

Today is the Day

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

In the initial days of this world, when there was little more than the earth and the sky, the sun, the moon and the stars, the world was waiting. Even after Adam was created and settled into the garden, le'ovdah uleshomrah, the world was still in a state of anticipation. The doubt would remain for centuries on end.

Throughout the generations that followed, despite Noach's lone piety in a world of darkness, Avrohom Avinu's perception of a Creator, and Yitzchok's readiness to be offered as the ultimate sacrifice, something was missing.

Even as Yaakov studied through the long nights and his sons marched forth, an army of soldiers of the Ribbono Shel Olam, the world was not yet perfect.

It was all a journey, a process leading finally to the Yom Hashishi, the sixth day of Sivan at Har Sinai, when the world received its heart and soul. Bishvil haTorah shenikreis reishis.

"Ve'am nivra yehalel Kah" (Tehillim 102:19). A nation, newly identified, newly charged with a mission, called out the two words that echo through the ages, defining us and what we are about: "Naaseh venishma."

It was the moment when Klal Yisroel announced for the entire world to hear that although they were mortals fashioned of flesh and blood, they would live on a higher and loftier plane, using the Torah to guide them.

And now, once again, we are at the time of year when the power and potency of that day reigns again and we are able to tap into its energy.

As we celebrate Zeman Mattan Toraseinu, the best and most appropriate preparation is to focus on how blessed we are, with the gift we received, and what those moments at Sinai and their reverberations mean to us.

We all know it's true. In the year 2022, we can perceive that the ongoing golus has taken its toll and neshamos are increasingly dimmer. It's hard to feel ruchniyus, to acutely sense kedusha in a crass, immoral world, but it is there.

If we take a moment and contemplate, and conduct an honest self-assessment, we will realize that whatever might give us a degree of happiness – a new car or home, a good meal or a great vacation – isn't the real deal. The feeling it gives us does not compare to the elation we feel when we gently stand up after a good shiur or seder, having learned with a child or chavrusa. Shetihyu ameilim baTorah. The joy we feel when we understand a difficult sugya and it all comes together is like none other. We taxed our powers of thought and concentration, and it became clear to us: Ahh! That is satisfaction.

The joy of Kabbolas HaTorah is eternal and hasn't faded along with everything else. Every time we hear a good sevorah, vort, or shiur; every time we work hard to understand a Gemara, Rashi, or Tosafos, the joy that was felt at Har Sinai is felt again.

Everything else is fleeting. The world was created for Torah. The joy that was felt on that day in Sivan so many years back and all those feelings that were apparent on that day are eternal. We can feel them any time we delve into the holy words of amar Abaye and Rebbi Yehudah omeir.

Hashem gave us the ultimate gift, and when we express our thanks, we allow ourselves to become vessels that contain it and open our hearts to its light. Hanosein matonah lachaveiro tzorich lehodio. This means that when a person gives someone a gift, the giver must inform the recipient that he is giving him something. Additionally, the word lehodio also has in its root the word hoda'ah, thanks, indicating that when a person gives a gift, he has a reasonable expectation that it will be appreciated and acknowledged. Therefore, we say thank you every day. Asher bochar banu. You chose us. And on Shavuos, we celebrate it.

On Shavuos, when we reaffirm that we only exist for the Torah and our nation has a unifying goal, we allow the Torah to shine its light into our hearts. We remain awake at night, demonstrating our appreciation of the Torah's role in our lives. We read through the entire Torah in Tikkun Leil Shavuos to show that we treasure every sefer of the Torah and the knowledge contained therein.

We pledge to take it all very seriously and endeavor to understand whatever we can.

The Meshech Chochmah asks at the end of Parshas Yisro: What did Moshe Rabbeinu personally gain from Kabbolas HaTorah? He had already been worthy and was able to rise Heavenward even before

having received the Torah. This was an indication that Moshe Rabbeinu had personally achieved perfection before Sinai.

The Meshech Chochmah's answer is instructive and relevant. Until Mattan Torah, he says, Moshe Rabbeinu and man were able to serve Hashem with ruchniyus. The novelty of Kabbolas HaTorah was that now, acts of gashmiyus were invested with kedusha. Man was directed to sanctify himself, his corporeal needs, and his animal instincts.

This, says the Meshech Chochmah, is the idea of Hashem telling Moshe Rabbeinu at the sneh, the burning bush, "She'al na'alecha mei'al raglecha – Remove your shoes from on your feet. Remove the vehicles for your gashmiyusdike living. Remove your chomer as you approach Me. Here you must be an angel." That was before Matan Torah. Afterward, the shoes became part of the package – the package called Am Yisroel, to whom the Torah was given.

After Matan Torah, Hashem tells Klal Yisroel, "Ve'anshei kodosh tihyun li – And holy people you should be unto me" (Shemos 22:30). The Kotzker Rebbe explained this to mean, "Be mentchlich heilig. Be holy within the context of being human." Figure out how to exist within society, to be a father and a husband and a friend who is holy. We are meant to be people who live elevated lives, not malochim. To be good, we don't have to escape to a desolate island away from humanity. Rather, we are to excel as we live among others.

On Shavuos, we celebrate this concept. Hakadosh Boruch Hu desires our service. He gave us the Torah to guide us and address our physical existence. We celebrate the potential of man, who can use the Torah as the ladder to climb to ever loftier heights.

The Creator didn't ask us to become angels, but rather to remain mortals, to incorporate the Torah and its laws into the realities of our human lives.

The Gemara states that while regarding other Yomim Tovim the rabbis disagree how much of the day should be dedicated to the purely spiritual, on Shavuos "hakol modim deba'anan nami lochem." They all agree that we need to please the more physical side as well.

We can understand this to mean that on Shavuos, we need "lochem," to proclaim that the physical is part of the Shavuos celebration. We demonstrate through our actions that Torah affects and impacts our basic human behaviors as well. The bein adam lachaveiro, the way we conduct ourselves and the way we deal with other people, is an integral part of Torah, not only the bein adam laMakom, the way we serve Hashem. Torah touches our souls, impacts our actions, and improves our personal conduct.

Perhaps this is a reason why the Torah is achieved through 48 attributes, many dealing with interpersonal relationships, because in order to excel in Torah, a person's middos must be refined as well.

This is also a reason why the Torah was only given when the Bnei Yisroel were united without any rancor or fights between them. As the posuk (Shemos 19:2) states, "Vayichan shom Yisroel neged hahar," using the singular conjugation vayichan, instead of the plural vayachanu, to denote that they came to rest at the foot of the mountain prior to Hashem giving them the Torah.

As Rashi famously states, "Vayichan shom Yisroel neged hahar, k'ish echod beleiv echod," as one person with one heart.

In fact, prior to that, the posuk uses the plural forms to track their movement: "Vayisu m'Refidim, vayavou midbar sinai, vayachanu bamidar." As long as they were divided and quarreling, Hashem did not yet see fit to give them the Torah. It was only after they were able to put aside their differences that Hashem said that now He could give them the Torah as He had intended since He created the world. [See Vayikra Rabba 9:9.]

Individually, as well, in order to be worthy of Torah, we have to have perfected our character, for it is only when people have refined their middos that they are able to set aside jealousy, petty concerns and hatred to be able to join together in harmony with others.

Achdus and the ability to live peacefully with others is a prerequisite for Torah.

Chazal (Pesikta Zutrasa, Va'eschanon) state, "Chayov odom liros ess atzmo ke'ilu mekabel Torah miSinai, shene'emar, 'Hayom hazeh nihiyeisa le'am.' Every day, a person is obligated to conduct himself as if he accepted the Torah that day at Har Sinai." We are all familiar with this directive regarding Yetzias Mitzrayim. In fact, it is the central theme of the leil haSeder, but we don't think about it on Shavuot.

Imagine if today was the day you received the Torah. Imagine standing at Har Sinai and hearing the words of the Aseres Hadibros being called out. Imagine the sounds. Imagine the sight. Imagine being led out of Mitzrayim with very little knowledge or holiness, and trekking through the desert, becoming a better person every day.

Now, imagine how empty and meaningless your life would be without Torah. No Torah, no learning, no Shabbos, no tefillin, no Yom Tov, nothing that your life is centered around, nothing that gives your life the meaning it now has. You wouldn't even have potato kugel or cholent, or a nice suit, hat or shaitel. You wouldn't have a shul to go to and no reason to go to one altogether. Think of everything you do in your day, week and year. Now imagine that there was no Torah.

Imagine that today is the day you discovered the secret of the world. Imagine that today you were invited to study G-d's word, to bask in His glow, to find meaning, satisfaction and joy in your life. How excited you would be! How grateful and how dedicated!

Today is that day. "Ke'ilu mekabel Torah miSinai."

Appreciate it. Show it. Feel it.

Hayom hazeh! Today and every day. Despite the degeneration of the world, despite the struggles we experience with every tefillah and the challenge of concentrating fully when we learn, despite the many forces competing for our attention, we have a new Kabbolas HaTorah.

Our human shortcomings are not a hindrance. We weren't given a Torah despite the fact that we are people, but specifically because we are mere humans.

In the days of old, this concept was widely appreciated. There was a natural reverence for Torah and its scholars even among the unlearned. In Volozhin, local homeowners would line up at the train station before each zeman to vie for the honor of pulling the wagons carrying arriving talmidim and their luggage. The yeshiva learned through Shas, and when the yeshiva celebrated a siyum on each masechta, the local people would arrive at the yeshiva and proudly serve as waiters.

Imagine that! Imagine if in your town, the bochurim and yungeleit would learn in yeshiva, and when there is a siyum, they would sit down in the dining room and the local residents would serve as their waiters, going from table to table giving out the food they had picked up at the kitchen.

Nobody forced them to come. Nobody even asked them to come. It was their special honor, because they appreciated Torah and lomdei Torah. It was an honor for them to carry the lomdei Torah and their belongings to the yeshiva, and it was their pleasure to partake in the simcha of the completion of yet another masechta.

It was special to them. It was valuable to them, as if it was given today. They treated it with respect. They treasured the Torah and the people who studied it the whole day. It was their pride and joy.

We hear these things and smile. They are charming reminders of a world that was. Of a world that we need to recreate.

Shavuot is a time to refocus on what Torah means to us, and on how blessed we are to be able to spend time by a Gemara or Chumash or Shulchan Aruch, and be surrounded by talmidei chachomim and yeshiva bochurim.

The Kadmonim call the moments spent in Torah study “lev hayom, the heart of the day,” its most crucial and life-giving period.

We open our arms wide and accept the Torah, just as our fathers and their fathers have done for thousands of years. We cherish its words, raising our children and helping guide them to see the honey under each letter.

It is who we are and what we are about. Our lives revolve around it. It is Torah.

As we go about what is commonly referred to as “real life in the real world,” as we confront issues of parnassah and health challenges, temptations of all sorts, the different types of people we must contend with and everything else that we encounter in our daily lives, we have to keep focused on our roles as bnei and bnos Torah to deal with everyone and everything as befitting those who stood together at Har Sinai and were embraced by Hashem and given the Torah.

We are higher and better than to get pulled down and sucked in by the vortex colluded by the yeitzer hora.

As we say and sing the words, “Boruch Hu Elokeinu shebra’anu lechvodo v’hivdilanu min hato’im v’nosan lonu Toras emes v’chayei olam nota besochenu,” let us think about them and what they mean, so that this Shavuot and every day thereafter, we bask in their glow and earn the brachos of a good life, happiness and fulfillment.

Gut Yom Tov.