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MAY THE LEARNING IN THIS NEWSLETTER BE A ZECHUS FOR THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF OUR FAMILY IN ERETZ YISRAEL. IT SHOULD ALSO BE A ZECHUS FOR A COMPLETE REFUAH LEEBA MIRIAM GEULAH BAS LEAH.

THIS ARTICLE IS DEDICATED BY THE LIDSKY FAMILY FOR THE SHEMIRA OF CHAYLEI TZAHAL

SHAVUOS 5785 INSIGHTS BY HARAV ZISHA KOHN: HASHEM HAS A PERSONALIZED RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH ONE OF US

As we approach the incredible Yom Tov of Shavuos – otherwise known as *Zman Matan Toraseinu* (Time of Giving the Torah) – there a are few interesting points that we need to consider. One of the differences between Shavuos and the rest of the Yamim Tovim is that the rest of the holidays have a specific date. For instance, Rosh Hashanah is the 1st of Tishrei, while Yom Kippur is the 10th of Tishrei, and Chanukah is the 25th of Kislev. Shavuos is the only holiday that doesn't have an independent date. This is because no month or day is specified in the *Torah* as the time of its celebration, but only that it is the "Fiftieth Day" of the counting of the *Omer* (see Vayikra 23:15-16) the counting which begins on the second day of *Pesach*.

As such, if Rosh Chodesh is 29 days or 30 days – it changes the date of Shavuos (either the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan). (Note: this doesn't apply nowadays when we have a fixed calendar). The first question we must raise is why Shavuos doesn't have its own date on the calendar? Since Shavuos is *Zman Matan Toraseinu*, it should have a set date, either the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan. It must be pointed out that the Shavuos date is dependent on the Karbon Omer. The day we bring this Karbon Omer, offering of barley, is when we start counting those 50 days. This is what we do nowadays, as well, when we count, "*Today is the first day in the Omer*…" After we count 49 days, we finally arrive at Shavuos, which is the climax of these days of counting the Omer. It turns out that the Omer is very influential in determining the day of Shavuos. What, then, is the message and lesson of the Omer for us?

Another thing we must ponder is that in a way, Shavuos is the continuation of Pesach. As the Ramban (Vayikra 27:36) writes: Pesach is like the first days of Yom Tov, Sefiras Haomer is like Chol Hamoed, and Shavuos is like the second days, so there is a very strong connection between the three. How are we to understand this? The Gemara (Bava Kama 83a) tells us that if even one Jew had been missing at the time the Torah was being given, Hashem would not have given the Torah. Why was it so important that there was perfect attendance? Also, we know that every Yom Tov has its Mitzvah (e.g. Esrog, Matza, Shofar) – why is it that Shavuos has no Mitzvos associated with it?

There is the eating of cheesecake, of course, which is the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of *lachem* (to have physical pleasure on the Yom Tov), but nothing else. Finally, there is a dispute whether Yom Tov is meant for spiritual or physical pleasure, but everyone agrees that when it comes to Shavuos, there is a Mitzvah to have physical enjoyment. This seems strange; shouldn't the day of the Torah giving be utilized only for learning Torah? Why is physical enjoyment such a central focus of this exalted day?

To understand, let us quote a story related by **Rabbi Yechiel Spiro** (in "One for the Books"). In May 2023, **Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky**, shlita, may he have a Refuah Sheleimah, suffered a debilitating stroke. For Rav Shmuel, eating became difficult, as he had to relearn how to use his less-dominant hand to eat and do other tasks. One day, a talmid (student) visited Rav Shmuel and saw how difficult it was him to put a cherry tomato onto his fork and instead, it fell to the floor. The talmid bent down to pick up the cherry tomato and put on Rav Shmuel's plate. The gabbai motioned to the talmid to leave the tomato, relating that Rav Shmuel previously had asked not to help. Rav Shmuel explained his request. He related that before caller ID was invented, he had to pick up every call, even from those who were difficult to speak to; Rav Shmuel would listen.

After his wife passed away, they got Rav Shmuel a phone with caller ID and all the calls were screened. No longer did Rav Shmuel have to sit through as many challenging callers. Then, he realized that he no longer had an opportunity to work on his Middah of patience as he did before. "Now, if I let other people help me with small annoyances," Rav Shmuel said, "where will I get the chance to work on my patience?" This gabbai said, "We sometimes things get frustrated when we must go out of our way for someone and take care of their needs. However, if we want to grow and become a better person, I should embrace these opportunities." We can now understand that although the Torah was given on a specific date, we are not just celebrating that anniversary. Rather, we are reliving that acceptance, and that needs a very specific preparation and realization. The introduction to *Kabbalas HaTorah* (accepting the Torah) is knowing who we are, who we can become, and what following the Torah can make of us.

SHAVUOS INSIGHTS BY RABBI ZISHA KOHN – HASHEM HAS A PERSONALIZED RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OF US

As the Pasuk says (Shemos 19: 5-6), Hashem told Moshe, "If you obey Me and keep My covenant, you'll be to Me a treasure out of all peoples; You shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation." This means that Hashem was telling Moshe, "Don't tell the Jews to keep 613 rules; rather, when one accepts to keep the Torah, they will become a person of greatness." Now, we can understand how the climax of Pesach is Shavuos. On Pesach, we say that every single person needs to see themselves as if they went out of Egypt. If one speaks about how the Jewish nation went out of Mitzrayim, he does not fulfill the requirement of the Haggadah. He must speak about how HE went out of Mitzrayim. We all must do shake lulav; we all must learn Torah; we all must do Chesed, but on Pesach we need to make it a personal Mitzvah.

On Shavuos, we got the Torah. The first of the ten commandments states: "I am the L-rd your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Rashi points out that Hashem said in singular form. Pesach, Sefiras Haomer, and Shavuos all symbolize one idea of realizing that we got lucky to be born Jewish and as such, left Mitzrayim and got the Torah. Rather, Hashem personally chose exactly who would be going out, as $4/5^{\text{th}}$ of the Jews didn't make it out and not everyone got the Torah. That is the lesson of Shavuos. If one of the Jews were not at Har Sinai, Hashem would not have given the Torah – this is because He didn't give the Jewish nation the Torah; rather, He gave it to each Jew personally.

There is an unbelievable story (in the same work, "One for the Books," p.78). There was a sewing room in the Auschwitz concentration camp where rows of skeletal women sat hunched over sewing machines, stitching for hours on end with the constant threat of violence hanging over them like a suffocating fog. The Nazi women who patrolled the room were ruthless, their eyes scanning every movement, every stitch, ready to pounce at the smallest mistake. Among the women in this sewing room was Hinda, a young woman whose once vibrant spirit had been reduced to a frail shadow.

One day, her body could endure no more. Her hands floundered at her machine, the stitching came to a halt, and she collapsed onto the cold, hard floor. The Nazi officer descended upon her like a predator. A storm of blows rained down on Hinda's fragile body, and when the guard finally tired of her barbarism, Hinda's motionless form was carried back to the barracks and laid gently on the wooden planks that served as their beds. She was dying; there was no question about it. She wouldn't survive more than a few hours.

Suddenly, a faint murmur escaped her cracked lips: "Soup... soup..." The evening soup had just arrived: a thin, watery gruel that was more an insult than sustenance, but it was all they had. To give even a sip to Hinda, whose death seemed inevitable, would mean less for the rest of them. Then Rochel, a young woman who had become an unspoken leader among them, stepped forward, her voice carrying a strength that rose above their dire circumstances.



"It is true," Rochel began, "we may not be able to save her life. But if we withhold the soup, we will lose something far greater: Our neshamos. The only way we can hold onto what makes us human, to the image of Hashem within us is by giving away what we so desperately need. So no, we may not save her life. However, we will save our own." The women looked at one another, their eyes brimming with tears. Slowly, one of them ladled a small portion of her soup into a bowl. Another followed, and then another, until they had enough to offer Hinda.

They brought the bowl to her, gently coaxing her to eat, spoonful by spoonful. Each drop was an act of defiance against the cruelty that sought to strip them of their humanity. Each sip was a declaration that their neshamos were stronger than their captors' hate. Hinda passed away the next morning, but in her final hours, she became a vessel of kedushah, a means through which her fellow prisoners could reclaim their dignity and sanctity.

This is the Jewish people. This is why the Omer is so influential to the day of Matan Torah. Hashem made it rain and made the crop grow, but as the **Chinuch** tells us, the Mitzvah of Karbon Omer is based on gratitude. Hashem didn't just allow the crops of the world to grow, and a person is part of the world – rather, each person must realize that Hashem made his specific crop grow. One can't enjoy that year's new crop (*chadash*) until they bring the Karbon Omer and say, "Thank you, Hashem, for caring about me, for You created the world for me".

We must count and remember the Omer for 49 days with this refrain, so when we come to Shavuos, we sit down at the meal so we can express our gratitude for this special gift that Hashem granted me, the gift of Torah which builds and molds us and turns us into a kingdom of Kohanim. The calendar is quite favorable to us this year, as we go into Shavuos out of Shabbos and Sunday and not huffing and puffing on a weekday. We can stop for a moment and think before Shavuos, during the "three days of preparation." Shavuos is not a specific day on the calendar, but a culmination of days of gratitude for all that we were gifted, and the Torah is above all.

This is a gift not only to Rabbanim or Talmidei Hachamim but a personal gift to every single Jew in our nation. We can take the Middah that those women had in the camps – of realizing that sacrifice and giving is the ultimate gift of life and how we can grow to become great, or the one from Rav Shmuel of seeking to have positive traits. B'Ezras Hashem we should be zoche to remember that Torah is the gift of life itself.

Last week's question: Every year, Parshas Bamidbar is read before Shavuos. What message is there in this Parsha that doesn't discuss the Giving of the Torah to ready ourselves for this special Yom Tov?

Answer: Let's understand first what this Parsha discusses. The Parsha opens (Bamidbar 1:2): "Take a census of the whole Jewish company [of fighters] by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head." There is a Mitzvah to count the Jews in every tribe from 20 years (see ibid. 1:3). However, there is one tribe that was not counted with the rest of the nation, Shevet Levi, as it says (ibid. 1:49): The Levi'im were not recorded among them by their ancestral tribe. The tribe of Levi had their own counting, as it says (ibid. 3:16): "Record the descendants of Levi by ancestral house and by clan; record every male among them from the age of one month up." The Torah adds (ibid. 3:39): The Levi'im that were recorded - all the males from the age of one month up, came to 22,000."

Rashi writes that the Levi'im were the army of Hashem, so they should be counted on their own. However, the **Da'as Zikeinim** (ibid. 3:39) explain that this number corresponds to the number of angels that formed Hashem's entourage (22, 000) when He descended to Mount Sinai on Shavuos. These 22,000 Levi'im corresponded to the angels. What is the connection between these? Regardless, we see a correlation between the angels at Har Sinai and the Shevet Levi counted in our Parsha.

Shevet Levi are the representatives of Hashem, and they are elevated from the rest of the nation. Furthermore, the **Rambam** (Hilchos Shemittah and Yovel 13:12): "Why did the Levi'im not receive a portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael and in the spoils of war like their brethren? Because they were set aside to serve Hashem and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large in His just paths and righteous judgments; Therefore, they were set apart from the world. They do not wage war like the rest of the Jewish people, nor do they receive an inheritance, nor do they acquire for themselves through their physical power. Instead, they're Hashem's legion, as (Devarim 33:11) states: "Hashem has blessed His legion."

Why can't they have some land? The Rambam answers: "Because as it says Bamidbar (18:20) states that Hashem said to the Levi'im, "I am your portion and your inheritance." Even though living in the land of Israel will see one experience great miracles and Hashgacha Pratis (Divine Providence), when one owns property/land, it shows they are their own in the effect of them living in the natural world. In the Desert, the Jews lived in an existence that superseded nature. They were eating Mann and sitting under the Ananei Hakovod (Clouds of Glory) – they didn't have a normal life. Their house and their food in the desert were not of this world.

This is exactly what Shevet Levi had – no place of their own to live in, secure in their lives. When one sits in their own house/car there's a level of separation from Hashem. Shevet Levi was with Hashem and that's why they couldn't have any real estate. This is what an army of Hashem means – they are going around with Hashem, like an army goes around with their general, not sitting in their own house.



That sounds very nice and inspiring, but what does it have to do with us today? We do have Shevet Levi, but they're not Kohanim. Kohanim are great, but we don't know them as a Shevet. The answer lies in the Rambam (ibid. 13:13): "Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him and he understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before Hashem to serve Him and minister to Him, proceeding justly as Hashem made him, removing from his neck the yoke of the many reckonings which people seek, he is sanctified as holy of holies. Hashem will be His portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world, like He provides for the Kohanim and the Levi'im."

There are two ideas we can get from this. One is, anyone can be part of the army of Hashem and live in a way that is elevated; that their *Parnassah* (livelihood) is set for them. We should all aspire for that. When Shavuos comes, there is an army of Hashem that is separated by Him. Anyone can join that army, which should truly be valued. The second idea is that we should take pride and appreciate those very special people who sit and learn Torah all day (as well as the Rabbeim and Rabbanim).

These giants separate themselves from the rest of the world, who are not busy working but are busy learning. There are people, as we see from the Rambam, who are able to do that. Even though it may be hard for some of us to understand how people can survive without working, we must realize an important idea. The Rambam, the **Chafetz Chaim**, and the **Shulchan Aruch** state that those who want to learn and are dedicated to the cause will not have to go out to work.

They are part of the army of Hashem and as such, they are a completely different individual. Let's show our appreciation to such people, as the rules of the rest of the world don't apply to them. When one realizes that, one can go into Shavuos with this choice: be part of the world or be part of the special people. Let's choose wisely!

This week's question: What is a way to connect to the entire avodah of carrying the Mishkan that the levi'im, Gershom, Kehas, and Merarri did. It seems so irrelevant to us in modern times? In this week's Parsha, Bamidbar, the Torah tells us about the census. Moshe is commanded to go around with Aharon and a prince from every tribe to count Klal Yisroel. Moshe does not count the Levi'im among the rest of the tribes; rather, the Levi'im are counted separately. The Torah then speaks about where each shevet camped. Once the Levi'im were counted, the placement of their tribe in the encampment is also listed. We see (Bamidbar 3:29), "The families of the children of Kohath would encamp on the side of the Mishkan to the south."

There is an insight we can glean from **Rashi** on this Pasuk. Rashi (ibid.) tells us they were located next to the tribe of Reuven who was also camped in the south. Rashi explains that this ended up to their detriment through the concept of "woe to the evil one and woe to his neighbor." Some members of the tribe of Reuven, having been encamped next to Kohas, got involved with Korach. Rashi tells us they were drawn into the fight by just being nearby. This is an insight we can apply to our marriages. If righteous people can be affected detrimentally by being in close proximity to a fight, how much more should we be careful about who we associate with.

Do we regularly bring random video clips into our homes and sit on our couch to watch something cute without giving thought to the potential negative exposure we are absorbing? We might call this activity relaxing, but what effect does this have on us? Rashi is telling us that the effect is huge.

Our marriage is sacred, and we want to be careful not to absorb values or ideas that are the antithesis to our Torah values. We want the relationship with our spouses to be *kodesh*, and strengthening our connection can achieve this goal. How can we instead strengthen our connection practically? We can make sure to carve out quality time every day. We can think about small actions that will make our spouses day sweeter, like writing them a card of appreciation, baking their favorite dessert, filling their car with gas, taking on an errand or giving them a hand with childcare.

We can communicate with our spouse that we would like to do something for them and ask them to tell us what they would appreciate most. Just as Rashi points out to us that being near negative influences is detrimental, the flip side of that coin is being in close proximity to kedusha is going to have a positive effect on us. Learning something like a halacha a day with our spouses can also deepen our connection to each other and to the Torah.

Giving careful thought to everything and everyone with whom we are in contact might be difficult, but the dividends are worth the effort. May Hashem deepen our connection with our spouses and ensure that we are successful in bringing positive influences into our homes. May our homes shine with the light of Shalom Bayis!

Rabbi Greenfield, MS MFT, is the author of the Torah marriage toolbox course. Create more Shalom Bayis in your home by visiting Torahmarriage.com or you may email him at rabbigreenfield@gmail.com

THIS ARTICLE IS DEDICATED BY CHANA PEARL and SHIMON GERSHKOWITZ - In merit of seeing Yiddishe Nachas and Yiras Shamayim for all future generations. May we continue to be zoche to see our family grow in Avodas Hashem and Shmiras HaMitzvos. Dedicated in honor of Nechama Shulamit, Zacharia Isaac, Chava Ettel, and David Moshe





DELICIOUS DVAR BY RABBI DOVID ORLOFSKY PARSHAS BAMIDBAR: WHERE WE BELONG



We start Sefer Bamidbar, the book of numbers (in fact, the Gemara in Sotah refers to it as the Sefer Pekudim, the book of accounting). This is the story of setting up the camp the Jews had in the Midbar (Desert). At Matan Torah, we learn that Hashem opened the Heavens above and the Jews were set up in four camps in four directions (as we say in the Bedtime Shema - Michoel be at my right, Gavriel at my left, Uriel before me, and Raphael behind me). Each one of the sides were ruled by an arch angel and his host, and they saw the angels have flags. Then, they said, "we want to live like Malachim (angels)."

Rabbeinu Bachye writes that the name of the Nasi who is listed in the middle always ends with *El* (like Michoel, Gavriel, Uriel, and Raphael) – names like Shlomiel and Gamliel. As such, the name of the person mirrors, to a certain extent, the idea of an archangel. As they set up the camp in the direction they selected (which was also significant), they each got flags.

Our sages describe what was on the flag of each tribe. For instance, Reuven had the *dudaim*, while Shimon had the city of Shechem depicted on his. To this day, some shuls still have the 12 pictures on the Aron or on the windows of these images from the tribes' flags. Each picture symbolized the strength of that particular shevet (tribe). What was the purpose of this?

On the modern-day battlefield, we have communication devices like walkie-talkies and the more fancy gadgets, but back in the day, how did the soldiers on the field get each other's attention in the midst of battle? Someone would rally and lift their tribes' flag, and all those people lost in battle would re-orient themselves and return to their respective camp. As such, a flag is a symbol for us to know where to go and where we belong. That is a *degel*. The flag is up on a pole for everyone to see. Rashi writes at the Akeida that *Hashem nos es Avraham* – He tested Avraham. A flag is also a banner/pillar so that everyone can see why Hashem was going with Avraham Avinu.

Each and every one of us also has a flag. However, we must figure out what's on our flag, what our rallying point is, and where we will come together who we are — as people, as a family, as a community, and as Klal Yisrael (the Jewish nation). B'Ezras Hashem, we should find our place in the *Machaneh* (camp).

This article has been dedicated by Yidi Derdik as a Refuah Sheleimah for Matisyahu Yeshayahu Ben Chana Chinka and Simcha Avrohom Ben Chana Chinka

CHIZUK BY RABBI YANIV MEIROV BAMIDBAR – THE CROWN OF TORAH



The Torah was given in the Midbar (desert)? Was there no fancier or more respectful place to give the Torah? Many answers are given, but we will discuss two. First, we know that the desert is endless, and so is the reward for Torah study. Hashem gives us many opportunities to earn rewards through the Torah. **Rav Shimshon Pincus**, ZT"L, tells us the second reason. The Midbar is ownerless; the Torah is also not owned by a single individual. Anyone can come and grab it. The Torah is also compared to fire and water, which like the desert, are all free.

The Torah is free, and all are invited to come take part in it. The Sages tell us there are three crowns. One crown is the one of Malchus-kingship (for the Davidic dynasty). The second crown is the crown of *kehunah* (priesthood, only for Aharon's descendants). The third crown is the crown of Torah, and everyone has access to it. As we near Chag Shavuos, we are told the message that if we want, come and give it all we got and acquire the Torah. We should all merit to grow in Torah and Mitzyos!

<u>SUGAR RUSH ON THE 613 MITZVOS BY R'ELI</u> <u>REIT MITZVAH # 165 -YOM KIPPUR</u>

On Yom Kippur, we are forbidden to do work that is forbidden on Shabbos. As the Pasuk says (Vayikra 23:32): "It is a double Shabbos for you". Work on Yom Kippur carries the death penalty of "koreis" by heaven but not the death penalty of Beis Din (stoning ordered by a court of the Jewish people).

Accidentally doing work requires a "chatos" sacrifice in the Beis Hamikdash. Normally, on Yom Tov there is permission to do work for the preparation of food, but this is not the case on Yom Kippur.

SUCCULENT SHORT BITES ON PARSHAS BAMIDBAR BY RABBI MEYER FRIEDMAN

"Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying..." (Bamidbar 1:1)

Rashi writes that Hashem constantly counted the Jews in the wilderness out of His great love for them. Just as a jewel merchant counts his precious wares over and over again to make sure that he has not lost any of them, so does Hashem value and love each individual of His chosen people.

Rabbi Yechiel London, ZT"L, points out that the first Rashi of every sefer in the Torah discusses Hashem's love for the Jewish people. The beginning of a sefer generally serves as an introduction to what is contained in it. Hashem's love for the Bnei Yisrael is an important theme throughout Chumash and serves as the introduction for each of its five books.

"These were all the counted ones of the Children of Israel, according to their fathers' house, from twenty years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the army in Israel" (ibid. 1:45)

The **Ramban** asks: Why was it so important to know the exact population of the Jewish people? If the purpose of the counting was to separate the people into separate encampments by tribe, it would have been enough for them to present their lineage without keeping a tally of how many members there were in each tribe.

The first answer that the Ramban offers is that perhaps it was important to publicize the kindness of Hashem that he multiplied them from seventy people to a large nation of 600,000. In this way, the counting is a praise of Hashem and a proclamation of the kindness that He performed for us. Another answer is that the counting required each person to pass before Moshe and Aharon and personally introduce himself to them.

Moshe and Aharon would bless each person whom they counted. This teaches us the concept of greeting tzaddikim and obtaining their blessings. The blessing of a righteous person has great strength and should not be taken lightly. The same holds true of the blessing from the Kohanim that we receive each Yom Tov. The Gemara writes: "The blessing of an ordinary individual should not be light in your eyes." Certainly, we should not underestimate the value of Birchas Kohanim or a blessing from a righteous person. Therefore, it is important for one to go to a tzaddik for a blessing and bring his children along.

A third explanation for the necessity of counting is that every individual was counted. They did not merely ask each head of household how many family members were in his house. Rather, each individual over the age of twenty had to personally appear before Moshe and Aharon. This taught every Jew the importance of the individual. The **Shelah** writes that the counting uplifted each person because every individual realized his importance in his own right. The power of the individual is not to be downplayed.

The **Rambam** writes that a person must view himself as having exactly half Mitzvos and half *aveiros* (sins) and the entire world also as exactly half and half. As a result of the equilibrium, every act that a person does, for good or bad, can tip his own personal scale and that of the whole world accordingly.

Every person has a tremendous capability and responsibility. We are living in a world where people fail to recognize that they can make a difference on their own. When a person realizes his capabilities, he will act in a more serious and responsible manner.

"Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before Hashem in the Wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children; but Elazar and Isamar ministered during the lifetime of Aharon, their father" (ibid. 3:4)

Rav Dovid Feinstein, ZT"L, says that the fact that they did not have children is not just mentioned here as a side point but is in fact one of the causes for their deaths. What does this mean? He explains that the dependents a person has stand as a protection for him against punishment. There are times when a person will be deserving of retribution but will not be punished right away because his children or other dependents do not deserve to suffer because of him.

However, Nadav and Avihu did not marry. Thus, when they brought ketores into the Kodesh Kodashim, they were immediately punished. Had they married and started a family, perhaps they would not have been killed on the spot. This idea does not only apply to immediate family but also manifests itself in other ways. When a person is active in his community and is needed or if he has an impact on the lives of other people, he will be protected because others are reliant on him.

"For every firstborn is Mine: On the day that I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified for Myself every firstborn in Israel, from man to beast; they shall be mine - I am Hashem" (ibid. 3:13)

The **Meshech Chochma** points out the emphasis of the Pasuk on the idea that "every firstborn is Mine." The privilege of the firstborn to perform the service was clearly given with a stipulation that they would remain faithful to Hashem. When they strayed from the proper path and worshipped the golden calf, they were no longer faithful to Hashem and lost that special privilege to the Levi'iim.

If we dedicate ourselves to Hashem in all aspects of our lives and remain faithful, we will merit to be blessed by Hashem, whose blessings are dependent on our faithfulness to Him. When we stray from the correct path, we may lose these blessings. We see this in the story of Chanukah. When the people became lackadaisical in their service of Hashem, the Greek persecution began, and they lost the freedom to be able to do the Mitzvos in peace.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shabbos and Yom Tov!

SHAVUOS: ENGULFED IN THE TORAH'S FRAGRANCE BY RABBI M.D. WEISS

The Gemara (Shabbos 3a-3b) tells us that Rav asked Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) a certain question on a topic that Rebbe was not involved in at that present time. Rebbe Chiyah (Rav's uncle and an elder student of Rebbe) chastised Rav, saying: "Haven't I told you that when Rebbe is studying one Mesechta do not inquire of him regarding a different Mesechta as you may embarrass him if he does not answer correctly?" To us, this seems difficult to comprehend. How is it possible that Rebbe, the greatest of his generation, the author of the Mishnah, would possibly not be able to answer a question in a Mesechta other than the one he was currently studying?

Rav Yitzchok Hutner, ZT"L, (*Pachad Yitzchok*, Shavuos, Maamar 9) tells us in the name of the Rishonim that this is actually an indication of Rebbe's greatness in Torah. This is because the greatness of an individual obligates him to be fully involved engrossed and engaged in the Mesechta that he is studying to the degree that there is no room for him to focus on any other Mesechta. Actually, on the contrary, if it is easy for a learner to "jump" from one topic to the next, this is an indication of lack of proper involvement in what he is studying.

Rav Hutner tells us that this concept is actually rooted in Matan Torah. The Gemara (Shabbos 88b) describes to us various happenings during the greatest event of history, Matan Torah. One of the things we are told is as follows. Every *dibbur* that Hashem spoke caused the entire world to be filled with a special fragrance. The Gemara asks: if this is so (that it filled the entire world) how was there any room for the next dibbur? The Gemara answers that Hashem brought a special wind that removed the first fragrance, thus making room for the following dibbur.

We see from here that when one dibbur was present, it filled the entire world and there was no room at all for another dibbur until Hashem brought a special wind to remove the previous one. Now, explains Rav Hutner, all events of Matan Torah were not events of history that took place then only. Rather, they represented and set the stage for the essence of how Torah is to be studied throughout all the following generations.

Therefore, just as by Matan Torah, each dibbur filled the entire world (leaving no room for the next), so too, when one studies Torah, the topic at hand should fill the entire essence of his *Neshama* leaving no room for anything else. Thus, we can understand why Rebbe was not to be asked about a Mesechta that he was not presently studying. Now, if involvement in Torah study means to be so engaged that it becomes difficult to focus even on other areas of Torah, how much more so must one see to it that he is not involved during his Torah learning in things other than Torah. For if one expects to have some measure of success in Torah growth, he must disengage from all else. An obvious and common distraction is one's phone. One should try not bring it with him to the Beis Midrash or at least turn it off while studying.

The **Shelah HaKadosh** writes (Mesechta Shavuos, 30b) that every year, on Shavuos, one is judged whether he has applied himself properly to Torah study and keeping Mitzvos properly. If Hashem sees that this Shavuos we commit ourselves to learn with fewer distractions, we will - *Be'ezras Hashem* - merit a favorable judgment. May we be zocheh to much success in our Torah growth which will surely result in success in all else!



<u>MEANINGFUL LIVING BY MICHAEL SZPILZINGER:</u> <u>SHAVUOS – WHAT'S IN YOUR MILK?</u>



Shavuos famously is a time that many have a Minhag to eat dairy. Some do it as a zecher for the fact that before Matan Torah, the laws of proper *Shechitah* (slaughtering) were unclear. Having a dairy meal avoids this issue altogether. Other sources indicate that the proper method is to have a meal which starts with dairy and then switches to meat mid-meal. Since this necessitates having a second piece of bread in between, it creates a "*Shtei HaLechem*" effect, which is a *zecher* for the special Korban of Shavuos.

Whatever your Minhag is, it's good to have a sense of the impact dairy foods have as part of our overall health. When milk and health are brought up the first thing on many minds is lactose. There is a significant percentage of people who are lactose intolerant or sensitive to lactose. Therefore, consuming milk and dairy can cause all kinds of discomfort and difficult reactions. If you are one of these people, then the rest of this column doesn't apply. If not, read on!

Benefits - As we have mentioned in the past, Hashem created us with a need for many vitamins and nutrients and created the world with many sources of these nutrients. With many of these components, it's about getting them in the right balance and not in excess. Milk is one of those items that has lots of key vitamins and minerals but needs to be in the right balance. Here are the key ones:

Calcium – is necessary for bone development and fortification

 $\it Vitamin\ D-$ is needed for calcium absorption and therefore also needed for bone health. Also boosts immunity and brain cell health

Potassium – maintains blood pressure

Protein – supports muscle growth and repair
 Phosphorous - performs many functions but primarily
 supports bones and teeth

Sounds pretty good right? Before you load up on the milk and cheese, you also need to know that there are some other considerations: 1. Many dairy products are high in saturated fat, which has been linked to heart disease. 2. Milk and other dairy items have natural and sometimes added sugars which can contribute to unhealthy weight gain and dental issues. *Takeaway* - This brings us back to the concept of balance. The experts recommend that healthy individuals have as much as three servings of dairy per day. This will ensure a base level intake of the nutrients we mentioned above without too much of the harmful stuff. Reduced fat dairy products along with getting the key nutrients from other sources can also help stay at healthy levels.

PERSPECTIVES ON PIRKEI AVOS BY RABBI SHLOMO LANDAU – CHAPTER 6: THE PROPOSAL

Several years ago, a woman approached me who was friendly with a Hollywood producer who was looking to do a reality show about an Orthodox Jew (preferably a Rabbi). This lady felt that I was the perfect candidate; I lived with a large family in a Kiruv community. We had many experiences with many people at our Shabbos table from different backgrounds coming together. I was a teacher, and my wife worked at the local school — these were the requirements, so for "sensationalism reasons", they made an offer, which I obviously declined.

However, the producers offered to sweeten the deal when they offered financial compensation, and a payment system based on commission. "Before you reject the proposition," they said, "please consider this incredible opportunity. The show has great potential." Regardless, I still said no, but I did come home and chuckled with my wife about the prospects of Hollywood following us. The reason I recall this story is that I was not the first person who had such a proposal and perhaps the money that was to be earned was substantial, which would have been very resourceful funds.

One of the times an incredible offer was made in history was the one made to Rabbi Yossi Ben Kisma. The Mishna (Avos 6:9) writes that: "Said Rabbi Yosi Ben Kisma: I was once walking on the road, when a certain man met me. He greeted me, "Shalom," and I responded: "Shalom." He said, "Rabbi, from which place are you?" and I said to him: "I am from a great city of scholars and sages." He said: "Rabbi, if you live would with us in our place, I will give you a million dinars, gold, silver, precious stones and pearls." I replied: "Even if you give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I will dwell only in a place of Torah..."

The proposal was very straightforward. The people of that community wanted Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma to become the Rabbi. They would likely put him up in a nice home with a great salary and material possessions, but he relented and explained that he would never dwell in a place with no Torah scholars.



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"I've considered your proposal, and I'd like to add the following amendment... No."

Perhaps, he would have considered the offer if he would make a spiritual impact. However, one of the turn-offs, the commentaries, was that the man who made the proposition immediately said, "If you're going to move to us, we're going to give you tens and thousands of pearls and precious stones." If that was the language and currency, he realized, it was not his currency. His priority was spirituality, Torah and Mitzvos and that's where his heart was at. As such, this offer was dead on arrival.

This Mishnah should give us pause. We should ask ourselves, "What are we willing to trade and what would we trade it for?" Are there certain things in our lives that are so precious to us that we find them to be non-negotiable? How much is our Torah and Mitzvos worth to us? Putting my family on display for the world to see was akin to taking the Queen's crown jewels in England and putting them out for all to see. That cheapens them. My family is more precious than all the money in the world.

King David (Tehillim 119:72) states: The Torah of your mouth is good for me than all the gold and silver in the world. If our value system is spiritual currency, then we can buy eternity. However, if our value system is material, those things don't come with us to the next world, so why invest in temporary stock? Let's buy stock in those things that can give us Eternity.

Rabbi Shlomo Landau is the North American director of Olami Mentors and a sought-after lecturer and storyteller. For over two decades Rabbi Landau was the rabbi at Torah Links of Middlesex County; a welcoming community in East Brunswick, NJ.

He has also been a beloved teen educator for close to twenty years. Rabbi Landau's inspiring and warm personality coupled with his seemingly never-ending repertoire of remarkable stories has endeared him to audiences across the globe.

WHY WAS MATAN TORAH ON SHABBOS? BY RABBI BINYOMIN RADNER

The Gemara (Shabbos 86b) says there is a *machlokes* if the Torah was given on the 6th or 7th of Sivan, yet everyone agrees the Torah was given on Shabbos. The **Mishna Berura** (Hilchos Shabbos Siman 290:1) quotes the Midrash which says that Shabbos is the Chavrusa of the Torah. Hashem comforted the Torah that even after the Jewish people enter the land of Israel and would be busy working in their fields from Sunday to Friday, Shabbos will be free of all work and will be reserved for studying Torah.

The reason why Hashem gives us the day of Shabbos Kodesh is so we can rest from work and instead bask in the delight of Shteiging in the Torah without distractions. **Rabbi Sruly Borenstein** cites **Rav Shimshon Pincus**, ZT"L, (in Nefesh Shimshon) who explains that greeting and receiving Shabbos and escorting the Shabbos with *Melava Malka*, is strictly something found with Shabbos. We do not find this concept with Yom Tov or with any other Mitzvah of greeting and escorting. Shabbos is a personality in and of itself, akin to the Shechinah; so, it is only befitting and proper for the Torah to be given on Shabbos.

The Brisker Rav, ZT"L, (Parshas Yisro) says this is why Hashem instructed the Jewish people to wash their clothes and prepare themselves for Kabbalas HaTorah - because it would take place on Shabbos when we greet the Shechina. Harav Hagaon Yitzchok Sorotzkin, Shlita, related a story in his fiery Drasha at the Dirshu Siyum on July 5th, 2024 which celebrated the completion of Mishna Berura Chelek Bais, as well as the commencement of Hilchos Shabbos with Mishna Berura Chelek Gimmel): "When the Chofetz Chaim, ZT"L, finished writing the Mishna Berurah, he invited numerous talmidei chachomim to come and celebrate with him a seudah for a whole week. The Chofetz Chaim made a seudah for a weeklong! On Sunday, the siyum and seudah was on the first chelek of Mishna Berurah. On Monday, the second chelek of Mishna Berurah, and they would discuss different halachos related to that chelek of Mishna Berurah. When they finished the seudah of Erev Shabbos Kodesh on sixth chelek of Mishnah Berurah, everyone, including the Chofetz Chaim, thought that they had finished.

To their surprise, after Shabbos davening, the Chofetz Chaim told everybody from the siyum that he wants them to come to his house. When they arrived the Chofetz Chaim said to them, "I'm sure you're wondering why I called you together when we already finished the siyumim on all the chalakim of the Mishnah Berurah." He answered, "What should I do? Shabbos itself came to me and said I should make another siyum especially for Chelek Gimel and Daled, which discuss Hilchos Shabbos on Shabbos itself." So, he made another siyum on the chalakim of Hilchos Shabbos.

Now, when Gedolei Yisroel would say over this story, they would say from here we see that Shabbos is a *metziyus* — a personality which has its own demands from us. May we be zoche to be mindful of and internalize this message of the Torah being given on Shabbos. Let us take advantage of the long summer Shabbosim to increase our study of the Torah in quality and in quantity! *Wishing Everyone A Gitten Fraylichin Yom Tov!*

SHORT AND SWEET STORY OF THE WEEK BY YONI SCHWARTZ

The **Steipler Gaon,** ZT"L, was once going through a tough time financially. He ended up getting in touch with and working alongside Rabbi Dardack from Cleveland, who offered to help sell his seforim in America. When Rabbi Dardack received the first shipment of seforim, he began learning them and wrote down any questions he had. After a few months, when the seforim were sold and he was sending back the money to the Steipler, he included all his questions on the seforim. When Rabbi Dardack received the next shipment, he also received the answers to all his questions. This cycle went on for years.

Later in life, the Steipler stopped selling seforim and responding to letters due to his old age. Nevertheless, he always pushed himself to respond to Rabbi Dardack. However, since he didn't have much money, he would bring his letters to the house of Mr. Dardack, Rabbi Dardack's father, who lived nearby and would then send them to his son. One time, he brought over a letter, returned shortly after asking for it back, and then came back again with a newly written one. Mr. Dardack asked if there was a mistake in the first letter. The Steipler responded, "No, I didn't change a word."

Curious, Mr. Dardack then asked why he rewrote the letter. The Steipler responded, "Normally, I don't write letters anymore. However, I don't want your son to think that I don't care to respond now that I don't need his help anymore. So, I pushed myself to write the first letter, despite it being difficult. However, I wrote it in a rush, like it was a burden. I wanted to rewrite it properly, with *hakaras hatov* - not because I must respond to him, but because I want to."

Comment: In Bamidbar, we learn about Bnei Yisrael's census. Though we may be just one person among many, to Hashem we are each counted, each valuable, and each precious in His eyes. our deeds may seem small, but Hashem counts each one and always appreciates them.

SUGARY SAYING OF THE WEEK BY RABBI MENACHEM LOMNER

"We must do our part, and Hashem will do the rest."

Hashem told Moshe to count the Jews from the age of twenty years. However, the Levi'im he had to count from the age of 30 days. Moshe asked how he could count the little babies if he really shouldn't be entering their tents. Hashem told Moshe to do his part. So, Moshe went to the entrance of the tent and a *Bas Kol* announced how many children there were. What's important for us is that we are expected to put in the effort but even if we can't finish the job, we get the reward as if we did!

INSIGHTS INTO MEGILLAS RUS - THE ROAD TO HEAVEN IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS BY R'HARRY ROTHENBERG

"Wherever you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live, your people shall be my people, and your G-d my G-d."

(Megillas Rus 1:16)

Rus' conversion is so stirring and iconic that we learn certain *halachos* of *geiros* from the scene – first attempt to dissuade the potential convert; then, embrace them once their desire to convert is firmly established. Yet, the seemingly simple question as to when Rus converted is trickier than it seems. If Rus converted during that scene, then how can we understand the later scene in Megillas Rus when Boaz tells *Ploni Almoni* – a closer relative than Boaz to Elimelech – that if Ploni wants to redeem Elimelech's field, he must also marry Rus – the widow of Elimelech's son Machlon? (ibid. 3:12 and 4:5.)

If Machlon had married Rus before she converted and then she converted after his death, there would not have been any <code>zika/yibum</code> attachment to Machlon that would have required Ploni to marry her! Therefore, she must have converted before marrying Machlon, creating the attachment to her husband prior to his death. if she converted before marrying her Jewish husband, then how could Naomi have told her (ibid. 1:8) and her sister Orpah to "turn back to your mothers' house"? Worse, how could Naomi have told Rus after Orpah decided to return (ibid. 1:15): "See, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Go follow your sister-in-law"? No one would tell a giyores to return to her gods after the death of her Jewish husband. Therefore, Rus must have converted after the death of her husband. How can we resolve this thorny catch-22?

Rav Uziel Milevsky, ZT"L, suggested the following solution. Rus and Orpah surely converted before marrying their Jewish husbands (hence the later *zika* attachment that forced Boaz to offer Ploni Almoni the opportunity to marry Rus). Yet, Naomi had no way of knowing whether Rus and Orpah had converted due to a sincere desire to accept the Torah and join the Jewish people or as a desire to marry her wealthy sons. Before taking them along with her back to Israel, she had to test them.

Orpah retroactively showed that her conversion was one of convenience and insincere; she left to write her tragic history as the ancestress of Golios (Goliath). In sharp contrast, Rus showed that she had always been sincere and went on to become the great-grandmother of David HaMelech after marrying Boaz. What lessons can we learn here? First, we do not know what people are thinking. Rus and Orpah – princesses, sisters, sisters-in-law – both convert. To the naked eye there is no difference, but we see later from their actions that they had vastly different intentions that lead to dramatically different outcomes. We should never assume that we know why someone else did something. Extend the same benefit of the doubt that you would want and expect if you did something that seemed insensitive or worse.

Second, our intentions continue to matter long after our actions are over. Sin and then later go through the three stages of teshuva - recognition, regret, and resolve not to repeat the act, and the sin retroactively disappears. But the opposite is also true. Do a Mitzvah and then regret it (why did I give so much to that charity; that favor was harder than I expected; they didn't even say thank you, etc., etc.), and the Mitzvah similarly disappears retroactively. We should therefore never regret doing a Mitzvah.

Third, Hashem keeps track of our thoughts. Rus, sincere throughout her journey to Judaism, is rewarded as the ancestress of David HaMelech and eventually, Moshiach. Our thoughts are similarly important. As the Torah tells us (Devarim 28:47): terrible things will happen because we "did not serve G-d with happiness and joyful hearts." Even if we are observing the laws of the Torah, that is not enough.

We must serve Hashem with happiness. Others may not notice, but Hashem, who is privy to our innermost thoughts, knows the difference between rote service and Mitzvos done with enthusiasm and passion. Like that of Rus, our legacy is ours to write.



