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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHAVUOS - 5774

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Practical Halacha Guide for Shavuot

Based on the halachic rulings of Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS Compiled by Rabbi Shay Schachter

Annotated by Rabbi Yehuda Turetsky and Rabbi Etan Schnell

Eating a Meal on Erev Yom Tov:

• One should refrain from eating a large meal on erev Yom Tov in order to eat the Yom Tov meal with an appetite.¹ It is best not to eat a meal in the late afternoon, even if the meal is not elaborate.² In all instances, one should not eat meat on erev Yom Tov.³

Candle Lighting:

• There are two opinions as to whether the bracha on Yom Tov candles should be recited before or after the candles are lit. The generally accepted practice is to recite the bracha before lighting the candles.⁴ • The bracha of Shehechyanu: There is no requirement to recite the bracha of Shehechyanu in conjunction with Kiddush. However, the Talmud (Eruvin 40b) states that the significance of the bracha is enhanced when it is recited in conjunction with Kiddush, and common practice is to act accordingly. R. Akiva Eiger (O.C. 263:5) quotes the opinion of R. Yaakov Emden that women should not recite Shehechyanu when lighting Yom Tov candles, but should instead wait until Kiddush to satisfy the requirement to recite the bracha.⁵ • The mitzvah to light Yom Tov candles should ideally take place in one's home. If one is staying in a hotel, one's private guest room is one's "home."⁶ However, hotels prohibit lighting candles in guest rooms because this poses a fire hazard.⁶ Therefore, the obligation is best fulfilled by turning on an electric light in one's room, provided that it is incandescent (not neon or fluorescent, etc.), as many poskim maintain that a bracha may be recited on a light bulb that contains a filament.⁷ It does not appear proper to light candles in a place where no one will benefit from the light of the candles, and a bracha may not be made in this scenario.⁸

Yahrtzeit Candles:

• Some poskim question whether one is permitted to light a yahrtzeit candle on the second day of Yom Tov in honor of Yizkor. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:1) cites poskim on both sides of the issue and concludes that one should not light such a candle on Yom Tov. He views it as a "ner shel

avtala," a candle whose light does not provide benefit on Yom Tov, and as such may not be lit. Therefore, one should ideally light a yahrtzeit candle on erev Yom Tov (see footnote).⁹

The Shavuot Meal:

• There is a long-standing custom to eat dairy on Shavuot.¹⁰ Mishna Berura (O.C. 494:16, Sha'ar HaTziyun 15) notes the long-standing custom to wait six hours before eating meat if one ate hard cheese.¹¹ R. Soloveitchik ruled that American cheese is certainly not included in the custom.¹²

Staying Up All Night:

• Many question whether a person who remains awake the entire night is obligated to wash his or her hands in the morning. The common practice is to wash one's hands without a bracha. However, if one uses the bathroom prior to washing, one may recite the bracha of Al Netilat Yadayim.¹³ • A similar question exists regarding the Birchot HaTorah. Common practice is to fulfill the obligation by answering amen to the brachot of one who did sleep. One should not recite amen after the phrase "la'asok b'divrei Torah," but after the entire paragraph of "v'ha'arev na" is completed.¹⁴ • It is likewise unclear whether one who remains awake all night may recite the brachot of Elokai Nishama and HaMa'avir Sheina Me'einai. Here, as well, common practice is to find someone who did sleep the previous night and answer amen to that individual's brachot.¹⁵ Amen following HaMa'avir Sheina should not be said until after the bracha that concludes the Yehi Ratzon prayer.

• Those who daven at sunrise (vatikin) should not recite a bracha on the tallit before the halachic time known as mishe'yakir. R. Moshe Feinstein states that in the New York area, this time is approximately 35-40 minutes before sunrise.¹⁶ Because of this concern, the B'nei Yissoschar recommends waiting to don the tallit until the completion of Korbanot (before Baruch She'amar) in order to ensure that one does not don his tallit or make the bracha too early.

Shavuot Davening:

• Staying up late to learn Torah does not exempt one from reciting Keriat Shema in its proper time. The mitzvah of Keriat Shema should ideally be fulfilled during davening—in order to recite Keriat Shema together with the Birchot Keriat Shema—and not beforehand. R. Soloveitchik and many other poskim maintain that it is better to daven without a minyan before sof zman Keriat Shema (the end of the period during which one may recite Keriat Shema) rather than daven with a minyan after this time has elapsed.¹⁷ • Many have the custom to follow the Ba'al HaTanya's practice to recite "ushnei se'irim l'chaper" (as opposed to "v'sa'ir l'chaper") in the Mussaf Amida, in order to make mention of the korban chatat (sin offering) that was offered with the shtei halechem (ritual loaves of bread) of Shavuot.¹⁸ • Megillat Rut is read on the second day of Yom Tov. The custom in our Yeshiva is to read the megilla from a klaf (parchment). Poskim differ as to whether the brachot of Al Mikra Megilla and Shehechyanu are recited when a klaf is used.¹⁹ • When the ba'al koreh reads Megillat Rut from a printed Tanach, etc. it is preferable for individuals to read along quietly. This applies to the reading of the haftarah throughout the year, as well.²⁰ • The aliyah of maftir on the first day of Shavuot should be reserved for an outstanding talmid chacham.²¹ • The custom of our Yeshiva is to omit the recitation of "Yetziv Pitgam" on the second day of Yom Tov.²²

¹ Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 249:2) states this explicitly in regard to erev Shabbat. This is included in the mitzva of honoring Shabbat, which includes preparations done before Shabbat begins. Rema (529:1) rules that this halacha applies to erev Yom Tov as well, for there is also an obligation to honor Yom Tov (see below). See Mishna Berura (249:10) for an additional reason to prohibit large meals. ² Ibid. Shulchan Aruch states that it is a mitzva to avoid eating a standard weekday meal after the ninth halachic hour has passed. Biur Halacha explains that this refers to eating what is sufficient to satisfy him during the week. However, one need not refrain from eating enough to simply quiet his feelings of hunger. ³ Regarding eating meat at a seudat brit milah on erev Shabbat, see Magen Avraham (249:6) who cites a disagreement amongst the Poskim. ⁴ Magen

Avraham (O.C. 263:12) quotes the Drisha's son who records that his mother's practice was to recite the bracha before lighting the candles. While Magen Avraham argues that one should recite the bracha after lighting, the accepted practice is not in accordance with his opinion. See Mishna Berura (263:27). 5 R. Yaakov Emden's position is recorded in his Shut Sheilat Ya'avetz (1:107) and has been accepted by many poskim. Mishna Berura (263:23) rules that one should not protest against those whose custom is to recite Shehechyanu at the time of candle lighting. Achronim present justifications for this practice; see Aruch HaShulchan (263:12) and Moadim U'Zmanim (7:117). 6 R. Schachter cautions that one who lights a candle in a guest room without permission violates the prohibition of theft, as hotel administration does not authorize guests to use rooms in this manner. See R. Asher Weiss, Kovetz Darkei Hora'ah (4:94). 7 It is important to note that this mitzva can be fulfilled by turning on a closet or bathroom light (the bracha must be recited outside of the bathroom). For a summary of poskim who discuss whether one fulfills the mitzva by lighting electric lights, see Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (chap. 43, note 22). 8 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 263:9). 9 Many other poskim accept the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch's ruling; see also Da'at Torah (O.C. 515:5). Shut Ketav Sofer (O.C. 65) permits one to light a yahrzeit candle on Yom Tov, though he believes that it should be lit inside the shul. In his discussion of the issue, Biur Halacha (514 s.v. Ner) writes that if one neglected to light a yahrzeit candle on erev Yom Tov, it is best to light it in shul or at least in the place where one eats in order to benefit from the additional light. Some later poskim have questioned whether Biur Halacha's logic still applies, as it is unlikely that a candle will significantly increase the light in the room in a contemporary setting. Biur Halacha concludes that one may perhaps be lenient in a pressing situation to light the candle because the aforementioned Ketav Sofer argues that a yahrzeit candle is considered a permissible ner shel mitzvah, and not a ner shel avtala, as it provides honor to one's parents. It should be noted that most poskim assume that it is only a custom to light a yahrzeit candle and not a halachic requirement; see Shut Yecheve Da'at (5:60). See also Mishna Berura (261:16) quoting Maharshal who permits one to instruct a non-Jew to light a yahrzeit candle during bein hashmashot of erev Shabbat, due to the unique importance that many associate with this custom. 10 This custom is recorded by Rema (O.C. 494:2). Various reasons are offered for this custom; see Rema and Mishna Berura (ibid.). 11 The custom to wait after eating hard cheese is recorded by Rema (Y.D. 89:2). For this purpose, hard cheese includes types that are aged and somewhat sharp. While Shach (89:17) quotes the Maharshal, who forcefully rejects this stringency, most poskim do not accept his opinion; see, for example, Biur HaGra (89:11), Shach (89:15), Taz (89:4), Yad Yehuda (89:30) and other poskim discuss how to define "hard cheese" for purposes of this halacha. 12 As reported by R. Schachter in Mesorah Journal (vol. 20, pg. 92). For an updated list of contemporary cheeses that may pose a problem, see May 2012 edition of "Daf HaKashrus," published by the Orthodox Union Kashrus Division (http://www.oukasher.org/index.php/learn/daf_ha-kashrus). 13 Rema (O.C. 4:13) requires one to wash without a bracha. Mishna Berura (4:30) notes that later poskim debate whether to accept Rema's ruling or to wash with a bracha. However, poskim agree that one can recite a bracha in this scenario if he or she uses the bathroom first. This appears to be common practice. 14 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 47:12) and Mishna Berura (ibid.). Mishna Berura also cites the ruling of R. Akiva Eiger that one who slept in bed the previous day (prior to staying up the entire night) may recite Birchat HaTorah in the morning according to all opinions. Although some poskim question R. Akiva Eiger's opinion, many poskim endorse this ruling (see Shut Tshuvot V'Hanhagot 3:149, citing the Brisker Rav). 15 Sha'arei Tshuva (O.C. 46:7) and Mishna Berura (O.C. 46:24). 16 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 18:3) and Shut Igrot Moshe (O.C. 4:6). Shemoneh Esrei is scheduled to begin at sunrise, as per Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 89:1). 17 Nefesh HaRav (pg. 114). For more on this subject, see Shut Pri Yitzchak (1:1) and Shut Binyan Olam (O.C. 4). 18 See Siddur Ba'al HaTanya where this practice is recorded. For an alternative perspective, see Shut Igrot Moshe (Y.D. 3:129:7). 19 See Rema (490:9), Levush (490:5), Ma'aseh Rav of the Vilna Gaon (175), Mishna Berura (490:19) and Hilchot Chag B'Chag (Shavuot chap. 8, note 79). 20 See Mishna Berura (284:1) and Shut Chatam Sofer (O.C. 68). See also Magen Avraham (284:5), Sha'arei Ephraim (9:33, cited in Biur Halacha 284:5, s.v. Trei) and Mishna Berura 494:4). 21 Chok Yaakov (494:4). See also Mishna Berura (494:4). 22 See Levush (O.C. 494).

Shavuos is called Z'man Matan Toraseinu. Originally, this event occurred in the Hebrew year 2448 (3324 years ago). As we know, Rav Dessler in his Michtav M'Eliyahu explains that time does not flow as a straight line, but rather as a circle. The day of Shavuos which is the 6th of Sivan is, therefore, the very day that we received the Torah.

Similarly, the Nesivos Shalom explains that just as the Torah is eternal, so too is Kabalas HaTorah eternal. Each and every year there is a new Kabalas HaTorah. In other words, Shavuos is not just a commemoration of our receiving the Torah – it is receiving it once again.

Receiving the Torah is monumental. The entire essence of the nation of Israel is only for Torah (Sefer HaChinuch 273). The entire universe, heavens and earth, were only created for the sake of the Torah (ibid). Receiving the Torah, therefore, requires much preparation. Indeed, the Torah tells us in Parshas Yisro that we needed to prepare for three days – "Heyu nechonim l'shloshes yamim (Shmos 19:15)."

One of the preparations that we make for receiving the Torah is that we learn Pirkei Avos on every Shabbos between Pesach and Shavuos. The Midrash Shmuel explains, "One who will be learning Torah must first know its method of study and how to treat Torah. Therefore, so that the heart of each member of Klal Yisroel will be ready to accept Torah with a complete heart and to properly observe it, they enacted the learning of Pirkei Avos."

ZENITH OF OUR GROWTH

Let us also recall that Shavuos represents the zenith of our spiritual growth. When we left Mitzrayim we were on the lowest level of Tumah – impurity. In a matter of 49 days we experienced record spiritual growth to the point where the nation of Israel at the time was greatest generation that ever lived.

NO LIMIT TO OUR MITZVOS

We should also be aware that there is no limit to the heights and growth we can accomplish in our ruchniyus – indeed in any Mitzvah. This can be seen from a passage of the Targum Yonasan on Sefer Rus. Boaz tells Rus that he is aware of both how she came and joined up the nation of Israel, and also of all the Chessed that she had performed with her mother-in-law. The Targum Yonasan on this Pasuk explains that because they were written next to each other and said in the same breath, these two Mitzvos were equal to each other.

This is somewhat mind-boggling. Rus was a princess of Moav, a very powerful nation. It is a remarkable notion that one of the top women in society would give it all up to become a lowly member of the Jewish nation that must take Tzedakah. Is this lofty Mitzvah equal to the mere Chessed that she does with her mother-in-law?

The answer, according to Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt"l. is that there is no spiritual limit to any Mitzvah that we perform. If we do a Chessed, any Chessed, with the right intentions and Kavannah – it can be equal to the greatest of Mitzvos.

EREV ROSH CHODESH IS PREPARATION TIME

The Shla HaKadosh explains that Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan (Monday Before Shavuos this year) is a special time of preparation in terms of Teshuvah, Tefillah and Tzedakah. This may be based upon the Rashi in Parshas Yisro (19:1-2) that the nation of Israel did Teshuvah on this day when they travelled from Refidim.

The Psukim in the Torah give us the pre-history of Matan Torah:

On Rosh Chodesh Sivan itself Klal Yisroel entered Midbar Sinai, a place wherein Har Sinai is located. On the second of Sivan Moshe was told and gave over to Klal Yisroel the two Parshios of "Atem Ra'isem" and "You shall be for Me a nation of priests and a holy nation." This was when they answered, "Everything that Hashem spoke – we shall do." On the third of Sivan Moshe related to Hashem the words of the nation. Moshe was then told of the Mitzvah of separating. On the fourth of Sivan Moshe was told to go to the nation and sanctify them. He then told them to prepare themselves for three days. The Mechilta (Parshas Yisro) explains that part of the preparations involved the utter unity of the nation – VaYachon Sham Yisroel – b'lev echad k'ish echad – with one heart, like one man. It is clear from this

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Shavuos -An Overview

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

MatanTorah

PREPARING FOR SHAVUOS

Mechilta that there are levels of Dveikus and holiness that cannot be achieved alone but only through a joint and communal effort. We achieved this level at that time. It was through this unique achdus that we merited to say “Naaseh v’Nishmah – we will do and then we will listen.”

Ultimately Hashem placed the very mountain above them like a barrel. The verse tells us that they stood under the mountain – “vayetzatzvu betachtis hahar” (Shmos 19:17) Rashi explains– “Kafah aleihem har k’gigis.”

THE THREE DAYS OF HAGBALLAH

“The essence of these days,” according to the Shaar HaMelech, “is to separate ourselves from all the vanities of this world to be prepared to greet Hashem. In each and every year we should look at ourselves as if we are preparing ourselves for Kabalas HaTorah on the mountain of Sinai.”

The separation means to focus on things spiritual, and avoid an emphasis on aspects of the physical world that take us away from concentrating on Hashem and upon our relationship with Him. Our brachos should therefore be recited with more intensity and concentration, we should avoid unnecessary window shopping and looking at catalogues. Rather, our focus should be on three more important things: 1] improving on Davening, 2] on focusing more on the life lessons inherent in our Torah studies, and 3] upon Chessed. Each of these three brings us ever closer to Hashem Yisbarach.

OTHER NAMES OF SHAVUOS

Another name for the Yom Tov of Shavuos is Atzeres. There are actually two Yomim Tovim with this name. Both of them have a unique and special quality to them that no other Yom Tov has. Shavuos is achieving a state of being alone with Hashem. The Bais Avrohom explains in terms of the Dveikus that can be achieved through the Yomim Tovim that Pesach is considered like the period of engagement and Shavuos is like the very wedding itself. When the mountain was placed upon the nation of Israel like a barrel – it was likened to a Chuppah.

The closeness to Hashem that we achieve at Matan Torah makes Shavuos the ideal time to celebrate the first fruits of the Seven Species with which Eretz Yisroel is blessed. During this time the first fruits were harvested and brought in decorated baskets to the Beis HaMikdash. Thus, another name for Shavuos is Chag HaBikkurim (the Festival of the First Fruits).

Shavuos is also the time when we celebrate the abundant wheat harvest that Hashem has given us. This is why it is called Chag HaKatzir (the Feast of Harvest). It is because Shavuos is also the beginning of the wheat harvest that we bring the shtei haLechem (two loaves) as a meal-offering in the Beis HaMikdash.

SHAVUOS CUSTOMS

No Bloodletting or Testing

The Talmud (Shabbos 129b) tells us that a celestial damager was sent out against the nation of Israel on the day before Shavuos. It’s name was T’voach. By virtue of Klal Yisroel having accepted the Torah, they saved themselves from the destructive fate of T’voach. On the eve of Shavuos we do not engage in any form of bloodletting because of the dangers involved. Indeed, the sages forbade doing so on every Erev Yom Tov on account of Shavuos. The Minhag is cited by the commentators (Darchei Moshe CM 468:3) and the custom in Klal Yisroel is to avoid it unless there is medical need.

Some people have the custom to sleep on Erev Shavuos in order to be able to stay up the entire night on Shavuos. The Mogain Avrohom (OC 290) quotes the Sefer Chasidim that when Erev Shavuos falls on Shabbos, it is forbidden to say that one is resting so that he or she can be awake for the night of Shavuos.

The Minhag of Grass and Trees in Shul

There is a Minhag mentioned by the Ramah in Shulchan Aruch (OC 494) to place grass, flowers, and trees in Shul on Shavuos. One explanation for this is found in the words of the Levush (Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe):

It commemorates the grass that surrounded Har Sinai at the time of Matan Torah. As the verse states, “the sheep and flocks may not graze..” The indication is that grass grew there. It is a worthwhile Minhag to continue

because it helps us relive the experience at Har Sinai – an experience that we actually go through once again.

Another explanation is that it commemorates the bringing of the Bikkurim the first fruits, which were made from baskets woven and decorated from and with grasses and flowers (Ziv HaMinhagim).

Another explanation is that Moshe Rabbeinu was saved on the banks of the Ye’or which had grassy knolls (Chiddushei HaRim – the Gerrer Rebbe).

The Brisker Rav explained that the decorations are a minimum form of decoration and show us that the only means in which one can acquire Torah is if we are satisfied with the minimum and not pursue luxuries and other forms of consumption. Grasses are mentioned in this vein in the Gemorah Eiruvim 22a by Rabbi Adda Bar Ahava (Moadim L’Simcha p. 402).

The Minhag of Milchigs

The Ramah mentions that it is the custom to split the meal on Shavuos, where the first half of the meal is comprised of dairy foods and the second half is comprised of meat foods. Although it is no longer the custom to split the meal, we do have the custom to eat dairy foods on Shavuos. The reason for this custom is to remind us that when we received the Torah we were taught the laws of preparing the meat in the proper, kosher manner. Since we were unable to do this immediately, we consumed only dairy foods at the time.

Waiting for Nightfall

Although generally we are permitted to bring in Shabbos or Yom Tov slightly earlier than is required, in regard to Shavuos the custom is not to pray immediately but to wait for nightfall. The reason is that we want to count the Omer completely and perfectly. Doing so would entail making sure that the last day is complete.

The Minhag to Stay Up All Night

Although the custom is not mentioned in the Talmud nor in the Shulchan Aruch, the custom has developed in Klal Yisroel to remain awake the entire night of Shavuos and to study Torah. The Seforim HaKedoshim explain that one who stays up all night studying Torah merits “Gilui Shechina” revelation of Hashem’s Divine Presence on that night.

The Kaf HaChaim (OC 494) writes that women who have the custom of counting the Omer can indeed partake in perfecting the Tikkunim involved in the Mitzvah of Sfiras haOmer by learning at night as well. Other Poskim explain that there was no Minhag for the women to stay up as well.

Shavuos Davening

The Shacharis and full Hallel of Yom Tov are recited. The reading of the Aseres HaDibros takes place on the first day of Shavuos. This is followed with Mussaf and the Birkas Kohanim. On the second day Megilas Rus is read before the reading of the Torah. It is preceded with the Piut of Akdamus.

Why We Read Megilas Rus

There is a debate among the Poskim as to whether our custom to read the Megillah of Rus on Shavuos is a full-fledged obligation or a Minhag. The reason why we read the book of Rus is to teach us that Torah is only given through hardship and poverty (Yalkut Shimoni 596). Another reason is that the entire episode took place during the Zman HaKatzir – and Shavuos is known as Chag HaKatzir too. A third reason is so that we will have read all three parts of the TaNaCh on the day of Matan Torah (Otzer HaMinhagim).

The Piut of Akdamus

The Piut (supplication poem) was written by Rav Meir Ben Yitzchok Shliachtzibbur, a Rishon that is often quoted by Rashi and Tosfos (See, for example, Rashi on Tehillim 73:12 and Tosfos RH 11a). It is a double Aleph Bais poem that describes the greatness of the Creator of the world, the nature of Malachim, and the loftier stature that the nation of Israel has above the angels themselves. One section of it describes how, kavyachol, Hashem is longingly desirous of Klal Yisroel learning Torah and desires their prayers. It ends with the statement that who hear (and absorb the depth and meaning of the piut) will merit to be among that group that will merit fantastic miracles on the great day.

The Piut is recited in Aramaic so that the Malachim will not understand it, hear it and take it for their own use. It should remain special for the Jewish people alone. It is the only Piut which is recited while the Sefer Torah itself is lying on the Bima. This demonstrates how very special it is.

Yizkor

On the second day of Yom Tov (the first day in Eretz Yisroel) after the Torah is read, a special prayer of Yizkor is recited as is done on all second day Yomim Tovim. We daven for and pledge Tzedakah in the merit of those in our family who have passed on. It is the custom in Klal Yisroel for everyone who still has both parents to leave the shul during the recitation of Yizkor.

YOM TOV HALACHOS

Like on Shabbos, there exists a prohibition of performing Malacha on Yom Tov. The admonition against certain Malachos should be used as a means of coming closer to Hashem as well. What is Malacha exactly, and how can it be used as a tool for greater closeness to G-d?

Malacha is not defined as work, necessarily. Malacha is defined as a certain, specific type of creative act. More precisely, Malacha is defined as the specific creative acts that were necessary to create the Mishkan, the resting place for Hashem's concentration of the Shechina Presence here on earth.

Our refraining from such creative acts on Shabbos and Yom Tov is the collective flag of the Jewish people. Just as any nation is proud and salutes its national flag, so too is the observance of Shabbos and the holidays the flag of the Jewish people. The flag symbolizes and embodies our belief that the world was created for a purpose by a kind and benevolent Being who rewards good and punishes evil. A focus on this idea will cause us to become ever closer to Him. Mere contemplation of it when we refrain from Malacha achieves this end.

While the definition of Malacha is the same for both Shabbos and Yom Tov, the Torah made some exceptions for Yom Tov. The Torah states that actions that are necessary for people to eat are permitted on Yom Tov. This is called "Ochel Nefesh." Not all actions, however, are permitted for Ochel Nefesh purposes. If the food preparation could have been done with equal freshness and results before Yom Tov, and one had the time opportunity to do it then, then it may only be done with a shinui on Yom Tov itself. There are some Malachos on Yom Tov that are forbidden or very different even when it comes to food preparation.

It is also important to know that one may never do Malacha on Yom Tov during a Bain HaSh'mashos – twilight that immediately followed a Yom Tov. Why is this so? Because we do not know exactly when the day changes from one to the other. It is forbidden to do Malacha on Yom Tov for another day. Thus we might be doing Malacha on Yom Tov for another day which is forbidden.

One is also, of course, not permitted to perform any Malacha on the first day of Yom Tov for the second day of Yom Tov – even if the preparations involve no Malacha. This is called Hachana and something in which we must be very careful. The Yom Tov is very special and acts performed on it must be limited only to the needs of that Yom Tov.

May it be Hashem's will that we merit a complete and full Kabalas HaTorah this year!

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is referred to in this manner in our holiday prayers, and especially in the absence of Temple service for all of these many centuries, the granting of the Torah is undoubtedly the centerpiece of the commemorative holiday. So how is this day observed and commemorated? Well, I doubt there is any other people that would commemorate such a day by staying awake all night studying and discussing serious topics, eating dairy foods, decorating all premises abundantly with flowers, adding special melodies to the Torah reading, and somehow as well, marking the anniversary of the death of the greatest king of Israel, David. In reality, there is really no human way to truly capture and commemorate the most momentous occasion of all societal civilization. So, the human heart and spirit searches for ways to define the indefinable and to experience physically the incorporeal reality of the spiritual and the eternal. And that is the role of custom and tradition in Jewish life. It says what logic and reality, rationality and law alone cannot ever say to later generations, who were not physically present on that day of revelation at Sinai. Custom speaks to one's soul while the law speaks to our minds. So undoubtedly the customs of Shavuot are the conduit to our past – to that great day and event, the turning point of all human civilization. And these customs conduct us to our future and the realization of the goals that Sinai presented before us. That is the reason why custom has such a long-lasting and tenacious hold on us. Rabbi Yaakov Emden ruefully remarked that he regretted that the prohibition against stealing was law and not custom for if it were custom people would have an emotional brake against stealing that law alone cannot do. So we can never discount the power and necessity of custom. On the other hand, custom alone can never do the job of transmitting Torah from generation to generation. Over-emphasis on custom, ignoring law and rationality, falling victim to superstition and false forms of spirituality is a terrible distortion of that day at Sinai. The Torah always demands a sense of balance and perspective from us. Every generation, even every individual Jew, has to find this balance and equilibrium in one's religious life. Over the past century, with its terrible and wondrous events, all of them mysterious and unbelievable, the Jewish people as a whole and each individual Jew has searched for this secure footing of balance and perspective. I would be dishonest if I told you that I, and in fact our generation as a whole, has found that secure and correct place. But Shavuot, with its combination of custom and law, spirit and food, natural beauty and rigorous scholarship, is a day that can help us achieve that security and balance so necessary to truly be a loyal and good Jew. After all, that is the true test of our lives and existence. That is how we will be judged and how we will be remembered. Shavuot, like all Jewish holidays, reminds us that a good life, a Jewish life, requires sacrifice and focus. There are harsh realities in Jewish history, as in all human history as well. Shavuot commemorates terrible pogroms against innocent and hapless Jews – the Crusades and the events of 1648-9 – that occurred at this time of the year over the centuries of our exile, persecution and dispersion. It is somewhat ironic that the memorial prayer of Yizkor is also part of the gala Shavuot prayer experience. But that is the reality of human existence, the mix of the bittersweet that is always part of living. Once again, we are witness to the balance that is the essential part of Jewish life and Torah understanding and values. Here in Israel the whole holiday is over in an instant. But the lessons that it imparts to us last for a lifetime and constantly challenge us to live up to our commitment to the events of Sinai. Shabat shalom Chag sameach

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/blog>

Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein Shavuot A strange people, we Jews. The national spiritual holiday of the Jewish people – in the words of the Torah itself, 'the day you became a nation' – is the one-day holiday (in Israel) of Shavuot. Even though the Torah itself describes the holiday in terms of the commandment of bringing the first fruits as an offering in the Temple in Jerusalem, Jewish tradition has highlighted the holiday as being the anniversary day of the granting of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai. It

http://torahweb.org/torah/2014/moadim/rtwe_shavuos.html

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Rotzoh Hakadosh Baruch Hu L'zakos Es Yisroel

Challenge and response is a category employed in the study of history. This category of thought recognizes that people, individually and/or collectively rise to meet challenges. In so doing, oftentimes they achieve what otherwise they would not have achieved. In truth, the **משפטים** already expresses this idea as one understanding of **נסיונות**, trials or

tests. רצה הקב"ה does not need to administer tests to discover results. People need challenging tests to achieve results. This idea provides one perspective on the incomparable blessing of תורה את ישראל

The Holy One, Blessed Be He, wanted to bestow merit upon the Jewish people

לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות

therefore He bestowed a vast Torah with a plethora of מצות The more מצות- the greater the challenge and the higher we are induced to rise. And, at times, when we struggle in our עבודת השם the greater the subsequent achievement. May we all be קבלת התורה באהבה בזכותה. Good Shabbos.

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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY • SHAVUOT TO-GO • SIVAN 5771

Torah Study: Results Are Also Important! Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

Torah study plays a prominent role in the holiday of Shavuot. There is a tradition to spend the entire night of Shavuot studying Torah and many synagogues provide additional opportunities to study Torah on Shavuot. In this article, we will explore some of the aspects relating to the mitzvah of talmud Torah, the mitzvah to study Torah.¹¹

How Much is One Required to Learn? The Mishna, Pe'ah 1:1, lists talmud Torah as one of the mitzvot that has no set amount. The Talmud Yerushalmi, Pe'ah 1:1, explains that these mitzvot have no minimum amount and no maximum amount. The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797), Sh'not Eliyahu ad loc., applies this comment to talmud Torah and notes that one can fulfill the mitzvah by learning a single word of Torah. Yet, no matter how much one knows, there is always an obligation to continue one's studies and actively pursue more knowledge. This dichotomy is expressed in the resolution of an apparent contradiction between two statements of R. Shimon B. Yochai. The Gemara discusses the requirement that the Lechem HaPanim (showbreads) maintain a constant presence in the Beit HaMikdash:

The Beraita stated: R. Yosi said: it is valid even if one removes the old [breads] in the morning and places the new [breads] in the evening. How do I understand (the verse, Shemot 25:30) "Constantly in front of me"? That the table should not go the entire night without bread. R. Ami stated: From the words of R. Yosi we learn that even if a person only studied one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening, he has fulfilled the commandment (in the verse, Yehoshua 1:8) "This Torah shall never leave your lips." R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai, even if he only read Sh'ma in the morning and Sh'ma in the evening, he has fulfilled this mitzvah. Menachot 99b

According to R. Shimon bar Yochai, one can fulfill the commandment to constantly study Torah by reciting Sh'ma in the morning and Sh'ma in the evening. Yet, R. Shimon bar Yochai seems to take the exact opposite approach. The Gemara cites a dispute between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon bar Yochai regarding how much time should be devoted to talmud Torah: Our rabbis taught: [The verse (Devarim 11:14) states] "You shall gather your grain." What does this teach? Since it states "This Torah shall never leave your lips," one may think that this should be taken literally; therefore the verse states that you shall gather your grain- follow the ways of the land. R. Shimon bar Yochai states: Is it possible for someone to plow at the time of plowing, plant at the time of planting, harvest at the time of harvesting? ... What becomes of (his study of) Torah? Rather, when the Jewish people follow the will of God, their labor is performed by others ... and when they don't follow the will of God, they must perform the labor themselves. Berachot 35b

R. Yishmael is of the opinion that although the verse states that the Torah shall never leave your lips, one must follow the ways of the land (derech erez) in order to earn a livelihood. R. Shimon bar Yochai disagrees and maintains that if one were to spend his whole day earning a livelihood, he will never be successful in his study of Torah. How is it possible that the same R. Shimon bar Yochai, who states that recitation of Sh'ma fulfills the mandate of the mitzvah of talmud Torah, does not subscribe to R. Yishmael's opinion that this mandate allows one to earn a livelihood?

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kuntrus Acharon, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:1, explains that there are two aspects to the mitzvah of talmud Torah. The first aspect is to constantly learn Torah such that the Torah never leaves one's lips. Regarding this aspect, R. Shimon ben Yochai teaches that constancy can be achieved through consistency. If one learns a small portion of Torah in the morning and a small portion in the evening, one achieves constancy.¹² This first aspect of talmud Torah represents the idea that there is no minimum for talmud Torah.

The second aspect of talmud Torah is to master Torah to the best of one's ability. Mastery is a never ending process. Even if one learned the entire Torah, he must constantly review it in order not to forget anything that was learned. R. Shimon bar Yochai's objection to R. Yishmael's opinion is not regarding the requirement for constancy. His objection is that the more time one spends earning a livelihood, the more difficult it will be to master the Torah. This dispute focuses on the idea that there is no maximum for talmud Torah.

R. Yishmael doesn't disagree with R. Shimon bar Yochai's principle. He too is of the opinion that one must attempt to master Torah. However, he is of the opinion that one must master Torah while factoring in his obligation to sustain himself and his dependents. In fact, Rashi (1040-1105), Berachot 35b, s.v. Minhag, explains that R. Yishmael is of the opinion that one who is poverty stricken cannot focus on his learning and won't learn to the best of his ability. R. Yosef Karo (1488-1575), Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 156:1, rules in accordance with the opinion of R. Yishmael. Choosing between Talmud Torah and performance of a mitzvah R. Shneur Zalman notes an important difference between the first aspect of the mitzvah and the second. Rambam states: If one has the opportunity to perform a mitzvah or to study Torah, if it is possible for the mitzvah to be performed by someone else, one should not interrupt one's study. If not, one should perform the mitzvah and continue studying. Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:4 If one is learning Torah and there is a mitzvah to perform that can only be fulfilled by the individual who is learning, he must break from his learning to perform the mitzvah. Rambam's ruling is codified in Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 246:18.

There are a number of Talmudic discussions which seem to present a challenge to the idea that one should stop learning Torah in order to perform a mitzvah. First, the Gemara, Kiddushin 29b, cites a dispute as to whether one should learn Torah and then get married or whether one should get married first and then learn Torah:

Our rabbis taught: If one has the option of studying Torah or getting married, he should study Torah and then get married but if he can't study without a wife, he should get married first and then study Torah. R. Yehuda said in the name of the Shmuel: The law is that one should get married and then study Torah. R. Yochanan said: How can he study Torah properly with a yoke on his neck? And there is no dispute (between Shmuel and R. Yochanan)- there is a difference between them and us. ¹³ Kiddushin 29b

The argument presented against getting married first is that it will be too difficult to learn Torah with all of the responsibilities of marriage. One can ask: according to Rambam's principle, one should not forgo the mitzvah of getting married (or the mitzvah of having children) in order to perform the mitzvah of talmud Torah. Why then, does the Gemara conclude that in certain situations it is permissible to delay marriage in order to learn Torah? Furthermore, Ben Azai (cited in Yevamot 63b) states that he never got married because he had a desire to learn Torah. Rambam, Hilchot Ishut 15:3,

and Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 1:4, both rule that if one is steeped in Torah like Ben Azai and he never gets married, he doesn't violate any transgression. How can one totally abrogate the obligation to get married because of a desire to learn Torah? Second, the Talmud Yerushalmi records the following incident: R. Avahu inquired regarding his son R. Chanina who was studying in Tiberias. They told him that his son is spending his time helping to bury the dead. R. Avahu responded: Are there not enough graves in Caesaria that I had to send you to Tiberias? Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 3:7 R. Shneur Zalman asks: if in fact there were no other people available in Tiberias to perform these services, why was R. Avahu bothered by his son's actions? Shouldn't his son break from learning in order to perform a mitzvah that cannot be performed by anyone else?

R. Shneur Zalman answers that the principle that one breaks from learning in order to fulfill a mitzvah only applies to the first aspect of talmud Torah, the daily obligation to learn Torah. It does not apply to the second aspect of talmud Torah, the obligation to master the Torah. Therefore, one must break from his learning in order to perform a mitzvah that arises on an occasional basis. However, if performance of the mitzvah is going to significantly impact one's ability to master Torah, one should not perform the mitzvah. This is why the Gemara entertains delaying marriage in order to study Torah. Since marriage will significantly impact how much one is able to learn, he may delay performance of the mitzvot associated with marriage in order to continue his studies. Furthermore, if one's dedication to Torah is on the level of Ben Azai, he may forgo these mitzvot altogether.

R. Shneur Zalman further explains that the reason why R. Avahu was bothered by his son's decision to perform burial services is that his son was at a stage in his learning when daily performance of burial services would significantly impact his ability to master the Torah. Therefore, even if there was nobody else available, his son should not have performed these services on a consistent basis. 14

Quantity vs. Quality

The dual nature of the mitzvah of talmud Torah is relevant to other discussions.

A person should always split his years into thirds: One third for the study of Tanach, one third for the study of Mishna and one third for the study of Talmud. How is one to know how long he will live? Rather it is referring to days. Kiddushin 30a Tosafot, Kiddushin 30a, s.v. Lo Tzricha, understand that the conclusion of the Gemara is that each day one should split one's learning between Tanach, Mishna and Talmud. According to Tosafot, the requirement to split one's learning into thirds seems to be a function of the requirement of the mitzvah to learn Torah on a daily basis. 15

Rambam seems to view this obligation differently. Rambam writes that the obligation to split one's learning into thirds only applies at the beginning of one's studies. Once one has advanced, one can focus on Talmud while reviewing Tanach and Mishna periodically. Rambam seems to view the obligation to split one's learning into thirds as a function of the obligation to master Torah. For this reason, there is no obligation to split one's learning once one has mastered Tanach and Mishna.

Second, R. David HaLevi Segal (c.1586-1667), Taz, Even HaEzer 25:1 discusses the practice of those who sleep very little because of their dedication to Torah study. He notes that there is no advantage to sleeping less when one can get more sleep and be more alert for one's studies. Why does Taz state that there is no advantage for the person who sleeps less? Wouldn't that person have a greater fulfillment of the mitzvah of talmud Torah simply by spending more time dedicated to the mitzvah?

The answer to this question is addressed in a comment of R. Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883), Ohr Yisrael no. 27, who states that the mitzvah of mastering Torah supersedes the mitzvah to constantly study Torah. He notes that the mitzvah to constantly study Torah would not provide an allowance for someone to seek out a means of improving the quality of one's study such as travelling to a yeshiva in another town or sleeping more in order to focus. It is only because of the mitzvah to master Torah that one can spend less

time studying in order to focus on the quality of one's studies. As such, one can explain that Taz is of the same opinion and therefore, if sleeping less is going to impact the quality of one's studies, quality should not be sacrificed for quantity.

R. Yisrael Salanter notes that the mitzvah to master Torah only supersedes the mitzvah to constantly learn Torah when the individual is someone who has refined character traits and yirat shamayim (fear of heaven). This is because the mitzvah to master Torah is focused on the result more than the actions taken to achieve that result. If one has mastered the Torah but is not a refined individual, his mastery of Torah is devalued and all of the time spent focusing on quality didn't produce the proper result. For this individual, it would have been better to focus on quantity. Talmud Torah is not simply a means of collecting information. It is part of a process of becoming a complete individual who lives the ideals of the Torah.

11 This article is an expanded version of an article written for yutorah.org 12 R. Shimon bar Yochai learns this from R. Yosi's opinion that although the lechem hapanim require constancy, if one removes the old breads in the morning and replaces them in the evening, it is nevertheless considered constant. Similarly, one who studies Torah in the morning and evening is considered to be constantly studying Torah. 13 According to Rashi, s.v. Ha Lan, the residents of Babylonia would travel to Israel to study and were not burdened by the needs of their family when in Israel. Therefore, it was preferable for them to marry first and then go to Israel to study. The residents of Israel would stay at home and therefore, it was preferable to study prior to getting married. According to Rabbeinu Tam (cited in Tosafot, ad loc., s.v. Ha Lan), the residents of Babylonia should study first because they can't leave their families to study in Israel once they get married. Furthermore, the residents of Babylonia were not as wealthy. The residents of Israel should get married first because they can remain close to home and they have the financial resources to study while married. 14 According to Kesef Mishneh, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:3, R. Avahu's argument was invalid and his son was acting properly because there were no other people to perform these services.

15 Tosafot also note the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam that the Talmud Bavli contains Tanach, Mishna and Talmud and therefore study of Talmud Bavli fulfills this requirement.

from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Sun, Aug 11, 2013 at 8:36 AM subject: Rus, David, and the Prohibition of Marrying Moavites

Rus, David, and the Prohibition of Marrying Moavites By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In this week's parshah, we study how the nation of Moav hired the evil Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. To guarantee that individuals who have inherited such disturbing character traits do not damage Klal Yisroel's pristine moral nature, the Torah prohibits a Moavite from marrying into Klal Yisroel. As the Torah expresses itself: An Ammonite or a Moavite may not enter the congregation of Hashem. Even the tenth generation is not to enter the congregation of Hashem, forever. Because of the fact that they did not come forward with bread and water when you were on your way out of Mitzrayim, and because of the fact that they hired Bilaam ben Be'or of Pesor, Aram Naharayim, to curse you (Devarim 23:4, 5). Since there are no indications that the nation of Ammon participated in employing Bilaam, the Ramban (ad loc.) explains that each of the two reasons specified here applies to only one of the two nations involved: The Ammonites are excluded from marrying into Klal Yisroel because they did not provide food for the Jewish people, thus not demonstrating any hakaras hatov for the fact that Avraham Avinu had saved their ancestor, Lot, and Moav is banned for hiring Bilaam. The Mishnah (Yevamos 76b) rules Ammoni velo Ammonis, Moavi velo Moavis, that the prohibition of marrying into the Jewish people applies only to male Ammonites and Moavites and their male descendants. Thus, a male

member of the Moavite people who converts to Judaism is still prohibited from marrying someone born Jewish. However, a female Moavite convert and all her descendants, and the female descendant of a male Moavite may freely marry within Klal Yisroel. It is for this reason that Boaz was permitted to marry Rus, who was a Moavite. The Gemara explains that only Ammonite men are included in the ban, since only men would have been involved in going out to present food and drink to the Jews. The female Ammonites' lack of involvement in this mitzvah may have been because of their extreme modesty – they never left their houses to be near unfamiliar men. Similarly, since we can assume that Bilaam was hired by the Moavite men, only they are prohibited from marrying into the Jewish people, and not the women (Yerushalmi).

The Story of Rus In addition to the above quoted Mishnah, several other early sources discuss whether the prohibition preventing Moavites and Ammonites from marrying Jews is restricted to males or extends also to females. The first time we find this matter discussed is in the days of Rus. Megillas Rus tells us that Ploni Almoni, an uncle of Rus' late husband Machlon, was concerned pen ashchis nachalasi, lest I destroy my descendants (Rus 4:6), which Rashi explains to be a concern that his descendants born from Rus would not be allowed to marry other Jews, because of their Moavite ancestor. Rashi there explains that Ploni Almoni erred regarding the halachic rule of Ammoni velo Ammonis. Yet, the comment of Ploni Almoni is peculiar. If he felt that female Moavites are prohibited from marrying Jews, why was he concerned only that his descendants would be banned and not about whether he himself was permitted to marry Rus? On the other hand, if he was willing to marry Rus because he knew that the prohibition is restricted to male Moavites, why was he concerned about his children? We will return to this question shortly.

The Story of David The issue of whether Moavite women may marry Jews surfaced again concerning the lineage of King David, who was descended from Rus. A fascinating passage of Gemara describes an early halachic debate among several known Biblical personages who, we see from this Gemara, were exemplary Torah scholars. Doeig HaEdomi, a member of King Shaul's retinue, and Avner ben Ner, Shaul's chief of military staff, debate the halachic issue concerning whether Moavite women may marry Jews. The discussion between them is what one expects from Talmidei Chachamim of the first order, vociferously debating a halachic issue in your local Beis Medrash. But first let us examine the historical context.

Background to the Story After Shaul had failed to destroy Amalek and he was told that he would, therefore, lose the monarchy, Hashem commanded Shmuel to clandestinely anoint David, the youngest of Yishai's eight sons, as the new King of Israel. Shmuel carried out this mission, but it was kept a complete secret. At this time, Shaul began suffering bouts of depression. Shaul's advisers sought out someone who could play music and thereby assist Shaul to cope with his depression. One of Shaul's attendants knew David and suggested him for the position. David tried out for the position and was very successful. Shaul then sent a message to Yishai, David's father, requesting that David be allowed to assume this position permanently. David did fill the position; Shaul had a very deep love for David and had him assume the additional role of armor bearer. Shaul sent a second message to Yishai requesting that David remain with the royal family "for he has found favor in my eyes" (Shmuel I 16:14-23). At this point, the Pelishtim (Philistines) waged war against the Jews. The Pelishtim had a giant warrior among them, Golyas (known in English as "Goliath"), who stood over six amos tall (well over ten feet!). Golyas would taunt the Jews with his powerful, terrifying voice. Golyas suggested that a single representative of the Jews face off in battle against him, and in this manner it could be determined which nation would be enslaved to the other. At the same time, Golyas screamed blasphemous things about Hashem. The Jewish troops were terrified of Golyas (Shmuel I 17:1-11). At the time, David's three oldest brothers were serving in Shaul's army. Yishai, David's father, who is described as zakein ba va'anashim, meaning a well known personage, sent

David to bring provisions to his brothers at the battlefield (Shmuel I 17:12). David discovered that Shaul was offering a vast reward to whoever would vanquish Golyas.

David the Brave David, after having gathered information about the situation, volunteered to fight Golyas by himself. Shaul discouraged David, noting that Golyas was an experienced warrior, whereas David was not. David replied that Hashem is the One who provides all salvation, and that Hashem often helped David fight lions and bears while he was tending his sheep. Shaul gave David his blessing. Shaul's armor was placed upon David, but David said that he could not move freely with the armor, and removed it. David then took five smooth stones from the stream and placed them in his shepherd's bag. When Golyas saw David, he taunted him, saying "I will offer your flesh to the birds of the heavens and the animals of the field," to which David responded: "You come against me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come against you with the name of Hashem, Master of Armies, the G-d of the troops of Israel." At this point, David took his slingshot, shot one stone that struck Golyas on the forehead, and Golyas fell dead. David then took Golyas's sword, chopped off his head and demonstrated to all the Pelishtim that their hero was dead. The Pelishtim fled, and on that day the Jews vanquished their enemy. Now, we come to the strangest part of the verse: "And when Shaul saw David move forward against the Pelishti, he said to Avner, his general, 'Avner, whose son is this lad?' And Avner answered, 'As you live, O King, I do not know.' And the king responded, 'Find out whose son is this lad'" (Shmuel I, 17:55-56). This last part of the story appears bizarre. Both Shaul and Avner certainly knew David well -- David was Shaul's armor-bearer and the harpist who played to treat Shaul's fits of depression. Furthermore, they were also familiar with Yishai who was a well-known personage and with whom Shaul had negotiated twice for David's employ.

The Gemara Passage As we can imagine, we are not the first to ask these questions: They form the basis for a fascinating Talmudic discussion (Yevamos 76b-77a). The Gemara asks, why did Shaul ask Avner who David or Yishai was? He knew them both very well. The Gemara answers that he suspected that David might be the person who would be replacing him as king of the Jews. Shaul inquired whether David was descended from the branch of Yehudah that was destined to be the Jewish royal family. Thus, the question "Avner, whose son is this lad?" was not about David's identity but, rather, it was a question about his genealogical roots. At this point, Doeig HaEdomi piped up, "Rather than ask concerning whether he is appropriate to become king, you should ask whether he may marry into the Jewish people. After all, he is descended from Rus, the Moavite." To this, Avner retorted that we know that the halachah is that only male descendants of Ammon and Moav are prohibited, and, therefore, Rus was permitted to marry into the Jewish people. Doeig, however, disputed the veracity of this ruling. At this point, a halachic debate ensued between Doeig and Avner concerning whether one can prove from the verses that the prohibition against Ammon and Moav is limited to males, or whether it extends also to the female descendants. Doeig won the upper hand in the debate, producing arguments, which his adversary could not refute, that females are also prohibited.

What was Doeig's Argument? As explained by the Ritva (ad loc.), Doeig insisted that the prohibition against marrying Ammonites applies equally to men and women of this nation. In his opinion, the Ammonite women equally share blame for the discourtesy they showed the Israelites, since the Ammonite women should have provided food and water. He disputes excusing their reticence to help as attributable to their extreme modesty, since the Ammonite women could have assisted the Jewish women.

But what about the Moavite women? But wait one minute! This concern should not affect David, who was descended from Moav, not from Ammon, and the Moavite women cannot be accused of hiring Bilaam. However, Doeig contended that Moavite women are also prohibited. Although it may be true that Bilaam was hired by the men, since the prohibitions against marrying Moavites and Ammonites are mentioned together, just as female

Ammonites may not marry Jews, the same applies to female Moavites (Rashba, Yevamos 76b). When Avner was unable to disprove Doeig's approach, Shaul referred the issue to the scholars who debated these matters in the Beis Medrash. These scholars also responded that the prohibition banning the marriage of Ammon and Moav applies only to males and not to females. Doeig then proceeded to demonstrate that their approach was incorrect, leading the scholars of the Beis Medrash to conclude that their previous assumption was wrong and that henceforth the halachah would be that female descendants of Ammon and Moav are prohibited to marry into Klal Yisroel. This ruling would seriously affect David and all his family members. Boaz had married Rus assuming that the prohibition banning Moavites applied only to males, and now the scholars of the Beis Medrash were considering banning Moavite and Ammonite women and all their descendants.

Amasa to the Rescue! They were about to conclude that this is the halachah, when a different scholar, Amasa, who was also a general in Shaul's army, rose and declared, "I have received a direct mesorah from Shmuel's Beis Din that the prohibition is only on male descendants and not on female ones." This last argument apparently turned the entire debate back in favor of Avner's original position, and it was accepted that David and all of Yishai's descendants could marry within Klal Yisroel (Yevamos 76b-77a). What did Amasa's declaration change? In what way did this refute Doeig's arguments? Based on a halachic explanation of the Rambam (Hilchos Mamrim 1:2), the Brisker Rav explains what changed. There are two basic types of Torah laws: (1) Those that are handed down as a mesorah from Moshe Rabbeinu at Har Sinai. (2) Those formulated through the thirteen rules, called in English the hermeneutic rules on the basis of which we derive new halachos. Let me explain each category by using examples:

Mesorah We have a mesorah that the Torah's requirement that we take "the fruit of a beautiful tree" on Sukkos refers to an esrog. No halachic authority in Klal Yisroel's history ever questioned this fact, and for a very simple reason. We know this piece of information directly from the great leaders of Klal Yisroel, who received this information from Moshe Rabbeinu, who heard it directly from Hashem (Rambam, Introduction to the Commentary on the Mishnah).

Logic However, there are also Torah laws that were not taught with a direct mesorah from Har Sinai, but are derived through the hermeneutic rules of the Torah. For example, there is a dispute among tana'im whether a sukkah requires four walls to be kosher or whether it is sufficient if it has three. This debate is based on two different ways to interpret the words of the Torah (Sukkah 6b).

Mesorah vs. Logic Are there any halachic distinctions between the two categories of Torah-derived laws? Indeed, there are. The Rambam explains that when the position is based on logic, halachic authorities may disagree what the halachah is. Thus, there can be a dispute among tana'im whether a sukkah must have three walls or four. However, there can never be a dispute concerning a matter that Klal Yisroel received as a mesorah. Once a greatly respected Torah authority reports a mesorah from his rebbe, who in turn received this mesorah in a direct line from Moshe Rabbeinu, that a specific halachah or a principle is true, no one else can question this mesorah. Thus, any dispute concerning a halachah of the Torah can concern only something derived logically with hermeneutic principles. There is another halachic difference between a ruling that was taught by mesorah and one that was derived through logic. The final decider of all halachah in every generation (until the era of the Talmud) was the Sanhedrin, also often called the Beis Din HaGadol, the supreme Beis Din. Once all the great Torah scholars of Klal Yisroel participated in a debate in the Beis Din HaGadol, which then reached a decision, this conclusion was and is binding on all of Klal Yisroel (Rambam, Hilchos Mamrim 1:1; Comments of Ramban to Sefer HaMitzvos, Rule II). The question is, can a Beis Din HaGadol overturn a ruling that had been decided previously, either its own decision or one made by an earlier

Beis Din HaGadol? The answer to this question depends on whether the ruling involved is based on logic or whether it was taught by mesorah. When the original decision was reached by logic, then a later Beis Din HaGadol has the authority to reexamine the case, and, should it decide to, overturn the previous ruling. However, this can never happen with a law whose source is mesorah. There can be no debate, no discussion and no overturning. Once a recognized scholar announces that he received this law as a mesorah from Sinai, this is accepted by all, and no debate or questioning of this mesorah may transpire. Thus, it makes a tremendous difference in halachah whether something is a mesorah, which means it is not subject to argument or debate, or whether it is based on an interpretation of the hermeneutic rules, which is subject to argument and debate. On the basis of these rules of the Rambam, the Brisker Rav (in his notes to the book of Rus in his Chiddushim on Tanach) explains why Amasa's argument closed the debate in David's favor. Doeig, Shaul, Avner, and the other members of Shaul's Beis Medrash all assumed that limiting the prohibition of Ammoni and Moavi to males was based on hermeneutic exposition, and thus debatable. Furthermore, if Doeig would succeed in demonstrating that his approach was logically correct, the long-established interpretation permitting Rus to marry into the Jewish people would be overturned. Indeed, the result of this ruling would be that Rus and all her descendants were prohibited to marry born Jews. Amasa, however, explains the Brisker Rav, knew that the principle of Moavi velo Moavis, that female descendants of Moav could marry into Klal Yisroel, was a mesorah that Shmuel knew originated at Har Sinai. Thus, its basis was not a logical interpretation of the Torah, which can be refuted, but mesorah, which cannot. Therefore, a logical interpretation concluding otherwise is completely irrelevant. At this point, we can return to an earlier question we asked about the story of Megillas Rus. Ploni Almoni, Machlon's uncle, seems convinced that he may marry Rus, notwithstanding her Moavite origins, yet he is concerned that his descendants from her might not be allowed to marry other Jews. The Brisker Rav explains that Ploni Almoni assumed that the law permitting Moavite women to marry Jews was based on logic, which might at some time in the future be refuted, thus changing the accepted halachah. At that point, the ability of his descendants to marry Jews would be overturned. However, Ploni Almoni was incorrect, since the halachah that Moavite women may marry Jews is mesorah, and therefore irrefutable. There will never be a question as to whether the descendants of Boaz and David may marry Jews, notwithstanding their Moavite origins.

Conclusion Besides the halachic issues regarding the pedigree of David, which are of supreme importance to us, since they are the basis of the lineage of Mashiach, we learn a very important lesson from the marital availability of the Moavites. One of the three identifying characteristics of the Jewish people is being makir tov: we appreciate what others, and especially Hashem, have done for us and we express that appreciation. This mitzvah demonstrates how much concern we must have about developing the qualities that characterize the Jewish people.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, May 29, 2014 at 6:46 PM subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

5/29/2014 **The All-Nighter - Holidays**

Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

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http://www.ou.org/holidays/shavuot/the-all-nighter/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=n=naso%203&utm_content=&spMailingID... 1/2

ORTHODOX UNION SHAVUOT

The All-Nighter

The scene is familiar. An auditorium or hall is stuffed full of bodies hunched over books. In the corner, there's a table bearing snacks and

caffeinated beverages. It could be any pre-finals study session in any college in the world but it isn't. You've stumbled into a synagogue on the night of Shavuot, when the custom is to stay up late studying Torah, in anticipation of the next morning's re-enactment of its transmission at Sinai.

Our current practice to stay up all night learning Torah is attributed to Rav Yosef Karo, the 16th-century codifier of the Shulchan Aruch, though its roots are much older. The Zohar speaks of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the second century, staying up all night. His reason for doing so is compared to an attendant helping to prepare a bride prior to her wedding. (A common metaphor for the revelation at Sinai is a wedding between God and the Jewish people.) The ultimate basis for the tradition is a Midrash in Shir HaShirim Rabbah to the effect that on the morning when God was to give them the Torah, the Jews slept in, showing a lack of enthusiasm. Throughout the generations, we rectify this national flaw through the many enthusiastic volunteers who spend the entire night engaged in study to show their love of God and appreciation for the gift of His Torah.

There is no particular course of study required for the night, though the Arizal, the famed Medieval Kabbalist, organized a selection of Biblical and Talmudic passages into a text called the Tikkun Leil Shavuot ("Order for the Night of Shavuot"). Some have colloquially come to refer to the all-night study session itself as "tikkun leil Shavuot." While not technically accurate, it is also not wholly inappropriate. The word "tikkun" in Hebrew can also mean a repair or a correction. While such was not the intention of the Arizal, it is perhaps a fitting way to refer to the night's activities, seeing as they are intended to make up for the oversight of our ancestors.

The custom as originally established was specifically to stay up learning the Tikkun Leil Shavuot text, which contains excerpts of the books of Tanach, the Jewish Bible, as a means of preparing to receive the Torah in the morning. This original practice now appears to be the exception rather than the rule in most communities. The current practice in most modern American synagogues is to hear speakers, to study in small groups or in pairs, or some combination of the two. Unlike a Passover Seder or reading the Megillah on Purim, staying up on Shavuot night is not an obligation, neither biblically nor rabbinically. It is a voluntary practice, much to be praised, but not for everyone. In fact, it's preferable that some people do sleep; the recitation of the morning blessings is complicated by not sleeping, so one who has slept typically serves as leader for that portion of the morning service. (If staying up were in fact an obligation, it is unlikely that we would ask someone to forego doing so in order to "take one for the team.")

The evening's events are typically punctuated by breaks for food and drink. As with the text for study, the fare can vary widely from community to community. Cheesecake and ice cream are common, but sushi and barbecue are also not unheard of. (Customs likewise vary as to eating meat or dairy meals on Shavuot, so one must exercise caution in his or her late-night snacking.)

Despite its superficial similarity to cramming for exams, the idea behind the Shavuot all-nighter is actually quite different. The purpose of cramming for exams is short-term and immediate: "I have a test in the morning." While perhaps effective for its intended purpose, cramming is not effective when it comes to long-term retention and internalization of the material. When it comes to Shavuot night, however, there is no test. Our goal is more profound. We seek to demonstrate our love for God and draw closer to Him through His Torah. On Shavuot morning, when we read about the revelation at Sinai and re-enact in microcosm the transmission of the Torah to the Jewish people through Moses, we have prepared ourselves, emotionally and intellectually, to appreciate the "Guidebook to Life" that God has given us. There may not be an exam and our night of study may not be graded, but it helps to direct us on a path that leads to endless credits. © 2014 Orthodox Union

Converting to Kindness

Rabbi Reuven Brand

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I am grateful to Rav Hershel Schachter, shlit"a, for his helpful insights in the preparation of this essay. Gifts to the poor

"R. Zeira said, this megila [Ruth] has not in it any [issues of] purity or impurity, nor prohibited or permitted [items], and [so] why was it written? To teach the reward for performing acts of kindness." Ruth Rabbah 2 This Midrashic statement explains the essence and message of Megillat Rut, the enchanting and inspiring tale we read each year on Shavuot. Our custom to read various Megillot on specific holidays is recorded in Masechet Sofrim (Chapter 14), and we are left to explore the connection between each Megillah and its holiday. In light of our Midrash, we wonder, what the thematic connection between Rut and Shavuot is. In the phrasing of our tefillot on Shavuot, we refer to this Yom Tov as the time of the giving of our Torah. It is quite curious, then, that on this day that commemorates the revelation at Sinai, at which we received the Ten Commandments, we read a tale that contains no laws at all?! Moreover, why is kindness so essential to the story of Rut?

An oblique connection between Megillat Rut and Shavuot can be found in the Torah's description of the holiday itself. In Parshat Emor, in its section dedicated to the holidays, the Torah describes this day as the culmination of a period of counting, beginning with the Omer offering and concluding with the Shte Halechem offering forty-nine days later. The capstone of the counting is our festival, which is described immediately before the Torah's introduction of Rosh Hashana, the ensuing holiday on the calendar. Yet, a peculiar law appears in this context: "And you shall make proclamation on the selfsame day; there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no manner of servile work; it is a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor, and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God." Vayikra 23:21-22

This Biblical prescription of Matanos L'Evyonim -gifts to the poor- plays a key role in the story of Rut, for it was while collecting these gifts that Rut first encountered Boaz, her future redeemer and husband. The development of the relationship between Boaz and Rut was formed on the backdrop of this mitzvah. However, the inclusion of the principles of gleanings for the poor at this point in the Chumash is perplexing. We have already been taught this law in Parshat Kedoshim, so why is it being repeated and why in the middle of the Torah's section of the festivals?

Another fascinating instance when we find a specific reference to gifts to the poor is in the guidelines regarding the process of conversion. While the acceptance of each and every mitzvah is the essence and definition of conversion, the convert is not required to learn all of the Torah's precepts in advance of conversion. "It was taught: A convert who comes nowadays to convert is asked "what did you see that motivated you to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people today are wanderers, pushed, beaten and ravaged, and suffering befall them"? If he says "I know, and I am not worthy" we accept him immediately. We tell him some of the light mitzvos and some of the heavy mitzvos, and we tell him the punishment for [not giving] leket, shichacha, peah and maser ani." Yevamot 47a Why are the mitzvot of gifts for the poor singled out of all the possible choices as necessary for the convert to accept in specific? To understand the role of gifts to the poor in the context of conversion, we must examine the roots of conversion itself and who was the first convert to Judaism.

Conversion and Kindness

At the conclusion of our seder, many have the custom to sing a poem with the refrain, "and it was in the middle of the night." In this poem, the anonymous author makes reference to an unnamed Ger Tzedek- an authentic convert. Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (12th c. France) in his commentary on this poem identifies this convert as Avraham Avinu. The

Gemara supports this by noting: “The precious ones of the nations were gathered with the God of Avraham.” The God of Avraham and not of Yitzchak and Yaacov? Rather, the God of Avraham who was the first to convert. Chagiga 3a

It is not coincidental that Avraham Avinu was historically the first convert and the founder of our faith. We know that the foundation of our universe is kindness, as Tehillim (89) teaches: Ki Amarti Olam Chesed Yibaneh “as I have said, the world, on kindness will be built”. The world of Judaism, too, is built upon kindness, as Avraham, the first convert, is the quintessential paragon of kindness:

The prophet Micah sums up this notion with his attribution: Chesed LiAvraham - kindness is to Avraham, our founding father. All future converts to Judaism continue the tradition of Avraham, building the foundation of their Judaism, their connection with Hashem, upon the precept of kindness, embodied by our first convert. [Hence, Hillel the elder, when approached by a potential convert who wanted to learn the entirety of Torah while standing on one foot, responded with a summative dictum guiding interpersonal relationships. See Shabbat 31a.] We now understand why the specific mitzvot that we share with a potential convert are those of kindness, the trait of Avraham the convert. This can also shed light on why the Torah includes this theme in its description of Shavuot, our anniversary of the revelation at Sinai, as we will explore.

Conversion at Sinai

The Torah outlines several fundamental tenets of Jewish faith that were established at the revelation of Matan Torah, yet the Talmud views it as a model for a Halachic process as well. According to the Talmud, Matan Torah and the revelation at Sinai is the model for conversion for generations as it culminated the conversion process of the Jewish people:

The Talmud describes that when the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai they immersed for Tevilah and offered korbanot, which completed their conversion to Judaism. Ramban (Shemot 24:1) explains that their response of Naaseh Vinishma- we will do and we will listen- was the fulfillment of a key step in conversion: the acceptance of Hashem’s mitzvot. Our experience at Sinai was history’s first communal conversion to Judaism and the model for the future. In light of what we have learned, an essence aspect of this national conversion is a culture of kindness, one that became embedded in our national identity, as the Talmud (Yevamot 79a) relates, Jewish people are marked with three qualities: merciful, bashful and ambassadors of kindness.

The Torah’s inclusion of a reference to the gifts to the poor at the onset of the harvest season heralded by the holiday of Shavuot is fully in consonance with the theme of Matan Torah-conversion to Judaism and its character of kindness. This is the bridge to understanding its connection with the reading of Megillat Rut.

A Tale of a Convert

Rut is the shining example of a convert to Judaism. The Megillah describes her insistence on becoming part of G-d’s covenant, in contrast to her sister, who returned to their Moabite origins.

And she said: 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people, and to her god; return after your sister-in-law.' And Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, and to return from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if only death will part us.' And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her. Ruth 1:16-18 This steadfast commitment, despite Naomi’s discouragement, becomes the framework for future converts and the litmus test for their sincerity, as the Talmud teaches: “[The potential convert] is not to be persuaded, or dissuaded too much”. R. Eleazar said: What is the Scriptural proof? It is written, And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her. 'We are forbidden', she told her, '[to move on the Sabbath beyond the] Sabbath boundaries!' 'Where

you go I will go'. 'We are forbidden private meeting between man and woman!' 'Where you lodge, I will lodge' 'We have been commanded 613 commandments!' 'Your people shall be my people'. 'We are forbidden idolatry!' 'And your God my God'. 'Four modes of death were entrusted to Beth din!' 'Where you die, will I die'. 'Two graveyards were placed at the disposal of the Beth din!' 'And there will I be buried'. Immediately she saw that she was steadfastly minded...” Yevamot 47b We learn that Rut is the paradigm of a true convert. Hence, explained Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik in the name of the Gaon of Vilna, Megillat Rut is the perfect fit for Shavuot. [Rabbi Soloveitchik delivered this talk on Megillat Rut in 5728. Notes from the talk were published in Beit Yitzchak vol. 24 by Alan Rothman.] Megillat Rut is the story of conversion and Shavuot is the anniversary of our national conversion to Judaism. Furthermore, the personality of Rut and her embrace of Judaism are all about kindness. In contrast to Moab, a nation that is described in the Torah as cruel and uncaring (Devarim 23:5) Rut seeks a new lifestyle, a religion of kindness, which she finds embodied in Boaz and Hashem’s people. We now appreciate that just as at Har Sinai we entered into the covenant of Avraham, the conversion of kindness, for all future generations, we read the story of Rut, the individual who entered into this covenant. The Midrash with which we began underscores that the central motif of the story of the Rut, the story of her conversion and the story of the founding of our nation is keenly focused on kindness.

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The 10 Commandments Today

Why we need them now more than ever.

by Rabbi Benjamin Blech

If God would have wanted to tweet the 10 Commandments on Twitter, He would’ve been restricted to 140 characters. As it is, He used 620 letters to write the entire Decalogue on the two tablets He gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. That’s because this magnificent summary of ethical behavior contains the key to all 613 mitzvot meant for the Jewish people as well as the 7 universal laws for mankind – 620 in all.

There has never been a better synopsis for righteous living than this essential text of Torah. Like all of Torah, no matter how much the times have changed the message of the 10 Commandments is timeless.

Here are ten ideas from the Decalogue that come from a contemporary perspective.

1. “I am the Lord your God”

Merriam-Webster added “selfie” as one of the 150 newly adopted legitimate words for 2014. The aggrandizement of self, the preoccupation with ego, the narcissism of our generation needs above all to be reminded that “it’s not all about you.”

“I am the Lord your God” – there is a higher power who created the world, who is in charge of the universe, who gave us laws that need to be observed for the benefit of all of mankind.

No moral system can be based solely on concern with the self. If man is the sole arbiter of goodness then evil will always be rationalized as necessary for personal pleasure and privilege.

As Dostoyevsky so perceptively put it, “Without God, all is permissible.”

“Just do it” may be a good slogan for Nike but it can’t serve as ideal for the behavior of an entire generation.

2. “You shall have no other gods before me”

Did you get caught up in the Kanye West/Kim Kardashian wedding obsession? Sociologists have a name for the idolatry of our times. It’s “celebrity worship syndrome.” It describes the pedestal on which we have put our movie stars, sports figures and famous people, follow their every move, and treat them as modern gods. There is a giant media subculture around the cult of personality. Gossip and news about the rich and famous is

big business. Magazines like People and Us Weekly, TV shows like Access Hollywood and Entertainment Tonight, and a long list of blogs .. have captured our imagination. There are more celebrity magazines than real news magazines in the United States.

And what is the real problem in all of that? It's that the celebrities of our time have become our heroes, and while I'm sure some of them are fine, upstanding people, no matter how infamous the famous, no matter how devoid of values their lifestyles, these people have become the role models for our youth, the veritable gods of our society.

In The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbon asserted that there were several factors contributing to the fall of Rome, but prime among them he said "The development of an over-obsessive interest in sport and celebrity was one of the main factors in the collapse of the greatest civilization ever known to man." That's why God warned us so strongly against worshipping false idols.

3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"

Beware most of those who camouflage their evil motives under the guise of serving a holy cause. The national memorial to the victims of 9/11 just opened. It is a striking and moving testimony to the need for memory to ensure that the tragedies of history not be repeated, that we learn from the past so that we must not be condemned to reprise its horrors.

And what is the message that ought to speak most starkly to us? Those who brought down the twin towers justified their murderous deed with words of praise to their God. Taking God's name in vain – presuming to act on behalf of the Father of all mankind even while destroying His children – is a sin that strikes at the heart of all religions, capable of bringing God himself into disrepute. All those who justify violence, hatred, and wickedness in the name of the Almighty who clearly abhors these actions stand guilty of profaning the third commandment.

4. "Remember the Sabbath"

There was a time when scholars predicted that technology would grant us the leisure to fulfill ourselves spiritually, to become more than beasts of burden whose lives are circumscribed by the demands of all-consuming work.

Instead, the title of a perceptive new work by Brigid Shulte says it all for 21st century Americans: "Overwhelmed: Work, Love, And Play When No One Has the Time."

The idea of the Sabbath came to teach the world that there must come a time in our lives when we set aside technology for a higher purpose. Remarkably, Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google, felt that this was the most important point he had to make in his commencement address to the graduating class of the University of Pennsylvania. The head of the world's most popular search engine urged college graduates to step away from the virtual world and make human connections. He told them "Turn off your computer. You're actually going to have to turn off your phone and discover all that is human around us." And that is what God told us to do once every seven days.

5. "Honor your parents"

There is great truth in the famous observation of a visitor to the United States who said, "The one thing that impresses me most about Americans is the way in which parents obey their children."

Children need parenting – and the first step is to demand respect.

The only commandment which has a reward alongside of it is the one that requires children to honor their parents. Our contemporary child worshipping society needs a strong dose of the reminder to enforce the fifth commandment.

6. "You shall not murder"

The Torah makes clear that this commandment is violated not only by those who actively commit the crime but also by those who passively sit by and watch without intervening. In an age of unchecked terrorism threatening civilization, in a time when nuclear capability makes global destruction possible, there is no excuse for failure to be involved in responding, be it to the cataclysmic threat from Iran or the murderous menace of fanatic Muslims.

7. "You shall not commit adultery"

Three of the 10 Commandments are so severe they demand martyrdom to prevent their violation. One of them is sexual immorality – a sin that permeates our culture even as it threatens the sanctity of marriage and the preservation of family life.

According to a major new study, over half of all television programming is filled with sexual content; in prime time, over two thirds of all shows deal with it. Sexual permissiveness is the norm. Chaste behavior is depicted as abnormal, faithfulness in marriage as unrealistic.

The seventh commandment is God's way of reminding us that happy marriages require commitment and that – in spite of what Hollywood says – it is more than worth it in creating relationships that last a lifetime.

8. "You shall not steal"

In 2008, the widespread corrupt practices of major Wall Street banks triggered a financial meltdown, hundreds of billions of dollars in losses to unsuspecting investors and homeowners, and the worst recession of modern times. Very few top executives were prosecuted in the massive financial scandal. Corrupt politicians, sleazy bankers, crooked business moguls are the cause of much cynicism in our contemporary society. Stealing in all forms, from petty theft to the high echelons of the corporate world, cannot be tolerated.

9. "You shall not bear false witness"

Lying is a sin. Yet remarkably enough a Florida Court of Appeals unanimously ruled that there is no law against distorting or falsifying the news in the United States (see <http://www.projectcensored.org/11-the-media-can-legally-lie/>). Read how the media, including the New York Times – the supposed Bible of journalistic integrity – cover Israel and those intent on its destruction and you fully appreciate the extent to which truth has become a victim of prejudice and honest reporting a fatality of anti-Semitism.

Consider this quote from John Swinton, former Chief of Staff for the New York Times in an address to the New York Press club: "There is no such thing, at this date of the world's history, in America, as an independent press. You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dares to write your honest opinions, and if you did, you know beforehand that it would never appear in print."

It is a tragic fact that the media today simply refuses to accept the ninth commandment.

10. "You shall not covet"

There is a multibillion-dollar industry whose goal is to make every one of us covet. It is called advertising. It makes us believe that we can never be happy with what we have, only with what we do not as yet own. It wants us to believe that true joy can only come from having more stuff – and then somehow finding the money to buy ever bigger homes and mansions in which to store it.

The Torah wants us to remember that happiness comes not from what we have but from who we are. Inner contentment is a result of knowing that our lives have meaning because they conform to the values of our creator.

How important are these teachings of the Decalogue? The midrash tells us that the reason God created us with 10 fingers is so that whenever we look at our hands we might constantly be reminded of these 10 truths the Almighty long ago revealed to us at Sinai.

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