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ON SHAVUOS - 5757

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ravfrand@torah.org "RavFrاند" List Rabbi Frاند on Bamidbar / Shavuos - Torah Takes Root In A Person Who Says, "Change Me" The Medrash gives a parable in this week's parsha: There was a King who wanted to build a palace and scouted around for an appropriate site. He went into one city after another and in each city the people ran away from him, indicating they did not want the palace in their town. Finally he came to a deserted ghost town and the few people there graciously and gratefully accepted the King's offer to build a palace in their town. The King said, "This is the place where I will build my palace." The Medrash explains the parable: When G-d wanted to give the Torah, he went to the sea and it ran away, as it is written "The sea saw and fled" [Tehillim 114:3]. G-d then went to the mountains and they ran away, as it is written "The mountains skipped like rams" [114:4]. He then came to a desolate desert (Sinai), which accepted Him with open arms, and G-d gave the Torah in a desert. What are our Rabbis trying to tell us with this parable? Why didn't those cities want the King's palace? Because they knew that building the palace in their cities would impact on their lifestyle. They had certain ways of doing things; they had certain customs. They knew that building a palace in their city would mean changes for them. The ghost town knew that it had nothing. They were saying, as it were, "Remake us. We have nothing anyway. We want you. We'll accept you and we'll take with your palace all the changes that accompany it." If one wants to accept Torah, he must be like a desert -- ready and open with no baggage. Torah takes root in a person who says, "Change me." Many of us have had the experience of dealing with apparently "religious" brethren and have sometimes come away disappointed. Our reaction invariably is "This is Torah? This is all that Torah can do for a person? I thought Torah was supposed to change a person! Here is a stereotypical guy with 'beard and payos' and he is ripping me off!" Someone once said, and it is a very important point: "Never judge Judaism by Jews." Judaism is bigger than most any Jew that one will find. If one wants to judge Judaism by a particular Jew, he must look at the Chofetz Chaim or Rav Chaim Ozer or Rav Moshe Feinstein. Why? Because they made themselves like a desert and said, as it were, to G-d, "Change me." They let themselves become desolate and open for the Torah to permeate them. The rest of us are like those cities. We are not really ready to fully change. If we accept it, we want to accept it on our terms. Therefore the Torah cannot change us, because we are not willing to be changed. This is what our Sages are hinting at when they tell us that Torah was given in a desert. Torah can only really change someone who is willing to be changed. When a person makes himself like a desert in his acceptance of Torah, that is when he can be changed to the extent that G-d can say, "You are My Servant, Israel, in whom I can be glorified." [Yeshaya 49:3] When people are not prepared to make themselves like the desert, the Torah can not make them over. The result is that sometimes we find people to be less than we would expect. ...

Sources and Personalities Chofetz Chaim -- Rav Yisrael Meir HaKohen of Radin (1838-1933) Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski -- (1863-1940) Vilna, Lithuania. Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986) New York City.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@aol.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Balt., MD dhoffman@clark.net
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mj-ravtorah@shamash.org Shiur HaRav Soloveichik on Inyanei Matan Torah
shavuos.97 Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Inyanei Mattan Torah
(Shiur date: 5/26/81)

After the story of the splitting of the sea and the Manna we read that Yisro came on the scene to join the people in the desert. The Torah describes his reception by the people and Moshe, the advice that he gives Moshe and of his decision to return home. Why does the Torah tell us about Yisro at this point, right before the main event of Matan Torah? Perhaps this story should have been located in Bhaaloscha where Moshe tells Yisro to join them on their journey to the promised land.

There is another individual mentioned prior to Matan Torah even though his actions were despicable and seemingly undeserving of mention in proximity to the other significant events prior to Matan Torah: Amalek. The Torah gives us a precise report about the travels of Bnay Yisrael, where they stopped and where they had water to drink. The Torah should have stopped after telling that the people came to Refidim and had no water. Indeed, after Refidim they next traveled to Sinai. But there is an interlude in that we are told the story of Amalek, as if this story is indispensable to the story of Matan Torah.

Before we can read about Matan Torah, the Jew must know 2 stories: Amalek and Yisro and his return home to convert the members of his household. Why do we need to know this? Yisro was impressed by these events and the role that his son-in-law played in all this. He returned home determined to convert his whole family after this encounter. Amalek was another non-Jew who was immensely impressed by the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim yet he decided that this story should be wiped off the pages of history and the people who left Egypt should be annihilated.

Yisro was the chief priest of Avoda Zara, yet he came with an open mind and was impressed, conquered and overwhelmed by what he saw. It was so impressive, that the chief priest of Midyan dropped everything and decided to join Bnay Yisrael. Yisro is never mentioned as one of the Chasidei Umos Haolam by Chazal, yet he was a decent person who followed his heart and was affected by the events of the time. Amalek reached an opposite conclusion. To Amalek, a nation whose laws are different than that of all others must be destroyed. He was not threatened by Bnay Yisrael, yet he still had to attack.

We must understand these different reactions on the part of Yisro and Amalek before Matan Torah. What change did the reaction of Yisro generate in Midyan and what were the conclusions that the Amalekim arrived at? Without this we can't tell the story of Matan Torah. Why?

In Ki Tisa when the Torah tells us that Moshe was commanded to take the second set of tablets for Hashem to engrave, the people are enjoined from coming up the mountain. Rashi says that the first Luchos were destroyed because they were given with too much publicity, and were broken because of Ayin Hara. Therefore only Moshe was around for the second set. It was given through anonymity and modesty.

The Meforshim ask on Rashi: if Ayin Hara was a problem in that the first Luchos were over publicized and caused the shattering of the Luchos, why order Moshe to bring the people to the mountain? Why make it a public affair? We recount the publicity associated with the event even in the Bracha of Shofros that we recite on Rosh Hashonah. According to Chazal, every king and kingdom was aware of Matan Torah, to the extent that they were scared and went to Bilaam and asked him to explain to them what was happening. This was not an intimate affair. The Midrash says that they recited Hashem Oz Lamo Yiten Hashem Yvaredch Es Amo Bashalom.

Why make it so public? The answer is that the first Luchos had to be given in a public display, even though this will cause them to be shattered. Despite the outcome, Hashem insisted that the whole world must know. Whether the world will understand and accept, does not matter. The whole world must know that a small nation, Israel, has accepted the Torah and the moral code. Even though the Luchos will be shattered, a second set will be given. The Bracha of Shofros on Rosh Hashonah represents Giluy Shechina

and revolves around the great noise that accompanied the Luchos, noise that was indispensable to the process. Without the noise there would not have been Matan Torah.

That is what Rashi says: the first set was destroyed because of Ayin Hara. This could not be avoided because every human being, even Bilam, must admit Hashem Oz Lamo Yiten Hashem Yvarech Es Amo Bashalom. That whole chapter of Tehillim expresses the great noise that accompanied Matan Torah. The whole world must know that Hashem resides in His people. The fact that Hashem gave His people the Torah proves that He has selected them.

The Midrash says that the Torah could have been adopted by the other nations but they refused. The whole world must know that the Jewish People accepted the Torah. That is why Hashem made it such a public display. Hashem wanted that years in the future, when Moshiach will come, the whole world will recognize that the Torah that was given so many years ago is the truth and that they would do well to accept it. The drama of Matan Torah caused the Luchos to be shattered, we paid an unavoidable price. It was important that all mankind know that the Torah is offered to everyone. The non-Jewish community did not take up the offer.

The shattering of the Luchos was not the main theme. The fact that the message got across to all humanity is the key. Among the multitudes of non-Jews who heard about this great miracle some were affected and understood. That is why it needed to be public to allow these people to come. Bayom Hahu Yihye Hashem Echad Ushmo Echad, that all will accept the Torah in Yemos Hamoshiach. At that time the whole universe will recognize the greatness of Hashem.

Yisro was the person who heard the message and was affected. He was a regular person, apparently sensitive. Yisro witnessed what confronted Moshe and Bnay Yisrael and he looked at how they existed and was so impressed that he went home to convert his family. Others could have done as Yisro did but chose not to. Eventually they will. The proof that they will when Moshiach comes is Vayishma Yisro.

The Torah also wanted us to recognize that there are certain people, who might be very strong and a great nation, yet they will never be converted. They will understand that the Jew represents something unique, but they will be impressed to try and destroy them rather than join them. This is the example of Amalek and all others who try to wipe out the Am Hashem

How will the nations of the world respond to Matan Torah? There are 2 examples: Yisro a sensitive non-Jew with a sense for truth who returned home to convert his family. Amalek, the incarnation of evil, will arrive at the opposite conclusion. The story of Amalek is as relevant today as it was at the time of Moshe. People resent the Jew because he lives by principles that others refuse to follow, not because of economic or political considerations. They attacked the Jews simply because they were Yisrael, a unique entity.

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[From last year] jr@sco.COM May 23 1996 mj-ravtorah@shamash.org Shiur HaRav on Chag Hashavuos Shiur HaRav Soloveichik on Chag HaShavuos

The Rav noted that the Torah speaks of 3 festivals, Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos. Shavuos is closely connected to Pesach. The Chinuch was the first to emphasize this connection as part of his discussion of the Mitzvas Sefiras Haomer. The Chinuch says that Kabbalas Hatorah, that the Jews would accept and keep the Torah, was the ultimate purpose and goal of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The Chinuch quotes the verse "And this shall be your sign that I have sent you, that you shall worship Hashem on this mountain after the exodus from Egypt" (Shemos 3:12).

Moshe offered 2 reasons as to why he was not the man for the job of taking the Jewish People out of Egypt: 1) Who am I (Moshe) that I should

appear before Paroh to demand the release of the Jewish People. I do not possess the typical qualities a political leader needs. I am tongue-tied and would make a poor ambassador to Paroh. Hashem answered that He will accompany him before Paroh and aid Moshe as needed. 2) Moshe said who am I that I should take the people out of Egypt. I am not worthy to be a political leader, to be the leader of Klal Yisrael. Hashem rejected this reason saying after the exodus you shall worship Hashem on this mountain. How does this answer Moshe's concern? Hashem indicated to Moshe that were He interested in creating a separate political and social entity out of Bnay Yisrael, simply another nation among all other nations, indeed Moshe would not have been the correct choice to lead the people. However the purpose for taking the Jews out of Egypt was that they should become a kingdom of priests and a sanctified nation. In order to accomplish this they do not need a politician to lead them, rather they need a teacher, a Rebbe. For this job, you, Moshe, are superbly qualified. The Exodus from Egypt was simply a pre-requisite to the events that would take place on Mount Sinai. For the events at Mount Sinai, Moshe was indispensable. According to the Chinuch, we count Sefiras Haomer to connect the events of the exodus with those at Mount Sinai. The Rav elaborated on the connection between Sefira and Shavuos. Chazal discuss the 4 terms of redemption in Parshas V'ayra as representing 4 distinct levels of redemption, similar to the rungs of a ladder where each one is higher than the next, yet one can not reach the higher steps without stepping through the lower ones. 3 of the levels of redemption were accomplished on the night and day of the 15 of Nissan. The levels of Vhotzaysi (and I will take them out), Vhitzalti (and I will save them) and Vgaalti (and I will redeem them) were accomplished right away. However the fourth level that of Vlakachti (and I will take you to Me as a nation), required a waiting period of 50 days till Shavuos. Both Shavuos and Pesach are connected with the process of redemption, as together they comprised the totality of the redemption process.

The Rav explained that Pesach and Shavuos represented 2 different types of redemption. Pesach was characterized by the physical redemption of the people from slavery to Egypt and Paroh. As the Torah says, that Hashem will take the people out (Vhotzaysi) from the oppression of Egypt, that Hashem will rescue (Vhitzalti) them from their slave labor and that He will redeem them (Vgaalti) with a mighty hand. These types of redemption were also intended to show respect for Bnay Yisrael. After all, they had been slaves in Egypt for years, and as slaves were shown no respect or allowed any dignity. The Rav noted that the Geulas Mitzrayim was accomplished by Hashem in a way that it was clear that He was responsible for the events. Moshe acted as a robot in the sense that he was told to lift his stick in order to begin a plague. This is why we do not mention Moshe in the Haggadah as a part of Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim, as it was Hashem alone who took us out of Egypt, Ani Vlo Malach. When this redemption came, it arrived very quickly and the people were forced to leave without even preparing provisions for the journey. Matzah, the bread that is not allowed time to rise, is the symbol of the speed with which the levels of redemption took place in Egypt. The fourth level of redemption, Vlakachti, required preparation. At this stage, Moshe's role becomes important, as it says that the people camped around Mount Sinai and Moshe went up the Mountain to Hashem. Spiritual redemption, to rid ones self from the slave mentality and personality and be worthy of receiving the Torah, required the individual to make the effort to draw close to Hashem. On the other hand, physical redemption was based on the time and situation: when Hashem recognized that the time of the redemption had arrived, He sought out Moshe immediately. The verses in Shemos regarding the prayers of the people being elevated to Hashem and that Hashem knew that the time of redemption had arrived are immediately followed by the selection of Moshe to lead the people. Man must redeem himself and rebuild his world through striving to reach higher levels of Kedusha. Only after these efforts are made will Hashem reward him with the final spiritual redemption, Kabbalas Hatorah. Hashem provided man with a blueprint for this redemptive process. The six day period of creation was a pre-requisite for achieving the spiritual high point of Shabbos. When man attempts his own creation in terms of Kedusha he must wait and prepare

himself for 7 weeks before he can be deemed worthy of the highest spiritual status, Kabbalas Hatorah. Only then will the final redemptive phase, Vlakachti, be attained. The term Shabbos is used when describing the start and end points of Sefiras Haomer (Mimacharas Hashabbos, Hashabbos Hasheviis) to connect the creation of the world in 6 days (with the ultimate goal of Kedushas Shabbos) to the effort the Jew must make in recreating his world in 7 weeks in order to achieve spiritual redemption and the ultimate goal of Kabbalas Hatorah. Man requires a longer period of time to rebuild his world than Hashem needed to create His world. When Hashem appeared to Moshe and instructed him to take the people out of Egypt, He says "Raoh Raeesi". Moshe was unable to see that Bnay Yisrael would merit redemption. However Hashem saw that the people were capable of 2 redemptions. Not only would they have the strength to achieve physical redemption, but they will also be capable of making the effort to achieve spiritual redemption as well. This second redemption of Vlakachti, will happen, and it will happen here, on Mount Sinai, after the exodus.

The Rav noted that this notion of Sefiras Haomer as preparation for the final redemptive level is mentioned in the prayer recited after the counting, that we were commanded to count the Omer to purify ourselves, L'taharaynu M'klipasynu. We were commanded to use the 7 week period of Sefira to re-create our world and lives through Kedusha so that we may achieve the heights of Vlakachti Eschem Li L'am, through Kabbalas Hatorah.

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weekly-halacha@torah.org WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5757 SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS BAMIDBAR-SHAVUOS

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

BIRCHOS HASHACHAR ON SHAVUOS MORNING

The widespread custom of staying awake the first night of Shavuos to study Torah presents an halachic problem - what to do about four of the morning blessings, Birchos Hashachar, which cannot be recited unless one slept during the night. The other sixteen blessings may be recited as usual(1), but the following four blessings present a problem:

AL NETILAS YADAYIM - The Rishonim offer two basic reasons for the Talmudic law(2) of washing our hands in the morning and then reciting the proper blessing: The Rosh tells us that washing is necessary because a person's hands move around in his sleep and will inevitably touch some unclean part of the body. The Rashba says that since each one of us becomes a biryah chadashah, a "new person" each morning, we must sanctify ourselves anew in preparation to serve Hashem. This sanctification is similar to a kohen's who washes his hands before performing the avodah in the bais Hamikdash. = [In addition to these two reasons, there is still another reason for washing one's hands in the morning - because of ruach raah, the "spirit of impurity" that rests on one's body at night and does not leave the hands until water is poured over them three times(3). Indeed, touching various body limbs or organs of the body is prohibited before hand-washing due to the "danger" which is brought about by the "spirit of impurity" (4). This third reason alone, however, is insufficient to warrant a blessing(5), since a blessing is never recited on an act which is performed in order to ward off danger(6).]

Does one who remains awake all night long need to wash his hands in the morning? If we follow the Rosh's reason, then washing is not necessary, for as long as one remains awake he knows that his hands remained clean. If we follow the Rashba's reason, however, washing may be required, since in the morning one becomes a "new person" whether he slept or not(7). [In addition, it is debatable if the "spirit of impurity" that rests on the hands is caused by the nighttime hours - regardless of whether or not one slept - or if it only rests upon the hands during sleep.(8)] Since this issue remains unresolved, the Rama suggests a compromise - washing is

indeed required, as the Rashba holds, but a blessing is not recited, in deference to the view of the Rosh. Not all the poskim agree with the Rama's compromise. In their view, the blessing should be recited(9). Since we again face a difference of opinions, it is recommended that one of the following options be exercised: 1. Immediately after alos amud hashacher, one should relieve himself and then wash his hands followed by Al Netilas Yadayim and Asher Yotzar. In this case, all poskim agree that washing is required and a blessing is recited(10). This is the preferred option. 2. Listen - with intent to be yotzei - as another person, who did sleep, recites the blessing. =

BIRCHO HATORAH - The poskim debate whether one who remains awake the entire night(11) is required to recite Birchos Hatorah the next morning. Some authorities do not require it, since they hold that the previous day's blessings are still valid. In their view, unless a major interruption - such as a night's sleep - occurs, yesterday's blessings remain in effect.. Others hold that Birchos Hatorah must be said each morning regardless of whether or not one slept, similar to all other Birchos Hashachar which are said in the morning whether one slept or not. According to the Mishnah Berurah(12), this issue remains unresolved and the following options are recommended: 1. Listen - with intent to be yotzei - as another person, who did sleep, recites the blessing. This should be followed by each person reciting yevorechecha and eilu devarim, so that the blessings are followed immediately by some Torah learning. 2. While reciting the second blessing before Krias Shema - Ahavah Rabbah, one should have the intention to be yotzei Birchos Hatorah as well. In this case, he needs to learn some Torah immediately after Shmoneh Esrei.

There are two other options available: All poskim agree that if one slept (at least one half hour) during the day of Erev Shavuos he may recite Birchos Hatorah on Shavuos morning even though he did not sleep at all during the night(13); While reciting Birchos Hatorah on Erev Shavuos, one may clearly stipulate that his blessings should be in effect only until the next morning. In this case, he may recite the blessings on Shavuos morning although he did not sleep(14). If one did not avail himself of any of these options and Birchos Hatorah were not recited, one may recite Birchos Hatorah upon awakening from his sleep on Shavuos morning (after davening). =

ELOKAI NESHAMAH AND HA'MAAVIR SHEINA - Here, too there are differences of opinion among the poskim whether one who remains awake throughout the night should recite these blessings. Mishnah Berurah (15) rules that it is best to hear these blessings from another person who slept. If no such person is available, many poskim rule that these blessings may be recited even by one who did not sleep(16).

In actual practice, what should we do? As stated earlier, all poskim agree that the other sixteen morning blessings may be recited by one who did not sleep at all during the night. Nevertheless, it has become customary in some shuls that one who slept recites all twenty morning blessings for the benefit of all those who did not sleep. Two details must be clarified concerning this practice: Sometimes it is difficult to clearly hear every word of the blessing being recited. (Missing one word can sometimes invalidate the blessing). If that happens, it is important to remember that sixteen of the twenty blessings may be recited by each individual whether he slept or not, as outlined above. The sixteen blessings which may be recited by each individual should not be heard from another person unless a minyan is present. This is because some poskim hold that one cannot discharge his obligation of Birchos Hashachar by hearing them from another person unless a minyan is present(17).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Rama OC 46:8. 2 Brachos 15a and 60b. 3 The source for the "spirit of impurity" is the Talmud (Shabbos 108b; Yuma 77b) and the Zohar, quoted by the Bais Yosef OC 4. = 4 OC 4:3. 5 Mishnah Berurah 4:8. = 6 Aruch Hashulchan 4:4 based on Rambam Hilchos Brachos 6:2. 7 The rationale for this is: 1) Lo plug, which means that once the Sages ordained that washing the hands is necessary because one is considered a "new person", they did not differentiate between the individual who slept or one who did not (Bais Yosef quoted by Mishnah Berurah 4:28); 2) The blessing was established to reflect chiddush ha'olam, which means that since the "world" as a whole is renewed each morning, it is incumbent upon the

individual to sanctify himself and prepare to serve Hashem each morning - whether he, personally, was "renewed" is immaterial (Biur Halachah quoting the Rashba). 8 Mishnah Berurah 4:28. 9 Aruch Hashulchan 4:12 rules like this view. 10 Mishnah Berurah 4:30 and Biur Halachah; 494:1. This should be done immediately after alos amud hashachar in order to remove the "spirit of impurity" - OC 4:14. 11 Even one who falls asleep during his learning [while leaning on a shtender or a table, etc.] dose not say Birchos Hatorah upon awakening - Kaf Hachayim 47:27. 12 47:28. Many other poskim, though, rule that Birchos Hatorah may be said even by one who did not sleep at all - see Birkei Yosef 46:12; Shulchan Aruch Harav 47:7; Aruch Hashulchan 47:23; Kaf Hachayim 47:26. 13 R' Akiva Eiger quoted by Mishnah Berurah 47:28. 14 Keren L'Dovid 59 and Luach Eretz Yisroel quoting the Aderet (quoted in Piskei Teshuvos OC 494:6). 15 46:24. This is also the ruling of Chayei Adam 8:9 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 7:5. 16 Shulchan Aruch Harav 46:7; Kaf Hachayim 46:49; Aruch Hashulchan 46:13; Misgeret Hashulchan 2:2 17 Mishnah Berurah 6:14.

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BEMIDBAR - Shavuot - Is "I Am" a Commandment? by Rabbi Gavin Broder, Chief Rabbi of Ireland

On Shavuot we read the climax of the Exodus; how the Jews received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The Decalogue is mentioned in the Torah in Parshat Yitro and repeated (differently worded) in Va'etchanan. On close examination there is a fundamental question that needs to be answered. The first Commandment of the Decalogue commences with Anochi Hashem Elokecha "I am the L-d your G-d who brought you out of Egypt from the house of slavery". The succeeding nine Commandments are obligations - the prohibition against having other gods, not to bear false witness...to honour parents...not to kill...etc. But the first Commandment is more a statement than a precept! The Midrash indeed explains that this first commandment is an introduction to the Decalogue. The significance is that G-d says, "First accept My sovereignty and then My decrees". [It thus parallels the Shema where man is first commanded to accept the yoke of heaven and only afterwards the "burden" of the mitzvot].

The Rambam, however, at the beginning of his classic Mishneh Torah writes: "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the earth, the heavens and what is in between them came into existence only from the truth of His Being." Later in the same chapter he concludes by saying "and the knowledge of this is a positive mitzvah as it says, I am the L-d your G-d". Rambam further cites this Commandment as the first of the 613 mitzvot. The implication, therefore, is that this is a mitzvah in the full sense of the word and not merely an introduction to the Decalogue.

The question itself is even deeper. For, if a person has faith then there is no need for a command; and if a person, G-d forbid, is faithless, how will he become faithful due to an obligatory command?

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman Z"L suggests that if a person is intellectually honest he will appreciate that there is a Creator since the world itself testifies to it. This being so, the only reason that could cause a person to reject G-d is his strong desire for things which are against the will of the Almighty.

According to this, the mitzvah to believe is not an active mitzvah in a sense that there is a need to perform the command directly but rather a mitzvah not

to let the desire that a person has overridden his intellectual knowledge.

There is an interesting difference of opinion between Rambam and Ramban regarding the age at which Abraham realised that there was a G-d i.e. this mitzvah of Anochi. Rambam (Avodah Zorah 1) opines that Abraham was 40 years old when he recognised G-d's existence, while Ramban states that he was 3 years old when he formulated the idea. Kesef Mishnah reconciles the two opinions by suggesting that Abraham was indeed 3 years old when he first began to formulate in his mind and to think about a Creator, but it was only at the age of 40 that he fully recognised Him. The inference is that it took Abraham 37 years of intense toil to "know" G-d.

This is reflected in the verse from Devarim which we say daily in the prayer Aleinu. "You shall know this day and reflect in your heart that G-d is the L-d in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is no other"(4:39) The verse states both "you shall know this day" and "And reflect in your heart". It is insufficient to acknowledge G-d's existence, one has to internalise it. This is the essence of the first mitzvah of the Ten Commandments.

This thought is succinctly worded by Sepher HaChinuch. He writes (mitzvah 25) "The substance of this faith is that a person should determine in his mind that this is the truth and nothing else of any sort is possible instead. Should it be questioned let him answer every questioner that this he believes in his heart and will never acknowledge anything else in its stead...For all this strengthens and sets the heart's belief firmly, when one transforms the potential or faith into something actual, i.e. when he affirms with the words of his mouth what his heart has decided. Then if he should merit to rise in levels of wisdom so that with his heart he understands and with his eyes he sees, by clear cut proof, that this belief which he holds is absolutely true, it could not be otherwise, then he shall have fulfilled this mitzvah in the very best way". Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch too, stresses that this mitzvah of Anochi Hashem Elokecha is not to be understood as a declaration but as an active mitzvah. He understands the verse not to mean "I am your G-d", but rather, "I am to be your G-d". It is not merely the knowledge that there is a G-d but the appreciation that G-d is my G-d, the One who created and formed me and continues to watch and guide me, and that every breath that I take is a gift from Him.

Jerusalem Post 4 Sivan 5757 SHABBAT SHALOM: Prepare for Redemption By RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN In attempting to understand the deeper significance of Shavuot, let's begin with the name itself. It's most unusual because Shavuot - literally 'Weeks' - is a term fundamentally different from the descriptive appellations given the other biblical festivals. The term "Shavuot" is a name which seems only peripherally connected to a festival celebrating the bringing of First Fruits (Bikkurim) and rabbinically has been declared as the day we received the Torah on Mount Sinai. "Weeks" suggests an interim period of waiting, of preparing. Is it not strange that Shavuot does not merit a name which describes its uniqueness, rather than the period which leads up to it? The answer begins with the connection to Pessah. After all, the seven weeks leading up to Shavuot begin on the day following the first day of Pessah, enjoining us to acknowledge every passing evening until we reach the count of 49 - replete with specific laws on how to count, when and how to make the blessing, what to do if one forgets, and even a kabbalistic superstructure based on the seven "sfirot," or Divine Emanation linking God with the world. Besides counting each day between Pessah and Shavuot, there is also a textual connection which binds the two festivals. During the section of the Pessah Seder which recounts the Egyptian experience (maggid), the Sages of the Mishna ordain that the haggada feature the passage from Deuteronomy 26:5: "An Aramean sought to destroy my father, and he went down to Egypt and dwelled there, a handful few in number. There he became a nation, great, mighty and numerous." Why these verses, and not the original source from the Book of Exodus? The obvious answer is in order to link Pessah with Shavuot, for these are the verses recited by each person who brings the first fruits to Jerusalem on Shavuot, the Festival of the First Fruits. Pessah needs Shavuot! Pessah, after all, is not

really our festival of freedom. The first Seder took place in Egypt, on the 15th of Nissan, before midnight - when we were still subjugated by the Egyptians, and even before the tenth plague. Pessah is merely the promise of freedom. And even after the Jews left Egypt, it was only an exodus into the desert - in a way, "out of the frying pan, into the fire." The real festival of freedom does not come until Shavuot, when Israelites inhabiting their sovereign state would give of their bounty to the Holy Temple. And even from a spiritual vantage point, although Pessah is when God wrought great miracles for the Jewish people, demonstrating His love and concern, He did not yet completely reveal how it was that we should serve Him. It was not until we received the Torah on Shavuot that this spiritual liberation became complete. Thus the time between Pessah and Shavuot is the time between redemption promised and redemption realized. The Sacred Zohar teaches that Pessah is when God promised to marry us; and Shavuot is the marriage itself. The seven weeks in between, teach the mystical Sages, are like the seven days a bride-to-be counts in preparation for her wedding, during which she purifies herself in order for the marriage to be properly consummated. Hence these days between the hope of redemption and the achievement of redemption, are crucial days of preparation. This may well be reflected in the two versions of the count - la'omer, and ba'omer. The prefix la - meaning toward - emphasizes anticipation; the prefix ba (which means within) emphasizes preparation. There can be no achievement of a goal without proper preparation. This preparation requires t'shuva - a return to the Land of Israel and to the Torah of Israel. In a sense, the preparation is more significant than the realization - for without it, redemption will remain an elusive dream. Perhaps this is why the weeks between Pessah and Shavuot have become a time of mourning - no weddings and no haircuts, at the very least. During this period, 24,000 students of R. Akiva died because they did not show proper respect for each other (Yevamot 62b). Apparently they understood the importance of Israel, but were missing the main message of Torah, which is brotherly love. Then, 1,000 years later, entire Jewish communities were destroyed by the Crusaders - Christians on their way to "liberate" the Land of Israel from the Saracens, while the Jews were content to remain in exile. Apparently, those Jews understood the importance of Torah, but were remiss in their appreciation of the Land. Our mourning during this period is not only for the lives lost, but also for the tragedy of redemption unachieved. Weeks of joyous anticipation have become weeks of tragic mourning because we lost sight of the spiritual and physical ideals so necessary for redemption. But in the past five decades, two new and joyous festivals have emerged between Pessah and Shavuot: Yom Ha'atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day) and Yom Yerushalayim (Jerusalem Unification Day). And what's most uncanny about these days is that they seem to be reclaiming a long-lost Jewish legacy, a willingness to accept the challenge and assume the responsibility of realizing the dream. "Weeks" is a name that speaks of the road which must be travelled, the religious development which is the prerequisite for the accomplishment of our goal. The real test lies in our willingness and ability to count and prepare for the God of Redemption. If our preparation is sufficient, our goal will certainly be achieved. Shabbat Shalom & hag Sameah

Rabbi Zalman Kossowsky (Zurich) The_Rabbi@compuserve.com
Morei v'rabotei,

Even though Shavuot is the shortest of the 3 Regalim, it contains within itself so many critical lessons for us as the Jewish People that one can truly say that what it lacks in quantity of time, it makes up in quality of time. We see this especially in Israel where all the elements are packed into a one-day observance. The Ten Commandments, the Book of Ruth and even Yiskor, all on the same morning. For us here in the Galut, we at least have two days in which to absorb it all, but the various elements of tomorrow's Tefila also leave their impression on today.

This year I would like to invite you to join me in exploring some of the lessons that we can derive from the Book of Ruth, which is the Megilla that we read on this Chag.

The whole story of Ruth is most fascinating. Ruth was a Moabite. She came from a people who were known for their cruelty and who, as our ancestors themselves found out, would not even give strangers bread and water when they crossed the desert. They were a people who even hired a sorcerer, Bilam, to curse the Jewish people. They did not ask Bilam to bring them up to the standards of the Jewish people. They just asked Bilam to curse the Jewish people, to bring the Jews down to even below their own standards.

The Torah therefore rules that a Moabite cannot convert to Judaism. Yet Ruth, who became the great-grandmother of David Hamelech, was the epitome of kindness. She was, according to the Rabbis, the daughter of the king of Moab, but she chose nevertheless to go with her impoverished mother-in-law, Naomi, after the death of both their husbands, to what for her was a strange land. She did this out of her love for Naomi and out of her desire to help her. She came with Naomi to the land of Judah where many looked down on her because of her Moabite heritage. But not all of them rejected her, for they recalled an ancient lesson Mo'avi - v'lo mo'avi'ya which distinguished between the men of Moab and the women of Moab. In the end, she married her late husband's kinsman, Boaz. The Megilla of Ruth tells us that all the community attended her wedding and they blessed her saying:- "May G-d make you as Rachel and Leah who, together, built the House of Israel."

I believe that there is a lesson here for us. Why did they give her this particular blessing? Why did they want her to have the qualities of Rachel and Leah?

We know that Rachel was a very sensitive and kind person. The Talmud tells us that Rachel knew that it was possible that her father would trick Yaacov and bring Leah to the 'chupa' instead of herself. So she arranged with Yaacov to give him special signals so that when she would come to the 'chupa' heavily veiled, Yaacov could determine whether it was she or somebody else. Yet when she saw that her sister was being brought to the 'chupa' and would be totally embarrassed if Yaacov would reject her, she could not stand it, so she gave her sister the special signals. Yaacov then thought that she was really Rachel.

So what special lesson can we learn from Rachel? Perhaps Rachel's greatest strength was her sensitivity to the needs of others. Rachel just could not bring herself to be the cause of terrible pain and embarrassment for her sister, even if it meant that she herself might never be able to marry in the future.

Not everybody is blessed with great talents, but everybody is blessed with some talent, and every one of us also has some handicaps. Being like Rachel tells us that it is important to be sensitive to each person and to try to bring out his or her strengths and not to dwell on his or her weaknesses. This was the blessing that was given to Ruth and as a result of this blessing she was able to become the great-grandmother of King David and of the Mashiach.

"Leah" stands for "perseverance." After all, when she married Yaacov, she knew that Yaacov did not love her and probably did not even want her. But Yaacov had children with her and grew to love her. She persevered and, in spite of her handicaps (the Rabbis say that she had watery eyes, and it was difficult for her to see), she was able to win her husband's love. She reared upstanding children. She had shed many tears in her life, but in the end she had overcome the sorrows.

So from being like Leah - Ruth derived the strength to persevere and it is through such strength that her descendants were able to persevere and overcome all the difficulties that befell them. Throughout Jewish history many tears have been shed because of all the terrible things that have happened to our people.

Yet, Judaism has survived and even flourished when we have listened to the words of the blessing given to Ruth, namely that we follow the examples of both Rachel AND Leah and try to combine perseverance with sensitivity to others. Then indeed we have been both strong AND beautiful.

Tomorrow we are going to say Yiskor and we honour our loved ones who have passed on. In this century the Yiskor that we recite has an

additional meaning. We remember also the millions who were murdered merely because they were descendants of Rachel, Leah and Ruth. In confronting the horrors of the Shoah, some of our People lost their faith and belief that the blessings given then to Ruth would in fact endure for as long there is a heaven over the earth. That is very sad and in this context I would like to share a story that I was told recently. In the city of South Bend, Indiana, they tell the story of their Rabbi who went to visit a Holocaust survivor, who claimed that he was an atheist even though he was a regular shul-goer. He was sick, very sick. Everyone knew that this was his last illness. He was not going to get well. When the Rabbi came the man said to him: "You know, Rabbi, I want to be cremated like my first wife, my children and my parents. No Jewish tradition for me. I am not interested in a coffin or 'Shiva' or 'shloshim.' All I want is to be cremated like my wife, children and parents." The Rabbi was shocked and said, "How can you do such a thing? How can you destroy your dignity as a human being by having your body treated like a bunch of garbage that is incinerated? You have dignity. You have new children. You have another wife. You should give them the opportunity to mourn you correctly and properly. There should be dignity and respect shown to you, even after you are gone." The sick man answered: "What do you mean, dignity and respect? I'll tell you about the village from which I came, in Poland. I'll tell you about my Rabbi, whose name was Moshe Yitzchak Rosenbaum. I'll tell you about him.

The Nazis made all the Jews in my village come and slap his face and spit on him before they took us away to be shot. Then they shot him in front of us. Is that respect for Torah? Is that the way you treat a saint like Moshe Yitzchak Rosenbaum, a great man, a wonderful man? We all slapped his face and spit on him and then we were all taken to be shot and later burned. I saw this, I managed to run away, but I saw this with my own eyes. Is this what you call dignity and respect? Let me be cremated like they were. I do not want anything to do with the Jewish customs of death any more. If those things could happen to a sainted Rabbi, a man like that, who was not only killed in such a demeaning way, but who lost his whole family, leaving no descendants, than I can have no faith any more in our traditions." The Rabbi looked at him and said, "You are wrong." The old man answered: "What do you mean, I am wrong?" The Rabbi said, "The Rabbi's name was not Moshe Yitzchak Rosenbaum. It was Moshe Yaacov Rosenbaum, and he was my grandfather. You were not the only one who hid. My mother also hid. My mother, whose mother's name was Leah Rosenbaum, remembers her father's house well. She does not remember his death all the time, but she remembers all the time the beautiful 'Shabbatot,' the beautiful shiurim that he gave, the love that he showered on them and all the family, the kisses, caresses and hugs. The Jewish tradition will continue. Yes, there will be tears. There may be many tears, but there will still be the beautiful parts and practices of our Faith. It is important that we never lose our faith." The man stood up, looked at the Rabbi, and he said, "Bury me according to the Jewish tradition." After he died, his children said Kaddish for him and his children sat 'Shiva' for him and his children came, as you are doing today, on Pesach, Shavuot, Yom Kippur and Shmini Atzeret to say Yiskor for him. The Jewish tradition did continue for that man's family. His children still make Shabbos and keep all the Festivals. Yes, there are always going to be tears in the world, but our Jewish tradition allows us to also feel the joy. We can only have the joy when we allow the light of Torah and our traditions to shine through these tears.

Life really has many, many happy and joyful moments in spite of the tears. If we are sensitive and persevere, we will feel these joyful moments. We also have the strength to try to make life better so that, eventually, the Mashiah, the great, great grandchild of Ruth, will come and the world will be redeemed from death.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH
 "Olam Chesed Yibaneh" - A Comparison of Ruth and Iyov
 by Rav Amnon Bazak (Translated by Sara Krengel)

A. Introduction Many have pondered over the question as to why

Megillat Ruth was written (see the introduction to the "Da'at Mikra" commentary on Megillat Ruth, pp. 3-6). This question begs to be asked since it is an accepted principle that all biblical texts must indicate the involvement of God in His world. The unequivocal and recurring point in Tanakh is that every event stems from the will of God. God causes death and life, lowers the haughty and raises the downtrodden, repays man with kindness according to his deeds, and repays the wicked with evil according to his wickedness. The famous exception to this rule is Megillat Esther, within which God's name is not mentioned at all. However, this omission is understood since Megillat Esther deals with the period of the Second Temple during which there was no prophecy within Israel. The whole purpose of that megilla is to show the hidden providence that characterized this time period. With this in mind, Megillat Ruth stands out: this wonderful story is completely brought about through the actions of man without any involvement of God - neither in speech nor in action. (The two times God is depicted as acting - Ruth 1:6 and 4:13 - are side points and are natural events which are not portrayed as miracles.) Furthermore, even an event that could have been seen as miraculous - Ruth's coming specifically to Boaz's fields on the exact day that Boaz visited that very field - is explained in the megilla as a chance occurrence ("va-yiker mikreha," 2:3). Another place in the megilla where the idea of "chance" is prominent is at the beginning of chapter 4: "And Boaz went up to the gate and sat there, and behold the relative whom Boaz had spoken of passed by." This is an exceptional phenomenon in Tanakh, since on the whole the Tanakh does not lend itself to chance occurrences. What, then, is the message that Megillat Ruth is coming to express? We will not be able, due to limited space, to delve into the depths of the megilla and its hidden plots. Therefore, we will focus on one point which may shed some light upon our question. We will compare Megillat Ruth to the book of Iyov, which has many similar details to the story of Naomi. With this comparison as our background, we will be able to distinguish the essential difference between them.

B. "Iyov Lived in the Days when the Shoftim Judged" These two stories have many points of comparison (see "Mikra Le-Yisrael," Yair Zakovitch, introduction, pp. 30-31): 1) Both stories discuss a person who has lost his/her children and possessions, and is left without any realistic chance of rebuilding his name anew. 2) Both sufferers complain about their bitter fate with the realization that God is behind all that happens to them. The words which each of them use are amazingly similar: Iyov said, "As God lives, Who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, Who has embittered my soul" (27:2); and Naomi mourns, "The Almighty has embittered my soul greatly" (1:20). It is important to stress that these two books are the only ones in Tanakh in which God is called by the name Shakkai (Almighty). [The phrase "Kel Shakkai," on the other hand, appears many times in Tanakh, and the name Shakkai appears from time to time in biblical songs (e.g., Bereishit 49:25).] 3) In both stories, society reacts in astonishment at the tragedies, which affected even the external appearance of the sufferers: about Iyov's friends it says - "And they lifted up their eyes from afar and they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept" (2:12), and about the women at Beit Lechem it says - "And the whole city was astir at their arrival, and they said: 'Is this Naomi?'" (1:19). 4) There is a "happy ending" in both stories - the destroyed family rises to rebirth (Iyov has children, and Naomi - a grandson). There is a parallel as well in the way in which salvation is reached: Iyov lived to see four generations of sons and Megillat Ruth ends with the fourth generation of Naomi - David. To Iyov seven sons were born (42:13), and paralleling this, the women of Beit Lechem give testimony about Ruth: "[She] is better to you than seven sons" (4:15). 5) There is no doubt that these comparisons were noticed by R. Elazar, who maintains (Bava Batra 15) that "Iyov lived in the days when the shoftim judged." The wording of this statement is intentionally similar to the opening of Megillat Ruth.

However, these comparisons actually sharpen the essential DIFFERENCE between the two stories, which is expressed through the means of salvation in each. By explaining this difference, we can clarify the different and even opposing purposes of the two books. Firstly, let us take a

look at the book of Iyov.

C. "Shall a Rebuker Contend with God? He who Reproaches God, Let Him Answer" (Iyov 40:2) The book of Iyov deals with the classic problem of "tzaddik ve-ra lo" (evil befalling the righteous). Throughout the majority of the book, Iyov and his companions are involved in raising philosophical ideas concerning this problem. No one in the book attempts to actively change the situation. The entire story consists of deliberations alone. Even the solution in the end is a philosophical one. Iyov never finds out what we know from the beginning of the book: that all the troubles which befall him are only a result of the "argument" between God and the Satan as to whether Iyov would remain steadfast. God does not reveal the specific solution to Iyov concerning his plight, but rather deals with the general question: the ability of man to come with complaints before the awesome and exalted Creator. The story of Iyov is one example of many of the suffering which comes upon man without his understanding why, and God wants to clarify the general picture: even when man does not understand, he does not have the right to complain before God. After all, who is man - who comes from dust and returns to dust - that he can stand before the everlasting King? "Who is this that darkens counsel with words without knowledge ... Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth, say if you have understanding ... Have you entered into the springs of the sea, have you walked in the hollows of the depth? Have the gates of death been revealed to you or have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness? ... Have you entered the treasuries of the snow or seen the treasuries of hail? ... Do you know the laws of Heaven, can you establish its rule on earth? ... Shall a rebuker contend with God? He who reproaches God let him answer." (Iyov, chapter 38) Only after Iyov admits that "I know that You can do everything and that no plan of Yours can be thwarted ... therefore, I have said things which I did not understand, things too wondrous for me that I knew not" (42:2-3), does the time come to complete the circle: "And God gave Iyov twice as much as he had before" (42:10). Just as there was no apparent reason for the calamity, so too, there was no apparent reason for the salvation. The book of Iyov thus considers human tragedy from God's viewpoint. "He is a faithful God, never unfair, righteous and moral is He" (Devarim 32:4). Man with his limited perspective and short life span cannot judge God. Man's actions will not always directly determine his destiny. Even when he does not understand, he must recognize his place. "What is man that You remember him and the son of man that You are mindful of him ... God, our master, how mighty is Your name in all the earth" (Tehillim 8:5,10).

D. "Kindness Builds the World" (Tehillim 89:3) How different is the picture in Megillat Ruth, the same megilla in which God does not act directly at all! In Ruth, it is people with THEIR acts of kindness who bring about the redemption and the building of the house of David. The whole essence of the megilla is the chain of acts of kindness brought about by people of chesed: 1) The first kindness we find is when Ruth and Orpa remain with lonely Naomi after her husband's and sons' deaths. For this, Naomi thanks her daughters-in-law: "May God do kindness with you as you have done with the dead and with me" (1:8). 2) Ruth, by leaving her nation and god in order to live with her mother-in-law Naomi in a strange land and strange surroundings, without any practical chance of building a family, does an amazing kindness: "It has been fully told to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law after your husband died, and how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a nation whom you did not know before" (2:11). 3) Boaz gladly accepts Ruth into his field and allows her to glean with a generous hand. This brings Naomi to bless him, "Blessed is he to God who has not abandoned his kindness to the living and the dead" (2:20). The story of the meeting of Boaz and Ruth resembles in many ways the meeting of Avraham's servant and Rivka in Bereishit 24 (see the introduction to "Da'at Mikra," pp. 13-14). Ruth has also been compared to Rivka, who was a prototype of kindness. 4) Naomi's turn arrives to do kindness for her daughter-in-law: "Shall I not seek a home for you that I may be good for you?" (3:1), and therefore she initiates the meeting between Boaz and Ruth, which brings about their marriage. 5)

Ruth's agreement to marry Boaz, who was older than her by many years, is seen in the eyes of Boaz as a kindness: "For you have shown greater kindness in the end than at the beginning, that you did not follow after the young men whether poor or rich" (3:10). ("At the beginning" here is referring to Ruth going with Naomi - see number 2 above.) 6) There is no doubt as well that the readiness of Boaz to marry Ruth was an act of kindness. This is obvious, based on the refusal of her kinsman to marry her - "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I harm my own inheritance" (4:6).

We shall not continue to prove this point, because the motif of kindness is interwoven throughout the entire megilla. "The characters of the megilla contribute their part to an ideal atmosphere; there are no negative characters. Similarly, the heroes of the megilla compete amongst themselves over doing good; everyone helps one another, everyone is striving to see their fellow man in a state of abundant goodness" (Y. Zakovitch, page 3). In contrast to the book of Iyov, Megillat Ruth reveals another facet in the way the world runs: man through his actions can fix, build, establish, expand and redeem. "Olam chesed yibaneh" - the world can be built through kindness. Man has a significant form of power. "You gave him dominion over the works of Your hands, You put everything at his feet" (Tehillim 8:1). Through the power of acts of kindness, the world MUST (as it were) be repaired. It is impossible that a person of kindness such as Ruth would not come to the fields of Boaz, a man of kindness, exactly on the day that he arrives at the field. It is impossible that the kinsman would not pass by the gate of the city at the exact moment that Boaz was trying to complete the circle of kindness. This is the power of kindness. All the deeds of Naomi, Boaz and Ruth and all the rest of the good people along the way, shout out for themselves: "We have done that which have decreed upon us, do with us that which you have promised us" (Sifri Devarim 26:15). "Boaz did what he had to do, and Ruth did what she must do, and Naomi did what she was supposed to do, God said also: I shall do My part" (Midrash Ruth Rabba 7:7). God has no choice, as it were, but to look down from His holy dwelling place, and to complete the work - "And God gave her a pregnancy and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13).

E. "And in the days when the Shoftim Ruled" (Ruth 1:1) ... "And Yishai Fathered David" (Ruth 4:22) We began with the question of the purpose of Megillat Ruth, and discussed the message that arises from its plot, namely, the abundance and influence of acts of kindness. It still remains for us to discuss one detail: the framework within which all of these events occurred - the passage from the time period of the judges to that of the kings. It seems as if the text wished to express the message of man's responsibility and his ability to be active in the world specifically at this point in time, when the Israelite monarchy is about to commence. There is no one like the king to represent the highest level that man is capable of reaching, in terms of his authority and power to act. It is specifically at this time period, then, that it must be stressed that man must invest all his efforts in doing kindness, and then he will be able to build worlds, rebuild ruins, and redeem. There are two ways in which God rules the world. One way is fixed from the beginning according to a hidden plan, and man must come to terms with it and accept it as absolute truth. The other is placed in the hands of man and he is given almost unlimited powers to influence his world. Megillat Ruth, then, comes to stress man's ability and obligation to do good; this is the power which brought about the lineage of King David and eventually the Mashiach, may he redeem us speedily. "R. Ze'ira said: This megilla does not discuss purity or impurity, commandments or prohibitions; so why was it written? To teach how great the reward is for the bestowers of kindness." (Ruth Rabba 2:15)

(An expanded version of this article appeared in Megadim 18.)

atendler@torah.org (Rabbi Aaron Tendler) 97-05-21
Business-Halacha - Hilchos Choshen Mishpat -
Volume I : Number 13 - Week Of Parshas Behar 5757 -
Removing Donated Items From A Synagogue -
Question:

Twenty years ago, Reuven donated an elaborate chandelier to his synagogue, in memory of his father. The officers of the synagogue recently decided to redecorate the synagogue, and have decided that the chandelier would have to be removed since it does not fit in with the new decor. Reuven objects to its removal, since he feels that the chandelier is a merit to the Neshama (soul) of his father.

Do the officers have the right to remove the chandelier over Reuven's objections?

Answer:

A. If it is not public knowledge that Reuven had donated the chandelier, and Reuven's name is not written on the chandelier, it is permitted for the officers to remove it over Reuven's objections, even though they will have no further use for it.

B. The authority to make the decision to remove a donated item is in the hands of the congregants or officers of the synagogue. They may make this decision based on a majority vote. However, a single Gabai (officer) has no authority to make such a decision unless he has been specifically charged by the congregants to be the sole arbiter in the above situation.

C. If Reuven had stipulated at the time that he had donated the chandelier that he is doing so on condition that the synagogue never remove it or replace it with another one, and the synagogue accepted this condition, they have no right to remove it.

D. If Reuven had made no such stipulation, but the chandelier has a plaque attached to it that states that it was donated by Reuven in memory of his father, the synagogue has no right to remove it and dispose of it, or use it for non-Mitzvah purposes. However they may sell it and use the money received for a Mitzvah, or move it to another location in the synagogue even though it may not be as noticeable as it was before it was moved.

Sources: -----

The Gemara in Eiruchin (6b) states that if someone has donated a lantern to a synagogue, the officers of the synagogue can not change its use to non-Mitzvah purposes unless people have forgotten who the donor was. However, they may decide to change its use from what the donor had originally intended, as long as it will be used for a Mitzvah. This is true even though people are aware of who had donated the lantern, and the donor objects to the actions of the synagogue officials. The reason why the officers of the synagogue have the authority to change its use is because, generally speaking, when something is donated to an organization, the understanding is that the officers and membership will decide to use it in the way that they consider best suited for the organization's purposes. This Din is stated in the Rambam (Hilchos Matnos Ani'im 8:6) and in the Shulchan Oruch (Yoreh De'ah 259:3). See the Shach there (11) who discusses whether they can use it for a Mitzvah need that is not as important as synagogue use. Also see Shulchan Oruch Yoreh De'ah 256:4 and the Shach there (8). However, if people no longer associate this item with the donor, and there is no plaque on the item stating who had donated it [even if it states who it was donated in memory of, but does not state the name of the donor], it would be permitted for three officers or the majority of congregants to decide to sell this item even though the money will be used for non-Mitzvah purposes, or to dispose of it entirely. This is stated in the Mishna Berura (153:56) and in other places in the Shulchan Oruch. The Mishna Berura adds there in the Biur Halacha (153:7, D"H V'Hu HaDin) that the Yerushalmi states that if the congregants had elected three (or more) officers to take care of synagogue needs, these officers have the status of "Seven Community Leaders" (Zayin Tuvei HaIr) in relation to this congregation. This gives them the power to remove the Kedusha (holiness) of synagogue items, and sometimes even of the synagogue itself, and sell them for non-Mitzvah purposes. The Biur Halacha there also quotes the Chasam Sofer and other Poskim that a majority vote is sufficient in determining such matters, and a unanimous vote is not required. However, even a communal majority vote has no power to override the individual rights of a property owner. Therefore, if the donor specifically stipulated at the time of the donation that he retains all rights in determining how the donated item is to be used, no one has any right to remove it or use it for another purpose if the donor objects, even if the new

purpose would seem to be more important. This is clearly stated in the Rema (Yoreh De'ah 259:2). Once the synagogue has accepted his donation, they also accept the donor's conditions and are bound by them.

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The Agricultural and Historical Significance of Sefirat Ha-Omer
By Rav Yaakov Medan Translated by Zev Jacobson

Each of the chagim (holidays) has a dual significance which is rooted and expressed in the duality of our calendar. The Jewish calendar is based on the movement of both the sun and the moon, in contradistinction to the solar calendar of ancient Egypt (and the Western world) and the lunar calendar of ancient Babylon (and the Islamic world). We calculate the months according to the waxing and waning of the moon (29 or 30 days to each month), but adjust the years based on the cycle of the sun and the seasons. (The lunar year is only 354 days long, as opposed to the 365 days of the solar year. In order that Pesach should fall out in the spring, we add an extra month every few years.)

Correspondingly, each holiday has both a historical and an agricultural significance. Pesach commemorates Yetzi'at Mitzrayim (the Exodus) and marks the beginning of the barley harvest. Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah) and marks the beginning of the wheat harvest. Sukkot commemorates the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness and marks the season when the produce is gathered in from the fields. The agricultural significance of the chagim is connected with the solar cycle that determines the seasons and represents the stable, natural, unchanging flow of time. However, the historical element of each holiday is linked to a specific day of a specific month and is, thus, connected with the lunar cycle - one that involves constant flux as expressed in the appearance and disappearance of the moon. This phenomenon is representative of the waning and waxing of the nations of the world who rise to power and then fade away.

The combination of these two cycles into one unit is an assertion of faith: Hashem, who is responsible for the creation of the world and who causes plants to grow, is the one who controls history. The God of Nature is He who redeemed us from Egypt. However, there is also a unique link between each festival and the time of year that it is celebrated - as will presently be explained.

The Torah (Devarim 16:1) assigns great importance to the period of the year when Pesach must be celebrated - Chodesh Ha-Aviv (Spring). The Festival of Freedom, which commemorates the unique historical event of the Exodus, must coincide with the start of the annual agricultural season - the harvest. What is the connection between the two?

For the six months from Sukkot until Pesach, the farmer is a slave to his land. He must clear the fields of stones, plough, sow and water without seeing the fruits of his labor. However, when the middle of Nissan comes, a dramatic change takes place. The farmer is transformed from one who "sows in tears" to one who "reaps in joy." He is now master of his land and earns his daily bread from it. This new-found freedom commences on Pesach when the barley harvest begins, as beforehand one is not permitted to benefit from the current year's grain. Thus, the two freedoms - agricultural and historical - go hand-in-hand. A barley offering (korban omer) is brought in the Temple on the second day of Pesach, expressing our recognition that it is God who causes the rains to fall and the grain to grow, just as it is He who redeemed us from bondage.

We are commanded to count fifty days from Pesach until Shavuot (Vayikra 23:15-18). This is called Sefirat Ha-Omer (counting of the Omer) and is so termed because it commences on the day that the Omer is offered. From the verses in the Torah, it seems that the significance of this counting

relates purely to the agricultural cycle: we mark off the days between the barley offering of Pesach and the wheat offering (shte ha-lechem - the two loaves) which is brought on Shavuot. Since barley ripens before wheat, these fifty days represent the interlude when only barley is being harvested. The farmer eagerly anticipates the new crop that he will soon harvest. In the words of our Sages, he waits as "a bride awaits her wedding day."

Barley is used primarily as animal fodder; it is the superior wheat that will serve as food for him and his family. Furthermore, the barley offering permits the current year's grain to be eaten only outside of the Temple; whereas the wheat offering permits it to be used in the Temple itself as part of the sacrificial service. Just as a bride is not satisfied with her engagement to her groom, but awaits their marriage, so too the farmer awaits the time when his grain will enter the House of God - symbolic of the close relationship between man his Maker. With every day that passes, the farmer gives thanks to Hashem for having sustained and blessed him in the inheritance that was promised to his forefathers.

However, our Sages identify Shavuot as the date of the giving of the Torah, and it is the historical significance of the day that lends the central meaning to the analogy of a "bride anticipating her wedding day." The Exodus is compared to an engagement between God and Israel. By redeeming us from bondage, He chose us to be His people, His beloved (see Shir Ha-Shirim, Yirmiyahu 2:2, and Hoshea ch. 2). However, the union was only sealed at the foot of Mount Sinai where we voluntarily accepted the Torah, thus forging a special bond with God. Upon leaving Egypt, the Jews counted each day that brought them closer to Shavuot, to the intimate connection that they yearned to have.

Every year, we relive this feeling of longing and anticipation. We eagerly await the festival of Shavuot when our covenant with Hashem is re-affirmed and renewed. We hope and pray that the bread of affliction - the poor man's bread of Pesach - is transformed into the full, rich loaves of the Shavuot service. Thus, Sefirat Ha-Omer as a period of transformation and longing is relevant in both the agricultural and the historical senses. The satisfaction and fulfillment of Shavuot is also to be experienced in both these realms, although the Sages place more emphasis on the historical overtones of the day. Note, however, that the focus of the historical experience is not merely recollection of the past, but reliving it in the present.

It is somewhat puzzling that while the Torah speaks directly of both aspects of Pesach - agricultural and historical - it focuses solely on the agricultural significance of Sefirat Ha-Omer and Shavuot. In fact, it is the Sages who calculate that Matan Torah took place on the selfsame day that we are commanded to offer the shte ha-lechem. Why does the Torah not mention the historical significance of the day at all?

While it is true that there is no direct mention of Shavuot as the commemoration of the revelation at Sinai, the connection is very strongly hinted at in the verses by the use of Sefirat Ha-Omer as the link between Pesach and Shavuot, as will be explained.

Sefirat Ha-Omer is very similar to the mitzva of Sefirat Ha-Yovel, whereby we are enjoined to count 49 years and consecrate the 50th year as the Yovel (Jubilee). This similarity is expressed both in the verses themselves (compare Vayikra 23:15-16 to 25:8-10) and in the laws relevant to the actual counting. (For example, with regard to Sefirat Ha-Omer, we are commanded to count seven sets of seven days - each set comprising a week; with regard to Sefirat Ha-Yovel, we are commanded to count seven sets of seven years - each set comprising one shemitta cycle where the ground is worked for six years and left untouched in the seventh year. In both cases it is a mitzva to count each day or year AND each individual set.) It is clear that the similarity between the two is not accidental and by taking a closer look at Sefirat Ha-Yovel, we can better understand Sefirat Ha-Omer.

On Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year, a shofar is blown throughout the land to proclaim the Yovel year. Another term for shofar is "yovel," and hence the name of the year. The basis of this practice has its roots in Matan Torah, where Hashem announced His presence with "the powerful sound of

the shofar" (Shemot 19:19) and signified that His presence had departed from the mountain by a long shofar blast ("bimshokh ha-YOVEL," Shemot 19:13). The sound of the shofar on Yovel parallels the shofar at Sinai and, thus, the counting of the Yovel is strongly reminiscent of the build-up to Matan Torah.

Furthermore, on the Sukkot following the shemitta year, there is a mitzva of Hak'hel (Gathering) where every able-bodied man, woman and child is enjoined to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and gather together to hear words of Torah from the mouth of the king (Devarim 31:10-12). The purpose of Hak'hel, in the words of the scriptures, is: "In order that you may hear and in order that you may learn to fear the Lord your God." This, too, is cited as the purpose of Matan Torah (see, e.g., Shemot 20:18), where the entire nation congregated to hear the words of Hashem.

In the Yovel year, this assumed greater significance, as all slaves were freed on Yom Kippur and were, thus, able to participate in the communal acceptance of the Torah that took place on Hak'hel. Thus, the Sefirat Ha-Yovel was in fact a countdown to the freedom from slavery and embracing of the Torah. By way of comparison, it follows that Sefirat Ha-Omer expresses the same idea.

The special nature of the Sefira - preparation for the bond between God and His people - is strongly hinted at by the Korban Ha-Omer itself. There are only two instances when an offering of barley is brought: the Omer offering and the Sota offering (brought by a woman whose fidelity to her husband is under suspicion). The period between the Exodus and the Revelation at Sinai is one of trial. The betrothed (Israel) is tested to verify the extent of her loyalty to the groom (God). Only once her unquestioning faithfulness has been proven can the union be finalized. In a similar vein, we find only two places where the name of God is cast into water: At the sota ceremony and at Mara. (After crossing the Red Sea, the Jews wandered for three days without water. When they came to Mara and found a well whose water was too bitter to drink, they complained to Moshe and he was instructed by Hashem to cast a piece of wood into the water to sweeten it - Shemot 15:22-25. According to the midrash, the wood contained the name of God.) In both cases, the betrothed must prove herself and her faithfulness.

The allusion to the Sota ceremony makes it clear that Israel were not redeemed to be free from responsibility. Rather, we were taken out of bondage in order to assume the difficult task of being "a light unto the Nations." Nevertheless, as our Sages state in Pirkei Avot: "There is none as free as he who is totally involved with the Torah."

This is the message of the Omer - in order to be worthy of the gifts of Hashem, both on a material (agricultural) plane and on a spiritual plane (Matan Torah) - we must prepare ourselves correctly.

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Reflections upon Birkot HaTorah
by HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein

Not surprisingly, few texts are as pregnant with concepts central to the definition of a yeshiva and its goals as birkot ha-Torah. Within the space of several lines - recited either prior to daily Torah study or before and after keriat ha-Torah in public - are encapsulated a number of major themes which express aspects of the traditional Jewish conception of Talmud Torah, in particular, and of the religious life, generally. In seeking to understand the nature and aspirations of our own yeshiva, it behooves us, therefore, to reflect, however cursorily, upon the substance of these berakhot.

At the outset, we are confronted by the question of the nature of the berakhot, and how, with respect to their origin and obligation, they are to be classified. At one level, this entails determining whether they have been mandated mi-de'oraita or mi-derabbanan - an issue which was debated by Rishonim, with the Ramban insisting that they had been prescribed by the Torah while the Rambam evidently held that, like most berakhot, they were

of Rabbinic origin. [See Ramban's list of mitzvot assei which he held had been omitted by the Rambam in the latter's Sefer Hamitzvot (printed after the section on mitzvot assei), no. 15. For fuller discussions, see Sha'agat Aryeh, 24-25, and, especially, Torat Refael, Orach Haym, 1.] At a second level, however, irrespective of origin, the character of the berakhot is at issue. That, in turn, may very well hinge upon textual factors; and this in two respects, one more general, and the other, quite specific.

With regard to personal birkot ha-Torah, the Gemara (Berakhot 11b) cites three different berakhot recited by three Amoraim, and then concludes: "Hence," i.e., in order to encompass the various themes included in the respective formulations, "Let us recite all of them;" and such is, of course, our familiar practice. It should be noted, however, that, prima facie, the texts point in different directions. The first, "Asher kidishanu be-mitzvotav ve-tzivanu la'asok be-divrei Torah," is framed as a birkat ha-mitzva, cut from the same cloth as similar assertions recited prior to lighting candles or eating in a Sukka. The second, "Ve-ha'arev na Hashem Elokeinu et divrei Toratkha be-finu," is a petitionary plea for learning characterized by pervasive sweetness and light. The last, "Asher bachar banu mi-kol ha-amim ve-natan lanu et Torato," is a paean of thanksgiving for collective chosenness manifested through the revelation of Torah to Knesset Israel.

Given this variety, one naturally asks what is the normative core of the obligation to recite birkot ha-Torah. The question may very well be out of court, as it is entirely conceivable that the obligation is multifaceted. Nevertheless, the quest - particularly, with respect to a possible de'oraita dimension - persists. Rav Haym Soloveitchik (Brisker), in a novellum preserved both through oral tradition and in a volume of his son, Rav Yitzchak Zev (Chiddushei Maran Riz Halevi, p. 10), contended that the obligation did not derive from the fact that Torah study was a mitzva prior to whose performance a berakha must be recited. It related, rather, to Torah per se, qua object, as a gift which the Ribbono Shel Olam, with munificent grace, had conferred upon us, irrespective of the command to study it.

In support of this contention - which, of course, consorts better with the latter berakhot, but which he, evidently, advanced even with regard to the first - Reb Haym adduced several proofs. First, although the Mechaber in Shulchan Arukh (O.H. 589:6) accepted the view that women should not recite a berakha prior to performing a mitzva from which they have been exempt, he nevertheless simply states, "Women recite birkat ha-Torah" (O.H. 47:14; cf. Rosh Hashana 33a, Tosafot, s.v. Ha). This can be easily understood if the berakha is over the object of Torah rather than over the mitzva to study it. Similarly, the argument is buttressed by the institution of berakhot around keriat ha-Torah, although there is presumably no independent mitzva to read in public. Conversely, the Mechaber (O.H. 47:4; see also the source in Sefer Ha'agur, Tefilla, 2) sets down that if a person meditates upon Torah matters without articulating them, he should not recite a berakha, although he is patently fulfilling the mitzva.

Perhaps the most trenchant proof in support of Reb Haym's thesis was offered by Rav Aryeh Pomoranchik, in his Emek Berakha (p. 5). The Gemara (Berakhot 11b) cites views that a berakha should be recited only when certain tracts of Torah are studied, to the possible exclusion of Midrash, Mishna, or Talmud. These are obviously mainstays of Torah study; hence, the apparent inference that the berakha relates to Torah per se - and, therefore, conceivably confined to its Scriptural epicenter.

These arguments can be rebutted. It may be rejoined, for instance, that women, too, albeit in a more limited vein, are obligated to study Torah; that keriat ha-Torah is an independent institution, invested with its own sui generis structure, unrelated to our topic; that no berakhot are recited in performing mitzvot, such as the love of God or one's fellow, which are not manifested by objective expression; and that the Gemara concludes that study of any aspect of Torah requires a berakha precisely because it rejected Reb Haym's contention. Nevertheless, halakhic arguments aside, the thesis is amply supported by a simple textual point. Both in the Bavli (Berakhot 21b) and in the Yerushalmi (Berakhot 7:1), birkot ha-Torah are treated as of a piece with those over food, before and after - birkot ha-nehenin and birkat

ha-mazon, respectively. Obviously, the analogy only holds insofar as Torah qua object is the focus. It is, of course, arguable that the Gemara is confined to the last berakhot or their equivalent, but that "la'asok be-divrei Torah" is an ordinary birkat ha-mitzva. Nevertheless, the cogency of the core concept is clearly implicit in the Gemara's comparison.

The validity of this thesis, even with regard to the first berakha, presumably depends - at least, up to a point - upon a textual factor. The prevalent Ashkenazi version reads "la'asok be-divrei Torah," "to engage in Torah matters," thus focusing upon the activity, presumably normative, of Torah study. However, Sephardim generally accept the reading - found in basic Geonic sources, the Rif and the Rambam, and even among some chachmei Ashkenaz - "al divrei Torah," "over Torah matters," which posits Torah itself at the heart of the berakha, and thus sets it apart from the ordinary birkat ha-mitzva. Nevertheless, the Ashkenazi formulation, too, bespeaks uniqueness. The verb employed is not *lilmod*, "to study," but *la'asok*, the term generally used to denominate commerce. What is envisioned is clearly not merely an act, or even a series of acts, but an enterprise. Even for the ordinary individual, belabored by the demands of a secular career, Torah is ideally defined as a calling. For the layman, too, it is, in a very real sense, to be a vocation, with all that the concept implies, quantitatively and qualitatively, in terms of aspiration and commitment. Commenting on the pasuk, "Im be-chukkotai telekhu," "If ye walk in my statutes," Chazal state (Sifra, Bechukkotai, 2):

"Can this refer to mitzvot? When it says, 'And ye shall keep my commandments and do them,' mitzvot have already been cited. So how am I to understand, 'If ye walk in my statutes?' That you are to be laboring in Torah."

"To be laboring in Torah" - that is the demand and the expectation; and it is to that commitment that birkot ha-Torah relate.

The emphasis upon committed effort is further sharpened - indeed, radically so - by another textual variant. We, Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike, conclude the second berakha by addressing "ha-Melamed Torah le-ammo Israel," "He who teaches Torah to His people, Israel." This is also the coda cited in most editions of the Rambam's Mishneh Torah (Hilkhot Tefilla 7:10). In a responsum (Teshuvot HaRambam, ed. J. Blau, p. 333), however, he rejects this formulation categorically: "But whoever concludes 'ha-melamed Torah' errs, for God does not teach it to us, but, rather, has commanded us to study and to teach it. And this is grounded upon a principle of our faith - to wit, that the enactment of mitzvot is in our hands, not by divine compulsion to perform or neglect them." The critique is a ringing assertion of human freedom, and, as such, refers to the full range of spiritual experience. Nevertheless, given the specific thrust of *lihyot amelim ba-Torah*, it is particularly apt with respect to this most critical and sensitive sphere.

The Rambam's version has not, of course, gained acceptance. The spirit which animated it, however, has had a broad and profound influence, especially as regards Talmud Torah. I am reminded, in this connection, of an anecdote - I presume it has numerous analogues - told to me by the Rav's mother, Rebbetzin Pesia Soloveitchik z"l - about an ordinary laborer in the town of Pruzhan, who, upon being blessed by well-wishers that he should become a great talmid chacham by virtue of miraculous giluy Eliyahu, demurred with the rejoinder that he would be most appreciative of supernal assistance in any other area, but as to growth in Torah, he aspired to attain that on his own.

However Torah study be denominated, the conjunction of the first two birkot ha-Torah - indeed, on Tosafot's view (Berakhot 46a, s.v. Kol), they are components of a single berakha - is striking, in one sense, and so typically Jewish in another. The first focuses upon Torah study as a normative duty, the second relates to it as a prospective joy. The conjunction reflects our overarching attitude to talmud Torah, in particular, and to avodat Hashem, in general. On the one hand, we learn because we must. No category is more central to Yahadut than mitzva. A Jew exists as a metzaveh - as a called and commanded being. He acts in response to duty, irrespective of inclination. We have been collectively defined as servants of

God, "avadai hem," and to serve is to discharge one's task, regardless of desire or gratification. What the Rambam (Hilkhot Klei Hamikdash 3:1), on the basis of the Sifra, stated with respect to Leviyim -

"And it is a positive commandment that Leviyim be ready and directed for the service of mikdash, whether they want to or not, as it is stated, 'But the Leviyim alone shall do the service of the tent of meeting.'" - is true, analogously, of every Jew. So, we should, and would, learn Torah, even if it did not attract or inspire us, even if we were not "turned on" in the slightest.

Obviously, however, we do want to be inspired - and much more. Our commitment to obligation and the moral law is no less fervent than Kant's, and we could subscribe to the substance of Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty." But we do not share the Kantian polarization of duty and inclination or the idealization of inner struggle as the basis, if not the definition, of moral existence. We acknowledge that "Who is a hero? He who conquers his will;" but the notion that moral and spiritual greatness is conditional upon the exercise of heroism is wholly foreign to us. Correspondingly, we categorically reject the persistent Christian antithesis of law and love. In sum, Yahadut is law and law and law. It is, also, love and love and love.

So, we should, and would, learn Torah - as we would fulfill other mitzvot - even if it were, to our palate, castor oil. We aspire, however, to experience it as milk and honey; and it is for that level of gratification, at once spiritual and visceral, that we pray in imploring "ve-ha'arev na." The fusion of duty and joy, obligation and gratification, commitment and fulfillment, is central to our view of avodat Hashem; and it receives special emphasis with respect to talmud Torah. "Oh how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." In describing it, Chazal (Eruvin 54b) resorted to metaphors of elemental passionate experience - an infant sucking at his mother's breast, bride and groom on their wedding night:

"R. Samuel bar Nachmani expounded: With reference to the Scriptural text, 'Loving hind and a graceful roe etc.,' why were the words of the Torah compared to a hind? To tell you that as the hind has a narrow womb and is loved by its mate at all times as at the first hour of their meeting, so it is with the words of the Torah. They are loved by those who study them at all times as at the hour when they first made their acquaintance. 'And a graceful roe'? Because the Torah bestows grace upon those who study it. 'Her breasts will satisfy thee at all times.' Why were the words of the Torah compared to a breast? As with a breast, however often the child sucks it so often does he find milk in it, so it is with the words of the Torah. As often as he studies them so often does he find relish in them" The conjunction of the first two birkot ha-Torah - all the more so, if they are, truly, a single berakha - is, then, a remarkable testament to the inextricable intertwining of norm and yearning at the center of Jewish existence and experience.

If this concept (of the intertwining of norm and yearning) is elucidated through the substance and sequence of entire berakhot, others are expressed via specific phrases or even a single word; and, of these, several may be noted. One is the term "lishmah" with which - in most current readings, although not, inter alia, the Rambam's - the body of "ve-ha'arev na" concludes. The thrust of the word is itself multifaceted. At one plane, it relates to the motivation of Torah study - as, by the same token, of other mitzvot. Lishmah defines the ideal of serving the Ribbono Shel Olam for His sake rather than for our own; in order to enhance the Kingdom of Heaven rather than for the pursuit of adventitious reward. In this vein, as the Rambam (Hilkhot Teshuva 10:2-5), in particular, emphasized, it is integrally related to the mitzva of ahavat Hashem, the call to love the Ribbono Shel Olam with our whole being, and to serve Him accordingly. (On the Ramban's view, the concept is also related to a kindred mitzva, "le-avdo be- khol levavkhem" - to serve Him with all your heart. See his animadversion upon the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvot, Assei 5.)

At a second plane, however, the term is more narrowly focused. It posits Torah knowledge as an independent value (to the extent that, within a religious context, any value can be independent). It utterly rejects, for instance, the perception of the study of Gemara as pseudo-philosophy; and,

as Rav Haym Volozhiner so vigorously contended, even cavils at reducing Talmud Torah to the instrumental role of inducing religious experience or commitment. Our faith in Torah, all Torah, properly studied, as illuminating and ennobling is, of course, profound and abiding; and the emphasis upon relating it to the whole of the spiritual life is beyond question. Yet, Torah study cannot be animated solely by such ancillary concerns, however worthwhile - not if we wish to be included among "those who know Your name and who study Your Torah for its own sake." That appellation is reserved for those for whom the bare fact that a text or an idea is devar Hashem is reason enough for its study.

Moving from the personal to the public arena, we encounter two additional themes in the berakha recited at the conclusion of keriat ha-Torah. The phrase, "ve-chayei olam nata be-tokheinu" - "And eternal life He has implanted within us," has been diversely interpreted. The Tur (O.H. 139) sees it in juxtaposition to the preceding phrase ("Who gave us the Torah of truth") and explains:

"To wit: 'The Torah of truth' refers to the written Torah, and, 'And eternal life He has implanted within us,' to the oral Torah, as it is written (Kohelet 12:11), 'The words of the wise are as goads and as nails well fastened.'"

The conclusion, alludes to a Gemara in Hagiga (3b) which takes the word netu'im (=well fastened) in the literal sense of "planted," and, in this vein, amplifies the organic metaphor in order to expound the efflorescence and diversity of Torah:

"'Well planted:' just as a plant grows and increases, so the words of the Torah grow and increase. 'The masters of assemblies:' these are the disciples of the wise, who sit in manifold assemblies and occupy themselves with the Torah, some pronouncing unclean and others pronouncing clean, some prohibiting and others permitting, some disqualifying and others declaring fit. Should a man say: How in these circumstances shall I learn Torah? Therefore the text says: 'All of them are given from one Shepherd'. One God gave them; one leader uttered them from the mouth of the Lord of all creation, blessed be He; for it is written: 'And God spoke all these words.'"

The organic element is endemic to the world of Torah she-be'al peh, generally, to which the Gemara and the Tur relate. Unlike written Torah, clearly defined and wholly delimited, it is marked by growth and development. These qualities are especially characteristic, however, of the yeshiva world, within which chiddush, the capacity for creative innovation, is held in such high regard. The organic moment is doubly significant. First, it lends a vitalistic cast to Torah learning, to be marked, ideally, by both verve and imagination. Secondly, it deepens the basis of normative commitment by investing submission to the authority of Halakha with an open-ended character. Historicists and Conservative ideologues champion development as a liberating factor, freeing an adapting present from the onerous shackles of a fossilized past. Properly perceived, however, it is no less an obligating factor, imposing, in effect, boundless commitment. As such, it is, most aptly, the vehicle of the covenantal relation of na'asseh ve-nishma, "We shall implement and heed." As the Bet Halevi noted (Bet Halevi al Derush U-mili De-aggadta, Jerusalem, 5707, p. 121; see also p. 130):

"But Torah she-be'al peh has no bound or limit, and in every generation new laws and halakhot are innovated... And it is with this intention that Israel then said, Na'asseh ve-nishma, as the import of na'asseh is that they took upon themselves to do all that they were told then, while ve-nishma refers to the future, that they took upon themselves to heed, further, the words of the sages of every generation, all that would be discovered subsequently as Torah novellae."

The Ravva (I:181, sec. 168) interprets "ve-chayei olam nata be-tokheinu" in a wholly different vein. He cites and rejects the view that it refers to Torah, and presents, alternatively, his own explanation. Birkot ha-Torah, he suggests, relate to both Torah and other themes:

"Part refers to Torah and part refers to Israel and other mitzvot, such as, 'And eternal life He has implanted within us,' which refers to other

mitzvot and to gemilut chasadim, in which Jews are always engaged, and we thank God for both."

The import of the passage is striking. However, an obvious question arises. Granted that "other mitzvot and gemilut chasadim" are important, but why are they cited in a berakha over Torah? Oughtn't Chazal rather have instituted a birkat ha-chesed, to be recited prior to visiting the sick or attending a funeral? The answer is equally obvious. Torah which is divorced from other mitzvot, which is devoid of meaningful relation to chesed, is inherently flawed. Torah is, optimally, Torat chesed, an organic whole within which both orders are integrally fused. Hence, the component of gemilut chasadim is included in birkat ha-Torah, under the rubric of chayyei olam.

In conclusion, quite apart from their content, a word about the role which Chazal ascribed to birkot ha-Torah. With reference to the pesukim in Yirmeyahu (9:11-12),

"Who is the wise man, that he may understand this, and who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord hath spoken, that he may declare it? Wherefore is the land perished and laid waste like a wilderness, so that none passeth through it? And the Lord saith: Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not hearkened to my voice, neither walked thereto,"

Rav comments (Nedarim 81a): "Are not 'they have forsaken my law' and 'they have not hearkened to my voice' the same? Rav states: It means that they did not say a berakha prior to learning Torah."

To learn Torah without a preceding berakha does not merely constitute failure to fulfill a particular halakha. It entails - and here, we return to our point of departure - missing the essence of Torah itself. Learning without praise, thanksgiving, and petitionary aspiration is learning which fails to realize the joy and the marvel, the awe and the wonder, of Talmud Torah. To learn with insouciance or indifference, or even with presumed dispassionate objectivity grounded in intellectual curiosity, is to reduce devar Hashem to an academic discipline. Hence, as the Rav stressed (see his Shiurim Le-zekher Abba Mori z"l. [Jerusalem, 5745], pp. 1-2), on the basis of the Rambam, talmud Torah sans berakhot does not merely miss out on a mitzva; it constitutes a positive violation. In effect, such learning disregards, perhaps even implicitly denies, the unique character of Torah; small wonder, then, that there is an issue.

This theme is complemented by an elaboration of the Maharal (see the introduction to Tiferet Israel; and cf. Turei Zahav, O.H. 47:1). Addressing himself to the Gemara in Nedarim, he asks how is it conceivable that Rav could have interpreted the pasuk as ascribing the decimation of the land to the failure to recite birkot ha-Torah when neviim repeatedly saw it as caused by the most heinous of sins - idolatry, fornication, and murder? He responds that, unquestionably, it was over these that the country was punished. Rav, however, sought to confront another question: If, as Chazal assumed, people then engaged in Torah study, how could they have become so degenerate and dissolute? Where was the illuminating and ennobling influence of Torah study - "For its light stimulates regeneration?" With respect to this query, Rav responds that those who fail to utter birkot ha-Torah, who, therefore, implicitly approach learning without tremulous awe, relegating confrontation with the divine word to the exercise of rational inquiry, are impervious to that light. Only when Torah is perceived as it is and related to as such, does genuine and pervasive spiritual illumination occur.

By the same token, this sense of Torah's uniqueness is the spirit in which we, who do recite birkot ha-Torah - suffused by the duty to persist, brimming with prayerful anticipation of joy, filled with humble gratitude for having been singled out as the chosen recipients of the Ribono Shel Olam's own Torah, - approach it. Above all, overwhelmed by the sheer marvel. In the words of the Tur (O.H. 47; the final phrase alludes to Mishlei 8:30):

"And, in his berakha, one should think of the convocation at Sinai, that He chose us from among all the nations; brought us near to Mount Sinai and made us to hear His words out of the fire, and gave us His sacred Torah

which is the base of our lives - His precious vessel with which He revealed daily."

It is with this intent, with an eye to these aspirations, out of souls yearning for their realization, that a yeshiva is conceived. Beyond conception lies fulfillment; beyond the dream, implementation. Toward these, we labor with might and main. For siyata di-shemaya, for divine assistance in their achievement, we bless and pray, with humility and hope.

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B"H The Chassidic Dimension Adaptation of Likutei Sichos by Rabbi Sholom Ber Wineberg Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion Shavuos

Preparing for Mattan Torah

The Midrash says that the Jewish people slept the entire night before Mattan Torah, the giving of the Torah. They did so, because the "sleep of Shavuos is sweet and the night is short." Moreover, the Midrash goes on to state: "on that night, even fleas did not bite them."

The Midrash concludes that when G-d came at dawn and found the people asleep, it was necessary to rouse them. This is the meaning of G-d's query: "Why did I arrive and no one was there? I called, and nobody answered."

Our Sages inform us that when the Jewish people heard that, 50 days after their departure from Egypt, they would receive the Torah, they became filled with an intense desire to acquire it. They therefore began counting the days that remained until the Torah would be given. Bearing in mind that, seven weeks prior to Mattan Torah, the Jews were already extremely impatient to receive it, we can imagine how much greater was their yearning on the night before it was given. This being so, how was it even possible for them to sleep, let alone sleep so soundly?

This leads us to the conclusion that their going to sleep on that night was not, G-d forbid, because they ceased thinking about the Torah, but quite the contrary, that going to sleep that night served to prepare them in some way to receive it.

Additional proof that this was indeed so can be adduced from the fact that the fleas did not bite them that night. If going to sleep constituted a lack of interest in receiving the Torah, G-d would not have kept the fleas from biting.

How was their going to sleep a preparation for receiving the Torah?

The Alter Rebbe writes that no matter how great a soul's comprehension of and union with G-dliness while clothed in a body, it can in no way compare to the soul's cleaving to G-d prior to its descent, when it was unencumbered by a physical body. For the body is simply incapable of experiencing such holiness.

When a person sleeps, the major portion of his soul leaves his body and ascends above. The soul of a sleeper can therefore attain much greater levels of spiritual comprehension.

This is why the Jews went to sleep just prior to Mattan Torah: They wanted their souls to attain greater spiritual heights. The Jewish people thought that this intense spiritual elevation would be the best possible preparation for the tremendous revelation they would soon be receiving from above.

Their good intentions notwithstanding, G-d was displeased with their going to sleep, for they should have prepared for Mattan Torah in another manner.

The unique accomplishment of Mattan Torah -- as opposed to mitzvos performed before the Torah was given -- was that the mitzvos a Jew performed afterwards refined and elevated the objects with which they were performed; the objects themselves became holy. It is specifically by working with the physical and refining one's physical body and surroundings that one attains union with G-d's Essence, something that cannot be accomplished by the soul alone.

Since Mattan Torah served to enhance the spiritual service of a soul

within a body, it follows that the preparation for receiving the Torah should have been in a like manner; not a flight from the body, but rather an effort within the framework of a corporeal soul.

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