

קול הנערים

Shavuot and Pirkei Avot

by Adina Strong (Bruria '19)

Many people hold the custom to learn Pirkei Avot from Pesach until Shavuot. While this *minhag* is extremely popular and beneficial to one's character, it is unclear why this specific time period is designated to learn Pirkei Avot. There are many other *zmanim* which are applicable to the lessons learned from Pirkei Avot. Near Tisha B'av, for example, improving one's *middot* is extremely valuable as it represents a reversal of the *sinat chinam* which destroyed the *beit hamikdash*. The *asoret yemei teshuvah* can also be a good time to focus on Pirkei Avot and *middot*, so why is the *minhag* not set for either of those times? What about Shavuot specifically warrants this *minhag*?

The answer may be found in the overall connection between Pirkei Avot and the Shavuot concept of "*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh*, All of Israel is responsible one for another (Shavuot 39a)." From the time Bnei Yisrael got the Torah, they became responsible for one another in terms of *sechar ve'onesh*, reward and punishment. This is one explanation for why when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah they used the plural language of "*Na'aseh ve'nishma*" as opposed to the singular form "*E'eseh ve'eshama*". In saying these plural words, Bnei Yisrael understood the idea of being responsible for one another and encouraging each other to follow the Torah properly. Another translation for the phrase of "*kol yisrael...*" is "everyone in the nation of Bnei Yisrael are sweet to one another." Both of these interpretations reflect the idea that learning Pirkei Avot during the time period leading up to Shavuot stresses the unity and positivity which should be infused throughout the nation when we accept the Torah every year on Shavuot.

Another explanation for the custom of Pirkei Avot can be seen in the opinion of the Ohr Hachaim. The Ohr Hachaim comments that the name of the holiday, "Shavuot", has the root of "*shevu'a*," meaning oath. On Shavuot, two oaths are taken—we, Bnei Yisrael promise to keep the Torah, and Hashem promises to keep us as His Am Kadosh and Am Segulah, and never to exchange us for any other nation. The Gemara (Ta'anit 26b) learns from a *pasuk* in Shir Hashirim (3:11) that Matan Torah was the wedding between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. Just as leading up to a wedding a great amount of preparation precedes. So too, during the weeks leading up to Shavuot, a time of *din*, we ready ourselves for our wedding by improving our *middot* and by doing *teshuvah* through learning Pirkei Avot. In addition, by reviewing our *mesorah* while learning Pirkei Avot, we further strengthen our connection to Matan Torah, the initial wedding and connection between us and Hashem.

It is no coincidence, then, that the last *perek* of Masechet Avot is called "*Kinyan hatorah*, The acquiring of the Torah." Although it is a compilation of *beraitot*, this sixth *perek* completes a system in which someone can be truly prepared to receive the Torah and accept all *mitzvot bein Adam lamakom* and *bein Adam lachaveiro*. Pirkei Avot (6:7) says "*Gedolah Torah shehi notenet chai le'osehah*, Great is Torah for it gives life to its doers." The

Midrash Shmuel writes that learning Torah offers much more than just its mere studying for intellect. It is Pirkei Avot which instills in us the easily applicable lessons on how to approach Torah and *mitzvot*, providing us with tools to practice them daily, and allows for the excitement to accept them every year on Shavuot.

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The Method of Kabbalat Hatorah

by Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman (MTA '87)

From within a storm of visible thunder and audible lightning, our ancestors heard the word of G-d in a moment of mass revelation that would change the course of history. Moshe ascended the mountain to accept the Torah on our behalf, and it is this revelation which we celebrate to this day some three millennia later. What is it that Moshe learned on that mountain; what insight did he receive that we celebrate today?

Our reflexive response is to say that Moshe received the Torah, and if we are familiar with Rabbinic literature we may add that Moshe received both the Written and Oral Law. Upon further reflection, however, we realize that the truth must be more complicated.

First, there is a narrative problem: if Moshe knew the entirety of the Torah, and all that it contained, would Moshe not have saved his nephews Nadav and Avihu? Would he still have hit the rock and be prevented from entering the Promised Land? Would he still have sent the spies to Canaan? Perhaps he would have descended the mountain a day earlier to save us from the Cheit Ha'eigel.

Second, if Moshe was taught the entirety of both the Written and Oral Law, why are there four instances after Sinai when Moshe needed to ask God for clarity in halachic matters (i.e. regarding the laws of Pesach Sheini and the inheritance of the Bnot Tzelafchad, and the punishment for Chillul Shabbat and cursing G-d)?

These are not new questions, and two Amora'im, Rav Yochanan and Rav Shimon ben Lakish, offer different accounts as to how the Torah was given. Common to both accounts is the claim that the Chamishah Chumshei Torah as we have in its completion was only available at the end of the forty years in the desert. Their disagreement, however, lies in the process by which we came to have this full edition.

In Gittin 60a, Rav Yochanan states that "*Torah megillah megillah nitenah*," the Torah was given portion by portion as events came to pass, and as Hashem transmitted new laws, they would be transcribed and added to the existing parts of the Torah. Alternatively, Rav Shimon ben Lakish claims that "*Torah chatumah nitenah*," the Torah was given as a "sealed," completed product at the end of the forty years. We are therefore offered two paradigms of Torah transmission, either as a continuous ongoing process, given piece by piece, or as a static, one time event received as a coherent, finished unit.

However, Rav Yochanan's view appears to contradict a straightforward statement related elsewhere in his name (Megillah 19b):

Rav Chiya bar Abba: Rav Yochanan said, "What is the meaning of that which is written 'and upon you are all the

precepts that Hashem has instructed you at the mountain (*behar*)? – that G-d showed (*hir'uhu*) Moshe intricacies of the Torah, and intricacies of the Scribes, and what the Scribes would eventually invent (*atidin lechadesh*).

Here Rav Yochanan claims that not only was the entirety of the Oral and Written Law revealed to Moshe at Sinai, but also (seemingly) every novel Torah thought that would ever be invented was revealed as well. Which one was it? Was Moshe taught all of the Torah at Sinai, or did he only have the complete version at the end of the forty years?

Notice that in the first passage about the transmission of the Torah, Rav Yochanan spoke of an act of *netinah*; however when addressing the revelation at Sinai, Rav Yochanan refers to an act of *re'iyah*. This distinction is consistently maintained even in all extant manuscripts of the Talmud.

Rav Yochanan uses the verb *nitenah*, “given,” when speaking about Torah that we have in a finite form, one that can be transcribed into a physical copy. However, the revelation at Sinai was a vision, and when Rav Yochanan speaks of that revelation, he addresses what God *showed* Moshe, not necessarily what He gave him.

Rav Yochanan maintains that Moshe was shown a vision on that fateful trip to Har Sinai, a glimpse of the promise and limitless potential inherent and latent in the Torah. Included in that vision are the basic tenets of Judaism, and the guiding principles, the *middot* (see Chagigah 6b and Shemot Rabbah 41:6), for grappling with the Torah and discovering its application. That is how Moshe was shown all of the future inventions related to the study of Torah. He saw them all in a state of potential.

From that moment of revelation, the Jewish people encountered new challenges, and embarked on new frontiers. But they continued to use the product of that revelation—the vision that God “showed” them—applied it to the real world, and brought the Torah from potential to actuality. At each step, more of the Torah was developed, the revelation continued, and the Torah expanded *megillah megillah*, piece by piece.

Rav Yochanan rejects the model of *chatumah nitenah*, that Hashem gave the entirety of the Torah with all of its complexities to Moshe at Sinai in its factory packaging, a sealed product, with no partners in its production. Rather, the Jewish people and the Torah are bound together in a process of constant growth and expansion. While the Torah and the *mesorah* that it birthed supply us with an authoritative foundation, we in turn build upon it as we seek constantly to apply the Torah to real time situations.

Armed with the guidelines and tradition given to them at Sinai, the Jewish people throughout history have been impacted by a continuously changing world, have tackled the challenges it presents, and have seized its opportunities. As the Jewish story flourishes, so does the Torah, further being expounded upon, developed to address a constantly shifting societal landscape.

We learn from Moshe, and celebrate on Shavuot, that we do not necessarily have all the answers. However, as we confront the exciting world of tomorrow, the vision at Sinai is our beacon to guide our way forward.

How to Halachically Stay Up on Shavuot Night

by Effie Klein (Rambam Mesivta '18)

It is a popular custom across all sects of Judaism to stay up on Shavuot night engrossed in Talmud Torah. While this is a very praiseworthy and virtuous *minhag*, many people seem unaware of the *halachic* ramifications of staying up all night, even on a typical Tuesday. The complications of staying up all night are delineated in the Mishnah Berurah (494:1). Our goal here is to analyze each of the four problems, figuring out what we do, and why we do it.

The first problem brought down is making *al netilas yadayim*. There is a *machlokes* between the Rosh and the Rashba why it is that we wash every morning. The Rosh holds that while we are in our unconscious state, our hands may be moving around without us realizing, and may come to touch parts of our bodies that are normally exposed. The Rashba says that every morning, we are created anew, and just as the Kohen washed his hands before he did the Avodah in the Beis Hamikdash, we wash our hands before we do our Avodah. The Shulchan Aruch (4:2) brings down that we wash 3 times to remove the *ruach ra'ah* that remains on our hands. Being that it is unclear who we *pasken* like in regards to the aforementioned *machlokes*, the Rama (ibid. 13) suggests we wash without a *berachah* when staying up all night. If the Rosh is right, his reason wouldn't apply by staying up all night. Regarding the *da'as harshba*, it is unclear whether night or sleep brings about the *beriah chadashah* status. To avoid the *safek*, the Mishnah Berurah (Ibid. 30) suggests that one uses the bathroom to put himself in a situation where there's no doubt that he's *chayav*. This also helps to fulfill his *chiyuv* of *asher yatzar*. While by many *berachos* we rely on *shomei'ah ke'oneh*, it is unclear whether one can do so when the *berachah* is brought about by an action (e.g. *netilas yadayim*), since you can't have *shelichus* by a *mitzvah* which is done on the body. It's best to stay away from this problem, and just do an action such as going to the bathroom or touching your shoe (although only the bathroom works for *asher yatzar*).

The next issue is *tzitzis*. Every day, we make the *berachah* on putting on *tzitzis*. If one stayed up all night and never took off his *tzitzis*, what should he do? It would seem that since he never removed them, there's no need for a *berachah*. However, it's not so simple. One is *patur* from *tzitzis* at night, because he is not in fulfillment of the *pasuk* of “*Ur'e'isem oso* (Bamidbar 15:39).” There's a *machlokes* brought down in the Shulchan Aruch (18:1) between the Rambam and the Rosh regarding what the *pasuk* means. The Rambam holds that night refers to the time of night, because nothing can be seen. Therefore, any four-cornered garment worn during the day must have *tzitzis*, while any four-cornered garment worn at night is *not* required to have *tzitzis*. According to the Rosh, night refers to the type of garment. A garment designated for nighttime use (such as a pajama top) is not required in *tzitzis* even if it is worn during the day. A garment designated for daytime use (such as a *talis*) is required in *tzitzis* even at night. (In fact, the Rama brings down that on the night of Yom Kippur, one should make the *berachah* on the *tallis* while it is still day, to remove the *safek*.) Because we wore our *tzitzis* throughout the night (constituting a *hefsek*), the Mishna Berurah (8:42) recommends that one putting on a *talis* or one who took off his *tzitzis* should make the *berachah* for everyone.

The Shulchan Aruch (47:12) explicitly states that one who was up all night doesn't have to say Birkas Hatorah in the morning, as there was never any *hefsek*. It is interesting to note the language of the Mechaber, saying “the night comes after the day that passed.” If that is the case, you should have to make Birkas Hatorah on Shavuot morning, as the night is a continuation of the previous day, and not vice-versa. However, the Mishna Berurah (ibid. 28) states that since the Chachamim enacted that Bikas Hatorah be said *every day*, some say one who stays up all night must indeed recite the *berachos*. He brings

down as he did by *tzitzis* to find someone who is definitely *chayav* (i.e. someone who slept) to recite the *berachah* on everyone's behalf. Everyone then recites the *pesukim* of Birkas Kohanim and the Mishnah and Gemara titled "*eilu devarim* (Peah 1:1, Shabbos 126a)" as one normally does. The Mishnah Berurah also brings down a *pesak* from Rav Akiva Eiger, who says if one took a nap (longer than a half hour) during the day and stayed up all night (as many do to prepare for Shavuos), he must say Birkas Hatorah the following morning. Although he didn't have to make a new *berachah* before the night (as the original *beracha* goes on the whole day), there wasn't continuity to the next day.

Certain Birkos Hashachar thank Hashem for everyday things. Some are "*shelo asani goy*," "*pokei'ach ivrim*," and "*malbish arumim*." However, some *berachos* we say every day are specifically related to the theme of waking up from sleep to a new day. Some examples are "*elokai neshamah*" and "*hama'avir sheinah*." The Shulchan Aruch (46:8) says that one to whom the *berachah* doesn't apply says the *berachah* without Hashem's Name. The Rama (ibid.), however, rules that we say the *berachah* completely, as it is general *shevach*. The Mishnah Berurah (ibid. 24) brings down that according to the Eliyahu Rabbah, one who stays up all night does not say the *berachos* of *elokai neshama* and *hama'avir sheina*. However, the Mishnah Berurah also quotes the Pri Megadim and Sha'arei Teshuvah, who were unsure about what to do. Therefore, just as by Birkas Hatorah, the suggestion is to find someone who slept and have them be *motzi* you.

The Mishnah Berurah (240:7) brings down that the source for staying up to learn on Shavuos night is actually from the Zohar. We know through current events that different sects of Judaism tend to disagree a lot, from Litvaks to Chassidim to Kabbalists, etc. However, even if they disagree with the reason behind the *minhag*, they recognize that it has become *minhag Yisrael*, and therefore rule for the general populace, even if they may disagree personally. We also see this by many of our *shul* Rabbanim, who will say that the general populace can be *meikel* in a certain area, even though he may be *machmir*. These sources teach us that even though we may fight with our brethren sometimes, it is our duty as Jews to help. Perhaps this is why the Mishnah Berurah starts talking about Shavuos in Siman 4. We can't learn *halacha* if we don't know the basic principles of who we are. With this in mind, we are able to commemorate *kabbalas hatorah*, which was given "*Ke'ish echad be'lev echad*, Like one man with one heart (Rashi, Shemos 19:2)." Through this unity, we should rectify the sin that destroyed the Beis Hamikdash (*sinas chinam*) and see the third Beis Hamikdash built speedily, in our days. Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach.

How to Observe Shavuos Throughout the Year

by Eitan Sztainbaum (JEC '19)

Staying up all night to learn on Shavuos has become one of the most commonly associated practices with the holiday, ranking only under eating cheesecake. Many shuls have *shiurim* that last until a quick *vasikin* minyan, followed by a marathon nap for many observers of this custom. Others, including many Chassidim and Sephardim learn Tikkun Leil Shavuos, a special collection of excerpts from the Written and Oral Torah, which gives one a general overview of the expansive work of G-d, leading perfectly into the Torah reading recalling Matan Torah in the morning. Many,

especially yeshiva *bachurim*, learn whatever they happen to be learning in yeshiva during that *zeman*, or whatever catches their interest to begin learning. Even though this practice, to remain awake all night learning, has become a Minhag Yisrael, it does not appear until recently in many *sefarim*. Therefore, it must be examined, not only for its historical sources, but also for the lessons we may glean from it.

The first time the custom to remain awake all Shavuos night was mentioned was by Philo in regard to Essenes, a Second Temple period non-normative Jewish sect which greatly valued *perishus*, and would therefore stay awake praying Shavuos night. It is most likely, though, that due to the Essenes philosophical beliefs and separation from the Jewish society at large, that we Rabbinical Jews would neither have adopted nor adapted a custom from them.

Centuries passed and the custom remained dormant until the Zohar became publicized, with its teaching that the Chassidim Harishonim would stay awake learning Shavuos night in order to rectify the sin of the Jews' oversleeping heading into Matan Torah. Aside from the fact that the Zohar is far from a halachic work, this specific section is referring to a practice of the Chassidim Harishonim, a group predating the late second Temple period and preceding groups such as the Pharisees. Many practices attributed to these people are not followed today nor were ever common in Klal Yisrael.

Since the Zohar, many other sources have brought it down, seeming to begin in the era of the early-mid Achronim, with the practice also being held, according to the Shelah, by Rav Yosef Karo. The practice is also brought down by the Magen Avraham.

Now that this practice has been established as a fairly recent *minhag*, what can be learned from the fact that Jews today attribute great importance to it, even though it is far from being *halacha*? For one thing, it demonstrates how important Klal Yisrael realize the Torah is. But should we really only be focusing on intense Torah study the night before we are to accept the Torah? Torah is for the whole year, for one's entire life, and it cannot be relegated to one night a year, or to certain hours a day. The Rambam in Hilchos Talmud Torah 1:12 states that one should split his Talmud Torah into three parts of three hours each, leaving his remaining time for work, eating, and sleeping.

Clearly, daily schedules and needs have changed over the past 800 years, but we still have to try to devote most of our free time to Talmud Torah or other endeavors that improve our spiritual state. It is not necessarily the time one puts in, but the effort. Without showing dishonor to the practice of learning all night on Shavuos, we must show honor to Torah at all times, trying to follow its *halachos* exactly and toiling in it as much as we can. Perhaps the way we can rectify the sin of sleeping in on the night before Matan Torah, aside from staying awake Shavuos night, is to wake ourselves up to *limmud hatorah* the rest of the year, and in doing so, merit a true and proper Kabbalas Hatorah.

Ruth: A Foundation of Kindness

by Atara Neugroschl (Ma'ayanot '18)

While much of Tanach recounts history, its books are all meant to teach lessons or *halacha*. Therefore, the Book of Ruth, without including any laws or explicit messages, stands out as peculiar. Chazal, noticing this anomaly, asks why the Book of Ruth was canonized as part of Tanach if it is void of practical *halacha*. They promptly answer that Ruth was included to relay a story of incredible kindness. However, it can still be asked why it was important to include this story of kindness. Tanach is filled with accounts of generosity. What sets this story apart that it is

important to include in Tanach?

This question can be answered by referring to Bereishit. In his first commentary, Rashi asks why the Torah starts with the story of creation, rather than the first commandment given to the nation of Rosh Chodesh, found in Shemot. This question is similar to the one asked on Ruth regarding the purpose of including a book without halachic significance. In this way, there is an obvious parallel between Bereishit and the Book of Ruth, both canonized *sefarim* void of halachic implications.

A second parallel between the two books can be extracted by analyzing the wording of Ruth. In Ruth 2:11, Boaz speaks to Ruth for the first time and says "It has been told to me everything you did for your mother in law after the death of your husband. And you left your father and mother and the land of your upbringing and you came to a nation that you did not know before." The language Boaz uses to describe Ruth's journey mimics the language used in Bereishit when recounting Avraham's journey to Eretz Yisrael.

According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, this similarity helps establish Ruth as the female counterpart to Avraham and explains why both books are necessary to be included in Tanach. Avraham and Ruth both had the incredible attribute of kindness and internal strength. This is important to note due to their unique standing in history. Avraham is the precursor to Bnei Yisrael as a nation, while Ruth, the great-grandmother of David Hamelech, is the precursor to Bnei Yisrael as a kingdom. By canonizing these books, the Torah is teaching a profound lesson. Our society, both religious and political, relies on kindness. It is this strength of character and generosity, possessed by both Ruth and Avraham that serves as the cornerstone of our religion and is most valued in our society. Therefore, although there are no halachic implications to the books of Bereishit and Ruth, they are important to establish our foundational values.

This insight can also provide further insight into why the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot. Shavuot is the holiday to celebrate the Torah. After Pesach and the Exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael came to Har Sinai, received the Torah, and was united as a nation. On Shavuot, we commemorate that event and rejoice over the Torah. However, before we can delve into the *halachot* of the Torah, we must acknowledge the kindness and strength our religion is built on and that Ruth personifies. It is these traits that allow us to thrive as a nation and only after we recognize the strength of character and generosity of Ruth, can we celebrate the creation of a Torah nation.

Purim and Shavuot: Two Aspects of Kabbalat Hatorah

by Tali Shlacht (Shalhevet '18)

Every year on Shavuot we commemorate our experience of Matan Torah at Har Sinai. Famously, before Moshe, Aharon and the Zekeinim started to ascend the mountain, Bnei Yisrael said "*Na'aseh ve'nishma*, we will do and we will hear (Shemot 24:7)." At this moment in our history the Jewish people accepted the Torah, which we celebrate on Shavuot. But, as the *mefarshim* point out, their act of acceptance was without knowing the full details of what they were accepting. It seems admirable that Bnei Yisrael were so committed to observing Hashem's *mitzvot* without knowing what they were or the reasoning behind them. As valuable as their commitment seems, it doesn't seem probable that the ideal is to act without any meaning behind our actions.

A few *perakim* before *na'aseh ve'nishma*, the *pasuk* tells

us that Bnei Yisrael stood at the foot of the mountain, "*Vayityatzvu betachtit hahar* (Shemot 19:17)." According to Rashi, who quotes a *midrash*, the mountain was picked up from its place and arched up so that Bnei Yisrael were beneath the mountain. Based on this *midrash*, the Gemara on Shabbat 88a records a famous conversation between the Amoraim explaining this *pasuk*: Hashem told Bnei Yisrael, "If you accept the Torah, great; if not— there will be your burial." Rav Acha Bar Yaakov then says that from here we learn that the Jews were coerced into accepting the Torah, and therefore the Torah is not binding. Rava responds that, even so, they re-accepted what they had already accepted on Purim, based on the *pasuk* in the Megillah of "*Kiyumu ve'kiblu*," which the Gemara explains to mean "*Kiyumu ma shekiblu kevar*, They fulfilled what they had already accepted."

The Gemara picks up on the issue at hand: At Har Sinai, the Jews were coerced into accepting the Torah. Having left Egypt a few *perakim* earlier, Bnei Yisrael saw the supernatural miracles performed in Mitzrayim. They saw all the Makot on the Mitzrim, they lived through Keri'at Yam Suf, ate the *mann* in the desert, and saw Hashem's Hand in the desert. By the time Bnei Yisrael were standing at the foot of the mountain, before God ever spoke to them, they had already experienced Divine Revelation! The Meshech Chochma picks up on this: "He (Hashem) showed them the glory of God in revealed and wondrous ways, up to the point where their natural free choice was literally removed." After the Jewish people witnessed the supernatural miracles of Mitzrayim, how could they not affirm Hashem and His *mitzvot*? In this way, they were "coerced" into accepting the Torah.

On Purim, the Jewish people re-accepted what they were commanded at Har Sinai. Purim is the inverse of our experiences in Mitzrayim. At a surface level, Hashem's name doesn't appear in the Megillah and He wasn't involved at all. But the essence of Purim is the search for God within our everyday lives, not just in a behind-the-scenes manner, but as a God who is involved and orchestrating our lives. At this point in our history, the Jewish people voluntarily accepted the Torah. Through their experience in Shushan, Am Yisrael was able to identify the natural miracles that Hashem performs every day and independently came to the decision to accept His Torah, creating a stronger, more meaningful connection.

The Purim acceptance signifies a more natural approach to Hashem's work, a more personal relationship to the *mitzvot*, arrived at on their own. On the contrary, The Har Sinai acceptance conveys a more supernatural view of Hashem's wonders. It represents the commitment to *mitzvot* without necessarily knowing why. Both of these approaches are included in Tanach and are important to balance. It is vital to make our actions meaningful and understand the motivation behind them. But it is crucial to also commit to Hashem's *mitzvot* whether or not we always understand and find meaning in them. This balance between the Har Sinai acceptance and the Purim acceptance is demonstrated through both Purim and Shavuot being recorded as important dates on our calendar. On Shavuot we commemorate the first acceptance of the Torah when we said *na'aseh ve'nishma* at Har Sinai. We focus on our commitment to *mitzvot* whether or not we completely understand and without focusing on the *sechar*.

Lilmod Torah Ve'lisa Ishah: To Marry or To Learn? An Analysis of the Halachic Sequence of Events

by Ned Krasnopsky (TABC '19)

Should a person learn Torah first, and then marry, or vice versa? The Gemara on Kiddushin 29b records an opinion cited in a *beraita*, followed by a statement provided by Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel. The *beraita* records that a person should study Torah first, and only then proceed to marry. However, if one is incapable of learning prior to marriage, he should marry and then study Torah. On the other hand, Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel states that one should marry first, and only then study Torah. After Rav Yehuda's statement, Rabbi Yochanan asks the question, "A millstone around his neck, and he will engage in Torah?" attacking Rav Yehuda's assertion that a man should marry first. The Gemara resolves the difficulty raised by Rabbi Yochanan by designating the opinions of the *beraita* and Rav Yehuda to specific communities. One statement would apply in Babylon, while the other would apply in the land of Israel. Rabbi Yochanan's statement can be understood in a variety of ways, and a closer analysis will yield a further awareness of the factors involved in the determination of the *halachic* progression of events.

Rashi explains that Rav Yehuda's statement would apply in Babylon, as the residents of Babylon would travel to the land of Israel to learn. They would be away from their wives, and would thus be able to study Torah. Since they are not in the home, they would not have to perform any domestic activities which would otherwise detract from their Torah learning. On the other hand, those in the land of Israel had no such release. They did not have to travel to learn, so the domestic responsibilities fell upon them. Rabbi Yochanan's statement would apply to them. Most notably, Rashi explains that those who married before learning would be able to learn without any inappropriate thoughts. Rashi seemingly presents the "Babylon marriage-first" route as the ideal order. It is by far the most productive path, as it both eliminates inappropriate thoughts, *hirhurim*, and does not hinder Torah learning.

Rabbeinu Tam disagrees with Rashi's geographic distribution of the original stances presented in the Gemara. He raises two issues with Rashi's approach: the man will still have inappropriate thoughts involving his wife due to their separation, and the man needs to support his family and if he leaves he will not be able to provide for them. Instead, Rabbeinu Tam offers an approach which relies upon the economic circumstances in Babylon and the land of Israel. In Israel, the people were rich, and could afford to travel to learn while continuing to provide for their wives. Therefore, Shmuel's statement would apply to them. In Babylon, however, the people were poor, and were thus unable to travel to learn without limiting their wives' financial support. Rabbi Yochanan's statement would apply to them, as they had to provide for their families. Regardless, both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam establish that the presence of a potential for inappropriate thoughts, *hirhurim*, affects the *halachic* sequence of events. It should be noted that Rabbeinu Tam places a greater emphasis on the man's domestic responsibility.

The creation of a pure environment through marriage is a concept spread throughout Shas, and its ramifications are abundant. The Gemara in Kiddushin continues with an anecdote involving Rav Hunah and Rav Hamnunah. When Rav Hunah learned that Rav Hamnunah was not married, he refused to look at him until he wedded. Rav Hunah also believed that one who has not married before the age of twenty has incurred sinful thoughts for the remainder of his life. The Meiri echoes this sentiment, and presents the "learn-first" path as the ideal; however, he is also comfortable with the idea of marrying first and then learning, assuming that the woman is able to sustain the household. The elimination of inappropriate thoughts impacts a person's capacity for Talmud Torah. Rav Chisda

believed that the fact that he married at the young age of sixteen was directly responsible for his superior learning skills. He goes on to say that if he married at fourteen, the Satan would never be able to affect him. The Talmud Bavli records similar ideas in a variety of *masechtot*. The Gemara on Menachot 110a defines one who "learns Torah in purity" as one who learns after getting married. The Gemara on Yoma 72b draws a similar parallel.

Clearly, marriage affects a person in a positive manner, both in his learning and mindset. However, the *halakha* prima facie may not be primarily motivated by these positive consequences. The Gemara on Yevamot 63b presents what at first glance appears to be an entirely different motivator all together—the *mitzvah* of *peru u'revu*. The Gemara states, "Someone who does not busy himself in *peru u'revu* is like a murderer per Rabbi Eliezer... like someone who degrades G-d per Rabbi Yaakov.... and Ben Azai holds that it is as if they are a murder and degrade G-d." Clearly, the Gemara places a great emphasis on the *mitzvah* of *peru u'revu*. But would the commandment to multiply be grounds for the delay of Talmud Torah? A closer look into Ben Azai's execution of his own statement will provide a commentary on this tension. Following Ben Azai's declaration, those around him pointed out that he himself was not married, and that he should have followed his own advice and married. Ben Azai responded to them, "What shall I do, as my soul yearns for Torah, and I do not wish to deal with anything else. It is possible for the world to be maintained by others, who are engaged in the *mitzvah* to be fruitful and multiply." This can be interpreted as either an inverse of Shmuel's allowance on Kiddushin 29b claiming that Ben Azai was an "*ones*" who was physically incapable of removing himself from Torah study, or as a special dispensation, or *petur*, due to his special attraction to the Torah.

The difference between the two interpretations of Ben Azai's predicament is monumental, and it serves as a segway into the positions of the Rambam, Tur, and Rosh concerning the proper *halachic* sequence of events. The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:5) writes that ideally, a person should learn Torah before getting married, because his *da'at* will not be free to learn after he marries. However, in the event where that is not possible due to the fact that "*Yitzro mitga'ber alav ad she'nimtza she'ein libo panui*, his urge for matters overcomes him, and his heart will not be open to learn," then he should marry first and then learn. There is a subtle balance between "*da'ato*," his intellectual mindset, and "*libo*," his emotional mindset. Rambam continues that everyone must learn Torah—"rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old, even a married man with a wife and children to support." The Rambam clearly expresses the difficulty of learning whilst married, yet he maintains that everyone is obligated. In Hilchot Ishut 15:2, he states that a man is obligated in *peru u'revu* from the age of seventeen, and if he is still unmarried by twenty he has neglected a *mitzvah asei*. There are two conflicting obligations at play. However, the Rambam mitigates some of the tension through a permission for regular individuals to delay marriage if they are occupied with Torah and do not wish to become burdened with sustaining a wife.

The Rambam addresses characters like Ben Azai in Hilchot Ishut 15:3. He writes, "One who yearns for Torah and studies it and cleaves into it always, as Ben Azai did, commits no sin thereby. That is, providing his sexual desire does not get the better of him. If it does, he is required to marry even if he already has children, in order that he not come to thoughts of sin." The Rambam compares Ben Azai's special attraction to Torah in terms of cleaving—*deveikut*". Similar language is used in describing the relationship between a man and wife.

Particularly, in Sefer Bereishit 2:24, the phrase “*Ve’davak be’ishto*” is used. The Gemara on Kiddushin 30b also supports the Rambam’s comparison; the source for teaching a son a trade comes from the *pasuk*, “Enjoy life with the wife whom you love” (Kohelet 9:9). If “*ishah*” is interpreted as Torah, then just like a father must teach his son Torah, he must teach him a trade. The Rambam clearly sees Torah as a potential replacement for a wife, at least for individuals like Ben Azai. Thus, Ben Azai is not an exception to the rule. He was *patur* from *peru u’revu* because he was already “married” to Torah. Granted, those of Ben Azai’s caliber are certainly able to withstand the pressures of sexual desire, however, as the Rambam implies, not everyone can maintain the proper balance.

Quoted in the Tur (Y.D. Hilchot Talmud Torah 246), the Rosh questions the Rambam’s authorization for the delay of marriage if one is busy with Torah. The delay would never end. He understands Ben Azai as the exception and maintains that no other significant of *halachot* can be extrapolated from it. He was incapable of marrying due to a physical incapability. It was a case of *ones*, and only he was able to sidestep the mitzvah of *peru u’revu*. Therefore, a regular individual should marry, and then learn. The Tur qualifies the Rosh’s opinion with a development of the mitzvah of *peru u’revu*. He explains, “the purpose of man is to reproduce, as it is not good for man to be alone; therefore, there is a commandment to get married. Anyone who lives without a woman lives without goodness, blessing, Torah, and peace. Anyone who does not marry is not a man, and when a person marries he is absolved of all sin.” *Peru u’revu*, according to the Tur, is a man’s telos.

The Rosh and Tur approach, at first appear to prioritize marriage over Talmud Torah. After all, one needs marriage to fulfill the mitzvah of *peru u’revu* and to eventually transmit the Torah to the next generation. However, this is not necessarily the correct assessment. In fact, this prioritization leads to the creation of a certain tension between Talmud Torah and marriage from the degradation of *da’at* due to domestic responsibilities, and an almost expected disbalance between the man’s emotional and intellectual mentalities. A far less tense solution exists-- a hybrid approach. Essentially, as alluded to in the Tur, marriage increases the quality of learning due to a dissolvment of *hirhurim*. Granted, the husband will accept some domestic responsibilities, but the state of marriage will greatly enhance his Talmud Torah. The Gemarot in Yevamot and Menachot, along with the statement of Rav Chisda all confirm this approach.

Overall, the various motivations come together to establish both the ideal and the effects of learning Torah while married. While at first glance, the motivations in the Gemara seemed to be dissimilar, after close analysis, they certainly all aim for the same goal: an increase in the quality of Talmud Torah.

“Relationships Aren’t as Cheesy as You May Think...”

by Scott Sandor (North Shore ’18)

Story adapted from Rav Niman’s parable regarding the significance of Shavuos

Imagine walking along a path in the middle of the night in nothing but pitch-black darkness. You are walking aimlessly, searching for a sign to point you in a certain direction. Eventually, you approach a fork in your path. You search around for the closest road sign, glancing at all corners. You touch a wooden plank, feeling a sense of relief that now you can

bring yourself safely and timely to your destination. However, your eyes cannot decipher the words because of the immense darkness. Suddenly, a flash of lightning appears, and within that moment, you are able to read the words on the sign to help you return home.

Shavuos, like any other Yom Tov, is a time for us to reaffirm our relationship and connection with Hashem. Despite the fact that Shavuos is a shorter holiday compared to Pesach and Sukkos, it still bears the same level of *kedushah*. That brief “strike of lightning” is the clarity that we acquire on Shavuos to express our appreciation for Matan Torah and re-establish the direction where we are heading in life. It is that “aha” moment, if you will, of our year to navigate ourselves within the parameters of the fundamental values that are the cornerstone of our religion.

The Torah states in Sefer Shemos 19:17 that “Moshe brought the people forth from the camp towards Hashem and they stood under the mountain.” Rashi explains that the phrase “towards Hashem” means that Hashem came to greet the Jewish people, just like a *chassan* goes out to greet a *kallah*. There is a famous concept illustrated in Shir Hashirim that Shavuos is the “marriage” between Hashem and the Jewish people and that the giving of the Torah represents the “*ketubah*” between the two parties. Many *mefarshim* suggest that the relationship a person has with his family, friends, and even spouse, are a metaphor for the relationship one has with Hashem. However, it is of great consideration that one try to understand what this special relationship really entails.

Any expert in relationships can agree that there are several qualities that a human connection must possess. One of the most crucial components of any relationship is proper communication. Each day, we have three opportunities to communicate with our Creator on the most personal level. We should not view *tefillah* as a time-bound obligation, but rather as an opportunity to really form a closer bond with Hashem.

The next component is commitment. How could anyone maintain a strong *chevrah* without committing ourselves to help each other out when necessary? That is why Hashem gave us the Torah. The guidelines behind the Ten Commandments not only summarize the entirety of the Torah, but are the basis by which we betroth ourselves to Hashem--through the safeguarding and performance of *mitzvot*. Another important factor in a relationship is growth. When getting ready for a wedding, a couple spends many hours learning in *chassan* and *kallah* classes, and preparing themselves mentally for the journey they are about to embark on, not simply having a wedding immediately. We have been experiencing the incredible journey of Sefiras Ha’omer, the link between Pesach and Shavuos. It is this time of the year that we focus each day on how to improve ourselves, grow, and prepare mentally to appreciate Matan Torah anew on Shavuos before Hashem.

Trust is also a major element in any relationship. We trust our families with our most personal information, and we trust that our friends will be able to help us in our time of need. This type of trust is exactly the trust we should share with Hashem. When the Jews left Egypt, Rashi comments that they did not question what they would eat while in the Midbar. They trusted in Hashem and followed His directions and they were rewarded for their approach. We must strive to acquire this same *bitachon* when we face difficult situations, accepting the fact that we do not always see the bigger picture of a given scenario. It is incumbent upon us to trust that Hashem is doing whatever He deems best for us.

The final component I would like to discuss is love. It is nearly impossible to imagine any familial relationship without a sincere sense of affection for the other. To understand how we can internalize and incorporate love into our relationship with Hashem, I would like to investigate the reason why there are

some people who are against staying up all night on Shavuot to learn Torah. These people claim that on Shavuot, people tend to rest too much the day before, extend their meals longer, delay davening, and when one begins their learning, they are already exhausted only to go back to sleep right after davening *vasikin*. Perhaps it is better to get an early night's sleep and learn Torah the throughout the next day?

Rav Yitzchak Berkovits provides a beautiful rebuttal of this argument. He states that the real goal of Shavuot is not to learn as much as possible. Rather, the true objective of Shavuot is to demonstrate our utmost appreciation and love of Torah and Hashem. We stay up late to emphasize our self-sacrifice and delight, learning sections of Torah that bring *simchah* and inspiration to our lives. This is exactly how we portray our love for Hashem—by going the extra mile.

This Shavuot, we are privileged to yet again experience Matan Torah, but hopefully with a bit of a new outlook. We should all be *zocheh* to strengthen the relationships we have with our families, our classmates, our friends, and our communities. We should also be able to recognize the privilege to forge a relationship with Hashem and remember that the *mitzvos* are really the means through which we connect and communicate with Him. Perhaps if we zero in on the important relationships in our lives and use them to navigate us in the proper direction, then that one moment on Shavuot—that “lightning strike” of clarity—will allow us to discover our true purpose in the world.

Shavuot: A Lesson in Character Building

by Liana Maza (Kushner '19)

The end of the *omer* is upon us, marking the Chag of Shavuot, which literally means “weeks”, in accordance with the Torah obligation which commands us to count the Sefirat Ha'omer from the second night of Pesach. As we all know, Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Aseret Hadibrot and the Torah on Har Sinai and the revelation of Hashem to the Jewish people. It is at Har Sinai where the Bnei Yisrael, recently liberated from harsh servitude in Mitzrayim, accepted the obligations of the Torah by reciting in unison the famous words “*Na'aseh ve'nishma*,” which may be translated as “we will do, and then seek to understand.”

On Shavuot, it is also customary to recite Megillat Ruth which chronizes Ruth as one of the great women in our illustrious history. Although she is of royal non-Jewish descent, after the death of her Jewish husband, she decides to convert to the Jewish faith and remain with Naomi, her recently widowed mother-in-law, to live what appears to be a destitute life. She resists Naomi's plea that she return to Moab, her past home, to seek a non-Jewish husband and resume her former life. Instead, Ruth answers with these famous moving words: “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God (Ruth 1:16).”

Ultimately, the story has a happy ending: Ruth marries Naomi's rich relative Boaz and lives securely thereafter. Most significantly, Ruth merits to give birth to a line of descendants that includes David Hamelech, the great king of Israel.

While we traditionally applaud the response of the Jewish people at Har Sinai to perform the obligations of the Torah absent a full understanding of its requirements, as well as the statement of Ruth to blindly follow Naomi, both seem at worst,

an exercise of poor judgment, and at best, naïve. These responses are contrary to our popular notion of seeking first to understand all the ramifications of an act prior to taking any action. Both the Jewish people and Ruth seem to be taking illogical risks; Bnei Yisrael taking on unusual rules and statutes, many of which have no obvious rationale, and Ruth seemingly choosing a life of hardship by opting to convert to Judaism and journey with Naomi to Beit Lechem.

Upon reflection, these acts signify a pure demonstration of trust and faith to greater ideals and values. Shavuot reaffirms the fundamental traits of *bitachon* and *emunah* which unfortunately are sorely missing in today's society. When Bnei Yisrael excitedly announce at Har Sinai that they will “do and then seek to understand,” they are in essence stating that they were willing to put their *bitachon* in Hashem and take on his *mitzvot* with the utmost confidence that the commandments are in their best interests. Bnei Yisrael witnessed the great miracles of Yezi'at Mitzrayim, including the Eser Makot and the splitting of the Yam Suf, and they are willing to wholeheartedly entrust their physical and spiritual wellbeing to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Similar to a patient that heeds the advice of a doctor or a young child that adheres to a parent's admonishments without fully understanding the reason, the Jewish people act with trusting faith as they accept the totality of the Torah as a proper way of life.

Similarly, Ruth, who has developed a strong connection with Naomi and her Jewish traditions, chooses to remain steadfast to her mother-in-law in her time of need, rather than abandon her for the comforts of refuge in Moab. Ruth's desire to remain loyal wins out over her need to meet her creature comforts. Ruth engages her intellect to ultimately do what is right rather than succumb to the seemingly easier path of abandoning Naomi when the chips are down. For acting in such a righteous manner, Ruth, the convert, is rewarded with being the matriarch from whom the great David Hamelech descends.

As we engage in Torah study during the Shavuot holiday, let us not only increase our knowledge of the Torah but also seek to continue to develop the positive traits of *bitachon* and *emunah* in Hashem. Shavuot reminds us that as a Jewish people, in Hashem and his Torah we indeed trust. Moreover, as the story of Ruth shows, loyalty and devotion are the pinnacles upon which all great human relationships are sustained and ultimately flourish. Chag Samei'ach!

Shavuot: The “Third Wheel” of the Shalosh Regalim

by Rivka Miriam Reiffman (DAT '18)

When you picture *Pesach*, you might see yourself sitting around a beautiful Seder table discussing the story of Yetzi'at Mitzrayim and eating *matzah*, all with no *chametz* in sight. When you picture Sukkot, you might feel a little chilly when you are transported outside, under the shade of the *sechach* and protected by the walls of the *sukkah*, waving your *lulav* and *etrog*. When you picture Shavuot, you might see people staying up all night learning Torah, a *shul* decorated with flowers and greenery, or your family enjoying a dairy meal.

Both the image of Pesach and Sukkot are universal because they depict people fulfilling *mitzvot de'oraita* connected to the holiday. Since they are *mitzvot de'oraita*, every Jew around the world is obligated in them, and they are globally recognized as *halacha*. On Pesach, we are commanded to eat *matzah* (Vayikra 23:6), to get rid of *chametz* (Shemot 12:15), and to tell the story

of Yetzi'at Mitzrayim (Shemot 13:3). On Sukkot, we are commanded to take the four species —*etrog*, *lulav*, *hadassim*, and *aravot*—on the first day (Vayikra 23:40), and to dwell in the *sukkah* for seven days (Vayikra 23:42). However, the image of Shavuot may vary more from person to person because, although the images described are beautiful *minhagim*, they are not *mitzvot*. In fact, there are no *mitzvot* unique to Shavuot.

There are some *mitzvot* that apply to all Yamim Tovim, such as Kavod Yom Tov, Oneg Yom Tov, and Lechem Mishneh. Additionally, the prohibitions of *melachah* on Shabbos also apply to Yom Tov, excluding *melachah* that is *le'tzorech ochel nefesh*—Cooking food which is necessary for the day, and excluding the *melachah* of *hotza'ah* - carrying from one domain to another without an Eruv Chatzeiros (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 495:1).

Beyond the *mitzvot* of the holiday, even the origins of Shavuot differ from the other two of the Shalosh Regalim. All three holidays have an agricultural aspect, attaching the holiday to a certain time of year in relation to the production of produce. Pesach is supposed to be in “*Chodesh ha'aviv*, The month of Spring (Shemot 23:15),” and Rashi there explains that this is when the grain finishes ripening. Shavuot, referred to as “*Chag hakatzir*,” is when we sow the field (Shemot 23:16). Sukkot is called “*Chag ha'asif*,” and is when we harvest and gather our produce (Shemot 23:16). We might want to assume that all three of the holidays also have a historical aspect, something attaching the holiday to a historical event that happened in those days at this time of the year. Yet again, Shavuot is an exception to this rule. Pesach is a time for commemorating the exodus from Egypt (Shemot 12:17). By celebrating Sukkot, we commemorate living in *sukkot* in the desert, after the exodus from Egypt (Vayikra 23:43). With regards to Shavuot, there is no historical aspect mentioned in the Torah. If you ask any little Jewish child what we are celebrating on Shavuot, they will most likely tell you that many years ago today, *Hashem* gave us the Torah. Why, then, does the Torah not mention this reason for Shavuot?

If you want to learn the origins of Hilchot Pesach, study Masechet Pesachim of Gemara. If you want to learn about Sukkot, you can pick up Masechet Sukkah. If you want to learn about Shavuot, you should *chazer* Masechet Shevuot, right? Wrong. There is no *masechet* in Gemara that solely discusses the laws pertaining to Shavuot; the laws, customs, and reasons behind Shavuot are discussed all over various *masechtot* of Gemara. Masechet Shevuot actually discusses the laws of oaths and vows and has nothing to do with the holiday of Shavuot.

It seems that Shavuot is the “third wheel” of the Shalosh Regalim. It doesn't have any unique *mitzvot* to be fulfilled, the reason most commonly given behind celebrating it isn't mentioned in the Torah, and it doesn't even have a *masechta* in *Gemara* dedicated to it!

According to Rav Menachem Leibtag, the answer lies within the differentiation between Yetzi'at Mitzrayim and Matan Torah. Pesach and Sukkot are commemorations of Yetzi'at Mitzrayim, the pivotal moment in Jewish history when we became a nation. Every generation is commanded to view themselves as if they personally exited Egypt (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5). This is done to put us in the proper frame of mind to praise Hashem during Leil Haseder, but we do not wish to actually relive the event. Conversely, we are supposed to feel as if the Torah has been given to us anew every single day (Rashi on Shemot 19:1), and we are meant to relive the event of Matan Torah every day, as Torah guides our day-to-day lives. Even though we are meant to relive Matan Torah every day, we still commemorate it on its anniversary, Shavuot, and experience Matan Torah by learning Torah all night. Perhaps this is why

there are no unique *mitzvot* to be fulfilled on *Shavuot*—the commandment to relive Matan Torah is in effect all year long; we just take it to an extreme on Shavuot, the day of its anniversary.

The Ultimate Battle Between Reason and Blind Faith

by Hadassah Yanofsky (Shulamith '18)

Every Shavuot we celebrate receiving the Torah a few thousand years ago. The Gemara (Shabbos 88a) says that when Hashem asked us if we want to accept the Torah, He held a mountain over our heads. As if to say, accept or die. Collectively as a nation we said “*Na'aseh ve'nishma* —we will do and we will listen.” This phrasing seems to mean that we will blindly follow the commandments without love or understanding. Is this the right way to follow the commandments of Hashem? Does one need to understand the reason behind commandments in order to follow them?

Shlomo Hamelech, the smartest man who ever lived, supposedly knew the reasons for many of the *mitzvot*. For example, one of the *mitzvot* of a king is to not have too many wives. He knew that the reason was so that the king should not be turned away from G-d. He decided that he can violate the law as long as he insured that the end result did not happen, which was a false way of thinking, as we see he did exactly that and was turned away. His wives put idols around the palace, and Shlomo ended up being culpable. From this story we can see that knowing the reasons for *mitzvot* can result in no longer keeping them. So is the correct approach to just follow the *mitzvot* blindly?

The ultimate convert that we know is Ruth, who we read about on Shavuot. She accepted the Torah and all its commandments without coercion. Nobody held a mountain over her head and made her accept the yoke of the Torah. She converted out of love for the people that follow Judaism and an urge to accept G-d's Torah. She was a Jew by choice. Even though she converted out of love, she still did all the laws, to the letter of the law. When she took wheat from the field, she took only the amount of stalks a poor person is permitted to take. She did not go over, not one too many. She didn't pick and choose which laws to keep or not like Shlomo did.

Every year on Shavuot we get to evaluate the Torah, and choose if we will accept it as an individual for the upcoming year. If you choose to accept, then understand that you must do so out of love. You don't have to see the beauty of all the *mitzvot* nor do you have to understand the reason behind every *mitzvah*, but you choose to follow them just the same.

Shavuot and the Woman of Torah

by Ilan Bocian (YULA '19)

As a prelude to Matan Torateinu at Har Sinai, Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded by Hashem to propose the covenant of Torah to Am Yisrael: “So shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel...and now, if you will hearken to My voice and keep My Covenant, you will be to Me a treasure from among the nations (Shemot 19:3-6),” to which Am Yisrael responds, “All that Hashem tells us we will do (Shemot 19:8).” The seemingly duplicative phraseology of “*le'veit Yaakov*” and “*livnei Yisrael*” did not escape Chazal's notice. We will find that this segment of the *pasuk* is vested with deep meaning.

First and foremost, why does the Torah state both “*Beit Yaakov*” and “*Bnei Yisrael*,” and what is the significance of the order of who is being addressed? Basing his interpretation on the Mechilta D’Rabbi Yishmael (19:3), Rashi writes in *dibur hamatchil Beit Yaakov*: “*Eilu hanashim*, These are the women.” Clearly, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to give the Torah to the women before giving it to the men. Later *midrashot* (*Shemot Rabbah* 28:2) offer reasons that the women precede the men in Matan Torah. One is that women are “*mizdarzot be’mitzvot*”—that they demonstrate alacrity in the performance of *mitzvot*.

A second explanation is that women are “*manhigot et beneihen latorah*”—that women will guide their children on the path of Torah. A third explanation, a somewhat cynical one posited by Rabbi Tachlifa, states that when Hashem commanded only Adam Harishon, Adam in turn commanded Chava, who proceeded to transgress. “Now, if Hashem does not call to the women first, “*hein mevatlot et hatorah*, they will nullify the Torah.” All three explanations agree that women are given sequential preference to men in Matan Torah. But perhaps there are deeper connections between the *pasuk* and the special status of women vis-a-vis their relationship to Torah.

The woman is considered tantamount to Bayit. Rabbi Yossi states that “I call my wife ‘my house’...” because she is the anchor of the household and its proper function (Shabbos 118b), reinforcing the notion that “*beit Yaakov*” refers to women.

A further hint lies in the difference between “Yaakov” on one hand, and “Yisrael,” the additional appellation given to Yaakov, on the other. “Yaakov” is associated with the main beam—the “*bariach hatichon*”—of the Mishkan (Rabbi Moshe de Leon, Shekel Hakodesh), which holds the edifice together, analogous to the way that the woman is the pillar of strength of the household.

Moreover, the Torah describes Yaakov as “*Ish tam*,” a perfect man and a man of *rachamim*, mercy. This is the synthesis of the *chesed* of Avraham and the *din* of Yitzchak. *Rachamim* is an all-embracing, unconditional love, as a mother has for a child—the physical pain of childbirth and the emotional pain of child-rearing notwithstanding.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks reminds us, the Kohen Gadol is described as having “*Torat emet* (Malachi 2:6),” while the woman who is extolled in *Eishet Chayil* is described as manifesting “*Torat chesed* (Mishlei 31:26).” It is noteworthy that in every instance in Tanach in which *chesed* and *emet* are phraseologically linked, *chesed* appears before *emet*. The primacy of *chesed* is seen, for example, in “Blessed is Hashem, God of my [Eliezer] master Avraham, Who has not withheld *chasdo ve’amito*—his kindness and truth—from my master (Bereishit 24:27);” “I [Yaakov] have been diminished—*mikol hachasadim u’mikol ha’emet*—by all the kindness and all the truth—that You have done Your servant (Bereishit 32:11);” “...*Ve’asitah imadi chesed ve’emet*—do kindness and truth with me [Yaakov]—please do not bury me in Egypt (Bereishit 47:29);” and in the thirteen Middot Harachamim, “...*Ve’rav chesed v’emet*—abundant in kindness and truth (Shemot 34:6).”

At Zeman Matan Torateinu, we are reminded that “*Olam chesed yibaneh*—the world is built with chesed”—and that “*Chesed ve’emet yekadmu panecha*—*Chesed* and *emet* go before You (Tehillim 89)”. *Chesed*, therefore, is a precondition for discerning *emet*. The Jewish woman epitomizes the Jewish ideal of *chesed*, and this is why the women at Har Sinai were presented with the Torah first.

Kol Hanearim would like to thank its outgoing editorial staff, coordinators, and writers for a wonderful year. We wish our outgoing staff all the best, and are excited for next year’s Kol Hanearim! Chag Samei’ach!



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