

# NEFESH SHIMSHON

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

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

## SPECIAL TOPIC

## The Essence of Our Life

Shavu'os is a very special day of the year. It is the day we received the *Torah Hakedoshah* on *Har Sinai* from *Hashem*. We all know about the *minhag* to stay up on Shavu'os night, learning Torah. This is what the Arizal writes about it:

“A person should not sleep on this night at all, but should be awake all night and engage in Torah learning. Let it be known that anyone who doesn't sleep on this night at all, even for a moment, and engages in Torah learning all night, it is guaranteed that he will live out the year and will not suffer any damage that year.... Furthermore, a person's life in that year is dependent on this....”

Therefore, the *minhag* has spread among the Jewish people to learn Torah all Shavu'os night.

However, our life being dependent on this night is not just a matter of the night's learning. It also depends on our whole conduct and on the thoughts we have during this day. Shavu'os every year is like it was back then, when we received the Torah.

Every year, the gates of Torah open up before every individual for him to receive *siyata d'Shamaya* the whole year long, each person as befits him. It depends mainly on how much we desire Torah and have aspirations for it.

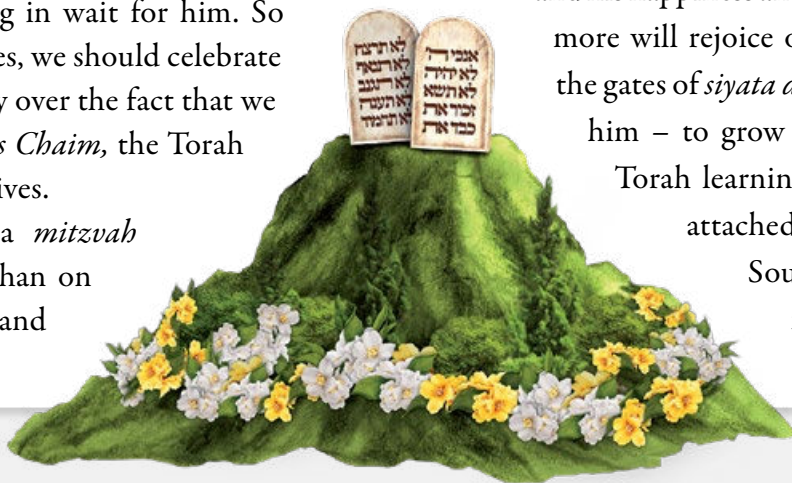
The Torah is truly and actually our life and the length of our days. A person's life depends on Torah, and not just when he is learning. The Torah, and only the Torah, is the constant source of our vitality, and the matter of utmost importance to us. For this reason, there is something even more important than learning Torah on Shavu'os night. It is showing our tremendous joy and good feelings over having received the *Torah Hakedoshah*, which is our true life, and asking Hashem for Torah, and aspiring to Torah. For Torah divides us from those who have strayed from the path of truth and stumble around in the darkness, pursuing the vanities of this world which will only bring them to pain and suffering and eternal shame.

This may be compared to someone who was tossed into a stormy sea, and the terrible waves are threatening to drown him, and he manages to grab

onto a rescue boat. He drags himself into the boat and holds on to it fiercely, with all his remaining strength, and thereby makes it through the raging waves to a safe coast. He loves and cherishes this boat so much! His whole life depends on it.

This is how it is in our world. The whole world is a stormy sea that threatens to take a person's soul and put him to eternal death. Torah and *mitzvos* are the rescue boat in which a person hides from all the dangers lying in wait for him. So when Shavu'os comes, we should celebrate and express great joy over the fact that we were *zocheh* to *Toras Chaim*, the Torah that saves our very lives.

It is therefore a *mitzvah* on this day, more than on all other holidays and *Yamim Tovim*, to



make a special *seudah* with fine food and drink, and to celebrate with great joy. What are we celebrating? That *Hashem* separated us from the nations and from those who stumble down a mistaken and deadly path! That He implanted within us eternal life, which is the *Torah Hakedoshah!*

The more a person recognizes this, the more he feels that Torah and all its *mitzvos* are his vitality and his happiness and his good fortune, the more will rejoice on Shavu'os, the more the gates of *siyata d'Shmaya* will open for him – to grow higher and higher in Torah learning all year long. To be attached to Torah and to the Source of life itself, which is *Hashem Yisborach*. ●



## Come to a Good Land

### From Egypt to Eretz Yisrael

Let's talk about *Eretz Yisrael* because that is our destination. When *Hashem* took us out of *Mitzrayim*, He informed us that our destination is *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Torah begins with the creation of the world, and this, too, is connected to *Eretz Yisrael*. As we know, the Torah is not a story book or a historical

account; it is *Hashem's* commandments to His people. This is why Rashi asks, on the first *pasuk* of the Torah, why did the Torah begin with the story of Creation?

The answer Rashi gives is all about *Eretz Yisrael*. The Torah began with Creation so that we and the nations of the world will realize that the world belongs to *Hashem*. He created it, and He retains the right to give its land to whomever He wishes. *Hashem* initially gave *Eretz Yisrael* to other nations,



and then He took it away from them and gave it to His people Yisrael.

Later, *Hashem* promised *Eretz Yisrael* to *Avraham Avinu*, at *Bris Bein Habesarim*:

לְזַרְעֶךָ נָתַתִּי אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת – To your offspring I gave this land.<sup>1</sup>

*Hashem* did not promise to give him Torah and *mitzvos*; only the land of Israel. And when *Avraham* performed *milah*, he was granted *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>2</sup>

And so it was with *Moshe Rabbeinu*. What did *Hashem* tell him? The same thing: *Eretz Yisrael*. *Moshe* was commanded to take the Jewish people out of Egypt, out of slavery, and bring them to *Eretz Yisrael*.

וְאָרַד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּלְהַעֲלֵתוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ  
הַזֹּאת אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרוּחָבָה אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבֶת חֶלֶב  
וְדָבָשׁ אֶל מְקוֹם הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי  
וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי – I will descend to rescue them  
from the hand of Egypt and to bring them  
up to that land, to a good and expansive  
land, to a land flowing with milk and honey,  
to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite  
and the Amorite and the Perizite and the  
Hivite and the Jebusite.<sup>3</sup>

It's true that *Hashem* did also mention in passing the Giving of the Torah, He said He will bring them to *Har Sinai* and they will serve Him there, but He never stated that this was the goal and purpose of leaving Egypt. He just said that receiving the Torah is a sign for going to *Eretz Yisrael*.<sup>4</sup>

Why is everything about *Eretz Yisrael*? Why is it the beginning and the middle and the end?

## Survival in Galus

After all, the Jewish people has been in *Galus* for about two thousand years now, and we have

survived, without *Eretz Yisrael*. Furthermore, these two thousand years of exile have not been empty and worthless. A lot of Torah developed. Many of the *Tannaim* lived after the destruction of *Beis Hamikdash*, as did all the *Amoraim*, the *Rishonim* and the *Acharonim*. They were all very great in Torah and they gave us so much.

When the world was created, it was prepared for *Abaye* and *Rava*, for the *Rashba* and the *Ramban*, and for the *Chasam Sofer* and the *Chafetz Chaim*. Included in *Hashem's* purpose for creating the world was *R. Akiva Eiger*. All this is not a *bedieved*, something that transpired due to force of circumstance. It was part of *Hashem's* plan from the beginning. The *Chafetz Chaim* once remarked that when *Mashiach* comes, we will say to him, "We made a lot of Torah until you came."

The Jewish people's ultimate purpose and very existence is Torah. If so, how did *Eretz Yisrael* come and take center stage?

We will answer this question a little later, along with the following questions.

## Sefiras Ha'omer

We all know that the holiday of *Shavu'os* celebrates the Giving of the Torah. However, the Torah does not state this anywhere.

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם  
אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימַת תְּהִינָה.  
עַד מַחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם  
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה – You shall count  
for yourselves, from after *Yom Tov*, from the  
day that you bring the sheave of waving.  
They shall be seven complete weeks, until  
after the seventh week you shall count fifty  
days, and then you shall offer a new grain  
offering to *Hashem*.<sup>5</sup>

The Torah tells us here that there are forty-nine days between *Pesach* and *Shavu'os*, but these days relate to the *Omer* offering, as it says: מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם

1 Bereishis 15:18.

2 See *Rashi* on Bereishis 17:2.

3 Shemos 3:8.

4 See *Ibid* v. 12.

5 *Vayikra* 23:15-16.

אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה – “From the day that you bring the sheave of waving.”

The Torah doesn't say why we count the *Omer* and what the purpose of this counting is. We are told to count, and that's it. We do know a little about the meaning of other *mitzvos*, such as *shofar*, which brings our remembrance before *Hashem*. And *Sukkah* is a remembrance of the *Ananei Hakavod* in which we dwelled when we left Egypt. But what does *Sefiras Ha'omer* commemorate?

There is a well-known explanation for *Sefiras Ha'omer* that comes from *Sefer Hachinuch*. It says there that the main reason for *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was to receive the Torah and to keep its *mitzvos*. This was the goal for which we were taken out of Egypt, thus we were commanded to count the days from Pesach until *Matan Torah*:

It is to show our great desire for the glorious day that is so precious to our hearts. [We long for it] “like a slave longs for shade<sup>6,7</sup>”

This is indeed a wonderful explanation. But the Torah itself does not even state that the holiday of Shavu'os is when the Torah was given, and does not say that the counting of the *Omer* is a preparation for Torah. The *pesukim* speak of counting the days between offering a sheave of barley and offering wheat flour, with no mention of Torah.

## Does Torah Have a Purpose?

In order to understand why the Torah seems to be left out so often from the places where we would expect it to be mentioned, we first need to understand something about Torah itself. *Chazal* ostensibly contradict themselves regarding the purpose of Torah. On the one hand, they say:

Torah study is equivalent to all [the other *mitzvos* put together].<sup>8</sup>

This seems to say that Torah learning is the most important thing. Its worth exceeds that of any other *mitzvah* and it is the ultimate purpose.

On the other hand, *Chazal* say that Torah study is great because it brings a person to do good deeds.<sup>9</sup> This seems to imply that the purpose of Torah study is *mitzvah* fulfillment. *Chazal* say further:

The goal of [Torah] wisdom is repentance and good deeds.<sup>10</sup>

So in the end, what's greater? Learning Torah or doing *mitzvos*?

Our main *avodah* in this world is to become connected to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Whatever we may be doing, we need to remember to bring *Hashem* into the purpose of it. *Hashem* created the whole world so we will recognize Him and fear Him, so we will feel that we are standing before the King. This is the best and most important thing of all.

וְאֲנִי קְרִיבָה אֶלֶּקִים לִי טוֹב – As for me, closeness to G-d is my good.<sup>11</sup>

The best way to connect to Torah is by learning it *lishmah*, for its own sake, as it says in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* (4:3). And the ultimate goal of learning *lishmah*, the purpose of connecting to Torah, is to connect to the Giver of the Torah, to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* Himself. So it says in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim* (4:6).

The real goal of it all is to connect to *Hashem*. This is *Chazal's* consistent message. *Eretz Yisrael* is the goal, Torah is the goal and *mitzvah* observance is the goal, because the ultimate goal is always the same: connection to *Hashem*.

*Chazal* are trying to show us the proper way to get to the ultimate goal of closeness to *Hashem*. One way has the advantage of being direct and practical: by doing good deeds, a person can attain closeness to *Hashem*. According to this approach, “Deeds

6 *Iyov* 7:2.

7 *Sefer Hachinuch*, *mitzvah* 306.

8 *Mishnah*, *Peah* 1:1.

9 *Baba Kama* 17a.

10 *Berachos* 17a.

11 *Tehillim* 73:28.

are great.”<sup>12</sup> However, nothing connects a person to *Hashem* more than Torah learning does, and the good deeds a person does are only a result of the Torah he learns, therefore *Chazal* conclude that “Torah is great.”<sup>13</sup>

Only by investing energy in Torah, which will also engender *mitzvah* observance, can we attain the goal of closeness and attachment to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

And what about *Eretz Yisrael*? Why is it so central?

Let’s say a person blesses his friend that he should merit building a *bayis ne’eman b’Yisrael*. Literally, he is wishing his friend to have a house, a *bayis*. Now, why did he choose to emphasize the house? What about the *shalom bayis*? Isn’t that more important than owning your own home? And what about the furniture in the house? And what about health, and *parnassah*, and all the other essential things in life? Why is he so fixated on his friend having a house?

Because everything is included in *bayis ne’eman*. A home includes all its components.

*Eretz Yisrael* is our home. It comprises all the good and important things we need in our lives. Torah and *mitzvos* are included in *Eretz Yisrael*. Not only that, but a married couple having their own home enables them to have privacy. In the same way, *Eretz Yisrael* enables us to develop a deep relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, a close relationship of Torah and *mitzvos*, which is facilitated by being alone with *Hashem* in our own holy land.

This is why *Hashem* promised *Moshe Rabbeinu* that He will take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to *Eretz Yisrael*. Because when we come to *Eretz Yisrael*, we will be able to live a full Torah life. There we will dwell together with *Hashem*, like one family inside their own home, so to speak, and we will attain full *deveikus* with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

As we mentioned before, *Hashem* told *Moshe* that receiving the Torah at *Har Sinai* is a sign for going

to *Eretz Yisrael*. This means that the tremendous closeness to *Hashem* that we experienced when we received the Torah is a sign of the ultimate goal, which is closeness to *Hashem*. And that goal reaches its ultimate fulfillment in *Eretz Yisrael*. For the same reason, *Hashem* consistently promised *Eretz Yisrael* to the *Avos*, because closeness to *Hashem* is the goal of it all, and the place to be close to *Hashem* is *Eretz Yisrael*. However, this *deveikus* comes through Torah and *mitzvos*, of course. There is nothing to be gained by just being in *Eretz Yisrael* without Torah.

## What is Deveikus?

Nowadays, when someone talks about *deveikus*, we think it means closing our eyes and swaying our head up and around. We are so far away from the true feeling of *deveikus* that we need to close our eyes in order to detach ourselves from what is happening around us. We can’t properly concentrate on something unless we disconnect from our environment.

However, a person who is learning Torah and trying to connect to it must keep his eyes open and learn from the *sefer*. When two people meet and want to connect to one another, they need to look at each other, to smile to one another, to say *shalom* and receive the other’s response.

When *Beis Hamikdash* stood, there was a *mitzvah* to go there on the *shalosh regalim*. At those times, we saw *Hashem*, so to speak, and were seen by *Hashem*, so to speak. לראות ולהיראות.<sup>14</sup> This was the greatest *deveikus*. We hope and pray to see *Hashem*’s return to *Tzion* with our own eyes – עֵינֵי בְּעֵינֵי יִרְאוּ בְּשׁוּב ה’ – צִיּוֹן.<sup>15</sup>

True connection and *deveikus* is not to close our eyes and ignore the reality around us, but to feel the very real experience of *Hashem*’s presence. *Hashem* is here and He is as true as can be. Genuine *deveikus* is sensing *Hashem*’s closeness in all areas of life. And this will bring us

12 *Baba Kama* *ibid*.

13 *Ibid*.

14 *Chagigah* 2a.

15 *Yeshayahu* 52:8.

to food, which will bring us back to the *Omer*.

## Food For Human Consumption

Every person can grow spiritually and attain *sheleimus* within the realm of natural life, despite the fact that he is in a physical body. He will feel the pull of physical desire, but he can handle it. He can overcome the animalistic aspects of his nature and perfect himself and become a human being attached to *avodas Hashem*.

But there is another and higher level. The higher level is that a person becomes connected to *Hashem* and His Torah by rising up to *Hashem's* world. He continues to live in this world, but he is disconnected from its influence. This *madreigah* does not depend on a person's own innate abilities. It comes from *siyata d'Shmaya*. Disconnection from the limitations of this world uplifts a person to the point where he can "see without eyes and hear without ears," as *Sefer Chovos Halevavos* describes a perfected human being.

Both of these levels can be attained by a person who lives in a physical body, who lives life as we know it. And the body will continue to need sustenance. It needs food to live.

Let's talk about food.

Bread is considered the main foodstuff that sustains life. Without nourishing food, a person can't function properly, and his head surely cannot think well. We don't know about starvation from personal experience, but we have heard stories about people who underwent an ongoing state of starvation, day after day, until they lost all strength and collapsed.

Within a piece of bread is a piece of life. However, there are different kinds of life. There is the life of a person on an uplifted spiritual level, and there is an animalistic kind of life. The former kind of life is sustained by human food and the latter is sustained by animal food. Both humans and animals need to eat food, but there is a big difference between them.

This brings us back to *Sefiras Ha'omer*.

Barley is primarily animal food. It is quite suited to livestock and pack animals. Another thing typical of an animal's way of eating is that it bends its neck down to get to the food and eat. Picture a horse or a cow eating from the trough.

Wheat is primarily for human consumption. And a human being doesn't bend his neck down to the ground to eat his food. He raises the food up to his mouth.

The *mitzvah* of *korban ha'omer* is to bring an offering of barley on the day after the first *Yom Tov* of Pesach. Why barley? Because the Jewish people is born on Pesach and they are not mature yet. They are still within the framework of natural, physical life, and need sustenance of that type.

But they are leaving the gross, material world of Egyptian impurity behind them, and entering the world of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, so they need to bring a new offering, a *minchah chadashah*, of barley. Barley, as we mentioned, is animal food, the food of natural life. They bring a *korban* of barley because they are starting a process of spiritual ascent and sanctification within the framework of the physical world, within the realm of natural life.

*Sefiras Ha'omer* is a count of seven times seven. This represents spiritual ascent within the natural world. Until comes the fiftieth day, the day of Shavu'os. This fiftieth day represents the level of



human perfection, of *sheleimus ha'adam*. Now, a person eats human food. He eats wheat. This is represented by the new wheat offering brought in Beis Hamikdash on *Shavu'os*.

The *avodah* of the days of *Sefiras Ha'omer* is to uplift ourselves from the level of animal food to the level of human food.

How do we grow from physical life to spiritual life? How do we go from animal eating to human eating?

By doing acts of *chesed*, by overcoming our negative inclinations, by sanctifying ourselves from

that which is forbidden, by accepting upon ourselves the yoke of Heaven's Kingship, by all the forty-eight ways with which Torah is acquired. We perfect ourselves spiritually and attain our true beauty. We use the physical aspects of life and upraise them to attachment and closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. On these forty-nine days, we steadily rise above natural life and reach a life of exalted *kedushah*.

When *Shavu'os* comes, we begin a new phase of *deveikus* to *Hashem*. We rise to a level where our feet stand on earth, but our head reaches up to Heaven. ●



# The Essence of Shavu'os

## Celebrate With a Seudah

*Shavu'os* is the time when we received the Torah and it is a very special day. It is customary to make a big deal about *Shavu'os* night. The Arizal said (and is so quoted in the *Ba'er Heitev* commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*<sup>1</sup>) that someone who learns all night on *Shavu'os* is guaranteed that he will not be harmed all year long. This shows that a person's very life depends on what he does this night, as this is when we received the Torah.

It is surely a very important thing to learn Torah on the day that the Torah was given. And many people learn with great energy and excitement. This itself is a very important thing. But it seems that the awesomeness of *Shavu'os* actually stems from a different point, which *Chazal* say is the central point of the day. Practically speaking, whether a person attains lofty spiritual levels or misses out on them depends on this point.

Said R. Elazar: According to all views,

<sup>1</sup> 494:7.

on *Shavu'os* we also need *לכנס*. What is the reason? It is the day the Torah was given.<sup>2</sup>

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

The same section of *Gemara* continues as follows:

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

Rav Yosef went out of his way to celebrate

<sup>2</sup> *Pesachim* 68b.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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

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

## Just Be Happy

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

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

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

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

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

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

Said R. Abahu, for all the forty days that Moshe was in heaven, he learned Torah and forgot it. He said, "Master of the World, I have forty days and I don't know anything." What did *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* do? When the forty days were over, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave him the Torah as a gift, as it says, ויתן אל משה – "He gave to Moshe."<sup>4,5</sup>

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

We see this idea emphasized in the wording of the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer. Before we ask for Torah, before we say חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל, "Grace us with knowledge, understanding and comprehension,"

4 *Shemos* 31:18.

5 *Shemos Rabbah* 41:6.

we preface it by saying **אתה חונן לאדם דעת** – “You graciously bestow knowledge upon human beings.” There is no such preface when we ask for forgiveness (סלה לנו) or healing (רפאנו ה') or sustenance (ברך עלינו). But we do say it before asking for Torah, because asking for Torah is asking for *Hashem* Himself. Thus, we first offer a praise of *Hashem*, without which we would be lacking the requisite merit to even ask for such a thing. The giving of Torah is always as an undeserved gift, מתנם חנם.

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

In order to leave Egypt, the Jewish people needed to demonstrate *mesirus nefesh* though the blood of *korban Pesach* and the blood of *milah*. So every year, on Pesach, we have certain *mitzvos* to do, which are related to this. But to merit receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people did nothing. The Torah was given as gift.

## I Want Torah

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

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

He said to the people of Eisav, “Will you

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

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

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

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

This may be compared to someone who wants to give his friend a precious diamond. But he will give it to him only he knows that his friend will guard it well and appreciate its value. If he knows that the recipient of the diamond is going to play with it in the sandbox, there is no way he will give it to him.

Similarly, on Shavu'os we don't have to do any special *mitzvos*. We just have to want the *Torah Hakadoshah*, that's all. This is the main *avodah* of the day. ●

<sup>6</sup> *Devarim Rabbah*, Parshas Ekev.

<sup>7</sup> *Shemos* 19:17.