

discovered that even there the border crossing was heavily guarded, and he was forced to scuttle his first plan. As he considered his options, he noticed that not only was the area well-patrolled, but the sentries were in a state of high alert.

It was only four months since the Revolution had erupted and whereas every citizen feared his own neighbor, Red Army soldiers were afraid of their own shadow. Not an especially auspicious climate for breaking the law...until Berel concocted a way to use it to his advantage.

Bravely and defiantly he made a beeline for the guard house and marched off toward his destiny. He strode right past the few merchants lined up at the border crossing, each of them displaying their papers and travel permits. Berel did not have a legitimate document to his name. The only identification papers he possessed had been forged to enable him to avoid the draft; an amateurish job, but the best he had been able to afford, it was the last thing he would present to guards who had instructions to refer all questions directly to jail.

"Halt!" ordered one of the soldiers.

Berel kept marching.

"I said, 'HALT!'"

Berel kept right on marching.

A second soldier aimed his rifle at Berel's heart. Berel could hear the cartridge slide into the breech. But he still continued marching toward Poland, on a collision course with the soldiers and their itchy trigger fingers.

"Papers!" the guard commanded.

Berel looked at him unbelievably. "What did you say?" he asked.

"Papers! Let me see your identification papers!"

"My papers? You want to see MY papers? Do you mean you're asking to see MY papers? Why, I should have you all shot! Don't you know who I am?"

For a moment there was silence. Berel's eyes blazed with anger, fury, wrath and righteous indignation. By this time, he was fairly shouting. "WELL?" he roared. "DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?"

The soldiers looked at one another. Before they could answer, Berel snarled, "Let me see YOUR papers!" and then screamed, "NOW!"

Stunned by the ferocity of his manner and the authority of his voice, the soldiers began fumbling through their pockets.

Berel continued shouting. "I ought to have you shot, and then drawn and quartered for good measure. The absolute insolence! The ultimate impudence! The outrageous audacity! And you call yourselves soldiers?!"

"We didn't know--"

"Silence!" Berel ordered. The guards meekly passed him their papers. He gave them a quick inspection, then threw them on the ground. "Fools! Imbeciles! You can be sure that when I return from my official mission across the border, I will have your HEADS!" he bellowed. Then Berel spat in disgust at their feet, and proceeded to cross the Russian checkpoint into freedom.

As he entered Poland, he couldn't resist a parting shot. When he estimated that he was beyond the range of their rifles, he turned and shouted at the top of his lungs, "NOW DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?"

"N-n-no," they shouted back.

"Berel Kasachkoff, at your service!" He tipped his hat, gave the stunned guardsmen a brief but polite bow, and then ran for his life. (A *Midrash* and a *Ma'aseh* - Hanoeh Teller)

Special Shabuot Edition



Sunday, May 16 5 Sivan 5781	Monday, May 17 6 Sivan 5781	Tuesday, May 18 7 Sivan 5781
Minhah: 6:25, 6:50, 7:50 pm	Shaharit:	Shaharit:
Candles: 7:48 pm	4:40, 8:00 & 9:00 am	4:38, 7:00, 8:00, 8:15, 9:00
Reading: 11:00 pm	Shema by: 8:20 am	Shema by: 8:19 am
	Class: 5:45 pm	Class: 6:50 pm
	Minhah: 6:45 pm	Minhah: 7:50 pm
	Candles: 8:47 pm*	Holiday ends: 8:48/9:20
*pre-existing flame	or before kiddush if before sunset (8:07)	

Shabuot Laws and Customs

- All work is forbidden on the holiday, as on Shabbat. Carrying necessary things and cooking for that day only are permitted. Taking a fire from an existing flame is permitted, but striking a match is forbidden. Lowering a flame is forbidden unless the cooking requires a lower flame. Turning on the stove from the 'off' position is prohibited unless it has a pilot light. Raising or lowering the heat on an electric stove is also prohibited.
- All Night Reading** - One of the few special things we do on this holiday is stay up the entire first night reading and studying Torah. This is to show our eagerness to accept the Torah.
- Azharot** - Our community has a beautiful custom to read the 613 Commandments in poetic form, known as the *Azharot*.
- The Book of Ruth** - Our custom is, also, to read the whole book of Ruth during the two days of Shabuot.
- Yehi Shem** - No *Tahanun* is recited from Wednesday, May 12 through Monday, May 24.
- Lighting candles** - On both nights of the holiday, as on Shabbat, two candles should be lit by the woman of the house.

A Lesson from a Date

Shabuot, is the holiday on which we celebrate the giving of the Torah to the nation of Israel. Upon examination, one would find that the Torah usually lists exactly what day a holiday begins. For example, by Pesah the Torah tells us that "*On the fifteenth day of this month is the Festival of Matzos.*" However, come Shabuot we find something different. The Torah writes "*and you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Shabbat . . . you shall count 50 days and you shall bring a new Minhah offering to Hashem . . . and you shall convoke on this very day – there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves.*" Why does the Torah not tell us the date of Shabuot? Why does the Torah force us to calculate 50 days from the start of our counting of the *Omer* to figure out when Shabuot is?

The Torah is composed of two parts: The written law, the Torah as we see it written in Tanach, and the Oral law, the elaborations, explanations and clarifications of that found in the Tanach, which we have nowadays as the *Talmud*. G-d gave both the Oral and the Written law to the nation of Israel at Sinai. The Oral law was transmitted from generation to generation until the point where the Sages were worried that we would

forget it. They preserved it first as the *Mishnah*, which was a concise, systematic compilation that was to serve as a memory device for later generations. However, later generations began to forget even more, and the Sages determined that writing down even more was necessary. Today, we have this as *Gemara*. Hashem gave these two parts of the Torah, as mentioned, to us at Sinai. That we acknowledge and believe that G-d gave the Torah in its entirety to us at Sinai is essential.

It is to illustrate how central a role the Oral Law plays that the Torah does not mention the date of Shabuot. The Torah terms the starting date for the count of the 50 days "*macharat HaShabbat*," "*the day after the Shabbat*." The Oral law tells us that this is the second day of Pesah, the "Shabbat" referred to in the verse being the first day of Pesah. The Tzedukim, Sadducees, who did not give credence to the Oral law, explained this verse differently. They explained it to mean literally the day after Shabbat. So, they began counting from the first Sunday after Pesah.

When we celebrate Shabuot on the day that we do, we are simultaneously affirming our belief in the Oral law. After all, it is only with the clarification that the Oral law provides that we know when Shabuot falls. Shabuot, the holiday on which we celebrate the fact that we have the Torah, is the day on which we acknowledge that we received all of the Torah, both oral and written. To be sure that we recognize the entirety of the Torah, G-d omitted the exact date on which we celebrate from the written Torah. Only by relying upon the Oral law can we celebrate Shabuot in its proper time. This Shabuot, we should all merit inspiration by the realization that G-d entrusted us with an amazing gift: the Torah. (Rabbi Yehudah Prero)

Change Me

The *Midrash* gives a parable: There was a King who wanted to build a palace and scouted around for an appropriate site. He went into one city after another and in each city the people ran away from him, indicating they did not want the palace in their town. Finally he came to a deserted ghost town and the few people there graciously and gratefully accepted the King's offer to build a palace in their town. The King said, "This is the place where I will build my palace."

The *Midrash* explains the parable: When G-d wanted to give the Torah, he went to the sea and it ran away, as it is written "The sea saw and fled" [*Tehillim 114:3*]. G-d then went to the mountains and they ran away, as it is written "The mountains skipped like rams" [114:4]. He then came to a desolate desert (Sinai), which accepted Him with open arms, and G-d gave the Torah in a desert.

What are our Rabbis trying to tell us with this parable?

Why didn't those cities want the King's palace? Because they knew that building the palace in their cities would impact on their lifestyle. They had certain ways of doing things; they had certain customs. They knew that building a palace in their city would mean changes for them. The ghost town knew that it had nothing. They were saying, as it were, "Remake us. We have nothing anyway. We want you. We'll accept you and we'll take with your palace all the changes that accompany it."

If one wants to accept Torah, he must be like a desert — ready and open with no baggage. Torah takes root in a person who says, "Change me."

Many of us have had the experience of dealing with apparently "religious" brethren and have sometimes come away disappointed. Our reaction invariably is "This is Torah? This is all that Torah can do for a person? I thought Torah was supposed to change a person! Here is a stereotypical guy with 'beard and payos' and he is ripping me off!"

Someone once said, and it is a very important point: "Never judge Judaism by Jews." Judaism is bigger than most any Jew that one will find. If one wants to judge Judaism by

a particular Jew, he must look at the *Hafess Hayim* or Rav Chaim Ozer or Rav Moshe Feinstein. Why? Because they made themselves like a desert and said, as it were, to G-d, "Change me." They let themselves become desolate and open for the Torah to permeate them.

The rest of us are like those cities. We are not really ready to fully change. If we accept it, we want to accept it on our terms. Therefore the Torah cannot change us, because we are not willing to be changed.

This is what our Sages are hinting at when they tell us that Torah was given in a desert. Torah can only really change someone who is willing to be changed. When a person makes himself like a desert in his acceptance of Torah, that is when he can be changed to the extent that G-d can say, "You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I can be glorified." [*Yeshaya 49:3*]

When people are not prepared to make themselves like the desert, the Torah cannot make them over. The result is that sometimes we find people to be less than we would expect. (Rabbi Yissocher Frand)

Opportunity Knocks

It is traditional to spend the entire night of Shabuot reciting or studying Torah until daybreak. This has its origin in the *Midrash* that relates that some of the Israelites overslept on the morning of the Revelation at Sinai, and that Moshe had to arouse them for the momentous event. It is generally assumed that denying ourselves sleep on this night is a kind of rectification for our ancestors' lethargy.

Far more important than being an atonement for our ancestors is the message this custom has for us. It is not unusual for us to fail to take advantage of opportunities. We too may "oversleep" for momentous occasions.

Whether opportunity knocks only the proverbial once, or several times, each missed opportunity is a loss we can ill afford. Some people regret having overlooked opportunities to buy properties that subsequently escalated greatly in value. Since we lack prophetic foresight, we can hardly fault ourselves for this. But there are opportunities which do not require prophecy, such as when Moshe tells the Israelites that tomorrow morning there will be an unprecedented Divine revelation and that they will be hearing the words of G-d directly from the Almighty Himself. Our Sages related this *Midrash* so that we should be aware of our vulnerability, that our inertia may result in our failure to take advantage even of a once-in-the-history-of-the-world event.

To avoid overlooking opportunities, we must forever be on the alert. Habit and routine are our greatest impediments. We may have opportunities for spiritual growth today that were not there yesterday, and if we become complacent we may not notice them. (Growing Each Day)

Caution: Jewish Minds at Work

Berel Kasachkoff, like thousands of his brethren at the time of the Russian Revolution, knew that freedom to live as a Jew and as a human being mandated escaping from the Soviet Union. The Russians knew this as well and accordingly stationed sentries all along their borders.

A problem, Berel conceded, but nothing a Jewish head could not overcome. One might say this was a rather flippant attitude, considering that the border guards were heavily armed and instructed to shoot on sight. Berel, however, had big plans and was not about to let a technicality - no matter how formidable - stand in his way. Thus, armed only with his wit and a prayer on his lips, Berel headed for the Polish frontier.

When Berel arrived at the most secluded spot he could find close to the border, he