



# הַמִּזְרָחִי HAMIZRACHI PARSHA WEEKLY

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SHAVUOT 5783 • 2023



ISRAEL  
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וּתְשֹׁב נְעָמִי וְרוֹת הַמּוֹאֲבִיָּה  
כִּלְתָּה עִמָּה...וְהָמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית  
לֶחֶם בְּתַחֲלֵת קֶצִיר שְׁעָרַיִם:

רות א:כב

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# Yom Yerushalayim and Shavuot

## Sinai and Moriah - A Tale of Two Mountains



**Rabbi Doron Perez**

Executive Chairman, World Mizrahi

Throughout Jewish history, two mountains stand out more than any others – Mount Sinai and Mount Moriah. They are so different. One is nestled in the heart of a barren wilderness and the other – the Temple Mount – is at the epicenter of one of the world's greatest cities – Jerusalem. One is in an arid desert far from human society and the other is at the core of a country and civilization. One is where G-d's word was revealed and the other is where it is lived. Sinai is where G-d's holiness appeared intensely and temporarily and the other is the locus of the permanent resting place of G-d's Presence. Sinai is about the Torah, Moriah the Temple. Both are indispensable to the history of the Jewish people and are inextricably linked to the Jewish journey. Sinai is where our spiritual destiny was chartered and Mount Moriah-Jerusalem is its ultimate destination.

### Two Mountains. One Story.

They are also deeply linked in time. I find it quite remarkable that in the modern era, the day of the reunification of Jerusalem – Yom Yerushalayim, the day when the Old City, the Kotel and the Temple Mount returned to Jewish sovereign control for the first time in 2,000 years – occurs

exactly one week before the Giving of the Torah, the Festival of Shavuot.

Yom Yerushalayim and Chag Matan Torah – two milestones in such close proximity. One of destiny, the other of destination. Both are integral parts of the same journey.

Two mountains. One story.

I have come to realize that so much about Judaism in general – and about Jerusalem and the Torah in particular – is essentially about the deeper conceptual meaning of the number two.

### A Tale of Two Cities

Jerusalem is not one city but two. There is not one Torah but two. And it's the secret of the duality of Jerusalem and Torah that will reveal the essence of Judaism itself.

Jerusalem is unlike any other city in that it always exists on two concurrent planes.

On the vertical plane, Jerusalem is simultaneously both a heavenly city and an earthly one, a physical and a spiritual reality, a Divine and a mundane phenomenon, transient and timeless.

On the horizontal, earthly plane, there is East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem, an upper city and a lower city, divided

territorially between the two tribes of Yehuda – Leah’s child – and Binyamin, Rachel’s child. The city is located geopolitically at the nexus between the western world and the eastern orient, between conflicting world views. And Jerusalem has two primary names in Biblical literature: ציון וירושלים, Zion and Jerusalem.

The Torah was given on two tablets, not one. Each tablet represents two distinct categories of Jewish life. One represents the commandments between Man and G-d, our heavenly relationship, and the other between Man and Man, our interactions with our fellow human beings. The Torah consists of two distinct parts – the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. They could not be more different. One we are commanded to write down and the other we are forbidden to write down.<sup>1</sup>

One focuses on the broad sweep of Jewish life – our spiritual history and perspective, while the other focuses on the narrow and particular – actionable items and behavioral requirements. One is about the macro and the other the micro – Halacha, the detailed minutiae of Jewish laws and customs.

Of course, the two cites of Jerusalem are one city and the two Torahs are one. So what is the essence of this duality? What is the deeper meaning of the concept of ‘two’?

Rav Yehuda Loewe, the Maharal of Prague, explains that two is unique in that it is the first number which converts the unitary into a multiple, a single into a plural. One is uniform; two is the birth of difference. The reality of two creates complexity.<sup>2</sup>

The great challenge of the number two is whether the potential for difference will create division or unity. Will two beget three, four and so on, endless expressions of diversity of experiences that have nothing in common? Or alternatively, can they all be weaved together to become one again? Herein lies the incredible power of plurality. It has the potential to transform the meaning of oneness. When one exists alone, it represents total uniformity, devoid of any complexity. The moment diversity is born it has the remarkable



### The Torah is one Torah, a complementary whole aimed at simultaneously synthesizing our relationship with G-d and with our fellow human beings.

ability to transform the blandness of uniformity into the richness of unity. To convert sameness into wholeness.

Will the complexity of contrast at the heart of life itself create irreconcilable contradictions or rather complementary experiences? Will there be conflict or completeness? Thesis and antithesis can remain polar opposites or they can merge to create a beautiful synthesis. Can two become one again or will they remain locked in eternal divisiveness?

Jerusalem is the lodestar of spiritual life and therefore presents us with this challenge more than anywhere else. Will the multifaceted city be divided against itself or will it become one glorious and unified whole?

Will the heavenly and earthly cities be locked in an endless conflict of irreconcilable truths or will they become one eternal city of peace and completeness?

#### Our Task

Our Sages, basing themselves on a cryptic verse in Psalms, charge us to take up this challenge of making the Holy City one complete whole:

ירושלים כעיר שחברה לה יחדיו – “Jerusalem is like a city that was joined together within itself” (122:3). Our Sages interpret this as, “The city which joins Jerusalem on High” – the heavenly city – with the Jerusalem below, the earthly city, must be a city which transforms all of the Jewish people into friends (חברים).

The Torah is one Torah, a complementary whole aimed at simultaneously synthesizing our relationship with G-d and with our fellow human beings. One without the

other is incomplete. We ought to have an equal commitment to both the Written and the Oral Torah – to Biblical and Talmudic study, to understanding both the broad context and meaning of Jewish life as well as the detailed implementation of Halacha and Jewish Law. One without the other creates divisiveness and tension.

If we focus only on our relationship with G-d and not with our fellow Jews and other people (or vice versa), we miss the mark. If we only study Tanach and not Talmud and Jewish Law, (or vice versa), we do not grasp the fullness of Jewish life. Inevitably, diversity becomes partial and divisive instead of harmonious. We should strive to bring all disparate aspects together, creating a תורה תמימה, one whole and wholesome Torah.

During the miraculous Six-Day War, and through an extraordinary turn of events, a divided city would finally be reunited.

I believe that to ensure that the city remains geopolitically united, it must first and foremost be internally united. The spiritual fault lines and fissures which create contrast and conflict ought to be forged together to complement each other and cultivate completeness.

Both the Torah and Jerusalem combine the earthly and the heavenly, the particular and the universal, the national and the religious, the ethnic and the ethical and the values of truth and peace. Indeed, the wholeness of the Torah is inherently linked to the unity and holiness of Jerusalem.

May we merit the ultimate expression of spiritual wholeness, the rebuilding of the Temple, soon and speedily in our days.

1. The prohibition to commit the Oral Torah to writing appears in Gittin (60b). Based on the Talmud (Temurah 14b), the Rambam explains the extenuating harsh, historical circumstances which left the Sages no choice but to begin committing it to writing lest it be forgotten (Introduction to Mishneh Torah).

2. Tiferet Yisrael 34.





# From Shir HaShirim to Rut – From Romance to Responsibility



**Rabbanit Shani Taragin**  
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

At the time of the formation of the canon of the Hagiographa (Ketuvim), the five “*megillot*” (Shir HaShirim, Rut, Eichah, Kohelet and Esther) were not regarded as a unit, nor is the name “Megillah” (a scroll to be read aloud in a public forum) applied to them, other than to Esther codified by the Tannaim. The custom to read the *sefarim* of Shir HaShirim, Rut and Eichah as part of our holiday liturgy first appears in the post-Talmudic Masechet Soferim (14:3). The question therefore arises regarding the association of these particular *sefarim* with the choice holidays upon which they should be read. The Gemara (Taanit 30a) teaches that we may learn Eichah on Tisha B’Av as it recounts the tragedy of *churban*; but why read Shir HaShirim on Pesach and Rut on Shavuot if the events recorded are not particular to that chag?

Numerous explanations are offered by Rishonim to associate the “*megillot*” of Shir HaShirim and Rut to the respective *moadim* of Pesach and Shavuot. Some are independent of one another, whereas others link the two *sefarim* historically, seasonally and thematically. Ample *midrashim* provide literary and thematic associations between the redemption of Pesach as the initial manifestation of a Divine relationship with Am Yisrael and the vicissitudes of a love relationship described in Shir HaShirim.<sup>1</sup> Rishonim also provide various additional associations between Rut, Matan Torah<sup>2</sup> and David HaMelech.<sup>3</sup> The Avudraham offers a seasonal-historical connection for both: The custom is to read Shir HaShirim on Pesach because the *sefer* contains allusions to our redemption (i.e. 1:9 – “My beloved resembles the steed of Pharaoh’s chariot”) and to read Rut which mentions the barley harvest and the

conversion of Rut on Shavuot as it shares the same agricultural season and theme of national “conversion”. This explanation enhances the connection between these two otherwise independent *sefarim* of Tanach – Shir HaShirim, written as poetry attributed to Shlomo HaMelech (circa 950 BCE) and Rut, one of the historiographical narratives of Shmuel haNavi (circa 1050 BCE)<sup>4</sup>. The former is set in the spring time<sup>5</sup> while the latter plot develops from the barley harvest through the wheat harvest on the threshing floor of Boaz. Similarly, the historical development of Am Yisrael from escaping the chariots of Pharaoh mentioned in Shir HaShirim to our acceptance of a Torah-based lifestyle like Rut, on Shavuot.

Connecting broader agricultural and historical themes of Shir HaShirim and Rut underscores the relationship between Pesach and Shavuot depicted in the Torah (i.e. counting seven weeks from the bringing of the Omer on Pesach to the Minchat Shte HaLechem on Shavuot). Once this textual relationship exists, it is fascinating to note other historical allusions and textual parallels which highlight poignant messages of comparison and contrast. Shmuel HaNavi seems to be thinking of the story of Pesach and Yetziat Mitzrayim as he writes the story of Rut.

The story of Rut begins with an exposition reminiscent of our national history in Egypt; A famine triggers a family to move from the fields of Judea to a foreign land (Egypt/Moav). Both stories begin with the repetition of names followed by deaths of male children (Pharaoh’s decrees, Machlon-Chilyon). Most textually striking, is the beginning of both narratives with the initiative of the head of the household – “Vayekeh ish miBeit \_\_\_\_”.

The Baa’l HaTurim notes<sup>6</sup> that this parallel alludes to the beginning of stories of redemption through the first “redeemer” (i.e. Moshe) and the final “redeemer” (i.e. *Mashiach*). The contrast, however, teaches us a remarkable message. *Sefer Shemot* begins with a man walking and taking a wife to perpetuate a family regardless of harsh decrees. *Sefer Rut* tells of a man who leaves Israel due to a famine and subsequently destroys his family,<sup>7</sup> only to have his family rebuilt when Boaz completes the verse properly – “*Vayikach Boaz et Rut*” as he takes Rut as his wife and begets a child.

Both expositions introduce the man (of Beit Levi/Beit Lechem) as the anticipated “hero” of the story only to be followed by passivity and disappearance from the narrative. In both stories, the women (mother/daughter/“adoptive” mother teams) become the active characters who precipitate the rebuilding of homes and stories of redemption. Shmuel HaNavi is certainly alluding to the story of Shemot when writing Rut as a means of revisiting the miracles of salvation as highlighted by employing the rare usage of “In the middle of the night...” at the climax of the story.<sup>8</sup> As opposed to the miracle of the plague of the firstborn and immediate evacuation of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt in the middle of the night without any food, Shmuel describes a “miracle at midnight” without divine intervention. He describes a scene of a man frightened by the appearance of a woman by his feet, only to provide her with a blessing, allow her to stay the night, and nourish her with food so she would not leave empty-handed. Herein lies the message of Rut on Shavuot; Pesach teaches us of the miracles of Hashem which allowed for our *geulah*, whereas the story of Rut highlights that the kind

*Continued on page 9*

# Halachic Q&A



**Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon**

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Rabbi of the Gush Etzion Regional Council

Rosh Yeshivah, Jerusalem College of Technology | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot and La'Ofek

**Question: What is the beracha on cheesecake?**

There is a custom to eat dairy foods on Shavuot (Rema 494:3). Some believe that dairy serves as a parable to Torah (Mishna Berura *se'if katan* 11), since the Torah is likened to milk, as it says “honey and milk under your tongue” (Shir HaShirim 4:11), metaphorically referring to the sweetness of Torah in one’s mouth. Some believe that since the people of Israel received the laws of *kashrut* for the first time at *Matan Torah*, they could not immediately eat meat and *kasher* their utensils, so they ate milk.

Many eat cheesecake on Shavuot; but what *beracha* should one say? In baked cheesecake, there is pastry (*mezonot*) and cheese (*shehakol*). Similar mixtures of different distinct ingredients in one dish exist in many foods today, for example, the Israeli *krembo*. Let’s think about the different possibilities for the *beracha*:

- Maybe we say a *shehakol*, because the cheese or cream is *shehakol*, and it seems this is the *ikkar*, the most important part of the cake.
- Maybe two blessings are recited: *mezonot* on the pastry or cake section and *shehakol* on the cheese or whipped cream.
- Could it be that we recite only *mezonot*?

The Mishnah (Berachot 44a) states:

“This is the rule: whenever there is an essential food and a secondary food [within a mixture], we say a *beracha* on the essential and exempt the secondary.”

The Gemara (Berachot 36b) teaches us another rule: when there is a mixture of foods which include *shehakol* ingredients and *mezonot* ingredients, the **flour is considered primary, even if it is less important** (unless we really do not enjoy its taste or cannot taste it). The reason for this is that the five kinds of grain are of special importance, since bread is usually made from them, so even if they are in a relatively small (but noticeable) amount, they are considered the main ingredient. In the language of the Gemara:

“Anything which contains one of the five kinds of grain – its *beracha* is borei minei *mezonot*.”

**Therefore, the *beracha* on baked cheesecake is only *mezonot*.** Although the cheese is most important to us, the **bottom of the cake, which is *mezonot*, is considered primary.** So too with chocolate bars which include *mezonot* ingredients (like the Israeli *kif-kef*, *pesek zman*, etc.): although the chocolate is more important to us, the *mezonot* part is primary, since we taste that part and enjoy it as well.

However, one of our most important *poskim*, the Mishna Berura (168, *sei’f katan*

45), clarified that only when the two ingredients are **baked together** should one say *mezonot* alone. However, **when the two things are separate, and only laid together**, like ice cream in a cone, such that a person enjoys both the ice cream and the cone, he should say two *berachot*: ***mezonot (on the cone)* and *shehakol (on the ice cream)***. Therefore, on a *krembo*, one should say two *berachot*, **because it includes two separate ingredients not baked together.**

If someone does not like the *mezonot* in the cake at all (or ice cream cone), **and the foods are used only as a ‘container’ to hold the cake or ice cream, one should not say *mezonot* at all, only *shehakol*.**

The diagram below summarizes.

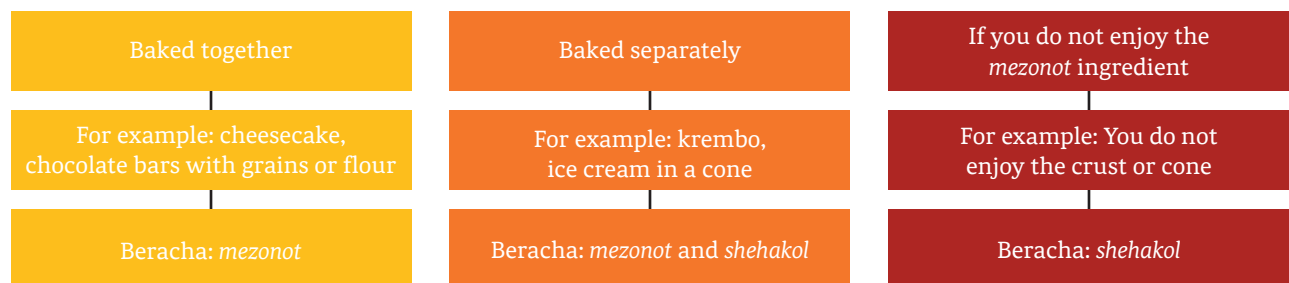
On Shavuot, we try to raise ourselves up a level, to be filled with the desire to fulfill G-d’s will in the world, to be ready to receive the Torah.

We hope that we will prepare properly and not only hear the *ba’al koreh* reading *Aseret HaDibrot*, but hear G-d’s very voice emanating from within the words. As the Kedushat Levi writes:

“Thus a person merits that on every Shavuot he hears the voice announcing *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*. We find that a person must greatly prepare himself to merit hearing the words of G-d.”

● *Compiled by Yaakov Panitch.*

The beracha on a food which consists of both *shehakol* and *mezonot* ingredients:



# Receiving the Torah in the Desert



**Rabbanit Sharon Rimon**  
Tanach teacher and author

When the Torah describes *Bnei Yisrael's* arrival at the place where they would receive the Torah, it mentions the word “desert” three times: “In the third month of *Bnei Yisrael's* departure from Egypt, on this day they arrived at the **desert** of Sinai. They journeyed from Refidim, and they arrived at the **desert** of Sinai, and they encamped in the **desert**, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.”<sup>1</sup> Why the seemingly superfluous emphasis?

The desert is a place of emptiness and lack, an expanse uncontrolled by human hand. In such a place, a person feels his deficiency and his complete dependence on G-d. In the desert, it is clear that without G-d's help he cannot survive. For 40 years, *Bnei Yisrael* traveled in the desert and experienced in the clearest, most powerful way, utter dependence on G-d to provide all of their basic needs: water, food, and protection from dangers such as snakes and scorpions. This sense of dependence constitutes the basis for the connection between G-d and *Am Yisrael*, and the obligation to fulfill His commandments.

This sense of dependence could be a technical matter, i.e. when a person understands that G-d gives him his needs, he must commit to fulfilling His commandments. However, it seems there is much more to it than that. A person who lives in the desert lives with a different awareness than one who lives elsewhere. As our Sages expressed it:<sup>2</sup>



**Humility is the basis for all interpersonal communication and for all learning, but it is especially important for learning Torah and for connecting to G-d.**

“And G-d spoke to Moshe in *Midbar Sinai*”<sup>3</sup> – Anyone who does not make himself like an uninhabited (*hefker*) desert, cannot acquire wisdom and Torah. Thus the verse states that G-d spoke to Moshe *BaMidbar Sinai*.”

Our Sages explained the repetition of the word *midbar* by teaching us that we are not just talking about a physical location, but also an awareness and a consciousness. What is this “desert” consciousness? Our Sages defined it as *hefker* – ownerless, uninhabited and abandoned. One can also define it as a consciousness of lack.

Lack or deficiency (be it in the desert or in other situations) opens up a person to the understanding that nothing can be taken for granted; that even our most basic needs depend on the kindness of Heaven. This, in turn, builds the character trait of humility: the ability to recognize that which is lacking, the deficiencies and weaknesses, and the understanding and willingness to accept that someone else can fill that void. The one who fills that lack can be G-d or any other person who can give us whatever we are lacking.

Humility is the basis for all interpersonal communication and for all learning, but it is especially important for learning Torah and for connecting to G-d. G-d's Kingship in this world can only exist when humans are not haughty, when they make space in their hearts and in their world for the presence of G-d. As Yeshayahu said: “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and G-d alone shall be exalted on that day.”<sup>4</sup>

*Am Yisrael's* journey through the desert was the basis for accepting the Torah with feelings of humility and dependence on G-d. Since then, every year we celebrate Shavuot, the holiday of receiving the Torah, and at the same time, we read the weekly Torah portion of Bamidbar. This *parasha* reminds us of the journey *Am Yisrael* went through in the desert – a voyage to the shores of humility, to a dependence on G-d and an inner connection with Him.

This year, as we are once again accepting the Torah, let us find our humility once again and enhance our awareness of our dependence on the Almighty.

1. Shemot 19:1-2.
2. Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar: Parasha 1, section 7.
3. Bamidbar 1:1.
4. Yeshayahu 2:17.



# Elevating to the highest level



**Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir**  
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

**W**hat is so special about the coming festival of Shavuot? Here's a simple and beautiful thought that I heard from Rabbi Shalom Rosner of Beit Shemesh:

We know how to unite against terror and during wars when we excel in solidarity. During the corona crisis we also demonstrated mutual responsibility. There are many examples of an external enemy that served to elevate our feeling of unity, and this is important. But our stature when we stood together at Mount Sinai heralded a revolution. It raised us up to a new level of unity.

For the first time we did not run away from anyone but rather came together in joy to receive our new identity. We did not crowd together close beside each other because of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the Nazis, the anti-Semites or any other threat but instead we chose to be together and to receive the Ten Commandments. We were not defined by a negative experience but by a positive one. During the last several months we went through the negative type of defining experience from intense disagreements. But on the festival of Shavuot it's possible to elevate to the highest level – unification around our joyful common story.



How and why do people change? I heard the following thought from Rebbetzin Esther Wein of New York.

“There were three people in history who succeeded in changing who they were and became Jews in the process, each by a different path. Avraham Avinu investigated the world, saw all of creation, arrived at faith in G-d, and became the father of the Jewish nation. He reached this status through scientific analysis, research, logic, use of his mind. The second person to change himself while becoming a Jew was Yitro (Jethro), a

pagan priest, who joined the Jewish nation by way of an examination of history, an appreciation of miracles, and an understanding of G-d's involvement in world events. He saw the Exodus from Egypt, the splitting of the Red Sea – and converted to the faith of his son-in-law.

On Shavuot we read the story of Ruth whose path was entirely different. Ruth joined our nation after meeting a good and pleasant person. Naomi, true to her name (Naomi is derived from *na'im* or pleasant), was pleasant above all. She was a straightforward woman who was full of kindness and compassion. Her pleasantness, day in and day out, found favor in the eyes of Ruth who simply wanted to stay by her side. During that time, Naomi became a widow, impoverished and alone, yet despite all this – the fact that she was a wonderful person with values was enough to change Ruth. This pleasantness attracted Ruth, caused her to join our people, and from her descendants King David was born.”



No social media campaign trumpeted this event. It had no spokesperson, no formal organization. But I was privileged to be there, and here is what I saw:

Thousands of people in the center of Jerusalem learning Torah in the middle of the night in lectures, seminars and hevruta study pairs, or reciting the traditional Shavuot Tikkun. A father and his son, spied through a window long after midnight, sitting in an empty synagogue studying the Book of Samuel together.

At 4:00 am, tens of thousands of people spilling out of all of the city's neighborhoods and alleys, making their way on foot to the Western Wall. Some of them comfortable, mainstream types, with eyes half-closed (like me), some smoking cigarettes because it's a holiday that permits lighting fire from a preexisting flame. Some Hassidim with towels over

their shoulders because they went to dip in the *mikveh* (ritual bath) in honor of the receiving of the Torah, and some – especially the youth – just walking while singing and dancing.

The huge quantities of food, drink and candies that people brought throughout the night to the security people deployed around the city. When we offer something to the two military police soldiers from the Druze town of Daliyat El Karmel on Shivtei Israel Street, they refuse, because they have already received such an abundance.

Arriving at the Kotel: The myriad *minyanim*, the cacophony of prayer styles and liturgical hymns and accents. I ask every person I meet where they are from. They came from southern Israel, from the Golan Heights, from Gush Etzion, from the greater Tel-Aviv area, from the Gaza periphery. I had no idea so many individuals and families make the effort to make this pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

And then I realize this is not just an Israeli story at all, we are part of something bigger. By my estimate, thousands of Jews flew from New York alone just to be here for these moments. The women standing next to me, flushed with excitement, told me they were part of a WIZO delegation from Mexico, Panama and Peru.

Going up to the roof of the Aish HaTorah yeshiva with a group of students from the Nefesh Yehudi project who were hearing, for the first time in their lives, the verses of Hallel sung at such a location and at such a time. And the Book of Ruth. And the Ten Commandments.

And the way all these multitudes of people later left the place quietly.

And the next morning, I read the newspaper, and all I find is a summary of the traffic jams and the number of visitors to Israel's national parks over the holiday.

And that's why I wrote this.



# Speech, Thought and Action



**Rabbi Danny Mirvis**

Deputy CEO, World Mizrachi

Rabbi of Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

In his introduction to the first of the *Aseret HaDibrot*, Ibn Ezra explains that there are three categories of *Mitzvot*: commandments of the heart (thought and belief), commandments of the tongue (speech), and commandments of action. After providing examples of each, he explains that the first of the *Dibrot* (“I am *Hashem* your G-d...”) fits in best with the category of commandments of the heart.

Nechama Leibowitz picked up where Ibn Ezra left off and categorised the rest of the *Aseret HaDibrot* according to these three groups, revealing a chiasmic structure. The *Dibrot* commence with *Mitzvot* of thought, move on to speech, continue with action, return to speech and conclude with a *Mitzva* of thought.

Fascinatingly, while the order of first of the *Luchot* (representing the *Mitzvot* between us and *Hashem*) is: thought,

speech, action; the second *Luach* (representing the *Mitzvot* between us and fellow people) has the inverse order: action, speech, thought.

When viewing the *Luchot* through the lens of these categories, crucial messages emerge.

When it comes to our relationship with *Hashem*, represented in the first five *Dibrot*, it is essential that it does not remain in the sphere of thought and belief. Our connection with *Hashem* must be reflected in our speech and translated into meaningful action. As Hamlet put it, “Suit the action to the word, the word to the action”.

Conversely, our responsibilities to other people are not limited to our actions. The way we speak *to* others and *about* others is of importance, and while it is less obvious, the way we think about others is of great significance too.

*Yizkor* is about combining speech, thought and action.

The thoughts and recollections of our departed loved ones accompany us every day of our lives. We do not need *Yizkor* to remember them (and especially not on *Yom Tov*, which is so focused on family and community). Yet *Yizkor* takes us beyond the realm of thought.

When reciting *Yizkor*, we verbalise those thoughts and we pledge to give to *Tzedaka*, translating them into positive and meaningful action.

Through reciting *Yizkor* and pledging to *Tzedaka*, may we contribute to the merits of those who are no longer with us, uplift our own actions, and enhance the lives of others in need.

Chag Sameach!

*Continued from page 5*

actions of man to fellow man and woman will lead to future stories of redemption.

This, I believe is the strongest connection between Shir HaShirim and Rut read respectively on Pesach and Shavuot. Though written by Shlomo HaMelech at a later date, Shir HaShirim introduces us to romantic love at springtime, the blossoming of a loving relationship reminiscent of the neophyte stages of our national redemption. The beautiful poetry, however, of Shir HaShirim ends somewhat tragically - with the distance of the lovers out in the field and garden. The Dod remains a shepherd though the Ra'aya longs for her “King” to invite her to his home. The story of Rut begins with tragedy - deaths of a family in the fields of Moav. From despair, a story of return and redemption from Pesach to Shavuot unfolds through the kind deeds and sense of responsibility of individuals. From a

“miracle at midnight” on the threshing floor, a home is rebuilt, and a threshing floor becomes the foundation of the Beit HaMikdash. Through kindness and loyalty the beginning of redemption of Malchut Beit David is born, wherein the shepherd becomes a king and from the fields, a dynasty is created.

Rabbi Zeira states<sup>9</sup> - the canonization of Rut comes to teach us of the rewards for those who act with kindness, albeit unbeknownst to them,<sup>10</sup> the basis of the messages of the Torah which begins and ends with Divine kindness.<sup>11</sup> Our national history begins with the romance, the “light”, the manifestation of Divine miracles experienced Pesach time and alluded to in Shir HaShirim.<sup>12</sup> Our national destiny, however, is broadcast on Shavuot as we bring the *bikkurim*, recount the miracles and take responsibility for providing kindness to every member in society. These are

the messages we are taught to read in Rut on Shavuot accompanying the Torah, i.e. the “miraculous” kindnesses that will lead to the next and final Davidic redemption and House rebuilt speedily in our days - *be'ezrat* - one another!

1. See Tanchuma, Parshat Toldot 18
2. E.g. Levush s.497, recurring themes of ‘Chessed’ in Torah and Sefer Rut
3. Bechor Shor Bava Batra 13b- Because David died on Shavuot (Yerushalmi Chagigah 2:3)
4. BT, Bava Batra 14b
5. Shir HaShirim 2:10
6. Shemot 2:1
7. Both Amram and Elimelech are described by ChaZa”L as leaders of their generation who set the tone for their followers
8. Shemot 12:29, Rut 3:8
9. Rut Rabba 2:14
10. Rut Rabba 5:6
11. Sotah 14a
12. Rav Kook, Olat Reiyah Shavuot vol.2, pg. 305

# A Double Celebration



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

**T**he festival of Shavuot is a mystery wrapped in an enigma. Here is how Shavuot is described and defined in Parshat Emor:

“From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord . . . On that same day, you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.” (Vayikra 23: 15-21)

These are the difficulties: First, Shavuot, “the feast of weeks”, is given no calendrical date: all the other festivals are. Pesach, for example, is “on the fifteenth day” of the “first month”. Shavuot has no such date. It is calculated on the basis of counting “seven full weeks” from a particular starting time, not by noting a date in the year.

Secondly, while the New Moon was determined on the basis of eyewitness testimony, Shavuot could have no fixed date. In the Jewish calendar a month can be long (30 days) or short (29). If Nisan and Iyar were both long months, Shavuot would fall on 5 Sivan. If both were short, it would fall on 7 Sivan. And if one were long and the other short, it would fall on 6 Sivan. Unlike other festivals, Shavuot is (or was) a moveable feast.

Thirdly, the point at which the counting of days and weeks begins is signaled in a profoundly ambiguous phrase: “From the day after the Sabbath”. But which Sabbath? And what is the reference to a Sabbath doing here at all? The previous passage talked about Pesach, not the Sabbath. This led to one of the great controversies in Second Temple

Judaism. The Pharisees, who believed in the Oral Law, as well as the Written one, understood “the Sabbath” to mean, here, the first day of Pesach (15 Nisan). The Sadducees, who believed in the Written Law only, took the text literally. The day after the Sabbath is Sunday. Thus the count always begins on a Sunday, and Shavuot, fifty days later, also always falls on a Sunday.

The fourth mystery, though, is the deepest: what is Shavuot *about*? What does it commemorate? About Pesach and Sukkot, we have no doubt. Pesach is a commemoration of the Exodus. Sukkot is a reminder of the forty years in the wilderness.

In the case of Shavuot, all the Torah says is that it is the “Feast of the Harvest”, and the “Day of Firstfruits”. These are agricultural descriptions, not historical ones. Pesach and Sukkot have both: an agricultural aspect (spring/autumn) and a historical one (exodus/wilderness). This is not a marginal phenomenon, but of the essence. Other religions of the ancient world celebrated seasons. They recognized cyclical time. Only Israel observed *historical* time – time as a journey, a story, an evolving narrative. The historical dimension of the Jewish festivals was unique. All the more, then, is it strange that Shavuot is not biblically linked to a historical event.

Jewish tradition identified Shavuot as “the time of the giving of the Torah”, the anniversary of the Divine revelation at Sinai when the Israelites heard the voice of G-d and made a covenant with Him. But that connection is not made in the Torah itself. To be sure, the Torah says that “In the third month after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness

of Sinai” (Shmot 19: 1), and Shavuot is the only festival in the third month. So the connection is implicit, but it is not explicit. For this, as for the festival’s date, we need the Oral tradition.

What then was the view of the Sadducees? It is unlikely that they linked Shavuot with the giving of the Torah. For that event had a date, and for the Sadducees, Shavuot did not have a date. They kept it on a Sunday – they observed it on a specific day of the week, not on a specific date in the year. How did the Sadducees view Shavuot?

There is a fascinating episode recorded in the rabbinic literature (Menachot 65a) in which a Sadducee explains to R. Yochanan ben Zakkai why, according to them, Shavuot is always on a Sunday: “Moses our teacher was a great lover of Israel. Knowing that Shavuot lasted only one day, he, therefore, fixed it on the day after the Sabbath so that Israel might enjoy themselves for two successive days.” Shavuot gave the Israelites a long weekend!

From this starting point, we can begin to speculate what Shavuot might have meant for the Sadducees. The late Louis Finkelstein argued that they were landowners and farmers. In general, they were wealthier than the Pharisees, and more closely attached to the State and its institutions: the Temple and the political elite. They were as near as Judaism came to a governing class.

For farmers, the agricultural significance of Shavuot would have been clear and primary. It was “the festival of the harvest, of the firstfruits of your work, of what you sow in the field” (Shmot 23:16). It came at the end of a seven-week process that began with the bringing of the Omer – the first of the barley crop. This was

the busy time of gathering in the grain. Farmers would have a specific reason to give thanks to G-d who “brings forth bread from the ground”. They would also, by the end of harvesting, be exhausted. Hence the Sadducee’s remark about needing a long weekend.

We can now see the outline of a possible Sadducean argument. Pesach represents the beginning of the Israelites’ journey to freedom. Sukkot recalls the forty years of wandering in the desert. *But where in the Jewish year do we recall and celebrate the end of the journey: the entry into the promised land?* When, in fact, did it take place? The Book of Joshua (5: 10-12) states:

“On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. *The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain.* The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan.”

It is this text that Maimonides takes as proof that “the day after the Sabbath” in

fact means, as the text states here, “the day after the Passover”. Seen through Sadducean eyes, however, this text might have held a quite different significance. *The Omer recalls the day the Israelites first ate the produce of the promised land.* It was the end of the wilderness years – the day they stopped eating manna and started eating bread from the land to which they had been traveling for forty years.

The reason Shavuot is given only agricultural, not historical, content in the Torah is that in this case agriculture was history. The fifty day count from the first time they ate food grown in Israel to the end of the grain harvest represents the end of the journey of which Pesach was the beginning and Sukkot the middle. *Shavuot is a festival of the land and its produce because it commemorates the entry into the land in the days of Joshua.* So the Sadducees may have argued. It was Israel’s first Yom HaAtzmaut. It was the festival of entry into the promised land.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sadducees rapidly disappeared. How do you celebrate a festival of the land

when you have lost the land? How do you predicate your religious identity on the State and its institutions when you have lost those institutions? Only a movement (the Pharisees) and a festival (Shavuot) based on the giving of the Torah, could survive. For the Torah was not completely dependent on the land. It had been given “in the wilderness”. It applied anywhere and everywhere.

To be sure, the Pharisees, no less than the Sadducees, loved the land. They knew the Torah in its entirety could only be kept there. They longed for it, prayed for it, lived there whenever they could. But even in exile, they still had the Torah and the promise it contained that one day Jews would return, and recover their sovereignty, and rebuild what they had lost.

The argument about Shavuot turned out to be fateful for Jewish history. Those who celebrated it as “the time of the giving of the Torah” ensured Jewish survival through nearly 20 centuries of exile and dispersion. And we, who live in the era of the return, can rejoice in a double celebration: of the Torah *and* of the land.



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We would like to express our gratitude to all the participating schools who took part in this competition. We hope this competition will connect and bring unity to Jewish schools from all over the world.



# Keviut of the Yom Tov of Shavuot



**Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

There are two *parshiot* in the Torah that mention *Sefirat HaOmer*, and there is a significant difference between them. In *Parshat Emor*, the Torah says וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת ... תספרו חמישים יום – “You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Rest Day ... you shall count 50 **days**” (Vayikra 23:15-16). In *Parshat Re’eh*, we read, שבועה שבועות תספר לך, – “Seven **weeks** you shall count for yourself” (Devarim 16:9).

Rav Soloveitchik noted an additional distinction between these two *parshiot*, aside from whether the unit of time to be counted is days or weeks. They also differ in terms of whether the *mitzvah* is directed to *Bnei Yisrael* in the singular or in the plural form. We can understand this in light of a *Beraita* cited in the *Gemara* (Menachot 65b), which appears more fully both in the *Sifra* (Emor) and in the *Sifrei* (Re’eh): “Seven weeks you shall count for yourself” – in *Beit Din [HaGadol]*. And from where do we derive [the obligation of *sefirah*] on each individual? The Torah states, “You shall count for yourselves” – [the *sefirah* must be performed] by each and every individual.

The basis of this *drasha* is a rule quoted in the name of the Vilna Gaon (*Divrei Eliyahu*, p. 94). Whenever a *mitzvah* is repeated in the Torah, once in the singular and once in the plural, the singular form is addressed to *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, while the plural form devolves upon the individual. In the case of *Sefirat HaOmer*, the *Beit Din HaGadol*, which represents *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, fulfills the obligation upon the **single** unit of *Klal Yisrael* when it counts the seven weeks from Pesach until Shavuot. The purpose of this *sefirah* is to be *kovea* (establish) the correct day of the

Yom Tov of Shavuot. As such, it is part of the more general *mitzvah* of *keviat haLuach* (establishing the calendar), which is the responsibility of the *Sanhedrin*. A second aspect of the *mitzvah*, reflected in its being repeated in the plural form, is directed to each and every individual, who should engage in a count of days during this time.

Based on this analysis, the Rav explained why the Torah calls the Yom Tov by the name שבועות – the “Festival of Weeks” – and not חג החמישים – the “Holiday of the 50th Day.” It is because the component of *sefirah* that is *kovea* the Yom Tov is not the counting of days by each individual, but rather the counting of **weeks**, which *Beit Din* performs as part of their mandate to take responsibility for *keviat haLuach*.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchot Temidin UMussafin* 7:24) includes the counting of days and weeks in the *mitzvah d’oraita* of *sefirah*, even nowadays. If, as we have seen, the *sefirah* of weeks is a *mitzvah* on the *Beit Din HaGadol*, how could that *sefirah* be *d’oraita* nowadays, when we lack the presence of a *Beit Din HaGadol*?

Rav Soloveitchik explained (*Shiurim LeZecher Abba Mari z”l* I, pp. 129-131, 137-139; *Kovetz Chiddushei Torah*, pp. 52-56) that when the *Rambam* holds that *Kiddush haChodesh* requires the authorization of the *Sanhedrin* (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, Aseh 153; *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:1-2), it is not in their capacity as the Supreme Court of the Jewish people, rendering the final legal decision on any halachic question. The Rav explained that *Kiddush haChodesh* does not necessarily involve a complicated *psak halacha*, requiring the greatest legal minds of the Jewish nation. The necessity of the involvement of the *Sanhedrin* here is due to its second role – its decision represents the majority opinion of the Jewish nation. In

this sense, the *Sanhedrin* fills a role akin to that of the Congress in the United States.

The Rav elaborated by explaining that the responsibility of *keviat haLuach* ultimately rests upon the entity of *Klal Yisrael*. When there is a *Beit Din HaGadol*, it performs this task as the representative of *Klal Yisrael*. Accordingly, we understand that when the *Beit Din HaGadol* ceases to exist, the responsibility of *keviat haLuach* shifts back to *Klal Yisrael*. This is the basis of the *d’oraita* obligation, according to the *Rambam*, to count days and weeks. The counting of weeks by *Klal Yisrael* accomplishes the *keviat Yom Tov* of Shavuot even in the absence of a *Beit Din HaGadol*. [See *Eretz HaTzvi*, pp. 9-14, 231.]

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.



# The Two Faces Of Shavuot



**Rabbi Yisroel Reisman**  
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

In order to properly understand and appreciate the *Chag* of Shavuot, there is a question that must be asked to fully understand what in essence this day is celebrating. There are two unique aspects to Shavuot. Firstly it is of course *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the climax to which the previous seven weeks have been leading towards and the foremost reason for this *Yom Tov* is our minds. On the other hand, Shavuot also marks the time that the *Shtei HaLechem* (Two Loaves) are brought to the *Beis HaMikdash* in recognition of the *Chag HaKatzir* and the wheat harvest in which *Korbanos* were offered from the new crops.

The Gemara is Menachos (45B) emphasizes as well that there are two distinct aspects on this *Yom Tov* by showing us that there are two completely separate types of *Korbanos* that are brought on Shavuot. One is taught to us in Parshat Emor which is given for the *Yom Tov* itself, *Chag Matan Torah*, and there is another taught in Parshat Pinchas that is given for the *Bikkurim*. Why is it that the day in which we recognize Hashem giving us His ultimate possession and separating us from all the other nations is also the day that we commemorate the *Yom HaBikkurim* in the *Beis HaMikdash*?

We see this idea also appear when speaking about the *Minhag* to eat dairy on Shavuot. The Rema explains that this is in response to the *Shtei HaLechem* brought to the *Beis HaMikdash*. One is to be eaten with meat and the other is to

be eaten with dairy. Additionally, the Mishna Berurah believes it is because when Moshe Rabbeinu came down to *Klal Yisrael* they now were obligated in the *Halachos* of *shechita*, they needed to *tovel* their dishes and overall the process would have taken much too long to prepare a *fleishig seudah* that they decided it would be easier to have a dairy meal. We see here that there are different answers for this *minhag* according to different aspects of the reason for the *Yom Tov*, yet the question still remains as to why these two seemingly very disconnected events have been brought together on the same day.

There is an answer given by Rav Pam ZT"l based on the Gemara based on the Gemara in Pesachim (68B). He explains that every *Yom Tov* can be a *Chag* that is *Kulo L'Hashem* – completely for Hashem without any such personal enjoyment or pleasure, yet the Gemara here teaches by that *הכל הולל מודים בעצרת דבגינו נמי לכם* - Everyone agrees that Shavuot needs an aspect of *Lachem*. Why is this the case? People may think there is a general contradiction between *Matan Torah* and the pleasures one may receive in our world. *Matan Torah* was given over to be kept within our world, not as a contradiction to our world. Therefore it is specifically on Shavuot that we need to have this *Lachem* feature to understand how these two ideas align with each other. This is why this *Yom Tov* in particular is a combination of the Torah and the physical world as well. When one brings the *Shtei HaLechem* and to the *Beis*

*HaMikdash*, there are ten *Mitzvos* he must do in order to properly offer them. This is why there is a special custom when one makes *HaMotzi* to hold the bread with all ten of his fingers to remind himself that even when a person is eating, they must be reminded that behind this seemingly completely physical action lies a deeper level of *Kedusha*. This is also why the *Bracha* of *HaMotzi* has ten words in it, as an expression that partaking in certain pleasures in this world must always be from the spirit of the Torah.

This idea appears as well in Megillas Rus which by no coincidence is read on Shavuot. Boaz is described to us as a *shofet*, a judge of Am Yisrael. Why is it that we are also taught that he was a man that would work the fields? Seemingly a person with such a role should be spending his time in the *Beis Midrash* or in *Beis Din*. The Chasam Sofer answers that we must remember that the physical working of the land of Eretz Yisrael is a *Mitzvah* of itself and not just some basic activity.

May this Shavuot help us recognize the need for the Torah to be the influence for us in everything we do and perhaps particularly let it be a reminder that the physical actions we take part in, when done properly are not in contradiction with the Torah but rather are a way of maximising our *Avodas Hashem*.

# Receiving the Torah Anew



**Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira zt"l**  
Former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel

**C**hag *Matan Torah* is the holiday of the Oral Law. Of the Torah Sages of every generation. *Matan Torah* is renewed in every generation, and the day the Torah was given in the past is a day infused with the spiritual energies for the Torah to be given every year. Every year, there is a return to what was, and just as Pesach is the time of freedom every year, so Shavuot is the time ripe for receiving the Torah anew in every generation. When we celebrate Shavuot, we are not celebrating an historical event in the past but the essence of the day that regenerates itself year after year.

The Yerushalmi says,<sup>1</sup> “In all the *korbanot* it is written חטא (sin) and concerning *Atzeret* (Shavuot) it is not written חטא. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* said to them, since you accepted upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, I consider it as if you have never ever sinned.” And the *Korban HaEida*<sup>2</sup> explains that concerning all *korbanot* it is written, ונשיתם שער עינים אחד לחטא, and concerning *Atzeret* it is not written לחטא but just שער עינים אחד, and that's because “every year on *Atzeret* is like the day we stood at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah anew... and therefore there is no חטא, no sin, on this day.” The regenerative reality of *Kabbalat HaTorah* every year is what allows a person's sins to be atoned for every year anew. And every time we read the pasuk כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע<sup>3</sup>, there is another, new acceptance of Torah.

## For each of us

This annual *Kabbalat HaTorah* is for each and every one of us. Rav Yosef says,<sup>4</sup> “Were it not for this day, how many Yosefs would there be in the marketplace?” In other words, thanks to *Matan Torah*, I am different from your regular Yosef, and hence he instituted special foods on Shavuot.



**A person can fulfil the mitzvah of Talmud Torah in the smallest amount of time, even with one word, but the crux of the Torah, the life of the Torah, is the yoke of Torah.**

But at first glance it is not clear why he says this. After all, if it wasn't for this day, the entire world wouldn't exist, not only Rav Yosef. Rather we learn from here that Rav Yosef is not referring to the Giving of the Torah to the entire world, but to his private *Kabbalat HaTorah*, and hence we learn that everyone has their own private *Kabbalat HaTorah*.

## Accepting the yoke of Torah

The Yerushalmi cited above stresses that “since you accepted upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, I consider it as if you have never ever sinned.” It is not enough to receive Torah, but one must accept the yoke of Torah. The effort, the challenge, in Torah is the main aspect of the Torah. A person can fulfil the *mitzvah* of *Talmud Torah* in the smallest amount of time, even with one word, but the crux of the Torah, the life of the Torah, is the yoke of Torah.

We learn all this as an introduction to Torah, as a preparation. The Torah's command: “And make yourself fit to learn Torah,”<sup>5</sup> is in itself a difficult, deep and complex instruction and one must learn it profoundly just like any other piece of Torah.

Before the description of *Matan Torah*, the Torah describes the people's preparation

across many verses,<sup>6</sup> and this section carries eternal lessons. The preparation for Torah is Torah in itself, and it needs to be “on this day.”<sup>7</sup>

There is a need to repeat the exercise every day and at any time, but there is particular significance in repeating it in the days leading up to Shavuot.

These are the days in which the light of Torah begins to appear, just as at *Har Sinai* the light of the Torah began to sparkle even before then, and therefore we don't say *Tachanun* on these days, like the *Rishonim* say we don't say *Tachanun* on Fridays at *Mincha*, because the light of Shabbat already begins to appear before Shabbat actually begins.

The elevated reality of *Chag* and Shabbat begins before the holy days themselves. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us specifically during these days to reinforce our Torah study and the way we prepare for *Matan Torah*.

May we merit receiving the Torah together as a people, and each of us individually, with awe and fear, love and joy.

1. Rosh Hashanah 4:8.
2. Rabbi David Frankel, 1704-1762.
3. Shemot 24:7.
4. Pesachim 68b.
5. Pirkei Avot 2:12.
6. Shemot 19.
7. According to the start of the chapter there: “In the third month to the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from the land of Egypt, they came to the Sinai Desert on this day.”

# Magic and Power of Torah



**Rabbi Shalom Rosner**  
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

**R**almud Zevachim (116a) tells us that at the time of מעמד הר סיני (standing at Mount Sinai), all the nations of the world were in shock, not knowing what cosmic event was occurring. They ran to the evil Bilam, the smartest person they knew, and asked him, "מה קול ההמון אשר שמענו, "שמה מבוול בא לעולם? "What is going on? Is G-d bringing another flood"? He answered that no, another flood is not on the horizon. "So what is it?" Bilam answers that G-d is giving the Torah, His most prized possession to the Jews, to ה' עוז לעמו יתן, which they answer מה בשלום ה'. ה' יברך את עמו בשלום. "G-d should bless His nation with peace". What exactly is the give and take in this conversation? Why did the nations think that there will be a flood? What is the connection between מעמד הר סיני and a flood?

Rav Meir Shapiro answers by first asking a different question. The prophet Isaiah (11:56) tells us that in Messianic times, all the animals will get along with each other. וגר זאב עם כבש ונמר עם ירבוך. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid". What an amazing description of an idyllic reality. But didn't it happen once before? On the ark, all the animals lived together in close quarters for an entire year. What, then, is Isaiah revolutionizing? Rav Shapiro answers that there are really two types of *achdut* (unity). The first is what we might call *achdut* מתוך - we get along because we want to survive. There is a common enemy from which we both need protection. That's what happened at the time of the flood. The animals didn't really love each other. The species, though, needed to continue



**Already before we received the Torah formally, we subconsciously yearned for its power and its messages.**

so they lived together. The *אחדות* of Isaiah, though, is one based on a shared vision and common aspirations to link into the Messianic reality of overflowing דעת ה' (knowledge of G-d), palpable even to the animals. That is something that has yet to occur in the animal kingdom.

At the time of מעמד הר סיני, the nations of the world witness ישראל כנגד ירח שם ישראל כנגד. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain- as one man and with one mind. What did they think? שמה מבוול בא לעולם? Perhaps another flood coming to the world? They understand only *אחדות* type one. Bilam, then, answers that no, this is a totally different type of *אחדות*, one based on Torah, based on common goals, shared visions, joint aspirations of connecting to ה' בורא עולם (Creator of the world) on the deepest of levels. They internalize what they have just witnessed and exclaim ה' יברך את עמו בשלום.

How fitting a thought this is for its author- Meir Shapiro arguably has done more than anyone over the past 100 years in unifying Jews through the medium of תלמוד תורה (learning Torah). Connecting Jews from all walks of life with the *daf*

*yomi* program is a true fulfillment of the message of this Talmud.

Talmud Bavli Babba Kama (82 A) records the story which occurred in Mara (Shemot 15), when the Jews thirsted for water, and G-d produced sweet water from the bitter surroundings. Chazal offer a deeper level of interpretation, that the Jews really thirsted for Torah (אין מים אלא תורה- there is no water except for Torah) and it was at that moment that the law was enacted that no Jew should ever go three days without hearing Torah reading. A beautiful passage, but there is one obvious problem. What were they thirsty for? This story occurred in Mara, a few weeks prior to מעמד הר סיני, so how could they be thirsty? There was no obligation of learning yet? Rav Soloveitchik answers that a Jew's connection to Torah does not flow purely from the obligation to learn, but that each of us have an inborn, magnetic connection to the Torah, the Divine word. Already before we received the Torah formally, we subconsciously yearned for its power and its messages.

As we ready ourselves for our own personal קבלת התורה (receiving of the Torah), let us allow the Torah to bind us to each other, to connect our hearts with Jews from all over the world, to connect to the Divine Infinite, together with our fellow man. Wherever a Jew may find himself or herself, through the gift of the תורה (learning the Torah), they can enter into a communal world of spiritual bliss, which is the ultimate mechanism to connect to ה' בורא עולם.

# Encountering Holiness



**Michal Horowitz**  
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**A**s we finish our count of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, the seven-week journey from Pesach to Shavuot, we find ourselves poised to receive the Torah once again. The Torah reading for Shavuot begins in *Parshas Yisro*: *In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on this day, they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai* (Shemos 19:1).

Rashi (ibid) teaches that they arrived in *Midbar Sinai* on *Rosh Chodesh*, on the first of Sivan. And then, Rashi asks: Why does it say they arrived *on this day*; should it not say they arrived in *Midbar Sinai on that day*? *To teach you that the words of Torah should be new to you, as if they were given on this very day! On this day... every single day, the words of Torah should be new to us, as if they were given today!*

In instructing the people regarding their preparations for *Kabbalas Ha'Torah*, Hashem commands Moshe regarding the sanctity of Har Sinai: *No hand shall touch it (the mountain of Sinai), for he shall be stoned or cast down; whether man or beast, he shall not live. When the ram's horn sounds a long, drawn out blast, they may ascend the mountain* (19:13).

Rashi (ibid) teaches: *When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, it is a sign of the departure of the Divine Presence (from the mountain) and the end of the Voice, and once I, G-d, depart from the mountain, they have permission to ascend.*

R' Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, "This verse (v.13) suggests an interesting *halachic*/historical paradox. Jews today are prohibited from walking on Mt. Moriah upon which the Temple stood. No power in the world can neutralize the holiness of this spot. Yet there is no prohibition to climb Mt. Sinai, upon which the Torah was given. Mt. Sinai maintains no residual holiness. Why is there a

difference in *halachic* status between the two mountains?

"Israel did not participate in the giving of the Torah. They slept on the night of Shavuot, and Moshe had to coax the people out of their tents to receive the Torah. The Children of Israel themselves did nothing to contribute to this seminal event. As a result, despite being the site of the greatest divine revelation in human history, none of Mt. Sinai's holiness endures. As soon as the revelation was over, as soon as His Presence departed, the holiness of the mountain vanished as well.

"The circumstances surrounding the events at Mt. Moriah were different. Our forefather Avraham prepared an altar on that mountain and placed his son Yitzchak upon it as a sacrifice. Avraham thus became a *partner* in the endowment of holiness permeating the Temple Mount.

*"The role of man in the endowment of holiness is a central theme in halacha.* For example, if a scribe writes a Torah scroll and does not explicitly note the sanctity of the Tetragrammaton while writing the Name, neither the Name nor the scroll has any sanctity. The loftiness of the text itself makes no difference – if the scribe does not write the Name with intent that he is writing for the purpose of vesting holiness in the scroll, even the ultimate expression of faith itself, the *Shema*, becomes profane.

"A Torah scroll is invested with holiness by man. A sacrifice is consecrated by virtue of man's designation. It is *Knesses Yisrael* who sanctifies the festivals through the establishment of the new month.

"Whether sanctity is vested in physical matter or in time, we find few instances where man is not the active participant in the establishment of holiness" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Shemos, p.163-164).

Why did the holiness of Mt. Sinai not remain for generations, yet the *kedusha*, the holiness, of *Har Ha'Moriah* – the site of the *Akeidas Yitzchak* (the Binding of Isaac) and both *Batei Mikdash* (Holy Temples) – remains forever: *Kidesha li'she'atah, kidesha la'asid lavo* – *holiness for that time, and holiness for the future, for all times?*

Because when it came to the Revelation at Sinai, as historic, as nation-altering, as life-changing, as it was... the *Bnei Yisrael* overslept... they were passive... they stood at the foot hill of the mountain by the urging of Moshe. On the other hand, Mt. Moriah symbolizes the passion of our people – beginning with our founding father, Avraham *Avinu* – the actions of our nation, the desire of *Am Yisrael* to actively serve G-d. To paraphrase the Rav, *The role of man in the endowment of holiness is a central theme in the life of a Jew.*

To be an *eved Hashem* means to *endow our lives with kedusha*. Through our actions, we bring holiness to ourselves, our people, and this world.

A grandson of R' Yaakov Edelstein zt'l (1924-2017, Rav of Ramat Ha'Sharon, Israel) related: "On the last Succos of his life, Rav Edelstein was in the hospital. He had one important request: to sit in the succah for at least *one minute*. The doctors gave him permission, and he went and sat for a minute in the succah, under the *schach*. We saw how precious and significant that one minute was to him, how he fulfilled the mitzvah of succah in just one minute" (Reaching for Heaven, Artsroll, p.278).

As we prepare for Shavuot, let us ensure that we are ready for the encounter with holiness – וְהָיָה נִכְנָסִים! (Shemos 19:11) – and *active participants* in infusing our selves, our homes, and our nation with *kedusha li'she'atah* and *kedusha la'asid lavo*.



# Shavuot and Matan Torah



**Rabbi Menachem Leibtag**

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When the Torah wishes to inform us of the 'historical' reason for a holiday, it certainly knows how to do so. Take for example the two other pilgrimage holidays – *Chag HaMatzot* and *Sukkot*: even though these holidays, as Shavuot, are first presented in Shemot 23:14-17 from their 'agricultural' perspective, in other instances, the Torah informs us of their historical perspectives as well.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is simply baffling that the Torah, in each of the five instances<sup>2</sup> when it discusses Shavuot, presents the holiday solely from its agricultural aspect, and never even once mentions any connection to the events of *Matan Torah*!

Should we conclude that it is only coincidental that Shavuot falls out on the same date as *Matan Torah*? Would that explain why *Chumash* makes no connection at all between that event and our grain harvest holiday in the Land of Israel?

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

When the Torah wishes to inform us of the precise date of a certain event, it certainly knows how to do so.<sup>3</sup> However, in regard to *Matan Torah*, the Torah is quite vague. Note how that story begins: "In the third month of *Bnei Yisrael's* departure from Egypt, on this day, they came to *Midbar Sinai*."<sup>4</sup>

Even if we assume *Bnei Yisrael* arrived on the first day of the month,<sup>5</sup> the lack of a clear chronology in the subsequent events makes it impossible to determine precisely how many days transpire between their arrival at *Har Sinai* and *Matan Torah*.

Indeed, the Midrash<sup>6</sup> calculates that the Torah must have been given on either the sixth or seventh day of Sivan, yet the Torah itself never explicitly mentions that date, even though it has ample opportunities to do so! Furthermore, we never find a specific *mitzvah* whose explicit purpose is to commemorate that date or event.<sup>7</sup>

To answer this question, we must consider a fundamental difference between the very nature of two monumental events in our history, i.e. the Exodus and *Matan Torah*.

One could suggest that the Torah's deliberate obfuscation of the date of *Matan Torah* may suggest that we should not treat it as a historically bound event. Instead, the Torah wants one to feel as though the Torah has just been given each and every day. This concept is reflected by the famous Rashi on 19:1: "... it should have been written: 'on that day.' Why does the *pasuk* say: 'on this day'? This comes to teach us that the words of the Torah should be considered new to you, as though they were given today!"<sup>8</sup>

In other words, we should not view *Matan Torah* as a one-time event. Rather, every generation must feel as though G-d's words were spoken directly to them, no less than they were to the first generation. Hence, a celebration of its anniversary as

a singular moment in our history might diminish from its eternal meta-historical dimension.

In contrast, the Exodus – the birth of our nation – was, and should remain, a one-time event in our history. As such, it becomes an event that must be constantly remembered, but not necessarily relived.

So why do we commemorate *Matan Torah* on Shavuot? In this regard, we find a beautiful balance between our oral and written traditions. Even though the Torah's obfuscation of this event may reflect the inherent danger of its commemoration, our oral tradition could not possibly totally neglect its anniversary.

Therefore, unlike Passover eve, when we gather at the Seder to 'retell' the story of the Exodus, on the evening of Shavuot, we 'relive' that experience by engaging in Torah study, a most appropriate expression of our gratitude for G-d's most precious gift.

1. See Shemot 12:17 and Vayikra 23:43.

2. Shemot 23:15,34:22, Vayikra 23:15-21, Bamidbar 28:26 and Devarim 16:9-12.

3. See Shemot 12:6,12-14,17-18 and 16:1.

4. Shemot 19:1.

5. See Rashi 19:1, "b'iom hazeh."

6. Shabbat 86b.

7. In Devarim 4:9-11 we are instructed never to forget what happened on that day, but there is no commemorative action.

8. See Rashi Shemot 19:1.

# Yes, the Torah is For Us



**Rabbi Eli Mansour**

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**T**he Mishna in Pirkeh Avot (3:14) teaches, “Man is precious, in that he was created in the image [of G-d]... *Yisrael* are precious, in that they were called children of the Almighty... *Yisrael* are precious in that they were given a beloved vessel [the Torah]...”

For each of these three statements, the Mishna brings a verse to prove the point being made. The statement that people are created in G-d’s image is supported by the verse, “for He made man in the image of G-d” (Bereshit 9:6). The statement that *Am Yisrael* are G-d’s children is supported from the verse, “You are children of Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 14:1). And the statement that we have been given a “beloved utensil” is supported with the verse in Mishleh (4:2), “For I have given you good teaching; do not abandon My Torah.”

The Netivot Shalom (Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky of Slonim, 1911-2000) raised the simple question of why this Mishna is included in *Pirkeh Avot*, which is a collection of practical ethical and religious teachings. The *Mishnayot* in *Pirkeh Avot* give us instructions and guidance for living our lives as Torah Jews. For what purpose are we told in *Pirkeh Avot* that we are “precious” both because we are human beings and because we are members of *Am Yisrael*?

The answer, the Netivot Shalom explains, is that this Mishna seeks to bolster our self-esteem, and reassure us that we are “precious” in the eyes of G-d. One of the common obstacles to religious commitment is shame and a lack of self-worth. Many people look at themselves, their behavior and their lives and conclude that G-d has no interest in them, that the sanctity of the Torah has no relevance to them. The Mishna therefore comes along and assures us that no matter who we are and what we have done, we are “*Habib*” – “precious,” both because we are human beings endowed with the divine image,

and because we, as Jews, are princes, the children of the King of the world.

The Netivot Shalom explains on this basis why the Mishna chose specifically the three verses it cited.

The verse, “for He made man in the image of G-d” actually appears in the context of the prohibition of murder. G-d warns that one who murders another person will himself be killed, because every person is endowed with the image of G-d. The Mishna chose this verse, the Netivot Shalom explains, because this verse makes it absolutely clear that every human being, for all time, has the image of G-d within him, and it can never be lost. If a person murders somebody else, he is liable to the death penalty regardless of who the victim was – because all people have a sacred spark within their souls, no matter what mistakes they have made.

The second verse cited by the Mishna – “You are children of Hashem your G-d” – introduces the prohibition against self-mutilation in response to personal tragedy (“*Lo Titgodedu*”). The Mishna could have cited an earlier verse to prove that *Am Yisrael* are Hashem’s children – G-d’s message to Pharaoh, “*Yisrael* is My firstborn son” (Shemot 4:22). It didn’t cite that verse, the Netivot Shalom writes, because one might have then assumed that only in those times, when G-d brought *Beneh Yisrael* from Egypt, we had the status of His beloved children. And so the Mishna cited the verse, “You are children of Hashem your G-d” which introduces a command which is eternally binding. This verse demonstrates that for all time, and under all circumstances, we are the Almighty’s beloved children.

Finally, the Mishna proves that we are precious by virtue of our having been given the priceless gift of the Torah, citing the verse, “For I have given you good teaching; do not abandon My Torah.” This verse speaks to each and every person, in each and every era, assuring him that the Torah

has been given to him, it is relevant to him, and it is binding upon him.

Each morning, we recite a special *Beracha* – “*Birkat Ha’Torah*” – thanking Hashem for giving us the Torah. This *Beracha* concludes, “*Baruch Ata Hashem Noten He’Torah*” – “Blessed are You, Hashem, who gives the Torah.” This *Beracha* is formulated in the present tense – “who gives the Torah” – because the Torah is given to us anew, each and every day, no matter what situation we are in, and no matter what spiritual level we are on.

This is something to reflect upon as we prepare for Shabuot, when we celebrate *Matan Torah*. It is a mistake to think that *Matan Torah* was relevant only to previous generations, when Jews lived on a higher level, when they did not have the distractions and temptations that we face in our time. This is incorrect. We must remind ourselves that the Torah is for us – yes, even us. Let us not belittle ourselves. As the Mishna teaches us, we are G-d’s beloved children, eternally. He wants us to serve Him and to build a relationship with Him to the best of our ability, no matter what we have done in the past.

The Gemara relates that when the Romans entered the *Bet Ha’mikdash*, just before they set the building ablaze, they entered the *Kodesh Ha’kodashim* – the most sacred chamber, where the Aron was kept – and they saw the two *Kerubim* (cherubs) on top of the Aron embracing one another. This symbolized G-d’s embracing the Jewish People. Even at that moment, when G-d was angry at His nation and destroyed the *Mikdash*, He showed us how much He loves us. G-d’s love for us is eternal and unconditional, and so our commitment to Torah must be eternal and unconditional.

Yes, the Torah is for us, on whatever level we are on, because no matter what, Hashem wants us to have this most precious of all gifts – the sacred Torah.

# Our Stormy, Committed Relationship with Hashem



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**A**fter reading the book of Rus on Shavuot, we are struck by the stark difference between how it begins versus how it ends. The book of Rus begins with the death of Ne'omi's, Orpah's and Rus's husbands and famine in Eretz Yisroel but it ends with (Rus 4:22) the birth of Dovid Hamelech and Moshiach. In contrast, the book of Shir Hashirim begins with love and hope (Shir Hashirim 1:2), "kiss me with the kisses of your mouth," but it ends with loss (Shir Hashirim 8:14) "flee, my beloved."

The relationship between the young people in Shir Hashirim is fleeting and unstable, as it says (Id. at 3:2), "I sought out the beloved of my soul, I sought him out but I did not find him." And when her beloved finally comes for her, (Id. at 5:2) "the voice of my beloved knocks [and he says] 'open up for me my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one.'" But the heroine of the story is apathetic, saying (Id. at 5:3) "I already took off my cloak, how can I get dressed? I already washed my feet, how can I now soil them?" And when she finally summons up the will to go open up the door for her beloved, it is already too late (Id. at 5:6), "I opened the door for my beloved but my beloved had already left." The whole Shir Hashirim is filled with longing, searching, finding, and losing.

Rus, on the other hand, is quite a different story. That story is populated by adults rather than the youthful figures in Shir Hashirim, and the story is filled with famine, exile, sickness, and death. Rus and Orpah's husbands were named מחלון (sickness) and כליון (obliteration), both names which denote suffering and death. It is not a story of young lovers, but rather

a story of three widows and their travails. As Ne'omi says (Rus 1:20) "Do not call me 'Ne'omi' (pleasantness), rather call me 'bitterness.'" The book of Rus is not a love story but a story of commitment and loyalty. It is the story of Rus's loyalty to Ne'omi and her nation and Boaz's commitment to uphold his deceased brother's name by marrying his son's widow, Rus. This story lacks any beautiful women roaming around in blossoming vineyards, but it has young men working hard in the fields.

In addition, the relationship between Rus and Boaz lacks any kind of stormy romance. It is based entirely on both sides' sense of responsibility and commitment. Despite, or perhaps because of, that, the story evolves from one of תורו, desolation, to one of תיקון, repair and rectification. Shir Hashirim was filled with gardens, orchards, and springtime, with hope and longing for a time where the relationship between the hero and heroine of the story would come to fruition. Rus, on the other hand, takes place in the harvest season, when the fruits of everyone's labor finally ripen and blossom. Shir Hashirim is romantic, stormy, filled with fickle unpredictability, while Rus is a story of marriage and family that is lacking a sense of romantic love. If one had to compare these two books to two מסכתות, tractates of the Talmud, one would say that Shir Hashirim corresponds to מסכת קידושין, relating to the laws of marriage, and Rus corresponds with מסכת כתובות, relating to the laws of the *kesuba*, the financial commitments of a husband toward his wife.

Both Shir Hashirim and Rus personify different aspects of the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. Shir Hashirim is connected to the exodus from

Egypt, as Hashem says Shir Hashirim-style to the Jewish people (Yirmiyahu 2:2) "I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, how you followed Me into the desert, into a land not sewn." That aspect of Hashem's relationship with the Jewish people involves revealed miracles and passionate love, which is also fleeting and fickle, ebbing and flowing. It is a story of great miracles, but it is also a story of great failures like the spies, Korach, the frequent complaints, and ultimately the departure of Hashem's presence from among the people and exile. It is a story of (Shir Hashirim 8:14) "flee, my beloved." While it is a story of springtime and love, that love is temporary and fleeting.

Rus, on the other hand, concludes with the rectification of Hashem's relationship with the Jewish people, with (Rus 4:22), the birth of Dovid Hamelech and Moshiach. Rus, which, takes place at harvest time, the time of actualizing that which previously existed only in potential, is the story of first fruits, of (Devarim 26:9) "And He has brought us to this place and given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. That fulfillment at the end of the story of Rus, however, follows a period of suffering. Similarly, Shavuot follows the period of the *sefira*, during which we observe the customs of mourners.

In our lives we have two types of stories. We have stories of breaking and fixing, ups and downs, failures and successes, love and unrequited longing, and stories of family and commitment. Nothing is completely certain, as it says in Pirkei Avos (2:4) "Do not believe in yourself until the day of your death." The common denominator between the stories of Rus and Shir Hashirim, that applies equally to

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# Entering into the Wilderness



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What was the significance of the fact that Torah was given in a wilderness, in a barren and infertile desert, not in a civilized terrain, nor on soil conducive to human living and nature's blessing. Why did G-d communicate His blueprint for life and enter into an eternal covenant with the Jewish people in the aridity and desolateness of a desert?

One of the errors that a Jew living in the modern era is likely to make is that Judaism makes no existentially profound demands on its believers. Judaism is a feel-good religion, and its objective is to make one feel comfortable about oneself. For many religious leaders and teachers today, the primary objective is to present a version of Judaism that will fit nicely into the mind-set and living patterns of their constituents and will reassure them that they are wonderful people. Many rabbis are committed above all to teach a Judaism that will not shake up our comfort-zones.

In many ways this has become the hallmark of the American version of Judaism – designed to conform to the paradigms of modernity. “In the image of the modern, American Jew, have we created Judaism.”

“My goal is to study and practice a Judaism that does not interfere with my conveniences,” a man once told me. “I have my lifestyle, philosophy, schedule, habits, and social patterns; as long as Judaism can fit into this, I will make room for it and enjoy it too.”

But if we communicate Judaism just to make people feel good, why do we really need it? Why not just figure out what works best for our lives and pursue that? Therapy, yoga, exercise, suburban living, meditation, nutrition, sports, the arts, music, etc. If Judaism is merely here to nurture my pre-defined identity

and satisfy my ingrained appetites, why bother with it all together?

But suppose that Judaism was real – it was the authentic blueprint for life from the living G-d – then the question should not be, “How do I find a Judaism that does not disturb me too much,” but rather – what does Judaism really say about my calling? What does Judaism believe about life, death and everything in between? What does Torah have to say about the most important question and dilemmas facing the human mind and heart? The question must be not how I can mold Judaism in my image, but how I can mold myself in the image of Torah? How can I revisit my image and recreate myself based on the visage of man articulated in Judaism?

If Torah is true, I must have the courage to take a hard, deep look at my preconceived notions, thoughts and behavior patterns, ready to discover truth that may challenge me.

This is why Torah was given in the barren desert, in uncivilized wilderness, where it had no predefined culture to contend with and to be compared with. Only in the physical and artistic silence of the desert can we open ourselves to a radical search for truth. Only in a desert, can we walk into something with our whole being, ready to find anything.

If Torah would have been given in a city or amidst a beautifully natural terrain, it would have, by definition, conformed to the culture prevailing in those particular areas. In the great river lowlands where civilization began (the Tigris-Euphrates rivers and the Nile), the eye is captivated by the shifting scenes of nature; in cities, the eye is overtaken by the works of man – art and architecture. In such environments, the Israelites would only be able to absorb a religion that would fit into their psyches, patterns, and sensibilities, like

all the Pagan religions of the time. The Jews could never attune themselves to the word of a G-d who transcends nature.

Sinai challenged the Jewish people to revisit all of existence from its deepest genesis; to reexamine life and history from its very nucleus; to see the world not from the human perspective, but from the perspective of G-d who cannot be confined in human modalities. A revolution of this magnitude cannot take place in a populated environment, not even in an environment where life blossoms and nature flourishes. Only in the emptiness and desolateness of the wilderness is the ego subordinate to the search for truth. Only in the silence of the desert, can a person bid farewell to all of his or her paradigms and allow his soul to absorb radical transcendence.

This explains a deeply enigmatic episode which occurred at Sinai.

The Bible relates that when Moses presented the covenant before the Israelites, they responded, “We will do and we will listen” (Exodus 24:7). This expression has always been a source of wonderment and surprise to rabbis and a refutation of the anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews as calculating and self-protective. “We will do and we will listen” implies a commitment to observe the covenant even before the Jews heard its details and understood its ramifications.

This process must occur each year anew. To receive Torah, we must have the courage to walk into a desert; we must strip ourselves from any pre-defined self-identity. We need to be ready to hear the sound beneath the sounds we are accustomed to. Torah is not merely a cute and endearing document filled with rituals, to satisfy nostalgia or tradition. Torah demands that we open ourselves up with our whole being and declare, “We shall do and we shall listen!”



# Shavuot: All for One & One for All



**Rabbi Judah Mischel**

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Although Menachem Mendel Beilis came from a *Chasidische* family, he was ‘indifferent’ to religion and assimilated, working at a brick factory seven days a week in a suburb of Kiev. In 1911, the completely unassuming Jew was cast into the international spotlight as the defendant in a sensational, anti-semitic blood libel trial in Russia, due to a baseless accusation of ritual murder of a Christian child. Jews around the world mobilized in support of the defendant. Ultimately, Beilis was acquitted because of lack of evidence, the lessons remained from the traumatic “Beilis Affair”. In effect, it was symbolic of the millennia-old existential trial inflicted upon all Jewry.

As part of the prosecution against Mendel Beilis, Russian theologians presented “proofs” from the Talmud that Jews do not view murder of gentiles as a crime, and that only Jewish life was to be valued. For example, *Atem keruim Adam*, “You, the Jewish People, are called *adam*, men, but gentiles are not called *adam*, men” (Yevamos, 61a). Here, the Gemara is only addressing the difference in laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, based on the verse, “When a man [*adam*] dies in a tent” (Bamidbar, 19:14). And the fact is, the intent of the discussion is to show that the corpse of a Jew can transmit ritual impurity to someone in the same tent, while that of a non-Jew cannot.

The vicious misinterpretation and removal from its context made the statement appear to say that gentiles are considered sub-human.

In anticipation of the predictable charge, Beilis’ attorneys reached out to various Jewish thinkers and leaders of the day to formulate a response. One of the responses came from a young Rav Meir Shapiro — the future founder of Yeshivas Chachmei

Lublin, and architect of the *Daf Yomi* movement. A brilliant and eloquent spokesman for the Jewish community, he was also a member of the Polish Parliament.

The Lubliner Rav advised the defense team: “Ask the judge this: If an Italian were arrested in Poland or a Frenchman in Germany, would the entire Italian nation or all Frenchmen be praying for his well being and advocating for his acquittal? Would countrymen across the world be fretting over his condition and awaiting news of his release? Certainly not.

“But when one Jew, such as Mendel Beilis, is falsely accused and put on trial, the entire Jewish nation stands by his side. The Jewish People are a single unit, and this is why they are indeed called “*adam*, a man”. Every Jew is a part of a single body; when one limb is suffering, the entire body feels the pain.”

■ ■ ■

“...And Israel encamped (singular) there, in front of the mountain.”

(*Shemos*, 19:2)

“...As one person, with one heart.”

(Rashi)

Rav Meir Shapiro, zt”l, said, “The Mishnah was edited by Rebbe Yehuda haNassi in Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara was compiled in Bavel by Rav Ashi, and explained by Rashi and Tosafists who lived primarily in France. The Rosh was from Germany, the Rambam from Spain and Egypt, and the Maharshah, the Maharsha and the Maharam were from Poland. A page of Gemara is an expression of unity...and by learning the same *daf* every day, Jews throughout the world now have an opportunity to be united through the bond of Torah.”

Similarly, Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelevitch, zt”l, used to tell his students: “We are now learning Torah that was given to us in the Desert, and which was expounded in the

Oral Torah by scholars living in Bavel. The Ramban, who wrote commentaries on both the Written and Oral Torah, lived in Spain, and Rashi in France. The Maharsha, who explains difficulties in Tosafos lived in Poland, and we who drink from the water of all of them live in Williamsburg, where we study the same Torah that was given at Har Sinai.”

“Am Yisrael, the Torah, and  
haKadosh Baruch Hu are  
*chad* — a complete unity.”

(Alter Rebbe, in the name of *The Zohar*)

How can this be? The Jewish People, the Torah and the formless Creator are obviously different in nature. And even within *Klal Yisrael* there are many different shapes, sizes, colors and hues; different nationalities, languages, customs and paths, as well as intellectual and spiritual lineages. Each one of us is radically different from all other people; we all have different gifts and abilities, challenges, and unique fingerprints, demanding a reassessment of our understanding of ‘oneness’...

“Understand, O Yisrael,  
*Hashem* (singular) is our *Elokim*  
(plural); Hashem is One.”

The Rambam (*Hilchos Yesodei haTorah*, 1:7) teaches that here the word *אֶחָד*, *Echad*, “One”, refers the Singularity of Hashem. Yet the term *Yachid* might have been a more accurate choice to convey this, especially as *echad* implies one in a series of other numbers: *echad*, *shtayim*, *shalosh*, *arba* — ‘one, two, three, four, etc...’ In fact, this implication seems to contradict the very meaning of ‘oneness’, for Hashem is certainly not ‘one’ deity among many. However the Mittlerer Rebbe, Reb Dovber of Lubavitch, presents a resolution (*Imrei Binah*, 98a): the oneness of Hashem actually encompasses each and every individual number; Hashem’s Oneness includes

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# Setting The Stage

**Mrs. Shira Smiles**

International lecturer and curriculum developer

**T**he Sefat Emet tells us that our entire spiritual year is dependent on the days of *Sefirat HaOmer*. Just as our physical sustenance is determined during this wheat harvesting period, so our spiritual sustenance is set during these weeks. If our lives are dependent on this *mitzvah*, shouldn't it involve a lot more than just a minute or so of a short liturgy? Obviously more is hidden beneath the surface.

What is the power of *Sefira* that gives us the ability to make ourselves pure and whole again? We find that Shavuot is the only holiday that has a Torah-mandated period of preparation. There is something very pivotal embedded in these weeks. Our counting during *Sefira* expresses our yearning for *Matan Torah*. The actual counting leaves an imprint on our soul and opens a pathway of desire to acquire the Torah in our hearts. The holiday of the giving of the Torah is called Shavuot – weeks, because our efforts determine how we will experience the holiday. We will receive the Torah in a more meaningful way only with the proper preparation.

In the Haggadah we read, אילו קרבנו להר סיני, דיינו "If You had brought us close to Sinai it would have been enough." The Alshich and the Shelah explain that the process of purification and preparation was so precious, that if G-d would not have given us the Torah, it would have been enough.

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the number one and the number two, etc., and each individual entity in Creation. Hashem is Singularity in multiplicity, Oneness in diversity.

In the same way, the great diversity of the Jewish People is 'one'. Each 'one' of us, in all our differentiation, are encompassed

Each year, in our individual and collective lives, we relive the experience of coming closer to G-d. Torah and *mitzvot* are not just knowledge and good deeds, but a catalyst for transformation. It is about making us into better people and bringing us nearer to His presence. The preparation of *Sefira* is bringing ourselves to a level of appreciating the greatness of Torah and awakening within ourselves a yearning for *deveikut baHashem*.

Shavuot is the 'Yom HaDin' of our *ruchniyut*. It is a time to take a good hard look at our spiritual state and ask ourselves, "Is this all I've achieved? What am I capable of?" It is a time to look at the disparity of who we are and what we can be if only we desire it enough. Not only is *Sefirat HaOmer* a time to work on respecting our fellow Jews; it is also a time to sensitize ourselves to *kavod haTorah*.

During the building of the Mishkan, G-d said, ובלב כל חכם נתתי חכמה, "I have given wisdom in the hearts of all the wise people." Rav Nebenzhal explains that G-d gives wisdom only to those who have the wherewithal to hold onto it, otherwise it is a wasted investment.

The way to guard our Torah is through working on our *middot*. That is why the first *omer* sacrifice was barley, an animal food. It was meant to teach us to subdue our animalistic desires and evil traits.

in a singular, inseparable whole — like one person with one heart.



Shavuos celebrates *Uba'u kulam b'vris yachad; 'Naaseh v'nishma' amru k'echad* — "They all came together in the Covenant of the Torah; 'We will perform it and then we will understand it,' they said as one."

Rav Pincus says that in G-d's lexicon, a "day" hints to *yichud Hashem* – oneness of G-d, similar to the very First Day of Creation, when there was no other reality except G-d. The 49 days of *Sefira* are about reminding ourselves that each day must be completely dedicated to *yichud Hashem*, to feeling G-d's presence at every moment in our lives.

When we count each day, we must ask ourselves, "What am I doing to make this day different?" By counting upwards, we show that each day is one of building and working towards the goal of becoming a fitting receptacle for Torah.

*Sefira* is called שבוע שבתות, seven Shabbatot. Shabbat is the source of blessing. The Sefat Emet tells us that every day of *Sefira* carries a vestige of Shabbat, and G-d gives us injections of *kedusha* to help us come close to Him. If we are successful in arousing ourselves out of our apathy, these days become a model of holiness for the entire year. When we recite the *beracha* of *Sefirat HaOmer* it should inspire us to feel more sanctity and to strive for greater heights. When we say *hayom yom...* we must think about committing ourselves to live that day in the best possible way.

May we activate the oneness of our People on this day, while also appreciating our individual uniqueness. May we manifest our essential oneness with Torah and Hashem, and receive the *Toras Achas*, the Torah of Oneness, *b'simchah u-b'penimiyus*, with joy and inner depth.

# Discovering Why You are Here



**Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi**  
Popular Torah teacher and author

People who know Naomi keep asking about Ruth: “Who is this?” Ruth is always being asked about her identity. Boaz watches her picking barley in his field, and asks his attendant, who is in charge of the reapers, “To whom is this girl?” But you know the answer, Boaz! After all, when Ruth and Naomi returned to Beit Lechem, poor and bereaved, the whole town was shocked to see them. So why are you asking who this girl is?

And it happens once more, when at night she sneaks into the threshing floor and lies at his feet, Boaz asks: “Who are you?” But Boaz, you were already told; you know the answer! And again, when Ruth returns to her mother-in-law and knocks at the door, Naomi asks her: “Who are you, my daughter?”

Why, throughout the Megillah, is Ruth asked, “Tell me, who are you? Who are you? Who are you? But who are you?”

How many times do you look in the mirror and ask yourself: “Who is this girl? To whom do I belong in the world? What did I come here to do? What is the role G-d expects me to fulfill?”

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our lives, is that the heroes in the stories never gave up. The only losers in the story of Rus were Machlon and Kilyon (who gave up on the Jewish people by intermarrying), Elimelech (who abandoned the Jewish people at a time of famine), Orpah (who abandoned Ne’omi upon her return to Eretz Yisroel), and “Ploni Almoni,” the anonymous man who passed up the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzva* of Yibum with Rus in order to reestablish her husband’s name in the Jewish people. Similarly, in Shir Hashirim the only losers

On Shavuot we receive our role in the world. This holiday is called *מי* in the Zohar HaKadosh. We reach the level of “who.” *מי* has a *gematria* (numerical value) of 50. We counted 50 days and arrived at a place called *Mi*, “who,” also called the *Keter Elyon* in the Zohar. After asking yourself so many times who you are, to whom you belong, you are given a role and reveal who you are. You have a title, you are crowned.

Rabbi Yosef HaTzaddik said: “If not for the holiday of Shavuot, כמה יוסף, how many Yosef would be roaming in the marketplace” (Pesachim 68b). How many “Yosef” – why not “Yosefs”? Because these are the parts of the same Yosef. He has dispersed in a million directions and does not know who he is: “Maybe I’m Yosef the *talmid chacham*. Maybe I’m Yosef the computer guy. Maybe I’m Yosef the coach. Maybe I’m Yosef the student. Who am I?”

Why don’t we recognize Ruth? Because the more you study Torah, the more you reveal about yourself. More and more and more. Ruth the Moabite gentile at the beginning of the Megillah is not the Jewish Ruth at the end of the Megillah. Each time we see her in a new and different context and

are the friends of the שולמית, the young woman who said (Shir Hashirim 5:9) “What makes your beloved better than anyone else?” But no matter how many ups and downs there were in the relationship between the young woman and her beloved, neither of them ever gave up on finding the other.

The period of the counting of the Omer links these two aspects of Shir Hashirim and Rus. Our job during that period is to develop ourselves and our relationship with Hashem in order to create a sense

ask: “Is this her? Which girl is this? What did the Torah do to her – could it be that, this one? Another one?”

The Russian doll, the babushka, hides another doll and another and another. Rabbi Nachman says that outwardly you become a heavy and cumbersome babushka. But the Torah removes one babushka and then another and another, until you reach the tiny babushkina deep in your soul. The Torah reveals my internal core to me. What have I come to do in the world? Who am I?

When the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai פסקה זוהמתן, their contamination ceased (Shabbat 146a). What is זוהמה? The Gemara explains: זו, מה – This, what is it? Meaning, who is it? Who is this girl? This confusion, this scattering, is זוהמה. You pollute yourself with unnecessary energies: “Maybe I will learn this or maybe that...” Unnecessary contamination. Get clarity and you will find out who you are. In the giving of the Torah, everything becomes clear to you. With the giving of the Torah, a crown is placed upon you; your contamination ceases. You reach the 50th level of purity and the incredible and beautiful woman inside you is revealed.

of consistency and commitment to our beloved and to believe and never give up on our relationship with Hashem, no matter how much that relationship is sometimes concealed. With that, we should see the happy ending of both stories with (Id. at 2:8) “the voice of my beloved comes” and (Rus 4:22) the birth of Dovid Hamelech and eventually Moshich, may we merit to greet him soon in our days!

# Hebrew Language in the Parsha



**David Curwin**

balashon.com

Author of the forthcoming book *Kohelet: A Map to Eden* (Maggid)

**S**havuot ends the period where we conclude the practice of *sefirat haomer* – “counting the *omer*”. What exactly is an *omer*?

“When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first *omer* of your harvest to the priest. He shall elevate the *omer* before G-d for acceptance in your behalf; the priest shall elevate it on the day after the Sabbath ... And from the day on which you bring the *omer* of elevation offering—the day after the Sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to G-d.” (Vayikra 23:10-16)

The precise meaning is not clear. If we look at other occurrences of the word in the Tanach, we find two different meanings. In Devarim 24:19, where we are commanded to leave overlooked stalks of grain for the poor, *omer* means “sheaf”. But in the story of the *manna* (Shemot 16:16-36), it refers to a measure of volume, one-tenth of an *ephah*. Which type of *omer* is the commandment in Vayikra referring to?

Many translations, from the ancient Greek Septuagint to the modern English JPS, say it means “sheaf.” The Greek word for sheaf was *dragma*, which literally means “handful”. It refers to the number of stalks you could grab in your hand. *Omer* is translated into a word with the sense of “handful” in several languages, including in Arabic by Saadia Gaon (on Devarim 24:9). In the Tanach itself there is a connection between *omer* and hand:

“It will never fill a reaper’s hand, nor a yield an armful for the gatherer of sheaves (*me’amer*).” (Tehilim 129:7)

On the other hand, *halachic* tradition, as described in the tenth chapter of Masechet Menachot says that the verses in Vayikra refer to a volume of flour. This conclusion derives from an identification of the grain offering mentioned earlier in Vayikra 2:14 with the *omer* offering appearing in Vayikra 23.

Evidence for this approach is brought by the Academy of the Hebrew Language in their pamphlet about the three festivals. They point out a comparison between the *omer* offering, and the Shavuot offering 50 days later. If *omer* is understood here as a measure of volume, we see an interesting parallel between the two offerings:

	Omer Offering	Shavuot Offering
Grain brought	Barley	Wheat
Form brought	Flour	Bread
Amount	1 tenth of an ephah	2 tenths of an ephah

Each aspect of the Shavuot offering is an upgrade from the *omer* offering. So if we view bringing the *omer* as the beginning of a process, and Shavuot offering as the culmination, then it makes sense that the *omer* would be a measure of flour – not a sheaf.

So why does the Torah use the ambiguous word *omer*?

Perhaps this special word *omer* is coming to teach us a lesson. Just as G-d helped his hungry people in the desert by giving them an *omer* of *manna*, we need to emulate Him and leave the *omer* of grain for the poor in our fields. And when is this message most important? When we begin the harvest season, as we are likely to feel like the grain belongs to us. At this time, we bring an *omer* offering to remind of us of the kindness G-d gave us and we must give others.

## Parsha Riddle



**Reb Leor Broh**

Mizrachi Melbourne

My son-in law was a Kohen Gadol, my grandson was also a Kohen Gadol, I appear in the Book of Ruth. Who am I?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

Amiadav, appearing in Ruth (4:19-20) was the father-in-law of Aharon and grandfather of Elazar both of whom were Kohanim Gedolim.



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