



Shavuot Torah Companion  
2020/5780

Welcome to Sha'arei Orah's first *Shavuot Tikkun* Study Companion!

In rabbinic literature, the Torah is compared to many things. The *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (21b) cites Rava who says, based on the verse, "Therefore, write down this song and teach it to the people of Israel" (*Devarim* 31:19), that each individual is obligated to write their own Torah scroll. The "song" is the entire Torah, and the directive to write it down is upon all of us.

One of the many things that make our community unique is the opportunity for each member to share his or her voice. Instead of relying on one sound to compose our communal song, we encourage each person to contribute to a symphony of ideas. Harmony is more powerful than a solo. *Divrei Torah* at Sha'arei Orah, whether on *Shabbat* mornings or on *leil Shavuot*, have always been open to everyone, veterans and rookies alike. But we are always eager to embrace new voices that we haven't heard in the past. It is our sincere hope that with time, more of us can find our individual expression within the orchestra of our community, and contribute a verse to our collective song of Torah.

We hope everyone will use this companion in their learning over *Shavuot* and experience the *Divrei Torah* that our shul has to offer, even while we remain apart. So many wonderful Torah thinkers and scholars have contributed their thoughts and ideas on a wide range of topics. Of course, we look forward to being together again in person next year, in good health and happiness.

A few notes about the items in your box:

1. Pages 3-4 in this packet is our Iron Torah source sheet. We hope you will learn the sources and think of a 2-3 minute *Dvar Torah* to share at our Zoom Iron Torah open mic night on Sunday, May 31st. We are excited to learn from you!
2. Please enjoy the cheesecakes - they have been lovingly baked by members of our community using safe and healthy practices to make and package their entries into the competition. Please make note of the number on the packaging so you can vote for your favorite after *Shabbat/Yom Tov*.
3. Whether you are learning through the night or after lunch one day, we hope these coffee drinks will give you the "pick me up" you need to keep learning.

*Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom!*

Yael Keller and Shmuel Honig  
Sha'arei Orah Board of Directors

Sponsored by Yael and Rabbi Will Keller in memory of Yael's father, Larry Kletter.  
Cosponsored by the Feldblum family in memory of all those  
for whom the community says yizkor.

### Shavuot 5780 - "Iron Torah" Sources

For the "Iron Torah" celebration, please use at least two of the pieces of Torah below to weave together a *D'var Torah* – about *Shavuot*, Revelation, the Jewish people, or a topic of your choice.

שמות יט	Exodus 19
<p>(זט) וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהֵיטֵב הַבֶּקֶר וַיְהִי קִלְתֵּי וּבָרָקִים וַעֲנַן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקַל שֶׁפָּר חֲזַק מְאֹד וַיִּחַרַד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה:</p> <p>(יז) וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם לְקִרְיַת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵיתֵי הָהָר:</p> <p>(יח) וְהָרִי סִינַי עָשָׂן כְּלוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו ה' בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עֲשָׁנוֹ כְּעֵשֶׂן הַכֹּבֶשֶׂן וַיִּחַרַד כָּל הָהָר מְאֹד:</p> <p>(יט) וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֶּׁפָּר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֲזַק מְאֹד מִשְׁמַע יְדִבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל:</p>	<p>16) It happened on the third day, as it became morning, there were thunders and lightning and a heavy cloud upon the mountain; and the voice of ram's horn, very strong, and the whole nation who were in the camp trembled.</p> <p>17) Moshe brought the people out towards God, from the camp, and they stood below the mountain.</p> <p>18) Mount Sinai was entirely as smoke, on account of God having descended upon it in fire; and its smoke rose like a furnace's smoke, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.</p> <p>19) The sound of the ram's horn increased greatly; Moshe would speak, and God would answer him with voice.</p>
בראשית יח	Genesis 18
<p>(א) וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵינוּ מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם:</p> <p>(ב) וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ לְקִרְיַתָּם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֶרְצָה:</p>	<p>1) God appeared to him at the Oaks of Mamre, as he was sitting at the opening of the tent, at the heat of the day.</p> <p>2) He lifted up his eyes and saw – behold! Three men standing over him. So he ran towards them from the opening of the tent, and prostrated upon the earth.</p>
שמות לד	Exodus 34
<p>(לד) וּבָבֹא מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי ה' לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ יֹסִיר אֶת הַמַּסָּוָה עַד יֵצֵאתוּ וַיֵּצֵא וַדְּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא:</p> <p>(לה) וַרְאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת פְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְהָשִׁיב מֹשֶׁה אֶת הַמַּסָּוָה עַל פְּנָיו עַד בֹּאוֹ לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ:</p>	<p>34) When Moshe would come before God to speak with Him, he would put aside the veil until his departure, when he would go out and tell to Bnei Yisrael what he had been commanded.</p> <p>35) Bnei Yisrael saw the face of Moshe, for the skin of Moshe's face radiated, and Moshe replaced the veil upon his face until he returned to speak with Him.</p>

בראשית ח	Genesis 8
(ח) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה מֵאַתּוֹ לִרְאוֹת הַקָּלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה: (ט) וְלֹא מָצְאָה הַיּוֹנָה מְנוּחַ לְכַף רַגְלָהּ וַתָּשָׁב אֵלָיו אֶל הַתֵּבָה כִּי מַיִם עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּקְחָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֹתָהּ אֵלָיו אֶל הַתֵּבָה: (י) וַיַּחַל עוֹד שְׁבַעַת יָמִים אַחֲרָיִם וַיִּסֹּף שַׁלַּח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה מִן הַתֵּבָה: (יא) וַתָּבֵא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה לְעֵת עֶרֶב וְהִנֵּה עָלָה זֵית טָרֶף בְּפִיהָ וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי קָלוּ הַמַּיִם מֵעַל הָאָרֶץ:	8) He sent forth from him the dove, to see if the waters had eased from the face of the earth. 9) but the dove did not find a resting-place for its foot, and she returned to him, to the ark, because water was on the face of the whole land; and he sent forth his hand and took her, and brought her to him into the ark. 10) And he completed another seven further days, and he again sent the dove from the ark. 11) and the dove came to him near evening, and behold! An olive leaf torn off in her mouth; so Noah knew that the water had eased from upon the earth.

שופטים ד	Judges 4
(יח) וַתֵּצֵא יַעֲלֵ לְקִרְיַת סִיסְרָא וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו סוּרָה אֲדֹנָי סוּרָה אֵלַי אֶל תִּירָא וַיִּסַּר אֵלֶיהָ הָאֱהֱלָה וַתִּכְסֶהוּ בַשְּׂמִיכָה: (יט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ הַשְׂקִינִי נָא מַעַט מַיִם כִּי צְמֵאתִי וַתִּפְתַּח אֶת נְאוֹד הַחֶלֶב וַתִּשְׁקֶהוּ וַתִּכְסֶהוּ:	18) Yael went out toward Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not fear!" He turned aside to her, to the tent, and she covered him with a blanket. 19) He said to her, "Provide me, please, a little water, for I am parched." She opened up the skin of milk, and she gave him to drink, and she covered him.

ישעיהו ו	Isaiah 6
(ב) שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים מִמַּעַל לוֹ שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפַיִם לְאַחַד בְּשָׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה פָּנָיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם יְכַסֶּה רַגְלָיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם יַעֲוֹפֶף: (ג) וַיִּקְרָא זֶה אֶל זֶה וַאֲמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ ה' צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָל הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:	2) Seraphs standing above Him; six wings, six wings to each: with two one would cover its face, and with two it would cover its legs, and with two it would fly. 3) and each one called to the other and said, "Holy! Holy! Holy! is Hashem Tzevaot. His glory fills the whole universe."

בראשית כד	Genesis 24
(ד) וַתִּשָּׂא רִבְקָה אֶת עֵינֶיהָ וַתִּרְאֶה אֶת יִצְחָק וַתִּפֹּל מֵעַל הַגָּמֶל: (ה) וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל הַעֲבָד מִי הָאִישׁ הַלֹּזֵה הַהֶלֶךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה לְקִרְיַתְנוּ וַיֹּאמֶר הַעֲבָד הוּא אֲדֹנָי וַתִּקַּח הַצִּעִיף וַתִּתְּכֶס:	64) Rivkah lifted her eyes and saw Yitzchak, and she leapt from upon the camel. 65) She said to the servant, "Who is this man, walking in the field towards us?" and the servant said, "He is my master." She took the veil and covered herself.

**Holy Hand-Washing**  
**Midrash ha-Ne'lam, Rut—Zohar Hadash 86d–87b**  
**Dr. Joel Hecker**

In the last several months we have all become experts on hand-washing technique: we've designated certain 20-second jingles that we hum in our heads; we count 'One-Mississippi, Two Mississippi...' or adopted other methods so that we ensured that soap will have successfully weakened the structure of Covid-19, disabling its ability to sicken us or others. No doubt, many of us have seen sundry Jewish memes that draw attention to the overlap between coronavirus protection and halakhic hand-washing. In the following, I'd like to guide us through a teaching from the *Zohar* that emphasizes the importance of hand-washing by delineating the cosmic correspondences of human hands and the divine forces that constitute our reality.

The teaching appears in the midst of a long homily, delivered by a young man thought to be illiterate, an ignoramus. The setting is an inn, at which two rabbis were settling for the evening. They meet the innkeeper's daughter who starts weeping shortly after their arrival. Upon enquiry, they discover the cause of the distress from the innkeeper, the young woman's father. He explains that his daughter had recently married a young man, who had caught the father's attention when he leapt down from a rooftop just in order to hear *Kaddish*. Seeing this earnest dedication, the innkeeper apparently quickly set up the match without further investigation. Soon enough, however, it came to light that the young man did not even know how to recite *Birkat ha-Mazon*! As the scene unfolds, the young husband apparently overhears and, leaping into the room (he does do a lot of leaping, this young man does) he asserts that he actually knows quite a bit, not only about the Grace after Meals, but also about a whole range of subjects surrounding meal-time practice. Many pages later, the story concludes with the rabbis astonished at the young man's extraordinary erudition in *halakhah* and kabbalah, prompting them to organize a new wedding feast, a meal at which *sheva berakhot* could be recited again, presumably because it occurred within the first year of the couple's marriage.

I direct our attention to the second rule of the young man's presentation:

“Laving one's hands before the meal. What is the explanation? It is because eating calls for cleanliness just like the ministering angels above. For this is as Rav Hamnuna Sava said, 'What is the meaning of *Man ate the bread of the mighty* (Psalms 78:25)? Bread eaten by the ministering angels. What is adduced from this? As the ministering angels eat in holiness, purity, and cleanliness, so should the Jewish people eat in holiness and cleanliness. This is as is written: *You shall sanctify yourselves* (Leviticus 11:44) ...”

Midrashic traditions read this verse to mean that in the desert, after rites of purification, the Israelites ate angelic food, manna from heaven. Elsewhere in the *Zohar*, the verse is interpreted as an indication that they absorbed heavenly wisdom, eating being a metaphor that connotes their transformation. Here, we have the teaching that we should be emulating the angels in our

eating practice, an impulse that we find in the daily *qedushah* as well— “Let us sanctify Your Name in the world just as it is sanctified in the heavens...”

“Further, whoever eats without laving his hands, Attribute of Suffering will rest upon him and will constitute his meal—impure. As for *Shekhinah*, what does She say? *Do not eat bread from Evil Eye, nor desire its delicacies* (Proverbs 23:6). What is *Evil Eye*? *Yetser ha-ra*, evil impulse. Thus, whoever eats without laving his hands, that food becomes *bread from Evil Eye*.”

If the previous paragraph provided positive inducement to wash one’s hands before eating, the homily has quickly turned to warning of the dangers of not doing so. Marshalling a confluence of different forces, the *Zohar* enlists impurity, the evil eye, and the *yetser ha-ra* as dangers consequent upon not washing one’s hands before eating. Liberal forms of Judaism generally do not recognize biblical or rabbinic assertions of metaphysical impurity, reinterpreting those values in moral terms when it’s viable. The same largely holds true for most Modern Orthodox Jews who, following Maimonides, treat categories of purity and impurity as normative, rather than descriptive of some supernatural state of the body. If, on the other hand, one lives in a universe in which these forces are operative, then this kind of rhetoric has real power. Moreover, I’d like to suggest that just as when we read fiction or watch a movie we are willing to suspend disbelief, in order to experience the pull of the plot, imagery, and thematics, I would encourage us to do the same here, bracketing potential disbelief in the supernatural to “experience” its array of dynamics.

If we look at the three dangers, we see the following pattern. Suffering befalls the person on account of the impurity that his unwashed hands impart to the food—an external and metaphysical property. The second danger, when one reads the verse according to its plain meaning, in which one is enjoined not to eat food from *ra ayin*—someone parsimonious—is also external, but this time the threat is social, rather than metaphysical. In the third aspect of the warning, it is the *yetser ha-ra*, the internal and psychological evil impulse residing in all of us, that poses the danger. Through associating the three with each other, they become mutually reinforcing, each magnifying the valence of its neighbor. Lastly, because the young man construes *ra ayin* to mean evil eye, he effectively conflates ethics and metaphysical forces.

“This follows Rav Hamnuna Sava’s teaching: Two attributes stand before a person’s table—one, Attribute of Goodness; the other, Attribute of Evil. If a person sanctifies his hands and recites the blessing, Attribute of Goodness declares: ‘This is the table of the blessed Holy One!’ and rests its hands upon his head and says, ‘You are my servant—servant of the Omnipresent.’ ... But if one does not lave his hands before eating, Attribute of Evil says, ‘That one’s mine!’ It rests upon him at once, rendering him impure, and his food is called *Bread from Evil Eye*.”

This paragraph personifies the two possible outcomes of washing and not washing, asserting that a divine force and a demonic force attend and scrutinize every individual’s meal. If one has behaved as prescribed, a public announcement is made on high, declaring this person (and their table), part of the team of holiness. If not in compliance, however, the individual and their

table are rendered impure—both them and their food. Echoing the well-known teaching that two angels accompany a person home from shul on Friday evenings, to inspect the Shabbos-ready condition of each household, here the heavenly surveillance has been heightened, extending to every meal before which one must wash. The result is binary: ‘You are my [holy] servant’ vs. ‘That one’s mine!’ [now a denizen of the realm of darkness and impurity]. The reader is encouraged to ask themselves, ‘What kind of table are *you* sitting at?’

“It once happened that a man had invited a poor person over to eat. The latter saw that his host had not laved his hands before eating. The poor man arose from the table and departed. The other called him, saying, ‘Come back to your place and eat!’ He replied, ‘God forbid that I should eat with you, for of you is written *Do not eat bread from one with an evil eye....* Not only that, your food is impure! It is written: *do not become impure with them, ונטמתם (ve-nitmetem), becoming impure, through them (Isaiah 11:43).* Without an א (*alef*), referring to one upon whom the spirit of Evil Eye has come to rest—he absorbs stopped-up impurity, with no recourse at all. ...”

Reinforcing the stricture with a story, no new theme is introduced, but a new resonance is added through recourse to letter mysticism. This teaching builds upon the Talmudic teaching that eating impure food not only makes one impure but causes one [perhaps one’s heart] to become obstructed (BT *Yoma* 39a). What allowed the Talmudic text to read *ve-nitmetem*, becoming impure, as (*ve-nittamtem*), becoming stopped-up, in this fashion, was the missing א, *alef*. In kabbalah, the *alef* is not merely the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but rather the paradigmatic linguistic symbol for Divinity. The rich man’s dismissive attitude toward the ritual of handwashing becomes a sign of his lacking God’s own Self in his life. Ritual washing is now a social and mythical marker identifying whose food is holy and whose impure.

“יד (*Yad*), Hand, must be laved—anything called *yad*. Fourteen phalanges called *yad*, and this is the meaning of *For יד (yad), hand, upon Yah’s throne (Exodus 16)*. This has been established by Rav Hamnuna Sava with the alphabet technique—using first and last letters—called אב ש (at bash), from ה (*he*) onward. All fourteen phalanges in the secret of the alphabet from ה (*he*) onward—called ‘*yad* phalanges.’ Fourteen serve fourteen, so that everything of the right is in the left, and of the left in the right. Thus, hand-laving contains one in the other.”

Here we begin to encounter some of the *Zohar’s* more challenging and obscure approaches to Torah. Several different elements need to be unpacked here. The text draws our attention to the essential correspondence between a thing and its name—the Hebrew word *yad*, meaning ‘hand,’ and its constituent segments (phalanges). When broken down according to the numerical values of its letters, the word יד, (*yad*), hand, equals fourteen, equivalent to the number of phalanges of the fingers and thumbs, manifesting—to the *Zohar’s* conception—the omniscience of nature, but also the essentialist quality of Hebrew, with numerical value reflecting semantics.

The verse from Exodus (17:16) reads in full: כִּי־יָדָּ עַל־כִּסֵּי הַמֶּלֶכֶת לַיהוָה בְּעַמְלֵק מִדָּר דָּר, *For hand upon Yah's throne, War for YHVH against Amalek from generation to generation* (Exodus 17:16). This line appears at the end of the story of the battle with Amalek, the quintessentially evil nation who attacked the newly-freed Israelites, focusing their strike against the children and Israelites straggling in the rear. One of the enigmas of the verse are the ostensibly abbreviated forms of כס (*kes*), rather than כסא (*kisse*), meaning throne, and יה- rather than the fully spelled out tetragrammaton (*YHVH*). As explained by Nahmanides in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century, the missing letters, leaving both God's name and throne incomplete, represent the way in which God's presence in this world will not be whole until Amalek has been defeated. Until then, the demonic realm has its hand upon the throne, weakening it.

The last obscurity in this paragraph arises from the use of the *At-bash* code. The *At-bash* cipher is a particular type of monoalphabetic cipher formed by taking the alphabet and mapping it to its reverse, so that the first letter becomes the last letter, the second letter becomes the second to last letter, and so on.

In English, that type of cipher appears as follows:

<b>Plain</b>	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
<b>Cipher</b>	Z	Y	X	W	V	U	T	S	R	Q	P	O	N	M	L	K	J	I	H	G	F	E	D	C	B	A

While in Hebrew, the exchanges appear thus:

<b>Plain</b>	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ת
<b>Cipher</b>	ת	ש	ר	ק	צ	פ	ע	ס	נ	מ	ל	כ	י	ט	ח	ז	ו	ה	ד	ג	ב	א

The *Zohar* here begins the code with the fifth letter, ה, reaching fourteen pairings when it reaches the letter צ, which corresponds to the letter ה. These fourteen pairs represent the reciprocity of the hand of Amalek which will ultimately be tamed by the hand of God. At present, these forces in the divine universe have a certain reciprocity, as represented similarly by the left and right hands. When one washes with a washing cup, each hand washes the other, in recognition that there is a mysterious balance in the universe of positive and negative forces, their tension to be resolved and harmonized in some ideal end-time.

“One should raise one’s hands when reciting the blessing after laving, sanctifying the hands. This is as is written: *Lift up your hands in sanctity and bless YHVH* (Psalms 134:2). Why? Well, it is because fingers are an image of the supernal realm... four fingers, joined as one, have three phalanges each—mystery of the celestial chariot.”



The *Zohar* turns next to the isomorphic relationship of the human body to the divine realm. One of the central teachings of the kabbalah draws upon the image of God's chariot, first envisioned by the prophet Ezekiel (and read as the *haftarah* on the first day of *Shavu'ot*). In the course of history, this image was transmuted from a heavenly vision into a symbol of any entity that serves as a support for God. Thus, in medieval kabbalah, each limb of the human body, if used for holy purposes, can serve as a chariot for Divinity. The idea of a 'chariot' has been effectively decentralized and made portable, no longer restricted to a vertical axis, located in the heavens. The arm that wears tefillin; the tongue, lips, and teeth that utter words of Torah or prayer; even sexual organs when used for holy purpose; all of these serve as vehicles that support the presence of God in the world. In this paragraph of our text, it is the four fingers, their very 'four-ness,' that stand as symbols of the chariot since the chariot in Ezekiel was borne by four creatures with four faces. We see here a conjugation of elements of the divine realm with elements of the human realm and with Jewish practice. The 'chariot' is now an element of spiritual consciousness, actualized through religious performance.

“Similarly, the Ineffable Name of four letters—numbering twelve letters. Thus, the Ineffable Name, with its letters, corresponds to twelve phalanges—each and every phalanx called a letter.”

Our discussion of this homily concludes with the ultimate claim for the fingers of the hand—that the four fingers symbolize the four letters of God's name, *YHWH*. No longer merely a support or a prop for God's presence, the *Zohar* asks us to imagine that our hands, responsible for supporting, lifting, caressing, or God forbid, striking, are God's agents in this world, enabled by us to do good or ill. The “twelve letters” reference signifies the three-fold utterance of the tetragrammaton in the priestly blessing. Three verses with one mention of God's name each yields twelve, and this notion of a twelve-letter divine name appears prominently through Jewish mystical and magical literature. It is no coincidence that the *Birkat Kohanim* (Priestly Blessing) is recited with one's arms and fingers outstretched. The text has effectively brought in another tie-in to a ritual involving the hands, reflecting the layering style that characterizes the kabbalistic approach to the biblical text and to Jewish ritual—in technical terms, the over-determined symbolism of kabbalah.

This concludes our study of the *Zohar's* treatment of the significance of hand-washing. While our experience of hand-washing during the pandemic has focused on the washing itself, the quality of soap vs. sanitizer, the pandemic has also brought to light the significance of our hands, those limbs used to greet, now potentially weaponized. How I long, truly, just to shake a friend's hand, to feel that contact and friendship. The *Zohar* encourages us to think of our hands differently, as divine symbols which, even in our solitude, allows us to connect, at least with God.

## Shavuot and Matan Torah Shmuel Honig

In the rabbinic tradition, *Shavuot* is called “*zman matan Torateinu*,” the time of the giving of the Torah. The *gemara* in *Shabbat* 86b recounts a debate regarding the exact date on which we received the Torah. All agree, based on the descriptions given in the Biblical text, that the Revelation occurred near the beginning of *Sivan*, on either the 6th or 7th day of that month. The majority opinion determines that the correct date is the 6th of *Sivan*, the same date that we observe *Shavuot*.

However, none of the passages in the Torah about *Shavuot* make any reference to receiving the Torah. Furthermore, in the Torah portion that we read on the second day of *Shavuot* in the diaspora, we are charged to remember that we were once slaves in Egypt, not the Revelation at Sinai (*Devarim* 16:12). How are we to understand this seemingly glaring omission?

In an attempt to answer this question, we will look at another textual oddity, this time in the Torah portion that we read on the first day of *Shavuot* (*Shemot* 19). In advance of God’s Revelation on Mount Sinai, God instructs Moshe to tell *Bnei Yisrael* to purify themselves, wash their clothing, and be “ready” for the third day. In addition, God tells Moshe to make a barrier around the mountain and to warn the people that they are to not touch it, lest they be liable for the death penalty. The Torah then records that Moshe does purify the people and oversee their cleansing, but there is no explicit mention of him warning the people about ascending the mountain. Later, during the beginning stages of the Revelation, God calls to Moshe again, and seems to repeat the instruction to warn the people against getting too close. Moshe responds that they cannot get too close, because of the barrier that God told him to erect. God then repeats, for a third time, to ensure that the people stay away, and Moshe obliges and talks to them. The consensus understanding of these passages is to take for granted that Moshe did, in fact, warn the people the first time, even though the text does not say so explicitly. If this is the case, then why does God repeat the warning later?

*Rashi* explains, based on the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael* (19:24), that there is a rule in Jewish law that requires warnings about transgressions to be given both at the time of learning and at the time of action. Therefore, God needed to warn the people again at “game time” for the warning to take effect. However, I would like to suggest an alternate reading of this episode.

In the first warning given to Moshe, God says that when the horn sounds, the people are allowed to go up the mountain (*Shemot* 19:13). This would seem to imply that the injunction was only temporary, lasting only for the duration of the three days of preparation. In the subsequent passages, as the Revelation begins, the horn is, in fact, sounded to mark the occasion. God then interrupts the proceedings to tell Moshe to warn the people again. On a textual level there seems room to argue that this second warning was not a repetition of the first, but a new warning altogether. Originally, God intended for the people to get close after purifying

themselves; in fact, the word “*Ya’alu*” (ibid) might even be translated as “*shall* go up the mountain.” But when the time came, God had a “change of heart.” If we look even closer at the text, we see that the first warning included instructions to kill any and all violators. But in the second and third warnings, it sounds like God plans to take action directly, almost automatically (*Shemot* 19: 21, 24).

What happened? Why did God extend the injunction to last through the Revelation itself? Did *Bnei Yisrael* do something to compel God’s reconsideration? The only clue we have in the intervening passages is that *Bnei Yisrael* “trembled” out of fear (*Shemot* 19: 16, and possibly 18 as well). This indicates, perhaps, that despite their preparation, the people were still not ready for the experience of God’s Revelation. Three days of physical purification were not enough for the awe and wonder that ultimately greeted them, and so the people were emotionally and spiritually overwhelmed. God recognized this, and realized that, not being spiritually ready, the people would surely die if they came too close, as originally instructed. Even with Moshe’s assurance that the barrier that prevented them from approaching was still in the way, God wanted to be extra careful; if they came too close after the initial trepidation wore off, their tragic fate would befall them naturally and directly from God, and there was nothing they could do to prevent it.

Three days is not sufficient to prepare ourselves for an encounter with God. We need time to prepare emotionally, intellectually, spiritually. Perhaps this is why we count 49 days, all the way from the day after the anniversary of the Exodus, until *Shavuot*. It is during this extended period that we are to make the spiritual transformations necessary to get closer to God. Devarim 16 therefore instructs us to remember our slavery in Egypt, to remind us that at the Revelation itself, we were not sufficiently prepared: at our core, we were still slaves to Egypt, and did not receive the Torah on account of our worthiness at that time. Rather, we received it on condition that we would become a “kingdom of priests” (*Shemot* 19:6), an accomplishment that we apparently had not yet achieved.

With this backdrop, we can now perhaps understand why there is no mention of receiving the Torah in connection with the holiday of *Shavuot*. *Shavuot* is not about receiving the Torah per se, but about the growth necessary to fully experience it. After all, the name of the holiday itself means the “Festival of Weeks,” implying that it has more to do with the journey, not the destination. We can only fully experience the wonder of God and Torah if we are spiritually ready to embrace them.

*Chag Sameach!*

## Milk and Meat at Shavuot?!?! What Could it Mean?

Rabbi Will Keller

Writing for last year's *Shavuot* learning, I focused on the tradition of spreading greenery in *shul* as a method of inviting us to transport ourselves to *Har Sinai* and *Matan Torah*. This year I was drawn by another sensory element of *Shavuot*, because I believe the lessons from our holidays appear not only in our text but reverberate into every aspect of our celebrations. The *Minhagim* and *Halachot* of *Shavuot* as they exist today - reciting *Megilat Ruth*, decorating our homes and *shuls* with greenery, staying up late or all night for a *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* - create a unique experience for us each to celebrate renewing our relationship with Torah.

Our tradition generally places a heavy emphasis on meat for holiday meals. The Talmudic maxim אין שמחה אלא בבשר (פסחים דף קט) - there is no joy without meat - is understood by many to mean that our holiday meals are elevated by eating meat. So the prevalence of dairy meals on *Shavuot* has always piqued my curiosity and I believe it is worthy of exploration.

The custom of dairy during *Shavuot* is traced back to several sources. The numerical value of חלב/*chalav* – ח *chet* (8) - ל *lamed* (30) - ב *bet* (2) - adds up to forty, which corresponds to the time Moshe spent on *Har Sinai* receiving the Torah, giving way to the connection that Torah is like milk. Another explanation is that the Jews did not yet know the laws of *shechita* or *kashrut*, and thus, before *Matan Torah*, ate both Kosher and non-Kosher animals without the proper preparation. Once learning the rules of *kashrut*, it took time to slaughter animals ritually, and prepare the vessels needed for cooking meat. This meant dairy was the first meal the Jews partook of after receiving the Torah largely for practical reasons. There are other sources attributed to be the genesis of the connection between *Shavuot* and dairy. One particular explanation spoke to me about the nature of our relationship to Torah and *Shavuot*.

The *Rema* connects the eating of dairy to an unexpected place, by tying the custom of dairy to meat with the *Korbanot* of *Pesach*.

<i>Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim</i> 494:3	שולחן ערוך אורח חיים תצ"ה:ג
We have the custom to spread out plants on Shavuot in the synagogue and in houses, as a memory for the happiness of the receiving of the Torah. We have a custom everywhere to eat dairy food on the first day of Shavuot. And it seems to me that the reason is: It is like the two foods that are taken on the evening of Pesach, a reminder of the <i>Korban Pesach</i> and a reminder of the <i>Korban Chagiga</i> , so too we eat a dairy food followed by a meat food, and we bring with them two loaves on the table in place of the <i>Mizbeach</i> , and thus there will be a reminder of the two loaves that were brought on "The day of the <i>Bikkurim</i> ."	נוהגין בכל מקום לאכול מאכלי חלב ביום ראשון של שבועות ונראה לי הטעם שהוא כמו השני תבשילין שלוקחין בליל פסח זכר לפסח וזכר לחגיגה כן אוכלים מאכל חלב ואח"כ מאכל בשר וצריכין להביא עמם ב' לחם על השלחן שהוא במקום המזבח ויש בזה זכרון לשני הלחם שהיו מקריבין ביום הבכורים:

In outlining the *Minhagim* for the *chag*, the *Rema* explains that *Shavuot* is connected to, and in some ways an extension of, *Pesach*, and as such, just as we acknowledge both the *Korban Pesach* and the *Korban Chagiga* with their own symbols, so to the two loaves of showbread also must be reintroduced today, in the form of a dairy meal followed by a meat meal.

I believe the intersection between milk and meat and *Shavuot* is no mistake. The *Kedushas Levi*, Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, says that the essence of *Shavuot* consists of it being the anniversary of the Jewish people's finest moment, the moment when they enthusiastically accepted the gift of the Torah. So in celebration of our foundational documents it makes sense that we would also explore one of the foundational paradigms. Humans, made in the image of G?d, are given the ability to imitate many of G?d's powers of creation and destruction.

Rabbi Yitz Greenberg shares in *The Triumph of Life* that:

The human is so Godlike that, at last, life can grasp the Divine willed direction and outcome of all existence. Now that humans understand, they have the power and the choice to join into these rhythms and amplify them – or to go against them and even seek to defeat them.

The most striking expression of this step up is the law of *tzaar ba'alei chayim*. As long as they are not wasted, animals may be used, as in labor, and their products, as in milk, eggs, eaten. They may be even killed and used up for human benefit – as in eating meat or in providing fat, chemicals, healing materials, leather for clothes and shelter.

However, it is forbidden to cause any unnecessary suffering to living things – at all times – even in the process of killing or in permitted use of them for the sake of human beings.

G?d gave us the gift of being executors of precious resources, charged with an awesome power to create, build up, sustain and nurture others. At the same time we also have the capacity, and in some cases the directive, to destroy that which intervenes with our growth, and divine endorsement to kill and consume certain living creatures in service of our own hunger. These weighty choices of life and death are represented by the dairy and meat of our *Shavuot* meals.

The confluence of the energies of life and death on *Shavuot* remind us that the Torah is the algorithm by which we balance these two forces, that a greater system is available to us should we rely on the Torah and guidance from G?d. *Shavuot* provides us the chance to assess the balance we strike with the power to create or destroy, prompting us to realign our thoughts and actions in such a way that we see ourselves as Torah observant Jews carrying out G?d's will.

This year we are all reassessing how to be the best version of ourselves in our new realities, and in this way I hope *Shavuot* serves as a welcome opportunity to acknowledge our G?d given ability to build up or destroy and use those powers in balance to benefit ourselves and the world.

## Experiencing Loneliness Yael Keller

Solitude. Does there exist a more anguishing problem for human beings, for the Creator, for the Jew? ...

And this is the secret and the power of the Talmud: it's characters are alive, present. They speak to us as though they were our contemporaries, as though our problems concerned them and theirs us. I follow Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai into his cave and he is less alone, and I too; I listen to Rabbi Akiva and his voice touches me, as the voice of Rabbi Zeira stuns me. Their past is not my past, but my present.

**Elie Weisel**, *Between Memory and Hope*, pgs 1, 4

Tonight I want us to examine a story about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his isolation in his cave. As you read through the story in the *gemara* from *massechet* Shabbat (33b-34a), I encourage you to think about ways that his story, his past, relates to our present. I tried to leave questions (and some suggested answers) below many of the blocks of text to guide your study.

The story is told in three parts. The first is the event that pushes Rabbi Shimon into isolation, the second is the experience of isolation itself, and the third is the (sometimes messy) re-entry into the world.

### Part 1. The events leading to isolation

The Gemara relates... an incident that took place **when Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosei and Rabbi Shimon were sitting, and Yehuda, son of converts, sat beside them. Rabbi Yehuda opened and said: How pleasant are the actions of this nation, the Romans, as they established marketplaces, established bridges, and established bathhouses. Rabbi Yosei was silent. Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai responded and said: Everything that they established, they established only for their own purposes. They established marketplaces, to place prostitutes in them; bathhouses, to pamper themselves; and bridges, to collect taxes from all who pass over them. Yehuda, son of converts, went and related their statements to his household, and those statements continued to spread until they were heard by the monarchy. They ruled and said: Yehuda, who elevated the Roman regime, shall be elevated and appointed as head of the Sages, the head of the speakers in every place. Yosei, who remained silent, shall be exiled from his home in Judea as punishment, and sent to the city of Tzippori in the Galilee. And Shimon, who denounced the government, shall be killed.**

דִּיתְבִי רַבִּי יְהוּדָה וְרַבִּי יוֹסֵי  
וְרַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, וַיִּתֵּיב יְהוּדָה בֶּן  
גְּרָיִם גְּבִיָּהּ. פָּתַח רַבִּי יְהוּדָה  
וְאָמַר: כַּמָּה נְאֻמִּים מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שֶׁל  
אוּמָה זוֹ: תִּקְנוּ שׁוּקִים, תִּקְנוּ  
גְּשָׁרִים, תִּקְנוּ מְרַחְצוֹת. רַבִּי  
יוֹסֵי שָׁתַק. נִעְנָה רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן  
בֶּן יוֹחָאי וְאָמַר: כָּל מָה  
שֶׁתִּקְנוּ, לֹא תִקְנוּ אֶלָּא לְצוּרְךָ  
עֲצָמָן. תִּקְנוּ שׁוּקִין —  
לְהוֹשִׁיב בָּהֶן זִנוּת, מְרַחְצוֹת  
— לְעַדן בָּהֶן עֲצָמָן, גְּשָׁרִים  
— לְטוֹל מִהֶן מַכֶּס. הֲלֵךְ  
יְהוּדָה בֶּן גְּרָיִם וְסִיפֵר  
דְּבָרֵיהֶם, וְנִשְׁמְעוּ לְמַלְכוּת.  
אָמְרוּ: יְהוּדָה שְׁעִילָה —  
יִתְעַלָּה. יוֹסֵי שָׁתַק — יִגְלָה  
לְצִיפּוֹרִי. שִׁמְעוֹן שָׁגִינָה —  
יִהָרַג.

## Part II. Experiencing Isolation

Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai and his son, Rabbi Elazar, went and hid in the study hall. Every day Rabbi Shimon's wife would bring them bread and a jug of water and they would eat. When the decree intensified, Rabbi Shimon said to his son: Women are easily impressionable and, therefore, there is room for concern lest the authorities torture her and she reveal our whereabouts. They went and they hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob tree was created for them as well as a spring of water. They would remove their clothes and sit covered in sand up to their necks. They would study Torah all day in that manner. At the time of prayer, they would dress, cover themselves, and pray, and they would again remove their clothes afterward so that they would not become tattered. They sat in the cave for twelve years. Elijah the Prophet came and stood at the entrance to the cave and said: Who will inform bar Yoḥai that the emperor died and his decree has been abrogated?

אָזל הוא ובריה, טשו בי מדרשא.  
כל יומא הוה מתא להו דביתהו  
ריפתא וכוזא דמיא וכרכי. כי  
תקיף גזירתא אמר ליה לבריה:  
נשים דעתן קלה עליהן, דילמא  
מצערי לה ומגליא לן. אזלו טשו  
במערתא. איתרחיש ניסא איברי  
להו חרובא ועינא דמיא, והוּו  
משלחי מנייהו והוּו יתבי עד  
צואריהו בחלא. כולי יומא גרסי.  
בעידן צלוי לבשי מיכסו ומצלו,  
והדר משלחי מנייהו כי היכי דלא  
ליבלו. איתבו תריסר שני  
במערתא. אתא אליהו וקם  
אפיתחא דמערתא, אמר: מאן  
לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר  
ובטיל גזירתיה.

Questions for thought:

1. What sustains you, as the carob tree and water sustained Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar? Physically? Emotionally?
2. Do you feel that this sustenance is miraculous?
3. Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar took off their clothes. What do we take off in our social distancing? Are there non-physical things we can take off (ex - our “game face”)?
4. Can we be more naked, more true to ourselves when we are distanced? What do we have to put back on when we return to the world? Do we really have to put everything back on?

## Part III. Emerging from the Cave, Part 1

They emerged from the cave, and saw people who were plowing and sowing. Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said: These people abandon eternal life of Torah study and engage in temporal life for their own sustenance. The Gemara relates that every place that Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar directed their eyes was immediately burned. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Did you emerge from the cave in order to destroy My world? Return to your cave. They again went and sat there for twelve months. They said: The judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts for twelve months. Surely their sin was atoned in that time.

נפקו, חזו אינשי דקא כרבי זרעי,  
אמרו: מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין  
בחיי שעה. כל מקום שנותנין  
עיניהן מיד נשרף. יצתה בת קול  
ואמרה להם: להחריב עולמי  
יצאתם?! חזרו למערתכם! הדור  
אזול איתבו תריסר ירחי שתא.  
אמרו: משפט רשעים בגיהנם  
שנים עשר חדש.

My thoughts: When they leave the cave Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar can't reconcile their values with others' actions. They can't recognize how a shared vision - a love of Torah and *mitzvot* - might play out in different ways for different people. Fire leaves their eyes, which is, I think, a way of saying they are just too intense. We intensify when we are distanced - both our good traits and our less tolerant ones. Leaving the cave, then, is hard.

Questions for thought:

1. Imagine we had the ability to shoot fire out of our eyes. What would be on fire?
2. Do you think that Rabbi Shimon always felt this way about those who work and are religious? Did this change in the cave? Would the things you want to set on fire be different or the same pre/post self isolation?
3. Where does the fire come from inside of you?

### Part III. Emerging from the Cave, Part 2

**A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Emerge from your cave. They emerged. Everywhere that Rabbi Elazar would strike, Rabbi Shimon would heal.** Rabbi Shimon said to Rabbi Elazar: **My son, you and I suffice for the entire world**, as the two of us are engaged in the proper study of Torah.

יִצְתָּה בֵּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: צְאוּ  
מִמְעַרְתְּכֶם! נִפְקוּ. כָּל הַיָּכָא דְהוּא  
מְחִי רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר, הָוָה מִסִּי רַבִּי  
שְׁמַעוֹן. אָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי, דִּי לְעוֹלָם אֲנִי  
וְאַתָּה.

My thoughts: Rabbi Shimon is no longer setting the world on fire, but he still thinks that his way is the only way; that it is only because of the intense way in which Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar learn Torah that the world exists. He still can't recognize other ways of honoring Torah and *mitzvot*.

### Part III. Emerging from the Cave, Part 3

**As the sun was setting on Shabbat eve, they saw an elderly man who was holding two bundles of myrtle branches and running at twilight. They said to him: Why do you have these? He said to them: In honor of Shabbat.** They said to him: **And let one suffice.** He answered them: **One is corresponding to: "Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), and one is corresponding to: "Observe the Shabbat day, to keep it holy" (Deuteronomy 5:12).** Rabbi Shimon said to his son: **See how beloved the mitzvot are to Israel. Their minds were put at ease** and they were no longer as upset that people were not engaged in Torah study.

בְּהַדִּי פְּנִיא דְמַעְלֵי שַׁבְּתָא חֲזוּ  
הֵוָא סָבָא דְהוּא נִקְיִט תְּרֵי מִדְּאֲנִי  
אָסָא וְרַהִיט בֵּין הַשְּׁמֶשׁוֹת. אָמְרוּ:  
לִיָּה: הֲנִי לְמָה לָךְ? אָמַר לְהוּ:  
לְכַבּוּד שַׁבְּת. וְתִיִּסְגִי לָךְ בְּחֻד! —  
חַד כְּנָגֵד "זְכוֹר" וְחַד כְּנָגֵד  
"שְׁמֹר". אָמַר לִיָּה לְבְרִיה: חֲזִי  
כְּמָה חֲבִיבִין מִצְוֹת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל.  
אִיתִיבָה דְעֵתִיָּיהוּ.



## Conclusion:

This story and its conclusion feel so resonant to me in a host of ways - I hear stories, expressed in outrage, from so many - who didn't wear a mask when they went out, who had a secret *minyán* in their home, who stepped too close in line at the grocery store. And on a lighter note for when we can leave our self isolation with more confidence - who chews really loudly or sings to themselves in line when you are used to the quiet of your cave? As we re-enter the world we have to struggle with these transitions. We have to find ways not only to tone down our intensity, but to recognize the good in others' actions.

And, perhaps to realize the good we have experienced in our caves of isolation. Just as Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar honed their Torah learning and gave it their undivided attention, I believe we, too, have gained something through this experience. I have enjoyed having lunch with Will and Ariella, Davidi and Meira every day. Through the distance we have gotten more FaceTime with grandparents and aunts and uncles. We have had more time to enjoy together without the rush of commuting and extracurriculars and *shabbat* guests.

I think that the quote from Dr. Ruth Calderon below sums up this tension. She has a book of talmudic tales, *A Bride for One Night*, in which she explores some famous stories from the *gemara*. She retells each story as a work of fiction, helping us get a better glimpse behind the terse words of the *gemara*. Here she concludes her rendition of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's account:

"This transition may be compared to awakening from a dream to the reality of daily interactions. It is hard to give up the dream, and it is not readily apparent which world is more real. The test confronting those in the cave is that of learning how to return to the outside world. Will they be able to integrate both worlds without losing one of them? Will they be able to fulfill the verse from tehilim "We were as dreamers" (Psalms 126:1)? To dream and live in the real world at one and the same time?"

Ultimately, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son demonstrate that those who remain devoted to a creative cultural tradition will emerge victorious against any conquering power.

~Ruth Calderon, *A Bride for One Night*, pg 113

I pray that we are able to take the sustenance we gained in our isolation and to leave behind anything that wasn't serving us; that we can reconcile our socially distanced world with our new reality to create a creative cultural tradition so we, too, can emerge victorious.

## Jewish Unity at Har Sinai Rabbi Joel Kessler

The *midrash* tells us that the opportunity for *kabbalat haTorah* was not just for the Jewish people. He first offered the Torah to the other nations, and before accepting, they asked “what does this Torah of Yours contain?” Amazingly, Hashem chooses an example for each nation that was the exact opposite of their nature and inclination. To one nation, whose entire existence was based upon stealing and thievery, He said – *lo tignof*, do not steal. Of course, they rejected Hashem immediately. To a second nation for whom murder was a natural way of life, He said – *lo tirtzach*, do not kill. They, too, rejected the Torah. And to Amon and Moav, the descendants of Lot, whose whole existence resulted from incest between Lot and his daughters, He said *lo tinaf*, do not commit adultery.

Of course, we all know the joke about what happened when He came to the Jews. When Hashem asked us if we would accept His commandments, we asked, “Okay, how much?” Hashem responded, “They’re free.” We responded, “Okay, we’ll take ten of them.”

Of course, we know what our real response was. We didn’t ask what was in it. We said “*na’ase v’nishma*.” While it is true that we responded properly, and the others rejected Hashem, why did He select the specific law that would have been most difficult for that nation to observe? Would we have responded with the resounding “*na’ase v’nishma*” if we were faced with the challenge of our most difficult task? And what, in fact, is that area that presents the greatest difficulty for us?

Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht *ztz”l* answered that at Mount Sinai we in fact did overcome our greatest issues and we did meet the challenge that remains until this day our greatest issue – to be unified. Our general inclination has been to quarrel among ourselves, to disagree with each other and never achieve unity. This lack of unity has caused arguments, disrespect, and ultimately the *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred, that has been the source of our continuing sorrows.

In preparation for *kabbalat haTorah* we are told (*Shemot* 19) ...“*they*” came to *Midbar Sinai*, “*they*” journeyed from *Refidim*, “*they*” arrived at the wilderness of Sinai and “*they*” camped in the desert – all plural. However, at *Har Sinai* it says *Vayichan* (in the singular). *Rashi* quotes the *Mechilta* which comments that they camped “*k’ish echad, b’lev echad*,” “As one person, with one heart.”

At that moment, at the time of receiving the Torah, we passed the test – we showed that we were able to overcome our greatest challenge. We showed that we could be united.

Interestingly enough, there is another mention in *Chumash* of “*ish echad*” and “*lev echad*,” one man, one heart. When the Egyptians were pursuing *Bnai Yisrael* at the time of the Exodus, the sentence says (*Shemot* 14:10) “behold Egypt is chasing after them,” again in the singular. *Rashi* again quotes the *Mechilta*, which explains “*b’lev echad k’ish echad*.” That sounds the

same as *Rashi's* comment about the Children of Israel camping at Mount Sinai. Rabbi Simcha Wasserman *ztz"l* points out a major difference between the two explanations of the *Mechilta*. In regard to *Bnai Yisrael* it says, "*k'ish echad, b'lev echad*" while in regard to the Egyptians it says, "*b'lev echad k'ish echad.*"

He explained as follows. When Reuven and Shimon are partners in business, why does Reuven want Shimon to be successful and make a handsome profit? It usually is so that Reuven himself will reap the benefits of the joint success. Reuven really isn't interested in whether Shimon is well off. Reuven is primarily interested in himself. Since his own desire for himself is dependent on Shimon's success, he wants Shimon to do well. This is the unity of the Egyptians. Since they had "*lev echad,*" similar desires for themselves, they acted at this time as a unit, "*k'ish echad.*"

*Bnai Yisrael*, however, came to Mount Sinai with another purpose in mind. We were like the partner who so much cares for, and desires the success of, the other. They acted primarily for the sake of the other partner. In this way they are one – "*k'ish echad, b'lev echad.*" They were like one person, each so concerned about his fellow that they therefore acted as one.

Our relationship to others should be modeled after that of *Bnai Yisrael* at the time of receiving the Torah. Our concern for the next person should be because we want the best for them. Our desire to share the beauty of living a life of Torah and *mitzvos* must be because of a true inner feeling and respect for one another. We need to try to be one person, one heart.

**Live in the Moment: The Moment of Matan Torah**  
**Rabbi Adam Mayer**

Masechet Shabbat 88b

שבת פח:

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: What is meant by (Song of Songs 5:13) 'His cheeks are as a bed of spices?' With every single word [dibbur] that went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the whole world was filled with spices [fragrance]. But since the world was filled from the first word, where was the second word to go? The Holy One, blessed be He, brought forth the wind from His store-chambers and caused each wind to pass on in order, as it is said, 'His lips are as lilies [shoshanim], dropping myrrh that passes on': read not 'shoshanim' [lilies] but 'sheshonim' [which teach].

וא"ר יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב (שיר השירים ה, יג) לְחָיו כְּעֲרוֹגַת הַבָּשָׂם? כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפי הקב"ה נתמלא כל העולם כולו בשמים, וכיון שמדיבור ראשון נתמלא דיבור שני להיכן הלך? הוציא הקב"ה הרוח מאוצרותיו והיה מעביר ראשון ראשון שנאמר (שיר השירים ה, יג) לְחָיו כְּעֲרוֹגַת הַבָּשָׂם מְגִדְלוֹת מְרַקְחִים שֹׁשְׁנִים נֹטְפוֹת מִזֶּרַע. אל תקרי שושנים אלא ששונים:

1. How is Torah like a sweet smelling fragrance?
2. What was it like for the whole world to be filled with fragrance?
3. What is this wind? What does it do and what does it symbolize?

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: At every word [dibbur] which went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the souls of Israel departed, for it is said, (ibid 5:6) 'My soul went forth when he spoke.' But since their souls departed at the first word, how could they receive the second word? — *Hashem* brought down the dew with which He will eventually resurrect the dead, and revived them, as it is said (Psalms 68:10) 'A plentiful rain You brought down, God; You built up your inheritance [Israel] when it was weary.'

ואריב"ל כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפי הקב"ה יצתה נשמתן של ישראל שנאמר (שיר השירים ה, ו) פְּתַחְתִּי אֲנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי חָמַק עָבַר נִפְשִׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְרֹוּ בְקִשְׁתִּיהוּ וְלֹא מִצְאָתִיהוּ קִרְאָתִיו וְלֹא עֲנִי. ומאחר שמדיבור ראשון יצתה נשמתן דיבור שני היאך קיבלו? הוריד טל שעתיד להחיות בו מתים והחיה אותם שנאמר (תהלים סח, י) גֶשֶׁם נִדְבֹוֹת תִּנְיֵף אֱלֹהִים נִחְלָתְךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתָּה כּוֹנֵנָתָה:

1. Why did the souls of Israel depart?
2. What is this dew? What does it symbolize?
3. What does this whole thing mean? What experience is this describing?
  - a. How would you describe it?

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: At every single word [dibbur] which went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the Israelites retreated twelve mil, but the ministering angels led them back [medaddin], as it is said (Psalms 68:13) 'The hosts of angels march, they march' [yiddodun yiddodun]: read not 'yiddodun' but 'yedaddun' [they lead].

ואמר ר' יהושע בן לוי כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפי הקב"ה חזרו ישראל לאחוריהן י"ב מיל והיו מלאכי השרת מדיין אותן שנאמר (תהלים סח, יג) מַלְכֵי צְבָאוֹת יִדְדוּן יִדְדוּן אֶל תִּיקְרֵי יְדוּדוֹן אֶלָּא יִדְדוּן:

1. Why did everyone retreat?
2. What was needed to restore them?
3. What does this whole thing mean? What experience is this describing?
  - a. How would you describe it?
4. \*How is this experience DIFFERENT from the previous one of the souls departing?

### Summary:

With each דיבור of *Matan Torah* the:

1. World was filled with *besamim*, then the wind blew to make space for the next *dibbur*.
2. Souls of Israel left their bodies, then dew fell to revive them to receive the next *dibbur*.
3. *Bnei Yisrael* retreated 12 *mil*, then they were led back by the angels to receive the next *dibbur*.

HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein noticed how the first *midrash* is describing the world, while the second and third are describing what happened to the people. Rav Aharon teaches that the *midrash* of the soul leaving the body is the soul's yearning for closeness with God. It is a *midrash* to teach *d'veikut* (cleaving to God) and *ahavat Hashem* (love of God). The *midrash* which recounts *Bnei Yisrael's* retreat signifies a response of *yirah* (fear/awe), running to the farthest edges of the camp. These are two types of reactions or responses, continues Rav Lichtenstein, to the overwhelming Divine Presence - signified by the world filled with *besamim*.

According to this interpretation we are left with the wind, the dew and the angels, whose role it is to help us transition from one moment to the next.

Perhaps we can look for these moments, or feelings:

1. The overpowering, overwhelming, Divine Presence of *Hashem*.
2. The Presence of *Hashem* causes a reaction or response of the desire to form a loving connection point between us and *Hashem*.
3. The Presence of *Hashem*, experienced as awesome and potentially scary could push us away a little or a lot.
4. What are the forces in our lives that move us from one moment to the next?
  - a. These might be cyclical or progressive...?

**Journey Towards Self-Definition: Thoughts on Megillat Rut**  
**Emilie S. Passow, PHD**  
**In memory of Emilie's beloved and loving mother,**  
**Dinah Schechter Scherz**  
**(Quotations from the Soncino translation)**

The opening of *Megillat Rut* is grim. Midrashic sources claim the situation is even worse than it appears. Based on other contexts in which the term “ish” appears, *Chazal* infer that *Elimelech* was a pillar of the Israelite community in Bethlehem who should not have left in a time of famine. Instead, he should have shared his resources with the community. And what is this family doing in Moab, of all places, in the first place? Forbidden to Israelites since the time of Esau, founder of this nation, proximity doesn't justify *Elimelech's* choice.

Another poignant *midrash* explains that Naomi was, in fact, resistant to leaving, but her husband prevailed. After arriving, *Chazal* tell us, Naomi regularly goes to meet caravans coming from Bethlehem, eager to learn whether the famine has stopped so that she and her family could return.

The names of Naomi's and *Elimelech's* two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, moreover, are ominously metaphoric, reflecting and foreboding sickness and death. In general, the *midrash* notes, it was a lawless period in Israel during which the judges were being judged, an overt hint of social and moral chaos. Tradition, in fact, attributes authorship of the *Megillah* to Shmuel. The contemporary Biblical scholar Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg describes this beginning as downright “Kafkaesque.”

Yet, from this unlikely start, *Megillat Rut* traces an exemplary spiritual and emotional journey, one that concludes with the announcement of King David's birth decades later. How, then, does this narrative get from devastation to the promise of redemption? For that matter, how does *Shavuot* expand from an agricultural celebration to a rejoicing in honor of *Matan Torah*, not at all mentioned explicitly in the Torah? (*Shemot* 19:1, 34:22; *Vayikra* 23:17; *Bamidbar* 28:26; *Devarim* 16:11.) Finally, when and why was *Megillat Rut* adopted as the signature text for the *chag*?

Let's start with considering some background information. The shift in emphasis from the agricultural to the religious, even theological, is rooted in the rabbinic observation that the 50th day from the beginning of *Pesach*, the 15<sup>th</sup> day of *Nissan*, coincides not only with the beginning of the wheat and barley harvest. This date, the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, also coincides with the giving and receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. (Talmud *Bavli*, *Shabbat* 86b; *Shemot Rabbah* 31.) Not unusually, these exact dates, observed today, were disputed by a difference of a day before they were confirmed by rabbinic majority.

In time, the religious significance of *Shavuot* became even more deeply anchored. With various prophetic and liturgical precedents for the marital metaphor, the *Zohar* later provides a mystical perspective of the *omer* as “courting days of the bridegroom Israel with the bride Torah.” Associated with the Safed kabbalists headed by Isaac Luria and recorded in a 16<sup>th</sup> century

reference, the custom of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, studying Jewish sacred texts all night on the evening of *Shavuot*, has become a hallmark of the *chag*. (Many feel that the custom may have started earlier. Today in Israel, we might note, even many secular communities devote *erev Shavuot* to textual study, Jewish but not necessarily religious.) Reading *Megillat Rut* in *shul* on *Shavuot* was first alluded to in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, *Massechet Soph'rim* (14:3, 18). Numerous works of the *Rishonim* also attest to *Megillat Rut's* association with *Shavuot*.

Why? More specifically, why is Ruth so insistent on following Naomi? Given its all-encompassing scope, Ruth's pledge goes beyond an expression of *chesed* and devotion:

“Entreat me not to leave thee and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and whither thou lodgest, I will lodge; thou people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God; whither thy diest, I will die and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me more also, if aught but death part us.”  
(1:16-17)

In short, Ruth is accepting the values of Torah and thereby transforming her entire identity. She is converting.

In fact, punctuated by queries that amount to “Who are you?” each chapter of the *Megillah* tests Ruth's understanding of the lived implications of her oath, and charts an evolution of Ruth's perception of her own identity as well as that of the community.

(*Chazal* even suggest that the pledge includes observing the rituals performed in Naomi's culture. We are left to imagine the kindness Ruth must have experienced during the many years she has been Naomi's “daughter in law.” Just one example: given the high priority of parenthood in the ancient world, another mother-in-law may have expressed resentment for not having grandchildren, usually presumed to be a problem with the potential mother.)

The theme of identity then surfaces in relation to Naomi when she and Ruth are met by the women of Bethlehem. At first, these people can barely recognize Naomi, let alone Ruth, whom they never have seen before. Aware of how much she has aged under the pain of losing her husband and her sons, Naomi, in fact, unofficially changes her name. Now, she would rather be known as “*Marah*,” the bitter one, rather than Naomi, the sweet one. Ruth, in turn, is still “the Moabite,” but the repetition of this designation has thematic rather than informational import. Both the reader and the community know where Ruth comes from. As events unfold, they test Ruth's acceptance of the lived implications of her oath. Simultaneously, her choices chart an evolution of Ruth's own perception of her identity and that of the community.

When Boaz first sees Ruth in the field, he overtly asks his farmers who she is and then notes that Ruth has been preceded by her reputation of devotion to Naomi. In the *midrash*, *Chazal* make a point of describing Ruth as beautiful, thus intensifying our awareness of her vulnerability both as a woman and as a poor foreigner. At the same time, her gratitude and humility in her first meeting with Boaz signal that what he has heard about her is accurate. Moreover, as various commentators point out, the language Boaz uses alludes to the language announcing

*Avraham's* very first mission: to become the progenitor of the Jewish people and, with God's help, to make of them a blessing (*Bereishit*, 12:1-7). Right before *Matan Torah* at Sinai, the role of the Jewish people becomes even more spiritually demanding: to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (*Shemot* 19:2).

Ruth becomes part of this process as she becomes more integrated within the Israelite community, starting with Boaz's invitation to break bread with him and all of the reapers.

This invitation then extends to the possibility of marriage into the family, first with "*ploni almoni*," the closest male relative to Naomi. Frightened by the financial obligations this union would incur, however, "*ploni almoni*" rejects this familial obligation. Again *Chazal* point out that he is not identified by name precisely because of his refusal. Subsequently, Naomi infers from his behavior so far that Boaz is a more honorable man who would be ready to marry Ruth. Surprisingly, if not shockingly, Naomi then advises Ruth to go to Boaz's barn in the middle of the night.

What is going on here? Naomi seems to put her beloved daughter-in-law, whom she now begins to call "my daughter," in a potentially compromising situation. Is this a just response to Ruth's loyalty and offer to glean food for them? Does this look like an act of *chesed*?

Several responses to this apparent impropriety, even recklessness, come to mind. Not only Ruth's, but also Boaz's, behavior have shown that Naomi can totally trust them. As the reader, the trust in her kinsman Boaz is warranted by several factors: reputation in the community, his *chesed* towards Ruth and Naomi, and his respect for the tradition of leverite marriage. Like the honorable man that he is, he calls upon the elders to witness that he tried first to have the closer relative fulfill the leverite marriage so that the honesty and correctness of the marriage can never be questioned.

As titillating as the "barn scene" might appear to be, the language re-directs our attention from the sexual to the spiritual. The language Ruth uses implicitly resonates with an image of divine protection "I am Ruth thy handmaiden; spread therefore thy wings over thy handmaiden for thou art a near kinsman" (3:9). As such, it signals honorable intentions on her part and the expectation of honorable behavior on Boaz's part. The references she makes to their relationship also indicate that she already feels related to him. Boaz also highlights his gratitude for the element of self-sacrifice involved in Ruth's decision to stay with him. She might have been able to marry a much younger man, but she has chosen grounding and growth rather than self-gratification. (The *midrash*, elaborating that Boaz is eighty years old and dies right after the birth of their child, seems to amplify their mutual gratitude even though their actions speak for themselves. In terms of plot, Boaz has served his narrative purpose and, alas, is no longer deemed necessary.)

The situation, then, becomes another test of whether Ruth is ready to live by the values and customs of Naomi's world. Her choice asserts her acceptance of Torah, and the joy of the



community at her wedding confirms Ruth's welcome into the community as a full-fledged member.

The allusions to the matriarchs Leah and Rachel in the conclusion of the text endow Ruth's trajectory with Jewish historical continuity and *gravitas*. And like Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, Ruth, too, becomes a direct great ancestor to King David through her son Oded, certainly an apt name. Yes, Ruth has moved from rags to royalty. Even more impressively, by allowing Naomi to assume the position of mother to her child, Ruth facilitates Naomi's renewed sense of purpose. Thus, Ruth implements the ultimate *chesed*, restoring Naomi's identity to being "Naomi" from having been "*Marah*." A very personal enactment of *kabbalat* Torah, Ruth's narrative is most fitting for reading on *Shavuot*.

## Shavuot Reflections Jaclyn Rakhman

*Shabbos* afternoon. I lay on a picnic blanket in the lush green grass, eyes closed, the sun warming me. My 8-month-old son plays beside me. The laughter of my 4-year-old daughter fills the air as she plays on her new swing set with her Abba.

It's quarantine. Isolation. Social distancing. But in this moment, all of that has disappeared. Life is simply this. My family. Together. Healthy. Happy. I think to myself... how did we lose sight of this?

Shavuot is the day we *received* the Torah from *Hashem*. But more importantly, it's the day we *accepted* the Torah from *Hashem*. We didn't ask "what's in it for us?" We didn't ask what would happen next. *Hashem* had brought us this far, so *na'aseh v'nishma* - we will do and we will hear. With those words, we accepted our mission. We accepted our lot.

Today, that message of acceptance rings true more than ever. Acceptance means not getting everything we want, but appreciating what we have and living in the moment by letting go and trusting in something greater.

In these difficult times, we're all making sacrifices. We're missing our extended families and our friends. There are no movie theaters, no sporting events, no hair and nail salons (oh my!). Even our children are making sacrifices as we celebrate birthdays at a Zoom meeting instead of The Little Gym. Yet we as Jews rally, because we are no strangers to accepting our lot. In fact, our focus on social responsibility holds true regardless of our religious affiliation. Although some of our brethren have unfortunately not lived up to it, the majority of us go to great lengths for the *mitzvah* of protecting a single human life. We will proudly wear that mask and keep our social distance. We understand that our freedoms are not without limits, and freedom without responsibility has no meaning at all.

Meanwhile, I realize just how blessed we truly are. For two months, we've been applauding our healthcare workers as they risk their lives every day to save ours. I'm thankful for the grocery store workers that allow my family to continue eating gourmet meals in our home (probably too much!). I appreciate the mailman who brings me something new that I've ordered from Amazon almost daily... even if Prime does take more than two days (ugh!). I'm also struck by the ingenuity of parents who organize birthday celebrations in isolation. One friend wrote in chalk on the street, "Honk for Izzy's 10<sup>th</sup> birthday," and every honk all day long made her feel that much more special. A neighbor put up signs in the yard for Madeleine, asking people to leave cards and by the end of the day her lawn was littered with messages from passersby.

Our new reality has also forced us to live in the moment. For those of us with full-time jobs and children at home, it's given new meaning to the term work-life balance. Yet it forces us to realize that our jobs outside the home don't define us. When we let go of the paid work we "should" be doing and instead laugh with our children as they make funny faces and refuse to take a nap, we learn the power of here and now. The work will get done... after all we must get paid... but

let's enjoy what *Hashem* has given us. Go ahead... have one more piece of string cheese. Listen to one more Disney song. I give in.... sigh.

I'm reminded of a saying. G-d sends the cure before the disease. Those of you more learned in Torah than I can likely point to the source. Whether through social distancing and a new set of behaviors, a vaccine, or our own plasma, the answer to the COVID question is within us, and in time we will find it. But let's not forget that in this moment we are not in control. And still G-d is with us, providing for our every need. Sending us the challenges meant to bring us closer to Him. So this Shavuot, I wish for each of us to see G-d's hand daily, to accept our current situation while still striving to improve our world, and in so doing, to find the joy amidst a pandemic. *Chag sameach!*

**Home Sweet Home**  
**The Right to Redeem Property in the Torah and in Philadelphia**  
**Susie Ratner**

**Redemption in the Torah**

Every seven years, the Jews observe a sabbatical year known as *Shmitah*. During *Shmitah*, farmers in Israel must stop cultivating their fields, and the farmers relinquish personal ownership of their fields. Whatever produce grows on the land is considered communal property. It is a *Shabbat* for the land; a chance to take a break from farming and focus on spiritual pursuits. In Biblical times, every seven *Shmitahs* (every 49 years), the Jews would observe an even more majestic year - *Yovel*. *Yovel* is explained in *Vayikra* 25:8-13,

**Leviticus 25:8-13**

You shall count off seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the horn loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, for it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field. In this year of jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding.

*Shavuot* makes a nice parallel to *Yovel*. After 49 days of anticipation, we have reached a day of holiness as we embrace and celebrate the Torah. Similarly, after 49 years of caring for the land, the Jews have reached a year of holiness (see *Pasuk* 10 in the source above, “*v'kidashtem*”) as they celebrate *Yovel*, the Jubilee.

What happens during *Yovel*?

**Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 25:10**

**Everyone will return to his estate** In the jubilee year, as will be shortly explained, all sold land reverts to its original owners.

**ויקרא כה:ח-יג**

וּסְפַרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים  
שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְהָיוּ לְךָ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת  
הַשָּׁנִים תִּשַׁע וָאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה: וְהָעֵבֶרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר  
תְּרוּעָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בְּעֶשְׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּיוֹם  
הַכַּפָּרִים תַּעֲבִירוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּכָל-אַרְצְכֶם:  
וְקִדַּשְׁתֶּם אֶת שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה וּקְרָאתֶם  
דְּרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל-יֹשְׁבֵיהָ יוֹבֵל הוּא תְהִיָּה לָכֶם  
וְשָׁבְתֶם אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחֻזָּתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ  
תָּשׁוּבוּ: יוֹבֵל הוּא שְׁנַת הַחֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה תְהִיָּה  
לָכֶם לֹא תִזְרְעוּ וְלֹא תִקְצְרוּ אֶת-סִפְיֹתֶיהָ וְלֹא  
תִבְצְרוּ אֶת-נִזְרֶיהָ: כִּי יוֹבֵל הוּא קֹדֶשׁ תְהִיָּה  
לָכֶם מִן-הַשָּׁדָה תֹאכְלוּ אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ: בְּשָׁנַת  
הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת תָּשׁוּבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחֻזָּתוֹ:

**אבן עזרא על ויקרא כ"ה:**

**ושבתם איש אל אחזתו.** כאשר יפרש כי  
בשנת היובל תשוב האדן הנמכרת  
לבעליה:

Ibn Ezra explains that during *Yovel*, all sold land reverts back to its original owners. In Biblical times, the land of Israel was divided geographically by tribes. During *Yovel*, the land would be “redeemed” back to its original owners and its original ancestral tribe. In essence, all of the land transfers that occurred in the past fifty years – all of the buying and selling – was temporary, almost like renting.

*Yovel* was not just a theoretical idea; it was actually observed by the Jews. We know this because *Yovel* is referenced in *Bamidbar* 36, when the daughters of *Zelophechad* request their inheritance; they reference *Yovel* as an active concept that is commonly practiced (I’m not including the full story here, but if you need additional material for your thrilling all-night learning-fest, I encourage you to consult your local *Tanach* for further reading).

### **Redemption in Philadelphia**

While Sha’arei Orah is technically located in Montgomery County, which sadly offers no property redemption rights, our county is literally across the street from Philadelphia, which offers a very cool right of redemption that is analogous to *Yovel*.

Every year in Philadelphia, homeowners must pay their property taxes by March 31. If they don’t pay by December 31, the City may file a foreclosure lawsuit in the Court of Common Pleas. If no agreement is reached, the property is ultimately sold to a bidder at a Sheriff’s Sale. The homeowner has lost the home, unless...

### **Pennsylvania’s Municipal Claims and Tax Liens Act, 53 P.S. § 7293. Redemption**

**“(a)** The owner of any property sold under a tax or municipal claim, or his assignees, or any party whose lien or estate has been discharged thereby, may... **redeem the same at any time within nine months from the date of the acknowledgment of the sheriff’s deed therefor, upon payment of the amount bid at such sale**; the cost of drawing, acknowledging, and recording the sheriff’s deed; the amount of all taxes and municipal claims, whether not entered as liens, if actually paid; the principal and interest of estates and encumbrances, not discharged by the sale and actually paid; the insurance upon the property, and other charges and necessary expenses of the property, actually paid, less rents or other income therefrom, and a sum equal to interest at the rate of ten per centum per annum thereon, from the time of each of such payments...

**(b) Any person entitled to redeem may present his petition to the proper court**, setting forth the facts, and his readiness to pay the redemption money; whereupon the court shall grant a rule to show cause why the purchaser should not reconvey to him the premises sold; and if, upon hearing, the court shall be satisfied of the facts, it shall make the rule absolute, and upon payment being made or tendered, shall enforce it by attachment.”

The Philadelphia Sheriff’s Office explains what this means:

“IMPORTANT: Notice of owner’s Right of Redemption after a Tax Delinquent Sale. Even if you win a bid on a Tax Sale property, within nine months of the acknowledgement of the deed, the

owner of record can go to court and get permission to recover the property by paying all back taxes and the money paid by the winning bidder. This is called the Right of Redemption.”

The homeowner who lost the home at Sheriff’s Sale has nine months to “redeem” the property by forcing the buyer to sell the home back. This is a beautiful concept in Philadelphia, where thousands of homes are multigenerational.

We have now seen two concepts of redemption.

**Yovel** = all property gets redeemed back to ancestors.

**Philadelphia** = after a Tax Sale, property may be redeemed back to the homeowner.

### What is the Reason for these Concepts?

#### Sforno on Leviticus 25:11

#### ספורנו על ויקרא כה:יא

**יובל** היא שנת החמישים שנה תהיה לכם, just as the soil will become free from those who have purchased it, it will not be enslaved to the owners that are returning to it; during that year they must not yet use it as if it were their own.

**יובל הוא שנת החמישים שנה תהיה לכם** כמו שיצאה הקרקע לחירות מיד הקונים כן תהיה בלתי משועבדת ביד הבעלים השבים אליה שלא ישתמשו בה כדרך בעלים באותה השנה:

#### Leviticus 25:23-24

But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me. Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

#### ויקרא כה:כג-כד

**וְהָאֲרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצַמְתֵּת כִּי־לִי הָאֲרֶץ כִּי־גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עַמְדִּי: וּבְכָל אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶם גְּאֻלָּה תִתְּנוּ לְאֶרֶץ: (ו)**

#### Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 25:23

#### אבן עזרא על ויקרא כה:כג

The fundamental reason for these laws is that **the land is Mine**. Moshe himself said in his prayer, “God, you have been our dwelling place” [Psalms 90:1]. In other words: You are like an eternal dwelling place, into which “one generation passes away, and another generation comes” [Ecclesiastes 1:4].

**כי לי הארץ.** זה טעם נכבד וכן אמר משה בתפלתו ה' מעון אתה היית לנו אתה כמו מעון עומד ודור הולך ודור בא:

*Yovel* occurs because land is not “enslaved” to owners. All land really belongs to God, not humans. As one generation dies, a new generation comes. All land is connected from generation to generation, but God is the eternal connector. In fact, everything physical belongs to God.

*Yovel* shows us that we do not really “own” our physical homes, and there is value to recognizing and embracing that fact. During *Yovel*, the Jews would renounce their ownership of land, distance themselves from the physical, stop focusing on materialism, and refocus their energy on the spiritual and divine. They allowed property ownership to be altered drastically so they could return to their ancestral beginnings.

Philadelphia’s right of redemption takes the opposite approach. Philly shows the importance and value of having a physical home. Your home is everything; it provides your basic human needs and necessities. Your physical needs are also crucial and must be prioritized. Therefore, you get a second chance to get your house back.

Let’s look at this court case:

City of Philadelphia v. Chin, 369 Pa. Super. 182; 535 A.2d 110 (1987)

“... this redemption statute is to be liberally construed so as to effect [sic] its object and to **promote justice**... However, we have recognized a competing principle, namely, that the objective of the... redemption period is to allow the purchaser of the property to obtain a clear title. There can be no question that finality is an important objective in any redemption process.”

Though different in many ways, *Yovel* and Philadelphia’s right of redemption have a similar essence. Both are determined to promote justice. Both play around with property ownership to advance important goals. Both see value in reclaiming family land.

Philadelphia’s major distinction from *Yovel* is the finality. In Philadelphia, after nine months, you lose your right to redeem your property... whereas *Yovel*’s concept of redemption is theoretically supposed to occur in endless 50-year cycles. Philadelphia’s system is arguably more practical in modern times; let’s just say a title insurance company would never agree to insure a *Yovel* property. But even today, we can find meaning and beauty in the fascinating and awesome concept of *Yovel*.

*Chag Sameach!*

**Encountering the Divine**  
**Rabbi Dan Rosenberg**

Our default mode of thinking of the experience of, or encounter with, God is in the awe-inspiring experiences of Sinai and the Sea: moments of awesome power or grandeur which overwhelm us entirely.

שמות יט	Exodus 19
<p>(טז) וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיט הַבִּקְרָה וַיְהִי קֶלֶת וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר חֲזָק מְאֹד וַיִּחַרְד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה:</p> <p>(יז) וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַחְתֵּית הָהָר:</p> <p>(יח) וַהֲרִי סִינֵי עֵשָׂן כְּלוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו ה' בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנוּ כְּעָשָׂן כְּעֹשֵׂן הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיִּחַרְד כָּל הָהָר מְאֹד:</p> <p>(יט) וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֲזָק מְאֹד מִשָּׁה יִדְבֵר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל:</p>	<p>16) It happened on the third day, as it became morning, there were thunders and lightning and a heavy cloud upon the mountain; and the voice of ram's horn, very strong, and the whole nation who were in the camp trembled.</p> <p>17) Moshe brought the people out towards God, from the camp, and they stood below the mountain.</p> <p>18) Mount Sinai was entirely as smoke, on account of God having descended upon it in fire; and its smoke rose like a furnace's smoke, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.</p> <p>19) The sound of the ram's horn increased greatly; Moshe would speak, and God would answer him with voice.</p>

שמות כ	Exodus 20
<p>(טו) וְכָל הָעָם רְאִים אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת הָהָר עֹשֵׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנְעֻוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק:</p> <p>(טז) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֵתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל יִדְבֵר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים פֶּן נָמוּת:</p>	<p>15) The whole nation, seeing the thunders and the torches and the voice of the ram's horn, and the mountain smoking – the nation feared, and they were shaken, and stood at a distance.</p> <p>16) and they said to Moshe, "speak, you, with us, and we shall listen; let not God speak with us, lest we shall die."</p>

This aspect of being overwhelmed is not only difficult for us (humans) to integrate, there's something almost unfair about it – how could humans NOT be awed by sensory overload?

תלמוד בבלי שבת פח:א	Babylonian Talmud <i>Shabbat</i> 88a
<p>"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.</p>	<p>"They stood below the mountain" – Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: this teaches that the Holy Blessed One suspended the mountain over them like a barrel, and said to them: "If you accept the Torah – good, but if you don't – there shall be your grave."</p>



The historical uniqueness of the revelation at Sinai, where God spoke not to an isolated individual in a private revelation but to an entire nation (Deuteronomy 4:32-34; Yehudah haLevi in *Sefer haKuzari*), is not the factor that made it so powerful. At the beginning of *Parshat Vayyetze*, when Yaakov was sent away by his parents after his angry brother threatened his life, he stopped – alone and in an isolated place – for the night and had a dream revelation that the rabbis understood to foreshadow Sinai itself.

בראשית כח	Genesis 28
<p>(יא) וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמִקְוֵם וַיִּלֵּן שָׁם כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמִּקְוֵם וַיִּשֶׂם מֵרָאשְׁתָּיו וַיִּשְׁכַּב בְּמִקְוֵם הַהוּא:</p> <p>(יב) וַיַּחְלֵם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מְצַב אֶרְצָה וְרֹאשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ:</p> <p>(יג) וְהִנֵּה ה' נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהּ אֲבִירְךָ וְאֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאֲרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לְךָ אֶתְנַנָּה וְלִזְרַעְךָ:</p>	<p>11) He reached the place, and he camped out there, since the sun had set; and he took of the stones of the place and put at his head, and he lay down in that place.</p> <p>12) He dreamed, and behold! A ladder, stood upon the earth, its head reaching heavenwards; and behold! Angels of God ascending and descending upon it.</p> <p>13) And behold! God stood over him (<i>or upon it</i>), and said, "I am Hashem, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzchak; the land upon which you lie – to you I shall give it, and to your children...."</p>

בראשית רבה (תיאודור-אלבק) פרשת ויצא פרשה סח ד"ה (יב) [ויחלם] אמר	<i>Bereshit Rabbah</i> (Theodor-Albeck ed.), 65, <i>Parshat Vayyetze</i>
<p>... רבנין פתרין ליה בסיני: "ויחלם והנה סלם" - זה סיני, "מצב ארצה", שנ' ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר (שמות יט ז), "וראשו מגיע השמימה" שנ' וההר בער באש עד לב השמים (דברים ד יא), "והנה מלאכי אלהים" - זה משה ואהרן, "עולים", ומשה עלה (שמות יט ג), "ויורדים", "וירד משה מן ההר (שמות י"ט:ד)", "והנה י"י נצב עליו", "וירד י"י על הר סיני (שמות י"ט:כ)....</p>	<p>... the rabbis solve it through Sinai. "He dreamed and behold! A ladder" – this is Sinai.</p> <p>"Standing on the earth" – as it says, "they stood below the mountain" (Ex 19:17).</p> <p>"its head reaching heavenwards" – as it says, "the mountain burned with fire to the heart of the heavens" (Deut 4:11).</p> <p>"and behold! angels of God" – this is Moshe and Aharon; "ascending" – "and Moshe ascended" (Ex 19:3); "and descending" – "and Moshe descended from the mountain" (Ex 19:14); "and behold! God stood upon it" – "God descended upon Mount Sinai" (Ex 19:20).</p>

On some level, the individual experience of prophetic revelation is only a fraction or refraction of the communal experience of revelation at Sinai (*b. Brachot* 57b – dreams are 1/60th the experience of prophecy) or at the Sea (Exodus 14:13)<sup>1</sup> – it is not different in nature, just in intensity or exposure. Other individual experiences of the divine are similarly powerful and told with some of the imagery of Sinai, as well (2Kings 2:13-14, when Eliyahu dies, or 1Kings 19:12, when Eliyahu was in the cave).

<sup>1</sup> שמות יד:יג - וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אֵל תִּירְאוּ הַתִּיצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם אֶת מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסְפוּ לִרְאֹתָם עוֹד עַד עוֹלָם:

But what happens when we are distanced from the experience of revelation? What happens when we are at a remove from the “normal” processes of supernatural experience of the divine, and are stuck in quotidian experience?

Nonetheless, we can excavate some consolation, even from isolation. *Chaz”al* recognized that the space that we get from distance can offer clarification at times. Let us look, for this model, to Moshe – but again, not at Moshe as a subject so much as Moshe from the distance of being an object.

Exodus 2	
(א) וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי:	1) A man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi.
(ב) וַתְּהַר האִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:	2) The woman conceived and bore a son; and she saw that he was good, and she hid him for three months.
(ג) וְלֹא יָכְלָה עוֹד הִצְפִּינוּ וַתִּקַּח לוֹ תִּבְתָּ גֹמָא וַתַּחְמְרָה בַּחֲמֵר וּבִצְפָת וַתִּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשֶׂם בְּסוּף עַל שַׁפַּת הַיָּאָר:	3) But she was not able to keep hiding him, so she took for him a box of papyrus, and she lined it with pitch and with mud, and she put the boy into it; and she put it into the reeds, at the edge of the river.
(ד) וַתִּתְצַב אַחֲתוֹ מֵרְחוֹק לְדַעַה מֶה יַעֲשֶׂה לוֹ:	4) His sister stood from afar, to know what would happen to him.
(ה) וַתֵּרַד בַּת פַּרְעֹה לְרַחֹץ עַל הַיָּאָר וַנְעֲרֹתֶיהָ הִלְכֹת עַל יַד הַיָּאָר וַתֵּרָא אֶת הַתִּבָּה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אַמְתָּהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ:	5) The daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe at the Nile, her maidens walking beside the Nile; she saw the box amidst the reeds, and she sent her maiden to fetch it to her.
(ו) וַתִּפְתַּח וַתֵּרְאֶהוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה נֹעַר בֹּכֶה וַתַּחֲמַל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר מִיִּלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה:	6) She opened it, and saw him – the boy – and look, a crying lad! She had mercy on him, and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.”
(ז) וַתֹּאמֶר אַחֲתוֹ אֵל בַּת פַּרְעֹה הֲאֵלֶךְ וְקִרְאתִי לָךְ אִשָּׁה מִיִּנְקוֹת מִן הָעִבְרִית וַתִּיַּנֵּק לָךְ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד:	7) His sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call for you a nurse-woman from the Hebrew women? She will nurse the baby for you.”

תלמוד בבלי סוטה יב:ב	Babylonian Talmud <i>Sotah</i> 12b
וְהִנֵּה נֹעַר בֹּכֶה - קָרִי לִיָּה יֶלֶד, וְקָרִי לִיָּה נֹעַר!?	“Look – a crying lad!” (Ex 2:6) It calls him a boy, and it calls him a lad!?
תֵּנָא: הוּא יֶלֶד וְקוּלוּ כְּנֹעַר, דְּבַרֵּי רַבִּי יְהוּדָה; אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי נְחֶמְיָה: א”כ, עֲשִׂיתוּ לַמֶּשֶׁה רַבִּינוּ בְּעַל מוּם!	It was taught: he was a boy with a lad’s voice, according to R. Yehudah; R. Nehemiah said to him, if so – you’ve made Moshe Rabbenu out to be malformed!
אָלָא, מְלַמֵּד שְׁעָשְׂתָהּ לוֹ אִמּוֹ חוֹפֵת נְעוּרִים בְּתִיבָה, אָמְרָה: שָׂמָא לֹא אֶזְכֶּה לְחוֹפֵתוֹ.	Rather – (“lad”) teaches that his mother had made him a young man’s wedding canopy in the basket, saying, “In case I don’t get to see his wedding canopy.”

The *gemara* zooms our focus in on Yocheved's experience, looking at Moshe as a baby – but looking back at him through the experience of Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, as a mouthpiece for flashback to absent Yocheved's loss. In placing Moshe into the basket, she acknowledged the loss of control of the future hopes and dreams that she had when she gave birth to him. Perhaps this was not making peace, per se, but acknowledging limitations.

Acknowledging limitations is deep and powerful, but the experience of revelation at distance, of finding God within the limitations, is expressed in Miriam, Aharon's sister. Wait – only Aharon?

<p>תלמוד בבלי מגילה יד:א (עיין בבלי סוטה יב:ג.)</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud <i>Megillah</i> 14a (vis Babylonian Talmud <i>Sotah</i> 12b-13a)</p>
<p>מרים - דכתיב "ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן" - ולא אחות משה?  אמר רב נחמן אמר רב: שהיתה מתנבאה כשהיא אחות אהרן, ואמרת: עתידה אמי שתלד בן שישוע את ישראל.  ובשעה שנולד, נתמלא כל הבית כולו אורה. עמד אביה ונשקה על ראשה, אמר לה: בתי - נתקיימה נבואתיך!  וכיון שהשליכוהו לניאור - עמד אביה וטפחה על ראשה, ואמר לה: בתי, היכן נבואתיך?!  היינו דכתיב "ותצב אחותו מרחק לדעה" - לדעת מה יהא בסוף נבואתה.</p>	<p>Miriam – as it's written, "Miriam the prophetess, Aharon's sister, took" – but not Moshe's sister?!  R. Nachman quoted Rav: she first prophesied when she was Aharon's sister, saying, "My mother will bear a son who will save Israel."  When he was born, the whole house was filled with light. Her father got up and kissed her on the head, and said, "My daughter – your prophecy has been fulfilled!"  And when they threw him into the Nile – her father got up and smacked her on her head, and said, "My daughter – where is your prophecy now?!"  That's why it says, "his sister stood from afar to know" – to know how her prophecy would turn out.</p>

Focusing on the same word יצב that the Torah uses for the people at Sinai and the Sea, and regarding Yaakov's dream ladder, the *gemara* gives a different model in Miriam for the experience of revelation. In the moment of what could reasonably be great sadness, Miriam teaches us to watch for the opportunity for hope. Instead of immuring or miring oneself in the difficulty of the immanent moment, there is the possibility for grabbing onto the potential that may be limned for a path to how things could become better. This is extraordinarily difficult, but extraordinarily important. Miriam has a history of being this person who can see a different path forward, not by being disconnected from the pain of her day but by insistently embracing her day as a place in which God may be encountered.

<sup>2</sup> שמות טו:20 - ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן את התף בידה ותצאן כל הנשים אחריה בתפיים ובמחלות.  
<sup>3</sup> ובגירסא שבתלמוד בבלי סוטה יב:ב - אמר רב עמרם אמר רב, ואמרי לה אמר רב נחמן אמר רב

תלמוד בבלי סוטה יב:א	Babylonian Talmud <i>Sotah</i> 12a
<p>וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי (שמות ב:א)<sup>4</sup> - לְהִיכֵן הַלֵּךְ? אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה בַּר זְבִינָא: שְׁהָלַךְ בְּעֵצַת בָּתוּלָה.</p> <p>תָּנָא: עֲמֵרָם גְּדוֹל הַדּוֹר הָיָה, כִּינּוּן [שְׁגָזָר] פְּרַעֲוֵה הַרְשָׁע "כָּל הַבֶּן הַיֵּלֹד הַיֵּאֲרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ" (שמות א:כב), אָמַר: לְשׂוֹא אָנוּ עֹמְלִין! עָמַד וּגִירֵשׁ אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ, עָמְדוּ כוֹלֵן וּגִירֵשׁוּ אֶת נְשׂוֹתֵיהֶן.</p> <p>אָמְרָה לּוֹ בָתוּלָה: "אָבָא, קָשָׁה גְזִירְתְּךָ יוֹתֵר מִשֶּׁל פְּרַעֲוֵה!</p> <p>שְׁפַרְעֵה לֹא גָזַר אֶלָּא עַל הַזְּכָרִים, וְאַתָּה גְזַרְתָּ עַל הַזְּכָרִים וְעַל הַנְּקִיבוֹת!</p> <p>פְּרַעֲוֵה לֹא גָזַר אֶלָּא בַּעוֹה"ז, וְאַתָּה בַּעוֹה"ז וְלַעוֹה"ב!</p> <p>פְּרַעֲוֵה הַרְשָׁע, סָפֵק מִתְקַיֵּימָת גְזִירְתּוֹ סָפֵק אֵינָה מִתְקַיֵּימָת, אֶתָּה צָדִיק בְּיָדָי שְׁגִירְתְּךָ מִתְקַיֵּימָת, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: וְתִגְזַר אֹמֵר וַיִּקָּם לָךְ (איוב כג:כח)!"</p> <p>עָמַד וְהִחְזִיר אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ, עָמְדוּ כוֹלֵן וְהִחְזִירוּ אֶת נְשׂוֹתֵיהֶן.</p> <p>וַיִּקַּח (שמות ב:א) - "וַיִּחְזַר" מִיִּבְעֵי לֵיהּ! א"ר יְהוּדָה בַּר זְבִינָא: שְׁעָשָׂה לּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂה לְקוֹחִין, הוֹשִׁיבָהּ בְּאַפְרָיִם וְאַהֲרֹן וּמִרְיָם מְרַקְדִין לְפָנֶיהָ, וּמְלַאכֵי הַשָּׁרָת אָמְרוּ: אִם הַבְּנִים שִׂמְחָה (תהילים קיג:ט).</p>	<p>"A man from the house of Levi went" – where did he go? R. Yehuda bar Zevina said, he went along with the advice of his daughter.</p> <p>It is taught: Amram was the leader of his generation. When he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed "every male born - you shall throw him into the Nile," he said, "For nothing we labor!" He got up and divorced his wife – (and so) they all got up and divorced their wives. His daughter said to him, "Daddy, your ruling is harsher than Pharaoh's!</p> <p>For Pharaoh only decreed upon the males, but you have decreed against males and females.</p> <p>Pharaoh only decreed in this world, but you have decreed in this world and the world to come!</p> <p>The wicked Pharaoh – it's doubtful whether his decree will stand or will not stand; but you are righteous – certainly your decree will stand, as it says, 'You shall decree a word, and it shall stand for you.'</p> <p>He stood up and took back his wife – and all of them stood up and took back their wives.</p> <p>"And took" – it should say "he took back"! R. Yehuda bar Zevina said that he made an affair of taking: he sat her in a palanquin, and Aharon and Miriam danced before her, and the heavenly angels sang, "Joyful is the mother of children."</p>

Miriam looked at the dissonance between the fact of her father's leadership and the consequences of it, and used that dissonance to push him back to his values. She did not deny the difficulty of the situation as a way to seek to convince Amram, but rather fully engaged the difficulty and presented a perspective that was greater and more enduring than the moment.<sup>5</sup>

This stepping back in the moment of challenge to take perspective (and find a different solution forward) is not the only model of religious experience, and may not be intuitively in everyone's toolbox. Nonetheless, it is exemplified as a paradigm that offers reward in balance with those who jump forward to act when they feel the situation requires an action (like Nachshon *ben* Aminadav) or with those who flee or avoid callings (like Moshe at the Burning Bush, or like Yonah *ben* Amitai at the beginning of his *sefer*). This is a different model – stepping back and waiting and watching – that offers discernment and reward.

<sup>4</sup> שמות ב:א: וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בֵּית לֵוִי.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 30:6 teaches וְלִבְקָר רָנָה – "for but a moment in Your anger and a life(time) in Your acceptance; in the evening one may lie down in tears and in the morning – joy."

<p><u>משנה סוטה א:ז</u> במדדה שאדם מודד, בה מודדין לו.....</p>	<p><u>Mishnah Sotah 1:7</u> With the measure a person measures out – with that, they measure to a person.</p>
<p><u>משנה סוטה א:ט</u> וכן לענין הטובה: מרים המתינה למשה שעה אחת, ששנאמר (שמות ב) ויתצב אחתו מרחק, לפיכך נתעכבו לה ישראל שבעה ימים במדבר, שנאמר (במדבר יב) והעם לא נסע עד האסף מרים.</p>	<p><u>Mishnah Sotah 1:9</u> So also in the direction of good: Miriam waited for Moshe for a single hour, as it says, “His sister stood from afar” (Exodus 2), and therefore all of Israel waited for her for seven days in the desert, as it says (Numbers 12) “the people did not travel until Miriam was brought back in.”</p>

<p>תלמוד בבלי סוטה יא:א</p>	<p>Babylonian Talmud <i>Sotah</i> 11a</p>
<p>וכן לענין הטובה, מרים וכו'. מי דמי? התם חדא שעתא, הכא שבעה יומי!</p>	<p><b>So also for the good – Miriam etc.</b> How is this similar? There one hour, here for seven days?!</p>
<p>אמר אביי, אימא: ולענין הטובה אינו כן.</p>	<p>Abaye said, “Perhaps the measure of good is different.”</p>
<p>א"ל רבא: הא וכן לענין הטובה קתני! אלא אמר רבא, הכי קתני: וכן לענין הטובה דבאותה מדה, ולעולם מדה טובה מרובה ממדת פורענות.</p>	<p>Rava said to him, “but it says ‘so ALSO for the measure of good!’” Instead, Rava said, “This is what it (comes to) teach: ‘and so also for the matter of good - <b>within the same measure</b>,’ and the measure of good is always greater than the measure of suffering.”</p>

Miriam’s prophecy is exemplified by watching for the moment of greater clarity – digging in the soil, as it were, with both hands to feel for what should be brought forth because it’s most worth holding onto. As opposed to Pandora, closing hope in tight out of fear at having crossed a line, Miriam waits patiently until hope glints through darkness, and then grabs it tight. That judicious consideration aims for wise salvation, and merit multiplication.

In our time of separation, may we nonetheless merit – through study, prayer, and community-at-a-distance – to endure patient watching for the ways we can strengthen ourselves and each other, and soon join together again to stand all together in more-obvious ways.

<p>ישעיהו נו</p>	<p>Isaiah 56</p>
<p>ז) והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמחתים בבית תפילתי עולתיהם וזבחייהם לרצון על מזבחי כי ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים: ח) נאם א'דני ה' מקבץ נדחי ישראל עוד אקבץ עלי לנקבציו:</p>	<p>7) “...I will bring them to My sacred mount, and cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be welcome on My altar; for My House shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” 8) Thus declares the Lord GOD, who gathers the dispersed of Israel: “I will yet gather still more to those already gathered.”</p>



**Eruv Tavshilin**  
**Shifra Vega**

This year the first day of *Shavuot* falls on a Friday, and as a result, our brothers and sisters in Israel will also be celebrating a two-day *Yom Tov* with *Shabbat* coming right after *chag*. While we are commanded to be happy on *Yom Tov* and we are supposed to avoid most *melachot*, on Friday, in addition to enjoying the *chag*, we need to prepare for *Shabbat*.

Generally, work on *Yom Tov* is only permitted for the needs of the day itself. However, when *Shabbat* starts right after *Yom Tov*, the rabbis permitted cooking and preparing on *Yom Tov* for *Shabbat*. This is allowed provided that preparations for *Shabbat* are begun before the holiday. This can be accomplished through an *eruv tavshilin* – before *Yom Tov* starts.

With this *eruv* we are permitted to bake, cook, warm, use fire, prepare and do anything necessary for *Shabbat*, for ourselves and for all Jews who live in our city, even if it is still *Yom Tov*. So, those of us who remember, will prepare an *eruv* of 2 cooked foods and recite the *bracha* on Thursday afternoon. And don't worry, those of us who forgot can rely on the *eruv* of others.

*Shavuot* celebrates the receiving of the Torah in the desert. The time leading up to this was a trying time for the Jewish people. They struggled to get food and water in the desert and God provided various miraculous solutions for the people to be able to eat and drink. One of these solutions is the *man* – the manna from heaven.

In the desert, the *man* fell for 6 days and on *Shabbat* there was a change in routine. We know that on Friday there were 2 portions of *man* that fell from the sky and that on *Shabbat* there were none. It is during this *man* episode that the Torah gives specifics of *Shabbat* conduct and how we are to prepare for the holy seventh day. The *pasuk* says:

<p>And it shall be on the sixth day that when they prepare what they will bring, it will be double of what they gather every day.</p>	<p>וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי וְהָכִינוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יָבִיאוּ וְהָיָה מִשְׁנֵה עַל אֲשֶׁר-יִלְקְטוּ יוֹם אֶחָד:</p>
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From this we learn the basic *halacha* that we prepare for *Shabbat* on Friday, *erev Shabbat*, but that we do not prepare on *Shabbat* for another day. This *pasuk* can also be interpreted as a lesson that we should not delay *Shabbat* preparations: *vehaya bayom hashishi* – immediately at the dawn of the 6<sup>th</sup> day, as soon as you collect the *man*, first thing in the morning, *vehechinu et asher yavi'u*, then you should prepare! (This is a cheer to those of us whose *Shabbat* table is prepared on Friday morning, and not in the few minutes before sunset on Friday afternoon.) A few *pesukim* later we read:

On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each.	וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לָקֵטוּ לֶחֶם מִשְׁנֶה שְׁנֵי הָעֹמֶר לְאֶחָד
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This is the source, or at least one of the sources, for the idea of having two loaves of bread on our *Shabbat* table, as well the source of the phrase *lechem mishne*. There are also several interpretations on these *pesukim* that relate to how many meals we eat on *Shabbat*, *seuda shelishit*, etc.

But for the sake of this week, our *eruv tavshilin* and *Shabbat* prep, I wanted to compare the *man* to our *Shabbat* prep today in modern times, when we are no longer travelling in the desert. *Man* in the desert fell from the sky and our *Shabbat* meals generally do not. We have to work for our food and we also have to work to prepare it. The idea that we make extra preparations for *Shabbat*, whether it be on a regular Friday, or in the case of a two day *chag*, when we begin on Thursday with an *eruv tavshilin*, gives us the sense of having things “taken care of” in advance on *Shabbat*.

Since everything that we need for *Shabbat* is prepared in advance, today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can allow ourselves to have an experience similar to that feeling that *bnei yisrael* had in the desert on Friday afternoon. They did not stress or worry that they might have to work on *Shabbat* – in *midbar sinai* they knew that the *abishter* would provide the meals for their *shabbes* table.

This is an experience and lesson that we can all take home with us. Every week we can benefit from and enjoy the fruits of our weekly pre - *Shabbat* preparation. *Vehechinu et asher yavi'u*, whether or not your *Shabbat* table is already set on Friday morning and food prep is almost complete hours in advance of sunset, I hope that this *Shabbat* you will be able to feel like *bnei yisrael* after they sang *shirat hayam* and celebrated *Shabbat* in the desert – the feeling of delight that led Moshe to sing and Miriam’s jubilation that followed in chorus and dance. The satisfaction of being prepared in advance and being taken care of both spiritually and physically.

*Shabbat Shalom* and *Chag Sameach!*

To make an *eruv*: Designate one cooked item and one baked item and hold them while reciting the following:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו על מצות ערוב:

By this Eruv may we be permitted to bake, cook, insulate food, light a flame and do everything necessary on the festival for the sake of Shabbat, for us and for all Jews living in this city.

בהדין ערובא יהא שרא לנא למפא ולבשלא  
ולאטמנא ולאדלקא שרגא ולמעבד כל צרכנא  
מיומא טבא לשבתא לנו ולכל ישראל הדורים  
בעיר הזאת:

*Eruv* must remain intact until *Shabbat* in order to permit Friday/*Yom Tov* cooking for *Shabbat*.