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שמע קולנו

SHEMA KOLEINU: SHAVUOS 5779

DIVREI TORAH FROM OUR REBBEIM AND TALMIDIM



**RABBI
JOSHUA KAHN**
HEAD OF SCHOOL

DEAR MTA COMMUNITY:

Ashreinu! Ma Tov Chelkeinu, UMa Naim Goraleinu, UMa Yafa Yerushaseinu. How fortunate are we as a yeshiva community to have the opportunity to learn Torah together, delving into the *Dvar Hashem* with great dedication and sophistication! As we prepare for *Zman Matan Toraseinu*, we reflect on the honor and privilege we have to learn from and with our mentor and leader, our Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Michael Taubes, our thoughtful and dedicated Administrators and *Rebbeim*, and our exceptional *talmidim*. Each member of our yeshiva contributes to the vibrant community of Torah learners.

Thematically, our inaugural *Shema Koleinu* expanded *Yom Tov* publication is the perfect way to celebrate *Shavuos*. On *Shavuos*, we have the minhag to read *Megillas Rus*. Why is this the *Megillah* chosen to read on *Shavuos*? What message does it share for us as we celebrate *Kabbalas HaTorah*?

The *Sfas Emes* suggests that reading *Rus* is meant to convey a message to us about the ongoing vibrancy of Torah. We read the story of *Rus* and *Boaz*, recognizing how their story is recorded for posterity, which illustrates to us that the corpus of Torah is always growing and expanding. In fact, *Boaz's* ability to marry *Rus* is predicated on a *drasha* of *Chazal*, showing the ability of *Chazal* to expound and expand that which is written in the Torah. With this background, the *Sfas Emes* highlights the powerful message that we have a responsibility and privilege to continue to uncover and develop the brilliance of the Torah. Through our learning, we too can add our own insights to the Torah.

This publication is a tribute to the Talmud Torah that we engage in as a yeshiva each day. It is the natural outgrowth of a community yearning to learn more, to grow, and to share our enthusiasm with others. It also follows up on the theme developed by the *Sfas Emes*, since *Shema Koleinu* highlights the *Divrei Torah* of our *Rebbeim* and *talmidim*.

This *Shema Koleinu* is the result of the efforts of many individuals. Thank you to Rabbi Dov Emerson, who created the vision for this project and nurtured it throughout the process. Thank you to Rabbi Shimon Schenker and Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson for their ongoing efforts for *Shema Koleinu*. Thank you to our Editors-in-Chief, Shua Pariser ('20) and Dovid Wartelsky ('20) for leading this project. May we continue to grow as *Bnei Torah* and aspiring *Talmidei Chachachim*. It is our hope that our *Shavuos Shema Koleinu* enhances your *simchas Yom Tov*!

Rabbi Joshua Kahn
Head of School

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REMINING OURSELVES WHO WE ARE

The *Rama* (*Orach Chaim* 494:3) quotes a prevalent *Minhag* to decorate our shuls and homes with trees and flowers for the holiday of *Shavuos*. The *Levush* (494:1) elaborates that greenery is meant to remind us of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* itself, as grass and flowers miraculously sprouted on *Har Sinai* in the middle of the desert. What is the significance of this reminder? Why is it so important to remember *Ma'amad Har Sinai*?

In truth, the importance of remembering *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is not limited to this one day a year. The *Ramban* in *Parshas Vaeschanan* explains that not only is there a prohibition to forget Torah which you've learned, but it is also forbidden to forget the experience of what it was like to receive the Torah at *Har Sinai*. The *Ramban* explains that when the *Pasuk* says, "*Pen Tishkach Es HaDvarim Asher Rau Einecha,*" (*Devarim* 4:9), "lest you forget that which your eyes saw," it is warning us to be very careful to remember where the *mitzvos* came from. We are commanded not to forget *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and everything we saw that day, the sounds and sights, His honor and greatness, and the things we heard from the fire, and to make sure we let our children and their children after them know everything we saw that day. While we may only decorate our shuls and homes once a year, we see from this statement of the *Ramban* that *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is something we should be thinking about much more often than that. It is an essential part of our heritage that we are commanded to pass on from generation to generation. Why is this so important? What impact is remembering *Ma'amad Har Sinai* supposed to have on us?

In the 1100's, the Jews of Yeman were experiencing terrible persecution. There seemed to be little hope for their future, and they were desperately in need for direction and *Chizuk*. They decided to send a letter to the *Rambam*, asking him how to approach their future, and how to stay positive in such a terrible time. With so many Jews around them leaving the fold, and seemingly nothing to look forward to down the path of their *Yidishkeit*, the Jews of Yemen needed something to hold onto. The *Rambam* sent a legendary letter back that said that the route to the *Chizuk* they so desperately needed was in this very episode of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. It was remembering the events of that day, he said, which would reinvigorate these helpless souls. What was the *Rambam* telling them? What is this incredible *Chizuk* we are supposed to get from remembering *Ma'amad Har Sinai*?

When thinking about the holiday which celebrates the receiving of the Torah, it is interesting to consider the first experience each of us has had learning Torah. The Gemara in *Nida* (30b) teaches us that every one of us had our very first *chavrusa* before we were even born: a *Malach* sat with us in our mother's' womb and taught us *Kol HaTorah Kula!* And just before we left the

womb, he touched us on our mouth, and we forgot everything we learned. Why does this happen? Why would we learn all of Torah just to forget it?

Reb Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, suggests the following answer, expressed beautifully in the words of Rabbi YY Jacobson: It is extremely difficult to remain spiritually and emotionally inspired while living in this world. G-d may give us life, but He does not always grant us the ready-made inspiration required for living a meaningful and elevated lifestyle. We need to stimulate and motivate ourselves through our own efforts. But how? Life is often stressful and burdensome. Also, our physical and animalistic cravings and temptations are so powerful that they almost completely eclipse our sensitivity to spirituality. This is the accomplishment of G-d infusing each unborn child with the entire Torah before he is born, though he later forgets it all. This nine-month process of implanting G-dliness and holiness in the brain of the child creates a condition in which the spiritual message of Torah forever remains the most familiar information to the soul. Affluence, power, good food, nice clothing, and physical temptations may excite us. Debt, responsibility, laziness, and numbness may bog us down. Yet despite all of these sensations being a real part of our lives, the voice of our inner spirituality - the voice of Torah within us - has a deeper, though often inaudible, resonance within us. It's like a melody that you once knew and have since forgotten. When it is sung to you again, you don't have to memorize it anew, because the song was always a part of you, stored in the memory of your brain. The melody of spirituality and Torah has been on the lips of our souls since time immemorial. Although in the process of growing up we may have forgotten the tune, none of us have to learn it anew. We need only to pay heed to the silent vibrations stored within us since our days in the womb. So although upon birth we were made to consciously forget, the truth remains etched in our unconscious psyche. When we discover a truth in our lives - when we are educated and taught wisdom - the truth resonates, because we already have it inside ourselves; it was just concealed beneath the conscious layers of existence. The function of a true Torah teacher is never to teach people a new truth, but to help them access the truth already ingrained deeply within them. A good teacher is one who helps us cut away the weeds and uncover the flowers within. As the Italian sculptor Michelangelo once said: "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free."

The same is true about *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. At the time of *Kabalas HaTorah*, *Klal Yisrael* had reached incredible heights in spirituality and closeness to Hashem. Every member of *Klal Yisrael* reached a level where they were fit to witness the awesome miracles surrounding the giving of the Torah. What is so important for us to remember is that so did we, because each and every one of us was at *Har Sinai* and experienced it too. In fact, the *Meshech Chachma* writes this very idea (*Devarim* 33:4). He says that the experience of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is etched into the form of every *neschama* because each Jewish soul was there to witness it.

As we celebrate *Shavuos*, the holiday commemorating *Kabalas HaTorah*, we decorate our shuls with trees to remind ourselves of the incredible heights in *Kedusha* that our *neschamos* reached when we were at *Har Sinai*, and the incredible heights in *Kedusha* that we can reach! This is the important message that the *Ramban* tells us we must remind ourselves and pass it down from generation to generation. It is impossible to approach *Limud HaTorah* and a life of *Shmiras HaMitzvos* without knowing that at our core, we have the ability to succeed. Perhaps this is the *Chizuk* that the *Rambam* was giving to the Yemenite Jews. No matter how dark a time, how difficult a circumstance we find ourselves in, we must remember how strong we are at our core. The *Rambam* was telling them: don't look any further than yourselves for the *Chizuk* you need to succeed, because it is all there. Our job as Jews is not to assess our potential, but to recognize and actualize it. Every Jew has endless potential for greatness, we just need to push past the

barriers we've built for ourselves and let our *neshamas* be free to soar to the heights they so desperately want to reach.

We must also remember that we didn't receive the Torah as individuals, but as a unified nation, *K'ish Echad B'Leiv Echad*. So, as we prepare to re-experience *Kabala HaTorah* this *Shavuot*, let's remind ourselves not only of how great we can be, but how great all Jews around us can be as well. May this *Shavuot* be the day where we start actualizing our own potential, while realizing it in all Jews around us, so that we can once again receive the Torah as a nation, and together bring *Mashiach, BiMheira BiYameinu*.

A GIFT FOR EVERYONE - THE MESSAGE OF THE *KORBAN MINCHA*



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In *Parshas Reah*, when the Torah discusses the holiday of *Shavuos*, the *Pasuk* says:

ושמחת בחגך אתה ובנך ובתך ועבדך ואמתך והלוי והגר והיתום והאלמנה אשר בשעריך:
“And you should rejoice before Hashem, you, your son, your daughter, your servants, your maidservant, the Levi who is in your city, the convert, the orphan and the widow who are among you” (16:14).

Why does the Torah have to go in depth and specifically command us to celebrate *Shavuos* with all of these different types of people? The *Chasam Sofer* answers that the *Pasuk* is teaching us a very important lesson. On the special holiday of *Shavuos*, on which we celebrate the giving of the Torah, it is absolutely critical that we spend it with all these different people, to remind us that every single person has a share in Hashem's Torah. As one spends time celebrating with his family, he must realize that his children will have a *chelek* in the Torah, even if he feels he will not have one himself. Realizing everyone has a share in the Torah is essential to one's identity as a Jew, and this idea is a central theme of *Shavuos*.

The Gemara in *Nedarim* says that the reason that the *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed was because *Bnei Yisrael* didn't say *Birkas HaTorah* before learning. This Gemara seems strange at face value. What was so bad about not saying the *Brachos* on the Torah that caused the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*? The answer lies within the *Chasam Sofer's* principle of realizing one's portion in Torah. In *Birkas HaTorah* one declares אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים, that Hashem chose the Jewish people to receive His Torah. By *Bnei Yisrael* not reciting *Birkas HaTorah* every day, they showed that they didn't feel that they received the Torah. They didn't feel that the Torah was given to the entire nation, instead thinking that Torah was only for the *Chachamim* of the generation. They didn't appreciate or realize the great potential each Jew had in Torah, and once that passion and feeling of belonging was gone from the Jewish people, we became unworthy to inhabit *Eretz Yisrael*. Every Jew must realize that Hashem gave us the Torah as a nation, and not only to the *Gedolei HaDor*.

We can take this idea one step further. The reason that not saying *Birkas HaTorah* caused the Jews to be exiled was because it showed that they didn't feel they had a *chelek* in the Torah. This is significant because knowing that one has a *chelek* in Torah gives one a sense of purpose. The Torah is a gift given to the Jewish people. If one is given a gift, the way he shows his appreciation for the gift at hand is by using it. The same is true about Torah. The way to show our appreciation of the great gift Hashem gave us is by using it to the best of our ability and putting in our effort to

understand it. This realization gives a person a sense of purpose and a desire to hold on to the Torah.

Once a person realizes this, they can experience the *Chag* of *Shavuos* in a new and inspiring light. We see the concept of the *Chasam Sofer* through the *Mitzvos* of the holiday itself. For example, on *Shavuos* there is a *chiyuv* to bring a *Mincha* offering from the new grain. Although a *Mincha* was brought every day, when viewed through the lens of this idea of the *Chasam Sofer*, there is a deeper meaning to the מנחה חדשה of *Shavuos*. A *Mincha* offering was brought by one who couldn't afford anything else. The *Mishna* in *Minachos* explains that by a *Korban Mincha*, the *pasuk* describes a "ריח ניחוח," a satisfying aroma to Hashem, just like it does by all the other *Korbanos*. The *Mishna* teaches from this the concept of אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכון אדם את דעתו "אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכון אדם את דעתו" - whether one has a lot or one has a little, as long as his intentions are purely to Hashem, Hashem accepts his offering.

This concept is also applied to Torah. The Gemara in *Brachos* (5b) tells a story about Rabbi Yochanan, who once saw Rabbi Eliezer crying. Rabbi Yochanan tried to comfort him by saying, "If you are crying because you didn't learn as much Torah as you would've liked, whether one brings a lot or one does a little, they have equal merit as long as the person's intentions are for Hashem." This concept, which we learned from the *Korban Mincha* also applies to the Torah, and for this reason, we bring a *Mincha Chadasha* on *Shavuos*. Rabbi Yochanan was saying that it doesn't matter how much Torah or how little Torah one learns in one's life, since whatever he learned, if his intentions were right, was his *chelek* in the Torah. This is the message of the *Korban Mincha* and the message of *Shavuos*. If we follow the words of the *Chasam Sofer* and celebrate our own *chelek* in the Torah, then we will be *zoche* to a true *Kabalas HaTorah* this *Shavuos*.

SHAVUOS: REDISCOVERING OUR INNATE BOND TO TORAH



**RABBI YECHIEL
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I was recently approached with a complaint about Judaism. It is one that we are all likely familiar with. “Rabbi, Judaism is too strict. It’s too restrictive. We can’t do anything! Half the *Mitzvos* don’t even make sense or apply to us anymore!”

While Torah life offers many beautiful moments, at times it isn’t so easy. Many times it is a challenge for us to understand what the Torah wants from us and why.

We need not feel guilty for feeling this way. The important question though, is therefore what? Do these become excuses to opt out of the Torah lifestyle or do we buy into the system and then consider how we can maintain our standards even if at times it is difficult? *Shavuos* is a time to reflect on these questions. *Shavuos* is a time when many have the practice to remain awake all night learning Torah. This seems to be counterintuitive as many times this decreases the quality of our learning, *Davening*, and behavior at large. If we really wanted to maximize the quantity and quality of our Torah learning over *Shavuos*, allow us to get a good night’s sleep, have somewhat abridged meals, and return to the *Beis Medrash!* What is the point of stretching ourselves through the night?

This *minhag* sheds light onto our attitude towards Torah. Torah is not just an intellectual pursuit. In addition to the intellectual rigor demanded for learning Torah, we as Jews have an innate emotional connection to Torah. The Gemara in *Maseches Shabbos* 88a records that after the utterance of “*Na’aseh V’Nishma*”, a Heavenly voice proclaimed, “Who told the Jewish People the secret of My Angels?!” Rav Kook wonders, why is this concept of *Na’aseh V’Nishmah* referred to as the “secret of the Angels?”

Rav Kook explains that while wisdom is usually acquired through study and reflection, there is an additional concept of “intuitive knowledge”. Angels are spiritual beings that intuitively understand how to serve G-d even without the directives of the Torah. However, we, as human beings, live in the world and get all sorts of distractions thrown at us. This intuition becomes clouded in all of the excitement of the world, and we need clear directives of the Torah. At *Har Sinai*, something special occurred - the spiritual intuition was revealed. As G-d revealed Himself to the Jewish people, we were able at that moment to tap into our real selves, revealing the spiritual intuition in human beings. This revelation allowed the Jewish people to take the secret of the Angels and proclaim, “*Na’aseh V’Nishma!*” We will do whatever it takes! We saw so clearly at that point in time the innate connection we have with G-d, that we were willing to do whatever He asks of us. It was a purely emotional, intuitive response. Rav Kook elsewhere

suggests that this can be an explanation of the opinion in the Gemara in *Maseches Shabbos* 86b that holds that the Torah was given on the sixth day of *Sivan*. Rav Kook explains that this sixth day corresponds to the sixth day of creation, the creation of mankind. The Torah is so much a part of our fabric that the creation of mankind is not complete until we integrate the Torah within us. *Na'aseh V'Nishma* was a commitment well beyond the venture of an intellectual pursuit, but rather one which accepted ALL the directives contained within the Torah.

Perhaps this is what the *minhag* of staying up all night attempts to tap into. True, if we view it from an intellectual endeavor we will be much more productive if we are well rested. However, this *minhag* allows us to tap into the emotional connection we have to Torah. This can be likened to what we think of the night before we embark on a trip. The intellectual side of us tells us that we need to be prepared and get a good night's sleep in order to best enjoy the trip. Yet, many of us, out of sheer excitement, are simply unable to sleep well. When we have a deep emotional connection to something which we are involved in, we sometimes can't contain our excitement. Whether we experience this emotion through staying up all night or otherwise, it is necessary for this to be a part of the full acceptance of Torah in our lives. If we ignore this connection to Torah then the complaints of "Rabbi, it makes no sense" or "it is so limiting" become an excuse to stray from Torah. However, if we are able to tap into our deep connection to Torah then we remain committed to doing whatever the Torah asks, to truly accept the yoke of Torah, then, we can begin to try to explore and further our *Shmiras HaMitzvos*. Perhaps there is a deeper meaning of which we are unaware. Perhaps not. But we must never make our commitment to *Halacha* contingent upon what makes sense to us.

This idea is presented in the opinion of the *Ramban* on his comments to the *Rambam's* count of *Mitzvos*. The *Ramban* in *Mitzva* 13 presents his opinion that "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*" is not one of the 613 *Mitzvos*, he says that it is a prerequisite which all the *Mitzvos* flow from. First, Hashem is saying accept my authority, after that I can teach you my *Mitzvos*. But it all needs to begin with acceptance of our role as G-d's servants.

On *Shavuos*, we try to rediscover our "spiritual intuition," to rekindle our emotional connection with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah.

It is true, Torah can feel limiting and restricting. And while at times this is a real difficulty—which we may acknowledge—it is also a wake up call for which we have to ask ourselves: do we truly appreciate our innate bond with Torah and our eternal emotional connection to it? Are we able to muster up the strength to perform even those *Mitzvos* which are most difficult to us as a pure expression of our spiritual intuition, of our innate attachment to the Torah? This *Shavuos*, I hope that we can all, together, recommit ourselves to living a Torah life in all regards.

EAT OR LEARN? THE CLASSIC YOM TOV DILEMMA



SHIMON WILDES

YUHSB '21

Shimon Wildes is a Sophomore in YUHSB. Shimon resides on the Upper West Side, and he learns in Rabbi Kerner's *Shiur*.

The Gemara in *Maseches Pesachim* 68b presents the following *machlokes* regarding how to spend one's *Yom Tov*:

רבי אליעזר סבר: או כולו לה' או כולו לכם. ורבי יהושע סבר: חלקהו חציו לה' וחציו לכם.
"Rabbi Eliezer held that one should either devote the day completely to Hashem for Torah study, or completely to himself for eating and drinking, fulfilling the mitzvah of *simchas Yom Tov*. Rabbi Yehoshua held that one should split it, half to Hashem and half to himself."

However, the following puzzling statement follows:

אמר רבי אלעזר: הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם. מאי טעמא? יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא.
"Rabbi Elazar said: Everyone agrees that on *Shavuos* one must also spend time for himself eating and drinking. Why? It is the day that the Torah was given."

The question must now be asked: why on *Shavuos*, of all days, would everyone agree that we should be eating, and not learning all day? Since it is the day that the Torah was given, one would think that everyone would agree the opposite: that we should specifically spend this *Yom Tov* immersed in Torah study all day!

Rashi comments on this Gemara that by eating and drinking on *Shavuos*, we demonstrate our happiness and acceptance of the *Yom Tov* in which the Torah was given. However, our initial question still remains: what better way is there to celebrate and demonstrate our acceptance of the Torah and joy at its acceptance than to spend the day involved in learning Torah?

The *Maharsha* asks a similar question with regard to various other times of the year that the Gemara says require some sort of feast or meal. The *psukim* which talk about these times speak of them as days of happiness. For example, regarding *Sukos*, the *pasuk* says "V'Samachta B'Chagecha" - you should be happy on your holiday. Is it not logical, asks the *Maharsha*, that the happiness referred to in these *psukim* is the happiness that comes from learning Torah, indicating that these days should be spent "Kulo LaHashem," entirely immersed in Torah study?

The *Maharsha* answers this notion by quoting a statement by *Reish Lakish*, which states that regarding *Yom Tov*, *simcha* refers to the eating of meat. (Our *minhag* of eating dairy on *Shavuos* does not contradict this, as we do have at least one meat meal over the course of *Yom Tov* to fulfill this obligation.)

The Gemara, shortly after the above-discussed statement, says that

everyone agrees that on Shabbos, some time must be devoted to eating and drinking. Rabbeinu Chananel explains that this means that one should not spend all day learning Torah, in turn ignoring the mitzvah *D'oraysa* of *Simchas/Oneg Shabbos*.

This Rabbeinu Chananel, combined with the previously mentioned *Maharasha*, may help resolve our original questions on the Gemara and *Rashi*. Why is it that everyone agrees that one must spend time eating and drinking on *Shavuos*, when studying Torah would seemingly be a more fitting *Mitzvah* for this day? Utilizing this *Maharsha* and Rabbeinu Chananel, we can suggest that by observing the other *Dinim* and *Mitzvos* that are described in the Torah, in this case *Simchas Yom Tov*, we demonstrate our acceptance and celebration of the day of *Shavuos* and of *Matan Torah* (as explained by *Rashi*) just as much as we do by learning Torah, as these other *Mitzvos* were given at *Matan Torah* just as *Talmud Torah* was. Thus, in addition to *Talmud Torah*, observing the *Mitzvah* of *Simchas Yom Tov* is also fitting for the day of the giving and acceptance of the Torah, and by observing more *Mitzvos*, we demonstrate a full acceptance of all of the Torah.

However, this solution still leaves us with a problem. There is a famous rule of “עוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה,” that when one is involved in one positive *Mitzvah*, he is exempt from the obligation to perform other positive *Mitzvos*. Thus, it would seem that if one spends the entirety of his *Shavuos* involved in *Talmud Torah*, he should be exempt from the *Mitzvah* to eat and drink. However, this is not true. Eating and drinking on *Yom Tov* is a *Mitzvah Chiyuvis* that is “*Ei Efshar Al Y'dei Acheirim*”, an obligatory mitzvah that cannot be performed by others for you, and *Talmud Torah* does not exempt one from such a *Mitzvah*. Because of this, one should not, as Rabbeinu Chananel states, be so involved in *Talmud Torah* over the course of Shabbos and *Yom Tov* that he neglects his *Mitzva* to eat and drink.

Of course, one must measure his eating and drinking to make sure that it is all truly *L'Shaim Shamayim*, and not simply to fulfil his own desires. Additionally, one must be sure to use the time during which he is not eating and drinking to learn Torah, as the main idea of *Shavuos* is the acceptance of the Torah. This idea can be seen through the above statement of the Gemara, which states that on *Shavuos* everyone agrees that we need “*Nami Lechem*” - also eating and drinking, implying that this is in addition to the preexisting (and possibly preeminent) aspect of *Talmud Torah* on *Shavuos*. The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Shabbos, Perek 30 Halacha 10* rules similarly that one may not have a set meal over wine on Shabbos or *Yom Tov* during times that one should be learning *Torah*.

We see from all of this that ideally everything that we do should be *L'Shaim Shamayim*. While one might want to eat and drink and enjoy his entire *Yom Tov* solely in that way, that is clearly not what the *Mitzvah* mandates nor what Hashem wants. While one might think that it is better and more fitting to learn Torah for the entire *Shavuos* and leave aside *Simchas Yom Tov*, this is also not what Hashem wants. By learning these lessons, may all of *Klal Yisroel be Zoche* to a true and full *Kabolas HaTorah* by demonstrating our full acceptance of all of the Torah and of Hashem's will upon ourselves. *A Gut'n Yom Tov* - eat heartily and learn well!

OUR YEARS IN YESHIVA - A COUNTING AND ACCOUNTING



RABBI BARUCH PESACH MENDELSON

MAGGID SHIUR

Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson is an 11th Grade Rebbe, and also serves as the Rabbinic Advisor for *Shema Koleinu*. Rabbi Mendelson has a long association with Yeshiva University, learning for many years under his great uncle, Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, zt"l, graduating Valedictorian with special awards in Talmud and in Bible studies and received *Semicha* from RIETS. Additionally, Rabbi Mendelson holds a Masters degree in Psychology from CUNY, and he studied in the RIETS post-*semicha* Kollel Elyon under the guidance of Rav Aharon Kahn.

Rabbi Mendelson joined the YUHSB faculty in 1996 and has enjoyed teaching the 10th and 11th Grade Masmidim (honors) *Shiur*. Rabbi Mendelson was awarded the Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Life Monument Funds, Inc. and the Grinspoon-Steinhardt Awards for Excellence in Jewish Education from the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York.

Rabbi Mendelson lives in Brooklyn with his wife Jessica and their children, where he serves as the *Morah D'asra* of Khilah Marine Park.

Many have the custom of reciting the six *Zechiros* every day after *Shacharis*. These are the *pesukim* which remind us of some of our basic beliefs. One of the items which we are supposed to remind ourselves of every day is, “*Yom Asher Amadta Lifnei Hashem Elokecha Bechorev*,” the day that we stood, as a people, before Hashem at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah. What is troubling about this statement is that despite *Chazal* telling us that we all stood and witnessed the giving of the Torah, it is impossible to remember that which we did not physically see. How can we recall that which is not in our memory? Furthermore, how do we make sure that that memory remains engraved in our hearts, “*Kol Yemei Chayeicha*,” all the days of our lives, and that we pass it on to our children, “*Vehodatam Levanecha Vivnei Banecha*.”

Homiletically, one may suggest that this Torah is asking each of us to recall the days of our own **personal** *Kabalas Hatorah*, namely, the *Kabalas Hatorah* that we experienced in Yeshiva. The sum of all our years and experiences in Yeshiva, constitutes our own *Har Sinai*. As such, memories of Yeshiva should guide us through life, and be passed on to our children.

My Rebbi, Harav Aaron Halevi Soloveitchik z”tl writes at length in his *Hashkafa* book about the various components of *Kabalas HaTorah* at *Har Sinai*. These concepts directly correspond to a Yeshiva experience. The first component is the “Voice of Sinai,” the actual words of the Torah as they were given to *Klal Yisrael*. This parallels the *shiurim* and myriad *halachic* and *lomdish* information that one accumulates of years of “learning.” The second component is the “Fire of Sinai,” or the thunder and lightning that shook the mountain. This corresponds to the inspiring *davening* and *ruach* provided by the Yeshiva. It’s not enough that we utilize our Yeshiva years to fulfill our intellectual quest for Hashem, we must also cultivate a healthy emotional component.

How does one ensure that one’s Yeshiva experience will be so powerful that one can draw from it throughout his life, and even use it to inspire one’s children? Perhaps we can answer this using the idea of *Sefiras Haomer*. Since the days of the *Omer* are supposed to be preparation for *Kabalas Hatorah*, maybe we can use it as a model for our own *Kabalas Hatorah*.

Tosafos in *Maseches Menachos* 66a mentions a *machlokes* between Rabbeinu Tam and the *Bahag*, about the ideal time to recite *Sefiras Haomer*. Rabbeinu Tam rules that we must count as soon as possible in order to fulfill the idea of “*Temimos*,” completeness. This would mean that one would only fulfill the *Mitzvah* of counting at night, and if one were to miss a night, one would forfeit the *Mitzvah*. We follow *Bahag*’s ruling that if one

forgets to count at night, one may continue to do the *Mitzvah* by counting in the daytime. The Bahag probably also accepts the basic concept of *Temimus*, yet only requires it *lechatchila*.

It is hard to understand why in order to count the days of the *Omer* in such a way to fulfill *Temimos*, one must count as early as possible, at the start of the day, but when it comes to counting weeks one only counts upon the completion of the week. Why this discrepancy between the counting of the weeks and the counting of the days? It becomes more perplexing in light of the fact that the *passuk* which mentions *Temimos* is written in the context of the *Sheva Shabason Temimos Tihyena*.

I would like to suggest that there are two types of counting or, perhaps better stated, there's "counting" and "accounting." When counting individual **units**, it is natural for the person to pronounce his count while initiating an act, such as placing down the objects being counted, or pointing to them. When counting entire **groups**, we do not count until after the components are collected and organized as an adhesive whole.

It then is quite understandable that the manifestation of *Temimos* differs according to the two categories. When counting the days of *Sefira*, the individual units, we count at the beginning, so that this counting is on an entire day *B'temimos*. However when counting the weeks, we must count differently. One can't count "this week will be or is the first week of the *Omer*." The concept of the "week," made up of seven days, simply does not exist until the seventh and final day has begun and the week is entire. Therefore the way to achieve *Temimos* with regards to weeks is to count at the week's end, to make an accounting.

Our Yeshiva experience also requires us to focus on this dichotomy. On the one hand we must count. We must make every day count, and we must begin the counting at the beginning of every day. Each morning one must tell oneself that "today will be a special day, today will be a day of personal *Kabala HaTorah*, both intellectually and emotionally, in the spirit of *Asher Anochi Metzavcha Hayom*, today will be a day of growth as a true *Ben-Torah* where I will strive towards new spiritual heights and create memories to take with me, even after I have physically left the walls of the *Beis Medrash*." On the other hand, at the end of each week, one must make a spiritual reckoning, a rigorous accounting. "How was my davening this week? How was my learning this week? Have I inculcated the values of the Yeshiva that surrounds me? How were my *middos* this week? Can I do more next week to improve myself and create those memories from which I will draw everlasting inspiration?"

These are the years of our personal *Kabala HaTorah*. May we all be *zoche* to *Kabala HaTorah Bishleimus*, and may we always remember *Yom Asher Amadta... Kol Yemei Chayecha*.

GOOD HEART, BAD HEART: THE MESSAGE OF SEFIRAH



**SHIMI
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YUHSB '21

Shimi Kaufman is a
Sophomore from
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He is the Head Writer
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The *Mishna* in *Maseches Avos Perek 2 Mishna 9* relates that Rabbi Yochanan asked his *Talmidim* to find which was the greatest trait which a person can have. The students suggested different things, until Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach said *Leiv Tov*, a good heart. Upon hearing this, Rabbi Yochanan declared that Rabbi Elazar's answer was the best, as it encapsulated all the other suggestions. The *Nesivos Shalom* writes on this *Mishna* that the *Gematria* of *Leiv Tov* is 49, the number of days in between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. But that begs the question: what about this *Mida* of *Leiv Tov* is so important in the *Sefirah* period?

The *Rambam* writes that all of our *Midos* come from the heart, and that having a "*Leiv Tov*" means having all of one's *Midos* in order. This *Mishna* seems to support this, as Rabbi Yochanan commented that a *Leiv Tov* includes all the other *Midos* which were suggested by the other *Talmidim*. Thus, one would think that the heart is the source of all good deeds which a person can do. However, we also have many instances of the heart being associated with evil. Every day in *Shema*, we say *ViLo Sasuru Acharei Livavchem ViAcharei Eineichem*, that we should not pursue the inappropriate desires of the heart and the eyes. The *Pasuk* is warning us not to pursue earthly desires, and it seems to be using the heart to demonstrate these cravings. This seems to indicate that our heart will lead us to do *Aveiros*. Additionally, we know that during the *Makkos*, Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart, leading to him not allowing the Jews to leave. Once again, the heart is associated with bad. Even the end of this very *Mishna* has Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach saying that the worst trait a person can have is a *Leiv Ra*, a bad heart. We thus see that the heart is not purely good or bad. We are thus left with a question: what separates a good heart from a bad heart?

As quoted earlier, the *Rambam* writes that the heart is the source of all *Midos*, and thus, it stands to reason that to improve our *Midos*, we must change our heart. In the case of Pharaoh, Hashem needed to harden his heart because the heart can be swayed towards good. The language of "hardening" implies stopping it from moving, as Pharaoh's heart would have been moved if not for divine intervention. Although our heart may lead us astray, it is our responsibility to take control and work to acquire a *Leiv Tov*. This is what the *Pasuk* means when it says not to pursue the inappropriate desires of the heart; one must guide and control their heart, and not the other way around.

In *Parshas Vayakhel*, the Torah says that those who are *Chachmei Leiv*, wise of heart, should be chosen to build the *Mishkan*. Many commentators are puzzled by what that phrase means. The *Rambam* in his *Seifer Moreh Nivuchim* 3:54:1 writes that the word "*Chacham*", wise, is often used by the

Torah to refer to refining character traits and working on *Midos*. According to this explanation, we can say that the “*Chacham Leiv*” is one who works on improving his *Midos* and becoming better. This is the essence of *Leiv Tov*, to strive to improve ourselves and perfect our *Midos*. In contrast, the *Mida* which the *Mishna* states as being the worst is *Leiv Ra*, a bad heart. While *Leiv Tov* has a *Gematria* of 49, *Leiv Ra* has a *Gematria* of 302, the *Gematria* of *Sheiv*, sit. One who allows his heart to sit idly and does not improve encapsulates this *Mida* of *Leiv Ra*. The Gemara in *Maseches Bava Basra* 16b says that one should not stand for too long, as it is bad for the heart. Staying in one place for too long without changing or improving leads to a *Leiv Ra*, and is antithetical to the life of a Jew.

This improvement of the heart is the core message of *Sefirah*. The *Beis Avraham* writes that the *Parshiyos* which fall out during *Sefirah* deal with *Tumah* initially, and *Kedusha* at the end (such as the *Mitzvos* of *Bein Adam LiChaveiro*, the *Kohanim*, the holidays, and the *Kedusha* of *Eretz Yisrael* in *Parshios Kidoshim*, *Emor*, *Bihar*, and *BiChukosai*). He suggests based on this that *Bnei Yisrael*, who were on the 49th Level of *Tumah* when they left *Mitzrayim*, used the period between *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and *Kabalas HaTorah—Sefiras HaOmer*—for growth and self-improvement in preparation for *Matan Torah*. The way in which we achieve this self-improvement is through working on our heart.

The *Pele Yoeitz* 200:1 writes that all 613 *Mitzvos* are dependent on this *Mida* of *Leiv Tov*. He writes that while certain constant *Mitzvos*, such as loving and fearing Hashem, are always dependent on the heart, every *Mitzvah* is related to the heart. When it comes to doing *Mitzvos BiSimcha* and conquering our *Yeitzer HaRa* to do them, the heart is directly involved with each and every *Mitzvah*. Therefore, before the Jews could receive the Torah, they needed to perfect this trait of *Leiv Tov*.

Additionally, a way to acquire a *Leiv Tov* is through *Tfila*, as the Gemara in *Taanis* 2a says, *Tfila* is an *Avoda SheBaLeiv*, and the best way to improve something is from the inside out, to provide a superstructure and scaffolding for the rest of the work. May we all be *Zoche* to improve our hearts and obtain this *Mida* of *Leiv Tov*, and through that, we should be able to be *Mikabel* the Torah this *Shavuos* in the proper way.

NO SLEEP ‘TILL SINAI



RABBI DOV EMERSON

DIRECTOR OF
TEACHING AND
LEARNING

Rabbi Dov Emerson joined the MTA leadership team in 2017. In his role as Director of Teaching and Learning, he focuses on faculty development and support, as well as nurturing MTA's continued academic growth. He works closely with the administration and faculty to continue developing innovative educational pedagogy, including educational technology, project-based learning, experiential education, and personalized learning.

Rabbi Emerson, an award-winning educator, is a graduate of Yeshiva College and holds rabbinic ordination from HaRav Ephraim Greenblatt z'tl. Additionally, he holds MA's in both Education and Social Work, and is currently a doctoral student at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration.

Rabbi Emerson lives with his wife Rina and five children (two of whom attend MTA) in Bergenfield, NJ.

The days between *Pesach* and *Shavuos* are uniquely established for the Jewish people to engage in a process of supercharged spiritual growth. We have left the inspiring days of *Pesach* with a renewed sense of *emuna* and appreciation for G-d's dominion over the earth, and suddenly, the *Zman Matan Toraseinu* is in sight. The *avoda* of *Sefiras HaOmer* is to somehow turn the feeling of faith into a tangible and concrete change in ourselves, individually and collectively. Through the seven *Sefiros* that the seven weeks of *Sefirah* are arranged by, we are charged with reflecting on each day and asking ourselves if it was indeed lived better than the previous one.

It would follow, then, that the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuos* would serve as the exciting climax to our efforts at growth. Indeed, staying up all night learning Torah on *Shavuos* logically seems to serve as a spiritual crescendo to the period that started with *Pesach*. And yet, when we think about the reason for this late night *Minhag*, a different picture seems to emerge. As is recounted in the *Midrash* in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* (1:12), on the night before *Matan Torah*, the Jewish people slept very comfortably. It was such a deep sleep that our ancestors were engaged in, that they overslept! The *Magen Avraham* cites this *Midrash* in explaining why we have the custom to spend the entire night of *Shavuos* awake and engaged in Torah study – as a way to correct the mistake of the Jewish people oversleeping when Hashem was ready to give them the Torah. This is how many understand the 'Tikun,' the 'fixing,' of *Tikun Leil Shavuos*.

This explanation raises a few interesting questions: is it really possible that the Jews overslept? We are taught that the *Mitzvah* of counting the days of *Sefiras HaOmer* was created in response to the Jewish people, who were so excited and impatient to receive the Torah after leaving Egypt, that Hashem gave them the *Mitzvah* to count as a way to calm them down. If so, how could they sleep at all on the night before getting the Torah, let alone oversleep? Furthermore, we know that these 49 days were a preparation for getting the Torah! Every day, the Jewish people were getting into spiritual shape; they were reaching higher and higher levels of holiness in anticipation of the rendezvous at *Har Sinai*. Again, how could such individuals dare oversleep? It does not make any sense!

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Likutei Sichos*, Vol. 4) addresses these questions in a phenomenal way. He quotes the *Alter Rebbe*, Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, that there is a major difference between the way in which our soul is able to connect with Hashem before it comes down here to earth, and after our soul becomes housed in our body. Here on earth, we try to connect, but whatever success we achieve pales in comparison to the type of connection the soul has with its Creator when it is unencumbered by restraints of the

physical body.

The Rebbe continues that there is one circumstance here on earth where the soul begins to achieve something resembling the intense connection that occurs in heaven: sleep. We are taught in the Gemara (*Brachos 57b*) that sleep is 1/60th of death. The *Zohar* teaches that this means that when a person is sleeping, the soul is able to return to Hashem in some measure. The soul is therefore able to appreciate spirituality and G-d's presence more acutely during a period of sleep.

The seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe clarifies: when the Jewish people slept the night before *Matan Torah*, it wasn't out of laziness, negligence, or disrespect. Instead, *Bnei Yisrael* appreciated the process through which the soul experiences a partial return to its Creator during sleep. After spending 49 days engaged in the intense labor of the soul, working to develop themselves spiritually, they wanted more. They wanted to uncover more of Hashem's presence in this world. They made the fateful decision to sleep out of a sincere desire to progress even further and connect even closer to Hashem at the moment of *Matan Torah*.

Despite these noble intentions, Hashem was not happy with the actions of His children. The Rebbe explained that the entire purpose of Torah and *Mitzvos* here on earth is to serve Hashem using the physical body that He gave to us. *Mitzvos* are actions that cannot be performed by the soul alone up in Heaven (See Gemara *Shabos 88b*). *Lo BaShamayim He*, the Torah is not in Heaven (*Devarim 30:12*). The Torah resides in the realm of the physical, here on earth. The significance of giving humans the Torah, is that we are supposed to work here on earth, using our body, to bring our soul closer to Hashem.

Therefore, preparing for *Matan Torah* has to be done with our eyes wide open, awake, using our physical body and the world around us, to struggle, and to grow. *Bnei Yisrael's* intentions were pure; they wanted to continue to build on their spiritual success. They decided to do so by sleeping. It was a noble idea, but as Hashem corrects them, that was—and is—not the way to prepare for the Torah here on earth. Therefore, on *Shavuos* night, when we are trying to recreate the magic of that holy event on *Har Sinai*, when we are trying to cleave to Hashem, we specifically stay awake and avoid sleep, for that represents the physical nature of our spiritual work here on earth.

It is a powerful lesson for all of us. It's not always easy to engage with this world. The world can be so dark, so sad, full of trials and tribulations. Sometimes we would like to simply close our eyes, escape the mundane, and connect with the divine. The lesson of *Leil Shavuos* is that spiritual connection is indeed within our grasp. But the vehicle to get there is by staying awake. Our uniquely human spiritual *avoda* requires the integration of the *neshama* with the *guf*, our body with our soul. Brought together, grappling with the darkness, we can bring the light of Torah to ourselves, our families, our communities, and indeed the entire world.

ACCEPTING THE TORAH WITH PEACE



SHUA PARISER

YUHSB '20,
CO-EDITOR IN CHIEF,
SHEMA KOLEINU

Shua Pariser is a Junior from Monsey, New York. Shua is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Shema Koleinu*, and is in Rabbi Mendelson's *Shiur*.

This coming *Shabbos*, we will be reading *Parshas Naso*. In *Pashas Naso Perek 6 Pasuk 26*, we talk about *Birchas Kohanim*. In *Parshas Naso*, we are introduced to the *Birchas Kohanim*, of which the last few words are “*Vyasem Lecha Shalom*.” I’d like to explore why this *parsha* is read right after *Shavuos*, and why this phrase is contained in the *Birchas Kohanim*.

We know that the first *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of three things: idolatry, murder, and illicit relations. If one looks closely at these three sins, one will see that the common denominator is a lack of *shalom*, of peace. The act of idolatry, in which one worships other gods, demonstrates a lack of *shalom* “*Bein Adam Lamakom*,” between man and G-d. Murder is a lack of *shalom* “*Bein Adam Lechavero*,” between man and his fellow man. Forbidden relationships destroy *Shalom Bayis*. It is not totally unreasonable to say that the first *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of a lack of *shalom*. The second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, baseless hatred. This too is a lack of *shalom*. The second *Beis Hamikdash*, like the first, was destroyed because of a lack of *shalom*.

On the first day of *Shavuos* we read about *Matan Torah*. In *Shemos Perek 19 Pasuk 2* the Torah uses a very strange language when talking about *Bnei Yisrael* as a whole. The Torah says “*vayichan*,” and he camped. *Rashi* is bothered by this. *Rashi* asks, why is the Torah writing in a singular language, when *Bnei Yisrael* should be referenced in the plural? *Rashi* answers that *Bnei Yisrael* were like one man with one heart. They were *b’yachad*.

As I am writing, we are in the times of *Sefira*. *Sefira* is a time when we mourn the death of the 24,000 *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva because they did not respect each other in their learning. When the Gemara explains why we are mourning during this period, it says because of the death of the 12,000 “*zugos*,” or pairs of Rabbi Akiva. When in Yeshiva, the only thing that is supposed to be done in pairs is learning *b’chavrusa*, so when we don’t have *shalom* while learning, we are disgracing the Torah of Hashem. It’s very important that on *Shavuos*, we try to be *mechazek* our *sedarim*, our *Shalom Bayis*, and *Shalom Bein Adam Lechavero* outside of *Seder*, which will ultimately increase our *Shalom Bein Adam Lamakom*. In following this path on *Shavuos*, we will hopefully strengthen our individual and collective *shalom* and bring *Mashiach* and with it, the 3rd *Beis Hamikdash*.



IKEY GUTLOVE

YUHSB '20

Ikey Gutlove is a Junior from Teaneck, New Jersey, and is in Rabbi Richter's *Shiur*.

LIKE ANGEL, LIKE AM YISRAEL

Thank you to the sefer The Juggler and the King by HaRav Aharon Feldman for help organizing this idea.

The Gemara in *Maseches Shabbos* 88a relates a story about the great sage, *Rava*, learning in the *Beis Medrash*. A heretic came by and witnessed how absorbed *Rava* was in his topic of learning, that he didn't realize his fingers, upon which he was sitting, were getting crushed and dripping blood. The heretic then said to *Rava*: "You impetuous nation! You put your mouth before your ears! You should have first heard what was in the Torah, then if you felt capable of fulfilling the commandments, accept it, and if not, refuse it."

If Reuven asks Shimon to travel somewhere with him, Shimon will, out of nature, ask why, but if Reuven holds up a gun against his head, Shimon won't ask any questions, and will automatically do as he is commanded. For when one's life depends on it, one acts without asking any questions.

The *Malachim*, angels, are created for only one purpose: to carry out G-d's plan. They have no other purpose of being; therefore they "do" Hashem's will, before they "ask" for the purpose. They cannot act otherwise, for their entire existence is based upon this one purpose.

This same situation took place for the Jews at *Matan Torah*: they were aware that the existence of their nation depended upon accepting the Torah. The belief of being in existence only to fulfill Hashem's will wasn't new for the Jewish people, as their forefathers displayed this same deep-seated belief. Avraham permitted himself to be thrown into a fire for the sake of his belief in Hashem and monotheism; Yitzchak allowed himself to be offered as a sacrifice in order to serve Hashem, and Yaakov lived a life of suffering in order to instill the values of Hashem in his children and future generations. This is the heritage which our Forefathers bequeathed to their descendants. When the Jews were offered the Torah, they realized there was no alternative for them but to accept the Torah. Like the angels, they said, "We will do," before "We will listen."

This too is why *Rava* was so absorbed in his Torah studies that he did not notice his bleeding fingers. Someone whose life depends on the Torah won't be focused mainly on his personal comfort. Although *Rava's* hands dripped with blood, he did not stop concentrating on his effort to understand the will of Hashem, which is what is expected of a descendant of the nation that had said, "We will do," before "We will listen."

The heretic who interrupted *Rava's* learning only believed in one reason for life: obtaining every possible pleasure. Since this was his sole sensation,

anyone who acted without consideration for themselves first, is considered "impetuous." If the heretic had been offered the Torah, he too, like the other nations would have first asked, "What is in it?"

It is our task this *Shavuos* to take after *Rava*, the *Malachim* and our *Avos* by making the Torah our sole purpose for existence. It is imperative that we do this because our *Mesora* is one of Torah, and we must pass that on to the generations after us, lest they, *Chas ViShalom*, become the heretics the Gemara speaks of.



RABBI SHIMON SCHENKER

ASSOCIATE
PRINCIPAL

Rabbi Shimon Schenker serves as Associate Principal, and he has been teaching in YUHSB since 2001. He began as a Rebbe in the PTACH program based at YUHSB and then transitioned to become the Director of YUHSB's Learning Center as well as a beloved 10th Grade *Maggid Shiur*.

Rabbi Schenker has a B.S. in Management Information Systems from the Sy Syms School of Business of YU, an M.S. in Jewish Education from the Azrieli Graduate School of Education, a Masters in Special Education from Herbert Lehman College CUNY and Rabbinic Ordination from RIETS. He is also trained in the Orton-Gillingham Reading Remediation by the Institute for Multi-Sensory Education.

Rabbi Schenker was the recipient of the Grinspoon-Steinhardt Award for Excellence in Jewish Education in 2013.

He lives in Passaic, New Jersey with his wife and family.

INFUSING OUR TORAH LEARNING WITH SPIRITUALITY

One of the biggest challenges that *Bnei Torah* have is imbuing a sense of intense spirituality into daily *Limud HaTorah*. While many people love learning and get an immense pleasure from a brilliant question of the *Rishonim* and/or *Acharonim*, it is sometimes difficult to feel as if Hashem is speaking to us through the words of the Torah. The question is how can we focus ourselves to be able to feel the Creator of the Universe in every *Pasuk*, *Mishna* and *blatt* of Gemara we learn?

The *Rashba* in *Brachos* 11b quotes the students of *Rashi* in the name of their Rebbe that when *Rashi* would wake up early in the morning to learn Torah before *Shacharis*, he would say *Birchas HaTorah*. Later, when he went to shul, he would recite the rest of the *Brachos*, and he would again recite *Birchas HaTorah*. The *Rashba* explains that this is not a *Bracha LiVatala* (a wasteful *Bracha*) because it is no different than if someone would get an *Aliya*, as they would also make another *Birchas HaTorah* at the end. The *Rashba* then continues to ask in the name of the *Baalei HaTosafos*, how is this the same as getting an *Aliya* and making another *Birchas HaTorah*, as there is a special *Halacha* that the second of the *Birchas HaTorah* is made because it is a public reading and the *Bracha* is for the public, not because the person himself needs to make a second *Bracha*?

Rav Aryeh Pomeranzik, in his *sefer Eimek Bracha Siman 1*, explains that there are two types of *Birchas HaTorah*: one on the *Mitzvah* of learning Torah which is similar to any other *Bracha* on a *Mitzvah*, and one on the concept of connecting to the Torah, which is the kind of *Bracha* we make when getting an *Aliya* and the type of *Birchas HaTorah* a woman makes before she learns Torah even though she is not obligated to learn Torah. He explains that this is why *Rashi* felt he should make another *Bracha*. When he woke up, that was the *Bracha* on his personal *Mitzvah* to learn Torah. When he got to Shul and said *Brachos* as part of *davening*, he was encountering a new type of Torah experience, similar to getting an *aliyah*, and therefore said another set of *Brachos*.

The above *Machlokes* between *Rashi* and the *Baalei Tosafos* is dependent on the fundamental question of the nature of *Birchas HaTorah*: is it like all other *Brachos* on *Mitzvos* which are Rabbinic in origin, or is it from the Torah itself? The *Rambam* does not list *Birchas HaTorah* as one of the 613 *Mitzvos*, seemingly implying that it is not a *Mitzvah* and it is not different from any other *Bracha* on a *Mitzvah* which are *Mitzvos DiRabanan*. This idea is strengthened by the comments of the *Ramban* in his additions to the *Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvos*, that we are commanded to give thanks to Hashem that he has enriched our lives by giving us the amazing gift that is the Torah. The *Ramban* continues: just like we are obligated from the Torah

to give thanks to Hashem for our food when we say *Birchas HaMazon*, so too we are obligated from the Torah to thank Hashem for the Torah.

Thus, according to the *Ramban*, learning Torah is not just another *Mitzvah*, it is an opportunity to be fully engaged with Hashem's presence, and therefore when we learn it, there is an opportunity to reflect on the incredible opportunity we have to interface with our Creator and recognize how much richer our lives are because of our relationship with Him through His Torah. Similar to when we eat, we say *Birchas HaMazon* not only to thank Hashem for our food, but to reflect on all that Hashem does to sustain us and the universe.

The ideology of the *Ramban* is reflected in the Gemara in *Brachos* 21a where Rabbi Yehuda asks, what is the source of the obligation to say *Birchas HaTorah*? The Gemara answers, from the *pasuk* in *Shiras Haazinu*, *Ki Sheim HaSheim Ekra Havu Godel LEilokeinu*, that when I call out the name of Hashem I will glorify our G-d. The *Ramban* writes in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah that the Torah is all one long name of Hashem, meaning, every word of Torah is infused with the name of Hashem. The Torah is not just laws and stories, it is the essence of Hashem and what He wants from and for us in this world.

This is apparent as well in the very first written commandment that Hashem Himself told us. The first of the Ten Commandments is "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*", I am Hashem your G-d. The Gemara in *Shabbos* 105a says, the word *Anochi* is an acronym for "***Ana Nafshi Ksivas Yahavis Anochi***", I am giving myself to you in writing. The *Torah Temima*, in his commentary to the above *Pasuk*, explains beautifully, saying that if we want to get to know an author and how his mind works, we need to read his books. So too with the Torah: if we want to get to know Hashem and feel close with Him, the ideal way to do that is by learning His Torah.

When we learn Torah, we have an immense opportunity to achieve closeness with the Creator of our universe. He puts Himself out there for us to connect to. His writings, our Written Torah and by extension Oral Torah are, as the *Ramban* said, gifts meant to enrich and empower our lives, our families, and the entire world. Over *Shavuos*, we need to reflect on the treasure that we have been entrusted with so that when we learn, we don't forget why we are learning and who we are learning for.



DOVID WARTELSKY

YUHSB '20,
CO-EDITOR IN CHIEF,
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BETWEEN MAN AND "MON"

The second to last *mitzva* in the Torah is that of *Hakhel*, the gathering of all of *Bnai Yisrael* at the *Beis HaMikdash* after *Sukkos* to hear the Davidic King Yehuda read from *Seifer Divarim*. *Hakhel* is even compared to *Kabalas HaTorah* by some. However, this *mitzva* is only done once every seven years, on the *Sukkos* following a *Shmita* year. In the *Shmita* year, farmers let their fields lay fallow. However, Hashem promised that He would provide enough food for the *Shmita* year and the first year of the next cycle, since there was no harvest in the *Shmita* year. Additionally, a farmer is only allowed to take two meals per day from the fruits Hashem produced in his field. What does leaving our fields untended have to do with *Hakhel*? It seems as if this is a very nice event that could easily be repeated on any given *Sukkos*. Why is it that this *mitzva* can only be done on the *Sukkos* following a *Shmita*?

To answer this question, one must take a look at the unique food source of the Jews in the desert: the *Mon*. The *Mon* was a miraculous food that literally appeared at the doorstep of the Jews in the desert. The Jews were able to take the *Mon* by themselves. This inevitably led to some people taking more than they were supposed to, and others taking less. However, the *Pasuk* (*Shemos* 16:18) says "*Vayimodu HaOmer*." The *Omer*, which was the amount of *Mon* every Jew was entitled to, measured itself, and every Jew got the exact amount. This was understandably a great test in *Emuna* for the fledgling nation, as they had to rely on *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* providence of their food. Additionally, if any of the *Mon* was left overnight, worms would eat it and it would spoil (*Shemos* 16:20). This was another test in *Emuna* as the *Bnai Yisrael* had to rely on Hashem anew every day. Another layer of *Emuna* was on *Shabbos*, where, contrary to the other days of the week, the food did not spoil overnight and everyone ended up with two *Omer* portions, one for Friday and one for *Shabbos*. This constant reliance on Hashem's *Hashgacha* accompanied the Jews throughout their tenure in the desert.

However, after a while, the *Bnai Yisrael* must have gotten used to the *Mon*. Since the *Bnai Yisrael* had some food with them when they left *Mitzrayim*, those first 30 days would have overlapped with the period of *Sefiras HaOmer*. The *Bnai Yisrael* would have still been unsure as to where their next meal was coming from, which made for an even bigger test in *Emuna*. However, after *Matan Torah*, the daily *Mon* ration would've been cemented in their psyche.

It seems as if the circumstances of the *Mon* can be easily compared to those of *Shmita*: both display complete reliance on Hashem, followed by a Torah-receiving experience. By *Hakhel* being after the *Shmita* year, we are commemorating the sequence of events of the *Bnai Yisrael* in the desert. This is supposed to strengthen our *Emuna* and serve to reaffirm our vows in our holy marriage to Hashem. This *Shavuot*, after counting the days of *Sefiras HaOmer*, may we be able to fully appreciate *Emuna BaHashem* and experience *Kabalas HaTorah* in a truly meaningful way.

WHERE ARE ALL THE MITZVOS?



**AKIVA
FINKELSTEIN**

YUHSB '19

Akiva Finkelstein is a Senior and hails from Memphis, Tennessee. Akiva was an editor of *Kol Hanearim* this year, and he is in Rabbi Tanchum Cohen's *Shiur*.

If you entered a second grade classroom at a Jewish school and asked a random student which *Mitzvos* we do on *Rosh HaShana*, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukos*, *Chanuka*, *Purim*, *Pesach*, etc., you'd likely get a correct answer. Everyone knows that we blow the *shofar* on *Rosh HaShana*, eat *Matza* on *Pesach*, and so on, as they are the *Mitzvos* of the day that really define the holiday and give them their uniqueness. And yet, when it comes to the holiday of *Shavuos*, which is upon us, there seems to not be a single *Mitzvas hayom*, a sole unique *Mitzva* of the day. Of course, we do have a number of well-known *Minhagim* such as eating dairy or staying up all night and learning, but how can there be a Torah-ordained holiday without even a single obligatory *Mitzva* to set it apart from all other holidays?

When we look in *Parshas Emor*, where all the holidays are discussed, we are further confused about the nature of *Shavuos*. While we all know that *Shavuos* is supposed to commemorate *Matan Torah*, the giving of the Torah, nowhere in the *Psukim* is this mentioned. Instead, the *Psukim* about *Shavuos* focus on the *Shte HaLechem*, the two loaves of bread that were brought as a *Korban Mincha* in the *Beis Hamikdash* on *Shavuos*. In fact, not only is the date of *Matan Torah* not mentioned at all in the Torah, but there is actually a dispute in the Gemara in *Shabbos* 86b about whether *Matan Torah* was on the 6th or 7th day of *Sivan*! We may not even be celebrating the right day! It seems that the well-known perception of *Shavuos* as a commemoration of *Matan Torah* is being called into question, which makes us wonder: what is *Shavuos* really about?

While the *Psukim* don't explicitly mention *Matan Torah* as the reason for our celebration, the *Kli Yakar* writes on *Vayikra* 23:16, *Tispiru Chamishim Yom ViHikravtem Mincha Chadasha LaHashem*, you shall count 50 days and then bring a new meal offering to Hashem, that this new meal offering of *Shavuos* was a hint to *Matan Torah*. He explains that when it comes to Torah, every single person has to treat the Torah as if it were given to us anew each and every day. The Torah must be like a "new meal offering," which we view with fresh eyes each time we crack open a *Sefer*, finding new *Chidushim* and insights with every new look. For this reason, explains the *Kli Yakar*, the Torah did not mention a specific date for *Matan Torah*. If the Torah did this, it would seem like an event of old, something that occurred in the past, rather than a new and fresh thing that we must constantly view with new lenses. So *Shavuos* can still be about celebrating *Matan Torah*, as we have posited, only the Torah wanted to obscure that aspect in order to convey a significant message about our attitude towards Torah.

But what about the *Mitzvos*? *Shavuos*, like many other holidays, forbids us to work. Additionally, as a *Yom Tov*, there is an obligation of *Simchas Yom*

Tov, the obligation to rejoice on the holiday. While this refers to the eating of the sacrificial meat in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, nowadays we are supposed to rejoice through eating meat and drinking wine. Interestingly enough, there is an argument in *Maseches Pesachim* 68b about how one should spend their *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* days. Rabbi Eliezer believes one must choose between eating all day or learning in the *Beis Medrash* all day, while Rabbi Yehoshua says that one should split the day between learning and eating. The question stems from the two *Psukim* about *Shavuos*. The first *pasuk*, in *Devarim* 16:8, says that we should have a holiday for Hashem, which is expressed through learning and davening. The second *pasuk*, in *Bamidbar* 29:35, says that we should have a holiday for ourselves, which is exemplified by eating and drinking. The question is whether it is one or the other, or both. However, Rabbi Eliezer says that everyone agrees that when it comes to *Shavuos* one must spend half the day eating, for *Shavuos* is the day of the giving of the Torah. But why would this seemingly unrelated idea require us to eat on *Shavuos*? What does Torah have to do with eating?

Rashi explains that *Shavuos* requires food and drink, as one must rejoice to show that this day is pleasant and great for *Bnei Yisrael* because it is when we received the Torah. In a similar vein, Rabeinu Dovid on this Gemara writes that one must rejoice on *Shavuos* in order to show that the Torah is not a burden on our shoulders, but rather something that we tremendously enjoy. There's no greater way to demonstrate our happiness than through eating meat and drinking wine.

While it's true that each holiday requires rejoicing through meat and wine, there is something unique to *Shavuos*, in its role as the day of *Matan Torah*, that gives the rejoicing a special meaning and purpose. There's something unique about *Matan Torah*, that unlike any other event commemorated on our calendar, this one in particular must be celebrated with food. Clearly, *Simcha*, or happiness, is integral to our study of Torah.

Rav Avraham Min HaHar asks the following question: how it can be forbidden for a mourner who is sitting *shiva* to study Torah? There is a concept of *mitzvos Lav LiHenos Nitnu*, that the Torah was not given for physical benefit or pleasure. He explains that this concept is said by all other *Mitzvos* where we are supposed to do them, not for physical pleasure, but purely for the sake of doing the will of G-d and following His command. When it comes to Torah, however, the purpose is specifically for us to benefit and rejoice in its great wisdom. As it says in *Tehillim* 19:9, *Pikudei Hashem Yisharim, Misamchei Leiv*, the laws of Hashem are upright, they gladden the heart. Therefore, given the inherent happiness involved in the study of Torah, a mourner who must be focused on his mourning, cannot partake in the joyous activity of learning Torah.

So *Shavuos*, with all its strange characteristics, is still a holiday in which we can focus on rejoicing in the giving of the Torah. While it may not have a completely different type of *Mitzva*, the *Mitzva* of *Simchas Yom Tov* that it does possess is special and of a different nature than that of any of other holiday. Due to the great *Simcha* associated with the giving and study of Torah, it requires a special kind of rejoicing; one focused on demonstrating just how glad we are to have the Torah. Just as *Bnei Yisrael* expressed their own joy as they proclaimed "*Naaseh ViNishma*" before receiving the Torah, we too must convey our own sense of joy and excitement for Torah this *Shavuos* as we stay up all night and *shteig*.

SEEING THE VOICE



RABBI JOSHUA KAHN

HEAD OF SCHOOL

Rabbi Joshua Kahn assumed the role of Head of School in July 2016.

He is a graduate of Yeshiva University's Yeshiva College, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, and Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration.

Prior to MTA, Rabbi Kahn served as the Associate Principal for Judaic Studies and Dean of Student Life at Torah Academy of Bergen County. He pioneered initiatives like the Senior Mentoring and *Beit Midrash* Programs and organized community programming and disaster relief missions.

In addition, he has brought his classroom expertise to his 9th Grade *Shiur*.

He is known for building strong relationships with students and parents and succeeded in streamlining many administrative processes to make them more intuitive, transparent and effective.

Rabbi Kahn lives in Bergenfield, NJ with his wife, Tamar, and six children.

If you can go back in time and experience one event in history, what event would you choose? When interviewing prospective MTA *talmidim*, the most common answer given is *Matan Torah*. When we think of *Matan Torah*, we think of the dramatic and miraculous scene in which the Torah describes (*Shemos* 20:15), וכל העם רואים את הקולות – and the entire nation saw the sounds. *Rashi*, quoting the *Mechilta*, explains that we were able to see that which is normally only heard. While we know that *Matan Torah* was replete with miracles and supernatural components, why is it that Hashem incorporated this specific miracle at the time of *Matan Torah*? What was the message for *Bnei Yisrael*?

Seeing and hearing are two different senses and experiences, with each one having advantages over the other. Vision is complete and absolute. We usually see things fully and clearly, without interference. Hearing, on the other hand, requires a process in which the sounds are internalized and processed. The *Sfas Emes* suggests that by providing *Bnei Yisrael* with the ability to see what is normally heard, Hashem was providing us with the opportunity to internalize the sounds with great clarity. This is the ultimate goal of *Talmud Torah*, to fully understand the word of Hashem and then to internalize it, making the Torah a part of our essence.

How did we merit this amazing *beracha* of seeing the sounds of *Matan Torah*? The *Sfas Emes* suggests that our commitment to נעשה ונשמע, the absoluteness with which we volunteered to perform the *mitzvos*, without hesitation or questions, earned us the clarity of vision that Hashem showed us in return. נעשה would then correlate with the ability to see and נשמע corresponds with the ability to hear. We will see and then hear.

Rav Shimon Schwab adds another layer to our commitment to נעשה ונשמע that includes a powerful blessing and aspiration for us. He illustrates the point with an analogy. When we get ready to jump in a pool, even those of us who really enjoy swimming will often be startled by the rush of water when we first jump in. It is a natural reaction to recoil or be unnerved by the sudden submergence in water. Then, we proceed to get used to and enjoy being surrounded by this water. Rav Schwab suggests that this is the key to enjoying our learning. In *Birchos HaTorah*, we begin with לעסוק בדברי תורה – a commitment to delving into Torah, to working hard to understand the words of Torah. Then, we go on to say והערב נא – and the Torah should be sweet to us. If we first commit to working hard and “seeing” the Torah with clarity, we then hope to “hear” it, to achieving the desired internalization of the Torah and the real joy and satisfaction of והערב נא.

May הקב"ה bless all of us with the ability to see the words of Torah with clarity and understanding, and merit the ability to hear the words of Torah, internalize them, and love our Torah learning!



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