

# Introduction

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In our *Amidah* prayer for Shavuot, we categorize the breathtakingly wondrous act of Divine Revelation at Sinai not as *Kabbalat Torateinu*, or “receiving” of the Torah, but as *Matan Torateinu*, the “gifting” of our Torah. Our Torah was and remains the greatest gift ever bestowed, a truly “perfect” bequest—“The Torah of Hashem is perfect” (Psalms 19:8). Moreover, it is an enduring gift: Torah does not remain confined to that singular mountaintop or crystallized in any individual moment in time—it is a dynamic *Torat chaim*, a living and breathing Torah, which continues to give for perpetuity.

Torah informs every inch and every crevice of our ostensibly quotidian existence. “Return to your tents” (Devarim 5:27), the Jews are instructed after receiving the Torah in an awesome and dazzling display—when the pomp and the fanfare finally subsides, take the Torah and inject it into your home and into every detail of your daily routine.

Torah Judaism, however, exists not only in the exacting details, but in the “big picture” as well. Perhaps the greatest gift within a gift that we Jews received at *Matan Torateinu* was the sense of sacred responsibility with which we were charged and subsequently ennobled.

Peculiarly, the Torah itself only vaguely explains the nature and purpose of the holiday of Shavuot. It’s very name, *Chag Hashavuot*, does not correspond to any specific custom or central practice associated with the holiday, as with *Chag Hasukkot* and *Chag Hamatzot*. An explanation of Shavuot’s whole point and purpose evades the written Torah entirely, and is instead left to the oral tradition.

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig, one of our esteemed roshei yeshiva, expounds the message which emerges from the text’s ambiguity in reference to Shavuot: “The very theme of *Matan Torah* as the centerpiece of Shavuot is specifically transmitted by means of the oral tradition entrusted to human transmission because it is precisely the human component that singularly characterizes Torah life that is uniquely celebrated on this day ... the greatest moment of human history, Divine Revelation, is celebrated not merely as a passive albeit awesome experience, but also as the foundational moment for the establishment of a covenant-partnership.”

Torah, then, affords us the capacity to both anchor and launch our lives under the guidance of Torah and as a critical partner with God. It fills our hearts and our minds with purpose, rescuing us from a meaningless, mission-less, meandering existence. Instead, the Torah proclaims loudly and clearly: Humanity matters in this world.

And it is the very notion of mattering that fuels our entire sacred enterprise here at Yeshiva University. As we all enjoy the Benjamin and Rose Berger Shavuot To-Go 5773 in our synagogues and homes, nearly 1,000 members of our community have gathered together for the

third annual RIETS Yarchei Kallah. So many individuals from various backgrounds, generations and locations, as well as distinctive perspectives along the *hashkafic* spectrum, have assembled as one to learn Torah from our incredible faculty. This touching assemblage almost serves as a beautiful metaphor for the Sinai experience itself.

Together, then, let us receive and celebrate anew our sacred Torah and heritage; let us celebrate the timeless ideas and ideals which infuse substance and meaning to our lives; let us resolve to make strides towards our promised land, nurtured and driven by our Torah and its timeless values.

Chag Sameach.