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Torah Wellsprings

Bamidbar - Shavuot

Flags

This week's parashah discusses the *degalim*, the four flags whose banners waved over the camps of Bnei Yisrael (דגל מחנה יהודה, דגל מחנה) - ראובן, דגל מחנה אפרים, דגל מחנה דן - *Bamidbar* 2:2-10).

The Midrash (*Tanchuma* 14) states, "When Hashem came to Har Sinai, He came with 22,000 *malachim*, and the *malachim* were divided into groups, and each group had their individual flag. When the Jewish nation saw that, they said, "I wish we could also have flags like them... I wish Hashem would show His love to us [and give us flags].¹ ... It states (*Tehillim* 20),

גרננה בישועתיך ובשם אלקינו נדגול,
'Let us sing praises for Your salvation, and in the name of Hashem, let us raise our flags.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu replies, 'ימלא ה' כל משאלותיך, Hashem grants all your desires. You desired flags; I swear I will do your will.' Hashem immediately demonstrated His love for Bnei Yisrael and said to Moshe, 'Make flags for them because they are yearning for them... In the future, I will redeem them in the merit of the flags.'¹

This Midrash clearly shows that the flags had profound meaning and importance. But what is their significance?¹

1. Rebbe Yitzchak of Radvil zt'l (Or Yitzchak) writes, "The Torah tells us that the nation had flags to help each tribe know where their camp is located, just as an army has flags so the soldiers could find their camp. But it can't be that this is what the flags are about." There must be a deeper meaning to the flags.

Tzaddikim explain that the flags remind us of everyone's differences and how each individual serves Hashem in his unique way. The *malachim* are divided into four groups, and they have four flags. This indicates that each camp of *malachim* serves Hashem differently. Malach Michoel's camp serves Hashem with love, Malach Gavriel's camp serves Hashem with fear, and so on. The Jewish nation, too, was divided into four camps and had four flags to imply that each division served Hashem in its unique way.²

In addition to the four primary groups, each Yid serves Hashem in his own

unique manner and has a divine mission that only he can accomplish.

The flags reveal that we shouldn't despair or feel unimportant when we see others serving Hashem more than us. Every person has his portion in avodas Hashem, and in his area, he excels more than everyone else.

This week's parashah also discusses the counting of the Jewish nation. Rashi writes, מתוך חיבתן לפנינו מונה אותם, כל שעה, "Because Hashem loves the Jewish nation, He counts them all the time." The message is the same as the flags. Counting them demonstrates to them that no Yid is superfluous. Each

2. The Shelah HaKadosh (*Bamidbar*) writes in the name of the Arizal, "Just as there are four camps of *malachim* in heaven, similarly, there are four camps within Klal Yisrael, and each has their own *minhagim*. They are קטלוניא, איטלייא, ספרד, אשכנז, the Spanish, German, Catalanian, and Italian Jews. Each should remain by their flag and keep their traditions."

The Shelah concludes, אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים, each of these communities has valid and authentic customs and approaches to serving Hashem.

Yid is counted and needed. Everyone has something new to add to Hashem's service that no one else can do.

Furthermore, each Yid understands Torah in a slightly different way. And therefore, matan Torah is for everyone. No one can complete your portion in Torah and avodas Hashem.

Expounding on the words שאו את ראש, Reb Moshe Feinstein zt'l explains that there are people who feel they aren't worthy to receive the Torah. They think that they aren't important. When the Jewish nation was counted, the greatest tzaddik was counted as "1," and the simplest Yid was counted as "1". שאו את ראש, this elevated the heads and the spirit of the Jewish nation to know

that no matter who they are, they are unique to Hashem.³

The Torah tells us the count of Levi's family. There were 2630 men (between the ages of thirty and fifty) in Gershon's family, 3200 men in Merari's family, and 2750 in Kehos's family. Then the Torah tells us the subtotal: (*Bamidbar* 4:48), ויהיו פקדיהם שמנת אלפים וחמש מאות ושמונים, "Their tally: eight thousand, five hundred and eighty."

The Midrash (*Naso* 6:10) states, "After Kehos was counted separately, and Gershon was counted separately, and Merari was counted separately, the Torah combines them. This is so we shall know that Hashem loves them all the same."

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Igra d'Pirka* 96) explains, "Kehos's service was more exalted

3. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l said that counting the Jewish nation turned them into a דבר שבמנין, a counted item, which cannot be batel (annulled). This reveals the greatness of each Yid, whose importance isn't batel.

than Gershon's and Merari's (because Kehos carried the *aron* and the other utensils of the Mishkan). Gershon's service (to carry the sheets of the Mishkan) was more exalted than Merari's (who carried the wooden walls of the Mishkan). Nevertheless, when Merari's family did the service incumbent upon them, it was as special before Hakadosh Baruch Hu as Kehos's service..." The Torah counts them all together to tell us that they were all equal in importance before Hashem.

The Bnei Yissaschar concludes, "Don't be jealous of your fellow man, not even in *avodas Hashem*. Be happy with the mission Hashem gave you..." Why should you be jealous? Your mission and service are as valuable as theirs.

The Bnei Yissaschar proves this from the malachim who are מתנשאים לעומת השרפים, which means the malachim (האופנים וחיות הקודש) feel equal to the malachim of higher levels (השרפים) because they know they are doing the service that is incumbent on them.

Chazal say, איזהו עשיר השמח, "Who is wealthy? It is someone happy with his portion." The Tiferes Shlomo zt'l and the Sfas Emes zt'l both explain that this also means to be satisfied with one's spiritual portion. Even if it isn't the portion you would ideally choose for yourself, if this is the portion Hashem prepared for you, be happy with it. This is the way Hashem wants you to serve Him.⁴

4. There's a halachic discussion about whether the brachah of Elokai neshamah should be recited before or after birchas haTorah. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l recommends saying it after birchas haTorah because Elokai neshamah is to thank Hashem for life, and without Torah study, life has no purpose.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky zt'l was sent to a Siberian prison, and

Torah for Everyone

Parashas Yisro begins with the story of Yisro, who converted from being a priest for avodah zarah and joined the Jewish nation and received the Torah. Reb Leibele Eiger (*Toras Emes, Yisro*) explains that the story of matan Torah is written only after Yisro's conversation to teach us that matan Torah is for everyone. No one should think that because he is on a

low level, matan Torah isn't for him. If Yisro could receive the Torah, so can everyone.

Hashem asked Yishmael, Eisav, and the other nations if they wanted the Torah. This implies that they could have accepted the Torah if they wanted to! The Imrei Emes (5667) says that this gives encouragement and hope for all Yidden. He writes, "The Torah is

one morning, he couldn't bring himself to say Modeh Ani in the morning. He asked himself, "I can't study Torah or perform mitzvos here. So why should I praise Hashem for returning my neshamah?" He felt that life didn't have a purpose if he couldn't study Torah and perform mitzvos.

Then, he told himself that he could serve Hashem by believing in Hashem. This was a great avodah because it meant not asking questions about Hashem's ways and why he must suffer so much. When he realized he could serve Hashem in this manner, he immediately said Modeh Ani with joy and thanked Hashem for another day of life, another day to serve Hashem with the only thing he had left: his emunah.

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky related this episode to the Rayatz of Lubavitz zt'l, who replied, "The entire Siberia was worthwhile so that you should say those words."

This story is an example of recognizing the greatness of our avodas Hashem when we carry out our mission, even when it isn't the avodas Hashem that we had envisioned.

mekarev everyone, also those at a low level."

The Magen Avraham (494) says we remain awake Shavuos night to rectify the sin of our forefathers who slept on the night before matan Torah. The Arugas Habosem (Yitzi'bo יצאו) says that it doesn't make sense that the Jewish nation went to sleep on the night before matan Torah. Among the Jewish nation were nevi'im, zekeinim, etc. Could it be that they all went to sleep? If *we* were told that we would meet with Hashem tomorrow, would we go to sleep? How could it be that everyone went to sleep that night?

The Arugas Habosem answers that we must say that they fell asleep involuntarily. Hashem caused them to fall asleep. This occurred to teach the future generations that even if they are sleeping (in a spiritual sense, which means they are fully immersed in their parnassah and other aspects of olam hazeh), even such people can receive the Torah.

The Gemara (Shabbos 88.) tells us that the nation was afraid at each of the Aseres HaDibros and fell back twelve *mil*. Malachim pushed them back to the mountain, where they received the next mitzvah of the Aseres HaDibros, and then, once again, they fell back twelve *mil*.

This taught them that the path to receiving the Torah is one of falling backward, trying to come near again, and falling back again. For our discussion, this is a reminder that the Torah is given to imperfect human beings; therefore, no one should think the Torah doesn't apply to him.

Likutei Maharich writes, "The second day of Sivan is called Yom HaMeyuchas (the day of *yichus*), and people say that it is because on this day Hashem said to the Jewish nation (*Shemos* 19:6), ואתם תהיו לי, ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, 'You shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation.' They became *meyuchasim* on this day." This pasuk reveals

the greatness of Bnei Yisrael, the specialness of every Yid. They are princes, a holy nation, close to Hashem, and therefore, every Yid is worthy to receive the Torah.⁵

On Yom HaMeyuchas, Hashem told the nation (Shemos 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Me."⁶

5. There are other reasons this day is called Yom HaMeyuchas. (33) האלף לך שלמה writes, "People call this day Yom HaMeyuchas because it is in between two holy days, between *rosh chodesh* and *shloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Aruch HaShulchan (494:7) writes, "We certainly don't say tachanun on *rosh chodesh*. The three days before Shavuos are *shloshes yemei hagbalah*, festive days. Therefore, the day in between also becomes part of the celebration. Furthermore, on this day, Moshe instructed the nation to be holy; it is therefore called Yom HaMeyuchas. Another reason is that the day of the week of Yom HaMeyuchas will also be the following Yom Kippur."

6. The Kli Yakar writes that the *pasuk* discusses three levels of Bnei Yisrael's relationship with Hashem.

"Three levels are written here, one higher than the other. The first level is ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, 'I carried you on eagles' wings.' This is like a parent who carries his nursing child. This represents when Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the father, and Bnei Yisrael is the child. Afterwards, it states, ואביא אתכם אלי, 'I brought you to Me.' This is when it appears that [Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the Jewish nation] are equal, like brothers at the same level. And then it states, ואתם תהיו לי ממלכה, 'And you shall be to Me a king...' This is when Yisrael are *keviyachol* like Hashem's king, as it states (*Shmuel* 2 23:3), צדיק מושל ביראת ה', 'A tzaddik rules [keviyachol] over Hashem.'"

The Kli Yakar adds that the Midrash mentions these three marvelous levels—son, brother, and king.

"This is as the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 3:11) states on the *pasuk*,

בַּעֲטֵרָה שֶׁעֲטָרָהּ לוֹ אִמּוֹ, "It can be compared to a king who had an only daughter whom he loved immensely. At first, he called her בְּתִי 'my daughter.' Later, he called her אַחֹותִי, 'my sister.' Then, לֹא זָז מִחֲבִבָּהּ, his love increased until he called her אִמִּי, 'my mother.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves the Jewish nation, and He calls them בְּתִי 'My daughter' and then אַחֹותִי 'My sister. He doesn't stop loving them until He calls them אִמִּי, 'My mother.'

"Now, it seems that this Midrash isn't referring to degrees of love because it begins with calling the Jewish nation a daughter, and then it calls them a sister and a person loves his daughter more than he loves his sister. Rather, the Midrash refers to the degrees of rulership the Jewish nation has. A father rules over his daughter, while brothers and sisters are equals. Hakadosh Baruch Hu first calls Klal Yisrael "daughter" because of His love for the Jewish nation. But at that stage, Hashem rules over them as a father rules over his daughter. This was in the days of Avraham...and this is the first level mentioned here, וְאִשָּׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל כְּנָפֵי נְשָׁרִים, 'I carried you on eagle's wings.' It is like a father carrying his infant. Then Hakadosh Baruch Hu raises them to a higher level and calls them אַחֹותִי, My sister. This means they are equal to Hashem. [About this level, Chazal say that] Hakadosh Baruch Hu requires us to respect and to be in awe of the tzaddikim similar to the degree we must respect and fear Hashem. When we are at this stage, tzaddikim become like partners with Hashem. This is how it was in Yitzchak Avinu's time because Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him (*Bereishis* 26:3) וְאִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, 'I will be with you.' This means equal with you. This is because Yitzchak's merits were added onto Avraham's merits [and with both merits combined, they reach a higher level]. This is the reason Hashem didn't say to Avraham וְאִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, 'I will be with you,' as He said to Yitzchak.

"This is the meaning of וְאִבִּיא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי, "I brought you to Me,' which is similar to וְאִהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, 'I will be with you.'

"Then, When Yaakov Avinu came, he acquired all three merits [his own, his father Yitzchak's, and his grandfather Avraham's], and Hashem raised him to an even higher level to call him אִמִּי, mother, like a mother who rules over her children. As Chazal (*Moed Katan* 16:) tell us [that Hashem decrees and a tzaddik annuls the decree]. Therefore, to Yaakov, Hashem said (*Bereishis* 32:29) כִּי שְׂרִית עִם אֱלֹקִים, 'You have commanding power with Hashem...' [which indicates

We will explain these words with a *mashal*:

An eagle crawled along the seashore. Someone called out, "Eagle, Eagle! Why are you crawling on the seashore? You have wings. Raise your wings and fly."

The *nimshal* is that when the Jewish nation was in Egypt, they weren't aware of their greatness. 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." Hashem showed them that they have

tremendous potential. They aren't simple people. They are the beloved royal nation. If they lift their wings, they will soar and reach the highest spiritual levels.

The *minhag* is to place trees that don't grow fruit (איילי סרק) in the *beis medresh* on Shavuos. The Chasam Sofer zt'l (Drashos, Megillas Rus, ד"ה ויהי) explains that trees without fruit represent the Yidden who don't have Torah and mitzvos. We place these trees in *beis medresh* so they know they can also receive the Torah.

About *matan Torah*, Rashi (*Shemos* 19:6) writes לא פחות ולא יותר, "Not less and not more."⁷ The Chasam Sofer (Drashos 264:) says that לא

that Yaakov rules *keviyachol* over Hashem]... This is implied by the words ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת, meaning you will be like kings לי, over Me, Hashem. I decree, and a tzaddik annuls. Klal Yisrael also merits this because they are Bnei Yisrael [descendants of Yaakov Avinu]."

7. Literally, this means that Moshe had to repeat precisely what Hashem told him to tell the Jewish nation regarding the preparations for *matan Torah*. "Not less and not more." He shouldn't add or subtract anything.

יִתְרֵךְ means that no one is greater than a person who studies Torah. There are nevi'im in the Jewish nation and malachim in heaven, but no one is greater than someone who studies Torah. לֹא פְחוּתִים means that no one is too small to receive the Torah.

The Chasam Sofer (Drashos, Shavuos 5562) writes, "The Torah wasn't given to individuals, rather it was given to the entire Jewish nation... so everyone will have a portion in Torah... Therefore, every Yid can be equally joyous on Shavuos... The Torah was given... when we first left the slavery of Mitzrayim. We weren't worthy then for matan Torah. This was to tell us that there are no barriers, and we shouldn't lose hope from receiving our portion in Torah. Even if one is at a very low level, he is equal to the greatest."

The Beis Aharon (Rosh Chodesh Sivan) teaches this same lesson from the words (Shemos 19:17) וַיִּתְּצֵבּוּ בַתְּחִילִית הַהָרַיִם,

"They stood at the bottom of the mountain." He explains that this refers to people who are at a very low level. He writes, "Everyone can receive the Torah, no matter who he is, even if he is at the lowest level."

Some people want to proclaim naaseh v'nishma with all their heart and soul, but deep down, they know they aren't entirely sincere. Part of them wants to receive the Torah, but part of them doesn't want to accept the yoke and the restrictions of the Torah. Nevertheless, even such an acceptance of the Torah is a wonderful accomplishment.

The Tosefta (Bava Kama 7:3) says that even the generation that received the Torah on *har Sinai* and proclaimed וַנִּשְׁמָע וְנִשְׁמָע, their hearts weren't entirely prepared to receive the Torah. Nevertheless, Hashem accepted their proclamation of naaseh v'nishma, and because of it, Hashem gives so much kindness to Bnei

Yisrael.⁸ Therefore, every person, no matter what level he is on, matan Torah is for him.⁹

Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan

There is a tefillah for good children printed in the Shelah HaKadosh. The Shelah writes, "My heart tells me that the best time to say this tefillah is erev rosh chodesh Sivan, the month we received the Torah and became Hashem's children. Parents should fast on this day and do teshuvah. They should cleanse their homes in the areas of *isur v'heter, tumah v'taharah*, and all matters. They should also give tzedakah to worthy, poor people."

While excessive fasting isn't recommended in our times, the other directives from the Shelah to merit good children are always applicable. On *erev rosh chodesh* Sivan, parents should daven for their children, examine their deeds, do teshuvah, and give tzedakah to the poor.

Although Erev rosh chodesh Sivan is an auspicious time to daven for good children, we should really daven for this every day.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l said at the chasunah of one of his children, "Believe me, every day I shed tears that Hashem should grant me

8. The Midrash (Tanchuma Emor 11) states, "All the wonderful, sweet things Hakadosh Baruch Hu will do for Yisrael is all because of one shout, when they said (Shemos 24:7) *נעשה ונשמע*."

9. A teacher took a hundred-dollar bill, trampled it, crumbled it, and stuck it into the mud. Then he asked his students, "Who wants it?" All hands shot up. They all wanted it because even in the mud and trampled, it was still worth \$100. The teacher then told them that the same is true with the Jewish soul. No matter what a person does, he remains a precious and holy Jewish soul.

that my children should become greater than me. It should be (*Devarim* 30:5), והטבך, והרבך מאבותיך, that your children will be better than their father." In our generation, it is especially important to daven for good children. We live in trying times, and no one is guaranteed success.

Reb Michel Lefkowitz zt'l was in chinuch for many years. (My father learned by him, and so did I. Some families were his students for three generations.) Reb Michel zt'l said that he found an unusual, surprising pattern. Often, the child of the family who was the least successful in his youth becomes the most successful in his family later in life. For some reason, the outstanding child of the family is precisely the one who didn't excel in his younger years. His success might be in Torah, mitzvos, or business, but the pattern is that the one who seemed

least likely to succeed ultimately outshines the others.

Reb Michel added, "I don't know why it is so, but I think it is because the parents invested many tefillos for this child. They davened for all their children but cried for this child, and their tefillos were answered."

The Baal Shem Tov said, "A segulah for good children is to wash in hot [water] every morning and night." He meant that parents should shed hot tears for their children at least twice daily.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said, "I don't miss a *Shemonah Esrei* to daven for my son, Aharele."

Reb Aharon of Belz zt'l said, "How can we have good children if we finish a tefillah with our eyes still dry?"¹⁰

10. *Shemonah Esrei* doesn't contain a brachah requesting good children, which is surprising. We have brachos for parnassah and

Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Rabba (18) brings a story of a kohen who would daven every day, with all his heart and soul, that his children shouldn't sin, and his tefillos were accepted. We quote, "There was a kohen who feared heaven... He had ten children, six boys and four girls. Every day, he davened, bowed, pleaded, asked for compassion, and his tongue licked the earth¹¹ that none of his children should ever sin or do something disgusting... When Ezra brought the Yidden up from Bavel, this kohen came up

with them, and he merited children and grandchildren kohanim and kohanim gedolim."

A man from an irreligious kibbutz, raised by nonreligious parents, did teshuvah. The Chazon Ish zt'l explained that this man's grandfather cried bitterly when his son left the path. His tefillos didn't work for his son, but they took effect on his grandson.

The Chazon Ish zt'l once said that sometimes a bachur turns around in a moment. Yesterday, he didn't

health; why not a brachah for nachas from the children?

One gadol replied that for good children, one needs to pray in his own words so he can express himself more fully and emotionally.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz zt'l said there is a request for good children in the Shemonah Esrei. It is implied in the words of *Modim*, לדור ודור נודה לך, "From generation to generation we will praise you..."

11. Hashem said to Yaakov Avinu (*Bereishis* 28:14), והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ, "Your seed shall be as the dust of the earth." A similar brachah was given to Avraham Avinu (see *Bereishis* 13:16). We can explain that hinted in עפר הארץ is that if one is מלכך בלשונו עפר, licks earth (the expression used in Tana d'Bei Eliyahu to describe intense tefillos), then he will merit good children.

understand the Torah, and today, he does. What happened? This is because his mother davened and cried for her son to succeed in Torah, but a *kitrug* prevented and blocked the tefillos from going up. The moment the *kitrug* was removed, everything turned around.

There were twin brothers that were learning in the same cheder. One was an exceptional student, and the other a very weak one. The teachers were amazed at how twins could be so different. One day, however, everything changed. The weaker student suddenly became a *masmid* and began understanding and enjoying Torah. The change was so quick and drastic that people wanted to know how it happened. The principal asked the father for an explanation. At first, he didn't answer, but when the *menahel* kept asking, he replied that he made a kabbalah to say *birchas haTorah* with kavanah. The

day he made this kabbalah, his weaker son began to excel in Torah.

This is because we say in *birchas haTorah*, ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו... יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה, we daven and ask that our children succeed in Torah study.

Reb Moshe Sternbuch zt'l once said a marvelous idea in Torah at the Tchebiner Rav's shiur. The Tchebiner Rav reacted by saying, "It isn't your explanation! It is your mother's because you could only say such a good *pshat* due to your mother's tears."

Reb Shlomo Wolbe zt'l says that he thinks the main chinuch of a child is the parents' tefillos. He said that his success in Torah and *harbatzas Torah* (teaching Torah) is because of his mother's tears.

Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk zt'l and Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli zt'l saw a very special young child, and they asked the mother

to tell them about her husband's ways because they wanted to understand how he merited having this special child. The mother said that her husband is a regular, good person, nothing out of the ordinary.

They asked her to tell them his *seder hayom*, and when she began speaking about Shabbos, she said, "There is one thing. During *shalosh seudos*, when he says, *וזכנו לראות בנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה*, לשמה, he repeats the words many times, with immense *hislahavus*, in a loud voice, until he faints. This happens each week." This young child became renowned as Rebbe Dovid of Lelov zt'l.

A seventy-year-old man came to the rosh yeshiva of a baal teshuvah yeshiva and said he wanted to do teshuvah. The rosh yeshiva asked him why he wanted to do teshuvah at this point in his life. (It isn't common for people to do teshuvah and totally change their life at that age.)

The man explained that his father was burned in Auschwitz, and his mother became irreligious. She sent him to an orphanage, which the Ponovitzer Rav zt'l ran. Once, his mother visited the orphanage and discovered that it was a religious institute, and she immediately took her son back home to Tel Aviv.

The next time the Ponovizher Rav visited the orphanage, he asked about this child and why he wasn't there, and the staff told him that the irreligious mother had taken him home.

The Rav immediately went to the woman's home in Tel Aviv. It was Friday afternoon, but his pain of losing a Jewish child was so great that he couldn't push it off. When the mother saw the Rav, she said, "If you came to convince me to return our son to the orphanage, I want you to know that there is nothing to talk about! I was in Auschwitz..." and she told him that after all the tzaros

she went through, she abandoned Yiddishkeit. The Ponovizher Rav didn't respond - he just sat there and cried.

When this son turned seventy, he came to the rosh yeshiva of the baal teshuvah yeshiva and said, "The Rav's tears chased me for sixty years, and that's why I am here today to do teshuvah."

There was an outstanding student learning in Gur and the rosh yeshiva, the Pnei Menachem zt'l, enjoyed speaking with him in learning.

The boy's father visited the Pnei Menachem to ask about his son's progress. The Pnei Menachem replied, "He's doing well. He learns well," but didn't elaborate. He didn't tell him how

special and scholarly his son was.

Soon after, the father returned to the Pnei Menachem and said, "The yeshiva students told me that you enjoy speaking with my son in learning, and you talk with him all the time. So why didn't you give me a more enthusiastic report when I asked about my son?"

The Pnei Menachem explained, "Parents have to daven for their children, and I didn't want to take that away from you the merit of tefillah. If I had praised your son, you would feel confident that everything is fine, and you would stop davening for your son's success, and that would be a great loss."¹²

12. Melamdin and magidei shiur shouldn't follow this counsel. When fathers ask how their sons are doing, they should lavish praise when due. The message is that parents shouldn't stop shedding tears and praying for their children.

Hashem tells Rachel (*Yirmiyahu* 31:15), מנעי קולך מבכי, "Refrain your voice from crying." But it wasn't only Rachel who cried. Leah also

The Pnei Menachem added a personal story. "I was born from my parent's second marriage. Once, my mother cried before her second husband, the Imrei Emes zt'l, that a son from her first marriage was called for the army draft. The Imrei Emes replied with a brachah, "May Hashem help. My mother told her mother how worried she was about her son. Her mother was the Imrei Emes's sister. She went to the Imrei Emes and

asked him about her grandson. The Imrei Emes replied, 'Don't worry. He won't be drafted.' When he gave this *havtachah* (promise), everyone calmed down, and baruch Hashem, there was a salvation.

"My mother asked the Imrei Emes, 'If you knew my son wouldn't be drafted, why didn't you tell me? I was so worried.'

"The Imrei Emes replied, 'A mother must daven. I

cried, as is implied in the words (*Bereishis* 29:17), ועיני לאה רכות, "and Leah's eyes were moist." She was crying that she shouldn't become Eisav's wife. Rashi writes, "Rivkah had two sons (Yaakov and Eisav), and Lavan had two daughters (Rachel and Leah). People were saying the older daughter to the older son (Leah for Eisav), and the younger daughter to the younger son (Rachel for Yaakov)." Leah was worried that she would marry Eisav, and therefore she cried. Hashem doesn't tell her to stop crying because Hashem loves such tears. Tears for spiritual success are desired tears.

The Torah (*Bereishis* 32:1) tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters. The Sforno writes, "Chazal tell us that a *birkas hedyot*, the blessing of a simple person, shouldn't be trivial in our eyes. The Torah tells us that Lavan blessed his daughters to teach us that when a father blesses his children, it is with all his heart and no doubt the brachos will take effect because this is the segulah of a brachah from a human being who was created with a *tzelem Elokim*, as it states (*Bereishis* 27:4), בעבור תברכה נפשי, 'So my soul can bless you.'"

knew there would be a *yeshuah*, but your tears were needed. If you had known for sure that everything would be okay, you would stop davening and crying, and your tears were needed for the *yeshuah*!"

The Pnei Menachem turned to the father, "This is why I didn't elaborate on your son's success. I didn't want you to feel that everything was wonderful. A parent must daven."

Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah

Rebbe Avraham HaMalach instructed his students not to come to him during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because he needed those days to study Torah alone.

The students didn't obey, and they came to their Rebbe during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* because they yearned to hear his *divrei Torah*. The Rebbe locked his door and didn't let them in. He explained, "One's success in Torah for the

entire year depends upon one's *hasmadah* in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Old Yerushalayimer Yidden still remember that the stores of Yerushalayim would close at midday during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, so the shopkeepers could spend the rest of the day immersed in Torah.

In Poland, the batei midrashim were filled to capacity two weeks before Shavuos.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis medresh in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and didn't see the beis medresh full of people preparing for Shavuos. He said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim* (the Jewish communities of Europe from before the War)?"

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story: Once, in Poland, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, someone came into the beis medresh and

watched with envy the passion for Torah in the beis medresh. He turned to the wall and cried because he wished to be like them. But unlike many who just pity themselves and go on with their lives, this person acted upon his aspirations. He took the first Gemara he saw, sat down, and was immediately engrossed in Torah.

That moment changed his life. He experienced the sweetness of the Torah and became a *masmid* and a great *talmid chacham*.

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zt'l had one bookshelf on which he kept sefarim written with ruach hakadosh. That man's *sefer* was stored on that shelf.

A daughter of a Lelover chassid was engaged to marry the son of Rebbe Elazar Mendel zt'l, the Lelover Rebbe of Yerushalayim. The chassid was overjoyed that his daughter was to marry into this prestigious family. Still, his wife was upset that the Rebbe's family wasn't sending gifts to the kallah as customary. Gifts were sent to the chassan, but the kallah received nothing in return. (Primarily, this was because the Rebbe gave away every penny he had to tzedakah to support the poor of Yerushalayim - no money was available for gifts.)¹³

The chassid's wife encouraged her husband to ask the Rebbe to send a gift to the kallah. The chassid promised that he would do

13. 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 without keeping anything for himself. That Pesach, the Tzanzer Rav zt'l praised Rebbe Elazar Mendel's seder. (The Tzanzer Rav saw through *ruach hakodesh* that Rebbe Elazar Mendel's Seder shone brightly.) Reb Elazar Mendel merited this because he gave everything away to others.

so, but feeling uncomfortable raising the issue with his Rebbe, he kept pushing it off.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to bring up the issue, but he was always in awe when in the Rebbe's presence and couldn't bring himself to discuss it.

During *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the Rebbe's custom was to daven *Maariv* and count *sefiras ha'omer* at the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik, and then go to the *Kosel haMaaravi* to daven some more. The chassid planned to accompany the Rebbe to these holy sites. His wife told him, "You must speak with the Rebbe tonight. I've asked you many times, and you keep pushing it off. This time, you must act. Otherwise, don't come home."

Her husband knew that it was more than just a threat.

So, that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he waited for the Rebbe to open the door, the husband thought to himself, "My wife is right, after all. The Rebbe is a holy man, but why doesn't he send a gift to our daughter? Even a small pin would suffice. Why can't the Rebbe give our daughter a small pin?"

The Rebbe answered the door and said, "*Mechuten shlita!* I didn't think that during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, you'd be going around with pins in your head."

He was astounded at the Rebbe's clear *ruach hakadosh*. He went home and told his wife, "Our *mechutan* has *ruach hakadosh*. Don't bother me any more about gifts, or I will tell you not to come home.

We don't eat matzah before Pesach, so we should eat it at the Seder with an appetite. The *Sfas Emes* zt'l asked why we don't do the same before Shavuot. We

should stop learning Torah before Shavuos so that on Shavuos, we would be hungry for Torah and study Torah with thirst!

The answer is that Torah is different from all other pleasures. One doesn't become tired of it. On the contrary, the more one studies, the more he loves the Torah. If he learns Torah before Shavuos, he will be even more thirsty for Torah on Shavuos.

Annual Matan Torah

The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe בשבועותיים ד"ה) reveals a great chiddush. There is a difference between Shavuos and all other yomim tovim. "We celebrate Pesach to remind us of what occurred, that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. Succos is also to remind us of what was (למען למען דורותיכם...). Matan Torah, however, isn't only a memory but a new reality. Today, we received the Torah from Hashem yisbarach."¹⁴

14. The Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe) writes, אבל מתן תורה הוא יום מתן תורה, בעצמו, אינו זכר למה שהיה, כי היא כלה חדשה כשעה ראשנה והיום מקבל מנותן התורה ית"ש "But matan Torah is an actual matan Torah. It isn't a commemoration of what was. She is a new kalah, like the first time, and today receives the Torah from Hashem yisbarach.

Matan Torah was in 2448 (3336 years ago), but that was just the beginning of matan Torah. Each year, Hashem gives us the Torah again.

Reb Eliyah Roth zt'l related that one year, on Shavuos, he was at the Kosel Maaravi with his Rebbe, Reb Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l. Before *alos hashachar*, his rebbe told him, "Now they are asking in heaven whether we want to receive the Torah. So let's say together Naaseh v'Nishma!" (He explained that Naaseh v'Nishma should be said with רבים, together, and that's why he wanted to say Naaseh v'Nishma with him.)

It states (Shemos 20:15) וירא העם ויגעו ויעמדו מרחוק "The people saw and

This means that Shavuos as a time to receive the Torah wasn't established as a commemoration but rather as a time to receive the Torah again, each year, anew.¹⁵

trembled, and they stood from afar." The Divrei Shmuel zt'l explains that the Yidden at Har Sinai saw (through ruach hakodesh) that the future generations will be ויעמדו מרחוק, "standing from afar," which means they will be at very low spiritual levels. Nevertheless, they, too, will accept the Torah. וירא העם וינעו, "The people saw this [the kabbalas haTorah of the future generations] and trembled." They were in awe of the future generation's devotion to the Torah, even on their low levels.

We say in the brachah on the haftarah, ודבר אחד מדבריך אהור לא ישוב ריקם, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty." The Aruch HaShulchan (284) explains, "The Torah discusses stories that happened years ago, and it seems that there isn't 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 and this generation, as well. This is because *yetzias Mitzrayim* continues to happen. Similarly, when Navi tells a story of the past, it continues to occur... This is the *segulah* of the holy Torah. Therefore, we say, אהור, the episodes of the past, לא ישוב ריקם, don't think they are irrelevant today because they continue to happen to this day."

The Ruzhiner zt'l wouldn't say divrei Torah on the first night of Shavuos. He explained that the Torah of last year was completed, and the new Torah hadn't come in yet. He said, "I feel like a farmer before the harvest. The old wheat was consumed, and the new wheat wasn't harvested yet."

The Yid HaKodesh zt'l also didn't say Torah on the first night of Shavuos. He said that this is because דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, *derech erez is before Torah*. "So, what do we do on this night? We prepare for matan Torah with fear of Hashem." After saying this, his limbs trembled from fear (Ramasayim Tzofim, Tana d'Bei Eliyahu 18:56).

15. It states (Vayikra 19:19) ויהי קול השפך הולך וחזק מאד. Rashi explains that

It states (Shemos 19) מִשֶּׁה יִדְבֵר, "Moshe will speak [the Aseres HaDibros]" - in the future tense. The Beis Aharon zt'l writes, "This is because Moshe Rabbeinu will speak in every generation to every Yid who purifies himself to receive the Torah..."

The Chizkuni (introduction to *Chumash*) writes, "I swear by my soul that I, Chizkiyah, heard Hashem's voice in my dream, saying the Aseres HaDibros..."

Chazal (Psikta Zuta, V'eschanan) say, "A person is obligated to imagine that he received the Torah on Har Sinai."¹⁶ It

the blast on the shofar became constantly stronger and stronger. "For humans, the longer one blows, the sound becomes weaker. But this time, it became stronger and stronger." Hinted in these words is that the matan Torah of every year becomes stronger and greater than the previous years.

16. The Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) tells that before the Torah was given on Har Sinai, the ruach (spirit) *Tavach* (which literally means Slaughter) had the power to harm the Jewish nation. Had the Jewish nation not accepted the Torah, this spirit would have slaughtered them and spilled their blood, chas v'shalom.

Therefore, *Shulchan Aruch* (468:10) states, "The custom is that one doesn't do [the remedy of] blood-letting (הַקֵּזֶת דָּם) on *erev yom tov*." The primary prohibition is *erev Shavuos*, but to be sure that one doesn't do this blood-letting procedure on *erev Shavuos*, the custom is to not do so on any *erev yom tov*. It is dangerous to let blood on *erev Shavuos* because that's when the spirit of spilling blood comes forth to harm us, *chalilah*. (Therefore, if a person needs a blood test, if it isn't urgent, he should push it off for another date and not do it on *erev Shavuos* or *erev yom tov*.)

The question is that the dangerous spirit wanted to harm the Jewish nation three thousand years ago when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai. Why do we worry about it today?

is logical that he must have this imagination because matan Torah reoccurs each year.

When Shaul became king, evil people ridiculed him. They said (Shmuel 1, 10:27) *מה יושיענו זה ויבזהו* "How can this person save us?!" They disgraced him."

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l says that we can learn a great lesson from this pasuk. When you think someone or something can't help you, that is called disgracing it.

In *עלינו לשבח* we say, *ומתפללים אל אל לא יושיע*, that the goyim pray to a god that can't help them. This is how we disgrace avodah zarah.

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

Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l (Halichos Shlomo, 12:6) quotes this *Machatzis HaShekel* as an indication that every year on Shavuos, there is a *kabbalas haTorah*. Shavuos isn't solely a commemoration of the past; there is matan Torah each year!

We don't cut the fingernails and toenails on the same day (see Magen Avraham 260, quoting the Beis Yosef's Magid). The Likutei Maharich (vol.3 p.45, also taught by the Chidushei HaRim zt'l) says that erev Shavuos is an exception. One may cut them both on the same day. He compares this to the halachah of someone with a Torah obligation to go to the mikvah who may cut his toenails and fingernails on the same day, so there shouldn't be a chatzitzah. The Zohar (Emor, written at the end of Tikun Leil Shavuos) explains that the counting of the Omer (which is seven times seven), followed by the tevilah in the mikvah Shavuos morning, represents purifying oneself to receive the Torah. This tevilah must also be without a chatzitzah, so one may cut both his finger and toe nails on the same day.

From this source, we understand that every year, we become pure and receive the Torah again.

Chazal (Avos 3:15) say, המבזה המועדות אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, "Whoever disgraces the yomim tovim doesn't have a portion in Olam HaBa." What is considered disgracing the yomim tovim? The Chidushei HaRim explains that it is when a person thinks, "How will this yom tov help me?" Thinking this way is a disgrace for the yom tov. Similarly, one shouldn't think, "I celebrated the yom tov Shavuos many times in my life, and I don't see that I gained so much from it. I don't expect to gain so much from this year's Shavuos, either." Thinking this way is a disgrace for the yom tov. One must believe that matan Torah occurs yearly on Shavuos and that we can gain much from the yom tov.

It states והיה אמונת עתיד חוסן ישועות, which can mean that

if you believe in the greatness of the holidays, you will receive yeshuos from the holidays. So, our first preparation for the yom tov Shavuos is to believe in it and know that we receive the Torah on this day.

Aseres HaDibros Each Year

The Shevet Mussar (34:19) discusses what one should have in mind when he listens to the Torah reading in beis medresh. (The Shevet Mussar refers to the entire year, not only when one hears the Torah on Shavuos morning.) He writes, "Imagine that the *bimah* is Har Sinai, and 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."¹⁷

17. *Mishnah Berurah* (146:19) writes, "According to halachah, one is permitted to sit, but the Maharam said that it is proper to stand because when one hears the reading of the Torah, one should

Certainly, we should have this thought in mind when we read the *Aseres HaDibros* on Shavuos (or when we read the *Aseres HaDibros* on *parashas Yisro* and *parashas Va'eschanan*).

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 Har Sinai and received the Torah."¹⁸

The *Divrei Yechezkel* of *Shinov zt'l* said that on

Shabbos parashas Yisro, when his father, the *Divrei Chaim* of *Sanz zt'l*, read the *Aseres HaDibros*, he felt as though he was standing at Har Sinai and was hearing the *Aseres HaDibros* from Hashem. He heard the shofar and the thunder, saw the lightning, and experienced everything else 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.

imagine that he is hearing it from Har Sinai, and at Har Sinai all *Yidden* stood. [Standing will help him visualize himself receiving the Torah.] However, if someone is weak and it is difficult for him to stand, and by standing, he won't have *yishuv hadaas* to concentrate on the *kriyah*, he should sit."

18. We read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: *Shavuos*, *Shabbos parashas Yisro*, and *Shabbos parashas Va'eschanan*. The *Beis Avraham* explains this with a *mashal* of a very sick person who needed a dose of powerful medications but was very frail, and the strong medication would harm him. So, his doctor divided the medication into three doses. The *nimshal* is that hearing the *Aseres HaDibros* is like a spiritual, powerful cure. However, this spiritual experience is too intense for our weak minds. Therefore, the impact is divided into three so the Jewish nation could accept it.

Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* would sweat profusely from fear when he would take out the *sefer Torah* to read from it on Shavuos. The congregation knew to wrap the *sefer Torah* with extra layers so it wouldn't get wet from his sweat. Before he came to the beis medresh on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis, he exclaimed, איך גיי זעך זעהן מיט, "I'm going to meet with Hashem!" (Some say that he said, "I met with Hashem!")

One Friday night of *parashas Yisro*, Rebbe Levi

Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* said at his *tish*, "Tomorrow, when the *Aseres HaDibros* is read, the people who have holy ears will hear Hashem saying the *Aseres HaDibros*..."

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

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.¹⁹

19. There are twenty-six *pasukim* from בחרוש השלישי (*Shemos* 19:1) until the *Aseres HaDibros*. The *Aseres HaDibros* itself contains thirteen *pasukim*. (The *gematriya* of 26 and 13 hints to אחד (הו"ה אחד).) Notice that there is twice the number of *pasukim* on preparing for *matan Torah* than *matan Torah* itself. This hints at what chassidim say, "The preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah itself."

The Torah states the importance of preparing for *matan Torah* (*Shemos* 19:11): והיו נכונים ליום השלישי: "Be prepared for the third day." The *Torah* instructed the nation to prepare for *matan Torah*.

We can add that the *nekudos* of והיו נכונים (with a *kametz* under the ה) implies that they were *already* prepared. (Otherwise, it would state והיו נכונים, with a *segol* under the ה, which would mean "be prepared.") The *pasuk* hints that if you do your part to prepare yourselves, Hashem promises, והיו נכונים, you will be prepared.

Chiddushei Torah

Rebbe Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh zt'l said that he is more afraid of Shavuos than Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Hashanah, the judgment is on gashmiyos. So, it will be one more *bilke*

(challah) or one less (it doesn't make much of a difference). But on Shavuos, the judgment is for Torah, and how much Torah one will receive that year. And therefore, he is more afraid of Shavuos.

We discussed above that every year, on Shavuos,

A town had a custom that a chasan should have two silver cups filled with gold coins. This was a good omen, a sign that the new couple would have wealth in their married life. If the chasan was poor and didn't have two silver cups and gold coins, he would borrow from others for the night of the chasunah and return it after the chasunah.

Once, a chasan didn't have two cups with coins. He went to a wealthy person (whom he knew was miserly) and said, "I have one silver cup with gold coins, and I need the other one. So, I am only asking for one silver becher filled with gold coins."

The wealthy man replied, "It is just for a good omen. So, I recommend that you put a mirror next to your cup, and it will appear like you have two cups with coins."

The chasan replied, "When I told you I have one cup with gold coins, I meant I have a mirror. I am lacking the other cup."

The nimshal is for Shavuos. It is called Shavuos, weeks, because the yom tov is like a mirror that shows everything we prepared during the weeks of sefiras ha'omer.

The Arugas Habosem comforts us and says that even if we begin preparing on Shavuos itself, it is also sufficient. But if one does it in an ideal manner, he prepares for Shavuos during the weeks of sefiras ha'omer, and then Shavuos will mirror all the kedushah that he had prepared.

Hashem once again gives us the Torah. One matan Torah occurred at Har Sinai, and a second type of matan Torah happens every Shavuos. There is also a third kind of matan Torah, which transpires daily. In birchas haTorah, we say נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה, "Hashem, Who gives the Torah." It is written in the present tense because Hashem gives us the Torah every day. The Taz (Orach Chaim 47:5) says that this is because Hashem gives us the Torah daily, based on the amount of Torah we received that year on Shavuos.

What is the significance of these three matan Torahs?

Derech HaMelech (from the Rebbe of Piaseczna zt'l) explains that we received the Torah on Har Sinai, and each year, on Shavuos, we receive the

chidushei Torah that we can discover that particular year. However, on Shavuos, it is still a non-defined prophecy because one doesn't yet know the chidushim he will discover. When one studies Torah throughout the year, he brings forth the *chidushei Torah* he received on Shavuos. That is when he discovers what he received on Shavuos. These are the three matan Torahs. One is a general matan Torah, one is for the Torah he can receive that year, and each day, he receives the Torah again, the chidushim that he can acquire on that day.

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say, "On Shavuos, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees."²⁰ The Sfas Emes explains that you are judged which chiddushim you will perceive that year on

20. The *Tola'as Yaakov* (quoted by the Shlah) says that פירות האילן represents 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*.

Shavuos. The Sfas Emes concludes, "Shavuos is the source of Torah for the entire year."²¹

The Purpose of Matan Torah - Emunah

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 these words as follows: Hashem taught כל הדברים האלה, the entire Torah so a Yid will be able to say אנכי ה' אלקיך. In other words, the purpose of matan Torah and all the mitzvos is so that we will believe in Hashem.

A hint to this idea is found in the *shemoneh Esrei* of Rosh Hashanah, where it

ובתורתך כתוב לאמר שמע ישראל ה' אחד. ה' אלקינו ה' אחד. This can be translated as "Everything that is written in the Torah is so people will be able to say 'Hashem is our G-d Hashem is one.'" That is the segulah of Torah and mitzvos; it fills our hearts with emunah in Hashem.

On a similar note, the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Mishlei* 22:19) writes, עיקר נתינת התורה לישראל הוא בכדי שיישימו בטחונם בה' "The Torah was given, primarily, so that the Jewish nation will have bitachon in Hashem."

Rashi (*Devarim* 4:35) writes, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, He opened up the seven heavens...and all the lower worlds, and they saw

21. The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:19) says, ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאוד, "The sound of the shofar was powerful..." The Or HaMeir *zt'l* teaches that חזק can also mean contains (see *Eiruvin* 14 - ים שעשה שלמה היה מחזיק מאה וחמישים מקוה - מהרה). This implies that *kabalas haTorah* contains and holds all *chiddushei Torah* that will be revealed during the year.

The Sfas Emes says that Shavuos is called יום בכורים, the yom tov of the new fruit. The new fruit represents the new Torah given to us on that day.

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.'"

This is the purpose of matan Torah: so we will know that Hashem is G-d; there is no other.

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. Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 119:86) כל מצותיך אמונה, 'All your mitzvos are about *emunah*.'"

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

The Rishonim ask why the Aseres HaDibros says, "I

am Hashem, your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim." It seems more appropriate and significant to say, "I am Hashem, your G-d, Who created heaven and earth!"

But there is a lesson in *yetzias Mitzrayim* that we don't know from creation. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* tells us that Hashem continues to lead the world with *hashgachah pratis*!

The Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* יום א' כ"ו) writes, "Trust in Hashem with all your heart. Believe in His *hashgachah pratis*... Believe that Hashem sees everything. He sees everything you do and examines your heart and your thoughts. Whoever doesn't believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim* [*hashgachah pratis*] also doesn't believe in אנוכי ה' אלקיך [belief in Hashem]... These beliefs make us the chosen nation and are the foundation of the entire Torah." Thus, the Rosh reveals that *yetzias Mitzrayim* teaches *hashgachah pratis*, which is

a primary foundation of emunah.

Everything is for the Good

In Megillas Rus, Naomi said (*Rus* 1:20), אל תקראנה לי נעמי, קראן לי מרא כי המר שד"י לי מאד, "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.) explains that when Naomi returned to Eretz Yisrael, she knew that she would need money to settle down and to survive, and she hoped that her wealthy nephew, Boaz, would support her. However, the Chasam Sofer writes, "It isn't the way of *tzanuah* women to meet with men. Indeed, we never find Naomi meeting or speaking to Boaz." Instead, Naomi's plan as she returned to Eretz Yisrael was to speak to Boaz's wife. She would talk to Boaz, and Boaz would help her and Rus settle down and live in Eretz Yisrael. But this plan didn't

work out because "the day Naomi came to Beis Lechem, the *levayah* of Boaz's wife took place!" (see *Bava Basra* 91.). Naomi's dreams and hopes were shattered.

Alternatively, if Boaz's wife wasn't alive, she could speak directly to Boaz and ask him to help them. However, Naomi refused to do so. She wouldn't speak to Boaz, not now that she didn't have the wife to relay her message. Naomi told the women of Beis Lechem to call her מרא, bitter, and not נעמי, pleasant, because her life was bitter. She said that she came to Eretz Yisrael with a plan of how she would support herself, and now she doesn't have any plan at all, and she doesn't have any source of income.

It was all for her good, though, writes the Chasam Sofer. "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."²²

The *roshei teivos* of הַמֵּר שָׂדִי "Hashem made it very bitter for me" spells שלמה. This hints that although Naomi thought matters were bitter for her, they were for her good, preparing the way for Shlomo HaMelech to come.

This is how it always is. We think something is negative, but it turns out to be positive.

When Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai, most people weren't permitted to go up on the mountain. The

exceptions were Moshe Rabbeinu, the seventy zekeinim of Sanhedrin, and Aharon HaKohen with his two elder sons, Nadav v'Avihu (see *Shemos* 24:1). Aharon's younger sons, Elazar v'Isamar weren't permitted to go on the mountain.

Elazar and Isamar were greater than the Sanhedrin (see *Eiruvin* 54:). In fact, they were the Sanhedrin's teachers. Yet the Sanhedrin was allowed to be on the mountain, and they were not.

Most people in this situation would be upset. They would say, "Why can't we go on Har Sinai, while the Sanhedrin that is smaller than us can? Why can our

22. It was also for Boaz's benefit that Rus arrived just then. Hashem prepared a wife for Boaz to replace his, who had died. The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91.) states, "The day Rus...came to Eretz Yisrael, Boaz's wife died." Rashbam writes, ולא שמועין אתא שהקב"ה מקדים רפואה למכה ויש לו ל'אדם לבטוח בהקב"ה" "This teaches us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the *refuah* before the injury. [Boaz's future wife, Rus, arrived just before his first wife died.] We learn from this that one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

brothers go on Har Sinai and not us?" Also, the situation would generally upset the parents, too. "Why can't our children be on Har Sinai? People less than them go on Har Sinai!"

But it was for their benefit. The Tur (on *Chumash*) teaches that Nadav, Avihu, and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were punished because they lacked the proper *yiras Shamayim* when they stood on Har Sinai. The Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behaloscha 16) states, "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 drank.' ... ויאכלו וישתו is an analogy of a slave who eats his lunch as he serves his master. This was disrespectful, and they deserved to be punished.

Hashem didn't want to punish them on the day He gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael because the day of *matan Torah* was precious to Hakadosh Baruch Hu..." so their punishments were postponed to a later date.

Nadav and Avihu received their punishment when they entered Ohel Moed with their ketores, and a fire came forth and burnt them, and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were burned due to the sin of מותאוניים (see Bamidbar 11:1).

So, in retrospect, Elazar and Isamar understood that it was for their benefit that they were prevented from being on the mountain. Had Elazar and Isamar been on the mountain, it is likely that they, too, would die, and Aharon would have been left without children.²³

23. It states, עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא, "Go up to Har Sinai; you, Aharon, Nadav, and Avihu." The *taamim* (*trop*) of these words are קדמא ואזלא מונח רביעי. Perhaps this hints קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very beginning, אזלא, that people who go up on Har Sinai will be smitten and leave the world. מונח, therefore Hashem left over a

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

One of the mitzvos of Shavuos is aliyah l'regel – to be in the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal (*Pesachim* 8) say that only people who own fields must perform the mitzvah of aliyah l'regel. Those who don't own a field don't have this obligation.

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

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that the purpose

of aliyah l'regel is to increase our emunah in Hashem. Being in the Beis HaMikdash on the holidays improved Yidden's emunah in Hashem. Poor people don't need aliyah l'regel to strengthen their emunah. Their life situation of poverty forces them to continuously place their trust in Hashem. Only those who own property must go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year to learn that everything is from Hashem because they are at risk of forgetting.

Once again, we discover that something we think is negative is actually positive. Many think poverty is undesirable, but from the

remnant, רביעי, from Aharon's four sons. Because two sons went up and were *niftar* and the two sons who didn't go up survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וידבר שלושת אלפים משל "Shlomo told three thousand *mashalim*..." שלושת אלפים can also mean three א's. This refers to אהרן, אלעזר, איתמר, three people whose names begin with א. Initially, Aharon, Elazar, and Isamar didn't understand how it was good that Elazar and Isamar weren't allowed up. Later, they understood the great kindness of Hashem. Shlomo Hamelech used this as a *mashal* to teach people that everything is for the good.

mitzvah of aliyah l'regel, we see that poor people benefit greatly. They always remember Hashem. Similarly, we believe many things are negative but are, in fact, for our benefit.²⁴

Chesed

We discussed above that the primary message of the Torah is emunah. Another primary message of the Torah is chesed.

The Gemara (*Sotah* 14.) states, "The Torah begins with *gemilus chasadim* and ends with *gemilus chasadim*. It begins with (*Bereishis* 3:21) ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבשם, "Hashem...made for Adam and his wife shirts of skin and He dressed them," and the Torah concludes with (*Devarim* 34:6) ויקבר אותו, "[Hashem] buried [Moshe]..." The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* writes that this teaches us that the focal point of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.²⁵

24. Chazal (*Shabbos* 31.) call *Seder Zeraim* (the tractate of Mishnayot that deals with the laws of agriculture) emunah. What is the connection between emunah and *Seder Zeraim*?

We can explain it this way: Agriculture reminds us that even when everything seems lost, something good will sprout from it. When a seed is planted in the earth, the seeds rot, and it seems nothing will come from it. But these rotted seeds will sprout, and the field will soon be covered with produce. Similarly, we must believe that even when we go through hard times, something very special will sprout from it. It looks like a problem, but something very good will come from it.

25. When one picks up a new sefer and wants to know what it is about, he reads the first and last pages, and he understands the gist of the sefer. L'havdil, the Torah begins and ends with *gemilus chasadim*, which indicates that chesed is the primary message of the Torah.

The Midrash (*Rus Rabba* 2:14) states, "*Megillas Rus* doesn't discuss the *halachos* of טומאה or וטהרה or איסור והיתר. So why was it written? It was written to teach us the reward for those who do *chesed*."

This can also be one reason we read *Rus* on Shavuos; the message of the Torah is gemilus chasadim.

The first five of the Aseres HaDibros are mitzvos בן אדם למקום, our obligations to Hashem. The remaining five are בן אדם לחבירו, the mitzvos and obligations we have toward our fellow man.

There are far fewer words in the second luchos. To keep the two luchos symmetrical, points out the Mabit, the words on the

second לוח were written in larger letters than the first. Now, both luchos were covered with the same amount of writing.

Large letters attract attention. It is as if the letters are shouting. The mitzvos of *bein adam lecheveiro* draw more attention than the mitzvos *bein adam lamakom*, indicating that our obligations to our fellow man are even more critical than our obligations to Hashem.

The Rosh (*Pei'ah* 1:1) writes, 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."²⁶

26. Chazal teach us שכר מצוה בהאי עולמא ליכא, that we don't receive reward for mitzvos in this world. Chesed is an exception. We receive reward in this world, as it states in the Mishnah we say each morning, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא, and the Mishnah lists several examples of *chesed*. The Rosh (*Peiah* 1:1) explains this because "Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires more the mitzvos of helping your fellow man than the mitzvos that are solely for Hashem."

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 Tiferes Shlomo explained that he also wants to grow in *avodas Hashem* and that he also needs to go to his Rebbe.

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir explained that his role as a leader is to help others, even at the expense of his spiritual growth. He proved it from the following source: It states (*Shemos* 19:14) ויורד משה מן ההר על העם, "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people," 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? He wasn't a businessman! The answer is that the pasuk refers to Moshe's quest for spiritual growth. Moshe also wanted to prepare for *matan Torah*. He wanted time in solitude to sanctify himself and prepare for this holy 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 their community, even at the expense of their growth.

The Pele 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.' The *Zohar* writes, 'If a person is happy 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*. Give *tzedakah* in accordance with the amount Hashem gave you. Don't be satisfied with giving a little because you should give in accordance with your wealth. And after you help the poor, you can be happy and rejoice, and nothing bad will befall you, and there will be peace in your home."

Regarding Shavuos, 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."

Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "The obligation [to help the poor for *yom tov*] applies

for all holidays... [Nevertheless], the Torah writes the mitzvah about Shavuos because Shavuos is one day, while Pesach and Succos are seven and eight days. One might think giving *tzedakah* before Shavuos isn't as important as giving before the other *yomim tovim*. Therefore, the *pasuk* emphasizes that we shouldn't be lenient... We must give *tzedakah* for Shavuos, just as we must for all other holidays..."²⁷

One reason for this importance is that the message of the Torah is *chesed*, to help one's fellow man. So, when you accept the Torah on Shavuos, do so with a desire and plan to help your fellow man.

Unity

It states (*Shemos* 19:2) ויחן שם ישראל, "Yisrael

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

encamped... opposite the mountain. Rashi writes, "[The singular form of ויחן, instead of the plural ויחנו, denotes that they encamped] as one man with one heart, but all the other encampments were with complaints and with strife." So, when the Jewish nation came to Har Sinai, they were united. The Or HaChaim elaborates that unity is a prerequisite for succeeding in Torah study.

Unity is also a great help with our battle against the yetzer hara.

There was a chasid who was tempted to commit a severe aveirah but stopped himself when he realized that after committing the aveirah, he wouldn't be able to face his Rebbe anymore. But then he told himself he would commit the aveirah and stop going to his Rebbe. But then he said to himself,

"If I don't go to the Rebbe, I will miss seeing all my friends who go to the Rebbe. How can I miss meeting with all my friends?" That thought stopped him from the aveirah.

The next time he came to his Rebbe, the Rebbe said (with ruach hakodesh), "What a Rebbe couldn't achieve, the chassidim achieved." (Because the thought of not seeing the Rebbe didn't stop him from aveiros, but the thought of losing his friends saved him from the aveirah). This is an example of the good influence we receive from unity and having good friends. It is our strength against the yetzer hara.

Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l says that the הר, mountain, represents the yetzer hara (see Succah 52.). So, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר means that when the Jewish nation is united, they can conquer the yetzer hara.²⁸

28. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88.) teaches, "Hashem placed Har Sinai over the nation like a barrel and said, 'If you accept the Torah, all will be well. Otherwise, שם תהיה קבורתכם, 'you will be buried there.'"

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 940) states, "אתם נצבים, you are standing [and no one can harm you]. When? כולכם, when you are united... A child can break a single reed, but no one can break many reeds bundled together." When you are united, you are a force that the yetzer hara can't break.²⁹

The Beis Aharon zt'l once sat with his chasidim at a tish, and he told one of his followers to go outdoors and return to report what he saw.

The chassid returned and said, "I saw two drunkards walking down the street. One 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 one another, we won't fall!"

Unity helps us serve Hashem with hislahavus. When one piece of wood catches on fire, the fire will extinguish quickly. But if there are several pieces of wood and one of them catches fire, the fire can burn for a long time. Similarly,

It seems that it should say כאן תהיה קבורתכם, "you will be buried *here*," because they would be buried directly under the mountain. Why does it say שם תהיה קבורתכם, "You will be buried *there*"?

The mountain hovering over them like a barrel (כפה עליהם הר כגיגית) represents all Yidden joined together as one. Hashem told them that if one leaves this protective environment and goes alone, then שם, *there*, at that place, distant from the Jewish people, תהיה קבורתכם, will be your spiritual ruination because unity is our weapon against the *yetzer hara*.

29. We say after birchas hashachar, ולא תביאנו... לא לידי נסיון ולא לידי בזיון, "Don't bring us...to tests, neither to disgrace." Tzaddikim explain that it is either one or the other. If one doesn't pass the test, he ends up being disgraced. This awareness can help many people avoid sin.

being united with Yidden helps us serve Hashem passionately, with a hislahavus that doesn't weaken with time.

Chassidim are accustomed to eating and drinking a lechayim while discussing *avodas Hashem*. Chassidim consider these gatherings extremely important because it is a moment of unity, combined 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 financed their Chassidic gatherings.

Once, the coin sold for a very high price. The chassidim wondered whether they should use all the money for their gatherings 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 for his opinion.

The Beis Aharon replied, "There is nothing greater than when chassidim gather in unity to speak about *yiras shamayim...*" and advised them to use the money solely for that purpose.³⁰

30. Reb Shimshon Wertheimer *zt'l* was a great scholar, and he was also very wealthy and a close confidant to the emperor of Austria. Once, the emperor asked him why Yidden are persecuted more than all other nations of the world. Reb Shimshon replied, "They are being punished because of their hatred of their fellow man and jealousy of one another."

The emperor refused to accept that explanation. He told Reb Shimshon, "I give you three days to think this over. If you don't give me a satisfying answer, I will banish every Jew from Vienna."

That night, Reb Shimshon made a *שאלת הלום*, and in his dream, he

was told, "Don't retract your words because you answered correctly. Yidden suffer in *galus* because of hatred and jealousy. Soon, the emperor will recognize that you spoke the truth."

It was the beginning of the winter, a good time for hunting. The emperor went with a group of officials to the forest to hunt game. After a few hours, some officers went home, and the emperor and the rest of the crew remained in the forest.

Some more time passed, and it was almost dark when the officials decided it was time to return home. They called for the emperor, and when there was no response, they figured that the emperor must have left earlier with the first group of officials, so they also left the forest.

The emperor was still in the forest. He was so deeply involved in his hobby that he didn't hear them call him. When it began turning dark, the emperor called for his officials. When no one replied, he understood what happened. He couldn't find his way out of the woods in the darkness, so he wandered around the forest until he came to a river. He spotted lights on the other side of the river, so the emperor understood that there was a village there. Having no choice, the emperor removed his royal clothing, left his horse behind, and swam across the river.

The emperor arrived in the village dripping wet, and there was no sign that he was the king. He knocked at doors, but no one took him in. Some residents shouted, "Demon!" and locked the door.

Cold and exhausted, the emperor decided to look for a mezuzah. "The Yidden are a compassionate nation. They will open their doors for me."

He knocked at a door where there was a mezuzah, and he was invited in. The Jewish couple gave him a warm meal and a coat to wear so that he could warm up. He didn't tell them that he was the king of Austria because he knew they wouldn't believe him.

The wife suspected that their guest was a thief. She told her husband, "Send this man 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 the guest didn't steal anything.

In the morning, the emperor asked his host, "How far is Vienna from here, and how much does it cost to get there?"

The host replied, "I can drive you there for four forties (a currency)." The emperor agreed to the price and requested to wear the fur coat during the trip because he was chilled from the previous night's ordeal. His host agreed to that, as well.

His wife wasn't happy with these arrangements at all. She whispered to her husband, "I'm certain he won't pay you. He will kill you somewhere in the middle of the way and take your coat. Why do you trust him?"

But this Yid wasn't concerned, and he drove the emperor to Vienna. "Where do you want to get off?" he asked the emperor. The emperor said he wanted to be let off at the royal palace.

The Yid replied, "But we may not go there without permission from the emperor. We can get arrested."

The passenger replied, "Don't worry. I'm allowed to go there."

The Yid parked his wagon in front of the palace. The emperor jumped out of the wagon and went inside the palace. The Yid was shocked. "My wife was right. He didn't pay me for the trip and ran off with my fur coat."

He turned the wagon around to leave. It was dangerous to be on these grounds without permission. But an armed soldier blocked the way. "The emperor summons you," he said.

The Yid feared the worst as the officer led him into the palace and brought him to the emperor's chamber. The emperor said, "Do you recognize me?"

The king, dressed in his royal clothing, looked very different. "No. I never had the privilege to meet the emperor before," he stammered.

"But I know you," the emperor told him. "I even know what your home looks like." And the emperor described to him what his home looked like.

The Yid was shocked. "Who can compare to the emperor's wisdom!" the Yid replied.

"It isn't wisdom. I'm the person you saved last night. I didn't tell you that I am the king of Austria because I knew you wouldn't believe me, but that is the truth: I'm the king of Austria. I want to reward you because you invited me into your home when no one else wanted to, and you served me a warm meal and lent me a coat to wear. Ask for whatever you want, and I will give it to you."

The Yid stood before the emperor in silence. The emperor figured the Yid didn't understand the offer, so he said, "If you ask for a forest, I will give it to you. If you ask for an entire city, I will give it to you. Just ask what you want, and it will be yours."

The Yid was quiet.

The emperor said, "If you don't tell me what you want, I will pay you the four forties we agreed on, and that's all. Is there nothing in the world that you desire?"

The Yid replied, "Actually, there is something that I want. I'm a traveling merchant. I go from town to town selling my wares. Recently, someone began coming to the towns I go to, and he sells the same items I sell. He is taking away my parnassah. I request that the king issues 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 must know that your request is foolish. You lost a golden opportunity. You could have asked for so much more, but because of jealousy, all you care about is that your competition shouldn't make money."

The emperor summoned Reb Shimshon Wertheimer and said, "Now I know you are correct. The Jewish people are punished because of their jealousy and hatred."

Rebbe Meir of Premishlan *zt'l* would tell this story every year before reading the Torah on Shavuos morning. This is because to receive the Torah, we need love and unity. Jealousy and hatred are contrary to the basic tenets of the Torah.

The Joy of *Matan Torah*

Chazal (*Pesachim* 68:) say, "All opinions agree that one needs to enjoy [good food] on Shavuos because on this day the Torah was given to the Jewish nation." Rashi explains, "He should be happy with food and drink to show that he is happy with this day that the Torah was given."

The Gemara relates that Rav Yosef asked his family to prepare the best meats for Shavuos. Rav Yosef explained, "If it weren't for this day, there are many Yosefs in the marketplace." Rashi explains, "If it wasn't for this day that enabled me to learn Torah and to become exalted, there are many other people in the market whose name is Yosef, and what difference would there be between us?"

Maaseh Rav writes, "The Vilna Gaon zt'l was very happy on Shavuos, more than any other yom tov, and he put good foods on his table..."

In Kiddush and in Shemoneh Esrei we say, וְרוֹמַמְתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa zt'l translated the words as follows: מִכָּל הַלְשׁוֹנוֹת, all expressions of all languages won't suffice to express רוממתנו, how holy we became. No language is rich enough, and no prose is talented enough to describe the greatness Hashem granted Bnei Yisrael when He gave us the Torah.

Seder HaYom (*Shavuos*) describes the great joy of matan Torah. He writes, "One should be very happy on Shavuos because it's the day the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael... One's body should rejoice because one uses his body to study Torah and to perform the mitzvos... And the neshamah rejoices when it understands Torah because the neshamah's joy is solely learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos."

The Seder HaYom elaborates on all the good we receive even in this world from matan Torah.

He writes, "We aren't fools who don't recognize all this honor that Hashem gave us. The nations of the world turn to their *avodah zarahs* that can't help them, but this isn't the lot of Bnei Yisrael. Hashem watches over us always. 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 Hakadosh Baruch Hu's daughter... Whoever will marry and love His daughter, Hashem will certainly grant him a dowry of lots of money, and nothing will be lacking."

This Seder Hayom teaches us many beautiful lessons. Hashem loves the *avos hakadoshim*, He loves the Torah, and therefore, He loves us endlessly because we are descendants of the avos and we study Torah. The goyim turn to their *avodah zarahs*, which don't help them, but Hashem loves the Jewish nation, and He therefore watches over us constantly. He concludes

that just as a king will give wealth and royalty to the person who marries his daughter, the King will give wealth, royalty, etc. to the Jewish people who study Torah, which is Hashem's daughter.

This final idea can be compared to a wealthy person who interviews a young man to see whether he is a suitable match for his only daughter. In the middle of the conversation, the bachur asks, "If I marry your daughter, how much money will you give me?"

The wealthy father replies, "I heard that you are a wise bachur, but I see that you aren't wise. My daughter is my only child, and I am extremely wealthy. Obviously, you will receive a lot of money from me. So why do you ask for a dowry?"

The nimshal is that the Torah is Hashem's daughter. Whoever studies and cherishes the Torah will receive everything he needs.

There will be wealth, and nothing will be lacking.³¹

The Noam Elimelech (Mishpatim ד"ה לא תבשל גדי) writes, "On Shavuot, we have a leniency to eat meat after milk, without waiting the standard shiur (time period).

This is because Shavuot is the day we received the Torah, and we show that we are like the malachim [who don't wait between milk and meat]."

We don't know which leniency the Noam Elimelech

31. During the Holocaust, an elderly, wealthy Yid said to Reb Chaim Kreisworth zt'l, "Tomorrow, I will be sent to the gas chambers r'l. I will give you my bank account information. If you survive this war, please seek out my children and provide them with the information so they can withdraw the money from the account."

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

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim was talking to a poor person in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim, and Reb Chaim realized that he was the offspring he was looking for. Reb Chaim gave him the account number and the name of the Swiss bank that was given to him by the poor person's father.

This man was so poor he didn't even have 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 informed him that the account contained a fantastic sum of \$30,000,000.

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

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

is referring to. The *meforshim* are puzzled by it because, as it appears from halachah, Shavuos is the same as the rest of the year regarding milk and meat. Some say that the Noam Elimelech refers to those who wait twenty-four hours between milk and meat (see Chulin 105.), and on Shavuos, one doesn't wait so long. Although we don't know the halachic issue that the Noam

Elimelech is referring to, we receive his message that we are like *malachim* on Shavuos.³²

Tikun Leil Shavuos

The *Zohar* (vol.1, 8:) mentions the minhag to study Torah all night long on Shavuos:

"Reb Shimon and his holy students were singing the Torah and creating

32. The Imrei Emes (Likutim, Pesachim 68) also says we become like *malachim* on Shavuos. He proves this from the halachah (written Pesachim 68:) that Shavuos should be *הוצי לכם והצי לה*, half for enjoying good meals and half for Hashem [engaged in Torah and tefillah]. The question is, how does a human being know how to divide a day precisely in half? It states (Shemos 24:6) *ויקה משה הצי הדם*, "Moshe took half of the blood," and Rashi asks, "Who divided it [exactly in half]? A *malach* came and divided it." Because humans cannot divide things precisely in half, only a *malach* can. So, on Shavuos, how do we divide the day in half? The Imrei Emes answers that on Shavuos, we become like *malachim*, and *malachim* can divide with precision.

One year, after Shavuos, Rav Shach zt'l asked Reb Menachem Ziemba zt'l hy'd, "What did the rebbe (the Imrei Emes) say?" and Reb Menachem Ziemba told him this vort (written above) that he heard from the Imrei Emes.

Rav Shach replied that we can express it this way: After we spend half of Shavuos with *הצי לה*, we become like *malachim*, and we will know how to divide the day in half.

chiddushim [Shavuos night]... and they were very joyous. Reb Shimon told them, 'My children, you are fortunate because tomorrow the *kallah* [the Torah] will go to the *chuppah*³³ with you – and only with you – because you are making the *tikun* tonight, and you are rejoicing with the Torah... Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bless you with seventy brachos and

put a crown on your head... Whoever joins us on this night will be protected... the entire year. He will live the year in peace."³⁴

The *Magen Avraham* (494) writes, "The *Zohar* (vol.3, 98.) tells us that the early chassidim would remain awake the entire night of Shavuos and study Torah. This is the current custom

33. 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*?"

34. 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, when one is awake Shavuos night, he attains forgiveness for many severe *aveiros*."

The Yerushalmi says, "Don't read it עזרת תהיה לכם, read it עזרת תהיה לכם, which means, "Shavuos you will live." We can explain that one attains life from Shavuos because life is given to all those who study Torah on Shavuos night.

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 ישנה is *gematriya* שס"ה, representing the 365 nights a year that one sleeps. ולבי ער refers to the night of Shavuos when people remain awake. It is called לבי, for it is the heart of the year.

today for most Torah scholars. We can explain according to *pshat*: Bnei Yisrael slept all night [before matan Torah], and Hakodosh Baruch Hu had to wake them [to receive the Torah], as the Midrash tells us. Therefore, we must rectify this."

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Masechta Shavuos, Ner Mitzvah, 8*) quotes the following episode, as it was told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz (who composed the *Lecha Dodi*) *zt"l*: "[Shavuos night], we were studying Mishnayos. We completed two *masechtos*, and then Hashem granted us to hear a *bas kol* from Heaven that said, 'My beloved, righteous friends, peace to you. You are so fortunate. *Ashreichem!* You are fortunate, and your parents who gave birth to you are fortunate. You are fortunate in this world and the next world, for you devoted yourself to crown Me on this night. My crown has fallen years ago, and no one has consoled me since

then. I was thrown to the earth; I lie in rubbish. You returned the crown to its place! Be strong, My friends, whom I love. Be happy! Rejoice! You are exalted people... Your kol Torah rises before Hakadosh Baruch Hu and breaks through several 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 because 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 כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד...and they did so."

The Seder HaYom (*Shavuos*) writes, "On the night of Shavuos, one should remain

awake and study Torah all night long, (or, at least, you should study Torah most of the night)... Don't take this matter lightly because a person might be low and unimportant in one area and have amazing strengths in other ways. He sustains the entire world – and that is something that even the *malachim* can't do. He gives strength to Hashem, the Creator of the world... And, *chas veshalom*, [if one sins], he weakens the strength of Heaven 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 שבהדיוטות, 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 that the worlds should be rectified through me?' ... Such thoughts cause disaster – onto oneself and others – because [if he thinks

so], he won't be cautious with his deeds..."

These words contain an essential lesson, not solely regarding the night of Shavuos. We shouldn't underestimate our potential. Great things can happen through us. Even if we are simple, regular people in many ways, this doesn't mean we can't have moments of greatness. And on the night of Shavuos, when regular people like us stay awake and study Torah, we create great *tikunim*. Many blessings and salvations, *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*, come from this to us and all Yidden.

Some people have ענוה *פסולה*, the wrong type of humility. They think the *tikkun* that happens on this night is reserved only for great *tzaddikim*. But we have to recognize our potential.

We continue with the Seder Hayom's lesson:

"If he feels exhausted and has to sleep, he can sleep, but not [in a bed], so he won't sleep too long. And then he should quickly awaken and study Torah until daybreak. And then he should praise Hashem in the beis medresh [at Shacharis] 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!"

Reb Shalom Ber of Lubavitch *zt'l* writes that he has a note, handwritten by his grandfather, the Tzemach 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." Rebbe Shalom Ber *zt'l* added, "The Tzemach Tzedek was a *posek* and a *Rav*, so the way he rules in this world is how the *beis din* rules in heaven. 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 when one studies 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. Why is that?"

The *dayan* replied, "I wasn't planning to tell you, but since you asked, I will tell you. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* said that whoever studies the entire night of Shavuos without interruption (without היסח הדעת) will merit *giluy Eliyahu*, seeing Eliyahu HaNavi. When I was a yeshiva student, I studied in the Ksav Sofer's yeshiva in Pressburg and on Shavuos, the yeshiva students always strived to study Torah

without interruption Shavuos night to merit *giluy Eliyahu*. I also tried for many years, but I never merited *giluy Eliyahu*. Last night, I was learning a difficult passage in the Zohar; I couldn't decipher its holy words. Then, an elderly person, whom I'd never seen before, came into the beis medresh. He explained the Zohar to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes to figure out whether his explanation answered all my difficulties. When I opened my eyes, the man wasn't there anymore, and it was time to daven *Shacharis*. Now you understand why I'm so happy this morning."

Someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l whether he should remain awake all night on Shavuos. He explained that he knows that he will learn much more Torah over Shavuos if he has a regular night's sleep.

Reb Shlomo Zalman replied that although he had a valid point, he should

nevertheless study Torah all night. 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 customs. *Lomdim* worldwide keep this custom; if you don't, your children and wife will think you are acting incorrectly. Therefore, I advise you to keep the *minhag*, even if it is hard" (*Halichos Shlomo* 12, note 13).

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*. He was the son of Count Pototski, who was renowned for his immense wealth. When his son became a *ger*, it was an embarrassment to the church. Reb Avraham ben Avraham was arrested and murdered *al kiddush Hashem*, *hy"d*.

Becoming a Jew meant forgoing his father's vast wealth. Someone once asked him why he did this. How could he forfeit so much wealth? He answered, "Friday night, when the Shabbos oil lamps go out, they give off a scent. That smell is more enjoyable than all the wealth I had previously enjoyed."³⁵

The *ger tzedek* knew who reported him to the government (which ultimately led 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?"

He explained with a parable:

A young prince was at the beach, building the image of a person in the sand. Someone came by and broke the sculpture. The

prince cried to his father, complaining that someone had broken his artistic work. The king listened to his son but didn't do anything. The prince was surprised that his father was so calm and relaxed. To the prince's young mind, a terrible crime was done. He thought, "When I grow up, I will take revenge on this person." And what happened when the prince became an adult and a king? He didn't take revenge because he realized it was nothing. "Similarly," Reb Avraham ben Avraham explained, "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 (using spiritual powers) to save him, but the *ger tzedek* replied that he

35. Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l* would tell this story and expressed that Yidden from previous generations relished every part of Shabbos, even the smell of the Shabbos lamps extinguishing.

preferred to die *al kiddush Hashem*.

Reb Alexander Zuskind *zy'a*, the author of *Yesod Veshores* *HaAvodah*, ventured out 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'Shores* *HaAvodah* to be there 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 the *ger tzedek's brachah*, the world would have reached its perfected state, and *Moshiach* would have come. Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach 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.

Fire

Many *pasukim* and sources mention the fire that was on Har Sinai. For example, it states (Devarim 4:11) *וההר בוער באש עד לב השמים*, "The mountain was burning like fire until the heart of the heaven." And it states (Shemos 19:18) *מפני אשר ירד עליו ה' באש*, "because Hashem has descended [on Har Sinai] with fire."

Ramban (Devarim 4:9) writes, "You mustn't forget the *maamad* Har Sinai [how it appeared when we received the Torah on Har Sinai. You mustn't forget] all the things your eyes saw: the sounds, the torches, Hashem's honor and greatness, and His words that you heard emerging from within the fire."

The Tur (Orach Chaim 47:7) writes that in birchas haTorah, when we say אשר בחר בנו, "We should think about maamad har Sinai, that Hashem chose us from among all nations and brought us to Har Sinai. We heard His words through the fire, and he gave us His holy Torah, which is our life, and His precious utensil, which He had pleasure with every day."

There is an emphasis on remembering the fire on Har Sinai. The Beis Aharon zt'l explains that the Jewish nation had hislahavus, a strong desire to receive the Torah, and to meet with Hashem at this special time. Their strong fiery desire for Torah drew Hashem down onto the mountain.

Hashem gives us the Torah every year again, and therefore, we should do our part and fill our hearts with a fire of hislahavus.

Chazal (Shabbos 88.) tell us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu held Har Sinai above the

nation, as it states ויציבו בהר, "They stood under the mountain." Hashem told them, "Accept the Torah, or you will be buried here."

Tosfos asks that the nation had already said נעשה ונשמע, "We will do, and we will hear!" So why was it necessary to place the mountain over them and to force them to accept the Torah?

Tosfos answers that Hashem knew that when they saw the fire on Har Sinai, they might be afraid and change their minds. Therefore, Hashem raised the mountain above them and forced them to receive the Torah.

However, why couldn't Hashem have removed the fire from Har Sinai? Why did the fire need to be on Har Sinai and risk scaring off the nation from receiving the Torah?

The answer is that there needed to be a fire on Har Sinai. The only way to

receive the Torah is with hislahavus. Without hislahavus, it is impossible to receive the Torah.

The Midrash (Tanchuma, Ki Sisa 31) explains that the first luchos were given in a very open, public manner (with fire, thunder, lightning, etc.), and therefore, they were broken. The second luchos were given in a tzanua, concealed manner, and consequently, they remained intact. The Midrash concludes, "This teaches us that there is nothing more beautiful to Hashem than tznus."

The Sfas Emes (Ki Sisa, 5639) asks: If Hashem loves tznus, why did Hashem give the first luchos in a revealed manner?

Furthermore, Hashem knows the future. He knew that by giving the luchos in a revealed manner, they wouldn't survive. So why

did Hashem give the first luchos in a revealed manner?

The Sfas Emes replies that this was the first time that Hashem was speaking with the Jewish nation, and He was giving them the Torah! At such a time, the only way to give the Torah was with hislahavus. It is impossible to establish the beginning in a concealed, silent manner.

We quote the Sfas Emes: "If it weren't for the hislahavus at the beginning, with great revelation, it would be impossible to give the Torah in a concealed manner afterwards. However, once the Torah was given with קולי קולות, in a loud voice, it was then able to be given in a concealed manner. And this is a lesson for all generations. You have to begin with great hislahavus, even if the hislahavus won't last..."³⁶

36. When a person prepares a cup of coffee, he boils water to the highest degree and then makes the coffee. But he won't drink the coffee when it is so hot; he will wait until it cools off. So, why

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 17:5) states, תחילה מפלה שינה, "The beginning of a downfall is sleep." Literally, this means that a person must be busy with work or learning Torah. He can't laze and sleep. Laziness breeds failure.

We can add that sleep alludes to coldness and lack of hislahavus. This attitude leads to people's downfall. Hislahavus is the key for accepting and succeeding in the pursuit of the holy Torah and mitzvos.

Tefillos on Shavuos

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said that the galus is so long because people rush through the *brachah* of אהבת עולם. If we spent more time on this *brachah* and recited it with more devotion and

concentration, the galus would end. Some shuls follow this counsel every day, and אהבת עולם can take them five minutes, and many batei midrashim say אהבת עולם in this manner on Shavuos.

In the beis medresh of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zt'l*, the *brachah ahavas olam* took hours and was said with much *hislahavus*.

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 like that.³⁷

doesn't he initially cook the water to the degree at which he plans to drink it? It is because if it isn't boiling at the beginning, when you make the coffee, it won't taste good. This is a *mashal* to the need to begin with hislahavus. The hislahavus may cool off with time, but there must be hislahavus at the beginning.

37. Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* began davening early on

Shavuos morning and finished late in the afternoon. Almost the entire day was spent in *tefillah*.

In Ropshitz, the *tefillah* was from 4:00 to 4:00. (We don't expect this from people of our time; we just request that it shouldn't be from 4:00 to 5:00.)

One year, 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 don'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. If we don't devote ourselves to Torah study after Shavuos, 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 are *mechutanim* with the Torah.

And who is the *chasan*? The one who goes home with the *kallah* after the *chasunah* is the *chasan*. 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.

A wealthy fool paid a lot to get a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He would walk down the streets with his son-in-law to show his friends what he proudly called "My *nachas*."

Someone asked him, "You're always speaking about how special your son-in-law is, but what about your daughter? Is she also special?"

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

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

The wealthy man replied, "For years, I watched wealthy people

One of the Rebbes of Munkatch (*Shaar Yissaschar*) *zt'l* writes, נוהגים הצדיקים החסידים להאריך בברכת אהבה רבה ביומא דשבועות ההג הקדוש הזה, "Tzaddikim say the brachah at length on Shavuos."

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

The Pele 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

וילמד לשמור ולעשות, that they will learn Torah, teach it, and keep the Torah."

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg *zt'l* said it is impossible to tell a true chiddush in Torah unless one has *kavanah* when he says *ahavah rabba* and אתה חונן in Shemonah Esrei.

A student asked, "I said a good chiddush 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 *chiddush*, but Rebbe Shmelke showed him that the *chiddush* was faulty. Because it is impossible to say a true Torah *chiddush* without *tefillah*.

proudly walking around with their scholarly sons-in-law, so I also wanted a son-in-law who is 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 puts on new clothing... They want to be the *chasan*... but they mustn't forget that they don't have anything without the *kallah*, which is the Torah.

And when you daven for success in Torah and all other areas of ruchniyos, don't be stingy and don't count your words. Ask for a lot because Hashem can give you whatever you ask for. It states (*Tehillim* 81:11), הרחב פיך ואמלאהו, and Rashi translates it, "Open your mouth wide, ask for all your hearts desires, ואמלאהו, and 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 it to you.

Sefer Chasidim (131) states, "If someone davens

for something that will increase Hashem's praise – such as 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 are closed." Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said this is solely when requesting worldly matters. But when one davens for ruchniyos, the gates are open.³⁸

38. Reb Menachem Rikanti *zt'l* yearned and pined to know Torah. For this purpose, he fasted many days and davened with all his heart. But he was born with a weak mind and wasn't succeeding in Torah. Nevertheless, he never gave up. He fasted, davened, and tried with all his might. When he was in his eighties, he dreamed 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, renowned throughout Klal Yisrael.

The Chazon Ish *zt'l* taught that we shouldn't lose hope in a child's ability to grow in Torah. The Chazon Ish explained that when his grandmothers lit the Shabbos lecht, they davened that their

Tehillim, Tefillah, and Torah

Shavuos is the *yahrzeit* of Dovid HaMelech. The *meforshim* say that Shavuos is also Dovid HaMelech's birthday because *tzaddikim* are *niftar* on the date they were born. This is one of the reasons we read *Megillas Rus* on Shavuos. The final words of *Rus* is וישי הוליד את דוד, "Yishai gave birth to Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on the day Dovid was born.

The Ben Ish Chai (*Bamidbar* 6) recommends saying *Tehillim* on Shavuos. He writes, "It is important to say *Tehillim* on Shavuos because Dovid HaMelech *a'h* was *niftar* on this day and the *Tehillim* said on this day will be more accepted

in heaven. 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 stated in the *Yerushalmi*)... *Tehillim* that one recites on this day will be answered."

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 בשירותו ותשבחות*, she had a descendant, Dovid HaMelech, who will make Hashem satisfied and content with his songs and praises." Yet, Dovid was *niftar* on Shavuos, on a day for Torah. The *Chidushei HaRim zt'l* says this is to tell

descendants should succeed in Torah. And the moment these *tefillos* are 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 weak mind, and when he reached the other side of the road, he became wise and sharp, and able to understand Torah because that was the moment that the *tefillos* were answered.

us that Torah and tefillah are connected and dependent on one another.

The Beis Aharon of Karlin zt'l said, "Polish Yidden love learning Torah, and so do we. The difference is that we say (*Megillah* 28:), שמעתתא בעי צילותא, which can be translated as, 'Learning Torah needs *tefillah*'. 'It is impossible to succeed in Torah without *tefillah*. And it is impossible to daven properly without Torah.'³⁹

We understand that to succeed in Torah, one needs tefillah, but why does tefillah need Torah? One reason is because Torah gives us joy and places us in the right frame of mind for tefillah.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 31.) says, אין עומדין להתפלל... אלא מתוך, "One only stands

up to daven... after studying a halachah." The poskim (Bach, Levush) explain that this is because Torah makes us happy, as it states (*Tehillim* 19:9) פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, and this helps us be in the right mood to daven.

Another reason is that tefillah is more beautiful to Hashem when associated with Torah. Hashem loves Torah, and when the tefillah is based on Torah (such as when one studies Torah before the tefillah), the tefillah is more precious to Hashem.

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'... יקראוהו באמת, 'Hashem is near...to those who call Him with truth' it means that Hashem is near

39. It states (*Shemos* 18:20) והזהרתם אתהם את החקים ואת התורות. The *pasuk* is speaking about teaching Torah, but *Targum Yonoson* says the *pasuk* refers to tefillah. He translates the *pasuk* as follows: ותהודיע להון ית צלותא דיצלוון בבית בנישתהון "Teach them the tefillos they should say in the beis knesses." So, the *pasuk* refers to both Torah and tefillah. This is because Torah and tefillah go together.

to listen to the tefillos of those who call out to Hashem with Torah. And especially on Shavuos, which the entire day is a day of Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for *tefillah*."

Matan Torah

The Rambam (Igeres Teiman) writes, "Remember Har Sinai because Hakadosh Baruch Hu commanded that we must always remember it. He forbids us to forget it and He obligates us to teach it to our children. Raise your children with the story of this great moment of matan Torah and speak about this wonder before many people because it is the pillar of emunah."

Therefore, let us briefly discuss some of the wonders that occurred at this special time.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 29:9) states, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah, the birds didn't chirp and they didn't fly. The oxen didn't groan, the sea was

still, people didn't speak. The entire world was silent and Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, 'I am Hashem your G-d...'"

The Gemara (Zevachim 116.) states that when Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah, His voice was heard throughout the world. Kings of the nations panicked. They came to Bilaam and asked, "What are these loud sounds that we hear? Is a flood coming to the world?"

Bilaam told them that Hashem was giving the Torah to bnei Yisrael. "Hashem has a precious item in his treasury, it was hidden with Him for 974 generations before the world was created, and He wants to give it to his children, as it states (Tehillim 29:11) ה' עוֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִהְיֶה, "Hashem will give might [the Torah] to His nation.' They all replied, ה' יְבַרְךָ אֶת עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם, 'May Hashem bless His nation with peace.'"

Teshuvah

The Gemara (Shabbos 89.) states that after matan Torah, the Satan went to Hashem and asked, "Where is Your Torah"?

Could it be that the Satan didn't know of matan Torah? When Hashem gave the Torah, His Shechinah came down onto Har Sinai, and Hashem opened all seven heavens, and the entire world knew about it. The malachim gave presents to the Jewish nation, and even the Satan gave a gift to the Jewish nation. So, why did he ask, "Where is Your Torah?"

My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zt'l answers that the Satan's question is directed to the Jewish nation, and he asks the question every year to every Yid. He asks, "You received the Torah a year ago. Where is that Torah that you received? It doesn't seem that you are studying it or keeping its mitzvos." With these words, the Satan

tries to discourage the Jewish nation.

But we must know that we can always do teshuvah. We can repent and improve. This year, we can truly receive the Torah.

Most foods become ruined when they spoil, but milk becomes an even better product when it spoils—it becomes cheese. On Shavuos, we eat cheese and milk products to remind ourselves that even if one sinned and spoiled his ways, he can always do teshuvah and receive the Torah. There is still hope for him.

Chazal (Niddah 9:) tell us *נעבר ונעשה חלב*, "blood becomes spoiled, and turns into milk." The origin of milk is blood, which transforms itself and becomes milk. It is forbidden to eat blood, so why is it permissible to drink milk? It must be that when it turns into milk, the blood disappears. The Brezhaner Rav zt'l says that this symbolizes teshuvah. When we improve our ways,

there remains no sign of our past sins.

The Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:5) states, "By all *korbanos* it states שׁעיר עיזים להטאת, a goat for a sin-offering.' But by the *korbanos* of Shavuos it states שׁעיר עיזים להכפר עליכם, 'a goat for atonement.' חטא isn't mentioned because, on Shavuos, no one has sins. Hakadosh Baruch Hu tells Bnei Yisrael, 'Since you accepted the yoke of Torah, it's as though you never sinned your entire lives.'"

The Torah writes (*Shemos* 19:4) "ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים", "I carried you on eagles' wings." The Yismach Yisrael (*Yisro* 6) explains that an eagle sheds its feathers and grows new ones every year, as it states (*Tehillim* 103:5) תתחדש כנשר, "Become new, your youth, like an eagle." Rashi writes, "Like an eagle that replaces its feathers and hair yearly." Similarly, the Torah tells us that Hashem carried us on eagle's wings to remind us that we should constantly change and not

remain stuck in our old ways.

The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 65.) tells us that when one gives a present, he gives it generously. Therefore, if someone has a well on his property and gives it to his friend as a gift, we can assume that together with the well, he also gave him a pathway in his field so that he can get to the well. The Chidushei HaRim zt'l (*Shavuos*) says that Hashem gave us the Torah as a gift, and therefore, we can be sure that Hashem gave it to us generously and included a path that one can take to reach and attain the Torah.

A Life of Kedushah

Hashem told Moshe (*Shemos* 19:10) וקדשתם היום ומחר, "Sanctify them [the Yidden], today and tomorrow." This is man's obligation in this world, to live a holy life filled with Torah and mitzvos.

We will explain this idea with a mashal:

A man once left a chasunah hall, and late at night, he remembered that he had forgotten something in the hall. So he returned to the hall to search for the lost item. The hall was messy, with leftover food scraps and dirt on the floor. It was dark, and the furniture was strewn around. It was hard to believe that this room had a beautiful event just a few hours earlier. He thought, "If it ends up being so messy, what is the purpose of making such a luxurious celebration?" But then he told himself, "A wedding took place in this hall, where a chasan declared הרי את מקודשת לי. This makes the mess and state of disarray all worthwhile."

The nimshal is that at the end of a person's life, he will be placed in the grave, and within a short time, nothing will remain of him other than dirt and bones. But if there was *kedushin* in his lifetime (he lived a life of kedushah with Torah and mitzvos), then his life was worthwhile.

However, if there wasn't any kedushah in his life, one can ask, what is the purpose of it all?

The Kedushas Levi (Likutim) discusses the letters סעפ"צ (these are the letters in order of the alef beis). The letter ס is closed from all sides, and the letters פ ע can be translated as עי"ן פ"ה, eye and mouth. One should keep his eyes and mouth closed from things he shouldn't see or say, and then he will be צ, a צדי"ק.

Another hint to this concept is from the pasuk (Shemos 19:23) הגבל את ההר וקדשתו, "Make boundaries around the mountain and sanctify it." הגבל את ההר can be explained as follows: Take the letters that border with the letters ה"ר. The letters before and after ה are ד and ו. The letters before and after ר are ק and ש. So, we have the letters that spell קדו"ש. This hints that by הגבל, making boundaries and precautions, one becomes holy.

A bachur had to leave his yeshiva in Yerushalayim and contemplated going to a yeshiva in Tel Aviv. He asked Rebbe Shlomke for counsel. Rebbe Shlomke went to the mikvah (it was his custom before offering advice) and said, "I cannot answer this question."

A couple of years later, Rebbe Shlomke asked his gabbai, Reb Elyah Roth zt'l, to find out what happened with that bachur. Reb Elyah returned to Rebbe Shlomke and said that the bachur went to the yeshiva in Tel Aviv and was doing very well there and growing in Torah and yiras Shamayim. Rebbe Shlomke said, "I am so happy and relieved to hear that." He explained that when he went to the mikvah, he saw with his ruach hakodesh that it was good for the bachur to go to Tel Aviv, but "I couldn't take the responsibility on my shoulders." Shemiras einayim in Tel Aviv is challenging, and he felt he couldn't answer the question.

This story is marvelous because Rebbe Shlomke answered all types of questions, including matters of life and death. Still, a question that would put a bachur's shemiras einayim at risk was too difficult to answer.

It states וירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחוק, "The nation saw and trembled, and they stood from a distance." The Apter Rav zt'l (ד"ה וירא, Ohev Yisrael, Yisro) explains that the nation was worried about how they would succeed in keeping all the mitzvos. They found a solution, ויעמדו מרחוק, that they should keep their distance from an aveirah. The Apter Rav writes, "They found a strategy, that they should protect the words of the Torah and the mitzvos with gates and boundaries that Chazal establish. This is the translation of ויעמדו; they gave the mitzvos the ability to exist and to stand, מרחוק, through the gates and boundaries that Chazal established."