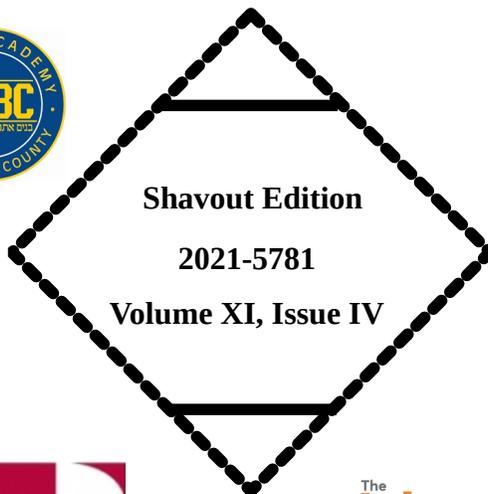


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Chag HaShavuot and Shemini Chag Ha'Atzeret

Nachi Scheiner ('22) TABC

Matan Torah, the pinnacle of the Jewish exodus. The Jewish people achieved closeness to Hashem that is unparalleled. We saw the awesomeness of God manifest itself in nature; Hashem's reverence-inducing voice shook the globe as the first two commandments were spoken. On this day Bnei Yisrael experienced Hashem's greatness. For this reason, Chag HaShavuot is like none other. While there is an aspect of "chag" to Shavuot, a significant portion of the holiday and its laws are centered around the Torah and our unique relationship to the Ribono Shel Olam.



Chag HaShavuot has many halachot that reveal the holiday's aspect of celebration and festivities. For starters, we have a mitzvah of aliyah l'regel and Simchat Yom Tov. Both of these laws are quintessential to the identity of any chag. Furthermore, the Gemara in multiple places (Rosh Hashanah 4b; Sukkah 55b) discuss the din of tashlumin (in the case of Shavuot, if one is unable to bring his korban chagigah on the only day of Yom Tov, he has seven days to make it up). Even though Shavuot is only one day, the Gemara learns out from a hekeish (connection) of "b'Chag Hamatzot u'Vchag HaShavuot u'Vchag HaSukkot" (Deuteronomy 16:16) that just like Pesach has tashlumin for the korban chagigah for seven days, so too does Shavuot. This korban is

the ultimate representation of the festive nature of a holiday. For that reason, even on Shavuot, one has seven days to bring the korban. Furthermore, with regards to mourning, the Gemara (Moed Katan 24b) teaches that erev Shavuot and Shavuot count as fourteen days towards a mourner's shloshim. The Gemara notes that even though it is only one day, it still has a din of a chag and counts as seven days towards shloshim (the other seven days come from erev Yom Tov). Since mourning is a halacha in the physical realm, Shavuot is treated as a seven day chag. From many halachot of Shavuot the aspect of "chag" stands out.

Despite the festive aspects of Shavuot, the essence of the day is focused on Matan Torah and the ingenuity of the Torah. The Bnei Yissaschar uses this aspect of Shavuot to explain two shocking dinim: Shavuot's short timespan and Shavuot's lack of agricultural connection. Pesach and Sukkot are celebrated on Monday, Tuesday, etc. and their timeframes are set (i.e. an entire week will be celebrated every single year). However, on Shavuot we only have one day to show that it has no long or set time (it falls out on different days every year) for celebrating; rather, it is a time for reflecting and acknowledging the Torah HaKedosha. Moreover, Shavuot has no agricultural connection to show that time isn't what defines the Torah. It is a zman simcha. For example, the harvest: it generates the festivities of Pesach and Sukkot, but this is solely up to the Torah for Shavuot. When focusing on the big picture, one is forced to acknowledge that even though many aspects define Shavuot as a chag, it is still very different.

One may be able to link the proposed idea above to Shemini Atzeret (outlined by my Rebbe, Rabbi Daniel Fridman). As many may know, Chag HaShavuot is also called by another name: Chag

Ha'Atzeret. Where did this name come from? Never once in the Torah does it mention Atzeret by Shavuot! Rabbi Fridman explained that Chazal understood the deep connection between Shemini Atzeret and Shavuot. Shemini Atzeret is, l'havdil, like the "after party" of Sukkot. The Gemara (Sukkah 55b) says that the seventy bullocks offered on Sukkot symbolize the seventy nations of the world. The single bullock on Shemini Atzeret symbolizes Hashem's precious nation, Am Yisrael. The Gemara goes on to say that this is comparable to a king who does not want to let his beloved friend go on the last day of his party, so he asks for a simple meal. Rashi there comments that Hashem wants pleasure and satisfaction from us. Furthermore, Rashi in Vayikra comments that Shemini Atzeret is Hashem clinging onto us before we lose our close connection. The essence of Shemini Atzeret is to maintain closeness with the Ribono Shel Olam for at least one more day. So too by Shavuot, though a holiday with the halachot of a chag, there is the essence of Shemini Atzeret present.

In my opinion, I think there is a difference between Shemini Atzeret and Sukkot: Shavuot represents our appreciation and desire to be near Hashem, whereas Sukkot is Hashem's desire for us. This fits in with the essence of Pesach and Sukkot. Although Pesach is laden with aspects of Hashem's kindness to us, it still has an aspect of our commitment to Hashem. The Korban Pesach was the ultimate sign of our dedication to being Hashem's nation. For this Reason, Shavuot is centered around our commitment to Hashem. On the contrary, Sukkot is centered around the protection and care God gave to us in the desert. Therefore, Shemini Atzeret focuses on Hashem's love for us. We need both relationships to be Hashem's chosen nation. The pasuk says "Ani l'Dodi v'Dodi Li", "I am My beloved and my beloved is mine" (Shir HaShirim 6:3). Every year

we experience Har Sinai by hearing the thunder of Hashem's voice and understanding what it meant to be close to Hashem. Shavuot is the manifestation of that bond that we have been building up whether from the sea splitting or yachatz at the seder; we don't want to lose the special connection we have developed. It is our duty on Shavuot to recognize how privileged we are to be able to serve Hashem and be close to Him. For this reason, Shavuot transcends time because our relationship with Hashem is so much more than physical pleasures, it is beyond a lifetime.

Shavuot: The Ten Commandments

Gavi Dickman ('21) Kushner

The Mishneh Burah's reason for having Shavuot is to prepare ourselves for accepting the Torah. How can one understand and accept the Torah? A good place to start would be by learning about and getting a better grasp on what the Aseret HaDibrot really are:

Anochi Hashem- I am the Lord, your God; Hashem exists. One has to realize that there is a God, and that Hashem is real before understanding the other nine commandments, let alone the entire Torah.

Lo yehiyeh lichah elohim acheirim- You may not have any other gods. While this goes without saying, it is still extremely important for every single person to think about on a regular basis. "Hashem is God--the one and only." One must fully believe in Hashem before accepting His Torah.

Lo tisa et sheim Hashem Elokechah la-shav- Do not say God's name in vain. Someone who swears on Hashem's name will be held accountable. If

one falsely testifies on Hashem's name they are putting lies with God's name on it out into the world and will be punished accordingly by Hashem.

Zachor et yom HaShabbat le-kadsho- Remember the Shabbat day and keep it holy. There are two main points in this commandment: First is remembering Shabbat, remembering it every day of the week and all the time. The second part is "keeping it holy". In other words, don't give into your yeitzer hara on Shabbat and do things that you know are wrong; keep it holy.

Kaveid et avicha v'et imecha- Honor your mother and father. This is actually a mitzvah that, if you follow, can prolong your life. I think that it's important to realize that because then, if you ever don't want to honor your parents, or even if you don't respect them in the moment, you can remember that by honoring them, you may get to live a longer life. This method can certainly help you follow this mitzvah, though it would be best if this was not your only reason.

Lo tirtzach- You shall not murder. Does that not sound obvious? If it does, good. That means that we live in a good and just society. If you realize that all the mitzvot are correct, like this one, it would make doing mitzvot much easier.

Lo tinaf- You shall not commit adultery. Marriage is a commitment. One who breaks that commitment by having relations with another person is breaking that commitment. If followed correctly, the Torah improves our relationships, middot, mental health, and lives altogether.

Lo tignov- Do not steal. Stealing means what it sounds like, but there is also a deeper meaning.

You should not steal anything by taking something that isn't yours, but you also shouldn't steal by cheating someone in business or delaying a payment that you owe someone.

Lo ta'aneh be-rayacha eid shaker- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Though this may sound like lying once more, this is actually perjury. Perjury is a lie that can cause someone else to get undeserved consequences.

Lo tachmod- Don't be jealous. The tenth commandment is to not be jealous of others or their belongings. I think that it's really interesting compared to the first commandment. Whereas that is about understanding Hashem's existence, this commandment says that if you trust Hashem to give you all you need, you really won't be jealous of others. If you do get jealous then you should just try to work on understanding the other nine commandments before this one.



Lo Tachmod: What is it?

Rivka Inger ('21) Bruriah

Everybody knows that we celebrate Shavuot in order to commemorate the giving of the Torah and our official union with Hashem as His nation. The most iconic part of those six hundred and thirteen laws is most certainly the Aseret Hadibrot: the only part of the Torah intended to be spoken by Hashem Himself directly to Bnei Yisrael. Most of these mitzvot are extremely essential, understandable beliefs in Judaism, such as: declare Hashem as the one and only G-d, honor your mother and father, don't kill or kidnap, etc. However, the strangest and most confusing of these laws is the very last: "Lo

Tachmod”, “Do not want or covet the belongings of others.” This commandment seems bizarre as it speaks to such a natural feeling, since all people want something or other at a certain point in time. How can we more logically explain this esoteric mitzvah, and how does it relate to a core belief of Judaism? Many commentators also grapple with this commandment, asking how the Torah can command you on what you should feel. Sforno explains that this mitzvah is put in place since coveting someone else’s object is only one step away from stealing it from them; so one must think such things to be so completely unattainable that you couldn’t want it in the first place. Ibn Ezra supports this approach, with the classic mashal of how a lowly peasant would never covet the princess since she’s so beyond his grasp of attainability. In this way, we see that Lo Tachmod is asking that we act as if things are unattainable if they do not belong to us, since unchecked desire can lead to robbery and other aveirot.

Though it may sound silly to say that wanting what isn’t yours may deem catastrophic outcomes, look no further than Achan in Sefer Yehoshua. After Bnei Yisrael defeated and left the city of Yericho, they experienced a brutal loss at the city of Ai, in which dozens of tzadikim were killed in battle. Hashem told Yehoshua that the reason for their loss was because someone stole spoils from the forbidden treasures of Yericho, and that He would abandon Bnei Yisrael if the culprit wasn’t found. Further investigation led to the discovery of Achan having stolen the treasures, as he stated in Yehoshua 7:21 “V’echmidaem V’ekchach”, “I desired and I took.” He uses the exact same shoshon in his confession as we see in Lo Tachmod; he wanted what should have seemed unattainable and which never should have been his. Though Achan was stoned for his aveirah, the damage had been done—Achan’s desire for these treasures alone caused

the horrible loss at Ai and nearly caused Bnei Yisrael to lose Hashem and succumb to the citizens of Canaan. This shows just how damaging this trait of chamad can be.

While the reasons behind the law may now appear perfectly understandable, it still begs the question of how the Torah can command you what to feel. To answer this question, we must again look at the shoshon of tachmod as seen in the dibrah and in the story of Achan. Many notice that the shoshon used in this dibrah isn’t rotzeh, the more typical word used for “want” in daily speech, but chamad. As all things in Torah, this was done extremely purposefully, as to differentiate between these two seemingly similar yet very different concepts. Rotzeh is the “typical” want, desires which we possess everyday from “I want sushi for lunch” to “I want a davening with amazing kavanah.” Chamad, on the other hand, is the dangerous emotion seen thus far, an intense and self destructive want for objects, positions, etc. which aren’t ours or which we aren’t allowed to have that can ultimately lead to unprecedented disaster.

With this in mind, the whole dibrah seems to come together. Hashem was never forbidding the mere expression of wanting. In fact, Rabbeinu Bechaei states that rotzeh can actually be an extremely positive middah. Passing the desire for lesser things, a true desire to grow and develop a relationship with Hashem is a very admirable quality which every single person works on. The true emotion which is being forbidden here is Chamad, the terrible middah which, rather than bringing a person closer to Hashem, drives them away from Him and can only lead to sin. Though every person may possess this level of jealousy at some point in their lives, it’s important to look past it and appreciate all that we already have and can one day achieve.

Where You Go I Will Go

Anonymous ('22) Frisch

In Megillat Rut, the narrative opens with the sad reality of Naomi's family. They had moved into the new land of Moav, and her husband, Elimelech, passed away. Naomi's two sons, Machlon and Kilyon, marry local Moabite women, only to pass away as well. All this tragedy occurs within the first five Pesukim.

Naomi is now left with only her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Rut. However, when she realizes her connections to her daughters-in-law no longer exist (i.e. her sons), Naomi tells them to return back to their homes, to start again. She says "Leichnah Shuvnah Isha LeBeit Ima", "Go back to your mother's house." This request results in tears and pain, reflecting on what they have been through. There is a bit of back and forth between Naomi and her daughters-in-law, but Orpah eventually leaves to go back to Moav, as Naomi suggested, with Rut saying behind.

Naomi says, "Your sister-in-law left, you should too!" However, Rut has different plans. She responds, "Al Tifgi'i Bi LeAzveich Lashuv Mei-Acharayich Ki El Asher Teilchi Eileich", "Do not force me to leave you because where you go I will go." Rut continues with many statements binding her to Naomi and Bnei Yisrael, ending with "Ya'aseh Hashem Li VeCho Yosif Ki HaMavet Yafrid Beini U'beinayich", "Hashem should ensure these and more, for only death can cause us to part." The confidence and trust in Hashem Rut displays convinces Naomi that she is there to stay.

Now, let us take a closer look at Rut's famous words. Does she mean them literally? Was she ready to go all in? The Gemara in Yevamot 47b breaks down Rut's words. (It is no coincidence

that this Gemara appears in Yevamot, a tractate majorly dealing with Yibum and occasionally with conversion.) The Gemara teaches, there is a hidden message in the text, Naomi was teaching the Jewish customs, all which Rut agreed to take on with her along with this lifestyle. Naomi tells Rut "Asir Lan Techum Shabbat", "We are unable to walk past the Techum (two thousand amot, just over a half-mile) on Shabbat" to which Rut responds "Asher Teilchi Eileich", "Where you go I will go." Naomi next tells her about the prohibition of Yichud, the inability to stay alone with a man who is forbidden to them; Rut responds "Ba'asher Teilini Eilayin", "Where you stay I will stay". Naomi goes further: the Jews are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen mitzvot; Rut responds "Amecha Ami", "Your people are my people." This implies that Naomi's ways are her ways. Naomi continues yet again with "Asir Lan Avodat Kochavim", "We don't worship idols"; of course, ever-persistent Rut responds "VeElokechah Elokai", "Your G-d is my G-d." Naomi brings her argument even further, telling Rut "Arbah Mitot Nimsaru Lebeit Din", "There are four methods of legal capital punishment for people who transgress mitzvot"; Rut merely replies "Ba'asher Tamoti Imavet", "Where you die I will die." Finally, in her final attempt, Naomi tells Rut "Bet Kevarim Nimsaru Lebeit Din", "There are two types of graves for these Jews [one for severe sins, and one for less severe]"; closing up the argument, Rut tells Naomi "VeSham Ekaver", "And there I should be buried." Rut shows Naomi her belief in Hashem and her willingness to stay with Naomi, pushing through the pain and suffering. Rut is later rewarded for her greatness, as her great-grandson is Dovid Hamelech, and Mashiach is destined to come from her line. This shows Hashem's kindness and how rewards last for generations to come for those that lead the right path.

Going Up

Asher Lieberman ('21) JEC

An esteemed rabbi at the JEC was giving us a D'var Torah about the counting of the Omer, and he specifically used the words “counting down the days to Shavuot”. This lashon intrigued me, because when we count the Omer, we count up from one to forty-nine rather than counting down from forty-nine to one. I asked another few rabbis this question until I got an excellent answer that provides a great lesson for Judaism. The reason we count up the numbers even though we're “counting down” the days of the Omer until Shavuot (the days on which we are so excited to celebrate our ancestors — and on a more spiritual level the entire Jewish nation — receiving the Torah) is



because we never want ourselves to go down, but rather we always wish to go up. This can apply to many things in our day-to-day lives: our relationship to Hashem, our middos, and even our knowledge and education. We always want to improve ourselves in all aspects, and that is where we constantly see ourselves rising and increasing. With every mitzvah we do, with every prayer we say, and with every bracha we make, we're rising up, getting higher and higher in schar, and getting closer and closer to Hashem.

Our forefather Yaakov Avinu had a dream in which a ladder stood on the ground and reached up to the heavens, and angels of Hashem were going up and down (Bereishis 28:12). Chazal compare this ladder to each human in the world. As we go up the ladder, climbing rung after rung, we get closer and closer to Hashem. This is achieved through acts of kindness, davening, and learning. As we climb, we can also climb down

rungs by doing aveirot, and as we do that — just like in Yaakov's dream — we get closer to the earth and farther away from Hashem.

Another example of this is at the creation of the world. The word “bi'hibar'am” “when they (the heavens and the Earth) were created” (Bereishis 2:4) has an abnormally small hei and Rashi gives an explanation to this that relates to the idea of going up. Rashi says that the world was created

with the letter hei so that we can rise with teshuva and go down with sins. This is a very similar idea to the one we see by Yaakov's dream, and it shows the idea of the importance of always rising up and improving. This is a lesson we can all take to heart to improve constantly in our day to day lives to get closer to Hashem and all work together to no longer be in galus and bring Mashiach.

What is Shavuot really about?

Ben Avner ('23) DAT

Following Pesach, we spend forty-nine days without getting haircuts, shaving, listening to music, and having parties. In addition, we count each of those forty-nine days. We have all these mitzvot and rules in preparation for the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot marks one of the most important events, if not the most important event, in Jewish history, and that is, of course, Matan Torah. After Matan Torah, we were no longer considered descendants of Avraham or Middle-Eastern people known as Israelites. We had now become God's nation, chosen to keep His Torah and laws.

Many people think of Matan Torah as the beginning of Torah and mitzvot in Judaism, which would make sense. After all, Hashem taught Moshe the entire Torah on Har Sinai, and prior to Matan Torah, Hashem had not spoken directly to Moshe or the Jews regarding the Ten Commandments or Torah. However, there were instances in which Jews had kept the Torah of their own violation before Matan Torah at Har Sinai. For example, it is said that Avraham kept and performed all of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot. If the Torah had already existed to a certain extent before Matan Torah, what is the significance of what happened at Har Sinai and the holiday of Shavuot?

It is clear that there was a significant and unique change that occurred on that day. The Torah that the Jews had and observed before Matan Torah was merely a physical form of Torah and mitzvot. Not to say that those Jews did not have any spiritual connection to Hashem, but their connection to Hashem was only as deep as their understanding of Torah and mitzvot. They were only able to connect to Hashem based on the physical actions that they performed and the Torah that they understood.

During Matan Torah, however, Hashem connected his essence to the Torah, and that was the version of the Torah that was given to us thousands of years ago on Har Sinai — the version that spiritually connected us to Torah and mitzvot. After Matan Torah, we were no longer restricted to just physical mitzvot; we had gained a full spiritual connection to Hashem. Hashem says regarding the Torah, “I have written and placed (within Torah) My very ‘Soul’ and Essence.”

Now, when we observe Torah and mitzvot (regardless of our understanding of them), we are all able to have a spiritual connection to the

essence of Hashem. The revelation at Har Sinai made our potential and achievement in Torah limitless. Matan Torah created unity not only between the Jewish people and Hashem, but between the Jewish people and themselves. All the Jews became equal in their ability to connect to Hashem. Matan Torah made it so that the most righteous and learned of Jews had the same ability to clutch onto Hashem’s essence as a more secular Jew. This aspect of Matan Torah was so influential that the Jews encamped before Har Sinai “as one man with one heart.”

Shavuot is not just a holiday where we get to eat lasagna and cheesecake and go to shul and daven. It marks an event that once and for all unified us with Hashem. Matan Torah revealed within every Jew that through our emunah and through Torah, we are fully able to grasp Hashem’s essence. Matan Torah’s intent was that every Jew, no matter their background, would be capable of grasping onto Hashem’s essence and creating the most special relationship possible — the relationship between us and Hashem. Chag Shavuot Sameach!

It’s Not Just Cheesecake

BCHA ('22) Josh Marcus

Like many other young children, I grew up thinking of Shavuot as the “ice cream holiday.” Every year at my shul, we had extravagant spreads of ice cream, cheesecake, and other dairy desserts. Although I greatly enjoyed taking part in the amazing kiddushes, as I got older I began to think about why we ate dairy foods on Shavuot.

To answer this question, we first must take a look into how Shavuot got its name. The most common name for Shavuot is — as you probably know — Chag Shavuot! This means the Holiday of Weeks.

Shavuot has this name because it takes place at the end of the Omer, the counting of the weeks. We count 49 days from the second day of Pesach to commemorate the time between the Jewish people leaving Egypt receiving the Torah. So this means that Shavuot is the commemoration of the day that Am Yisrael received the Torah, leading to another name: Zman Matan Torateinu. When we arrived in the land of Israel, we referred to Shavuot as Chag HaKatzir because Shavuot also coincided with the first harvest. After the first fruits were harvested, people from all over Eretz Yisrael made trips to the Beit HaMikdash to show their thankfulness to Hashem for giving them the opportunity to grow these crops that sustained their lives and gave them their livelihoods, giving Shavuot another name, Chag HaBikkurim.



Now that we know all about the names of Shavuot and why they are pertinent, we can ask again the question of why we eat dairy on Shavuot. The reason why we eat dairy on Shavuot is mainly because we weren't allowed to eat meat. At Har Sinai, when the Jewish people were preparing to receive the Torah, they did not yet receive the laws of shechita, so therefore they couldn't eat meat when they were in the desert until they received the Torah, and it is assumed that they ate dairy. Additionally, Israel is "Eretz Zavav Chalav u'Dvash", "A land flowing with milk and honey", so another interpretation is that the people were eating dairy to prepare to receive the Torah and to soon after enter Israel. This Shavuot, when I am eating my ice cream and

cheesecake at kiddush, I will now know the significance behind these yummy dairy desserts and how they remind us of when we received the Torah at Har Sinai.

It's The Little Things

Shimi Kaufman ('21) MTA

There is a famous Mishnah (Avot 6:6) which outlines 48 character traits through which the Torah can be acquired. Commonly referred to as the 48 Kinyanei HaTorah, these Middot have been known as the calling cards of Talmidei Chachamim throughout the generations. Rav Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, suggested that one should utilize the 49 days of Sefirat HaOmer to perfect these 48 Kinyanei HaTorah, in preparation for receiving the Torah on Shavuot. Based on this, it would stand to reason that the Kinyanei HaTorah would increase in intensity as we grow closer and closer to the moment of revelation. It is therefore surprising that the final Kinyan HaTorah, the penultimate character trait which demands our attention before we can fully accept the Torah, is rather anticlimactic. The Mishnah concludes that the 48th mark of a Talmid Chacham is "HaOmer Davar BiShem Omro," one who quotes things in the name of their original author. Certainly, academic integrity is a noble quality, but is it really the final thing that demands our attention before we receive the Torah? One would have expected the Mishnah to finish on some triumphant note about Yirat Shamayim or Ahavat Torah; why end with a PSA about plagiarism? The next phrase in the Mishnah only adds to the confusion. The Mishnah quotes a related Tanaitic teaching, namely that anyone who says something in the name of its original source brings redemption to the world. This is proven from the Pasuk in Megillat Esther, which tells us that

Esther told Achashveirosh that Mordechai had been the one who discovered the plot on his life. Of course, Esther quoting Mordechai in this context led to Mordechai being written in the king's official record book, which would later come back to haunt Haman. The Mishnah's proof seems to make sense; here we have a case where quoting someone directly led to a redemption. However, my Rebbe, Rav Baruch Pesach Mendelson, Shlit"a, asked an amazing Kashya on this Beraita. Did Esther quoting Mordechai really lead to any form of redemption? Mordechai's name was written in the Sefer HaZichroniyut, which led to him being remembered by Achashveirosh, which led to

Haman being forced to parade Mordechai down the street on the royal horse. While this was without a doubt a cathartic scene, one is left to wonder how this glorified pony ride really affected the larger story of Megillat Esther. The Mishnah's proof seems to make no sense; Esther quoting

Mordechai had nothing to do with causing the final redemption! Rav Mendelson suggests an answer based on a Shiur of Rav Kalman Weinreb on Sefer Shmuel. The Pasuk (Shmuel I 13:22) tells us that the Pelishtim had amassed at the border, and nobody had any weapons with which to fight them. Suddenly, the Pasuk tells us that Shaul and his son Yonatan found swords. Rashi explains that these swords were found by miraculous means, as there really were no weapons in all of Eretz Yisrael. Rav Weinreb asks a seemingly obvious question: why was the miracle of the swords necessary? In a battle against thousands upon thousands of Pelishtim, the difference between two men with swords and no men with swords is inconsequential. We know



that Hashem does not perform unnecessary miracles, so why did Hashem feel it was necessary to give Shaul and Yonatan weapons? Rav Weinreb answers based on a Yesod brought down by the Vilna Gaon: Every day in our Shemoneh Esrei, we praise Hashem as a "Misha'an U'Mivtach LaTzadikim," providing support and faith to the righteous. The Gaon explained that a Misha'an is a small sign that Hashem is there. Once the righteous witness even the slightest incident which reaffirms their belief, they are refreshed with a new surge of Bitachon in Hashem. This is why we praise Hashem as both a Misha'an and a Mivtach; He provides the

Misha'an which allows the Tzadikim to strengthen their Bitachon. In the case of Shaul and the swords, the Jewish nation was about to despair of all hope, faced with a looming army and no weaponry. Thus, when Hashem gave Shaul and Yonatan swords, it served as a reminder to the people that

Hashem was still with them and that they could still win. This is why the miracle was needed.

Rav Mendelson explains that this is how we may understand Megillas Esther as well. True, Mordechai's honor at Haman's expense didn't directly lead to the Geulah of the Jewish people. However, it reaffirmed the faith of the people that Hashem was watching over them and guiding everything that was happening. This reaffirmation led to an increase in Tefillah, which directly caused the Geulah to come about. Thus, Esther recounting the tale of Bigtan and Teresh in Mordechai's name did eventually lead to the ultimate salvation of the Jewish people.

We know that Purim and Shavuot are inexorably linked; where Shavuot marks our original acceptance of the Torah, Purim is “Kimu Mah SheKiblu Kvar,” the first voluntary acceptance of the Torah by the Jewish people. Just as the Geulah on Purim only came through this sort of Misha’an, a small reminder from Hashem that He was still watching, so too, the realization of Shavuot’s potential requires this aspect as well. Perhaps we may suggest that this is why the Mishnah’s last Kinyan HaTorah is the idea of “Kol HaOmer Davar BiShem Omro.” The Mishnah is reminding us that in order to accept the Torah, we must call upon this idea of “Misha’an U’Mivtach,” and actively search for ways where Hashem is involved in our lives. We must, in a sense, ensure that we see and appreciate the world “BiShem Omro,” as the work of the One who spoke it into existence. This is the last thing we need before coming to accept the Torah, to learn that our inspiration need not come from the fiery lightning of Har Sinai, but from the little Misha’an’s that Hashem provides for us every day. It is these little drops of inspiration that will fuel the fire of Torah in our hearts long after the buzz of Matan Torah has faded away. If we can learn to see the world “BiShem Omro,” we will be well on our way to acquiring the Torah this Shavuot.

We Will Do and We Will Listen By

Sara Weinstein (’22) Goldie Margolin School for Girls

On Shavuot, we celebrate Hashem giving us the Torah at Har Sinai. When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish people, they immediately said “Na’aseh V’Nishmah,” “We will do and we will listen.” This seems strange, for why would Bnei

Yisrael say they will do the Mitzvot before they will listen to them? It seems like a blind acceptance. To explain this question further, imagine you are in an algebra class taking a test. Obviously, the test should consist of algebraic problems. However, when you get the test, you notice that you have never seen these problems before and there is no algebra at all! You can’t possibly take this test because you have never learned this material before. In other words, one cannot ride a bike until they’ve learned how to ride a bike. Defying that logic seems both crazy and impossible. That being said, we must now return to the question as to how the Jews could respond “Na’aseh V’Nishmah” immediately after Hashem offered the Jewish people the Torah? How could they have known what to do without listening?



There are many explanations to this question, however, I will share only a few. The Chatam Sofer explains that the Jewish people had so much trust in Hashem at that point in time that they believed anything He said was true and for their benefit. Thus the Jewish people didn’t need to listen first, because they knew it was from Hashem, who they trusted. They were ready to do whatever He commanded. Sforno gives a different explanation, stating that the reason behind the Jews going to do these Mitzvot are in order for us to listen to Hashem, and they are not for our personal gain. So they were saying, “we will do them, so we can listen and follow Hashem.” The last explanation is in relation to the angels. The

angels do not possess free will, and their sole purpose is to carry out G-d's will. They are created to do and listen. When the Jews said "Na'aseh V'Nishmah, they tapped into the secret of the angels, of doing G-d's will without hesitation or second-thoughts. We, however, are different from the angels because we have free will and often do things that reflect our will instead of Hashem's. We are praiseworthy because we rose up to such a high level - that of the angels - at Har Sinai. By Bnai Yisrael saying "Na'aseh V'Nishmah" they were saying that they would become extension's of Hashem's will. G-d offered the Torah to everyone; however, in contrast to the Jews, the rest of the nations did not rise to the level of the angels. They listened first and then voiced their unwillingness to give up their own wills for Hashem's. They did not want to follow Hashem and His Torah because they thought they would lose their free will. However, Bnei Yisrael had the secret of the angels, to say that they would do first before listening, so that



their own wills and desires wouldn't get in the way of Hashem's.

We see from these explanations that Bnei Yisrael did not blindly accept the Torah. They were on such a high level at Har Sinai that they had true Emunah, faith in Hashem, and were ready to give up their own wills to become extensions of G-d's and serve Him. This is applicable to our lives today as we find ourselves in uncertain times and do not know what the future holds. However, we should strive to reach that level again, and have

complete faith that Hashem will make things better, and hopefully soon bring the Mashiach and return us all to the land of Israel.

Connecting Our Hearts to the Infinite Torah

Jake Fuchs ('21) Rambam Mesivta

Imagine there existed a book with answers to all the enigmas of the universe. Everything man has discovered, or has yet to discover, in one book. All of science, mathematics, astronomy, physics, history, medicine, etc. in one text. This book also contains the entire life story of every person who existed or will exist on the planet. Sounds incredible, right? Not only that, but every second someone reads this book, a part of the earth itself is sustained from it. Fascinating! Of course, I am not referring to some man-made book. Rather, I am referring to the divine Torah given to us by HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Our Sages make it clear that all information is found in the Torah. "Ben Bag Bag says: Delve into it and continue to delve into it, for all is in it. Grow old and gray over it, and do not stir from it, for you have no better portion than it" (Avot 5:22). This means that all true secular knowledge can be learned from the Torah. The Vilna Gaon became knowledgeable from the Torah in many of the great secular branches of wisdom. Of course, when the average person looks into the Torah, he might not be able to see all these wonders. However, even the great David HaMelech, who had a mind of Torah greater than all the generations who followed him, said that when it came to knowledge of Torah he was like a mere stranger and he Davened that HaShem should uncover his eyes so he could perceive the wonders of the Torah (Sefer Shem Olam Chapter

12). However, though no human mind can grasp all the infinite layers of the Torah, one can learn tremendous information from it. Therefore, we too say the same words as Dovid HaMelech before we learn.

The Zohar says that HaShem looked into the Torah and created the universe based on it. We see that Torah is the DNA of creation itself. The physical world's fabric are the eternal spiritual letters of the Torah. That is why when we learn Torah, we are accomplishing two major functions: we are soaking some of the infinite spiritual light of all information in existence, and we are sending the energy of Torah into a certain part of the universe to sustain it. Pretty cool, right?

When one internalizes this, the Torah should not be viewed as just one of the many academic wisdoms. The Torah is life itself. All physical existence depends on it, "Ki Hem Chayeinu, ViOrech Yameinu." However, all of this is meaningless if not for one of the main purposes of Torah study: "Lilmod La'asot", "Learning in order to practice the Torah is the one of the main functions of the art (Rambam Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:3)." If a student learns Hilchot Shabbat in school and then plays on their phone on Shabbat, what did they accomplish? If someone learns the entire Masechet Berachot, but doesn't even recite Birkat HaMazon, is his learning meaningful? Certainly, it is severely flawed! This does not mean one should not learn Torah and then thereby avoid being a hypocrite, for they would never have known the knowledge. Such a person will be judged as if their sins are purposeful, as it is written in Pirkei Avot 4:12: "One is negligent with Torah study will have their unintentional sins judged as intentional." Rather, one simply must apply the knowledge of Torah they learn to their lives, which will in turn elevate their existence.

The nations of the world produced many intellectual giants throughout history. However, none of these philosophers or scientists knew as much about the creation of the universe as a Jewish child. The Midrash tells a story where a Roman named Akilas told the Emperor Hadrian that he wanted to convert to Judaism. When asked why, he responded that even a child among the Jews knows the six day process of the Creation of the world. The question is: How is it that such great minds cannot grasp basic concepts of Yahadut that even a Jewish child can, like the Sheishet Yemei Bereishit?

Rav Elchanan Wasserman deals with this question, specifically regarding Aristotle. Rambam notes that Aristotle had intelligence approaching that of prophecy. If so, how could he come to heretical beliefs? The answer, Rav Wasserman gives, is that his heresy was based on emotional, not intellectual reasons. He wanted to sin and live a life of wickedness. We say everyday in Keriyat Shema states: "You shall not stray after your hearts..." The Gemara says this refers to heresy. Therefore, Rav Wasserman explains, the heart is the source of heresy, not the mind.

The Torah states in Sefer Shemot (36:1,8) that those chosen to work on the Mishkan were Chachmei Lev - Wise of Heart. Isn't wisdom in the brain, not the heart? Rabbi Nachman of Breslov explains that all Jews' knowledge is centered in the heart, not the brain. We all have divine sparks in our hearts that try to convince us to follow the correct path. In contrast, the non-Jews view their teachings as something separate from their hearts and emotions. Aristotle had no problem preaching ideas of morality, but then violating his teachings in other places. Their intelligence is in a completely different part of the body (the brain) than their emotions (the heart). However, as Jews, our knowledge is in the same

place as our emotions, the Lev. We therefore must aspire to be Chachmei Lev. What do the first and last letters of the Torah spell? "Lev," the heart. We cannot just study divine knowledge (the Torah), but must transform our hearts into the Torah.

Shavuot, Megillat Ruth, & Having Faith

Felicia Stendig ('22) The Idea School

Shavuot is a very special holiday centered around unity, connection, and acceptance. In fact, we even formally count the days until we reach this chag, a mitzvah unique to Shavuot alone. The chag is made additionally unique with the inclusion of Megillat Ruth. But why do we read Ruth's narrative, in particular, and what lessons does it bring to the table as we celebrate this holiday?

Shavuot is the chag in which we celebrate our receiving of the Torah. With this gift came much responsibility: we agreed to always show kindness, responsibility, and generosity toward others. So too is the case in Megillat Ruth, in which Ruth is welcomed with open arms and without any hesitancy by a man whom she's never met. As said in perek bet, pasuk chet: "Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls.'" Not only is Boaz embracing Ruth despite the fact that she is a stranger, but he is showing her compassion and assuring her security, as she is unfamiliar with the land she is in.

When we were standing at Har Sinai, we, as a nation, took on all the burdens of what it would mean and look like to accept such a great, powerful gift. While there might have been rules and regulations with which we may not have

entirely agreed, we understood that they were for the best and that they would help us through life for generations to come. When Ruth became a widow, Naomi was no longer her mother-in-law, thus giving her every reason to leave her. However, Ruth did not want to break or leave a strong relationship filled with love and understanding. Even when Naomi urged Ruth to leave and find a new, better life for herself, Ruth stayed by Naomi's side, disregarding their differences in religion and beliefs. "Va'tomer Rut al tefgei bi l'azveich la'shuv mai'acharayich ki el



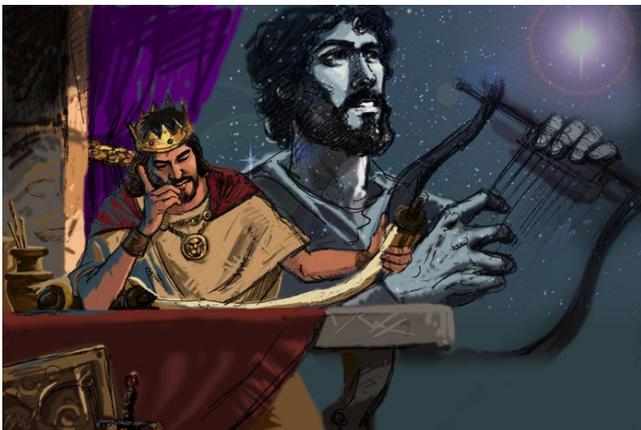
asher telchi elech oo'baasher talini alin amech ami v'Elochaich Elochai," "But Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'"

As seen above in perek aleph, pasuk tet zayin, Ruth has this strong-willed desire to stay with Naomi so as to bring comfort to her and help her through this challenging time. As a nation, we can learn much from this: we may have our unique differences and challenges throughout life, but we can always try to help someone out and understand that God is right alongside all of us in the process. In this pasuk, Ruth also says wherever you go, I will go, a powerful, famous verse. From these beautiful words, we are able to fully grasp the depth of Ruth's love for Naomi.

Similarly, God cherry-picked us as His chosen people to love and nurture even though we did

not, by any means, deserve His graciousness or promise of protection. Even now, we may feel that God doesn't love us or do what is best for us at times. However, it is difficult to imagine the sheer number of instances when we betrayed God, disobeyed Him, or went behind His back, and He still held firm in his belief that we were His chosen people. When receiving the Torah, we were told that He would love us forever and always, and indeed He has. In the book of Rut, it seemed very far-fetched for Rut to have a future and continue the lineage of her family, as she had moved away from her native land and was now a foreigner. But this was not the case. In fact, she turns out to be the great grandmother of one of the most important and impactful people in all Jewish history—King David! As seen at his birth: "...and the woman neighbors gave him a name, saying, 'A son is born to Naomi!' They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, father of David."

Ultimately, we learn that when we have hope and faith in God, even when it feels useless, there lingers the potential for a brighter tomorrow. Rut made a great leap of faith, as she was headed to a new land with people different from and critical of her, and yet the love she felt for Naomi overpowered her fears. Megillat Rut helps us better understand the purpose of Shavuot, as it can be a hard chag with which to resonate. Megillat Rut and the story of her journey can empower us to understand and make those significant connections.



Dveykus: Keeping our Tafkid

Naomi Reichenberg ('22) KYHS

Shavuot is the time we celebrate receiving the Aseres HaDibros. For over two thousand years, Mesorah has allowed us to remember the significance of this date, but oftentimes we forget what we are truly here to accomplish. What is our true tafkid? Perek Ayin-Gimmel, pasuk Chaf Chet of Tehillim says: "V'Ani Kirvat Elokhim Li Tov Shati B'Adoni Hashem Machsi L'Saper Kul Molochotecha" "But as for me—God's nearness is my good; I have placed my refuge in the Lord God, to tell all Your mission."

This pasuk describes that for David HaMelech, dveykus was his tafkid. Just being close to Hashem was his good. Of course, none of us are anywhere near the level of David HaMelech, so how are we supposed to keep our tafkid as the icker in our minds, goals, and thoughts?

Imagine we find out that there is life on a different planet and the president declares that ten people must go and inform the people there that there is life here on earth. This journey will take generations to complete. The president prepares you to take a spaceship with food to last years and years and a mission plan. So, you go and generations die out and slowly you forget why you are truly in the spaceship. You lose sight of the mission that the president had sent you on years before. Suddenly, one day, one of the children is playing hide and seek and hides in a cabinet that has not been opened for a while. In the cabinet, he finds the mission plan and informs everyone on board of what they are supposed to be doing there.

This, of course, is a mashal to us. We may lose sight of our tafkid, but Shavuot is a time to

remember what we are here for. Hashem gave us rules that help us to be close with him. Our sole purpose is to achieve dveykus to Hashem and we would not be able to accomplish that without the Aseres HaDibros. And when we find ourselves becoming discouraged and our tafkid seems like it is extremely difficult to achieve, Moshe Rabbeinu tells us in Devarim, “Ki karov aleicha ha’davar mioad b’peecha u’blvavecha la’asoto,” “No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.”

This is describing that geulah is so much closer than we could ever imagine. Being close to Hashem and wanting to be close with him will only bring us closer to geulah shleima.

May we constantly be zoche to remember our tafkid and to achieve the utmost dveykus to Hashem so that we can achieve geulah shleima b’maheira b’yameinu.

Creating Your Shavuot

Hannah Munk (‘22) Ma’ayanot

Shavuot is hard to connect to. If prompted, most people would tell you that Shavuot is about the receiving of the Torah at Har Sinai. If you asked for further details, they might add something about learning all night to show our enthusiasm or about the flowers we have in shul to beautify the building and remind us of Har Sinai. Overall, it seems we do a lot to remember Har Sinai, but we have never experienced it. Flowers and all-nighters are nice, but what do they tell us? Is there another way we can frame this chag to make it meaningful?

Interestingly, while Shavuot is the anniversary of receiving the Torah and becoming a unified nation, there is another, lesser-known event we are celebrating. There is a tradition noted by

Rashi in Sefer Bereishit, that mankind was created on the sixth of Sivan—the day we celebrate Shavuot. So not only are we celebrating the giving of the Torah, we are celebrating our very existence. Furthermore, there is another tradition from Sefer Bereishit that none of the other creations began their functions until man was created. Therefore, Shavuot commemorates something greater—it is the anniversary of the beginning of a working universe.



If we think about what this means, it is truly remarkable. No matter how you picture the creation of the world, that day you imagine it to all fall into place is Shavuot. It is the ultimate “satisfying picture” where all the principles of physics, chemistry, and biology fuse together to support life. Controlling factors for human and animal life as well as the rotation of Earth were created on this day. The seasons, as well as time itself, were created on this day. Carbon started to bond, amino acids started to become proteins, cellulose began to be produced, photosynthesis began to occur, inertia began, and the list goes on and on. And it all began on Shavuot.

As far as connection to the holiday goes, we now have a lot to connect to. We can literally take anything in the universe and celebrate its special creation on Shavuot. In this way, it can be easier for us to connect with this seemingly difficult holiday. Shavuot is more than the day we received the Torah, it is the day our world was put into motion.

But what about Torah? After all, that is the focal point of this holiday. We cannot leave it out of the picture, so where does it fit in? There is a famous midrash that states that HaShem looked in the Torah and created the world. What does this mean?

Perhaps it means that the world is a 3D representation of the Torah. When we look around and see creation, that is Torah. Torah is not limited to words on a page and the four walls of a study hall. It is what everyone lives and breathes, even if they are unaware of it. When we see a Lewis dot structure — that is Torah. When we study that shape of a double helix — that is Torah. When we graph $\sin(x)$ — that is Torah. All the scientific and mathematical formulas that make the world function were created by looking at “Torah”, therefore, that is what they must be.

Overall, this Chag can be challenging, to say the least. Celebrating an occasion we cannot remember and trying to recreate it is a challenge. However by remembering the day is about creation as a whole, and connecting to Ma’aseh Bereishit, the original creation, we can more easily see the beauty of the holiday and its special meaning.

Ish Echad B’Lev Echad

Andrew Rubel (‘23) YULA

I would like to dedicate this Dvar Torah to Noah Arnold z”l, a fellow student at our school who sadly passed away a few weeks ago. May his neshama have an Aliyah and may his family feel some comfort at this time of sorrow.

Although it may seem as if we have just packed away our Pesach dishes, Shavuos happens to be right around the corner. With the coming of the chag, we think about Pesach in the rearview

mirror, the counting of the Omer, and the arrival of Shavuos, also known as Yom Habikkurim.

One of the three holidays with the distinction of being one of the Shalosh Regalim, the Chag of Shavuos coincides with the bringing of the bikkurim, the ceremonial first fruits presented before the kohen in the Beis HaMikdash. The tradition of bikkurim, aligning with the festival of Shavuos, represents the arrival of the harvest season. The bikkurim serve as a perennial symbol of a new beginning for the Jewish people and of their appreciation for Hashem and the sustenance He provides. Historically, Shavuos also coincides with another significant event, the founding of the Jewish nation.

Shavuos marks the beginning of the Jewish people; the nomadic Israelites who had just escaped slavery in Egypt had now agreed to adopt the same set of laws which we follow to this day. Before the monumental events at Har Sinai, the notion of a Jewish people was nothing but a fantastical idea, an unimaginable dream of the possibility of a chosen people, an am segulah. After such trying times in slavery and throughout their travels in the desert, one might think that the Israelites would feel crushed and distanced from each other, unable to unite amongst themselves and become a connected tribe. However, in defiance of all odds, the Israelites, who had just endured inconceivable suffering after hundreds of years of bondage at the hands of the Egyptians, joined together at Har Sinai to accept the Torah and unify for a greater purpose.

As Rashi points out, quoting the Mekhilta on Sefer Shemos, the pasuk says “Vayichan Sham Yisrael,” “and Israel encamped there.” Although the Torah refers to the entire group of people who settled near Har Sinai as Israel (plural), the word “Vayichan” remains in the singular form. According to the explanation provided by the

Mekhilta, the usage of the singular form of the word is indicative of the unified nature of the Israelites before receiving the Torah. The Israelites are designated as “Ish Echad B’Lev Echad,” one man with one heart, a term expressive of the connectedness found between the Israelites gathered at the foot of the mountain. Even through all of their hardships, they still managed to come together, as hundreds of thousands of Israelites gathered as one. The perseverance and resolve exhibited by the Israelites, now familiar character traits of the Jewish people, led British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to refer to the Jewish people as “the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world.”

That determination, first displayed throughout the desert and at the base of Har Sinai, has now become synonymous with the history of the Jewish people, and still remains evident to this day.

Just in this past year, our resolve has been tried and tested time and again, as our communities have been forced to find new means of meaningful engagement and togetherness, even in times of physical distance between all of us. On a note of personal tragedy, our Los Angeles community has struggled to grapple with the loss of a beloved YULA student, Noah Arnold z”l. His passing has been particularly difficult for all of us given the circumstances which may physically separate us, although we are united in our grief and remembrance of his profound impact on this world.

My hope before the chag is that our community and all of Klal Yisrael can overcome the sorrow and join together as “Ish Echad B’Lev Echad,” even through the recent suffering which we have all endured.

Ma Lecha Po Eliyahu: The Last Return to Har Sinai

Isaac Deutsch (‘21) SAR

Har Sinai is central to Jewish tradition. The phenomenon of Ma'amad Har Sinai is the foundation of our faith and belief in Hashem. It's one of the shesh zechirot, the six remembrances. It's how we backdate halachos; a halacha that we know only by tradition (since it is not derived from Tanach) is known as a Halacha l'Moshe MiSinai, a Law to Moshe from Sinai. It's even used as shorthand for Hashem Himself, such as in Pirkei Avot 1:1: "Moshe kibel Torah miSinai," "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai," which the Bartenura explains as "MiMi sheNiglah b'Sinai," "from the One Who was revealed at Sinai." So, given its centrality, why don't we know its location? The answer lies in a narrative from Melachim Alef, where the only known record of anyone returning to Har Sinai appears.

The prophet Yirmiyahu relates that after Eliyahu killed all the prophets of Ba'al, Izevel put a price on his head, ordering his death. Eliyahu fled, laid beneath a juniper bush, and pleaded with Hashem to take his life. An angel came to give him food and water, and on the strength of that meal, Eliyahu walked for forty days and forty nights to "Har HaElokim, Chorev," "The Mountain of G-d, Chorev," another name for Har Sinai. When Eliyahu got to the mountain, Hashem asked, "Mah licha poh, Eliyahu?" "What are you doing here, Eliyahu?" Eliyahu told Hashem about his plight, and Hashem then engineered an interesting and rather unclear test: causing a few natural phenomena and having Eliyahu determine which contained His Presence. Finally, Hashem told Eliyahu what to do upon his return to Israel.

This story makes no sense at face value. Why would Hashem ask Eliyahu what he's doing at Har Sinai? What was the point of the test? And why does Hashem's question paired with Eliyahu's answer appear twice, as we'll see from the pesukim? I think there's something deeper going on.



Once Eliyahu arrives at Har Sinai, the story continues: "Vayavo sham, el haMe'arah, vayalen sham, v'Hinei d'var Hashem eilav vayomer lo mah licha poh, Eliyahu," "And he came there, into the cave, and lodged there, and behold, the word of Hashem was with him, and He said to him, what are you doing here, Eliyahu?" That's how the pasuk is usually translated. However, I think it's misleading. I think it's actually the root cause of the repetition in the story. You see, the Hebrew phrase "mah licha poh" can mean "what are you doing here," but it can also mean, more literally, "what is there for you here." That is Hashem's question. Thus, that pasuk should be translated "And he came there, into the cave, and lodged there, and behold, the word of Hashem was with him, and He said to him, what is there for you here, Eliyahu?" Hashem is not asking why Eliyahu came to Chorev. Hashem knows that. Hashem is asking what Eliyahu hopes to get out of returning to Har Sinai. "What do you think there is here, that I can help you with, Eliyahu, that you could not find in Israel?" That is Hashem's question.

Now here's the clincher: Eliyahu doesn't get it. Eliyahu interprets Hashem's question like our usual translation, as "why are you here?" So he answers: "Vayomer kanoh kineiti LaHashem Elokei Tzevakot ki azvu britecha Bnei Yisrael et mizbichotecha harsu v'et nevi'echa hargu becharev v'otar ani livadi vayivakshu et nafshi likachta," "And he said, I was greatly zealous for Hashem, the G-d of Legions, for the Children of Israel have left Your covenant, they have trampled Your Altars and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I alone remain, and they seek my life to take it." Eliyahu insists that the covenant has been left. He totally separates himself from B'nei Yisrael. Moshe, in the same position on the same mountain, argued with Hashem, placing himself with the people: "V'ata im tisa et chatatam v'im ayin micheini na misifricha asher katavta," "And now, if You will but forgive their sin! But if not, erase me from Your Book which You have written." Eliyahu separates himself out, implying that he wants the option that Hashem gave Moshe, to be made into a great nation. Eliyahu goes back to the site of the original covenant to inform its Maker that it has been broken, and suggest, if not outright with his words, that Hashem discard B'nei Yisrael, or at the very least, renew the covenant with another Sinai, with revelation. They've left Your covenant, You need to fix it.

Hashem then engineers a miraculous display to show Eliyahu how wrong he is. Continues Sefer Melachim, "Vayomer tzei v'amadta bahar lifnei Hashem v'hinei Hashem oveir v'ruach gedolah v'chazak mifarek harim u'mishaber sela'im lifnei Hashem lo b'ruach Hashem," "And He said, exit and stand on the mountain, before Hashem, and behold, Hashem will pass. And there was a great strong wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks before Hashem, but not in the wind was Hashem." Where else in Tanach do we have a

great strong wind? The splitting of the Sea was facilitated by a mighty wind as well. With the wind, Hashem symbolizes ge'ulah, redemption, to Eliyahu. That was an option: Hashem could save B'nei Yisrael then like He saved them from Egypt. Would that work? Answers Eliyahu's perception of Hashem's message, "lo b'ruach Hashem," "Hashem was not in the wind." No, it wouldn't work. Miraculous redemption didn't last the first time, and it wouldn't last again. It could not be the Band-Aid to slap on to an idolatrous corrupt kingdom of Israel. Hashem then causes another miraculous display: "v'achar haRuach ra'ash lo baRa'ash Hashem", "And after the wind, an earthquake; Hashem was not in the earthquake." There is exactly one earthquake I recall in Tanach before this: in Parshas Korach, when the earth swallowed Korach, Dasan, Aviram, and their families. The earthquake, then, represents the punishment of the wicked, the removal from a community of those who would do it harm. Could this be the answer? If Hashem can't miraculously redeem Israel and return them to Him, maybe He can at least cut away the canker that infects it. Well, as Yirmiyahu relates Eliyahu's experience, he clearly tells us this was not meant to be. For "Hashem was not in the earthquake," removing the idolaters from Israel would do nothing but diminish the population. The issue was not in individuals, but in the community.

Finally, Hashem arrives at Eliyahu's most drastic thought, as I've laid it out. Continues Sefer Melachim, "v'achar hara'ash aish lo ba'asish Hashem," "And after the earthquake, fire; Hashem was not in the fire." What is fire? Fire, especially on Har Sinai, reminds me only of Matan Torah, when the Har was bo'er ba'asih, blazing with fire, to give the Book wrought of fire, as it is written, "halo koh divarai ka'aish ne'um Hashem," "Is not thus My word like fire?"

declares Hashem." This represents the idea that Hashem should give the Torah again. He should start over, pick another nation, leave B'nei Yisrael for ruin. Is this it? Is this the last resort, the only option? Hashem's spectacle gives a resounding "NO!", for Hashem was not in the fire. So what then? What rests? Hashem provides the answer: "v'achar ha'aish kol dimama daka," "and after the fire, a quiet, thin voice." "vayehi kishmoa Eliyahu vayalet panav b'adarto vayeitzei vaya'amod petach hame'arah v'hinei eilav kol vatomer mah licha poh Eliyahu," "And it was, when Eliyahu heard, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and he exited and stood at the opening of the cave, and behold, a voice was with him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Eliyahu?'" What could this quiet, thin voice be? This is the sound of tefillah. This is the sound of Torah study. This is the sound of quiet good deeds that do not need to be seen by anyone, but have an unimaginable impact. This is where people help each other, where Eliyahu teaches others, where the souls of B'nei Yisrael cry out to Hashem. This is not miraculous help. This is the sound of bitter work. Is this the solution?



Not only is it the solution, but Eliyahu finally understands the question. Hashem is asking, "what is there for you here, Eliyahu?" Eliyahu responds with the same answer he gave before, but it is no longer the brash, fatalistic appeal for

miracles. The focus is no longer on “ki azvu britecha Bnei Yisrael,” “for the Children of Israel have abandoned your covenant,” but rather on “v’otar ani livadi vayivakshu nafshi likachta,” “And I alone remain, and they seek my life to take it.” Instead of answering why he’s here, that is, that B’nei Yisrael have sinned, he tells Hashem what there is here (ie. at Har Sinai) for him: a solution to having no one to fall back on. Yes, Eliyahu essentially says, “I see the answer is for me to teach and to hearten the Jewish people. But I have no one to listen to me, no one to teach. I am a fugitive, I am alone, and they seek my life to take it.” With that, with Eliyahu asking for the right thing, Hashem provides it, and tells Eliyahu to anoint Yehu ben Nimshi as king over Israel, Chazael as king over Aram, and Elisha ben Shaphat of Avel-Mecholah as prophet to succeed him. Eliyahu, knowing from Hashem’s display which of these is most imperative, anoints Elisha first, so that he can teach and have another to teach and daven on behalf of Israel. In fact, Elisha is the only one Eliyahu anoints: Yehu and Chazael are both anointed under the “prophethdom” of Elisha.

So how does this connect to Shavuot? Short, simple answer: it involves Har Sinai. Longer, more thorough answer: It explains why we don’t know where Har Sinai is: we don’t need to; it isn’t helpful. It served an incredible purpose for us, but the answers are no longer at Chorev. The answers are with us. Learning, teaching, studying, davening, helping each other, doing mitzvos, that is the essence of Hashem and the Torah. That is where Eliyahu found Hashem, and where we can too. Every time you learn Torah, every time you teach it, every time you study it, every time you daven, every time you help another, every time you do a quiet mitzvah that no one will see: remember that you just stood at Har Sinai.

Editor’s Article: Confusion, Culmination, and Customs: The Lesson of Shavuot

Eli Novick ('21) Kushner

Staying up all night to learn Torah, decorating our Shuls and homes with flowers to look like Har Sinai, reading the Aseret HaDibrot as the daily Torah reading, etc. — nearly every single one of the customs of Shavuot relate to a single theme: Matan Torah, the receiving of the Torah. And yet, nowhere in the (Written) Torah do we find any connection between this event and the holiday of Shavuot. Whenever it is mentioned, Shavuot is nicknamed some variation of Chag HaKatzir, the Holiday of the Harvest. Furthermore, neither of the dates of Shavuot or Matan Torah are mentioned explicitly in the Torah, making it difficult to draw a connection between the two on our own. And though we are eventually told by Chazal about this connection, it seems from the Torah’s lack of clarity that the Torah is trying to obfuscate the truth. Why?

My teacher, Rabbi Menachem Leibtag, suggested that this confusion in the Torah is intentional. Regarding Yetziat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah records the exact date, commands us to remember the event every day of our lives (which we do through the daily Shema and weekly Kiddush), and instructs us to relive the events of the day on its anniversary (i.e. Pesach). We are supposed to remember Yetziat Mitzrayim as a day in history, an event that happened. None of this is true, however, of Matan Torah. The Torah, through cryptic diction, hides the exact date, never instructs us to remember Matan Torah (although, interestingly enough, Devarim 4:9-10 warns us never to forget the event), and makes no mention of how to celebrate its anniversary (which Chazal tell us is Shavuot).

All the Torah-related customs we perform on Shavuot are just that — customs!



Rabbi Leibtag made the argument that if we were to have been given the information and commandments to remember Matan Torah as a day in history, that's all it is. It would mean that every day we would be moving further away from the event, making it less and less relatable. By hiding the historical nature of Matan Torah and telling it as a timeless story, we are inspired to relive the events of Matan Torah every single day, with the same excitement and enthusiasm that our ancestors had thousands of years ago. To quote Rashi (Shemot 19:1), “the words of Torah should be new to you as if you are receiving them today.” Rabbi Leibtag points out that although we seem to say the same thing by the Pesach Seder — “in every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he left Egypt” — it is clear from context that this is only for the purpose of better understanding the Exodus, not for the inherent purpose of reliving the event.

But if the ambiguity in Chumash helps us better understand the timelessness, relevance, and freshness of Torah, why do Chazal “feel they have the right” (for lack of better words) to institute

Shavuot as Zman Matan Torateinu, the Time of Receiving the Torah? Doesn't that undo the Torah's whole purpose? For this, Rabbi Leibtag suggests, we must turn to the name the Torah does use to speak about Shavuot — the Holiday of the Harvest. The harvest is not an isolated event; it marks the end of the grain-growing season. We see this reflected in the Korbanot that are brought on both Pesach on Shavuot. On Pesach, the Korban Shelamim (for obvious reasons) was accompanied by Matzah (unleavened bread — the beginning of the bread-making process). After bringing the Korban Omer for seven weeks, on Shavuot the Korban Shelamim was brought with Shte'i HaLechem, the two loaves of bread (leavened bread — the end of the bread-making process).

Hashem constructed Yetziat Mitzrayim and Matan Torah (and the weeks in between) in a way that they would correlate to the agricultural seasons. Pesach is the start of the spring, so it was then that we left Egypt (the beginning of our ancestors becoming a people) and it is then that we eat Matzah (the “beginning” bread). Shavuot is the harvest, so it was then that we received the Torah (the end of reaching peoplehood) and it was then that we offered Korbanot with loaves of bread (the “end” bread). So even though the Torah wanted to teach us about the timelessness of Matan Torah by not establishing Shavuot as an obligatory celebration of the Jewish people receiving the Torah, it still hints to the idea of Shavuot being a culmination of something, which led Chazal to establish Shavuot as a customary celebration of this pivotal day in Jewish History.