



Beth Jacob Shavuot Torah Companion

Dedicated in memory of Menucha Raitza bas Shlomo HaLevy z"l



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Dedication

Menucha Raitza Bas Shlomo Halevy grew up in Detroit, MI, raised by parents who imbued in her a strong connection to her Jewish heritage and community. When she was a teenager, she decided to be mekabel Torah and Mitzvos. Her pursuit of Torah knowledge and observance took her to the classroom of Nehama Leibowitz at Hebrew University, Shabbos tables at Chabad families like the Shemtovs in Philadelphia, and friendships with Torah scholars the world over – sometimes in person, but often through their books and seforim. Eventually, she shared that knowledge either by hosting shiurim in her home or by teaching shiurim to her communities in Detroit and Philadelphia.

She raised two sons, informed by her life experiences and Torah learning, to develop their relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu by learning and living His Torah. They, in turn, are raising her grandchildren in that same vein.

In the spirit of generational continuity, we present a recipe shared by four generations of the family, beginning with Menucha Raitza's mother. This recipe for cheesecake was selected as it is customary amongst many families to make Kiddush on Shavuos morning followed by a milchig/dairy snack before transitioning to a regular fleishig/meat meal.¹

Here is the recipe in her own words:

Cheesecake, Lower Fat²

serves 8

This is based on my mother's recipe. My changes are in parentheses. This cake has spoiled me for others. When my mother made this, she had to put signs not to touch after one she made never cooled. She barely salvaged a piece for my father for dessert that evening.

Crust:

1 ½ packs graham crackers (*about half the box; or ½ lb plain cookies*), crushed
1/3 cup margarine

Filling:

2 lbs regular cottage cheese (*or low or non-fat*)
1 cup sugar
3-4 eggs (*we never used it, but I guess you could use an egg substitute*)

¹ Many reasons exist for this practice, though few Halachik sources require the eating of dairy on Shavuos. Some reasons noted include 1) the gematria of chalav is 40, corresponding to the forty days that Moshe was on Har Sinai and 2) Moshe Rabeinu was rescued as a baby from the Nile river on Shavuos, but refused to nurse from the milk of non-Jewish women

² This particular cheesecake recipe includes instructions for a prominently tasting crust that satisfies Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l's requirement for k'dei achilas pras, "the time it takes to eat a piece of bread" (under 3 minutes, see Igros Moshe 4:41)

½ small can evaporated milk OR 1/3 cup sour cream (*OR 1/3 cup low fat plain yogurt OR 1/3 cup skim milk*)

1 tbsp melted margarine

1 tsp vanilla

Crust:

Blend well; pat into a 9"x13" baking pan, reserving a bit for the topping.

Filling:

Blend this all together and pour into the prepared crust. Sprinkle with reserved crumbs. Bake at 350F for about 40 minutes. Test by inserting knife in the center. It should be dry.

The Leavened Loaves

Rabbi Kalman Topp

The central religious element of Shavuot during the era of the Beit Hamikdash was undoubtedly the “shteï halechem”- the two loaves. Indeed, the daily counting between Pesach and Shavuot is triggered by the Omer offering of barley brought on the second day of Pesach and culminates in the “minchah chadashah”- the new meal offering of two loaves from wheat (Vayikra 23:15-17), thus highlighting this offering’s prominent role.

According to the leading ashkenazic authority, the Rama (494:3), the shteï halechem is relevant today as it serves as the basis for the well known custom to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. The Rama makes an astonishing suggestion, not widely practiced, that the custom is not to simply consume dairy alone but rather to first have dairy followed by meat (with the requisite halachic buffers such as clearing the table and cleaning your mouth). Being that one meal is dairy and one is meat, each meal will require its own challah. This will result in having two (sets of) breads to symbolize the offering of two loaves, with our table signifying the altar (for other explanations of the custom to eat dairy, see the footnote in this pamphlet’s dedication as well as the Mishna Berura 494:12-13).

The Torah highlights the fact that these two loaves were baked leavened- “chametz te’afenah” (Vayikra 23:17). This detail is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, the Torah establishes the principle that flour offerings should not be leavened (Vayikra 2:11). While the two loaves were eaten by the Kohanim and not burned on the altar, it is still unusual to prescribe chametz in our service to Hashem (the Todah offering is another exception but even there, 30 of the 40 loaves are not chametz). Secondly, Chametz is absolutely forbidden on Pesach, and the Sages associate chametz with the yetzer hara (Brachot 17a), haughtiness or sluggishness (Sefer Hachinuch). Since Shavuot is considered the capstone of the seven week process, we would not have expected that which is so strictly forbidden on Pesach to suddenly play such a prominent role on Shavuot. If Chametz is prohibited on Pesach and banned on the altar all year round, why does the Torah make an exception for Shavuot?

To resolve this incongruence, let us revisit the notions of matzah and chametz. Matzah is achieved by ceasing the process of fermentation. The bread is not allowed to reach its full potential. If so, matzah symbolizes humility and limitation, the quintessential poor man’s bread. Chametz, however, represents human ingenuity and creativity in that it’s the completion of the process. Bread has a special status in Halacha and requires birchat hamazon, perhaps precisely because it is the result of human effort, energy and initiative. Chametz is one of the best examples of the capacity Hashem gives us to engage in the world and advance society.

With this understanding, we can suggest that when humankind stands before Hashem, we must recognize our limitations and acknowledge our dependence upon Hashem. Flour offerings

brought on the altar must be unleavened because when we approach Hashem, we realize that we are dwarfed by Him.

Turning to Pesach, we begin by reflecting upon the shackles of slavery which had plagued us. We had been limited and stifled from reaching our potential. Even when freed from Egypt, it was an incredible moment of progress, but before we engaged in human ingenuity, we needed to reflect upon how we will use our freedom? On Pesach, we recreate the experience, and so prior to jumping into creative ventures, prior to eating chametz, we must ask ourselves where we want our creativity to be placed? How will we be an agent for change? Each day of the Omer, we evaluate ourselves and discern in which ways we need to strengthen ourselves and grow.

Then we complete the seven weeks and reach Shavuot. We have now built up our character and developed a vision towards which we can apply our human creativity. Even more significant, Shavuot celebrates our receiving of the Torah, which serves as a guidebook to utilizing our creative talents in productive ways. Creativity unharnessed will often become the work of the yetzer hara, which is why the Sages associate chametz with negative qualities. With the Torah, however, we can now sublimate our instinctual impulses into performing impactful mitzvot. Our creativity can flourish within the framework of Torah. We are now in a position to incorporate chametz, representing creativity, into our service of Hashem which is exactly what we do with the shte'i halechem- the two loaves.

In the Shema, when we declare our aspiration to “love Hashem your God with all your heart,” the word “levavcha” is spelled unusually with a double *bet* when it could have been spelled with one *bet* as “libcha.” Rashi teaches us that the double *bet* hints to our desire to love Hashem with “shnei yitzrecha,” with both of our inclinations, the good and evil, the yetzer hatov and yetzer hara. Armed with commitment to Torah, we have the ability to offer the two loaves, and channel the chametz/human ingenuity for productive purposes that enable us to reach our potential and deepen our relationship with Hashem.

Turning to our current reality, we can perhaps draw a lesson from the Pesach- Shavuot trajectory to the pandemic which has dramatically affected our lives. While very different circumstances, we can suggest that like the Jewish people upon being freed from Egypt, needed to ready themselves for the transition and think about how they will maximize their freedom, we can engage in similar introspection. As restrictions are eased, society is opened up and we re-emerge into the world, we ought to reflect upon perspectives we’ve learned during this time and consider how we incorporate them going forward. It has been tough and major challenges lie ahead. With a newfound appreciation for that which is important to us, how will we be agents for change? How will we use our “freedom”? As we emerge from this tunnel, how will

we utilize our human creativity to (continue to) make a difference for our loved ones and for the world around us?

These are difficult questions for each of us to ponder but if we recall the message of the two loaves and grasp onto the Torah, our “tree of life” will point us in the right direction and supply us with the resilience, hope, confidence and framework to utilize our human ingenuity towards a better future.

Creating A Hero
Cantor Rabbi Arik Wollheim and Dr. Ellen Basian

On Shavuot, we celebrate the receiving of the Torah and we perform the ancient custom of reading the Book of Ruth. Shavuot is also the day that King David was born and, seventy years later, it is the day upon which he died. On this significant anniversary, we might expect to focus upon one of the many sources in the Bible that honor David's legacy as can be found in his monumental work the Book of Psalms, in the chapters of Samuel, or in the references to King David as the ultimate leader to whom we refer "Chai Vekeyam (i.e. alive and exists). Instead, we read the Book of Ruth that does not really tell us anything about David, the man, the leader.

To understand the importance of this custom, we would like to suggest that while other books may better present King David and his achievements, the placement of his name as the last word in the Book of Ruth signifies that we are meant to study David's ancestry on this holiday. From the plethora of significant players in David's ancestry, we find four extraordinary female figures whose stories illustrate their pivotal roles as essential enablers of the Davidic lineage and reveal themes of transformation from transgression to redemption. Drawing from their stories, we will demonstrate common elements embedded within them as well as thematic threads woven across them. We will appreciate the context within which these women lived, how they coped with their challenges, and the generational consequences of their actions. Furthermore, we will suggest that these ancestral conditions sow seeds that literally or figuratively contribute to the cultivation of David's character such that he emerges as the ultimate leader, and, by extension, that they contain crucial elements for his lineage, the "Messiah, son of David".

To set the stage for our observations and analysis, we will briefly outline the stories of the following four women: Lot's eldest daughter; Tamar (daughter-in-law of Judah); Ruth; and Nitzevet (Mother of King David).

A) Lot's eldest daughter

Lot was the orphan nephew of Abraham who grew up in Abraham's house and then decided to part from his uncle to settle in Sodom for financial reasons. Sodom represents the worst of human behavior, such that it cannot be corrected and, therefore, Sodom had to be destroyed. The city of Sodom was destined for complete destruction due to its moral and social corruption, despite Abraham's plea to God to save it. God decided to destroy Sodom, but agreed to save Lot and his family and sends angels to evacuate the family. The angels appeared as strangers looking for hospitality and only Lot was willing to offer it to them. The rest of the city residents

demanded that the guests be handed over to them and, in an effort to save the strangers and appease the crowd, Lot, offered his daughters instead. Before that exchange, the angels were able to safely extract the family from Sodom, however, along the way, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt and he and his two daughters took refuge in a cave nearby. Believing that they are the only survivors in the world, Lot's older daughter decided that she and her sister have the sole responsibility to continue mankind. In order to fulfill that responsibility, she arranged for her father to get so drunk that he unwittingly complies with her efforts to become pregnant. That union results with the birth of Moab, father of the nation of Ruth.

B) Tamar

Judah, fourth son of Jacob, following the sale of Joseph, moves out of the house, marries a Canaanite woman and fathers three sons. The oldest marries a Canaanite woman named Tamar and dies before having any children. Judah asked his second son to provide offspring for Tamar so that the family line might continue, however, he too dies before they have children. At this point, Judah is portrayed as viewing Tamar as cursed and, therefore, he is reluctant to give her his remaining and youngest son, Shelah. Rather, he tells Tamar to wait for Shelah. However, even after Shelah has grown up, Judah still does not give Tamar to him in marriage. After Shelah had grown up, Judah became a widower and following the mourning of his wife, he planned on going to shear his sheep. Upon hearing this news, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and went there. Judah saw the prostitute, but he did not recognize her as Tamar in her disguise and he requested her services. Tamar's plan was to become pregnant by this ruse so that she might bear a child in Judah's line. While she was disguised as a prostitute, Tamar struck a bargain with Judah for a goat, secured by his staff, seal, and cord. When Judah was able to have a goat sent to her in order to collect his staff and seal, the woman was nowhere to be found. Three months later, Judah wrongfully accused Tamar of inappropriate relations and he ordered that she be burned to death. Tamar sent the staff, seal, and cord to Judah with a message declaring that the owner of these items was the man who had made her pregnant. Upon recognizing these items as his security, Judah released Tamar from her sentence and admitted his mistake of not letting her marry Shelah and of accusing her of inappropriate relations. Tamar, having thus secured her place in the family as well as Judah's posterity, gave birth to twins, and one of them, Perez, is identified in the book of Ruth as an ancestor of King David.

C) Ruth

Elimelech a man of Bethlehem-Judah, with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, went in time of famine and sojourned in the land of Moab. Elimelech died in Moab and his two sons married. Mahlon married Ruth and Chilion married Orpa; both women of Moab and both widowed shortly after they wed. Naomi heard that the famine in Judah had passed and determined to return home. Ruth, in spite of the dissuasion of Naomi, declared her devotion to G-d and to the Jewish people in her statement "your nation is my nation, your G-d

is my G-d" and Ruth accompanied her mother-in-law to Bethlehem. The two women arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest in a state of dire poverty, but Elimelech had an inheritance of land among his brethren. In order for Naomi to claim it, she had to find a Goel, that is, a kinsman of Elimelech who could assert Elimelech's inheritance rights. Elimelech had a prosperous relative in Bethlehem whose name was Boaz. Boaz was busy with the harvest, so Naomi sent Ruth to his fields to collect barley where Boaz spoke with her kindly and showed her some favors. Acting upon the advice of her mother-in-law, Ruth approached Boaz at night, and he was inspired to take responsibility for her. Before he could do so, Boaz informed her that there was a kinsman nearer than he who had the first right to redeem the estate of Elimelech and that it would be necessary for this kinsman to renounce his right before Boaz could proceed in that matter. After informing the elders and the kinsman that the kinsman had renounced his rights in favor of Boaz, Boaz bought the estate from Naomi. Boaz then interpreted the Torah prohibition about marrying a Moabite as one that only applies to the men, not to the women, which enabled him to marry Ruth. Ruth and Boaz became the great grandparents of David.

D) Nitzevet

Only the Talmud reveals the name of David's mother, Nitzevet. David's father, Jesse, was married to Nitzevet, however, the Midrash explains that, at some point, after they married, Jesse second guessed his own status as a Jew because he as a descendant of Ruth and the ruling about distinguishing marriage with a Moabite man versus a Moabite woman was still controversial three generations later. Therefore, Jesse separated himself from Nitzevet to her great despair and he planned to be with his non-Jewish servant instead of her. The servant told Nitzevet and they switched places unbeknownst to Jesse. Nitzevet became pregnant from their union, but Jesse and his sons believed that she had been unfaithful. When Nitzevet gives birth to their son, David, he was treated as a bastard by his father and brothers and she suffered humiliation for 28 years. Only when Samuel the prophet comes to Jesse to anoint "his son, David" as King of Israel does the truth come out that Jesse was David's father indeed and that Nitzevet was faithful. At that point, Jesse reconciled with his Jewish status and with his wife, Nitzevet.

Having briefly outlined the tales of these four women, we will now explore how their stories share common elements as well as how their stories seem to progress from the most extreme situation to more subtle variations of a theme.

1. Context

Each woman's story takes place against the backdrop of the senior male figure making a mistake of moving away from the Jewish nation in varying degrees. Across the stories, we observe how the moral qualities of the reason to leave improve from the worst reason to seek

financial gain, to social success, to find food, and then to misguided Halachic belief. Additionally, the progression follows the greatest separation from their Jewish identity to their least departure from it.

Lot leaves Abraham and chooses to live in Sodom where he seeks financial gain and becomes highly assimilated into that corrupt society which represents the greatest departure from a moral Jewish life. Judah leaves Jacob's house after the sale of Joseph to live among the Canaanites where he marries a Canaanite woman, but he still holds onto his Jewish identity. While Elimelech moves to Moab because of famine in Israel, he retains his Jewish identity, but his sons assimilate and marry Moabite women. Jesse separates himself mentally from the Jewish community under the misguided belief that his Jewish status is in question.

2. Alienation

Each woman is alien to the Jewish nation in the sense that she is an outsider and it is only through her decisive actions that she moves into alignment to become a critical predecessor of King David.

Lot's daughters are the only survivors after the destruction of Sodom. Sodom represents the worst of human behavior beyond redemption. Since the Torah requires us to live a moral and conscience life, Sodom is the most alien society to the Jewish nation. While Lot's eldest daughter is associated with this most egregious society, she is counted amongst David's predecessors through the birth of her son Moab who is the founder of Ruth's birth nation. Tamar, according to the Midrash, is a descendant of Shem, son of Noah. Even though the Jewish nation also traces back to Shem, she is still not considered to be part of the Jewish lineage. She moves closer to it initially by securing her membership as part of Judah's family and then by bearing his children, one of whom is noted as David's ancestor. Although Ruth was a Moabite, she becomes an integral part of the Jewish nation when she marries Mahlon and remains devoted to Naomi who connects her with Boaz. Ruth's marriage with Boaz positions her to become a great grandparent of David. Nitzevet is estranged from her husband Jesse and their union is essential for the birth of David.

3. Rejection

At the heart of each woman's crisis are profound feelings of unresolved rejection ranging from the most expansive rejection by G-d to the intimate rejection by a spouse.

Lot's daughter believes that they are the lone survivors in the world after the destruction of Sodom and that God has rejected them and the entire world without recourse. Tamar is rejected by Judah twice: first, when she was not given in marriage to the third son; and secondly, when he discovers that she is pregnant. Both rejections are resolved when he acknowledges his mistakes and she returns to the fold of the family. Ruth is rejected by Naomi, but that rejection is quickly rectified when Ruth decides to stay with Naomi. Nitzevet is rejected by her husband for more than 28 years before they fully reconcile.

4. Abandonment

Within each story, we find our underdog heroine abandoned by the person upon whom she was dependent. The theme of isolation is woven into the most concrete physical plane of existence through to the social, emotional, and Halachic fabric of marital connection.

Lot's daughter is left motherless, homeless, and bereft of any protective resources with no foreseeable future dependent upon a father who was willing to give her to an angry mob to be abused. Tamar, twice widowed and still childless, is abandoned by a father-in-law who refuses to grant her future marriage. Ruth is left widowed, childless, and dependent upon her Mother-in-law. Nitzevet is dependent on her husband Jesse who emotionally and sexually abandons her for reasons related to his beliefs.

5. Life threatening trouble

Within each traumatic tale, the woman recognizes that life as she knew it is over and she is in crisis. These crises progress from global devastation to marital dissolution.

Lot's daughter believes the world was destroyed and the very survival of mankind is threatened. Tamar has lost two husbands and realizes that her future options are bleak. Ruth, widowed and dependent upon mother-in-law Naomi, faces a journey into unknown land to secure the future of their family. Nitzevet recognizes that Jesse is intimately inaccessible to her and that situation later deteriorates further when she is accused of infidelity.

6. Motivation

Here we are addressing the underlying motivations rather than the behavior itself. They each have a compelling reason for their "mis-conduct" that is greater than their own self-interest. These characters are driven by a sense of loyalty to life itself, to the Jewish nation, to the family, and to the marriage. They are willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater good and, in doing so, they express their courage to break taboos, engage in prohibited relations, violate societal norms, and cross personal boundaries.

Lot's daughter believes it is up to her to continue Mankind, even at the price of committing incest. Tamar is motivated to pursue prohibited sexual relations with Judah to perpetuate the Tribe. Ruth is motivated to secure the continuity of the Family even by bending the rules of extra-marital relations. Nitzevet is motivated to have another child and to reconcile her marriage even without Jesse's informed consent.

7. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

The women initiate action to create optimal conditions to ensure future generations. They assume responsibility for fulfilling their destiny as far as they can conceive it to be, given their limited horizons. Their extreme efforts to fulfill their vital mission range from committing the most heinous sin of incest to covert deception within a marital relationship.

While Lot's daughter gets him drunk so he will not be conscious enough to object to committing incest, Tamar plans a strategic meeting with Judah, sets the stage, prepares her disguise, negotiates a trade, and reveals the truth in a timely and modest manner. Ruth approaches Boaz in a way that occurs outside the sanctity of marriage and Nitzevet secretly switches place with her servant in order to be intimate with her own husband.

8. Deliberately Disguised Identity to Ensure Anonymity

Within each scenario, the woman deliberately disguises her identity to fulfill the objective of having a child for the greater good. Across this theme of anonymity, we see their deception progress from creating a state of unconsciousness to contriving a case of mistaken identity. Lot is drunk, passively compliant and totally unaware of his actions as the Torah states "he did not know when she lay or when she arose". Judah is conscious of his actions, but he does not know that the prostitute is actually Tamar. Boaz is in a half sleep state and susceptible to Ruth's subtle advances. Jesse is unaware that Nitzevet has switched places with the servant.

9. Informed Consent

Another common element is the absence of informed consent by the men. None of the male partners would have knowingly consented to the coupling with their respective female partners had they been aware of their true identity at that time.

10. Powerful men

Each woman is forced to deal with the powerful, dominant man in her life who would be reluctant to cooperate with her under consensual circumstances. There is a progression in the amount of control the man has over the woman from complete control to a more equal partner.

Lot has complete control over his daughter to the extent that he can send her to be abused by an angry mob. Tamar's father-in-law has complete control over whether and when she will re-marry. Boaz is a powerful kinsman who holds the key for Ruth's future. Despite Jesse and Nitzevet's relatively equal status as husband and wife, Jesse still exercises a measure of emotional control over her as he believes that she was unfaithful and makes her suffer for 28 years.

11. Un-normative leverage marriage

The Torah tells us that a childless widow is supposed to marry her brother-in-law and that the child "shall be accounted to the dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out in Israel". Yet, in all our stories, there is a twist where someone else unites with the widow and, while they are from the same family, they are not the intended Yabam (i.e. the husband's brother).

Lot is the father, not the Kinsman. Selah is supposed to be with Tamar, not Judah. Not until after the closest kinsman declines to be with Ruth does Boaz marry her. After Jesse clarifies his Halachic status as a Jew, he returns to the intimate relationship with Nitzevet.

12. It's a Boy!

Our heroines consciously choose to take decisive action in the direction of motherhood and they each produce a son that is instrumental in providing for the next generation; each of whom plays a pivotal role in assuring the perpetuation of David's ancestry.

Lot's eldest daughter's son was Moab who is the founder of Ruth's birth nation. Tamar bore twins and one of them was Peretz who continued the lineage which 10 generations later produced David. Ruth is the mother of Oved who was the grandfather of David. Nitzevet is the mother of David.

13. Redemption

One of the ideals in Judaism is the creation of a long-lasting marriage with children. In each of these scenarios, the women strive for this ideal with lesser to greater success.

The only decree of success that Lot's daughter achieves is that she gives birth to Moab who is essential for the future generations to culminate in the birth of David. Tamar achieves a greater degree by giving birth to twins and reuniting with the family, however, she does not regain full marital status. Ruth and Boaz do marry and have a child, however, according to tradition, Boaz dies shortly after they wed, so they do not experience the ideal long-lasting marriage. After 28 years, Nitzevet and Jesse fully reconcile their marriage.

14. Conversion

Each woman moves a step closer towards Judaism. There is a progression from Lot's daughter who starts the nation of Moab to Tamar who ties her destiny to Judah's Jewish family. Ruth is the first recorded convert and, finally, Nitzevet, is already Jewish.

Each personal journey presents a poignant arc of transformation from suffering victimhood via circumstances beyond their control through self-assertion to arrange conditions whereby they actualize their potency to create future generations for the greater good. Each scenario is imbued with intricate elements that cultivate conditions propelling the generations into alignment with the destiny of David. From the crudest of conditions to the most delicate of dynamics, we see how these four women emerge to become pivotal predecessors of King David and how the Book of Ruth calls our attention to these ancestral stories that may contain the seeds of King David's lineage leading to the Messiah.

For in the face of adversity, these women demonstrate their loyalty to their life affirming ideals, creativity to cope with crisis, courage to take risks, humbleness to make personal sacrifices, and willingness to use unconventional measures, despite their impoverished beginnings, disadvantages, vulnerability, and limited resources. All their qualities are conducive to creating a true and noble leader who possesses the heart, mind, and will to lead with kindness, compassion, and integrity.

Unlike other cultures where the Myth of the Hero includes a pre-destined future, our King David is the Antihero story. While David would appear to be the least likely person to become the king because he is small, weak, rejected by his father and outcast by his family, he emerges from his low status and difficult conditions to become the ultimate king because of his character and how he masters his challenges.

As we celebrate receiving the Torah on Shavuot, we are reminded that while our ancestors hold the key to our history, they neither guarantee nor limit our legacy. Likewise, we must not judge the history or future potential of another person as if we can stereotype their destiny based on their circumstances or station in life. The rabbis continue the message of the Bible and teach us that the crown of Torah is greater than the crown of priesthood and sovereignty because it is available to all who want it, not just to those who are born to it (Rambam, Talmud Torah 3,1).

Chag Same'ach and Shabbat Shalom

The Parameters Of Responsibility

Robert E. Levine MD

COVID-19 has brought the issue of personal responsibility very much into the forefront recently. Certainly we know that Judaism places an emphasis on personal responsibility. Each one of us is responsible for our own actions. We have free will. No one is forcing us to do anything. We make our own decisions, and act accordingly. We know that all of those decisions will be subject to the rules of reward and punishment.

We also know that our responsibility does not extend only to ourselves, but also to our brethren. If our brother Jew needs physical help because his beast of burden is overloaded, we come to his aid. If he needs financial help, we provide *tzedakah*. For whatever problems he may have, we attempt to provide the appropriate *chesed*.

However, the level of responsibility which is brought down in Tractate Shabbos (75b) in the name of Bar Kappara is less familiar. "Anyone who knows how to calculate the progression of the seasons and the position of the constellations and he does not calculate them, Scripture states about him: *and the work of God they do not regard and the action of his hands they do not see* (Isaiah 5:12)."

The Gemara goes on to present a similar idea. It is brought down in the name of Rabbi Yochanon: "From where do we know that there is a mitzvah incumbent upon a person to calculate the progression of the seasons and the position of the constellations? For it is stated: *you shall safeguard and perform them for it is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations* (Deuteronomy 4:6). What wisdom and discernment is in the eyes of the nations? You have to say this is a calculation of the progression of the seasons and the position of the constellations."

Before embarking on a trip to Switzerland in the 1880's, the great Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch is reported to have said, "When I shall stand before God, the Eternal One will ask me with pride: Did you see my Alps?" Similarly, Bar Kappara is telling us that an individual who has at his disposal the scientific abilities and information to increase his appreciation of God's works has a responsibility to himself to do so. The more one investigates the details of God's creation, the greater his love of God. So says the Rambam.

For me personally, the opportunities presented to me in medical school to unravel the mysteries of the body's biochemistry, gross anatomy, and cellular biology provided me with a religious experience.

However, making the calculations described above is not only a responsibility to oneself. The calculations referred to include weather forecasting. Especially in an agrarian society, the ability to forecast an imminent storm may provide the opportunity to save fragile crops from

destruction and the farmers from financial ruin and famine. Thus, we see that if we are blessed to have the scientific abilities to help the society around us, we have a responsibility to the society to use those abilities.

Clearly the concept is not limited to astronomy, mathematics or weather prediction. Using whatever talents, training, education and favorable circumstance that we have for the benefit of society is not optional. The Talmud tells us it is a responsibility

Lastly, Rabbi Yochanon is telling us that what Jews achieve with the wisdom that Hashem has given them is recognized by the nations of the world. It is part of the responsibility of the Jewish people to be a “light unto the nations.” It is also the part of our mission that includes: “This is my God and I will glorify Him.”

Shavuot is a time for us to take stock of all of the intellectual blessings and wisdom that came with the Revelation at Sinai, and the responsibilities to ourselves, to our brethren, and to society to fully utilize all those gifts to the utmost of our abilities, and thereby glorify Hashem’s name.

כֹּאשׁ אוֹכֵלֶת – “Like a Consuming Fire”

Dr. Ivor Geft

זי- וּמִרְאֵה כְבוֹד ה' כֹּאשׁ אוֹכֵלֶת בְּרֹאשׁ הָהָר לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: שְׁמוֹת כד)

Shavuot is the culmination of a journey that begins at Pesach and concludes 7 weeks later with the receiving of the Torah. Following the physical redemption from Egypt on the first day, we then begin the spiritual redemption over the next 49 days, a step by step process of ridding ourselves of the negativity (טומאה) that we experienced and imbibed in Egypt.

יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם is mentioned 50 times in the Torah. This parallels the counting of the Omer, as if we leave (יציאה) a little more of Egypt behind us each day. Through a process of introspection and self-improvement, we progressively shed a little more of the influence of Egypt and raise ourselves to a state of readiness to receive the Torah on day 50, the Chag of Shavuot.

The awesome experience at Mount Sinai is described at the end of *פְּרַשְׁת מִשְׁפָּטִים*: “And the appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain top in the eyes of all Bnei Yisrael.” The *קְטָב וּקְבֵלָה* gives a novel interpretation of the pasuk, asserting that the “consuming fire” – *אש אוכלת* – is not an external conflagration, but a reference to the “spiritual combustibility” of each person. The experience of *מִתַּן תּוֹרָה* at *הַר סִינַי* was not uniform, but differed for each individual depending on the effort invested during the preparatory phase of *סְפִירַת הָעוֹמֵר*. The more one invested in the spiritual process leading to that day, the more one was ‘fired up’ by the event. The less prepared person was simply “warmed” by the experience on *הַר סִינַי* and the well-prepared was “totally consumed”.

Like every endeavor in life, the more one puts into the process, the more satisfying and rewarding the results.

Lovingkindness in the Time of COVID

Shirley Traum

On Shavuot, we read Megillas Ruth, which tells the story of Naomi and Ruth. Naomi is married to Elimelech and has two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. The family leaves Bethlehem due to a famine and settle in Moab. Elimelech dies there, leaving Naomi a widow. Her sons take Moabite wives, Orpah and Ruth. After ten years, tragedy strikes again; both of Naomi's sons die in a plague. Naomi decides to return to Judah, and tells her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab with their people. After some hesitation, Orpah kisses Naomi and leaves, but Ruth is obstinate. Her immortal words are: "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d."

The circumstances in Moab parallel what the world faces today. Instead of a plague that threatens lives, we have a pandemic. We are sheltering at home to protect our families, so that no one should experience the pain of losing multiple family members the way Naomi did. We are separated from those we love, distanced from everyone. We feel isolated because we are isolated, and in such a world, it is easy to wonder if G-d has abandoned us. The gematria for COVID (כּוֹבִיד) is 42. In the 42nd verse of Megillas Ruth (2:20), we read: "Blessed be he by the Lord, who has not abandoned his lovingkindness to the living and to the dead." There is an ambiguity regarding the subject of this statement by Naomi. Is she referring to Boaz, who has shown kindness to Ruth, or is she referring to Hashem? Is it "his lovingkindness" or "His lovingkindness"?

On one hand, Malbim³ and Ibn Ezra⁴ contend that Naomi is recognizing Boaz for the kindness that he showed her through his magnanimity towards and protection of Ruth. On the other hand, Ruth Rabbah⁵ and Otzar Midrashim⁶ argue in favor of the latter, that Naomi is thanking G-d for continually showing lovingkindness towards the Jewish people, both in life and beyond. She has an unshakeable faith that her well-being as well as Ruth's are ultimately in His hands.

³ Malbim on Ruth 2:20:1: "She began by blessing him (Boaz) with the words 'who has not abandoned his kindness with the living', because she understood that what he had done was in order to honorably provide for Naomi and Ruth, who were living and of his kin, 'and for the dead,' since she also understood that he would show kindness to the dead by performing the levirate rituals, which do good for the soul of the dead."

⁴ Ibn Ezra on Ruth 2:20: "'Blessed is he to G-d, who has not abandoned his kindness' - this is evidence that he had performed kindness beforehand toward Elimelech and his sons."

⁵ Ruth Rabbah 5:10: "Blessed be he of Hashem, Who has not failed in His kindness to the living - He nourished and supported the living - and to the dead - He attended to their burial shrouds."

⁶ Otzar Midrashim, Midrash on Ruth 2:48: "Blessed is he to the Lord! Blessed is the name of the Lord who does not withdraw His lovingkindness from the living, and is destined to resurrect the dead."

Perhaps both points are true, that even at times like these, G-d has not forsaken us. He continues to shield us with lovingkindness while expecting us to do the same. Boaz was blessed because he showed lovingkindness towards both kin, Naomi, and convert/stranger, Ruth. It was Ruth's willingness to be a stranger in a strange land out of love and loyalty to Naomi that touched Boaz. His words to Ruth are: "It has been fully told to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband; and how you have left your father and your mother, and the land of your birth, and have come to a people which you did not know before. The Lord will recompense your work, and a full reward shall be given to you by the Lord G-d of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

By showing lovingkindness towards all, kin and stranger, during this crisis, G-d will continue to protect us as we shelter at home. What goes around comes around, and Ruth and Boaz were blessed by G-d with being the great-grandparents of King David. Perhaps it is how we treat each other, both those in our families and those in the wider community, during a time when it is easy to hunker down and turn a blind eye, that will merit us worthy of seeing the Mashiach come speedily in our days.

Rut Fixing Lot's Mistake

Nava Gelb

When Sodom was destroyed, Lot and his daughters thought they were the only people left on Earth and therefore thought it was their obligation to continue the line of people. One of the daughters gave birth to the leader of Moav. Rut therefore came from him and ended up descending from Lot.

Lot left Avraham because he thought that since he understands that Hashem is G-d, he doesn't need a connection; the knowledge is service enough. His mistake is that in order to serve Hashem, he can't just be aware of the truth, but he has to practice the truth and live the truth. He had to have a connection to G-d.

Rut felt the complete opposite way. She came from Moav, and after she learned about G-d from her new in-laws, she yearned for more. She followed Naomi and wanted to go to Israel with her. Naomi tried to dissuade her, but Rut ended up correcting her ancestor, Lot's, mistake by longing to be closer to Hashem.

Naomi tried to turn her away and told her to go back three times by saying "שבנה" meaning "return." This, perhaps, is Naomi's way of really converting Rut, as a convert is supposed to be turned away three times. We actually learn this halacha from Naomi. Naomi got Orpa to turn back, but not Rut. She just stopped trying to dissuade her at some point.

The Vilna Gaon says that Naomi stopped trying to convince her when she sees Rut struggling. Rut was younger than Naomi and Naomi's pace shouldn't be a problem: Rut should be able to keep up with her. However, Naomi realizes that she is having trouble walking by her side since she feels a bit conflicted. She was a Moavi princess, and is used to having the best of the best handed and served to her. There was a part of her that hesitated to convert. She is going from literally being a princess and having the princess high status to going into poverty.

Rut had the same thoughts as Lot by thinking, "Why do I need to go to Israel or stay with my mentor? I know everything I need to know to live a Jewish life by myself. I don't need to go with my 'spiritual coach.'"

Unlike Lot, however, Rut wanted that connection with G-d. If she remained in Moav, even if she kept the Mitzvot, she still wouldn't reach that closeness that her soul longs for -- only Naomi would be able to give that to her.

Naomi understood that the inner conflict halted Rut from running towards Israel. She realized that Rut wasn't just going to help her old, poor mother-in-law, but she was after what Judaism had to offer: an honest attachment with Hashem.

Relating the Message of Shavuot to Today

Eitan Gelb

Another name for Shavuot is Chag HaKatzir, or the harvesting holiday. Specifically, it is about harvesting our first fruits and eventually giving them to God. Leading up to Shavuot, we count the Omer, which was meant to be a countdown from the bringing of the Korban Omer to the Korban Shte Halechem. As we all know, the Torah teaches transcendent ideas that can apply to any time period. So how can a holiday centered around the harvest, sacrifices and cheesecake uplift us and bring us closer to God in the age of the iPhone?

This question becomes more complex when looking at how the Torah describes Shavuot in Parashat Re'eh. Deuteronomy 16:9-12 describes the obligations of Shavuot. We have to make a holiday for God and give everything that He has blessed us with back to him. After giving God all our valuable possessions, we are supposed to rejoice before God with all the underprivileged people we know (likely going out of our way to help them) and remember that we were slaves in Egypt. So although these Pesukim seem to indicate that we will end up happy, the command to lose so much could lead to depression rather than joy.

Rashi famously says (Deuteronomy 16:11) that if we care for God's charges (the underprivileged), then he will care for our people. Still, how does this apply to us nowadays and how can we really get Simcha from losing our valuables.

The Simcha question can be answered by using the Rambam's definition of Simcha as opposed to Freud's accepted definition of happiness. While Freud says that happiness is satisfying one's needs or wants, the Rambam defines Simcha as a positive energy. In order to attain a positive energy, people need to be giving. When someone gets a new toy, it's really cool for a little while and then it wears off, and can even make people self-centered as opposed to happy. When people give, they are more content and carry around a positive energy. So while to Freud getting a sports car may be the best way to satisfy a desire and stimulate happiness, the Rambam would support giving as a primary way to achieve Simcha, or a positive energy. So now we see that God's commandment to care for the underprivileged and to give Him our stuff is meant to result in happiness. The more we are able to give the more happiness we get.

But still, why is this holiday centered around agriculture and korbanot? How are those relevant to us? The answer lies in the hope that these spiritual connections of the past can give us. By reading about the obligation to bring Korbanot, we are reminded of the opportunities that we once had, and that we will have in the future. We are reminded to keep hoping for Moshiach so that one day, we too can offer these Korbanot to Hashem and achieve the Simcha of giving.

Revelation and the Cloud at Matan Torah

Paul Gelb

When we daven, we tend to think of the silent Shemoneh Esrei as the main part and the public repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei as secondary. But the events of Ma'amad Har Sinai show that, while individual connection with Hashem is important, the public pronouncement of the Amidah – and the awareness of identity with Knesset Yisrael that it reflects – is equally or perhaps even more central to our relationship with Hashem.

The verses at the end of Parashat Mishpatim state (Ex. 24:15-16): “Moshe ascended the mountain, and the cloud covered [*vayechas he-anan*] the mountain. Hashem’s Divine charisma was present on the mountain, and the cloud covered it [*ve-yechaseihu he-anan*] for six days, and He called to Moshe on the seventh day from within the cloud.”

The words “*ve-yechaseihu he-anan*” raise an ambiguity. It is unclear why the reference to the covering of the cloud is repeated in these two verses, and why the first verse uses the term “*vayechas he-anan*” while the second verse uses the term “*ve-yechaseihu he-anan*.” It is also unclear what six day period the verse references.

Rashi addresses this by quoting two opinions of the Gemara in Yoma 4a-b. The first is the opinion of Rabbi Akiva that the word “*ve-yechaseihu*” means that the cloud covered the mountain and that the six days of waiting correspond to the days between Rosh Chodesh Sivan and Matan Torah. The second opinion that Rashi quotes is of Rabbi Yose HaGelili that the word “*ve-yechaseihu*” means that the cloud covered, not the mountain, but Moshe (i.e., the cloud covered “him” / Moshe, rather than “it” / the mountain), and that the time period before Hashem called out to Moshe were the first six of the 40 days when Moshe ascended Har Sinai to receive the Torah. He says that six days are necessary preparation before an act of great religious significance, such as receiving the Torah.

It is striking, according to the second opinion, that six of the 40 days of revelation of the Torah to Moshe were spent in silence. The Shechina of Hashem was present and Moshe was contained within the cloud that covered him. Hashem and Moshe stood silently within the presence of one another, as it were, until the seventh day when Hashem spoke to Moshe.

This is resonant of another time that Moshe had a seven day encounter with Hashem. The verse in Parashat Shemot describing Moshe’s experience at the burning bush states (Ex. 4:10): “Moshe said to Hashem, ‘Please my Lord, I am not articulate; nor was I yesterday nor the day before yesterday nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.’” Rashi comments that the verse implies that by this point Moshe’s encounter with Hashem had lasted six days, and that this was the seventh day.

This was a significant encounter. Indeed, in Parashat VeZot HaBracha (Deut. 33:16), Moshe refers to Hashem, not as the redeemer from Egypt or the giver of the Torah, but as the “*Shochni Sneh*,” because Moshe’s first meaningful encounter with Hashem was at the burning bush. Now, after they had succeeded in the plan they had discussed a year earlier at the *Sneh*, Moshe and Hashem stood together, as it were, again connecting closely for six days in silence. This accentuates the capacity for individual engagement with Hashem.

The other interpretation, asserted by Rabbi Akiva, is that the six days referenced in Parashat Mishpatim occurred prior to Matan Torah, and that these six days presaged Hashem’s revelation to the entire Knesset Yisrael. By understanding the word “*ve-yechaseihu*” to mean that the cloud covered the mountain as a whole and not just Moshe in particular, Rabbi Akiva underscores that the Divine revelation primarily occurred through the engagement with Knesset Yisrael. This fits with the explanation for the singular form of the word “*va-yichan*” in the verse (Ex. 19:2): “and Israel encamped [*va-yichan*] there opposite the mountain,” to mean that the people of Israel stood at Har Sinai like one person with a unified heart. This was a prerequisite to the *gilui HaShechina*, which occurred through the cloud on the mountain, to the entire Knesset Yisrael.

In interpreting the word “*ve-yechaseihu*” at the end of Parashat Mishpatim, Rashi quotes both the opinion of Rabbi Yose HaGelili and the opinion of Rabbi Akiva. In doing so, Rashi conveys that he believes each of these is a potentially correct explanation of the verse. Our engagement with Hashem occurs on a one-on-one, individualized basis, like Moshe at the burning bush and then again for six days at the beginning of his encounter to receive the Torah directly from Hashem. And our ability to encounter the *Shechina* also occurs through our attachment to the Jewish people. We receive the Torah by connecting to Knesset Yisrael.

Thus, Rashi quotes the interpretation of Rabbi Yose HaGelili, implying that the encounter with Hashem at Har Sinai was individualized, as well as the interpretation of Rabbi Akiva expressing that, at the same time, the encounter with Hashem during Matan Torah was accomplished primarily through identity with the people of Israel.

An Exposition on the Shema

Dr. Sam Smith

About a year ago after saying the first paragraph of the Shema all my life, I discovered something so obvious and profound. I forwarded it to rabbi Bleich who immediately replied " excellent "and told me the same insight had been noted in the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Shema begins "hear oh Israel the Lord our G-d is One". When was the last time the entire Jewish people were gathered together and told to listen? I would say at Mount Sinai! Then they all heard the first two commandments spoken by G-d. The first was I am the Lord your G-d the 3rd and 4th words of that first line and the second commandment was no other G-ds before me, the 5th and 6th words. After that, the people were unable to listen directly to G-d and asked Moshe to relay the other 8 commandments to them . The first line of the Shema brings us to Sinai and is appropriate for the prayer that reminds of G-d's commandments. The first line of the Shema is stating the first two commandments. This explanation of the first line of the Shema avoids using G-d's name 3 times in that sentence when one time would not have changed the meaning.

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The Perseverance of the Jewish Spirit

Shelly Rosenfeld

The holiday of Shavuot celebrates HaShem giving the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai more than 3,300 years ago. During Shavuot, we renew our acceptance of this gift, which touches the essence of the Jewish soul. Through receiving the Torah, we became HaShem's people, chosen to learn the Torah and keep its laws. But the receiving of the Torah is not just a gift, it is a responsibility.

Celebrating Shavuot is especially meaningful because the Jewish people have in each generation had the existential fight to be Jewish, a fight ultimately to live and have the possibility of following the Torah.

Yet, despite this challenge, the Jewish people have survived. All it takes for me is to look back two generations, to my grandparents, to see how Jews worldwide have had at times everything at stake, and took a path that was imbued by both tremendous fear and also awe at HaShem's miracles in order to survive.

My paternal grandmother, Klara, born 96 years ago in Lwow, Poland is one such example of a person who had to fight for her life because she was born as a Jew. Nazis killed my grandmother's parents and all but one of her siblings when she was 16. It was an Italian soldier who rescued my grandmother and helped her to hide in a convent in Northern Italy for the last several years of the war.

Her story could have ended there, where she could have safely lived as a nun, as almost all of her family was killed. But she never lost sight of her identity as a Jew, despite the kindness and safety of the convent.

After the war, the Jewish Brigades found her and she joined other survivors on the ship Antzo Sireney. Even when she reached the land of Israel, however, she was unable to enter it. On the way to British ruled Mandatory Palestine, British forces stopped the ship and she was sent to a detainee camp in Atlit, where she lived surrounded by barbed wire.

When I would ask her about her experiences in the Holocaust, they were too painful for her to speak about. Tears would well up in her eyes, and I did not press her silence further. But the one aspect of her life for which she was always grateful was her ability to live freely as a Jew in Israel.

On my maternal side, my grandparents David and Zvia lived in Baghdad, Iraq. As a result of the growing influence of Nazism in Iraq, there was a pogrom against the Baghdad Jewish community on Erev Shavuot in 1941. It was called the Farhud, and Muslim rioters destroyed synagogues and killed Jews. This caused David and Zvia to make a decision: to risk their lives

for the hope of living freely as Jews. In the middle of the night, my grandparents left behind almost all of their belongings, including wedding photographs and jewelry, so that their Arab neighbors would not notice that they permanently fled to Israel. All they took was their newborn, forged documents that gave them a false identity as Arab travelers, and faith that HaShem would keep them safe on a life-threatening journey. My grandfather recited the Shema silently at each police checkpoint on their way from Baghdad to Tel Aviv.

On both sides of my family, there was an unbroken chain of a commitment to remaining Jewish, and upholding the Torah since HaShem gave it to His people. The fight for survival seems almost impossible to truly conceive, and why the world at times forces Jews to stake everything, at times their safety, and even their lives for the possibility of continuing the lineage of being chosen to learn His Torah and keep its laws. It wasn't just fighting for their lives, it was fighting for their lives as Jews. The ability to live freely according to the Torah, exercising one's faith as a Jew, could not be taken for granted by my grandparents in their countries of origin. We not only have the gift of the Torah, but the ability to freely live according to its laws, which is especially worth commemorating every Shavuot.

Blazing Our Own Path

Rabbi Adir Posy

Before Shavuot, when we try to internalize the meaning of Kabalat Hatorah and apply it to our own lives, we are often faced by what seems like an unsolvable paradox. On one hand, the Torah can be seen as an ancient text that has been interpreted in a myriad of different ways over Jewish history. It is often difficult to get a clear idea of how any particular issue was viewed by Chazal over the generations. On the other hand, the text's very antiquity and multifaceted nature poses a serious challenge to anyone trying to form his or her own style of thinking and achieve a personal Kinyan (acquisition) HaTorah. In short, it is often difficult to understand the past, and it can be equally difficult to blaze your own path toward the future. It may be possible to gain insight into this dilemma through an exposition of a famous passage in the Ketzot Hachoshen (A halachic work by Aryeh Leib HaCohen Heller 1745 – 1812).

The Ketzot Hachoshen (200:4) raises a very interesting issue with regards to the character of the acquisition method known as "Kinyan Daled Amot." The process in question is based on a Gemara in Bava Metzia (10a), where Reish Lakish states in the name of Abba Cohen Bardela that our Rabbis enacted that one may acquire objects within a 4-amma radius around him so as to prevent fighting [between parties trying to take possession of a particular object]. The Ketzot cites the Shach and S'ma who bring the opinion of the Talmidei HaRashba contending that kinyan daled amot is only effective when the acquiring party precedes the object that is to be acquired. However, should the object arrive on the scene before the person, daled amot would be ineffective. Conversely, Rabbeinu Yerucham (Netiv 10:2) does not differentiate, seemingly implying that the chronology is of no import. The Rosh in Bava Metzia (1:28) concurs. Shach qualifies the opinion of the Talmidei HaRashba and says that even they would agree that the chronology does not matter if the object is a metzia (a lost object that any finder is permitted to take) or hefker (ownerless).

The Ketzot posits that the reasoning of the Talmidei HaRashba is based on the opinion of Tosfot in Kiddushin (25b). Tosfot deals with the statement that when one tries to acquire an animal, kinyan meshicha (acquiring by pulling an object into one's own domain) works only in a simta (alleyway), while kinyan mesira (acquiring by handing over) is effective only in a reshut harabim (public domain). The Tosafist R' Chaim Cohen offers the following explanation. According to Tosfot a simta is classified as a reshut hayachid (private domain) given over to whomever arrives there first. Since, generally, the seller will arrive with his or her wares at the place of a transaction before the buyer, the place where the animal is becomes her domain. If that is the case, the halacha is abundantly clear that "mesira" has no power in the seller's domain because there is lacking hachnasa lireshut (bringing an object into one's own sphere of control). The only kinyan that will work is meshicha, which is seen as uprooting the animal from its original

resting place. (See Tosfot in Kiddushin and in Bava Batra 76a for further elaboration). This, says the Ketzot, is the source of the Talmidei HaRashba's position. Since kinyan daled amot does not work in the seller's domain (Shulchan Aruch C.M. 200:2), if we are dealing with a transaction between a buyer and a seller the object will be considered birshut mocher (the seller's domain) and daled amot will be ineffective. However, if the object is ownerless, then there is no interfering reshut and daled amot will work even if the object preceded the koneh.

What remains to be explored is the position of Rabbeinu Yerucham and the Rosh. If we accept the Ketzot's assertion that even in a two-person transaction they would hold that the object could precede the buyer, how is it possible to acquire an object from another using kinyan daled amot when there is an interfering reshut? The most obvious possibility would be to say that they disagree with the basic assumption that the place of the animal is considered the reshut of the seller with regard to kinyanim when it is not under his direct physical control. Thus, when one attempts kinyan daled amot, some sort of in between state of ownership is created to allow bringing it into his domain. Another possibility could be that part of the takana (rabbinic injunction) of kinyan daled amot is that when one is clearly acquiring, the Rabbis decreed that the object being within your four-amma radius is tantamount to your actually uprooting the object from its place which would create a method similar to meshicha (pulling).

What we see coming out of this analysis are two basic views on acquisition revolving around the following basic question. How much activity is necessary for acceptance? It seems clear from both opinions that some sort of preparation is needed, and the argument is about what should the nature of this preparation be. According to the Talmidei HaRashba one cannot be completely passive in acceptance, rather they must precede the acquisition and be prepared before it occurs so that there will be no interference. However, the Rosh and Rabbeinu Yerucham take the position that while it is important that there be nothing interfering, it is still possible to actively pursue objects that are already in the place of the transaction.

These two perspectives can also be seen as different ways of approaching Torah learning. The Talmidei HaRashba's approach to Kinyan HaTorah would focus on preparation of all of the basic foundations of a topic and through thorough preparation the insights will come on their own accord. This could be seen as analogous to the idea posed by the gemara in Nedarim (55a) quoting the verse, "from the desert to Matana." (Bamidbar 21:18) The Gemara states that the Torah is given as a gift to one who transforms to be like a desert for it. In other words, whomever does the proper preparations to remove external obstacles has the Torah brought {given??} to him. Similarly the Gemara in Megilla (6a) states that one can only believe one who says, "I have toiled and I have found", meaning that to acquire Torah one must toil, but even then the Torah will be considered a "M'tziah" (a *found object*) The approach of the Rosh and Rabbeinu Yerucham would be more along the lines of this second pasuk. Their perspective would be to actively search out things that are already there, looking directly for the deepest

point of Chidush that would characterize their personal Kinyan HaTorah. This would necessitate actually ridding oneself to a certain extent of preconceived notions in order to truly see the Torah in a new light.

When we approach Shavuot we should try to utilize both of these perspectives to create an approach that synthesizes both solid preparation of the basic issues in the topic and deep thought that will dig down to the root of the ideas presented. It is through harmony of these two ideas that one can not only uncover new ways of seeing the Torah, but also truly understand, to the best of one's ability, the thinking of earlier scholars who approached this same text.

So, there is truly no quick and easy solution to the with which we began, and the integration of {opposing styles of} the Rosh/Rabbeinu Yerucham with the Talmidei HaRashba is surely a task that will require much time and effort. However, it is important to realize that "as to the toil, so is the reward" nothing can stand in the way of sincere desire to grow in Torah. May we all merit to have a true Kabbalat Hatorah on this Shavuot achieve, "Place our share in Your Torah."

Traveling Across the International Date Line During Sefirat Ha'omer

Reuven Feinstein

There are not many contemporary halachic issues regarding the holiday of Shavuos, but there is one main issue concerning counting the Omer. According to the prevailing opinions of the poskim, we view the counting of the Omer as one mitzvah and therefore, each night must be counted in order to fulfill the mitzvah. A challenge arises if one were to travel across the International Date Line during *Sefirat ha'omer*. The International Date Line is an imaginary line zig-zagging around 180° longitude through the Pacific Ocean. It separates one day from another, meaning that if it were to be 8:00 a.m. Monday morning on the eastern side of the Date Line, it would be 8:00 a.m. Tuesday morning on the western side.

From a halachic standpoint there is a debate as to where the exact locations of the International Date Line is. The Chazon Ish's opinion is rooted in the Baal Hamaor's explanation of a Gemara in Rosh Hashana. He says that the Date Line technically runs 90 degrees east of Yerushalayim. According to his opinion the Date Line runs through Australia, The Philippines, China, North Korea and Russia. The second opinion is given by Rav Yechiel Michel Tukatzinsky, zt"l. His opinion is based on Chazal's principle that Yerushalayim is "The center of the world." He says that the Date Line is 180 degrees east of Yerushalayim. The date line would run from the Gulf of Alaska through the Pacific Ocean east of Hawaii, thus placing the entire state of Hawaii on the other side of the Date Line from the United States.

Many Angelenos travel to the far east, or Australia either for work, or for pleasure. The 16 hour non stop flight from Los Angeles to Australia crosses over the International Date Line, resulting in a "loss of a day." If one were to board his 11:00 p.m. flight from Los Angeles to Australia on Sunday, the twentieth day of the Omer, he would arrive in Australia at 9:00 a.m., Tuesday morning. Due to the day change, he would have missed counting the 21st day of the Omer at Maariv, which would result in a halachic problem, because he cannot continue counting with a bracha.

There are some poskim, like the Mishneh Halachos, who rule that the traveler should count the 21st night of the Omer on Tuesday, during the day, without a bracha, and then continue counting the following days with a bracha according to the count of Australia. Other poskim like Betzel Hachahmah and the Be'er Moshe suggest that in this situation the traveler should continue counting according to Australia's count, without a bracha. Finally, there is the controversial ruling of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe says that the traveler should continue counting according to his personal count that he started with. The same would apply for every subsequent night, considering that he is going according to his own count. This would mean that the traveler would be a day behind Australia's count of the Omer, and would start celebrating Shavuos a day later than everyone in Australia. A consensus of poskim disagree with the Lubavitcher Rebbe and hold that the traveler continues to count according to Australia, and celebrate Shavuos on the 49th day of the Omer in Australia.

According to all Poskim one is discouraged to travel across the Date Line during the period of *Sefira*. For halacha *lima'aseh*, one should always take a question like this up with a rabbinical authority on what course of action one should take if they must travel to the Far East, or Australia during the counting of the Omer

I would like to thank Rabbi's Nachum Sauer and Avi Stewart for their valuable help and encouragement in preparing this d'var torah.

Defeating a Faceless Enemy

Aryeh Goldberg

“In the Third Month of the Exodus of Bnei Yisroel from Mitzrayim, on this day, they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai” (Shemos 19:1)

Rashi, in Maseches Rosh HaShanah (11b) comments that the astrological sign for the “Third Month”, or Sivan, is Gemini – twins. Yalkut HaGershuni further explains that this is symbolic of the need for the Jewish nation to be united together in brotherhood and friendship in order to receive the Torah. The Torah cannot be given to an isolated individual for it is impossible for a secluded individual to observe all the commandments of the Torah. The communal construct seems to be woven into the very fabric of our people serving as a prerequisite for fulfilling the collective tenets of the Torah.

Throughout our history, though we’ve faced existential persecution on many occasions, it is rare that we’ve faced an enemy who has subtly tore at the communal fabric that binds us together and the infrastructure that has enabled us to persevere. For example, Haman, and similarly Hitler, sought to exterminate the Jewish people entirely. The Y’vanim of Chanuka fame endeavored to eradicate our faith. Never have we been forcefully isolated from each other, each Jew from another. In fact, just the opposite as in many instances we were confined together, such as in the ghettos of the 1930’s and early 1940’s.

Today, we are facing a subtle, faceless enemy. While we are distracted by the health and economic impacts of the virus and its global response, COVID-19 has the potential to pose an existential threat to our nation like never seen before. By forcing us into seclusion, the virus has begun to uproot the tangible and fundamental perpetuating force that is at the very core of our nationhood – our communal interactions. Whether it be daily minyanim, face-to-face chavrusa learning, hachnasas orchim, widespread bikur cholim visits, communal influence on increased Torah observance, or even shidduch dating and simchas, these are the scaffolding that have maintained our community for thousands of years, but yet were essentially quashed in an instant just after Purim a few months ago.

Upon arriving at Har Sinai, *“Yisrael encamped there opposite the mountain”* (Shemos 19:2). Rashi hones in on the use of the singular⁷ to describe the encampment of the Jews, saying, “K’ish ehad, b’lev ehad – as one person with one heart”. This in contrast to all other encampments in the midbar where Bnei Yisrael argued.

What specifically about their time at Har Sinai motivated Am Yisrael to subjugate their differences and come together as one – the acceptance of the Torah?

⁷ The pasuk here uses the singular form “va’yichen – and he encamped”, whereas earlier in the same pasuk the plural form was used to describe Bnei Yisrael’s actions: “va’yisu – and they journeyed”, “va’ya’vo’u – and they arrived”, “va’ya’cha’nu – and they encamped”

Rav Yeshaya Zimmerman suggests there are two types of experiences that can inspire a person to overcome his own desires and even his needs so that he can devote himself to something far greater. The first is the influence of a great person. The strength of that person's character incites those around him to follow in his footsteps, regardless of their previously identified agendas. At Har Sinai, Am Yisrael was to be in the presence of G-d – what greater character could there possibly be?

The second experience is the perception of a great truth. Hereto, what greater perception of truth could there be than that of the Torah? The Maharal, in his work, the "Nesivos Olam", articulated that the universe was created according to the mandate of the Torah. Planets, gravity, electrodynamics, the nature of the cell, and energy all follow the principles and laws laid out in the Torah. The Gemara in Masesches Shabbos (87b) points out that the universe was created for the sake of the sixth day – the sixth of Sivan – when the Torah would be given.

While the effects of the Coronavirus may have removed the "trappings" of Jewish communal life, many distractions of everyday life have also been similarly minimized or removed. Thus, as Jewish families across the globe have been quarantined at home, we've been able to distinguish between and reflect upon the noise of contemporary society and the Torah values that we hold dear. Without daily commutes, we've been able to dedicate more time to regular Torah study. The mass global proliferation of Torah over the internet has exploded in response. Our community has grown hungry to return to daven with a Minyan, while in the interim we've realized how meaningful our davening itself can be. Our family relationships have been strengthened. These are just a few examples of how we've each grown closer to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and have strived to perceive the Torah's greater truth.

When we are all, individually and collectively, able to focus on that greater truth - the Torah and our underlying purpose in life of growing closer to HaKadosh Baruch Hu - we are able to overcome both the absence of our supportive communal infrastructure and the devastating impacts of the Coronavirus.

This sixth of Sivan, let us return to our Sinaitic roots and metaphorically gather at the foot of the mountain, to recapture the experience when we, Am Yisroel, stood as one person with one heart, k'ish echad b'lev echad, in the presence of G-d and his Torah. Emboldened by that strength, together, we will defeat this faceless enemy.

Based on Divrei Torah learned from my Rebbe, Rabbi Ben-Zion Rand, in his sefer, "Birkas Moadecha, A Yom Tov Digest" (Feldheim, 2019).

The Mysteries of Zman Matan Torateinu

Josh Katzin

Shavuot, which we refer to as Zman Matan Torateinu, is a holiday of mysteries, notably the following:

1. The Torah never explicitly connects Shavuot with Matan Torah. Uniquely among the Shalosh Regalim, the Torah describes the holiday solely in terms of its agricultural context but not in terms of its association with any historical event. In contrast, Pesach is celebrated in the Spring “for in the month of Aviv, at night, did Hashem take you out of Egypt” (Devarim 16:1). Similarly, Sukkot is a holiday celebrated at the time of year “when you have gathered in the yield of your land”, and we are told to sit in booths for seven days “so that future generations may know that I housed Bnei Yisrael in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Vayikra 23:43). But Shavuot is described solely in terms of its agricultural aspect: “You shall observe Chag Ha-Shavuot, of the first fruits of the wheat harvest” (Shemot 34:22). The holiday’s association with the giving of the Torah-- Zman Matan Torateinu—is never mentioned in the Torah itself.
2. The connection between the date of Shavuot and the date of the revelation at Sinai is not obvious. It is notable that the date of Shavuot itself is not specified in the Torah. By way of comparison, the Pesach sacrifice is always to be brought on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan and the celebration continues for seven days starting on the 15th. Sukkot very clearly starts on the 15th of Tishrei. About Shavuot’s date, we are told vaguely: “Start to count the seven weeks from when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for Hashem” (Devarim 16:9-10). Or an alternative formulation: “And from the day on which you bring the sheaf elevation offering [i.e. the Omer]—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 Hashem.” (Vayikra 23:15-16). Essentially, Shavuot comes 50 days after Pesach but there is no specific date associated with it. In fact, we are told that a controversy emerged in the days of the Beit Hamikdash, with the Boethusian sect (affiliated with the Sadducees) arguing that the rabbis had the date of Shavuot wrong (see Menachot 10:3).

The connection between the date of Shavuot and the date of Matan Torah is further complicated by the fact that the Torah at best indirectly gives us the date of the revelation at Mt Sinai. It takes a fair amount of close-reading to figure out that Matan Torah took place on the date of Shavuot. In fact, the Talmud records a disagreement between Rabbi Yossi and the Chachamim about whether the Ten Commandments were given on the 6th of Sivan (the date on which Shavuot falls under our fixed calendar) or

the 7th (Shabbat 86b). The dispute arises because the date of the revelation at Mt Sinai must be calculated indirectly based on various other dates provided in the text, with some additional assumptions mixed in.

Perhaps these anomalies give us some insight into what it means to celebrate Shavuot as Zman Matan Torateinu. A key principle of the Shalosh Regalim is that we celebrate these holidays by re-living them. Every Pesach, we re-enact the exodus from Egypt on the Seder night. Every Sukkot, we share the temporary dwellings of our wandering forefathers. How do we re-live the experience of Matan Torah?

Turns out that receiving the Torah doesn't mean standing at the foot of a mountain and listening. It means engaging, challenging, and studying the material in a way that makes it your own. It means interpreting and unlocking the text's mysteries. Matan Torah cannot be reduced to a download from the divine on one particular day in our history. Perhaps that is why the Torah downplays the association of Shavuot with the events at Sinai, omits a fixed date for the holiday, and even obscures the date of the revelation itself. Experiencing Zman Matan Torateinu does not mean simply commemorating a one-time event.

No text in our tradition gets across this idea that Matan Torah is about more than that fateful day at Sinai than a poignant story recounted in the Gemara in Menachot (29b). Moshe Rabbeinu is transported by God to the study hall of the great Rabbi Akiva. As Moshe listens to the discussion between the students and their teacher, he becomes confused by the unfamiliar subject matter. Imagine Moshe coming to see the future of Torah study and finding that he cannot follow the debate! At first, Moshe is saddened, until the students ask their master, "from where do you derive this?" To which Rabbi Akiva answers: "It is a halacha transmitted to Moshe from Sinai." When Moshe heard this, the Talmud tells us, his mind was put at ease. Matan Torah is an ongoing event that continues to this day through our active engagement with the Torah itself.

Articles & Activities

Steve Fink

***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah* (2020)**

Steve Fink

“Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah.” [Midrash Vayikra Rabbah 9:3]
“Good Character Comes Before Torah.”

While ***“Derech Eretz”*** is understood in many ways, we will take it to refer to ***“proper behavior”*** or ***“good character”***.

WHY DOES DERECH ERETZ KADMA L'TORAH?

When a person lacks good *middot* (virtues), no amount of Torah is going to help.

The RAMBAN explains that a person may be a ***“naval bi-reshut ha-Torah”***. One may yet be coarse, crude, self-indulgent while claiming to be observant of the Law.

FROM WHERE DO WE LEARN THESE MIDDOT (VIRTUES) FROM?

Most importantly we learn *middot* from G-d's Behavior Towards Us. This includes humility [see RASHI Braishith 1:26; ***“And G-d said, ‘Let us make man’***], ***bikkur cholim*** (visiting the sick), being merciful, and offering forgiveness, etc. [see The 13 Attributes of G-d; Ki Thissa 34:6-7]

“you shall keep the commandments of the L-rd thy G-d, and walk in His ways [וְהִלַּכְתֶּם בְּדֵרֶכָיו].” [Ki Tavo 28:9]

We also learn *middot* (virtues) from our Avot & Imahot; our Fathers & Mothers.

In the Introduction to Sefer Braishith by Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the *Netziv*) he writes that *Sefer Braishith* is referred to as ***“Sefer HaYashar”***, ***“The Book of the Upright”***. In Sefer Braishith the stories of our ancestors serve as lessons of how to behave, and also how not to behave.

Sefer Braishith, *The Book of the Upright*, precedes Sefer Shemot, the Book where we receive the Torah: ***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah***.

THE COUNTING OF THE OMER & THE DEVELOPMENT OF MIDDOT

Since Pesach, during this ***“Sefirah Period”*** we have been counting for 7 weeks up to the time of Shavuoth and *matan Torah*.

Each week focuses on a different *middah* (virtue): ***Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah***

WEEK	MIDDAH
Week 1	CHESED: KINDNESS
Week 2	GEVURAH: JUSTICE, DISCIPLINE, SELF-CONTROL; PATIENCE (Savlanut)
Week 3	TIFERET: COMPASSION; EMPATHY (Rachamim)
Week 4	NETZACH: DILLIGENCE, PERSEVERANCE
Week 5	HOD: HUMILITY (Anavah); CONTENTMENT; MODERATION (Shevil Ha'zahov); GRATITUDE (Hakarat HaTov)
Week 6	YESOD: GENEROSITY (Nedivut Lev); GOOD HEART
Week 7	MALCHUT: SENSE OF DUTY; RESPONSIBILITTY (Achrayut); INTEGRITY; ROLE MODEL; NOBILITY

THE TWO RABBIS OF THE HAGGADAH AND DERECH ERETZ

It is customary to study Pirkei Avot (“*Ethics of Our Fathers*”) during these 7 weeks leading up to Shavuoth and matan Torah [*Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah*].

Two Rabbis prominently featured in the Haggadah are Rabban Gamliel & Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. Interestingly in PIRKEI AVOT both these 2 Rabbis (& ONLY these two Rabbis) make statements about “*Derech Eretz*”:

[1] Rabban Gamliel; Pirkei Avot 2:2

“Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world [תלמוד תורה עם דרך], for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin. Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever. And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.” [Pirkei Avot 2:2]

רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עוון וכל תורה שאין עימה מלאכה סופה בטילה וגוררת עוון וכל העמלים עם הציבור יהיו עמלים עימם לשם שמיים שזכות אבותן מסייעתן וצדקתם עומדת לעד ואתם מעלה אני עליכם כאילו עשיתם

[2] Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah; Pirkei Avot 3:21

“Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah used to say: Where there is no Torah there is no דרך ארץ; and where there is no דרך ארץ there is no Torah. Where there is no wisdom

there is no fear of G-d, and where there is no fear of G-d there is no wisdom. Where there is no knowledge there is no discernment; and where there is no discernment there is no knowledge. Where there is no food there is no Torah; and where there is no Torah there is no food. [Pirkei Avot 3:21]

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר אם אין תורה אין דרך ארץ אם אין דרך ארץ אין תורה
אם אין חכמה אין יראה אם אין יראה אין חכמה אם אין דעת אין בינה אם אין
בינה אין דעת אם אין קמח אין תורה אם אין תורה אין קמח

From this Pirkei Avot, we learn that **Derech Eretz is a pre-requisite for Torah, as well as a consequence of Torah study.**

What we are calling “*Derech Eretz*” may be a pre-requisite for Torah study. BUT Torah study provides guidance in how to acquire and deveop these *middot* and how to employ them.

FAVORITE BIBLE VERSE

Steve Fink

This is not a *dvar Torah*, but more an “activity”.

If someone were to ask you, “What is your favorite verse from the Bible?”, what would answer?

So, here are some possibilities for you to consider. (There are so many to choose from, that most of those offered below are from only the Chumash, and not Tanach or the Talmud or the Siddur.

Maybe we should compile a list submitted from the entire Congregation?!

[1] The 1st Verse of the Bible:

“In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth.” [Braishith 1:1]

בְּרֵאשִׁית, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים, אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.

[2] The Sifra on Kedoshim 19:18 records a debate between Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai on what single verse is the great principle of the Torah; *klal gadol ba-Torah*, “the great principle of the Torah.” Ben Azzai says it is the verse:

“This is the Book of the chronicles of man. On the day that G-d created man, He made him in the likeness of G-d;” [Braishith 5:1]

זֶה סֵפֶר, תּוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם : בְּיוֹם, בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם, בְּדַמוֹת אֱלֹהִים, עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ.

[3] Ben Zoma says that there is a more embracing principle:

“Hear, O Israel: the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is one.” [Vaetchanan 6:4]

שְׁמַע, יִשְׂרָאֵל : יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְקֹוֹק אֶחָד.

“And thou shalt love the L-rd thy G-d with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” [Vaetchanan 6:5]

וְאַהֲבַתְּ, אֶת יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מְאֹדְךָ.

[4] Rabbi Akiva says: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am G-d” is the fundamental principle of the Torah. This is the Principle of the “Golden Rule; Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

“Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the L-rd.” [Kedoshim 19:18]

לֹא-תִקֵּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאַהֲבַתְּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ : אָנֹכִי, יְקֹוֹק.

[5] Ben Pazzi says we find a more embracing principle still:

“Now this is that which thou shalt offer upon the altar: two lambs of the first year day by day continually [ליום תמיד].” [Tetzaveh 29:38]

וְזֶה, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי-שָׁנָה שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם, תָּמִיד.

“The first sheep shall be offered in the morning, and the second sheep in the afternoon” (Exodus 29: 39) – or, as we might say today, Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv. In a word: “routine.”

וְזֶה, אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי-שָׁנָה שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם, תָּמִיד.

The passage concludes: The law follows Ben Pazzi. [The passage is cited in the Introduction to the commentary HaKotev to Ein Yaakov, the collected aggadic passages of the Talmud. It is also quoted by Maharal in Netivot Olam, Ahavat Re'a 1.]

[6] And now, Israel what does G-d want of you? *Only to be in awe of G-d, to walk in all His ways and to love Him and to serve G-d with all your heart and with all your soul; to keep the commandments of G-d, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good?* [Ekev 10:12]

“Now, Israel, what does the L-rd your G-d require from you? [Ekev 10:12]

וְעַתָּה, יִשְׂרָאֵל--מָה יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, שְׂאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ:

*Just (only) to fear the L-rd your G-d [וְיָרֵא אֱלֹהֶיךָ];
to walk in all His ways [וְלָלַכְתָּ בְּכָל-דַּרְכָיו];
and love Him [וְיִלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ];
and to serve the L-rd your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul
[וְיִלְעַבְדְּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ].*

וְעַתָּה, יִשְׂרָאֵל--מָה יִקְוֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, שְׂאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ: כִּי אִם-לִירְאָה אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
לָלַכְתָּ בְּכָל-דַּרְכָיו, וְיִלְעַבְדְּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ.

“to keep the commandments of the L-rd, and His statutes, which I command you this day -- for your own good [לְךָ, לְטוֹב, לְךָ]” [Ekev 10:13]

לְשֹׁמֵר אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְהוָה, וְאֶת-חֻקֹּתָיו, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ, הַיּוֹם--לְטוֹב, לְךָ.

[7] “Keep and hearken to all these words that I command you, that it may benefit you and your children after you, forever, when you do what is good and right in the eyes of the L-rd, your G-d.” [Re'eh 12:28]

שֹׁמֵר וְשֹׁמְעָה, אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי, מְצַוְךָ: לְמַעַן יִיטַב לְךָ וּלְבְנֵיךָ
אֲחֵרֶיךָ, עַד-עוֹלָם--כִּי תַעֲשֶׂה הַטוֹב וְהַיָּשָׁר, בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

[8] The RAMBAN located the “Supra-legal” (over-arching) concept of Torah in the pasuk:

“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them: You shall be holy; for I the L-rd your G-d am holy.” [Kedoshim 19:2]

דַּבֵּר אֶל-כָּל-עֵדוּת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם--קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ: כִּי קָדוֹשׁ, אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

[9] The RAMBAM located the “Supra-legal” (over-arching) concept of Torah in the pasuk:

“The L-rd will establish you for a holy people unto Himself, as He hath sworn unto you; if thou shalt keep the commandments of the L-rd thy G-d, and walk in His ways [בְּדַרְכָּיו, וְהִלַּכְתָּ, Ki Tavo 28:9]

יְקִימֶךָ יְקֹוֹק לֹו לְעַם קָדוֹשׁ, כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע-לְךָ: כִּי תִשְׁמַר, אֶת-מִצְוֹת יְקֹוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ, וְהִלַּכְתָּ, בְּדַרְכָּיו.

From this, the RAMBAM inferred [Hilkhot Deot, ch. 1] that we are commanded to develop certain traits of character - to be gracious, merciful, and holy, as G-d is gracious, merciful and holy.

[10] The one prohibition [מִצְוֹת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה] for which there is no Tshuvah is performing a Chillul Hashem:

“And you shall keep my mitzvos and observe them, I am Hashem, and you will not perform a Chillul Hashem. In this way I will be sanctified (Kiddush Hashem) among the people of Israel.” [Emor 22:32-33].

וְלֹא תַחֲלִלוּ, אֶת-שֵׁם קָדוֹשִׁי, וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי, בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אֲנִי יְקֹוֹק, מְקַדְשְׁכֶם. הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, לְהִיּוֹת לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים: אֲנִי, יְקֹוֹק.

[11] The Prophet Michah further reduced the number of Mitzvot to three:

“It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the L-rd doth require of thee: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy G-d.” [Micah 6:8]

הֲגִיד לְךָ אָדָם, מַה-טוֹב; וּמַה-יְקֹוֹק דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ, כִּי אִם-עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד, וְהִצְנַע לְכַת, עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

Nishmat Prayer

Were our mouth as full of song as the sea, and our tongue as full of joyous song as its multitude of waves, and our lips as full of praise as the breadth of the heavens, and our eyes as brilliant as the sun and the moon, and our hands as outspread as the eagles of the sky and our feet as swift as hinds -- we still could not thank You sufficiently, HaShem our G-d and G-d of our forefathers, and to bless Your Name for even one of the thousand thousand, thousands of thousands and myriad myriads of favors, miracles and wonders that you performed for our ancestors and for us.

אֱלוֹהֵינוּ מְלֵא שִׁירָה בְּיָם
וּלְשׁוֹנֵינוּ רִנָּה בְּהַמּוֹן גְּלוֹ
וְשִׁפְתוֹתֵינוּ שְׂבַח כְּמַרְחֲבֵי רִקְיעַ
וְעֵינֵינוּ מְאִירוֹת כְּשֶׁמֶשׁ וְכִכְלֵם
וְיָדֵינוּ פְּרוּשׁוֹת כְּנִשְׂרֵי שָׁמַיִם
וְרַגְלֵינוּ קָלוֹת כְּאַיִלוֹת
אִין אֲנַחְנוּ מִסְּפִיקִים לְהוֹדוֹת לָךְ יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
וּלְבָרְךָ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ
עַל אַחַת מֵאֵלֶּף אֵלֶּף אֵלֶּפֶי אֵלֶּפֶים וְרַבֵּי רַבּוֹת פְּעָמִים הַטּוֹבוֹת שְׁעָשִׂיתָ עִם אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
וְעִמָּנוּ

Based on David Brooks' The Road to Character (2016)
 (submitted by Steve Fink)

Your Resume vs Your Eulogy

The eulogy is the foundational document of our legacy – how we cared; how courageous we were; how funny we were; how we were as a human being; how people remember us; how we live on in the minds and hearts of others. Our legacy is comprised of the small kindnesses; the lifelong passions; the unique and curious habits and traits; and the things that made us smile and laugh.

RESUME	EULOGY
What you write about Yourself	What is said about You
the jobs and roles you do at work	the way you live your life
External Successes	Internal Values; Character
the skills you bring to the marketplace	the nature of your relationships
Focus is on oneself	Focus is on others
The occasional Big Events (graduation; advancements; promotions; honors)	The daily small acts
We become Slaves to our work & the routine in our lives	Who are We & What do We do when we are not “working”, but “Free”?
Serving our own needs	Serving a higher Purpose
The Focus is on the Goal; the Destination; the “Ends”	The Focus is on the Journey; the “Means”

Is it the Destination or the Journey that makes you who you are?

Moses was to lead the people out of Egypt to the “Promised Land”.

Does Moses ever make it to the “Promised Land?”

Did the People ever make it to the “Promised Land?”

So, from the perspective of his Resume, was Moses a success?

Or, was the real story about how Moses led his people out of Egypt to the “Promised Land”?

So, from the perspective of his Epitaph, was Moses a success?