

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT NASSO-SHAVUOT · 5 SIVAN 5776 - JUN. 11, 2016 · VOL. 23 NO. 36

EDITOR'S NOTE: THIS WEEK NASO IS READ IN ISRAEL AND BAMIDBAR IS READ OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED

**“When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit by committing treachery towards G-d.” (5.6)**

**B**ecoming Jewish is a “tortuous” procedure. The degree of sincerity and commitment that a non-Jew must display to prove his or her *bona fides* might well prove too much for those of us blessed to be born of a Jewish mother.

Thus, when a convert is accepted, the Torah charges us to “love the stranger” (Vayikra 19:34). Interestingly, the mitzvah to love our spouse is learned only from the general rule of “You shall love your friend as yourself”, whereas the imperative to love the convert is stated explicitly. In fact the Torah warns against cruelty, oppression, or unkindness to a convert 36 times!

Rashi explains that the seemingly general term of one

committing “any sin that men commit by committing treachery towards the Name of his G-d” means “theft from a convert.”

Someone who steals from a convert desecrates the Name of his G-d in the eyes of this convert who has come to seek refuge under the wings of the Divine Presence. For this reason the Torah uses the verb *me'ila*, which denotes misappropriation of Temple property and the like. Thus, someone guilty of such an offence must bring a *korban chatat* (a sin-offering) — the punishment for Temple property misappropriation.

• Source: based on the *Tzifono* as seen in *Talelei Orot*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**T**he Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor’s property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for

inscribing G-d’s Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A *nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The *Mishkan* is completed and dedicated on the first day of *Nissan* in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the *Mishkan*, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

## BAVA KAMA 9 - 15

*Rabbi Zeira said, "One should add a third in order to beautify a mitzvah."*

Rashi explains: If one wants to buy a *Sefer Torah* (Torah Scroll), and he finds two to choose from, if one is more beautiful than the other he should add a third of the value and buy the more beautiful one. Rashi cites a *beraita* for this requirement to "beautify a mitzvah": "The Torah states 'This is my G-d and I will glorify Him', which teaches us to be beautiful in the presence of G-d in mitzvah fulfillment. For example, one should have a beautiful *Sefer Torah*, a beautiful *lulav*, a beautiful *talit*, and beautiful *tzitzit*."

Tosefot explains the obligation to beautify the mitzvah in a different manner, not in terms of adding a third more *money*, but to obtain a *larger etrog*. In the event that he finds one *etrog* that is small but kosher, he should beautify the mitzvah by buying a larger *etrog*, up to a third larger.

The *gemara* also records that in Eretz Yisrael it was taught in the name of Rabbi Zeira, "Until a third, from his own; after that, is from G-d". Rashi elucidates this cryptic statement as follows: For the additional third of money that a person spends to beautify a mitzvah, he receives reward in the World-to-Come instead of this world. But if he spends more than an additional third, G-d will reward him in this world during his lifetime. Tosefot appears to concur with Rashi on this point. The halacha regarding "*hidur mitzvah*" — beautifying a mitzvah — is codified in the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 656:1.

• Bava Kama 9b

*Rabbi Natan said, "From where do we learn that a person should not raise a 'bad dog' (i.e., dangerous) in his house, and that he should not put up an unsafe ladder in his house? The verse states 'Don't put blood in your house' (Deut. 23:8)."*

Although the verse specifically mentions only the mitzvah of building a *ma'akeh* (parapet) on the roof of one's house to help prevent a person who goes there from falling and losing his life, Rabbi Natan teaches that this verse is also the source for not having dangerous objects around one's house.

The Maharsha explains the need to teach the prohibition of 'giving home to' these additional potential dangers, in addition to the explicit need for the verse to teach the mitzvah of *ma'akeh*. A *ma'akeh* serves as protection for the dwellers of his household, who may go on the roof and risk the danger of falling off. Therefore a *ma'akeh* is needed. However, a dangerous dog is something he may want to have for protection against thieves and criminals, and is a creature well known to his family and would seemingly pose no danger to them. Likewise, a ladder that is not really safe is known by his family to be a potential threat, since they live there and know the unsafe state of the ladder. Therefore, members of his household will know to be careful with these potentially life-threatening items. Rabbi Natan teaches that it is nevertheless forbidden to possess these items in one's home, since they are dangerous by nature, and thus pose a danger to guests and others who come to his house. In fact, they may even be considered a threat to the lives of his own household members, despite their awareness of the potentially harmful nature of these items.

• Bava Kama 15b

## PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

*"Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon."*

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this week's *Parsha*?
2. Besides transporting the *Mishkan*, what other service performed by the *levi'im* is referred to in this *Parsha*?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *teme'im* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the Name of G-d is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart." What word in the *Parsha* conveys this idea of "a full heart?"
18. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d lift up His countenance upon you"?
20. The tribe of Yissaschar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *levi'im* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the *Mishkan* was erected.
4. 5:2 - The camp of the *Shechina* was in the center, surrounded by the camp of Levi which was surrounded by the camp of *Yisrael*.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the camp of *Yisrael* but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the camp of the *Shechina*.
6. 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* is deserving of eventually bringing his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of G-d is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazir's shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May G-d bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissaschar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesi'im* should offer gifts.

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# Abarbanel

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## ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

### Nasso

#### The Sotah and the Nazir

In this Parsha the Torah discusses the subjects of the *Sotah*, or suspected adulteress and the *Nazir*, the individual who, for a minimum of thirty days, refrains from wine and all grape products, lets his hair grow and does not come into contact with the deceased, even members of his own family. Abarbanel cites the Talmudic statement that the reason the subject of *Nazir* follows the subject of *Sotah* is that “One who sees the disgrace of the suspected adulteress will vow to abstain from wine, since it is wine that can bring one to adultery.” Abarbanel states that this reason seems insufficient. Since the *Nazir* has to bring sacrificial offerings either at the end of this period or if he did become ritually impure due to accidental contact with a deceased individual, this whole section should have been included in the book of Vayikra where all the sacrificial offerings are detailed.

Abarbanel answers that this is actually the most appropriate point to discuss the subject of *Nazir*. The previous *parshiot* represent the progression of the spiritual purification of the nation. Starting with the construction of the Tabernacle, the Torah has divided the nation into the *Kohanim*, the *Levi'im* and each of the tribes under its individual banner. The nation is further purified by the separation of those afflicted by *tzara'at* and other forms of ritual impurity, and in this Parsha there is the implied separation of the illegitimate child of a proven adulteress. This sets the stage for the *Nazir*, who represents an even higher level of personal spiritual purification. His level of sanctity differs from that of the *Kohanim* in that it is not inherited nor is it permanent. It is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, he has the additional restriction of not cutting his hair which is not shared by the *Kohanim*.

Abarbanel explains that the word *Nazir* is rooted in the concepts of ‘turning away’, ‘distancing’ and ‘vigilance’. It is also related to the word for ‘crown’ since the Torah explicitly states “...for the crown of his G-d is upon his head.” His first

obligation is to refrain from wine and, as an additional precaution, all grape products, since intoxication can obviously interfere with proper judgment and prevent him from attaining the goal of cleaving to G-d. The second obligation, to refrain from cutting his hair, symbolizes that since the head is the repository of all the wisdom and intelligence that G-d has granted him, he must refrain from removing even a part of a single hair emanating from that head. Additionally, just as a king is recognized by the crown upon his head, so too the unruly hair of the *Nazir* is his crown of sanctity. To fortify that striving for a higher level of spiritual purity the unruly physical appearance serves to minimize the natural tendency toward exaggerated emphasis on our physical appearance. His third obligation is to refrain from all contact with the deceased. This puts him on an even higher level than the *kohen*, who is permitted to come into contact with his deceased close relatives. Abarbanel states that a verse in the prophet Amos is also an indication of this heightened spiritual level: “I established some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazarites” — an indication that a Nazarite is on an even higher level than a prophet.

The wording of this subject in the Torah attests to the difficulty of accepting these obligations. At the beginning of the section, the Torah states, “A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence for the sake of G-d...” The Hebrew word which is here translated as ‘dissociate’ is the word ‘*pela*’ which literally means ‘wondrous’ or ‘astounding’. Abarbanel explains that this vow is truly astounding and unusual. Finally, the heightened spiritual level implied by the vow of the Nazarite is also indicated by the fact that one of the sacrificial offerings that he is required to bring at the conclusion of his commitment is a transgression offering to atone for his ‘transgression’ of giving up his status and returning to the world of physical desires.

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## SHAVUOT — MILK AND HONEY

**From: Melissa**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I am hosting my first Shavuot meal this year and I'd like to know what to prepare. I know each holiday has its own special cuisine and featured foods, but I thought the basis for Shabbat and Holiday meals was always meat or poultry. My sister said that Shavuot is different, and that the custom is actually to eat dairy food! Is this right, and, if so, what's the reason behind the custom?*

Dear Melissa,

The widespread custom is in fact to eat dairy foods during the morning meal of the first day of Shavuot. This often takes the form of various types of cheese cakes and quiches, or as an actual meal of various types of cheeses.

However, since Shavuot is a *Yom Tov*, it is also proper to honor the festival with the traditional holiday cuisine of various meat dishes as well.

Many people therefore have both dairy and meat, by first making a dairy *kiddush* with a variety of cheese cakes and other baked goods with enough dough to require an after-blessing, followed by a regular *Yom Tov* meat meal. Alternatively, after *kiddush* some actually have a light bread-meal with dairy foods, and then make the blessing after meals, followed by another *Yom Tov* meat meal.

In either of these scenarios one must separate the eating of dairy from meat by rinsing one's mouth of residual dairy food, making the appropriate after-blessing, waiting at least half an hour, and changing table cloths, plates and utensils.

There are several reasons for eating dairy on Shavuot.

One well-known explanation is that before the Torah was given, Jews were permitted to eat meat of non-kosher animals as well as that of kosher animals without needing to properly slaughter and salt the meat to remove its blood. After the giving of the Torah, kosher slaughter, salting and other preparations needed to make meat kosher became required, and the Jews were not able to prepare meat or even use their cooking vessels which became prohibited. They therefore could eat only dairy foods on the day the Torah was given.

Another explanation is that since Shavuot is both an extension of, and conclusion to, Pesach, which includes two cooked dishes corresponding to the two sacrifices eaten then, Shavuot *also* includes two dishes — meat and milk. And since one loaf of bread can't be used for both, thereby requiring two loaves of bread, this corresponds to the two

breads that were offered in the Temple on Shavuot.

An additional, very interesting explanation is based on the idea that the day when Moshe was drawn out of the waters of the Nile and destined to receive the Torah was the 6th day of the Hebrew month of Sivan, the day destined for the giving of the Torah on Shavuot. This is based on the fact that Moses was born on the 7th of Adar, and according to the Torah was hidden for three months until, under the threat of his death, his mother was driven to save him by setting him in a basket on the river. That same day he was found by Pharaoh's daughter, and refused to nurse from any other but a Hebrew woman. We thus recall this by eating milk foods on that day.

Finally, the numerical value of the letters that make up the Hebrew word for milk, *chalav* – *chet* (8), *lamed* (30), *bet* (2) – add up to forty, corresponding to the forty days Moshe spent on Mount Sinai in conjunction with receiving the Torah.

There is also a beautiful tradition that highlights the theme of milk and honey on Shavuot, by sweetening the dairy foods and challah bread with honey from bees, dates or figs. This is because the Torah is compared to the fulfilling and enriching quality of milk, and to the sweet and pleasurable quality of honey, as in the verse metaphorically referring to G-d's giving of the Torah: "Honey flows from Your lips, honey and milk from under Your tongue" (Song of Songs 4:11).

Also, the comparison of Torah to milk and honey teaches that Torah enables one to live in harmony with the physical and spiritual worlds since "its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). Milk and honey are both foods that do not require the taking of life or the severing of growth. They, like the ways of Torah, are harmonious with life.

Similarly, Torah is compared to milk and honey in that just as these foods originate from non-permitted sources — milk from blood, and honey from the bee — yet they themselves are kosher, so too the Torah transforms a person from a state of spiritual defilement to spiritual purity and refinement.

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch, O. Ch., 494:3, Rema and Mishnah Berurah*
- *The Book of Our Heritage, Sivan*
- *Gateway to Judaism, Shavuot*

## NOT JUST ANOTHER “YOSEF”

On the night of Shavuot it has become an established custom throughout Jewish communities to stay up all night to learn Torah. Although this custom is mentioned in the Zohar, its popularity seems to have grown around the time of Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*. Today, people gather everywhere around the world to learn all through the night. Some learn what is called “*Tikun Leil Shavuot*”, a set text from the Written and Oral Torah, while others choose to study *Gemara*, or other Torah texts, or to attend Torah lectures.

Of all of the special times in the Jewish calendar, the holiday of Shavuot — the time of the giving of the Torah — stands out among them as the day the Jewish nation was given the potential to rise above the rest of creation and unify with its Creator. By means of the Torah, man, a mere physical creature, was given the opportunity to soar above even the holy angels.

We find this idea expressed in the Talmud by Rav Yosef: Every year on the day of Atzeret (Shavuot) Rav Yosef would say to his servants, “Prepare for me a third-born calf, for if not for this day (Shavuot) that allowed me to learn Torah and become spiritually exalted, how many Yosefs are

there in the market (and I would have been considered just another one of them!)”

In order to understand the depth of Rav Yosef’s words we must first answer a fundamental question about Matan Torah. Since we know that the *Avot* and the Jews in Egypt learned Torah even well *before* its acceptance at Mount Sinai, what changed with the giving of the Torah that made that day so special?

The answer is that the power of the Torah to refine and elevate the physical world, including man, was greatly *enhanced* when the Torah and its *mitzvot* were given. Through Torah learning a person unifies with Divine wisdom; and through fulfilling a *mitzvah* a person unites with the Divine will. Since the origin of a *mitzvah* is its Commander, its power to refine and elevate comes from G-d. If not for the Divine aspect within the Torah and its *mitzvot*, there would not be a significant change in those who learn it.

According to the above we can understand why Rav Yosef would have been considered just “another Yosef” in the market. Without the power of the Torah to spiritually elevate those who learn it, a person would remain basically the same as those who spend all of their time in the market.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### GUSH CHALAV — TOMB OF THE AKDAMUT AUTHOR

One of the highlights of the Shavuot morning service is the melodic chanting of *Akdmut*, a lengthy, beautiful Aramaic poem that praises G-d and describes the reward for the righteous in the end of days.



The author of *Akdmut* is Rabbi Meir ben Yitzchak, a twelfth century *shaliach tzibur* (prayer leader) for his German community, and his tomb is in Gush Chalav, about 2.5 miles north of the Meron Junction on Route 89.

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## RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

Age 28 - Valley Village, CA  
Hertz Ohr Lagolah Program, Class of 2017

Reuven Chaim grew up in the Orthodox community of Valley Village, a suburb of Los Angeles. His parents are California transplants. His father, Michael Klein, is from Boro Park and studied in Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn and is now the head of Quality Control at the Herzog Wine Cellar Winery in Oxnard, California. His mother grew up in Slovakia and worked as a civil engineer after coming to America.

Reuven Chaim attended Emek Hebrew Academy, a modern-Orthodox day school in “The Valley”. By the time he was to enter high school, he had become very serious about learning and enrolled in Yeshiva Gedolah of Los Angeles, a Lakewood-affiliated Yeshiva. He spent three years in its high school, and two years in the Beit Midrash program.

Afterwards, he came to the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem as a *bachur*, and learned there for more than two years before spending a year and a half at Beis Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey. In 2011, he married Shira Yael Klein (nee Deifik) — a “Valley” girl — who studied at Chochmas Lev Seminary in Jerusalem and works as an editor/ghost-writer. After their marriage they moved back to Israel, first living in Ramat Eshkol and then settling in Beitar Illit.

Reuven Chaim returned to the Mir Yeshiva, where he is still learning today in the mornings. He has received *Smicha* (Rabbinical ordination) in *Issur v’heter* from Rabbi Moshe

Sternbuch and Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Lerner, and in *Hilchos Niddah* from Rabbi Zalman Nechmiah Goldberg. He also received certification in *Even HaEzer* from Rabbi Chanoch Sanhedrai (a *dayan* in Beit Shemesh).

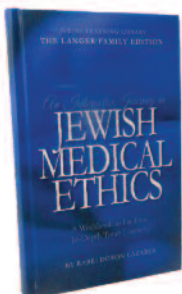
Until now, this story sounds fairly conventional. However, Reuven Chaim is not your “average” *avreich*. He gives a weekly *shiur* in Beitar Illit on the Midrash *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* (available online) and he is an avid writer. As a teenager he started publishing a blog with his Torah essays, and, for his wedding, he published a sample collection of those essays. He later published a *sefer* on *Mesechet Yevamot* called *HaMakom MeRachok*. He has published many English articles in the “Jewish Bible Quarterly”, an academic journal, as



well as publishing Hebrew articles in such rabbinic journals as *Kovetz Hamaor* and *Kovetz Kol HaTorah*. In 2014, Mosaica Press published his book in English, entitled *Lashon Hakodesh: History, Holiness, & Hebrew*. It is now in its second edition. In this work he examines the history of *Lashon Hakodesh* through Tanach, *Midrashim*, Gemara and classical commentaries, and its effect on the other languages of the world.

This past Elul, Reuven Chaim started the Ohr Lagolah Hertz Institute program at Ohr Somayach, where he learns every afternoon and evening. He looks toward a bright future as a rabbinic leader of the next generation

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## “I AM” — AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

**T**he Midrash (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana, Pesikta 12*) likens the Jews exiting Egypt to a prince who was kidnapped for an extended period. Finally, his father, the king, decided to exact his revenge on the kidnapers and release his son. The king conversed with his child in the language spoken to him by the kidnapers. Similarly, explains the Midrash, after G-d redeemed the Jews from exile in Egypt, He spoke to them in Egyptian. The Jews had been in Egypt for many years, where they had learned the Egyptian language. Therefore, when G-d wanted to give them the Torah He began to speak with them in the Egyptian language with which they were familiar. He opened the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) by proclaiming, “I (*anochi*) am Hashem, your G-d...!” (Exodus 20:2). According to this Midrash, the word “*anochi*” in this context does not only mean the English word “I.” Rather, it refers to the Egyptian word *anoch*, which means “love” and “endearment.” One Midrashic source explains that the Jews forgot *Lashon HaKodesh*, which is why G-d had to speak to them in Egyptian.

This Midrash is the source of a *piyut* (liturgical poem) written by Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir for the second day of Shavuot, which states that G-d gave the Decalogue “in Assyrian script, in Hebrew language, in Egyptian speech.” This implies that the entire Decalogue was uttered in Egyptian, a claim also repeated by the Tosafists in *Hadar Zekeinim* (to Exodus 20:1).

Interestingly, the *Sifrei* (Deuteronomy 32:2) says that when

G-d revealed Himself when giving the Torah to the Jewish People, He did not reveal Himself in only one language. Rather, He revealed Himself in four languages: *Lashon HaKodesh*, Arabic, Latin, and Aramaic. This passage seems to imply that G-d did not speak to the Jews in Egyptian, but He did speak to them in four other languages. However, Rabbi David Pardo (1719-1792) explains that the passage does not refer only to G-d revealing Himself to the Jews when He gave them the Torah. Rather, it refers to Him also offering the Torah to other nations (an offer which they refused). He revealed Himself to the Edomites in Latin, to the Ishmaelites in Arabic, and to all other nations in Aramaic (Aramaic is a language not associated with any one nation in particular, but rather with all nations in general). However, only the Jewish People accepted the Torah.

*Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein spent over a decade studying in such premier Yeshivas as the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem and Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, NJ. He is currently a member of the Ohr LaGolah Hertz Leadership Institute (an affiliate of Ohr Somayach), preparing for a promising career in rabbinic leadership. To contact the author or purchase a copy of his book, please email [historyofhebrew@gmail.com](mailto:historyofhebrew@gmail.com) — the above article is an excerpt from “Chapter 4: The Jews in Egypt” in *Lashon HaKodesh: History, Holiness, & Hebrew* (Mosaica Press, 2015), by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein*



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## SHAVUOT — CONNECTING WITH THE CREATOR

BY RABBI ARYEH DOV KAHN

In the Jewish yearly cycle we are blessed with many rich and exciting festivals. We have Pesach, celebrating the Exodus from Egypt, a weeklong festival with much activity around it. We have the Seder night and all its components: the story of the Exodus, the 4 cups of wine and much more. We eat matzah for an entire week, and we refrain from chametz. The week is continually focused around the Exodus.

We have Succot, when we relocate from the secure dwellings of our homes and move into temporary booths, the succa, for a week. We shake the four species everyday. For an entire week we are connected to the purpose and meaning of this festival.

We have the High Holidays, which, despite being a relatively few days in length, actually have a “build-up” of the preceding month of Elul until we get there, and their awesomeness itself is highly impactful.

Every week we have Shabbat, which, being a recurring event leaves its mark on the mundane experiences of each week, to rejuvenate us again with a spiritual recharge every seven days.

When we start to think about Shavuot, however, it seems to be a hard festival to engage us and make its impression on our beings. First of all, it is only one day long. Secondly, there are no physical changes we make or items we use to get the spirit of the holiday into our mindset (aside maybe from eating cheesecake, that perhaps makes a greater impression on our waistline than on our souls). Even more so, in virtually all Orthodox circles people spend the whole night awake, learning Torah, and it appears to be a festival reserved for the Yeshiva Talmudists. Is there a deeper meaning which is relevant to the entirety of the Jewish People?

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *zatzal*, asked the following two questions: Why is it that we are not commanded to celebrate Shavuot in the same manner as the other festivals, and why is it that the Torah does not give a specific date for Shavuot?

He answers that all the other *Regalim* (i.e., Pesach and Succot) are a recollection of past events, and we use those events to impact our future. Shavuot, however, is very different. It is a recurring event, every single day, an event that is *constantly* impacting us.

The Derech Hashem explains that the purpose of creation is to benefit from the goodness of the Creator, and

the way to experience this is to emulate and attach ourselves to the Master of the universe. The best way to do so is through learning of Torah on any level. Torah is the revelation of the will of the Creator, and it is, so to speak, a “part” of the Creator. By engaging in its study one is directly engaging with the Creator, and connecting to, and deepening, our appreciation of His will. In that sense it is an end in and of itself.

Shavuot celebrates the day that we received the Torah, the day when we merited the possibility of this unique opportunity to understand and attach ourselves to the Creator. The *simcha* (joy) of all the other holidays is relevant only in light of this opportunity, which is possible only through Torah. The *simcha* of Shavuot therefore is greater than the *simcha* of all other festivals. More than that, it is a constant, recurring event — not a once-off historical event that we recall every year. The relationship that one forges with the Creator, the fulfillment of our purpose in this world, is possible only through Torah. Therefore we are *constantly* living the event of the giving of Torah. Every time we engage in Torah study we are meeting the Creator at Sinai again.

That is also why there is no specific day listed for Shavuot, as it is not limited to the day it occurred, but rather it is *re-occurring*.

One should not think though that this experience is limited only to Yeshiva students. Our Sages teach that when the Jewish nation encamped at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah they were, “As one person with one heart”. The commentaries explain that when they came to receive the Torah there was complete unity amongst the nation. We learn from here that the condition for us to merit the Torah is only when we are a united unit called “Klal Yisrael”. A prerequisite for our relationship with the Creator through Torah is only if we understand that the Torah was given to us as a united nation in which every single Jew plays an essential role.

It is true that the Yeshivas have a unique way of celebrating Shavuot by staying up all night. However, Shavuot is a celebration of the ongoing relationship we have with the Creator through every facet of His Torah. That relationship is relevant only to the nation as a larger, united entity, with each individual having his purpose in that experience — which is an ongoing, recurring event.

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# Abarbanel

## ON SHAVUOT

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BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

The Parsha we call “Yitro” describes the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the culmination of the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. Abarbanel poses two simple but important questions: Why didn’t G-d give the Torah much sooner in history, to Adam or Noach or at least to one of the Patriarchs? Secondly, why did G-d choose to give the Torah at that particular location? Why not give it when the people were in Egypt, or in the Land of Israel, perhaps on the very spot where the Temple would be built?

In regard to the first question, Abarbanel offers three perspectives. First of all, the Torah had to be given to a large congregation of people that constituted an entire nation. Even though Adam and Noach observed the universally applicable Noachide laws, and the Patriarchs observed the commandments of the Torah prophetically even before they were given, they did so only as individuals with a personal intellectual and prophetic connection to the will of G-d. Also, according to Kabbalistic thought, the 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60 present at Sinai constituted all the different character types in the totality of Mankind. In effect, the Torah, although it was given directly to only one distinct nation, was actually transmitted to all of Mankind.

Secondly, the monumental task of receiving and transmitting the vast scope of the Torah and ensuring that it would be accepted by the nation could only be achieved through Moshe. Although the Jewish nation produced hundreds of prophets, Moshe stood alone, unique in the history of Mankind. That uniqueness can be characterized as follows: 1) Maturity at an early age and physical strength undiminished by age. 2) Total control over his physical desires. 3) The wisdom to understand almost completely the nature of G-d’s total creation. 4) A spiritual make-up that allowed him to receive prophecy at any moment, unlike any other prophet. 5) Since he had led the nation out of Egypt and fought battles and performed miracles on their behalf, it was fitting that only he should be the one to transmit the Torah. 6) He combined all the positive characteristics of the Jewish People into one individual: royalty, priesthood, scholarship, material and spiritual accomplishment. 7) Most importantly, the nature of his prophecy was unlike any other. He received his prophecies when fully conscious. They were never shrouded in metaphors, images, visions or dreams. His prophecies came clearly

and directly from G-d. This is what is meant by the fact that he spoke with G-d “face to face”.

Thirdly, in order to emphasize the fundamental difference between Torah Judaism and all other religious beliefs and philosophies, the giving of the Torah had to be a clearly miraculous Divine intervention. It was the culmination of the Exodus, from the plagues to the splitting of the sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, to the miraculous manna from Heaven, to the victory over Amalek, and finally to the thunder, lightning, smoke and fire that surrounded the mountain.

In regard to the second question, the Torah was given specifically at Mount Sinai for the following reasons: 1) Since it required Divine intervention, the Torah had to be given in a desert setting where the nation could only be sustained miraculously. It also had to be given soon after the Exodus so that those miracles would be fresh in their minds. 2) Mount Sinai possessed a unique measure of spiritual sanctity. It was there that Moshe first encountered G-d in the burning bush. 3) They could not receive the Torah in Israel since they would be overwhelmed by the physical necessities of conquering and developing the Land. At the same time, they could not receive it in Egypt as they were still affected by the spiritual contamination of the immoral and idolatrous Egyptian society. They required a cleansing experience of a period of travel which brought them to Mount Sinai. 4) Finally, the Torah had to be given in a desolate wilderness that was not claimed by any other nation. This symbolizes the availability of the Torah to all peoples. If the Torah had been given in Israel, the nations of the world could claim that since the Torah was given only in the territory of the Jewish People, they had no connection to it, were not bound by the dictates intended to apply to all of Mankind, and were not welcome to accept it in total, even voluntarily. Additionally, disputes could arise among the Jews themselves, each tribe claiming that the Torah was given in its portion of the land.

Therefore the Torah had to be given publicly and dramatically in a place owned by no one and thus owned by everyone, to a prophet and a nation uniquely prepared to receive the message which would enlighten all of Mankind.

## SHAVUOT - TRUE FREEDOM

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

**S**havuot is the grand finale, which commenced with Pesach. The whole point of Pesach was to bring the Jewish People to Mount Sinai to accept the Torah. Therefore, after leaving Mitzrayim (Egypt), the Jewish People counted up to the day when they would receive the Torah, which we now observe as the mitzvah of *sefirat ha'omer*. Thus, Pesach, *sefirat a'omer*, and Shavuot are all interconnected (see Ramban on Vayikra 23:36 and Kad Hakemach under "Atzeret"). In our *tefillot* (prayers), Pesach is referred to as "Zman Cherutenu", the time of our freedom. Since Pesach and Shavuot are intertwined, the incredible freedom experienced on Pesach culminates with Shavuot, the day we received the Torah. In fact, there is an explicit *mishna* in Pirkei Avot that makes the connection between freedom and Torah: "Only someone who is involved with Torah is free" (Avot 6:2). This, however, is initially difficult to understand; it would seem more sensible to say that when one observes the Torah, one is living a life of *truth*, not freedom. In fact, at times, the Torah and its laws may seem "constrictive", and one may feel as though his freedom is limited. Where, then, is the freedom in living a life of Torah and *mitzvot*?

## True Will

Every person is composed of both a body and a *neshama* (soul). Of the two, the more important is the *neshama*, with the body merely meant to serve as the *neshama's* clothing so that the *neshama* can exist in this physical world. Just as it would be false to say that a person is his clothing, so too it is nonsensical to claim that a person is his body. The *yetzer hara* (an inner inclination to do wrong), however, manages to fool us into believing that, in fact, the core of a human is indeed his body. It thus tricks us into thinking that our bodily desires are our *true* desires. Rabbi Dessler points out that the *yetzer hara* is so successful at this that when it comes to fulfilling our bodily needs, the *yetzer hara* speaks in the first-person perspective. For example, *I* want to eat that, or *I* need to sleep right now, etc. However, when the *yetzer hatov* (our inner inclination to do 'good') attempts to take the reins and steer us toward the right direction, he comes across in the second-person perspective. For example, *You* shouldn't be doing that now, or *You* should really go to *minyán* (Michtav M'Eliyahu I, p. 255 and IV p. 286).

This, however, is just a distortion of the *yetzer hara*. A person's true essence is his *neshama*, and his *neshama* constantly yearns to be close to G-d through observing the *mitzvot*. Perhaps the greatest proof of this is the feeling of regret and disappointment that generally immediately follows an action that one did only to mollify his bodily wishes. *Before* the deed

is done, one is filled with a burning sensation; however, *following* the action, after his desires are quenched, he can tap into his real self. It is only at that moment that the *yetzer hara's* hold over his true self becomes apparent, thus causing a sudden transformation in his feelings towards the action. It must be pointed out, however, that this is not always the case. Unfortunately, there are those who are so taken over by the *yetzer hara* that, even following the transgression, they don't get in touch with their *neshamot*. As the Gemara says: One who sins and repeats it, it (the sin) becomes permitted to him in his own eyes (Kiddushin 20a). For these people, even after quenching their bodily desires, their body speaks louder than their *neshama*, thus preventing any feeling of regret.

With the above introduction we can now understand that the only way a person can become truly free is by performing his *neshama's* desires. For that to happen, though, one needs to be in touch with his *neshama*, and know his real *ratzon* (will). Frequently, and understandably, the wills of both the body and the *neshama* are at odds with each other. In these times it is, ironically, by limiting the body's liberties that one gains the soul's liberty (see Rambam, Hilchot Gerushin 2:20 and Gur Aryeh on Vayikra 1:3).

For example, take someone who has trouble waking up on time for *shacharit*. As many times as he tells himself to get out of his bed, he still cannot manage to do so. One day he decides that he needs outside help, and recruits a close friend for his mission. He tells his friend not to give up, and instructs him to even forcefully pull him out of the bed, ignoring his pleas and screams to refrain. This man's true will is to get up for *shacharit*, but his bodily desire for sleep gets in the way. While from an observer's perspective, it may not look like it, through physical force his friend is actually giving him his freedom by enabling him to fulfill his true will.

Now we can understand why the Torah is the ultimate freedom. Many people are more in touch with their bodies than their souls, so they feel as though they are giving up their freedom when they deny their bodily desires to serve G-d. However, once one comes to realize that his true self is his *neshama*, everything changes. Torah is G-d's will, G-d's will is the *neshama's* will, and his *neshama's* will is his true will. When someone is toiling over Torah and occupying himself with fulfilling its laws, he is freeing himself from the bonds of the *yetzer hara*, and allowing himself to experience true autonomy. This is why Shavuot is the culmination of the freedom that began on Pesach, and this is why only a person who subjects himself to Torah is truly free.



An old friend's wedding, an uncle's funeral, Passover at the family homestead — these are but a few of the challenging real-life events that are fraught with conflict and anxiety for the newly observant.

After returning to the faith of their ancestors, many re-enter the secular world without the tools to respond to the inevitable challenges to their newly adopted set of beliefs.



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# *After the Return*

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