

# *Torah Wellsprings*

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Bamidbar*

*Shavuot*



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Torah Wellsprings - Bamidbar - Shavuot

## Flags

This week's parashah discusses the *degalim*, the four flags whose banners waved over the camps of Bnei Yisrael (דגל מוחנה יהודה, דגל מוחנה ראובן, דגל מוחנה אפרים, דגל מוחנה דן - Bamidbar 2:2-10).

The Midrash (*Tanchuma* 14) states, "When Hashem came to Har Sinai, He came with 22,000 *malachim*, and the *malachim* were divided into groups, and each group had their flag. When the Jewish nation saw that, they said, 'I wish we could also have flags like them... I wish Hashem would show His love to us [and give us flags].' ... It states (*Tehillim* 20), 'נרננה בישועתך ובשם אלקינו נדגיל', 'Let us sing praises for Your salvation, and in the name of Hashem, let us raise our flags.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'כל ימלא ה' כל משאלותיך', 'Hashem grants all your desires. You desired flags; I swear I will do your will.' Hashem immediately demonstrated His love for Bnei Yisrael and said to Moshe, 'Make flags for them because they are yearning for them... In the future, I will redeem them in the merit of the flags.'"

From this Midrash we see that the flags had profound meaning and importance. But what is their significance?<sup>1</sup>

Tzaddikim explain that the flags remind us of everyone's differences and how each individual serves Hashem in his unique way. The *malachim* are divided into four

groups, and have four flags, which indicates that each camp of *malachim* serves Hashem differently. Malach Michael's camp serves Hashem with love, Malach Gavriel's camp serves Hashem with fear, and so on. The Jewish nation, too, was divided into four camps and had four flags to imply that each division served Hashem in its unique way.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the four groups of *klal Yisrael*, each individual Yid serves Hashem in his own unique manner. He has his mission, which only he can accomplish.

The first Rashi of the parashah states, מתוך, "Because Hashem loves the Jewish nation, He counts them all the time." The counting demonstrates that no Yid is superfluous. Each Yid is counted and needed. Everyone has something new to add to Hashem's service that no one else can do.

It states (1:2) שאו את ראש, "Raise the sum..." Or, as translated literally, "Raise the heads." Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l explains that some people feel they aren't worthy to receive the Torah. They think that they aren't important. When the Jewish nation was counted, the greatest tzaddik was counted as "1," and the simplest Yid was counted as "1". שאו את ראש, this elevated the heads and the spirit of the Jewish nation to know that no matter who they are, they are unique to Hashem.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Rebbe Yitzchak of Radvil zt'l (Or Yitzchak) writes, "The Torah tells us that the nation had flags to help each tribe know where their camp is located, just as an army uses flags so the soldiers locate their camp. But it can't be that this is what the flags are about." There must be a deeper meaning to the flags.

2. The Shelah HaKadosh (*Bamidbar*) writes in the name of the Arizal, "Just as there are four camps of *malachim* in heaven, similarly, there are four camps within Klal Yisrael, and each has its *minhagim*. They are, ספרד, אשכנז, קטלוניא, איטליא, the Spanish, German, Catalanian, and Italian Jews. Each should remain with their flag and keep their traditions." The Shelah concludes, אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, each of these communities has valid and authentic customs and approaches to serving Hashem.

3. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l said that counting the Jewish nation turned them into a דבר שבמנין, a counted item, which cannot be batel (annulled). This reveals the greatness of each Yid, whose importance cannot become batel.

The Torah tells us the count of Levi's family. There were 2630 men (between the ages of thirty and fifty) in Gershon's family, 3200 men in Merari's family, and 2750 in Kehos's family. Then the Torah gives us the subtotal: (*Bamidbar* 4:48), ויהיו פקדיהם שמנת אלפים וחמש מאות ושמנים, "Their tally was: 8580."

The Midrash (*Naso* 6:10) states, "After Kehos was counted separately, and Gershon was counted separately, and Merari was counted separately, the Torah combines them. This is so we shall know that Hashem loves them all the same."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Pirka* 96) explains, "Kehos's service was more exalted than Gershon's and Merari's (because Kehos carried the *aron* and the other utensils of the Mishkan). Gershon's service (to carry the sheets of the Mishkan) was more exalted than Merari's (who carried the wooden walls of the Mishkan). Nevertheless, when Merari's family did the service incumbent upon them, it was as special before Hakadosh Baruch Hu as Kehos's service..." The Torah counts them all together to tell us that they were all equal in importance before Hashem.

The Bnei Yissaschar concludes, "Don't be jealous of your fellow man, not even in *avodas Hashem*. Be happy with the mission Hashem gave you..."

The Bnei Yissaschar proves this from the words we say in Shacharis, הַאֲלֹפִים וְחַיֵּי הַקֶּדֶשׁ, "The *Ofanim* and the holy *Chayos* rise up toward the *Seraphim*..." *Ofanim* and *Chayos Hakadosh* are types of *malachim*, and an even higher level of *malachim* are the *Seraphim*. We say מַתְנַשְּׂאִים, *le'umot sh'raim*, which means the *malachim* (הַאֲלֹפִים) feel equal to the *malachim* of higher levels (הַשְּׂרָפִים) because they know they are doing the service that is incumbent on them.

Chazal say, איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו, "Who is wealthy? It is someone happy with his portion." The *Tiferes Shlomo* zt'l and the *Sfas Emes* zt'l both explain that this also means to be satisfied with one's spiritual portion. This is the portion Hashem prepared for you, so be happy with it. This is the way Hashem wants you to serve Him.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to know that everyone has his part and portion in the Torah, his specialty, where he is better than all others.<sup>5</sup>

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4. There is a halachic discussion about whether the brachah of *Elokai neshamah* should be recited before or after *birchas haTorah*. The *Chidushei HaRim* zt'l recommends saying it after *birchas haTorah* because the theme of *Elokai neshamah* is thanking Hashem for life, and without Torah study, life has no purpose.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l was sent to a Siberian prison, and one morning, he couldn't bring himself to say *Modeh Ani*. He asked himself, "I can't study Torah or perform mitzvos here. So why should I praise Hashem for returning my *neshamah*?" He felt his life had no purpose if he couldn't study Torah and perform mitzvos.

Then, he told himself that he could serve Hashem by believing in Him. This was a great *avodah* because it meant not doubting Hashem's ways and why he had to suffer so much. When he realized he could serve Hashem in this manner, he immediately said *Modeh Ani* with joy and thanked Hashem for another day of life, another day to serve Hashem with the only thing he had left: his *emunah*.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky related this episode to the *Rayatz* of Lubavitz zt'l, who replied, "The entire Siberia was worthwhile so that you should say those words."

This story is an example of recognizing the greatness of our *avodas Hashem* when we carry out our mission, even when it isn't the *avodas Hashem* that we had envisioned.

5. Reb Mendel Futerfas zt'l spoke about his imprisonment in Siberia. The warden forbade the prisoners from playing cards. (There was no reason for this other than to break the prisoner's spirits.) Nevertheless, some prisoners smuggled in a deck of cards and played in their barracks.

Once, the guards heard that there were cards in prison, so they came to the barracks and searched all over

It states in the *Aseres HaDibros* (Shemos 20:6), לא תשא שם ה' אלקיך לשווא כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא שמו לשווא, "Don't carry Hashem's name in vain because Hashem will not forgive those who carry His name in vain." The Netziv zt'l explains that this *pasuk* refers to the unique talents that Hashem grants each individual. Some sing well, some excel in teaching Torah, and others are talented in other ways. The talent is שם ה', Hashem's name. The Torah says that one mustn't carry his talent לשווא, for no purpose. כי לא ינקה ה' את אשר ישא שמו לשווא, Hashem won't forgive him for doing so.

The Netziv (*Haamek Davar* 15:39) writes, "If someone will ask you: Which approach of Torah study should I follow, and which mitzvos should I focus on the most? Reply (*Koheles* 11:9), והלך בדרך לבך, 'Follow your heart.' The place where your heart pulls you is a sign that your mazal understands this is a good path for your soul."<sup>6</sup>

This rule also applies to approaches in Torah study. There are many approaches to Torah study, and the heart's pull to a particular section of Torah is a sign that Hashem wants him to excel in that area.

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for the cards but found nothing.

This is what happened: One of the prisoners was an expert at pickpocketing. He knew how to take a wallet out of another person's pocket without the person feeling anything. This time, instead of picking a pocket, he used his talents to place the deck of cards into the pocket of the guard searching the barracks.

The guard looked for the cards under the beds, inside the drawers, and in everyone's pockets, failing to realize it was in his own pocket. On his way out, the pickpocket slid the cards back out of the guard's pocket.

The nimshal is that people think their fortunes are elsewhere. They want to copy others because they believe others know how to serve Hashem better. But this isn't necessarily true. Each person has his own treasure in his pocket. All he must do is discover it and master it.

6. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 118:) states, תיתי לי דקיימת ג' סעודות שבת, "I deserve reward because I keep the three meals of Shabbos."

Reb Yehudah said, "I deserve reward because I daven with *kavanah*."

Rav Hunah (son of Rav Yehoshua) said, "I deserve reward because I never walk four *amos* without a head-covering."

Rav Sheshes said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tefillin" (he wouldn't walk four *amos* without tefillin – *Rashi*).

Reb Nachman said, "I deserve reward because I keep the mitzvah of tzitzis" (he wouldn't walk four *amos* without tzitzis – *Rashi*).

Rav Yosef said to Rav Yosef (son of Rabba), "What was your father most cautious with?"

"It was tzitzis. Once, he was climbing a ladder, and a string of his tzitzis ripped off. He wouldn't come down until it was fixed."

Abaya said, "I deserve reward because whenever I see a talmid chacham finish a *masechta*, I make a *yom tov* for the *chachamim*."

Rava said, "I deserve reward because when a Torah scholar comes before me in a *din Torah*, I won't lie my head down until I find a merit for him."

The Netziv explains that each of these scholars chose a particular mitzvah to excel in; the mitzvah that tugged at their hearts. They understood that Hashem gave them this unique yearning and ability because that would help them excel in their service and fulfill their mission.

Shevet Mussar (1:13) teaches, "I will now tell you an idea that you should always pursue. It is life for your soul, make it a necklace around your neck: Your primary study in Torah should always be what your heart desires. If it is Gemara, let it be Gemara. If it is *drush*, let it be *drush*. If it is the path of *remez* or *kabbalah*, follow your desire. As it states (*Tehillim* 1:2), **כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חִפְצוֹ**. This hints that Torah study is dependent on **חִפְצוֹ**, what the individual wants to study. As the Arizal (*Shaar HaGilgulim* 3) teaches, "There are people who desire the realm of *pshat* in Torah. Some prefer *drush* or *remez*. Some like to study *gematriyos* or *kabbalah*. [These desires are] dependent on why he came to the world this time as a *gilgul*. In his previous lives, he completed his soul with the other parts of Torah. It isn't necessary to study all parts of Torah in every *gilgul*."

The Shevet Mussar concludes, "Don't pay attention to those who will oppose you when they see your desire to study *pshat*, or *drash*, etc., and they will ask you, 'Why are you spending all your days in this section of Torah? Why don't you study other sections?' Because you came to the world to focus on the parts of Torah you enjoy studying."

### Preparing for *Matan Torah*

Hashem said to the nation (*Shemos* 19:11) **וְהָיָה יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי**, "Be prepared for the third day." Be prepared for *matan Torah*. Every year, on Shavuos, Hashem gives us the Torah again, and we should prepare ourselves for *matan Torah*.<sup>7</sup>

The dates of Pesach and Yom Kippur are written explicitly in the Torah. Similarly, the dates of all yomim tovim are clearly stated in the Torah. The exception is Shavuos. About Shavuos, the Torah writes that it is on the fiftieth day of Sefiras Ha'Omer, but it doesn't state the date and month. Indeed, the date can vary. It depends on how many days Rosh Chodesh Iyar and Rosh Chodesh Sivan will be. Therefore, the Gemara says that Shavuos is on either the fifth, sixth, or seventh of Sivan. (In our times, Shavuos is always on the sixth of Sivan, because Iyar always has two days of *Rosh Chodesh* and Sivan one day. But when *Rosh Chodesh* was established through *Kidush HaChodesh*, with witnesses who saw the new moon, the date of Shavuos would differ.)

Shavuos is different than all yomim tovim to imply that when the Jewish nation finishes preparing for the yom tov, it is then that they will receive the Torah. Shavuos isn't dependent on a set day, but rather on the preparation of the Jewish nation.

The Kedushas Levi *zt'l* writes, "If a person merits, he will hear Hashem's voice on Shavuos when He says **אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ**. How could a person not prepare for this? Millions of *malachim* tremble before Hashem's magnificence. Certainly, us human beings... Three days of preparation isn't enough. Even if one prepares the entire year, it also isn't enough."

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

7. We can add that the *nekudos* of **וְהָיָה יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** (with a *kametz* under the ה) implies that they were *already* prepared. (Otherwise, it would state **וְהָיָה יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי**, with a *segol* under the ה, which would mean "be prepared.") The *pasuk* hints that if you do your part to prepare yourselves, Hashem promises, **וְהָיָה יוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי**, you will be prepared.

There are twenty-six *pasukim* from **בְּהוֹרֵשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי** (*Shemos* 19:1) until the *Aseres HaDibros*. The *Aseres HaDibros* itself contains thirteen *pasukim*. (The *gematriya* of 26 and 13 hints to אחד.) Notice that there are twice the number of *pasukim* on preparing for *matan Torah* than *matan Torah* itself. This hints to what chassidim say, "The preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah itself."

It states (*Shemos* 3:10) **לֵךְ וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל פָּרְעֹה**. Rabbeinu b'Chaya notes that the word **לֵךְ** has an extra ה, alluding to the five days of the beginning of Sivan, when we prepare for *matan Torah*.

The Avodas Yisrael of Kozhnitz zt'l added, "Even today, it is certainly possible to hear Hashem say the *aseres HaDibros*. This will occur if he cleans and purifies his ears, and then he can also hear it!" This means he should prepare himself for *matan Torah*.

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

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*..."

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 and the thunder, saw the lightning, and experienced everything else that took place at *matan Torah*.<sup>8</sup>

It states (Shemos 19) מִשֵּׁה יִדְבֹר, "Moshe will speak [the *Aseres HaDibros*]" - in the future tense. 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>9</sup>

### Counsels to Prepare

Now that we've seen the importance and the need to prepare for *matan Torah*, we ask, *how* does one prepare for *matan Torah*?

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

9. It states (Shemos 19:3) וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים וַיְקַרָּא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הָהָר, "Moshe went up to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain." The Or HaChaim notes that Moshe had to climb the mountain, and then Hashem called out to him. "Because holiness doesn't come to a person unless he prepares for it. As the *Zohar* states, 'An arousal from below causes an arousal Above.'" So, we must prepare for the yom tov and *matan Torah*, and then we will receive it.

In the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, we say, אֵילֹו קָרְבָנוּ לִפְנֵי הָרַ סִינִי וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה דִּינִי, "Had Hashem brought us to Har Sinai and not given us the Torah it would be enough." It seems that just being at Har Sinai had a benefit, even without *matan Torah*.

What was the benefit?

The Chida (*Leiv Dovid* 31) zt'l explains that when they stood at Har Sinai, they *prepared* to receive the Torah, and due to their preparations, they perceived the divine secrets of the Torah (even before it was actually given). Therefore, we say that for arriving at Har Sinai דִּינִי.

A person got married, and a month later, he divorced. The following year, he married again, but a month later, he divorced again. This pattern repeated itself numerous. He got married, and after a month, there was a divorce. Understandingly, with each wedding he made, fewer people attended, and the joy was less. No one expected the marriage would last for longer than a month.

One year, this man was engaged for marriage and invited everyone to come. "This time the marriage will last!" he told everyone. "Everyone should come and rejoice at my chasunah!"

"Why do you think this time will be different?" his friends asked him.

He explained that this time he prepared for the chasunah; he went to a chasan teacher to learn how to get along in marriage, and therefore, it will be different this time.

The *nimshal* is that every Shavuos, there is a chasunah. Keviyachol, Klal Yisrael marries the Torah. But the marriage doesn't last. Soon after Shavuos, he stops learning Torah. His kabalos for the new year cease. However, if he prepares for Shavuos, there is a greater chance that the marriage will endure this time, and he will remain with Torah the entire year and for years to come.

One counsel is to take on a *kabbalah tova*, a good resolution, to improve your ways in some manner. The *kabbalah tova* doesn't have to be hard, just something that fits your needs. We can learn this idea from the word **וספרתם לכם**. Find the *kabbalah* and service that is **לכם** at your level, and you will grow from there. *Mitzvah goreres mitzvah*, one *mitzvah* draws others. You will be surprised at how high you have risen from that small *kabbalah tova* in a short time.<sup>10</sup>

Another way to ready ourselves for *matan Torah* is with the *mitzvah* of *sefiras ha'omer*. The *tefillah* after *sefiras ha'omer* states, **רבונו של עולם אתה צויתנו על ידי משה עבדך לספר**, **ספירת העומר כדי לטהרנו מקלפתנו ומטמאתנו**, "Master of the World, You commanded us through Moshe, Your servant, to count *sefiras ha'omer* to purify us from our *kelipos* and our *tumah*."<sup>11</sup>

But what should a person do if almost all the days of *sefiras ha'omer* have already passed and he didn't take advantage of these special days? The Chidushei HaRim replied

that everything could be accomplished on the final day. It is never too late. On the last day of *sefiras ha'omer* you can free yourself from all your *kelipos* and be prepared for *matan Torah*.

This is hinted at in the *pasuk*, **עד מחרת, השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום**, "Until the morrow of the seventh week, count fifty days." This implies that on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer* you can count *all* fifty days. On the last day, you can acquire the purity you need to prepare for *matan Torah*.

But some people haven't taken advantage of *sefiras ha'omer*, and not even the final day. What will be with them? How will they be pure for *matan Torah*?

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* says there is no need for despair. It isn't too late. You can amend everything you need on Shavuot itself. The *poof* is that it states about Shavuot (*Vayikra* 23:21), **וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קודש יהיה לכם**. This *pasuk* implies that even **בעצם היום הזה** in the midst of Shavuot, you can make a

## 10. Consider the following *mashal*:

A *talmid chacham* enters a shoe store, looking to buy a pair of shoes, size eight. The generous store owner replied, "You're a *talmid chacham*, so I want to give you extra. I'll give you a size ten."

The man replied, "Your generosity doesn't help me. A size ten shoe will slip off my foot. I need a size eight."

Similarly, there are great, impressive *kabbalos* that you can take on, but if they are beyond your abilities, you will fail. Rather, find something you think you can do. Even if it seems small, it is really a lot.

**11.** A town had a custom that a *chasan* should have two silver cups filled with gold coins the night of his wedding. This was a good omen, a sign that the new couple would have wealth in their married life. If the *chasan* was poor and didn't have silver cups and gold coins, he would borrow them from others for the night of the *chasunah* and return them after the *chasunah*.

Once, a *chasan* didn't have the two cups with coins. He went to a wealthy person (whom he knew was a miser) and said, "I have one silver cup with gold coins, and I need the other one. So, I am only asking for one silver becher filled with gold coins."

The wealthy man replied, "It is just for a good omen. So, I recommend you place a mirror next to your cup, and it will appear like you have two cups with coins."

The *chasan* replied, "When I told you I have one cup with gold coins, I meant I have a mirror. I am lacking the other cup."

The *nimshal* is for Shavuot. It is called Shavuot, weeks, because the *yom tov* is like a mirror that mirrors everything we did to prepare during the weeks of *sefiras ha'omer*.

decision of מקרא קודש, that you will live a life of holiness, and that will be sufficient.

The Arugas HaBosem writes, "Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Jewish people would be on a very low level in *galus*, and they won't be able to properly prepare themselves to be fitting to receive the light of the *yom tov* of *matan Torah*. He yearned that each Yid should experience the light of the King's face that shines on Shavuos. Therefore, Moshe added another day on his own [and the Torah was given a day later – on the fifty-first day] *ha'omer*. If Shavuos would immediately follow *sefiras ha'omer*, it would indicate that receiving the light of *matan Torah* is impossible without keeping the *sefirah* properly. But since Shavuos didn't directly follow the *sefirah*, it shows they are not dependent on each other. Even when the Jewish nation cannot purify themselves properly, the light of *mttan Torah* will not be lost from them because of that."

Another counsel to prepare for *matan Torah* is to *study* Torah! Even if it is hard, try hard and push yourself. This will prepare you for *matan Torah*.<sup>12</sup>

Reb Shmuel Salant *zt'l* would often repeat the following story:

There were two brothers, one was a wealthy businessman, and the other was a scholarly but poor talmid chacham. The businessman would periodically give money to his brother so that he could devote himself to studying Torah.

One day, the wealthy man said, "Since I am supporting you, it would be proper that we sign a Yissachar/Zevulun agreement so that I can receive half of your reward in Gan Eden.

The scholar replied that he wanted to ask Reb Chaim Volozhiner before signing such a document.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner told him he could sign the document, but he should tell his wealthy brother that he was receiving half of the reward even without the document. Furthermore, Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* said, "Tell your brother that although he will receive reward with you, it won't be divided fifty-fifty. Your reward will be greater because you study Torah מתוך הדחק, amidst poverty and hardship. Your brother can receive the reward of Torah study, but it isn't מתוך הדחק for him."

Perhaps we can say that there are different kinds of תורה מתוך הדחק. There is studying Torah when one is financially poor, studying Torah when one isn't in the mood to do so, and studying Torah when one doesn't realize that his Torah study is precious. (For example, when a person only has a short period of time available to learn). When one studies Torah at these times, it is תורה מתוך הדחק because he forces himself to study Torah. Therefore, his reward is very great.

Reb Shmuel Salant would repeat this story to emphasize the immense reward of those who study Torah מתוך הדחק, when it is hard.<sup>13</sup>

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**12.** We don't eat matzah before Pesach, so we should eat matzah at the Seder with an appetite. The Sfas Emes *zt'l* asked why we don't do the same before Shavuos. Why don't we stop learning Torah before Shavuos so that on Shavuos, we will be hungry for Torah?!

The answer is that Torah is different from all other pleasures. One doesn't become tired of it. On the contrary, the more one learns, the more he loves the Torah. If he learns Torah before Shavuos, he will be even more thirsty for Torah on Shavuos.

**13.** Chazal (*Sotah* 21:) say, עבירה מכבה מצוה ואין עבירה מכבה תורה, "An *aveirah* extinguishes the reward of a mitzvah, but an *aveirah* can never extinguish the reward for studying Torah."

The Rebbe of Sokolov *zt'l* explains that this is because mitzvos are performed without toil. Even a goy, *lehavdil*, can hold an *esrog* in his hands. It isn't hard. Therefore, an *aveirah*, which was also performed

The truth is that the only way to acquire Torah is through toil. By relaxing and studying nonchalantly, one will never fully acquire Torah.

Chazal (*Megillah* 6:) say יגעתי ומצאתי תאמין, "If one says, 'I toiled in Torah and I succeeded in Torah,' believe him. But if he says לא יגעתי ומצאתי, 'I didn't toil in Torah, and nevertheless I attained Torah' אל תאמין, don't believe him" because it is impossible to acquire Torah without toil.

It states (*Tehillim* 116) האמנתי כי אדבר אני עניתי מאד, The Maharshah explains, האמנתי, believe me, אני עניתי מאד, כי אדבר, when I say, אני עניתי מאד, that I toiled a lot in Torah. אני אמרתי בחפזי, but if I say I studied quickly, without toil, and nevertheless I acquired Torah, כל האדם כוונ, don't believe me because it is impossible to acquire Torah without effort.

The Yismach Moshe (*Tefillah LaMoshe, Tehillim* 119, 162) asks that the words יגעתי ומצאתי "I toiled and I found" don't seem to go together, because a מציאה is something one finds when he doesn't expect it, and when he isn't looking for it!

The Yismach Moshe answers that when one toils in one section of Torah, he will be granted understanding in other areas of Torah.

### ***Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah***

Reb Avraham HaMalach asked his students not to come to him during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*. He explained that he needed those days to study Torah by himself.

His students didn't obey, and they came to their Rebbe during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because they yearned to hear his *divrei Torah*. The Rebbe locked his door and didn't let them in. He explained, "One's success in Torah for the entire year depends upon one's *hasmadah* in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Old Yerushalayimer Yidden still remember that the stores of Yerushalayim would close at midday during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, so the shopkeepers could spend the rest of the day immersed in Torah.

In Poland, the batei midrashim were filled two weeks before Shavuos.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis medresh in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and didn't see the beis medresh full of people. He said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim* (the Jewish communities of Europe from before the War)?" He remembered how it used to be in Poland and mourned that it wasn't anymore.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story: Once, in Poland, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, someone came into the beis medresh and watched with envy the passion for Torah that was going on there. He turned to the wall and cried because he wished to be like them. But unlike many who just pity themselves and go on with their lives, this person acted upon his aspirations. He took the first Gemara he found, sat down, and was immediately engrossed in Torah.

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without toil, can extinguish the reward of a mitzvah. But Torah is acquired through toil. An *aveirah*, performed without toil, can't extinguish Torah acquired with toil. Therefore, the merit of Torah remains eternally.

The *Zohar* (vol.3 28:) states, "Although an *aveirah* can extinguish the reward of a mitzvah, the mitzvos that *chachamim* perform are never extinguished."

The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* explains that this is because the *chachamim* perform mitzvos with toil. Even when the mitzvah is easy to perform, their minds are toiling, delving into the deep thoughts associated with the mitzvah. Thus, their mitzvos are performed with toil, and an *aveirah* can't put out its light.

That moment changed his life. He experienced the sweetness of the Torah and became a *masmid* and a great *talmid chacham*.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zt'l had one bookshelf on which he kept sefarim written with *ruach hakadosh*. That man's *sefer* was stored on the shelf.

A daughter of a Lelover chassid was engaged to marry the son of Rebbe Elazar Mendel zt'l, the Lelover Rebbe of Yerushalayim. The chassid was overjoyed that his daughter was to marry into this prestigious family. Still, his wife was upset that the Rebbe's family wasn't sending gifts to the kallah as was customary. Gifts were being sent to the chassan, but the kallah received nothing in return. (Primarily, this was because Rebbe Elazar Mendel gave away every penny he had to tzedakah to support the poor of Yerushalayim – no money was available for gifts.)<sup>14</sup> The chassid's wife urged her husband to ask the Rebbe to send a gift. The chassid promised that he would do so, but feeling uncomfortable raising the issue with his Rebbe, he kept pushing it off.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to bring up the issue, but he was always in awe in the Rebbe's presence and couldn't bring himself to discuss it.

During *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the Rebbe's custom was to daven *Maariv* and count *sefiras ha'omer* at the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik, and then go to the Kosel haMaaravi to daven some more. The chassid planned to accompany the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "You must speak with the Rebbe tonight. I've asked you

many times, and you keep pushing it off. This time, you must act. Otherwise," she warned, "don't come home."

Her husband knew that this was more than just a threat.

So, that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he waited for the Rebbe to open the door, he thought to himself, "My wife is right, after all. The Rebbe is a holy man, but why doesn't he send a gift to our daughter? Even a small pin would suffice. Why can't the Rebbe give our daughter a small pin?"

The Rebbe answered the door and said, "*Mechuten shlita!* I didn't think that during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, you'd be going around with pins in your head."

He was astounded at the Rebbe's *ruach hakadosh*. He went home and told his wife, "Our *mechutan* has *ruach hakadosh*. Don't bother me anymore about gifts, or I will tell you not to come home."

### Annual Matan Torah

As we wrote above, every year we receive the Torah again.

The Chasam Sofer (ד"ה בשבועותיכם Toras Moshe) teaches that Shavuot is different than all other yomim tovim. "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...). Matan Torah, however, isn't only a memory, but a new reality. Today, we received the Torah from Hashem yisbarach."<sup>15</sup>

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14. Rebbe Elazar Mendel of Lelov zt'l once received a large sum of money to distribute for *kimcha d'Pischa* to help the poor of Yerushalayim for Pesach. He distributed every penny without keeping anything for himself. Reb Elazar was poor, himself. He would have benefitted greatly from the *kimcha d'Pischa* but, instead, he gave everything away to others. That Pesach, the Tzanzer Rav zt'l praised Rebbe Elazar Mendel's seder. (The Tzanzer Rav saw through *ruach hakadosh* that Rebbe Elazar Mendel's Seder shone brightly.) Reb Elazar Mendel merited this because he gave everything away to others.

15. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe) writes, אבל מתן תורה הוא יום מתן תורה בעצמו, אינו זכר למה שהיה, כי היא כלה חדשה כשעה ראשונה, "But matan Torah is an actual matan Torah. It isn't a commemoration of what was. She is a new kalah, like the first time, and today receives the Torah from Hashem Yisbarach."

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l taught: Shavuos is only one day, unlike Pesach and Succos, which are for seven or eight days. This is an indication of its holiness. All seven and eight days are concentrated into one day of Shavuos.

Reb Eliyah Roth zt'l related that one year, on 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* is in plural, and that's why he wanted to say *Naaseh v'Nishma* together with him.)

It states (Shemos 20:15) וירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחוק, "The people saw and trembled, and they stood from afar." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l explains that the Yidden at Har Sinai saw (through ruach hakodesh) that the future generations will be ויעמדו מרחוק, "standing from afar," which means they will be at very low spiritual levels. Nevertheless, they, too, will accept the Torah. וירא העם וינעו, "The people saw this [the kabbalas haTorah of the future generations] and trembled." They were in awe of the future generation's devotion to the Torah, even on their low levels.

We say in the brachah on the haftarah, ודבר אחד מדברך אחר לא ישוב ריקם, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty." The Aruch HaShulchan (284) explains, "The Torah writes stories that happened years ago, and it sometimes seems that there is no purpose in writing them. 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 envision ourselves leaving Mitzrayim in every generation. 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, אחר, the episodes of the past, לא ישוב ריקם, don't think they are irrelevant today, because they continue to happen to this day."

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 hadn'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).

The Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) tells that before the Torah was given on Har Sinai, there was a ruach (spirit) called *Tavach* (which means Slaughter), which had the power to harm the Jewish nation at that time. Had the Jewish nation not accepted the Torah, this spirit would have slaughtered them and spilled 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*." We don't want to let out blood at a time when the spirit *Tavach* is present and tries to cause harm, *chalilah*.

The question is that the dangerous spirit wanted to harm the Jewish nation three thousand years ago when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai. Why should we worry about it today?

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

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; there is matan Torah each year!

We usually 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 both 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 shouldn'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 on Shavuos morning, represents purifying oneself to receive the Torah. This *tevilah* must also be without a *chatzitzah*. Therefore, one may cut both his finger and toe nails on the same day, on *erev Shavuos*.

It states (Vayikra 19:19) ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד. Rashi explains that the blast of the shofar became consistently stronger and stronger. "When humans blow a shofar, the longer one blows, the weaker the sound becomes. But here, it became stronger and stronger." Hinted in these words is that the *matan Torah* of every year becomes stronger and greater than the previous years.<sup>16</sup>

### Tefillos

Reb Mendel of Raminov *zt'l* said that in the desert, from Rosh Chodesh Sivan until *matan Torah*, the Yidden were saying the

*brachah* of *ahavah rabba*, begging Hashem, והאר עינינו בתורתך, "Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah." This is how they prepared for *matan Torah*.

The Baal Shem Tov Hakadosh *zt'l* taught that if Klal Yisrael will say the *brachah* of אהבת עולם with *kavanah*, and not rush through it, the *galus* will be shortened and Moshiach will come. Some batei midrashim follow this counsel every day. אהבת עולם can take them around five minutes. Also, on Shabbos, many batei midrashim say אהבת עולם in this manner. On Shavuot, many communities do

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This source is another indication that each year we become pure, and each year we receive the Torah again.

**16.** The Shevet Mussar (34:19) discusses what one should have in mind when he listens to the Torah reading in beis medresh. (The Shevet Mussar refers to the entire year, not only Shavuot.) He writes, "Imagine that the *bimah* is Har Sinai, and you are receiving the Torah on Har Sinai. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His *malachim* are present, Moshe Rabbeinu is the *baal koreh*, and the entire nation is standing around the mountain to hear Torah from his mouth."

Certainly, we should have this thought when we read the *Aseres HaDibros* on Shavuot (and when we read parashas Yisro and parashas Vaeschanan).

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.'"

We read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: Shavuot, Shabbos *parashas Yisro*, and Shabbos *parashas Vaeschanan*. The Beis Avraham explains this with a *mashal* of a very sick person who needed a dose of powerful medications. But he was frail, and the strong medication would harm him. So, his doctor divided 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 minds. Therefore, the impact is divided into three so that the Jewish nation could accept it.

When a father speaks to his son, it is *derech eretz* that the son should face his father. If he turns around and faces the other direction, that is *chutzpah*. Therefore, when the Torah is read, we should listen with *yiras Shamayim* and pay attention to the words. If we turn our minds to other matters, that is *chutzpah*.

We should want to receive the Torah. There is a *mashal* of a person from a third world country who came to a developed country, and saw someone tie himself in ropes, and climb up a pole. The simple man said, "I thought this is an intelligent country, but I see these people are foolish. In my country, they also tie people up in ropes. They do that to someone who breaks the laws of the land. But people of my country are intelligent. They won't tie themselves up willingly. But I see in this land, people willingly tie themselves up in ropes, to be hung!"

A local explained to him that this person isn't going to be hung. He is an electrician. He is climbing up the pole to fix a lightbulb. He is tying himself with ropes so he won't fall.

The *nimshal* is that the halachos of the Torah are limiting, and some people feel it is hard for them. The Torah doesn't allow them to go where they want, look where they want, and so on. But these limitations are for their benefit so that they won't fall. Being cautious with the laws of the Torah protects them, and a great light of *kedushah* comes from it.

so. Let us go back some years and hear about the communities of the past.

In the beis medresh of Rebbe Naftoli of Ropshitz *zt'l*, on Shavuos, the brachah אהבת עולם took several hours, and it was said with much *hislahavus*.

Once, a student of the Chasam Sofer's *zt'l* yeshiva went to Ropshitz for Shavuos. (His

wife's family lived in that area.) 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>17</sup>

When we say this brachah, and in general, when we daven for Torah, we also daven for

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17. Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* began davening early on Shavuos morning and finished late afternoon. Almost the entire day was spent in *tefillah*.

In Ropshitz, the *tefillah* was from 4:00 to 4:00. (We don't expect this from people of our time; we just ask that it shouldn't be from 4:00 to 5:00.)

One year, Shavuos, after *Shacharis*, the Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* handed 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 to understand 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. The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* told a *meshal* of a poor person who cried and pleaded with a wealthy person to help him and give him money. The rich person replied, "I don't have money with me now. Come to me tomorrow, at my workplace, at such-and-such time, and I will help you." But the poor person didn't show up. The next day, the poor person returned to the wealthy person and cried and pleaded for financial support. The wealthy man replied, "I already told you you should come to my workplace. Why didn't you come? Nu, come today." But he didn't come. This pattern repeated itself several times. After a while, the wealthy person will refuse to listen to his requests.

The *nimshal* is that we davened for Torah, and our *tefillos* were answered. Now we have to open up the Gemara and begin learning to receive the blessings Hashem sent us.

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

People standing behind the Chazon Ish's *zt'l* on Shavuos witnessed that when he reached the brachah of אהבה רבה, his entire body trembled and he broke down in tears like a young child. (Maaseh Ish vol.5 p.115).

As we wrote, saying this brachah at length is a praiseworthy deed, every day of the year. The Shinover Rav *zt'l* once asked Reb Yaakov Eliyahu Lazar *zt'l* to be with him for Shabbos HaChodesh. The Shinover Rav said, "It's very important for a chasid to be with his rebbe on Shabbos HaChodesh, since on this Shabbos one has the potential to become a new person." Reb Lazar would often speak nostalgically of that Shabbos. He said it's impossible to repeat what he saw that Shabbos. But he did reveal that when he davened אהבה רבה in *Shacharis*, he was overcome with emotion. He left the beis medresh and cried profusely from *deveikus*. He felt that he had become a new person.

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*. 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.

A wealthy fool paid a lot to get a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He proudly showed off his scholarly son-in-law to his friends, calling him "My nachas."

our children's success in Torah. Pele Yoetz (Atzeres) writes, "How good it is to pour out your heart [on Shavuos] that your children

should earn the crown of Torah, ללמוד וללמד, לשמור ולעשות, to learn Torah, to teach, and to keep the Torah."<sup>18</sup>

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

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

The friend asked, "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, 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 that, before Shavuos, everyone takes haircuts, cuts their nails, and puts on new clothing... They want to be the *chasan*...but mustn't forget that they have nothing without the kallah, the Torah.

**18.** Reb Azriel Lebovitz zy"a (rav of the Vien community in America) was the student of the gaon, the Levushei Mordechai, who was the rav of Mada, zt'l, and one of the leading poskim before the Second World War. Reb Azriel once asked his rebbe, "Why did you choose Reb Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky as your son-in-law? What was special about him over other bachurim?"

The Mada Rav told him that when his daughter reached the age of shidduchim, he traveled to Pressburg, to the yeshiva of the Shevet Sofer zt'l, to seek a shidduch for his daughter. The Shevet Mussar asked him what type of bachur he is looking for, and the Mada Rav replied, "I am looking for כליל המעלות, a perfect bachur, in all ways."

The Shevet Sofer replied, "I can't help you with that. Go to the beis medresh, there are many very special bachurim there. Choose your 'Esrog'."

The Mada Rav came to the beis medresh but didn't know how to choose. There were many young talmidei chachamim there, learning with *hasmadah*. There were many good candidates, and he couldn't decide. He did notice one bachur who sat and cried a lot.

The Mada Rav returned to the Shevet Sofer and said that he wants to stay overnight, and the next day, he would go to the beis medresh again, to find a bachur for his daughter.

The next day, he came to the beis medresh, and once again, he was surprised to see this bachur crying.

The Mada Rav felt sorry for this young man. He figured that he probably needed something, or perhaps someone had made fun of him... He asked the bachur why he was crying, and whether he could help him.

The bachur replied, "You can't help me."

The Mada Rav said, "Maybe I can help? What do you need?"

The bachur replied, "No." He doesn't need his help.

The Mada Rav went to the Shevet Sofer and asked him about the bachur crying so much.

The rosh yeshiva (the Shevet Sofer) called for this bachur and asked why he was crying. The bachur replied, "I don't need anything. It is just that I have been learning a difficult Tosfos for the past few days, and I didn't understand it properly. I can't go further and I can't sleep at night, so I cry and pray והאר עינינו בתורתך."

The Mada Rav was impressed. This was the bachur he was looking for. He said to Reb Azriel, "I was certain that he would become a great talmid chacham and be one of the gedolim."

We learn from this episode that the Mada Rav didn't choose his son-in-law solely because of his greatness in Torah. It was due to his thirst to know Torah, his determination not to give up, and his many tefillos

Don't be stingy with your words when you daven for success in Torah (and for all other areas in *ruchniyos*). Ask for a lot because Hashem can give you whatever you ask for. It states (*Tehillim* 81:11), *הִרְחֵב פִּי וְאִמְלֵאֵהוּ*, and Rashi translates these words to mean, "Open your mouth wide, ask for all your heart's desires, *וְאִמְלֵאֵהוּ*, 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, *וְאִמְלֵאֵהוּ*, 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 have good deeds."<sup>19</sup>

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>20</sup>

The Sfas Emes (תרמ"ג ד"ה וי) writes, "It states *קָרוֹב ה'... יִקְרָאֵהוּ בְּאֵמֶת*, 'Hashem is near...to those who call to Him with truth', and 'truth' is Torah, as it states (*Avodah Zarah* 4:), *אֵין אֱמֶת אֵלָּא תוֹרָה*. Therefore, every tefillah said from the midst of Torah is accepted. As Chazal (*Brachos* 31a) say, one should begin tefillah after studying Torah. Certainly, on this day of Shavuos, which the entire day is a day of Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for *tefillah*. In Megilas Rus [which we read on Shavuos], it tells about the birth of Dovid, and he was the root of tefillah."

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to succeed in Torah. In the merit of his yearning, many tefillos and tears, the Mada Rav knew he would become a gadol in Torah.

Shavuos, we have a chasunah with the Torah, *keviyachol*. Who does Hashem choose to be His "son-in-law"? Those who genuinely desire to know Torah cry, pray, and plead to Hashem to teach them His Torah.

Rebbe Shmelke of Nikolsburg *zt'l* said it is impossible to say a true chiddush in Torah unless one has kavanah when by *ahavah rabba* and *אתה חונן* in Shemonah Esrei.

A student asked, "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 repeated the chiddush, but Rebbe Shmelke showed him that the chiddush was faulty because it is impossible to say a true Torah *chiddush* without *tefillah*.

**19.** Chazal (*Mechilta Shemos* 20) say that Hashem appeared to the Jewish nation at matan Torah *בְּזֶקֶן מָלֵא רַחֲמִים*, like an elderly person full of compassion. If we think about the word *מָלֵא*, full, it reminds us of a cup filled with liquid. Every time someone lifts the cup or touches it, some liquid spills out. Similarly, on Shavuos, the day Hashem has a lot of compassion and He wants to give us a lot of Torah, every tefillah we say will shake the Kisei HaKavod, and Torah and bounty will pour down onto us.

**20.** 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 fasted, davened, and tried with all his might. 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. In just a year or two afterwards, he completed his holy sefarim, renowned throughout Klal Yisrael.

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. The moment these tefillos are answered, everything will turn around. The Chazon Ish said that a person can cross the street; when he began crossing the street, he had a weak mind, and when he reached the other side of the road, he had a wise and sharp mind, able to understand Torah. This is because that was the moment the tefillos were answered.

Shavuot is the *yahrzeit* of Dovid HaMelech. The meforshim say that Shavuot is also Dovid HaMelech's birthday since *tzaddikim* are *niftar* on their birth date. This is one of the reasons we read Megillas Rus on Shavuot. The final words of Megillas Rus are וַיֵּשֶׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת דָּוִד, "Yishai gave birth to Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on the day Dovid was born.

The Ben Ish Chai (*Bamidbar* 6) recommends saying *Tehillim* on Shavuot. He writes, "It is important to say *Tehillim* on Shavuot because Dovid HaMelech *a'h* was *niftar* on this day, and the *Tehillim* said on this day will be more accepted in heaven. Everyone should say the entire *Tehillim* on Shavuot."

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

There is an interesting contrast: Dovid HaMelech said about himself (*Tehillim* 109:4), ואני, תפילה, "I am *tefillah*." Similarly, the Gemara (*Brachos* 7:) tells us that רות is called רות because ריווהו להקדוש ברוך הוא בשירות ותשבחות, she had a descendant, Dovid HaMelech, who made Hashem satisfied and content with his songs and praises." Yet, Dovid was *niftar* on Shavuot, on a day of Torah. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* says this is to tell us that Torah and *tefillah* are connected and dependent on

one another. One can't succeed in Torah without *tefillah*, and one can't succeed in *tefillah* without Torah.

The Beis Aharon of Karlin *zt'l* once told his chassidim from Poland (who were with the Beis Aharon for *yom tov* and were about to return), "Polish Yidden love learning Torah, and so do we. The difference is that we say (*Megillah* 28:), שמעתתא בעי צילותא, which can be translated as, 'Learning Torah needs *tefillah*'. This is because it is impossible to succeed in Torah without *tefillah*. And it is impossible to daven properly without Torah."<sup>21</sup>

### Our Power of *Tefillah*

Likutei Maharich writes, "The second day of Sivan is called Yom HaMeyuchas (the day of *yichus*), and some say that it is because on this day Hashem said to the Jewish nation (*Shemos* 19:6), ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, 'You shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation.' Bnei Yisroel became *meyuchasim* on this day." This *pasuk* reveals the greatness of Bnei Yisrael, the specialness of every Yid. They are princes, a holy nation, close to Hashem, and therefore, every Yid is worthy of receiving the Torah.<sup>22</sup>

On Yom HaMeyuchas, Hashem told the nation (*Shemos* 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא, אתכם עלי, "I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Me."<sup>23</sup> The Kli Yakar writes, "Three levels are written here, one higher

21. It states (*Shemos* 18:20) והזהרתם אתם את החקים ואת התורות. The *pasuk* is speaking about teaching Torah, but *Targum Yonason* says the *pasuk* refers to *tefillah*. He translates the *pasuk* as follows: ותהודע להון ית צלותא דיעלון: בבית כנישתהון, "Teach them the *tefillah* they should say in the beis knesses." So, the *pasuk* refers to both Torah and *tefillah*. This is because Torah and *tefillah* work together.

22. האלף לך שלמה writes, "People call this day Yom HaMeyuchas because it sits between two holy days, *rosh chodesh* and *shloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Aruch HaShulchan (494:7) writes, "We don't say *tachanun* on *rosh chodesh*. The three days before Shavuot are *shloshes yemei hagbalah*, festive days. Therefore, the day in between also becomes part of the celebration. Furthermore, on this day, Moshe instructed the nation to be holy. It is therefore called Yom HaMeyuchas. Another reason is that the day of the week of Yom HaMeyuchas will also be the following Yom Kippur."

23. We can explain these words with a *mashal*:

An eagle crawled along the seashore. Someone called out, "Eagle, Eagle! Why are you crawling? You have wings. Raise your wings and fly."

than the other. The first level is **ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים**, 'I carried you on eagles' wings.' This is like a parent who carries his nursing child, representing the time that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Father, and Bnei Yisrael is the child. Afterwards, it states, **ואביא אתכם אלי**, 'I brought you to Me.' This is when it appears that [Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish nation] are equal, like brothers on the same level. And then it states, **ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת**, 'And you shall be to Me a king...' This is when Yisrael are *keviyachol* like Hashem's king, as it states (*Shmuel 2 23:3*), **צדיק מושל ביראת ה'**, 'A tzaddik rules [keviyachol] over Hashem.'"

The Kli Yakar continues:

"This is as the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 3:11) states on the *pasuk*, **בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו**, "It can be compared to a king who had an only daughter whom he loved immensely. At first, he called her **בתי** 'my daughter.' Later, he called her **אחותי**, 'my sister.' Then, **לא זו**, *מחבבה*, his love increased until he called her **אמי**, 'my mother.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves the Jewish nation, and He calls them **בתי** 'My daughter' and then **אחותי** 'My sister. He doesn't stop loving them until He calls them **אמי**, 'My mother.'

"It seems that this Midrash isn't alluding to the levels of love that there are, because it begins with calling the Jewish nation a daughter, and then it calls them a sister. Doesn't one love his daughter more than he loves his sister? Rather, the Midrash here refers to the degrees of rulership the Jewish nation has. A father rules over his daughter, while brothers and sisters are equals. Hakadosh Baruch Hu first calls Klal Yisrael "daughter" because of His love for the Jewish nation. But at that stage, Hashem rules over them, as a father rules over his daughter.

This was in the days of Avraham...and this is the first level mentioned here, **ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים**, 'I carried you on eagle's wings.' It is like a father carrying his infant. Then Hakadosh Baruch Hu raises them to a higher level and calls them **אחותי**, My sister. This means they are equal to Hashem. [About this level, Chazal say that] Hakadosh Baruch Hu requires us to respect and to be in awe of the tzaddikim, similar to the degree we must respect and fear Hashem. When we are at this stage, tzaddikim become like partners with Hashem. This is how it was in Yitzchak Avinu's time because Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him (*Bereishis 26:3*) **ואהיה עמך**, 'I will be with you.' This means equal to you. This is because Yitzchak's merits were added to Avraham's merits. This is the reason Hashem didn't say to Avraham **ואהיה עמך**, 'I will be with you,' as He said to Yitzchak.

"This is the meaning of **ואביא אתכם אלי**, 'I brought you to Me,' which is similar to **ואהיה עמך**, 'I will be with you.'

"Then, when Yaakov Avinu came, he acquired all three merits [his own, his father Yitzchak's, and his grandfather Avraham's], and Hashem raised him to an even higher level to call him **אם**, mother, like a mother who rules over her children. As Chazal (*Moed Katan 16:*) tell us [that Hashem decrees and a tzaddik annuls the decree]. Therefore, to Yaakov, Hashem said (*Bereishis 32:29*) **כי שרית עם אלקים**, 'You have commanding power with Hashem...' [which indicates that Yaakov rules *keviyachol* over Hashem]... This is implied by the words, **ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת**, meaning you will be like kings **לי**, over Me, Hashem. I decree, and a tzaddik annuls. Klal Yisrael also merits this because they are Bnei Yisrael [descendants of Yaakov Avinu]."

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The *nimshal* is that when the Jewish nation was in Mitzrayim, they weren't aware of their greatness. But when they were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told them (*Shemos 19:5-6*) **ואתם תהיו לי סגולה מכל העמים**, "You will become My treasure among all nations... You will be a kingdom of princes, a holy nation." Hashem showed them that they have tremendous potential. They aren't simple people. They are the beloved royal nation. If they lift their wings, they will soar and reach the highest spiritual levels.

So, we can be confident that we have the power of tefillah on Shavuot. It is the day Hashem considers us His mother, keviyachol, and He does as we request.

### Daven for Good Children

The Chasam Sofer zt'l said at the chasunah of one of his children, "Believe me, every day I shed tears that Hashem should grant me that my children should become greater than me. It should be (*Devarim* 30:5), והטבך והרבך מאבותיך, that your children will be better than their father." In our generation, it is especially important to daven for good children because we live in trying times, and there are great challenges.

Reb Michel Lefkowitz zt'l was in chinuch for many years. (My father learned by him, and so did I. Some families were his students for three generations.) Reb Michel zt'l said that he found an unusual, surprising pattern. Often, the child of the family who was the least successful in his youth becomes the most successful in his family later in life. For some reason, the outstanding child of the family is precisely the one who didn't excel in his younger years. His success might be in Torah, mitzvos, or business, but the pattern is that the one who seemed least likely to succeed ultimately outshines the others.

Reb Michel added, "I don't know why it is so, but I think it is because the parents invested many tefillos for this child. They davened for all their children, but cried for this child, and their tefillos were answered."

The Baal Shem Tov said, "A segulah for good children is to wash in hot water every morning and night." He meant that parents should shed hot tears for their children at least twice daily.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said, "I don't miss a *Shemonah Esrei* to daven for my son, Aharele."

Reb Aharon of Belz zt'l said, "How can we have good children if we finish a tefillah with our eyes still dry?"<sup>24</sup>

Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba (18) tells a story of a kohen who would daven every day, with all his heart and soul, that his children shouldn't sin, and his tefillos were accepted. We quote, "There was a kohen who feared heaven... He had ten children, six boys and four girls. Every day, he davened, bowed, pleaded, asked for compassion, and his tongue licked the earth<sup>25</sup> that none of his children should ever sin or do something disgraceful... When Ezra brought the Yidden up from Bavel, this kohen came up with them, and he merited children and grandchildren kohanim and kohanim gedolim."

A man from an irreligious kibbutz, raised by nonreligious parents, did teshuvah. The Chazon Ish zt'l explained that this man's grandfather cried bitterly when his son left the path. His tefillos didn't work for his son, but they took effect on his grandson.

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**24.** In *Shemonah Esrei* we don't ask for good children, which is surprising. There are brachos for parnassah and health; why not a brachah for nachas from the children?

One gadol replied that for good children, one needs to pray in his own words so he can express himself more fully and emotionally.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said there is a request for good children in the *Shemonah Esrei*. It is implied in the words of *Modim*, לדור ודור נודה לך, "From generation to generation we will praise you..."

**25.** Hashem said to Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishis* 28:14), והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ, "Your seed shall be as the dust of the earth." A similar brachah was given to Avraham Avinu (see *Bereishis* 13:16). We can explain that hinted in עפר הארץ is that if one is מלכך בלשונו עפר, licks earth (the expression used in Tana d'Bei Eliyahu to describe intense tefillos), then he will merit good children.

The Chazon Ish zt'l once said that sometimes a bachur turns around in a moment. Yesterday, he didn't understand the Torah; today, he does. What happened? This is because his mother davened and

cried for her son to succeed in Torah, but a *kitrug* prevented and blocked the tefillos from going up. The moment the *kitrug* was removed, everything turned around.<sup>26</sup>

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26. The Noda b'Yehudah (Tzlach) writes, "In my opinion, *birchas haTorah* is a wonderful *segulah* for remembering Torah." This is because when one says *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift. Hashem can provide gifts in large quantities. We can grow in Torah immensely by being careful with *birchas haTorah*.

The Tzlach writes, "Rebbe [Reb Yehudah HaNasi] arranged and organized the Mishnayos so that people won't forget the oral Torah. Nevertheless, Rebbe feared that even after arranging the mishnayos, people might forget Torah. Therefore, he named the first *masechta* "Brachos", to remind people to recite *birchas haTorah*. It was important for Rebbe that people say *birchas haTorah* because then the Torah will be given to them as a gift, and it won't be forgotten. If it weren't for this reason, he would have called it "Masechta Kriyas Shema," because Shema is a mitzvah from the Torah and is the first topic of the *masechta*."

The Tzlach writes that this is also the reason the ב"ה"ג (Baal Halachos Gedolos) wrote out the entire *birchas haTorah* at the beginning of his sefer. He wanted to remind people to say *birchas haTorah*, so the students will remember the lessons he writes in his sefer.

There were twin brothers that were learning in the same cheder. One was an exceptional student, and the other a very weak one. The teachers were amazed at how twins could be so different. One day, however, the weaker student suddenly became a *masmid* and began understanding and enjoying Torah. The change was so quick and evident that people wanted to know how it happened. The principal asked the father for an explanation. At first, he didn't answer, but when the *menahel* kept bugging him, he replied that he had made a kabbalah to say *birchas haTorah* with kavanah. The day he made this kabbalah, his weaker son began to excel in Torah.

This is because we say in *birchas haTorah*, ונודה אנחנו וצאצאינו... יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה, we daven and ask that our children succeed in Torah.

Reb Moshe Sternbuch Shlita once said a genius idea in Torah at the Tchebiner Rav's shiur. The Tchebiner Rav reacted by saying, "It isn't your *pshat*! It is your mother's because you could only say such a good *pshat* due to your mother's tears."

Reb Shlomo Wolbe zt'l said that he thinks the main chinuch of a child is the parents' tefillos. He said that his success in Torah and *harbatzas Torah* (teaching Torah) is thanks to his mother's tears.

During their travels, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l and Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli zt'l saw a very special young child, and they asked his mother to tell them about her husband's ways because they wanted to understand how he merited such a special child. The mother insisted that her husband is a regular, good person; nothing unusual.

They asked her to share his *seder hayom*, and when she began speaking about Shabbos, she said, "There is one thing. During *shalosh seudos*, when he says, וזכנו לראות בנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה לשמה, he repeats the words many times, with immense *hislahavus*, in a loud voice, until he faints. This happens each week." This young child became renowned as Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l. It was these tefillos that made the difference.

A seventy-year-old man came to the rosh yeshiva of a baal teshuvah yeshiva and said he wanted to do teshuvah. The rosh yeshiva asked him why he wanted to do teshuvah at this point in his life. (It isn't very common for people to do teshuvah and change their lives at that age.)

The man explained that his father was burned in Auschwitz, and his mother became irreligious. She sent him to an orphanage run by the Ponovizher Rav zt'l. Once, his mother visited the orphanage and discovered that it was a religious institute, and she immediately took her son back home to Tel Aviv.

There was an outstanding student learning in Gur and the *Rosh yeshiva*, the Pnei Menachem zt'l, enjoyed speaking with him in learning.

The boy's father visited the Pnei Menachem to ask about his son's progress. The Pnei Menachem replied, "He's doing well. He learns well," but didn't elaborate. He didn't tell him how special and scholarly his son was.

Soon after, the father returned to the Pnei Menachem and said, "The yeshiva students

told me that you enjoy speaking with my son in learning, and you talk with him all the time. So why didn't you give me a more enthusiastic report when I asked about my son?"

The Pnei Menachem explained, "Parents have to daven for their children, and I didn't want to take away from you the merit of tefillah. If I had praised your son, you would feel confident that everything is fine, and you would stop davening for your son's success, and that would be a great loss."<sup>27</sup>

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The next time the Ponovizher Rav visited the orphanage, he asked about this child and why he wasn't there, and the staff told him that the irreligious mother had taken him home.

The Rav immediately went to the woman's home in Tel Aviv. It was Friday afternoon, but his pain of losing a Jewish child was so great that he couldn't push it off. When the mother saw the Rav, she said, "If you came to convince me to return our son to the orphanage, I want you to know that there is nothing to talk about! I was in Auschwitz..." and she told him that after all the tzaros she went through, she abandoned Yiddishkeit. The Ponovizher Rav didn't respond – he just sat there and cried.

When this son turned seventy, he came to the rosh yeshiva of the baal teshuvah yeshiva and said, "The Rav's tears chased me for sixty years, and that's why I am here today to do teshuvah."

**27.** *Melamdin* and *magidei shiur* shouldn't follow this counsel. When fathers ask how their sons are doing, they should lavish praise when due. The message is that parents shouldn't stop shedding tears and praying for their children.

The Pnei Menachem told a personal story. He related that his mother was the Imrei Emes's second rebbetzin and had children of her own. One of her sons was called up for the draft. She went to the Imrei Emes to request that he daven for her son, and he did so. But she was still worried.

She went to her mother, who was the Imrei Emes's sister, and asked her to go to the Imrei Emes, and to ask him again to daven for the bachur. When her mother came to the Imrei Emes, the Imrei Emes gave a *havtachah*, his guarantee, that the bachur wouldn't be drafted.

When the Imrei Emes gave this *havtachah* (promise), everyone calmed down, and baruch Hashem, there was a salvation.

The Pnei Menachem said, "My mother asked the Imrei Emes, 'If you knew my son wouldn't be drafted, why didn't you tell me? I was so worried.'"

"The Imrei Emes replied, 'A mother must daven. I knew there would be a *yeshuah*, but your tears were needed. Had you known for sure that everything would be okay, you would stop davening and crying, and your tears were needed for the *yeshuah*!'"

The Pnei Menachem told this story to the father, who wanted to know why he didn't give a more flowery report when he asked him about his son. The Pnei Menachem replied, "This is why I didn't elaborate on your son's success. I didn't want you to feel that everything was wonderful. A parent must daven."

Hashem tells Rachel (*Yirmiyahu* 31:15), *מוני קולך מבכי*, "Refrain your voice from crying." But it wasn't only Rachel who cried. Leah also cried, as is implied in the words (*Bereishis* 29:17), *ועיני לאה רכות*, "and Leah's eyes were moist." She was crying that she shouldn't become Eisav's wife. Rashi writes, "Rivkah had two sons (Yaakov and Eisav), and Lavan had two daughters (Rachel and Leah). People were saying the older daughter to the older

## Torah for Everyone

Chazal (Kesubos 63a) tells us that when Kalba Savua's daughter married Reb Akiva, who was an *am ha'aretz* (ignorant in Torah) he made a *neder* and forbade his daughter and son-in-law from benefiting and from receiving anything of his vast wealth. When Reb Akiva became a *gadol* and had 24,000 students, Kalba Savua asked him to be *matir* his *neder*. Reb Akiva asked him, "If you knew that your son-in-law would become a *talmid chacham*, would you have made the *neder* and banned them from your wealth?" Kalba Savua said that he wouldn't have made the *neder*. With this "פתח", opening, Reb Akiva redeemed him from the *neder*.

Tosfos asks a question about the פתח, the opening. It didn't exist when Kalba Savua made the *neder* since Reb Akiva was still unlearned in Torah. It was something that occurred afterwards, and this is called נולד, born. The rule is that נולד, born situations, which weren't in existence when the *neder* was being made, aren't sufficient for a פתח, to free someone from his *neder*!

Tosfos answers that since Reb Akiva was going to study Torah, it was very likely that he would become great in Torah. Therefore, the excuse and the "opening" (פתח) existed when he made the vow.

Reb Akiva was forty years old and didn't know the alef beis. What was his chance of becoming a *talmid chacham*? The answer is that he had a lot of potential because he had a strong desire to grow in Torah. When there

is a yearning and a desire to succeed in Torah, anyone, at any age, can make great strides in Torah.

It states (Shemos 19:17) וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר "They stood at the bottom of the mountain." Beis Aharon (Rosh Chodesh Sivan) explains that this refers to people 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."

About *matan Torah*, Rashi (Shemos 19:6) writes, לֹא פָחוֹת וְלֹא יוֹתֵר "Not less and not more."<sup>28</sup> The Chasam Sofer (Drashos 264:) says that לֹא יוֹתֵר means that no one is greater than a person who studies Torah. לֹא פָחוֹת means that no one is too small to receive the Torah.

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos, Shavuos 5562) writes, "The Torah wasn't given to individuals, rather it was given to the entire Jewish nation... so everyone will have a portion in Torah... Therefore, every Yid can be equally joyous on Shavuos... The Torah was given... when we first left the slavery of Mitzrayim. We weren't worthy then for *matan Torah*. This was to tell us that there are no barriers, and we shouldn't lose hope of receiving our portion in Torah. Even if one is at a very low level, he is equal to the greatest."

Reb Leibele Eiger (Toras Emes, Yisro) explains that the story of *matan Torah* is written after Yisro's conversion. This is to teach us that *matan Torah* is for everyone. No one should think that because he is on a low level, *matan Torah* isn't for him. If Yisro, who used to be

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son (Leah for Eisav), and the younger daughter to the younger son (Rachel for Yaakov)." Leah was worried that she would marry Eisav, and therefore she cried. Hashem doesn't tell her to stop crying because Hashem loves such tears. Tears for spiritual success are desired tears.

The Torah (Bereishis 32:1) tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters. The Sforno writes, "Chazal teach us that a *birkas hedyot*, the blessing of a simple person, shouldn't be trivial in our eyes. The Torah tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters to teach us that when a father blesses his children, it is with all his heart, and no doubt the brachos will take effect because this is the segulah of a brachah from a human, who was created with a *tzelem Elokim*, as it states (Bereishis 27:4), בְּעֹבוֹר תְּבָרֵךְ נַפְשִׁי, 'So my soul can bless you.'"

**28.** Literally, this means that Moshe had to repeat precisely what Hashem told him to tell the Jewish nation regarding the preparations for *matan Torah*. "No less and no more." He shouldn't add or subtract anything.

a non-Jewish priest, could receive the Torah, everyone can.

Hashem asked Yishmael, Eisav, and the other nations if they wanted the Torah. They could have accepted the Torah if they wanted to! The Imrei Emes (5667) says that this gives encouragement and hope for all Yidden. He writes, "The Torah is *mekarev* everyone, also those at a low level."<sup>29</sup>

The minhag is to place trees that don't grow fruit (אילני סרק) in the beis medresh on Shavuot. The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Drashos, Megillas Rus, ד"ה ויהי) explains that trees without fruit represent the Yidden who don't have Torah and mitzvos. We place these trees in the beis medresh so they know they can also receive the Torah.

Some people want to proclaim *naaseh v'nishma* with all their heart and soul, but deep down, they know they aren't entirely sincere. Part of them wants to receive the Torah, but part of them doesn't want to accept the yoke and the restrictions of the Torah. Nevertheless, even such an acceptance of the Torah is a wonderful accomplishment. The Tosefta (Bava Kama 7:3) says that even the generation that received the Torah on *har Sinai* and proclaimed *נעשה ונשמע*, their hearts weren't entirely prepared to receive the Torah. Nevertheless, Hashem accepted their proclamation of *naaseh v'nishma*, and because of it, Hashem bestows so much kindness to Bnei Yisrael.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, *matan Torah* is for every person, no matter what level he is on.<sup>31</sup>

**29.** The Magen Avraham (494) says we stay awake Shavuot night to rectify the sin of our forefathers who slept on the night before *matan Torah*. The Arugas Habosem (Yisro וייתעצבו) says that it doesn't make sense that the Jewish nation went to sleep on the night before *matan Torah*. Among 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? How could it be that everyone went to sleep that night?

The Arugas Habosem answers that we must say 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, which means they are fully immersed in their *parnassah* and other aspects of *olam hazeh*), even such people can receive the Torah.

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

This taught them that the path to receive the Torah is to fall backward, to try to come near again, and then to expect to fall again. For our discussion, this is a reminder that the Torah was given to humans, who have limitations and challenges. Therefore, no one should think the Torah isn't for him.

**30.** The Midrash (Tanchuma Emor 11) states, "All the wonderful, sweet things Hakadosh Baruch Hu will do for Yisrael is all because of one shout, when they said (Shemos 24:7) *נעשה ונשמע*."

**31.** A teacher took a hundred-dollar bill, trampled it, crumbled it, and stuck it into the mud. Then he asked his students, "Who wants it?" All hands shot up. They all wanted it because even in the dirt and trampled, it was still worth \$100. The teacher then told them that the same is true with the Jewish soul. No matter what a person does, he remains a precious and holy Jewish soul.

Chazal (Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba ch.1) tell an unusual praise of Hashem. It praises Hashem for being *שמח בחלקו*, happy with His portion. The Chazon Ish zt'l asks that this praise is something one would say about a poor person who lacks money. But the entire world is Hashem's. He lacks nothing. Why is it a praise to say Hashem is happy with His lot?

The Chazon Ish replies that Chazal say *אין לו להקב"ה בעולמו אלא אוצר של יראת שמים בלבד*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu has only one treasure in the world, and that is the treasure of *yiras Shamayim*. This is the only thing in the world important to Hashem – to see people who fear Him and do His *mitzvos*. About this treasure, Chazal say that Hashem is *שמח בחלקו*, happy with His portion. We know that our service and *yiras Shamayim* are

### Chiddushei Torah

Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh zt'l said that he is more afraid of Shavuos than Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, the judgement is on gashmiyos, one more *bilke* (challah) or one less (it doesn't make that much of a difference). But on Shavuos, the judgment is for Torah, how much Torah one will receive that year. And therefore, he is more afraid of Shavuos.

We discussed above that every year, on Shavuos, Hashem once again gives us the Torah. The first *matan Torah* occurred at Har Sinai, and a *second matan Torah* happens

every Shavuos. There is also a third *matan Torah*, which transpires daily. In birchas haTorah, we say נותן התורה, "Hashem, Who gives the Torah," written 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.

What is the significance of these three *matan Torahs*?

*Derech HaMelech* (from the Rebbe of Piaseznica zt'l) explains that we received the Torah on Har Sinai, and each year, on Shavuos, we receive the *chidushei Torah* that we can discover

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imperfect, that there is much to improve on, but nevertheless, Hashem is happy with the little we do. He is happy with His portion. Each time a person guards his speech or eyes and lives with the principles of yiras Shamayim, this gives Hashem immense joy, and Hashem is happy with His portion.

Why is that? We will explain with a mashal:

Someone had two sons: a wise son, Yankele, and an intellectually challenged child, Moshele. One day, Yankele returned home with his report card. It was straight A's. His behavior and his knowledge of the subjects studied were perfect. The father had nachas to read the report card, and he gave Yankele a candy to express his love and appreciation.

That same day, the mother went to Moishele's cheder to hear how he was doing. She came home extremely happy. "Moishele looked at me for an entire minute," she said. That was something Moishele never did before. He had trouble making eye contact with people. The mother called her mother and her mother-in-law, sisters and brothers, to share the good news.

Yankele watched his mother's excitement and was insulted. "I brought home a perfect report card, and no one makes a big deal out of it. And all Moishele did was look at his mother for a minute, and everyone is so excited."

The father explained to Yankele, "You are an outstanding student; therefore, it isn't surprising to us when you bring home a perfect report card. However, Moishele is limited in what he can do. Now that he could look at his mother for a minute, that is a great accomplishment, and everyone is excited about it."

For our topic, when malachim serve Hashem in perfect ways, this isn't surprising. But when a human being, made from dust and earth, overcomes the yetzer hara, this creates a great tumult and joy in heaven, because he is doing something surprising, something that isn't easy for him to achieve.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 35:1) states, "Dovid HaMelech said to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, 'Ribono Shel Olam, every day I say that I will go to this place, or to that place, and then my feet bring me to the beis merdresh.'" (The midrash bases this on the pasuk, Tehillim 119:59, וְאֶשְׁכְּחַתְּיָהּ כִּי אֶל עֵדֶתְךָ). The Brezhaner Rav zt'l (Techeles Mordechai, Bechukosai) explains that there are people who desire to go to the beis medresh to study Torah, but then the yetzer hara tells them, "If you won't make remarkable strides in Torah and avodas Hashem, it isn't worth the effort." To overcome this claim of the yetzer hara, think about the people who work hard for their parnassah, even for a small gain. They don't say that it isn't worth their effort. They take whatever they can, even if it isn't much. This is the meaning of Chazal that Dovid said, "I will go here, I will go there." It isn't that he actually wanted to go to these places; rather, he reminded himself how people go to these places, even if the reward is minimal, so certainly we should go to the beis medresh. Whatever we gain, it will be an incredible accomplishment.

that particular year. However, on Shavuot, it is still an undefined prophecy because one doesn't yet know the *chidushim* he will create. When one studies Torah throughout the year, he brings forth the *chidushei Torah* he received on Shavuot. That is when he discovers what he received on Shavuot. These are the three *matan Torahs*. One is a general *matan Torah*, one is for the Torah he can receive that year, and each day, he gets the Torah again, the *chidushim* that he can acquire on that day.

*Chazal* (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say, "On Shavuot, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees."<sup>32</sup> The Sfas Emes explains that you are judged on which *chiddushim* you will perceive that year on Shavuot. The Sfas Emes concludes, "Shavuot is the source of Torah for the entire year."<sup>33</sup>

### The Purpose of Matan Torah – Emunah

The Aseres HaDibros begins with *ידבר* אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה' אלקיך. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* said we should translate these words as follows: Hashem taught כל הדברים האלה, the entire Torah so a Yid will be able to say אנכי ה' אלקיך. In other words, the purpose of *matan Torah* and all the *mitzvos* is so that we will believe in Hashem.

A hint to this idea is found in the *shemoneh Esrei* of Rosh Hashanah, where it says *ובתורתך* כתוב לאמר שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. This can be translated as "Everything that is written in the Torah is so people will be able to say 'Hashem is our G-d Hashem is one.'" That is the *segulah* of Torah and *mitzvos*; it fills our hearts with *emunah* in Hashem.

On a similar note, the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Mishlei* 22:19) writes, עיקר נתינת התורה לישראל הוא בכדי, שישמרו 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 all 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.'"

This is the purpose of *matan Torah*: to know that Hashem is G-d, and there is no other.

The Degel Machaneh 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 why the Aseres HaDibros says, "I am Hashem, your G-d Who took you out of *Mitzrayim*." It seems more appropriate to say, "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who created heaven and earth!"

But there is a lesson in *yetzias Mitzrayim* that we don't learn from creation. *Yetzias*

32. 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 Shavuot, Yidden are judged for *bittul Torah* and for not being sufficiently devoted to keeping the *mitzvos*.

33. 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 contain (see *Eiruvin* 14 – ים שעשה שלמה היה מחזיק מאה וחמשים מקוה טהרה). This implies that *kabala haTorah* contains and holds all *chiddushei Torah* that will be revealed during the year.

The Sfas Emes says that Shavuot is called *יום בכורים*, the *yom tov* of the new fruit. The new fruit represents the new Torah given to us on that day.

Mitzrayim tells us that Hashem *continues* to lead the world with hashgachah pratis!

The Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* י"ח 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] also doesn't believe in אלקי [belief in Hashem]... These beliefs make us the chosen nation and are the foundation of the entire Torah." Thus, the Rosh reveals that yetzias Mitzrayim teaches hashgachah pratis, a primary foundation of emunah.

### Everything is for the Good

In Megillas Rus, Naomi said (*Rus* 1:20), אל, "תקראנה לי נעמי קראן לי מרא כי המר שדי" לי מאד 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 knew that she would need money to settle down and to survive, and she hoped that her wealthy nephew, Boaz, would support her. However, the Chasam Sofer writes, "It isn't the way of *tzanuah* women to meet with men. Indeed, we never find Naomi meeting or speaking to Boaz." Naomi didn't want to meet with Boaz. Instead, as she returned to Eretz Yisrael, Naomi planned to speak to Boaz's wife and ask her to speak with Boaz on their behalf, to help them settle down in Eretz Yisrael. But this plan didn't work out because "the day Naomi arrived in Beis Lechem, the *levayah* of Boaz's wife took place!" (see *Bava Basra* 91.). Naomi's dreams and hopes were shattered.

Naomi told the women of Beis Lechem to call her מרא, bitter, and not נעמי, pleasant, because her life was bitter. She told them that she came to Eretz Yisrael with a plan of how she would support herself, and now she doesn't have any plan at all, and she doesn't have any source of income.

It was all for her good, though, writes the Chasam Sofer. "The petirah of Boaz's wife was for Naomi's benefit because Rus arrived 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>34</sup>

The *roshei teivos* of המר שדי"י לי מאד, "Hashem made it very bitter for me" spells שלמה. This hints that although Naomi thought matters were bitter for her, they were 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 of Klal Yisrael weren't permitted to ascend the mountain. The exceptions were Moshe Rabbeinu, the seventy zekeinim, 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.

Elazar and Isamar were greater than the seventy zekeinim (see *Eiruvim* 54:). In fact, Elazar and Isamar were the teachers of the seventy zekeinim. Yet the zekeinim were allowed to be on the mountain, and they were not.

<sup>34</sup>. It was also for Boaz's benefit that Rus arrived just then. Hashem prepared a wife for Boaz to replace his wife, who had died. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91.) states, "The day Rus...came to Eretz Yisrael, Boaz's wife died." Rashbam writes ולאשמועינן אתא 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 just as his first wife died.] We learn from this that one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

Most people in this situation would be upset. They would say, "Why can't we go up on Har Sinai, while the seventy zekeinim, who are smaller than us, can? Why can our brothers Nadav v'Avihu go up on Har Sinai and not us?"

Also, such a situation would generally upset the parents, too. "Why can't our children be on Har Sinai? People less than them can go on Har Sinai!"

But it was for their benefit. The Tur (on *Chumash*) teaches that Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy zekeinim were punished because they lacked the proper *yiras Shamayim* when they stood on Har Sinai. The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behaloscha 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. This was disrespectful, and they deserved to be punished. 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..." 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 zekeinim 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 have died, and Aharon would have been left without children.<sup>35</sup>

Let this be a lesson for us when something seems to be going wrong. The situation is directed by Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*, and it is the best for you.

One of the mitzvos of Shavuot 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 improved Yidden's emunah in Hashem. Poor people don't need aliyah l'regel to strengthen their emunah. Their life situation of poverty forces them to continuously place their trust in Hashem. Only those who own property must go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year to learn that everything is from Hashem because they are at risk of forgetting.

Once again, we discover that something we think is negative is actually positive. Many reason that poverty is undesirable, but from the mitzvah of aliyah l'regel, we see that poor people benefit greatly. They

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35. It states, עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא, "Go up to Har Sinai; you, Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu." The *taamim* (*trop*) of these words are קדמא ואולא מונח רביעי. Perhaps this hints קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very beginning, ואולא, that people who go up on Har Sinai will be smitten and leave the world. מונח, therefore, Hashem left over a remnant, רביעי, from Aharon's four sons. Because two sons went up and were *niftar*, and the two sons who didn't go up survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וידבר שלושת אלפים משל, "Shlomo told three thousand *mashalim*..." שלושת אלפים can also mean three א's. This refers to אהרן, אלעזר, איתמר, three people whose names begin with א. Initially, Aharon, Elazar, and Isamar didn't understand how it was good that Elazar and Isamar weren't allowed up. Later, they understood the great kindness of Hashem. Shlomo Hamelech used this as a *mashal* to teach people that everything is for the good.

always remember Hashem. Similarly, many things appear to be negative, but are, in fact, for our benefit.<sup>36</sup>

### Chesed

We discussed above that the primary message of the Torah is emunah. Another key message in the Torah is 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 כִּתְנוּת עוֹר וַיַּלְבִּשֵׁם, "Hashem...made for Adam and his wife shirts of skin and He dressed them," and the Torah concludes with (*Devarim* 34:6) וַיִּקְבֵּר אוֹתוֹ, "[Hashem] buried [Moshe]..." The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* writes that this teaches us that the focal point of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.<sup>37</sup>

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*."

This can be one reason we read *Rus* on Shavuos; the message of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

The first five of the *Aseres HaDibros* are *mitzvos* *בין אדם למקום*, our obligations to Hashem. The remaining five are *בין אדם לחבירו*,

the *mitzvos* and obligations we have 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. Now, both *luchos* were covered with the same amount of writing.

Large letters attract attention as if they are shouting. The *mitzvos* of *bein adam lechaveiro* 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 למקום, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires more the *mitzvos* of helping your fellow man than the *mitzvos* that are solely for Hashem."<sup>38</sup>

One year, the Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk *zt'l* traveled to Kozhmir to be with Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l* on Shavuos. 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 explained that he also wanted to grow in *avodas Hashem* and must go to his Rebbe.

36. Chazal (*Shabbos* 31.) call *Seder Zeraim* (the tractate of *Mishnayos* that deals with 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. When a seed is planted in the earth, it rots, and it seems nothing will come from it. But these rotted seeds will eventually 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, but something very good will come from it.

37. When one picks up a new book and wants to know what it is about, he reads the first and last pages, and he gets 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.

38. Chazal teach us שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא ליכא, that we don't receive reward for *mitzvos* in this world. *Chesed* is an exception. We receive reward in this world, as it states in the *Mishnah* we say each morning, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא, and the *Mishnah* lists several examples of *chesed*. The Rosh (*Pei'ah* 1:1) explains this because "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires more the *mitzvos* of helping your fellow man than the *mitzvos* that are solely for Hashem."

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir explained that his role as a leader is to help others, even at the expense of his spiritual growth. He proved it from the following source. It states (*Shemos* 19:14) וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה מִן הָהָר עַל הָעָם, "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people," and Rashi writes, מִלְמַד שֶׁלֹּא הָיָה מֹשֶׁה פֹּנוֹה לְעַסְקוֹ, "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 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 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 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 nothing bad will befall you, and there will be peace in your home."

Regarding Shavuos, the Torah states (*Devarim* 16:10-11) וַעֲשִׂיתָ חֹג שָׁבוּעוֹת לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ ... וְשִׂמַּחְתָּ

אתה ובנך ובתך... והגר והיתום והאלמנה אשר בקרבך, "Make the holiday Shavuos for Hashem your G-d... and be happy...you, your son, your daughter...the convert, the orphan, and the widow that is among you."

Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "The obligation [to 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 giving 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>39</sup>

One reason for this is that the message of the Torah is *chesed*, to help one's fellow man. So, when you accept the Torah on Shavuos, do so with a desire and plan to help your fellow man.

## Unity

It states (*Shemos* 19:2) וַיַּחֲזֵן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגַד הָהָר, "Yisrael encamped there opposite the mountain. Rashi writes, "[The singular form of וַיַּחֲזֵן, instead of the plural וַיַּחֲזִינוּ, denotes that they encamped] as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments were with complaints and with strife." So, when the Jewish nation came to Har Sinai, they were united. The Or HaChaim explains that unity is a prerequisite for succeeding in Torah study.

Unity is also a great help with our battle against the yetzer hara.

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

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

would commit the aveirah and stop going to his Rebbe. Later, he said to himself, "If I don't go to the Rebbe, I will miss seeing all my friends who go to the Rebbe. How can I miss meeting with all my friends?" 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. It is our strength against the yetzer hara.

Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l says that the הר, mountain, represents the yetzer hara (see Succah 52.). So, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר means that when the Jewish nation is united, they can conquer the yetzer hara.<sup>40</sup>

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." When you are united, you are a force that the yetzer hara can't break.<sup>41</sup>

The Beis Aharon zt'l once sat with his chasidim at a tish, and he told one of his followers to go outdoors and return to 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. When one piece of wood catches on fire, the fire will extinguish quickly. But if there are several pieces of wood and one of them catches fire, the fire can burn for a long time. Similarly, being united with Yidden helps us serve Hashem passionately, with a hislahavus that doesn't weaken with time.

It is a Chassidic custom to sit with friends, with food and drink, sing together, and discuss *avodas Hashem*. Chassidim consider these gatherings extremely important because they are a moment of unity, combined with yiras Shamayim. The Sadigura Rebbe zt'l would sometimes give his chassidim a coin, and the chassidim would auction off the coin. 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 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.

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40. The Gemara (Shabbos 88.) teaches, "Hashem placed Har Sinai over the nation like a barrel and said, 'If you accept the Torah, all will be 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, שם, there, at that place, distant from the Jewish people, תהיה קבורתכם, will be your spiritual ruination because unity togetherness are our weapons against the yetzer hara.

41. We say after birchas hashachar, ולא תביאנו... לא לידי נסיון ולא לידי בויון, "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.

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>42</sup>

**42.** Reb Shimshon Wertheimer *zt'l* was a great scholar, very wealthy, and a close confidant to the emperor of Austria. Once, the emperor asked him why Yidden are persecuted more than all other nations of the world. Reb Shimshon replied, "They are being punished because of their hatred toward their fellow man and jealousy of one another."

The emperor refused to accept that explanation. He told Reb Shimshon, "I give you three days to think this over. If you don't give me a satisfying answer, I will banish every Jew 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 that you spoke the truth."

It was the beginning of winter, a good time for hunting. The emperor went with a group of 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, and it was almost dark when 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 must have left earlier with the first group of officials, so they also left the forest.

The emperor was still in the forest. He was so deeply involved in his hobby that he didn't hear them call him. When it began turning dark, the emperor called for his officials. When no one replied, he understood what had happened. 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. He spotted lights on the other side of the river, so the emperor understood that there was a village there. Having no choice, the emperor removed his royal clothing, left his horse behind, and swam across the river.

The emperor arrived in the village dripping wet, and there was no sign that he was the king. He knocked at doors, but no one took him in. Some residents 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."

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 they wouldn't believe him.

The wife suspected that their guest was a thief. She told her husband, "Send this man out of the house before he steals everything we own, including 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 the 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 said he wanted to be let off at the royal palace.

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

### The Joy of *Matan Torah*

Chazal (Pesachim 68:) say, "All opinions agree that one needs to enjoy on Shavuot because on this day the Torah was given to the Jewish 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."

The Gemara relates that Rav Yosef asked his family to prepare the best meats for Shavuot. Rav Yosef explained, "If it weren't for this day, there would be many Yosefs in the marketplace." Rashi explains, "If it weren't for this day that enabled me to learn Torah and to become exalted, there would be many other people in the market whose

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The passenger replied, "Don't worry. 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 turned the wagon around to leave. It was dangerous to be on these grounds without permission. But an armed soldier blocked the way. "The emperor summons you," he said.

The Yid feared the worst as the officer led him into the palace and brought him 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 meet the emperor before," he stammered.

"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, and you served me a warm meal and lent me a coat to wear. Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

The Yid stood before the emperor in silence. The emperor figured the Yid didn't understand the offer, so he said, "If you ask for a forest, I will give it to you. If you ask for an entire city, 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 that I want. I'm a traveling merchant. I go from town to town selling my wares. Recently, someone began coming to the towns I go to, and he sells the same items I sell. He is taking away my parnassah. I request that the king issue an executive order forbidding this man to sell his wares in the towns I go to."

The king said, "Your request is granted, but you must know that your request is foolish. 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 summoned 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 Shavuot morning. This is because to receive the Torah, we need love and unity. Jealousy and hatred are contrary to the basic tenets of the Torah.

name is Yosef, and what difference would there be between us?"

Maaseh Rav writes, "The Vilna Gaon zt'l was very happy on Shavuot, more than any other yom tov, and he put good foods on his table..."

In Kiddush and in Shemoneh Esrei we say, וְרוֹמַמְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l translated the words as follows: מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת, all expressions of all languages won't suffice to express וְרוֹמַמְתָּנוּ, how holy we became. No language is rich enough, and no prose is talented enough to describe the greatness Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael when He gave us the Torah.

Seder HaYom (*Shavuot*) describes the great joy of matan Torah. He writes, "One should be very happy on Shavuot 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... And 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 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 of lots of money, and nothing will be lacking."

In review, Seder Hayom teaches us that Hashem loves the *avos hakadoshim*, He loves the Torah, and therefore, He loves us endlessly because we are descendants of the avos and we study Torah. The goyim turn to their *avodah zarahs*, which don't help them, but Hashem loves the Jewish nation, and He therefore watches over us constantly. He concludes that just as a king will give wealth and royalty to the person who marries his daughter, the King will give wealth, royalty, etc. to the Jewish people who study Torah, which is Hashem's daughter.

This final idea can be compared to a wealthy person interviewing a young man to see 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 I see that you aren't wise. My daughter is my only child, and I am extremely wealthy. Obviously, you will receive a lot of money from me. So why do you ask for a dowry?"

The nimshal is that the Torah is Hashem's daughter. Whoever studies and cherishes the Torah will receive everything he needs. There will be wealth, and nothing will be lacking.<sup>43</sup>

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**43.** During the Holocaust, an elderly, wealthy Yid approached Reb Chaim Kreiswirth zt'l and said, "Tomorrow, I will be sent to the gas chambers r"l. I will give you my bank account information. If you survive this war, please seek out my children and provide them with the information so they can withdraw the money from the account."

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

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim was talking to a poor person in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim, and Reb Chaim realized that he was the offspring he was looking for. Reb Chaim gave him the account number and the name of the Swiss bank that was given to him by the poor man's father.

The Noam Elimelech (Mishpatim גדי תבשל לא) 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 the same as 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, even those machmirim won't wait so long. Although we don't know for certain the halachic issue that the Noam Elimelech is

referring to, we receive his message that on Shavuos we are like malachim.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Tikun Leil Shavuos***

The *Zohar* (vol.1, 8:) mentions the minhag to study Torah all night long on Shavuos:

"Reb Shimon and his holy students were singing the 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>45</sup> with you - and only with you - because you are making 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>46</sup>

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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 informed him that the account contained a fantastic sum of \$30,000,000.

Reb Chaim Kreiswirth commented, "He was wealthy for so many years, only he didn't know it."

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

**44.** The Imrei Emes (Likutim, Pesachim 68) says we become like *malachim* on Shavuos. He proves this from the halachah (Pesachim 68:) that Shavuos should be חצי ללם וחצי לה, half for enjoying good meals and half for Hashem [engaged in 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." Because humans cannot divide things precisely in half, only a malach can. So, on Shavuos, how do we divide the day in half? How can they keep the Chazal חצי ללם וחצי לה, "half for enjoying good meals and half for Hashem" accurately? The Imrei Emes answers that on Shavuos, we become like *malachim*, and *malachim* can divide with precision.

One year after Shavuos, Rav Shach zt'l asked Reb Menachem Ziemba zt'l hy'd, "What did the rebbe (the Imrei Emes) 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 then we will know how to divide the day in half.

**45.** 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 under the *chuppah*?"

**46.** 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 that decree. This is said about any night of the

The *Magen Avraham* (494) writes, "The *Zohar* (vol.3, 98.) tells us that the early chassidim would remain awake the entire night of Shavuot and study Torah. This is the current custom today for most Torah scholars. We can explain according to *pshtat*: Bnei Yisrael slept all night [before matan Torah], and Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to wake them [to receive the Torah], as the Midrash tells us. Therefore, we must rectify this."

The *Shlah HaKadosh* (*Masechta Shavuot, Ner Mitzvah*, 8) quotes the following episode, as it was told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz (who composed the *Lecha Dodi*) *zt'l*: "[Shavuot night], we were studying Mishnayot. We completed two *masechtot*, and then Hashem granted us to hear a *bas kol* from Heaven that said, 'My beloved, righteous friends, peace to you. You are so fortunate. *Ashreichem!* 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; I lie in rubbish. You returned the crown to its place! Be strong, My friends, whom I love. Be happy! Rejoice! You are exalted people... Your kol Torah rises before Hakadosh Baruch Hu and breaks 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 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 *Tikun Leil Shavuot* has the first and the last three *pesukim* of each *parashah* and each *Navi* and *Kesuvim*. The *Ben Ish Chai* writes, "The early generations established that we should read the first three and last three *pesukim* of each portion of *תנ"ך*, and it is considered like he read the entire *תנ"ך*. This reveals Hashem's *chesed* that he does with Yisrael, that a drop of learning Torah is considered like a lot."

The *Seder HaYom* (Shavuot) writes, "On the night of Shavuot, one should remain awake and study Torah all night long, (or, at least, you should study Torah most of the night)... Don't take this matter lightly because a person might be low and unimportant 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*, *שבהדייטות*, 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..."

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year. Certainly, when one is awake on Shavuot night, he attains forgiveness for many severe *aveiros*."

The *Yerushalmi* says, "Don't read it *לכם*, *עצרת תהיה לכם*, read it *לכם*, *עצרת תהיה לכם*, which means, "Shavuot you will live." We can explain that one attains life from Shavuot because life is given to all those who study Torah on Shavuot 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 *ישנה* is *gematriya* שס"ה, representing the 365 nights a year that one sleeps. *ער* refers to the night of Shavuot when people remain awake. It is called *לבי*, for it is the heart of the year.

These words contain an important lesson, which we must remember for the entire year, and not solely regarding the night of Shavuos. We shouldn't underestimate our potential. Great things can happen to us. Even if we are simple, regular people in many ways, this doesn't mean we can't have moments of greatness. 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 to us and all Yidden. Some people have ענוה פסולה, the wrong type of humility. They think the *tikkun* that happens on this night is reserved only for great tzaddikim. But we have to recognize our potential.

We continue with the Seder Hayom's lesson:

"If he feels exhausted and has to sleep, he can sleep, but not [in a bed], so he won't sleep too long. And then he should quickly awaken and study Torah until daybreak. And then he should praise Hashem in the beis medresh [at Shacharis] 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 Lubavitch zt'l writes that he has a note, handwritten by his grandfather, the Tzemach 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 Tzemach Tzedek was a *posek* and a Rav, so the way he rules in this world

is how the *beis din* rules in heaven. 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 Auerbach zt'l (the father of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach 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 to tell you, but since you asked, I will tell you. The Chasam Sofer zt'l said that whoever studies the entire night of Shavuos without interruption (without היסח הדעת) will merit *giluy Eliyahu*, seeing Eliyahu HaNavi. When I was a yeshiva student, I studied in the Ksav Sofer's yeshiva in Pressburg, and on Shavuos, the yeshiva students always strived to study Torah without interruption Shavuos night to 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, whom I'd never seen before, came into the beis medresh. He explained the *Zohar* to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes to figure out 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 you understand why I'm so happy this morning."<sup>47</sup>

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47. Someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l whether he should remain awake all night on Shavuos. He added that he knows he will learn much more over Shavuos if he gets a regular night's sleep.

Reb Shlomo Zalman replied that although he had a valid point, he should nevertheless stay awake 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 customs. *Lomdim* worldwide keep this custom; if you don'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).

## Fire

Many pesukim and sources mention the fire that was on Har Sinai. For example, it states (Devarim 4:11) **וההר בוער באש עד לב השמים**, "The mountain was burning like fire until the heart of the heaven." And it states (Shemos 19:18) **מפני אשר ירד עליו ה' באש**, "because Hashem has descended [on Har Sinai] with fire."

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."

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. The Beis Aharon zt'l explains that the Jewish nation had hislahavus, a strong desire to receive the Torah, and to meet with Hashem. The fire is a symbol of the hislahavus of the nation, at that time.

Hashem gives us the Torah every year again, and therefore, every year, we should fill our hearts with a fire of hislahavus.

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

Tosfos asks why it was necessary to place the mountain over them if the nation had already said **נעשה ונשמע**, "We will do, and we will hear!"?

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, why couldn't Hashem have removed the fire from Har Sinai? Why did the fire need to be on Har Sinai and risk scaring off the nation from receiving the Torah?

The answer is that there needed to be a fire on Har Sinai. The only way to receive the Torah is with hislahavus. Without hislahavus, 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 tznua, 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? Furthermore, 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 that this was the first time that Hashem was speaking with the Jewish nation, and He was giving them the Torah! At such a time, the only way to give the Torah was with hislahavus. It is impossible to begin in a silent, concealed manner.

We quote the Sfas Emes: "If it weren't for the hislahavus at the beginning, with great revelation, it would be impossible to give the Torah in a concealed manner afterwards. However, once the Torah was given with **קולי קולות**, in a loud voice, it was then able to be given in a concealed manner. This is a lesson for all generations. You have to begin

with great hislahavus, even if the hislahavus won't last..."<sup>48</sup>

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 17:5) states, תחילה, מפלה שניה, "The beginning of a downfall 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 downfall. Hislahavus is the key to success in the holy Torah and mitzvos.

### **Matan Torah**

The Rambam (Igeres Teiman) writes, "Remember Har Sinai because Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded that we must always remember it. He forbids us to forget it, and He obligates us to teach it to our children. Raise your children with the episode of this great moment of matan Torah and speak about this wonder before many people because it is the pillar of emunah."

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, and they didn't 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, אנכי 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 בשלום, 'May Hashem bless His nation with peace.'"

### **Milichigs on Shavuos Represents Teshuvah**

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

Could it be that the Satan didn't know of matan Torah? When Hashem gave the Torah, His Shechinah came down onto Har Sinai, and Hashem opened 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?"

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l answers that the Satan's question is directed to the Jewish nation, and he asks the question every year to every Yid. He asks, "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 its mitzvos." With these words, the Satan tries to discourage the Jewish nation.

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

Most foods ruin when they spoil, but milk becomes an even better product when

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**48.** When a person prepares a cup of coffee, he boils water to a high temperature and then makes the coffee. But he can't drink it when it is so hot; he will wait until it cools off. So, why doesn't he initially boil the water to the degree at which he plans to drink it? It is because if it isn't boiling at the beginning, when you make the coffee, it won't taste good. This is a mashal to the need to begin with hislahavus. The hislahavus may cool off with time, but there must be hislahavus at the beginning.

it spoils—it becomes cheese. On Shavuot, we eat cheese and milk products to remind ourselves that even if one sinned and spoiled his ways, he can always do teshuvah and receive the Torah.<sup>49</sup>

Chazal (Niddah 9:) tell us דם נעקר ונעשה חלב, "blood becomes spoiled, and turns into milk." The origin of milk is blood, which transforms itself into milk. It is forbidden to eat blood, so why is it permissible to 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 remains 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 Shavuot it states שעיר עיזים לכפר עליכם, 'a goat for atonement.' חטא isn't mentioned because, on Shavuot, no one has sins. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells 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 sheds its feathers and grows new ones every year, as it states (Tehillim 103:5) תתחדש כנשר, "Become new, your youth, like an eagle." Rashi writes, "Like an eagle that replaces its feathers and hair yearly." Similarly, the Torah tells us that Hashem carried us on eagle's wings to remind us that we should constantly change and improve our ways.

## A Life of Kedushah

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

We will explain this idea with a mashal:

A man once left a chasunah hall, and late at night, he remembered that he had forgotten something in the hall. 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 strewn around. It was hard to believe that this room had a beautiful event 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 chasan 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 in 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 lived a life of kedushah 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"ה can be translated as עי"ן פ"ה, eye and mouth. One should keep his eyes and

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**49.** Wine takes time and effort to prepare. The same is with oil. But milk is immediately available. One milks an animal, and there is milk. We eat milk and milchigs on Shavuot to remind us that Torah is readily available. תורה מונחת בקרן זווית, the Torah is in the corner, and whoever wants to can come forward and take it, study it, and acquire it.

The letters of חל"ב, spelled out in full, are חיי"ת למ"ד ביי"ת, and if we look at solely the מילוי, the letters added (without the primary letters חל"ב), the letters spell the word תמידית. This hints that to succeed in Torah, one must study תמידית, constantly. With קביעת עתים לתורה, setting time for learning Torah, and studying Torah every day, one can excel and grow in Torah.

mouth closed from things he shouldn't see or say, and then he will be צ, a צדי"ק.

Another hint to this concept is from the pasuk (Shemos 19:23) וְהִגַּבְלָה אֶת הָהָר וקדשתו "Make boundaries around the mountain and sanctify it." הִגַּבְלָה אֶת הָהָר can be explained as follows: Take the letters that border with the letters ה"ר. The letters before and after ה"ר are ו" and ד". The letters before and after ר" are ק" and ש". So, we have the letters that spell קדו"ש. This hints that by הִגַּבְלָה, making boundaries and precautions, one becomes holy.<sup>50</sup>

It states וירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחוק "The nation saw and 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 would succeed in keeping all the mitzvos. They found a solution, ויעמדו מרחוק, that they should keep their distance from an aveirah. The Apter Rav writes, "They found a strategy, that they should protect the words of the Torah and the mitzvos with gates and boundaries that Chazal established. 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."

### 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 and legendarily wealthy. Someone once asked Reb Avraham why he chose to be a Yid, as it meant forfeiting all this wealth. He answered, "Friday night, when the Shabbos oil lamps go out, they give off a scent. That smell is more enjoyable to me than all the wealth I had enjoyed in my previous life."<sup>51</sup>

In those days, it was forbidden to convert. Especially, when a child of the famous and wealthy Pototzki family converted, they viewed it as a great disgrace to the church. Reb Avraham had to conceal his background, but someone told the government where he was living, and this led to his death, r'l. The *ger tzedek* knew who reported him to the government, but he said he wouldn't take revenge. The *ger tzedek* said, "In this world, I didn't take revenge. Do you think that I will take revenge in the next world?"

He explained with a parable:

A young prince was at the beach, building the image of a person in the sand. Someone came by and broke the sculpture. The prince cried to his father, complaining that someone had broken his artistic work. The king listened to his son but didn't do anything. The prince was surprised that his father was so calm and relaxed. To the prince's young mind, a terrible crime was committed. He

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**50.** A bachur had to leave his yeshiva in Yerushalayim and contemplated going to a yeshiva in Tel Aviv. He asked Rebbe Shlomke for counsel. Rebbe Shlomke went to the mikvah (as it was his custom 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, a question that would put a bachur's shemiras einayim at risk was too difficult to answer.

**51.** Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l would tell this story and expressed that Yidden from previous generations relished every part of Shabbos, even the smell of the Shabbos lamps going out.

thought, 'When I grow up, I will take revenge on this person.' However, when the prince became an adult and a king, he didn't take revenge. As an adult, he realized that it was nothing. "Similarly," Reb Avraham ben Avraham explained, "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 Veshoresh 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'Shoresh HaAvodah to be there 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 the *ger tzedek's* *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.

*Yehi Zichro Baruch.*

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חדש!

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