

The Greatness of Shavuot

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller Gottlieb

We are approaching *Shavuot* which means weeks. Every week, during the *sefirah* period leading up to *Shavuot*, we are challenged by Hashem to get past the bad *middot* that keep us from receiving *Torah*. *Shavuot* also means oaths. It's a time when Hashem promised us that he would make us into a holy nation by giving us the *Torah*. On *Shavuot* night, many have the custom of reciting *Tikun Leil Shavuot*, short passages from the entire *Torah* to give us an awareness of what we received. Just as when a child opens a gift box and finds inline skates and all he wants to do is skate away, so too we want to immerse ourselves in *Torah*.

The five *chumashim* are parallel to a hand with five fingers, where all the fingers are equal but still have a completely different function. Similarly, there are *middot* that go forth and detract. The *middah* of *malchut* expresses the whole *Torah*. If one asks, what's more important, receiving the *Torah* -Hashem's will and wisdom or actual practice, there are two things to consider. This world is called *maaseh*, the world of deeds, because it's in this world that we can find Hashem through the actions we do. The *mitzvot* we do affect us on a very deep level. In addition, the *Torah* we learn helps us transcend the blockages we face. The more *mitzvot* you do the more it changes you and the more your consciousness relates to *Torah*.

A relationship has two sides to it. There's the side of the one who is giving and the side of

the one who is receiving. *Torah* enables us to have a relationship with Hashem. He asks and commands and we do. 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 change our relationship with Hashem the most are the ones that we relate to the least, because they force us to extend our faith in a profound way.

The main message of *Sefer Bereishit* is that if you make good choices good things happen and visa versa. There is cause and effect in terms of words and deeds. When you know that everything you do has consequences you approach things differently. *Shemot* means names. The first thing Adam was told to do was to give names and he called himself Adam, from the earth. Hashem asked him, what name are you going to call me and Adam called Him *Adon* - the master. Adam saw the consequences of his bad choices but in *Shemot* when we were given a new chance, new names and new descendants we learned that you can have an identity even if you sinned and you can start again. The seventy souls that went down to Egypt were a new beginning. *Sefer Shemot* revealed that Hashem was there, that he could break the laws of nature.

Sefer Vayikra contains more *mitzvot* than in any other book. With the *mitzvot ase* and *lo tasei Hashem* told us-Do this and it will take you where you want to go. Don't do this because it will take you where you don't want

to go. The tricky part of all this is that where we want and don't want to go is hidden from the human eye. We don't always know the end result of our choices.

Sefer Bamidbar is the story of the Jews sojourn in the desert, their adventures and misadventures. We became a people in isolation devoid of foreign influences. You can spend your whole life doing what desert people do, living their lives in accordance with the fulfillment of their material needs, but as Jews we have a holy mission.

Sefer Devarim means words. These are the words Moshe spoke before his death. *Devarim* tells us the fate of the Jews. It's a book not only of *halacha* but also history. We said *Naaseh V'nishma* before receiving the *dibrot* because there had to be a willingness beforehand in order to receive instruction. The *Kuzari* points out, people tend to pick and choose *mitzvot*. People who are emotional gravitate to emotional *mitzvot* such as *tashlich*, *neilah*, *brit milah*. People who enjoy logic will revel in a hard sugya with irresolvable questions. One might end up picking and choosing and not be conscious of it. But in the end people who are emotional will end up in a position where they ask, why am I doing this. Logical people might come to a point of asking how are these *mitzvot* changing me and making me a better person. The message of the five books of *Torah* are meant to tell us that the *Torah* is indivisible, like fingers on a hand and its impact is transcendental and eternal.

Continuous Carrying: Shavuot

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

In our *Yom Tov Mussaf* prayer, we say, "Bestow upon us/Enable us to carry, Hashem, our God, the blessings of Your appointed Festivals..." The *Tolna Rebbe* makes an interesting observation about carrying. When one has been carrying a heavy load, after one puts it down, he will still feel its weight for a while. What we are asking of Hashem is that He help us take the blessings and light of the *yom tov* with us after we 'put it down.' The

successful *yom tov* is one whose spirit stays with us after it's gone. After all, writes Rav Biederman, *Shavuot* represents the symbolic wedding of Hashem to *Bnei Yisroel*.

When you go to a wedding, it may be difficult to tell who the *chatan* is. After all, everyone is dressed in their best clothes. But the next day, the one who remains in his best clothes and has not changed into his work clothes is the

chatan, for he has taken the wedding with him to celebrate at least during *sheva brachot*. Our special wedding clothes for *Shavuot* is the *Torah*. Our key word in this *Mussaf* passage is *Hasiyanu*, a word closely related to *nisuin*, the marriage ceremony. If we are to retain that special relationship with Hashem, we must still be wearing the *Torah* even after the *yom tov* ceremony. But how do we achieve this?

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When we are merely window shopping, it is unlikely that we will take anything with us when we exit the store. Similarly, when we enter a *yom tov*, we should also enter with some expectation that we will leave with a continuing uplifted experience.

Since *Matan Torah* is compared to a marriage, several customs have developed as a reenactment of the Sinai experience. The glass that the *chattan* breaks represents the first set of luchot that were broken. According to our tradition, had we received the *Torah* completely with the first set of Tablets, a person would remember every bit of Torah he learned. When the luchot were broken, forgetfulness entered and we often forgot what we had learned. In a nod to our human nature, Rav Biederman teaches us that in a successful marriage, husbands and wives often need to “forget” the foibles of their spouse.

When placing the ring on the bride's finger, the groom says, “*Harei at mekudesht li...You are sanctified unto me...*” Similarly, in preparation for receiving the *Torah*, Hashem declares, “*Vihiyisem Li segulah...Va'atem tohiyu Li mamlechet kohanim/You will be unto Me the most beloved treasure... And you shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers (priests)...*” Our role is to serve Hashem.

Matnat Chaim asks, if those first luchot were broken, should we not celebrate receiving the *Torah* on *Yom Kippur*, the day Moshe brought down the second set of luchot? But when we analyze the gift of *Torah*, we understand that this is really a double gift. Hashem gave us the ability to observe the *mitzvot*, a gift He also gave to our Patriarchs even before He actually gave the *Torah*. However, when we accepted the *Torah* and agreed to abide by its laws after having been commanded to do so, we entered a higher realm of our relationship with Hashem and were gifted with the ability to affect and

alter creation. We became invested in being Hashem's partner. From the moment He chose us and we accepted, we became sanctified through the *mitzvot*, and that sanctity carries through from the first *brachah* of *Kiddush* until the final *brachah* of *Havdalah*. It elevates every *mitzvah* of the day, and indeed changes our perspective in life and invests all aspects of our life with sanctity. For example, if we drop some money and have no hope of retrieving it, we automatically hope that some poor person will find it and be helped. This spirit of sanctifying the mundane was infused into us even with the broken *luchot*. It was given to us as we chose to do Hashem's will even after we were commanded to do so.

The root of *hasiyanu*, *siya*, also means fire, and we pray that Hashem will help us keep the fire of Sinai burning within us even after the close of the holiday.

A Hard Day's Work

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

In previous classes, we learned that man was born to work hard and that trust in Hashem never replaces the obligation to invest effort in *panasah*. This begs the question- Where is the place for *bitachon* in Hashem? How does it transform the working life of a *Torah* Jew? If our purpose is to learn Torah and do mitzvot, how does a working Jew carve out space for Torah? The *Shulchan Aruch* notes that at the end of one's life the primary thing that will be assessed will be one's time and commitment to *Torah*.

There's an incredible *Mishna in Avot D'Rav Nosson*. Rav Nechunia ben Hakana says, “One who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah, the yoke of kingship and *derech erez* is removed from him and one who throws off from himself the yoke of *Torah*, the yoke of kingship and *derech erez* is placed upon

him.” In this world, we need to work hard. Which yoke we will carry is our choice. Let's investigate this further. *Rabbeinu Yonah* explains the Mishna-If a person makes the yoke of *Torah* primary in his life and his work flexible, Hashem protects him from any type of mishap that will cause him to neglect his *Torah* learning. This is an incredible interpretation. If *Torah* is one's primary occupation and fills the gaps overflowing into one's work time, then Hashem will enable him to continue keeping his commitment by ensuring that nothing will interfere with his time set aside for *Torah*. As He protects you from kings, He will protect you from the yoke of a livelihood.

A little bit of effort will suffice to make a living, because Hashem will shower blessing on a *Ben Torah's* work, to ensure that his time for learning *Torah* remains sacrosanct. This is the

place for trust in Hashem. Hard work alone doesn't bring financial gain. You need hard work with Hashem's *bracha*. If you take upon yourself the yoke of *Torah* you will need to work far less time and be far more efficient and make exactly the same amount of money. The chiddush of this *Mishna* is that Hashem has fixed the amount you'll make and you have to work hard to get it. The more time you fill up with learning *Torah*, the less time is required of you in the workplace in order to earn what is predestined for you.

It doesn't come easy to make fixed times for *Torah* a nonnegotiable part of one's life. It requires incredible *bitachon*. But it forges a relationship of trust between oneself and Hashem that earns reward in this world and the next.