

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Shavuos



Torah WELLSPRINGS

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Torah Wellsprings - Shavuos

The Joy of Mattan Torah

Chazal (*Pesachim* 68:) say, "All authorities agree that one needs to enjoy himself on Shavuos because on this day the Torah was given to the Jewish nation."

Rashi explains, "This means he should be happy with food and drink to show that he is happy with the Torah given on this day."

The Gemara relates that Rav Yosef asked his family to prepare the choicest meats for Shavuos. Rav Yosef explained, "If it weren't for this day, there are many Yosef's in the marketplace."

Rashi explains, "If it wasn't for this day – that I learned Torah and became exalted – there are many other people in the marketplace with the name Yosef, and what difference would there be between us?"

Let us understand why we are so happy on Shavuos:

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 because one uses his body to study Torah and perform mitzvos. The *neshamah* also needs to rejoice, and the *neshamah* rejoices when it understands Torah. The *neshamah* enjoys learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos."

These words explain why we need to enjoy hearty meals on Shavuos and learn a lot of Torah. We make good meals because the body deserves to rejoice, for we use the body to serve the holy King of the world! The *neshamah* must also rejoice on this day. The *neshamah* delights when one studies Torah and performs mitzvos.

The Seder HaYom writes, "[On Shavuos], one should praise Hashem in the *beis medresh* for all the kindness Hashem

performs for us. He gave us His Torah and chose us from all nations to be His beloved nation. How fortunate is our lot!

"We aren't fools who don't recognize all this honor that Hashem bestowed upon us... The nations of the world turn to their *avodah zarahs* who can't help them. This is not the lot of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem always watches over every single Yid (as evident from the miracles Hashem performed for our forefathers and us at all times).

"Hashem loves us due to 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. He will lack nothing."

A story is told about a wealthy man who was interviewing a bachur to see if he might be a suitable match for his only daughter. The bachur asked, "What will you give me as a dowry if I marry your daughter?"

The wealthy man replied, "The shadchan told me that you are clever, but I see that you aren't. My daughter is my only child, and as everyone knows, I am extremely wealthy. Obviously, I will give my future son-in-law a lot of money."

The *nimshal* is that the Torah is Hashem's daughter. Whoever will marry the Torah and whoever loves the Torah can be certain that he will receive everything he needs. As the Seder HaYom tells us, Hashem loves us because we are descendants of the *avos hakedoshim* and because we love and cherish the Torah. A father-in-law loves his son-in-law, especially when he sees that his son-in-law loves his daughter. So too, Hashem loves us when He sees our love for His Torah.

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

A bachur once asked the Chazon Ish, "How can one be happy?" This bachur would often come to the Chazon Ish "to speak in learning" to discuss the topics he was studying in yeshiva. (Later in his life, he became a rosh yeshiva.) But apparently, he was going through a hard time and wanted to know the path to happiness.

The Chazon Ish responded, "Hashem chose us from among all the nations; He took us out of Mitzrayim and gave us His Torah. Think about these matters, and you will become happy."

The bachur replied, "I don't feel connected with these ideas."

The Chazon Ish replied, "But you should." These are the happiest thoughts and the ideas of joy we should always contemplate, especially on Shavuos, the day Hashem chose us to be His beloved nation.

We receive an abundance of gashmiyos and ruchniyos from this day. The entire world is ours. We should rejoice immensely.¹

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 מדבר סיני, "They traveled from Refidim, and they arrived at the 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 goes back to writing where they came from.

The Or HaChaim (*Shemos* 19:2) answers that when the Yidden arrived at Har Sinai,

1. Someone said to Reb Zalman Brizel zt'l, "From your happiness it looks like you think the world is yours." He replied, "The world is mine. Come with me and I'll show you."

They went to the grocery and bought a loaf of bread. They stopped a taxi and went to the bank and took out some money. The elderly Reb Brizel said to his companion: "Do you see? The entire world is mine. One supplies me with bread, the taxi drives me where I need to go and the bank gives me money. Everyone is working for me."

The world was created for Yidden who learn Torah. So, indeed, when one studies Torah the entire world is his.

During the Holocaust, an elderly Jew said to Reb Chaim Kreisworth zt'l, "Tomorrow, I will be sent to the gas chambers. I am wealthy, and my money is stored in a bank in Switzerland. I will tell you my account number. If you survive this war, seek out my children and give them the account number, so they could take out the money."

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

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim was speaking with a poor person in a beis midrash in Yerushalayim, and Reb Chaim discovered that he was the offspring he was looking for. He was the son of the wealthy man who went to the gas chambers. Reb Chaim told him the account number and the name of the Swiss bank.

This man was so poor, he didn't even have enough money to travel to Switzerland. But he borrowed money and made the trip.

Having accrued interest all these years, the value of the account increased. The bank told him that he has \$30,000,000 in the account.

Reb Chaim Kreisworth said, "He was wealthy for many years, only he didn't know it."

Reb Chaim Kreisworth explained, "We are also extremely wealthy, we have millions. We have the Torah, we have mitzvos, our fortune is endless, only we aren't aware of what we have."

exclaimed, "Why can't you just be like your brother?" This rebuke shattered him. The drop of interest he once had in Torah was extinguished by this mechanach's comment (as a rule it is unwise to compare children to one another).

But one day, everything turned around. It was a sudden and shocking change. A week before, he got a thirty on his test; the following week, he received a hundred. A week earlier, he didn't want to go to cheder, and the moment the bell rang, he bolted out the door. The following week, he woke up early and rushed to get to cheder.

The principal called the father to hear from him how this happened.

At first, the father didn't want to answer, but when 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 consented.

"Recently," he said, "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 to Hashem, והערב נא, 'Make the Torah sweet for my son. Let him understand and love the Torah.' I cry when I say, ונהיה אנתנו וצאצאינו כולנו יודעי שמך, 'May we and our children all know Your name and study Torah l'shmah.' Shortly after I began saying *birchas haTorah* with *kavanah*, my son turned around."

There is a beautiful lesson from the Noda b'Yehuda (Tzlach, Brachos 64), which reveals what occurs when one says *birchas haTorah*. The lesson is based on the Gemara (Brachos 35), which states that when one makes a *brachah* over food, the food becomes his. Before he said the *brachah*, the food belonged to Hashem, and he may not consume it. This is as it states לַה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלֶאֱכָהּ, "To Hashem is the earth and everything that's in it." The food and the world belong to Hashem; it is like *hekdesh*, from which you may not derive any pleasure or benefit. After one recites a *brachah*, Hashem gives the food to the person to eat. This is as it states וְהָאָרֶץ נְתַן לְבְנֵי אָדָם, "The earth was given to mankind."

Something similar occurs when one says *birchas haTorah*. It states (Tehillim 1:2) כִּי אָם בְּתוֹרַת ה' חִפְצוֹ וּבְתוֹרַתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹמָם וּלְיַלְלָהּ, "His desire is in Hashem's Torah, and in his Torah he studies day and night." The pasuk begins by stating that the Torah is Hashem's (תּוֹרַת ה') and then refers to it as man's Torah (תּוֹרַתוֹ). The Tzlach explains that it changes ownership when one says *birchas haTorah*. That's when Toras Hashem becomes Toraso; Hashem's Torah becomes his. Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift.

The Noda b'Yehudah (Tzlach) writes, "In my opinion, *birchas haTorah* is a wonderful *segulah* for remembering Torah." This is because when one says *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift. Hashem can provide gifts in large quantities. We can grow in Torah immensely by being cautious with *birchas haTorah*.³

3. Reb Menachem Rikanti zt'l yearned and pined to know Torah. For this purpose, he fasted many days and he davened a lot. However, he was born with a weak mind, and he wasn't succeeding in Torah. But he never gave up. He continued to fast, daven, and try. When he was in his eighties, he had a dream that an elderly person gave him a cup of water and told him to drink it, which he did. In the morning, he was a new person. His heart was open to understanding Torah, and within a year or two 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. The Chazon Ish explained that when his grandmothers lit the Shabbos lecht, they davened that their descendants should succeed in Torah. And 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

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

The Tzlach writes that this is also the reason the *ג"ה* (*Baal Halachos Gedolos*) wrote out the entire *birchas haTorah* at the beginning of his sefer. He wanted to remind people to say *birchas haTorah*, so the students will remember the lessons he writes in his sefer.⁴

Tefillos on Shavuot

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11), *בעטרה שעטרה לו*, "The crown His mother made for Him on His wedding day, the day of His joy."

Chazal say *יום חתונתו*, "His wedding day" refers to *matan Torah*, and is therefore also called *יום שמחת לבו*, "the day of His joy."

The Midrash on this *pasuk* teaches:

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

"Yes, I did."

"What did he say?"

"He said it can be compared to a king who had an only daughter whom he loved dearly. Initially, he called her *בתי* 'My daughter.' Later, he called her *אחותי*, 'My sister.' *לא זו מחבבה*, his love kept increasing 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*, He didn't stop loving them until He calls them *אמי*, 'My mother.'⁵

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

The Midrash refers to three types of relationships the Jewish nation has with Hashem. The Kli Yakar (*Shemos* 19:4) says that when Hashem calls us "mother," this means we are able to annul Hashem's decrees like a mother can tell her children what they must do.

The Kli Yakar adds that the three levels of relationships are alluded to in the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:4), *ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם*, "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." Rashi explains that an eagle carries its offspring on top of its wings to protect them from arrows shot

weak mind, and when he reached the other side of the road, he is wise, sharp, and he can understand Torah because that was the moment that the tefillos were answered.

4. There was a chassidische Yid in Yerushalayim named Reb Elazar Mordechai Rubinstein zt'l. There was a period in his life when he would say *birchas haTorah* in a tune. It took him about twenty minutes for him to say it. There was a rosh yeshiva who would send his students to listen to how he says the brachos.

5. 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.

from below. They say, "Better the arrow should pierce me than my children." This level of closeness to Hashem is called *בתי*, daughter, because Hashem cares for us as a father cares for his offspring.

ואביא אתכם אלי, "I brought you to Me." This means that Hashem raises the Jewish nation to his level until they become like an equal with Hashem, *keviyachol*, the level of אחותי, sister.

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, the level of אמי, mother. As it states (II Shmuel 23:3), צדיק מושל, "A tzaddik rules over Hashem." And Chazal say, "Hashem makes decrees, and a tzaddik annuls them." Primarily, this high level of closeness to Hashem occurs on Shavuos, as it states (Shir HaShirim 3:11), בעטרה, "The crown His mother made for Him on His wedding day, the day of his joy."

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

An eagle was hopping along the seashore, and whenever it saw a small bug, it quickly and expertly caught it and sent it down its belly. However, this diet was way too little for the giant eagle.

Someone called out, "Eagle! Eagle! Why are you crawling on the seashore? Lift your wings and fly over the deep sea. When you see a large fish, swoop down and catch it."

The eagle began doing so and was never hungry again.

The *nimshal* is alluded to in the words, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings." Hashem revealed to the Jewish nation that they have wings, they can fly, and they can achieve so much. When the Jewish nation lived in Mitzrayim, they weren't aware of their greatness. They didn't know that they had the power of tefillah. But when they were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told them (*Shemos* 19:5-6), והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים... ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, "You will become My treasure among all nations... You will be a kingdom of princes, a holy nation." And Hashem told them (*Shemos* 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I raised you on eagles' wings." He revealed to them that they had great potential. When they daven, Hashem listens to them.

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 and with proper *kavanah*, the galus would end.

There are batei midrashim that follow this counsel every day. The *brachah* אהבת עולם takes them five minutes to say.

Shavuos morning, in the beis medresh of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l*, they said the *brachah ahavas olam* for hours, with a lot of hislahavos.

One year, 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.⁶

6. 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 it is to pour out your heart [before Hashem on Shavuos] that your children should earn the crown of Torah, ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות, that they will learn Torah teach it, and keep the Torah."

One of the Rebbes of Munkatz (*Shaar Yissaschar*) *zt'l* writes, נהגים הצדיקים החסידים להאריך, בברכת אהבה רבה ביומא דשבועות החג הקדוש הזה, "Righteous *tzadikim* spend a lot of time on the brachah אהבת עולם on Shavuos."

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

Having kavanah at this brachah every day of the year is essential. Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg *zt'l* said that it is impossible

to say a true chidush in Torah unless one has kavanah when he says the brachah of *ahavah rabba* and אתה חונן in Shemonah Esrei.

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

Rebbe Shmelke asked him to repeat the *chiddush*. The student proudly said the chidush he made, but Rebbe Shmelke showed him that the *chiddush* was incorrect.

Because it is impossible to say a true Torah *chiddush* without *tefillah*.

And when you daven for success in Torah and other areas of *ruchniyos*, don't be stingy

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 it is up to you to study Torah. If you won't study, you won't get it."

This often occurs. One's tefillos were answered, but he doesn't know about it, so he doesn't look for the treasure he just attained.

On Shavuos, Hashem gives us many brachos, but it is up to each individual to take advantage of it. If we don't devote ourselves to Torah study, we won't discover the treasure Hashem gave us.

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

Those who are davening fervently at the *chuppah* for the couple's success are the *mechutanim*.

The same is on Shavuos. Who are *mechutanim* with the Torah? Those who cry and beg Hashem for success in Torah, they are *mechutanim* with the Torah.

And who is the chasan? The one who goes home with the kallah after the *chasunah*. Similarly, Shavuos is a *chasunah* between the Jewish nation and the Torah. Who among the Jewish nation can be called the chasan? Those who continue learning Torah after Shavuos, they are the chasan.

A wealthy person paid a lot of money for a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He was so proud of his son-in-law! He would walk down the streets with his son-in-law to show his friends "his nachas."

Someone asked him, "You're always speaking about how special your *chasan* is, but what about your daughter? Is she also so special?"

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

The friend asked, "So, how do you have a son-in-law if you don't have a daughter?"

The wealthy man replied, "For years I watch wealthy people proudly walking around with their scholarly sons-in-law, so I also wanted a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. I paid a lot of money and got one. I don't have a daughter, but at least I have a son-in-law a *talmid chacham*."

The *nimshal* is, before Shavuos, everyone takes haircuts, cuts their nails, and they put 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.

and count your words. Ask for a lot. Hashem can give you whatever you ask for. It states (*Tehillim* 81:11), הרחב פיך ואמלאהו, and Rashi translates it, "Open your mouth wide and ask for all your hearts desires, ואמלאהו, because [Hashem says] I will grant all your requests." The Gemara (*Brachos* 50.) says this pasuk refers to success in Torah. So, open your mouth wide, ask for a lot, ואמלאהו, and Hashem will give.

Sefer Chasidim (131) states, "If someone davens for something that will increase Hashem's glory – such as when one davens for 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."

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "From the time the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, the gates of heaven closed." Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said that when one davens for *ruchniyos*, the gates are open. They are closed for worldly requests but open when one requests *ruchniyos*.

Tehillim

Shavuos is Dovid HaMelech's *yahrtzeit*, so it is a good day to say *Tehillim*.

The *miforshim* say that Shavuos is probably Dovid HaMelech's birthday, as well, because Chazal tell us that *tzaddikim* are *niftar* on their birth date.

Some say that this is the reason we read *Rus* on Shavuos. The final *pasuk* is, וישי הוליד, את דוד, "And Yishai begot Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on Shavuos, on the day Dovid was born.

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 *Tehillim* that one says on this day will be more accepted in heaven. Therefore, everyone should say the entire *Tehillim* on Shavuos."

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

Blending Torah with Tefillah

Chasidim from Poland came to the Beis Aharon of Karlin (Belarus) *zt'l*. Reb Aharon told them, "Polish Yidden love learning Torah, and so do we. The difference is that we say, שמעתה 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.⁷

Dovid HaMelech said about himself (*Tehillim* 109:4), ואני תפילה, "I am *tefillah*."

Similarly, the Gemara (*Brachos* 7:) tells us that *רוח* is called *רוח* because ריווהו להקדוש ברוך הוא, הוא בשירות ותשבחות, 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 we wonder why Dovid was *niftar* on Shavuos, the day of *mattan Torah*! Would it not be more appropriate for Dovid to be *niftar* on *Yom Kippur*, *Hoshanah Rabba*, or on another day designated for *tefillah*? Why was he *niftar* on a day that is primarily associated with Torah?

7. The following *pasuk* (*Shemos* 18:20) is an indication that Torah and *tefillah* need each other. It states והזהרתם אתהם את החקים ואת התורות "Teach them the halachos and the Torah..." The *pasuk* is speaking about teaching Torah, but *Targum Yonoson* says the *pasuk* is talking about *tefillah*. He translates the *pasuk* as follows: ותהודיע להון ית צלותא דיצלון בבית כנישתהון, "Teach them the *tefillos* they should say in the *beis knesses*." So the *pasuk* is referring to both Torah and *tefillah*. This isn't surprising because Torah and *tefillah* go together.

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* answers that this teaches us that Torah and *tefillah* are connected. They need one another. One needs *tefillah* to understand Torah, and one needs Torah study to be able to daven properly.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 31.) says, אין עומדין ... להתפלל... אלא מתוך הלכה פסוקה "One only stands up to pray...after studying a halachah." Rashi explains that the halachah should be clear and definite, without any questions and doubts, so that he won't think about it during the *tefillah*. We can also explain that it is good to learn halachah before davening because the joy of Torah will create the mood needed for meaningful *tefillah*.

Furthermore, *tefillah* is more beautiful to Hashem when connected to Torah. The Sfas Emes (תרמ"ג ד"ה וכו') writes, "Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 4:) say, אין אמת אלא תורה, that Torah is truth. Therefore, when the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 145:18) says, קרוב ה'... יקראהו באמת, 'Hashem is near...to those who call Him with truth,' it means that Hashem is near to listen to the *tefillah* of those who call out to Hashem with Torah. Therefore, especially on Shavuos, when the entire day is Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for *tefillah*."

When a person studies Torah and then davens, Hashem is near him to listen to this *tefillah* because of Hashem's love for the Torah. And as the Sfas Emes writes, we have this benefit of *tefillah* throughout Shavuos because Shavuos is a day of Torah.

Preparation

We wrote above about the joy of Shavuos and that we can earn on this day a lot of *gashmiyus* and *ruchniyus* blessings. It is proper that we prepare ourselves for Shavuos so that we will honor and experience the *yom tov* in the right spirit.

The Kedushas Levi *zt'l* writes, "If a person merits it, every Shavuos 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."

The importance of preparing for *matan Torah* is stated in the Chumash (*Shemos* 19:11), והיו נכונים ליום השלישי, "Be prepared for the third day." The Torah instructs the nation to prepare for *matan Torah*. They won't be able to receive the Torah without preparing for it.

The *nekudos* of והיו נכונים (with a *kametz* under the ה) imply that they were *already* prepared. (Otherwise, it would state והיו נכונים, 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, והיו נכונים, you will be prepared.

It states (*Shemos* 19:3) ומושה עלה אל האלקים ויקרא אליו ה' מן ההר, "Moshe went up to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain." The Or HaChaim notes that Moshe had to take the first step. He had to begin climbing the mountain, and then Hashem called out to him. "Because holiness doesn't come to a person unless he prepares for it. As the *Zohar* states, 'An arousal from below causes an arousal Above.'"

One has to do the first step, and then he can receive the holiness of *matan Torah*.

Shavuos, we begin reading the Torah from בחודש השלישי (*Shemos* 19:1). The first 26 *pesukim* discuss preparing for *matan Torah*, and then there are the 13 *pesukim* of the *Aseres HaDibros*. 26 is the *gematriya* of Hashem's name הוי"ה and 13 is *gematriya* אחד, hinting to הוי"ה אחד, belief in the one Hashem, which we attain from *matan Torah*. 26 is double 13. This hints at the renowned concept that preparing for a *mitzvah* is greater than the *mitzvah* itself.

In the *Hagadah Shel Pesach*, we say, אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה דינו ברוח ה' אלקיך, "If Hashem brought us to Har Sinai and He didn't give us the Torah it would be enough." It seems that just coming to Har Sinai was a benefit, even without *matan Torah*.

What was the benefit?

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

Now that we've seen the importance and the requirement to prepare for matan Torah, we ask: How does one prepare for matan Torah? There are many answers, included among them are yearning for matan Torah and an uplifting yom tov, davening for it, and doing teshuvah so you will be pure and ready for matan Torah.

It is also advised to take on a kabbalah tovah, a good resolution, to improve your ways in some manner. The kabbalah doesn't necessarily need to be a major change in your lifestyle. It is sufficient if you take on something that will help you improve your ways in some small area. The kabbalah tovah expresses that you want to be pure before Hashem on Shavuos when you receive the Torah, but you aren't able to change everything. That would be too much to expect of yourself. So you try to improve yourself in a small way, which will be your preparation for Shavuos and matan Torah.

Generally, that one good kabbalah will lead to many more good deeds, for there is a rule: מצוה גוררת מצוה, one mitzvah draws others. In a short time, you will be surprised how high you rose from that small kabbalah tovah.

It is advised that you should take on something that isn't too hard to keep.

Consider the following *mashal*:

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

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

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

A hint to this concept is in the words, וספרתם לכם. Find the kabbalah and service that is לכם at your level, and you will grow from there.

Sefiras Ha'omer

Another preparation for matan Torah is the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*. The tefillah after *sefiras ha'omer* states, רבונו של עולם אתה, צויתנו על ידי משה עבדך לספר ספירת העומר כדי לטהרנו ומקלפתנו ומטמאתנו "Master of the World, You commanded us through Moshe, your servant to count *sefiras ha'omer* to purify us from our kelipos and our tumah."

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

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

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

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

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* says there is no need to despair. It isn't too late. You can

amend everything you need on Shavuos itself.

The poof is that it states about Shavuos (*Vayikra* 23:21), וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קודש יהיה לכם. This *pasuk* implies that even בעצם היום הזה in the midst of Shavuos you can make a decision מקרא קודש, that you will live a life of holiness, and that will be sufficient.

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

Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah

A suitable time to prepare for *matan Torah* is during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the three days before Shavuos.

Rebbe Avraham HaMalach told his chassidim not to come to him during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because at that time, he wanted to study Torah by himself.

His chasidim didn't listen and came to him in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* to hear his *divrei Torah*. The Malach (as the Rebbe was called) 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*."

The custom in Yerushalayim (before תש"ח) was that the stores would close at midday, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, so the shopkeepers could spend the afternoons and night immersed in Torah study.

This was also the custom in Poland. Polish Yidden began their preparations for Shavuos even earlier. Two weeks before Shavuos many batei midrashim in Poland were filled with people studying Torah.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis midrash in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim*?"

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story:

The *batei midrashim* of Poland were packed during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*. People would take off from work to immerse themselves in Torah. Once, someone came into the beis midrash during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and enviously watched the passion for Torah that existed. He turned to the wall and cried. He too, wanted to join in the Torah learning.

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

At that time, he experienced the sweetness of Torah and this changed him forever. He became a *masmid* and a great *talmid chacham*.

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

Rebbe Elazar Mendel of Lelov *zt'l* was one of the honored rebbes in Yerushalayim, and his son was engaged to the daughter of one of his chassidim. The chassid (overjoyed that his daughter did such a fine *shidduch*) sent

gifts to the chosson, as customary, but Rebbe Elazar Mendel's family didn't send anything back, and this upset the chassid's wife. "I understand that the Rebbe doesn't have money," she said, 'but they could send at least a pin to the kallah. Why don't they send anything?"

(Primarily, this was because the Rebbe gave every penny to tzedakah to support the poor of Yerushalayim. Nothing was left for gifts.)⁸

"Speak to the Rebbe," she told her husband. "Tell him that he isn't acting properly. He should send a gift to the kallah!"

The chassid promised to do so, but he kept pushing it off. He was, after all, a chassid of Reb Elazar Mendel (and now a mechutan, too), and felt uncomfortable demanding a gift from him.

But his wife was extremely upset, and he knew that he had to do something about it.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to mention something about the gifts, but the chassid was always in awe of the Rebbe's presence and 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, and then he would go to the *Kosel haMaaravi* to daven some more. The chassid was planning to go along with the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "Tonight, you must speak to the Rebbe. I've asked you many times, and you keep pushing me off. This time you must take action. Otherwise, don't bother returning home!"

That's what she told him, and her husband knew that her threat was real.

Later that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he waited for the Rebbe to open, he thought to himself, "My wife is right, after all. The Rebbe is a holy man, that's true, but it would be proper that he give a gift to our daughter, the kallah. Even a small pin would be sufficient. Why doesn't the Rebbe do so?"

The Rebbe answered the door and said, "*Mechuten shlita!* I am surprised that during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* you are going around with pins in your head."

The chassid was astounded. It was *ruach hakadosh!* The Rebbe knew exactly what he was thinking. The chassid went home and told his wife, "We have a *mechutan*, a *baal ruach hakadosh*. Don't talk to me about the presents anymore, or you can leave the house."

The Purpose of *Matan Torah* – *Emunah*

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

And this is the purpose of *matan Torah*, that we know Hashem.

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Mishlei* 22:19) writes, *עיקר נתינת התורה לישראל הוא בכדי שישמו בטחונם בה*, "The Torah was given, primarily, so that the Jewish nation will place their trust in Hashem."

8. 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, with his *ruach hakodesh*, saw the *sedarim* 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.

A hint to this is in the Rosh Hashanah shemoneh esrei, ובתורתך כתוב לאמר שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, which can be translated as, "Everything that is written in the Torah is so people will be able to proclaim, 'Hashem is our G-d Hashem is one.'"

The Aseres Hadibros begins with וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה' אלקיך. Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l said we should translate it as, "Hashem taught כל הדברים האלה, the entire Torah so that a Yid will be able to say אנכי ה' אלקיך."

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

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

The Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* י"ב א' כ"ו) writes that *emunah* has two parts: (a) Hashem is the creator of the world. (b) Hashem leads the world with *Hashgachah pratis*. This means He didn't leave the world after He created it.

The Rosh writes, "Trust in Hashem with all your heart and believe in His *hashgachah pratis*. Believe that Hashem sees everything. He sees everything you do and checks your heart and your thoughts. Whoever doesn't believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim*, also doesn't believe in אנכי ה' אלקיך. [Belief in *hashgachah pratis*] is the foundation of the entire Torah."

The Rosh is saying that אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר ה' אלקיך teaches us these two aspects of *emunah*. אנכי ה' אלקיך teaches us that there is a Creator. אשר ה' אלקיך מֵאֲרֶץ מִצְרַיִם teaches us that Hashem intervenes with the world and leads us with *hashgachah pratis*. This was revealed with the miracles He performed to take us out of Mitzrayim.

The Rishonim ask why the Aseres HaDibros doesn't state אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר ברא שמים וארץ, "I am Hashem your G-d Who created heaven and earth?!" Why does it mention *yetzias Mitzrayim* instead?

The answer is that from creation alone, we don't know about *hashgachah pratis*. The Aseres HaDibros states אשר הוצאתיך מֵאֲרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, "Who took you out of Mitzrayim..." to tell us that Hashem **continues** to lead us with His *hashgachah*.

Everything is for the Good

When we have *emunah* in *hashgachah pratis* we know that everything that happens to us is for our good.

On Shavuos we read *Megilas Rus*, which tells the story of Elimelech and Naomi, who used to be wealthy when they lived in Beis Lechem, together with their two children Machlon and Kilyon. However, when they moved to Moav, they suffered many tragedies. Elimelech and his two sons were niftar. Several years later, Naomi returned to Beis Lechem as a poor, childless widow. The women of Beis Lechem were shocked to see Naomi so distraught and broken. Naomi told them (*Rus* 1:20) אל תקראנה לי נעמי קראן לי מרא, "Don't call me Naomi (pleasant). Call me Mara, bitter, because Hashem made my life very bitter."

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (*Drashos* vol.2, p.299.) elaborates on this episode. When Naomi returned to Eretz Yisrael, she hoped her wealthy nephew, Boaz, would help her settle down. It would be very hard for her to settle in Eretz Yisrael without financial aid.

But she never spoke to Boaz to ask him for help. 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." Instead, Naomi planned to meet with Boaz's wife to ask her to speak to Boaz on their behalf.

"However, the day Naomi came to Beis Lechem, the *levayah* of Boaz's wife took

place! (see *Bava Basra* 91.)" Naomi's plans and hopes were shattered.

But it was all for her benefit. The Chasam Sofer writes. "The *petirah* of Boaz's wife was for Naomi's benefit because Rus came and took her place, and from this marriage, Rus bore a child, which Naomi raised as her own.

"Naomi told the women of Beis Lechem that her life was bitter. She thought Boaz's wife's death was bitter for her. But it was Hashem's plan and for her benefit. Only, at the time, Naomi didn't realize that."⁹

Indeed, everything that happens to us is for our benefit.

The *roshei teivos* of "המר 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 for the good, preparing the way for Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech to come.

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 giving *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. A person plants seeds in the earth, they rot, and it looks like nothing will come from them. But these rotted seeds will sprout, and soon the field will be covered with produce. Similarly, we must believe that even when

we go through difficult times, something special will sprout from it. Right now, it looks like a problem, but something very good will come from it.

Poverty seems terrible and bitter, but many good things come from it. We will give one example:

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. Those who don't own a field don't have this obligation.

What is the logic behind this? Why should this *mitzvah* be dependent on the ownership of a field?

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that a person who doesn't own a field is poor and constantly turns his eyes to Hashem for his next meal. It isn't as necessary for him to come to the Beis HaMikdash to acquire *emunah*. His life situation forces him to have *emunah*. Whereas those who own property and grow their food might think they earn their *parnassah* on their own. So the Torah obligates them to go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year to learn that everything is from Hashem.

There is nothing more important than recognizing Hashem, so is there a benefit in poverty? Certainly there is, and this is in addition to the atonement and humility one gains from being poor. Perhaps it isn't something we hope for, but when this is the portion Hashem gave you, it is proper that you believe that it didn't happen by chance.

9. 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 sending the wound." 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 injury. Therefore, one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

It was by Hashgachah pratis, and it is for your good.

Let us go on and discover more unpleasant episodes which proved to be for the good in the long run.

The Gemara (*Eiruvim* 54:) says, כיצד סדר משנה, "How was Torah taught to Bnei Yisrael? Moshe learned Torah from the Almighty, and then Aharon entered, and Moshe taught him the lesson. Aharon sat on Moshe's left side, and Aharon's children [Elazar and Isamar] came in [and sat before Moshe], and Moshe taught them the portion. And then the zekenim, the elders of the Sanhedrin, came in and Moshe taught them the lesson. Then the entire nation came in and Moshe taught them. So, Aharon heard the lesson four times, Aharon's children heard it three times, the zekenim [of Sanhedrin] heard it twice, and the nation heard it once.

"And then Moshe left, and Aharon taught them [to his children, to the zekeinim and all Yidden] the portion. Aharon left, and his children taught the lesson. Aharon's children left, and the Sanhedrin taught the portion. In this manner, everyone heard the lesson four times. Reb Eliezer says that we learn from this that one must teach his students four times. It is a kal v'chomer. Aharon learned from Moshe, and Moshe learned from Hashem [so, it was mesugal that Aharon should understand the lesson quickly], and yet he had to be taught four times, certainly when one learns from an average teacher, and the teacher learned it from an average rebbe, certainly he needs to review the lesson four times."

From this Chazal we discover that Elazar and Isamar were greater than the ziknei Sanhedrin. They heard the lesson before the zekenim, and after Moshe and Aharon left the room, Elazar and Isamar became the teachers of the zekenim.

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 be on the mountain, but not Elazar and Isamar. Why? 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*, Behalasha 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 they drank.' ... ויאכלו וישתו is implying an analogy of a slave who eats his lunch as he serves his master. It isn't respectful. [Similarly, they looked at 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 precious to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Therefore, it states (*Shemos* 24), ואל אצילי בני ישראל לא שלא ידו, 'and to the princes of Bnei Yisrael, Hashem didn't put forth His hand.' Hashem refrained from punishing them, and the punishments were postponed to 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 of Sanhedrin were burned due to the sin of מתאוונים (see *Bamidbar* 11:1).

So, in retrospect, Elazar and Isamar understood that it was for their benefit that

they were prevented from ascending the mountain. Had Elazar and Isamar been on the mountain and gazed at the Shechinah without the proper respect, they too would die, and Aharon would have been left childless.¹⁰

Let this be a lesson for us that even when something seems to be negative, it isn't so. The situation is directed by Hashem's hashgachah pratit and is the best for you.

Annual Mattan Torah

The Torah was given in the year 2448. Nevertheless, on Shavuos we aren't only celebrating the gift we received 3334 years ago. On Shavuos we celebrate that Hashem gives us the Torah again because each year, there is another matan Torah.

Birchas haTorah is written in the present tense. We praise Hashem 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) elaborates, "It seems to me that נתן התורה, 'Hashem gives the Torah' 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."

The holy sefarim tell us that this is how it is with all the yomim tovim. They aren't solely commemorations of past miracles, rather, the miracles and the salvations of the past repeat themselves each year. And each year, Hashem gives us the Torah again.

The Aruch HaShulchan (284) writes that this is true with all episodes mentioned in Tanach. The stories discussed there, which happened thousands of years ago, on a certain level, reoccur every year.

He says that this is implied in the brachos of the haftarah when we say ודבר אחד מדברך לא ישוב ריקם, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty." He writes, "The word אחר, 'of the past' seems extra, and its meaning is not understood. I think the explanation is as follows: When the Torah writes stories that happened years ago, it appears that it is without any purpose. But the truth is that what occurred in the past continues to happen in the present. One example is *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We are obligated to imagine ourselves leaving Mitzrayim in every generation, including our generation. This is because *yetzias Mitzrayim* continues to occur.

Similarly, when Navi tells a story of the past, it continues to occur. This is the *segulah* of the holy Torah. Therefore, we say, אחר, the episodes of the history, לא ישוב ריקם, aren't irrelevant in today's world. They continue to this day."

As the Meor Einayim teaches: Every year, on Pesach, Hashem redeems us from tumah. On Shavuos, Hashem grants us *sechel* (wisdom) on how to serve Him. On Purim, Hashem saves us from our enemies, and on Chanukah, Hashem enables us to remain strong with our religion. The miracles and the episodes of the past repeat themselves annually.

10. It states, עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואיחיהו, "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 that קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very beginning, אולא, that people who go 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 go up on the mountain, survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וידבר שלושת אלפים משל, "Shlomo told three thousand *mashalim*..." שלושת אלפים 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 is for the good.

The Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) teaches that before the Torah was given on Har Sinai, the ruach (spirit) *Tavach* (which means Slaughter) had strength *chas v'shalom* to harm the Jewish nation. If the Jewish nation didn't accept the Torah this spirit would slaughter them and spill their blood c"v.

Therefore, *Shulchan Aruch* (468:10) states, "The custom is not to do bloodletting on *erev yom tov*."¹¹ It is dangerous to do the remedy called bloodletting (הקזת דם) on *erev Shavuos* because that's when the spirit of spilling blood comes forth and has the power to harm us, *chalilah*.

The question arises: That dangerous spirit wanted to harm the Jewish nation three thousand years ago when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai. So why must we be cautious every year?

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

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* quotes this *Machatzis HaShekel* as an indication that every year on *Shavuos*, there is a *kabbalas haTorah*. On *Shavuos*, we aren't only commemorating the past. Each year, we accept the Torah again!

Chiddushei Torah

But what does it mean that we receive the Torah each year? What will we receive this year *Shavuos* that we don't already have?

One answer is *chidushei Torah*. On this day, each individual receives the ability to be *mechadesh chadashim* (find new *chidushim* in Torah).

It states (*Devarim* 33:4), תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה, קהלת יעקב, "Moshe commanded us the Torah; it is an *inheritance* for the congregation of Yaakov." However, it also 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 an inheritance, or is it not?

The *Sfas Emes* (*Shavuos* 5661) answers that Torah has two parts: The Torah that we received on Har Sinai more than three thousand years ago and the *chidushei Torah* that are new each year. The Torah that Moshe taught us 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 clarity in Torah – when you review a Gemara until you understand it well – is also 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.

Furthermore, new *shaalos* come up each year. Especially in recent times, due to the advances in the sciences, there are constantly new situations and new technologies, which raise further questions. The *poskim* of our generation are *mechadesh* how we should act (based on the lessons of the scholars of the past). These abilities are given to us on *Shavuos*.

Derech HaMelech (from the Rebbe of Piassetzna *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*, and discovers what he received on *Shavuos*.

The *Sfas Emes* writes, "The Torah is called עץ חיים, a tree of life. Just as a tree grows new fruit each year, so does the Torah bring forth

11. The primary danger is on *erev Shavuos*, but as a precaution (so people don't get confused) the rule was established to prohibit blood-letting before every every *yom tov*.

new fruit each year. On Shavuos, when Hashem gives us the Torah, Bnei Yisrael receive their portion of *chiddushei Torah* for the year. They bring it forth (מכח אל הפועל) at the right time and place."

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say, "On Shavuos, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees."¹² The Sfas Emes explains that this means 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.' These allude to the new *chiddushim* that comes forth from Shavuos.

The Sfas Emes concludes, ויום זה שורש התורה, של כל השנה, "This day is the source of Torah for the entire year."¹³

New Sweetness in Torah

What else do we receive on Shavuos that we didn't have previously?

The Ta'z (*Orach Chaim* 47:5) writes that one can study the same Torah that he had known before, but today it has a new taste and sweetness. As the Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54) says, just as a nursing child tastes new flavors whenever he nurses, similarly, when one studies Torah, he always finds new pleasures in Torah.

The Taz explains that this is the reason we say in birchas haTorah נותן התורה in the present tense – because "Hashem is constantly giving us His Torah – each day anew. When we study Torah, Hashem grants us the ability to find newness in it."

One year on *erev Shavuos*, Reb Meir of Amshinov *zt'l* said to a chassid, "Chazal (*Chagigah* 4) say, 'Who is a fool? One who loses what is given to him.' Therefore, I encourage you, do not be a fool. On Shavuos, we receive the Torah for the entire year. Don't miss the opportunity." As we explained, on Shavuos we receive *chidushei Torah* for a year, the sweetness that we will experience in Torah, and more! But don't lose it. Use the hours of Shavuos well so this gift will remain with you.

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

Aseres HaDibros

The Shevet Mussar (34:19) discusses what one should have in mind when hearing the Torah being read in *beis midrash*. He is

12. 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*.

The Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:5) states, "By all *korbanos* it states שער עיזים להטאת, 'a goat for a sin-offering.' But by the *korbanos* of Shavuos, it doesn't state הטאת. It states שער עיזים לכפר עליכם, 'a goat for atonement.' This is because on Shavuos no one has sins. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling 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).

13. 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 *Eiruvin* 14 – ים שעשה שלמה היה מחזיק מאה וחמישים). This implies that *kabalas haTorah* contains and holds all *chiddushei Torah* that will be revealed afterwards.

referring to *Krias Hatorah* the entire year, not only when one hears the Torah on Shavuos morning. He writes, "Imagine that the *bimah* is Har Sinai and that you are receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His *malachim* are present, and Moshe Rabbeinu is the *baal koreh*. The entire nation is standing around Har Sinai to hear Torah from his mouth."

This imagery is also discussed in *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chaim 146:4). There, it states that there are opinions that one should stand while listening to the Torah reading, and the *Mishnah Berurah* (141:19) explains, "According to halachah, one is permitted to sit, but the Maharam said that it is proper to stand. This is because when one hears the reading of the Torah, one should imagine that he is hearing it from Har Sinai, and at Har Sinai all Yidden stood."

From these sources we derive that when we hear the Torah reading in beis midrash, it should seem like we are receiving the Torah on Har Sinai. We should imagine that we are receiving the *Aseres HaDibros*.

The Midrash (*Psikta* 12, *Yalkut Shimoni Yisro* 271) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to the Jewish nation, 'My children read this *parashah* [of *matan Torah*] each year and I will consider it as though you stood before Me on Mount Sinai and received the Torah." We see that when we read the *Aseres HaDibros*, it is counted as if we heard it from Har Sinai. It is like experiencing *matan Torah* once again.

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

The Beis Avraham explained:

A very ill person who needs strong medications may be too weak to withstand the treatment. Therefore, the doctor would prescribe taking the medicine in three separate doses.

Similarly, our cure comes from the *Aseres HaDibros*. It instills within us *emunah*.

However, the spiritual experience is too intense for our weak state. 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 and he was hearing the *Aseres HaDibros* from Hashem. He heard and saw the shofar, the thunder and lightning, and all the other experiences that took place at *matan Torah*.

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

Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* would sweat profusely from fear when he would take out the *sefer Torah* to read on Shavuos. The congregation knew to wrap the *sefer Torah* with extra layers so that it wouldn't get wet and ruined from his sweat. Before he came to the beis midrash on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis, he exclaimed, "איך גיי זעך זעהן מיט די לעבעדיגן, '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 saying the Ten Commandments in my dream."

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

The Avodas Yisrael of Koznitz *zt'l* added, "If someone doesn't have such ears, then he should clean them well, so he too should be able to hear!"

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*.

Tikun Leil Shavuos

The *Mishnah Berurah* (494:1) writes, "The *Zohar* (vol.3, 98.) tells us that the early chassidim would stay awake the entire night of Shavuos to study Torah, and that is the current custom today of most Torah scholars."

The Magen Avraham writes that remaining awake this night amends for an error committed at matan Torah. He writes, "[At matan Torah], the nation slept all night, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to awaken them to receive the Torah. We must correct this."

It is an old custom and is mentioned in the *Zohar* (vol.1, 8):

"Reb Shimon and his holy students were singing Torah and creating *chiddushim* and were very joyous. Reb Shimon told them, 'My children, you are fortunate because tomorrow the *kallah* will go to the *chuppah*¹⁴ only with you because you are performing the *tikun* tonight, and you are rejoicing with the Torah. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bless you with seventy brachos and put crowns

on your head. Whoever joins us on this night will be protected the entire year. He will live out the year in peace."¹⁵

Similarly, the *Mishnah Berurah* writes, "Whoever remains awake, and studies Torah will live out the year, and nothing bad will happen to him."

The Seder HaYom (Shavuos) writes, "On the night of Shavuos, one should remain awake and study Torah all night long, (or, at least, study Torah most of the night). Don't take this matter lightly because a person might be lowly in one area, and in other ways, he has amazing strengths. After all, he sustains the entire world – which is something even the *malachim* can't do. He gives strength to Hashem, the Creator of the world. And *chas veshalom*, [if one sins], weakens Heaven's strength and draws His right hand back. As it states, צור ילדך תשי, 'You weakened the strength of the One Who created you.'

"Therefore, every person, קטן שבקטנים והדיוט, even the lowest and most simple person, should consider himself great and say, 'Perhaps I can fulfill Hashem's will.' Don't say, 'Who am I, and what is my worth

14. Mattan Torah is called a *chasunah* (*Taanis* 26: based on the pasuk *Shir HaShirim* 3:11, יום חתונתו). Therefore, many customs of a *chasunah* resemble *mattan Torah*.

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

15. When you are tempted to speak idly on this night, remember the rare promises and guarantees that is stated in the *Zohar*.

(This *Zohar* is printed at the end of the *Tikun leil Shavuos* and therefore many people read these words at the end of the night. It would be better to read the *Zohar* at the beginning of the night, so we will be inspired to study the entire night with *hasmadah*.)

The Yerushalmi says, "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 redeem him from כרת. If he deserved to die, *chalilah*, studying Torah all night long will annul the decree. This is said about any night of the year. Certainly of one is awake Shavuos night, he will be atoned for many severe *aveiros*."

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 ולבי ער refers to the night of Shavuos when people remain awake. It is called לבי, for it is the heart of the year.

that the worlds should be corrected through me?' Such thoughts cause disaster - onto oneself and others - because he won't be cautious with his deeds."

These words are an essential lesson. Some people have ענוה פסולה, the wrong type of humility. They think the *tikkun* that happens on this night is only for the great tzaddikim, so they want to go to sleep.

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

We continue with the Seder Hayom's lesson:

"If he is exhausted and needs to sleep, he can sleep, 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 Hashem performs for us. He gave us His Torah and chose us from all nations to be His beloved nation. How fortunate is our lot!"

The Seder Hayom then elaborates that as a father-in-law loves his son-in-law when his son-in-law loves and cherishes his daughter, Hashem will also love and bestow many blessings on the person who marries the Torah, keviyachol, and loves the Torah and studies it.

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Masechta Shavuos, Ner Mitzvah*, 8) quotes the following episode, as it was told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz (composer of *Lecha Dodi*) *zt'l*: "(Shavuos night) we were studying Mishnayos and we completed two *masechtos*. And then Hashem granted us the privilege to hear a divine bas kol, a message from Heaven. It said, 'My beloved, righteous friends, peace to you. How fortunate you are! *Ashreiechem!* You are fortunate, and your parents who gave birth to you are fortunate. Fortunate are you in this world and the next, for you devoted yourself to crown Me on this night. My crown has fallen 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! You are exalted people. Your kol Torah rises before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as it breaks through the heavens. The *malachim* are silent. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and all the hosts of heaven listen to your voices. You earned this greatness. You are fortunate, and so are your parents who gave birth to you because you didn't sleep this night, and I was elevated this night. Therefore, be strong, be happy, My children, My beloved. Rejoice and don't stop your studies. Your Torah study is sweet before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Stand on your feet and elevate Me and say in a loud voice like on Yom Kippur, ברוך שם...and they did so."

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

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

So, one of the benefits of remaining awake and studying Torah this night is that it is mesugal that you will love Torah, and you will merit knowing it and attaining the crown of Torah.

Rebbe Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* added, "The Tzemech Tzedek was a *posek* and a *rav*, so the way he rules in this world is how the heavenly *beis din* rules. Therefore, one must be awake the entire night and toil in Torah... The main thing is *נעור בלילה*, (with an emphasis on the word *נעור*) to be awake [and not to learn with laziness]."

Every Shavuos morning, after davening *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. Why is that?"

The Pupa *dayan* replied, "I wasn't planning on telling you, but now that you asked, I will tell you. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* said that whoever studies the entire night of Shavuos without interruption (without *הסח הדעת*) will merit *giluy Eliyahu*. He will merit to see Eliyahu HaNavi. As a student, I studied in the Ksav Sofer's yeshiva in Pressburg, and the yeshiva students always strived to study Torah without interruption on Shavuos night so they could merit *giluy Eliyahu*. For years, I also tried, but I never merited *giluy Eliyahu*. Last night, I was learning a difficult passage in the Zohar; I couldn't decipher its holy words. An elderly person came into the beis medresh. I never saw him before. He explained the Zohar to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes in concentration, checking whether his explanation answered all the difficulties I had. 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 this morning."

We've seen many benefits in studying Torah and particularly on Shavuos night. (a) It is a protection from all harm. (b) It atones for severe aveiros. (c) He becomes married to the Torah, and Hashem will undoubtedly love him and grant him all his desires as a father-in-law loves his son-in-law. (d) He will merit becoming a Torah scholar and attaining the crown of Torah. (e) He can merit *giluy Eliyahu*. (f) And there are several other gains that one earns when he studies Torah on this night.

Once, someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* whether he should stay awake Shavuos night to study Torah because he will end up studying much Torah on Shavuos if he has a normal night's sleep. He will also daven better if he is well-rested.

Reb Shlomo Zalman agreed that his points were valid, but he should nevertheless remain up all night studying Torah. Reb Shlomo Zalman explained, "This is a great principle: One must keep the customs accepted by all Yidden and talmidei chachamim, and he should educate his family to respect those 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 you as not having acted correcting. (They will consider it *קלות ה"ו*). Therefore, I advise you to keep the *minhag*, even if it is hard" (*Halichos Shlomo* 12, note 13).

Unity

It states (*Shemos* 19:2) *ויהן שם ישראל נגד ההר*, and Rashi writes, "The nation camped [next to Har Sinai] like one person, with a united heart." This is derived from the word *ויהן* in singular tense (and it doesn't state *ויהנו*). The entire nation was united as one – without division or *machlokes*. This was important because unity ensures that the Jewish nation will keep the Torah throughout the ages.

The Gemara (*Succah* 52.) refers to the *yetzer hara* as a *הר*, mountain. Reb Akiva Eiger *zt'l* taught that *ויהן שם ישראל נגד ההר*, means that when the Jewish nation is in unity, they can conquer the *yetzer hara*.¹⁶

16. 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 should say *כאן תהיה קבורתכם*, "you will be buried *here*," because if Hashem places the mountain on top of them, they will be buried at that spot. 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 כגיטת*) represents all Yidden joining together as one. 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 demise, because unity is our power against the *yetzer hara*.

One reason it is so is that unity among Yidden, and living among Yidden, creates a positive kind of peer pressure that keeps everyone in their spot, as we will explain:

(Brachos 28:) Before Reb Yochanan ben Zakai departed this world, he blessed his students and said, "May it be Hashem's will that you fear Hashem as much as you fear man."

They asked, "Only that much?"

Reb Yochanan replied, "Halavay, you should fear Hashem so much. The proof is that when one commits an aveirah, he says, 'I hope no one sees me (even though Hashem always sees him).'"

The Chovas HaLevavos writes that we can use fear of people for our benefit. Deep inside, a Yid doesn't want to do aveiros. But the yetzer hara blinds a person at a time of test. One can utilize fear of people to help keep him in place.¹⁷

There was a chasid who was tempted to commit a severe aveirah but stopped himself when he realized that he wouldn't be able to face his Rebbe if he committed the aveirah.

But then he told himself that he would stop going to his Rebbe. So he was once again at risk of committing the aveirah.

Then he said to himself, "But how can I miss meeting all my friends who come to the Rebbe?" That thought stopped him from the aveirah.

He came to his Rebbe, and the Rebbe said (with ruach hakodesh), "What a Rebbe couldn't achieve the chassidim achieved" (because the thought of missing the Rebbe didn't stop him from aveiros, but the thought of missing his friends stopped him from committing the aveirah).

This is an example of positive influence gained from good friends. This is one of the reasons it is so crucial that ויחזק, there be unity among Yidden.

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

The Beis Aharon zt'l said, "Did you hear what he said? If we hold on to 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. Here is proof of this concept. Even a child can break a single reed, but no one can break many reeds bundled together." This shows us that no harm will befall us when we are united.

Another benefit of unity is that it helps us serve Hashem with hislahavos. Think of a wooden beam that caught fire. The fire will probably go out quickly, and most of the beam will remain intact. But if there are several beams, and one of them catches fire, the fire can burn for a long time. Similarly, being united with Yidden helps us serve Hashem with passion and hislahavos that won'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 and harm. (4) Being united enables us to serve Hashem with hislahavos, excitement, and joy.¹⁸

17. We say in birchas hashachar, ואל תביאנו... לא לידי נסיון ולא לידי בויון, "Don't bring us to tests, neither to disgrace." Tzaddikim explain that either we pass the tests (the נסיון) or we be disgraced (בויון). This awareness helps people avoid sin.

18. Chassidim are accustomed to eat and drink a lechayim together, and speak together about avodas

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."

"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 הלוים* 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 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

the king must have already left with the officials earlier.

The king was deeply involved in his hobby and 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 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, "I will look for a door with 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 to warm up.

He didn't tell them that he was 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

Hashem. Chassidim consider these gatherings extremely important because it is a moment of unity with *yiras Shamayim*. The Sadigura Rebbe *zt'l* would sometimes give his chassidim a coin, and the chassidim would auction off the coin, and with the money they earned from the auctions, they funded their Chassidic gatherings.

Once, the coin sold for a very high price. The chassidim wondered whether they should use all of the money for their get-togethers, or whether part of the money should be used for some other *tzedakah*. The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (father-in-law of the Sadigura Rebbe) was then in Sadigura, so the chasidim asked the Beis Aharon.

The Beis Aharon replied, "There is nothing greater than when chassidim gather in unity to speak about *yiras shamayim*..." and he advised them to use the money only for that purpose.

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 didn'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 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 wanted 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 also ran off with his fur coat.

He wanted to quickly leave the grounds because it was against the law to stand 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 into 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 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 turned to Reb Shimshon and said, "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 Shavuos 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* says that this teaches us that the focal point of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

When one buys a new book and wants to know what it is about, he reads the first and last page, and he gets the gist of the book. L'havdil, 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* *בן אדם למקום*, our obligations to Hashem. The following five of the *Aseres HaDibros*, written on the other *לוה*, are the *mitzvos* *בן אדם לחבירו*, 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, like the letters are shouting. In other words, the *luchos* drew more attention to the *mitzvos* of *bein adam lecheveiro* than 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 lamokom*.

In the morning we say, *אלו דברים שאדם אוכל, פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא*, "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 are of even greater focus in the Torah.¹⁹

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

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

The Torah states (Devarim 16:10-11) ועשית חג שבועות לה' אלקיך... ושמחת... אתה ובנך ובתך... והגר והיתום, והאלמנה אשר בקרבך, "Make the holiday Shavuos for Hashem your G-d...and be happy...you, your son, your daughter...the convert, the orphan, and the widow that is among you."

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, 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 doesn't give to the poor, he will be punished.' Therefore, don't forget to give tzedakah to the poor before each *yom tov*. Don't be satisfied with giving a little because you should give tzedakah in accordance with your wealth. And after you help the poor, you can be happy and rejoice, and nothing bad will happen to you. There will be peace in your home."

Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "This obligation applies for all holidays. Nevertheless, the Torah writes the mitzvah [to bring happiness to the needy] in reference to Shavuos because Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and Succos

are seven or eight days. One might think that it isn't as important to give tzedakah for Shavuos as it is for the other yomim tovim. Therefore, the *pasuk* emphasizes that we shouldn't be lenient. We are obligated to give tzedakah for Shavuos, just as we must for all other holidays."²⁰

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 than all the wealth I had previously enjoyed."²¹

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 spiritual growth. 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? Moshe didn't run a business. 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 disregarded his own needs and focused on helping Klal Yisrael. Every leader of Bnei Yisrael must do the same. They must be devoted to the needs of their community, and even at the expense of their own loss.

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

21. 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.

The *ger tzedek* knew who reported on him to the government, ultimately leading 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 person in the sand. But then someone came by and cruelly broke the sculpture. The prince went to his father, crying that someone had broken 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 the felony was nothing. 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 had 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*.

Reb Alexander Zuskind *zy'a*, the 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*. Had there been a minyan answering amen, the world would have reached its complete rectification.

May his merit protect us.