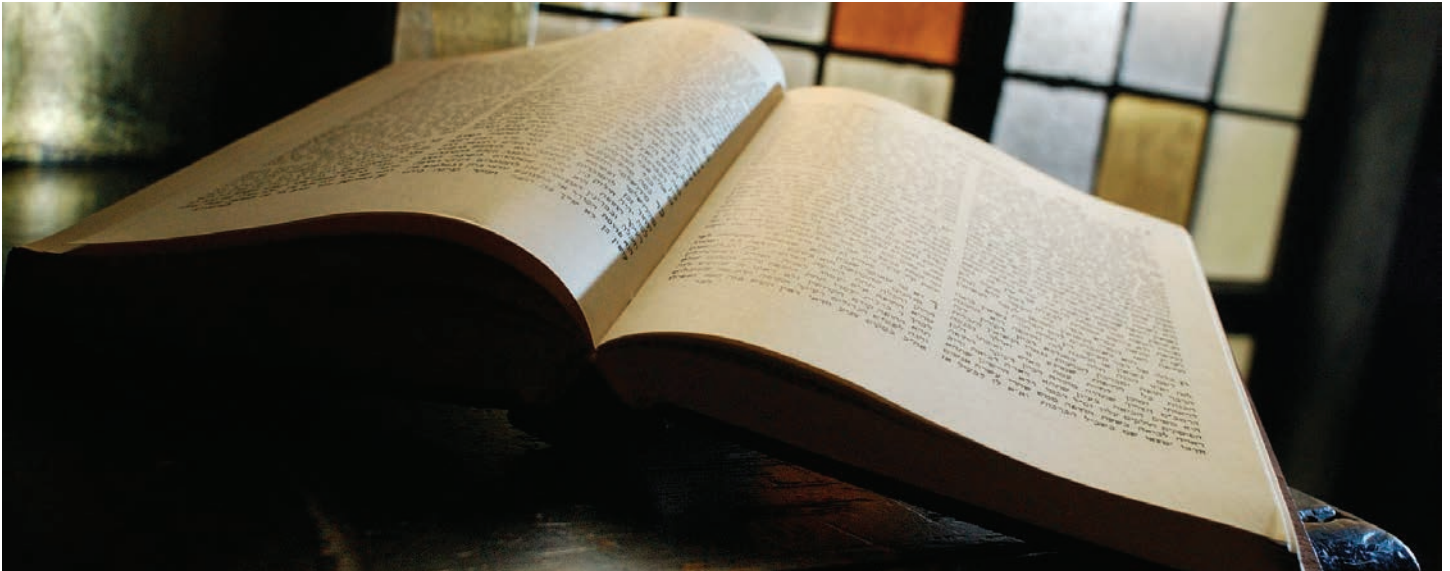


Receiving the Torah on Shavuot

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

Mrs. Michal Horowitz offers weekly classes and shiurim at many venues in her home community of the Five Towns, NY and the greater New York area. Additionally she is a speaker at Yeshiva University's Millie Arbesfeld Midreshet Yom Rishon and has been a featured speaker at the RIETS Shavuot Yarchei Kallah Program for the last four years. She has hundreds of shiurim available on yutorah.org.



KABALAS HATORAH: LIVING A DEDICATED LIFE

Chazal (*Shabbos* 88b-89a) tell us about a conversation that took place when Moshe Rabbeinu went to receive the Torah:

ואריב"ל בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע מה לילוד אשה בינינו אמר להן לקבל תורה בא אמרו לפניו חמודה גנוזה שגנוזה לך ... אתה מבקש ליתנה לבשר ודם ... אמר לו הקב"ה למשה החזיר להן תשובה ... אמר לפניו רבוננו של עולם תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה (שמות כ, ב) אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים אמר להן למצרים ירדתם לפרעה השתעבדתם תורה למה תהא לכם שוב מה כתיב בה לא יהיה לך אלהים אחרים בין עמים אתם שרויין שעובדין עבודת גלולים שוב ... כלום אתם עושים מלאכה שאתם צריכין שבות שוב מה כתיב בה לא תשא משא ומתן יש ביניכם שוב מה כתיב בה כבוד את אביך ואת אמך אב ואם יש לכם שוב מה כתיב בה לא תרצה לא תנאף לא תגנוב קנאה

יש ביניכם יצר הרע יש ביניכם מיד הודו לו להקב"ה.

When Moshe ascended to the heavenly heights to receive the Torah, the angels said before HaKadosh Baruch Hu (HKB"H): Master of the World! What is someone born of a woman doing among us? Hashem replied: he came to receive the Torah. They said before Him: the coveted and treasured Torah ... You intend to give to flesh and blood!? Hashem said to Moshe: Answer them ... Moshe said, Ribbono Shel Olam (RS"O), Master of the World, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it? I am Hashem your G-d Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt (Ex.20:2). Moshe said to the angels: Did you descend to Egypt? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? Why should the Torah be yours? What else is written? There shall not be gods of others before you (ibid, v.3). Do you live

among nations who worship idols? ... (Furthermore, Moshe challenged them), Do you engage in any labor from which you would need to rest on Shabbos? Are there any business transactions among you? Do you have a father and mother to honor? Is there any murder, adultery or theft among you? Is there envy among you? Is there a yetzer harah, an evil inclination, among you? Immediately, the angels conceded to HKB"H, and Bnei Yisrael received the Torah.

Chag Ha'Shavuot is *z'man matan Torasainu*, the holiday that commemorates the giving of the Torah. Chazal teach (*Shabbos* 31a) that after a person departs this world and is brought to judgment in the next world, he will be asked: *ko'va'tah itim la'Torah* — did you designate times for Torah study?

While there is a mitzvah to set aside time for Torah study daily, our relationship to Torah must be more than that. We must couple the fulfillment of the mitzvah of Torah learning with ecstatic passion for the gift of Torah.

Based on the teachings of Rabbi Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, R' Menachem Genack writes:

One aspect of Torah study is utilitarian and practical — Torah study is a mitzvah which one is required to observe. But there is another aspect of Torah study, a more profound dimension, and that is the requirement that when one studies Torah, one must sense that the Torah is the grand song of existence that animates every Jew, that the Torah resonates with divine music to which we all must be attuned and from which it is impossible to separate ourselves ... For us, the Rav was the living embodiment of Torah that integrated rigorous logic with the emotional and experiential, reason with passion, and comprehension with worship. When he would teach Torah, the sense of the link of generations and the palpable feeling that the Shekhina was present was wholly evident. He said that sometimes when he studied Torah, he almost felt the breath of the Shekhina behind him, as if whispering to him, "Reb Yosha Ber, what do you say about this sugya?" And when we studied with him, we could almost hear the echo of King David's harp playing, and how the sweetness of the Torah was so very much linked to the soul of the Jew. Through the prism of Torah, we were able to glimpse G-d's infinite mind and connect to Him. Through the Rav we were able to join the chorus singing the song of Torah."
The Koren Mesorat HaRav Siddur, OU Press, p.1-li

Shavuot is a celebration of the giving of the Torah to Am Yisrael. For while its lofty ideals emanate from the

Heavenly realms, it is only man who can keep all that is written within.

On the last Shavuot of his life (5776/2016), Rav Yaakov Edelstein zt'l (1924–2016) wrote:

My dear beloved, holy community in Ramat HaSharon. Why is Shavuot called z'man mattan Toraseinu, the time of the giving of the Torah, and not z'man kabbalas Toraseinu, the time of the receiving of the Torah? I heard from my rabbeim, my holy teachers, that we are obligated to accept the Torah all year round, and not only on the sixth day of Sivan! We accept the Torah upon ourselves every day, when we recite in Shachris and Maariv the tefillos of Ahavah Rabbah and Ahavas Olam. But the giving of our Torah happens just once a year, on Shavuot, when HKB"H, the ultimate Giver, causes our hearts to be open to clinging to the Torah and its mitzvos each and every year ...

Reaching for Heaven, Artsroll, p. 303

In the bracha of Ahavas Olam — with everlasting love — which is recited before the Shema in Maariv, we say: *ki he'im chayeinu v'orech ya'meinu*, for they are our life and the length of our days, and upon them we will meditate day and night.

R' Lord Jonathan Sacks teaches that Ahavas Olam is a:

Counterpart to the morning blessing, "Ahavah Rabbah — You have loved us with great love." Both speak of Divine love in terms of revelation: G-d's gift to Israel of the Torah and its commandments. In the same way that G-d binds Himself to His people through word and deed, so do we bind ourselves to Him by the words of Torah and the deeds of the commandments. No simpler or more profound statement exists of the love of Jews for the life of the commandments than the phrase, "For

they are our life and the length of our days".

The Koren Siddur, p. 244–245

Perhaps this year more than ever before, when the world as we know it has been turned upside down, we have come to realize that the only meaning to be found in life is through the lens of Torah. All the inanities society worshipped — from actors to athletes, from wealth to opulence, from NASCAR drivers to Olympic runners — mean nothing when the Mighty Hand of G-d brought the world to its knees.

From *middos* and *mitzvos bein adam l'chavairo* to *mitzvos bein adam la'Makom*, our existence is purposeful only when we accept the Torah anew upon ourselves each and every day, and live by its precepts and guidance.

The Ribbono Shel Olam gave the Torah to His nation on Shavuot, but every day is a new opportunity for us to receive its wisdom, and to better ourselves as Torah Jews.

The *pasuk* tells us:

וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמְעוּ אֶל מִצְוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּלְעֲבֹדוֹ בְּכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם.

And it will be, if you will surely listen to My commandments that I command you this day to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut.11:13).

Rashi comments:

מצוה אתכם היום — שיהיו עליכם חדשים כאלו שמעתם בו ביום.

That I command you this day — That the mitzvos should be new to you, as if you heard them this very day.

In a world where everything as we know it has changed, the gift of Torah is that it remains an unwavering constant, a beacon of light, *every*

single day. And so, our commitment to Torah and mitzvos must remain as strong as ever, if not stronger, during these turbulent times.

The Gemara (*Menachos* 99b) records a conversation between Ben Damah and R' Yishmael.

שאל בן דמא בן אחותו של ר' ישמעאל את ר' ישמעאל כגון אני שלמדתי כל התורה כולה מהו ללמוד חכמת יונית קרא עליו המקרא הזה לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפוך והגית בו יומם ולילה צא ובדוק שעה שאינה לא מן היום ולא מן הלילה ולמוד בה חכמת יונית.

Ben Damah, the son of the sister of R' Yishmael, once asked R' Yishmael the following question: Someone like me, who has studied all of the Torah, what is the law with regard to my studying Greek wisdom? R' Yishmael answered him by citing the following verse: This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth; rather, you shall contemplate it day and night (Yehoshua 1:8). Go out, R' Yishmael said to Ben Damah, and find a time which is neither day or night, and learn in that time Greek wisdom!

Rashi explains, *davar shelo yehei b'olam* — there is no such thing as a time that is neither night or day — there is only time for Torah study and Torah living.

Hence, the words of Torah are our life force, which must be contemplated day and night.

In describing his relationship to Torah, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik so powerfully related:

When I teach Torah, I feel the breath of eternity on my face. Even now, in my old age, teaching Torah and giving shiurim relieves me of the fear of death and all the gloomy and depressing moments that elderly people go through. When I teach Torah, I feel rejuvenated and as if I were twenty five or thirty years old. If not for the study and teaching of Torah, I would have lost my sanity in the year of my triple mourning in 1967 when I lost my mother, brother and wife. I was on the verge of a mental collapse and breakdown. I did not break down; I emerged victorious. That victory over despair was due to one thing only, I would say — my overwhelming dedication to Torah and teaching Torah. I felt somehow that because of teaching Torah I was not alone and that I had somebody. That Somebody was invisible, but I felt His presence, I could confide in Him ... People do not know — and again, please take it in the proper spirit, I am not bragging — how busy I am and what my schedule is. They know I teach shiurim here (in New York). All right, fine, I say shiurim three times a week in the Yeshiva. And you know that these shiurim should be an hour and a half

each. It never happens that I get through with the shiur in an hour and a half. So two hours, sometimes three hours, and sometimes the shiur is even more than three hours. It is very strange; the boys in my class are very young ... Yet they come out exhausted and I come out refreshed after the shiur.

Then I return to Boston. Every Friday morning, from half past eight for three hours, until half past eleven, I study with my son-in-law (R' Isadore Twersky). Shabbos — believe me that I cannot afford to take a nap on Shabbos afternoon. I have not taken a nap on Shabbos afternoon for the last, I would say, twenty years, because I study with Moshe¹ three hours at least, and I study with Mayer² two and a half hours. The same with Sunday and the same with Monday; and I simply have no time sometimes to sit down and relax...

The study of Torah is basically, for me, an ecstatic experience in which one meets G-d ... Our Sages equate the study of Torah with revelation, the great event and drama of G-d's revelation on Har Sinai. This event is reenacted, restaged and relived every time a Jew opens the Gemara.

The Rav, v.2, A. Rakefett-Rothkoff, p. 200–203

Yes, the world today has been shaken up, and this Shavuot is very different

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than what any of us can remember in our time. But the gift of Torah always remains with us; it is our guide in life, wherever life may take us. In conclusion, the following moving story is worth relating, as we celebrate *Zman Matan Torasainu* once again.

Shortly after the Holocaust ended, R' Moshe Soloveitchik (1914-1995), a grandson of R' Chaim Brisker, spent Shabbos in the Rheinfelden DP camp.³ On this fateful Shabbos afternoon, the men in the camp gathered to daven Mincha, and found they were one man short. A tenth man was needed. Just then, a young man by the name of Yoav Kimmelman walked by, smoking a cigarette.

When he was sixteen years old, Yoav was deported to the concentration camps, where he somehow survived four hellish years of misery and torture. Soon after the war ended, Yoav understood that he was the sole survivor of a large family of Gerrer chassidim.

Like many survivors who endured unfathomable tortures, Yoav abandoned religion.

However, it was now Shabbos, and a tenth man was needed... and there was Yoav. The group asked if he would make their minyan for Shabbos mincha prayers. Yoav saw no reason to deprive the men of their ability to pray with a minyan, so he agreed.

When it came time for keriyas ha'Torah, the men realized that no one knew how to *lain*. Even R' Moshe

Soloveitchik refused, urging someone else to do the task.

After a few minutes, Yoav spoke up and offered to help. Though he had not seen a sefer Torah for many years, he said, he was certain he still remembered how to *lain*.

Yoav put his cap on his head. He took his place at the bimah, looked over the reading quickly in the Chumash, and then began to chant the ancient melody and words from the Sefer Torah. As he stood before the Holy Scroll, he felt the letters reaching out to him from the parchment, fixing him in their grasp, riveting him to the spot in front of the Torah. Each man present was mesmerized by his performance and nobody moved a muscle. Yoav continued to stand in front of the scroll, long after he had finished the keriyas ha'Torah, and just stared at the words. The message was being transmitted right before his eyes. It was the turning point of his life. At that moment, he resolved to return to Torah observance. As he later noted, "The letters have not relinquished their grip on me to this very day."

Heroes of Faith, Israel Bookshop Publication, p.298.⁴

Our celebration of Shavuot this year will be different than other years. We may not be able to have the same experiences we are used to from previous years, but we can still recommit ourselves to living a fulfilling, meaningful and passionate life of Torah, for ourselves, and our children, and our children's children. For indeed, it is our life and the length of our days.

Endnotes

1. The Rav's eldest grandson, Rav Moshe Twersky zt'l HY"D was murdered in the Har Nof Massacre, 25 Cheshvan 5775/ Nov.18, 2014.
2. The Rav's grandson, Rav Mayer Twersky, *shlita*, YU Rosh Yeshiva.
3. Displaced Person Camp for Holocaust survivors In Switzerland.
4. There is an amazing follow up to this story. After I related Yoav's story in a shiur posted to yutorah.org in the spring of 2016, I received the following email from a Ms. Michelle Feiglin of Melbourne, Australia:

Hi Michal, my sister and I listened to your shiur on Iyar, we loved it. We were very emotional to hear you tell the story about our dear friend Yoav Kimelman a"l. He grew up in the same town as my father a"l, they were liberated from Buchenwald together, spent time recovering in Switzerland and came to Melbourne, Australia.

Yoav became a well known baal koreh as well as successful businessman. His family lives mainly in Israel, some are Gerrer chassidim, some religious Zionists, two of his granddaughters are yoatzat halacha; all fine, frum, upstanding families. Yoav merited dor yesharim yevorach. His widow lives in Jerusalem where she attends Pardes. Her grandson, Levi Cooper, is a lecturer there as well as a Rabbi in his community. Shabbat shalom and we love listening to you and others on our YU Torah app.



Find more shiurim and articles from Mrs. Horowitz at
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