



SHAVUOS TALKS

WITH QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON SHAVUOS


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Preparing For Shavuos

1.1 | *The Essence of The Three Festivals*¹

Different Terminologies of the Three Festivals

We find different terms used by our *Chazal* (holy Sages) in describing the festivals. Our festivals are called *zmanim*, *chagim*, *moadim*, and *regalim*.

They are called *zmanim* and *moadim*, since they are established at certain times of the year. They are called *chagim* from the word *machog*, which means to “cycle”, because the cycle of the festivals repeats itself each year.

They are also called *moadim* from the word *vaad*, which means “meetings.” Three times a year we would trek to the *Beis HaMikdash* and bring a *korbon*; we would all gather together and ascend upon the mountain of Hashem, the site of the *Beis HaMikdash*. This was not just a “*vaad*” in the sense that we were all gathered together. It was our “meeting” with Hashem, for we would appear “in front of Hashem”.² It was a *vaad* in that we were all gathered together, and it was a *vaad* because we were all meeting with Hashem.

Another term to describe the three festivals is “*regalim*.” The simple meaning of this is “feet”. We would all walk by foot to Jerusalem for *Yom Tov*. The *Gemara*³ deduces from the word “*regalim*” that a person is only obligated in the *mitzvah* if he has normal feet (*regalim*) to walk with, but if he limps, he is exempt from the *mitzvah*.

Regel/Walking – Going From One Place To Another

Let us reflect on the “*regalim*” aspect of the *Yom Tov*.

*Chazal*⁴ state that the world stands on three “pillars”: Torah, *avodah*, and *chesed*. These are like three “feet” which the world stands upon. The world stands on three “pillars”, and so does time. Time stands on the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Succos. These are the three “pillars” that uphold time.

The word *regel* (רגל) besides for its simple meaning of “foot”, can also mean “because of”, like when Yaakov told Lavan, “*And Hashem blessed you, because of me.*” It is also written, רגלי חסידי יושמור, “*The feet of His pious ones are protected* [because they are pious].”⁵

1 פסח 034 – המושג של רגל (מדות שלש רגלים) 1

2 *Devarim* 16:16

3 *Chagigah* 4a

4 *Avos* 1:2

5 *Shmuel I* 2:9

In other words, the three festivals are not a purpose unto themselves; they exist “because” of a greater goal. The festivals take us and lead us to a certain point.

If a person is unaware that the *Yomim Tovim* serve a greater goal, then he does not experience *Yom Tov* through his soul; he only experiences it through his body. The festivals are given to us so we can use them to reach a higher place than we were at until now. A festival moves us from one point to the next point.

We have so far mentioned two aspects of *Yom Tov*. One aspect of *Yom Tov*, we mentioned, is that it upholds a person. The second aspect of *Yom Tov* is that it leads us to a higher point. Thus, meeting with Hashem three times a year was not just to travel there with our feet. The purpose of *Yom Tov* was that we should ascend to a higher [more spiritual] point. That is the deeper implication of *regalim*.

Yom Tov is a time to ascend spiritually. Just as we ascended onto a certain place in the world on *Yom Tov* – the site of the *Beis HaMikdash* – so must we ascend, in our very soul, to a higher place than the one we are at now.

Holy Habits

How do we ascend in our souls through *Yom Tov*?

The answer lies in the following: there is another meaning of the word “regel”. It can also mean to “search”, as we find in the word *meraglim*, “visitors” of the land, who really come to search out the land. This hints to us that the way we ascend through *Yom Tov*/the *regalim* is by “searching” for something. The first *regel* is Pesach, which we begin by searching for any *chometz*.

Yom Tov is a “regel”, and this implies that we need to search for something on *Yom Tov*. *Chazal* say that “It is better had man not been born, and now that we have been born, we need to examine our deeds.”⁶ Thus, we need to search inside ourselves. What is it that we need to search for?

The word “regel” can also come from the word “*hergel*”, which means “habit.” We ask of Hashem, “*Shetargileinu B'Torasecha*”, that “we should become accustomed in Your Torah” – we want to develop a habit for the words of Torah. Doing things out of habit is usually not a good thing [this is called *melumadah*, doing things by rote]. But there are times in which we find that doing things out of habit is a good thing [and then *hergel* is being used for holiness]. On *Yom Tov*, we need to search inside ourselves and see which of our habits are good, and which are not good.

We count 50 days of the Omer until we get to the giving of the Torah, in which we have hopefully become accustomed to the Torah, when we have reached our aspiration of “*And we should become accustomed in Your Torah.*” At first we search ourselves out on the night before Pesach. This is the beginning aspect of the *regel*. In between Pesach and Shavuos, we have hopefully become more accustomed to going to the *Beis Midrash*, so that our feet are naturally taking us to towards the *Beis*

⁶ *Erwin 13b*

Midrash [as Dovid *HaMelech* describes in *Tehillim*]. On Shavuot, we ideally reach the apex of getting used to holiness, which is the purpose.

This is the first aspect of the three *regalim*, which begins with Pesach – at first we search inside ourselves to see what our habits are, if they are holy or unholy. If we find habits in ourselves that are not for holiness, we need to destroy it, just as we destroy the *chometz* we find in any nooks and crannies. Along with this, we need to gain good kinds of habits – to become used to learning Torah, which is how we use the power of *hergel*/habit, for holiness: “*Shetargileinu B’Torasecha.*”

The First Step: Inner Order To Our Soul

When we search inside ourselves to discover what our habits are, we must proceed in steps. It is written of the Jewish people when they would travel to Jerusalem, “*How beautiful are your steps.*”⁷ When we would travel to Jerusalem by foot, it was with “steps” – in other words, our *avodah* needs to be practiced in steps. We must give ourselves some inner order to our soul. As the *Mesillas Yescharim* says, we cannot acquire the various levels of piety all at once. Spiritual growth is a gradual, step-by-step process.

So when we search ourselves inside, we must do this in steps. It must be done with a carefully planned notion (“*sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*” – “The end of actions is first with thought”⁸).

Thus, we need to gain a clear perception of what our soul’s abilities are. As one of the Sages said, “You see a clear world.”⁹ We should become clear in what our soul’s abilities are, from the lowest point to the highest point, and be aware of the many parts in our soul.¹⁰ Then we should search our entire soul, in an orderly fashion [beginning from our lowest point of the soul, all the way to the highest point of our soul] and discover what our habits are leading towards. Then, one should write down all of one’s habits that are holy, and all the habits that are unholy. The goal is to prepare oneself for holiest “habit” of all: to become accustomed to learning the Torah, *Shetargileinu B’Torasecha.*

This is the first step of how we grow from *Yom Tov*.

The Second Step - To See Where We Are Going

There is an inner *avodah* that we have on *Yom Tov* as well. This is contained in another term for the word *regel* – the term “*aragah*”, which means “thirsty.” We find this in the *posuk*, “*Just as a deer thirsts over the banks of water, so does my soul thirst for You, G-d.*”¹¹ The feet of a person lead him

⁷ *Shir HaShirim* 7:2

⁸ from the “*Lecha Dodi*” prayer of Friday Night

⁹ *Pesachim* 50a

¹⁰ Editor’s Note: The Rav explains the structure of the soul in “*Da Es Nishmatecha*” (*Torah Way To Enlightenment*)

¹¹ *Tehillim* 42:2

toward something he wants and longs for. *Yom Tov*, which is called *regel*, leads a person to what he is thirsty for, to what he has “*aragah*” (thirst) for. *Yom Tov* reveals to a person what his aspirations are. It shows what we really want, what we are really getting pleasure from in life.

So the first part of our *avodah* is that we need to search inside ourselves and discover what our habits are, and after that, we need to discover to where we are actually heading. If we discover in ourselves that we are heading towards habits that are bad, we need to destroy them.

When we left Egypt, we were “redeemed from a house of slaves”; we were not just redeemed in the physical sense from Egypt, but we were redeemed in our souls. There were “seventy souls” who went down to Egypt, connoting that the exile in Egypt was taking place in our souls as well. The redemption from Egypt was essentially an inner redemption, a redemption from the exile upon our very souls. Hashem took us out from there and instead “brought us closer into His service.” We became close to Hashem because we gained inner clarity within our souls. The redemption showed us what we really wanted and enjoyed and longed for.

Defining The Joy of Yom Tov

The unique *mitzvah* of all three festivals is that we have a *mitzvah* to rejoice on *Yom Tov*. Chazal state that the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov* (joy on the festival) is fulfilled through meat and wine.¹²

Yom Tov is a revelation of our happiness, and it also shows us **what** makes us happy. The meat and wine only satisfies our *nefesh habehaimis*, the lower and animalistic part of our souls, but this is not the entire *simcha* of *Yom Tov*. It is only needed so that we can give something to our *nefesh habehaimis* to satisfy it, because if we don’t satisfy it, our *nefesh habehaimis* will rebel and get in the way of our true, inner happiness.

Therefore, if a person thinks that *simchas Yom Tov* is all about dining on meat and wine, he only satisfies his *nefesh habehaimis*, and he only knows of an external and superficial *Simchas Yom Tov*. Woe to such a person, if this is his entire *simchas Yom Tov* !

What is the real happiness of *Yom Tov*? The *posuk* says, “*And you shall rejoice in your festival.*”¹³ Our true happiness on *Yom Tov* is the happiness we have in *Yom Tov* itself. It is to rejoice with Hashem, Whom our soul is thirsty for. It is from this that we derive the depth of our happiness, on *Yom Tov*.

It is written, “*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*”¹⁴ When a person lives a life of truth, when he lives a very internal kind of life, his entire happiness is “in Hashem.” He is happy “in” his feeling of closeness with Hashem and with His Torah – the place where true happiness is derived.

¹² *Pesachim* 109a

¹³ *Devarim* 15:15

¹⁴ *Tehillim* 97:12

So *Yom Tov*, the time to rejoice, is the time in which we discover the happiness we are used to. It is a time to discover if our main happiness is coming from externalities such as meat and wine (for the men) jewelry and clothing (for the women) and candy (for the children) – or if our happiness is coming from an inner place. It is only inner happiness which satisfies our spiritual needs – our *nefesh Elokus* (G-dly soul).

Yom Tov is thus not just the time in which we rejoice, but it is a time in which we clarify to ourselves what our soul is really rejoicing in. On *Yom Tov*, we do not just attempt to ‘connect’ ourselves to happiness, as if happiness is somewhere on the outside of ourselves. The festivals are called *regalim*, which implies that we reveal from within ourselves where we are habitually drawn towards, and where we really are.

When a person never makes this internal clarification – when he never bothers to search himself on the inside, and he never discovers what truly makes him happy – he is like a dove who cannot find any rest. *Yom Tov* to him will feel like a time of confusion; he is like the dove who could not find any rest from the *mabul* (the flood), which is from the word *bilbul*, confusion.

A person should cleanse himself from the desires for this world’s pleasures and instead reveal his thirst for true happiness.

Assessment

When *Yom Tov* arrives, the first thing one needs to clarify with oneself is if *Yom Tov* truly makes him happy. You should know that most people are not really happy on *Yom Tov* – not even for one second do they really experience *Simchas Yom Tov*!

This is not just because the Vilna *Gaon* says that the most difficult *mitzvah* to keep is *Simchas Yom Tov* (due to the fact that it is for a 24-hour period lasting for seven days). We are referring to a much simpler and basic level of *simchas Yom Tov*, which most people also do not reach.

Most people enjoy some moments of relaxation on *Yom Tov*, but they never reach one moment of true *simcha*. If someone experiences even one moment of *simchas Yom Tov*, he has begun to touch the spiritual light of *Yom Tov*.

In order to reach true *simchah* on *Yom Tov*, we need to remove the various bad habits we have towards the many ambitions we have that are not about holiness. We must remove any “thirsts” we may have for things that are not truthful sources of pleasure. When we begin to feel our soul’s thirst for its source – Hashem – we will find our source of happiness there.

A person needs to discover: “What makes me happy?” If one’s entire happiness on *Yom Tov* comes from eating meat and drinking wine, then, on a *halachic* level he has certainly fulfilled the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*. He has made his *nefesh habehaimis* ¹⁵ happy, but he did not reach the

¹⁵ animal level of the soul

goal of *Yom Tov* ! He did not reach “*And you shall rejoice in your festival*” on the true, inner level. He hasn’t even touched upon the real happiness of *Yom Tov*.

The three festivals have the power to awaken us to spiritual growth, and to know what is making us happy. From knowing that, we are able to continue that very same happiness and extend it into the rest of the year.

1.2 | *Outer-Body Experience of Har Sinai*¹⁶

Shavuos/‘Atzeres’

Each Yom Tov has its unique *mitzvos*. On Pesach we eat *matzah*, we are not allowed to eat *chometz*, and in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we brought the *Korbon Pesach*. On Sukkos, we sit in the *sukkah*, we shake the four species, and we would bring the *nisuch hamayim*.¹⁷ in the *Beis HaMikdash*. What special *mitzvos* do we have on Shavuos?

In the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*, we had a *mitzvah* to bring the *korbon shtei halechem* (the two loaves). But there are no private *mitzvos* that apply to us as individuals, on Shavuos.

Shavuos is called “*Atzeres*”. The Torah does not openly call it “*Yom Matan Torah*” (the day of the giving of the Torah) as it is popularly called. Only in the Gemara it is identified as ‘the day in which the Torah was given’. In the language of the Torah, it is called “*Atzeres*”.

The Sages called it ‘*Shavuos*’, and the Men of Great Assembly who established the prayers called it ‘*Yom Matan Torah*’. Elsewhere it is referred to as ‘*Yom HaBikkurim*’ (day of donating the first fruits of one’s crop). But the Torah calls it “*Atzeres*”, from the word ‘*atzor*’, which means “restraint”. This reflects the nature of the festival, which does not have any *mitzvos* that apply to the individual, which in turn places a “restraint” on any ‘self-expansion’ that would be attained through the *mitzvos*. Why is it only the festival that is called Shavuos that is called “*Atzeres*”? Doesn’t every *Yom Tov* have this concept of ‘restraint’ in it, such as the fact that we don’t do *melachah* (forbidden labor) on each *Yom Yov*, which clearly restrains us? What is the aspect of “*Atzeres*” unique only to Shavuos?

The answer to this is connected with understanding why there are no *mitzvos* on Shavuos that apply to us as individuals. Soon we will explain the connection between these two aspects. But let’s first explore another aspect of Shavuos, in order to understand it.

Why Do We Count 49 and not 50?

There are 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer* that precede Shavuos. Why don’t we count 50 days? Why isn’t Shavuos preceded by a counting of a 50th day? The fact that there is no counting of the *Omer* on Shavuos is for the same reason that we have no personal *mitzvos* on Shavuos - we will try to explain why.

שבועות_009_עיקר העבודה בשבועות תשע 16

17 the “water libation” which was poured on the Altar at the “*Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*”, which spanned all of *Chol HaMoed Sukkos*, in the times of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The Torah and Its Mitzvos

The giving of the Torah contained two aspects: it was time where we received the Torah, and we also received the 613 *mitzvos* that are contained in it.

Why then is it called '*Zman Matan Torah*', the time of the giving of the Torah? Why don't we also mention the giving of the 613 *mitzvos*? The simple answer to this is because the *mitzvos* are written in the Torah, so calling it '*Zman Matan Torah*' covers both aspects: Torah and *mitzvos*.

But the deeper answer is as follows.

When we stood at Sinai and we received the Torah, what exactly did we receive? We received the Ten Commandments, and within that was contained all of the 613 *mitzvos*. Why is it that we received the Torah in this way, in the form of ten commandments? Why couldn't we receive it in all its 613 *mitzvos*?

Let's go back earlier in time. How many *mitzvos* did Adam have in Gan Eden? He had a *mitzvah* to protect and work the fields. When the Jewish people stood at Sinai, they returned to the level of Adam before the sin. If so, why did they require 613 *mitzvos*? Why not suffice with the 2 *mitzvos* that Adam had? And why didn't Adam receive 613 *mitzvos*?

The answer is that at Har Sinai, indeed, there were no 613 *mitzvos* that were said. There were 10 commandments given there. Had the people kept to their level and they wouldn't have sinned with the Calf, they would have gone straight into Eretz Yisrael with the coming of *Mashiach*. (There are no *mitzvos* in the future, according to one opinion of the Sages). This is reminiscent of how Adam would have gone straight into the eternal Shabbos had he not sinned.

So the giving of the Torah was not just about *mitzvos*. There was a deeper dimension being given. The *Zohar* says that the 613 *mitzvos* are called 613 "*itin*", "advice" – they are all ways that return to the level of Adam before the sin. We can see from this that the giving of the Torah wasn't just about receiving the 613 *mitzvos*. It was more than that: it was about the Torah itself. There is Torah, and there is *mitzvos*. The higher aspect of Torah is the Torah itself, whereas the lower aspect of Torah is its *mitzvos*.

The 10 commandments are parallel to the 10 Expressions of the world, as is well-known. The 613 *mitzvos* began as a result from sin; they came about as a result of Adam being distanced from Hashem after the sin. They are essentially 613 ways of getting back to the original pure state. But when we stood at Sinai, it was a return to the beginning of creation, in which there were 10 Expressions; thus, we only needed 10 commandments there.

Now it has become clearer to us why the giving of the Torah was not just about revealing to use the 613 *mitzvos*. To the contrary: it revealed the dimension of Torah that is beyond the 613 *mitzvos*.

After we fell from the level of Sinai, we needed 613 *mitzvos*. Had we remained pure, we wouldn't have needed to be told the 613 *mitzvos*; we would have had only 10 commandments, and everything else would have been contained in it.

“Atzeres”: Remaining In Our Pure State

Adam, in Gan Eden, was with Hashem. After the sin, he was driven out. What is the rectification that mankind needs? We need to return to Gan Eden - and make sure to *remain* there. Now we can know the deep implication of the word “*Atzeres*”, which is the name of *Shavuos*: to “remain”, to return to the original place where we are, and to stay there.

Thus, we can now understand why there are no private *mitzvos* on Shavuos. It is because on Shavuos, the point is not to accept the 613 *mitzvos*. It is to return to our original point of purity - when there were no 613 *mitzvos* yet given to mankind.

The time of Pesach was when we left Egypt. There, we started out with certain *mitzvos* to keep: the *mitzvos* of *korbon pesach* and *bris milah*. On Shavuos, however, when we came to Sinai to receive the Torah, we came to the dimension that is beyond *mitzvos*. We came to receive the “Torah” itself. This is the deep reason why there are no personal ‘*mitzvos*’ on Shavuos.

‘For Every Word of Hashem They Heard, Their Neshamos Flew Out Of Them’

It is written “*Ner mitzvah, Torah ohr*” (“A commandment is a flame, and the Torah is the light”). The *mitzvos* are compared to a flame, and the Torah is compared to the light that emanates from the flame. The festival of Shavuos is about the level of ‘*Torah ohr*’, not ‘*ner mitzvah*’, just as *ohr* (light) is above the *ner* (flame).

We find that the *neshamah* (soul) is called ‘*ner*’, a flame – for it is written, “*Ki Ner Hashem, Nishmas Adam*” (“For the flame of Hashem is the soul of man”). The Torah, though, is above our *neshamah*.

This is the depth behind what the Sages say, that “for every word of Hashem that the people heard, their *neshamos* flew out of their body”.¹⁸ It is because our *neshamah* is called a ‘*ner*’, and the ‘*ohr*’ of the Torah is above it [the *neshamah*]; and the ‘*ner*’ of our *neshamah* wishes to rise to the light above it, to the Endlessness of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Our souls left our bodies for every word of Hashem that we heard. The depth of this because we went beyond the level of *mitzvos*, which represents the current level of our life, and we viewed the level that is above our current life: “Torah”. This is because the Torah, itself, is beyond the *mitzvos* that we do.

There are two levels of *kiddush Hashem* (sanctifying Hashem’s Name): to live *al kiddush Hashem*, and to die *al Kiddush Hashem*. To live *al kiddush Hashem* is to keep the 613 *mitzvos* as we live. To die *al kiddush Hashem* is essentially the level of *d’veykus* (attachment) to Hashem. After the sin, we received 613 *mitzvos*; it essentially meant that we must live *al kiddush Hashem*. Before the sin, though, there were no *mitzvos*, for it was the level of “Torah” - nothing but *d’veykus* in Hashem.

¹⁸ *Shabbos 88a*

Thus, our souls left us when we heard the Torah, because we viewed the level that is above the *mitzvos*: the level that is “Torah”.

Shavuos: A Paradoxical Avodah of Going ‘Inward’ and ‘Outward’

We explained that the deep meaning of ‘*Atzeres*’, to ‘remain’, is for one to remain in his original state of being alone with Hashem, and not leave Him. This is the unique level represented by the festival of *Shavuos*. Let us reflect into this more.

We actually find an opposite aspect of this concept on *Shavuos*. When we heard the word of Hashem at Har Sinai, our souls left our bodies. If so, we went ‘outward’, not ‘inward’ – in what way? We needed to go ‘outward’ from the perspective of the current level of our life, the level of ‘doing the *mitzvos*’ - and transcend it, rising to the level above the *mitzvos*, which is the Torah.

But *Shavuos* is also called “*Atzeres*”, which means to remain where you are, and not to go outward. This is a paradox in our *avodah*. Is *Shavuos* about going outward, or is it about remaining inward? How do we reconcile these two facts?

Our Avodah on Shavuos To Go ‘Inward’

Now that man has gone outward from Gan Eden by being exiled from it, our *tikkun* (rectification) is to be ‘*Atzeres*’ - to remain where we are, and not go outward from our innerness. [Our souls left our bodies on *Shavuos* when we heard the Torah, which reflected the idea that man has gone outward of himself ever since the first sin, which made us fall from our level of ‘Torah’ to the level of ‘*mitzvos*’].

Let’s think into this more. Adam was exiled from Gan Eden; in other words, he left the ‘inside’ and was sent into the ‘outside’. The festival of *Shavuos/Atzeres* comes to rectify this, for it is a power to remain in our ‘inside’, our inner state, where we return to the level of Adam before the sin, in which he was alone with Hashem; it is our *avodah* to return to that state, [specifically on *Shavuos*, where this point is revealed], and to ‘remain’ there.

The simple understanding of this concept instead of going out into the outside world and becoming superficial, we need to remain inward, in our inner state.

Our Avodah on Shavuos of Going ‘Outward’

What about our ability of going ‘outward’, though? What do we do with it?

Every power in our soul has its proper use. We can't suffocate an ability of our soul; every part of our soul can be turned to a good use. So there is some way to use the power of going "outward", for holiness.

To illustrate, our *middos* can all be used for good or evil; there is no such thing as a bad *middah* or a good *middah*. Rather, every *middah* can be used for good, or evil, *chas v'shalom*. So when we try to rectify a part in our soul, we are not rectifying a 'bad' part of ourselves. Rather, we are turning it towards a proper direction.

When Adam was sent out of Gan Eden, he left the inside and went into the outside. At the giving of the Torah, we remain inward, "*Atzeres*". But what happens to our ability to go outward? It also has its use, and we need to learn how it can be used for holiness.

When our souls left our bodies at Har Sinai, the secret behind this was that it shows how we can turn outwards for holiness. The power to go "outward" from ourselves, like every other aspect of ourselves, can be used for either holiness or evil. Either we can go beyond ourselves, or we fall below our level.

Going 'outwards' from ourselves, even when it comes to spiritual ascension, is dangerous, because a person has to be careful where he goes. He must not seek to skip levels, such as by trying to learn secret parts of the Torah that he is not on the level of learning right now.

But the fact that our soul left us at Har Sinai shows that there is a holy way to go outwards. It showed us that there is a way to use this power of going "outward" for holiness and rectify this ability of ourselves.

Every person has these two different abilities in his soul: to "outward", as well as to go "inward". Each of these different sides to ourselves represents a different kind of *avodah* we have.

Inward and Outward

Going "inward" into ourselves is when we enter deep within ourselves, into the depths of our heart, to the innermost point of the heart. But what is the *avodah* of going outward? It is otherwise known as the *avodah* of '*bittul ani*' – nullifying the self.

The *avodah* of going "inward" into ourselves is essentially when we build our soul and develop its abilities. One has to keep developing the soul's abilities until he can penetrate into his deepest point, where the real "I" is found. That is one kind of *avodah* we have: to enter our soul, our very "I."

But what is our *avodah* of going "outwards"? And how can it be holy?

Going "outwards" is called '*chutzah*', from the word "*chitzoniyus*" (superficiality). Normally, it is harmful to our soul when we leave our *pnimiyus* (inner state) and we enter "*chitzoniyus*". Yet ultimately, the external and superficial dimension of our life, our "*chitzoniyus*" layer of life, also needs

to be rectified and achieve a *tikkun*. How, indeed, do we rectify the area of “*chitzoniyus*” in our life? It is when we nullify ourselves to that which is ‘outside’ of us.

Bittul / Self-Nullification

To illustrate the concept, the Sages say, “Make for yourself a *rav* (teacher), and remove yourself from doubt.” What is the depth of making for yourself a *rav*? There are many interpretations, but for our purposes, the depth is as follows. It means to go *outwards* from yourself, to leave your own inner state and enter the outside superficial layer of the world.

When making for yourself a *rav*, you must listen to him, no matter what he tells you, and the Sages say that even if he tells you that your right hand is your left hand, listen to him. The depth of this is that normally, a person is used to his *daas* (thinking), and it is very hard for him to hear or accept things which oppose his way of thinking. But a person needs to be able to nullify his *daas* sometimes – to the level that is above him - and for this reason, one needs to listen to a *rav*.

To be clearer about this, each person has a soul, and it is his *avodah* to reach his innermost point. We must get deeper and deeper into the *neshamah*. However, even after you reach your deepest point, you should know that there are other souls who have reached higher levels than you. So it is upon you to have *bittul* towards those who are on a higher level than yours.

So there is one part of our *avodah* to reach our self, to go ‘inward’. One must first get by the outer layers of his *nefesh habehaimis*.¹⁹, and then he can get deeper into the five parts of the soul: the *Nefesh*.²⁰, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*, and *Yechidah*, all the way until the innermost point. After that point, the *avodah* is to nullify yourself to a soul that is above your soul. How? It is through having a *rebbe*/teacher. When a person nullifies himself to a higher soul level than his own, he has gone ‘outward’ of himself.

It is brought in the *sefarim hakedoshim* that a person should find a *rebbe* who is of a higher soul root than his.

If the student’s soul level is higher than the level of the teacher, even if the teacher worked harder to reach into himself than the student did, the teacher cannot bring him to a higher level. He can give him a way to reach his soul, but he cannot elevate the student higher than his current level. A person needs a *rebbe* who can raise him higher than his current level, and this is only possible if the *rebbe* has a higher soul root than the student’s.

This represents the *avodah* to go ‘outward’ of ourselves. This was the concept behind how our souls left us at Har Sinai: we went outside of ourselves – we went above our own self.

¹⁹ animalistic layer of the soul, the source of our base emotions, thoughts, and desires

²⁰ Editor’s Note: Within the *Nefesh* itself, there are two layers. The lower layer is called the *nefesh habehaimis* (animalistic layer of the soul) and the higher layer is called the *Nefesh Elohis* (G-dly layer of the soul).

Our Two-Fold Avodah

So one part of our *avodah* is to enter our actual self and penetrate it, and this is our ‘inward’ aspect. The other part of our *avodah* is to leave the area of the self and enter G-dliness, which is our outward aspect. The inward aspect is called ‘*avodas pnim*’. Our outward aspect, our *avodah* to have *d’veykus* in Hashem, is called ‘*avodas chutz*’ – to go “outside” of ourselves, by connecting ourselves with Hashem.

Both of these aspects were present at Har Sinai. We each had an ‘inward’ aspect, for each of us received an individual part of the Torah. But we also had an ‘outward’ aspect: our departed from our bodies at every word of Hashem we heard. We left the self and entered into G-dliness, into *d’veykus* with Hashem – a realm totally beyond the self.

“Chad” – Oneness With Hashem

One of the 48 qualities in Torah is called “*pilpul chaveirim*” – when one sharpens his learning when he speaks to others about Torah. *The Midrash Shmuel* explains that every word of Torah can be sharpened and be made clearer, when we speak of it. What is the depth of “sharpening” our words of Torah? Chazal say that “Words of Torah should be sharp (*‘mechudadin*’, from the word “*chad*”, one) in your mouth.” Simply speaking, “*chad*” means “sharp”, but it can also mean “one” - to reveal the power of *Echad* (“one”) in the soul, to be “one” with Hashem.

Pilpul chaveirim represents our power to bring ourselves to the state of “*chad*”, to oneness, with Hashem.

It is our ability to go ‘outward’ of the self. Besides for its simple meaning, which is that we should learn Torah with sharpness and clarity, its deeper meaning is to become “*chad*” with Hashem.

Moshe Rabbeinu ascended the heavens to receive the Torah, where he did not eat or drink for 40 days. Only Moshe reached the level in which even his body left its nature, and that is why he merited being the one who gave us the Torah. Chazal say that Moshe Rabbeinu had a stutter when he spoke, which was clearly an impediment to his speech, so how were the words of Torah “*mechudadin*” in the mouth? But it was because reached the state of “*chad*” with Hashem, through his selflessness. Thus in a deep sense, he was the only one who really reached the level of “*mechudadin*”.

No person would be willing to fast for 40 days from food and drink. The highest level of selflessness that a person can reach is when one is ready for his soul to leave his body, “their souls flew out of them for every word of Hashem”, but the body does not become elevated with this. The only person whose body was sanctified on the level of the soul, was Moshe Rabbeinu. Thus, even his body was able to ascend to Heaven and receive the Torah.

Shavuos: Returning To The Level of Adam Before The Sin

The giving of the Torah is essentially the time where we return to the state of Adam before the sin.

Ever since Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, we have been on the level of the *Eitz HaDaas*; had Adam not sinned, he would have partaken of the *Eitz HaChaim*, the Tree of Life, which we mankind was supposed to eat from. At Har Sinai, the Torah was given to us – and the Torah is called “*Toras Chaim*”, a “Torah of life”, which represents the *Eitz HaChaim*. So it was a return to the level of before the sin, where we had not yet eaten from the *Eitz HaDaas*.

Eating from the *Eitz HaDaas* represents going outside of our self for evil purposes; it was the evil use of the power to go ‘outward’. Eating from the *Eitz HaChaim* represents going outside of the self to become elevated – the holy use of our power to go ‘outward’, to go above our level, for connect ourselves to a higher and holier plane that is above our own soul.

The Deep Meaning of ‘On Atzeres, All Agree That ‘Lachem’ Is Required’

Thus, we can now understand the depth behind the words of the Gemara²¹ that “on *Atzeres* (Shavuos), all opinions agree that there is a requirement of “*lachem*” (“for you”), to rejoice with physical pleasures such as food and drink.

Normally, we are meant to abstain from indulgence in food and drink, as Chazal state, “Eat bread dipped in salt and drink water in a cistern”; but this is referring to the current state of mankind, in which we live after man ate from *Eitz HaDaas*, where the act of eating has become spiritually damaged. But had Adam eaten from the *Eitz HaChaim*, it would have been a holy kind of eating, which would have elevated man above his initial level to a higher level.

Shavuos, where we stood at Har Sinai, was a return to the level of the *Eitz HaChaim*; thus, on Shavuos, we are specifically commanded by the Sages to have food and drink, because it parallels the level of eating from the *Eitz HaChaim*.

Going Within and Going Above

This is the depth behind the event of receiving the Torah. On one hand, it revealed to us our ‘inward’ essence, our power to penetrate our souls all the way until our innermost point, whereupon we can reach the *d’veykus* with Hashem, which is the innermost point of all of Creation. That is one way how we reach *d’vekyus*. But it was also a time which revealed our ‘outward’ aspect: that we are able to go ‘out’ of our self, and connect in *d’veykus* with Hashem through that way.

21 *Pesachim 68a*

When it comes to our *avodah* in our personal life, as we are in the midst of growing spiritually, we should be able to find ourselves cycling back and forth between these two different phases. At times, we are involved with trying to reach our innermost point that is within us (and we can do this by closing the eyes and concentrating deeply on the innermost point of the soul); and at other times, we can let go of ourselves, and concentrate instead on going above our self.

These are two different phases that we need to experience throughout all of our *avodah*, even when we are in the midst of a period of spiritual growth. It is the way we are designed, so we need to always be involved with either one of these two abilities in ourselves.

When Hashem becomes revealed in one's heart, He gives a person the power to leave his own self and rise above himself, to reach levels that are normally beyond his level.

Through utilizing these two abilities of our soul ('inward'/going within, and 'outward'/going above), may we merit to receive the Torah completely, with the rest of *Klal Yisrael*.

1.3 | To Die For²²

A Difficult Test To Our Free Will

We are approaching Shavuos, the time of the giving of the Torah. It is now the time to prepare to receive the Torah. We will reflect into what went on as the Jewish people prepared to receive the Torah, and from that, each person on his own level can take practical inspiration from it.

Hashem revealed Himself when He came down onto Har Sinai. The entire nation trembled at this. Moshe *Rabbeinu* had to reassure the people that they had nothing to fear, for Hashem was merely giving us a test.

When we are faced with a difficult test, this is called a “*nisayon*”. During the days of the *Sefiras HaOmer*, we traverse through three months of the Jewish calendar – the second half of the month of Nissan, the entire month of Iyar, and the beginning of the month of Sivan. The word *Nissan* is rooted in the word *nisayon*. In other words, it is a *nisayon* – it is a test. It is the test of how we will prepare for the Torah.

The month of *Iyar* comes from the word *yirah*, awe. This alludes to how the month of Iyar contains a certain power of awe, *yirah*, which can enable us to prepare for the Torah.

Thus, the months of Nissan and Iyar both serve to help us prepare for the test that comes on Shavuos – the test, the *nisayon* which we are being presented with; as well as the a test to see if we will have proper *yirah* towards receiving the Torah.

A *nisayon* can either lift a person higher, or bring him down; *nisayon* comes from the word *nes*, which means to “run”; if a person fails the *nisayon*, he “runs” away from its message. Every *nisayon* we go through serves to test of our power of free choice.

What will we choose? Will we choose to elevate ourselves through the *nisayon* we are presented with, or will we run away from the message?

When the people heard the voice of Hashem at Har Sinai and all the lightning with it, they had a *nisayon*; they were afraid. Either they could choose to become uplifted, or to feel like they want to run away.

What happened in the end? They grew very afraid; Moshe *Rabbeinu* had to calm everyone down and tell everyone not to be afraid. He was really telling them that the purpose of this *nisayon* is not to make you run away - but to uplift you.

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The Test At Har Sinai

What exactly is the “*nisayon*” which the Jewish people faced in receiving the Torah? What did they find so difficult?

The *Mesillas Yescharim* writes that everyone on this world is in a “*nisayon*”. No matter who you are what your situation, you are always in a *nisayon*.

The event at Har Sinai was a perfected state of Creation; what was the *nisayon* there? At first, the *nisayon* was that Hashem asked all the nations if they want the Torah, and they refused. This *nisayon* took place before the Torah was given. We were tested to see if we would really accept the Torah or not.

But then came another *nisayon*, which was at the actual time of the giving of the Torah. This *nisayon* was that when the people heard the voice of Hashem at Har Sinai, they were afraid that they would die from hearing Hashem’s voice.

This was a very deep kind of test. It was not like the first kind of test, which was about if they were ready to receive the Torah or not. This was a deeper test: they had already reached the apex of perfection, standing at Har Sinai and seeing the revelation of Hashem, but they now faced a new, subtle test: to choose if they would hear the Torah directly from the voice of Hashem, or not.

Did they pass the test? The *posuk* tells us that they did not. They requested to hear the Torah from Moshe’s voice, because they were too frightened to hear Hashem’s voice. The *Vilna Gaon* says that because of this, the sin of the Golden Calf began to take root. It was already a deviation from listening to Hashem.

They were supposed to be able to prepare themselves to die in order to hear the voice of Hashem. A person has to be prepared to die just to listen to the voice of Hashem!

A Life of Hearing Hashem’s Voice

But what is so bad if we want to just be alive and we won’t hear Hashem’s voice? If we are given a choice, either to Hashem’s voice – and die – or to continue living on as usual, without hearing Hashem’s voice – what would we choose...?

Of course, when the people did not want to hear Hashem’s voice, this does not mean that they wanted to instead commit idol worship. They were too scared of Hashem’s voice, so they preferred to hear the Torah instead from Moshe. But they were supposed to be ready to die over hearing Hashem’s voice.

To go on living without hearing the voice of Hashem’s is really not a life. Life is worthless without hearing Hashem’s voice!

When Adam sinned, he was embarrassed from Hashem. He said, “*Your voice I hear amidst the garden, but I am afraid and hiding.*” He ran away from hearing Hashem’s voice. At Har Sinai, we

reached the purified state of Adam before the sin, and thus we were tested once again to see if we would listen to Hashem's voice or not. We didn't pass the test.

This is the test which all of us once again experienced at Har Sinai. We were all there; our souls were there in a previous lifetime. Again, we did not pass that test – we were afraid to die.

However, every year when *Shavuos* comes back again, the same effects of Yom Tov are renewed, and the test comes to us once again. Thus, every Shavuos, the test comes back: Are we ready to die to hear the voice of Hashem?

The light of receiving the Torah returns every year on Shavuos, but the event of standing at Har Sinai also returns every year. This includes the test of standing at Har Sinai that we were faced with then.

By Har Sinai, the test was pretty clear: Will we listen to Hashem's voice, or not? But the test of our current day is not as clear to us, even though it is the same test. Of course, we are not on the same level as we were at Har Sinai, but the test still returns to us each year.

How does it return to us each year? What is our test that comes each Shavuos?

Before we try to understand what difficult test is coming to us each year on Shavuos, we must first understand that there are two totally different ways with which we can live life.

Superficial Life vs. Real Life

One kind of person can learn Torah and do all the *mitzvos*, but when he encounters a difficulty, he goes to *tzaddikim* and he gives *tzedakah*, and he also *davens* by *kevarim*, (and he even *davens* and talks to Hashem a little when he is there)...but he is missing the point.

Of course, there is something special in visiting *tzaddikim*, but the way our life is supposed to look like is to talk to Hashem all the time when we have a difficulty! “*Segulos*” are not enough. We need the “simple” kind of life – to talk to Hashem simply. You can talk to Hashem directly – you don't need someone else to do it for you!

When a person *davens* to Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei*, he must realize that he is speaking directly with Hashem, and he can have a direct contact with Him. Our entire life must be like this as well – we should always feel that Hashem is in front of us. We can always talk to Him – as the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, we can talk to Hashem “as a man who talks to his friend.”

When a Jew needs something, there is something very simple which he can do: talk to Hashem! *Davening* to Hashem is not a “*segulah*”. It is our entire way how life looks – talking with Hashem. *Tefillah* is the art of a Jew, which we received from our ancestors.

We need to remember how we were when we stood at Har Sinai, and to return to that situation. If a person never spoke to Hashem his whole life, he can't suddenly jump into this concept of being prepared to die for Hashem. Why would a person want to die for Hashem if he never spoke to Him

his whole life?! There has to first be a relationship with Hashem, and then one can reach the level of being prepared to give himself up for Him.

Hashem is coming to us on Shavuos so we can hear His voice. Are we prepared to listen to Him? We do not mean that a person has to simply say this verbally; the point is to feel this way in your heart – that in your heart, you should want to hear the voice of Hashem.

Hearing The Torah Directly From Hashem

Consider the following question, which is very deep. We all wait for *Moshiach* that he should come. When he comes, he will teach us the Torah. When *Moshiach* comes, from whom will we go to hear the Torah from? We will have a choice to hear it either from Hashem directly, or from *Moshiach*. Will we choose to hear it from *Moshiach* – or from Hashem Himself, directly?

If someone never spent his life talking with Hashem, he never developed a relationship with Him. When *Moshiach* comes, he won't be able to suddenly run to go hear Hashem's voice teaching the Torah. He will say, "I want to hear *Moshiach*. I don't want to hear Hashem."

This is the truth. The same thing happened by Har Sinai – the people did not want to hear Hashem's voice, and they instead chose to hear the Torah from Moshe.

Of course, if you ask any person if he wants to hear Hashem's voice, he will respond, "Of course! What a spiritual delight that would be!" But as soon as he told that he will have to give his life for it and die for it, he turns back and runs away.

To Die For

The question we must ask ourselves each Shavuos is: Are we prepared to *die* for the Torah?

The Sages say that one must exert himself over the Torah, and must "kill himself in the tents of Torah." Why it is indeed necessary for us to 'die' for the Torah? Simply, it is because we must disconnect from materialism, and to instead feel a deep connection with the Torah. This is true, but the deeper answer is because just as the people were supposed to die in order to hear Hashem's voice, so must *we be prepared to die* in order to hear Hashem's voice in the Torah.

Imagine if Hashem would come to us and ask us again if we want the Torah, and we would feel our soul leaving us, just as the souls of the Jewish people left them with each word of the Torah they heard from Hashem. What would we do? Would we be willing to do it? Or would we say, "I don't know about this. I have to ask my wife. Also, I have kids at home. If I die, they will be left without a father." All kinds of excuses. Would a person be prepared to die to receive the Torah, or not?

If a person feels in his heart that he would be prepared to die for the Torah and hear Hashem's voice, he is truly preparing for the Torah. If he doesn't feel that way, then even if he says he would, it's just a superficial lip service.

The way our life is supposed to look like is to learn Torah, with Hashem sitting in front of us as we learn. Who feels Hashem sitting next to him as he learns? If someone feels Hashem next to him when he learns, he'd die! So what does it mean to have Hashem next to you when you learn? It means to have a *relationship* with Him!!

Contemplating These Words

People think that all this only was for previous generations, and that we cannot be on the level of standing at Har Sinai anymore; that the words here are describing a very high level. "What do you want from us? These words are not for this generation..."

But if a person feels that way, he's basically saying that he has nothing to do with receiving the Torah. It is true that the giving of the Torah was a very exalted level in our spirituality. But we must *want* that high level, and we must not remain complacent with a low spiritual level.

This is the question that each Jew should ask himself every Shavuos: If I would be standing at Har Sinai, would I be on the level to receive it? Would I be ready to hear Hashem's voice? Would I be ready to *die* so that I can hear it?"

The words here are simple for anyone who searches for a true kind of life. Contemplating these words is the true way to prepare for receiving the Torah.

Every person needs to find times of quiet [in the three days before Shavuos, which is the time to prepare for the Torah], make a self-accounting, and ask himself if he is ready to accept the Torah or not; if he is ready to die, or not, to hear Hashem's voice.

This decision should not just be limited to preparing for Shavuos. It should carry over into the rest of the year as well – to live a life of connection with Hashem, all day, and not just when we *daven* three times a day. Every day, each person should have times in which he reflects deeply about his relationship with Hashem.

"Remember the day in which you stood before Hashem, your G-d, at Horeb." Don't just remember that you stood at Har Sinai – remember that you stood in front of **Hashem**, at Har Sinai.

I hope that this concept is not new to you; I hope that the words here are quite simple to you.

May Hashem merit all of us to accept the Torah, and to be ready to give ourselves up in order to hear Hashem's voice and His Torah. This should come from the inner truth within every Jew, and they should not just be superficial words to say with our mouth.

Anyone who thinks that you can get by life without being close to Hashem is living in his imagination.

1.4 | *Living A Life of Neshamah*²³

The Light of the Torah

At the giving of the Torah, the original light which existed at the beginning of the Creation returned. The Torah is called “*Torah ohr*” (light) because the Torah revealed the original *ohr* of Creation, in which Hashem declared, “*Behold, let there be light.*”

The first commandment was “*I am Hashem your G-d.*” This reflected the first statement which Hashem declared in Creation, which was “*Behold, let there be light.*” When Hashem first declared that there should be light in Creation, He used his light that was already there; He took His original light, which always existed before He created the universe, and continued it into the Creation.

The root of the Ten Commandments was the first commandment, “*I am Hashem.*” Thus, the giving of the Torah – which is called ‘*Torah ohr*’, the ‘Torah of light’ – is really the light of Hashem, which fills all of existence. The light of Hashem is revealed in Creation through the Torah.

The inner way to learn Torah is by understanding that the Torah is *ohr*. It is Hashem’s very light!

There is a way of life we can live in which the Torah is *ohr* to us; it is not the regular kind of life we are used to.

Living A Life of ‘Torah Ohr’

There is a *sefer* called “*Moreh HaPerishus V’Derech HaPeshitus*”,²⁴ written by Rav Dovid HaMaimoni, one of the grandchildren of the Rambam, which describes how our ancestors lived. In that *sefer*, an inner kind of life is described – a life of detachment from the physical world, and to instead live totally secluded with Hashem. The basic concept of it is for a person to realize that there is an inner layer of reality, in which Torah is a light to us.

Why is it that most people do not see Torah as “*ohr*” in their life? It is because man was created from the earth. The earth is a dark kind of texture, thus, man tends to experience life through a very dark lens. Even if a person keeps Torah and mitzvos, he will naturally perceive himself as “You are earth”, as Adam was told; he lives a very dark kind of existence. And this is true even if he does all the mitzvos and learns the Torah very intellectually. He lives in a dark kind of world, a world of materialism.

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24 lit. translation: “*Guide To Detachment and Path of Simplicity*” (Editor’s Note: This *sefer* was recently reprinted by Feldheim. See [here](#) for the Rav’s *peirush* on this extremely interesting *sefer*.)

Life without Torah is really dark. When a person really connects to Torah, the Torah lights up the darkness of his life. It shows a person that he has an inner point in his soul, a place that is “simple” and totally detached from the physical.

Rav Dovid HaMaimoni’s *sefer* is a guide for how a person can separate himself from the materialism of life. It can show a person how he can abandon his once sensual kind of existence and instead help him radiate an inner depth to life – it can help a person reach an inner place of the soul which is divested from all physicality.

This is called the *makom hapashut*, the “point of detachment” in the soul, the deepest point – the point in the soul which is totally pure and devoid of materialism.

Without the light of Torah in a person’s life – without accessing ‘*Torah ohr*’ - a person is attached to materialism. When a person learns Torah in an inner way, the Torah can remove all the darkness in his life caused by materialism.

Disconnecting From A Materialistic Life

In order for a person to learn Torah in the real way, he has to give a “divorce” to his materialistic life – literally – and then his hold of materialism will weaken. In its place, he enters into an inner, radiant world of the soul, a world of real Torah: *Torah ohr*. A world in which “*The flame of Hashem, is the soul of man*”; a world of *Shechinah*, which is entirely spiritual light.

When people hear about this concept, ‘*Torah ohr*’, they tend to think that *ohr* is just a “*moshol*” (parable) to Torah. But “*ohr*” is not just a *moshol* in which we have to find the lesson; it is a *possuk* in the Torah, that Torah is an *ohr*! The fact that Torah is *ohr* is the very reality. Sometimes our Sages describe a concept in the form of a *moshol*, but ‘*Torah Ohr*’ is not a *moshol*. It is a reality in and of itself.

‘*Torah Ohr*’ is accessed when a person divorces himself from the materialistic lifestyle of this world; his soul then begins to really shine, and then he begins to feel, recognize, and see the light that is Torah. He sees it as a reality that he feels and recognizes.

But it is only a reality for someone who indeed detaches from this materialistic world and he wants to enter the inner reality. It is only for someone who is willing to literally give a ‘divorce document’ to the materialistic kind of life, whereupon he can then enter his deep place of the soul, the point of simplicity.

(This inner point of the soul is called *peshitus* [another term for *makom hapashut*] or *temimus*/simplicity). It is the point in the soul in which a perfected level of Torah is revealed – a “*Toras Hashem Temimah*” (the Torah of Hashem is perfect).

When a person reaches this inner point in his soul, the Torah becomes a Torah of light to him, and it is a reality, not just a “*moshol*”.

A person can recognize it as a light – he can feel its warmth. He feels, clearly, the light, and that it exists - that it is actually *there*.

The Roles of the Intellect and The Heart In Our Life's Task

In aforementioned *sefer (Moreh HaPerishus U'Derech HaPeshitus)*, it is described that there are basically two deep ways with which how we should ideally live our life. These two ways form the basis of a person's *avodah* (life's mission in serving the Creator).

One approach is for a person to use his soul, his **heart** – to have yearnings for holiness, for spirituality; and on a more subtle level, to yearn just for Hashem alone. As the verse says, “*My soul thirsts for You.*” Our heart has yearnings to become closer to Hashem.

There is a more inner approach in one's *Avodas Hashem*, and this is when a person uses his mind to yearn for more knowledge of the Torah, the wisdom of Hashem. This is when one wishes to partake of Hashem's hidden treasures, to enlighten his intellect with the light of Torah, depth within depth, getting deeper and deeper into the subtlety of the Torah's wisdom. It is for one to involve oneself in Hashem's wisdom, the Torah, which was passed down to us throughout the generations.

These are two great yearnings of our soul. The first way we mentioned is a yearning of our heart, for spirituality, for Torah, for Hashem Himself. The second way mentioned is the yearning of our mind, our intellect, to know the depth of the Torah's wisdom, its secrets. It is there [in the second way mentioned] that a person can see clearly the “light” of Torah; it is revealed to those who succeed in entering the inner chambers of the Torah. But it is only accessed by those who divorce themselves from a materialistic lifestyle.

Fusing Together The Intellect and the Heart

The true way to live, as described in the *sefer Moreh HaPerishus*, is to combine both approaches. On one hand, we must yearn for more holiness, for more Torah, for closeness to Hashem. As it is written, “*My soul is sick with love for You.*” But together with this, we also need to develop a deep desire to know the G-dly wisdom of Torah; that the G-dly wisdom of Hashem should fill our mind and turn our minds to think G-dly.

When we combine these two approaches – the **heart's** yearning for more spirituality, as well as to sanctify the thinking of our **mind** with Torah – we will then enter into the inner reality called ‘*Torah ohr*’. We discover there the Torah of our mind - and the Torah of the heart. The reality of what the Torah truly is becomes revealed when we reach this dimension. It transforms a person into living an angelic kind of existence, in which the light of Hashem is shining forth in him.

If a person studies the *sefer* of Rav Dovid HaMaimoni in-depth, his soul can essentially enter the “G-dly light” available today. But this is only if the reader reflects deeply into the matters of this *sefer*, as opposed just to perusing the pages superficially. The reader has to actually let his soul enter the *sefer*, and then, his soul enters into the light of Hashem.

‘Temimus’ (Innocence) and ‘Peshitus’ (Simplicity)

Before Creation, Hashem was One, and His Name was One; His light filled the universe. At Har Sinai, our soul – our inner depth of our soul (mind and heart together) – connected with Hashem. “Hashem and the Torah and Yisrael are one.”²⁵

When a person enters the inner reality of Torah, he can feel the *ohr* of Torah just as a person can feel the sun shining on him.

As we said before, a person needs to be connected to Torah both with his heart and mind; and then he enters into the inner depths of his soul, which is the pure *temimus* (earnestness) of the soul. (On a more subtle note, he will go above even his own *temimus* (innocence) of the soul, which is the point called *peshitus*, “simplicity”. When he enters that inner place, he is connected to it **both** with his mind and his heart – not one without the other.) It is then that he recognizes, feels, and sees, how the light of Hashem really fills the entire universe.

This is the level we were on when we received the Torah at Har Sinai. At the giving of the Torah, we reached an inner place in our soul in which we felt Hashem’s light surrounding everything and permeating all of Creation.

When a person achieves the inner kind of life, he feels Hashem’s light surrounding him. He feels himself being found entirely within Hashem’s light, and thus he is purified both externally and internally, just as the *Aron* was gold on the outside and gold on the inside. He merits the state that existed before Adam’s sin, in which Adam possessed *kosnor ohr*, special garments that were made from Hashem’s light.

The words we are saying here are very different from the kind of life that we see going on in the outside world. On a more subtle note, there is no real life going on today – but rather a **death**-like kind of existence.

Hashem’s Kiss At Death

People don’t recognize the inner kind of life we are describing, because they aren’t willing to divorce themselves from the superficial, materialistic lifestyle. They have no idea that there is an inner world, an inner reality.

²⁵ Zohar *parshas Achrei Mos* 73a

We all know that there is a Next World, a place called Gan Eden, in which the *tzaddikim* sit and enjoy the radiance of the *Shechinah*. R' Dovid Maimoni states in *sefer Moreh HaPerishus* that if a person didn't feel the light of Hashem as he lived on this physical world, when he comes to the next world, he won't be able to experience the spiritual enjoyment of the Next World – because he never connected to it yet.

It could be that he kept all the *mitzvos* and learned Torah on this world, but if he never lived the inner reality, he has never yet connected himself to the spiritual reality, and thus he cannot connect with it in the Next World!

Chazal say that although no one can see Hashem as they live, upon death, it is possible to see Hashem. When a *tzaddik* dies, he merits *misas neshikah* – a “kiss of death”. The soul of the *tzaddik*, upon his time of physical death, sees Hashem's light in its full zenith. *Chazal* say that this is a very pleasurable experience; the soul of a *tzaddik*, as soon as his physical life ends, immediately wishes to ascend to Heaven out of great love for Hashem, and it is compared to a strong magnetic pull.

Only a person who detaches from the materialistic kind of life merits this. The *sefarim hakedoshim* say that if someone attached himself already on this world to Hashem, he connects to Hashem's light when he leaves this world. This “kiss of death” is obviously not a physical kind of kiss. It is an incredible yearning of the soul to attach itself to the light of Hashem, and in this sense, it is like a kiss.

The light of Hashem is really everywhere; it fills all of existence. But in order to reach it, a person has to remove all the dirty layers that are covering him; he must remove himself from the attachment to this physical world, if he wants to reveal the light.

Making This Concept Practical

If someone wants to make this concept practical and merit the inner kind of life we are describing, the opportunity is very available to him. As *Chazal* say, “The Torah is in a corner; all who wish to take it can come and take it.”

One should take this *sefer* of Rav Dovid HaMaimoni – *sefer “Moreh HaPerishus V'Derech HaPeshitus”* – and he should learn it in-depth. And he shouldn't just “learn” the *sefer* on a purely intellectual level – he should actually practice the kind of lifestyle being described in that *sefer*. He should practice everything it says in that *sefer*, not just partially.

It is a lifestyle in which a person lives with Hashem, with *temimus* (earnestness), with *peshitus* (simplicity). It is a kind of life which can take a person out of the materialistic lifestyle we recognize. It is *not* a “new” way to live life; it is the way of our great ancestors, who were like angels.

In Conclusion

In the three days before Shavuos, when we are meant to prepare to accept the Torah, we have a test before us. It is the test to see where our lives are at, what kind of life we want to live; if we really want to live a life of *Torah Ohr*. It is the test of determining where our soul is heading towards.

The soul in us, deep down, has a yearning for something, and it is an endless desire, which we are not able to silence. It screams out inside each and every one of us, and it is demanding that we detach from the superficial kind of life we see, and instead enter into the inner world.

We must disconnect from the superficial life in front of us that we see, and become like a convert, who is considered born anew. We must enter a totally different reality, a reality which is entirely Hashem's light.

If we want to merit the great spiritual bliss of the Next World – the light of Hashem – we need to connect ourselves already now, on this world we live on, to that light.

May we merit to receive the Torah which we received at Sinai – in the same way we were like when we are in the desert as we received it, separated totally from materialism; may we merit to return to the true way of life, as our *Avos* lived.

1.5 | Give Yourself Your Real Needs²⁶

Three Kinds Of Love: For the Creator, For Torah, and For Another Jew

With the help of Hashem, we are approaching the time of the giving of the Torah.

When the Torah was given, there were three great revelations. The first revelation was that Hashem came down onto Har Sinai, and opened up all the heavens and showed us that *Ain Od Milvado*, there is nothing besides for Him. The second revelation was the Ten Commandments, which contains the entire Torah. The third revelation was that we all stood together with one heart.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* reveal that there are three kinds of love that we need to seek: love for Hashem, love for the Torah, and love for the Jewish people. These three kinds of love were all revealed at the giving of the Torah. Our love for the Creator was revealed when Hashem revealed Himself to us. Our love for the Torah was revealed through the Ten Commandments. Our love for the Jewish people was revealed when we had complete unity with each other, standing together with one heart.

The Love We Have Towards Ourselves

When a person is born, his power of love isn't developed yet. He does not know of love for Hashem, for Torah, and for another Jew. He loves himself – and he identifies himself as a body, so he loves his body. As a person gets older, he is supposed to mature and develop his love to become more spiritual, forming a love for Hashem, for Torah, and for other Jews.

When a person loves himself, there are two kinds of love: love for his body (*guf*), and love for his soul (*nefesh*).

Unless someone works on his *middos*, he naturally worries for himself all day, from morning until night. People also think a little about others, more or less, and it depends on each person; some are a bit more purified.

A person worries about his physical needs and for his emotional needs (we are referring to his *nefesh habehaimis* ("lower, animalistic layer of the soul) and not to the deeper, spiritual needs of the soul).

Most people put more focus on their physical needs. This is usually a very strong kind of love. People eat and drink because they love their body.

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Most people are concentrating on their body's **physical** needs - and not their soul's **basic emotional needs**.

We are not even addressing how people neglect their soul's spiritual needs, which are higher needs; even the basic emotional needs of a person are often neglected. Most people are busy and occupied with [shopping for] clothing and food. And if that is the situation of Jews today, surely the gentiles are like this too. The world today is mostly running after physical gratification.

Unless a person works to change this, when it comes Shavuos time - a time to prepare for loving Hashem the Torah and the Jews – it is far from him. If he doesn't meet his soul's basic emotional needs, he won't even care about his spiritual needs.

How We Love Others

A person who pays attention to his body and neglects his soul only loves others superficially. He might feel like he “loves” his friends, but in reality, he only loves them on a ‘bodily’ level.

Even with his family he's like this; he only loves his wife and children with a “body” kind of love. The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that our family is part of our flesh. Therefore, if a person loves only his ‘flesh’, and not his soul, then although he will love his family, he only loves the physical ‘flesh’ of his family. He can love his wife who is called his ‘flesh’ (that is, if he even reaches the basic love for his wife...), but he only loves her from his body, not from his soul.

If a person doesn't love his own soul, he does not know what it means to love the soul of another. This is because love is an extension of how much a person loves his own self²⁷. If a person only loves his ‘flesh’, he will love others only for their ‘flesh’. (One he truly loves his soul, though, is a very inner kind of person). His whole *Ahavas Yisrael* towards other Jews will be superficial, because he only loves others' ‘flesh’, and not their souls. This is not *Ahavas Yisrael*.

We can find that there are certain people who only love their own ‘type’ – similar to how the *chassidab/stork* only does kindness with other storks, and not with other animals. (And for this reason, the stork is a non-kosher bird, because it does not do real kindness – only to those who are the “same type”...) It is all because most people are only loving the flesh of others, because they only know of love for their flesh, and they do not know of love for the soul.

A person can only love others in the same way he loves himself, because love to others is an extension of how much you love yourself. If one only loves his ‘flesh’ – his physical existence – his love can only go so far as to love the ‘flesh’ of others, but he cannot love their souls. He doesn't love his own soul.

²⁷ Rav Shimon Shkop zt"l, in the *hakdamah* to *Shaarei Yoshor*. See *Fixing Your Water* #018 – *The Desire To Be Loved and Getting To Know Your Hisbodedus Practice* #021 – *Hisbodedus and Ahavas Yisrael*.

Simchas Yom Tov

When Shavuos comes, it's a time of *Simchas Yom Tov* (rejoicing in the festival). What is the *simchah*? Is it physical contentment, or it is a spiritual feeling?

Of course, Chazal say²⁸ that the *mitzvah* is fulfilled through meat and wine; these things do bring a degree of happiness. But it's clear that meat and wine are not the entire of happiness of the *Yom Tov*. This is not only true with regards to *Simchas Yom Tov*. It is true with regards to all of life: the physical aspects of our life cannot be everything. There is more to life than our physical needs.

When a person does *mitzvos* – like if he puts on *tefillin* – it might be on his 'body', but it's not necessarily affecting his soul. This is because if a person identifies himself as a body and not as a soul, it will hamper his connection to anything spiritual.

Learning Torah is spiritual. Even the intellectual aspect of it is spiritual. If a person only identifies with his body and not with his soul, then even if he learns Torah for many hours of the day, it won't affect his soul.

Overeating: The Prime Example of Materialistic Pursuit

The generation is full of physical desires (including kosher and non-kosher). New things come out every day. When a person pursues them, his soul gets concealed more and more, as the person only gives attention to his physical body. He embodies the *possuk*, "*Ach besari*" – "Nothing but my flesh"...

When a person eats and eats, he can get so involved in it that he feels as if the food is a part of him! The *Chovos HaLevovos* writes that when people indulge in food, it connects a person more and more to materialism, and the more a person indulges, the thicker he is entrenched in the materialism. The person begins to feel very connected to food with the more and more he indulges, and he identifies the food as a part of himself...

Nowadays, when a person meets with a friend, he usually eats with him. Rarely do people meet each other without seeking to have some kind of meal with each other. Why can't people meet each other and just be happy that they see each other, without eating with each other? With many friendships, it's based on how eating they have with each other!

When it comes to spending time with family, all people often do is eat meals with each other, and that's the basis of their whole relationship...

The physical desires of this world all affect us with the more we indulge in it. When we only give attention to the needs of our physical flesh, we experience life only through our physical flesh – and that is how we will see others: as mere physical flesh. Our whole relationship towards others will only be based on recognizing them as physical bodies of flesh.

²⁸ *Pesachim 109a*

And, taking this further, *rachmana litzlan*, that is how a person will also relate to Torah and to Hashem: he will have a very superficial connection with Torah and with Hashem, because he is only living life superficially. Even if he tries to experience a connection with Hashem, he won't get to it, because he is living only in his physical flesh.

The *Maharal* says that the more a person attaches himself to *choimer*/materialism, the less the Torah can enter him. The Torah is spiritual, and it cannot enter materialism.

Physical Affection: Feeling The Other's Body – Or Feeling The Other's Soul...?

When two friends meet each other and they feel really close with each other, they will usually hug and kiss each other, as signs of affection. What are their motivations, though? If they only love their bodies, and not their souls, then they are hugging and kissing the other person's body, not the other's soul!

They should really wish to hug and kiss the others' soul, and the signs of physical affection would be a reflection of that inner love for each other. But because they live life through their bodies, they can only know of love for the others' body...

It is similar to when Esav kissed Yaakov. When Esav kissed Yaakov, he wasn't kissing the soul of Yaakov. He was kissing the body of Yaakov. It wasn't a love emanating from his soul, because he only knew of physical gratification. The rule is that "Esav hates Yaakov" – even though he kissed him. Because it wasn't a real kiss. But if a person lives a life of the soul, and he loves his soul in turn, he will open himself up to begin to love the soul of others.

The Needs of A Child

The love that most people have for their families is only for their bodies, and not for their souls.

We can see this from the fact that most parents do not provide even the most basic emotional needs of the child, such as that the child should feel loved and happy. They give lots of things to their children, but they don't provide the emotional needs.

Why? It is because they don't even give themselves their own emotional needs. Therefore, they don't realize that their children aren't getting their emotional needs met, because they don't give importance in their own life to their own emotional needs.

The Test

If a person was given a choice if he will be given 10 minutes of good food or 10 minutes of happiness, what would he choose?

Here is the litmus test. If a person says he'll go for the food, it shows how he views life, that his life is all about loving his physical flesh. If a person says he'll choose happiness, it shows that he identifies with his soul's needs.

We are not describing a high level to be on. We are talking about how a person experiences life.

What Weddings Have Become Today

Take a look at *simchos* (celebrations) today. When people go to a wedding, how many of them can say that they rejoiced the *chosson* and *kallah*? What is the *simcha* that most people have by weddings? The food! People go to weddings and eat and eat and eat; weddings nowadays have become an entire evening for one to simply fulfill his physical desires! What does this have to with rejoicing a *chosson* and *kallah*?!

A person often gets caught up in all the good food there, and he often doesn't even get around to rejoicing the *chosson* and *kallah*. If we ask him, "Did you get to rejoice the *chosson/kallah*?" The answer is, "I didn't even think about that. I was too busy eating the food and having a good time."

If you ask him if he enjoyed the wedding, he might answer, "Sure, I enjoyed the wedding." *Baruch Hashem*, he enjoyed it. He enjoyed it all for himself; he didn't even think to rejoice the *chosson* or *kallah*. Can we call this *simcha*?! Is this the *simcha* of a wedding?!

The only happiness that we have today – conceptually - is (besides for Yom Tov) by a wedding, a *simchas chosson v'kallah*. But to our chagrin, *weddings* today are not about *simcha* – people go just for the food. They gratify their bodies through it, not their souls.

Changing

The choice that everyone has on this world is: If he will live life through his body, or through his soul.

A person should ask himself how much physical gratification he's getting, versus how much of his basic soul needs that he is getting. One should try thinking about this every day.

If anyone reflects, he'll find that most of the day is spent on physical gratification – whether it's coffee, smoking, food, newspapers, etc. Each to his own.

To begin to change this, one should try to make sure that he's giving himself at least a little attention each day to his soul's needs.

Today, pleasure is often only experienced sensually, with the physical. People often are completely devoid of experiencing any enjoyment whatsoever with regards to their souls.

A person can start to change this by making sure to give his soul a little pleasure each day. This is just the beginning step.

When a person then feels a desire for something physical, such as for food - if he feels that he can give it up for something that is a soul need, he is making progress with this. It shows that he has begun to change his perspective at least a little.

Someone who does this and gets used to this will come to an amazing discovery. He will begin to actually feel others. He will feel other's happiness when they make a *simcha*, and he will feel their sadness when they go through a loss. His soul will be able to feel the other's soul.

A Newly Developed Awareness

The more a person gets used to satisfying his soul's basic needs, he will begin to live a life of the soul. It will open a whole new kind of awareness in himself.

Most people identify themselves as a body and live life through that awareness. People know intellectually about the soul, but they are mostly experiencing life only through their body.

Once a person identifies himself more with his soul, he will feel like his body is a heavy weight upon him. He will feel like, "This body of mine that I'm carrying all the time is so heavy!" Even if he isn't a heavy person, he will still feel that his body is like a heavy weight upon him that he has to carry around. He used to think his body was himself, so he didn't feel this heaviness as a burden. He thought his body was "Me." Now that he has begun to identify himself as a soul, his body feels like something on top of him that's a heavy load. Slowly, his desires for the physical will listen.

This has to become a natural feeling toward oneself, and in this way, one will begin to naturally feel that others are souls as well – as opposed to feeling them as mere bodies of physical flesh.

Feeling Another's Soul

To give an example: When two friends meet each other and they shake each other's hands, what do they feel? Do they just feel each other's hands, or do they feel the other's soul? If the person only feels the other's hands, then he is acting with the same emotions with which a non-Jew lives life.

When a person meets another, why doesn't he feel if the other is in a happy mood or a sad mood? It is because he only feels the other's body. He doesn't feel the other's soul.

The more a person gives attention to his own soul's needs, the more he will naturally feel another soul, as he begins to pay attention to his own. He will feel both the emotional as well as the spiritual needs of others. Without feeling oneself as a soul, love for others doesn't even begin.

Of course, this doesn't mean that after beginning to change his mindset that he will have perfect love toward others; he will still feel bothered by some people. But at least he has begun to open up in himself the ability to love others, and he's on his way to building his love for others.

Leaving The Body And Entering The Soul

When we heard the Torah at Har Sinai, our souls left us. In other words, we left the perspective of the body and entered the perspective of our soul!

This shows us that the way to prepare for the Torah – [at least] one of the ways – is to leave our body's perspective and to instead enter into our soul a bit. This will resemble how the souls of the Jewish people left their bodies at Har Sinai.

May we be *zoche* to leave the thick materialism of this world and instead feel how we are a soul, beginning from the most basic needs of our soul [our emotional happiness], and then to the more spiritual needs of our soul, until we finally reach the highest part of our soul – the point of total *d'veykus* (attachment) with Hashem.

1.6| *The Spiritual Light of Shavuos*²⁹

The Two Levels of Learning and Receiving The Torah

The three days preceding the festival of Shavuos are called ‘the days of *Hagbalah*,’ the time where we prepare for receiving the Torah.

Our Sages state that when learning Torah, there are two stages. First we learn it in a cursory manner (“*ligras*”, or “*ligmar*”), and then we learn it with in-depth and analytical understanding (“*lisbar*”). Just as this is true with learning Torah, so is this true with how we must *receive* the Torah. First a person receives the Torah in the manner of “*ligras*”, and then he must receive it in the deeper manner, which is called “*lisbar*”.

It can happen that a person is even learning Torah on the level of ‘*lisbar*’, but his actual level of ‘*receiving*’ the Torah is still at the elementary level of ‘*ligras*’. There is supposed to first be a level of ‘*ligras*’ in receiving the Torah that is reached, and then a person can reach the receiving of the Torah on the level of ‘*lisbar*’.

Let us try to understand what the inner layer of receiving the Torah is, which is called ‘*lisbar*’.

‘Lisbar’: The Higher Revelation of Torah

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that the Torah emanates from the uppermost spiritual realms, and extends downward, all the way until the lowest realm, which is this ‘world of action’. Therefore, there are levels of receiving Torah, and not everyone is experiencing the same level of receiving the Torah.

Every year, the spiritual light contained in the festival of Shavuos returns at this time of the year, the time when the Torah was given, and a person has the chance to receive the Torah anew each year - according to the level of Torah that he is currently at. Every person is therefore able to receive a higher level of Torah than last year.

When someone is at the more perfected level of receiving the Torah, he receives the higher level of Torah when Shavuos comes – a level of Torah which purifies his entire being.

But if someone is not connected to that level of perfection, he receives Torah on the level he is currently at, which is limited to the low spiritual level he is at. When a person never reflects and he never thinks into this concept, it’s very possible that his level of receiving the Torah is at the lowest possible level to receive it on.

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We will try to give some examples of how we can conceptualize the perfected level of receiving the Torah, but this does not mean that a person who never reaches the perfect level is exempt from trying to reach it. Every person needs to understand that there is such a depth to the Torah that exists, and he must try to reach it as much as he can, on his own level.

The Torah Is Called ‘Woman of Valor’

During the three days of *Hagbalah* that precede the giving of the Torah, the Jewish nation was commanded by Hashem to refrain from marital intimacy. The simple understanding of this is, as the *Gemara* explains, that they had to be ritually pure in order to receive the Torah. But the deeper understanding is as follows.

The *Gemara* elsewhere says that night is for sleep, while day is for learning Torah; whereas Torah scholars fend off sleep so they can learn Torah at night. The power to have exertion in Torah study – where does it come from? How is a person able to do it? The superficial understanding of the matter is that just like a person can learn Torah at day, so can he learn it at night. By nature we get tired at night, but a person can fight this nature and stay up at night to learn Torah.

That is the simple understanding of how Torah scholars fend off sleep from their eyes in order to stay up at night and learn Torah. But there is a deeper understanding of this matter.

Adam was put to sleep and then Chavah was created. We see from this that there is a connection between the concepts of ‘sleep’ and ‘woman.’ Now we can understand the deeper the depth behind the commandment we had at Har Sinai to refrain from marital relations: we were told to stay away from woman, from the idea of “sleep”, so that we could return to the level of mankind before the creation of woman - when man was alone with Hashem.

Chazal state, “Therefore, man is created individual”. Although we have a *mitzvah* to be married, the inner state of the soul is to be ‘individual’, to be able to live without woman – to be alone, with Hashem.

This is the soul’s deep power to connect to the Torah on the level of “*Aishes Chayil*” (“woman of valor”). The Torah is called the ‘*Aishes Chayil*’ - just as woman bears children with man, so does the Torah bear children with man - through producing *Chiddushei Torah*.

So we were commanded at Har Sinai to abstain from woman, to abstain from having any “sleep” to our eyes - and to return to our original state, the nature of our soul, of being ‘individual’, where the Torah is called our “*Aishes Chayil*”.

But in order to get to such an intimate connection with the Torah, a person has to enter the Torah, with all of the depths of the soul – and to do, he must be able to disconnect from the materialistic lifestyle of the world around him.

This is an example of what it means to have deep acceptance of the Torah, and it is far from most people; but this is the example.

Torah – Beyond Space, Time, and Soul

Here is another example that can help us get to the inner level of receiving the Torah.

There is a well-known concept of our Sages called “*Olam, Shanah, Nefesh*” (World, Time, and Soul), that every concept exists on the three planes of space, time, and soul. [The Torah is above all of these three planes, however. It is above all space, it is above all time, and it is above our souls.]

Receiving the Torah, in its complete form, is connected to the concept of how “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” The Torah came before creation; Hashem looked into it to create the world. So it is above space and time. It also preceded the creation of man, so it is above the soul as well.

When a person merits to penetrate deeply into his soul, he can go above time and space, and above his own soul as well; he receives the Torah there, at its complete level, at the level of Torah before the creation of the world.

All of this was present when we stood at Har Sinai. The Sages state that when we stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, Hashem first opened up all the layers of heaven and showed us “*Ain Od Milvado*”, the deep revelation that “there is nothing besides for Him”. This was clearly not just for the purpose of performing a miracle of opening the heavens. It was to show us that Torah came before the world. It was the stunning revelation to us that the Torah came before this world.

We count 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*, but the day of the giving of the Torah, which is the 50th day, is not counted. The depth of this is because Torah it is above time.

We find this revealed as well in terms of our soul: our souls left us at every word of Hashem that we heard at Sinai³⁰. It was because the Torah is *above* our soul, therefore our souls could not bear its light.

There is exertion in Torah, physical exertion in Torah, which we must have. That is one level of receiving the Torah: preparing for it by exerting ourselves in its study. But the more complete level of Torah is reflected in the words of our Sages, “One must ‘kill’ himself, in the tents of Torah.” It means to be at the level of standing at Sinai - when our souls left us. This is the depth of how we see that Torah is above our soul.

It was above all space as well, for Hashem opened all the heavens and showed us the Torah; in other words, it is above the world - it is above any place. It is also above all of time, as we see from the fact that the day of the giving of the Torah is not counted in *Sefiras HaOmer*. And it is above our soul, for our souls left us at Sinai when we heard it.

When we understand this properly, we can perceive that “receiving the Torah” is essentially for one to leave the sphere of human comprehension; to leave place, time, and soul; to leave all of man’s own *hasagah* (comprehension); to leave the entire life he recognizes.

³⁰ *Shabbos 88a*

As long as a person remains connected to his current level of life and he does not know how to aspire beyond it, he can only receive the Torah from where he stands - which will be very limited.

Shavuos: Returning To The State of Pre-Sin

The day of receiving the Torah, in a certain way, is the loftiest day of the year. This is because throughout the year, we are in the state of after the sin of Adam. But once every year, when it comes the festival of Shavuos, we return to the level of before the sin of Adam; because when we stood at Sinai, the spirit of impurity that had been on us since the first sin was removed. That spiritual light returns to us every year on Shavuos.

(On a more subtle note, there are really two points in time during the year in which we return to the state of pre-sin: Friday afternoon, which was the time in Creation where Adam didn't sin yet; and on Shavuos, when we were rectified from the sin of Adam, and it was before we sinned with the Golden Calf.)

The time of the giving of the Torah is the day of the year that is designated specially for the Jewish people, when Hashem set us apart from the other nations in giving us the Torah. It is the day of the year that is unique to the Jewish people. It is also the day in which we return to the pre-sin. It is the holy day of the year in which it is revealed a world in which there is no reality of sin. It is the one day of the year where the soul can connect itself to a level beyond where it normally is.

How can our soul go beyond its normal level? When our soul deeply connects to Torah and to its Giver that is found in it, Hashem, it can go above the normal constraints of place and time (and itself).

Shavuos: The Higher Revelation of Torah That Is Above The Self

Normally, during the rest of the year, there is exertion in Torah, in which one strives to reach his own place in the Torah, which is reached through his own *hasagah* (comprehension). During the rest of the year, each person strives to reach his *individual* portion in the Torah, his own place in Torah that's unique to him, which he reaches through toiling to understand it.

But on Shavuos, the time of the giving of the Torah, which is above all time and place and soul, it is the day where we *all* received the Torah, thus there is a level of Torah revealed on this day that goes *above* the individual's role in Torah. It reveals a level of Torah that is on a higher and collective level, as opposed to a Torah on the individual level.

When searching to reach true level of Torah, firstly, we have an *avodah* to reveal more and more Torah upon the world, exerting ourselves day and night in it, each of us trying to reach our own *hasagah* in it. When it comes to this, each person can come to his own revelation of Torah, using his

own intellect and soul; each person has an individual place in the Torah, which he can reach through exerting himself in it.

But on Shavuos, a level of Torah that is above the individual is revealed. If one is truly connected to that place, he connects to the Torah that is above his normal *hasagah*.

Therefore, the depth of “receiving the Torah” is not just to exert ourselves in it and try to understand it. It is to connect to it in a way that reflects the statement, “To part from it, I cannot” - to deeply connect to it. That is the true spiritual light contained in the festival of Shavuos.

‘Exile’ of the Soul

As we are in exile, our own soul is in exile as well. It is ‘exiled’ in two ways.

Firstly, it is exiled by the bad *middos* that tarnish its outer layers. The days of *Sefiras HaOmer* come to rectify our bad *middos* and can help us come out of the inner imprisonment which bad *middos* place us in.

But the other aspect of the soul’s exile, which is a deeper kind of inner exile, is the fact that each person only seeks to understand his own personal comprehension in Torah. This limits and constricts a person to the level of his own individual understanding.

When we stood at Sinai, we all stood “with one heart”. The exile of the soul, on a deeper level, is that each person is stuck within himself, and he is not unified with others.

Currently, our level of “receiving of the Torah” is at the level of the second *Luchos*, which contain a drawback: it is a Torah that is individually understood, each person according to his own understanding. But the truer understanding of Torah, the Torah we received with the first set of *Luchos* (which is contained in the festival of Shavuos that returns each year), is the level of Torah that goes beyond our own personal level of *hasagah*. It was the kind of Torah that was given to all of us collectively, as opposed to individually.

The festival of Shavuos reveals a point that is above the level of our souls, so we can return to the level of pre-sin every Shavuos. We cannot reach it perfectly, though; only in the times of *Moshiach* will we live in it totally. But although we cannot reach it perfectly and we cannot live it, we can still have some access to its light, by directing our lives towards it.

We can direct our lives towards this point of perfection that exists above all space, time, and soul - by *yearning* for it. In that way, we are at least somewhat connected to it.

Leaving “Katnus” and Entering “Gadlus”

When one lives a life of *katnus* (small-mindedness) and he thinks this is “life”, and that is the greatest “*katnus*” possible. The words here were not meant to inspire you to live on such a high level

like this all the time. That would be impossible. The point of hearing these words is so that we can inspire ourselves to take ourselves out of a perspective of *katnus* towards life, and bring us to closer to a “*gadlus*” kind of life.

Striving Towards Perfection

It should be our aspiration to try to connect to this higher level of Torah, by disconnecting somewhat from being limited to our own individual existence, and to try to connect ourselves to a plane that goes beyond our personal understanding.

Again, we cannot live this concept totally. But we can be headed towards it; we can strive towards it. “*Sof maaseh, b’machshavah techilah*” – “The end of actions, is first with thought.” The goal, the “end of actions”, can still be in the background of our minds, even though we are not there yet at that point of perfection.

We can know that although we cannot reach this level totally as we live on This World, we can still yearn for it, and thus be somewhat connected to it. (We have Shabbos, which only ‘resembles’ *Olam HaBa*, and it is not the actual *Olam HaBa* itself). We must know clearly where we should want to get to – a point above time and space and soul that is perfect and above our own individual existence.

Of course, one should not delude himself and think that he is on this high level we described. Nor should a person feel that the words here do not speak to him at all. Rather, we can know exactly where we stand right now, along with aspirations to get to the highest levels, yearning for that great perfection.³¹

In Conclusion

I hope that the words here have spoken to you and given you a greater feeling of connection to the Torah, and that your souls should become directed towards this point of perfection described. May all of return to that place perfectly - saying “*Naaseh V’Nishmah*” all at once.

³¹ See also Tefillah #018 – *To Live In A Perfect Place*, and Tefillah #045 – *To Yearn For A Pure World*.

1.7 | *Returning to Har Sinai*³²

Clear Emunah

By the giving of the Torah, when Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He said, “*I am Hashem Your G-d (who took you out of Egypt).*”

There is a dispute in the *Rishonim* if belief in Hashem is counted as one of the 613 *mitzvos*. Some say that *emunah* is a *mitzvah*. Other *Rishonim* say that it’s not possible to list *emunah* as a *mitzvah*, because a person cannot be commanded to believe in Hashem; for if he wouldn’t believe, *chas v’shalom*, it would be possible for people not to feel commanded in this *mitzvah*.

It is explained, however, that even those *Rishonim* who do count *emunah* as a *mitzvah* are not saying that we are simply commanded to have *emunah*; rather, that it is a *mitzvah* upon us to let internalize our *emunah*, more and more. We cannot be commanded to actually have *emunah* - but we can be commanded to let our *emunah* penetrate into our *daas* (inner awareness) and into the depths of our heart.

The *mitzvah* to have *emunah* in Hashem, then, is to be clear about it - using the power of *daas* in our mind. When we have clear *emunah* in our mind, it can then penetrate into our heart, into its innermost depths.

Our Emunah Was In Exile

“*I am Hashem your G-d, who took you out of Egypt*”. When Hashem took us out of Egypt, what did He take us out of? Simply speaking, He took us out of the land of Egypt. But the depth is because our very *emunah*, itself, was in exile!

When we were in Egypt, Moshe complained to Hashem that the people are not believing in him to perform miracles. In other words, their very *emunah* was in exile.

Until the people were absolutely sure that Moshe was the “faithful shepherd” of Hashem who would take them out, their own *emunah* was in exile. Hashem promised Avraham that his descendants would inherit Eretz Yisrael, and Avraham asked Hashem for a sign for this. There were *Rishonim* that say that this was some imperfection on his level of *emunah*, and for this he was punished that his descendants would endure exile. Thus, the entire exile came about through a lack of *emunah* – and even more so, the nature of the very exile itself was that there was a lack of *emunah*.

The Egyptian exile was full of difficult labor, the bricks and the mortar, the terrible physical suffering, the *avodas perach* (cruel labor) in which men had to do women’s labor and women had to

³² שבועות 016 – אמונה

men's labor, etc. But this was all but the physical aspect of the exile. As we know, everything in Creation consists of two layers – *chitzoniyus* (a superficial layer) and *pnimiyus* (an inner layer).³³ The *chitzoniyus* of the exile was the physical suffering there, while the “soul” of the exile, the *pnimiyus* of the exile, was the absence of the light of *emunah* from our minds and hearts. When *emunah* isn't revealed to us - *that* is a deep form of exile.

There was exile to our bodies there, but there was exile as well to our souls. We are made of body and soul. Just as the body is made of many parts, so is the soul made of many parts. The root of the soul is *emunah*. It is the ‘head’ of the Jew's soul. Egypt was the root of all exiles to come. It was the root of all suffering to our soul – an exile upon the root of our soul, our *emunah*. Thus, the depth of the redemption from Egypt was that our *emunah* became revealed. We believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant. At first the people did not believe in Moshe, and now that there was a redemption from Egypt, they were able to believe in Moshe. From that, we became eligible to receive the Torah.

The Revelation of Perfect Emunah

The giving of the Torah revealed a clarity of *emunah*, a perfected level of *emunah*. The Sages say that when Hashem said I am Hashem your G-d, “the words of Torah became carved onto our hearts”. The Vilna Gaon³⁴ says something a bit different: “*Emunah* became carved onto their hearts”.

At the splitting of the sea, everyone saw the miracle and believed. The Sages say that a typical maidservant there reached levels of vision that even the prophet Yechezkel did not see. They saw great visions of *emunah*, but it wasn't yet engraved in the depths of their heart. Only at the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said “*I am Hashem your G-d*”, did *emunah* become carved on their hearts. Our *emunah*, ever since then, has become imprinted onto our hearts. That *emunah* knows no end and it is the very *havayah* (essence) of a Jew's soul. At the giving of the Torah, the *posuk* says that all souls were present – those that were there, and even those that weren't there. Some were there in body and soul, some were there only in soul – but all of the Jewish people were there. There, the depth of *emunah* was engraved on our hearts.

Remembering Har Sinai: Returning To Our Emunah

But it didn't last for long. As we know, the sin with the Golden Calf made us once again plummet to the damaged level of mankind where we are cursed with death. But the *emunah* still didn't leave us! It has been covered over and hidden. Therefore, *emunah* is in the depths of every Jew's soul, but it is just very covered over, where it remains unrevealed. “*Remember the day you stood*

³³ *Chovos HaLevovos*

³⁴ *Gra on Shir HaShirim*

before Hashem at Choirev.” What is the depth of remembering Har Sinai? It is to remember the clear *emunah* we had there. There are many facts to this *mitzvah*, but the root of the giving of the Torah was “*I am Hashem your G-d.*” The depth of remembering Har Sinai is to return to the clear level of *emunah* we had there, as much as we can, which resembles our level of standing at Sinai.

But the question of all questions is: How do we return to it?

The Current Generation and the ‘50th Level of Spiritual Impurity’

Our Sages said that in Egypt, the people were steeped into the 49th level of spiritual impurity, and they were on the verge of entering the 50th and worst level. Had they remained even one more moment, they would have descended into the 50th, so they had to get out right away, or else they would go lost forever in their depravity.

The *Ohr HaChaim* writes that in our final exile, the ‘50th of impurity’ (defilement) has already been opened. If so, he asks, why did our Sages say that we couldn’t get out of Egypt had we entered the 50th level of impurity, yet we are guaranteed to leave this current exile even though we are in the 50th level? The *Ohr HaChaim* answers that in Egypt, they didn’t yet have the Torah, so there was no way for them to get out of it had they entered. Therefore, they had to get out right away, lest they become forever entrenched. But in our current exile, we have the Torah, and with the power of the Torah, we can leave even the worst level of impurity.

Based upon his words, it must be clear to all of us what kind of time we are found in; what kind of situation we are in. We are in the 50th gate of impurity! What they didn’t descend to in Egypt, that is what we are in now. If one doesn’t know this, he is like a person who shakes *lulav* and *esrog* on Pesach; he doesn’t know the time he is in.

The time we are in is in “the 50th gate of impurity”. It is our hope each day that we be redeemed from it, but we must understand *this is where we are found* as of now; this is where we are.

There was never an exile like this. In Egypt they didn’t get to this point we are in. They were in the 49th level, and they were redeemed from it. The 49 ‘gates of impurity’ essentially represent 49 evil forces that prevent the light of *emunah* from being shined onto the soul. (In the side of holiness, there are also 49 levels of purity, which can counter this).

When the Torah was given, we were first told “*Anochi Hashem*”; it was revealed to us the depth of *emunah*, the 50th gate of holiness, which can take us out of the ‘50th gate of impurity’ that is the total absence of belief in G-d.

There were two times in history when we needed to be armed with the ‘50th gate of holiness’ in order to save ourselves from evil. One time was then, at Har Sinai, when we were rescued from the impurity of Egypt. The other time is now! In our own generation, when we are in the 50th gate of impurity, there is no way to be saved spiritually, unless we return to the ‘50th level of holiness’ that was at Har Sinai. The deeper our exile is, the deeper of a spiritual light our soul needs.

When *emunah* is perfect, that is the ‘50th gate of holiness’. By contrast, the ‘50th gate of impurity’ is when a person reaches a point where he cannot believe.

When Truth Vanishes

The world which we are in now is called by our Sages as “*alma d’shikra*” (world of falsity). To be more specific, the Sages said that it is “mostly false, and minimally truthful”. The few people who do have truth get fewer and fewer as the generations continue, until we will get all the way to the end of the exile, where truth is almost completely gone from the world, as the *Mishnah* in the end of *Tractate Sotah* has predicted³⁵.

There, the Sages said that if there is *emes* (truth), there is *emunah*. It follows, then, that if there is no *emes*, there is no *emunah* either. It places a person into a situation where, although there is the light of complete *emunah* slowly being revealed onto the world as we head into the future redemption, at the same time, there is also a darkness enveloping the generation, which totally obscures a person from *emunah*.

The depth of the exile we are in is that people don’t even know where *emes* (truth) is found. Simply speaking, the *emes* is found in the lives of our *Gedolim* (leaders). But where is *emes* found in the world? Where is it??

Emes used to be openly revealed. It used to be that you could go to a place and see openly the *emes* there. In today’s times, though, there is no place where *emes* is openly found. Everything is concealed. Even the writings of our Sages today are being corrupted by people today who are explaining their words as they see fit. There is no place in the world where *emunah* shines completely. There are a few people who are connected to that *emunah*, but there is no place in the world where we can find it.

As a result, there is much confusion everywhere. Every person, no matter what sect of *Yiddishkeit* he comes from, is facing various kinds of confusing thoughts about life.

There are also some groups who feel that only *they* have the truth and that only *they* live correctly, but this very notion itself is false. There is no such thing. The few people that truly seek truth do exist, as in every generation. But the general lifestyle of people today is false.

Returning To Emes: How?

How indeed can a person reach the *emes*? How do we sift out the truth from all the falsity that has mixed up the world?

³⁵ *Sotah* 49a

It is through the power of returning to the event of Sinai. That is the general definition of the concept. Now let us explain how we can return to there.

The Power To Separate Ourselves

The *Bnei Yisrael* at Har Sinai were commanded to prepare for three days before the Torah and separate from society; they were told to isolate themselves and be separate from everything. Even the *Erev Rav* were apart from us then, as the *Ramban* says. Thus, the giving of the Torah essentially enabled each Jew to separate himself from everything and be connected to nothing else, other than his own soul, the Torah, and the Creator.

The Sages recount that “For every word of Hashem, their souls left them”. At first, we were all connected with each other, with “one heart”. We all had *ahavas Yisrael* then. What could be greater than that? But that was only a step to get to a greater goal. The greater goal was to reach the point where our souls left us. That was the apex of the event.

These represent two totally different levels: being unified with others, and being apart from others.

The unity we had before we received the Torah came to us from purifying ourselves for 49 days. But in order to receive the Torah on the 50th day, we needed the clear *emunah*. Thus, we needed to leave the body and gain the view that comes entirely from our soul. If we would have remained in our body, we wouldn't be as purified to accept the Torah; our body always holds us back.

We must understand a very deep point. We are made of soul and body. Our body causes us to connect to all that goes on in this world, which doesn't allow truth to shine completely on us. What, then, is the solution? We must leave the body! “For every word of Hashem, their souls left their bodies”. So too, we must leave the ‘body’ – we must leave our connection to materialism.

One who lives only with his body will fall together with the rest of the generation who are pulled after the body. We are referring to all the many kinds of gadgets of this world that sway a person after them.

If a person has the higher perspective that comes from his soul, he can be saved; he has hope. But if one wants to remain in the body, he is far from truth.

If one merits for even one moment how a truthful and Heavenly existence feels like, he sees a whole different world. Many things which he had previously thought were truthful, he will now see as totally false.

The giving of the Torah gave us the strength to have the view of the soul as it is in the body (when we all stood as one man, “with one heart”, and we were connected with all Jews), as well as a deeper aspect: the power to leave the body, and only have the soul's viewpoint. In other words, we can see life from the perspective of the soul in a body (which is the external perspective), or we can see life from the soul without a body (the inner perspective). Both aspects are necessary.

The Two Sides of Our Life

Now we will speak about how to make this matter more practical.

There is love of the Creator, love of the Torah, and love for the Jewish people. Love of the Jewish people is when the souls are connected with each other deeply. But that is all one side to the coin. The other side of ourselves is to feel separate from society.

If one takes either extreme, it is detrimental. One who only secludes himself and is not connected to others is forgoing the purpose of Creation. But if one only knows of *ahavas Yisrael* and he does not know how to separate himself from others, he is not living truthfully either.

Every person must have two sides to his life. One side of his life must include others and be deeply connected to other Jews in love. But the other side of his life must be able to isolate from others. As Chazal say, “Therefore, man was created individual.”

(This is part of the cycle of “*ratzu v’shav*” (“advancing and retreating”) which we must live with and alternate with.)

There are two different viewpoints in us – our ‘outer’ aspect and our ‘inner’ aspect. The ‘outer’ aspect was the fact that we were all connected together at Har Sinai, with one heart; we were each united with each other. But our ‘inner’, deeper aspect than this was what came afterwards: our souls left our bodies. We became “one” with Hashem. We separated from everything and everyone and integrated our being with Hashem; we each became individuals.

The tendency of man is to seek either one of these two natures, and we do not like the idea of maintaining opposite aspects in our personality. Some people love to pursue *ahavas Yisrael* as the center of life, others think that love of Torah is all that there is to life, and others think that loving the Creator is the central aspect of life. As for the rest of the Torah, it’s doubtful if they will keep those other parts...

But if we want to know what the complete and true way to live life is, it is to be able to live alone with Hashem, along with love for others. When we have these two aspects together, we are properly balanced and living life correctly.

On one hand, we must love others, accept others, and greet each person with a smile. Chazal say that one should learn from all people. But at the same time, we each need to be able to be individuals – *totally*.

Seeing The Truth

Herein lays the secret of life.

When one reaches this state, he sees the truth according to the level of his unique soul. There are so many different opinions in the world, so many different ways of how to view things, so many

ways of serving Hashem. The Sages said, “Just as all their faces are not equal, so are all *de’os* (opinions) not equal.” But each person can see the truth that is meant for *him* to see.

This is not referring to the truth which is gleaned from outer sources, which is usually full of falsity and only a little bit truthful.

If one doesn’t reach this place in himself, he has never clarified where he is and what his unique role is; and he surely doesn’t realize how affected he is by the outside. He has no idea which parts he picked up are good and which parts need to be thrown out. And if a person simply accepts everything he comes across which he has picked up from the outside, he will definitely fall by the wayside, into the great mixture of good and evil that is out there.

Preparing To Receive The Torah

When we think about what it means to prepare for the Torah, we must seek an inner kind of preparation, and not a kind of preparation that is superficial. We have to make sure that we are not just going through the same motions we go through each year, continuing a routine kind of life.

We instead need to reach our innermost depths, the place in ourselves where our soul is ready to leave everything around us. There, in that place in ourselves, we can merit the light of *emunah*, the true light that was at the giving of the Torah.

Then and Now

It’s very possible that many people who hear this will find these words far-fetched. But we all stood at Har Sinai; would we have said then also that it’s too much for us to hear the word of Hashem, and that we’re not capable?

The words here are close only to those who search for truth - and they are far from anyone who does not really yearn that much for an inner kind of life.

We must know that the generation today is as upside-down as can be. It is totally not like how we were at Har Sinai. It’s like two opposite sides of a coin. By Har Sinai, the ‘50th gate of holiness’ was revealed there. In our generation, the ‘50th gate of impurity’ is here! (If someone merits it, he can leave the impurity and enter holiness). There was never a generation as far from the giving of the Torah as in today’s generation – and surely the next generation after this is going to be further.

If someone says that it is the opposite, being that there is more Torah learning today which was never here before, all we have to do is take a look into what’s going on inside people’s hearts. Then we can see what kind of ugly level of the ‘50th gate of impurity’ we have descended to. Almost all of us have fallen into it.

Examining Our Way of Living

I will ask a very clear question. Is there anyone here who thinks that the way of life he lives is a true kind of life? I am not talking against any one particular sect of *Yiddishkeit* today; I am referring to the general way that we are living. Is anyone confident that his way of *Yiddishkeit* is the true way for him to follow?

The first question to ask is if one is taking a truth path or not. The second question is, that even if the path one is taking is a true path, how does one know if that path of *Yiddishkeit* is good for *him* to take? There are ways that are true and ways that are false. Even the ways that are 'true' are only 'true' for those who are *meant* to take that path.

If a person has thought about this question, he will find that there is no end to how much we can search for truth. As an example, the Alter of Novhardok zt"l said that if there is a person who says even one statement that is perfectly true, he will cross the ocean to meet him.

It seems that the *emes* (truth) is found in all of the *sefarim hakedoshim* which we know of, and it seems that that we are all basically "on the *derech*", and that we just have a few things that we need to rectify. But you should know that it is not quite like that. The *emes* today is very hidden.

Most people cannot deal with the *emes*, not because it is difficult for them to change, but because they simply do not know what the *emes* is; they don't recognize it.

Reb Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l said sharply, about his own *yeshivah*, that people have been listening to him for 30 years, yet they haven't even begun to understand what he wants when he speaks. This didn't mean that people have a hard time carrying out what he says and following his advice. They didn't even *begin* to know what he's talking about.

People today can hear a *shmuess*, write it down, and think they understand it, and they go on to live their life, confident that they understand what was said...but after 120, a person sees the truth. He sees if his life was really spent pursuing Hashem or not. Our Sages write that every person merits at least one moment in his life where he sees the truth. A person can then realize what kind of life he is living and what kind of life he must now live.

Understandably, we all make mistakes, and none of us are perfect. But the question is if we are heading towards the inner and true point of life. That is the deepest question we can ask about our life.

Learning Torah, doing *mitzvos*, loving the Torah, and loving other Jews are all but general descriptions of what we have to do. These are all true, and there is no doubt about this. But the question is if our soul is heading towards truth.

At the giving of the Torah, we all became aware of the total truth. That was the complete level of our *emunah*. Complete *emunah* did simply not mean that we knew Hashem existed and that He runs the world. That is all true, but the depth of clear and complete *emunah* means that we do not see anything other than the pursuit of *emunah*. The Torah, the *mitzvos*, *ahavas Hashem*, *ahavas*

HaTorah, ahavas Hashem, are all things that shine the light of complete *emunah*. They are all tools that bring us to a greater goal.

We reached it at Har Sinai, when we understood clearly what the truth was. But ever since we sinned with the Golden Calf and we fell from our pure state, we tend to think that there are “other” things than this that we need to pursue. Even holy acts such as learning Torah and doing *mitzvos* can be masking our true priority in life.

Chazal say that all *tzaddikim* will say in the future, “This is my G-d that I hoped for.” How much time in a person’s day does he spend thinking about this and yearning for this? We have many tools we use, the tools that are Torah, *mitzvos*, *chesed* – all of these are but *tools* that must lead us to a greater goal!

Being ‘Alone’: Separating From The World

In order to live such a life, we cannot be connected to this world.

This is not limited to separating from the streets and keeping ourselves in the *beis midrash*. That’s just the first step. The more inner aspect is that we need to enter our own souls. We need seclusion, as our Sages say, that one must seclude himself each day and think about the truth.³⁶ But this is not referring to physical seclusion alone; it means to enter the most secluded place in our own soul. Yaakov fought “alone” – and so do we have a power to be “alone” in our own souls. The giving of the Torah enabled us to be a nation that is apart and alone from the other nations, at the same time allowing us to feel connected with all souls of the Jewish people. But after that, our souls left us, and we each became “alone” with Hashem. We entered the “individual” aspect in us which enables us, individually, to connect to the reality of the Creator.

Practically speaking, one needs to set aside time every day to separate himself from everything. The first thing you need to do to disconnect yourself from all that’s going on in the world. Along with this, as we said, is that a person must also make sure that he feels a deep love for other Jews.

The Balance Between Connection and Being Alone

However, *ahavas Yisrael* is a very delicate matter, because there is a very narrow and fine border between how much we should connect to others and at what point we should disassociate. It is very easy for a person to fall into bad influences when we too connected with people, even if we have a lot of *ahavas Yisrael*.

To give a dramatic example, one of the students of the Baal Shem Tov would see people and return them to *teshuvah*, and people would come to him and tell him all of their sins. He eventually fell into those very same sins that people were confiding to him about.

³⁶ *Ramchal in Derech Eitz Chaim*

One who is very connected to his own soul is balanced. He is able to have deep *ahavas Yisrael* yet he can also avoid the influences of others. But if someone is not balanced in his soul, he is not fortified enough spiritually, and his involvement with *ahavas Yisrael* will be detrimental to his spiritual situation. He will end up stumbling; it will not be a path that brings him to *emes*. Even our *tzaddikim* who succeeded with their *ahavas Yisrael* were only able to do so because they also knew how to isolate themselves from others.

Leaving The 50th Gate of Impurity

These words are deep, not just intellectually, but because they are deep matters of our soul. It is describing a way of life which cannot be seen on the surface of this world we see. But that is where life is found. On the streets, there is nothing but death there.

The words here are subtle and sensitive, and if they are misunderstood, they can be detrimental; and indeed, these words can be easily misunderstood. But if we really want to live a truthful life, we need to develop both our external and internal sides of life. On our external side of life, we need *ahavas Yisrael* and we need to learn Torah in-depth, but we also need to develop our inner side: to be able to live ‘alone’ from the world.

Hashem opened all the heavens at Har Sinai and showed us that He is the only One. The depth of this is that He revealed to each of us our ‘individual’ aspect. If one reaches his ‘individual’ aspect and he has succeeded in separating totally from all outside influences, that is how he will go free from the ‘50th gate of impurity’. When one reaches this place in himself, instead of being influenced by others for evil, he cannot be influenced at all, and instead, he influences others.

Of course, if he does not balance his ‘individual’ aspect with love for others, then he will simply become stubborn and unaccepting of others, and that is why he is uninfluenced. But if he has attained the balance, of being connected deeply to all Jewish souls as well as knowing how to be ‘individual’, he has gotten it right, and he is a kind of person who can avoid all influences.

In Conclusion

This is the *only* advice that can help a person avoid all the outside influences today. It is called the level of the “giving of the Torah” that essentially enables us to leave the ‘50th gate of impurity’.

The influences that are found in the world today are so destructive to the soul that the only way to be saved from them is to become ‘individual’ and unfazed by what goes on in the world. Upon reaching that place in oneself, one is not influenced by anything, and instead, he influences others, for holiness.

May we merit Hashem’s help, all of us, to return to standing at Har Sinai, and receive the Torah completely, and merit the complete redemption, speedily, and today. Amen.

1.8 | Seeing Hashem In Creation ³⁷

Shavuos and Bikkurim

Besides being the time when the Torah was given, the festival of Shavuos is also called “*Chag HaBikkurim*”, the time when the *bikkurim* (first fruit) were brought. What is the connection between receiving the Torah, with the *bikkurim*?

If Shavuos contains both of these aspects, it must not be a coincidence. There must be some connection between the two concepts; they express the essence of the festival somehow. What, indeed, is the connection between *bikkurim* with Shavuos - the time of the giving of the Torah?

The Two Beginnings of Creation

The Torah begins with the letter “*beis*” (“*Beraishis*”³⁸), whereas the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai began with the letter “*Aleph*” (“*Anochi Hashem*”³⁹). These are the two beginnings of creation – there was a physical beginning of Creation, “*Beraishis*”, which began with the letter *beis*, and there was a spiritual beginning of Creation, the giving of the Torah, “*Anochi Hashem*”, which began with *aleph*.

The Torah begins with the description of physical Creation: the creation of the skies and earth, the water, etc. The Sages said that the Torah really should have begun with the first commandment we were given when we left Egypt, “*This month shall be to you*” [the *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new month]. That was our spiritual beginning. It was revealed through the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said “*Anochi Hashem*” (“I am Hashem, your G-d”).

“Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”⁴⁰. There are two parts to this – there was the fact that Hashem looked into the Torah, which is the spiritual roots of Creation, and there was the fact that He created the world, which represents physical Creation that He created from the Torah. Creation is essentially an expanded point of the root it came from: the Torah. “*Anochi Hashem*” was thus the revelation of “Hashem looked into the Torah.”

Which came first – the fact that Hashem created, or the fact that He looked into the Torah? First, Hashem looked into the Torah. From the perspective of time, which came after the Torah was given, it is “*Beraishis*” that came before “*Anochi Hashem*”. But at the roots of Creation, it was really *Anochi Hashem* that came before *Beraishis* – because first Hashem looked into the Torah, and then

37 שבועות 016 – אמונה 37

38 “*In the beginning*”

39 “*I am Hashem your G-d*”

40 Zohar, parshas Terumah 161b

He created the world. Just as *Rosh HaShanah* is called “*HaYom Haras Olam*” – the birth of the world – so is the giving of the Torah the revelation of a new beginning, another beginning, a spiritual beginning. It was the beginning that is “*Anochi, Hashem.*”

The giving of the Torah did not just reveal the spiritual beginning of creation. It revealed a way in which we can see the physical creation through a spiritual lens. It is essentially the spiritual viewpoint on reality, where we see physical creation through the lens of Torah; where we see “*Anochi Hashem*” everywhere.

When a person takes a look at Creation, he doesn’t necessarily see it through a spiritual lens, thus he doesn’t see the “*Anochi Hashem*” in it. But there is a way for us to see Creation through a spiritual lens, and then we see Creation as all one expression of “*Anochi Hashem.*” It was revealed at the giving of the Torah: a way for us to reveal the spiritual root behind all that we see in this physical creation; to see the creation through “looking into the Torah”.

Shavuos: Sanctifying Creation

The *Gemara* says that “According to all opinions, on *Atzeres* (Shavuos), we need “*lachem*” (a day that belongs “to you”, to have physical enjoyment), for it was the day when the Torah was given.”⁴¹ When it comes to the other festivals, there is an argument amongst the Sages if the entire day of the festival should be devoted to spiritual pursuits⁴² or if there should be partial enjoyment that is physical; but when it comes to the festival of Shavuos, all agree that it requires physical enjoyment – for it was “the day that the Torah was given.”

This is perplexing. If Shavuos is such a spiritual time, the day when the Torah was given, shouldn’t it be a totally spiritual pleasure? Shouldn’t we be commanded to learn Torah all day on Shavuos, with no food and no drink? Instead, we are precisely told by our Sages to make sure to eat and drink on such a spiritual day like this?!

But it is because when the Torah was given, it was not only our spirituality that was given to us. It revealed how we can see the One who created this world, in the world that we see.

Seeing Hashem Through Creation

“*Istakel B’Oirasa, U’Bara Alma*” – “Hashem looked into the Torah, and created the world [from it]”⁴³. It is our own *avodah* to use this world and see Him in it – to see the “*Istakel B’Oirasa*” (“He looked into the Torah”) within the ‘*Bara Alma*’ (creation).

⁴¹ *Pesachim 68b*

⁴² *Such as Torah learning, prayer, and thoughts of attachment to G-d*

⁴³ *Zohar, parshas Terumah 161b*

We find that at the giving of the Torah, Hashem opened all the Heavens and showed us “*Ain Od Milvado*” (There is nothing else besides Him). In other words, He showed us how we can see the ‘*Istakel B’Oiraisa*’ through the ‘*Bara Alma*’ – how we could see *Him* through this creation. He showed us *Who* looked into the Torah – Hashem Himself - and *what* he looked into, which was the Torah.

Thus, on Shavuos, the giving of the Torah, all opinions of our Sages agree that we need *lachem*, a day that is “for you” to have the physical pleasures of food and drink: because the giving of the Torah reveals how this physical world, this Creation, this “*Bara Alma*”, can be used to see the “*Istakel B’Oiraisa*” – the One Who looked into the Torah to create the world.

Bikkurim – The Revelation of Beginnings

Now we can understand why Shavuos is also the day to bring *bikkurim*. The *bikkurim* were the first fruit; they represent beginnings. A *bechor*, a firstborn is also a beginning; he is the first child. The father is called *av*, which begins with letter *Aleph*, while his firstborn son is a *bechor*, which begins with the letter *beis*. Again we see that the concept of two beginnings, one with *Aleph* and one with *Beis*.

This also reflects the two beginnings of Creation – *Beraishis*, and the Torah. “*Beraishis*” is the beginning of physical creation, which is like the *bechor*/firstborn, which begins with the letter ‘*beis*’. Torah, which began with “*Anochi Hashem*”, begins with the letter *Aleph*, which is like the *av*/father.

On Shavuos, we bring *bikkurim*, because we reveal how the ‘beginning’ reveals the ‘One who looked into the Torah’: the Creator. We brought *bikkurim* to the *Beis HaMikdash*, to Hashem, to show that the *bikkurim*, which represent the ‘beginning’ of Creation, reveals “*Anochi Hashem*”, the One who looked into the Torah to create the world.

Exertion In Torah: The Power To Change Creation

When Hashem gave the Torah to us, besides for this simple fact, there was another power that came with it. Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, and when He gave us the Torah, He essentially gave us as well the power to be able to look into the Torah and see the world from it.

There are two aspects in the Torah. There is the Torah itself, and there is the fact that Hashem looked into it. Thus the Torah is a lens on Creation. The Sages, throughout the generations, were able to see Creation from the lens of Torah – and they were able to change Creation, through the power of Torah.

What about us? Do we have the power as well to change Creation when we learn Torah? The *Ohr HaChaim* wrote that those who exert themselves in Torah study are given the means to alter nature. A good example of this was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his colleagues.

When anyone learns Torah *lishmah*, he is given the power to miraculously change Creation. How is that we have this power? It is because when Hashem gave us the Torah, He gave us the power to view Creation through the Torah. If not for this aspect, we would have just been given the Torah alone, and we wouldn't be able to affect Creation with it. But now that Hashem gave us the Torah along with the power to "look into the Torah" from which He created the world, ever since then, anyone who truly looks into the Torah can change nature.

The Snake said to Chavah, "Just as He creates world, so can you create world." However, every concept exists both in the side of evil as well as in the side of holiness. There is a holy way to use the Snake's argument: just as Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, so did He give us the power of '*Istakel B'Oiraisa*'. It was given to every Jewish soul as we stood at Har Sinai. It is accessed by anyone who truly learns the Torah.

Viewing Creation Through A Lens of Torah, and Seeing Torah In All of Creation

But besides for this power, we have another power which was given to us, which is a lot closer for us to reach. Most of us have not reached such a high level of exertion in Torah to the point of changing nature. But "*Istakel B'Oiraisa*" is a power that every Jew has. What, essentially is it?

Let us reflect. When Hashem created the world, He looked into it - what does this mean? Does He have to see it? He could have created the world without looking into the Torah. What it means is, that He created a world in which *we* can see Torah in everything. He created a world in which can view Creation through the lens of Torah, as well as to be able to look at the world and see Torah in everything.

What is the depth of this concept? We live in a physical world. We do not live in Heaven, in Gan Eden. We try to learn Torah, each of us as much as we can. But each person lives two sides to his life. We each have Torah and spirituality on one side of our life; those who merit to sit and learn all day have their share of learning, and those who set aside time every day for learning also do their fair share of learning, but we all have times of learning. On the other side of our life, we have the physical side to our life. How, then, do we bridge the gap between these two opposite points of our life?

"Istakel B'Oiraisa, U'Bara Alma" – Hashem gave us the power to see how it can all be connected. He did not give us the Torah or creation alone; He has given us both. He gave us the power to see creation through the Torah, as well as the power to connect the Torah with Creation. That is exactly what He gave us.

Since this is so, every person is able to live the two worlds simultaneously: he can have times where he learns Torah and times when he is involved with his worldly needs, but even when he is

involved with the materialistic side to life, he can see Torah in it; he can see how Hashem is there also.

How the Chofetz Chaim Saw Divine Providence In Ordinary Events

Tzaddikim, such as Chofetz Chaim zt”l, would see Hashem through every event and learn what message Hashem was sending us through these events. When the Chofetz Chaim learned that a railroad was being built, he expressed amazement, and he viewed this as a preparation stage for Mashiach. He viewed it that Hashem was making travel faster as a sign that the redemption is speedily heading our way. There are many other such stories as well like this.

From where did this perspective come from? An ordinary person, upon seeing a railroad, just sees a railroad. But the Chofetz Chaim saw through the lens of Torah, thus he saw how the Creator is in everything. In everything we see on the physical world, we can see its root, its blueprints of the Torah that run throughout its design.

Money

Here is another example brought in the words of our Rabbis: the Hebrew word for money, *keseif*, can also mean to “yearn” (*kissufin*). When we look at money, it can remind us of a yearning for Hashem! Without using the power of “*Istakel B’Oirisa*” that we have, a person who sees a dollar bill does not see anything else other than a dollar bill. But when we see Creation through the lens of “*Istakel B’Oiraisa*”, we see “*kissufin*” in the “*keseif*”; it can awaken us to yearnings. What kind of yearnings? Yearnings for Torah, for Hashem, and for *mitzvos*.

Creation Is Like A Mirror

This power to view the deeper dimension of Creation in everything we see, big or small, is only through the lens of the Torah.

We are not talking about becoming inspired from events that take place in the world, in which people become shaken up by the news, such as a war or a tragedy, which awakens people to think and reflect. Chazal state that “thunder was not created except to remove the crookedness of the heart”⁴⁴, and we also know that all events that take place in the world are to awaken *Klal Yisrael*. This is all true, but there is much more to it than this.

When we get inspired from events of the world, this is inspiration that comes from the world, not from seeing *Hashem* in the world. But when we see the world through the lens of Torah, we can see a world that is reflecting to us all that it says in the Torah, like a mirror.

⁴⁴ *Berachos 59a*

When one stands in front of a mirror, he sees reality staring back at him in the face; he is not merely ‘inspired’! So too, when we see the world, not only do we get inspired from it, but we can see its reality, when we view it through the lens of Torah.

The Power of a Jew To See Hashem In Each Thing

Chazal state, “*Yisrael* (the Jewish people) were the first thoughts of Hashem, to be created.”⁴⁵ The first thing that Hashem thought about, so to speak, was *Klal Yisrael*. The depth of this is that “Hashem looked into the Torah” to create the world, and it is *Klal Yisrael* who can see the Torah in each thing, thus, *Klal Yisrael* was His first thought.

“The Blessed One, Yisrael, and the Torah, are one.”⁴⁶ In other words, the Jew’s soul can see “Torah” in each thing - he can see *Hashem* in each thing. This is not some intellectual definition that we read about in the sefarim. It is very relevant in our life! A Jew has can see the Torah in everything, and he can see Hashem in each thing – the One who looked *into* the Torah. At the giving of the Torah, the Jewish people received the ability to see the depths of Torah in everything; to see Hashem in each thing.

Now we can better understand why according to all opinions in the Sages, the festival of *Atzeres/Shavuos* requires “*lachel*” (eating and drinking). It is because the entire concept of the giving of the Torah is to see the Torah within your very “*lachel*” - to see Torah, and Hashem, within the physical. The Sages state, “You are called *adam* (man), while the nations of the world are not called *adam*.”⁴⁷ The Torah forms man; it contains 613 commandments, parallel to the 613 limbs of man. This is in line with the concept of, “*From my flesh, I see G-d.*” One can see Torah in all his limbs; he can see how his entire being reflects that of the *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) that he was created in.

“*Istakel B’Oiraisa, U’Bara Alma*” – “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world.” He created the world in a way that we can see things through the lens of Torah, that we can see Torah in written over all of Creation. And what do we see in Creation when we look at it through Torah? *Hashem!*

Seeing The Beginning

Now we can understand the depth of why *bikkurim* are brought on Shavuos, when the Torah is given. *Bikkurim* are a beginning, for they are the first fruits.

We bring the ‘beginning’ to Hashem. Why we must we bring the beginning to Hashem? The simple understanding is as Chazal say, that we need to bring our first produce to Hashem out of

⁴⁵ *Beraishis Rabbah* 1:64

⁴⁶ *Zohar, parshas Yisro* 90b

⁴⁷ *Bava Metzia* 114a

gratitude that He allowed it to grow⁴⁸. But the depth of the matter is because in everything we see, we must see its beginning. [Thus, we must realize the beginning of *bikkurim*, which is Hashem.]

It is well-known that the Chofetz Chaim would always review the story of *Beraishis* – the creation of the six days of the week and Shabbos. What is the depth behind this? It is because one must always return to the beginning. When one reflects into the beginning of everything, it is then that he sees ‘Torah’ in everything.

When reflecting upon Creation, we can keep seeing how Hashem is in everything. The heavens created on the second day are the heavens that were sustained by the word of Hashem. The land exists because the word of Hashem allows it to keep existing. The animals exist because Hashem said they should.

Ordinarily when we see an animal, we do not see the “word of Hashem” in it. We would say it came from its parent, who came from its parents, etc. Perhaps if we would see an animal that was from the six days of Creation, then we would have no doubts that it came from Hashem. Otherwise, we usually do not see the “word of Hashem” in animals. And when we see a fish, we do not either see it as the “word of Hashem”; instead, we see it as a fish that came from a fish, which came from another fish, etc.

But if we realize that it came from the six days of Creation, we can remind ourselves that it came from Hashem, and then we can see how everything in Creation is all from Hashem.

The depth of *bikkurim* is thus not just about bringing *bikkurim* to Hashem. It is because we need to see the beginning of each thing, and when we see the beginning, we see Hashem. When we reflect into what the beginning of each thing is, we can reveal Hashem in each thing.

When we realize that each thing we see in Creation was created by Hashem during the first six days of Creation, it helps us gain this perspective to always reveal the beginning of each thing. In this way, whenever we see anything, whether it is a fish, or a bird, we see “*Istakel B’Oiraisa*” in it.

May Hashem help us merit to receive the Torah completely, to see in each thing how “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world” – not just to see the *world*, but to see how *Hashem* and His Torah are in each thing. Then, we can truly receive the Torah.

⁴⁸ *Bikkurim* 3:1

1.9 | *Perfection In Torah*⁴⁹

Yeru-shalayim: 'Yarei-Shaleim' / To Yearn For Spiritual Perfection

In the blessing of **ולירושלים** we say, **ובנה אותה בקרוב בנין עולם** “And build it [the city of Jerusalem] soon, as an eternal edifice.” We ask Hashem to rebuild Jerusalem.

Clearly, we are not just asking for the physical rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash*; we are really asking that there should be an inner, spiritual revelation which will be the future *Beis HaMikdash*.

The word *Yerushalayim* comes from the word “*yarei shalem*”, to “fear perfection.” The *Mesillas Yescharim* lists three levels of *yirah* of Hashem, the lowest level being *yiras ha'onesh*, fear of punishment, the higher level being *yiras haromemus*, awe, and the highest level is *yiras hashleimus*, fear of perfection. There, the *Mesillas Yescharim* writes that *yiras hashleimus* is attained by those who seek *shleimus*, spiritual perfection.

Seeking *shleimus* is really the concept behind *Yerushalayim*, which is the perfect city. Thus, only the one who seeks *shleimus* is one who truly desires the *Yerushalayim* of the future - and only he will be the kind of person who merits it.

Perfection Vs. Perfectionism

What does it mean to seek *shleimus*, perfection? It is a very deep matter.

Nothing in Creation is perfect; there are faults in everything. All Creations lack something, as we say in *Borei Nefashos*. Also, even when we do come across something perfect, it is only “perfect” according to our viewpoint, but that doesn't mean it represents perfection. For example, if we look at a perfect table, we think of it is a perfect table, but that still doesn't give us an idea of *shleimus*.

What, then, is *shleimus*?

There are degrees to seeking perfection – a higher use, and a lower use. The lower use of seeking perfection is when people seek to perfectly reach their ambitions. There are people who want things to be perfect, that is, with regards to their material situation. There is a demand for perfection, that things be perfect, and this isn't always coming from a holy desire. It is simply a desire for perfectionism, and it is an emotion rooted in our *nefesh habehaimis*, (the lower, animal level of the soul).

If one's need for perfection is coming from his *nefesh habehaimis*, it manifests as perfectionism. Sometimes a person will seek to even engage in a sin on its most complete level, *chas v'shalom*,

⁴⁹ תפילה 0122 – ובנה אותה וכל בנין עולם – ירושלים. ירא שלם 49

because he likes to have things perfect. Or, it could be that a person seeks perfection in his *ruchniyus*/spirituality, but it's not always because he is seeking *shleimus*. He is simply a perfectionist, and he is merely directing it towards spiritual matters. He wants to be spiritually "perfect", not because he seeks *shleimus*, but because he has is merely using his nature of perfectionism when it comes to his spiritual side of life.

The real search for perfection, the ability in the soul to search for *shleimus*/spiritual perfection, is a power that stems from the deeper layer of our soul, the *nefesh Elohis* (the "G-dly soul").

Attaching Yourself To Perfection

There is really nothing perfect in Creation, for everything is lacking, as we declare in *Borei Nefashos*. However, "Hashem and *Yisrael* are one", thus we have a need to become perfected, which stems from our *nefesh Elohis*.

How are we able to seek *shleimus*, though, if it is impossible to be perfect? Why isn't seeking *shleimus* considered to be something delusional and unrealistic? We are imperfect by essence, for all of Creation is lacking. Yet, our soul inside is demanding for perfection. Why does our soul demand perfection, when it is clearly impossible to be perfect, being that we are human?

It is because since we all have the power to attach ourselves with Hashem and have *d'veykus* (closeness) with Him, therefore, I can attach myself to the Creator, and when I attach myself to the Creator, I am connected to perfection! When I connect myself to the Source of all perfection, Hashem, I can then reach perfection in the Torah according to my own level that I can currently reach.

Man has the power to nullify himself to the Creator. The *Mesillas Yeshtarim* says that the true perfection that exists is for one to cleave to Hashem. When a person attaches himself to Hashem, this is not just a degree of perfection, but it is rather an ability we have to connect our being with the One who is Perfect, Hashem. This is the deepest yearning in the soul, because it is deeply ingrained in us, for "Hashem and *Yisrael* are one."

It is really impossible, from our human efforts alone, for a person to become an *adam shaleim*, a perfected person. But we are still able to attach ourselves with perfection. In the future, "*the light of Zion shall shine forth*" – the fear of perfection will be revealed. The light of Hashem's Name will be revealed onto every Jew's soul. Our soul feels a demand for this great perfection of the future, even now, when the future hasn't come yet.

When we realize that "Hashem and *Yisrael* are one", the light of this revelation will shine in us, and then we will be able to connect ourselves with Hashem, and then we are connected with Torah; and when we connect with Torah, we can be connected with Hashem.

Without this understanding, a person might wish he could know many *masechtos* (tractates of Gemara) or he might wish to know all of *Shas* in-depth, but he is still not seeking the

shleimus/perfection of Torah. Only when a person connects himself with Hashem, with the depths of his soul, and through connecting in his soul to the Torah (and this involves *eisek HaTorah*/studying Torah, as well as feeling a deep “soul connection” to the Torah), it is then that a person can reach the *Toras Hashem Temimah*, which is perfect.

Frustration In Our Learning: Will We Ever Understand The Torah?

“*Toras Hashem Temimah, meshivas nanefesh*” - “The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it settles the soul.” It is “*wider than sea and longer than the earth.*”

The following is a subtle point to realize. At first when a person begins to learn Torah, his mind is not that developed, and he sees everything through *katnus mochin* (an immature mind). But as a person learns more and more Torah, his mind opens up and becomes more developed. He then begins to realize how endless the Torah is - and he can get very frustrated.

If a person has no aspirations, he won't experience this frustration. But anyone with aspirations for understanding in Torah – and surely if he wishes he could know all of the Torah perfectly – will get very frustrated when he sees he's not getting there. He sees that it's impossible. The Torah is always beyond us. Even in what we reveal in the Torah, there is always so much more, both in quantity and quality.

Anyone with aspirations for understanding Torah will feel frustration, realizing that it's impossible to finish the Torah; and surely a person will get frustrated if he aspires to know all of the Torah perfectly. Anyone who learns Torah in-depth can see that it is an endless ocean. It can make a person get overwhelmed and lose aspiration to progress in his learning. This frustration is especially felt by those who seek *shleimus*.

Even when a person learns a *sugya* of *Gemara* very in-depth, and even if he gets to the true understanding of the *sugya*, he is aware that it is impossible to get to the true understanding of every *sugya* that we learn. It would take too much energy to try to get to the true understanding of every *sugya*. After all, we can see that every *sugya* of *Gemara* contains so many fine and subtle points that can always be probed further for more and more levels of understanding to it.

It can make a person feel flustered, both because of the amount of knowledge in Torah that we need to acquire, as well as the quality of understanding that we need to acquire. It is indeed impossible to know the entire Torah. We can't finish it even on a superficial level, and we surely can't fully understand all of the parts of the Torah we learn about. Our learning can therefore make us feel very, very frustrated, and it can make a person want to give up completely. So what should we do?

On one hand, we must try as hard as we can in our learning to understand what we are learning. At the same time, we must realize that we cannot perfectly reach the understanding in Torah. But, the more you exert yourself in Torah – simply speaking – you gain *d'veykus* with the Torah. This is

not referring to a more perfected “understanding” of the Torah; rather, it means that you are attached to it in *d'veykus*, as much as you are able to reach, according to your own unique soul root.

When you try as hard as you can in your learning the Torah, you become connected to the Torah, and since the Torah is perfect, you become connected with the ultimate perfection. Just as we can connect our soul with Hashem, so can we take our soul and connect with the Torah. These are subtle words, but they describe the entire direction of how we need to connect ourselves with the Torah, and the words here are especially relevant to those who have aspirations in their learning.

Without exertion in your learning as much as you can, it is impossible to get to *d'veykus* in the Torah. But at the same time, a person needs to have the mentality that this is not all there is to our learning. The connection we must strive to have with Torah is to connect to its *shleimus*, its perfection, and from that, we will be connected to the perfection of the Torah; and that in turn will provide us with better understanding of it.

In Conclusion: Two Ways of Reaching Comprehension In Our Torah Learning

There are two root ways of how to we can have *hasagas haTorah*, to reach comprehension of Torah.

One way is to connect our existence with Hashem, and from that connection, a person receives special wisdom from Hashem to understand the Torah; just as Hashem filled Betzalel with special wisdom.

The second way to reach the Torah is through having *mesirus nefesh* and exertion in it, and this gives a person understanding in Torah, according to the level that his soul can reach. It will not be a perfect understanding, but it will be a level of understanding that one's unique soul level is able to reach. Both of these parts are needed in order to reach the Torah.

We are approaching the day in which the Torah was given. Chazal say that Har HaMoriah was uprooted from its place and brought to Har Sinai at the giving of the Torah. Thus, there was *yarei shalem*/Yerushalayim/Har HaMoriah present at Har Sinai when the Torah was given. The Torah must be learned with awe, and the meaning of this is that one must aspire for perfection in Torah – by connecting to Hashem, Who is perfect, and by connecting our soul with the Torah, which connects us to its perfection. If a person reaches this, he receives a degree of understanding in Torah that his soul level can reach.

This is the ‘perfect’ way to prepare for the giving of the Torah!⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For further understanding of this concept see *Getting To Know Your Torah_03- Soul Connection To Torah*.

1.10 | *Real Spirituality - Yearning For Hashem*⁵¹

Praying For The Revelation of Hashem's Name

ועל כולם יתברך ויתרומם ויתנשא שמך תמיד לעולם ועד – “And above all, may Your Name be blessed, exalted, and raised, constantly and for eternity.” We can understand this part of the blessing as a continuation of the theme of the “*Modim*” blessing, whereupon we express our thanks to Hashem, and now that we have thanked Hashem, the Name of Hashem can become exalted.

It can also be understood as a request. Although it is only the first three blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* that are called ‘*bakashos*’ (requests), and the last three blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* are called *hodaah* (thanks), we still find *bakashos* in the last three blessings. For example, רצה and שים שלום are also requests, even though the final three blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* are not considered to be in the category of *bakashos*. Here, too, in this part of the *Modim* blessing, we are asking Hashem for a request: we are asking Hashem that His Name be revealed.

Chazal state that as long as Amalek exists in our world, the Name of Hashem and the Throne of Hashem is incomplete, and it will not be complete until Amalek is totally erased from the world. Thus, when we ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* that His Name become exalted forever, we are really asking that all evil become erased, so that His Name can be revealed.

Let us think a little into this, so that this prayer should not be uttered from our mouths superficially, and that it should rather be in line with what we know in our hearts.

Becoming More Spiritual: What Does It Mean?

Man was created from earth, and he has a *neshamah*⁵² breathed into him from Hashem. When a person starts out life, it is his body which is dominant. His desires and thoughts and energies are mostly channeled towards the physical. It's very possible that he will end life that way too, if he never seeks to awaken his *ruchniyus* (his spiritual side). But when a person exerts himself in Torah study, and he keeps the *mitzvos*, and along with this he works to purify his *middos* and he separates himself from materialism - slowly but surely, his spiritual side will begin to emerge.

Our *ruchniyus* – our ‘spirituality’ - essentially means that we are a *neshamah*, the spirit of life that was breathed into us from Hashem. The more a person grows and is purified, he naturally begins to seek more *ruchniyus*, and not simply because he feels that he is ‘commanded’ by Hashem to learn Torah and do the *mitzvos*. Not only does he recognize intellectually that there is a G-d and that there is reward and punishment; he develops a natural sense for the spiritual.

תפילה 0159 – שמך מלכינו 51

52 Divine soul

The intellect (*seichel*) is referred to as “the spirituality of the body”, but it’s still within the “body”, so intellectual pursuit of spirituality is not yet real spirituality. It is only when a person *naturally* seeks spirituality that spirituality becomes real to him. It is when the soul’s nature is becoming revealed to the person.

Just as the body naturally seeks materialism, for it comes from earth and it is drawn towards the earthy materialism of this world that it comes from, so does the soul seek its source, which is the spiritual. When a person purifies himself from materialism - through learning Torah and doing the mitzvos and working on his *middos*, along with active effort to separate from the materialism of this world - the light of the *neshamah* begins to become revealed. He exits the physical dimension of this world and enters another dimension: the spiritual.

Living Superficially

But we must understand that even if a person grew up in a Torah home, where he learned Torah and did all the *mitzvos*, it is not always definite that he will become spiritual and become purified and reveal the nature of the soul. It’s very possible that although he learned Torah and kept all the mitzvos, it was only because he intellectually recognized that he must do all these things, or because he simply grew up that way and he’s used to it, or because he sometimes felt inspired. This doesn’t free a person from the nature of the physical body and let him be able to enter the nature of the soul.

It is therefore possible that for his entire life, he learned Torah and even exerted himself in its study, but he never pursued it *naturally*. If he is not pursuing it naturally, it means that he has never really accessed his *ruchmiyus*.

When a person merits to purify himself from materialism and he reveals his spiritual side, he *naturally* seeks spirituality, no less than how the body naturally seeks the physical.

Leaving the body’s nature, and entering our soul’s nature, is essentially a redemption to our souls, where we leave the ‘prison’ of the body. It enables us to live a higher form of life.

Why Do We Search?

However, we must know that while seeking spirituality is a “redemption to the soul”, it can also be a form of exile to the soul! This is because it depends on why we are searching to become more spiritual.

There are two reasons why a person would want to become more spiritual.

One motivation is a desire to live a spiritual kind of life; just as the angels live in Heaven and they live an entirely spiritual life, so does our *neshamah*, which is called “daughter of Heaven”, seek to live a spiritual life. Our *neshamah* wants to live an angelic kind of life, where there are no animalistic

desires or human weaknesses that come from the elements of our lower soul. It wants Torah, mitzvos, holiness, spirituality, good *middos*, and all the qualities it can attain.

But there is a deeper search of the soul than this: instead of simply seeking to become spiritual and leave the physical, there is a deep desire of the soul to seek Hashem Himself. “*Your face, I seek.*” The depth of the Jew’s soul seeks to become attached to Hashem. This is much deeper than simply seeking to live a spiritual life. It is to search for Hashem Himself, for His very *havayah* (reality).

(There are people who overdo this and they search for attachment with the Creator alone, but they do not want Torah or mitzvos, *chas v’shalom*. This is a terrible mistake. But in general, the search for attachment with the Creator is the holy and deep desire of the soul.)

One must be clear that he has two kinds of searches in life. One kind of search is to live a more spiritual kind of life, and a deeper kind of search is to search for Hashem Himself.

When one is not clear about his spiritual side of life, when he does not live in a “clear world”, **he** will mix up the two kinds of searches, mistaking them for being the same. He will think that living a spiritual kind of life alone is already an attachment to Hashem - which is not always the case. He might go his whole life searching to become more spiritual and to keep elevating himself, but he is not really searching for *Hashem*.

“*It Is Our Desire To See Our King*”

This kind of person is missing the desire of “*Ritzoneinu Liros Es Malkeinu*”, “It is our desire to see our King”⁵³ - which the Jewish people uttered at Har Sinai.

The receiving of the Torah, originally, was supposed to be given in the form of Torah alone. But the Jewish people requested to see Hashem there. They knew that Torah and all spiritual revelation is not yet the deepest level. They knew that the greatest recognition is to see Hashem, to recognize the *havayah* of Hashem descending onto Har Sinai. Therefore, they requested, “It is our desire to see our King.”

“Hashem, the Torah and Yisrael are one.”⁵⁴ The root of all spirituality is Torah, and the root of Torah is Hashem. A person can connect to Hashem through the spirituality of Torah, where he can enjoy both revelation of Torah and connection to Hashem. This was the perfect level we reached at Har Sinai.

But after the people sinned with the Golden Calf, that great connection with Hashem through the Torah became obscured. Now Hashem’s Presence is hidden and concealed from us. He is definitely there, but He placed limits on how much He reveals himself. Therefore, it’s possible that a person exerts himself in Torah, but he doesn’t recognize Hashem through it.

⁵³ Rashi Shemos 19:9

⁵⁴ Zohar Achrei Mos 73a

It is written, “*Those who grasp Torah do not know me.*” This is referring to a person who does not have the desire to see the King, and he simply seeks spirituality - without Hashem in the picture.

One must first reflect about this concept and internalize it in the heart: the search for spirituality, and the desire to see the King, are not the same thing.

The Purpose of Creation

If a person is not aware that there is a difference, he will think that simply learning Torah and doing all the *mitzvos* will, by default, bring a person closer to the purpose, to attachment with the Creator. He will definitely be able to become more spiritual and perhaps he will become somewhat deeper and more purified, but that doesn't mean he will develop a yearning for Hashem, a desire to see the King.

Such a person will think that the purpose of Creation is that Hashem's Torah be revealed. Although this is true, it is not the total truth. There is more to life and its purpose: we must remember that *Hashem* was revealed through the Torah, for that was the perfected level of Torah that we had when we received the Torah at Har Sinai.

Preparing For Shavuos: It's Not Just About the Torah

When we prepare for the time of the giving of the Torah, during the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*, we must know clearly where we are heading towards. The point is not to reach deep spiritual revelations and high levels of purity and holiness. The point of purifying ourselves during this time is so that we can merit a greater goal: to prepare ourselves for the King.

Every year, when Shavuos returns, the light of the giving of the Torah returns with it, so it is not just the 'time' when the Torah was given. The entire event of Sinai returns! That means that “Our desire to see our King” returns each year on Shavuos. But we have to be aware of this and prepare for it. If a person isn't aware of this, then he thinks that preparing for the giving of the Torah means to prepare for the “Torah” alone. But the true way to prepare is to realize that there is not only a *giving* of the Torah that is coming – there is a *Giver* behind it. Shavuos is called *Zman Matan Torah* (the time of the giving of the Torah) as opposed to *Zman Kaballas Torah* (the time of receiving the Torah), so that we can remember the One who gave it to us.

Why Do We Await The Times of Moshiach?

When a person only prepares for Torah - but not for Hashem – then he has a hard time understanding why he should want the Name of Hashem to be revealed, as we ask in *Shemoneh Esrei*. He will wish for more Torah in the world, more purity and holiness in the world – all of these are good things – but he is missing the main yearning.

If a person doesn't deeply desire "to see the King", he merely awaits a more purified kind of world, he awaits the resurrection of the dead and the coming of Mashiach, and he thinks that the goal of Creation ends there.... Although the times of Moshiach will be times where we are free to learn the wisdom of Torah all day, this is not all there is to it. There is also the desire to "see our King." When a person is missing this yearning, he is not yet yearning for the purpose of Creation which he is supposed to long for.

Thus, yearning for more Torah, without a yearning for Hashem, is missing the point. Such a person is missing the main yearning to have on this world. He might spend his life learning Torah and doing all the mitzvos, but he is not searching for Hashem in all of it. He yearns for more and more revelation of Torah, but he is blank from yearnings for Hashem!

Two Different Yearnings To Have

So we must know that these are two very different yearnings. The truth is that at the root of everything, everything is rooted in Hashem, so Torah and Hashem are ultimately intertwined. "Hashem and the Torah are one." But this is not always revealed in a person's life, so he does not always see Torah as being "one" with Hashem.

When we separate from materialism and we yearn for spirituality and for more Torah, this is but half of our *avodah*. Of course, we must certainly yearn for more spiritual levels and for more Torah, as we explained before; but it is not yet everything. The greater part of our *avodah* on this world is to yearn for the revelation of Hashem on the world. We can keep moving back and forth between these two yearnings (revelation of Torah, and revelation of Hashem), which, on a deeper level, is really an integration of our yearning for Torah with our yearning for Hashem.

The Desire For Hashem's Name

This deep place in the soul is described by the Rambam as "the desire for Hashem's Name". We can awaken in ourselves a yearning for Hashem. Not only does the thought of His existence awaken this yearning, but even the mention of His mere name can awaken it. "לשמך ולזכרך תאות נפש" - "For Your Name and mention, is the desire of [my] soul" – even the mention of Hashem's Name can awaken our soul's yearning for Him.

The "Pain of the Shechinah"

The more a person lives his life in this way, the more he yearns for the revelation of Hashem's Name on this world, and then he can feel great pain at the tremendous *chilul Hashem* (desecration of His Name) in our times: the void of feeling Hashem's Presence on this world.

It is also called the “pain of the *Shechinah*.” The *Shechinah* has pain over the fact that people are not keeping Torah and mitzvos and don’t know of Hashem. But there is also pain of the *Shechinah* over people who know of spirituality, yet they don’t have a desire to see the King.

The *Shechinah* is described by our Sages as the revelation of Hashem on this world. There is His reality, and there is His revelation. When He is revealed on this world, this is called *Shechinah*. The pain of the *Shechinah* is the fact that His presence is hidden and not revealed in the world.

But when we have a “desire to see our King”, then the words we daven in Shemoneh Esrei of **ועל כולם יתברך**, where we *daven* that Hashem’s Name be revealed, it is a prayer emanating from our soul. We are not only asking that Hashem be revealed to *Klal Yisrael*, but that He be revealed in the entire world.

Especially during these days, when we prepare for the Torah, we need to reveal this yearning, the desire to see our King. Along with it, it must cause us to feel pain over the fact that Hashem’s Presence is not yet revealed on the world. Then we can really mean it when we say the words, **ועל כולם יתברך יתרום ויתנשא שמך תמיד לעולם ועד**.

In Conclusion

The concept here is far from the comprehension of most people in the world now, who are entrenched in materialism, and even those who seek spirituality are not in always in touch with the desire to see Hashem. There are only a few people who truly yearn to find Hashem Himself.

May we merit to desire this as we go along in our *avodah* throughout life, especially as we prepare for the time of receiving the Torah. And when the time of the giving of the Torah comes – as well as before it – we can merit, all of *Klal Yisrael*, as well as the entire world, the recognition of Hashem, alone.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ See also Tefillah #0121 – *Yearning For Revelation of Shechinah and Torah*

1.11 | *Yearning For Revelation of Shechinah & Torah*⁵⁶

The Shechinah Can Dwell Inside You

ותשכון בתוכה כאשר דברת - We are asking Hashem that His *Shechinah* (Presence) should dwell in us.

There is a well-known statement of Chazal that there is *Shechinah* which dwells in each person. Just as there *Shechinah* in the *Beis HaMikdash* - so can there be *Shechinah* in each person.

On a deeper note, the more *Shechinah* a person has revealed inside himself, the more he can identify with the *Shechinah* that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. And, *chas v'shalom*, the converse is true as well – if one doesn't have *Shechinah* in himself, he doesn't merit to see the *Shechinah* in Yerushalayim either.

Thus, when we *daven* to see the return of the *Shechinah* to Yerushalayim, we are really *davening* that the *Shechinah* should dwell in ourselves, and from that, we will be able to reveal the *Shechinah* in Yerushalayim.

Levels of Existence

There are many levels to how a person lives – levels within levels.

The lowest level of existence is when a person is far from a life of holiness, in which the reality of Hashem is totally hidden from his perception; Hashem is a “hidden G-d” (*Keil Mistater*) to him.

Higher than this is when a person merits to be part of the world of Torah and holiness, and he has some recognition of Hashem's existence. But it's still a faraway view, because he isn't yet connected to the reality of Hashem. He knows about Hashem's existence, but he feels that Hashem is far away from him.

A higher level of existence is when a person purifies himself internally, and he comes to feel that Hashem is really very close by him. As it is written, “*For the matter is very close to you.*”

An even more elevated kind of existence is when a person not only feels that Hashem is close by, but he feels how Hashem surrounds him and is beside him.

Higher than this level is when a person feels that Hashem resides in himself. This is a level of revelation of *Shechinah* in a person.

תפילה 0121 – ותשכון בתוכה כאשר דברת 56

Revealing Shechinah Within

There are two kinds of revelation of *Shechinah* – through the mind, and through the heart. It is written, “*And you must know today and you shall let it settle upon your heart.*” We have an avodah to “know” Hashem, which is through our mind. This is not just another kind of knowledge, but it a kind of thought we must constantly reflect about, or else it is just intellectual knowledge that has no effect on us – and this is the situation of most people. It is a knowledge we need to connect to; to connect our mind to it.

But there is a higher level. When a person merits to internalize his knowledge about Hashem’s existence, when it settles on his heart, there is revelation of the *Shechinah* in his heart. The *Nefesh HaChaim* writes that one’s heart is a personal *Kodesh Kodashim*. The heart can become a *Beis HaMikdash* that contains the *Shechinah*, and this is man’s purpose on this world. Our Rabbis wrote of a concept of becoming a “*merkavah* (chariot) to hold the *Shechinah*”. The heart can become a container that holds the *Shechinah*, and upon reaching this, a person is constantly attached with Hashem in *d’veykus*.

This the ultimate pleasure of the soul and the yearning of the soul – to attach itself to Hashem and enjoy the pleasure of the rays of the *Shechinah*.

Two Revelations To Yearn For: Shechinah and Torah

Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech argued about where our *chochmah* (wisdom) is.

Dovid HaMelech held it is in our mind. Shlomo HaMelech held it is in the heart; “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*”

“Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one”⁵⁷ – the more a person connects with Hashem, the more he reaches Torah. Without real *d’veykus* with Hashem, a person will not really understand the Torah. Being that Hashem and the Torah are “one,” our level of *d’veykus* with Hashem is mainly built through exertion in Torah. When we exert ourselves in Torah *lishmah* (for Hashem’s sake and not our personal interests), that is how we connect with Hashem, and from *d’veykus* with Hashem, that is how we much we understand afterwards in Torah.

We ask Hashem for understanding in Torah. In *Shemoneh Esrei*, in the blessing of *Attah Choinen*, we ask Hashem for *chochmah* (wisdom), *binah* (comprehension) and *daas* (understanding). And in the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah*, we ask Hashem that He give *binah* to our hearts. That is how we daven for Torah. But that is only one part of what we must do, for “*tefillah* does half the job”. The other half of what we need to do is exertion in learning; one must “kill himself in the tents of Torah”. After the exertion [when it is *lishmah*], one is opened up to “a new gate of understanding”, as the Chazon Ish writes - that a person who learns Torah *lishmah* can merit that his intellect has

⁵⁷ Zohar Achrei Mos 73a

endless joy. The level of connection that a person has with Hashem will in turn affect how much he will understand the Torah.

In order to have *d'veykus* with Hashem, we need to seek revelation of *Shechinah* on the world, and we express this in our *tefillos* [as we *daven* here in *Shemoneh Esrei*], for this is the purpose of Creation - to recognize Hashem. Therefore, yearning for *d'veykus* with Hashem is really for a greater purpose: to yearn that the purpose of Creation be fulfilled, that Hashem's Name be revealed to all.

Besides for this yearning we need to have, there is another yearning for holiness which we need to have. "Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world" – thus, the world cannot survive without Torah learning. As the *Nefesh HaChaim* says, without even one second of Torah, the world would go kaput. So we must yearn for the revelation of Torah. Without the revelation of Torah, there cannot be revelation of *Shechinah*.

So we must yearn for two things: the revelation of Hashem's Name, which is the revelation of *Shechinah*, and the revelation of Torah upon the world. Without revelation of *Shechinah*, there is no revelation of Torah. If there is no revelation of *Shechinah*, even if it appears to us that there is a revelation of Torah, this is not the "Torah of truth".

Every day, Hashem renews Creation. The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that Hashem literally creates the universe anew each day, just as He created it in the beginning. Hashem looks into the Torah each day to create it, just as He created the world from the Torah in the beginning. In order for there to be a world, there must be a revelation of *Shechinah*, and we also need to yearn for the revelation of Torah.

Of course, we must exert ourselves to learn Torah in order to understand it, and this is indeed the way to reveal the Torah from revealing the *Shechinah*. But we must know that true understanding of Torah is only after there is revelation of *Shechinah* on the world!

These words are really simple and clear. But because we live in a world in which the truth is very concealed from us (the word "*olam*", world, is from the word "*he'elam*", "concealed"), this concept is very forgotten, even though it is so fundamental to Judaism.

Not only are nuances of *halachah* forgotten from us - in spite of being so clear and simple - but even fundamentals of our very faith are usually hidden from us. Many concepts which should really be so simple to us are often hidden from us. Often the simple fundamentals of faith which we were taught as children are forgotten from those who are sitting and learning Torah all day for many years. This fact, that all understanding of Torah only comes to a person when he reveals *Shechinah*, is really a clear and undisputed fundamental.

Har Sinai and Yerushalayim/Har HaMoriah

There are two root places in which Torah was revealed upon the world – Har Sinai, and Har HaMoriah. Torah was given at Har Sinai, and the Torah comes forth from Zion, from Har

HaMoriah. Hashem revealed the *Shechinah* by Har Sinai. From that revelation came the Torah; Rav Saadya Gaon said that the entire Torah is contained in the Ten Commandments. But it all began with the revelation of the *Shechinah*. Hashem opened up all seven layers of Heaven and revealed to us *Ain Od Milvado*, that there is nothing besides for Him. Har Sinai was where we accepted the Torah.

There was also Torah revealed in Zion, in Yerushalayim, in the *Beis HaMikdash*. “*The word of Hashem comes from Jerusalem.*” This is a revelation of Torah that comes from revelation of *Shechinah* that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. So there are two sources of revelation of Torah – two sources of our understanding and revelation of the Torah.

Approaching Shavuos: What To Yearn For

We are approaching the time in which we prepare for receiving the Torah. Those who seek Torah are exerting themselves to acquire the 48 qualities need. But we must know to where we are heading.

We must know that the purpose of Creation is to reveal Hashem on the world. We are approaching the day in which Torah is revealed to the world, but we must be aware, that this is not a separate goal, *chas v’shalom*. There is no such thing as revealing Torah on the world without revealing Hashem on the world. A person might *chas v’shalom* wish for Torah, but he does not have an aspiration to reveal Hashem on the world.

The real way to view life – and this is not a novel concept at all, for it is based on the words of our Sages – is that our whole direction in life has to be towards revealing Hashem on the world. It is just that the **way** we do that is through learning the Torah with exertion. The only way to reveal Hashem on this world is through exertion in Torah, but, a person has to be aware that his exertion in Torah is meant to reveal Hashem. One has to have this mentality towards his learning.

Why We Daven For The Rebuilding of Yerushalayim

In whatever we do – in deed, word, or thought – we must know the goal. We must know why we do what we do. “*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*” (“The end of actions is first with thought”).

Thus, when we *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, we should know: What are we *davening* for, and why do we want this? We must make sure this is not just a lip service, that we are merely saying the words. We must pray for this earnestly, from our heart, and really yearn for Yerushalayim. Why, indeed, must we yearn for Yerushalayim? Is it because we just want to come out of this exile that we are in, or because we want *korbonos* and get atoned for our sins....?

We all have kinds of motivations why we can want Yerushalayim to be rebuilt, and we should become aware of our inner motivations. These can be truthful aspirations, but, we need to be

become aware of why we want it, and after clarifying this, we then we need to know why indeed the Sages enacted that we should pray for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim.

There is always more than one reason for anything, but there is always a root reason with many branching reasons. We need the root and not to get caught up in the branches. The root reason of why we need to *daven* for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim is to reveal the *Shechinah*. When *davening* for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim three times every day in *Shemoneh Esrei* (and in *Bircas HaMazon*); what are we yearning for as we say these words? Do we want more revelation of Hashem on the world? If a person does not yearn for this, his *tefillos* are not stemming from the root of why we need to *daven* for this.

The Two Yearnings We Need To Have

We must *daven* for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim from a yearning that there be revelation of *Shechinah* on the world, and also, we must yearn that there be more revelation of Torah on the world. There are people who yearn for more Torah revealed on the world, but they don't aspire for revelation of Hashem on the world. There are also people who yearn for the revelation of Hashem on the world, but they don't yearn for the revelation of Torah to come to the world. Either of these views is *alma d'piruda* (disparity); we need to connect both of these views together. We need to yearn for the revelation of **Hashem** on this world, which is the purpose of Creation, and we also need to yearn that **His chochmah (wisdom)** be revealed on the world.

So we need to yearn that His very **reality** be revealed, and in addition, that His **wisdom** be revealed. The revelation of the reality of Hashem is the revelation of *Shechinah*, and the revelation of Hashem's wisdom is through the revelation of Torah, Hashem's wisdom. On a deeper note, the reality of Hashem can be revealed from the Torah, and we must yearn that the reality of Hashem be revealed through His wisdom, the Torah.

When we direct our soul to have both of these yearnings together – the revelation of the reality of Hashem, as well as the revelation of His wisdom – this is the depth of our prayer to ask for the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, that the *Shechinah* be returned.

כאשר דברת, ותשכון בתוכה, כאשר דברת – “And dwell in it, as You spoke.” Why do we add on the words כאשר דברת, “As you spoke”? It is because we must also yearn that the *dvar* (word) of Hashem, the Torah, should be revealed in Yerushalayim. This is what lays behind our yearning for Yerushalayim and the rebuilding of the *Beis HaMikdash* – to yearn for the revelation of Hashem on this world, together with the revelation of Torah to come to the world. When this happens, it will be revealed how “Hashem, the Torah, and Yisrael are one.”

1.12 | *Preparing To Receive The Torah*⁵⁸

The beginning of this derasha is a bit deep but towards the end is an incredible exercise of *hisbodedus* “**A Meditation For Before Shavuos**”, which is from 19:16 minutes until the end of the derasha.

Receiving The Torah: Receiving The Power of “Raishis” (Beginning)

Most of the days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* have now passed, the time to prepare for receiving the Torah. Let us reflect about the day in which the Torah was given to *am Yisrael*.

The Torah is called the “*raishis*” (beginning), which means that the Torah is the beginning of all wisdom. This is the simple meaning of the concept of its “*raishis*”, but on a deeper level, the concept of “*raishis*” is something which takes place in the present as well. Not only does Hashem constantly renew Creation, but there is a constant acceptance of the Torah, due to the fact that Torah is the *raishis* (“beginning”) of the world.

Raishis/Beginning In Space, Time and Soul

There is a concept of “World, Time, and Soul”⁵⁹ - everything that exists in space and time exists on a personal level in our own souls. Let us consider this concept of *raishis*/beginning that is contained in the Torah, and how it exists in all three of these dimensions.

In “World” (space), the “*raishis*” of Torah is the fact that “Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world”; the Torah preceded the world, and in this sense it is the *raishis*/beginning of the world. In “Time”, the *raishis*/beginning of Torah was that it always existed.

In “Soul”, the *raishis*/beginning of the soul is revealed through attaining a personal connection with the Torah. Every person, in the depths of his heart, as well as in his conscious intellect, is aware of what comes first, second, third, fourth, etc. In our own soul as well, there is a certain order of the soul's internal forces.

When the Torah was given to us, we received the power of “*raishis*”, for the Torah is called “*raishis*”.

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The “Raishis” Level of Torah Is Only For The Jewish People

The fact that we received the Torah that is “*raishis*” (the beginning) thus had ramifications in all of the three dimensions - space, time, and our soul.

As an example, the Torah was given only to the Jewish people; if a gentile studies it, he is liable to capital punishment, because it is considered as if he is violating a married woman. Although there are some parts of Torah which apply to gentiles as well, such as the Seven Noachide Laws which they are obligated to accept (the Gemara says that although they accepted this obligation, nowadays they do not even keep it⁶⁰), and in addition, the Gemara states that Hashem originally offered the Torah to all of the nations in the world⁶¹, even so, the Torah which could apply to gentiles does not contain the power of *raishis*.

Only the Jewish people have the Torah that contains the power of *raishis*/beginning. Yisrael were “the first to “rise up in the thoughts of Hashem”, and the nation of Yisrael is called “*raishis*” (as Chazal state, “*Beraishis – b’shvil Yisrael*” (for the sake of the Jewish people), who are called “*raishis*” (the first”).

Therefore, only the nation of Yisrael, who are called the “*raishis*”, can receive the Torah, namely, the level of Torah which contains “*raishis*”. The other nations of the world, however, are not called the “*raishis*”; therefore they cannot receive Torah on the level of “*raishis*”.

Thus, the Torah is revealed to the Jewish people via the power of “*raishis*” in their souls.

The Torah of “Raishis” Is Attainable Via The Power of “Raishis” In The Soul

Before the Torah was given, Hashem opened all the heavens [and showed them “*Ain Od Milvado*”, that there is nothing besides Him]. The inner reason for this was so that they would first be shown Him, and then they could be shown the very first offshoot of Him, which is the Torah. Every year, the light of the giving of the Torah, as well as the light of receiving the Torah, renew and return.

The giving of the Torah is essentially Hashem giving us the power of “*raishis*” through the Torah, to the Jewish people, who are called the *raishis*/beginning.

There is much depth to the concept of receiving the Torah, but one of the fundamental aspects to it is that a person is receiving the power of *raishis*/beginning from the Torah. In order to receive it, one must give over the “*raishis*” of his own personal soul, for the Torah, and then he can reveal the Torah which is called “*raishis*”; and even more so, to reveal the One who gave the Torah: “*I am the First, and I am the Last, and besides for Me there is no other god.*”⁶²

⁶⁰ Bava Kamma 38a

⁶¹ Avodah Zarah 3a

⁶² Yeshayahu 44:6

The Avodah Of Sefiras Ha'Omer: Getting Deeper Into Our Soul

We count 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, and then we come to the 50th day, which we do not count. The 50th day is not part of the count, because it is above the count. It is referred to as “*echad*” (one) in the *Shir HaYichud*. The 50th day of the Omer [Shavuos], the day of the giving of the Torah, it is the day where “Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one” – it is the *echad* (oneness), or the *raishis*/beginning, of all reality.

The *avodah* of a person throughout the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, in order to properly enter the day where the Torah was given, is to reach the *raishis*/beginning of one's soul.

There are garments upon garments in our soul, and if a person remains at the level of the garments of his soul and he does not penetrate past those garments, he lives life like a child, who lives superficially and who never experiences his own inner reality. When a person gets older, sometimes he becomes even more superficial than when he was a child, and sometimes he becomes a bit more spiritual and inward, each person on his own level.

Whatever a person's situation, one must have a goal to reach the inner layer of his own soul, which is the *raishis*/beginning in his soul.

Our Sages wrote that the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* are days of clarifying our soul, getting deeper and deeper into the soul's layers, until we eventually reach the deepest and most hidden point in our soul, which is really the point of “*raishis*” (beginning) in the soul. It is in that deep place in ourselves where we can stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah there.

But in order to reach it, one needs to keep penetrating further and further into the layers of the soul.

Studying In-Depth The Topic of “Torah Study”

If we reflect a little, we can notice that our Sages have said thousands of sayings about the greatness of learning Torah, of how great it is to study it, of its great reward, etc. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (in *shaar daled*) explains much about this. These statements of Chazal are describing the truth about the Torah and of the inner essence of the Torah.

However – and I am placing a great stress here on “however” – that is all with regards to the One Who gave us the Torah, and what He gave to us. Shavuos is the day when the Torah was “given”, and that is what Chazal are describing when praising the qualities of learning Torah.

But we, who receive it and who must prepare for it, and comprehend it – not only must we try to understand on an intellectual level what *Chazal* have said about the greatness of Torah learning – besides for this basic part, each person needs to wonder how much he has truly reached his own “portion” in Torah learning. This generally divides into three different aspects, as follows.

Inspiration and Clarification

When it came to learning *mussar*, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that there are three parts involved. The first aspect is to become passionate and inspired when learning *mussar*. The second aspect is to use intellectual understanding, to clarify and understand the matters being learned; when one acquires the necessary knowledge, his *avodah* after that is to internalize the knowledge in his heart. The first method, inspiration, works directly with the heart. One can accomplish it by speaking to his heart. The other method is to use the intellect, seeking to define and clarify the information that one learns.

When it comes to the particular aspect of awakening ourselves to appreciate the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, these two parts also play a role. When one wants to strengthen his exertion in Torah learning and to increase his connection to the Torah, just as learning *mussar* requires passion, so must a person passionately learn the sections of *mussar* that describe the greatness of Torah, so that he can be inspired and moved. Just as there is a general *mussar* session, so can a person have a specific *mussar* session, where he focuses his *mussar* learning just on the topic of learning Torah.

The second part is to clarify, with your mind, the greatness of Torah and learning Torah. Anyone who has grown up in an environment where Torah learning was the norm should not suffice with this level. He might have heard since he was a child about how important it is to learn Torah, both in his home and in his school, where he slowly absorbed the message that Torah learning is so important. But to remain at that level is *katnus mochin* (small-mindedness).

The more a person matures, the more he must deepen his appreciation for learning Torah. Just as hearing the *halachos* of washing your hands in the morning when you are a child is not the same as hearing these *halachos* when you get older, when you learn these *halachos* more in-depth and in much more detail, in the same way, we need to deepen our understanding of the importance of Torah learning, even if we already heard about it a lot when we were growing up. So it is not enough if a person knows many of the statements of Chazal about learning Torah. One must now acquire this knowledge on a level of *da'as*⁶³.

We can understand that a *gadol* (a leader of the generation) has a much more mature and deeper understanding of the greatness of the Torah, and that this awareness does not come on its own. It is an understanding which is gained through the power of *da'as*. A person cannot have a deep appreciation for the power of Torah learning just from what he has heard about it from his childhood years. The stage of childhood was certainly an impressionable stage, but that level of understanding is not on the level of *da'as*. A child cannot comprehend what it means to have true exertion in Torah and to understand the exaltedness of the Torah.

If that child has grown up and he is now an adult, and he has never yet deepened his understanding of the greatness of Torah learning, even if he remembers a lot of statements of Chazal about how important and great it is to learn Torah, he has never really clarified and understood what it means. A person needs to first find this information and study it. The many words of Chazal

⁶³ inner knowledge

about Torah learning are spread out all over the Talmud, and they are not concentrated in any one place. The *Nefesh HaChaim* put many of these statements together in one place, but it doesn't nearly exhaust the topic.

One must know clearly that in order to understand the importance of Torah learning, he needs to acquire this knowledge on a level of *da'as*, just as a person can only acquire something if he is a *bar da'as* (capable of mature understanding). It is the most important "*sugya*" one can ever learn about, because the Torah is the root of every *sugya*, for every *sugya* is built upon the qualities, exaltedness, and exertion in Torah.

Without a doubt, there is a vast difference between a person who remains with his child understanding about Torah learning, with a person who has studied this topic in-depth, on a level of *da'as*, with the attitude that learning about this matter is a part of the Torah like any other part of Torah that we learn about. One can gain a whole new kind of understanding towards the topic of Torah study, undergoing a huge change of perspective, and as a result from this, he gains a much greater level of exertion, and connection to, the Torah.

This is an incredible insight when we reflect into it. One might remain throughout his life with a childish perspective towards Torah learning, and sadly, many people remain with an immature perspective towards it. A person might be a fully grown adult and he is learning the Torah with adult mental abilities, yet his actual appreciation for Torah learning is on the level of a child. For this reason, many people slacken off in their Torah learning. They are actively involved in Torah learning on an adult level, but are being motivated on a childish level.

Therefore, besides for the fact that a person should learn about the importance of Torah study in a way that inspires himself, which is surely important, even more so, a person must clarify and understand the "*sugya*" of Torah study. If anyone desires to be a true *ben Torah*, this is what he should do. There must be an ongoing clarification throughout his life of the "*sugya*" of Torah study.

The intention here is not that a person should learn about this topic for many months and devote all of his time to learning about it. We only mean that a *ben Torah* needs to also clarify this very important topic at some point in his life, and the earlier the better. From clarifying this very important *sugya*, one will gain a clearer, stronger picture of Torah study, which will make him feel more obligated to learn Torah, an appreciation of the Torah which is more uplifting. With this, his connection to Torah will strengthen. Understandably, a person also needs to have exertion in Torah along with this. That is clear and simple.

Personal Connection To The Torah

That's all the first step. The second step, which was mentioned a bit before, is that after a person has inspired himself about the importance of Torah study, and after he has delved into the topic of Torah study and he has clarified the details of this topic, the next part is to make an inner clarification, of how much connection to the Torah do I feel.

It is written, “*And you shall know today, and you shall settle the matter upon your heart.*” In all of life, we encounter knowledge contained in our brain, but we must then bring this knowledge into our heart. It is said that the distance between the brain and the heart is greater than the distance between the sky and the earth.⁶⁴ Our intellectual understanding about the importance of Torah learning, initially, is not on the level of a “heart understanding” of it, where the true connection to Torah lies. It is one thing to know about the importance of exertion in Torah study, on an intellectual level. That is the first step one needs to traverse, but the second step is for a person to clarify on what level he is really found on; to know where his personal portion in Torah is.

Each person has his own place in Torah learning. There is what you learn in Torah, how you learn Torah, which parts of Torah you learn, and this is one kind of personal share in Torah learning. We are not talking here about that kind of “share” in Torah learning. Here we are talking about something else: How much personal connection do you feel to the Torah?

The Torah is called *raishis*/beginning, and this should not remain as an intellectual definition to us, and it is not only a quality of the Torah; rather, it must become visualized by our own personal soul. One must come to truly feel that the Torah is the *raishis* of his soul, that it is the first and primary force in his soul. When one feels that this “*raishis*” is his soul’s primary force, he is connected to the Torah.

The subtle, inner clarification which one should make, deep in his heart, is for a person to wonder: “What am I truly connected to? What am I attached to? Where is my heart found?”

⁶⁴ *The Alter of Kelm*

A Meditation For Before Shavuos

Imagining A World Where There Is Nothing But Hashem and Torah

We can give one fundamental example in order to actualize this concept, and although it is just one example, it is truthful.

Chazal ask: Why was the Torah given in the desert? One of the reasons given in Chazal is because the desert is an uninhabited place. There is no civilization there; nothing is there. Chazal also state that the Torah is only acquired by “one who kills himself over it, as in the desert.” One who ‘kills himself’ when learning Torah is one who disconnects from his surroundings.

This is not a rule that was only applicable to the time when we received the Torah. We are currently in This World, and we await the World To Come, the days of Mashiach, and the resurrection of the dead. Chazal say that the wise sages only desired the days of Mashiach so that they could learn Torah in peace. If we try to picture what the World To Come is like, what is it? There is a very clear picture of what the World To Come is. There is only *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and His Torah there. That is what “eternity” is.

Let’s understand this clearly. If Torah is not the main part of a person’s life, and he has many other desires in his life that are on his mind instead, he will not be able to live a “life of Torah.” He will be able to *learn* Torah, but he will not be able to *live* a life of Torah! He won’t become a “*ben olam haba*” (one who is destined for the World To Come) on This World. In the Next World, there is nothing except for Hashem and His Torah. That is all that goes on there, 24|7!

In This World, even if we learn Torah all day, we eventually go to sleep at night. But in the Next World, there is no sleep. It is for 24 consecutive hours in a day! Every day! (On a deeper note, the 24 hours of the day are only from the perspective of This World, but in the Next World, there are no 24-hour intervals). It keeps continuing. It is a “day of entirely light”, a “day of entirely Shabbos”, where the *tzaddikim* bask in the rays of the *Shechinah*.

If one tries to imagine this, he might think of it as a bright, sunny day which warms his body. That is very far from what the Next World is like; it is but a parable. What is life in the Next World? There is nothing there at all, other than Hashem and His Torah!

When considering how we are living our own life, this is not simply a question of what “level” we are on. There are certainly levels upon levels that a person can be on in the World To Come, for it is the “world of reward”, but our question is: Who is the kind of person that can live a life on This World that resembles the World To Come? Only someone who lives it and is found there.

An ignoramus, who does not learn Torah and who is sustained from the Torah others, certainly doesn’t live that kind of life. A Torah scholar, someone immersed in Torah, is one who can live a life that resembles the “Next World” already on This World. If someone cannot identify with such a

place in his soul [in which there is nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah], he is far removed from anything to do with the Next World.

Let us imagine the following simple example in our own lives. If we come to a person today and we tell him, “From Elul until Yom Kippur, for 40 days straight, when you are waiting to receive the second pair of Luchos, you will have absolutely nothing on This World. It will be just you and Hashem, Hashem and His Torah, and that’s it.” Can a person do that for 40 days straight, doing nothing else?

Let’s consider the three days preceding Shavuos (the *y’mei hagbalah*). Can a person just imagine three days in which there will be nothing in the world other than Hashem and Torah, and himself? (A person needs a *chavrusa* too, because “Either a *chavrusa* (friend) or death.”) But can a person be ready to live three days with nothing other than this, just him, Hashem, and the Torah? Would a person feel that these three days are a “resemblance of the World To Come”, or does he instead feel towards it like Hashem removing the sun from its sheath in the future, which will punish the wicked? What does a person imagine towards it?

If someone cannot fathom going for three days with nothing in his world other than Hashem and Torah, and it seems to him too far-fetched and not for our generation, and that we should just feel fine with learning Torah seriously for even 5 minutes – we must counter to this: “But Hashem has created a certain reality. He has created the situation of the Next World, and all people will need to reach it someday!”

This is not an issue of what personal *madreigah* (spiritual level) one is on. Rather, it is the general level of all of the *madreigos* which describe the Next World. Within it of course are many levels of *madreigos*, and there is no end to these levels, depending on how much Torah one has attained. But this is the picture of the life that we need to arrive at!

When we understand it, we can realize that This World is but a passageway to the Next World; it is like preparing on Friday afternoon for Shabbos, so that we will have what to eat on Shabbos. All that we do on This World is but a preparation stage for the Next World. What does it mean to prepare on this world for the next world? It means to reach a deep place in your soul where you are prepared to live such an existence, where there will be true spiritual pleasure, and not the opposite of pleasure, *chas v’shalom*. That is what it means to prepare for the Next World.

Of course, on This World, we also have the three pillars which the world stands on, which includes *tefillah* and *chesed*, and we have all the 613 mitzvos. These all give us holiness, but at the same time, they also obscure us from studying Torah on the perfected level, because we currently do not have the perfect level of Torah, for we live after the sin. But in the Next World, where all is rectified, where the perfected level of the End of Days is already realized, where “Hashem is One and His Name is one” – it is a realm where there is complete revelation of *Shechinah* – that is what life is like there! That is what our life will be like, because that’s the way it’s supposed to be!

If you want to visualize a perfect picture of what life should look like, what is the driving force in our life that will help us reach this perfect picture? It is to have a goal of reaching such a kind of life,

in which there will be nothing in our life other than Hashem and His Torah. That is what a person should want, and that is what he should be enjoying. If one keeps reflecting on this point, he can eventually reach a point where he will want this to continue without pause. If he can envision such a thing, he is touching upon a “resemblance of the World To Come” in the soul. For how long will he be able to remain in such a space in himself? It will depend on how connected he is to this. If he has a connection to this, he can already experience a “resemblance of the World To Come” here, in his own soul.

(A higher level than this to become a “*ben olam HaBa*” (destined for the World To Come; here we are talking about the first step, which is to experience *me'in olam haBa*, a resemblance of the World To Come).

It is to imagine a life in which you are totally removed from everything on This World, and you are perfectly content with all that you remain with [nothing but Hashem and His Torah]. This is a truthful visualization to imagine, and one who has *da'as* (mature understanding) and who desires true life will visualize this many times. Slowly as a person gets used to this visualization, he will see what his current level is, and think of how to get to the next step. It will be a journey in his soul.

This imagination exercise is but one example of how you can personally connect yourself to the Torah (and it is in addition to what we said before about learning about the importance of Torah study). Anyone who desires to be a true *ben Torah* should try the above imagination exercise.

Advancing And Retreating

On the flip side, a person might counter to all of this, “But I have a wife and children, *Baruch Hashem*, and I also have physical needs.” That is all true, but a *ben Torah* needs to think about the following.

The Torah says that in the three days preceding Shavuos, the men were told to separate from their wives. After they received the Torah, they then were told, “*Return to your tents.*” The meaning of “return” here is to return to your previous state, where you are not as elevated; but there is also a point in our soul in which we need to ascend to higher levels. This is also known as the concept of *ratzu v'shav*, “advancing and retreating”, in which we move back and forth between spiritual progression and regression. Our soul has a point of “*shav*”, where we return/retreat to our previous level, after we have become spiritually elevated. But our soul also has a point of “*ratzu*”, to advance – to reach for higher levels.

We must want to ascend to an existence in which there is nothing but Hashem and His Torah. After we reach higher levels we will certainly fall back onto our previous level, “return to your tents”, but we must also have a point in our soul in which we ascend to higher levels, where we want nothing other than Hashem and His Torah.

Practically Actualizing This Concept In Our Torah Learning

If someone thinks that preparing for Shavuos means to close the doors to the *Beis Midrash* after the morning session starts so that anyone coming late won't be able to enter, this is missing the whole point of preparing to receive the Torah. It is not incorrect to act this way, but it is simply an immature perspective, which misses the point. The point is to develop an attitude in our life in which we want to experience a "resemblance of the World To Come".

Practically speaking, it is advisable for a person to set aside a few hours of the day of his Torah learning, which he will view as a blissful experience of "a resemblance of the World To Come". If a person gets used to this, putting his heart into it and not simply as a habitual practice (which does not bring a person to the desired purpose, and it is just fleeting inspiration).

The point here is not to simply feel uplifted, or to become more immersed in one's Torah learning, or to attain more clarity it; those are all wonderful qualities, but they are results of what we should want to achieve. What we should mainly want to achieve here is to feel how Torah learning is "a resemblance of the World To Come" on this world. For a little bit of time, a person can temporarily feel in his soul a resemblance of the World To Come, where he is disconnected completely from everything, and that has nothing in his life other than Hashem and His Torah.

When a person truly desires the World To Come, he seeks ways of how he can experience some of it already on This World. He can try learning Torah for several hours straight, consecutively and without interruption, in which he truly feels that has nothing in his life other than his Torah learning. He can try this twice a day as well. But in order to do this, one needs to expand both his mind and heart, as mentioned earlier.

Every day, one should set aside time of the day in which he does not just learn Torah by rote, and to reflect before he begins to learn Torah: "Where do I want to go with this? What is the purpose?"

There are simpler reflections than this that one can make as well. But we are approaching the days preceding Shavuos, and it is worthy to contemplate this, even if one is not actually on the level of living like this all year round. Since it is the desired purpose of one's life to reach this, it is worth it to have it at the forefront of our minds, even if a person can't reach actually reach it yet.

When one gets used to the imagination exercise described here, his entire attitude towards his Torah learning will receive an overhaul. The point is not to enjoy the feeling of disconnecting from the world, which feels uplifting and which is certainly wonderful to experience; rather, the point is to truly connect oneself to the purpose of life, to connect oneself to the World To Come as he is on This World.

These words are but an opener, but we should hope to merit it, to enable ourselves to reach the inner, intended goal. May we merit, together, to truly live in a world which is entirely a world of Torah, a world which is entirely the world of Hashem.

1.13 | *Restoring The Holiness of Our Festivals*⁶⁵

How Are We Spending Yomim Tovim?

Let us take a look at the way we spend the *Yomim Tovim* (Jewish holidays). Are we just living *Yom Tov* through our bodies, or through our soul?

What do people talk about on *Yom Tov*? On the day that *Yom Tov* sets in – let’s take *Erev Rosh Hashanah* for example – what are our conversations about? Some people are speaking about the inner meaning of the *Yom Tov*, but most conversations go like this: “Which seat did you get in *shul* for the davening?”, or “Who’s babysitting your kids when you are in *shul*?”

What are we thinking about as we prepare for *Yom Kippur*? Most people are busy with how to eat and drink enough before the fast so that their fast will go easy.

And what about *Sukkos*? As *Sukkos* is about to enter, people are busy with how to have the nicest looking *sukkah* on the block. Now there are even contests in communities who can build the nicest *sukkah*...

Chanukah comes, and people talk about how to make the best doughnuts, and what the best jelly is. People are mainly busy with where the *Chanukah* party will be this year: by the parents, by the in-laws, or by the cousins...?

Purim comes, and the focus is about how to make the fanciest *Mishloach Manos* (baskets) – the fancier, the better...

Pesach comes, and people are talking about how the cleaning is going, or “When did you finish the *seder* last night?” and “Which of your small children asked the Four Questions?”

As for *Shavuos*, it has basically become a holiday devoted toward the best dairy recipes! *Baruch Hashem*, the dairy suppliers are making a lot of money this time of the year!

When it comes the Nine Days, people don’t know what to make of it, so they turn it into an extension of **Shavuos** – with the eight days before *Tisha B’av* being a time for the tastiest dairy recipes out there.

We all recognize that this is the reality of how we are living. Can we call this the way a Jew is supposed to live?? True, no one is breaking the laws of *Shulchan Aruch* here. It’s all within the bounds of *halacha*; no one would dare eat meat during the Nine Days, and we are all careful to carry out exactly what it says in *Shulchan Aruch*. But this way of living is sapping all the *ruchniyus* out of these special times and leaving us with just the physical, superficial shell of it. These holy days have become emptied from their *ruchniyus*.

⁶⁵ Excerpt from the *drashah* entitled “Feeding Your Soul” (*Derashos* #035)

Can we say that *Pesach* to us is our “*zman cheiruseinu*” (“time of our freedom”)? Is *Shavuos* to us a time that the Torah was given? Is *Sukkos* to us really our *zman simchaseinu* (time of joy)?

What is our joy on *Sukkos* – about how nice the *sukkah* is?! What will happen then if we see our neighbor with a nicer *sukkah*?! All our happiness will go down the drain! And whatever happened to just being happy with the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos itself*? Who talks about it, who thinks about it?

We have become used to experiencing only the superficial layer of each *Yom Tov*, with just the traditional aspect of it – and even secular people can do that part. If so, have we become satisfied with that level?! Statistics show that on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the most honey in the world is sold, and even secular people are buying honey, not just observant Jews. It’s not a big deal to dip the apple in the honey.

Rosh Hashanah must have more meaning to us. A person has to come into it with a hunger for it, and after it is over, he has to see if he has indeed filled that hunger. We need to come into *Yom Kippur* as well and feel a hunger for it, and then to see if we have indeed satisfied it. The same goes for *Sukkos*, *Pesach* and *Shavuos*: we must always check to see if we have filled ourselves up from it spiritually, or if it just another *Yom Tov* that comes and goes.

We all have gone through *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos* more than once. Have we ever gone through any internal change from them, or have we remained the same exact as before?

We are at the beginning of a new year. Can anyone say that he has grown this year since last *Rosh Hashanah*? Are there any goals which we have set for ourselves and achieved? For most people, the answer is, “No.” Why?

It is for two reasons. The first reason is as we have said before, that we don’t feel our soul’s hunger. We know about *Yom Tovim* and the *mitzvos* they entail, we learn about them on an intellectual level, but we don’t feel a **hunger** for *Yom Tov*. Just knowing about the *halachos* of *Yom Tov* will help us keep its *halachos*, but in order to live like a true Jew, we have to come out of *Yom Tov* satisfied spiritually. And when the eight days of *Sukkos* end, we are supposed to come out of it with a happiness that can accompany us into the winter months.

We need to change our whole attitude towards the *Yomim Tovim*. We usually do not feel our soul’s hunger, and maybe it’s because we don’t think that it’s necessary for us to feel. We have become so used to the routine of life – we get up in the morning, run to *davening*, get through it, learn, and attend social events. Each day passes by, but are we ever feeling a spiritual hunger? Or are we only hungry for food, social acceptance and success...?

“No hunger for bread...only to hear the word of Hashem”

We are all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. We all stood at Har Sinai. Hashem gave us all a power for spirituality – the Torah, and the soul that is in us. How much are we exercising our soul, in comparison to our body?

It's possible that a person lives in a very *frum* (observant) community, yet his entire day is spent about gratifying the body, from morning until night. Although a person often does much good deeds, much *chessed* and *mitzvos* – where is his soul at? Is his soul hungry to do *chessed*, just as when his body gets hungry? We are much more accustomed to getting things done than to feel a hunger for what we do.

We need to get to a situation in our life, (and when it comes to *Yom Tov* especially), to reflect what is written in the possuk, “*No hunger for bread and no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*” If we are hungry during these days for more spiritual growth, we are setting forward on the proper path.

Some people think that this possuk is only referring to people who were never *frum*, and that in the End of Days they will merit to join Judaism. But this possuk is not just a prophecy for the End of Days – it is referring to us, even now.

It's possible that a man wears a hat and jacket and that a woman dresses very modestly, but inside, he/she isn't hungry to carry out the “word of Hashem.” Maybe the person feels a hunger to eat good food on *Yom Tov*, but not more than that...

To be “hungry for the word for Hashem” means that a person feels hungry before the *Yom Tov* comes to grow spiritually from it, and that if he doesn't fill that hunger, he is left feeling very unsatisfied.

1.14 | *Shavuos – Too Much Cheesecake*⁶⁶

Developing Restraint

We are living in a generation with an unprecedented amount of desires. This past week, on Erev Shavuos, I had to go the market, and I came across places that were selling 1,200 different kinds of cheesecake. 1,200 kinds of cheesecake! I am not exaggerating. (But people justify this by saying, “It’s a *minhag* in *Klal Yisrael* to eat cheesecake...”)

People are growing up in a generation that is full of physical desires; how can a person avoid chasing them??

A person has to uncover a deep, tranquil place in his soul in which he can reflect about this, how problematic it is, and how it prevents us from living a true and spiritual life. This is the most important part of the solution of fixing the problem.

At a later stage, you can begin to work on how you will actually accomplish avoiding desires, but the first stage is the most important: to reflect deeply about the kind of situation we are living in, and to realize how the lifestyle of this generation contradicts the truth we aspire for.

The contradiction you notice, upon making this reflection, has to bother you. If it bothers you, you already have the key to putting a restraint on your pull towards physical desires.

⁶⁶ Excerpt from “*Fixing Your Water*”_05

1.15 | *The Depth of Dairy On Shavuos*

The Torah Is Compared To Milk

With the help of Hashem, we will say a bit about a matter that is relevant to *Shavuos*, the day when the Torah was given.

The *Shulchan Aruch*.⁶⁷ mentions the custom to eat dairy foods on Shavuos. There are many reasons given for this, and one of the reasons mentioned in the *Poskim* is because the Torah is compared to milk [dairy], for it is written, “*Honey and milk under your tongue*”⁶⁸ [the ‘honey’ and ‘milk’ of the verse is a metaphor for Torah]. There are also many other statements in the Sages which compare the Torah to milk.

The Gemara⁶⁹ compares the Torah to a mother’s milk: Just as an infant always find new taste in its mother’s milk, so too does a person always find new tastes in Torah whenever he delves into it.” Thus, the Torah is compared to the milk that an infant nurses from its mother.

However, elsewhere, the Sages state that “The Torah does not remain except with one who vomits the milk he nursed from his mother”.⁷⁰ The simple meaning of this is, metaphorically speaking, that one must ‘vomit’ his mother’s milk in the sense that he must divest himself from physical pursuits [the mother’s milk being an allegory to his childhood stage of immaturity], so that he can become devoted to spiritual pursuits and thereby be able to acquire Torah.

On a simple level, we can understand this to mean that one must first ‘vomit’ his pursuit of physicality, symbolized by his mother’s milk which he nursed from, so that he can now be able to ‘nurse’ forth the “spiritual milk”, which is Torah. While that is true, there is more to this matter. Let us explore further into this matter.

The “Milk” of Torah

When an infant nurses from its mother, there is a powerful bond which takes place between the mother and her nursing child. On a more spiritual level, the infant nursing from its mother is an allegory to an intense bond with Hashem. There is a verse, “*Like an infant upon its mother*”⁷¹, which is describing the attachment and dependency that one can feel in G-d. The Sages also state that

⁶⁷ *Orach Chaim* 494

⁶⁸ *Shir HaShirim* 4:11

⁶⁹ *Eruvin* 14a

⁷⁰ *Berachos* 63a

⁷¹ *Tebillim* 131:2

when Dovid HaMelech was an infant nursing from his mother, he sang *shirah*.⁷² This symbolizes how the infant nursing his mother's milk represents, on a deeper level, the intense attachment one can feel in Hashem.

The mother's milk is therefore a powerful metaphor of connection – on the simple physical level, it is the connection between the mother and her nursing child, and on the deeper level, it symbolizes the connection between one and Hashem.

Thus, we can understand that when the Sages said that one should 'vomit' the milk of his mother, it means that one must remove his initial perception and gain an entirely new perception, and that this is how one acquires Torah. This is what it means to drink the "milk" which the Torah is compared to, of which the Sages said that just as an infant always find new taste in its mother's milk, so can a person always find new tastes in the Torah.

An Infant Nurses Mother's Milk from the Place of Heart/Understanding

The Gemara⁷³ says that an infant nurses from the place of *binah* (understanding), the area of the body where the physical heart is. Now we can have a deeper understanding of how "the Torah does not remain except with a person who vomits the milk of his mother": it means that one needs to gain the perception that Torah needs to be 'nursed' forth from a place of understanding, from a place of heart.

This is the deeper implication of how the Torah is compared to a mother's milk: just as the mother's milk is nursed forth from the place where the heart is, and the heart is the source of spiritual understanding, so too must a person "nurse" forth the Torah from a place where the "heart" is – from a place of spiritual understanding.

The Depth of Dairy On Shavuos: Nursing Forth Our Spiritual "Milk"

The Hebrew word for milk is *chalav*, which is a combination of the letter *ches* and the word *lev* (heart). This spells the word *ches lev*, which alludes to the number 8 (since the letter *ches* corresponds to the number 8), and the spiritual heart. The number 8 refers to the spiritual level beyond our current world. For example, the seventh day of the week is Shabbos, and there are seven weeks of *Sefiras HaOmer*. What is the day that comes after counting the 7 weeks of *Sefiras HaOmer*? This is the "50th day of the *Omer*", the day of *Shavuos*, the giving of the Torah, which corresponds to the 50th level of understanding, the 50th level of holiness.⁷⁴

⁷² *Berachos 10a*

⁷³ *ibid*

⁷⁴ *Ramchal "Maamar HaChochmah"*

[Hence, the 50th day of the *Omer*, Shavuos, is like the number 8 which comes after the “7” of *Sefiras HaOmer*. The number 8 always corresponds to the spiritual dimension which comes after the current spiritual dimension of 7.]

What is the connection between *chalav*/milk and the heart? Earlier it was explained that an infant nurses forth its mother’s milk from the place of the heart. Hence, milk corresponds to a revelation of the “50th gate of understanding”, also known as the “50th gate of holiness”, which is manifest on the “50th day of the *Omer*”, the day of the giving of the Torah. This implies that from the very deep revelation of holiness which is present at the time the 50th day of the *Omer* - from that very depth – are we meant to eat dairy foods on *Shavuos*. It is because on *Shavuos*, we can ‘nurse’ forth the ‘milk’ that comes from the “50th gate of understanding”.

The Gemara says that 50 gates of understanding were created in the world, and the first 49 gates of understanding were reached by Moshe.⁷⁵ [Simply speaking, this implies that Moshe did not merit to reach the “50th gate of understanding”. However, on a deeper level, it can also mean that Moshe reached the first 49 levels from his own comprehension, whereas the “50th level of understanding” was given to him from a higher source that did not come from his own comprehension]. This is explained to mean that Moshe reached the first “49 gates of understanding” [in Torah] from his own efforts, whereas the “50th gate of understanding” was given to Moshe by Hashem as a gift, meaning that Moshe did not reach it out of his own comprehension. The “50th gate of understanding” is referred to as *matnas chinam*, a “free gift”, for it can only come as a “gift” from Hashem to a person. Once Moshe received it as a gift, the rest of the Jewish people received this “gift” as well, on *Shavuos*, the day of the giving of the Torah.

The 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer* correspond to the 49 gates of understanding, and when we arrive at the “50th day of the *Omer*”, the day when the Torah was given, that is when we can “nurse” forth the spiritual “milk”, and that is the depth behind why we eat dairy on the festival of the giving of the Torah. There was only one time in history where all of the Jewish people were prophets, and this was when the people stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, when Hashem descended upon Har Sinai and revealed His Glory to all of the people. That is where we were all “nursing” on an esoteric level, in the way that an infant nurses its mother’s milk, where there is a powerful bond of connection.

Milk: The White Color Which Symbolizes the Pure State at the Giving of the Torah

There is also another aspect contained in milk which reflects the connection between milk and the Torah. Milk is a white liquid. Chazal teach that the four primary colors are blue, red, green, and white. The color white is the color of purity. The hairs of an elderly person are white, for the elderly person is closer to the spiritual, to the world of purity, hence all of his hairs are white, the color of purity. The Sages state that at the giving of the Torah, Hashem appeared to the people as “an elderly sage, filled with compassion.”⁷⁶ This meant, on a deeper level, that Hashem revealed the spiritual

⁷⁵ *Rosh HaShanah* 21b

⁷⁶ *Rashi to Shemos* 20:2

“whiteness”, the whitening and cleansing of sins, as symbolized by the white beard of an elderly sage. It was a revelation similar to the how “the sins of *Yisrael* are whitened [cleansed]”⁷⁷, where all souls of the Jewish people are deemed equal by Hashem. Hence, the entire Jewish people were prophets at the time of the giving of the Torah.

That is why on the day of the giving of the Torah, all of us are considered to be on an equal spiritual level by Hashem. That is the implication of the dairy foods eaten on *Shavuos* – it is because the white color of the dairy foods is a revelation of this “whiteness” from above which cleanses all of the Jewish people from sin and, which reveals a state of equality (*hishtavus*) of all the souls of the Jewish people.⁷⁸

Mother’s Milk To The Infant: The Symbol of Purity

Ever since the sin of Adam, there has been a curse placed upon mankind, of “*By the sweat of your brow, shall you eat bread.*”⁷⁹ In order for mankind to gain nourishment and sustenance, mankind must work the fields and earn a living. But there is one point in our world where a person can be nourished and sustained without having to work for it. That is an infant nursing from its mother.

That is the only phenomenon on this world where we can see the revelation of the spiritual “whitening” that comes from above, where there is no curse upon mankind and where man can draw forth sustenance without having to make any effort to get it. It is a point where there is no sin – for an infant is pure from sin. Although we currently live with the curse given to Adam, we still remain with a semblance of the original state before the sin: every newborn baby is able to nurse from its mother and be nourished without having to make any effort to do so.

This was the depth of the revelation at the time of the giving of the Torah. Chazal state that when the Torah was given, there was freedom from death and from the evil inclination.⁸⁰ Elsewhere, Chazal state that the spirit of defilement which mankind received from the Serpent [after Adam and Chavah sinned] was removed from the people at the time when the Torah was given.⁸¹ It was a time where the effects of the curse were removed from upon mankind. Hence, when the Torah was being given, the people were on a level before the sin, the point that is above sin – the point where mankind “nurses” forth all sustenance and nourishment directly from Hashem, with no effort involved.

77 *Yoma 39b*

78 *Editor’s Note: The Rav explains more about the spiritual benefits of viewing the color white and how this can further reveal one’s soul, in the sefer “Da Es Nishmasecha”. Refer to the english adaptation of this in “Torah Way To Enlightenment: Chapter 3: Seeing The Spiritual In Yeish-Material”*

79 *Beraishis 3:19*

80 *Shemos Rabbah 41:7*

81 *Shabbos 146a*

And, unlike a nursing mother, who can only nurse for a total of 24 months⁸², the Jewish people were in a state of nursing eternally from their Source [and they would have remained in this state had they not sinned later with the golden calf].

The Infants Who Nursed From Sarah Imeinu

The Sages state that Sarah Imeinu nursed many children for Avraham. Not only did she nurse her son Yitzchok, but she nursed many children, who later converted to the Jewish religion.⁸³ Simply speaking, this was because these infants nursed from our holy and righteous mother Sarah, whose spiritual influence elevated them to a higher level.

But there is also a deeper reason why these infants later converted. It was because by nursing from Sarah Imeinu, they were nursing from a pure place where there is no sin. This is what gave them the spiritual energy to find holiness and convert to the Jewish people. At the time of the giving of the Torah, the entire Jewish people were “nursing” from a place where there is no sin, like the infants who nursed from Sarah Imeinu.

That is the depth behind the dairy foods we eat on *Shavuos*, which commemorates the spiritual “milk” we nursed from at that time – for we were nursing forth spiritual nourishment from the point that is above all sin.

In Conclusion

May we merit from the Creator to reach the complete spiritual repair of Creation, in which all sins will become whitened like snow, where we will all be “whitened”, cleansed, and purified [as symbolized by the white color of the milk and dairy we eat on *Shavuos*]. May the complete level of purity and holiness be revealed in Creation, so that this entire Creation can become a vessel to reveal the light of the Creator.

⁸² *Yevamos 36b*

⁸³ *Midrash Tanchuma parshas Vayeira: 38*

1.16 | *The Test of Shavuos*

The Test That Returns Each Year

Shavuos is the time of the giving of the Torah. Consequently, it is now the time to prepare to receive the Torah.

In order to ‘receive’ the Torah each year we can gain inspiration from reflecting on what the Jewish people did to prepare themselves to receive the Torah.

When Hashem came down to Har Sinai, He revealed Himself to the Jewish people. The entire nation trembled at the awesomeness of His revelation. Moshe *Rabbeinu* had to reassure the people that they had nothing to fear, and that Hashem was merely giving them a test.

A difficult test is called a *nisayon*. The days of *Sefiras HaOmer* occur during three months of the Jewish calendar – the second half of the month of Nissan, the entire month of Iyar, and the beginning of the month of Sivan. The word *Nissan* is rooted in the word *nisayon*. In other words, this first month of the *sefiras ha’omer*, the month of Nissan, contains in it a *nisayon* – a test. The “test” is how we will prepare for the Torah.

The word *Iyar* (the month which follows Nissan) comes from the word “*yirah*”, awe. This alludes to how the month of Iyar contains the power of *yirah* which can help enable us to prepare for receiving the Torah.

Thus, the months of Nissan and Iyar both serve to help us prepare for Shavuos. The “*nisayon*” (test) of *Nissan* requires us to prepare for the Torah, and the month of *Iyar* aids us in having the proper *yirah*, which are both necessary in order to receive the Torah.

The word *nisayon* comes from the word *nes*, which means to “run”; if a person “runs” away from the *nisayon*, he fails to grow from it. Alternatively, the word *nes* also means “miracle,” which uplifts a person. The hint of this is that a *nisayon* can either cause a person to run away from it, or become uplifted from it. Thus, every *nisayon* we endure serves as a test of our power of free choice – we can choose to elevate ourselves through the *nisayon* we are presented with, or run away from the message and fail to grow.

When the people heard the voice of Hashem at Har Sinai and all the thunder and lightning that followed, they had a *nisayon*. They were faced with a choice – they could want to run away, or they could choose to become uplifted. Their first reaction was to want to flee; only then did Moshe *Rabbeinu* calm them down and reassure them not to flee in fear. He was really teaching the people that the purpose of this *nisayon* was to uplift them.

The Test At Har Sinai and Each Year

What exactly is the *nisayon* which the Jewish people faced in receiving the Torah? What did they find so difficult?

The *Mesillas Yesharim* writes that everything in this world is in a *nisayon*. No matter who you are and what your situation is, one is always facing a *nisayon*.

The first *nisayon* at Har Sinai was whether we the Jewish people would really accept the Torah when it was offered by Hashem to them as an option. The second *nisayon* occurred at the actual time of the giving of the Torah and was a much deeper but more subtle kind of test. At this point the Jewish people had already reached the apex of perfection, standing at Har Sinai and seeing the revelation of Hashem. Their test was whether they were willing and courageous enough choose to hear the Torah directly from the voice of Hashem.

Did they pass the test?

The Torah tells us that they did not pass the test. When the people heard the voice of Hashem at Har Sinai, they were afraid that they would die from hearing Hashem's voice. In their fear, they requested to hear the Torah from Moshe's voice instead. The Vilna *Gaon* teaches that this deviation from listening to Hashem was the seed that ultimately led to the sin of the Golden Calf. The Jewish people were supposed to be on the level of being willing to die in order to hear the voice of Hashem. From this we learn that we actually need to serve Hashem on the level of being prepared to die just to listen to Hashem's voice!

But surely we would be forgiven for wanting to live and give up the opportunity to hear Hashem's voice, rather than hear Hashem's voice and die? What is the problem with choosing to live rather than hear Hashem's voice? The answer is that to live without hearing the voice of Hashem's is not really a life!

Admittedly, the people's fear of Hashem's voice did not signify idol worship. However, the sin lay in the fact that their fear of dying (which they associated with hearing His voice directly) surpassed their love of Hashem. The people's fear of dying led them to settle for hearing the Torah through Moshe instead of directly from Hashem's voice. However, the people failed to realize that life without hearing Hashem's voice is meaningless.

When Adam sinned, he was ashamed in front of Hashem. He said, "*Your voice I hear amidst the garden, but I am afraid and hiding.*"¹ He ran away from hearing Hashem's voice. At Har Sinai, we reached the purified state of Adam before the sin and were tested once again to see if we would listen to Hashem's voice or run in fear. However, we failed to pass the test.

All of us were at Har Sinai, for our souls were there in a previous lifetime. Thus, we all failed to pass that test – we were afraid to die. However, we have a chance every year to pass this test again every year at Shavuos time. Are we ready to die to hear the voice of Hashem?

Before we accept the light of receiving the Torah which returns every year on Shavuos, we are first tested again to see whether we have reached the level of choosing to listen to Hashem's voice

and risk dying. At Har Sinai, the test was overt. In contrast, the test of our current day is not as clear to us, though it is the same test. And though we are not on the same level as we were at Har Sinai, Hashem still sends us the same test to each and every one of us each year [to see if we will pass].

Striving For A Relationship With Hashem In Our Daily Life

In practical terms, what is our “test” that returns to us each Shavuos? In order to understand the essence of this difficult test presented to us each year on Shavuos, we must first understand that there are two totally different ways to live life.

When faced with a difficulty, one kind of person will continue to learn Torah and do all the *mitzvos*, visit *tzaddikim* and give *tzedakah*. He may also *daven* by *kevarim* (and even talk to Hashem a little when he is there). In contrast, the second type of person who meets with challenges will talk to Hashem about them all the time, and share with Him all his problems. Hashem. What would we do? Would we be willing to continue listening and sacrifice our soul? Or would we say, “I don’t know about this. I have to ask my wife. Also, I have kids at home. If I die, they will be left without a father.” All kinds of excuses....

Preparation for receiving the Torah is really all about being prepared to sacrifice one’s life for the sake of Torah and to hear Hashem’s voice. And, this must be a true willingness in one’s heart, and it will not suffice as a mere utterance of the lips that is superficial.

Preparing For Shavuos: Making A Self-Accounting

Practically speaking, in the three days leading up to Shavuos, everyone should actively carve out some time of quiet to make a self-accounting and ask himself if he is ready to accept the Torah or not. Is he willing to stay and listen to Hashem’s voice at the risk of death? This is the question that each Jew should ask himself every Shavuos: “If I would be standing at Har Sinai right now, would I be on the level to receive the Torah directly from Hashem’s voice?”

People may assume that such willingness to sacrifice our lives for Hashem was only relevant and appropriate for previous generations, and that we surely cannot be on the level of standing at Har Sinai. They may react, “What do you want from us?? These words are not for this generation...”

But such an attitude reveals a rejection of receiving the Torah. Whether or not we are there yet, we must at least strive to have a yearning to reach that high level, and we must not remain complacent with a low spiritual level.

This willingness to die for Hashem and His Torah should not be limited just to Shavuos. It should carry over into the rest of the year as well – to live a life of connection with Hashem, all day, and not just when we daven three times a day. Every day, each person should actively

consider deeply about his relationship with Hashem, and how much he is willing to sacrifice to get closer to Him.

The Torah says, *“Remember the day in which you stood before Hashem, your G-d, at Horeb.”* Don't just remember that you stood at Har Sinai – remember that you stood in front of Hashem at Har Sinai.

These words here will ring true for anyone who searches for a true kind of life. It is the true way to prepare for receiving the Torah. I hope that the words here are not new to you; to the contrary, I hope that they are quite familiar to you. We must separate ourselves from the mores of our generation to become souls of the Creator of the World.

May Hashem merit all of us to accept the Torah before Shavuos, and to be ready to give ourselves up in order to hear Hashem's voice and His Torah, all year.



Power of Torah Learning

2.1 | *Life After Death*⁸⁴

What Was Our Neshamah Doing Before It Came Down Here?

There is something good they have in America: it's called "Sunday." It's a time of the week in which people have off from work. But the question is: what to do with this time. Hashem gave Sundays to us as a day off; is it only so that we can spend more time with our family? It's a day where we can reflect on the purpose of our life.

Hashem took a soul, carved it out from His Throne, and sent it down to this world. For what purpose did He send our soul here for? And if we know that purpose, we still have to ask ourselves if our life is heading towards that goal we were sent here for.

What is the purpose of life? Is it so that we should be a good husband, a good father, to support our family, and to give *tzedakah*...or is there more to our life?

Think about what our soul was doing in Heaven before it came down here. What was our soul doing in Heaven? Yes, it was very happy there. But what was our soul actually doing there all the time?

Our Soul's Inner Yearning

Let's say a person was married to a woman for 70 years, and then his wife dies one day. This is a very hard thing to go through. When you have a wonderful relationship for 70 years, it's very difficult to just move on.

Before we were born, we learned the entire Torah in the mother's womb. When we are born, this is very hard for our soul. It's a very hard transition. This is really why a baby cries as soon as he's born – he misses the Torah he was learning.

It seems as if we have all forgotten our first relationship we once had with Hashem!

Once there is a relationship, it's very hard for us to just sever ourselves from the relationship. When a spouse dies after 70 years of marriage, it's extremely painful for the other spouse who remains alive. You don't just forget your spouse after living with him/her for so many years.

That is the *moshol*. The lesson of this is very clear – our own soul has left Heaven, from the wonderful relationship it enjoyed, and it can't just forget this relationship so easily.

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Life After Death

Chazal say that one must know where he came from, and to where he is going. We must all know that we came down from Heaven, and we will go back there one day. Are we aware from where we came from – and to where we are eventually going?

We will all leave this world eventually. Do we know where we are going to? We are going to a whole different world than what we see now. Should we go there if we don't know anything about it? Don't we all want this transition to go easy for us, so that we will feel at home when we get there?

If we want to be comfortable when we get to Heaven eventually after we die, we must already prepare ourselves on this world, and to learn about what life is like in Gan Eden.

One day, we will all go back to Gan Eden, where all day the Torah is being learned. Are we ready for that? Are we ready to learn Torah all day?

Most people would be afraid of what to do with themselves if they wouldn't work. We all want to have something to do one day when we get old and can't work anymore. Do we realize that one day our life will end, and that we will no longer have our job? Are we aware of reality?

Most people are terrified of the thought of death. But if a person lives a true kind of life, he doesn't fear death, because he realizes that death is just another step – it is another step in the process of living a truthful kind of life.

Let's be very honest. Are we ready to learn Torah all day in Gan Eden, after we die? Do we look forward to that?

Imagine if Hashem would come to a person and tell him, "You don't have to worry at all about money. I'll give you all the money in the world. Just learn Torah all day." Would any of us be ready for that?

If someone answers, "Yes", then it shows that he does indeed want to learn Torah, even though he works. But most people would answer, "No, I'm not ready to learn Torah all day, even I don't have to work and I have all the money in the world."

Balancing Your Torah Learning With Working Life (If You Work)

I understand that everyone needs a source of livelihood. I also need a livelihood. But what I'm asking is: What are our *aspirations* in life? Dovid HaMelech says in Tehillim, "*One thing I ask of Hashem, that I sit in the house of Hashem all the days in my life.*" Is it only Dovid HaMelech who said this, or do any of us feel that way also, that we wish we could sit and learn all day, even though we work?

I understand that not everyone can sit and learn all day. But imagine if you have a child who can't walk; do the parents not want him to walk? Of course they want him to walk. It is just that he can't. So even if a person can't sit and learn all day, he should at least *want* to.

If we have to go to work, then of course it's necessary for us to go to work. But as we leave shul in the morning, shouldn't we at least wish that we could linger in the *beis hamidrash* and learn, even though we have to go to work?

Hashem wants us to desire the right kind of life.

When Adam sinned, he was told that now he will have to work to make a living. This was a curse, not a blessing. We have to realize that ideally, man was not supposed to work – and our whole situation of having to go to work is a curse. Of course, now we have to work; but we still have to realize that it's a curse placed upon mankind.

When a person is in jail, he knows that he has to be in jail as a punishment, but he knows that jail is not his real life. He wants to get out of jail.

The same attitude we need to have if we work. When we go out to work each day, we have to realize that it's not the real situation we are supposed to be in. We should realize that although we have to work, we should wish that we could sit and learn all day.

There is a verse in Tehillim, "*Take my soul out of prison.*" Dovid HaMelech says: Take my soul out of the prison of my body. Our soul is imprisoned by our body. We have to want to come out of the materialistic pursuits of the body.

What Does Hashem Want From You?

What does Hashem want from us, and what should we want from ourselves?

The first thing we need is to have a desire for a true kind of life – the real kind of life. Most people are not rich, but most people still want to be rich. The same goes for learning Torah – not everyone is *zoche* to sit all day and learn. But we should at least wish that we could.

If a person doesn't aspire to sit and learn all day, then he has no hope for a true kind of life. However, if a person at least wishes that he could sit and learn, then even if he works, he at least has hope that he will live a true kind of life.

We may not have the time to be able to sit and learn all day, but we should at least want this. Hashem wants us to really *want, want, and want* to learn Torah – even if we can't actually do it. We have to at least *want* to.

Even if a person works to make a living and he can't learn Torah all day, he has to at least want deep down in his heart to be able to learn all day.

After a person dies, he goes to Heaven. If someone truly learned Torah on this world, he has what to do when he gets to Gan Eden, because people are learning Torah in Gan Eden. Even if someone on this world worked to make a living, if he had a deep wish inside to learn Torah, then he will find what to do in Gan Eden – he will be able to learn the Torah he always wanted to learn. But if someone didn't even want to learn Torah, he will have nothing to do when he gets to Heaven.

A Guarantee For Getting Into The Next World

How can a person know if he will get *Olam HaBa* (the Next World) or not? There are two ways how you can know you're heading towards *Olam HaBa*. One way is if you sat and learned Torah on this world – and the other way is if you want to learn Torah all day, even if you didn't.

I will say something now that is a bit harsh. If a person gave a lot of *tzedakah* on this world, and he also wanted to learn Torah – then when he gets to the next world, his *tzedakah* will uplift him and be a merit for him. But if he gave *tzedakah* and he didn't want to learn Torah, then his *tzedakah* will not be a merit for him when he gets to Heaven, and it will be the opposite – it will feel like *Gehinnom* for him.

Hashem wants us to all have the desire to want to learn Torah. If we really want to learn Torah, then we have a real life. Not to have this desire is a life that is death. I hope that all of you here, from the depths of my heart, should gain a desire to want to learn Torah all day; and through that, maybe we will also actually merit to sit and learn Torah all day.

Questions & Answers With The Rav

Q1: *How can the Rav say that we won't get into Olam HaBa if we don't desire to learn Torah, won't our other mitzvos help us get in?*

A: The Zohar says that our mitzvos are like a garment, while our Torah is our soul. If a person comes into the next world with just garments and no soul – he's like a body without a soul.

Q2: *If people who are sitting and learning all day are living the right kind of life, while we who work, who want to support our families, but wish deep down that we could be able to sit and learn all day – are we only living a "b'dieved" kind of life?*

A: First of all, the fact that you wish you could sit and learn all day makes you feel pain at this, and the pain itself is an atonement... The fact that you know that your life is a "b'dieved" kind of life is already an atonement. As long as you wish you could learn Torah, you will have hope in achieving you want. It's like a person who is in jail – if he wants to get out of jail, he will have hope in getting out of jail. But if he never desires to get out of jail, he won't ever get out of jail.

Q3: *What should I do if I realize that I don't have any time to learn Torah, because all day I am either working or taking care of my family?*

A: Good question. Firstly, realize that it's a problem. Then realize that if there's nothing you can do, all you can do is to cry to Hashem about this. If you don't cry about it, it shows you don't realize how much of a problem it is. But if you cry to Hashem about it, Hashem will help you find time to learn Torah.

Q4: If a person can't sit and learn all day, but he still wishes that he could, what can he do to protect his aspirations?

A: Very good question. Every day, for 15 minutes a day, sit quietly, and ask yourself: "Who am I? What is the purpose of my life? Am I on the right direction in life?"

If you have pain that you aren't on the right direction, then that pain itself will lead you to the right direction in life.

Q5: If I want to learn Torah, but I also have other good desires in life – such as a desire to give a lot of tzedakah, chessed, and to support my family – what is wrong with that?

A: Imagine you come to a Shabbos meal and you have fish, kugel, and dessert – but you don't have challah – what kind of meal is that? The primary blessing on a meal is on the challah. The lesson from this is that Torah has to be our primary desire in life; after that, we can want many other good things. But if we are missing the primary will of learning Torah, then everything else we do is like a building built on air, and it will have no foundation.

I hope that all of you will strengthen the inner will that is found in a Jew.

2.2 | *The Root of Learning Torah*⁸⁵

Why did Hashem have to reveal Himself to us at Mt. Sinai at the Giving of the Torah? If the entire purpose of the Giving of the Torah was so that our nation should receive the Torah, it would have been enough to receive this gift even through an emissary. So why did Hashem Himself have to reveal Himself when He gave us the Torah?

Another question is: We know that our souls left us at this revelation - if we weren't able to handle this spiritual revelation, why didn't Hashem just give the Torah to Moshe? Why did we have to receive it directly from Hashem?

The existence of the universe depends on the Torah. Learning the Torah began at Mt. Sinai; before this, there was no "giving" of the Torah, and all Torah that we had we learned from ourselves. At Mt. Sinai, we, the Jewish people, received the way how to learn Torah.

Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin *zt"l* said that everything is contained in its beginning; thus, in order to understand anything, we must know its root. The root of learning Torah was when we stood at Sinai. Let us think about this.

The first commandment was, "*I am Hashem your G-d.*" The Sages expound on this that when anyone sits and learns Torah, Hashem sits and learns next to him. So we must know that the Torah wasn't only for the time we stood at Mt. Sinai! Hashem descended onto the mountain. The Sages said that not only on Mt. Sinai did Hashem come, but every time a person learns, Hashem is there.

That was what we received at Sinai – that every time we learn Torah, it is a revelation of Hashem's presence. Just like our souls left us at Sinai, so too when we learn Torah, in a sense, our souls leave us. Learning Torah, throughout all the generation, resembles the way we received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

Another thing we find by the Giving of the Torah is that for every word that Hashem spoke, our souls left us. We find this well in our own Torah learning. The Rambam writes that a person has to kill himself over the words of Torah; so, in a sense, when we exert ourselves in learning, it is as if our souls are leaving us, because we are "killing" ourselves in our toil.

Why did their souls leave them when they heard each word of the Torah? Because when they heard each word, they saw Hashem. From their great *d'veykus* to Hashem, they could see Hashem through each word they heard. (This is like the words of the *sefer Nefesh HaChaim*, that learning Torah itself is *d'veykus* to Hashem). If a person learns Torah without this *d'veykus*, the Torah he is learning does not represent the Torah that was given by Sinai.

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The Torah was not just given so that it could be given to us. The Torah was given to us so we could connect to the One who gave us the Torah.

We know that a person can send a *sheliach* (a messenger) and give *kiddushin* (betrothal) to a woman, and the *kiddushin* is valid. But if a *chosson* (groom) sends a *sheliach* to his *kallah* (bride) to give her *kiddushin*, although this is a valid act of *kiddushin*, it is clear that such a *chosson* doesn't know anything about the relationship between a husband and wife. That is why the Torah could not be given through a *sheliach*; it was like the wedding of Hashem with the Jewish people.

These words are not novel concepts. They are written in the words of the Torah and in the words of the Sages, but we just don't reflect on them. So, back to our question: Why did Hashem have to give us the Torah directly, from Himself, and not through a messenger?

"Hashem and the Torah are one."⁸⁶ If a person forgets Hashem, it's like a *kallah* who forgets about her *chosson* on her wedding day [or vice versa].

It's possible that a person can learn Torah the entire day and he never interrupts his learning, yet he is still very far from the Torah. Why? Because a person might still think that the Torah could have been given to him through a *sheliach*, and not directly from Hashem. He might think, "*Baruch Hashem*, we have many explanations of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* that explain the Gemara. We have so many *sefarim*. But my own learning isn't so needed..."

People can learn and learn Torah all day, diligently, and even enjoy their learning, but they can still be missing something in their learning. They might be thinking that the Torah belongs only to Moshe Rabbeinu – after all, the Torah is called "*Toras Moshe*" ... but they feel that the Torah will never be their own.

But we have to know: Without our own, personal share in Torah learning, there is nothing we that have on This World.

The *Rema* in the beginning of the *Shulchan Aruch* starts out that one must always remember, "Hashem is always near me." Why is this the very first *halachah* in *Shulchan Aruch*? It is because in order to learn Torah, first we must know that there is Hashem.

In the laws of learning Torah, it is brought in *Shulchan Aruch* that a person, before he learns, should be aware that he is in Hashem's presence. This doesn't mean that a person has to keep thinking of this fact obsessively throughout the day. It just means that for two minutes, or even one minute, we should remember that we are learning Torah in front of Hashem.

How do we prepare for receiving the Torah? It is by accepting the responsibility of learning Torah upon ourselves. It means to actually accept the Torah. We can do this by thinking for a minute before we sit down to learn: "There is a Hashem, Who gave us the Torah". We are not alone when we learn - Hashem is sitting with us.

We should all be *zoche* to learn Torah with *kedushah* and become close to Hashem all day with it.

⁸⁶ Zohar Achrei Mos 73a

2.3 | *The Torah is Our Life*⁸⁷

I hope these words aren't *Bittul Torah* (a waste of Torah study) to you but instead as a way to strengthen our learning.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* says that Hashem is constantly looking into the Torah and creating the world from it, and if there would be one second without learning, the world would not exist. The *Nefesh HaChaim* also says that Torah is the person himself! The Torah is part of the design of a person.

It is thus not possible to live without Torah, because Torah is a part of the human design.

People that don't learn Torah are alive, of course, but only physically. Without learning Torah, their existence resembles that of a chair or table, which has no life to it.

There are people who are living, but they aren't alive! There is also such a thing as a *Talmid Chochom* (Torah scholar) who doesn't have any *daas* (mature thinking), and *Chazal* say that he is worse than a dead animal. This is because it is not enough for a person to just learn the Torah and even know it very well; it has to feel like a life-giving energy to him.

Why do we learn Torah? It is not simply because we have a *mitzvah* to constantly learn Torah. It is true that we have a *mitzvah* to learn, and that this *mitzvah* is greater than all the *mitzvos*, but that is still not the inner reason. The inner reason why we need to learn Torah is because we really have nothing else in our life other than Torah.

Although it looks to us like there are other things than Torah, it's only the imagination.

What is the meaning of a *Gadol* (a Torah leader)? Does it mean that he learns Torah all day? This cannot be the meaning of a *Gadol*, because we can find people who learn all day, yet their minds are still very small and undeveloped. Learning a lot of Torah all the time doesn't mean that a person is a *Gadol*. A *Gadol* is rather someone who realizes what the reality is – he realizes that there is nothing else that can be considered true reality other than the Torah.

Once a person said to a certain *Talmid Chochom*, "I get up in the morning to learn because I have nothing else to do other than learn Torah". The *Talmid Chochom* told him sharply, "You learn because you have nothing else to do?! That is the only reason you learn? You shouldn't be learning because you have "nothing else to do."

This is not "*chizuk*" (inspiration). It is rather a description of reality! If a person is sitting on a chair or breathing, is it *chizuk*? No, it's a lot more than that; it's reality. So why do the words of Torah need *chizuk* (and the Sages indeed say that words of Torah need *chizuk*)? It is only because people don't realize that Torah is reality. If a person would realize that Torah is reality, he wouldn't need to

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hear any *chizuk* when it comes to how he must learn Torah. If a person knows that Torah learning is all there is to reality, he won't need *chizuk*.

If a person learns Torah all day, *Baruch Hashem*, he is away from the bad influence of the world. But it's not enough. A person has to forge a deep connection with the Torah – to make a *bris* (a covenant) with the Torah.

One day, you might have to leave this *Beis Midrash* when your children get older. What will be then? Do you have the slightest thought of leaving the world of Torah, even if you have to go out to work and make a living? If you do, then you don't know that Torah is your very life. It doesn't matter that you are worried about *parnassah* (livelihood). Just because you are worried about what will be with *parnassah* does not mean that you should one day leave the world of Torah you currently find yourself in.

There were great *tzaddikim* in the times of the *Gemara* who were able to leave the *Beis Midrash* and go make a *parnassah*, but that was because they didn't lose their *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of Heaven) in the process. But for someone today who leaves the *beis midrash* and goes out to work, who knows what will be his end? It's endangering his very *Yiddishkeit* (religious Judaism).

If we forge a deep connection to the Torah, we will have a life. But if we have even the slightest thought to leave the *beis midrash* for even one day, then that means that even today we aren't really learning! If we know, for sure, that only Torah is life to us – that there is no other option – then we have a life.

It is written in Eichah, “*Merciful women cooked their children.*” How could such a thing be? A mother ate her own children?! The answer to this is that when a person slowly becomes further from the Torah here and there, he loses so much of his spiritual sensitivity. The women who killed their own children in the era before the destruction of Jerusalem could only come to such barbaric behavior because they were so distanced from the way of Torah. It began as a slow descent from the Torah, then more and more, until they were totally callous to any spirituality.

If a person makes sure he is connected, in an inner place in his soul, to the Torah – if he makes sure to always protect his connection to Torah – then he understands that Torah is his life, and he knows what life is all about.

This is what one of the Sages said, “I will not live except in a place of Torah.” Why did he have to live in a specific place to learn Torah – aren't there many places that one can learn Torah? It is because he wanted to protect his connection to the Torah, and therefore, and that is what he meant by saying that he could only live in a place of Torah.

Hashem gave life to all of us, and eventually, our life will end at some point. All of us have the power of free will. We all have difficulties, and not all of us feel it easy to “stay in learning” forever. But you should know that the alternative is much worse. It is much worse to leave the world of learning and go to work.

Do you think those who left learning to go to work have it better? They don't. Do you think it will be easier when you go to work for ten hours a day? It's easier to work on one's *Bitachon* (trust in Hashem) than to work so hard!

We must make a *bris* (covenant) – inwardly, deep within our soul - with the Torah, and decide that we will never leave learning! Forever! There is no other alternative we have!

In Gan Eden, what else goes on besides learning Torah? One who understands this is living in Gan Eden already on this world. One who doesn't is living in *Gehinnom* on this world.

There is nothing else we have on this world other than learning Torah. If a person thinks that there is something important other than learning, it's in all his imagination.

It is only when a person thinks that there is something else other than Torah that he starts to have *nisyonos* (difficulties) and, then he feels like he has go out to work. He has many valid excuses: "My father-in-law wants me to go to work...my family needs more support...my father wants me to go to work..." and all kinds of other excuses. But when a person truly realizes that his life is Torah, nothing will stop him, not even his father. He will look at is as if his father is telling him to commit suicide. He will find in *Shulchan Aruch* that if his father tells him not to learn Torah, he doesn't have to listen to him. Of course, he should try to do this in a peaceful way, but one thing is for sure: when a person really understands that Torah is his life, nothing will get in his way.

Baruch Hashem, we are all *zoche* to sit and learn. But do we realize that Torah is our very life? Are we prepared, now, to want to continue learning forever – from day until night? There is a story about a certain prestigious family in Europe, who were known for their greatness in Torah learning. All of the boys in this family were diligent in studying Torah, and they all learned in the finest yeshivos of Europe. But one of the boys wasn't like his other brothers. For some reason, he didn't have that much interest in learning. He told his parents that he's not interested in going to yeshiva. His parents were very pained at his lack of interest in learning Torah, because it was their very life, and they were distraught about how to deal with him.

One day, his mother said to him, "Come with me. We're going for a walk." He walked with her, not knowing why she was suddenly asking him to go on a walk with her. They came to the bridge that overlooked the river below. She turned to him suddenly and said, with emotion: "If you don't learn Torah...I will throw you into the river." He got the message. His mother's words made such an impact on him that he decided from then on that he will dedicate himself to the Torah.

Did a person come to this world only to cut himself off from life, and then on top of that, to have to endure punishment for all his sins? If a person leaves the world of Torah learning, he will have to endure a lot of suffering, because he will end up with a lot of sins. First he cut himself off from real life, which is Torah, and then he ended up leading a life of sin, as a resulting of leaving learning and going out to work.

Chazal say that a person who is not considered "free" unless he studies Torah. Why? It is because he understands that there is no other kind of life other than learning Torah. If a person understands that, he is truly free.

During *Yamim Noraim*, there are kinds of resolutions that people make. But we must know that first we need to have a basis to all these resolutions. If we have a basis, we can build upon it. The basis we need to have is this: We must firmly decide that we **never plan on** leaving this *beis midrash* to go to work - not even once.

If we build our inner look on reality, and we realize that we have nothing else other than learning Torah, we will be strong inside, and then we can start to really serve Hashem in other areas. But if we have any doubts about this – if we think maybe there’s something out there in the world that we need to have, and that maybe one day go we should go to work, then we have no firm basis in our life to build anything upon, and then we will not be able to serve Hashem in other areas that we wish we could improve in.

If we go like this into *Rosh HaShanah* – knowing in the depth of our soul that we will never leave learning the Torah - we can avoid many decrees of this year. I hope that you understand that these words here are not *bittul Torah*, but rather as a way to strengthen your Torah learning. These are not meant to be mere words of inspiration. If these words here are “inspiration” to you, then it’s a waste of time; inspiration goes away after some time. The Chazon Ish said that the best *mussar sefer* is one’s *Gemara*. Some argued on this, and of course each person is different when it comes to this. But the point is that inspiration alone cannot build us.

We need to realize that this is the true freedom a person can have – to realize that we have nothing in our life except learning Torah. What are we judged on *Rosh HaShanah*? We are mainly judged for how connected we are to the Torah. If we aren’t, what is the point of living....?

Decide to yourself that you will never leave this *Beis Midrash*, not for anything – no matter what difficulty will come your way. If you do this, you will feel truly free.

2.4 | *Torah In A Working Person's Life*⁸⁸

Being Ready To Receive The Torah

When Hashem asked the Jews at Har Sinai if they want to receive the Torah, everyone answered, “*Naaseh v'nishma*” – “We will do and we will hear.”

Every Shavuot, we have a new chance to receive the Torah again.

Some Questions to Ask Yourself Before Shavuot

1) How many people truly receive the Torah again anew on Shavuot? Imagine if Hashem would come to us and ask all of us if we want the Torah. Would we say “*Naaseh v'nishmah*” so fast?

2) Moshe *Rabbeinu* told the Jews in Egypt that they would be redeemed and go to the desert to receive the Torah and then go to *Eretz Yisrael*. How would we react if we heard that Hashem is giving the Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*? Would we quickly run and buy the next flight to Israel, or would we first check with our parents and family to see if they agree?

3) For every word that came out of Hashem's mouth at Har Sinai, every person's soul there left him, and then it returned to him miraculously by the word of Hashem. Would we be prepared for this? If we would want to accept the Torah nowadays, would we be prepared to go through such an experience - that our souls should leave our bodies?

4) Of course, we only received the Torah once, and there will not be another giving of the Torah; we believe that “This Torah shall not be exchanged.” But how much do we, personally, really *want* the Torah?

5) We have three *regalim* – Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos. We all look forward to Pesach and Sukkos. But what about Shavuot? Do we look forward to Shavuot? Is there anyone who waits for Shavuot?

Don't Wait For Shavuot – Accept the Torah Now!

In order to really want the festival of Shavuot, we need to prepare for it a lot. The *Sefer HaChinuch* says that the *mitzvah* of *sefiras haomer* is to count down the days to Shavuot, when we receive the Torah, so we see that we need 49 days of preparation for Shavuot. In order to really gain from Shavuot, we have to prepare for it and want it.

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I met someone who always goes to *kevarim* and to holy sites; he always goes to *Kever Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* every *Lag B'Omer*. I asked him, “How come you don’t go to Har Sinai? Why is it that people don’t want to see Har Sinai and reflect upon what happened there? How come people aren’t enthusiastic about going to Har Sinai, just like people wish to see the *Beis HaMikdash* when they go to the Kosel?” He didn’t have an answer. But there is an answer. The Sages say that “Torah remains in a corner, and whoever wants can come and take it.” Torah is really found everywhere, all over the world. We don’t have to wait for Shavuot to receive the Torah, because Torah is everywhere. Don’t wait for Shavuot in order to strengthen your connection to Torah. It is impossible to live without the Torah for even one day!

“Marrying” The Torah

Moshe *Rabbeinu* separated from his wife Tziporah after forty years, in order to receive prophecy. The question is, why was he allowed to this – isn’t it forbidden for a man to remain unmarried? I once heard an answer to this: The Torah is called by our Sages an “*aishes chayil*” – the wife – of a *Talmid Chochom* (Torah scholar). Therefore, the Torah was like the “wife” of Moshe *Rabbeinu*.

Who is prepared to dedicate himself to the Torah, to make a *bris* (covenant) with the Torah? To make a *bris* with the Torah, it is not enough to simply say the words. It’s like giving *Kiddushin* to your wife to marry her! The Torah is called a person’s wife! Nobody marries a woman he doesn’t like. Anyone who gets married thinks that the woman he is marrying is a good woman, the best woman in the world. We must realize that the Torah is a good wife to us – not a bad wife.

Correcting Our False View of Reality

People don’t realize how much of a lie this world is; the very thought in a person that maybe there is something out there in the world other than the Torah is a lie.

People erroneously think that marriage, children and livelihood are more important in their life than learning the Torah. This is also an example of falsity. Of course, we have to be normal and be concerned about our family and livelihood. But we must realize that there is nothing we really have in our life other than learning Torah! It is the most important part of our life.

How To View Our Need To Make Parnassah

We are talking about what a person essentially feels connected to. When a person feels very attached to his job, or to other things, he is not really living like a Jew.

Shavuot is the test for a person to ask himself: “What do I really want out of my life? Do I really want a life of Torah...?”

Is the Torah the main point of your life when you go to work? Most people would answer, “It’s true, the Torah is the main thing, but in the end of the day, we have to go make a living.” But the correct attitude we should have toward working is that it is only *secondary* in our life to learning Torah. We should look at work the same way we look at going to sleep. Of course we have to go to sleep, but nobody believes that going to sleep is the main point of our life just because we need it. So just because we have to go to work doesn’t mean that it is the main point of our life.

Do we feel how making a living is really a curse we have to endure? Really, *parnassah* is a curse of this exile. Do we feel that really it’s a curse? Of course it’s important, and we know that there is such a thing as “the key to livelihood” which Hashem has. But we must know that Torah is even more important. If Hashem would give us a choice: “Do you want the Torah, or would you instead want to have a good *parnassah* and be very rich (but you won’t have the Torah)”, what would we choose? What would we answer? Would we say, “Chazal say that if there is no *kemach* (flour), there is no Torah”, therefore, we have to go to work...”?

The Sages say that one must have “Torah with *Derech Eretz*” – that a person should learn together with earning a living. We also find in the Gemara that Reb Yochanan HaSandlar went to work for a living because he said, “If there is no flour, there is no Torah.” But that was back then, when people were always thinking about Hashem. To Reb Yochanan HaSandlar, Torah was his main point of life.

The Gemara says that there are ten *kavin* (amounts) of speech given to the world. I think it can be said of today that there are ten kinds of *parnassah* in the world today. Today, the situation of making a *parnassah* has become like going to *Gehinnom* on this world! Going to work to earn a livelihood is really a curse.

What is the proper attitude to have, then, if we have to go to work? We need to feel that our life and our soul is connected to the Torah – and not to our livelihood.

The Truth

The words here are the simple truth. Everyone at some point will one day understand this – even if a person doesn’t understand how it is true now, after 120 years when he dies, he will finally realize it. The way of life in America is a world of lies. People are looking at work as the main part of their life, while Torah is just a side thing. It is not the way of our fathers and teachers.

We have to become connected to the Torah from the depths of our soul. We should all be *zoche* to learn the Torah the way we should.

2.5 | *The Reason To Learn Torah*⁸⁹

Knowing Why We Learn Torah

From all of the *mitzvos*, learning Torah is the most important *mitzvah*. This shows us that every single Jew has a connection to the Torah.

We need to understand what this connection is, and how we actually connect to the Torah. What is the reason that we must learn Torah? Is there only one reason, or are there a few reasons? Is it automatic, or do we have to actually reveal it?

Maybe you will say that it doesn't make a difference, because all that matters is that we must do what Hashem commands us to do. But we find that when it comes to the mitzvah of Sukkah, there the Torah reveals the reason for the mitzvah – “*So that the generations will know that in Sukkos, I dwelled amongst them*”, so there must be a reason for the mitzvah of learning Torah as well. What is that reason? Do we have to know the reason, or should we just learn because Hashem said so?

Another thing one must know is: “Why should I learn? Is the reason that I learn the same reason that everyone else learns?” The reason is not the same for every person. If one does not know the reason why he learns, then it is a sign that he definitely needs to improve in his learning.

If the whole reason that one learns is because he knows that learning Torah has a great reward in Gan Eden, then he is basically saying that you don't really have to learn Torah for the sake of the Torah, but simply because “Hashem said that you have to do it”. If a person learns Torah for this reason, then when he gets to Gan Eden, he will have nothing to do!

In Gan Eden, we know that the souls learn Torah there. Why do they learn Torah in Gan Eden? Whatever that reason is, the reason why they learn should be the very same reason that *we* learn!

“*Sof Maaseh, B'machshavah techilah*” – “The end of actions is first with thought.” What do we first have to think before we learn Torah? If the reason for learning Torah isn't clear to oneself on a personal level, then he hasn't yet begun to learn in the right way. Not only that, but the rest of what he does as well also needs to be fixed. He will then discover that all of his Torah learning was being done until now in a lethargic manner.

The *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* (in the laws of Talmud Torah) writes that in learning Torah, we have two *mitzvos*. One is the *mitzvah* to **know** the Torah, and the second *mitzvah* is to put **effort** into the Torah. But these two *mitzvos* are still just the external aspect of our learning. What is the actual essence of learning?

Why do we have to know the Torah? Is it so that we shouldn't become an *am haaretz* (ignoramus)?! Is that the only reason why need to learn Torah...?

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We are all aware that we must know the entire Torah, but why?

Just like when it comes to each Yom Tov, we have to know its laws before we enter the Yom Tov. So too, when it comes to the *mitzvah* of learning Torah, we must know what it entails. On Sukkos, we have to know the laws of Sukkos before we enter the Yom Tov. We must know its laws of the Sukkah and the Four Species. The Yom Tov of Shavuot has its “laws” as well – the mitzvah to learn Torah! What are the “laws” of this mitzvah? What is the inner reason for why we learn?

If a person isn't clear exactly why he learns Torah, his “life” is not a “life”!

Connecting To The Torah

How, indeed, does a person connect himself to the Torah?

There are many people who sit and *learn* the Torah, but there aren't that many who are actually *connected*, inwardly, to the Torah.

Why? It is because the depth of their minds and hearts is not connected to the Torah. Such people are just “sitting and learning”, in the superficial sense. A person has to know *what the reason is* that he learns the Torah – not the reason that “has to be”, but the personal reason of why *he himself* learns the Torah.

Longing and Desiring For The Torah

If you learn Torah because you have a *longing* and a *desire* (*hishtokekut*) to know of it, then you are at least *starting* to connect to the Torah.

This *longing* that you need to have for the Torah is not simply from a desire of gathering more knowledge, but from the holy power of thought in the Jewish soul, “*machshavah*”. Our connection to the Torah must be an inner connection, and it has many facets to it. We must reveal this inner power, and without it, we are not connected to the Torah.

Soul Connection To Torah

How does a person use his thought to connect to the Torah? The Sages say that the soul (the “*neshamah*”) resides in the brain. The soul is what connects a person to the Torah. It is not simply the *thoughts* of the brain that connect one to the Torah; that is only a superficial attitude. The whole connection that one has with the Torah by thinking in it is only through the *soul* which resides in the brain.

We understand that a body cannot live without a soul. The root of all our *avodah* is with our soul, so we always have to look at everything through our soul's viewpoint, not through the body's viewpoint.

The superficial attitude of learning Torah is that we have “think” in our learning. But this does not always reveal the light of the soul as one learns Torah. Such an attitude is to be connected to the Torah only through one's body. A person might very well be learning Torah with the same attitude that he has toward eating and drinking...he learns it as more of an intellectual kind of thing. He's connected to the Torah only on a purely physical level.

Torah is a spiritual light, and one can only connect to the Torah through his soul. The mitzvah to learn Torah is an entirely internal kind of mitzvah. All other mitzvos, such as shaking a *Lulav* and wearing *Tefillin*, involve physical actions. But the mitzvah to learn Torah is entirely internal.

If a person learns Torah through his body – meaning, if he was connected to Torah only a purely physical/intellectual level - then when he dies, he cannot learn Torah in Gan Eden, because his body is gone. His soul never got used to learning Torah! It was only his body that was used to learning the Torah...and now his body isn't here...

The words here are very sharp. These words are not merely words of “*chizuk*” (inspiration). It is rather how we can have an entirely different view on things.

A “Torah of Life”

Many people make effort to “know” the Torah ever since they were young children, but they were never connected to the Torah. It is not a surprise, then, that these people grow up and eventually go off the *derech* (irreligious). They were never connected to the Torah in the first place, even though they learned it and knew it.

Yes, they will certainly get reward for their learning. Hashem doesn't hold back reward from anyone. A person will always be rewarded in Heaven for having learned Torah. But this is not enough for a person to become affected during his current lifetime through his Torah learning. When Torah is learned without a realization that it is a *Toras Chaim*, a “Torah of life” – when a person does not understand that the Torah is our very source of vitality – then such Torah learning was not a “Torah of life” to the person, and in turn, it does not provide him with life. That is why many people learned Torah when they were younger but it didn't have an effect on them to want to lead a better life. It is because they didn't realize that Torah is a “Torah of life” – a source that sustains us and keeps us spiritually alive.

The reason why you should be learning Torah is because you should have a desire for *life* itself, and to realize that the Torah is *life*! The Torah is called “*Toras Chaim*” – a Torah of life; it gives us life! It should be life to us!

The problem with our generation is that we do not have this desire enough for 'life'; many of us are like dying people who don't have enough life.

But at least we have hope, because, after all, we all have within us a desire to live. We all want to live, and that, itself, can help us push ourselves to get to the real kind of life that we need.

We need to realize that only the Torah is *life*, and for that reason, we should have a desire and longing to know of the Torah.



Women & Torah

3.1 | *The Song of the Jewish Woman*⁹⁰

What Are Women Doing All Day in Gan Eden?

We all received the Torah at Har Sinai, which we celebrate on the festival of *Shavuot*. Ever since standing at Har Sinai, Jewish men spend their time learning the Torah. What about women? What special significance does the Torah have for women, being that women do not have the *mitzvah* to learn Torah?

It is written, “Do not forsake the Torah of your mother.”⁹¹ What does this mean? What Torah does a mother learn? She doesn’t learn *Gemara*, or the *Zohar*.

In order to answer this question, we need to reflect into the following. After *Shavuot* ends, what do the women take from it for the rest of the year?

We know that when a person dies, the soul ascends to *Gan Eden*. But what exactly does everyone do in *Gan Eden*? And specifically, what do the women do in *Gan Eden*? Exploring this will help us understand what a woman’s Torah is, and what part of Torah will remain with them after *Shavuot* is over.

The Song of Miriam

The Torah is replete with stories, many of which are very applicable to women. One reason the Torah tells us all these stories is to teach us *mussar* and good ethics from them. However, there is more to it than this.

One great story entirely focused on Jewish women is the story of Miriam, when she sang *shirah* (great song) with all the women after the splitting of the *Yam Suf*. We can learn from this that this *shirah* is a record of all the miracles together throughout history which are essentially connected via a continuous chain of song. The *sefarim hakedoshim* teach that this *shirah* continues to be sung in a special chamber in Gan Eden, and that this women’s choir in Gan Eden is headed by Miriam.⁹² The

90 שבועות_027_שיר.האישה.היהודיה.תשע"ד

91 Mishlei 1:8

92 Zohar III 167b. The following is a translation of the words of the Zohar with the commentary of the “Matok M’Devash”:
 “There was a story that when Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai that once when he was learning Torah, two messengers from Gan Eden came to him and said to him, “The head of the Heavenly yeshivah (the angel Metatron) is inquiring about your peace. Many novel Torah insights were revealed tonight.” Rabbi Shimon asked of them to reveal one of the novel Torah insights, so they told him. Afterwards, Rabbi Shimon said to one of the two messengers, “There is one thing I wanted to know. Can you tell me if women get into the Heavenly Yeshivah, since they, too, have a neshamah (Divine soul) which ascends to Gan Eden above? Since they are not “daughters” of the Torah, for they do not learn Torah like men, perhaps because of this they do not ascend to the Heavenly Yeshivah. If there is any yeshivah for women in Heaven, please let me know about this.” As he was saying this, one of the messengers flew to Gan Eden. After the messenger returned, the messenger said that it requested permission to tell Rabbi

fact that this *shirah*, this song which was conducted by Miriam, is continuing, means that the great miracles that happened to the Jewish people didn't end with the splitting of the sea. Rather, the miracles continue as the song of Miriam continues to be sung.

How does this *shirah* relate to a woman's Torah? One of the names of Torah is "*shirah*". And this particular name of the Torah, "*shirah*", the song, is the woman's Torah – and it is this particular aspect of Torah which women "practice" since Har Sinai. Whereas men *learn* the Torah, the women "*sing*" the Torah. That is the "Torah" which our mothers learn – it is the *shirah* which was sung by Miriam with the women at the *Yam Suf*, and it continues on in *Gan Eden*.

Though women are exempt from learning Torah, women relate to Torah and teach it through their *shirah*, their song. A man is not allowed to hear a woman singing, and the deep reason behind this is because a woman's unique *avodah* is the *shirah*, the "song" - which is not a man's *avodah* - thus, a man is not allowed to "hear" a woman's song.

What Is The Song of the Jewish Woman?

What does it mean that a woman "sings" the Torah? The Hebrew word "*shirah*" is linked to the Hebrew word *sharsheres*, which means "chain" (Maybe that's why women like to wear chains!). [In the context of Torah, a "chain" refers to an episode in Jewish history, made up by links in the chain represented by various events.] A *shirah* is sung at whenever a **certain** "chain" is completed. *Shirah* is the point at which the historical event has been played out, the episode is complete and the women can sing about the positive outcome, with hindsight.

For example, at the time when Yosef was sold into slavery, this event seemed like the worst thing possible. However, after reading about the subsequent events, we can see how this original, apparently negative event led to Yosef being second in command and saving his brothers and people from famine. A woman sings when she reaches a point of genuine realization, understanding and gratitude to Hashem in seeing that the details and events of history are vital links in a chain.

Shimon Bar Yochai about the spiritual benefits which women receive in Gan Eden, and that since this request was in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the messenger was shown what it previously never knew about. The messenger began to speak: "Six chambers were shown to me, which were full of several pleasures and delights. It was in a place in Gan Eden which is draped by a curtain, and from this curtain and onward, no men are allowed to enter. In the third chamber, there resides Yocheved the mother of Moshe, the trustworthy prophet. Her daughter Miriam is also there, and thousands and myriads of women are with them in this chamber. Every day, for three times a day, she [Miriam] and all the women give thanks and praise to the Master of the world, and every day, they sing the Song at the Sea. She [Miriam] alone begins from this verse: "And Miriam the prophetess took..." And all of the righteous in Gan Eden listen to the pleasantness of her voice, and several holy angels give thanks and praise with her, to the Holy One. In the fourth chamber resides Devorah, and she is also regarded with the other prophetesses, and all the rest of the women are found with her and they all give thanks and sing, the same song which she [Devorah] sang on this world: "And Devorah sang, along with Barak son of Avinoam..." Then one of the messengers added by saying to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, "Ho, Rebbi, Ho, Rebbi! Who shall merit and see the joy of the righteous [men] and the righteous women, which they make for the Holy One Blessed Is He?" The messenger also said, "There are also four hidden chambers, where the holy Matriarchs Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah reside in. No one is given permission to reveal these chambers, and no one has ever seen or reached them."

In other words, by contemplating their lives with *emunah*, a woman is able to come to sing *shirah*.

Reflecting About Your Life

Shirah is a song of recognition, appreciation and pure joy for the journey and for seeing the distance one has travelled in life. In order to appreciate the chain of history and be brought to *shirah*, a woman must reflect on see how all the events in his life and how they connect. For instance, a woman may reflect back to the time when she was a baby and she cried and all the challenges and growth moments she faced before reaching her wedding day. But then she gets married and sings out of joy.

The Greatness of Women

Miriam was the one who began the *shirah*. She was also the one who was responsible for Moshe's birth and survival.⁹³ Ever since Moshe was born, his older sister Miriam looked after him and ensured his survival. Thus, if not for Miriam, there would be no Redemption! This is the depth behind why "in the merit of the righteous women, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt."⁹⁴ If not for Miriam, there would be no Moshe!

Miriam's name comes from the word *merirus*, bitterness. When Miriam sang the *shirah*, she was alluding to the fact that although the Jewish people first went through bitterness in Egypt, now they were singing. In a certain way, the song of Miriam is greater than the Torah which Moshe gave! This is because it is written, "*Az yashir Moshe*" – "Then, Moshe sang." The men only sing after the miracles are complete,⁹⁵ as the *Gemara* states that "*Az Yashir*" is a song of the future, in which Moshe will lead all the men to sing.⁹⁶ But Miriam was singing with the women even before the people had witnessed the salvation, as the Torah says, "*And Miriam took*,"⁹⁷ which is written in past tense, implying that the women were already singing from before.⁹⁸

Thus, the women expressed their faith in Hashem even before they could even experience the salvation. This is a perfect example of a woman's role in the Torah. Just as Miriam and the women sang *shirah* by the sea to prepare the people to receive the Torah, so too every Jewish woman can provide her family with Torah by singing the *shirah*.

⁹³ Editor's Note: Miriam also convinced her parents to reunite and this led to Moshe being born.

⁹⁴ Talmud Bavli: Sotah 11b

⁹⁵ Shelah HaKadosh, cited in the sefer "Mussarei HaShelah al HaTorah"

⁹⁶ Talmud Bavli: Tractate Sanhedrin: Chapter Eleven (Cheilek)

⁹⁷ Shemos 15:20

⁹⁸ Shelah HaKadosh, cited in the sefer "Mussarei HaShelah al haTorah"

Making Time to Reflect

It is written, “*A new Torah shall come forth from me*”⁹⁹, which means that at the Redemption, Moshiach will reveal a “new Torah.” What is the Torah that Moshiach will reveal? Mashiach will reveal the entire story of the Jewish people throughout history, and this will show us the great chain of events that will lead us to *shirah*.

Every woman should take some time every day to reflect: “What has happened to me since the time I was born? What were the major events and stages I went through in my life?” Then she can reflect on how Hashem was there with her at every stage and provided salvation.

This process of reflection and contemplation would reveal the “chain” of events in our life. Recognizing this chain reveals Hashem’s guidance and *hashgachah peratis* (Divine Providence), which in turn leads us to *shirah*.

This process is similar to what the Chofetz Chaim did one day when he sat down and went through his entire life in his head, thanking Hashem for all that he had in his life. He spoke to Hashem, saying, “Hashem, thank you for letting me learn Torah my entire life. Thank you for meriting me that I write sefer *Mishnah Berurah*. Thank you for my wife and for the children You gave me.”

When a person takes time to contemplate the chain of events in her life, she will become more aware of how Hashem has always been there in her life. This process should not just be a lip service but a deep and true reflection into Hashem’s kindness and protection. In turn, this can bring one to such a state of gratitude that your heart will burst out with song to Hashem.

This is the “*Torah of your mother*”. This is the Torah which a mother must give to her children – she teaches them how to sing *shirah* about everything in life, to see how all the seemingly disparate events in their lives link together and form one chain. This is the true song, the true ‘bedtime lullaby’ that a mother should sing to her children!

A Woman’s Torah Comes From Within

A man’s Torah learning is usually derived from an external source, such as by learning from a *sefer*, or by going to the *Beis Midrash*. But a woman does not need to rely on an external source to obtain her Torah. She doesn’t need a *sefer*, or a *Beis Midrash*, to discover her Torah. A woman’s Torah comes from within herself. Just as Chazal teach that “Avraham learned Torah from himself.”¹⁰⁰ Avraham Avinu knew [what Hashem] wanted [and knew Torah] without actually receiving it from an external source. So too, women have the ability to obtain the Torah from their

⁹⁹ *Yeshayahu 51:4*

¹⁰⁰ *Beraishis Rabbah 95:3*

hearts and souls. It is written, “Write the words of Torah on your heart”.¹⁰¹ This can refer to the women’s Torah which is derived from their hearts.

Every Woman Has a Unique Song To Sing: The Events of Her Own Life

When a person wants to buy a new chain, she might go to a jewelry store. She asks the shopkeeper to show her a special chain that is completely unique. Similarly, the “chain” which is the basis of the *shirah* of a woman’s life is also the chain which is unlike any other in the world! Every person’s life is different and thus each person has her own personal *shirah*.

When a woman has sung *shirah* during her life and then goes to *Gan Eden*, she enters that special chamber in Heaven where Miriam sings with all women. However, she does not sing the particular song that others are singing. Rather, she adds her own, unique song to the chorus, the song of her own life. This idea is supported by the phrase “*shirah chadashah*”¹⁰², a “new song” which we can reveal. The more *emunah* a woman attains by reflecting on her life with joy, the greater her contribution to the chorus. Each woman can potentially turn her whole life into a chain of events that brings her to contribute a wonderful *shirah*.

Imagine that a woman wants to write a biography about her life. Potentially, she could write about her whole life and all the struggles and pain she endured. However, such a reflective exercise will not bring her to sing *shirah* about her life. Instead, it will just bring her more pain. However, if she reflects on her life with *emunah* and focuses on how all the events in her life are parts of one positive chain, she would break out in song. That would be a useful and *shirah*-filled biography.

We entered this world as a baby crying. How will we leave this world? Will we also leave the world crying? If we do, then we were born with crying and we will leave this world crying. But if we use our time in this world to contemplate our life and see the numerous kindnesses Hashem has bestowed on us, we can come to sing *shirah*, and we will end our life with song instead!

Practical Recommendations

In order for a woman to receive her unique Torah – the “*shirah*” - a woman must first learn about *emunah*. The *sefer Chovos HaLevovos* first discusses *emunah* before discussing gratitude to Hashem, which implies that *emunah* is the prerequisite to gratitude to Hashem. It is recommended to learn *Chovos HaLevovos: Sha’ar HaBechinah* (Gate of Reflection), especially with the commentary of the “*Lev Tov*”. This can awaken us to consider how to think about Hashem’s goodness in our life.

¹⁰¹ Mishlei 7:3

¹⁰² recited in *Shacharis*, before *Shemoneh Esrei*

Then, a woman must set aside regular time to reflect about all that has happened to her until now. Then she will be able to see the significant role each event played in the overall chain of her life.

Finally, a woman can take a piece of paper and write down all the major events she experienced in her life and think about how He saved her and brought her to her next step.

This practice can help her see the chain of events in her life and sing a unique shirah which is unlike any other in the world. A mother can gradually begin to include her children in her *shirah* as she expresses it. Eventually over time, her children will open up and learn themselves how to have *shirah* in their own life.

The Challenge

However, at first, this process may not be so easy in practice. For instance, one might find it hard to see how certain events in one's life are useful or connect to other events. Compare this process to doing a puzzle. While completing the puzzle, one may be required to initially set aside certain pieces aside that do not seem to fit and come back to them later. Slowly, as the picture evolves, one will find where to add the missing pieces. So too, we can treat the inexplicable parts of our life like unsolvable puzzle pieces and put them aside temporarily. Eventually, we will see that these hard-to-understand-events also have their place in the overall puzzle. When completing this exercise, it is important to remember that everything you experience in life is from Hashem, and plays a vital role in your life.

This understanding will hopefully grant you the patience and persistence required to come back to the events you initially did not grasp and you will be able to incorporate them into the full picture.

Tehillim – The Ultimate Song

The entire book of *Tehillim* (Psalms) is actually one big *shirah*. It is the song of Dovid *HaMelech's* life, a chain of events that occurred in his life and that he connected together. Thus, if a woman says *Tehillim* with heartfelt intention, she can connect to the *shirah* within it and express her Torah.

Tehillim is the ultimate *shirah*, because it is the all-inclusive song of the Jewish people. After we have discovered our own personal song in our life, we can strive to connect ourselves to the great *shirah* of *sefer Tehillim*.

Preparing for Shavuot

In order for a woman to adequately prepare for Shavuot, she should be able to clearly identify what is a woman's Torah. She should understand that a woman's Torah (which women continue to sing in *Gan Eden*) is the *shirah*.

If a woman never reveals a *shirah* about her life, contemplating the events and how they were all necessary in order to lead her in her life's mission and to her current place, then she will not be able to sing the *shirah* of the women in *Gan Eden*! Imagine a person who comes to a wedding but does not understand the language spoken there. She will surely not enjoy the wedding to the same extent. To be able to enjoy the full, spiritual pleasure of *Gan Eden*, we need to understand and be familiar with the "language" of *shirah* already on this world.

In Conclusion

In summary, the unique aspect of Torah which women received at *Har Sinai*, and which she can pass onto her children, is the *shirah*, the song. A woman can reach her personal *shirah* and sing it, praising and thanking Hashem for her life, by tracing and linking all the seemingly disparate events in her life, as many parts of one puzzle that has led her to where she is today. Seeking out one's own personal *shirah* is necessary for any woman who desires to live the inner life.

These are not simply theoretical ideas! Rather, they are instructions which teach us what a woman's Torah is all about, and we need to put them into practice.

May we each merit to reveal our own personal, deep *shirah*. And may all of our songs come together in harmony, and reveal the complete *shirah*, the song of the entire Creation.

3.2 | *A Woman's Connection To the Torah*¹⁰³

A Woman's Avodah on Shavuot

The festival of **Shavuot celebrates the Jewish people receiving the Torah**. Both men and women received the Torah at Har Sinai. The men learn Torah on *Shavuot* night, in celebration of this gift. But what is the women's *avodah* (role) on *Shavuot*? Is a woman's sole *avodah* on *Shavuot* simply to avoid disturbing her husband from his rest when he returns from the *beis midrash* after staying up a whole *Shavuot* night? Is a girl's main task on *Shavuot* to avoid disturbing her father's sleep when he returns from the *beis midrash* on *Shavuot* night?

We see that by the festival of Pesach, the women have many *mitzvos*, such as getting rid of the *chometz*, eating *matzah*, and joining the *sefer*. On the festival of Succot, women also shake *lulav* and *esrog*. But how do women partake in the festival of *Shavuot*, the festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah? What connection do women have with the Torah – the most precious gift from Hashem? What, essentially, is a woman's *avodah* on *Shavuot*?

The Torah is our Light

The Torah is called "*Torah Ohr*", a "Torah of light".¹⁰⁴ Light shows a person which way to travel, illuminating the path ahead. However, Torah does not simply show us a path – it shows us our soul and how to live a life of happiness. Doing *mitzvos* without the Torah is like trying to arrange things in a dark room. Torah is the light that helps a person see things in this world. Men access this light of Torah by learning the Torah. How can a woman access this light?

How a Woman Can Access the Torah's Light?

One way a woman can connect to this light of Torah is by being connected to her father or husband who learn Torah. However, there is a more direct, yet inner way for a woman to access this light of Torah: through our inner soul.

In order to be connected to the Torah, a woman needs to become connected to her soul. If a woman only focuses on her external layer her whole life, she will not receive this light of Torah. Only when a woman lives a life of the soul, can she receive the "light" of the Torah.

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104 Mishlei 6:23

Feeling Connected to the Mitzvos

To illustrate the idea, we may do a lot of *mitzvos* every day. But the question is, *why* do we do them? Do we do them because we have to, or because we enjoy them and want to do them? Do we look forward to doing our *mitzvos* the way we may look forward to a good meal or enjoy our vacation time? When a person honors his parents, does he do it because he has to or does he do it from his heart? Do we feel connected to this *mitzvah* when we do it...?

And what about our *davening*? Do we feel some connection to Hashem when we *daven*, or do we just say the words by rote or without emotion? The *davening* of a Jew that comes from his/her soul looks and sounds very different than when a person *davens* by rote. Whether a person is thanking Hashem for something or asking Hashem for something, one needs to *daven* from a place of emotional connection to Hashem - to *daven* from her heart.

When a woman simply lives a superficial kind of life, she may do everything she is supposed to do according to the strict letter of the *halachah* and yet not be acting from her heart. She will not be that connected to the actions that she does. But when she lives a life from her *neshamah*, she feels connected to her actions and her *mitzvos*. Her service of Hashem will be from her heart, and this will be her connection to the “light” of the Torah.

Women Connect to the Torah with their Heart

Connecting the *mitzvos* of the Torah to her heart is essentially a woman’s unique aspect of Torah. The final letter of the Torah is the letter *lamed* (ל). The first letter of the Torah is the letter *beis* (ב). This forms the word *lev* (לב), heart. This provides a clue that the entire Torah from beginning until end is really about our heart! Whereas men connect to the Torah by learning the Torah with their intellect, women connect to the Torah through their hearts.

If we practice the *mitzvos* without our heart, our whole *Yiddishkeit* is missing something integral. But if we put our heart into the *mitzvos* – such as by putting our heart and emotions into when we *daven*, or whenever we do *chessed*, or whenever we honor our parents – it is then that the Torah will have a powerful and positive affect on our whole lives.

So practically speaking, we must stop and examine to what extent our hearts are behind what we do. We need to ensure that we put our hearts into our Torah and *mitzvos*. For instance, when we *daven*, let us utter at least one paragraph from our heart. And we should do at least one *chessed* a day from an inner love for others – because we really want to. Set yourself a task to make sure you try to practice three *mitzvos* a day from your heart. When a woman acts and practices a Torah lifestyle from her heart, then this is the way she learns and is illuminated by the light of the Torah.

May we be *zoche* to connect to the Torah through our hearts.



*Q&A ABOUT
SHAVUOS*

Q&A – Shavuot – Avodah On Night of Shavuot

QUESTION

The Rav has said that our *avodah* on the night of Shavuot is to connect, as much as we can, to the “50th Gate of Holiness”, to the level of Torah that was before the sin, to Torah learning amidst *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). How can I do this, practically speaking? We know that in Torah learning, a person needs to be intellectually focused, and that a person shouldn’t involve the heart or emotions in it. Therefore, how can I connect to the “50th Gate of Holiness” on the night of Shavuot, which is a “heart” matter? It would make sense if I was learning *agadta*, which is more of a “heart” kind of study, but what if I’m learning regular Gemara, which requires a focused intellect? How can I stay focused on my learning on Shavuot night while also trying to reach the “50th Gate” in my Torah learning on the night of Shavuot? (Obviously this question will only bother a person who is interested in *avodas Hashem*, as opposed to those who only learn Torah for purely academic and intellectual purposes).

ANSWER

Before beginning to learn, concentrate with your heart, from the depths of your heart and from thoughts of repentance (as stated in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim, shaar IV*). Your heart should mainly be used before beginning to learn, as a preparation for learning. After you have made this “heart” preparation well, attach your thoughts, calmly, and with precise focus, as you calmly concentrate with your mind, in a deep and penetrating way [to the Torah discussions you are learning] until you have exhausted your thoughts, amidst inner silence, calmness, and pleasantness. Keep repeating this process, in a cycle, as much as you can on your own level, by using the abilities of your soul. Make sure that you do not exhaust your thoughts too much, to the point that you cannot think properly afterwards, *chas v’shalom* – for that is an error that many have fallen into. Every so often, you should break up your thinking process by calming your thoughts.

In this way, practically speaking, you can begin your Torah learning sessions with repentance and a clear heart, and then by connecting your mind to the Torah discussions you are learning about, concentrating with all of your focus, but amidst pleasantness, as stated earlier, and then by calming your mind. Keep repeating the cycle. This kind of learning closely resembles the way that the Chazon Ish would learn Torah for all of his life.

Q&A – Shavuot – Experientially Connecting To Sinai

QUESTION

The Jewish people received the Torah and reached a state where the sin of Adam HaRishon was rectified. If one didn’t merit to connect to this level of rectifying the sin of Adam HaRishon, is it possible for him also to connect to the event of standing at Har Sinai, which is the main *avodah* of this day [Shavuot], to connect to that event of Har Sinai? In our generation, how is it possible to connect to that event, when we are missing the necessary conditions which the Jewish people had at that time?

ANSWER

Through *mesirus nefesh* [willingness to give up our souls for G-d and for His Torah], we penetrate to the root of the spiritual level of the giving of the Torah. The root of the giving of the Torah was *mesirus nefesh*, because the souls of the Jewish people left them at every word of Hashem.

Q&A – Shavuot – Learning Alone Vs. With Chavrusa**QUESTION**

Regarding Shavuot, if a person finds that his daily learning is disturbed [as a result of staying up at night to learn], is it better for him to learn at night together with everyone else, so that he shouldn't separate himself from the congregation, or does his own personal growth take precedence, and he shouldn't be concerned about separating from the congregation?

ANSWER

If no one will be aware that he is separating himself from everyone else, it is proper for him to learn alone, if this will be of gain to him. If possible, he should also spend a little time learning with the congregation. He should also bind his soul with the root of the souls of the Jewish people, so that he isn't simply learning by himself.

Q&A – Shavuot – The Custom of Dairy**QUESTION**

What is the connection between dairy treats and Shavuot, and how can a person make this a more spiritual experience?

ANSWER

Many reasons have already been explained [about why dairy products are eaten on Shavuot]. There is now a sefer which gives 70 reasons of why dairy is eaten on Shavuot. With *siyata d'shmaya*, here is an additional reason.

An infant's only food is its mother's milk. This is due to the very sensitive and refined nature of the infant. At the time of the giving of the Torah, when Hashem descended upon Har Sinai, and His Infinite Light was revealed to the people, all creations were on a level of little children, against the backdrop of the endlessness and unlimited light of Hashem which was revealed then. At the time of the giving of the Torah, all of the people reflected the verse, "Like a child on its mother's lap", an infant nursing from its mother. It was a state of deep *temimus* (childlike innocence). On Shavuot, we return to this *temimus*. From this *temimus* we become attached with Hashem, as in the verse, "You shall be wholesome with Hashem your G-d", meaning that when you are a *tamim* [pure and trusting, like a child], you are then "with" Hashem. This is how we become attached with the Torah, on the level of *Toras Hashem Temimah*, "the Torah of Hashem is perfect".

Q&A – Shavuot – The Custom of Flowers & Grass

QUESTION

What is the connection between having flowers in the house and *Shavuot*? When a person sees flowers on his table on *Shavuot*, what can he think, in order to transform it from a mere externality into a more spiritual experience?

(Also, I noticed that the word for “flower” in Hebrew is *perach*. Can this be an implication that the flowers on *Shavuot* are supposed to remind a person that the souls of the Jewish people were *porcha*, they “flew out” of their bodies, when they stood at Har Sinai?)

ANSWER

The roots of this custom are discussed in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim: 494*, which cites the custom to hang grass in remembrance of the event of the giving of the Torah, where **grass** surrounded Har Sinai. The *Magen Avraham* (ibid) writes that there is also a custom to place **trees** in the *shul* and in houses, in remembrance of how Shavuot is the time where the world is judged on its fruit of trees. The *Magen Avraham* adds that one should pray for the fruit of the trees [to merit a good judgment]. The *Gra* abolishes this custom, since it is now the custom of gentiles to erect trees on their festivals. Refer to the *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid, 10) for more on this.

In *halachah*, only grass and trees are mentioned. But **flowers** are also included in this. The root of this matter is because at the time when Adam sinned, there were “288 sparks of holiness” which fell to the “side of evil”. The number 288 in Hebrew spells the word *repach*, an opposite arrangement of the letters of the Hebrew word *perach*, which means “flower”. At the time of the giving of the Torah, there was a temporary leave from death, for the curse of death was lifted at that time. At that time, the “288 sparks” were raised back to holiness (this is according to one opinion of the Sages in Tractate Avodah Zarah). Since the “288 sparks” were raised back to holiness, the souls of the Jewish people flew out of their bodies - as Chazal state, “*parcha nishmasan*”, their souls flew away from them. In other words, the “288 sparks of holiness” were raised back to holiness, together with this elevated state.

This is the depth behind hanging grass to remember the giving of the Torah. At the giving of the Torah, they were raised from the level of animal to the level of human being, for on Pesach there is a *korbon* brought made of barley, which is animal food, and on Shavuot there is an offering brought from wheat, which is food for people [therefore, grass is in remembrance to the food of animals, which we became elevated from, at the time of the giving of the Torah].

The *Magen Avraham* writes that one should place trees in shuls and homes and pray for the fruit of trees. On a deeper level, this is really a prayer to rectify the sin of eating from the fruit of the forbidden tree, the *Eitz HaDaas*, the first fruits of the world which were eaten which were an act of sin, and in its place, we pray to reveal the fruit of the *Eitz HaChaim*, the Tree of Life. This can be accomplished through the study of Torah, for Torah is called the *Eitz HaChaim*, the “tree of life”. That is also why there is a custom to place the trees near the place in the shul where the Torah is read from.

Q&A – Shavuot – Women & Girls

QUESTION

How can women and girls relate to *Shavuot*? How can women and girls have a connection to the event of receiving the Torah, and to relate to this on an emotional level? How can women and girls connect to the concept of this festival, in a way that speaks to their emotions?

ANSWER

1) [A woman can feel a connection to the event of receiving the Torah since] all of the Jewish people stood together at Har Sinai with one heart. So the women, too, were each unified with the whole of *Klal Yisrael*.

2) Women have a connection to a more inner root than the above: they can connect to the “light” of Torah. There is a “light” within the Torah which is at a higher spiritual point than the intellectual aspects of Torah (which include *chochmah*, *binah* and *daas*), and this higher level is called “*Toras Hashem Temimah*”, the “Torah of Hashem is perfect” [and it is this particular aspect of Torah which women can emotionally connect to].

3) Women also have an active connection to the Torah, on the level of “*shirah*”, “song”, for the Torah is called *shirah* [Ed. refer to the *derashah* of “*Song of the Jewish Woman*”].

Q&A – Shavuot – Night of Mesirus Nefesh For Torah

QUESTION

In the *Shelah HaKadosh* it is written that on Shavuot, a man is judged for how much Torah he will merit, in amount and in quality. Why didn’t Chazal establish any special prayers about this?

ANSWER

The Torah was given with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), because for every word of Hashem that was uttered, their souls flew out of them. Every year as well, the main spiritual level of this day is *mesirus nefesh*, which is a higher level than *tefillah*\prayer.

Q&A – Shavuot - Learning From A Deeper Place

QUESTION

What does the Rav recommend to do on Shavuot night, besides for what the Rav has taught us that a person needs to prepare himself [for the upcoming festival]? What is the kind of learning that the Rav suggests? Should a person also go out to do *hisbodedus*? Should one learn with the program that is in the place he lives in, or should he learn alone?

ANSWER

One should learn from a deep connection of his mind and heart, each person according to his own level, from the deepest place in his soul, the “fiftieth gate” of the soul, on the fiftieth day [of the Omer]. Part of this is that a person should also reach the place of “alone” in his soul, which is the deepest place in his own individual soul.

Q&A – Shavuot – Mikveh

QUESTION

Should a person try especially hard to find a *mikveh* [on Shavuot morning before *Shacharis*]?

ANSWER

Yes.