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[Home](#) > Shavuos - 011 Seeing Hashem In Creation

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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*"^[1]_[1]), whereas the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai began with the letter "*Aleph*" ("*Anochi Hashem*"^[2]_[2]). 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".^[3]_[3] 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 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."^[4] ^[4] 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 pursuits^[5] ^[5] 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]"^[6] ^[6]. 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).

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'Oirasa*' 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'Oirasa*" - 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 Shavuot, 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, *kesef*, 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 *"kesef"*; 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" [7] [7], 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.

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.”^[8] ^[8] 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.”^[9] ^[9] 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 “*lachen*” (eating and drinking). It is because the entire concept of the giving of the Torah is to see the Torah within your very “*lachen*” - 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*.”^[10] ^[10] 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 gratitude that He allowed it to grow^[11] ^[11]. 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.

[1] ^[12] *“In the beginning”*

[2] ^[13] *“I am Hashem your G-d”*

[3] ^[14] *Zohar, parshas Terumah 161b*

[4] ^[15] *Pesachim 68b*

[5] ^[16] *Such as Torah learning, prayer, and thoughts of attachment to G-d*

[6] ^[17] *Zohar, parshas Terumah 161b*

[7] ^[18] *Berachos 59a*

[8] ^[19] *Beraishis Rabbah 1:64*

[9] ^[20] *Zohar, parshas Yisro 90b*

[10] ^[21] *Bava Metzia 114a*

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Links

- [1] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn1
- [2] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn2
- [3] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn3
- [4] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn4
- [5] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn5
- [6] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn6
- [7] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn7
- [8] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn8
- [9] file:///D:/DATA-ACTIVE/BILVAVI/NEW_WEBSITE/UPLOAD%20TO%20WEBSITE/need%20to%20place%20on%20site/Shavuos%20011.%20Seeing%20Hashem%20In%20Creation.docx#_ftn9
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