



NEFESH SHIMSHON

DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה בן רחל ויעקב בן רחל נחמה. MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Desert Torah

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי. (במדבר א, א)

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai. (*Bemidbar 1:1*)

The Torah was given to us in the desert, in the wilderness. Some people ask why wasn't the Torah given in *Eretz Yisrael*, seeing as the "air of *Eretz Yisrael* makes a person wise"¹ and the sanctity of the Land would have influenced us positively? Furthermore, the Torah applies fully only in *Eretz Yisrael*, as many of its *mitzvos* depend on being in the Land. Why did *Hashem* give us the Torah even before we came to *Eretz Yisrael*?

The answer emerges from what it says in *Shir*

Hashirim:

בְּיוֹם חֲתֻנָּתוֹ וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַת לְבוֹ – On the day of His wedding and the day of the joy of His heart.²

Chazal say that the day of *Hashem's* "wedding" was the day He gave us the Torah.³ This signifies that our relationship with *Hashem* is through the Torah.

So that our relationship will be as it should, without getting distracted by other things, Torah

1 *Bava Basra* 158b.

2 *Shir Hashirim* 3:11.

3 *Ta'anis* 4:8.

This week's publication, for Chag Matan Torah, is dedicated to the merit and success of our dear partners who have so generously adopted the Kollel:

הר"ר יונתן לוי והר"ר אשר מוריי שליט"א

May the zechus of Torah envelop them forever, that Torah should never cease from their mouths or the mouths of their descendants. May they see success in all their endeavors, and be blessed with expansiveness, good health, nachas and simcha all the days of their lives.

needs to be the only thing that's there. If we would have entered *Eretz Yisrael* before receiving the Torah, it is likely that this person would have gone to tend to his grapevine and that person to tend to his fig tree, and what would be with the Torah?

The forty years in the wilderness, without tending to fields and vineyards, were like a “*cheder yichud*” for husband and wife. This period of time strengthened our relationship, so we could focus on *Hashem* without distractions. There is a reason why a *chuppah*

is never held inside a home. If it would be inside a home, the *kallah* would be drawn to take care of the kitchen, and this is not the appropriate time for that.

In the *Midbar*, without the *mitzvos* that depend on *Eretz Yisrael*, we were occupied with Torah alone. This established for all generations our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* through the Torah. This was the wedding, the *chuppah* and the *yichud* between the Jewish people and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. ●

SPECIAL TOPIC

Minhagim of Shavu'os

Shavu'os is different from other holidays because it doesn't have any practical *mitzvos* that are special for the day. But there are many customs, many *minhagim* of the Jewish people, the first of which is reciting *Tikun Leil Shavu'os*. This entails reading the whole Torah in condensed and abbreviated form. This is like the seed of a tree. Planting the seed is the beginning of the tree's subsequent sprouting and growth. Later it will need to be fertilized, watered and otherwise cared for, but its growth depends primarily on being planting. We know the tree could grow to be very big, and we hope it will, so we don't plant it in a constricted space that won't have room for a tall tree.

The Arizal said that the whole year depends on Shavu'os night.¹ By learning Torah properly in depth,

or by the concentrated “seed” of reciting the *Tikun*, the tree of Torah, the *Etz Chaim*, will sprout and grow throughout the year. It is all according to the aspirations and desires that we express on Shavu'os night. This influences our whole year's learning.

If a person doesn't plant the seed on Shavu'os, all the work and effort of the year will be in vain, because there is nothing there to sprout. The *avodah* of Shavu'os night is to plant great aspirations, to express our inner desire to devote our energy to Torah learning. Praying for and aspiring to greatness in Torah is attachment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

There is a custom based on *Kabbalah* to immerse oneself in a *mikveh* at the end of Shavu'os night. Going under water is like death because a person cannot survive in water without air to breathe. Coming up from the water is an ascent like *Techiyas Hameisim*. Similar to a *ger*, whose conversion is

¹ See *Mishnah Berurah* 494:1.

לעילוי נשמת

מוה"ד משה בן אליעזר המבורג זצ"ל

ומוה"ד ברוך זאב בן נפתלי קראוס זצ"ל

נדבת נכדיהם ~ עשרת זקנים בני נשים והפארת בני אבותם

completed by immersion in the *mikveh*, every Jew is renewed by immersing himself in the *mikveh*. He comes out a new person.

We need to work extra hard on the *tefilos* of Shavu'os not to doze off at this *eis ratzon*, at this special opportunity for our prayers to be answered. It says in Torah sources that *Tefilas Musaf* of Shavu'os is an *eis ratzon*. It is like *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur and like *Minchah* on Shabbos. These three "*Ne'ilos*" draw down from Above great *siyata d'Shmaya* in spiritual matters.

It is customary to eat dairy and honey foods on Shavu'os. One of the reasons for this *minhag* is that Torah is compared to milk and honey. The goal of eating such foods is that we should taste the sweetness and pleasantness of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. חָכּוֹ מִמֶּתְקִים וְכֹלּוֹ מִחֲמָדִים – "His cheeks are sweet and He is all pleasantness."² He who tastes the "honey" of Torah is so fortunate and has such great enjoyment!

The joy of *Yom Tov*, which we celebrate with a

festive meal, expresses the feeling exclaimed by Rav Yosef:

Rav Yosef would say on Shavu'os, "Cook for me a choice calf!" He would explain, "If not for what this day did for me, there are lots of 'Yosefs' in the street."³



Rav Yosef went out of his way to celebrate Shavu'os with a festive meal because Torah made him what he was. If not for Shavu'os, the day when the Torah was given, he would be just another "Yosef" with nothing special about him.

This expresses the happiness of every Jew who lovingly receives the Torah. Through the Torah he is spiritually uplifted and can grow in Torah and *mitzvos* and live a life of attachment and *deveikus* to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

May we merit that this year and its curses will come to an end, and a new, blessed year will begin,⁴ with the blessing of Torah, which brings goodness and blessing, life and peace, to all who wholeheartedly learn it and support it. ●

2 Shir Hashirim 5:16.

3 Ibid.

4 See Megilah 31b.

SPECIAL TOPIC

Celebrate With a Seudah

Shavu'os is the time when we received the Torah and it is a very special day. It is customary to make a big deal about Shavu'os night. The Arizal said (and is so quoted in the *Ba'er Heitev* commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*¹) that someone who learns all night

1 494:7.

The Essence of Shavu'os

on Shavu'os is guaranteed that he will not be harmed all year long. This shows that a person's very life depends on what he does this night, as this is when we received the Torah.

It is surely a very important thing to learn Torah on the day that the Torah was given. And many people learn with great energy and excitement. This itself is a very important thing. But it seems that the awesomeness of Shavu'os actually stems from a

different point, which *Chazal* say is the central point of the day. Practically speaking, whether a person attains lofty spiritual levels or misses out on them depends on this point.

Said R. Elazar: According to all views, on Shavu'os we also need לנחם. What is the reason? It is the day the Torah was given.²

There is a disagreement among the *Tanna'im* regarding other holidays, whether there is an obligation to have a festive *Yom Tov* meal or not. One view holds that a person may make the day כולו לה', devoted solely to spiritual matters, to Torah learning and *tefilah*, and there is no need to have a *se'udah*. But on Shavu'os, everyone agrees that besides the spiritual *avodah* of the day, there is also a *mitzvah* to have a festive *Yom Tov* meal. Why? Because on this day we received the Torah.

The same section of *Gemara* continues as follows:

Rav Yosef would say on Shavu'os, "Cook for me a choice calf!" He would explain, "If not for what this day did for me, there are lots of 'Yosefs' in the street."³

Rav Yosef went out of his way to celebrate Shavu'os with a festive meal because Torah made him what he was. If not for Shavu'os, the day when the Torah was given, he would be just another "Yosef" with nothing special about him.

We should not belittle *minhagim* of the Jewish people such as staying up to learn on Shavu'os night. Such things are very important. But we see from the *Gemara* that the *mitzvah* of the day is the festive meal, the *se'udah*, in which we rejoice and celebrate that we received the Torah.

Now we will explain on a simple level why this is the central point of Shavu'os.

Just Be Happy

It is said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that the reason everyone agrees a festive meal must be held

is because Shavu'os is different from other holidays, each of which has a special *mitzvah* to do. Pesach has *matzah*, Rosh Hashanah has *shofar*, and so forth. But Shavu'os has no special *mitzvah* to do on that day. The only thing we need to do on Shavu'os is to be happy, to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*, which is expressed by holding a festive meal. This why all views concur that a *se'udah* must be held on Shavu'os.

And why doesn't Shavu'os have a special *mitzvah*? The simple explanation is because it is merely a continuation of the days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. We count the *Omer* for forty-nine days, and the fiftieth day is the holiday of Shavu'os.

Sefiras Ha'Omer is all about building ourselves in preparation to receive the Torah on Shavu'os. That is the very form and shape of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*. We build one row on top of another, seven and then another seven, until the person is completely built when Shavu'os comes. Counting the *Omer* and the holiday of Shavu'os at its conclusion are a matter of תחילתו השתדלות וסופו מתנה. It starts with our own efforts and ends with a gift from Heaven. During the days of the *Sefirah* a person builds himself. But Shavu'os itself is a matter of וירד ה' על הר סיני – *Hashem* opens the gates of heaven and comes to give us His Torah.

Shavu'os could not be anything other than receiving a gift. On Shavu'os we receive the Torah, and when it comes to Torah, we pray in the *Shemoneh Esreh*: חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל – "Grace us with knowledge, understanding and comprehension." The word חננו, "Grace us," derives from מתנת חנם, an undeserved gift.

There are things you can't buy with money. Let's say we see someone wearing a nice watch. We might ask him where he bought it, because its value looks like something he could afford, so it is reasonable to assume that he purchased it himself. But if we see a poor *kollel* man holding a diamond worth five million dollars, we don't ask him, "Where did you buy it?" We will rather ask him who gave him the diamond, because he could not possibly have bought it himself.

² *Pesachim* 68b.

³ *Ibid.*

The *Torah Hakedoshah* contains within it such wondrous closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that even if a person would put all his effort and strength into fulfilling *mitzvos* and doing *ma'asim tovim* there is no way he could thereby acquire Torah. A Jew is not capable on his own of understanding and knowing what it says in the Torah. Even *Moshe Rabbeinu* couldn't do it.

Said R. Abahu, for all the forty days that Moshe was in heaven, he learned Torah and forgot it. He said, "Master of the World, I have forty days and I don't know anything." What did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* do? When the forty days were over, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave him the Torah as a gift, as it says, ויתן אל משה – "He gave to Moshe."⁴⁵

Even *Moshe Rabbeinu* received the Torah as a gift, not as something he earned by means of his deeds.

We see this idea emphasized in the wording of the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer. Before we ask for Torah, before we say חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל, "Grace us with knowledge, understanding and comprehension," we preface it by saying אתה חונן לאדם דעת – "You graciously bestow knowledge upon human beings." There is no such preface when we ask for forgiveness (סלח לנו) or healing (רפאנו ה') or sustenance (ברך עלינו). But we do say it before asking for Torah, because asking for Torah is asking for *Hashem* Himself. Thus, we first offer a praise of *Hashem*, without which we would be lacking the requisite merit to even ask for such a thing. The giving of Torah is always as an undeserved gift, מתננם חנים.

Shavu'os is the day we received the Torah, and like it was back then at *Har Sinai*, so it is every year. *Hashem* opens the gates of heaven and pours out a great flow of Torah, completely independent of our deeds. Therefore, we were not commanded to perform any *mitzvah* on this day.

In order to leave Egypt, the Jewish people needed to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* though the blood of *korban Pesach* and the blood of *milah*. So every year,

on Pesach, we have certain *mitzvos* to do, which are related to this. But to merit receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people did nothing. The Torah was given as gift.

I Want Torah

Although the Torah is given to us totally as a gift and we don't need to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* in order to receive it, there is one thing that is required of a gift's recipient, and that is to want the gift. This is a necessary precondition for giving to take place.

When were the nations of the world disqualified by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? From the time that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave the Torah at Sinai. He went around to all the nations, offering them to receive the Torah, and they didn't want, as it says, ה' בא מסיני בא – "*Hashem* came from Sinai."

He said to the people of Eisav, "Will you accept My Torah?" They replied, "What is written in it?" He answered, "You shall not kill." They said to Him, "That is what we rely on...." And so He said to the people of Yishmael, "Will you accept My Torah?" They replied, "What is written in it?" He answered, "You shall not steal." They said, "That is what we rely on... we will not accept it. Give it to Your people, as it says, ה' עוז לעמו יתן – "*Hashem* gives strength [i.e., Torah] to His people."

Hashem said to them, "Those who accept My Torah are the ones I will bless with peace, as it says, ה' יברך את עמו בשלום – "*Hashem* will bless His people with peace."⁶

The only thing that the Jewish people did when they received the Torah was to want it and desire it. Moshe led the people out of the camp toward *Hashem* to receive the Torah, and they went.⁷ Since they really desired the Torah, they received it.

4 *Shemos* 31:18.

5 *Shemos Rabbah* 41:6.

6 *Devarim Rabbah*, Parshas Ekev.

7 *Shemos* 19:17.

The same is true today. Unlike Pesach, where the main *avodah* is connected to *matzah*, the *avodah* on Shavu'os is just to want the gift of Torah and to value it. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* is waiting to see, so to speak, what we will do with His holy Torah.

This may be compared to someone who wants to give his friend a precious diamond. But he will give it to him only he knows that his friend will guard

it well and appreciate its value. If he knows that the recipient of the diamond is going to play with it in the sandbox, there is no way he will give it to him.

Similarly, on Shavu'os we don't have to do any special *mitzvos*. We just have to want the *Torah Hakadoshah*, which we demonstrate by celebrating it with a festive meal, that's all. This is the main *avodah* of the day. ●

STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF RAV SHIMSHON PINCUS ZT"l



A Child's Shavu'os Night

At a very young age, when unable to achieve his desires on his own, Rav Shimshon turned naturally to *Hashem Yisbarach* and cried from the depths of his pure heart with absolute faith and conviction that only *Hashem*, Who is All-Powerful, would fulfill his desires. There were times when he was girded with such iron-clad *emunah* that *Hashem* would answer his *tefilos* that he simply acted accordingly — and, indeed his *tefilos* were fulfilled!

One famous episode occurred on Shavu'os night when Shimshi was all of seven years old. As his father prepared to leave to *shul* with his elder brother, Avner, Shimshi begged his father to come along. Rav Chaim Avraham, who felt that the boy was too young to stay in *shul* all night long, regretfully shook his head, promising that he would come along when he was older.

A half-hour later while reciting *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os*, the father regretted his decision, reflecting that if the boy was so determined to come to *shul*, he shouldn't have refused him. Retracing his steps to the house, he was astounded to find his son in the building stairwell, dressed in his *Yom Tov* finest.

"Shimshi! What are you doing here? I told you to put on pajamas and go to bed!" he exclaimed in disbelief.

"I did, but then I *davened* to *Hashem* with all my heart that you'd change your mind and come get me. I was so sure that *Hashem* had answered me that I got out of bed, got dressed, and came downstairs to wait for you!"

Climax of Sefiras HaOmer

Every year on Shavu'os night before *Maariv*, Rav Shimshon would proclaim that Shavu'os is a day symbolic of the eternal bond between *Knesses Yisrael* and *Hashem Yisbarach*, the bedrock of the year and life of each and every Jew, and the pinnacle of *Sefiras Ha'omer*. "*Minhag Yisrael Torah hu*, Jewish customs [have the status] of *Halachah*." On Shavu'os, the chief *minhag* itself is learning Torah throughout the night. Some prefer to fulfill this custom by learning *Gemara*, whereas others learn *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os* — and both are praiseworthy, affirmed Rav Shimshon. He likewise commended the custom of immersing in a *mikveh* prior to *Shacharis*, explaining that submerging in a *mikveh* is an expression of *mesirus nefesh*, while emerging from the waters in a state of cleanliness and purity is akin to spiritual rebirth — the state that *Klal Yisrael* experienced at the time of *Matan Torah*.

Yom Tov of Aspirations

Rav Shimshon taught that the *minhagim* that one observes on *Yom Tov* reveal one's deepest aspirations, which during the week are cloaked in routine. On *leil Shavu'os*, the Vilna Gaon recited *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os*, while the Dubner Maggid was drawn to his *Gemara*.

When the Vilna Gaon once asked his contemporary why he did not recite *Tikkun*, the latter replied with a parable: "A wholesaler who wishes to exhibit his wares presents a random selection of items to retailers. He exhibits only a small percentage of his stock, yet no one has a doubt that he has much more packed neatly away in his warehouses.

"You, the Vilna Gaon, overflow with Torah, and so you can suffice with several *pesukim* from each *parshah*. I, who do not possess such vast quantities or stock, have no need to expose my scanty knowledge of Torah by reciting individual *pesukim* from *Bereishis*, *Noach*, *Nevi'im*, and *Kesuvim*. I need to still sit and learn."

Repeating the story, Rav Shimshon lifted his head, closed his eyes, and shouted heavenward:

"If only I had the privilege to be present during this discussion before these venerable *geonim* and *kedoshim* and the audacity to open my mouth, do you know what I would have told the Maggid?"

Smiling in Rav Chaim Kamil's direction, he continued: "I'd crouch behind Rav Chaim's frock in fear of being scorched by the Maggid's spiritual fire, but I would peek out and say that there are actually two times when a man will display his wares — when he is looking to sell, and also when he is looking to buy.

"Here, on the eve of Shavu'os, we are not seeking to hawk our wares, but we are showing samples that we wish to purchase and acquire for ourselves! What

do I want? My aspiration is to acquire complete knowledge of Torah — from '*Bereishis bara Elokim*' until '*Leinei kol Yisrael!*' I want to know everything, to acquire all the Torah in the universe! I want *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, *Kesuvim*, *Mishnah*, and *Shas*, so what do I do? What do I say? I display samples of all these to the *Eibishter* and cry out, 'This is what I want!'

"Similarly, when I spend the entire night of Shavu'os toiling in Torah in the *beis midrash* instead of going to sleep, I am actually beseeching *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to grant me physical strength to sit and learn all night long, every night!

"But then the *yetzer hara* appears and whispers in my ear, 'Are you out of your mind? Do you really want to sit and learn all day long, from morning until night, and be like Rav Chaim Kanievsky? Why, you might even end up not knowing the name of the street you live on!'

"And I say, 'Yes! *Ribbono shel Olam*, that's exactly what I want!' True, I may not identify that desire inside of me yet. I may not taste that unparalleled sweetness of Torah yet. But if I continue learning, then one day, I will feel it!

"And you know what else I aspire to do? I want to *toivel* in the *mikveh* and emerge clean and pure to serve *Hashem!*

"Indeed, the Arizal teaches that these three elements — a full night dedicated to learning, *Tikkun Leil Shavu'os*, and immersing in the *mikveh* prior to dawn — are the three rungs forming the spiritual ladder that lead a Jew to attain the ultimate spiritual plane of *Kesser*. One who ascends all three rungs is rewarded as the gates of *Shamayim* open wide to admit him. On Shavu'os, we do not achieve greatness through our own actions, but utilize action to demonstrate our deep desire and aspirations for *kedushah*." ●

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