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[Home](#) > Shavuos - 009 Out of Body Experience of Har Sinai

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## Shavuos - 009 Out of Body Experience of Har Sinai

### **Shavuos\‘Atzeres’**

Each Yom Tov has its unique *mitzvos*. On Pesach we eat *matzah*, we are not allowed to eat *chometz*, we brought the *Korbon Pesach*. On Sukkos, we sit in the *sukkah*, we shake the four species, and we would bring the *nisuch hamayim*<sup>[1]</sup> 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 us to as individuals, on Shavuos.

Shavuos is called ‘*Atzeres*’. The Torah does not openly call it “*Yom Matan 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*’. But the Torah calls it “*Atzeres*”, from the word ‘*atzor*’, to “hold back”, to restrain oneself from expansion. This reflects the nature of the festival, which does not have any *mitzvos* that apply to the individual.

Why is it only Shavuos that is called “*Atzeres*”? Doesn’t every *Yom Tov* have ‘restraint’ in it, such as the fact that we don’t do *melachah* (forbidden labor) on each *Yom Yov*? 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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.

### **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".<sup>[2]</sup> It is because our *neshamah* is called a '*ner*', and the '*ohr*' of the Torah is above it; 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 means 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. Thus, our souls left us when we heard the Torah, because we viewed the level that is above the *mitzvos*: the 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 more into this more.

We 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 need 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) 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 go "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.”<sup>[3]</sup>

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 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*<sup>[4]</sup>, and then he can get deeper into the five parts of the soul: the *Nefesh*<sup>[5]</sup>, *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.

### ***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 soul 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 *“pipul chaverim”* - 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 chaverim* 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 to be 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 man 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 Gemara<sup>[6]</sup> that “on Atzeres (Shavuos), all opinions agree that there is a requirement of *“lachem”*, to rejoice with 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.

### ***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 soul 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.

When it comes to our *avodah* in our own 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; that's the way it's supposed to be. 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)<sup>[7]</sup>; and at other times, we can let go of ourselves, and concentrate instead on going above our self.<sup>[8]</sup>

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. 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*.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Water libation

<sup>[2]</sup> Shabbos 88a

<sup>[3]</sup> Refer to the Rav's ***Getting To Know Your Self*** and ***Getting To Know Your Soul***

<sup>[4]</sup> animalistic layer of the soul, the source of our base emotions, thoughts, and desires

<sup>[5]</sup> 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 Elokis* (G-dly layer of the soul).

[6] Pesachim 68a

[7] As explained in ***Getting To Know Your Self***

[8] For more on “bittul” (self-nullification), see ***Bilvavi Part 6: Chapters 3-7***

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