

## Parshat Bamidbar: Being Yourself

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

The fact that Hashem gave us the Torah in the desert seems perplexing. Why indeed did he choose the desert? He could have given it to us in the land of Israel, which in terms of our perspective would have been more natural.

Receiving the Torah had to be in a completely barren environment where there were no other people, so that the way we would accept it would not be influenced by any social norms. Rambam says it is human nature to be impacted by our environment.

One sort of influence is what our friends have upon us. We instinctively mold our beliefs and opinions to match theirs. But the other, which is more subtle, is the environment of the greater society where intuitively we want to fit in and be normal. This doesn't have to do with beliefs and opinions, it has to do with externalities. What is really so terrible about being normal on an external level? In truth, there are no consequences. However, what does matter is whether our *tzelem*, the image we create, is touched by people's norms and by the spirit of

their souls.

It is appropriate that Sefer Bamidbar begins with recounting the names of the tribes of Israel. Names tell us who we are, and give us the foundation of our identity. Our Jewish names kept us distinct from general Egyptian society, allowing us to eventually become an independent society.

## Preparing for Shavuot Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

There are endless stories of converts throughout the generations who sacrificed a great deal, who reached the lofty level of *hineni*- Regardless of what the consequences, I'm here to serve you. There are 7 weeks of preparation, inner detachment from physicality, acceptance of whatever Hashem wants from us. But who can say that he's fully prepared? Even the smallest change is difficult. We have to get out of *Mitzrayim* and get to *Shavuot* in 49 days. How is that possible?

The answer is in Parshat Reah which refers to the holiday as *Shavuot* not *Shabbatot*. This hints to the future *Shavuot* after *Kabalat HaTorah*. The receiving of the *Torah* will be for each individual on his level. Hashem will judge me- Who am I? How did I prepare myself to receive the *Torah* based on my capacities? Hashem will fill up our spiritual resource to the extent that we show our willingness to receive. The first *Shavuot* was a gift-*Shabbatot*. The future *Shavuot* are weeks. I have to toil and according to how much I prepare myself, that is what I will get. *Temimot* is not mentioned here. It is not humanly possible to perfectly rectify the world.

But Hashem looks at our efforts and our commitment to the future and rewards us accordingly.

The Nesivos Sholom explains, on *Shavuot* the fruits of the trees are judged on a conceptual level. This means that while Rosh Hashana is the day when physical allocations are decided, *Shavuot* signifies the fruits of life, it is the day when we are judged and gifted with the spiritual strengths to achieve our ultimate aspirations. It could express itself in many ways. It could be moments of special clarity or Hashem giving us extra *siyata d'shmaya* to come closer to Him. He can bring us a sefer that inspires us to grow or role models that come into our life and give us the ability to ascend higher. The amount of spiritual gifts we will receive is dependent on our preparations. But can I really fully prepare?

When the *Torah* discusses *Matan Torah* it says, "It was on the third day as morning dawned..." The *Shem MiShmuel* quotes the *Zohar* that this is associated with another thing that happened in the morning - *Avraham* arising and going to the *akeida*. On *Shavuot*, the merit of *Avraham* is awakened. *Avraham*

lived in an era of darkness. No one recognized Hashem. People saw only physicality, even the idols were humanized. And *Avraham* created a different reality, a new morning. There is a special power of renewal on *Shavuot*. We aren't judged based on what we accomplished, but on our commitment to the future. If we can say- Hashem my aspiration is to become one with You, then even if we're only taking small steps toward the goal, Hashem will give us the ability to get there. If we are bringing a *mincha chadasha l'Hashem* -a new offering, a commitment which creates a new reality, then Hashem will be with us in the process and help us get to *Har Sinai*.

Hashem tells *Klal Yisrael*, "I carried you on the wings of eagles." As the eagle ages, its feathers fall off and he grows new ones. That is *Shavuot*. We'll experience a speedy ascent, but we have to make the initial commitment. *Shavuot* can also mean oaths. We commit ourselves to Hashem and He commits himself to us. Hashem will never exchange us with another nation. In return, we commit ourselves to using our spiritual gifts to bring the world to its purpose.



## Shavuot: Glimpses of Redemption

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

The Gemara in Pesachim tells us that while on all other *yamim tovim* one can spend the entire day on spiritual pursuits, on Shavuot all agree that one must devote part of the day to material pleasures. This seems perplexing. Why is one of the holiest experiences in Jewish history marked by physical celebration? Additionally, what was the significance of bringing the sacrifice of the *shte'i halechem*, the unique bread sacrifice brought only on Shavuot?

The Mishna in Rosh Hashana says that the world is judged at four times in the year: on Pesach for the grain; on Shavuot for the fruit; on Rosh Hashana for our deeds; and on Sukkot for water. It is fascinating to note that Shavuot has almost the same responsibility and accountability as the judgment on Rosh Hashana. The Gemara teaches that Ezra Hasofer established that Parshat Bechukotai should be read before Shavuot, similar to Parshat Ki Savo which is read before Rosh Hashana. Both readings contain the blessings and the curses. We ask that the year should end along with its curses and that we should begin on a positive note.

When Hashem created the world, the *pasuk* says Yom hashishi with a *heh hayediah*, the definite article. The whole world waited to see if the Jews would accept the Torah. If they would refuse the world would return to desolation. It's almost as if we have this same judgment every year on Shavuot. Will we re-accept the Torah or not?

The Shlah Hakadosh notes that just as on Rosh Hashana, Hashem reexamines every individual, similarly on the day of receiving the Torah He looks to see if we are upholding the Torah. According to Kabbalah, every Rosh Hashana Hashem recreates the world again. Every person must ask himself, "Where do I fit into this new world?" On Rosh Hashana our material portion for the year is decided. Our children, livelihood, and health hang in the balance. On Shavuot the stakes are higher. Hashem evaluates our spiritual affinity to

Torah. This will determine how much spirituality we will receive in the coming year.

Rav Salomon asks, why don't we don't feel the same trepidation before Shavuot as we do before Rosh Hashana? He explains that the period of *sefirat haomer* is a period of mourning meant to prepare for us for the judgment of Shavuot. It's not a time of trepidation, because the judgment is about our desire and our will to come closer to Hashem. We want to show our love and attachment to Hashem, so we eat and drink and rejoice. On Shavuot, our mindset has to be total dedication to the will of Hashem. We may not be there one hundred percent. But if we have the *ratzon*, it can influence the judgment for good.

How can we awaken our will to serve Hashem? The Matnat Chaim quotes the Mesillat Yesharim that the way we act on the outside has a direct impact on the inside. *Zerizut*, doing *mitzvot* with alacrity, can awaken a desire for more *mitzvot*. Rav Hillel notes that every time a person does a good deed with *zerizut*, he arouses love for the *mitzvah*. The more we do good deeds with alacrity, the more we strengthen our spiritual connection to Hashem. Rav Wolbe notes that every *mitzvah* is a direct gift from Hashem. Every opportunity to do a good deed is priceless. The Ari Hakadosh said that all of his spiritual achievements came from the joy he had while fulfilling *mitzvot*. Shavuot is a time to show Hashem clearly that our desire is to do His will.

The Imrei Shefer asks, why is it that the sanctity of Har Sinai did not last while the holiness of Har Hamoriah remained forever? Rav Chaim Sanzer explains that at Har Sinai, Hashem Himself came down to the mountain. However, at Har Hamoriah Avraham brought Hashem's presence down. At Har Sinai there was no real effort made to accept the Torah. In fact, Hashem had to force it on the Jews' heads. In contrast, the *akeida* was a testimony to the incredible strength Avraham invested to overcome his *nisayon*. His struggle created a

reality that engendered *kedusha* for eternity.

The Baal Hatanya explains that going above and beyond what is required is a reflection that one is not just doing *mitzvot* by rote. It's a sign of true *avodat Hashem*. *Yegiah*, extending oneself for a *mitzvah* is a reflection of one's desire for it. There is a transformation on Shavuot similar to what happens on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We are purified of our sins. The gift of Torah, an expression of Hashem's divine will, has the power to change us.

Although Shavuot commemorates a spiritual experience, its ultimate purpose was to provide us with a divine blueprint for our daily lives, especially in the areas where we are naturally weak. In the world of business, where greed lures us to be dishonest, and even in communal affairs, where our egos can be aroused, the guidance of Torah helps us stay on the straight path. The *shte'i halechem* were brought on Shavuot because specifically in the areas of *lechem*, physicality, we can become a *mincha chadasha*. We can create ourselves anew. We have the ability to experience the transformative power of Torah. During Mussaf on Shavuot the gates of heaven are open and we can ask Hashem to give us spiritual blessing for the coming year.

In chapter three of Megilat Ruth, Naomi tells Ruth to go down to the threshing floor at midnight and ask Boaz to redeem her. Chazal say that David Hamelech would awake every night at midnight to the song of his harp. At this hour Hashem visits Gan Eden and the souls of the *tzadikim* awaken and sing *shira* to Him. The harp within the heart of David Hamelech perceived this and was aroused. Naomi knew Boaz would awaken at midnight. He would sense the harp of Ruth and recognize that she too was destined to be a part of the messianic vision. On Shavuot night our voices join with the souls of all the righteous *tzadikim* throughout the generations. As we lift our voices in song and praise to our Maker, we express our ultimate hope that He will redeem us.