



Shavuot: Regeneration & Rejoicing

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

There's an ancient custom to decorate our homes and shuls with flowers and greenery in honor of *Shavuot*. The Mishna Berura writes that some are particular to use trees as a reminder that the fruits of the trees are judged on this day. The Paamei Moed notes that the *shte'i halechem* was offered on Shavuot to awaken Hashem's mercy for the fruit trees. This seems rather puzzling. Wheat grows from the earth. Wouldn't it have been more suitable to offer fruit?

Rashi explains that before the sin of *eitz hada'at*, wheat grew on trees. Rav Zadok Hakohen explains, citing the Gemara, that in the future the trees of Israel will again grow loaves of bread. On Shavuot, Hashem is not only judging the fruit trees, he is judging the spiritual state of the world. Are we worthy of redemption? Do we yearn to return to the spiritual level of Adam before the sin when wheat grew on trees? Rav Baruch M'Mezibuz would say that he feared the spiritual judgment on *Shavuot* more than the physical judgment on Rosh Hashana. *Shavuot* is one of the holiest days of the year when our entire *ruchniyut* is determined. Hashem judges us to see how we have kept His Torah. We are like the fruit of the trees and the greenery is meant to remind us of this.

The question remains, if we do not use fruit

bearing trees due to the prohibition of cutting them down, how are the trees a reminder? On *Shavuot*, we read the book of Rut, which traces the lineage of David and Mashiach. The trees remind us to pray for the *geulah* when all the non-fruit bearing trees will blossom and bear fruit. We should yearn for Mashiach so that we can once again experience the clarity and closeness to Hashem that we attained at Sinai.

The Bnei Yissachar relates a parable from the Midrash. A king had a garden that grew wild with thorns. He wanted to uproot it but when he spotted a lone rose hidden among the thistles, he decided to spare the garden. After 26 generations, when Hashem saw the sinful state of humanity, He wanted to decimate them. Then the Jews said *naaseh v'nishma* and in that merit Hashem saved the world. The roses on *Shavuot* remind us of Hashem's profound love for us and the incredible power of Torah.

The Alshich explains the verse, "*Yifrach kashoshana*." The splendor of a budding rose is hidden. But when its petals open, its incredible beauty is revealed. Similarly, on the outside, a Jew may appear coarse and ugly. Yet inside there's the *pintele yid*, the pure and holy spark hidden inside him. The power of the *shoshana*, our inner strength, is the part within us that is eternally connected to Hashem. The

Yismach Yisrael writes that Hashem is called *haroeh ba'shoshanim*, the shepherd of the roses. Hashem leads us in the merit of the eternal spark within us. On Chanukah we sing, "*Naasa nes l'shoshanim*," a miracle happened to the roses, referring to the Jewish people. Likewise, on Purim we say, *Shoshanat Yaakov*. The Midrash says this comes from the root word *she'shone*, to change. *Shavuot* is a time to celebrate the *shoshana* aspect of ourselves that yearns to come back to Hashem. It's a time to return to our core, to *naaseh v'nishmah*. We take in the beauty of the roses through our sense of smell, the highest of the senses that was never defiled by the sin of *Eitz Hada'at*. At Har Sinai, Hashem infused new life into the souls of the Jews. We are reborn on *Shavuot*. We ask Hashem to give us a fresh start.

The Ohr Daniel explains that there were two sides to the experience of the giving of the Torah. There was fear, symbolized by lightning. There was also the love, signified by the grass and flowers. Every *Shavuot*, Rav Nachman of Breslov would go out to the fields. He would say, "If we would hear every blade of grass singing praises to Hashem, we too would burst into song." Our davening and our whole *avodat Hashem* on *Shavuot* should be an uplifting experience of connection to Hashem.

Every Day is Matan Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsberg

There's a disagreement in the Gemara whether the Torah was given on the sixth or seventh day of Sivan. We also find that the Torah gives no particular date for the holiday of *Shavuot*. Rav Yisrael Salanter explains that our information is hazy so that we should not hone in on one day to the exclusion of others. The Torah applies every day at all times and in all eras.

Likewise, the Torah was given in the desert in

an unknown place to teach us that it applies in all places. The Aruch Hashulchan points out that we received the Torah in *chutz l'aretz* so that we shouldn't think that one can only keep Torah in the land of Israel. Rav Aharon Soloveitchik adds that the first *mitzvot*, *korban Pesach* and *kiddush hachodesh*, were given among the materialistic decadence of Egypt to show us that the Torah applies in all circumstances no matter how impure.

The Torah deemphasizes the connection of *kabalat haTorah* to *Shavuot* so that we should not focus on the Torah on one particular day, but rather every day.

There is no specific *mitzvah d'orayta* connected to this *yom tov* because the giving of the Torah applies every day. *Shavuot* is about dedicating every part of our life to Hashem.



Ramifications of Desertion

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

A *megilah* means a repository of revelation. *Megilat Rut* contains the secret of redemption. It begins by depicting the period. Society was falling apart and people were criticizing their leaders. "It was in the days when the people judged the judges." Gossip is the great equalizer. People like to feel good by making other people smaller, rather than making themselves bigger. They slide down the slope of needing to feel superior rather than being superior. In response, Hashem brought a famine. The people could have reacted by saying, "We're in it together. Let's try to save ourselves collectively." But instead they thought only of themselves and failed.

A man from *Beit lechem* went to dwell in the fields of *Moav*. *Adam* means the earthen one. It connotes man as a mere human fashioned out of earth. *Ish* comes from the root word *aish*, fire. The soul is compared to a flame whose nature is to ascend. *Ish* means a superior person. Elimelech was a man of such profound spiritual depth that he could have been *Mashiach*. He could have united the Jews so they would have been redeemed. But he failed. He was a wealthy man. During a famine no matter how much you give it's never enough. You feel depleted and guilty for turning people away. This guilt can eventually grow into resentment. Ideally a person should empathize with the pain of others. He should say, "I wish I had more. I'm doing what I can

and I will ask Hashem to give me the means to give even more." Rashi says Elimelech left Israel because of *tzarut ayin* and the pressure the poor put on him. *Tzar* means narrow. He saw everything with the most narrow possible view.

They went to Moav, which was the embodiment of cruelty and immorality. Elimelech rationalized that the redeemer would have to be a person who could redeem everyone. He would need to have the kind of heart that is so broad and deep that it could speak to people wherever they were and discover the good within them. Elimelech said the redeemer would have to come from Moav. However, his subconscious motivation really was because he did not want to give to the poor.

Elimelech's sons were Machlon and Kilyon. *Machlon* means the one who forgives. It could also mean to erase; ultimately he died. *Kilyon* means totality or destruction. It can either mean to bring to positive fruition or to become totally void of anything. In the end he too was destroyed. They married Moabite woman, Rut and Orpah, daughters of the king of Moav. *Orpah* comes from the root word *oref* which is the part of the body that controls the physical system and connects the spinal column to the back of the brain. Orpah turned her back on everything she could've become. Conversely, Rut comes from the word *rava*, to quench one's thirst. Rut yearned for truth and

ultimately attained it.

The Zohar writes that Er and Onen were reincarnated in Machlon and Kilyon in order to give them another chance to rectify their sins. Unfortunately, they failed again and died. Naomi was left alone. She decided to return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Orpah kissed Naomi and left, but Rut attached herself to her mother-in-law. Orpah wanted the closeness but not the life of being a Jew. Rut desired both. Naomi told her the laws of *techum Shabbat*. You have to submit your personal freedom of movement and destiny to Hashem. She answered, "I will walk where you walk." She told her that there are *halachot* that require one to give up one's life. Ruth assured her, "I see life as a means and not an end." Naomi said, "You'll be buried in a disgraceful grave." Ruth answered, "I'm in it with the full recognition of reality.

They got back to *Eretz Yisrael* during the period between Pesach and Shavuot. On Pesach, the *Omer* sacrifice of barley, normally used as animal food, is brought. On Shavuot we offer the *shte'i halechem*, two loaves of bread. The *sefirah* days are days of transition from animal to human consciousness. The Jews left Egypt and moved from not knowing who they were, to knowing who they truly were. This transitional period was the time when Rut and Naomi arrived in *Eretz Yisrael*. They were moving forward towards fulfillment.