

## **Crowned Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Shavuot may be the shortest of the Shalosh Regolim but its impact is immeasurable. For on this one day (or two, in chutz la'aretz), we remember and relive the special occasion which defines us: the giving of the Torah. This is the day for which the world was created, when Heaven touched Earth and a nation found its purpose. While our footsteps once led to the Beis Hamikdash, our hearts still ascend year after year toward that same sacred encounter at Har Sinai.

"Kofah aleihem har kegigis." Chazal tell us that Hakadosh Boruch Hu, so to speak, held Har Sinai over the Jewish people and told them that either they accept upon themselves to study and observe the Torah or He would drop the mountain upon them and they would be buried alive.

Many explanations are given for why Hashem forced them to accept the Torah under the penalty of death. One of the many is that the world was created for Torah and for the Bnei Yisroel to accept it. If they would not agree to study and be governed by the laws of the Torah, the world would cease to have a purpose and would be returned to its original inert state.

The path was laid by the avos, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and passed on to the shevotim and to their children. In Mitzrayim, their offspring grew exponentially, but sank to levels of depravity that endangered their ability to continue their glorious heritage.

Before they reached the point of no return, Hashem redeemed them, miraculously removing them from Mitzrayim. They went to the Yam Suf to escape the clutches of decadence and immorality and began the trek back to the hallowed land of their forefathers.

After 49 days of preparation, they were ready to fulfill their destiny and accept the Torah. They proclaimed the immortal words, "Naaseh venishma," accepting upon themselves the Torah's obligations and, by doing so, setting the world on its proper trajectory.

At that moment, Klal Yisroel proclaimed that although they were mortals fashioned of flesh and blood, they were willing to live on a higher and loftier plane, with the Torah as their guide.

Malochim objected to the notion of giving the Torah to humans, but after the Bnei Yisroel demonstrated their worthiness, the malochim placed crowns on their heads (Shabbos 88a). There are different interpretations as to what the crowns consisted of, what their significance was, and what they accomplished. Most likely, they did not resemble the adorable golden paper crowns that children wear to celebrate Shavuot and the receipt of their siddurim and Chumoshim, but those crowns keep the message alive and remind us of the heights we reached and can still attain even in our day.

Shavuos contains the power and potency evident on the day the Torah was first given to us. Every year, on Chag Mattan Toraseinu, the gift that was first given at Sinai is regifted to those who have undertaken the proper preparations and made themselves worthy. Even in our day, when tumah is all around, it is possible to live a life of kedusha.

The further a person is removed from Torah, the more he is affected by tumah, silliness and ideas that weaken his inherent goodness.

The Meshech Chochmah at the end of Parshas Yisro writes that until Matan Torah, people were only able to serve Hashem through ruchniyus. When the Torah was given, acts that were previously purely gashmiyus and physical were invested with kedusha. With the acceptance of the Torah, people were empowered to sanctify themselves and all human needs and instincts.

That is why Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu at the s'neh, the burning bush, "Shal ne'alecha mei'al raglecha – Remove your shoes from your feet." He was saying, "Remove the vehicles for your gashmiyuslike physical lives as you approach Me."

After Matan Torah, Hashem told the Jewish people, "V'anshei kodesh tihiyun li—And you shall be holy people" (Shemos 22:30). It's a powerful instruction that reveals something essential about our identity and mission. Hashem did not ask us to become malochim. The Torah does not expect us to transcend our human nature. Instead, it teaches us to live fully human lives, while elevating ourselves with holiness.

We are meant to be people: working, building, raising families, maintaining relationships, facing challenges, and experiencing growth. But as we do so, we are expected to live as anshei kodesh, human beings who sanctify our lives through the Torah.

This concept lies at the heart of Shavuos. On this Yom Tov, we celebrate not only the giving of the Torah, but the idea that Hashem gave it to us flawed, growing, learning human beings. The Torah wasn't given in the heavens, but here on earth. It wasn't meant only for the spiritually elite, but for everyone: the busy parent, the student, the worker, the neighbor, the friend. Torah is a guide for life in this world, for people who strive to elevate the physical through the spiritual.

In fact, the Gemara points out something unique about Shavuos. While there is a machlokes regarding how other Yomim Tovim should be divided between spiritual pursuits (laShem) and physical enjoyment (lochem), on Shavuos, "hakol modim deba'anan nami lochem—all agree that there must be an element of lochem, of physical enjoyment." This is not a contradiction to holiness, but a celebration of it. On Shavuos, we demonstrate that even our physical desires can be influenced, refined, and uplifted by the Torah.

Chazal (Pesikta Zutrasa, Va'eschanon) teach us: "Chayov adam liros es atzmo ke'ilu mekabel Torah miSinai," every person is obligated to see themselves as if they are receiving the Torah today. We are all familiar with this directive regarding Yetzias Mitzrayim. In fact, a central theme of the leil haSeder is to perceive ourselves as if we were let out of Mitzrayim. On Shavuos, we need to view ourselves as if we are receiving the Torah.

Imagine if today were the day you stood at the foot of Har Sinai.

Imagine hearing the voice of Hashem, the thunder, the lightning, and the indescribable awe as the Aseres Hadibros echoed through the universe. Imagine feeling your neshomah and entire being rise,

connecting to something far greater than yourself. Imagine walking through the wilderness, day after day, step by step, growing closer to your purpose, until you are finally standing at that mountain and hearing the truth that would change everything.

Now imagine your life without Torah. No mitzvos. No davening. No Shabbos or Yom Tov. No purpose, no anchor. Just an endless cycle of busyness and noise – meals, meetings, work, posts, clips, chats. A life filled with motion, but lacking meaning.

Then imagine discovering Torah for the first time – today. Imagine being invited to learn Hashem's word, to feel its depth, to live by its values. Imagine being given the opportunity to lead a life that has eternal meaning, clarity, and light. How grateful would you feel? How inspired would you be?

That's what Shavuot invites us to experience. Not as a memory, but as a living moment.

Hayom hazeh nihiyeisa le'am. This is the day. Today, we are once again receiving the Torah. Today, we recommit ourselves to living as anshei kodesh.

Yes, we face distractions. Yes, it's hard to concentrate on tefillah, to carve out time for learning, to push back against a world that often seems to pull us in every direction. But that's the point. Torah wasn't given to malochim. It was given to us. To human beings with struggles and limitations, but with souls capable of greatness.

Holiness is not a contradiction to humanity. It's our potential.

Let us embrace it. Let us live it. Let us become, once again and always, anshei kodesh.

Hayom hazeh! Today and every day. Despite the degeneration of the world, despite the struggles we experience with every tefillah and the challenge of concentrating fully when we learn, despite the many forces competing for our attention and time, we have a new Kabbolas HaTorah.

Human shortcomings are but a hindrance that we can overcome.

There was once a time, not so long ago, when reverence for Torah was instinctive, deeply rooted in the hearts of even the simplest Jews. It wasn't taught through slogans or campaigns. It was lived. It pulsed through communities, shaping their values, their choices, and their relationships with those who carried the torch of Torah.

In the town of Volozhin, this reverence was visible and tangible. Before each new zeman began, townspeople would gather at the train station, awaiting the arrival of the yeshiva bochurim. They didn't come to observe. They came to serve. Competing for the chance to pull wagons loaded with the talmidim and their luggage, they saw honor in serving those who toiled in Torah.

When the famed Volozhin Yeshiva made a siyum upon completing a masechta, it wasn't only the students who celebrated. The entire town felt the joy. Local tradesmen would make their way to the yeshiva to take part in the simcha. But they didn't come as honored guests. They came as waiters.

At the celebratory meal, it was these upstanding members of the community who moved from table to table, serving food to the bnei hayeshiva. And when the celebration ended, they stayed behind to clean up. This wasn't done begrudgingly. It was done with pride, with love, and with a sense of profound privilege. They may not have known every daf, but they knew what it meant to honor Torah. They set aside time to learn what they could and cherished those who spent their days and nights learning.

Today, we hear stories like this and we smile. There's a sweetness to them, a charm that feels almost quaint. But more than that, they are windows into a world that understood something deep and eternal. A world that recognized the holiness of Torah and the people who bear its burden. A world that viewed service not as subservience, but as sacred opportunity.

Stories such as this one are not just nostalgic vignettes. They are a call to remember who we are and what we value. They are gentle reminders of a world that was, and of a world that we can, and should, strive to recreate.

Shavuot is a time to refocus on what Torah means to us and on how blessed we are to be able to spend time by a Gemara or Chumash or Shulchan Aruch, surrounded by more talmidei chachomim and yeshiva bochurim than there have been since the days of Sura and Pumpedisa.

We open our arms wide and accept the Torah just as those who came before us have done for thousands of years. We cherish its words, raising our children and helping guide them to see the honey under each letter.

It is who we are and what we are about. Our lives revolve around it. It is Torah.

With our feet dragging through the dust of life, temptations, parnassah and health challenges, we persist in walking with our eyes on Him and on His Torah, knowing that it is meant for us, to give us the tools to climb higher.

Modim anachnu loch shesamta chelkeinu m'yoshvei bais hamedrash. Thank You, Master of the universe, for allowing us to have a connection with Torah, to have tasted the truest joy of all.

We are the most blessed people, living in a blessed time. Let us show Hashem, our families and ourselves that we appreciate all that we have been given to be able to realize our purpose in this world.

Let us demonstrate that we are worthy of all that we have and use what Hashem has given us to enhance our own lives and those of our families and those around us. Let us show through our actions that we strive to become holier and better.

On Shavuot and throughout the year, we are called to draw closer to the Torah by learning more, by learning deeper and understanding better. To engage with Torah in a way that stirs our hearts and touches our souls, bringing us back to that sacred moment at Har Sinai, where everything began. To perform mitzvot with love, happiness and precision.

When the Bnei Yisroel gathered to receive the Torah and proclaimed, “Naaseh v’nishma,” 600,000 malochim descended from heaven and placed two crowns upon each person, one for naaseh and one for nishma. These were not just symbols of acceptance. They were testaments to our greatness, potential, and deep-rooted connection to Hashem.

But then came the sin of the Eigel. In its aftermath, 120,000 angels of destruction came and removed the crowns. It appeared as though the radiance was lost, the holiness withdrawn, the glory stripped away.

Rav Dovid Cohen, rosh yeshivas Chevron, offers a deeply comforting insight in his Beiurei Chochmah (p. 75), quoting the teachings of the Leshem. The malochim, he explains, only removed the crowns that adorned our physical bodies, our guf and chomer. The spiritual crowns, the ones embedded in our neshamos, our inner essence, were never taken. They remain, even now, resting within our souls, quietly shining.

We may not fully understand the depth of this mystical teaching, but one thing is clear: the kedusha inside us was never erased. Despite mistakes, despite pain, despite all we’ve been through, we are still crowned. We are still holy. That spark remains intact.

And so, we must stop saying that we’re not capable of reaching those heights. We must stop believing that holiness is out of reach, reserved for others but not for us. It is not true. We were at Har Sinai. Our neshamos were at Har Sinai. We carry that memory in our spiritual DNA. We carry those crowns within us.

Especially now, after all the challenges we’ve endured, it is time to rise. To remember who we are. To believe in what we still hold inside.

Let us show that we are more than resilient, that we are sacred. We are strong, we are good, and, yes, we are holy. We are an am kadosh comprised of anoshim kedoshim, looking to improve, to rise, and to fulfill our mandates of being anshei kodesh.