

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Shavuos





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Torah Wellsprings - Shavuos

The Purpose of Mattan Torah – Emunah

The purpose of mattan Torah is to believe in Hashem. As the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Mishlei* 22:19) writes, עיקר נתינת התורה לישראל הוא בכדי שישמו, "The Torah was given, primarily, so that they will place their trust in Hashem."

Similarly, the Ramban (end of *parashas Bo*) writes, "If one doesn't believe that everything that happens to us is miraculous and that the concept of nature doesn't exist, he doesn't have a portion in the Torah."

The Aseres HaDibros begin with וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה' אלקיך. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk *zt'l* translates it as follows: "Hashem taught כל הדברים האלה, the entire Torah, so a Yid will be able to believe in Hashem and say אנכי ה' אלקיך...."¹

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

The commentaries ask, why does the Aseres HaDibros begin with, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר

"I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim"? Why doesn't it say, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר ברא שמים וארץ, "I am Hashem your G-d Who created heaven and earth"?

To answer, we quote the Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* (יום א' כ"ו) who writes, "Trust in Hashem with all your heart and believe in His *hashgachah pratis*... Believe that Hashem sees everything you do and examines your heart and your thoughts. Whoever doesn't believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim* [which showed us that Hashem leads the world with *hashgachah pratis*], also doesn't believe in אנכי ה' אלקיך... and [belief in *hashgachah pratis*] is the foundation of the entire Torah."

The Rosh is saying that אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר teaches us two aspects of *emunah*. אנכי ה' אלקיך teaches us that there is G-d, the creator. אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים teaches us that Hashem controls the world and leads us with *hashgachah pratis*, as He did when He took us out of Mitzrayim. This second lesson would be lacking if it stated אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר ברא שמים וארץ, "I am Hashem your G-d who created heaven and earth."²

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

2. Chazal (*Pesachim* 8) say that only people who own fields must perform the mitzvah of עליה לרגל, to go up to the Beis HaMikdash on Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos. Someone who doesn't own a field isn't obligated to go to the Beis HaMikdash.

What is the logic behind this? The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that those who don't own a field constantly turn their eyes to Hashem for their next meal. It isn't as important for him to come to the Beis HaMikdash to acquire *emunah*. His life circumstances force him to have *emunah*. Whereas, those who own property, and grow their own food, might think that they earn their *parnassah* on their own. The Torah obligates them to go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year to learn that everything is from Hashem.

Everything is for the Good

Another aspect of *emunah*, which we acquire with *mattan Torah*, is the belief that everything is for the good.

When Naomi left Beis Lechem to live in Moav, she was a wealthy woman; she was married and had two sons. When she returned to Beis Lechem, Eretz Yisrael, more than ten years later, she was a poor, childless widow. The women of Beis Lechem were shocked to see her so distraught and broken. Naomi told them (*Rus* 1:20), "Don't call me Naomi (pleasant). Call me bitter because Hashem made my life very bitter."

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (*Drashos* vol.2, p.299.) writes another reason Naomi felt so bitter. When Naomi returned to Eretz Yisrael, she hoped that her husband's wealthy nephew, Boaz, would help her settle down in Eretz Yisrael. Naomi didn't want to speak with Boaz directly. As the Chasam Sofer writes, "It isn't the way of *tzanuah* women to meet with men. And, indeed, we never find Naomi meeting or speaking to Boaz."

Naomi planned to approach Boaz's wife and ask her to speak to her husband on her behalf. "However, when Naomi arrived in Beis Lechem, the *levayah* of Boaz's wife was taking place (see *Bava Basra* 91.)." Naomi's plans and hopes were dashed. But ultimately, it was all for her benefit, as the Chasam Sofer writes. "The *petirah* of Boaz's wife was for Naomi's benefit because Rus came and took her place [Rus married Boaz]. And from this marriage, Rus bore a child, which Naomi raised as her own. So, it was Hashem's plan, and for the good. But at the time, Naomi

didn't realize that. She thought it was bad for her [because she relied on Boaz's wife to be her contact]. Therefore, she said, *כי המר שד"י לי מאוד*, 'Hashem made it very bitter for me.'³

The *roshei teivos* of *שד"י לי מאוד*, "Hashem made it very bitter for me" spell *שלמה*. This hints that although Naomi thought matters were bitter for her, it was all for the good, preparing the way for the birth of Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech [who were descendants of Boaz and Rus].

Chazal (*Shabbos* 31.) say, *אמונה זה סדר זרעים*, *emunah* hints to *Seder Zeraim* (which discusses the *halachos* related to agriculture, such as the *halachos* of *terumah* and *maasar*). Why is it called *אמונה*? What is the connection between agriculture and *emunah*?

Perhaps we can explain it this way: Agriculture reminds us that when everything seems lost, good things will sprout from it. One plants seeds in the earth, they rot, and it looks like nothing will come from it. But these seeds will sprout, and soon the field will be covered with produce. Similarly, we must believe that even when we go through a difficult period, something extraordinary will sprout from it.

Aharon's children Elazar and Isamar were greater than the seventy *zekenim* of the Sanhedrin. The proof is the Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54:) that teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu taught Torah to Aharon, then to Elazar and Isamar, and then to the seventy *zekeinim*. Elazar and Isamar were taught before the Sanhedrin, which indicates that Elazar and Isamar were on a higher level.

3. We explained why it was for Naomi's benefit that Boaz's wife was *niftarah*. Her death made room for Rus to take her place.

It was also good for Boaz that exactly at this time, Rus arrived. As Chazal say, *הקב"ה מקדים רפואה למכה*, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the cure before the affliction" Before Boaz's wife died, Rus arrived to take her place.

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91.) states, "The day Rus came to Eretz Yisrael, Boaz's wife died." The 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 affliction. Therefore, one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

Furthermore, the Gemara explains that Torah study requires review, and Elazar and Isamar would teach the Sanhedrin, to repeat what they heard from Moshe rabbeinu. So, Elazar and Isamar taught the seventy zekenim, which that means Elazar and Isamar were greater.

Yet, by *mattan Torah*, the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were permitted to go on Har Sinai, but Elazar and Isamar had to stand at a distance. As the Torah (*Shemos* 24:1) says, ואל משה אמר עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא ושבעים מזקני ישראל, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go up on the mountain, you, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Yisrael.'" Elazar and Isamar aren't mentioned.

Nadav and Avihu were Aharon's older children. They were permitted to go up on Har Sinai. Moshe, Aharon, and the seventy zekenim were also allowed to ascend the mountain, but not Elazar and Isamar. Why? Why were they denied this privilege? They were greater than the elders of the Sanhedrin! If the Sanhedrin could be on the mountain, why couldn't they?

In retrospect, the reason was understood.

The Tur (in his commentary on *Chumash*) teaches that Nadav and Avihu and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were punished because they didn't have the proper *yiras Shamayim* when they were on Har Sinai. As the Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behalascha 16) states, הקלו ראשם בעלותם להר סיני שראו את השכינה, "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.' This analogous to a slave who eats his lunch as he serves his master. It isn't respectful. [Similarly, they watched Hashem on Har Sinai without the proper respect, and] they deserved to be punished for this. But Hashem didn't want to punish them on the day He gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael because the day of *mattan Torah* is special to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore, it states (*Shemos* 24), ואל, אצילי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו, 'and to the princes of Bnei Yisrael, Hashem didn't put forth His hand.' This means Hashem refrained from punishing them, and the punishments were postponed for a later date. Nadav and Avihu received their punishment when they entered Ohel Moed with their ketores (and fire came out and burnt them), and the seventy elders were burned when they had the *taavah* (temptation for meat). As it states, והאספסוף אשר בקרבו התאו תאוה, 'Hashem's fire burned them'."

So, in retrospect, Elazar and Isamar understood that it was for their benefit that they were banned from ascending the mountain. Had Elazar and Isamar ascended the mountain and gaze at the *Shechinah* without the required respect, they too would die, and Aharon would be left without children.⁴

Eagerness

At *mattan Torah* Klal Yisrael proclaimed נעשה ונשמע, "We will do, and we will listen."

4. It states, עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא, "Go up to Har Sinai: You and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu." The *taamim* (*trop*) of these words are קדמא ואולא מונה רביעי. Perhaps this hints קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very beginning, אולא, that the people who went up on Har Sinai will be smitten and punished. מונה, 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, survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וידבר שלושת אלפים משל, "Shlomo told שלושת אלפים, three thousand *mashalim*..." means 3000, but it can also mean 3 א's. This refers to אהרן, אלעזר, איתמר, three people whose names begin with א. Initially, Aharon, Elazar and Isamar didn't understand why Elazar and Isamar's exclusion was for their good, but later they understood the great kindness that was concealed there. Shlomo used this as a *mashal* to teach people that everything Hashem does is for the good.

The order is problematic because how can one do before he listens and hears what he needs to do?

The answer is that when one desires something immensely, his doing almost precedes listening. The following analogy will help us understand:

A poor person required financial aid, and his neighbors held a meeting to see what they can do to help him. The neighbors weren't wealthy, so they couldn't help him with their own money. They planned to divide up the different areas in Eretz Yisrael and raise money for their neighbor.

The person chairing the meeting gave everyone present a territory where to go and raise funds. They listened first, and when they understood their mission and goal, they went to do it. But there was one righteous person who was very motivated to help his neighbor. When it was his turn to hear his mission, he was already putting on his coat, and was one foot out the door, rushing to his destination; all this before he even heard precisely what he is to do! In this respect, his doing preceded his listening.

Here is another analogy:

People living in a condominium would gather once a year to discuss the maintenance of the condominium and plan future capital projects (such as whether they should invest in a playground for the children, or repaint the building interiors, etc.).

They would listen to the ideas, debate them, and together they would reach conclusions. But one year, during the annual meeting, the condominium caught on fire. They didn't sit there to debate how to put out the fire. Everyone ran and acted. Their *doing* came before they listened because when something is urgent, doing comes first.

This describes the uniqueness of *נעשה ונשמע*. Indeed, they had to listen first. It is impossible to act before hearing and knowing what you should do. But their desire to keep

the Torah was so strong that they were ready to do even before they heard.

This describes the attitude we should have toward Shavuot. We should accept the Torah with joy and yearning, ready to do even before knowing what our obligations will be.

The Joy of Mattan Torah

We must also be happy on Shavuot. That is the spirit of the entire day.

At the beginning of the story of mattan Torah, the Torah tells us (*Shemos* 19:1-2): *ביום הזה: באו מדבר סיני*, "On this day (rosh chodesh Sivan) they arrived at Midbar Sinai. *ויסעו מרפידים ויבאו*, "They traveled from Refidim, and they arrived at Midbar Sinai." The Or HaChaim asks that the pasuk isn't written in order of the events because it begins with the nation arriving at Midbar Sinai, and then it goes back and tells us that they traveled there from Refidim.

The Or HaChaim (*Shemos* 19:2) answers that the Torah couldn't contain its excitement, and it immediately proclaimed, "They came to Midbar Sinai!" Afterward, the Torah relates the details of where they came from, and where they traveled to, etc.

As the Or HaChaim writes:

"Ever since the world was created – the entire world...was waiting anxiously, 'When will Bnei Yisrael come to *midbar* Sinai?' When they arrived at Har Sinai, the Torah couldn't contain itself to tell the order of events. It immediately let us know, *ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני*, 'They came to Midbar Sinai! *הגיע חשוק ונחשק*. לחושק חשוק. The beloved Jewish nation came to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who loves them."

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

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 68:) states, "Rav Yosef requested from his family on Shavuot,

'Prepare me a calf עגל תלתא" (a calf, the third-born to its mother, because it has the choicest meat).

Rav Yosef explained, "If it weren't for this day [of *mattan Torah*], there are many Yosefs in the marketplace."

The Shlah HaKadosh (18) writes, "One is obligated to be very happy on Shavuot because on this day we receive the crown of Torah."

How can a person not rejoice on this day, the day that Hashem elevated us from among all nations to be His chosen nation? Who wouldn't rejoice when the Creator of the world chose him — a human being made of flesh and blood — to be beloved to Hashem? That is the spirit of joy that we should feel on this holy day.⁵

Annual Mattan Torah

The Aruch HaShulchan (284) discusses the *brachah* that we say in the *haftarah*, ודבר אחר מדברך אחר לא ישוב ריקם, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty."

He asks, "The word אחר, 'of the past' seems extra, and its meaning is not understood. He answers that when the Torah discusses stories that happened years ago in the past, it seems that there isn't any purpose.

But the truth is that what occurred in the past continues to happen in the present time. One example is *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We are obligated to imagine ourselves leaving Mitzrayim in every generation. This is because *yetzias Mitzrayim* continues to happen.

Similarly, when the *Navi* discusses something that happened in the past, it continues to occur. This is the *segulah* of the holy Torah. Therefore, we say, even matters that occurred in the past, אחר, לא ישוב ריקם, aren't empty. They are not irrelevant stories of history. They continue to this very day."

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* found an indication in Shulchan Aruch that *mattan Torah* repeats itself each year:

Shulchan Aruch (468:10) states, "The custom is that one doesn't do הקזת דם, blood-letting [for healing purposes] on *erev yom tov*."

The Magen Avraham (15) explains the reason for this custom: "The Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) tells that before the Torah was given, on *erev Shavuot*, a spirit called טבוח came forth. If the Jewish people didn't accept the Torah, the spirit would have killed them and spilled their blood..." Therefore, in every generation, we must be cautious of this spirit, and we avoid letting

5. During the Holocaust, an elderly Jew said to Reb Chaim Kreisworth, "Tomorrow, I will be sent to the gas chambers H"Y. I am very wealthy, and my money is kept in a Swiss bank. I will tell you the number of my account. If you survive this war, seek out my children and give them the account number, so that they can claim the money."

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

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim was speaking to a poor person in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim, and that person happened to mention his name. Reb Chaim realized that he was the offspring he was looking for. Reb Chaim told him, "Your father told me that he has money in a bank in Switzerland. Go there and collect your money."

This man was very poor and couldn't pay for a trip to Switzerland. So, he borrowed money, and made the trip. Having accrued interest all these years, the account now contained \$30,000,000.

Reb Chaim Kreisworth commented, "This man was wealthy for many years, only he didn't know it."

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

blood on *erev Shavuos*. And since we are careful *erev Shavuos*, the custom is that we are cautious every *erev yom tov*, and we don't draw blood.

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

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

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach quotes this *Machatzis HaShekel* as an indication that every year on Shavuos, there is *kabbalas haTorah*, along with all the details of the original *mattan Torah*.

Chiddushei Torah

But what does it mean that we receive the Torah each year, again? We received the Torah about 3,300 years ago. Don't we already have the Torah? What do we receive on Shavuos that we don't already have?

The answer is that each year, new *chidushei Torah* comes to the fore, new questions and answers, and new Torah insights. Moshe Rabbeinu received the entire Torah on Har Sinai. As Chazal say, "Moshe received on Har Sinai even what a student will ask, many years in the future." These sections of the Torah become revealed, each *chidush* at the right time.

This explains what we receive on Shavuos. On this day, each individual gets his portion of Torah for that year. He receives the ability to be *mechadesh chadashim* (find new *chidushim* and ideas in the Torah).

Is Torah an inheritance? One *pasuk* states that it is. As it states (*Devarim* 33:4), תורה צוה לנו

מושה מורשה קהלת יעקב, "Moshe commanded us the Torah; it is an inheritance for the congregation of Yaakov." However, the Mishna states (*Avos* 2:12), התקן עצמך ללמוד תורה, שאינה ירושה לך, "Prepare yourself to learn Torah, because it isn't an inheritance." So, is Torah our inheritance, or is it not?

The Sfas Emes (*Shavuos* 5661) answers that Torah contains two parts: The Torah that we received on Har Sinai more than three thousand years ago, and the *chidushei Torah* that are new each day and each year. The Torah that Moshe taught us, and which was passed down over the generations, is an inheritance. The *Chidushei Torah* aren't an inheritance. That comes from a person's toil in Torah.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* taught that even clarity in Torah – when you review a Gemara until you understand it well – is called *chiddushei Torah*. And there is the standard definition of *chiddushei Torah*, the novel insights in Torah that each person can perceive according to his level. All this is given to us on Shavuos.

Derech HaMelech (from the Rebbe of Piasetzna *zt'l*) explains it this way: On Shavuos everyone receives a non-defined prophecy. When he studies Torah throughout the year, he brings forth the *chiddushei Torah* that he received on Shavuos.

The Sfas Emes writes, "The Torah is called עץ חיים, a tree of life. Just as a tree grows fruit each year, so does the Torah bring forth new fruit each year. Shavuos, when Hashem gives us the Torah, Bnei Yisrael receive their portion of *chiddushei Torah* that will for the year. They bring it forth (מכא אל הפועל), each one at the right time and place."

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say "On Shavuos, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees."⁶ The Sfas Emes explains that this

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

means that on Shavuos you are judged which *chiddushim* you will perceive throughout the year.

Therefore, Shavuos is called **יום הביכורים**, 'the day of the new fruit.' This alludes to the new *chiddushim* that are conceived on Shavuos.

The Sfas Emes concludes, **ויום זה שורש התורה**, "This day is the source of Torah for the entire year."⁷

New Sweetness in Torah

In *birchas haTorah* we say, **נותן התורה** "Who gives the Torah." Why don't we say **נתן התורה**, "Who gave us the Torah"?

The Ta'z (*Orach Chaim* 47:5) writes, "It seems to me... that **נותן התורה**, 'Hashem gives the Torah' [in the present tense] implies that Hashem gives us the Torah, even in the present. We don't say **נתן התורה**, that Hashem gave us the Torah in the past. Hashem is always giving us His Torah, each day anew. When we study Torah, Hashem grants us the ability to find newness in it."

The Ta'z compares it to the Gemara (*Eiruv* 54), which says that just as a nursing child always tastes new flavors whenever he nurses, similarly, someone who studies Torah always finds new pleasures in Torah.

So, this can be another explanation of what we receive on Shavuos. We accepted the Torah approximately 3300 years ago, and every year, on Shavuos, we receive the ability to find newness in Torah, new pleasures, and new enjoyment.

One *erev Shavuos*, Reb Meir of Amshinov *zt'l* said to one of his chassidim, "Chazal say, 'who is a fool? The person who loses what is given to him' (*Chagigah* 4). Therefore, I encourage you, don't be a fool. On Shavuos, we receive the Torah for the entire year. Don't miss the opportunity."

We can compare it to someone who owns many fields and has the potential to become very wealthy. But if he doesn't harvest the crops, he won't have anything. Similarly, Shavuos, we have the potential to receive so much Torah, so much spiritual growth. But it is up to us to harvest it. A farmer wouldn't miss the harvest season, let us not miss out on Shavuos, the **הג הקציר**, the harvest of Torah and spirituality for the entire year.

Reading the Aseres HaDibros

Whenever we read from the *sefer Torah* – also during the weekday – it is like we are receiving the Torah again, on Har Sinai.

The Shevet Mussar (34:19) writes, "In your mind, imagine that the *bimah* is Har Sinai and that you're receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. Think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His *malachim* (פמליא שלו) are present, as it was by *mattan Torah*. Think that Moshe Rabbeinu is reading the Torah, and the entire nation is standing around Har Sinai to hear Torah from his mouth."

Shulchan Aruch (141:1) states, "[The *baal korei*] must stand."

In *siman* (146:4) *Shulchan Aruch* states that some say that also those listening to *kriyas haTorah* should stand. The *Mishnah Berurah*

The Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:5) states, "By all *korbanos* it states **שעיר עיזים לחטאת**, 'a goat for a sin-offering.' But by the *korbanos* of Shavuos, it doesn't say **חטא**. It states **שעיר עיזים לכפר עליכם**, 'a goat for atonement.' This is because on Shavuos 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.'" This is what happens every Shavuos (and whenever one accepts the yoke of Torah).

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

(141:19) explains, "According to halachah, it is permitted to sit, but the Maharam said it is proper to stand. This is because when hearing the reading of the *sefer Torah*, one should imagine as if he is receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, and at Har Sinai all Yidden stood, as it states, *אנכי עומד בין ה' וביניכם*"

We see from these sources that whenever we read the Torah is a micro *mattan Torah*. Certainly, when we read the parashah of *mattan Torah*, it is as though we are receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. As the Midrash (*Psikta* 12, *Yalkut Shimoni Yisro* 271) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to the Jewish nation, 'My children read this *parashah* [of *mattan Torah*] each year and I will consider it as though you stood before Me on Mount Sinai and received the Torah."

We read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: Shavuos, Shabbos *parashas Yisro*, and Shabbos *parashas Ve'eschanan*. Why is it necessary to read it three times?

The Beis Avraham explained:

A very sick patient needs strong medications. The problem is that the patient is too weak and ill to endure the strong medicines. Therefore, the doctor will administer the medication in two or three doses, so it isn't all given at one time. Similarly, our cure is the *Aseres HaDibros*, as it instills in us *emunah*. The spiritual experience from reading this section of the Torah is very intense and perhaps too harsh for our weak selves (weak and ill in a spiritual sense). Therefore, the impact is divided up into three parts – so the Jewish nation can absorb its message.

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

The Shinover Rav said that he was expecting to experience the same on Shavuos, and he prepared himself for that moment. But on Shavuos he didn't experience it.

One Friday night of *parashas Yisro*, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* said at his *tish*, "Tomorrow, when the *Aseres HaDibros* is read, people with holy ears will hear Hashem saying the *Aseres HaDibros*..."⁸

When the Avodas Yisrael of Koznitz *zt'l* heard this, he added, "Someone who doesn't have such ears should cleanse them well, and he too will be able to hear it!"

Preparation

There are twenty-six *pesukim* from the words *בחודש השלישי* (*Shemos* 19:1) until the *Aseres HaDibros*. The *Aseres HaDibros*, itself, are thirteen *pesukim*. (The *gematriya* of 26 and 13 hints to *הוי"ה אחד*.) Notice that there is twice the amount of *pesukim* that discuss the preparation for *mattan Torah* than *pesukim* that discuss *mattan Torah* itself. This indicates that the actual preparation is on the highest level. As chassidim say, "the preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah itself."

8. The Kedushas Levi would sweat profusely from fear when he took out the *sefer Torah* to read on Shavuos. The congregation knew to wrap the *sefer Torah* with extra layers, so it wouldn't get wet and ruined from his sweat. Before he came to the beis medresh on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis, he exclaimed, *איך* "I'm going to meet with Hashem!" (Some say that he said, "I met with Hashem!")

The Chizkuni (introduction to *Chumash*) writes, "I swear by my soul that I, Chizkiyah, heard Hashem say the Ten Commandments in my dream ..."

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

In the *Hagadah Shel Pesach*, we say, אילו קרבנו לפני ה' סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה דיינו "If Hashem brought us to Har Sinai and He didn't give us the Torah it would also be enough." The commentaries ask, what would we gain from coming to Har Sinai if we wouldn't receive the Torah?

The Chida (*Leiv Dovid* 31) *zt'l* answers that when the Yidden stood by Har Sinai, they were preparing themselves to receive the Torah. The holy *sefarim* teach us that as a result of their preparations they perceived the divine secrets of the Torah even before the Torah was given. Hence, even just coming to Har Sinai (where they prepared for *mattan Torah*) דיינו, would render it enough reason to praise Hashem.

The significance of preparing for *mattan Torah* is stated in the Chumash, as the *posuk* says (*Shemos* 19:11), והיו נכונים ליום השלישי, "Be prepared for the third day."

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

The Kedushas Levi *zt'l* writes, "If a person merits is worthy, every Shavuot he will hear Hashem's voice announce אנוכי ה' אלקיך. 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."

It states (*Shemos* 19:3), ומשה עלה אל האלקים ויקרא, "Moshe went up to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain..." The Ohr HaChaim writes, "Moshe took the initiative, and he began climbing up the mountain (as it states, משה עלה אל האלקים), and then Hashem called him, immediately (as it states, ויקרא אלו ה'). Holiness doesn't come to a person unless he prepares for it. The *Zohar*

states, 'An arousal below causes the arousal Above.'" Therefore, after Moshe took a step towards holiness (by climbing up the mountain), Hashem called him. Similarly, we must prepare ourselves for *mattan Torah*, and then we will attain the holiness of *mattan Torah*.

One way to prepare yourself for *mattan Torah* is to take on a good *kabbalah* (undertaking/resolution).

When taking on a *kabbalah*, it is essential to know your abilities – what you can do and what you can't. To explain, consider the following *meshal*:

A *talmid chacham* went into a shoe store and asked for a pair of shoes, size 8. The generous store owner replied, "You're a *talmid chacham*, so I want to give you more. I'll give you a size 10."

The man replied, "Your generosity doesn't help me. A size 10 shoe will slip off my foot. I need a size 8."

As for the *nimshal*, there are great, impressive *kabbalos* that one can take on, but if they are beyond his abilities, he will fail. This is hinted in words, וספרתם לכם. Find the *kabbalah* and *avodah* that is לכם, at your level.

Sefiras Ha'omer

We also have the *mitzvah* of counting *sefiras ha'omer* to prepare ourselves for *mattan Torah*. As we say in the *tefillah* following *sefiras ha'omer*, רבונו של עולם אתה, צויתנו על ידי משה עבדך לספר ספירת העמר כדי לטהרנו מציטוננו ומטמאתנו, "Ribono Shel Olam, You commanded us... to count *sefiras ha'omer*, to purify us from our *kelipos* and our *tumah*." But what should a person do if almost all the days of *sefiras ha'omer* passed, and he realizes that he didn't take advantage of this opportune time?

The Chidushei HaRim said that even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, one can fix everything. This is hinted at in the *pasuk*, עד, ממוחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום, "until the morrow of the seventh week, count fifty

days." Even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, one can count *all* fifty days. One can even acquire the purity that's attainable during all the days of *sefiras ha'omer*.

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* adds that even if one came to Shavuos and didn't improve his ways during the seven weeks of *sefiras ha'Omer*, it also isn't too late. As it states (about Shavuos, *Vayikra* 23:21), וקראתם בעצם היום הזה, מקרא קודש יהיה לכם. This *pasuk* implies that even in the middle of Shavuos, one can make a decision מקרא קודש, to draw himself towards holiness – and that will be sufficient.

The Arugas HaBosem writes, "Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Jewish people will be on a very low level in *galus*, and that they won't be able to prepare themselves properly to receive the light of the *yom tov* of *mattan Torah*. He yearned for each Yid to 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* one would understand that it's impossible to receive the light of *mattan Torah* without keeping the *sefirah* properly. But since Shavuos didn't directly follow the *sefirah*, this shows that they are not interdependent. Even if the Jewish nation isn't able to purify themselves properly [during *sefiras ha'omer*], the light of *mattan Torah* will not be lost because of that."

Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah

Rebbe Avraham HaMalach told his students that they shouldn't come to him during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, because he needs these days to study Torah by himself.

The students didn't obey and they came to their Rebbe in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* 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 is dependent upon one's *hasmadah* in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Old Yerushalayimer Yidden still remember (before תש"ח) that the stores of Yerushalayim would close at midday, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, and the shopkeepers would spend the rest of the day immersed in Torah study.

The batei midrashim of Poland were filled to capacity, already two weeks before Shavuos.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis medresh in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim* (the Jewish communities of Europe from before the War)?"

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story: The *batei midrashim* of Poland were always full during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*. People would take off from their work in order to immerse themselves entirely in Torah. Once, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, someone came into the beis medresh and watched with envy the passion for Torah that he saw taking place in the beis medresh. He turned to the wall and cried, as he wished he was also like them.

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer said, "But he didn't merely remain with a desire to learn Torah. He reached for the first Gemara he saw, sat down, and was immediately engrossed in Torah."

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

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer had one bookshelf where he kept the *sefarim* that were written with *ruach hakadosh*. That man's *sefer* was also stored on that shelf.

There was a Lelover chasid who was very fortunate that his daughter was engaged to the rebbe's son. His rebbe was Rebbe Elazar Mendel of Lelov (who lived in Yerushalayim), and he praised Hashem that he merited this.

But the chasid's wife didn't share his enthusiasm. She was upset that the Rebbe's

family wasn't sending gifts to the kallah, as customary. They sent gifts to the chassan, but they didn't receive any presents in return.

(Primarily, this was because the Rebbe gave every penny away to tzedakah, to support the poor of Yerushalayim. Nothing was left for gifts.)⁹

The chasid's wife encouraged her husband to speak with the Rebbe, to tell him to send gifts to the kallah. The chasid promised his wife that he would do so, but he kept pushing it off because he felt uncomfortable raising the issue with his Rebbe. Rebbe Elazar Mendel was his Rebbe, after all, how could he rebuke him!

But he knew that his wife was distraught, and he understood that he would have to discuss the issue with the Rebbe sooner or later.

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

During the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the Rebbe's custom was to daven *Maariv* and count *sefiras ha'omer* at the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik. Then he would go to the Kosel haMaaravi to daven some more. The chasid was planning to go along with the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "Tonight, you must speak with the Rebbe. I've asked you so many times, and you keep pushing me off. This time you must take action. Otherwise, don't return to this home anymore."

She told him that because she was extremely hurt that her daughter wasn't

receiving any gifts. And her husband knew that it wasn't just a threat.

So, later that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he stood behind the closed door, the husband thought to himself, "My wife is right, after all. The Rebbe is a holy man, that's true, but why doesn't he give a gift to our daughter? Even a small pin would be enough. Why can't the Rebbe give our daughter a small pin?"

The Rebbe answered the door, "*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, "We have a *mechutan*, a *baal ruach hakadosh*. Don't bother me any more about the presents. If you do, then *you* won't be allowed in this home anymore."

The lesson to take from this story is to recognize the preciousness of the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, and to set time to study Torah in these holy days.

Tikun Leil Shavuos

On the night of Shavuos, we have yet another preparation for mattan Torah, and that is when we remain awake all night studying Torah.

The Mishnah Berurah (494:1) teaches, "The Zohar (vol.3, 98.) states that the early chassidim remained awake the entire night of Shavuos and they studied Torah. Today, most *לומדים* (scholars) do so. The Arizal teaches: 'Know, whoever doesn't sleep at all this night, and studies Torah, *מובטח לו שישלים שנתו ולא יארע לו שום*

9. It is told that Rebbe Elazar Mendel once received a large sum of money to distribute for kimcha d'Pischa, to help the poor of Yerushalayim for Pesach, and he distributed every penny to the poor. He didn't keep any of the money for himself. That Pesach, the Tzanzer Rav zt'l praised Rebbe Elazar Mendel's seder. (The Tzanzer Rav saw, through *ruach hakodesh*, the sederim of tzaddikim, and he saw that Rebbe Elazar Mendel's seder shone brightly.) It is explained that Reb Elazar Mendel merited this because he gave all the money to tzedakah, and he didn't keep anything for himself.

נוק, he is guaranteed that he will live out the year and nothing bad will happen to him.'

The Magen Avraham gives a reason for this custom: "The nation slept the entire night, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to awaken them to receive the Torah (as stated in Midrash). To rectify this, we remain awake on this night."

The Zohar (Introduction vol.1, 8:) states, "Reb Shimon and his holy students were singing Torah and saying chiddushim...and they were very joyous. Reb Shimon told them, 'My children, you are fortunate because tomorrow the *kallah* will go to the *chuppah*¹⁰ with you, and only with you because you are doing the *tikun* tonight and you are rejoicing with the Torah... Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bless you with seventy brachos and crown you. Whoever joins us on this night will be protected the entire year. He will live out the year in peace."¹¹

It is an extraordinary night, but some people possess ענוה פסולה, false humility. They go to sleep and leave this service for the tzaddikim and the great scholars. They think

that the *tikkun*, rectification, of this night, is exclusively for the great tzaddikim.

But we shouldn't underestimate our potential. Great things happen, great tikunim, even when simple people stay awake and study Torah on this night.

As the Seder HaYom (*Shavuos*) writes, "One should be very happy on Shavuos because it's the day the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael... The body should rejoice [with good food] because we will use the body to study Torah and perform the mitzvos... The *neshamah* also needs to rejoice. The *neshamah* rejoices when it understands Torah. Because the joy of the *neshamah* is solely learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos. In particular, on the night of Shavuos, one should remain awake and study Torah all night long (or, at least, he should be awake most of the night). Don't take this matter lightly because a person is lowly in some ways, and in others, he has amazing strength. He can sustain the entire world – which even *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

10. Mattan Torah is called a chasunah, as Chazal (*Taanis* 26:) translate (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11), יום חתונתו (wedding day, as) "the day Hashem gave us the Torah." Therefore, many customs of a *chasunah* resemble *mattan Torah*.

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

11. When you have a temptation to speak idle talk on this night, remember the rare promises and guarantees of the Zohar, and that will help you refrain.

(Many people read these words of the Zohar at the end of Shavuos night because it is printed at the end of the Tikun leil Shavuos. It seems that it would be better to read it at the beginning of the night, so he will study the entire night with hasmadah.)

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

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 save him from the punishment of כרת. This is said about any night of the year. Certainly, it is so when one remains awake, studying Torah on Shavuos night. He will be atoned for aveiros that are punished with kares)."

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

His right hand back. As it states, צור ילדך תשי, 'You weakened the strength of the One Who created you.'

"Therefore, every person, קטן שבקטנים והדיוט, even the lowest and most simple person, should consider himself great in this regard 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 corrected through my deeds?' Such thoughts cause disaster – onto oneself and others – because he won't be cautious with his deeds...

"If he is exhausted and must sleep, he should sleep [on the table], but not [in a bed], so he won't sleep too long. And then, he should quickly wake up and study Torah until daybreak. And then he should praise Hashem in the beis medresh for all the kindness He performs for us. He gave us His Torah and chose us from among all nations to be His beloved nation. How fortunate is our lot...! We aren't fools who don't recognize all this honor that Hashem granted us; that He elevated us above all nations of the world. They turn to their *avodah zarahs* who can't help them... This isn't the lot of Bnei Yisrael... Hashem is always watching over us, at all times, and performed miracles for our forefathers and us, at all times."¹²

Reb Shlomo Alkebetz *zt'l* (renowned kabbalist and composer of *Lecha Dodi* that we sing on Friday night) was once awake Shavuot night, studying Torah with the scholars, and they merited great revelations.

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Masechta Shavuot, Ner Mitzvah*, 8) quotes this episode, told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz *zt'l*: "We began studying Mishnayos and completed two *masechtos*, and then Hashem granted us the privilege to

hear a voice from heaven, which said, 'My beloved, righteous friends, shalom to you. *Ashreiechim!* Fortunate are you, and fortunate are your parents who gave birth to you. You are fortunate in this world and in the next world, for you devoted yourself to crown Me on this night. My crown fell years ago, and since then, no one has consoled me. I was thrown to the earth, lying in the rubbish. You returned the crown to its place! Be strong, my friends, my beloved. Be happy! Rejoice! And know that you are holy people... The voice of your Torah rose before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and as it went up, it broke through several heavens. All the *malachim*...are silent. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and all the hosts of heaven are listening 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. Say in a loud voice, like on Yom Kippur, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, and they did so.

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

"I guarantee whoever stays awake all Shavuot night and studies Torah that he will merit the crown of Torah."

Rebbe Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* added, "The Tzemech Tzedek was a *posek* and a *rav*, and 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

12. The Seder HaYom elaborates on our obligation to attach ourselves to the Torah, always. He writes, "Hashem loves us because of our forefathers and because of His love for the precious, perfect Torah that He implanted in our midst... The Torah is the daughter of Hakadosh Baruch Hu – the King of kings. Whoever will marry and love His daughter, Hashem will certainly grant him a dowry and a lot of money; nothing will be lacking."

emphasis on the word (נעור) to be awake (and not to learn with laziness)."

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

One year, Reb Chaim Leib asked the Pupa *dayan*, "I see that you are extremely happy today, more than other years. Is there a reason?"

The Pupa *dayan* replied, "I wasn't planning to tell you, but now that you asked, I will tell you. When I was a bachur, I studied in the Ksav Sofer's yeshiva in Pressburg. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* said that whoever studies the entire night of Shavuos without *hesach hadas* (without stopping) will merit *giluy Eliyahu*. The yeshiva students always strived for this, and for many years, I also tried, but I never merited *giluy Eliyahu*... Last night, I learned a difficult passage in the Zohar, and I couldn't decipher its holy words. An older adult came into the beis medresh, someone I don't know, and he explained the Zohar to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes to focus. When I opened my eyes, the man wasn't there anymore, and it was time to daven

Shacharis. Now, I think you understand why I'm so happy."¹³

The Holiness of Bnei Yisrael

Let us examine the power of tefillah that the Jewish nation possesses, especially on Shavuos. We begin this subject by recognizing the greatness of the Jewish nation.

In the tefillah we say, ורוממתנו מכל הלשונות. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* explains: Words from all languages (מכל הלשונות) aren't sufficient to express our greatness (רוממתנו). No language is rich enough to describe the greatness Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael when He chose us from all nations of the world and gave us the Torah.¹⁴ Part of the greatness that Hashem gave us is that we have the power of tefillah. Hashem listens and answers our requests.

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11), צאנה וראינה בנות ציון, במלך שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו ביום חתונתו וביום שמחתו, "Go out and see, O daughters of Zion... the crown that His mother made for Him on His wedding day, the day of his joy."

This pasuk alludes to Shavuos, because Chazal say יום חתונתו, "His wedding day" refers to the day Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation.

The Midrash on this *pasuk* (*ibid.*) teaches:

13. Someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* whether he should stay awake Shavuos night, because he knows that he will study much more Torah on Shavuos, and will daven better, if he goes to sleep at a normal hour.

Reb Shlomo Zalman told him that although his concerns are valid, he should nevertheless remain up all night studying Torah. He explained, "One should keep the customs that were accepted by all Yidden and scholars, and he should educate his family to have the correct respect for customs... [Furthermore] since all *lomdim*, all over the world, keep this custom, if you won't keep it, your children and your wife will consider it בקלות ה"י, that you are acting improperly. Therefore, you should keep the *minhag*, even if it is hard" (*Halichos Shlomo* 12, note 13).

14. Generally, these words are translated as follows:

אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים, "You selected us from all nations... ורוממתנו מכל הלשונות, You uplifted us above all nationalities."

But that would basically be saying the same thing twice. Therefore, Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa explains that the second phrase means that Hashem raised us so high, that, ורוממתנו מכל הלשונות, no language is rich enough to express our greatness.

Reb Shimon bar Yochai asked Reb Elazar b'Reb Yosi, "Perhaps you heard from your father the meaning of the words בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו, 'The crown that his mother made for him'?"

"Yes, I did."

"What did he say?"

"It can be compared to a king who had an only daughter who he loved very much. Initially, he called her בתי 'my daughter.' Later he called her אחותי, 'my sister.' לא זו מחבבה, his love didn't cease 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, לא זו מחבבה עד שקראן אמי, He doesn't stop loving them until He calls them אמי, 'My mother.'"¹⁵

"Reb Shimon bar Yochai stood up and kissed him on his head. He said, 'If I came here only to hear this explanation from your mouth, it is sufficient.'"

The Kli Yakar teaches that the level of אמו, mother, means the Jewish nation is, keviyachol, at a higher level (as a mother ranks higher than her children), and this means the Jewish nation can annul Hashem's decrees.

The Kli Yakar also teaches that the three levels of closeness to Hashem that are mentioned in this Midrash (daughter, sister, mother) are alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם אלי... ואתם, "I carried you on eagles' wings and I brought you to Me... and you will be for me like a kingship of priests, a holy nation."

The first level is ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings." This is when Hashem treats us as a caring father who tends to his youth.

Then Hashem raised us to a higher relationship until we are like a sister. As it states, ואביא אתכם אלי, "I brought you to Me." This means the Jewish nation became equal with Hashem, *keviyachol*.

The *pasuk* concludes, ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים, "You will be for Me like a kingship of priests..." This means, *keviyachol*, the Jewish nation will be kings over Hashem! As it states (*II Shmuel* 23:3), צדיק מושל ביראת אלקים, "A tzaddik rules (*keviyachol*) over Hashem." As Chazal say, "Hashem makes decrees, and a tzaddik annuls them." This is the level of "mother," who is at a higher position.

This all happens on Shavuot, ביום חתונתו, on His wedding day.

An eagle was crawling along the seashore, eating tiny ants and bugs. This diet wasn't sufficient for the large eagle. But what could it do?

Someone called out, "Eagle! Eagle! Why are you crawling on the seashore? You have wings. Lift your wings, fly over the sea, and you can catch fish." The eagle flew over the ocean, swooped down, caught a fish, and was satiated.

The *nimshal* is that when the Jewish nation was in Egypt, they weren't aware of their greatness and their power of tefillah. But when they were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told them (*Shemos* 19:5-6), והייתם לי סגולה, "You will become My treasure among all nations... You will be a kingdom of princes, a holy nation." Hashem told them (*Shemos* 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I raised you on eagle's wings..." He showed them that they have great potential. They can daven, and Hashem will listen to their prayers.

15. The Midrash proves its lesson from the following *pesukim*: In *Tehillim* (45) Hashem calls the Jewish nation "My daughter" as it states, שמעי בת וראי. In *Shir Hashirim* (5) we are called sister, as it states, פתחו לי אחותי. In *Yeshayah* (51) it states, הקשיבו אלי אמי, which means we are called mother.

Tefillos on Shavuos

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said that the galus is so very long because people rush through the *brachah* אהבת עולם (or אהבה רבה, depending on one's nusach). If we said this *brachah* slowly, the galus would end.

Shavuos morning, in the beis medresh of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l*, they would

say the *brachah ahavas olam* for hours and with a lot of hislahavos.

A student of the Chasam Sofer's *zt'l* yeshiva was in Ropshitz for Shavuos. When he returned to the yeshiva, the Chasam Sofer asked him what he saw in Ropshitz. The student described the magnificent way they said *ahavah rabba*. The Chasam Sofer was very impressed and praised the Ropshitzer chassidim for praying that way.¹⁶

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

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

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A poor person met a wealthy person in beis medresh and asked him for *tzedakah*. The wealthy *baal tzedakah* replied, "I don't have money on me. Come to my office and I will give you money."

The day passed, and the poor person did not arrive at his office.

The next morning, the poor person once again met up the wealthy *baal tzedakah*, and again asked for help.

Once again, the *baal tzedakah* replied, "Come to my office and I will give you," but the poor person never came.

The *nimshal* is related to *yom tov*. Hashem grants us many *brachos* on *yom tov*, but we have to be present to pick up those blessings. For example, on Shavuos, it is important to daven for success in Torah, for you and for your children. Hashem is giving, but if we don't ask, how will we receive.

One year on Shavuos, after *Shacharis*, the Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* gave a large Gemara to one of his chassidim and said, "Today, you said *ahavas olam* with a lot of *kavanah*, and your *tefillos* were answered. You asked for Torah, and you will receive it. Now start learning."

Because on Shavuos, Hashem wants to give us many *brachos*, but it is up to the individual to take advantage of it. If we don't apply ourselves to Torah study, we aren't present to receive the blessings that Hashem is giving us.

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

There's a simple sign. 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, they are *mechutanim* with the Torah.

A wealthy person paid a lot of money so he could get a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He was very proud of his son-in-law. He called him, "My *nachas*." He would walk with his son-in-law on the street, showing off his son-in-law to his friends.

Someone asked him, "You're always speaking about 'your *chasan*,' and you tell us how special he is. But what about your daughter? What about her?"

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

The friend was shocked. "How do you have a son-in-law if you don't have a daughter?"

The wealthy man explained, "I watch wealthy people, proudly walking around with their scholarly sons-

One of the Rebbes of Munkatz (*Shaar Yissaschar*) *zt'l* writes, נהגים הצדיקים החסידים להאריך, בברכת אהבה רבה ביוםא דשבועות החג הקדוש הזה, "Tzaddikim are accustomed to spending a long time on the *brachah* of *ahavah rabba* on this holy holiday of Shavuos."

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

It is important to have *kavanah* by this *brachah*, every day of the year. Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg *zt'l* said that it is impossible to say a true *chidush* in Torah, unless one has *kavanah* by the *brachah ahavah rabba* and by אתה חונן in *Shemonah Esrei*.

A student replied, "I said a good *chidush* today, and I didn't have *kavanah* by *ahavah rabba* or by אתה חונן."

Rebbe Shmelke asked him to repeat the *chidush*. Then, Rebbe Shmelke showed him that the *chidush* was incorrect. Because it is impossible to say a true Torah *chidush* without *tefillah*.

When it comes to Torah (and all other areas of *kedushah*) don't be stingy with your requests. Ask for a lot. Hashem can give you whatever you ask for.

As it states (*Tehillim* 81:11), הרחב פִּי וּאֲמַלְאוּ, and Rashi translates it, "Open your mouth wide and ask for all your hearts desires, ואמלאו, because [Hashem says] I will grant all your requests." And the Gemara (*Brachos* 50.) says that this *pasuk* is referring to success in

Torah. Open your mouth wide, ask for a lot, ואמלאו, and Hashem will give.

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

Similarly, the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "Ever since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, the gates of heaven are closed." However, Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said, when one prays for success in spirituality, the gates open, and his *tefillos* will be answered.

Therefore, let's daven for success in Torah, for good children, etc., and let's ask for a lot because *tefillos* for *ruchniyus* are always answered.

Tehillim

Chazal tell us that tzaddikim are *niftar* on the date they were born. We know that Dovid HaMelech was *niftar* on Shavuos, and therefore, we can assume that Dovid was born on Shavuos, too. Some say that this is the reason we read *Rus* on Shavuos. The final *pasuk* is, וישי הוליד את דוד, "Yishai begot Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on Shavuos, on the day Dovid was born.

Since Shavuos is the day Dovid HaMelech was born and was *niftar*, it is an ideal time to say *Tehillim*.

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

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, before Shavuos, everyone takes haircuts, cuts their nails, and puts on new clothing... They want to be the *chasan*...but they mustn't forget that without the *kallah*, which is the Torah, they don't have anything, at all.

Therefore, everyone should say the entire *Tehillim* on Shavuos."

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

Binding Torah with Tefillah

Dovid HaMelech said about himself (*Tehillim* 109:4), ואני תפילה, "I am tefillah." Similarly, the Gemara (*Brachos* 7:) says that רות is called רות because ריווהו להקדוש ברוך הוא בשירות ותשבחות, she had a descendant, Dovid HaMelech, who will make Hashem satisfied and content with his songs and praises." These two sources show us that Dovid's essence is tefillah. So why was he niftar on Shavuos, a day of mattan Torah?

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that this is because Torah and tefillah are connected. They aren't separate, ununited entities. They both need each other. To daven properly, you need to learn Torah, and to understand Torah, you need tefillah.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 31.) says, אין עומדין, להתפלל... אלא מתוך הלכה פסוקה, that one should learn a halachah and then daven. Because tefillah has more beauty before Hashem when it is connected with Torah. As the Sfes Emes (תרמ"ג ד"ה וכו') writes, "Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 4:) say, אין אמת אלא תורה, that Torah is truth... Thus, the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 145:18), קרוב ה', means Hashem is near to listen to the tefillos of those who call out to Hashem with truth, with Torah. And especially on Shavuos, which the entire day is Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for tefillah."

Among the chasidim of the Beis Aharon of Karlin *zt'l* (Lithuania) were chasidim who

lived in Poland. Once, when they came to him, he told them, "Polish Yidden love learning Torah, and so do we. The difference is that we say, שמעתתא בעי צילותא, 'Learning Torah needs tefillah' (*Megillah* 28:). Torah needs to come together with tefillah because it is impossible to succeed in Torah without tefillah, and it is impossible to daven properly without Torah. Torah and tefillah are bound to each other."¹⁷

Birchas HaTorah

Shulchan Aruch (47:1) states, ברכת התורה צריך, לזהר בה מאד, we must be very cautious with *birchas haTorah*.

The Mishnah Berurah explains that this means, "Don't learn before saying *birchas haTorah*, and say the brachah גדולה בשמחה, with a lot of joy. Chazal say, what caused the galus...? It is because they didn't say *birchas haTorah*... Therefore, we must be cautious with this mitzvah, to praise Hashem that He chose us and gave us His beloved Torah. Chazal also say that one doesn't merit having children talmidei chachamim if he isn't cautious with *birchas haTorah*."

The accepted opinion is that *birchas haTorah* is a mitzvah from the Torah, which is another reason we must be extra cautious with this brachah.

By the first Beis HaMikdash, people weren't cautious about saying *birchas HaTorah*, resulting in the Jewish people being banished from their land.

As it states (*Yirmiyahu* 9:11) מי האיש החכם ויבין את זאת, ואשר דבר ה' אליו ויגידה, על מה אבדה הארץ נצתה כמדבר בלי עובר, "Who is the wise who understands this, and who received a word from Hashem that he can tell us: Why was

17. The following *pasuk* (*Shemos* 18:20) is another indication that success in Torah and tefillah are intertwined. It states והזהרתם אתם את החקים ואת התורות, The *pasuk* is speaking about Torah, but *Targum Yonoson* translates it: "Teach them the tefillos that they should say in the beis knesses." The *pasuk* is referring to both Torah or tefillah, another indication of the close connection between Torah and tefillah.

the land destroyed and it became like a wilderness, without anyone passing."

ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורתו, "Hashem replied, 'It is because they abandoned my Torah...' which means, they didn't make a brachah over Torah. This caused the galus.

Twins were learning in the same cheder. They looked the same, they had the same temperament, but they were vastly different when it came to learning Torah. One child was an iluy, a genius, and he loved learning Torah, and the other child had a weaker mind; he didn't understand and didn't enjoy learning Torah.

It isn't always a good idea to compare children one to another, but an inexperienced teacher said to the weaker twin, "Why can't you be like your brother?" This broke him, and the next day, he tried to understand what was being taught in the cheder, but there was no hope. He couldn't understand.

But one day, everything turned around. The child was understanding and enjoying Torah. The change was sudden. A week before, he got a thirty on his test, and this week, a hundred. Last week, he rushed to leave the cheder, and this week he ran to go to cheder. The change was so significant that the menahel (principal) of the school called up the father to hear what happened.

At first, the father didn't want to answer, but then the principal said, "If you tell me the trick you used to help your son succeed in Torah, I will share it with other parents, so they can also have nachas from their children."

The father said, "Recently, I made a *kabalah* to say *birchas haTorah* with *kavanah*, as a *segulah* that my son should understand

and love Torah. Every morning I plead, והערב נא, 'Make the Torah sweet for my son. Let him understand and love Torah.' And I cry and say, ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו כולנו יודעי שמך ולומדי, תורתך לשמה, that our children should know Hashem and learn Torah *lishmah*. This turned my son around."

The Torah is sometimes called תורת ה', Hashem's Torah, and it sometimes called תורתו, the person's Torah (see Tehillim 1).¹⁸ So, whose Torah is it, the person studying it, or is it Hashem's Torah?

Similarly, when the Torah discusses the world, it is sometimes called Hashem's world, as it states ליה הארץ ומלאו, and sometimes it is called the person's world, as it states והארץ נתן לבני אדם? So, who does the world belong to, man or Hashem?

In regards to the world, the Gemara (*Brachos* 35) supplies the answer. The world belongs to Hashem, but after one says a brachah, it belongs to the person. For example, a plate of food is placed before you. You can't eat it because the world, everything in it, including this plate of food, belongs to Hashem. However, after you say a brachah, Hashem gives it to you as a gift. Now it is yours, and you can enjoy it.

The Tzlach (*Brachos* 64) says that the same happens with regards to Torah. Before one says *birchas haTorah*, the Torah belongs to Hashem. After one says *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift.

And we can be certain that when Hashem gives us the Torah as a gift, it will be given in a way that is very good for us. Hashem can provide us with tremendous portions of Torah if He so desires.¹⁹

18. As it states, כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה וילילה, "His desire is solely Hashem's Torah, and he studies his Torah day and night."

19. Reb Menachem Rikanti zt'l yearned and pined to know Torah, and for this purpose, he fasted many days and he davened a lot. But he was born with a weak mind and had a very difficult time understanding Torah. But he never gave up. He continued to fast, daven, and try. When he was in his eighties, he had a

As the Tzlach tells us, "In my opinion, *birchas haTorah* is a wonderful *segulah* for remembering Torah," because when one says *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift. When that happens, he will understand, and he will remember what he learns.

We say in *birchas haTorah*, ונתן לנו את תורתו, "Hashem gives us His Torah." It is appropriate to say these words in *birchas HaTorah*, because when we say *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives us the Torah as a gift.

The first *masechta* of *Shas* is *masechta Brachos*. The first discussion is about *kriyas Shema*. Why isn't the *masechta* named for the *Shema*?

The Tzlach writes, "Rebbe arranged, organized, and wrote the Mishnayos. The purpose was that people shouldn't forget the oral Torah. But Rebbe was afraid that even so, people might forget Torah. He, therefore, named the first *masechta* of *Shas*, "*Brachos*." This name will remind people to say *birchas haTorah*.²⁰

Achdus

The Torah tells us that the Jewish nation encamped near Har Sinai, as it states (*Shemos* 19:2) ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר. The word ויחן is in the

singular form. (It doesn't say ויחנו, "they encamped," rather ויחן, "he encamped.")

Rashi explains, ויחן שם ישראל. כאיש אחד בלב, "They encamped like one person, with a united heart. But all other encampments [in the desert], there were complaints and disputes."

We understand from this that peace is a prerequisite for *mattan Torah*.²¹

The Gemara (*Succah* 52.) writes, "In the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring the yetzer hara and slaughter it in front of the tzaddikim and the resha'im. The yetzer hara will appear like a mountain to the tzaddikim and as a hairsbreadth to the resha'im. The tzaddikim will cry, and the resha'im will cry. The tzaddikim will cry and say, "How did we manage to conquer such a great mountain?"

The resha'im will cry and say, "Why weren't we able to conquer this yetzer hara that is as tiny as a string."

We see from this Gemara that one of the descriptions of the yetzer hara is a mountain.

We also know, from our discussion above, that ויחן (written in singular form) hints to peace and unity. With these two introductions, Reb Akiva Eiger *zt'l* taught that ויחן שם ישראל

dream that an elderly person handed him a cup of water and told him to drink it, which he did. In the morning, he was a new person. His heart was open to understanding Torah, and he wrote his holy sefarim.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught that we shouldn't lose hope on a child's ability to grow in Torah. Grandmothers davened for him when they lit the Shabbos candles. They davened that their descendants succeed in Torah. The moment these tefillos will be answered, everything will turn around. The Chazon Ish said that a person can cross the street, and when he began crossing the street, he had a weak mind, unable to understand Torah, and when he reached the other side of the road, he is wise, sharp, and can understand Torah because that was the moment that the tefillos were answered.

20. The Tzlach writes that this is also the reason the ב"ה (Baal Halachos Gedolos) wrote the entire *birchas haTorah* at the beginning of his sefer. This is to remind people to say *birchas haTorah* before studying, so they will succeed in understanding and remembering the teachings he writes in his sefer.

21. We also say, ובאו כולם בברית יחד, "They came into the covenant [of the Torah] together." נעשה ונשמע אמרו כאחד, "They said in unison *naaseh venishma*..." These sources show that unity is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah.

נגד הדר, means that when the Jewish nation is unified, they can conquer the yetzer hara.²²

This is well known. A mighty force against the yetzer hara is the community. Peace and unity are protective guards against the yetzer hara.

The Beis Aharon zt'l was sitting with his chasidim at a tish, and he told one of his chasidim to go outside and return and tell everyone what he saw. The chassid returned and said, "I saw two drunks walking down the street. One of them said to the other, 'Let's hold on to each other so that we don't fall.'"

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

When the Jewish nation is in unity, no one can harm them. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 940) states, "אתם נצבים", you are standing [and no one can harm you]. When? כולכם, when you are united. We can prove this from things we see in this world: It is easy to crack a single reed, but no one can break many reeds bundled together." This shows us that when we are united, no one can harm us.

Another benefit of unity is that it helps us serve Hashem with hislahavos. Think of a single burning log. It will soon extinguish. But if there are many logs, the fire can burn for a long time. Similarly, being united with other Yidden helps a person serve Hashem with passion, and the hislahavos doesn't weaken with time.

In summary, we've seen several benefits of unity: 1) It is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. (2) Unity protects us from the yetzer hara. (3) When we are united, we are protected from our enemies. (4) Being united enables us to serve Hashem with hislahavos, excitement, and joy.²³

Hatred and Jealousy

There was a wealthy tzaddik and scholar in Vienna named Reb Shimshon Wertheimer zt'l. He was close to the king of Vienna, and once, the king asked him to explain why the Yidden are prosecuted more than any other nation in the world.

Reb Shimshon Wertheimer replied, "They are being punished because of their hatred to their fellow Jew, and they are jealous of one another."

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

Perhaps we can explain that the mountain hovering over them like a barrel (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית) represents all Yidden joined together as one, because it is like they are all within the same vessel. Hashem told them that if one leaves this protective environment and goes alone, then, שם, there, at that place, away from the Jewish people, תהיה קבורתכם, it will be your spiritual suicide because unity is our weapon against the yetzer hara.

23. Chassidim are accustomed to eat and drink a *lechayim* together, and speak about *avodas Hashem*. Chassidim consider these gatherings extremely important. The Sadegura Rebbe zt'l would sometimes give his chassidim a coin, and the chassidim would auction off the coin. The money earned from the auctions funded their Chassidic gatherings.

Once, the coin sold for a very high price. The chassidim wondered whether they should use all the money for their get-togethers, or whether part of the money should go to some other *tzedakah*. The Beis Aharon zt'l (father-in-law of the Sadugura Rebbe) was in Sadugura at the time, and they asked him. The Beis Aharon replied, "There is nothing greater than chassidim getting together in unity to speak about *yiras shamayim*..." and he advised them to use the money exclusively for that purpose.

"That isn't a valid answer," the king replied. "I'll give you three days to answer me. Tell me why the real reason the Jews suffer so much. If you don't give me a satisfying answer in three days, I will banish every Yid from Vienna."

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

The time was the beginning of the winter, an ideal time for hunting. The king set out with a group of officials to the forest to hunt game.

After some hours passed, some of the officials went home, and the king and the rest of the crew remained in the forest, trying to catch prey.

Some more time passed, it was almost dark, and the officials decided it was time to return home. They called for the king, and when there was no response, they figured that the king must have already left with the officials earlier.

The king was deeply involved in his hobby, and he didn't realize that he was alone until it turned nighttime.

It was dark, and the king couldn't find his way out of the forest. He wandered around the woods until he came to a river, and he saw lights shining on the other side. There was a town there.

The king knew how to swim, so he took off his coat, left his horse behind, and swam across the river.

He knocked at the first house he encountered, but no one answered. "Please let me in," he pleaded. "I was lost in the forest. I need a place to stay for the night." But they ignored him.

He went to the next house; the same story repeated itself. No one would let him in.

The king said to himself, "I will look for a door that has a mezuzah. The Jewish people are a compassionate nation, and they will certainly help me."

Indeed, a Jewish couple let him in. They gave him a warm meal and a coat so he could warm up.

He didn't tell them that he is the king of Austria because he knew that 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 that the guest doesn't steal anything.

In the morning, the king asked his host, "How far is it to Vienna? How much does it cost to get there?"

The host replied, "I can drive you there for four forties (a currency)." The king agreed to the price and asked, "Will you let me wear your fur coat until we arrive because I'm still under the weather? Swimming in this cold water made me sick."

The Yid graciously agreed.

The wife whispered to her husband, "He won't pay you. He'll kill you in the middle of the way, and he'll take your coat. Why are you taking him? Why do you trust him?"

But he wasn't concerned.

As they approached Vienna, the host asked the king where he wants to go. "Bring me to the king's palace," he replied.

The driver said, "It is forbidden to go there without an invitation."

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

They arrived, and the king jumped out of the wagon and ran into the palace.

The Yid sat in the wagon, shocked. His wife was right. His passenger didn't pay him for the trip, and he ran off with his fur coat, too.

He wanted to quickly leave the grounds because it was forbidden for him to be in front of the palace without an invitation, but before he could leave, an armed guard blocked his way.

"The king wants to see you," the armed officer said.

The Yid shuddered; he feared the worst.

The officer brought him to the king, and the king asked him, "Do you recognize me?"

He didn't. Now that the king was dressed in his royal clothing, sitting on his majestic throne, he looked very different.

"I know you," the king told him. "I even know what your home looks like." And the king described to him what his home looked like. The Yid was shocked.

"Who can compare to the king's wisdom!" the Yid replied.

"It isn't wisdom; I was in your home. I'm the person you saved. I didn't tell you before because I knew you wouldn't believe me, but I'm the king of Austria. You deserve a reward for helping me. You let me in your home, gave me a meal, and a warm coat. Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

The Yid was quiet.

The king said, "You can ask me for a forest, and I will give it to you. You can ask for an entire city, and I will give that to you. Just ask, and it will be yours."

The Yid was quiet.

The king became impatient, "If you don't tell me what you want, I will just pay you the four forties we agreed on, and that's all."

The Yid replied, "Actually, there is something I want. I am a traveling merchant. I go from town to town selling my wares.

Recently, someone began coming to the same towns I go to, and he sells the same items as I do. He is competing with me and taking away my *parnassah*. I request that the king issue an executive order forbidding this man to sell his wares in the towns that I go to."

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

Now, the king saw that Reb Shimshon Wertheimer was right. He said to Reb Shimshon, "Now I know you were correct. The Jewish people are punished because of their jealousy and hatred."

Rebbe Meir of Permishlan *zt'l* would repeat this story every year before reading the Torah on Shavuot morning.

May we be *zoche* to eradicate all jealousy and hatred from our hearts and become worthy of the *geulah sheleima*, speedily, in our days.

Chesed

The Gemara (*Sotah* 14.) states, "The Torah begins with *gemilus chasadim* and ends with *gemilus chasadim*. It begins with (*Bereishis* 3:21) 'Hashem made clothing for Adam and Chavah, and He clothed them...', and the Torah concludes with (*Devarim* 34:6) 'Hashem buried Moshe...'"

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* taught that this is to tell us that the focal point of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*. L'havdil, when one has a new book, and he wants to know what it is about, he reads the first page and the last page, and he gets the gist of the book. The Torah begins and ends with *gemilus chasadim* because kindness is the message of the Torah. It is what the entire Torah is about.

The Midrash (*Rus Rabba* 2:14) states, "*Megillas Rus* doesn't discuss the *halachos* of *טומאה וטהרה* or the laws of *איסור והיתר*. So, if it doesn't teach

halachos, why was it written? It was written to teach us the reward for those who do *chesed*." Rus did *chesed* (see Rus 2:11 and 3:8), and she was rewarded that Dovid HaMelech is her descendant. We read Rus on Shavuos, because the message of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

The first five of the *Aseres HaDibros*, written on one of the *luchos*, are the *mitzvos* our obligations to Hashem. The following five of the *Aseres HaDibros*, written on the other *לוה*, are the *mitzvos* that we are obligated to do for our fellow man's sake.

There are far fewer words in the second *luchos*. The *Mabit* (Beis Elokim) says that to make the two *luchos* symmetric, the words on the second *לוה* had to be written in much larger letters. That way, the words on both *luchos* covered the same amount of space.

Now, large letters attract more attention, and it is like the letters are shouting. In other words, the *luchos* drew more attention to the *mitzvos* of *bein adam lecheveiro* than to the *mitzvos bein adam lamakom*. This indicates that our obligations to our fellow man are even more important than our obligations to Hashem, *bein adam lamakom*.

In the morning we say, *אלו דברים שאדם אוכל*, "These are the things one eats the fruits of the reward in this world, while the primary reward will be given in *Olam Haba...*" and the Mishnah lists several examples of *chesed*.

Why is *chesed* rewarded in this world?

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

So, on Shavuos, as we accept the Torah, let us accept the *mitzvos bein adam lechaveiro*, too, because these take an even greater focal place in the Torah.²⁴

Help the Poor

When the Torah (*Devarim* 16:10-11) mentions Shavuos, it emphasizes that we must make sure that the poor have enough food for the *yom tov*. As it states, *ועשית חג שבועות לה' אלקיך...* *ושמחת... אתה ובנך ובתך והלוי... והגר והיתום והאלמנה אשר בקרבך*.

The *Pela 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*,

24. One year, the *Tiferes Shlomo* of Radomsk *zt'l* traveled to Kozhmir, because he wanted to be with Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l* on Shavuos.

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

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

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir explained to him that the role of a leader is to help others, even at the expense of his own growth. As it states (*Shemos* 19:14) *וירד משה מן ההר על העם*, "Moshe went down from the mountain to the nation," and Rashi writes, *מלמד שלא היה משה פונה לעסקיו, אלא מן ההר אל העם*, "This teaches us that Moshe didn't tend to his own business. He went straight from the mountain to the nation."

What business did Moshe have? The *pasuk* is referring to Moshe's personal quest for spirituality. Moshe also wanted time to prepare for *mattan Torah*. He wanted time in solitude so he can sanctify himself and prepare himself for this holy, once-in-a-lifetime moment. Nevertheless, Moshe abandoned his own needs, and focused on helping *Klal Yisrael*. Every leader of *Bnei Yisrael* must do the same. They are responsible for the needs of their community, and they must be devoted to them, even at the expense of their own growth.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu visits the homes of the poor, and if they don't have enough food, Hashem cries for them.'

"And, the *Zohar* says, 'If a person is happy by himself, and he doesn't give to the poor, he will be punished... Therefore, don't forget to give *tzedakah* to the poor before each *yom tov*, and you should give in accordance with the amount Hashem gave you. Don't be satisfied with giving a little; rather, give *tzedakah* in accordance with your wealth. And after you help the poor, you can be happy, and you can rejoice, and nothing bad will happen to you. There will be peace in your home...'"

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "This obligation applies to all holidays... The Torah writes the mitzvah by Shavuos because Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and Succos are for seven or eight days. One might think that it isn't as important to give *tzedakah* for Shavuos as is necessary to help the poor for the other yomim tovim. Therefore, the *pasuk* emphasizes that we shouldn't be lenient. We are obligated to give *tzedakah* for Shavuos, as we must give for all other holidays."²⁵

Reb Avraham ben Avraham zy'a hy'd

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

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

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

Becoming a Jew meant forgoing the vast wealth of his father's home. Someone once asked him why he did this. He replied, "Friday night, when the candles go out, they give off a certain odor. That smell is more enjoyable for me than all the wealth I enjoyed beforehand."²⁶

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

Reb Avraham ben Avraham was a student of the Vilna Gaon zt'l. The Vilna Gaon told him that he has the ability (with his spiritual strengths) to save him from prison (which meant to be saved from being burned at the stake), but the *ger tzedek* replied that he preferred to die *al kiddush Hashem*.

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

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

Reb Alexander Zuskind zy'a, author of *Yesod Veshoresh HaAvodah*, went 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, because if someone saw him, they were liable to burn him at the stake as well, *chalilah*.

The Vilna Gaon said that if ten people answered amen to his *brachah*, the world

would have reached its perfected state, and Moshiach would have come.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach 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*. If there were a minyan answering amen, the world would be rectified.

May his merit protect us.