



Produce, Preparation, and Progress

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowtz-Stein

While we often refer to the upcoming holiday as *Zman Matan Torateinu*/the Time of the Giving of the *Torah*, the *Torah* never uses this name. Instead, it refers to the holiday as *Chag Habikurim*, *Chag Hakatzir*, or *Chag HaShavuot* which are agricultural in origin. *Even Shavuot* involves counting the days to bringing the barley offering. In addition, the *Torah* reading on *Shavuot* discusses the offerings in the Temple rather than receiving the *Torah*. Yet our Sages use the name, *Zman Matan Torateinu*. Why this discrepancy? Rabbi Mintzberg asks this question and adds another. If we received the *Torah* on the seventh of Sivan, why do we celebrate on the sixth?

Interestingly, the *Torah* mentions only the third month with no specific date for *Shavuot* as it does for the other holidays, notes Rabbi Mintzberg. It seems there was no inherent day already invested with the sanctity of giving the *Torah*. The *Torah* was destined to be given in the third month, but it could have been given any day. It was the number three that was significant. For the holy texts are divided into thirds – *Torah*, *Neviim* and *Ketuvim*, the nation has three major sections – *Kohain*, *Levi* and *Yisroel*, and three leaders led them toward receiving the *Torah*– Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam.

However, the focus of the holiday remains agricultural, the first fruit and the harvest. Since we received the *Torah* during this time frame, our Sages saw fit to link the commemoration of receiving the *Torah* to the holiday named in the *Torah* for this time. Even so, our Sages must have seen a deeper connection between the land and the *Torah*. Rabbi Mintzberg suggests that indeed the land was given to *Bnei Yisroel* so they could keep the

Torah. The *Torah* itself tells us that when *Bnei Yisroel* leave the *Torah*, Hashem will force them to leave the Land as well. Thus, they are inseparably intertwined. The *Torah* is compared to milk and honey beneath your tongue, and the Land of Israel is described as flowing with milk and honey. In fact, it's customary to eat dairy and honey on *Shavuot*. However, since we no longer have a *Beit Hamikdash* where we can bring *bikurim* and the two loaves, we emphasize receiving the *Torah*.

Although the focus of the holiday is agricultural, why does the *Torah* completely ignore our receiving the *Torah* at that time, not mentioning it even once? The *Torah* does discuss the seven weeks between our exodus from Egypt and receiving the *Torah*. Rabbi Roberts, citing Rav Lopian, explains that this is to teach us that receiving the *Torah* was dependent on proper preparation. It took seven weeks of freedom from physical enslavement to prepare ourselves for the total freedom that can only be achieved through living a *Torah* based life. The need for preparation also explains why the offering on Peach was barley, animal food, while the offering on *Shavuot* was bread, human food. It would take seven weeks for *Bnei Yisroel* to transform themselves from a totally physical mindset to the elevated mindset required of human beings.

Only with the proper preparation will *Torah* be absorbed and impact our lives, writes Rabbi Emanuel Bernstein. Since that preparation is of overriding importance to receiving the *Torah*, our Sages designated the sixth day of Sivan, the final day of preparation, for the holiday rather than the seventh of Sivan, the actual day of *Matan Torah*. It is for this reason that we count up toward the day of receiving

the *Torah*, for each day our preparation builds on the previous day, strengthening the foundation upon which the structure of our *Torah* life can be built. The importance of this preparation is highlighted by the law that we must count forty nine full days, unlike *Shabbat* or other holidays when one may usher in the day earlier.

Similar to a wedding where the preparation is so much longer than the event itself, our preparation to receiving the *Torah* is also much longer than the moments of revelation. Perhaps that explains why we begin the *Torah* reading with, "In the third month," rather than with Moshe ascending *Har Sinai*, to allow a few extra moments of preparation, even on the 50th day itself, suggests Rabbi Shpritzer quoting the Satmar Rav.

Preparation means uprooting negative *midot*. The Shvilei Pinchas tells us that just as a farmer must remove stones and thorns before planting, so too must man uproot his negative characteristics before the *Torah* will take root and grow within him. Therefore, *Shavuot* is the only holiday where such intense preparation is mandated. Because of the seven week preparation, the holiday is referred to as *Shavuot/Weeks*.

The offering on *Shavuot* is called a new offering. Each day we receive the *Torah* as a new offering, a new gift, in the present. The *Torah* is compared to a Tree of Life that produces fruit every day. Just as Hashem judges the quantity and quality of the fruit trees on *Shavuot*, so does He determine the spiritual levels we can achieve for the year, writes Rabbi Reiss. On *Shavuot* we have the opportunity to affect our spirituality for the year.



Traveling the Journey of Life Accompanied by the Book of Tehillim Part 20

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In Tehillim, Chapter 15 it says, "Who will climb the mountain of Hashem ...who can swear to his detriment without retracting... He did not give his money with interest, nor did he accept a bribe against the innocent..." This describes a person who is loyal to what he promises, refrains from taking interest on a loan to a Jew and doesn't take any bribes even from the innocent party. These behaviors bring a person closer to Hashem and they correspond to the last three commandments, "Don't commit adultery; Don't steal; Don't covet.

Let's examine the *mitzva* of, "Don't covet." The Torah says not to desire what another person has. The Ibn Ezra questions, how is it possible for a person not to desire something he really wants? The Torah never commands us to do something we aren't capable of fulfilling. The Seforno explains, when we know that something is impossible, we won't desire it. If we know in our hearts that something that wasn't meant for us is impossible to attain, we won't feel a longing for it.

The Ibn Ezra offers a parable. When a commoner sees a very beautiful princess, he doesn't desire to marry her because he knows that would be impossible. So too every thinking person should train himself to think that whatever another person has is because Hashem decided to give it to him. If it's not his, it means Hashem doesn't want to give it to him. It's not in his power to attain it and no matter how much he tries to get it, he won't succeed. If a person thinks this way, he won't desire what other people have. A believing Jew trusts that Hashem will give him whatever he needs. He will do the will of Hashem with what he has. Climbing the mountain of Hashem means having total trust in Him and believing that He is with us all along. If I can see something beautiful and not desire it because Hashem didn't give it to me, that means Hashem is with me and constantly in my thoughts.

The parallel to this in *Tehillim* is refraining from giving bribery to a judge. It's leaving the job of running the show to Hashem. Ultimately, the judge's decision will be the decision Hashem

wants him to have. Hashem will guide him to rule according to His will. Doing something against the *Torah* won't help, because it's Hashem who's in control.

Haketav V'kabala adds another idea. He firsts asks the same question. The nature of the heart is to desire. How can we dictate our feelings? He explains, we have another commandment in the Torah to love Hashem b'chol levavcha-with all your heart. What does this mean? If you would fill your heart completely with love of Hashem, there would be no room left to desire physical things. If your heart is full to the top with closeness to Hashem, if the relationship is real and delightful, then there is no place left to covet. This is a lifetime avodah and many will not reach this level. So then, how can we fulfill the *mitzva* of *lo sachmod*? We have to work towards the goal and invest effort. It doesn't matter if we don't make it to the finish line. As we grow in the right direction and work on filling our hearts more and more with love of Hashem, we will automatically desire less.

The Matriarch I- Sarah Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

In *Parshat Lech Lecha* it says, "Now Sarai, Avram's wife, had not borne to him, and she had an Egyptian handmaid named Hagar." Sarai tells Avram, "Behold now, Hashem has restrained me from bearing; please come to my handmaid; perhaps I will be built up from her." Sarai thought she was blocking the fulfillment of Hashem's promise that Avram would have children. She thought she was unworthy of bearing a child. She therefore told Avram to marry her maid as a way of building her character and perhaps something would remain of her after her death.

When Hagar saw that she had immediately conceived, her mistress became *kal b'einenah*-light in her eyes. The root word of *kal* is *klala*- a curse or a denigration. She saw her mistress as less worthy than she was. The *Torah* says, "*Va'taneh Sarai*." She responded in kind and treated Hagar harshly. The *Ketav*

V'kabala says Sarai wanted to put Hagar back in her place so she made her work very hard. He learns this from the language used to describe the bitter labor in *Galut Mitzrayim*, where the *Torah* uses the expressions, "*Vayaninu*." Rav Hirsh offers a different explanation, pointing out that it's related to the word *oneh*-to answer to someone or to be made to feel vulnerable and dependent. Sarai forced Hagar to submit and revert back to her place. The Ramban says this was considered a flaw and that is why the angel tells Hagar that Hashem heard her affliction and would give her a son. This son would eventually torture and debase the children of Avraham and Sarai.

Yishmael is described as a *pereh adam*. *Pereh* is an untamed horse or donkey. Yishmael would be free and uncontrolled and would ultimately reign over all his brethren, the

children of *Ketura*. The Ramban argues that Sarah failed because she tried to be superhuman. She thought she could give another wife to her husband and she would somehow overcome her natural feelings of jealousy.

Hagar's behavior at the end explains to us what Sarah foresaw. It says, "*Va'teyra Sarah et ben hamitzri mitzachek*." The *Torah* doesn't refer to him by name but rather as the son of the Egyptian. Hagar wanted to delegitimize Yitzchak and claim that he was not Avraham's son. She put these ideas in her son's head. This is why Hashem tells Avraham to listen to Sarah when she asks him to send away Yishmael. Unfortunately, tragedy was born from Sarah's lack of faith in herself. Yet she stood up to the truth and did not hesitate when the need arose, to preserve her son's spiritual purity.