoms when they go to war. Now they are poised to enter the land and engage in battle with the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan River and with all others… Moshe and the heads of the tribes needed to know the number of soldiers ready for war and the count of each tribe… for the Torah does not rely on miracles such that a single man shall chase a thousand foe."

Here, the Ramban highlights the message that upon entering the land, the Israelites will have to engage in warfare, rather than simply rely on God's miracles.

The Ramban's second reason tackles a more profound notion. He states that "God commanded to count them in a manner dignifying and honoring each and every individual. Rather than asking the head of each family – How many are in your family? How many sons do you have? – [God commanded] let each person pass before you with reverence and honor, and thus shall you count them…"

Moreover, the Ramban explains that the count, conducted legulgelotam ["by each head"], teaches us the significance of each individual in Israel. The soldiers are not to be seen as grains of sand, replaceable if one is lost. Each soldier is unique and indispensable.

These words of the Ramban touch us deeply at this time when our soldiers are fighting with courage and valor. Each soldier is precious to us, unique and special to his family and to all of Israel. The world dims when a soldier falls in battle, and an entire world is lost to the family and to Israel. This is not merely due to the absence of one more soldier in the battle, but because an individual, unique in God's world, has been lost, leaving the world forever lacking. Their individuality, personality, and unique qualities are like a missing letter in our Sefer Torah.

The Ramban's first reason for the count is, perhaps, the most significant of all: "This may have been to show them His kindness upon them, for their ancestors descended to Egypt with seventy souls, and now they were as numerous as the sands of the sea, as can be seen from the count of those who had reached the age of twenty…"

Here, the Ramban highlights the great miracle of our existence, emphasizing the fact that despite numerous harsh and brutal blows, we have not been destroyed; instead, we have flourished and multiplied. From a place of gratitude for the great miracles they had experienced, the people of Israel march with pride to conquer the Land of Israel.

In the Ramban's view, both the commandment to remember our exodus from Egypt as well as the commandment to count the people of Israel are meant to reinforce within us the hidden miracles that sustain our lives, and which we may overlook in times of distress.

These words of the Ramban are still significant in our own times. We, too, have endured suffering. In recent generations, we have survived a Holocaust and pogroms; we have returned to the Land of Israel and established a state and an army; and we have thrived and multiplied here in our land. With this upright pride, accompanied by God's daily and hourly kindness, we go forth to defend our nation.

May it be God's will that the promise of the prophet Micha be fulfilled in our times: "As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders."

## Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

**Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg**

**The Proper Attitude for Talmud Torah**

"The sages taught that the Torah was given with three things: with fire, with water, and in the desert" (Bamidbar Rabbah, 1:7). These three elements reflect three aspects of the proper attitude that one must develop in order to fully acquire Torah.

The first element is fire. This symbolizes the passion that one must feel for Torah. A person should engage in talmud Torah with diligence (hasmadah) and effort (ameilus). He should approach each day of Torah study with a newfound exhilaration. Rashi comments on the possuk (Yisro 19:1), "On this day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai" - "Why does it say 'on this day?' To highlight that the words of Torah should be fresh and exciting as if they were given to you today." What's more, Torah should be seen as something precious. Shlomo Hamelech says, "If you seek it as if it were silver, and search for it as if it were hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of Hashem and discover the knowledge of G-d" (Mishlei 2:4). Only if one appreciates the priceless value of every word of Torah will he truly acquire its knowledge.

But fire also alludes to the fact that one has to be willing to sacrifice in order to accomplish in the study of Torah. "Nullify your will in the face of His will" (Avos 2:4). One should always be willing to sacrifice his personal desires to fulfill the ratzon Hashem, but this is especially true regarding talmud Torah. "The words of Torah are retained only by someone who 'kills' himself over them" (Berachos 63b). Chazal say that Yaakov Avinu did not sleep in a normal fashion for the 14 years he studied Torah in the yeshiva of Shem and Eiver (see Rashi, Vayeitzei 28:11). Yaakov serves as a model of how every Jew, on his own level, should be willing to give up some of his time, his comforts and his conveniences in order to accomplish in his Torah learning.

The second element with which the Torah was given is water. This symbolizes the thirst a person should feel for words of Torah. Chazal comment, "'V'yidgoo larov b'kerev ha'aretz - may they proliferate like fish in the midst of the land' (Vayechi 48:16), just as fish grow in water, but when a single drop falls from above they receive it thirstily like one who never experienced the taste of water in all their days, so it is with Klal Yisrael, they grow in water, in Torah, but when they hear a novel matter of Torah, they receive it thirstily like one who has never heard a matter of Torah in all their days" (Bereishis Rabbah, 97:3).

One should thirst for Torah not only because he feels excited for every new idea of Torah, but because he feels that Torah is a necessity, without which he simply cannot exist. On a fast day, one often doesn't feel right. Some people find it hard to concentrate while davening in the morning before having a cup of coffee. That is how one should feel about Torah. The study of Torah should be such an integral part of one's day that when, for some reason, one is not able to keep to his daily schedule of learning, something feels off.

One of the questions that a person is asked in the beis din shel ma'alah is whether he had set times for learning Torah - ka'vata itim l'Torah (Shabbos 31a). He is not asked whether he studied Torah, but rather whether he had set times for talmud Torah because the question really is: did you feel so connected to Torah that you could not go a day without learning? This is the lesson symbolized by water. A person should feel that Torah is like water. It is a necessity that one simply cannot live without - ki heim chayeinu.

The third element associated with kabbolas haTorah is the midbar, the desert. Why was the Torah given in the wilderness, in midbar Sinai? The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7) explains that this was meant to allude to the fact that anyone who does not render himself like a wilderness, accessible to all (hefker), is unable to acquire the wisdom of the Torah. Similarly, Rava comments (Nedarim 55a), "Once a person renders himself like a wilderness, deserted before all, the Torah is given to him as a gift (matana), as it says, 'And from the wilderness to Matana'" (Chukas 21:18).

What does it mean to render oneself like a wilderness? One answer might be that a person should study Torah with humility and without a personal agenda. His sole focus should be to find the truth in Torah, not to promote his own interpretation. Such an individual is given an extra gift of Torah; he is blessed with additional siyata dishmaya (divine assistance), and that enables him to retain his Torah more easily.

R. Chanina ben Tradyon says (Avos 3:2) that if two people are sitting together, but there are no words of Torah between them, that is a moshav leitzim (a session of scorners). Rav Chaim Volozhiner (Ruach Chaim there) explains that the Mishna is actually referring to two people who are learning Torah, but are not sharing Torah with each other; rather, each one is interested only in promoting his own Torah.

That is why their learning session is called a moshav leitzim because each one belittles the Torah of the other.

By contrast, the halacha is generally decided in accordance with the opinion of Beis Hillel and not Beis Shammai, because Beis Hillel were pleasant, they did not respond to insults, and they would teach both their own opinions and those of Beis Shammai as well (Eiruvin 13b). Beis Hillel studied Torah with humility, recognizing the value of the opinion of those who argued against them. They studied Torah for its own sake, to arrive at the truth. As a result, their opinion is the one we generally follow.

Talmud Torah is a mitzvah like no other - v'talmud Torah k'neged kulam. But if we internalize the multiple messages of fire, water, and the desert, we can take our Torah study to an entirely different level.

**Torah.Org Dvar Torah**
**by Rabbi Label Lam**

**The Son of Your Friend**

These are the offspring of Aaron and Moshe on the day HASHEM spoke with Moshe at Mount Sinai. (Bamidbar 3:1)

These are the offspring of Aaron and Moshe: It mentions only the sons of Aaron, yet they are called "offspring of Moshe" because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches his friend's son Torah the verse speaks about him as if he had fathered him. (Rashi) (See Sanhedrin 19B)

Why is the statement by the sages worded that way? Why does it refer to "his friend's son"? What would be lacking if it had just stated that someone who teaches another person or a child in his class?! I would like to offer two approaches from two completely different angles.

I found this statement to be valuable in prepping the mindset of my teachers and rebbes and myself. Again, why do the sages speak of one who teaches Torah to "his friend's son"? What is the advantage?

Let us say there are 25 boys in Rebbe G's class. Not every child is on the same level. Some get it easily and some only after much effort. There are also some that struggle even after trying and trying and one might easily conclude, "Learning just isn't for everyone!" Now let us say that one of those struggling students in Rabbi G's class is the son of his good friend Chaim. He is not just going to meet him one time at PTA but he sees him every day in Shul. He can't hide from "the situation". He sees this boy every Shabbos. He cannot ignore him and dismissively "write him off" as a loss. No, he will take a little extra time every day and stand by his desk and point inside and feed him words of encouragement. He will care enough to see this child attain the sweet taste of success.

This child is not just one of 25. He is his friend Chaim's son and that wakes up enough motivation to treat him with special individualized attention. That way of viewing this particular child will make the difference for his friend Chaim's son and even for the other more talented students as well. Every child is someone's son and "all Jews are friends"- "Chaverim Kol Yisrael". (Yerushalmi Chagiga 3A)

I used to have one sign in my office that read, "Every child is somebody's whole world!", and another sign that said, "Parents are only as happy as their unhappiest child!" That is one practical approach to the wisdom of this statement by the sages.

Now, here is a recent discovery. Something completely different! Not long ago I received a desperate call from a close friend and colleague, a very accomplished educator, Rav, Rebbe, school administrator, lecturer and you name it. The conversation turned out to be hours-long. There were volumes of emotion filled anecdotes he needed to unpack to make his point clear. I listened and listened. The bottom line was that he was annoyed to no end about his son's lack of drive and underachievement. "When I was his age, I was Laining the Torah every week in Shul and he lounges around reading magazines and shopping for cool clothing." He could no longer hold back his disapproval and growing resentment. He started lashing out at him. They clash on Shabbos, all Shabbos. It's become a misery for both of them. I asked him if his son is good at anything. He gave me a short and very impressive list of his talents. His friends call him up. He listens well, they trust him, and he gives them good advice. I told him, "Why don't you ask him for some advice?! Begin to build a positive relationship with him."

He agreed that it is a great idea but he cannot do it because he feels so much anger watching him wasting his time. Then it dawned on me, a solution. I said to him, "Let me ask you a question, please. If this would be your neighbor's kid, would you be able to ask him some advice and bring him close? Would you know what to do?" His answer was, "Of course!"

It is because he is so close and personally involved, he has lost all objectivity. My advice to him was, "Treat him like the neighbor's kid!" Why didn't the sages tell us that anybody who teaches Torah to someone as if he was his own child, it will be considered like he gave birth to them? Why such a limited parameter, "the son of your friend"?

Now it occurs to me that even your own child needs to be treated like the neighbor's kid, no different than the son of your friend.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's**
**Derashot Ledorot**

**Torah Beloved – The Little Things***

In the Book of Vayikra, in the passage where the Torah first mentions the major festivals of the year, we find the intrusion of a seemingly irrelevant verse, one which seems out of context in this list of great holidays. Our Rabbis already wondered at the fact that after the mention of Pesach and Shavuot, and before the mention of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, the Torah introduces an extraneous verse, one which seems to have nothing whatever to do with the moadim, or holidays. "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am Hashem, your God" (Leviticus 23:22).

When reaping the harvest, you may not reap the whole field, but must leave a "pe'a," a corner of the field unreaped; and the "leket," the gleanings of the harvest, the ears of corn which fell to the ground were to be left there. This leket and pe'a, the gleanings and the corner, were to be left for the poor man and the stranger, for the needy and the alien who have not their own fields.

Our Sages (Rashi on Leviticus 23:22 quotes Torat Kohanim 23:175), contemplating the mention of pe'a and leket in the context of the holidays, ask: Why did the Torah see fit to mention leket and pe'a in the middle of the portion of the moadim, with Pesach and Shavuot on one side, and Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur on the other?

Many answers have been offered to this question posed by the Rabbis. All of them are worthy of deep study. This morning, however, I invite you to consider what I believe is the intention of the Torah in this juxtaposition of the mitzvot of tzedaka (for leket and pe'a are really forms of tzedaka or charity-giving) and the festivals.

We live in an age which has an unusual flare for the dramatic and the spectacular. Our interests are directed almost solely to headlines and lead articles. The big things in life, the flashy glamors, they attract us, while the prosaic, everyday matters are regarded as too dull to merit our consideration. In an age of space travel, only that which goes farthest fastest is deemed worth discussing, and

yesterday's missile is passé. As one wit in the Pentagon is supposed to have informed his subordinates concerning rockets, "If it works, it's obsolete!"

In this kind of world, only a daring rescue becomes a virtue, while a kind helping hand is worthless. Only a dramatic act of courage is worth emulating, not an unspectacular deed of generosity. And at the same time, only the violent acts of murder or pillage must be avoided, not the small sins which attract no public comment. In this kind of culture, we read the best sellers, but neglect the classic literature which does not strike us as sensational. We devour every new report about the mysterious Dead Sea Scrolls, even though some of us have yet to read through the far older and more important Bible for the first time. We have, in other words, decided to live on the peaks of life, and have neglected the fertile plains below.

And nowhere is this attitude more pernicious and more dangerous than when it comes to religion and religious observance. For here too are we inclined to bring our worship of the big and dramatic and spectacular. Here too we may emphasize the great acts and cavalierly dismiss the trivial, to stress the glorious breakthroughs of the spirit and demean the constant, slow struggle of the human heart and mind and soul to rise upwards. Thus do we American Jews tend to concentrate on the so-called High Holidays and overlook the less dramatic Shavuot – we call it a "minor" holiday – and certainly Shabbat. We hear of adult courses on "Customs and Ceremonies" which deal with the great turning points of life of birth and marriage and death, and which leave all in between forgotten and neglected. We begin to think that Judaism consists of bris and ḥuppa and shiva, but that we may ignore such details as tefilin and talmud Torah and taharat hamishpaḥa, which are marked by quiet dignity and unobtrusive modesty. And it is to forewarn us against this concentration upon the big issues to the exclusion of the seemingly trivial that the Torah inserts the mention of leket and pe'a in between the great festivals of Judaism. Remember, the Torah tells us, that no matter how important the big holidays are, they are meaningless unless the Jew pays attention to the daily requirements as well, the simple things as leket and pe'a. Yes, the themes of the moadim are world-shaking – revelation on Shavuot, redemption on Passover, judgment on Rosh Hashana, repentance on Yom Kippur. Yet all of these lofty themes are for naught if the poor man remains outside, cold and hungry and forlorn, because you choose to neglect the prosaic and plain and paltry and petty mitzva of leket and pe'a. The great things are great indeed, the Torah means to tell us, but a man stands and falls on the small things. What determines the success or failure of the spiritual life of the Jew are not his grasp of the great theological concepts or even his participation in the synagogue
festival service on High Holidays, but his everyday leket and pe'a, his daily Jewishness; not his rare splurge of kindliness as much as his constancy in tzedaka; not by his conduct in great public events, as much as by his tefilin and tefila, even in the privacy of his parlor, by his consideration for wife and children and neighbors, by his kashrut and his study of the Torah. In a word, the Torah counsels us to beware of the spectacular only and to concentrate as well on the substantial.

And oh, how history has proven the importance of the little things, the leket and pe'a amidst the moadim. The generation of Noah was destroyed by the flood because, tradition teaches, of gezel paḥot mishaveh peruta, petty pilfering! The whole Egyptian exile began because of a mere two sela'im worth of silk which Jacob gave his favorite Joseph more of than his brothers, thus incurring their jealousy. The founder of Christianity began with a tiny sin – rejecting netilat yadayim. Reform started its career of truncating our tefila by eliminating only the Yekum Purkan.

Today we read from the Torah the aseret hadibrot, the Ten Commandments. There was a time, when the Temple was on Zion's heights, that they were recited daily as part of the service.Why do we not recite them thus today during our regular daily services? The Talmud answers that the Sages revoked this requirement, and actually forbade it because of tar'omet haminim, because of the heretics. They, the heretics, probably the early Christians, said they were going to observe only the big things, only the Ten Commandments, but that the rest was unimportant. Have you not heard that in our own day? "I'm religious enough; I observe the Ten Commandments." Aside from the fact that Shabbat is one of the Ten Commandments, and usually not observed by people who are satisfied with only ten of the 613 commandments, this is a typically Christian attitude. It plays up the big and dismisses the trivial. Murder, adultery, stealing are acknowledged as evils. But what of the minor sins; what of this willful ignorance of Judaism? What of this unJewish diet and vocabulary and whole pattern of unJewish living? So what our Rabbis told us about the Ten Commandments that we read on Shavuot – that better not to read them at all if that is going to be all of our religion, that better no Ten Commandments if we are going to neglect less dramatic mitzvot, that's just what the Torah meant when after Shavuot in the list of moadim it mentioned in the unglorious but extremely vital mitzvot of leket and pe'a. The Yiddish writer Peretz put it in his own way: no man ever stubs his toe against a mountain. It's the little things that bring a man down. So it is with us, friends. None of us will ever commit murder. But someone may casually wound the pride of a friend by a word of lashon hara. No one here will ever bow to an idol. But someone may deny a smile to a neighbor who is starved for friendship. No one here is going to rob a bank. But someone may neglect to provide the leket and pe'a for a needy family. And it is these unspectacular little things, rather than the giant themes of the moadim or Ten Commandments, which ultimately decide our fate. That is why such seeming trifles are of such concern to the halakha – for trifles make perfection – and perfection is no trifle.

*Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's Torah Beloved: Reflections on the Love of Torah and the Celebration of the Holiday of Matan Torah, co-published by OU Press and Ktav Publishers*
**May 25, 1958*

# Likutei Divrei Torah

**Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet**




**Volume 31** **Shavuot Issue** **5785 B"H**

**Mizrachi Dvar Torah**

**Rav Doron Perez - What Date is Shavuot?**

Shavuot is the only Festival that has no date in the Torah. We know it is 50 days after Pesach, but when we didn't have a fixed calendar, it could have been on the 5th, 6th or 7th of Sivan!

Moreover, we don't know what historical event happened on this day. According to our Sages, of course, it is the day of the giving of the Torah, but the Torah makes no mention of it. Not only that, but the accepted opinion is that the Torah was in fact given on the 7th of Sivan the day AFTER we now celebrate Shavuot!

What is going on? The day is not clear and the connection to Matan Torah isn't clear?!

Brilliantly, the Kli Yakar answers this quesiton in the most beautiful way, it says we have to bring a "mincha chadasha", a new sacrifice. Why do we have to bring a new sacrifice on Shavuot? He answers because the Torah cannot and dare not be limited to one day – Matan Torah, the giving and the receiving of the Torah is EVERY DAY! We have to accept and reaccept the Torah every day as if it is the first time we are receiving it.

Every single day is the first day of the rest of our lives, the first day we received the Torah – may this inspire us to reinvigorate our connection to Hashem and reaccept the Torah every day afresh.

**Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

**Giving and Receiving the Torah**
**Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l**

The Gemara in Shabbat records a discussion about the date of the giving of the Torah: Our Rabbis taught: On the sixth day of the month [of Sivan] were the Ten Commandments given to Israel. Rabbi Yose said: On the seventh thereof… An objection was raised [to Rabbi Yose's opinion]… Rabbi Yose can answer you: Moshe added one day [to the period of separation between husbands and wives, in preparation for the giving of the Torah,] of his own understanding. For it was taught: Three things did Moshe do of his own understanding, and the Holy One, blessed be He, gave His approval: he added one day of his own understanding, he separated himself from his wife, and he broke the tablets. (Shabbat 86b-87a)

The Sages maintain that the tablets were given on the 6th of Sivan, while Rabbi Yose says they were given on the 7th of that month. According to Rabbi Yose, the reason the tablets were given one day later stems from the fact that, although God said "sanctify them today and tomorrow" (Shemot 19:10, alluding to two days of separation), Moshe added a third day based on his own interpretation of God's words. It turns out that the giving of the Torah did not take place on the fiftieth day of the omer, but rather on the fifty-first day.

What is the reason for this? Why did Moshe delay heaven and earth for a whole day?

It seems that Moshe sensed that the people of Israel were not ready. They needed an additional day of preparation to receive the Torah, and preparation for Torah is so significant that it warranted pushing off Israel's receiving the Torah for an entire day.

Interestingly, in light of what we have said, it turns out that the festival of Shavuot is celebrated on the fiftieth day of the omer – on the day when God was ready to give the Torah – rather the day we actually received it. Thus, essentially, we do not celebrate the day of receiving the Torah, but rather the anniversary of its giving. The real joy is precisely in the giving of the Torah, not in receiving it.

The same is true with regard to Torah study. Even though Torah study takes place through the intellect, the success of one's study depends on yirat shamayim (awe of heaven) and observance of the mitzvot. This is evident from the midrashic description of David's request to learn from God: "'Blessed are You, O Lord; teach me Your statutes' (Tehillim 119:12) – I know nothing, except for what You have taught me" (Midrash Tehillim 144). Despite his investment in intellectual efforts, David asks to learn Torah from God Himself. In other words, it is impossible to study Torah without God's help.

We Will Do and Hear - The statement, "we will do and we will hear" opens with action – the willingness to accept the Torah, in a practical sense, as it is. Even if I don't understand the Torah, I will observe it. In a similar fashion, the Rambam says in his Moreh Nevukhim (III, 26) that one who gives a reason for the details of the mitzvot is considered "void of sense," for the only reason for the particulars of the mitzvot is to refine people through them. That is to say, a person must accept God's command as it is, without a reason.

However, "doing" in itself is not enough; "hearing" is also necessary. The Rambam writes that when a gentile comes to covert to Judaism, he is taught the fundamentals of the religion and the mitzvot:

We inform him of the fundamentals of the faith… And we inform him of the punishment given for [violating] the mitzvot… Just as he is informed of the punishment [for disobeying] the commandments, so too, he is informed about the reward for [their observance]. We tell him that by observing these mitzvot, he will merit the life of the world to come. For there is no completely righteous man other than a master of wisdom who observes these mitzvot and knows them. (Hilkhot Issurei Bi'a 14:2-3)

One of the fundamentals of the faith that we deem appropriate to tell a gentile who comes to convert is that "there is no completely righteous man other than a master of wisdom who observes these mitzvot and knows them." That is to say, one who recites Kiddush on Shabbat but does not know what Kiddush is, one who dons tefillin but does not know the laws of tefillin, cannot be a fully righteous man! Thus, together with the commitment of "we will do," there must also be "we will hear." The Torah requires observance of the mitzvot together with understanding them.

God Overturned the Mountain Over Them - The pairing of "we will do" and "we will hear" is still only one aspect of receiving the Torah. There is also another aspect – that "God overturned the mountain over them like a

barrel" (Shabbat 88a). However we understand this, the message is that there was an element of force in the receiving of the Torah.

We all have moments of "smallness of mind," moments when we get up on our "left foot." We must remember that even at those moments, we have no choice but to observe the mitzvot.

This point is doubly important in our time. The whole world of Western culture is based on lack of coercion. We must be aware and admit the fact that this element is lacking in us, and that this absence affects our religious world as well. We must not observe Torah and mitzvot only because we desire to do so; accepting the Torah must come from a dimension of being forced, or coerced. Even when I don't have the desire to do it; even when I don't understand.

Acceptance for the Future - As mentioned, accepting the Torah should come, on the one hand, from a sense of "we will do and hear," and on the other hand, from a sense of coercion. However, in order to give that acceptance force for the long term, we mention in the blessing recited over the Torah:

Please, Lord, our God, make the words of Your Torah pleasant in our mouths and in the mouths of all of Your people, the House of Israel. And may we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel – all of us – be knowers of Your Name and studying Your Torah for its sake.

Do you want your children to be "religious"? Do you want them to be among those who know God's name? Then you must make the words of the Torah pleasant in your mouth.

In order for the Torah to be pleasant in our mouths, we must first of all approach it with thirst and humility. We shouldn't make the Torah fit into our lives; we should shape our lives around the Torah. Don't expect to receive the Torah in partial manner! Don't say I have already decided for myself what I will be and how my life will look! We must accept everything the Torah asks and demands of us.

**To Whom Did God Speak at Sinai?**
**By Harav Yaakov Medan**

The Torah is ambiguous about the question of whether the Revelation at Mount Sinai was only to Moshe – "Lo, I come **to you** in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak **with you** and believe you forever" (*Shemot* 19:9) – or to the entire people – "For on the third day the Lord will come down **in the sight of all the people** upon Mount Sinai" (*Shemot* 19:11).

Another question arises as well: Did the glory of God reach the foot of the mountain, down to the Israelite camp – **"And Mount Sinai smoked in every part,** because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke of it ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and **the whole mountain** quaked greatly" (*Shemot* 19:18) – or did God's glory rest only on the top of the mountain – "And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, **on the top of the mountain,** and the Lord called Moshe up to **the top of the mount;** and Moshe went up" (*Shemot* 19:20)? Furthermore, if all the people stood at the foot of the mountain, to where did the priests ascend after the sweeping warning not to go up the mountain or even touch its perimeter?

Let us first consider three generally accepted interpretations of the Revelation. The words of the Rambam suggest that God did not speak directly to the people of Israel. The essence of the Revelation involved God's speaking with Moshe. The people heard God speaking with Moshe, but they neither heard nor understood what God said to him. Through the Revelation, the people came to understand the strength of Moshe's prophecy and they learned to believe in his future prophecies. The heart of the Revelation took place, then, on the top of the mountain. The people stood at a distance, while Moshe ascended to the top of the mountain to speak with God:

What is the source of our belief in him [Moshe]? The [Revelation] at Mount Sinai. Our eyes saw, and not a stranger's. Our ears heard, and not another's. There was fire, thunder, and lightning. He entered the thick clouds; the voice spoke to him and we heard: "Moshe, Moshe, go tell them the following…" Thus, it says (*Devarim* 5:4): "Face to face, God spoke to you," and it says (*Devarim* 5:3): "God did not make this covenant with our fathers, [but with us, who are all here alive today]." How is it known that the [Revelation] at Mount Sinai alone is proof of the truth of Moshe's prophecy that leaves no shortcoming? As it is stated (*Shemot* 19:9): "Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." This implies that before that point, they did not believe in him with a faith that would last forever, but rather with a faith that allowed for suspicions and doubts. (*Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 8:1)

In contrast, R. Yehuda Ha-Levi implies that the essence of the Revelation involved God's speaking with all of the people of Israel and that on that occasion they all attained prophecy and the experience of God's speaking to them. This is how Israel learned that God speaks to man through prophecy: "We have seen this day that God talks with man and he lives" (*Devarim* 5:21). It was only at the Revelation at Mount Sinai that all of Israel attained the level of prophecy; from that time on, the word of God was transmitted to them through the hand of Moshe:

Although the people believed in the message of Moshe, they retained, even after the performance of the miracles, some doubt as to whether God really spoke to mortals… They could not associate speech with a Divine being, since it is something tangible. God, however, desired to remove this doubt and commanded them to prepare themselves morally, as well as physically, enjoining them to keep aloof from their wives and to be ready to hear the words of God. The people prepared and became fitted to receive the prophecy, and even to hear publicly the words of God. This came to pass three days later, being introduced by overwhelming phenomena, lightning, thunder, earthquake, and fire, which surrounded Mount Sinai. The fire remained visible on the mount for forty days. They also saw Moshe enter it and emerge from it; they distinctly heard the Ten Commandments, which represent the very essence of the Law… The people did not receive these ten commandments from single individuals, nor from a prophet, but from God, but they did not possess the strength of Moshe to bear the grandeur of the scene. Henceforth, the people believed that Moshe held direct communication with God. (*Kuzari* 2:87)

Rashi maintains an intermediate position between that of the Rambam and that of R. Yehuda Ha-Levi. His words suggest that the question of whether God would speak only to Moshe or to the people as a whole was subject to negotiation between God and the people during the days of preparation for the Revelation:

"And Moshe told the words of the people [to the Lord]" – [He said to God:] I have heard from them a reply to this statement – that their desire is to hear the commandments from You and not from me. One who hears from the mouth of a messenger is not the same as one who hears directly from the mouth of the King Himself. It is our wish to see our King. "And the Lord said to Moses" – If so, that they force Me to speak with them, go to the people. (Rashi, *Shemot* 19:9-10)

*Chazal* express different views on the matter. Let us consider the position of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, which in my opinion accords well with the plain sense of Scripture:

How many commandments did Israel hear from the Almighty? R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: Two commandments. And the Rabbis said: Israel heard all of the commandments from the Almighty. What is written after all the commandments? "And they said to Moshe: Speak, you with us, and we will hear, but let God not speak with us, lest we die" (*Shemot* 20:16). What did R. Yehoshua ben Levi say to counter this? There is no chronological order in the Torah. (*Pesikta Rabbati* 22)

According to R. Yehoshua ben Levi, the first two commandments were spoken to Israel directly by God, but the last eight commandments were given to them through Moshe, who heard them from God. This possibility is mentioned elsewhere in *Chazal* as well: R. Simlai expounded: Six hundred and thirteen commandments were communicated to Moshe, three hundred and sixty-five negative commandments, corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments, corresponding to the number of the members of man's body. R. Hamnuna said: What is the verse [that teaches this]? "Moshe commanded us the Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov" (*Devarim* 33:4), "Torah" being in numerical-value equal to six hundred and eleven, "I am [the Lord your God]" and "You shall have no [other gods]" [not being reckoned, because] we heard them from the mouth of the Almighty.[1]

It is for this reason that the first two commandments are formulated in the first person, as God Himself spoke to Israel, whereas the last eight commandments are formulated in the third person, as they were given to the people through Moshe. For this explanation, R. Yehoshua ben Levi invokes the rule that there is no chronological order in the Torah; the Ten Commandments were not proclaimed in one sequence, but rather the people's request that they hear the commandments from Moshe intervened between the second and third commandments.

We can add the verses appearing after the Ten Commandments to the data supporting the idea that God spoke directly with the people:

And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it, they were shaken, and stood afar off. And they said to Moshe, "Speak you with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die." (*Shemot* 20:14-15)

This is the chronological order of the verses according to this explanation:

(19:10) And the Lord said to Moshe, "Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day;
(11) for on the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of the all the people upon Mount Sinai.
(12) And you shall set bounds to the people round about, saying: Take heed to yourselves, that you go not up into the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall be surely put to death.
(13) No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live; when the horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mountain."
(14) And Moshe went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.

(20:1) God spoke all these words, saying:
(2) "I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
(3) You shall have no other gods beside me.
(4) You shall not make for yourself any carved idol, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
(5) You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of those that hate Me;
(6) but showing mercy to thousands of generations of those that love Me and keep My commandments."

(20:15) And all the people perceived the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it, they were shaken and stood afar off.
(16) And they said to Moshe, "Speak you with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die."
(17) And Moshe said to the people, "Fear not, for God is come to test you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that you sin not."
(18) And the people stood afar off, and Moshe drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

(19:20) And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai on the top of the mountain and the Lord called Moshe up to the top of the mount; and Moshe went up.
(21) And the Lord said to Moshe, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through to the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish.
(22) And let the priests also, who come near to the Lord, sanctify themselves, lest the Lord break forth upon them."
(23) And Moshe said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You did charge us, saying: Set bounds about the mountain and sanctify it.
(24) And the Lord said to him, "Go, get you down, and you shall come, you, and Aharon with you; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break forth upon them."
(25) So Moshe went down to the people and spoke to them.

(19:19) And then the voice of the shofar sounded louder and louder; Moshe speaks, and God answers him by a voice.

(20:7) "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.
(8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
(9) Six days shall you labor, and do all your work,
(10) but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates.
(11) For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
(12) Honor your father and your mother: that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.
(13) You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
(14) You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

According to this proposal, there were two parts to the Revelation at Sinai. In the first part, God's glory revealed itself on the entire mountain, down to its foot and in the sight of all the people, to the point where the people of Israel stood at the foot of the mountain. In this part, God proclaimed the first two commandments and the people heard them. The people, however, could no longer stand this awesome experience, and therefore they asked Moshe to speak to them in place of God.

Consequently, God's glory went up to the top of the mountain and called to Moshe to come up to Him. The people were once again warned not to ascend even part of the mountain, despite the fact that the *Shekhina* had already removed itself from the bottom of the mountain. Only the priests were permitted to go up to a certain level on the mountain after the *Shekhina* went up to the top, and Aharon was permitted to go up one level higher. At this stage, the last eight commandments were told to Moshe, and he passed them on to the people.[2]

We have explained some of the verses (the first two commandments) in accordance with

[1] In the verse "Moshe commanded us the Torah" (*Devarim* 33:4), the numerical value of the letters comprising the word "Torah" is expounded as alluding to six hundred and eleven commandments. From here we learn that we received from Moshe six hundred and eleven commandments, and two additional commandments we received directly from God, they being the first two of the Ten Commandments. Together, the number of the commandments totals six hundred and thirteen.

[2] The approach closest to our proposal is that of the *Chizkuni*.

the position of R. Yehuda Halevi, and some of them (the last eight commandments) in accordance with the view of the Rambam. We will try now to integrate into this the position of Rashi cited above.

Initially, God had intended to speak with Moshe alone. The people would be convinced that God spoke with him, and then believe in his prophecy forever:

And the Lord said to Moshe, "Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, **that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever.**" (*Shemot* 19:9)

But the people ask to hear the word of God directly. This might follow from what is told about the Revelation in *Shemot* chapter 24,[3] and it is possible that Rashi infers this from the difference between the two accounts of the people's response:

And all the people answered together, and said, "All that the Lord has spoken **we will do.**" (*Shemot* 19:8)

And they said, "All that the Lord has said **we will do and hear**." (*Shemot* 24:7)

In *Parashat Yitro* (ch. 19), the people commit themselves only to action, whereas in *Parashat Mishpatim* (ch. 24) they wish to hear the word of God. This difference might lead to Rashi's conclusion. Since the people asked to hear the word of God, God sent Moshe to sanctify them for three days so that they should be fit for God's descent upon all of Mount Sinai, at the foot of which they are standing. God proclaims His word, but the people are shocked and ask to return to the original plan, according to which God speaks to Moshe alone.

The change in plan in the wake of the people's request to hear the word of God might explain another matter. According to *Chazal's* tradition, the Torah was given on the sixth (and according to R. Yose, on the seventh) of Sivan, the third month. According to the plain sense of Scripture, based on the assumption that the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Sivan (the plain meaning of the words "on the third month" is Rosh Chodesh), it would have been enough to say that on that very day God sent Moshe to sanctify the people in anticipation of the third day, and to explain that the Torah was given on the third of Sivan.[4] It might be that *Chazal* pushed the Revelation off to the sixth or the seventh of Sivan based on the fact that initially there were three days of preparation for Moshe's receiving the Torah. But since the plan was altered, the people needed another three days to prepare themselves for hearing the word of God. Accordingly, the Torah was given on the sixth or the seventh of Sivan.

Something similar to what happened according to our understanding at the Revelation at Sinai happened also with the *Mishkan.* Initially, God appeared at the time of the dedication of the Temple to the entire people:

For today the Lord will appear to you [plural]. (*Vayikra* 9:4)
And Moshe said, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do; and the glory of the Lord shall appear to you [plural]." (*Vayikra* 9:6)
And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat: which, when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces. (*Vayikra* 9:23-24)

But this great incident ended with a fire consuming Nadav and Avihu, recalling the argument advanced by the people at the Revelation at Mount Sinai: "Now therefore why should we die? For this great fire will consume us" (*Devarim* 5:22). In response to the death of the sons of Aharon, God gave Israel the service of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies at its appointed time:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon, when they came near before the Lord, and died; and the Lord said to Moshe, "Speak to Aharon your brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the covering, which is upon the ark, that he die not; for I appear in the cloud upon the ark cover. Thus shall Aharon come into the holy place…" (*Vayikra* 16:1-3)

By way of the Yom Kippur service, the glory of God reveals itself to the High Priest in the Holy of Holies alone, and not to the entire people. Thus, it is a sort of continuation of the last eight of the Ten Commandments, when God revealed Himself at the top of the mountain to Moshe alone, and not to the entire people.

[3] According to Rashi and most commentators, the Torah goes back in chapter 24 to describe what happened at Mount Sinai prior to the giving of the Torah.

[4] It should be noted that according to the plain meaning of the verses, there is no need at all to identify the day of the giving of the Torah with the festival of Shavuot. Shavuot falls on the fiftieth day after the day of the waving of the Omer, the sixteenth of Nisan. At a time when there was no fixed calendar and the months were sanctified in accordance with sightings of the new moon, Shavuot could fall out on the fifth, the sixth, or the seventh of Sivan. At the time of the Revelation as well, the day of the giving of the Torah was the fifty first day of the Omer, and not the fiftieth day, when the festival of Shavuot is supposed to fall. This issue is discussed by the *Taz* and the *Magen Avraham* on *Shulchan Arukh* (*Orach Chayim* 494).

## Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

### From Inheritance to Partnership – The Power of Torah Blessings:

**Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander**

As we gather on Shavuot to celebrate the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the moment that forever transformed the Jewish people into a nation of destiny and covenant, we often focus on the awe of revelation — the thunder, the fire, the awe of the transformative moment. But beyond the display lies a quieter, more enduring covenantal act that we perform every day: Birkat HaTorah, the blessings we recite before learning Torah. The way we bless the Torah every morning — what we say and how we frame the experience — reveals the transformative nature of Torah and its role in our lives.

The Rambam, in Hilchot Tefillah (7:10), records that before learning Torah each day — whether written or oral — one must recite three blessings.

The first acknowledges God who "sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about the words of Torah," ("Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al divrei Torah")

The second is a request, "Please Hashem our God make sweet the words of your Torah" ("V'ha'arev na Hashem Elokeinu et divrei Toratecha…").

And the third maintains that God "chose us from among all the nations and gave us His Torah" ("Asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim v'natan lanu et Torato").

The Rambam's approach is distinctive. While most other Rishonim count only two requisite blessings – viewing the first two as a single unit – the Rambam separates them into three independent blessings, each with its own purpose.

For the Rambam, the first blessing is historical and communal. It acknowledges the divine origin of Torah and our eternal relationship with it. The phrase "al divrei Torah," subtly implies receptiveness; we received something sacred, and that created an unbreakable bond between us and Hashem. This is the Torah as it was given at Sinai — our national inheritance.

But that inheritance alone is not enough.

The second blessing, beginning "V'ha'arev na" — a plea for sweetness and engagement— introduces a critical shift. This standalone blessing reflects an internal, personal relationship with Torah. It's the voice of the individual learner, not the nation. Strikingly, it uses active language: "v'nih'yeh anachnu v'tze'etza'einu…oskei Toratecha lishmah" –

"may we and our descendants…be those who engage with Your Torah for its own sake." We are not merely inheritors of Torah — we are its builders, active partners. This blessing reflects a core Jewish truth: Torah has no continuity without chiddush — without renewal. Torah must be not only received but reimagined in each generation.

The third blessing then fuses these two dimensions. "Asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim" emphasizes our chosenness — echoing the first blessing — but continues with "v'natan lanu et Torato," compelling us toward active ownership. Torah is simultaneously a divine gift and a personal responsibility. Only once both elements unite — historical connection and personal engagement — can Torah become a living, eternal force in our lives.

This idea emerges from a Talmudic discussion (Berachot 11b) about when one is obligated to recite Birkat HaTorah. Rav Huna requires blessings only for the study of Mikra (written Torah), while Rabbi Elazar extends this to include Midrash. Rabbi Yochanan includes Mishnah on the list, as Rava goes furthest, saying that even the study of Talmud requires a blessing.

This debate reflects more than legal technicalities— it's a vision of how we define Torah. Is Torah only the literal word of God? What about rabbinic interpretation? What about human conversation about sacred texts?

The Rambam rules like Rava: even human discourse — the dialectics of the Talmud — require a blessing. Why? Because the sugya, even when it seems to stray from the biblical text, remains sacred. The divine voice reverberates through human debate. As the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, often taught: the very act of wrestling with Torah is itself a form of divine communion.

This may explain why Shavuot is the only holiday that has no specific ritual mitzvah . There is no sukkah to build, no matzah to eat, no shofar to blow. Shavuot transcends ritual; it celebrates the beginning of a journey that requires constant renewal, sweetness, and personal investment.

As we stand again at Sinai this Shavuot, may we hear not only the thunder of revelation, but the quiet daily call to engage with Torah in the everyday activities of our life. Let us commit not only to study Torah, but to wrestle with it so that it can navigate our lives and shape our world. May we become the active partners that the Torah demands – sweetening the Torah for ourselves and for future generations.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot**

**Why Moral People Need Torah**

A fundamental of Judaism that is a perpetual source of wonderment is the relation of religion and morality. A major part of Torah concerns the social and ethical obligations of man to his fellow man. The question is, why should it be necessary to have revelation at all for ideas and regulations of behavior that man can arrive at independently? Do we not know of societies preceding that of Israel at Sinai which arrived at moral codes by themselves? Do we not know individuals who are not committed to Torah and who nevertheless lead ethical, decent lives? The question is too extensive and the problem too significant, to attempt anything approaching an exhaustive answer. But on this festival of revelation, permit me to commend a more specific line of approach.

The site of the revelation is called by two names in the Bible, Sinai and Horeb. The Rabbis, as is their wont, offer us a remarkable insight by means of a play on words; they took these two names of this mountain where the Torah was revealed, and related them to two rather negative terms. Sinai is reminiscent of sin'ah, hatred, and Horeb to hurvah, destruction. Essentially, what they mean to say is that Torah, revealed at Sinai-Horeb, is what allows man to avoid hatred and curtail destruction in the world.

Simply put, the Rabbis meant that the Torah is, as Zvi Kolitz has called it, "the great deterrent" against the innate evil that rises from the breast of man. Torah restrains him, it curbs his evil propensities, it allows man to repress his concupiscence and envy by accepting the moral code of revelation.

However, just as Judaism acknowledged man's evil inclination, so it posited his native moral intuition. Man is, after all, created in the Image of God, and just as God is good so does man possess extensive reservoirs of goodness and morality. Man naturally possesses noble wishes, the feel for ethical living. Men are good and virtuous on their own, even without divine instruction.

Why then is Torah necessary? It is needed because it contributes the setting, the structure, the context for moral life. It takes man's disparate and fragmented moral inclinations, and unifies and integrates them into an overall pattern of living.

This is necessary — and this, I believe, is the major import of the Rabbis 'play on words — because there is nothing quite as dangerous as virtues on the loose, ideals gone wild, ungrounded goodness. Without the structure and the grounding provided by Torah, virtues can turn venomous, ideals can devour us, goodness can strangle us. Never before has any generation realized as does ours that moral perfectionism can turn nihilistic and threaten us with total destruction.

**Likutei Divrei Torah**

What the Rabbis implied is that without Sinai we are at the mercy of sin'ah (hatred) and without Horeb we are at the mercy of hurvah (destruction), all wished upon us by ungrounded virtues. We need Torah not only to curb our yetzer ha-ra, but also to direct the yetzer tov, lest it become a Frankenstein's monster and turn upon us.

Here are but a few immediate examples of how a virtue, over-done, can undo us. Honesty is, everyone will agree, a great ideal. But honesty can sometimes shade into uninhibited frankness, and frankness is often used as a tool to humiliate another person, with total insensitivity to his feelings. Honesty, then, can be used as a weapon to crush another human being. The person who honestly tells you what he thinks of you, and in the process demolishes your ego, has taken a virtue and, because it is ungrounded in anything deeper and more transcendent, allowed it to become an instrument of evil design.

Consistency is another such example. Certainly, consistency is a desideratum. But consistency can lead to rigidity, to immoveability, to an unwillingness to change for the better: since I already made a statement or performed an act, I feel that my future conduct must be mortgaged to consistency with my past.

Humility, one of the greatest of all virtues, can prove a source of hurvah. If I feel totally humble and lacking in importance then I yield to the feeling of impotence with regard to improving myself or bettering my society. I then lose my self-respect. And a man who has no respect for himself can have no respect for others. Hence, sin'ah, or hatred. How does Torah solve the problem? How does Sinai impede sin'ah and Horeb avoid hurvah?. Each virtue or ideal, by and of itself, can be destructive if it follows a straight line of development. Great ideals carried too far are usually counterproductive. But within the context of Torah, within a total religious situation, where moral principles issue from one Source and give man the feeling of responsibility to that Source, there takes place what might be called a dialectical motion: each virtue is checked and modified by an opposite virtue, and both blend into a third ideal that preserves the best of both. In this manner, all of man's life is integrated, unified, elevated.

Consider the following illustrations and we shall see how individual virtues can lead to sin'ah and hurvah, whereas if they are integrated dialectically in the context of Sinai and Horeb, they add up to a torat hayyim, to living Torah.

Idealism is a superb phenomenon. But it also can be deadly. Idealism sometimes morphs into ideology -- idealism in rigor mortis -- and is accompanied by excessive zeal, which turns into blind passion, and ends up as fanaticism. This is the way of hurvah, destruction. Realism alone, a virtue usually professed by those of middle age and over, is certainly a virtue for

people seriously attempting to construct the good society. But realism alone usually turns into resignation, the acceptance of evil and corruption, and this gradually becomes resignation, and finally -- cynicism. This is the way of sin'ah or hatred.

However, when each reacts upon the other, when each modifies the other, when a man has the combination of idealism and realism as a result of his anchorage in Sinai-Horeb, he has avoided the pitfalls of hatred and destruction.

Freedom is certainly one of the noblest ideals of man. Yet, freedom taken to an extreme is utterly destructive. If everyone will "do his thing" without recourse to a transcendent Judge and without concern for his fellow man, there can be no constructive life. Personally it leads to immorality, and socially it leads to anarchy. This is the way of hurvah.

Its opposite is responsibility. But responsibility can be taken to an extreme too. People who feel overly responsible for everyone and everything, live under a crushing burden. All of existence becomes joyless, and they begin to lose spontaneity and therefore initiative. People who are constantly oppressed by the burden of responsibility, by the guilty feelings that it engenders, hate life. This is the way of sin'ah.

We have many such examples of each element taken to an extreme by itself. The freedom of parents to crush prenatal life, which now seems to be in vogue, will eventually lead to utter destruction, because it is only a small leap of logic from feticide to infanticide, to getting rid of infants who may not fulfill our ideals of mental and physical health, or, eventually, ethnic and genetic respectability. The opposite can also be oppressive and bring hatred and animosity into life: an absolute decision that never must the life of a fetus be taken. Halakhah combines freedom and responsibility, and offers us guidelines as to when the one should be exercised, when the other. When freedom and responsibility react upon each other and with each other, dialectically, we have attained the moral maturity of Judaism.

Reason or intellect have always been accorded the greatest respect in both the Jewish and Western traditions. Yet, by themselves, they make life insufferable. In our own days they have resulted in the passion for research, harsh and cruel technology, the depersonalization of society, the fostering of inhumanity. Parents and children are strangers to each other, husband and wife barely know each other, teachers and students are related to each other as employer and employee or even worse. This is the way of sin'ah, hatred

Reason must be merged with emotion. But emotional experience and expression alone are also inadequate. The New Romanticism of the campus has tried to correct the balance by reintroducing into American life the validity of sentiment, feeling, heart. But it has tended to ignore the element of intellect, it has tended to downgrade the role of the academy as a meeting place of ideas and criticisms. And so, this New Romanticism and celebration of emotion and sentiment have turned into hysteria, to a clash of blind passions, the way of hurvah, or destruction.

When we take these two ideals together, and allow them to play upon each other and modify each other, then we have the adam ha-shalem, the "whole man" of Jewish tradition. The same might be said for love and discipline. Love by itself can lead, amongst equals, to promiscuity, and from parents to children to what has been called "smother love," to a warping of the child's personality. It is the way of hurvah. Discipline alone leads to rigidity, to a lack of warmth and affection in family and society, to a sense of isolation and alienation by the individual who feels crushed in his loneliness. It is the way of sin'ah or hatred. Together they lead to the fullness of Jewish life, to the interplay of din and rakhamim, justice and mercy, which is the reflection in human society of the attributes we notice in God.

As a last example, we might take the tendency to look to the past and the one to look to the future. There are those who, especially in Jewish life, seem fixed upon the past. Their entire Jewish expression is one long yizkor. But this is the counsel of despair; it reflects a sense of unhappiness and even sin'ah towards conditions that prevail today. The other extreme is that of ignoring the past and acting as if we can create Jewish life de novo, all from a fresh beginning, looking only to the future and ignoring our roots. This is stupid; it is the way of hurvah, or destruction. A true Jewish attitude requires consideration of the past and looking to the future at the same time. To drive on the highway of life, according to Jewish teaching, we must keep our eyes on the road ahead, but every now and then, regularly, look at the rear-view mirror to know where we have come from.

It is worth repeating what I have said before from this pulpit -- anything worthwhile is really worth repeating occasionally -- in the name of the great Kotzker Rebbe. He said: klug iz krum, intelligence can sometimes lead to crookedness, as intellect is abused for corrupt ends. Gut iz ni'uf, goodness can sometimes lead to immorality, when out of sheer love one consents to demands that are immoral. Frum iz shlecht, piety can sometimes be malicious, when it is expressed as self-righteousness and intolerance. Aber gut un klug un frum, das iz a Yid -- when you combine these virtues of goodness and cleverness and piety, then you have the whole Jew. All that we have said on Revelation as the unifying factor in the moral life, on Torah as the undergirding and transcendental stabilizing factor of virtue, we can find in a famous passage in the Book of Ruth. When Boaz first makes the acquaintance of Ruth, he blesses her in the following words: "May the Lord recompense thy work, and may thy reward be complete from the Lord the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12). The Malbim asks: is not this verse repetitious? The first half and the second repeat each other — the Lord recompense your work, may your reward be complete.

No, answers the Malbim, there is no redundancy here; each expression means something different. Pa'alekh and maskurtekh are rewards for different kinds of activities.

Pa'alekh is the wages of the artisan, whereas maskurtekh is the salary of the day laborer. The poel (artisan) is one who is paid for piece work, he is compensated only for what he achieves, no matter how long it takes him or how little time he spends on it. The sakhir, however, is paid not for achievement of specific tasks, but for the time he spends in his labors, whether it be an hour a day a week a month or a year.

What Boaz said to Ruth is this: may God compensate you for your work as a poel. Before you accepted the Revelation of Sinai-Horeb, whilst you were yet outside the community of Israel, you were a highly moral person, one who was ethically gifted. Everything you accomplished that was noble and decent will receive its reward from God. But you will be compensated as a poel, only for what you achieved that was deserving and noble. But you lacked an overall pattern; your life was moral, but only in its individual expressions, not as a totality. Now, however, that you have come to rest under the wings of God, that you have accepted the Torah of Sinai-Horeb, all your life is integrated in the service of God, every moment is lived under this great commitment to the Covenant. Now God judges the overall pattern of your life, He sees how your virtues blend and mesh and merge, and He considers not your individual acts alone, but their totality -- you are a sakhir, and your reward will be great and complete, not only when you are actively engaged in particular moral missions, but in their totality. As a Jew and the heir of the Sinaitic tradition, your reward is shelemah, whole, as you have come to place your entire life in all its aspects under "His wings.". Without Torah, without Revelation, we can have at most pa'alekh, moral credit for individual deeds, and, at worst, the ravages of sin'ah, hurvah, hatred and destruction. Let us rededicate ourselves on this Shavuot, once again, to the great Covenant of Sinai, the great heritage of Horeb, so that not only will the Lord recompense our work, but that our reward be complete and whole before the Lord God of Israel.

---

**Aish.Com: Shraga's Weekly**
**by Rabbi Shraga Simmons**

---

**Humility and Mount Sinai: Why humility is the essential ingredient needed to receive the Torah**. The story is told of Novardok, the great 19th century European yeshiva, where

the students were known for their great humility. To reach such levels, they would sit for 30 minutes each morning in the study hall, rocking back and forth, chanting the mantra, "I am nothing, I am nothing."

One morning, a new student arrived at the yeshiva, and upon entering the study hall, was surprised to find hundreds of students muttering, "I am nothing." He checked the sign outside the door to make sure he had the right place, then figured he might as well join them. After finding an empty seat, he began rocking back and forth, chanting, "I am nothing, I am nothing."

Suddenly the student seated next to him turns and says: "The nerve of you! I was here an entire year before I was nothing!"

The Humble Hill - The Midrash says that when God was preparing to give the Torah, all the mountains stepped forward and declared why they thought the Torah should be given on them. "I am the highest mountain," said one. "No," said another, "I am the steepest mountain and therefore the Torah should be given on me."

One by one, they all stated their claims. In the end, God chose Mount Sinai - not because it was the tallest or the grandest (it's not, as anyone who's toured the Sinai Desert will attest), but because, says the Midrash, it was the most humble.

What is this notion of "humility" and what does it have to do with Torah?

First, let's clarify what humility is NOT. Humility does not mean a meek reluctance to speak up or be assertive. Humility is not slouching your shoulders and having low self-esteem. The Torah (Numbers 12:3) refers to Moses as "the most humble person who ever lived" – yet he aggressively confronts Pharaoh, fights a war against Amalek, and stands up to castigate the Jewish people.

Humility Defined - Humility is to know one's place. In this week's Parsha, the Torah describes the arrangement of the 12 Tribes in the Israelite camp. After a long description of who will travel first, and who will travel last, the Torah says: "The people did exactly as they were instructed" (Numbers 1:54).

What's the big deal that everyone camped where they were supposed to? The Midrash explains that when God suggested the arrangement, Moses feared that by specifying which tribe travels in the East and which in the West, who in front and who in back, disputes will break out between the tribes.

God tells Moses: Years earlier, at Jacob's funeral, his 12 sons carried the coffin. The way the sons were arranged around the coffin is the same way the tribes are to be arranged in the camp today. In this way, everyone is already clear as to his proper place. So don't worry, God tells Moses, because when someone knows their place, there is inevitably peace and calm.

This applies to our own lives as well. Our circumstances of birth and our talents (or lack thereof) to a great degree determine our choices. The higher a person becomes spiritually, the more humble he becomes - internalizing the reality of our tenuous mortality, and only God is eternal.

Moses was called "the most humble" because when he stood before God he knew his place. Anything else precludes room for God to fit in. That's why the Talmud likens arrogance to idol worship; both push away the presence of God.

Nose in the Air

In the secular world, the biggest personalities are often the most arrogant. Picture the scene: A movie star walks into a party – strutting, cocky, head raised. His mannerisms shout: "I am great and I don't need you or anybody else." The room is silent with awe. Charisma! Judaism says this is counterfeit charisma.

True humility means living with the reality that nothing matters except doing the right thing. The humble person is not dependent on the opinion of others. Because sometimes doing the right thing is popular (and consistent with one's ego needs), and sometimes it's not. The humble person can set his ego aside, to consistently do the right thing.

An arrogant person, on the other hand, is less concerned about right and wrong – and more concerned about himself. He may appear smooth on the outside, while manipulating things around him to suit his self-centered needs.

In actuality, it is humility which guarantees charisma. The humble person has the ability to rise above his self-contained narcissistic envelope and embrace those around him. Since he confidently knows his place, he can leave space for others without having an ego crisis. He honors others and helps them find their place, too.

Judaism defines it like this:

"Arrogance" = I'm all that counts.

"Humility" = What's greater than me is what counts.

Forward or Back? - Unfortunately humility has gotten a bad rap. Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.

Humility is the ability to be objective about one's own position vis-a-vis others. If I am in the position to lead, then I should lead. And if not, I should defer. I know where I stand, and not take undo liberties. If I am in the presence of someone more knowledgeable, I think twice before speaking. There is nothing more annoying than an accountant standing in a roomful of doctors and pontificating on medical science.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa (19th century Europe) always carried two slips of paper – one in the right pocket and one in the left. On one paper was written the Talmudic statement, "The entire world was created just for me" (Sanhedrin 38a). On the other paper was written the words of Abraham, "I am but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). In this way, the rabbi was reminded that there are times to step forward, and times to step back.

Rabbi Rafael of Barshad (19th century Europe) summed it up as follows: "When I get to heaven, they'll ask me, why didn't you learn more Torah? And I'll tell them that I'm slow-witted. Then they'll ask me, why didn't you do more kindness for others? And I'll tell them that I'm physically weak. Then they'll ask me, why didn't you give more Tzedakah? And I'll tell them that I didn't have enough money. But then they'll ask me: If you were so stupid, weak and poor, why were you so arrogant? And for that I won't have an answer."

Modern Model of Humility - A contemporary model of humanity Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l, the leader of American Jewry for much of the 20th century. In the introduction to "Iggros Moshe," his monumental compendium of responsa, Rabbi Feinstein writes: "I would not have volunteered for the job of leading the Jewish people. But since this is the role that God selected for me, I must oblige."

One day in the study hall, a visitor picked up the pay phone, and the voice on the other end asked to speak with Moshe Feinstein. The visitor then walked into the study hall and began shouting: "Moishy! Phone call for Moishy" – using an informal nickname for the great sage! Rabbi Feinstein calmly raised his hand and graciously accepted the phone.

Rabbi Feinstein's sister was once asked, "What makes your brother so special?" She answered: "What makes my brother special is that he never looks at himself as being so special."

Getting Practical - How do we achieve humility? The first thing a Jew does upon awakening in the morning is to say the Modeh Ani prayer: "I acknowledge you, God, for graciously returning my soul for yet another day. Thank you!"

Step one of humility is to put our relationship with God into perspective. We feel the "We," rather than the self-indulgent, negative energy. This makes us more relaxed, calm and flexible, which trickles down to all our interpersonal relationships: business partnership, marriage, community and nation-building.

More tools for gaining humility:

Read eulogies. They're a good dose of humility. They help us get perspective on the true meaning of life. Try to write your own obituary. For what do you want to be remembered?

Use humility to rise above arguments. You don't have to respond to every insult.

Ask a close friend to give you criticism. As we more clearly see our own faults, we are less likely to be arrogant toward others.

A crucial step to humility is found in the opening verse of this week's parsha: "And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert" (Numbers 1:1). The Sages ask a fundamental question: Why was the Torah given in a desert? Because a desert is empty. This means that to acquire Torah – to receive God's wisdom – one must first be willing to open up space inside.

The Maharal (16th century Prague) explains that the only way to learn anything is to first ask a question. A question creates a lack and a need – a space that the answer can then come and fill. But without first a question, there is no room for the answer

Parshat Bamidbar always falls out in conjunction with Shavuot, the holiday of reliving the Sinai experience. The message for us is to know our place, make some space, and let the truth of God and His Torah enter deep inside.


BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

# INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
# ON **BAMIDBAR / SHAVUOS** - 5785

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 30th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to http://www.parsha.net and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at http://www.parsha.net It is also fully searchable.

---

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov.
In memory of Sara Masha bat R' Yaakov Eliezer a"h, Baila bat Arye Leib a"h & Ana Malka bas Yisrael a"h.

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@gmail.com
(proceeds to tzedaka)

---

The Sefira for Friday night with be 48 days, 6 weeks & 6 days

---

**"RavFrand" List Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bamidbar** 5756

Legacy from Yaakov Avinu: Maintaining Civility In Times of Duress

There is an interesting Medrash on this week's Parsha: When G d said to Moshe Rabbeinu, "Make them 'Flags' as they desire", Moshe began to complain. Moshe said, "Now there will be divisions and disputes between the tribes".

In other words, Moshe reasoned, "Once I start dividing and specifying who travels in the East and who travels in the West, who is in front and who is in back, I know what's going to happen people are going to start arguing. If I tell the tribe of Yehudah, they should travel in the East, they will come back and say they want to travel in the South; and so too with the tribe of Reuvain, and the tribe of Ephraim, and so forth with each of the tribes. What am I going to do? I know there's going to be machlokes."

G d responded to Moshe, "Moshe, what are you worried about? They know their proper places by themselves. This has all been previously worked out; there is a system that they received from Yaakov Avinu regarding how to camp by 'flags'."

How did they get this system from Yaakov Avinu after all, Yaakov died long before their current travels in the Wilderness?

The answer is that the Tribes were to circle the Mishkan now, in the exact formation in which they circled the coffin of Yaakov when they returned his body from Egypt to the Land of Israel for burial. Yaakov gave this formation to his sons as part of his death bed instructions: Yehudah, Yissachar, and Zevulun will carry my coffin from the East; Reuvain, Shimeon, and Gad will carry it from the South; Ephraim, Menashe, and Binyamin will carry it from the West; and Dan, Asher, and Naftali will carry the coffin from the North.

Therefore, G d told Moshe Rabbeinu that the travel formations around the Mishkan are already all worked out. There is no need to worry about fights or about Machlokes.

Rav Mordechai Rogov, zt"l, a Rosh Yeshiva in Skokie, interpreted this Medrash as follows:

It is the nature of people to act with civility and treat each other with respect when things are all right and secure. However, when people are thrown into conditions of danger and insecurity, into conditions of duress and of pressure, then, those niceties of humanity and civility begin to decline.

Moshe Rabbeinu was worried that he was facing a situation of traveling with Klal Yisroel in the Wilderness; a dessert lurking with danger, with the possibility of attacks from animals and enemies. Even though they were being protected, they still felt themselves to be constantly in a place of danger. Moshe feared that Klal Yisroel would deteriorate in terms of their menschlichkeit and in terms of how they would treat one another.

When people are forced into such a situation they begin to lose the manner of humanity (tsuras haAdam). It is one thing to walk around with a veneer of humanity now, but what of times of war, of famine, of danger? This was Moshe's worry.

G d's response was they have a heritage from the Patriarch Yaakov, that people under duress and under tough times and in times of danger can still act with humanity. Because, at the time when their father was about to die, during the time of the personal tragedy of losing a Yaakov Avinu, he taught them and gave over to them a lesson.

Yaakov Avinu taught them a lesson that they would take with them not only on that occasion but for thousands and thousands of years. The lesson that Yaakov taught them is how a Jew should act in times of Tsores; how a Jew should act in times of pressure.

This is what the Medrash is teaching. Not just that Yaakov taught them how to position themselves geographically around his coffin. Yaakov Avinu, knowing that there would be pogroms and inquisitions and concentration camps, knew that he had to teach his sons that Klal Yisroel must know how to act with humanity (tsu zein a mensch) even under the worst of circumstances. This is what G d reassured Moshe Rabbeinu that Klal Yisroel learned from no less a personage than Yaakov Avinu how a Jew has to act in times of tsores.

I am sure we have all heard the stories and there are not only hundreds, there are thousands of stories about the Holocaust. There are many stories about people who were treated like animals, who were treated worse than animals, yet they did not lose their humanity; they did not lose their civility. When they were treated like animals, they nevertheless acted like Angels.

There are many stories about what Jews did on Yom Kippur and on Chanukah and how they exhibited self sacrifice. However, one simple story about one simple Jew, seems to me, to tell it all. The story did not take place at Neilah or on Yom Kippur; it was not on Rosh Hashanah, but on an ordinary, regular day.

It is a story about a Jew who writes that bread in the concentration camp was not only a scarce commodity, it was a commodity that consumed all their thinking hours: Should one eat the bread right away or should one save it and eat it in nibbles? Should one eat it right away or should one eat it at the end of the day when they would be tired and hungry so they could fall asleep. Should the bread be eaten all at once or should it be rationed so it could be eaten all throughout the day? Chakiras and Derishas about a piece of bread! This is what a piece of bread meant literally life!

A Jew who survived writes that he was in a camp and was given an order to see the Commandant of the camp, which meant only one thing his time was up.

What did a Jew do when he knew his time was up? First of all he recited Vidui and he made peace with his Maker. Then he would exchange his clothes with another person. He would give his shoes to someone else who had tattered shoes, knowing that he would not need his own much longer. He took off his better winter coat and gave it to someone else, because he knew that he would have no need for it. And that precious piece of bread that he had saved the entire day, he gave to another Jew who was weak and half starved and could so dearly use another piece of bread.

He went to the Commandant and as Providence would have it, he wasn't killed. He came back to his camp. They were all elated to see him and the person who took the piece of bread said, "Here, take back your piece of

bread you have to eat it; I can't take it anymore you are still among the living, not among the dead".
Where does a Jew get the strength, that under such situations, when he is treated worse than an animal, he still acts like an Angel?
This is the tradition that we have from the Patriarch Yaakov. When Yaakov told them how to carry the coffin he was giving them guidance how to always conduct themselves even in moments of extreme pain and distress not only then, but for all the bitter days of Exile. This is what G d reassured Moshe Rabbeinu: You don't have to worry about Klal Yisroel about how they are going to act in the Wilderness because they have a legacy they received from the Patriarch Yaakov.
Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@scn.org

Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network learn@torah.org P.O. Box 1230 http://www.torah.org/ Spring Valley, NY 10977 (914) 356 3040
---
from: **RIETS Kollel Elyon** from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>
date: May 29, 2025, 1:44 PM
subject: Reading Bamidbar Before Shavuot: Names and Also Numbers
Reading **Bamidbar Before Shavuot: Names and Also Numbers**
**Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman**
Parshat Bamidbar creates an unusual impression right from its first aliyah, which is largely a recitation of names (presenting both benefits and challenges in the fulfillment of Shnayim Mikra V'Echad Targum). This opening, seemingly a simple census, carries a deeper resonance, particularly in its placement before the upcoming festival of Shavuot.
Parshat Bamidbar is traditionally read at this time, as the Tur (OC 428) notes, providing a mnemonic phrase: "menu v'atzru", meaning menu, referencing counting, should always precede Shavuot, which is referred to as Atzeret, hence 'atzru'.
R. Yerucham Leiner of Radzin, in his Tiferet Yerucham (quoted in Pardes Yosef HaChadash), interprets this mnemonic as akin to taking attendance, ensuring that everyone is present and accounted for before the momentous occasion of Shavuot. This highlights the profound importance of the unity of the Jewish people as integral to the entire process of receiving the Torah and the spiritual preparation for Shavuot, as evident in the Torah's phrasing "for on the third day God will come down in the sight of all the people (kol ha-am)", which the midrash understands to indicate that the Torah could not have been given had any of the Jews been missing (Mekhilta Yitro ch. 3). The memorable phrase "as one person with one heart" (Rashi Ex. 20:2, citing the Mekhilta) expresses this foundational unity.
The strategic placement of Bamidbar before Shavuot also serves a spiritual purpose, as related by the Talmud (Megillah 31b), to relegate the klalot (curses) of the previous week's Torah reading to the past, in the spirit of "let this year end together with its curses, and let the new year begin with its blessings". This parallels the tradition of reading Parshat Ki Tavo, with the harsh admonitions and warnings, before Rosh Hashanah, effectively consigning the troubles of the past year to oblivion. So too, Bechokotai, with its similar content, should be read before Shavuot. This suggestion, as the Talmud notes, contains the striking implication that Shavuot is comparable to Rosh HaShanah as a starting point for a new year. This perspective suggests that the period before and after Shavuot can even be viewed as distinct spiritual "years." Indeed, Shavuot itself is regarded as a form of renewal, marking a redefining moment for the Jewish people through the reception of the Torah.
To extend the parallel between these two "fresh starts" for a year, it is notable that Rosh HaShanah does not come immediately after Ki Tavo. Nitzavim is inserted between them. In fact, Nitzavim and Vayelekh actually constitute one combined parashah (Sefer HaEshkol, p. 170) but they are nonetheless sometimes separated, despite their brevity. R. Nissim Gaon, (cited in Tosafot, Bava Batra, 88b) asserts that this, as indicated by the Talmudic statement noted above, is to consign the curses read in the parashah to the previous year by reading them before Rosh HaShanah. The Ri, however, disagreed that anything in Parashat Nitzavim could rise to the level of "curses" and thus explained that Nitzavim is read to allow an entire parashah to interrupt between the curses of Ki Tavo and the new year.
The Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva, R. Yitzchak Flesker (quoted in Pardes Yosef HaChadash to Nitzavim), observed that it is not the mere spacing that accomplishes the effect; rather, it is the message of the parashah: "Atem Nitzavim kulchem, you are all standing here today" - it is the theme of unity that breaks the pattern and allows a new year of blessings to replace the old one.
A comment of R. Natan Gestetner in his L'Horot Natan is an important qualifier to this idea. The verse later on in Nitzavim (29:18 ) teaches that there may be one who hears the warnings and nonetheless thinks "shalom yihyeh li". R. Gestetner suggests that this is a reference to one who is aware that shalom is a powerful force for forgiveness. Accordingly, he attempts to manipulate it, cynically, pretending to act harmoniously without any genuine effort at repentance, and assumes that that will bring him absolution. Such an insincere ploy will be useless. It is only a sincere effort at genuine harmony that will be effective towards forgiveness.
Similarly, the concept of having Bamidbar between Bechukotai and Shavuot serves as a crucial transition into a new year. It signifies a profound shift, with elements like unity and peace acting as a form of atonement, a transformative experience that allows Shavuot to itself transform a year in progress into something new.
This concept is discussed by R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin in his Pri Tzadik. He notes that the book of Bamidbar contains two counts, one at the beginning, to mark those who left Egypt, and another in Parashat Pinchas, regarding the division of the Land. The midrash (Num, Rabbah ch. 2) observes that these counts are distinguished from other counts of the Jewish people in their specificity, and will be joined by a third count in the Messianic Era, "sheep shall pass again under the hands of the One who counts them" (Jeremiah 33:13).
The first count, suggests R. Tzadok, is to convey the importance of the Written Torah to the Jews who would come to Sinai, and the second is to do the same for the Oral Torah, represented by the leadership of Joshua who "received" the Torah from Moses. The third count of the future, then, is when all that was hidden will be clarified, and the world will be filled with light and knowledge (Is. 11:9), and the purpose of all we have gone through will be revealed. Apparently, it is awareness of all of these integrated themes that prepares us for the full experience of Shavuot.
The concept of counting is central to the "Book of Numbers", a nomenclature that is not only used in non-Jewish sources, but rather reflects the rabbinic language of Chumash HaPekudim. This presents a fascinating tension with the general prohibition against directly counting Jews, as stated in the Talmud (Yoma 20b). Counting can be perceived as dehumanizing, reducing unique individuals to mere statistics. Yet, it can also symbolize a profound connection to the totality of the Jewish people, underscoring the importance of each person being an integral part of a larger, unified entity. The delicate balance between counting and not counting is extensively debated in halakhic literature, with discussions on the permissibility of a census often contingent upon a justified purpose (tzorech).
Rabbi Betzalel Rudinsky, referencing Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky's commentary on the Torah, highlights how the establishment of each shevet (tribe) with its own distinct degel (banner) emphasized their unique individuality. However, this individuality only finds true expression within a unifying context, such as the Mishkan (Tabernacle), which allows distinct identities to contribute to a larger, shared mission. An analogy can be made to different body parts, each with unique functions but only able to operate as part of the whole body. Counting the tribes in Bamidbar serves to acknowledge their individuality as components of a larger unit, without diminishing their identity to mere numbers.
The Torah's repeated enumeration of the same numbers, despite being identical, highlights the miraculous preservation of the population, with no deaths occurring during the counting period as Nachmanides notes. This miracle emphasizes God's divine plan for the shvatim, meticulously

preserving their composition and identity until they could fully establish their distinct functions (see K'Matar Likchi). This reflects the broader theme of counting: maintaining a delicate balance between recognizing individuality and preserving unity, a crucial aspect both philosophically and halachically. Individual differences and unique circumstances are not merely incidental; they are essential for personal growth and the accomplishment of one's unique purpose, just as each shevet required its distinct context to fulfill its role. The challenges and constraints inherent in one's situation are Divinely orchestrated to help maximize individual potential and fulfill a unique task. Adapting to these circumstances and embracing challenges are therefore critical for growth and development.

The desert (midbar) is a potent image in the opening of Sefer Bamidbar, intrinsically linked to the giving of the Torah (and giving the parashah and the sefer their commonly used Hebrew name). Building on the imagery, the Midrash describes the Torah as being free, but also requires one to make themselves "ownerless" (hefker)—to empty themselves—in order to be fully taken over by it. The Sefat Emet and R. C. Y. Goldvicht draw a crucial distinction between simply learning the Torah, which is freely accessible, and acquiring (koneh) the Torah, which demands immense effort and profound commitment. Acquiring the Torah is not about relinquishing oneself, but rather about developing and maximizing one's unique attributes and potential through humility and unwavering devotion.

Mount Sinai, from which the Torah was given, is notably a humble mountain. R. Yitzchak Blazer, in his introduction to his Responsa, Pri Yitzchak, points to a seeming contradiction: the Torah is described as both a gift (mi'midbar matanah) and a purchase (lekach tov). This paradox highlights that the acquisition of Torah necessitates a joint effort between the Divine (HaKadosh Baruch Hu) and human endeavor. Humility is crucial for correct interpretation and effective internalization of the Torah. While everything in life requires a combination of Divine assistance (siyata diShmaya) and human effort, this is particularly true for Torah study. Despite this emphasis on personal striving, siyata diShmaya remains undeniably necessary, as reflected in our daily prayers.

Shavuot is a time to rekindle the excitement of the Torah and reignite our passion for learning, reliving the experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai and its associated emotions. The Magen Avraham emphasizes the importance of fulfilling the mitzvah of remembering Ma'amad Har Sinai, and that Shavuot plays a crucial role in reinforcing this excitement and awareness in our continuous learning.

The Talmud debates whether a Festival should be devoted purely to spirituality or a combination of spirituality and personal needs. However, there is universal agreement that Shavuot specifically demands an element of celebration. The custom of staying up all night on Shavuot encapsulates this unique blend of learning and excitement, creating an experiential event that incorporates both intellectual exertion (yegiah) and the joyous celebration that comes through emotional devotion.

The overarching themes of Sefer Bamidbar and Parshat Bamidbar, including the imagery of the desert and the concept of counting, are intricately connected to Shavuot and the profound importance of recognizing individuality within a national mission. Counting, much like Sefirat HaOmer, transcends mere numbers. It is about perceiving each individual as part of a larger context and a cohesive whole, and recognizing the crucial significance of each person's unique contribution.

The Sefat Emet offered an interpretation of Hillel's statement in the Mishnah, ""If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?" This teaching, as he understood it, emphasizes the importance of both individuality and personal responsibility, affirming that no one else can develop our unique personality or make the distinct contributions that we can.

We are called to recognize our individuality and personal responsibility while simultaneously understanding our indispensable role within the larger community. The mishnah emphasizes the critical balance between self-awareness and personal growth, and the acknowledgment of our unique contributions to the community. The question becomes, "If I was doing that just for myself, for my own purposes, then what kind of an accomplishment is that?" and powerfully highlights the imperative to consider the greater good. This delicate balance between individuality and communal responsibility, alongside the interplay between recognizing the Torah as a Divine gift and our own arduous labor to make it meaningful, forms a central theme. An acute awareness of these balances is vital to honoring them and ultimately reaching our full potential, both as individuals and as a community, bringing us to accept the Torah and its mission, fully prepared.



---

From: **Josh Rapps** <jr@sco.COM> mj ravtorah@shamash.org
Date: 1998

Shiur **HaRav Soloveichik ZTL on Mattan Torah** (Shiur date: 6/6/1978)

Parshas Shemos (Chapter 24) relates how HaShem told Moshe to climb the mountain alone and how Moshe told the people the words and laws of HaShem and how all the people answered (Vayaan Kol Haam Kol Echad) with one voice "All the things that HaShem has spoken we will do". The Torah relates that Moshe brought sacrifices on behalf of the people and he sprinkled them with the blood of the sacrifices after telling the people Sefer Habris and the people answered Naaseh Vnishma.

[The Rav noted that on Rosh Hashonah, the blessing of Malchios concludes with M'loch Al Kol Haolam Kulo Bchvodecha. The word Kulo seems superfluous. The Taz says that it adds emphasis to underscore that we do not mean Rubo K'kulo (majority == totality), rather we insist that ALL of creation recognize HaShem, we do not "round up". Similarly, ALL the people answered in unison that they will do all that HaShem commands them.]

The Gemara (Krisus 9a), (echoed by the Rambam) that the laws of conversion were learned from this chapter at the end of Mishpatim. Moshe converted the Jewish People at Sinai, similar to a gentile converting nowadays. Why did they require conversion, after all Avraham Avinu was a convert? Wherever they became obligated with new Mitzvos, they had to renew the Kedushas Yisrael and required a new conversion. At Mount Sinai, where they received all of Torah, they had to undergo conversion. The Ramban says that there was also a conversion in Egypt, where they received the obligation of Pesach. The mothers also underwent conversion, Tevila, prior to the Korban Pesach while the men underwent circumcision and immersion. Since all of Torah was given at Sinai, that marked the final conversion for the Jewish People.

We read the story of Ruth on Shavuos, because it is one of the 2 places in Tanach where the story of conversion is mentioned. Mishpatim mentions Hartzaas Damim, the requirement to bring a sacrifice and to undergo the circumcision and immersion aspects of conversion. Ruth mentions Kabbalas Mitzvos and Onshim. Ruth is the Megila of conversion, and Mattan Torah was the mass conversion of the Jewish nation, hence it is appropriate to read these on Shavuos.

Did the conversion take effect before or after Mattan Torah? There is no mention of the official process of conversion undergone by Bnay Yisrael in Parshas Yisro. Rashi (24:1) says that the events of the end of Mishpatim were given on the fourth of Sivan before Mattan Torah. When the Jews approached Sinai on the sixth they already were converted. According to the Ramban (24:1) the events at the end of Parshas Mishpatim took place on the seventh of Sivan. Immediately after the Asseres Hadibros, HaShem gave Moshe the laws of Parshas Mishpatim and then the Jews went through the conversion process.

One question on the Ramban: Mattan Torah was given to a group that were not yet Jews, since they had not yet gone through the conversion process. Also, an uncircumcised person may not enter the Mikdash, so how could these people have stood around Sinai, which had a law of Mikdash, prior to their conversion?

According to the Rav, Rashi and the Ramban agree when they were Niskadesh Bkdushas Yisrael. Kdushas Yisrael took effect through Giluy Shechina. When HaShem revealed Himself at Maamad Har Sinai and said Anochi, Bnay Yisrael were sanctified with Kdushas Yisrael. As seen from the blessing of Shofros on Rosh Hashonah, there were 2 purposes to Mattan Torah: 1) Giluy Shechina which was Mkadesh the people and 2) to teach them Torah. After all, if not for these 2 purposes to Maamad Har Sinai, why have the people encircle the mountain? HaShem could have simply given the Torah to Moshe and he would have relayed it to Bnay Yisrael. They had to be there in order to partake of the Giluy Shechina and the Kedushas Yisrael that it imparted to them. This is why Moshe said that on the third day HaShem will descend upon the mountain before the eyes of the entire nation, to allow the Giluy Shechina to impart the Kedushas Yisrael. In Devarim (4:9), Moshe tells the people to be careful not to forget what they saw with their eyes at Sinai, or to remove from their hearts what they learned at Sinai. Moshe is reminding them of the dual aspects of Maamad Har Sinai: the Giluy Shechina that imparted Kedushas Yisrael and the Torah that HaShem taught them.

The blessing of Ahava Rabbah recited daily stresses that HaShem taught us Torah at Har Sinai. Ahava Rabbah does not stress the Giluy Shechina. On Rosh Hashona we stress the Giluy Shechina in the blessing of Shofros, to underscore the divine revelation that happened at Sinai and that it will happen again in the days of the Messiah. We emphasize that Shofros is the Bracha of Giluy Shechina that was Mkadesh the people at Sinai when HaShem said the Asseres Hadibros. Therefore according to both Rashi and the Ramban the people were converts at the time of the Asseres Hadibros through the Giluy Shechina.

According to Rashi the process of conversion began on the fourth of Sivan, when they underwent the Milah (circumcision), Tevila (immersion) and Hartzaas Damim (sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice) noted at the end of Parshas Mishpatim. On the sixth of Sivan, when HaShem announced the first commandment, they underwent Kabbalas Hamitzvos for ALL Mitzvos HaShem. This was Mkadesh the people. As Rashi and Rabeinu Saadiah Gaon say, the Asseres Hadibros are the principles from which all 613 Mitzvos are derived At that time the Kabbalas Kol Hamitzvos applied to all Yisrael. According to Rashi, the conversion started on the fourth of Sivan, but the Chalos Hageirus, the fulfillment of the conversion, occurred with the Giluy Shechina at Mattan Torah on the sixth, when they received additional Mitzvos.

However according to the Ramban, if the Jews were sanctified as converts with the Giluy Shechina on the sixth of Sivan, why did Moshe have to put the people through the conversion process of the seventh of Sivan that is described at the end of Parshas Mishpatim?

The Rav answered that circumcision and immersion and offering the Korban are not only Meakev in the Geirus, rather there is a mitzva on the Ger to do all these things. There is a Machlokes in Yevamos if a Ger that does one (Tevila or Mila) but not the other qualifies as a Ger. The Ger that has circumcision is not complete until he undergoes immersion. The fulfillment of all the ceremonies of Geirus is both a Meakev (without which the process is incomplete) and a Kiyum (a fulfillment of the Mitzva of Geirus) that the Ger is now obligated to perform. Mattan Torah imbued the people with Kedushas Yisrael. But there was still an obligation to fulfill all the aspects of Geirus and to perform the rest of the process of Milah and Tevila and Korban. This happened on the seventh of Sivan. According to Rashi and the Ramban, Kedushas Yisrael occurred at Maamad Has Sinai, it is impossible to believe that they were Jews before Sinai. According to Rashi, Maamad Har Sinai completed the Geirus process that began on the fourth of Sivan with Milah, Tevila and Hartzaas Damim (Korban). According to the Ramban, Moshe completed the Kiyum Geirus on the seventh.

A convert must achieve two attributes of conversion. 1) To be sanctified with Kedushas Yisrael. 2) A ger must enter the covenant of HaShem, Krisas Bris. In Parshas Bchukosai we mention the Bris HaShem at Har Sinai, which took place on the seventh of Sivan (according to the Ramban). The Ger must fulfill the obligations that the Jews took at Sinai. He must experience the Kdushas Yisrael attained at Sinai on the sixth of Sivan. He must also enter Krisas Bris through Tevila, Milah and Hartzaas Damim, just like the Jews did on the seventh of Sivan (according to the Ramban). The Braysa says that the Jews entered the Bris HaShem through Milah, Tevila and Korban. We add that the same applies for all future genres so that nowadays we require that the Ger first undergo the Milah and Tevila (which both facilitate Geirus and fulfill the Mitzvas Hager) and then accept upon himself the obligations of Mitzvos (Kabbalas Ol Mitzvos) to enter the Bris HaShem. According to the Ramban, at Har Sinai the order was reversed. First they underwent Kabbalas Ol Mitzvos by obligating themselves to do (Naaseh) all that HaShem has commanded them through the 10 commandments and the laws of Parshas Mishpatim, and then they performed the acts of Geirus.



---

weekly halacha@torah.org Parshas Bamidbar Shavuos: Morning Blessings By **Rabbi Doniel Neustadt** A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

**BIRCHOS HA SHACHAR ON SHAVUOS MORNING** The widespread custom of staying awake the first night of Shavuos to study Torah presents a halachic problem what to do about four of the morning blessings, Birchos ha shachar, which cannot be recited unless one slept during the night. The other sixteen blessings may be recited as usual(1), but the following four blessings present a problem:

AL NETILAS YADAYIM The Rishonim offer two basic reasons for the Talmudic law(2) of washing our hands in the morning and then reciting the proper blessing: The Rosh tells us that washing is necessary because a person's hands move around in his sleep and will inevitably touch some unclean part of the body. The Rashba says that since each one of us becomes a biryah chadashah a "new person" each morning, we must sanctify ourselves anew in preparation to serve Hashem. This sanctification is similar to that of a kohen who washes his hands before performing the avodah in the Beis ha Mikdash. [In addition to these two reasons, there is still another reason for washing one's hands in the morning because of ruach ra'ah, the spirit of impurity that rests on one's body at night and does not leave the hands until water is poured over them three times(3). Indeed, touching various limbs or organs of the body is prohibited before hand washing, due to the danger which is brought about by the spirit of impurity(4). This third reason alone, however, is insufficient to warrant a blessing(5), since a blessing is never recited on an act which is performed in order to ward off danger(6).] Does one who remains awake all night long need to wash his hands in the morning? If we follow the Rosh's reason, then washing is not necessary, for as long as one remains awake he knows that his hands remained clean. If we follow the Rashba's reason, however, washing may be required, since in the morning one becomes a "new person," whether he slept or not(7). [In addition, it is debatable if the spirit of impurity that rests on the hands is caused by the nighttime hours regardless of whether or not one slept or if it rests upon the hands only during sleep.8] Since this issue remains unresolved, the Rama suggests a compromise: washing is indeed required, as the Rashba holds, but a blessing is not recited, in deference to the view of the Rosh. Not all the poskim agree with the Rama's compromise. In their view, the blessing should be recited(9). Since we again face a difference of opinion, it is recommended that one of the following options be exercised: Immediately after alos amud hashachar, one should relieve himself and then wash his hands, followed by Al netilas yadayim and Asher yatzar. In this case, all poskim agree that washing is required and a blessing is recited(10). This is the preferred option. One should listen with intent to be yotzei as another person, who did sleep, recites the blessing.

BIRCHOS HA TORAH The poskim debate whether one who remains awake the entire night(11) is required to recite Birchos ha Torah the next morning. Some authorities do not require it, since they hold that the previous

day's blessings are still valid. In their view, unless a major interruption such as a night's sleep occurs, yesterday's blessings remain in effect. Others hold that Birchos ha Torah must be said each morning regardless of whether or not one slept, similar to all other Birchos ha shachar which are said in the morning, whether one slept or not. According to the Mishnah Berurah(12), this issue remains unresolved and the following options are recommended: One should listen with intent to be yotzei as another person, who did sleep, recites the blessing. This should be followed by each person reciting yevorechecha and eilu devarim, so that the blessings are followed immediately by some Torah learning. While reciting the second blessing before Kerias Shema Ahavah Rabbah one should have the intention to be yotzei Birchos ha Torah as well. In this case, he needs to learn some Torah immediately after Shemoneh Esrei. There are two other options available: All poskim agree that if one slept (at least half an hour) during the day of erev Shavuos, he may recite Birchos ha Torah on Shavuos morning even though he did not sleep at all during the night(13). While reciting Birchos ha Torah on erev Shavuos, one may clearly stipulate that his blessings should be in effect only until the next morning. In this case, he may recite the blessings on Shavuos morning although he did not sleep(14). If one did not avail himself of any of these options and Birchos ha Torah were not recited, one may recite them upon awakening from his sleep on Shavuos morning (after davening).

ELOKAI NESHAMAH AND HA MA'AVIR SHEINAH Here, too, there are differences of opinion among the poskim as to whether one who remains awake throughout the night should recite these blessings. The Mishnah Berurah(15) rules that it is best to hear these blessings from another person who slept. If no such person is available, many poskim rule that these blessings may be recited even by one who did not sleep(16).

IN ACTUAL PRACTICE, WHAT SHOULD WE DO? As stated earlier, all poskim agree that the other sixteen morning blessings may be recited by one who did not sleep at all during the night. Nevertheless, it has become customary in some shuls that one who slept recites all twenty morning blessings for the benefit of all those who did not sleep. Two details must be clarified concerning this practice: Sometimes it is difficult to clearly hear every word of the blessing being recited. [Missing one word can sometimes invalidate the blessing.] If that happens, it is important to remember that sixteen of the twenty blessings may be recited by each individual whether he slept or not, as outlined above. The sixteen blessings which may be recited by each individual should not be heard from another person unless a minyan is present. This is because some poskim hold that one cannot discharge his obligation of Birchos ha shachar by hearing them from another person unless a minyan is present(17).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Rama O.C. 46:8. 2 Berachos 15a and 60b. 3 The source for the "spirit of impurity" is the Talmud (Shabbos 108b; Yoma 77b) and the Zohar, quoted by the Beis Yosef O.C. 4. 4 O.C. 4:3. 5 Mishnah Berurah 4:8. 6 Aruch ha Shulchan 4:4 based on Rambam, Hilchos Berachos 6:2. 7 The rationale for this is: 1) Lo pelug, which means that once the Sages ordained that washing the hands is necessary because one is considered a "new person", they did not differentiate between the individual who slept or one who did not (Beis Yosef quoted by Mishnah Berurah 4:28); 2) The blessing was established to reflect chiddush ha olam, which means that since the "world" as a whole is renewed each morning, it is incumbent upon the individual to sanctify himself and prepare to serve Hashem each morning; whether he, personally, was "renewed" is immaterial (Beiur Halachah quoting the Rashba). 8 Mishnah Berurah 4:28. 9 Aruch ha Shulchan 4:12 rules like this view. 10 Mishnah Berurah 4:30 and Beiur Halachah 494:1. This should be done immediately after alos amud ha shachar in order to remove the spirit of impurity; O.C. 4:14. 11 Even one who falls asleep during his learning [while leaning on a shtender or a table, etc.] does not say Birchos ha Torah upon awakening; Kaf ha Chayim 47:27. 12 47:28. Many other poskim, though, rule that Birchos ha Torah may be said even by one who did not sleep at all; see Birkei Yosef 46:12; Shulchan Aruch Harav 47:7; Aruch ha Shulchan 47:23; Kaf ha Chayim 47:26. 13 R' Akiva Eiger quoted by Mishnah Berurah 47:28. 14 Keren L'David 59 and Luach Eretz Yisrael quoting the Aderes (quoted in Piskei Teshuvos O.C. 494:6). 15 46:24. This is also the ruling of Chayei Adam 8:9 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 7:5. 16 Shulchan Aruch Harav 46:7; Kaf ha Chayim 46:49; Aruch ha Shulchan 46:13; Misgeres ha Shulchan 2:2. 17 Mishnah Berurah 6:14. In addition, see Kisvei Harav Henkin 2:7, who maintains that since many of the blessings are written in the first person, they must be recited by each individual; listening to them being recited by another person is not good enough.



---

http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/776128

Reishit Bikkurim

**A Guide to Shavuot Observance**

Prepared for the RIETS Shavuot Yarchei Kallah

Expanded and Updated Edition for Shavuot 5772

**According to the Piskei Halakha of**

**Rav Hershel Schachter, Shlit"a**

Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Erev Shabbat Eating a Meal on Erev Shabbat: 1. One should refrain from eating a large meal on Erev Shabbat in order to eat the Shabbat meal with an appetite.1

2. Magen Avraham cites the opinion of the Shelah that one should not have a meat meal on Erev Shabbat.2

Shabbat Candle Lighting:

1. The Mitzvah to light Shabbat and Yom Tov candles should ideally take place in one's home. In a hotel, this refers to one's private guest room. However, hotels prohibit lighting candles in guest rooms because this poses a fire hazard.3 Therefore, the obligation is best fulfilled by turning on an electric light in one's room, provided that it is incandescent (not neon or fluorescent, etc.), as many Poskim maintain that a Bracha can be recited on a light bulb that contains a filament.4

2. If this option is not feasible, one should light candles in a place where people will derive benefit from them, such as the dining room, especially if it will enhance the Yom Tov meal. It does not appear proper to light candles in a place where no one will benefit from the candles' light, and a Bracha may not be made in this scenario.5 Shabbat Davening:

1. Av HaRachamim is recited prior to Mussaf when Erev Shavuot coincides with Shabbat.6 This Tefilla is especially relevant during the days of Sefirat HaOmer when countless lives were lost at the hands of the crusaders.7

Seuda Shlishit:

1. Seuda Shlishit should be eaten earlier than usual when Shabbat precedes Yom Tov to ensure that the Yom Tov meal is eaten with an appetite.8 Therefore, Seuda Shlishit should ideally begin no later than half an hour prior to Mincha Ketana (approximately 4:30 PM).9

Shavuot Candle Lighting:

1. When Yom Tov begins on Motzaei Shabbat, as it does this year, Yom Tov candles must be lit after Tzeit HaKochavim (nightfall).10

2. Prior to lighting the candles (if one has not already Davened Ma'ariv and recited VaTodeainu), one should say the words, "Baruch HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L'Kodesh."11

3. There are two opinions as to whether the Bracha on Yom Tov candles should be recited before or after the candles are lit. The generally accepted practice is to recite the Bracha before lighting the candles, as is the practice on Erev Shabbat.12

4. The Bracha of Shehechiyanu: There is no requirement to recite the Bracha of Shehechiyanu in conjunction with Kiddush. However, the Talmud (Eruvin 40b) states that the significance of the Bracha is enhanced when it is recited in conjunction with Kiddush, and common practice is to act accordingly. R. Akiva Eiger (O.C. 263:5) quotes the opinion of R. Yaakov Emden that women should not recite Shehechiyanu when lighting Yom Tov candles, but should instead wait until Kiddush to satisfy the requirement to recite the Bracha.13

Yahrtzeit Candles:

1. Some Poskim question whether one is permitted to light a Yahrtzeit candle on the second day of Yom Tov in honor of Yizkor. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:1) cites Poskim on both sides of the issue and concludes that one should not light such a candle on Yom Tov. He views it as a "Ner Shel Batala," a candle whose light does not provide benefit on Yom Tov, and so may not be lit. Therefore, one should ideally light a Yahrtzeit candle on Erev Yom Tov (see footnote).14 This year, following this view entails lighting the candle prior to Shabbat.

Yaknehaz: 1. When Yom Tov falls on Motzaei Shabbat, Havdala is combined with Kiddush.15 Besamim (spices) are not included in the Havdala.16 The Bracha of "Borei Meorei HaAish" may be made upon the unfrosted17 incandescent light bulbs18 that add significant light to the dining room.19

The Shavuot Meal:

1. There is a long-standing custom to eat dairy on Shavuot.20 Mishna Berura (O.C. 494:16, Sha'ar HaTzion 15) notes that one should wait six hours before eating meat if one ate hard cheese.21 R. Soloveitchik ruled that American cheese is certainly not included in the custom.22

Staying Up All Night:

1. Many question whether a person who remains awake the entire night is obligated to wash his or her hands in the morning. The common practice is to wash one's hands without a Bracha. However, if one uses the bathroom prior to washing, one may recite the Bracha.23

2. A similar question exists regarding the Birchot HaTorah. Common practice is to fulfill the obligation by answering Amen to the Brachot of one who did sleep. One should not recite Amen after the phrase "Laasok B'Divrei Torah" but after the entire paragraph of "Vihaarev Na" is completed.24

3. It is likewise unclear whether one who remains awake all night may recite the Brachot of Elokai Nishama and HaMa'avir Sheina Me'einai. Here, as well, common practice is to find someone who did sleep the previous night and answer Amen to that individual's Brachot.25 Amen following HaMa'avir Sheina should not be said until after the Bracha that concludes the Yehi Ratzon prayer.

4. Those who Daven Vatikin should not recite a Bracha on the Tallit before the Halachic time known as Mi She'yakir. R. Moshe Feinstein states that this time is approximately 35-40 minutes before sunrise.26 Because of this concern, the B'nei Yissoschar recommends waiting to don the Tallit until the completion of Korbanot (before Baruch She'amar) in order to ensure that one does not don his Tallit or make the Bracha too early. Shavuot Davening:

1. Those who did not stay up all night should be careful to Daven at a Minyan that recites Keriat Shema at the proper time. R. Soloveitchik and many other Poskim maintain that it is better to Daven without a Minyan before Sof Zman Keriat Shema (the end of the period during which one may recite Keriat Shema) rather than Daven with a Minyan after this time has elapsed. This option is preferred because it allows the recitation of Keriat Shema together with the Birchot Keriat Shema.27

2. Many have the custom to follow the Ba'al HaTanya's practice to recite Ushnei Seeirim Lichaper (as opposed to "Visair Lichaper") in the Mussaf Amida, in order to make mention of the Korban Chatas (sin offering) that was offered with the Shtei Halechem (ritual loaves of bread) of Shavuot.28

3. Megillat Rut is read on the second day of Yom Tov. The custom of Yeshiva is read the Megilla from a Klaf (parchment). Poskim differ as to whether the Brachot Al Mikra Megilla and Shehechiyanu are recited.29

The Second Day of Yom Tov: 1. One is not permitted to prepare for the second day of Yom Tov on the first day of Yom Tov.30 As such, in a hotel setting, it is proper to wait until nightfall (Tzait HaKochavim) to begin Davening on the second night of Yom Tov. This allows the caterer sufficient time to prepare the Yom Tov meal following the conclusion of the first day.31

2. The Rabbinic restriction against taking medication does not apply on the second day of Yom Tov.32

General Shabbat and Yom Tov Halakhot

Elevator Use on Shabbat and Yom Tov: 1. A non-Jewish elevator operator will be present throughout the Yarchei Kallah. The elevator will stop at every floor, so there is no need for guests to give instructions to the operator. Use of the elevator should be limited to guests who are unable to use the stairs.33

Carrying: 1. Shabbat: One may only carry inside the hotel and within the Eruv. 2. Yom Tov: It is permitted to carry beyond the Eruv on Yom Tov. However, one may only carry outside the Eruv when necessary. Rishonim and subsequent Poskim debate what defines a sufficient necessity to permit carrying outside of an Eruv.34 Carrying a Tallit or Machzor for use in Shul is a permissible need, even if this could have been done prior to Yom Tov.35

Showering on Yom Tov:

1. One may not take a shower or bathe in warm or hot water on Yom Tov. However, one may adjust the temperature such that the water is not uncomfortably cold.36 A child who is generally bathed daily in warm water may be bathed in warm water on Yom Tov, as well.37 One should not use a towel to dry his or her hair. Rather, hair should be allowed to air-dry.38

Lighting a Fire on Yom Tov:

1. Though one is permitted to cook on Yom Tov, it is prohibited to light a new fire.39 Taz (O.C. 502:1) maintains that this prohibition is biblical, but the accepted opinion is that lighting a new fire only constitutes a rabbinic prohibition.40 As such, one is allowed to ask a non-Jew to turn on or off a light on Yom Tov in certain circumstances.41

2. Even those who assume that smoking is generally permitted42 maintain that one is not permitted to smoke on Yom Tov.43

Muktza on Yom Tov:

1. The generally accepted Ashkenazi practice is to treat one's leftover chicken bones as Muktza on Yom Tov,44 because they are viewed as Nolad (a newly created item from the perspective of Halakha45). This is true despite the fact that the bones may still be fit for animal consumption. 2. Nolad also applies to peels, pits, and shells that remain after a fruit or nut is eaten on Yom Tov.46

Footnotes

1 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 249:2) states this explicitly in regard to Erev Shabbat. Rema (529:1) rules that this Halakha applies to Erev Yom Tov, as well, for there is also an obligation to honor Yom Tov (see below). See Mishna Berura (249:10) for an additional reason to prohibit large meals.

2 O.C. 249:6

3 R. Schachter cautions that one who lights a candle in a guest room without permission violates the prohibition of theft, as hotel administration does not authorize guests to use rooms in this manner. See R. Asher Weiss, Kovetz Darkei Hora'ah (4:94).

4 It is important to note that this Mitzva can be fulfilled by turning on a closet or bathroom light (Bracha must be recited outside of the bathroom).

For a summary of Poskim who discuss whether one fulfills the Mitzva by lighting electric lights, see Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (chap. 43, note 22).

5 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 263:9).

6 This is based on the simple understanding of Rema (O.C. 284:7) and Mishna Berura (ibid.). Though some have the custom to omit Av Harachamim on this Shabbat, the custom recorded here is also found in Luach Ezrat Torah and Luach Eretz Yisrael.

7 Nimukei Orach Chaim (284:3) points to the fact that many Jews were murdered between Rosh Chodesh Sivan and Shavuot and on Erev Shavuot in particular.

8 See above, note 1.

9 Biur Halakha (529, s.v. MiMincha). Time is for Ryebrook, NY (5772). If one is unable to eat Seuda Shlishit earlier, one should refrain from eating more than will allow him to eat the Yom Tov meal with an appetite, see Mishna Berura (529:8 with Sha'ar HaTziun).

10 When Yom Tov does not begin on Motzaei Shabbat, Poskim disagree whether one should light candles before Yom Tov begins or only after the onset of the Chag. Many Poskim, including R. Soloveitchik, maintain that one should light Yom Tov candles before the start of Yom Tov, just as Shabbat candles are lit prior to Shabbat (Divrei HaRav pg. 173). Be'er Hetiv (503:4) cites Poskim who offer additional justification of this practice. See also Shut Pri Yitzchak (1:6) and Drisha (introduction to Yoreh Deah). This was also the custom in the home of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichot Shlomo Pesach, pg. 240). R. Auerbach also notes that there is no reason to be concerned that lighting before Yom Tov begins is a violation of the requirement to pass seven complete weeks before Shavuot begins (ibid., pg. 373).

11 Mateh Efraim (599:10) cited in Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (Note to 44:3).

12 Magen Avraham (O.C. 263:12) quotes the Drisha's son who records that his mother's practice was to recite the Bracha before lighting the candles. While Magen Avraham argues that one should recite the Bracha after lighting, the accepted practice is not in accordance with his opinion. See Mishnah Berura (263:27).

13 R. Yaakov Emden's position is recorded in his Shut Sheilat Ya'avetz (1:107) and has been accepted by many Poskim. Mishna Berura (263:23) rules that one should not protest against those whose custom is to recite Shehechiyanu at the time of candle lighting. Achronim present justifications for this practice; see Aruch HaShulchan (263:12) and Moadim U'Zmanim (7:117).

14 Many other Poskim accept the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch's ruling; see also Da'at Torah (O.C. 515:5). Shut Ketav Sofer (O.C. 65) permits one to light a Yahrzeit candle on Yom Tov, though he believes that it should be lit inside the Shul. In his discussion of the issue, Biur Halakha (514 s.v. Ner) writes that if one neglected to light a Yahrzeit candle on Erev Yom Tov, it is best to light it in Shul or at least in the place where one eats in order to benefit from the additional light. Some later Poskim have questioned whether Biur Halakha's logic still applies, as it is unlikely that a candle will significantly increase the light in the room in a contemporary setting. Biur Halakha concludes that one may perhaps be lenient in a pressing situation to light the candle because the aforementioned Ketav Sofer argues that a Yahrzeit candle is considered a permissible Ner Shel Mitzvah, and not a Ner Shel Batala, as it provides honor to one's parents. It should be noted that most Poskim assume that it is only a custom to light a Yahrtzeit candle and not a Halachic requirement; see Shut Yechave Da'at (5:60). See also Mishna Berura (261:16) quoting Maharshal who permits one to instruct a non-Jew to light a Yahrtzeit candle during Bein Hashmashot of Erev Shabbat, due to the unique importance that many associate with this custom.

15 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 473:1).

16 Mishna Berura (O.C. 491:3) quotes an explanation given by the Rishonim: the festive Yom Tov meal takes the place of spices in reinvigorating the spirit that remains anguished after losing the Neshama Yeteira when Shabbat concludes.

17 R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Meorai HaAish, 5:1). This is based upon the requirement to see the actual flame of the Havdala candle, as codified in Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 298:15).

18 Many Poskim view the filament of an incandescent light bulb as actual fire, and so Borei Meorei HaAish may be said. For example, see Nefesh HaRav (pg. 196) where R. Schachter records that R. Soloveitchik witnessed R. Chaim Ozer Grodzenski recite the Bracha on an incandescent light bulb.

19 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 298:4) rules that one must benefit from the light source in order to recite the Bracha of Borei Meorei HaAish. For this reason, R. Schachter notes that it is improper to recite Havdala on any Motzaei Shabbat in a room that is already well-lit due to electric lights. This is the source of the common practice to extinguish all lights other than the Havdala candle in order to recite the Bracha of Borei Meorei HaAish. Indeed, this was the practice of Chofetz Chaim, as reported by R. Elchanan Wasserman (Ohr Elchanan 1:286).

20 This custom is recorded by Rema (O.C. 494:2). Various reasons are offered for this custom; see Rema and Mishna Berura (ibid.).

21 The custom to wait after eating hard cheese is recorded by Rema (Y.D. 89:2). For this purpose, hard cheese includes types that that are aged and somewhat sharp. While Shach (89:17) quotes the Maharshal who forcefully rejects this stringency, most Poskim do not accept his opinion; see, for example, Biur HaGra (89:11). Shach (89:15), Taz (89:4), Yad Yehuda (89:30) and other Poskim discuss how to define "hard cheese" for purposes of this Halakha.

22 As reported by R. Schachter in Mesorah Journal (vol. 20, pg. 92). For an updated list of contemporary cheeses that may pose a problem, see May 2012 edition of Daf HaKashrus, published by the Orthodox Union Kashrus Division (http://www.oukosher.org/index.php/learn/daf_ha-kashrus).

23 Rema (O.C. 4:13) requires one to wash without a Bracha. Mishna Berura (4:30) notes that later Poskim debate whether to accept Rema's ruling or to wash with a Bracha. However, Poskim agree that one can recite a Bracha in this scenario if he or she uses the bathroom first. This appears to be common practice.

24 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 47:12) and Mishna Berura (ibid.). Mishna Berura also cites the ruling of R. Akiva Eiger that one who slept in bed the previous day (prior to staying up the entire night) may recite Birchot HaTorah in the morning according to all opinions. Some Poskim question whether one should accept R. Akiva Eiger's ruling, and it is therefore better to hear the Brachot from one who slept and is certainly obligated; see Shut Tshuvot V'Hanhagot (3:149, citing the Brisker Rav).

25 Sha'arei Tshuva (O.C. 46:7) and Mishna Berura (O.C. 46:24).

26 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 18:3) and Shut Igrot Moshe (O.C. 4:6). Sunrise time is for Ryebrook, NY (5772). Shemona Esrei is scheduled to begin at sunrise, as per Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 89:1).

27 Nefesh HaRav (pg. 114). For more on this subject, see Shut Pri Yitzchak (1:1) and Shut Binyan Olam (O.C. 4).

28 See Siddur Ba'al HaTanya where this practice is recorded. For an alternative perspective, see Shut Igrot Moshe (Y.D. 3:129:7).

29 See Rema (490:9), Levush (490:5), Ma'aseh Rav of the Vilna Gaon (175), Mishna Berura (490:19) and Hilchot Chag B'Chag (Shavuot chap. 8, note 79).

30 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 503:1).

31 Many wait to Daven Ma'ariv until nightfall on the first night in order to ensure that seven complete weeks elapse between Pesach and Shavuot; see Magen Avraham (O.C. 494:1) and Taz (ibid). Pri Migadim (O.C. 494:1) notes that this concern does not apply on the second night. However, it is still proper to wait on the second night to allow the caterer enough time to prepare the meal. The custom of German Jewish communities is to always Daven Maariv after nightfall following the first day of Yom Tov. By doing so, those making preparations at home will not rush to do Melachot before nightfall (Maharil, Minhagim: Seder Tefillot of Pesach, 6).

32 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 496:2) with Mishna Berura (ibid.). As far as taking medication on the first day of Yom Tov, see Magen Avraham (O.C. 532:2), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:13) and Shut Tzitz Eliezer (8:15).

33 Use of electronic systems that do not heat a filament during use, such as an elevator, generally constitute a rabbinic prohibition of Makeh B'Patish; see Mesorah Journal (vol. 20, pg. 61). Therefore, in cases of great need, one may instruct a non-Jew to operate an elevator on his behalf. Amira L'Akum, instructing a non-Jew to perform a Shabbat or Yom Tov Melacha, is also a rabbinic prohibition. This constitutes a Shvus D'Shvus, a confluence of two rabbinic prohibitions, which is permissible in special situations; see Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 307:5) and Mishna Berura (307:20). According to Rashi (Avoda Zara 15a, s.v. Keivan) the prohibition of Amira L'Akum is predicated upon the verse, "V'Daber Davar" (Yeshaya 58), which defines permissible speech on Shabbat. Therefore, even when a great need exists, it is best to arrange for the operator to stop the elevator at every floor, rather than instructing him verbally when entering the elevator.

34 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 518:1) and Biur Halacha (ibid., s.v. Mitoch). 35 See Shulchan Aruch and Rema (O.C. 495:1, 504:2) and Magen Avraham (O.C. 498:3). Ra'avad (cited in Shita Mikubetzet, Ketuvot 7a) is stringent when an item could have been carried before Yom Tov, but this opinion is not cited in Shulchan Aruch.

36 Mishna Berura (326:7, 511:18, 19 and Sha'ar HaTziun). Even lukewarm water is included in this prohibition; see Beit Meir (Y.D. 197:3), Shut Noda B'Yehuda (O.C. Tinyana 25) and Tehilla L'Dovid (326:3). The permissible temperature described is below lukewarm.

37 Mishna Berura (511:18)

38 Mishna Berura (326:25)

39 Gemara Beitza (33a-33b), Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 4:1) and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 502:1).

40 See Biur Halakha (502:1 s.v. Ain), Pri Chadash (O.C. 502:1) and Meorei Aish (chap. 1) at length.

41 See above, note 33. One should consult with a Halachic authority if such a need arises.

42 Many Poskim maintain that it is always prohibited to smoke; see for example, Shut Tzitz Eliezer (15:39) and Shut Rivivot Ephraim (8:586). See also http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/Prohibition_Smoking.pdf.

43 The permission of fire use on Yom Tov is limited to those purposes considered Shaveh L'chol Nefesh (use generally enjoyed by all people). For that reason, the Talmud (Beitza 22b) prohibits the burning of incense on Yom Tov. P'nei Yehoshua (Shabbat 39b) and Biur Halakha (511:4) permit one to smoke on Yom Tov, arguing that smoking is considered Shaveh L'chol Nefesh, because the conventional thinking in earlier generations was that smoking was beneficial to one's health. Today, we are aware of the dangers of smoking. Smoking cannot be considered an act of enjoyment but of self-injury; see Shut Minchat Shlomo (2:58:6). Additionally, even contemporaries of the P'nei Yehoshua disagreed with arguments advanced by the P'nei Yehoshua; see Chayei Adam (95:13).

44 Mishna Berura (495:17). It is permitted to move the bones if their presence on the table is repulsive (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 518:5) or if the table will be used later on Yom Tov. When possible, they should be moved without direct contac; see Rema (O.C. 509:7) and Biur Halakha (638:2 s.v. U'Byom Tov). In a hotel setting, it is best to allow the non-Jewish waiters to handle such items, as this is permitted as a Shvus D'Shvus in a situation of Ochel Nefesh (see above, note 33).

45 When flesh is attached to the bones, they are defined by Halakha as human food. When the flesh is removed, the bones are defined as animal food. An item that undergoes such a change in Halachic status is known as Nolad and is considered Muktzah on Yom Tov. Mishna Berura (501:30) notes that the bones may still be moved even if just a little flesh remains.

46 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 501:7). Some pits and shells (ie. peaches, pistachios, etc.) may not even be considered animal food.

---

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary • The Benjamin and Rose Berger CJF Torah To-Go Series • Shavuot 5775

**Matan Torah: Singular Event, Two Narratives**

**Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger**

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS • Morah D'asra, Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ

Parshas Hageirus / The Conversion Narrative Tucked away after the lengthy legal discourses of Parshas Mishpatim and prior to the launching of the even lengthier detailed description of the Mishkan requirements, Hashem recorded an understated eleven-verse narrative. Woven around the story of the writing and reading of the first sefer Torah, this portion describes Moshe building twelve pillars, one for each tribe, and sprinkling the Jews with blood of their sacrifices. The events climax with a penetrating and puzzling vision that reassures us that Hashem was watching over us even as we were suffering terribly, even during His apparent hiddenness from us.

4 Moshe wrote all of the words of Hashem, and he woke in the morning and built an altar under the mountain and twelve pillars corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 And he sent the youth of the people of Israel and they brought burnt offerings and offered peace offerings to Hashem using bulls. 6 Moshe took half of the blood and placed it in basins, and the other half, he sprinkled on the altar. 7 He took the Book of the Covenant and he read it to the nation and they said "Everything that Hashem said, we will do and we will follow." 8 Moshe took the blood and sprinkled it on the nation and said "Behold this is the blood of the covenant that Hashem created with you on these matters." 9 Moshe went up with Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel. 10 They saw the God of Israel and under His feet was like a work of paved sapphire and the very essence of Heaven in its purity. Shemot 24

Though this story is understudied as a biblical narrative, the rabbis of later years teased out from these verses all the necessary elements of conversion. That means to say that they saw here a description of the "conversion" of the Sinai generation. Indeed later scholars would entertain whether the laws of conversion were consistently applied to that generation.

When this process took place is debated by Rashi and Ramban. Whereas Ramban understands that the text follows in chronological order and that this covenant took place on the day after Matan Torah, Rashi sees it as a flashback to the preparatory days leading up to revelation. This is part of Rashi and Ramban's deliberations on the interpretation and application of the Talmudic principle ain mukdam ume'uchar baTorah, passages in the Torah are not necessarily written in chronological order.

Simply put, the rabbis of the Talmud stated that chronology need not be the driving organizer of the Torah narratives. While Rashi applies this principle broadly throughout Torah, the Ramban understands that it refers to a specific parsha in Bamidbar where the recorded dating clearly indicates that the chronological order of the texts was ignored. Beyond that episode, argues Ramban, almost all the narratives of the Torah text follow in their natural sequence.

Thus Ramban explains that this parsha occurred just after the content of the entire Parshas Mishpatim was taught. It precedes Moshe's return to the top of Sinai for the next forty days but it represents a more informed covenant than the one that took place the day before:

Behold, Moshe wrote in the Book on that day all that he was commanded, statutes, laws and commandments, and he awoke the next morning to create a covenant on all of it. He built an altar and offered sacrifices and placed half the blood on the altar of Hashem and half in basins. He took the Book that he wrote the day before and read it to them and they accepted to enter the covenant with him. They said: everything that Hashem said, we will do and we will follow you, whatever you command us from Hashem. He then sprinkled the other half of the blood upon them because this covenant required two equal parts. After he completed his actions, he was required to fulfill the word of Hashem who told him to go up with Aharon etc. This is what is stated "Moshe went up with Aharon, Nadav, Avihu etc." He also performed what was commanded, "And he approached Hashem himself," and this is reflected in the verse, "Moshe went into the cloud etc." Behold, this covenant took place the day after the giving of the Torah and that is when Moshe went up the mountain and stayed there for forty days. Ramban, Shemot 24:1

Here, Ramban is arguing with his much more succinct predecessor, Rashi, who says: This portion took place before the giving of the Ten Commandments. On the fourth of Sivan, he was told to go up [the mountain]. Rashi, Shemot 24:1

Rashi's View: Two Narratives

Accordingly, Ramban views that our commitment to the life that Hashem wants us to lead coalesced over a multi-step process. That process included the teachings of Mara, the initial verbal commitments to becoming a "mamleches kohanim" (a nation of priests), the Sinai revelation per se, and finally, completing a conversion process complete with sacrifices and accepting the "stone handiwork" of Hashem.

Yet Rashi's view begs interpretation. In Rashi's view, the Torah divided the story of Matan Torah into two storylines. How intriguing it is to have two parshiyos focus separately on the selfsame episode, each one choosing details so different from each other that they convey vastly different impressions and overtones.

The Matan Torah of Parshas Yisro welcomes the Shechinah with supernatural thunder and lightning and shofar sounds that increase in volume. The trembling mountain marks Hashem's presence as it sends up furnace like smoke. The people are prepared through abstinence and are severely cautioned to keep their distance. They are overwhelmed and left shaking, somewhat traumatized and ready to run:

15 He said to the nation: Be prepared for the next three days, don't approach a woman. 16 It was on the third day in the morning and there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain; the sound of a shofar was very strong and the nation in the camp trembled. 17 Moshe took the nation out of the camp towards Hashem and they stood at the base of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was full of smoke because Hashem descended upon it and the smoke rose like smoke from a furnace and the mountain trembled greatly. 19 The sound of the shofar was growing stronger. Moshe would speak and Hashem would respond with a voice. 20 Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai to the peak of the mountain and Hashem called Moshe to the peak of the mountain and Moshe ascended. Shemot 19

Not so the Matan Torah of Parshas Mishpatim. Here, the people stand — presumably quietly — to be crowned by the light sprinkling of blood that marks the new covenant. They have been engaged through Moshe's Torah instruction and have responded with absolute commitment. They have their korbonos sprinkled on them. The depiction of a fiery quaking mountain lifted off its core surrounded by bolts of light, sound, and visible thunder is absent.

Why two different stories instead of one complete account? Why are so many details suppressed, seemingly in an effort to paint such distinct pictures?

Perhaps the event that would model the experience of Torah study for all time has to include both the impulsive excitement associated with the high drama that Sinai was, as well as the very measured care and concern that characterizes sacrificial service. There are times that our study must be charged by an exciting program and fuelled with a flamboyant teacher and charismatic colleagues. However, as any matter worthy of our energies, it will more often require the careful and even painstaking efforts to succesfully pave our path in the labyrinth of Torah. For most of us, we will

have to slowly amass knowledge even as we attempt to deepen our understanding of all of Hashem's wisdom.

Certainly, we, who have come to appreciate the results of laborious and thorough research in so many areas of life, can well understand the humbling message of Parshas Mishpatim. It is the unassuming ongoing and scheduled Torah study that connects students and teachers, and fathers and sons. Quietly imbibing wisdom, slowly and steadily, molds hearts, souls and minds and plants anchors to our commitment.

Thus, we return to the story of Sinai after learning in great detail about courts and torts, and the concern for the poor and disadvantaged and having been exposed to the breathtaking scope of Torah.

The experience of study modeled in Parshas Mishpatim, the one closer to our ongoing efforts to be kove'a itim la'Torah (set aside time for Torah study) does not end with a shocked people on the run, rather it culminates with a people riveted on their vision of Hashem as a consuming fire that is visible to all.

---

from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
date: May 29, 2025, 3:43 AM
subject**: Rav Kook** on Bamidbar: Flags of Love in the Desert

Bamidbar: Flags of Love in the Desert

Throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites were commanded to camp around their tribal banners:

"The Israelites shall encamp, each by his own banner, according to the insignias of their paternal houses." (Numbers 2:2)

What is the meaning behind these banners?

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3) says that the inspiration for the banners came from Mount Sinai. Twenty-two thousand chariots of angels, each one decked out with flags, attended the Revelation of the Torah. The Israelites immediately desired to have flags just like the angels, and God agreed.

This request for flags, the Midrash teaches, is alluded to in Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs 2:4): "He brought me to the wine-house, and His banner over me is love."

From the Midrash we understand that banners relate to some inherent characteristic of angels, though not of people. But we are left with many questions. Why do angels bear flags? Why is Sinai likened to a "wine-house"? And what is the connection between banners and love?

The Specialized Service of Angels

The Zohar teaches that the banners of the four encampments — positioned to the north, south, east, and west — correspond to the four "faces" of the supernal Merkavah (Chariot) described in Ezekiel's vision. Since these four "faces" represent fundamental divine attributes, each encampment related to a particular divine quality.

Before we can explain the meaning of the flags and their connection to angels, we must first understand what an angel is. In Hebrew, mal'ach literally means "messenger." An angel is essentially a divine messenger, created to fulfill a specific mission. An angel cannot perform a task, important though it may be, other than the specific mission for which it was designated.

Now we can better understand the function of the angels' flags. A banner proclaims a distinctive function or trait. Each angel, limited to a specific area of divine service, carries its own distinguishing flag. These flags may be compared to military uniforms, where the dress and insignia indicate a soldier's unit and assignment.

Human beings, on the other hand, are not limited to serving God in one particular manner. Our divine image encompasses all spiritual spheres (see Nefesh Hachaim 1:10). For us, a banner is too restricting; it does not reflect our true spiritual essence.

Nonetheless, the Jewish people saw in the angels' banners at Sinai an inspiring sight that appealed to them, albeit in a non-obligatory way. Every person has special talents and interests, based on individual character traits and the soul's inner root. While we are not limited in serving God in a particular way, we are certainly more inclined towards those activities for which we have a natural proclivity. For example, a kind-hearted person will gravitate toward acts of compassion and chesed; a strong-willed individual, to acts of courage and self-sacrifice; and so on.

The Jewish people desired flags like those the angels bore at Sinai. They wanted every individual to be able to choose an aspect of divine service that suits his personality, just as each angel executes a specific function, as defined by his flag.

The Wine-House of Sinai

Why, then, does the verse refer to Mount Sinai as a "house of wine"? Drinking wine releases our inhibitions, revealing our inner character. In the words of the Talmud (Eiruvin 65a), "Wine enters, secrets emerge." The Israelites envied the beauty and joy they witnessed in divine service of the angels. The root of this joy stems from the angels' natural affinity for their service. Each angel naturally identifies with its particular mission. The Jewish people sought to uncover and emphasize every individual's personal strengths, in the same way that wine liberates and highlights one's inner characteristics.

This individualized worship only applies to the service of the heart and character traits. The banners reflect our feelings of love and joy when serving God: "His banner over me is love." The banners, however, are not directly connected to the service itself. Within the framework of Torah study and practical mitzvot, there is no need for distinctive forms of service. That is why no banners flew over the central Tent of Meeting, where the luchot — the stone tablets — were stored. The Torah and its mitzvot relate equally to every soul.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 227-229. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 24-25)

---

from: **Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: May 29, 2025, 7:14 AM
subject: **Morals and Meanings in Shavuos**

Learning Torah –

Atmosphere and Connectivity

As we approach the festival of Shavuos, our attention is naturally drawn toward the endeavor of Torah study. Alongside the questions of what and how to learn, the topic of atmosphere while learning Torah also deserves our reflection and consideration.

When discussing the idea of "learning atmosphere" as it pertains to most disciplines, the question relates solely to the conditions that allow for the most effective absorption and comprehension of the material on an intellectual level. However, when it comes to Torah study, this concept assumes entirely new dimensions. The words of Torah contain within them immense sanctity and allow for a unique, elevated connection with Hashem. As such, the question of learning atmosphere becomes: "What are the conditions which will allow for the sanctity of Torah to be released and the higher connection with the Almighty to be realized?"

Indeed, as we will see, the answer to this question is decisive.

Accessing Torah

In the course of his discussion concerning Torah study, the Ramchal writes: The power of Torah is solely a product of the fact that Hashem has attached His exalted Influence to it, so that through speaking and thinking about it, that lofty Influence may be drawn onto the person. Were this not the case, speaking about Torah would be no different than speaking about one's affairs or other branches of wisdom, which involve nothing more than the knowledge of that matter, not imparting any form of exalted level in the person's soul.

This Influence is a Godly thing; in fact, it is the most exalted of things that Hashem has imparted to His creations. This being the case, a person should certainly approach this involvement with a great sense of awe, for he is essentially coming before his God and involving himself in drawing a great light from Him. This [attitude] entails that he should not engage in Torah flippantly or irreverently. If he approaches Torah with an awareness of the One before Whom he is involving himself, then his Torah study will achieve the effect it is truly intended to achieve and he will incorporate within himself Godly excellence.

However, if this condition is lacking, this light will not be drawn onto him and his words will be no different than those in any other human endeavor: his speech will be as one reading a letter, his thoughts will be as those regarding matters of the world.

Indeed, depending on the level of reverence and the measure of respect and care he shows the Torah, so will be the elevated worth of his study and the level of Influence that he draws onto himself.

The Ramchal is reminding us that the exalted qualities of Torah are its sanctity and Divine Influence that are contained within the words. Therefore, the effect of learning Torah comes from accessing those qualities and releasing them into the person's system. This effect is neither automatic nor is it guaranteed by the process of study alone. In other words, if Torah words and ideas are "capsules of holiness," it is possible for a person to merely ingest them, without ever digesting them. The means through which a person accesses these things are through his attitude to and regard for Torah.

Sound, Light, and the Ten Commandments

The central importance of atmosphere when it comes to Torah is apparent in the events surrounding the giving of the Torah itself. When we look at the passages in the Torah that discuss the event of Matan Torah, we see that there is extensive description of the awesome sights and sounds that accompanied and surrounded Hashem's conveying the Torah to the Jewish People: thunder, lighting, fire, and a thick cloud. Indeed, the Torah seems to devote as much attention to describing what it was like at Mount Sinai in relation to what it actually was that we heard there! The reason for this is that having the correct atmosphere is as much a part of receiving the Torah as the Ten Commandments themselves, for the atmosphere will determine how much of the Torah we actually receive.[1]

This appraisal of the events at Mount Sinai is not merely of historical value. The Torah commands us to "take great care lest we forget the day that we stood at Mount Sinai."[2] We may ask: Why is that day so important to remember?

Although a major part of the answer is undoubtedly that the revelation at Sinai is the basis of our faith,[3] there is more. The Ramban explains that the reason we need to constantly remember the day we stood at Sinai is because we need to remember what it was like![4] And should we persist and ask, why is that important? The answer is, because that is what it needs to be like as we engage in Torah study on an ongoing basis. Every time a person sits down to learn, he is essentially preparing to "receive Torah." The atmosphere and conditions that existed when we received the Torah at Sinai served to set the tone for what it should be like as we receive the Torah from that point onward!

A Process Called Mount Sinai

The underlying idea here is that the concept of "The Giving of the Torah," is ultimately not an event but a process. It began at Mount Sinai, but it did not end there.

Indeed, the verse itself refers to this idea when it states that Hashem spoke to us at Sinai with "קול גדול ולא יסף" — A great sound that did not cease.[5] This means that the original "Sound of Sinai," which contained within it the Torah that Hashem wishes to impart to the world, continues to sound throughout history, finding expression in the understanding attained by those who study it in each generation.[6]

This truly stunning idea is reflected in the wording of the blessing we recite every day prior to learning Torah, which concludes with the words, "ברוך אתה ה' נותן התורה" — Blessed are You Hashem, Who gives the Torah.[7] The usage of the word "נותן" — Who gives," in the present tense, expresses the idea that the giving of the Torah is an ongoing process.

Hence, when we learn Torah and we aspire to "tune in" to the sound which began at Sinai — and which continues until our time — we must likewise endeavor to approach our study with "Sinai conditions."

Atmospheric Harmony: Awe and Enjoyment

Having seen through the above sources the central importance of awe, respect, and reverence in Torah study, we come to consider a rather unlikely partner to those attitudes — enjoyment! Enjoying Torah study is considered so valuable that we even have a section in the blessing on the Torah where we ask Hashem: "והערב נא את דברי תורתך בפינו" — Make the words of Your Torah pleasant in our mouths!" We do not find a parallel request regarding any other mitzvah.

Moreover, one of the forty-eight ways enumerated in Pirkei Avos through which Torah is acquired is "Joy."[8] Indeed, when the Sages seek to describe Torah learning at its highest level, they use the expression "The words were as joyous as when they were given at Sinai."[9]

Awe or joy, which one is it?

Evidently, the answer is: "Yes!" Both of these are necessary.

But how does it work?

The truth is, it is only on a surface level that these two concepts appear incongruous, with the superficial notion of "happiness" and "enjoyment" being synonymous with a flippant or carefree mindset. However, on a deeper level, it is the things which are most important that bring us the greatest joy. Someone who has had the opportunity to meet a truly special and elevated person will find it hard to match the joy he felt at that time, notwithstanding the fact that the meeting was accompanied by a feeling of awe and reverence. This is infinitely true when it comes to Torah.

Moreover, not only do the concepts of awe and joy in learning Torah not contradict each other, but they actually work together in promoting its ultimate goal — absorbing the words of Torah into one's system. When someone is in a state of awe, he is greatly impacted by what he sees. By the same token, there is a natural absorption which accompanies the things that a person enjoys, and someone who is happy is naturally receptive. Hence, the awe and joy form a potent combination in connecting a person fully to the words of Torah.

It is worthwhile quoting in this regard the words of the Avnei Nezer of Socatchov, in the introduction to his classic work Eglei Tal. He notes there that there were some people in his time who mistakenly felt that the enjoyment felt during one's learning may detract from the purity of intent required for the mitzvah of learning Torah. In response to this, he writes: In fact, the exact opposite is true, for this is the primary way to learn Torah, to rejoice in and enjoy one's learning, for this allows the words of Torah to become absorbed in one's bloodstream and, having enjoyed the words of Torah, he thereby becomes attached to Torah.

It is interesting to note that while the Hebrew word "ערב" means enjoyable, it also has another meaning: mingling or merging. Hence, when things get mixed in with each other, we say they are "me'urav" with the mixture being called a "ta'aroves," and when domains are merged for purposes of carrying on Shabbos it is called an "eiruv." Indeed, these two meanings complement each other, for the extent to which something becomes absorbed (me'urav) within a person is determined by how enjoyable (arev) it is. Similarly, when we ask Hashem for enjoyment in Torah ("ha'arev na"), we are asking for the words of Torah to be fully absorbed in our system — as they should be!

Chag Sameach!

[1] Rav Yitzchak Hutner, Pachad Yitzchak, Shavuos, maamar 8. [2] Devarim 4:9–10. [3] See below, Chapter 14. [4] Commentary to Devarim loc. cit. [5] Devarim 5:19. [6] Rav Avraham Chaim Schor, Toras Chaim, Bava Metzia 85a, s.v. mi'kan. See also Shelah Hakadosh, Shavuos, Torah Ohr §67, and Nefesh Hachaim 4:14. [7] Toras Chaim loc. cit. [8] 6:6. [9] See Yerushalmi, Chagigah 2:1, and Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:10.



Journeys in Torah 2/4 Rechov Yitzhok ben Nachum Bayit Vegan 90045 Israel

---

https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/holidays/an-early-second-night-of-shavuot/2025/05/29/

**An Early Second Night of Shavuot?**

**By Rabbi Yaakov Hoffman** - 2 Sivan 5785 – May 29, 2025

Spaniards are famous for eating dinner quite late; on the second night of Shavuot, Jews can compete. The Spanish-like timing of this seudah stems from the fact that one may not even begin to prepare for the nighttime meal until after dark (which is around its latest occurrence in the northern hemisphere around Shavuot), since preparing on the first day of Yom Tov

for the second is forbidden. But is there any way to permit eating the repast at a more comfortable hour?

On a regular Friday night, we are familiar with the option to eat early via davening Maariv and making Kiddush after plag hamincha (one and a quarter hours before sunset/nightfall) (Berachot 27a; although a less popular option, Maariv could also be prayed at night after the meal according to most opinions). While one might wish to follow this procedure for the second evening of Shavuot as well, the permissibility of doing so is not straightforward. When one makes an "early Shabbat," one adds to the holiness of Shabbat at the expense of a mundane Friday. If one were to make an "early second night Yom Tov," one would be sanctifying the rabbinically-ordained second day of the festival while it is still technically the afternoon of the biblically-mandated first day.

Since the case of "early second night Yom Tov" involves infringing on a holier day for the sake of a less holy one, it seems more analogous to davening Motzaei Shabbat Maariv and reciting havdalah after plag on Shabbat afternoon. Although the Talmud does mention such a possibility, almost all authorities rule that one may do this only in extraordinarily exigent circumstances. (See my "May One Daven Maariv Early on Motzei Shabbat?" from 2020 on The Jewish Press website.)

Rabbi Yosef Teomim (author of the Pri Megadim) indeed makes this comparison, writing that the precept of tosefet Yom Tov (adding additional time to Yom Tov), which applies on a biblical level to the first day of the festival, requires one to delay Maariv and Kiddush for the second night of Yom Tov until after tzeit hakochavim (Noam Megadim 20; cf. Tosafot, Shabbat 27b s.v. tzalei shel Shabbat).

Earlier sources, however, contradict Rabbi Teomim's analysis. The Maharil notes that the reason for not davening second night Maariv before nightfall is simply because people erroneously believe that it is Maariv, not tzeit hakochavim, that permits one to begin cooking for the nighttime meal (Seder Tefillot Shel Pesach, see also Minhagei R. Isaac Tirnau Pesach and Matteh Efraim 599:2). Although the Maharil reports that waiting until nightfall was the prevalent practice, he also uncritically cites the dissenting custom in Mainz to daven Maariv immediately after Mincha without waiting for tzeit hakochavim. The fact that not all communities waited until nightfall to daven, and those that did only meant it as a tactic to prevent desecration of the first day of Yom Tov, makes clear that davening early is not an intrinsic disparagement of Yom Tov Rishon the way that davening Motzaei Shabbat Maariv early is a slap in the face to Shabbat.

But why? What's the distinction between "early second night Yom Tov" and "early Motzaei Shabbat?" The Motzaei Shabbat liturgy is a regular weekday davening which is entirely inappropriate for Shabbat; additionally, the added tefillah of Attah Chonantanu as well as havdalah explicitly reference the end of the holy day and the transition back to the mundane. Mentioning this theme while it is still technically Shabbat shows a distasteful haste to leave the Sabbath holiness (even though, of course, the Shabbat rules remain in effect until nightfall regardless). In contrast, the liturgy and Kiddush of Yom Tov Sheini are identical to those of Yom Tov Rishon (see Responsa Lehorot Natan 9:60). Granted, one's intention is to recite these prayers for Yom Tov Sheini; nevertheless, the words themselves simply praise the holiday and cannot be taken as explicitly referencing the conclusion of the first day of Yom Tov.

But what about the concern that an early Maariv will lead people to prepare for the second night too early? This was not a universal concern, as the Mainz custom shows; today, the concern that people will err is further lessened (admittedly, not eliminated) by the presence of clocks and calendars in every home.

Furthermore, too-early preparation is really only likely when Maariv is prayed toward the end of the day, because then one might cook immediately (while it is still afternoon) but not consume the food until after nightfall. But when davening shortly after plag, there is time to prepare and cook for the meal after Maariv and still begin consuming the food during the daytime. After all, on a biblical level, it is still Yom Tov Rishon until nightfall; the timing of Maariv and Kiddush is irrelevant. Indeed, one may even prepare for this meal earlier in the day, since the cooking of this meal as well as its consumption will be taking place entirely within the biblical confines of Yom Tov Rishon, i.e. during daylight hours1. Of course, one may cook only those dishes that one sincerely plans to start eating before sunset2. One may also light the Yom Tov candles before the meal since they are for the honor of the seudah. (See Ben Ish Chai Year 1, Bemidbar 2, and Responsa Rav Pealim 4, OC 23.

Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that "early Yom Tov Sheini" is a novel idea and does create complicated scenarios regarding the timing of food preparation on Yom Tov. Thus, those without a strong preference to eat earlier should follow the more common practice of waiting until nightfall to daven and recite Kiddush on the second night of Yom Tov3. It should be noted that although the temptation to make "early Yom Tov Sheini" is greatest on Shavuot, one can also theoretically take in the second night of Rosh Hashana or the eighth night of Pesach early as well (the fact that the two days of Rosh Hashana are, to a certain extent, considered one unit of holiness bolsters the possibility of "early Yom Tov Sheini," although Rav Hershel Schachter has ruled to the contrary). The other holidays pose complications regarding making Kiddush early (but not Maariv per se), as one may not do so at the Seder or the first nights of Sukkot; on Shmini Atzeret, one must consider the transition to dwelling in the sukkah without a beracha and then, on the second day (Simchat Torah), avoiding the sukkah entirely.

Of course, the above discussion is only relevant when the festival is not immediately adjacent to Shabbat. When either day of Yom Tov falls on Friday, it is not only permitted but preferred to take in Shabbat early in deference to its greater holiness and to ensure that all preparations (which are permitted on Yom Tov for Shabbat via an eiruv tavshilin) are completed well before sunset (cf. Magen Avraham intro to 527). Conversely, when either day of Yom Tov falls on Motzaei Shabbat, one may not daven Maariv or make Kiddush/havdalah until after nightfall, as on any Saturday night4.

Some have expressed reservations about making "early Yom Tov Sheini" on Shavuot specifically. After all, the custom is to wait until tzeit hakochavim to recite Kiddush on the first night of Shavuot, and some delay Maariv as well (of course, there is no intrinsic problem in davening Maariv early on the first evening of any Yom Tov unless it is Motzaei Shabbat). Does this custom apply to the second night of Shavuot as well? If so, that would mean that one should never take in Yom Tov Sheini of Shavuot early, even when it falls on Shabbat!

The originators of the custom to delay Kiddush on the first night of Shavuot base this practice on a novel understanding of Torah's requirement that the seven weeks of the Omer be "complete" (Vayikra 23:15), maintaining that if one recites the Shavuot liturgy early, that would inappropriately eat into the last day of the Omer. According to this understanding, there would be no problem with davening and making Kiddush early for the second night of Shavuot, since the counting of the seven weeks of the Omer has already been completed a day earlier (Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav 494, introduction)5. The Netziv, however, explains the custom via his own biblical exegesis, ruling that Kiddush on Shavuot must intrinsically take place after tzeit hakochavim (Haamek Davar, Vayikra 23:21); this would require a post-nightfall Kiddush on both nights of the festival. Since the former understanding is the classical one, and in any event the entire concept of refraining from early Shavuot has no basis in Chazal and the Rishonim, practically speaking there is no need to avoid "early Yom Tov Sheini" on Shavuot particularly.

Rabbi Serayah Deblitzky rules that it is rabbinically prohibited to cook on the first day of Yom Tov for an "early Yom Tov Sheini" meal (letter printed at the beginning of Hilchot Chag BeChag, Yom Tov, vol. 2). This is difficult, however, because it would mean that the permissibility to cook during the first day of Yom Tov for a late-afternoon meal that very day depends on whether one plans to make Kiddush before that meal, which could obviously be subject to change. Indeed, it seems that the consensus of the poskim who permit "early Yom Tov Sheini" is not in accordance with Rabbi Deblitzky.

Seemingly, one could complete the entire meal before sunset. When making early Shabbat, many are stringent to extend the meal past tzeit hakochavim, but this is because there is a requirement to eat three meals, which perhaps must be consumed on the actual calendar day of Shabbat. On Yom Tov, although we feast during the evening and the daytime, there is no prescribed number of meals per se (see Rabbi Deblitzky's letter cited in the last footnote, but see Rav Hershel Schachter's "Zeman tefillas Arvis, leil beis d'Shvauos," part of his Covid-19 teshuvos). Nevertheless, there may be room to be stringent to eat some meat and/or drink some wine after nightfall to fulfill the concept of simchat Yom Tov during the actual nighttime. A full analysis of simchat Yom Tov, including whether it applies at night, is objective or subjective, and if it requires having meat and/or wine each day of the holiday, requires its own article.

Regardless of the hour, some people find eating numerous consecutive festive meals difficult. Such individuals could arguably count an "early Yom Tov Sheini" meal both as the daytime meal of the first day and the night meal of the second, since the two days are conceptually identical and ultimately only one of them is the true day of the festival. Contrast this to when Purim or Yom Tov falls on Friday: even when making the Shabbat Kiddush early, one declares that any subsequent seudah is in honor of Shabbat; one cannot count that meal for Friday as well, which is an entirely distinct day requiring an independent feast.

One could, however, employ the technique of pores mappah umkaddesh. One extends Shabbat's afternoon meal until nightfall, whereupon one recites yaknehaz and continues the meal as the Yom Tov night seudah (note that when beginning a meal on a weekday and continuing into Shabbat or Yom Tov, one must pause one's meal at sunset until one recites Kiddush; in this case, one need not and should not pause for yaknehaz until Shabbat is over. See Hilchot Shabbat beShabbat chap. 7 n. 7). Pores mappah umkaddesh is also a viable option between the two days of Yom Tov instead of "early Yom Tov Sheini," but most would prefer to complete their prayers with the congregation before beginning the meal.

One could challenge this argument: By keeping a second day of Shavuot, we conduct ourselves as if the first day could potentially be the 49th day of the Omer (although we do not explicitly count it as such), hearkening back to a time where not all Jewish communities knew the correct date of Pesach, throwing the timing of Shavuot into doubt. As such, on some level, the Omer has not been certainly completed until tzeit hakochavim on the second night of Shavuot. In truth, however, even when the date of the new month was announced by messenger, confirmation of the true date of Pesach would have reached even far-flung Jewish communities by Shavuot. Chazal decreed two days of Shavuot not because there was ever really a doubt as to its date but merely to avoid the confusion of celebrating other holidays as two days but Shavuot as one (cf. Rambam, Hilchot Kiddush Hachodesh 3:12).

---

https://www.jewishpress.com

**The Spiritual Human Being**

**By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser**

2 Sivan 5785 – May 29, 2025

Our sages derive from the Talmud (Pesachim 6a) that there is a mitzvah to study the halachos and hashkafos related to the yom tov 30 days in advance. This is so that we can appreciate the objectives of its observance and achieve greater spiritual heights.

There is also a discussion in the Talmud (Pesachim 68b) between R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua whether there is an obligation to eat and drink on yom tov. R' Eliezer maintained that there was no specific mitzvah to eat on the festival, while R' Yehoshua suggested that the day be divided, half for eating and drinking (which he held was obligatory) and half for Torah study.

R' Elazar states that all agree, though, that on the holiday of Shavuos, we are obligated to eat and drink because it is the day on which the Torah was given.

R' Shimshon Nachmani, the renowned Zera Shimshon, notes that this conclusion seems paradoxical. We would think that the day commemorating the giving of the Torah would be dedicated solely to spirituality, to Torah study.

The Zera Shimshon cites the Talmud (Shabbos 89a) which describes Moshe Rabbeinu's defense to the angels when they protested against the Torah being given to humans. He argued that unlike human beings, the angels, as Heavenly creatures, were unable to fulfill written therein, such as honoring parents, stealing, or committing murder. Therefore, says the Zera Shimshon, it is certainly appropriate for us to celebrate with food and drink on this day, establishing our merit to get the Torah which is filled with mitzvos having to do with food and drink.

The great rosh yeshiva, R' Meir Mazuz, further elaborates that, unlike other religions, Judaism utilizes every means to sanctify the physical world. Our mission on this earth is to elevate ourselves spiritually while we simultaneously enjoy the physical world as human beings. A life of Torah does not negate eating and drinking, as we learn (Avos 3:17), "if there is no flour there is no Torah." In fact, continues R' Mazuz, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 26b) tells us that Torah study weakens the strength of a person. Therefore, those who are immersed in Torah study need to make sure that they eat and drink to maintain their strength. He points out that the numerical value of Shavuos is 784, which is 28 times the numerical value of koach, to teach us that one needs much strength to study Torah.

long those lines, R' Yehuda Tzadka writes in his Sefer Kol Yehuda, that when a boy becomes bar mitzvah there is a festive celebratory meal, because the occasion is comparable to standing at Har Sinai and receiving the Torah. It is a pivotal day in his life, as he strives to find a balance between the spiritual and physical aspects of his life so that they complement and enhance each other.

Rabbeinu Bachya (Bereishis 32) comments that, unlike Avraham Avinu who was no longer called Avram after his name was changed, Yaakov Avinu kept his original name from birth as well as the name Yisrael that Hashem gave him. Yaakov, from the word meaning "heel," alludes to the lowest part of the human being, i.e. humility; Yisrael denotes the superiority of the Jewish People. This is to teach us that one has to constantly strive to seamlessly synthesize the physical and spiritual elements of his being.

A woman who sold elegant exclusive baked cookies and cakes for simchos and special occasions related the following:

One day she took an order for an elaborately designed cake. She worked on it for many hours to meet the specifications of the order, and it was a perfect masterpiece when she finished. She put the cake aside to be delivered the next day to the family who had submitted the order.

That evening, when her son returned from yeshiva, he excitedly reported that the class would be making a siyum on Mishnayos. He asked his mother if she could send along one of her specialty items for the siyum. The mother consented, of course, and she quickly prepared a beautiful cake for the siyum.

The next morning, when her son was ready to leave for yeshiva, he found the elaborate special cake in the refrigerator and thought that was for him. He took the cake, leaving behind the cake for the siyum which he hadn't even noticed. When the mother came down to the kitchen and saw the siyum cake in the refrigerator, she had to start from scratch to recreate the original masterpiece.

While she was working, her son called her from yeshiva to report on the excitement and delight of all his friends who had participated in the siyum and enjoyed the cake. In truth, most of the students in the yeshiva had never before seen such an impressive cake. She refrained from saying anything other than, "For a simcha, for a siyum mishnayos, it's all worth it."

R' Fishel Schachter noted that a number of years later, when this boy grew up, he was not successful in yeshiva. Things were not going well and he had to be transferred to another yeshiva where he joined up with a rough group of boys.

One day, this group of new friends decided to travel somewhere that could negatively impact this young boy for life. At the airport, as the group was ready to board the plane, the boy suddenly decided that he was not going with them. Although they begged him to change his mind, he steadfastly

refused and told them to stop wasting their time because “I have made my decision not to go with you.”
When he returned home, he explained to his parents what had made him change his mind. He said that when they arrived at the airport, a huge screen displayed a picture of an elaborately designed cake, with many layers, that looked like an exact duplicate of the cake that his mother had spent so many hours preparing and which she had gladly contributed to his siyum, when he took it in error.
The flashback to his cheder days awakened intense feelings within him. At that moment, he grasped the extent of his mother’s love for him – her enthusiasm for his accomplishments, her heart, her kindness and encouragement. He realized how much his parents were willing to give up for his Torah learning. Some food – a cake, granted it was not just a plain cake – had become the means of saving the spiritual future of a little boy.

---

from: **Peninim on the Torah** <peninim@hac1.org>
date: May 26, 2025, 3:03 AM
**Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**
subject: Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bamidbar, 5785

וידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)
Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7) explain that Hashem chose the wilderness as the site where He would give the Torah, by design. It is not that we received the Torah in the wilderness, because we just happened to be there. Rather we were there because this is where Hashem wanted us to receive the Torah.
Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, explains the simile of wilderness as a place where there is no baalus, ownership. Likewise, one who learns Torah, one who seeks to grow and achieve in the field of Torah, must render himself like a wilderness, by relinquishing control, possession over his time. This plays itself out with regard to giving up time toward helping others learn Torah. With regard to Torah, “My” time is “your” time. “I” have no time.
Rav Shternbuch relates that his revered Rebbe, Horav Moshe Schneider, zl, organized in the yeshivah that all senior students (elter bochur) would take turns standing near the bima in the center of the bais hamedrash, for two hours for the express purpose of helping the younger students with difficulties they encountered in understanding the shiur. The Rosh Yeshivah commented that just as one is obliged to give tzedakah with his material assets, so, too, must he give tzedakah with his time (and patience) to help someone who is finding learning Torah to be difficult. Just as one who gives tzedakah with money is assured of a segulah, talisman, a remedy or charm, to protect his money, likewise, one who gives up his time to assist others in learning, will himself be blessed with extraordinary personal achievement.
The Rosh Yeshivah added that this falls under the rubric of middah k’neged middah, Hashem repays/rewards measure for measure. Thus, if one performs an act of chesed through the medium of Torah, the Almighty will repay him in kind. He will
be accorded an extraordinary dose of siyata d’Shmaya, Heavenly Assistance.
He cites Chazal (Avodah Zarah 35b), “A talmid chacham, Torah scholar, who teaches Torah to others, those areas of Torah which, heretofore, had been concealed from him (too difficult), will now be revealed and mastering them will come with ease and little toil.” One not only does not lose precious time when he helps another student, he personally benefits from the interaction. Indeed, this is how the Jewish people fulfilled the mitzvah of tzedakah, charity, while they journeyed in the wilderness. Clearly, not a single Jew was financially challenged, having left Egypt with gold, silver and jewelry beyond their wildest dreams. On the other hand, there were those who could use a spiritual uplift, some inspiration, or tutoring with their Torah lessons. This was tzedakah.
In the hakdamah, preface, to his Shaarei Yosher, Horav Shimon Shkop, zl, writes that many yeshivah students err in thinking that since their material assets are at a premium, they are absolved of the mitzvah of tzedakah. This is not true, because tzedakah is not the exclusive domain of money. When one teaches Torah to another fellow, there is no greater execution of the mitzvah of tzedakah. He fulfills the mitzvah and garners for himself the added blessings acquired by one who is charitable. Torah is the source of blessing for a person. What greater source of blessing is there than helping another Jew expand his Torah knowledge.
The prevailing excuse for sidestepping, avoiding our responsibility toward others is most commonly “no time.” The “no time” excuse comes in all shapes and sizes, from “previous commitment” to “already involved in a mitzvah,” may often be valid, but this does not grant one immunity from his obligations. This is especially true when one has convinced himself that the mitzvah in which he is presently involved takes precedence. Perhaps, the following vignette may be enlightening.Horav Shlomo Lorincz, zl, was a shtadlan, intercessor, advocate, who often acted as a liaison between the gec/oZef Yisrael and the ruling authorities of the secular Israeli government. His function was to explain and advocate on behalf of the Orthodox community. His position required diplomacy, political skill and connections. He was highly respected by members of both sides of the bargaining table.
The Chazon Ish highly valued those who undertook to serve the Torah community. The following incident indicates just how much it meant to the gadol hador. Rav Lorincz was charged with raising funds for the many organizations in the Torah community. At this juncture, he traveled to Bournemouth, England (1952) to spend Rosh Hashanah in a resort hotel. He was not the hotel type, but it was there where men of means would spend their Yom Tov. He represented the Chazon Yechezkel youth village, established by Zeirei Agudas Yisrael. As such, he was asked to deliver the pre- Maariv opening sermon, which he did. As a member of the Knesset, he was not only knowledgeable, he was also a powerful and prolific orator. Understandably, the audience was quite pleased - responding with generous pledges.
Then it came time for Maariv. Rav Lorincz took one look at the mechitzah, separation between the men and women’s section, and realized that its halachic status as a kosher mechitzah was, at best, questionable. Therefore, rather than daven with the congregation, he opted to daven Maariv in his room. Now only did he fail to daven with a minyan, it was also his father’s yahrtzeit and he failed to recite Kaddish. The next morning, he was able to locate a more suitable minyan, but missing Kaddish the night before gnawed at him. To make matters worse, since he did not say Kaddish the night before, he forgot to recite Kaddish the next morning as well. Thus, his father’s entire yahrtzeit passed without him having recited Kaddish.
Rav Lorincz was filled with remorse and guilt. His commitment to the klal, greater community, was the reason that he spent Rosh Hashanah in a resort in England. In his depressed state, he viewed his failure to say Kaddish for his father as a Heavenly sign that the time had come for him to leave public life.
On his return to Eretz Yisrael, he immediately went to the Chazon Ish to share his decision with him. He explained to the Gaon that he
was returning to the bais hamedrash, which was actually his “home” before being asked by the gedolim, Torah giants of the generation, to become the official spokesman for the Torah community.
The Chazon Ish listened intently, and then spoke. “I do not accept what you said. You did recite Kaddish. ” He assumed that the Chazon Ish either did not hear what he had said, or, did not understand. So, he repeated the story, ending with, “This is why I am giving up klal work. It is because of my work that I did not say Kaddish for my father!”
Once again, the Gaon said, “You are mistaken. You very definitely said Kaddish. What do you think is the purpose of a son saying Kaddish? It is to bring nachas ruach, pleasure to his father’s soul, when he sees his son sanctifying Hashem’s Name. What could bring greater pleasure to your father’s neshamah, than what you did on behalf of the youth village? You ignored your personal comfort, and was compelled to daven on Rosh Hashanah alone, without a minyan. Why? Because Klal Yisrael needed you. What greater Kaddish can there be than that?” Obviously, after hearing these words spoken from the Chazon Ish, his decision to leave klal work was scrapped.
In a similar vein, the Chazon Ish asked an avreich, kollel fellow, to assist a sickly woman with a certain chore. The young man replied that he would do

it, but it was the yahrzeit of one of his parents and he did not want to miss reciting Kaddish following Minchah at the minyan he attends regularly. The Chazon Ish countered that an act of chesed for the woman in need would be no less of a good deed for the elevation of his parent's neshamah.

In other words, we find excuses, and, in some instances, they are valid reasons for non- participating in an important endeavor. We must remember that at the end of the day, they are mere excuses for our lack of desire to help. Shlomo Hamelech says (Mishlei 26:13), "The lazy person says, 'There is a lion in middle of the road.'" Those who look for a way out will always conjure up an excuse, no matter how absurd.

---

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bamidbar/the-ever-repeated-story/

**The Ever-Repeated Story**

**במדבר Bamidbar • 5772**

**Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL**

Bamidbar takes up the story as we left it toward the end of Shemot. The people have journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai. There they received the Torah. There they made the Golden Calf. There they were forgiven after Moses' passionate plea, and there they made the Mishkan (the Tabernacle) inaugurated on the first of Nissan, almost a year after the Exodus. Now, one month later, on the first day of the second month (Iyar), they are ready to move on to the second part of the journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

Yet there is a curious delay in the narrative. Ten chapters pass until the Israelites actually begin traveling (Num. 10:33). First there is a census. Then there is an account of the arrangement of the tribes around the Ohel Moed - the Tent of Meeting. There is a long account of the Levites, their families and respective roles. Then there are laws about the purity of the camp, restitution, the sotah (the woman suspected of adultery), and the nazirite. A lengthy series of passages describe the final preparations for the journey. Only then do they set out. Why this long series of seeming digressions?

It is easy to think of the Torah as simply telling events as they occurred, interspersed with various commandments. On this view the Torah is history plus law. This is what happened, these are the rules we must obey, and there is a connection between them, sometimes clear (as in the case of laws accompanied by reminder that "you were slaves in Egypt"), sometimes less so.

But the Torah is not mere history as a sequence of events. The Torah is about the truths that emerge through time. That is one of the great differences between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. Ancient Greece sought truth by contemplating nature and reason. The first gave rise to science, the second to philosophy. Ancient Israel found truth in history, in events and what God told us to learn from them. Science is about nature, Judaism is about human nature, and there is a great difference between them. Nature knows nothing about freewill. Scientists often deny that it exists at all. But humanity is constituted by its freedom. We are what we choose to be. No planet chooses to be hospitable to life. No fish chooses to be a hero. No peacock chooses to be vain. Humans do choose. And in that fact is born the drama to which the whole Torah is a commentary: how can freedom coexist with order? The drama is set on the stage of history, and it plays itself out through five acts, each with multiple scenes. The basic shape of the narrative is roughly the same in all five cases. First God creates order. Then humanity creates chaos. Terrible consequences follow. Then God begins again, deeply grieved but never losing His faith in the one life-form on which He set His image and to which He gave the singular gift that made humanity godlike, namely freedom itself.

Act I is told in Genesis 1-11. God creates an ordered universe and fashions humanity from the dust of the earth into which He breathes His own breath. But humans sin: first Adam and Eve, then Cain, then the generation of the Flood. The earth is filled with violence. God brings the Flood and begins again, making a covenant with Noah. Humanity sin again by making the Tower of Babel (the first act of imperialism, as I argued in an earlier study). So God begins again, seeking a role-model who will show the world what it is to live in faithful response to the word of God. He finds it in Abraham and Sarah.

Act II is told in Genesis 12-50. The new order is based on family and fidelity, love and trust. But this too begins to unravel. There is tension between Esau and Jacob, between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel, and between their children. Ten of Jacob's children sell the eleventh, Joseph, into slavery. This is an offence against freedom, and catastrophe follows – not a Flood but a famine, as a result of which Jacob's family goes into exile in Egypt where the whole people become enslaved. God is about to begin again, not with a family this time but with a nation, which is what Abraham's children have now become.

Act III is the subject of the book of Shemot. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt as He once rescued Noah from the Flood. As with Noah (and Abraham), God makes a covenant, this time at Sinai, and it is far more extensive than its precursors. It is a blueprint for social order, for an entire society based on law and justice. Yet again, however, humans create chaos, by making a Golden Calf a mere forty days after the great revelation. God threatens catastrophe, destroying the whole nation and beginning again with Moses, as He had done with Noah and Abraham (Ex. 32:10). Only Moses' passionate plea prevents this from happening. God then institutes a new order.

Act IV begins with an account of this order, which is unprecedentedly long, extending from Exodus 35, through the whole of the book of Vayikra and the first ten chapters of Bamidbar. The nature of this new order is that God becomes not merely the director of history and the giver of laws. He becomes a permanent Presence in the midst of the camp. Hence the building of the Mishkan, which takes up the last third of Shemot, and the laws of purity and holiness, as well as those of love and justice, that constitute virtually the whole of Vayikra. Purity and holiness are demanded by the fact that God has become suddenly close. In the Tabernacle, the Divine Presence has a home on earth, and whoever comes close to God must be holy and pure. Now the Israelites are ready to begin the next stage of the journey, but only after a long introduction.

That long introduction, at the beginning of Bamidbar, is all about creating a sense of order within the camp. Hence the census, and the detailed disposition of the tribes, and the lengthy account of the Levites, the tribe that mediated between the people and the Divine Presence. Hence also, in next week's Parsha, the three laws – restitution, the sotah and the nazir – directed at the three forces that always endanger social order: theft, adultery, and alcohol. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites, this is what order looks like. Each person has their place within the family, the tribe, and the nation. Everyone has been counted and each person counts. Preserve and protect this order, for without it you cannot enter the land, fight its battles, and create a just society.

Tragically, as Bamidbar unfolds, we see that the Israelites turn out to be their own worst enemy. They complain about the food. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses. Then comes the catastrophe, the episode of the spies, in which the people, demoralised, show that they are not yet ready for freedom. Again, as in the case of the Golden Calf, there is chaos in the camp. Again God threatens to destroy the nation and begin again with Moses (Num. 14:12). Again only Moses' powerful plea saves the day. God decides once more to begin again, this time with the next generation and a new leader. The book of Devarim is Moses' prelude to Act V, which takes place in the days of his successor Joshua.

The Jewish story is a strange one. Time and again the Jewish people has split apart: in the days of the First Temple when the kingdom divided into two; in the late Second Temple period when it was driven into rival groups and sects; and in the modern age, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it fragmented into religious and secular in Eastern Europe, orthodox and others in the West. Those divisions have still not healed.

And so the Jewish people keep repeating the story told five times in the Torah. God creates order. Humans create chaos. Bad things happen, then God and Israel begin again. Will the story never end? One way or another it is no coincidence that Bamidbar usually precedes Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. God never tires of reminding us that the central human challenge in every age is whether freedom can coexist with order. It can, when humans freely choose to follow God's laws, given in one way to humanity after the Flood and in another to Israel after the Exodus.

The alternative, ancient and modern, is the rule of power, in which, as Thucydides said, the strong do as they will and the weak suffer as they must. That is not freedom as the Torah understands it, nor is it a recipe for love and justice. Each year as we prepare for Shavuot by reading Parshat Bamidbar, we hear God's call: here in the Torah - and in its mitzvot - is the way to create a freedom that honours order, and a social order that honours human freedom. There is no other way.

**********

**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org**
***In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag***
**Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag**

**********

# *SHAVUOT & MATAN TORAH*

When the Torah wishes to inform us of the 'historical' reason for a holiday, it certainly knows how to do so. Take for example the two other pilgrimage holidays - "chag ha'matzot" & "succot": Even though these holidays are also presented from their 'agricultural' perspective (see Shmot 23:14-17), the Torah informs us of their historical perspectives as well (see Shmot 12:17, 13:3 etc. and Vayikra 23:42-43).

Therefore, it is simply baffling that the Torah presents Shavuot ONLY from its agricultural aspect, without mentioning even a word about its connection to events of MATAN TORAH!

In this week's shiur, we attempt to understand why.

**SHAVUOT IN THE BIBLE**

Before we begin our shiur, let's verify our statement that Shavuot is presented solely from its agricultural perspective by quickly reviewing the five 'parshiot' in which it is mentioned:

I. **Shmot 23:15** = "v'et chag ha'KATZIR bikurei ma'asecha"
[the HARVEST holiday - the first fruits of your work]

II. **Shmot 34:22** = "v'chag shavuot... bikurei KTZIR CHITIM"
[Feast of Weeks, the first fruits of the wheat harvest]

III. **Vayikra 23:15-21**: "u'sfartem lachem..."
"And you shall count from the time you offer the OMER offering (from your first harvest/ see 23:10) seven weeks... and you shall offer a new MINCHA to God..."

IV. **Bamidbar 28:26** = "u'v'yom ha'BIKURIM..."
"And on the day of the first fruit offering, when you bring a new MINCHA to God on Shavuot..."

V. **Devarim 16:9-12** = "...m'ha'chel chermesh b'kamah..."
"Count SEVEN weeks, starting when the sickle is first put to the standing grain, then you shall celebrate the holiday of SHAVUOT to God..."

As you review these five sources, note how in each instance Shavuot is presented solely as a harvest holiday, when we must thank God for our grain crops; while its connection MATAN TORAH is never mentioned - not even once!

However, when we study the above sources, it also becomes quite clear that there is ample reason to celebrate SHAVUOT, even without the events of MATAN TORAH. Considering that grain is man's staple, it is only logical that we are commanded to celebrate its harvest together with God, in order to thank Him for His providence during this most critical time of the year.

[Recall also that the custom of the nations of Canaan was to relate the growth of grain to various local gods such as Baal & Ashera and Dagon etc. This made it even more important to celebrate Shavuot, to assure that Bnei Yisrael would thank the proper God and not fall into the traps of AVODA ZARA. For more detail, see Hoshea chapter 2 (which just so happens to be the Haftara for Parshat Bamidbar). See especially Hoshea 2:7,10,14-18 & 23!]

Based on these sources, should we conclude that it is only coincidental that Shavuot falls out on the date of Matan Torah? Would that explain why Chumash makes no connection at all between that event and this holiday?

To answer this question, we must first take issue with our original assumption that the Biblical date of Matan Torah indeed coincides with the holiday of Shavuot.

**THE DATE OF MATAN TORAH**

When the Torah wishes to inform us of the precise date of a certain event, it certainly knows how to do so. Once again, take for example the events of Exodus. Review Shmot 12:6,12-14,17-18 and 13:3-8, noting how the Torah informs us of the precise date (and even the time of day) when the Tenth Plague struck and when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt! Later on, the Torah even records the precise date when Bnei Yisrael arrived at Midbar Sin (on the 15th of Iyar, see Shmot 16:1).

However, in regard to Matan Torah, the Torah is quite vague. Indeed we are told that Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai in the third month (Sivan), but we are not told on what DAY of the month they arrived:

"In the third month of Bnei Yisrael's departure from the Egypt, ON THIS DAY, they came to Midbar Sinai." (19:1)

Not only is the phrase "on this day" ambiguous, it is quite difficult to determine how many days actually transpire between their arrival at Har Sinai and Matan Torah (see Shmot 19:3-16).

Even if we assume that Bnei Yisrael arrived on the first day of the month (see Rashi 19:1-"b'yom hazeh"), the lack of a clear chronology in the subsequent events still makes it impossible to pinpoint that date. Even though it is recorded how Moshe goes up and down the mountain several times, and that three days are required to prepare for that special occasion; we never told how many days elapse in the interim.

In the Mechilta (and in Mesechet Shabbat 86b), Chazal calculate that the Torah was given on either the sixth or seventh of Sivan (see also Rashi on 19:2->19), yet the fact remains that the Torah clearly prefers to obscure the precise date of this event.

**CALCULATING 'BACKWARDS'**

However, there is an additional manner by which it is possible to calculate the approximate date of Ma'amad Har Sinai. If we assume that tenth of Tishrei was chosen as 'Yom Kippur' specifically because it marks the date when Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second "luchot" [See further iyun section for a discussion of how we can prove this.], then we can calculate 'backwards', using the three sets of 'forty days' that are described in the story of chet ha'egel in Devarim chapter 9.

Working 'backwards' from the tenth of TIshrei; we can arrive at the following approximate dates of these three sets of forty days:

The last forty days - from 1 Elul until 10 Tishrei.
[when Moshe receives the second Luchot.]

The middle forty days - 19 Tamuz until 29 Av
[when Moshe's prayer for their forgivenss.]

The first forty days - from either 6 or 7 Sivan until 17 Tamuz.
[when Moshe receives the first Luchot.]

These calculations leads us to the conclusion that the Torah was given on either the 6th or 7th of Sivan (depending if the month of Sivan that year was 29 or thirty days).

However, even if all of the above assumptions are correct, the fact still remains that the Torah never explicitly mentions the date of Matan Torah, even though it has ample opportunities to do so!

Thus, we really have a double question. Not only is it strange that Torah makes no connection between Shavuot and Matan Torah, it doesn't even tell us WHEN Matan Torah took place!

Again, the question remains - why?

To answer this question, we must consider a fundamental difference between the very nature of these two monumental events in our history: Yetziat Mitzraim and Matan Torah.

**MATAN TORAH: AN UNCOMMEMORATED EVENT**

In the Torah, we find numerous mitzvot through which we commemorate Yetziat Mitzraim, both on the:
**ANNIVERSARY** of the Exodus: e.g. eating matzah, telling of the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, korban Pesach etc.; and **ALL YEAR ROUND**: e.g. "mitzvat bikkurim" (bringing the first fruits to Yerushalayim), tfillin, shabbat, and the daily recital of "kriyat shma", etc., all of which the Torah relates to the Exodus (i.e. "zecher l'yitziat mitzrayim").

In contrast, in Chumash we do not find even one specific mitzvah whose explicit purpose is to commemorate the events of Matan Torah. [Sefer Devarim does require that we not forget the events that transpired at Har Sinai (see 4:9-16), but does not

command us to perform any specific positive mitzvah in order that we do not forget that event! Certainly, those psukim do not require that we commemorate that event on any specific day. See Further Iyun section for additional sources on this topic.]

Why does the Torah call upon us to commemorate these two events in such dramatically different ways?

One could suggest that by this manner of presentation, the Torah is sending a complex message. Even though the Torah provides us ample information to calculate the approximate date of Ma'amad Har Sinai, its deliberate obfuscation of that date may suggest that we should not treat Matan Torah as a historically bound event. Instead, from a certain perspective, each and every day one should feel as though the Torah has just been given.

This concept is reflected by the famous Midrash, quoted by Rashi on 19:1:

> "... it should have been written: 'ON THAT DAY'. Why does the pasuk say: 'ON THIS DAY'? This comes to teach us that the words of the Torah should be considered new to you - as though they were given TODAY!" (see Rashi Shmot 19:1)

In other words, we should not view Matan Torah as a one time event. Rather, every generation must feel as though they have just entered into a covenant with God (see Devarim 5:1-3). Every generation must feel that God's words were spoken to them no less than to earlier generations. To celebrate the anniversary of Matan Torah as a single moment in our history could diminish from that meta-historical dimension.

Similarly, in our study of the Mishkan, we showed how the primary function of the Mishkan was to perpetuate the experience at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [See Ramban on Shmot 25:1, and the TSC shiurim on Parshiot Terumah & Tezaveh.] From that source as well, it appears that the Torah would rather we treat Matan Torah as an event that needs to be perpetuated, more than commemorated.

In contrast to Matan Torah, the Exodus is not an event that must be re-lived. Rather it is an event that the Torah emphasizes over and over again that we must REMEMBER. Even if we must ACT as though we went out of Egypt on the seder night (See in the Hagada - "b'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot atzmo k'ilu..."), it is in order that we put ourselves in the proper frame of mind to praise God and thank Him for our redemption.

Yetziat Mitzrayim was, and should remain, a one time event in our history - our national birth. As such, it needs to be commemorated. Matan Torah is totally different! It is an event that must be constantly RE-LIVED, not just remembered, for it is the essence of our daily existence.

So is it wrong to commemorate Matan Torah on Shavuot? Did Chazal make a 'mistake' (chas v'shalom) by connecting a 'purely agricultural' holiday with the historical event of Matan Torah?

Of course not! Is it possible that the most important event in our national history not be commemorated on its yearly anniversary?!

In this regard, Chazal strike a beautiful balance between Torah "sh'bichtav" (the Written Law) and Torah "sh'baal peh" (the Oral Law). Chumash emphasizes one perspective, the inherent danger of commemorating this event, while tradition balances this message by emphasizing the other perspective, the historical significance of remembering that day, by re-living that event.

Therefore, Chazal instituted that just like on "leil ha'seder (Passover eve), when we spend the entire evening 're-telling' the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, on "leil Shavuot", we spend the entire evening engrossed in the study of Torah, 're-living' the experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai!

**SOME BIBLICAL 'HINTS'**

Even though the connection between Matan Torah and Shavuot is not explicit in Chumash, we do find several interesting 'hints' to their connection in Parshat Emor.

Recall how Parshat Emor is the primary source for the specific details of the special laws of Shavuot (see Vayikra 23:15-21). That parshia discusses the special korban of the "shtei ha'lechem", offered at the conclusion of the 50 days of "Sfirat Ha'omer". Together with the shtei ha'lechem, the "tzibur" (the community of Israel) is commanded to bring an additional korban of "OLOT u'SHLAMIM". [The Olah is 7 sheep, 2 rams, and 1 bull, together with the standard goat for the chatat offering. For the shlamim the tzibur offers 2 sheep, whose meat is waved ('tnufa') together with the "shtei ha'lechem".]

**THE SHTEI HA'LECHEM**

There are two unique laws regarding the "shtei ha'lechem" - the special korban of Shavuot.

1) It is the only korban 'mincha' offered by the tzibur which is baked 'chametz' (all other flour offerings must be baked 'matzah').
2) It is the only time during the entire year when the tzibur brings a korban SHLAMIM.

**1) CHAMETZ U'MATZAH**

As we explained in earlier shiurim, matzah symbolizes the initial stage of a process, whereas the fully risen 'chametz' symbolizes its completion. Thus, the mitzvah to bake the shtei ha'lechem as 'chametz' may indicate that Matan Torah should be understood as the culmination of the redemption process which began with Yetziat Mitzrayim. Just as the "shtei ha'lechem' marks the culmination of the wheat harvest, the staple of our physical existence - the historical process which began with the Exodus culminates with Matan Torah, the essence of our spiritual existence.

Just as we find in "chag ha'matzot" and "succot", the agricultural time of year 'sends' an educational message that can help us understand the significance of the historical event that we commemorate. [See shiur on Parshat Emor.]

**2) KORBAN SHLAMIM**

If we compare the korbanot offered on Shavuot to the various korbanot offered on all the other holidays, we reach a very interesting conclusion: Shavuot is the ONLY holiday when the "tzibur" must offer a korban SHLAMIM, i.e. the two kvasim which are offered with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM.

As usual, to understand the significance of this korban, we must uncover its Biblical precedent.

The FIRST instance where we find a korban SHLAMIM is at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (Shmot 24:4-8) when the Torah describes the special covenantal ceremony that takes place at Ma'amad Har Sinai. At this ceremony, Bnei Yisrael proclaim "na'aseh v'nishma" while entering into a covenant to become God's special nation by accepting the laws of Matan Torah.

That ceremony included the offering of special korbanot: OLOT and SHLAMIM (see Shmot 24:5). The blood from these korbanot, sprinkled both on the mizbayach and on the people, symbolized Bnei Yisrael's entry into the covenant (24:6-8). [The meat of the shlamim was eaten at the conclusion of the ceremony (24:11).]

Thus we find that the very first korban SHLAMIM is offered as a symbol of Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of MATAN TORAH. Recall our explanation (see shiur on Parshat Vayikra) of how a SHLAMIM reflects a joint feast shared by covenental partners. Therefore, the korban SHLAMIM, which is presented together with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM on Shavuot, may serve a symbolic reminder of MATAN TORAH.

In fact, we find two additional instances in Chumash when Bnei Yisrael offer a special collective SHLAMIM offering - and once again, both relate to Ma'amad Har Sinai:

1) During the YOM ha'SHMINI ceremony (see Vayikra 9:1-5)
2) On Har Eival, when the generation that enters the land re-enacts Ma'amad Har Sinai and studies its laws! [see Devarim 27:1-8]

1) In many ways, "Yom ha'Shmini"- the day of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan - can be considered as an extension of Ma'amad Har Sinai. Considering that God's SHCHINA, which had left Bnei Yisrael in the aftermath of chet ha'egel, now returns to the Mishkan, and God begins once again to teach Bnei Yisrael

mitzvot - now from the Ohel Moed instead of from Har Sinai - we can view this event as parallel to the day of MATAN TORAH.

Furthermore, this day marks the first time that God appears to Bnei Yisrael (see 9:4-5) since He appeared to them on the day when they first proclaimed "na'aseh v'nishma" (see 24:9-11).

Once again, the korban SHLAMIM offered during this ceremony may reflect the re-establishment of the covenant of Har Sinai, which was broken due to chet ha'egel.

2) The purpose of the ceremony which God commands Bnei Yisrael to perform on Har Eival (to teach Bnei Yisrael the Torah and offer korbanot OLOT & SHLAMIM) is clearly to re-create the experience of MATAN TORAH for the new generation (for most of them were not present at the original event). Here once again, we find a thematic connection between the korban SHLAMIM and MATAN TORAH.

Therefore, it is only logical to assume that special korban SHLAMIM that the Torah obligates us to offer with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM on Shavuot alludes to the deeper thematic connection between SHAVUOT and MATAN TORAH.

Indeed, Shavuot remains as "ZMAN MATAN TORATEINU".

chag sameyach,
menachem

==========

**FOR FURTHER IYUN**

1. Based on the above shiur, can you find a deeper meaning to the popular phrase "im ein kemach - ein Torah" [If there is no flour then there is no TORAH.]

2. In regard to Devarim 4:9-10. Note how these psukim could be understood as an introduction to the prohibition to make any image to represent God, as explained in 4:11-22. Therefore, this may not be considered as an independent mitzvah to remember Matan Torah. Only Ramban counts it as a mitzvah - See his pirush on 4:9 and the Hasagot HaRamban to Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam- Lo Ta'aseh #2. Note, that even if it is counted as a mitzvah, it does not require any specific action by which we are to commemorate that event. We are simply commanded never to forget it.

3. Our assumption that the specific date of the tenth of Tishrei was chosen for 'Yom Kippur' because it marks the date when Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second "luchot" is based on several thematic parallels.

First and foremost, the very concept of "kappara" was first introduced when Moshe first petitioned God to forgive Bnei Yisrael for their behavior at chet ha'egel - see Shmot 32:30 - "...u'lie ACHAPRA b'ad chatatchem". Furthermore, during Moshe's forty days and nights on Har Sinai, he did not eat or drink (see Devarim 9:9). This may relate to our need to fast on Yom Kippur.

Finally, the specific date of the TENTH of the month would have no logical reason, other than if it commemorated a certain event that happened on that day. [A holiday on the fifteenth of the month (Pesach & Succot) would be because of full moon, or Rosh ha'shana, because it is a new moon. However a holiday on the tenth would require a reason for that specific day.]