

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

Our Winning Argument

As we approach the holiday of Shavuot, there is a very relevant Pasuk in Vayikra which tells us that on Shavuot, we bring the offering of the Shte Ha'Lechem, two loaves. This was made from chametz. We know that chametz is symbolic of the yetzer hara (evil inclination), as during the course of Pesach, we rid our homes of chametz and the yetzer hara. Why then, at the auspicious occasion of the Giving of the Torah with such spirituality, would we bring a korban representing chametz and the yetzer hara?

We also know from the Gemara (Berachos 17a) that R' Alexandria stated that while all the Jewish nation wants to do is carry out the will of Hashem, the 'yeast in the flour,' the yetzer hara, is what subjugates us in these times of exile and challenges us to overcome our spiritual shortcomings. This only makes our original question more pronounced. Why, on Shavuot, would we bring an offering comprised of the very ingredients of chametz and our yetzer hara?

The Sefer Masok Ha'Or cites the Gemara (Shabbos 88b), which relates that when Hashem wanted to give the Torah, the angels argued that the Torah should not be given to mankind. Hashem then told Moshe Rabbeinu to respond to the angels. Moshe began by arguing that the first of the Ten Commandments speaks to how Hashem took

the Jewish nation out of Egypt. Did that happen to the angels? It didn't. Moreover, the Torah instructs us not to murder, not to steal, and not to be jealous. Do the angels possess a yetzer hara that they would need to be commanded about these things? It was at this point that the angels conceded that the Torah should be given to man.

In fact, then, what is it that gained mankind the merit to receive the Torah? That we have a yetzer hara, which presents challenges to us and makes us fight in life. These difficulties are the specific things in life that we grow from, and as a result, can strive even higher. When a person is faced with a nisayon (test) in life, and realizes that they are of flesh and blood, and can fall to do what they shouldn't, that is our merit to grapple and grow.

This is what we learned at the time of the Giving of the Torah and reinforce each year on Shavuot. Don't worry. If you have a challenge and have a yetzer hara, whatever it is, it's a good sign. It means that you are a servant of Hashem and the Torah. It means that Hashem gave you the chance and ability to strive higher and higher.

There was a great tzaddik, Reb Meir Abuchatzairah zt"l. A Mashgiach of a yeshiva once came to him with a manuscript of a book he was about to publish. The sefer was about Shemiras Einayim, watching our eyes and making sure that we look

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Manish ben Esther

Meir Eliyahu ben Yaakov Dov

Bechor ben Rivkah

Shlomo Zalman ben R' Mordechai Yisroel Tzvi

Esther bat haRav Avraham Halevi zt"l

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at the right things. He asked the great Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah for a haskama (approbation). Excitedly, Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah wrote a beautiful haskama, filled with enthusiasm and appreciation for the attention to this subject. He then handed the approbation to the Mashgiach, who placed the letter in his briefcase, received a beracha from Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah and then left the study.

Some time later, the Mashgiach felt a tap on his shoulder, was knocked off kilter, and before he knew it, someone had grabbed his briefcase and was running on his way. The Mashgiach, along with several other

bystanders, began to run after the thief. Only after a few blocks did they get even close to him, and not wanting to deal with them, the thief threw the briefcase aside.

The Masghiach went and checked the briefcase. Nothing was missing... except the letter that he was given by the great Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah. He had no choice. He had to go back.

Indeed, he returned to the home of Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah, and relayed the news of what had happened. Hearing this, Reb Meir Abuchatzzeirah was greatly disconcerted. "How could it be?" he wondered, shakingly. "I can't believe that this

happened!" Despite his old age and frail body, Reb Abuchatzzeirah wrote another beautiful and enthusiastic haskama, and handed it to the Mashgiach. He then added, "This was a great fight between the yetzer hara and yetzer ha'tov."

There is a fight that goes on each and every day of our lives. How clearly Reb Abuchatzzeirah and the Mahgiach saw it that day.

This Shavuot, let us take the strength and power we need to grapple with our yetzer hara and overcome it. Let us have our yetzer tov guide each of our lives and help us grow higher and higher.

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro

Natural Instincts

The Sifri tells us that prior to the Giving of the Torah, Hashem went to the children of Eisav and Yishmael and offered them the Torah, but they both declined. The children of Eisav rejected it because the Torah prohibits murder, and since the children of Eisav were inclined toward murder, it wasn't something they wanted to accept upon themselves. Hashem then went to the children of Yishmael, but they too rejected it because the Torah forbids stealing, something which the nation was steeped in. Restricting these behaviors went against these nations' natural instincts and what was ingrained within them.

When it came to presenting the Torah to the Jewish people, how-

ever, Hashem did not first inform the Jewish people of something contained in the Torah which went against their natural inclinations. Why couldn't then Eisav and Yishmael complain, "It's not fair! We were first presented with something which goes against our natural instincts. Let the Jews also be presented with something that goes against their natural dispositions, and maybe then, they also would have declined the Torah!"

The Avnei Nezer explains that we were in fact presented with something which went against our natural inclinations. Deeply ingrained in our very being is a yearning to come close to Hashem, to experience the most intimate of relationships with Hashem. That is our natural

instinct. This was why Hashem needed to place borders to Har Sinai. This was to impress upon us that we couldn't move beyond a certain point and strive to become closer. This demonstrates that we were indeed presented with something which went against our very being—boundaries of closeness with Hashem. And yet, being presented with this limit, we were willing to go against something that was within our nature and abide by the border.

As we approach the Giving of the Torah, let us remember that our natural instinct is kirvas Elokim, the inner draw and pull to come closer and closer to Hashem.

Rabbi Avi Wiesenfeld

A Special Day

The calendar date of the 2nd of Sivan is a special day. In fact, it is called Yom

Ha'meyuchas, a day of entitled status and heritage. But it's very strange. There is actually nothing unique about the 2nd of Sivan,

except for the days that preceded it and follow it.

The day before was Rosh Chodesh Sivan, and the days after—the three days preceding Shavuot—are known as the Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah, and are given special status in prepa-

ration for the Giving of the Torah.

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe, R' Yisroel of Vizhin, asks how then the 2nd of Sivan would hold any special status. What is special about it when, in fact, what's special are the days before it and after it, but not it unto itself?

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe explained that herein lies a tremendous lesson. Oftentimes, people feel like they are a nothing and don't deserve anything. They won't get anywhere in life, given their life's circumstances, including their family, job and anything else.

"I'm not going to get anywhere..." they tell themselves. They don't feel, "I'm good at this, or good at that..." They don't feel that they are special or will get anywhere in life or make their mark on the world.

That person, explains the Vizhnitzer Rebbe, who views themselves that way is the person of true worth and true significance. He is very much a superior person. And that is yichus. Yichus doesn't mean that you are important "because it's Rosh Chodesh or because it's the Shelosh-

es Yemei Hagbalah." You are special because of who you are.

The 2nd of Sivan is called Yom Ha'meyuchas because of who we are. It's not because of an outer, exterior motive or factor. We are special simply because we are who we are. And often the person who feels that they cannot get far in life can get to the farthest places. Remember that.

The 2nd of Sivan reminds us that anyone who believes that they cannot get anywhere can get amazingly far.

Rabbi Daniel Staum

World-Class Chefs

The Gemara tells us that the students of R' Akiva passed away during this time period of Sefiras HaOmer because "they did not afford one another respect."

A friend of mine was repeating this Chazal, and his seven-year-old daughter asked him, "So you mean if I don't treat my friend nicely, I'm going to die?" Not prepared for that question, my friend responded, "They were big tzaddikim (righteous people)!" "So you mean that if I become a big tzaddekes and don't treat my friend nicely, I'm going to die?"

Later in the day, I was thinking further about this, and came up with the following mashal (analogy) in response.

Imagine a five-star restaurant in a city where dignitaries, politicians and well-known individuals would gather. The restaurant was graced by elegance and status, and stacked with several world-class chefs. One

day, one of the chefs wasn't paying attention and he accidentally added too much salt to a dish. In receiving the dish, the wealthy entrepreneur was less than pleased. As soon as the restaurant owner caught wind of what had happened, he hurried to the guest's side and apologized profusely. He then offered to provide the man with a meal, entirely free of charge.

The restaurant owner then discovered which chef had added too much salt and reprimanded him. Very embarrassed, he promised it would never happen again and went back to work. Time moved on, and this event was slowly forgotten.

At the restaurant entrance, there was a poster, which labeled how to make each dish and was available for all chefs to refer to.

One day, two head chefs wrote down ingredients to be included in one dish, but failed to notice that the other chef had done the same. As a result, the special for that day

was made with double the amount of salt.

It wasn't long before customers began complaining. The owner rushed to the kitchen and demanded to know what was going on. Summoning all the chefs together, he said, "Gentleman, pack your bags. You are no longer employees." The chefs couldn't understand. "Wait a minute, just the other time, one of the chefs made this mistake and you gave him a second chance!" "That's true," replied the owner. "But that was different. He wasn't the head chef. Here, this error came from the two head chefs working together. And if the two head chefs cannot learn how to work together, we can't have a functioning restaurant. You are supposed to be a team, and everyone will follow your lead. If you don't get the master list corrected, we can't continue."

The students of R' Akiva, explains Reb Aharon Kotler zt"l, were the transmitters of the Torah. Chazal

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tell us that all the Oral Torah stems from the teachings of R' Akiva and his students. They were, so to speak, the “head master chefs.” The Torah was to come from them. And therefore, if they couldn't get along, they couldn't be the transmitters of the Torah.

The next five students of R' Aki-

va, who picked up after the demise of all the other students, regenerated the new future of the Jewish people, basing their teachings on R' Akiva, their rebbe.

While we might not be on the level of R' Akiva, to our family and our students and our communities, we are responsible not only to accept,

and uphold the Torah ourselves, but transmit it to others. And in that respect, the responsibility is great. Our role is critical, and accepting the full brunt of it, we will be empowered and focused to carry out our mission toward others with the necessary dedication that we can put forward.

Rebbetzin Slovie Jungreis-Wolff

Build Your Story

As we approach Kabbalas HaTorah on Shavuot, we have been counting Sefiras HaOmer every single day. We count up, as we know—1,2,3,4—because we never count down. We are always building, we are always constructing. Sefirah comes from the same word as sippur, story, because when I count my days and I build my days, I am constructing and telling my story. This is who I am. I can create a whole new persona in the days between Pesach and Shavuot.

This is the power of these days:

to leave Mitzrayim (Egypt) behind. Mitzrayim comes from the word “tzar,” narrow. Anything that constricts me, anything that brings me down, anything that doesn't allow me to believe in myself and in the energy that I have to make a difference in this world. Anything that makes me weak, I leave behind in Mitzrayim.

Who was the big personality in Mitzrayim who made us suffer? Pharaoh, from the words “peh rah,” the negative mouth. When we have that negativity, and tell ourselves that we will never be able to do it,

and nothing ever works out for me, it's impossible, then we are stuck. We are stuck in Mitzrayim.

These days we need to tell ourselves a new story. We must write our new story. And if we must, we close the chapter from yesterday, and start a new chapter today. We cannot control things that have happened to us, but we can control our reaction. We can control the story that we write every single day.

Let's write the most awesome story as we come to Kabbalas HaTorah. Keep counting, keep building, keep creating.

Rabbi Aryeh Kerzner

The Torah Personality

Rav Yosef is cited in the Gemara (Pesachim 68b) as having said, “If not for the day of the Giving of the Torah, how many other Yosef's would there be on the street.” Simply understood, Rav Yosef is expressing his appreciation for the incredible value the Torah brings to his life and the spiritual development it provides him as a human being.

Rav Matisyahu Salomon shlita

added another layer to this Gemara. Rav Yosef is speaking to something very fundamental about the nature of learning Torah. If not for this day of the Giving of the Torah, “there would be many versions of my personality on the street.” I would be one person in the way I interact with my friends in a social environment, I'd be another way in shul, I'd be another way within the confines of my home, interacting with my family,

and so on. I'd be a split personality and behave differently, depending on the context. There would lack consistency and uniformity to my personality. But, now that I have the Torah, I am one unified person. The Torah transforms me and permeates every single sphere of my life. The way I interact with my friends is in line with the Torah, as is the way I interact with my family, at shul, or on the street. Now, I am wholesome and complete and in every situation and time called a “Ben Torah” or “Bas Yisrael.”

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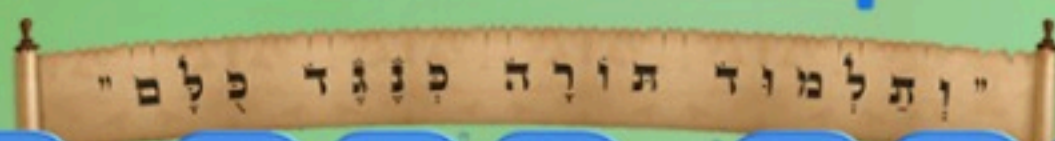
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