

Preparing for Shavuot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In Sefer Vayikra, the *pasuk* hints to the holiday of *Shavuot*, "*Usefartem lachem mimacharat haShabbat m'yom haviachem et omer hatenufa sheva shabbatot temimot tihiyena ad mimacharat haShabbat hashevi'it tisperu chamishim yom*- You shall count seven weeks till the day after the 50th day." Why is there no date or name of a yom tov or even some mention of what the day is about?

In Sefer Devarim, Parshat Reah, the *chagim* are discussed again. Again, the *Chumash* refers to *Shavuot* in an ambiguous way, "*Shiva shavuot tispor lach*...-Seven weeks you shall count for yourself..." On a superficial level it seems to discuss the counting and not the holiday. In addition, compared to the previous verse mentioned, it uses the singular language, *lach* instead of *lachem*, the weeks are called *shavuot*, the common word for weeks, and not *shabbatot*, and the word *temimot* is not mentioned. Sefer Vayikara is Hashem telling us how to maintain our holiness so that He can dwell in our midst. Sefar Devarim are the words of Moshe Rabbeinu to *Klal Yisrael* as coming from Hashem. It's the eternalization of *Torah*, a form of rebuke, a sweeping look at the failures and successes of *Bnei Yisrael* and the lessons learned for the future.

Hashem tells *Klal Yisrael*, "*V'atem ti'hiyu li mamlechet kohanim v'goy kodesh*-May you be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This is our mission statement. *Chazal* say, there are 70 nations but *Klal Yisrael* belong to *Hashem*, "*Ki Chelek Hashem amo*-Hashem's portion is His people." The Nesivos Sholom explains the verse in Shir Hashirim, "*B'yom chatunato*-His wedding day," refers to *Matan Torah*. We are the bride of Hashem. Marriage is a nullification of independence which makes two into one. Whatever one has, both have. *Chazal* say that when a person says *Vayichulu* on Friday night he becomes a partner with Hashem in

creation. When we nullify our will and make Hashem's will our will, it becomes like a marriage. When we emulate His ways, when we cling to Him and become one with Him, whatever He has, we have. This gives us capacities beyond natural bounds to do what He wanted and created us to do. At *Har Sinai*, *Klal Yisrael* nullified themselves before Hashem. They said, "We will do and we will hear." They experienced a divine revelation they had never experienced before. Hashem opened for them the seven heavens and the depths of the earth. They saw the spiritual force behind all of creation. On this first *Shavuot*, Hashem gave *Klal Yisrael* this gift of elevation which is hinted at in the verse in Parshat Emor. It says *sheva shabbatot* instead of *sheva shevuot* because the concept of Shabbat is a gift. Immediately after creation, Hashem gave us *Shabbat* without man doing anything to deserve it. In contrast, *yom tov* usually marked a historical event that we invested in. In addition, Hashem left it up to us to decide when it would be, based on witnesses or calculations. The experience of *Matan Torah* was a heavenly gift. It was essential as a foundation when clarity and connection to Hashem had to be established. What *Klal Yisrael* got was way beyond what they deserved. Hashem wanted them to have it as a nation. That is why it says *U'sefartem lachem* in the plural. And that is why it says *temimot*, because only Hashem can give us something perfect.

Every holiday is not just a remembrance of the past but contains potential that can be accessed again and again. Hashem gives us the ability to experience *kabalat haTorah* every year. But although the first generation received it as a gift, we have to make it happen. We must aim for unity with Hashem, *U'ledavka bo* which is a major test. That is why the preparation for *Shavuot* is longer and more intense than any other yom tov. In order for two things to cling to each other they must be very clean on the surface. If we want to cling to Hashem,

we must purify ourselves. We are given seven weeks corresponding to the seven *sefirot* or middot, ways to emulate Hashem, that ultimately leads to self- improvement.

When the Jews left Egypt, they were given seven weeks of preparation before *kabalat haTorah*. In addition, Hashem commanded them to sanctify themselves three days prior to *Matan Torah*, through *perisha* and *hagbala*-separation and staying within defined borders, two aspects of nullifying oneself before Hashem. This indicates to us how we too can prepare and what will make us worthy to cling to Hashem on *Shavuot*. *Perisha* is separating from that which is normally permitted. The physical aspects of life are not our essence. We are capable of abstaining from it because it is not who we are. The more we do Hashem's will in relationship to the physical, the more we are capable of clinging to Him. The second command was *hagbala*. The desire of *Klal Yisrael* was to get as close as possible to the *Shechina*. They saw Moshe, Aharon, and the Elders advancing closer to the mountain, but they remained standing where Hashem told them to stay. It was a very powerful form of restraint because it nullified their own logic. Here their intelligence told them to get closer to Hashem. But they remained where they were in deference to Hashem's command.

These two ideas have ramifications in all areas of life. Not allowing physical desires to control us is *perisha*. Staying where we are and accepting that where Hashem put us is where we have to be, even if we don't understand, is *hagbala*. These two prerequisites are a preparation for *kabalat haTorah*. The *Torah* connects us to Hashem. The word *onochi* stands for -I put myself in the *Torah*. When a Jew studies *Torah* and performs *mitzvot* he not only gains knowledge and becomes a more elevated person, but the *Shechina* enters within him.

Make it Count Day 45

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenbaum

Day 45 is the *middah of tiferet sheb'malchut*. It's spreading the teachings of *Torat emet*, of recognizing that the *Torah* way of life in thought and action is the most beautiful thing in the world. *Torah* refines us into a *bat melech* (princess), it's royalty and leadership. It actively influences every realm of our life. *Tiferet sheb'malchut* leads and guides us towards the constant acceptance of *Torah* and gives us dignity to embrace every aspect of it.

Rabbi Tarfon was a second generation *Tanna*. He was a *kohen* who saw the *Beit Hamikdash* as a child and studied at the feet of Rabbi

Yochananon Ben Zakkai and Rabban Gamliel. He was one of the teachers of Rabbi Akiva and was called *avihem shel kol Yisrael* (father of all Jews). Rabbi Tarfon taught us the famous *Midrash* that before *Hashem* gave us the *Torah*, he asked the other nations, "Do you want this gift of mine?" Only *Klal Yisrael* who have the gift of *tiferet sheb'malchut* embraced the *Torah*. They said, "*Naaseh v'nishma*-We will do and we will hear," and accepted the *Torah* way of life before even hearing the details. They knew that anything *Hashem* would offer them would be the most beautiful thing in the world. When *Hashem* heard their

response, He gave every Jew two crowns, one for *Naaseh* and the other for *Nishma*.

Rabbi Tarfon is famous for his *kibud em*. His respect for his mother in all situations was incredible. He treated her as *malchut*, royalty, and glorified the *mitzva* of *kibud em, tiferet*.

When we learn *Torah*, let us think- *Naaseh v'nishma*, I am doing and hearing, I am incorporating the *Torah* into my life. In return, may *Hashem* crown us with *Tiferet sheb'malchut*, true royalty.

Ransom

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

The *Shulchan Aruch* in *Yoreah Deah, Hilchot Tzedaka* writes that redeeming captives is a greater *mitzvah* than feeding and clothing the poor. If money was collected to buy wood and stones in order to build a shul, one must use these funds to redeem captives if necessary. The *Shulchan Aruch* further states that someone who hides his eyes from redeeming Jewish captives transgresses several prohibitions including, "*Lo t'aamitz et levavcha, Lo tikpotz et yadecha, Lo taamod al dam roecha, and Lo yordu b'farech*." One also violates the *mitzvot* of "*Poteach tiftach et yadecha, V'chay achicha imoch, and V'ahavta l'reiacha komocha*." The *Shulchan Aruch* says that if one has the opportunity to redeem captives and refrains from doing so, it is as if he has spilled their blood.

One of the most famous cases of a Jewish captive was that of the *Maharam M'Rottenberg*, one of the *Baalei Hatosfot*, and recognized leader of the Jewish community. In 1286, Rudolph I, issued a terrible decree against the Jews ordering them to become slaves of the king. The *Maharam M'Rottenberg* attempted to escape but was caught and imprisoned. The authorities then demanded an astronomical sum to redeem him. The *Maharam M'Rottenberg* issued a strict and clear ruling not to ransom him as the authorities might take the idea that they could imprison famous Rabbis and demand high

sums for their return. The community followed the *Maharam M'Rottenberg's* orders. For seven years, he sat in prison until he became ill and died. Still the authorities refused to release his body. Fourteen years later, Alexander Suskind Wimpfen, a Jew from Frankfort, redeemed him and the *Maharam M'Rottenberg* was finally laid to rest.

In modern times, the famous case of Rav Hutner who was taken hostage by terrorists, was brought before Rav Yaakov Kamentzky. Rav Hutner had some very wealthy followers who wanted to redeem him. Rav Kamentzky said they must not do it as they would be teaching the terrorists that they could capture great Rabbis and demand high ransoms. In the end, he was freed without the ransom.

The Gemara in *Gittin* quotes the *Mishna* that says that one is not allowed to redeem captives for more than the accepted price. Another enactment Chazal made was not to attempt armed force to try to free prisoners.

The Gemara asks, what is the reason for the first enactment? Is it because it will be difficult for the community to pay so much money or is it because if they pay the high price, the kidnappers might think they could continue doing this. Perhaps in exchange for freeing the prisoner, the terrorist might demand the freeing of other terrorists in jail. This reason might not

pose a financial stress but the danger that the terrorists would be motivated to capture more people still remains.

The Gemara tries to solve the question. It brings an example of Levi who redeemed his captive daughter by paying a significant price, more than her worth. The Gemara learns from this that the reason one wouldn't be allowed to pay an extravagant sum is because it puts financial stress on the community not because we're worried that the kidnappers will take more people. Perhaps one can't bring a proof from what Levi did because maybe he never even asked the Rabbis before he redeemed his daughter. The *Gemara* doesn't seem to come to any *halachic* conclusion. It continues to discuss the second enactment- that one should not stage any military action to free the captives because it will cause danger to the other prisoners who are left behind. Perhaps if all the captives were freed it wouldn't be a problem?

The Rosh quotes this Gemara pointing out that it doesn't come to any conclusion. He references another Gemara in *Kesubot* that says that if one's wife is taken captive one is allowed to redeem her for even ten times the normal price. This is because, "*Ishto k'gufo*-One's wife is like oneself," and if a person is taken captive there's no limit on how much ransom he is allowed to pay to redeem himself.