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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHAVUOS / NASO - 5770

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### Zman Matan Torah: Our Name is Yosef, Not Joe Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

In our tefillos we refer to Shavuos as zman masan toraseinu, the time of the giving of the Torah. Our reaction to Hashem giving of the Torah to the Jewish people was expressed in the statement of naaseh v' nishma, we will do and hear. The Ohr Hachaim points out that every Jew that witnessed the giving of the Torah spontaneously answered naaseh v' nishma without consulting their friends or family or even forming a committee to first look into the pros and cons of accepting the Torah. Every individual accepted and answered naaseh v' nishma with a full commitment and were compared to the angels, as stated in the gemara:

Rabbi Elazar said: when the Jewish people said "we will do" before "we will hear", a bas kol (voice from heaven) came out and said "who revealed to my children this secret that the administering angels use, as it says (Tehillim 103:20) bless Hashem, his angels, mighty in strength, that do His will to hear the voice of His word". Shabbos 88a

We see true d'veikus, cleaving, and love of Hashem on the part of every individual through their statement of naaseh v' nishmah. One could ask that when the Jewish people stood by Har Sinai to accept the Torah, it says (Shemos 19:17) that they stood literally under the mountain, which is interpreted by the gemara as a reference to being forced to accept the Torah, and it was not just a voluntary act. In fact, the gemara describes the scene: God suspended the mountain over [the Jewish people] like a barrel, and said "if you will accept the Torah, it will be good, and if not, there will be your burial place." Shabbos 88a

The midrashim explain that the statement of naaseh v' nishmah only applies to Torah sheb'ksav, the written Torah, whereas the gemara is referring to the Torah sheb'al peh, the Oral Torah, which required coercion on the part of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This coercion on the Torah sheb'al peh was only necessary until the time of Mordechai and Esther, where at the conclusion of the events of Purim, when the Jewish people escaped complete annihilation, the Megilla records kiymu v' kiblu<sup>7</sup>, they willingly accepted all parts of Torah, including the Torah sheb'al peh. <sup>7</sup> The Torah Temima points out that it should have been written kiblu v' kiymu. Since the word kiymu comes first, there must have been a previous kabalah before Purim, namely by Har Sinai.

One could ask how it was the Jewish people didn't accept the Oral Torah at Har Sinai. For instance, the Torah says "do not burn a fire [on Shabbos], which is interpreted by the gemara to prohibit giving the death penalty on Shabbos. Did the Jewish people only accept this at face value, which would mean they didn't have any fires burning on Shabbos, and no stoves cooking food on Shabbos at all? It is inconceivable that the Jewish people were on the level of karaaites and tzedukim, who refused to accept any part of Torah sheb'al peh. Rav Leib Bakst zt"l explains that all the parts of Torah sheb'al peh that did not require a great amount of deep analysis and were easily understood were accepted by the Jewish people at Har Sinai. One cannot separate Torah sheb'ksav and Torah sheb'al peh, as they are all one unit, and were accepted together. There are, however, areas of Torah sheb'al peh which require a tremendous amount of effort and delving into in order to understand. This was the part of Torah sheb'al peh that the Jewish people were forced to accept through Hashem holding the mountain over their heads.

The Tanchuma indicates this unique quality of Torah sheb'al peh. For only those that love Hashem with all their heart, soul and possessions can study [Torah sheb'al peh] as it says "you shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your possessions." From where do we know that this love refers to study? See what it says afterwards "and these things that I command you shall be on your heart" and what is that? This is study, and what study is on the heart? We would say "and you shall teach your children" this is study which requires sharpness. The first parsha of krias shma does not refer to reward in this world, as the second parsha does, "and I will bring rains in their time", [the first parsha] refers to the reward for doing mitzvos but without learning Torah, and in the second parsha it is written "with all your heart and with all your soul" and doesn't mention "and with all your possessions" to teach that anyone that loves wealth and pleasure can't study Torah sheb'al peh, for it requires great effort and lack of sleep, and there are those that waste themselves away on it, and therefore its reward is in the world

### There Is No Sanctity Without Preparation:

**On The Torah Ethics Of Dating Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter** Senior Scholar, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future University Professor of Jewish History and Thought, Yeshiva University  
The days leading up to Shavuot, coming closer and closer to kabbalat ha-Torah, remind us of the power of preparation. Ever since the counting of the omer commenced on the second night of Pesach, the countdown continues as we look forward to celebrating this most monumental and powerful event in our national history.

The notion of preparation in the life of a Jew is central and is expressed in a number of different ways throughout the year. For example, in a teshuvah drashah Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik delivered thirty years ago, in 1976, the Rav reflected on his experience as a child on the day before Yom Kippur:

I remember how difficult it was to go to sleep on Erev Yom Kippur. The shohet used to come at the break of dawn to provide chickens for the kapparot ritual, and later the people would give charity. . . Minhah, Vidduy, the seudah ha-mafseket, [and] my grandfather's preparations all made Erev Yom Kippur a special entity, not only halakhic but emotional and religious as well. Erev Yom Kippur constitutes the herald that the Ribbono Shel Olam is coming, that "lifnei Hashem titharu, before Hashem you shall be purified." <sup>1</sup> See Arnold Lustiger, Before Hashem You Shall be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe (Edison, 1998), 60-61.

It would appear, perhaps, that the Rav understood the word "lifnei" in this pasuk not only in a sense of place or geography, i.e., "purification takes place in the presence of Hashem" but also temporally, i.e., "purification takes place even prior to encountering Hashem," namely, beginning already on erev Yom Kippur.

To understand the halakhic status of this unique day, we need to examine the one ritually mandated act most closely associated with it. The Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 604:1; based on Berakhot 8b, Yoma 81b, Rosh Hashanah 9a; Pesachim 68b) states that it is a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur. The Rabbenu Yonah (Sha'arei Teshuvah 4:8-10) offers a number of rationales for this obligation. One explanation is that on all other Yamim Tovim we institute a festive meal as an expression of the "simhat hamizvah" that we feel. After all, Yom Kippur is also a Yom Tov (see Ta'anit 26b) but, since eating on the day of Yom Kippur itself is prohibited, we express that joy the day before. Another explanation is that we eat on Erev Yom Kippur to give us the strength to engage in the activities of prayer, supplication and teshuvah mandated on the next day when we will be fasting.

There seems to be a fundamental difference between these two explanations that reflects on the core essence of the day of Erev Yom Kippur. According to the first, Erev Yom Kippur has a din of Yom Kippur, it is an extension of Yom Kippur, it fulfills the role of Yom Kippur with regard to the mitzvah of eating on a Yom Tov. It serves as the part of "Yom Kippur" when food is permitted. According to the second, however, Erev Yom Kippur is not an extension of the day of Yom Kippur but is, rather, a preparation for Yom Kippur. We eat on that day purely to enable us properly to acquit ourselves on the more important day that will follow. This point of view is also reflected in Rashi (on Yoma 81b, s.v. kol ha-okhel) and in the Rosh (Yoma 8:22). There is a long list of halakhic distinctions that may possibly depend on this conceptual analysis. For example: is this mitzvah de-orayta or de-rabbanan?; what and how much must one eat to fulfill the obligation?; does the obligation begin the night before or only in the morning?; what if one knows that he will fast well on Yom Kippur without eating the day before?; and are women also included in this obligation? A growing literature addresses these issues – and others – and is worth careful study.<sup>2</sup> See, for example, R. Aharon Kahn, "Kol ha-Okhel ve-Shoteh be-Teshi'i," *Bet Yosef Shaul* 2, pp. 40-85; R. Yizhak Mirsky, *Hegyonei Halakhah* (Jerusalem, 1989), 178-83; R. Shlomo Weisblit, "Al Mizvat Akhilah u-Shetiyah Merubah be-Erev Yom ha-Kippurim, Iyyun be-Aggadah u-be-Halakhah," *Mehkerei Hag* 11, pp. 52-60; R. Matityahu Blum, *Sefer Torah la-Da'at al ha-Mo'adim* (New York, 1985), 36-39; R. Zevi Pesah Frank, *Mikraei Kodesh: Yamim Nora'im* (Jerusalem, 1996), 125-27; R. Elyahu Slesinger, *Eleh Hem Mo'adai* (Jerusalem, 1999), 298-305.

This notion of preparation is clearly central before the Yamim Noraim, as it is before Shavuot. What are we doing to insure that we maximize the opportunity granted us by Hodesh Elul, Rosh Hashanah, the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah and Yom Kippur? We will benefit from them all only to the extent that we have prepared ourselves in advance to do so.

The centrality of this idea is also expressed in a very interesting statement of Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur, the author of the *Sefat Emet* on *Humash*, in the context of the yom tov of Sukkot. The *Tur* (Orah Hayyim 581) quotes a Midrash that states that the phrase "ba-yom ha-rishon" found in the Torah in the context of the first day of Sukkot (Vayikra 23:40) includes the fact that that day is "rishon le-heshbon avonot," the first day in the accounting of sins. After all, we are engaged in performing mizvot from the first day of Rosh Hashanah until that point: doing teshuvah during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah and preparing for the holiday of Sukkot from Mozaei Yom Kippur until its arrival. But, asks the *Taz* (Orah Hayyim 581:beginning), after all, on the first day of Sukkot one performs the very mizvot for which one was only preparing until then so why is the time spent on the preparation more sanctified than the time actually doing the mitzvah? In response, the *Sefat Emet* (Ha'azinu 5634) asserts for two reasons that this is precisely the case: "yoter koah ve-hazalah yesh behakhanat ha-mizvah mi-guf kiyyum ha-mizvah."<sup>3</sup> For more on the role of hakhanah in the Torah of Ger, see R. Hayyim Yeshayahu Hadari, "Hag La-Hashem Mahar," in *Ishei Mo'ed* (Jerusalem, 1984), 65f.

The power of preparation for a mizvah is profound, even more profound than the power of the performance of the mizvah itself.

One final example of the power of preparation is a comment of the Rav about Erev Shabbat Jews:

True, there are Jews in America who observe the Sabbath. . . . But, it is not for the Sabbath that my heart aches, it is for the forgotten "eve of the Sabbath." There are Sabbath-observing Jews in America, but there are not "eve-of-the-Sabbath" Jews who go out to greet the Sabbath with beating hearts, with their feet or with their mouths.<sup>4</sup> 4 Pinchas Peli, ed., *On Repentance* (Northvale and London, 1996), 88.

Observing the Shabbat is one thing; preparing to observe the Shabbat is something else entirely. This notion applies in so many areas of our religious lives and it must also be central in the dating lives of young men and women as they are engaged in the search for a life's partner. Marriage represents a life lived in sanctity and, as a result, it too requires appropriate, thoughtful and sensitive preparation. I present here a small and by no means exhaustive list of what I have in mind. Most apply to the young man as well as to the young woman; some apply only to the young man.

- When you received a call from someone with a suggestion for a date, did you respond in a timely and respectful way to say either that you are interested in finding out more about the person in question or that you are busy now and may consider the suggestion at a future time?
- What kinds of questions did you ask about that person? Were they the most appropriate ones? Did you focus on internal, longer lasting, aspects or on external ones which can – and will – change more easily?
- How much time elapsed from the time you agreed to the date until you made the call?
- Were you respectful to the other person during the telephone call setting up the date?
- Were you dressed properly for the date?
- Did you devote time to plan where you will take the young lady?
- Did you clear your schedule and select a time when you can focus on your date and not appear rushed?
- Did you bring along enough money to offer your date something nice to eat?
- Did you pick up your date on time?
- Were you ready at the designated time or did you have the young man wait for you?
- Did you arrange for transportation, parking, etc.?
- Did you spend a respectable amount of time with your date, even if you may have felt early on that he or she was not for you?
- If an intermediary was involved, did you call back in a timely manner and let him or her know whether or not you want to go out again?
- If your relationship has progressed and you feel at a later point that you want to end the relationship, did you part ways with respect and sensitivity?
- What did you say about the other person to your friends and others after you broke up?
- Did you make an effort to suggest someone else more suitable as a possible match for this individual?
- Whether the date results in an engagement or not, did you express hakarat ha-tov for those who worked – often hard – to bring the two of you together? Each of these questions – and there are more – focus on the interpersonal skills necessary for a meaningful relationship. They seem to be self-evident and obvious but need to be the focus of constant attention. We want our marriages to be blessed with thoughtfulness, respect, kindness, responsible behavior, expressions of gratitude, flexibility when necessary, and focus on the other. Such skills and such a focus need to begin at the beginning. Proper preparation for marriage will help insure more lasting, loving and meaningful relationships once Hakadosh Barukh Hu blesses us with the person with whom we will build our futures and share the rest of our lives.
- Did you speak to your date's parents with graciousness and respect?

## Weekly Halachah

**Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)**

Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

### Shavuos: Questions and Answers

#### **Question: What are the Yom Tov restrictions in regard to flowers?**

Discussion: Flowers, while still connected to the ground, may be smelled and touched, provided that their stems are soft and do not normally become brittle.<sup>1</sup> Flowers in a vase may be moved on Shabbos and Yom Tov.<sup>2</sup> They may not, however, be moved from a shady area to a sunny area to promote blossoming. If the buds have not fully bloomed, the vase may be moved but just slightly, since the movement of the water hastens the opening of the buds.<sup>3</sup> One may remove flowers from a vase full of water, as long as they have not sprouted roots in the water.<sup>4</sup> Once removed, they may not be put back in the water if that will cause further blossoming.

Water may not be added to a flower vase on Shabbos.<sup>5</sup> On Yom Tov, however, a small amount of water may be added but not changed.<sup>6</sup>

Flowers should be placed in water before Yom Tov. In case they were not, they may not be placed in water on Shabbos if the buds have not blossomed fully. If the buds are completely opened, however, some poskim permit placing them in water on Yom Tov while others do not.<sup>7</sup>

One may not gather flowers or create an arrangement and place it in a vase on Shabbos, even if the vase contains no water.<sup>8</sup>

#### **Question: Does one recite a blessing over the pleasant fragrance exuded from flowers in a vase?**

Discussion: Just as one may not derive pleasure from food or drink before reciting a proper blessing, so too, one may not enjoy a pleasant fragrance before reciting the appropriate blessing.<sup>9</sup> There are two different types of blessings that can be recited over pleasant<sup>10</sup> fragrances exuded from flowers: 1. Borei atzei vesamim: Recited over fragrant shrubs and trees or their flowers (e.g., myrtle, roses<sup>11</sup>). 2. Borei isvei vesamim: Recited over fragrant herbs, grasses or flowers. The blessing is recited immediately before one intends to smell the pleasant fragrance. B'diavad, one may recite the blessing within a few seconds after he smelled a pleasant fragrance.<sup>12</sup> But a blessing over a pleasant fragrance is recited only over an object whose purpose is to exude a pleasant fragrance. If the object is primarily for another purpose — even if the object is sweet-smelling — no blessing is recited.<sup>13</sup> Although flowers in a vase exude a pleasant fragrance, since people usually buy flowers for their beauty, one who walks by and smells them does not recite a blessing. If, however, the flowers are picked up and smelled, a blessing must be recited.

#### **Question: Within the same meal, may one eat cheese or other dairy food and then eat meat immediately thereafter?**

Discussion: According to the basic halachah it is permitted to eat meat or chicken immediately after eating cheese or any other dairy food, even during the same meal; there is no requirement to recite Birkas ha-mazon or a berachah acharonah between the dairy and the meat. The only separation required is to clean and rinse the mouth and teeth, wash the hands and clean the table (or change the tablecloth) to make sure that no dairy residue or crumbs remain. While there are scrupulous individuals who wait at least an hour<sup>14</sup> between eating dairy and meat in addition to reciting Birkas ha-mazon or a berachah acharonah between them — and their custom is based on the Zohar and quoted by several poskim<sup>15</sup> — it is not required by the halachah.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Question: Does the same halachah apply to hard cheese as well?**

Discussion: When “hard” cheese is eaten, the halachah is different. Shulchan Aruch quotes an opinion that requires one to wait a full six hours between eating hard cheese and meat. This view maintains that the taste and oily residue of hard cheese lingers in the mouth long after the cheese has been consumed, just as the taste and residue of meat lingers long after consumption.<sup>17</sup> In addition, other poskim hold that hard cheese can get

stuck between the teeth just as pieces of meat do.<sup>18</sup> While other poskim do not consider either of these issues to be a problem with hard cheese and permit eating meat immediately after eating hard cheese, Rama and the later poskim<sup>19</sup> recommend that one be stringent and wait six hours between consuming hard<sup>20</sup> cheese, and meat or poultry. (See tomorrow’s Discussion for a definition of “hard cheese.”) Question: How do we define “hard” cheese concerning this halachah? Discussion: Exactly how to define “hard” cheese is another controversial subject. All poskim agree that cheese which has been cured for at least six months before being packaged and refrigerated is considered hard cheese.<sup>21</sup> While many of the hard cheeses sold in the United States are not aged for six months, there are several brands of cheese that advertise that they have been cured for ten months or longer and those are surely considered hard cheeses. Parmesan cheese, for instance, is aged for at least a year, if not longer. The poskim are also in agreement that cheeses that are not aged six months but are cured long enough to become wormy<sup>22</sup> are considered “hard” cheese.<sup>23</sup>

There are, however, some poskim who maintain that all hard cheeses, including all kinds of American (yellow) cheese, etc., are considered hard cheese and one who eats them should wait six hours before eating meat.<sup>24</sup> While some individuals follow this opinion, the widespread custom follows the more lenient view.<sup>25</sup> It is appropriate, though, to wait at least one hour between eating any hard cheese and meat.<sup>26</sup>

Question: Why do some women omit the blessing of shehecheyanu when they light Yom Tov candles? Discussion: The validity of the custom to recite shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time, a prevalent long-standing custom,<sup>27</sup> has been extensively debated by the poskim.<sup>28</sup> The preferred time to recite shehecheyanu is right after the recitation of Kiddush, while the cup of wine is still being held aloft. Since ladies listen and answer amen to the shehecheyanu which is recited after Kiddush, there is no halachic reason for them to recite this very blessing when they light candles. There are other halachic objections as well. Still, since many women are inspired by the important mitzvah of candle-lighting and feel the need to express their joy at that time, the custom evolved of reciting shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time. Most poskim feel that while we do not encourage this practice, we need not object to it and the ladies who recite their own shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time may continue to do so.<sup>29</sup>

1 Mishnah Berurah 336:48. 2 Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Sefer Hilchos Shabbos, pg. 64). 3 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Shalmei Yehudah, pg. 73); Bris Olam, pg. 32. 4 Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26. 5 Mishnah Berurah 336:54. 6 O.C. 654:1 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 654:2; Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 26:26. 7 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 336:48; Shulchan Shlomo 336:12; Yechaveh Da'as 2:53. 8 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:73. 9 O.C. 216:1. A berachah acharonah, however, was not instituted for pleasant fragrances; Mishnah Berurah 216:4. 10 One who does not enjoy a particular fragrance does not recite a blessing. 11 Mishnah Berurah 216:17. 12 Halichos Shlomo 1:23-38. 13 O.C. 217:2. See also Mishnah Berurah 217:1; 216:11. 14 Some wait an half an hour; see Peri Hadar on Peri Megadim, Y.D. 89:16. 15 See Minchas Yaakov 76:5 and Be'ur ha-Gra, Y.D. 89:2. See Darchei Teshuvah 89:14 who rules like these poskim. See also Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:160. 16 Mishnah Berurah 494:16; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89:9. 17 Taz, Y.D. 89:4. 18 Peri Chadash, Y.D. 89:2. 19 Chochmas Adam 40:13; Aruch ha-Shulchan, Y.D. 89: and Mishnah Berurah 494:16 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 15. Sefaradim, however, do not follow this stringency; see Yabia Omer, Y.D. 6:7. 20 If the hard cheese is softened through boiling or cooking, it is no longer considered hard cheese; Darchei Teshuvah 89:43. But if it is merely fried or baked (as in pizza), it is still considered hard cheese; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 426). 21 Shach, Y.D. 89:15. 22 These “worms” are kosher and are permitted to be eaten as long as they remain within the cheese; see Rama, Y.D. 84:16. 23 Taz, Y.D. 89:4; Chochmas Adam 40:13. 24 Rav Y.Y. Weiss, quoted in Teshuvos v'Hanhagos, Y.D. 1:388; Rav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Me'or ha-Shabbos, vol. 3, pg. 427; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Sefer ha-Kashrus, pg. 280; Shevet ha-Levi 2:35. 25 Ma'asei Ish 5, pg. 22, quoting Chazon Ish; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (Feiffer), pg. 138, quoting Rav A. Kotler; Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148, quoting Rav M. Feinstein; Debreciner Rav in Pischei Halachah, pg. 108; Mi-Beis Levi 6; Rav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Nezer ha-Chayim, pg. 213; Mesorah, vol. 20, pg. 91, ruling by Rav Y. Belsky. 26 Rav Y.E. Henkin, written ruling published in Yagel Yaakov, pg. 148. 27 Mateh Efrayim 581:4; 619:4. 28 See Sh'eilas Ya'avetz 107, Kaf ha-Chayim 263:40 and Moadim u'Zemanim 7:117

quoting the Brisker Rav. 29 Sha'arei Teshuvah 263:5; Mishnah Berurah 263:23; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:12; Emes Y' Yaakov, O.C. 585:2; Halichos Shlomo, Moadim 2:9-22.

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### Torah and Life

#### Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

Adapted by Yitzchak Barth with Reuven Ziegler Translated by Kaeren Fish

1) "REAL LIFE" Many people assume there is a contrast – if not conflict – between Torah and "life." In this view, "life" includes all the practical, "serious" spheres whose participants contribute to the world and help develop it. As opposed to them is the "Torah," with which young people who have not yet moved on to "real life" amuse themselves. Unfortunately, echoes of this view are even to be heard within the beit midrash. Many yeshiva students do not relate to Torah study as "life" itself, but rather as preparation and training for life. In the chapter on the word "life" in his *Studies in Words* (Cambridge, 1967), C.S. Lewis points out that when a person speaks about "real life," he refers to those elements of life which he values most highly. Thus, for example, many people relate to a business deal as an expression of "real life," while writing poetry or engaging in philosophy are pursuits not deemed worthy of such a dignified title. Lewis claims that the source of this mistaken distinction is to be found in "the deeply ingrained conviction of narrow minds that whatever things they themselves are chiefly exercised on are the only important things, the only things worth adult, informed, and thoroughgoing interest" (p. 292). He finds this distinction unacceptable, since it means that "everything except acquisition and social success is excluded from the category of 'real life' and relegated to the realm of play or day-dream" (ibid.). Lewis' analysis of the prevailing attitude towards spheres of secular thought is all the more applicable when it comes to engaging in Torah. Many Jews believe that the Torah is relevant only within a constricted area, and they attempt to discover at which points this area coincides with "life" – the world in which they themselves are engaged. In many cases people think this way even if they are not aware of it. The frequently posed question, "What are you going to do when you leave yeshiva and go out into the big wide world?" actually reflects an attitude that regards Torah as a sphere external to life. Obviously, such a view – in which utilitarian activities take precedence over the realm of thought – is deficient from any self-respecting religious and spiritual point of view. Of course, we value *yishuvo shel olam*, developing the world, and the people involved in it are certainly worthy of praise. But we must be firm in our opposition to the view that engaging in *divrei chokhma*, Torah and matters of the spirit, is not "real life." A well-known mishna teaches that both the practical and the intellectual spheres are essential; neither can exist without the other. "If there is no worldly sustenance (literally: flour), there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no worldly sustenance" (Avot 3:17). The mishna does not mean to equate the significance of these two spheres. Man was not created in order to grind flour, nor to fill his belly with bread. Rather, he was created in order to serve God – including the pursuit of Torah, "for it is for this purpose that you were created" (Avot 2:8). Like the famous assertion of the French playwright Moliere, that "One should eat to live, and not live to eat" (Valère, Act 3, Scene 1), we believe that we must work and eat in order to engage in Torah, rather than engage in Torah in order to eat. Torah is not detached from life; on the contrary, we declare daily that Torah "is our life and the length of our days." This means that engaging the Torah is the crux, the essence, the most important part of life. At the end of Avot de-Rabbi Natan (34:10), the beraita lists ten entities that are called "life": God is called "life," Israel are called "life," the Torah is called "life," as well as the righteous, the Garden of Eden, the Tree, Eretz Yisrael, deeds of kindness, Torah sages, and water. Even the most cursory review of this

list reveals that most of the things that are called "life" belong to the realm of the spirit. Some of them are connected to the practical world, and some even belong to that world exclusively, but this list unquestionably suggests that "true life" is found, first and foremost, in the world of the spirit, the Torah, and sanctity. The reasoning behind this assertion is clear: King David defined life as the connection with the Source of life: "For with You lies the source of life; by Your light we shall see light" (Tehillim 34:10), and the Torah is the most central and direct channel to the Creator. The Torah connects man with God, and therefore occupation with Torah is the principal channel of life. At the conclusion of two different discussions, the Gemara quotes Rabbi Tarfon's exclamation after Rabbi Akiva won an argument between them: "Akiva, anyone who separates himself from you is, as it were, separating himself from life!" (Kiddushin 66b; Zevachim 13a). Ironically, the subjects under discussion in each of these two debates are far from practical. In Massekhet Kiddushin the debate concerns matters of ritual purity and impurity, while in Massekhet Zevachim the Tannaim discuss receiving the blood of sacrificial animals. The impression conveyed by the Gemara is unequivocal: it is Torah itself that is life, and hence there is no need to seek artificial points of contact between these two spheres. Since the Torah is called "life" and engagement in it is a central occupation of our lives, it is clear that yeshiva study should not be regarded merely as a preparation for the rest of life. Every moment in which a person is not engaged in Torah is a moment wasted, and represents a loss in its own right – over and above the loss for the future, in that the person is not preparing for the rest of his life. When King David asked God to allow him to die on erev Shabbat rather than on Shabbat day, his request was refused: "Better for Me one day that you sit and engage in Torah than a thousand burnt sacrifices that Shlomo, your son, is destined to offer upon the altar before Me" (Shabbat 30a). Obviously, the Torah that David learned on the eve of his death was not preparing him for anything. The sole significance of those hours on Shabbat eve was the learning itself, altogether unconnected to "preparation for the rest of life." Nevertheless, the Gemara concludes decisively that those hours of learning, not preparing him for anything, were preferable in God's eyes to the thousand sacrifices that Shlomo offered on the day of the dedication of the altar! Torah study has inherent importance in God's eyes, and we should view it in the same way. The mishna teaches, "Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than all of the life of the World-to-Come" (Avot 4:17) – even if it is one single hour, in which the person is not preparing himself for the rest of his life. Beyond the fact that the period of yeshiva study prepares students for the rest of their lives, it is a period of intensive life in its own right – filled with Torah and closeness to God. The purpose of life is to cleave to God, and the road to this cleaving passes through the beit midrash. We must be careful not to downplay the importance of engaging in Torah by assigning an exaggerated significance to worldly concerns. The Torah's definition of "life" is unequivocal: "And you who cleave to the Lord your God are alive, all of you, this day" (Devarim 4:4). Cleaving to God is itself "life," and the place where this "life" is realized is in the beit midrash. For this reason, King David says of the Temple – the focal point of cleaving to God – "For there God commanded the blessing, eternal life" (Tehillim 133:3). It is specifically within the beit midrash, the place where we cut ourselves off from the external world and devote all our energies to achieving an intensive closeness to God – it is specifically here that the blessing of eternal life is invoked. 2) A "TORAH OF LIFE" The expression "a Torah of life" (Torat chayyim) is familiar to us from the prayer service: in the blessing "Ahava Rabba" we thank God for teaching us "chukkei chayyim, statutes of life," and in the "Sim Shalom" blessing we mention that He has given us a "Torah of life." There are several reasons why the Torah is referred to in this way. First, Torah comes from God, Who is the Source of life. The Torah first became manifest to us as the voice of the living God speaking from Mount Sinai to all of Israel. From that time onwards, as the Torah expanded into the Tanakh, Mishna, Gemara, and the writings of the great Torah sages of all generations, it

remained essentially an interpretation and elaboration of the words of the living God. Second, the Torah is called a “Torah of life” because it gives life and leads towards life, as we declare in the “Ahavat Olam” blessing in the evening service: “For they [the words of Torah] are our life and the length of our days.” It is interesting to note that the blessings over the Torah actually point to a contrast between Torah and life: we bless God for having given us “the Torah of truth,” and thereafter we say that He has “implanted within us eternal life.” However, most of the commentators explain that the expression “eternal life” (chayyei olam) parallels “the Torah of truth” which precedes it. In other words, the “Torah of truth” is itself “eternal life,” for by engaging in Torah a person inherits eternal life. In Bava Metzia (33a) the same idea is formulated in halakhic terms: “One’s father brought him into this world, but one’s teacher – who imparts to him wisdom – brings one to the eternal world.” A third reason for the title “a Torah of life” is the vitality and ongoing development that characterize Torah. The Gemara (Chagiga 3b) draws a comparison in this regard between Torah and the plant kingdom: “Just as this plant is fertile and multiplies – so the words of Torah are fertile and multiply.” Similarly, the final mishna in Bava Batra (175b) draws a parallel between dinei mammonot and a flowing spring. Although a mikve – like a flowing spring – purifies those who are ritually impure, a spring continually replenishes itself and never stands still, and therefore a spring is preferable to a standing mikve (Mikvaot 1:7). This is also the nature of Jewish civil law. A final reason for the term “Torah of life” is that, in contrast to many other cultures which glorify death, the Torah occupies itself with life and sanctifies it. There is no death worship in Judaism. By delving into the tiniest details of all aspects of life, Halakha expresses its respect and appreciation for life in all its forms. The Torah addresses every part of a person’s life and strives to sanctify all of it – including everything from creative life, through economic life, to the most everyday and material of daily activities. The message that arises from the Torah’s occupation with these spheres is that every moment of life has significance, and can serve as the springboard to spiritual elevation. In the Jewish view, a live dog is preferable to a dead lion. So long as a person is alive, he may progress and sanctify himself. But when he is dead, he is removed from the world of sanctification and the fulfillment of Halakha. Some people posit that a “Torah of life” is a Torah that shows consideration for the realities and necessities of life. According to this view, Torah sages should enact rabbinic rulings and interpret Halakha with a view towards addressing life’s issues. In practice, this approach is popular mainly in specific areas of Halakha, in which the halakhic authorities have been especially lenient throughout the ages, such as their consideration for the anguish of “chained women” (who are refused divorces by their husbands) and the suffering of the poor. This is not the place to treat this extensive subject in detail, but it should be emphasized that in this regard both extremes are wrong. On the one hand, there are those who insist that for every issue and in every instance there must be a halakhic solution, and the only problem preventing the release of all the “chained women” in the world is the timidity and laziness of the halakhic authorities. On the other hand, there are those who declare that the world of Halakha is self-contained, and no values need be taken into consideration other than purely halakhic ones. In my view, a true Torah sage must feel a dual obligation: towards Torah and towards the Jewish people, and he must find the “golden mean” that balances the needs of these two factors. 3) “A LIFE OF TORAH” In addition to speaking of a “Torah of life” (Torat chayyim), we also speak of a “life of Torah” (chayyei Torah). By this we mean a life that is based upon Torah – and this is true on several different levels. First, a “life of Torah” is built on the foundation of the Torah’s commandments; it is the Torah that directs one’s path. On the most basic level, we are speaking of a life guided by Halakha; one makes one’s decisions and acts in accordance with the Torah’s directives. But beyond this, a Jew who lives a life of Torah senses continually the weight of his or her responsibility as a commanded being. This constant awareness is unique to the Jewish religion and to the Jewish nation. There are many

religions in which a person experiences God as the Creator, the Redeemer, the All-Powerful, and the Source of kindness, but a Jew experiences God primarily as the Law-Giver and the One Who commands. A person who lives a life of Torah operates in accordance with this constant consciousness: as he or she wakes up in the morning, goes to work, eats, and even as when preparing to sleep. There is no activity – even the most seemingly mundane and insignificant – that does not consult the Shulchan Arukh for guidance. But a life of Torah is more than just a life founded upon halakhic awareness. Along with the commandments that comprise Halakha, Torah also includes a whole system of values that establish the proper relationship between a person and God, the community, and the world in general. A true life of Torah is one in which the spirit of Halakha influences one beyond its straightforward demands and prohibitions. A person who lives a life of Torah understands that the Torah does more than just delimit parameters of the permissible and the forbidden. It influences our attitudes towards all areas of life, such as politics, economics, and spirituality. A certain kippa-wearing professor once defined himself as an “observant secular Jew.” This is certainly an extreme and exaggerated definition, but it does reflect the lifestyle of some people who call themselves “religious.” In their view, Torah merely defines the playing field and establishes the “rules of the game” within which life is to be lived. They believe that one can think, feel and do as one pleases, as long as one does not break any of the technical rules. A true life of Torah is not a secular life that features the observance of the commandments; rather, it is a life in which Torah is the “game” itself, not just the framework of its rules. A person may be a shoemaker, a physicist or an economist, but if Torah lives within him and the focus of his life is the aspiration to “sit in God’s house all the days of my life” – then this person lives a life of Torah. Such a person does not feel that Torah limits or constricts his life; rather, he feels that it guides and inspires him. In this sense, a life of Torah is not just a life that is permissible according to Torah, but a life with Torah at its center. In various contexts, the Gemara mentions the definition of a person “whose profession is Torah” (e.g. Shabbat 11a). Two of the greatest Rishonim – Ramah (Responsa, 248) and Rosh (Responsa, 15:8) – maintain that this definition refers to anyone whose aspiration is to “sit in God’s house,” and who organizes his life on the basis of this aspiration. According to this definition, even a person who spends most of his day in a laboratory, for example, and only sits down to learn Torah at the end of the day – even this person may be considered one “whose profession is Torah.” This status stems from his feeling that he engages in the other spheres because he needs to – for his own benefit or for that of society – but his main desire is to “dwell in God’s house all the days of his life.” Even if a person does not devote his entire day to Torah study, the main question is how he relates to his occupation and what he does with his free time. What is common to all of these definitions is the negation of contrast or distinction between Torah and life. Torah and life – by their very definition – do not compete with one another. In its most perfect and ideal sense, “life” is defined as such specifically when it is a life of Torah, hinging on Torah values and on the aspiration towards involvement in Torah. Similarly, the ideal sense of “Torah” is a Torah of life in that it addresses life, promotes life, and rewards those who engage in it with eternal life. Any approach that attempts to negate these definitions and to draw a distinction between Torah and “true life” is alien to servants of God. Only a view that identifies true life as a life of Torah can guide us on our spiritual path, on the road leading forever upward towards the House of God. (This sicha was delivered in Summer 5761 [2001].)

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 32 YESHIVA UNIVERSITY • SHAVUOT TO-GO • SIVAN 5770  
**The Tuition Challenge: A Discussion Guide**  
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Torah study plays a prominent role in the holiday of Shavuot. It is a holiday where many people make a concerted effort to study Torah with their children. While the effort to study Torah with our children on Shavuot and throughout the year is commendable, in most cases, it does not supplant the need to send a child to a Jewish day school in order to receive a formal Jewish education.

Day school education can be financially draining for a family. Many families simply cannot afford to pay the tuition fee. Day schools do offer scholarships for those in need, but the scholarship funds require significant fundraising efforts in order for the school to meet its financial obligations. Raising scholarship funds has become increasingly difficult in the last few years, given the current economic situation. As such, many schools are faced with the challenge of finding a way to make tuition affordable while remaining financially stable. The "tuition challenge" compels us to find alternative means of funding day school education. At present, in many schools, the collective parent body cannot afford to pay for the capital and operating expenses of the school. Any solution to this challenge will involve reducing expenses, increasing revenue or a combination thereof. In this study guide, we will present Torah sources relating to the various options available for schools and communities. We hope that these sources help in facilitating a meaningful discussion about a topic that weighs heavily on the minds of many of us in the Jewish community.

The Institution of Yehoshua ben Gamla Rav Yehuda has told us in the name of Rav: Nevertheless, the name of that man is to be blessed, his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla, but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all. By what [verse of the Scripture] did they guide themselves? — By the verse (Devarim 11:19), "And you shall teach them to your children," laying the emphasis on the word 'you' (i.e. this should be performed personally). They then made an ordinance that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem. By what verse did they guide themselves? — By the verse (Michah 4:2), "For from Zion shall the Torah go forth." Even so, however, if a child had a father, the father would take him up to Jerusalem and have him taught there, and if not, he would not go up to learn there. They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each province, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] and if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Yehoshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town and children should enter school at the age of six or seven. Baba Batra 21a (Translation adapted from Soncino Talmud)

Accessibility to Jewish education came in stages. Initially, Jewish education was only accessible to those who were willing to travel and was only accessible to teenagers. Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution provided local accessibility to all children from the age of six and up. R. Tzvi Elimelech Shapira (1783-1841) suggests that the institution transforms the way we approach Jewish education: Although one fulfills his biblical obligation by teaching Torah to his children, on a rabbinic level, one does not fulfill his obligation unless all of the children of the city are educated, both rich and poor. It would seem to me that after the institution [of Yehoshua ben Gamla], one does not even fulfill his biblical obligation unless all of the children of the city are educated as I will explain ... In our situation, since Yehoshua ben Gamla instituted a stringent feature to the quality of the mitzvah - to be involved in the education of all children of the city - one who educates only his own children, and is not concerned with the children of the poor, certainly violates the rabbinic enactment of Yehoshua ben Gamla, but additionally, does not fulfill his biblical obligation [to teach Torah to one's children]. Takanot Tamchin D'Oraita no. 3

According to R. Shapira, Yehoshua ben Gamla did not merely add an additional communal obligation. He added a whole new dimension to the obligation to teach Torah to one's children. Once the institution was enacted, one cannot fulfill one's own biblical obligation to teach one's own children until he has done his part to ensure that Torah education is accessible to all children.<sup>8</sup> See R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926) Ohr Same'ach, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:2, who suggests that there is a biblical obligation on the community to educate its children. This obligation existed before Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution.

The Obligation of the Parents There are two questions that must be addressed in discussing the obligation of parents to pay for the education of their children. First, what is the extent of their obligation to ensure that their children receive a Jewish education? Second, what criteria should be used in determining what percentage of the school budget comes from tuition and what percentage comes from charitable donations? Rambam (1138-1204) states that a father's obligation to teach his son Torah extends to hiring a teacher, if necessary:<sup>9</sup> One must hire a teacher to teach his son ... If the local custom is that teachers receive compensation, one must provide compensation. One is obligated to pay for a teacher until he reads the entire Written Torah. Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:3,7

According to Rambam, the requirement of parents to spend money for the education of their children only applies to educating them to read Tanach. However, R. Moshe Feinstein (1895- 1986) notes that for practical reasons, the obligation extends far beyond that:<sup>10</sup> In our country (USA), there is a government requirement to educate

them in their schools, and through the kindness of God to the Jewish people, there is an option to educate in schools that are under the auspices of God fearing individuals, such that if one does not send his daughter to be educated in the ways of Torah, faith and observance of mitzvot in a proper school such as Beit Ya'akov and the like, one is required to place her in a public school which, God forbid, has no Torah and no faith. Since one is required to ensure that his daughter is someone who believes in God and His Torah observes His mitzvot, even if it is necessary to spend money, it [i.e. education in a proper Jewish school] is a matter of obligation. Igrot Moshe, Y.D. 2:113 9 R. Avraham de Boton (c.1560-1605), Lechem Mishneh, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:3, suggests that the requirement for a father to hire a teacher is part of Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution. R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah 2:110, notes that there is a comment of Maharik (as cited by Lechem Mishneh) that indicates that a father has a biblical obligation to hire a teacher for his son if he cannot personally teach his son. 10 R. Feinstein's responsa addresses whether there is a difference between the obligation to educate a son and the obligation to educate a daughter. R. Feinstein notes that there is no obligation to teach one's daughter Torah (see Kiddushin 29b) and therefore, from the perspective of the laws of Torah learning, Rambam's requirement to hire a teacher would not apply to one's daughter.

According to R. Feinstein, the obligation to pay for Jewish education is not merely a function of the mitzvah of learning Torah. Each parent has an obligation to ensure that his or her children are raised with the proper values and beliefs. In modern times, this can (generally) only be accomplished in a Jewish day school. R. Feinstein adds that the parents are obligated to spend money to ensure that their children receive a proper Jewish education.<sup>11</sup> The question of what percentage of the budget should come from tuition is perhaps one of the most sensitive issues in this "tuition challenge" discussion. Here are a few questions that one might address when approaching this issue: Is a donor justified in claiming that he will only donate money if every effort is made to collect as much as possible from the parent body? Is a parent who pays full tuition justified in complaining to the school about a neighbor who receives tuition assistance but lives a more luxurious lifestyle? Is the school scholarship committee justified in scrutinizing the financial situation of scholarship applicants when the applicants complain that the process is overly intrusive? R. Moshe Isserles (Rama, 1520-1572), in addressing the institution of Yehoshua ben Gamla states: In a place where the community hires a teacher for the children and the parents of the children cannot afford to pay for their children so that other members of the community must contribute, the money is collected based on wealth. Rama, Choshen Mishpat 163:3

According to Rama, the communal obligation to pay for education only applies when the parents cannot afford to pay for the education of their children.<sup>12</sup> Rama, however, does not provide guidelines for what the standards are for someone who cannot afford to educate his child. Do we follow the criteria for giving someone charity - which requires the recipient to 11 R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993), also asserts that the exemption from teaching one's daughter Torah does not exempt one from providing one's daughter with a proper Jewish education. It only exempts one from teaching her the theoretical portions of the Torah. R. Soloveitchik adds that the obligation to provide a proper Jewish education to one's children is not only a function of chinuch (training) and therefore, it applies even after the child becomes bar/bat mitzvah. [R. Soloveitchik developed this idea in a lecture that was originally given on Shevat 3, 5719 in Yiddish. The Yiddish notes were compiled by Dr. Hillel Zeidman and were translated to Hebrew by R. Shalom Carmy. The article appears in Beit Yosef Sha'ul, Vol. IV (1994).] 12 Rama's comments are stated in a chapter in Shulchan Aruch dealing with communal ventures. The general rule is that each individual pays based on the degree to which he benefits. As such, one who has two children in a school of one-hundred children should pay two percent of the school's costs. However, because of Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution, the community is obligated to cover the tuition costs of those who cannot afford to pay. A similar idea is presented by Rama, Orach Chaim 53:23, regarding the costs of hiring a shaliach tzibbur (cantor). Rama rules that half of the salary should be split evenly among the congregants and the other half should be based on what each individual can afford. liquidate his non-essential possessions<sup>13</sup> - or is there a different standard when it comes to education?

While Rama does not provide any clear guidelines on the matter, there is a comment of R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntchitz (1550-1619), Kli Yakar, Shemot 23:5, that is relevant to this discussion. The Gemara states the following about the mitzvah to help someone whose donkey is struggling with its load: If he [the owner of the animal] went, sat down and said [to the passerby], 'Since the obligation rests upon you, if you desire to unload, unload:' he [the passer-by] is exempt, because it is said (Shemot 23:5), 'with him.' Baba Metzia 32a (Soncino Translation)

There is no mitzvah to help the donkey owner if he does not put in an effort to help himself. R. Luntchitz adds: This is a response to some impoverished individuals among our nation who demand communal support but don't want to perform any labor - even if it is within their means to perform labor or something else that can

provide for their family - and they complain if they are not provided with all of their needs. [However, there is no requirement to support them] because God only commanded to help "with him." The poor person must do whatever is in his means, and if, nevertheless, he is not able to afford his expenses, then there is an obligation on every Jew to help him, support him and provide him with whatever he is lacking and then one must help, even one hundred times. K'li Yakar, Shemot 23:5

While one cannot necessarily compare the allocation of scholarships to the allocation of charity, R. Luntchitz seems to extend the Gemara's idea regarding helping the donkey owner to all forms of assistance. There is no requirement to assist those who are not putting in the effort to assist themselves. As such, the school and its representatives have the right (and ergo the responsibility) to set up guidelines to ensure that scholarship money is only allocated to those who can't help themselves. It is also incumbent upon those applying for scholarship to accurately represent their financial situation so that the tuition committee can distribute its scholarship funds equitably. 13 Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah no. 253, contains a detailed discussion of which assets must be liquidated before one is able to collect charity.

The Obligations of the School The school manages and distributes the incoming revenue and therefore, must take responsibility to spend the money properly. Yehoshua ben Gamla's institution accounted for the optimization of the school system: Raba further said: The number of pupils to be assigned to each teacher is twenty-five. If there are fifty, we appoint two teachers. If there are forty, we appoint an assistant, at the expense of the town. Baba Batra 21a (Soncino Translation)

Tosafot note that if the school system does not follow this structure, the school is not entitled to communal funds: However, less than that (twenty five students), the members of the community cannot force each other to hire a teacher. Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a s.v. Sach

It should be noted that Ramban (1194-1270), Baba Batra 21a, disagrees with Tosafot and maintains that if there are less than twenty five students, the community is nevertheless obligated to provide the funds necessary to hire a teacher. However, Ramban does agree that if there are enough students, and the school decides to hire more teachers than are necessary, there is no communal obligation to support the school for the additional expenses. R. Aharon Koidenover (c. 1614-1676), Emunat Shmuel no. 26, adds that the requirement to have twentyfive students in a classroom was only applicable in earlier times. Nowadays (in the 17th century), when children require more attention, we should not require such large classrooms. R. Koidenover's comments are cited in Pitchei Teshuva, Yoreh De'ah 246:8. R. Shneur Zalman of Lyadi (1745-1812), Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchot Talmud Torah, K.A. 1:3, agrees with R. Koidenover that from an educational perspective, Yehoshua ben Gamla's classroom requirements are not applicable. Nevertheless, R. Shneur Zalman asserts that the community cannot be obligated to pay for a school system that is more expensive than the original institution.

The school system of today differs greatly from the school system set up by Yehoshua ben Gamla. There are many more expenses incurred by a school in order to meet the needs of modern education. R Shmuel Wosner (b. 1911) discusses whether there is a communal obligation to pay for these expenses:

In truth, I am not sure if we use the institution of R. Yehoshua ben Gamla to obligate members of the community to pay for all of the expenses that exist today because there are a number of issues such as building costs, food and transportation that were not included in his institution. Although one can argue that the institution is based on the needs of each generation, I see that R. Shneur Zalman did not follow this logic and concluded that even hiring a teacher for less than twenty five students is not included in the institution. If so, certainly, the items that I discussed are not included. Furthermore, one must investigate whether one can include the cost of building big buildings, as is practiced today, as part of the cost of educating a child and include it in the communal responsibility or whether money collected for the building should be categorized as a general donation for a mitzvah. Shevet HaLevi 6:147

Conclusion Yehoshua ben Gamla is praised and remembered for saving Jewish education in his time. He did so by creating a system where the community, the parents and the schools work together to ensure that all children are afforded the opportunity to receive a Jewish education. The current tuition challenge is complex and there are no simple solutions. Yet, we can learn from Yehoshua ben Gamla that we can ensure the continuity of Jewish education through the collaborative efforts of the community, the parents and the schools.

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**Berel Wein - Parshat Nasso**  
**SHAVUOT THOUGHTS**  
 Friday, May 21, 2010 Printer Friendly

Here in Israel Shavuot is a one day holiday. Since many stay up all night on Shavuot and therefore spend a great deal of the Shavuot day sleeping off the night's study session, the day really whizzes by. This really does not allow for much true contemplation of the holiday and its intended message and long lasting influence upon us.

We all know that Shavuot marks the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, though the biblical names for Shavuot, which appear in the Torah itself, do not specifically reflect this truth. The reality of the holiday is not easily absorbed in so short a period of time as one day. After all, we savor Pesach but it takes a week to do so and the same is true for Succot which lasts eight days.

When I lived in the United States, the second day of Shavuot was one of my favorite days of the year. I appreciated the wisdom of Jewish tradition in extending the holidays for a day for Jews living in the Diaspora. But living now in Israel, with its one day holiday of Shavuot, it has forced me to consider the import of the holiday in a less leisurely manner than before.

There is no second day of Shavuot here but the aftermath of Shavuot nevertheless can and should wield an influence upon us, on our attitudes, behavior and beliefs. If it does not, the holiday itself, passing in a blur, loses its sense of importance and relevance and becomes a wasted opportunity.

Dealing with the Torah is not a one-time situation. Perhaps this is the reason behind the Torah itself not emphasizing Shavuot as the anniversary of its being granted to the Jewish people on Sinai 3382 years ago. Torah is "our life and the length of our days." It really therefore has no anniversary or commemorative day for it is the constant factor in the life of Jews.

It is a continuous guide and challenge in our everyday life, always demanding and probing into our innermost thoughts and outward behavior and lifestyle. It does not allow for vacations and negligence, societal correctness and sloppy thinking. Our teacher Moshe stated in his famous psalm that life itself passes by as in a blur, much like the holiday of Shavuot does. Without focus and purpose, dedication and fortitude, life itself resembles a lost opportunity.

Therefore, Shavuot's message truly lies in its aftermath and not so much in its one-day of commemoration. In Temple times, Shavuot, so to speak, was extended for another week to allow the holiday offerings of individuals to be brought upon the Temple's altar.

There was a conscious effort by Torah law to impress upon the Jews the continuity of Shavuot, with the deep understanding that out of all of the holidays of the year it was the one that never quite ends. It was and is the source of "our lives and the length of our days." Shavuot is only one day out of 365 but its true commemoration extends to the other 364 days of the year as well.

I have often remarked that Shavuot is the forgotten holiday for many Jews in the Diaspora. Its almost complete disappearance from Jewish life outside of the observant Orthodox community has become the symbol of the ravages of assimilation, intermarriage and alienation that plague the modern Jew who has little self-identity and abysmal ignorance of Torah and its values.

Here in Israel all Israelis are aware of Shavuot, even those who only honor it in its breach. So the Torah and its influence is still a vital part of Jewish life here. The study of Torah and Jewish subjects of interest on the night of Shavuot here cuts across all lines and groupings in Israeli society. Secular and religious, Charedi and Reform, synagogues and community centers, all have all night learning sessions on the night of Shavuot. So Torah has an effect upon all here, naturally in varying degrees of knowledge and attitude.

In the Diaspora, Shavuot is simply ignored by many Jews and thus it cannot have any continuity in the lives and value systems of those Jews. It is difficult to see how this situation can be materially changed in the near future. Yet Shavuot has always somehow been able to produce its magic on the people of Israel. We should therefore be most grateful that the Lord has extended to us a year long and eternal Shavuot.

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**Rabbi Berel Wein** <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-  
toinfo@jewishdestiny.com Weekly Parsha

**NASSO**

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The idea of the nazir always raises questions and problems. The idea of monasticism is certainly not a basic Jewish value. Just the opposite seems to be true from the ideas and statements of the rabbis in the Talmud and from Jewish societal behavioral patterns over the centuries.

Jewish society in all of its divisions and manifestations is engaged, vital and gregarious, social to the extreme with a brashness of involvement in all fields of human endeavor, thought and progress. Yet the Torah describes for us quite clearly and vividly the necessity for some necessity of monasticism, be it permanent or temporary, in Jewish life and social order.

Yet even this monastic situation is not meant to separate the nazir from active participation in societal and communal life. Shimshon, the prime example of the nazir in our Tanach is nevertheless the leader of Israel, its chief judge and commanding warrior. There are halachic restrictions placed upon the nazir but locking one's self away from Jewish society is certainly not one of them.

There are restrictions regarding retaining purity and cutting one's hair, avoiding any sorts of defilement and on consuming wine and affiliated beverages. These restrictions amongst others certainly remind the nazir of his special status, but the nazir is still positively a member of the general society in all senses of participation in normal human life.

If anything, a nazir now becomes a model for others for the attempt to achieve probity and purity in a world of the impure and sometimes wicked. So even though the rabbis are not really happy with someone becoming a nazir, nezirim and nezirut are a necessary piece of the human puzzle that the Torah describes for us.

The Talmud also teaches us that the impetus for becoming a nazir is also societal. It stems not from the inner wish of the individual to forego certain pleasures and norms of life as much as it stems from the wish for a protective shield from the dissoluteness and licentiousness of the surrounding society.

Apparently, in a perfect world, the whole concept of nezirut would be unnecessary. But the Torah judges human life, even Jewish life, as it really is in our imperfect world and not as it should somehow be. And, therefore, the nazir becomes a necessary ingredient in our Torah society.

Over the ages there have been a number of outstanding people who have chosen the way of the nazir for themselves in their lifetimes. However, the reticence of the rabbis and Jewish tradition on this matter has prevented nezirut from becoming widespread or even accepted behavior.

The Torah does not seek to impose burdens upon one's life as much as it intends to guide, channel and temper our choices and behavior within the framework of a wholesome complete life. This is also part of the lesson of the parsha of nazir to us. In essence, by knowing that becoming a nazir is an acceptable last resort in dealing with immorality and heartbreak, we are able to avoid this by living daily according to Torah precepts and values and shunning foreign and immoral influences in our lives and communities.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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fromRabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-  
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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Rabbi Frand on Parshas Nasso**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 683 – Shalom Bayis: How Far Can One Go? Good Shabbos!

The Connection Between The Chapters of Sotah and Nazir

In Parshas Nasso, the section about the Nazir [the person who vows to abstain from wine, hair cutting, and contact with the dead for at least 30 days] immediately follows the section about the Sotah [suspected adulteress]. Our Sages suggest that this juxtaposition teaches that whoever sees a Sotah in her state of humiliation, should take a nazirite vow to abstain from wine [Sotah 2a].

Rav Aharon Feldman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, made the following very true observation: One might have argued that just by witnessing the events associated with the Sotah's humiliation that alone would be enough of an inspiration and moral lesson for people to behave themselves in the future. Why do Chazal suggest that under those circumstances one should additionally vow to abstain from wine?

The lesson is that if one witnesses a scene as traumatic and awesome as that associated with a Sotah's punishment and then does nothing with that inspiration, this will deaden the person from any future inspiration. If an amazing sight – one that should shake people up -- happens in someone's lifetime and he or she lets it pass with equanimity and without acting upon it, then the next time such a thing happens, the person will become insensitive to the wonderment (hispaylus) that such a scene should engender in a person.

Rav Feldman related that in the Slabodka Yeshiva in Europe during Simchas Torah, they would open up the mechitza separating the men from the women so that the women behind the mechitza would be able to see the hakofos (dancing around with the Torah). The women were very excited to see the dancing and the honor being given to the Sifrei Torah. However one girl was not moved by the scene. She did not even bother getting up from her seat to watch the festivities. Who was this girl? It was the daughter of the town's scribe (sofer). She saw Sifrei Torah on her dining room table every day so seeing a sefer Torah was not such a big deal to her. Simchas Torah for her was "Just another day at the office".

If a person sees the amazing event of a Sotah being humiliated and he lets it go by without it changing him, without doing anything about it, then the next time a wondrous event occurs, his attitude will be "been there; done that".

This does not just apply to witnessing a Sotah in her moment of humiliation. There are other events that shape our lives that sometimes occur on a fairly common basis – both good events and bad events. If we let these events nonchalantly pass without doing anything about them, then we are spiritually deadening ourselves from appropriate reaction to future events of significant import. In order to prevent going through life so spiritually numb that nothing makes a difference, one who sees the humiliation of a Sotah should take upon himself a nazirite vow to abstain from wine.

One Needs To Be Flexible and Bend The Rules Sometimes To Bring Peace

The Sotah process entails within it the dramatic ritual of erasing G-d's Name by placing it in water and forcing the Sotah to drink this water to prove her innocence. If she is in fact guilty, drinking this potion will cause her to die an extraordinary gruesome death. Under normal circumstances, the making of such a potion would involve a Biblical prohibition – erasing the Name of G-d. However, G-d -- as it were -- says "My Name that was written in holiness shall be erased by water to make peace between husband and wife."

Clearly this involves a miraculous process, but the question that needs to be considered is why G-d made it work in precisely this fashion. Why was it



necessary to take the Divine Name and erase it to accomplish this test of the woman's guilt or innocence? The same miraculous "explosion of the woman" could have occurred with water mixed with dirt from the floor of the Temple or with ashes from the altar. Why did G-d's Name have to become part of this potion? Why create a process that involves this seemingly unnecessary erasure of Hashem's Name?

The answer must be that the Almighty is teaching us a lesson that is vital for Shalom Bayis (domestic tranquility). The lesson is that when it comes to making peace it is sometimes necessary to bend the rules. One cannot stand on principle all the time. One must not always be yelling "the law is the law!" The Master of the Universe is teaching us that to preserve domestic tranquility, it is even sometimes permissible to erase the Name of G-d. True this miracle could have been accomplished with ashes or with dirt, but the symbolism would be lacking.

The Torah introduces the laws of Sotah with a peculiar expression "A man, a man whose wife goes astray and commits trespass against him..." [Bamidbar 5:12]. The commentaries note that repetition of the word "Ish" [a man] is indicative of a husband who is "too much of a man" – i.e. – too domineering and too con trolling. When the atmosphere in the house is one of over assertiveness on the part of the husband, a likely result will be that the wife will go astray.

G-d teaches here that sometimes the way to bring peace between people requires bending the strict letter of the law. There was no greater way to teach this lesson than to allow "My Name that is written in sanctity" to be eradicated in water.

The Medrash tells of a man whose wife went to hear a lecture from Rabbi Meir one Friday night. It was a long lecture and by the time the woman returned home, the Shabbos candles had already burned out. The husband chastised his wife that she failed to come home in a timely fashion to get benefit from the Shabbos candles as the law requires. He forbade her from stepping foot back in the house until she spat in Rabbi Meir's eye.

The Medrash continues that Eliyahu haNavi came to Rabbi Meir and explained the situation between the husband and his wife. Rav Meir found the woman and told her that he had a certain eye disease and his doctor told him the only way he would be cured of the disease would be to have someone spit in his eye seven times.

There in the Beis Medrash, the woman approached Rabbi Meir publicly and spat into his eye seven times. She then returned to her husband and told him that she not only fulfilled his condition of spitting in Rabbi Meir's eye once, she did it seven times!

The students asked Rabbi Meir why he allowed himself to be disgraced in such a fashion. He responded that he learned a kal v'chomer from the Almighty. If G-d can forgo His honor to bring peace between husband and wife, certainly Rabbi Meir can forgo on his own honor to accomplish the same goal.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are: Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org. Join the Jewish Learning Revolution! Torah.org: The Judaism Site brings this and a host of other classes to you every week. Visit <http://torah.org> or email [learn@torah.org](mailto:learn@torah.org) to get your own free copy of this mailing. Need to change or stop your subscription? Please visit our subscription center, <http://torah.org/subscribe/> -- see the links on that page. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email [copyrights@torah.org](mailto:copyrights@torah.org) for full information.

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#### **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski**

Shavuos: Dawn of Intellectual Emotion

We did our thing. We were up all Shavuos night, and were inspired by the dramatic account of mattan Torah. And now? Business as usual, right? After the awesome revelation at Sinai, Hashem said "Return to your tents" (Devarim 5:27), and commentaries say that the message was, "Here at Sinai you reached the lofty level of spirituality, naaseh venishma. Take this spirituality back to your tents, and conduct your daily lives with the attitude of naaseh venishma." We must take the spiritual gain of Shavuos with us as we return to our daily routine. The gift of Torah was daas. "If there is no daas, how can one distinguish right from wrong?" (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachos 5:2)."If you have daas, you lack nothing" (Nedarim 41a). The chassidic writings say that in the enslavement of Egypt, the Israelites were bereft of daas. As slaves, they had no opportunity to exercise daas, so it atrophied. During the seven weeks between the exodus and Sinai, they began to reclaim daas, although this was not fully attained until forty years later, as Moses said, "But Hashem did not give you a heart lodaas (to know) ...until this day" (Devarim 29:3). The failings that they had on the desert were due to their lack of daas. I used to take offense at the scientific classification of man as homo sapiens, which in simple English means "a baboon with intellect." It is clear to me that intellect is not the primary feature that gives man his uniqueness and separates him from other creatures. Firstly, it is evident that animals do have intellect. If you observe a lion stalking its prey, one can see that the lion calculates just the right moment to make its attack. Secondly, if intellect is the primary characteristic that defines man, then the person with the highest intellect should be the most ideal human being, and this is simply not true. Prior to World War II, the country most advanced in intellect was Germany. In Happiness and the Human Spirit I elaborated on the concept that it is the spirit rather than intellect that gives us our uniqueness as human beings. But I have gained new respect for intellect and am perfectly comfortable with being a homo sapiens. It is only a matter of putting sapiens, the intellect, to proper use. Yes, animals, too, have intellect, but except for domesticated pets that can pick up human traits, animals use their intellect solely to satisfy their own needs. Animals are driven to act by their bodily desires, and they use their intellect to satisfy them. The animal intellect is a tool that serves the desire. In Tanya, the Alter Rebbe posits that the human being has two spiritual components, one that is identified with the physical body (nefesh habehamis) and one that is identified with the neshama (nefesh elokis). Both of these are comprised of intellectual traits and of affective or emotional traits. The difference between the two is that in the nefesh habehamis, as in all animals, the motivation is provided by the affects, and the intellect is then used to satisfy the affective drive; i.e., the intellect is a tool of the affect. In the nefesh elokis, the Alter Rebbe says, the reverse occurs: The intellect give rise to the affect. This is reminiscent of the story of the doctor who told the patient, "You can eat whatever you like, and here is what you are going to like." This is a revolutionary idea. Conventional wisdom is that we like something because we like it. Our emotions are spontaneous. You cannot tell someone that he must develop a particular emotion, and that he must like something. The Alter Rebbe's position, however, is proven by the mitzvah in the Torah, "You shall love Hashem." One can be commanded to do something, such as to put on

tefillin or to sit in a sukkah, or to refrain from doing something, like working on Shabbos. Actions can be legislated, but how can one be ordered to love something? Yet, we are commanded to love Hashem (ahavah) and to be in awe of Hashem (yirah), both of which are emotions that are not subject to volition. But the Torah does not ask the impossible of us. Rambam addresses this question, and says that the way to develop ahavas Hashem is to contemplate His wondrous creations (Yesodei HaTorah 2:2). The commentary explains that Rambam is redefining ahavah to mean not only love, but also adoration, and appreciation of Hashem's wondrous creations can indeed produce adoration. The Alter Rebbe introduces a novel concept: intellectual emotion. I.e., if a person does not feel love for Hashem, but understands intellectually that Hashem should be loved, that, too, is fulfillment of the mitzvah to love Hashem. Mesilas Yesharim addresses this issue by citing a principle found in Sefer HaChinuch, that behavior can determine emotion. I.e., even if one is unable to feel love for Hashem, if one acts as if one did feel love, these actions will generate love. Whichever approach one takes, the Alter Rebbe's point is validated. Intellect can produce emotions. This use of intellect is uniquely human, and allows me to accept the appellation homo sapiens. This is more than a philosophic discussion. We are witnessing an unprecedented incident of failure of marriages. As Chana Levitan explains in I Only Want to Get Married Once, western civilization's concept of "love" is more rightfully called "infatuation," an affect originating in the nefesh habehamis which gradually wanes, resulting in couples "falling out of love." It is possible, however, to develop a true love ala nefesh elokis, a love generated by the intellect. Respect for another person and appreciation of that person's character traits and virtues can produce an ahava which does not wilt with the passage of time. If this concept seems strange, it is because we have been impacted by the idea of "love" that prevails in our environment, which threatens the stability of marriage. If we implement the sapiens properly, to be master of the affects rather than its tool, we can preserve the wholesomeness of marriage. This is the Torah concept of daas, which was given to us at Sinai and which we commemorate on Shavuos. We must take this spiritual gain of Shavuos as we return to our daily routine. Copyright © 2010 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved. --