

## **TorahFax**

Rabbi Zalmen Marazov

Monday, Iyar 24, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 39th Sefirah / May 15, 2023

Each Shabbat, between Pesach and Shavuot, we recite/study a chapter of Pirkei Avot – Chapter of our Fathers. Many continue even after Shavuot, until Rosh Hashana.

One of the many lessons in the fifth chapter of the Pirkei Avot (Chapters of our Fathers), which we recited this past Shabbat is the following: “Seven things characterize a silly person (a Golem), and seven a wise person (Chacham):”

A wise person does not speak before one who is greater than he in wisdom or in years;

He does not interrupt the words of another person when he is speaking;

He does not rush to answer [when asked something];

He asks what is relevant to the subject matter and replies to the point;

He speaks [in order] of first things first and of last things last;

About a subject which he has not heard, he says “I have not heard”;

He acknowledges the truth. And the reverse of all these is with a fool (Golem).

“He does not rush to answer [when asked something].” This applies even when it’s a simple question to which he knows the answer. One reason is that when one is in haste to answer they will not analyze the question as they should and then they may come up with the wrong answer. This applies especially in matters of disputes between two litigants or questions about Kashrut etc. where the wrong ruling will cause someone to commit a sin or a loss.

Another reason: When one asks a question, to the person who asked, it is a legitimate question. If the rabbi or teacher is going to rush to answer, that person may get the impression that the question was a foolish one. As a result, the next time they have a question they will be embarrassed and refrain from asking. Thus, our sages teach that we must be very sensitive to the feelings of others. Even when you have the answer before he finished his or her question, take your time and give it some thought, thus, show the person that it was a legitimate question. This will encourage them to ask again the next time.

A rabbi was in the middle of teaching his students, when a wagon driver (ba'al agala) burst into the room with his whip in his hand, and said, “Rabbi, I am a kohen, may I take a divorcee?”

The rabbi looked at him, thought for a moment, and then replied, “Yes, you may take a divorcee.”

After he left, the students said, “Rabbi, how can you allow a kohen to take a divorcee? He said he is a kohen and a kohen is prohibited to marry a woman who is divorced?”

The rabbi smiled. "Do you think he would come with a whip in his hand to ask me if he may marry a divorcee? I thought about his question, and realized that he wasn't asking about marrying her, only if he can take her as a passenger on his wagon...

Tuesday, Iyar 25, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 40th Sefirah / May 16, 2023

The holiday of Shavuot will be celebrated at the end of next week. In Israel, Shavuot will be celebrated only one day: Thursday night, May 25th & Friday May 26. In the Diaspora we celebrate two days, also, Friday night & Shabbat May 27. On Shavuot we received the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Q. How old was Moshe at the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai?

A. Moshe was eighty years and his brother, Aaron eighty-three.

Q. Why did G-d choose to give the Torah at Mount Sinai and not on one of the taller mountains?

A. Our sages tell us that the taller mountains figured that G-d will choose to give the Torah on them. But G-d chose Mount Sinai, for the very fact that it is not a tall mountain. G-d wanted to teach the Jewish people that Torah cannot be acquired when one feels tall and haughty. Only through humility and modesty can one merit acquiring and absorbing the depth of the knowledge of Torah. Humility and Torah go hand in hand.

Mount Sinai teaches us another important lesson. When coming to learn Torah one may encounter obstacles. Good things do not come easy.

Mount Sinai is a small mountain. G-d didn't give the Torah on a high mountain. Mount Sinai is a manageable mountain. It is climbable. It teaches us that, yes, one has to put effort into it, one has to climb the mountain, but it is within reach of everyone who decides to make the effort.

Our sages say that G-d does not demand of us something which we cannot handle. If He commands us to study Torah and perform the mitzvot, He also gives us the ability to accomplish it.

When a person makes the effort, G-d helps them overcome all obstacles. We only have to trust that G-d helps.

Q. The Torah was given 3335 years ago. How is it relevant in today's day and age?

A. Although the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai took place 3335 years ago, we have to view that great event, each day, as if it happened today.

Just like we proclaim at the Passover Seder, "In every generation we must see ourselves as leaving Egypt", so too, we view the Giving of the Torah, in the spiritual sense, as if it takes place each day.

This is reflected in the blessing we recite each day, thanking G-d for the Torah, and also when called up to the Torah; "Blessed are you G-d Who gives the Torah." We say "gives" in the present tense.

Our sages tell us that, "Each day the Torah shall be in your eyes as new!"

Thursday, Iyar 27, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 42nd Sefirah / May 18, 2023

The Shavuot holiday, which is one of the three festive holidays mentioned in the Torah, begins next week, Thursday night, May 25th, when we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It happened seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt. This is why we count seven weeks of the Omer (Sefirat HaOmer) and then celebrate the holiday of Shavuot.

The holiday has many names. Shavuot, Chag Habikurim, Chag HaKatzir, Z'Man Matan Torateinu and Atzeret.

"Shavuot" means "Weeks," as it comes after counting the seven weeks of the Omer, after Pesach. It also comes from the word "Sh'vuo" which means to swear. At the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people swore that they will never exchange G-d for anyone else. G-d swore that He will never exchange the Jewish nation as His people for anyone else.

"Chag Habikurim" - "Festival of the First Fruits." In the days of the Holy Temple, one had to bring the first fruits to the Temple and offer them as a gift to the Kohen. The season of this offering began on Shavuot.

"Chag HaKatzir" - "Festival of the Harvest." A special offering of Two Breads was offered in the Temple on Shavuot in honor of the new harvest.

"Zman Matan Torateinu" - "Season of the Giving of the Torah." This is the most common name with which the holiday is known. The Giving of the Torah was one of the greatest events in history. G-d then called us His people and proclaimed, "You shall be unto Me a Priestly Kingdom and a holy nation."

"Atzeret" means to "refrain." Shavuot differs from the other holidays in that there are no special laws and requirements which are unique to this holiday, except for refraining from work as in other holidays.

However, the following customs are associated with Shavuot: 1) We eat dairy on Shavuot. 2) The first night of the holiday is spent studying Torah. 3) Many decorate the synagogue with branches and greenery for Shavuot.

Reasons for eating dairy on Shavuot: At Mount Sinai, the Jewish people were given the Ten Commandments along with the rest of the Torah including the laws of Kashrut. As a result, when they returned to their tents after receiving the Torah, they couldn't use their cooking utensils which they used before as they were now non-Kosher. Without cooking utensils, they had no choice but to eat dairy on that day. Thus, we too, eat some dairy on this day.

Another reason: The Torah tells us, "And Moshe was on the mountain forty days and forty nights" (Exodus 24:18). "Milk in Hebrew is "Chalav". The numerical value of Chalav is 40 (Chet = 8, Lamed = 30, Vet = 2). Eating dairy alludes to the 40 days Moshe stayed on the mountain receiving the Torah.

Friday, Iyar 28, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 43rd Sefirah / May 19, 2023

This week's Parsha, Bamidbar, is read every year on the Shabbat before the holiday of Shavuot. The holiday of Shavuot, when we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, is in one week. With this Parsha we begin the fourth Book of the Torah.

The Parsha begins with the count of the Jewish people in the Sinai desert. All men between the ages of 20 to 60 were counted and they totaled 603,550. We read this Parsha on the Shabbat before the holiday of Shavuot, to emphasize that every Jew is counted equal. The simple Jew was equal to the greatest scholar. Each one was counted. This teaches us that when it comes to Torah, we are all equal and every Jew has their share in the Torah.

Shavuot means weeks. Shavuot is different than all other holidays. Every holiday is identified in the Torah by a specific date in the Hebrew calendar. But Shavuot has no date mentioned. It is identified in the Torah as, seven weeks from the second day Pesach. In preparation for Shavuot, we perform the mitzvah of counting the Omer for seven complete weeks.

Q. Why doesn't the Torah give a specific date for the holiday of Shavuot?

A. Although the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai was a one-time event which took place on a specific date, yet, the Torah tells us that we have to remember the Giving of the Torah each day. The Torah should not be viewed as something which we received on a specific day thousands of years ago. We must cherish it as it is new every day.

The study of Torah comes with effort. The Talmudic sage Rabbi Yitzchak says, "If a person tells you, I have made an effort in the study of Torah, but I have not succeeded, do not believe him. If a person tells you, I didn't make any effort and I have succeeded, do not believe him. When a person tells you, I made an effort and I have succeeded, believe him!"

Children played a very important role in the Giving of the Torah. Our Sages say that before G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He asked for guarantors that the Torah will be studied and cherished.

Jews made a number of suggestions which were rejected by G-d. Only when they declared, "Our children will be our guarantors," did G-d immediately accept and agreed to give them the Torah. Giving our children a Jewish education from a very early age is essential to our survival.

Someone once asked the Rebbe of Kotzk for a blessing that his children should have a desire and love for the study of Torah.

The Rebbe replied: "Children emulate their parents. If your children will see your love for studying Torah and will observe you learning Torah regularly, they too will study Torah regularly. But if all you want is for them to study, then they too, will want someone else to study Torah..."