



TAL

SHAVUOT 5775

THE COMMUNITY PARASHA SHEET

Quality Drink - But No Glass!

Rabbi Jonathan Tawil



Imagine coming to a wedding of a rich friend. The hall is adorned with fragrant flowers; the pleasant aroma fills the air, whilst the live band sets the scene. As you enter the hall you envisage a large free bar, with all the latest cocktails and best whiskeys. You make your way to your designated place, looking forwards to take part and enjoy this remarkable meal and experience. Yet when you arrive you find that there are no plates or glasses set at your table.

The place is full and the waiters excuse themselves by telling you that there are no more plates or glasses left. All that food, all that drink, it's within reach, but there is no way for you to enjoy. How are you going to eat and drink without vessels? This becomes a nightmare not a celebration. How do you feel?

The greatest gift that G-d gave is the ability to give. But in order to give, there must be a taker. Someone has to be there to receive. And in order to receive G-d's abundance of blessings we need to make ourselves into a vessel that can receive.

Three thousand three hundred and thirty seven years ago, G-d gave us the best and most prestigious gift – the Torah.

Gemara in Zevachim (116a) says that they ran to Bilam and asked him "Hashem LaMabul Yashav", (Tehilim 29) is Hashem destroying the world? He answered, "Vayeishev Hashem Melech L'Olam", Hashem promised never to make a Mabul again.



Fearful they replied that although He promised not to bring a Mabul of water, He never said anything about fire. Perhaps He will destroy the world with fire. Bilam answered "Hashem Oz L'Amo Yitein" – Hashem is giving His people Strength – the Torah. The nations of the world heard this and answered "Hashem Yivarech Et Amo BaShalom" – May Hashem grant His people with peace.

At the time the nations of the world were happy that Hashem had granted His nation the Torah. After all

Hashem had first come to them and offered it to each nation. They had all declined the opportunity; it was too much of an obligation for their lifestyles.

One of the names of Har Sinai is Har Chorev.

Chorev can mean destruction and doesn't seem an appropriate name for a mountain in which the biggest blessing was given on!?

Our Sages explain that the nations of the world heard the commotion and were worried that the world was going to be destroyed (Chorev), perhaps no one had accepted the Torah.

Yet once Bilam told them that the Jews had accepted the Torah, they became more relaxed, even blessing the Jews for having received the Torah and saving the world.

There is a deeper explanation.

When the Torah was given to the Jews it represented the end of the real world to the other nations. They had refused and lost out on the opportunity to take part in a higher spiritual dimension. Whilst the Jews created a vessel in themselves to receive G-d's abundance, the nations of the world had no such vessel and for them this represented Churban – destruction.

They might have been happy at the time, but it seems that since then the nations of the world have realised how amazing the Torah is and what they lost out on. This has led to some jealousy towards us.

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An anti-Semite walks into a crowded bar. He looks around and sees a Jewish man sat in a corner. The anti-Semite walks up to the bar, turns around and announces, "I'm going to buy everyone in this bar a free drink, except for that Jewish guy over there!" Everybody is clapping and cheering for the anti-Semite and when he buys the last pint, the Jewish man turns around, puts his thumb up and says, "Thanks mate!" The anti-Semite is slightly puzzled by his reaction but doesn't pay too much attention to it.

The next night, the anti-Semite goes into the same bar and again, there is a Jewish guy sat in the corner, so the man, again, goes to the bar, turns around and says, "I'm going to buy everyone here a free drink, except for that Jewish guy over there!" The crowd are all ecstatic and are hugging and cheering the anti Semite for his generosity. When he buys the last pint, the Jewish guy turns around, puts his thumb up and says, "Thanks mate!" The anti-Semite scratches his head and asks the barman, "Why is that Jewish guy

thanking me when he's the only person I'm not buying drinks for?"

"Well" the barman responds, "He owns this place."

Anti-Semitism is unfortunately ripe even nowadays, but our rabbis let us into the secret to its origins.

The Gemara (Shabbat 69) cites the source of anti-Semitism using a play on words: The Torah - the source of the Jewish system of laws, values and moral standards - was received at Mount Sinai. The Hebrew pronunciation of "Sinai" is almost identical to the Hebrew word for "hatred" - Sinah. "Why was the Torah given on a mountain called Sinai?" asks the Talmud. "Because the great Sinah - the tremendous hatred aimed at the Jew - emanates from Sinai."

At Sinai Jews were told that there is one God, who makes moral demands on all of humanity. Consequently, at Sinai the Jewish nation became the target for the hatred of those whose strongest drive is to liberate mankind from the shackles of conscience and morality.

There are those that don't like rules, and there are those that now understand the importance of all those rules and the power of Torah. As Jews we have granted the world morals and ethics, we have contributed to society in a major way. We have portrayed that special connection with G-d.

This all emanates from the power of Torah and that most wonderful Divine given gift of G-d.

Every year we revisit that power and have the ability to reconnect to G-d.

As the night of Shavuot approaches and hundreds of thousands of Jews stay up learning from this Divine Torah, Shavuot is a time to appreciate this gift and resolve to commit more time in our daily lives to connecting to G-d. Don't be left in the wedding without any plates or glasses to enjoy the food and drink.

Today is the day – make yourself into a vessel and receive that wisdom.

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 this 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 is this puzzling Medrash telling us?

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 any Jew that one will find. If one wants to judge Judaism by a particular Jew, he must look at the Chafetz Chaim or Rav Chaim Ozer or Rav Moshe Feinstein. Why? Because

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Rabbi Mashiach Kelaty



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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 cannot make them over. The result is that sometimes we find people to be less than we would expect.

The Talmud in Pesachim 68A tells us of an interesting ritual performed by Rabbi Joseph. Each year, on the Holiday of Shavuot, Rabbi Joseph would announce, "prepare a delectable calf for me. After all, if it were not for this special day, how many Josephs would there be in the marketplace?" Simply stated, Rabbi Joseph felt that the holiday of Shavuot, which commemorates the receiving of the Torah, elevated him from a

common Joseph to the stature of the acclaimed Rabbi Joseph. But what does he mean by how many Josephs would there be in the marketplace? Why use the plural expression, how many Josephs would there be in the marketplace? Would it not suffice to say, "I would be like any Joseph in the market?"

"the Torah personality is constant and consistent in his every action, in his every mode of life."

Isaac Bashevis Singer tells the story of a man who went to Vilna who then came back and said to his friend, "the Jews of Vilna are a remarkable people. I saw a Jew who studies all day long. I saw a Jew who spent all day scheming how to get rich. I saw a Jew who was waving the red flag calling for a revolution. I saw a Jew who was loyal to his country. I saw a Jew running after his desires all day, and I saw a Jew who was ascetic and avoided temptation." The other man said, "I don't know why you're so astonished. Vilna is a big city, and there are many Jews, all types." "No," said the first man, "it was all the same Jew."

Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel of Baltimore, once explained that the

Torah personality is constant and consistent in his every action, in his every mode of life. Unlike some who have one moral standard in the home, another in business, and yet another at leisure, the Torah demands unwavering commitment in every aspect of living. Unfortunately, one Joseph may turn to many Josephs. There may be the Joseph who is honoured for his charitable work, yet at home he may be an abusive and demanding Joseph - totally foreign to the Joseph who accepted an award at the podium hours earlier. There may be a Joseph who sways fervently in the synagogue yet he cheats deviously at business.

Rabbi Joseph celebrated at finding himself as one unwavering person whose consistency in life was guided by one stabilising factor - the Torah. "If not for this day," Rabbi Joseph said, "there would be many aspects to my life and much diversity in my character. My whims and fancies would guide my actions to the end that I would assume multiple characters, And there would be many Josephs in the marketplace." Today, after receiving the Torah, Rabbi Joseph can proudly say, as proud as the nation that received the Torah said, we - or I - am one!

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Our Chachamim



Effie Eitam relates that while the IDF was still in Lebanon, when he was commander of Oetzavot HaGalil (ugda 91), he was the only senior commander that was religious in the whole division. He says he went to his rabbonim in Yerushalayim to discuss how he, as a high ranking religious commander could add a unique flavour to the army in his position. His rabbonim told him that he should form a "prayer commando unit" - he should form a select group of rabbonim that will daven every time the division is in distress.

Eitam says that Rav Mordechai Eliyahu was the "commander" of this special commando unit, and he would call him at any hour of the day or night if something serious was going on with their unit. One time, a unit went into a mine field by Musawa. These were laser triggered mines, and the unit found themselves right in the middle of the field, in a very difficult situation. It was the middle of the night, and the moment the commander updated him with the situation, he immediately

called Rav Eliyahu and the other rabbonim and asked them to daven for the unit.

While the rabbonim were davening for the unit, Rav Eliyahu told Eitam that he should give the order to immediately leave the mine field. Just walk right out. Eitam asked for confirmation, as the mines could be activated at any moment. The rav repeated his instructions that the unit should be told to leave the area. Eitam says he gave

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the instructions and the unit began to leave. While this was happening, Eitam says, he heard over the communications that area commander of Hizballah was complaining that he was not able to activate the mines, and he has a whole IDF unit trapped in the field. This Hizballah commander kept

complaining, frustrated that he couldn't do anything. The moment, Eitam says, the commander in the field reported that the last soldier had gotten out, he told Rav Eliyahu they can stop praying. Moments later, right after the rabbonim stopped davening, the whole field of mines

exploded. (source: Srugim) An amazing story of Rav Eliyahu's power and effectiveness of prayer, and I would add that it took a lot of emunat chachamim for him to move his men through an active mine field on the words of a rav.

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?

1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.

2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?

1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.

3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?

2:2 - Each tribes flag was the colour of that tribes stone in the breastplate of the kohen gadol.

4. What is the difference between an "ot" and a "degel"?

2:2 - An "ot" is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A degel is a flagpole.

5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed "techum Shabbat" - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 amot on Shabbat?

2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 amot from the Ohel Moed. Had they camped



farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the Ohel Moed on Shabbat.

6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?

2:9 - The cloud over the Ohel Moed departed and the kohanim sounded the trumpets.

7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?

2:32 - 603,550.

8. Why are Aharon's sons called "sons of Aharon and Moshe"?

3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, its as if he gave birth to them.

9. Who was Nadav's oldest son?

3:4 - Nadav had no children.

10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week's Parsha?

3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.

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All the TAL team wish a hearty Mazal tov to Sarah Herskine and Dovi Greenman on their engagement. Special one for TAL, as they met at our TAL and Od Yosef Chai Dinner back in September - Wishing you both a massive Mazal Tov and May Hashem bless you to build a Bayit Neeman Beyisrael!

MAZAL TOV TO -

- Mazal Tov to Eliyahu Moses and Channah Tyberg on their engagement.
- Yuval and Elaine Hen on the brit of their son Eitan Hen (see images above right)



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