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Torah
Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita

Shavuos



לזכות רפואה שלמה,
מלכה בת רחל, מיכאל בן שולמית
יעקב משה בן דבורה שירה,
ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה

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Torah Wellsprings

Shavuos

Emunah

If you would describe the essence of Torah in one word, which word would you use?

The answer is Emunah. Mattan Torah is about believing in Hashem. As the Vilna Gaon *zt'l* (*Mishlei* 22:19) writes, עיקר נתינת התורה, לישראל הוא בכדי שישמו בטחונם בה, "The Torah was given, primarily, so that they will place their trust in Hashem."

We see this theme in the first two commandments. אנכי ה' אלקך... לא יהיה לך אלקים אחרים, which means to 1. Believe in Hashem and 2. Not to worship idols.

Emunah is the foundation of the Torah. As the Ramban (end of *parashas Bo*) writes, "One doesn't have a portion in the Torah unless he believes that everything that happens to us is

miraculous and there is no nature involved at all."

The Aseres HaDibros begin with וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר, אנכי ה' אלקך, "And Hashem spoke all these words, saying, 'I am Hashem your G-d...'" Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhzenk *zt'l* said that we should translate it as follows: "Hashem taught all the words of the Torah with all the mitzvos so a Yid will be able to believe in Hashem and say אנכי ה' אלקך..." Because Torah and mitzvos instill in us emunah.

Since emunah is the foundation of the Torah, by *matan Torah* Hashem showed the nation that He is the only one in the world. As Rashi (*Devarim* 4:35) writes, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael, He opened up the seven heavens. And

just as He ripped open the upper worlds, He also opened the lower worlds and they saw that there is only Hashem. As it states, אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא האלקים אין עוד מלבדו, 'You were shown so that you will know that Hashem is G-d. There is none other than Him.' Hashem showed this to the nation at Har Sinai, because *emunah* in Hashem is the essence of the entire Torah.

The Degel Machanah Efraim (beginning of *parashas Ekev*) writes, "The main thing is *emunah*. My grandfather, the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*, would emphasize the importance of having *emunah*. *Emunah* is the basis of *avodas Hashem* and the basis of the Torah. As Dovid HaMelech said (*Tehillim* 119:86) כל מצותיך אמונה, 'All your mitzvos are about *emunah*.'"

In addition to belief in creation, *emunah* also means that Hashem leads the world with *hashgachah pratis*.

The commentaries ask, why do the *Aseres HaDibros* begin with, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, "I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of Mitzrayim"? Why doesn't it state, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר ברא שמים וארץ, "I am Hashem your G-d Who created heaven and earth"!

According to the Rosh the answer is that creation teaches us that Hashem created the world. *Yetzias Mitzrayim* teaches us that Hashem didn't abandon the world after creating it. The *Aseres Hadibros* declare that Hashem continues to lead the world with *hashgachah pratis*.

As the Rosh (*Orchos Chaim* יום א' כ"ו) writes, "Trust in Hashem with all your heart and believe in His *hashgachah pratis*... Believe that Hashem sees everything in the world, He sees all the ways of man, and He checks his heart and thoughts. Whoever doesn't believe in *yetzias Mitzrayim*, also doesn't believe in אנכי ה'

אלקיד... and this is the foundation of the entire Torah."

Three times a year we are obligated to go to the Beis Hamikdash, as it states (*Devarim* 16:16), שלוש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך את פני ה' אלקיד במקום אשר יבחר בחג המצות ובחג השבועות ובחג הסוכות ולא יראה פני ה' אלקיד ריקם, "Three times a year all males must see Hashem's face in the place that He chooses: Pesach, Shavuos, and on Succos. Don't see Hashem's face emptyhanded." One must come with *korbanos*. This mitzvah is called עליה לרגל, to go to the Beis HaMikdash for the holidays.

Chazal (*Pesachim* 8) say that only people who own fields must go to the Beis HaMikdash. Someone who doesn't own a field isn't obligated to go to the Beis HaMikdash and to be עולה לרגל (see *Pesachim* 8).

What is the logic behind this distinction?

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l explains:

When one owns a field and his produce is his source of income, he might think that he earns his *parnassah* on his own. He might think that he doesn't need Hashem to give him *parnassah*. The Torah obligates him to go to the Beis HaMikdash three times a year, to fortify his *emunah* and to cause him to recognize that his *parnassah* and success are from Hashem.

Those who don't own fields are always turning to Hashem for their livelihood. Their lives are a constant reminder that they can't manage without Hashem. Therefore, Chazal say, "Someone who doesn't own a field isn't obligated to be עולה לרגל." He doesn't need this reminder.

Everything is for the Good

A father and son slipped on the icy sidewalk and fell into the street. The father

fell near the curb, but the son fell further in the street and a bus was rushing towards him. With phenomenal strength, while still sitting on the ground, the father picked up his son and tossed him onto the sidewalk. This saved his child's life.

Upset and angry, the son said to his father, "Why did you throw me like that onto the hard sidewalk?"

The child didn't realize that his father had saved his life.

Now, let us check ourselves and see if we are any different. Hashem saves us and we complain, "Why did you do this to me?" When we suffer discomfort, humiliation, and the like, we must believe that this relatively minor problem is saving us from far greater problems. Everything is for our benefit.

A father brings his son to the dentist. The son cries

because the drilling and the treatment hurt. The father isn't upset with his son for crying. It is natural that the son will cry when he is in pain. But if the son will complain, "Why did you bring me here? Why did you hurt me?" the father will be upset with his son. The child should trust that his father wouldn't have brought him there, if it weren't for the child's benefit.

One Chol HaMoed Succos, Rebbe Shlomo Leib Lenchana *zt'l* was leading a *tish* and was talking to his chassidim about the vanities of this world. He told them, "The entire world isn't worth a *krechtz*." Our destiny is Olam HaBa and we shouldn't be upset about matters that happen in this world. Nothing here is very important.

As the Rebbe was discussing this topic, one of the benches in the *succah* couldn't carry the weight of the many people standing on it. The bench

broke and wounded the Rebbe. Rebbe Shlomo Leib let out a *krechitz*, from pain.

One of the chassidim asked, "Didn't the Rebbe say this world isn't worth a *krechitz*?"

The Rebbe replied, "It is exactly so, but when it hurts, one shouts from pain."

The Beis Yisrael of Gur *zt'l* repeated this story and explained that a person is permitted to *krechitz* when something hurts him. It is natural to *krechitz* and shout when in pain. But it is important that even then, he should remember that there really isn't any reason to *krechitz*. Especially since everything is for the good, and Hashem is leading us in the very best way.

When Naomi returned to Beis Lechem, after living some years in Moav, the women of Beis Lechem were shocked to see her appearing so distraught and broken. Naomi told

them (*Rus* 1:20), "Don't call me Naomi (pleasant). Call me bitter, because Hashem made my life very bitter." This is because Naomi's husband and two sons died.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (*Drashos* vol.2, p.299.) offers some more meaning in Naomi's words:

"Naomi assumed that when she would come to Beis Lechem, the wealthy and honored Boaz...her late husband's nephew... would help her... However, it isn't the way of modest, *tzanuah* women to meet with men. Indeed, we never find Naomi meeting or speaking with Boaz. Naomi's plan was that she would speak with Boaz's wife, and receive help through her... However, she arrived in Beis Lechem just as the *levayah* of Boaz's wife was taking place (see *Bava Basra* 91.). This was ultimately for Naomi's benefit, because Rus came and took the place of Boaz's wife, and Rus bore a child

who Naomi raised as her own. It was Hashem's plan – for the good. But at the time, Naomi didn't know that. She thought it was bad [because she lost her contact]. Therefore, she said, *כי המר שד"י לי מאוד*, 'Hashem made it very bitter for me.'"

The *roshei teivos* of *המר* "Hashem made it very bitter for me" spell *שלמה*, and we know that the era of Shlomo HaMelech's reign was a most prosperous one for the Jewish nation. This hints that although Naomi perceived her situation as bitter, it was all

for her good, preparing the way for Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech to come.¹

Chazal (*Shabbos* 31.) say, *אמונה זה סדר זרעים*, *emunah* hints to the tractate of *Zeraim* (which discusses the *halachos* related to agriculture). The commentaries struggle to understand the connection between *emunah* and the *halachos* of agriculture specifically. Perhaps we can explain it this way: When seeds are planted in the ground they rot, especially after they are watered. It seems like a waste. But then the rotting

1. Chazal say, *הקב"ה מקדים רפואה למכה*, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the cure before sending the wound." This happened to Boaz. Before his wife died, Rus arrived, and Rus would take her place. This tells us that one never needs to worry. Even when going through hard times, be aware that the cure and the solution is already in place. If you will be patient, you will see it transpire.

As the Gemara (*Bava Basra* 91.) states, "The day Rus...came to Eretz Yisrael, Boaz's wife died. This is as people say: 'Before a person dies, the successor over his home comes.'" The Rashbam explains, *ולאשמועינן אתא שהקב"ה מקדים רפואה למכה ויש לו לאדם לבטוח בהקב"ה* "This teaches us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu prepares the *refuah* before the injury. Therefore, one should trust in Hakadosh Baruch Hu."

seeds will sprout, and the entire field will be covered with produce. This alludes to the *emunah* one must have when going through hard times. He must believe that something very special will sprout from this. Right now, it seems like a problem, but something very good will come from it.

Elazar and Isamar were greater tzaddikim than the seventy elderly scholars of the Sanhedrin. To prove this, we bring the Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54:) which teaches us how the oral Torah was given over in the desert. It states that Moshe learned Torah from Hashem, and then Moshe taught it to Aharon, and then Moshe taught Torah to Elazar and Isamar, and *then* he taught Torah to the seventy elders of Sanhedrin. This order

shows us that Elazar and Isamar were greater than the Sanhedrin.

Yet, by *mattan Torah*, only Moshe, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were permitted on Har Sinai. Elazar and Isamar were forbidden.² Why couldn't they go on the mountain? Weren't they greater than the Sanhedrin?

The Tur (in his commentary on *Chumash*) answers that when Nadav and Avihu and the seventy elders of Sanhedrin were on Har Sinai, they didn't have the proper *yiras Shamayim*, and they were punished.

As the Midrash (*Tanchuma*, Behalascha 16) states, הקלו ראשם, בעלותם להר סיני שראו את השכינה, "They were lightheaded when they went up to Har Sinai and saw the *Shechinah*."

2. As the Torah (*Shemos* 24:1) states, ואל משה אמר עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב, ואביהוא ושבעים מוקני ישראל, "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go up on the mountain, you, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Yisrael.'"

As it states (*Shemos* 24), ויחזו את, 'And they saw Hashem and they ate, and they drank.' Was there food there?! It is comparable to a slave who took care of his master while holding his own food in his hand, and he was biting into it and eating it. This expresses the lack of respect that they had; it was as if they were eating and drinking [while seeing the *Shechinah*]. Nadav and Avihu and the elders deserved to be burned at that time, but since *mattan Torah* is precious to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't want to harm them on that day. As it states (*Shemos* 24), ואל אצילי בני, "and to the princes of Bnei Yisrael, Hashem didn't put forth His hand' which implies that they deserved to be punished. But they were punished later. Nadav and Avihu were burned when they entered Ohel Moed, and the seventy elders were burned when they had the *taavah* (temptation for

meat). As it states, והאספסוף, 'The אספסוף had a temptation...' Who were the אספסוף? ... They were the seventy elders of Sanhedrin... What does it say about them? ותבער בהם אש ה', 'Hashem's fire burned them'..."

Hashem foresaw that the people who will go up on Har Sinai will commit this sin, and therefore will be punished with fire. Elazar and Isamar were greater than the elders of Sanhedrin, but if they would have ascended the mountain, they would have also been punished, and Aharon would be left without children.

When Elazar and Isamar were prevented from going up on Har Sinai, they didn't understand why they must miss out on this privilege. If people less than them could go on the mountain, why couldn't they? Is this their reward, after all the great services that they performed for Hashem? On their level it seemed

like a disgrace. Aharon Hakohen also didn't understand why his children, Elazar and Isamar, had to stay behind, together with the rest of Klal Yisrael. In retrospect they understood that this disappointment and humiliation granted them life.³

Hashem is with Us

It states in *Tehillim* (23),
לא אירא רע כי אתה עמדי, "I am not

afraid because You are with me." When Hashem is with us, we have nothing to fear.

A child who is outdoors at night is afraid of wild animals and of thieves. But when his father grabs hold of his hand, the child isn't afraid anymore. Similarly, Dovid HaMelech says "You, Hashem, are with me, therefore I have no fear." ⁴

3. It states, עלה אל ה' אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא, "Go up to Har Sinai: You and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu." The *taamim* (*trop*) of these words are קדמא ואולא מונה רביעי. Perhaps this hints קדמא, Hashem foresaw from the very beginning, אולא, that people who go on Har Sinai will be smitten and punished. מונה, therefore Hashem left over a remnant, רביעי, from Aharon's four sons. Because two sons went up, and the two sons who didn't, survived.

It states (*Melachim* 1, 5:12) וידבר שלושת אלפים משל, "Shlomo told three thousand *mashalim*..." שלושת אלפים means 3000, but it can also mean 3 א's. This refers to אהרן, אלעזר, איתמר, three people whose names begins with א'. Initially they didn't understand why Elazar and Isamar's exclusion was for the good, but later they understood the great kindness that was concealed there. Shlomo used this as a *mashal* to teach people that everything is for the good.

4. Before surgery, the patient checks and makes certain that the doctor is an expert, reliable, and has a good record. However, when one flies on a plane, he doesn't check out the pilot. What's the difference?

It states (*Shemos* 20:18), ומשה נגש אל הערפל, "And Moshe approached the darkness..." This is the dark cloud that hovered over the mountain during *mattan Torah*. The Baal HaTurim writes that הערפל is *gematriya* שכינה, Hashem's presence. The Nesivos Shalom *zt'l* says that this hints that when one endures "darkness" in life, and he is going through hard times, he isn't there alone. Hashem is with him.

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 5.) states, כל שאינו בהסתר פנים אינו מהם, "Whoever doesn't suffer from the *hester panim* (Hashem's concealment) isn't a part of the Jewish nation." According to its literal meaning, the Gemara is saying that in *galus*, when Hashem conceals His countenance, it is expected that the Jewish nation will

endure distress and suffering. Whoever enjoys a perfect life, that's a sign that he isn't a Yid. Because the fate of all Yidden in exile is to undergo hardships.

The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (p.7:) explains this Gemara differently. According to the Beis Aharon's explanation the Gemara is saying that the Jewish nation keeps their eyes open all the time to recognize Hashem's kindness. Even during the eras in which Hashem's countenance is concealed, the Jewish people realize that Hashem is with them, caring for them with *hashgachah pratis*. The Gemara says, כל שאינו בהסתר פנים, whoever doesn't find Hashem's פנים, kindness, in the midst of the הסתר,

The answer is simple: When one flies on a plane, the pilot is with him. The passengers trust that the pilot will fly the plane safely. But by an operation, the doctor isn't in any danger at all. There is room to suspect that he will take chances on the patient's life (to get money, honor, or experience).

concealment, that's a sign *אינו מהם*, that he isn't a Yid. Because the Jewish people know that Hashem is always with them, and therefore they find the kindnesses that Hashem performs for them.

It states (*Tehillim* 42), *מה תשתוחחי נפשי ותהמי עלי הוהלי לאלוקים* "My soul, why are you sad? ... Trust in Hashem, for I will yet praise Him for the salvation of *His countenance*."

The chapter ends, *ישועות פני*, "the salvations of *my countenance*." The chapter changes terms from discussing *פני*, Hashem's face, to *פני*, the person's face.

Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh explains that when the person is going through hard times, only Hashem knows about the salvation that is about to come. Therefore, it states *ישועות פני*, "the salvation that Hashem knows about." But when the salvation comes, it is *ישועות פני*, because now the

person also knows the salvation.

The vast ocean, with its powerful waves, is sometimes used (in Tanach and by Chazal) as an analogy to describe the many *tzaros* that come to a person, and threaten to knock him over and drown him. It states (*ibid.*), *תוהם אל תהום קורא לקול, צנוריד*, "The depths of the seas call to each other, to the roar of the water channels." The *תהום*, the depths of the sea is referring to *tzaros*, and the *pasuk* calls them *צנוריד*, a channel or a pipe.

Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh *zt'l* explains that the difference between the sea and a channel is that the sea is endless, and it isn't controlled, whereas a channel is limited, and it is directed exactly to where you want it to go. When a person is going through hard times, he feels that an uncontrolled and unlimited sea of problems are coming his way. We tell him that the *tzaros* are limited, and

they are directed, like water pouring through a pipe. Such waters are controlled. Think of *tzaros* in that way and you will have courage to stand up against them.

The *pasuk* concludes, כל משברך וגליך עלי עברו, "All Your strong waves passed over me." Reb Shmshon Refael Hirsh explains: "All troubles have gone over me, but I remain strong. Why? It is because these are גליך... משברך, Your waves, [under Your control], and you won't let the waters sweep us away in their current."

The Gemara (*Yevamos* 121) states:

Rabban Gamliel said, "Once I was on a ship, and I saw a ship wrecked at sea. I was very upset because the *talmid chacham*, Reb Akiva, was on that boat. But when I came to dry land and I met Reb Akiva, he was speaking halachos with me. I asked him, 'My son, who saved you?'

"He replied, 'I grabbed hold of a plank that belonged to the ship. With every wave that came towards me, I lowered my head.'"

The Gemara concludes, "The *chachamim* learned from this episode the following lesson: 'If *resha'im* come to a person, lower your head.'"

As Rashi explains, "Don't start up with *resha'im*... Let the time pass."

This is how one should deal with all *tzaros* of life. Don't panic; be patient. The waves are limited, and they are controlled from Above. And soon you will be singing Hashem's salvation.

The Joy of Mattan Torah

Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* says, ורוממתנו מכל הלשונות (which we say on *yom tov*) means Hashem made us so exalted, no words can express it. Using words, from any language (מכל)

(הלשונות), won't suffice to express the greatness that Hashem bestowed upon us.

Generally, we translate this phrase as follows: אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים, "You chose us from all the nations... ורוממתנו מכל הלשונות, and You exalted us above all languages (nationalities)." But that would be basically saying the same thing twice. Rebbe Bunim explains that the second phrase means that Hashem raised us so high, that, רוממתנו מכל הלשונות, no language and no expression can express our greatness.

Similarly, we can say that no words can express our joy for *matan Torah*.

As the Shlah HaKadosh (18) writes, "One is obligated to be very happy on Shavuos, because on this day we merit to get the crown of Torah. Chazal (*Pesachim* 68:) say, 'All opinions agree that one needs to enjoy festive meals on Shavuos because it's the

day the Torah was given to the Jewish nation.'"

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 68:) states, "Rav Yosef said to his family on Shavuos, 'Prepare for me a calf עגל אהא.'" (Rashi explains that he asked for the third-born calf to its mother, for that is the best tasting calf).

Rav Yosef explained, 'If it isn't for this day [of *matan Torah*], there are many Yosefs in the marketplace.' (Rashi explains that there are many Yosefs, and he wouldn't be better than them.) The Gemara gives other examples of the joy we should have on Shavuos.

The entire world rejoices with *matan Torah*. A hint to the joy is found in the first two pesukim that we read on Shavuos morning (*Shemos* 19:1-2). First, we read, ביום הזה, באו מדבר, "on this day, they came to Midbar Sinai." The next pasuk states: ויסעו מרפידים, "And they traveled from Refidim and they came to Midbar Sinai." The question is: Why do

we begin by saying that the nation arrived at Har Sinai, and only afterwards we mention where they came from?

The Or HaChaim (*Shemos* 19:2) answers that the joy was so great when the Jewish nation came to Midbar Sinai that the Torah couldn't contain its excitement and it immediately states, "They came to Midbar Sinai!" Afterwards, the Torah goes through the details, of where they came from, and so on. But first and foremost, the excitement and anticipation of *mattan Torah* causes the order to change (אהבה מקלקלת את השורה) and the Torah tells us about the wonderful, joyous moment when the Jewish nation came to Midbar Sinai, the place where the Torah will be given.

We quote the Or HaChaim HaKadosh: "Ever

since the world was created – the entire world, those above and those below – were waiting anxiously, 'When will Bnei Yisrael come to *midbar* Sinai?' When they arrived there, [the *pasuk*] couldn't contain itself to tell the order of events. It immediately lets us know, ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני, 'They came to Midbar Sinai! הגיע השוק ונחשק לחושק השוק. The beloved Jewish nation came to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who loves them.'"

How can a person not rejoice on this day, the day that Hashem elevated the Jewish nation from all nations to be His chosen nation? Who wouldn't rejoice when the Creator of the world chose him – a human being made of flesh and blood – to be close to Hashem? The entire universe is excited on this day, and we too, should connect to this great joy.⁵

5. During the Holocaust, an elderly Jew came to Reb Chaim Kreisworth, "Tomorrow, I will be brought to the gas chambers. I

The Holiness of Bnei Yisrael

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11), צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך, שלמה בעמרה שעמרה לו אמו ביום התונתו וביום שמחת לבו, "Go and see, O daughters of Zion... the crown that his mother made for him on his wedding day, the day of his joy."

Chazal say that יום התונתו וביום שמחת לבו, "His wedding day, the day of His joy" refers to *mattan Torah*.

The Midrash on this *pasuk* (ibid.) teaches:

Reb Shimon bar Yochai asked Reb Elazar b'Reb Yosi, "Perhaps you heard from your father the

am wealthy, and my money is stored in a bank in Switzerland. I will tell you the number of my account. If you survive this war, seek out my children and give them the account number, so they could take out the money."

Reb Chaim Kreisworth survived, but he couldn't find that man's children.

Twenty years later, Reb Chaim was speaking with a pauper in a beis medresh in Yerushalayim, and the pauper told him his name. Reb Chaim discovered that he was the offspring he was looking for. Reb Chaim told him, "Your father told me that he has money in a bank in Switzerland. Go there and collect your money."

This poor man didn't have enough money to travel to Switzerland, so he borrowed money, and made the trip. Having accrued interest all these years, the value of the account increased. The bank told him that he has \$30,000,000 in the account.

Reb Chaim Kreisworth said, "He was wealthy for many years, only he didn't know it."

Reb Chaim Kreisworth explained, "We are also extremely wealthy; we have millions. We have the Torah, we have mitzvos; our fortune is endless, only we aren't aware of what we have."

meaning of the words בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו, 'The crown that his mother made for him'?

"Yes, I did."

"What did he say?"

"It can be compared to a king who had an only daughter whom he loved immensely. Initially he called her בתי 'my daughter.' Later he called her אחותי, 'my sister.' לא זו מחבבה עדין, his love continued until he called her אמי, 'my mother.' Similarly, Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves the Jewish nation and He calls them בתי 'My daughter' and then אחותי 'My sister, עדין מחבבה עדין, לא זו מחבבה עדין, שקראן אמי, He doesn't stop loving them until He calls them אמי, 'My mother.'"⁶

"Reb Shimon bar Yochai stood up and kissed him on his head. He said, 'If I

came here only to hear this explanation from your mouth, it is sufficient."

The Kli Yakar teaches that these three levels of closeness to Hashem (daughter, sister, mother) are alluded to in the *pasuk* (Shemos 19:4), ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings and I brought you to Me..." As the *Kli Yakar* teaches:

The first level is ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, "I carried you on eagles' wings." This is when Hashem treats us like a caring father who tends to his young. Then Hashem raised us to a higher relationship, as it states, ואביא אתכם אלי, "And I brought you to Me." This means that the Jewish nation became equal with Hashem, *keviyachol*. They became like brothers, on an

6. The Midrash proves its lesson from the following *pesukim*: In *Tehillim* (45) Hashem calls the Jewish nation "My daughter" as it states, שמעי בת וראי. In *Shir Hashirim* (5) we are called sister, as it states, פתחו לי אחותי. In *Yeshayah* (51) it states, הקשיבו אלי אמי, which means we are called mother.

equal level. The *pasuk* concludes, *ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים*, "And You will be for Me like a kingship of priests..." This means, *keviyachol*, that the Jewish nation will be kings over Hashem! As it states (*II Shmuel* 23:3), *צדיק מושל ביראת אלקים*, "A tzaddik rules..." *keviyachol* over Hashem. And Chazal say, "Hashem makes decrees, and a tzaddik annuls them." This is the highest level when Hashem makes the Jewish nation greater than Him.

An eagle was walking along the sea shore, eating the small ants and bugs it found there. This diet wasn't sufficient for the large eagle. But what could it do?

Someone called out, "Eagle! Eagle! Why are you crawling on the seashore? You have wings. Lift your wings and fly." The eagle raised its wings and flew over the ocean. It swooped down, caught a fish and was satiated.

The *nimshal* is that when the Jewish nation was in Egypt they weren't aware of their greatness. When they were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told them, *והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים...* ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש, "You will become My treasure among all nations... You will be a kingdom of princes, a holy nation" (*Shemos* 19:5-6). Hashem told them, *ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים*, "I raised you on eagle's wings..." (*Shemos* 19:4). He showed them that they have the greatest potential. They aren't simple people. They are a beloved, royal nation. If they lift their wings they will soar and reach the highest spiritual levels.

Eagerness

At *mattan Torah* Klal Yisrael proclaimed *נעשה ונשמע*, "We will do and we will listen." This order is difficult to understand, because how can they do before they hear what they need to do?

The answer is that when one desires something immensely, the doing almost precedes the listening. The following analogies will help us understand: There was once a group of neighbors who were invited to a parlor meeting to help one of their neighbors who needed financial help. The person chairing the meeting distributed jobs, to help raise money for this family. Most of them listened first, and when they understood their mission, they went to do it. But there was this one person who was very motivated to help his neighbor. He was ready to act even before he knew what he was supposed to do. When it was his turn to receive his task, he ran to the chairman, and even before he heard what he has to do, he was already putting on his coat, and one foot was almost outside the door to accomplish his mission. In a way, his doing preceded his listening.

Here's another analogy:

People living in a condominium would gather once a year to discuss communal issues such as: Whether they should invest in a playground for the children, and when they should repaint the building, and the like.

The residents of the condominium would listen, debate, and eventually reach a conclusion. Their listening preceded their doing.

But one year at the annual meeting, the building was on fire. They didn't sit there debating how they should put out the fire. Everyone ran and acted. Their doing came before their listening. This is because when something is urgent, doing comes first.

This describes the greatness of *נעשה ונשמע*. Obviously, they had to listen first. It is impossible to do before hearing. But

their desire to accept the Torah and do the mitzvos was so strong; it was almost as if they did before they heard.

Annual Mattan Torah

The Aruch HaShulchan (284) discusses the *brachah* on the *haftarah*, ודבר אחד מדבריך, אחר, "Not one of Your words of the past will return empty."

He writes, "The word אחר, 'of the past' seems extra and its meaning is not understood. I think that this is the explanation: ...When the Torah discusses stories that happened in the past, it seems that there isn't any purpose for them. But the truth is, that whatever occurred in the past continues to happen in the present. One example of this is *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We are obligated to imagine ourselves leaving Mitzrayim even now, in our generation. This is because *yetzias Mitzrayim* continues to happen.

Similarly, whenever the *Navi* discusses something that happened in the past, it continues to occur... This is the *segulah* of the holy Torah. Therefore, we say, ודבר אחד ... אחר. This is telling us that even matters that happened in the אחר, past, לא ישוב ריקם, aren't empty. They are not irrelevant stories of our history. They continue to happen until today."

Matan Torah continues to happen, each year, on Shavuos.

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* found an indication in Shulchan Aruch that the episode of *matan Torah* repeats itself, each year:

Shulchan Aruch (468:10) states, "The custom is that one doesn't do דם רוק, blood-letting [for healing purposes], on *erev yom tov*."

The Magen Avraham (15) explains, "This is because the Gemara (*Shabbos*, end of chapter 18) tells that

erev Shavuos a spirit called *טובה* came forth. If the Jewish people didn't accept the Torah, the spirit would have killed them and spilled their blood..." Therefore, we must be cautious from this spirit, and we avoid letting blood on *erev Shavuos*.

The question is, that spirit came three thousand years ago, before Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai. Why must we be cautious every year?

The *Machatzis HaShekel* replies, "It is known that

whatever happened to our forefathers happens again...in the present, when that time comes."

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach quotes this *Machatzis HaShekel* as an indication that every year on Shavuos there is a *kabbalas haTorah*, with all the details of the original *mattan Torah*.⁷

In fact, every time we read from the *sefer Torah*, it is like we are receiving the Torah on Har Sinai.

The *Shevet Mussar* (34:19) writes, "Imagine the

7. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) says, *בעצרת נידונים על פירות האילן*, "On Shavuos, the fruits of trees are judged." The *Tola'as Yaakov* (quoted by the *Shlah*) explains that the fruits are the Jewish souls. They are judged for *bittul Torah*, and for not being sufficiently devoted to keeping the mitzvos.

The *Yerushalmi* (*Rosh Hashanah* 4:5) states, "By all *korbanos* it states *שעיר עיזים לחטאת*, 'a goat for a sin-offering.' But by the *korbanos* of Shavuos, it doesn't state *חטאת*. It states *שעיר עיזים לכפר עליכם*, 'a goat for atonement.' This is because on Shavuos no one has sins. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling Bnei Yisrael, 'Since you accepted the yoke of Torah it's as though you never sinned your entire lives.'" This is what happens every Shavuos (and whenever one accepts the yoke of Torah).

bimah is Har Sinai and you're receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. Think that Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His *malachim* (פמלאי שלי) are there, as it was by *mattan Torah*. Envision Moshe Rabbeinu reading the Torah, and the entire nation is standing around Har Sinai to hear Torah from his mouth."

Therefore, *Shulchan Aruch* (141:1) states, "[The *baal korei*] must stand [when he reads the Torah]." The *Mishnah Berurah* (141:1) explains this is because Hashem stood when He gave us the Torah, as it states, ואתה פה עמוד עמדי, "Stand here with Me."

Similarly, in *siman* (146:4) the *Shulchan Aruch* states that some say that those listening to *kriyas haTorah* should also stand up. The *Mishnah Berurah* (141:19) explains, "According to halachah, it is permitted to sit, but the Mahara'm said that it is proper to stand. This is because when hearing the reading of the

sefer Torah, one should imagine it as if he is hearing the Torah from Har Sinai. And at Har Sinai all Yidden stood, as it states, אנכי עומד בין...ה' וביניכם

We see from these sources that each time we read the Torah, it's a small *mattan Torah*, and it should bear a resemblance to the fear (and even the standing) that was felt at the time of *mattan Torah*. Surely when we read the portion of the Torah that discusses *mattan Torah*, it is as though we are actually receiving the Torah from Har Sinai. As the Midrash (*Psikta* 12, *Yalkut Shimoni Yisro* 271) states, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu says to the Jewish nation, 'My children read this *parashah* [of *matan Torah*] each year and I will consider it as though you stood before Me on Mount Sinai and received the Torah."

We read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: *Shavuos*, *Parashas Yisro*, and *Parashas*

Ve'eschanan.⁸ There were tzaddikim who actually heard Hashem giving them the Torah when they heard the *Aseres HaDibros* in beis knesses.

One Friday night of *parashas Yisro*, Rebbe Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev *zt'l* said at his *tish*, "Whoever has holy ears will hear tomorrow, during *kriyas haTorah*, the *Aseres HaDibros* spoken from Hashem's mouth, as He gives us the Torah...."

When the Avodas Yisrael of Koznitz *zt'l* heard this, he added, "Someone who doesn't have such ears should cleanse them well, so he will be able to hear it! Even today one can hear

mattan Torah, but one must first clean his ears from all impurities."

The Divrei Yechezkel of Shinov *zt'l* said that on Shabbos *parashas Yisro*, when his father, the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l*, read the *Aseres HaDibros*, he felt as though he was standing at Har Sinai and he heard the *Aseres HaDibros* uttered by Hashem, with the sounds of the shofar, thunder and lightning, and all the other experiences that took place by *mattan Torah*. The Shinover Rav said that he was expecting to experience the same on Shavuos, and he prepared himself for that moment. But on Shavuos he didn't experience it.⁹

8. When an ill person needs a very strong medication – too strong for the patient to tolerate – the doctor will administer the medication in two or three doses. Similarly, we read the *Aseres HaDibros* three times a year: *parashas Yisro*, *parashas Ve'eschanan*, and Shavuos. The spiritual experience that comes from this reading is very intense, so the impact is divided up in three parts –so the Jewish nation can absorb it (Beis Avraham).

9. The Chizkuni (introduction to *Chumash*) writes, "I swear by my soul

Preparation

The Kedushas Levi *zt'l* writes, "If a person merits it, every Shavuos he will hear Hashem's voice announce אַנְכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ. How could a person not prepare for this...? Millions of *malachim* tremble before Hashem's magnificence. Certainly us human beings... Three days of preparation isn't enough. Even if one prepares the entire year, it also isn't enough."

The Satmar Rebbe *zt'l* explained that נְעִשָׂה וְנִשְׁמָע means if a person prepares himself with נְעִשָׂה, deeds, he will merit נִשְׁמָע, to hear Hashem say אַנְכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ.

The average person is not yet on the level to actually witness *mattan Torah* taking place and to hear Hashem say אַנְכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ. Nevertheless, the more one prepares for *mattan Torah*, the more he will be connected and influenced by *mattan Torah*.

It states (*Shemos* 19:3), וּמֹשֶׁה, עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים וַיְקַרְא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הָהָר, "And Moshe went up to Hashem, and Hashem called to him from the mountain..." The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh focuses on the order of the *pasuk*, that first Moshe began ascending Har Sinai and then Hashem called to him. The Ohr HaChaim explains that this is always

that I, Chizkiyah, heard Hashem saying the Ten Commandments in my dream ..."

The Kedushas Levi would sweat profusely from fear when he would take out the *sefer Torah* to read on Shavuos. The congregation knew to wrap the *sefer Torah* with extra layers, so it wouldn't get wet and ruined from his sweat. Before he came to the beis medresh on Shavuos morning to daven Shacharis, he exclaimed, אֵיךְ גִּי זַעַךְ וְעָהָן, מִיֵּט דִּי לַעֲבֹדֵינִי, "I'm going to meet with Hashem!" (Some say that he said, "I met with Hashem!")

the order: Man must take the first step and then Hashem will help him.

The Ohr HaChaim writes, "When Moshe took the first step and went up the mountain, Hashem called to him immediately. Because you must know that holiness doesn't come unless one prepares for it. As the *Zohar* states, 'An arousal below causes the arousal from Above.'" Therefore, only after Moshe took a step towards holiness, by going up the mountain, did Hashem call him. In the same way, we must prepare ourselves for *mattan Torah*, and then we can receive the holiness of *mattan Torah*.

The importance of preparing for *mattan Torah* is stated in the Torah. It says (*Shemos* 19:11), והיו נכונים ליום השלישי, "Be prepared for the third day." The *pasuk* is explicitly telling the nation that they must prepare for *mattan Torah*.

We can add that the *nekudos* of והיו נכונים (with a *kametz* under the ה) implies that they were *already* prepared. (Otherwise, it would state והיו נכונים, with a *segol* under the ה, which would mean "prepare yourselves.") The *pasuk* is hinting that if you do your part to prepare yourselves, Hashem promises, והיו נכונים, you *will* be prepared.¹⁰

10. There are twenty-six *pesukim* from בחרש השלישי (*Shemos* 19:1) until the *Aseres HaDibros*. The *Aseres HaDibros* has thirteen *pesukim*. (The *gematriya* of 26 and 13 hints to אהרן אהרן.) Notice that there is twice the amount of *pesukim* about preparing for *mattan Torah* than *pesukim* that discuss *mattan Torah* itself. This indicates that preparation is the highest level. As chassidim say, "the preparation for a mitzvah is greater than the mitzvah itself."

In the *Hagadah Shel Pesach*, we say, אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה, "If Hashem brought us to Har Sinai and He didn't give us the

How does one prepare for *mattan Torah*?

We should take practical steps towards acquiring purity. For example, we can take on *kabbalos* to guard our eyes or our speech; and we can increase the amount we study Torah; or how we act and so on.

When taking on a *kabbalah*, it is essential to know your abilities, and know what you can take on and what you can't do. To explain that, consider the following *mashal*:

A *talmid chacham* went into a shoe store and asked for a pair of size 8 shoes. The store owner was

generous, so he said, "You're a *talmid chacham*. I want to give you more. I'll give you a size 10."

The man replied, "Your generosity isn't helping me. A size 10 shoe will slip off my foot. I need a size 8."

The *nimshal* is, a person has to improve his ways according to his strengths. If he will take on *kabbalos* that are beyond him, he will fail.

This lesson is also alluded to in the words, **לכם ולפניהם לכם**. This means find the service that is **לכם**, on your level.

Torah it would also be enough [reason to praise Hashem]..." The commentaries ask, what do we gain from coming to Har Sinai if we don't receive the Torah?

The Chida (*Leiv Dovid* 31) *zt'l* answers that when they stood by Har Sinai they were preparing themselves to receive the Torah. The holy *sefarim* teach that due to their preparations, they perceived divine secrets of the Torah even before the Torah was given. Hence, even just coming to Har Sinai (where they prepared for *mattan Torah*) **ריינו**, is enough reason to praise Hashem.

Sefiras Ha'omer

Counting *sefiras ha'omer* purifies us and prepares us for Shavuos. But what should a person do if he realizes that he didn't take advantage of these special days?

The Chidushei HaRim said that even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, one can acquire the entire purity available during *sefiras ha'omer*. This is hinted at in the *pasuk*, *עד מחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום*, "until the morrow of the seventh week, count fifty days." This hints that even on the final day of *sefiras ha'omer*, you can count all fifty days. On this final day you can acquire the purity from all the days of *sefiras hta'omer*.

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* adds that even if one came to Shavuos and he didn't improve his ways at all during the seven weeks of *sefiras ha'Omer*, it isn't too late. As it states (about Shavuos, *Vayikra* 23:21), *וקראתם*

בעצם היום הזה מקרא קודש יהיה לכם. This *pasuk* implies that even *בעצם היום הזה* in the middle of Shavuos you can decide *מקרא קודש*, to draw yourself towards holiness, and that will be sufficient.

The Arugas HaBosem writes, "Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Jewish people will be on a very low level in *galus*, and they won't be able to prepare themselves to be fitting to receive the light of the *yom tov* of *mattan Torah*. He yearned for each Yid to experience the light of the King's face that shines on Shavuos... Therefore, Moshe added another day on his own and the Torah was given a day later, on the fifty-first day of the omer. If Shavuos would immediately follow *sefiras ha'omer* one would assume that it's impossible to receive the light of *mattan Torah* without keeping the *sefirah* properly. But since Shavuos wasn't directly after the *sefirah*, this shows that they are not

interdependent... Even if the Jewish nation isn't able to purify themselves properly [during *sefiras ha'omer*] they will not lose the opportunity to experience the light of *mattan Torah*."

Sheloshes Yemei Hagbalah

Rebbe Avraham HaMalach told his students that during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* they shouldn't come to him to hear *diorei Torah*. He needs these days to study Torah by himself.

The students didn't obey and they came to their Rebbe, the Malach, during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* to hear his *diorei Torah*. The Rebbe locked his door and didn't let them in. He explained, "One's success in Torah for the entire year is dependent upon one's *hasmadah* during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*."

Old Yerushalayimer Yidden still remember (before תש"ח) when the stores in Yerushalayim closed at midday in the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* so the shopkeepers could spend the rest of the day immersed in Torah. They worked half a day and the other half was spent studying Torah, in preparation for Shavuos.

The batei midrashim of Poland were filled to capacity with people studying Torah, already two weeks before Shavuos.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* once entered a beis medresh in Yerushalayim during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah* and said in exasperation, "Where are the Yidden of the *alter heim* (the Jewish communities of Europe from before the War)?"

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zy'a* would tell the following story: The *batei midrashim* of Poland were always full during the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*.

People would take off from work to immerse themselves in Torah. Once, during *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, someone came into the beis medresh, and watched with envy the passion for Torah that was displayed by the people learning in the beis medresh. He turned to the wall and cried, wishing he was also like them.

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer said, "But he didn't merely remain with *wanting* to learn Torah. He reached for the first Gemara he saw and was immediately engrossed in Torah." That moment changed his life. He experienced the sweetness of Torah, became a *masmid*, and eventually a great *talmid chacham*.

Rebbe Yehoshua Belzer had one bookshelf where he kept *sefarim* that were written with *ruach hakadosh*. That man's *sefer* was also stored on that shelf.

The son of Rebbe Elazar Mendel of Lelov was engaged to the daughter of one of Rebbe Elazar Mendel's chassidim. As customary, the *kallah's* family sent presents to the *chasan*, but Rebbe Elazar Mendel's family didn't reciprocate. They didn't send back a gift to the *kallah*. The *kallah's* mother was upset about that. She asked her husband to speak to the Rebbe about it.

(The primary reason the Rebbe's family wasn't sending gifts to the *kallah* was because every extra penny they had went to *tzedakah*, to help the poor of Yerushalayim.)

The *kallah's* father felt uncomfortable approaching the Rebbe to ask why he wasn't sending gifts. Rebbe Elazar Mendel was his Rebbe, after all! But his wife was very upset, and he understood that sooner or later, he will have to raise the issue with the Rebbe.

Each time he went to the Rebbe, his wife reminded him to discuss the matter with the Rebbe, but he was always awed by the Rebbe's presence, and he simply couldn't bring himself to mention the issue.

During the *sheloshes yemei hagbalah*, the Rebbe's custom was to daven *Maariv* and count *sefiras ha'omer* at the *kever* of Shimon HaTzaddik and then go to the Kosel haMaaravi to daven some more. The father of the *kallah* planned to go together with the Rebbe to these places. His wife told him, "Tonight you must gather your courage and speak to the Rebbe about the gifts."

So later that night, he knocked on the Rebbe's door. As he stood behind the closed door, he was thinking, "My wife is right. It is true the Rebbe is a holy man, but why doesn't he give a gift to our daughter? Even a small pin would be

enough. Why can't the Rebbe give a small pin?"

The Rebbe answered the door, "*Mechuten shlita!* I wouldn't think that during the *shleoshes yemei hagbalah* you'd be going around with pins in your head."

He was astounded at the Rebbe's *ruach hakadosh*. He went home and told his wife, "We have a *mechutan*, a *baal ruach hakadosh*. Don't bother me anymore about the presents..."

Chiddushei Torah

The Rebbe of Ruzhin *zt'l* wouldn't say *divrei Torah* at his *tish*, Shavuos night. He explained, "I feel like a farmer before the wheat harvest. The old produce has been consumed and the new crops weren't brought in yet. Similarly, the Torah *chiddushim* of last year have already been used up, and the new Torah hasn't come in yet."

The Yid HaKadosh *zt'l* also didn't say Torah on

Shavuos night. He said, "דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה" *'derech erez* comes before Torah.' So, what do we do this night? We prepare ourselves for *mattan Torah* with awe and fear." After saying this, he became very frightened, and all his limbs trembled. (Stated in *Remasayim Tzofim, Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* 18:58).

We received the Torah about 3,300 years ago. Don't we already have the Torah? Why do we say that on this day we receive the Torah again?

Before answering this question, we quote another question from the Sfas Emes (*Shavuos* 5661): It states (*Devarim* 33:4), תורה צוה לנו משה, מורשה קהלת יעקב "Moshe commanded us in matters related to Torah; it is an inheritance for the congregation of Yaakov." This implies that the Torah is our inheritance. However, Chazal say (*Avos* 2:12), התקן עצמך ללמוד תורה שאינה ירושה לך, "Prepare yourself to learn Torah, because it isn't an

inheritance." So, is Torah our inheritance or is it not?

The Sfas Emes answers, we have the Torah as an inheritance, but the *chiddushei Torah* are new each year. Hashem gave us the Torah 3300 years ago; that is our inheritance. But Hashem also gives each individual the ability to be *mechadesh* in Torah, to find new explanations, clarity, depths, and so on. That part of Torah is given to us on Shavuos, and it becomes revealed to the person each time he studies Torah.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* taught that even clarity in Torah can be considered *chiddushei Torah*. If at first you didn't fully understand a section of Torah, and then you learn it again and again until you understand it, that clarity is a *chiddush* in Torah.

And, obviously, there are the literal *chiddushei Torah*, novel insights in Torah that each person can perceive according to his

level and abilities. All this is given to us on Shavuos.

Derech HaMelech, from the Rebbe of Piascana zt'l, explains it this way: On Shavuos everyone receives a non-defined prophecy. When he studies Torah throughout the year he brings forth the *chiddushei Torah* that he received on Shavuos. That's when he discovers what he received on Shavuos.

The Sfas Emes (*Shavuos* 5661) writes, "The Torah is called עץ חיים, a tree of life. Just as a tree grows new fruit each year, so does the Torah bring forth new fruit each year... Shavuos, when Hashem gives us the Torah, Bnei Yisrael receive their portion of *chiddushei Torah* that will become new throughout the year. They bring it forth (מכאן אל הפועל),

each one at the right time and place."

Chazal (*Rosh Hashanah* 16.) say "On Shavuos, there is a judgment for the fruits of the trees." The Sfas Emes explains that this means on Shavuos you are judged which *chiddushim* you will acquire throughout the year. Shavuos is called יום הביכורים, 'the day of the new fruit.' The new fruit are the new *chiddushim* that will come forth from Shavuos.

The Sfas Emes concludes, ויום זה שורש התורה של כל השנה, "This day is the root of the Torah for the entire year."¹¹

In *birchas haTorah* we say, גותן התורה. The Ta'z (*Orach Chaim* 47:5) explains, "It seems to me... that גותן התורה, 'Hashem gives the Torah' implies that Hashem gives us the Torah in the present.

11. The *pasuk* (*Shemos* 19:19) says, ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאוד, "The sound of the shofar was very strong..." The Or HaMeir of Zhitomer zt'l teaches that חזק can also mean contains (see *Eiruvain* 14 - ים שעשה שלמה היה - מחזיק מאה וחמישים מקוה מורה). This implies that *kabalas haTorah* contains and holds (מחזיק) all *chiddushei Torah* that will be revealed afterwards.

We don't say נתן התורה, Hashem gave us the Torah in the past. Because Hashem is always giving us His Torah, each day anew. This is because when we study Torah, Hashem grants us the ability to find newness in it..." The Ta'z compares it to the Gemara (*Eiruvin* 54) which says that a nursing child always tastes new flavors whenever he nurses, similarly, someone who studies Torah always finds new pleasures in the Torah.

One *erev Shavuos*, Reb Meir of Amshinov *zt'l* said to one of his chassidim, "Chazal say, 'who is a fool? The person who loses everything that was given to him' (*Chagigah* 4). Therefore, I'm encouraging you, don't be a fool. On Shavuos we receive the Torah for the entire year. Don't miss the opportunity."

We can compare it to someone who has many fields, but if he doesn't plant his fields in the months of Tishrei and Cheshvan, then at Shavuos time, the season for reaping (הג הקציר), he won't have anything to harvest. Similarly, this is the season for acquiring Torah. Let's not lose out on this opportunity.

Tikun Leil Shavuos

The *Mishnah Berurah* (494:1) teaches, "The *Zohar* states that the early chassidim remained awake the entire night [of Shavuos] and they studied Torah.¹² And today, most לימדים (people who study Torah) are accustomed to do so. The Arizal teaches: 'Know, whoever doesn't sleep at all this night, and he studies Torah, מובטח לו שישלים שנתו ולא יארע לו שום נזק, he is guaranteed that he will live this year

12. The *Zohar* (vol.3 98.) states, "the early chassidim didn't sleep on this night and they studied Torah."

and nothing bad will happen to him.'

The Magen Avraham explains the reason for this custom (על פי פשוטו): [It is because on the night before *mattan Torah*] the nation slept the entire night and Hakadosh Baruch Hu had to waken them to receive the Torah (as stated in Midrash). We have to correct this, [therefore we remain awake and study Torah on this night]."

The original source promising protection and blessings from studying Torah on this night is the *Zohar* (Introduction vol.1, 8:) which states, "Reb Shimon

and his holy students were singing the song of Torah, coming up with *chiddushim* - each one of them - and they were very joyous. Reb Shimon told them, 'My children, you are fortunate, because tomorrow the *kallah* will go to the *chuppah*¹³ with you alone, because you are making the *tikun* tonight and you are rejoicing with the Torah. All of you will be inscribed in the Book of Memory, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bless you with seventy blessings and He will crown you... Whoever joins us on this night will be protected...the entire

13. The analogy to a *chuppah* is precise, because Shavuos and *mattan Torah* is like a wedding. As Chazal (*Taanis* 26:) translate (*Shir HaShirim* 3:11), "יום התתנו, "the day Hashem gave us the Torah."

Many customs of a *chasunah* resemble *mattan Torah*, because *mattan Torah* was truly a wedding.

Someone who was up all night, fell asleep during the *tefillah* on Shavuos morning. When he woke up, Reb Chaim Brim asked him, "Did you ever see a *chasan* that slept when he stood under the *chuppah*?"

year, and he will live out the year in peace."¹⁴

Many great secrets and rectifications take place when Bnei Yisrael study Torah on this night (as is discussed in kabbalistic *sefarim*). Some people think that because they are simple

people and not scholars, they can't accomplish great things. But that isn't so. As the Seder HaYom writes, "A person can be lowly in one way, and have great strength in others." Even the simplest person can accomplish so much when he stays awake and studies

14. When you have a temptation to speak idle talk on this night, remember the rare promises and guarantees from the *Zohar* and that will help you refrain.

(Many people read this portion of *Zohar* at the end of Shavuos night, because it is printed at the end of the *Tikun leil Shavuos*. It seems that it would be better to read it at the beginning of the night, so he will study the entire night with greater *hasmadah*.)

The holy *sefarim* quote a Yerushalmi, "Don't read it *עצרת תהיה לכם*, read it *עצרת תהיה לכם*, which means, "Shavuos you will live." Perhaps this is because life is given to all those who study Torah on Shavuos night.

The Megaleh Amukos teaches: It states in *Shaar HaKavanos* in the name of the Arizal that throughout the year, whenever one is awake all night long studying Torah, this will free him from *ברה*. This is said about any night of the year. Certainly, it is so on Shavuos night. Remaining awake will atone for many *krisus* (for many sins that are punished with *kares*)."

It states (*Shir HaShirim* 5:2), *אני ישנה ולבי ער*, "I am asleep, but my heart is awake." The Imrei Emes *zt'l* said that *ישנה* is *gematriya* שם"ה, representing the 365 nights a year that one sleeps. *ער ולבי ער* refers to the night of Shavuos when people remain awake. It is called *לבי*, for it is the heart of the year.

Torah Shavuos night. We shouldn't underestimate our greatness, and our potential.

As the Seder HaYom (*Shavuos*) writes, "One should be very happy on Shavuos because it's the day the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael... All opinions agree that one must celebrate Shavuos [with good food] so the body will be happy, because one uses his body to study Torah and perform mitzvos... Nevertheless...his *neshamah* also needs to rejoice, by understanding Torah...for the *neshamah* finds joy only in learning Torah and keeping the mitzvos. Especially on the night of Shavuos, one must learn Torah the entire night (or, at least, most of the night). The *Zohar* states...that on this night we decorate the *kallah* (the *Shechinah*) with ornaments, for she will come to the *chuppah* on the next day... Don't take this matter lightly [and don't think you aren't on the

level to accomplish such great matters], because a person is low in one way, and in other ways he has amazing great strengths. He can sustain the entire world - which even *malachim* can't do. He gives strength to Hashem, the Creator of the world... And, *chas veshalom*, [if one sins], he weakens the strength of Heaven and draws His right hand back. As it states, צור ילדך תשי, 'You weakened the strength of the One Who created you.'

"Therefore, every person, קטן שבקטנים והדיוט שבהדיוטות, even the lowest and most simple person, should consider himself great in this regard and say, 'Perhaps I can fulfill Hashem's will.' ... Don't say, 'Who am I and what worth do I have that the worlds should be rectified through me?' ... Such thoughts cause disaster - onto himself and onto others - because he won't be cautious with his deeds...

"If he is very tired and he has to sleep, he should sleep leaning [on the table], but not lying down [in a bed], so he won't sleep for long. Then, he should wake up with *zrizus* and study Torah until daybreak. And then he should praise Hashem in the *beis medresh* for all the kindness Hashem performs for us. He gave us His Torah and chose us from all nations to be His precious nation. How fortunate is our lot...! We aren't fools who don't recognize all this honor that Hashem granted us; that He elevated us above all nations of the world. The Goyim turn to their *avodah zarahs* who can't help them... This isn't the lot of Bnei Yisrael... Hashem watches over them

with His kindness, at all times - on the entire nation and also on the individual - as we see the miracles Hashem performs for our forefathers and for us, all the time."¹⁵

There is a renowned story of Reb Shlomo Alkebetz *zt'l* (renowned kabbalist and composer of *Lecha Dodi*, which we sing on Friday night) who studied with other scholars on Shavuot night. They merited receiving a message from heaven, telling them how happy Hashem is with their studies.

The Shlah HaKadosh (*Masechta Shavuot, Ner Mitzvah*, 8) quotes this episode, told by Reb Shlomo Alkabetz *zt'l*: "When we began studying Mishnayos, and

15. The Seder HaYom then elaborates on our obligation to attach ourselves to Torah, at all times. He writes, "Hashem loves us because of our forefathers and because of His love for the precious, perfect Torah that He implanted in our midst... The Torah is the daughter of Hakadosh Baruch Hu - the King of kings. Whoever will marry and love His daughter, Hashem will certainly grant him a dowry and a lot of money; nothing will be lacking."

we completed two *masechtos*, Hashem allowed us to hear a heavenly voice, which said... 'Listen My beloved, righteous friends: Shalom to you. *Ashreiechim!* You are fortunate, and so are your parents who gave birth to you. You are fortunate in this world and in the next world, for you devoted yourself to crown Me on this night. My crown has fallen years ago, and since then, no one has given Me condolence. I was thrown to the earth, hugging rubbish. [But you crowned Me and] returned the crown to its place! Be strong, My friends, My beloved. Rejoice! Celebrate! And know that you are exalted people... The voice of your Torah והבל פיכם went up before Hakadosh Baruch Hu and it tore open several heavens as it went up. All the *malachim* are silent, so are the *seraphim*, and the *chayos* (other types of *malachim*). All the hosts of heaven, together with Hakadosh Baruch Hu are listening to your voices... You earned

all this greatness. You are fortunate and so are your parents who gave birth to you...because you didn't sleep this night, and I was elevated this night. Therefore, be strong and be happy, My children, My beloved. Rejoice...and don't stop studying. Because a string of *chesed* is on you and your Torah study is sweet before Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Stand on your feet and elevate Me. Say in a loud voice, like on Yom Kippur, "'ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד" and so they did.

Reb Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* writes that he has a handwritten note from his grandfather, the Tzemech Tzedek *zt'l*, who wrote the following:

"I guarantee that whoever stays awake all Shavuos night and studies Torah will merit the crown of Torah." This is a great promise, worth pursuing. Obviously, one night of Torah study isn't sufficient to attain the crown of

Torah. The Torah is wider and deeper than the sea. Apparently, by studying on this night, one earns *siyata dishmaya* to study with *hasmadah* and to understand Torah, and eventually he will acquire the crown of Torah.

Rebbe Shalom Ber of Lubavitz *zt'l* added, "The Tzemech Tzedek was a *posek* and a *rav* and the way he rules is the way *beis din* in heaven rules. Therefore, one should stay awake the entire night and toil in Torah... The main thing is *נעור בלילה*, to be awake (and not to learn with laziness)," and in this merit he will earn the crown of Torah.

Every Shavuos morning, after *Shacharis* at the *neitz*, Reb Chaim Leib Aurbach *zt'l* (father of Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l*) would go to the Pupa *dayan* of Yerushalayim, Reb Moshe Yosef Hoffman *zt'l*, to wish him a *gut Yom Tov*. One year, he saw that the Pupa

dayan was extremely happy and he asked him about it. The Pupa *dayan* answered, "I wasn't planning to tell you, but since you asked, I will tell you. As a youth I studied in the yeshiva of the Ksav Sofer and we were taught in the name of the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* that whoever studies Torah the entire night of Shavuos without *hesach hadas* (without stopping) will merit *giluy Eliyahu*. The students of the yeshiva always strived for this. For many years, I also tried, but I never merited *giluy Eliyahu*... Last night, I was struggling to understand a section of the *Zohar* that I've always found difficult. An elderly person came into the *beis medresh* and explained the *Zohar* to me in a beautiful way. I closed my eyes in concentration, to see whether the answer was correct. When I opened my eyes, the man wasn't there anymore, and it was time to daven *Shacharis*.

Now, you understand why I'm so happy."¹⁶

Tefillos on Shavuos

The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* said, "The *galus* is long because Yidden aren't saying the *brachah* אהבה עולם at length."

What better time to say this *brachah* with *kavanah* than on Shavuos, the day we received the Torah?

The beis medresh of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz

zt'l they said the *brachah* of *ahavah rabba* for hours on Shavuos morning with immense fervor.

One of the Chasam Sofer's *zt'l* students was in Ropshitz for Shavuos. When he returned, the Chasam Sofer asked him what he saw in Ropshitz. The student described the magnificent way they said *ahavah rabba*. The Chasam Sofer was very impressed and praised the Ropshitzer chassidim for that.¹⁷

16. Someone asked Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach *zt'l* whether he should stay awake Shavuos night, because he knows it will ruin his entire next day. He will learn more Torah and daven better if he goes to sleep at a normal hour.

Reb Shlomo Zalman told him that his concerns are valid, but he should nevertheless remain up all night studying Torah. He explained, "There is a great principle with these matters: One should be scrupulous with a custom that was accepted by all G-d fearing Yidden and scholars, and educate his family to have the correct respect for the customs... [Furthermore] since all *lomdim*, all over the world, keep this custom, if you won't keep it, your children and your wife will consider it בקלות ח"ו, that you aren't acting properly. Therefore, you should keep the *minhag*, even if it is hard" (*Halichos Shlomo* 12, note 13).

17. Rebbe Hershel of Ziditchov *zt'l* would begin davening early on Shavuos morning and finish late in the afternoon. Almost the

The Rebbe of Munkatz נוהגים הצדיקים החסידים להאריך בברכת
(*Shaar Yissaschar*) *zt'l* writes, אהבה רבה ביומא דשבועות החג הקדוש

entire day was spent in *tefillah*.

The Pela Yoetz (*Atzeres*) writes, "How good it is on these days to pour out your heart [before Hashem] that your children should earn the crown of Torah, ללמוד וללמוד לשמור ולעשות, that they will learn Torah teach it, and keep the Torah."

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* *said* that on the holidays Hashem gives us many *brachos*, but we have to be present to receive the blessings when they are given.

To explain this the Chofetz Chaim gave the following *mashal*:

A pauper asked a wealthy person for money. The wealthy *baal tzedakah* replied, "I don't have money on me. Come to my office and I will give you money."

But the pauper didn't come.

The next day the pauper asked for some money, again.

"Come to my office and I will give you," but the pauper didn't come.

The same happens on *yom tov*. Hashem grants us many *brachos*, but we have to be there to accept the *brachos*.

The following story is an example of this principle:

One year, Shavuos after *Shacharis* the Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l* (who is renowned for his sharp wit) gave a large Gemara to one of his chassidim and said, "I was in heaven and I heard that your *tefillos* for Torah were answered. You said *ahavah rabba* with a lot of *kavanah*, and you were granted the ability to succeed in Torah. Now start learning." Because Hashem grants us Torah, but it is up to each individual to take advantage of it. If we don't devote ourselves to Torah study, we aren't present to receive the blessings that Hashem gives us.

הזה, "Tzaddikim are accustomed to draw out the *brachah ahavah rabba* on this holy holiday of Shavuos."

Rebbe Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* said that from Rosh Chodesh Sivan until *mattan Torah*, the Jewish nation in the desert said the *brachah* of *ahavah rabba*, and they begged Hashem, והאר עינינו בתורתך, "enlighten our eyes in Your Torah..." This is how they prepared for *mattan Torah*.

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsburg *zt'l* said, "If during *Shacharis* one didn't have *kavanah* by *ahavah rabba* and also not by אתה חונן it's impossible for him to say a true *chiddush* in Torah that day."

One of the students said that he didn't have *kavanah* by either *brachah*, yet he said a true *chiddush*.

Rebbe Shmelke asked him to repeat the *chiddush*, and when he did so, Rebbe Shmelke showed him

where he had erred. It wasn't a true *chiddush*. The student realized that it is impossible to say a true Torah *chiddush* without *tefillah*.

It states (*Tehillim* 81:11), והרחב פיך ואמלאהו. Rashi translates these words as "Open your mouth wide and ask for all your hearts desires, ואמלאהו, because I will grant you all your requests." The Gemara (*Brachos* 50.) says that this pasuk discusses the Torah. When it comes to Torah and all other areas of *kedushah* open your mouth wide and ask for a lot and Hashem will grant your request.

As the *Sefer Chasidim* (131) writes, "If someone prays for something that's Hashem's praise – such as success in Torah, or anything that is related to Hashem's will – and he pours out his heart in *tefillah*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will answer his *tefillos*, even if he doesn't have sufficient merits."

Similarly, the Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59.) states, "Ever since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, the gates of heaven are closed." Nevertheless, Reb Yisrael Salanter *zt'l* said, when one prays for spirituality, his *tefillos* will be answered.

Therefore, let us be wise and daven for *ruchniyos* on the great *eis ratzon* of Shavuos. Daven for success in Torah, for good children, and the like, because *tefillos* for *ruchniyus* are always answered.¹⁸

18. When you come to a *chasunah*, and everyone is dressed in their Shabbos clothing, how can you figure out who the *mechutanim* are?

There's a simple way to find out. Those who are praying fervently before the *chuppah* for the new couple's success, they are the *mechutanim*.

The same is with Shavuos. Who are *mechutanim* with the Torah? Those who cry and beg Hashem for success in Torah are *mechutanim* with the Torah.

An indication to the importance of *tefillah* on Shavuos is that when Hashem gave the Torah, He appeared to the nation like a *זקן מלא רחמים*, like an old, compassionate man. *רחמים* also means *tefillah* (*בעי רחמי*). This hints that for success in Torah, one must rouse Hashem's compassion with prayers.

There was a wealthy person who paid a lot of money to get a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*. He was very proud of his son-in-law, who he called "my *nachas*" and he would show off his son-in-law to his friends.

Someone asked him, "You're always speaking about 'your *chasan*.' But what about your daughter? What about her?"

"I don't have a daughter."

The friend was shocked.

Tehillim

The Kaf HaChaim (494:34) writes, "It is ideal to learn (say) *Tehillim* on Shavuos because Dovid HaMelech was *niftar* on this day (as stated in the Yerushalmi)... *Tehillim* that one recites on this day will be answered."

The Ben Ish Chai writes (*Bamidbar* 6), "It is important to learn *Tehillim* on Shavuos, because Dovid HaMelech *a'h* was *niftar* this day, and the *Tehillim* will be more accepted in heaven. Therefore, everyone should recite the entire *Tehillim* on Shavuos."

Chazal tell us that tzaddikim are *niftar* on the date they were born. Thus,

Dovid was born on Shavuos. Some say that this is the reason we read *Rus* on Shavuos. The final *pasuk* is, וישׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת דָּוִד, "Yishai begot Dovid." We want to read this *pasuk* on Shavuos, on the day Dovid was born.

Binding Torah with Tefillah

Dovid's essence is *tefillah*, as he says about himself (*Tehillim* 109:4), וְאֵנִי תְפִלָּה, "I am *tefillah*." Furthermore, the Gemara (*Brachos* 7:) says, "Why was her name רִית? It's because Dovid is her descendant and Dovid רְיוּוְהוּ לְהַקְדֹּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְשִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבְּחוֹת Hakadosh Baruch Hu with songs and praises."

The wealthy man explained, "I watch the wealthy people, proudly walking around with their scholarly sons-in-law, and I also wanted a son-in-law, a *talmid chacham*, like they have. So, I paid a lot of money and got one. But I don't have a daughter..."

The *nimshal* is, on Shavuos, everyone takes haircuts, cuts their nails, and wears new clothing... They want to be the *chasan*...but they mustn't forget that without the *kallah*, the Torah, they have nothing at all.

So Dovid is *tefillah*, and he was both born and *niftar* on Shavuos, which is about Torah. The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* explains that this demonstrates the close bond between Torah and *tefillah*. And it teaches us that to acquire the crown of Torah one needs *tefillah*.

Once, the Beis Aharon of Karlin *zt'l* said to his chassidim who came to him from Poland, "The Polish Yidden love to learn Torah. We also love learning Torah. Only we say, *שמענתא בעי צילתא*, 'Learning Torah needs *tefillah*' (*Megillah* 28:). One can't succeed in Torah without *tefillah* and one won't succeed in *tefillah* without Torah. Torah and *tefillah* are bound to each other."

It is important to bind together Torah and *tefillah*. There are people who focus on one, but not on the other, but perfection is when we unite the two. For example, one can learn Torah before the *tefillah*.

The inspiration of his learning will help him daven better. That is an example of uniting Torah and *tefillah*. Another example is to pray for success in Torah. Once again, he is uniting Torah and *tefillah*, and that is a very special prayer for Hashem. Hashem loves Torah, and when one unites Torah with *tefillah* it gives extra beauty to his *tefillos*, and there is a greater likelihood that his *tefillos* will be answered.

The Sfas Emes (תרמ"ג ד"ה ו') writes, "It states (*Tehillim* 145:18), *קרוב ה'... לכל אשר יקראוהו*, 'Hashem is near to all those who call Hashem with truth.' Truth (*אמת*) refers to Torah. As Chazal (*Avodah Zarah* 4:) say, *אין אמת אלא תורה*, 'Truth is Torah.' Thus, the *pasuk* is saying *קרוב ה' לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת*, to all those who pray with Torah. As Chazal (*Brachos* 31.) teach, one should stand up to pray from the midst of studying Torah. Certainly,

on Shavuos, which the entire day is Torah, it is an *eis ratzon* for *tefillah*. We therefore [read *Megilas Rus* on Shavuos] because the *megillah* recounts the tale of Dovid's birth and Dovid's essence is *tefillah*."

It states (*Shemos* 18:20), והזהרתם אתהם את החקים ואת התורות "Warn the nation to keep the laws of the Torah; teach them the path they should follow..." According to its simple translation, this *pasuk* means Moshe should teach the nation the halachos that they must keep. However, the *Targum Yonoson* says the *pasuk* is referring to *tefillah*. As he translates it, ותהודע להון ית צלותא, "Teach them the prayers they should say in the beis knesses." This is another indication to the connection between Torah and *tefillah*, and to the precept that to succeed in Torah one needs *tefillah*.

Birchas HaTorah

Shulchan Aruch (47:1) states, ברכת התורה צריך לומר בה מאד, "One must be very cautious with *birchas haTorah*." One must be very cautious with this mitzvah because *birchas haTorah* is a Torah obligation. (The other *brachah* that is a Torah obligation is *birchas hamazon*).

During the period of the first Beis HaMikdash people weren't careful to say *birchas HaTorah*, and this resulted with the Jewish people being banished from their land.

As it states (*Yirmiyahu* 9:11) מי האיש החכם ויבין את זאת, ואשר דבר ה' אליו ויגידה, על מה אבדה הארץ "Who is the wise who understands this, and who received a word from G-d that he can tell us: Why was the land destroyed and it became like a wilderness, without anyone passing."

ויאמר ה' על עוכם את תורת, "Hashem replied, 'It is

because they left My Torah..."

Birchas HaTorah is also *mesugal* for having children who are *talmidei chachamim*. For these reasons, one must be very cautious with *birchas haTorah*.

How can one be cautious?

The Mishnah Berurah (47:2) gives us some advice:

"Be cautious and don't learn before you say *birchas haTorah*. Say the *brachah* גדולה, *בשמחה גדולה*, with immense joy... Therefore, one must be very cautious with *birchas haTorah* and praise Hashem that He chose us and that He gave us His precious Torah. Chazal say that if one isn't cautious with *birchas haTorah*, he won't merit having a son who is a *talmid chacham*, *chas veshalom*."

There was once a boy who wasn't doing well in cheder. His twin brother was doing exceptionally well, but this child didn't

understand Torah, and he didn't show any interest to know Torah, either.

One day, everything changed. He began understanding Torah, and he enjoyed learning Torah very much.

The principal asked the father, "What did you do that brought out the change in your son?"

The father didn't want to answer, but the principal urged him to give an explanation. The father replied, "I recently made a *kabalah* to say *birchas haTorah* with *kavanah*, that it should be a *segulah* for my son to understand and love Torah. Every morning I pray והערב נא, that the Torah become sweet for my son. ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו כולנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמה, that our children should know Hashem and learn Torah *lishmah*. Apparently, that is what brought about the change in my son."

The Tzlach (*Brachos* 64) teaches that when one says *birchas HaTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift. And when Hashem gives him the Torah as the gift, he will obviously understand it very well.

The Tzlach compares it to *brachos* over food. The Gemara (*Brachos* 35) says that the entire world belongs to Hashem, as it states לה' הארץ ומלואה, "The earth and everything that's in it belongs to Hashem." After one says a *brachah*, the world becomes his, and he may enjoy it. As it states, והארץ נתן לבני אדם, "The earth was given to man." What changes the status of the earth, from belonging to Hashem to belonging to man? It is the *brachos* that one makes over food.

Similarly, in regard to the Torah, it is sometimes called תורת ה' Hashem's

Torah, and sometimes it is called תורתו, "the person's Torah" (see *Tehillim* 1).¹⁹ How does Hashem's Torah become the person's Torah? The Tzlach says that the exchange occurs when one says *birchas HaTorah*.

In *birchas haTorah* we say, ונתן לנו את תורתו, "Hashem gave us His Torah." It is appropriate to say these words in *birchas HaTorah*, because when we say this *brachah* Hashem gives us the Torah.

The Tzlach (*Brachos* 64) writes, "In my opinion, *birchas haTorah* is a wonderful *segulah* for remembering Torah," because when one says *birchas haTorah*, Hashem gives him the Torah as a gift, and when that happens, he will understand and remember Torah.

The first *masechta* of *Shas* is *masechta Brachos*. This

19. As it states, כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה ויליה, "His desire is solely Hashem's Torah, and he studies his Torah day and night."

masechta discusses the laws of *brachos*, but the first discussion is about *kriyas Shema*. Why isn't the *masechta* named for the *Shema*?

The Tzlach writes, "This might be the reason Reb Yehudah HaNasi called the first *masechta* of *Shas* – *Brachos*. Rebbe [Yehudah HaNasi] organized the *Mishnayos* so people shouldn't forget them, but he was afraid that people might forget Torah, nonetheless. He named the first *masechta* *Brachos* to remind people to say *birchas haTorah*... and then the Torah will be given to them like a gift and it won't be forgotten. Otherwise, it would be more fitting to call this first *masechta* *Kriyas Shema*, because *Shema* is a *mitzvah* from the Torah and is the first discussion of the *masechta*..."

The *בבב"ג* (*Baal Halachos Gedolos*) begins his *sefer*, quoting in full the three

brachos of *birchas haTorah*. The Tzlach explains that this is because success in Torah is solely after one says *birchas haTorah*.

Achdus

A prerequisite for *mattan Torah* is *achdus*, unity. Generally, when the Jewish nation set up camp in the desert the Torah writes, *ויהיו*, "they camped" in plural. The exception is when they camped opposite Har Sinai. This time it states, *ויהן שם ישראל נגד* *ההר* (*Shemos* 19:2) in singular. Rashi explains that this teaches us that at all other encampments there was *בחרעמת ובמחלקה*, "fighting and complaining," without unity. But when they came to Har Sinai, *ויהן*, they camped in unity. *כאיש אחד*, *בלב אחד*, "like one person, with one heart," perfectly united.

This is because *achdus* is a prerequisite and a

preparation for receiving the Torah.²⁰

Reb Akiva Eiger *zt'l* taught that being united is a protection against the influences of the *yetzer hara*. This is the meaning of, ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר, "The Jewish nation encamped there opposite the mountain." A mountain represents the *yetzer hara* (see *Succah* 52.), ויחן, being united, נגד ההר, is our

defense against the *yetzer hara*.²¹

Once, at a *tish*, the Beis Aharon *zt'l* told a chassid to go outdoors and to return and tell them what he saw. The chassid returned and said, "I saw two drunks walking. One of them said, "Let's hold on to each other so we don't fall."

20. Many phrases that discuss *mattan Torah* emphasize the unity of the Yidden at *mattan Torah*. For example, we say, ובאו כולם בברית, "They came into the covenant *together*." נעשה ונשמע אמרו כאחד, "They said in unison *naaseh venishma...*" This is because unity is essential for receiving the Torah.

21. The Gemara teaches, "Hashem placed the mountain above them like a barrel and said, 'If you will accept the Torah, all is well. Otherwise, שם תהיה קבורתכם, 'you will be buried there'" (*Shabbos* 88.). It seems that it should say, באן תהיה קבורתכם, "you will be buried *here*," because if Hashem places the mountain on top of them, they will be buried exactly where they are. Why שם תהיה קבורתכם, "You will be buried *there*"?

Perhaps we can explain that the mountain hovering over them like a barrel (בפה עליהם הר כנגיית) represents all Yidden joined together as one, within the same vessel. Hashem told them that if one leaves this protective environment and goes alone, then, שם, *there*, at that place, away from the Jewish people, תהיה קבורתכם, will be your spiritual genocide, because unity is our power against the *yetzer hara*.

The Beis Aharon zt'l said, "Did you hear what he said? If you will hold on to each other, you won't fall down!"

The nations of the world can't harm the Jewish nation when we are united. The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 940) states, "אתם נצבים, you are standing [and you survive]. When? כולכם, when you are united. This phenomenon can be observed in the world: Can anyone break a bundle of reeds? No, but a single reed even a child can break."

Another benefit of *achdus* is that it enables people to serve Hashem with passion and *hislahavus*.

Hashem gave us the Torah amidst a fire, as it states (19:18), והר סיני עשן כולו מפני אשר ירד עליו ה' באש ויעל עשנו כעשן, הכבשן ויחרד כל ההר מאד "Har Sinai was full of smoke, because Hashem came

down to the mountain in a fire, and the smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain trembled immensely..."

What does fire represent? It hints to the passion and enthusiasm we should have when studying Torah. It is easier to serve Hashem with enthusiasm and with fire when one is among a group of people who are serving Hashem together. A single log that's burning will extinguish quickly. But a bundle of logs burns for a long time.

In summary, we've seen several benefits of unity: 1) It is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. (2) Unity guards us from the *yetzer hara*. (3) When we are united, we are protected from our enemies. (4) Being united enables us to serve Hashem with "fire," excitement, and joy.²²

22. Chassidim are accustomed to eat and drink a *lechayim* together, and speak together about *avodas Hashem*. Chassidim consider these

Hatred and Jealousy

Every year on Shavuos morning, right before *kriyas haTorah*, Rebbe Meir of Permishlan *zy'a* would tell the following story, which happened approximately three hundred years ago:

In Vienna there lived a wealthy tzaddik called Reb Shimshon Wertheimer *zt'l*. Once, the king of Austria asked Reb Shimshon, "Why are the Jewish people persecuted more than any other nation?"

Reb Shimshon replied, "That's their punishment

for their hatred and for their jealousy."

The king wasn't satisfied with that answer. He said, "I'll give you three days to tell me the real reason the Jews suffer so much. If you don't come up with a satisfactory answer in three days, I will banish every Yid from Vienna."

That night, Reb Shimshon Wertheimer made a *שאלת הלום* and in his dream he was told, "Don't retract your words. You answered correctly. Yidden suffer in *galus* because of hatred and jealousy. Soon

gatherings extremely important, however, food and drink cost money. Therefore, the Sadegura Rebbe *zt'l* would sometimes give his chassidim a coin, and the chassidim would auction off the coin. The money earned from the auctions funded their Chassidic gatherings.

Once, the coin sold for a very high price. The chassidim wondered whether they should use all of the money for their get-togethers, or whether part of the money should go to some other *tzedakah*. The Beis Aharon *zt'l* (father-in-law of the Sadugura Rebbe) was then in Sadugura, and they asked him. The Beis Aharon replied, "There is nothing greater than chassidim getting together in unity to speak about *yiras shamayim...*" and he advised them to use the money solely for that purpose.

the king will recognize that you spoke the truth."

It was then the beginning of the winter, and the king went hunting with his officers in the forest. When the officers wanted to return, they looked for the king, but didn't find him. Assuming the king had already gone home with other officers, they left the forest. The king was left alone. He was deeply engrossed in his hobby and didn't realize he was alone in the forest until night fell.

In the dark of night, he couldn't find his way out of the forest. Eventually, he reached a river and could see lights on the other side of the river. There was a town there.

The king knew how to swim, so he took off his coat, left his horse behind, and swam across the river.

The king, freezing and wet, knocked on the first house he encountered, and asked permission to come

in, but they refused to let him in, because they thought he was a demon. This repeated itself in several other homes the king knocked on.

The king decided to look for a home with a mezuzah. He thought, "The Jewish people are a compassionate nation. They will surely help me." He found such a home and was invited in and given dry clothing and a satiating meal. The king was still cold, so the Yid lent him his fur coat.

The wife suspected that the king was a thief. She told her husband, "Send this man out of the house before he steals everything we own - including the fur coat you gave him to wear." The husband replied that he didn't suspect his guest, but just in case, he would remain awake all night and make certain that the guest doesn't steal anything.

In the morning, the king asked his host how far it

was to Vienna, and how much it would cost to hire a wagon to get him there.

The host said that he could drive him there for four forties (a currency). The king agreed to pay that price, and asked, "Will you let me wear your fur coat until we arrive, because I'm still under the weather?" The Yid agreed.

The wife whispered to her husband, "He won't pay you. He'll kill you in the middle of the way and take your coat. Why are you taking him?"

But he wasn't concerned.

As they approached Vienna, he asked his passenger where he wanted to go. He asked to go to the king's palace. (He didn't yet reveal that he was the king, because he was certain that no one would believe him.) The Yid said, "We could get in trouble for going to the king's compound without an invitation."

"Don't worry about that. I'll take care of it," the king replied. When they arrived in front of the king's palace, the king jumped out of the wagon and ran into the palace.

The Yid sat in the wagon shocked. His wife was right. His passenger didn't pay him for the trip, and he ran off with his fur coat, too. His greatest problem was that he was on the palace grounds without an invitation and was liable to get into trouble.

Just then, an armed officer arrived and said that the king wants to see him in the palace. The Yid shuddered, wondering what libel would be thrown on him.

When he stood before the king, the king asked him, "Do you recognize me?" He didn't. Now that the king was dressed in his royal clothing, sitting on his throne, he didn't look at all like the same person

he saved the previous night.

"Well, I know you very well. I even know what your home looks like," and he started describing the house he slept in the previous night.

"Who can be compared to the king's wisdom!" the Yid replied.

"It isn't wisdom; I was there last night. I'm the person you saved. I didn't tell you before, because I knew you wouldn't believe me, but I'm the king of Austria. I want to reward you for helping me. I will grant you whatever you want."

The Yid was silent.

The king said, "If you want a forest, I will give it to you. If you want an entire city, it's yours. Anything at all, just ask for it, and I'll give it to you."

The Yid was quiet.

The king was becoming impatient, "If you aren't

going to tell me what you want, I will just pay you the four forties you asked for, and that's all."

The Yid replied, "There is something I want. I'm a traveling merchant. I go from town to town selling my wares. But recently, someone began competing with me. My request is that the king should decree that this man may not go to the cities where I work."

The king said, "Your request is granted, but I never saw a greater fool than you! You had the opportunity to ask for so much more, but because of your jealousy, all you care about is that your competition shouldn't make money."

The king summoned for Reb Shimshon Wertheimer and he said, "You were so right. The Jewish people are punished because of their jealousy and hatred."

Rebbe Meir of Permishlan *zt'l* would say

this story every year before reading the Torah on Shavuos morning.

Chesed

One year, before Shavuos, the Tiferes Shlomo *zt'l* of Radomsk went to Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir *zt'l*. The Rebbe of Kozhmir asked him, "Why did you come here for Shavuos? You have your own chassidim, and they want you to be with them."

The Tiferes Shlomo replied that although he was already a famous Rebbe and he has his own following, he came as a chassid to Kozhmir, because he also needs a Rebbe. He also has to grow in *avodas Hashem*. If he will always be leading his congregation, when will he grow?

Rebbe Yechezkel of Kozhmir wasn't pleased with his response. He explained to the Tiferes Shlomo that the role of a

leader is to help others, even at the expense of his own growth. This is what Moshe Rabbeinu did. As Rashi (*Shemos* 19:14) writes, "Moshe didn't tend his own business. He went straight from the mountain to the nation."

What business did Moshe have? The answer is, עסקיו means his personal spiritual quests. Moshe also wanted to prepare for *mattan Torah*, but he sacrificed his own desires for the sake of Klal Yisrael. He went straight to the nation to help *them* prepare for *mattan Torah*. This is the obligation of a leader, to forgo his own growth to help others.

Chesed is a primary pillar of the Torah. The first five commandments, which are written on the first tablet, are laws *bein adam lamakom*, between man and Hashem. The second tablet has five laws *bein adam lechaveiro*, between man and his fellow man. Many more words were written

on the first tablet than on the second one. The Mabi't explains that for both *luchos* to appear symmetric, the fewer words on the second tablet had to be written in a very large font.

Large letters are used to catch people's attention. It is like the words are shouting, לא הרצח, "Don't murder!" לא תגנוב, "Don't steal!" etc. This helps us recognize the importance of the halachos *bein adam lechaveiro*. They are just as important as the laws of *bein adam lamakom*.

In fact, they might even be more important. In the morning we say, אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן שצריך לו לעולם הבא, "These are the things one eats the fruits of the reward in this world, while the main reward is stored for Olam Haba..." and the Mishnah lists several examples of *chesed*. Why is *chesed* rewarded in this world? The Rosh (*Pei'ah* 1:1) explains, כי הקב"ה הפך יותר במצוות שיעשה בהם גם רצון הבריות מבמצוות שבין אדם לקונו,

"Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires the mitzvos of helping his fellow man, more than the mitzvos that are solely for Hashem."

The Vilna Gaon *zt'l* taught: When one wants to know what a *sefer* is about, he reads the first page and the last page and then he knows the goal and objective of the *sefer*. The Torah begins and ends with *chesed*. As the Gemara (*Sotah* 14.) states, "The Torah begins with *gemilus chasadim* and ends with *gemilus chasadim*. It begins with 'Hashem made clothing for Adam and Chavah, and He clothed them...' (*Bereishis* 3:21), and the Torah concludes with "Hashem buried Moshe..." (*Devarim* 34:6). Therefore, since the beginning and the end of the Torah demonstrate *gemilus chasadim*, this shows us that the essence of the Torah is *gemilus chasadim*.

One of the reasons we read *Rus* on Shavuos is to teach us the significance of

gemilus chasadim. The Midrash (*Rus Rabba* 2:14) states, "*Megillas Rus* doesn't discuss the laws of *tumah* and *teharah*, or the laws of איסור והיתר. So why was it written? [It doesn't teach us halachos. It was written] to teach you the reward given to those who do deeds of loving-kindness." Because *Rus* did *chesed* for her mother-in-law she was rewarded that Dovid HaMelech was her descendant.

The *Pela Yoetz* (*Yomim Tovim*) discusses the mitzvah to be happy on *yom tov* and he writes, "one aspect of this mitzvah is to bring joy to the poor. One should therefore give *tzedakah* to the poor before *yom tov* – each person according to his abilities. The holy *Zohar* is very strict with this obligation. The *Zohar* says: Hakadosh Baruch Hu visits the poor on *yom tov*. If they don't have enough food, Hashem cries for them. And, the *Zohar* says, 'If a person is happy all by

himself, and he doesn't give to the poor, his punishment is great... About him it states (*Malachi* 2:3), וזריתי פרש על פניכם פרש חגיכם, 'I will spread dung onto your faces – the dung of your holidays.' Therefore, please don't forget to give *tzedakah* to the poor before each *yom tov*. Give in accordance to the amount Hashem gave you. Don't be satisfied with giving a little, because, as the saying goes, לפום גמלא שיהנא 'load a camel according to its strength' (*Kesubos* 67.). So, give in accordance to your wealth and abilities. After you gave to the poor, be happy, rejoice, and nothing bad with happen to you. There will be peace in your home..."

Interestingly, the mitzvah to give money to the poor for *yom tov* is written specifically by the *yom tov* Shavuos (see *Devarim* 16:10-11, and *Rashi*).

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya explains, "This obligation applies for all holidays.

One should give *tzedakah* and invite guests for the holidays according to one's generosity and abilities. The Torah writes it by Shavuos because Pesach and Succos are for seven days, but Shavuos is only one day. One might think that it isn't so important to give *tzedakah* for Shavuos as it is important to give *tzedakah* to the poor for the other holidays. Therefore, the *pasuk* emphasizes that we shouldn't be lax... We are obligated to give charity for Shavuos, as we give for all other holidays...²³

The urgency of this obligation shouldn't surprise us, because one of the primary pillars of Torah is *chesed*.

Avraham ben Avraham *zy'a hy'd*

The second day of Shavuos is the *yahrtzeit* of the *ger tzedek*, Reb Avraham ben Avraham *zt'l*, the son of Count Potoski, who was killed *al kiddush Hashem*.

Count Pototski, was extremely wealthy, and renowned throughout Poland and Europe. When his son converted to Judaism it was an embarrassment for the church. They therefore arrested Avraham ben Avraham and murdered him *al kiddush Hashem, hy"d*.

Becoming a Jew meant forgoing the vast wealth of his father's home. Someone once asked him why he did this. He replied, "I have more pleasure from the smell of the candles on

23. Reb Chaim Palagi *zt'l* writes that on *erev* Shavuos, one should give charity to the amount of 104 (twice the *gematriya* of י"ד) to a poor *talmid chacham*, and this rectifies severe sins and is a *segulah* for the barren to bear children.

Friday nights when they go out, than from all the wealth that I enjoyed beforehand."²⁴

About the one who was *malshin* [the informer] on the *ger tzedek*, he said, "In this world I didn't take revenge. Do you think that I will take revenge in the next world? Listen to this parable: A young prince was at a beach sculpting a statue of a person with the wet sand. Someone came along and destroyed it. The prince went to his father, the king, and complained that someone broke the person he made. The king didn't do anything. The

prince thought to himself, 'When I will grow up and become king, I will take revenge on that person.' And what do you think happened when he became an adult? He realized that it was nothing, and he let it pass. Similarly, I'm not taking revenge in this world, do you think I'll take revenge in the next world?"

He was a student of the Vilna Gaon *zt'l*. The Vilna Gaon told him that he had the ability (with his spiritual strengths) to save him, but the *ger tzedek* replied that he preferred to die *al kiddush Hashem*.²⁵

24. My grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zt'l*, used to tell this story and he spoke about the Yidden from previous generations who enjoyed every part of Shabbos, even the smell of the candles extinguishing.

25. Once the Vilna Gaon visited him in prison and saw that he was depressed. The Vilna Gaon asked him why he was down. Behold, Chazal say that those who die *al kiddush Hashem* go directly to Gan Eden. The *ger tzedek* replied, "I don't have any Jewish roots. My father is a gentile and I don't have any children. So I'm leaving the world without any Jewish connection."

The Vilna Gaon told him: It is written (*Yeshayah* 44:6), **אני ראשון ואני אחרון**,

Reb Alexander Zuskind zy'a, author of *Yesod Veshoresh HaAvodah*, went to the square where the pyre was prepared to burn the *ger tzedek*. He wanted to answer amen to the *brachah* the *ger tzedek* would say right before being *moser nefesh al kiddush Hashem*. This was *mesirus nefesh* on his part, for if someone saw him, they were liable to burn him as well, *chalilah*. But the *Yesod VeShoresh HaAvodah* wanted to be there and answer amen to this unique and holy *brachah*, said at a time of *mesiras nefesh*. The Vilna Gaon said that had there

been ten people answering amen to that *brachah*, the world would have reached its perfected state (*tikun hashaleim*).

Reb Shlomo Zalman Aurbach said that he heard *ish mipi ish* [from a direct source] from the Vilna Gaon zt'l that when the *ger tzedek* recited the *brachah*, a fire came out from beneath Ma'aras HaMachpeilah and burned up all *kelipos*. If there was a minyan answering amen, the world would be perfectly rectified.

May his merit protect us.

"[Hashem says] I am first and I am last." Rashi explains, "[Hashem says] I am first, because I don't have a father and I am last, because I don't have children."

What is this *pasuk* telling us? Doesn't everyone know that Hashem doesn't have a father and that He doesn't have children?

The *pasuk* is speaking to the *ger tzedek*. Hashem tells them, "I am your father, and I am your son."

ת"ש



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