

THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



TAL Torah Action Life

SHAVUOT EDITION



London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
TAL Founder & Director

SHAVUOT - UNDERSTANDING

This Thursday we celebrate the festival of Shavuot.

It will be three thousand three hundred and thirty-five years to the day that we received the Holy Torah from G-d.

This Torah is what sets us aside from all the other nations in the world. For, albeit, they might be able to read and translate the Torah, nevertheless it is only the Bnei Yisrael who possess the key (through the Torah She'Bal Peh – Oral Law) that was given to Moshe at Har Sinai.

Given this important event in our calendar, how should we go about celebrating this exciting festival? Is there something special that we do on Shavuot to commemorate The Day? We know that with other festivals such as Succoth (where there is the Mitzvah of Succah, Lulav and Etrog) and Pesach (where we have the Mitzvah of Matsah) there is a special Mitzvah attached to the day. Is there a similar Mitzvah with regards to Shavuot?

Shavuot – "weeks" is so called after the weeks leading up to this festival. But why call it after the weeks that have passed?

Our Chachamim tell us that although the Bnei Yisrael were freed in Pesach they only reached the climate of their spiritual freedom when they received the Torah at Har Sinai on Shavuot. This required seven complete weeks of tiresome self-improving. Every day the Bnei Yisrael would increase a level in Kedusha until on the fiftieth day they had reached the summit and were ready to receive the Holiest of gifts – the Torah. Shavuot also means Oaths. To which oaths are we referring?

The first oath was made by G-d that He would never exchange the Jewish people for any other. The second, was that we promised that we would not exchange G-d for another.

The Gemara (Shabbat 89a) commenting on the fact that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai asks, "What does the word Sinai mean?" Rav Chisda and Rabbah both explain that Sinai comes from the word "Sina", implying "Har Sheyardu Sina L'ovdei Kochavim, a mountain where hatred came to the other nations."

When the nations of the world saw the greatness of the Torah and how Klal Yisrael had received

the Torah straight from the Mouth of G-d they realised their mistake in having previously rejected it, and as a result now became jealous of the Bnei Yisrael.

All the nations in the world knew that the Tachlit Habria – purpose of the world, was to be subservient to G-d and fulfil His Will, and when they saw that the Bnei Yisrael had achieved this they became envious.

The Torah is Chochmat Elokim, the wisdom of G-d. Hashem is infinite. It is impossible for man with his limited intellect to comprehend anything of His great wisdom. Nevertheless, Hashem in all His Kindness gave us the ability to understand His Torah. It is a great gift to which we are eternally grateful. Chazal teach us, "Yagaati U'matzati, if one works hard he will succeed (literally he will find)". Why do they phrase it as a Metsiyah a find, surely if someone worked hard and succeeded, it is due to his exertion? Our Sages wanted to teach us an important lesson. When it comes to the Holy Torah - the Wisdom of G-d, man cannot fathom its vastness, no matter how hard he toils. It is only due to the gift given to him by Hashem that he is then able to "find" his way through and succeed in understanding. We should not take our spiritual wisdom for granted - G-d has bestowed upon those who toil effortlessly in understanding His Torah the key to the Torah – the gift of comprehension.

This is what we celebrate on Shavuot. The connection between the spiritual and the physical, the great gift of the Torah, the purpose of the world being brought to the forefront for all to see - The ability to understand the deep secrets of the world and how G-d wishes the world to run.

For 26 generations, since Adam's creation G-d had waited to transmit to mankind the precious Torah, which had preceded the creation of the universe. Finally, He found a people willing to accept it. The entire universe awaited the great moment of Revelation anxiously, since it would thereby realise the spiritual goal of Creation.

Shavuot is a time where we have no special physical Mitzvah such as Matsot or Succah. The only Mitzvah we have is the Mitzvah of learning and toiling in G-d's Torah. We show G-d our appreciation for granting us this precious gift, and assure Him of our everlasting servitude to Him. Rav Yosef the great Sage used to say "...were it not for this special day, I would not be different from the many Josephs that hang

6TH SIVAN 5783

SHAVUOT & SHABBAT TIMES:

1st Day Shavuot Starts 20:46pm (25th May)

2nd Day Shavuot/Shabbat Candle Lighting 20:47pm (26th May)

Shavuot/Shabbat Ends 22:04pm (27th May)

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By Rabbi Jonathan Tawil



DVAR TORAH
Shavuot Insight
By Rabbi David Baadani



DVAR TORAH
Take the Jump
By Rabbi Benjamin Stone



DVAR TORAH
I know what you did last Shavuot
By Rabbi Mashiach Kelaty



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KIDS ZONE
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around the market place". We need to think how much the Torah has affected the Bnei Yisrael and us in particular and enter this

festival with a love and appreciation of the Torah and a resolution to increase our learning and toiling in G-d's Holy gift. For

were it not for this special day we would just be another Joe Shmo. Chag Sameach



RABBI DAVID BAADANI

Director - TAL Chazanut Program

INSIGHT שבועות

The Rashi says: וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר. Rashi says: לפי פשוטו בְּרִגְלֵי הָהָר. According to its literal meaning this signifies "they stood) at the foot of the mountain".

אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שקפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב, ואם לאו – שם תהא קבורתכם. Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: the Jewish people actually stood beneath the mountain, and the verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a tub, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, here will be your burial.

In another place our Sages said regarding the verse וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר: שְׁעָרָה לֹא אָמוּ בָּיָם חֲתָנָתוֹ וּבָיָם שְׁמַחַת לְבוֹ

Go forth, daughters of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, upon the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, and on the day of the gladness of his heart" (Song of Songs 3:11) This verse is explained as an allusion to special days: בָּיָם חֲתָנָתוֹ, זֶה מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה. "On the day of his wedding"; this is the giving of the Torah. The day G-d and the Jewish people joined in a marriage covenant.

If so, imagine a man who wants to marry a girl and on their wedding day he says to her, 'If you marry me, excellent. And if not, here will be your burial. What value will such a marriage have? Even more so, the bride has already said 'yes' in 'עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל' situation they had already said 'נעשה ונשמע'. So, what is the point of 'strengthening' the relationship with threats and intimidation?

The Chadishei Harim says: וַיִּתְּצוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר: כל 'וַיִּתְּצוּ' היינו: מרצון. Vayityatzevu means that they did it willingly! G-d did uproot the mountain, but

the Jewish people were the ones who put themselves under it. This is because ישראל עַם understood a very important principal that day. ישראל עַם understood that just like in any other relationship, in their relationship with G-d there will be days of deep connection, love and attachment. And there will be days when they will have a feeling of disconnection and detachment.

Therefore the Jewish people chose to impose on themselves the connection with the הקב"ה because they knew that a life without Torah is a meaningless life and therefore it is not enough to say 'נעשה ונשמע' only when you feel connected but also in times when there is less closeness, less desire, less emotion, and in days when everything feels like 'כפה עליהם הר' כגיגית, even then we know that the Torah way is the natural, true and the only way and we can reach perfection ממעל ממש, part of the Divine, by knowing that Israel, the Torah, and G-d are one.



RABBI BENJAMIN STONE

Director - YP Chavruta Program

TAKE THE JUMP

Many of us are familiar with the story of Rabbi Akiva who saw water dripping on the rock face of a well and came to the conclusion that "if water can make an impression on a rock then certainly Torah can make an impression on me".

He then resolved to learn Torah and spent the next forty years in uninterrupted study. This story is a little baffling however: Had R' Akiva never seen a rock formation before? Why only now at the age of forty did R' Akiva become inspired in this way?

The great mussar giant R' Yisroel Salanter zts"l (Ohr Yisroel; letter 10) explains that R' Akiva had actually learned Torah in his youth. He put in considerable effort at the outset but found that his learning made no impression on him whether in terms of improving his character or in terms of becoming a talmid chacham. He therefore decided to give up learning and turned his attention to sheparding. When he reached the age of understanding however he saw something profound in the effect that the dripping water had had on the rock – something he had never seen before. It occurred to him that when the water began dripping on the rock, it made no discernable

impression at all. Even when it continued to drip, over many years the water made no apparent indent in the rock. Only after an extended period of time – possibly hundreds of years – did marks begin to form on the rock until out of nowhere a hole suddenly formed. R' Akiva realized that the same might be true of Torah learning. We might make a conscious decision to take our learning seriously – be it through going to yeshiva (or seminary), attending a new shiur or starting out with a new chavruta. However after some time we may ask ourselves "Why am I doing this?"; "Has my learning had an effect on me? ("I still screamed at my wife when she threw out my favourite jacket") or "Am I even close to becoming a talmid chacham?" R' Akiva realized that when it comes to learning Torah a person needs to just keep going. He may not see the fruits of his labour for some years, maybe even a decade – but he will at some point taste success and his middot will also improve noticeably.

But there is a deeper message to be taken from R' Akiva's personal story of re-awakening (as heard from R' Yosef Elefant of Yeshivat Mir).

The verse in Devarim (18:13) famously states: "Be tamim ("act with faithfulness") with Hashem your G-d".

In a fascinating passage Rashi writes that

this verse is telling us "Do not look too far into the future. Accept without question whatever happens to you and then you will be with Hashem and part of his people".

Rashi informs us that there is a specific mitzvah not to be strategic when it comes to serving Hashem.

When any of us pick up a sefer a myriad of thoughts might cross our mind. Thoughts of hopelessness, ("How far I am I going to get through this gemarah any way") or possibly thoughts of resignation ("I have a wife and young family to take care of. Hopefully during the summer holidays I will have the peace of mind to learn. Now it's just not possible"). The mitzvah to be "tamim with Hashem your G-d" tells us not to think or analyse too much. It is encouraging each individual to live the moment, to take the opportunity he has now before him. Why is it that if you live in the moment, you become "with" or connected to Hashem? The reason is that if you live in the moment then essentially you are saying that you accept what Hashem has given you. You are not saying "I want more" or a "different" or "better" life situation. This is what Hashem put on your plate. This is Hashem's personal plan for you and you have got to take it on! It may not be perfect but your job is to learn Torah and keep mitzvot in the situation you are in, at the standard you are

at and without consideration of what benefit may or may not come from your learning. We find in the gemarah (Shabbat 88a) that this idea underpinned the process of matan Torah itself.

Rava was sitting on his fingers as he was learning and his fingers were bleeding because he was so deep in thought. A heretic said to him "You are an irresponsible person and you come from a nation of

irresponsible people who said "We will do" before saying "We will hear". The heretic was criticizing the Jewish people for acting without forward planning. How could they accept the Torah without knowing if they would be able to keep all its laws?

Rava answered quoting a verse in Mishlei (11:3) "The faithfulness of the upright will guard them"

Rava's response was that the essence of

the Torah life is to be able to "take the jump" without concern for what might be. This approach is based on the reasoned conviction that Hashem loves us and will protect those who seek to serve him with sincerity. This is why the B'nei Yisrael chose to "do" before they "heard".

It took time for R' Akiva to appreciate this point. But when he finally did so...well the rest is history.



RABBI MASHIACH KELATY

Rabbi of Stanmore Sephardi Kehillah

I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SHAVUOT

I once heard a shiur given by Rav Moshe Aaron Stern zt'l. In his inimitable way, he posed the following question. Hillel the Elder had 80 talmidim. The top of the list was Rav Yonatan ben Uziel, otherwise known as the Targum Yonatan. He used to have a fire above his head, which used to burn birds who were flying overhead. The sort of person you want to sit next to at a barbeque. 'Floundering' at the bottom of the list was Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai, whose timely three point plan was accepted by the Roman Emperor Vespasian, thereby saving Rav Tzadok, the Royal line of King David, and all of the chachamim in Yavneh in one fell swoop.

Knowing only two names at positions 1 and 80, that leaves 78 talmidim, at least greater than Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai, who remain unnamed. Who are they?

Before I attempt to give you the answer, please indulge me by reading on.

In the beginning of Megillat Ruth we are told that a man from Bethlehem in Yehudah went to live in the fields of Moav, because of the famine in Eretz Yisrael. Chazal criticise this person for abandoning his people in their time of need and fleeing with his family to Moav.

When the Megillah first tells us of this person's departure, he is mentioned anonymously ('a man'). However, we do not remain guessing about his identity for very long. In the very next verse, we are told that "The name of the man is Elimelech". Why the 'cloak and dagger'? Why not write this story more 'economically' and tell us the name of the man and what he did in one pasuk?

To further exacerbate the point, I will quote you another verse: "And a man went from the House of Levi and he married the daughter of Levi" [Shemot 2:1]. The Torah later identifies these mysterious individuals as Amram and Yocheved, the parents of Moshe. But why the anonymity? Why not simply say: "And Amram went and married Yocheved"?

The Baal HaTurim in Shemot points out that these two places are the only times in Tanach where the Torah uses the expression "And a man went" (vayelech ish). The Baal HaTurim comments that the pasuk "A man went from the Tribe of Levi" brought about the first redeemer (Moshe Rabbenu) and the pasuk "A man went from Bethlehem Yehudah" led to the final redeemer (Mashiach -who will descend from King David, a descendant of Ruth). [Incidentally, the Mincha Belulah says that the word 'im' as in 'Im Bechukotai teleichu' is a hint to redemption, past and present. It stands for Aaron and Moshe, and for Esther and Mordechai, and ultimately for Eliyahu and Mashiach. If we keep shteiging, we will get to merit the last set of saviours – very soon, Amen]

The Shemen HaTov elaborates on this Baal HaTurim. The person who produces the Redeemer can be an anonymous person. One does not need to be the great leader of his generation – an Amram or an Elimelech – to produce the Redeemer. Any Jew can produce a child who will be the greatest personage in his generation and in fact a Redeemer.

The Chafetz Chaim once told the following story. During the reign of the Czar of Russia, a father and son worked together in Siberia to lay the tracks for the railroad. This was backbreaking labour. Night and day, under the most brutal conditions, from freezing cold to stifling heat, they worked putting their blood, sweat and

tears into the Czar's railroad. One day, the son turned to his father and asked, "Father, will the people that ride the train have any idea concerning the backbreaking labour that went into preparing this railroad?"

The father looked at his son and said, "It is not important what people will or will not think, what they will or will not know. We work for one reason and for one purpose: to fulfil the command of the Czar. He is our leader, our father, who provides for our country. He has asked us to build the railroad. That is all that counts."

"The same idea applies to Torah study," continued the Chafetz Chaim. "It is unimportant for us to know if those who later delve through Torah chidushim will appreciate the time and effort expended in their production. Likewise, it should not matter to us the amount of toil that we put into learning a difficult sugya. Everything that man does in this world should be executed with one focus in mind: he is carrying out Hashem's will."

One does not necessarily need to be great himself or have superior lineage or wealth or power. Any anonymous Jew can potentially produce the future leader of the Jewish people.

And that's why we are not privy to the names of the students of Hillel. Although they remain anonymous, their effect upon the history of Klal Yisrael was felt most acutely. Who knows how many times we have been saved from untold tragedies in the merit of these holy tzaddikim?

From red eye to Sinai, as you take part in the all night 'stake-out', make your stake in Torah. Even if you never get your name on a plaque, or will never have a synagogue named after you, you can sleep well after tikkun leyl – knowing that there is One who knows all, and Who will never forget what you did last Shavout.



RABBI AHARON GABBAY

Kollel Zichron Chana VeRachel - Jerusalem

שבועות INSIGHT

Chag Shavuot is a grand time for the Jewish people. It is the reliving of the Jews receiving their beloved Torah from Hashem. It is arguably the most eventful occurrence in Jewish history. However, with some thought, it doesn't seem to be as grand as it appears. If one looks into the story of the Jewish people, it seems that there was some form of teachings well before the Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai. Rashi in Sefer Bereshit refers numerous times that mitzvot, such as matsot and korban pesach, were being fulfilled. The Gemara in Shabbat (87b) also says that the Bnei Yisrael received Shabbat before they even got to Har Sinai. If there were already teachings around, what happened at Har Sinai that was so remarkable? Furthermore, in the Haggadah we say "If we came to Har Sinai and we didn't receive the Torah, it would be enough". How could it be enough just to stand and the bottom of the mountain, if the whole purpose of standing there is to receive the Torah?


Avraham was the first man to create a connection with Hashem. He reached very high levels in relating to G-d not to mention

going against the ideologies of the entire society that was around him. Hashem made a Brit (covenant) with Avraham and the rest of Bnei Yisrael who would follow. This began with the Brit Milah. This was the birth of Bnei Yisrael. Avraham began to spread his teachings about a one powerful G-d who ruled over all nature. He instilled it into his children, and they passed it on through to their descendants. The teachings continued through the descendants of the forefathers and even under the intense slavery in Egypt, they managed to keep everything they had learned until they broke out of the chains of slavery and into freedom into the desert. However, for the Jewish people, this was not enough.

When the Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai they accepted upon themselves another Brit. The pasuk says that the Bnei Yisrael stood facing the mountain. Rashi says "שיאכ דחא בלב דחא" – like one man, with one heart. Every single soul that left Egypt was standing at Har Sinai ready to receive the Torah from Hashem. Everything they had learnt was about to materialise in front of their eyes, but it requires one thing that was not there before. Rashi says that until now there had been lack of connection between each other, they did not see eye to eye and there was dispute between one and other.

What enabled the Jews to receive the Torah was that they stood together with love and care which combined them as one body of people which can never be torn apart. Only through this connection were they able to receive the Torah from Hashem. That is what is so remarkable about Har Sinai and that is what we are referring to in the Haggadah – the unification of the Jewish people would be enough. The Jewish people are not just a race who come from a country, they are an interconnected group of people who inevitably affect each other. Rav Yisrael Salanter used to say that when a Jew gossips in Kovno, a Jew in Paris desecrates Shabbat. Furthermore, the same way every single cell is vital for a human body to fully function, every Jew is vital for the Jewish people to fully function.

We have a tremendous faculty that is unique in many ways. The Jewish people feel such connection to each other throughout their entire livelihood. The kindness, generosity, and hospitality we share, just because we are Jewish, is indescribable. The reason we do that is because we are a people who established an unbreakable connection. That connection was established at Har Sinai and that connection is what we relive today.



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