

BAMIDBAR-SHAVUOS: CONNECTING TO OUR BEGINNING

SANCTITY OF THE FIRSTBORN AND SANCTITY OF
THE LEVITES

In *Parshas Bamidbar*, Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded by Hashem to sanctify the firstborns, as well as the Levites of the Jewish people: “Behold, I have taken the Levites from the among the children of Yisrael, in place of every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among the children of Yisrael, and the Levites shall be Mine. For every firstborn is mine....”¹

The sanctity of the firstborns of the Jewish people began with the night of Pesach, when Hashem killed all the firstborns of Egypt. Ever since the exodus from Egypt, the firstborns received a sanctified status, and when they stood at Har Sinai, they were destined to do the *avodah* (the service in the *Beis HaMikdash*²).

Rashi states that after the sin with the golden calf, the firstborns were punished for taking part in the sin, and were no longer allowed to do the *avodah*. In their place, the Levites received the rights to do the *avodah* of the firstborns, in the merit of refusing to take part in the sin. This conferred a status of sanctity upon the Levites.

However, it is clear that the sanctity of the firstborn and the sanctity of the Levites were not the same exact kind of sanctity. It was not simply a transfer of the sanctity of the firstborns upon the Levites. Rather, when the firstborns lost their sanctity and the Levites became sanctified instead of

them, there was a change in the concept of this sanctity. At first it was a sanctity of the firstborns, and later it was a sanctity of the Levites – two different and distinct kinds of sanctity.

THE SANCTITY OF FIRSTBORN\BEGINNING AND
LEVITES\CONNECTION

What, indeed, was the difference between the sanctity of the firstborn and the sanctity of the Levites?

The Torah says that a firstborn is sanctified because he is *peter rechem*, “first to exit the womb”. Thus, a firstborn represents a root, a beginning - a *raishis* (first). In contrast, the Levites did not receive any sanctity in the sense of being the first. Although there is a commandment of “*And you shall sanctify them*”³, to give certain honors and preferences to a Kohen and Levi, the sanctity of the Levites is not because they have any “first” status, but for a different reason.

When Levi [ancestor of all Levites] was born, Leah said, “*This time my husband shall become attached to me, for I have born him three sons*”⁴ – and the depth of this is that the word “*Levi*” is from the word “*levayah*”, escort, which connotes an attachment\connection between two things, the escort and that which is being escorted. The sanctity of the Levite is therefore defined as a connecting point between two previously separated points.

Thus, the sanctity of the firstborn was because they had a status of being the

“first”, whereas the sanctity of the Levites is because they are a connecting point which enables holiness.

Three-Fold Connection With Hashem (Levites\Connection) Vs. Inherent Connection With Hashem (Firstborn\Beginning)

There is also a more fundamental understanding of the difference between the sanctity of the firstborns with the status of the Levites - and **which also can help us prepare to receive the Torah**.

The sanctity of the Levites represents connection of two sides. Chazal state, “Three ties are bound to each other – *Yisrael* (the Jewish people), the Torah, and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (G-d)”⁵. There is Hashem, the Jewish people, and the Torah. The Torah is called *bris* (pact), for a *bris* connotes a bond and connection, and so is the Torah the “connecting point” between Hashem and Yisrael. This is like the sanctity of the Levites, which connects together two sides.

This is the depth behind the sanctity of the Levites – it is the three-fold connection of Hashem, Yisrael, and the Torah, with the Torah being the middle, connecting point between Hashem and Yisrael.

The sanctity of the firstborn, however, represents the level at the giving of the Torah, when the firstborns still had their sanctified status to do the *avodah*, which was taken away from them only after the sin with the Golden Calf. The sanctity of the firstborn is not about a

1 Bamidbar 3: 12-13

2 The Holy Temple

3 Vayikra 21:8

4 Beraishis 29:34

5 Zohar parshas Re'eh 73a

connection to something after it now exists - rather, [it is more inherent], it is a connection to the very essence of something, for it is a connection to beginning point of something.

In clearer terms, the sanctity of the firstborn, which is a sanctity of the being the first, is represented by the concept that Hashem is called “First”, for it is written, “*Ani Rishon*” (“I am the First”)⁶. The Torah is also called “*raishis*\first”, as *Rashi* in the beginning of *Parshas Beraishis* cites from *Midrash Rabbah*, that “The world was created for the Torah which is called *raishis*\first.”⁷ *Rashi* there also cites Chazal who state that “The world was created for the sake of Yisrael, who are called *raishis*”.

Thus, the nation of Yisrael shares a bond with Hashem [and His Torah] on two levels – a bond through the power of “connection”, as symbolized through the sanctity of the Levites, and a [deeper] bond, through being connected with “*raishis*\first”, as symbolized by the sanctity of the firstborn.

The Torah – Our Connection of “Raishis” With Hashem

Through the Torah, which is called the *raishis* (beginning, or first), there is a bond of the nation of Yisrael with Hashem, for at the giving of the Torah, there was the revelation of Hashem and His Torah, to the nation of Yisrael.

On Pesach, Hashem revealed His presence and also the firstborn status of the Jewish people, and especially the firstborns of the Jewish people; 50 days later, on Shavuot, there was also this revelation of Hashem, when “Hashem opened all the heavens and showed them *Ain Od Milvado*,” that

there is nothing else besides Him.⁸ At the giving of the Torah, the Creator, Who is the ultimate *Raishis* (First, or Beginning) was revealed. The Torah, which is also called the *raishis*, was revealed. The nation of Yisrael is inherently connected to the *raishis* – to the Torah, and to the ultimate *Raishis*, Hashem.

This was the kind of *d’veykus* (connection) that the nation of Yisrael had to Hashem when they stood at Har Sinai.

A DEEPER LEVEL OF BONDING WITH HASHEM: FINDING OUR BEGINNING POINT

This matter will now be explained further.

In This World, in whatever a person is involved with, there are two ways of how he may relate to it and connect to it. He may either have a love towards it, or he relates to it with awe. In the spiritual realm, there are also these two ways of connecting. There is both a love and awe towards the Creator, and there is also love and awe towards the Torah. From a superficial standpoint, the nation of Yisrael is outside of Hashem and His Torah, and they [we] have a task to connect to that reality.

That, however, is but an external, superficial level of bonding with Hashem and the Torah – and, if only people could merit even this level. According to this understanding, there is Hashem, there is Torah, there is the nation of Yisrael whom I am a part of, and my task is to connect myself to that reality.

But there is a deeper view. In whatever we are involved with, we can really find its root, or its *raishis* (beginning

point). We can look into what came before it, and then we are led to its source.

EXAMPLE: PARENTS

Here is an example of this concept. What is the depth behind the *mitzvah* of honoring parents? It is so that we should realize that our beginning did not begin with us, but with something that came before us.

The *avodah* of a person is to build his soul, in order to become an *adam hashelaim* (perfected individual) as the *Mesillas Yesharim* states. At first one must know his outer “garments”, and then his more inner “garments”, and then he can get deeper into his soul.

First, [he should get used to this idea of “garments” by] he should see his physical clothing. Then he should realize that his body and its forces are also “garments” atop his soul, and he should recognize the bodily forces. Getting further in, he needs to recognize the aspects of a more inner garment, his *nefesh habehaimis* (the “animal soul”, or the base, undeveloped emotions of the human soul). From there, he can slowly get further into his soul.

One should then contemplate and recognize that his parents are a *levush* (garment) to his *neshamah* (Divine soul). In order for one to get to his actual essence, he needs to get to his own beginning point. His physical beginning began with his parents. That is the depth of honoring parents – to get to the beginning of something.

When one views Creation, if he looks superficially, he just sees a world in

⁶ Yeshayahu 44:10

⁷ Beraishis Rabbah 1:1, cited in Rashi Beraishis 1:1

⁸ Rashi to Shemos 15:35

front of him. But if he looks deeper into Creation, he will see the source of everything. “Hashem looked [saw] into the Torah and created the world”⁹ – and so, too, does man have the *avodah* to “look and see” that there is a Creator of the world; and from this contemplation, he can be led to the root of creation, which is the Torah.

This is a deep way to prepare to receive the Torah. “Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world”, and our *avodah*, from our human perspective, is to get to “see” the Torah from this world.

How do we get to the Torah from seeing the world? If we just look at the world and see *niflaos haborei* (wonders of the Creator), that is wonderful, and we will receive much wisdom, and it is all true. But there is a deeper part to life: One can try to discover the source of each thing he comes across.

He can start with himself, and see that his beginning started with his parents, through the *mitzvah* of honoring parents. When he views the world in such a way, he can get to the Torah. And when one takes a look into himself - his soul - he can get to the beginning of his soul, his *nefesh chayah* (living soul) which is called the “breath of Hashem”, of which the Sages state, “The One Who blew, from His own did He breathe it”¹⁰, so to speak. In this way, man can get to Hashem, from himself.¹¹

OUR TRUE BEGINNING - THE GIVING OF THE TORAH

That is the depth of the giving of the Torah.

The world was created for the sake of

the Torah and for the sake of Yisrael, which are both called *raishis* \begin-ning. Before the giving of the Torah, there was just a world. After the Torah was given, there was now a revelation that the beginning of the world was not only for the sake of Torah and for the sake of Yisrael, but that Torah and Yisrael are the *shvil*, the path, by which all Heavenly sustenance comes to the world (as the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains). At the giving of the Torah, the true *raishis* was revealed – not the simple beginning of Creation which took place on the first day of Creation, but the true [inner] beginning of Creation - which was the Torah that Hashem looked into to create the world.

DRAWING CLOSER TO THE DEEPER LEVEL OF CLOSENESS AS WE PREPARE FOR SHAVUOS

If we understand this matter deeply, we see that there are two deep perspectives towards life.

The perspective which people are more familiar with is reminiscent of the concept of the “sanctity of the Levites”. We are currently not found on the level we were at by the giving of the Torah, for ever since the *Luchos* were broken, we fell from that exalted level, and, correspondingly, we fell from the perspective of “sanctity of the firstborn” to the perspective of “sanctity of the Levites”.

Our usual perspective reflects **the sanctity of the Levites, which represents the level of closeness with Hashem in the sense that there is Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael, and that we need to connect with Him and His Torah [as if this reality exists “outside” of us].** It is the understanding that *now* that there is a Cre-

ator, Torah, and Yisrael, we recognize that bond and we seek a bond with Hashem and His Torah.

But there is a more inner perspective towards life, which corresponds to “sanctity of the firstborn”, which is a deeper level of closeness with Hashem than “sanctity of the Levites”.

The giving of the Torah changed all of life and all of man. It revealed the power that one can find the source of each thing he comes across. In each thing you encounter, you can think of what came before it.

When we live in this world, we tend to think that it is we who do everything. We certainly have *emunah* that Hashem does everything, but while we are actually going about our daily living, we usually think that we are doing it all. But if we want to draw closer to the level of standing at Har Sinai, we should think *about what is actually empowering us* to act, as we move and perform throughout the day.

For example, when you see a fruit, you can wonder where it came from. It came from some man who planted it, who descends all the way back to Adam HaRishon, and Adam was created by Hashem. Every time you see a fruit, you can try thinking of the first fruit, which Hashem made through His word, by looking into the Torah to create the world. When you make the blessing of *Borei Pri Ha'Eitz* on the fruit, remember that the *Borei* is the Source of this fruit, just as the first fruit was created by His own word.

There are many more examples as well, of this concept. When it comes Yom Tov, we have a *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov*, to eat meat. As you are eating meat on Yom Tov, you can also

9 Zohar parshas Shemos 361a

10 Ramban Beraishis 2:3

11 Editor's Note: The concept of knowing the Creator through knowing one's own soul is depicted in the verse in Iyov (19:26), “From my flesh, I see G-d.”

think of the first animal which all meat came from, which was created by Hashem on the fifth day.

This kind of thinking connects you all the time with the Creator, all the way back to the six days of creation. Living in this way is an overhaul. It connects a person to the Torah on a deeper level, in which one is always connected with his beginning point.

In the three days preceding Shavuos, there is preparation for the Torah. The three days of preparation symbolize the three-fold connection between Hashem, Torah and Yisrael, corresponding to the sanctity of the Levites. At the day of the giving of the Torah itself, though, there is a deeper level of closeness. It is no longer a three-fold connection, but a level of Torah *which is the Creator's revelation to us*, where we are "one" with the Creator - as the Sages state, "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one"¹² - a connection with Hashem through recognizing the *raishis*, the "beginning point", of each thing.

How can reach such a level of connection to the Torah, especially since the Torah preceded man? As explained, it is when we are looking for the root (or beginning) of each thing.

This perspective connects us to a bond with the Torah on the level of *raishis*, beginning. It is not simply a connection to the Torah "now" that it is here. Rather, it is a connection to our inherent bond with the Torah, for both Yisrael and the Torah are called the *raishis* beginning. From there we can reach the Creator.

Without this perspective, a person does not reach his own beginning point, so he will not either reach the beginning of the Torah, and he will not completely reach the Creator. Of the Creator it

said, "*He was, is, and will always be*" - the Creator always existed before Creation, so to speak. One who recognizes the Creator on the level of the "sanctity of the Levites" is only connecting to the Creator "after" Creation. In contrast, when one connects to the Creator through the perspective explained here, he touches upon the beginning of his soul as it in his body, as well as the beginning of his soul root above, and the beginning of the Torah.

Hashem says, "*I am First and Last, and besides for Me there is none other*".¹³ The ability to connect to Hashem is uniquely the Jewish people's, and it cannot be reached by any other nation. Only of the Jewish people it is said, "*Yisrael*, since the time they stood at Sinai, their impurity left them."¹⁴ This was said about the nation of *Yisrael*, not of the gentiles. By the giving of the Torah, Hashem opened the heavens and revealed "*Ain Od Milvado*", that there is nothing else besides Him, and this meant that the bond between Yisrael and Hashem was not simply "now" that there was Creation, but a bond that existed even before Creation.

SHAVUOS - THE RETURN TO THE INHERENT BOND WITH THE CREATOR

These words, understandably, are describing a lofty spiritual concept. But we have no loftier day of the year than the day of the giving of the Torah. All other days of the year, with almost no exceptions, are on a level of after the sin of Adam. The giving of the Torah was a level reminiscent of before the sin of Adam. (To some degree, *Rosh HaShanah* is also on a level of before the sin of Adam, from the perspective of time.) We have one day of the year, the day when the Torah was given to

Yisrael, where we were free from the Angel of Death, and when the spirit of impurity left us entirely.

Each year, the spiritual light of this day returns. Although it is not completely revealed, due to the presence of sin today, it is still allowed to shine, and it exists in a concealed dimension.

The power of *Yisrael* to bond with Hashem from the depths of their *neshamos* - that spiritual light is allowed to shine during this time of the year. It is the power of each individual Jew to reach the *raishis* beginning of his soul. From there a person can connect to the Torah which is called *raishis* - and, as explained, this is not the level of Torah of "after" Creation, but the level of Torah as it was before Creation, at its very beginning.

At that level, the Jewish people enjoy a bond with the Torah as if they are "twins" with the Torah, who have been born together, [and who are seen as 'always being together'] - and even more so, they have this relationship of "twins" towards Hashem, as it were.¹⁵

IN CONCLUSION

May we merit together, as well as the entire Creation, to once again receive the light of the giving of the Torah. It should be revealed completely, the revelation of Hashem on His world, through the revelation of His Torah, and through the nation of Yisrael, [which is] the extension of this spiritual light - and from there, may it spread to the rest of the Creation.

שיחת השבוע 027 במדבר - שבועות -
קדושת בכור - ראשית

¹² Zohar parshas Achrei Mos 73a

¹³ Yeshayahu 44:10

¹⁴ Shabbos 145b

¹⁵ Editor's Note: Refer to the derashas of *Mazal of Rosh Chodesh_05_ Twins* and *Mazal of Rosh Chodesh_06_ Closer Than Twins*

PRE-SHAVUOS MEDITATION

Chazal ask: Why was the Torah given in the desert? One of the reasons given 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 Shavuot (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 five 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 Shavuot, 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

If someone thinks that preparing for Shavuot 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, where he views it as a blissful experience of experiencing 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 Shavuot, 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 be overhauled. 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.

IN CONCLUSION

These words are but an opener that we should merit 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. ■
Clip taken from the end of original hebrew audio shiur: שבועות 031 – הכנה למתן תורה תשע”ז

Q: 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.

Q: 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 we 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.

Q: 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 since there’s nothing you can do - and 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.

Q: 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.

Q: The Sfas Emes in parshas Beraishis writes that just as the Chayah and Yechidah parts of the soul are “enveloping lights” which surround a person, so are Torah and mitzvos “enveloping lights”, which raise a person from the soul levels of Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah to the higher soul levels, Chayah and Yechidah. He writes further that doing mitzvos raises a person to the Chayah level of the soul, and learning Torah raises a person to the Yechidah level of the soul. Understandably, though, most people learning Torah do not reach the Yechidah level of the soul, even though they learn it with exertion and even though their main desire in life is to learn Torah. So

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

how can a person truly reach the Yechidah level of the soul through learning Torah, as the Sfas Emes describes?

A: Through learning Torah with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) and *l'sheim l'shamayim* (for the sake of Heaven).

Q: For years, I have been learning in *Kolel*, and I have not been successful yet to finish any topic of Gemara I learned. I never yet completed anything, from beginning until end. At first, whenever I begin to learn, I have excitement, and slowly my excitement wanes, until I lose the whole thing. Then my learning will eventually become shaky and unstable, and unproductive. What is the reason for this, and how can I solve this issue?

A: Whenever you begin to learn, the main power you need to use is your intellect, not your heart. You need to enter Torah learning with the abilities of logical planning and thinking. In contrast, when [you start with excitement], you are starting from your heart [from a place of emotion], and this excitement will tend to weaken. You can also bring some of your heart into the process, but you mainly need to apply your cold, clean intellect, so that you can build a structure, step after step. The more solid your foundation is when you start, by mainly using your intellect as opposed to your heart, the more your Torah learning will last, with *siyata d'shmaya*.

Q: 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?

A: 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: 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?

A: 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: 1) What is the difference between the Chassidim, Litvish, and Sefardim regarding the different ways of learning the “inner dimension” of Torah?

A: The way of learning for Sefardim is to focus on the simple meaning of the text, from deducing the meaning of the words (*diyuk*). (When it comes to learning the writings of the Arizal, the commentaries differ regarding how much *diyuk* one needs to use). In addition, the Sefardim use the ability of *cheshbon* [following the flow of thought of the words], and sometimes in order to answer a question or in order to fill in a missing detail which isn't explicitly written, the Sefardim also employ the ability of *sevara* (logic).

The way of learning of the Litvish is to learn with understanding (*havanah*) and

intellectualizing (*haskalah*), to understand the very concept of each level, and accordingly, to understand the path of the wisdom, with *sevara* and with *cheshbon*. A little bit of this is explained by the Gra, in his commentary on Mishlei, besides for what the Gra explains in his commentary to Sefer Yetzirah and mainly in his commentary on Tikkunei HaZohar.

Chassidim learn about each thing from a “soul” understanding, and from an understanding that relates to personal *avodah*.

Q: What are the different ways of their *avodas Hashem*?

A: The Sefardim emphasize the specific *kavanos* (intentions) to have when performing *mitzvos*. The way of the Litvish is to become completely attached by contemplating the ideals. The way of the Chassidim is to do the *avodah* of the soul that pertains to each detail, for the purpose of achieving *d'veykus*.

Q: Which is the path that the Rav recommends?

A: Each person needs to choose which path is appropriate for him, based on his personal soul root.

Q: 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 one learn with the program that is in the place he lives in, or should he learn alone?

A: 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: Should a person try especially hard to find a *mikveh* [on shavuot morning before *shacharis*]?

A: Yes.