

Torah Tidbits

ב"ה

OU
ישראל

י' סיון תשפ"ג 23' MAY 26TH 1517 ISSUE

שבועות - פרשת נשא

SHAVUOT - PARSHAT NASO (the following shabbat)
AVOT CHAPTER 1



טוב לי תורת פוך
מאלפי זהב וכסף
תהלים קיט:עב



A Message For The Entire Team
By Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus
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Using A Plata Cover For Both Meat And Dairy
By Rabbi Ezra Friedman
Director, The Gustave & Carol Jacobs
Center For Kashrut Education
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OU Israel wishes you *Chag Sameach!*



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN

Executive Director, OU Israel



It is with great gratitude and thanks to Hashem that we are able to launch our first international edition of Torah Tidbits to the Atlanta Jewish Community. I want to give a special thanks to Rabbi Norman Schloss of OU Kashrut and his family, members of the local community, who generously donated to make this initiative happen in time for Shavuot.

By reading Torah Tidbits you are joining a readership which reaches more than 14,000 households a week in Israel and more than 3 Million readers

worldwidewithouronlineeditionat (www.TorahTidbits.com). I'm sure each and every one of you will find something in Torah Tidbits which you can connect with and will help you share the blessing of the Chag with members of your family – bringing you closer together while enriching your Shabbat table.

Next time you're in Israel please stop in and say "hi" at our Seymour J. Abrams Jerusalem World Center in Yerushalayim to let us know what you think about Torah Tidbits. See you then!

Chag Shavuot Sameach!

*Rabbi Avi Berman,
Executive Director, OU Israel*

How meaningful can purchasing a tub of Ben & Jerry's ice cream be? As we prepare our menus for *Shavuot* I ask that you contemplate this question.

This past week I was interviewed on Channel 14. Although preparation is always needed before an interview, there is one question I am asked repeatedly to which my response remains the same. "What does *kashrut* and saving teens at risk have

anything to do with one another? I thought the OU provides *kashrut* certification?"

Torah Tidbits readers are well versed in the answer to this question - OU Kosher is a unique *kashrut* certification organization. Beyond certifying 1.4 million products across 106 countries, profits from OU Kosher, together with donors around the world who see its impact on *Am Yisrael*, are invested back into the organization to

support its broader initiatives. The work of the OU in the United States is well known, and here in Israel, we have programs to support *kiruv*, supporting youth and teens at risk *klitat aliyah*, and inspiring *Anglo olim* throughout Israel.

The complexity and depth of the OU can be found across many Jewish organizations



which began by tackling one area of need for *Am Yisrael* and ultimately expanded to fill evolving needs. You can find this across many organizations large and small, including *Yad Sarah*, *Gesher* and *Zichron Menachem*. While I anticipate being asked this question for many years to come, I hope this week's Torah Tidbits issue will remind readers of the impact their purchases can have.

Last year, when celebrating the *Bat Mitzvah* of my daughter Tzofia Chana, my wife and I took her classmates to learn about *kashrut* and the *halachot* of *chaliva b'Shabbat* with live demonstrations. First we visited a *refet* in *Masu'ot Yitzchak*, a *moshav shitufi* in southern Israel where we watched a live demonstration of how a *refet* is run on *Shabbat* according to *halacha* throughout the stages of a cow's life. From there, we took the girls on a tour of the Ben & Jerry's factory. For those who know me, you're aware that Dulce de Leche is my

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favorite Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor and is something I only allow myself to eat once a year on my son's birthday. Since Tzofia's *Bat Mitzvah* trip did not coincide with my yearly "cheat day," I resisted the temptation to taste some of my favorite flavors, but I believe the experience was memorable for the girls.

Upon sharing the details of the *Bat Mitzvah* with Torah Tidbits readers I received a flurry of comments asking why I wasn't partaking in the Ben & Jerry's boycott. As a reminder, last June, Ben & Jerry's US announced it would stop selling its products in East *Yerushalayim*, *Yehudah*



v'Shomron and the *Golan*. In response, Jews around the world called for a boycott of Ben & Jerry's products. However, there was no reason whatsoever to boycott Ben & Jerry's in Israel because it was never willing to accept the new stipulations. In fact, my good friend Avi Zinger, the Israeli licensee of Ben & Jerry's, asked that locals continue buying the products so he could keep the plant running.

When preparing for *Shavuot* 5783 I hope to clarify any misunderstanding surrounding the status of Ben & Jerry's products in Israel. On November 15, 2022, Unilever

sold its Ben & Jerry's business interests in Israel to Blue and White Ice Cream Ltd. This arrangement allowed Ben & Jerry's to be sold under its Hebrew and Arabic names throughout Israel and the West Bank under the full ownership of Avi Zinger.

The attempted boycott of Ben & Jerry's and its ultimate failure to stop production in Israel is a story of triumph in which Jews around the world rallied behind Avi Zinger and changed the outcome. Now it's time to offer full support. Whether or not you choose to buy Ben & Jerry's ice cream outside of Israel, within Israel's borders, its products are available throughout the country and certified by OU Kosher.

Proceeds from every tub of ice cream not only support Ben & Jerry's Israel whose leadership stood up to international pressure, but also fund broader OU initiatives created to fill unmet needs in *Klal Yisrael*. I encourage Torah Tidbits readers to add a tub (or two!) of Ben & Jerry's ice cream to the *Shavuot* grocery list. When you do, remember that some flavors are *Mehadrin* and *Cholov Yisrael*, while products that are *Cholov Stam* are marked with only an "OU-D."

If you're interested in catching up on the Channel 14 segment and the youth at risk video which was aired with it, visit www.ouisrael.org.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring *Shavuot* and *Shabbat*, and a happy 13th birthday to my Tzofia Chana!

Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER



OU Executive Vice President

Not Just Praying for Peace

As Jews, we are often subject to attack and have had many seek to deny us the right and the ability to defend ourselves. We seek the fulfillment of the comforting and strengthening words of the *Birkat Kohanim*, the priestly blessing taught in this week's Parsha (6:22-27): "May G-d bless you and keep you; May G-d shine His radiant countenance towards you and favor you; May G-d turn His countenance towards you and establish peace for you."

The words of this blessing describe exactly that which we seek, safety, peace, and – at the heart of it – a clear sense of connection to our attentive and protective G-d. Yet, while this is what we seek from G-d, is there anything that we ourselves can consider doing to gain those blessings?

Before the *kohanim* share this blessing with us, they make a *bracha* of their own, blessing G-d Who infused them with the sanctity of Aharon the original *kohain* and commanded them to bless His people with love. This is the only mitzvah for which we note that we

are expected to perform it with love. Indeed, a version of the *sifrei* in our Parsha notes that the unusual form of the instruction to the *kohanim* – where they are told "*amor lahem*" rather than the expected "*emor lahem*" – implies that they must convey these blessings with a full heart. The Zohar – cited by *Magen Avraham* (128:18) – declares that a *kohain* who does not feel love for his fellow Jews is not allowed to bless them, as he does not meet the criteria of blessing His people "with love."

This blessing cannot be conveyed out of a sense of duty. It can only flow from true love felt by the *kohein*, the descendant and the disciple of Aaron who – as described in *Pirkei Avot* 1:12 – "loved and pursued peace, loved people and brought them close to Torah." We gain G-d's blessing of safety, peace, and connection when we first share those feelings and blessings amongst ourselves.

Our country, our society, and even our community has been riven by tension and disagreement. We must find it within ourselves to turn to each other *b'ahava*, with genuine love and care, and do our part to restore to each other that sense of safety, peace, and connection. That will be the foundation upon which G-d will grant us the fullest blessings of peace. ■

The background image shows a vibrant Jewish festival scene. In the center, a group of young men are dancing on a wooden floor, some with their arms around each other's shoulders. They are wearing casual clothing like t-shirts and jeans. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads are visible, showing they are wearing kippot (skullcaps). The background is decorated with blue and white balloons, some shaped like flowers, and strings of small white flags. The overall atmosphere is festive and communal.

נס

טס ישראל

OU Israel

At the Center
of Jewish Life



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



Rabbi Reuven Tradburks
Director of
RCA Israel Region



1st aliya (Bamidbar 4:21-37) A census of the family of **Gershon** (son of Levi) is done. The

family of Gershon is responsible for the textiles of the Mishkan: the curtains and the covers of the Mishkan. They are to function under the supervision of Aharon and his sons; in their case, under Itamar. The census of the family of **Merari** is taken. Their responsibility is the structure of the Mishkan: boards, sockets, wall braces. Their tasks are assigned by name, supervised by Itamar. The census, aged 30 – 50, of the family of Kehat is 2,750.

These first 2 aliyot conclude the description of the jobs of the Leviim in managing and transporting the Mishkan. And of their census. The Leviim encamp around the Mishkan. The other 12 tribes encamp around them.



2nd aliya (4:38-49) The census of Gershon, 2,630, and Merari, 3,200. The total of those who will serve and carry the Mishkan is 8,580.

With the conclusion of the assigning of roles and of the census of the Leviim, the detailed description of the Jewish camp is complete. In the description of the jobs,

the names, and the numbers, we begin to see the Jewish nation as a nation. It is real people, with real names and real populations. And this nation is to march with G-d in our midst and to encamp with Him in our midst. With the destination: the Land of Israel. But. We who know how the rest of the book will unfold, with rebellions and disputes, recognize this detailed order as foreshadowing. Oh that our national life would be so neat and tidy. You here, you here. You doing your task, you doing yours. All of us recognizing G-d in our midst. This is a lovely description of how we *ought* to live and how we *ought* to travel on into the Land of Israel. But the book of Bamidbar is the meeting of the ideal with the real. Instructions and descriptions of what ought to be are great; how they actually are lived in this less than neat and tidy world gets messy.



3rd aliya (5:1-10) Command the people to send those, male or female, with Tzarat, or who

are Zavim or Tamei out of the camp. The people did so. A man or woman who steals, swears denying the theft and then admits, shall repay the principal plus one fifth to the owner. If the owner has died leaving no heirs, the payment is paid to the Kohen. The Kohen's portions fully belong to him.

These 2 aliyot are also foreshadowing. Now that the march to the land of Israel is about to become a reality, don't ignore the foibles of people in society. Keep the camp tahir – both in the details of the laws and in a metaphoric sense. Know that people will steal. And not only steal, but lie to cover it up. Stealing and lying are paradigmatic failures of people trying to live together

in society. In the book of Bamidbar, when we make the shift from theory to practice, from instructions to marching, coalescing as a nation, human failures are inevitable. Stealing and lying. The Torah never portrays the Jewish people as perfect, pristine. We are a real life people with all of our shortcomings. A holy people; but a holy people that is real, not fairy tales.



4th aliya (5:11-6:27) The Sotah:

If a married woman is suspected by her husband of being unfaithful with a particular man and he warns her to not be alone with that man, and she nonetheless spends time alone with that man, then she is brought to the Kohen. She brings a simple offering. The Kohen places water and dust in a container. She swears that she is innocent (of adultery). The Kohen writes in a scroll that should she be guilty, the water she will drink will cause fatal internal damage. These words are put in the water. Her offering is brought; the water is drunk by her. If she is guilty, this will be fatal. If innocent, this will prove it. The **Nazir**: When a person

vows to be a Nazir, they may not drink wine or any product from a grape, may not cut their hair and may not come in contact with the dead, including closest relatives. If the Nazir does come in contact with the dead before the conclusion of his Nazir status, then he must bring an offering of 2 birds, one for a chatat and one for an olah. At the final end of his Nazir state he brings animals for a chatat, an olah and a shlamim. He cuts his hair and burns it. **Birkat Kohanim**: Tell Aharon that he shall bless the Jewish people with Birkat Kohanim: in so doing they place My name on the people and I bless them.

The 2 quite dramatic mitzvot in this aliya express the theme of this book of Bamidbar: the tricky business of living the ideal in this complicated world of the imperfect. The ideal has been the topic of Shemot and Vayikra: living a life with G-d in our midst, a holy life, a noble and sanctified life walking with our G-d in our midst. But stuff happens in life. That ideal has to be lived by real live people, who, well, get in the way.

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

"And he shall blot "it" out with the bitter water (5:23)

ומחה אל מי המרים

As part of this mystical ceremony of the "Sotah" the verses of the curses from the Torah are inscribed on a scroll, including G-d's name, and erased in the bitter waters..

The known question is asked. How can the Torah allow for the erasing of the name of G-d, seemingly such a reprehensible offense?

The great Maharal from Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew 1520-1609) answers that the reason that erasing G-d's name is sanctioned is because there is the hope that this will allay any suspicions the husband may have of his wife. There is the chance that peace will be restored between this couple and the presence of G-d will continue to remain in this marriage. The goal of this erasure is not to belittle or eradicate G-d's name but rather the opposite, an attempt of ensuring that G-d's presence continues to dwell in this family. The Talmud in Shabbat 10b emphasizes this idea by stating that "Peace" or "Shalom" is actually one of G-d's names, very befitting for this very act.

Shabbat Shalom

The 2 elaborate mitzvot mentioned here, Sotah and Nazir, are breaches in communal life in particular. Sefer Bamidbar, as the book of the march to the Land of Israel, is both the transition from the ideal life of camping at Mt. Sinai, to the rough and tumble of real people living real lives. And it is the maturing of the Jewish people in our communal, national expression. Sotah and Nazir are breaches in communal life. The Sotah, the wife suspected of adultery, is a breakdown in the holiness of family life. The Nazir is a breach in the reach for super holiness; as if to say the Torah isn't enough, isn't holy enough for me. Insufficient holiness is a breach, but no less a breach is super holiness.

In the mitzvah of the Nazir, left unsaid is what prompts this person to swear off wine, contact with the dead and cutting their hair. Something is going on in their life so that they need to restrict themselves. Vows of restriction of this sort could be a desire to live an even more rarefied and holy life than the rest of us. That may be a noble desire; or it may be distorted. When the Nazir has failed himself and wants to rectify his weaknesses by swearing off wine, that would appear positive. But if the Nazir ascribes to himself a holier than thou position, that the Torah is fine for you, but not for me, then this is a breach not of erosion but of hubris, of condescension.



5th aliya (7:1-41) On the day Moshe completed, anointed and sanctified the Mishkan and

all it contains, the leaders of the tribes brought a contribution. They brought 6 wagons and 12 oxen for the transport of the Mishkan: 2 wagons and 4 oxen were given

to Gershon, 4 wagons and 8 oxen to Merari. Kehat did not receive any for they carried the vessels of the Mishkan on their shoulders. The leaders of each of the 12 tribes brought offerings as an inauguration of the Mishkan. Each day the leader of the tribe is named and his offering brought. Each leader's offering is identical.

Our parsha is the longest parsha in the Torah due to these last 3 aliyot. In fact, these 3 aliyot are only one chapter but a chapter of 89 verses, longer than many full parshiot.



6th aliya (7:42-71) The description of the leader's offerings continues, outlining days 6 to

10.

Each day a different Nasi, head of the tribe brought an offering, though the offering was identical each day. This repetition engages the commentators. Perhaps this relates to the nature of leadership itself. Jonathan Sacks, z"l, occupied himself extensively with the notion of leadership. One of his dominant themes was the theme of service versus power. Jewish leadership is service, not power. The leader serves his people. And serves his G-d. Not himself. This is hammered home by the offerings of the Nasi. In offering to G-d, the Nasi is expressing that he is a servant of G-d and a servant of His people. The march to the Land will be demanding of these leaders. They need to affirm from the outset that they serve not themselves but their G-d and their people.



7th aliya (7:72-89) The description of the leader's offerings continues, with days 11 and 12.

The Torah enumerates the totals of each of

the offerings brought by the leaders. These served as inauguration of the anointed altar. When Moshe entered the Ohel Moed to speak with G-d, he heard the Voice emanate from upon the kaporet, the covering of the Aron, from between the angels and He spoke with him.

The Parsha concludes with a repetition that G-d spoke to Moshe from above the Aron. Whereas the emphasis previously was on the magic of the meeting of G-d and man, here the emphasis is on the content: Moshe acts on Divine instruction, not his own personal power and pride.

HAFTORAH

SHOFTIM 13:2-25

The theme of the laws related to the *nazir* comes to light in the haftorah by describing the birth of Shimshon.

A child is to be born to Manoach and his wife, members of the tribe of Dan. An angel of Hashem conveys the message that this child is to observe the nazarite laws by abstaining from all foods forbidden to a nazarite. The angel also declares that this child will defend the Jewish people from the Philistine oppression and will protect the nation of Israel in the Land.

God then sends the angel a second time to convey the same message and establish that these instructions are to be closely followed. The angel instructs Manoach to take a goat that he wished to slaughter for a celebratory meal upon hearing of this joyful news, and instead, bring it as a sacrifice to God.

The prophecy from heaven comes to fruition and the child Shimshon is born into

the world: "And the boy grew up, and God blessed him." ■



STATS

35th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 10 in Bamidbar
Written on 311 lines in a Sefer Torah.
That's a record breaking 7.4 columns 26 Parshiyot; 18 open, 8 closed. Only 4 sedras have more parshiyot
176 p'sukim, 2264 words, 8632 letters
Indisputably the longest sedra in the Torah, however you count length.
Naso is well below average, though, in length of p'sukim, but not enough to affect its first place ranking



MITZVOT

18 mitzvot; 7 positive, 11 prohibitions - the most of Bamidbar's 10 sedras
18 might not seem to be that many mitzvot, but only 9 sedras in the Torah (of 54) have more mitzvot than Naso


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THE PERSON

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB

OU Executive Vice President, Emeritus

IN THE PARSHA

A Message for the Entire Team

All beginning students of Torah face this obstacle: in their original, the primary texts of our Jewish tradition have no punctuation. There are neither commas nor periods in the Torah scroll, the *Sefer Torah*. There are no question marks, nor are there indications of where one paragraph ends and another begins in standard editions of the Talmud.

In recent years, publishers have included vowels and punctuation marks in the new editions of almost all basic Jewish texts. This innovation has facilitated the ability to study Torah unimpeded by the necessity to puzzle over the various quandaries with which students of previous generations had to cope.

However, before these innovations and throughout our history, there have been numerous disagreements as to how the unpunctuated texts should be read. Let me provide one example of such a text from the Torah portion which we will read in the synagogue on the first day of the upcoming festival of *Shavuot*. The text is to be found in the book of *Exodus/Shemot* 19:5-6. Unpunctuated, and translated literally, it reads as follows:

And now if you listen will listen in My voice and keep My covenant and you will be for Me a treasure among all the nations for Mine

is all the land and you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people...

Many commentators struggle with the above verses. Permit me to introduce you to one of them. His name was Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, and he lived in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He was the dean, or *Rosh Yeshiva*, of the “mother of all *yeshivos*,” in the town of Volozhin in Lithuania. He is known as the *Netziv*, based upon the initials of his name. He wrote prolifically and gave daily lectures on each week’s Torah portion. Those lectures formed the basis of his profound and extremely insightful five-volume commentary, entitled *Haamek Davar*.

As one becomes familiar with his work, one begins to realize that the author uses certain basic themes, again and again, to resolve a wide variety of textual problems. One of these themes is the distinction between passages directed to an exclusive audience, versus passages which are addressed to all of the Jewish people, and occasionally to all mankind.

To put it bluntly, some messages are for the spiritual superstars, and others are for the entire team.

The *Netziv* suggests that our text can be punctuated in two different ways: one with a message for the elite, and another with a message for us all. In this column, I will confine myself to the message for the broader group and leave the message for the aristocracy to

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those willing to consult the *Haamek Davar* on their own.

Here is the *Netziv*'s suggested punctuation, with his interjected interpretive remarks, as addressed to the group he calls the *hamon am*, the "masses," or as I prefer, the "entire team," all who stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

And now if you listen well *in* My voice, and keep My covenant, *then, and only then*, will you be My treasure, among all nations, for people of all lands are Mine. You are qualified to serve as My kingdom of priests/servants, you are qualified to be a holy people...

The *Netziv* proceeds to elaborate upon the message:

"From this moment forward, you must 'listen to My voice.' That is, you must ponder Torah and attempt to understand it precisely. 'Listen *in*,' rather than merely 'listen *to*.' This is a precondition for My divine support of your national interests, your political agenda, matters of war and peace.

"Then, you must 'keep My covenant', the covenant I made with Abraham regarding sacrificial worship, the *Avodah*, in the Holy Temple. This is a precondition for My divine sustenance, providing you with a fertile land, with abundant food and nourishment.

"But note," continues the *Netziv*, "that reference is only made to *Torah* and *Avodah*, to Torah study and ritual observance! What about *gemilut chesed*? What about interpersonal relationships, charity, kindness, generosity, tolerance, compassion? I, the Almighty, expect those behaviors of all human beings, not just of you! Remember Sodom, totally destroyed because it neglected the poor and needy. Furthermore, I know

that *chesed*/compassion comes naturally to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I need not stipulate that it is a precondition for My divine rewards.

"Beyond those two essentials, *Torah* and *Avodah*, without which there is no nation of Israel, you may elevate yourself yet higher by becoming exemplary in your relationships with others, by acting nobly in your dealings with others. But, when it comes to human relationships, much depends upon the special circumstances of time and place. In those matters, you must strive to discern My will, you must attempt to determine what the Almighty expects of you. For that, you must be a *mamlechet kohanim*, a 'kingdom of priests.'

"And then, you must be a *goy kadosh*, 'a holy people.' You must be able to determine for yourselves what makes for holiness in new and unfamiliar contexts which are not explicitly regulated in My Torah. You must ask what I, the Almighty, would want you to do in unprecedented and unanticipated new circumstances, which you are sure to encounter in your national and personal futures."

What a powerful message these words have for us as we enter *Z'man Matan Torateinu*, the Festival of Shavuot, when we not only commemorate the Almighty's revelation upon Mount Sinai, but when we relive it.

The *Netziv* reminds us of the fundamental requirements that we have as a people and as individuals: Torah study and ritual observance. He reminds us that we have responsibilities, not just as Jews, but as members of the human society. He urges us to go beyond those universal responsibilities and to excel morally and ethically. *Chag Sameach* ■

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Who We Are...

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Supporting Israel's English Speaking Jewish Community

OU Israel supports Israel's English-Speaking Jewish community with a special emphasis on individuals and families who arrive in Israel.

Strengthening Israel's Youth

OU Israel builds the Jewish identity and character of Israel's youth. Since its establishment 20 years ago, OU Israel Youth Centers have motivated more than 56,000 youth to be a part of Israeli society as responsible adults and contributing citizens.

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The Blessing of Love

At 176 verses, Naso is the longest of the *parashot*. Yet one of its most moving passages, and the one that has had the greatest impact over the course of history, is very short indeed and is known by almost every Jew, namely the priestly blessings:

The Lord said to Moses:

"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them "May the Lord bless you and protect you; May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."' Let them set My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (Num. 6:23–27)

This is among the oldest of all prayer texts. It was used by the priests in the Temple. It is said today by the Kohanim in the reader's repetition of the Amidah, in Israel every day, in most of the Diaspora only on festivals. It is used by parents as they bless their children on Friday

night. It is often said to the bride and groom under the *chupah*. It is the simplest and most beautiful of all blessings.

It also appears in the oldest of all biblical texts that have physically survived till today. In 1979 the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay was examining ancient burial caves at Ketef Hinnom, outside the walls of Jerusalem in the area now occupied by the Menachem Begin Heritage Center. A thirteen-year-old boy who was assisting Barkay discovered that beneath the floor of one of the caves was a hidden chamber. There the group discovered almost one thousand ancient artefacts including two tiny silver scrolls no more than an inch long.

They were so fragile that it took three years to work out a way of unrolling them without causing them to disintegrate. Eventually the scrolls turned out to be *kemayot*, amulets, containing, among other texts, the priestly blessings. Scientifically dated to the sixth century BCE, the age of Jeremiah and the last days of the First Temple, they are four centuries older than the most ancient of biblical texts known hitherto, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Today the amulets can be seen in the Israel Museum, testimony to the ancient connection of Jews to the land and the continuity of Jewish faith itself.

What gives the priestly blessings their power is their simplicity and beauty. They

have a strong rhythmic structure. The lines contain three, five, and seven words respectively. In each, the second word is “the Lord.” In all three verses the first part refers to an activity on the part of God – “bless,” “make His face shine,” and “turn His face toward.” The second part describes the effect of the blessing on us, giving us protection, grace, and peace.

They also travel inward, as it were. The first verse, “May the Lord bless you and protect you,” refers, as the commentators note, to material blessings: sustenance, physical health, and so on. The second, “May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you,” refers to moral blessing. *Chen*, grace, is what we show to other people and they to us. It is interpersonal. Here we are asking God to give some of His grace to us and others so that we can live together without the strife and envy that can so easily poison relationships.

The third is the most inward of all. There is a lovely story about a crowd of people who have gathered on a hill by the sea to watch a great ship pass by. A young child is waving vigorously. One of the men in the crowd asks him why. He says, “I am waving so the captain of the ship can see me and wave back.” “But,” said the man, “the ship is far away, and there is a crowd of us here. What makes you think that the captain can see you?” “Because,” said the boy, “the captain of the ship is my father. He will be looking for me among the crowd.”

That is roughly what we mean when we say, “May the Lord turn His face toward you.” There are seven billion people now living on this earth. What makes any of us more than a face in the crowd, a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore? The fact that we are God’s children. He is our parent. He turns His face toward us. He cares.



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The God of Abraham is not a mere force of nature, or even all the forces of nature combined. A tsunami does not pause to ask who its victims will be. There is nothing personal about an earthquake or a tornado. The word *Elokim* means something like “the force of forces, cause of causes, the totality of all scientifically discoverable laws.” It refers to those aspects of God that are impersonal. It also refers to God in His attribute of justice, since justice is essentially impersonal.

But the name we call Hashem – the name used in the priestly blessings, and in almost all the priestly texts – is God as He relates to us as individuals, each with our unique configuration of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities. Hashem is the aspect of God that allows us to use the word “You.” He is the God who speaks to us and who listens when we speak to Him. How this happens, we do not know, but that it happens is central to Jewish faith.

That we call God ‘Hashem’ is the transcendental confirmation of our significance in the scheme of things. We matter as individuals because God cares for us as a parent for a child. That, incidentally, is one reason why the priestly blessings are all in the singular, to emphasise that God blesses us not only collectively but also individually. One life, said the Sages, is like a universe.¹

Hence the meaning of the last of the priestly blessings. The knowledge that God turns His face toward us – that we are not just an indiscernible face in a crowd, but that God relates to us in our uniqueness and singularity – is the most profound and ultimate source of peace. Competition, strife, lawlessness, and

violence come from the psychological need to prove that *we matter*. We do things to prove that I am more powerful, or richer, or more successful than you. I can make you fear. I can bend you to my will. I can turn you into my victim, my subject, my slave. All of these things testify not to faith, but to a profound failure of faith.

Faith means that I believe that God cares about me. I am here because He wanted me to be. The soul He gave me is pure. Even though I am like the child on the hill watching the ship pass by, I know that God is looking for me, waving to me as I wave to Him. That is the most profound inner source of peace. We do not need to prove ourselves in order to receive a blessing from God. All we need to know is that His face is turned toward us. When we are at peace with ourselves, we can begin to make peace with the world.

So the blessings become longer and deeper: from the external blessing of material goods to the interpersonal blessing of grace between ourselves and others, to the most inward of them all, the peace of mind that comes when we feel that God sees us, hears us, holds us in His everlasting arms.

One further detail of the priestly blessings is unique, namely the blessing that the Sages instituted to be said by the *Kohanim* over the mitzva: “Blessed are You... who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel *with love*.”

It is the last word, *be’ahavah*, that is unusual. It appears in no other blessing over the performance of a command. It seems to make no sense. Ideally, we should fulfill *all* the commands with love. But an absence of love does not invalidate any other command. In any

1 See Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5.

case, the blessing over the performance of a command is a way of showing that we are acting intentionally. There was an argument between the Sages as to whether mitzvot in general require intention (*kavanah*) or not.² But whether they do or not, making a blessing beforehand shows that we do have the intention to fulfil the command. But intention is one thing, emotion is another. Surely what matters is that the Kohanim recite the blessing and God will do the rest. What difference does it make whether they do so in love or not?

The commentators wrestle with this question. Some say that the fact that the Kohanim are facing the people when they bless means that they are like the cherubim in the Tabernacle, whose faces “were turned to one another” as a sign of love. Others change the word order. They say that the blessing really means, “who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and with love has commanded us to bless His people Israel.” “Love” here refers to God’s love for Israel, not that of the Kohanim.

However, it seems to me that the explanation is this: The Torah explicitly says that though the Kohanim say the words, it is God who sends the blessing. “Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Normally when we fulfil a mitzva, we are doing something. But *when the Kohanim bless the people, they are not doing anything in and of themselves. Instead they are acting as channels through which God’s blessing flows into the world and into our lives.* Only love does this. Love means that we are focused not on ourselves but on another. Love is

selflessness. And only selflessness allows us to be a channel through which flows a force greater than ourselves, the love that as Dante said, “moves the sun and the other stars,”³ the love that brings new life into the world.

To bless, we must love, and to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child. To know that is to find true spiritual peace. ■

3 Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso* p. 33.

These weekly teachings from Rabbi Sacks zt”l are part of his ‘Covenant & Conversation’ series on the weekly Torah teaching. With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. Visit www.RabbiSacks.org for more.

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This week's haftarah relates the miraculous birth of Shimshon, Samson, who, even before his birth, was marked for exceptional accomplishments and for leadership in Israel. Additionally, the charge given to his mother that her soon-to-be-born son would take on the strictures of *nezirut* throughout his life (the clear connection to the parasha), indicated that he would also have a special relationship with his Father in heaven as well as one with his people.

We have discussed the story of Shimshon in the past including our attempts to understand his character and his accomplishments. But this perek in Sefer Shofetim (chp.13) speaks only of his birth and so, by understanding the state of the Israelite nation at that time – and that of Shimshon's tribe of Dan, we would better understand the mission he was challenged to meet and whether or not he was successful.

The story of Shimshon occupies a full four p'rakim in Sefer Shofetim (13-16), more than any other shofet ("judge" or, better "chieftain"). Given that no other shofet is recorded in the rest of the sefer, the end of his leadership marked the close of an era, with the guidance of the prophet Shmuel beginning an entirely new era. The final chapters of the book (17-21) are acknowledged as not being in chronological order, retelling events

that had taken place during the previous years of the Shofetim era. Significantly, the events in the final p'rakim, describe a time of widespread idolatry in Israel (the story of Micha's idol") and a civil war, with the tribes' battling against shevet Binyamin.

It is no wonder that the book concludes with a pithy summary of the final episodes and, perhaps, all of the entire era, with the words "Bayamim hahem, ayn mel-ech B'Yisrael..." – in those days, there was not king in Israel – and, therefore "...ish hayashar b'eirav ya'aseh." – ...each person did whatever he deemed proper. A painful description of the era of the Shofetim.

Simply put, the situation of Israel during most of the Shofetim era was a "mess".

And into this "mess" entered Shimshon.

In order to repair the situation, Hashem looked to have a leader who would both raise the nation's spiritual stature and would unite the people. His sanctification of the child with the state of *nezirut* – even before his birth -would provide the unborn with an aura of sanctity, and the nation's knowledge that he was chosen by G-d would encourage their acceptance of Shimshon as their leader. Likewise, Hashem would bless him with strength to ease the oppressive hand of the Philistines and further unite the people behind his leadership.

It was with these G-d-given "tools" that

Shimshon went out to meet this challenge.

But did he succeed?

I have always felt that he did not.

After reviewing his story, we should consider the following:

He was sent to be a leader – but he never led the nation – or her army - or even his tribe! In fact, the only time we find a large (Israelite) contingent gathering around him was in order to hand him over to the enemy!!!

He was meant to protect a weak nation - yet fought most of his battles to avenge personal affronts and not to defend national interests.

He, as a nazir, could have raised the spiritual stature of Israel and brought them closer to their G-d, and yet we read of his marriage to a Philistine woman, his celebration with Philistine friends (“mere'im”) and his eventual fall into the hands of a Philistine harlot.

Given these facts, it is difficult to regard him as the “hero” we should admire.

However, I have recently reconsidered my view of Shimshon and have begun to see him as a tragic figure whose failures reflected the sad state of the nation itself. Given his miraculous birth and his widespread feats (13; 25), one would have expected a massive following supporting him! The fact that we find no mention of any national or tribal support in any of the p'rakim, stands as a subtle – yet powerful condemnation – of the people of that time.

Furthermore, an oppressed population which was so faithless that it regarded their divinely chosen leader as a threat rather than a redeemer - speaks volumes

of their reluctance to remove the yoke of the P'lishtim.

Lastly, the tribes' simple disregard of Shimshon's commanded state of nezirut might indicate the people's perception of Samson as “not one of us” – an outsider, a stranger. And, given the nation's seemingly distant relationship with Hashem (note the behavior of Shimshon's parents upon receiving the angel's message), it is not difficult to believe that the population rejected him, his elevated *nezirut* stature and his leadership.

Each generation receives the leader fitting for them and if the leader is lacking, then perhaps it is because the generation is as well.

It is a lesson well-worth remembering in all times.

And in our time as well. ■

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Lessons from *Birchat Kohanim*

In this week's parsha we find "*Birchat Kohanim*", the phrases used by the Kohanim to bless Am Yisrael. The following pasuk serves as an introduction:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבַרְכוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמֹר לָהֶם: (במדבר ג:כג)

Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them: (Bamidbar 3:23).

What exactly is intended by the word כֹּה? How are the kohanim to bless Am Yisrael?

The Kli Yakar offers three interpretations of the word כֹּה.

Connection to Nazir: The word כֹּה (Ko) draws our attention to what immediately preceded this parsha. We were previously instructed of the laws of Nazir – one who takes upon himself certain restrictions, including not to cut hair, not to **drink wine**, and to avoid becoming *tamea* (impure). The connection between the previous segment of Nazir and Birchat Kohanim is to highlight that wine may bring one personal enjoyment but throughout Tanach we find examples where the consumption of too much wine

leads to tragedy (Noach, Lot, etc). When a Kohen is engaged in blessing the nation, he must avoid drinking wine. The Torah stresses אֲמֹר להם – it needs to be spoken and a drunk individual is unable to speak properly.

Connection to Birchat Avraham. The bracha granted to Avraham utilized the word כֹּה יהיה זרעך – כֹּה – (Bereshit 15:5). When Bilam sought to curse the nation it states: הִתִּיצַב כֹּה עַל עוֹלֹתֶיךָ וְאָנֹכִי אֲקַרָּא כֹּה (Stand here next to your burnt offering and I will be call out from here). The midrash interprets the two uses of the word כֹּה to refer to Bilam stating that through the sacrifice the bracha to Avraham's offspring will be uprooted and then the curse would be able to overcome the bracha of כֹּה תְבַרְכוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. Bilam was able to entice the nation to sin and 24,000 were killed. He was unable to reach the number he desired of 25,000 which he figured would supersede the bracha of כֹּה (gematria of 25).

25 Gifts to the Kohen. The reference to כֹּה is to the 25 gifts offered to the kohanim. כֹּה מתנות כהונה. Wait a second – aren't there only כֹּד מתנות כהונה? The kli Yakar suggests that with Birchat Kohanim we arrive at 25 gifts to the Kohen. How is this bracha a gift to the Kohanim? They are blessing Am Yisrael- what are they receiving from this bracha? Essentially, Birchat Kohanim is a blessing for sustenance. If the people

have a productive year, the kohanim will receive a larger portion of gifts from *teru-mot, uma'asrot*. In addition, the term *אמור להם* (say to them), requires the chazan to first state each word for the Kohanim to repeat. The Kli Yakar does not think it is just a practicality so that the Kohanim are all in sync. It is a manner in which we empower the Kohanim, by first blessing them so that they have from where to draw upon to share the blessing with us.

The next time we receive the blessings from the Kohanim, we should consider the blessings granted to Avraham and our blessing to the Kohaim, so that they can bless us wholeheartedly. May the blessings offered by the Kohanim be fulfilled and may we experience *ישם לך שלום* – peace and tranquility in the land of Israel. ■



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The Essence of Shavuot

Interestingly, every *chag* is known by multiple names. One of the names for the holiday of Shavuot is *Yom Habikurim*, the time that we offer first fruits. What is the connection between the day we celebrate *kabbalat HaTorah*, and *bikurim* - first fruits?

Rabbi Dovid Hofstedter in *Darash Dovid* cites the purpose of the mitzvah of *bikurim* as showing gratitude to Hashem for all the bounty that we receive. It is commonplace for one to ascribe success to his own initiatives and power. Hence, we find this mitzvah immediately following the commandment to remember what Amalek did to our people as we traveled away from Egypt. Amalek is known as the quintessential nation that denied belief in Hashem and His personal involvement in every detail of life. The mitzvah of *bikurim* functions as a continuous reminder that all our gifts emanate from Divine kindness. Shavuot is the holiday that represents this theme in a dramatic fashion. At *Kabbalat HaTorah*, the heavens opened and the Jews saw with utmost clarity Hashem's overwhelming Presence in this world. Each year, bringing the first produce of our fields helps us emotionally

connect to the experience of Sinai.

The Chasidic masters offer a different perspective connecting these two ideas. The *Sefat Emet* explains that the “*shte halechem*,” the two breads that were offered on Shavuot, represent the two most powerful tools that the Jew possesses, Torah and *tefillah*. Indeed, Rav Kanatopsky, in his insights on Shavuot, notes that the two outstanding personalities associated with the holiday are Moshe Rabbeinu and Dovid Hamelech. The former is the model of Torah and the latter is the essence of prayer. Shavuot is a day that celebrates the fusion of both aspects.

Rav Schorr in *Halekach Vehalebuv* quotes the Midrash Tanchuma teaching that there is an intrinsic connection between *bikurim* and *tefillah*. Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Beit Hamikdash would be destroyed and *bikurim* would cease to be offered. He therefore established *tefillah* three times a day. As we are now in *galut*, the day of bringing of *bikurim* has become a day to emphasize *tefillah*. Indeed, we read in *parashat Pinchas*, “*olat tamid ha'suya b'har Sinai* – the daily burnt offering, [the same as that] offered at Har Sinai.” (*Bamidbar* 28;6) This verse suggests that the daily sacrifice and by extension, our *tefillah* today, relates to the Sinai experience. Rav Schorr explains that we can infuse

our *tefillah* with passion and excitement, thus facilitating a deeper connection to Hashem, as we experienced on Shavuot.

Rav Meizlish in *Sichot B'avodot Hashem* relates that the *tefillah* of “*ahavah rabbah*” before the *Shema*, should have particular emphasis on Shavuot. It is our plea to be able to learn Torah, to be inspired by Torah, and to be able to love Torah. One’s heartfelt *tefillah* of this sort can have a tremendous impact on one’s Torah learning for the entire year. Rav Pincus likewise notes that Mussaf service on Shavuot is a particular time of “*eit ratzon*”, akin to the time of *Ne’ilah* on Yom Kippur when our *tefillot* achieve a particular power of connection. Let us utilize the energy of this chag to connect with Torah and *tefillah* in a meaningful way. ■



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SHAVUOT



Shavuot: All for One & One for All

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

As part of the prosecution against Mendel Beilis, Russian theologians presented “proofs” from the Talmud that Jews do not view murder of gentiles as a crime, and that only Jewish life was to be valued. For example, *Atem keruim Adam*, “You, the Jewish People, are called *adam*, men, but gentiles are not called *adam*, men” (*Yevamos*, 61a). Here, the Gemara is only addressing the difference in laws

of *tumah* and *taharah*, based on the verse, “When a man [*adam*] dies in a tent” (*Bamidbar*, 19:14). And the fact is, the intent of the discussion is to show that the corpse of a Jew can transmit ritual impurity to someone in the same tent, while that of a non-Jew cannot.

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

In anticipation of the predictable charge, Beilis’ attorneys reached out to various Jewish thinkers and leaders of the day to formulate a response. One of the responses came from a young Rav Meir Shapiro — the future founder of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, and architect of the *Daf Yomi* movement. A brilliant and eloquent spokesman for the Jewish community, he was also a member of the Polish Parliament.

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

“But when one Jew, such as Mendel Beilis, is falsely accused and put on trial, the

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

וַיִּחַרְץ שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר:

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

(Shemos, 19:2)

כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלִב אֶחָד

“...As one person, with one heart.”

(Rashi)

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

Similarly, Rav Shraga Feivel Mendelevitch, zt'l, used to tell his students: “We are now learning Torah that was given to us in the Desert, and which was expounded in the Oral Torah by scholars living in Bavel. The Ramban, who wrote commentaries on both the Written and Oral Torah, lived in Spain, and Rashi in France. The Maharsha, who explains difficulties in Tosafos lived in Poland, and we who drink from the water of all of them live in Williamsburg, where we study the same Torah that was



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given at Har Sinai.”

ישראל אוריינתא וקודשא בריך הוא כולא חד

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

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

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

שָׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶלְכִינוּ ה' אֶחָד:

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

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

Singularity in multiplicity, Oneness in diversity.

In the same way, the great diversity of the Jewish People is ‘one’. Each ‘one’ of us, in all our differentiation, are encompassed in a singular, inseparable whole — like one person with one heart.

Shavuot celebrates *Uba’u kulam b’vris yachad*; ‘*Naaseh v’nishma’amru k’echad* — “They all came together in the Covenant of the Torah; ‘We will perform it and then we will understand it,’ they said as one.” May we activate the oneness of our People on this day, while also appreciating our individual uniqueness. May we manifest our essential oneness with Torah and Hashem, and receive the *Toras Achas*, the Torah of Oneness, *b’simchah u-b’penimiyus*, with joy and inner depth. ■

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we are one people; each and
every one of us **included.**

Chag Sameach to **everyone**



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This is Yachad



Using a Plata Cover for Both Meat and Dairy

In many households, food is kept warm on Shabbat by using a *plata* (hotplate). Some families also cover the food that is sitting on the *plata* with a special fire-resistant fabric cover that makes the heating process more effective.

As we approach Shavuot with its custom of eating dairy foods, the question arises, is it permissible to use the same *plata* cover for a dairy meal, even though it's been used to cover meat items?

The Torah commands in three places: "לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו", "Do not cook a kid in its mother's milk". *Chazal* teach that this is the source for three different prohibitions: eating, cooking, and benefitting from a mixture of meat and dairy (*Shulchan Aruch*, YD 87:1).

This prohibition also applies to a situation in which only the **flavors** of the meat and dairy mix together, (*Pesachim* 44:b). *Pri Megadim* (preface to *Hilchot Basar Bechalav*) concludes that even residual flavors that mix by being absorbed within a vessel (e.g. milk cooked in a pot that was

used for meat) are a Torah prohibition.

In this case, however, the prohibition is only in effect as long as the residual flavor isn't degraded (*pagum*). The flavor is considered viable while it is still *ben yomo* - within 24 hours since the vessel's previous use with meat/dairy. The *Gemara* (*Avodah Zara* 76a) states that after the vessel has ceased to be *ben yomo* it is still forbidden to use it for the opposite kind (meat-dairy), but if it was used (*bediavad*), it is permitted to eat the food cooked in it.

This means that you aren't allowed to use the same vessel for meat and dairy (in hot temperatures), even if you wait 24 hours between them.

The common way to use a *plata* cover isn't directly on top of the food, but rather on top of covered pots or pans. This is important because the direct cover of a vessel is the same as the vessel itself (see *Rema* YD 93:1). But if the vessel is already covered, and one puts another cover on top of that cover (e.g. a *plata* cover over a covered pot), the steam that is emitted from the food doesn't transfer its flavor to the upper cover (*Rema*, YD 92:8). It is also evident from *Rema* that this is true even if a meat pot is sitting on the lid of a dairy pot (or vice-versa) that is sitting on the fire, as long as there is no liquid between them.

Bach (*Bayit Chadash*, YD 92:11) points out that even though simple pot lids aren't hermetically closed and some steam does



escape, it is still permitted because the small amount of steam isn't enough to transmit the flavor.

Based on *Rema* and *Bach*, it seems that using a *plata* cover for both covered meat and covered dairy is permitted, even within 24 hours, because the flavor isn't transmitted beyond the lids of the pots and pans.

However, everyone with some experience in the kitchen knows that food tends to splatter. The splattered food often stays on the *plata* cover, which in most households is washed infrequently, and is sometimes nearly permanent. The visible residue that is on the cover is more than just flavor; *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 103:5) rules that actual food substance does **not** become degraded (*pagum*) after 24 hours. This means that if a cover is dirty with meat residue, one may not cover dairy pots with it, because the meat will transmit flavor to the dairy pot. It should also be noted that if the *plata* cover is used with open, unlidded meaty foods, it cannot then be used for dairy.-

In short, if the *plata* cover is completely clean from meaty foods it may be used on top of covered dairy, but if there is any residue on the *plata* cover, it may not be used for dairy. A solution for the dairy meal on Shavuot can be either to wash the cover with hot water and detergent before the holiday or to cover the dairy food with towels or a new cover instead. A *plata* cover which is used for uncovered pans such that

it comes in direct contact with the food, such as schnitzel, can also be restored to a neutral state if washed with very hot water and detergent.¹

In summary:

- The Torah not only prohibited the mixture of meat and dairy foods; the transfer of flavors in pots is also prohibited.
- Hot vessels with milk and meat that touch or are placed on top of one another do not transfer flavors as long as there is no liquid between them.
- A **clean** *plata* cover used only for closed meat pots may subsequently be used for dairy.
- A *plata* cover used for uncovered meaty food or a *plata* cover that is dirty with residue may not be used for both meat and dairy.
- *Plata* covers have been known to cause fires if allowed to remain in contact with the *plata* for an extended time. One should use them very carefully. ■

¹ Thank you to Rabbi Levari Batinski for his significant contribution to this article.

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

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BY RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

Ram, Yeshivat Har Etzion

Shavuot: Is Torah In Israel “Different”?

Thousands of years ago, we stood underneath a fiery mountain, attentively listening to the directly revealed voice of Hashem. No religion has ever, or will ever, lay claim to a direct encounter between an entire nation of three million strong and the Creator of the universe. Har Sinai was the seminal moment of Jewish faith and religion.

Strangely, this celebrated encounter with Hashem was staged in a barren desert landscape. Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to conduct this meeting in a more elegant and palatial setting?

Lessons for Torah Study

Chazal point to the numerous guidelines for Torah study which are distilled within the metaphor of a desert. For example, an unfenced desert allows free passage, as opposed to a delicate garden which is shielded from human intrusion. Similarly, Torah study demands extraordinary humility and only an accepting person, who tolerates the trespass of others can fully absorb the word of Hashem.

Secondly, Torah is endowed in a desert, which is an ownerless site, suggesting that Torah is not the province of any one

particular group. No human being or faction hosted the delivery of Torah, and none can claim a monopoly over Torah knowledge.

Finally, a stark and barren desert highlights that Torah study cannot be relaxed or cavalier. Mastering the infinite and uncontainable word of Hashem demands relentless intensity and, typically, comes at the expense of the extravagant luxuries normally associated with city life. The cost of Torah excellence is often a barebones and spartan “desert” lifestyle.

These three lessons of Torah study all justify its delivery in a desert, but they don't explain why the chosen desert was located outside the land of Israel. Evidently, scheduling Matan Torah specifically in Sinai projects a different Torah message: Torah is non-geographical and can be studied and practiced anywhere, even outside of Israel. Torah is a cosmic encounter with the eternal word of an unfathomable G-d, and has little to do with location. As the gemara (Berachot 6a) reassures

ומנין שאפילו אחד שיושב ועוסק בתורה ששכינה עמו - שנאמר: בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבוא אליך וברכתך

The Shechinah attends any incident of Torah study, wherever and whenever it occurs.

Preserving Torah's Independence

During two pivotal entries into galus, the geographical autonomy of Torah was underlined. During the initial stage of our first exile,

a cadre of surpassing Torah scholars was relocated from Yerushalayim to Bavel, establishing a Torah hub which lasted well over 1500 years. Bavel would ultimately host the greatest surge of Torah study in history- the development of Torah sheba'al peh. Conditions in Israel proper remained too austere and too grueling for the flourishing of the oral Torah, whereas the calm valleys of Bavel and Persia provided a more serene backdrop for this phenomenal expansion. The Talmud Yerushalmi, compiled in Israel, pales in comparison to the Talmud Bavli, reflecting the degraded state of the Jewish imagination operating under duress in Israel. Even before our first gallus concluded, Torah was already firmly entrenched in Bavel, its future residence outside of Israel.

During our second exile, during the Roman siege, Rebbe Yochanan ben Zakai negotiated the surrender of Yerushalayim in exchange for the relocation of the High Court of the Sanhedrin. Though the Sanhedrin relocated to a different site in Israel, this barter set the stage for the portability of Torah. Rebbe Yochanan swapped “location” for Torah. Our religion was now transportable, able to be carried anywhere.

As the gemara (Berachot 8a) remarks:

מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין להקב"ה בעולמו אלא ד' אמות של הלכה בלבד

Though we were expelled from Israel, Torah never required a location or a specific “place”. It merely required an inner four cubits of divine logic.

To showcase Torah's geographical independence from the Land of Israel, it was delivered in a remote desert, outside of Israel.

Is Torah in Israel Different?

Yet, Torah study in Israel is still distinct and

still different from Torah studied elsewhere. The amora, Rebbe Zeira, in particular, sensed the superiority of Torah in Israel, and emigrated to Israel, despite the disapproval of his Rebbe, Rav Yehuda who banned it. Evidently, for Rebbe Zeira, Torah in Bavel was inferior to the purer Torah in the Land of Hashem. Seeking to purge himself of the impure Torah of Bavel, he fasted 100 days prior to his arrival in Israel. Finally, Rebbe Zeira coined the well-known adage דארץ ישראל מחכים claiming that the atmosphere of Israel enables greater access to divine wisdom. His observation echoes a midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 16:4) which reports

אין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל ואין חכמה כחכמת ישראל,

affirming that Torah wisdom in Israel is superior.

Unfortunately, throughout our troubled history, as we were scattered amongst the nations, we rarely had the opportunity to fully explore this unique blend of Torah in Israel... until now.

Torat Eretz Yisrael

Over the past 150 years, renewed Jewish sovereignty in Israel has raised the question of whether Torah study should be updated. Rav Kook in particular, believed that, with our national and historical return, a new Torah study or “Torat Eretz Yisrael” should be developed. He wasn't specific about *how* this should be accomplished, but his repeated messaging did inspire an entire school of thought supporting a transformed Torah study in modern day Israel.

One suggestion is to study Torah in Israel in a more contoured fashion, with less give and take, less questioning and less disputation. Supernatural inspiration in the Land of Israel

should expedite the process, enabling more consensus opinions and precluding the need for extended debate or elliptical analysis. Outside of Israel there was greater need for argumentation and for dialectics, whereas in Israel, the experience is more direct and straightforward.

A different modification of Torah study in Israel would seek to fuse various disciplines of Torah into one integrated whole. Traditionally, legal Talmudic inquiry study was kept distinct from Kaballah or from Midrash, as their respective logic and their ground rules of analysis are so different. Combining these dissimilar fields would distend their inner logic and would constitute, as the Chatam Sofer warned, a prohibition of Kilayim.

Perhaps, now that we have resettled Israel and live under the direct presence of Hashem, who is indivisible, we should similarly unify the various strands of His Torah into one incorporated fabric.

A third opinion of Torat Eretz Yisrael wants to better apply Torah to our more expansive Jewish horizons. Living in Israel, we finally experience a holistically Jewish environment, and we also aim to spiritualize our culture, our politics and our society at large. Shouldn't we also explore the impact of Torah upon this broadened Jewish totality? Shouldn't we think about how Torah is expressed in all sectors of the modern Jewish experience, rather than confining it to study halls or to legal halachic applications for daily life?

Enhancement, Not Replacement

My Rebbe, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l, was very cautious about these changes, strongly opposing any alteration of Torah study, adhering instead to the classic

"internal" analysis of Torah. Talmudic debate, as serpentine as it appears, isn't a function of disrupted analysis, but instead generates multiple approaches to a Talmudic concept, each of which contain elements of a larger divine truth. Streamlining the process splices off segments of this broader divine truth.

Similarly unifying diverse areas of Torah study can wreck the internal logic of each respective field. Talmudic calculus is completely different from the mysticism of Kaballah.

Finally, stretching Torah for social and political commentary undermines the internal self-sufficient relevance of the eternal word of Hashem. Torah need not comment upon broader society or enjoy contemporary applications to attain relevance.

Moreover, the very prospect of altering Torah study can invite broader dangers such as antinomianism, or the false but seductive notion that, in a redeemed state, normative halachic practice is no longer binding. If Torah study changes, why shouldn't mitzvot? Torah and mitzvot are each immutable, and any notion of adjusting them to our new reality can subvert their eternal inalienability.

As time passes, we will probably reach a balanced calibration. We should continue to study Torah in its classic manner, but gradually become sensitive to additional hues and tints which never surfaced in Bavel, but have emerged now that we have returned to the Land of Hashem. Religiously, historically and even intellectually we cannot overhaul Torah study. We can, however, add layers to the ever-evolving word of Hashem, especially when it flows through His Land.

Torah was delivered in a desert, but it has now come home to Israel. ■

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Rehabilitating Israel's Youth at Risk

The Zula Outreach Center



About the Project:

Established by OU Israel, The Pearl and Harold Jacobs Zula Outreach Center is a safe haven for at-risk teens. These teens and young adults have become estranged from their families, teachers, and communities and are experiencing a crisis in faith. Many are homeless, substance abusers, and involved in anti-social behaviors.

Located in the heart of Jerusalem, the Zula's team of counselors and educational professionals guide these "diamonds in the rough," who with a warm embrace and listening ear have been helped to feel wanted, loved and appreciated. The Zula helps more than 4,600 youth on an annual basis "to become polished and sparkle again," to stand on their feet, and shine on their path of personal growth and development.

What is the Zula?

OU Israel's Pearl & Harold Jacobs Zula Outreach Center is a welcoming place for youth ages 12-24 who have dropped out of formal frameworks. They are at risk youngsters who feel alienated and rejected. They are experiencing a crisis of faith and tremendous chaos in their lives. What they need above all is unconditional love, caring, and guidance to a warm and embracing Torah. The Zula has been running for 22 years in the Center of downtown Jerusalem. The Zula offers a safe haven for over 4,600 boys and girls who find their way

there during the year. The Zula has a team of professional counselors, social workers and psychologists with a genuine desire to help these youngsters.

How Does the Zula Work?

The Zula is open Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday Evenings and until the early hours of the morning. The Zula's counselors have developed a unique approach aimed at developing a personal connection with each participant and providing a space in which the staff are open and attentive and allow the youth to speak about their problems and be confident of receiving encouragement and support. The Zula provides art therapy, including music therapy and creative writing workshops which encourages the youngsters to express their creativity and increase their confidence.

The Zula staff is comprised of trained professionals, including psychologists, social workers and counselors. Zula participants know that these professionals are available for them at all hours of the day or night. A personal growth program is devised for every girl and boy who comes to the Zula, aimed at putting their lives back together in an optimal manner. Zula's professional youth counselors are given professional training through weekly staff meetings and in-service trainings aimed at helping them support at-risk youth. Since its creation in 2000, the Zula has helped rehabilitate thousands of young adults. 30% - 60% of participants have made significant strides in improving their behavior in regards to disreputable activity including substance abuse, criminal activity, promiscuity and truancy.





RABBI AARON

GOLDSCHIEDER

Editor, Torah Tidbits

Unifying Distinct Paths

The value of the wisdom of the awe of God, faith and the worship [of God], broadening ethical teaching and the wisdom of life, combined with the depth of Torah and its greatness which is the way of true genius, are bifurcated and detached from one another outside the Land, and this [reality] must be so. With great pains do the scholars and righteous ones outside the Land endeavor to unite the multiple topics which are generally differentiated from one another, and [their unification is not realized] due to the fact that the lofty light of God's unity is not found there.

[However] here (in the Land of Israel), my brethren, we thank and praise and bless the honored name of God, the Lord of Israel, where he has placed in His glory, all is possible, indeed, not merely possible but essential; when we demand the ultimate good which is rightfully ours in Zion, "all" is found. (Eretz Chefetz 4:5)

Maharal: Equilibrium in the Land

Rav Kook's philosophy often draws from the writings of the Maharal of Prague. The teaching above echoes the following approach of the Maharal in

which he analyzes a somewhat shocking rabbinic passage:

The Talmud (Pesachim 113b) enumerates different groups of individuals whose members 'hate one another.' The examples cited are 'dogs, roosters and harlots,' and shockingly - 'Torah sages of Babylonia hate one another as well.'

The Maharal attempts to explain this statement about the sages of the exile. In his treatise on the topic of Torah study (*Netivot Olam, Netiv HaTorah*, ch. 13) he offers a lengthy explanation of this passage. He notes that the description of Babylonian Torah scholars as "hating" each other is meant along the lines of a passage in *Sanhedrin* 24a. The Gemara there discusses the verse (in *Zecharia* 11:7): "And I took for myself the two staffs [to guide the sheep]; one I called 'Gracious' and one I called 'Assaulters'." The Gemara expounds that 'Gracious' represents the Torah scholars of Eretz Yisrael, who are gracious towards one another in their discussions of Torah law, whereas 'Assaulters' represents the Babylonian Torah scholars who assault each other with stinging retorts.

Rashi explains that when studying, the students in Babylonia would vigorously refute their partners' explanation. By contrast, their counterparts in Eretz Yisrael worked together and strove to understand each other's words. As a

result they would emerge with a clear understanding of the subject being studied. In this narrow sense, then, the Babylonian Torah scholars hated each other. (See Schottenstein Artscroll Talmud, Pesachim p.113b3)

The Maharal insists on a mystical explanation as to why there is greater unity in Israel. It is based on the fact that Israel is situated in the center of the world and therefore has a unifying effect. Additionally, “God’s eyes are on the Land,” as stated in the Torah - God’s own characteristic of oneness has an impact on the multiple streams of Torah learning finding harmony with one another.

A City Long-Rooted in Brotherhood

Perhaps the Maharal’s mystical approach to the unifying effect of the Land can be traced to the earliest descriptions of our Holy City. King David describes the city as - “Jerusalem that is built as a city knit together “(Psalms 123:3). The Talmud comments on this verse saying that it is a city that bonds people close to one another (*Yerushalmi, Bava Kama* chap. 7, Halacha 7).

It is a city of *achdut*, oneness and brotherly love. When Avraham and Yitzchak ascend the holy mountain in Jerusalem the verse says: “*Vayelchu shneheim yachdav*” -They walked as one (Bereshit 22:8). *Rashi* comments: “Even though Yitzchak understood that he was to be slaughtered, they walked together, with a full heart.”

Opposing Arguments Bring Peace

“Torah scholars bring peace into the world” (*Berachot* 64a). This aggadic

statement appears at the conclusion of several talmudic tractates. These exact words bring *Yevamot*, *Nazir* and *Kareitot* to a close, and are the penultimate words of *Berachot*. Rav Kook (*Ein Aya*) beautifully explains that peace is not achieved when all opinions but one are obliterated; rather, it emerges when the valid aspects of a myriad of positions are acknowledged. The variety of opinions enables us to see that each one has its time and place. Thus, the verse utilizes the phrase *rav shalom banayich* instead of *gadol shalom banayich*, because peace stems more from multiplicity than from sameness.

Rav Kook himself practiced what he preached. He believed firmly that the religious community was more correct than the secular Zionists, but he also believed, and taught, that the secular Zionists critique of the religious community had elements of truth.

It is noteworthy that Rav Kook made use of an acronym to describe an approach to Torah study that is more all-encompassing and unifying: ‘*Kemach*.’ The term he said is representative of *Kabbalah*, *Mada* (worldly knowledge) and *Chassidut* (*Pinkasei HaRaya* 4, See article by Naor, ‘The Hasidism of Rav Kook’ Learhaus website). Rav Kook believed that the Land of Israel is a home to Judaism that is more organic and embracing of multiple paths. In the contemporary Jewish world in Israel one sees this becoming more of a reality. *Im ein kemach ein Torah* - without a synthesis in our Torah learning then our Torah learning is incomplete. ■



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR.
ADINA SHMIDMAN



(SHOFTIM 13:2-25)

וַיַּעֲתֵר מְנוּחַ אֱלֹהֵי וַיֹּאמֶר בְּנִי אֵיךְ הָאֱלֹקִים אָשֶׁר
שָׁלַחְתָּ יְבוּאֲרָא עִדּוּ אֵלֵינוּ וַיִּזְכְּנוּ מִהַנְעֻשָׁה לַנֶּעֱר לְהוֹלִד:

Manoah prayed with the L-RD. "Oh, my L-rd!" he said, "please let the man of G-d that You sent come to us again, and let him instruct us how to act with the child that is to be born." (Shoftim 13:8)

In this week's Haftorah, we read about Shimshon's birth story, his family narrative. The events precipitating his birth are both dramatic and intimate at the same time. The Posuk states that "וַיַּעֲתֵר מְנוּחַ" and *Manoach prayed*. The Midrash Rabba (10:17) shares that Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish questions the term used for Manoach's prayer. It is an unusual

word for prayer and interestingly the same term used when Yitzchok prayed with Rivka for a child when they were barren. Rabbi Shimon Ben Lakish shares that the Tefillos of Tzadikim are compared to a pitchfork (טר), as just as a pitchfork turns over the grain on the threshing floor, so too, the prayers of the righteous can turn over G-d's decree from one of cruelty to mercy. When davening for a child, this word is employed as there needs to be a reversal of barrenness. Rav Pam in his sefer on Haftoros emphasizes that the power of Tefillah is not exclusive to Tzadikim, but rather, all people have the power to pray and connect with Hashem and impact G-d's will. We all have the ability to reach out... ■



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לעילוי נשמת
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Cooking for Shabbat at the End of Yom Tov

Question: Are there any things to be careful about when cooking for Shabbat on *Yom Tov* that falls out on Friday, with the help of an *eiruv tavshilin* (=et)?

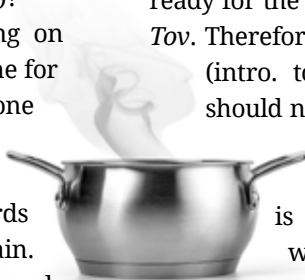
Answer: The laws of cooking on *Yom Tov* are the same when done for Shabbat (with an *et*) as when done for *Yom Tov* eating, concerning what one is permitted to do. The likely difference is in regards to **when** to cook, as we will explain.

Et, like *eiruvei chatzeirot* and *techumin*, is only capable of solving Rabbinic problems (Pesachim 46b). Rabba and Rav Chisda argue (ibid.) why cooking on *Yom Tov* for the following day of Shabbat is not a Torah-level prohibition. Rav Chisda says that according to Torah law, the needs of Shabbat (on the next day) are a legitimate reason to do *melacha* just as the needs of *Yom Tov* are (Rashi ad loc.

explains that the *kedusha* of the two are one). Rabba says that even when one cooks on *Yom Tov* for a weekday, he is not guilty of a full-fledged violation because of “*ho’il* ...,” which works as follows. We cannot conclude that the cooking on *Yom Tov* will not be eaten on *Yom Tov*, despite his plans to use it for Shabbat, because he could always be surprised by guests on *Yom Tov* to whom he would give the food. According to both *Amoraim*, the remaining Rabbinic prohibition is permitted based on the institution of *et*.

Tosafot (ad loc.) points out that *ho’il* does not apply to cooking one starts at the end of *Yom Tov* because the food will not be ready for the guests to eat until after *Yom Tov*. Therefore, says the Magen Avraham (intro. to Orach Chayim 527), we should not do the cooking at the end of *Yom Tov*, as at that time, i.e., without *ho’il*, there is a Torah-level prohibition, which *et* cannot remove. This stringency is predicated on the presumption that we accept Rabba’s opinion (above) over Rav Chisda’s, as the latter posits that even without *ho’il*, there is no Torah prohibition on cooking done on *Yom Tov* that falls on Friday for Shabbat.

However, the Mishna Berura (527:3) says that if one finds himself too close to Shabbat to cook food that will be usable on *Yom*



Tov, there is room for leniency. In the Be'ur Halacha (to 527:1), he justifies this due to the existence of *Rishonim* who accept Rav Chisda's approach that the Torah does not forbid cooking on *Yom Tov* for Shabbat even when the food will not be ready on *Yom Tov*. It is possible that the Rambam (*Yom Tov* 1:13; *ibid* 6:1) takes this approach (see Beit Yosef, OC 527; Chemed Moshe 527:1).

The Mishna Berura (*ibid.*) is significantly more accepting of such a leniency when Friday is the second (Rabbinic) day of *Yom Tov* (as opposed to how Shavuot falls out this year). The Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata 2:12 is likewise equivocal about leniency, even in the case of need, on the first day of *Yom Tov*.

There is another point that makes it somewhat easier to be lenient – the possibility of violating a Torah law by cooking at the end of *Yom Tov* on Friday may be rare or even non-existent (see Avnei Nezer, OC 397). If the food reaches *ma'achal ben d'rusai* (minimally cooked) before *Yom Tov* finishes, then *ho'il* should apply (the Pri Megadim, intro. to Hilchot Shabbat 34 is skeptical whether *ma'achal ben d'rusai* suffices in this regard). If it will not reach this point until Shabbat, then one did not violate *Yom Tov* by Torah law because the *melacha* was not complete on *Yom Tov* and he did not violate Shabbat because the action was done before Shabbat. The Pri Megadim (*ibid.*) disagrees, stating that cooking that

began on *Yom Tov* is a Torah-level violation even if it finished after *Yom Tov*. Even according to the Pri Megadim, there should only be a problem if one started relatively close to the end of *Yom Tov*, which is rare to happen considering that women light Shabbat candles (and cease *melacha* due to Shabbat) and men usually go to *shul* well before the end of *Yom Tov*.

In summary, it is important not to leave the cooking for the end of Friday. However, there is room for leniency *b'dieved*. If one put up the food reasonably before Shabbat, it is not necessary for the food to be fully cooked on *Yom Tov*. ■

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BY RABBI MOSHE BLOOM
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Shavuot and Matanot Aniyim – Gifts for the Poor

In *Megillat Rut*, we read about Rut who arrives in Beit Lechem and goes out to the fields to collect sheaves grain to support herself and her mother-in-law Naomi: “Rut the Moabite said to Naomi, “I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness ... and off she went. She came and gleaned in a field, behind the reapers ... “ (Rut 2:2-3). Here we see the application of the *mitzvah* of *lekhet*: (1-2) sheaves that fell during the time of harvest cannot be gathered by the reapers, rather they must be left for the poor, as the Torah states: “And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall ... gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the L-rd am your G-d” (*Vayikra* 23:22).

According to some commentators, *shichechah* is also mentioned: “She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the

omarim behind the reapers” (Rut 2:7). A bundle of sheaves is called an *omer*. If forgotten in the field, it is called *shichechah* (lit. “that which is forgotten”) and is designated for the poor, as the Torah states: “When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook an *omer* in the field, do not turn back to retrieve it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (*Devarim* 24:19).

Do *Lekket* and *Shichechah* apply today?

Matanot aniyim theoretically applies today as a biblical commandment, even without the Beit Hamikdash and while the majority of world Jewry does not reside in the Land of Israel. However, the Gemara states that *matanot aniyim* are meant for “the poor, and not for ravens or bats” (*Chulin* 134). That is, if it is clear that poor people will not come to harvest their gifts, and the produce left for them will be consumed by animals, there is no obligation to leave them in the field.

Today, poor people don’t go to fields to gather fallen sheaves, forgotten bundles, or even to harvest the corner of a field (*pe’ah*). They would need a car to access the field and then mill the grains. This is expensive and not financially worthwhile. Given that today’s poor won’t go to fields to engage in harvest labor, *matanot aniyim* (*lekhet*, *shichechah*, *pe’ah*, *peret*, *olletot*) do not apply today (see Rambam, *Matanot Aniyim* 1:10). ■



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

Program Director, OU Israel Center



Each year on *Shavuot*, we have the opportunity to at least symbolically return to that awesome moment in Jewish history, when we stood as one together to receive the *Torah* at Sinai.

The first of the *Aseret HaDibrot* instructs each of us:

Anochi HaShem Elokecha Asher Hotzeitcha M'Eretz Mitzrayim, M'Beit Avadaim-I am Hashem your G-d, who took you forth from the Land of Egypt and the House of Servitude...

Many of our *meforshim* have asked why is it that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* chose to emphasize and describe Himself as the one who has redeemed the Jewish People from Egyptian servitude, and not as the Creator of all existence? Why specifically is the redemption from slavery in Egypt the aspect of *Hashem's hashgacha* which is emphasized in the opening verse of the *Aseret HaDibrot*?

The Kedushat Levi, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy'a, explains that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* chose to emphasize that the *Torah HaKadosha* is given to *Am Yisrael* specifically after they have been redeemed from Egypt. *Hashem* chose to reiterate that had *Am Yisrael* been offered the *Torah* while still enslaved in Egypt, their acceptance of the *Torah* might have been from a sense of feeling compelled to do so, that perhaps their departure from Egypt was somehow pre-conditioned upon their acceptance of the *Torah*. By bestowing the *Torah* after our departure from Egypt, and by emphasizing

this fact in the first of the *Aseret HaDibrot*, *Hashem* intended to empower *Am Yisrael* to accept the *Torah* with love, as a sign of the love that *Hashem* feels toward *Am Yisrael*, and that we in turn feel toward *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Hashem first took us forth from Egypt, explains *Reb Levi Yitzchak*, so that we could leave behind the mentality of the 'House of Servitude,' in order to receive the *Torah* as a sign of the loving dynamic between the *Ribono Shel Olam* and the Jewish people. It is precisely this fundamental idea, explains the *Kedushat Levi*, which we recall each *Shavuot* and which is introduced in the first of the *Aseret HaDibrot*, which serves as an eternal reminder that indeed *Hashem* has given *Am Yisrael* the gift of the *Torah HaKadosha*, like a parent lovingly bestows gifts to each of their children.

Yehi Ratzon, as we prepare for *Chag Matan Torah*, may each of us internalize this beautiful message encrypted in the first of the *Aseret HaDibrot*. *Chag Sameach* ■



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PORTION FROM

THE PORTION



BY RAKEL BERENBAUM

Contributor, Torah Tidbits

Shavuot And Receiving The Torah Every Day

The Torah talks about the holidays in a number of different portions (Mishpatim, Ki Tisa, Emor, Pinchas, and Re'eh). Each place concentrates on different aspects of the holidays. The festivals are described in relation to the agricultural times of the year that they are celebrated. They are also described related to events in our nation's history that they commemorate. We are also taught about the mitzvot that we must do on each holiday. Pesach is connected to the Exodus from Egypt, and we remember this event by eating matzah. Sukkot is connected to the historical time when our nation dwelled in booths on our way from Egypt to the Holy land and that is why we sit in sukkot (Vayikra 23:42-43).

So what historical event does the Torah mention in connection to the mitzvah of the holiday of Shavuot? It seems unusual that we do not find a mention of the historical significance of Shavuot in the Torah. As well, the Torah doesn't mention any symbolic action that is connected to the holiday (like the sukka and lulav on sukkot

or matza on Pesach) for Shavuot.

Rabbi Yitchak Arama in his book *Akedat Yitchak* (Sha'ar 67, 5) asks why doesn't the Torah state explicitly that on Shavuot we celebrate the revelation of God that happened on the mountain of Sinai? Why doesn't the Torah say that on Shavuot we remember that on this day God gave the Torah to His nation?

Rav Arama gives an answer to his question stating that the acquisition of the Torah is a timeless mitzvah, not just a one-time event. It is therefore different from the celebration of the Exodus from Egypt, and the dwelling in sukkot in the desert. Matan Torah is an ongoing process that continues throughout the generations. This we learn from the verse in Devarim (26:16), **"This day** Hashem your God commands you to perform these decrees". Rashi on this verse says "every day it should be as if commanded **today**." When we celebrate the giving of the Torah, we do not commemorate a one-day historical event that took place at Har Sinai, but rather we must recognize that the process of understanding the Torah and living by it requires continual engagement. Every moment that we study the Torah reminds us of its Divine source. That is why the blessing on the Torah is recited in **present** tense, **"Noten Hatorah"** "He who **gives** the Torah " and not in the past tense **"Natan Hatorah"** – who gave the Torah . Every day we have

the opportunity to continue the process of acquiring the Torah and making it part of our lives.

Learning all night on Shavuot has become a very popular minhag. We should take this energy from the holiday and continue our connection to the Torah given on Shavuot throughout the whole year. There are many ways to do this. The many varied classes offered at the OU Israel center help make Torah come alive and meaningful every day. Wishing everyone a Chag Sameach and a daily connection to the Torah.



RECIPE

The watermelons are already sweet now so I've included a quick fresh summery salad recipe to serve with a milky meal for Shavuot or on Shabbat.

WATERMELON, BULGARIAN CHEESE

- 1 small (or 1/4 of a large) watermelon, rind removed and cut into bite sized chunks
- Juice from a lemon (15 ml)
- 45 ml olive oil
- 10 g chopped fresh mint leaves
- 110 g Bulgarian cheese
- Salt & pepper to taste

Choose a good hard watermelon. Mix lemon juice, oil, and mint together. Pour over the watermelon. Mix. Place salad in a wide, shallow bowl or a large plate and spread out evenly. Sprinkle the cheese on top and season with pepper and a bit of salt if needed. Serve. ■

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RAV AHARON ZIEGLER

“Why Did G-D Choose Us?”

Parashat Yitro contains the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and the receiving of the Ten Commandments. Why is not called Parashat Kabbalat HaTorah?

Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu, introduced a “novel plan” of establishing a hierarchical court system. Undoubtedly, this was a valuable innovation. However, the Or HaChayim, (R. Chaim ben Moshe Attar, 1743) writes that Yitro’s idea was not novel at all. The idea of the efficiency of a division of labor and the practicality of implementing a hierarchical court system is something that we would have figured out on our own without Yitro. However, Hashem wanted to send us a message to our people of that generation and of all future generations that *chachma* (wisdom) does exist among the nations of the world and that there are many wise gentiles in the world.

Chazal state, “If you are told that there is wisdom within the gentiles, believe him” (Eicha Rabba 2:17). The lesson is that we Jews should not think that Hashem chose us because we are the wisest of all nations. We are not the only nation to whom Hashem chose to give the Torah because we supposedly have a higher IQ than non-Jews. The

reason why the incident with Yitro is the introduction to Kabbalat HaTorah, according to the chachamim, is to teach this lesson.

Why, indeed, then, were we chosen? We were chosen because of Hashem’s love for our forefathers. It was because of the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Surely, they may have been wise, but that is not what the Ribbono Shel-Olam valued in them. He valued the Chesed, the kindness of Avraham, the Gevurah, the spiritual strength of Yitzchak, and the attribute of Emet, truth in Yaakov. And above all, G-d valued their commitment to passing on these valued attributes to their descendants. That is why He ‘chose us from all the nations.’

Our chosenness has nothing to do with high intelligence. It has to do with Midot, character traits. At the end of the day, this is what we are all about. The central challenge to us is working on our personal Midot. The Vilna Gaon said that the reason we are here in this world is to improve a Midah, which we have thus far not perfected. Therefore, we must always work on this, for if we do not improve our Midot while we are here, what is the purpose of life? We must instill this concept in our children and grandchildren that bringing home a Report Card with all “A’s” on academic subjects will bring them a reward but getting all “A’s” on the Midot side will bring even a greater reward. ■



RABBI GIDEON

**Machon Puah for Fertility and
Gynecology in Accordance with Halacha**

WEITZMAN

A Pregnancy Outside the Uterus

We saw last time that if a child was born through cesarean delivery there is no obligation to perform a pidyon haben. Additionally, if the next child is born in a regular delivery, there is still no obligation to do a pidyon haben. The reason is that the first child, delivered through a cesarean section, did not "open the womb", and the second child, even though delivered through a regular delivery, was not the first-born.

Therefore, we can see that in order to require a pidyon haben the child must be the first-born child and be delivered in a regular fashion, so as to "open the womb".

How does this impact the case of a woman with two separate uteruses, who becomes pregnant in both of them with male fetuses. Assuming that both boys are delivered in a regular way, and not through cesarean section, are both of them liable to pidyon haben?

Rabbi Vosner (Responsa Shevet Halevi, Vol. 8, 239) discusses the case of a woman who had an ectopic pregnancy, in which the fetus develops outside of the uterus, usually in the fallopian tube. Such a pregnancy cannot develop, is potentially dangerous,

and must be terminated. The woman subsequently became pregnant and delivered a healthy baby boy in a regular delivery. Rabbi Vosner was asked as to whether the child born would need to undergo a pidyon haben.

He writes that since the first pregnancy did not develop inside the uterus it is not considered a pregnancy in halachic terms in relation to pidyon haben. The first child born after the ectopic pregnancy, if delivered in a regular manner, would be considered "opening the womb" and would be obligated in a pidyon haben.

Rabbi Vosner adds another requirement; the pregnancy must develop inside the uterus, otherwise the child would not have to undergo pidyon haben. If so, in the case of a woman born with two separate uteruses, how do we relate to the "other uterus"? If a pregnancy develops in the left-hand uterus and another in the right-hand uterus, do we view these as two separate entities? As such, can we consider a pregnancy in the left-hand uterus as though it was "outside the uterus" in relation to the right-hand uterus?

What is the law in the case of a woman who became pregnant in the left-hand uterus, and delivered the baby and redeemed the child. She then becomes pregnant in the right-hand uterus. If, in relation to the right-hand uterus, the left-hand uterus is considered "outside the uterus", would the second child also require a pidyon haben? ■



Humility Is Not Weakness

In the delightful book, “The Little Prince” by Antonine de Saint-Exuperyt there is a scene in which the Little Prince takes credit for the sunrise itself, glorying in his work in bringing about the new day. We find this scene charming because we recognize in the Little Prince the innocence and astonishment of childhood. The delight in “causing the sun to rise” is wonderful in a child but it is tiresome and troubling when adults behave similarly.

* * *

As we enter the holiday of Shavuot, celebrating the crowning event in the annals of our Peoplehood, the Giving of the Torah, we cannot help but think of Torah as spiritually uplifting and inspiring. After all, Torah is the medium through which God communicates with mortal man. It stands to reason that the more Torah we learn, know and understand, the more intimate our relationship with God; the more we study, the more uplifted and inspired.

And yet, Rav Chanan seems to turn this thinking on its head in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 26b), “why is Torah referred to as *toshiya*? Because it *mateshes kocho shel adam* – Torah wears man out, it weakens man’s strength.”

What? Poll serious Torah learners and they will undoubtedly report that long sessions of learning leave them *upbeat* and exhilarated. Hardly “weakened”. They are exuberant, not *toshiya*.

What is Rav Chanan saying? His comment has been troubling scholars for decades upon decades. Over 90 years ago, a R’ Moshe Frankel from New York took pen to paper and wrote to my grandfather, HaGaon Rav Bezalel Zev Shafran z”l asking him to *please* explain to him what Rav Chanan meant by his astonishing statement. R’ Frankel could not imagine how Torah could be exhausting. He could not understand how the labor of learning – unlike physical labor – could be anything but pleasant and wholesome.

In response, my grandfather offered a novel interpretation of the comment. I present it here with the fervent prayer that his Torah continues to be passed down and learned by my children, grandchildren and beyond.

His response to R’ Frankel begins with a citation of the *Chavos Da’as* on the verse in Bereishit (18:4) in which Abraham greets the three “guests” who came to visit soon after his *bris*. As the visitors approached, Abraham extends every lavish courtesy to them, establishing our understanding of *Hachnasas Orchim*. He says to them, *yukach nah meat mayim v’rachatzu ragleichem* – let water be brought and wash your feet.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia) quotes the guests, “Do you suspect that we are Arabs who worship the dust of their feet – *ragleihen*?” The Chavos Da’as reminds us that Rambam argues that the word *regel* used in Torah does not denote “foot/feet” but “cause” as in the verse where Yaakov speaks directly and honestly to Laban, telling him not to exaggerate his worth and accomplishments, because what he has is because God blessed you *l’ragli* – because of me. Here it is clear that “*regel*” is the cause; God is saying “I am the *regel*”, I am the cause for your abundance.

Similarly, the *Arviim* believed that their *parnasa*, their material accomplishments, came about because of their *ragleiem* – they believed that *they* were the cause for all they had and accomplished. Like the Little Prince, they believed that the sun rose by their smarts, toil, strength and hard work. But Abraham set them straight. He tells them to “wash your *ragleichen*”. He tells them to cleanse themselves of the foolishness of bowing down and worshipping the dust of your own doings! Never think, even for a moment, that all you have is a result of your doing! For the one who fails to recognize that all s/he has emanates from the First Cause has toiled for naught.

My grandfather teaches that now we can well understand Rav Chanan. Whether through the innocence of youth or the arrogance of age, most who experience success claim responsibility for that success. Without shame they declare, “*kochi v’otzem yadi asah li et kol ha’chayil ha’zeh* – It’s my doing; my strength and prowess has allowed me to accumulate all of this wealth...”

“It’s all me!” So, they believe, never giving

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a thought that were it not for the will of God their toil and effort would be in vain. They remain blind to the truth that success and failure, like the rising and falling of the sun, is a turning wheel. One invariably follows the other.

But the one endowed with the wisdom of Torah, the spirit of God and *yiras shomayim*, the one who knows that it is God who grants him the *koach la'asos chayil*, the strength to succeed, he is the one rooted in truth. It is this man who readily admits and proclaims that Torah is *toshiya*. Why? Because it *mateshes* his strength. He knows it is not Torah learning that saps his strength or beats him down. Rather, as we learn from Abraham's lesson to his guests, Torah teaches us not to attribute our success to our own strength. Therefore,

the Torah's outlook about *parnasa* detracts from/is *mateshes* one's strength, meaning one's belief that his strength is the cause for his success.

Yes, Torah beats down on me (*mateshes*). Why? So that I do not attribute my success to my own doing. To the student of Torah, "*koach*" does not mean strength (*kochi v'ot-zem yadi* - my strength) but to one's sense of self. A student immersed in Torah will ultimately come to the realization that his entire existence and being depends solely on God.

As my grandfather concludes, "the holy ones among Israel believe in the First Cause, the Master Lord God, blessed be His name..."

The innocent and arrogant believe in themselves. The wise and the holy believe in God. In my grandfather's own words:

סימן מ

על-פי הוראים הנלה עולים ישה דברי רבי חנן שאמר: "למה נקרא שמה תושבה? זמני שהיא מושבה כמו של ארץ". כי תנה רבים מעמי הארץ, והמן והנס, אשר לרגל מוסרם הצליחו וצלה בידם לצבור כספי ועושרות, יתברכו בלבבם לאמר, "בהננו ועושרנו דינו עשה לנו את כל החיל הזה", וידעו בנושם, כהם בכבודם ובעצמם, על-ידי חוכמתם הגדולה והשגורלחם הנמרצה שבנו ועשו חיל, באין מבין, כי אם ה' לא יבנה בתינו בחן ועושר, הוא עמלו הכוננים, כי התצלחה איננו דבר קיים לעד, בוגדה היא האין אמוך בה, היום תורה שיש תצלחת על האיש אשר בחרה בו, ומאז תאמין אורה, ויבא תישך תהנית ומכשית אופן דרכה, כשאמרם זיל: "לגלג הוא שחור בעולם" (שבת קכ"א ע"א). אמנם כן, האיש החכם, אשר חננו ה' בדעת תורה, וידאת ה' ויהא אורה, ונפשו יודעת, כי ה' הוא הנותן לו כח לעשות חיל, ואינו אוכל משלו, רק משלחו גבוה על צד החסד וזה לכל העושר החכמה, ומה נאות דבריהם ז"ל: "למה נקרא שמה תושבה? זמני שמושבות כחו של ארץ" – לבל לאמר בדי ועושר ידי עשה לי את החיל, וכל חכמי תורה יענו בקול צוה הולדת, כי תש פתח, חוללה חילין תוא להם להשתחויות לאבק רגליהם, להשוב שהם בעצמם הסבה להצלחתם, אדרבה תהיה מושבת כחו של אדם, לכל יתלה הצלחתו בכוחו ועושרו ידו. ישראל קדושים מאמינים הם בסיבה הראשונה, האדון ה' צבאות אלוק קדם מעונה, שהוא יחיש ישלח צויר מקודש לרושם בכבוד את קדשם של הבורחים בו יח באמת ובאמונה, עולים לגדולה במעלה עליזות.

ד"ר ברנסי ידידות,

בבאלא האב שאמרין

כבוד התורה הנעלה מורה משה סורנקל ז"ר
וגר בקי בנצחאלק (אבריקא)

מכתבו הנני תנינו במעוד, כי שאל ודרש מאותי, לפרש לו כמין חומר דברי רבי חנן שאמר: "למה נקרא שמה של תורה 'תושבה', מפני שהיא מושבה כמו של ארץ" (פטרין כי ע"ב). וכל הבא אל המאמר הזה, יתבונן, שעל-ידי תורה עמלה של תורה היא מושבה כמו של אדם. הלא תושבי עמנו תושבי אבנים ושאר עמלי מלאכה, נדרים מלאכהם קשה וכבדה ביותר מעמלה של תורה, ואדרבה דרכיה דרכי נועם, וכל העוסק בה יש לו קורת רוח ודעתו נוחה ורדויה?

תשובה

בט"ר יצחק כל שית, אני אכרתי לתקדים תחלה וראש מברכי הבאות של הבאות בעל, "חזק דעת" ז"ל, אשר אמר עם הספר, להפוך אור בזה על פני מאמרים ז"ל: "קח טא משע מים ורחצו רגליכם" (בראשית י"ח – ד'), אמרו לו וכי בערבים השתדלו שהם משהתרים לאבק רגליהם" (בבא מציעא פ"ז ע"ב), בהקדם דברי הרמב"ם ז"ל שכתב ד"ג"ל הוא שם המושאל על הסיבות. על דרך הכתוב (בראשית ל' – ל'), "ויברך ה' אותך לרגליך", וכן ויבטן כי הערבים היו מאמינים כי פרנסתם תבא להם רק על-ידי רגליהם ומעשי יריהם, הם בעצמם יסבכו בחכמתם ופתח כי עז לצבור הן רב, לכן העיר אברהם למור אונם: "רחצו רגליכם" – רחצו חוכם, ושהו לכם משימי קום להיות משתחוים לאבק רגליהם, להלות העושר מביטוייהם, הם מלחוכי, ואם לא ישלח האדם על ה' יתבר הוא הסבה הראשונה להצלחתו, כל עמלו לחותו ויח, הכל יסא תבל יסא רוח ואבק פורד.

Rabbi Safran recently made aliyah and is an author, educator, and lecturer. His most recent volume, "Something Old, Something New; Pearls From the Torah" was published by Ktav and is available on Amazon.

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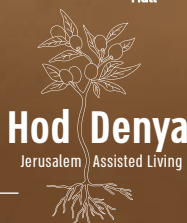
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DR. JACOB SOLOMON

From The Ha'amek Davar – Naso

**“May G-d bless you and keep you.”
(6:24)**

These words open *Birkat Kohanim* – the daily Priestly blessing for the Israelites.

Both Rashi and Sforno present “may G-d bless you and keep you” in material terms. Your affluence should expand and it should stay that way, explains Rashi. Your wealth should be permanent. Nothing should come and take it away from you.

The Sforno takes it one step further, and links the material to the spiritual: *gashmiut* to *ruchniut*. Wealth is needed to support Torah life: *im ein kemach, ein Torah* (Avot 3:15). Thus *Birkat Kohanim* opens with the necessities for living life according to the teachings of the Torah. A person's *Avodah* (service to G-d) should not suffer the frustrations of struggles for food, clothing, and shelter. The blessing is that *Am Yisrael* should enjoy the prosperity needed to carry out its service to G-d and to Mankind.

The Ohr HaChayim offers an explanation for the *Birkat Kohanim* that explores a new dimension. As Rashi and Sforno, he opens in material terms, additionally observing in “May G-d bless you and keep you” that the

blessing comes before the keeping. There is a reason, explains the Ohr HaChayim, for that order. It is that the material prosperity should be so great that you *will* need a separate blessing that that prosperity should stay with you and not dwindle.

But “May G-d shine His Face on you, and favor you” (6:25) takes the *Birkat Kohanim* into a different area: the relationship between G-d and *Am Yisrael*. As implied by the words “I will hide My face on that day...” (Deut. 31:18), there are times when and reasons why there are high barriers between G-d and His People. They obstruct G-d's spiritual rays. The Ohr HaChayim suggests that this is the point of that *Beracha*: that G-d's blessings should reach you without being impeded by spiritual barriers. And G-d's favoring should include giving you the necessary people skills to interact honorably and mutually beneficially with other people, as Joseph was received even when he was thrown in to prison: “G-d was with Joseph and he extended kindness to him, giving him favor with the chief jailer” (Gen. 39:21).

And the Ha'amek Davar takes it also the other way round. Not only should G-d's blessings reach the person without being blocked by the spiritual barrier. But also that person should have his own spiritual barrier unblocked, so that he knows that the blessing came from G-d, not by chance or that it was a lucky day. That is an additional meaning of “May G-d shine His face

on you”, that you yourself can see that the good fortune came to you from G-d, from his *hashgacha peratit*, His personal supervision of the individual on the basis of what the individual needs now. The light of ‘His face’ illuminates His signature, His divine intervention on your behalf. So that when you *bentch gomel* on being saved or miraculously recovered from a disastrous event, you feel and proclaim with all sincerity, as did Lavan and Bethuel: “This can only have come from G-d!” (Bereishit 24:50).

Perhaps the Ashkenazi in-Israel-only daily practice of *Birkat Kohanim* with full *Kohanim* participation is in harmony with the Ohr HaChayim. Eretz Yisrael, “the Land that G-d desires” (Deut. 11:12) is where G-d is closest to his people, which enables His Blessings to reach their target without spiritual barriers obstructing. ■

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Alex Cohen **JLIC Tel Aviv** **From: Wales**

You probably remember that we started counting the omer the day after seder night. This is because our rabbis (unlike the Beitusim - a non rabbinic group mentioned in the gemara in Masechet Menachot) were very explicit in defining “Shabbat” in “ספרתם לכם ממחרת” as meaning Yom Tov rather than Shabbat.

Rav Kook (and thanks to R’ Joe Wolfson for sharing the idea with me) suggests that what might be at the heart of this ideological debate is not when should we start counting, but when should we finish counting? For the Beitusim, since the first day of the Omer will always be Sunday (the day after Shabbat), Shavuot can never fall on Shabbat. For the חכמים in contrast, Shavuot could fall on Shabbat (at least up until we fixed the calendar).

Why were the Beitusim avoiding Shavuot falling on Shabbat? Because the Beit Hamikdash, for any private offering, was only open 6 days a week (closed on Shabbat). For the Beitusim, the harvest offerings offered on Shavuot were all about individuals thanking G-d for their personal material success, not something which justified opening up the Beit Hamikdash on Shabbat.

In contrast (R’ Kook explains) that for our חכמים Shavuot could happen on Shabbat because the harvest offering of Shavuot wasn’t just an individual gesture of thanks, it was also a collective and communal offering. The Beit Hamikdash was open 7 days a week (including Shabbat) for communal offerings.

Israeli farmers then and now, and those of us working in other fields too (pun intended), are not only working to support ourselves but we are also part of building something bigger. The bikkurim offerings were not only to thank G-d for being able to support ourselves but also thanking G-d for being able to play our role in building the Jewish economy. Something for us to consider next time we see our taxes being deducted from our payslip!



Tyla Shur **JLIC Tel Aviv** **From:** **Johannesburg,** **South Africa**

Shavuot is the commemoration of when the Jews received the Torah at Mount Sinai. Shavuot is said to be a wedding between Hashem and the Jewish people. We make a promise to be loyal to Hashem while He will be devoted to us. When the Torah was given to the Jews, we were no longer only Avraham’s descendants but we became a unified nation. As we celebrate each year,

it is as if G-d “re-gives” the Jews the Torah and the Jews re-receive it. Each time we learn Torah we are able to discover something new about the exact same words. It’s like we were all at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given, meaning it is every Jew’s responsibility to follow the Torah as if it was given specifically to him.

Before receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, there were some Israelites that, of their own accord, already kept the entire Torah. Since this is the case, why is this day so important?

On the day of Matan Torah 2 things changed. Firstly the Jews gained a connection to Hashem. Hashem put his essence into the Torah so when he gave it to us both those that had and had not kept the Torah before were now keeping it because of this connection to Hashem’s essence.

Secondly, the Torah given at Mount Sinai is able to have an effect on the physical world whereas before Torah and mitzvot were considered strictly spiritual matters.

The Talmud (Shabbat 88b) states that when the Jews heard G-D’s divine voice, they all died from its intensity and afterwards G-d brought them back to life. I think this emphasizes why Hashem cannot be openly present in this world. For if he was, the Jews’ free will would no longer be preserved and we would follow Hashem in everything. If his awe and will were so apparent, we would be compelled to follow him without having a real choice.

JLIC at Tel Aviv University does amazing work in bringing Jews together and teaching us all about the Torah we received at Mount Sinai. JLIC, I believe, helps us

students see Hashem, even though he is hidden by the mask of nature and teaches us how to use our free will to bring Hashem into the physical world in whatever way we choose. ■

The OU’s Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus (JLIC) is creating and nurturing vibrant religious communities in Israel to support English-speaking college students and young professionals. JLIC Israel’s goals include: building a warm and welcoming Jewish community for students and young professionals; providing engaging and dynamic Jewish education; providing a supportive home environment for Olim; providing resources for personal and religious growth, including personal mentoring, Aliyah support, religious guidance and leadership development. Current JLIC programs in Israel include: Reichman University - Herzliya; Bar Ilan University - Givat Shmuel; Tel Aviv University; Tel Aviv for Young Professionals; and Jerusalem. Contact: Rabbi Jonathan Shulman, Director of OU-JLIC in Israel shulmanj@ou.org

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Committing to the Torah is the Key

It says in Parshat Yitro:

"ויוצא משה אתהעם לקראת האלהים מןהמחנה"

(ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר" (יט פסוק יז)

Moses led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.

The gemara teaches based off of this pasuk

"ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר", אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב, ואם לאו — שם תהא קבורתכם. (שבת פח.)

Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain and Hashem forced them towards the mountain and said to them: "If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, here will be your burial"

Rav Yitchak Meir Alter of Ger, more commonly known as the Chidushei Harim zy"a brings down a question which is already asked by Tosfos on the Gemara; WHY did Hashem have to force Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah!? They already said נשמע ונשמע!

The Jewish people made it clear that they wanted the torah, there was no need to force them!

The Chidushei Harim gives a profound answer. He explains that this generation of Jews were riding high on inspiration and belief. They had seen miracles in Mitzrayim that no other generation would ever see!

Therefore, of course they were able to accept the Torah out of pure and genuine desire! But what about the generations to come who wouldn't have this level of inspiration and belief? Do they get to opt out of keeping the Torah if they don't feel spiritually connected? This is why the Torah needed to be given with some force.

The acceptance of the Torah cannot just depend on feelings and desires. If it did, then the moment a Jew wakes up not in the mood to be an Eved HaShem, his relationship with Torah goes out the window!

The Ger Rebbe is teaching us that the foundation of properly accepting the Torah must be a combination of desire and commitment. This way, when it gets tough and our desire is weak, we won't just give up – we will remember that commitment we have and be able to continue moving forward in our Avodat HaShem.



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**Is Achdut Really So
Hard To Achieve?**

Parashat Naso is placed in the order so that it is always around the time of Shavuot

and קבלת התורה. Many reasons have been theorized as to why this is, but one of my favorite interpretations is that of the בעל שם טוב, who chooses to focus on one specific pasuk:

"ויקח הכהן מים קדושים בכלי החרס ומן האפר אשר יהיה בקרקע המשכן יקח הכהן..." (במדבר פרק ה פסוק יז)

In this interpretation, every element of this pasuk is hinting to an element in our society. The dirt of the ground represents those in our society who are weaker, disabled, challenged, and so on. The Cohen represents the opposite; those of us who are seen as the pinnacles of society, whether financially, spiritually, intellectually, or any other way. With this in mind, there is great symbolism in the Cohen taking a piece of the dirt. The Torah is reminding us that no matter how different we are and how far

apart we seem in life and stature, there is still much to learn from each other.

Coming up to Shavuot, much of our focus gravitates towards the concept of Achdut, and becoming one as a society and people. However, we also have a tendency to believe that if someone disagrees with us there is no way we can be fully together as one. This can be seen also in our country at this very moment, as political arguments are tearing us apart. The בעל שם טוב wants to remind us that even if we disagree, it is our duty as a people to treat each other with respect and kindness, and remember that there is something new you can learn from every person you meet. If we finally put these concepts into action we can not only come together amongst ourselves, but make the world a better and brighter place for everyone living in it. ■

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