

ב"ה

CCNY Shavuot Torah Collaboration

כאיש אחד בלב אחד

Like One Person With One Heart

A special study package for challenging times

Shavuot 2020

שבועות ה'תש"פ

A Project of



Introduction

Dear CCNY Chabad family,

We hope and pray that you and your family are safe and healthy. We miss you!

Shavuot is the celebration of the giving of the Torah.

The momentous occasion was more than the knowledge within the Torah. The day marked a new era- an era when G-dliness and the mundane, the spiritual and physical can become one. When heaven and earth meet.

We hope and pray that the power of this day, give us the ability to transform our lives into G-dly experiences.

We greatly appreciate everyone that contributed their time and thoughts to this CCNY Shavuot Collab:

Avi Weinberg, Netanel Raden, Deena Shaffer, Jordy Gross, Baruch Schwartz, Esther Kaufman, Yisroel Ben Porat, Daniel Rosenthal, Sammy Landesman, Dovi Brand, Sara Fisher and Bracha Erlich.

Chag Sameach.

Rabbi Yudi and Chanie Shmotkin

Meeting G-d alone on the Mountain

Rabbi Yudi Shmotkin

G-d descended on Mount Sinai.. And called to Moshe..

The story is told about Mt. Sinai being chosen from all the other mountains because Mt. Sinai was the humblest of them all.

Why was the Torah given on a mountain? Why wasn't the Torah given on flat land? That would signify the idea of humility even greater? Why was it so necessary the Torah be given on a mountain?

The first time in the Torah a significant occurrence happened on a mountain, was when G-d commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the Mountain. Mt. Moriah.

This was the final test and the most difficult of Abraham's ten tests. And it was done on a mountain. Why?

Thinking about mountains, two thoughts come to mind.

1. Solitude. Being alone on a mountain. Away from civilization. A time and space for oneself.
2. A climb. Effort. To climb a mountain takes work.

Abraham's test and moment of truth did not take place in public, no media was invited, it was a unique and monumental moment in history that took place between Abraham, Isaac, and G-d. On a mountain. Abraham made the climb, and in solitude was ready to fulfill G-d's will.

Abraham the first Jew withstood the test, and met G-d on the top of the mountain. This moment changed history.

We each have our own moment and our own mountain. Where we meet G-d at the top. That moment of truth, and many times in solitude- that we reach our pinnacle and meet G-d.

Professor Velvl Greene- an eminent NASA scientist, started his journey to reconnect to his Jewish roots. Rabbi Moshe Feller- the Chabad emissary to Minnesota was alongside for his journey.

One day Rabbi Feller called Dr. Greene and said, "Velvl, I know you're traveling by plane. Please do me a favor. Call the airline and order a kosher meal."

Velvl replied, "What? You know I don't keep kosher. If I don't keep kosher in my house, why keep kosher on the plane?"

Rabbi Feller responded when the Jewish passengers heard that Professor Velvl Greene asked for his kosher meal, it could inspire them as well.

Velvl responded, "Look, I'm not so sure about this, but if it makes you happy, I'll do you the favor."

Dr. Greene ordered the kosher meal, and boarded the plane the next day. But when the flight attendant came by, she handed him a regular, non-kosher meal. Dr. Greene was ready for this too. Clearing his throat, he declared for everybody to hear, "No, ma'am, I ordered a kosher meal!"

"Your name, please?"

"Professor Velvl Greene."

All heads turned. Professor Greene had ordered a kosher meal! The attendant said, "Okay, I'll be right back."

After a few minutes, and after everyone on the plane had been served, the flight attendant came to his seat and said, "Um, Dr. Greene, there must have been a mistake. We don't seem to have your meal on the plane."

Dr. Greene was about to blurt out, "Fine, give me another meal." Problem was, he had just made such a big deal on the plane for everyone to know that Professor Velvl Greene had ordered a kosher meal? How would it look if he said, "Fine, give me a regular meal"?

Greene was angry. At the airline. At himself for listening to this nonsense. He was angry at G-d. But he was most angry, fuming at Rabbi Feller for convincing him to do this. And Greene decided that he would show him yet.

He landed at Chicago's O'Hare airport at midnight for a one-hour stopover. He arrived at the terminal, and there was still one store open: a non-kosher hot dog stand. Velvl Greene was very hungry, but he was even more angry than hungry. He therefore headed first to the phone booth and called the rabbi—collect. A collect call in the middle of the night was sure to invite panic. And indeed, Rabbi Feller was deeply concerned that something terrible had happened.

“This is a very upset and hungry Professor Greene calling from O'Hare airport in Chicago,” he said. “I'll have you know that they didn't have my kosher meal on the plane, and I'm starving. I also want you to know that there is a hot dog stand 20 feet away from me. Before I go ahead and buy one and eat it, I just wanted to wake you up to tell you that I'm going to eat it. I'm going to have it with mustard, onions, relish and kraut. After I finish the first one, I'm going to have a second one!”

The rabbi was quiet for a minute, and then he said, “Velvl, on many occasions you have asked me about the essence of Judaism, what it all comes down to, what it calls forth from within us. Tonight, right now, in this telephone conversation, I'm going to tell you the essence of Judaism. It's about passing the hot dog stand and not buying one. It's about being able to get on your connecting flight without having eaten the hot dog. That's all of Judaism; the rest is commentary.”

He headed straight for the stand, stood in line and waited for his turn. He was about to place his order, when something very strange happened. He tried to say, “Can I have a hot dog?” He wanted it, he was hungry, he was angry, and gosh, those hot dogs looked better and better with each rotation of the grill.

But he couldn't.

At that moment, he got it. G-d was stronger than that hot dog. And he had to listen to G-d. Not out of fear, not out of guilt, but out of love. And that was Judaism. All of it.

Professor Greene never bought that hot dog, not then, not ever again. That trip changed his life. One small “no” for a hot dog, one great step for a man.

Man meets G-d atop of the mountain.

We are all in solitude now. No minyans, no congregating, just us and G-d.

What is our mountain? Is it our relationship with our loved ones? Is it our relationship with G-d? Can I be more careful in a mitzvah?

Together this Shavuot let's climb our mountain.

And meet G-d at the top!

Chag Sameach!

King of the World

Avi Weinberg

It is written in the Gemarah, Masechet Zevachim, 116a, that when the Jews accepted the Torah, a heavenly voice rang out over the world, stirring fear in all the kings. Rashi says these kings all went into their chambers to pray to God. This begs the question, why did only kings hear this voice and become frightened? Why not everyone else? Was this like a dog whistle only kings could hear?

Perhaps we can answer, that the highest expression of God being king of the world is through the giving of the Torah. Through this act, he asserted his power over the world and expressed his omnipotence. The Torah is not just a book of rules, rather it gives meaning and purpose to the world. When the Torah was given at Sinai the kings realized that they would have to subvert their power to God, who is commonly referred to in liturgy as the King of all kings.

We are now in the midst of a worldwide pandemic in which no one knows what the future holds. The only way to have any understanding of current events is to realize that God is running the show. The Torah gives us meaning and helps us maximize our potentials. Its commandments make us better people, both through serving God directly and through social interactions. Perhaps we can use this time to focus on prayer, help those in need, and reflect on our own lives. Using his Torah as our guide, we can overcome the challenges brought on by these times.

When one has meaning in life, it brings out inner happiness. On Shavuot, we have been given the guide towards clarity and purpose. It is for this reason that we celebrate. I wish everyone a happy Shavuot, and may we all emerge from this pandemic safe, healthy, and with a deeper connection to God.

Chag Sameach

Honor Your Father and Mother

Netanel Raden

Mother's Day and Father's Day always come around Shavuot. So what's the meaning that they fall around the same time? What's the similarities? What's the mutuality that they share? So, on Shavuot there's not even a halacha. Like on Pesach we eat matzah, Succos we shake the Lulav, on Shavuot it's just a Yom Tov. Everything we do is a minhag like eating cheesecake and learning Torah all night. It's the same thing with Mother's Day. On Mother's or Father's Day what do we do? We take our mothers and fathers out for breakfast? That's a mitzvah on Mother's Day? Really Mother's Day is nothing at all, it's really just a REMINDER! It's the day you stop and say, "Oh my goodness! I must stop and thank my mother! I have to appreciate her!" Same thing with Shavuot. On Shavuot there is no mitzvah; because that will make you lose your focus. Your focus is we got the Torah, Torah is our life, that is our focus. Our mission. If on Mother's Day, you just take your mother out for breakfast and never call her every day for two minutes it's a waste of time! Why? Because she doesn't really care that you take her out on Mother's Day. Rather she wants you to call her every day for two minutes, rather than spend four hours on Mother's Day and get her flowers, or just give her a beautiful breakfast. It's the same thing with Shavuot. Shavuot isn't "Wow, I just stayed up the whole night learning Torah." Shkoyach. That's not the important thing of Shavuot. The most important thing is that Shavuot is a REMINDER just like Mother's Day is that I must give every day to the Torah. Every day I must be with the Torah. I must give five minutes to the Torah, ten minutes to the Torah. We must always be giving something to the Torah. Have a beautiful Shavuot!

Ruth and Her Intuition

Deena Schaffer

On the second day of Shavuot the book of Ruth is read. The book of Ruth is more than just a story that we read as a history of our predecessors. It is about the coming of Moshiach and recognizing the ultimate truth which is the Torah.

At har Sinai, when G-d proclaimed his glory upon the world, the Jews understood with complete clarity that *Ein Od Milvado* – He is the One and only G-d of the entire universe. The revelation of G-dliness was so great that the Jews understood with complete clarity that the Torah is the source of life for the whole world. A profound awareness of the truth became deeply embedded within them. Hence, in that moment they accepted the Torah upon themselves.

Judaism is more than just a practice. Often, we get so caught up in routine that we lose sight of the purpose of keeping the mitzvot - to develop a deep relationship with G-d and to elevate our lives with spiritual meaning. On Shavout, we celebrate the receiving of the Torah, not just for the purpose of renewing our acceptance of practice, but perhaps more importantly, to renew our personal connection to G-d. Shavuot is an opportunity to tap into the spirituality and inherent truth that is deeply rooted within each and every one of us.

Ruth was a Moabi princess. After her husband died, she could have returned to Moab and lived a glorious life of royalty. Instead she chose to follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Israel where she was destined to a life of poverty and sorrow. One cannot help but question why Ruth would submit herself to such a lifestyle?

Ruth understood the truth with a clarity that was similar to that which the Jews encountered with the receiving of the Torah. Because she was a convert, she did not experience the 'entrapment' of being Jewish. She had a strong intuition of *Ein Od Milvado*. Intuition is a characteristic typically associated with women. When G-d created man, male and female were joined together. Consequently, every person is comprised of different male and female energies. Female energy is about empowerment. It is about having a deeper understanding of what is needed - intuition. Ruth embodied this energy, thus embracing a life of truth by clinging to Naomi. For this reason, she merited to have her descendant be King David and ultimately Moshiach.

Rabbi Gafni of Kfar Chabad once said that “Moshiach will remove the veil from our eyes and the chains from our hearts.” We must learn to connect to the Ruth within ourselves. Being confined to our homes now is an opportunity to meditate on this energy. Everything that happens in this world is *Hashgacha Pratit*, Divine Providence. We are living in a time where the routine of Judaism has been restricted. Our typical Jewish practices like *minyanim* and Jewish schooling were put to a halt. Perhaps this isolation was G-ds way of reminding us of our real purpose. We have the time now to develop a real relationship with G-d without the likely distractions of habit. It is a call for the return to the intuition of Torah and to reconnect on a higher level. That is the idea of the holiday of Shavuot.

May we merit to see the coming of Moshiach in our times, very soon.

Chag Sameach!

Ruth and Action

Jordy Gross

This is based on a shiur that I heard from Rabanit Rachel Weber Leshaw. She quotes a line from Gemara Makkot 23b, which gives us three examples of halachic innovations that were made by mankind that God retrospectively approved of: reading Megillah, greeting people with God's name, and certain concepts in Ma'aser. All three of these innovations actually happen to appear in Megillat Ruth, along with many other sources for halachic behavior that are quoted by more modern sources. What's interesting is that Megillat Ruth does not strike most as a halachic text. In fact, Rabbi Zeira in Ruth Raba writes that the purpose of Megilat Ruth is specifically not halachah or issues of permissibility, but rather to teach us about reward for kindness.

Notable about Megillat Ruth and each of the halachic concepts that are learned from it is that they are all learned through action. In no instance does God call down from the heavens and command the people in their observance of the Torah. Rather, all that is learned from Megillat Ruth, specifically in the context of halacha, is learned through action. Through Ruth's conversion, or through Boaz's greeting others with the Name of God, or through the actual tithing of produce, and so on. Megillat Ruth stands out as a text that inspires human action, not by learning passively and just listening, but rather by learning actively and actually doing. Perhaps this was Rabbi Zeira's point - we derive benefit and reward from our efforts when we can see how we've inspired others, how we've set a precedent in our actions.

May we all be inspired to take initiative , always and specifically during these times of quarantine.

Chag Sameach!

Medicine on Yom Tov: A Primer

Baruch Schwartz

Introduction

The laws of taking medication (and medicine in general) on Yom Tov can be divided into 3 categories. From most lenient to least lenient, they are life threatening illness, incapacitating illness, and simple ailments. It should be noted that these laws apply to Shabbat as well.

The following article will use the word “violate” when talking about prohibitions. This word is generally used to mean “to break, infringe, or transgress.” However, in this context, it means to “do an action that would, under normal circumstances, be a transgression.” That is because there is an established principle that any action done to help a sick person, even if it would normally be a transgression, if allowed (see below) is a good deed.

A disclaimer: The author is not a Rabbi, therefore, please treat all statements in this work as purely theoretical. Ask a religious authority if any questions arise about non-life-threatening issues.

Life Threats

Life threatening illness has a singular overriding law applied to it. Do what is necessary immediately, without hesitation, and help the person in need. Anything that one would be concerned with on a weekday as a threat to someone’s life should be treated on Yom Tov as though it was not Yom Tov. Furthermore, that which is debatable if it threatens life or not should be treated as though someone’s life is in danger and all Yom Tov prohibitions are waived in caring for that person. The commandment to save a life makes it incumbent on a person that they help in this scenario; one who worries about doing a prohibited action and therefore delays in helping is considered as though they murdered the person that they could have helped.

To illustrate the above points: A young child (Bill) is playing when he falls and hits his head. He does not get up. When his parents check on him, he is ‘breathing funny.’ On a weekday one would (hopefully) immediately call emergency medical services to bring Bill to the hospital, so also on Yom Tov, one must

immediately call for an ambulance to take Bill to the hospital. The ambulance crew must do all necessary treatments to stabilize Bill without thinking about Yom Tov at all. Similarly, all hospital medical professionals involved in Bill's care cannot consider Yom Tov when they are making determinations about what interventions to do or not.

Incapacitation

The laws regarding a life threat, potential or realized, are rather simple. What about someone who is ill, to the extent that they cannot get out of bed, but they aren't in life threatening danger? For those whose whole body is suffering/in pain, to the extent that they are confined to bed, significant leniencies are allowed. While they may not violate Torah prohibitions in caring for themselves, they may violate Rabbinic prohibitions if they do the action in an odd manner. Furthermore, one can ask a non-Jew to do any action for the sick person. Lastly, the sick person may take medication.

An example: A woman (Jan) has a 'stomach bug' and is unable to get out of bed due to her nausea. While Jan may not be given IV medication for her nausea, as starting an IV violates the Torah prohibition of causing bleeding on Yom Tov¹, one may give her anti-nausea medication as needed and may ask a non-Jew to turn on a hot shower to help alleviate Jan's condition. If needed, one may obtain the medication from a neighbor's apartment, provided the person obtaining the medication carries it in an odd manner, in his shoe, for example.

Ailments

The last category of illnesses on Yom Tov are those that do not relegate one to their bed. For these, a person may not take any medication, nor may they do any prohibitions, even in an odd manner, whether Torah or Rabbinic.

A case: A man (Sam) has a headache, but he is not in such discomfort as to be unable to get out of bed, nor is he in life threatening danger. Sam may not take any medication for his headache; furthermore, he may not ask a non-Jew to do any prohibited activity on his behalf.

Differences Between Yom Tov And Shabbat

So far, all cases and laws apply equally on Shabbat and Yom Tov. However, there exists a single difference between the laws of Shabbat and the laws of Yom Tov about medicine. Namely, that if one is

already boiling some water to cook with, they may boil a little extra so that they can sterilize a needle (for removing a splinter) and the like. Normally on Yom Tov, one may not boil more water than is needed right at that moment, for that day, however, this leniency is provided for medical purposes.

Second Day of Yom Tov

A second distinction between Shabbat and Yom Tov exists regarding the second day of Yom Tov, observed only outside of Israel. On the second day of Yom Tov, because it is a Yom Tov only by virtue of Rabbinic decree, one can override Rabbinic prohibitions, even for an ailment. There is no need to perform the forbidden action in an odd manner. However, this leniency does not apply to Rosh Hashana, as that is a two-day holiday by decree of the Torah. This applies to day 2 of Shavuot, Pesach (first and last days), and Sukkot (first and last days).

Conclusion

The laws of medical treatment on Yom Tov are complex and numerous, but a few main points are generally the only ones needed for the average layperson. These are: Consulting an authority about the religious permissibility of an action when someone is dying or in danger of dying is not virtue, but a grave sin. When a life is even potentially in the balance, action must be done regardless of religious implications. (The Rabbis even decreed that should a person violate Shabbat believing that a life was in danger and find out later that was not the case, any violations of law performed in those circumstances aren't violations, they are good deeds.)

If someone is not in danger of dying, but their whole body is in pain/they are confined to bed, they are permitted to take medication and do Rabbinic prohibitions in an odd manner (e.g. using the back of one's hand to push an elevator button if they find it difficult to walk up the stairs). Someone who is not in danger of dying, nor in whole body pain/suffering to the extent that they would stay in bed, may not take medication nor override any prohibitions. The author would like to thank Rabbi Yisroel Pinchos Bodner and Rabbi Doctor Daniel Roth for their comprehensive overview of the subject, *Halachos of Refuah on Shabbos*. Rabbi Ezra Schwartz provided valuable insight. May we merit that by learning these laws we never need to apply any of the guidelines above; but if needed, may it be God's will that we act with alacrity and precision for good outcomes.

Like One Man With One Heart

Esther Kaufman

Taken from Mrs. Michal Horowitz on YU Torah

Last week's parsha, Parshas Bamidbar, is always read the Shabbos before Shavuos. Many reasons have been given to explain the connection between Bamidbar and Shavuos.

R' Dr. Abraham J. Twerski writes, "The first portion of Bamidbar is generally read before Shavuos, the holiday which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Inasmuch as there are no coincidences, we may assume that this portion (Bamidbar) is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah.

"In relating the episode at Sinai, the Torah states: וַיִּחַן-שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל, נֹגֵד הָהָר, and Israel camped there, opposite the mountain (Shemos 19:2). The Torah uses the singular (וַיִּחַן), lit. he camped, rather than vayachanu, they camped. [How can a nation of upwards of two million people be described as encamping as one, in the singular?] Rashi explains: כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד - they camped like one man with one heart; the singular language indicating that all the Israelites were united as one person. It is this unity that made them worthy of receiving the Torah.

"There is nothing so dear to G-d as unity among His children. So much so, that the Gemara states that when Jews are united, G-d forgives even their gravest sins. Furthermore, the Sages teach, 'אִין לְךָ אָדָם שְׂאִין' - You have no person without his hour and no thing without its place' (Pirkei Avos 4:3). One of the chassidic masters asked, 'If every person has a specific time and place, why is there so much dissension among us?' He answered, 'Because many people are envious of others, and wish to occupy their (i.e.: the other person's!) time and place.' If we were free of envy, we might achieve the coveted unity.

What, then, is the connection between Parshas Bamidbar and Shavuos, Zman Matan Torasainu?

Answers R' Dr. Twerski, "This portion of the Torah describes the organization of the Israelites in the desert (which is necessary for delineating their tribal encampment around the Mishkan). As the verse says: אִישׁ עַל-דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֶתֶת לְבַיִת אָבְתָם, יַחְנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - The Children of Israel shall encamp, each person by his

banner according to the insignia of his father's household (Bamidbar 2:2). Each person knew his place. The Kohanim had their place, the Leviim had their place, and every single person knew his rightful place. It was this knowledge and acceptance of one's place that enabled the Israelites to be a (single, cohesive) unit rather than fragmented.

“We may conceptualize unity of a nation as a symphony orchestra, where each musician has a designated assignment. If the percussionist or the flute player would balk at his assignment because the violinist plays a better part, the performance would suffer. No one musician is of greater importance than another. This is equally true of the Jewish nation. We all have specific assignments: Kohanim, Leviim, Israelites, men, women, Torah scholars, lay people. We are one harmonious unit.

“The message of Parshas Bamidbar is the message of unity: ‘The Children of Israel encamp, each person by his banner.’ This is why the Torah reading of Bamidbar precedes Shavuos. Unity is the prerequisite for acceptance of Torah” (Twerski on Chumash, p.268).

In the dessert, Bamidbar, each tribe camped under their unique flag and banner, in the formation that Yaakov Avinu had prescribed for them (and the formation by which the brothers - the fathers of the tribes - carried the remains of Yaakov Avinu from Egypt, to Israel, for burial). Each one recognized his place, strengths, uniqueness and contributions to the nation; as well as recognizing the strengths of his fellow Israelites, who camped under their own flag and banner, in their own place.

No one tribe and no one flag was more important than the next. Each of the tribes came together, with unity, to make a united people, Am Yisrael. It is no wonder, then, that we read this parsha before Shavuos, when we recall that achdus, unity, is THE prerequisite for Torah.

As we come to accept the Torah again this year (and yes, Shavuos 5780 is, sadly, different than Shavuos of any other year that we can remember) we must remember the lessons of our desert encampment. To be part of Am Yisrael is to be proud of who I am, happy with whom my friend is; to know my own distinct flag and banner, and to respect the flag and banner of my friend. Only then can we camp b'achdus, like one man with one heart, ready to accept the Torah anew again.

The Kotzker Rebbe (d.1859) would say, “If I am I, because I am I; and you are you, because you are you; then I am I and you are you. But If I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you”.

As we prepare to once again declare, “all that G-d has spoken, we will do and we will listen” (Shemos 24:7), let us embrace our place, our strengths, our banner, our identity, and let us rejoice and respect that of our friend’s. So that I am I, and you are you, and together, we are Am Yisrael.

Shavuot and the Seventh Commandment

Yisroel Ben-Porat

There is a tradition to study tractate Sotah—which runs 49 pages in the Vilna edition of the Babylonian Talmud—during the days of Sefirah. Fittingly for a holiday that commemorates the acceptance of the Torah, Sotah addresses the case of a woman whose husband suspects her of adultery, the seventh commandment (*lo tin'af*). In this short piece, I will offer a perspective on biblical adultery that highlights the sanctity of marriage and our relationship to God.

The first question we must address is why adultery constitutes a sin. Historically, many have argued that adultery (hence its etymology) threatens the bloodline of the father, resulting in contested claims of paternity and inheritance. Others have conceptualized adultery as a form of theft, though this notion problematically implies a degree of ownership on the part of the husband. Today, some argue that adultery betrays the mutual partnership of a husband and wife. Yet none of these explanations addresses cases of adultery when the couple has no children or when both partners consent to the affair.

Ultimately, one must turn to morality to explain *lo tin'af*. Adultery is wrong because it violates the sanctity of marriage. The relationship between a husband and wife is sacred, analogous to the domain of the Holy Temple. Hence the Torah uses the term *me'ilah* (desecration) to describe the Sotah's actions. Similarly, throughout Tanach, human marriage serves as a metaphor for our relationship with God, hence idolatry's status as a form of theological adultery.

A historical perspective on the Torah can enhance our appreciation of biblical morality. While we rightfully look to the Torah as an eternal source of wisdom, it remains true that the Torah did exist in a historical context: the ancient Near East. Scholars of other law codes from this period have found that ancient Near Eastern societies largely conceived of adultery as a violation of the husband and thus a forgivable offense. In biblical law, however, adultery constituted a capital offense regardless of the husband's wishes.

Today, the idea of legislating the seventh (and other) commandments seems preposterous in a free society. In the seventeenth century, the Puritans sought to create a biblical society and even prescribed

capital punishment for adultery. Those days are long gone. Technically, adultery remains on the books as a crime in twenty states, but it has not been prosecuted for generations. Nevertheless, I believe that the lesson of *lo tin'af* remains relevant and timely.

In an age of serial monogamy, when divorce rates stand at an all-time high, we must renew our appreciation for the sanctity of marriage. As we approach Shavuot, which celebrates the theological marriage between us and God, let us cherish and reflect on our human relationships. The social distancing during the ongoing coronavirus crisis has only highlighted our need for human connection. May we all merit to experience the beauty and sanctity of a committed relationship with our loved ones.

Torah in the Desert

Daniel Rosenthal

Knowing the importance of Eretz Yisroel to the story of the Jewish people, one would surely expect that it would be the most fitting place for us to have received the Torah. However, the Torah was interestingly given to us in the middle of the desert. In an attempt to explain this, Rav Shimshon Pincus quotes the last Mishnah in Ta'anis that explains that, in the verse in Shir HaShirim (3:11), the words "*on his wedding day*" refer to the giving of the Torah. Rav Pincus uses this famous idea to try and answer our original question. For the forty years that we were in the desert, we did not need to toil in the fields for our food (as it was provided to us from Hashem) just like how you would never hear of a newly married couple going to work the morning after their wedding: this was our honeymoon! In the desert, without any distractions, we were able to focus on strengthening our relationship to Hashem through the Torah. Interestingly enough, this was even in a time when not all of the Mitzvos were able to be performed (as many of the Mitzvos are tied to the land of Israel). We see then the importance of learning Torah just for the sake of growing closer to Hashem. To commemorate the giving of the Torah, Jews across the world stay up the whole night of Shavuot in deep learning, once again affirming our love for Hashem. We find ourselves in an interesting and unusual position this year though, as we are in a position where we are unable to fulfill many of the mitzvos that we are used to doing. Nonetheless, we have perhaps one of the first opportunities since we received the Torah to spend some time engrossed in learning Torah to deepen our relationship with Hashem without any distractions.

Shavuot 2020 – “*Roim Et HaKolot*”

Samuel Landesman

The *Torah* portion we read over the holiday of *Shavuot* tells the story of the Jewish people receiving the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*. After listing the Ten Commandments, the experience of the Jewish people is described in a rather peculiar way. “And the people could see the sounds...” (Exodus 20:15). This is quite strange, as we generally see sights and hear sounds. *Rashi* quoting the *Mechilta* explains that the Jewish people saw that which was audible, which is impossible to see elsewhere. This does not seem to clear up much of the confusion. Rav Moshe Shapira ZTz”L and others understand *Rashi* to be referring to how the information of the *Torah* was actually transmitted for the first time. Humans have two main senses, sight and hearing, and they work in almost opposing ways. Hearing is a process. Sounds make up syllables, which make up words, and so on, until full messages can be understood. Sight, on the other hand, happens in an instant. For this reason, when giving over a large amount of information, it is simpler to do so verbally rather than visually. The typical exception to this rule would be a written message. Reading and writing essentially allows for the visual to act as the audible. A reader must read through a piece to understand its message, using their sense of sight to go through a process of understanding. Art often works in a similar manner. Elongating visual intake into a process is something we can understand, but what is seeing sound? How would that work?

As we already saw from *Rashi*, this form of communication was one that was unique to the experience at *Har Sinai*. There, the amount of information that would normally be transmitted verbally, or in a book (such as the *Torah*) was instead transmitted with the instantaneousness of sight. The full breadth of the messages of the *Torah* could be somehow comprehended simultaneously. In this way the Jewish people were properly able to appreciate the bigger picture. Sometimes when learning one topic in depth, the greater purpose of something can be lost. It was essential that the Jewish people see the *Torah* in its entirety when they received it to have a proper understanding of its purpose.

As we celebrate the receiving of the *Torah* this *Shavuot*, I think we should remember how it was originally transmitted. We obviously did not get to experience this seemingly miraculous event, but we can learn from it. It is important not only to focus on having a greater understanding of something, whether it be related to Judaism or anything else, but to also take the time to “zoom out” and try and

understand the bigger picture. We have to focus in order to grow, but if we don't look at the bigger picture we will lose where we are going.

Torah on Our Hearts

Dovi Brand

The following D'var Torah is based on the writing of Rav Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin and was heard from one of my Rebbeim, Rav Chaim Rosenblatt.

If you ask a person what we are celebrating on Shavuot they will most likely respond that we are celebrating the giving of the Torah. But if you really examine the events that occurred on Shavuot, you will notice that we never actually received the Torah on Shavuot. We were taught mitzvot in the Torah both before and after being at Mount Sinai, so we cannot be celebrating receiving mitzvot because they were not commanded on Shavuot exclusively.

One may claim that while we didn't receive the Torah on Shavuot, we did receive the two *luchot*, the tablets. However, we didn't even physically receive these *luchot* on Shavuot as they were only delivered to us 40 days later on the 17th of Tammuz. Rather, on Shavuot what really transpired was the reading of the 10 commandments.

So, that being the case, why do we refer to Shavuot as *zman matan torateinu*, the Time of the Giving of the Torah. We didn't receive the entire Torah or the *luchot* on Shavuot, we only orally received the Ten Commandments.

Rav Tzadok HaCohen of Lublin answers this question based on a Midrash in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* which states that "with the giving of the first commandment, 'I am Hashem your G-d', the entire Torah became ingrained in the heart of each and every Jew." It follows that when we refer to the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, we are not referring to the giving of the physical Torah or even the two tablets, rather we are celebrating G-d etching the Torah into our hearts. This concept is found in two other sources, the first is in Proverbs 3:3, where it states that we should "write the words of Torah on *the Tablets of our Hearts*" and in Jeremiah 31:32 where it states. "Upon their hearts I shall write it." We are celebrating the fact that in the heart of each and every Jew, there is a deep-seated desire to connect to G-d and to His Torah. Not only is there a desire to connect, but because the Torah is ingrained in our hearts the connection already exists.

Many depictions of the tablets show the tablets as being rounded at the top. However, the Talmud in *Bava Basra* 14a explicitly states that they were square at the top, so why do we find so many rounded tablets? It is possible that the depiction of the tablets is not meant to depict the tablets that were given at Mount Sinai, rather the tablets that were received on Shavuot, the ones that were in our hearts. To symbolize this the tablets are rounded at the top, similar to the way we depict a heart ♥. This was done to teach two lessons. First, it is to remind us of the primary tablets that we received at Mount Sinai, and second it is to teach us that when we learn Torah, we should make an effort to engrain it into our hearts and have it positively affected who we are.

While we no longer possess the original tablets, we can never lose the tablets that are part of ourselves. We can always follow our hearts. At any stage or period of our lives we can connect to G-d and the Torah because it is an intrinsic part of who we are. We can always access the desire to connect to G-d and the pre-existing connection that we already have.

Shavuot: Our Relationship with God

Bracha Erlich

Every year, the Jewish people celebrate the festival of Shavuot. We spend time with our families, study the Torah and even eat some cheesecake. Yet, the essence of what we are celebrating is far deeper. Shavuot is a celebration of our unique relationship with God. This special relationship is illustrated by the difference between how we and the other nations responded when He offered us the Torah. When God asked all the other nations whether they would accept the Torah, their response was, "What does it entail?" Each nation, upon hearing a statute that conflicted with their desires, rejected it. The Jews, on the other hand, not only accepted the Torah, but they took it on without first knowing what it contained, by answering, "We will do, and we will listen."

When someone asks for something, there are two likely responses, and the nature of the response will usually depend on who is asking. If a random person requests a favor, it is only natural to ask what the favor necessitates. However, if the asking is done by a loved one, like a spouse, one is more apt to respond, "Sure" without knowing the full nature of the request. Our answer to God of "We will do, and we will listen" demonstrates our loving relationship with Him, like a newlywed couple who is happy to do anything for each other.

Shavuot is a time when we should think about this relationship with God and reconnect with Him. We have to realize the power of the relationship and utilize it. Like any relationship, it goes both ways. Just as we said, "We will do, and we will listen" proving our unconditional love, so too God is also always there for us. We are able to speak to Him anytime and know that He is listening. This reality is especially powerful during this crazy time amidst a global pandemic. We are in a relationship with the Creator of the world who runs everything, and as His spouse, we can ask Him to bring an end to this disease and all the suffering in the world.

The Essence of Torah

Sara Fisher

It is written in the book of Devarim (Deuteronomy):

“When your son will ask you in the future, “What are the testimonies and statues and judgments that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?” you should tell your son, “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out with a strong hand... and G-d commanded us to do all these statues for our good and give us life as this day.” (Devarim 6:20-24)

The Ibn Ezra (a medieval sage) says that the son is not asking what these mitzvot are, but rather why we were given 613 mitzvot while the other nations of the world were only given 7 easy ones. The father’s answer is that If G-d took us out of slavery in Egypt, we know that he is only doing what is good for us. We can therefore assume that the mitzvot he gave us are only for our benefit. Just like the redemption from Egypt was obviously only for our good, so to the giving of the Torah with all its mitzvot is solely for our good.

The Torah starts with kindness – G-d clothing Adam and Chava after they sinned – and ends in kindness – G-d burying Moshe Rabbeinu. This can be understood in a deeper manner as G-d giving man a modest framework, like the clothing of Adam and Chava, within which he can elevate himself. Once man has achieved this by following the Torah and mitzvot, he will reach an elevated level of closeness to G-d. the Torah concludes with G-d himself burying Moshe Rabbeinu, who became so holy that he could be buried by none other than G-d himself.

The essence of the Torah is to guide man in doing what is true and right, and to bring him closer to G-d. The Torah itself is the embodiment of all kindness, it satisfies the spiritual necessities of life, and without it nothing else can exist.

The sages tell us that G-d offered the Torah to every other nation before asking the Jewish people. Each nation questioned the contents and declined based on conflicts with their lifestyle. When G-d offered the Torah to the Jewish people they immediately said *נעשה ונשמע* - we will do and hear. What was wrong with the answers of the rest of the nations? Is it not right to understand the implications before committing to something?

The answer lies in the concept outlined above. When one asks a favor of his friend, his friend should first ask what is involved to make sure he can comply, but when one offers his friend a

gift, it would be inappropriate to ask what is inside before accepting it. A gift is only meant to be for the good of the receiver. When G-d offered the Torah to the nations of the world, they believed that G-d was asking them a favor, and so they questioned it. When G-d offered the Torah to the Jewish people, they understood that it was a gift from G-d, purely for their benefit, and so they answered correctly. נעשה ונשמע, first give it to us and then we will find out what it entails.

We call the holiday of Shavuot זמן מתן תורתנו – the time of the giving of the Torah. The word מתן is also the root of the word מתנה, meaning gift. Shavuot is a time “...when the nature of the Torah as a benefit was demonstrated to us in a most poignant manner.”

Source: Rabbi Zev Leff, “Festivals of Life- the depth and meaning of the mo’adim.”

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