

Potomac Torah Study Center
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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 almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

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

My friend Saadia Greenberg, who compiles Likutei Torah every week, agreed with a statement that I sent to him by E-mail. There are fewer Devrei Torah on Shavuot than on any Shabbat or other holiday. We both had unusual difficulty finding something new to include in our compilations this week.

For Pesach, we have symbols such as matzah, Seder, and korban Pesach. For Succot, we have the Succah and four species. For Shavuot, however, we have laws (the Torah). Shavuot in the Torah marks the end of seven weeks since the Omer offering (given on the second day of Pesach). We count 49 days (seven weeks of seven days each), and the following day is Shavuot. The Omer (and thus Shavuot) parallel the seven years of shmittah and yovel in Behar – periods of letting land in Israel lie fallow (every seventh year), letting slaves go free, cancelling debts, and returning land to the original “owners” from the division to the tribes at the time of Yehoshua. For Jews outside Israel, and especially since the mingling of the tribes, most of the Omer, shmittah, and yovel requirements no longer directly affect us as much as do the rituals from Pesach and Sukkot.

A widespread custom on Shavuot is eating dairy, especially cheesecake. On Shavuot, the korbanot at the Mishkan and Temple included two loafs of bread. (On other holidays, the bread eaten with korbanot was only matzah.) (My close friend Rabbi Yehoshua Singer of Am HaTorah Congregation helped me with the technical aspects of what follows.) The Rema (Rabbi Moses Isserles) explained the practice as consisting of dairy and meat at the same meal, observing all the Halachic restrictions to keep the meal Kosher. The meal must start with dairy. After eating dairy, avoiding any hard cheese, one must remove all the dairy utensils, change the tablecloth, etc., and set out a meat meal. Everyone must rinse and clean his mouth and wash hands. When having both dairy and meat, one loaf of bread would be for dairy and the other for meat. (Vegetarians or those following the custom of only eating dairy should eat from both loaves when reciting motzi.) This custom continues in much of the Orthodox communities (because our tradition is that meat is part of a Shabbat or holiday meal).

According to the Mishna Berurah, once God gave us the Torah, we had to observe the laws of kashruth. Our ancestors could not eat meat until they could shecht and salt meat, and kasher their dishes. Before completing this process, they could only eat dairy. (Chabad.org provides numerous other interpretations between dairy and Shavuot.)

The coronavirus danger, which has closed synagogues in most of the world, is especially difficult for a holiday with a custom of staying up and learning Torah all night, and then reading the Ten Commandments in shul at morning services. My son Evan prepared imaginative Devrei Torah for Shavuot night the past two years – but without public meetings, this custom must take a year off. Hopefully long before next spring we can resume attending shul safely.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, used to devote services the first morning of Shavuot to children of congregants who attended day schools. These children would lead the davening, read the Torah and Haftorah, and present Devrei Torah. We have a long line from God presenting the Torah to Moshe, then Moshe passing it along to Yehoshua, then the Elders, Prophets, Men of the Great Assembly, and a long line of rabbis. To continue this line into the future, we must teach our children. As we read from Pirkei Avot during the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, we extend this line that has preserved our people for thousands of years. May we all do our part to keep the link going.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Milda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Chaya Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Shavuos: The Untouchables

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1999

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

A unique aspect of the holiday of Shavuot struck me as I was explaining the customs of the holidays to some beginners. They began to review the various holiday laws with me. "OK," began one young man. "So on Pesach you've got the matzoh, and the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus." "Correct," I nodded. "And on Sukkot you've got the lulav, esrog and eating the entire holiday in a sukkah right." Again I gave an approving nod and smiled. The student continued. "And what special observance does the Torah tell us to do on Shavuot?" I hesitated. Sacrifices aside, what special mitzvah observance do we do to commemorate the receiving of the Torah?

I was reluctant to respond with, "we stay up all night and learn" or "we eat cheesecake at the holiday meal," –beautiful customs that are in no way comparable to the level of a Torah-ordained command. In fact, the Torah tells us in Parshas Re'eh how we celebrate the holiday. "You shall count seven weeks for yourselves... Then you shall observe the holiday of Shavuot for Hashem. You shall rejoice before Hashem, your son your daughter, your servant your maidservant, the Levite in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan and the widow who are among you" (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

Why is there no physical act in commemoration of the Yom Tov? There is no Torah-prescribed requirement to blow Shofar, read a special Torah portion (the reading of the 10 Commandments is Rabbinically ordained), or special ritual to commemorate the event. There is only all-inclusive rejoicing. Why is joy the only way to celebrate? And why is every type of citizen mentioned? Aren't the poor and rich, widowed and orphaned included in every command? My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, passed away 13 years ago. At the end of the shloshim period of mourning, his student, Rabbi Yitzchok Chinn, Rabbi of Gemilas Chesed Congregation of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, eulogized him. He related the following story:

Reb Yaakov spent his summers at Camp Ohr Shraga in Ellenville, NY. One summer, a young boy asked Reb Yaakov a most difficult question, "Rebbe," he inquired, "where is my neshama (soul)?" Reb Yaakov turned to the boy and asked him, "Where is your arm?" The boy stuck out his arm. "Good!" said Reb Yaakov. "I want you to shake it." The boy began to shake his arm up and down. Reb Yaakov smiled, "Good, now shake your other arm." The boy began flapping his arms. "Wonderful! Now show me your leg." The boy lifted his foot. "Now shake it!" While flapping his arms, the boy shook his leg. Then Reb Yaakov smiled. "Now your other leg!" The boy began to jump and shake and rock and sway. And as he watched the youngster move with every part of his very essence, Reb Yaakov gave him a tremendous smile and exclaimed, "That is your neshama!"

The only way to commemorate the receiving of the Torah is to celebrate the receipt of our nation's soul. We cannot celebrate the soul with a physical commemoration. The soul of the nation celebrates by shaking every one of its parts: poor or rich, wealthy or poor, free or slave, son or daughter with unmitigated joy. The only way to capture the essence of our very being and our gratitude for the gift that infused us with boundless spirituality is through a rejoicing that permeates every part of the Jewish body; its arms, legs, and torso — The Torah. The observance is not relegated to eating an item, telling a story, hearing a shofar or sitting in a booth. Like the Torah we received, the celebration encompasses every aspect of our lives. And that is done thorough joyous simcha.

Chag Sameach and Good Shabbos!

Shavuot: Does Torah Ever Take a Sleep Break?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, and Rabbi Avram Schwartz © 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. Rabbeinu 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 Rabbeinu 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.

Chag Samayach!

Shavuot- Whose Torah Is It?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2018 Teach 613

Shavuot is a holiday that could have been predicted. It is the holiday on which Hashem gave us the Torah. From the world around us, one could have predicted the giving of the Torah as a moral guide for people. DNA, the brain, the eye, and digestion, all speak of a "master craftsman" of great sophistication. Would a master craftsman create such a glorious world, and not provide an owner's manual?

Yet, even an owner's manual would not, on its own, convey Hashem's plan for creation and the human journey. It requires a sense of unity, a sense of community, to properly understand, discuss, apply, and maintain the Divine Directive. An individual person ready to accept the Torah, even many individuals ready to accept the Torah, does not ensure success of the Torah's mission. Indeed, when the Torah recounts the revelation at Sinai it states that the Jewish people camped before the mountain, using the singular form "Vayichan," rather than the word "Vayachanu," the plural form of "camped." Rashi explains that the Jewish people were united as one; hence the use of the singular form of "camped." The commentaries explain that national unity was a prerequisite for receiving the gift of Torah.

The Medrash relates that an ignorant Jew once approached Rabbi Yanai and called him a thief. Rabbi Yanai was stunned, until the man said that he heard that there is a verse stating that Torah is, "...an inheritance to the congregation of Yakov." The man explained, "It is not your personal inheritance. It is the inheritance of the Jewish people. You need to teach it!" The gift of Torah was not made to individuals. The gift of Torah is a gift to the nation.

When we consider the gift of Torah, we realize that Torah goes beyond basic guidelines of dos, don'ts, and a code of ethics. The Torah provides the precision by which to weigh one priority against another. What happens when two priorities — such as healing, on the one hand, and not inflicting pain, on the other — collide? Or when the value of Tzedaka and community service conflicts with Shalom Bayis and family responsibility? The Torah doesn't just provide global, universal values, it also provides the surgical nuance to enable precise application of those priorities.

No wonder that every morning as we ask for Torah to be sweet, we ask not only for ourselves, but for the entire Jewish people. Likewise, in the blessing before Shema we declare, "Illuminate our eyes with Your Torah." The Jewish people are united in recognizing that the gift of Torah is ours as a nation. And so, we hope that every Jew worldwide may experience that joy, as we say, "Sweeten the Torah for us and for the entire Jewish people. Let all of us and our descendants study Torah with clarity."

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a happy and productive Shavuos!

A New Revelation? -- Thoughts for Shavuoth

by Rabbi Marc Angel

Jewishideas.org

On Shavuoth, we commemorate the awesome Revelation at Mount Sinai, when the Almighty presented the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel. All of the Israelite men, women and children experienced that solemn moment, marking an everlasting covenant between God and the Israelite nation.

Let us imagine that God would invite us to a second Revelation at Sinai, asking all the Jews of the world to attend.

The Hareidim would say: we cannot be in the same domain as the non-religious or less religious Jews. We are pure, we will not have contact with those of lesser purity.

The Secularists would say: we cannot attend because we do not want to be bound by any commandments. We are citizens of the world and don't want the particular responsibilities of being Jewish.

The non-Orthodox would say: we can't attend unless the event is egalitarian; and unless there is no expectation that we accept any commandments. We are open to suggestions, but not to commandments.

The modern Orthodox would insist that the Revelation also include Divine words relating to science, philosophy and the modern world.

Hassidim would demand that they be placed near their own Rebbe, and not anywhere else.

Each Sephardic and Ashkenazic ethnic group would insist on having its own hazan, its own minhag, its own pronunciation of Hebrew.

Unaffiliated Jews would turn up out of curiosity; the Kabbalah Center would set up booths on the outskirts selling books and red strings.

Alienated and ignorant Jews would complain: this event is boring, we need a rock band or other entertainment to make it attractive.

The hypothetical second Revelation might not be such a happy and congenial event, after all. And yet, it should be a tremendous unifying experience for the Jewish people.

The Talmud (Eruvin 21b) teaches that King Solomon instituted two practices, and a heavenly voice approved of both. One practice is the washing of hands before meals; the other is the setting up of eruvin (boundary enclosures). Washing hands relates to personal purification. After we wash, we remain silent until reciting the blessing over bread. During that period of time, we are in a uniquely private domain, involving only us and the Almighty. Interpersonal relationships are excluded. The eruv, though, provides a method of including others in our domain. It is a symbolic way of turning a public area into a private area by considering all of us as one extended family and community.

For us to be a whole, united Jewish people, we need to draw on both of these wise practices established by King Solomon. We need to concentrate on personal purity, on fostering a direct and powerful relationship with God. We need the humility to accept God's commandments, and to delight in them. At the same time, we need the "eruv" philosophy that attempts to include as many as possible within our domain. It is a philosophy of inclusion, not exclusion; it is a way of extending boundaries and demonstrating concern for our neighbors—even those with whom we may disagree.

Shavuoth is the festival on which we recall the Revelation at Mt. Sinai. It is also a good time to plan for a hypothetical second gathering of Israelites at Sinai—and to think carefully how we can envision such an event as an opportunity to bring all of us together.

For the Jewish people to find its spiritual balance, we will need to work on personal spiritual development and purity; and also on strategies that are grand enough to allow all of us to stand together in the presence of God.

Moadim leSimha.

Shavuot & Receiving the Torah

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

There is a beautiful and powerful Rash"i at the beginning of the Torah reading on Shavuot morning. Noting the singular verb "jn'I – 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.

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Chalav and the Power of Permission

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

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 conjecture 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 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 Mamona 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

¹ Excluding rabbinic gezeiros of Chalav Yisrael

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."

1. Excluding rabbinic gezeiros of Chalav Yisrael

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Rav Kook Torah Shavuot: Accepting Two Torahs

A careful reading of the Torah's account of Matan Torah indicates that the Jewish people accepted the Torah not once but twice. First it says:

"Moses came and told the people all of God's words and all of the laws. The entire people responded with a single voice, 'All the words that God spoke — we will do (Na'a'eh).'" (Ex. 24:3)

Immediately afterward, we read:

"Moses wrote down all of God's words.... He took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'All that God said, we will do and we will understand — Na'a'eh VeNishma.'" (Ex. 24:4,7)

These two passages cannot refer to the same event. In the first account, Moses communicated God's words orally, while in the second account he read to the people from sefer habrit, the written record of God's word.

This corresponds to the teaching of the Sages that not one but two Torahs were given at Mount Sinai — the Oral Law and the Written Law. The Jewish people first accepted upon themselves the Oral Torah, and afterward, the Written Torah.

Why Two Torahs?

Why was it necessary for the Torah to be given both orally and in writing? And why did the people accept the Oral Torah with the words, "We will do," but when accepting the Written Torah they added, "and we will understand"?

There are two aspects to Torah study. The primary goal of Torah is to know how we should conduct ourselves. This is the function of the Oral Law — the Mishnah and the Talmud — which discusses in detail how to apply God's laws to the diverse situations of life.

The second goal of Torah study is to know the Torah for its own sake, without practical applications. This goal is particularly relevant to the Written Torah. Even if we do not fully understand the words and intent, we still fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study when we read the Written Torah. As the Sages taught: "One should first learn superficially, and later analyze [the material]... even if one does not [initially]

understand what one has read" (Avodah Zarah 19a).

There is no value, however, in studying the Oral Torah if it is not understood properly. On the contrary, misreading the Oral Law will lead to errors in Halachic rulings and faulty conduct.

Attaining accurate insight into the practical application of Torah principles requires a breadth and depth of Torah scholarship. It is unreasonable to expect the entire people to reach such a level of erudition. For this reason, the practical side of Torah was transmitted orally. Only those who labor diligently in its study, receiving the traditions from the great scholars of the previous generation, will truly merit this knowledge. If this part of Torah had been committed to writing, many unlearned individuals would be falsely confident in rendering legal decisions, despite not having studied all of the relevant issues.

One might argue that perhaps the entire Torah should have been transmitted orally. But then Torah knowledge would be limited to only a select few. The Written Torah enables all to be exposed to Torah, on whatever level they are capable of comprehending.

Now we can better understand the Torah's account of Mount Sinai. When they first accepted the Oral Law, the people promised, 'Na'aseh.' This aspect of Torah related to the entire people only in terms of its practical application — "We will do." It was with regard to the Written Torah, which is intellectually accessible to all, that the people added, 'VeNishma' — "and we will understand."

First — "We Will Do"

It is natural to want to understand as much as possible and to act according to our understanding. The spiritual greatness of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai was their recognition of the benefit of not committing the Oral Law to writing so that their actions would best fulfill God's Will. This is the significance of their response, "We will do": we accept upon ourselves to follow the practical teachings of the scholars and teachers of the Oral Law. Since this acceptance was equally relevant to all, regardless of intellectual capabilities, the verse emphasizes that "the entire people responded with a single voice."

After they had accepted upon themselves to observe the Torah according to the teachings of the rabbis, Moses then presented them with the Written Torah. We would have expected that the people would have shown particular love for the Written Law, since they could approach this Torah directly. But in an act of spiritual nobility, the Jewish people demonstrated their desire to first obey and observe the applied rulings of the Oral Law. Thus they announced: "We will do," and only afterward, "we will understand."

In summary: the Jewish people received two Torahs at Sinai. Moses first gave them the Oral Law, so they could fulfill the Torah's principal goal — proper conduct in this world. Then Moses transmitted the Written Law, enabling each individual to access Torah at his level, and preparing the people to receive the practical teachings of the Oral Law.

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 160-165.)

Shavuos: Questions And Answers

By Rabbi Daniel Neustadt (© Torah.org 2013)

Question: What are the Yom Tov restrictions in regard to flowers?

Discussion: Flowers, while still connected to the ground, may be smelled and touched, provided that their stems are soft and do not normally become brittle. 1 Flowers in a vase may be moved on Shabbos and Yom Tov. 2 They may not, however, be moved from a shady area to a sunny area to promote blossoming. If the buds have not fully bloomed, the vase may be moved but just slightly, since the movement of the water hastens the opening of the buds. 3 One may remove flowers from a vase full of water, as long as they have not sprouted roots in the water. 4 Once removed, they may not be put back in the water if that will cause further blossoming. Water may not be added to a flower vase on Shabbos. 5 On Yom Tov, however, a small amount of water may be added but not changed. 6 Flowers should be placed in water before Yom Tov. In case they were not, they may not be placed in water on Shabbos if the buds have not blossomed fully. If the buds are completely opened, however, some poskim permit placing them in water on Yom Tov while others do not. 7 One may not gather flowers or create an arrangement and place it in a vase on Shabbos, even if the vase contains no water. 8

Question: Does one recite a blessing over the pleasant fragrance exuded from flowers in a vase?

Discussion: Just as one may not derive pleasure from food or drink before reciting a proper blessing, so too, one may not enjoy a pleasant fragrance before reciting the appropriate blessing. 9 There are two different types of blessings that can be recited over pleasant¹⁰ fragrances exuded from flowers: 1. Borei atzei vesamim: Recited over fragrant shrubs and trees or their flowers (e.g., myrtle, roses¹¹).

2. Borei isvei vesamim: Recited over fragrant herbs, grasses or flowers.

The blessing is recited immediately before one intends to smell the pleasant fragrance. B'diavad, one may recite the blessing within a few seconds after he smelled a pleasant fragrance. 12

But a blessing over a pleasant fragrance is recited only over an object whose purpose is to exude a pleasant fragrance. If the object is primarily for another purpose — even if the object is sweet-smelling — no blessing is recited. 13 Although flowers in a vase exude a pleasant fragrance, since people usually buy flowers for their beauty, one who walks by and smells them does not recite a blessing. If, however, the flowers are picked up and smelled, a blessing must be recited.

Question: Within the same meal, may one eat cheese or other dairy food and then eat meat immediately thereafter?

Discussion: According to the basic halachah it is permitted to eat meat or chicken immediately after eating cheese or any other dairy food, even during the same meal; there is no requirement to recite Birkas ha-mazon or a berachah acharonah between the dairy and the meat. The only separation required is to clean and rinse the mouth and teeth, wash the hands and clean the table (or change the tablecloth) to make sure that no dairy residue or crumbs remain. While there are scrupulous individuals who wait at least an hour¹⁴ between eating dairy and meat in addition to reciting Birkas ha-mazon or a berachah acharonah between them — and their custom is based on the Zohar and quoted by several poskim¹⁵ — it is not required by the halachah. 16

Question: Does the same halachah apply to hard cheese as well?

Discussion: When “hard” cheese is eaten, the halachah is different. Shulchan Aruch quotes an opinion that requires one to wait a full six hours between eating hard cheese and meat. This view maintains that the taste and oily residue of hard cheese lingers in the mouth long after the cheese has been consumed, just as the taste and residue of meat lingers long after consumption. 17 In addition, other poskim hold that hard cheese can get stuck between the teeth just as pieces of meat do. 18 While other poskim do not consider either of these issues to be a problem with hard cheese and permit eating meat immediately after eating hard cheese, Rama and the later poskim¹⁹ recommend that one be stringent and wait six hours between consuming hard²⁰ cheese, and meat or poultry. (See tomorrow’s Discussion for a definition of “hard cheese.”)

Question: How do we define “hard” cheese concerning this halachah?

Discussion: Exactly how to define “hard” cheese is another controversial subject. All poskim agree that cheese which has been cured for at least six months before being packaged and refrigerated is considered hard cheese. 21 While many of the hard cheeses sold in the United States are not aged for six months, there are several brands of cheese that advertise that they have been cured for ten months or longer and those are surely considered hard cheeses. Parmesan cheese, for instance, is aged for at least a year, if not longer. The poskim are also in agreement that cheeses that are not aged six months but are cured long enough to become wormy²² are considered “hard” cheese. 23

There are, however, some poskim who maintain that all hard cheeses, including all kinds of American (yellow) cheese, etc., are considered hard cheese and one who eats them should wait six hours before eating meat. 24 While some individuals follow this opinion, the widespread custom follows the more lenient view. 25 It is appropriate, though, to wait at least one hour between eating any hard cheese and meat. 26

Question: Why do some women omit the blessing of shehecheyanu when they light Yom Tov candles?

Discussion: The validity of the custom to recite shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time, a prevalent long-standing custom,²⁷ has been extensively debated by the poskim. 28 The preferred time to recite shehecheyanu is right after the recitation of Kiddush, while the cup of wine is still being held aloft. Since ladies listen and answer amen to the shehecheyanu which is recited after Kiddush, there is no halachic reason for them to recite this very blessing when they light candles. There are other halachic objections as well. Still, since many women are inspired by the important mitzvah of candle-lighting and feel the need to express their joy at that time, the custom evolved of reciting shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time. Most poskim feel that while we do not encourage this practice, we need not object to it and the ladies who recite their own shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time may continue to do so. 29

Sources:

1. Mishnah Berurah 336:48.
2. Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64).
3. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73); Bris Olam, pg. 32.
4. Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26.
5. Mishnah Berurah 336:54.
6. O.C. 654:1 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 654:2; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26.
7. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:48; Shulchan Shlomo 336:12; Yechaveh Da'as 2:53.
8. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:73.
9. O.C. 216:1. A berachah acharonah, however, was not instituted for pleasant fragrances; Mishnah Berurah 216:4.

10. One who does not enjoy a particular fragrance does not recite a blessing.
11. Mishnah Berurah 216:17.
12. Halichos Shlomo 1:23-38.
13. O.C. 217:2. See also Mishnah Berurah 217:1; 216:11.
14. Some wait an half an hour; see Peri Hadar on Peri Megadim, Y.D. 89:16.
15. See Minchas Yaakov 76:5 and Beiur ha-Gra, Y.D. 89:2. See Darchei Teshuvah 89:14 who rules like these poskim. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:160.
16. Mishnah Berurah 494:16; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89:9.
17. Taz, Y.D. 89:4.
18. Peri Chadash, Y.D. 89:2.
19. Chochmas Adam 40:13; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89: and Mishnah Berurah 494:16 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 15. Sefaradim, however, do not follow this stringency; see Yabia Omer, Y.D. 6:7.
20. If the hard cheese is softened through boiling or cooking, it is no longer considered hard cheese; Darchei Teshuvah 89:43. But if it is merely fried or baked (as in pizza), it is still considered hard cheese; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 426).
21. Shach, Y.D. 89:15.
22. These "worms" are kosher and are permitted to be eaten as long as they remain within the cheese; see Rama, Y.D. 84:16.
23. Taz, Y.D. 89:4; Chochmas Adam 40:13.
24. Rav Y.Y. Weiss, quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanhagos, Y.D. 1:388; Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 427; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Shevet ha-Levi 2:35.
25. Ma'asei Ish 5, pg. 22, quoting Chazon Ish; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (Feiffer), pg. 138, quoting Rav A. Kotler; Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148, quoting Rav M. Feinstein; Debreciner Rav in Pischei Halachah, pg. 108; Mi-Beis Levi 6; Rav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Nezer ha-Chayim, pg. 213; Mesorah, vol. 20, pg. 91, ruling by Rav Y. Belsky.
26. Rav Y.E. Henkin, written ruling published in Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148.
27. Mateh Efrayim 581:4; 619:4.
28. See Sh'eilas Ya'avetz 107, Kaf ha-Chayim 263:40 and Moadim u'Zemanim 7:117 quoting the Brisker Rav.
29. Sha'arei Teshuvah 263:5; Mishnah Berurah 263:23; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:12; Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 585:2; Halichos Shlomo, Moadim 2:9-22.

11 Shavuot Myths and Misconceptions

By Yehuda Altein* © Chabad 2020

1. Myth: Shavuot Is Always on 6 Sivan

Every year, the holiday of Shavuot takes place on the 6th (and 7th) day of the Hebrew month of Sivan (corresponding to May-June). It would seem that Shavuot has always been celebrated on this date.

Fact: Shavuot Is the 50th Day From the Omer

The Torah instructs us to count seven weeks (49 days) from the day of the omer offering, and to celebrate Shavuot on the 50th day.¹ The omer offering was brought on the second day of Passover (more on this below), and according to the calendar we follow today, 50 days later is 6 Sivan.

In Temple times, however, each month was established anew by the rabbinical court, based on the testimony of witnesses who had observed the new moon. (Read: The Jewish Month.) The length of each month varied accordingly, and Shavuot therefore occurred on either the 5th, 6th, or 7th day of Sivan.

Interestingly, alternative Shavuot dates are possible today as well—for someone who crossed the International Dateline between Passover and Shavuot. In such a case, your 50th day is different from the 50th day of those around you. If you crossed the line westward (e.g., from America to Australia), your Shavuot will begin on 7 Sivan. Conversely, if you crossed the line eastward (e.g., from Australia to America), you will begin celebrating on 5 Sivan.

If you are planning to cross the dateline between Passover and Shavuot, make sure to discuss the relevant halachic details with a competent rabbi.

2. Myth: Shavuot Is Always on Sunday

Although this mistake is pretty much a thing of the past, it is probably the oldest Shavuot myth in history, dating back to Talmudic times.

The Torah instructs us to "count seven complete weeks from the day after the day of rest, from the day you bring the omer offering."² This seems to imply that the omer offering was brought on Sunday (the day after the "day of rest"—Shabbat). If this is when the seven-

week count begins, it should always conclude on Shabbat, and Shavuot—the fiftieth day—should always be celebrated on Sunday.

Fact: The “Day of Rest” Is the First Day of Passover

Along with the Written Torah, G d gave us the Oral Torah to ensure the correct interpretation of the law. The Talmud cites an oral tradition,³ sourced from Moses, who received it from G d Himself, that the “day of rest” in this verse refers not to Shabbat, but to the first day of Passover. (Indeed, it is common for Scripture to refer to holidays as “days of rest” or “appointed times.”)

Hence, the omer offering was always brought on the second day of Passover, no matter which day of the week it was, and Shavuot is 50 days later, be it a Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, or Thursday.

3. Myth: It Is Enough to Celebrate Shavuot for One Day

Many people erroneously believe celebrating Shavuot for one day is sufficient.

Fact: Shavuot Is Celebrated for Two Days in the Diaspora

According to Torah law, Shavuot is a single day. In Temple times, since each month was established anew by the rabbinical court in Jerusalem, and it took time to send out word, the communities in the Diaspora were often unsure as to the correct day of the holiday. As such, in the Land of Israel, where word traveled faster and there was no doubt which day was the first of the month, Shavuot was celebrated for one day (as per Torah law), while in the Diaspora a second day was observed to cover all bases.

In the 4th century CE, a fixed calendar was established, and people knew in advance when the festivals would occur. Nevertheless, the Talmud explains that we are bound by rabbinic law to observe a second day. On a simple level, the reason for this ancient requirement is to uphold the customs of our forefathers. Deeper, mystical reasons are also provided.

4. Myth: It's a Mitzvah to Eat Dairy

On Rosh Hashanah it's a mitzvah to hear the shofar; on Sukkot—to eat in a sukkah; on Passover—to eat matzah; and on Shavuot—to eat dairy. Shavuot without cheese blintzes is not Shavuot, right?

Fact: It's a Custom (Albeit a Delicious One)

The Torah does not instruct us to eat dairy; in fact, it is not even mentioned in the Talmud. Eating dairy foods on Shavuot is a custom that evolved in post-Talmudic times, with numerous explanations (see next myth for more on this). As with all customs, we express our devotion to G d by doing even more than He asks of us.

5. Myth: It's Primarily Because That's What We Had After Sinai

Perhaps the most well-known reason for eating dairy is that when G d gave the Torah, the Jews became obligated to observe the kosher laws. All the meat in their possession was rendered unfit, and since the Torah was given on Shabbat, no cattle could be slaughtered nor could utensils be koshered. They had no choice but to eat dairy, and we commemorate this by doing the same.

Fact: This is Only One of Many (Earlier) Reasons

This explanation can be traced to a book printed about 100 years ago, presenting Torah thoughts of the chassidic greats of the 18th century. However, many other fascinating reasons have been given for this custom, some of them from centuries earlier.

6. Myth: No Need to Eat Meat on Shavuot

The typical Shabbat and festival fare includes a sumptuous meat-based dish. Eating meat is one of the ways we fulfill the mitzvah to rejoice on the holidays. Some assume that Shavuot is an exception. Since we must wait a specified amount of time between eating meat and dairy, the custom to eat dairy would seem to override the obligation to eat meat.

Fact: There Is Still an Obligation to Eat Meat (Separate From Dairy, of Course)

Shavuot is no exception; the obligation to eat meat remains. There are numerous customs regarding when to serve dairy so it should not conflict with the meat. One common practice is to serve a dairy meal immediately after morning services. Then, after reciting Grace After Meals and waiting an hour, a meat meal is served.

7. Myth: Tractate Shevuot Is About Shavuot

There is a Talmudic tractate devoted to each of the major holidays—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Purim, and Passover (although Chanukah is a noticeable exception). There is also a tractate named Shevuot. Obvious conclusion: Tractate Shevuot is about Shavuot.

Fact: Tractate Shevuot Discusses Oaths

Interestingly enough, Tractate Shevuot is not about Shavuot but about oaths. While the holiday's name means weeks, as it is celebrated seven weeks after the omer offering, the similar word shevuot means oaths, and that is the subject of the tractate.

Although Shavuot is blessed with a myriad of beautiful customs, it has very few unique laws. Many laws relating to festivals in general are discussed in another tractate—Beitzah.

There is, however, a connection between Tractate Shevuot (oaths) and Shavuot (the holiday): On this day G d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.

8. Myth: We Received the Two Tablets on Shavuot

Shavuot is the day G d gave us the Torah. Many understand this to mean that we received the two Tablets (luchot)on this day.

Fact: We Got Them (and Lost Them) on 17 Tammuz

On Shavuot G d communicated the Ten Commandments to us, the first two directly and the last eight via Moses. Moses then ascended Mount Sinai and remained there for 40 days, where G d gave him the Tablets upon which these Ten Commandments—the foundation of all 613 mitzvot G d taught him during that time—were inscribed.

The 40 days concluded on the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz. When Moses descended with the Tablets, he was met with the sight of the Jews worshipping the golden calf. Horrified, he threw the Tablets to the ground, shattering them instantly.

Moses then ascended Mount Sinai once more to intercede on behalf of the sinners. G d heeded his requests and forgave the Jews, and 80 days later, on Yom Kippur, Moses descended once more with a second set of Tablets.

9. Myth: The Giving of the Torah Was a One-Time Phenomenon

The giving of the Torah was a wondrous experience, unmatched by anything since. The common perception is that on Shavuot we commemorate a climactic event that occurred over 3,330 years ago.

Fact: Every Year—Every Day—We Receive the Torah

From a deeper perspective, the Jewish festivals do not merely commemorate long-gone events. On a spiritual realm, the incidents of yore recur each year, imbuing us with ever-increasing energy and vigor.

Moreover, we are taught that G d gives us the Torah anew each and every day. This idea is expressed in the blessing we recite—in present tense—each morning before studying Torah: Blessed are You L rd who gives us the Torah.

So this year on Shavuot, picture the momentous giving of the Torah as a current reality. It's happening today! And next year, when circumstances allow, be sure to attend synagogue and hear the Ten Commandments read from the Torah.

10. Myth: The Ten Commandments Are the Most Important Mitzvot

It is common knowledge that the Ten Commandments are the most important of the 613 mitzvot, while the remaining ones are less significant and perhaps not binding. Or are they?

Fact: Every Mitzvah Is Equally Important

While the Ten Commandments certainly occupy a unique role, we should not underestimate the significance of any mitzvah, no matter how small it seems.

A mitzvah is the will of G d, and its value far exceeds anything we can grasp. Each and every mitzvah is an opportunity to forge a personal connection with G d Himself. So go ahead and do any that you can!

11. Myth: We Slept in Because We Were Apathetic

The Midrash relates that the night before the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people turned in early for a good night's sleep. The next morning, they slept in and Moses had to wake them. To rectify this wrongdoing, it is customary to stay up all night on Shavuot and study Torah texts.

This story is commonly viewed as a shameful part of our history, reflecting our forefathers' lack of enthusiasm to receive the Torah.

Fact: We Wanted to Prepare by Drawing Spiritual Energy

Although the Jews did sleep in on that fateful morning, there is a deeper dimension to the story, giving us a more positive way to look at what happened.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the Jews went to sleep not because of apathy, but because they felt that was the best way to prepare. When you sleep, your soul ascends to the supernal realms and receives renewed spiritual energy. What better way to prepare for the giving of the Torah, they felt, than to spend the preceding hours basking in spirituality?

Despite their good intentions, that was a mistake. By going to sleep, the Jews demonstrated they had misunderstood the point of the Torah. The Torah wasn't given so that we can become spiritual beings, but for us to grapple with and refine our physical nature. We therefore stay up to fix their mistake. We spend the night learning, working with our body, inspiring it, and purifying it, so that every part of us, both the physical and the spiritual, is ready to receive the Torah anew.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Leviticus 23:15–16.

2. Leviticus 23:15.

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Dvar Torah :: Shavuot

Why is it important to enjoy the meal at a wedding?

The Gemara in Berachot 6b tells us, “**כִּי הַנְּגָהָה מִפְעָזָת תְּחִזּוֹן... זֹהָה לְתִזְבָּחָת**” – “whoever enjoys the meal at a wedding and makes the bride and groom happy... acquires Torah”. What is the source for this? In the biblical account of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai the term ‘**לִילָּך**’- voice’ is mentioned 5 times. Similarly in Jeremiah chapter 33 verse 11, with reference to a bride and groom that same word ‘**לִילָּך**’ is mentioned five times. A beautiful teaching but does it actually make sense? I could have understood perhaps some of the more spiritual elements of the wedding ceremony being linked to acquiring Torah but why the physical activity of eating the meal?

I'd like to suggest the following peirush: Here we find an outstanding example of that Torah-true character trait of empathy.

Anyone who has hosted a simcha, a wedding or bar or bat mitzvah knows how much effort goes into creating the menu. All the considerations relating

to the options for the food, the financial investment, the tasting, etc. But it's a long run up for a short jump -after so many months of planning it's all over within a few hours. That is why it's so important that as guests at a wedding, if we enjoy the meal, we must let the hosts know that we appreciated their choice of food – that will give them so much encouragement and make them feel good. If you relate to others in this way you are showing you can be ‘**Zocher Latorah**’. The reason is, that our consideration for others in our tradition is always seen as an integral part of the way in which we connect spiritually with our creator.

The previous Gerer Rebbe was once asked ‘what should the name be for the Shabbat before Shavuot?’ After all the Shabbat before Pesach is called Shabbat HaGadol. The Shabbat before Yom Kippur is Shabbat Shuva, so what about the Shabbat before Shavuot? In an instant he replied: It should be called ‘**Shabbat Derech Eretz**’ – the Shabbat of menchlechkite, of being considerate, of being a decent human being -because the Mishna tells us ‘**Derech Eretz Kadma la'Torah**’ – ‘being a good person precedes the Torah’. That is why the Shabbat before Shavuot should be ‘**Shabbat Derech Eretz**’. This forthcoming festival of Shavuot it is going to be so different from others. We won't be in our shuls to enjoy our beautifully adorned synagogues, full of flowers and plants. We won't be able to enjoy a communal tikun leil. Most Jewish people around the world will be in their own homes and the reason for all this is: ‘**Derech Eretz Kadma la'Torah**’ – it is because of our consideration towards those in our society. We are looking after ourselves and we are looking after everyone else. Let us take the very same message forward for all years to come and if indeed we show that beautiful empathy towards those living around us we will all be ‘**Zocher Latorah**’, we will have the privilege of embracing a Torah way of life. May it be a shining light to guide us with meaning and joy throughout our lives.

I wish you all Chag Sameach

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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Ask Rav Aviner

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Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:
Popping Pimple on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to pop a pimple on Shabbat?

A: No, since blood comes out. If blood does not come out but only other debris, it is permissible.

Giving Tzedakah at Night

Q: What is the source that it is forbidden to give Tzedakah at night?

A: The Arizal, but the basic Halachah is that it permissible and proper to do so.

Faith in the Redemption

Q: What is the difference if we are in the Redemption or not?

A: It is the difference of what we believe. The Torah directs us what to do, what to believe, what to think and how to feel.

Torah Learning in Yeshiva

Q: Regarding one who comes to learn for a few years in Yeshiva: what is worthwhile for him to learn, and in what quantity – in-depth Gemara learning, broad Gemara learning, Halachah, Emunah, Musar, Tanach, etc.?

A: There are 3 answers: 1. He should follow what is customary in the Yeshiva where he learns. The two of us cannot decide in place of your Rosh Yeshiva. 2. A person learns Torah in a place that his heart desires (Avodah

Zarah 19a). But if a person's heart does not desire, he should bring himself to a level that his heart does desire. He should discuss it with his Ra"m in Yeshiva. 3. There is an order to Torah learning in Yeshiva for thousands of years, and who are we to change it? The essence is to learn Gemara in depth, and to learn a little of the rest.

Tevilat Kelim for Flower Vase

Q: Does a flower vase require Tevilah in a Mikvah?

A: No. Only a utensil which comes in contact with food.

Civil War in the U.S.A.

Q: A Rabbi said that there will soon be a civil war in the United States, and Jews should therefore make Aliyah. Is this true?

A: We do not have prophets which can reveal the future to us. But it is correct that Jews should make Aliyah.

Yom Ha-Atzmaut and Charedim

Q: A feeling of hatred against Charedim arises in me every Yom Ha-Atzmaut, since they belittle the State and the army. How can I look at them positively?

A: 1. They have many positives. 2. At the same time, theirs is a mistake within a good intention.

Change the Prayer for the State of Israel

Q: Should we change the expression "The beginning of the sprouting of our Redemption" in the Prayer for the State of Israel, since perhaps we are already after the beginning?

A: No. It is impossible to know where we are in the process. As long as we have not arrived at the Complete Redemption, it is possible to call it "the beginning".

Shemirat Ha-Lashon and Har Ha-Bayit

Q: Instead of Ha-Rav writing so much about the prohibition to enter the Temple Mount, isn't it preferable to focus on not speaking Lashon Ha-Ra?

A: We need to address both issues, and many others as well. "We will do and we will obey everything which Hashem spoke" (Ha-Rav receives 400 text message questions each day. 398 are on various subjects and about 2 of them are usually about the Temple Mount – M.T.).

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Jewish Media Resources :: Seed of Redemption

Jonathan Rosenblum, May 26, 2020

Breaking Free To Geulah

Mashiach can only come from a seed other than the one that gave birth to Kayin

Rav Aaron Lopiansky, rosh yeshivah of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, recently published Seed of Redemption, his English adaptation of Rav Yosef Lipovitz's Nachalas Yosef on Megillas Rus. Just in time for Shavuos.

When Nachalas Yosef was presented to Rav Gedaliah Nadel, one of those closest to the Chazon Ish, "he read it breathlessly from beginning to end, sobbing uncontrollably. [When he finished], he said, 'it is 500 years since a sefer of this kind was written; undoubtedly, it was written with ruach hakodesh,'" according to an eye-witness account.

Nachalas Yosef weaves the words of Chazal together in a seamless tapestry, not as isolated comments. The commentary demonstrates that Chazal's words are not fanciful extrapolations from the text, but careful explications of the verses, which peel back layers of meaning..

Rav Lipovitz, a close talmid of the Alter of Slabodka, introduces his commentary with two essays on recurrent themes throughout the megillah. The first focuses on chesed. "Rav Zeira said, [The megillah was written] to teach me how much reward lies in store for people who perform deeds of kindness" (Rus Rabbah 2:14).

Chesed, as defined by the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim, is acts of benevolence toward one's fellow man to whom no duty, or even sense of duty, exists. The paradigmatic act of chesed was Hashem's creation of the world, which obviously did not emanate from a preceding obligation. Every

act of chesed, then, attests to the Creator, for it flows from the breath of the Divine within us. Avraham was able to deduce the existence of the Creator "from himself," from his own middah of chesed.

Not only is chesed the foundation stone of the world, and necessary for its continuation, it is through chesed that the world will come to final establishment of the Davidic kingdom with the coming of Mashiach. Thus the centrality of chesed to the story leading to the birth of Dovid Hamelech. The second essay describes the period of the Judges, which was in many ways the antithesis of a world of chesed. Chazal ask how the nation degenerated so rapidly following the death of Yehoshua. They find a hint in the description of Yeshoshua's burial. Nowhere does it say that the people mourned Yehoshua, after burying him north of Gaash (Yeshoshua 24:29–30).

Nowhere else in Tanach is a place called Gaash mentioned. That absence leads Rav Berachiah to deduce that the meaning of the verse is that the people were too preoccupied (nisgaashu) to mourn Yehoshua. They were involved instead in their properties, fields, and vineyards. (See Rus Rabbah Psicha 2)

Materialism and self-absorption were the culprits. The entire period of the Judges is described as one in which each man did what was straight in his eyes. They acted without any consideration of anyone but themselves. Chazal found in a verse in Mishlei (19:15) — "Laziness begets slumber, and the deceitful soul starves" — stages of decline. Because Yisrael was lazy in paying their respects to Yehoshua, and were deceitful to Hashem, even to the point of idol worship, Hashem starved them of the Divine spirit. Overindulgence in material pleasures led to a slackening of chesed, and ultimately to spiritual slumber.

But because Hashem can neither destroy His rebellious people nor return them to Egypt nor exchange them for another, He must instead bring upon them famine to awaken them from their spiritual slumber. Megillas Rus begin with a terrible famine. (Perhaps today we could substitute plague for famine.)

THE EVENTS of Megillas Rus all foreshadow the process culminating in Mashiach. The first verse tells us "va'yitzei ish — a man went out," a phrase that appears in only one other place in Tanach — with respect to Amram's taking back his wife Yocheved. The earlier event led to the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Redeemer of Israel from Egypt, and the second va'yitzei ish, for which Elimelech is sharply criticized by Chazal, ironically sets in motion the process leading to the final Redeemer.

Particularly subtle is Nachalas Yosef's treatment of Orpah. She and Rus are sisters. Orpah does not feign her love for Naomi. Her tears upon parting from Naomi are genuine. For each tear shed, say Chazal, she was rewarded with another gibur as a descendant.

Her decision not to accompany Naomi followed normal human logic. There was little she could do to significantly improve Naomi's fate, and by joining her mother-in-law she would be dooming herself to self-extinction, for who would marry a daughter of an enemy nation. She was, in essence, following the halachic principle, "Your life takes precedence."

It was Rus's decision that was unnatural, or above nature, as it were. For Rus, the ideals she saw embodied in Naomi were not just enhancements of life, but ideals for which it was worth sacrificing one's life. Naomi's truth was the higher prophetic truth from which the ultimate tikkun haolam derives. As David told Golyas, the descendant of Orpah, "You come against me with the sword and spear, and I come with the Name of Hashem...." (I Shmuel 17:45). The strength of Israel in all our battles is not the born of human logic but of steadfast clinging to Hashem.

Breaking free of any trace of self-absorption, as Rus did, is the key to the messianic process. Boaz, the male forebear of Dovid Hamelech, and through him Mashiach, is introduced, "And his name was Boaz." Evil-doers, however, are introduced by their name first: "Golyas is his name" (I Shmuel 17:4). Since the wicked act primarily out of their self-interest, their name comes first.

Boaz greets his harvesters, "May Hashem be with you." That usage of Hashem's Name in routine greetings is one of three rabbinic decrees to be endorsed by the Heavenly Court (Yerushalmi Berachos 9:5). The greeting serves as a reminder that we all have a common Father and are made in His Image. As such, it hints to the tranquillity and universal brotherhood that will characterize the messianic era.

When Boaz awakens at midnight and finds Rus sleeping at his feet, he could have cursed or shamed her, for her apparent brazenness. Instead he blesses her, "Your last chesed is greater than your first." The Targum translates the first chesed as her conversion, the very conversion that made it possible to enter the Jewish People and marry Boaz.

But what does conversion have to do with chesed? Unlike other converts — e.g., Yisro, Rachav, and Naaman — Rus did not convert because she witnessed the overwhelming power of Hashem. But rather she saw the sweetness of Naomi's ways. Her recognition of Hashem, like that of Avraham Avinu, was through chesed.

And it was her good intentions — her second chesed in coming to the granary — that Boaz discerned. So too were Tamar's intentions good when she risked everlasting shame by hiding her identity from Yehudah in order to give birth to Peretz. The latter's genealogy through Boaz to David is emphasized in the megillah's closing verses.

Similarly, did Lot's daughters sacrifice themselves out of the best of intentions — to preserve humanity. The verse refers to them as nimzaos in Sodom, and Chazal expound that they are the ancestors of two metzios (precious found objects) — Rus the Moabite and Na'amah the Ammonite, who form the matriarchal line to Mashiach.

Chazal take note that Lot's daughters did not express a desire for children from their father, but rather "seed." In so doing, they hinted to a process going back to the beginning of human history. When Chavah gave birth to Shes, she referred to him as "zera acher — a different seed." Chazal explain: a seed from a different place, i.e., from Mashiach.

Mashiach can only come from a seed other than the one that gave birth to Kayin. Kayin viewed the world as a zero-sum game. In his worldview, anything that elevated Hevel must diminish himself. Mankind built on the seed that brought forth Kayin will inevitably implode. Only from "another seed," one steeped in chesed, will Mashiach come.

May that seed of redemption come to fruition speedily in our days.
Chag samei'ach.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

"The Anonymous Holiday"

(updated and revised from Shavuot 5760-2000)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This Thursday night, Friday and Shabbat, the joyous festival of Shavuot will be celebrated, marking the giving of the Torah at Sinai (in Israel it is celebrated only on Thursday and Friday). On the Hebrew calendar, it is the sixth and seventh days of Sivan.

According to traditional calculation, the Torah was given at Sinai 3332 years ago, in the year 2448 on the Jewish calendar, corresponding to the year 1313 BCE. Because this Shabbat is Shavuot, the normal Torah portion for the week is postponed until next Shabbat, and instead, this Friday we will read from Exodus 19:1-20:23, and on Shabbat day from Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17—readings which concern the festival of Shavuot.

Despite the tradition that the Torah was given on the holiday of Shavuot, many of the commentators are astounded that nowhere in the Torah is there any mention that the Torah was given on that day.

Rabbi Yehudah Nachshoni, in his observations on the weekly parasha, cites a number of traditional commentaries and their remarks regarding this peculiar omission.

Rabbi Nachshoni notes the writings of the Akeidat Yitzchak, who suggests two reasons for the seeming omission. In his counting of the mitzvot, says the Baal Akeida, the Bahag did not count the existence of G-d among the 613 mitzvot, simply because the existence of G-d is a given, and the most fundamental principle of all the mitzvot. If there is no Commander, there can be no commands. So, obviously, there is no need to count the existence of G-d among the 613 commandments. Similarly, with Shavuot, says the Akeida, the giving of the Torah is such a primary philosophical principle, and so self-evident, that for the Torah to mention it would be extraneous.

A second reason recounted by the Akeida, is that most of the holiday mitzvot depend upon time, but the giving of the Torah can never be constrained by time. As it says in the book of Joshua 1:8: *לֹא יִמּוֹשׁ סְפִר הַתּוֹרָה כִּי־מֵבָבָר וְהַגִּיתָ בָּו*, This Torah shall not depart from your mouth, and you should contemplate upon it both day and night. The words of the Torah need to be fresh and beloved in our eyes at all times as if they were newly given. Consequently, Scripture did not fix a time for the giving of the Torah, and only mentions the mitzvah of bringing bikurim, the first fruits, that are observed on the festival of Shavuot.

The Abarbanel, goes even further, arguing that the relationship between Shavuot and the giving of the Torah is merely coincidental. Shavuot is a holiday of thanksgiving to thank G-d for the harvest and the first fruits.

While it is true that on the sixth of Sivan the Torah was given to the Jewish people, that is not really what necessitates the celebration. Rather, the first fruits and the harvesting of the wheat are the reasons to rejoice. The Abarbanel suggests that while there is no specific mention in the Torah to celebrate the Revelation, there are certain symbolic allusions in the celebration of the festival of Shavuot that relate to the giving of the Torah. The Abarbanel notes that on Passover an offering of the first barley is brought, which is a coarse food for animals, whereas on Shavuot the Shtei ha'Lechem, the two loaves of bread and the first offering of the very fine wheat are brought. The implication, clearly, is that the Exodus was the coarse liberation, while Shavuot and the giving of the Torah is the refined elevation. Similarly, the fact that we count the Omer from the second day of Passover until Shavuot, shows how much we long for Shavuot and yearn for the Torah.

As published in Shiurei Ha'Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, delivered some impromptu remarks concerning the study of Torah to his class at Yeshiva University, that put the centrality of Torah and the festival of Shavuot into proper perspective. Rabbi Soloveitchik commented on the ceremonial blessings that are recited at the completion of the learning of a Talmudic tractate. Jews, he noted, yearn for both kedusha, sanctity, and Torah. Just as Jews always refer to Shabbat in their prayers as the day to which they long, by referring to the other days of the week as, today is the first, or the second, or the third day in the Shabbat cycle, so does the counting of the Omer reflect the Jews' awareness that the ultimate goal of the exodus from Egypt was really receiving the Torah.

So it is with the Jews yearning for mastery of Torah. Torah is not only to be studied, it must be an all-encompassing involvement. That is why the blessing that Jews recite every morning is, *לְעַזְסָקְדָבָרִי תּוֹרָה*, Blessed art thou, L-rd our G-d, *קָדְשָׁךְ*, to be involved in, to make our business, our careers, in the words of Torah.

Usually, when a Jew makes a blessing and departs from an activity, such as leaving a Sukkah after eating and drinking, and then re-enters the Sukkah to again eat or drink, the Sukkah blessing must be recited again. But, the blessing for Torah is recited only once in the morning, and never again, even though a Jew may open the Torah to study many times a day. The reason for this is that the obligation of Talmud Torah, of studying Torah, never ends. This is what is meant by the verse from Joshua that was cited above, *הַגִּיתָ בָּו*.

יְזִימָה לְלִילָה, You should be aware and conscious of the mitzvah of Torah study all day and all night.

Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that there are two kinds of awareness. The first is acute awareness, while the second is latent awareness. Acute awareness is obviously lacking when one thinks about other matters, but latent awareness is always present, even though one may be engaged in other matters. Rabbi Soloveitchik notes insightfully, that when a mother plays with her child, there is acute awareness of the child. But, even when the mother is at work at a job, or distracted by some other activity, there is always a latent awareness of the child, and so it remains throughout the mother's lifetime. This is an awareness that typical parents have that can never be extinguished. The infant is the center of gravity of the parents' lives. That is why parents often feel that they cannot live without their child.

Says Rabbi Soloveitchik, the same is true with regard to Torah. A Jew may not be acutely aware of Torah at every moment during each 24 hour period, but the latent awareness never ceases. *צְסָוָק דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה*, to engage in the words of Torah, implies that even when Jews are mentally involved in something else, they are always aware of Torah. This awareness of Torah becomes part of a Jew's innate consciousness. Just as one is always aware of one's existence without having to confirm it by constantly repeating: "I exist, I exist," so must a Jew be aware of the Torah.

Concludes Rabbi Soloveitchik, it is for this reason that we make a special siyum, conclusion ceremony, at the end of learning a Talmudic tractate, by saying the words, *הִרְחָן אֶלָךְ*, Hadran alach, "We shall return to you." As far as acute awareness is concerned, we are through with the tractate, we are leaving this chapter, but the latent awareness remains, and for that reason, we still return again to learn. It is similar to the mother who leaves her child and says, "I'll be back." She does not say this merely to encourage the infant, she is expressing a basic truth. A mother leaves only to return, otherwise, she would never leave.

We pray that this Shavuot will be an all-embracing celebration of Torah, not only of holding it, but making it an intimate part of our lives. With Torah as our guide, we will surely be blessed.

May you be blessed.

Please note: The wonderful festival of Shavuot commemorating the giving of the Torah at Sinai 3332 years ago is observed this year on Thursday evening, May 28th, and continues through Saturday night, May 30, 2020.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shavuot

Ruth, the righteous proselyte

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – The Scroll of Ruth contains one of the most idyllic stories in the Bible, a tale of "autumnal love" between a widow (Ruth) and a widower (Boaz), within the backdrop of diaspora inter-marriage, conversion to Judaism, and the agricultural life in ancient Israel. The Rabbinic Sages ordained that we read this Scroll on Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, the anniversary of the Torah Revelation at Sinai and the celebration of the first fruits brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. And since Shavuot is the climatic zenith of Passover, the development of a newly-freed group of slaves in the Sinai desert into a Torah-imbued nation firmly ensconced in their own homeland of Israel, the reasons for this special reading are many: Boaz and Ruth are the great – grandparents of David, the Psalm-singing military hero who united the tribes of Israel and first envisioned the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, Ruth the Moabite is Jew-by-choice whose commitment to Torah Judaism makes her worthy of being the great grand-mother of the prototype of the eventual Messiah-King, and the last three chapters of the story takes place between the beginning of the barley harvest (just before Passover) and the very end of the wheat harvest (not long after Shavuot). I would wish to

ask three questions on the Scroll of Ruth, the answer to which I believe will provide an extra dimension of our understanding as to why we read this particular Scroll on Shavuot, the festival which serves as harbinger to redemption.

Firstly, from a narrative perspective: the first chapter spans the ten years the family of Naomi is in Moab, and the last three chapters describe the happenings of the three month period between the barley and wheat harvests. Why did the author give so much text space to such a small span of times? Secondly, the midrash (Ruth Rabbah) tells us that Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem at the precise time of the funeral of Boaz's wife, and that Boaz died immediately after he impregnated Ruth; that is how the Rabbinic Sages account for the fact that Boaz is not mentioned in the last verses of the Scroll (Ruth 4:14-22), which specifically deal with the birth of Oved, son to Boaz and Ruth as well as father to Jesse. Why do the Sages see fit to sandwich these joyous verses recounting such a significant love story between two seemingly tragic deaths – without the text itself mentioning those deaths explicitly or even hinting at a mournful mood? And finally, can we possibly glean from between the lines of the Scroll what precisely occurred between Boaz and Ruth during the night they spent together on the threshing floor. What did her mother-in-law Naomi suggest that she do – and what did she do in actuality?

If Shavuot is truly the Festival of Redemption – and redemption links humanity to the Eternal G-d of all eternity – the period which is eternally Sabbath – then the Scroll of Ruth must deal with the eternal rather than the temporal. Israel is the eternal homeland of the Jewish people – and any diaspora experience can only be temporal at best and destructive at worst. The first chapter opens with a famine in Israel, and an important personage (Elimelekh) who leaves Bethlehem (literally the house of bread) with his wife and sons to seek "greener pastures" in the idolatrous Moab. As happened with Father Abraham, Diaspora proved far more dangerous (Genesis 12:10-20), the two sons, Mahlon (lit. sickness) and Kilion (lit. destruction) marry Hittite wives – and since the children follow the religion of the mother, the Israelite line of Elimelekh and Naomi – seems to have ended! The father and his sons all die in Moab – their earlier spiritual demise expressing itself physically; fortunately one daughter-in-law clings to her mother-in-law Naomi, converts to Judaism ("Where you will go" – to Israel – "there shall I go, where you will lodge, there shall I lodge," – maintaining the same sexual purity as you – "Your people shall be my people, your God my God" – Ruth 1:16), and returns to Bethlehem. Only now – in Israel – can eternal history begin, and so the next three chapters, and the next three months, are far more significant than the previous ten years, which had almost destroyed the family line.

The midrash tells us that Boaz's wife has died just as Naomi and Ruth return – and that Boaz will die three months later. But death in itself is not tragic for Judaism: after all, every individual must die sooner or later. The only relevant question is to what extent the individual, when alive, participates in Jewish eternity. Naomi sends Ruth to glean the forgotten grain and harvest the produce in the corner of the field – agricultural provision which the Torah provides for the poor Israelites. Divine Providence sent Ruth to Boaz's field – and Boaz was a Kinsman of Elimelekh. Boaz seems to be attracted to this comely proselyte –stranger and gives her his protection. Naomi understands that participation in Jewish eternity means having a child with Jewish parentage in Israel; she therefore instructs Ruth to wash and anoint herself, dress in special finery, visit the place on the threshing floor where Boaz will be spending the night at the height of the harvest season, and lie down at his feet. She also warns Ruth not to reveal who she is (Ruth 3:3,4). In effect, she is suggesting that Ruth tempt Boaz as Tamar had tempted Boaz's forbear Judah generations earlier – and at least enter Jewish history by bearing his child (see Genesis, chapter 38). Ruth senses that Boaz loves her – and so she holds out for higher stakes than a mere "one night stand." She tells him exactly who she is, and she asks that he "redeem" her by marriage and by restoring to her Elimelekh's previously

sold homestead in Israel. Ruth understands that true eternity means bearing a child on your own piece of land in Israel – not in the sly, but as a respected wife and householder. Boaz complies, and Oved, the grandfather of King David, is born. Ruth's commitment to Torah – the land of Torah, the laws of Torah, the loving-kindness of Torah, the modesty of Torah – catapults this convert into the center stage of Jewish eternity.

And this for a very important reason. According to the Midrash of R. Yishmael, the reason the Torah was given at Mt. Sinai – a desert galut – and not on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem, is because had the Torah been given in Israel the Jews may have thought that the Gentiles have no place in Torah. The truth is the very opposite: Rav Shimon ben Elazar maintains that in the future (Days of the Messiah) the Gentiles will all convert, and Maimonides, at the very conclusion of his Mishneh Torah, rules that at the End of the Days “everyone will return to the true religion”, which for him was certainly Judaism. The truth is that to a partial extent the issue is in dispute between two Prophets, Isaiah (chapter 2) maintaining that all the nations will rush to our Jerusalem Temple, declaring “Let us learn from the Jewish ways, let us walk in the Jewish paths, for from Zion will go forth Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem” (to the entire world), while the Prophet Micha quotes Isaiah's words almost verbatim, and then concluding, “each nation will walk in the Name of its (individual) god and we will walk in the name of the Living Lord our God forever” – ethical absolutism (in accordance with the Torah demands of ethical absolutism – compassionate righteousness, moral justice, universal peace) and ritual pluralism!

I am ready to accept either view, and according to everyone at least the Biblical ethic will reign supreme. And the truth is that God initially blessed Abraham with becoming a great nation through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed with peace and security (Gen 12:1-3) – the Gentiles will certainly adopt our ethical outlook!

This is the vision of Shavuot and this is why we read about the righteous proselyte Ruth on Shavuot!

Shabbat Shalom!

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Rav Kook Torah

Shavuot: 7 Tips for Success in Torah Study

While much of Orot HaTorah, a collection of Rav Kook's thoughts on Torah study, discusses philosophical matters, the book also contains a number of practical lessons on studying Torah.

Below are seven pieces of advice for budding Torah scholars.

1. Daily Talmud study is good for the soul

In a letter to his son, Rav Kook wrote:

“Do not belittle the importance of a daily study session of Talmud and its major commentaries. This is a holy service, over which the greatest scholars of Israel toiled throughout the generations.”

2. Traditional Talmudic study, a prerequisite for greatness in Torah

Writing to his younger brother, he noted:

“I have never met a truly great Torah scholar except those who devoted their principal efforts in the study of Talmud and Rishonim, learning and reviewing them in their proper order.”

3. Write down a summary of what you learn

In a letter to his son, he suggested:

“It is advisable to make a habit of writing down a summary of each Talmudic topic, together with the various opinions, even if you do not add any original thoughts of your own. And you should certainly record any new insights and explanations that come to you.”

4. Review your studies!

Rav Kook wrote to his younger brother, R. Shmuel Kook:

“I was quite alarmed when I realized that you only review your Talmudic studies three times. I know from personal experience that it is impossible to attain mastery of Talmud with only three reviews. I implore you to accustom yourself to review each chapter of Talmud at least ten times before starting the next one.”

5. The CliffNotes to Shas: learn the Rif

“You should undertake to learn the entire Alfasi Code (הכלות ר' אלפס) on a simple level, with competent proficiency. This goal is not difficult to accomplish if you follow a set study schedule. It does not even require a demanding pace.

The labor of studying the Alfasi Code is very pleasant in and of itself. It is also rewarding, due to the gratifying feeling that this approximates the goal of mastering the entire body of Halakhah, while using a medium that is as close as possible to the original Talmudic text. It is only when we encompass all of the details that we are able to truly observe and appreciate the striking beauty of the magnificent structure of Halakhah as a whole.”

6. Don't forget 'spiritual' Torah topics

“Spiritual Torah subjects, in all of their width, depth, and breadth, must also have a place in the yeshiva curriculum. Aggadah and Midrash, both exoteric and esoteric, works of philosophy and theoretical Kabbalah, ethical tracts, Jewish thought, Hebrew grammar, piyyut, and poetry... are also fundamental areas of Torah study.

While these are not the primary topics of study, it is inconceivable to preclude them for securing a pivotal role in the curriculum, especially in our generation.”

7. Learn what interests you

“Each person should engage in his own field, in the occupation where one feels most adept. This principle is especially true with regard to Torah study. Even though circumstances may make it difficult to keep to the area that interests you, you should be resolute and not abandon the particular area of study that cultivates your spirit. Do not yield to social pressures to limit your study to those fields of Torah that society honors [such as Halakhah or Talmud], if your interests lie in other areas of Torah.”

(Orot HaTorah, chapters 9 and 14)

<https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/>

The Gerald & Karin Feldhamer

OU Kosher Halacha Yomis

I know that according to many poskim the brachos of Eloki Neshama and Hamaavir Sheina are not recited in the morning if one did not sleep. How long must a person sleep at night to justify reciting the brachos?

The Mishnah Berurah (46:24) quotes the Chayei Adam (7:8) that if one slept at night for a duration of sixty breaths, he may recite the brachos of Eloki Neshama and Hamaavir Sheina in the morning. How long is a duration of sixty breaths? The Chayei Adam writes that it is the length of time it takes to walk 100 amos. Since it takes 18 minutes to walk 2,000 amos, 100 amos would take slightly less than a minute. The themes of these brachos are emotions of hakaras hatov for the neshama's return after temporarily departing while we sleep. The Chayei Adam explains that even during a very short sleep there is “a taste of death”, and the brachos are warranted.

However, the Mishnah Berurah elsewhere (Beiur Halachah 14, s.v. Dovid) quotes three different opinions about the time length of sixty breaths: three hours, thirty minutes, and three minutes. Many poskim write that regarding these two brachos thirty minutes is required (Dirshu M.B. footnote 30). The Elya Rabba writes that even if one dozed off for this duration at a table, he may recite these brachos.

If one did not sleep at all, some poskim allow the recitation of these brachos (Oruch Hashulchan 46:13 and Yechaveh Da'as 3:33). However, the Mishna Berura recommends listening to someone else (such as one's wife) recite these brachos and answering Amen. If there is no one available to recite these brachos, he can fulfill the bracha of Eloki Neshama with the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei, provided one has in mind to be yotzei in this

manner (MB 6:12). Alternatively, sefer Even Yisroel (9:63) writes that if a person sleeps in the morning for more than 30 minutes before Chatzos (halachic midday), the bracha can be recited when waking up.

Subscribers can also ask their own questions on Kashrus issues and send them to grossmany@ou.org. These questions and their answers may be selected to become one of the Q and A's on OU Kosher Halacha Yomis.

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Weekly Halacha :: **Shavuos: Questions And Answers**

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Question: What are the Yom Tov restrictions in regard to flowers?

Discussion: Flowers, while still connected to the ground, may be smelled and touched, provided that their stems are soft and do not normally become brittle. 1 Flowers in a vase may be moved on Shabbos and Yom Tov. 2 They may not, however, be moved from a shady area to a sunny area to promote blossoming. If the buds have not fully bloomed, the vase may be moved but just slightly, since the movement of the water hastens the opening of the buds. 3 One may remove flowers from a vase full of water, as long as they have not sprouted roots in the water. 4 Once removed, they may not be put back in the water if that will cause further blossoming. Water may not be added to a flower vase on Shabbos. 5 On Yom Tov, however, a small amount of water may be added but not changed. 6 Flowers should be placed in water before Yom Tov. In case they were not, they may not be placed in water on Shabbos if the buds have not blossomed fully. If the buds are completely opened, however, some poskim permit placing them in water on Yom Tov while others do not. 7 One may not gather flowers or create an arrangement and place it in a vase on Shabbos, even if the vase contains no water. 8

Question: Does one recite a blessing over the pleasant fragrance exuded from flowers in a vase?

Discussion: Just as one may not derive pleasure from food or drink before reciting a proper blessing, so too, one may not enjoy a pleasant fragrance before reciting the appropriate blessing. 9 There are two different types of blessings that can be recited over pleasant¹⁰ fragrances exuded from flowers: 1. Borei atzei vesamim: Recited over fragrant shrubs and trees or their flowers (e.g., myrtle, roses¹¹).

2. Borei isvei vesamim: Recited over fragrant herbs, grasses or flowers. The blessing is recited immediately before one intends to smell the pleasant fragrance. B'diavad, one may recite the blessing within a few seconds after he smelled a pleasant fragrance. 12

But a blessing over a pleasant fragrance is recited only over an object whose purpose is to exude a pleasant fragrance. If the object is primarily for another purpose — even if the object is sweet-smelling — no blessing is recited. 13 Although flowers in a vase exude a pleasant fragrance, since people usually buy flowers for their beauty, one who walks by and smells them does not recite a blessing. If, however, the flowers are picked up and smelled, a blessing must be recited.

Question: Within the same meal, may one eat cheese or other dairy food and then eat meat immediately thereafter?

Discussion: According to the basic halachah it is permitted to eat meat or chicken immediately after eating cheese or any other dairy food, even during the same meal; there is no requirement to recite Birkas ha-mazon or a berachah acharonah between the dairy and the meat. The only separation required is to clean and rinse the mouth and teeth, wash the hands and clean the table (or change the tablecloth) to make sure that no dairy residue or crumbs remain. While there are scrupulous individuals who wait at least an hour¹⁴ between eating dairy and meat in addition to reciting Birkas ha-

mazon or a berachah acharonah between them — and their custom is based on the Zohar and quoted by several poskim¹⁵ — it is not required by the halachah. 16

Question: Does the same halachah apply to hard cheese as well?

Discussion: When “hard” cheese is eaten, the halachah is different. Shulchan Aruch quotes an opinion that requires one to wait a full six hours between eating hard cheese and meat. This view maintains that the taste and oily residue of hard cheese lingers in the mouth long after the cheese has been consumed, just as the taste and residue of meat lingers long after consumption. 17 In addition, other poskim hold that hard cheese can get stuck between the teeth just as pieces of meat do. 18 While other poskim do not consider either of these issues to be a problem with hard cheese and permit eating meat immediately after eating hard cheese, Rama and the later poskim¹⁹ recommend that one be stringent and wait six hours between consuming hard²⁰ cheese, and meat or poultry. (See tomorrow’s Discussion for a definition of “hard cheese.”)

Question: How do we define “hard” cheese concerning this halachah?

Discussion: Exactly how to define “hard” cheese is another controversial subject. All poskim agree that cheese which has been cured for at least six months before being packaged and refrigerated is considered hard cheese. 21 While many of the hard cheeses sold in the United States are not aged for six months, there are several brands of cheese that advertise that they have been cured for ten months or longer and those are surely considered hard cheeses. Parmesan cheese, for instance, is aged for at least a year, if not longer. The poskim are also in agreement that cheeses that are not aged six months but are cured long enough to become wormy²² are considered “hard” cheese. 23 There are, however, some poskim who maintain that all hard cheeses, including all kinds of American (yellow) cheese, etc., are considered hard cheese and one who eats them should wait six hours before eating meat. 24 While some individuals follow this opinion, the widespread custom follows the more lenient view. 25 It is appropriate, though, to wait at least one hour between eating any hard cheese and meat. 26

Question: Why do some women omit the blessing of shehecheyanu when they light Yom Tov candles?

Discussion: The validity of the custom to recite shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time, a prevalent long-standing custom,²⁷ has been extensively debated by the poskim. 28 The preferred time to recite shehecheyanu is right after the recitation of Kiddush, while the cup of wine is still being held aloft. Since ladies listen and answer amen to the shehecheyanu which is recited after Kiddush, there is no halachic reason for them to recite this very blessing when they light candles. There are other halachic objections as well. Still, since many women are inspired by the important mitzvah of candle-lighting and feel the need to express their joy at that time, the custom evolved of reciting shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time. Most poskim feel that while we do not encourage this practice, we need not object to it and the ladies who recite their own shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time may continue to do so. 29

Sources: 1. Mishnah Berurah 336:48. 2. Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64). 3. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73); Bris Olam, pg. 32. 4. Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchah 26:26. 5. Mishnah Berurah 336:54. 6. O.C. 654:1 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 654:2; Shemiras Shabbos K’hilchah 26:26. 7. See Sha’ar ha-Tziyun 336:48; Shulchan Shlomo 336:12; Yechaveh Da’as 2:53. 8. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:73. 9. O.C. 216:1. A berachah acharonah, however, was not instituted for pleasant fragrances; Mishnah Berurah 216:4.

10. One who does not enjoy a particular fragrance does not recite a blessing. 11. Mishnah Berurah 216:17. 12. Halichos Shlomo 1:23-38. 13. O.C. 217:2. See also Mishnah Berurah 217:1; 216:11. 14. Some wait an half an hour; see Peri Hadar on Peri Megadim, Y.D. 89:16. 15. See Minchas Yaakov 76:5 and Beirur ha-Gra, Y.D. 89:2. See Darchei Teshuvah 89:14 who rules like these poskim. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:160. 16. Mishnah Berurah 494:16; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89:9. 17. Taz, Y.D. 89:4. 18. Peri Chadash, Y.D. 89:2. 19. Chochmas Adam 40:13; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89; and Mishnah Berurah 494:16 and Sha’ar ha-Tziyun 15. Sefardim, however, do not follow this stringency; see Yabia Omer, Y.D. 6:7. 20. If the hard cheese is softened through boiling or cooking, it is no longer considered hard cheese;

Darchei Teshuvah 89:43. But if it is merely fried or baked (as in pizza), it is still considered hard cheese; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 426). 21. Shach, Y.D. 89:15. 22. These "worms" are kosher and are permitted to be eaten as long as they remain within the cheese; see Rama, Y.D. 84:16. 23. Taz, Y.D. 89:4; Chochmas Adam 40:13. 24. Rav Y.Y. Weiss, quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanhagos, Y.D. 1:388; Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 427; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Shevet ha-Levi 2:35. 25. Ma'asei Ish 5, pg. 22, quoting Chazon Ish; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (Feiffer), pg. 138, quoting Rav A. Kotler; Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148, quoting Rav M. Feinstein; Debrecciner Rav in Pishei Halachah, pg. 108; Mi-Beis Levi 6; Rav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Nezer ha-Chayim, pg. 213; Mesorah, vol. 20, pg. 91, ruling by Rav Y. Belsky. 26. Rav Y.E. Henkin, written ruling published in Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148. 27. Mateh Efrayim 581:4; 619:4. 28. See Sh'eilas Ya'avetz 107, Kaf ha-Chayim 263:40 and Moadim u'Zemanim 7:117 quoting the Brisker Rav. 29. Sha'arei Teshuvah 263:5; Mishnah Berurah 263:23; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:12; Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 585:2; Halichos Shlomo, Moadim 2:9-22. Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2013 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com Weekly Halacha © 2020 by Torah.org.

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Shavuot & Rut: Inner Dimensions

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by

Mrs. Shira Smiles

A name conveys the essence of whatever is being named. The name most often used in our liturgy for the holiday of Shavuot is Zman Matan Torateinu, the time of the giving of the Torah. We read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot, for, just as we accepted the Torah as our way of life, so too did Ruth.

Ruth clung to Naomi. She declared with every fiber of her being that she would not be separated from Naomi or her God. It is this same kind complete dedication to God that must form the cornerstone of our own lives. In fact, this was the Sinai experience. Rav Soloveitchick, in trying to reconcile contradictory timelines for matan Torah presented by Rashi and Ramban, explains that when we received the Torah at Sinai, we underwent our own two step conversion process. The dveikut of our hearts and minds, the essence of our commitment, was actualized at the foot of the mountain, on Shavuot day. This clinging to Hashem, constituted the marriage ceremony between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel. This spiritual, essential intimacy is what we celebrate on Shavuot. Every year we reenact this experience and reaffirm our intimate connection to Hashem. We did not actually get the luchot at that time, nor did we offer the sacrifices that would consummate the union until later.

The next two interrelated names are Chag Hekatzir, the harvest festival, and Chag Habikurim, the first fruit festival. Much of the action in the Book of Ruth involves different aspects of the harvest, from Ruth gleaning in the fields to Boaz's commitment on the threshing floor. From the kindness Ruth shows Naomi, to the acts of kindness Boaz shows his destitute relatives, we are shown how the members of Bnei Yisroel should act. This contrasts with the negative behavior of Elimelech, Machlon and Chilyon who died after running away from the suffering of their brethren. It is from this that we learn that proper middot must precede the acquisition of Torah as Ruth did before her conversion.

We have forty nine days, including three intense days of separation and preparation to elevate ourselves to be proper receptacles for the Divine Presence. The Netivot Shalom points out that on Rosh Hashanah we get judged on all things physical, but on Shavuot we get judged on the spiritual abundance we will receive. This is derived from the Chazal that states on this day the world is judged for the fruit of the tree. The tree is symbolically Hashem, while the fruit represent the souls of Bnei Yisroel. On this day,

Hashem is deciding how much Torah and how much intimacy with Him we will achieve in the coming year.

Bikurim are the first fruits the newborn produce of the trees. In a similar way, at Mount Sinai each Jew was born anew, a "first fruit" of his Maker. As the Netivot Shalom points out in the name of the Berditchever Rebbe, the entire purpose of this festival is the message of renewal, as it is written, "At the time of the giving of the Torah you will offer a new offering to Hashem." The simple explanation for the name Shavuot lies in the command to count seven weeks from Pesach. But it also means oaths, for on this day we took an oath to be loyal to Hashem, and Hashem took an oath to be loyal to us. However, there is yet another oath relevant to the festival, the oath of Boaz when he realized Ruth was at his feet. The Maayon Beis Hashoevah proposes that Naomi was trying to rectify the relationship of Judah and Tamar through their descendant, Boaz. Although our commentators say it was Divinely ordained, there was still the hint that perhaps Judah suffered a lapse. Naomi sensed that this stain needed to be removed to enable the full strength of the royal dynasty she knew was destined to descend from Boaz and Ruth to come to fruition. She knew that the only way to completely rectify a misdeed is by finding oneself in a similar situation. Boaz stopped himself by invoking the name of Hashem, by taking an oath that he would in fact marry Ruth if the closer relative refused to do so. This gave him the strength to rein in his passion, rectify the lapse of Judah, and provide the purity necessary for the future Davidic dynasty.

The final name is the Festival of Atzeret, of being reined in and closed up with Hashem. This means selflessly focusing on the other. This was the relationship of Boaz to Ruth. Boaz gave Ruth six barley grains to seal the deal symbolizing the future righteous descendants destined to be born from Ruth.

Boaz recognized that the nation needed the traits Ruth possessed as a Moabite to establish a lasting monarchy. A king needs some arrogance but he also needs to be altruistic. When Boaz gave Ruth these six barley grains, he symbolically transferred the future Davidic line to her, whether it would be through this other unnamed relative or through himself. This selflessness exhibited by both Boaz and Ruth, Boaz in his willingness to remove himself from the royal lineage and the young Ruth in agreeing to a levirate marriage to begin with and then marrying the elderly Boaz, is the kind of selfless devotion of a true marriage. This is the dveikut we hope to establish and renew between our neshamas and Hashem every Shavuot.

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RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL SHAVUOT SPECIAL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY Executive Director, Camp HASC Dedicated L'Ilu Nishmas HaChaver Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l
Matan Torah

The Holy Ba'al Shem Tov would often travel the countryside visiting isolated shtetlach, sharing words of encouragement and inspiration with the Jews gathered to hear his messages, as well as those fortunate to meet the tzadik along the way. Once he related the following story, as a small crowd of simple townspeople stopped to listen with rapt attention.

"In a certain village lived Shimkeh, a day laborer who was barely managing to support his family and put bread on the table. Awakening before dawn, his prayers were often rushed and incomplete. He would often arrive late to Maariv and, exhausted from the day, rarely made it through the prayer without dozing off. He often wished he could learn Torah and invest energy in his Avodas Hashem, but he was just too emotionally and physically drained.

"In the same shtetl, there lived a young ben Torah, Reb Moishe, a budding scholar who received a weekly stipend to sit and learn without any financial responsibilities or worries. He was blessed with the freedom to spend his days and nights in the Beis Medrash, davening with devotional intent and learning with intense focus.

“Every evening following Maariv the two would cross paths on the dirt path of the shtetl. Shimkeh, broken from his daily grind, walked bent over. One night, feeling slightly embarrassed to see his scholarly neighbor, he sighed deeply: how he yearned to have the freedom and peace of mind to serve Hashem the way his holy neighbor did! Meanwhile, Reb Moishe the masmid greeted his neighbor with a dismissive smirk. What could he possibly have in common with an am ha’aretz who slept through davening?

“Years passed, and both Reb Moishe and Shimkeh left the world and arrived before the Beis Din shel Ma’alah, the Heavenly Court. With his head held high, Reb Moishe placed all of his years of uninterrupted limmud haTorah, impressive davening and careful mitzvah observance on the right side of the scales. As the judges were about to hand him a unanimously favorable verdict and Divine reward, a malach approached. Without saying a word, the malach placed on the left scale the selfrighteous smirk that used to pass over Reb Moishe’s face when he saw his shlepper neighbor. With a sudden thud, the smirk threw down the scale, outweighing all his zechuyot, merits.

“Soon thereafter, Shimkeh arrived before the heavenly court, humble and teary-eyed. He said before the Beis Din Shel Ma’alah: ‘I stand before you shamefaced; I spent most of my life shlepping, working hard to make ends meet. I regret that I wasn’t able to focus on learning and davening the way I would have liked.’ Before he could even finish speaking, a malach came forward and placed on the scale Shimkeh’s krechtz, the heartfelt sigh that the sincere shlepper had emitted when he yearned to be more. That holy sigh weighed down his entire scale of judgment to the side of good.”

The Jews who had gathered around the Ba’al Shem Tov wiped tears from their eyes and sat still for some time, contemplating its message.

HUMILITY

Chazal teach us that as opposed to revelation taking place on the highest peak, in the most grandiose setting, the Torah was given on Har Sinai, a small, modest mountain. This lowly mountain stood among the higher ones like a person bent over in humility. With this image, we learn the importance of approaching learning and spiritual work with the midah, the character trait, of humility.

The Chid’ah, Rebbe Chaim Yosef David Azoulay zy”a (d. 1806), in Sefer Nachal Kedumim, explains an oft-quoted drasha of Chazal in this light: Vayichan sham Yisrael neged ha’har — “Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain.” (Shemos 19:2) The word Vayichan “encamped” is unexpectedly in the singular, as if to say, ‘And he, Am Yisrael, encamped there....’ Rashi adds, K’ish echad b’lev echad — “...as one person with one heart”. Through internalizing the message of the place where the Torah was given, and embodying these traits of humility and modesty, the millions of Jews that had gathered together around the mountain became a unified vessel to receive Hashem’s Torah. Their humility joined them as one.

Rebbe Leibele Eiger of Lublin teaches that the word vayichan is a term of chein, ‘grace’. Because at Mount Sinai we all saw ach other’s good points and found grace in each other’s eyes, we were unified in receiving the Torah. Shavuos celebrates Uba’u kulam b’vrus yachad; ‘Naaseh v’nishma’ amru k’echad — “They all came together in the Covenant of the Torah; ‘We will perform it and then we will understand it,’ they said as one.” We all have different entry points, and there are infinite pathways to draw near, but the Torah and the closeness with Hashem belong to all, equally, as one.

REBBE YISRAEL BA’AL SHEM TOV

Shavuot also marks the Yahrtzeit of Rebbe Yisrael Ba’al Shem Tov zy”a, the revolutionary Tzadik and founder of the Chasidic movement, whose contributions have left an indelible impression on the way all of us live and experience Yidishkeit. The Ba’al Shem Tov’s empowering teachings and perspectives open wide the gates of Gan Eden for all, from the learned intellectual to the hard-working simple person who sighs in yearning for closeness with the Ribono Shel Olam. The light of the Baal Shem Tov tips each of our scales toward the good.

This Yom Tov, may we recognize the chein in ourselves and each other, and renew our commitment to serve Hashem with sincerity and simplicity, modesty and humility, and celebrate our receiving of the Torah all together, k’ish echad b’lev echad.

From: Stuart Halpern <shalpern@yu.edu>

Sent: Wednesday, May 27, 2020 9:16 PM

Subject: **Ruth as a cure for loneliness**

How to Cure Loneliness

The Book of Ruth delivers an ancient prescription to a thoroughly modern condition

BY STUART HALPERN

No one is laughing at the U.K.’s Minister for Loneliness now. When Tracey Crouch was appointed to the position by then-Prime Minister Theresa May in early 2018, more than a few snickers could be heard across the pond. This past month, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy published Together, documenting the early signs of an American “social recession” he witnessed during his 2014-2017 tenure. Even prior to quarantines and social distancing, the nation’s former top doctor was already lamenting the isolation felt by so many across the U.S. “Overcoming loneliness and building a more connected future is an urgent mission that we can and must tackle together,” he wrote during those hazy pre-pandemic days.

Synagogue doors are still shuttered, which means we won’t get to read the biblical Book of Ruth on the upcoming holiday of Shavuot, but if you’re looking to fight isolation, loneliness, and the other social plagues of the moment, look no further than this short but stunning tale. More, perhaps, than any other biblical text, Ruth’s story feels incredibly raw and relevant, a prescription for all of us who are aching to connect in a society that grows increasingly more alienating.

In case you haven’t read the book in a while, here’s a refresher: Set around 1100 BCE, it begins during a famine, the economic recession of biblical times. An absence of centralized and unifying political leadership forces individuals to seek their own means of survival. An Israelite couple, Elimelech and Naomi, leave their homes to seek sustenance in the neighboring nation of Moab. After settling there, Elimelech dies, as do the couple’s two adult sons. While mourning the losses of their husbands, the sons’ Moabite widows, Ruth and Orpah—the latter being Oprah Winfrey’s actual first name—summon the psychological strength to salvage what remains of their future. Orpah decides to remain in Moab. But Ruth offers an altruistic affirmation so lyrical it has been sung millennia later by musical luminaries Bing Crosby, Mahalia Jackson, and Leonard Cohen.

“Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”

Having pledged allegiance to her mother-in-law, the pair travel the 50 miles to Bethlehem—literally meaning the House of Bread—where food is newly available. Seeing the formerly wealthy Naomi walk back into town, her former neighbors can’t believe their eyes. They exclaim aloud, upon seeing the bedraggled old widow and her unrecognized companion, “Is this really Naomi?”

In a heartbreaking comment, Naomi replies that her name, which translates to “pleasant,” should be changed to Mara, or “bitter,” a fitting description of her state of mind. It should come as little surprise, then, that no one rushes to Naomi’s aide, leaving Ruth as the family’s sole breadwinner. The newly arrived immigrant goes to work in the fields, collecting the grain left there, per Torah law, by the wealthy landowners obliged to care for the poor. Though in John Keats’ poetic imagining Ruth “stood in tears amid the alien corn,” the biblical text portrays no sadness on Ruth’s part, only a gritty determination to keep her word and feed herself and Naomi.

Eventually, Ruth’s efforts are rewarded. She happens upon the field of Boaz, a distant relative of Naomi’s, and they marry. Their union produces communal restoration in the form of the eventual King David, and, in the Christian tradition, Jesus. World history, it turns out, hinged on Ruth’s

decision to remain faithful to Naomi. The book ends shortly after an emotionally and physically revived Naomi, the once-wailing widow now radiant with joy, embraces the baby born to Ruth and Boaz as if it were her own. His name is Oved, or “worker,” an indication that everything that happened in the book happened because of the hard work of human beings, not necessarily the miraculous intervention of God. Indeed, the Almighty is rarely mentioned in the book; the story of Ruth is the most intimate, human-scale domestic drama in the Bible, a book otherwise dedicated to the heroic ploys of larger-than-life prophets, kings, and conquerors.

The book’s approachable scale is the first clue that the story it tells is one that modern readers may find particularly relatable. But look inside and you’ll be shocked by how ahead of her time Ruth truly was. First of all, long before we learned to accept nontraditional families as valid and valuable, Ruth and Naomi give us a reminder that the family unit comes in all shapes and sizes. They’re two women, both widowed and poor, living together in a patriarchal society dominated by wealthy men and reminding us that staying together and offering the mutual support we so desperately need can literally save our lives.

Science eventually caught up with Ruth’s wisdom: In recent decades, researchers have discovered how loneliness impairs judgment, increases stress, depression, and mortality rates, while friendship improves both psychological and physical health, including the body’s ability to overcome heart disease and viruses. Not that we need clinical studies to remind us why human interaction is so important: Open the window at 7 p.m. each night and you’ll hear people clapping and cheering, not only to thank our health care workers but also to remind ourselves that we are all in this together, and that even though we may not be able to see and talk to friends and neighbors, they are still there, waiting for the opportunity to reconnect.

But Ruth isn’t just a paragon of making your own family, even amid devastation. She’s also the embodiment of another virtue, giving, that physicians are now confirming can do much to boost both emotional and physical well-being. “Giving and serving others doesn’t just strengthen our communities,” writes Murthy. “It enriches our lives and strengthens our own bonds to the community and our sense of value and purpose.” Small acts of selfless kindness like Ruth’s lay the foundation for our individual and communal salvation.

Finally, Ruth delivers one more crucial lesson for us reading her story today: If you want it, work for it. Naomi’s self-pity, while understandable, led her nowhere. Ruth’s resilience, on the other hand, gave both women the happy ending they so richly deserved. Ours is a culture quick to assign blame and claim the mantle of victimhood; Ruth teaches us to forgo these tempting feelings for the harder yet ultimately more effective virtue of never, ever giving up.

There’s a theological lesson in there, too: Pleased with the tremendous character shown by this impoverished immigrant, God grants her not only a husband and a son but the privilege of becoming the mother of Judaism’s most illustrious family, the one, we’re told, that would eventually bring about the Messiah. The moral of the story is clear: Work hard, believe in yourself, be true to your friends, find your family when you can, and you will bring about redemption, not only to you but, one day, to the entire world. Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern is Senior Adviser to the Provost of Yeshiva University and Senior Program Officer of YU’s Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought. He has 16 edited books including *Gleanings: Reflections on Ruth and Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Hebrew Bible in the United States*. He is currently editing a volume on the reception history of the Scroll of Esther in America.

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com>

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Shavuot: Always Receiving

Shavuot (Exodus 19:1 - 20:23)

by **Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein**

The year was 1935, and the Spanish government was making elaborate plans to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the Rambam’s birth – seemingly a great honor and proud moment for Jews everywhere.

Yet, while many Jews around the world welcomed the initiative and prepared celebrations of their own, some had reservations. These concerns were addressed to the leading Torah sage of the time, Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky. Here is his extraordinary response:

“We do not need to commemorate the Rambam’s birth, for he lives on wherever teachers and students discuss his words; his teachings upon which we meditate every day are his eternal remembrance. This has been an everyday occurrence for many generations – the wellsprings have not ceased to this day.”

Stamps and statues. Plaques and paintings. Buildings and bridges. Google Doodles. These are the traditional ways we commemorate the great people of the past. And the 1935 Spanish government sought to celebrate the legacy of the great Maimonides, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, the Rambam, in much the same way. But we Jews aren’t in the habit of memorialising our leaders and teachers. Rav Chaim Ozer’s objection was based on the fact that we live with the Rambam – with his writings and teachings – every day. His philosophical ideas and halachic rulings form part of our collective Jewish consciousness. To commemorate an 800-year anniversary is to live in the past – Torah is about living in the here and now. The Rambam is not a historical relic; he is a figure of the present.

What, then, is our approach to history? Jewish history is rich and replete with important events. The Torah is filled with mitzvot that are a remembrance of the past. Our holy days are linked to historical events. And yet, there is tension between the past and the present. The Torah is very much about how we live life today. It seems to be rooted in both the present and the past.

This vignette about the Rambam provides a window into understanding the Torah’s approach to history. We do more than remember the fact that the Exodus from Egypt took place – we relive that liberation. The Rambam himself codifies – based on the Talmud – that a person is obliged in every generation to see themselves as if they had personally gone out of Egypt. And it’s not just once a year. We live by the Exodus daily – by its messages of faith in God, of the importance of freedom and of resisting tyranny, and of dedicating that freedom to something greater than ourselves.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, quoting from the writings of our sages, says Jewish time is not linear, but cyclical; that every year, when, for example, Pesach comes around, it’s not that we are remembering an event that happened in the distant past, but rather we experience the same spiritual energy that was unleashed in the world at the time of the original Pesach.

Similarly, when we keep Shabbat each week, we commemorate the anniversary of the creation of the world. But we also re-experience what it means that God is our Creator, that we owe Him everything, and that the world is constantly being renewed and refreshed by God’s pulsating energy into the molecules of the universe. We re-experience the same energy that God unleashed into the world on the seventh day of creation – the energy of rest and rejuvenation and returning to source that was introduced on the very first Shabbat of human history.

This same principle applies to every one of the events that are recorded in the Torah, and that we are called on to remember. We are not merely remembering; we are reliving and re-integrating the experiences, and making them part of our daily lives – tangible and relevant in every way.

Arguably, no festival embodies this idea quite like Shavuot, which is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah exactly 3,331 years ago. The Kli Yakar points out that when the Torah calls on us to celebrate the festival of Shavuot, it does so without mentioning it is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at all. We infer that Shavuot is the anniversary of the giving of the Torah from the date on which the festival takes place (the 6th of Sivan), but

there's no explicit mention of it. Why would the defining dimension of Shavuot not be directly stated by the Torah?

He answers that the Torah did not want us to fixate on one day as the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, to relate to this day as a memory of the distant past.

Our relationship with the Torah is immediate and visceral. We receive it – we incorporate it into our lives – each and every day. When the Jewish people are approaching Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the verse says, “In the third month of the children of Israel leaving the land of Egypt, on this day they arrived in the desert of Sinai.” Rashi notes that it says “this day” and not “that day”. “That day” would imply an event in the past, “this day” implies that it’s happening today. Right now. Let us stop for a moment now and realise that at this moment in time we are actively receiving the Torah from God.

The Shema speaks about “these words that I command you today” (Deuteronomy 6:6). Rashi, on that verse says, that “today” means that the words of Torah should always feel as new and fresh to us as the day they were given. This is not some ancient, dusty manuscript stored away in a museum somewhere. This is a living Torah, a Torat Chaim. It gives us our mission and purpose; direction and guidance on how to live and why to live, and what our ideals are. It is something of immediate relevance, every moment of every day.

The Talmud cites the verse in Proverbs which compares our relationship with the Torah to a suckling infant with its mother; the more we draw out of it, the more life-giving nutrients are produced. The Torah is an endless reservoir of spiritual sustenance; no matter how deep you go, you can always go deeper. A small child, for example, can learn the first verse of the Book of Bereishit: “In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth”, and understand it in a very basic way. And the greatest Torah sage of the generation can learn that same verse with all of its nuances and mystical meanings in a much deeper way. In each case, it’s the same Torah being learnt. But there’s always something new in it.

There’s a unique offering which was brought in the Temple on Shavuot – two loaves of bread, made from the newly ripened first grains of the wheat harvest. The Torah calls this offering the Mincha Chadasha – the “new offering”. Why this focus on newness? By now, the reason should be clear. Shavuot is a celebration of freshness and renewal. It’s a celebration of renewed inspiration and renewed challenge. It’s a celebration of Torah, today.

We must live life dynamically, not statically. We do not remain in frozen perfection like the angels; we struggle constantly to become better people. We do not remain set in what we know and what we’ve experienced; we must always search in Torah for new knowledge and fresh inspiration. This is the way God wants us to live – and He sets the example. As we say in the morning prayer service, God “renews the works of creation in His goodness, at every moment of the day, always”.

And just as God recreates the world from afresh, moment by moment, every single day, we should be recreating our own personal world on a similar basis, always looking for renewed inspiration, receiving the Torah into our lives that is as fresh as the day it was given.

Shavuot is a great place to start.

<https://www.dafyomi.co.il/shabbos/points/sh-ps-086.htm>

Point by Point Summary of the Daf (Summary of the Daf)

[Matan Torah discussion in Shabbat 86-88 is the Daf Yomi for this coming Sun-Tues!]

86...

1) WHEN WAS THE TORAH GIVEN?

(a) (Beraisa): The Aseres ha'Dibros were given on the sixth of Sivan;

(b) R. Yosi says, they were given on the seventh.

(c) (Rava): All agree that Benei Yisrael came to Midbar Sinai on Rosh Chodesh Sivan. It says “Ba'Yom ha'Zeh Ba'u Midbar Sinai”, like it says “Ha'Chodesh ha'Zeh Lachem Rosh Chodeshim” - just like the latter refers to Rosh Chodesh, also the former.

(d) All agree that Matan Torah was on Shabbos - it says “Zachor Es Yom ha'Shabbos

Lekadsho”, like it says “...Zachor Es Yom ha'Zeh” - just like the latter refers to the day itself [that it was said], also the former;

(e) They argue about which day [of the week] was Rosh Chodesh.

R. Yosi holds that Sunday was Rosh Chodesh: 1. On Sunday Moshe did not address Benei Yisrael, because they were weary from travelling; 2. On Monday he told them “V'Atenu Tihyu Li Mamleches Kohanim”; 3. On Tuesday he told them the Mitzvah of Hagbalah (fencing off Har Sinai); 4. On Wednesday he told them to abstain from relations.

(b) Chachamim hold that Monday was Rosh Chodesh: 1. On Monday Moshe did not address Benei Yisrael, because they were weary from travelling; 2. On Tuesday he told them “V'Atenu...”; 3. On Wednesday he told them about Hagbalah; 4. On Thursday he told them to abstain from relations.

(c) Question (against R. Yosi): “V'Kidashtem ha'Yom u'Machar” (there were only two days of abstention)!

(d) Answer (for R. Yosi): Moshe himself decided to add a third day (so all of Yisrael would be Tehorim). 1. (Beraisa - R. Yosi): Moshe himself decided to do three things, and Hash-m agreed to all of them - he added a day of abstention, he separated from his wife, and he broke the Luchos. (Tosfos - even though the Gemara brings Moshe's 'source' for each, in every case it is not a real Drashah or Kal va'Chomer, for we say that Moshe himself decided.)

(e) Question: What did he expound to justify adding a day?

(f) Answer: It says “Ha'Yom u'Machar” - today should be like tomorrow, i.e. a full day, including the night; 1. Hash-m said this during the day, so “Ha'Yom” could not mean today (Wednesday, according to R. Yosi) - rather, it means Thursday (in addition to the rest of today), and ‘Machar’ refers to Friday).

(g) Question: What is the source that Hash-m agreed?

(h) Answer: The Shechinah did not descend until Shabbos.

(i) Question: What did he expound to justify separating from his wife?

(j) Answer: He made a Kal va'Chomer - Hash-m spoke with Benei Yisrael only once, and he fixed a time, yet He required them to abstain from relations - “V'Hayu Nechonim...Al Tigshu [El Ishah]”; 1. Hash-m speaks with me at all times, without fixing a time - all the more so I should abstain!

(k) Question: What is the source that Hash-m agreed?

(l) Answer: It says “Lech Emor Lahem Shuvu Lachem l'Ohaleichem” (Benei Yisrael should return to their wives) “V'Atah Po Amod Imadi” (but you should remain with Me. Tosfos - surely, Moshe intended to separate before Hash-m said this - otherwise, Miryam and Aharon would not have disapproved). 1. Some learn from “Peh El Peh Adaber Bo” (this rebutted the disapproval of Moshe's separation).

(m) Question: What did he expound to justify breaking the Luchos?

(n) Answer: Korban Pesach is just one of 613 Mitzvos, it says “V'Chol Ben Nechar Lo Yochal Bo” (one estranged from Hash-m may not eat it) - all the more so, the entire Torah should not be given to Benei Yisrael, for they are Mumrim (on account of the Egel)!

(o) Question: What is the source that Hash-m agreed?

(p) Answer: Reish Lakish expounded “Asher Shibarta” - Yeishar Kochacha (your strength should be increased) for having broken them.

2) WHEN THE TORAH WAS GIVEN - QUESTIONS ON THE VARIOUS OPINIONS

... 87b 3) WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK WAS ROSH CHODESH SIVAN THAT YEAR?

88 1) QUESTIONS ON THE OPINION OF REBBI YOSI ...

KABALAS HA'TORAH

(a) (Rav Avdimi bar Chama): “Va'Yisyatzvu b'Sachtis ha'Har” - this teaches that Hash-m bent Har Sinai over Yisrael like a bowl; (Aruch - like a wicker basket with holes - if we say that Hash-m let Yisrael see outside, i.e. [the emptiness of] life without Torah, this explains the continuation ‘...If not, you will be buried there - PF) 1. He told them, if you accept the Torah, good - if not, you will be buried there. (Maharal, Netzach Yisrael 11 - even though Benei Yisrael previously said ‘Na'aseh v'Nishma’, Hash-m wanted Kabalas ha'Torah through coercion, lest Yisrael think that transgression of Torah nullifies the acceptance. Medrash - Hash-m acted like a rapist, who must marry the girl and may never divorce her.)

(b) (Rav Acha bar Yakov): This is a great Moda'ah for Kabalas ha'Torah! (Someone forced to do something against his will tells witnesses that he is coerced and does not intend for his deed to take effect - we can say that we never intended to accept Torah! Maharal - the Moda'ah shows that Yisrael were not worthy of Torah.)

(c) (Rava): That is true - however, at the time of the miracle of Purim, “Kiyumu v'Kiblu ha'Yehudim”, Yisrael [willingly] affirmed what they already accepted [through coercion]. (Tosfos - the covenants and oaths Moshe imposed on Yisrael were also through coercion; Yisrael willingly made a Bris with Yehoshua, but it was limited to the Isur of idolatry.)

(d) Question (Chizkiyah): "Mi'Shomayim Hishmata Din Eretz Yor'ah v'Shokotah" - if the land was afraid, why was it quiet?!

(e) Answer: At first it was afraid; after Yisrael accepted the Torah, it was quiet.

(f) Question: Why was it afraid at first?

(g) Answer: Reish Lakish taught, "Yom ha'Shishi" - Hash-m created the world on condition that Yisrael will accept His Torah on the sixth of Sivan; if they will not, the world will revert to emptiness. (Tosfos Avodah Zarah 3A - R. Yosi can explain, this refers to the sixth day from the second of Sivan, when Hash-m began discussing Matan Torah with Yisrael; alternatively, Moshe added a day to enable receiving the Torah in greater Taharah, this is like acceptance.)

(h) (R. Simai): When Yisrael said 'Na'aseh' before 'Nishma' (agreeing to observe before hearing the Mitzvos), 600,000 angels came, they tied two crowns [of radiance of the Shechinah] on every Yisrael, one for Na'aseh and one for Nishma; 1. When Yisrael sinned [with the golden calf], twice this number of damaging angels came, each removed one crown - "Va'Yisnatzlu Venei Yisrael Es Edyam me'Har Chorev".

(i) (Rav Chama bar Chanina): They put on the crowns at Chorev (Sinai), they removed them at Sinai; 1. They put them on at Sinai, like R. Simlai taught; they removed them at Sinai - "Va'Yisnatzlu...".

(j) (R. Yochanan): Moshe merited to receive all of them - right after this it says "U'Moshe Yikach Es ha'Ohel" (he took the crowns; alternatively, Ohel is like "B'Hilo Nero Alei Rashi", the radiance went to Moshe's head. Maharsha - Na'aseh represents Mitzvos Ase, the crown of Kehunah (from Midas ha'Chesed); Nishma represents Lavim, the crown of Malchus (from Midas ha'Din) - Hash-m made Yisrael "Mamleches Kohanim v'Goy Kadosh"; Moshe received the crowns (he was Melech, and Kohen Gadol during Chaunkas ha'Mishkan) on account of learning in the Ohel, i.e. the crown of Torah. The crowns were removed at Chorev, the two Churbanos ended the Malchus and [Avodah of] Kehunah of Yisrael.)

(k) (Reish Lakish): In the future, Hash-m will return them to Yisrael - "UFduyei Hash-m Yeshuvun...v'Simchas Olam Al Rosham", the joy that used to be on their heads.

(l) (R. Elazar): When Yisrael put 'Na'aseh' before 'Nishma', a Bas Kol (voice from Heaven) said 'Who revealed to My children this secret that the angels use' - "Borachu Hash-m Mal'achav Giburei Cho'ach Osei Devaro Lishmo'a b'Kol Devaro", first Osei (they accept to do) his word, afterwards they hear it. (Maharsha - usually, people are not so resolute to do His will, for the Yetzer ha'Ra incites - Yisrael overcame this.)

(m) Question (Rav Chama bar Chanina): What do we learn from K'Sapu'ach ba'Atzei ha'Ya'ar..."?

(n) Answer: Yisrael are compared to an apple tree - just like its fruit precedes its leaves, Yisrael put Na'aseh before Nishma.

(o) A Tzeduki (heretic) saw Rava engrossed in learning; Rava's fingers were under his leg, he was pressing on them [without realizing], they were bleeding. 1. The Tzeduki: You are a hasty nation! You put your mouths before your ears, and you persist in your haste! You should have heard [the Mitzvos] first - then, you can accept if you see that you can keep them! 2. Rava: We go with a pure heart (We knew that Hash-m would not demand more than we are capable of) - it says about us "Tumas (from the root 'Tam', pure) Yesharim Tanchem";

88b It says about people [like you] who are full of accusations "V'Selef Bogdim Yeshadem" (Maharsha - those who seek to be straight receive Hash-m's help, those who seek to be crooked are given the opportunity).

(p) Question (R. Shmuel bar Nachmani): What do we learn from "Libavtini Achosi Chalah Libavtini b'Achas me'Einayich"?

(q) Answer: At first [when Yisrael accepted Torah], we drew close to Hash-m with one eye; later [through keeping Torah] we drew close with both. (Maharsha - Na'aseh v'Nishma corresponds to an intellectual vision, fulfillment in practice corresponds to physical vision.)

(r) (Ula): A bride that had Zenus (extramarital relations) at the Chupah is Aluva (audacious).

(s) (Rav Mari, son of Shmuel's daughter): He learns from "Ad sheha'Melech bi'Msivo Nirdi [Nosan Reicho]" (Yisrael made the golden calf while still at Har Sinai); 1. (Rava): Yisrael retains its dearness to Hash-m - it says, "Nosan Reicho" (gave its scent), it does not say 'stank'.

(t) (Beraisa): "V'Ohavav k'Tzeis ha'Shemesh bi'Gvuraso" - this is one who is disgraced and does not disgrace; he hears [others recounting] his shame and does not answer, he serves Hash-m from love and happily accepts afflictions. (While the moon was suggesting that it should be supreme, the sun was silent - as a result, the sun became supreme.)

from: Kollel Iyun Hadaf kornfeld@dafyomi.co.il

date: May 28, 2020, 1:01 AM

subject: Insights to the Daf: Shabbos 86-90 Rosh Kollel: **Rabbi Mordechai Kornfeld**
SHABBOS 88

1) ON WHAT DAY DO WE CELEBRATE SHAVUOS

QUESTION: The TUR and SHULCHAN ARUCH (OC 494:1) write that Shavuos is celebrated on the sixth of Sivan, fifty days after the day of on which the Omer offering was brought (the second day of Pesach). This implies that the month of Iyar in the year that the Torah was given was not a full (Malei) month, but was 29 days long. If Iyar of that year had been 30 days long, then Matan Torah would have been on the fifty-first day after the day of the Omer offering, and not on the fiftieth.

The Gemara seems to conclude that according to the Rabanan, who maintain that the Torah was given on the sixth of Sivan, there indeed were 51 days between Pesach and Shavuos (since the Gemara (87b) resolves the Beraisa which conflicts with the opinion of the Rabanan by saying that Iyar of that year had thirty days). How, then, can it be that Shavuos is on the sixth of Sivan and yet it is only fifty days after the day of the Omer offering? Moreover, it seems that according to both Rabbi Yosi and the Rabanan, the Torah was given on the fifty-first day after Pesach. According to the Rabanan, Iyar was thirty days long, as we explained above, and according to Rabbi Yosi, Iyar was 29 days long, but the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan, 51 days after the day of the Omer offering.

ANSWERS:

(a) The MACHTZIS HA'SHEKEL explains that this question applies only if the Jewish people left Egypt on a Thursday. If they left on a Thursday, then there indeed were 51 days between the second day of Pesach (Friday) and the day they received the Torah (Shabbos). The Seder Olam, however, says that they left Egypt on a Friday, and thus the Torah, which was given on a Shabbos, was given fifty days later. (The Seder Olam also states that the Man started to fall on a Monday. Even though the Gemara derives from verses that the Man started to fall on a Sunday, this inference is not explicit in the verses, and the simple understanding of the verses does not imply that the Man started to fall on a Sunday). We rule like the Seder Olam, and not like the Gemara.

It should be noted that according to the Seder Olam, the tenth of Nisan (the day on which animals were designated for the Korban Pesach) was not Shabbos but Sunday, contrary to what the TUR (OC 430) quotes in the name of the Seder Olam (since the Jews left Egypt on a Friday, five days before that day was Sunday, as the PERISHAH points out).

(b) The SEFAS EMES explains that according to the TUR, the Jewish people left Egypt on a Thursday (as he says in OC 430), and that the Torah was given on a Friday and not on Shabbos, as the Pirkei d'Rebbi Eliezer (ch. 46) maintains.

The Sefas Emes points out, however, that the Tur himself (OC 292) states that the Torah was given on Shabbos.

(c) The RIVASH (#96) writes that the festival of Shavuos has nothing to do with the day on which the Torah was given. Shavuos comes fifty days after the day of the Omer offering, whether or not it falls on the day that the Torah was given. The reason why we call Shavuos, "Zeman Matan Toraseinu," is because according to our calendar system (in which Iyar has 29 days), the festival occurs on the sixth of Sivan, which is the day of the month on which the Torah was given (according to the Rabanan, whose opinion we follow). Unlike the actual day on which the Torah was given, our sixth of Sivan occurs fifty days after the Omer offering, while the original day of Matan Torah was 51 days after the Omer offering (because they left Egypt on a Thursday and received the Torah on Shabbos, as the Gemara here states).

(d) The MAGEN AVRAHAM (OC 494) says in the name of SEFER ASARAH MA'AMAROS that by adding a day on his own, Moshe Rabbeinu alluded to the second day of Yom Tov which is observed outside of Eretz Yisrael. Thus, the Torah was actually supposed to have been given on the fiftieth day after the Omer of that first year, which is why our holiday begins on the fiftieth day after the Omer. The Torah was actually given on the fifty-first day to symbolize that the fifty-first day after the Omer would also be observed as Yom Tov (when the Jews would go into exile). Just as Moshe

Rabeinu made that day into the day of Kabalas ha'Torah, the Rabanan would later make that day into Yom Tov.

The BEIS HA'LEVI (Parshas Yisro) expands on this idea. He explains that even though the Jewish people received the Torah on the fifty-first day, the Torah was given on the fiftieth day. The explanation for this is as follows. The Gemara (88b) says that the Mal'achim did not want the Torah to be given to Moshe Rabeinu. What was their argument? What did they intend to do with the Torah themselves? As Moshe Rabeinu argued, none of the Mitzvos of the Torah are relevant to heavenly entities; they are relevant only for humans!

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (61a) states that the verse, "Lo ba'Shamayim Hi" -- "the Torah is not in the heavens" (Devarim 30:12), means that the authority to expound and elucidate the Torah is not in the heavens, but was given to the Sages. The Mal'achim argued that this authority should not be given to man, because they did not think that it was appropriate for man to have the power to legislate in Torah matters.

Moshe Rabeinu's decision to delay the giving of the Torah by one day was based on a Hekesh, as the Gemara explains ("just as the second day of Perishah was a day that follows a night, so, too, the first day must be a day that follows a night"). By his application of a Hekesh to derive a Torah law (i.e., the day on which the Torah should be given), Moshe Rabeinu asserted that the Torah was given to man to expound. The Gemara adds that indeed, Hash-m agreed to Moshe's action.

Therefore, even if the Halachah follows the view of Rabbi Yosi who says that we received the Torah on the seventh day of Sivan, that day was the day of Kabalas ha'Torah, when the Jews received the Torah. The day before, though, was the day of Matan Torah, when Hash-m gave man the ability to make decisions that affect Torah law. (The CHASAM SOFER in Toras Moshe (Shavuos) offers a similar explanation.)

2) FORCED TO ACCEPT THE TORAH

QUESTION: The Gemara relates that at Har Sinai, Hash-m held the mountain above the heads of the Jewish people, and the people accepted the Torah under duress. The Gemara explains that because of this involuntary acceptance of the Torah, the Jewish people had a "Moda'a Rabah l'Oraya" -- a claim of immunity for any transgressions that they might commit. This "Moda'ah Rabah" lasted until the Jewish people willingly accepted the Torah during the time of Purim, nearly a thousand years later.

If the Jewish people had this claim of immunity due to their forced acceptance of the Torah, why were they punished during the interim years for their sins, before they accepted the Torah willingly?

In addition, what does the Gemara mean when it says that they were forced to accept the Torah? The Torah itself relates that the Jewish people exclaimed, "Na'aseh v'Nishma," which implies that they willingly accepted the Torah!

ANSWERS:

(a) TOSFOS (DH Moda'a) answers that although the "Moda'ah Rabah" vindicated them from punishments for most sins, they were punished for the sin of Avodah Zarah. This because the Jewish people did accept upon themselves, willingly, the prohibition against idolatry.

Why, though, does the Gemara say that their acceptance of the Torah was involuntary when the Torah teaches that they said, "Na'aseh v'Nishma"? Tosfos explains that initially, before they stood at Har Sinai, they said "Na'aseh v'Nishma" and expressed their intention to accept the Torah willingly. However, when they stood at Har Sinai, Hash-m had to hold the mountain over their heads lest they change their minds out of fright when they saw the mountain afire and the full awe of the Divine presence (which caused their souls to leave their bodies).

(b) The MIDRASH TANCHUMA (Parshas Noach) explains that they willingly accepted Torah she'Bichtav, the Written Torah. The punishments that they received until the time of Purim were given for laws of Torah she'Bichtav that they transgressed. The "Moda'a" was for Torah she'Ba'al

Peh, the Oral Torah, which they were forced to accept. They did not accept it willingly due to the considerable difficulty involved in fulfilling all of its laws.

(c) The RAMBAN and RASHBA explain that when they accepted the Torah, they accepted to observe the Mitzvos only in Eretz Yisrael. Eretz Yisrael was given to them only on the condition that they fulfill the Mitzvos (see Tehilim 105:24). The "Moda'a" went into effect only after they were exiled from the land (see Sanhedrin 105a), as they did not willingly accept to keep the Torah outside of Eretz Yisrael.

On Purim, they accepted the Torah out of love even in Galus. They wanted to express their desire to never again be distanced from Hash-m, and thus they accepted the Torah in such a way that even if they must go into exile again, they will still remain loyal to the Torah. Thus, the "Moda'a" was no longer in force.

The explanation of the Ramban is consistent with his explanation (Vayikra 18:25, Bereishis 26:5) that the primary goals of the Mitzvos are fulfilled only in Eretz Yisrael. Although we must observe the Mitzvos outside of Israel as well, nevertheless the fulfillment of the Torah does not accomplish as much in the spiritual realms when done outside of Eretz Yisrael as it accomplishes when done in Eretz Yisrael.

3) AGADAH: A NATION THAT PUTS ITS MOUTH BEFORE ITS EARS

The Gemara relates that a Nochri said to Rava, "You are a hasty nation, who put its mouth before its ears [when you said 'Na'aseh v'Nishma' and accepted to do the Mitzvos even before you heard what those Mitzvos are]. The PIRCHEI NISAN (in Koheles Yitzchak, Parshas Yisro) uses this Gemara to explain a Gemara earlier.

In the Gemara earlier (77b), Rabbi Zeira asked Rav Yehudah why, when the flock walks along, the goats go before the sheep. The commentators explain that the Jewish people are compared to sheep, and the Nochrim are compared to goats (sheep are white, which represents purity and holiness, while goats are dark, which represents impurity and depravity). The Pirchei Nisan suggests another explanation for the metaphor.

The Gemara in Bechoros (35a) states that a person is permitted to make a blemish in a Bechor before its head emerges from the womb, so that when it is born it will not have the Kedushah of a Bechor (see Insights to Bechoros 3b). The Gemara describes how one makes such a blemish. For a goat, one should blemish its ear, because its ear is the first part of its body to emerge at the time of birth. For sheep, one should make the blemish on its lips, because the lips are the first part of the sheep to emerge.

The Jewish people are compared to sheep because they put their mouths first, before their ears, when they said "Na'aseh v'Nishma." The other nations, in contrast, put their ears first; they wanted to hear what was written in the Torah before they accepted it. Therefore, they are compared to a goat, whose ear emerges first at birth.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Thought for the Day

Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted

This is Mental Health Awareness Week, and its theme this year is kindness. Next week is the Jewish festival of Shavuot, Pentecost, when we read the biblical book of Ruth, whose theme is kindness. These two things coming together during this time of isolation made me see the book with new eyes and realise what a contemporary text it is though it tells of events more than 3000 years ago.

It begins with a couple and their two sons forced to leave home because of famine. They go to a foreign country where their two sons marry local women. Then tragedy strikes. All three men die. The woman, whose name is Naomi, is left a childless widow, the most vulnerable of all positions in the ancient world because there was no one to look after you.

She goes back home but is so changed that her former neighbours hardly recognise her. Can this be Naomi? They ask. Don't call me Naomi, she replies – the word means pleasant. Call me Mara, bitter.

That is how the book begins: with bereavement, isolation and depression. Yet it ends in joy. Naomi now has a grandson. Her daughter-in-law Ruth and relative Boaz have married and had a child. This is no mere child. In the last line of the book, we discover that he is the grandfather of David, Israel's greatest king and author of much of the book of Psalms.

What transforms Naomi's life from bitterness to happiness is described by the Hebrew word chessed. When, in the early 1530s, William Tyndale was translating the Bible into English for the first time, he realised that there was no English equivalent for chessed, so he invented one, the word lovingkindness. Two people's lovingkindness, Ruth and Boaz, rescued Naomi from depression and gave her back her joy. That is the power of chessed, love as deed.

One of the enduring memories of the coronavirus period will be the extraordinary acts of kindness it evoked, from friends, neighbours, and strangers, those who helped us, kept in touch with us, or simply smiled at us. When fate was cruel to us, we were kind to

By the Friedman and Klahr families
on the occasion of the eighth yahrzeit of
their father, grandfather, and great grandfather,

Dr. Carl Klahr, a" h,
(Nosson Karpel ben Shmuel Zanvil Tzvi),
on the fifth of Sivan

one another. Human goodness emerged when we needed it most. And Mental Health Awareness Week reminds us that some need it more than most.

Kindness redeems fate from tragedy and the wonderful thing is that it doesn't matter whether we are the giver or the recipient. Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted.

A Life of Vertical & Horizontal Responsibility: Shavuot During the Coronavirus Pandemic

What I wanted to do with this shiur is to talk about the Coronavirus. Because Torah gets very interesting when you relate them to the things that are constantly changing. Now, as the Chief Rabbi has already said, the Coronavirus pandemic has enforced a situation that seems to be exactly the opposite of the situation at Mount Sinai. We have three indications of that in the Torah, pretty explicitly. Number one, the famous line at the beginning of Chapter 19 of Shemot, just before the Giving of the Torah, where it says "vayichan-sham Yisrael negged hahar." (Ex. 19:2). The Torah uses the singular form: "and Israel encamped (in the singular) there opposite the mountain". The famous words of Chazal, echoed by Rashi "k'ish echad b'lev echad", explain that the singular form of the verb is used because they encamped together as though they were "One person with one mind". That enormous sense of unity.

The second, a pretty explicit statement of this, is when Moshe Rabbeinu proposes to the people what God is proposing. "Vaya'anu chol-ha'am yachday." (Ex. 19:8). "And all the people answered together and said, 'All that God has said we will do.'" The "yachad" (unity) there is explicitly in the verse, in verse eight of this chapter. And then after the revelation, in chapter 24, when Moshe Rabbeinu repeats the terms of the Torah, "vaya'anu kol-ha'am kol echad". (Ex. 24:3) "All the people answered with one voice." Now, these are pretty unique statements of unity, and all three of them are about the giving of the Torah. What we have here are three statements of people coming together. The question is, where do we find the opposite of isolation, of tragedy, of bad things happening, with people being left alone? And the answer is that we find this in Megillat Rut, in the Megillah that we read on Shavuot, of the story of Ruth. Let's just remind ourselves at how that story begins.

It begins with five hammer blows of tragedy. First of all, the first verse tells us, Vayehi bimei shfot hashoftim... (Ruth 1:1) And it came to pass, at the time when the Judges judged, that there was a famine in the land. Now, a famine in those days was pretty much as severe as an

epidemic in our time. Because without freezers and fridges and supermarkets, a famine was a life-threatening condition. So, the first hammer blow there is a famine. Secondly, a man from Bet Lechem, together with his wife and two sons, went to live in the country of Moab. Now, here we have a double tragedy. There's a famine, specifically in Bet-Lechem in Israel. Bet-Lechem means the House of Bread. Of all places where you would not wish to have a famine, Bethlehem is that.

Then the man goes, but does not go the way Avraham went, to Egypt, or to Gerar, he goes to Moab. Moab was Israel's enemy. Here is a family forced out of their own land, out of their own home, to go to the country of their enemies. Then comes the next blow.

Elimelech, this man himself, Naomi's husband, dies and she is left a widow. Then comes the fourth blow. Her two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Moabite women were not exactly welcome in Israel, because the Moabites, as we have said, were Israel's enemies. (Of course, in the end, one of them turns out to be an exceptional human being.) That is the fourth tragedy. And then comes the fifth tragedy, that Machlon and Chilyon, Naomi's two sons, died also. Now you have Naomi left a childless widow and her two daughters-in-law also left as childless widows. Three childless widows, and you cannot get more vulnerable than that in biblical society because they had absolutely no one to support them.

We then read of how Naomi hears that there's again food available in her own land and she decides to go back. Her two daughters-in-law initially accompany her. She says, "Please, don't. There's nothing for you here. I can't give you any more children. Go back and get married." Of course Orpah does go back. Ruth refuses and goes with her. She then returns to Israel. People of the town, the people she knew not that long ago, come and they look at her and they say, "Can this be Naomi? She has been so shattered by tragedy." The people hardly recognise her. And then she replies, "Don't call me Naomi (i.e. pleasant one), call me Mara, (i.e. bitter one), because God has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord brought me back empty. The Lord has afflicted me. The Almighty has brought misfortune on me." That is point number one. We now have a point of contact with a very tragic episode which left three women exceptionally vulnerable. And one in particular, Naomi, completely isolated, completely devastated.

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Then we move to the end of the Megillah. At the end of the Megillah we know what has happened. Boaz, a kinsmen of Naomi, has taken Ruth as a wife, and repurchased the family properties. They now have a child, a son, and all the women of the town come and surround them and say, "Praise be to the Lord who has not left you without a guardian redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel." Everyone is rejoicing with Naomi, who now has a grandchild. Boaz has a wife and a child. Ruth has a husband and a child. The ultimate blessing, the final coup de theatre at the end of the Megillah, is that the child that they have called Oved is the grandfather of David Hamelech, the greatest King of Israel. We have a situation in which in the space of four chapters, our story has moved from isolation and devastation to one of rejoicing, and, indeed, a kind of renewal of life for all concerned.

The second question is: what brings about this change? The answer is very interesting. There is a Midrash Rabbah that says "Amar Rabbi Zeira", "Rabbi Zeira said", "Megillah Zu", "this scroll," "ein ba lo tuma velo taharah, velo issur velo heiter." "It contains no laws of any consequence. Not pure, impure, permitted, forbidden." "Velamar nichtavah?"

"Why was it written?" "Lelamedechah kamah s'char tov legomli chassidim" "To teach how great is the reward of those who do acts of kindness." (Rut Rabbah 2:14)

The story of Ruth is the supreme story of kindness in Tanach. The word itself appears three times in the megillah. But most importantly, it is Ruth's kindness in staying with Naomi despite all of Naomi's protestations, and Boaz' kindness in really realising what it would take to redeem this family from tragedy. Those two acts of kindness are the reason why the story that begins in tragedy ends in joy. That is the power of chessed, to redeem tragedy and bring joy where there was sadness and hope where there was despair.

Obviously the question that we ask ourselves is why Ruth is read on Shavuot. There's no obvious connection between Ruth and Shavuot. The two standard explanations are that, number one, it has to do with the time of the year. Ruth is set bimei k'tzir cheitim, at the time of the wheat harvest. And Shavuot takes place at the time of the wheat harvest. Or, number two, that Ruth became a convert. "Where you go, I go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your God will be my God. Your people will be my people." And the Israelites, as it were, became converts at Mount Sinai because the essence of conversion is kabbalah hamitzvot, acceptance of the commands, and that's what the Israelites did at Sinai. Maybe it has to do with time of the year, or maybe it has to do with Ruth's conversion.

However, I want to suggest to a different answer. An answer put forward by none other than Moses Maimonides in The Guide For the Perplexed. The Guide For the Perplexed is the greatest work of Jewish philosophy, and it's a big work. It consists of three books, and it's a

very lengthy work. Right at the end, (book three has 54 chapters, and right at the end in chapter 53 of book three) in the penultimate chapter, the Rambam devotes one third of that chapter to defining what is chessed, what is loving kindness? The Rambam says chessed means doing good for people in a way that they have no claim on you. It's not justice, it's not tzedakah, it's chessed. You have no claim, but nonetheless, we do good to somebody that is chessed, going beyond anything the law requires.

In chapter 54, we begin to understand why the Rambam has taken all this time to tell us the meaning of chessed. In book four, chapter 54, the closing chapter of the Guide, he quotes Jeremiah, who says, "Koh amar Hashem", Thus says God, "Al yithallel chacham bechochmato...", "Let the wise not boast of his wisdom, nor the strong hero of his strength, or the rich person of his wealth." "Ki im bezot yithallel hamithallel". But only boast of this, "haskel veyado'a oti." "Think hard, meditate hard, and know Me." "Ki Ani Hashem." "That I am God." (Jer. 9:22) This is a very Rambam sort of idea, that the highest thing in life is to develop an intellectual understanding of God.

But Jeremiah doesn't stop there. He goes on and says, "Haskel veyado'a oti, ki Ani Hashem oseh chessed mishpat utzedakah ba'aretz". "I" says God, "do loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth." "Ki v'eileh chafatzi n'oom Hashem". Because these are what I desire," says God." The Rambam says, (to paraphrase), "I may have been giving you the impression that the most important thing in life is to intellectually understand what God is. But actually, the most important thing in life is to do acts of loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness." It is the kind of people we become and the kind of virtues we embody, that are what the Torah are all about. And since Ruth is the Book of chessed in Tanach, maybe that is why we read it on Shavuot. Because the Rambam tells us that the whole purpose of Torah culminates in this ability to do acts of loving-kindness to other people. Thus far, the Rambam.

However, I want to suggest something else as well and take it just a little bit further. We know what happened at Mount Sinai. The Israelites made a covenant with God. He would be their God and they would be His people. But at key moments in Tanach, critical moments, we find another phrase altogether. Listen very carefully. Here is Moshe Rabbeinu, here is Moses, speaking in the Book of Devarim. "Veyadata ki Hashem Elokecha hu haElokim Hakel hane'eman shomer habrit ve'hachessed", "You shall know that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God, who keeps" "Habrit ve'hachessed," "the covenant and the loving-kindness" (Deut. 7:9). He says it again a few verses later. "Vehaya eikev tish'me'un et hamishpatim ha'eleh ushamartem ve'asitem otam v'shamar Hashem Elokecha lecha et habrit v'et hachessed". "God will keep the covenant and the loving kindness." (Deut. 7:12). When King Solomon dedicated the Temple, he uttered the following prayer.

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"Hashem Elokei Yisrael, ein kemocha Elokim bashamayim mima'al ve'al ha'aretz mitachat...", "There is no one like you, God, in the heavens above or the earth below." "shomer habrit ve'hachessed", "keeping the covenant and the loving-kindness" (I Kings 8:23). And likewise, Nehemiah, when he renews the covenant as the people come back from Babylon. He says, "Hakel hagadol hagibor v'hanora", "The great, mighty, and awesome God," "shomer habrit ve'hachessed". "He who keeps the covenant and the loving-kindness." (Neh. 9:32)

That's a really puzzling phrase, "shomer habrit ve'hachessed", the covenant and the loving-kindness. If you look, for instance, at the Jewish Publication Society translation, they just translate 'covenant'. Because the chessed is included in the covenant. If you look at the New International version, which is a very good non-Jewish translation, habrit ve'hachessed is translated as, "The covenant of love." But of course it doesn't mean that, it means "covenant and love." Everyone had a problem in understanding what else God does for the Jewish people other than make a covenant with them on Shavuot, at Mount Sinai. But if you think about it, the answer's really quite simple. A covenant is what sociologists and anthropologists call reciprocal altruism. You do this for me. I will do this for you. "You serve Me," says God, "and I will protect you." Covenant is always reciprocal and neutral. But that is terribly vulnerable, because what happens if we don't keep the covenant? The covenant is then rendered null and void.

The covenant is not enough. And that's what Moses was saying, that's what King Solomon was saying, that is what Nehemiah was saying. God does not just make a covenant with us. He has a relationship of chessed with us. An unconditional love, which is translated into deeds of kindness to us. The covenant is conditional, but chessed is unconditional. That is exactly what the Rambam meant when it said chessed means doing something for somebody who has no claim on us. There's nothing reciprocal.

And maybe ultimately that is what the Book of Ruth is there to show us. The Book of Ruth is the Book of chessed. We received a covenant at Mount Sinai, but we also received something much more long-lasting and profound, which is God's unconditional love. And that's what the book is telling us, that God has love for us, the way Ruth had for Naomi and Boaz had for Ruth. Acts of loving-kindness all define our relationship with God. And as the Book of Ruth shows, they should be what define our relationship with one another.

Coming back to where we are in the Coronavirus crisis, the short answer is that just as in the Book of Ruth, tragedy and loneliness and isolation are healed by acts of loving-kindness, so have the isolation of so many of us been healed by acts of loving-kindness, acts of neighbourliness, people being in touch, helping us, getting things for us, phoning us

up, connecting us by Zoom, showing that they care about us. Those acts of kindness have humanised and lightened our want. Chessed has a redemptive quality, that it transforms tragedy into some form of celebration and despair into some powerful form of hope. Let what Ruth did for Naomi and Boaz did for Ruth be with us in the months ahead, as we try and help those who have been so terribly isolated these last weeks and months. And may we remember that, as well as giving us a covenant at Mount Sinai, God gave us a bond of love that is unbreakable. He will never abandon us, let us never abandoned Him.

OTS Dvar Torah

"Shavuot, God and Creating Eternal Holiness" - Rabbi Kenneth Brander

Did you ever wonder why, when it comes to the holiday of Pesach, Sukkot, or Rosh haShana or Yom Kippur, there are specific mitzvot to do- whether it's eating matza and maror, sitting in the sukkah or shaking lulav and etrog, hearing the shofar, or fasting. But when it comes to the holiday of Shavuot, which concretizes our relationship with God, there are no particular commandments! Eating cheesecake is not a biblical commandment. Why are there no particular commandments for the holiday of Shavuot?

I believe there is a deep message here for us. First, the acknowledgement of the fact that our relationship with God, which is fully celebrated on Shavuot, cannot be limited to a particular basket of commandments. It's the way we engage with God every single day that's important.

We take out 25 hours – or outside of Israel we take out two days – to reflect upon that perspective: that Shavuot is about the way we talk to our neighbors, how we fill out our tax forms, how we interact with our spouses, our children, our grandchildren, our parents.

And that's why it's not limited to specific commandments. To highlight the fact that Shavuot requires us to realize that our engagement with God is based on our entire weltanschauung on life.

It is God who creates the holiness on Mount Sinai, and therefore when God leaves, the holiness dissipates. But in the Temple, it wasn't God alone that created the holiness; the holiness was created by the partnership with the Jewish people. Likewise our synagogues: the holiness may emanate from God, but that holiness is created because the energy of the community, the energy of the people. And when holiness is created in partnership, between God and the Jewish people, that holiness is eternal.

What an important message for us! We are the ones who guarantee the eternity of the holiness. We guarantee that holiness lasts forever. We play a role in the future of the Jewish people, in the future of society, and

even – according to Rav Kook – in the future of God, in the future of God's role within this world.

And therefore Shavuot is not limited to a particular commandment. Holiness created in partnership with God lasts forever, and holiness that is created by God alone just lasts for a moment.

What a power we have, the capacity to change the world! Let's recognize that as we celebrate this holiday of Matan Torah, this holiday in which we also – in Israel at least – read on Shabbat the Parsha of Naso, of rising and playing a leadership role in our relationship with God, and let us understand that we need to take a moment back on Shavuot and ask ourselves how each and every one of us can change the world around us, can transform ourselves, and in the process, transform society around us.

The Chain of Torah transmission and its implications today

Tzivia Kusminsky

The festival of Shavuot has several names, among them "The feast of the receipt of the Torah", given that on that day, after the exodus from Egypt, Israel received this important compendium of laws, morals and history.

In Masechet Avot it is written: "Moses received Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly. They [the Men of the Great Assembly] would always say these three things: Be cautious in judgement. Establish many pupils. And make a safety fence around the Torah." (Chapter 1, Mishnah 1)

From this first Mishnah, we can learn various principles regarding the giving of the Torah, its form of transmission and the values that it contains.

First of all: what does it mean that Moshe received the Torah "from Sinai", should not it say "in Sinai"? The Maharal of Prague explains that since it is impossible to receive the Torah from Hashem directly, as the relationship between the infinite and the finite does not allow it, we had to receive it from Sinai.

The concept "Sinai" means: "product of the spiritual level in which Moshe was". The Midrash tells us that Mount Sinai was chosen because of its low height, teaching us the importance of humility – as is written about Moshe, that he was a very "humble man".

Question: Who wrote this sentence? Answer: Moshe
 Question: If Moshe wrote that he is very humble, he probably was not so humble, otherwise he would not have written that.
 Answer: Humility means to recognize what I

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am, what are my faculties and my virtues, and at the same time to understand that in front of my creator I am null.

Consequently, the meaning of Moshe receiving the Torah "from Sinai" is that Moshe deserved to receive the Torah because he reached such a level of humility.

Likewise, the Mishnah tells us that Moshe received Torah from Sinai, and not "The Torah". What is the difference? "The Torah", which talks about the order of the world, the place that everything has in the divine intelligence and more, has not yet been received. Moshe, on the other hand, received the part of the Torah that we can understand.

The Mishna continues: "...and gave it over to Joshua". The words "gave it over" represent a certain decline, meaning that the level of the Torah that Joshua received is not the same as the level that Moshe received. He did not have the same "kelim", tools, that Moshe had to understand it. When a person transmits an experience to another, the experience is not understood in the same way by the one who listens as by the one who actually experienced it.

Joshua in turn, gave it to the elders – a second decline – and the elders in turn gave it to the prophets. The prophets gave it – last decline – to the Men of the Great Assembly. So the version of the Torah received is the "third version".

This last point represents the decline of the generations. The farther we move away from the source, from the receipt of the Torah, the more we need to "lower" its level so that we can understand it.

Despite the decline of the generations, our sages call us "the dwarf on the giant", meaning that although we are far away from that glorious day at Mount Sinai, we have gained all the wisdom and merits of the generations above. We can see things from a broader point of view, and this gives us a certain advantage over our ancestors.

Finally, the Mishnah brings the message that the Men of the Great Assembly choose to transmit to us (from them, and not Moshe, because from them we finally "received" the Torah): "Be cautious in judgement. Establish many pupils. And make a safety fence around the Torah."

This message, moral in its base, closes the circle. Moshe, the leader of the Jewish people, receives Torah and transmits it to Joshua, and with this, the transmission from generation to generation begins. This transmission is the source of the survival of the Jewish People and as such, the key for the message of Hashem to continue being spread in this world.

Likewise, in order to continue to remain united

as a people, it is important to take into account all the people of Israel, in all their facets and ideologies. This is why our wise men teach us to be moderate, so as not to alienate anyone from our ranks and to establish many students, in order to reach everyone. And this is why they teach us to make a fence around the Torah – because although it is important that everyone find within the Torah's "70 faces" the way to serve God that best suits his soul, it is necessary to establish boundaries to tell us the rules of interpretation and within which context.

Faith and Kindness

Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz

I have always wondered why it is that of all the Megilot – Scrolls that we read, on Shavuot we read the book of Ruth. Yes, it is true that, as the midrash points out, this is a narrative of Chessed and kindness – the kindness of Ruth and the kindness of Boaz – but why is it associated with the giving of the Torah? In fact, if you were to ask me I would suggest reading the book of Proverbs on this day, with its philosophical complex web of words covering faith, doubt and mankind's condition on earth.

Yet our sages decided that it would be the book of Ruth that is read, for somehow not only is this the book of the origins of the house of David but possibly more significantly, it is the very embodiment of our faith.

In a cryptic but profound midrash our sages describe how Avraham Avinu arrives at his moment of realization that the world has a creator. A moment that sparks humanity's monotheistic religions but more importantly serves as the moment which we try to recapture. For this was the moment of pure faith. Avraham had no one to teach him, no philosophers to suggest God. It was a world where Avraham was very much a man apart. He was on one side of the world faith-wise and the rest of mankind on the other, as our sages taught. Yet he did discover, he did believe, and he did launch monotheism, founding our faith.

Ruth was the same; she had married into a family that had nothing left to offer her. She saw Judaism at its worst. The family of Naomi had left and deserted their people and land. Yet despite it all she clung to Naomi and her people, and above all – to God.

This is no simple feat. She arrives at the realization herself; Naomi attempts to dissuade her, as she has no prospects and very little hope for the future. Yet she listens to her heart, opens her mind, uncovers her soul and discovers God.

In the book of Shemot the Sefat Emet asks what I regard as a thought-provoking question. The verse in the Torah states when it describes the giving of the law "...And all the people see the sounds ..." yet then the verse concludes it says "...the people saw and trembled and

stood from afar." (Shemot 20:15)

The first part of the verse is in the present tense, whilst the latter part of the verse is in past tense, capturing the emotions and atmosphere of the revelation and Matan Torah itself. Why is this so? What is the Torah teaching us here?

Have you ever noticed how it is that the first of the ten commandments is in reality not a commandment at all? Rather it is read as a statement: "I Am the Lord Your God." For faith cannot be instructed and forced. Faith such as the faith of Avraham or the faith of Ruth has to be found. The Sefat Emet teaches that for the Jew, it is found within. The verse above speaks in the present tense, for in the realm of the soul there is no past, present or future! The impression of the Torah and the word of the living God on the Jewish soul is not only perpetual, but also eternal.

Hence, there is no need to command it; rather, we are instructed to find it, uncover it, reconnect to what already exists within. The Torah is predicated on faith. Ruth is all about faith. Faith in herself, her family, and above all – her God. Faith and commitment. Ruth finds faith just as Avraham our Patriarch did – from within. She is practically abandoned, yet she believes in God and His people. In fact, she clings to Naomi and in doing so leaves all she had known, an entire world of existence behind.

Chessed and faith are two sides of the same coin. The prophet stated "I remembered unto you the Chessed -kindness – of your youth when you followed me in the desert in a barren wasteland." The Jewish people are complimented, for we had faith in God and followed him through the barren wasteland.

Ruth embodies Chessed- loving-kindness because her faith in God comes from within – the paradigm of Chessed. She finds God in her wasteland, in her desert. Perhaps this is why Shavuot always falls on the week of the portion of Bamidbar, which literally means 'in the desert.' It is this type of faith we strive to recreate as we approach Shavuot, the celebration of the giving of the Torah. To rediscover, uncover and reconnect, and to be inspired – as Ruth was – from the Torah itself.

Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

Ruth: The Scroll of Troubles?

By Justice David Frankel

The Book of Ruth is one of the most fascinating books of the entire Bible. The fact is that almost every verse of the book begins with the Hebrew conjunction, ve, indicating that the narrative is continuous and uninterrupted, contributing to the fascination the book holds for us.

Ruth Rabbah (proem 7) says: Wherever it is said, "and it came to pass" (va-yehi), it denotes trouble (vay yehi = there was woe). Here we

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have "and it came to pass" twice: "And it came to pass in the days of the judging of the judges" that there was a dearth of Torah (a generation that judges its judges); "and it came to pass that there was a famine in the land," that there was a dearth of bread; Elimelech then said: Thongs [of the hungry] wait at my doorstep every morning—and so he fled [the country].

Indeed, this book could have been called the Scroll of Troubles, or Scroll of Suffering, as presented in Yalkut Shimoni (Ruth 596): "What has the Book of Ruth to do with Atzeret [Shavuot], that it is read on Atzeret at the time the Torah was given? This is to teach us that the Torah was given only through suffering and hardship."

According to the homiletic interpretations of the Sages, the Book of Ruth is also the book of symbols and symbolism, as illustrated by the names of the figures mentioned in it:

Elimelech was one of the important men of the city; his sons, Mahlon and Chilion ("Sickly" and "Ruin"), were so named because of their [bitter] end. In the same spirit, we can add that the fact of the family coming from Bethlehem ("House of Bread") was also symbolic, for bread is often symbolic of poverty, as when a person is "reduced to a loaf of bread," and lo, hard times also came to Bethlehem, a place where there is supposed to be an abundance of bread.

Some of the suffering described in this book is explained in the gemara (Bava Bathra 91a): "And so said R. Simeon b. Yohai: Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion were [of the] great men of their generation, and they were [also] leaders of their generation. Why, then, were they punished? Because they left Palestine for a foreign country."

Naomi's suffering was of a different nature. Her suffering reminds us of the suffering of Job, both in intensity and in the fact that it mounted on her gradually. First, her husband died; second, her two sons married Moabite women (even though according to a homily in Yalkut Shimoni [Ruth 600], Ruth and Orpah were the daughters of Eglon, King of Moab, they were nevertheless still Moabite); third, although they lived together some ten years, they did not manage to have children; fourth, her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, died. So who was left? There remained only three widows, where Naomi, the senior, found herself in a foreign land, among a foreign people.

From the context of the story we may deduce a fifth hardship: the abundance at the beginning of the story had given way to poverty and want.

The turns taken by Job's life (as described in Job, chapter 1) are similar. He, too, is described as being a well-to-do, honest and straight person who was visited by troubles hard to bear, one after the other; he lost not only his wealth, but also his children.

Both Naomi and Job lend similar expression to their misery. Naomi says to the people of Bethlehem, "Call me Mara (= bitterness), for Shaddai has made my lot very bitter" (Ruth 1:20); and Job says, "Shaddai has embittered my life" (Job 27:2).

Another similarity between the two is in the attitude of others towards them. When Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, the people did not recognize her and asked, "Could this be Naomi?" (Ruth 1:19), and likewise it is told of Job that his friends could not recognize him (Job 2:12).

As in Job, so too in Ruth, the book ends on an upbeat, with the hero being blessed and bearing progeny. Of Job it is explicitly said, "Thus the Lord blessed the latter years of Job's life more than the former" (Job. 42:12), and Ruth, blessed by the elders and all the people at the city gate, and later also by the women, became the great grandmother of David, King of Israel.

Thus, this wonderful book is transformed from a tale of woe to a tale of hope, from the book of troubles to the book of loving mercy; and its conclusion makes it the book of monarchy in Israel, as the psalmist said: "He raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the refuse heap..." ending with the words "a happy mother of children" (Ps. 113). Naomi and Ruth also embody the realization of the verse from Job (8:7), "Though your beginning be small, in the end you will grow very great." *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Beit Mikdash And Beit Midrash

Sicha Of Harav Moshe Lichtenstein

Summarized by Binyamin Fraenkel

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"Thunder and lightning and heavy cloud" - "And all the people saw the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it they were shaken, and stood afar. And they said to Moshe, You speak with us, and we will hear, but let God not speak with us lest we die." (Shemot 20:15-16)

Am Yisrael stands at Mount Sinai and they are afraid that they will die. The thunderous, electric, smoky darkness is terrifying: "And Moshe brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 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. And then the voice of the shofar sounded louder and louder; Moshe speaks, and God answers him by a voice." (Shemot 19:17-19)

The impact of this occasion is expressed in the Haggada: "Had He brought us close before Mount Sinai and had not given us the Torah, it would suffice for us." One might ask, what could be the point of standing at Sinai without receiving the Torah? Clearly, this was a profound and penetrating experience in its own right, even before the Torah was given.

In Sefer Devarim, prominent and explicit attention is given to the experience of the

Revelation: "These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a great voice which was not heard again. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone, and delivered them to me.

And it came to pass, when you heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness – for the mountain burned with fire – that you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes, and your elders, and you said, 'Behold, the Lord our God has shown us His glory, and His greatness, and we have heard His voice out of the midst of the fire; we have seen this day that God does talk with man, and he lives. Now, therefore, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? You go near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say, and speak to us all that the Lord our God shall speak to you, and we will hear it, and do it.'" (Devarim 5:19-24)

In Sefer Devarim we see that Bnei Yisrael want Moshe to represent them, out of fear that they will die if they continue to hear God's voice. It is readily apparent that their claim is self-contradictory, since they themselves acknowledge, "For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?" Why, then, are they afraid that they will die?

"In order that the fear of Him be before your faces" - It seems that "death" is not meant here in the simple, literal sense, for Am Yisrael are aware that they are still alive. Rather, they fear the death of the "self." Am Yisrael is afraid that receiving the Torah directly from God will have a permanent, irreversible effect on personal character and the ability to achieve self-fulfillment, to preserve uniqueness and independence. The concern is that full, complete and absolute commitment to God, accepted as a nation, will harm every individual and his right to his own personal freedom.

Moshe, an ideal figure capable of living in a constant state of intense spiritual experience, rebukes them: "And Moshe said to the people: 'Fear not, for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before your faces, so that you will not sin.' And the people stood far off, and Moshe drew near to the thick darkness where God was." (Shemot 20:17-18)

Moshe tries to persuade the people to actually hear God, to nullify themselves before Him and to be ready to serve Him wholeheartedly. Ultimately, however, Moshe approaches the thick darkness alone, while the nation remains far off. God understands the nation's fear and answers Moshe: "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: 'I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there be such a heart in them, that they will fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever.'" (Devarim 5:25-26)

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God accepts the argument of the people and treats their request as a positive inner development: "O that there be such a heart in them...."

Why can Am Yisrael not live with this "high voltage" spiritual experience on an ongoing basis? The human condition is such that when a person has a powerful experience (of any sort) on a very frequent basis, it begins to lose its value and meaning for him; he becomes desensitized. The intense joy of a wedding, for example, could not be sustained if a person were to hold a wedding every night, complete with a banquet, music, etc. A couple has to invest effort in the mundane reality of their ongoing relationship, nurturing a simple but intimate bond in their everyday interaction. Likewise, the Mishkan is a home of sorts, in which the spiritual experience of the Revelation at Sinai is preserved. As the Mishna teaches:

"On the day of his wedding" (Shir Ha-shirim 3:11) – this refers to the [day of] the giving of the Torah, 'and on the day of the gladness of his heart' (Shir Ha-shirim 3:11) – this refers to the building of the Temple, may it be rebuilt speedily in our days." (Ta'anit 4:8)

Moreover, if Am Yisrael had to maintain such a high level of spiritual tension, spiritual progress would lose its value, since such moments of elevation would be common; there would be nothing new or unusual about them.

The command concerning the Mishkan - For this reason, God commanded that Am Yisrael's motivation be channeled in other ways. In Sefer Shemot, we find that God gives Am Yisrael three commands following their request that Moshe mediate between them and God:

"And the Lord said to Moshe, Thus shall you say to Bnei Yisrael: You have seen that I have talked with you from heaven; You shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.

An altar of earth shall you make to Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in all the places where I cause My Name to be pronounced, I will come to you and I will bless you. And if you will make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone, for if you lift up your blade upon it, you have defiled it.

Neither shall you go up by steps to My altar, that your nakedness not be exposed on it." (Shemot 20:19-23)

The first command, "You shall not make with Me gods of silver," demands that Am Yisrael not forsake the worship of God, despite the difficulty involved. There is concern here that when Am Yisrael discovers and understands God's profound demands, they will turn to "gods of silver" and "gods of gold," and so God warns against this explicitly.

The aim of the third command is to prevent Am Yisrael from superfluous attempts to ascend to God: "Neither shall you go up by steps to My altar" – because if Am Yisrael were to burst forth towards God at inappropriate times, they could be harmed. They are warned against running away with themselves, forging ahead too quickly.

The second command is one of the main solutions that God gives Am Yisrael, along with Parashat Mishpatim (which follows from these three commands). We find here two alternatives for the ecstatic Divine worship that occurred at the Revelation at Sinai: the Mishkan, and the “mishpatim” (judgments, laws).

The Mishkan is an alternative of sorts because there is ongoing, fixed service, with a clear connection with God in the form of the offering of sacrifices, while the Mishkan itself is a spiritual nerve-center for all of Am Yisrael – “...that I may dwell in their midst.” Every Jew can go to the Mishkan and seek God. The Mishkan is a way of maintaining the connection with God, in a way that allows the nation to continue living as usual, alongside Divine worship. The command concerning the Mishkan also appears in the “covenant of the basins” at the end of Parashat Mishpatim:

“And Moshe came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All the words which the Lord has said, we will do.’ And Moshe wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent the young men of Bnei Yisrael, who offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the Lord. And Moshe took half of the blood, and put it in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people, and they said, ‘All that the Lord has said, we will do and obey.’ And Moshe took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words.’” (Shemot 24:3-8)

The Mishkan is a solution that condenses the experience of the Revelation, in the spirit of the midrash that speaks of the Mishkan as a portable dwelling for the king: “...Instead, make Me a chamber that I may speak with her [Am Yisrael]: So it was in the beginning, ‘When Israel was a child, then I loved him...’ (Hoshea 11:1). In Egypt, they saw Me: ‘And I shall pass through the land of Egypt...’ (Shemot 12:12). At the sea they saw Me: ‘And Israel saw the great hand...’ (Shemot 14:31). At Sinai, they saw Me face to face, as it is written, ‘Face to face God spoke with you’ (Devarim 5:4). When they received the Torah, ... ‘Let them make Me a Sanctuary’ – and I will speak to them from within the Mishkan.” (Yalkut Shimoni Shir Ha-shirim 586)

Massekhet Bava Kama - Along with the Mishkan, God offers another solution for spiritual experience; this solution, too, is firmly rooted in day-to-day life:

“And these are the judgments which you shall set before them. If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, without paying.” (Shemot 21:1-2)

It is no coincidence that the laws contained in most of Massekhet Bava Kama come after the Revelation at Sinai. Am Yisrael is looking for a way of maintaining the connection with God, and the setting down of the statutes and judgments is

the second solution that God proposes, after the Mishkan. In Sefer Devarim, too, we find:

“But as for you – stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land which I gave them to possess it. You shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.” (Devarim 5:28-29)

“The commandments and the statutes and the judgments” are the solution that God provides after Bnei Yisrael’s request, to which the response is, “They have well said all that they have spoken.” God offers the solution of Torah study, with its tremendous, immeasurable depth and breadth. These two solutions are also mentioned explicitly in the Gemara:

“And this is as Rabbi Chiya bar Ami said in the name of Ula: Since the day that the Temple was destroyed, the Holy One has nothing in His world but the four ‘amot’ of Halakha alone.” (Berakhot 8a)

This teaches us that while the Temple stood, there were two channels for closeness to God: the Temple, with its sacrificial service, and Halakha. Since the Destruction, what remains is the ‘four amot of Halakha’ alone. Of course, we must also bear in mind the Gemara’s teaching (Yoma 86b) that prayer is the replacement for the sacrifices in our times – “We will offer the words of our lips instead of calves” (Hoshea 14:3).

Routine and renewal in the life of the individual - These solutions have two ramifications, on the personal and the collective level. On the personal level, we learn that we cannot spend all our time pursuing powerful experiences. The proper path to follow is that of ongoing, day-to-day effort. An example is the ongoing endeavor of Torah study, which accumulates over time. We are now approaching the middle of the year, and this is an appropriate time to take stock of what we have done over the course of this period. There are some people who might be asking themselves, “What have we done this year? We haven’t made any progress at all.” Sometimes, this sort of soul-searching leads to a feeling that one has achieved nothing, that one’s Torah study is not accompanied by any special Divine aid; that it is a lost cause. “Maybe I’m not cut out to study Torah.”

It is important to remember that yeshiva study is a cumulative endeavor that is carried out over an extended period of time and demands intensive work throughout the year. There is a story of someone once asking the Vilna Gaon if he would like the entire Torah to be revealed to him by Eliyahu, without him having to labor over it, word by word, page by page, chapter by chapter. The Vilna Gaon reportedly declined. He understood the significance of the experience of studying Torah by one’s own efforts. Beyond this, he understood that we are not judged by the measure of knowledge that we acquire, but rather by the measure of effort that we invest. What would we answer if someone were to offer to install the entire Responsa Project in our brains in the form of a tiny chip?

The spiritual growth and the knowledge that accumulate with effort over time, gradually

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become noticeable in the student. One cannot draw conclusions from a mere half-year of study. Everyone can ask his friends, his teachers, or the mashgiach, and hear from them about his own progress. One cannot compare a student in his first or second year of study to someone who has been in yeshiva for a long time, for there is always spiritual movement and progress. Nevertheless, this movement is not to be measured in days, and it is impossible to determine a point of transition or a moment of change – just as a father is unable to tell his children at what exact moment he fell in love with their mother. The inner world of a yeshiva student is built one brick at a time, at its own pace, and we must not be afraid to embark on this process and to become “yeshiva students” – bachurei yeshiva.

Students sometimes ask me on Purim, when they are happily tipsy, how they might progress and acquire more knowledge and fear of Heaven. The way to do this is by studying and investing effort on all the other 364 days of the year. On Purim we rejoice over the Torah; the other days of the year we study it. Yom Kippur happens only once a year, and the Ne’ila prayer is a rare and very special experience. If we were to experience a Yom Kippur every week, Ne’ila would lose its significance. Therefore, we must focus on our spiritual efforts throughout the year and thereby elevate ourselves.

Study of Torah throughout the year, on an ongoing basis, with a significant effort to “receive the Torah” in a personal sense, will lead, with God’s help, to a feeling of connectedness to the Torah and to God. We must focus on our daily lives, on our ‘sedarim’ during the day, and progress and thrive through them.

“And he sent Yehuda before him” – communal Torah - On the communal level, Torah study as a solution has undergone transformation in recent times. We know that the Torah has a unique status and importance, as the Gemara teaches:

“Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehinnom, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Mashiach. Torah – as it is written (Mishlei 8:22), ‘The Lord created me as the beginning of His way....’” (Pesachim 54a)

It is not for nothing that the Torah was given in the wilderness. Admittedly, there is a view amongst Chazal that the Torah was given there in order to express the “democratic” nature of Torah study, which is available to all:

“What is the meaning of the verse (Bamidbar 21:18-19), ‘... And from the wilderness to Matana (or, ‘a gift’), and from Matana – to Nachliel, and from Nachliel to Bamot?’ The answer is – if a person makes himself like a wilderness, which is open to all, then Torah will be given to him as a gift, as it is written, ‘from the wilderness – a gift.’” (Nedarim 55a)

However, there is another level to the idea of the Torah being given in the wilderness. The Torah is independent of time or place, and the question of Eretz Yisrael has no decisive impact on the commandment of Torah study. The Torah is the ultimate focus; it is severed from any concrete,

earthly factor. The Torah is beyond the world; it existed before the world did.

This approach reached its zenith in the manner of Torah study practiced in the Lithuanian yeshivot some 150 years ago, and since then it has been the prevailing approach. It is not the approach of the Charedi public alone. Despite the many points of disagreement between the Religious-Zionist public and the Charedi public, Torah study is an absolute value for us, too, and is not measured against or compared with other values.

Charedi rabbis used to be brought in to teach at Religious-Zionist yeshiva high schools not only because of the dearth of educators amongst our own sector, but also in order to nurture this attitude of exclusivity towards Torah, and to inculcate among the students the understanding that Torah stands above all else. In the eulogy that I delivered for my Rabbi and teacher, Rav Aryeh Bina, of blessed memory, I mentioned the uniqueness of his ability to create a “Lithuanian yeshiva high-school” – Yeshivat Netiv Meir – here in Israel:

“R. Aryeh was one of those sons of ‘Yehuda,’ who came here with the wealth of the yeshiva world of Eastern Europe... His wisdom led him, specifically at Netiv Meir, to emphasize this former aspect. Because he knew that he was deeply immersed in what was happening in Israel, he decided to be the head of a Lithuanian high-school yeshiva. He was a unique person: the head of a [Religious Zionist] high-school yeshiva who was also the head of a Lithuanian yeshiva.

He represented this combination in the smaller details, too. He wore a Lithuanian kippa, and instituted the singing of niggunim from the beit midrash of the Mussar movement in the beit midrash prior to his sicha. He took care to inculcate within us the feeling that Netiv Meir was a yeshiva in the full sense of the word, in no way inferior to any other yeshiva.”

We must know that the Divine service of Torah study is immeasurably greater than the tremendous importance of the Divine service of the army. The yeshiva is a place that is important in its own right; one should not treat two years of Torah study merely as a “preparation” for military service. We must understand that Torah is the central spiritual pillar that allows us to create a direct connection with God; nothing can compare with it.

The yeshiva world must create a new generation of talmidei chakhamim – not only a scholarly elite to serve as rabbis of the next generation, but a significant cadre of regular citizens for whom the Torah occupies a position of honor, and who are guided by it in their educational and communal efforts, in the synagogue, in schools, and in their family life. (*This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Yitro 5773 [2013].*)

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'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 forgiveness.]

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. "mitzvah bikurim" (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'yetziat mitzraim").

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 covenantal 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

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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.]

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PARSHAT YITRO - Ma'amad Har Sinai

A wedding ceremony? Well, not exactly; but many sources in Chazal compare the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai to a marriage between God (the groom) and Am Yisrael (the bride).

[See for example the last Mishnah in Mesechet Taanit!]

In this week's shiur, as we study the numerous ambiguities in Shmot chapter 19, we attempt to explain the deeper meaning of this analogy, as well as the underlying reason for those ambiguities.

INTRODUCTION

Thus far, Sefer Shmot has discussed the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, and hence - how God had fulfilled His covenant with the Avot. However, that covenant included not only a promise of redemption, but also the promise that Bnei Yisrael would become God's special nation in Eretz Canaan. As Bnei Yisrael now travel to establish that nation in that 'Promised Land', God brings them to Har Sinai in order to teach them the specific laws [mitzvot] that will help make them His special nation.

Therefore, the primary purpose of Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai was to receive God's LAWS. Nevertheless, the Torah describes in no less detail the 'experience' of how those laws were given. In the following shiur, we undertake a careful reading of Shmot chapter 19 (i.e. the events that precede the Ten Commandments), highlighting its complexities, in an attempt to better appreciate Chazal's understanding of Ma'amad Har Sinai.

[Before you continue, it is highly recommended that you quickly review chapters 19 and 20 to refresh your memory, noting its flow of topic. (While doing so, try to notice how many psukim are difficult to translate.) For a more comprehensive preparation, see the Questions for self-study (sent earlier this week).]

THE 'PROPOSAL'

Shmot chapter 19 opens as Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai - presumably, to receive the Torah. However, before the Torah is given, God first summons Moshe to the mountain, instructing him to relay a certain message to the people. As you review these psukim (19:3-6), note how they form a 'proposal':

"Thus shall you say to Beit Yaakov and tell Bnei Yisrael:

You have seen what I have done to Egypt... so NOW:

IF - you will OBEY Me faithfully and keep My COVENANT...and be my treasured nation, for all the Land is Mine.

THEN: You shall be for Me a 'mamlechet Kohanim v'goy kadosh' [a kingdom of priests and a holy nation]..." (19:4-6)

The 'if / then' clause proves that these instructions constitute a proposal (and not just a decree) - to which Bnei Yisrael must answer either 'yes' or 'no'. And that's exactly what we find:

"And the people answered together and said, 'Everything that God has spoken we shall keep,' and Moshe brought the people's answer back to God." (see 19:7-8)

Clearly, Moshe Rabeinu acts as the 'middle-man' - who must relay the people's answer to this 'proposal' back to God.

[In regard to what would have happened had Bnei Yisrael answered 'no', see the Further Iyun section.]

Let's take a minute to discuss the meaning of the two sides of this 'proposition'.

The first part of the **'IF'** clause - "if you will OBEY Me" - makes sense, as God must first clarify if Bnei Yisrael are indeed now ready to follow His laws; in contrast to their previous 'refusals' (see Yechezkel 20:5-9, Shmot 6:9 & 15:26). However, the precise meaning of the second clause - "and if you will keep My COVENANT" is uncertain, for it is not clear if this 'covenant' refers to something old - i.e. 'brit Avot'; or something new - i.e. 'brit Sinai'.

SOMETHING 'OLD' or SOMETHING 'NEW'

It would be difficult to explain that the word 'covenant' in this pasuk refers to 'brit Avot', for brit Avot doesn't seem to include any specific action that Bnei Yisrael must keep. More likely, it refers to 'brit Sinai' - whose details will soon be revealed, should Bnei Yisrael accept this proposal.

However, this ambiguity may be intentional, for this forthcoming "brit Sinai" could be understood as an 'upgrade' of "brit Avot". In other words, 'brit Avot' discusses the very basic framework of a relationship (see Breishit 17:7-8), while 'brit Sinai' will contain the detailed laws which will make that original covenant more meaningful.

If so, then the proposition could be understood as follows: Should Bnei Yisrael agree to obey whatever God may command, and to remain faithful to this covenant, and act as His treasured nation (see 19:5) - **THEN**, the result will be that Bnei Yisrael will serve as God's 'model' nation, representing Him before all other

nations [a "mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh"/ see 19:6].

As a prerequisite for Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael must both confirm their readiness to obey God's commandments while recognizing that these mitzvot will facilitate their achievement of the very purpose of God's covenant with them.

Whereas a covenant requires the willful consent of both sides, this section concludes with Bnei Yisrael's collective acceptance of these terms (see again 19:7-8).

MAKING PLANS (and changing them)

Now that Bnei Yisrael had accepted God's proposal, the next step should be for them to receive the specific MITZVOT (i.e. the laws that they just agreed to observe). However, before those laws can be given, there are some technical details that must be ironed out, concerning HOW Bnei Yisrael will receive these laws. Note how the next pasuk describes God's 'plans' for how He intends to convey these mitzvot

"And God said to Moshe, 'I will come to you in the thickness of a CLOUD, in order that the people HEAR when I SPEAK WITH YOU, and in order that they believe in you [i.e. that you are My spokesman] forever..." (19:9)

It appears from this pasuk that God plans to use Moshe Rabeinu as an intermediary to convey His laws to Bnei Yisrael, consistent with Moshe's role as His liaison heretofore. Nonetheless, God insists that the people will 'overhear' His communication with Moshe, so that they believe that these laws truly originate from God, and not from Moshe.

At this point, in the middle of pasuk 9, we encounter our first major difficulty in following the flow of events. Note that God has just informed Moshe of HOW He plans to convey His laws. Hence, we would expect Moshe to convey this message to Bnei Yisrael (just as he did in 19:7). However, when we continue our reading of 19:9, something very strange takes place:

"...Then Moshe reported the PEOPLE'S words to God." (19:9)

What's going on? The second half of this pasuk seems to omit an entire clause - for it never tells us what the people responded. Instead, it just says that Moshe relayed the people's response back to God, without telling us WHAT the people said!

BE PREPARED!

This question is so glaring (and obvious) that Rashi, taking for granted that the reader realized this problem, provides an answer based on the Midrash that fills in the 'missing details'.

"Et divrei ha'am" [the words of the people]... The people responded: 'We want to hear from YOU [God] directly, for one cannot compare hearing from a "shaliach" (a messenger) to hearing from the King himself, [or they said,]: We want to SEE our King!' (see Rashi on 19:9)

Note how Rashi adds an entire line to this narrative. According to his interpretation, Bnei Yisrael don't accept God's original plan that they would hear the MITZVOT via Moshe. Instead, they demand to hear them directly - from God Himself!

What allows Rashi to offer such a bold interpretation?

Rashi's interpretation is based on an apparent contradiction between God's original plan in 19:9 and what appears to be His new plan, as described in the next two psukim:

"And God told Moshe, 'Go to the people and get them ready... for on the third day God will reveal Himself IN VIEW OF ALL THE PEOPLE on Har Sinai.' (see 19:10-11)

Note how God commands Bnei Yisrael to ready themselves, for in three days time they will actually SEE God. This declaration that He plans to reveal himself before the 'eyes of the entire nation' suggests that God now plans to convey His mitzvot DIRECTLY to the people. These instructions appear to describe a NEW PLAN for Matan Torah (in contrast to His original plan that Moshe will act as an intermediary - as described in 19:9).

For the sake of clarity, from now on, we refer to the God's original plan (Dibrot via Moshe) as PLAN 'A' (based on 19:9), and to the new plan (Dibrot Direct) as PLAN 'B' (based on 19:11).

Rashi claims that God's suggestion of Plan 'B' stems from the people's unwillingness to accept Plan 'A' - for Bnei Yisrael want to hear the Commandments DIRECTLY.

This 'change of plan' can explain why the people now require THREE days of preparation. In order to prepare for this DIRECT encounter, Bnei Yisrael must first attain a higher level of spiritual readiness, as reflected in the three-day preparation period. Note how the details of this 'preparation' continue until 19:15.

In 19:12-13, Moshe is commanded to cordon off the entire area surrounding the mountain. In 19:14-15, Moshe relays these commands to the people. Hence, from now on, we refer to this section (i.e. 19:9-15) as 'PREPARATION'.

Are Bnei Yisrael capable of reaching this level? Are they truly ready to receive the DIBROT directly from God?

If so, why did God not suggest this direct encounter in the first place? If not, why does God now agree to their request?

[As you may have guessed, we have encountered a 'dialectic'.]

To answer these questions, we must analyze the psukim that follow to determine which of these two divine plans actually unfolds.

RUNAWAY BRIDE

According to the new plan, on 'day three' God should reveal Himself on Mount Sinai and speak the DIBROT directly to the entire nation. Let's continue now in chapter 19 and see what happens:

"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, and there were loud sounds and lightening, and a THICK CLOUD on the mountain, and the SHOFAR sounded very strong, and the people in the CAMP all became frightened." (19:16)

If you read this pasuk carefully, you will most probably be startled by the fact that Bnei Yisrael never came to Har Sinai that morning! Instead, they were so frightened of God's "hitgalut" [revelation] that they remained in the CAMP.

[Our minhag to stay up (and learn Torah) the entire night of Shavuot is based on the Midrash that Bnei Yisrael 'slept in' on that morning. Note how that Midrash is based on this pasuk.]

This background explains the next pasuk, where Moshe goes back to the camp, and brings everyone back to the foot of the mountain (see 19:17). Now it's time to 'try it again'. Let's see what happens:

"And Har Sinai was full of smoke, for God had DESCENDED upon it in FIRE, and its smoke was like a furnace, and the entire mountain shook violently..." (see 19:18)

This pasuk certainly describes God's "hitgalut", and it appears to follow according to PLAN 'B'. Note how God's descends onto the mountain (note the word "va'yered" in both 19:11 and 19:18). Nevertheless, one could also understand the intense smoke as reflective of the protective 'cloud' described in 19:9 (Plan 'A').

The stage has now been set for Matan Torah. The people are standing at the foot of Har Sinai and God has revealed Himself - He has descended upon Har Sinai. Therefore, the next pasuk should describe God's proclamation of the Ten Commandments.

Let's examine that pasuk (19:19) carefully:

"The sound of the shofar grew louder and louder; as Moshe would speak, God would answer him with a KOL." (19:19)

This pasuk is quite ambiguous, for it does not give us even a clue as to WHAT Moshe was saying or what God was answering. It is not even clear as to WHOM Moshe is speaking, to God or to the people!

If Moshe is speaking to the people, then this pasuk would be describing how he conveyed the DIBROT. If so, then Moshe speaking and God responding with a "kol" - implies that the DIBROT were given according to PLAN 'A', as Moshe serves as the intermediary. [Compare with 19:9!]

However, if "Moshe y'daber" (in 19:19) refers to Moshe speaking to God, then it not at all clear what their conversation is about; nor can we make any deduction in regard to how the Dibrot were given! [Note the range of opinion among the commentators on

this pasuk!]

PLAN 'B' - MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING!

Rashi's commentary on this pasuk is simply amazing. Again quoting the Midrash, Rashi claims that Moshe is speaking to the people, telling them the Dibrot! However, what's amazing is Rashi's explanation that the clause "Moshe y'daber..." describes the transmission of the LAST EIGHT Commandments, but not the first TWO. This is because Rashi understands that the first two DIBROT were given DIRECTLY from God - in accordance with PLAN 'B' - while the last eight were given via Moshe - in accordance with PLAN 'A'. As this pasuk (19:19) describes PLAN 'A' it could only be referring to the transmission of the last eight DIBROT!

[See also Rambam in Moreh N'vuchim II, chapter 33.]

Note that according to Rashi, chapter 19 intentionally OMITS two key events relating to Plan B:

- 1) Bnei Yisrael's original request for Plan B (in 19:9), &
- 2) The story of the two DIBROT given at the level of Plan 'B'.

For some thematic reason that remains unclear, chapter 19 prefers to omit these two important details, leaving us with the impression that Plan 'B' may have never taken place!

Ramban rejects Rashi's interpretation of 19:19 (as do many other commentators), arguing that 19:19 does NOT describe how the Dibrot were given. Instead, Ramban explains that "Moshe y'daber..." describes the conversation between God and Moshe that immediately follows in 19:20-25.

[As usual, Ramban prefers to keep the sequence of events according to the order of the psukim, while Rashi is willing to 'change' the order for thematic considerations.]

LIMITATION/ A FINAL WARNING

To better appreciate this "machloket" between Rashi and Ramban, we must examine the last set of psukim in chapter 19 (i.e. 19:20-25).

"God descended upon Mount Sinai to the TOP of the Mountain and summoned Moshe to the TOP of the Mountain, and Moshe ascended... Then God told Moshe: Go down and WARN the people lest they break through toward God to SEE, and many of them will perish. And even the KOHANIM who are permitted to come closer must prepare themselves..." (19:20-22)

[Btw, note that 20:25 refers to Moshe's conveying this warning to the people, NOT to his conveying the "DIBROT," as is commonly misunderstood. See Rashi!]

According to Ramban, this additional 'warning' is given BEFORE Matan Torah, and serves as the final preparation before the DIBROT are given. However, according to Rashi's interpretation, it remains unclear when, where, and why this conversation (in 19:20-25) takes place.

[Even though Rashi explains 19:19 as depicting the presentation of the DIBROT, he maintains that 19:20-25 takes place beforehand - for it relates to the ceremony described in 24:3-11, which Rashi himself claims to have occurred BEFORE the DIBROT. This "sugya" lies beyond the scope of our shiur.]

In any case, this final 'warning' clearly reflects the mode of transmission of the Dibrot that we have referred to as PLAN 'A' - God will appear only to Moshe (at the top of the mountain), while everyone else must keep their distance down below. Only Moshe will be privy to witness the descent of the "shechina" onto the TOP of the mountain, while Bnei Yisrael are prohibited from ascending to see, "lest they die."

As this section describes how God is now limiting His revelation to the top of the Mountain, we refer from now on to this section (19:20-25) as 'LIMITATION'.

Note how chapter 19 now divides into four distinct sections:

- I. PROPOSITION (19:1-8)
- II. PREPARATION (19:9-15)
- III. REVELATION (19:16-19)
- IV. LIMITATION (19:20-25)]

So what happened? Has God reverted to Plan 'A' (that Moshe is to act as an intermediary)? If so, why? On the other hand, if Plan 'B' remains in operation, why does God restrict His revelation to the TOP of the mountain? Could this be considered some sort of 'compromise'?

There appears to have been a change in plans, but why?

Even though chapter 19 does not seem to provide any explanation for what motivated this change, a story found later in chapter 20 seems to provide us with all the 'missing details'.

TREPIDATION [or 'FEAR' STORY ONE']

Towards the end of chapter 20, immediately after the Torah records the DIBROT, we find yet another story concerning what transpired at Har Sinai:

"And the people all saw the KOLOT, the torches, the sound of the SHOFAR and the mountain smoking; the people saw and MOVED BACK and stood at a distance. And they told Moshe: 'Why don't YOU SPEAK to us, and we will listen to you, but God should NOT SPEAK to us, lest we die.'

"Moshe responded saying: 'DO NOT BE FEARFUL, for God is coming to 'test' you and instill fear within you so that you will not sin.'

"But the people STOOD AT A DISTANCE, and Moshe [alone] entered the CLOUD where God was." (see 20:15-18)

This short narrative provides us with a perfect explanation for WHY God chooses to revert from PLAN 'B' back to PLAN 'A'. Here, the reason is stated explicitly: the people changed their mind because they were frightened and overwhelmed by this intense experience of "hitgalut."

But why is this story recorded in chapter 20? Should it not have been recorded in chapter 19?

Indeed, Ramban does place this story in the middle of chapter 19. Despite his general reluctance towards rearranging the chronology in Chumash, Ramban (on 20:14-15) explains that this entire parshia (20:15-18) took place earlier, BEFORE Matan Torah. Based on a textual and thematic similarities between 20:15-18 and 19:16-19 (and a problematic parallel in Devarim 5:20-28), Ramban concludes that the events described in 20:15-18 took place before Matan Torah, and should be read together with 19:16-18!

Thus, according to Ramban, the people's request to hear from Moshe (and not from God) that took place within 19:16-18, explains the need for the 'limitation' section that follows immediately afterward in 20:19-25. [See Ramban on 20:15.]

Rashi and Chizkuni offer a different interpretation. They agree with Ramban that 20:15-18 - the Fear Story - is 'out of place,' but they disagree concerning WHERE to put it. While Ramban places this story BEFORE Matan Torah, Rashi (based on his pirush to 19:19) & Chizkuni (on 20:15) claim that it took place DURING Matan Torah, BETWEEN the first two and last eight commandments.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - FIRST OR THIRD PERSON

In fact, this creative solution solves yet another problem. It explains WHY the text of the Ten Commandments shifts from first to third person after the second commandment. Whereas the first two commandments (20:2-5) are written in FIRST person, indicating that God conveyed them DIRECTLY to the people [reflective of Plan 'B'], the last eight commandments (20:6-14) are written in third person, suggesting a less direct form of communication [reflective of Plan 'A']. This reflects Chazal's explanation that: "Anochi v'Lo Yihiyeh Lachem, m'pi ha'gvurah shma'um" - the first two commandments were heard directly from God (Makkot 24a); see also Chizkuni 20:2 and 20:15.]

Rashi and Chizkuni's explanation has a clear advantage over Ramban's, as it justifies the 'transplantation' of the Fear story (20:15-18) from its proper chronological location to after the Dibrot. Since this story took place DURING the Ten Commandments, the Torah could not record it beforehand. On the other hand, it could not have been recorded where it belongs (i.e. in between the second and third

DIBROT), for the Torah does not want to 'break up' the DIBROT (whereas they form a single unit). Therefore, the Torah records this 'fear story' as a type of 'appendix' to the Ten Commandments, explaining afterward what happened while they were given.

To summarize, in chapter 19, it was unclear whether or not Bnei Yisrael would hear the DIBROT according to PLAN 'A' (as God originally had planned) or at the higher level of PLAN 'B' (as Bnei Yisrael requested). Later, in chapter 20, the Torah describes how Bnei Yisrael were frightened and requested to revert back to PLAN 'A'. Ramban claims that this 'fear story' took place BEFORE Matan Torah, and hence the people heard ALL Ten Commandments through Moshe (Plan 'A'). Rashi maintains that this story took place DURING the DIBROT; hence the first TWO DIBROT were transmitted according to PLAN 'B', while the remainder were heard according to PLAN 'A'.

[Ibn Ezra (see 20:15) takes an opposite approach, maintaining that the fear story is recorded right where it belongs; it took place only AFTER Matan Torah. Therefore, the people heard all Ten Commandments directly from God, as mandated by Plan 'B'.]

A PROOF FROM SEFER DEVARIM

Based on our discussion, we can resolve two adjacent yet seemingly contradictory psukim in the description of Matan Torah in Sefer Devarim:

"Face to face God spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire [PLAN 'B']. I stood BETWEEN God and you at that time to convey God's words to you [PLAN 'A'], for you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain..." (see Devarim 5:4-5)

Once again, the Torah incorporates BOTH PLANS in its description of Matan Torah. Evidently, both plans were in fact carried out, as we explained.

Although we have suggested several solutions to problems raised by chapters 19-20, a much more basic question arises: why can't the Torah be more precise? Why does the Torah appear to intentionally obscure the details of such an important event in our history?

AHAVA and YIRAH

One could suggest that this ambiguity is intentional, as it reflects the dialectic nature of man's encounter with God.

Man, in search of God, constantly faces a certain tension. On the one hand, he must constantly strive to come as close to God as possible ("ahava" - the love of God). On the other hand, he must constantly retain an awareness of God's greatness and recognize his own shortcomings and unworthiness ("yirah" the fear of God). Awed by God's infinity and humbled by his own imperfection, man must keep his distance (see Devarim 5:25-26!).

God's original plan for Matan Torah was 'realistic.' Recognizing man's inability to directly confront the "shechina," God intends to use Moshe as an intermediary (Plan 'A'). Bnei Yisrael, eager to become active covenantal partners, express their desire to come as close as possible to God. They want to encounter the "Shechina" directly, without any mediating agent (Plan 'B').

Could God say NO to this sincere expression of "ahavat Hashem"? Of course not! Yet, on the other hand, answering YES could place the people in tremendous danger, as they must rise to the highest levels of spirituality to deserve such a direct, unmediated manifestation of God.

While Plan 'B' may reflect a more 'ideal' encounter, Plan 'A' reflects a more realistic one. One could suggest that by presenting the details with such ambiguity, the Torah emphasizes the need to find the proper balance between this realism as well as idealism when serving God.

GOD KNOWS BEST

Although God knows full well that Bnei Yisrael cannot possibly sustain a direct encounter, He nonetheless concedes to their request to hear the Commandments directly. Why?

One could compare this Divine encounter to a parent-child relationship. As a child grows up, there are times when he wishes to do things on his own. Despite his clear incapability to perform the given task, his desire to accomplish is the key to his growth. A wise

parent will allow his child to try, even though he knows that the child may fail - for it is better that one recognize his shortcomings on his own, rather than be told by others that he cannot accomplish.

On the other hand, although a child's desire to grow should not be inhibited by an overprotective parent, a responsible parent must also know when to tell his child STOP.

Similarly, God is well aware of Bnei Yisrael's unworthiness to encounter the Divine at the highest level. Nevertheless, He encourages them to aspire to their highest potential. As Bnei Yisrael struggle to maintain the proper balance between "ahava" and "yirah," God must guide and they must strive.

Our study of Parshat Yitro has shown us that what actually happened at Ma'amad Har Sinai remains unclear. However, what 'could have happened' remains man's eternal challenge.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. What would have happened had Bnei Yisrael said NO to God's proposition? The Midrash posits that had Bnei Yisrael rejected the offer, the world would have returned to "tohu va'vhu" (void) - the phrase used in Breishit 1:2 to describe the state prior to Creation! [See Shabbat 88a & Rashi 19:17.] From this Midrash, it appears that Bnei Yisrael had no choice but to accept. Why is the covenant binding, if Am Yisrael had no choice?

Any covenant, by its very nature, requires the willful acceptance of both parties. Therefore, according to "pshat," Bnei Yisrael have "bechira chofshit" to either accept or reject God's proposition. Their willful acceptance makes the covenant at Har Sinai binding for all generations. Thus, had Bnei Yisrael said NO (chas v'shalom), Matan Torah would not have taken place! However, such a possibility is unthinkable, for without Matan Torah there would have been no purpose for Creation. Therefore, because the psukim indicate that Bnei Yisrael had free choice, the Midrash must emphasize that from the perspective of the purpose behind God's Creation, the people had no choice other than accept the Torah.

B. Most m'forshim explain that "b'mshoch ha'yovel hay'mah ya'al b'Har" (19:13) refers to the long shofar blast that signaled the COMPLETION of the "hitgalut" - an 'all clear' signal.

One could suggest exactly the opposite interpretation, that the long shofar blast indicated the BEGINNING of Matan Torah.

Explain why this interpretation fits nicely into the pshat of 19:11-15, that limiting access to the Mountain is part of the preparation for Matan Torah. [What does an 'all clear' signal have to do with preparation?] Explain as well why this would imply that during Matan Torah, Bnei Yisrael should have actually ascended Har Sinai!

Relate this to concept of PLAN 'B' and Bnei Yisrael's request to SEE the "Shchina." Relate to Devarim 5:5 in support of this interpretation. Why would "kol ha'shofar holaych v'chazak m'od" (19:19) be precisely what God meant by "b'mshoch ha'yovel."

Relate to "tachtit ha'har" in 19:17! Use this to explain why the psukim immediately following 19:19 describe God's decision to LIMIT his "hitgalut" to the TOP of the mountain.

C. Compare the details of 19:20-24 to the Mishkan: i.e. Rosh ha'har = kodesh kdoshim; Har = Mishkan; Tachtit Ha'har = azara, etc. Where can Moshe and Aharon enter? What about the Kohanim and the Am? Explain how this may reflect a bit of a 'compromise' between plans A & B.

D. You are probably familiar with Kabbalat Shabbat. Based on the above shiur, explain why our weekly preparation for Shabbat could be compared to Bnei Yisrael's original preparation for Matan Torah.

Relate this to the verses of "l'cho dodi" and its 'wedding like' imagery!

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

A. WHAT WERE "DIVREI HA'AM" in 19:9:

In the shiur we mentioned Rashi's interpretation (based on the Mechilta), that though the Torah does not state this explicitly,

Bnei Yisrael insisted on hearing Hashem's word directly, rather than through a mediator. Moshe then reports this request to Hashem. This is also the implication of the Midrash in Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:2. We will briefly review some of the other interpretations offered to resolve the difficulty in this pasuk:

1. The **Abarbanel** takes the same general approach as Rashi, that Moshe here tells Hashem of the nation's desire to hear His word directly. However, he claims that this request actually appears in the psukim (whereas according to Rashi the Torah never records the people making this request). The Abarbanel claims that their acceptance of the "proposition" - "everything that Hashem said - we will do" - included their wish to hear Hashem directly. (He appears to interpret the clause, "im shamo'a tishm'u b'koli..." which we generally explain to mean, "if you obey Me faithfully," as, "if you will hear My voice." Thus, when they accepted this proposition, they expressed the desire to hear Hashem's voice as well.

This approach appears more explicitly in the Netziv's *He'amek Davar* (19:8.) Hashem here tells Moshe that as not everyone is worthy of prophecy, He will speak to Moshe "b'av he'an'an," which the Abarbanel explains as a physical voice, as opposed to the usual medium of prophecy, which involves none of the physical senses. (This understanding of "av he'an'an" appears as well in the *Or Hachayim* and *Malbim*.) The nation will thus hear Hashem's voice without experiencing actual prophecy. Moshe then informs Hashem that the people want to hear Hashem speaking to them, rather than to Moshe. This general approach of the Abarbanel appears to be the intent of the Midrash *Lekach Tov* on our pasuk.

2. The **Ibn Ezra**, like Rashi, understands the "divrei ha'am" in this pasuk as referring to something not explicitly mentioned in the psukim. Whereas according to Rashi that something was the nation's desire to hear Hashem directly, the Ibn Ezra points to the skepticism on the part of segments of Bnei Yisrael. He claims that "vayaged Moshe et divrei ha'am" means that Moshe had previously made this comment to Hashem, prior to the beginning of this pasuk. It thus turns out that Hashem speaks to Moshe here in response to his report of the "divrei ha'am." Moshe had reported that some among Bnei Yisrael do not believe that a human being can survive a revelation of Hashem; they therefore doubted the fact that Moshe had been appointed God's messenger. Hashem therefore tells Moshe that Ma'amad Har Sinai will result in "v'gam b'cha ya'aminu l'olam" - Bnei Yisrael's complete trust and faith in Moshe's prophecy.

3. Other Rishonim suggest that when Moshe "returns the nation's words to Hashem" (see 19:8) - he does not actually tell Hashem what the nation said; he merely returned to God with the intention of telling Him. It is only in 19:9 that Moshe actually told this to God (see Ibn Ezra in *Shmot* 19:23 citing Rav Sa'adya Gaon's claim that just as in his day people could not initiate conversation with a monarch, but must rather wait for the king to begin speaking with them, so did Moshe abstain from addressing God until after God spoke with him.)

This explanation is also suggested by Rav Sa'adya Gaon (as explained by Rabbenu Avraham Ben ha'Rambam, and Rabbi Yaakov of Vienna in "Imrei Noam"), the Ba'alei HaTosfot (as quoted in both *Hadar Zekeinim* and *Da'at Zekeinim*), Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor, and the Ramban. The Rashbam, too, appears to take this position.

[Two Midrashic interpretations of this pasuk appear in *Masechet Shabbat* 87a and in the *Mechilta* on our pasuk.] This discussion surrounding 19:9 directly impacts another issue, one of the central points of our shiur: does Hashem introduce a "new plan" in psukim 10-11, after Moshe "reports the people's words" to Him? According to Rashi, as discussed at length in the shiur, He clearly did. The same is true according to the Abarbanel's approach. However, according to the second and third explanations quoted here, it would seem that Hashem is not describing here an alternate procedure. Indeed, the Ramban (on this pasuk) explains Hashem's original "plan" as having Bnei Yisrael watch as Hashem appears to Moshe. Thus, pasuk 11, in

which Hashem says that He will descend "in the view of the nation," does not mark a change of plans. Similarly, in the introduction to his commentary to *Shir Hashirim*, as well as in his *peirush* to *Shmot* 3:12, the Ramban writes that Hashem's promise to Moshe at the burning bush, that Bnei Yisrael will "serve God on this mountain," involved their "beholding His glory face-to-face." This was God's intention all along.

B. PLAN A & PLAN B

In the shiur we worked with Rashi's view - i.e. God originally had planned to speak only to Moshe, as Bnei Yisrael listened in. In response to the nation's request, however, God switches to "plan B," by which He will address the nation directly.

An interesting variation on this theme is suggested by the *Malbim*. According to his explanation, plan B, which the people requested, involved their hearing directly from Hashem the entire Torah, not only the Ten Commandments. (The Ramban - 20:14 - writes that Bnei Yisrael feared that this was God's plan, though in actuality He had never intended to transmit the entire Torah to them directly.) Hashem initially agrees, but their sense of terror upon hearing the thunder and lightening signaling God's descent onto the mountain (19:16), and their consequent hesitation to go to the mountain ("vayotzei Moshe" - 19:17), reflected their unworthiness for this lengthy exposure to divine revelation. Hashem therefore presented them directly either the Ten Commandments or the first two. Only Moshe received the rest of the mitzvot directly from Hashem.

We should note that in contradistinction to our understanding of Rashi, the *Maharal* of Prague (in his *Gur Aryeh* to 19:9) explains Rashi to mean that Moshe simply confirms Hashem's plan. God tells him that He plans on revealing Himself to Moshe as the nation hears, and Moshe replies, "Indeed, this is what the people want." Apparently, the *Maharal* understands "hinei Anochi ba eilecha b'av he'an'an..." to refer to the same level of "giluy Shechina" that actually occurs, such that there was never any change of plans. (According to the *Maharal*'s approach, it turns out that there is no difference between the approaches of Rashi and the Ramban.)

C. "Moshe Yedaber Veha'Elokim Ya'anenu B'kol" (19:19)

As we saw, Rashi, following the *Mechilta*, understands this pasuk as referring to the procedure of the transmission of the *Asseret Hadibrot*. We also noted that the Ramban disagrees, claiming that it describes the manner in which the laws in the following psukim - concerning the "limitation" - were presented. This is the general approach of the Abarbanel and Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor, as well. The Ibn Ezra claims that the pasuk does not reveal what it is that Moshe says here, but it definitely does not refer to the *Asseret Hadibrot*. The point of the pasuk is to stress that despite the overpowering sound of the shofar, it did not interfere with Moshe's conversation with Hashem. The *Or Hachayim* writes that Moshe here spoke words of praise to Hashem, and He would then respond. According to all these views, this pasuk does not refer to *Asseret Hadibrot*, as Rashi claims.

A particularly interesting interpretation is suggested by the *Malbim*, *Netziv* and "Hadash Veha'iyun" (though with some variation). They claim that the sound of the shofar proclaimed, "Moshe yedaber vехa'Elokim ya'anenu b'kol." In other words, they place a colon after the word "me'od" in this pasuk. The shofar blast thus informed the people that Moshe will serve as the intermediary in between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael in transmitting the Torah.

D. What Did Bnei Yisrael Hear?

The issue of whether or not Bnei Yisrael heard Hashem speak at Ma'amad Har Sinai involves both *parshanut* and *machshava*. In terms of *parshanut*, as we discussed in the shiur, we must accommodate several psukim: in our *parasha* - 19:9, which, as discussed, implies that Hashem (at least originally) planned to speak to Moshe as the nation listened; 19:19 - "Moshe yedaber vехa'Elokim ya'anenu be'kol," which, if it refers to the *Asseret Hadibrot* (a point debated by Rashi and the Ramban, as

discussed in the shiur), points to the involvement of both Hashem and Moshe in the transmission of the Commandments to Bnei Yisrael; 20:15-18, where Bnei Yisrael retreat from fear; and the transition from second to third person after the second Commandment. We must also resolve the contradiction noted in the shiur between Devarim 4:4 and 4:5. Devarim 5:19-28 strongly implies that Hashem said all the dibrot to the people and then they asked Moshe to serve as an intermediary.

The philosophical issue involves the question as to whether an entire nation can experience prophecy, or is this reserved only for the spiritual elite who have adequately prepared themselves.

We briefly present here the basic positions that have been taken regarding this issue:

Ibn Ezra (20:1) and Abarbanel (here and in Devarim 5:4) maintain that Bnei Yisrael heard all Ten Commandments. This is also the majority view cited in Pesikta Rabbati 22, and the implication of the Yalkut Shimoni - Shir Hashirim 981. Although in Parshat Vaetchanan Moshe describes himself as having stood in between Hashem and the people serving as an intermediary, the Ibn Ezra there explains that this refers to the situation after the Dibrot, when Moshe conveyed the rest of the Torah to Bnei Yisrael.

It emerges from Rashi's comments to 19:19 and 20:1 that Hashem first uttered, as it were, all Ten Commandments in a single moment and then began repeating them one by one. After the second Dibra, however, Bnei Yisrael became too frightened and asked Moshe to serve as their intermediary. This is the position of the Chzikuni, and is found in an earlier source, as well - Midrash Asseret Hadibrot l'Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan, as cited by Rav Menachem Kasher (Torah Shleima, vol. 16, miluim # 4). In his commentary to Masechet Brachot 12a, however, Rashi seems to imply that Bnei Yisrael in fact heard all Ten Commandments from Hashem.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 2:33) maintains that all Bnei Yisrael heard and understood the first two commandments (without any need for Hashem to repeat them). They then asked Moshe to hear the other commandments on their behalf; he therefore heard the last eight Dibrot and conveyed them to Bnei Yisrael. Though the Rambam claims that this is the view of Chazal, many later writers could not find any sources in Chazal corroborating this view. Rav Kasher, however, notes that this is the implication of the Mechilta as quoted by the Da'at Zekeinim mi'Ba'alei ha'Tosfot (20:1; the Mechilta is cited differently in other sources). The Rambam claims that since one can arrive at the first two Dibrot (the existence and singularity of God) through intellectual engagement, even without divine revelation, Bnei Yisrael understood these Dibrot as clearly as Moshe did. This philosophical point sparked considerable controversy and drew strong criticism from later rishonim and acharonim. See Sefer Ha'ikarim 17, the Abarbanel here and in Vaetchanan, Shut ha'Rashba 4:234, and Shnei Luchot Habrit - Masechet Shavuot.

The Ramban (on 20:6), explaining the Mechilta, claims that Bnei Yisrael heard all Ten Commandments but understood only the first two. Moshe then explained to them the final eight. The Sefer Ha'ikarim (ibid.) concurs with this view.