

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Shavous*





# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Shavuos

## Annual Matan Torah

Chazal (Psikta Zuta, V'eschanan) say, "A person is obligated to imagine as if he himself received the Torah on Har Sinai."<sup>1</sup>

We must visualize this because every year, we receive the Torah again. On Shavuos, we aren't solely celebrating the holy gift of the Torah that we received in the year 2448 (3335 years ago). But rather, each year, on Shavuos, there is another matan Torah taking place.

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe בשבועותיכם ד"ה) writes, "We celebrate Pesach to remind us of what occurred, that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. Succos is also to remind us of what was (למען ידעו דורותיכם...). But matan Torah isn't only a memory, but a new reality that today we received the Torah from Hashem yisbarach."<sup>2</sup>

This means, according to the Chasam Sofer, that there is a fundamental difference between Shavuos and all other holidays. Shavuos wasn't established as a commemoration but rather as a time to receive the Torah again, each year, anew.<sup>3</sup>

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1. The Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) tells that before the Torah was given on Har Sinai, the ruach (spirit) *Tavach* (which literally means Slaughter) had the power to harm the Jewish nation. If the Jewish nation didn't accept the Torah, this spirit would slaughter them and spill their blood, chas v'shalom.

Therefore, *Shulchan Aruch* (468:10) states, "The custom is that one doesn't do [the remedy of] blood-letting (הקזת דם) on *erev yom tov*." It is dangerous to let out blood on erev Shavuos because that's when the spirit of spilling blood comes forth to harm us, *chalilah*.

The question is that dangerous spirit wanted to harm the Jewish nation three thousand years ago when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai. So why must we be cautious every year?

The Machatzis HaShekel replies, "It is known that whatever happened to our forefathers happens again... in the present, when that time comes."

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l (Halichos Shlomo, 12:6) quotes this *Machatzis HaShekel* as an indication that every year on Shavuos, there is a *kabbalas haTorah*. Shavuos isn't solely a commemoration of the past. Each year, there is matan Torah!

We don't cut the fingernails and toenails on the same day (see Magen Avraham 260, quoting the Beis Yosef's Magid). The Likutei Maharich (vol.3 p.45, also taught by the Chidushei HaRim zt'l) says that erev Shavuos is an exception. One may cut them on the same day. He compares this to the halachah of someone with a Torah obligation to go to the mikvah who may cut his toenails and fingernails on the same day, so there won't be a chatzitzah. The Zohar (Emor, written at the end of Tikun Leil Shavuos) explains that the counting of the Omer (which is seven times seven), followed by the tevilah in the mikvah Shavuos morning, represents purifying oneself to receive the Torah. This tevilah must also be without a chatzitzah, so one may cut them both on the same day.

We understand from this source that every year we become pure, and every year, we receive the Torah again.

2. Reb Eliyah Roth zt'l tells that one year, Shavuos, he was at the Kosel Maaravi with his Rebbe, Reb Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l. Before *alos hashachar*, his rebbe told him, "Now they are asking in heaven whether we want to receive the Torah, so let's say together Naaseh v'Nishma!" (He explained that Naaseh v'Nishma should be said with a רבים, together, and that's why he wanted to say Naaseh v'Nishma with him.)

3. The holy sefarim tell us that all of the yomim tovim have the ability to recapture the miracles of the past

It states in the *pasuk* (Shemos 19) מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר, "Moshe will speak [the Aseres HaDibros],"<sup>4</sup> not מֹשֶׁה דִּבֶּר, "Moshe spoke." The Beis Aharon zt'l writes, "This is because Moshe Rabbeinu will speak in every generation to every Yid who purifies himself to receive the Torah..."<sup>5</sup>

The Chizkuni (introduction to *Chumash*) writes, "I swear by my soul that I, Chizkiyah, heard Hashem's voice in my dream, saying the Aseres HaDibros..."<sup>6</sup>

The main preparation for matan Torah is for one to believe that, indeed, we receive the Torah again each year. With that knowledge, we will prepare ourselves with holiness for this great moment.

After Shaul became king, some bad people ridiculed him. They said (Shmuel 1, 10:27) מַה יִּשְׁעֵנוּ זֶה וַיְבִיחוּ, "How can this person save us!" They disgraced him."

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l understands from this *pasuk* that if you think something won't help you, that in itself is disgracing it. (In מִתְפַּלְלִים אֵל אֵל לֹא יוֹשִׁיעַ, we say, עלֵינוּ לִשְׁבַח, that the goyim daven to a god that can't help them. This is how we disgrace *avodah zarah*.) Chazal (Avos 3:15) say, הַמְבִיחַ הַמְוֹעֲדוֹת אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, "Whoever

disgraces the yomim tovim doesn't have a portion in Olam HaBa." What is considered disgracing the yomim tovim? The Chidushei HaRim explains that it is when a person thinks, "What will this yom tov help?" Thinking that way is a disgrace for the yom tov. Similarly, one shouldn't think, "I celebrated the yom tov Shavuos many times in my life, and I don't see that I gained so much from it. I don't expect to gain so much from this year's Shavuos, either." Thinking this way is a disgrace for the yom tov.

It states וְהָיָה אֲמוֹנַת עֵתִיד חֹסֶן יְשׁוּעוֹת, which can be explained that if you believe in the greatness of the holidays, you will receive *yeshuos* from the holidays.

### Aseres HaDibros

The Shevet Mussar (34:19) discusses what one should think when he hears the Torah being read in *beis medresh*. (The Shevet Mussar refers to the entire year, not only when one hears the Torah on Shavuos morning.) He writes, "Imagine that the *bimah* is Har Sinai, and you are receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His *malachim* are present, and Moshe Rabbeinu is the *baal koreh*. The

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so that they should happen again in our times. Nevertheless, the primary aspect of the yom tov is to celebrate what occurred in the past. Shavuos is different, because it was primarily established so that could receive the Torah every year.

4. Rashi explains that we heard from Hashem the first two of the Aseres HaDibros (אֲנִכִּי... לֹא יִהְיֶה לָךְ), Moshe said the other eight, and Hashem gave strength to his voice so that the entire nation could hear.

5. It states (Shemos 20:15) וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֻ מֵרָחוֹק, "The people saw and trembled, and they stood from afar." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l explains that the Yidden at Har Sinai saw (with *ruach hakodesh*) that the future generations will be וַיַּעֲמֻ מֵרָחוֹק, "standing from afar," which means they will be at very low levels. Nevertheless, they, too, will accept the Torah. וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ, "The people saw this [the *kabalas haTorah* of the future generations] and trembled." They were in awe of the future generation's devotion to the Torah, even from the lowest levels.

6. We say in the *brachah* on the *haftarah*, וְדָבָר אֶחָד מִדְּבָרֶיךָ אַחֵר לֹא יָשׁוּב רִיקָם, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty." The Aruch HaShulchan (284) explains, "The Torah discusses stories that happened years ago, and it seems that there isn't any purpose. But the truth is that what occurred in the past continues to happen in the present. One example is *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We are obligated to imagine ourselves leaving Mitzrayim in every generation and this generation, as well. This is because *yetzias Mitzrayim* continues to happen. Similarly, when Navi tells a story of the past, it continues to occur... This is the *segulah* of the holy Torah. Therefore, we say, אַחֵר, the episodes of the past, לֹא יָשׁוּב רִיקָם, don't think they are irrelevant in today's world because they continue to happen until today."

entire nation is standing around Har Sinai to hear Torah from his mouth."<sup>7</sup>

Certainly, we should have this thought in mind when we read the Aseres HaDibros on Shavuos (or when we read the Aseres HaDibros on parashas Yisro and parashas Ve'eschanan).

The Midrash (*Psikta* 12, *Yalkut Shimoni Yisro* 271) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to the Jewish nation, 'My children read this *parashah* [of *matan Torah*] each year, and I will consider it as though you stood before Me on Har Sinai and received the Torah."<sup>8</sup>

The Divrei Yechezkel of Shinov *zt'l* said that on Shabbos *parashas Yisro*, when his father, the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l*, read the *Aseres HaDibros*, he felt as though he was standing at Har Sinai and was hearing the *Aseres HaDibros* from Hashem. He heard the shofar, the thunder and lightning, and all the other experiences that took place at *matan Torah*.

He said that he was expecting to experience the same on Shavuos, but on Shavuos, he didn't experience it.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* would sweat profusely from fear when he would take out the *sefer Torah* to read from

it on Shavuos. The congregation knew to wrap the *sefer Torah* with extra layers so it wouldn't get wet from his perspiration. Before he came to the beis medresh on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis, he exclaimed, *אײך גיי זען זעהן מיט די לעבעדיגן*, "I'm going to meet with Hashem!" (Some say that he said, "I met with Hashem!")

One Friday night of *parashas Yisro*, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* said at his *tish*, "Tomorrow, when the *Aseres HaDibros* is read, the people who have holy ears will hear Hashem saying the *Aseres HaDibros*..."

The Avodas Yisrael of Koznitz *zt'l* added, "If someone doesn't have such ears, he should cleanse them well, so he will also be able to hear it!"

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* explained that *נעשה ונשמע* means if a person prepares himself with *נעשה*, deeds, he will merit *נשמע*, to hear Hashem say *אנכי ה' אלקיך*.

### The Purpose of Matan Torah - Emunah

The *Aseres HaDibros* begins with *וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה' אלקיך*. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* said we should translate these words as follows: Hashem

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The Ruzhiner *zt'l* wouldn't say *divrei Torah* on the first night of Shavuos. He explained that the Torah of last year was completed, and the new Torah didn't come in yet. He said, "I feel like a farmer before the harvest. The old wheat was consumed, and the new wheat wasn't harvested yet."

The Yid HaKodesh *zt'l* also didn't say Torah on the first night of Shavuos. He said that this is because *דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה*, *derech eretz* is before Torah. "So, what do we do on this night? We prepare for *matan Torah* with fear of Hashem." After saying this, his limbs trembled from fear (*Ramasayim Tzofim*, Tana d'Bei Eliyahu 18:56).

7. *Mishnah Berurah* (146:19) writes, "According to halachah, one is permitted to sit, but the Maharam said that it is proper to stand because when one hears the reading of the Torah, one should imagine that he is hearing it from Har Sinai, and at Har Sinai all Yidden stood. However, if someone is weak and it is hard for him to stand, and if he stands, he won't have *yishuv hadaas* to concentrate on the *kriyah*, he should sit."

8. We read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: Shavuos, Shabbos *parashas Yisro*, and Shabbos *parashas Ve'eschanan*. The Beis Avraham explains this with a *mashal* of a very ill person who needed powerful medications, but he was frail, and the strong medication would harm him. So his doctor prescribed that he divide the medication into three doses. The *nimshal* is that hearing the *Aseres HaDibros* is like a spiritual, powerful cure. However, this spiritual experience is too intense for our weak selves. Therefore, the impact is divided into three parts, so the Jewish nation can accept it.



taught כל הדברים האלה, the entire Torah so that a Yid will be able to say אני ה' אלקיך. In other words, the purpose of matan Torah and all the mitzvos is so that a Yid can believe in Hashem.

A hint to this idea is in the Rosh Hashanah shemoneh esrei, where it says ובתורתך כתוב, לאמר שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, which can be translated, "Everything that is written in the Torah is so people will be able to say 'Hashem is our G-d Hashem is one.'"

On a similar note, the Vilna Gaon zt'l (Mishlei 22:19) writes, עיקר נתינת התורה לישראל הוא, בכדי שיישמו בטחונם בה', "The Torah was given, primarily, so that the Jewish nation will have bitachon in Hashem."

Rashi (Devarim 4:35) writes, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, He opened up the seven heavens... and the lower worlds, and they saw that there is only Hashem. As it states, אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו, 'You were shown that Hashem is G-d; there is none other than Him.'"

And this is the purpose of matan Torah.

The Degel Machanah Efraim (beginning of parashas Ekev) writes, "The main thing is *emunah*. My grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov zt'l, would emphasize the importance of *emunah*. *Emunah* is the basis of *avodas Hashem* and the foundation of the Torah. Dovid HaMelech said (Tehillim 119:86) כל מצותיך אמונה, 'All your mitzvos are about *emunah*.'"

The Ramban (end of parashas Bo) also tells us that *emunah* is the foundation of the Torah. He writes, "If one doesn't believe that everything that happens to us is miraculous... he doesn't have a portion in the Torah."

The Rishonim ask about the wording of the Aseres HaDibros. Shouldn't it have said in the Torah אני ה' אלקיך אשר ברא שמים וארץ, "I am Hashem your G-d Who created heaven and earth?" If Hashem is introducing Himself to the Jewish nation, it seems that telling them that He is the Creator is more

appropriate than saying He took us out of Mitzrayim!

But the answer is that we don't know about hashgachah pratis from creation itself. The Aseres HaDibros states אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, "Who took you out of Mitzrayim..." to tell us that Hashem continues to lead us with His hashgachah.

The Rosh (Orchos Chaim יום א' כ"ו) writes, "Trust in Hashem with all your heart. Believe in His *hashgachah pratis*... Believe that Hashem sees everything. He sees everything you do and examines your heart and your thoughts. Whoever doesn't believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim* [hashgachah pratis], he also doesn't believe in אני ה' אלקיך [belief in Hashem]... These beliefs make us the chosen nation and are the foundation of the entire Torah."

### Everything is for the Good

Those who live with *emunah* lead happier lives because they know that everything that happens to them is with hashgachah pratis and for their good. In Megilas Rus, Naomi said (Rus 1:20), אל תקראנה לי נעמי קראן לי מרא כי המר, "Don't call me Naomi (pleasant). Call me Mara, bitter, because Hashem made my life very bitter."

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Drashos vol.2, p.299.) explains that when Naomi returned to Eretz Yisrael, she hoped her wealthy nephew, Boaz, would support her and help her settle down. However, she never spoke directly to Boaz to ask him for financial help, as the Chasam Sofer writes, "It isn't the way of *tzanuah* women to meet with men. Indeed, we never find Naomi meeting or speaking with Boaz." Instead, Naomi planned to meet with Boaz's wife and ask her to speak to Boaz on their behalf. But that plan didn't work out because "the day Naomi came to Beis Lechem, the *levayah* of Boaz's wife took place! (see Bava Basra 91.)." Thus, Naomi's dreams and hopes were shattered.

Naomi's modest nature became even more revealed. Some righteous women prefer speaking to the wife rather than

directly to the man. But when that isn't possible, they will talk with the man. Rus, however, wouldn't speak with Boaz, not even now that she didn't have the wife to relay her message. According to the Chasam Sofer, Rus told the women of Beis Lechem to call her *מרָא*, bitter, and not *נְעֻמִי*, pleasant, because her life was bitter. She came to Eretz Yisrael with a plan of how she would support herself, and now she doesn't have any source of income.

But as things turned out, everything was for her benefit. The Chasam Sofer writes. "The petirah of Boaz's wife was for Naomi's benefit because Rus came and took her place, and from this marriage, Rus bore a child, which Naomi raised as her own... Naomi told the women of Beis Lechem that her life was bitter. She thought Boaz's wife's death was bitter for her. But it was Hashem's plan and for her benefit. Only, at the time, Naomi didn't realize that."<sup>9</sup>

The *roshei teivos* of *המר שר"י לי מאור*, "Hashem made it very bitter for me" spell *שלמה*. This hints that although Naomi thought matters were bitter for her, it was for her good, preparing the way for Shlomo HaMelech to come.

This is how it always is. We think something is negative, but it turns out to be positive.

When Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai, most people weren't permitted to go up on the mountain. The exceptions were Moshe Rabbeinu, the seventy zekeinim of Sanhedrin, and Aharon HaKohen with his two elder sons, Nadav v'Avihu (see *Shemos* 24:1). Aharon's younger sons, Elazar v'Isamar weren't permitted to go on the mountain.

It is possible that Elazar and Isamar were upset about this. (Perhaps Aharon, their father, was upset, too.) Elazar and Isamar were greater than the Sanhedrin (see *Eiruvim* 54:). In fact, they were the teachers of the Sanhedrin. Yet, the Sanhedrin was allowed to be on the mountain, and not they.

But it was for their benefit. The Tur (on *Chumash*) teaches that Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were punished because they lacked the proper *yiras Shamayim* when they stood on Har Sinai. The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behalascha 16) states, "They were lightheaded when they went up to Har Sinai and saw the *Shechinah*, as it states (*Shemos* 24), ויחזו את האלקים ויאכלו וישתו, 'They saw Hashem, and they ate and drank.' ... ויאכלו וישתו is an analogy of a slave who eats his lunch as he serves his master – that is disrespectful, and they deserved to be punished. However, Hashem didn't want to punish them on the day He gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael because the day of *matan Torah* was precious to Hakadosh Baruch Hu..." And so, their punishments were postponed to a later date.

Nadav and Avihu received their punishment when they entered Ohel Moed with their ketores, and a fire came forth and burnt them, and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were burned due to the sin of *מתאוונים* (see *Bamidbar* 11:1).

So, in retrospect, Elazar and Isamar understood that it was for their benefit that they were prevented from being on the mountain. Had Elazar and Isamar been on the mountain, it is likely that they, too, would die, and Aharon would have been left without children.<sup>10</sup>

9. It was also for Boaz's benefit that Rus arrived just then. Hashem prepared for him a wife to replace his wife, who had died. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91.) states, "The day Rus...came to Eretz Yisrael, Boaz's wife died." The Rashbam writes, "ולאשמועינן אתה שהקב"ה מקדים רפואה למכה ויש לו לאדם לבטוח בהקב"ה" "This teaches us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the *refuah* before the injury. [Boaz's future wife, Rus, arrived right before his first wife died.] We learn from this that one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

10. It states, *עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן, נדב ואביהו*, "Go up to Har Sinai: You and Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu." The *taamim* (trop) of these words are קדמא ואזלא מונח רביעי. Perhaps this hints קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very



Let this be a lesson for us: when something seems negative, it isn't so. The situation is directed by Hashem's hashgachah pratis and is the best for you.

One of the mitzvos of Shavuos is aliyah l'regel – to be in the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal (*Pesachim* 8) say that only people who own fields must perform the mitzvah of aliyah l'regel. Those who don't own a field don't have this obligation.

What is the logic for this? Why should a mitzvah be dependent on the ownership of a field?

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that the purpose of aliyah l'regel is to increase our emunah in Hashem. Being in the Beis HaMikdash on the holidays grew and improved Yidden's emunah in Hashem. However, poor people don't need aliyah l'regel to strengthen their emunah. Their life situations force them to continuously place their trust in Hashem. Only those who own property are obligated to go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year to learn that everything is from Hashem because they are at risk of forgetting.

So, once again, we discover that something that we think is negative is actually positive. People think poverty is negative, but from aliyah l'regel, we see that poor people greatly

benefit. They always remember Hashem. Similarly, there are many things that we think are negative but are, in fact, for our benefit.<sup>11</sup>

### Chesed

The Gemara (*Sotah* 14.) states, "The Torah begins with *gemilus chasadim* and ends with *gemilus chasadim*. It begins with (*Bereishis* 3:21) וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱלֹקִים לָאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כִּתְנוֹת עוֹר וַיַּלְבֵּשֵׁם, "Hashem...made for Adam and his wife shirts of skin, and He dressed them," and the Torah concludes with (*Devarim* 34:6) וַיִּקְבֹּר וַיִּקְבֹּר [Hashem] buried [Moshe]..." The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* writes that this teaches us that the focal point of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

When one picks up a new book, he reads the first and last pages to get the gist of the book. L'havdil, the Torah begins and ends with *gemilus chasadim*, which indicates that *chesed* is the primary message of the Torah.

The Midrash (*Rus Rabba* 2:14) states, "*Megillas Rus* doesn't discuss the *halachos* of טומאה וטהרה or איסור והיתר. So why was it written? It was written to teach us the reward for those who do *chesed*." We read *Rus* on Shavuos because the message of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

The first five of the Aseres HaDibros are mitzvos בן אדם למקום, our obligations to

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beginning, אִלָּא, that people who go up on Har Sinai will be smitten and leave the world. מוֹנֵה, therefore Hashem left over a remnant, רַבִּיעִי, from Aharon's four sons. Because two sons went up and were *niftar*, and the two sons who didn't go up on the mountain survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וַיְדַבֵּר שְׁלֹמֹה שְׁלוֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים מַשָּׁל, "Shlomo told three thousand *mashalim*..." שְׁלוֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים can also mean three א's. This refers to אֶהְרֹן, אֶלְעָזָר, אִיסָמָר, three people whose names begin with א'. Initially, Aharon, Elazar, and Isamar didn't understand why it was good that Elazar and Isamar shouldn't go up to Har Sinai. Later they understood the great kindness Hashem performed for them. Shlomo Hamelech used this as a *mashal* to teach people that everything is for the good.

**11.** Chazal (*Shabbos* 31.) call *Seder Zeraim* (the tractate of Mishnayos that discusses the laws of agriculture) *emunah*. What is the connection between *emunah* and *Seder Zeraim*?

We can explain it this way: Agriculture reminds us that even when everything seems lost, something good will sprout from it. A person plants seeds in the earth, the seeds rot, and it seems like nothing will come from it. But these rotted seeds will sprout, and the field will soon be covered with produce. Similarly, we must believe that even when we go through hard times, something very special will sprout from it. It looks like a problem right now, but something very good will come from it.

Hashem. The remaining five are *בן אדם לחבירו*, the mitzvos and obligations toward our fellow man.

There are far fewer words in the second *luchos*. To keep the two *luchos* symmetrical, points out the *Mabit*, the words on the second *לוח* were written in larger letters than the first.

Large letters attract attention. It is like the letters are shouting. So, the mitzvos of *bein adam lecheveiro* draw more attention than the mitzvos *bein adam lamakom*, indicating that our obligations to our fellow man are even more critical than our obligations to Hashem.

The Rosh (*Pei'ah* 1:1) writes, הקב"ה חפץ יותר במצוות שיעשה בהם גם רצון הבריות מבמצוות שבין אדם לבן אדם, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires more the mitzvos of helping your fellow man than the mitzvos that are solely for Hashem."<sup>12</sup>

So, on Shavous, when we accept the Torah, let us remember to accept the mitzvos *ben adam lechaveiro*, too, because these are of great importance in the Torah.

One year, the Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk *zt'l* traveled to Kozhmir to be with Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l* on Shavuot.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir asked him, "Why did you leave Radomsk? You have chasidim there, and they want to be with you."

The Tiferes Shlomo replied that he also needs a Rebbe and that he also wants to grow in *avodas Hashem*.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir explained that his role as a leader is to help others, even at the expense of his spiritual growth. It states (*Shemos* 19:14) וירד משה מן ההר על העם, "Moshe descended from the mountain to the

people," and Rashi writes, מלמד שלא היה משה פונה לעסקיו, אלא מן ההר אל העם, "This teaches us that Moshe didn't tend to his own business. He went straight from the mountain to the nation."

What business did Moshe have? He wasn't a businessman! The answer is that the pasuk refers to Moshe's quest for spiritual growth. Moshe also wanted to prepare for *matan Torah*. He wanted time in solitude to sanctify himself and prepare for this holy moment. Nevertheless, Moshe disregarded his own needs and focused on helping Klal Yisrael. Every leader of Bnei Yisrael must do the same. They must be devoted to their community, even at the expense of their growth.

The Torah states (*Devarim* 16:10-11) ועשית חג שבועות לה' אלקיך... ושמחת... אתה ובנך ובתך... והגר והיתום אשר בקרבך, "Make the holiday Shavuot for Hashem your G-d...and be happy...you, your son, your daughter...the convert, the orphan, and the widow that is among you."

The Pele Yoetz (*Yomim Tovim*) writes, "On yom tov, we must bring joy to the poor. Therefore, before yom tov, give tzedakah to the poor - each person according to his abilities. The *Zohar* says: 'On yom tov, Hakadosh Baruch Hu visits the homes of the poor, and if they don't have enough food, Hashem cries for them.' The *Zohar* writes, 'If a person is happy by himself, and doesn't give to the poor, he will be punished...' Therefore, don't forget to give tzedakah to the poor before each yom tov. Give tzedakah in accordance with the amount Hashem gave you. Don't be satisfied with giving a little because you should - give in accordance with your wealth. And after you help the poor, you can be happy and rejoice, and

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**12.** The Rosh teaches this lesson from the Mishnah that we say each morning, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם, "These are the things one eats the fruits of the reward in this world, while the primary reward will be given in Olam Haba..." and the Mishnah lists several examples of *chesed*. Why is *chesed* rewarded in this world? The Rosh explains that Hashem prefers *chesed* over mitzvos done solely for Hashem.

nothing bad will befall you, and there will be peace in your home."

Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "The obligation [help the poor for yom tov] applies for all holidays... [Nevertheless], the Torah writes the mitzvah about Shavuos because Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and Succos are seven and eight days. One might think giving tzedakah before Shavuos isn't as important as before the other yomim tovim. Therefore, the *pasuk* emphasizes that we shouldn't be lenient... We must give tzedakah for Shavuos, just as we must for all other holidays..."<sup>13</sup>

### Unity

There was a chasid who was tempted to commit a severe aveirah but stopped himself when he realized that after committing the aveirah, he wouldn't be able to face his Rebbe anymore.

But then he told himself he would commit the aveirah and stop going to his Rebbe.

His internal conflict continued, and he again said to himself, "How can I miss meeting with all my friends who come to the Rebbe?" That thought stopped him from the aveirah.

The next time he came to his Rebbe, the Rebbe said (with ruach hakodesh), "What a Rebbe couldn't achieve, the chassidim

achieved" (because the thought of not seeing the Rebbe didn't stop him from aveiros, but the thought of losing his friends saved him from the aveirah).

This is an example of the good influence we receive from unity and having good friends.

One of the prerequisites for receiving the Torah was achdus, unity, and loving all Yidden, as it states (*Shemos* 19:2) ויחן שם ישראל נגד ה' "Yisrael encamped...opposite the mountain. Rashi writes, "[The singular form of ויחן, instead of the plural ויחנו, denotes that they encamped before Har Sinai] as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments were [divided] with complaints and with strife."

Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l says that the ה' mountain, represents the yetzer hara (see *Succah* 52.). So, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ה' means that when the Jewish nation is in unity, they can conquer the yetzer hara.<sup>14</sup>

We say after birchas hashachar, ואל תביאנו... "Don't bring us...to tests, neither to disgrace." Tzaddikim explain that it is either one or the other. If one doesn't pass the test, he ends up being disgraced. This awareness can help many people avoid sin.

In several ways, unity and friendship help us avoid aveiros.

**13.** Reb Chaim Palagi zt'l writes that on *erev* Shavuos, one should give tzedakah the amount of 104 (twice the *gematriya* of ב"ן) to a poor *talmid chacham* and this will rectify severe sins, and it is a *segulah* for the barren to bear children.

**14.** The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88.) teaches, "Hashem placed Har Sinai over the nation like a barrel and said, 'If you will accept the Torah, all is well. Otherwise, שם תהיה קבורתכם, 'you will be buried there.'" It seems that it should say כאן תהיה קבורתכם, "you will be buried here," because they would be buried directly under the mountain. Why does it say שם תהיה קבורתכם, "You will be buried there"?

The mountain hovering over them like a barrel (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית) represents all Yidden joined together as one. Hashem told them that if one leaves this protective environment and goes alone, then, שם, there, at that place, distant from the Jewish people, תהיה קבורתכם, will be your spiritual burial, because our unity is our power against the *yetzer hara*, and it is our strength to be successful in Hashem's service.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 940) states, "אתם נצבים, you are standing [and no one can harm you]. When? כולכם, when you are united... A child can break a single reed, but no one can break many reeds bundled together."



The Beis Aharon *zt'l* once sat with his chasidim at a tish when he told one of his followers to go outdoors and report what he saw.

The chassid returned and said, "I saw two drunkards walking down the street. One said, 'Let's hold on to each other so we don't fall.'"

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* said, "Did you hear what he said? If we hold on to one another, we won't fall!"

Unity helps us serve Hashem with hislahavus. Think of a wooden beam that caught fire. The fire would go out eventually. But if there are several beams, and one of them catches fire, the fire can burn for a long time. Similarly, being united with Yidden helps us serve Hashem passionately, and that hislahavus doesn't weaken with time.

Chassidim are accustomed to eating and drinking a lechayim while discussing *avodas*

*Hashem*. Chassidim consider these gatherings extremely important because it is a moment of unity with *yiras Shamayim*. The Sadigura Rebbe *zt'l* would sometimes give his chassidim a coin, and the chassidim would auction off the coin, and with the money they earned from the auctions, they financed their Chassidic gatherings.

Once, the coin sold for a very high price. The chassidim wondered whether they should use all the money for their chasidic gatherings or whether part of the money should be used for some other *tzedakah*. The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (father-in-law of the Sadigura Rebbe) was then in Sadigura, so the chasidim asked the Beis Aharon for his opinion.

The Beis Aharon replied, "There is nothing greater than when chassidim gather in unity to speak about *yiras shamayim*..." and advised them to use the money solely for that purpose.<sup>15</sup>

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**15.** The outstanding scholar, Reb Shimshon Wertheimer *zt'l*, was also very wealthy and a close confidant to the emperor of Austria.

Once, the emperor asked him to explain why Yidden are prosecuted more than all other nations of the world.

Reb Shimshon Wertheimer replied, "That is their punishment because of their hatred and jealousy towards their fellow man."

The emperor didn't accept that explanation. He told Reb Shimshon Wertheimer, "I give you three days to think it over and tell me why Jews suffer so much. If you don't give me a satisfying answer within three days, I will banish every Yid from Vienna."

That night, Reb Shimshon made a *שאלת חלום*, and in his dream, he was told, "Don't retract your words because you answered correctly. Yidden suffer in *galus* because of hatred and jealousy. Soon the emperor will recognize you spoke the truth."

It was the beginning of the winter, which is a good time for hunting. The emperor went with a group of his officials to the forest to hunt game.

After a few hours, some officers went home, and the emperor and the rest of the crew remained in the forest.

Some more time passed, it was almost dark, and the officials decided it was time to return home. They called for the emperor, and when there was no response, they figured that the emperor had left with the first group of officials who left earlier, so they also left the forest.

The emperor was so deeply involved in his hobby he didn't hear them call them, and he didn't even realize that he was alone in the forest until it became dark.

The emperor called for his officials, and when no one replied, he understood what happened. He was left alone in the forest. He couldn't find his way out of the woods in the darkness, so he wandered around the forest until he came to a river. The lights on the other side of the river showed the emperor that there was a village there. The emperor knew how to swim, so he removed his royal clothing, left his horse behind, and swam across the river.

We can only imagine how the emperor appeared to the villagers. He was dripping wet, and there was no sign that he was the king. He knocked at doors, but no one took him in. Some of them shouted "demon!" and locked the door.

Cold and exhausted, the emperor decided to look for a mezuzah. "The Yidden are a compassionate nation. They will open their doors for me."

Indeed, he knocked at a door where there was a mezuzah, and he was invited in.

The Jewish couple gave him a warm meal and a coat to wear so that he could warm up.

He didn't tell them that he was the king of Austria because he knew that they wouldn't believe him.

The wife suspected that their guest was a thief. So she told her husband, "Send this man out of the house before he steals everything we own, even the fur coat you lent him." The husband replied that he didn't suspect his guest, but just in case, he would remain awake all night and make sure the guest didn't steal anything.

In the morning, the emperor asked his host, "How far is Vienna from here, and how much does it cost to get there?"

The host replied, "I can drive you there for four forties (a currency)." The emperor agreed to that price and requested to wear the fur coat during the trip because he was chilled from the previous night's ordeal.

His host agreed to that, as well.

His wife wasn't happy with these arrangements at all. She whispered to her husband, "I'm certain he won't pay you. He will kill you somewhere in the middle of the way and take your coat. Why do you trust him?"

But this Yid wasn't concerned, and he drove the emperor to Vienna. "Where do you want to get off?" he asked the emperor.

The emperor told him he wanted to be let off at the majestic palace.

The Yid replied, "But we may not go there without permission from the emperor. We can get arrested."

The passenger replied, "Don't worry about it. I'm allowed to go there."

The Yid parked his wagon in front of the palace. The emperor jumped out of the wagon and went inside the palace.

The Yid was shocked. "My wife was right. He didn't pay me for the trip and ran off with my fur coat."

He wanted to leave. It was dangerous to be on these grounds without permission. He turned the wagon around, but an armed soldier blocked the way. "The emperor summons you," he said.

Shuddering, the Yid feared the worst as the officer led him into the palace and brought him directly to the emperor's chamber.

The emperor said, "Do you recognize me?"

The king, dressed in his royal clothing, looked very different. "No. I never had the privilege to have seen the emperor before," he replied.

"But I know you," the emperor told him. "I even know what your home looks like." And the emperor described to him what his home looked like.

The Yid was shocked. "Who can compare to the emperor's wisdom!" the Yid replied.

"It isn't wisdom. I'm the person you saved last night. I didn't tell you that I am the king of Austria because I knew you wouldn't believe me, but that is the truth: I'm the king of Austria. I want to reward you because you invited me into your home when no one else wanted to, served me a warm meal, and lent me a coat to wear. Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

## Chiddushei Torah

There are three matan Torahs. One took place at Har Sinai. The second matan Torah happens every Shavuos, and the third matan Torah transpires daily. In birchas haTorah we say *נותן התורה*, Hashem, Who gives the Torah in the present tense. The Taz (Orach Chaim 47:5) says that this is because Hashem gives us the Torah every day, based on the amount of Torah we received that year on Shavuos.

*Derech HaMelech* (from the Rebbe of Piaseczna *zt'l*) explains that we received the Torah on Har Sinai, and each year, on Shavuos, we receive the chiddushei Torah that we can discover this particular year. However, on Shavuos, it is still a non-defined prophecy because one doesn't yet know the chidushim he will discover. When one studies Torah

throughout the year, he brings forth the *chiddushei Torah* he received on Shavuos. That is when he discovers what he received on Shavuos.

*Chazal* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say, "On Shavuos, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees."<sup>16</sup> The Sfas Emes explains that you are judged which chiddushim you will perceive that year on Shavuos. The Sfas Emes concludes, "This day is the source of Torah for the entire year."<sup>17</sup>

## The Joy of Matan Torah

It is impossible to describe all the good we receive from matan Torah because the list is endless. Therefore, *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 68:) say, "All opinions agree that one needs to enjoy [good food] on Shavuos because on this day the Torah was given to the Jewish

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The Yid stood before the emperor in silence.

The emperor figured the Yid didn't understand the offer, so he said, "You can ask me for a forest, and I will give it to you. You can ask for an entire city, and I will give it to you. Just ask what you want, and it will be yours."

The Yid was quiet.

The emperor said, "If you don't tell me what you want, I will pay you the four forties we agreed on, and that's all. Is there nothing in the world that you desire?"

The Yid replied, "Actually, there is something. I'm a traveling merchant. I go from town to town selling my wares. Recently, someone began coming to the same towns that I go to, selling the same items as I do. He is competing with me and taking away my parnassah. I request that the king give an executive order that this man can't sell his wares in the towns that I go to."

The king said, "Your request is granted, but you must know you lost a golden opportunity. You could have asked for so much more, but because of jealousy, all you care about is that your competition shouldn't make money."

The emperor called for Reb Shimshon Wertheimer and said, "Now I know you are correct. The Jewish people are punished because of their jealousy and hatred."

Rebbe Meir of Premishlan *zt'l* would tell this story every year before reading the Torah on Shavuos morning. To receive the Torah, we need love and unity among Yidden, not jealousy and hatred.

**16.** The *Tola'as Yaakov* (quoted by the Shlah) says that *פירות האילן* represent Jewish souls. When the Gemara says that the judgment is for the *פירות האילן*, this means that on Shavuos, Yidden are judged for *bittul Torah* and for not being sufficiently devoted to keeping the *mitzvos*.

**17.** The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:19) says, *ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאוד*, "The sound of the shofar was powerful..." The Or HaMeir *zt'l* teaches that *חזק* can also mean contains (see *Eiruvin* 14 – *ים שעשה שלמה היה מחזיק מאה וחמישים מקוה טהרה*). This implies that *kabalas haTorah* contains and holds all *chiddushei Torah* that will be revealed afterwards.



nation." Rashi explains, "He should be happy with food and drink to show that he is happy with this day that the Torah was given."<sup>18</sup>

The Seder HaYom (*Shavuos*) writes, "One should be very happy on Shavuos because it's the day the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael... One's body should rejoice because one uses his body to study Torah and to perform the mitzvos... The *neshamah* must rejoice. The *neshamah* rejoices when it understands Torah because the *neshamah*'s joy is solely learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos."

The Seder HaYom elaborates on all the good we receive even in this world from matan Torah. He writes, "We aren't fools who don't recognize all this honor that Hashem gave us. The nations of the world turn to their *avodah zarahs* that can't help them, but this isn't the lot of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem watches over us always. Hashem loves us due to our forefathers and because of His love for the precious, perfect Torah that He implanted in our midst. The Torah is Hakadosh Baruch Hu's daughter..."

Whoever will marry and love His daughter, Hashem will certainly grant him a dowry and a lot of money, and nothing will be lacking."

This idea can be compared to a wealthy person conversing with a young man to determine whether he is a suitable match for his only daughter. In the middle of the conversation, the bachur asks, "If I marry your daughter, how much money will you give me?"

The wealthy father replies, "I heard that you are a wise bachur, but truthfully you aren't wise. My daughter is my only child, and I am extremely wealthy. Obviously, I will give my future son-in-law a lot of money. So why do you ask for a dowry?"

The nimshal is that the Torah is Hashem's daughter. Whoever marries, studies, and cherishes the Torah will receive everything he needs. There will be wealth, and nothing will be lacking.<sup>19</sup>

In Kiddush and in Shemoneh Esrei we say, וְרוּמַתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת. Rebbe Bunim of

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**18.** The Gemara relates that Rav Yosef asked his family to prepare the choicest meats for Shavuos. Rav Yosef explained, "If it weren't for this day, there are many Yosefs in the marketplace." Rashi explains, "If it wasn't for this day that enabled me to learn Torah and to become exalted, there are many other people in the market whose name is Yosef, and what difference would there be between us?"

**19.** During the Holocaust, an elderly, wealthy Yid said to Reb Chaim Kreisworth zt'l, "Tomorrow, I will be sent to the gas chambers. I have a lot of money in a Swiss bank. I will tell you my bank account information. If you survive this war, seek out my children and give them the account number so that they can withdraw the money."

Reb Chaim Kreisworth survived but couldn't find that man's children.

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim spoke with a poor person in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim, and Reb Chaim discovered that he was the offspring he was looking for. He was the son of the wealthy man who went to the gas chambers. Reb Chaim told him the account number and the name of the Swiss bank.

This man was so poor he didn't even have money to travel to Switzerland. But he borrowed money and made the trip.

Having accrued interest all these years, the value of the account increased. The bank told him that he had \$30,000,000 in the account.

Reb Chaim Kreisworth said, "He was wealthy for many years, only he didn't know it."

Reb Chaim Kreisworth explained, "We are also extremely wealthy; we have millions. We have the Torah and mitzvos. Our fortune is endless; only we aren't aware of what we have."

Pshischa zt'l translated the words as follows: מכל הלשונוֹת, all expressions of all the languages won't suffice to express רוממותנו, how exalted we became. No language is rich enough to describe the greatness Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael when He chose us from all nations and gave us the Torah.

On Shavuos, we become like the *malachim*, like the angels in heaven. The Noam Elimelech (Mishpatim ד"ה לא תבשל גדי) writes, "On Shavuos, we have a leniency to eat meat after milk, without waiting the standard shiur (time period). This is because Shavuos is the day we received the Torah, and we show that we are like the *malachim* [who don't wait between milk and meat]."

We don't know which leniency the Noam Elimelech is referring to. The meforshim are puzzled by it because, as it appears from halachah, Shavuos is like the rest of the year regarding milk and meat. Some say that the Noam Elimelech refers to those who wait twenty-four hours between milk and meat (see Chulin 105.), and on Shavuos, one won't wait so long.

Although we don't know the halachic issue that the Noam Elimelech is referring to, we receive his message that we are like *malachim* on Shavuos.

The Imrei Emes (Likutim, Pesachim 68) also says we become like *malachim* on Shavuos. He proves this from the halachah (written Pesachim 68:) that Shavuos should be חצי לכם וחצי לה', half for enjoying good meals and half for Hashem [with Torah and tefillah]. The

question is, how does a human being know how to divide a day precisely in half? It states (Shemos 24:6) ויקח משה חצי הדם, "Moshe took half of the blood," and Rashi asks, "Who divided it [exactly in half]? A *malach* came and divided it." And this is because a human being isn't able to divide something exactly in half. So on Shavuos, how do we divide the day in half? The Imrei Emes says that on Shavuos, we become like *malachim*, and *malachim* can divide something precisely in half.<sup>20</sup>

### **Tikun Leil Shavuos**

The Magen Avraham (494) writes, "The Zohar (vol.3, 98.) tells us that the early chassidim would remain awake the entire night of Shavuos, to study Torah. This is the current custom today for most Torah scholars. We can offer a simple explanation: Bnei Yisrael slept all night [before matan Torah], and Hakodosh Baruch Hu had to awaken them [to receive the Torah], as the Midrash tells us. Therefore, we must rectify this." This is a reason for remaining awake on this night.

It is an old custom, and it is mentioned in the Zohar (vol.1, 8):

"Reb Shimon and his holy students were singing Torah and creating *chiddushim* [Shavuos night]...and they were very joyous. Reb Shimon told them, 'My children, you are fortunate because tomorrow the *kallah* [the Torah] will go to the *chuppah*<sup>21</sup> with you – and only with you because you are making

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**20.** The Imrei Emes added that although the halachah to divide the yom tov in half applies to all yomim tovim and not only to Shavuos, nevertheless, the primary source of this halachah is discussed regarding Shavuos.

One year, after Shavuos, Rav Shach zt'l asked Reb Menachem Ziemba zt'l hy'd, "What did the rebbe say?" and Reb Menachem Ziemba told him this vort (written above) that he heard from the Imrei Emes.

Rav Shach replied that we can express it this way: After we spend half of Shavuos with חצי לה', we become like *malachim*, and we will know how to divide the day in half.

**21.** Shavuos morning, at Shacharis, someone fell asleep because he was tired after an entire night studying Torah. When he woke up, Reb Chaim Brim asked him, "Did you ever see a *chasan* sleeping as he stood under the *chuppah*?"

the *tikun* tonight and you are rejoicing with the Torah... Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bless you with seventy brachos and put a crown on your head... Whoever joins us on this night will be protected...the entire year. He will live the year in peace."<sup>22</sup>

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Masechta Shavuos, Ner Mitzvah*, 8) quotes the following episode, as it was told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz (composer of *Lecha Dodi*) *zt'l*: "(Shavuos night) we were studying Mishnayos, and we completed two *masechtos*. And then Hashem granted us the privilege to hear a divine *bas kol*, a message from Heaven. It said, 'My beloved, righteous friends, peace to you. How fortunate you are! *Ashreiechim*! You are fortunate, and your parents who gave birth to you are fortunate. You are fortunate in this world and the next world, for you devoted yourself to crown Me on this night. My crown has fallen years ago, and no one has consoled me since then. I was thrown to the earth, lying in the rubbish. You returned the crown to its place! Be strong, My friends, My beloved. Be happy! Rejoice! You are exalted people... Your kol Torah rises before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, breaking through several heavens. The *malachim*...are silent. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and all the hosts of heaven listen to your voices... You earned this greatness. You are fortunate, and so are your parents who gave birth to you...because you didn't sleep this night and because I was elevated this night. Therefore, be strong, be happy, My children, My beloved. Rejoice...and don't stop your studies... Your Torah study is sweet before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Stand

on your feet and elevate Me and say in a loud voice like on Yom Kippur, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד...and they did so."

The Seder HaYom (Shavuos) writes, "On the night of Shavuos, one should remain awake and study Torah all night long, (or, at least, study Torah most of the night)... Don't take this matter lightly because a person might be low in one area and have amazing strengths in other ways. He sustains the entire world – and that is something that even the *malachim* can't do. He gives strength to Hashem, the Creator of the world... And, *chas veshalom*, [if one sins], he weakens the strength of Heaven and draws His right hand back. As it states, צור ילדך תשי, 'You weakened the strength of the One Who created you.'

"Therefore, every person, קטן שבקטנים והדיוט, even the lowest and most simple person, should consider himself great and say, 'Perhaps I can fulfill Hashem's will.' ... Don't say, 'Who am I, and what is my worth that the worlds should be rectified through me?' ... Such thoughts cause disaster – onto oneself and others – because [if he thinks so], he won't be cautious with his deeds..."

These words are an essential lesson, not only regarding the night of Shavuos. We shouldn't underestimate our potential. Great things can happen through us." And on the night of Shavuos, when regular people like us stay awake and study Torah, we create great *tikunim*. Many blessings and salvations, *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*, come from this.

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**22.** The Megaleh Amukos teaches: "It states in *Shaar HaKavanos* in the name of the Arizal that throughout the year, whenever one is awake all night long studying Torah, it will redeem him from כרת. If he deserved to die, *chalilah*, studying Torah all night long, will annul the decree. This is said about any night of the year. Certainly, if one is awake Shavuos night, he will be atoned for many severe *aveiros*."

The Yerushalmi says, "Don't read it עזרת תהיה לכם. Instead, read it עזרת תהיה לכם, which means, "Shavuos you will live." Perhaps this is because life is given to all those who study Torah on Shavuos night.

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 5:2), אני ישנה ולבי ער, "I am asleep, but my heart is awake." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* said that ער is *gematriya* שם"ה, representing the 365 nights a year that one sleeps. ער refers to the night of Shavuos when people remain awake. It is called לבי, for it is the heart of the year.



Some people have ענוה פסולה, the wrong type of humility. They think the *tikkun* that happens on this night is reserved only for the great tzaddikim, so they go to sleep, but we have to recognize our potential because although we are small in some ways, we are also mighty in others.

We continue with the Seder Hayom's lesson:

"If he is exhausted and needs to sleep, he can sleep, but not [in a bed], so he won't sleep too long. And then he should quickly wake up and study Torah until daybreak. And then he should praise Hashem in the beis medresh for all the kindness Hashem performs for us. He gave us His Torah and chose us from all nations to be His beloved nation. How fortunate is our lot!"

Reb Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* writes that he has a note, handwritten by his grandfather, the Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l*, with the following notation:

"I guarantee that whoever stays awake all Shavuos night and studies Torah will merit the crown of Torah." Rebbe Shalom Ber *zt'l* added, "The Tzemech Tzedek was a *posek* and a *Rav*, so the way he rules in this world is how the *beis din* in heaven rules. Therefore, one must be awake the entire night and toil in Torah. The main thing is נעור בלילה, (with an emphasis on the word נעור) to be awake [and not when one studies with laziness]."

Every Shavuos morning, after davening *Shacharis* with the *neitz hachamah*, Reb Chaim Leib Aurbach *zt'l* (the father of Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l*) would go to Reb Moshe Yosef Hoffman *zt'l*, the Pupa *dayan* of Yerushalayim, to wish him "a *gut Yom Tov*."

One year, Reb Chaim Leib asked the Pupa *dayan*, "I see that you are extremely happy today. Why is that?"

The *dayan* replied, "I wasn't planning on telling you, but now that you asked, I will tell you. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* said that whoever studies the entire night of Shavuos without interruption (without הפסק הדעת) will

merit *giluy Eliyahu*. He will merit seeing Eliyahu HaNavi. When I was a yeshiva student, I studied in the Ksav Sofer's yeshiva in Pressburg, and the students of the yeshiva always strived to study Torah without interruption on Shavuos night so that they can merit *giluy Eliyahu*. I also tried for many years, but I never merited *giluy Eliyahu*. Last night, I was learning a difficult passage in the *Zohar*; I couldn't decipher its holy words. Then, an elderly person came into the beis medresh. I never saw him before. He explained the *Zohar* to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes in concentration, thinking whether his explanation answered all my difficulties. When I opened my eyes, the man wasn't there anymore, and it was time to daven *Shacharis*. Now, I think you understand why I'm so happy this morning."

Someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt'l* whether he should remain awake all night on Shavuos because he knows that he will learn much more Torah over Shavuos if he has a regular night's sleep.

Reb Shlomo Zalman replied that although he had a valid point, he should nevertheless study Torah all night. Reb Shlomo Zalman explained, "This is a great principle- one must keep the customs accepted by all Yidden and talmidei chachamim, and he should educate his family to respect the customs. *Lomdim* all over the world keep this custom, and if you won't, your children and wife will think you are acting incorrectly. Therefore, I advise you to keep the *minhag*, even if it is hard" (*Halichos Shlomo* 12, note 13).

### **Reb Avraham ben Avraham zy'a hy'd**

The second day of Shavuos is the *yahrtzeit* of the *ger tzedek* of Vilna, Reb Avraham ben Avraham *zt'l*, who was killed *al kiddush Hashem*.

His father, Count Pototski, was extremely wealthy and renowned throughout Poland and Europe. When his son became a *ger*, it was a great embarrassment to the church. The government arrested Avraham ben

Avraham and murdered him *al kiddush Hashem, hy"d*.

Becoming a Jew meant forgoing the vast wealth of his father's home. Someone once asked him why he did this. He replied, "Friday night, when the candles go out, they give off a special scent. That smell is more enjoyable than all the wealth I had previously enjoyed."<sup>23</sup>

The *ger tzedek* knew who reported on him to the government, ultimately leading to his death, but he said he wouldn't take revenge. The *ger tzedek* added, "In this world, I didn't take revenge. Do you think that I will take revenge in the next world? I'll explain with a parable: A young prince was at the beach, drawing a sculpture of a person in the sand. But then, someone came by and cruelly broke the sculpture. The prince went to his father, crying that someone had broken his artistic work. The king listened to his son, but he didn't do anything. The prince thought to himself, 'Why isn't my father doing anything? When I grow up, I will take revenge on this person who ruined my sculpture.' And what happened when he became an adult and a king? He didn't take revenge because he realized the felony was nothing. Similarly, I'm not taking revenge in this world; do you think I'll take revenge in the next world?"

Reb Avraham ben Avraham was a student of the Vilna Gaon *zt'l*. The Vilna Gaon told him that he had the ability (using spiritual powers) to save him, but the *ger tzedek* replied that he preferred to die *al kiddush Hashem*.

Reb Alexander Zuskind *zy'a*, the author of *Yesod Veshores HaAvodah*, ventured out to the square where the pyre was prepared to burn the *ger tzedek*. He wanted to answer amen to the *brachah* the *ger tzedek* would say when being *moser nefesh al kiddush Hashem*.

It was also *mesirus nefesh* for the Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah because if someone saw him, they were liable to burn him at the stake as well, *chalilah*.

The Vilna Gaon said that if ten people answered amen to his *brachah*, the world would have reached its perfected state, and Moshiach would have come.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach said that he heard *ish mipi ish* [from a direct source] from the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* that when the *ger tzedek* said this *brachah*, a fire came forth from beneath Ma'aras HaMachpeilah and burned up all *kelipos*. Had there been a minyan answering amen, the world would have reached its complete rectification.

May his merit protect us.

### Fire

It states (Shmos 19:18) מפני אשר ירד עליו ה' באש, "because Hashem has descended [on Har Sinai] with fire." The Beis Aharon *zt'l* explains that Hashem descended to Har Sinai as a result of the nation's fire. The Jewish nation had hislahavus, a strong desire to receive the Torah and to meet with Hashem at this special time, and this drew Hashem down onto the mountain.

There are many *pesukim* that mention the fire that was on Har Sinai. For example, it states (Devarim 4:11) ויהרר בוער כאש עד לב השמים, "The mountain was burning like fire until the heart of the heaven."

Ramban (Devarim 4:9) writes, "You mustn't forget the maamad Har Sinai [how it appeared when we received the Torah on Har Sinai. You mustn't forget] all the things your eyes saw: the sounds, the torches, Hashem's honor and greatness, and His words that you heard emerging from within the fire."

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23. My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, used to tell this story and noted that Yidden from previous generations would enjoy every part of Shabbos, even the smell of the candles extinguishing.

The Tur (Orach Chaim 47:7) writes that in birchas haTorah, when we say אשר בחר בנו, "We should think about maamad har Sinai, that Hashem chose us from among all nations and brought us to Har Sinai. We heard His words through the fire, and he gave us His holy Torah, which is our life, and His precious utensil, which He had pleasure with every day."

There is an emphasis on remembering the fire on Har Sinai, and as the Beis Aharon tells us, it is to remind us of the Jewish nation's fire and hislahavus at the time. Their fire inspired Hakadosh Baruch Hu, keviyachol, to give us the Torah.

Hashem gives us the Torah every year again, and therefore, we should do our part and fill our hearts with a fire of hislahavus and a strong desire to receive the Torah.<sup>24</sup>

Chazal (Shabbos 88.) tell us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu held Har Sinai above the nation, as it states וַיִּצְבּוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר, "They stood under the mountain," and told them, "Accept the Torah, or you will be buried here."

Tosfos asks that the nation had already said נעשה ונשמע, "We will do, and we will hear!" They had already agreed to accept the Torah, so why was it necessary to force them to accept the Torah?

Tosfos answers that Hashem knew that when they saw the fire on Har Sinai, they might be afraid and change their minds. Therefore, Hashem raised the mountain above them, forcing them to receive the Torah.

However, Hashem could have removed the fire from Har Sinai! Why did the fire need to be there and risk scaring off the nation?

The answer is that the fire had to be there. The only way to receive the Torah is with hislahavus. Without that element, it is impossible to receive the Torah.

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Ki Sisa 31) explains that the first luchos were given in a very open, public manner (with fire, thunder, lightning, etc.), and therefore, they were broken. The second luchos were given in a tzanua, concealed manner, and consequently, they remained intact. The Midrash concludes, "This teaches us that there is nothing more beautiful to Hashem than tznus."

The Sfas Emes (Ki Sisa, 5639) asks: If Hashem loves tznus, why did Hashem give the first luchos in a revealed manner?

Perhaps an even greater question is that Hashem knows the future. He knew that by giving the luchos in a revealed manner, they wouldn't survive. So why did Hashem give the first luchos in a revealed manner?

The Sfas Emes replies, "If it weren't for the hislahavus and revealed manner that the first luchos were given, it wouldn't be possible to give the luchos afterward in a concealed manner. This is a lesson for all generations: One must begin with a great hislahavus, even if it won't last, because that fiery beginning will help him when he falls from that level."<sup>25</sup>

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 17:5) states, תחילה מפלה שניה, "The beginning of a downfall

**24.** We repeat what the Berdichever Rav zt'l said before he came to the beis medresh on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis. He exclaimed, איך גיי זיך זעהן מיט די לעבעדיגן, "I'm going to meet with Hashem!" We must develop this holy fervor, recognizing the special time of matan Torah, and in this spirit, receive the Torah.

**25.** We compare this to someone who prepares piping hot coffee and then lets it cool off before drinking it. This is because coffee tastes better when made with boiling water. He wouldn't drink the coffee if it were made with lukewarm water. The nimshal is that we begin avodas Hashem (or the beginning of a seder in yeshiva, etc.) with a piping hot hislahavus. The hislahavus won't last, but the momentum that it created will continue. However, if he begins lukewarm, everything will wear off with time.



is sleep." Literally, this means that a person must be busy with work or learning Torah. He can't laze and sleep. Laziness breeds failure.

We can add that sleep alludes to coldness and lack of hislahavus. This attitude leads to people's downfall.

### **Tefillos on Shavuos**

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said that the galus is so long because people rush through the *brachah* of אהבת עולם (or אהבה רבה, depending on one's nusach). If we spent more time on this *brachah* and recited it with more devotion and concentration, the galus would end.

Some shuls follow this counsel every day, and אהבת עולם can take them five minutes.

Shavuos morning, in the beis medresh of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l*, the *brachah ahavas olam* took hours and was said with a lot of hislahavos.

One year, a student of the Chasam Sofer's *zt'l* yeshiva was in Ropshitz for Shavuos. When he returned to the yeshiva, the Chasam Sofer asked him what he saw in Ropshitz. The student described the magnificent way they said *ahavah rabba*. The Chasam Sofer was very impressed and praised the Ropshitzer chassidim for praying like that.<sup>26</sup>

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**26.** Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* would begin davening early on Shavuos morning and finish late in the afternoon. Almost the entire day was spent in *tefillah*.

The Pele Yoetz (*Atzeres*) writes, "How good it is to pour out your heart [before Hashem on Shavuos] that your children should earn the crown of Torah, ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות, that they will learn Torah, teach it, and keep the Torah."

One year, Shavuos, after *Shacharis*, the Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* gave a large Gemara to one of his chassidim and said, "Today, you said *ahavas olam* with a lot of *kavanah*, and your tefillos were answered. You asked for Torah, and you will receive it. Now it is up to you to study Torah. If you don't study, you won't get it."

This often occurs. One's tefillos were answered, but he doesn't know about it, so he doesn't look for the treasure he just attained. If we don't devote ourselves to Torah study after Shavuos, we won't discover the treasure Hashem gave us.

When you come to a *chasunah*, how can you figure out who the *mechutanim* are?

Those who are davening fervently at the *chuppah* for the couple's success are the *mechutanim*.

The same is on Shavuos. Who are *mechutanim* with the Torah? Those who cry and beg Hashem for success in Torah are *mechutanim* with the Torah.

And who is the chasan? The one who goes home with the kallah after the chasunah is the chasan. Similarly, Shavuos is a chasunah between the Jewish nation and the Torah. Who among the Jewish nation can be called the chasan? Those who continue learning Torah after Shavuos, they are the chasan.

A wealthy person paid a lot of money to get a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He was so proud of his son-in-law! He would walk down the streets with his son-in-law to show his friends what he proudly called, "My nachas."

Someone asked him, "You're always speaking about how special your son-in-law is, but what about your daughter? Is she also special?"

The wealthy man replied, "My daughter? I don't have a daughter."

The friend asked, "So, how do you have a son-in-law if you don't have a daughter?"

The wealthy man replied, "For years, I watched wealthy people proudly walking around with their scholarly sons-in-law, so I also wanted a son-in-law who is a *talmid chacham*. I paid a lot of money and got one. I don't have a daughter, but at least I have a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*..."

The *nimshal* is, before Shavuos, everyone takes haircuts, cuts their nails, and puts on new clothing... They

One of the Rebbes of Munkatch (*Shaar Yissaschar*) *zt'l* writes, נהגים הצדיקים החסידים להאריך, בברכת אהבה רבה ביוםא דשבועות החג הקדוש הזה, "Righteous tzaddikim say the brachah אהבת עולם at length on Shavuos."

Rebbe Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* said that in the desert, from Rosh Chodesh Sivan until *matan Torah*, the Yidden were saying the brachah of *ahavah rabba*, and begged Hashem, והאר עינינו בתורתך, "Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah." This is how they prepared for *matan Torah*.

It is important to have kavanah at this brachah every day of the year. Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg *zt'l* said it is impossible to tell a true chiddush in Torah unless one has kavanah when he says *ahavah rabba* and אתה חונן in Shemonah Esrei.

A student asked, "But I said a good chiddush today, and I didn't have kavanah by ahavah rabba and אתה חונן."

Rebbe Shmelke asked him to repeat the chiddush. The student proudly said the chiddush, but Rebbe Shmelke showed him that the chiddush was faulty.

Because it is impossible to say a true Torah chiddush without *tefillah*.

And when you daven for success in Torah and all other areas of ruchniyos, don't be stingy and don't count your words. Ask for

a lot because Hashem can give you whatever you ask for. It states (*Tehillim* 81:11), הרחב פִּי, ואמלאהו, and Rashi translates it, "Open your mouth wide and ask for all your hearts desires, ואמלאהו, and I will grant all your requests." The Gemara (*Brachos* 50.) says this pasuk refers to success in Torah. So, open your mouth wide, ask for a lot, ואמלאהו, and Hashem will give it to you.

Sefer Chasidim (131) states, "If someone davens for something that will increase Hashem's praise — such as success in Torah, or anything else that is Hashem's will — and he pours out his heart in *tefillah*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will answer his *tefillos*, even if he doesn't deserve it."

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "From the time the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the gates of heaven are closed." Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said this is solely when requesting worldly matters. But when one davens for ruchniyos, the gates are open.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Tehillim***

Shavuos is the *yahrzeit* of Dovid HaMelech, and the meforshim add that Shavuos is probably Dovid HaMelech's birthday, as well, because Chazal tell us that tzaddikim are *niftar* on the date they were born.

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want to be the *chasan*...but they mustn't forget that without the *kallah*, which is the Torah, they don't have anything at all.

**27.** Reb Menachem Rikanti *zt'l* yearned and pined to know Torah. For this purpose, he fasted many days and davened with all his heart. But he was born with a weak mind and wasn't succeeding in Torah. Nevertheless, he never gave up. He continued to fast, daven, and try. Finally, when he was in his eighties, he dreamed that an elderly person gave him a cup of water and told him to drink it, which he did. In the morning, he was a new person. His heart was open to understanding Torah, and within a year or two, he wrote his holy sefarim.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught that we shouldn't lose hope in a child's ability to grow in Torah. The Chazon Ish explained that when his grandmothers lit the Shabbos lecht, they davened that their descendants should succeed in Torah. And the moment these *tefillos* are answered, everything will turn around.

The Chazon Ish said that a person can cross the street, and when he began crossing the street, he had a weak mind, and when he reached the other side of the road, he became wise and sharp, and he could understand Torah because that was the moment that the *tefillos* were answered.

Some say that this is the reason we read megillas *Rus* on Shavuos. The final *pasuk* in the megillah is, וישי הוליד את דוד, "Yishai gave birth to Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on Shavuos, on the day Dovid was born.

The Ben Ish Chai (*Bamidbar* 6) writes, "It is important to say *Tehillim* on Shavuos because Dovid HaMelech *a'h* was *niftar* on this day, and the *Tehillim* that one says on this day will be more accepted in heaven. Therefore, everyone should say the entire *Tehillim* on Shavuos."

The Kaf HaChaim (494:34) writes, "It is ideal to learn *Tehillim* on Shavuos because Dovid HaMelech was *niftar* on this day (as stated in the *Yerushalmi*)... *Tehillim* that one recites on this day will be answered."

It might be surprising to some people that Dovid HaMelech's *yahrtzeit* is on Shavuos because, for many, Dovid is more remembered for his *tefillos* than for his Torah. Dovid HaMelech said about himself (*Tehillim* 109:4), ואני תפילה, "I am *tefillah*." Similarly, the Gemara (*Brachos* 7:) tells us that ריווהו להקדוש ברוך הוא because she had a descendant, Dovid HaMelech, who will make Hashem satisfied and content with his songs and praises."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that Dovid was *niftar* on Shavuos to tell us that Torah and *tefillah* are connected. They are dependent on each other. One needs *tefillah* to understand Torah, and one needs Torah to be able to daven properly.

The Beis Aharon of Karlin *zt'l* once said to his chasidim from Poland, "Polish Yidden love learning Torah, and so do we. The difference is that we say Torah study alone isn't enough. To succeed in Torah, one needs *tefillah*. Chazal (*Megillah* 28:) say, שמעתתא בעי, *צילותא*, which can be translated as, 'Learning

Torah needs *tefillah*.' It is impossible to succeed in Torah without *tefillah*, and it is impossible to daven properly without Torah."<sup>28</sup>

The Gemara (*Brachos* 31.) says, אין עומדין, "One only stands up to daven...after studying a *halachah*." The poskim (Bach, Levush) explain that this is because Torah makes us happy, as it states (*Tehillim* 19:9), פקודיה ישרים משמחי לב, "The mitzvos of Hashem are upright, causing the heart to rejoice." The study of Torah will bring us to the right mood to daven.

*Tefillah* is more beautiful to Hashem when it is associated with Torah. This is because Hashem loves the Torah, and when the *tefillah* is based on Torah (such as when one studies Torah before the *tefillah*), the *tefillah* is more precious to Hashem.

The Sfas Emes (תרמ"ג ד"ה וז) writes, "Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 4:) say, אין אמת אלא תורה, that Torah is truth... Therefore, when the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 145:18) says, קרוב ה'... 'קראוהו באמת, 'Hashem is near...to those who call Him with truth' it means that Hashem is near to listen to the *tefillos* of those who call out to Hashem with Torah. And especially on Shavuos, which the entire day is a day of Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for *tefillah*."

### The Event of *Matan Torah*

The Rambam (*Igeres Teiman*) writes, "Remember Har Sinai, because Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded that we must always remember it, He forbade us from forgetting it, and He obligates us to teach it to our children. You should raise your children with the story of this great episode of *matan Torah*, and you should speak about this wonder and glory before congregations because it is the pillar of *emunah*."

<sup>28</sup>. It states (*Shemos* 18:20) והזהרתם אתם את החקים ואת התורות. The *pasuk* is speaking about teaching Torah, but *Targum Yonoson* says the *pasuk* is talking about *tefillah*. He translates the *pasuk* as follows: ותהודע להון ית צלותא, "Teach them the *tefillos* they should say in the *beis knesses*." So, the *pasuk* refers to both Torah and *tefillah*. This is because Torah and *tefillah* go together.



We must talk about matan Torah, how it looked, and the details of all that happened there, and therefore, let us briefly discuss some of the wonders that occurred at this special time.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 29:9) states, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah, the birds didn't chirp or fly, the oxen didn't groan, the sea was still, and people didn't speak. The entire world was silent, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, *אני ה' אלקיך*, 'I am Hashem your G-d...'"

The Gemara (Zevachim 116.) states that when Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah, His voice was heard throughout the world. Kings of the nations panicked. They came to Bilaam and asked, "What are these loud sounds that we hear? Is a flood coming to the world?"

Bilaam told them that Hashem was giving the Torah to bnei Yisrael. "Hashem has a precious item in his treasury, it was hidden with Him for 974 generations before the world was created, and He wants to give it to his children, as it states (Tehillim 29:11) *ה' עוז* לעמו יתן, 'Hashem will give might [the Torah] to His nation.' They all replied, *ה' יברך את עמו*, 'May Hashem bless His nation with peace.'"

### Torah for Everyone

When we study the episode of matan Torah, one of the lessons that we become aware of is that Torah is for everyone. No one should think that matan Torah isn't for them.

We remain awake on Shavuot night, and the Magen Avraham (494) says that this is to rectify the sin of sleeping that occurred on the night of matan Torah.

The Arugas HaBosem (Yisro ויחינו) says that it doesn't make sense that the Jewish nation went to sleep on the night before matan Torah. Within the Jewish nation were nevi'im, zekeinim, etc. Could it be that they all went to sleep? If *we* were told that we

would meet with Hashem tomorrow, would *we* go to sleep?

The Arugas HaBosem answers that they fell asleep involuntarily. Hashem caused them to fall asleep. This occurred to teach the future generations that even if they are sleeping (in a spiritual sense, totally immersed in their parnassah and olam hazeh), they, too, can receive the Torah.

The Gemara (Shabbos 88.) tells us that the nation was afraid at each of the Aseres HaDibros and fell back twelve *mil*. Malachim had to push them back to the mountain, where they received the next mitzvah of the Aseres HaDibros, and once again, they fell back twelve *mil*.

This taught them that the path of receiving the Torah is full of ups and downs. One falls backward, he tries to come near again, and then he falls back again, but in the end, this is how one receives the Torah.

The story of matan Torah is written in parashas Yisro, which begins with the story of Yisro, who was a priest for avodah zarah, and he came to receive the Torah. Rebbe Leibele Eiger (Toras Emes, Yisro) explains that this is a good introduction to matan Torah, to know that no matter which level you are on, you can receive the Torah and turn a new leaf.

Hashem asked the nations of Yishmael, Eisav, and others if they wanted the Torah. They could have accepted the Torah had they wanted to. The Imrei Emes (5667) says that this gives encouragement and hope for all Yidden. No one should think that they are too low, that the Torah isn't for them.

"The Torah is mekarev everyone, also those at a low level."

The Midrash (Tanchuma Emor 11) states, "All the wonderful, sweet things that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will do for Yisrael, is all because of one shout, when they said (Shemos 24:7) *נעשה ונשמע*." The Tosefta (Bava Kama 7:3) says that the Jewish nation wasn't entirely sincere when they said *נעשה ונשמע*.

Their hearts weren't entirely prepared to keep the entire Torah. Nevertheless, Hashem accepted their proclamation, and because of it, Hashem gives so much kindness to Bnei Yisrael.

This also gives chizuk to those who, on Shavuos, want to proclaim naaseh v'nishma with all their heart and soul, but deep down in their heart, they know they aren't entirely ready for that. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean your acceptance of the Torah isn't a wonderful accomplishment. Do what you can, and it will be precious to Hashem.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Drashos, Megilas Rus, ד"ה ויהי) talks about the minhag of putting trees that don't grow fruit (אילני סרק) in the beis medresh on Shavuos. The Chasam Sofer zt'l explains that these fruitless trees represent the Yidden who don't have Torah and mitzvos. We want them to know that they can also receive the Torah.

Rashi (Shemos 19:6) writes לא פחות ולא יותר, "Not less and not more." Literally, this means that Moshe had to repeat precisely what Hashem told him to tell the Jewish nation regarding the preparations for matan Torah, not less and not more.

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos 264:) says that it can also mean לא יותר, no one is greater than a person who studies Torah. There are nevi'im in the Jewish nation and malachim in heaven, but no one is greater than someone who studies Torah. לא פחות means that no one is too small to receive the Torah. Regardless of which level you are on, you can receive the Torah and attain the highest levels in the world.

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos, Shavuos 5562) writes, "The Torah wasn't given to individuals, rather it was given to the entire Jewish nation...so that everyone should have a portion in Torah... Therefore, every Yid can have the same joy on Shavuos... The Torah was given...when we first left the slavery of Mitzrayim. We weren't yet worthy of matan Torah. This was to tell us that there are no barriers, and we shouldn't lose hope

from receiving our portion in Torah. Even if one is at a very low level, he is equal to the greatest."

The Beis Aharon (Rosh Chodesh Sivan) teaches this same lesson from the words (Shmos 19:17) וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר, "They stood at the bottom of the mountain." He explains that this refers to people who are at a very low level. He writes, "Everyone can receive the Torah, no matter who he is, even if he is at the lowest level."

### **Teshuvah**

The Gemara (Shabbos 89.) states that after matan Torah, the Satan went to Hashem and asked, "Where is Your Torah?"

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l, asked that it seems strange that the Satan didn't know that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation! When Hashem gave the Torah, His Shechinah came down onto Har Sinai, and Hashem opened up all seven heavens, and the entire world knew about it. The malachim gave presents to the Jewish nation, and even the Satan gave a gift to the Jewish nation. So, why did he ask, "Where is Your Torah?"

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov explains that the Satan intended his question to the Jewish nation, and he asks the question every year, to every Yid. He asks them, "You received the Torah a year ago. Where is that Torah that you received? It doesn't seem that you are studying it or keeping it. I don't see the Torah that you received." And with these words, he attempts to weaken their hope and inspiration to accept the Torah this year. This is the Satan's way, making people lose hope of ever improving their ways and receiving the Torah.

But we must know that we can always do teshuvah. We can repent and improve. This year, we can receive the Torah.

Most foods become ruined when they spoil, but milk becomes an even better product when it spoils. It becomes cheese.

We eat cheese and milk products on Shavuos to remind ourselves that even if one sinned and spoiled his ways, he can do teshuvah and receive the Torah. There is still hope for him.

Chazal (Nidah 9:) tell us נעכר ונעשה חלב, "blood becomes spoiled, and becomes milk." The origin of milk is blood, which transforms itself and becomes milk. It is forbidden to eat blood, so why may we drink milk? It must be that when it turns into milk, the blood disappears. The Brezhaner Rav zt'l says that this symbolizes teshuvah. When we improve our ways, there will be no sign of our past sins.

The Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:5) states, "By all *korbanos* it states שעיר עיזים לחטאת, a goat for a sin-offering.' But by the *korbanos* of Shavuos, it states שעיר עיזים לכפר עליכם, 'a goat for atonement.' חטא isn't mentioned because on Shavuos, no one has sins. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling Bnei Yisrael, 'Since you accepted the yoke of Torah, it's as though you never sinned your entire lives.'"

The Torah writes (Shemos 19:4) ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings." The Yismach Yisrael (*Yisro* 6) explains that an eagle changes its feathers every year, as it states (Tehillim 103:5) תתחדש כנשר נעוריכי, "Become new, your youth, like an eagle." Rashi writes, "Like an eagle that changes its feathers and hairs yearly." Similarly, the Torah tells us that Hashem carried us on eagle's wings to remind us that we should change and that we don't have to remain stuck in our old ways.

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 65.) tells us that when one gives a present, he gives it generously. And therefore, if someone has a well on his property and gives it to his friend as a gift, we can assume that together with the well, he also gave him a pathway in his field so that he can get to the well. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l (Shavuos) says that Hashem gave us the Torah as a gift, and therefore, we can be sure that Hashem gave it to us generously, together with the path

that one can take to reach and attain the Torah.

### A Life of Kedushah

Hashem told the nation (Shemos 19:10) וקדשתם היום ומחר, "Sanctify them, today and tomorrow." This is man's obligation in this world, to live a holy life filled with Torah and mitzvos.

We will explain with a mashal:

A man once left a chasunah hall and, late at night, remembered that he had forgotten something in the hall. So he returned to the hall to search for the lost item. The hall was messy, with leftover food scraps and dirt on the floor. It was dark, and the furniture was overturned. It was hard to believe that there was a beautiful event in this room just a few hours earlier. He thought, "If it ends up being so messy, what is the purpose of making such a luxurious celebration?" But then he told himself, "A wedding took place in this hall, where a chassan declared הרי את מקודשת לי. This makes the mess and state of disarray all worthwhile."

The nimshal is that at the end of a person's life, he will be placed into the grave, and within a short time, nothing will remain of him other than dirt and bones. But if there was *kedushin* in his lifetime (he was cautious with Torah and mitzvos), then his life was worthwhile. However, if there wasn't any kedushah in his life, one can ask, what is the purpose of it all?

The Kedushas Levi (Likutim) discusses the letters סעפ"צ (these are the letters in order of the alef beis). The letter ס is closed from all sides, and the letters ע"פ can be translated as עין, eye and mouth. One should keep his eyes and mouth closed from things he shouldn't see or say, and then he will be צ, צדיק.

Another hint to this concept is from the pasuk (Shemos 19:23) הגבל את ההר וקדשתו, "Make boundaries around the mountain and sanctify it." הגבל את ההר can be explained as



follows: Take the letters that border with the letters ה"ר. The letters before and after ה are ו and ד, and the letters before and after ר are ש and ק. So, we have the letters that spell קדו"ש. This hints that by הגבל, making boundaries and precautions, one becomes holy.

A bachur had to leave his yeshiva that he had learned in Yerushalayim and was contemplating going to a yeshiva in Tel Aviv. He asked Rebbe Shlomke for his counsel. Rebbe Shlomke went to the mikvah (it was his custom to go to the mikvah before offering advice) and said, "I cannot answer this question."

A couple of years later, Rebbe Shlomke asked his gabbai, Reb Elyah Roth zt'l, to find out what happened with that bachur. Reb Elyah returned to Rebbe Shlomke and said that the bachur went to the yeshiva in Tel Aviv and was doing very well there and growing in Torah and yiras Shamayim. Rebbe Shlomke said, "I am so happy and relieved to hear that." He explained that when he went to the mikvah, he saw with his ruach hakodesh that it was good for the

bachur to go to Tel Aviv, but "I couldn't take the responsibility on my shoulders." Shemiras einayim in Tel Aviv is challenging, and he felt he couldn't answer the question.

This story is marvelous because Rebbe Shlomke answered all types of questions, including matters of life and death. Still, in his book, a question that would put a bachur's shemiras einayim at risk was too difficult to answer.

It states וירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחוק, "The nation saw, and they trembled, and they stood from a distance." The Apter Rav zt'l (Ohev Yisrael, Yisro, ד"ה וירא) explains that the nation was worried about how they will succeed in keeping the mitzvos. They found a solution, ויעמדו מרחוק, that they should keep their distance from an aveirah. The Apter Rav writes, "They found a counsel and a strategy that they should establish the words of the Torah and the mitzvos with gates and with boundaries that Chazal establish... This is the translation of ויעמדו; they gave the mitzvos the ability to exist and to stand, מרחוק, through the gates and boundaries that Chazal established."