

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

# Shavuot To-Go

# 5770

**Special Edition in Honor of YUConnects**



**Featuring Divrei Torah from**

Rabbi Kenneth Brander  
Rabbi Yitzchak Blau  
Rabbi Reuven Brand  
Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen  
Mrs. Mindy Eisenman  
Rabbi Joshua Flug  
Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter  
Mrs. Tova Sinensky  
Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

**Featuring a collection of insights from  
members of the YU Kollelim**

RICHARD M JOEL, *President, Yeshiva University*  
RABBI KENNETH BRANDER, *David Mitzner Dean, Center for the Jewish Future*

RABBI ROBERT SHUR, *General Editor*  
RABBI MICHAEL DUBITSKY, *Editor*

Copyright © 2010  
All rights reserved by Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
500 West 185<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 413, New York, NY 10033  
office@yutorah.org • 212.960.5400 x 5313

# Table of Contents

**Shavuot 2010/5770**

## Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander ..... Page 4

## **Special YUConnects Shavuot Relationship Supplement**

### Ten Steps to a Healthy Relationship: Pesach to Shavuot

Mrs. Mindy Eisenman ..... Page 7

### There Is No Sanctity Without Preparation: On The Torah Ethics Of Dating

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter ..... Page 12

### Loving Hashem: A Model Relationship

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky ..... Page 16

### A Walk Down the Aisle

Rabbi Reuven Brand ..... Page 18

### תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם במשנת הרב הוטנר

Rabbi Yitzchak Blau ..... Page 25

### Zman Matan Torah: Our Name is Yosef, Not Joe

Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen ..... Page 28

### The Tuition Challenge: A Discussion Guide

Rabbi Joshua Flug ..... Page 32

### The Gift That Keeps On Giving

Mrs. Tova Warburg Sinensky..... Page 40

### Avraham's Yom Tov

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner ..... Page 44

### Collected Insights from Members of our Kollelim

Rabbi Eli Belizon, Rabbi Akiva Block Rabbi Mendel Breitshtein, Rabbi Yoni Chambre,  
Rabbi David Hellman, Rabbi Akiva Koenigsberg, Rabbi Yoni Levin, Rabbi Rafi  
Rosenblum, Rabbi Ilon Soniker, Rabbi Yehuda Turetsky

..... Page 48

# Words of Introduction

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

*The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future*

The Talmud in *Kiddushin* 39b states *s'char mitzvah b'hai almah lekah*— there is no reward in this world for the performance of commandments. This Talmudic statement seems to be in conflict with the words found in the Torah which expound on the material reward for observance of Torah and the physical punishment for disobedience. R. Samuel Eidels, the *MaHarSha*, attempts to resolve this apparent conflict by suggesting that there are two paradigms of reward for the celebration of the Divine mission. There is reward for an individual observing commandments and an additional component for adherence by community. The Talmud's comment focuses on the individual. Reward for personal observance is not manifested in the physical; rather, it is found in the calibration of the soul and the achievement of a spiritual rendezvous with God. The narrative in the Torah focuses on the reward and punishment which are consequences of how the community engages in embracing the will of God.

*YU To-Go* is one of many mediums we utilize to share the Torah of our Yeshiva. It is my hope that through the exploration of ideas in this virtual *sefer* each reader's personal embrace with Shavuot, the holiday celebrating the covenantal relationship between ourselves and God, is enhanced. We have designed this project not only for the individual, studying alone, but perhaps even more for a *חברותא* (a pair studying together) that wish to work through the study matter together, or a group engaged in facilitated study.

In this volume we engage in two critical contemporary issues: 1: Singles and 2. Yeshiva Day School affordability.

YUConnects is a program sponsored by Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future, available to Yeshiva University undergraduate and rabbinical students, single undergraduate and rabbinic alumni, and currently expanding to the larger orthodox community; featuring activities and events designed to facilitate meeting opportunities and networking.

The goal of this initiative is to create comfortable opportunities, for single men and women to socialize and connect. A special feature of YUConnects is our volunteer connectors - a varied group of talented and trained married men & women available to meet with members individually. There are over 80 YU volunteer connectors across the Jewish world. In the past year and a half YUConnects has facilitated over 40 marriages.

Yet our goal must be greater than the above. There are significant roadblocks that challenge young men and women in developing relationships. As a premier Torah institution and a great University we must convene our spiritual and intellectual resources to create a new model removing barriers which all our Roshei Yeshiva and mental health professionals classify as destructive.

*This is a community issue and requires a community response.* Like the observance of any commandment, this communal dimension adds a level of shared responsibility that cannot be achieved solely by the efforts of even the most committed and selfless individuals. With the guidance of lay communal leaders who came together last summer at Yeshiva University's leadership conference, we established Shabbat *Parshat B'har-Bechukotai* (May 8<sup>th</sup>) as a Shabbat focused on "Creating Connections." YU CJF in partnership with the OU, Young Israel, Make A Shidduch Foundation, Future Simchas, Only Simchas, Shalom Task Force, Sasson v'Simcha, Gateways, and Saw You At Sinai worked with over 80 communities to use this Shabbat to have communal conversation on this issue. We provided educational guides, source material on how to create singles events and a video sharing concerns from the perspective of singles on this issue.

YU Connects would never have happened without the tireless efforts and vision of Rebbetzin Dr. Efrat Sobolofsky. She has toiled in this issue with a single-mindedness and drive that is rarely seen. President Richard M. Joel has consistently sought to improve the academic, Torah environment, and student life at Yeshiva University. He recognized the importance of this issue and afforded us the capacity to create YUConnects. We are all in his debt.

On the holiday which portrays the marriage of Keneset Yisroel to Hashem, Rabbis Schacter, Sobolofsky, and Mrs. Mindy Eisenman have prepared Torah pieces focusing on this issue in the enclosed Shavuot To Go.

Additionally, Rabbi Josh Flug has contributed an important piece allowing us to focus on the ongoing issue of day school costs and its effect on our community.

May we continue to achieve meaningful connections: in our personal search for a relationship with God, amongst those who are looking to find their soul mates, and in developing communities empowering us to live purposeful and meaningful lives.

Byedidut,

*Rabbi Kenneth Brander*



# CREATING CONNECTIONS

A Worldwide Event • May 7 - 9

A Project of YUConnects

**Dozens** of Communities participated in a remarkable **unifying event**

a weekend dedicated to creating connections with singles.

**We thank the following shuls and communities hosting events, educational sessions, shuirim, meals.**

Young Israel of Toco Hills, Atlanta, GA • Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation, Baltimore, MD • Suburban Orthodox Congregation, Baltimore, MD • YU Alumni and Friends in Beit Shemesh, Israel • Bais Medresh of Bergenfield, Bergenfield, NJ • Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ • Ohr HaTorah, Bergenfield, NJ • Yeshivas Beis Zion, Berlin, Germany • Beth Jacob Congregation, Beverly Hills, CA • Boca Raton Synagogue, Boca Raton, FL • Young Israel of Brookline, Brookline, MA • Brooklyn College JLIC Educator, Brooklyn, NY • Young Israel of Lawrence Cedarhurst, Cedarhurst, NY • YU Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago, Chicago, IL • Congregation Agudas Israel, Cincinnati, OH • Young Israel of Greater Cleveland, Cleveland, OH • Beth Jacob Congregation, Columbus, OH • Congregation Ahavas Sholom, Columbus, OH • Torat Emet, Columbus, OH • Congregation Ahavas Moshe, Crown Heights, NY • Congregation Shaare Tefilla, Dallas, TX • Young Israel of Deerfield Beach, Deerfield Beach, FL • YU Alumni and Friends in Efrat, Israel • Congregation Ahavath Torah, Englewood, NJ • Congregation Shomrei Torah, Fair Lawn, NJ • Congregation K'neseth Israel, The White Shul, Far Rockaway, NY • Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft Lauderdale, Ft Lauderdale, FL • Congregation Anshei Chesed, Hewlett, NY • Congregation Ahavas Achim, Highland Park, NJ • Young Israel of Holliswood, Holliswood, NY • United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston, Houston, TX • Young Israel of Jamaica Estates, Jamaica Estates, NY • Ohr Somayach, Glenhazel, Johannesburg, South Africa • Congregation BIAV, Kansas City, KS • Kehilas Ishei Yisrael, Kew Gardens Hills, NY • Young Israel of Kew Garden Hills, Kew Garden Hills, NY • Congregation Beth Sholom, Lawrence, NY • Suburban Torah Center, Livingston, NJ • Golders Green Synagogue, London, England • Young Israel of Century City, Los Angeles, CA • Young Israel of Miami Beach, Miami, FL • Young Israel of Memphis, Memphis, TN • Young Israel of Monsey, Monsey, NY • Congregation Shaarei Tefillah, Newton, MA • Adereth El, New York, NY • Bialystoker Synagogue, New York, NY • Chabad of the West Side, New York, NY • Congregation Ohav Zedek, New York, NY • Congregation Ohav Sholom, New York, NY • Congregation Ramat Orah, New York, NY • Lincoln Square Synagogue, New York, NY • Manhattan Jewish Experience, New York, NY • The Jewish Center, New York, NY • West Side Institutional Synagogue, New York, NY • Young Israel of the West Side, New York, NY • Young Israel of North Woodmere, North Woodmere, NY • Young Israel of Oceanside, Oceanside, NY • The Desert Synagogue, Palm Springs, CA • Congregation Beth Tefillah, Paramus, NJ • Kehilas Bais Yosef of Passaic-Clifton, Passaic, NJ • Young Israel of Passaic - Clifton, Passaic, NJ • Lower Merion Synagogue, Philadelphia, PA • Riverdale Jewish Center, Riverdale, NY • Young Israel of Riverdale, Riverdale, NY • Young Israel Ohav Zedek of North Riverdale/Yonkers, Riverdale, NY • Young Israel of Scarsdale, Scarsdale, NY • Congregation Israel Springfield, Springfield, NJ • Congregation Agudath Sholom, Stamford, CT • Young Israel of Stamford, Stamford, CT • Young Israel of Staten Island, Staten Island, NY • Young Israel of St. Louis, St. Louis, MO • Congregation Beth Aaron, Teaneck, NJ • Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, Teaneck, NJ • Congregation Keter Torah, Teaneck, NJ • Congregation Rinat Yisrael, Teaneck, NJ • Congregation Zichron Mordechai, Teaneck, NJ • Young Israel of Teaneck, Teaneck, NJ • Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, Toronto, Canada • YU Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov of Toronto, Canada • Kehillas Bais Yehudah, Wesley Hills, NY • Young Israel of West Hempstead, West Hempstead, NY • AABJ&D, West Orange, NJ • Westwood Kehilla, Westwood, CA • Young Israel of Woodmere, Woodmere, NY



Yeshiva University  
CENTER FOR THE JEWISH FUTURE

YUConnects thanks the participating organizations.



For more information about YUConnects, please visit [www.yu.edu/cjf/youconnects](http://www.yu.edu/cjf/youconnects) or call 212-960-5400 x 6163.

The Creating Connections Event is an initiative of the YUConnects ChampionsGate Task Force.

# Ten Steps to a Healthy Relationship: Pesach to Shavuot

Mrs. Mindy Eisenman

Staff Connector, YUConnects  
Faculty, Stern College for Women

Clearly, the journey from Egypt to Mt. Sinai parallels man's journey from betrothal to wedding ceremony. God frees the Jews and betroths Himself to us at Pesach. We travel from Egypt, protected on all sides with God's love, to Mt. Sinai, where we accept God's covenant. We agree to follow his Torah and mitzvot and God promises to protect us from all the sicknesses that befell Egypt. The commentators suggest that the relationship between God and His people is a metaphor for the most sacred relationship: a marriage between husband and wife.

The Exodus from Egypt to the arrival at Mt. Sinai is symbolic of the beginning of the relationship between a husband and wife. It is fair to say that God's actions and the way He treats the Jewish people is a paradigm for any long and communicative relationship. Just as the Ten Commandments, read every Shavuot, remind us of and reinforce our commitment to our relationship to our Creator, so too, when examining the journey between the first Pesach and Shavuot we can find ten steps that helped solidify the relationship between God and His people. We can use these actively to ensure our relationships in our personal lives as well.

The metaphor of bride and groom is often used by Rashi when discussing Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

*Moses brought the people forth from the camp toward God and they stood under the mountain*

**Shemot 19:17**

*Toward God: This implies that the Shechina went out to greet them, as a bridegroom to a bride.*

**Rashi ibid.**

ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים מן המחנה  
ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר  
שמות יט:יז  
לקראת האלקים: מגיד שהשכינה יצאה לקראתם,  
כחתן היוצא לקראת כלה  
רש"י שם

*God gave to Moshe, when He finished speaking with him on Mt. Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God*

**Shemot 31:18**

ויתן אל משה ככלתו לדבר אתו בהר  
סיני שני לחת העדות לחת אבן  
כתבים באצבע אלקים  
שמות לא:יח

*K'khaloto is spelled defectively (without a vav) to be read k'khalato for the Torah was given to him as a gift like a bride to a bridegroom.*

**Rashi ibid.**

ככלתו: ככלתו כתיב חסר שנמסרה  
לו תורה במתנה ככלה לחתן  
רש"י שם

This idea is also seen in the fifth of the sheva brachot. A couple is referred to as *re'im ahuvim*, loving and kind friends. The Hebrew word for love *ahuvim* is derived from the root word *hav*, to give. To love means to give. It isn't what my spouse is doing for me, but what I am doing for my spouse. We shouldn't view our relationship like a business. This isn't a 50/50 partnership. That kind of relationship can lead to mistrust. Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis is known for saying, "marriage is about give and give more".

## 1. Anticipating Your Spouse's Needs

The first of the ten solidifying steps we can learn from God is that He carried us on the wings of eagles. (Shemot 19:4) When we first left Egypt, Rashi tells us that God deliberately took us out of Egypt during the Spring, with nice weather. We were weary and He anticipated our needs.

## 2. Trust

The second action in this relationship was that of the Jewish people. In שמות יב:לט it states וגם צדה לא עשו להם ("and also they had not made provisions for themselves"). Rashi elaborates and mentions that the verse is a praise of Israel by pointing out that the people did not ask what they would eat in the wilderness; rather, they believed in God's word and went. The trust that the Jewish people placed in God is cherished and treasured by God.

*I remembered you for your favor the kindness of your youth, the love when you were a bride, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown.*

**Yirmiyahu 2:2**

זכרתי לך חסד נעורייך אהבת  
כלולותיך לכתך אחרי במדבר  
בארץ לא זרועה  
ירמיהו ב:ב

This trust elevated us according to the Mechilta to a level of holiness, where we separated ourselves from others and a connection was established with God. The element of trust is so important in a relationship that once you lose it, it is very hard to regain it

## 3. Praise

On the morning of the seventh day after leaving Egypt, the Jewish people teach us yet another valuable lesson, the importance of praise. After the splitting of the sea and the drowning of their enemies, Moshe and Miriam separately lead the men and women in song. In a relationship, take the time to express your appreciation appropriately. Spell out gratitude in detail so that your spouse is assured of your feelings. Chazal tell us that King Chizkiyahu had the potential to be the Messiah, but because he didn't recognize the importance of singing praise to God, he wasn't selected. When we think positively about our spouse it will also lead to a lessening of criticism.



## 4. Listening Effectively

In Chapter 15 of Sefer Shmot the Jewish people complain about a lack of water at Marah. God listens to the people. Listening effectively is skill number four. You need to truly hear the message the other person is trying to convey. On the fifteenth of Iyar the Jewish people ran out of food. Although they complain, God doesn't get angry. We learn from Chazal:

*Man is recognized by three things: The way he spends money, the way he drinks, and the way he responds with anger.*

על שלשה דברים האדם ניכר;  
בכיסו, בכוסו, ובכעסו

While a person cannot help being hurt or upset, we can control our reaction.

## 5. The Art of Communication

A true Middah of God which is recognizable in His relationship with the Jewish people is communication. God constantly called on Moshe to relay His thoughts to us.

*And Moshe said: If you will diligently listen to the voice of the Lord your God, and what is right in His eyes you will do, and you will listen to His commandments and will keep His statutes, all the diseases which I have put upon the Egyptians I will not put upon you.*

**Shemot 15:26**

ויאמר אם שמוע תשמע לקול ה'  
אלקיך והישר בעיניו והאזנת  
למצותיו ושמרת כל חקיו כל  
המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא  
אשים עליך כי אני ה' רפאך  
שמות טו:כו

Following listening effectively is the art of communication. At the start of the relationship this is the focus. Both sides must voice their thoughts and opinions, necessary to prevent quarrels or prejudgments.

## 6. Stand by Your Spouse

When Moshe himself gets frustrated, because the people have complained twice already about their lack of water and God's ability to provide it, we see Hashem's positive attitude and His willingness to stand by the Jewish people during their frustration as the sixth lesson.

*[Moshe is so upset he says] What shall I do for this people? A bit more and they will stone me ... [God tells Moshe] Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel.*

**Shemot 17:5**

מה אעשה לעם הזה עוד מעט וסקלני  
... עבור לפני העם וקח אתך מזקני  
ישראל  
שמות יז:ה

The Midrash Tanchuma Beshalach 22 asks, what is the purpose of these two passages? The midrash regards it as a rebuke from God for Moshe's impatience. "God answered Moshe: Is this the way you talk? How often have I told you not to order them about but to lead them like a shepherd his flock; ..." We might think that Moshe is right. What kind of behavior is this from the Jewish people?

*Do not test God the way you tested Him in Masah*

**Devarim 6:16**

לא תנסו את ה' אלקיכם כאשר נסיתם במסה  
דברים ו:טז

Isn't this contradicting the Midrash? The Midrash feels that Hashem sided with Bnei Yisroel. This pasuk clearly shows us that Hashem was not happy with the Jewish people at the time. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch tells us that at the beginning of a relationship certain things can't be expected. Hashem allowed Bnei Yisroel this learning curve. After God had proven Himself to us it would then not be acceptable to test God. We are told to hold fast to this certainty and to not ask for further miracles. We need to believe that God is in our midst and live and die in that certainty.

## 7. The Importance of Time and Effort

When the Jewish people reach Mt. Sinai the seventh lesson is taught, the importance of time and effort in a relationship. The Jewish people wanted to hear the commandments directly from God, so Moshe instructs them to diligently prepare themselves.

## 8. The Importance of Boundaries

In Chapter 19 they separated for three days from their spouses and prepared themselves physically and spiritually to greet God at Mt. Sinai. God as well set up boundaries on the mountain because even in the most intimate of relationships people need to respect each other, an eighth point to be learned.

God reiterates His love for His people.

*You will be a treasure to Me from among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine You will be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation.*

**Shemot 19:5**

והייתם לי סגלה מכל העמים...ואתם  
תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש  
שמות יט: ה

## 9. Love is Based on Reason

The essence of a relationship between two people is expounded upon in Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch's commentary in Chayei Sarah when Yitzchak brings Rivkah into his mother's tent.

*And Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah.  
And he married Rivkah, she became his wife and he loved  
her, and only then was Isaac comforted after his Mother*

**Bereishit 24:67**

ויביאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו ויקח את  
רבקה ותהי לו לאשה ויאהבה וינחם יצחק  
אחרי אמו  
בראשית כד:סז

Rav Hirsch states that the longer Yitzchak and Rivkah were married the more Yitzchak loved Rivkah! Like this marriage of Yitzchak and Rivkah, Jewish marriages are contracted not strictly by passion, but by reason and judgment. This ninth idea is different from most non Jewish marriages whose main reason for existing is "love." However, love that is based on attraction alone is blind and every step leads to disappointment.

## 10. Sharing the Same Basic Goals and Values

We finally reach the tenth action in this relationship: the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai which is the main celebration of Shavuot. The Torah tells us

*They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. And Israel encamped there opposite the mountain*

**Shemot 19:2**

ויסעו מרפידים ויבא אל מדבר סיני  
ויחנו במדבר ויחן שם ישראל נגד  
ההר.

**שמות יט:ב**

Why the repetition? According to Rashi it is to show “כאיש אחד בלב אחד” - “we were as one man with one heart.” At that moment God and the Jewish people shared the same basic goals and values. Both parties were committed to honoring the covenant of the forefathers using the Torah, which comes from the word, להורות, to instruct, as their guide.

A relationship is destined to succeed when strengthened by God and His people. At Mt. Sinai, we were taught to follow halacha, which shares the same root as ללכת, “to go” implying that in the Torah, God has given us the preparation to success; the “way to go”.

God has shared with us the intimate activities of His relationship with the Jewish people. It is clear that if we want a successful marriage this is the path that we too should follow.

# There Is No Sanctity Without Preparation: On The Torah Ethics Of Dating

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter

Senior Scholar, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future  
University Professor of Jewish History and Thought, Yeshiva University

The days leading up to Shavuot, coming closer and closer to *kabbalat ha-Torah*, remind us of the power of preparation. Ever since the counting of the *omer* commenced on the second night of Pesach, the countdown continues as we look forward to celebrating this most monumental and powerful event in our national history.

The notion of preparation in the life of a Jew is central and is expressed in a number of different ways throughout the year. For example, in a *teshuvah drashah* Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik delivered thirty years ago, in 1976, the Rav reflected on his experience as a child on the day before Yom Kippur:

*I remember how difficult it was to go to sleep on Erev Yom Kippur. The shohet used to come at the break of dawn to provide chickens for the kapparot ritual, and later the people would give charity. . . Minhah, Vidduy, the seudah ha-mafseket, [and] my grandfather's preparations all made Erev Yom Kippur a special entity, not only halakhic but emotional and religious as well. Erev Yom Kippur constitutes the herald that the Ribbono Shel Olam is coming, that "lifnei Hashem titharu, before Hashem you shall be purified."<sup>1</sup>*

It would appear, perhaps, that the Rav understood the word "*lifnei*" in this *pasuk* not only in a sense of place or geography, i.e., "purification takes place *in the presence of Hashem*" but also temporally, i.e., "purification takes place even *prior to encountering Hashem*," namely, beginning already on erev Yom Kippur.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Arnold Lustiger, *Before Hashem You Shall be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe* (Edison, 1998), 60-61.



To understand the halakhic status of this unique day, we need to examine the one ritually mandated act most closely associated with it. The *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayyim* 604:1; based on *Berakhot* 8b, *Yoma* 81b, *Rosh Hashanah* 9a; *Pesahim* 68b) states that it is a *mitzvah* to eat on Erev Yom Kippur. The Rabbenu Yonah (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 4:8-10) offers a number of rationales for this obligation. One explanation is that on all other *Yamim Tovim* we institute a festive meal as an expression of the “*simhat ha-mizvah*” that we feel. After all, Yom Kippur is also a *Yom Tov* (see *Ta'anit* 26b) but, since eating on the day of Yom Kippur itself is prohibited, we express that joy the day before. Another explanation is that we eat on Erev Yom Kippur to give us the strength to engage in the activities of prayer, supplication and *teshuvah* mandated on the next day when we will be fasting.

There seems to be a fundamental difference between these two explanations that reflects on the core essence of the day of Erev Yom Kippur. According to the first, Erev Yom Kippur has a *din* of Yom Kippur, it is an extension of Yom Kippur, it fulfills the role of Yom Kippur with regard to the *mizvah* of eating on a Yom Tov. It serves as the part of “Yom Kippur” when food is permitted. According to the second, however, Erev Yom Kippur is not an extension of the day of Yom Kippur but is, rather, a preparation for Yom Kippur. We eat on that day purely to enable us properly to acquit ourselves on the more important day that will follow. This point of view is also reflected in Rashi (on *Yoma* 81b, s.v. *kol ha-okhel*) and in the Rosh (*Yoma* 8:22).

There is a long list of halakhic distinctions that may possibly depend on this conceptual analysis. For example: is this *mizvah de-orayta* or *de-rabbanan*?; what and how much must one eat to fulfill the obligation?; does the obligation begin the night before or only in the morning?; what if one knows that he will fast well on Yom Kippur without eating the day before?; and are women also included in this obligation? A growing literature addresses these issues – and others – and is worth careful study.<sup>2</sup>

This notion of preparation is clearly central before the *Yamim Noraim*, as it is before *Shavuot*. What are we doing to insure that we maximize the opportunity granted us by *Hodesh Elul*, *Rosh Hashanah*, the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* and Yom Kippur? We will benefit from them all only to the extent that we have prepared ourselves in advance to do so.

The centrality of this idea is also expressed in a very interesting statement of Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur, the author of the *Sefat Emet* on *Humash*, in the context of the *yom tov* of *Sukkot*. The *Tur* (*Orah Hayyim* 581) quotes a Midrash that states that the phrase “*ba-yom ha-rishon*” found in the Torah in the context of the first day of *Sukkot* (*Vayikra* 23:40) includes the fact that that day is “*rishon le-heshbon avonot*,” the first day in the accounting of sins. After all, we are engaged in performing *mizvot* from the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* until that point: doing *teshuvah* during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* and preparing for the holiday of *Sukkot* from *Mozaei Yom Kippur* until its arrival. But, asks the *Taz* (*Orah Hayyim* 581:beginning), after all,

---

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, R. Aharon Kahn, “Kol ha-Okhel ve-Shoteh be-Teshi'i,” *Bet Yosef Shaul* 2, pp. 40-85; R. Yizhak Mirsky, *Hegvonei Halakhah* (Jerusalem, 1989), 178-83; R. Shlomo Weisblit, “Al Mizvat Akhilah u-Shetiyah Merubah be-Erev Yom ha-Kippurim, Iyyun be-Aggadah u-be-Halakhah,” *Mehkerei Hag* 11, pp. 52-60; R. Matityahu Blum, *Sefer Torah la-Da'at al ha-Mo'adim* (New York, 1985), 36-39; R. Zevi Pesah Frank, *Mikraei Kodesh: Yamim Nora'im* (Jerusalem, 1996), 125-27; R. Eliyahu Slesinger, *Eleh Hem Mo'adai* (Jerusalem, 1999), 298-305.

on the first day of Sukkot one performs the very *mizvot* for which one was only preparing until then so why is the time spent on the preparation more sanctified than the time actually doing the *mizvah*? In response, the *Sefat Emet* (Ha'azinu 5634) asserts for two reasons that this is precisely the case: “*yoter koah ve-hazalah yesh be-hakhanat ha-mizvah mi-guf kiyyum ha-mizvah.*”<sup>3</sup> The power of preparation for a *mizvah* is profound, even more profound than the power of the performance of the *mizvah* itself.

One final example of the power of preparation is a comment of the Rav about Erev Shabbat Jews:

*True, there are Jews in America who observe the Sabbath. . . . But, it is not for the Sabbath that my heart aches, it is for the forgotten “eve of the Sabbath.” There are Sabbath-observing Jews in America, but there are not “eve-of-the-Sabbath” Jews who go out to greet the Sabbath with beating hearts, with their feet or with their mouths.*<sup>4</sup>

Observing the Shabbat is one thing; preparing to observe the Shabbat is something else entirely.

This notion applies in so many areas of our religious lives and it must also be central in the dating lives of young men and women as they are engaged in the search for a life's partner. Marriage represents a life lived in sanctity and, as a result, it too requires appropriate, thoughtful and sensitive preparation. I present here a small and by no means exhaustive list of what I have in mind. Most apply to the young man as well as to the young woman; some apply only to the young man.

- When you received a call from someone with a suggestion for a date, did you respond in a timely and respectful way to say either that you are interested in finding out more about the person in question or that you are busy now and may consider the suggestion at a future time?
- What kinds of questions did you ask about that person? Were they the most appropriate ones? Did you focus on internal, longer lasting, aspects or on external ones which can – and will – change more easily?
- How much time elapsed from the time you agreed to the date until you made the call?
- Were you respectful to the other person during the telephone call setting up the date?
- Were you dressed properly for the date?
- Did you devote time to plan where you will take the young lady?
- Did you clear your schedule and select a time when you can focus on your date and not appear rushed?
- Did you bring along enough money to offer your date something nice to eat?
- Did you pick up your date on time?
- Were you ready at the designated time or did you have the young man wait for you?
- Did you speak to your date's parents with graciousness and respect?

---

<sup>3</sup> For more on the role of *hakhanah* in the Torah of Ger, see R. Hayyim Yeshayahu Hadari, “Hag La-Hashem Mahar,” in *Ishei Mo'ed* (Jerusalem, 1984), 65f.

<sup>4</sup> Pinchas Peli, ed., *On Repentance* (Northvale and London, 1996), 88.

- Did you arrange for transportation, parking, etc.?
- Did you spend a respectable amount of time with your date, even if you may have felt early on that he or she was not for you?
- If an intermediary was involved, did you call back in a timely manner and let him or her know whether or not you want to go out again?
- If your relationship has progressed and you feel at a later point that you want to end the relationship, did you part ways with respect and sensitivity?
- What did you say about the other person to your friends and others after you broke up?
- Did you make an effort to suggest someone else more suitable as a possible match for this individual?
- Whether the date results in an engagement or not, did you express *hakarat ha-tov* for those who worked – often hard - to bring the two of you together?

Each of these questions – and there are more – focus on the interpersonal skills necessary for a meaningful relationship. They seem to be self-evident and obvious but need to be the focus of constant attention. We want our marriages to be blessed with thoughtfulness, respect, kindness, responsible behavior, expressions of gratitude, flexibility when necessary, and focus on the other. Such skills and such a focus need to begin at the beginning. Proper preparation for marriage will help insure more lasting, loving and meaningful relationships once *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* blesses us with the person with whom we will build our futures and share the rest of our lives.

# Loving Hashem: A Model Relationship

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

Proper understanding of the mitzvah of *ahavas Hashem*, love of Hashem, is a cornerstone for our entire observance of mitzvos. It is always incumbent upon us to strive to grow in our *ahavas Hashem*. However, it is particularly appropriate to concentrate on improving our loving relationship with Hashem as we approach the Yom Tov of Shavuot, *zman matan Toraseinu*, the time that celebrates the giving of the Torah as the beginning of that relationship.

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva perek 10 gives us a framework as to how to fulfill the mitzvah of *ahavas Hashem*. The love between a man and a woman is the model for our love of Hashem. Such a love is all encompassing. Just as the love between a man and a woman has the ability to completely take over one's thoughts, so too we are commanded to reach this level of constantly focusing on Hashem and His Torah. The Rambam refers to the phrase in Shir HaShirim “חולת אהבה” – one who is lovesick – as the ultimate description of an *ahavas Hashem* that consumes one's very being. Following the Rambam's comparison between these two loves, we can learn from analyzing *ahavas Hashem* what a Torah perspective is regarding the proper love between husband and wife.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev has a powerful insight about how we relate to Hashem which is fundamental to any loving relationship. In his book *Kedushas Levi*, he observes that the Torah refers to the celebration of Pesach as *Chag Hamatzos*. Although the Torah does not refer to this festival as Pesach, the Jewish People always call it Pesach. What is the difference between Pesach and *Chag Hamatzos* and why have Hashem and His people chosen different ways to refer to the same holiday?

The name Pesach has its roots in the kindness that Hashem performed for the Jewish people when He passed over the Jewish homes during the plague of the firstborn. *Chag Hamatzos* describes the Jewish people rushing as they left Egypt. The image of an entire people following Hashem into the desert with nothing more than matzos on their shoulders is encapsulated with the words of *Chag Hamatzos*. Hashem and His people chose to commemorate the beginning of their loving relationship by emphasizing what their beloved did for them.

It is this focus ‘on the other’ that is the pillar of true love. All of *chesed* is predicated on one looking to another rather than focusing on oneself. It is therefore not surprising that *chesed* is such a critical character trait to look for in a spouse. There are two models in Tanach that deal with looking for a spouse, and they both highlight the significance of *chesed*. Eliezer the servant of Avraham uses *chesed* as the test to see whether Rivkah would be worthy of Yitzchak. The



*chesed* performed by Ruth towards Naomi and by Boaz towards Ruth are the catalysts that bring this couple together. Thus the entire future of the Jewish People and the royal chain of King David culminating with Melech Hamashiach came about only through *chesed*. So too, every Jewish home rests upon the foundation of *chesed*.

Looking to the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people as a model for a loving relationship, we can derive an important lesson from the words of commitment “נעשה ונשמע,” that brought this relationship into existence. The Jewish people were not aware of all the details of Torah life before committing to its observance. What was necessary was the trust in Hashem and the total commitment of the Jewish people that as the relationship progressed they would learn more about Hashem and His Torah, and want to observe all of its laws. Shavuos was more of an emphasis on trust and commitment than knowledge of all the details. That knowledge would eventually come at the right time. Similarly, in a growing relationship with a potential spouse it is unrealistic to focus on every possible detail about the other person. More emphasis should be on general personality traits, compatibility, and mutual trust. As events unfold, a relationship built on trust and commitment will be able to sustain life’s challenges.

Even a relationship as close as the one created between Hashem and His people on the first Shavuos can sometimes have setbacks. An important lesson about our interpersonal relationships can be learned from the events that followed Matan Torah. Upon forgiving the Jewish People for the sin of making a golden calf, Hashem taught us the secret of how to attain His forgiveness in the future. Chazal (Rosh Hashana 17b) comment that Hashem appeared to Moshe and taught him the thirteen attributes of mercy. Hashem assured Moshe that whenever the Jewish people would sin they should perform these words and they will be forgiven. Chazal are careful to describe that the assurance for forgiveness is contingent upon performing these words, not merely reciting them. Performing them means acting to others how Hashem deals with us. Just as He is merciful and forgives our misdeeds, so too are we expected to relate to others. True in all interpersonal relationships, this is even more critical in marriage. In our approach to our spouse’s shortcomings, we emulate Hashem’s patience and willingness to overlook our flaws. Nobody is perfect, and those who constantly focus on the others’ imperfections will never be happy.

As powerful the experience at Har Sinai was, it could not ensure an eternal bond to last between Hashem and His people. The Ramban in his introduction to תרומה sees in the institution of the Mishkan and later the Beis HaMikdash the necessity to keep the experience of Har Sinai fresh in our minds. Every visit to the Mishkan, and later the Beis HaMikdash, had the effect of reconnecting the visitor to the Har Sinai experience, as the central feature of Mishkan and Mikdash was the Aron which housed the luchos. It is only subsequent reconnecting to the events of the past that kept Har Sinai fresh and new in every generation. A similar model is necessary within the marriage relationship. To prevent the relationship from losing its freshness a couple must take many opportunities throughout life to reconnect to the original excitement that was present in the early stages of their life together.

Our relationships with Hashem and with our spouse have many parallels. May we learn from these valuable lessons, thereby strengthening these two fundamental aspects of our lives.

# A Walk Down the Aisle

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago

## Korban Omer: A Unique Beginning

Sefirat HaOmer, is the colloquial term for our counting of the days between Pesach and Shavuot. It is so called because the counting commences after the Korban Omer, the offering which was brought in the Beit Hamikdash on the first day of Pesach. In several ways, this Korban is unique among its class of offerings, meal offerings, termed Menachot. The Torah presents the motivation for the Korban Omer in an unusual way:

*And if you offer a meal offering of your first fruits to the Lord, you shall offer for the meal offering of your first fruits green ears of grain dried by the fire, grain beaten out of fresh ears.*  
**Vayikra 2:14**

ואם תקריב מנחת בכורים לה' אביב  
קלוי באש גרש כרמל תקריב את מנחת  
בכורך:  
ויקרא ב:יד

Rashi observes that this commandment refers to the annual Mitzvah of the Korban Omer, yet the Torah introduces it with the word *im* (if) as if it were an optional Korban. This seems to accent a voluntary aspect or theme of this Korban. The Midrash emphasizes this concept of volition as an integral part of the Korban. In Parshat Emor, the Torah reiterates the laws of the Korban Omer and the Sifra explains a seemingly superfluous word in the text:

*And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, according to your will; on the next day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.*  
**Vayikra 23:11**  
*According to your will, we do not coerce the community against its will.*  
**Sifra Emor 7**

והניף את העמר לפני ה' לרצונכם  
ממחרת השבת יניפנו הכהן:  
ויקרא כג:יא  
לרצונכם, אין כופים את הציבור על  
כורחו  
ספרא אמור פרשה ז

Based on this source, the Minchat Chinuch (Rav Yosef Babad, 19<sup>th</sup> c. Poland) notes that although all Korbanot must be offered willingly, the Korban Omer requires *ratzon gamur*, complete and total agreement (Mitzvah 302:15).

In addition, the composition of the Omer is unique. In contrast to almost all other Menachot which must be comprised of wheat, the Omer consists of barley. The role of barley in this Korban appears in another highly unusual context, in the third chapter of the Navi Hoshea:

1. Then said the Lord to me, Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a lover, and an adulteress; even as the love of the Lord toward the people of Israel, who look to other gods, and love cakes of raisins. 2. So I bought her for me for fifteen pieces of silver, and

(א) ויאמר ה' אלי עוד לך אהב  
אשה אהבת רע ומנאפת כאהבת ה'  
את בני ישראל והם פנים אל אלהים  
אחרים ואהבי אשישי ענבים: (ב)  
ואכרה לי בחמשה עשר כסף וחמר

for a homer of barley, and a letekh of barley; 3. And I said to her, You shall remain as mine for many days; you shall not play the harlot, and you shall not be for another man; so will I also be for you. 4. For the people of Israel shall remain many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without a pillar, and without an ephod, and without teraphim;

### Hoshea 3

Rashi explains this passage in a remarkable fashion:

For fifteen pieces of silver, and for a homer of barley, and a letekh of barley: Targum Yonatan explains: and I redeemed you according to my command on the fifteenth day of the month of Nissan and you gave the money, shekels, as an atonement for your souls. **And I said that you should offer before me an Omer brought of barley**, as if to say, I did not trouble you with difficult things. "With fifteen silver pieces" is the numerical value of "Nissan". And in the Pesikta it explains that the fifteen silver pieces is the fifteenth of Nissan and a homer and a letekh that is forty five (for a homer is 30 seah and a letekh is a half a homer), then, And I said to her, You shall remain as mine for many days: days is two, many is three, this is five; **these are the fifty days between Pesach and Shavuot**, on that day I gave them the Torah and in it I warned them.

שערים ולתך שערים: (ג) ואמר אליה ימים רבים תשבי לי לא תזני ולא תהיי לאיש וגם אני אליך: (ד) כי ימים רבים ישבו בני ישראל אין מלך ואין שר ואין זבח ואין מצבה ואין אפוד ותרפים:

### הושע פרק ג

(ב) בחמשה עשר כסף וחומר שעורים ולתך שעורים: ת"י ופרקתיון במימרי ביום חמשה עשר לירח ניסן ויהב ית כסף תקליא כיפור לנפשיהון ואמרית דיהון מקרבין קדמי עומר ארמותא מעללת שעורין כלומר לא הוגעתם בדברים קשים, בחמשה עשר כסף בגמטריא ניסן ובפסיקתא הוא נדרש בט"ו כסף בט"ו בניסן וחומר ולתך הרי ארבעים וחמשה שהחומר ל" סאה והלתך חצי חומר: (ג) ואומר אליה ימים רבים תשבי לי - ימים שנים רבים שלשה הרי חמשה אלו נ' יום שבין פסח לעצרת בו ביום נתתי להם התורה ובה הזהרתיה

According to Rashi, this chapter of Hoshea which describes Hashem's prophet hiring an unfaithful wife for a sum of barley is an allusion to the period of the counting of the Omer, the fifty days which began with the barley offering of the Korban Omer on Pesach. We should consider, what is the significance of this Korban as the beginning of our count, and what do we learn from its unique character and symbolism?

## Shte Halechem: The Culmination of Counting

The Korban Omer is only the beginning of the counting. The ensuing seven week tally culminates with another Korban Mincha, known as the Shte Halechem, two breads that were offered in the Beit Hamikdash on Shavuot. The Torah describes the period from the Korban Omer until the Shte Halechem:

15. And you shall count from the next day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven Sabbaths shall be complete; 16. To the next day after the seventh Sabbath shall you count fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal offering to the Lord. 17. You shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals; they shall

(טו) וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת תהיינה: (טז) עד ממחרת השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לה': (יז) ממושבתכם תביאו לחם תנופה שתיים שני עשרנים סלת תהיינה חמץ תאפינה בכורים לה':

*be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the first fruits to the Lord ... 21. And you shall proclaim on the same day, that it may be a holy gathering to you; you shall do no labor in it; it shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.*

**Vayikra 23:15-17, 21**

... (כא) וקראתם בעצם היום הזה  
מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבודה  
לא תעשו חקת עולם בכל מושבתיכם  
לדורותיכם:  
**ויקרא כג: טו- יז, כא**

The finale of the count, the Shte Halechem, is similar to its counterpart, the Korban Omer, in many respects. It too is a Korban Mincha offered by the community and it requires tenufa, waving, just as the Omer. Both Menachot create new allowances, as the Omer enables us to eat the grain of the new year known as chadash, and the Shte Halechem enables this new grain to be used in Menachot in the Beit Hamikdash. However, there are marked differences between the two. The Omer consists of barley and is baked as Matzah. In contrast, the Shte Halechem is comprised of wheat and has the unique distinction of being chametz, leavened, which is highly unusual for Menachot. Clearly, there is a process- a transformation- which occurs during the period of counting which results in a distinct and different Korban Mincha at the end of the Sefirah process. Interestingly, the Torah proscribes that this progression develop over seven weeks, each with its seven days. How do we understand the religious development symbolized by the different Menachot and this sevenfold pattern?

## A Jewish Wedding

Perhaps this can all be understood if we consider an altogether different topic: the Jewish wedding. According to Halacha, to covenant of marriage consists of two stages, erusin (betrothal) and nissuin (marriage). The first step consecrates the woman to her husband through the act of kiddushin, practiced today in the form of the groom giving a ring to the bride. The second step of nissuin exists when the couple enters their new home, the chuppah and their quiet moment alone, upon which time full marital responsibilities obtain. In years bygone these two phases of marriage were separated by many months, while today only a few moments bridge the almost unnoticeable transition. While these two steps are closely related, they may not be identical. We know that kiddushin, the act of betrothal requires two witnesses. These onlookers are indispensable; without them the kiddushin would be invalid. The Or Sameach (Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen, 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> c., Dvinsk) in his commentary on the Rambam (Ishut 10:2) wonders whether the chuppah, the nissuin, requires witnesses as well. Perhaps nissuin is just an extension of kiddushin, and thereby requires witnesses as well?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik quotes his grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, who answered this question unequivocally.<sup>5</sup> He taught that the concept of nissuin is fundamentally different from that of erusin and ruled that no witnesses are necessary for nissuin. In addition, although the woman's clear consent is critical for the kiddushin, Rav Chaim held that it was unnecessary for the nissuin, as all she requires is basic cognizance and understanding. Rabbi Soloveitchik

---

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's quotes this insight in his eulogy for his uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, entitled "Ma Dodech Midod," published in *Divrei Hagot Vahaaracha*, where he expands upon the Rav Chaim's principle.



explains his grandfather's position by demonstrating that there is a fundamental, qualitative distinction between the two stages of marriage. Kiddushin is a formal kinyan, a contract, which is a defined legal action. It is governed by the parameters of all legal instruments of transfer that require specific intent, and it is binding because of the mutual consent of the husband and wife. It is a limited partnership in that the couple may not yet live together, and they maintain their distinct identities. In contrast, nissuin does not require neither intent of acquisition nor witnesses, because it is not a maaseh. It is not a defined action. There is not specific act of nissuin; the marriage is simply the de facto result of the couple being together under the chuppah. Rav Soloveitchik explained the essence of nissuin:

*The betrothed man and woman wrap their lives in one fulfillment. Their fates intertwine, destinies merge and from the individual is born the true unity. There is in the chuppah/ yichud a symbol of joint experiences, turbulence times and challenges of a metaphysical, existential covenant. The husband and wife that marry, each checks the heart of the other, feels their experiences and knows their way of their spirit. The unity of hearts that beat in common rhythm, with mutual effect; the prayers and longings that spire and soar above as one; and the complementary desires, the feelings that emerge from one source erase the otherness of personality and two foreign individuals, who have become connected through a strong, profound and essential bond.*

הארוס והארוסה כורכים את חייהם בקיום אחיד. גורליהם מתמזגים ייעודיהם מתלכדים ומן הייחוד נולדת היחדות האמיתית. יש בייחוד חופה מן הסמליות של שיתוף ניסיונות הרפתקאות ואתגרים של כריתת ברית מיטאפיסית אקסיסטנציאלית. הבעל והאשה הנשואים – כל אחד בוחן לבב משנהו מרגיש את חוייתו ויודע את הלך רוחו. איחוד הלבבות הדופקים בריתמוס אחיד הנפעמים ומפעמים הדדית התפילות והתחנונים המיתמרים ועולים מעל כאחד הרציות המקבילות הרגשות הנובעים מאפיק אחד מנשלים את האחרות הפרסונאלית של שני היחידים הזרים שנתקשרו בקשר אמיץ תוכני ועצמי.

**דברי הגות והערכה**

We learn that nissuin is not an extension of the kiddushin, which is a measurable, defined act. It is a new reality, one that simply devolves from the melding of two lives into one, the presence of a new entity which is the synthesis of shared existence.

## Pesach: The First Phase of our Covenant

We know that our bond with Hashem is one that is described as a marriage covenant. The Megillah of Shir Hashirim portrays a loving relationship between a young woman and man that Rashi explains is an allegory of the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. We can suggest that just as a union between two people develops through the two stages of erusin and nissuin as we described above, our union with Hashem unfolded over two stages, the first on Pesach and the second on Shavuot.

We read the beautiful tale of Shir Hashirim specifically on Pesach, as during this time we commemorate our initial covenant with Hashem through yetziat Mitzrayim. We had encountered Hashem before the exodus, through our forbearers and through His miraculous interventions in Egypt. However, this nascent relationship was only concretized formally with the exodus as we entered a covenant with Hashem. We committed ourselves to a covenant with the blood of milah and Pesach, and He committed Himself by redeeming us. He chose us as his

nation, as the Torah describes, *bni bchori Yisrael*, that we are His firstborn. This initial phase parallels kiddushin, the initial, formal bond between us and Hashem. Hence, the holiday of Pesach is associated with Matzah, dough which is rudimentary and undeveloped, much as a relationship of erusin is not a fully developed marriage. The symbol of this kiddushin is the Korban Omer, a Korban of Matzah, which symbolizes the embryonic stage of our relationship with Hashem. Barley, the primary ingredient of this Korban, expresses this notion as well, because it is a less dignified food than other grains. The Netivot Shalom (Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky, 1911- 2000, Israel) articulates this parallel between the Omer and kiddushin and suggests why the ensuing count, Sefirat HaOmer is in multiples of seven:

*And parallel to this concept of counting seven clean days it says, from the day that you offer the Omer of waving, because the counting of the seven clean days follows the kiddushin before the nissuin and one could say that the commandment of the bringing of the Omer is an aspect of kiddushin between Hashem and the Jewish people.*

**Netivot Shalom Sefirat Haomer Essay 2**

וכלפי ענין זה של ספירת ז"נ נאמר  
מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה. כי  
הנה ספירת ז"נ הרי היא אחר קידושין  
קודם נישואין וי"ל דמצות הבאת  
העומר ענינה בחי' קדושין בין ישראל  
להקב"ה.  
**נתיבות שלום ספירת העומר מאמר  
שני**

If the Korban Omer symbolizes the stage of kiddushin, which begins the anticipatory process leading to the wedding- the nissuin, then just as a bride prepares herself by counting seven clean days before her wedding, so too we count seven weeks of seven days in anticipation of our union with Hashem.<sup>6</sup> In light of this parallel, the role of intent and volition of the Korban Omer is well understood. Just as the act of kiddushin, requires specific intent, so too, our initial commitment to Hashem, symbolized by the Korban Omer, must be solely, *lirtzonchem*, of our complete and total volition. Perhaps now we can appreciate Rashi's interpretation of the story in Hoshea. The Navi is demonstrating that the relationship of a husband and wife is the model for our relationship with Hashem. The barley, the Korban Omer, was the currency and symbol of our commitment to a process that developed over the course of fifty days and which requires subsequent fealty.

## Shavuot: A Walk Down the Aisle

The culmination of this process is the nissuin, the consummation of our marriage to Hashem. This occurred with Matan Torah on Shavuot. The Midrash Rabbah ties this concept to a verse in Shir Hashirim:

*"On the day of his marriage and on the day of the joy of his heart;" on the day of his marriage, this is Har Sinai, on the day of the joy of his heart, this is the Ohel Moed.*

**Vayikra Rabbah Acharei Mot 20**

ביום חתונתו וביום שמחת לבו, ביום  
חתונתו זה הר סיני, וביום שמחת לבו זה  
אהל מועד  
**ויקרא רבה פרשת אחרי מות פרשה כ**

<sup>6</sup> Tosafot articulates this parallel between the counting of the Omer and the counting of a woman's seven clean days and even suggests initially that perhaps just as one counts the Omer aloud, so too a woman should count aloud (see Tosafot, Ketubot 72a Vesafra and Menachot 65b Usfartem). In fact, the Shelah accepts this practice *l'maaseh*, see Shnei Luchot Habrit, Shaar HaOtiot, no. 376.

The Shavuot wedding metaphor illuminates a beautiful Midrash regarding our experience at Sinai:

*Rabbi Yosi said, Yehuda would expound, (Devarim 32:2) 'And he said, Hashem came from Sinai' don't read it as this, rather Hashem came to Sinai to give the Torah to the Jewish people or perhaps otherwise, rather He came from Sinai to accept the Jewish people, as this groom who goes out to greet his bride.*

*And they stood, they pressed together [...] we learn that the mountain was uprooted from its place and they encroached and stood beneath the mountain as it says (Devarim 4:11) 'and you came close and you stood under the mountain'.*

**Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael Yitro**

אמר ר' יוסי, יהודה היה דורש, (דברים לג ב) ויאמר ה' מסיני בא, אל תקרא כן, אלא ה' לסיני בא, ליתן תורה לישראל או אינו אומר כן, אלא ה' מסיני בא, לקבל את ישראל, כחתן זה שהוא יוצא לקראת כלה.

ויתצבו, נצפפו. [מלמד שהיו ישראל מתיראין מפני הזיקין מפני הזועות מפני הרעמים מפני הברקים הבאים. - בתחתית ההר]. מלמד שנתלש ההר ממקומו, וקרבו ועמדו תחת ההר, שנאמר (דברים ד יא) ותקרבו ותעמדון תחת ההר.

**מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל יתרו - מסכתא דבחדש פרשה ג**

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (1934- 1983, New York) in his volume, *Made in Heaven* (p.144), explains the Midrash in light of our parallel:

*The chuppah also recalls the revelation at Mount Sinai. The revelation at Sinai is seen as the marriage between God and Israel, and many marriage laws and customs are derived from the Sinai experience. It is taught that before giving the Torah to the Israelites God held the mountain over their heads. The mountain over their heads was like the chuppah under which the bridal couple stands.*

Shavuot is not only a commemoration of our receiving the Torah from Hashem. It is the celebration of the consummation of our marriage to Hashem. Matan Torah represents the final stage in our covenant with the Almighty as it is our nissuin. As Rabbi Soloveitchik explained, nissuin is more than just a formal, legally binding state. It is the most profound connection, the merging of destinies and an intimate closeness and understanding. With the revelation at Sinai, Hashem shared His essence with us to create this profound bond, as the Talmud teaches:

*'Anochi' is an acronym for I wrote Myself and gave it.*

**Shabbat 105a**

אנכי - נוטריקון: אנא נפשי כתיבת יהבית. מסכת שבת קה.

This is our profound bond of Torah with Hashem, one that is intimate and exclusive like a marriage in which we are privy to the secrets of His heart. It is one that creates one unified, shared entity of Hashem, Torah and the Jewish people, as our tradition teaches. This inherent connection through Torah, much like the chuppah of nissuin, requires no specific action or particular Mitzvah. Hence, the holiday of Shavuot does not involve any specific *mitzvot maasiot*-practical religious actions. It is simply *Atzeret*, a time of cessation of work to enable us to focus on our relationship as we stand beneath the canopy of Har Sinai. The Korban of Shavuot, the Shte Halechem, symbolizes this climax of our relationship. It is comprised of the noble ingredient wheat and is prepared as chametz which both symbolize the advanced degree of fulfillment in our connection. It differs from the Omer in that the intentionality of focus is less

crucial, as it does not represent a juridical agreement but rather the emotional and spiritual reality of a developed relationship.

The anticipation of Shavuot, the preparation for our wedding, is one which ought to be filled with great emotion. Rabbi Soloveitchik relates that this is expressed in some congregations in their Tefillot:

*The relationship between God and us is described as a marriage in the piyutim for the seven weeks separating Shavu'ot from Pesah. All of these piyutim are centered around a verse in Shir ha-Shirim (1:7), "Why shall I be like one veiled in mourning (ke-otyah)?" The Midrash says that otyah is "ke-armalta, like a widow." I remember that in the old batei midrashim in Lithuania, they used to recite payit every Shabbat between Pesah and Shavu'ot. Many of the piyutim were written by Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, and all of them centered about one idea, namely, that there is a love affair between Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu and Yisrael. And Shavu'ot is when the love of Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu for Yisrael, and vice-versa, that of Yisrael for HaKadosh Barukh Hu, is consummated. Shavu'ot is the yom hanisu'in, the day of marriage.*

***The Lord is Righteous in all His Ways p. 193***

We should anticipate Shavuot, our Matan Torah, with the excitement and anticipation as we would for a wedding. When we finally reach this great day of excitement, *Yom Chatunato*, we should aspire to feel a sense of profound joy and exhilaration, much as we do when we participate in a chuppah. We watch as the bride and groom walk down the aisle, moved by a sense of commitment and overwhelmed by joy and happiness. It is a time of great love. Shavuot is our walk down the aisle with Hashem. It is a time to feel our emotional bond with our Beloved. It is an opportunity to appreciate our commitment and to feel the excitement and joy of our spiritual journey together with Hashem. It is a time in which we celebrate Torah, the ultimate connection that consummates our unification with Hashem, which is renewed each year on the anniversary of our wedding at Har Sinai.



# תלמוד תורה כנגד כולם במשנת הרב הוטנר

רב יצחק בלאו

ראש כולל ישיבת שבילי התורה

המשנה הידועה במסכת פאה (א:א) קובעת ש"תלמוד תורה כנגד כלם." כנראה תלמוד תורה נחשב למצווה החשובה ביותר בתורתנו. אולם למעשה תלמוד תורה נדחה ביתר קלות בהשוואה למצוות אחרות. לכאורה הכלל ש"העוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה" אינו תקף בצורה המלאה ביחס למצווה זו. הגמרא אומרת שאם באמצע לימוד מגיעה עוד מצווה שאי אפשר לעשות על ידי אחרים, אז מפסיקים ללמוד ומקיימים את המצווה השנייה (מועד קטן ט:). מדוע אין אנו אומרים שהעוסק במצוות תלמוד תורה פטור מן המצווה גם כשאי אפשר לעשות את המצווה השנייה על ידי אחרים?

הניסוח של הרמב"ם מוסיף לשאלה:

אין לך מצוה בכל המצוות כולן שהיא שקולה כנגד תלמוד תורה אלא תלמוד תורה כנגד כל המצוות כולן שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה. לפיכך התלמוד קודם למעשה בכל מקום. היה לפניו עשיית מצוה ותלמוד תורה, אם אפשר לעשות המצוה על ידי אחרים לא יפסיק תלמודו, ואם לא יעשה המצוה ויחזור ללימודו. (הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק ג הלכות ג-ד)

אם באמת אין אף מצווה שהיא שקולה כנגד תלמוד תורה ואם "תלמוד קודם למעשה בכל מקום", מדוע מפסיקים ללמוד כדי לקיים מצוות אחרות? יתר על כן, הרמב"ם פוסק שמי שחושש שחיי משפחה יבטלו אותו מתלמוד תורה יכול לדחות נישואים לכמה שנים. הוא מצדיק פסק זה בטענה: "שהעוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה וכל שכן בתלמוד תורה" (הלכות אישות פרק טו הלכה ב). כאן משתמע שהכלל של העוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה תקף בצורה חזקה יותר ביחס לתלמוד תורה אבל בהלכות תלמוד תורה ראינו בדיוק את ההפך!

כמובן ניתן להסביר שלא ייתכן שניישם את הכלל של העוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה בצורה מלאה ביחס לתלמוד תורה כי אילו היינו עושים כך, יש סכנה שאדם יעסוק רק במצווה חשובה זו ואף פעם לא יגיע למצוות אחרות. אפילו אם זה המניע להגבלת הכלל ש"העוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה", איך זה בא לידי ביטוי בקטגוריות הלכתיות? איזה מושג הלכתי מגביל את הפטור של העוסק במצווה? הרב אלחנן ווסרמן (קובץ שיעורים חלק ב סימן יט) טוען כך:

נראה דהא דצריך לבטל תלמוד תורה בשביל קיום מצוה אין הטעם משום דמצות תלמוד תורה נדחית מפני קיום מצוה דהא מצות תלמוד תורה גדולה מכל המצוות אלא דכמו שמותר לבטל תלמוד תורה מפני דרך ארץ וכל צרכי האדם ההכרחיים ומשום דחייב תלמוד תורה אינו חלה על האדם אלא בשעה שהוא פנוי ובטל מעשיית צרכיו דקרא כתיב ואספת דגנך אבל בשעה שהוא צריך לעשות מלאכתו או אינו מחויב כלל בתלמוד תורה הכא נמי אם הוא צריך לעסוק במצוה לא גרע משאר צרכי האדם שאז אינו מחויב כלל בתלמוד תורה וכל

לפי גישת רב אלחנן, חיוב תלמוד תורה אף פעם אינו נדחה אבל החיוב לתלמוד תקף רק כשאין לאדם צרכים גשמיים או רוחניים אחרים העומדים על הפרק. כשיש צרכים חשובים אחרים, אין חיוב לתלמוד ולכן ניתן לעשות את הדברים האחרים בלי לבטל חיוב תלמוד תורה.

לרב הוטנר יש גישה אחרת והוא מזכיר אותה כמה פעמים בספר פחד יצחק לחג שבועות (סימנים ה, ח, יג, יח, מ) וגם פעם אחת בספרו על פסח (סימן סח). ריש לקיש לימד אותנו ש"פעמים שביטולה של תורה זהו יסודה

דכתיב אשר שברת אמר לו הקב"ה למשה יישר כחך ששברת" (מנחות צט.). רש"י מביא עוד דוגמא לתופעה זו ממקרה שאדם מבטל תלמוד תורה להוצאת המת ולהכנסת כלה. הרב הוטנר מסכים עם רב אלחנן שתלמוד תורה אינו נדחה מפני מצוות אחרות אבל יש לו הסבר אחר להפסקת לימוד לקיום מצווה שאי אפשר לעשות על ידי אחרים. רבוננו של עולם אמר למשה ששכירת הלוחות לא היתה ירידה בתלמוד תורה אלא דווקא הוספה לתורה. כמו כן, רש"י מלמד אותנו שהפסקת תלמוד תורה כדי לקיים עוד מצוות אינו ביטול תלמוד תורה אלא דווקא הוספת מימד ללימוד. "ביטולו זהו קיומו".

רעיון זה שונה מאוד ממקרה שדבר אחד נדחה מפני השני. אם סומכים על הכלל "עשה דוחה לא תעשה" ולובשים כלאים בציצית, לא מקבלים "יישר כחך" על לבישת הכלאים אלא רק על לבישת הציצית. על פי הבנת הרב הוטנר, כשמשנה שבר את הלוחות, הוא קבל "יישר כחך" על עצם השבירה ולא רק על דברים אחרים שנבעו מהמעשה. שבירת הלוחות מייצגת את המושג של "ביטולו זהו קיומו" ועצם ההפסקה בלימוד התורה נחשבת להוספת תלמוד תורה.

המאירי במועד קטן טוען שלא אומרים העוסק במצווה פטור מן המצווה ביחס לתלמוד תורה כי יש דין שתלמוד תורה אמור להיות "על מנת לעשות". זאת אומרת, מי שרק לומד ואינו מקיים מצוות אחרות, יש דבר חסר בתלמודו. לכן מי שמפסיק לימודו להכנסת כלה אכן מקיים מצוות תלמוד תורה בצורה עמוקה יותר. הוא אינו דוחה מצוות תלמוד תורה אלא דווקא מעשיר אותה.

הרב הוטנר משתמש ברעיון זה להסביר כמה וכמה סוגיות. התוספות בברכות יא: שואלים מדוע אנחנו מברכים ברכת התורה רק פעם אחת ביום אפילו אם מפסיקים ואז חוזרים ללמוד אבל מברכים על ישיבת סוכה כל פעם שנכנסים לסוכה לאכול. הם עונים: "שאני תלמוד תורה שאינו מייאש דעתו ממנה כל שעה." האם זה באמת נכון שאדם עדיין חושב על תלמוד תורה כשהוא עוסק בעבודתו או אוכל ארוחת צהריים? הרב סולובייצ'יק פעם הסביר שיש שתי רמות בתודעה של אדם. גם כשאני עסוק בדברים אחרים, חלק מתודעתה תמיד חושבת על ילדיה. כמו כן, חלק מתודעת האדם תמיד קשורה לתלמוד תורה. למרות שיש כאן רעיון מאוד יפה, ייתכן שהרב הוטנר הציע תשובה פשוטה יותר. אדם שמפסיק לימודו לתת צדקה אינו באמת משבר את הרצף של מצוות תלמוד תורה כי קיום מצוות אחרות מוסיף את המימד של "על מנת לעשות" ללימודו. לכן לא היה כאן הפסק ואין שום צורך לברך עוד ברכת התורה.

ייתכן שדבר זה תלוי באדם ובאופן שהוא סוגר את ספרו. יש בני אדם שמפסיקים לימודם כי הם מבינים את הצורך להוסיף את המימד של "על מנת לעשות" ללימודם אבל גם ייתכן שיש אנשים שמפסיקים את לימודם כי הם אינם קשורים כל כך לתלמוד תורה. אבן הבוחן היא מה עושים אחרי שגומרים את העסק השני. מי שקשור באמת לתלמוד תורה חוזר ללימודו. עכשיו ניתן להבין את לשון הרמב"ם שהבאנו למעלה. הרמב"ם כתב: "יעשה המצוה ויחזור ללימודו." מדוע הוא הרגיש צורך להוסיף את המשפט האחרון? אם הוא ביקש להזכיר את הדין שמפסיקים ללמוד כדי לקיים מצוות אחרות למה הוא הצטרך לומר שלאחר מכן, האדם חוזר לבית המדרש? לפי הרב הוטנר, הכל מובן. רק מי שחוזר ללימודו מראה שלא היה כאן סתם ביטול תורה אלא פעולה זאת מלמדת שהוא אדם שקשור לתלמוד תורה בצורה מאוד עמוקה אבל בכל זאת מפסיק לימודו בשביל שהוא גם מבין את הצורך בלימוד על מנת לקיים. רק אדם כזה מוצדק לגמרי בהפסקת הלימוד.

כמן כן, ניתן להסביר הלכה אחרת שנראית לכאורה מוזרה במקצת. ברכה השניה של ברכות קריאת שמע, ברכת אהבה רבה, יכולה לשמש בתור ברכת התורה אם האדם לומד משהו מיד אחרי התפילה. הרב הוטנר מעיר שהמטבע של כל ברכות המצווה עוסק אך ורק במצווה שמדובר בה. לדוגמא, ברכות התורה הרגילות של כל יום ויום מדברות כל כולן על הנושא של תלמוד תורה. באהבה רבה, יש מכלול של נושאים ואיך ייתכן שהיא נחשבת לברכת התורה? שנית, מה פשר הדבר שברכת אהבה רבה מועילה כברכת התורה רק כשלומדים אחרי התפילה?

הרב הוטנר מסביר שבאופן כללי ברכת מצווה אמורה לדבר רק על המצווה הפרטית. ברם, ביחס למצוות תלמוד תורה, ברכתה יכולה לכלול דברים אחרים כי כשאדם לומד על מנת לעשות, גם הדברים האחרים מוסיפים נופך למצוות תלמוד תורה ונכללים בה. מכאן שכל הרעיונות המוזכרים בברכת אהבה רבה קשורים באמת לתלמוד תורה. אמנם ראינו ברמב"ם שההוכחה שהאדם הפסיק לימוד כדי להוסיף מימד ללימוד היא שאותו אדם חוזר ללימודו. רק מי שלומד אחרי התפילה יכול לטעון שמכלול הרעיונות של ברכת אהבה רבה כולם קשורים למצוות תלמוד תורה.

עכשיו ניתן להבין גמרא קשה במסכת קידושין (מ): יש דיון שם מה גדול יותר – לימוד או מעשה. מסקנת הסוגיה היא "תלמוד גדול שתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה." הקושי ברור. אם כל גדלות התורה היא שהיא מביאה לידי מעשה, אז משתמע שבאמת מעשה עדיף. רש"י הרגיש בקושי וכתב: "נמצאו שניהם בידו." כלומר, תורה עדיף כי מי שלומד זוכה גם ללמוד וגם לעשות. הרב הוטנר מציע הסבר אחר. לימוד שהוא על מנת לעשות הוא סוג אחר של לימוד. לכן, לימוד ש"מביא לידי מעשה" הוא הלימוד ברמה ההכי גבוהה ודווקא הוא עדיף ממעשה.

נשאר לנו רק לברר מדוע שונה הדין ביחס למצוות קידושין ומצוות פרו ורבו: מדוע תלמוד תורה אכן דוחה את המצוות האלה. ראינו ברמב"ם שכן אומרים העוסק בתורה פטור מן המצוות לדחות נישואין למרות שמדובר במצווה שלא ניתן לקיים על ידי אחרים. אכן בעל מהר"ם שיק טוען שפרו ורבו מוגדר כמצווה שאפשר לעשות על ידי אחרים כי אחרים יכולים להתחתן, להוליד, וליישב את העולם (עיי' בתשובותיו אבן העזר סימן א). הרב אהרן ליכטנשטיין מצביע על קושי גדול בהסבר זה. גם אם נאמר שהתיישבות העולם היא מטרת מצוות פרו ורבו, עדיין מוטלת חובה אישית על כל גבר פרטי להביא ילדים לעולם ועל כן היינו צריכים להגדיר את המצווה כאי אפשר לעשות על ידי אחרים (עיי' במאמרו "בענין העוסק בתורה פטור מן המצווה" בספר כבוד הרב).

הרב הוטנר עצמו מסביר שמפסיקים ללמוד כדי לקיים מצוות אחרות רק כשעצם המצוות הוא מה שמבטל את האדם מהלימוד. לדוגמא, יש בכוחן של מצוות נטילת לולב או נתינת צדקה לגרום להפסקת לימוד שכן על ידי זה נעשה הלימוד על מנת לעשות. ברם, בחיי אישות, זה לא רק המצווה עצמה שמבטלת את הלימוד אלא טרחת מזונות שבאה בעקבות קיום המצווה וממשיכה לימן ארוך אחר גמר קיומה. ביטול לימוד זה אינו כרוך במימד של על מנת לעשות ולכן תלמוד תורה אכן דוחה מצוות אלה.

למיטב הבנתי, הרב הוטנר לא הסביר מדוע טענה זאת יכולה לאפשר רק איחור הנישואין ולא החלטה לא להתחתן בכלל. הרב ליכטנשטיין, אחד מתלמידיו של הרב הוטנר, הסביר את הדין בהלכות אישות בצורה שונה. כמו הרב הוטנר, גם הרב ליכטנשטיין טוען שאין דוחים תלמוד תורה בעבור מצוות אחרות אלא שהפסקת הלימוד כדי לקיים מצוות אחרות מוסיפה מימד לתלמודו. ביחס למצוות פרו ורבו, תלמוד תורה יכולה להצדיק איחור המצווה אבל לא לבטל אותה. מי שדוחה מצווה לכמה שנים עדיין יכול לטעון שלימודו אינו חסר כי הוא עדיין מוגדר כלימוד על מנת לקיים אבל מי שמבטל את המצווה לנצח כבר אינו לומד על מנת לקיים. עכשיו הפסק של הרמב"ם מאוד סביר.

עד כה ראינו דין מיוחד של העוסק במצווה שנאמר רק ביחס לאדם שעוסק בתלמוד תורה. עכשיו נראה הרחבת הרעיון לאופקים אחרים של תלמוד תורה. הרב הוטנר היה מאוד רגיש לענייני לשון וגם בסוגייתנו הוא שם לב להבדלי סגנון בין שתי סוגיות מקבילות. יש שתי סוגיות העוסקות באפשרות לעבור על דברי תורה למען צורך דתי. חז"ל החליטו לכתוב תורה שבעל פה למרות האיסור בגלל "עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורותיך" (תמורה יד:). יש גם ביטוי "יש כח ביד חכמים לעקור דבר מן התורה" שנאמר ביחס להחלטת חז"ל לבטל קיום מצוות שופר ולולב בשבתות בגלל חשש של חילול שבת (יבמות צ:). הרב הוטנר טוען שכל אחת מסוגיות אלה משתמשת בכלל אחר כי מדובר בשני מושגים שונים.

הוא מסביר:

ומעתה יראה לומר דהיתר כתיבת תורה שבעל פה אין זה מגדרי עקירת דבר מן התורה, אלא מגדרי ביטולה זהו קיומה. דמחמת גדר העקירה אין זה אלא היתר על איסור שאסרה תורה. מה שאין כן עכשיו שהותרה כתיבתה של תורה שבעל פה מצד שביטולה זהו קיומה, עצם מעשה הכתב של דברי תורה נעשה פעולה של קיום התורה.

הגמרא אינה יכולה להשתמש בביטוי "עקירת דבר מן התורה" ביחס לכתיבת תורה שבעל פה כי אז היה משתמע שמעשה הכתיבה אינו מעשה של תלמוד תורה אלא מעשה אסור הנדרש לאפשר לימוד. באמת, בגלל הדין המיוחד של "ביטול זהו קיומו" ששייך אך ורק בתלמוד תורה, מסתכלים על זה אחרת. ברגע ש"עת לעשות לה'" מתיר כתיבת תורה שבעל פה, עצם מעשה הכתיבה נהפך לאקט של תלמוד תורה. תלמוד תורה מצליח לכבוש שטחים אחרים ושם נאמר ביטולו זהו קיומו.

# Zman Matan Torah: Our Name is Yosef, Not Joe

Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

In our tefillos we refer to Shavuot as *zman masan toraseinu*, the time of the giving of the Torah. Our reaction to Hashem giving of the Torah to the Jewish people was expressed in the statement of *naaseh v'nishma*, we will do and hear. The Ohr Hachaim points out that every Jew that witnessed the giving of the Torah spontaneously answered *naaseh v'nishma* without consulting their friends or family or even forming a committee to first look into the pros and cons of accepting the Torah. Every individual accepted and answered *naaseh v'nishma* with a full commitment and were compared to the angels, as stated in the gemara:

*Rabbi Elazar said: when the Jewish people said "we will do" before "we will hear", a bas kol (voice from heaven) came out and said "who revealed to my children this secret that the administering angels use, as it says (Tehillim 103:20) bless Hashem, his angels, mighty in strength, that do His will to hear the voice of His word".*

**Shabbos 88a**

אמר רבי אלעזר: בשעה שהקדימו ישראל  
נעשה לנשמע יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן: מי  
גילה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשין  
בו? דכתיב (תהלים קג) ברכו ה' מלאכיו  
גברי כח עשי דברו לשמע בקול דברו,  
**מסכת שבת דף פח.**

We see true *d'veikus*, cleaving, and love of Hashem on the part of every individual through their statement of *naaseh v'nishmah*. One could ask that when the Jewish people stood by Har Sinai to accept the Torah, it says (Shemos 19:17) that they stood literally under the mountain, which is interpreted by the gemara as a reference to being forced to accept the Torah, and it was not just a voluntary act. In fact, the gemara describes the scene:

*God suspended the mountain over [the Jewish people] like a barrel, and said "if you will accept the Torah, it will be good, and if not, there will be your burial place."*

**Shabbos 88a**

כפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית,  
ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב,  
ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם.  
**מסכת שבת דף פח.**

The midrashim explain that the statement of *naaseh v'nishmah* only applies to *Torah sheb'ksav*, the written Torah, whereas the gemara is referring to the *Torah sheb'al peh*, the Oral Torah, which required coercion on the part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This coercion on the *Torah sheb'al peh* was only necessary until the time of Mordechai and Esther, where at the conclusion of the events of Purim, when the Jewish people escaped complete annihilation, the Megilla records *kiymu v'kiblu*<sup>7</sup>, they willingly accepted all parts of Torah, including the *Torah sheb'al peh*.

One could ask how it was the Jewish people didn't accept the Oral Torah at Har Sinai. For instance, the Torah says "לא תבערו אש", do not burn a fire [on Shabbos], which is interpreted by the gemara to prohibit giving the death penalty on Shabbos. Did the Jewish people only accept this at face value, which would mean they didn't have any fires burning on Shabbos, and no stoves cooking food on Shabbos at all? It is inconceivable that the Jewish people were on the level of karaaites and tzedukim, who refused to accept any part of *Torah sheb'al peh*.

Rav Leib Bakst zt"l explains that all the parts of *Torah sheb'al peh* that did not require a great amount of deep analysis and were easily understood were accepted by the Jewish people at Har Sinai. One cannot separate *Torah sheb'ksav* and *Torah sheb'al peh*, as they are all one unit, and were accepted together. There are, however, areas of *Torah sheb'al peh* which require a tremendous amount of effort and delving into in order to understand. This was the part of *Torah sheb'al peh* that the Jewish people were forced to accept through Hashem holding the mountain over their heads.

The Tanchuma indicates this unique quality of *Torah sheb'al peh*.

*For only those that love Hashem with all their heart, soul and possessions can study [Torah sheb'al peh] as it says "you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your possessions." From where do we know that this love refers to study? See what it says afterwards "and these things that I command you shall be on your heart" and what is that? This is study, and what study is on the heart? We would say "and you shall teach your children" this is study which requires sharpness. The first parsha of krias shma does not refer to reward in this world, as the second parsha does, "and I will bring rains in their time", [the first parsha] refers to the reward for doing mitzvos but without learning Torah, and in the second parsha it is written "with all your heart and with all your soul" and doesn't mention "and with all your possessions" to teach that anyone that loves wealth and pleasure can't study Torah sheb'al peh, for it requires great effort and lack of sleep, and there are those that waste themselves away on it, and therefore its reward is in the world*

לפי שאין לומד אותה [תורה שבעל פה] אלא מי שאוהב הקב"ה בכל לבו ובכל נפשו ובכל מאודו שנא' ואהבת את ה' אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך ובכל מאורך (דברים ו'), ומניין אתה למד שאין אהבה זו אלא לשון תלמוד, ראה מה כתיב אחריו והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום על לבבך ואי זה זה תלמוד שהוא על הלב הוי אומר ושננתם לבניך זו תלמוד שצריך שנון, ללמדך שפרשה ראשונה שבק"ש אין בה פירוש מתן שכרה בעוה"ז כמ"ש בפרשה שנייה והיה אם שמוע תשמעו וגו' ונתתי מטר ארצכם, זה מתן שכר עוסקי מצות (ס"א תורה שבכתב) שאין עוסקין בתלמוד, ובפ' שנייה כתיב בה בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם ולא כתב בכל מאדכם ללמדך שכל מי שאוהב עושר ותענוג אינו יכול ללמוד תורה שבע"פ לפי שיש בה צער גדול ונדוד שינה ויש מבלה ומגבל עצמו

<sup>7</sup> The Torah Temima points out that it should have been written *kiblu v'kiymu*. Since the word *kiymu* comes first, there must have been a previous *kabalah* before Purim, namely by Har Sinai.

to come.

### Midrash Tanchuma Noach 3

עליה לפיכך מתן שכרה לעה"ב  
מדרש תנחומא פרשת נח סימן ג

This midrash is a proof as to why *Torah sheb'al peh* wasn't fully accepted at Har Sinai, since it requires a full commitment of love and dedication to Torah and Hashem.

One should still ask why Torah was given in such a manner of force in reference to *Torah sheb'al peh*. Why couldn't the Jewish people accept everything at the very outset with the words of *naaseh v'nishmah*?

The gemara even asks that since the Jewish people were forced to accept the Torah, this gives an excuse for one not to observe the mitzvos in a proper manner. The gemara says:

*From here is a great claim on the Torah.*

**Shabbos 88a**

מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא.

מסכת שבת דף פח.

Rashi explains:

*For if you are called to judgment as to why you didn't fulfill what you accepted, there is an answer, that it was accepted against our will.*

שאם יזמינם לדין למה לא קיימתם מה שקבלתם עליכם - יש להם תשובה, שקבלוה באונס.

The gemara continues and says that the answer to the claim is that in the time of Purim the entire Torah was accepted willingly by the entire Jewish people. Still, why was it necessary for the Torah to be accepted in two steps?

## Torah as the Blueprint of the World

The entire world was created to give us the opportunity to lead our lives under the observance of Torah and mitzvos. Everything in this world was created to follow the word of Hashem. For example, lulavim and esrogim were created for the sole purpose of being used for mitzvos on Sukkos. The desire to sin through the yetzer harah was only created so that we should be able to fight that inclination and follow mitzvos instead. The laws of the Torah control our lives.

All our actions in our performances of mitzvos are all part of nature which is a part of Torah. Torah preceded the world. Chazal tell us *Bereishis bara Elokim* means that Hashem created the world for the sake of Torah which is called *reishis*, the ultimate.

We are all aware that on this earth, things such as climate, weather conditions, daily earthly functions and even life and death are not in the control of man. These daily events are placed upon us and are considered against our will, as we are taught (Pirkei Avos 4:22) that we live and die against our will.

The idea that *Torah sheb'al peh* was forced upon us is meant to indicate to the Jewish people that Torah is a part and parcel of daily life. We are prepared and willing to accept all daily natural events regardless of our own desires. The Torah was forced upon us to reinforce the notion that Torah is built into the workings of the world. The world is a model of the Torah. Just as we

accept life which was thrust upon us without our agreement, we accept Torah even when it was presented to us in a coercive manner.

*On Shavuot, Rav Yosef would say "prepare for me a three year-old calf." And he would say "if not for the effects of this day, how many people named Yosef are there in the market?"*

**Pesachim 68b**

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר: עבדי לי  
עגלא תלתא. אמר: אי לא האי יומא  
דקא גרים, כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא?  
מסכת פסחים דף סח:

Rav Yosef wanted and requested to eat very fancy foods on Shavuot, for this day was a very joyous one. Rav Yosef was convinced, as we should be, that if it were not for the *kabalas haTorah* on Shavuot, we would not be any different than the rest of the human race.

Rashi explains:

***If it were not for this day:** that I learned Torah and grew to greatness, there are many people in the marketplace named Yosef, and what would be the difference between me and them?*

אי לאו האי יומא: שלמדתי תורה  
ונתרוממתי - הרי אנשים הרבה בשוק  
ששמן יוסף, ומה ביני לבינם.

The *kabalos haTorah* of Shavuot not only differentiated us from the rest of the world but also elevated us. The words we recite in our prayers in numerous places, אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים, that Hashem chose use from all the nations, is in reference to Torah, Shabbos and Yom Tov. A non-Jew is forbidden to learn Torah or keep the Shabbos, since these mitzvos differentiate us.

Our names are not John or Joe. We are Yosefs, proudly continuing the names and actions to emulate our forefathers. Take advantage of this Shavuot to utilize our time and efforts in a fashion of Torah-observant Jews.

# The Tuition Challenge: A Discussion Guide

Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

Torah study plays a prominent role in the holiday of Shavuot. It is a holiday where many people make a concerted effort to study Torah with their children. While the effort to study Torah with our children on Shavuot and throughout the year is commendable, in most cases, it does not supplant the need to send a child to a Jewish day school in order to receive a formal Jewish education.

Day school education can be financially draining for a family. Many families simply cannot afford to pay the tuition fee. Day schools do offer scholarships for those in need, but the scholarship funds require significant fundraising efforts in order for the school to meet its financial obligations. Raising scholarship funds has become increasingly difficult in the last few years, given the current economic situation. As such, many schools are faced with the challenge of finding a way to make tuition affordable while remaining financially stable.

The "tuition challenge" compels us to find alternative means of funding day school education. At present, in many schools, the collective parent body cannot afford to pay for the capital and operating expenses of the school. Any solution to this challenge will involve reducing expenses, increasing revenue or a combination thereof. In this study guide, we will present Torah sources relating to the various options available for schools and communities. We hope that these sources help in facilitating a meaningful discussion about a topic that weighs heavily on the minds of many of us in the Jewish community.

## The Institution of Yehoshua ben Gamla

*Rav Yehuda has told us in the name of Rav: Nevertheless, the name of that man is to be blessed, his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all. By what [verse of the Scripture] did they guide themselves? — By the verse (Devarim 11:19), "And you shall teach them to your children," laying the emphasis on the word 'you' (i.e. this should be performed personally). They then made an ordinance that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem. By what verse did they guide themselves? — By the verse (Michah 4:2), "For from*

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב ברם  
זכור אותו האיש לטוב ויהושע  
בן גמלא שמו שאלמלא הוא  
נשתכח תורה מישראל  
שבתחלה מי שיש לו אב מלמדו  
תורה מי שאין לו אב לא היה  
למד תורה מאי דרוש ולמדתם  
אותם ולמדתם אתם התקינו  
שהיו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות  
בירושלים מאי דרוש כי מציון  
תצא תורה ועדיין מי שיש לו



*Zion shall the Torah go forth." Even so, however, if a child had a father, the father would take him up to Jerusalem and have him taught there, and if not, he would not go up to learn there. They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each province, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] and if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Yehoshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town and children should enter school at the age of six or seven.*

**Baba Batra 21a (Translation adapted from Soncino Talmud)**

אב היה מעלו ומלמדו מי שאין  
לו אב לא היה עולה ולמד  
התקינו שיהו מושיבין בכל פלך  
ופלך ומכניסין אותן כבן ט"ז  
כבן י"ז ומי שהיה רבו כועס  
עליו מבעיט בו ויצא עד שבא  
יהושע בן גמלא ותיקן שיהו  
מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בכל  
מדינה ומדינה ובכל עיר ועיר  
ומכניסין אותן כבן שש כבן  
שבע.

**בבא בתרא כא.**

Accessibility to Jewish education came in stages. Initially, Jewish education was only accessible to those who were willing to travel and was only accessible to teenagers. Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution provided local accessibility to all children from the age of six and up.

R. Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov (1783-1841) suggests that the institution transforms the way we approach Jewish education:

*Although one fulfills his biblical obligation by teaching Torah to his children, on a rabbinic level, one does not fulfill his obligation unless all of the children of the city are educated, both rich and poor. It would seem to me that after the institution [of Yehoshua ben Gamla], one does not even fulfill his biblical obligation unless all of the children of the city are educated as I will explain ... In our situation, since Yehoshua ben Gamla instituted a stringent feature to the quality of the mitzvah - to be involved in the education of all children of the city - one who educates only his own children, and is not concerned with the children of the poor, certainly violates the rabbinic enactment of Yehoshua ben Gamla, but additionally, does not fulfill his biblical obligation [to teach Torah to one's children].*

**Takanot Tamchin D'Oraita no. 3**

והנה הגם שיוצאין מן התורה י"ח המ"ע  
בלימוד תורה לבניו. עכ"ז מדרבנן אינם  
יוצאים י"ח המ"ע רק בלימוד תורה לכל  
בני העיר יחד עשיר ואביון. והנה נ"ל  
לפ"ז כי אחר התקנה מדאורייתא אינם  
יוצאים י"ח המ"ע רק בלימוד תורה לכל  
התינוקות שבעיר כאשר אבאר אי"ה  
הסכת ושמע ... בנידון דידן כיון שתיקן  
יהושע ב"ג חומרא באיכות המ"ע  
להשתדל בלימוד לכל ילדי בני העיר.  
א"כ המחזיק מלמד לבניו לבד. ואינו  
משתדל ואינו חושש לבני העניים. הנה  
הא ודאי עברו אדרבנן תקנות יב"ג. אבל  
נוסף לזה. גם המ"ע לא קיים ולא יצא  
י"ח.

**תקנות תמכין דאורייתא אות ג'**

According to R. Shapira, Yehoshua ben Gamla did not merely add an additional communal obligation. He added a whole new dimension to the obligation to teach Torah to one's children. Once the institution was enacted, one cannot fulfill one's own biblical obligation to teach one's own children until he has done his part to ensure that Torah education is accessible to all children.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926) *Ohr Samei'ach, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 1:2, who suggests that there is a biblical obligation on the community to educate its children. This obligation existed before Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution.

# The Obligation of the Parents

There are two questions that must be addressed in discussing the obligation of parents to pay for the education of their children. First, what is the extent of their obligation to ensure that their children receive a Jewish education? Second, what criteria should be used in determining what percentage of the school budget comes from tuition and what percentage comes from charitable donations?

Rambam (1138-1204) states that a father's obligation to teach his son Torah extends to hiring a teacher, if necessary<sup>9</sup>:

*One must hire a teacher to teach his son ... If the local custom is that teachers receive compensation, one must provide compensation. One is obligated to pay for a teacher until he reads the entire Written Torah.*

**Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:3,7**

והייב לשכור מלמד לבנו ללמדו... היה מנהג המדינה ליקח מלמד התינוקות שכר נותן לו שכרו. והייב ללמדו בשכר עד שיקרא תורה שבכתב כולה.  
**רמב"ם הל' תלמוד תורה א:ג,ז**

According to Rambam, the requirement of parents to spend money for the education of their children only applies to educating them to read Tanach. However, R. Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) notes that for practical reasons, the obligation extends far beyond that:<sup>10</sup>

*In our country (USA), there is a government requirement to educate them in their schools, and through the kindness of God to the Jewish people, there is an option to educate in schools that are under the auspices of God fearing individuals, such that if one does not send his daughter to be educated in the ways of Torah, faith and observance of mitzvot in a proper school such as Beit Ya'akov and the like, one is required to place her in a public school which, God forbid, has no Torah and no faith. Since one is required to ensure that his daughter is someone who believes in God and His Torah observes His mitzvot, even if it is necessary to spend money, it [i.e. education in a proper Jewish school] is a matter of obligation.*

**Igrot Moshe, Y.D. 2:113**

אבל במדינתנו כאן שמחוייבין מדינא דמלכותא ללמדם בבתי ספר שלהם ובחסדי השי"ת על ישראל איכא הרשות ללמדם בבתי ספר שתחת הנהלת ישראל כשרים ויראי ה' שנמצא שאם לא יתן בתו ללמוד בבי"ס כשר כהא דבית יעקב וכדומה להתחנך שם בדרך התורה והאמונה ושמירת המצוות הרי יהיה מוכרח ליתן אותה לבי"ס של המדינה שהוא ח"ו ללא תורה וללא אמונה, שזה מחוייב גם לראות שתהיה בתו כשרה להאמין בה' ובתורתו ולקיים כל מצותיו אף בהוצאת ממון, וממילא הוא דבר שבחובה.

**אגרות משה יו"ד ב:קיג**

<sup>9</sup> R. Avraham de Botton (c.1560-1605), *Lechem Mishneh*, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:3, suggests that the requirement for a father to hire a teacher is part of Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution. R. Moshe Feinstein, *Igrot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah* 2:110, notes that there is a comment of Maharik (as cited by *Lechem Mishneh*) that indicates that a father has a biblical obligation to hire a teacher for his son if he cannot personally teach his son.

<sup>10</sup> R. Feinstein's responsa addresses whether there is a difference between the obligation to educate a son and the obligation to educate a daughter. R. Feinstein notes that there is no obligation to teach one's daughter Torah (see *Kiddushin* 29b) and therefore, from the perspective of the laws of Torah learning, Rambam's requirement to hire a teacher would not apply to one's daughter.

According to R. Feinstein, the obligation to pay for Jewish education is not merely a function of the mitzvah of learning Torah. Each parent has an obligation to ensure that his or her children are raised with the proper values and beliefs. In modern times, this can (generally) only be accomplished in a Jewish day school. R. Feinstein adds that the parents are obligated to spend money to ensure that their children receive a proper Jewish education.<sup>11</sup>

The question of what percentage of the budget should come from tuition is perhaps one of the most sensitive issues in this "tuition challenge" discussion. Here are a few questions that one might address when approaching this issue: Is a donor justified in claiming that he will only donate money if every effort is made to collect as much as possible from the parent body? Is a parent who pays full tuition justified in complaining to the school about a neighbor who receives tuition assistance but lives a more luxurious lifestyle? Is the school scholarship committee justified in scrutinizing the financial situation of scholarship applicants when the applicants complain that the process is overly intrusive?

R. Moshe Isserles (Rama, 1520-1572), in addressing the institution of Yehoshua ben Gamla states:

*In a place where the community hires a teacher for the children **and the parents of the children cannot afford to pay for their children** so that other members of the community must contribute, the money is collected based on wealth.*

**Rama, Choshen Mishpat 163:3**

במקום שבני העיר מושיבין ביניהם  
מלמד תינוקות, ואין אביהן של  
תינוקות יכול לשכור לבניהם, ויצטרכו  
הקהל ליתן השכר, גובין לפי ממון.  
רמ"א חו"מ קס"ג.

According to Rama, the communal obligation to pay for education only applies when the parents cannot afford to pay for the education of their children.<sup>12</sup> Rama, however, does not provide guidelines for what the standards are for someone who cannot afford to educate his child. Do we follow the criteria for giving someone charity - which requires the recipient to

<sup>11</sup> R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993), also asserts that the exemption from teaching one's daughter Torah does not exempt one from providing one's daughter with a proper Jewish education. It only exempts one from teaching her the theoretical portions of the Torah. R. Soloveitchik adds that the obligation to provide a proper Jewish education to one's children is not only a function of *chinuch* (training) and therefore, it applies even after the child becomes bar/bat mitzvah. [R. Soloveitchik developed this idea in a lecture that was originally given on Shevat 3, 5719 in Yiddish. The Yiddish notes were compiled by Dr. Hillel Zeidman and were translated to Hebrew by R. Shalom Carmy. The article appears in *Beit Yosef Sha'ul*, Vol. IV (1994).]

<sup>12</sup> Rama's comments are stated in a chapter in *Shulchan Aruch* dealing with communal ventures. The general rule is that each individual pays based on the degree to which he benefits. As such, one who has two children in a school of one-hundred children should pay two percent of the school's costs. However, because of Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution, the community is obligated to cover the tuition costs of those who cannot afford to pay. A similar idea is presented by Rama, *Orach Chaim* 53:23, regarding the costs of hiring a *shaliach tzibbur* (cantor). Rama rules that half of the salary should be split evenly among the congregants and the other half should be based on what each individual can afford.

liquidate his non-essential possessions<sup>13</sup> - or is there a different standard when it comes to education?

While Rama does not provide any clear guidelines on the matter, there is a comment of R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntchitz (1550-1619), Kli Yakar, Shemot 23:5, that is relevant to this discussion. The Gemara states the following about the mitzvah to help someone whose donkey is struggling with its load:

*If he [the owner of the animal] went, sat down and said [to the passer-by], 'Since the obligation rests upon you, if you desire to unload, unload:' he [the passer-by] is exempt, because it is said (Shemot 23:5), 'with him.'*

**Baba Metzia 32a (Soncino Translation)**

הלך וישב לו ואמר הואיל  
ועליך מצוה אם רצונך  
לפרוק פרוק פטור שנאמר  
עמו.  
בבא מציעא לב.

There is no mitzvah to help the donkey owner if he does not put in an effort to help himself. R. Luntchitz adds:

*This is a response to some impoverished individuals among our nation who demand communal support but don't want to perform any labor - even if it is within their means to perform labor or something else that can provide for their family - and they complain if they are not provided with all of their needs. [However, there is no requirement to support them] because God only commanded to help "with him." The poor person must do whatever is in his means, and if, nevertheless, he is not able to afford his expenses, then there is an obligation on every Jew to help him, support him and provide him with whatever he is lacking and then one must help, even one-hundred times.*

**K'li Yakar, Shemot 23:5**

ומכאן תשובה על מקצת עניים בני עמינו  
המטילים את עצמם על הציבור ואינן  
רוצים לעשות בשום מלאכה אף אם  
בידם לעשות באיזו מלאכה או איזה דבר  
אחר אשר בו יכולין להביא שבר רעבון  
ביתם, וקוראים תגר אם אין נותנים להם  
די מחסורם, כי דבר זה לא צוה ה' כי אם  
עזוב תעזוב עמו הקם תקים עמו כי העני  
יעשה כל אשר ימצא בכוחו לעשות ואם  
בכל זה לא תשיג ידו, אז חייב כל איש  
מישראל לסעדו ולחזקו וליתן לו די  
מחסורו אשר יחסר לו, ועזוב תעזוב  
אפילו עד מאה פעמים  
כלי יקר שמות כג:ה

While one cannot necessarily compare the allocation of scholarships to the allocation of charity, R. Luntchitz seems to extend the Gemara's idea regarding helping the donkey owner to all forms of assistance. There is no requirement to assist those who are not putting in the effort to assist themselves. As such, the school and its representatives have the right (and ergo the responsibility) to set up guidelines to ensure that scholarship money is only allocated to those who can't help themselves. It is also incumbent upon those applying for scholarship to accurately represent their financial situation so that the tuition committee can distribute its scholarship funds equitably.

<sup>13</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah no. 253, contains a detailed discussion of which assets must be liquidated before one is able to collect charity.

# The Obligations of the School

The school manages and distributes the incoming revenue and therefore, must take responsibility to spend the money properly. Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution accounted for the optimization of the school system:

*Raba further said: The number of pupils to be assigned to each teacher is twenty-five. If there are fifty, we appoint two teachers. If there are forty, we appoint an assistant, at the expense of the town.*

**Baba Batra 21a (Soncino Translation)**

אמר רבא סך מקרי דרדקי עשרין  
וחמשה ינוקי ואי איכא חמשינ מותבין  
תרי ואי איכא ארבעין מוקמינ ריש  
דוכנא ומסייעין ליה ממתא.  
**בבא בתרא כא.**

Tosafot note that if the school system does not follow this structure, the school is not entitled to communal funds:

*However, less than that (twenty five students), the members of the community cannot force each other to hire a teacher.*

**Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a s.v. Sach**

אבל פחות מכאן אין בני העיר יכולין  
לכופ זה את זה להשכיר להם מלמד.  
**תוס' בבא בתרא כא. ד"ה סך**

It should be noted that Ramban (1194-1270), *Baba Batra 21a*, disagrees with Tosafot and maintains that if there are less than twenty five students, the community is nevertheless obligated to provide the funds necessary to hire a teacher. However, Ramban does agree that if there are enough students, and the school decides to hire more teachers than are necessary, there is no communal obligation to support the school for the additional expenses. R. Aharon Koidenover (c. 1614-1676), *Emunat Shmuel* no. 26, adds that the requirement to have twenty-five students in a classroom was only applicable in earlier times. Nowadays (in the 17<sup>th</sup> century), when children require more attention, we should not require such large classrooms. R. Koidenover's comments are cited in *Pitchei Teshuva*, *Yoreh De'ah* 246:8. R. Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (1745-1812), *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, K.A. 1:3, agrees with R. Koidenover that from an educational perspective, Yehoshua ben Gamla's classroom requirements are not applicable. Nevertheless, R. Shneur Zalman asserts that the community cannot be obligated to pay for a school system that is more expensive than the original institution.

The school system of today differs greatly from the school system set up by Yehoshua ben Gamla. There are many more expenses incurred by a school in order to meet the needs of modern education. R Shmuel Vosner (b. 1911) discusses whether there is a communal obligation to pay for these expenses:

*In truth, I am not sure if we use the institution of R. Yehoshua ben Gamla to obligate members of the community to pay for all of the expenses that exist today because there are a number of issues such as building costs, food and transportation that were not included in his institution. Although one can argue that the institution is based on the needs of each generation, I see that R. Shneur Zalman did not follow this logic and concluded that even*

ובאמת אני מסופק אם אנחנו יכולים  
לחייב מתקנת ר"י בן גמלא גם בני  
הקהילה בכל ההוצאות של היום כי  
הרבה ענינים בבנינים והספקת מזון  
- הסעה וכדומה שבדאי לא היו  
נכללים בתקנתו, ואם כי י"ל  
שהתקנה חלה לפי המצב הצורך

*hiring a teacher for less than twenty five students is not included in the institution. If so, certainly, the items that I discussed are not included. Furthermore, one must investigate whether one can include the cost of building big buildings, as is practiced today, as part of the cost of educating a child and include it in the communal responsibility or whether money collected for the building should be categorized as a general donation for a mitzvah.*

**Shevet HaLevi 6:147**

שבכל דור ודור אבל רואה אני  
שהגאון הק' בעל שו"ע הרב בשו"ע  
ה' ת"ת בקו"א אות ג' לא כתב כן,  
ומצדד דאפילו השכרת מלמד אם  
רוצים לפחות מכ"ה ילדים אינו נכלל  
בכלל התקנה, ומכ"ש דברים  
שכתבתי וגם בנית בנין גדול כנהוג  
היום צ"ע בזה אם אפשר להטיל זה  
מצורף לשכר מלומדת, מטעם  
התקנה - או רק בדרך נדבת מצוה.  
**שבט הלוי ו:קמז**

## Conclusion

Yehoshua ben Gamla is praised and remembered for saving Jewish education in his time. He did so by creating a system where the community, the parents and the schools work together to ensure that all children are afforded the opportunity to receive a Jewish education. The current tuition challenge is complex and there are no simple solutions. Yet, we can learn from Yehoshua ben Gamla that we can ensure the continuity of Jewish education through the collaborative efforts of the community, the parents and the schools.

[Editors note: We have included this page for those wishing to further explore the issues mentioned in the above article]

# Questions to Guide Day School Affordability Conversations in Your Community

Yeshiva University's Institute for University-School Partnership has published several reports that shed some light on the questions that frequently come up in our communities when issues of day school affordability are discussed. These include: ***The Big Challenges Facing Small Day Schools***, ***Does Better Governance Correlate with Better Day Schools***, and ***Jewish Day School Economics: Today and Tomorrow***— all available for free download from our website. These are merely the first in a planned series of publications on the nature of day school economics. Yeshiva University will continue to work to gather facts about why our schools cost what they cost in order to provide our schools and communities with insights on how to make them more affordable.

To guide conversations in schools and communities, here are some questions for you to think about and discuss relative to the affordability challenges:

1. Independent schools that are not Jewishly connected are also experiencing affordability challenges that are affecting enrollment. They are starting to ask the following questions. Should we also be asking them about our day schools?
  - a. Have we collectively caused at least some of the affordability problems by requiring our schools to offer additional subjects or special sections for enrichment that have steadily driven up costs?
  - b. Would we be better off with schools that continue to offer high quality but have more limited offerings and are more affordable? Where do we draw the "lines"?
2. Many new schools have been started over the past five to ten years and some of these schools have very focused constituencies. Could we find a way to merge these schools somehow in order to share more of the fixed costs and also increase buying power on purchased goods and services and thereby reduce tuition?
3. How important is affordability versus having a small school environment and feeling where every child is well known by every administrator and teacher but where administrative costs and other fixed costs of running a school need to be absorbed by fewer families?
4. Most of us are averse to fundraising. We fear rejection and embarrassing those who might turn us down. But we are in a day school affordability crisis. Is there more each of us can and should be doing to (a) acquaint non day school families, business associates and our relatives with the value of Jewish day schools and (b) to ask them to add their financial support to these pillars of our Jewish society?
5. We are all busy with our family and personal lives. But we have talents that could be applied to helping our day school boards and their related committees. Could we be doing more to bring our skills and networks to the attention and support of our day school boards and school administrators?

For more information about the work of the Institute for University-School Partnership  
visit our website at [www.yu.edu/schoolpartnership](http://www.yu.edu/schoolpartnership)



**Yeshiva University**  
BRING WISDOM TO LIFE™

**INSTITUTE FOR  
UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL  
PARTNERSHIP**

# The Gift That Keeps On Giving<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. Tova Warburg Sinensky

Faculty, Talmud & Jewish Philosophy, Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls

In *Masechet Berachot* Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi makes a striking comment:

*Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi says: Anyone who teaches his son Torah, it is as if he has received it from Har Chorev, as it says: "And you shall make them known to your children and to your grandchildren," and this is juxtaposed to [the verse], "The day that you stood before God at Chorev."*

**Berachot 21b**

...אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל המלמד לבנו  
תורה - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו קבלה מהר  
חורב, שנאמר (דברים ד') והודעתם לבניך  
ולבני בניך, וכתוב בתריה: יום אשר עמדת  
לפני ה' אלהיך בחורב.  
**ברכות כא:**

In *Masechet Kiddushin*, however, we find a different version of this statement:

*Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Levi says: Anyone who teaches his grandson Torah, it is as if he has received it from Har Sinai, as it says: "And you shall make them known to your children and to your grandchildren," and this is juxtaposed to [the verse], "The day that you stood before God at Chorev."*

**Kiddushin 30a**

אמר ריב"ל: כל המלמד את בן בנו תורה,  
מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קבלה מהר  
סיני, שנאמר: והודעתם לבניך ולבני  
בניך, וסמך ליה: יום אשר עמדת לפני ה'  
אלהיך בחורב.  
**קידושין ל.**

Three questions jump out from these texts. First, to whom does the word עליו refer—the teacher (father or grandfather) or the student (son or grandson)? Is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi saying that when the son or grandson learns it is as if the learner has received the Torah from Mount Sinai, or that the when father or grandfather teaches it is as if the teacher has received the Torah from Mount Sinai? Second, according to the *girsah* in *Berachot*, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi asserts that teaching one's son replicates the Sinaitic experience, while according to the *girsah* in *Kiddushin* he states that teaching one's grandson replicates the experience of Revelation. What is the logic of each position? Third, if we are to consider these two *girsas* mutually exclusive as do some Rishonim<sup>15</sup>, what is the difference between them? In particular, it would seem that the father is the primary educator of his child. What could the grandfather possibly contribute that the father cannot?

<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank my husband Rabbi Tzvi Sinensky for his helpful comments and suggestions.

<sup>15</sup> See the *Rif* and *Rosh* on *Kiddushin* who have the *girsah* of רבנן. See also the *Bach* to *Tur* Y.D. 245:3.



To answer our three questions, we must first understand the meaning of the phrase “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*.” What about the Sinaitic Revelation is Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi pinpointing when he makes these statements? Let’s analyze the three other places in Tannaitic literature where this phrase appears in order to ascertain its meaning.

*Anyone who desists from Torah study is as if he denies God, for the Torah was given to Israel to engage in it day and night, as it says, ‘And you should meditate upon it day and night etc.’, and it says, ‘for the Torah of God is his desire etc.’ And anyone who engages in Torah and keeps it, it is as if he has received it from Mount Sinai.*

**Midrash Tanchuma Re’eh 1**

... כל מי שמתבטל מן התורה כאלו כופר בהקב"ה, שלא נתן תורה לישראל אלא כדי שיעסקו בה יומם ולילה שנאמר (יהושע א) והגית בו יומם ולילה וגו', וכתוב (תהלים א) כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו וגו', וכל העוסק בתורה ומקיימה כאלו קבלה מהר סיני.  
מדרש תנחומא פרשת ראה סימן א

*Any mitzvah that has been forgotten from Israel and a prophet or wise man comes and clarifies it anew, it is as if he has received it from Mount Sinai.*

**Pesikta Zutra Matot 140b**

וכן כל מצוה ומצוה שמשתכחת מישראל ובא נביא או חכם לחדשה על בוריה כאלו הוא קבלה מהר סיני ...  
פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) במדבר פרשת מטות דף קמ עמוד ב

*And Rabbi Yehoshua son of Abba said in the name of Rav Gidel who said in the name of Rav, ‘One who grabs a Torah Scroll from the marketplace is as if he grabs a mitzvah from the marketplace; if he writes it, it is as if he has received it from Mount Sinai. Rav Sheshet says, ‘If he edits even one letter, it is as if he has written it.*

**Menachot 30a**

וא"ר יהושע בר אבא אמר רב גידל אמר רב: הלוקח ס"ת מן השוק - כחוטף מצוה מן השוק, כתבו - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיבלו מהר סיני. אמר רב ששת: אם הגיה אפי' אות אחת, מעלה עליו כאילו כתבו.  
מנחות ל.

What is the common denominator between all these instances where the phrase “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” is used<sup>16</sup>?

All of the individuals about whom it says “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” —one who learns and keeps Torah, one who revives and clarifies a forgotten a *mitzvah*, and one who writes a *Sefer Torah*—have found personal meaning in the laws and values of the Torah, and as a result are involved in preserving Torah so that others can experience its relevance as well<sup>17</sup>. This understanding of the phrase “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” is beautifully supported by the striking similarity to the opening words of the first *Mishna* in *Avot*, “*Moshe kibel Torah mei-Sinai*.” Many of the commentators note that while it says “*Moshe kibel*,” it does not say, “*Yehoshua kibel*,” but rather “*Umesara l’Yehoshua*!” Why? The language of “*kibel*,” as we have demonstrated, is used to connote a personal encounter with Torah, as was surely experienced by

<sup>16</sup> My analysis assumes that the phrase “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” means the same thing throughout Tannaitic literature. I believe that the examination of the sources makes this assumption quite compelling, although it is theoretically possible that in each context the phrase means something different.

<sup>17</sup> The relationship between experiencing Torah as relevant and therefore sharing it with others is similar to Rambam’s understanding of the commandment to love God. In *Sefer HaMitzvot* 1:3 Rambam states that part of the *mitzvah* of loving God is facilitating others to love God as well.

*Moshe* who himself received it from God. *Yehoshua's* encounter with Torah, however, was not as personal and therefore the language of "*kibel*" is utilized.

With this interpretation of "*ke'ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*" in mind we can return to each of the three sources where the phrase appears in order to fully appreciate its meaning.

According to the *Tanchuma*, when a person learns Torah and observes its precepts, he affirms that the Torah that was given to the Jewish people thousands of years ago is relevant to him and he is therefore driven to engage himself in its perpetuation through study and practice; if this were not the case, why would he learn and practice Torah in the first place!? The *Tanchuma's* proof texts, "*ki im beTorat Hashem cheftzo*" and "*vehigitah bo yomam valayla*" serve to underscore the passion for Torah that one feels when he experiences Torah as personally meaningful. When a person does not learn Torah, however, the *Tanchuma* says that it is as if he denies God. Why? Perhaps the *Tanchuma* maintains not that one is denying God's existence in the philosophical sense, but rather is contesting the fact that Torah, a primary expression of God in this world, has what to offer about the world today.

The *Pesikta* also utilizes the phrase "*ke'ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*" as a way of describing a person who perpetuates the existence of Torah because he understands its eternal nature. When the prophet or scholar clarifies to other Jews a *mitzvah* that has been forgotten, he essentially declares that all the *mitzvot* of the Torah are pertinent. Every single *mitzvah*, he claims, even a "*mitzvah shemishtakachat mi-Yisrael*"—a *mitzvah* that has been forgotten from Israel—is important for future generations and must be preserved! We may not, exclaims the scholar, leave this *mitzvah* to be buried in the annals of history. All *mitzvot* bear relevance to all generations! Therefore, the scholar takes upon himself the act of reviving this *mitzvah*.

Let us now address the *Gemara* in *Menachot*. The writing of a *Sefer Torah* is perhaps the most powerful way of communicating the timelessness of Torah. Ensuring the perpetuation of an ancient document makes the powerful statement that while it may have distant origins, it resonates with contemporary man as well. In the physical-historical realm, the Torah is ancient; in the spiritual realm, the Torah is brand new. But it is only one who writes or edits the *Sefer Torah* fulfills the dictum, "*ke'ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*." Why? Because he does not just *passively* acquire a Torah by employing someone else to write it; he is **actively** involved in crafting a Torah of his own. .

With this understanding of "*ke'ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*," we can now answer our original questions. Who is the referent of the word עֲלִיו, the one who has "received it from Sinai"—the teacher or the student? In all three contexts where the phrase appears it clearly refers to the individual – the one studies and practices Torah, the prophet or scholar who clarifies a forgotten *mitzvah*, and the author of a *Sefer Torah* – who is actively engaged in communicating the eternal import of Torah. Based on how the phrase is used in these contexts, it would seem that in the

statements of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi as well, the one who has “received it from Sinai” must be the teacher—the father or grandfather<sup>18</sup>-- who is involved in this task as well.

The underlying logic of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s statements is now clear as well. Why does he say that when one teaches his son or grandson Torah it is as if he received it from Mount Sinai? For the father or grandfather, teaching Torah does not entail the mere communication of facts; it is a passionate gesture in which the teacher strives to communicate to his progeny that Torah is meaningful to *the teacher himself*, and therefore is pertinent to his children and grandchildren as well. Through the act of teaching<sup>19</sup>, the instructor becomes part of the material that he imparts, serving as a role model for what can happen when a person allows Torah to speak to him and penetrate his soul.

Let us finally address the conceptual difference between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s two statements, in particular the unique contribution of the grandfather. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would agree that both the parent and grandparent testify about the timeless nature of Torah by transmitting it to their progeny. I propose that when the *grandfather* is active in transmitting Torah to his grandson who is two generations beyond him, the grandfather essentially declares that Torah is truly eternal. It is not applicable just to him, and will not be relevant just to his son, but to *all* future generations; it is timeless. This is “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” par excellence.<sup>20</sup>

As we celebrate the historical event of *Matan Torah* this Shavuot, let each and every one of us strive to be Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s hero: one who has sought out the relevance of Torah and is spurred to share with others this gift that keeps on giving. May it be said about us, “*ke’ilu kibalnu ha-Torah mei-Har Sinai*,” that “it is as if we ourselves have received the Torah from Har Sinai.”

---

<sup>18</sup> One could offer a number of plausible explanations for the position that the referent is the student—the son or the grandson. However, based on the other contexts in which “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” is used, I believe that it is referring to the teacher—in this case, the father or grandfather.

<sup>19</sup> In light of this analysis, it appears that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi would not say that it is “*ke’ilu kiblah mei-Har Sinai*” when one merely facilitates the transmission of Torah by hiring a teacher but rather only by teaching personally.

<sup>20</sup> For a moving development of this theme, see “The First Jewish Grandfather” in *Reflections of the Rav*, vol. 2.

# Avraham's Yom Tov

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Zichron Dov

Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

## Avraham: Hero of Shavuot?

Logically, Moshe should be the hero of Shavuot; as the leader who addressed God, as the prophet whose hands realized miracles, as the individual who ascended Har Sinai and accepted the blueprint of the universe on our behalf, Moshe ought to be celebrated as the mortal most responsible for our receipt of the Torah.

And yet, a midrash describing the scene atop Har Sinai places the credit not with Moshe, but with Avraham:

*At that moment the ministering angels sought to harm Moshe. God shaped Moshe's face to appear like that of Avraham, and God said to the angels, "Are you not embarrassed before him? Is this not the one to whom you descended and in whose home you ate?" God then turned to Moshe and said, "The Torah was given to you only in the merit of Avraham."*

**Midrash, Shmot Rabbah 28**

באותה שעה בקשו מלאכי השרת לפגוע  
במשה עשה בו הקב"ה קלסטירין של  
פניו של משה דומה לאברהם, אמר להם  
הקב"ה אי אתם מתביישין הימנו לא זהו  
שירדתם אצלו ואכלתם בתוך ביתו,  
אמר הקב"ה למשה לא נתנה לך תורה  
אלא בזכות אברהם  
מדרש שמות רבה כה

The storyline of this midrash is perplexing on several levels:

- We are taught (Talmud Bava Metzia 86b) that the malachim did not actually eat in Avraham's home; rather, they merely pretended to do so. If that is true, then they owed Avraham no debt.
- We are further taught (ibid) that the malachim who visited Avraham were Michael, Raphael and Gavriel. The malachim who protested were a set of anonymous "מלאכי השרת, ministering angels." Are we to assume that the general angels should have felt gratitude for Avraham's service of their three compatriots?
- What connection is there between offering food to the angels, and forcing them to forego their right to the Torah?

But most of all: What is unique about the merit of Avraham's hospitality?

## Avraham's Unique Contribution

As God personally declared in the Torah, Avraham was worthy of Divine affection because of his commitment to benevolent chesed, as well as his determination to educate his descendants to benevolence:

*For I have loved him, because he will instruct his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God to perform acts of righteousness and justice.*<sup>21</sup>

**Bereishit 18:19**

כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחרייו ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט

**בראשית יח:יט**

The arrival of these traits on the human scene was the moment for which God had been waiting since the formation of Adam and Chavah.

Adam and Chavah were charged with working in their garden and protecting it, and they would have been the sole beneficiaries of their work; every plant they grew, nearly every fruit they cultivated, was theirs to eat.<sup>22</sup> Only in one case were they told to labor benevolently without expectation of reward: The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil would receive their care, but provide no benefit. All work for that tree would be purely *chesed shel emet*, kindness without any anticipation of reciprocity. This was their own opportunity to engage in *עולם חסד*, bringing into reality a world founded on kindness. Instead, though, the first human beings took that fruit for themselves.

The generations leading up the Flood were far worse in their abdication of *chesed*; as the Torah describes, they engaged in kidnapping and theft until God decided to roll back Creation and begin anew. Only Noah was saved, and his generosity aboard the Ark earned the survival of humanity.

One might have expected Noah to be honored with Divine favor as Avraham was, but Noah lacked Avraham's second trait; he did not expect to convey this generosity to the next generation. We will see that Avraham educated his children in benevolence; no such example exists for Noah. Indeed, the sages noted that Noah waited far longer than his ancestors did before producing children, and they explained that Noah intentionally refrained from procreating because he expected that his children would imitate the sins of the people around them:

*Therefore he delayed procreation, because of the guilt he perceived in his generation, until God revealed to him the matter of the Ark. At that point he married a woman and produced children.*<sup>23</sup>

**Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 14:12**

ולכך איחר לפריה ורביה מפני עון דורו שהיה רואה עד שגילה לו הקב"ה ענין התיבה ובאותה שעה נשא אשה והעמיד בנים

**מדרש במדבר רבה יד:יב**

Avraham, however, charted a new path. In contrast to Adam and Chavah who took personal benefit from their generosity, in contrast to the Flood Generation who only demanded and did

<sup>21</sup> There is some debate as to the proper translation of *צדקה* in this sentence, but whether it is read as philanthropy or righteousness, it is understood to be a reference to social conduct rather than internal spiritual development.

<sup>22</sup> Bereishit 2

<sup>23</sup> A comparison to Amram and Yocheved's decision to refrain from producing children (Talmud, Sotah 12a) and to King Chizkiyah's decision to refrain from producing children (Talmud, Berachot 10a), and to the sages' view of those decisions, might be fruitful.

not give, and in contrast to Noach who anticipated his descendants' moral failure, Avraham demanded the opportunity to produce children<sup>24</sup> and teach them his unique ways.

This vision earned Divine affection, and, ultimately, the selection of Avraham's descendants to receive the Torah. A midrash<sup>25</sup> informs us that HaShem waited for 26 generations to present the Torah to humanity, because humanity needed to learn ארץ ארץ, the proper functioning of society. Avraham initiated that process of training the nation which would ultimately stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah.

## Avraham and the Malachim

Nowhere, perhaps, was Avraham's commitment to train the next generation in benevolence on greater display than in his offer of hospitality for his three visitors:

*"[And Avraham ran to the cattle, and he took a tender and good calf] And he gave it to the youth" – This was Yishmael; he gave it to Yishmael in order to energize him in mitzvot.*

**Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 48:13**

ויתן אל הנער זה ישמעאל  
בשביל לזרזו במצות.  
מדרש בראשית רבה מח:יג

While in the middle of an audience with God, Avraham turned away and ran to greet three strangers and offer them assistance – and he made certain to ask his son, Yishmael, to participate, the better to train him in “the path of God, to perform acts of righteousness and justice.”

In aiding the visitors, Avraham superseded the angelic guardians of the Torah - despite the fact that, as we noted above, he addressed only three representatives, who did not consume any actual food. The point was not the actual meal, but the supersession it demonstrated.

Malachim do not give of themselves to others, and they do not reproduce and educate their young; these traits displayed Avraham's trademark transcendence. So it is that the story of Avraham's hospitality opened with the strangers “נצבים עליו,” standing over Avraham, but it concluded with Avraham “עומד עליהם,” standing over them, in a superior position.

This may also be why the merit of Avraham, rather than Moshe, is invoked as the cause for our receipt of the Torah: Without Avraham's commitment to practice social generosity and to transmit that trait to his descendants, humanity could not have received the Torah at all.<sup>26</sup>

Certainly, Avraham's commitment provides urgent instruction for us: To be a nation worthy of receiving the Torah, we must first demonstrate kindness, and teach our children to do the same.

## Megilat Ruth

We read Megilat Ruth on the day we celebrate receiving the Torah, and among the classic explanations for this association is the text's emphasis on the chesed which fills the Torah.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Bereishit 15, for example

<sup>25</sup> Midrash, Vayikra Rabbah 9:3

<sup>26</sup> Note, as well, Bava Batra 109b regarding the fate of Moshe's descendants

<sup>27</sup> Birkei Yosef Orach Chaim 494:11

Naomi informed Ruth and Orpah that she was empathically embittered by the suffering they experienced, and she would prefer they fare better elsewhere rather than suffer for her.<sup>28</sup> Ruth took care of Naomi without hope for recompense. Boaz generously provided for Ruth without knowing of their family connection, and then married her without concern for the potential effect on his estate. Ploni Almoni's real name is erased from the scroll precisely because of his selfish concern for what marrying Ruth might do to the ultimate division of his wealth.<sup>29</sup>

But beyond benevolence, the story of Ruth follows Avraham's model of passing the lessons of selfless chesed to one's children. Elimelech failed in this regard, and the price was his own life as well as the lives of his sons. Ruth, in contrast, practiced chesed, and bequeathed it to her descendants. She did so to such an extent that Ruth's great-grandson's wife, Batsheva, used her as an example for her son Shlomo haMelech, composing the classic Eishet Chayil in tribute to her strength and generosity.<sup>30</sup>

On Shavuot, we accept Torat Chesed, a Torah filled with mitzvot which provide a moral baseline as well as a set of ethical aspirations for our role in society. May we merit to follow the model of Avraham and of Ruth, practicing chesed and teaching it to our children, and in doing so prove ourselves to be worthy descendants.

---

<sup>28</sup> Vilna Gaon to Ruth 1:13

<sup>29</sup> Rashi to Ruth 4:1

<sup>30</sup> Daat Mikra to Mishlei 31, among others

# Collected Insights from Members of our Kollelim

## What day is Shavuos?

Rabbi Eli Belizon

Wexner Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

The holiday of Shavuos is arguably the most important day in the Jewish calendar. The day we received the Torah on Har Sinai was the beginning of our becoming a nation with a unified mission and goal. It is for this reason that there are many questions that arise when reviewing the references to Shavuos in the Torah.

The date and time of the holiday of *Shavuos* is omitted from the Torah. The Torah states that the festival should be celebrated after the culmination of counting fifty days "*vikarassem betzem hayom hazeh mikrah kodesh*, you shall declare on this very day there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves" without mention as to the exact day to celebrate. Why is it that the Torah does not mention the specific time and date for shavuos, whereas every other holiday the Torah clearly delineates the time and date to celebrate?

The *Magen Avraham* in his commentary to the *Shulchan Aruch* states that historically the day of the week that Bnei Yisroel received the Torah was Shabbos. The Gemara explains that Hashem was prepared to deliver the Torah on Friday, a day earlier, but Moshe Rabbeinu delayed *Matan Torah* until Shabbos. The *Magen Avraham* calculates that the actual day of *Matan Torah* was fifty one days after *yitzias Mizrayim* (which occurred on a Thursday). This raises the question of whether our holiday that takes place on the fiftieth day of the omer is an accurate celebration of *Matan Torah*. The *Magen Avraham* suggests that we celebrate the fifty first day of *sefirah* to stress the significance of the *yom tov sheni shel galiyot* of Shavuos. This is even more perplexing! Why should the second day *Yom Tov* of *galus* play a role in dictating which day we celebrate our receiving the Torah on Har Sinai. Furthermore, the second day *yom tov* in *galus* is a dictum from the oral Torah, which should be unrelated to the celebration of our receiving the written Torah on Shavuos.

Hashem commanded Moshe (Shemos 19:10) to tell the nation to prepare themselves *hayom u'machar*, today and tomorrow, for accepting the Torah. Moshe realized that two 24 hour periods including both day and night were required to prepare for *matan Torah*. Since the night



time of the first day had already passed, Moshe deemed it necessary to add a third day so that there would be 2 nights and 2 days of preparation. The Kushigluver Rav, in his *sefer Eretz Tzvi*, clarifies the importance of Moshe's addition of a full 24 hour period. Moshe needed to insure that the preparation for matan Torah would include a night with each day. The delivery of the Torah would be insufficient without the night. Night symbolizes a time of darkness, a time of confusion and lack of revelation of Hashem's presence. Night symbolizes the experiences of exile. Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to emphasize that *kabbalas haTorah* is eternal and exists both in good times and in bad. Although there will be times that are dark and difficult, the bond that was created at matan Torah between Hashem and Bnei Yisroel is never severed. Even in a time which we consider dark and uncertain, the Torah must remain the focus and mainstay of our lives. This explains the Magen Avrohom who suggested that matan Torah actually occurred on *yom tov sheini shel glauyos*. Moshe felt that having matan Torah occur on the chag of the *galus*, the *yom tov sheni*, emphasizes that our *kabbalas haTorah* is not limited to time or place. It is ongoing wherever Jews live and is part of our essence.

The *Chok Yaakov* on *Shulchan Aruch* (*siman* 473) suggests that if one forgets to make the blessing of *shehechyanu* on the holiday of Shavuot he can recite the blessing the following week. In no other instance when we say *shehechyanu* do we see an option to make the bracha on another day. Shavuot differs from all other holidays as it is not restricted to a specific date and time but rather extends itself to all the days of the year. The message of the chag of matan Torah is that it is celebrated, accepted and meant to extend beyond the day of the holiday itself.

It is for this reason that the Torah is extremely vague about the exact date of Shavuot. *Kabbalas haTorah* is not bound by a specific time or place; it is a part of who we are, no matter what the date and no matter where we dwell. The *Meshech Chachmah* points out that when it comes to the holiday of Shavuot the Torah switches the language it typically uses and rather than the usual "*ldoroseichem bchol moshvoseichem*," "for generations in all places of dwellings" (which according to the gemara in *kiddushin* includes the exile) the Torah instead states *bchol moshvoseichem ldoroseichem*, for all places of dwellings and all generations. On all other holidays those living in exile may not celebrate on the same day as Israel. They are contingent on the announcement from the Bet Din which may not reach them in time. In contrast, the timing of Shavuot is established at the culmination of *sefiras haomer* and therefore those living in the exile (*moshvoseichem*) will definitely rejoice on the same day as those living in Israel. Therefore, the Torah preceded the term for dwelling by the chag of Shavuot because it is the one holiday that all areas will definitely rejoice in unison. This further highlights the essence of matan Torah, by placing "*moshvoseichem*", "all dwellings" first, demonstrating that the acceptance of the Torah is global and eternal and not restricted to a place or time.

## Intrinsic Jewish Unity

Rabbi Akiva Block

Wexner Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

One of the central themes of the episode of Har Sinai is the immense unity that the Jewish People enjoyed as they encamped at the foot of the mountain. Rashi, in his famous comment

citing the Midrash on the verse, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר, extrapolates from the usage of the singular *vayichan* rather than the plural *vayachanu*, notes that the Jews were, "*k'ish echad b'lev echad*", like one individual with one heart.

In an odd twist, however, in an earlier comment Rashi attributes those very same qualities of unity and togetherness to the Egyptians! In Shmos 14:10, the Torah says regarding the Egyptians pursuit of the Jews at the banks of the Red Sea, "ויהנה מצרים נוסע אחריהם" with the singular voice *nose'ah*, rather than the plural *nos'im*. There too, Rashi states, citing the Midrash, that the Egyptian people were united, but in a slightly different way: "*b'lev echad k'ish echad*", with one heart, as one person. That the Egyptians and the Jews were equally unified is in itself remarkable. But even more puzzling, why does Rashi feel the need to flip the two phrases, so that the Jewish people are *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, like one person with one heart, and the Egyptians are *b'lev echad k'ish echad*, with one heart like one person? What qualitative difference in the two nations' respective unity are Rashi and the Midrash attempting to highlight?

Perhaps the Midrash provides a prescription for what true Jewish unity is all about. While the Egyptians may have achieved unity to the same level as the Jews encamping around Har Sinai, their unity began with their *lev echad*, their unity of purpose, their singular objective. Only as a result of that were they able to be *k'ish echad*, unified as one. The Jews, on the other hand, possess an intrinsic unity which transcends a unity of purpose. They are, irrespective of any ideological differences, *k'ish echad*. At Har Sinai, the Jews also happen to have been *b'lev echad*, but Jewish unity is not contingent on ideological harmony or unity of purpose. Each and every Jew possesses an unbreakable bond with their fellow Jew, *k'ish echad*, regardless of how differently they think or feel.

It's interesting to note that Shavuot comes at the culmination of the period of Sefirat Haomer, where we mourn the tragic loss of the students of Rabbi Akiva, who perished because of a lack of respect and honor for one another. As staunch disciples of the great Rabbi Akiva, these were students who undoubtedly were *b'lev echad*, singularly committed to the mission of learning and spreading the teachings of their revered rebbe. What they perhaps lacked was the *k'ish echad*, the sense of brotherhood and togetherness which allows us to overcome what are, in the grand scheme of things, petty differences. A failure to acknowledge the significance and importance of Jewish unity results, unfortunately, in a deficiency in and a lack of appreciation of, true *kedushas Yisrael*.

In this light, Rav Kook noted the interesting formulation of our *birchos haTorah* which we recite each and every morning and upon being called to the Torah. We begin by saying *asher bachar banu mikol ha'amim*, which praises Hashem for choosing the Jewish nation as his chosen nation, and only then do we finish with *v'nasan lanu es Toraso*, thanking Hashem for giving us the Torah. At first glance, it should be reversed; doesn't our chosen status flow from the simple fact that we are the nation who accepted Hashem's Torah? Why not mention the Torah first and only then refer to the Jews' status as the chosen nation? Rav Kook answers that not only was national unity a pre-requisite for the giving of the Torah, but that that unity exists as an intrinsic quality of the Jewish nation, *k'ish echad*, separate and apart from their *b'lev echad*, their belief in and pursuit of a Torah way of life.

May this Shavuot serve as a catalyst to answer the call of *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, of not letting that which divides us trump that which unites us, so that we may accept the Torah anew in all its glory, the way the Jews did at Maamad har Sinai.

## Connecting to the Message of the Torah

Rabbi Mendel Breitstein

Chicago YU Torah Mitzion Community Kollel Fellow

The Gemara in *Menachot 28b* quotes a very curious *halakha* involving the *chatzotzrot*:

*All the vessels that Moshe made were valid for him and valid for future generations. The trumpets [however] were valid for him and invalid for future generations.*

כל הכלים שעשה משה כשרים לו וכשרים לדורות, חצוצרות - כשרות לו ופסולות לדורות.

At first glance, this *halakha* seems very strange. What is it about the trumpets that they alone must be made anew for every generation? Let us turn to two other texts to gain some insight.

On the first night of Pesach, we begin the *seder* with *הא לחמא עניא* *This is the bread of poverty*. Just after Pesach, we begin learning *Pirke Avot* on *Shabbat* afternoons. The very first chapter of *Pirke Avot* contains the following statement of Hillel's: *הוא היה אומר נגד שמא. אבד שמיה. ודלא מוסיף. יסיף...* *He used to say "One who pursues a reputation, his reputation shall be lost, and one who does not add [to his Torah learning] it will cease [that learning which he already has]..."* These two statements share a striking peculiarity. They are both in Aramaic, despite their being found in Hebrew texts. Why did the *Ba'al Haggadah* see fit to begin the *seder* in Aramaic? Similarly, why did Hillel, whose teachings are almost entirely in Hebrew, deem it necessary to express this particular idea in Aramaic? Our classic commentators offer insights into both of these apparent anomalies.

The *Ritva* offers two explanations as to why the *Haggadah* opens in Aramaic. While he does present one mystical approach, the explanation that he refers to as "correct" is a purely practical consideration: Babylonian Jews in the Talmudic period spoke Aramaic. In order that everyone should understand, we open the *seder* in the common language. The idea here seems to be that in order to facilitate the involvement of everyone at the *seder*, the *Ba'al Haggadah* composed the first part of the *Haggadah* in a way that would draw everyone in. After all, the *seder* is for all Jews, whether or not they have had the advantage of a strong Jewish education<sup>31</sup>.

And what of Hillel's statement? Here, R. Liphshutz in his *Tiferet Yisroel*, explains that Hillel's statement concerns modesty in one's behavior. Hillel discusses several ways in which the arrogant are liable to stumble as well as the consequences. It was for this reason that it was so critical that *everyone* understand, and so he taught this in Aramaic, which is the language that

<sup>31</sup> It is striking that the רמ"א, in סימן תעג, writes that *ויאמרו בלשון שמבינים הנשים והקטנים או יפרש להם הענין וכן עשה*. Here we see a sage not only saying the introductory part of the *seder* in the commonly spoken language, but the rest of the *Haggadah* as well! Obviously, on the *seder* night, we want everyone to participate.

most Jews spoke at the time. The common denominator between these two explanations is that ideas that are necessary for the entire nation must be expressed in a language they can understand.<sup>32</sup> How does this relate to the abovementioned *halakha* concerning the *chatzotzrot*?

Rabbi Baruch Simon שליט"א, in his *Imre Baruch* (*Parshat Toldot*), cites a beautiful explanation as to why the trumpets must be remade for each generation. R. Avraham Weinfeld observes that the function of the trumpets is to gather and mobilize the people. They summon the people to gather around the leader, and therefore serve to mobilize the people, not only physically but also spiritually. Each generation speaks a somewhat different language, and while the message is eternal, it cannot be restated in exactly the same way from one generation to the next. Rather, it needs to be communicated in a manner appropriate for that generation. What spoke to the people some years ago may fall on deaf ears today. While the content is unchanging, the manner in which it is communicated not only may, but *must* change.

As we approach the festival of *Shavuot*, in which we prepare ourselves to receive the Torah once again, we should keep in mind that every individual “hears” differently than others. It is not merely worthwhile, but essential, that we search out those works which can speak to us. One person may understand the “language” of the *Rambam*, while another can better appreciate the thought of the *Ramchal* or the *Maharal*. Others may be more drawn to contemporary writings, such as Rav Kook’s or Rav Soloveitchik’s. May we each find an authentic voice of the Torah which we can comprehend and to which we can connect.

## Eating Dairy – A Zecher to the Shte Halechem

Rabbi Yoni Chambré

Beren Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

There isn’t really a typical Yom Tov meal. On Rosh Hashana, our tables are adorned with symbolic foods for a sweet sin-free year. On Succot, our meals are held under the shade of our Succot. On Pesach, we eat matzah and abstain from roasted meat so that our meal should not be mistaken as an actual attempt to recreate the Korban Pesach. And on Shavuot we eat dairy. What is the basis of this practice?

Most explanations assume that the significance of the practice is per se to eat dairy. The Mishna Brurah (594:12) writes that when the Jews returned from *Har Sinai* they found nothing to eat

---

<sup>32</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> mishnah of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of עדייות we find yet another *tannaitic* source in Aramaic: העיד רבי יוסי בן יועזר ... Yossi ben Yoezer is lenient regarding three different purity related laws. Why is this mishnah recorded in Aramaic? Perhaps the answer is exactly what we said above. The third item discussed by Yossi ben Yoezer concerns one who comes into contact with a human corpse. In such a case, the person becomes טמא or impure. Rabbi Pinchas Kehati, citing the *Gemara*, explains that Yossi ben Yoezer’s leniency is that the person only becomes טמא if we are certain—assuming the potential contamination was in a public area—that he came into contact with a corpse, but if there is a doubt, the person remains pure. While this was, in fact, always the *halakha*, it was never publicized. Now, however, Yossi ben Yoezer perceived the need to publicize this law. We might suggest that this mishna was taught/recorded in Aramaic for the same reason given by the *Ritva* and *Tiferet Yisroel* mentioned above. When a particular teaching or message needs to reach the widest possible audience, it is taught in the language that most people understand. Since his goal was to publicize this previously unknown law, it makes sense that he did so in Aramaic.

except for dairy foods, due to the extensive preparation that the Torah mandates for meat products. Hence, eating of dairy would seem to be a *zecher* to the actual giving of the Torah, so that we act as if we ourselves received the Torah. Alternatively, various explanations rooted in Kabalistic sources<sup>33</sup> explain that there is something spiritual about the day of Shavuot that is enhanced through the eating of dairy foods.

However, the Rema<sup>34</sup> presents an entirely different rationale for this practice. According to the Rema, one should eat both meat and dairy food on Shavuot<sup>35</sup>. Doing so will require the proper separation of dairy and meat dishes and will require us to bring out an extra loaf of bread<sup>36</sup>, which will serve as a *zecher* to the *Korban Shtei Halechem*.

---

<sup>33</sup> For example, see Magen Avraham (494:6) who writes that “the seven weeks of Sefirah are comparable to the seven clean days that a woman must wait in preparation for her husband, and that it is well known that blood congeals and becomes milk.” (See Niddah 9a). See also Noam Elimelech (to Shemot 23:19), who explains that Avraham Avinu specifically served *basar bichalav* to the Angels whom visited his tent (Bereishit 19:8) because the combination enables one to reach spiritual levels that are beyond what is attainable for mortal people. However, he notes that on the day of Shavuot, such levels are attainable, and for that reason “chazzal allowed forgoing the regular period of waiting between milk and meat on Shavuot.

<sup>34</sup> O.C. 494:3. “Just as on the Seder night we have two cooked foods as a *zecher* to the *Korban Pesach* and the *Korban Chagiga*, so too via eating both dairy and meat foods, we will have to bring two different loaves of bread to our table, that is like the *mizbeach*.”

<sup>35</sup> There is a considerable range of opinions as to how such is to be executed. **a)** The *sefer Piskei Teshuvos* (O.C. 494) writes that it is the practice in many communities to have a dairy meal in the evening and a meat meal during the day. However, he notes that many object via assuming that the requirements of *Simchas Yom Tov* mandate two official meat meals (See *Shaarei Teshuva* to O.C. 529, and *Shaagas Aryeh* #68.) **b)** The *Noam Elimelech* (ibid) writes that one does not have to wait on Shavuot between milk and meat, as normal. *Piskei Teshuvos* (ibid) explains that while he normally advocates the position of the *Ari Z"L* that one must wait an entire day after eating hard cheese before eating meat, on Shavuot one can eat meat after only 6 hours. *Pri Megadim* (*Eshel Avraham* O.C. 494:6) writes that one must wait on Shavuot as long as we normally wait after eating meat or hard cheese. *Be'er Heytev* (494:8) quotes from the *Kol Bo* that one can eat cheese in the afternoon, even if a full six hours have not passed. *Chok Yaakov* (494:11) implies that this is accepted as the *din*, although he advocates against it. *Piskei Teshuvos* understands the *Kol Bo* to mean that on Shavuot, assuming that waiting is for the purpose of digestion, afternoon sleep will speed up the clock. While it is noted from the diary of the *Chassam Sofer* that he seemed to have this practice, such is not a normally accepted practice. **c)** *Magen Avraham* (494:6) writes that one does not have to say *Birchat Hamazon* to formally make the meat and milk courses into separate meals. *Pri Megadim* (Y.D. *Mishpazos Zahav* 89:3) argues that such is required, but notes that although it would normally be a violation of the laws of unnecessary blessings to *bentch* so that one can switch over, that on Shavuot the standards of unnecessary blessings are relaxed. While all of the above issues vary in nature, such is presented to demonstrate that the *minhag* is acknowledged as being ensconced within the *halachik* system. However it is also presented with a degree of hesitance, as it is not my impression that any of these leniencies are accepted practice. Please note that this article is in no way intended to make any recommendations *halacha Limaaseh*.

<sup>36</sup> The *Shulchan Aruch* (Y.D. 89:4) writes that after eating dairy, one must remove the remaining bread from the table. While the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Pesachim* 6:4) and the *Ohr Zarua* (460) present this as an absolute *halachik* requirement, *Beit Yosef* (Y.D. 89) and *Hagaos Ashrei* (to *Rosh Chullin* 8:7) write that such is an act of extra stringency. *Rav Moshe Feinstein* (Y.D. 1:38) explains that as normative *halacha*, it is only forbidden to consume the remainder of an individual slice of bread with meat if one had eaten that slice while eating dairy. What emerges according to the Rema is that we eat both milk and meat in closer proximity than we probably usually would, but we specifically make a divide with a level of separation beyond what is normally required.

One might suggest that the entire practice of the Rema seems strange. Seemingly we go out of our way to create a technical problem, so that we have a need to create a technical solution. However, I believe that there are two subtle but important lessons that lie within this practice.

The Shte Halechem is unique in the world of korbanot in that it contains chametz. After leaving bondage, the natural assumption could have been non-constricted freedom. However, the Torah immediately channeled such an opportunity into a chametz-free environment, in which growth is appropriately limited and controlled. Conversely, the overpowering experience of God's revealed presence could have been entirely constricting of human expression and engagement. Yet, it is specifically on Shavuot that chametz is brought into the normally chametz-free Mikdash. In contrast to other holidays, where there is an opinion in the gemara (Pesachim 68b) that one's holiday routine could be entirely dedicated to Hashem, on Shavuot all agree that one must engage in physical pleasure, "because it is the day the Torah was given." On Shavuot we go out of our way to demonstrate our ability to properly navigate the halachik system. We demonstrate that we can properly use an extra stringency to compensate for a seeming leniency. Such is not a manipulation, nor is it a *haarama*. Rather it is a demonstration that we are spiritually empowered via our ability to carefully and confidently live our lives according to the Torah that Hashem gave us on this day. Spiritual initiative is guided via implementation of Halacha, and our spiritual growth could be limited if we were too timid to be confident in our navigation of Halacha.

Why is it important to make a zecheh to the korban that was brought on Shavuot? This minhag is the climax of seven weeks where remnants of the mikdash permeate our daily practice in a manner that is unparalleled at any other point of the year. At the Seder, we wash for vegetables as was done in temple times, although such is not normally our practice<sup>37</sup>. We refrain from roasted meat, lest one think that we are violating the prohibition of bringing a korban outside the mikdash<sup>38</sup>. To quote the Netsiv<sup>39</sup>, Chazal guided us to conduct the Seder as when the Temple stood. We count Sefiras Haomer, although we can not bring either the Omer or the Shte Halechem<sup>40</sup>. And on Shavuot, we make a zecheh to the Shte Halechem.

In truth, it is appropriate to mourn the Beis Hamikdash every day<sup>41</sup>. However, perhaps different times of the year call for different types of remembrance. During the summer, we mourn the mistakes and actions that lead towards the destruction of the mikdash, and our continued failure to rebuild the mikdash. However, during this period of the year, between two holidays that are bridged by their unique korbanot, which creates a period of time that has a distinct holiness<sup>42</sup>, it

---

<sup>37</sup> O.C. 483:6. See Taz #6.

<sup>38</sup> See O.C. 476. See also O.C. 469.

<sup>39</sup> Introduction to the Passover Haggada with the Commentary of the Netsiv, "Imrei Shefer."

<sup>40</sup> Such is particularly striking according to the position of the Rambam (Temidin uMusafim 7:22), for whom Sefirah bizman hazeh is a biblical obligation.

<sup>41</sup> Orach Chaim 1:3.

<sup>42</sup> See Vayikra 23:9-22. It is striking that amidst the listing of the moadim, the Chumash extensively details the halachot of the korban haOmer and of the Shte Halechem. Ramban (23:2) notes that such details would presumably be in Parshas Pinchas. While the Ramban accepts a technical answer, it is noteworthy that the Vilna Gaon (Biur HaGra to Yoreh Deah 399:9) suggests that Erev Pesach is a moed due to its inclusion in Vayikra 23. A parallel suggestion would lead to the conclusion that the period of Sefirah is a period of Kedushas Hazman.

is most appropriate to have a greater degree of sensitivity toward the larger corpus of Halacha that unfortunately can not be fully implemented in our day<sup>43</sup>.

## The Holiday of the Harvest and Har Sinai

Rabbi David Hellman

Wexner Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

The Torah refers to *Shavuot* as the “holiday of the harvest of the first fruits of your labor” (Shmot 23:16). In almost every place the Torah mentions *Shavuot* it characterizes it with its agricultural timing. While *Shavuot* celebrates the anniversary of no less an event than *ma’amad Har Sinai*, the Torah stresses that it also coincides with the beginning of the harvest season. Similarly, *Shavuot* also marked the first day *B’nei Yisrael* would begin bringing the *bikurim*, the first fruits of the year, to the *Beit Hamikdash*. Why did *Hashem* give the Torah during the first days of the harvest season? Why do we celebrate *ma’amad har sinai* with the arrival of the first fruits of the year? How do these spiritual and physical themes blend together?

All winter the farmer toils in the soil. First, he plows the tough earth and carefully plants it. Over the next few months, he fertilizes, waters, and nurtures it. Finally, he guards his field from animals and hopes that diseases or parasites don’t destroy it. All of this time, he has nothing to show for it: no grain, no fruits, nothing to take home. He doesn’t even have time to think about the fruits he will later enjoy; he has to focus on the task at hand. Perhaps sometimes he is so lost in the daily drudgery of this period, so consumed by the draining sunrise to sunset days, that he even forgets why he’s doing it at all. However, with the glorious arrival of the first fruit, the farmer sees the product of his labor and remembers why he worked so hard all winter. Without the harvest, his efforts would have been pointless, his entire winter wasted. Now, with the grain standing tall and the fruits glistening on the trees, his time and effort have found their purpose.

In many ways, the world is *Hashem’s* field. From *Adam* to the *Avot* to *Moshe Rabbeinu*, the world was being plowed and planted, nurtured and protected. But for what? For the Torah. Rashi (*Breishit* 1:31) explains that the Torah refers to the sixth day of creation as “the sixth day” to imply that *Hashem* created the world for “the sixth day” of Sivan, the day of *matan Torah*. Without *ma’amad Har Sinai*, all of world history would have been for naught. The *mitzvot* of every *tzadik*, the efforts of the *avot*, even *yitziat Mitzrayim* would have been without purpose. A world without *matan Torah* would have resembled a field plowed, planted, but not harvested. *Hashem* gave the Torah specifically at this time of year, for the Torah is the truest harvest of the world. Like the precious first fruits of a planted field, *Har Sinai* imparted Torah to the world and brought *ma’aseh breishit* to its fruition.

---

<sup>43</sup> This may be consistent with the fact that it is commonly practiced to refrain from listening to music during the Omer. It may be forbidden to listen to music at anytime due to the churban (See Sotah 48a, Gittin 7a and Rambam Taanis 5:14.). Perhaps it is appropriate that we engage in practices *zecher lichurban* more than normal during this period of the year.

Although we are not farmers, our own lives are filled with similarly busy, consuming schedules, from daily chores to demanding careers. We too sometimes get caught up in the most immediate and obvious obligations of our lives. However, on *Shavuot* we pause and behold the Torah in its glory like a farmer spotting the first fruit of the year. We study it, praise it, and rejoice with it. Like a farmer at the harvest, on *Shavuot*, we suddenly so clearly see the purpose of our lives and all of our efforts. Indeed, we are celebrating the “harvest of the first fruits of our labor,” for it is the Torah and its *mitzvot* that redeem us, granting meaning to our toil and purpose to our creation.

Just as the first fruits of the harvest bring unbridled joy to the farmer, may this *Shavuot*, the *chag matan torateinu*, bring a sublime simcha to us, our families, and all of *k'lal yisrael*.

## Preparing to receive the Torah

Rabbi Akiva Koenigsberg

Beren Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

Every year, the holiday of Shavuot helps us reflect on *Matan Torah* and what the giving of the Torah means to us. Naturally, the giving of the Torah was not meant for one day or one time. Rather, each and every day we thank Hashem for giving us His Torah and affording us the opportunity to learn from its wisdom. Nevertheless, Shavuot is indeed a special time of the year in that we commemorate the original giving of the Torah. If we carefully analyze the original story of *Matan Torah* as presented in *Parshas Yisro*, we may glean a unique insight as to how we can prepare ourselves to receive the Torah every day. What should we focus on to enable ourselves to have success in studying and internalizing the Torah and its wisdom?

Several commentators highlight various phrases and terms that are used when the Torah describes the events leading up to *Matan Torah*. The Ohr haChaim comments on the verse in which the Torah describes how the people came to Har Sinai: ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו מדבר סיני, ויחנו. במדבר, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר.<sup>44</sup> The Torah writes that they traveled from Refidim and came to Midbar Sinai, they camped in the wilderness, and B'nei Yisrael camped opposite the mountain. The Ohr haChaim points to three anomalies in this verse which he explains refers to three critical elements in B'nei Yisrael's preparation for receiving the Torah. The first element is the strong commitment to the study of Torah. Thus, the Torah lets us know that the people traveled from Refidim. It was unnecessary to tell us that, after already mentioning in the previous verse that they came to Midbar Sinai. The Ohr haChaim explains that Refidim is not merely the name of a place, but it reflects the “weak hands” (*rifyon yadayim*), or weakened commitment that the B'nei Yisrael had towards the *mitzvos* they had previously received. Thus, “they traveled from Refidim” hints to the notion that they distanced themselves from that state to a sense of greater commitment to serve Hashem. The second point the Torah emphasizes is the trait of humility and submissiveness which is necessary to accept the Torah. This lowliness is what the Torah alludes to when it repeats that they camped in the wilderness, a lowly place on which everyone tramples. Finally, for Torah to thrive there must be a collaboration of minds who work together

---

<sup>44</sup> Shemos 19:2.



to sharpen each other's understanding of Torah. This element of unity, is indicated by the singular use of the word *vayichan* (and **he** camped) to refer to the entire B'nei Yisrael camping at Har Sinai.<sup>45</sup>

While all the aforementioned points are certainly appropriate values for us to improve on in order to make us worthy as a group to receive the Torah, perhaps we should also look towards the specific protocol that Hashem laid out for B'nei Yisrael to prepare themselves as individuals. What does Hashem tell Moshe to instruct the people?

*And God said to Moshe, go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow and wash their clothes. And they shall be ready for the third day, for on the third day Hashem will descend before the people onto Har Sinai.*

**Shemos 19:10-11**

ויאמר ה' אל משה לך אל העם וקדשתם היום  
ומחר וכבסו שמלתם: והיו נכנים ליום  
השלישי כי ביום השלישי ירד ה' לעיני כל  
העם על הר סיני.  
**שמות יט:י-יא**

Hashem mentions three things that the people should do: They should sanctify themselves, they should launder their clothes, and they should prepare themselves. While this program may have had one meaning for the Jews at that time, these three steps may also refer to fundamental principles that can apply to us even today.

The notion of sanctifying ourselves carries various meanings in different contexts. Ramban, on the verse *קדשים תהיו*, explains that we should transcend the mundane by holding ourselves back even from the permissible pleasures of this world.<sup>46</sup> To sanctify ourselves in that way means to focus on spiritual aspirations even at the expense of some of the physical aspects in our lives. Having this proper sense of priorities is surely necessary to succeed in Torah, as we are told in the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avos; the path to Torah is to study Torah even if we only have the bare minimum to live on.<sup>47</sup>

The second step is to launder our clothes. When Kohelet says that we should make sure to keep our clothes white (and unsoiled), the commentaries explain that one should engage in good deeds and repent for any sins.<sup>48</sup> We may therefore understand the notion of cleaning our clothes as a reference to becoming more involved in *mitzvos* and avoiding any sin.

The last step is to prepare ourselves. The Ibn Ezra explains this as referring to the excited anticipation that a person should have to hear the voice of Hashem when he reveals the Torah and *mitzvos*.

In light of this interpretation, the path to our success in Torah is clear. It is important that we commit ourselves to make time to study Torah and make it a priority in our lives. This increase in Torah study needs to be complemented by an increase in *mitzvos* involvement. But of course,

<sup>45</sup> See also Kli Yakar who explains these phrases and terms to refer to the peace and harmony that was necessary for the people to receive the Torah.

<sup>46</sup> Vayikra 19:2.

<sup>47</sup> Avos 6:4.

<sup>48</sup> Koheles 9:8. Similarly, see Rashi to Eicha 1:9, who explains the soiled hem of a garment as a reference to sin.

both endeavors need to be performed with eagerness and enthusiasm. If we keep these lessons in mind we will hopefully all enjoy success in Torah.

## Why is this Holiday not like the others?

Rabbi Yoni Levin

Beren Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

The Festival of Shavuos is shockingly anticlimactic. We count Sefiras Haomer, with much excitement and enthusiasm, leading up to the celebration of Kabalas Hatorah. But the anticipation is met with a celebration well below expectations. In contrast to Pesach and Sukkos, Shavuos is a mere 24-hour celebration. In addition to its brevity, we perhaps would have expected the Torah to obligate the performance of mitzvos in order to enhance the commemoration of this epic event, Kabalas Hatorah –yet here too, Shavuos is lacking.

There is an intriguing comment by chazal that may hold the key to understanding the anomaly of Shavuos. Based on a pasuk in Sefer Yeshaya (54:1), the Talmud (Taanis 7a) compares the Torah to three liquids: milk, water, and wine. This analogy needs clarification. Why do Chazal feel compelled to compare the Torah to liquids? And when doing so, why specifically these three?

Perhaps these three liquids symbolize the development and maturity of the human intellect, which is, of course, an integral part of Torah study. Milk, which is the life source of the new born baby, represents the first stage of life. Water, which is the essential drink for all ages, signifies the middle stage of life. And wine, which is reserved for the mature and sophisticated, symbolizes the latter years of life. This progression can now be applied to Torah study. Milk represents the Written Law, the fundamentals of Torah; water signifies the Oral Law; and wine symbolizes the hidden dimension of the Torah.

These three liquids, these three levels of Torah study, correlate to the three regalim. Shavuos, when we customarily enjoy dairy foods, represents the Written Law. Sukkos, which embraces the theme of water<sup>49</sup>, signifies the Oral Law, and Pesach (perhaps coupled with Purim), when we drink four cups of wine, symbolizes the hidden dimension of Torah.

This notion that Shavuos represents the Written Law, the fundamentals of Torah, justifies its brevity as well as its lack of an attached ritual. Shavuos is limited to one day, a simple day, an uneventful day to highlight its very essence: celebrating the receiving of the Torah, the beginning of the Torah, the basics of the Torah.

However, this interesting approach to the relationship between the three regalim leaves us in a quandary. Why do we count *up*, from Pesach to Shavuos, when it appears we're moving backwards? Keeping everything simple still doesn't make for an exciting climax. It seems backward to count from Pesach to Shavuos, regressing from the sophisticated to the primitive!

---

<sup>49</sup> On Sukkos we are judged on rain (Rosh Hashannah 16a), we begin reciting "mashiv haruach" (Taanis 2a), and we have a special water libation accompanying the korban tamid (Taanis 2b)

The Written Torah, although basic and fundamental, is unlike the ABC's of preschool. A preschool graduate never returns, but one who studies the Written Law must. He must return and review, revisit and reexamine. In fact, it is through the other areas of Torah, both the Oral Law and the hidden element, that one can reenter the world of the Written Law. It is only through these lenses that one appreciates new understandings of the Written Law. It is now clear why we count from Pesach to Shavuos – it is simplicity that is the greatest climax. Throughout the year we sustain ourselves on water, we dine with aged wine, but it is the milk we thirst. We strive to peer into the Torah, in its simplicity, yet see myriads of concepts and ideas.

## Standing for the Aseres Hadibros

Rabbi Rafi Rosenblum

Wexner Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

On Shavuos, many communities have the custom to stand for the reading of the *Aseres Hadibros*, based on our desire to reenact the giving of the Torah, which was given to the Jewish people as they were standing at the foot of Har Sinai. However, by specifically standing up for the *Aseres Hadibros*, it appears that we are placing a greater emphasis on this portion of the Torah than on other sections. This seems to contradict the gemara in Meseches Brachos, daf 12a that tells us that the *chachamim* wanted to incorporate the *Aseres Hadibros* into the everyday *davening*, but decided against doing so because it could lead heretics to convince the people that only the *Aseres Hadibros* were part of the Torah and nothing else. Is there any way to reconcile our practice in light of this gemara?

Indeed, the Rambam (Teshuvos HaRambam #46) writes against the practice to stand for the *Aseres Hadibros*, based on the gemara in Brachos, and says that communities that have such a custom should be corrected. Rav Ovadya Yosef (Yechaveh Daas #29) quotes a number of *achronim* who were in support of maintaining the minhag, and who offer explanations why it does not contradict the gemara in Brachos. However, Rav Ovadya Yosef isn't willing to follow these *achronim* because he says that they did not see what the Rambam had written, for if they had, they would have agreed with him. Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Teshuvos V'hanhagos 1:144) recommends standing up *before* the baal koreh begins reading the *Aseres Hadibros* so no one will mistakenly think that the Torah is only comprised of the *Aseres Hadibros*.

Nevertheless, many communities maintain the practice, and a number of reasons are given. Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach (Halichos Shlomo Hilchos Tefillah, perek 12 footnote 30, and Hilchos Shavuos, perek 12 halacha 8) writes that we don't need to take the gemara's concern into account because there are other Torah readings we stand for, such as Shiras Hayam and at the end of each of the Chamisha Chumshai Torah, so no would be tricked into thinking that only the *Aseres Hadibros* are part of the Torah. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe OC 4:22) says that there is no reason to broaden the concern discussed in the gemara. In the time of the gemara they had a specific concern based on the fact that they *had* instituted saying the *Aseres Hadibros* during davening, and found that this caused people to falter, and so they abolished the practice. However, says Rav Moshe, if something hasn't been proven to be a problem, we don't need to be worried about it.

Is there any way to reconcile our minhag with what the Rambam writes? Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik (Mesorah, vol. 1 page 17) offers an explanation. The Aseres Hadibros can be read as pesukim (tam tachton), or as dibros (taam elyon), with each commandment being read individually. Our practice is to read each dibrah by itself, thereby taking many pesukim and making them one long pasuk, or taking one pasuk and converting it into many small pesukim. However, there is a general prohibition to break up pesukim in the Torah reading up differently from the way they are arranged now because the weekly Torah reading is a public form of talmud Torah, accomplished by reading the pesukim as they are divided. However, the Torah reading on Shavuos is different. In addition to acting as a public form of talmud Torah, on Shavuos we read the Aseres Hadibros in the taam elyon, as separate commandments, as a remembrance and reenactment of kabalas haTorah. And just as we read the Aseres Hadibros as they were said on Har Sinai, we stand during their recitation because we initially received the Torah at Har Sinai while standing at the foot of the mountain. On Shavuos, we do as much as we can to commemorate that momentous occasion<sup>50</sup>. However, the Rambam was opposed to the practice of standing because the Rambam doesn't mention the minhag of reading the Aseres Hadibros broken up into individual commandments. He felt that they should be read according to the existing pesukim, and that the only purpose of the kriyas haTorah is to allow public talmud Torah. Therefore, someone who would stand for this section of the Torah, and not for others, may be viewed as giving the Aseres Hadibros primary importance over the rest of the Torah, which could lead to a misconception.

The poskim (Chidah Tov Eiyin #11, Sharai Ephraim shar 7 #37, Igros Moshe ibid, Kaf Hachaim 146: 23) say that no matter what one's individual practice is, one must conform to the minhag hamakom. If one is in a place where the practice is to stand, he or she should stand, and if the communal custom is not to stand then he or she shouldn't stand (if doing so would be obviously going against the norm). By following the communal custom, and not separating oneself from the tzibbur, we build achdus in our communities. This is another opportunity to recreate kabalas haTorah, as Chazal tell us that Klal Yisrael were "k'ish echad b'lev echad", like one person with one heart when they stood at Har Sinai. May we be zocheh to reach that level once again, and see the Bais Hamikdash rebuilt b'meharah b'yamenu.

## **The First Night of Shavuos: What Should We Do?**

**Rabbi Elon Soniker**

Beren Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

The first night of Shavuos is a very special and holy night. The Arizal writes that anyone who stays awake the entire night of Shavuos and spends all of his time engaged in learning Torah is guaranteed a peaceful, safe and healthy year to follow. The Magen Avraham (O.C. 494) writes that the minhag, quoted in the Zohar, to dedicate the night to learning Torah is an attempt to rectify a mistake made by Klal Yisrael at the time of matan Torah. When Hashem "arrived" to

---

<sup>50</sup> A colleague of mine, R' Daniel Turkel, showed me that Rav Hershel Schachter in Nefesh Harav, page 136 cites R' Soloveitchik who explains the Maharam Rittenberg's requirement to stand for every krias haTorah similarly. Every week during krias haTorah we recreate kabalas haTorah, which is why he maintains that one needs to stand.

give the Torah to the Jewish people, they were sleeping and had to be woken. Therefore, the custom developed to stay awake all night to show Hashem that we are preparing for and awaiting His “arrival” to give us the Torah.

The question is, which Torah subject is the most appropriate to study? How should the night best be spent?

Some communities have the minhag to recite and study the Tikkun Leil Shavuos, which according to most, contains the beginning and end of all of the parshiyos of the Torah and the books of Nach as well as various other texts. There is a difference of opinions regarding what other texts should be included in this Tikkun. Some recite the beginning and end of all of the tractates of Mishna, while others recite various midrashim and parts of the Zohar. The source for Tikkun Leil Shavuos is based on the Zohar and quoted by the Arizal.

Rav Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov (Derech Pikudecha, Introduction 3, paragraph 4) explains that the reason for this type of study is that when a person is unable to finish a sefer in its entirety, they should at least learn the beginning and end of it. By doing this, in the eyes of Hashem, it is as if you have finished the entire sefer. Therefore, since we do not have the ability to finish all of Tanach in one night, we recite the beginning and end of each section and it is as if we have learned all of the Torah. There are other reasons offered for reciting Tikkun Leil Shavuos which are based on kabbalah and are beyond the scope of this article (see Kaf Hachaim 494:7-8).

However, some communities do not have the custom of reciting Tikkun Leil Shavuos and spend the night involved in in-depth study of different areas of Torah. Why would one choose to pass on the reasons and merits of reciting the Tikkun Leil Shavuos and study other topics instead?

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (Mikraei Kodesh, Pesach Volume 3, 34) writes that the ideal way to spend the night of Shavuos is to study Torah in-depth with much effort and concentration. He states a number of reasons why this is the highest level of Torah learning and therefore the most appropriate way to spend the night. Through this type of study, writes Rav Frank, one acquires the Torah for himself (“nikreis al shemo,” Bamidbar Rabba 12:9), as we find that the Torah is referred to as “Moshe’s Torah” (Malachi 3:22) because of Moshe Rabbeinu’s exertion and self-sacrifice at the time of receiving the Torah. Rav Frank writes that staying up all night on its own is a form of mesiras nefesh and if the night is spent learning Torah with energy and dedication it is an even greater level of self-sacrifice for the Torah. He adds that another reason why in-depth Torah study is preferable is because it leads to great levels of loving Hashem by developing a deep relationship with Him through the Torah.

Both of these customs are admirable and commendable ways to spend the night of Shavuos. Regardless of which custom we follow, we should try to take advantage of the night and spend our time involved and engaged in Torah study. By doing this, we can prepare ourselves to receive the Torah anew and show Hashem our excitement and love for His Torah.

# Achieving Unity Through Independence

Rabbi Yehuda Turetsky

Beren Kollel Elyon Fellow, RIETS

Shavuot is a celebration of God's revelation at Sinai. It is a time when we recall a defining moment in world history and a transitional juncture in Jewish history. It is, perhaps most critically, a unique and singular experience for mankind. God directly spoke to the world.

In the first of the Ten Commandments, God said clearly and unequivocally **"אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים"**, "I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Shemot 20:2). The paramount importance of this verse is clear; there is a God, and we must believe in him. Yet, a series of debates have ensued surrounding this statement. What may be most fascinating is the range of opinions found in the Jewish tradition about how one acquires faith in God, the truth clearly and explicitly stated in this verse.

Rambam and other medieval rationalists argue belief is acquired through philosophical inquiry. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto and fellow mystics feel the study of kabbalah and various esoteric teachings are necessary for true understanding of God. Various chassidic thinkers are of the opinion that the greatest faith is simple faith, where questions needn't be asked and doctrine is simply accepted<sup>51</sup>. Indeed, many argue belief should be accepted as tradition, passed down from one generation to the next. R. Elchanan Wasserman (Kovetz Maamarim, ch. 1) even writes that belief is obvious, as an objective look at the world would lead anyone to believe in God. Clearly, what appears to be a simple and straightforward statement leads to many different approaches and perspectives in the Jewish tradition.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, a basic question emerges. Why would God formulate such an important tenet of our faith without giving us insight into how to attain it? Why would something as fundamental as belief in God not come with a "how to guide" about how to reach it? It appears that the Torah wishes to convey the message that *what* we believe is more important than *how* we believe, that knowledge of God is primary and it can be acquired in varying ways. People are not all moved the same way or inspired in the same manner. God wants us to believe in him, but how we get there is up to us.

The recognition that people work and think differently, that there is no uniform and singular path towards belief in Hashem, is significant. It has led to divisiveness and arguments about which approach is most authentic. But, in truth, this recognition should have the opposite effect. It should encourage a more ambitious approach that is also more accepting. Knowledge that mankind is diverse should inspire us to find our unique role without rejecting the unique role of others, to maximize our own contributions without minimizing those of others. It should enable us to find allies instead of adversaries and engender empathy instead of enmity, all in the name of creating a more successful and integrated community.

---

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, the formulation of R. Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan (Tinyana), no. 78).

<sup>52</sup> For a survey of various opinions on the way one acquires faith, see R. Moshe Tzuril's Oetzrot HaMussar (Vol. 1, pgs. 143-147, 149-209).

Prior to God's revelation at Sinai, the Jewish people were united, as one person with one heart (Rashi, Shemot 19:2). Yet, R. Shlomo Luria<sup>53</sup> notes that each person received the Torah from his own perspective and with his own unique background.<sup>54</sup> Apparently, independence does not undermine unity. A nation can be like "one person with one heart" with individuals that embrace their respective differences. Indeed, prior to receiving the Torah, the Jewish nation maintained their individuality with no cost to their unity.

Shavuot is a time when we remember that God told us to believe in him. We weren't given an exact path detailing the best way to have faith, and there is a range of ways to get there. Our job is to find the one best suited for us, and in the process, come to better understand not only ourselves but also the unique and special role of others.

---

<sup>53</sup> Yam Shel Shlomo, introduction to Bava Kama

<sup>54</sup> R. Luria uses this idea to explain the Talmud's statement (Eruvin 13a) that "these and those are the words of the living God." Individual differences are what allow multiple truths to exist.



# YUTorah.org

The Marcos and Adina Katz  
A Project of Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

Daily Shiur • Daf Yomi • Parshat  
HaShavua • Halacha • History •  
Machshava • and much more!

Over 34,000 shiurim and articles and growing every day.  
All materials available for download completely free.  
Subscribe to a podcast or e-mail subscription of your  
favorite speaker or series. There's something for everyone  
on the largest web site for Jewish learning online.



## OPEN HOUSE and ISRAEL FAIR for Undergraduate Men

WILF CAMPUS

Yeshiva College/Sy Syms School of Business  
Sunday, November 21, 2010



## OPEN HOUSE and ISRAEL FAIR for Undergraduate Women

BEREN CAMPUS

Stern College for Women/Sy Syms School of Business  
Sunday, November 14, 2010

# Office of Admissions

**Early Decision Application Deadline • November 1, 2010**



Yeshiva University  
OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS

[www.yu.edu/admissions](http://www.yu.edu/admissions)