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SHAVUOS

WITH

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT" L

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Preparing for Shavuos

— Q: —

What should a *ben Torah* do to prepare for *Matan Torah*?

— A: —

He should sit and learn. He should get into the habit of learning. That's very important.

But there's one more thing. He should make the *bracha* on the Torah with more *kavanah*. Because we know that this was a *ta'anan*, a complaint, against the Am Yisroel; עַל שֶׁלֹּא בָּרְכוּ בַּתּוֹרָה תְּחִלָּה – that they did not make a *bracha* before they learned Torah (Nedarim 81a). And the Ran says that what it means is that they didn't say the *bracha* with enough *kavanah*;

they *did* make the *brachos* before learning but they didn't have enough appreciation. So therefore, every *ben Torah* – not only a *ben Torah*, a working boy too; every *frum* Jew, boy and girl, should think, “How lucky I am that we received the Torah.”

If you didn't have the Torah, what would you be already? You'd be nothing. Torah transforms your life. And even though you're a man who's in business, the Torah transforms your life. A mother at home is a different mother because of the Torah. A Jewish home is an entirely different institution than any kind of a home just because of the Torah. The Torah changes everything in us.

And therefore the Torah is **כִּי הֵם חַיֵּינוּ וְאֵרֶךְ יְמֵינוּ** – it's our life in this world, and also it's our **חַיֵּי עוֹלָם הַבָּא**. The Torah is forever and ever; it's this world and the Next World. And so there's no gift like the gift of Torah.

But if you're asking about a *ben Torah*, so in addition to that, he should get busy learning the Torah as much as possible. We have to get into the habit of learning. The habit of learning is something you have to acquire. And you have to get a taste, a *geshmak* in learning. It should be sweet and delicious to you. **וּמְתוּקִים מְדֻבָּב וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים** – *Torah is sweeter than honey and the drippings of the honeycombs*. You should try to get the impression that you're eating something delicious when you're learning; as if the Gemara was printed on chocolate cake and as you're chewing the *sugya*, you're enjoying. “Ah! A *geshmake sugya* it is.” That's how you should get a *geshmak* in learning. You can do that if you try it. If you know that's the purpose, you can do it. It actually becomes **מְתוּקִים מְדֻבָּב וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים**.

So two things: Accustom yourselves to think about the great gift of the Torah. When we make the *bracha* on the Torah every morning, that's a good time to practice up. Also, get a haggle, a practice in learning Gemara and learning all the time as much as possible. And try to get a taste for the sweetness of learning Gemara.

The Importance of Shavuos

— Q: —

How does the Gemara know that *yom hashishi* means the sixth of Sivan? Isn't it talking about the sixth day of creation?

The Gemara (Avoda Zarah 3a) says that the Torah is hinting to us that all of creation is dependent on the Am Yisroel accepting the Torah. That's how the *Chachomim* explain the *possuk*, **וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי** – *And it was evening and it was morning; it was the sixth day*. They took note of the fact that it doesn't say *yom shishi* the way it says by all the other days, *yom sheini*, *yom shlishi*, *yom revi'i*. It says *yom ha'shishi*, the sixth day; a special sixth day. And the Gemara says there that it's talking about Shavuos, the sixth of Sivan.

So we read the *possuk* like this: **וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר** – The creation of day and night, that means the creation of the world, you know when it was? **יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי** – It was on *yom hashishi*, on that sixth day of Sivan when the Am Yisroel accepted the Torah; that's when the world was created. Because Matan Torah is the fulfillment of the creation of the world. If not for Matan Torah, the whole creation would have been a waste.

Now how does the Gemara know that? And the answer is it's written in big characters all over the entire *Chumash*. As follows: Let's say that you enter a house and you see on the walls a picture of the master of the house; a big picture. Then you see his diploma hanging on another wall. Then you see on another wall a framed testimonial that his local synagogue presented to him.

So you start thinking, “Probably this man is somebody important in this house.” At least he thinks he's important. Because on all sides there are mementos to remind you of him. His personality is being displayed on all sides. Here is his big Morris chair where he sits in the evening. Here is his box of favorite cigars. The man is all over the place even though you don't see him right now. Here are his slippers. Here is his favorite place where he sits by the television, where he munches let's say. He munches peanuts or whatever it is. The man is all over the place. All you need is he should come in and show himself.

Now, when you look *lehavdil* at the Torah, what do you see in the Torah? You see one thing in the Torah, *and that's Torah*. Wherever you look in the Torah, you see Torah. You see learning Torah. You see keeping the Torah. It's reiterated again and again. If there's anything conspicuous in the *Chumash* it's Torah.

Now, if the creation of the world was paramount in the Mind of Hakadosh Baruch Hu then that's all we should talk about. Torah? Alright.

You put it someplace in the corner. You mention it in passing. But the continents! That should be the main subject! Why shouldn't there be a *sefer*, not *Bereishis*, not *Shemos*, not *Vayikra*, but a *sefer* Europe and Asia, a *sefer* North and South America, a *sefer* Africa? Let's study geography. Or the *Chumash* should talk about astronomy; this galaxy, this solar system. There's so much to talk about in the world and they're all wonders. It should talk about the nature of insects; the wonderful instincts you see in animals. There's so much to speak about in flowers. There's no end to the beauties and wonders of nature that demonstrate the Hand of Hakadosh Baruch Hu on all sides. It would bring you to a lot of *emunah*.

But all that valuable space is sacrificed and it's all for Torah. Again and again, it says "Keep My laws," "Study My laws."

What do we see here? We see that that's what the Torah is talking about; not the creation of the world. And therefore it stands to reason whether you'll interpret *vayehi erev vayehi boker yom hashishi* means the sixth day of creation or something else makes no difference. It's as clear as if it had been there. Just like the man in the house, his pictures are all over the place, his things are all over the place and so we see that the man is demonstrating his personality.

And because the Torah demonstrates that everything depends on Torah so we understand that all of creation is dependent, is hanging, on the sixth of Sivan when the Am Yisroel accepted the Torah.

The Gift of Shavuos

— Q: —

Why do we say Akdamus on Shavuos?

— A: —

On Shavuos we received the Torah. Now, the Akdamus portrays how the nations of the world are proposing to us that we should go along with them and we'll share together with them the greatness that they promise us. And we say to them, "No matter what you'll give us, it's nothing compared to the greatness that Hashem already gave us."

There's no greater happiness than Matan Torah. The greatest gift that Hashem can give, אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת – that's the gift of all gifts.

Of course, one gift is more important. That's the gift of life; that's something else. But life and Torah is the same thing – Toras Chaim. You can't learn Torah if you're not alive. The gift of life and Torah, that's the gift.

The nations have nothing to offer us. And even though they promised us the highest rewards for coming with them, it's nothing at all compared to what we have.

And therefore, the Akdamus come to emphasize, what is the great happiness of Shavuos? The happiness is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu did for us what He never did for anybody else. That's the biggest of all possible gifts that He could give – נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ חַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ. Because Torah means everlasting life. Torah means Olam Haba. חַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ! It's so important to realize what a happiness Torah is.

The Happiness of Shavuos

— Q: —

What are some thoughts that we should be having on Shavuos?

— A: —

You have to know that in the *yeshivos* in Europe, up till not long ago, Shavuos was celebrated as the happiest day of the year – even more than Simchas Torah. It became wild on Shavuos in the *yeshivos*; a wild *simchas haTorah*. Why? Because they, the *yeshiva* men, understood best that אֲשֶׁרֵנוּ מְה טוֹב הַלְקֵנוּ – *How fortunate we are to be able to enjoy the special privilege of being the nation that received the Torah.*

That's the number one thought, that by receiving the Torah, first of all we all became Yisroel. Before Matan Torah even the *Avos* were called *benei Noach*. Our nation became *geirim* at Sinai – the Gemara says that. We all became *geirim* at Sinai. We became the Am Yisroel, and once that happened then we were included in all the promises that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made to the Am Yisroel.

Included in those promises was that at Har Sinai everyone received a ticket. כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא – Every Jew is given a ticket to

Olam Haba. Of course you could lose it. You could lose the ticket. It's a big responsibility. If you have a precious ticket, you have to guard it at all times. You have to hold onto it. You can't take your eyes off of it. Never to be *meisiach da'as* from this great privilege that you now possess forever and ever.

And that's a foundation of being a Jew, to believe implicitly in that. Because included in guarding that ticket is that you have to believe *b'emunah sheleima*. A person has to believe in it. If you don't believe in it then forget about it. You have to believe *be'emunah sheleima* that being a Yisroel gives you the right to Olam Haba.

Now, Avraham Avinu and the *kadmonim* before Matan Torah when they got Olam Haba, it was not because they were Yisroel; they earned it with a very great merit. Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, they earned it. They were very great people.

But after Matan Torah even if you're not great, you're holding that ticket. A plain Jew – as long as he doesn't rebel against the Torah, as long as goes along with the *derech haTorah*, he is promised **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ לָהֶם** **חַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ** **חַלֵּק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא**. That's why we say **חַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ**. When You gave us the Torah, You planted everlasting life among us.

Now, isn't that a happy thought? Nothing could be happier because Olam Haba, that's the greatest happiness that even Hakadosh Baruch Hu could invent.

Now, some ask a *kasha*. How could I say that? Hashem can't make a greater happiness than Olam Haba? And the answer is He can't make anything greater than Himself. And Olam Haba is **נִהְיֶה מְזִיזֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה**; you're enjoying looking at the splendor of the *Shechinah*. And so Olam Haba, that's the greatest splendor there is.

Right now generations of *tzaddikim* are sitting and looking at the *Shechinah*, and they're so full of joy. If we had the ability to see for one minute, our nerves, we would be so excited that we would fall apart. Our blood vessels would burst with excitement. That's why **לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי**, you can't see Hashem while you're alive. You'll burst. It's a tremendous excitement! And the longer you sit there, the greater the excitement; the more and more is the pleasure.

And when the Torah was given we were promised, we're given a guarantee, **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל**, without any exception. Every one of us was given a

ticket: “You are hereby entitled to Olam Haba.” All the great happiness with all the pleasures, unlimited and forever and ever and ever is yours because you received the Torah and you're now an entitled Yisroel.

The happiness of Olam Haba that our forefathers are now enjoying is unimaginable; it's infinite. And we achieved all that on Shavuot when we received the Torah and became the Am Yisroel. So how can we not be overwhelmed with everlasting happiness when we celebrate Shavuot?! בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – We are so happy, so grateful to You, Hashem, that forever and ever You put us on a level far above the rest of the world.

And therefore the first obligation of a Jew on Shavuot is to be full of joy that he has been included in the Klal Yisroel by means of what occurred at Har Sinai when we accepted the Torah. That's *pushut sh'bepashut*. There are no *chiddushim* here, no *drashos*. That's the happiness of Shavuot.

A Nation Is Uplifted

— Q: —

What did Klal Yisroel do in the *midbar* to prepare for Matan Torah?

— A: —

What did they do to prepare for Matan Torah? So we know Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu beforehand what to say to the people. כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – So shall you say to the House of Yaakov and tell the sons of Yisroel (Shemos 19:3).

What did He say? וְהִיְיָתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים – “You, the whole nation, will be for Me a special treasure from all the nations” (Shemos 19:5). “I’m going to do something now,” said Hashem, “that’s going to change the nature of the entire people. The whole Klal Yisroel will become different now. If you will stand at Har Sinai and you say, ‘Na’aseh v’nishma; yes, Hashem, we accept You forever and ever,’ then I’m going to make you into an *Am Segulah*, an exceptional type of people.”

Now, *Am Segulah* doesn’t merely mean “I’m going to give you *semichah*; I’m going to give you a rabbinical certificate to hang on the wall and you’ll be honored just by the title.” No; it’s much more than that.

Segulah means that your nature is going to change. Your character will be entirely metamorphosed and you'll become an entirely different type of people. At Har Sinai not only did we adopt certain attitudes and promise to remain faithful to them, but we became an entirely different people than we were before.

That's what Hashem said then: וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ – And you will be for Me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Holy Nation (*ibid.* 6). אֵלֶּה אֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – Take these words and tell it to the Bnei Yisroel” (Shemos 19:6). “Make sure the people understand what I’m saying now very well,” Hashem said to Moshe Rabbeinu. Because it wasn’t just a promise of reward for accepting the Torah – it was being proposed as part of the acceptance, part of *Kabolas HaTorah*.

And you can be sure that Moshe Rabbeinu was *masbir* to them, he explained to them what it means to be a kingdom of priests. That's how they prepared. Moshe told them *Mamleches Kohanim* means we're all *kohanim* to serve Hashem. That's your job in this lifetime. Your entire history should be like a *kohen*, someone who's devoted to serving Hashem.

Now, I wasn't present. I could only guess some things, but that's the idea that he spoke to them, about the greatness of choosing to accept the Torah and the function in the world as a nation to serve Hashem.

וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ – And when you accept the Torah, you'll be a holy nation. Moshe spoke at length; he gave them a *peirush* on that. How accepting the Torah means becoming a holy nation, a nation that strives for perfection.

So there's no question that the Bnei Yisroel were thinking about these great ideals, these great requirements that were included in accepting the Torah. They prepared by means of thinking.

The Nation are Demoted

— Q: —

Why was the mountain that we received the Torah on, called Har Sinai?

Now, it's called Har Sinai because that's its name. But the Gemara says that there's a hint here to something more; Sinai is connected to the word *sinah*. *Sinah* means hatred. The Gemara (Shabbos 89a) says, why is it called Sinai? שִׁירָה שְׁנָאָה לְעוֹלָם – A hatred came down on the world. Unfortunately a number of people misinterpret this. They say that it means when the Torah was given, a hatred against Jews developed in the world, anti-semitism. But that's not what the *ma'amar* is saying. Whether it's true or not, I can't tell you, but that's not what the *ma'amar* is saying.

Rashi explains like this: When the Torah was given, a hatred came down against the nations. שִׁירָה שְׁנָאָה לְעוֹלָם means Hashem became angry at the nations of the world. That's the plain meaning.

I'm going to take some time now to explain that because there's a lot of confusion about this subject. At Matan Torah, a big change took place. Up until Matan Torah, all the nations were equal. Once upon a time, the whole world was one. The gentiles and the family of the Avos were all one. That's why, Avraham Avinu, when he wanted to practice hospitality and he saw people coming whom he suspected of being idolaters, people that worshiped even the dust of their feet, nevertheless, there was no difference to him. He ran out to greet them. He prostrated himself on the ground. He begged them to eat with him and to rest with him. He went to all the limits that he could to show them hospitality.

But after Matan Torah, we don't find such a thing. After the Torah was given, no more. Yes, to fellow Jews, yes; but not to others. Yes, you should be polite and kind to everybody but there's a big difference now, a tremendous difference, between the Am Yisroel and the *umos ha'olam*.

That's why we have certain *dinim* in the Torah. לֹא תִחַנְּנִים: לֹא תִתֵּן לָהֶם (Avodah Zarah 20a). You're limited in your dealings with the gentiles because they lost out. Up until Matan Torah, all the nations were in Hashem's good graces but once we accepted the Torah, no more. At that time, שִׁירָה שְׁנָאָה לְעוֹלָם – a *sinah* went down to the world. And from now on, you'll never find Moshe Rabbeinu running out of his tent and bowing down and slaughtering oxen for an Amoni or Emori or anybody else. Nothing doing. It's all over! "Too late," we say to the nations of the world. "You had your opportunity. Why didn't you come and try to be included in the opportunity of accepting the Torah?! You had your test and you failed the test."

Shavuos Night

— Q: —

Should I stay up on Shavuos night?

— A: —

There's no question that it's a big *zechus* to stay up on Shavuos night. Now, some people however are ill, they're physically weak, so I'm not telling you what to do. But if you're capable, there's no reason why not because it's a demonstration of what we said before – for an important event it pays to be up all night.

There was one time when I was in Williamsburg – the old Satmerer Rav was still alive then. So I went in to see him because I was going to do something, a job, for him. I was the one who composed the advertisement against the Zionists that was placed in the New York Times – I wrote it for the Satmerer Rav. So I went in to him and he gave me a *bracha* that I should succeed. And I was up all night writing that article. Over and over again, I worked on it. All night I was up because it was important!

Now, when you're going to accept the Torah and you know how important it is, so you stay up all night. Just like they stayed up that night at Har Sinai. That's our tradition, that they were up all night. (See Eben Ezra Shemos 19:11, Moed L'kol Chai [Palagi] 8:17). They couldn't sleep; they didn't want to sleep, they were so excited.

Now, the truth is that you *do* want to sleep, but *l'zeicher*, to remember what our forefathers did, we act as if we are excited to stay up all night.

Now, we have to know that everything in the *halacha* is with a grain of salt; you may need some personal guidance *vu ein vu ois*. It's not a *mitzvah min haTorah* to stay up. It's not even a *takanas Chachomim*. It's a *minhag* of the Am Yisroel. And therefore, if you have any *chashoshos*, any suspicions, about your health, so consult somebody. And if he'll tell you it's better you should sleep, so you go to sleep. But otherwise there's no question that Klal Yisroel is up that night and it makes a tremendous impression on them. They feel like they're walking in the footsteps of our fathers who prepared in that manner by staying up all night waiting for that great day of *Kabolas HaTorah*.

What Happened at Sinai

— Q: —

How do we know that our nation stood at Har Sinai and got the Torah?

— A: —

A Rosh Yeshiva was once talking to a group of boys. It was in America. A Rosh Yeshiva from Europe was talking to American boys. I was there; I was listening. So one of the American boys asked, “How can we prove what happened in the days of old, that we stood at Har Sinai? What’s the proof?”

So the Rosh Yeshiva said, “Do you believe in George Washington?”

The boy said, “Yes.”

“Did you see him?”

“No, I never saw him.”

“Did you see anybody who saw him?”

“No. That also not.”

How many people saw George Washington when he was alive? Maybe 10,000 people at most. A million people for sure didn’t see him. When George Washington was alive, nobody in Poland knew about him. Nobody in Africa knew about him. Even today, if you go to Africa, most people don’t know about him. In America they talk about him a little bit, but in other countries, who knows about George Washington?

Now the Rambam (Yesodei Hatorah ch. 8) explains that when the Torah was given, it was no secret. Like it states *לֹא מֵרֵאשׁ בְּסֵתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי* – *From the beginning I did not speak to you in secret* (Yeshaya 48:16). The entire Jewish nation witnessed the giving of the Torah. How many people were present at Har Sinai? At least two million witnessed it.

That’s a very important point because it’s a claim that is unequalled in the claims of all the nations. All the religions have big claims, they make big promises, and they tell about big incidents, but never will you find a claim that Hakadosh Baruch Hu appeared to the entire nation and spoke to them. Because even the biggest falsifier has limits to what he can claim.

Nobody in the world, no nation had ever claimed that their entire nation had heard the voice of their deity speaking to them. Nobody ever said that. At least let them claim that! No, that's too much for them to claim, because people will say, "You know it's not so."

Muhammad never claimed that a deity appeared to a multitude of Arabs. At best, some miracles are claimed but they were not performed—even according to his statement—in the presence of a great multitude. Yeshu never claimed, or his disciples never claimed, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu spoke to him in the presence of a multitude; and when his followers wanted authority for their claims, they based them all on statements in the Hebrew scriptures.

And yet, all the Mohammadans believe that there was a Matan Torah, that Hashem gave the Torah at Har Sinai. There's no question about it. It's clear and open in the Koran. All the Christians believe that Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation at Har Sinai. It's in the New Testament openly; they all believe in it. So the whole civilized world believes that the Torah was given to us. The whole civilized world admits it!

The only case in history that such a claim is made is by the Jewish nation because it happened only once in history. And we've been speaking about it and celebrating it and living it since that great day.

What Happened at Sinai 2

— Q: —

Yetzias Mitzrayim we have a mitzvah to remember, to mention it twice a day, by day and by night, and then on Pesach we even have a special night dedicated to it. If Matan Torah is so important, why does it get only a short two day Yom Tov?

— A: —

The answer is that here the mitzvah is not only in the morning and night, it's in between the morning and night too. A Jew must be always cognizant of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*; he must be aware of Matan Torah at all times. Every day of his life and all day long.

There's a possuk like this: **הִשְׁמַר לְךָ וְהִשְׁמַר נְפִשְׁךָ מְאֹד** – *Be on guard and watch yourself very much*. You hear that? "Be very much on guard." What's

this all about? פֶּן תִשְכַּח אֶת הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר רָאוּ עֵינֶיךָ – *Lest you will forget what you saw with your eyes, יוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַדְתָּ לְפָנַי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּחֹרֵב, – the day that you stood before Hashem at Chorev. It means always; never to forget that.*

You'll say, "Well, that's a very big demand to make." So I'll tell you that it's like saying never forget that you're a Jew. What does a Jew mean? A Jew means *Kabolas HaTorah*. It's like saying that when you wake up in the morning, when you go out in the street, when you're in business, when you're in yeshiva, when you're with your family, when you're asleep, you have to be a Jew all the time. That you understand, right? Well, being a Jew means only one thing; remember *Kabolas HaTorah*. A Jew doesn't mean anything else except *Kabolas HaTorah*. And that, you should never forget.

And not only to never forget about it, but to speak about it too. That's the mitzvah of the Torah. וְשָׁמַר לְךָ וּשְׁמַר נִפְשְׁךָ מֵאֵד פֶּן תִשְכַּח... וְהוֹדַעְתָּם – *You should make it known to your children. Speak to your children and to your grandchildren.*

So when you're an old man and your grandchildren come to your house, say, "Kinderlach, you know what happened on Shavuos? We all were assembled at Har Sinai and we heard a Voice."

The children say, "What kind of voice was it?"

"Kinderlach, I cannot tell you exactly. But it was a sweet and dreadful voice. It was so sweet that נִפְשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ – *our souls went out when He spoke* (Shir Hashirim 5:6, Shabbos 88b). We all fell down on the floor when we heard that voice. *Malachim* had to come and revive us! Ooh, was that an experience." Tell that to the children.

It's a mitzvah to think about standing at Har Sinai. Once in history, at least two million people were standing in front of Har Sinai and they heard the Voice of Hashem. נִפְשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ – *When He spoke, they fainted from happiness. They were delirious. They fell down on the floor in happiness. They had to be revived. They got up; they were groggy, they were intoxicated with happiness – נִפְשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ.*

הֲשָׁמַע עַם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים – *Was there ever such a thing that a nation should hear such a sweet and dreadful voice?! (ibid. 4:33). They fainted; they died and had to be revived! It was a tremendous excitement, an unbearable experience; and yet it was the most happy and joyous experience ever.*

You have to speak about that to your children more than you speak about anything else.

About Matan Torah the Rambam in his Iggeres Taiman says, גְּדֹלְהוּ עַל כָּל גְּדוּלָה – *Make this the most important of all great things to speak about.* You have to speak about Matan Torah. Speak to your wife about Matan Torah. She should speak to the children about Matan Torah. Get excited about it. Make that bigger than the biggest things. Don't get excited over small things. Here, people are getting excited, let's say, over the news of a *dybuk* in Eretz Yisroel; about water coming out of a rock, about a fish that talks.

People's minds are on small things. What's so important? What difference does it make? *This is what is important, thinking about Har Sinai!*

"I don't forget about it," you'll say. "Of course, I wouldn't forget about Matan Torah." But you're not remembering it.

So why not get busy now, on Shavuot? You're walking around in the street and you're trying to recall *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, how once in history the Jewish nation all stood together – the entire Jewish nation! They weren't scattered over the world! All together in one place! And they all swore – *mushba v'oimed mei'Har Sinai* – they swore, "We're going to keep the Torah." It was a moment of the greatest excitement! And even Hakadosh Baruch Hu was excited *kavyachol*. He said, מִי יִתֵּן וְהָיָה לְבַבְכֶם זֶה – *If only this kind of heart that they have today would that would it be forever!* Hashem was excited at that great moment!

And therefore as much as possible we have to keep that scene in our minds. The Rambam says that every Jew should make that the greatest of all things to talk about. If you can't find somebody to talk to, think about it. That glorious one day in history! קוֹל אֱלֹקִים – *Did a nation ever hear the Voice of Hashem* בְּאִשְׁר שָׁמְעַתְּ אֹתָהּ – *like you did hear.* A glorious experience! Never before or after!

He Loves the Loyal

— Q: —

When we *lain Rus* on Shavuot what's one of the lessons we should learn from that story?

We learn how great is the *middah* of loyalty. Here's a queer situation. There's a Jewish woman, Naomi, whose husband decided to go away from Eretz Yehuda because there was a famine. And so they went to Eretz Moav to wait until the famine would end in Eretz Yehuda.

In the meantime, the husband died and you know, when the father dies, it's like a *sefer* where one of the covers falls off. The cover falls off, so the pages start falling out too. So now his two sons took gentile wives.

And finally Hakadosh Baruch Hu took away the two sons because they married gentile women and they died and now she was left alone with those two women.

Then she heard that in Eretz Yehuda **כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת עַמּוֹ** – *that Hashem had pity on His people*, **לָתַת לָהֶם לֶחֶם** – *He gave them food once more (1:6)*. So she said, "I'm going back to Yehuda."

Everybody knows the story, how these two young women were so much in love with her that they said, "We're going with you." And they both set out together to join her.

And she said, "Please, don't go with me. Stay here. It won't be good for you. You'll be strangers. Go back to your people, to your father and mother. Stay here in Moav."

But they didn't want to listen. And as they walked on the road, Naomi was begging them to go back and she was arguing with them. You can picture that.

Nobody was present except Hakadosh Baruch Hu and He was watching the proceedings. These three lonely women were on the country road, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu was listening. And finally Orpah broke down and she wept and she kissed Naomi and she turned back to Moav.

Then Naomi turned to Rus and said, "Look what the other one did. You do the same. Go back home."

And Rus said, "Nothing doing. Nothing doing!"

And Naomi starts begging her. Rus says, "Nothing doing! **אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי** – *Wherever you go I'm going to go*, **בְּאֲשֶׁר תָּמוּתִי אָמוּת** – *I'll die wherever you die*, **עַמִּי עַמִּי** – *your people will be my people!*"

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu saw that Rus was exercising her free will, her *bechirah* in the *middah* of *ne'emanus*, of *emunah*, loyalty, that she wanted to stay together with Naomi no matter what, so Hakadosh Baruch Hu pushed her tongue to say one more thing. And she added, “וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ – Your G-d is my G-d.” Ooh wah! That’s already something else! That was *siyata diShmaya*. Hashem said, “I’m going to give you a gift,” and her tongue said these words. That was Hashem’s gift to Rus, her *schar* for being a *ne’eman*, for being loyal.

And we know what happened. When Moshiach will come, he won’t deny that he came from his *Bubbeh* Rus.

And it’s only because of the *middah* of loyalty that she was *zocheh* to it. That’s a big lesson for us, that Hashem loves those who are loyal. That’s why we say those words in the *Akdamos* on *Shavuos*: בְּרָם בְּאֵמֶתְנוּתָא – *but because of our emunah*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu despite everything, because of our *emunah*, that’s why *sof kol sof* He’s going to give us all the things. He’s describing *Olam Haba*, the happiness of the *tzaddikim* in *Olam Haba*, and he says, בְּרָם בְּאֵמֶתְנוּתָא – it’s all because of *emunah*, תְּקוּף הַמְּנוּתָא – because of the strength of their loyalty.

We have to know that this is the *middah* because of which the *Am Yisroel* is a nation forever. We belong to Hashem forever. וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בְּה' – *Because you’re loyal to Me*, because you’ll stick to Me, חַיִּים בְּלָכֶם – *you’ll be forever*. It’s a covenant, a *bris* Hashem made. If you’re *daveik* in me, then just as I am forever, then you’ll be forever too. Because of your loyalty to Me, because you never forget what happened that day at *Har Sinai* when you became My people forever, that’s why you will all be with Me forever – in this world and the next.

Entering the Summer

— Q: —

Now that we finished counting the Omer and we had Shavuos and we already received the Torah, so what should be the focus of our service of Hashem from after Shavuos until Rosh Hashana?

— A: —

Now *rabbosai*, I’m going to tell you something that I always say. The happiest season of the year is the summertime; yes, the good old

summertime. There's nothing like the days of summer and so, let's learn to enjoy life right now.

The summertime is a pleasure! What a great blessing it is! Look how much there is to enjoy in the summertime. You're getting vitamins free of charge. The sun is a vitamin dispensary. Walk out in the street and the sun is showering vitamins on you. In the wintertime there are clouds and you don't always get the vitamins you need. Sometimes you have to take extra vitamin pills. But in the summertime, you get all you want. And so, *baruch Hashem* for the summer.

When you walk out in the street, don't complain, "Oh, it's a hot day." Don't be a fool. Say, "Thank You Hashem for the heat!" Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving you so much energy from the sun and it's free of charge. Millions of tons of horsepower energy are pouring onto this earth and it's causing the earth to become enriched and the fruits to develop. In the summertime fruits are plentiful. The tasty apples are coming! Ah! Red apples and luscious cherries and plums and peaches! They're plentiful in the summer and the prices go down in all the fruit stores. Now you're living!

So, this person asks, "What's the service of Hashem from Shavuot until Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur?" The service is singing to Hashem! Practice singing to Hashem! What do you think was the *avodas Hashem* that we were *mekabel* when we accepted the Torah on Har Sinai? The most important service of Hashem is gratitude to Hashem!

So now you know! From Shavuot until Rosh Hashanah that's our *avodah*; we have to get busy singing and thanking Hashem for the manifold benefits He's giving to us. That's the very great service in the summertime. It doesn't mean you have to stop learning. We can continue learning and doing Torah and *mitzvos*. Nevertheless, the *avodah* of gratitude for the summertime – the happiness of the summertime and thankfulness for the summertime – that's a very important *avodah* to be busy with after *Kabolas HaTorah*.

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The Power of Yearning For Shabbos

The Power of Yearning For Shabbos

“And on the sixth day they prepared what they brought.” (Shemos) The *pasuk* describes how B’nei Yisrael in the *midbar* prepared the *mann* that fell on Friday, making it ready for Shabbos use. Chazal say this *pasuk* is more than that, it is a mitzvah for every Jew in every place and time to prepare for Shabbos. (Bei’ur Halachah 243)

We tap into Shabbos’s great *kedusha* by preparing tasty food for the day: fish, meat, cake etc. Is this all we need to do in order to reach the holiness of the sacred day of Shabbos? Prepare some fish and shine our shoes?

In truth, preparing fish alone will not enable us to attain the greatness and holiness of Shabbos. Neither will anything else. This is because *Shabbos Kodesh* is a special gift from Hashem. And there is only one way to get it: **to want it!** It is given to anyone who desires it and truly yearns for it. And someone who puts in time and effort to prepare special food to honor the Shabbos is showing that he eagerly anticipates its arrival. He is looking forward to it. Shabbos is on his mind, and that is why he is making a big deal preparing for it. It is said about Shammai Hazakein: When he found a choice animal, he would say: “This one is for Shabbos.” When he found a better one, he would designate the second one for Shabbos and eat the first one. (Beitzah 16a) His preparation for Shabbos was always on the forefront of his mind.

An effective way to strengthen our yearning for Shabbos is thinking about it well before it arrives. There is even a special halacha to remember Shabbos on all six preceding days.

We fulfill this mitzvah every day in Shachris when we recite the *shir shel yom* and say: “*Ha-yom yom rishon b’Shabbos*, Today is the first day in the count towards Shabbos,” and so on each day. All week long we remember Shabbos!

We should start getting ready on Sunday, because on Shabbos, we will have a guest - Hashem. On Monday, we should be occupied with thoughts of Shabbos. We should be thinking about Shabbos as much as possible. On Thursday, we should hurry to prepare. On Friday, we should think to ourselves, “Shabbos is almost here!”

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QUESTION

Today when we hear about intermarriage they say that's the worst thing that could happen to the Jewish people. Yet it seems to infer from the story of Rus that we could get a great prize; that's how we got *malchus Beis Dovid*?

ANSWER

If someone will dive off a boat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean during a hurricane, let's say, and he'd be submerged for a minute or two and then he'd come up holding a casket of jewels, so therefore would you say that there's any virtue of diving off the liner in the middle of a hurricane in the Atlantic Ocean? No. It's just his dumb luck. That's all. You don't dive off to look for jewels in the middle of a raging ocean! And anybody who would be happy with an intermarriage because of the hope that it will bring back a jewel, probably will bring up an oyster.

And so in this case it was *min haShamayim*. It was rigged up. It was one of the mysteries of history that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had planned and that's why it's written in *Megillas Rus*. But nobody else should attempt to emulate Machlon v'Chilyon because what happened to them will happen to him; and if he won't be destroyed in this world, he'll be destroyed in the World to Come. He's much better off if he's destroyed in this world. At least he'll have the Next World. And anybody who even countenance that – it means if he's even friendly to a relative who has an intermarriage among his children *chalilah* – then that person who is friendly towards them is also an accomplice and is going to lose out. The only way to deal with such a situation is the way Naomi dealt with it while her sons were still alive. That's hostility and opposition.

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