

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our calendar moves from the spring festivals of Passover and Shavuot to the fall festivals of universal redemption and plenty, a journey in time that parallels a journey in space, from the barren desert to the land of milk and honey - Israel.

In the spring, Passover is linked by the counting of the Omer to its concluding Festival of Shavuot, seven weeks later; the Talmudic Sages even refer to Shavuot as Atzeret, or the Closing Holiday (paralleling Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day which concludes the fall festival of Succot). And while Passover celebrates the promise of freedom, our journey from slave-labor and suffering to liberation and freedom, it is, for the time being, liberation in a hostile and homeless desert. When does this journey come to an end? Shavuot, celebrated on the 50th day after the Seder of Passover, gives expression to the paradigm of completion, coming full circle, for it celebrates the bounty of the land, the first fruits brought by the Israelites who have not only reached their promised homeland but have also established their Holy Temple in Jerusalem!

Remarkably, the holidays of this spring period are sandwiched between the public readings of two of our five Biblical Scrolls (Megillot), each of which features a heroic woman as its central personality: Purim is marked by the reading of the Scroll of Esther; Shavuot by the reading of the Scroll of Ruth.

And both Ruth and Esther, two of the greatest heroines of the Bible, have come to symbolize both the internal -and eternal- heart and essence of these festivals. But even more so, their stories, their 'scrolls' (these two megillot) reflect each other in remarkable ways, each one a prism into the nature of the other.

First of all, we need to keep in mind that just as Passover moves from the reality of a nation still smarting from slavery and only tasting the beginnings of freedom in the more confining, treacherous landscape of the desert to the far more satisfying Shavuot realization of home and hearth, state and sanctuary, (coming home after being away for so long in Egypt),

**While you read these words of Torah,
please have David ben Roza
in mind for a speedy recovery**

we find that the Esther-scroll of Purim (pre-Passover) describes the opposite phenomenon, focusing upon Jews in vulnerable galut (exile). In terms of our experience of the festive calendar, Shavuot always culminates the trajectory that starts with Purim, inexorably leading us toward the climatic moment when the Scroll of Ruth is read, ending with its majestic reach for messianic geulah (redemption), the final word recording the name of David, the future king and redeemer of Israel.

A study of the contrasts and comparisons between these two feminist-featuring Scrolls from galut to geulah should elucidate the march of our calenderical journey, which clearly points us in an eastward direction toward Zion.

First of all, the entire story of the Scroll of Esther takes place in Persia, opening with an exquisitely detailed description of the dining chambers of the Persian King in Shushan. (Esther 1:6). The Scroll of Ruth, on the other hand, opens in Bethlehem, Israel - and although the rest of that chapter takes place in Moab, the succeeding three chapters all take place around the verdant hills of Bethlehem and Efrat. It is important for us to realize that the ten years of Naomi's life in Moab are described in that very first chapter, whereas it takes the next three chapters to detail the crucial events in Israel of only three months duration: from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the wheat harvest. These three months prepare the stage for Jewish eternity!

Secondly, according to the Midrash (B.T. Megillah 11a), the Scroll of Esther describes Jews who have the opportunity to return to Judea but opt to remain in the "diaspora;" Ahasverosh was King of Persia immediately following Cyrus - who conquered Babylon and permitted the exiled Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple. Esther may have even changed her name from the Hebrew "Hadassah" to the more Persian "Esther" (probably from the Persian word for star, and the Persian goddess Astarte). In the Scroll of Ruth, however, the text makes fairly short shrift of the sons of Elimelekh, who leave Bethlehem (Lit. House of Bread) for the falsely glittering fields of Moab (lit. "from father," a reminder of a Biblical act of incest between Lot and his daughter); their names, Makhlon (illness) and Kilyon (destruction) succinctly sum up their galut experience of assimilation and intermarriage. The remaining three quarters of the book tell of Naomi's return to her homeland, and of the triumph she

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eventually experiences there as the "ancestor" of the Messiah David. In short, the Scroll of Ruth is the record of Jews who leave their exiled status and return to Israel.

Thirdly, the Scroll of Esther tells the story of a Jewess in exile who is forced to forsake the home of her relative Mordecai (cousin, uncle, nephew, husband?) and live with a Gentile King in order to save her people; moreover, the salvation she achieves is only temporary, with the Talmud ruling that we don't even recite Hallel on Purim since we still remained slaves of Ahasveros even after Haman's demise (B.T. Megillah 14). The Scroll of Ruth, on the other hand, tells the story of a Gentile Moabite who becomes a Jewess - by - choice, how she journeys to Israel to live with her Jewish mother-in-law, and enters the royal family of Judah when she marries Boaz; moreover, she becomes the progenitrix of ultimate Jewish salvation through the eventual descendant of her great - grandson, David.

Finally, the manner in which we celebrate Purim is by drinking until "we can no longer distinguish between praising Mordecai and cursing Haman, perhaps because it was the arch anti-Semite Amalekite Haman who forcibly reminded the assimilating Jews of Persia that they were after all - Jews; nevertheless, such raucous celebration is certainly not identified with the way in which our Sages generally asked us to celebrate. Shavuot, however, is celebrated by our bringing first fruits to the Temple singing praises to G-d and staying up all night studying Torah. It seems that true Jewish piety, Jewish future and eternal Jewish salvation can only come out of Zion! Apparently, even a celebration of galut survival must depend upon the temporary "high" of inebriating beverages, whereas a Festival of Jerusalem brings us to the supernal "heights" of our eternal Torah -for even Torah has its first fruits-through which we glimpse our redemption.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“(G-d) created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah to be its antidote” (Kiddushin 30b, Bava Basra 16a). One of the many things to be appreciative of the Torah for is its ability to help us fight our physical desires and choose good over evil. The

Talmud is telling us that by engaging in Torah study we can weaken the power the evil inclination has over us in order to defeat it. However, this seems to be at odds with something else the Talmud teaches us (Succah 52a), "whoever is greater than his friend has an even stronger [evil] inclination." The implication is that the greater the individual is - greatness achieved through growth in Torah - the stronger the evil inclination becomes. How can learning Torah weaken the evil inclination and strengthen it at the same time? Although I have yet to come across anyone that discusses this issue directly, some of the explanations given to these concepts by Torah sages throughout the ages may shed some light on it.

The Talmud (in Kiddushin) uses an example of someone that has a bad wound, upon which a medicated bandage is placed. He is told that as long as he keeps the bandage on, there are no restrictions. If he takes it off, though, he risks developing ulcers. So too, the Talmud continues, is Torah the "medicine" for the evil inclination. Based on this example, the Maharsha says that the "medicine" only works while the Torah is being studied; if the learning is interrupted, it is as if the bandage was removed, and the danger returns. The Maharal (Tiferes Yisroel 25) implies the same thing, changing the wording of the Talmud from being protected from the evil inclination "if you engage in Torah" to "while you are engaged in Torah." This is consistent with the wording of the Rambam (Hilchos Isuray Biyah 21:19), who tells us "if improper thoughts come, he should turn his heart from worthless matters to matters of Torah." If we are only protected while we are actually learning, it can be suggested that studying Torah weakens the evil inclination, but once the studying has ended, the vulnerability returns, a vulnerability that is greater the greater the person is. We would still need to explain how the same action, studying Torah, can cause a greater (future) vulnerability while protecting it during the study session.

The Mishnah Berurah (1:12), after telling us that a scholar who is proficient at Torah study should not take time away from his learning for supplemental prayers, adds that "a person must set a time to learn Mussar (books that focus on internal growth) every single day, whether a lot or a little, for the greater the person is, so is his evil inclination greater (quoting the Talmud in Succah), and the antidote for the evil inclination (paraphrasing the Talmud in Kiddushin) is the rebuke [contained in] the sayings of Chazal." The Mishnah Berurah seems to be differentiating between the "aggadic" parts of the Torah and the "halachic" parts, with the former weakening the evil inclination that had been strengthened by the latter. However, with the Mussar Movement being relatively recent, and books of Mussar not available for most of Jewish history, and the term "Torah" applying to all parts of the Torah (not just Mussar or Aggadah), it would be difficult to make such a broad differentiation. This is especially true since the

Ba'alay Mussar insist that even learning the parts of the Talmud that discuss halachic issues provide this protection against the evil inclination as well. Nevertheless, a similar distinction can be made, based on different facets that are inherent in Torah study. On one hand, studying Torah increases one's knowledge, and the deeper into the topic one delves, the more he understands G-d's world, His concepts, the way He operates, and what He wants from us. Learning Torah gives us a glimpse into G-d's mind, as it were. On the other hand, this knowledge also brings about a better understanding of our place in the universe and how much is expected of us, and provides us with a game plan for growing closer to Him. There is both "chuchma" (wisdom) and "tochacha" (rebuke); it can be suggested that the "chuchma" aspect strengthens the evil inclination, while the "tochacha" aspect weakens it. While both of these facets are contained in all areas of Torah study, since the works of Mussar contain a higher percentage of the latter, a daily dose is recommended to keep the evil inclination weak.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav Me'Eliyahi vol. 5, pg. 152) limits the power of Torah to weaken the evil inclination to Torah studied in great depth and with great effort - to the extent that it takes over his very being, occupying his every thought. It can therefore be suggested that Torah learned on any other level, although very beneficial, has the side effect of making the person more vulnerable to sin. Elsewhere (vol. 1 pg. 235), Rav Dessler distinguishes between destroying the evil inclination completely and fighting back against it but not destroying it. If not destroyed, the evil inclination fights back, and the harder we fight against it, the harder it fights back. This, Rav Dessler says, is what Chazal meant by "the greater the person the stronger his evil inclination is," as his stronger actions against the evil inclination bring about a stronger reaction from it. Putting these two "halves" together, it could be suggested that Torah study is the "antidote" if it is so pervasive that it "destroys" the evil inclination, but causes the evil inclination to push back even harder if it is not all-encompassing (or at moments that one is not fully engrossed in it).

In vol. 4 (pg. 134) and vol. 5 (pg. 23), Rav Dessler describes two different types of evil inclination. One stems from the human being's physical drives, while the other, which attacks those that have conquered such temptations, tries to trick the person into sinning. It could have been suggested that Torah weakens physical temptations but increases the possibility of being tricked into sinning. However, Rav Dessler himself (Sefer Hazikaron vol. 2, pg. 87) says that the concept of "the greater one is the greater his temptation is" applies to both.

The most common theme Rav Dessler suggests to explain why the greater one is the greater his temptation is (vol. 1 pg. 164, vol. 5 pgs. 143, 175 and 355; see also Geon Yaakov and Anaf Yosef on

Succah 52a) is that in order to still have free will, the evil inclination must become stronger as one grows. If the "fight" the evil inclination puts up was always of the same intensity, and the individual has reached the level of no longer being enticed by it, the game is over. Instead, as the person grows, so must the level of temptation. From this perspective, learning Torah enables the individual to overcome temptation, but also causes the temptations to necessarily become stronger. This is necessary not just to allow for a continuation of free will, but also to prevent stagnation. For even if we have studied much Torah, we must continue to study it even more, so that we can constantly keep ahead.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Shavuot is a celebration of that moment when we, the Jewish people, were wed to God. Note the parallel between that moment and the wedding of bride and groom.

At Sinai, God and the people of Israel stood at the base of the mountain, "be-tahtit ha-har." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on the word be-tahtit, the Midrash concludes that we, the Jewish people, were literally standing beneath the mountain - much like bride and groom stand under the huppah, the bridal canopy during the wedding ceremony.

At Sinai, God pronounces the words "ve-atem tihiyu li...goy kadosh, and you will be to Me a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) This formula is very similar to what the groom says to the bride when he places a ring on her finger - harei at mekudeshet li, behold you are betrothed to me.

At Sinai, God and the people of Israel signed a contract in the form of the ten declarations, aseret hadibrot. Bride and groom do the same - they enter into the marital agreement through the signing of a ketubah - a marital contract.

There are other traditions and rituals that point to a parallel between Sinai and a wedding ceremony. The Jews encircled Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:12) just as the bride circles the groom. There was lightning at Sinai. (Exodus 19:16) This is mirrored in the wedding ceremony as some have a tradition to carry lit candles to the huppah. In the end, the tablets were broken at Sinai. (Exodus 32:19) Similarly, a glass is shattered at the end of the nuptials. The Jewish people ate and drank at Sinai. (Exodus 24:11) In the same way, we also partake of a festive meal at a wedding celebration.

Thus, the Torah states, that "Moshe (Moses) brought the people forth from the camp toward God." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on this sentence, the Midrash compares this moment to a groom and bride coming toward each other.

There are emotional considerations that point to a connection between divine and human love. For

example, feeling the presence of God means, no matter how lonely one is, God is near. Love, in the human realm, is also a response to loneliness. Moreover, when we connect to God, we connect to eternity, as God, of course, lives forever. Eternity is also a central component of marriage as we attempt to transcend our own lives by having children. Finally, loving God and loving a fellow human being can both give one a sense of deep fulfillment and meaning in life.

I believe that only through the experience of blissful marital love can one understand love of God. While each partner in the relationship maintains her or his own individuality, love is the uniting of two souls. This gives one a sense of the absolute oneness of God. Human love is also an emotion that is infinite in its scope, giving one a sense of the infinity of God. No wonder the Torah calls cleaving to one's spouse *ve-davak* (Genesis 2:24), just as cleaving to God is called *deveikut*.

In one word: love of God and love of spouse and family interface. On this Shavuot, may each one show us the way to the other. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is a long standing tradition that connects the book of Ruth with the holiday of Shavuot. The book of Ruth is the book of Jewish kindness and compassion, especially towards those individuals in society who feel themselves weak and disadvantaged because of life and societal circumstances. This includes the widowed and the orphaned, the alien and the stranger, the poor and the otherwise hopeless.

Ruth and Naomi, the heroines of the book and the mothers of Israel are befriended and saved by Boaz, a man of stature and power, who risks a great deal in saving them from penury and abandonment. From this act of compassion and kindness sprouts eventual love, marriage and a child who will be one of the founders of the Davidic line of royalty of the kingdom of Judah and of all messianic hope and yearning.

Judaism views all seemingly small things as being great and important in their own right for no one can estimate or foretell the consequences of even the smallest act of courtesy to others. The rabbis give examples of "if only so and so knew the consequences of the small act of goodness that he performed" he would have acted with even greater fervor and intent to do greater good in performance of that act.

In the book of Ruth the "menu" of the lunch that Boaz gave Ruth to eat is recorded minutely. Had Boaz realized the cosmic and generational importance of this act of kindness of giving a defenseless widowed

stranger food he would certainly have provided a more elaborate menu and fare.

The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that goodness, courtesy, kindness, a compassionate "way of the land," precedes Torah. Thus the holiday of Shavuot marked as the commemoration of the granting of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai is introduced to us through the book of Ruth. The Torah is not only laws and commandments; it is a value system as well.

To understand and appreciate the Torah itself, its value system must be discerned and appreciated first. Otherwise one runs the risk, in the words of Ramban, of being an obnoxious person and yet seemingly remaining within the limits of Torah law. The book of Ruth, though written many centuries after the granting of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is really the preface to the Torah.

The Jewish people begin with Avraham and Sarah, our father and mother, whose basic characteristic that allowed them to spread the message of monotheism in a pagan world was their kindness and hospitality towards others. The palace of Torah is entered through the garden of goodness. This goodness and concern for others has been the hallmark of the Jewish people throughout our existence. It has guaranteed that the Torah has remained with us and has forged the eternal link with Mount Sinai that the holiday of Shavuot represents and commemorates. The rabbis of the Talmud again characterized Israel as being a compassionate and kind generous people. All of this is represented in the book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot.

The holiday of Shavuot has many meaningful traditions associated with it. However, lest we become lost in the dairy meals and all night study sessions without realizing the true importance of this holiday of Torah, the book of Ruth comes to place it all into proper perspective. The idea of the acceptance of Torah through kind and compassionate behavior towards others is basic to Judaism.

The nineteenth century Mussar movement attempted to make this idea widespread amongst the Jewish society of Lithuania and parts of Eastern Europe. It is worthy of support today, especially in a society that has become more and more self-centered. From nineteenth century Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement to twenty-first century life in our societies there is an enormous distance in time and attitude. But human problems remain constant as do our failures and shortcomings.

The Torah attempts to raise our field of vision to see what can and should be noble in our lives and society. How to pursue this vision is through the actions that we exhibit towards others. The Torah emphasizes this message in myriad ways. The book of Ruth is the perfect guide to this accomplishment. We should be aware that Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, Elimelech, Machlon, Chilyon, Ploni Almoni and all of the characters that

appear in the book of Ruth still walk among us. Realizing this will make our acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot most meaningful and sincere. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Summarized by Shaul Barth

Translated by Kaeren Fish

On Shavuot, we celebrate kabbalat ha-Torah; but the word "kabbala" can be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, we "received" the Torah as a gift. Indeed, the Torah is "more precious than fine gold and pearls;" on Shavuot, we must thank God for the gift that He has bestowed on us and for granting us the privilege of this great treasure.

On the other hand, we "accepted" the Torah. "Acceptance" can be understood as the internalization of a value or idea. The expression "kabbala le-atid"-accepting a resolution upon oneself for the future-implies the internalization of one's repentance and an attempt to live accordingly in the future. According to this interpretation, we must explain what exactly it was that Am Yisrael accepted at that exalted occasion at Sinai. What was given to the nation as a legacy for the future, continuing many generations after God's revelation?

This question assumes special significance in light of the fact that Ramban, in his glosses on Rambam's Sefer Ha-Mitzvot (prohibitions, addition #2), counts the remembering of the revelation at Sinai as a commandment: "Take heed to yourself, and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life, but teach them to your children and your childrens' children: the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Chorev..." (Devarim 4:9-10). According to this understanding, we must understand what it is that we are meant to remember. Which values are we meant to internalize as part of our remembrance of the acceptance of Torah?

There are a number of points to which Am Yisrael committed themselves and which they accepted upon themselves at Sinai.

As we know, there are commandments that are not set down explicitly in the Torah; the Sages throughout the generations have interpreted the Torah and revealed these commandments. Seemingly, a person could claim that the system of Halakha as we know it is not what he committed himself to at Sinai. There, we accepted the obligation of a certain number of commandments, but we never committed ourselves

to the obligations imposed later by the Sages, such as, for example, the reading of the megilla on Purim!

We therefore must understand that at Sinai, the nation did not accept each individual commandment, but rather the entire body of commandments as their subjugation to God. The very first commitment of Am Yisrael at Sinai was towards the fulfillment of that general system of Halakha, not each law individually. This idea is proposed by R. Yosef Baer Soloveitchik (the Beit Ha-Levi) to resolve the difficulties that he discerns in the obligation of Am Yisrael to all of the commandments.

The gemara (Shabbat 88b), in discussing the revelation at Sinai, tells us: "They stood at the foot of the mountain"-R. Avdimi bar Hama said: This teaches that God held the mountain over them like a cask, and said to them: "If you accept the Torah [-- then well and good]; and if not-there you will be buried"-Rava said: [Although it would seem that the Torah was accepted because of coercion], nevertheless it was re-accepted [willingly] in the days of Achashverosh, as it is written: "The Jews fulfilled and accepted"-they fulfilled that which they had already accepted [at Sinai].

The generally accepted meaning of this gemara is that at the time of Mordekhai and Esther, the Jews willingly accepted upon themselves the Torah that they had accepted through coercion at the time of the revelation at Sinai. However, we may perhaps propose another interpretation which, to my view, reflects the simple, literal meaning of the gemara. At the time of Mordekhai and Esther, "the Jews fulfilled that which they had already accepted." Until the time of Esther, Am Yisrael fulfilled the commandments as part of the overall subjugation to God to which they had committed themselves at the time of accepting the Torah; from that time onward, they also committed themselves to each and every individual law, so as to fulfill that which they had already accepted in the general sense.

Furthermore, at Sinai, the nation accepted upon itself not only the laws, but also God as Creator and Master of the world; the nation accepted the Kingship of God, and since that time this faith has been "the pillar of all wisdom and the foundation of all foundations." The faith that the nation took upon itself was not limited to the acceptance of God's existence, but also other beliefs that are integral to Judaism. At Sinai, Am Yisrael accepted fundamental beliefs that remain binding to this day, as part of the concepts and principles that are the "red lines," the definitive framework of faith, in which every Jew believes.

The last element that we may list as a commitment by every Jew at Sinai is the belonging to the nation of Israel and the concept of the nation of Israel as a single body, with everyone connected to everyone else. At Sinai, the status of Am Yisrael was established as a special nation in which every individual is meant to feel a part of, and connected to, his fellow; thus, a collection of individuals is forged into a nation.

From that time on, every individual Jew is obligated to accept upon himself his belonging to the nation of Israel and to recognize that all of us belong to the same entity, with each responsible for the other.

All of these elements are contained in the command "Take heed-lest you forget-the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Chorev" (*This sicha was delivered on Shavuot 5763 [2003].*)

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

R'Bana'a used to say; "Whoever studies Torah for with a pure motive, his Torah scholarship becomes an elixir of life as it is said, "It is a Tree of Life to those who fast to it..."(Proverbs 3:18) However whoever studies Torah for an ulterior motive his Torah scholarship becomes a deadly poison to him..." (Tractate Taanis 7A)

A person should always be busy with Torah and Mitzvos for ulterior motives, because through the ulterior motive he will come to the pure motive. (Tractate Pesachim 50B)

How do we reconcile these two Talmudic statements? On the one hand it is dangerous to engage in Torah study for some other reason and on the other it seems to be a requirement. Is it always or never good to learn Torah with a foreign- motive? Tosfos offers a distinction that helps to resolves the apparent contradiction. It all depends upon the nature of the motivation.

If the person is being encouraged to learn in order to get some reward like a candy, or to be considered for a worthy marriage partner, or even to gain honor then that's fine and dandy. Is the person to wait to be perfect to begin to do Mitzvos? That day will never come.

We all require regular behavioral modifiers to jumpstart and maintain appropriate behavior. After a while the flavor of virtue is its own reward. Over time a person can be weaned from lesser to higher incentives. When one seeks Torah knowledge for the purpose of argumentation, however, then it is potentially poisonous.

Years ago I was giving a class in prison. We were learning the laws pertaining to proper behavior in a synagogue. At one point we quoted the sagely statement from the Talmud Brochos, "Someone who does not come to synagogue is called a wicked neighbor!"

When I looked up and read their reaction I knew immediately that something was wrong. There was this head dance going on. A group of fellows were exchanging glances and confirming something. I realized that I had inadvertently armed them and I needed to diffuse the bomb.

I told them as we had learned above that the Torah is a "Tree of Life" or alternately "a deadly poison". When is it a healthy medicine? -When we take it for our

own improvement. That which we just learned, "Someone who fails to come to Synagogue is called a wicked neighbor" , is for us to know about ourselves when we are flip flopping in our beds and deciding if we should make the minyan today or not. None of us wants to play the role of the bad neighbor, so we might thereby kick ourselves out of bed.

However, when considering why Mo, Larry, or Curly doesn't make it to the prayers in the morning we have another active principle, "Judge your nation to the side of merit" (Vayikra). He has a good reason why he doesn't come. We don't have to know what that reason is. He's tired. He's depressed. He's busy with some other pressing matter. Whatever!

What we learn here is in order to change our own behavior. If we approach it that way and allow it to do so, then it is a life giving force. If, however, the information we gain here is to be used as a weapon to bludgeon others just to feel just and throttle them into submission to gain moral superiority then it is a terrible mixture.

A traveling lecturer came to a certain town and was discouraged by the local Rabbi, "These people are too difficult to reach even with the best speech. They're "Yenemite Jews!" The visiting speaker corrected him, "You mean Yemenite Jews! What does that have to do with anything?" "No! The Rabbi explained, "YENEMite. (In Yiddish YENEM means 'others') Everything you say they think you're talking about someone else, but just not them."

The preacher understood what had to be done. He delivered a fiery and a clear sermon on the lesson of taking personal responsibility and not pointing fingers at others. When he was done, a group of congregants gathered around and told him, "That was one of the most important and inspiring speeches ever and that fellow over there, he really needed to hear it!" Receiving the Torah as a "Tree of Life" on Shevuos may be a simple or as difficult as agreeing to take a dose of our own medicine. © 2003 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The first portion of Bamidbar (Numbers) is generally read before the Shavuos festival, which commemorates the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Inasmuch as there are no coincidences, we may assume that this portion is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah.

In relating the episode at Sinai, the Torah states: "Israelites camped near the mountain" (Exodus 19:2). However, the Torah uses the singular vayichan, "he camped" rather than vayachanu, "they camped." Rashi explains that the singular indicated that all the Israelites were united as one person. It is this unity that made them worthy of receiving the Torah.

There is nothing so dear to God as unity among His children. So much so, that the Talmud states that when Jews are united, God forgives even their gravest sins (Kallah 8).

The Sages teach, "You have no person without his hour and no thing without its place" (Ethics of the Fathers 4:3). One of the chassidic masters asked, "If every person has a specific time and place, why is there so much dissension among us?" He answered, "Because many people are envious of others, and wish to occupy their time and place." If we were free of envy, we might achieve the coveted unity.

This portion of the Torah describes the organization of the Israelites. "The Children of Israel shall encamp, each person by his banner according to the insignia of his father's household" (Numbers 2:2). Each person knew his place. The Kohanim had their place, the Levites had their place and every single person knew his rightful place. It was this knowledge and acceptance of one's place that enabled the Israelites to be a unit rather than fragmented.

We may conceptualize unity of a nation as a symphony orchestra, where each musician has a designated assignment. If the percussionist or the flute player would balk at his assignment because the violinist plays a better part, the performance would suffer. No one musician is of greater importance than another. This is equally true of the Jewish nation. We all have specific assignments: Kohanim, Levites, Israelites, men, women, Torah scholars, lay people. We are one harmonious unit.

The message of Bamidbar (Numbers) is the message of unity: "The Children of Israel shall encamp, each person by his banner." This is why the Torah reading of Bamidbar precedes Shavuos. Unity is the prerequisite for acceptance of the Torah. *based on Preparation for Sinai by Rabbi Avraham J. Twerski, M.D. © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI EFRAIM LEVINE

Hadrash Ve-Haiyun

It is a widely accepted Jewish custom to eat milk products on the holiday of Shavuos. The commentators give many reasons for this custom. One reason is that the Torah is compared to milk as it says in the posuk "Honey and milk is under my tongue" (Shir Hashirim 4:11). Chazal interpret this posuk as a reference to Torah study. Being that Shavuos is the holiday in which we received the Torah, we eat milk products as a symbolic reminder as to what has occurred on this day.

Another reason we eat milk products is to draw attention to the prohibition of eating meat and milk together. The commentators tell us that every day of the year corresponds to one of the negative commandments. For example the commentators devote much effort to show how tishah ba'av corresponds to the prohibition of eating from the gid

hanashe, the sciatic nerve. Similarly, the holiday of Shavuos corresponds to the prohibition of eating meat and milk together. An allusion to this can be found in the posuk "The first of the fruits of your land you shall bring to the house of Hashem your G-d, you shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk" (Shemos 23:19). The holiday of Shavuos is the earliest time in the year that we may bring our first fruits to the Beis Hamikdash. The fact the Torah juxtaposes the law of the first fruits to the prohibition of eating meat and milk together, reveals a relationship between the two. What is the symbolic significance of this relationship?

If a drop of milk falls on a hot piece of meat, the meat is prohibited due to the fact that the meat now contains a flavor of milk. However, if the piece of meat is sixty times the volume of milk, the meat is permitted. In this instance we say that the flavor of milk has been nullified by meat. If the meat is less than sixty times the volume of milk, and the piece of meat subsequently falls into a pot of meat that contains less than sixty times the volume of the meat, all the pieces of meat in the pot are prohibited. The novelty of the law is that even if all the pieces of meat together contain more than sixty times the volume of the original drop of milk they are still prohibited. The reason here is because we need sixty times the volume of the prohibited meat, not the milk.

The above mentioned law illustrates the principle of chatichah atzmah naasais neveilah, the piece itself becomes like a piece of non-kosher meat. When the drop of milk falls on the original piece of meat we don't view the piece of meat as merely a mixture of meat and milk but rather as a new entity that is completely forbidden, similar to a piece of non-kosher meat. Even the meat flavor that exudes from this piece is forbidden.

The principle of chatichah atzmah naasais neveilah is unique to the laws of meat and milk. With regard to other prohibited mixtures the Torah law states that the prohibited flavor becomes nullified. For example, if a piece of non-kosher fat fell on a piece of meat which is less than sixty times its volume and the meat subsequently fell into a pot that has more than sixty times the volume of the non-kosher fat but less than sixty times the volume of meat, the pot of meat is permitted. We view the first piece of meat as merely a mixture of non-kosher fat and kosher meat. Thus, even if we only have enough volume to nullify the prohibited fat, the remaining pieces of meat are permitted. In practice we are stringent and follow the principle of chatichah atzmah naasais neveilah even with regard to prohibited mixtures other than meat and milk but only out of stringency not due to the letter of the law.

Throughout the Torah and Rabbinic literature we find man described as a "basar vada'am," meat and blood. We have mentioned that on Shavuos it is customary to eat milk products as a symbolic reminder that the Torah was given on this day. We have also mentioned that we eat milk products to draw attention to

the law that it is forbidden to eat meat and milk together. We may suggest that the purpose of eating milk products is to draw attention to the unique principle of chatichah atzmah naasais neveilah that applies only to law of meat and milk.

We would be tempted to believe that Torah study has little impact on our behavior and lifestyle. After studying Torah we are merely a mixture of meat and milk. We use the term meat here to refer to our physical bodies and the term milk as a reference to Torah. We would think that even when we devote time to Torah study we remain that same people as before only with an accumulation of Torah knowledge. The law chatichah atzmah naasais neveilah teaches us otherwise. Just as a combination of meat and milk is not viewed as merely a mixture of two dissimilar items but rather a new entity, likewise when we bring the milk of Torah into our bodies of meat we are transformed into a new people who live with the spirit of Torah. © 2004 Rabbi E. Levine & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Untouchables

A unique aspect of the holiday of Shavuot struck me as I was explaining the customs of the holidays to some beginners. They began to review the various holiday laws with me. "OK," began one young man. "So on Pesach you've got the matzoh, and the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus." "Correct," I nodded. "And on Sukkos you've got the lulav, esrog and eating the entire holiday in a sukkah right." Again I gave an approving nod and smiled. The student continued. "And what special observance does the Torah tell us to do on Shavuot?" I hesitated. Sacrifices aside, what special mitzvah observance do we do to commemorate the receiving of the Torah?

I was reluctant to respond with, "we stay up all night and learn" or "we eat blintzes at the holiday meal,"—beautiful customs that are in no way comparable to the level of a Torah-ordained command. In fact, the Torah tells us in Parshas Re'eh how we celebrate the holiday. "You shall count seven-weeks for yourselves...Then you shall observe the holiday of Shavuot for Hashem. You shall rejoice before Hashem, your son your daughter, your servant your maidservant, the Levite in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan and the widow who are among you" (Deuteronomy 116:13-15).

Why is there no physical act in commemoration of the Yom Tov? There is no Torah-prescribed requirement to blow Shofar, read a special Torah portion (the reading of the 10 Commandments is Rabbinically ordained), or special ritual to commemorate the event. There is only all-inclusive rejoicing. Why is joy the only way to celebrate? And why is every type of citizen mentioned? Aren't the poor and rich, widowed and orphaned included in every

command? My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, passed away 13 years ago. At the end of the shloshim period of mourning, his student, Rabbi Yitzchok Chinn, Rabbi of Gemilas Chesed Congregation of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, eulogized him. He related the following story:

Reb Yaakov spent his summers at in Camp Ohr Shraga in Ellenville, NY. One summer, a young boy asked Reb Yaakov a most difficult question, "Rebbe," he inquired, "where is my neshama (soul)?" Reb Yaakov turned to the boy and asked him, "Where is your arm?" The boy stuck out his arm. "Good!" said Reb Yaakov. "I want you to shake it." The boy began to shake his arm up and down. Reb Yaakov smiled, "Good, now shake your other arm." The boy began flapping his arms. "Wonderful! Now show me your leg." The boy lifted his foot. "Now shake it!" While flapping his arms, the boy shook his leg. Then Reb Yaakov smiled. "Now your other leg!" The boy began to jump and shake and rock and sway. And as he watched the youngster move with every part of his very essence, Reb Yaakov gave him a tremendous smile and exclaimed, "That is your neshama!"

The only way to commemorate the receiving of the Torah is to celebrate the receipt of our nation's soul. We cannot celebrate the soul with a physical commemoration. The soul of the nation celebrates by shaking every one of its parts: poor or rich, wealthy or poor, free or slave, son or daughter with unmitigated joy. The only way to capture the essence of our very being and our gratitude for the gift that infused us with boundless spirituality is through a rejoicing that permeates every part of the Jewish body; its arms, legs, and torso—The Torah. The observance is not relegated to eating an item, telling a story, hearing a shofar or sitting in a booth. Like the Torah we received, the celebration encompasses every aspect of our lives. And that is done thorough joyous simcha. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

