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## SHAVUOS – 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 [Shavuos], 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.

## SHAVUOS – NIGHT OF MESIRUS NEFESH FOR TORAH

### QUESTION:

In the *Shelah HaKadosh* it is written that on Shavuos, 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.

## SHAVUOS – AVODAH ON NIGHT OF SHAVUOS

### QUESTION:

The Rav has said that our *avodah* on the night of Shavuos 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 Shavuos, 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 Shavuos night while also trying to reach the “50th Gate” in my Torah learning on the night of Shavuos? (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.

## SHAVUOS – LEARNING FROM A DEEPER PLACE

### QUESTION:

What does the Rav recommend to do on Shavuos 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.

## SHAVUOS – LEARNING ALONE VS. WITH CHAVRUSA

QUESTION: Regarding Shavuos, 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.

## SHAVUOS – MIKVEH?

QUESTION: Should a person try especially hard to find a mikveh [on Shavuos morning before Shacharis]?

ANSWER: Yes

## SHAVUOS – WOMEN AND GIRLS

QUESTION: How can women and girls relate to Shavuos? 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”*).

## SHAVUOS FLOWERS & GRASS

QUESTION: What is the connection between having flowers in the house and Shavuos? When a person sees flowers on his table on Shavuos, 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 Shavuos 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 Shavuos 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.

## SHAVUOT – 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 *seyata 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”.

## END OF DAYS

**QUESTION:** 1) What did the Rav mean in a recent response that a person can have a clearer perspective on our current times by “seeing opposites in everything”? This seems like a very abstract concept, can the Rav please give some examples of how one can do this?

**ANSWER:** In each thing, see the good parts and bad parts in it, as well as the logical parts in something and the non-logical parts in something.

**QUESTION:** 2) I understand from previous responses of the Rav that this concept of “seeing opposites to everything” is the entry into the 50th Gate of Holiness which is essentially the entry into *Radl”a* (*reisha d’lo isyada*, the unknowable head. Thus entering into the deepest level of *kedushah* depends on this concept of seeing opposites in everything. Why would the deepest level depend on accessing this intellectual ability? How does this intellectual ability awaken the heart to more closeness with Hashem?

**ANSWER:** The intellect [understanding conflicting concepts and being able to contain the contradiction] is one of the possible ways to enter into *Radl”a*, but it can also be entered through [being able to contain] contradicting desires and contradicting *middos* and emotions, etc.

**QUESTION:** 3) Is seeing opposites in everything the same concept as “the secret of opposites” or is it the mind’s ability to overturn information (*daas d’hipuch*)?

**ANSWER:** No. Seeing opposites to each thing is to see the different parts of something, sometimes seeing one aspect of something and sometimes seeing a different aspect of it, whereas *daas d’hipuch* (*using the mind to overturn information*) is to see opposites within the same concept.

**QUESTION:** 4) Is there a source that seeing opposite in every concept is the entry into the 50th level of holiness, the *Radl”a*?

**ANSWER:** What source is needed for this? That is the entire concept of the *Radl”a*, to see differing and opposite concepts with-

in the same thing, to see opposites within each thing, as the Ramchal explains clearly in “138 Openings To Wisdom” (*sefer Kelach Pischei Chochmah*).

**QUESTION** 5) The Rav said that only through the 50th gate of *kedushah* (holiness) can we fight against the 50th gate of *tumah* (impurity), and it is either through *emunah peshutah*, or through *temimus*, or through seeing opposites to everything. My question is that I know people who seem to be strong at these abilities, they have *emunah peshutah* and *temimus*, yet they are very connected to their smartphones and internet use, either for Torah or *kiruv* purposes. They don't understand why they need to separate from the Internet, especially if they are getting so much Torah from the internet.

It seems to me that the only way for people to wage war against the Internet is through *mesirus nefesh* to do the will of Hashem. It is just that most people do not understand at all why this is what Hashem wants from us now, because they don't see a problem with Internet if they are using it for Torah or *kiruv* purposes and other good purposes. It seems then that *mesirus nefesh* is the only way to reach the 50th level of *kedushah*, but just through *emunah peshutah* or *temimus* alone, it doesn't seem that this will be enough to fight against the Internet.

If anything, their *temimus* makes them fall into the Internet even more because in their earnestness they don't see a problem at all with using Internet – they don't have the subtlety to feel how this device is intrinsically impure, especially if they get Torah from it. So can the Rav please explain how people can fight against their Internet use just through having *emunah peshutah*, or *temimus*, or the ability of seeing opposites in everything? How do these abilities bring a person to the 50th level of *kedushah*?

It seems to be that the only advice to win against the Internet is through *mesirus nefesh* to do the will of Hashem, and then to explain to others how this is what Hashem wants from us, and only then can they understand it intellectually and then internalize in their hearts, and then they can actually be *moser nefesh* for Hashem...

**ANSWER** Either they have *ohr makif* (enveloping light which they haven't yet internalized but which they are encircling and grasping onto), or they have reached a partial level of light. If someone has *emunah peshutah* or *temimus* or *pshitus*, they are certainly connected to the 50th level of *kedushah*. But it is possible that it hasn't yet penetrated into their *nefesh habehaimis*, their animal level of their soul.

**QUESTION** 5) Will this generation for sure see Mashiach, since

we are the last generation? Or can there *chas v'shalom* be another Holocaust-like scenario that happened to the Jews of Europe (which the Rav hinted to recently that it's still a possibility of happening, *chas v'shalom*)?

**ANSWER** Both are a possibility. May Hashem take pity on us and bring his Mashiach now, through His compassion.

**QUESTION** 6) Are there individuals in our generation who are *moser nefesh* to do the will of Hashem who can bring the *Geulah* and make all of *Klal Yisrael* worthy for the *Geulah*?

**ANSWER** That would be possible if the *Geulah* happens through an “awakening from below”, but now we are already at the level of “For My Sake, for My sake, I will do it.”

**QUESTION** 7) The Rav explained recently that the decree of “45 days of in desert” which was prophesied about the end of days doesn't necessarily mean a physical event of being exiled to the desert, because it can also mean a spiritual exile to a spiritual desert, and the Rav also explained that this was also the secret behind the 45 souls who perished in Meiron this year. Did the Rav mean that the tragedy in Meiron was a fulfillment of the exile of the 45 days in the desert? And if yes, does that mean we are found in the process of the 45 days in the desert in the spiritual sense?

**ANSWER** Yes! It was the cessation of the ideal design of man (the death of the 45 implies the cessation of adam/man, equal to 45). And now the main light is through the illumination of the *kav* (the ray that extends from the infinite) which is above the human being – the *kav d'Adam Kadmon*.

**QUESTION** 8) The Rav said that the closer we get to Mashiach, the light of Mashiach gets stronger, even though the birth pangs preceding Mashiach are getting sharper and more painful. Here is my question Lately I feel a lot of darkness – both because of what's happening in the world and also because of darkness that I feel inside me. I feel that it's a holy feeling of mourning the void of holiness in Creation, but I also feel that because my soul isn't balanced, it also brings me to feel sad and bitter: “I am bitter and am difficult of spirit.” I don't feel the light of Mashiach shining strongly in these times. I know that it exists but it's abstract to me, and I just believe dryly that it exists but I don't feel it. How can I feel the light of Mashiach during these times and how can I feel that it's getting stronger?

**ANSWER**

Connect to *p'shitus* (unquestionably loyalty to Hashem) and *Ain Oid Milvado k'pshuto* (the simple and literal sense that there is truly nothing other than Hashem). That is the light which is above our world and above all *tumah*/impurity. When one truly feels a disconnection from the world, it is easier to feel this.