



EST. 1916

# שמע קולנו

**SHEMA KOLEINU: SHAVUOS 5781**

DIVREI TORAH FROM OUR REBBEIM, FACULTY, TALMIDIM, AND ALUMNI

OUR SHEMA KOLEINU IS DEDICATED IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF OUR BELOVED TALMID, DONNY MORRIS ('20), Z"l,

נחמן דניאל בן אריה צבי ז"ל

THE 5781 SHAVUOS EDITION OF SHEMA KOLEINU IS DEDICATED

לזכר נשמת נחמן דניאל בן אריה צבי ז"ל

TO THE MEMORY OF DONNY MORRIS, Z"L,

MTA CLASS OF 2020



Donny was a loving and caring son, grandson, sibling, talmid, and friend. Most of all, he was a true *mivakesh* who was singularly devoted to his development as a Ben Torah. We will miss his leadership, his smile, and how he made each person that interacted with him feel special.

תהא נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים

DEDICATED BY THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS  
TALMIDIM, REBBEIM, FACULTY, ADMINISTRATION, AND BOARD.

## Introduction

# The Shaliach Tzibbur as the Consummate Role Model

*Rabbi Joshua Kahn  
Head Of School*

*Shavuos* marks the end of the halakhic *sheloshim* for Donny Morris z"l. But the loss and the pain is so profoundly felt in our *yeshiva*, and we are therefore dedicating the *Shavuos Shema Koleinu* to his memory. As was described in each of the *hespedim*, Donny left an impact in so many ways. I would like to focus on one aspect, Donny's passion for *shul*, evident through his love for davening, his dedication to being a *gabbai*, and commitment to *leining*. Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger, *Rosh Yeshiva* at YU and *Mora D'asra* of Congregation Beth Abraham in Bergenfield, told about Donny's desire to serve as *shaliach tzibbur*. This description of Donny as *shaliach tzibbur* is an appropriate way to describe Donny and the impact he had on others.

In describing the proper *shaliach tzibbur*, the Tur lists several characteristics:

צריך שיהיה ש"צ הגון... ואיזהו הגון זה שהוא ריקן מעבירות... ושפל ברך ומרוצה לעם  
ויש לו נעימה וקולו ערב (אורח חיים סימן נא)

A *chazzan* must be free of sin, humble, works hard, have a good reputation, and have a sweet voice. In contrast to many leadership positions, such as *Nasi* or *Av Beis Din*, the *shaliach tzibbur* does not come from aristocracy, wealth or other elevated status. He is of the people, a representative from the community who has worked hard to refine himself, earned a good reputation, and tried to stay free of sin. This growth mindset propels him to look at ways to improve and his humility helps him realize his reliance on *Hashem*. Perhaps this is why Donny was so drawn to this role of *shaliach tzibbur*. His humility, sensitivity to others, sweetness, work ethic, and reputation were re-

markable. He was a regular member of the community, be it his *shitur*, his grade, or our *yeshiva*, and yet his care and concern for others, hard work, humility, sweetness and reputation made him the appropriate leader of the community. He had a growth mindset, constantly striving to be the best he could be, with a humility that enabled him to appreciate davening and our reliance on *Hashem*. Why do these qualities specifically guide us in choosing a *shaliach tzibbur*? Perhaps it is because when we send someone up to represent us, we need someone who generally cares about each person and would commit to working to help them. Who else would we rather send up that Donny to lead us in davening, someone who cared about each person and embodied the work ethic to follow through on his commitment to help?

Although the *shaliach tzibbur* must be a member of the community, Chazal also describe that he must have a pleasant voice, with the ability to inspire those around him. His role is to encourage others to *daven* and grow. Through his example, he inspired others. His dedication to always arriving at davening early and to taking his davening seriously set a tone in *minyan*. His *hasmadah* in learning earned him the reputation of a *masmid*. He went to every learning program, *night seder*, and *tisch*. As he matured throughout high school, the *Beis Midrash* became his home. When Covid struck, his home became a *Beis Midrash*. But he also inspired others by encouraging them to join him in these pursuits. He loved learning and davening so much that he wanted others to be able to enjoy it like he did.

We have lost a *shaliach tzibbur*, but we take comfort in knowing that not only is Donny leading davening in *Shamayim*, but his example and his legacy will continue to lead and inspire us. We are charged with the responsibility of trying to emulate Donny in serving as *shluchoi tzibbur*. May his *neshamah* have an *aliyah* as a result of the learning that takes place through the Shavuos Shema Koleinu!

# Table Of Contents

## Torah From Our Roshei Yeshiva

<b>Why Was the Torah Forced Upon Us?</b> - Rabbi Hershel Schachter ('58)	· 6
<b>Eating Dairy On Shavuos</b> - Rabbi Michael Taubes ('76)	· 9
<b>Precision In Our Avodas Hashem</b> - Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen	· 14
<b>Tachanun During The Days Following Shavuos</b> - Rabbi Menachem Genack ('65)	· 16
<b>Seven Weeks Of Seven Days: Making Our Time Meaningful</b> - Rabbi Baruch Simon ('85)	· 19
<b>Memories That Last A Lifetime</b> - Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz ('95)	· 22
<b>Wide Awake On A Sleepless Night: Hama'avir Sheina Mei'eini</b> -Rabbi Etan Schnall ('99)	· 25
<b>Not Right Or Left, Rather Up Or Down</b> - Rabbi Eli Belizon ('00)	· 28

## Torah From Our Rabbeim

<b>What Is So Special About Shavuos</b> - Rabbi Shimon Schenker	· 31
<b>The Value Of Silence</b> - Rabbi Dov Emerson	· 33
<b>Penimiyus, Chitzoniyus, and the Aseres Hadibros</b> - Rabbi Tanchum Cohen	· 36
<b>Elimalech's Mission</b> - Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson	· 39
<b>The Forty Ninth's Kinyan Hatorah</b> - Rabbi Netanel Danto	· 44
<b>Megillas Rus: A Powerful Message For Our Current Crisis</b> - Rav Avraham Shulman	· 46
<b>The Power Of Sincere Tefillah</b> - Rabbi Baruch Gopin	· 49
<b>Limmud Torah: The Holiest Of Holies</b> - Rabbi Daniel Konigsberg	· 51
<b>Talmud Torah And Drafting Yeshivah Students Into The Army</b> - Rabbi Yisrael Apfel	· 54

# **Table Of Contents**

<b>What Are We Saying?</b> - Rabbi Mordechai Brownstein .....	58
<b>The Name Game: An Exploration Of Names In Megillas Rus</b> - Mr. Murray Sragow .....	61

## **Torah From Our Alumni**

<b>From "Man" To "Mon"</b> - Dovid Wartelsky ('20) .....	63
<b>Hallel With Or Without A Berachah</b> - Moshe Neiss ('68) .....	65
<b>Torah And Kibbud Av Vi'eim</b> - Shua Pariser ('20) .....	67
<b>Something To Celebrate</b> - Zack Kaufman ('13) .....	69
<b>Shavuos: A Time Of Jewish Pride</b> - Zack Steiner ('17) .....	71
<b>Don't Be Afraid To Start</b> - YUHSB Dorm Staff .....	75

## **Torah From Our Talmidim**

<b>Matan Torah And "Present Theory"</b> - Shneur Agronin ('21) .....	76
<b>Be Free</b> - Yaakov Weinstock ('22).....	78
<b>The Enigma of Shavuos: Its Lack of Mitzvos and Focus on the Spiritual</b> - Yosef Weiner ('23) .....	80
<b>Acceptance of Torah: A Voluntary Decision</b> - Yonatan Burns ('22) ....	82
<b>Simchas Sefirah</b> - Isaac Cohen ('23) .....	84
<b>Megillas Rus: Priorities In Tzedakah</b> - Oriel Inzlicht ('21) .....	86
<b>Cheesecake For Your Seudah?</b> - Elisha Price ('23) .....	89
<b>The Special Connection Between Food And Shavuos</b> - Yisroel Hochman ('21) .....	92
<b>The Importance Of Achdus</b> - Avraham Friedenberg ('22) .....	94
<b>Find Your Niche</b> - Yehuda Emerson ('22) .....	96

# **Table Of Contents**

<b>Rav Gifter On What Our Thoughts Should Be Over Shavuos -</b>	
Akiva Kra ('21) .....	98
<b>Why Eat Dairy On Shavuos? - Moshe Lieberman ('24) .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Torah On One Foot - Natan Horowitz ('23) .....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Understanding The Importance Of The Fifty Days Between</b>	
<b>Pesach and Shavuos - Eitan Rochwarger ('23) .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>The Message Of Atzeres - Yeshurin Sorscher ('21) .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Na'aseh Vinishma and Judgement Day - Samuel Gorman ('21) .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Milk and Meat At the Same Meal: An In-Depth Look Into</b>	
<b>The Rama's Opinion About Milk On Shavuos - Meir Morell ('22) .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Echoes In Tanach: Shavuos - Aryeh Klein ('22) &amp; Avidan Loike ('22) ..</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Why Do We Eat Cheesecake On Shavuos? - Ezra Schechter ('22) .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Timeless Lessons Of Har Sinai - Yosef Flamenbaum ('21) .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>The Fight To Stay Up All Night - Dov Hochman ('23) .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>The Ten Commandments - Elijah Alayev ('24) .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>The Significance of Matan Torah - Yitzchak Hagler ('22) .....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Mussar Moments: Shavuos - Max Korenman ('22) &amp; Avidan</b>	
<b>Loike ('22) .....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>What Is Megillas Rus Doing Here? - Yisrael-Dovid Rosenberg ('23) ..</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Balancing Act - Aaron Rouhani ('22) .....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>The Meaning Of True Ameilus - Shimi Kaufman ('21) .....</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>The Two Shofars - Aaron Sisser ('23) .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Finding Inspiration For Our Present From Events In Our</b>	
<b>Past - Alexander Cooper ('24) .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>The Great Combination - Daniel Toth ('24) .....</b>	<b>137</b>

# Torah From Our Roshei Yeshivah

## Why Was The Torah Forced Upon Us?

*Rabbi Herschel Schachter ('58)*  
*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

Before God was prepared to give His *Torah* to the Jewish people, He first wanted to know whether they were prepared to accept it. With great enthusiasm the Jews expressed their desire to both accept and observe all of the laws of the *Torah*. Then, according to Talmudic tradition (*Shabbos* 88a), God pressured the Jewish people to accept the *Torah*, and forced it upon them against their wishes.

The commentaries on the Talmud all wonder why it was necessary to force the *Torah* upon the Jews if they had already enthusiastically expressed their willingness to accept it? The *Medrash Tanchuma* (to *Parshas Noach*) elaborates upon this *aggada* and distinguishes between the different parts of the *Torah*. The people were prepared to accept both God's written *Torah*, and all the *halachos liMoshe miSinai* – transmitted directly from God. Their response to Moshe was that “*kol asher diber Hashem na'aseh*” - that all that God had said we are prepared to accept. But the bulk of the Oral *Torah* is really what the Talmud and the Rambam refer to as “*divrei Sofrim*”, *halachos* which were developed over the centuries with much rabbinic input. The rabbis were licensed to employ the various “*middos shehaTorah nidreshes bahem*” to read (so to speak) “in between the lines” of the *Torah* in order to present a fuller picture of each of the *mitzvos*. This the Jews at *Har Sinai* were not prepared to accept. They felt that this was not Divine! This is a human *Torah*, and all humans can err. Why should they agree to be subservient to the idea of other human beings? Who says that another is so much more intelligent than I? Each Jew should be entitled to interpret the law according to his own understanding!

It was this part of the *Torah* that God had to force upon us. Whether we like

it or not, God expects us to follow the *positions* set forth by the rabbis in interpreting the *Torah*. Not until years later, after the story of Purim occurred, did the Jewish people as a whole fully accept this aspect of rabbinic authority. It was at that time that Ezra and the *Anshei Kneses Hagedolah* set up the entire system of the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* as we know it today. They formulated the text for all blessings and prayers, *kiddush* and *havdalah*, the system of thirty-nine categories of *melachah*, etc., along with many rabbinic enactments. *Klal Yisroel* at the period of the beginning of the second temple wholeheartedly accepted all of these formulations and innovations of their rabbonim.

This is the significance of the expression we use (from the Rambam's formulation), that we believe (*ani maamin*) that the *Torah* as it is observed today, is an accurate transmission of that Divine *Torah* which was given to Moshe *Rabbeinu*. This added phrase, "as it is observed today", implies exactly this idea – to include all of those *halachos* where there was rabbinic input. We have "*emunas chachomim*". We believe that throughout all the generations there was an invisible Divine assistance given to the rabbis to develop the *halachah* in a correct fashion.

The Talmud (*Menachos* 29b) records an *aggada* that when God showed Moshe *Rabbeinu* a vision of the rabbis of future generations, Moshe became troubled with Rabbi Akiva. By the time of Rabbi Akiva, the *halachah* had already so developed, it seemed to Moshe as if this was not really the *Torah* he was given. Moshe was very upset over the distortion, until he heard a student ask Rabbi Akiva - what is the source of a certain *halachah*, and Rabbi Akiva responded that that was a "*halacha liMoshe miSinai*". In other words, all of the *Torah*, even in the days of Rabbi Akiva as well as today, is a legitimate development of *Toras Moshe*, based on the use of the "*middos*", and therefore everything is implicitly "included" in what was given to Moshe. He was given the text with the "*middos*", and when applying these "*middos*" to the text, all the details of the *halachah* as we know it today follow automatically. The "*middos*" simply guide the rabbis in their task of reading "in between the lines", in order to obtain a fuller picture of each *mitzvah*.

In the *berachah* one recites after an *aliyah* we praise God for having given us his *Toras Emes*, which is a reference to the text of the *Torah Shebichsav*, as well as for having implanted in our midst ("*nota besochenu*") the ability to further develop the "living" *Torah* ("*chayei olam*") with the aid of the "*middos*" and through rabbinic input (see *Orach Chayim* 149:10 and Gra

nos. 27, 28). This *berachah* was composed after the period of the *Anshei Kneses Hagedolah*, at which time *Klal Yisroel* came to realize – without any coercion – the immense value of the “*divrei sofrim*”; that the ability to have rabbinic input is what keeps the *Torah* in constant touch with an ever-changing world.

Of course, the application of those “*middos*” is a science unto itself, which is only mastered by a small handful of qualified individuals in each generation. And the new additional *halachos* that read “in between the lines” have to “fit in” with “the spirit” of the rest of the *Torah*, which again can only be fully sensed by those few qualified individuals who have a proper sense of what “the spirit of the law” is!

## Eating Dairy on Shavuos

*Rabbi Michael Taubes ('76)*  
*Rosh Yeshiva, YUHSB*

Unlike all our other *yomim tovim*, the holiday of *Shavuos* is unique in that outside the *Beis Hamikdash*, no specific *mitzvos* are assigned to it. Over the years, however, various customs have developed in *Klal Yisrael* which are in fact particular to this special *yom tov*. In discussing some of the details relating to *Shavuos*, the Rama (*Orach Chayim* 494:3) writes that it is customary in some places to eat dairy products on the first day of *yom tov*. He then suggests that the reason for this custom may be connected to the reason for the practice of setting aside two cooked food items on the night of *Pesach* as part of the *Seder* table, which is done, as noted by the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (114b), and codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Chametz Umatzah* 8:1) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*ibid.* 473:4), in order to commemorate the two *korbanos* brought in the afternoon of *Erev Pesach* (the fourteenth of *Nissan*) in advance of the *Seder*, namely, the *Korban Pesach* and the *Korban Chagigah*. The *Shulchan Aruch* there notes that the two items customarily used for this commemoration on *Pesach* are a piece of meat and an egg. Similarly regarding *Shavuos*, the Rama quoted above explains, the custom to have a dairy meal relates to a commemoration of that which was offered in connection with this *yom tov*, namely, the *korban* known as the *Shtei Halechem*, the Two Loaves offering, as elaborated upon by the *Magen Avraham* (*ibid.* 494:7) and the *Machatzis Hashekel* (*ibid.* No. 7). Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Shu"t Igros Moshe Orach Chaim* 1:160) discusses this idea of establishing a commemoration for holiday *korbanos*, and he also explains why no formal requirement was established by Chazal for *Shavuos*, as one was for *Pesach*, but he writes that it is certainly proper to observe this as a custom.

This special *Shavuos* offering, as its name suggests, included two loaves of bread which were baked from the season's new harvest of wheat, as described in the *Torah* (*Vayikra* 23:16-21); the details of this offering are further described in the *Gemara* in *Menachos* (83b-84a), and are codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Temidin Umusafin* 8:1-21). Since the *Yerushalmi* in *Pesachim* (6:4, 43a) indicates that one should not have the same bread on the table when eating meat that one has had on the table when eating dairy, and presumably, vice versa (even though the bread itself, of course, is *pareve*), a ruling quoted by the *Tur* (*Yoreh Deah* 91) and codified by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*ibid.* No. 4), it becomes necessary, when eating both a

dairy meal and a meat meal, to have two separate loaves of bread, one for each meal, as described by the *Aruch Hashulchan* (*ibid.* No. 15), who asserts that this is the widespread practice. The *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chayim* *ibid.* No. 8) also asserts that it is forbidden to use the same bread to eat with both meat and dairy, as does the *Mishnah Berurah* (*ibid.* No. 14). Consequently, the Rama goes on to explain, if one will eat a dairy meal on *Shavuos*, in addition to the regular meat meal appropriate for every *yom tov*, one will have to have a total of two separate loaves on the table. Since one's table today, in a certain sense, takes the place of the *mizbeiach* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, as noted by the *Gemara* in *Berachos* (55a), among other places, by bringing two loaves to the table on *Shavuos* it is as if one is bringing two loaves to the *mizbeiach*, and he is thereby commemorating the *Shtei Halechem* offering.

The aforementioned *Machatzis Hashekel* spells this out clearly, as does the *Mishnah Berurah* cited above; the *Magen Avraham* (*ibid.* No. 9) writes that the bread must thus be made specifically out of wheat, as were the *Shtei Halechem* loaves, according to the instructions of the *Torah* (*Vayikra* *ibid.* 17). The *Kaf Hachayim* (*ibid.* No. 66) adds that the *gematria* (numerical value) of the Hebrew word for wheat (*chittah*), which is 22, hints at the 22 Hebrew letters used to write the *Torah*, the giving of which we of course celebrate on *Shavuos*. This is thus one source for the custom to have a dairy meal on *Shavuos*, and it is clearly intended to be eaten *in addition to* a meat meal; the general requirement to eat meat on *yom tov* is recorded by the Rambam (*Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:17-18), among others, is elaborated upon by the *Yam Shel Shlomo* in *Beitzah* (2:5), and is codified by the *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim* 529:3). The *Darkei Teshuvah* (*Yoreh Deah* *ibid.* No. 19) discusses this custom to eat dairy products on *Shavuos* at some length, and he too indicates that one must also eat meat on *Shavuos*, citing, among other sources, a *Mishnah* and a *Gemara* in *Chullin* (83a) which implies that most people eat a lot of meat on *Shavuos*, and he concludes that the proper practice is to eat a meat meal on the night of *Shavuos* and then both a dairy meal and a meat meal during the day of *Shavuos*.

It is interesting to note that the aforementioned Rama indicates that the custom is to eat a dairy meal and then a meat meal, in that specific order; this presumably is based on the fact that if one were to eat the meat meal first, one would have to wait for a long time before eating the dairy meal, as discussed by a later *Gemara* in *Chullin* (105a), and codified by the Rambam (*Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros* 9:28) and by the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh Deah* *ibid.* No.1; see also *Shach* No. 8, *Taz* No. 2 and *Darkei Teshuvah* No. 6). The *Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim* 494:6), while accepting the custom to eat a

dairy meal on *Shavuos*, also cautions one to be careful not to come to violate any prohibitions (relating to eating meat and dairy) by observing this custom. The *Chok Yaakov* (*ibid.* No. 11), however, quotes from the *Kol Bo* (end of No. 106) that there are those who eat dairy products at a *Shavuos* meal (following a meat meal) without waiting for the normal amount of time which one usually waits after eating meat before eating dairy, noting that they rely on a certain leniency which is not usually accepted, because they want to observe this custom of eating dairy on *Shavuos*. He also quotes one authority who suggests a reason to allow one to eat dairy and meat products (separately) at the very same meal on *Shavuos*, but he himself concludes that one should not follow these lenient views, adding that the consensus of the *Poskim* is that even on *Shavuos* one must follow the same stringencies regarding meat and dairy that one always follows.

The *Be'er Heitev* (*ibid.* No. 8) also quotes this leniency from the *Kol Bo* which allows not waiting as long between meat and dairy on *Shavuos* as one normally does, but he concludes that it is preferable to specifically eat a dairy meal first and then have a meat meal, noting that following this order actually hints at the fact that the Jews were given the *Torah*, which obviously is commemorated on *Shavuos*, because it demonstrates that we now have certain fixed laws which must be observed. The *Pri Megadim* (*Eishel Avraham* *ibid.* No. 6) rules that one should not allow on *Shavuos* anything that is not allowed all year long, and one must rather wait the full amount of time after eating meat before eating dairy; he forcefully asserts elsewhere (*Mishbetzos Zahav* *ibid.* No. 1) that one must do everything regarding meat and milk on *Shavuos* that one always does, and that if one does otherwise, the negative result of his conduct outweighs the positive result of obeying this custom on *Shavuos*. He concludes that particularly nowadays, when we are in *galus* and still awaiting redemption, it is better to be stricter about these matters. This view is quoted as well by the *Mishnah Berurah* (*ibid.* No. 14) and the *Kaf HaChayim* (*ibid.* No. 65), and the *Aruch Hashulchan* (*ibid.* No. 5) also rules that one can not be lenient on *Shavuos* in these matters.

It should be pointed out that there are numerous other reasons suggested as to why this custom to eat dairy products on *Shavuos* is observed, and according to these reasons, which do not focus on the *Shte HaLechem* offering, there is really no need to have a whole extra meal on *Shavuos* with another loaf of bread, and it is sufficient simply to eat something dairy at some point during the day, which is the idea favored by the aforementioned *Darkei Teshuvah* (*ibid.*, end of No. 19). For example, the *Magen Avraham* (*ibid.* No. 6) quotes from the *Zohar* that the seven weeks leading up to *Shavuos* are comparable to the seven day purification period for a wom-

an who has had a discharge of blood, and, as the *Gemara* in *Bechoros* (6b) indicates, there is a kind of biological connection between blood and milk, which represent, according to *Kabballah*, the attributes of judgement and mercy respectively. By eating dairy products on *Shavuos*, then, we are thus drawing attention to the purification process of the Jewish people and the advent of *Hashem's* attribute of mercy, as the *Aruch Hashulchan* cited just above explains a greater length. The *Chok Yaakov* (*ibid.* No. 9) quotes from the *Kol Bo* (No. 52), as does the *Kaf Hachayim* (*ibid.* No. 60), that there is a custom to eat honey and drink milk on *Shavuos* because the *Torah* is compared to honey and milk in a *possuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (4:11; see *Metzudas Dovid* there *d"h Nofes*), and the *Mishnah Berurah* (*ibid.* No. 11) quotes this as well; the *Pri Chodosh* (*ibid.* No. 1) also quotes this idea from the *Kol Bo*, while he himself cites a *Gemara* in *Taanis* (7a) which indicates that the *Torah* is compared to milk, among other things, and it is thus customary to eat milk products on the day on which we celebrate the giving of the *Torah*.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (*ibid.* No. 12) also quotes yet another explanation, suggesting that after the Jewish people accepted the *Torah* on *Har Sinai* and returned to their tents, they were able to eat immediately only dairy products, because preparing meat, now that they had been given all the laws relating to slaughtering and the other details of *kashrus*, including the laws relating to what types of utensils to use, would require a lot of time and effort, so they decided that for that moment they would eat dairy, and this is what we commemorate. Rav Shlomo Zevin, in his *Sefer Hamoadim Behalachah* in the section about *Shavuos* (Chapter 1, page 311, Note 41), adds that according to the *Gemara* in *Shabbos* (86b), the *Torah* was given on a *Shabbos*, in which case the people could not slaughter anything in order to have meat because slaughtering is a prohibited act on *Shabbos*; they therefore had to eat dairy products on that very first *Shavuos*, and we commemorate this fact by also eating dairy on *Shavuos*. In the actual text there, though, Rav Zevin also notes that one must eat meat as well because of the general requirement to eat meat on *Yom Tov*, as discussed above. The *Sefer Hatoda'ah* (*Sivan/Chag HaShavuos*, page 280, *d"h lamah ochlin*), who quotes several of the aforementioned reasons for this custom to eat dairy on *Shavuos*, also cites an authority who suggests that prior to the giving of the *Torah*, the consumption of milk (and milk products) was forbidden altogether, because milk originates as a part of a living creature ("*Eiver Min HaChai*"), the consumption of which was prohibited to all descendants of Noach (see *Sanhedrin* 56a-b and 59b; see also Rambam, *Hilchos Melachim* 9:1, 10-13). It was only when the *Torah* was given that milk became a permitted food item, as discussed by the *Gemara* in *Bechoros* mentioned

above; we therefore eat dairy products on *Shavuos* to highlight this idea.

The *Midrash Shochar Tov* on *Tehillim* (8:2) records that when Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the *Torah*, the *Malachim* tried to prevent him from taking it, implying that they would be able to better observe it, but Hashem responded by pointing out that when *Malachim* visited *Avraham Avinu*, they ate meat and dairy together, as the *Torah* implies (*Bereishis* 18:8), which is something every Jewish child knows is forbidden. When the *Malachim* had no response to this challenge to their position, Hashem gave Moshe the *Torah*. We thus indeed find that one of the *pesukim* which forbids the consumption of meat and dairy together (*Shemos* 34:26) is followed immediately by Hashem's commandment to Moshe concerning the *Torah* and the covenant at *Har Sinai*. This idea is also found in the commentary of the *Da'as Zekeinim MiBa'alei HaTosfos* (*Bereishis* *ibid.*). Rav Moshe Shternbuch, in his *Sefer Moadim Uzemanim* (Volume 4 No. 319), records and analyzes this story, and suggests that this may be another reason why we have both a meat meal and a dairy meal on *Shavuos*, namely, that our observance of the distinction between meat and dairy is precisely what silenced the *Malachim's* objection to our receiving the *Torah*. Rav Shternbuch also says that this may explain why the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (68b) indicates that there is a particular requirement to eat food in general on *Shavuos*, above and beyond that which exists on every *yom tov*; one may suggest that we therefore specifically have an *extra* meal on *Shavuos*, which must be done if one is to have both meat and dairy, so as to fulfill this requirement.

There are also various other hints at this custom to eat dairy products on *Shavuos*. The *Shelah*, for example (*Maseches Shevuos, Amod HaTorah, d"h Ashrei Ayin*), notes that two of the *pesukim* in the *Torah* from which we derive prohibitions concerning meat and dairy (*Shemos* 23:19 and 34:26), begin with a reference to *bikkurim*, the offering of the first fruits of one's harvest to Hashem, which may be brought starting on *Shavuos*, as indicated by the *Mishnah* in *Bikkurim* (1:3), among other places, and codified by the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Bikkurim* 2:6). The *Aruch Hashulchan* cited above points out that the Hebrew word for milk ("*chalav*") is hinted at by the first letters of three words which introduce the *Torah's* presentation of the *Korban Mussaf* for *Shavuos* (*Bamidbar* 28:26), while the aforementioned *Sefer Ha-Toda'ah*, who notes that the *gematria* of this word is forty, the number of days Moshe spent on *Har Sinai*, as well as the *Sefer Ta'amei Haminhagim* (*Inyanei Chag HaShavuos*, No. 622-625) bring additional sources which hint at the practice of eating dairy on *Shavuos*.

## Precision In Our Avodas Hashem

*Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen  
Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

*Based on a shiur given in the YU Beis Medresh*

On *Shavuos*, we celebrate *Hashem* giving us the *Aseres Hadibros* at *Har Sinai*. The first words of the *Aseres Hadibros* are “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha, asher hotzaisicha mei’Eretz Mitzrayim*” - I am *Hashem* your God, who took you out from *Eretz Mitzrayim*. Everyone asks why *Hashem* taking us out of *Mitzrayim* is mentioned here - if anything, the *Luchos* should say that *Hashem* is the one who created heaven and earth! What does *Hashem* being the one who took us out of *Mitzrayim* prove?

The answer may be that there is no *safek* that man did not create the world. If the sun, moon, and stars were created out of nothing, it certainly was not mankind who did it. That, anyone could tell you! But, *asher hotzaisicha mei’Eretz Mitzrayim* speaks to *hashgacha pratis*, *Hashem’s* involvement directly in our lives. To believe that *Hashem* was directly involved in taking us out of *Mitzrayim* requires *emunah* and *bitachon*, and for this reason, *Hashem* reminds us of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* directly after the *mitzvah* of *emunah*.

To believe in *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* means to believe that *Hashem* cares about the minutiae of our lives as well as big-picture world events. This is a basic *nekudah*; nobody who believes in *Hashem* doubts that he is the one who created the world, and who keeps it running. But, who said *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* cares if I make a *Birchas Hamapil* before going to sleep, or a *berachah acharonah* after drinking water? *Hashem* cares about managing the Coronavirus, not the little details of my life! But, the *possuk* does not say *Anochi Hashem Elokecha asher bara shamayim va’aretz* - I am *Hashem* your God who created heaven and earth. *Emunah* means believing in the *Hashem* who took us out of *Mitzrayim*, in the *Hashem* who is involved in our lives and cares about us personally.

I was once in a chemistry class, and I was supposed to transfer some chemical to a beaker with tweezers. I decided that I didn’t want to drop the tweezers, so I used my hand instead. The teacher came over to me and told me that I needed to use the tweezers. I explained to him that I was using my hand because I was scared I would be clumsy with the tweezers. The teacher responded that using the hand would make a difference of .01

grams, as some of the chemical would remain on my hands. Then, I said a terrible thing: “big deal!” The teacher threw me out right there! I didn’t mean to be disrespectful, but I thought, what difference could .01 grams make? If “close enough” isn’t good enough in math and science, how much more so should it not be good enough for us in our *avodas Hashem*! One “*amein yihei shmei rabbah*”, one *berachah*, one tiny *halachah*, can elevate a person to unimaginable heights! In science, there is no such thing as “approximately”; to say it is *nivul peh*. Everything must be exact. We must also be exacting in our *avodas Hashem*. *Anochi Hashem Elokecha* means believing that *Hashem* cares about every single detail of our lives, and every single *nekudah* of our *avodah*. This *Shavuos*, we should strive to work on our precision in our *avodas Hashem*.

## Tachanun During the Days Following Shavuos

*Rabbi Menachem Genack ('65)*  
*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

*Based on a shiur from YUTorah*

There are different *minhagim* regarding whether or not to say *tachanun* in the days which follow *Shavuos*. The *Gemara* (*Chagigah* 17a) quotes in the name of Rabbi Elazar that a *hekesh* between *Pesach* and *Shavuos* teaches that just as on *Pesach*, one can make up missing one of the *korbanei hachag* (such as the *chagigah* or *shalmei simchah*) all seven days of the *chag* (called *tashlumin*), so too on *Shavuos*, one can bring the *korbanei hachag* for the whole week afterwards, even though the *yom tov* itself is only one day. The Rambam quotes this ruling *lihalachah* (*Hilchos Chagigah* 1:7). This *halachah* can be interpreted in one of two ways: one can either understand that there is a special *din* which allows the bringing of the *tashlumin* for the whole week after *Shavuos*, even though the days themselves are days of *chol*, or one can interpret this *din* differently, that the *hekesh* teaches us that there is still some aspect of *kedushas hachag* for the week after *Shavuos* as relates to the *korbanos*. One *nafka minah* which relates to this issue is whether or not we say *tachanun* during the days which follow *Shavuos*.

In many *yeshivos*, *tachanun* is generally recited after *Shavuos*, while the *chassidim* do not do so. The source to not say *tachanun* is a comment of the Ravyah (*Chagigah* 494), who quotes that one should not recite *nefilas apayim* for the seven days after *Atzeres*, for precisely this reason that there remains a *kedushah* on the days when the *tashlumin* can be brought. There is an amazing *teshuvah* of the *Chok Yaakov* who rules that if a person did not recite *Shehechyanu* on *Shavuos*, he may do so for all seven days of *tashlumin* afterwards. What emerges from this *chiddush* is that the week after *Shavuos* is still called *Shavuos* in a limited sense.

This issue may depend on a *sugya* in *Moed Katan* (19a). There, the *mishnah* says in the name of Rabbi Eliezer that from the day when the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, *Shavuos* is considered like *Shabbos* regarding *hilchos aveilus*, meaning that it does not cause *aveilus* to end early as other *yomim tovim* do. The reason for this is that *Shavuos* is no longer a seven day holiday after the *churban*, as there are no more *korbanos*, and as such the days

of *tashlumin* are irrelevant. The *Chachomim* in the *mishnah* disagree, and maintain that *Shavuos* does cause *aveilus* to end even after the *churban*. The reason for this opinion would appear to be that the days of *tashlumin* maintain some level of *kedushah* inherent in the days themselves, even without the *korbanos* being practically brought. For this reason, the *Chachomim* maintain that *Shavuos* is still considered a seven day *chag* in regards to being *mevatel aveilus*. Thus, this *machlokes tana'im* would appear to revolve around this same debate as to whether the *kedushah* of the days of *tashlumin* is based on the practical ability to bring the *korbanos*, or if it is part of the inherent status of the day.

There could be another *nafka minah* in this debate as to whether the days of *tashlumin* have any inherent *kedushah* nowadays. The *Gemara* quotes a *machlokes* between Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Chisda as to whether *tashlumin* is *tashlumin dirishon* or *tashlumin zeh bazeh*. What this means is as follows: if a person was unable to bring a *korban* on the first day of *yom tov* due to some physical defect, can he make up the *korban* later if he was later healed? If we say that *tashlumin* is *tashlumin dirishon*, this means that the *tashlumin* serves to make up a *korban* missed on the first day of *yom tov*. Thus, if the person was *patur* from bringing the *korban* on the first day of *yom tov* due to some disability, he is *patur* from bringing *tashlumin*, as he was not *chayiv* to bring a *korban* on the first day of *chag*, and the whole purpose of *tashlumin* is to make up the *korban* from the first day of *yom tov*. However, if we say *tashlumin zeh lazeh*, then we would obligate such a person to bring a *korban tashlumin* even if he was *patur* on the first day, since the *tashlumin* obligates a new *korban* each day as long as one was not already brought. The *Gemara* quotes this discussion in regards to *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, but *Tosfos* takes up the issue as to whether it applies to *Shavuos* as well. *Tosfos* assumes that nobody would maintain the opinion of *tashlumin zeh lazeh* on *Shavuos*, where only the first day is actually *yom tov*, and it would be illogical to say that the days of *tashlumin* generate their own *chiyuv* of a *korban*. However, other *rishonim* imply that we would say *tashlumin zeh lazeh* even by *Shavuos*, and that someone who was *patur* from bringing the *korban* on *Shavuos* could bring it the week afterwards if he later became *chayiv*. This *machlokes rishonim* would again seem to be based on this same discussion; *Tosfos* would maintain that the *kedushah* of the days of *tashlumin* for *Shavuos* comes from the fact that one can make up the *korban* of *Shavuos*, and as such, no *tanna* would maintain that the days of *tashlumin* could generate their own *chiyuv korban*. However, the other *rishonim* who argue on *Tosfos* would apparently maintain that there is a *kedushah* inherent to the days of *tashlumin* for *Shavuos*, and thus, the opinion which maintains *tashlumin zeh lazeh* would say that even the *tashlumin*

of *Shavuos* generates its own *korban*. This would once again appear to be the basis of the Ravyah's opinion not to say *tachanun* during the days of *tashlumin*.

## Seven Weeks of Seven Days - Making Our Time Meaningful

*Rabbi Baruch Simon ('85)*  
*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS*

Shavuot is the only holiday in the Jewish calendar which is not given a date. It always falls out on the 6th of *Sivan*, but is described as being the day after counting seven weeks of seven days from *Pesach*. A very similar phraseology can be found in the laws concerning the *mitzvah* of *yovel*, where we are commanded to count seven sets of seven years, until the fiftieth year of *yovel*.

The commentaries ask if there is a *mitzvah* for us to count forty-nine years to *yovel* like we count for *Sefiras Ha'omer* leading up to *Shavuot*. *Tosfos* in *Menachos* (64b) explains that there is an obligation upon *beis din* to count each year with a *berachah* "*al sefiras shnei hayovel*" - on the counting of the years of the *yovel*. The Ramban in *Parshas Emor* questions whether *beis din* has to verbally count the years, or just keep them in mind. The *Chizkuni* writes that since the obligation is on *beis din* and not the individual, no *berachah* is recited.

By contrast, we learn about the obligation to count the days and weeks of the *omer* in two different places. The repetition of the *mitzvah* implies that there are two parts to *Sefiras Ha'omer*. There is the obligation of *beis din* to count without a *berachah*, and the obligation of the individual to count with a *berachah*. The *Sifrei* on *Parshash Re'eh* supports this idea based on the two sources of *Sefiras Ha'omer* (*Devarim* 16:9 and *Vayikra* 23:15), pointing out that one *possuk* has the command to count in the plural, while the other has it in the singular. The singular form in the *possuk* in *Devarim* refers to the communal counting of the *beis din*, and the plural form used in *Vayikra* refers to the obligation on each individual.

The Abarbanel points out that number seven features prominently in Judaism. *Pesach* and *Sukkos* are seven days, *bris milah* (circumcision) is after seven days, and *Sefiras Ha'omer* consists of seven weeks of seven days. The idea behind this is that time in this world is precious and must be used properly. When we find in *Tehillim* 90:10, "The days of our years are seventy," we realize that this became the paradigm of a lifetime in Tanach. Thank God, people live longer nowadays, but Judaism constantly gives us catego-

ries and classifications of sevens to remind us that these are microcosms of life; the week and the holiday. That is why we always find sevens in the *Torah*; they are all constant reminders of the ticking clock. As such, the Abarbanel explains that people should be more conscientious of losing time than losing money.

*Yovel* also represents the progression of life. The 49 years represent the productive years of youth, while 50 represents the slowing down of aging. Men return to their fields, to the dust from which they came. The Abarbanel explains that these *mitzvos* are constant reminders of the finite nature of life, and that we must constantly strive to be productive in our lives. This fits with the dual obligations of *Sefiras Ha'omer*, the responsibility of the individual and *beis din*. In every one of us there exists this dichotomy of personal versus communal life. We must always be involved in both spheres, because as life progresses we must take into account what we have done for ourselves and for others. This is the *sefiras hayachid* (individual counting) and *sefiras beis din* (communal counting). Sometimes, we forget one or the other. While some people give so much of themselves to the community that they neglect their own family, others are so wrapped up in themselves, obsessed with the *sefiras hayachid*, that they never give anything to the community. In the microcosm of our lives in the 49 days or years, we need to fulfill the communal accounting and the personal accounting. One must always make sure that he is active in both of these areas.

This duality of individual and communal responsibility can be seen elsewhere in the *Torah*. The *Ya'aros Devash* examines the difference between the curses in *Bechukosai* and in *Ki Savo*. The *Gemara (Megillah 31b)* says that the curses in *Bechukosai* were spoken by *Hashem*, while the curses in *Ki Savo* appear to be spoken from Moshe's vantage point. The curses in *Bechukosai* are because the Jewish people will have disgust for the *Torah* and commandments, as the *pesukim* begin "and if My laws have disgusted you" (*Vayikra 26:15*). In *Ki Savo*, we have an emphasis on doing the *mitzvos*, "to guard, to keep all My *mitzvos*" (*Devarim 28:1*). The curses in *Bechukosai* have to do with our personal attitude toward *Torah* and *mitzvos*, which is why it is spoken from *Hashem's* vantage point, as only He can know our innermost thoughts and feelings. The curses in *Ki Savo* are spoken from Moshe's vantage point, because a human being is only able to see whether someone is doing *mitzvos*. *Hashem* is the One who can tell whether you are disgusted by the *mitzvah* or take pleasure in it. The Abarbanel writes that you have to fill up those "fifty years" of life. You are only going to be able to fill them up if you take pleasure in what you do. You have to make sure that you are enjoying the activities you are involved in for your personal and

communal obligations.

Sometimes people do things they don't enjoy, but as long as the general feeling is one of enjoyment and fulfillment, the years will be filled with individual and communal involvement. Everyone has to see in their life what they can contribute in a meaningful and enjoyable way. People serve *Hashem* as doctors, rabbis, and many other professions. There is room for everything, and everyone can contribute to the community with little expense to his personal life. If you don't find your niche in life, the "sevens" of the *Torah* serve as a constant reminder that the clock is ticking, as the Abarbanel points out.

The *Sefiras Ha'omer's* seven weeks of seven represents life. Just as the weeks fly by, life vanishes in the blink of an eye. *B'ezras Hashem*, everyone should merit to find in his life where he belongs. Rav Herschel Schachter explains, (based on the *Gemara* in *Chagigah* 5b) that *Hashem* sheds tears every day for misplaced people. He cries over people that are learning *Torah* and shouldn't be learning *Torah*, and people who aren't learning *Torah* but should be. The *mitzvah* of *yovel*, which represents the minimal 50 years of productivity, tells us that we have to fill our lives with meaning. The *Chizkuni* explains that filling our lives with meaning only comes from doing things both for our own personal lives and for the good of the community. The key is to find the proper balance between the two, filling all the years of our life with productivity.

We stand now shortly before the time of receiving the *Torah* on *Shavuos*. All seven weeks preceding *Shavuos* are considered preparation for accepting the *Torah*. They are a time of *teshuvah* (repentance) and *aveilus* (mourning), irrespective of the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students. These seven cycles remind and warn us of the passing of time. *Shavuos* is a time of introspection. It is an opportunity to look around us at where we are and where we are going. May we enjoy and gain from the full meaning of the *yom tov* of *Shavuos*.

## Memories That Last A Lifetime

*Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz ('95)*  
*Director Of Semicha, RIETS*

*Based on a Shiur from YUTorah*

What did *Har Sinai* look like during *Kabalas HaTorah*? If one asked a child, we would expect them to answer that the site was a beautiful one, covered in colorful flowers. After all, isn't that why we decorate our *shuls* with flowers every year on *Shavuos*, to recall how *Har Sinai* looked when we received the *Luchos*? But, what is interesting is that no *possuk* or *derashah* in the *Gemara* ever indicates that there were flowers or anything of the sort present at *Har Sinai* on the very first *Shavuos*. Rather, only a short passage from the *Medrash* points to such a detail, but it does not imply that the flowers constituted a significant part of *Kabalas HaTorah*.

In truth, if we really wanted to decorate our *shuls* appropriately for *Shavuos*, the most fitting objects to use would be large barrels, just as *Hashem* held *Har Sinai* above the *Bnei Yisroel* like a barrel in order to encourage them to accept the *Torah*, which is known to be a famously essential part of the overall experience of *Kabalas HaTorah*. Why exactly should we decorate our *shuls* with something which was seemingly not an important or notable part of *Shavuos*? If anything, flowers, which are not generally associated with desert scenery, are quite an inappropriate decoration to recall an event which took place in the Sinai desert!

There is a *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 68b) which discusses how *Shavuos* is best celebrated. This is part of an overall *machlokes* which focuses on how any *yom tov* should be celebrated - with activities centering around ourselves (physical enjoyment), or with those directed more toward *Hashem* (spiritual indulgences, such as learning)? Should *yom tov* in general feature both types of activities, each day split half and half between spiritual and physical enjoyments, or should one choose to focus entirely on only one type? While the *tannaim* disagree about this issue, they agree that the *yom tov* of *Shavuos* certainly requires physical celebrations, since, as the *Gemara* goes on to explain, we received the *Torah* on *Shavuos*. Seemingly, though, this sounds counterintuitive - shouldn't the *yom tov* which specifically focuses on the origin of our spiritual inheritance mandate a *total* focus on spiritually-centered activities?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky asks: there are two *mitzvos* associated with *Sefiras Ha'omer* - counting the fifty days between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, and counting the seven days. The name "*Shavuos*" itself means "weeks," a clear allusion to one form of the counting included in *Sefiras Ha'omer*, but one which seems to brush over the equally important element of counting the days. Why exactly does this *yom tov* have a name which doesn't seem to accurately represent what leads up to it?

A unified concept which may answer all of these questions is that the singular event of *Kabalas HaTorah* itself is secondary to what comes after it - our *Torah* observance. Indeed, there was such a monumental and dramatic moment in which we received the *Torah* and which deserves recognition in future generations, but even then, it was simply a means to an end. *Kabalas HaTorah* is *really* about how our reception of the *Torah* affects every single Jew's life, and this continued observance is more important than the singular moment of *Kabalas HaTorah* itself. The structure, values, and connection with *Hashem* that the *Torah* gives us will forever be greater than the moment when we received the *Torah*, which only took place to facilitate this relationship.

This can be illustrated through a *mashal*. When we look back at vacation photos, some thoughts might include how nice the scenery was, how luxurious the accommodations were, and what some of the trips we took were like. In other words, the memories are totally rooted in the past. But, when we look at photos of a *chasunah*, the first pictures of our newborn children, the reflections are completely different; every day *since* those events cements them as more significant and meaningful, as we grow in a relationship with a spouse or child. The memories are meaningful because of what they led to over time. Similarly, when it comes to *Shavuos*, the *yom tov* serves to remind us of how great we have become *since* the day we received the *Torah*, how our lives are rich with meaning and structure, and how we have become distinct as a people with such sterling qualities among all of humanity.

This idea can help us answer the above three questions. Why do we include flowers as *shul* decorations instead of something more apropos, such as barrels or kegs? We do so because the latter objects are static, unchanging, and only reference the *event* of *Kabalas HaTorah* itself. Flowers, however, are alive - they grow, bloom, change color, and produce offspring. That is much more representative of who we became *after* receiving the *Torah*, which is what *Shavuos* is all about.

Additionally, the *Gemara* instructs us to make a point of including physical celebrations of *Shavuos* out of recognition for life *after and as a result of Kabalas HaTorah*. *Shavuos* is not only a commemoration of the event itself, but of how our physical, daily lives have been impacted by the *Torah*.

We also call the *yom tov* itself by the weeks which precede it, not the days, since a very interesting and peculiar calendrical difference exists between counting fifty days and seven weeks (forty-nine days) from *Pesach*. Counting fifty days will take us to the 7th of *Sivan*, which, according to Rabbi Yosi, is when *Kabalas HaTorah*, the event, actually took place. But, seven weeks only takes us to the 6th of *Sivan*, one day before *Kabalas HaTorah*. Isn't it odd that, according to one opinion, we actually celebrate *Shavuos* not on the day which the apparent focal event of the holiday took place? The answer is that ultimately, *Kabalas HaTorah* is not the centerpiece of *Shavuos*. What *Shavuos* really focuses on is how we have been positively impacted by the *Torah* ever since *Kabalas HaTorah*, and as such, we refer to the holiday by the name which accurately reflects its prime focus - not an isolated event which took place 3300 years ago, but rather us, *Klal Yisroel*, our own lives, who we are today, and where we are ultimately heading in the future with our eternally applicable guide in hand.

## Wide-Awake on a Sleepless Night: Hama'avir Sheina Mei'ainai

Rabbi Etan Schnall ('99)

Maggid Shiur, SBMP/RIETS

Each morning, we recite the *Birchos Hashachar*, which culminate with the blessing of *Hamaavir Sheina M'ainai* – praising *Hashem* for removing sleep from our eyes as we begin a new day. *Halachah* dictates that one must not interrupt between this *berachah* and the *Yehi Ratzon tefillah* that follows; even *amen* is not recited by listeners (see *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim* 46:1). This indicates that the *tefillah* is an integral continuation of the *berachah*, even though the respective themes seem completely distinct. Moreover, the concluding *berachah*, *Hagomel Chasadim Tovim Li'amo Yisrael*, needs explanation. If we assume the great kindness highlighted here is the awakening of man, is it only the Jewish people who enjoy this *chessed*? Finally, why does the *berachah* of *Hama'avir Sheina M'ainai* not appear much earlier in our *Siddur*, if its theme mirrors that of *Modeh Ani* and *Elokai Neshamah*? Why is it even necessary after those sections have been said?

Rav Shimon Schwab (*Bereishis*, pg. 9) suggests that the “awakening” discussed in this *berachah* is of a spiritual nature, unlike the physical awakening that is already accounted for by earlier elements of the *tefillah*. Chazal indicate that *Matan Torah* represented a major shift towards the reality that existed for *Adam Harishon*. The Jews experienced a revelation that brought them closer to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* than man had even been since *Gan Eden*. “*Hashem* placed Adam in a slumber, and he fell asleep” (*Bereishis* 2:21) – yet the *Torah* never tells us that he awoke. This symbolically conveys that mankind forevermore slipped into a spiritual inertia; only *Klal Yisrael* emerged from this slumber when *Hashem* aroused them and spoke to them directly at *Har Sinai*.

This explains why the *Yehi Ratzon* centers on our engagement in the *Torah* and *mitzvos* that we received on *Shavuot*: “*shetargilainu bitorasecha vidabkeinu limitzvosecha*”. By forging His unique relationship with us at *Har Sinai*, indeed it is only *Klal Yisroel* that is the beneficiary of that transcendent *chessed*. The slumber removed from our eyes is of a spiritual nature, one that desensitizes our awareness of *Hakadosh Barchu Hu* in this world. Thus, the concluding *berachah* (*Gomel Chasadim Tovim*) is very much linked to the subject of the opening *berachah* (*Hama'avir Sheina M'ainai*; see also *Ma-*

*gen Avraham and Pri Megadim, Orach Chayim 46:5).*

For that reason, our *tefillos* are replete specifically with expressions of the clarity of vision that we enjoy or pray to be endowed with; for example, *vi-ha'eir eineinu bitorasecha*. We may feel sleepy after a long night of learning, but our *neshamos* are wide-awake from *Matan Torah* and our spiritual eyes are wide-open. Even if *Klal Yisrael* as a whole cannot perpetually maintain that level, we are imbued with a singular spiritual awareness that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz (see Rav Schwab on Prayer, pg. 39) offers a parable of an institute for individuals born blind. One volunteer was permitted to undergo a procedure to give him vision, but only for twenty-four hours. That one day allowed him to experience the world of color and light and the beauty of the world, but then he was blind once more. However, due to the new understanding and perspectives of the world that he gained, he was elected the head and advisor to all of his fellow patients. Similarly, the momentary glimpse of the Heaven and experience of *Hashem's* communications at *Har Sinai* distinguished a *Mamleches Kohanim Vigoy Kadosh*, even if the tests of time and the lengthy *Galus* have dimmed that perception.

Elsewhere, Rav Schwab (*Vezos Haberachah*, pg. 451) explains that this unique quality that distinguishes *Klal Yisrael* is exactly what was offered to the non-Jews who rejected it. After all, each nation that inquired about the *Torah* was told about a commandment of the Seven *Mitzvos Bnei Noach* and could have not rejected it (*Sifrei Vezos Haberachah*, 343). Rather, they were actually offered an inherent transformation and fusion with the *Torah*, but only the Jewish people assented. This was the essence of *Matan Torah*, forming the fundamental connection every Jew has with the *Torah* at the core of his *neshamah*. This connection is a spiritual drive and a basic yearning for *Hashem*. Though it is sometimes obscured by the *yetzer hara*, it cannot be extinguished.

Perhaps this is the significance of “*tisha yarchei leida*” in the song, *Echad Mi Yodeah* of the *Seder* night. Seemingly, the “nine months of pregnancy” is the only stanza without a correspondence unique to *Klal Yisrael* – all humans share this gestation period. Following *Matan Torah*, Rav Schwab explains, it is the study with the angel *in utero* and the accompanying revelations that achieves this internalized sense of spirituality (see also *Nefesh HaRav* pg. 72)

In another essay, Rav Schwab (*Va'eschanan* pg. 389) points to the fact that the revelation at *Har Sinai* is consistently underscored by the *pesukim* with a term for standing. “*Vayisyatzevu*” (*Shemos* 19:17) and “*vaya'amod ha'am*” (*ibid.* 20:18) are two examples. Indeed, the event is known as

"*Ma'amad Har Sinai.*" And yet, with so many other events in history and *halachah* where Hashem's presence is revealed, the result is the opposite. For example, when Eliyahu contests the false prophets on Har HaCarmel and God's fire descends from heaven, no one is left standing, for they are prostrated on the earth (*Melachim* 1, 18:28-39). In contrast, everything about *Matan Torah* points towards the "*amidah*" of *Klal Yisrael*. Hashem gave the Jews the special capacity to withstand the cataclysmic event and emerge from it a changed people. Many stand during *kriyas haTorah*, to recall this very point (*Shulcan Aruch Orach Chayim* 146:4).

This new identity, forged at *Matan Torah*, is the innate *kedushah* that is highlighted by the *mishnah* in *Avos* (3:14). Chazal teach us that all of humanity carries the special feature known as *Tzelem Elokim* – humans are created in the image of Hashem. However, *Klal Yisrael* are designated as *banim laMakom*, the children of Hashem. (Rav Schwab, *Pinchas* pg. 367). The inherent sanctity which this entails allows one to be spiritually alert in a world of slumber. And we thank Hashem, the *Ma'avir Sheina Me'einai*, for endowing the Jewish people with this great *chessed* at *Har Sinai*, at the culmination of our daily *berachos*.

## Not Right Or Left, Rather Up Or Down

Rabbi Eli Belizon ('00)  
Maggid Shiur, SBMP

*Based on a Sichos Mussar given in YU's Glueck Beis Medresh*

What if we had the opportunity to hear a fantastic *shiur klali* (general *shiur*) given by the greatest *Rosh Yeshiva* around? How would we prepare for it? We would ask, which *masechta* is the *shiur* given in? What are the *ma'areh mekomos*? How can I prepare for it? On *Shavuos*, we commemorate the greatest "*shiur klali*" in history - *Hashem* Himself gives the greatest *shiur* of all time to the *Bnei Yisroel*, giving them the *Torah*. And yet, there are seemingly none of the aforementioned preparations - no morning *seder*, no *maareh mekomos*, no specific intellectual preparation, nothing of the sort. The only things mentioned in the *Torah* concerning what we must do before this "*shiur*" is to separate from our wives, to avoid approaching within a certain radius of *Har Sinai*, and to, on the third day from beginning to observe these restrictions, sit by the mountain.

The *Medrash* famously says that *Hashem* held the mountain above the *Bnei Yisroel* like a barrel, forcing them to accept the *Torah*, yet this contradicts what the *Torah* asserts itself, that the *Bnei Yisroel* took the obligations found therein upon themselves willingly. Various answers are given to this issue, but there seems to be a greater issue - for what reason do the *rishonim* feel that *Hashem* holding the mountain above the Jews must be an act of coercion at all? Many of the *meforshim* note that many of our *minhagim* at weddings seem to mimic what happens in this week's *parshah*. The *Shitah Mekubetzes* points out that the *chuppah* represents how *Hashem* held *Har Sinai* above the *Bnei Yisroel*, as the *Medrash* says. But, if this is true, how could it be that *Hashem* doing so was an act of forceful acceptance? Surely a *chuppah*, and a *chasunah* in general, is a very willing and very joyous occasion, not an act of coercion! How can we resolve this with the view that *Hashem* lifting the mountain was meant to force *Bnei Yisroel* to accept the *Torah*?

The answer seems to lie in *Maseches Avodah Zarah*. In the beginning of the *masechta*, the *Gemara* says that the *goyim* approached *Hashem* and complained that their lot was an unfair one - *Hashem* had merely asked them if they wanted to accept the *Torah*, but *never* forced them to via holding a mountain above their heads! What does *Hashem* say in response? He admits

that their complaint is reasonable, and grants them in compensation the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, which *Hashem* notes is simple and inexpensive. How exactly does *Hashem* satisfy their request in this manner?

Rav Avrohom Shor points out that, in saying that this *mitzvah* is inexpensive, Rashi explains that the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is not bound by personal ownership according to the *chachomim*. That is to say, one need not actually own the *sukkah* in which he eats and performs the other relevant *mitzvos* of *Sukkos*. How is this so? This is because of the fact that one day, all of *Klal Yisroel* will sit in one *sukkah*, in the times of *Moshiach*. In order to own even a part of something, one must own at least a *perutah*'s value of the object - since millions of Jews will eventually sit together in a single *sukkah*, it would be impossible for each to own a *perutah* of the value of the *sukkah*. Yet, they would still fulfill the *mitzvah* of sitting in the *sukkah* without owning even a part of it! Thus, we see that it is not necessary according to the *chachomim* for one to own the *sukkah* that he uses. Rav Avrohom Shor explains based on this that the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is one which can be fulfilled without any monetary requirements - it is a *mitzvah* which everyone who is obligated in it can accomplish the holy task without paying even a single *perutah*. Thus, when *Hashem* gave the nations this *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, each one individually sat in their own *sukkos* at home. In so doing, however, they failed to follow an implied essential direction which constitutes the very reason *why* the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is inexpensive - the collective ability to sit in one together and fulfill the *mitzvah* at the same time.

We see that *Hashem* gave the *umos haolam* the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* in compensation for not having held a mountain above them, since both share a common principle - they involve a collective action, uniting a people as one in following *Hashem*'s will without a single one of them singled out for greater honor in doing so. It was this opportunity which the *umos haolam* missed on both occasions.

In this way, we can similarly understand why this act of *Hashem* was not necessarily one of coercion. Just as by the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, whose very nature is defined by the ability of the many to fulfill it as one, so too is accepting the *Torah* an undertaking best sought out by the greater whole, not as individuals. It would be inappropriate for a single person to decide to improve themselves in the *darchei haTorah* should it prove isolating for them from what and *who* surrounds them. Accepting the *Torah* is not a statement of monasterial and secluded devotion. On the contrary, it is the gateway to further cementing oneself as a single member of a much greater nation.

It is for this reason that the *Bnei Yisroel's* fervent declaration of "*naaseh vinishma*" is not a contradiction whatsoever to the following idea of *Hashem* lifting up the mountain. The two ideas are complementary. Once the *Bnei Yisroel* took it upon *themselves as a plural obligation* to observe the *Torah*, *Hashem* reflected their conviction by uniting them all under a single mountain, a *chuppah* of sorts, from which they would complete their acceptance.

The *Torah* here tells us clearly that *Kabalas HaTorah* requires *achdus*, but why does the *Torah* convey this idea *here*? It seems out of place - surely there were plenty of opportunities for the *Torah* to demonstrate the importance of acting as a collective before *Parshas Yisro*, when the *Torah* is being given!

The answer is that both learning and taking the *Torah* upon oneself can be risky, should one do so as an individual. Such is exactly against what *Hashem* warns all Jews to come in this pivotal moment, effectively declaring that any acceptance of the *Torah* undertaken as a single Jew, not as a member of *Klal Yisroel*, is not truly an acceptance at all. *Torah* and *mitzvos* observed with an individualistic mindset, with a "holier than thou" and self-righteous attitude, do not reflect among the most basic requirements of their proper observance.

The *Imrei Emes* writes that the three ways that the Jews prepared for *Kabalas HaTorah*, separating from their wives, avoiding getting close to *Har Sinai*, and sitting near it on the third day following the commencement of these preparations, all reflect the three most objectionable tendencies to living a *Torah* lifestyle: *ta'avah* (inappropriate desires), *kinah* (jealousy and envy - the Jews were instructed not to approach the mountain and to remain separate before receiving the *Torah*, focusing on themselves and their own respective situations), and *kavod* (honor-seeking - the Jews were instructed to sit *together* "under" *Har Sinai* in an equal act of true unification, with no single person held in higher esteem than another in accepting the *Torah*). It is for this reason that, in such a situation, the Jews did not have the option to go "left or right," and to flee from under the mountain. Their declaration of *naaseh vinishma* left them with only one choice driven by their collective commitment to accept the *Torah* - to either go up and accept it as one, or to go down and remain separate. The ultimate nature of *Torah* observance, despite obligatorily falling upon the individuals, is one rooted in our constitution of a single nation driven by one goal - to maintain and beautify our *mitzvos* as one.

# Torah From Our Rabbeim

## What Is So Special About Shavuos?

*Rabbi Shimon Schenker*  
*Associate Principal / Maggid Shiur*

When I was in college, I once took summer classes outside of YU. In that class, we had a quiz every single day, and if you missed one quiz, it was an automatic zero on the quiz - no exceptions. That summer, *Shavuos* fell out during the week, and I had to miss a quiz, so I went to the Dean to discuss it. She asked me why I had to miss the quiz, and I told her that it was *Shavuos*, when the Jews received the *Torah*. She went on to lecture me that she had heard of all of the Jewish holidays, and accused me of making this one up. I had to bring her a Jewish calendar to prove to her that *Shavuos* was in fact a holiday (this is before the internet was a thing, so I couldn't just look one up) which she then hung on her wall, and now *Shavuos* is officially in the Rutgers calendar.

The question posed by Rav Eliyahu Dessler, Rav Matisyahu Solomon, and others throughout the generations, is why is *Shavuos*, or at least the sixth of Sivan, the day we celebrate the receiving of the *Torah*? On that day, *Hashem* gave Moshe Rabbeinu the *Aseres Hadibros*, but immediately after that, Moshe went on to break those, and the *Aseres Hadibros* that are ours are the one's given to Moshe on *Yom Kippur* after he came down the second time. So, why is *Shavuos* not on *Yom Kippur*?

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal), in his *sefer Da'as Tevunos*, writes that there were two goals accomplished at *Har Sinai*: one, the giving of the *Torah* itself and its laws to perform them, and two, enabling *Klal Yisrael* to be fit to keep the *mitzvos* and enable our *mitzvos* to positively impact and sanctify the world. Ramchal explains that on *Shavuos*, we accomplished goal number two even though the *luchos* were broken. Standing at *Har Sinai* is what changed a group of slaves from people who were "*eino mitzveh vi'oseh*" (not commanded) to "*mitzveh vi'oseh*" (commanded). In essence, says Rav Solomon, *Shavuos* was the big *bar mitzvah* of *Klal Yisrael*. It was the singular moment where we became transformed from a bunch of slaves into *Knesses Yisrael*.

The Mabit in his commentary to the *Siddur* writes that this is what we say every time we make a *berachah* on a *mitzvah*, “*asher kidishanu bimitzvosav*” - who sanctified us with his *mitzvos*. When we do *mitzvos*, it is not only to accomplish fulfilling goal number one of the Ramchal, but it is also to accomplish goal number two, to transform us and to be *mekadesh* us. Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky writes in *Emes LiYaakov* that when we make a *berachah* before we do an action as a *mitzvah*, it fundamentally changes the action and lifts up from an ordinary action to a lofty spiritual act. He writes that even though we always assume like the Rambam in *Hilchos Berachos* that all *berachos* on *mitzvos* are Rabbinic in nature, when we have that focus and that recognition that we are doing an action as a way to serve *Hashem* and make ourselves holy, it changes everything we do.

Rav Herschel Schachter *shlit”a* writes in his *sefer Eretz Hatzvi* in the name of Rav Soloveitchik that we need to recognize that *Torah* is the word of *Hashem*. As we are simply flesh and blood, one might think “how is it possible for us to internalize the word and essence of *Hashem*?” The Rav explained that when the *ma’alach* teaches us the entire *Torah* in the womb, the *Gemara* (*Niddah* 3a) describes that after he teaches us the whole *Torah*, he touches us on the top of the lip and we forget everything we learn. Asks the Rav, what was the point in teaching us the *Torah* if we are just going to forget it? The Rav explained that it is the same idea as goal number two of the Ramchal mentioned above; by learning *Torah* with the *ma’alach*, we are sanctified and prepared to learn *Torah* on earth.

So, we see that while it is true that we might not have the physical *luchos* given to Moshe or the original *Torah* taught to us by the *ma’alach*, it is alright. Every day we learn *Torah* and do *mitzvos*, we have the opportunity to be a *metzuveh vi’oseh*, to do *mitzvos* because we were commanded to and transform ourselves to true *ovdei Hashem*.

# The Value of Silence

*Rabbi Dov Emerson*

*Director Of Teaching and Learning / Maggid Shiur*

The giving of the Torah was undoubtedly the most significant event in the history of our people. Our Torah is our anchor, our identity. It is the means through which we navigate this world and strive to connect with our Creator. To the casual reader of the story of Matan Torah, it will come as no surprise that there is much accompanying pomp and circumstance surrounding the giving of the Torah.

The scene was set at Har Sinai, where the Jewish people were told to spend three days preparing themselves for this monumental occurrence. There were boundaries set at the base of the mountain, with strict warnings about where the people could not wander upon pain of death. There were thick clouds and shofar blasts. There was not only thunder and lightning, but there was thunder that could somehow be seen! Everything was building up for a pyrotechnic, blaring, overwhelming demonstration of Divine force.

And then...silence.

As the Medrash writes in Shemos Rabbah (29:9): "Said Rabbi Abbahu in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: When the Holy One gave the Torah, no bird screeched, no fowl flew, no ox bellowed, none of the ophanim (angels) flapped a wing, nor did the seraphim chant "Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh." The sea did not roar, and none of the creatures uttered a sound. Throughout the entire world there was only a deafening silence as the Divine Voice went forth speaking: "I am the Lord your God."

Rabbi Normal Lamm zt"l, in a Shavuot sermon delivered in 1969, notes that in this silence, even the first command that came forth, *anochi Hashem*, was itself not a call to action, but rather something that must be contemplated and internalized, a silent sort of activity. The lesson of the loud action followed by the silent nature of Hashem's communication with all of us at Har Sinai is that, as Rabbi Lamm writes, "activity and motion and work and performance are all important, but only as a preface and introduction to true creativity. Greatness itself is born out of the womb of stillness. The Torah was given when the world was silent. The word of God comes forth when the words of man come to an end."

The message delivered in that 1969 sermon was that there is a need to slow down sometimes. That the American approach is about action and being a 'go getter,' and while there is certainly tremendous value in tenacity and accomplishments, it cannot be the purpose of one's existence. There is a higher meaning, and a deeper connection to one's purpose and ultimately to Hashem, that can only be achieved through stepping back, taking a breath, and engaging in some productive silence. These words resonate even more powerfully in 2021, as the ubiquitous nature of our cell phones and other technology ensures that even while sitting on a park bench or standing in line at the supermarket, we do not have to be alone with our own thoughts.

As we celebrate Shavuos and relive the giving of the Torah, what are we to make of this silence? What should be our call to action when considering the value that Chazal gave to silence, calling it a "fence to wisdom" (Avos 3:13), and stating that "if words are worth a coin, silence is worth two" (Megillah 18a).

Perhaps, as Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l explains, the silence is a means to the end of true listening. When Hashem gave us the Torah, it permeated our hearts in a way that nothing else could. It happened in silence, so that we could truly listen and internalize its message, and make it part of our spiritual DNA. It's not simply something that we heard. It was something that we listened to. It is the act of nishma, which Rabbi Sacks defines as "listening, hearing, heeding, responding", that serves as our call to arms upon hearing the words of Hashem.

Whether we are dealing with friends, family, students, teachers, or if we are seeking to encounter the Ribono Shel Olam: the mechanism is the same. Silence affords us the opportunity to quiet all the external noise and distractions, and truly listen and internalize what is being said to us.

We know that Shavuos is known as Zman Matan Toraseinu, the time of the **giving** of the Torah, and not Zman Kabbalas Toraseinu, the time of the **receiving** of the Torah. A Chassidic teaching points out that the message of this title is that there was only one singular giving of the Torah by Hashem, directed at all Jews equally. But it is up to each Jew to determine their specific and unique relationship with the Torah and to define their specific type of receiving it.

Shavuos is the time when we can remind ourselves that while actions and movement have a place, it is stillness and silence which allows us to truly appreciate the message of the singular giving of Hashem's Torah, so that we

can internalize the universal mission into our unique manner of receiving the Torah. In doing so, Hashem's mission for us, collectively and individually, comes into sharper focus.

# Penimiyus, Chitzoniyus, and the Aseres Hadibros

*Rabbi Tanchum Cohen  
Maggid Shiur*

*Based on a shiur form YUTorah*

*Shavuos* is the *chag* on which we commemorate the giving of the *Torah*. Yet the *Torah* wasn't conveyed in its entirety to *Klal Yisroel* on *Shavuos* itself; rather, *Shavuos* is the day when Moshe went up to *Har Sinai*, and the day on which *Hashem* began the process of giving the *Torah*, specifically through the *Aseres Hadibros*. The *Aseres Hadibros* appear twice in *Chumash*: once in *Parshas Yisro* as part of the story of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, and once in *Parshas Va'eschanan* as part of Moshe Rabbeinu's final speech to *Klal Yisroel*. While the two *parshiyos* are largely the same, there are certain nuances of difference between how the *Aseres Hadibros* are presented in each context. One such difference can be found in the last of the *Aseres Hadibros*. In *Parshas Yisro* (20:14), we read that the tenth commandment is "*lo sachmod*" - do not covet the possessions of your friend, while in *Parshas Ve'eschanan* (5:18), the phrase instead reads "*lo sis'aveh*" - do not *desire* the possessions of others. Rashi, based on the *Targum Onkelos*, explains that the two *leshonos* largely mean the same thing. This, of course, begs the question - if the two words are synonyms, what is the *Torah* trying to capture with this shift?

The Rambam takes up this issue in a halachic context. In the first *perek* in *Hilchos Gezeilah*, the Rambam discusses different types of theft and their halachic ramifications. At the end of the *perek*, the Rambam brings up this distinction between *chemdah*, coveting, and *ta'avah*, desire. The Rambam says something fascinating, and something which is puzzling in context. He explains that according to the *Midrashei Chazal*, *ta'avah* is when a person dreams about someone else's items and how much he wants them, while *chemdah* is where someone pressures someone to such an extent that they actually give it or sell it when they otherwise wouldn't have. However, the Rambam follows by saying that if one violated the *issur* of *lo sachmod* and got someone to sell something when they didn't really want to, there is no punishment of *malkos*, since *chemdah* is a *lav she'ein bo ma'aseh* - a prohibition without any physical action involved. The *issur* to covet someone else's things is emotional and internal, and therefore cannot be considered a *ma'aseh*. But when we put two and two together, this is very odd - the Ram-

bam just clarified that the difference between *chemdah* and *ta'avah* is that *ta'avah* is merely in the heart and mind, while *chemdah* is when one pushed and actually got the item! The Ra'avad points out the apparent contradiction: how can the Rambam say there is no *ma'aseh* in the case of a person pressuring and succeeding in getting the owner to hand over his item? If the entire definition of *chemdah* is that it requires action in addition to the internal desire within the heart and mind, how can it be considered a *lav she'ein bo ma'aseh*?

Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky zt"l, the Steipler Gaon, in his *sefer Birchas Peretz* on *Chumash*, has an insight which both answers the technical issue, and also gives a perspective which can help our growth and allow us to appreciate the richness of *Kabala HaTorah*. He explains that for the Rambam, the *issur* of *chemdah* is internal, as the word itself would seem to imply. In differentiating between *chemdah* and *ta'avah*, the *Torah* is giving us two levels at which this *issur* can be violated. *Ta'avah* is a level where the person only dreamt about the item, while *chemdah* is where the *ta'avah* reached such a degree where the person actually got the item. But, the actual violation is not the reception of the item; rather, the fact that the person got the item serves as a spiritual litmus test which demonstrates the severity of the desire in question. If you reached a level of *chemdah*, you must have wanted the item so badly that you actually took action and got it. The Rambam therefore counts *chemdah* as a *lav she'ein bo ma'aseh*, because the actual *lav* only occurred in the person's heart and mind. The fact that he got the item only serves to indicate how badly he wanted it.

If we zoom out beyond the *lomdus* for a moment, the philosophy behind this *halachah* is both intriguing and vitally important. This *din* speaks to the relationship between *penimiyus* and *chitzoniyus*, between *leiv* and *ma'aseh*. What we see is that if a desire runs deep enough, it will most likely express itself in action. Of course, for the specific context of the Rambam, this has a negative connotation - if a person gets to the point that they are pressuring others into giving them that which they desire, it is a sign that their mind is significantly twisted in the wrong direction. But this concept can have tremendous positive implications as well. On the one hand, we can recognize that we may have a *ratzon* to do good even if it does not express itself in action. Even if our desire is not yet strong enough to express itself in action, the *ratzon* itself is still worthwhile and incredible. We can take pride even in the smallest inclination to be better. And at the same time, this concept challenges us to reach further - if we truly wanted badly enough to do *tov*, that positive desire would express itself in action. If we have *ratzon tov*, we must challenge ourselves to ensure that the *ratzon* runs deep enough to ex-

press itself in action. This idea is central to our *Kabalas HaTorah*. We began with a declaration of *na'aseh vinishma*, a shining pronouncement of *ratzon*. But at the same time, that *ratzon* must be nurtured and grown further to the level of *ma'aseh*, to the point at which we follow *Hashem* in our actions as well as in our hearts. May we all be *zocheh* to a *Kabalas HaTorah* of *chitzoni-yus* as well as *penimiyus*!

## Elimelech's Mission

Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson  
Maggid Shiur

There is a well-known custom to read *Megillas Rus* on the second day of *Shavuos*. The *Yalkut Shimoni* (596) explains that this *minhag* is based on the fact that *Shavuos* is the holiday of *Kabalas HaTorah*. *Chazal* tell us in several places that the *Torah* can only be acquired through *mesiras nefesh*, giving of oneself for the *Torah* (see *Avos* 6:6). Since the story of *Rus* is one of *mesiras nefesh*, we read it on *Shavuos* to remind ourselves what is required of us for proper acceptance of the *Torah*. This concept of *mesiras nefesh* is found throughout *Megillas Rus*.

*Megillas Rus* begins by telling us that in the times of the *shoftim* (judges) there was a famine in *Eretz Yisrael*. This famine caused a man by the name of *Elimelech*, along with his wife *Na'ami* and their two sons *Machlon* and *Kilyon*, to leave *Eretz Yisrael* and go to *Moav* instead. While there, *Machlon* and *Kilyon* married two *Moavi* women by the names of *Rus* and *Orpah*. *Rashi* explains that *Elimelech* was both extremely wealthy and one of the *gedolei hador*. He left *Eretz Yisrael* out of stinginess, since he was unwilling to give *tzedakah* to those who needed it during the famine. This seems strange, as all the commentaries seem to imply that *Elimelech* was a tremendously righteous individual. The *Targum* calls *Elimelech* a "gavrah rabbah" (great person), and the *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 91a) tells us that he was not only the greatest *tzaddik* in the generation, but also a direct descendant of *Yehudah*! We know that *Chazal* generally try to minimize the sins of people in *Tanach*; the *Gemara* (*Shabbos* 55a) gives many examples of sins recorded in *Tanach* which were really miniscule transgressions, only magnified by the tremendous righteousness of the people who committed those sins. The *Alter of Slabodka* expressed this as a general principle; the people in the times of *Tanach* were so unfathomably great that we cannot possibly understand their level, and any sins which they seem to have committed were really infinitesimally small blemishes that would be practically unnoticeable to us. With this in mind, how could it be that *Elimelech* would desert his people in their time of need and leave *Eretz Yisrael* to escape giving them *tzedakah*? Can you imagine if Rav Herschel Schachter *shlit"a* or Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlit"a* were to do something like this? What was *Elimelech* thinking?

The *Alshich* points out that the phrase used here to describe *Elimelech's* departure, *vayelech ish* (and the man went), is also used when *Amram* goes to

marry *Yocheved*. Just like there, the man went to form a marriage which would eventually lead to a redeemer (*Moshe*), so too *Elimelech's* leaving would lead to the marriage which would begin the line of *Dovid Hamelech*, and eventually *moshiach*. *Elimelech's* name itself hints to this idea - the words "*eli melech*" translate to "to me, there will be a king". *Elimelech* assumed that the first king of *Klal Yisrael* would come from him based on his *yichus*. As we mentioned, *Elimelech* was the descendant of *Yehudah* and *Tamar* through their son *Peretz*, but he also had *malchus* in his genes from a different source, namely *Miriam*. The *possuk* calls both *Elimelech* and *Miriam* "*efrasi*" and the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 11b) says that *efras* leads to *malchus*. Since *Elimelech* was related both to *Yehudah* and *Miriam*, it is possible to suggest that *Elimelech*, in addition to the *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 91a) which states that he was the son of *Nachshon Ben Aminadav*, was also the grandson of *Miriam*. This *yichus*, combined with the *yichus* of his wife, who was a granddaughter of *Nachshon* herself, led *Elimelech* to conclude that the *meluchah* must be destined to come from him. For this reason, he left *Eretz Yisrael* and went to *Moav*, in order to marry off his sons.

This leaves us with two main questions. First, why did *Elimelech* decide to go on this mission now, in the middle of a famine? Second, why did he go to *Moav* of all places to find a *shidduch* for his sons?

The first words in *Megillas Rus* are "*vayehi bimei shefot hashoftim*," and it was in the days when the judges judged. The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 15a) explains this *possuk* to mean "and it was in the days when the judges **were** judged". The people at the time of *Megillas Rus* had no respect for the authority of the judges or their rulings, and took it upon themselves to slander and disrespect the *shoftim*. As a result, chaos reigned, and there was almost no law and order in the land. As a result of this, *Hashem* brought a famine to punish the people for their disrespect. *Elimelech* realized that the only way to end the famine was to enforce some kind of law and order in *Klal Yisrael*, in order to force them to do *teshuvah* out of fear. Thus, *Elimelech* reasoned that the best thing he could do to help *Bnei Yisrael* was to try and start the *meluchah*, which would provide the *shoftim* with *shotrim* (enforcers) to back up the decisions of the courts and bring order to the people.

This explains why *Elimelech* decided to go on this mission now, but why did he go to *Moav*? The *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 38b) says that *Moshe Rabbeinu* wanted to destroy *Moav*, but was stopped, since *Hashem* told him that two "little birds" would come out of *Moav*. This was in reference to *Rus*, great-grandmother of *Dovid*, and *Na'amah*, the wife of *Shlomo* and the mother of *Rechavam*. *Elimelech*, being a *ba'al hamesorah* (someone who received the

tradition from *Har Sinai* through his father *Nachshon*), knew that there was a *neshamah* in *Moav* which was destined to lead to *malchus*. Developing this idea further, Rav Chaim Vital writes that *Adam HaRishon* contained within him all the *neshamos* of future Jews, while the non-Jewish *neshamos* were created by the *Satan*! The *Ohr Hachaim* writes that some of these original Jewish souls were turned into *goyishe* ones when *Adam* ate from the *Eitz Ha'Daas*. These souls are the souls of people who eventually became *geirim*, converts. *Elimelech* knew that one of these souls was in *Moav* and was destined to begin the line of Jewish kingship.

In truth, there was a deeper reason that *Elimelech* chose to look in *Moav*. An essential characteristic of *meluchah* is *mesiras nefesh* (giving of oneself). A king is not bound by the rules of mankind; *Chazal* tell us “*melech poretz geder*”, a king can break boundaries. He is allowed to seize property, seize people, and even kill a rebel, all without any special permission from a *Beis Din*. A king is ruled only by the will of *Hashem* and is meant to give himself over entirely to the yoke of Heaven. This trait of *mesiras nefesh* is evident in the bloodline of *malchus*. *Yehudah* was *moser nefesh* when he admitted his sin with *Tamar*, as well as when he offered to sacrifice himself to save *Bin-yamin* in *Mitzrayim*. Of course, *Tamar* herself was *moser nefesh* when she preferred to be thrown into a fiery furnace than to embarrass someone else. (Incidentally, this may be why the *Medrash* tells us that *Hashem* was busy creating the light of *geulah* during the story of *Tamar*. This *middah*, which *Tamar* demonstrated, was instrumental for the bloodline of *Moshiach*.) *Miriam* showed *mesiras nefesh* to save the Jewish babies in Egypt and her husband, *Kalev*, showed *mesiras nefesh* when he went against the report of the other *meraglim* to praise *Eretz Yisrael*. *Elimelech's* own father, *Nachshon Ben Aminadav*, showed *mesiras nefesh* by jumping into the *yam suf* before anyone else did. This trait is essential for beginning the family of *meluchah* and *Elimelech* knew that it could be found in *Moav*. The nation of *Moav* came from *Lot*, who was tricked into having improper relations with his daughters after they were led to believe that the entire world had been destroyed along with *Sodom*. *Lot's* whole journey to *Sodom* was out of *mesiras nefesh*, albeit misguided, as he hoped to inspire the wicked citizens of the city to do *teshuvah*. This *middah* of misguided *mesiras nefesh* came from *Lot's* father, *Haran*, who jumped into the fiery furnace of *Nimrod* for improper reasons, causing him to become burned. When *Sodom* was destroyed, *Lot's* daughters reasoned that the whole world must have been destroyed as well, since otherwise, *Avraham* would not have allowed for the destruction of *Sodom*. *Lot's* daughters grew up in the home of *Sarah Immeinu*, the paradigm of *tznius* (modesty). Even while in *Sodom*, they remained pure and uncorrupted despite the promiscuity around them. How-

ever, they were *moser nefesh* to break their nature and be *mezaneh* with their father for the sake of the world at large. In fact, the *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 38b) says that their actions were a *mitzvah* and *Tosfos* adds that what they did was completely *lisheim shamayim* (for the sake of heaven). *Elimelech*, again being a *ba'al hamesorah*, knew all of this and thus knew that the *middah* of *mesiras nefesh* was inherent in the genes of *Moav*, the child of this relationship.

How did *Elimelech* know where to look for this *middah* of *mesiras nefesh*? *Elimelech* knew of a recent example of this *middah*, which had manifested in *Moav*. In *Sefer Shoftim* (3:20), *Ehud* came to *Eglon* in order to kill him. *Ehud* declared that he had a message from *Hashem*, at which point *Eglon* stood up out of respect. The *possuk* describes that *Eglon* was tremendously overweight and standing up took a tremendous amount of effort. In fact, the *Medrash* says that as a reward for *Eglon* standing up from his throne, *Hashem* promised that his descendant would sit on *Hashem's* throne. The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 105b) tells us that *Rus* was the granddaughter of *Balak*, the king of *Moav* in the times of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. *Balak* excelled in his use of *mesiras nefesh* in a negative manner, going to extreme lengths to try and destroy *Bnei Yisroel* along with *Bila'am*. The *Yalkut Shimoni* further explains that *Balak* was the ancestor of *Eglon* and *Rus*. *Rus* was *Eglon's* daughter, the most recent example of the *middah* of *mesiras nefesh*!

We can now put the final picture together. On a conscious level, *Elimelech's* mission was a noble one, quite appropriate for a *gadol hador*. He saw that the people required a massive *teshuvah* movement in order for the famine to end, and believed it could only come about through the institution of a Jewish *meluchah*. He therefore left with his sons in order to find the daughters of *Eglon* in *Moav* to create a powerful combination of *mesiras nefesh* and *yichus*, which would jumpstart the creation of the *malchus*. What, then, went wrong? The *possuk* says that *Elimelech* initially left *Eretz Yisroel* and went to *Moav* "lagur sham", to dwell there temporarily. *Elimelech* initially planned to go to *Moav*, find *Eglon's* daughters, and then return home. However, the trace amount of stinginess in his heart caused him to stay for longer than he originally intended. The *Bach* explains that *Elimelech* was drawn to stay in *Moav* because he felt a kinship with them, as the people of *Moav* were also famously stingy. In fact, the *Torah* tells us that a *Moavi* man may never join *Klal Yisrael*, since they did not give *Bnei Yisrael* food when they were traveling in the *midbar*. *Elimelech* took all of his money with him, saying that he needed it to make the *shidduch*, but in truth, it was the subconscious stinginess which caused him to hoard his possessions. Because of this tiny, subconscious flaw, *Elimelech* didn't do what he should have done, instead em-

barking on this mission to begin the *malchus*.

What should *Elimelech* have done? *Elimelech*'s plan was to force a *teshuvah meiyira'ah* (repentance out of fear) in the people. This can work in theory, but it is not the best way for the nation to repent. This contrasts with the other central figure in the *Megillah*, namely *Boaz*. *Boaz* attempted to get the people to do *teshuvah meiahavah* (repentance out of love). He did this by speaking about *Hashem* constantly, even innovating the concept of greeting people with *Hashem*'s name. He did this by saying "*Hashem imachem*" (*Hashem* should be with you), and we continue this today by greeting others with *shalom aleichem* (lit. peace be upon you; *Shalom* is also a name of *Hashem*). With this, *Boaz* hoped to coax *Bnei Yisrael* into doing *teshuvah* not out of fear of the government, but out of a love for *Hashem*. If *Elimelech* had only attempted the same, his fate could have been different.

We should all be *zocheh* to achieve a level of *teshuvah meiahavah* this *Sha-vuos*!

## The 49th Kinyan HaTorah

*Rabbi Netanel Danto*  
*Maggid Shiur*

The fifty day period leading up to *Shavuos* is known as *Sefiras Ha'omer*, a time during which we count towards the upcoming *Kabalas HaTorah*. However, these days are not merely the days which happen to separate the *yamim tovim* of *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. The Ramban (*Vayikra* 23:36) famously comments that these days are actually a form of *Chol Hamoed*, a sort of “in-between” holiday connecting *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. This is because the whole purpose of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, which we celebrate on *Pesach*, was to eventually bring the Jewish people to *Har Sinai*, where they could receive the *Torah*. Thus, this period of time serves as the connection between our freedom from Egypt and our acceptance of the *Torah*, and we are therefore meant to work on ourselves during these seven weeks to prepare for the upcoming *Kabalas HaTorah*. Rav Yisroel Salanter pointed out that the *mishnah* in *Avos* (6:3) lists forty-eight methods through which the *Torah* is acquired. He therefore suggested that we should use the forty-nine days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* to work on these forty-eight *middos*, such that we can be fully ready to receive the *Torah* when *Shavuos* comes. Of course, we know that *Toras Hashem temimah* - *Hashem's Torah* is perfect in every way. We also know that forty-eight does not equal forty-nine. “Almost” is not good enough in *Torah*, so why are there forty-eight *middos* given for the forty-nine days of *Sefirah*?

My Rav, Rav Yonasan Sacks *shlit"a*, explained that the answer can be found in the *Gemara* in *Niddah* (70b). The *Gemara* tells us that if a person truly wants to succeed in his learning, he should be “*marbeh biyeshivah umima'et bisechorah*” - he should increase his time for learning, and decrease his time set for business. The *Gemara* is telling us that to have success in *Torah*, we need to put in maximum effort. Now, maximum effort is no simple thing - we may feel that we have tried our hardest, but chances are we have the ability to do even more. There was once a football player who was trying out for an NFL team. One day after practice, the coach called him over and told him to lift the goalpost at the edge of the field from the ground. Of course, such a feat is impossible, but when you're trying out for a team and the coach tells you to do something, you listen! The player tried and tried with all his might, until the coach finally told him he could stop. The coach knew it couldn't be done, but he wanted to demonstrate the kind of effort that would be expected of him every single day if he made the team. So, it is safe to assume that we can always try a bit harder.

But, it could be that someone really does put in maximum effort, and still does not see success. The *Gemara* recognizes this, and explains why this could be - such a person, the *Gemara* explains, was not “*mivakeish meimi shehachachmah shelo*” - he did not petition the One to Whom all knowledge belongs. We need to recognize that as a bottom line, success is not up to us; even if we put in all our effort, we still need to *daven* to *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*, and recognize that He is the only one who can allow us to succeed.

For this reason, we have forty-eight *middos* through which the *Torah* is acquired. Even if we put in our maximum *hishtadlus* and perfect each of these attributes to their apex, there is still one ingredient missing, that of *tefillah*. If someone wants to see and feel how sweet *Torah* truly is, they need to put in their full effort, but they also need to *daven* to *Hashem* that they should merit success. The forty-ninth day of *Sefirah* is meant to remind us that even if we put in as much effort as we could, we still need to ask *Hashem* to enlighten our eyes with the beauty of *Torah*. When we do both, putting in our full *hishtadlus* while also *davening* that we should see results, we will merit a true *kinyan haTorah*.

## Megillas Rus: A Powerful Message for our Current Crisis

*Rabbi Avraham Shulman  
Maggid Shiur*

The *minhag* of *leining Megillas Rus* on *Shavuos* is recorded by the Rama (490) and has gained nearly universal acceptance amongst *Klal Yisroel*. This year, there is a particular significance to the lessons we can learn from this *kriyah*.

There are various well-known reasons for this *minhag*. The Avudraham writes that there is a strong connection to the *Kabbalas HaTorah* of *Klal Yisroel* at *Har Sinai* and the *geirus* of Rus. Before they were able to accept the *Torah*, *Klal Yisroel* went through a process that is similar to the *tevillah* and *milah* of a *ger*. A second connection which he mentions is based on the *zman* of the story of Rus. The *pesukim* indicate that Rus and Naomi came to Beis Lechem at the beginning of the harvest season (1:22) and stayed until the end of it (2:23). The *Megillah* takes place during the harvest season, which is the *zman* of *Shavuos*, the *Chag Hakatzir*.

Another reason to read *Megillas Rus* is based on the *Yerushalmi* in *Maseches Chagigah* (2:3), which says that Dovid Hamelech was *niftar* on *Shavuos*. The *Tevuos Shor* notes that since *Hashem* fully completes the years of *tzaddikim*, Dovid Hamelech must also have been born on *Shavuos*. Therefore, it is appropriate to read the story of the basis of Dovid's *yichus* on this day. Finally, the *Mishnah Berurah* (420:17) quotes the *Yalkut Shimoni* that the reason *Rus* is read at the *zman* of *Kabbalas HaTorah* is to show the manner in which the *Torah* can be acquired. *Rus* overcame hardship and obstacles and was willing to lower herself to join the Jewish people. It is these *middos* that one needs to receive the *Torah* properly.

Perhaps there is additional relevance from the *keriyah* of *Rus* that applies to our current circumstance of the worldwide pandemic we have been experiencing. After the death of their husbands, Naomi, *Rus* and *Orpah* all leave *Moav* and begin to journey back towards *Eretz Yehudah*. Naomi discourages them from joining her as she says "turn back, each of you to your mother's house (1:8). Both *Orpah* and *Rus* respond "we will return with you to your people" (1:10). Their original intention was that *Orpah* would also accompany Naomi back to her country. However, after further discouragement from Naomi, we read that *Orpah* kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but *Rus* clung to her (1:14).

We would think that Rus' decision to stay was an act of *chesed* in the category of *lifnim meshuras hadin* (beyond the letter of the law), and Orpah was justified in returning to her homeland. However, Chazal view Orpah's departure as an act of betrayal to Naomi, that revealed the true essence of who Orpah was. As Chazal say in the *Midrash Rabbah* (Rus 2:9), Orpah's name came from the root *oreph*, meaning neck, as she turned her neck from Naomi. Furthermore, the *Gemara* in *Sotah* (42b) records the opinion of several *amoraim* who *darshan* the name Orpah to be based on acts of severe immorality. What indication is there that Orpah became morally corrupt? As a general rule we do not encourage *geirus*, and Orpah was under no obligation to leave her nation and continue forward with Naomi.

A careful reading of Naomi's response in the next *possuk* may offer some insight. Naomi tells Rus regarding Orpah "Orpah has returned to her nation and to her god." (1:15). Naomi describes Orpah as leaving her *emunah* and returning to "her god". There is a *machlokes Rishonim* regarding whether Rus and Orpah were *migayeir* when they married Machlon and Kilyon. According to the opinion that they converted, Orpah was now rejecting her *Yiddishkeit*, which explains Chazal's negative view. According to the other opinion that Rus and Orpah were still Moavites however, it is difficult to understand any critique of Orpah for leaving Naomi to go back to Moav.

The *Gemara* in *Yevamos* (48b) mentions several reasons why *geirim* suffer tribulations. One of them is that they delay in coming "*tachas kanfei haShechinah*", beneath the wings of the *Shechinah* and into the fold of the Jewish people. The proof the *Gemara* brings is actually from Rus, who receives a *berachah* from Boaz in *perek beis* in response to her *chesed*. How can a potential convert be punished for something they are not obligated to do? The Maharal in his *Chidushei Aggados* explains the *Gemara's* proof. If Rus received a reward because she was now closer to *Hashem* through her *geirus*, then by definition one who willingly remains distant from *Hashem* is punished. Perhaps we can apply this to Orpah. Rus and Orpah both saw the results of running from *Hashem* and his land. They saw the direct *hashgachah* of *Hashem's* punishment against their husbands for brazenly violating the *ratzon Hashem*. They were so close to being *tachas kanfei haShechinah*. Rus was rewarded for her *zerizus* in staying with Naomi, but Orpah made a different choice. She didn't just leave Naomi, but she walked away from the *Ribono Shel Olam*. The opportunity for Orpah to transform her life and be *koneh olamo bisha'ah achas*, to elevate her very existence, stood right in front of her, but she chose to miss that once in a lifetime opportunity.

We are going through a historic crisis. Millions have been affected worldwide in terms of human suffering and economic loss as a result of the COVID-19 virus. We too have a tremendous opportunity standing in front of us: to respond and grow from this crisis. The challenge is for each one of us to find a personal way in which we can change and grow through the different twists and turns which we are faced with through this period. Iy”H the virus will leave us soon. We need to make sure we accomplish our personal mission of this *zman* before it ends. Clearly, *Hashem* is sending us a message. Let’s not make the mistake of Orpah, and make sure that we are ready to declare *na’aseh vinishma*.

## The Power Of Sincere Tefillah

Rabbi Baruch Gopin

Maggid Shiur

Over the last year and a half, our *shiur* has spoken numerous times regarding *tefillah*. We have spoken about how sad it was when we could not *daven* together in our *shuls* and how sad it was when we couldn't rely on the *kol tefillah* from our friends to "pick us up" and inspire us.

Perhaps if we realize how much power we possess via sincere *tefillah*, how much we have the ability to affect change in the world with heartfelt *kavanah*, then our davening will be much more meaningful to us, and will accomplish great things for us, *Klal Yisroel*, and for the world in general.

The *Gemara* (*Bava Basra* 91a-b) tells us that Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon, whom we speak about in the beginning of *Megillas Rus*, were *gedolei hador* and *parnisei hador* - great *tzaddikim* who supported others. Yet, Rabbi Chiya Bar Avin says that they were punished "*shehaya lahen livakeish rachamim al doram vilo bakshu*" - they should have prayed for mercy for their brethren, and they did not.

Rabbi Chiya Bar Avin is of the opinion that Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon were not punished because they left *Eretz Yisroel*. On the contrary, they were willing to stay in *Eretz Yisroel* despite the hardships of the famine. They only left because they had no *parnassah* and it became impossible for them to remain. They were punished because they did not pray for the Jewish people who remained in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Rav Henoch Leibowitz zt"l poses the obvious question: Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon were leaders of their generation! They were *gedolei hador* and *parnisei hador*!! Why didn't they pray for *Knesses Yisroel*? The Rambam (*Hilchos Ta'anis* 1:1) tells us that it is a *mitzvas aseh* to cry out when a *tzarah* befalls the Jewish people - why didn't these great *gedolim* follow this *halachah*?

Rav Leibowitz answers that of course Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon davened for the Jewish people. Of course they poured out their hearts to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for *rachamim*! However, their *tefillah* was lacking a *dakus* of *kavanah* - a minuscule amount of intent and concentration. Therefore, they were punished.

Rav Leibowitz pointed out two insights which can be gleaned from this perspective:

“We see from here the tremendous power of *tefillah*. If Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon would have have prayed with 100% *kavanah*, they could have nullified the decree of famine!! Even though it was decreed from *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* that there would be a famine, nevertheless, their fullhearted *tefilah* could have had such a potent *koach* that it could have been *mivatel* the decree in its entirety!!

We also learn about the *dikduk hadin* - the exactitude of the judgment of Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon. *Hashem* had the ability to put an end to the famine through their sincerest *tefilah*. However, since they failed to do so, they were held accountable and punished in the most severe fashion.”

The world is slowly starting to emerge from the isolation associated with the global pandemic. If we look at the actual *gezeirah*, we see that what we could not do were so many of those things that are so basic to *Yiddishkeit*. One of those items that we could not engage in was to gather and *daven* together. The power of *tefilas hatzibbur* was taken away from us for such an extended period of time. As we emerge from this isolation, and start to get back to davening in our *Shuls* as a full *tzibbur*, let us not forget the unbelievable potency that our *tefillah* carries - individually and as a *tzibbur*. We have the ability to erase decrees that have already been sealed, we have the ability to bring *yeshuos* for those who need it most, and we have the gift to be able to bring down the infinite *rachamim* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and to shower it upon *Knesses Yisroel*.

May we rise to this challenge - to always pour our heart with the most sincere *tefilah*!!!

# Limmud Torah: The Holiest Of Holies!

*Rabbi Daniel Konigsberg*  
*Maggid Shiur*

I heard an incredibly powerful idea from my *rebbe*, Rabbi Yehuda Werblowsky, *shlit"a*, that highlights the greatness of *Talmud Torah* within the context of the service performed by the holiest of Jews in the holiest of places on Earth.

In the beginning of *Parshas Acharei Mos*, the *Torah* describes the process that the *kohen gadol* is required to perform prior to entering the *Kodesh Kodashim*. According to the *Torah*, a *kohen gadol* may not just enter the Holiest of Holies at any time; he may not come and go as he pleases. Rather, he must undertake a highly technical, multi-stage process in preparation for this momentous occasion.

While the *Torah* does not provide a specific time or date when this applies, the simple understanding according to Rashi and the Ramban is that these *pesukim* refer to the *avodah* of *Yom Hakippurim*, which was, practically speaking, the one time a year that the *kohen gadol* entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. According to these *Rishonim*, the *kohen gadol* was only permitted to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* once per year, on *Yom Kippur*, and prior to doing so he needed to perform the steps delineated in the *pesukim*.

However, not everyone agrees with this approach. The Gra explains these *pesukim* differently based on a *Midrash* in *Vayikra Rabbah* (21:7). The *Medrash* tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu was in great pain on behalf of his brother Aharon, when he heard from *Hashem* that the *kohen gadol* could only enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* once a year. He worried that perhaps Aharon would take this limitation as a rejection of sorts. *Hashem* responded to Moshe that this would not in fact be the case for Aharon. Whereas other, future *kohanim gedolim* would be limited to entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* once per year on *Yom Kippur*, Aharon *Hakohen* could enter at any and all times. Aharon was given special permission to go into the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he wanted, with the caveat being that he needed to perform the special *avodah* beforehand each time. Based on this, the Gra explains that these *pesukim* and the *avodah* they describe apply at all times, not just on *Yom Kippur*, and that the service delineated therein had to be performed as a prerequisite whenever Aharon wanted to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim*, whether it be on *Yom Kippur* or an ordinary Tuesday.

The Gra, in his infinite wisdom and in his typical style, points out that at the beginning of the *parshah*, the *Torah* refers to Aharon specifically by name (”והקריב אהרן הכהן, דבר אל אהרן אחיך, בזאת יבא אהרן אל הקדש”). Yet, later on in the *parshah*, beginning with *possuk* 29, when the *Torah* specifically refers to the 10th of *Tishrei* (i.e. *Yom Kippur*) and addresses future generations (היתה לכם להקח עולם), the *Torah* no longer uses Aharon’s name, and switches to speaking generally of “the *kohen gadol* at the time.” It is in this context that the *Torah* states that the *kohen gadol* is limited to entering the *Kodesh Hakodashim* only once per year. But Aharon *Hakohen*, according to the Vilna Gaon, was permitted to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he wanted, without limitation.

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman *zt”l* asks an interesting follow up question: Practicality speaking, did Aharon *Hakohen* take advantage of the special permission he was granted to go into the *Kodesh Hakodashim* whenever he wanted? Did he make the most of this unique opportunity to enter the holiest place on Earth, where he could be closest to Hashem, whenever he wanted?

He answers that in fact he did not. Aharon, like all other *Kohanim Gedolim*, only entered the *Kodesh Hakodashim* once a year, on *Yom Kippur*, even though he was allowed to go in at his discretion.

But why not? Why did Aharon limit himself? Why didn’t he take advantage of this? Why would he give up such an incredible opportunity that only he would ever get permission for?

Rav Shteinman answers this question based on the *Gemara* in *Horayos* (13a), which, in describing the value of *Torah* learning, brings the *possuk* in *Mishlei* (3:15) which states that *Torah* is “יקרה היא מפנינים” - more precious than expensive gems. The *Gemara darshens* the word “פנינים”, and says that really the *possuk* means to tell us that *limmud haTorah* is more precious than *ולפנינים* - כהן גדול שנכנס לפני - the *kohen gadol* who enters to the innermost place. Simply stated, when someone learns *Torah*, he’s doing something that’s more valuable than the *kohen gadol* at the time he enters into the *Kodesh Hakodashim* and performs the special *avodah* therein.

Therefore, says Rav Aharon Leib, it’s *pashut* that Aharon *Hakohen*, who as the #2 *gadol hador* responsible for learning, mastering and transmitting the *Torah* to the Jewish people, was always learning *Torah*, and would not have given it up even to enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim* and do the *avodah* there!

This would have been a downgrade for him, and we have a rule of *ma'alin bikodesh vi'ain moridin* - we go up in holiness, and never down. Only on *Yom Kippur*, when there was a specific *mitzvah* to go do the *avodah*, did Aharon close his *Gemara* and enter the *Kodesh Hakodashim*.

This *derashah* serves as powerful inspiration to help frame exactly what we do each day in *yeshivah*. When we sit in *shiur* learning with our *rabbeim* and *chaveirim*, we are *mamash* like the *kohen gadol* performing his special service inside the *Kodesh Hakodashim*!

Personally, I am grateful to have been able to call two of the newest classrooms in MTA as home for my *shiur* this year. My *talmidim* and I certainly appreciate the luxury to learn in a bright, spacious classroom, with all of the educational technology a teacher could ever dream of at my disposal. But the truth is, our classrooms, regardless of room type or location, are really so much more. Each and every classroom in our *yeshivah* is the *Kodesh Hakodashim* between the hours of 9:30-11:30, at a minimum, and most even well beyond that, as they house Tanach and *bekiyus* classes as well. But most importantly, we must view each and every one of ourselves as the *kohen gadol* while we're learning! If we can truly take this to heart, we can develop an even greater appreciation for the incredible *zechus* to learn *Torah* on a daily basis! *Ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu* takes on a new meaning when viewed through this prism, and one that can only lead to enhancing our commitment and dedication to *limmud haTorah* as we head into the ultimate holiday of *kabalas haTorah*!

## Talmud Torah & Drafting Yeshiva students into the Army

*Rabbi Yisrael Apfel*  
*Maggid Shiur*

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 3b) records a *braisa* which states that the *kohanim* engaged in their *avodah*, the *levi'im* engaged in their musical accompaniment to the *avodah*, and the *yisraelim* attending the *avodah*, all must abandon their service to go hear the *Megillah* reading on *Purim*.

The *Gemara* records further, that the *yeshiva* of Rebbi relied upon this *braisa* to interrupt their study of *Torah* in order to hear the *Megillah*. They reasoned that if the *avodah*, which is stringent, must be abandoned for *Megillah* reading, then it is certain that *Torah* study, which is not as stringent, should be abandoned to hear the *Megillah*. (The *Gemara* concludes (3b) that *Talmud Torah of the rabim*, which both Rashi & Ran explain means when all of Klal Yisrael is learning *Torah* at the same time, would not be suspended for the sake of *Megillah* reading, but *Talmud Torah of a yachid*, which includes even a large group of people studying *Torah*, must be suspended for *Megillah*. See *Sha'ar Hatziyun* 677:8)

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 677:5) codifies this ruling that we interrupt *Torah* study to go hear the *Megillah*, and adds that all the more so would one have to disrupt any *mitzvah* one is engaged in order to hear the *Megillah*.

At first glance this *halachah* is difficult to understand. Why does the *Gemara* refer to interrupting the study of *Torah* in order to hear the *Megillah*? In what manner is the study of *Torah* being interrupted if one is simply going to hear the *Megillah*, which inherently is *Talmud Torah*, as it is part of *Tanach*?

There are a number of approaches in the *Acharonim* to answer this question.

The *Aruch Hashulchan* writes (*Orach Chayim* 677:5) that indeed, hearing the *Megillah* itself is full-fledged *Talmud Torah*, but it is the time that is wasted in getting the people together until the actual reading begins which is considered *Bittul Torah*. (See *Teshuvos Beis Efraim*, O.C. 67, who derives this

from the fact that the *Gemara* says “we cease to learn to *come* and hear the *Megillah*, rather than “we cease to learn to *hear* the *Megillah*).

However, there are a number of different approaches which highlight a fundamental difference between the *Torah* that one is engaged in when hearing the *Megilah* and other types of *Torah* learning.

One, is that in addition to the concept of ceasing to learn for a mundane activity to be considered quantitative *Bittul Torah*, there is also a concept of qualitative *Bittul Torah*, in which one could have learned in a more in depth manner, but instead chooses to learn *Torah* on a more superficial level. This concept is stressed in *Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Hilchos Talmud Torah 72)*, who codifies that it is wrong for one to actively choose to engage in *Torah* learning that it is easier instead of tackling a new complicated topic. (See *Medrash Rabbah Mishlei (12)* for further development of the notion of the severity of one who does not seek to advance the level of their *Torah* study. See *Moadim Uzmanim* Vol. 2 169 for further elaboration on the distinction between hearing the *Megilah* and other forms of *Talmud Torah*)

Based on this concept, we can understand the nuance of the *yeshiva* of Rebbi establishing that one must interrupt their study of *Torah* in order to hear the *Megillah*. Otherwise, one would have thought that to go from intense study of *Torah* to hearing the *Megillah* would be a violation of qualitative *Bittul Torah*.

The *Acharonim* suggest a different approach to this issue.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Talmud Torah 3:3-4*) writes that the study of *Torah* is equivalent to the performance of all other *mitzvos*, since through learning *Torah*, one’s overall fulfillment of *mitzvos* will be enhanced. The Rambam writes that if, when one is engaged in learning *Torah*, there arises the ability to do a *mitzvah* that no other person can fulfill, then one must stop their learning in order to fulfill that *mitzvah*. Based on this Rambam, the *Ohr Sameach* raises a difficulty with a ruling in the *Gemara*.

The *Gemara (Sukkah 26a)* records that in *halachah*, there is a concept of ‘*oseik bimitzvah patur min hamitzvah*’, that one who is engaged in the performance of a *mitzvah* is exempt from fulfilling other *mitzvos*. This exemption even includes one who is walking to do a *mitzvah* to be exempt from fulfilling the *mitzvah* of sitting in a *Sukkah*. The *Gemara* gives as an example for such a case, Rav Chisda and Rabbah bar Rav Huna who were exempt from sitting in the *sukkah* due to the fact that they were traveling to learn

*Torah* from the *Reish Gelusa*.

This *Gemara* is difficult to understand. For according to the Rambam's formulation that even one who is engaged in *Talmud Torah* itself is not exempt from any *mitzvah* which only they can perform, how can it be that these Amoraim, who were simply walking to hear *Torah*, could be exempt from the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*?

The *Ohr Sameach* answers this question based on a principle formulated by *Tosfos*. *Tosfos* (*Kesuvos* 17a *d"h Mevatlin*) records that when Rabbi Akiva began to learn before *talmidei chachamim* he interrupted his *Torah* study in order to go bury a *meis mitzvah*. R' Yehoshua criticized R' Akiva for violating *Bittul Torah* by engaging in such activity. *Tosfos* asks that this episode seems to contradict the ruling in the *Gemara* that one should interrupt their *Torah* study in order to bury a dead body? *Tosfos* answers that R' Yehoshua was not criticizing R' Akiva for ceasing from his *Talmud Torah*, but rather for ceasing from his *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim*, and one who is engaged in *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim* should never interrupt that for the *mitzvah* of burying the dead, since *gadol shimusha yoser meilimuda* - it is greater to be involved in *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim* than actual *Torah* study.

What is the definition of *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim*? The *Gemara* (*Berachos* 47b) says that even if one has learned *Torah*, they are still considered an *Am Ha'aretz* if they do not engage in *Shimush Talmid Chochom*. Rashi explains that this is referring to engaging in group *Torah* study with masters of *Torah*, in which the logic and reasoning behind the *halachos* are explained. As R' Akiva had just began his study of *Torah* and was developing his skills of reason and understanding from his teachers, it would be inappropriate for him to interrupt this foundational learning period for any *mitzvah* whatsoever.

Based on this answer of *Tosfos*, the *Ohr Sameach* explains that R' Chisda and R' Hunah were exempt from fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *sukkah*, since they were not merely going to study *Torah*, but rather, they were going to be involved in *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim* through hearing and discussing *Torah* with their teacher.

This concept can serve as an explanation for why it was innovative for the *yeshiva* of Rebbi to interrupt their study of *Torah* to go hear the *Megillah*. A *yeshiva* is not simply a place where people learn *Torah*, but it is a place where students actively engage in discussion regarding the reasoning of the *halachah* and are learning from their teachers how to properly study *Torah*.

They were involved in *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim*. Therefore, without a specific ruling, it would have been inappropriate for the students to interrupt their learning to go and hear the *Megillah*.

Interestingly, this argument was advanced by R' Yitzchak Arieli zt"l (*Einayim Limishpat, Bava Basra 7b*), one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* in Merkaz HaRav, regarding why *yeshiva* students should be exempt from serving in the Israeli Defense Force. While it is certainly a *mitzvah* to participate in the Israeli army in protecting *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*, students in *yeshiva* who have not yet fully developed their skills in learning and are involved in *Shimush Talmidei Chachamim* would be exempt from this *mitzvah*. (For a different approach to this issue, see the essay 'The Ideology of Hesder' by Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, available online).

## What Are We Saying?

*Rabbi Mordechai Brownstein*  
*Director Of College Guidance*

One of the differences in the *tefillah* text between European communities and non-European communities is the explicit mention of *korbanos* in the *Mussaf* of *Yom Tov*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 591:2) writes, “The popular custom for all *Bnei Sephard* is not to mention the *pesukim* of the *Korban Mussaf* at all”. The Rama notes that European communities do, in fact, mention the *pesukim* of *korbanos* in the *tefillos* of *Mussaf* not only on *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*, but in every *Mussaf*. This difference of opinion is repeated many times in the *Shulchan Aruch*. The European custom espoused by the Rama is found in *Tosfos Rosh* (*Rosh Hashanah* 35a) in the name of Rabbeinu Tam.

What are the *korbanos* of *Shavuos* that the *Mussaf* text according to Rabbeinu Tam should mention?

We read in *Parshas Emor* (*Vayikra* 23:18) :

“Together with this bread, you shall sacrifice seven unblemished yearling sheep, one young bull, and two rams...

You shall also prepare one goat as a sin offering, and two yearling sheep as peace sacrifices.”

[Translation: Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan]

Of interest is the list of *korbanos* for each *Yom Tov* found in *Parshas Pinchas* (*Bamidbar* 28:27) in which *Shavuos* appears again:

“As an appeasing fragrance to God, you shall then present a burnt offering consisting of two young bulls, one ram and seven yearling sheep... and there shall also be one male goat to atone for you.”

The compelling question is: Are these two separate services, or is it one?

Rashi in *Parshas Emor* addresses the question:

“I might think that the seven lambs and the he-goat mentioned here [in *Emor*], are the same seven lambs and he-goat mentioned in *Sefer Bamidbar*; but when you read there [in *Parshas Pinchas*] bullocks [two in *Pinchas* but one in *Emor*] and rams [two in *Emor* but one in *Pinchas* you will see] they are not the same. You must then say that these are separate, and the others are separate; these are offered because of the bread, and the others are ad-

ditional [*Mussaf*] offerings.”

[Translation: Rabbi Abraham ben Isaiah and Rabbi Benjamin Sharfman]

The proof that these accounts are separate is that in *Emor*, one bull is sacrificed, while in *Pinchas* two are sacrificed, with two rams in *Emor* but only one in *Pinchas*, indicating that the series are two distinct services.

The Maharal MiPrague adds another proof to Rashi's, quoting the *Gemara* in *Menachos* :

“The order of service is reversed; here [in *Emor*] the seven unblemished lambs are mentioned first in the order of sacrifice while there [in *Pinchas*] the seven unblemished lambs are mentioned afterward. This proves that these are two distinct orders of operation”

In summary, according to Rashi:

The list in *Emor* speaks of the service accompanying the *Shtei Halechem* bread offering for *Shavuos* – these are not for the *Yom Tov Mussaf*:

- 7 Lambs, 1 Bull, and 2 Rams for the *Olah*
  - 1 Goat for the *Chata'as*
- 2 Lambs for the *Shelamim*

The list in *Pinchas* speaks of the *Korban Mussaf* for *Shavuos* which is for the *Olah* exclusively:

- 2 Bulls
  - 1 Ram
  - 7 Lambs
- 1 Goat [*Chata'as*]

So, what do we say in *Mussaf* on *Shavuos*?

“And on the day of the first fruits, when you bring a meal offering [*Shtei Halechem*] to *Hashem* on your Festival of Weeks, a Holy Assembly it shall be for you; all work of labor you shall not do. And you will bring a burnt-offering for a pleasing savor to *Hashem*; two young bullocks, one ram, seven male yearling lambs...and a he-goat for atonement [*Chata'as*].”

Please notice that a goat is mandatory in *Emor* and another in *Pinchas*, both for the *Chata'as*. Are they the same?

According to Rashi, certainly *no*! Rashi explained, as did Maharal, that the two series are distinctly two separate *mitzvos*. Based on this, we should say

‘two he-goats for atonement’, not ‘a he-goat for atonement’?

A reading of the Rambam (*Hilchos Tamidim Umusafin* 8:1) focuses on the problem encountered by Rashi in the two operations in *Emor* and *Pinchus*, with the very same conclusion that these are indeed separate and distinct. The Rambam then adds:

”ושני שעירי הטאת”

In the opinion of Rashi and the Rambam, our text in *Mussaf* is faulty, since it should include ‘two he-goats for atonement’.

See the footnote by Binyamin Azriel Re'em in *Otzar Hatefillos*.

I don't know what to say.

# The Name Game: An Exploration Of Names In Megillas Rus

*Mr. Murray Sragow*

*Director Of College Guidance*

It's hard to imagine anyone naming their child "Machlon" or "Kilyon," names that mean "disease" and "destruction," more or less. Either Rav or Shmuel clearly agrees, as is recorded in *Bava Basra* 91b. Both *amoraim* presume that the two sons of Elimelech are the same pair identified in *Divrei Hayamim* I 4:22 as "Yoash" and "Saraf," but they disagree as to which were the real names, and which were given to them to emphasize their poor behavior. One says that "Machlon" and "Kilyon" actually were their names, and "Yoash" refers to lack of faith and "Saraf" refers to having committed a crime worthy to be punished by burning (*sereifah*). The other, perhaps troubled by the thought process of their parents, argues that their names were really "Yoash" and "Saraf," but the *megillah* names them "Machlon" and "Kilyon" because of their sins.

Either way, it is apparent that it's much more important that names be descriptive than historically accurate. This is, in fact, a recurring theme in *Megillas Rus*. Naomi, Rus's mother-in-law, abandons her given name upon her return to *Beis Lechem*, saying that "Naomi," which connotes sweetness, does not match her life experience (after all, she lost her husband and sons before their time), and instead insists on being called "Mara," which connotes bitterness. Similarly, Boaz's kinsman who has a prior claim on Elimelech's field and on Rus loses his given name for failure to act (perhaps it was Eitan, or some other name meaning strength, and he loses it by wimping out), and instead is referred to as "*Peloni Almoni*," which roughly means "so and so." Rus and Boaz's son is only called "Oved" by the ladies in town. We don't know what name his parents gave him.

Later sources expand on this theme regarding many other characters. Boaz, according to the *Gemara* above, is actually Ivtzan, an obscure judge mentioned in *Shoftim* 12. Orpah, according to the *Medrash* in *Rus Rabbah*, is not her name, but she is given that description for turning the back of her neck ("*oref*") on Naomi when she chose to return to Moav. Elimelech, according to that same *Medrash*, is only called that because he used to say "*eilai tavo malchus*," or "I should be king" (Dr. Yael Ziegler, in her article "Megillat Rus - What's In A Name?", cleverly points out that this contrasts powerfully with

Rus herself. Twice in the third *perek* there is a “*kri vilo ksiv*” of the word “*eilai*,” in both cases where the word missing from the text refers to Rus. Ziegler notes that as opposed to Elimelech’s self-centeredness as understood by the *Medrash*, Rus literally removes herself from the text).

Even Rus herself, according to some, in truth had some other name and took the name “Rus” only upon conversion when she originally married Machlon (see R. Moshe Shernbuch’s *Moadim Uzmanim*). This explains a common custom for female converts to change their name to Rus, as well.

So, putting it all together, NONE of the characters in *Megillas Rus* are called by the names that appeared on their driver’s licenses and passports. Why? What message might the *megillah* be teaching us? Perhaps the *berachah* given by the women of *Beis Lechem* is the key. Upon the birth of Oved, they bless Naomi and describe him as her “*go’el*,” her redeemer (because he will restore the honor of her family), and they say “*v’yikarei shemo b’Yisrael*,” “his name should be called in Israel.” Although this phrase sounds familiar to those who have attended a *bris*, as it is said at the point at which the baby’s name is announced by his father, that cannot be the meaning here, because three more *pesukim* pass before the ladies actually name the boy. So, what does “*v’yikarei shemo b’Yisrael*” mean?

Perhaps the ladies meant “your grandson should have a name that is called out in Israel.” He will be the answer to the Ghostbusters’ question “who you gonna call?” In other words, their *berachah* to Naomi was that this boy was going to contribute to society, to be a respected person, to be the guy others could go to in time of need. To be, in the words of Thomas the Tank Engine, “really useful.” And the message, therefore, is that it doesn’t really matter what name appears on your driver’s license or passport. That just represents your parents’ hope for you when you were born. But, it’s the name you make for yourself, the name the results from your actions, the name that your friends call you, that really matters.

## Torah From Our Alumni From “Man” To “Mon”

*Dovid Wartelsky ('20)*

The second-to-last *mitzvah* in the *Torah* is that of *Hakhel*, the gathering of all of *Bnei Yisroel* at the *Beis Hamikdash* after *Sukkos* to hear the Davidic King of Yehudah read from *Sefer Devarim*. *Hakhel* is even compared to *Kabalas HaTorah* by some. However, this *mitzvah* is only done once every seven years, on the *Sukkos* following a *Shemittah* year. In the *Shemittah* year, farmers let their fields lay fallow. However, *Hashem* promised that He would provide enough food for the *Shemittah* year and the first year of the next cycle, since there was no harvest in the *Shemittah* 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 *mitzvah* can only be done on the *Sukkos* following a *Shmita*?

To answer this question, we 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 *possuk* (*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 *emunah* for the fledgling nation, as they had to rely on *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s providence for 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 *emunah*, as the *Bnei Yisrael* had to rely on *Hashem* anew every day. Another layer of *emunah* 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 *hashgachah* accompanied the Jews throughout their tenure in the desert.

However, after a while, the *Bnei Yisroel* must have gotten used to the *mon*. Since the *Bnei Yisroel* had some food with them when they left *Mitzrayim*, those first thirty days without *mon* would have overlapped with the period

of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. 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 *emunah*. 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 *Shemittah*: both display complete reliance on *Hashem*, followed by a *Torah*-receiving experience. By *Hakhel* being after the *Shemittah* year, we are commemorating the sequence of events of the *Bnei Yisroel* in the desert. This is supposed to strengthen our *emunah* and serve to reaffirm our vows in our holy marriage to *Hashem*. This *Shavuos*, after counting the days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, may we be able to fully appreciate *emunah baHashem*, and experience *Kabalas HaTorah* in a truly meaningful way.

# Hallel With Or Without A Bracha?

*Moshe Neiss ('68)*

Years ago , I had developed a rather unique hobby. I would write letters to ballplayers, famous people and politicians. After a few years, I had accumulated quite a number of responses and autographed photos. I did not limit my missives to athletes and headline makers. About twenty-five years ago , I sat with great trepidation and penned a letter in Hebrew , to Harav Ovadia Yossef, zt"l, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel. While a student years ago at YC/RIETS, I had heard him address the student body, and became absolutely enthralled with his incredible *Torah* knowledge and use of *pesukim* to drive his point home.

I am also a student of history, my focus being on the World War Two Era, 1933-1945, perhaps the most critical twelve year period in the last few centuries. The question I posed to the *Rishon LiTzion* was in 1995, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War Two.

Based on *Siman* 41 in Volume 6 of his *Yabia Omer*, Rav Yossef ponders whether *Hallel* with a *berachah* should be recited on Israel Independence Day , the fifth of *Iyar*.

Rav Yossef notes that *Hallel* with a *berachah* was instituted only if the Jewish Nation was in dire straits and then saved , but if only a portion of the nation was affected, no *berachah* is to be recited on the *Hallel* being recited to thank God for the salvation.

The question is then raised, why say *Hallel* with a *berachah* on *Chanukah*? The *yeshua* was only for those Jews living in *Eretz Yisrael*. The answer given is that *Chanukah* involved the re-dedication of the *Beis Hamikdash*, hence it is viewed as a national event. Another observation made by the *Rishon LiTzion*, Rav Yossef, zt"l, is that *Hallel* with a *berachah* is said only after the full completion of the victorious event- not before.

The query I put to Rav Yossef was the following: World War Two saw the Nazi hordes advancing in North Africa, even into Egypt. In October 1942, there was little to stop Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his Panzer tanks from breaking through into Palestine and wreaking havoc, death and destruction. A thin line of British troops under Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery managed to defeat the Germans and halt the Nazi advance at the Battle of El Alamein. I asked if the Rav did not think of that event as being worthy of *Hallel* with a *berachah*. Palestine, later to become our State of Is-

rael, had been saved.

The answer I received was remarkable for its clarity and brevity. The Hebrew response translated into English is, "Had such a *takanah* been made immediately after the victory at El Alamein, perhaps there would be a valid reason to say *Hallel* with a *berachah*. However, we are engaged in a battle still being raged against Jews by their enemies, and *Hallel* with a *berachah* is recited only after the threat to our people is completely removed."

## Torah And Kibbud Av V'Eim - Love And Fear

*Shua Pariser ('20)*

After a long and productive night of learning, the *ba'al kriah* gets up and *leins* the *Aseres Hadibros* on *Shavuos* morning. The fifth commandment of the *Aseres Hadibros* is "*kabed es avicha ves imecha*" - honor your father and your mother. In *Parshas Kedoshim* (19:3), we have a similar *possuk* of "*ish imo veaviv tirau*" - a man must fear his mother and father. Rashi explains that *kibbud* is bringing one's parents food and dressing them, while *yirah* refers to not sitting in their chair and not correcting them. There is another *mitzvah* which has similar aspects, namely *ahavas* and *yiras Hashem*. Perhaps a connection can be made between these two sets of *mitzvos*.

On *Lag Ba'Omer*, there is a *zemer* called *viamartem ko lechoi*. The *zemer* follows the order of the *aleph-beis* and describes the greatness of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, whose *yahrzeit* was on *Lag Ba'Omer*. The fifth and sixth stanzas of this *zemer* describe that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was forced to hide in a cave because of a *gezeirah* against teaching *Torah*. There, he learned all of the *Torah* and taught it to his son. He had a spring of water created for him to drink and a carob tree from which to eat, and it says about his situation "*mah tov chelko vechevlo*". He has nothing but the bare minimum. In describing his dire situation, however, the *zemer* declares "*mah tov chelko vechevlo*" - how great is his portion! How can the *zemer* say this about someone who has nothing but the bare minimum?

Every day, as part of *birchos haTorah*, we say the paragraph of *eilu devarim*, in which we list *mitzvos* that have reward both in this world and in the World To Come. Included in this list are both *kibbud av v'eim* and *talmud Torah*. Why are these two *mitzvos* in particular included? To answer this, we must ask ourselves, what is *talmud Torah*? *Talmud Torah* is learning the words of *Hashem*, fulfilling them, and not going against them. This sounds similar to an aspect of *kibbud av v'eim*, namely Rashi's description of *yiras horim*. Rabbi Shimon was able to learn with his son, thereby receiving *nachas* from his son and allowing him to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *kibbud av*. At the same time, they were being *mechabed* and *moreh* their Father in Heaven, in addition to the relationship they had with each other. This meant that by learning *Torah*, Rabbi Shimon and his son were able to fulfill both of these *mitzvos*!

There is a *Gemara* in *Maseches Sotah* that says that *Torah* is a shield. Rabbi Shimon was not only doing *kibbud* and *yiras Hashem*, but he was also being protected by *Hashem*. To that, we can surely say *mah tov chelko vechevlo*. Have a great and safe *Zman Matan Toraseinu*.

## Something To Celebrate

*Zack Kaufman ('13)*

The holiday of *Shavuos* has always been seen as one of the highlights of the Jewish calendar. The commemoration of the receiving of the *Torah*, the harvest, the ending of long itching beards at the beginning of summer- you can find endless reasons to be happy *Shavuos* has arrived. But after over a year spent gloomily looking through the glass at a world rapidly changing in scary ways, stuck in our homes for months at a time it can be hard to find reasons to be truly happy in these times.

*Shavuos*, at its core, is about waiting. The holiday is named *Shavuos*, “weeks”, after the seven-week period preceding the holiday, by which its date is defined. We wait and wait for *Shavuos*, we make sure to count down every day and mark it off in anticipation for when we can finally celebrate. And after everything we’ve gone through, its safe to assume that everyone at this point has been waiting in anticipation for something to celebrate.

The *possuk* in *Devarim* makes a statement about the nature of *Shavuos*, which ends with the phrase:

וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיְפַדְּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל-כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְנֶךָ אֶת-הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם:  
 “And you should remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem your God redeemed you; therefore, I command you about this thing today” (*Devarim* 15:15).

The obvious question is, what is the connection? Why is the celebration of the *Torah* specifically connected to our work as *avadim* in Egypt? We already spoke about *Yetzias Mitzrayim* by *Pesach*, so why remember it again?

The Abarbanel answers that the arrival of *Shavuos* marks the hardest part of the year for Jews in the time of the temple. It's a time immediately after *Pesach*, when people had recently been *oleh liregel*, but before the harvest, unlike *Sukkos*. Asking people to come back to Yerushalayim barely a month after they left while the farming season is at its zenith is hard, a difficult task to ask of anyone, and making the idea of being purely happy seem even more impossible.

Hashem mentions our slavery to show that times can be hard, but they will

never be that hard again. We've endured, through every situation, through every plague, through every conflict, with *sasson visimchah*, for thousands of years, because we know there will always be another *regel*, and maybe once we reach that one, we'll have more of a reason to smile.

*Iy"H* our celebration of the next *chag*, *Sukkos*, will be one where we can be wholly happy, and don't have to work out the logistics of socially distanced *sukkos*. Until then, may we all be *zocheh* to a happy and healthy *Shavuos*, and remember that better days are right around the corner.

## Shavuos: A Time of Jewish Pride

Zack Steiner ('17)

From a young age, I was raised with the understanding that *Shavuos* is a *yom tov* of the *Torah*. It's a day unto itself, set aside to celebrate the *zechus* that we have to even be a nation that is related to such a beautiful object. The *Torah* is referred to as *sha'ashu'im*, joy-inducing toys which fill our lives with meaning and pleasure. And the one day a year we have to fully appreciate this is *Chag Hashavuos, Yom Matan Toraseinu*.

However, if one looks carefully at the Rambam, one does not get that perspective at all. First, the only mention of *Shavuos* in the Rambam's *Hilchos Yom Tov* is his mentioning of it as one of the days on which *melachah* is forbidden. Second, when the Rambam speaks about the *korban* of *Chag Hashavuos* (in the middle of *Hilchos Temidin Umusaffin*, away from any other *halachos* about *yom tov*), he simply says that the fiftieth day of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* is called *Shavuos*, or *Atzeres*. Not one mention of *Torah*. Nothing about *simchah*. (See also the Rambam's *Sefer Hamitzvos* 45:46, where the Rambam doesn't even say the word *Shavuos*; he instead calls this *yom tov* the "fiftieth day since the *Omer* offering".) The number of days since the *Omer* seems pretty irrelevant to me. Do we count how many days it's been since *Rosh Hashanah* on *Shemini Atzeres*? Not that I know of. But on the other hand, in the Rambam's *nusach hatefillah* (text of prayer), he calls *Shavuos* "*Yom Matan Toraseinu*"! Does the Rambam recognize *Shavuos* as a time or not? And if so, why doesn't he mention that in his introductory remarks to the *halachos* regarding the *korban hayom* of *Shavuos*?

The question is furthered by the fact that the Rambam is not the only person to omit the mention of *Matan Torah* by *Shavuos*. In fact, *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* Himself does the same thing. In *Parshas Emor (Vayikra 23:17)*, when the *Torah* is listing the *moadim*, it goes through all of the *dinim* of the *Korban Shtei Halechem*, the *korban* of *Shavuos*. But, the *pesukim* never once mention *Torah* or *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. What is going on here?

To answer this problem, Rav Michael Rosensweig *shlit"a*, one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of RIETS, points to a Ramban (*Vayikra 23:36*). There, the Ramban explains the word *Atzeres* (which is how Chazal typically refer to *Chag Hashavuos*), saying that *Shavuos* is like the *Shemini Atzeres* of *Pesach*. The culmination, the most intense and intimate part of *Chag* is *Shemini Atzeres*, the day where *Hashem* tells us "please, stay with me for one more day. I

can't bear to see you leave". *Shavuos* is the same concept. *Hashem* showers us with gifts - the *Torah* -to show His love for us, His pride to be ours. Additionally, this would mean that the days in between 'the first days' and 'the last days' of this long *Yom Tov* are a type of *Chol Hamoed*.

To fully understand this concept, let's look at a *marshal*. A young boy has been struggling in school for years. He's been passing by the skin of his teeth. He's not a bad boy—the opposite is actually true. He wants more than anything to be successful. He wants to show his parents, his teachers, his friends, that he amounts to something, that he can make them proud. But he just can't do it. Each test comes back worse than the one before. And the poor boy can't help but cry. He drags his feet through the front door in tears, embarrassed to show parents his low grade. His parents, encouraging and optimistic, tell him it's ok. But it's not, and the boy knows it. It's been too long since he's gotten a good grade. He can't take it.

His parents come up with a plan. The boy has a math test coming up in two weeks. This math test will be the test. The boy is going to set aside two hours every day to study. His parents will be right there with. Every problem will be perfect. He'll know the formulas better than his siblings' names. He's going to ace this test. And as an incentive, his parents promise him a brand-new bike. "Just get above a 90", they tell him, "and the bike is yours". You can imagine the work ethic of this boy. He gives his all to this math test, poring over practice problem after practice problem. He can't tear himself away. He needs this bike. And more importantly, he needs to make his parents proud.

The day of the test comes and the boy is sweating through his shirt. It's not that he doesn't know the material; he couldn't know it better. But this test is high stakes. The boy needs this test to boost his confidence, to show his parents what he's got.

A week later the boy gets his grade on the test. A 92! He's passed with flying colors. He breaks down crying, right there in front of his friends. He just can't help himself. He earned this more than anything else in the world. He skips all the way home, unable to contain his joy. When they see his grade, his parents too, break down in tears. They knew he could do it. They know what he's got. And they run to the bike store. But both the parents and the boy know—it's not about the bike. It's about the pride. It's about the joy of the fruits of labor coming to the fore. It's the beautiful smile of this boy, finally proud of and confident in himself.

This is the feeling of *Klal Yisroel* on *Shavuos*. The Jewish people spent 210 years in Mitzrayim, too broken to cry or to feel emotion. They gave up. The 49<sup>th</sup> level of *tumah* was too far for them to climb out of. But *Hashem*, our loving Father, knew that wasn't true. He knew what they had in them. He knew they just needed a little push. So, He gave it to them. *Klal Yisroel* left Mitzrayim and worked hard in the forty-nine days following. Every day was a day for them to make up for what they had lost, for the pain and suffering. Test day was coming, and they knew it.

Finally, on the 50<sup>th</sup> day, *Hashem* reveals to them their grade. They've passed with flying colors. They can have the *Torah*, they can have the *mitzvos*. They're ready for it. They can handle it.

The joy of *Shavuos*, therefore, is not in the *Torah* itself. It's in the relationship. It's in the confidence shown in the Jewish people, the pride *Hashem* has for us. We gleam on *Shavuos*, because the *Torah* represents that pride, that love *Hashem* has for us. He knew we could do it. He knows we can, right now.

Therefore, the Rambam doesn't stress *Zman Matan Toraseinu* in most places. Neither does *Hashem* Himself. The joy of *Shavuos* is the fruition of the hard work. It's the pride and love *Hashem* shows us with the giving of the *Torah*. Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (*Pri Tzaddik Shavuos 2*) explains that *Torah* is only given through love, as we say every night in the *berachah* of *Ahavas Olam* that *Hashem's* giving of the *Torah* was an expression of his love. The *berachah* of *Torah* begins with love, since this is the nature of the *Torah* - the pendant which we hold that symbolizes undying passion *Hashem* holds for us.

Reb Tzadok further suggests that there are two types of love which merit the giving of the *Torah*. One is the love of Avraham Avinu. Avraham is called "Avraham *Ohavi*", *Hashem's* beloved. He is the paradigm of an *Eved Hashem* - he never messes up, the perfect student, with straight A's. The other type of love is that of Yaakov Avinu. The *possuk* (*Malachi 1:2*) refers to Yaakov as Eisav's brother. They are similar in nature, both lying to get what they want (for the *berachos*), both cheating (by Lavan and his pay). But there's something fundamentally different about Yaakov. His intentions are not for himself. He only means to make *Hashem* proud. Yes, he consistently flunks his math test. He seems like a bad kid. But his heart never sways from his Father. He never wants anything other than the love and pride of his beloved. That's why "*vi'ohiv es Yaakov*", *Hashem* declares that He loves Yaakov, not Eisav. *Hashem* sees that burning desire to pass this math test, to pass this

*nisayon*, to do the right thing. He knows it and cherishes it.

Wherever we may find ourselves when we come to *Chag HaShavuos*—whether we're feeling like Avraham or Yaakov - we are *zocheh* to the *Torah*. The love and passion that we may feel sometimes, deep down, faintly—it's significant. And if we have never felt that love, that passion; *Hashem* has. He knows what's deep down. He knows why we do what we do. And He cherishes that pure state of our psyches, so much so that He gifts us the *Torah*.

This *Shavuos*, let us try to feel what *Shavuos* really is - "*kasha alai pridaschem*". *Hashem* cannot bear to see us go. He wants us to be close to Him, all the time. Let's take the opportunity of the night of *Shavuos*, of the days of *Shavuos*, the *tefillos* and the *seudos*, to try to internalize this concept.

## Don't Be Afraid To Start

*YUHSB Dorm Staff*

Oftentimes, we are critical of ourselves. We tell ourselves not to take on a new project or a new challenge due to past attempts that have failed or that have not been completed.

At *Kabalas HaTorah*, Moshe goes to the top of *Har Sinai* in order to receive the *Torah*. While Moshe is there, *Hashem* teaches him the *Torah* for forty days, only for Moshe to go down to *Har Sinai* to find *Klal Yisroel* worshipping the golden calf. If *Hashem* knows the past, present and future, why would *Hashem* give us the *Torah* when He knew that we were going to mess up right away?

Rav Elimelech Biderman *shlit"a* explains that the sin of the golden calf, which *Hashem* knew would take place, didn't cause *Hashem* not to give the *Torah* to *Klal Yisroel* at that present moment. The *Sfas Emes* says that from here we learn that it is against the *hashkafah of the Torah* for someone to think that just because they are going to mess up in a week from now, just because they are going to stop whatever they took upon themselves, that they shouldn't try to do the best they can in the present moment. The fear of failure doesn't mean that a person should not take upon themselves a new challenge, project or *mitzvah*. A prime example of this is *Daf Yomi*. Seven and a half years is a long time. 2,711 *daf* of *Gemara* is a lot of pages. 2,711 days in a row of learning a *daf* isn't so easy; some days are more challenging than others. However, last year the amount of people that took on doing the *daf*, even though they weren't sure they would be able to stick with it, is amazing and beautiful. By making the decision to do the best they could do in that moment, not worrying about the future challenges, they have changed so many lives.

Every year on *Shavuot*, we reaccept the *Torah*. We all know that some days are better than others, and on some days there are more challenges than others. What is important over these next couple of days is that we fully accept the *Torah*. Even after the *Nazir* finishes his term as a *Nazir*, the *Torah* still refers to him as a *Nazir*. Rav Biderman says that we see from here, that even when a person is not fully doing what they took upon themselves, when they are "on a lower level," or are not sticking to their goals, what they have taken upon themselves, what they have started to accomplish, sticks with them. Everything that we accomplish and try to do stays with us, and makes us better for it.

# Torah From Our Talmidim

## Matan Torah and “Present Theory”

*Shneur Agronin ('21)*

Among our most central *mesoros* in *Yiddishkeit* is the firm belief that *Hashem*, in His infinite wisdom, chose to bestow upon our ancestors the *Torah* at *Har Sinai* around 3300 years ago. This episode is revisited on *Shavuos*, and constitutes both the origin and focal point of the *Yom Tov*. In this article, I would like to summarize among the most famous modern rationales behind our *mesorah* presented by Rabbi Lawrence Kelemen *shlit"á* in both his book *Permission to Receive* and in numerous *shiurim* (and many such featured concepts are based on Rabbi Yehudah HaLeivi's *Sefer HaKuzari*). He begins by first outlining the three possible “origin theories” into which virtually all known religious narratives fall: past theory, present theory, and future theory. In short, a religion based upon past theory is one whose claim to ultimate divinity stems from a past revelation of a deity to a single prophet, who then spreads this new faith to all, *or* that a deity revealed itself to the ancestors of the targeted group, but whose knowledge and teachings were then forgotten until this prophet, who is now returning the target group to them with the aid of their own revelation. Present theory dictates that the “founder” of the religion claims to his potential-followers that he or they have just now experienced a divine revelation. Future theory involves a future prophecy which is predicted to come true one day (“a deity will one day reveal itself to your descendants”).

A religion based upon past theory, such as the vast majority of popular ones today (Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and others), presents an interesting feature: the *uncheckable claim*. Can one ascertain *with certainty* that Saul of Tarsus was spoken to by a certain deity, that a man in what is presently Saudi Arabia experienced divine revelation 1500 years ago, or that a South Asian prince attained solitary enlightenment? No - nobody can verify with certainty or by testimonial evidence (beyond the “founder” themselves) that such events took place. Ironically, this is exactly why such faiths have attracted massive followings, according to this theory - human nature focuses on the possibility of truth which cannot be disproven over the possible falsehood. The other “unverifiable” theory, future theory, is also at the root of less well-known religions, and features the exact same attractive aspect which past theory does - an inability to have its narrative disproven with certainty.

The “outlier” theory, present theory, is tricky. While humans may believe that their distant ancestors were privy to divine revelation, they will not believe that *they themselves* have experienced that unless the event is to actually take place. After all, if an ambitious theologian assembled even the most gullible group of people and told them upon grabbing their attention, “a deity just spoke to you! Worship it and pass its teachings onto your children,” the crowd would obviously reject their claim and move on with their lives. Christianity claims that a certain deity revealed itself to a single man, not even to a group of people, as does Islam, effectively. Buddhism does not claim that a group of people obtained simultaneously enlightenment after prolonged meditation - rather, that a single man did so.

Of course, though, we do find just *one* faith of the thousands analyzed in Rabbi Kelemen’s study, whose claim follows not past theory nor future theory, but instead, the uncanny present theory: Judaism. Judaism does not align with past theory, since never do we claim that the *Torah* was forgotten by the entire nation and subsequently returned to us, especially not by a single prophet or other significant figure (*Ezra HaSofer, Nechemiyah, and Chizkiyahu HaMelech* have been speculated to be this figure by dissenters to this theory, but none satisfy even most of the criteria for the “founder” of a past-theory religion). Our claim is that *Hashem* revealed Himself, in unrestrained glory and access, to an assembled nation of *three million* people; not to their ancestors, to them, to their own eyes, and to their ears do we claim He spoke both sets of the *Aseres HaDibros* in a single instant. No other faith group has claimed an origin so bold, so climactic, and indeed, *so unstable* - if, of course, such an origin were to be false. Only if the origin claim following present theory is verifiable and definite can such a faith be passed on - otherwise, there would be nothing to transmit to future generations. In one such way is our unique *mesorah* further strengthened.

At the conclusion of one lecture given by Rabbi Kelemen discussing his findings, he quotes the *possuk*: “...has anything as grand as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been known? Has any nation heard the voice of God speaking out of a fire, as you have, and survived?” (*Devarim* 4:32-33), demonstrating that even the *Torah* itself espouses this idea, that our *mesorah* directly linked back to our ancestors standing at *Har Sinai* 3300 years ago is unlike that of any other faith or nation, and that it stands the test of time and hardship to preserve our traditions and beliefs since then, today, and for all time. I hope that we may all enjoy a renewed and strengthened sense of *emunah* in our *mesorah* as we revisit our distinct and incredible beginnings.

## Be Free

*Yaakov Weinstock ('22)*

The Ramban asks in his *hakdamah* to *Sefer Shemos* why the entire *sefer* is referred to by Chazal as *Sefer Hageulah* (the Book of Redemption), if the *geulah* seems to have ended when the Egyptians drowned in the *Yam Suf* and *Bnei Yisrael* were no longer subservient to Mitzrayim. Why should the entire *sefer* of *Shemos* be called *Sefer Hageulah* based on the first four *parshiyos* which tell the story of how *Bnei Yisrael* were freed? The Ramban answers his own question and explains that before the Jews came to *Har Sinai*, got the *Torah*, and built the *Mishkan*, they were not yet considered free. Only once the spiritual foundation of *Torah* and a connection to *Hashem* was established in the proper way were they able to be considered free. The Ramban seems to say that *Ma'amad Har Sinai* and *Kabala HaTorah* was the beginning of making *Bnei Yisrael* really free. However, what changed before and after *Matan Torah* to enact this freedom?

The *mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* states that the *Luchos* were the handiwork of *Hashem*, as the *possuk* says that the writing was the writing of *Hashem* engraved (*charus*) on the *luchos*. The *mishnah* then adds that the word can also be read not as *charus*, engraved, but as *cheirus*, freedom, because there is no one who is free except one who is involved in *Torah*. We can ask a similar question on this *mishnah* as we did on the Ramban. How does *Torah* make one into a free person?

The Maharal of Prague, in his *sefer Derech Chayim*, explains beautifully that the redemptive quality of *Torah* is that learning *Torah* and accepting the *Torah* allows one to see the true reality of the world. When one learns *Torah* he becomes able to see a true reality, unblocked by other things. He is able to achieve truth. A slave doesn't have the ability to achieve this truth because his reality is defined by his master. The Maharal gives an example that a slave sees a donkey not because he views it as a donkey, but rather because his whole perception of the world is dictated by his master, and his master said that this was a donkey. Therefore, his perception of reality comes only from what his master dictates to him and tells him. This can help us answer the question on the Ramban. Even after *Kriyas Yam Suf*, the Jews were still slaves, since before they were given the *Torah* they couldn't be considered truly free, as they were never exposed to *amitah shel Torah*, the truth of *Torah*. Thus, they were still slaves, because they were enslaved by their perceptions and unable to see the true reality of the world. *Kabala*

*HaTorah* instilled in *Klal Yisrael* a *Torah*-guided reality, and once they had that, they could be called free people.

The Rambam in *Hilchos Geirushin* writes that if a couple gets divorced, the man needs to give the *get* willfully. However, if he refuses, the Rambam writes "*kofin oso ad sheyomar rotzeh Ani*" - we force him until he says he wants to. That is considered giving a *get* willfully. How could this be considered willfully? Isn't it clear that he was forced? The Rambam explains that really, every Jew wants to do the right thing, but there might be obstacles in his way preventing him from making that choice that deep down he really wants to make. Thus, when we force him to give the *get*, we are really just bringing out his internal desire to do what is right. *Torah*, based on this Maharal, functions in a similar manner. Learning *Torah* allows a person to remove any obstacles to seeing reality through the lens of *Torah*. The Maharal gives one an appreciation for *Torah*, and the fact that it has the ability to completely change a person's life for the better in that he can become a free person. With this idea of the Maharal, may the *Torah* impact our lives, so that we can fully accept the *Torah* this *Shavuos*.

## The Enigma of Shavuos: Its Lack of Mitzvos and Focus on the Spiritual

Yosef Weiner ('23)

*Shavuos* is unique in that, unlike other *yomim tovim*, there are no *mitzvos* specific to it. In fact, the *halachos* of *Shavuos* in *Shulchan Aruch* are all tucked away at the end of *Hilchos Pesach*, constituting a mere *siman*, which itself contains only three *seifim* discussing the *tefillos* and some of the *minhagim* of the day. What could possibly be the reason for the lack of *mitzvos* dedicated to *Shavuos*?

Additionally, the *Gemara* in *Maseches Pesachim* (68b) recounts that Rav Yosef would ask for a special delicacy on *Shavuos*. He reasoned that if it were not for *Shavuos*, the day on which the *Torah* was given, he would be just like the other Yosef's in the marketplace. What is Rav Yosef's rationale? Wouldn't it be more fitting to exclaim that if not for *Shavuos* he would not have the *Torah* which gives him so much joy and purpose to his life? Furthermore, why is Rav Yosef choosing to celebrate *Shavuos* by having a delicacy? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to celebrate the giving of the *Torah* by going to the *Beis Medrash* and sharing some *Torah*? The *Gemara* further states with regards to *Shavuos*, all are in agreement that one needs to spend part of the day engaged in activities that bring oneself joy (e.g. eating and drinking), while with regards to other *yomim tovim* there is a dispute how much time if at all one should dedicate to enjoying this world. Why, out of all of the *yomim tovim*, would *Shavuos* be the one where there is focus on the physical in addition to the spiritual?

A beautiful explanation to the above questions is offered by Rabbi Shmuel Greenberg. The *Torah* states at the end of the story of creation

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי:

*And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Bereishis 1:31).*

By all of the other days of the creation, the *Torah* does not add the prefix *hay* to the beginning of the day, but rather simply states the day (e.g. *yom chamishi*). Thus, Rashi comments that the *hay* by *yom hashishi*, whose numerical value is five, was added to the sixth day, which is the day of the completion of creation, to indicate that the world was created on the condition that *Bnei Yisrael* accept the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*. Alternatively, Rashi com-

ments that the *Torah* added the prefix *hay* because it is referring to *the* sixth day, that being the sixth day of *Sivan*, when the *Torah* was given to *Bnei Yisroel*. It expresses that creation was not finalized until *Bnei Yisroel* accepted the *Torah* on the sixth of *Sivan*.

Based upon Rashi, it is possible to understand why unlike other *yomim tovim*, *Shavuos* has no special *mitzvos* dedicated to it. *Shavuos* is the celebration of the giving of the *Torah* and thereby the solidification of all of creation. Therefore, there cannot be a *mitzvah* specific to *Shavuos*, as one would need to celebrate all of creation, which is impossible to distill into a *mitzvah*.

Furthermore, Rashi sheds light on Rav Yosef's actions in *Maseches Pesachim*. Since *Shavuos* is the day when all of creation became concrete, one cannot limit their celebration to the realm of *Torah*; rather, one must recognize that all of creation only exists because of the *Torah* and *Bnei Yisrael's* acceptance of it on *Shavuos*. When Rav Yosef pronounced that if not for *Shavuos* he would be just like all the other Yosef's walking in the marketplace, he is stating that because of *Shavuos*, he sees the marketplace differently, because he realizes that it exists because of *Matan Torah*. Moreover, Rav Yosef asked for a delicacy to be served to him on *Shavuos* because by doing so he recognized that if not for the *Torah*, he would not be able to enjoy the meal. *Shavuos* is not simply responsible for the joy of *Torah*, but also for everything we have in this world. The day, therefore, is not just about celebrating the *Beis Medrash*, but rather about recognizing that everything, even the marketplace and a fine meal, is an outgrowth of *Matan Torah*.

## Acceptance of the Torah: A Voluntary Decision?

Yonatan Burns ('22)

The *Torah* in *Parshas Yisro* describes *Klal Yisroel's* acceptance of the *Torah*. The *possuk* writes, "On the third day, as morning dawned, there was thunder, and lightning, and a dense cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud blast of the horn, and all the people who were in the camp trembled; Moshe led the people out of the camp toward God, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain. (*Shemos* 19:16-17)" Rashi, commenting on this second *possuk*, cites a *Medrash* which explains that really Hashem picked up the mountain and held it over *Klal Yisroel*. They were not standing at the foot of the mountain, but under it.

Using this *Medrash* to understand the *possuk* leads many to question *Klal Yisroel's* acceptance of the *Torah*. *Klal Yisroel* had just witnessed Hashem's miracles in *Mitzrayim*, had walked across the dry *Yam Suf*, and had eaten the *mann* which had fallen from heaven. Now after being led by Moshe to *Har Sinai*, Hashem is holding a mountain over their heads and telling them that if they don't accept the *Torah*, this will be their burial place (*Shabbos* 88a). How can anyone claim that *Klal Yisroel* accepted the *Torah* voluntarily? It would seem that this is a valid reason for non-observance of *mitzvos*, as one could claim the *Torah* was forcefully given.

This question is raised in the *Gemara* in *Shabbos* (88a). Rav Acha Bar Yaakov says "from here there is a strong answer to the *Torah!*" (Meaning, one can give a strong retort to Hashem as to why he has not followed the *Torah* - he can claim that the *Torah* was not accepted willingly.) In response, Rava says that *Klal Yisroel* accepted the *Torah* during the story of *Purim*, as it's written in *Megilas Esther*, "the Jews established, and took upon them, and upon their offspring, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them (*Esther* 9:27)."

What is distinctive about *Purim*, that Rava gave such an answer? A possible answer is that the story of *Purim* is quite the opposite from that of *Kabalas HaTorah*. At the time of *Kabalas HaTorah*, *Klal Yisroel* were on a spiritual high after witnessing firsthand the miracles of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Conversely, the time of *Achashveirosh's* reign is considered a low point in Jewish history. *Klal Yisroel* watched *Achashveirosh* feast using the holy *keilim* from the *Beis Hamikdash*, the very same *Beis Hamikdash* that he was celebrating the

destruction of. If that's not enough, Achashveirosh and Haman plotted to wipe out *Klal Yisroel* completely. Nevertheless, despite this pain, *Klal Yisroel* turned to *Hashem*, accepting Him and His *mitzvos*. While *Kabalas HaTorah* on *Har Sinai* was forced, *Klal Yisroel* wholeheartedly accepted the *Torah* at a time in which *Hashem* seemed to be hidden from their lives.

All of *Klal Yisroel* today were not around during *Kabalas HaTorah* on *Har Sinai* or during the time of the *Purim* miracles. We are bound to the *Torah* and *Hashem's mitzvos* by its acceptance by our ancestors. To strengthen our own connection to the *Torah* and to *mitzvah* observance, we should make our own meaningful contribution to *Chag HaShavuos* and make our own personal *Kabalas HaTorah*.

## Simchas Sefirah

*Isaac Cohen ('23)*

During the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, leading up to *Shavuos*, there was a *mitzvah* to bring a *Korban Omer* from the first night of *Pesach* until 50 days later, *Shavuos*. Today without a *Beis Hamikdash*, this *mitzvah* is not possible, and instead we count the days until *Shavuos*. However, when analyzing the *mitzvah*, a conundrum becomes apparent. Most *poskim* hold that *sefirah* is said without any *shehechyanu*, which is strange since it is a positive 'one-time holiday' *mitzvah*. Thus, many *rabanim* brought many approaches as to why this is the case.

The *Shibolai Haleket* answers that *sefirah* is a timed *mitzvah*, that is, that the date it begins is dependent on the date of *Pesach*. Thus, the *shehechyanu* which we say on *Pesach* covers the *shehechyanu* for *sefirah*. Therefore, the question is not 'why is there no *shehechyanu*', but rather "when do we say *shehechyanu*". Other *Rabbanim* latch on to this idea, stating that the *shehechyanu* of *Shavuos* covers *sefirah* because they are also dependent upon each other.

The *Ba'al Hamor* brings a different perspective. He states that *sefirah* is only a remembrance of the *korbanot* brought in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Therefore, it is *dirabanan*, but more importantly, it is a remembrance of a past *mitzvah* as opposed to the actual *mitzvah*. Thus, there is no *shehechyanu* during *sefirah*. The *Ba'al Hamor* brings another approach. He states that happy holidays that bring benefit require *shehechyanu*. However, *sefirah*, as stated above, is a remembrance of a past *mitzvah* and brings no benefit. As it is seen as a sad *mitzvah*, there is no *shehechyanu*.

The kabbalistic *Leshem Yichud* prayer preceding the counting displays the lack of the *Beis Hamikdash*, stating that all we can do today is to count. This is why the *harachamam* prayer that follows the counting asks *Hashem* to restore the *Beis Hamikdash*.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* brings another interpretation of *sefirah*. It states that the *Bnei Yisroel's* goal after being freed from *Mitzrayim* was to receive and keep the *Torah*, but more importantly, from this teaching we see that the true essence of *Bnei Yisroel* is the *Torah*. During *sefirah* we count in anticipation for the receiving of the *Torah*. Rav Soloveitchik adds that *sefirah* is only a preparation for a *mitzvah*, and therefore at the moment of counting *sefirah*

there is nothing to say *shehechyanu* on.

*Sefer Hamanhig* (by Rabbeinu Avraham b. Natan HaYarhi of Lunel, 12th century – *Hilchos Pesach* 64), provides a similar answer. He states how we say *shehechyanu* over matters that provide both pleasure and *simchah* ( e.g. *Megillas Esther*). *Sefirah* provides no pleasure, and therefore there is no *shehechyanu*.

*Sefirah* is a chance for us to prepare for *Matan Torah*, an event every Jewish person has a connection to, whether Modern Orthodox or Charedi. Our goal today is to do what we can, whether it is counting or praying, in order that we are prepared for the coming of the *Moshiach* and rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

## Megillas Rus and Priorities in Tzedakah

*Oriel Inzlicht ('21)*

In a case of two *ani'im*, one who is a regular poor person and the other is an *ani* that used to be wealthy, we are told that it is a priority to give *tzedakah* to the *ani* that used to be wealthy.

The Rambam, in *Hilchos Matanos Aniyim*, describes eight levels of *tzedakah*. The Rambam writes that the best and highest form of *tzedakah* is to prevent a person on the verge of financial ruin from going over the edge. One should give *tzedakah* to prevent that person from becoming an *ani* and therefore being dependent on others.

In his *sefer, Ahavas Chesed*, the *Chofetz Chaim* says that upholding or saving a poor person from complete financial ruin takes precedence over upholding or saving a wealthy person from complete financial ruin.

The question is, why, in a case where the wealthy person is already poor, they take precedence, whereas in a case of two people who are on the brink of complete financial ruin, one poor and one wealthy, the poor person takes precedence?

An answer that can be suggested is that the *Torah* is extremely sensitive to and very much intune with the feelings and needs of the people who follow it, the *Bnei Yisrael*. In each case, the priority seems to go to whoever receiving help or going around collecting would be harder for. It is easier for a regular *ani* to go around and ask for help. It is already known that he is poor and, while still very embarrassing, it is not as embarrassing as a former *gevir* who becomes poor.

In the case of saving someone from financial ruin, it is harder for an *ani* to get help. Who wants to give a loan to an *ani*? There is a big risk that they won't be able to pay it back. Additionally, many people would rather try to help a wealthy person in trouble, hoping to get in the "good graces" of the wealthy person. The *gevir* will owe them a favor and he can give lots of *kavod*. This is all besides the fact that the loan is safer with the *gevir*.

Even by innocent logic, a person can come to conclude that the *ashir's* business takes precedence since through that business he, the *ashir*, can support lots of *ani'im*. Nevertheless, a true *ba'al tzedakah* is supposed to give priority to the *ani*

when he is on the verge of financial ruin.

On the topic of logic, many people would assume that a person that can do more for others and has more to lose would take precedence. With that logic, it would be harder for a poor person that is struggling and on the verge of ruin financially to get help. People might also think that giving to an *ani* who used to be wealthy might be on a lower level than giving to a regular *ani*. Because of this, in the case of saving someone from financial ruin, the *ani* takes precedence, while in the case of giving to people who are already poor, the *ani* that was once wealthy takes precedence.

כִּי־יִהְיֶה־בְּךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאַחֶיךָ בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאַרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תִאָּמֵץ אֶת־לִבְּךָ  
וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת־גִּדְּךָ מֵאֶחִיךָ הָאֶבְיוֹן

*"If there shall be a destitute person among you, from any of your brethren in any of your cities, in your land Hashem, your God, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother."* (Devarim 15:7)

עניי עירך קודמין

*"The poor of your city take precedence"* (Bava Metzia 71a)

R' Herschel Schachter is quoted as having said that "*aniyei ircha*" are the people with whom you associate, with whom you have a *kesher*. We also know that a person has a special obligation to give to his "brother". In this context, it literally means someone with a familial relationship. The Rambam (*Sefer Hamitzvos* Negative Commandment 232) translates the word instead as "brethren".

Perhaps we can also suggest that a regular person is not "brothers" with the wealthy person. Therefore, the wealthy person will be taken care of by his wealthy "brothers" and the other men of means he associates with. For most people, loaning money to a wealthy person seems more attractive, so much so that the regular people may end up choosing the *gevir* over the regular *ani*. We are therefore warned and reminded to give to the *sni* when he is struggling and to worry about our "brothers" and the *aniyei ircha* before we try to "move up" or get in the "good graces" of those on a higher financial level than us. As Rashi warns when commenting on the words "Do not close your hands" (towards your destitute brother), 'lest you become his "Brother" in poverty'. And as the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Matanos Aniyim* (10:2), "All of Israel and those who join them are like brothers..and if a brother will not take pity on his own brother, who then should take pity on him?"

The connection this has to *Shavuos* is vast and very clear. In *Megillas Rus*, we have the relationship between Boaz and Rus. A former princess, Rus is now forced to go to the fields and collect the leftovers from the farmers. As a Moavis, she is also a stranger, making it much harder for her to collect and get help from others. Boaz, clearly a great *ba'al tzedakkah*, instructs his staff to give priority to Rus and provide her with extra food. Finally, in a supreme act of *chesed* and *tzedakah*, Rus stays with Boaz and they marry, despite Boaz telling Rus that she should find someone younger.

May we all continue to give *tzedakah* and merit the coming of *Moshiach*, speedily and in our time, *Chag Sameach*.

*I welcome any feedback or suggested answers at [oinzlicht@gmail.com](mailto:oinzlicht@gmail.com).*

## Cheesecake For Your Seudah?

*Elisha Price ('23)*

There are many *minhagim* that are traditionally associated with *Shavuos*. Perhaps the most famous of these customs is to eat dairy products. But there are a couple of questions about this practice that should be addressed.

First, let's start with the source of the custom. The Rama (*Orach Chayim* 494:3) cites this *minhag* and gives the following reason: By *Pesach*, we have meals commemorating the *Korban Pesach* and *Korban Chagigah*, so too here we commemorate the *bikkurim* by having two loaves of bread eaten within the span of two meals, the first of which should be dairy, and the second of which should be meat.

An alternate reason, given by the *Mishnah Berurah* (494:12) is also the most famous. He explains that when *Bnei Yisrael* were in the *midbar* after hearing the ten commandments at *Har Sinai*, they were unable to eat meat, because their vessels were *treif* and they needed new ones. Therefore, for some time after *Matan Torah*, the entire Jewish population only ate dairy, so we commemorate this by eating dairy on the day that celebrates *Matan Torah*.

With that being said, we can move on to our first question about this popular *minhag*: is it *mutar* from a *kashrus* perspective?

The *Gemara* in multiple places (e.g., *Chullin* 104b) records arguments about whether or not one can eat meat right after eating dairy. Rabbi Moshe Isserlis, the Rama, in his commentary to the Tur (*Yoreh De'ah* 89), cites a *teshuvah* of the Maharam of Rothenburg who says that it is better to be *machmir* and not have meat right after dairy, but there is room to be lenient. Additionally, Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Orach Chayim* I 160) says that it's better to create a separation between the dairy and meat meals, but he points out that there is room to be lenient and eat meat right after dairy. Rav Ovadya Yosef says that the problem of eating meat after dairy can be avoided by simply washing out your mouth after finishing your dairy meal, and then proceeding to eat the meat.

With that in mind, we can move on to our next question about the *inyan* of dairy on *Shavuos*: does one fulfill the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov* through it?

The *Gemara* (*Beitzah* 15b) says that in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov* one has to give themselves both spiritual and physical pleasure. How?

By eating, drinking, and learning *Torah*. Based on this, the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* attempt to determine what foods bring about *simchah*.

The Rambam in the *Mishneh Torah* (*Hilchos Shevisas Yom Tov* 6:18) cites the importance of eating meat and drinking wine *lihalachah* as well, going so far as to say that one would not be *yotzei* without it, since *ein simcha ela babasar* (there is no happiness other than with meat).

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 529:3) *paskens* that one must eat, drink, and be merry on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. He includes in this *halachah* that one must not overindulge in wine or meat, the implication being that it is highly suggested, if not required, to eat meat. The *Mishnah Berurah* (*Orach Chayim* 529:20) doesn't limit this *inyan* to a suggestion, but says that on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, one is obligated to eat meat and drink wine.

This would imply that our dairy *seudos* on *Shavuos* do not satisfy the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov* at all, as that requires meat. While these opinions make it sound like an open-and-shut case, there are those whom one can rely upon for a more lenient *psak*. The *Maaseh Rokeach* on the Rambam quoted above cites the opinion of *Tosfos* that nowadays there is no need for wine or meat for *simchas Yom Tov*; we are able to be *yotzei* without it. Since that is true, and the *Shulchan Aruch* only implies that meat is required, but doesn't actually say it, there is definitely room to go either way.

Even the Rama quoted above implies that meat is required, because he *paskens* that a second meal must be eaten after the dairy meal, and that the second meal must contain meat. One could argue (like the *Sefer Yosef Ometz* (854)) that the Rama meant that the meat and dairy products are to be eaten at one meal; the dairy and then the meat. Based on this, the Rama would be *paskening* that this one large meal would satisfy your *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*.

However, R. Tzvi Hirsch Shapiro, the second Munkaczer Rebbe, suggests that the Rama didn't mean that at all. According to him, the Rama simply meant two meals, one dairy and one meat, which must be eaten in that order at some point over *Shavuos*. Therefore, he suggested that one should eat their dairy meal at night and the meat meal during the following day. This was also the practice of R. Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the *Steipler Gaon*.

In conclusion, there are several possible reasons for the *minhag* of eating dairy products on *Shavuos*, all of which are mentioned in the *Achronim*, although I only mentioned two. There is a major *machlokes* about eating meat products right after dairy, the major *nafka minah* being whether or not you must have

two separate meals for *Shavuos* according to the Rama. (If you can eat meat right afterwards, then no. If you cannot, then two meals are required.) Lastly, we visited the *sugya* of *simchas Yom Tov* and whether or not one can be *yotzei* in that *mitzvah* with dairy products, and the immense *nafka mina* for every *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov*: can one have a dairy *seudah* at all?

# The Special Connection Between Food and Shavuos

*Yisroel Hochman ('21)*

*Editor In Chief, Shema Koleinu*

When one looks at *Shavuos* compared to the other *Shalosh Regalim*, one may come to the mistaken conclusion that *Shavuos* is ordinary in comparison. After all, there are no *mitzvos* making you eat outside or eat any special dishes or types of food. A person may see *Shavuos* as “just a holiday”. But in truth, this itself should raise a question; why are there no restrictions on how or what we eat on *Shavuos* specifically?

The connection between *Shavuos* and eating becomes clearer with a look at the *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (68b). On this *daf*, Rav Elazar says that on *Shavuos*, even one who holds that regular holidays should be devoted entirely towards *Hashem* still would agree that by *Shavuos* one must split his time between serving himself and *Hashem*. Additionally, Mar bar Ravina used to fast every day of the year barring three important days, with *Shavuos* being one of them. In light of these *Gemaros*, it is clear that *Shavuos* has a special connection to food and eating, so what could be the reason for that connection, and is the takeaway for us?

Perhaps by thinking about what *Shavuos* is all about, we may understand the additional connection to food and taking care of what the body needs on this holiday. *Shavuos* is a holiday celebrating the receiving of the *Torah* by the Jews. After the period of *Sefiras Ha'omer*, in which we prepare for seven weeks straight to arrive at a high enough spiritual level to receive the *Torah*, we, as a nation, stand at the one the highest points of holiness throughout the year. In that position, how can our thoughts be occupied with anything other than those of serving *Hashem* and learning his precious *Torah*? We may forget that we have an obligation to celebrate the fact that we were given the *Torah* to be practiced through our physical bodies. This may be why *Shavuos* is the only one of the *Shalosh Regalim* with no restrictions on eating; not because it is inherently a physical holiday, but rather because of its spiritual potency.

The *Chasam Sofer* writes that to celebrate *Hashem's* kindness with songs and *tefillah*, while beautiful, is nothing new to *Hashem*, because that is how we show our love for *Hashem* year-round. If we want to truly show our grat-

itude for the amazing gift that is the *Torah*, we must find a new way to serve him. Using food as a facilitator to accomplish new levels of connection to *Hashem* shows that we can honor *Hashem* even through food and drink. The Chiddushei Rabbeinu David on the aforementioned *Gemara* in *Pesachim* adds an additional dimension to the connection between food and *Shavuos*. He writes that by eating on *Shavuos*, a person shows that he is thrilled to receive the *Torah*, and he is also displaying that the *Torah* itself is not a burden, but rather a privilege that we as Jews alone get to enjoy. Eating becomes a way to express the immense joy which we feel in response to this privilege.

In fact, it is the eating itself that shows that the *Torah* is intended for us. The *Shemos Rabbah* (28:1) says that when Moshe went up to receive the *Torah*, the angels wanted to harm him because they wanted the *Torah* for themselves. *Hashem* replied back to them that there are things in the *Torah* that cannot apply to a non-physical being. The angels believed that the *Torah* should only be used spiritually, but the angels could not understand that the *Torah* enables the Jews to serve *Hashem* even through fulfilling physical needs. Only man can serve *Hashem* through the simple act of eating. When the angels were told this by *Hashem*, even they agreed that the *Torah* was meant for the Jewish people. It is because of our ability to elevate the physical to the plane of spirituality that we are uniquely served to be the recipients of the *Torah*, and on *Shavuos*, the day that celebrates our accepting the *Torah*, it is fitting that we remind ourselves of this aspect of eating and drinking, as a means of serving *Hashem*.

## The Importance of Achdus

*Avraham Friedenberg ('22)*

The *Torah* states - “*vayichan sham Yisrael neged hahar*” - “the *Bnei Yisrael* encamped there in front of the mountain [*Har Sinai*]” (*Shemos* 19:4). The Ibn Ezra questions that the word *vayichan* is written in singular form, and not the plural. This is unusual, because we know that the *Bnei Yisrael* numbered over 600,000, even when just counting the men eligible to serve in the army, without including the women, children and elderly who also left *Mitzrayim*. Rashi explains that the singular form indicates that we were united “*k'ish echad bileiv echad*” - “like one person, with one heart”. From here we learn that the dream of *achdus* was achieved at *Har Sinai*. Clearly, then, one of the messages of *Shavuos* is to strive to reach, once again, this sense of community we attained at this time, years ago.

One should not think that this description of our unity is unrelated to the giving of the *Torah*. Just the opposite; this is one of the major purposes of the *Torah*. As the Rambam teaches at the end of *Hilchos Chanukah* (4:14), the whole *Torah* was given in order to make peace in the world, as it says “*diracheha darchai noam, vikol nesivoseha shalom*” - His ways are pleasant ways, and all of His paths are peace. The Rambam is teaching that the common thread running through all 613 *mitzvos* is peace, and we therefore must make sure that we are all in pursuit of peace.

We know that learning *Torah* strengthens peace based on a *Gemara* in *Maseches Shabbos* (33b). The *Gemara* discusses the many years that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar sat learning in a cave, hiding from the Roman government. After leaving, they looked around at people involved in regular workday activities. Their gaze burned anyone who entered their line of sight. They were unable to fathom how anyone could spend their time involved in non-*ruchniyus* activities. Thus, *Hashem* commanded them to return to the cave. Rav Reuven Feinstein raised the following question: if it was their deep level of *Torah* learning that raised them to such a lofty level of *kedushah*, wouldn't their return to learning put them even more out of touch with the outside world? How would re-entering the cave help? Rav Feinstein explained that *Hashem* told Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar to go back to the cave and learn the *Torah* of *shalom* - peace. When they exited one year later, they had successfully accomplished this objective.

This year, let us focus on overlooking the differences in other individuals and communities, thereby bringing the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash* one step closer.

## Find Your Niche

*Yehuda Emerson ('22)*

The primary reason we celebrate *Shavuos* is because of the gift we received from *Hashem*: the *Torah*. The *Torah* is a guidebook, or a spiritual stepping stone into how we serve *Hashem* the way He intended us too. In the simple reading of the *Torah* there are stories from our forefathers and laws, some of which we are not given a reason for. Either way, when plumbing the depths of the *Torah*, there are lessons we can take out to be better Jews, and ultimately better people.

The *Torah* signifies that *Hashem* knows how we can be better people and how we should use His words to lead better lives. If we didn't live it every day, it would be hard to believe - this scroll was given thousands of years ago on *Har Sinai*, and is still just as relevant to us now? The question is why. Why do we still have this ancient book dictating our everyday life? We have had the *Torah* for so long, and the world has changed so much. How is that our guidebook remains static, never changing?

We can address this set of questions using a powerful *meshal*. There was a small coastal city in Europe where a struggling but aspiring artist lived. He tried for many years to make "the perfect painting," but struggled and could not paint what he thought was perfect. After many years he went on a walk to the beach and saw a strange shell. He proceeded to bring it home, and he put it on a table, gazing at it for hours. He was fascinated by the colors being in their own distinct pattern, and how it was glistening from the reflection of the light from the window, so he decided to paint it. And paint he did! He painted for two straight hours without even taking time to blink. He did not even sketch the shell out; he just painted. When he was finished he was amazed by what he just accomplished. Before him stood the most magnificent painting he had ever witnessed: "the perfect painting". He was so excited that he jumped up and took the painting around town to show the rest of the city inhabitants.

But the response of his fellow citizens was devastating. One after another, the response was "it's just a shell" or "I don't like the color". Devastated, he walked home with his head hung low. Right before he opened the door he heard a voice saying "that is the most beautiful painting I have ever seen". He turned around to see an old man smiling at his painting. The painter beamed and thanked the stranger.

This is the point of the *Torah*. Judaism does not have a one size fits all approach. Everyone grows and follows the *Torah* within their particular level and their particular passions for specific areas of the Jewish experience. What we cannot forget is that *Hashem* is our father and that He is One. That is the painting. No one disagreed that there was a painting in the painter's hand. The disagreement was the detail involved. One person can love *Shabbos* while another prefers doing acts of *chessed*. Another person can love *Shacharis* while the other finds *Ma'ariv* more inspiring. The important thing in Judaism is to find something beautiful in the *Torah* and something you connect to and enjoy. Only then can the lifestyle of *Torah* and *mitzvos* be enjoyable to you.

The *Sfas Emes* notes an interesting dichotomy that we experience on *Shavuos*: On the one hand, the *Torah* is called our "inheritance for the congregation of Yaakov" (*Devarim* 33:4). At the same time, each year on *Shavuos*, we are supposed to experience the giving of the *Torah* anew. Which one is it? An ancient inheritance, or something we just received?

The *Sfas Emes* explains that yes, we were given the *Torah* 3300 years ago. It is most definitely our birthright, reinforced over hundreds of generations. But the *chiddushim* that we develop, the new ideas, the new connections, the new ways in which we connect to the *Torah*, that is something that is unique and hopefully develops anew each and every year.

As the *Ohr Hachayim* writes, "When Moshe took the first step and went up the mountain, *Hashem* called to him immediately. Because you must know that holiness doesn't come unless one prepares for it. As the *Zohar* states, 'A spiritual awakening below causes the awakening from Above.'" In other words, *Hashem* is only as close to you as you make Him. How you connect and how you find beauty in the *Torah* is up to you." *Shavuos* presents a wonderful opportunity to think about this connection, and rededicate ourselves towards it. In doing so, we can continue to grow as individuals, and most importantly, grow closer to *Hashem*.

## Rav Gifter On What Our Thoughts Should Be Over Shavuos

*Akiva Kra ('21)*

In an article that appeared in *Dos Yiddishe Vort* (Sivan 1956), MTA alumus and legendary *Telshe Rosh Yeshivah* Rabbi Mordechai Gifter wrote that when we celebrate *Shavuos*, it is worthwhile for us to contemplate a specific teaching of Chazal. "What fools are the people who stand in the presence of a *Torah* scroll, but do not stand in the presence of a *Torah* scholar" (*Makkos* 22b). We hopefully know the importance of respecting and believing in the *Torah*, but unfortunately we sometimes forget that *talmidei chachamim* are "walking *Torahs*". *Emunas chachamim* (faith in sages) is a critical aspect of Judaism.

Rav Gifter explains that *chachamim* do more than just spread *Torah*. They represent it, bring it to life, uncover its depth, teach it, and bring us closer to it. *Torah* study, writes Rav Gifter, "is a constant continuation of the giving of the *Torah* - and generations after the Revelation at *Sinai* the *talmid chacham* can relive that moment through his learning, and his very being can proclaim: 'The words are as joyous as when they were given at *Sinai*.' (*Nefesh Hachayim* 4:14)"

We dare not, however, make the mistake of thinking that all this happens simply through a mortal approach, as if we were approaching a human code of laws. In order to master particular science, a person must first prepare himself to evaluate that science according to its unique characteristics. Good physicians are only those who approached medicine with a profound inner desire to study and master it. "Those who wear garments of precious wool can appreciate its value" (*Shabbos* 10b). If one wishes to master *Torah* wisdom, he must approach it according to the character of *Torah* wisdom, as the revelation of the Divine will. Our Sages teach us that just as the *Torah* was given through awe, fear and trembling - with a profound inner trembling and inspiration - so too must the *Torah* be studied and expounded (*Berachos* 22a). Only then can it legitimately be called "*Torah* study," and only then can one hope to plumb a bit of its depth.

The *Torah* student who directs his life and study in the *Torah* path is the one who is crowned with the title *talmid chacham*. *Torah* Jewry sees in such scholars a continuation of the acceptance of the *Torah* through Moshe. The *beis medrash* of such a *talmid chacham* represents the *beis medrash* of

Moshe, who receives the *Torah* from the Omnipotent (Iggeres of R' Shmuel ben Eli). Jewry does not see before itself a person who teaches his *Torah* to the generation; rather it observes the phenomenon of the *Torah* being presented to the Jewish nation through the agency of the *talmid chacham*. He serves as the river through which the *Torah* streams from the Creator to the Jewish nation. When this happens, we can understand exactly why the *Gemara* tells us that the word “*es*” in the verse “*es Hashem elokecha tira*” comes to add *Torah* scholars to the category of reverence of God.

Rav Gifter concluded his article by writing: “From this deep conviction, Jews have derived the fundamental principle of *emunas chachamim*, faith in *Torah* sages: to believe in and be convinced in the correctness and consistency of the *da’as Torah* of Israel’s great men. Even when “they tell you that right is left and that left is right, when you feel that you understand better than they - and the truth is diametrically opposed to the *Torah* opinion of the *Gedolei Yisrael* - nevertheless you dare not turn away from whatever they tell you” (*Devarim* 17:11). This is not a matter of understanding a human being, this is a matter of understanding *Torah*, which is revealed to you by means of this person, this *talmid chacham*, this great *Torah* scholar. Woe to the generation that seeks right and left for the *Torah* to point the way, but that seeks it according to its own shrunken, human understanding instead of according to the wisdom of the *Torah* itself.

How far, how far is our generation from this life-principle of *emunas chachamim*! It is even possible for us not only to reject a ruling of the *Torah* leaders of the generation, but even to criticize it on the grounds that the “*gedolim* do not understand clearly the issue that they considered.” And these critics bear the title “*rabbi*”! If the title “*rabbi*” contains any meaning at all, it lies in the fact that it represents the strength of the *Torah*. How empty, therefore, is a rabbinate that is devoid of *emunas chachamim*. Without *emunas chachamim*, faith is lacking in the Principle of all principles, in *Hashem Yisborach* Himself! Without *emunas chachamim*, the entire concept of *Torah*’s meaning to us is lacking. There is a concept of *Torah* that is denuded of the revelation at *Sinai*...Whoever sees through *Torah* eyes becomes confounded by how possible it is for human logic to become the instrument of enormous perversity.”

We as well need to make sure that we are following in the ways of *Hashem* and have *emunas chachamim*. Every day in school, work, at home, or on the road, we are presented with halachic challenges. Convenience or reliance on the strict understanding of written law can sometimes distract one from our ultimate goals. So, as we spend this time reflecting on what *Shavuos* and

all of *Sefirah* means, let us not forget that “to those who go to the ‘right’ with [the *Torah*], it is a potion of life; to those who go to the ‘left’ with [the *Torah*], it is a potion of death” (*Shabbos* 88a).

## Why Eat Dairy on Shavuos?

*Moshe Lieberman ('24)*

Most people have the custom to eat a dairy *seudah* on the first day of *Shavuos*, and it has become a common stereotype of *Shavuos*, but why dairy? Why don't we eat meat like we do at many other *seudos* year round?

There are many beautiful answers to this question:

In *Shir Hashirim*(4:11) *Hashem* says to us, "The sweetness of *Torah* drops from your lips, like honey and milk it lies under your tongue." Since we see here that the *Torah* is being compared to milk, we fittingly eat a dairy meal.

Also, the comparison between *Torah* and milk teaches us that just as milk keeps best in earthenware and spoils quickly in silver or golden utensils, *Torah* remains with the humble people and despises conceited and arrogant people.

We have a law of *eiver min hachai*- not eating a limb of a live animal. The *Gemara* (*Bechoros* 6b) raises the question of why are we permitted to drink cow's milk, since that is produced from a live animal. We are allowed to drink this milk because the *Torah*, when talking about *Eretz Yisroel*, describes it as flowing with milk (*Shemos* 13:5), and it is evident from the text that it wouldn't be forbidden, because the *Torah* wouldn't praise our holy land with something that is forbidden. But before we received the *Torah*, milk was actually forbidden because of this prohibition of *eiver min hachai*. Consequently, to emphasize that milk became permitted only after *Matan Torah*, a dairy meal is eaten on *Shavuos* immediately after the receiving of the *Torah*.

Further, we all know the famous story of Moshe Rabeinu being placed in the basket in the river as a 3-month-old baby. Then, Basya (Pharaoh's daughter) finds him, and Moshe refuses to drink the milk of any of the Egyptian women. Thus she was forced to hire Yocheved (Moshe's mother) to raise him. This incident took place on the 6th of *Sivan*, the famous date when an adult Moshe in later years finally received the *Torah* at *Har Sinai* (*Sotah* 12b). Since he was miraculously reunited with his mother on the 6th of *Sivan* through milk, a dairy meal is eaten on *Shavuos*.

Another interesting reason why we eat dairy is because the numerical value of the hebrew word "*chalav*" (milk) is 40, corresponding to the 40 days that Moshe went up to heaven to receive the *Torah*.

A final and most famous answer to this question is that on *Shavuos*, when the *Torah* was given, the Jews learned the laws of *shechitah* (slaughtering) and *kashrus* for the first time. Since the *Torah* was given on *Shabbos*, they were unable to slaughter any animals on that day, and their vessels needed to be “*kashered*.” Any meat they may have had from before, even if slaughtered, was not usable because no one was a *bar zevichah* — a proper ritual slaughterer — when the animal was killed. Thus, immediately after receiving the *Torah*, they did not have *kosher* meat or utensils available, and their only alternative was eating dairy.

A hint we see in the *Torah* for eating a dairy meal on *Shavuos* can be found in the *possuk* “Bring your first fruits (*bikkurim*) to the house of *Hashem*, your God; you shall not cook a kid in its mother’s milk” (*Shemos* 23:19). The festival of *Shavuos* is also known as “the festival of *bikkurim*” (*Bamidbar* 28:26), as it is the preferred time for bringing *bikkurim*. Therefore the *Torah* reminds us that when we bring the *bikkuurim* on *Shavuos*, we should be careful while cooking for *yom tov* not to mix any meat together with milk. Eating dairy products on *Shavuos* may seem like a small little custom that we have, but really there are so many reasons that can support this, that it seems to be more of an understandable obligation. So when you are eating your cheesecake this *yom tov*, just remember all of the significant reasons as to why you are really eating it.

## Torah on One Foot

*Natan Horowitz ('23)*

We all know the famous story of the non-Jew who went to Shammai and said: “Convert me, and teach me all of *Torah* as I stand on one foot!”. Shammai chases the non-Jew away with a stick, so the non-Jew asks Hillel the same request. However, Hillel doesn’t chase him away, and instead he tells him: “that which you hate, don’t do to others (a paraphrase of the famous *vi’ahavta lireiacha kamocho*); this the whole *Torah*, the rest is just an explanation, go learn it!”. We also know that the *mitzvos* of the *Torah* have two categories: *bein adam liMakom*, between man and God, and *bein adam lichaveiro*, between man and his fellow. While Hillel’s statement may include the second category, how does this rule include *mitzvos* which are *bein adam liMakom*?

The *Kli Yakar* explains that the non-Jew was not joking around, but rather he was using a mnemonic technique of doing something strange while learning something you wish to remember. He wanted to know one thing through which he could remember the whole *Torah* in his entirety. So *Hillel* taught him the *possuk*: “*vi’ahavta lireiacha kamocho*”, love your neighbor as yourself, and the second part of the *possuk*: “*Ani Hashem*”, I am *Hashem*”, which serves as the base of our belief in *Hashem* for all of our *mitzvos bein adam liMakom*. Thus, this one *possuk* sums up both types of *mitzvos*. This appears to answer our question, but in fact it does not. *Hillel* paraphrased the *possuk*, he did not quote it, and when he paraphrased he made no mention of the “I am *Hashem*” part of the *possuk*, so our question still stands.

Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt”l explains that every part of the *Torah* is connected to *mitzvos bein adam lichaveiro*. How so? The *Gemara* in *Kiddushin* says that one should view themselves as if they have an equal amount of *mitzvos* and *aveiros*, and the world as if it was perfectly balanced with an equal amount of *mitzvos* and *aveiros* as well, such that if they were to perform a *mitzvah*, they would be fortunate that they tilted the world toward *mitzvos*. but if they sinned, woe to one who tilts the world toward sin. It is such that by doing an *aveirah*, one could be causing another pain and difficulty that came about because of their sin that tilted the world toward sin. So, we learn that all *mitzvos* are connected to *vi’ahavta lireacha kamocho*, and that *Hillel*’s words have a new meaning. Just as we would not want someone else to tilt the world the wrong way, so too we should not tilt the world the wrong way through *aveiros*. May we all be blessed to do more *mitzvos* than *aveiros* in our lives, and have a wonderful *Yom Tov*!



ginning of a week, while “fifty days” refers to when it starts in the middle of a week. Thus, we see that the count need not start at the beginning of a week.

The *Rishonim’s* proof is given by the Rambam, who writes that we learn from tradition that the “*Shabbos*” in the *possuk* is referring to *yom tov*. He adds that this view has been accepted by the *Nevi’im* and the *Sanhedrin* of every generation. They would begin counting the *Omer* on the sixteenth of *Nissan* whether it was a weekday or a *Shabbos*.

The *Acharonim’s* proof looks deeper into the words *sheva shabason temimos* - seven complete weeks”. If the count always begins on a *Sunday*, why do we need a *possuk* to tell us the weeks are complete? Rather, the “seven complete weeks” must be referring to when *Pesach* falls out on a weekday, and we can apply the rule of *miktzas shavua kikulo*, part of the week is counted as the whole week. The second week will begin after *Shabbos*, even though the first week was only partial. *The Panos Yafim* adds that this could explain why the *Torah* writes that “they shall be complete” since the first week is not complete until seven days from the beginning of the *Omer*.

After looking at all these proofs, a conclusion can now be made that the fifty days are counted after the second day of *Pesach*, as we do nowadays. Even so, the period of the *Omer*, which was also when the Jews were traveling from *Mitzrayim* to *Har Sinai* to receive the *Torah*, is a very spiritually uplifting time period where pleasures we take in life are avoided. This allows us to have an uplifting *Shavuos* and celebrate the giving of the *Torah* in a whole new way we never imagined we could do. This includes other *minhagim* that take place on *Shavuos*, such as staying up all night learning to be prepared for the acceptance of the *Torah* which occurs the next day. All of these acts show why *Shavuos* is called *Atzeres* by the rabbis, since there is a progression in our spirituality to *Hashem* that is gained from these seven weeks which is brought into the *Shavuos* holiday.

## The Message Of Atzeres

*Yeshurin Sorscher ('21)*

The *Kedushas Levi* asks why it is that *Shavuos* is called *Ateres*. He answers that *Ateres* has three different meanings, and each one can teach something about our service to *Hashem*. The first approach focuses on how *Shavuos* is different from all other *Chagim* in the aspect that all other festivals have both a prohibition of work as well as a commandment which is specific for that festival, such as *sukkah* or *matzah*. *Shavuos*, on the other hand, only has the prohibition of work. Therefore, the *Kedushas Levi* writes that *Shavuos* is called *Atzeres* because the word means refraining. We refrain from all work on this *Yom Tov*, and this is how we connect with *Hashem*. There is no special commandment for this day. The message from this is clear for us; *Shavuos* is a time where we can spend the entire day solely enveloped by *Hashem's Torah*. This is a lesson that we should try to carry with us the entire year. We have to set aside times to 'refrain' from other activities and spend the time engrossed in *Torah*.

The Rebbe's second answer deals with the fact that all other *chagim's* commandments have to do with something that you do while the festival is taking place. For example, the *mitzvah* of *matzah* takes place on *Pesach*. It does not take place a day before or a day after. Yet when we look at *Shavuos*, we see that we are in fact celebrating a commandment which we have finished the day before. We are happy that for the past forty-nine days, we have been counting the *omer*. This *chag* is unique in the respect that we are looking at a past accomplishment with happiness. We find a similar idea by the last day of *Sukkos*, *Shemini Atzeres*, where *Hashem*, after celebrating seven days with his children, so-to-speak wants another day before He has to say good-bye. There has to be some extra time to appreciate the people that you are with. The Rebbe writes that this is why *Shavuos* is called *Atzeres* to parallel the message behind *Shemini Atzeres*. *Hashem* wants to give us a day to appreciate what we have accomplished over the last forty-nine days. This day is an incredible opportunity to really internalize our accomplishments and see what an impact that they had on us as people. By having an extra day, it shows us the importance of commandment, and how we should strive to do *Hashem's* will.

Lastly, the Rebbe tells us that whenever we are hit with inspiration, we have to take immediate action. If we do not capitalize on our high energy and motivation, then we will lose all the excitement that we had gained. The Jews,

when they were at *Har Sinai*, did not have any commandments to follow. They had all this energy, but nothing to do with it. The only *tzivui* they had was that Moshe told them they could not approach the mountain. The only way for them to channel their motivation into a concrete act was to refrain from doing something. This is why *Shavuos* is called *Atzeres*. They refrained from going up onto the mountain, and by doing so they allowed their emotional state to translate into physical actions. They created a concrete way of storing all that they felt in that moment. Holding back was the key to their victory.

We often think that when we are challenged by something which we know is wrong and we hold back, that it is not such a big accomplishment, because we were supposed to not do it anyway. There is nothing major about doing what is expected of us. This is completely wrong. *Shavuos*, as we have seen, is about celebrating what we accomplished, and recognizing that our holding back from going onto the mountain was incredible. Whenever we hold ourselves back, it is an incredible achievement. It is worthy of having a *chag* named after the specific trait of holding back. This *chag*, take a second to realize that you are amazing. There has to be at least one moment where you held yourself back and did the right thing. Take the day to reflect on that accomplishment. The message from the Rebbe is clear: what you do, or even what you don't do, is tremendous, and you have to take the time to reflect and appreciate it.

## Na'aseh Vinishma and Judgement Day

*Samuel Gorman ('21)*

As *Shavuos* approaches, we prepare to celebrate our acceptance of the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*. From preschool and on, Jewish youth are told of the famous words said by the Jewish people at *Har Sinai* by *matan Torah*: “*na'aseh Vinishma* - we will do and we will listen” (*Shemos* 24:7). So goes what is perhaps the most iconic verse of Jewish scripture. As children, we are all provided a basic explanation of the greatness of these words; the idea of doing before hearing, of trusting *Hashem* enough to pledge allegiance even without knowing what we are promising. These words, however, have much more meaning to them than just that.

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Shabbos* provides several interesting statements of several of the *Amoraim* on these words.

The first of these statements is that of Rabbi Simai (*Shabbos* 88a). Rabbi Simai says that at the moment the Jewish people said the word “*na'aseh*” before the word “*nishma*,” six hundred thousand angels were tasked with placing two crowns on the head of each Jew, one crown for each of the two words. Rabbi Simai continues by stating that when the Jewish people sinned and lost these crowns, it took twice as many angels to remove them. Rather than each angel removing two crowns, each crown required its own angel to remove it. This, I believe, illustrates the greatness of the words “*na'aseh vinishma*”. By saying those words in that order, the Jewish people each earned two crowns. Moreover, we see that it took twice as much effort to then remove those crowns as it did to get them in the first place.

The *Gemara* in *Shabbos* also relates a statement of Rabbi Chama, son of Rabbi Chanina, conveying the greatness and significance of the words “*na'aseh vinishma*” (*Shabbos* 88a). Rabbi Chama points to a *possuk* in *Shir Hashirim* comparing the Jewish people to an apple tree (*Shir Hashirim* 2:3). What might be the meaning of such a comparison? Rabbi Chama explains: whereas most trees grow leaves and then fruit, the apple tree grows fruit first. In this way, the apple tree is just like the Jewish people, as while most would instinctively place “*nishma* - hearing” before “*na'aseh* - doing”, the Jewish people said it the other way around. Just like the apple tree hastily jumps straight to the best part, so too, “*na'aseh vinishma*” teaches us that the Jewish people are hasty and attentive in their service of God.

Next, the *Gemara* shares the story of an interaction between the esteemed Rabbi, Rava, and a heretic (*Shabbos* 88a-88b). The *Gemara* explains that as Rava was deeply immersed in his learning, Rava's fingers began to bleed, but he didn't notice. Observing this, the heretic immediately seized on this opportunity and began to criticize Rava and the Jewish people for saying "*na'aseh vinishma*," and for taking action before listening and thinking. In response, Rava cited a *possuk* in *Mishlei* (*Mishlei* 11:3). "*tumas yesharim tanchem, viselef bogdim yeshadem* - the integrity of the righteous will guide them, and the treacherous ways of the treacherous will destroy them", reads the *possuk*. The message seems clear. Those who live the life of "*na'aseh vinishma*", of unconditional dedication to *Torah* and *mitzvos*, will be guided through life; those who mock the unconditional dedication of "*na'aseh v'nishma*" will not receive such guidance.

The message that Rava seems to have been conveying strikes me as being of particular relevance to *Shavuos*. As is explained in the *mishnah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:2), *Shavuos* is not just when we accept the *Torah*, but it is also one of the four judgement days of the year. On *Shavuos* we are judged on fruit, whether it will be a plentiful year or not. It is for this reason that I believe Rava's message to hold a particular relevance to *Shavuos*. Rava's message appears to be that those who live the life of "*na'aseh vinishma*" will be guided through life. As we accept the *Torah* once again and renew our commitment to "*na'aseh vinishma*" values this *Shavuos*, may we merit guidance from God and favorable judgement this year.

## Milk and Meat at the Same Meal? An In-Depth Look Into Rama's Opinion About Milk On Shavuos

*Meir Morell ('22)*

*Executive Editor, Shema Koleinu*

Rama, Rav Moshe Isserlis, writes (*Orach Chayim* 494:4), that there is a custom to eat dairy food on the first day of *Shavuos*. He explains the reason for this custom, that just like the two cooked foods that are taken at the *Seder* on *Pesach*, as a remembrance for the *Korban Pesach* and a remembrance for the *Korban Chagigah*, so too we eat dairy followed by meat, and we have two different *chalos*, as a remembrance for the *Korban Shtei Halechem*, which was brought on *Shavuos*.

Before we can expound on the different opinions with regard to the opinion of Rama, of eating milk and meat at the same meal, we need to approach a broader issue regarding the laws of milk and meat.

We must now go to another comment of the Rama in *Yoreh De'ah* (89:2). There, discussing the laws of milk and meat, he says, that the simple length of waiting between milk and meat is one hour, however, there are those who are careful to wait six hours, and that is the correct custom. I remembered that Rabbi Kerner, my tenth grade Rebbi, and later Rabbi Mendelson, my current Rebbi in eleventh grade, when dealing with the subject of waiting between meat and milk, quoted a *Biyur HaGra*. The Gra says that the custom of waiting one hour stems from a *Zohar* in *Parshas Mishpatim* that says not to eat milk and meat, and vice versa, in the same hour or the same meal.

So how can this custom of Rama, which says to eat milk and meat in the same meal, fit with the source of a custom that he quoted, to only wait one hour, despite the fact that he doesn't think that one should be lenient like that opinion? (Alternatively, one could simply ask why the Rama is not concerned for this statement of the *Zohar*.)

Before we answer, we must first see the three opinions of how the order of the meal goes on *Shavuos*. The first opinion is to eat dairy first then, wash out your mouth, and change the table cloth, but not to recite *birchas hamazon*, before eating the second part of the meal with the new *challah* and meat. This is the opinion of the *Mishnah Berurah*, commenting on Rama. The

second opinion is to eat dairy first, then wash out your mouth and change the table cloth and to recite *birchas hamazon*, before washing again eating the second part of the meal with the new *challah* and meat. This is the opinion of the *Pri Megadim* (*Yoreh De'ah Mishpitzos Zahav* 89:3). The third opinion is to eat a lighter dairy meal earlier on in the day, and to wait at least an hour before eating another meal, with a second *challah*, of meat. This is the preferred practice of *Chassidim*, and the *Darkei Teshuvah* views this as the preferable way to approach this custom.

Now that we see the order, we can better understand how to answer our question. According to those who say to wait an hour between the two meals, they have no issue, since it's not a contradiction with the opinion we had seen in the *Zohar*.

However, our question still stands for those who say either a) to continue the meal without *birchas hamazon*, after washing your mouth and cleaning the table, and b) for those who say that once you recite *birchas hamazon* and wash your mouth out and change the table cloth, you may continue right away!

And indeed, there are opinions, such as that of the *Toras Chayim* commenting on *Chullin* 83, that says not to observe the custom in order to keep to the opinion of the *Zohar*. However, *Darkei Teshuvah* holds that in order to fulfil this custom, one may be lenient on the opinion of the *Zohar* (however, he does agree that it is not the preferable path to take).

There are many other reasons for why dairy is eaten on *Shavuos*, such as the fact that the Jews didn't have dishes that were able to be used because of *kashrus* concerns right after the giving of the *Torah*, so they were limited to dairy products that didn't need cooking (*Mishnah Berurah*), or because *Torah* is compared to milk and honey (*Chok Yaakov* in the name of the *Kol Bo*). It is apparent that because there are so many reasons explaining why to eat dairy that don't also include meat, the custom of Rama has become less popular.

So however you eat your meals on *Yom Tov*, like Rama or the other opinions, it should be happy and healthy.

## Echoes In Tanach: Shavuos

*Areyh Klein ('22) and Avidan Loike ('22)*

תאמר לה ננעמי חמותה בתי הלא אבקש לך מנוח **אשר ייטב לך**.

Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must ask for (find) a place of rest for you, that will be good for you. (*Rus* 3:1)

ושמרת את חקיו ואת מצותיו אשר אנכי מצוך היום **אשר ייטב לך** ולבניך אחריך ולמען תאריך  
מים על-ההאדמה אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך כל-הימים: (פ)

Observe His laws and commandments, which I enjoin upon you this day, that it may go well with you and your children after you, and that you may long remain in the land that *Hashem* your God is assigning to you for all time. (*Devarim* 4:40)

ושמעתי ישראל ושמרת לעשות אשר ייטב לך נא אשר תרבו מאד באשר דבר ה' אלקי אבותיך לך  
אנכי ובה חלב ודבש: (פ)

Obey, O *Yisrael*, willingly and faithfully, that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly [in] a land flowing with milk and honey, as *Hashem*, the God of your fathers, spoke to you. (*Devarim* 6:3)

Over *Shavuos*, we read various parts of Tanach, namely *Rus*, the *Aseres Hadibros* in *Shemos*, and *Kol Habechor*, which is read on the last day of every one of the *Shalosh Regalim*. Following the reading of *Rus*, we find an interesting idea.

In *Rus*, there is a very interesting line where Naomi tells Rus that she will try to find a place to rest (lit. a place for rest, meaning a house) for her, and she says ” **אשר ייטב לך** -” “it will be good for you.” Initially, looking at this *possuk*, it seems it has little to no real significance. Upon further examination, however, we find that the line, “ **אשר ייטב לך** - ” “it will be good for you” is the exact same phrase used throughout *Sefer Devarim* when *Hashem* tells *Bnei Yisrael* to do *mitzvos*.

In *Rus*, when Naomi is talking to Rus, and saying “ **אשר ייטב לך** - ” “it will be good for you”, the *peshat* translation has this line refer to Rus getting a house. A different and interesting reading of this same line, by the *Midrash Lekach Tov*, reveals that in actuality, this line spoken by Naomi refers not to a house, but to Boaz. What does Boaz have to do with all of the *mitzvos* in the *Torah* that we are commanded?

The *Medrash* explains that Boaz was the *gadol hador* of his time. In addition, the *Gemara* says that Boaz defeated his *yetzer hara*. In accordance with these two factors, Boaz perfectly exemplified many of the *mitzvos* of the *Torah*. This was Naomi hinting to Rus that she should go on the right *derech*. Rus was on the right *derech* because she would be married to the *gadol hador*.

As being the *gadol hador* is obviously such a *zechus*, one can clearly see that it is optimal to be as close to a *gadol* as one can. Although we are not all always the best, we should strive to always be bettering ourselves, and in that become *gedolim* ourselves.

## Why Do We Eat Cheesecake On Shavuos?

*Ezra Schechter ('22)*

On the second night of *Pesach*, we start counting seven weeks of the *Omer*, which concludes on *Shavuos*. The reason we do this is because we are preparing and showing our excitement for the anniversary of receiving the *Torah* and of course, for the delicious cheesecake that we will eat on *Shavuos*. The creamy cake, consisting of a layer of crust topped with sweet fresh cheese, is a staple in *Shavuos* meals.... Where did the custom come from to eat Cheesecake? Why do we eat dairy on *Shavuos*?

The first answer is given by the Rema. The Rema answers that the reason for dairy is so that we can commemorate the *korban* of *Shtei Lechem*, which was given on *Shavuos*. We would commemorate this by washing on bread and then eating a dairy meal, followed by washing again and having a new meal with meat. This would lead us to having two breads, just like the sacrifice.

Another reason for why we eat dairy on *Shavuos* is because in *Shir Hashirim*, the *Torah* and our relationship with *Hashem* is linked with milk. "Your lips, my bride, drop honey--honey and milk are under your tongue; and the smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon" (*Shir Hashirim 4:11*). This would make sense as a reason to eat dairy, since we are commemorating the anniversary of receiving the *Torah*. According to this answer, we should also have a custom to eat honey, yet most people have no such custom.

The most famous answer is given by the *Chofetz Chaim*. The *Chofetz Chaim* comments on the Rema, and suggests that when the Jews received the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*, they had to keep all of the laws instantly. Since they now had to follow *kashrus* and *shechitah* laws, they did not have time to make a meal with meat before the feast, so they had dairy instead. A similar answer is that some people believe that after receiving the *Torah*, the Jews had a dairy meal for the first time. This is because before the Jews got the *Torah*, they followed the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*, which include the prohibition of eating a limb off of a live animal. This would seem to forbid drinking a live cow's milk, so when the Jews got the *Torah* and it said that "the land of Israel was flowing with milk and honey", they were then allowed to have milk and dairy for the first time, so they had a big dairy meal. This would explain

that we have dairy on *Shavuos*, to commemorate this dairy meal the Jews had after getting the *Torah*.

Some people say that the reason is because of *gematrios*. The *gematria* of the Hebrew word milk, "*chalav*", is forty, which corresponds to a few things. Forty is the amount of days Moshe was up on *Har Sinai*, and it is also the amount of generations between Moshe and Ravina and Rav Ashi (the rabbis who wrote the *Gemara* down). The first and last letters of *Shas* are also *mem*, which has a *gematria* of forty.

One last reason why we eat dairy on *Shavuos* is because of a *possuk*. The *possuk* in *Shemos* (34:26) says that Jews should "bring *bikkurim* to Hashem's holy temple [and that they should not] cook a kid in its mother's milk". The first day for bringing *bikkurim* is the first day of *Shavuos*, and *Shavuos* is even called *Yom Habikkurim*. Since *Shavuos* already corresponds to the first half of that *possuk*, we make sure to eat meat and milk meals over *Shavuos*, to show that we do not eat them together, like the second half of the *possuk* says.

Now, when you are biting into your delicious slice of cheesecake, you can know why you are eating it, and what you are commemorating as you eat dairy on *Shavuos*.

## Timeless Lessons of Har Sinai

Yosef Flamenbaum ('21)

*Tosfos* in *Maseches Shabbos* (89b) points out a fundamental contradiction with regards to the acceptance of the *Torah*. While one *possuk* famously describes a whole-hearted acquisition with the declaration “*na’aseh vinishma*”, the *Gemara* there derives from a different *possuk* that *Hashem* had to actually threaten to bury *Bnei Yisrael* under the mountain, with the whole hearted acceptance only coming much later by the story of *Purim*. So which is it? Is the story of *Har Sinai* the story of a beautiful show of trust in *Hashem*, or of a forced transaction carried out under extreme duress? Another, more minor seeming, question is asked by the Rav (Quoted by Rav Schachter *shlit”a*) on the language of the story itself: The *Gemara* quotes the threat by *Hashem* as being “*sham tihei kivuraschem*” - you will be buried **there**. However, if the mountain is being held over the heads of the people, it would seem to make sense to say “your burial will be **here**”. Why is the word *sham* used instead?

While many *meforshim* offer their own understanding of the *Gemara*, it can be especially instructive to understand the answer of *Tosfos* themselves. They seem to suggest that these were in essence two acceptances: the first one consisting of a willing one, and the second a forced one to cement the agreement and ensure that there would be no possibility of retraction upon seeing the awesome and frightening sights at *Har Sinai*. The threats then serve to impress upon all that the *Torah* is binding for all times and occasions, even when one may, in fact, be in a crisis or under duress. This is also the lesson that Rav Soloveitchik expounds from the *lashon of sham* - our burial will be “there”, in any place in the future where we attempt to forsake the *Torah*. Rav Yehudah Amital *zt”l* (Quoted by Rav Yona Reiss) expounds on this idea in a similar manner in his *sichos*. He suggests that we must take away from this second acceptance at *Har Sinai* that each and every one of us must be ready to strengthen ourselves to uphold the *Torah*, even when we are faced with our own *nisyonos*.

We know that our celebration of the *yom tov* of *Shavuos* centers around *Klal Yisrael's* special relationship with *Hashem* and His *Torah*. It is indeed described in its *tefillos* as “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*” and the *minhag* has developed to spend the night learning so as to prepare ourselves for our commemoration of *Matan Torah*. It would seem then, that it is only appropriate on this upcoming *Shavuos*, as we slowly but surely turn the corner on this dark period, to also prepare by delving into and evaluating the way we engage with the *mitzvos* in our own lives.

## The Fight To Stay Up All Night

*Dov Hochman ('23)*

Every child loves the first night of *Shavuos*. The anticipation of the *Torah* being given, the excitement all around, the cheesecake, and, of course, staying up all night. Staying up all night requires intense preparation both before (sleeping the day before) and during the night (hoarding the best candy to eat before everyone else gets to *shul*). But why we go through with this extreme *Mishmar* is worth looking into.

Based on an article from Y.U. Torah by Rabbi Dr. Andrew Schein, we see the earliest mention of this custom is from the Essenes, who were a group of Jews who we believe wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls. We believe that they used to *daven* the entire night of *Shavuos*. This is not the reason we stay up all night and learn, because they were an offshoot of Judaism, and we didn't trace their *minhag* any further down. We also see from the *Zohar* who wrote on *Vayikra* 23 that a group of *Chassidim* would stay up all night to learn so they could greet the *Torah* properly. A couple of centuries later, we see that Rav Shlomo Alkabetz and Rav Yosef Cairo stayed up one *Shavuos* night, when a Rav Alkabetz heard a voice from Rav Cairo saying they should move to Israel, so they did. When Rav Cairo moved to Israel, more people started staying up all night on *Shavuos*, and it spread throughout the Jewish nation.

It was said that the people were staying up until midnight to say *Tikkun Chatzos*, mourning for the *Bais Hamikdash*. Once they were up anyway, they might as well stay up all night learning, following the custom of Rav Yosef Cairo. The Arizal said that a person who stays up all night on *Shavuos* has a protection on him for the year.

The *Magen Avraham* says that it was the custom to stay awake the night of *Shavuos* to prepare for the *Torah* being given. This is a custom learned from the *Zohar*. This was done to remember the Jews in the desert, who slept that night and needed *Hashem* to wake them with the *shofar* for them to receive the *Torah*. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov defended the Jews in the Sinai Desert, saying that maybe they were not on a level holy enough to stay up to hear the *Torah* being given, so they rested the night before. This is why some Jews today do not stay up all night on *Shavuos* night.

Rav Moshe Cordovero made a list of holy *seforim* to read from on *Shavuos* night called *Tikkun Leil Shavuos*. This consists of specific *Torah* portions, *Nevi'im*,

*Kesuvim*, *Mishnayos* (mainly *Pirkei Avos*), *azharos* which are a summarization of the 613 *mitzvos*, and also some *Kabbalah*. There are Rabbis who change the list to include all of *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, *Kesuvim*, and some *Gemara* too. Rav Yaakov Reischer said in the early 17th century that simple people who are not good at learning learn this, and we hold that you can learn whatever you want to.

There are two other reasons for learning all night that I found interesting. In *Gemara Yoma* we learn that the *kohen gadol* was kept awake all night prior to *Yom Kippur* morning, so he would avoid any *tumah* in his sleep. What is interesting is that much like Rav Reischer suggested, the *Gemara* tells us that a learned *kohen gadol* would learn on his own, a less learned one would have *shiuirim* said to him, and one even less learned would just read stories of the leaders of the past (*Neviim* and *Kesuvim*). The *Gemara* sets a precedent for staying awake and learning whatever you are most comfortable with.

However, is there really a need to learn all night? In *Parshas Emor*, right after being given the *mitzvah* of *Shavuos*, we are once again told about the *mitzvah* of *Peah*, which was originally taught in *Parshas Kedoshim*, literally one week earlier. In *Gemara Chagigah* it says that the reason for the second teaching of *Peah* is that even if someone forgot and not only harvested the corners of their field but also ground it into flour, then that person should leave flour at the corner of their field for the poor. This gives everyone a second chance to do a *mitzvah*. Perhaps staying up all night gives us a second chance to learn properly, so we are truly ready to receive the *Torah*.

# The Ten Commandments

*Elijah Alayev ('24)*

The Ten Commandments, the *Aseres Hadibros*, were given to us on *Har Sinai* on *Shavuos*. After counting the *Omer* for seven weeks, we are finally ready to stay up all night learning and celebrate the holiday. But what is *Shavuos*? What is so significant about this holiday? The Rabbis answer that *Shavuos* is the day that the Jews received the *Torah*. This was a momentous occasion, because never before had God chosen a nation to be his personal servants. The significance of this holiday is that we, the Jews, became the Chosen People, and were given the *Aseres Hadibros*.

What is so important about the Ten Commandments? When we go up to *shamayim*, we will be judged based on how well we followed these commandments. The reason we are judged based off of these commandments is because all other decrees in the *Torah* fall under a subcategory of the Ten Commandments. For example, the commandment of not stealing implies literally stealing, but it also includes general violations of dishonesty. In this manner, the entire *Torah* is included in the *Aseres Hadibros*.

On *Shavuos*, we did something inconceivable; we, for the first time ever, bridged the spiritual world and the physical world. However, there is a *possuk* that needs unraveling. What is the meaning of the verse “and upon the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand”? This *possuk* refers to the people who ate and drank at the time of *Ma’amad Har Sinai*. The Hebrew word for “nobles”, *atzilei*, shares the same root as the word *etzel*, which means “near”. The *Alter Rebbe*, the founder of Chabad, explains: “He did not lay His hand” means that God did not place paralyzing fear within their hearts.” Many of the Jews were overwhelmed by the miracles of this holiday, and because of their excitement they were unable to eat. It was the nobles that were not as flabbergasted and because they were not as awe-stricken as the rest, and they were able to eat and drink. The lesson is that “the more we connect to the sacred, the more we are able to fulfill the task of elevating the physical world.”

## The Significance Of Matan Torah

Yitzchak Hagler ('22)

Executive Editor, Shema Koleinu

I believe in *Torah MiSinai*. I think this is a statement that all Orthodox Jews would unhesitatingly agree to, and rightly so - after all, *Pirkei Avos* starts off by telling us that Moshe received the *Torah* from *Sinai*. The question is, however, what exactly did Moshe receive at *Har Sinai*? And furthermore, why is *Ma'amad Har Sinai* such a central part of our belief system, to the extent that it merits an eternal holiday on the day of its occurrence? I recently heard a *shiur* from Rav Herschel Shachter *shlit"á* (Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS) on this topic, and I'd like to share some of what he said. (note: In transferring Rav Shachter's words from a verbal *shiur* to written *dvar Torah*, I was forced to skip over some of what Rav Shachter said, as well as add in a little clarification where I thought it necessary. Therefore, it is very possible that I misinterpreted or misrepresented Rav Shachter's ideas, and so any discrepancies or inaccuracies which appear should be attributed to me.)

Rav Shachter started with the answer most people would probably give upon being asked this question- that the significance of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is that it was when *Hashem* gave to Moshe every word, letter, and punctuation mark which is found in the *Torah* as we know it. However, Rav Shachter pointed out, this is actually not the case, as can be seen from the *Gemara (Chagigah 6)*, which states that according to Rabbi Yishmael, only the more general sections of the *Torah* were given at *Har Sinai*, with the more specific passages being given at the *Ohel Mo'ed*, and the most detailed ones being given at the plains of Moav. And even the position that Rabbi Akiva (as well as Rashi to *Vayikra 25:1*) adopts - that *Hashem* did give the whole *Torah* over to Moshe at *Har Sinai*, but He also gave it to him in its entirety on two other, separate occasions, once at the *Ohel Mo'ed* and another time at the plains of Moav - is explained by the *Chazon Ish (Orach Chayim Moed 125)* as meaning that there really were three different versions of the *Torah*, and *Hashem* commanded Moshe to write different segments of the *Torah* using the language of the different versions (sometimes commanding him to use the *Har Sinai* version, sometimes the *Ohel Mo'ed* version, and sometimes the plains of Moav version). This is not to say that the whole *Torah* wasn't written entirely by Moshe acting on the word of *Hashem*, as it was. Rather, what this *Gemara* teaches us is that according to all opinions, the *Torah* is, believe it or not, a conglomeration of three different texts, not one complete text given at *Har Sinai*. Therefore, to say that we received at *Har Sinai* the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah* would be inaccurate.

So we return to our original question: what *did* we receive at *Har Sinai*, and why is it significant? Rav Shachter now presented a second possible answer, based on the most famous phrase in the *Matan Torah* story- *na'aseh vinishma*, we will do and we will hear. With this phrase, *Bnei Yisrael* entered into a covenant with *Hashem* in which they promised to keep his *mitzvos*. So maybe this is the significance of *Matan Torah*- it was the time when *Bnei Yisrael* first accepted upon themselves the yoke of the *mitzvos*, the first time we took an active role in pursuing our relationship with *Hashem*. Rav Shachter retorted that this too is not the case, as it turns out we did not actually accept the yoke of *mitzvos* at *Har Sinai*. How so? Although *Bnei Yisrael* said *na'aseh vinishma*, that constituted an acceptance of the *Torah* for that generation specifically, not for future generations. In fact, on a national, eternally binding level, *Bnei Yisrael* only accepted the *Torah* upon themselves later, at the covenant which began in the plains of Moav and ended at the mountains Gerizim and Eival (see Rashi to *Devarim* 29:14). (Rav Shachter explained that the reason why this second agreement is still binding today, while the agreement made at *Har Sinai* only applied at the time it was made, is because only here, when *Bnei Yisrael* had entered a part of *Eretz Yisrael*, were they considered a nation whose agreements last as long as their nationhood). Thus, the gravity of *Matan Torah* is not its binding force in requiring us to fulfill our side of the agreement and do the *mitzvos*, as the agreement made at *Har Sinai* is in fact not still binding today.

So we find ourselves back, once more, where we started, trying to figure out the answer to this very basic question, a question which, in the *haggadah*, is asked by no less than the simple son- the question of 'what is this?' *What is Ma'amad Har Sinai??* The final answer, according to my understanding of Rav Shachter, is twofold.

First of all, answered Rav Shachter, *Ma'amad Har Sinai* is the paradigm for how *Torah* should be transmitted. It was *Hashem's* model lesson for all future *mechanchim*, *Rabbeim*, and parents on how they should pass on the *Torah* they received from their teachers to the next generation, how they should keep alive the everlasting flame of *Bnei Yisrael's* commitment to *Torah*. And *Ma'amad Har Sinai* doesn't just function as the tutorial for those involved in teaching the next generation- it is also incumbent upon the children and *talmidim* to take from *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, and specifically *Bnei Yisrael's* role in it, the methods one should utilize to successfully *receive* the *Torah*. This can be seen from the *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 30a, *Berachos* 21b), which finds the source for the father's obligation to teach his son *Torah* from *pesukim* (*Devarim* 4:9-10) which read: "make known to your children

and the children of your children the day you have stood in front of *Hashem* at [*Har Sinai*]" . And this is spelled out explicitly in *Berachos* 21b-22a, where the *Gemara* states that just like at *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, *Bnei Yisrael* accepted the *Torah b'eimah uviyirah uvereses uveziya* - with reverence, fear, quaking, and trembling - so too all those who learn *Torah* (Rav Shachter qualified this to refer only to someone who is learning from a teacher) must do so with reverence and fear. Furthermore, the Rif quotes a *Yerushalmi* which states that just like at *Har Sinai*, *Hashem* gave the *Torah Shebechsav* in written form and the *Torah Sheba'al Peh* verbally, so too at *kriyas haTorah*, the public teaching of *Torah*, the *ba'al koreh* must read the *Torah* from the text, and the translator (in the times that they had translators who publicly translated the *parsha*) must not be reading his translation from any written text (see *Gittin* 60b). Lastly, the *Kedushas Levi* and Rav Chaim Volozhiner are united in explaining, in their respective commentaries to *Pirkei Avos* 1:1, that because *Har Sinai* was the most modest of the mountains (see *Sotah* 5a), and Moshe was the humblest of men (*Bamidbar* 12:3), they were able to act as the vehicles through which *Ma'amad Har Sinai* was conducted, which teaches us that we can only acquire *Torah* through humility. So this is one aspect of *Matan Torah's* significance- it demonstrates to future generations how to both properly transfer and successfully accept the *Torah*: with much awe and reverence for the holy words being learned, with respect for the different types of *Torah* (written and oral) and their different qualities, and with unending humility.

In addition to the practical ways through which *Torah* can survive from generation to generation, *Matan Torah* also has another dimension to it. (I want to pause here to give full disclosure that this concept I am about to discuss was something Rav Shachter mentioned only in passing, and the idea of using it as a second level in answering our original question is entirely my suggestion). The *Gemara* has a tradition that all future Jewish *neshamos* were present at *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. And while a person's soul cannot agree to a contract on their behalf, it can, however, have certain feelings and emotions impressed upon it, and these feelings will have a major effect on the person. Moshe describes the purpose of *Matan Torah* as "so that the fear of *Hashem* will be upon you so that you will not sin" (*Shemos* 20:17). So this, then, is another way that *Matan Torah* was relevant and continues to be relevant today- because every ounce of *yira'as shamayim* we have can be traced back to the moment when *yiras shamayim* was instilled into the deepest recesses of our *neshamos*, the moment of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*.

In conclusion, I believe we can gain from this *shiur* new insight into the last-

ing significance of *Matan Torah*, a significance which comes not from *Matan Torah* being the time when the text of the *Torah* was given to Moshe, nor from it being the time when *Bnei Yisrael* accepted upon themselves the *mitzvos*, but rather from the example it sets on how to properly continue the chain of *Torah* and *yiras shamayim*.

## Mussar Moments: Shavuos

*Max Korenman ('22) and Avidan Loike ('22)*

On the last day of *Shavuos*, we are going to read from *Megillas Rus*. Within *Megillas Rus* there is a very interesting *possuk* that says “and Boaz came from *Beis Lechem*, and he said to the harvesters “*Hashem* is with you” and they replied to him “*Hashem* should bless you.”” The *Medrash* explains that Boaz adopted this form of greeting as common practice because he incorporated *Hashem* and the essence of *Torah* into his everyday life. While the form of greeting that Boaz incorporated was a nice gesture, one has to wonder as to why it was so important that the *possuk* felt it was imperative to mention this. The answer lies within the message the *possuk* is looking to convey. The *possuk* is teaching the importance of having *Hashem* at the forefront of our minds at all times. Moreover, having *Hashem* at the forefront of our minds is so important that the *Midrash* says it is one of the three *halachos* that was made by man that *Shamayim* accepted. The reason thinking of *Hashem* at all times is so important is because the inclination to do a sin diminishes when one realizes that the Creator and All-Powerful is constantly looking down on them. The *possuk* is trying to show how thinking about *Hashem* is not merely a nice trait, but something which is a tremendously important part of maintaining *yiras Shamayim*. So as we go into *Shavuos* and the reading of *Megillas Rus*, we should realize the importance of always thinking of *Hashem*, and how having *bitachon* is crucial to doing what is right.

## What is Megillas Rus Doing Here?

*Yisrael-Dovid Rosenberg ('23)*

*Megillas Rus* has several themes which all point to different reasons for which it may have been written and canonized in Tanach.

The most obvious theme of the story is *chesed*. Rus may very well be the most generous person in all of Tanach. Her story is one where she gives everything that she can, all of herself to others. From the very beginning, she dedicates herself to Naomi rather than going home to find a husband and build a life of her own. And by the story's end, Rus fairly literally gives her own child to Naomi to allow Naomi a consolation and a joy that Naomi so dearly desires. The behavior of others (particularly Boaz toward Rus) also exemplifies the *middah* of *chesed*. This is in fact the subject of a *midrash* in *Rus Rabbah*, where Rabbi Zeira notes that the *Megillah* is not brimming with *halachos* of *tumah* and *taharah* or *issur v'heter*, but rather exemplifies the value of *chesed* and its reward (*Rus Rabbah* 2:14).

Of course, the story is also important background knowledge to Dovid Hamelech and his dynasty. It ratifies Rus's entrance into the nation and reason for her as a woman of Moav (and not a man) to be accepted fully into the Jewish people and given permission to marry Boaz. The *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 76b) relates how Do'eg Ha'adomi told Shaul Hamelech that Dovid was not permitted to marry his daughter, for he was a descendant of Rus. Ultimately, the *halachah* is determined that it is not an issue for Dovid to marry a Jew, for it was not truly an issue for Rus in the first place. At the time, the issue was taken to the *Beis Medrash*, where they quoted Shmuel Hanavi as having said that Rus's marriage was valid. In the version of the story in *Rus Rabbah* it is even said by Shmuel himself (*Rus Rabbah* 4:6). Shmuel was the author of *Megillas Rus* (see *Bava Basra* 14b) and with such criticism afloat, he may have been compelled to write the story out to clarify the matter and to clearly ratify Rus's acceptance of the *Torah*, and consequently the righteousness of Dovid's lineage. The *Megillah* in its final *pesukim* also records the direct line from Peretz to Dovid, thereby acknowledging his proper ancestor of Yehudah (as Peretz is the son of Yehudah and Tamar).

Dr. Yael Ziegler develops and explains both of these ideas in her book on *Megillas Rus* and combines the two approaches, resulting in a third general

lesson of the *megillah*. Rus's generosity, as noted, is far greater than any usual type of *chesed*. This is seen through the specific acts to form a general style to Rus's behavior. *Perek by perek*, Rus acts with a total lack of self-thought. First comes the choosing of Naomi instead of her home, followed by carrying through with her words to the fullest and going to glean in the fields for Naomi and listening to her mother-in-law's odd and potentially dangerous advice to find Boaz at night. And finally, we have Rus handing over her child to the sorrowful Naomi. The style found in Rus's choices is that she doesn't have any care for herself whatsoever. Rus, in Dr. Ziegler's phrasing, abrogates her own self, and in so doing sets down a model, not for the average citizen, but for kings. For kings teeter on a dangerous ledge. They have absolute power and can take anything for themselves, and are always in danger of corruption without correction. Only a king who, like Rus, has this "self-nullifying" type of *chesed*, is truly safe. Thus, *Megillas Rus* emerges with the appropriate warnings and a deeper understanding as to the reason that Dovid merits to be king - not despite his lineage, but because of it and that for which it stands.

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner proposes one more pattern of the *Megillah*: loyalty and betrayal. Betrayal is certainly present when Elimelech left *Beis Lechem* to avoid giving his great wealth away to support the poor during the famine (according to Rashi and Malbim on *Rus* 1:1). And, of course, Rus shows incredible loyalty to Naomi throughout the story. But even when it came to Naomi's sons as they married Moabite women after settling in the fields of Moav with their father, we see a betrayal of their brethren and the nation at large. (They never even intended to have their Moabite wives convert, and were thus punished [see Malbim and *Chomat Anakh* on *Rus* 1:4].) Rabbi Torczyner explains how the book fits in the context of *Sefer Shoftim* (which is the general time period in which the story of Rus took place) and argues that the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah* would have been very concerned about the loyalty of the nation and their intermarriage (in context with the rebuke of Malachi to the people in Malachi 2:10-12), and perhaps for this reason they would have chosen to include Rus as a key book of Tanach, to show the consequences that befall those who fail in this area.

Though short, *Megillas Rus* is a very powerful and impactful story. It proves Dovid Hamelech and his dynasty's suitability, both in his descendancy from Yehudah, the *shevet* of kings, and in his righteous ancestor, Rus, whose style of *chesed* models that which a king must require in himself. The book also outlines that one incurs punishment by failing to follow *Hashem*, and that *Hashem* rewards those who show Him true faith and devotion.

# The Balancing Act

Aaron Rouhani ('22)

I read this amazing *Dvar Torah* called *Keep Your Balance* by Rabbi Yossy Goldman, and I wanted to share it with everyone:

What is the definition of a well-balanced individual? In *Shemos*, we read the Ten Commandments. As we know, the *Luchos* were separated into two columns, the *mitzvos* between humankind and God (*Adam LiMakom*), and the commandments from person to person (*Adam Lichaveiro*). One side is devoted to our responsibilities to God while the other side deals with our person-to-person obligations.

The message that so many tend to forget is that both these areas are sacred and equally important. *Both* come directly from God. *Both* form the core of *Torah* law and what being Jewish is all about. We must be well-balanced Jews, and we may not prioritize one side of the *Luchos* over the other. A healthy and well-rounded Jew lives a balanced, wholesome life, and is good to God and good to people as well. If you focus on one side of the *Luchos* and ignore the other, then you are not pushing yourself to your full potential.

A good Jew is a well-balanced Jew. It's not enough to just be religious on the spiritual side of Judaism and relaxed when it comes to being a *mentsch*. A Jew has to be honest and kind, and live with righteousness so people will respect him too. If you are religious towards God but not right with people, you will in essence be committing a *Chilul Hashem* in the name of the same God who encourages and motivates you to follow religious law. There is no doubt that it's a *mitzvah* to be a *mentsch*, and that's in fact exactly what *Hashem* expects of us.

But we can't ignore the right side of the *Luchos* either. A good Jew cannot simply be a good human being. Otherwise, why would God need Jews altogether? It's not sufficient for a Jew to just be a kind person. Everyone should be nice; all of humankind is supposed to act genuinely and honorably. This is not innately a "Jewish" concept. To be good, moral, ethical, and decent is the responsibility of every human being on the planet. It doesn't have to be religiously motivated at all! What makes us unique, and what makes a Jew a good Jew, must be that in addition to all of that, he also fulfills his specific uniquely Jewish responsibilities, the *mitzvos*.

The right-hand side of the *Luchos*, which contains the *mitzvos* between person to God, consists of 146 words, and the left-hand side of the *Luchos*, which lists our

human responsibilities, has only 26 words. Yet both sides of the *Luchos* were filled with writing. There were no big empty spaces, so how did 26 words match the space of 146 words? The answer is pretty simple: the 26 words on the left, indicating our person-to-person responsibilities, were just a bigger size than the 146 words on the right, reflecting our religious responsibilities. This should teach us that we should never undervalue the significance of the human relations side of the Ten Commandments.

*Shavuos* was the day we received the *Torah*. Something I hear every now and then is “*Torah* is not for me,” but I want to elaborate on that statement, as I feel it’s used incorrectly. *Torah* is for everyone, no matter who you are or what background you come from. As Rabbi Yossy Goldman says, every human should act genuinely and honorably. What sets us Jews apart from the rest of the world is our love and dedication to *Hashem* and *Torah* learning. This doesn’t mean everyone is going to start on the same level of learning; everyone has to build themselves up and do what they are comfortable with, whether that means finding a good person to learn with or finding a topic you enjoy learning about. Not everyone will start off reading multiple pages of *Gemara* a day and going through the *Rashis* and *Tosfos*. A person might start with just doing one *possuk* of *Navi* a day, and then doing a bit more each day. Personally, I love learning with my amazing *shiur*, not only because my friends are there, but because our amazing Rabbi makes the learning fun and teaches with enthusiasm. Everyone starts their journey somewhere, and *Shavuos* is an excellent time to begin your journey in learning.

# The Meaning Of True Ameilus

Shimi Kaufman ('21)

Editor In Chief, Shema Koleinu

A few months ago, I had the privilege to hear a *schmooze* on Friday night from HaRav Ezra Neuberger *shlit"a*, one of the *Maggidei Shiur* at *Yeshivas Ner Yisroel* in Baltimore. Towards the end of his talk, he raised a question regarding the *yomim tovim* of *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. Both *chagim* commemorate what we would describe as fundamental points in the history of the Jewish people, our exodus from *Mitzrayim* and the receiving of the *Torah*. And yet, there is a difference in how we recall these two events. On *Pesach*, there is a distinct *mitzvah* to recount and retell the story of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, and to reach a point where, in the Rambam's paradigm, we ourselves feel that we left Egypt along with the *Dor Hamidbar*. In contrast, there is no specific *mitzvah* to retell the story of *Matan Torah* on *Shavuos*. In fact, the holiday is bereft of any unique *mitzvos* at all; where *Pesach* has the *Korban Pesach*, *matzah*, and *marror*, which all serve to enhance our immersion in the story, *Shavuos* is left with an eclectic assortment of *minhagim* and the basic laws pertaining to *yom tov*. Why is *Pesach* geared towards passing down the *mesorah* of the event of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, while *Shavuos* has no such intense focus on the specific moment of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*?

After posing his question, Rav Neuberger thought for a long while, and then opted to leave his audience without an answer, feeling that it would be more beneficial for us to think about the concept on our own. After ruminating on the issue for several months, I would like to present my reflections on the distinction which Rav Neuberger drew.

*Parshas Bechukosai* begins with a somewhat standard exhortation towards *mitzvah* observance, with the words "*im bechukosai teileichu...*" - if you will walk with My laws, then I will shower blessings upon you. Rashi points out that "*bechukosai*" cannot refer to the *mitzvos*, as the next phrase in the *possuk* continues "*vi'es mitzvosi tishmoru*" - and [if] you will guard My *mitzvos*". Thus, Rashi, quoting the *Sifra*, concludes that this *possuk* refers to *ameilus biTorah*, being involved in *Torah*. Many *meforshim* ask the question which becomes immediately apparent upon reading Rashi - presumably, the commandment to learn *Torah* is included among the rest of the *mitzvos*, so why is a separate *possuk* needed to include it? The most common answer which is given lies in the specific use of the word "*amal*" - involved. Thus, this *possuk* does not refer to the strict commandment to learn *Torah* each day and night, which can technically be fulfilled with the reading of *kriyas shema* each morning and evening, but rather to a general

attitude of involvement and occupation with *Torah*. Yet this answer still leaves something to be desired when we re-examine the *possuk*. If the intention of the *Torah* was to refer to *ameilus biTorah*, why not just say so? The words “*bechukosai teileichu*” would appear to be rather vague when we consider that they are actually referring to *Torah* learning! Why would the *possuk* choose this phrase?

I believe that we can answer this question based on an idea which I heard quoted in the name of noted historian and scholar Rabbi Berel Wein. Rabbi Wein discussed why it is that *Gemara*, more than any other section of *Torah*, became the accepted and regularly studied text for Jews across the world. Rabbi Wein suggested four reasons why *yeshivos* and *chinuch* in general is primarily focused on *limmud Gemara*. One of Rabbi Wein’s suggestions was that the study of *Gemara bi’iyun* gives a framework for how to approach life as a whole. When a person spends their formative years trying to understand how *Tosfos* or Rav Chaim thought about a certain *sugya*, they instinctively begin to approach all issues from that lens. This does not happen automatically; it takes a conscious effort to apply the mindset one uses in their morning *seder* or *shiur* to their self-reflection and relationships. Perhaps this is the intention of the *possuk* in saying “*bechukosai teileichu*” to refer to *ameilus baTorah* - the truest value of *ameilus* and deep involvement in *Torah* comes when a person resolves to walk, to live, with the frame of mind of a *ben Torah*.

On the *Seder* night, all of us recited the line in *Dayeinu* - “if You had brought us before *Har Sinai*, but not given us the *Torah*, it would have been enough”. Every child knows the question: what good would it do to bring us before *Har Sinai*, if not for giving us the *Torah*? Without *Matan Torah*, *Har Sinai* is just an ordinary mountain. One answer which is commonly suggested is that we are saying that there would have been value in simply coming to *Har Sinai* only to witness the spectacle of *Matan Torah* as the *Torah* was given to some other nation! But, this is only an isolated feature of the experience of *Matan Torah*; the most important part was not the thunder, or the lighting, or the voices from heaven, but the long-term implications of a *Torah* which could shape the minds of those willing to listen into true *ovdei Hashem*. If the only purpose of coming to *Har Sinai* was to witness a Divine sound-and-lights show, then yes, it would have been enough even if we did not receive the *Torah*. The declaration of *na’aseh vinishma* implies something greater, a commitment to be *ameilim*, to be people whose lives are guided by the lens of *Torah*.

At the end of *davening*, many people recite the *sheish zechiros*, six passages

in the *Torah* which we are commanded to “remember”. By each one, the word “*zachor*”, remember, is used - remember *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, remember the war with Amalek, and so on. However, one of the six does not mention the word *zachor* at all. When we are commanded to remember *Matan Torah*, *Hashem* is not interested in telling us to remember the details of how the event occurred; instead, the *pesukim* say “guard yourself... and do not allow it to leave your heart all the days of your life.” The purpose of remembering *Matan Torah* is only insofar as it strengthens our long term commitment to delve into the depths of *Hashem's* wisdom and learn more about the *Ribono Shel Olam*, ourselves, and our relationship with Him.

On *Pesach*, we are concerned primarily with preserving the *mesorah* regarding the events of *Matan Torah*, creating an experiential recollection as a means of connecting with an event in the past. But on *Shavuos*, we are not focused on remembering *Matan Torah*, but rather on renewing our commitment to deepen our understanding and connection with the *Torah*, to be *ameilim* in every sense of the word. The oft-quoted *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (68b) tells us that irrespective of the debate whether *yom tov* should be devoted exclusively to matters of *ruchniyus* or not, all agree that on *Shavuos*, some time must be spent engaging in pleasures of *gashmiyus*. The question presents itself: why on *Shavuos*, the day dedicated to celebrating the *Torah* and matters of *ruchniyus*, would we devote ourselves to physical enjoyment? The question is compounded by the fact that *Tosfos* writes that the reason behind this requirement is pure logic - why would we logically assume that *Shavuos* requires physical celebration? The answer is that the celebration of *Shavuos* is not meant to recall the frozen moment in time when we received the *Torah* - rather, the goal is to renew our commitment to *Torah* as it affects our entire mindset; to live a life imbued with *Torah* thoughts and consideration while eating, drinking, and engaging with *Olam Hazeh*. *Shavuos* teaches us to be true *ameilim* by reminding us that the true goal of *Matan Torah* is *bechukosai teileichu* - to live a life of reflection, through the lens of a properly developed *Torah* perspective, and to grow ever closer to the *Borei Olam*.

## The Two Shofars

Aaron Sisser ('23)

By *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the ram that was slaughtered instead of Yitzchak had two horns. Chazal bring down that one of these horns was sounded as a *shofar* at *Matan Torah*, and the other one of these horns will be sounded as a *shofar* when *Moshaich* comes. On the holiday of *Shavuos*, we commemorate *Matan Torah*, when the first *shofar* was blasted. On the second day of *Shavuos*, we read *Megillas Rus*. There are many reasons why we do this, such as the fact that the story in the *Megillah* takes place around the time of *Shavuos*, or the fact that *Shavuos* is considered to be the *yahrzeit* and birthday of Dovid Hamelech, and Rus is an ancestor of Dovid Hamelech. However, many of the reasons that we read *Megillas Rus* on *Shavuos* emanate from what we can learn from the happenings of the story. What lessons can the *Megillah* teach us and what morals can we derive from it? We, as members of *Am Yisroel*, can learn a lot from what Rus does throughout the *Megillah*, and many of these are expressed throughout Rus' dialogue in the *Megillah*.

Rus was a non-Jew who married into a Jewish family, and her mother-in-law Na'amah was telling Rus to leave her after the death of Rus' husband, Na'ami's son. In fact, Rus had a sister-in-law - Orpah - who was going through the same situation, and after some convincing Orpah left Na'ami. However, Rus was not swayed. She stayed with her mother-in-law and ended up converting to Judaism, and she became an ancestor of the great Dovid Hamelech.

Na'ami was at the lowest point of her life. Her husband and two sons just passed away, and now she was telling her last two remaining relatives - her two daughters-in-law - to abandon her. Rus was determined to not let that happen. So, even though Orpah acquiesced to Na'ami's dictation, Rus was adamant that she was going to stay by Na'ami's side. The *Megillah* relays to us that Rus said to Na'ami "do not urge me to abandon you, to turn back and not follow you, because wherever you will go - I will go, wherever you will lodge - I will lodge, your nation is my nation, and your God is my God. Wherever you die - I will die, and there I will be buried." What did Rus mean by this statement? Why did she say the same formula multiple times, all implying the same thing: Whatever you will do, I will do? What was really going on here?

The *Gemara* in *Yevamos* (47b) learns from this *possuk* that someone who is going to be accepted into *Am Yisroel* needs to go through a series of steps

before they are allowed to convert. One of the things that has to be done is that they have to be acquainted with the *mitzvos* and the punishments they would incur as Jews if they do not do the *mitzvos*. Rus' responses in this *possuk* tells us that she was willing to accept all of the *mitzvos* and their punishments if she would not do them. Let us see the reason why Rus said what she said.

The *Gemara* teaches that Na'ami first said to Rus that Jews are not allowed to move 2000 *amos* out of the boundary of the city in any direction on *Shabbos*. To this, Rus responded with the beginning of her statement in the aforementioned *possuk* - "wherever you will go - I will go." This comes to show that Rus was accepting this commandment and all that it entails. Then, Na'ami told Rus that men and women are not allowed to be alone together, to which Rus responded that she will accept when she said "wherever you will lodge - I will lodge." When Rus said that "your nation is my nation", she was telling Na'ami that she accepts the 613 *mitzvos* and that she was accepting the commitment to be a member of *Am Yisroel*. When Rus said that "your God is my God", she was proclaiming that she would never worship other gods, and that she would only worship *Hashem*. Lastly, when Rus said that "wherever you will die - I will die, and there I will be buried" Rus was declaring that she was willing to face capital punishment if she would commit such a heinous sin deserving of such punishment.

This *possuk* shows how Rus utterly and completely accepted Judaism into her life. She was willing to give up everything to be a Jew. We can learn from this *possuk* that no matter the cost, Rus was willing to pay it in order to join the great nation of *Am Yisroel*. We can also apply this *possuk* to ourselves. We have a great advantage over the rest of the world. We are already in the greatest nation. As we read in *Divrei Hayamim*, "Who is like the nation of Israel, the greatest nation in the world?" We, as members of *Am Yisroel*, should use our great privilege to try and get closer to *Hashem*. We should use our prerogative to bring amazing things into the world. Hopefully, we will all be *zocheh* to achieve this great thing of accepting anything in order to worship *Hashem* better!

When we celebrate *Shavuot* this year, when we commemorate the sounding of that first *shofar* by *Matan Torah*, may we all desire the coming of *Moshiach*, where the second of these two *shofars* will be blasted. May we all be *zocheh* to be like Rus, always willing to do anything for Judaism, for *Am Yisroel*, and for *Hashem* - just like Avraham by *Akeidas Yitzchak*. We should all try to see the connection between *Akeidas Yitzchak*, *Matan Torah*, *Megil-*

*las Rus, Shavuos, and Moshiach, and strive to bring the coming of Moshiach, a descendant of Rus, bimheirah Bbyameinu, Amen!*

## Finding Inspiration in the Present from Events of Our Past

*Alexander Cooper ('24)*

On *Shavuot* we remember the first day the relationship between *Am Yisrael* and *Hashem* became official. It is explained that when the Jewish Nation was given the *Torah* at *Har Sinai* there was an overwhelming amount of *kedushah* and awe surrounding the mountain, as it says (*Shemos* 24:18): “and Moshe came into the cloud, and he ascended the mountain, and Moshe was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.” The *Torah* describes what an amazing sight *Matan Torah* was for those present, and how *Hashem* revealed Himself to the Jewish people.

How can we, in 2021, find inspiration in a tremendously spiritual and godly event that took place 3000 years ago? In other words, how can we maintain the same close connection to the *Torah* and *Hashem* as did the Jews who actually heard *Hashem's* voice at the bottom of *Har Sinai*, and who saw the very mountain in which *Hashem* descended which was surrounded by smoke and fire (*Shemos* 19:18)?

One way to find inspiration is through the unique quality of the relationship that we, today, in our lives can try to obtain with *Hashem*. This special relationship with *Hashem* may not have been possible so many years ago. The miracles that *Am Yisrael* experienced during *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and the event at *Har Sinai* were singular events that will never happen again. Although those events were unbelievable and awesome, they were not personal to the individuals who were there at that time, as Rashi comments (*Shemos* 19:2) that the nation experienced these miracles “as one people”.

In today's world, when *Hashem's* presence may not be as overwhelmingly bright as it was then, we try to connect with *Hashem* as individuals, each with our own challenges and obstacles.

As we see (*Melachim I* 19:11-12) with Eliyahu Hanavi, the voice of *Hashem* was not in the powerful wind, or the earthquake or the fire, but was found to be soft and gentle, speaking to every individual.

Another way to find inspiration is through a want to improve the imperfect world in which we live today. This is different from the experience of *Am*

*Yisroel* during their journey through the *Midbar*. At that time things were simple. *Hashem* provided protection, safety and sustenance. The nation was not given the challenge of improvement. The world in which we live today is filled with opportunities to challenge each of us to seek to be better as individuals and to be better as a group.

Finally, we find inspiration through witnessing miracles that may seem small but are really big. The miracle at *Har Sinai* that *Bnei Yisroel* witnessed was large. Through learning cutting-edge modern science, we are able to appreciate miracles which may be just as great, but occur within every day, millions of times a day. Breathing, waking up each morning, getting better from sickness - the list goes on! The fact that we may not appreciate these miracles as much as *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah* may be our own fault. We should strive to see how the mirales to which we bear witness, may be just as great as those in the *Midbar*.

May our path to finding inspiration bring us all closer to *Hashem*!

## The Great Combination

*Daniel Toth ('24)*

When we read the Ten Commandments, we begin with *vayedaber...laimor* (And Hashem spoke all these words, saying). The *Torah* uses the words *vayedaber* and *laimor* to expressly mean that whatever concept *laimor* is connected to should be taught to the Jewish nation and to its future generations repeatedly. We are taught that all of the Jewish souls, future, present, and past were present at *Sinai* at the giving of the *Torah*, and hence all Jewish souls heard what was said then. But if this is so, what is the meaning of *laimor*, if all of the Jewish souls were already present?

The *Maggid* of Mezritch states that these two words, *vayedaber* and *laimor*, have to be combined in order to better understand their meanings. The word *vayidaber* has the same root as *Aseres Hadibros* (D.B.R.), the Ten Commandments. The word *laimor* has the same root as *Asarah Ma'amaros* (A.M.R.), the ten utterances with which God created the world. According to the *Maggid*, we should not think that this physical world and the *Torah* are separate. We should always strive to bring the *Torah* into our worldly encounters, and have *Torah* values guide us in our everyday worldly affairs. On the other hand, we should never become two sided. We should not act one way in environment A, and then act another way in environment B. We should always dedicate ourselves to any situation according to the lessons of the *Torah*.

We are told in the *Midrash* that when we received the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*, a deep-rooted decree was put to an end. This decree stated that "what is above can't come below, and what is below can't go above." Although our forefathers did *mitzvos* and studied *Torah* even before it was given, their actions did not affect the physical world. They failed to fill our physical world with meaningful holiness. These two worlds, the physical world and the spiritual world, contradict one another. But thankfully, all of this changed when God gave us the power to combine the physical world and the spiritual world through *Torah*. Finally, the holy and the mundane were able to become one entity.

This is quite self-explanatory, for out of the six hundred thirteen *mitzvos* we were given, God only assigned these ten special *mitzvos* to every Jew personally. Instead of giving us the ten most spiritually packed *mitzvos*, He gave us the most holy *mitzvos*. He began with "I am the Lord your God"

and later continued with “You shall not murder” and “You shall not steal.” Although these are a few examples of the Ten Commandments, it is noticeable that these commandments are basic rules that cannot be violated. By putting the rules of not murdering and not stealing together with His holiness, it is also quite clear that God has a desire for us to combine the physical world with the spiritual world. Therefore, after the giving of the *Torah*, God finally allows anything which is above to come below and anything which is below can go above.

Doing *mitzvos* because they are God’s will, is an example of bringing what is above down below. Although we understand why stealing and murdering are terrible things, they need to be stated with “I am your Lord your God” because they are God’s will. On the other hand, understanding that stealing and murdering are bad actions, because the *Torah* states not to do them, also relates to God’s holiness. This is an example of bringing what is below above.

As it was previously stated, the way we bring the physical together with the spiritual is through the six hundred thirteen *mitzvos*. This is proven from the fact that the Ten Commandments begin with the word *Anochi*, I am. This refers to God’s essence, which is above all things, spiritual and physical. Since God’s essence is above all creation, it can combine opposites. With the giving of the Ten Commandments, our *mitzvos* can also combine opposites. One reason God would allow us to create such a great bond, is because one of our purposes as the Jewish Nation is to transform this world into a dwelling place for God.

The word *havaya* also hints to us that God wants our actions to connect these two worlds. The word *havaya* is a combination of *hayah* (past), *hoveh* (present), and *yehiyeh* (future). Thus, our actions are beyond time and beyond any other worldly limitation.

May we all take this great opportunity to remember our purpose and do *mitzvos*. May we create an everlasting bond through our simple yet complex actions. Last, but not least, may we create an appropriate dwelling place for *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

## **Staff List:**

**Rosh Yeshiva:** Rabbi Michael Taubes

**Head of School:** Rabbi Joshua Kahn

**Associate Principal:** Rabbi Shimon Schenker

**Rabbinic Advisor:** Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson

**Advisor For Special Editions:** Rabbi Dov Emerson

**Editors in Chief:** Yisroel Hochman, Shimi Kaufman

**Head Writer:** Shnuer Agronin

**Distribution Manager:** Noam Steinmetz

**Executive Editors:** Yitzchak Hagler, Meir Morell



EST. 1916