

Struggle and Supplication: Shavuot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Shavuot is called *Chag Habikurim*, the holiday of the first fruit. How is this relevant today and what is the connection to *Shavuot*, asks Rabbi Hofstедter? Further, asks Rabbi Revivo, if the purpose of the holidays is to forge a connection between Hashem and *Bnei Yisroel*, why is *Shavuot* only one day?

Another offering unique to *Shavuot* was the *shte' halechem*, the two loaves of bread made from the new harvest of wheat. According to the *Sefat Emet*, one loaf represents *Torah* and the other refers to prayer. Rabbi Kanatopsky explains that they are two parallel streams that are necessary for maintaining a fulfilling *Torah* life. One of the loaves represents the truth of halacha while the other represents song and prayer, the emotion and heart of a Jew. The Gemara finds allusions to this in acronyms for *Anochi* in the first of the Ten Commandments, *ne'eman* (truth) and *ne'emah* (pleasantness). The models for these two parallel streams are Moshe who brought the *Torah* to us, and David Hamelech who was born and died on *Shavuot* and who composed *Tehillim*. The *Torah* is referred to as *Torat Moshe*, and David was the embodiment of, *V'ani tefilah*. Each *mitzvah* that a Jew does, must include not only adherence to *halachah*, but the emotional joy of connecting to Hashem.

The Gemara says that the world was created in the merit of Moshe and David. Sichot Eliyahu cites the *Torah* command not to forget what we saw at Sinai. The experience itself

must be remembered. It taught us not only to believe in Hashem, but also in Moshe as the truthful transmitter of His word. It taught us that while the world was created with Ten Utterances in the beginning, it is maintained since then through these Ten Utterances. We see that the hidden element of the physical existence of the world (*ha Olam*) is its spiritual component. Nothing is random. Just as Hashem has created it, so does He maintain it. Each year *Shavuot* concretizes this notion. The Peninei Chen explains that although the people saw and heard all the pomp at Sinai, at the center was the smoke and fog. It was precisely within the fog that Hashem was found. Moshe entered this darkness, and there he encountered God. This is what we must never forget, that in the darkest of times, we can see Hashem and move forward with the light of *Torah*. In fact, on Rosh Hashanah in the *brachah* of *Shofrot* we say, "You revealed Yourself in thick clouds of purity (clarity)." How could one get clarity in such darkness? The Tolna Rebbe explains that the *Torah* was given in darkness and under pressure because we are meant to accept the *Torah* even when we feel it as a yoke. It is when we break through the darkness that we can see Hashem with clarity.

Rabbi Biederman cites the *Chasam Sofer* on *Megilat Ruth*. When Naomi and Ruth returned to *Beit Lechem*, all the townspeople came out to accompany Boaz as he went to bury his wife. Naomi felt her death as a severe blow as she had hoped to approach her relative for

help. Now who would assist her? But in truth Hashem was setting the stage for her salvation and all of *Bnei Yisroel*. The death of Mrs. Boaz was not darkness, but the beginning of the light, so that Boaz could marry Ruth and create the future Davidic Dynasty. *Yom Habikurim* teaches us that the natural world all comes from the Creator. Everything is tailor made for my benefit, even if I cannot see it, even if I cannot bring *Bikurim* today.

Rabbi Tatz quotes the Rambam to explain why *Shavuot* is only one day. When one is lost on a dark path, one momentary flash of light will be enough to find the right direction. *Shavuot* is that flash of light that helps us find God through the dark paths of life. Our prayers on *Shavuot* are extremely powerful. After all, it represents the marriage of the King with His beloved *Bnei Yisroel*, say Rabbi Meislisch, when He is inclined to bestow gifts. All we need do is ask. And one of the most powerful prayers is *Ahavah Rabbah* which incorporates so many of our requests for spiritual growth. *Shavuot* is the call of *tefilah* and *Torah*. Since David is the embodiment of *tefilah*, we harness his power in our prayers. Some have the custom to recite all of *Tehillim*. The *Mussaf Amidah* of *Shavuot* has the same power as *Neilah*, writes Rabbi Pincus. We ask that Hashem purify our hearts and make His words sweet in our mouths. It is not a choice between *Torah* and *tefilah*, between Moshe and David that makes *Shavuot* so powerful; it is the combination of the two.

Part 2A- Why Do you Work

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justen Treger

On a basic level, most people especially at the start of their career say they work to put food on the table. While that's true it's not the end reason. Many people earn much more money than they need and continue to work. And if you're honest, you'd probably admit you'd do the same.

When I was a young *avrech*, I thought if I had enough money to retire, I'd stop working and go learn. Today I know I wouldn't do it and the reason why, bothered me. So I began to ask

people about it. People said - Work is the place where I feel fulfilled, where all my aspirations and ambition is expressed. But it wasn't exactly the answer I was looking for. So, I asked my boss this question and he said- "I came from a poor home and I wanted to make sure my family wasn't in that position. So, I worked day and night so I could assure my family's stability. And when I reached that goal, I wanted to work so I could improve my family's lifestyle a bit more. Then I wanted more niceties. Now I've got all that and I'm still

working. Except now I want to change the world with the money I make."

I remember sitting in the room and thinking, his reason for working changed throughout his life. There seemed to be no constant answer. I thought about it some more and then Hashem gifted me with clarity. The one common thread at every stage was more money. There was a reason to justify why you needed more money and that reason had to change once you hit certain hurdles in life, but the one goal was- I

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need more money and that's why I am working.

Until you and me can acknowledge that we work because we want more money, we can't really move forward. It's the basic draw driving everything. The joy and satisfaction in business comes from the opportunity it presents to use our talents, but at the root of it is the need to make more money. This is not an easy thing to acknowledge especially in the frum world where it's seen as a base

physical need. But the drive is beating within everyone of us and we need to acknowledge it and not fight it.

The Even Sheleima writes, even people who are Bnei Torah and have got *yirat shamayim* get caught in the trap of desire for money. At the outset a person reasons that it's very necessary to achieve stability in life and to build Hashem's world. The Mishna says, "Your Torah will flourish if you work." Then he reasons that he needs those extra comforts to broaden his mind so his Torah learning will

benefit. Then he further reasons- I need to start putting away money for retirement or if I fall sick...

So you say- It's all for learning, but in reality it's all for money; just you cant say that, so you dress it in a very noble garb. But when you acknowledge that you want more money and that's why you're at work you can begin to explore this drive. In the next shiur we will further discuss this gift Hashem gave us and how to harness it for *avodat Hashem*.

Preparing for Shavuot Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

There are endless stories of converts throughout the generations who sacrificed a great deal, who reached the lofty level of *hineni*- Regardless of what the consequences, I'm here to serve you. There are 7 weeks of preparation, inner detachment from physicality, acceptance of whatever Hashem wants from us. But who can say that he's fully prepared? Even the smallest change is difficult. We have to get out of *Mitzrayim* and get to *Shavuot* in 49 days. How is that possible?

The answer is in Parshat Reah which refers to the holiday as *Shavuot* not *Shabbatot*. This hints to the future *Shavuot* after *Kabalat HaTorah*. The receiving of the *Torah* will be for each individual on his level. Hashem will judge me- Who am I? How did I prepare myself to receive the *Torah* based on my capacities? Hashem will fill up our spiritual resource to the extent that we show our willingness to receive. The first *Shavuot* was a gift-*Shabbatot*. The future Shavuots are weeks. I have to toil and according to how much I prepare myself, that is what I will get. *Temimot* is not mentioned here. It is not humanly possible to perfectly rectify the world.

But Hashem looks at our efforts and our commitment to the future and rewards us accordingly.

The Nesivos Sholom explains, on *Shavuot* the fruits of the trees are judged on a conceptual level. This means that while Rosh Hashana is the day when physical allocations are decided, *Shavuot* signifies the fruits of life, it is the day when we are judged and gifted with the spiritual strengths to achieve our ultimate aspirations. It could express itself in many ways. It could be moments of special clarity or Hashem giving us extra *siyata d'shmaya* to come closer to Him. He can bring us a *sefer* that inspires us to grow or role models that come into our life and give us the ability to ascend higher. The amount of spiritual gifts we will receive is dependent on our preparations. But can I really fully prepare?

When the *Torah* discusses *Matan Torah* it says, "It was on the third day as morning dawned..." The *Shem MiShmuel* quotes the *Zohar* that this is associated with another thing that happened in the morning - *Avraham* arising and going to the *akeida*. On *Shavuot*, the merit of *Avraham* is awakened. *Avraham*

lived in an era of darkness. No one recognized Hashem. People saw only physicality, even the idols were humanized. And Avraham created a different reality, a new morning. There is a special power of renewal on *Shavuot*. We aren't judged based on what we accomplished, but on our commitment to the future. If we can say- Hashem my aspiration is to become one with You, then even if we're only taking small steps toward the goal, Hashem will give us the ability to get there. If we are bringing a *mincha chadasha l'Hashem* -a new offering, a commitment which creates a new reality, then Hashem will be with us in the process and help us get to *Har Sinai*.

Hashem tells *Klal Yisrael*, "I carried you on the wings of eagles." As the eagle ages, its feathers falls off and he grows new ones. That is *Shavuot*. We'll experience a speedy ascent, but we have to make the initial commitment. *Shavuot* can also mean oaths. We commit ourselves to Hashem and He commits himself to us. Hashem will never exchange us with another nation. In return, we commit ourselves to using our spiritual gifts to bring the world to its purpose.