

# Online Learning and Talmud Torah

Without a doubt, the proliferation of technology has had a profound impact on our lives. Virtually every aspect of life has been changed by the spread of technology. We vacation differently now than we did merely 15 years ago, and we obtain information more rapidly and share it with a wider audience than we did in the not too distant past. We can and do communicate with geographically distant friends and acquaintances in a way that would have been unimaginable just a short time ago. Technology has left virtually no aspect of our lives unchanged, and unsurprisingly, the way we study Torah and disseminate our learning has similarly changed.

There are some who are uneasy with the changes to the way Torah is studied and taught. Their traditional mindset views the changes brought by technology — the study on a screen or with an iPad or laptop rather than a traditional Gemara — as negative. They note how the traditional methods of study produced exemplary *talmidei chachamim*, and there is no reason to change that which works. Moreover, they contend that new methods of study and teaching are likely to dilute the intensity, reduce the subtlety, and shallow the depths of the *yam haTalmud* (the sea of Talmud).



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Of course technology is extremely broad, and to properly discuss its impact on *talmud Torah* (Torah study), one would have to chart technology in all of its forms. Such a discussion would certainly include the easy availability of some of the most unsavory materials that the internet provides, and the consequent damage both psychologically and spiritually that may come from this exposure. Some rightfully shy away from using technology to teach Torah out of concern that exposure to technology may lead to dangerous places. Others have taken a different approach. The internet is a reality that we must live with and not one that can be combated. The struggle for purity would exist whether or not Torah is placed online. Yeshiva University has supported the latter approach and consequently, a robust online home for Torah was created. In this vein, our focus will therefore not be on whether or not YUTorah.org and similar websites should exist, but on the impact that this sort of online audio and video learning has on the

way Torah is currently being studied and taught.

In assessing the impact of technology on the teaching of Torah, we must not ignore the potential shortcomings of this relatively new media. Even so, I am convinced that the positives far outweigh the negatives. The more I teach, the more I grow convinced that hindsight will judge technology as an overall advancement and enhancement of Torah. Technology has already exponentially increased both the quality and quantity of *talmud Torah*. I personally have *talmidim* (students) in far corners of the world, *talmidim* whom I am never likely to meet in person. A person can search any of a wide array of websites and locate thousands of *shiurim* on any given topic. He or she can be exposed to diverse teachers who present a multiplicity of perspectives. There are large numbers of women in particular who otherwise would not be exposed to high level *shiurim* and are now studying the depths of halacha because of YUTorah.



## TORAH STUDY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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In describing Matan Torah, the verse (Shemot 20:15) states:

וְכָל הָעָם רָאוּ אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם  
וְאֶת קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר וְאֶת הַהָר עֹשֵׂן וַיֵּרָא הָעָם  
וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֵק.

*The whole nation saw the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the shofar and the mountain smoking. The nation saw and they trembled and stood from afar.*

How is it possible to see the sounds of the thunder? R. Chaim Tzanzer, *Divrei Chaim* to Yitro suggests that the reason why we normally can't see sounds is because there are too many other sensations we are feeling at the same time; we are distracted. At Matan Torah, the Jewish people reached the level of a prophet who is able to block everything else out and actually hear the sounds with the clarity as if actually seeing it. From this perspective, Matan Torah serves as the paradigm of distraction-free learning.

**Torah To Go Editors**

Additionally, beginners who may lack even the basic facility to navigate a text, any text, in any language, may still become proficient in intricate areas of halacha and philosophy. Students with learning disabilities, who are unable to process ordinary written texts, can grow into *lomdim* (advanced learners) based on technologically enhanced methods of transmission.

Of course, it is our responsibility to highlight a few of the challenges presented to us in dealing with online learning. We need to recognize where online learning falls short of the ideal set forth by Chazal and learn how to compensate for these shortfalls.

Too often, because of technology, live teachers are exchanged for virtual ones. Students may decide to skip class since the material is available online. Chazal (*Horiyos* 12a and *Eruvin* 13b) speak glowingly of the face-to-face interaction between teacher and student:

אמר להו רב משרשיא לבריה כי בעיתו מייעל ומיגמרי קמי רבייכו גרסו מתניתא ועלו לקמי רבייכו וכי יתביתו קמיה חזו לפומיה דכתיב והיו עיניך רואות את מוריך.

*R. Mesharshiya said to his son: when you want to study before your teachers, first prepare the teachings of the Mishna and then go to your teachers and when you sit, make sure you can see [the teacher's] mouth, as it states, your eyes should see your teachers.*

Too often our desire as rebbeim and teachers to post *shiurim* online and to meet the mandate of *he'emidu talmidim harbeh*, raise forth for yourself many students (*Avos* 1:1), comes at the cost of detracting from the face-to-face interaction that Chazal so clearly favor.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the influence of technology has led

to a greater sense of distraction from the task at hand. We are all so worried about the email that just arrived or the ping we heard from our Facebook account that we do not completely focus on the text in front of us or even the person sitting next to us. This point is noted by Meiri in explaining why it is so important for the student to face the teacher:

ויהיה נותן עיניו ולבו לשמוע דברי הרב ולא יהיו עיניו ולבו תרים ומשוטטים הנה והנה.

*One should direct one's eyes and attention to listen to the words of the teacher. One's eyes should not be roaming here and there.*

Meiri notes that directly facing one's teacher helps avoid distraction.

Listening online, even when one is not multitasking, clearly provides greater opportunity for distraction. In this respect, *talmud Torah* presented online falls short of the ideal mentioned by Chazal.

Moreover, due to technology, halachic questions are answered not through direct conversation with a rav or posek, but through the sources provided by the Googler Rov. The sometimes unfortunate consequence of this is that nuances of difference between the case at hand and the case discussed in a particular shiur, or found in a particular online source, may go unnoticed. Additionally, the vast amount of information available online allows one to find a source that will confirm whatever position he or she is inclined to. This confirmation bias will undoubtedly lead to deciding every issue leniently (*lekula*) even when *kula* is not warranted.

Furthermore, the personal relationship that should bond teacher and student, rabbi and congregant, or even two peers grappling together to properly decipher a text can be lost.

This phenomenon is not unique to Torah. Interpersonal collaboration has decreased in all areas of life. However, it is of particular concern with respect to Torah. Arriving at the ultimate truth of *dvar Hashem* necessitates give and take, reworking and reformulating of an idea, to come to its correct understanding. On the positive side, however, the ready availability of halachic information online enables a questioner to approach a rav or posek armed with greater research and information. The depth of engagement with the sources and the genuine exchange of ideas can only lead to a genuine improvement in the quality of the psak issued.

The advent of technology has also meant that the pure study of text, the reading of material from beginning to end, is in too short supply. People can easily search for the quote they need and the passage they want to cite. The painstaking effort of deciphering an entire text, including the “boring parts,” is too rarely embarked upon. Technology has made finding sources all too easy. On the positive side, source sheets are much easier for teachers to put together and have a far more appealing look to them. The old-fashioned method of cutting with scissors and pasting with scotch tape is fortunately no longer needed. However, from the perspective of the learner, something is lost. The experience of plowing through material, even just reading through a large segment of text before arriving at the sought after source, is now in short supply. The older system helped in

acquiring the skill of how to read even that which does not interest him or her. It allowed for understanding the quote in its correct context. Although no one can deny the benefits of easy access to sources, nonetheless, something is lost. It is important to educate students to find a quote quickly, but then to spend the time to completely read the source in its entirety, understand its context, and decipher its true meaning.

There is another dimension of technology’s impact on *talmud Torah* that is worthy of our attention. The question we are dealing with is as much about technology as it is about the type of information that we digest. Because of technology, more and more audio and video information is processed. Even the written material available online is often significantly different from the written material found in books. The written word as found in books and journals (popular literature such as magazines are clearly in a different category) is most often carefully thought out. More often than not, the written word in books can be pregnant with meaning and convey subtlety and nuance in a way that is generally absent from the spoken venue. Even the written word online is very often not as precise and well-thought-out as the written word in books. Hence it can be somewhat troubling when online sources are cited in research and scholarly works. There is no real way to assess if the online source is a scholarly, well-thought-out exposition or a simple stream of consciousness. The

### The Scope of Online Torah

On any given month on the Marcos and Adina Katz YUTorah.org website there are:

- 140,000 visits to learn Torah, over a third on the go with mobile devices, to choose from over 115,000 shiurim and 10,000 articles from over 2,000 teachers and authors;
- Visitors from 128 countries around the world, from 6 continents;
- 1,500 shiurim and articles uploaded by over 500 volunteers;
- Shiurim being uploaded from multiple YU campuses, high schools, Yeshivot and Seminaries, and synagogues from across North America and Israel.

explosion of information, to a certain extent, equalizes all sources, but in reality they are not all equal.

When comparing the written word as found in books with the oral word found in online *shiurim*, the contrast is even more extreme. Of course, the spoken word can also be profoundly expressive and laden with content. In theory, the variations of tone can make the spoken word even more expressive than the written word. As Maharsha on the aforementioned Gemara in *Horiyos* notes, the ideal method of Torah study, sitting in front of one’s teacher, allows one to pick up on facial gestures and subtle cues



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that can convey much information. Audio and video *shiurim* found online fall miles short of the precision and subtlety presented in written Torah form. They do not allow the student to pick up on the subtleties of gesture that are found in direct face-to-face transmission and which can transmit so much meaning.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Online *shiurim* almost always contain off-the-cuff remarks, irrelevant comments and unnecessary verbiage. These are absent from the written word and most often they are not of particular consequence. However, occasionally there is a stray remark found in an online shiur that may be insensitive to others or downright hurtful. An insensitive comment may be due to the speaker struggling for the right way to express an idea and misspeaking, or it may be the function of an inside comment that is totally appropriate for the live audience but insensitive to the broader online audience. Furthermore, the spread of online learning not only creates new contexts for off-the-cuff comments

or inside jokes to become insensitive, it also helps disseminate them. In previous times, a local shiur given in one's shul or classroom may have been genuinely local. Today, however, when Torah is spread to the far corners of the world, the possibility exists for insensitive remarks to be spread far beyond the confines of the local classroom and thereby hurt others and potentially cause a massive chilul Hashem. The admonition of Chazal, *chachamim hizaharu bidivreichem* — scholars, be careful with your words (*Avos* 1:11), must be conscientiously heeded. Teachers and rebbeim must formulate ideas with proper nuance and subtlety and articulate them clearly so that there can be no misunderstanding on the part of the students. They must be concerned with mistakes in the interpretation of halacha as the simple understanding of the Mishna implies, or mistakes in ideology as the Rambam in *Peirush haMishna* to that Mishna notes. However, there must also be an awareness that the audience to whom one is speaking extends far beyond the confines of one's local classroom.

Inappropriate comments were never acceptable, even if they were at times uttered. In our global world we must be even more careful, since they can be all the more damaging.

Despite all the challenges that technology presents, our approach must in no way lead towards a Luddite philosophy. Technology's impact on Talmud Torah is already and will continue to be overall very positive and will ultimately prove to be a great force in *harbatzas haTorah*. Let us not make the same mistake as the medieval monks who opposed the printing press. With all of the shortcomings and all the areas of potential concern, we must not lose sight of the incredible potential of technology to enhance limud hatorah. Our challenge is to find the right balance where technology doesn't replace traditional models of learning, but rather enhances and complements them. By doing so, we can see technology as our tool in fulfilling the Messianic notion of *ki malah ha'aretz de'ah es Hashem*, the land will be filled with knowledge of God (*Yeshayahu* 11:9).



# Something and Nothing

On the first day of Shavuot, we read the description of Matan Torah where Hashem speaks to the entire nation of Bnei Yisrael and tells them of the *Aseres Hadibros*, the Ten Commandments. Rashi explains that the Ten Commandments include the entire Torah. The Jewish people accepted the whole Torah at Har Sinai, even though they only heard the Ten Commandments. The rest of the Torah was given to them during their 40 years in the desert. By accepting the Ten Commandments, Bnei Yisrael essentially accepted the entire Torah.

*Shem Mishmuel, Yisro 5671*, cites the Gemara, *Shabbos 86b*, that records a dispute as to the exact date of the giving of the Torah. All opinions agree, however, that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people on the day of Shabbos. We mention in our Shabbos prayers that Moshe received the *luchos* on Shabbos. Apparently this was an important part of Matan Torah. Why was the Torah supposed to be given on Shabbos?

The verse (Shemos 19:20) tells us that Hashem came down (*vayered*) on Har Sinai to teach the Ten Commandments. *Vayered* can't be taken literally. God doesn't have



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a body. Motion is foreign to Him. He is everywhere. Targum Onkelos translates *vayered* not as motion, but as a revelation, *v'isgeli*. According to the Targum, the Almighty appeared at Sinai. What does this mean?

## Inspiration from Above and Below

In truth, the world is filled with God's glory — *M'lo chol ha'aretz k'vodo* (Yeshayahu 6:3). Hashem is found everywhere. But there is a barrier in our perception of Him. We don't see Him everywhere. Our perception is weak. If a blind person is in a room with beautiful paintings, he won't see them because his perception is limited. A person who can see but is wearing a blindfold won't be able to see either. Hashem's presence is everywhere. We should be able to see it because we are spiritual beings. But there is something blocking our sensitivity to this perception. This is

why we think God is hidden. At Har Sinai, Hashem removed the blindfolds that stop the human spirit from seeing Him. God let Himself be perceived. This is what the Targum means — *v'isgeli* — God revealed Himself.

Chassidus teaches a basic rule of the spiritual world about the interplay between man and God. In the human experience, we oscillate between perception and revelation of Hashem. Surprisingly, Hashem does not control this. Rather it is controlled by people. He would reveal Himself, but we are the ones who don the blindfolds. The prophet said, "*Avonoseichem hayu mavdilim beineichem u'vein Elokeichem* — your sins separate you from your Lord" (Yeshayahu 59:2). Our own failings prevent us from seeing the glory of Hashem. He would allow Himself to be seen if only we would remove our masks.

This human influence on the spiritual world is called *isarusa d'l'tata*, the movement from below. Human beings create the beginning of the movement. Then Hashem responds with an *isarusa d'l'eila*, a movement from above.

This is like two spouses who had a fight. One of them will have to make the first move toward reconciliation, either the husband or the wife. According to Chassidus, in our

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relationship with Hashem, we the people have to make that first move. In halacha, the effectiveness of teshuva also begins from our side, from below. The Midrash (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 5:2) describes this as if Hashem says to us: Open for me the tiniest crack in your iron armor, which is blinding you and blocking you from me, and I will widen this crack to be as wide as the grand entrance to a huge hall. People must make that first move, then Hashem responds with much more than what people can do themselves. The *isarusa d'l'tata* is the first move. It makes the first crack in the wall that separates us from our Father in Heaven. After we make the first move, Hashem will make the rest of the wall crumble.

מים עמקים עצה בלב איש ואיש תבונה  
 ידלגה.

*Deep waters are the thoughts of man's heart and a wise man will draw them out.*

**Mishlei 20:5**

*Chovos Halevavos*, in his introduction, explains that underground there is a lot of water, which can nurture many people as well as animals and plants. The only problem is that it's not easily accessible. We have to dig deep to find it. Many people have a feeling that they don't have a spiritual capability. This is a mistake. The human being has an amazingly deep reservoir of spirituality. Even if it is covered, it is still there under the surface. This is like an underground well, waiting to be tapped to release its voluminous waters. In the human soul there is a

deep *eitza b'lev ish*, a spiritual wisdom, waiting to be tapped. This is where the *isarusa d'l'tata* comes in. You crack open the passage for those deep waters, and Hashem will widen that crack for you, giving you access to a whole world of spirituality.

As a rebbe in a yeshiva, I see an amazing amount of spirituality sitting in the Jewish soul. We should not write off people as impossible to reach. *Mayim amukim, eitza b'lev ish*. The underground water is a tremendous reservoir below the surface. Once you crack that surface, it is revealed. Each person himself has the ability to uncover his latent spirituality. We must believe that we are able to do this.

I have seen people make such great changes in their lives. They did not discover something new. The power to change and grow already exists deep inside of us. The ability to connect to our Creator is a latent ability within us. *Isarusa d'l'tata* is the first step required to evoke the *isarusa d'leila* when Hashem comes down in response to us.

**Shabbos: The Best Day to Access Your Spiritual Reservoir**

The best day of the week to open our spiritual reservoir is Shabbos. Shabbos is a day dedicated completely to God. We completely abandon our weekday focus and burdens. On Shabbos we don't discuss our financial needs and plans. We don't

discuss *divrei chol*, sports, business, and recreation. It is a day dedicated to prayer and study of Torah. It is a day when families come together. It is a beautiful, holy day.

The day of Shabbos itself supports the *isarusa d'l'tata*. Even this movement from below has a secret guiding hand from above. Hashem gives us the day of Shabbos, a special day to rest from the wearisome, stale atmosphere of the six days of the week. We can find our refuge and true selves on the holy day of Shabbos. It gives us the ability to open up and make the first move toward the Almighty.

The day comes with so much revelation and holiness. The Jew begins the process with *isarusa d'l'tata* and Hashem continues with *isarusa d'leila*. Shabbos is the day of Matan Torah, because Shabbos is the day on which we are ready to make the first move toward Hashem. On Shabbos we connect to Him — and that's why He connects to us.

**Yesh and Ayin, To Be or Not To Be?**

*Shem Mishmuel* explains a great concept, the problem of *yesh* and *ayin*, existence and nonexistence. The question is, do I really exist, am I real, or is the only true existence Hashem? After all, what am I in contrast to Him? *Shem Mishmuel* explains the Chassidic understanding of the philosophical issue of man's worth in the shadow of God.



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Is Adam something, *yesh*, or nothing, *ayin*? Chassidus, and Torah in general, take a dialectical approach to address this issue. On the one hand, man is great. People are like angels, sometimes even greater than angels. The whole world is created for people. The heavens, sun, moon, and stars were all created for man to be able to serve God. God spent six days preparing a gorgeous hotel that we call earth. People are great, so Hashem wanted the world to be great for them. People are the goal and crown of all of creation.

On the other hand, our importance fades when contrasted with the Creator of it all. When faced with God, man seems to be practically worthless. As David wrote in Tehillim 8, “What is man that you pay attention to him?” Our planet Earth is not even a speck in the universe. The stars appear to us as mere specks of light in the skies, but we know how big they really are. Someone standing on a planet in another galaxy would barely see our sun, and certainly would never see Earth. The Milky Way itself is a relatively small galaxy compared to others. Our sun is a relatively small star, and our planet is relatively small in comparison to the rest of the solar system. On our planet, we humans are smaller than the oceans and the mountains, the elephants, whales and trees and many other beings. When compared to Hashem’s vastness and infinity, we are truly nothing.

On the one hand, Adam and Chava are direct creations of God and the whole world is created to serve them. On the other hand, they are meaningless and infinitesimal.

## Yesh and Ayin in Our Avodas Hashem

In Chassidus, there are two ways that we serve Hashem. One way is by being a *yesh*, being something with tremendous spiritual energy. We have great worth. We must serve Hashem with our powers and strengths. On the other hand, there is a service of the Almighty through *bitul hayesh*, by being an *ayin*, a nothing, and losing yourself in the vastness of Hashem’s infinite being. When we lose ourselves in Him, He then takes us as *ayin*.

This is a very high level of service of Hashem. This is the level of Avraham, who said (Bereishis 18:27) *anochi afar va’eifer*, “I am nothing but dust.” Hashem calls Avraham *ohavi*, my beloved (Yeshayahu 41:8). Moshe Rabbeinu also said (Shemos 16:7) *v’nachnu ma*, “Who are Aharon and I, we are nothing,” just part of God’s reality, which is everything in this world. According to Chassidus, this is a higher level of serving Hashem.

All of us live this dialectic. We know we have to do great things to observe Torah and mitzvos. We have to use our skills and abilities to achieve greatness. We must face challenges and overcome them. We are *yesh*. We have an identity; we have responsibility to use our power. We must be active, get up and conquer the world for God’s sake and the Torah’s sake and to make this world a better place. Each person has his unique responsibility that he must contribute to the world. This is all a function of *yesh*. We are more than anything else God created. *Vatchesreihu me’at me’elokim*, we are just a little lower than God (Tehillim 8:6). He charged us to make this world a better place. We must help the poor, make the

world a place of spirituality. We have tremendous power to achieve, and we have great responsibility that comes with the power.

There is a different way of serving Hashem, as *ayin*. The thought process of *ayin* is somewhat different. I will let Hashem take over, I am too weak. If I try too much it is audacious. I will give myself to the Master of the Universe and let Him take me wherever He wants. This is the *mida* of Avraham *ohavi*, who said “I am nothing but dust.” This is also the *mida* of Moshe, who said *v’nachnu ma*. This was also the *mida* of David Hamelech, who said *ani tola’as v’lo ish*, “I am [insignificant as a] worm.” (Tehillim 22:7) Hashem shelters me and protects me.

This is how Hashem treated Bnei Yisrael when He took us out of Mitzrayim. Hashem told us before He gave us the Torah:

אַתָּם רֵאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשֶׁר  
אַתְּכֶם עַל כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׂרִים וְאָבָא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי.

*You saw what I did in Egypt, I carried you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me.*

### Shemos 19:4

Hashem took Bnei Yisrael on clouds of glory to carry them to Sinai to receive the Torah. Still today, we are riding on His wings. We are nothing, like little children clinging on to our mother’s bosom, as the verse in Tehillim (131:2) says, *k’gamul alei imo*. Like a baby who completely identifies and clings to his mother, we cling to Hashem, our father and mother. From this perspective, the nothingness of a human being is his greatness because it means he has a complete connection with Hashem.

We are each involved in this paradox between *yesh* and *ayin*. We are powerful and yet we are helpless, we are mature adults and at the same time helpless babies. We confront this paradox all the time. There are things that we should do, and there are things that are beyond our ability to control. We live with this paradox all the time. We have to work to get our jobs done, and we must be willing to step back to let Hashem finish the work sometimes. We need to be humble at times.

## Torah and *Yesh* and *Ayin*

Within Torah as well there is a struggle between the *yesh* and *ayin*, between the me and the not me. Hashem gave us the Torah, and gave us the ability to study and understand it. He even gave us the power to make decisions about Torah, the power to implement the Torah. This starts with the *talmid chacham* who interprets *Torah lishma* as his mind sees it. It is as if He says, “My dear Jewish children, take the Torah and use it. It is yours.” The Gemara says *Torah dilei*, the Torah of a *talmid chacham* is his own (*Kiddushin* 32b). This is why he can forgive his *kavod* (honor) as a *talmid chacham*. He is a partner in Torah with Hashem Himself. The oral Torah was given to the scholars of Israel to interpret and to try to understand what God meant. The Gemara says that that Hashem said “*nitzchuni banai* — My children defeated me,” when the rabbis overruled a heavenly voice. “Now that My children have made a decision about halacha, I have to understand as My children have explained,” concedes Hashem.

On other hand, the midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7) says that if someone wants to merit receiving

the Torah in its fullest sense, he must make himself like a desert. A desert has nothing, no trees nor flowers. A person who wants to gain Torah must not be interested in a fat bank account, not interested in luxuries. He is like a desert, which doesn't even have rain. There's nothing there but sand and dust. Hashem gave it to us and gave us power to explain and develop it. As special and great as we are, to receive Hashem's special incredible Torah, we must understand still that a person is nothing. Moshe was the most humble of all people. This is why he was *zoche* to Torah. Humble people are the greatest Torah scholars, and the greatest of the Jews.

My *rebbe* Rav Moshe Feinstein zt”l was so humble. My *rebbe muvhak* Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt”l was also exceedingly humble. These two great giants always had time to answer even the most elementary questions of a young student. They made themselves like a midbar. They were able to say “I don't know. I spent 75 years studying Torah, I'm a genius and I still say I don't know.” This is the greatness of *gedolei Yisrael*. They know the secret of being like a desert and of losing oneself in the vastness of the Torah. The Torah is the *daas* of Hashem, expressed in this way. A person must make his ego null and void to truly merit Torah knowledge.

We don't learn the Torah with close up personal interest. We must approach it with the question: What is Hashem teaching me? We lose ourselves in His values, goals and teachings.

## Conclusion

Someone who wants to be a great student in Torah must recognize his

own abilities. He cannot say I have limited skills or abilities. *Mayim amukim eitza b'lev ish*. We don't know the extent of our abilities. I am always surprised as a teacher to see how many students become great in Torah. Their abilities lie untapped under the surface. Once tapped they gush forth like fountains of water. These are the abilities planted deep within every Jewish person

Today in Israel we see Jewish children gushing with Torah. Children age 7 or 8 know whole *sforim* of *chumash* by heart, and *mishnayos* too. It is *mayim amukim eitza b'lev ish*. Now this potential is being tapped in front of our very eyes.

At the same time, we must realize that we are dust at the feet of our Torah teachers. It is important to let the Torah teacher take you on his wings up to the Torah. It is important to be humble and not a *baal gaavah*. The Torah does not like haughtiness. Like water, the Torah goes down to the lowest point. Torah seeks those who are humble.

We Jews are privileged to have received the Torah from God. We received this lesson of being at the same time both something and nothing, *isarusa d'l'tata*, our actions when we act as a *yesh*, and *isarusa d'l'eila*, Hashem's actions, and we are *ayin*. God responds to us from Infinity to take away the mask that we ourselves have put over our own eyes.

Let us hope and pray that on Shavuot, we study, learn, live and receive the Torah. May we be *zoche* to know when we are something and when we are nothing, how to be humble and great at the same time!

# Shavuot: The God-Given and the Man-Made

Sometimes we can find the big ideas in small details. One such detail is that Shavuot is not assigned a specific calendar day by the Torah. Its calendrical date in Sivan is not determined by when Rosh Chodesh Sivan is declared, but simply by counting 50 days from the second night of Pesach. Therefore, the Talmud (*Rosh HaShanah* 6b) notes that if both Nisan and Iyyar are 29 days long, Shavuot will fall on the seventh of the month of Sivan. If both are 30 days, Shavuot will fall on the fifth, and if one month is 29 and the other 30, Shavuot will fall on the sixth (as it does according to our current calendar). Shavuot's unfixed date is not merely a calendrical quirk, however, but a function of a big idea: the essence of the holiday of Shavuot as the day when we received both the *Torah she-be-ketav* (Written Torah) and the *Torah she-be-al peh* (Oral Torah).

## Shabbat and Mo'ed

At the end of *Parashat Emor*, there is a special section known as *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* (*Megilah* 30b), which introduces the cycle of the festivals of the year. Before discussing the festivals, however, the Torah begins with a short review of the commandment to observe Shabbat:

א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ

## Rabbi Moshe Schapiro

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אַתֶּם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲלֵהֶם הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי: ג שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבָּת הוּא לָהּ בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֵי־יָכֶם:

*Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals — that you are to designate as holy convocations — these are My appointed festivals. For six days, labor may be done, and the seventh is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places.*

### Vayikra 23:1-3

Rashi asks why Shabbat appears here in conjunction with the *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* and he answers:

ללמדך שכל המחלל את המועדות מעלין עליו כאלו חלל את השבתות וכל המקיים את המועדות מעלין עליו כאלו קיים את השבתות. *Anyone who violates the festivals, we consider it as if he violated the Sabbath, and anyone who upholds the festivals, we consider it as if he upheld the Sabbath.*

Rashi's answer is perplexing. The punishment for the violation of Shabbat is far more severe than the punishment for violating any of

the festivals. Shabbat and *mo'ed* are not equivalent and, at least on the surface, appear to be unconnected. Why should the violation of a festival interfere in any way with a person's observance of Shabbat?

The Talmud (*Beitzah* 17a) articulates a fundamental distinction between Shabbat and the *yamim tovim*. Shabbat is "*mikdesha ve-kayyama*" — "sanctified and confirmed," meaning it is a reality set by God. Mankind does not determine when Shabbat falls out. However, *yom tov* is dependent on us. The *beit din* determines and declares when Rosh Chodesh is (*kiddush ha-chodesh*), thereby establishing when *yom tov* will fall that month. [Even today, our current, fixed calendar represents the formalization of the *kiddush beit din* process]. This distinction expresses itself in the liturgy. The middle blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrei* for Shabbat ends with the words "*mekadesh ha-Shabbat*" — "He who sanctifies the Sabbath" — because it is God alone who establishes the Sabbath. However, on *yom tov* we conclude the blessing "*mekadesh Yisrael ve-ha-*

*zemanim*” — “He who sanctifies Israel and the festivals” — because it is through Israel that the festivals come to be sanctified. The *Ohr Ha-Chaim* (Vayikra 23:2) points out that the opening verses of *Parashat Ha-Mo’adot* hint at this distinction. Regarding Shabbat, the Torah says, “Hashem’s appointed festivals, that you are to designate as holy convocations — these are My appointed festivals.” The Torah repeats “these are My appointed festivals” to emphasize that it is God alone who establishes the Sabbath, and we cannot choose to make the day of rest on any other day. However, after speaking about Shabbat and before listing off each individual yom tov, the Torah repeats: “These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the holy convocations which you shall designate in their appropriate time” (23:4), to emphasize that it is Klal Yisrael who establishes the festivals.

### **The Shabbat/Yom Tov Analogy to Torah**

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook, in his commentary to the siddur (*Olat Reiyah, Kiddush Leil Shabbat*), draws a fascinating analogy between Shabbat and yom tov on the one hand, and the Torah on the other. Just as Shabbat is established by God, fixed and unchangeable, so

too the *Torah she-be-ketav* was given to Klal Yisrael by Hashem in fixed form, and we cannot change one single letter or verse. However, just as yom tov depends upon the Jewish people’s input — namely, that it is only through an act of *beit din* that the *yamim tovim* take effect — so too Hashem gave to Klal Yisrael a second Torah — the *Torah she-be-al peh*, which allows for, requires, and indeed only attains its purpose through human input and endeavor.<sup>1</sup> Each generation’s Torah sages must debate and discuss, decide, interpret, and formulate new laws, understandings, and concepts that become an intrinsic part of the Torah itself. This analogy also leads us to an important conclusion about the relationship between Shabbat and yom tov. Just as the Written Torah serves as the source and basis of the Oral Torah, and the Oral Torah interprets and applies the laws of the Written Torah, so, too, the Sabbath is the origin and source of the *yamim tovim*, and they in turn develop the themes of the Sabbath itself. When we proclaim, in the *kiddush* for Friday night, that Shabbat is *yom techilah le-mikra’ei kodesh* — the first of the holy convocations — we do not mean merely that it appears in the beginning of the text of *Parashat Ha-Mo’adot*. Rather, we mean that the *mo’adot* draw their holiness from Shabbat and in turn develop and

mold the sanctity of Shabbat, much the same way in which the Oral Torah draws its significance from and interprets the Written Torah.

We may understand Rav Kook’s terse comments in light of a fascinating observation by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (commentary to Vayikra 23:3):

*The commandment of the Sabbath is mentioned repeatedly in the Torah, each time with reference to a different aspect of Jewish life, of which the Sabbath is the principal foundation... the Sabbath is the starting point and the climax of all the holy days; the Sabbath is their basis and should find its realization in them.*

The Torah speaks about Shabbat in many contexts, each with a different emphasis. Leaving aside Shavuot, which will be addressed at greater length in the next section, we can quickly illustrate Rav Hirsch’s assertion. Shabbat’s most fundamental message, found in both the second chapter of Bereshit and the Ten Commandments (Shemot 20:11), that God is the Creator and King of the universe, is highlighted on Rosh HaShanah. Shabbat as a sign of the covenant between Hashem and Klal Yisrael (Shemot 31:12-18) is reflected on Yom Kippur, a day that celebrates the unique, intimate relationship between God and the Jewish people. Shabbat is connected to the idea of faith in God’s role as provider and protector

One who violates yom tov is cutting short the impact of Shabbat, denigrating its spiritual message and rendering it irrelevant and impotent. In that sense the yom tov violator is violating the Sabbath itself.



in the context of the story of the Manna (Shemot 16), and the holiday of Sukkot underscores this theme. Finally, Shabbat is associated with the events of the Exodus (Devarim 5:15), and underscores the themes of human freedom and compassion (Shemot 23:12), which are central to the celebration of Pesach. Shabbat encompasses many different themes and motifs, each of which should inform our weekly experience of the Sabbath. However, it is impossible to give each theme its due every week when there are so many competing, equally important ideas. While the holidays themselves are also multihued and complex, they each emphasize a particular aspect of the Sabbath.

The relationship between the festivals and the Sabbath, understood through the analogy to the Written and Oral Torah, sheds light on Rashi's startling assertion in Vayikra 23 that one who violates the festivals is considered in violation of the Sabbath. The yamim tovim serve to deepen and expand the lessons and messages of the Sabbath just as the Oral Torah deepens and expands the laws and principles of the Written Torah. If one rejects the Oral Torah, he renders the Written Torah a "dead" document, one that cannot be applied to ever-changing circumstances and cannot be relevant to the complexities of real life. So too, one who violates yom tov is cutting short the impact of Shabbat, denigrating its spiritual message and rendering it irrelevant and impotent. In that sense the yom tov violator is violating the Sabbath itself.

## Shabbat and Shavuot

The holiday of Shavuot also addresses a particular theme of Shabbat, namely, Matan Torah. However,

this connection needs explication as Matan Torah is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah with regard to either Shabbat or Shavuot. There is no direct scriptural evidence that the Torah was given on Shabbat, and yet the Talmud (*Shabbat* 86b) makes this an axiom: "And everyone agrees that on Shabbat, the Torah was given to Israel." Chazal formulated the text of the liturgy for Shabbat morning to stress the connection between the Sabbath and the giving of the Torah:

ישמח משה במתנת חלקו. כי עבד נאמן  
קראת לו. כליל תפארת בראשו נתת. בעמוד  
לפניך על הר סיני. ושני לחות אבנים הוריד  
בידו. וכתוב בהם שמירת שבת.

*Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion; that you called him a faithful servant. You placed a crown of splendor upon his head when he stood before You on Mount Sinai. He brought down two stone tablets in his hand, on which was inscribed the observance of the Sabbath.*

Similarly, in the Written Torah, Shavuot is called "the Festival of the Harvest" (Shemot 23:16) and "the Festival of Weeks" (Shemot 34:22 and Devarim 16:10), but no mention is made of Shavuot as a celebration of the giving of the Torah. Of course, a simple calculation based on the chronological information given in the nineteenth chapter of Shemot, which introduces the revelation at Sinai, puts the date of Matan Torah approximately around Shavuot. But ultimately, it is only through the Oral Tradition, stated clearly in the Talmud (*Pesachim* 68b), that we know that Shavuot is "the day upon which the Torah was given." Once again, the Sages fixed this association in the liturgy, in which Shavuot is called *zeman Matan Toratenu*.<sup>2</sup> Just as each of the other holidays comes to emphasize a different feature of Shabbat, Shavuot

focuses on the aspect of Shabbat that relates to Matan Torah.

As faithful bearers of the tradition, we believe that the Torah that was given on that Shabbat-Shavuot many thousands of years ago was a two-part Torah comprised of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.<sup>3</sup> Incorporating Rav Kook's analogy that Shabbat is likened to *Torah she-be-ketav* and yom tov to *Torah she-be-al peh*, two further fascinating points emerge. First, while Shabbat is fundamentally sanctified by God, just as the complete text of the Written Torah was given by God, there is also an aspect of Shabbat that reflects the human input associated with *Torah she-be-al peh*. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (*Shiurim Le-Zecher Abba Mari z"l*, v.2 *Kiddush Ke-Mekadesh Ha-Shabbat*) writes that the fact that Shabbat was included with the rest of the festivals in *Parashat Ha-Mo'adot* means, not only that

A number of reasons are given as to why Megillat Rut is read on Shavuot. One suggestion (see R. Yehuda Leib Maimon's *Chagim UMoadim* pp. 271-272) is that Megillat Rut is a symbol of the Oral Tradition. While the Torah (Devarim 23:4) prohibits Moabites from marrying into the Jewish people, our rabbis (*Yevamot* 77a) teach us that this is only true of Moabite men, not Moabite women. By reading the megillah on Shavuot, including the last few verses, that state explicitly that King David was a product of the marriage of Boaz and Rut, we are affirming our belief in the Oral Tradition. The Oral Tradition that allowed Boaz to marry Rut, against the simple meaning of the text, is an equal partner with the Torah text and both were given together at Matan Torah.

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the festivals draw their sanctity from Shabbat, but that Shabbat itself can be likened to the sanctity of the festivals. The mitzvah of kiddush on Shabbat, based on the verse “*Zachor et yom ha-Shabbat le-kadesh*” — “Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it” — instructs us that by making kiddush on Friday night we are not merely acknowledging the sanctity of the Sabbath, but superimposing an additional layer of holiness onto the God-given Sabbath. Ramban (Shemot 20:8) compares making kiddush on Shabbat to the act of *beit din* in sanctifying the new moon or the Yovel year. It is for this reason, for instance, that the Talmud (*Pesachim* 105b) conceptualizes kiddush and *havdalah* as “bringing in the day” and “bringing out the day” respectively, because while the beginning and end of Shabbat are ostensibly simply a function of when it gets dark, there is an aspect of the Sabbath’s sanctity that we create and dissolve through kiddush and *havdalah*.<sup>4</sup>

The holiday of Shavuot also contains within it these two forms of sanctity: the God-given and the man-made. R. Mordechai Yehudah Leib Zaks (*Milei de-Mordechai, Ve-Zot Ha-Berachah*) observes that while Shavuot is a *yom tov* and therefore can be considered to be established by the *beit din*, unlike Shabbat which is a fact of the creation as God established it, Shavuot can also be seen from the perspective of a Shabbat-like, God-given day. We began with the observation that Shavuot can fall either on the fifth, sixth or seventh of the month of Sivan depending on the lengths of the months of Nisan and Iyyar. Usually, a holiday can fall only on two possible days depending on when the *beit din* declares the new moon for that month. However, Shavuot’s calendrical date in Sivan

does not directly relate to when Rosh Chodesh Sivan is declared. Shavuot is always 50 days from the second night of Pesach. Its observance is fixed like the Sabbath; its calendar day in Sivan is incidental. Like most festivals, Shavuot does depend in an indirect, removed sense upon the *beit din*’s determination of the month of Nisan and the holiday of Pesach, but it is also a fixed day like the Sabbath. R. Zaks speculates that this dual aspect of Shavuot corresponds to the fact that both the Written and Oral Torah were given on Shavuot and, therefore, the holiday’s sanctity reflects both elements: the God-given and the man-made.

## The Greatest Gift

The holiday of Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah, which comprises both the God-given Written Torah and man-developed Oral Torah. As such, it exhibits two forms of sanctity: one God-given and Shabbat-like and the other man-made and *yom tov*-like. Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlap (*Mei Marom, Terumah* 66) utilizes the God-given/man-made dichotomy to instruct us on how to better ourselves. The world was created by Hashem; its laws of nature set at the time of creation by God’s will, but humanity was commanded to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Bereshit 1:28). This exhortation is a challenge to develop the physical world, but more importantly to perfect it spiritually. We must respect and protect God’s world and God’s Torah, but at the same time it is the will of God that we also develop and transform them. Similarly, we must recognize and appreciate the God-given talents and strengths that we possess, but we must utilize them to perfect ourselves by setting and

attaining ascending spiritual goals. The message that we must take with us from the *yom tov* of Shavuot is that we have been given great gifts and we must make them even greater. It is the permission and challenge to do so that is the greatest gift of all.

## Notes

1. Obviously, the Oral Torah is God-given, just as, ultimately, the *yamim tovim* only exist because of God’s commandment, but both are determined and controlled by human involvement.
2. See *Magen Avraham* in his opening comments to *Orach Chaim* 494, who questions why we refer to Shavuot as *zeman Matan Toratenu* in the liturgy, since in our fixed calendar Shavuot always falls on the sixth of Sivan, but the halakhah follows the opinion in *Shabbat* 86b that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan. R. Yosef Dov Ha-Levi Soloveitchik (*Beit Ha-Levi, Yitro*) suggests a profound answer. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 87a) explains that the rabbi who says that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan maintains that it should have been given on the sixth, but that Moshe added an extra day of preparation of his own accord and Hashem subsequently concurred. In essence, we celebrate Shavuot on the sixth of Sivan, the day when the power of *Torah she-be-al peh* was confirmed by God in the hands of the Jewish people. While the official day of *Matan Torah* may have been the seventh, the confirmation of the power of Torah was already accomplished on the sixth by God’s acquiescence to Moshe’s addition, and so we can confidently refer to it as *zeman Matan Toratenu*.
3. See the beginning of Rambam’s introduction to his *Perush Ha-Mishnah*.
4. See Rav Herschel Schachter, *Ginat Egoz* 4, who fine-tunes the distinction between *beit din*’s power to create the fundamental sanctity of the *yamim tovim* and the power of individuals to superimpose sanctity onto an already existing holy day. We could suggest that these two powers may reflect two aspects of *Torah she-be-al peh*. The Sages have the power both to create new rules that are fundamentally rabbinic in nature (*gezerot* and *takkanot*), as well as to interpret and formulate preexisting laws that are fundamentally biblical in nature (*middot she-ha-Torah nidreshet ba-hen*).



# A Shavuot Night Learning Activity

Potluck learning is a fun, interactive way for everyone to have a voice in group learning. Each participant is able to contribute by bringing and teaching sources that they have chosen.

There are two ways for this activity to take place:

1. Decide on a theme and share it with all the group members prior to the group's gathering to learn together. Each person then prepares one piece of learning; a section of Torah, a passage of Gemara, a story, a quote, or any other idea, and teaches it to the rest of the group. The group then discusses the theme in the context of the sources that were brought.

2. Decide on a theme and prepare a collection of different sources relating to the theme. Each person in the group chooses a source (or they can be assigned at random) to read privately and then teaches it to the group.

For this program, we chose option 2, and have also included questions to help facilitate the conversation. The theme of the learning is Matan Torah. For this broad theme, we purposely chose different types of sources. This enables participants to interpret the topic however they wish, and then bring in sources that they feel relate. These sources do not need to be presented in any particular order.

This activity is a great way to actively participate in learning on Shavuot night or for a family to have a meaningful conversation at the yom tov table.

Enjoy your learning!



Aliza Abrams Konig

Director of Student Life and Jewish Service Learning, Beren Campus



Rabbi Joshua Flug

Director of Torah Research, YU Center for the Jewish Future

## 1) Beit HaLevi, Parashat Yitro

והנה המלאכים ביקשו שיתנו להם התורה ... ומשה רבינו נצחם ועיקר הנצחון היה במה שהמלאכים אינם יכולים לקיים מצות שבגוף ומש"ה בעצרת צריך לקיים המצוה דלכם מה שאין המלאכים יכולים לקיימה ... וזהו הענין שנוהגין בעצרת לאכול מאכל חלב, ועיקר הכוונה בזה דביו"ט מצוה לאכול בשר ... ובעצרת אוכלין גם חלב מקודם כדי לקיים ההבדל והזריזות שיש בין אוכל חלב לבשר והוא הקינוח והדחת הפה כדי לקיים מצוה שבאכילה, ועיין במדרש תהלים (מזמור ח) על פסוק מפי עוללים ויונקים יסדת עוז וע"ש שמסדר הויכוח של המלאכים על נתינת התורה ולבסוף אמר וז"ל אמר הקב"ה והלא אתם כשירדתם אצל אברהם אכלתם בשר בחלב ... ותינוק שלהם כשבא מבית הסופר ואמו נותנת לו פת ובשר וחלב ואומר היום לימדני רבי לא תבשל גדי בחלב אמו ... ומכאן יצא המנהג לאכול חלב כדי להראות הזריזות וההרחקה שבין אכילה זו לאכילת הבשר ולא כמו שעשו המלאכים שאכלו תיכף זה אחר זה.

*The angels requested to receive the Torah ... and Moshe Rabbeinu defeated them (i.e. their claims), and his defeat was based on the fact that angels cannot fulfill commandments that require physical activity. For this reason, on Shavuot, the emphasis is on the physical, the aspects of Judaism that*

the angels cannot fulfill ... This is the idea behind eating dairy products on Shavuot. On the holidays, there is a mitzvah to eat meat ... but on Shavuot, we eat dairy products beforehand in order to fulfill the requirements between eating dairy and meat — wiping one's hands and rinsing one's mouth. The midrash states, regarding the dispute between the angels and God about God giving the Torah to humans, that God said to them: "When you went down to visit Avraham, you ate meat and milk ... but even a young child of theirs knows that when he comes home from school and his mother gives him meat and milk, that he won't eat it." ... From here developed the practice to eat dairy to show the care and caution between eating milk and meat, not like the angels who ate one right after the other.

ובודאי שניהם יש להם שכר בשוה ... מי שישן הרבה כדי שיחזק מוחו בתורה נותן לו הקב"ה חלקו בתורה כמו אותו שממעט בשינה ומצטער עצמו כי הכל הולך אחר המחשבה

There are Torah scholars who deprive themselves of sleep and spend a lot of time learning Torah, and there are other Torah scholars who get sufficient sleep so that they have enough energy and alacrity to properly learn Torah. [This second group] can study in one hour what it takes [the first group] two hours to study, and they both receive equal reward ... one who sleeps so that he can concentrate on his learning, God gives him the same portion as the one who deprives himself of sleep because everything follows one's intent.

### Questions for Discussion:

- When the angels came down as humans, they failed to keep the physical aspects of the Torah. Why should we commemorate such an event?
- Can you think of examples of mitzvot that show the importance of the physical aspects of Judaism?

### Questions for Discussion:

- Can we learn more between 1am and 5am on no sleep or between 3pm and 4pm on a full night's sleep? If the latter, why do we spend the whole night of Shavuot studying?
- Sir James Mackintosh once commented, "The powers of a man's mind are directly proportioned to the quantity of coffee he drinks." How do you think R. Segal might respond to this comment?

## 2) Ruth 1:16-17

וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תִּפְגַּעֵיבִי לְעֻזָּבֹד לְשׁוּב מֵאֲחֵרָיִךְ כִּי אֶל-אִשְׁרַת תִּלְכִּי אֲלֹךְ וּבְאִשְׁרַת תִּלְיִנִי אֲלִין עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֶל-קִוֵּי אֲלֹקֶיךָ: בְּאִשְׁרַת תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת וְשֵׁם אֲקַבֵּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה ה' לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הִמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינְךָ:

Ruth said: Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn away from you. Where you go, I will go and where you sleep, I will sleep. Your nation is my nation and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. This is what God will do for me and may He do more because only death will separate me from you.

### Questions for Discussion:

- This statement of Ruth's is her acceptance of Judaism. What allusions can you find to some of the foundations of Judaism?
- How does Ruth's commitment to Naomi and to Judaism impact how we celebrate Shavuot?

## 4) Story about R. Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv)

When the Netziv completed his work *Ha'amek She'eilah*, he gathered his students together and held a party. One of his students asked: why are you making a party for the completion of a book? The Netziv responded:

*This isn't an ordinary party. Before my bar mitzvah, I wasn't such a good student. One night, I overheard my parents discussing taking me out of school and sending me to become an apprentice to learn a trade. I immediately ran into the kitchen and pleaded with them to give me another chance at becoming a Torah scholar. If not for that moment, I would have become a tailor or learned some other profession, and I would have been a good Jew. Yet after my death, I would have gone up to the Heavenly Court and they would have asked me, "Where is the Ha'amek She'eilah?" I wouldn't have known what they were talking about. However, that moment changed everything and this party is a celebration of that moment.*

## 3) R. David HaLevi Segal, Taz, Even HaEzer 25:1

שיש ת"ח מנדדין שינה מעיניהם ועוסקים בתורה הרבה ויש ת"ח שישינים הרבה כדי שיהיה להם כח החזק וזריזות לב לעסוק בתורה ובאמת יכול ללמוד בשעה אחת מה שזו מצטער ועוסק בשני שעות

### Questions for Discussion:

- What does this story teach us about achieving our potential?
- For those of us who are not as brilliant as the Netziv, how do we know if we are achieving our potential?

### 5) Pesachim 68b

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר עבדי לי עגלא תלתא אמר אי לא  
האי יומא דקא גרים כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא.

*On Shavuot, Rav Yosef would say, "Prepare for me a fattened calf ... if not for this day, I would just be another Yosef in the marketplace."*

### Questions for Discussion:

- Even if Rav Yosef were just an "ordinary Joe," wouldn't it still be worthwhile to celebrate the giving of the Torah? What do you think Rav Yosef meant by highlighting his personal connection to the giving of the Torah?
- Rav Yosef was known for his humility (*Sotah* 49b). Does Rav Yosef's statement about Shavuot reflect humility?

### 6) Mishna Berurah 47:28

ואם היה ניעור כל הלילה י"א דא"צ לברך בבוקר וי"א דצריך לברך  
כי קבעו חכמים ברכה זו בכל יום דומיא דשאר ברכות השחר וספק  
ברכות להקל אך אם אפשר לו יראה לשמוע בה"ת מאחר ... ואם  
היה ישן ביום שינת קבע על מטתו ובלילה שלאחריו היה ניעור כל  
הלילה פסק הגאון רע"א דבזה לכו"ע צריך לברך בבוקר בה"ת.

*If one was awake the whole night, there are those who are of the opinion that one does not have to recite the blessing [on learning Torah] and there are those who are of the opinion that one should recite the blessing because the rabbis instituted this blessing on a daily basis, similar to the other blessings of the morning. [In general,] when it comes to blessings, when there is a doubt, one does not recite a blessing. However, if possible, one should try to listen to the blessing on learning Torah from someone else ... If one slept during the day in a significant way in one's bed and then stayed up the whole night, R. Akiva Eger ruled that everyone agrees that one recites the blessing on learning Torah in the morning.*



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Whether it's planning lobbying missions to Washington, D.C. with YUPAC or teaching English to teens in the Negev through Counterpoint Israel, Shlomo brings to bear his leadership skills for the sake of the Jewish people and homeland. He is proud to invite Israeli diplomats to YU to help his peers contextualize current events. Shlomo chose YU because, to him, Torah Umadda isn't merely the convergence of science and our mesorah—at Yeshiva University, it is the formula for a values-driven preparation for life. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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