

Matan Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

We are approaching *Shavuot* which means weeks. Every week we've been challenged by Hashem to open our hearts and to get past the bad *middot* that keep us from accepting the *Torah*. *Shavuot* can also mean oaths and it's a time when Hashem promised us that by accepting the *Torah* we will be His *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kodash* - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

On the day of *Matan Torah* we heard the Ten Commandments which is like the skeleton of the entire *Torah*. All of *Torah* comes forth from it. Some people have the custom of reciting *Tikun Leil Shavuot* on *Shavuot* night. It consists of short passage spanning the entire *Torah* giving us an awareness of what we were given. The same way we picture a child opening a present of online skates and then immediately putting them on and skating away, we too cherish the gift of *Torah* and want to learn all of it right away.

The five *chumashim* parallel the hand consisting of five fingers which are all equal. You can't say one finger is more important than another, although they each have a different function. This world is called the world of *maaseh*-deeds because through our actions we discover Hashem. Each *mitzva* we do creates an internal impression. *Torah* takes you above and beyond and flies you over the blockages that keep you from choosing good. If a person is learning *Bereishit* and someone aggravates him and he's about to give it to him; but then he stops to think about what he just studied and says, "Wait a minute, we are all creations of Hashem, how can I say this to

him?" The more you do the *mitzvot*, the more your consciousness becomes intertwined with *Torah*. *Mitzvot* are meant to change you, to strengthen your higher self. There's also a relationship that is created. A relationship always has two sides, the giver and the receiver. Hashem gave us the ability not only to do the *mitzvot* which has intrinsic purpose, but to build a relationship with Him. The *mitzvot* that have the most impact are those that clash with our innate nature or those we relate to the least, because they not only create a relationship with Hashem but they force us to extend ourselves and thereby our faith.

The main message of *Sefer Bereishit* is that if you make good choices, good things happen, and if you make bad choices, bad things happen. It sounds trite but in the world we live in there's so much concealment that we have to be aware of this. *Bereishit* tells us there's cause and effect in terms of our words and deeds. *Shemot* means names. In *Sefer Shemot* we're given a new chance, new names, new descendants. It's telling us-you can have an identity even if you sinned, you can start again. It also teaches us that Hashem is in control. The ten plagues showed the world that Hashem could break the laws of nature. In *Sefer Vayikra*, Hashem calls out to Moshe and gives over *mitzvot*. There are more *mitzvot* in *Vayikra* than in any other *sefer*. The positive *mitzvot* will get you where you want to go and the negative *mitzvot* tell you -don't do this, it will take you where you don't want to go. The tricky thing is, where we want to go and where we don't want to go is hidden from

the human eye. We don't always know the end results of our choices. *Sefer Bamidbar* discusses our adventures and misadventures in the desert, a barren place totally devoid of foreign influences. The central *mitzva* in *Vayikra* is the sacrificial offerings which are meant to elevate physicality. *Korbonot* were meant to transcend physicality. A man is supposed to work and do whatever he needs for physical survival, but the main goal must be *Torah*. If not, we can spend our whole life doing what desert people do; which is living their whole life according to the fulfillment of their material needs. We're meant to live for a higher cause.

Sefer Devarim tells us the fate of the Jews. It's not only about instructions but about history. Chronologically *nasseh v'nishma* appears before the *dibrot* because to accept the *dibrot* there needed to be a certain willingness to receive and a relationship already developed. The Kuzari points out that people tend to pick and choose *mitzvot*. Emotional people will be pulled to emotional *mitzvot*, logical people will enjoy logical *mitzvot*. People will tend to neglect the *mitzvot* that clash with their personalities. But at some point the emotional people will ask, "Why am I doing this *mitzva*," because he hasn't involved his mind. The logical person might stop and ask himself, "How is this changing me and helping me be a better person?" The message of there being five different books is to tell us they are indivisible and equally part of one *Torah* and this is what we need to remember on *Shavuot*.



Preparing for Shavuot Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Besides the 7 weeks of counting before *Shavuot*, Hashem told Moshe to tell the Jewish people about two more levels of preparation, *perisha v'hagbala*- sanctification and the placing of boundaries. Before *Matan Torah*, the Jews had to sanctify themselves by immersing themselves in a mikva, separating from their wives, and refraining from touching or ascending *Har Sinai*. This really indicates to us how to prepare before *yom tov*. *Perisha* is about separating from what is usually permitted. Hashem wants us to cling to Him, but he created us with physical desires that can cause us to be distanced from Him. We have to be involved in physicality to some extent in order to live, but we need to be on guard that it doesn't become our main aspiration and our essence. The 3 days of separation before *Matan Torah* teach us that if we want to cling to Hashem we must detach ourselves to some extent from physicality and when we are involved in it, we must attune our hearts to elevate it *l'shem shamayim*.

The second command of *hagbala* took *Klal Yisrael* to the next level. It seems that what took place before *Matan Torah* was unfair.

When Hashem asked the nations if they wanted the *Torah*, he told them a commandment that was difficult for them and they said no. But when He came to the Jewish people, He didn't tell us anything. But in fact, He did. He gave us the commandment of *hagbala* and that was very difficult. The Jewish people watched Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu getting closer to the mountain. They saw others fulfilling their aspirations of coming closer to Hashem and they continued to stand at a distance. It was a very powerful lesson of restraint because they nullified something they thought they should not. They said no to their logic and stood steadfast in their commitment to follow Hashem's command. This can be applied to our own lives. There are many things we don't understand and accepting that this is the right thing for us even if we don't comprehend it, is actualizing *hagbala*. It's telling Hashem, "You put me here and this is where I have to be." Hashem didn't just command us to connect to Him, but He gave us the means to do so via the *Torah*. On a superficial level we think that *Torah* contains the *halachot* that tell us what to do and the stories that direct us how to develop our

middot. It's a body of knowledge, but that's only one aspect. It also connects us to Hashem who so to speak put Himself in the *Torah*. By learning *Torah* and doing *mitzvot*, we bring Hashem into ourselves.

This explains why we read Megilat Ruth on *Shavuot*. The Shem MiShmuel quotes the Anei Nezer discussing the response Ruth gave Naomi when she tried to persuade her not to accompany her back to Israel. Naomi told her that if Jew violates certain *mitzvot* he is killed by *beit din*. Ruth should've answered, "Don't worry, I'm committed. I'll keep what the Torah commands me to do." But instead, she said, "Wherever you'll die, I will die." She meant to say that if she has to die for being a Jew, she's ready. That's ultimate *bitul*- nullification before Hashem. Similar to Avraham Avinu's response of "*Hineni*- Here I am." It doesn't matter if Hashem's command is difficult or seemingly illogical- I will follow His word, come what may. This is why we read Megilat Ruth on *Shavuot*. It's the day we nullify ourselves before Hashem and by doing so we become one with Him.

Tehillim 89 - Chesed and Emet The Eternal Covenant

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

There is a disagreement as to who composed Chapter 89 in Tehilim. Commentators are unsure whether it was composed during the lifetime of David Hamelech or later on when the kingdom was divided between Israel and Judea. Others argue it was written during the Babylonian exile. Whoever wrote it was foretelling our long exile and could envision our situation prophetically.

The chapter begins with *Maskil* which according to Rav Hirsh is a type of *mizmor*. Others say this is purely a contemplative psalm, not an anthem or a celebratory song. It's meant to arouse some serious thinking. The chapter continues, *Eitan haezrachi*. Some say he was one of the poets or singers in the lifetime of David Hamelech. Not all *Tehillim* was written by David Hamelech. He compiled the great epic poems and the minor ones that had been our legacy and inheri-

tance. Some are attributed all the way to Adam. There's a *Midrash* that says *Eitan haezrachi* means he comes from the east and it refers to *Avraham Avinu*. The common view is that he lived in the days of *David Hamelech* and he is also listed among the wise men who served in the court of Shlomo Hamelech.

"Hashem's kindness I will forever sing for generation to generation. I will inform through my mouth your *emunah*. The couplet of *chesed v'emunah* or *chesed v'emet* will be found constantly woven together throughout the chapter. The Malbim explains that *chesed* which is sometimes defined as charity or mercy is in fact unconditional love. It's the desire of the lover to give to the beloved whatever He can and has nothing to do with whether the beloved deserves it or not. *Emunah* in common parlance is translated as faith but it really means faithfulness, sticking to

the commitments you made. This refers to Hashem's love and His keeping His promise in choosing *Am Yisrael* as His nation. The *Torah* doesn't really specify why Avraham was chosen although we know from the *Midrash*. It seems the chosenness was completely arbitrary. But the text later on tells us that only after he was chosen did he undergo the ten tests. Then we find mention of the *brit ben habesarim*, the covenant Hashem makes with Avraham telling him the land of Israel will be your children's forever; but also telling him that they would be slaves in Egypt. It seems now that it's no longer an outpouring of love but a covenant which is conditional, because if one side doesn't keep it it's no longer valid. And it seems Avraham earned it after withstanding the tests. The *mizmor* not only discusses the covenant Hashem made with David, but what he made with the people of Israel and Yerushalayim which can never be breached.