

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET  
ON SHAVUOS - 5756

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SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO SHAVUOS

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Candle-Lighting Time on Shavuos

**QUESTION:** On Erev Shavuos, when should women light the Yom Tov candles ?

**DISCUSSION:** There are two basic customs governing the time of candle-lighting on Yom Tov. Since it is permissible to light candles on Yom Tov proper, women have two options. Some women(1) light at the same time that they light on Erev Shabbos, approx. 18 before sunset. Although they could delay the lighting till later, it is meritorious to usher in the Yom Tov by lighting candles as is done on every Erev Shabbos. Other women(2) light candles on Yom Tov after the men come home from Shul and before the meal is ready to begin. Their reasoning is that since the purpose of candle lighting is primarily to enhance and honor the meal, it is proper to light as close to the meal as possible. Each one of these customs has valid Halachic sources and reasons and women should continue the practice of their mothers.

On the Yom Tov of Shavuos, however, there is a good reason for women to light candles on Yom Tov itself and not before sunset. This is because the Torah commands that Shavuos commence on the fiftieth day of the counting of the Omer. The fiftieth day does not begin until nightfall. Since most women have the custom of reciting the blessing of Shehechyanu along with their candle lighting, it would be considered as if Shavuos had begun for them before nightfall of the fiftieth day(3). It would be better, therefore, for the women to light candles after nightfall(4).

Alternatively, women who do not wish to light after nightfall should light before sunset but should not recite Shehechyanu at the time of their lighting. The recital of Shehechyanu represents the unconditional acceptance of the Yom Tov, and it should be recited, therefore, only at the time that the Yom Tov is actually accepted(5). The blessing of Shehechyanu may be omitted at candle-lighting time because the custom of women to recite it then has no Halachic source. Indeed, some Poskim(6) are of the opinion that women

should not recite Shehechyanu at that time. Although the custom of most women is to recite Shehechyanu(7) and we need not object to their custom(8), on Shavuos it would be better not to recite Shehechyanu if candles are lit before sunset.

A woman lighting candles after sunset should recite the Bracha first and then light the candles(9). A woman lighting candles before sunset has a choice whether to light first and then recite the Bracha as she does every Shabbos, or to recite the Bracha first and then light the candles. Both customs have legitimate sources and reasons(10).

This coming Friday night, when women light candles for both Shabbos and Yom Tov, the Bracha must be said for both occasions. If a woman forgot that it is also Shabbos and lit candles for Yom Tov only, she must light another candle and recite the Bracha over Shabbos and Yom Tov(11). If she forgot that it is Yom Tov and lit candles for Shabbos only, she should ask her husband or another person to light candles for Yom Tov and that person should make the Bracha(12).

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FOOTNOTES:

- 1 Mate Efraim (625:33); Be'er Haitav 503:4 quoting the Sh'lah.
- 2 Minchas Shmuel (30). See Mishnas Yaavetz (34) for a full explanation of the two customs.
- 3 See Shu"t L'horos Nosson 7:31 who explains that even if women are exempt from the counting of the Omer, they are still commanded to accept the day of Shavuos on the fiftieth day of the counting.
- 4 Harav Y.M. Tikontinsky in Luach Eretz Yisroel, quoting Harav S.Z. Zlatnik.
- 5 Consequently, women may not make a precondition that they are not accepting the Yom Tov (which otherwise may be done at a time of need) if Shehechyanu will be recited - See Shu"t Titz Eliezer 10:19 for a complete discussion.
- 6 See Shailas Yaavetz 107, Kaf Hachayim OC 263:40 and Moadim Uzmanim 7:117 quoting the Brisker Rov
- 7 Mate Efraim 581:4;619:4.
- 8 Shaarei Tesuvah 263: 5; Mishnah Berura 263:23; Aruch Hashulchan 263:12.
- 9 Mate Efraim 625:33 and Elef L'mateh 50.
- 10 Mishna Berura 263:27
- 11 Shu"t Mahram Brisk 2:44. See also Shu"t Kinyan Torah 6:11
- 12 Shmiras Shabbos Khilchasa 44:5.

Enayim L'Torah Shavuot Publication of Student Organization of Yeshiva University

Insights into Shavuot by Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

The central theme of Shavuot, reflected in its Torah reading and prayer, though not explicated in the Torah itself, is Matan Torah (giving of the Torah). Chazal, in numerous contexts, develop the thesis that is the crucial cornerstone of Judaism -- that Revelation was two-tiered, consisting of oral and written components. On the pasuk: These are the statutes and the laws and the Torot which Hashem gave the Jewish people, by the hand of Moshe, on Mount Sinai. (Vayikra 26:46) The Sifra comments that the plural language Torot teaches us that the Jews received two Torahs -- one written and one oral.

At first glance, the two components appear to represent a study in contrasts. However, the relationship between the two is, in fact, complementary and even ideal. Torah shebi'chtav, the Divine text that yields multiple truths (shiv'im panim latorah), is subject to a variety of legitimate interpretations (see Sanhedrin 34), and whose very letters recombine into the different Divine names (see Ramba"n introduction to Breishit). In sharp contrast,

Torah she'b'al peh, though divine in origin, unfolds through a distinctly human process, consisting of painstaking transmissions of data and Halachic methodology, and the rigorous analysis and application of its conceptual content. The functional complementarity of the two torot is evident. The TorahEs content along with its structure and form contains numerous hints and obscure references that are accessible and decipherable only through the masorah (tradition) and the hermeneutic methodology of the thirteen middot (see Eruvin 21b).

Moreover, it is obvious that the respective designations, torah shebi'chtav and torah she'b'al peh, transcend descriptive labels. They convey distinctive, singular, approaches to Torah. Torah she'bi'chtav is significant as a text. The spelling and structure of each word and marking has Halachic and homiletic significance. Even when the meaning is apparently unchanged, an inaccurate sefer Torah is disqualified. Absolute attention to form may even come at the expense of substance, as kri u'ktiv demonstrate. Torah she'b'al peh recorded in the Talmud and Midrash, on the other hand, derives its special status from its conceptual content, not its specific formulation. Indeed, obsessive allegiance to a specific formulation occasionally can be inhibiting and counterproductive.

The Ba'al HaTanyaEs suggestion that one can fulfill the mitzva of talmud Torah by simply reading torah shebi'chtav even without comprehending its message, while such a gesture would be meaningless in torah she'b'al peh highlights the distinctiveness of these approaches. The twin Halachic injunctions that ideally prohibit the transcription of torah she'b'al peh and proscribe the quotation of torah she'bi'chtav divorced from its text reflect the ideal reciprocal interplay between the two components of Torah.

Yet, it is striking that Chazal perceive a difference in the attitude of Bnei Yisrael toward these two torot at the time of matan torah. In response to apparently conflicting reports of na'aseh v'nishma (Shemot 24:7), on the one hand, and the extremely reluctant posture reflected by the need for coercive measures (kafah aleihem har k'gigit), on the other, the Midrash resolves the dilemma by advancing a distinction between the two torot. Coercion was necessary only with respect to torah she'b'al peh: The Oral tradition has detailed mitzvot ... which are as strong as death ... because the only ones who study it are those who love Hashem with all their heart and soul. This development is extremely perplexing particularly since Chazal view the commitment to torah she'b'al peh as primary -- as the prerequisite to torah she'bichtav, and with its inherent spiritual value -- "Hashem consecrated the covenant with the Jewish people only for the sake of the Oral tradition" (Gittin 60b).

What accounts for the need for a dual Revelation of the Torah, for the drastic measures to promote torah she'b'al peh, and for its axiological priority?

The continuation of the Tanchuma provides the clue. Chazal view the distinctive categories of Torah as representing basic themes of Judaism. Torah Shebi'chtav, standing on its own, projects a commitment to broad values and general religious principles whose demands need not intrude pervasively on apparently neutral spheres of one's life. Broad guidelines that can be implemented variously, together with ritual imperatives that are hardly overwhelming in scope constitute the essence of such a Torah. It is torah she'b'al peh in conjunction with torah she'bichtav and independently by means of masorah that is responsible for a Halachic system which regulates every aspect of life, suffusing the neutral and secular with sanctity. It is this Torah which overwhelms us with detail and minutiae (see Gittin 60a). The Tanchuma itself elaborates: The Written law has general rules while the Oral tradition has specifics. The Oral tradition has a lot while the Written law has a little. And on the Oral tradition it is said, "longer than a big land and wider than the ocean. Torah she'bichtav is the source and inspiration of ethics, while torah she'b'al peh serves as the means of interpreting that vision, imbuing it with substance and establishing a sense of legal obligation: The Written law is in listen to the message of your fathers which is the message of Hashem. And donEt forsake your motherEs instruction - the Oral tradition which is acceptance of the yoke of mitzvot. In Midrashic and Kabbalistic literature, torah she'bichtav is sometimes equated with the flexible midat harachamim, while the torah she'b'al peh is characterized in terms of the more rigorous and uncompromising midat hadin. Torah she'bichtav is symbolized by the bright sun, while torah she'b'al peh is identified with the moon, a light that is dimmer, but also has the capacity to illuminate even the

night.

Bnei Yisrael's initial reticence is now fully comprehensible. It is much easier to enthusiastically embrace the general commitment articulated by torah she'bichtav than the all-encompassing life of torah she'b'al peh. At the same time, torah she'b'al peh's primacy is manifest.

We live in an age in which, unfortunately, many Jews, like Bnei Yisrael of old, display greater enthusiasm for the symbol of torah she'bichtav than for the motifs conveyed by its oral counterpart. They do not adequately appreciate that universal values, and even specific ritual behavior, require an overarching and comprehensive structure to be effective. The failure of secular ethics and of other religions to produce moral societies that safeguard even basic principles of justice and fairness reinforces this theme. Pirkei Avot, for this reason, is preceded by a description of the masorah. Moreover, they have completely ignored the theme of commitment and submission that is the basis for the real relationship between man and his Creator.

At the same time, for Bnei Yeshiva who are steeped primarily in torah she'b'al peh, as they should be, it is important to underscore the indispensability of torah she'bichtav. A torah she'b'al peh that loses sight of its torah shebi'chtav origins and roots runs the risk of becoming preoccupied with detail in a way that threatens to detract from the substance and conceptual significance of those very details. Divorcing the details halacha from the lofty goals and ideals of torah she'bichtav which must animate and guide it is totally inconsistent with the dual commitment undertaken at Har Sinai. Midat hadin untempered by midat harachamim is hardly the ideal. The Midrash declares unequivocally that neither factor alone suffices, nor should one be substituted for the other (see Shemot Rabba 47:4). Rabbeinu Bachya, commenting on "Ki ner mitzvah v'torah or," emphasizes the primacy of torah she'b'al peh, equated with ner, but accents its necessary roots in torah she'bichtav -- or. He notes that torah she'bichtav contains both din and chesed, and torah she'b'al peh is merely its extension. Elsewhere, he concludes that while many situations require the bright universal light of the sun, other circumstances mandate the more focused beam of a candle to illuminate the cracks and crevices of specific life situations.

The theme of shtei torot is as compelling today as it was at the dramatic moment of matan torah. May we rededicate ourselves to this dual, ambitious, yet complimentary program -- lehaagdil torah u'lha'adirah.

Editors-in-Chief Naftali Bodoff Uriel Lubetski

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Special Shavuot Package

YHE: SPECIAL SHAVUOT PACKAGE

SHAVUOT AND SOULSEARCHING  
BY HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Adapted from a sicha given on Shavuot night 5755 (1995)

Summarized by Gedalyah Berger

I. The Joy of Receiving the Torah

The Bible nowhere connects the holiday of Shavuot, "chag ha-katzir" - the festival of harvest, with matan Torah (the giving of the Torah). It was left to Chazal, to mankind, to figure out the chronology and make the connection between the fiftieth day of the Omer and the giving of the Torah.

This is puzzling, since the Torah enjoins us to remember the experience of the Sinai revelation (Deut. 4:19-20; see Ramban Sefer Ha-mitzvot, mitzvot she-shachach otan ha-rav, lo ta'aseh #2), and clearly places it at approximately the time of Shavuot (Exodus, beginning of ch. 19). Why, then, does the Torah not explicitly associate the holiday of Shavuot with the giving of the Torah?

The answer, says the Maharal, lies in the fact that Shavuot is, of course, a chag - a holiday on which we celebrate and rejoice. An explicit association of Shavuot with the giving of the Torah would constitute a commandment to rejoice about our having received the Torah. But such happiness can not be legislated - it must originate with us. While the salvation from slavery commemorated by Pesach and the God-given protection of Sukkot, "ba-sukkot hoshavti" (Lev. 23:43), are to every person obvious grounds for joy, receiving the Torah might not appear to the casual observer as a reason to rejoice. Thus, it was left to the Jewish people, as a community and as individuals, to reach this conclusion on our own; to appreciate and celebrate

the privilege of matan Torah. The Sages, then, and not the Bible, stamped chag ha-Shavuot as "zeman matan Toratenu" - the time of the giving of our Torah.

Thus, on a communal level, the nation of Israel independently realized the joy of Torah. However, it still remains for each of us to reach this goal individually. It is often said that there is a bit of Shavuot in Yom Kippur, because the second tablets were given on Yom Kippur. Now, we can say the reverse as well; that there is a bit of Yom Kippur in Shavuot, being that a cheshbon ha-nefesh (soul searching) is necessary on Shavuot to see if we have succeeded in genuinely rejoicing in receiving the Torah.

II. But Didn't God Coerce Us into Receiving the Torah?

"Va-yityatzvu be-tachtit ha-har" - 'They stood at the bottom of the mountain' (Ex. 19:17) - Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: This teaches that God placed the mountain over them like a cask (kafa aleihem et ha-har ke-gigit) and said to them, 'If you accept the Torah, fine, and if not, there you will be buried.'" [Shabbat 88a]

Isn't a joyous celebration of matan Torah a bit out of place if, alongside our enthusiastic voluntary acceptance of the Torah with "na'aseh ve-nishma" - "we will obey and we will hear" (Ex. 24:7), there was a strong element of coercion? According to the gemara quoted above, God forced us to accept the Torah. It should be noted that this is not really much of a problem if we understand the gemara as Tosafot do. They understand God's holding the mountain over them like a cask as being only "insurance;" they explain that really at the time, benei Yisrael were completely ready to accept the Torah. However, God was, as it were, worried that they would back out from fear of "ha-eish ha-gedola" - the raging fire of ma'amad Har Sinai. The Maharal, though, disagrees strongly, and sees the coercion as a central element of matan Torah.

We turn again to the Maharal for an explanation. The truth is that the Torah really was not given exactly on the fiftieth day of the Omer, i.e. the holiday of Shavuot. There is a Tannaitic dispute [Shabbat 86-87] whether the Torah was given on the sixth or the seventh of Sivan (50th and 51st days of the Omer, respectively). In the end, Rabbi Yossi's opinion, that matan Torah was on the seventh, is accepted. Rabbi Yossi's position is based on the assumption that "yom echad hosif Moshe mi-da'ato;" that although God told Moshe to have the people prepare for two days before matan Torah, Moshe decided on his own to add a third day, thus pushing off the revelation of Mount Sinai from the fiftieth of the Omer to the fifty-first.

So, what actually happened on the fiftieth? On that day, God was ready to give us the Torah, and would have, had Moshe not pushed it off. In other words, on that day God considered us spiritually fit for the revelation of His Presence and the receiving of His Torah. It is this that we celebrate on Shavuot. On the fiftieth day of the Omer, we focus not on the giving of the Torah per se, but rather on our worthiness of it in the eyes of God. This, in and of itself, is a monumental achievement. Thus, "kafa aleihem et ha-har ke-gigit," along with the actual acceptance of the Torah, is somewhat beside the point.

This approach once again highlights the "Yom Kippur" aspect of Shavuot; are we ourselves indeed spiritually prepared for acceptance of the Torah? If ma'amad Har Sinai were scheduled for today, would God be willing to personally present us, you and me, with His sacred Torah?

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#### MASTER AND BELOVED

BY HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT" A

Adapted from a sicha given on Shavuot 5745 (1985) Summarized by Roni Kleinman, Translated by Menachem Weinberg

"And Moshe led the people out' (Shemot 19:17) - R. Yose said R. Yehuda would teach as follows: "'Hashem mi-sinai ba' (Devarim 33:2) - God came from Sinai. Do not read it so but rather 'Hashem le-sinai ba' - God came TO Sinai to give the Torah to Israel." However, I disagree, and rather teach - 'God came from Sinai' to greet Israel, like a groom who goes out to greet his bride." (Mekhilta Yitro, 3)

A mere change of one letter - "mi-sinai" to "le-sinai" - leads to two totally different understandings! This argument exposes two opposing approaches in Chazal to the relationship between God and the Jewish people, between the Giver of Torah and its receivers. R. Yehuda cannot accept the literal reading of the verse 'from Sinai' - did God come from Sinai as an equal of

the Jewish nation? Does the Torah not say 'God descended to Mount Sinai' and 'God is in the heavens and you are on the earth?' Rather, as the gemara says (Sukka 5a), 'Never has the Shekhina (Divine Presence) gone below ten cubits.' God came TO Sinai - the transcendental God, who threatens and commands, who suspended the mountain over our heads like a cask, came down to Sinai. There is commandment and a Commander, a Ruler and his subjects. God is the master, and Israel are his subjects. 'I am the Lord your God who took you out from the house of slavery' and therefore God declares 'For Me are the Children of Israel slaves, My slaves...'

R. Yose, however, disagrees - he reads the verse literally: 'God came FROM Sinai.' There is a dimension in which God comes from Sinai, as an equal, as it were, of Israel: 'like a groom who goes out to meet his bride.' In Shir Hashirim, when Israel is called by God "My dove, My pure one (tamati)," the midrash expounds, "Do not read 'tamati' but rather 'te'omati' - my perfect match." Here we have a relationship between a lover and a beloved, a bride and groom, nothing remotely resembling the master-slave relationship described above by R. Yehuda. The revelation at Sinai is described here as the climax of the period of engagement, 'your love as a bride' (Yirmiyahu 2:2). God set up a rendezvous with his beloved, the Nation of Israel, in the desert at the foot of Mt. Sinai. He said, as it were, "You agreed - you did not say 'Let us meet somewhere more convenient,' you agreed to go out to the desert!" In R. Yose's scenario, God is seen as immanent; He comes from Sinai into the desert to meet His bride Israel.

These two strains are also present regarding the Torah. On the one hand, the Torah is a book of commandments incumbent upon us, God's servants, to perform. Yet, on the other hand, there exists within this framework of commandments an emotional side, the experiential element in the service of God. Here it is possible to feel closeness to God, not as a master, but as a friend; not as a ruler, but as a groom and a beloved.

The Mekhilta (Yitro, 9), however, points out that the experience of Revelation and Divine command must not be a passive one: "'And all the people saw the sounds ...' (Shemot 20:15) - Rebbe said: this teaches us the praise of Israel, that when they all stood at Mt. Sinai to accept the Torah, they would hear each commandment and analyze it, as it says (Devarim 32:10) 'Yesovevenhu yevonenehu' (midrashically interpreted as 'He encompassed them, and they studied it') - as soon as they heard a commandment, they analyzed it."

Israel stood at a momentous event - thunder and lightning, the blasts of the shofar, the Almighty Himself speaking and commanding. With all this enveloping them, they must have felt uplifted to tremendous spiritual heights. In such a state, most people would let the enveloping experience sweep them away; they would remain passive so as not to interfere with the power of the experience. Most would not use the mind or human logic at such a time, so as not to taint the experience, not to ruin or lessen its impact.

But the greatness of Israel was that they knew how to be engrossed in the event, 'they would hear the command,' but they did not settle for hearing the voice alone. Israel also 'analyzed it' - using their intellect, they tried to understand and gain wisdom. They grasped the Torah not only through pure experience, but through the intellect as well. What is easier than 'yesovevenhu,' being surrounded and enveloped, embraced by the Shekhina?

But there must also be 'yevonenehu' - the intellectual dimension of our relationship with God and his Torah. Albeit 'He encompassed them' comes first, for without this dimension, a relationship is impossible. But this alone cannot suffice; the experiential dimension of the Torah must be accompanied by the intellectual dimension - 'they analyzed it.' It is this dialectic that forms the matrix of the relationship between the Jewish Nation and God, and between Israel and the Torah.

The Mekhilta (Yitro, 4) further expounds: "'Because God descended on it in fire' (Shemot 19:18) - this teaches us that the Torah is fire and from fire it was given, and was compared to fire. Like fire, if a person comes close to it - he is burned; if he goes far from it - he is cold; but rather one should warm himself near its brightness."

The Torah is compared to fire. God too is called 'a consuming fire' - it is impossible to get too close to the Almighty. Fire can be a destructive force, burning and consuming, yet on the other hand, fire can create and build. Fire illuminates the way in the darkness; when there is unclarity, its light can lead and guide. However, light alone is only external, something shined

forth, and cannot penetrate deeply into one's being.

Fire, however, has an additional quality: heat. Fire radiates warmth on a cold day, and this warmth suffuses one's body, 'like water in his midst and like oil in his bones.' Man cannot break down the barriers of the enormous division between himself and his Creator; he cannot bring down the Creator to his level, for then, God forbid, we would reach the situation described by one of the philosophers as 'God being created in man's image.' On the other hand, if man shies away and retreats, he becomes colder and colder. All of the experience, the fire that warms and illuminates, disappears from his personality, and he will grow distant from a personal connection with God. "Rather one should warm himself NEAR its brightness." We must maintain the balance between nearness and distance, and must know how to remain within the framework of Torah and, through it, reach closeness to God.

This dialectic is well expressed by Chazal regarding the verse "And I will walk among you and be for you a God, and you will be My nation" (Vayikra 26:12). Rashi comments, "I will walk among you" - I will stroll with you in the Garden of Eden like one of you and you will not quake in fear before Me. Perhaps this implies that you will not fear Me? Therefore the verse continues, 'and I will be for you a God.'"

God strolls among us as one of us, yet this is only after the framework described in the continuation of the verse exists: 'and I will be for you a God.' Only under the rubric of fear of Heaven and acceptance of God's commandments, can we hope to experience a personal relationship with Him.

We hope and pray that we will know how to integrate these two themes, as we request in our prayers: "Our Father, the merciful Father, the One who has mercy, have mercy on us," and we continue, "and plant in our hearts understanding, to understand and gain wisdom..."

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OU Torah Insights Project  
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Shavuot May 25, 1996 by Rabbi Moshe J. Yeres

One of the linchpins of the Jewish faith, presented by Rabbi Yehudah Halevi in the Kuzari, is Hashem's revelation to over 600,000 Israelites. Judaism is not based on hearsay or philosophical speculation. Nor does it rest on the oracle or a divination received by a single "prophet."

Rather, Am Yisrael in its entirety witnessed, directly and openly, many miracles of Hashem, both in Egypt and in the wilderness of Sinai.

The most significant of these miracles, theologically and religiously, was G-d's revelation to us of the Torah, commonly referred to as Maamad Har Sinai, which we celebrate on this holiday of Shavuos.

The Torah makes it patently clear that G-d's magnificent performance was visible to all of Klal Yisrael, His words heard by the entire people. We are told: "All the people perceived the thunder and lightning and the sound of the shofar."

This marvelous and awe-inspiring spectacle of G-d appearing to a vast audience of direct and immediate witnesses remains unique in the history of world religions. As the Kuzari notes, it would be close to impossible to fabricate such a tale and claim that so many people could vouch for it.

Just as importantly, the Midrashic literature paints a picture of not only Benei Yisrael being witness to this seminal event. The revelation at Sinai was heard around the world. Not one animal moved, not one person spoke, not one blade of grass rustled while G-d uttered those epic commandments. The entire world, too, served as eternal witnesses to these magical moments at Sinai.

However, one ought not forget that immediately subsequent to the public proclamation of the Ten Commandments, the Israelites sinned with the Golden Calf, resulting in the smashing of the two tablets by Moshe.

Ironically, Rashi suggests that the luchos were destined to be broken specifically because of the public fanfare that accompanied their reception.

And the longevity accorded to the second set of luchos was due primarily to their being received in a non-ostentatious manner.

If so, why did Hashem choose to present the Ten Commandments in such a public forum? And why is this story the focus of our Torah reading on Shavuos?

Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik, zt"l, suggests that though G-d was aware of the consequences, it was nevertheless essential that He state the Ten Commandments - and by extension the entire Torah - openly, so that all the nations of the world would become exposed and sensitized to our religious beliefs, tenets and laws.

As significant as the Torah was for Klal Yisrael, it needed to be enunciated publicly for the rest of mankind.

Rav Soloveitchik adds that the two events described by the Torah immediately prior to the Sinaitic Revelation are the arrival of Yisro to the Israelite camp and the attack on Israel by Amaleik. Both of these heard of Hashem's miracles. Yisro heard and joined the cause, impressed by G-d's law. Amaleik heard and came to weaken and destroy the nation.

The Torah was proclaimed not only for Klal Yisrael but also for all of the Yiros of the world, and even for the Amaleiks.

Our obligation, as proud inheritors of Sinai's legacy, is to spread and share the moral and ethical ideals of our faith with the family of man.

We tend to view Shavuos, Zeman Mattan Toraseinu, in a parochial fashion, linking it with Jewish religious commitment as is indeed implied by the words spoken at Sinai, "Naaseh venishma." Yet, Shavuos is also the holiday that enabled us to become the orlagoyim, setting the moral and ethical standards for the world.

To be a religious Jew, one must accept both the ritual and the ethical components of our faith equally. One can not be divorced from the other. Facing G-d, we need to be as ritually righteous as possible; facing mankind - both Jew and non-Jew - we need to present a faith of ethical rectitude and upright morality, for our goal in this life is to allow Hashem's word to enter this world.

-Rabbi Moshe J. Yeres Rabbi Yeres is the Rabbi of Congregation Ohav Zedek, Wilkes, Pennsylvania

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Shavuos 1996 Contributions and Commitments  
Drasha Shavuos 1996 Contributions and Commitments Volume II Issue 33  
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

As a youngster I was intrigued by a famous Medrash. As an adult I was puzzled by it.

Our sages tell us that the Jews were not the first nation to have been offered the Torah. An angelic representative visited his counterparts for all the of the world's nations. The Medrash continues. "When the angel approached the nation of Edom, it was asked, 'tell us, what does it say in the Torah.' The angel replied, 'though shall not kill.' "If that is the case, the Torah is not for me," Edom sharply replied. "I live and die by the sword."

The angel then approached the Ishmaelites. This time the angel chose to declare the prohibition of adultery. Ishmael refused to accept such a writ. The Medrash tells us about other nations as well. Each one, upon hearing a capitol or moral law, flatly refused to accept the Torah.

Finally, the Jewish nation was approached. They replied the words that have been etched as our eternal battle cry of the Jew, "we will do, and we will listen." Of course, the rest is history. Jewish history.

The Medrash, beautiful as it may be, is in fact quite difficult to understand. Prohibitions against murder, adultery, and stealing were embedded in human civilization since the time of Noach. They are all crimes proscribed by the Seven Noachidic Laws. Why, then, when murder was packaged as part of Torah does Edom refuse to commit? What is the difference to Edom if murder is prohibited as a Noachidic Law or as a Torah Law?

Why did Ishmael refuse the Torah on the basis of its moral restrictions? Weren't they prohibited as part of the ethical code? Why are Torah commitments more threatening to the nations than their own humanistic codification?

A cow and a hen were shmoozing one evening in farmer Smith's barn when

they heard Mrs. Smith declare, "Honey, tomorrow, for your birthday, I'm gonna fix you the most delicious breakfast you've ever had. I'm goin' fresh out to the barn in the morning and making us the freshest beef and eggs you have ever tasted.

The animals froze in fear. "Again she's coming for eggs," cried the hen. "She is always taking my eggs!" The cow turned to the hen in disgust. "Big talker you are. You're just making a contribution. I have to make a total commitment!"

The nations of the world understood that the Torah is not a guidebook that dictates our actions. It is the moral cast that molds our very essence. The command, "do not murder," is not only a restriction against homicide, it defines our attitude toward human life. It even prohibits us from humiliating someone -- an act considered by the Talmud as tantamount to murder. It forces restraints on our tempers; it molds our values as a nation.

The Torah command "do not steal" is not only a prohibition against larceny, as it is in Noachidic form. It enforces our value of every possession that is not our own. It prohibits us from carelessly waking a neighbor from sleep. It destroys the concept of "finders keepers, losers weepers." It creates an atmosphere of respect from even treading on a neighbor's property without permission.

The nations had laws, but those laws were kept or broken as single conduct issues. Those laws controlled movement not mission. Adhering to them took effort, but the effort was only a contribution. We were the only nation ready to transform our psyche, attitude, and essence. We made the total commitment. Chag Sameach

Mordechai Kamenetzky Ateres@pppmail.nyser.net

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Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network learn@torah.org P.O. Box 1230 http://www.torah.org/ Spring Valley, NY 10977 (914) 356-3040

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Shavuot 5756 - "Boaz' redemption"

The Weekly Internet

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by Mordecai Kornfeld

(kornfeld@jer1.co.il)

edited by Yakov Blinder

This week's issue has been dedicated by Dr. Simcha Bekelnitzky to the memory of his father, Shraga Faivush ben Natan Yaakov, Z"L. His Yahrzeit is the first day Shavuot.

#### Boaz' Redemption

(3)[Boaz] said to the relative (lit., "redeemer"), "Naomi, who has come back from the fields of Moav, has sold the portion of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. (4)I thought that I would inform you, saying, purchase it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders -- if you will redeem [the property], redeem it, and if not, tell me, so that I may know, because there is no one else [with rights to redeem it] before you, and I am after you." He said, "I will redeem it." (5)Then Boaz said, "On the day you purchase the field from Naomi and from Ruth, you must also take the [Ruth, the] wife of the deceased, in order to establish the name of the deceased in his inheritance." (6)So the relative (lit., "redeemer") said, "I cannot redeem it myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem it, because I cannot redeem it." ... (8)So the relative (lit., "redeemer") said to Boaz, "Purchase it for yourself," and he took off his shoe. [Giving the shoe -- or any other object -- to someone as a symbolic barter, is an act that effects acquisition. The Gemara explains that Boaz was performing this act with the \*relative\*.] (9)Boaz said to the elders and to all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have purchased all that was Elimelech's and all that was Machlon's and Kilyon's from the ownership of Naomi (10)and that I have also acquired Ruth of Moav, Machlon's

former wife, for a wife, in order to establish the name of the deceased in his inheritance, so that the deceased's name should not be eradicated from among his brothers and from his place. You are witnesses this day!"

(Ruth, 4:3-6, 8-10)

On Shavuot, we read publicly the Book of Ruth. Most people are completely baffled by the proceedings that ensued between Boaz, Naomi and the relative in the above passage from the Book of Ruth. Firstly, the verses themselves are rather vague concerning the details of the transaction. Also, a knowledge of the basic laws of "redemption" is needed in order to begin to understand what took place. There are, in fact, a number of halachic difficulties involved in Boaz' redemption of the field that the commentators grapple with. Let us attempt to shed some light on this esoteric passage.

#### II

We must begin our discussion by defining exactly what is meant by the term "redemption," in reference to a piece of land.

In Ruth 3:9 we read that Ruth told Boaz, "You are the redeemer." Rashi (ad loc.) explains her statement to mean, "Since you are a close relative of my husband's, you have the responsibility to reclaim the inheritance of my husband, as it says in Vayikra 25:25, 'If someone becomes poor and has to sell part of his ancestral property, his redeemer -- that is, his next of kin -- shall go and redeem the sale of his relative.' "

Every male who entered the land of Israel after the Exodus from Egypt was allotted a portion of property (Bemidbar Chap. 26). This portion was divided among the man's heirs upon his death, and so on throughout the generations.

If someone found it necessary to sell some of his inherited property in order to raise cash, the buyer -- perhaps someone of a different family, or even of a different tribe -- would now occupy this land. The Torah mandates that if the seller would at some point be able to raise the money necessary to buy back the property, the buyer was obligated to return the property for a full refund (calculated according to the time still remaining on the lease) (Vayikra 25:26).

If the buyer himself did not find the means to repurchase ("redeem") his ancestral property, his next of kin was urged to redeem the family property in his place (ibid., 25:25). This relative is thus called a "redeemer." As the Gemara tells us (Kiddushin 21a), the duty of redemption rests upon the closest relative of the seller of the field. If he does not redeem the property, the next closest relative takes his place, and so on. There is one important restriction in the laws of redemption, however. A field may not be redeemed (even with the consent of the purchaser!) until at least two years have elapsed from the time of its sale (Erchin 29b).

#### III

Let us now return to the Book of Ruth. As we know, Naomi and Ruth returned penniless to the land of Israel after their husbands (Elimelech and Machlon, respectively) had passed away in the land of Moav (1:21). All that Naomi and Ruth had to their names, it appears, were the fields that their husbands had left behind in the land of Israel. As we read in Ruth 4:3, Naomi sold Elimelech's field, apparently in an attempt to support herself. Elimelech's relatives were thus expected to redeem the property from the buyer. (The identity of the person who had purchased the property from Naomi is not recorded, and is apparently irrelevant.)

Elimelech had a living brother who was his next of kin. This man was Boaz' interlocutor in vv. 4:3-8 (Rashi to 2:1 and 3:12). According to the Sages, this man's name was Tov (see Rashi to 3:12). Boaz, however, was only a nephew to Elimelech (his father, Salmon, was Elimelech's brother). This is what Boaz meant when he told Tov, "If you will redeem [the property], redeem it, and if not, tell me so that I may know, because there is no one else [with rights to redeem it] before you and I am after you."

This at least seems to be the background of the events recorded in the verses cited above. Upon further analysis, however, several serious questions arise on this reconstruction of the events.

(#1) Firstly, what is meant by, "You are witnesses this day that I have purchased all that was Elimelech's ... from the ownership of \*Naomi\*" (v. 9)? Didn't Naomi already sell the property to someone else (v.3)? It is from the hands of that other party that the redemption was taking place, not from Naomi's! Similarly, in v. 5 the property is described as being purchased from

Naomi and from Ruth. How could either Naomi or Ruth be involved in this transaction, if they already sold the property? (#2) The second question is, why does Boaz say (v. 5) that the redemption of the property is contingent upon taking Ruth as a wife? Why should marrying Ruth be a pre-condition for performing the mitzvah of redemption? The concept of redeeming a relative's field applies even when that relative is still alive, and certainly does not seem to have any relevance to his wife! (#3) A third difficulty is, why did Boaz perform the acquisition ceremony of "taking off the shoe" with Tov (his uncle)? Boaz was redeeming property from the anonymous man who had purchased it from Naomi. It was with this anonymous party that he should have performed an act of acquisition, not with Tov! What was Boaz attaining from Tov? (#4) Fourth and last, we mentioned above that redemption is not permitted until at least two years have passed following the sale. In the story of Ruth, we are told that Naomi sold her husband's field upon returning destitute from Moav (4:3). We learn (1:22) that Naomi and Ruth returned to Israel "at the beginning of the barley harvest" (which precedes the wheat harvest, in early spring). Ruth stayed at Boaz' field until the end of the wheat and barley harvests (2:23). During the winnowing process which followed the harvest, Ruth approached Boaz and brought the redemption of the field to his attention (3:2). Boaz acted upon his obligation of redemption the very next day (3:18). This latter event must have taken place no longer than several months after the beginning of the barley harvest, which was when Naomi sold the property. Since two years had not passed, how was redemption possible?

These questions are raised by Rav Shlomo Alkabetz (16th cent. Safed, Israel) in his work "Shoresh Yishai" on Megillat Ruth, and he discusses them at length. Let us follow his lead, and see how we may resolve these difficulties.

#### IV

Perhaps the simplest approach to our questions can be found in a comment made by the Ramban in his commentary to Vayikra 25:33. The Ramban proposes that the term "redemption" is also be applied to a situation other than the one outlined above. When a person found it necessary to sell his ancestral property due to poverty, it was customary (although not obligatory) for a relative of his to offer to buy the field \*directly\* from him. This was done in order to prevent the field from going into the hands of a non-relative in the first place. The Ramban asserts that this, too, is referred to by the Torah as "redemption." The Ramban tells us that although such "preventative redemption" was not a Mitzvah, it was nevertheless an ancient custom.

With this in mind, the Ramban suggests that the property being redeemed by Boaz still belonged to Naomi -- she and Ruth had never sold the fields! Nevertheless, the Torah -- and the Book of Ruth -- refers to Boaz' act as one of "redemption," because he stepped in to ensure that the property would not have to be sold to a stranger in the future. This seems to be the opinion of Rashi as well, in his comments to Ruth 3:9 and 4:5.

The problem with this interpretation is that in 4:3 Boaz says, "Naomi, who has come back from the fields of Moav, has \*sold\* the portion of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech." According to what we have just said, Naomi had not sold the property yet! The Ibn Ezra (who also apparently understood the verses as the Ramban did) provides us with a solution to this problem in his commentary on that verse. He explains that the word "sold" in this case should not be taken literally, but should be understood to mean that Naomi had \*planned\* to sell the property. (Alternatively, as the Bach [17th cent. Poland] suggests in his work "Meishiv Nefesh" on Ruth, 4:3, Naomi had entered into an agreement to sell the land but did not actually conclude the transaction.)

(#1,#4) To return to our four questions -- as Shoresh Yishai points out, the Ramban's interpretation clearly answers question #1, as the sale was indeed directly from Naomi and Ruth to Boaz. It also explains how the redemption could be carried out before the requisite two-year waiting period (question #4). It is obvious that the waiting period is necessary only when redeeming a field from a purchaser, and not in this "preventative" type of redemption.

(#2) As for question #2, or how did the marriage of Ruth become a condition for redemption, Rashi (to 3:9 and 4:5) deals with this issue. Rashi, as mentioned above, agrees with the Ramban's interpretation that Naomi and Ruth themselves were selling the fields to Boaz. He asserts that Ruth, as the

seller, stipulated that she was not willing to sell her field to anyone unless he would agree to marry her. She wanted to retain an attachment to the field so that, through the combination of Machlon's wife and Machlon's field, people would not forget her deceased husband. This is the meaning of Boaz' statement (4:10), "I have also acquired Ruth of Moav, Machlon's wife, for a wife, to establish the name of the deceased in his inheritance so that the deceased's name should not be eradicated from among his brothers and from his place." (#3) We must still solve the problem raised in question #3 -- why did Boaz conduct a transaction with Tov, being that he was not buying anything from Tov? Shoresh Yishai deals with this issue by noting that an act of transaction is not necessarily indicative of a sale. Sometimes it is done as a mark of an \*agreement\* between two parties, without any connection to an actual purchase (the equivalent of a handshake in today's society). The "removal of the shoe" was carried out in order to officially ensure that Tov was indeed waiving his rights as primary redeemer, and would not be able to change his mind before Boaz purchased the field. (In actuality, there was not much time for Tov to change his mind since Boaz ended up redeeming the fields immediately thereafter).

Putting this together, we now have a much greater appreciation of the verses in Ch. 4 of the Book of Ruth.

Mordecai Kornfeld |Email: kornfeld@netmedia.co.il | Tel: 02-6522633  
6/12 Katzenelenbogen St. | kornfeld@jer1.co.il | Fax:972-2-6536017  
Har Nof, Jerusalem |parasha-page-request@jer1.co.il| US: 718 520-02

B"H Torah Studies Adaptation of Likutei Sichos  
by Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of Great Britain  
Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe  
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion  
Shavuot

Shavuot is the day on which we recall the giving of the Torah on Sinai. The Torah itself does not explicitly mention the connection. It merely says, "You shall count fifty days (from the second day of Pesach)... and you shall proclaim on that selfsame day: It shall be a holy convocation unto you." Now although we know that the Torah was given on the 6th of Sivan, during the time when the calendar was fixed by eyewitnesses to the new moon, the fiftieth day - Shavuot - could fall on the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan. Nonetheless, now that the calendar is no longer variable, Shavuot always coincides with the 6th. And there is also a Biblical allusion to the significance of Shavuot in the fact that unlike the other festivals, the word "sin" is not mentioned in connection with the special sacrifices for Shavuot, and this is related to the Israelites' acceptance of the Torah, which gave them the special merit of being forgiven their sins. These two Sicha are therefore meditations on the significance of the event at Sinai.

What revolution in man's spiritual possibilities  
was brought about by the Torah?

What did that first Shavuot usher into  
the world that had never existed before?

The first Sicha takes as its starting-point the fact that Sivan was the third month of the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Why was the Torah not given immediately? Is there any significance to the number three? Its theme is the different kinds of unity that a Jew can reach in his relationship with G-d.

#### THE THIRD MONTH

The giving of the Torah took place in the month of Sivan - the third month. Since this was clearly part of the Divine plan, there must be a significant connection between the event and the date, between Torah and the third month.

The point is made explicitly in the Talmud: "Blessed be the Merciful One who gave a threefold Torah to a threefold people through a third - born on the third day in the third month."

The figure three is the constant motif.

The Torah is in three parts: Pentateuch, Prophets and Hagiographa (Torah, Neviim, Ketubim).

Israel consists of three kinds of Jew: Kohen, Levite and Israelite. Moses was born third, after Miriam and Aaron.

The Torah was given in the third month, on the third day of the Israelites' separation from their wives.

Why, then, the figure three?

Surely the Torah was intended to be unique and to reveal the oneness of G-d. The number one is what we would have expected.

To take the point further.

The principal event of the third month was the giving of the Torah in itself. The commandments, as such, were not an entirely new disclosure. There had been commandments before: The seven Noachide Laws, circumcision, and the things that were commanded at Marah.

Sinai certainly changed the nature of a Mitzvah, but the idea of a Mitzvah was not new. But the Torah was. And the difference between Torah and the commandments is this: through a Mitzvah one becomes nullified in the face of G-d's will, as a "chariot to its rider."

But through Torah we become one with G-d.

The two things are not the same.

A chariot has no will other than that of its rider, but chariot and rider are not one. The innovation at Sinai was radical - now the Jew could become at one with G-d.

And if so we must ask again: Why is three, not one, its symbol?

#### TWO KINDS OF UNITY

The purpose of the giving of the Torah was indeed unity. But what is a true unity?

When a person recognizes the One in the many, then he perceives unity in the midst of diversity. If he knows only one kind of existence, we do not know what his response will be when he discovers another kind. Perhaps he will then say: There are two realities, G-d and the world. It is only when he has encountered more than one form of existence and still maintains that G-d is the only reality that he has seen the true Oneness of G-d.

There is a traditional analogy.

If we want to know how close is the bond between a prince and his father, the king, we will not discover it in the palace but only by taking him from it and setting him amongst ordinary men. If he still behaves like a prince, he is a true son of his father.

So with a Jew, it is not within the Sanctuary but within the diversity of the world that his sense of G-d's unity is proved. And he can preserve it in two ways. He can suppress his awareness of other things besides G-d. Or he can be fully aware of other things of the world and in them discover G-d. It is the latter which is the deeper response.

The person who suppresses his senses and closes his eyes to the ways of the world, believes that they form something apart from and in opposition to G-d, and must be kept at a distance. The unity of his religious life is neither deep nor secure.

#### THREE STAGES

There are, as we can see, three phases in the growth towards the sense of the unity of G-d. And they correspond to the three months from Pesach to Shavuot.

Nissan is the month of the Exodus itself, when G-d was revealed to the Israelites. They "fled" from Egypt, both literally and metaphorically - fled from the knowledge of the world and were filled only with the revelation from above.

Their unity was of the world-denying kind. G-d was One because they knew only one thing, because the world had ceased to have being in their eyes.

Iyar, the second month, is the month wholly taken up with the Counting of the Omer, and preparing ourselves for the coming events at Sinai. We are aware of ourselves and our world as something apart from G-d which had to be suppressed. Like the chariot and its rider, G-d and the world were one will but two things.

Sivan, the third month, was the time when the Torah was given, when G-d and the world became one thing. This was the moment of genuine unity, when what had seemed two things became a third, including and going beyond both.

#### THE HIGH AND THE LOW

This is why the Torah was given on the third month. For, through fulfilling a commandment we efface our own existence, but we are not yet at one with G-d. The ultimate unity comes only through (learning) Torah, when the mind of man and the will of G-d interfuse. The two become a third thing, a

complete unity.

This is why Moses received the Torah at Sinai.

The Rabbis said that Sinai was chosen because it was the lowest (i.e., the humblest) of the mountains. But if lowness was the sought-for virtue, why was the Torah not revealed on a plane or a valley? Because Sinai represented the fusion of two opposites, the high and the low, G-d and man. And this is the significance of the Torah.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. II, pp. 301-303)

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Besides the revelation in the wilderness, there are two other events which occurred on Shavuot, at widely separated intervals of time, namely the deaths of two of the greatest figures in history. This serves as a reminder to us that revelation was not just a moment but a continuing process; that new faces of the infinitely meaningful Torah have always been revealed at the critical moments of our religious development; and that Sinai posed an immense challenge to the Jewish people to which we continue to try to rise. These two figures stand at key points in the development of this response, and thus have a special relationship to Shavuot.

#### THREE EVENTS

The main event which Shavuot commemorates is, as we say in the prayers and the Kiddush of the day, "the time of the giving of our Torah." It is the day of the revelation at Sinai.

Many generations later another event occurred on the same date: The death of King David.

And within the span of more recent history a third memory was added to Shavuot: The death of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidut. Seen in the light of Divine Providence, the occurrence of these three events on the same date is no coincidence. It is a sign of an inner connection between them, namely that the initial disclosure of the voice of G-d at Sinai was brought into greater openness by King David and subsequently by the Baal Shem Tov.

They represent three peaks in the continual unfolding of the Divine revelation.

#### THE MEETING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

In the Midrash we are told, about the new state of affairs brought into being by the giving of the Torah, that "David said, Even though the Holy One, blessed be He, decreed that 'The heavens are the heavens of the L-rd, but the earth He has given to the sons of men...' when He wished to give the Torah He annulled the initial decree and said, the lower (worlds) shall ascend to the higher, and the higher descend to the low. And I shall take the initiative, as it is said, 'And the L-rd descended upon Mt. Sinai' and (subsequently) it is written, 'And to Moses He said, come up unto the L-rd.' "

It is significant that though the Midrash quotes G-d as saying "I shall take the initiative," and though the descent of G-d in fact preceded Moses' going up, it still mentions the ascent of the lower worlds before the descent of the higher. This is because the ascent of the low was the ultimate purpose of the giving of the Torah, and the ultimate purpose is the last to be realized.

Though Moses' ascent came after G-d's descent, it was nonetheless of greater importance. But G-d's initiating step was needed beforehand, before man could rise to meet Him.

#### THE DESCENT OF G-D

What was new at Sinai was the descent of G-d to the (lower) world.

Although there had been Divine revelations beforehand, especially to the Patriarchs, they were purely spiritual events which did not enter and affect the fabric of the material world. But when "G-d descended on Mt. Sinai," the effect was felt within the world. At that moment, says the Midrash, "No bird called, no bird flew" and "the voice which came from G-d had no echo" because it was absorbed into the very texture of the world.

The Torah was no longer "in heaven." The word of G-d had descended to earth. Only afterwards did the work begin of refining, sanctifying and raising the world in spiritual ascent. This was the worship of the Jewish people, to turn the world into a "vessel" receptive of G-d. The possibility of this achievement was created at Sinai; the actuality began later.

Just as the descent of G-d to the world began with Abraham and culminated in Moses, so the ascent of the world to G-d began after the giving of the Torah and reached its climax in David and Solomon, his son, who in building the Temple took the Jewish people to a new apex in their upward climb to

### THE ASCENT OF MAN

With the advent of David came two new developments. Firstly, he was the first king to rule over the whole of Israel (unlike Saul, who according to the Midrash did not rule over the tribe of Judah), and the dynasty was entrusted to him in perpetuity: "The kingship shall never be removed from the seed of David."

Secondly, although the Temple was built by Solomon, it was planned and prepared by David, and it was even called by his name.

Both the kingship and the Temple are symptoms of the real nature of David's achievement: The elevation of the world and the ascent of man.

#### KINGSHIP

The bond between a king and his subjects is different to and deeper than that between a teacher and his pupils. A pupil owes much of what he is to his teacher; but he has a life outside the classroom. The king, however, holds sway over every aspect of his subject's being. Thus the penalty for an Israelite disobeying a king of Israel is death - even if the command in question has, on the face of it, no connection with the king's proper field of authority; if, for example, he says, "Go to such and such a place," or, "Do not leave your house." The reason is that kingship is absolute, its domain unlimited and the whole of the subject's life is bound up in it.

This, of course, is a special kind of monarchy. For the absolute obedience of the people to their king rests in turn on the king's absolute obedience to G-d, the King of Kings. And thus it is that through the intermediary of kingship, Israel has an obedience to G-d which is both total and extending to every aspect of their being.

Thus we can see the difference between the acceptance of the Torah at Sinai and the obedience to G-d involved in the idea of Kingship, which David initiated.

The revelation at Sinai was an act of G-d: "I shall take the initiative." It did not come from within the hearts of the people. And so it did not affect their whole being absolutely. But kingship does come from the people - their obedience is the source of the king's authority.

David's reign signifies a new phenomenon: The voluntary, inward acceptance by the people of an absolute authority over them.

#### THE TEMPLE

The same idea of the elevation of man and the world can be found in the Temple, David's other monument.

There was a difference between the Temple, and the Tabernacle (Mishkan) which the Israelites carried with them in the wilderness.

The places where the Mishkan rested did not become permanently holy.

When the Mishkan departed, so did their sanctity. But the Temple site remains holy ground even after the destruction of the Temples. In both Tabernacle and Temple was the indwelling presence of G-d; but only in the latter did this presence permanently sanctify and elevate the earth on which it stood.

#### THE BAAL SHEM TOV

These two movements, of G-d reaching out towards man and man aspiring towards G-d will ultimately become one in the Messianic Age, when unity will prevail. Indeed, ever since the Torah was given, this unity has become possible, because the "decree" separating heaven and earth was annulled. But the great impetus to bringing about this unity and the Messianic Age has been the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov. He and the Chassidut which flowed from his inspiration have taught us to see the world as filled with the light of G-d, and to understand that it is the indwelling word of G-d that sustains all things. Through him we have learned to see G-d in the world.

And this elevation of the world, the Baal Shem Tov revealed through Torah, which represents a revelation from above. And so the Messianic Age will be brought by the spreading of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov; and Messiah will be versed and steeped in Torah like his ancestor David.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. VIII, pp. 21-8)

### The Issur of Lo Tachmod - Covetousness

On Shavuot we read the Ten Commandments, as the centerpiece of this festival's Torah portion. Accordingly, I have selected one of the dibrot as the topic for this week's shiur.

The final commandment listed in the asseret ha-dibrot is "lo tachmod," Do not covet anything which belongs to your neighbor. To be sure, many have commented on the difficulty of prohibiting an emotion - especially when that emotion is by and large natural to the human condition (see Sefer Ha-chinukh 416). What, however, is the legal definition of this issur (prohibition)?

The conceptual structure of this issur might be glimpsed by studying the definition of the word "tachmod" itself. The Ibn Ezra in his commentary to Va-etchanan demonstrates that the word "tachmod" has two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to EXTORTION and forced acquisition of an item. Alternatively, it refers to desiring and CRAVING that which one finds attractive.

This semantic duality reflects, in truth, a broader question: What is the exact nature of the issur of "lo tachmod?" Do we relate to it as a mitzva she-balev, a duty of the heart? If so, one who craves that which belongs to another has violated this issur. We might instead view this issur as related in some way to the world of gezeila (robbery). Without being identical to robbery in all respects, it might still belong to its general category.

The Smak in his book of the 613 mitzvot, divides the mitzvot into seven categories corresponding to each of the seven days of creation. In his list of the "mitzvot of the first day" which refer to mitzvot of the heart, he cites the issur of lo tachmod and defines it as one which focuses upon the emotions and thoughts in the heart. Similarly, the Ramban in his commentary to Kedoshim cites a midrash which maintains that each of the asseret ha-dibrot is alluded to in the list of mitzvot which opens parashat Kedoshim; the parallel to "lo tachmod" is the mitzva of "ve-ahavta le-rei'akha ka-mokha," loving your neighbor as yourself. By establishing this symmetry, the midrash as well, appears to formulate "lo tachmod" as a mitzva governing our emotions.

In contrast, the Rabbenu Bachye in his commentary to Va-etchanan defines "lo tachmod" as a form of gezeila. The Ramban in his commentary to Yitro agrees and thus assures that some ban on stealing is included in the actual asseret ha-dibrot (remember that the issur of lo tignov which would appear more directly to address theft refers instead to kidnapping). These two commentators apparently viewed "lo tachmod" as an issur based in some way (with, as we said, subtle differences) upon the general model of theft.

The Sefer Ha-chinukh in mitzva 416 confirms this view while drawing an interesting application. He writes that the mitzva applies to both men and women and members of all races. The obvious problem which arises is that the list of seven mitzvot which Gentiles are commanded to keep does not include lo tachmod! His response: "lo tachmod" is a subset of theft which is one of the seven Noachide laws. The Chinukh, by defining the mitzva as an extension of gezeila, expanded the scope of the mitzva to include all individuals.

#### SUMMARY:

We have isolated two strands within the word "tachmod" - two meanings which reflect two possible characters of the prohibition. On the one hand, "tachmod" might refer to the actual emotion of craving that which belongs to another. Alternatively, it might refer to a prohibition which resembles "gezeila," some form of forced extortion.

Intuitively, we might expect the nafka mina (i.e., the practical difference between those two approaches) to revolve around the level of action necessary in order to violate the prohibition. If indeed "lo tachmod" is a prohibition of the heart, one might violate it even if he does not actually act upon his plans. Alternatively if "lo tachmod" is a form of gezeila we might only prohibit actual extortion. This issue is debated by the Mekhilta to parashat Shemot which rules (based upon a gezeira shava, i.e., parallel language) that one only violates "lo tachmod" if an act is executed. We might conclude, then, that this stipulation proves that the emotion per se does not form the essence of the prohibition.

Closer inspection of the Mekhilta, however, enables us to continue viewing the issur as one of the heart. It is possible that the Torah requires



some litmus test to indicate how entrenched a particular trait or emotion is. Many thoughts pass through our heads (especially in a complicated modern world) and we are not held responsible unless such a thought actually becomes anchored within our personality. Perhaps the indicator that covetousness has crystallized is its expression into action. In this view, the action per se does not form the substance of the issur but serves instead as the "shiur" or DEGREE at which the emotion becomes punishable.

We might then seek to analyze the role of the action within "lo tachmod." This will indirectly assist us in deciding whether the action or the emotion forms the nucleus of the issur.

An extreme issue in this regard is raised by the Smak. Remember, the Smak groups this issur within the "first day" list which contains only mitzvot of the heart. Hence, he feels compelled to reinterpret the Mekhilta and somehow marginalize the element of action while continuing to focus upon the emotion. He rules that the action only forms the FINAL stage of the issur which indeed began with the thought itself. If the action never occurs, the issur is never consummated. Once, however, the action is performed, the violation is seen as having begun retroactively from the moment of the thought. By de-emphasizing the action and keeping the thought in the foreground the Smak is able to retain his vision of "lo tachmod" as a duty of the heart despite the Mekhilta's insistence upon the actual extraction of the item before one becomes culpable.

Another significant question might be the type of action which the Mekhilta requires. The Rambam in Hilkhos Gezeila interprets the Mekhilta in the most straightforward manner: only a successful extortion entails an issur. Others, however, demand far less of the action. For example Rabbenu Tam (quoted in the Commentary of Tosafot to Chumash) only requires that the desire be verbally articulated. Clearly we would demand a successful extortion if we sought to define the case as resembling gezeila. If, however, the action were necessary only to consolidate the emotion even a verbal declaration would suffice. In a similar vein, the Netziv in his commentary to this Mekhilta claims that any attempt to extract the item suffices - even if it is unsuccessful. It is likely that he, too, views "lo tachmod" as an issur relating to the emotions of the heart and interprets the Mekhilta as requiring an action to demonstrate the solidity of the emotion - as a shiur in the emotion. Successful extortion, though, is unnecessary.

A third issue which might prove significant is a factor raised by the Rambam. He rules that no malkot (lashes) are administered for violating "lo tachmod" since it is a "lav she-ein bo ma'aseh" - a violation which involves no action, which according to the gemara in Makkot carries no corporal punishment. The Ra'avad is understandably skeptical of this ruling since the Mekhilta which the Rambam himself cites requires that an action be performed. The Ra'avad himself waives malkot in this case but for alternate reasons. What, though, could be the logic of the Rambam who, on the one hand, requires that the action of the Mekhilta be performed but on the other defines this issur as one which contains no action?

Apparently the Rambam himself might have viewed "lo tachmod" as a prohibition relating to emotions. Hence the action (even though he demands a successful one) is merely AN INDICATOR rather than the ACTUAL ESSENCE of this lav. Even though practically an action - and a successful one at that - must be executed, this does not represent the essence of the prohibition. Hence, the Rambam cannot categorize this as a lav which contains an action. Evidently, then, the Ra'avad himself equated "lo tachmod" to gezeila, viewing the action as the lav itself and defining it as a lav SHE-YESH bo ma'aseh. He was forced to discover some other logic to justify the lack of malkot. We will examine this factor as well as some additional issues related to "lo tachmod" in next week's portion I"H.

METHODOLOGICAL POINTS: -----

1) Whenever dealing with a mitzva which is biblical in origin, three types of seforim must be consulted before learning the more familiar sources (gemara, Rishonim, Rambam, commentaries etc.):

a) Look up the actual pasuk which serves as the source of the mitzva/halakha. Check the biblical commentaries (Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra etc.).

b) Look up the various sifrei ha-mitzvot (Rambam, Chinukh, Smag, Smak, Yerei'm etc.) and check the manner in which they define the mitzva. These seforim are generally written in very precise and unambiguous language

which greatly assists in deciphering the nature of the mitzva.

c) Check the midrash halakha. If it is a pasuk in Shemot see what the Mekhilta writes. For a pasuk in Vayikra check the Torat Kohanim. For one in Bamidbar or Devarim consult the Sifrei. These are statements/derashot of Chazal, some of which are quoted in the mishna and some of which are not. For those statements which are actually cited in the gemara one can often detect slight linguistic changes which the redactors of the gemara made. The original statement might contain a slightly different meaning. Very often, though, you can locate a derasha which was not cited about a topic which the gemara discusses. Sometimes these derashot will not be accepted as halakha, but they are just as important to study as a shita yachid (minority opinion) which the gemara cites. We do not neglect the study of Beit Shammai's position simply because we don't rule like him. In some instances the derasha of the Mekhilta, even though not cited by the gemara, will be quoted by the Rishonim and accepted as halakha.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Same'ach

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH

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"And they traveled from Refidim and came to the Sinai desert, and they camped in the desert, Israel camped facing the mountain." [19:2]

The Ohr HaChaim, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, asks why it was necessary to say that Israel came to the Sinai desert - the previous verse already said that. In addition, why must the verse tell us that they camped in the desert - is it not obvious that they would camp where they arrived at their destination?

The Ohr HaChaim offers a drasha, a deeper interpretation of the verse, saying that these words teach us three crucial acts of preparation for receiving the Torah.

"And they traveled from Refidim" - the place where Amalek met and fought with them, because, our Sages tell us, they suffered a "Rifyon Yadayim," a weakness. What sort of weakness? A weakness in Torah learning. One can only truly understand a difficult subject after making a total commitment. One cannot learn Torah in a lazy way, and gain more than a superficial understanding. To receive Torah, one must leave "Refidim," laziness, behind. "And they camped in the desert" - they made themselves like a desert, which everyone steps on. Modesty and humility are also requirements, "for words of Torah only last in a person who lowers himself, and makes himself like a desert." A haughty and proud person will be too proud to ask, too proud to admit error. Torah is acquired by one who is willing "to learn from every individual," and displays this trait in every aspect of his life.

"Israel camped facing the mountain" - in the singular, meaning as a united body. The scholars sat down to learn together in an environment of unity and peace, rather than making divisions. And this was perhaps the most difficult of all. They put aside petty arguments and concentrated upon that which they all held dear.

I wonder when in our history the Jewish people has been divided as it is today. I doubt that this bears elaboration - everyone knows what I mean. Petty arguments are indeed the order of the day.

I'm delighted, on the other hand, that when it comes to traditional learning, we see plenty of exceptions. This is truly one of the highlights of our program - that we have 7000 participants from all over the world, representing practically every stream and school of thought, all learning something about Judaism and our united Jewish heritage with each piece of email. Let's please remember that. At the bottom line, we really are all one people, all brothers and sisters, children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. May we - all of us together - go forward and receive the Torah. Chag Sameach!

Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network learn@torah.org  
P.O. Box 1230 http://www.torah.org/ Spring Valley, NY 10977  
(914) 356-3040 FAX: 356-6722

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT (VBM)  
STUDY - TALMUD TORAH  
by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

[This article originally appeared in Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought, 1987]

In Jewish thought and experience, few values are as cherished as talmud Torah, the study of Torah; and few cultures, if any, have assigned to learning of any kind - let alone the mastery of scriptural and legal texts - the status it enjoys within Judaism. That priority is not the result of much-vaunted Jewish intellectualism. Quite the contrary: it is, if anything, the latter's cause rather than its effect. Its true source is the specifically religious role that Jewish law and tradition have accorded talmud Torah.

This religious role is multifaceted. The study of Torah constitutes, at one level, a halakhic act, entailing the realization of a divine commandment - and one of the preeminent commandments at that. As such, it has a dual basis. On the one hand, it is a distinct normative category, positing specific goals and prescribing, like other mizvot, clearly defined conduct enjoined by a particular mandate. The mizvah of talmud Torah charges the Jew to acquire knowledge of Torah, insofar as he is able; but it addresses itself primarily to the process rather than the result. Its minimal demand, some daily study of Torah, is formulated in verses included in the first portion of the Shema: "Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut. 6:6-7). On the other hand, it is included in the far more general charge enjoining the Jew "to love the Lord, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and soul" (Deut. 11:13) - that service requiring, as the midrash postulates, the study of Torah apart from ritual and prayer (Sif. Deut. 5).

At a second level, talmud Torah is viewed axiologically - both as an independent value and as a means of ensuring and enriching spiritual existence, both personal and collective. Engagement with Torah for its own sake, *lishmah*, is a prime goal. Its *raison d'être* need not be sought by reference to other categories, moral or religious. Can study that "only" entails live contact with the revealed and expounded divine Word be less than invaluable? Obviously, that contact can ordinarily have instrumental value as well - in two respects. First, study provides knowledge requisite to halakhic living even as it deepens halakhic commitment. Second, since talmud Torah enables a person, within limits, to cleave unto God, it has moral, passionate, and pietistic repercussions.

These elements exist on the collective plane as well. Beyond them, however, one may note a more strictly public aspect. As Torah itself is the basis of Israel's covenant with God, so is its study a means both of cementing that bond and of providing communal uplift. In one sense, this applies to the oral Law in particular, as the intimacy of the covenantal relationship is experienced within it uniquely. "Rabbi Yohanan stated: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, entered into a covenant with Israel only because of oral matters, as it is written [Ex. 34:27]: 'For after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee, and with Israel'''" (BT Git. 60b). The principle, however, applies to Torah in its entirety, with its full conceptual and experiential import.

At a third level, the role of talmud Torah is conceived in cosmological and mystical terms, bordering in some formulations, on the magical. From this perspective, it attains continuous cosmic significance as a metaphysical factor affecting the fabric of reality - indeed, as that which supports and sustains the very existence of the universe. The Talmud cites this concept in the name of Rabbi Eleazar, who, interpreting a biblical verse in this vein, saw it as attesting to the significance of Torah: "Rabbi Eleazar said: 'Great is Torah for, were it not for it, heaven and earth would not exist, as it is stated [Jer. 33:25], 'If my covenant be not day and night, I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth'''" (BT Ned. 32a); and elsewhere the Talmud explains the gravity of *bittul Torah* - literally, "the

negation of Torah," that is, the failure to study it adequately - on a similar basis (BT Shab. 33a). Rabbi Hayyim Isaac Volozhiner, founder in 1802 of the archetypal Lithuanian *yeshiva* and the most vigorous modern proponent of this view, went so far as to arrange for some measure of Torah study at his *yeshiva* at all times in order to ensure cosmic existence. To many, this may surely seem naively bizarre anthropocentrism. Be that as it may, the underlying attitude, shorn of its literalist application, is deeply rooted in rabbinic tradition.

The object of study can of course be any and every part of Torah. The Midrash, commenting upon the verse "Give ear, my people, to my teaching" (Ps. 78:1), notes: "Let not one tell you that the psalms are not Torah, for they are indeed Torah, and the prophets are also Torah...as are the riddles and the parables" (Mid. Ps. ad loc. Ps. 78:1). And from a purely normative standpoint, the *mizvah* is fulfilled, regardless of which area of Torah is being studied. Historically, however, the major emphasis - particularly, but not exclusively, at more advanced levels of scholarship - has been upon the Torah she-be-al peh, the corpus of law and tradition, homily and exegesis, primarily formulated and preserved in the Talmud. Jews often recited *tehillim* (psalms) as a pietistic exercise, but learning was more likely to deal with the Mishnah, the Gemara, or the collection of talmudic *aggadot*, Ein Ya'akov. The Talmud itself postulates that periods of study should be apportioned, "one third to Scripture, one third to midrash, and one third to Talmud [that is, Gemara]" (BT Kid. 30a). However, one classical medieval authority, Rabbeinu Tam, held that the study of the Babylonian Talmud sufficed, since all three elements were blended within it, while another, Moses Maimonides, stated that this counsel applied only in the early stages of intellectual development, during which the raw material of Torah was being absorbed and digested, but that once the infrastructure existed a person should devote himself to the subtle analysis of the Gemara. Whatever the rationale, the primacy of Torah is fairly clear.

The primacy derives, in part, from concern about potentially heterodox tendencies springing from direct and independent study of Scripture. Primarily, however, it is grounded in the centrality of law and rabbinic tradition within Jewish consciousness and experience. The encounter with God as commander lies at the heart of Jewish existence; to the extent that it is realized through talmud Torah, the legal corpus, as developed within the oral tradition, is a prime vehicle for this encounter. To an outsider, much of traditional talmud Torah no doubt borders on the absurd. From a purely rational or pragmatic perspective, the prospect of a group of laymen studying the minutiae of complex and often "irrelevant" halakhot may indeed be bizarre. In light of Jewish commitment and experience, however, it is thoroughly intelligible.

That commitment is the key to the traditional conception of the nature of talmud Torah. Study is of course an intellectual and largely critical activity, but in this case it is significantly molded by its religious character. The effect is both enriching and constricting. On the one hand, Torah study, regarded as an encounter with the Shekhinah (the divine Presence), is enhanced by an experiential dimension. Hence the importance that the rabbis assigned to the confluence of prayer and study: They urged that one should preferably engage in both at the same place, even if in most views this entails praying in private rather than in public. In this vein, talmud Torah can assume an almost visceral quality, and *aggadic* texts abound with similes comparing Torah study to sensuous and even sensual activity, elemental and exotic alike. Commenting upon the verse "A lovely hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy thee at all times" (Prov. 5:19), Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman expounds: "Why were the words of the Torah compared to a hind? To tell you that the hind has a narrow womb and is relished by its cohabitants at each and every moment as at the first hour....Why were Torah words compared to a nipple? As with a nipple, however often an infant fondles it he finds milk in it, so it is with Torah words. As often as a man ponders them, he finds relish in them" (BT Er. 54b).

Conceived in such terms, talmud Torah is invested with a dual nature. In part, it is oriented to accomplishment, with the acquisition of knowledge and skills being obvious goals. Teleological considerations aside, however, the process, as has been noted, is no less important than its resolution; and even if one has retained nothing, the experience itself - live contact with the

epiphanous divine will manifest through Torah, and encounter with the divine Presence, which hovers over its students - is immeasurably important. Talmud Torah is not just informative or illuminating; it is ennobling and purgative. He who studies Torah, says the Mishnah, "is called friend, beloved, lover of God, and lover of men. He rejoices God and men. The Torah invests him with modesty and reverence and enables him to be virtuous, pious, upright, and faithful. It distances him from sin and draws him near to virtue" (M. Avot 6:1). It is this emphasis upon process and its purgative character that renders abstruse study both possible and meaningful. From a pragmatic standpoint, much talmud Torah is futile or irrelevant, or both. Religiously regarded, however, it is eminently sensible. The bather is refreshed, regardless of where he dips into the ocean. Does he refrain from going to the water merely because he cannot reach the other shore?

But if the religious conception of talmud Torah extends its horizons in one sense, it constricts them severely in another. The religious view implies, in effect, that study that is not grounded in commitment is, at best, of limited value, and that has indeed been the traditional position. With reference to more extreme cases - presumably those involving patently negative attitudes - the rabbis stated that while Torah is life-giving to those who approach it rightly, "to the sinister, in relation to it, it is a poisonous herb" (BT Shab. 88b). However, even purely dispassionate study, the very ideal of much of the academic world, has been regarded with great reservation. This attitude has not been grounded in a mystical view of Torah as a gnosis to be reserved for the initiate; it has sprung, rather, from the perception that talmud Torah cannot be realized by approaching sacral material from a secular perspective.

While the sacral character of talmud Torah has generally been universally assumed by Jewish tradition, its scope has been very much in dispute. Of course, relatively few have doubted that much learning is a desirable thing; but opinions have differed over how much could be normatively demanded or ordinarily expected. Some have held that while the *mizvah* of talmud Torah clearly required a modicum of daily study, anything beyond the barest minimum was more a matter of lofty aspiration than of halakhic duty. Others, however, have insisted that while minimal daily study could be singled out as an inescapable and irreducible charge, maximal commitment - flexibly perceived - constituted an obligation rather than a meritorious desideratum. As Rabbenu Nissim, one of the last of the great medieval authorities, put it in the fourteenth century: "Every person is obligated to study constantly, day and night, in accordance with his ability" (Comm. on BT Ned. 8a).

The key phrase is, of course, "in accordance with his ability" (*kefi koho*), but its practical substantive import remains wholly amorphous so long as one has not come to grips with the critical question of the relation of talmud Torah to other areas of human endeavor, secular or religious. In one sense, this is simply a variant of the broader problem of the definitions of priorities and the apportionment of energies, resources and commitment between the mundane and the spiritual realms, respectively. This specific point was debated in the twelfth century by Rabbenu Tam and his grand-nephew, Elhanan ben Isaac of Dampierre, who, in interpreting the aphorism "Excellent is talmud Torah together with a worldly occupation" (M. Avot 2:2), disagreed as to which component was primary. Presumably, they dealt with practical rather than axiological primacy; nevertheless, their controversy is clearly significant. At a second level, however, the problem concerns the relation between different elements of the spiritual life proper - between the outreach of charity and *gemilut hasadim* as opposed to self-centered spirituality; or between talmud Torah and prayer as aspects of the contemplative life.

Surveying much of the current yeshiva scene and its recent east European, and particularly Lithuanian, background, one often gets the impression that, as a spiritual value, talmud Torah is not only central but exclusive. From a broader perspective, however, the picture is more balanced - especially with reference to the talmudic sages. Statements to the effect that "talmud Torah is equal to them [that is, a list of key *mizvot*] all" (Pe'ah 1:1), or the famous counsel "Turn it over and turn it over [that is, the torah] for all is in it" (M. Avot 5:25), are complemented by sharp asseverations that single-minded talmud Torah is not only incomplete but distorted. "Whoever says that he has nothing but Torah," expounds the

Talmud in the tractate *Yevamot*, "does not even have Torah. Why? Rav Papa said, 'Scripture states, "Study them and observe them faithfully" [Deut. 5:1]. Whosoever relates to observance relates to study, whosoever does not relate to observance does not relate to study'" (BT Yev. 109b). Elsewhere, we encounter an even more radical statement. "He who engages solely in Torah [study]," declares Rav Huna, "is one who has no God. For it is written [II Chron. 15:3], 'Now for long seasons Israel was without the true God.' What is meant by 'without the true God'? It means that he who engages solely in Torah [study] is as one who has no God" (BT Av. Zar. 17b).

Unquestionably, emphases differ among both the talmudic sages and subsequent generations. The Talmud relates that when Rav Huna saw Rabbi Hamnuna prolonging his prayer at the expense of talmud Torah, he commented: "They forsake eternal life and engage in temporal life"; and it goes on to explain that Rabbi Hamnuna evidently held that there should be "a time for prayer apart, and a time for Torah apart" (BT Shab. 10a). Analogously, the practice of the Palestinian amora Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, who "would not go to a house of mourning save to that of one who had been childless, for it is written, 'Weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more nor see his native country' [Jer. 22:10]" (BT MK 27b), presumably so as not to divert time and energy from talmud Torah, reflects this singular emphasis. But one principle is beyond question, namely, that Torah exists within a larger axiological complex. It both complements other values and is complemented by them, and even if it reigns supreme, it surely does not rule alone.

Clearly, then, the assertion of Rabbenu Nissim that one is obligated to engage in talmud Torah "day and night, to the extent of one's ability [*kefi koho*]," remains, in practical terms, ill defined. Only after one has determined the scope of other legitimate concerns and has allocated to them their respective time and effort does *kefi koho* become clear. Nevertheless, the formulation - with its implicit assumption that there is a basic total commitment to talmud Torah from which one then subtracts - is highly significant in its own right. It clearly reflects the singular importance that, whatever the continuing dialectic between intellection and implementation, Judaism has uniquely assigned to the study of Torah, even at the popular level. One might note that the concern with talmud Torah attains further significance as a source of the heightened time-consciousness that is so integral a part of Jewish sensibility and experience.

Finally, as to the scope of talmud Torah, it is very broad in one sense and extremely limited in another. As a value, its range is well nigh universal. It relates to Gentiles and Jews alike, to both men and women, to children as well as adults. "Rabbi Meir stated, 'Whence that even a Gentile who engages in [the study of] Torah is as a high priest? For it is stated [Lev. 18:5], "Which if a person do [i.e., the *mizvot*], he shall live by them." It does not say, "Kohanim, Levites, and Israelites," but "a person"' (BT Sanh. 59a). As a normative *mizvah*, however, it devolves only upon Jewish men. For others, it is regarded in part as an admirable aspiration and in part as a means for acquiring the knowledge requisite for the fulfillment of other *mizvot*, but not as a duty to pursue knowledge for its own sake. Moreover, concern lest half-baked knowledge be abused has, at times, actually led to discouraging such voluntary study. This fear of dilettantism has, historically, been a prime reason for the relatively limited level of Torah study by women. Given the changes in women's overall social and educational status and the nature of their total cultural experience within the modern world, many have felt that this benign neglect is no longer warranted; and, indeed, since the turn of the century, much has been done to redress the imbalance in the talmud Torah of men and women. How far this process will develop and whether it has built-in halakhic limits remains to be seen. Be that as it may, the axiological and historical centrality of talmud Torah remains a cardinal fact of Jewish spiritual existence.

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shavuot 'Shabbat Shalom', by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

FROM RUTH: BECOME A JEW BY CHOICE  
DURING a period of great uncertainty and concern, formidable risk and

questionable opportunity for the State of Israel, it is crucial to recognize the significance of our homeland.

It is especially timely to do so on Shavuot, the festival of first fruits, when Jewish farmers brought their most-longed-for produce to the Holy Temple, and the presentation speech gratefully acknowledges that "[the Lord] brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deut. 26:9. )

The Scroll of Ruth, the biblical reading for the festival, opens with economic difficulty - a famine - in Judea, which causes Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and his sons Mahlon and Chilion to leave their home of Bethlehem (lit. the house of bread) for the seemingly greener pastures of Moab. As in the case of the Patriarch Abraham, who similarly left Israel for Egypt because of famine, disaster strikes, the lesson being that if it is difficult for Jews to survive in Israel - our own homeland - it will be far more difficult to survive in exile.

In a scene remarkably reminiscent of our contemporary Diaspora, both sons marry Moabite women, and a once-proud Israelite family seems doomed to gentile grandchildren.

Shavuot, the festival that celebrates the Revelation at Sinai, understandably emphasizes the most insidious dangers of exile: assimilation and intermarriage, the death-knell of our historical tradition.

Newborn commitment is the only antidote; and so Ruth, the Moabite daughter-in-law who chooses to cling to her Israeli mother-in-law and convert to her faith, saves the family and secures the future of our nation. Most instructive is the language of her conversion, the biblical definition of commitment:

"Where you shall walk, there I shall walk [halacha, lit. a life-style commitment], and where you shall lodge, there I shall lodge [a 24-hour-a-day commitment], your nation shall be my nation [a nationalistic commitment] and your God shall be my God [a theological commitment]." (Ruth 1:16. )

When we remember that this statement was made in response to Naomi's decision to return to her homeland alone, the paramount importance of the Land of Israel for Jewish survival is revealed as the essence of Ruth's pledge. She will continue to dwell (walking and lodging) with Israel's God and Naomi in the Land of Israel.

Indeed, Boaz, the Israeli kinsman, compliments this woman "who has left your father and your mother and the land of your birth and went to a nation you did not know yesterday and the day before" (Ruth 2:11) - words echoing the divine charge to Abraham to found a nation/religion: "Get thee forth from thy land, thy birthplace and thy father's house to the land which I will show thee." (Gen.12:1. )

From this perspective, the continuation of Ruth's story completes the circle: Boaz redeems the family property, Naomi and Ruth assume their rightful place in the Land and then - and only then - the father of David, progenitor of the Messiah, symbol of Israel's destiny, can be born.

WHEN I was growing up, there were six million Jews in America, a comforting statistic. Given the natural Jewish birthrate and post-WWII immigration, four decades later the number should have doubled. But alas, whether we admit it publicly or not, Diaspora Jewry - particularly in America - is at a crossroads.

Instead of 12 million American Jews, today's statistics speak of 5.5 million, and this includes 1 million who describe themselves as being merely Jewish. Only two million belong to any kind of Jewish organization, frighteningly distant even from Mordechai Kaplan's three "Bs" of Jewishness: behaving, believing and belonging. Is it any wonder that the intermarriage rate is 52 percent and climbing?

And intermarriage (the term ought to be mixed-marriage) is not so much a cause for Jewish decline as it is a symptom of a Jewish disease - ignorance of and apathy concerning our Jewish heritage and traditions.

Many Jewish sociologists point to the Scroll of Ruth, read on Shavuot, as a guidepost for our troubled times. Who says that mixed marriages will lead to more Jews opting out? Perhaps it will enable more Gentiles to count themselves in? Was not Ruth the prototypical convert, a

Moabite woman who married a Jew from Israel and eventually became grandmother to King David?

However, Ruth's conversion was not tied to her marriage; she converted only after her first husband had died impoverished.

The door that Ruth opened is the door through which every one of us, including Jews from birth, must pass. It is the doorway of commitment.

Mordechai Kaplan was right when he defined Judaism as a civilization, with its own unique land, language and literature, with its specific days of celebration and mourning, eating habits and rites of passage. Only if we expose our youth to this great civilization will we give them the opportunity to choose it for their own.

We must launch an Exodus from Assimilation. We must learn from Ruth that the key to Jewish survival lies in commitment; we must all become Jews by choice.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameah

(c) The Jerusalem Post/Shlomo Riskin, 5/754/1994

## YHE-VBM by Rabbi Menachem Leibtag FOR SHAVUOT FOR TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT

On Shavuot night, the study of Torah takes on an added dimension, as we mark the anniversary of Matan Torah. This includes not only the minhag of learning throughout the night, but also HOW we learn. In other words, our learning should be more ACTIVE than passive. Towards this end, I have opted this week to write questions for self study, as opposed to a regular ('spoon fed') shiur in the hope that they will facilitate a more active manner of learning.

So, in case you are looking for a 'structured' learning program for Shavuot night, with or without a chavruta, I am sending out some 'preparation questions' which deal with Ma'amad Har Sinai and Shavuot.

chag samayach  
menachem

## BACKGROUND

In Chumash, we find several 'conflicting' accounts of the events which took place at Ma'amad Har Sinai. Considering that this is probably the most important event in our national history, it is important that we study the Torah's presentation of this event carefully.

The following is a list of "mkorot" (sources) in Chumash which deal with Ma'amad Har Sinai. I have also included several questions and pointers to various commentators which you should think about as you read.

## ff=PART ONE/ MA'AMAD HAR SINAI IN CHUMASH IN SEFER SHMOT

### I. AS A REASON YETZIAT MITZRAYIM

- A. 3:7-12 (at the burning bush)
- B. 5:1-3 (Moshe request to Pharaoh)
- C. 7:14-16 (the request before each plague)
- D. 12:29-32 (Pharaoh's reaction to makat bchorot)
- E. 15:22-27 (What happened after 'three days')
- F. 19:1-6 (The actual arrival at Har Sinai)

1. Bnei Yisrael request from Pharaoh that he allow them to "worship their God on this mountain" ["taavdun Elokim b'Har hazeh"] (see 3:12 and 5:3). Does Pharaoh ever answer this request?

2. If so, do Bnei Yisrael actually 'worship Him' at Har Sinai? If so, when and where?

[See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Rashbam on 3:12!]  
[Read 12:29-32 carefully!]

### II. SHMOT 19:1-20:18 - MA'AMAD HAR SINAI WHO WAS WHERE WHEN THE DIBROT WERE GIVEN? [or WHO HEARD WHAT?]

\* Begin by reading perek 19 and breaking it into four distinct sections. Try to give a title for each section (the sections as listed below).

[If you have time, follow Rashi, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni as you read each section.]

- A. 1-8 / What proposition is being made? Should Bnei Yisrael say yes, how will it be fulfilled?

B. 9-15 / Why is this three-day preparation necessary?

\* Read Rashi on pasuk 9 carefully! What question is Rashi referring to?

Use the contradiction between psukim 9 and 11 to explain Rashi's shita. According to this shita, why is the three day preparation necessary?

\* "bim'shoch ha'yovel..." /pasuk 13 - Is the long blow of the shofar a sign that Matan Torah is over or about to begin? (relate to 19:19!)

C. 16-19 / the "hitgalut" (revelation)

\* Why were the people in the 'camp' (pasuk 16)?

\* Why did Moshe have to 'take them out' to Har Sinai? Would they have not come on their own?

\* "Moshe y'daber, v'ha'Elokim ya'anenu b'kol"

Who is Moshe speaking to: 1) the people; or 2) God?

What did he say? See Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban!

[Did you ever notice this before?]

\* Where are Bnei Yisrael standing at this time?

Relate to Dvarim 5:4-5!

D. 20-25 / "mitzvot hagbalah" - [limitation]

\* Note the use of "rosh ha'har" (the TOP of the mountain) in these psukim, as opposed to the use of only "Har Sinai" up until this point. What is the significance of this?

\* Relate this to the structure of the Mishkan - relate also to pasuk 24, see Rashi!

\* Why is this mitzvah: 'not to approach the mountain' - being repeated now? Does Moshe himself understand why? Read all five psukim, and then explain precisely what has changed (note 24)?

\* According to those commentators who explain that pasuk 19 included the dibrot (or at least some of them), when did psukim 20-25 take place?

\* Pasuk 25 - "va'yomer aleihem"- what did Moshe say when he came down? [The dibrot?] What did you think the first time you read this pasuk? Why?

E. The Dibrot : 20:1-14

\* Note the difference in 'person' between the first two dibrot and the last eight.

How does the Chizkuni explain the reason for this?

Can there be any other explanation?

\* Do the "dibrot" contain TEN: 1) mitzvot; 2) statements; or 3) parshiot?

Explain each possibility.

How do we know that there were TEN dibrot?

[After you answer, see Dvarim 4:11-13. In your opinion, does this relate to the name of Sefer Dvarim?]

\* If we divide these ten into two "luchot" (tablets), where should they be divided? How does this relate to their content?

\* Are these ten mitzvot qualitatively different than the remaining mitzvot? If not, why are they special, or are they?

F. 20:15-18 / THE PEOPLE'S FEAR OF THE HITGALUT

A major controversy exists over when these four psukim took place. Ibn Ezra claims that this event took place AFTER Matan Torah, while Ramban claims that this took BEFORE Matan Torah. Chizkuni explains that it happened DURING Matan Torah!

\* Read the parallel account in Dvarim 20:20-30, and explain the reason for this machloket.

[See the mforshim inside!]

G) 20:19-23:33 The MITZVOT AND THE MISHPATIM

When, Where, and to Whom were these mitzvot given?

\* Why didn't the people hear them directly, like the dibrot? When did they hear them from Moshe? Why are specifically these mitzvot given at this time, as opposed to the remaining mitzvot which were given on to Moshe during his forty days on Har Sinai?

Relate all your answers to 24:3-7!

\* Is all of Parshat Mishpatim - mishpatim?

If not, which mitzvot are not?

\* How is 23:20-33 different than the mitzvot which precede it? What do they constitute? Why?

H) 24:1-11 / The BRIT AT HAR SINAI

Another major controversy exists over when these events took place. Rashi, (and anyone else who claims that Bnei Yisrael proclaimed "na'aseh v'nishma" before Matan Torah), explains that this covenant took place BEFORE Matan Torah. Ramban claims that it took place AFTERWARDS.

\* According to each opinion, what is the meaning of "divrei Hashem" & "ha'mishpatim" in 24:3?

\* Accordingly, what is "sefer ha'brit" in 24:7?

\* Ramban's approach appears to be most logical, what causes Rashi to differ (relate to 19:7-8) and to the word "va'yavoh" there and in 24:3.

\* According to either opinion, what is the purpose of this covenantal ceremony?

\* Explain Bnei Yisrael's statement of "na'aseh v'nishma" (according to Ramban's shita) based on 23:22 and the nature of this "brit" and the mitzvot which precede it. [Which word should Bnei Yisrael have said first? / (cute?)]

\* Why are certain leaders now permitted to 'see' God, while at Har Sinai they were warned against doing so (see 19:20-24)?

What is the meaning of their ascent to Har Sinai to bow down before God, at the conclusion of this ceremony (relate to 24:1,9-11)?

I) 24:12-18 MOSHE'S ASCENT TO RECEIVE THE LUCHOT

Does MOSHE tell Bnei Yisrael how long he is going for? What does he tell them.

\* Who are the people to go to if a problem arises?

Who did they go to? (What happened to Chug?)

\* Relate your answers, and the ceremony described in 24:4-6, to the events that take place at "chet ha'egel"!

SEFER DVARIM f==

A. 4:9-15 / NOT TO FORGET WHAT HAPPENED AT HAR SINAI

Read these psukim carefully, and in their context within the entire parsha 4:1-24.

\* Although this appears to be a mitzvah not to forget the events which took place at Har Sinai, this commandment is coming in the context of a more general prohibition against making an image to represent God. The main reason why the events of Har Sinai are mentioned is to remind Bnei Yisrael that they so no image of God at Ma'amad Har Sinai, and for that reason, they should not make any image of him in the future, even for good intentions! [Note 4:15.]

\* Explain why this warning is of special importance at this time, as Moshe is about to leave them as their leader. [What happened the last time they thought that he was gone?] Use your answer to explain the inclusion of 4:21-23 at the conclusion of this parsha.

## B. 5:1-18 / THE DIBROT IN SEFER DVARIM

\* Psukim 5:1-5 comprise not only an introduction to the "dibrot" in Sefer Dvarim, but also an introduction to the main speech of Moshe Rabeinu.

Explain why the "dibrot" begin this speech.

Relate this to the concept of "brit" and 5:2-3 & 4:13.

\* Read 5:4-5 carefully. Is there a discrepancy between these two psukim?

\* What did happen at Matan Torah - did Hashem speak through Moshe and directly to the people?

Relate this to the machloket Ramban, Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni in Shmot perek 20:15.

\* According to 5:5, should (or could) have Bnei Yisrael been on Har Sinai at the time of Matan Torah? Relate your answer to the two possible understandings of "bmshoch ha'yovel..." (Shmot 19:13) noted above!

\* 5:6-18 the DIBROT

In what way in the mitzvah of shabbat here different than in Shmot? Is it only "zachor v'shamor"?

What is the respective REASON for shabbat in each?

What other mitzvot in Chumash have both these aspects? (Relate this to the laws of "shmita".)

\* Why is the phrase "ka'asher tzivcha Hashem elokecha" used specifically in Sefer Dvarim and not in Shmot?

(See 5:11,12,15,16.)

## C) 5:19-28 / THE PEOPLE'S FEAR OF THE HITGALUT

Compare this parsha to Shmot 20:15-18. What details are the same, what details are different? Are these two accounts describing the same event?

If yes, why then are there so many discrepancies?

If no, when did each take place?

What is Ramban's conclusion in Shmot 10:15?

[Read that Ramban carefully.]

\* In what way is God's reaction to Bnei Yisrael's fear in Dvarim different from Moshe's reaction to their fear in Shmot? Can you explain why?

\* Read 5:27-6:4 carefully. How are the events that took place at Har Sinai (5:20-27) related to Moshe Rabeinu's main speech in Sefer Dvarim (prakim 5->26)? Use this to explain why this story begins his speech.

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## EXTRA CREDIT

1. Had Bnei Yisrael not become fearful during Ma'amad Har Sinai, would there have been more than ten 'dibrot'?

In what manner would have the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim and/or Sefer Dvarim been given?

2. See the Rambam's explanation of Ma'amad Har Sinai in Moreh Nvuchim: Section II/ chapter 33! [See also the end of chapter 32 where he introduces chapter 33.]

Which "shita" (of the mforshim noted above) does Ramban follow? How does he relate the various midrashim of Chazal?

## ff PART TWO - SHAVUOT AND MATAN TORAH

1. Read carefully the following sources, which includes every instance when Shavuot is mentioned in the Torah:

A. Shmot 23:14-17 / 34:22-24;

B. Vayikra 23:15-21;

C. Bamidbar 28:26;

D. Dvarim 16:9-12.

In each of the above, what is the reason which the Torah gives for its celebration? What is the primary mitzvah which must be performed on Shavuot?

2. Is the fact that Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah ever mentioned in any of these sources? Why not?

3. Does Chumash ever mention precisely when Matan Torah took place? Read Shmot 19:1-2 carefully, see Rashi.

What can we infer from Shmot 24:15-16?

4. Given that Yom Kippur marks the date on which Moshe came

down with the second Luchot, and based on the description of the events of chet ha'egel is Dvarim 9:9-10:11 (note the mention of forty days in 9:9,18,25 & 10:10), can we determine a more precise date for Matan Torah?

5. Does the Torah tell us the precise date of when we left Egypt? Is that date commemorated? How many other specific mitzvot commemorate Yetziat Mitzrayim? How many specific mitzvot commemorate Matan Torah?

Why do you think the Torah never tells us the precise date of Matan Torah?

In other words, in what way is the event of Matan Torah different than Yetziat Mitzrayim? See Rashi Shmot 19:1!

6. In the Torah's presentation of the other two "shalosh r'galim", chag ha'matzot and chag ha'succot, we find mention of their historical significance (Shmot 13:3-7, Vayikra 23:43) as well as their agricultural perspective. In what way is Shavuot different?

Had Bnei Yisrael been worthy and thus gone directly from Mitzrayim to Har Sinai, when would have Matan Torah taken place? Would Shavuot still have been celebrated? If so, when?

7. Where in Parshat Emor (Vayikra perek 23) do you think the historical aspect of Shavuot should have been mentioned? [Relate to 23:9-22, especially pasuk 22!]

Does pasuk 22 belong where it is? Is there any similar pasuk anywhere else in Vayikra perek 23?

Where does pasuk 22 belong (see Vayikra 19:9)?

Now, read Vayikra 19:1-18, noting the use of the phrase "Ani Hashem", and the parallel between these mitzvot and the dibrot! Where is this 'shared pasuk' with Parshat Emor located? Could there be a hidden connection here to Matan Torah?

8. Note that in the special korban that comes with the "shte ha'lechem" in Emor (23:17-19), a korban shlamim is included. This is the only time during the entire year when the "tzibur" offers a korban shlamim. Relate this to the special korban offered at Ma'amad Har Sinai (Shmot 24:4-6).

Note that the only other instance when Bnei Yisrael offered a shlamim was during the dedication of the Mishkan "b'yom ha'Shmini" (see Vayikra 9:1-4).

Try to explain the significance of this korban shlamim?

9. How does the dedication of the Mishkan relate to Matan Torah? (See shiur on Parshat Trumah- Tzaveh.)

The other special korban brought on "Yom Ha'Shmini" (the seir l'chatat of the Am and "par chatat" of Aharon etc.) finds its parallel in the korban tzibur offered on Yom Kippur. Relate this to the connection between Matan Torah and Yom Kippur (the day Moshe descended Har Sinai with the second luchot!).

Why do you think that these two aspects of the "yom ha'shmini" korban (the chatat and shlamim), continue in this manner on these two holidays (Yom Kippur and Shavuot)?

10. Another special law concerning the "shte ha'lechem" is the fact that it is to be baked "chametz". How does this relate to chag ha'matzot, and the connection between chag ha'matzot and chag ha'shavuot.

How do the special agricultural mitzvot of these two holidays relate to the nature of the historical events which they commemorate?

That should keep you busy. Most of the points raised in the above questions have been dealt with in the Parsha shiurim over the last year, however, learning the sources on your own should enable you to arrive at a better appreciation of the "sugya".

If I have a chance, I will send (before yom-tov) a few re-edited shiurim which deal with the issues raised above. So remember to check your e-mail before yom-tov.

chag Matan Torah samayach, menachemenayim l'torah shavuot

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SHAVUOT AND MATAN TORAH "Menachem Leibtag  
<ml@etzion.org.il>"  
YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT  
(VBM)

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## SHAVUOT & MATAN TORAH

Ask any observant Jew, and he will tell you that Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah, just as Pesach commemorates Yetziat Mitzraim. Nevertheless, according to Chumash, it appears that Shavuot is only an agricultural holiday, with no connection at all to 'Matan Torah'! How could it be that the Torah 'neglects' the primary reason for Shavuot?

### PART I - MATAN TORAH: AN UNCOMMEMORATED EVENT

Yetziat Mitzraim (the Exodus) and Ma'amad Har Sinai are probably the two most important events in our national history. Nevertheless, the Torah calls upon us to commemorate these two events in dramatically different ways.

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 even ALL YEAR ROUND: e.g. "mitzvat bikkurim" (bringing the first fruits to Yerushalayim), tfillin, shabbat, and the daily recital of "kriyat shma", etc., all of which the Torah relates to the Exodus (i.e. "zecher l'yitziat mitzrayim").

In contrast, the Torah's approach to Ma'amad Har Sinai is totally different. Nowhere in Chumash do we find a specific mitzvah whose purpose is to commemorate this event. [Sefer Dvarim does require that we not forget the events that transpired at Har Sinai (see 4:9-16), but that requirement is related to the prohibition to make any image of God. / See Hasagot HaRamban to Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam- Lo Ta'aseh #2.]

Furthermore, the Torah does not even tell us the precise day on which Matan Torah took place. While the precise day (and even time of day) of the Exodus is mentioned numerous times, Chumash never reveals the precise day on which Matan Torah took place. We are only informed that Bnei Yisrael arrived at Har Sinai in the third month:

"In the third month of Bnei Yisrael's departure from the land of 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 & B.T. Shabbat 86b). Thus, even if we assume (see Rashi 19:1- "b'yoam hazeh") that Bnei Yisrael arrived on the first day of the month, the lack of a clear chronology in the subsequent events still makes it impossible to pinpoint that date.

Why does the Torah PURPOSELY obscure the date of Matan Torah? Why does it not leave us with any specific mitzvah to commemorate that event?

The Torah's implicit message may be that Matan Torah is not an historically bound event. EVERY DAY we must feel as though the Torah was given TODAY. This concept is reflected in the Midrash:

"... 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!" (quoted by Rashi Shmot 19:1)

Every generation must feel that it has entered into a covenant with God (see Dvarim 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 would diminish from that meta- historical dimension.

But without a commemorative mitzvah, how is Matan Torah to be perpetuated? As we explained in our study of Sefer Shmot, that is precisely the purpose of the Mishkan (see Ramban on Shmot 25:1). As we will see in our shiurim on Sefer Dvarim, this is also the purpose of "ha'Makom asher yivchar Hashem" (the site which God will choose to make His Name great/ in the time of David ha'melech - the city of Jerusalem is chosen as this site). By ascending to Jerusalem on a regular basis (Dvarim 12:5-14), be it:

- \* to celebrate the "shalosh r'galim" (16:1-17);
- \* to eat and share our "maasrot" (tithes / 14:22-27);
- \* to ask judgement or guidance from the Kohanim (17:8-11);
- \* to gather for the mitzvah of Hakhel (31:10-13); we re-enact the experience

of Har Sinai.

In contrast, there is no need to re-enact the experience of Yetziat Mitzrayim, rather it is important that we REMEMBER that event. 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 redemption.

Yetziat Mitzrayim was, and should remain, a one time event in our history - our national birth. Matan Torah is totally different! It is an event which 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 event of Matan Torah.

Obviously not. In Chumash itself, we find numerous hints to their connection. Any student can figure out that Shavuot falls out 'more or less' at the same time of year that Matan Torah took place. Is it thinkable that such an important date in our history would not be commemorated on its anniversary?

By relating to Shavuot as "zman Matan Torateinu" - the time of year when the Torah was given - Chazal present us with an important message, as we find 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.

On "leil ha'seder (Passover eve), 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.

### PART II - THE BIBLICAL HINTS

Although the Torah does not explicitly relate 'Matan Torah' to Shavuot, there is ample textual evidence that an implicit connection does exist between the two.

We will present two examples;

#### 1) THE SHTEI HA'LECHEM

The primary parsha that details the special laws of Shavuot is parshat ha'moadim in Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23:15-21). That parsha discusses the special korban of the "shte ha'lechem", offered at the conclusion of the 50 days of "Sfirat Ha'omer". Together with the shte 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 "shte ha'lechem".]

There are two unique aspects of the "shte ha'lechem" (the special korban of Shavuot).

- 1) It is the only korban 'mincha' offered by the tzibur which is baked 'chametz' (all other m'nachot 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 shte 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 "shte 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.

[The commandment that we offer "shte" (TWO) "ha'lechem", may also relate to the TWO LUCHOT of the dibrot./ See Dvarim 5:19]

#### 2) KORBAN SHLAMIM

Shavuot is the ONLY holiday when the tzibur brings a korban shlamim! To understand the significance of this korban, we must find its biblical precedent.

At the end of Parshat Mishpatim (Shmot 12:1-11), the Torah describes the special covenantal ceremony which takes place at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [It is during this ceremony when Bnei Yisrael proclaim "na'aseh v'nishma",

marking their acceptance of His covenant of Matan Torah.]

That ceremony also included the offering of special korbanot: OLOT u'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 original offering of a korban shlamim takes place at "Ma'amad Har Sinai"! Since Shavuot is the only instance when the "tzibur" is commanded to offer this type of korban, we can assume that it relates the holiday of Shavuot to Ma'amad Har Sinai. ff

It's a few hours before yom-tov, so that will be all for now, Parshat Naso iy"h will be sent out next week, according to the calendar in chutz la'arezt. My apologies to our subscribers in eretz yisrael.

chag sameyach,  
menachem

NOTE:

On "Yom ha'Shmini"- the day of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan - we find the only other instance when we find that the tzibur offers a korban shlamim. Here again, the korban shlamim symbolizes the re-establishment of the covenant of Har Sinai, which was broken due to the sin of the golden calf. Considering that Mishkan itself serves to perpetuate Har Sinai, again we find the same thematic connection.

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YomTov: Shavu'os and Megillas Rus by Rabbi Yaakov Prero  
YomTov, vol. II # 12 Week of Shavu'os Topic: Shavu'os and Megillas Rus

The Megilla of Rus (Ruth) is read on the holiday of Shavu'os. The author of the Megilla, our sages tell us, was Shmuel HaNavi, the prophet Samuel. There are many commentators who have given reasons explaining the connection between Shavu'os and Megillas Rus. (For some reasons, see vol. I, 26.) However, an answer to a question posed in the Medrash gives us a particularly important understanding of the connection between Shavu'os and Megillas Rus. In the Medrash Rabbah on Rus (2:14), we find the following question: Rav Zaeira said "This Megilla (of Rus) does not tells of the laws of purity and impurity...Why was it written?" The question, however, does not have to end here. We can question further. Even once we know a reason for why it was written, why was it necessary to include it among the Scriptures? In order to understand the answers, a little background about an issue of Halacha that was of concern at the time of Rus is needed. Generally,

according to Halacha, gentiles are allowed to join the nation of Israel through conversion. However, there are certain nations that the Torah explicitly lists whose members may not join the nation of Israel. The Torah states "Lo yavo Amoni U'Moavi b'kahal Hashem," "An Ammonite or a Moavite shall not enter into the assembly of G-d." As Rus was from the nation of Moav, how could it happen that not only was she permitted to convert, but she also married one of the most respected, distinguished, and wisest men of her generation, Boaz ?

The answer lies in the verse cited above. The verse says that a "Moavi," a male Moavite, can enter into the nation of Israel. However, the verse does not say that a "Moavis," a female Moavite, can not enter into the nation of Israel. Boaz understood that the law was a female Moavite was indeed allowed to convert, and therefore Rus' conversion and marriage to a Jew presented no problems. This Halachik ruling about the status of a female Moavis, however, was not widely known amongst the nation of Israel. Many thought that no person, male or female, from the nation of Moav was allowed to convert to Judaism. This understanding of the law not only presented problems in the time of Rus, but also in the time of King David, Rus' great-grandson. In the time immediately proceeding the crowning of David as king and right afterwards, there were those who began to publicly raise doubts as to whether David was of proper, "kosher," lineage, because of his great-grandmother Rus.

Shmuel HaNavi, the author of the Megillas Rus, was the one who anointed David and proclaimed him king. Shmuel saw first hand how weak the knowledge of the nation of Israel was regarding the laws surrounding the conversion of Moavite women. Therefore, Shmuel decided he had to educate the masses in this area. It could even be that Shmuel felt he was obligated to

do such, because he was the one who anointed David as king over the nation of Israel. Therefore, he was the one who had to "defend" what he had done and publicize the fact that David was of proper lineage, according to Jewish law, and more than fit to be king of Israel. The Megilla of Rus accomplished this task. It cleared the air of any doubts as to the lineage of David, from who Moshiach, the Messiah, will descend. It proclaims that a Moavite woman, like Rus, may join the nation of Israel.

It is because of the importance of the underlying message of Rus that not only was it included in Scriptures, but it is read on Shavu'os on well. When Boaz married Rus, there were those that were amazed - the Torah says that a Moavite cannot enter the nation of Israel! Boaz, a leader of the generation, is blatantly violating a law of the Torah! When we read the Megilla, we could ask the same questions, and add to them: How could Moshiach, who will come to redeem the entire nation of Israel, come from such blemished lineage, from a union prohibited by the Torah? The answer is that there are two components of the Torah that was given to us on Sinai by G-d: The Written Torah, and the Oral Torah. It is true that the Written Torah seems to say that Rus' conversion and marriage was forbidden. However, the Oral Torah clarifies the issue for us. It lets us know that the verse only forbade male Moavites from converting. The Oral Torah contains the laws of the Torah and their explanations. Both the Oral and Written Torah were given to the nation of Israel at Sinai. Both need to be followed.

The Megilla of Rus stands for the proposition that the Oral Law was given to us at Sinai, and that the Oral and Written Torah are truly one intertwined gift from G-d. Boaz acted properly based on that which he knew from his study of the Oral Torah. His willingness to act on that which he knew to be the law should send us a message: we must show that we truly believe in the Oral Torah, that we recognize that the Oral Torah was given to us at Sinai. Because of the importance of this message, the Megilla was included in Scriptures. This message also makes the reading of the Megilla on Shavu'os appropriate. On Shavu'os, the day on which we celebrate the fact that we were given the Torah, we demonstrate our belief that the Written and Oral Torah were both given to us on this day by reading the Megilla. By reading the Megilla, we reaffirm our belief in the authenticity of the Oral Torah. On Shavu'os, we affirm and celebrate our acceptance of the Torah, and therefore the Megilla, which tells of this affirmation, is read on Shavu'os. (from Hegyonai Halacha) -----

---R' Yehudah Prero, DaPr@aol.com

: Megillas Rus - A Lesson About the Basics -----  
The guest contributor to this issue is R' Aryeh Winter.

In the last post, we mentioned that the Megilla of Ruth is read on Shavu'os. Ruth, a Moavite, was the daughter-in-law of Na'omi. Na'omi's husband Elimelech and her two sons Machlon and Kilyon died when the family was living outside of the land of Israel. After the death of her husband and children, Na'omi decided to return to her homeland. Ruth insisted on going with her mother-in-law. The two returned to Israel as paupers. Ruth went out to the fields, hoping to collect the part of the harvest which by Jewish Law goes to the poor. Ruth went to the field of Boaz, who was a relative of Elimelech, Ruth's deceased father-in-law, and one of the most respected men of his generation. Boaz, upon finding out that Ruth was collecting in his field, made sure that Ruth collected all that she needed to bring home in order for her and Na'omi to live.

When Boaz met Ruth, he explained to her why he was dealing with her in such a kindly fashion (2:11). He said "It has been told to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law...and that you left your mother and father and your birthplace and you went to a nation that you did not know." The Targum explains that Boaz was also telling Ruth through prophecy that she would merit having the kingship of Israel descend from her on account of these two deeds. The Targum states that Boaz mentioned the deeds in this specific order: First, that she supported her mother-in-law; Second, that she left her idols and parents and converted to a nation she did not know. From the words of the Targum and the order in which these deeds were listed, there seems to be an implication that the first act, the support of Na'omi, is at least equally



responsible for Ruth meriting her great reward.

A question that arises upon reading this is how Boaz could equate these two actions. One action was an incredible act of self-sacrifice. Ruth, our Sages tell us, was the daughter of the king of Moav. Ruth, after the death of her husband, did not return to the comfort of the palace life in which she was raised. Instead, she decided to convert and become part of the Jewish nation! Ruth went from being a princess in a royal court to becoming a pauper, destitute, and dependent upon charity for her very sustenance. The other action of Ruth was an ordinary kindness. It was a daughter-in-law helping her elderly mother-in-law. What was so special about this everyday act that because of it, Ruth would merit to be the mother of Jewish royalty, and even more outstanding, that the act was placed on the same plane as Ruth's extraordinary self-sacrifice in her decision to convert?

The answer is that Boaz is teaching us that even the smallest and seemingly most mundane act, if done with the proper intentions, can be elevated to an act of great self-sacrifice. Ruth, by performing the act of kindness with a pure heart and with every fiber of her being in a desire to do the will of Hashem, raised her small act of kindness above everyone else's similar acts of kindness. Because of this act of kindness, she merited having the monarchy of Israel descend from her. When approaching Shavuot, the day we celebrate the acceptance of the Torah, many of us have lofty goals, ideals, and aspirations which we greatly desire to fulfill. Boaz should remind us that we need to remember the potential greatness in everyday, ordinary acts. When these acts are done properly, we can merit great reward.

---R' Yehudah Prero, DaPr@aol.com

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Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network learn@torah.org P.O. Box 1230 http://www.torah.org/ Spring Valley, NY 10977 (914) 356-3040

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"Arutz 7 - Editor <editor7@jer1.co.il Arutz-7: Urgent Notice and Op-Ed

\*\*\* URGENT NOTICE \*\*\* May 23, 1996 / Sivan 5, 5756

Dear Subscriber, As many houses in Israel are preparing for the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, and the Arutz-7 ship was preparing to end its week's broadcasts and dock in Ashdod for the 2-day Holiday-Shabbat weekend, we received word from informed and reliable sources that Minister of Communications Shulamit Aloni and Minister of Internal Security (Police) Moshe Shahal were planning to send the police to raid the Arutz-7 ship, confiscate our broadcasting equipment and close down the station. The ship and the entire crew will remain outside of Israel's territorial waters for the duration of the holiday, despite the fact that they are very low on gas and water.

Arutz-7 is Israel's one and only independent national radio station (not government-controlled). At any given hour, the station's listenership stands at hundreds of thousands representing a wide and varied audience all of whom will not tolerate such extreme politically-motivated measures and limitations on Freedom of Expression. It is appalling to the Arutz-7 staff to see that in the final and most crucial week before Israel's democratic elections, the current ruling powers would attempt to arbitrarily silence a fully legal and legitimate voice.

Though several illegal radio stations which broadcast from the Tel-Aviv area endangered landing aircraft at Ben-Gurion Airport this week, the Director-General of the Ministry of Communications went on record several times to the Israeli media that Arutz-7 broadcasts did not constitute any interference whatsoever.

The planned raid is clearly reminiscent of the attempt, on the part of Ms. Aloni, to silence the station in the summer of 1995. Based on her false allegation that Arutz-7 had broadcasted from within Israel's territorial waters, Minister Aloni sent the police who seized and smashed delicate equipment onboard. The Arutz-7 management easily refuted her allegation by pointing out that the date upon which she claimed that we had violated the law was within the nine days of Av, a period of mourning on the Jewish Calendar during which it is forbidden by most opinions in Jewish law to play songs. We had announced to our listeners for over a week that we would be

discontinuing our broadcasts for the full nine days.

For the sake of preserving Israel as a democratic country including the basic right of Freedom of Expression, we call upon all fair-minded Israeli citizens and friends abroad to contact government offices, embassies, and consulates to express their grave concern and outspoken opposition to the closing of Arutz-7 (see PHONE NUMBERS bottom of page). It is our prayer and hope that despite the differing opinions of the Israeli population, we will unite as one nation with respect, love, and tolerance for one another.

It being the eve of the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, no news report will appear today. Our next news report will be on Sunday, May 26. We hope that you will enjoy the article below which relates to Shavuot. We invite you to view our "Good News From Israel" web page <<http://www.jer1.co.il/media/arutz7/gross.htm>> which was updated yesterday.

On behalf of Katzele, Arutz-7's General Manager, and the entire staff, we wish you a healthy and happy Shavuot, and a very pleasant weekend, The Arutz-7 Internet Staff

PHONE NUMBERS OF GOV'T OFFICES AND ISRAELI EMBASSIES/  
CONSULATES Prime Minister's Office 3 Kaplan St. P.O.B. 187 Kiryat Ben-Gurion Jerusalem 91919 Tel: 972-2-705555 Fax: 972-2-6512631  
Ministry of Police Kiryat Hamemshala P.O.B. 18182 Jerusalem 91181 Tel: 972-2-308003/847808 Fax: 972-2-847872

Ministry of Communications 23 Yaffo St. Jerusalem 91999 Tel: 972-2-706320/3 Fax: 972-2-706372

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THE TORAH AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE By RABBI ZALMAN B. MELAMED [The Jewish holiday of Shavuot, which commemorates the Jewish People's receiving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, begins this year on the evening of May 23rd] And so, it is more than 3000 years that the Nation of Israel has been keeping the Torah that it received on Mt. Sinai - the Written Torah, together with its commentary, the Oral Torah. Between the two of them, we have a precious, elaborate guide that regulates the existence of the People of Israel. In the history of mankind, there is no other example of such a detailed tradition of a national way of life that has lasted 3000 years, and that still retains its vitality and relevance. The Torah has withstood all the tests of time, has outlasted all "modern" developments, overcomes various crises, and comes out all the stronger.

Many powers in many generations attempted to use their strength to separate us from our Torah, but the pressure was invariably shunted aside. With tremendous self-sacrifice, Israel always zealously guarded its Torah. Various ethical and social world-views have arisen in the world, lasted for a certain amount of time, and then either collapsed, or changed. Not so the Torah; the Torah never changes. Yes, there were crises of faith in our history, as we mention in our prayers, "Because of our sins, we were exiled from our Land." But in every generation, a fundamental remnant always remains, to transmit the torch of Torah throughout our history.

The world has made giant strides forward in many areas over the past few generations. Science has advanced, as have social and moral theories, to the extent that many people even thought that the solutions to all problems would soon be found, and the need for Torah would dissipate. Yet the truth was very different. The faith of the Torah was able to overcome even this latest wave of modernity, and again the Torah has returned to Israel, and Israel is returning to the Torah. If some decades ago, there were those who predicted that soon there would no longer be any observant Jews in Israel, there are now those who "worry" that the State may soon have a religious majority. This is a realistic possibility not only in the eyes of the religious, whose tradition it is that at some point, all of the world's Jews will return to their Jewish roots - but also according to those who call themselves secular. Our historical experience has shown that, as our Rabbis have said, "Israel and the Torah are one entity." There were crises, and there were periods of regression, but paradoxically, they were often the catalysts for a re-enforcement of the absolute bonds connecting Israel and the Torah. In a few days, on the Shavuot holiday, we will celebrate another year of our acceptance of the Torah, and our entering into an eternal covenant with

Hashem. "How fortunate we are, how good is our lot, and how pleasant is our portion, and how beautiful is our inheritance." Shalom, and happy Shavuot holiday.

Rabbi Melamed is the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Arutz-7, and Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of the Bet-El Yeshiva Center.

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CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTION INFORMATION:

""Yeshivat Har Etzion" <yhe@jer1.co.il>" Subject: A Request For Your Support...

Please give a copy of this letter to whomever you regularly forward the VBM shiurim. Likhvod talmideinu bechol atar ve-atar

Dear student,

It has taken a while - longer than we expected - but we have finally tabulated the results of the questionnaire we sent out before Pesach. Six hundred and sixty seven answers were received. All in all, the responses were quite favorable, including several positive suggestions which we will attempt to implement. I only hope that the results are indicative of those who for whatever reason were unable to respond.

Which brings me to another topic. The shiurim of the VBM are free and will continue to be so. However, while free, it is not true that they don't cost money. In fact, our expenses are quite significant, and this despite the fact that much of the work is done by volunteers. Until now, Yeshivat Har Etzion has dipped into its own deficit-laden budget to cover our costs, but the Yeshiva needs to be relieved of that burden.

And so, I turn to you, those who I have reason to believe are most able to appreciate the VBM. I am asking you to make a voluntary contribution in lieu of tuition. Next year we are planning to continue existing courses as well as develop new ones, while widening our scope to new segments of the Jewish community. We will not be able to do so, maintaining our standards, if we cannot plan a budget now.

I think our students fall into three categories.

1 - Those who learn every week with us and think it is great. For them, the donation is worth it. 2 - Those - hopefully very few - who think it is a waste of disk space but haven't gotten to unsubscribing. 3 - Those who have intended to keep up but have found themselves at the end of this semester with a great pile of unread and skimmed shiurim. First of all, the summer is a great time to set aside regularly the missing hours to catch up. Secondly, you have an additional reason to pay. I personally have found that payment has a wonderful effect on my powers of concentration and ability to organize my time effectively.

We suggest the following voluntary tuition for the year.

	Students, etc.	Gainfully employed
1-2 courses:	\$ 36	\$ 75
3 courses:	\$ 54	\$ 125
4 courses:	\$ 65	\$ 165
5 or more courses	\$ 75	\$ 200

Naturally, if you cannot afford this, send less. On the other hand, if you can afford it, any additional donation will be used to improve and widen the global reach of Torah, coming to the home of every Jew we can find. This is therefore a wonderful place to invest your ma'aser kesafim. Your generosity will be greatly appreciated.

Please keep learning with us, passing on our address and copies of the shiurim to your friends. Pass on this letter to your friends who get hard copies as well - they are our students as much as you are. Our first and utmost concern is harbatzat Torah. And if you can, we will appreciate - and put to good use - your support. This is the time - once a year - to express your regard for what you have received.

You should receive a donation form in your mailbox. PLEASE fill it out and return it to us - this is very important for our bookkeeping. Donations are tax deductible. Checks should be payable to Yeshivat Har Etzion and sent to:

In the US The Etzion Foundation, 160 Broadway, Suite 1000, New York, NY 10038 USA

Outside of the US Yeshivat Har Etzion Alon Shevut, 90433 Gush Etzion,

ISRAEL

Please mark "Virtual Beit Midrash" on the back of your check. Thank you Be-birkat ha-Torah mi-Tzion Ezra Bick

VBM Donation Form

Please e-mail response back to: YHE@jer1.co.il

VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH

I am sending a check in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_ as a donation in lieu of tuition.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ If you are an alumnus of the Yeshiva, please list your machzor. \_\_\_\_\_

Send check, payable to Yeshivat Har Etzion, to:

In the US The Etzion Foundation

160 Broadway, Suite 1000

New York, NY 10038 USA

Please mark "Virtual Beit Midrash" on the back of your check. Thank you.

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[From last week's e-mail:] I see (looking at our books) that we are victims of our own success, and a persistent Internet myth. Our own success, because we need more staff to serve you properly, answer the questions that come on a daily basis, and to provide new services to our growing audience. And an Internet myth, namely, "the Internet is free, didn't you know that?"

[I should note that the conjunction of this appeal with this week's Dvar Torah was not designed by me. I wrote the appeal, and \_then\_ decided to say something from my wife's grandfather (which, I suppose, makes the Dvar Torah about our parents' honor quite appropriate as well...). I was quite surprised to discover that he spoke this week about the Jewish trait of giving generously and lovingly!]

Project Genesis is in a pretty unique situation. Commercial organizations on the Internet pay for their web sites as worthwhile advertising - or as an opportunity to sell ads to others. Most Jewish organizations are able to raise money for their Internet staff as part of their overall budget, or at least to present themselves as the Internet version of a large and familiar organization. Most companies and organizations need not depend upon their Internet audiences as a critical part of their funding.

We must. When any organization is falling short, they turn to their "core constituency" first. \_You\_ are our core constituency! If you read our materials, print them out, pass them around or quote them, then we must ask you to help us first - because only then can we fairly ask others, who do not benefit so directly, to help our organization to survive and flourish.

So, we're asking: please join us in our "Chanukas HaBayis" campaign, which will culminate with the opening of our new offices at the end of June.

If you would like to help us to go forward, then please consider a \$36 "subscriber" donation, or even \$10 for students and those just starting out.

Every dollar counts - even the "counting" alone is worthwhile. By sending even one dollar, you declare your recognition of the value of Torah learning through this project, and make yourself a part of it; the donation of a single half-shekel coin showed that the giver was part of the Jewish people.

If you see the potential of an independent, unaffiliated Internet program for Jewish outreach and education, and would like to see us grow and introduce new programs, then please take a membership in Project Genesis for \$108. Has any synagogue ever asked so little for membership? If even 10% of our subscribers became members, our troubles would be over!

Being that that is a most unlikely dream, the opportunity exists for those who believe in "non-profit venture capital" to turn our small effort into a truly professional organization. Dedications are also available - the learning of thousands of people is no small merit, and we want to provide that to your loved ones on our mailing lists and web site.

Please be in touch if you have questions - if you simply need an address for your tax-deductible contribution, it is found below. Please send your email address - we'll send an immediate, electronic acknowledgment, and put the 32 cents to work for the program! [For donations over \$250, the IRS requires a

printed receipt, which we will send by mail.]  
Good Shabbos, Rabbi Yaakov Menken  
Project Genesis, the Jewish Learning Network P.O. Box 1230 Spring Valley,  
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shamash.org (8.7.1/8.6.12) with SMTP id MAA08788 for  
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23 May 96 9:17 PDT  
From: Josh Rapps <jr@sco.COM>  
X-Mailer: SCO OpenServer Mail Release 5.0  
To: mj-ravtorah@shamash.org  
Subject: Shiur HaRav on Chag Hashavuos  
Date: Thu, 23 May 96 12:17:01 EDT  
Message-ID: <9605231217.aa14363@jade.newjersey.sco.com>

shavuos

Shiur HaRav Soloveichik on Chag HaShavuos

The Rav noted that the Torah speaks of 3 festivals, Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos. Shavuos is closely connected to Pesach. The Chinuch was the first to emphasize this connection as part of his discussion of the Mitzvas Sefiras Haomer. The Chinuch says that Kabbalas Hatorah, that the Jews would accept and keep the Torah, was the ultimate purpose and goal of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The Chinuch quotes the verse "And this shall be your sign that I have sent you, that you shall worship Hashem on this mountain after the exodus from Egypt" (Shemos 3:12).

Moshe offered 2 reasons as to why he was not the man for the job of taking the Jewish People out of Egypt:

- 1) Who am I (Moshe)  
that I should appear before Paroh to demand the release of the Jewish People. I do not possess the typical qualities a political leader needs. I am tongue-tied and would make a poor ambassador to Paroh. Hashem answered that He will accompany him before Paroh and aid Moshe as needed.
- 2) Moshe said who am I that I should take the people out of Egypt. I am not worthy to be a political leader, to be the leader of Klal Yisrael. Hashem rejected this reason saying after the exodus you shall worship Hashem on this mountain. How does this answer Moshe's concern?

Hashem indicated to Moshe that were He interested in creating a separate political and social entity out of Bnay Yisrael, simply another nation among all other nations, indeed Moshe would not have been the correct choice to lead the people. However the purpose for taking the Jews out of Egypt was that they should become a kingdom of priests and a sanctified nation. In order to accomplish this they do not need a politician to lead them, rather they need a teacher, a Rebbe. For this job, you, Moshe, are superbly qualified. The Exodus from Egypt was simply a pre-requisite to the events that would take place on Mount Sinai. For the events at Mount Sinai, Moshe was indispensable. According to the Chinuch, we count Sefiras Haomer to connect the events of the exodus with those at Mount Sinai.

The Rav elaborated on the connection between Sefira and Shavuos. Chazal discuss the 4 terms of redemption in Parshas V'ayra as representing 4 distinct levels of redemption, similar to the rungs of a ladder where each one is higher than the next, yet one can not reach the higher steps without stepping through the lower ones. 3 of the levels of redemption were accomplished on the night and day of the 15 of Nissan. The levels of Vhotzaysi (and I will take them out), Vhitzalti (and I will save them) and Vgaalti (and I will redeem them) were accomplished right away. However the fourth level

that of Vlakachti (and I will take you to Me as a nation), required a waiting period of 50 days till Shavuos. Both Shavuos and Pesach are connected with the process of redemption, as together they comprised the totality of the redemption process.

The Rav explained that Pesach and Shavuos represented 2 different types of redemption. Pesach was characterized by the physical redemption of the people from slavery to Egypt and Paroh. As the Torah says, that Hashem will take the people out (Vhotzaysi) from the oppression of Egypt, that Hashem will rescue (Vhitzalti) them from their slave labor and that He will redeem them (Vgaalti) with a mighty hand. These types of redemption were also intended to show respect for Bnay Yisrael. After all, they had been slaves in Egypt for years, and as slaves were shown no respect or allowed any dignity.

The Rav noted that the Geulas Mitzrayim was accomplished by Hashem in a way that it was clear that He was responsible for the events. Moshe acted as a robot in the sense that he was told to lift his stick in order to begin a plague. This is why we do not mention Moshe in the Haggadah as a part of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, as it was Hashem alone who took us out of Egypt, Ani Vlo Malach. When this redemption came, it arrived very quickly and the people were forced to leave without even preparing provisions for the journey. Matzah, the bread that is not allowed time to rise, is the symbol of the speed with which the levels of redemption took place in Egypt.

The fourth level of redemption, Vlakachti, required preparation. At this stage, Moshe's role becomes important, as it says that the people camped around Mount Sinai and Moshe went up the Mountain to Hashem. Spiritual redemption, to rid ones self from the slave mentality and personality and be worthy of receiving the Torah, required the individual to make the effort to draw close to Hashem. On the other hand, physical redemption was based on the time and situation: when Hashem recognized that the time of the redemption had arrived, He sought out Moshe immediately. The verses in Shemos regarding the prayers of the people being elevated to Hashem and that Hashem knew that the time of redemption had arrived are immediately followed by the selection of Moshe to lead the people.

Man must redeem himself and rebuild his world through striving to reach higher levels of Kedusha. Only after these efforts are made will Hashem reward him with the final spiritual redemption, Kabbalas Hatorah. Hashem provided man with a blueprint for this redemptive process. The six day period of creation was a pre-requisite for achieving the spiritual high point of Shabbos. When man attempts his own creation in terms of Kedusha he must wait and prepare himself for 7 weeks before he can be deemed worthy of the highest spiritual status, Kabbalas Hatorah. Only then will the final redemptive phase, Vlakachti, be attained. The term Shabbos is used when describing the start and end points of Sefiras Haomer (Mimacharas Hashabbos, Hashabbos Hasheviis) to connect the creation of the world in 6 days (with the ultimate goal of Kedushas Shabbos) to the effort the Jew must make in recreating his world is 7 weeks in order to achieve spiritual redemption and the ultimate goal of Kabbalas Hatorah. Man requires a longer period of time to rebuild his world than hashem needed to create His world. When Hashem appeared to Moshe and instructed him to take the people out of Egypt, He says "Raoh Raeesi". Moshe was unable to see that Bnay Yisrael would merit redemption. However Hashem saw that the people were capable of 2 redemptions. Not only would they have the strength to achieve physical redemption, but they will also be capable of making the effort to achieve spiritual redemption as well. This second redemption of Vlakachti, will happen, and it will happen here, on Mount Sinai, after the exodus.

The Rav noted that this notion of Sefiras Haomer as preparation for the final redemptive level is mentioned in the prayer recited after the counting, that we

were commanded to count  
the Omer to purify ourselves, Ltaharaynu M'klipasynu. We were commanded  
to use the 7 week period of Sefira to re-create  
our world and lives through Kedusha so that we may achieve the heights of  
Vlakachi Eschem Li L'am, through Kabbalas Hatorah.

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Halevi Soloveichik ZTL over many years.

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