



Shenk Shul
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5780

Shenk Shul Shavuot Dvar Torah Packet



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Although we cannot have our normally scheduled programming together, we have dvrei torah and some recipes from community members for your enjoyment. — Shenk Shul

Refrain—Rabbi Matt LeVee: Rabbi, Shenk Shul

The Festival of Shavuot as it appears in the Torah is often referred to as Festival of Weeks or Festival of the First Fruits (see parshat Emor, Pinchas and Re'eh). Targum Onkelos is the first to use the language of "aztaret" meaning, refrain, stop or hold back, when referring to Shavuot. Actually almost exclusively within the Oral Torah (mishnah and talmud) the name used for Shavuot is Aztaret. How we refer to a thing and the name itself is very telling of the nature of that "thing itself." This idea is found in regards to Adam HaRishon naming every creature (see the second Rashi on Bereshit 2:19). What is the meaning of the rabbinic name given to Shavuot; Aztaret-*refrain*? And what does it teach us about this festival itself? This essay presents the approach of the Kedushat Levi (Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev, born 1740) on Shavuot.

Our festivals can be divided into two general aspects of their practice. The affirmative aspects, to do and the refraining aspects specifically not doing creative work. For example Pesach has the positive mitzvah of eating matzah additionally there is a refraining from creative work. Sukkot we take a lulav and etrog and sit in a sukkah additionally we refrain from creative work. When it comes to Shavuot there is no affirmation, there is no unique positive commandment just the negative of refraining from creative work. On the other two festivals of assent there are days of chol hamoed between yom tov in which the halachic concept of refraining is removed (to a degree) part of the holiday is chol (not refraining). On Shavuot there is no chol hamoed, only yom tov, only refrainment. And so we have a name associated with the only practice recognizable on this festival: the refrain of creative work, aztaret.

Festivals generally are named on account of a specific action or event that took place. On Pesach HaShem passed over our homes and did not afflict His people and so the festival is named Passover. Alternatively we were commanded to take a Pesach offering (Shemot 12:11), a lamb or a goat which the Torah refers to as a Pesach. On Sukkot we dwell in a sukkot on account of the fact we dwelled in sukkot in the desert (according to some). What event took place on Shavuot? We have stopped our count of sefira. Since the second day of Pesach when the previous year's grain has become permissible with the bringing of the korban omer until Shavuot with the bringing of the shte lechem, we are commanded to make a count of forty-nine days (Vayikra 23:15). Upon completion of this count, we have a festival and so Shavuot marks the end (refrainment) of counting. This is very similar to the notion of having a celebration upon the completion of a tractate of talmud or completion of a significant work of study. Shabbat 118b explains that Abaye would make a 'yom tov,' a feast for the rabbis when a student would finish a tractate of learning. This is one source for the common practice to have a meal (seudat mitzvah) upon completion of Torah study and how appropo to mimic such a practice on Shavuot, one on account of the completion of the mitzvah to count and two on the notion for completions of Torah study to come.

We could still ask the question, what event took place on Shavuot? Three days prior to the giving of the Torah, the people of Israel are commanded to refrain themselves from approaching the mountain of Sinai (Shemot 19:12). Although this leads up to Shavuot and is not a distinct action for the festival itself it bears meaning for the festival.

Often when we are struck with love, fear or any substantial emotion it may foster a physical response. The physical response may be a means to concertize an abstract feeling. At moments of great

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inspiration we may find ourselves committing to giant acts beyond our perceived abilities. On account of the inspiration we want to hold that metaphysical concept and manifest it into reality. Think of a wedding, the emotion of love expressed between a chatan and kallah such an abstract metaphysical realization is brought down into the world through the ritual (in part) and celebrations that follow; singing, dancing, eating. The inspiration of the giving of the Torah must have been like nothing imaginable. Shabbat 88a, expresses the angels bringing crowns to the people of Israel, HaShem's words dividing into seventy languages, the mountain itself in a mixture of fire and clouds. How could this ultimate metaphysical reality of emotion be actualized into any physical manifestation my mere human? Only by the act of refraining.

Just as certain emotions make us speechless, the revelations at Sinai left us stunned. The rabbinic voice often expresses the people's perspective while the Torah is HaShem's expression. The people call this holiday 'Refrain,' as it was the only practice we could conceive after such inspiration. On this Shavuot we all have a much greater understanding of how the refrainment of actions can be impactful.

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For Your Own Good: Torah, Mitzvot, and Quarantine—Ben Kohane

When social distancing was first instituted, beyond it being the right thing to do to listen to medical experts and governmental authorities, I among many welcomed the opportunity to escape the daily monotony of early morning alarms, crowded commutes, and packed lunches. However, that enthusiasm has waned, as weeks have turned into months and we are still unfortunately unable to come together for work, social, and congregational gatherings. For our own good and for the health of the country, we are sadly still directed to restrict our movements and isolate ourselves at home.

Thousands of years ago, our ancient ancestors went through a similar struggle of reluctant acceptance when presented with the Torah at Mount Sinai, which we commemorate this and every Shavuot. The Torah relates in several places how excited the Jews were at first to receive G-d's Torah, proclaiming "*na'aseh v'nishma*" - "we will do and we will hear" (Exodus 24:17). However, a well-known Gemara in Masechet Shabbat (88a) chronicles a more coercive scene at the foot of Har Sinai. When the Jews "stood at the lowermost part of the mountain" (Exodus 19:17), Rabbi Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa homiletically explains that the people were actually positioned beneath the mountain, that Hashem "*kaffah aleihem har k'giggis*" - "overturned the mountain above them like a barrel" - and declared that if they were to accept the Torah, all would be good; otherwise, they would be buried right then and there. Beyond the divine manifestation of power - and recall, in just the previous verse, the Midrash recounts how the Jews had seen thunder and heard lightning - why was it necessary for Hashem to force the Torah upon the Jews, especially if they had already eagerly expressed their willingness to accept it?

Rav Hershel Shachter, quoting the Medrash Tanchuma on Parshat Noach, provides an interesting resolution to this seeming contradiction. While the Jews were ready to take on the *Torah Shebichtav*, the Written Torah accompanied by the teachings directly transmitted to Moshe from G-d, they were less enthusiastic about accepting the rabbinical interpretations and derivations of the *Torah Sheba'al Peh*, the Oral Torah that in their eyes was not Divine. Relying on a legislative network of human beings raised questions of ideological subservience for a people who just a few years prior had been literal slaves in Egypt. How could they accept that some individuals would have the intelligence and power to analyze and enact law for an entire nation? It was these worries which G-d had to suppress with his coercive threats. Whether we like it or not, Rav Shachter concludes, G-d expects us to follow all the positions set forth by the rabbis in interpreting the Torah.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, in several of his commentaries on the book of Exodus, discusses the wording used to proclaim the Jews' readiness to accept the Torah, "*na'aseh v'nishma*." He writes that the people's declaration included both *asiyah* and *shemiyah*, doing and understanding. While Judaism may first and foremost be a religion of belief, the way we manifest our faith is often through action, through our observance of required commandments, the mitzvot. Indeed, Judaism is unique in its upholding of deed as well as creed.

Reflecting these evaluations back to our current situation is clear. While quarantine drags on and as much as we may want to disregard the judgement of our fellow humans and take matters into our own hands, we must have faith in their expert analysis and rely upon their experienced judgement when the right time will be to emerge from isolation and see our friends and family once again. We cannot just have faith that the crisis will be resolved, we must do what we can to realize that goal, even if that means not doing anything at all. Wishing you all a healthy and safe Shavuot.

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Loyalty in Megilat Rut

One of the main themes that appears in Megillat Rut is chessed. Now, I know that since we started learning about it, whether as children or not, we generally translate chessed as kindness. In Tanach, though, that is not what it means. When the concept comes up, it is better understood as loyalty.

The sefer begins and ends with displays of loyalty. Orpah and especially Rut show loyalty by starting the journey with their mother-in-law back to a land where they had never been, where they would be considered outsiders. In this case, their chessed is rejected by Naomi, who wants them to stay in Moav, and after Rut will not turn back, she does not talk to her at all on the remainder of the journey back to Israel.

Boaz is the epitome of loyalty. As soon as he heard that he was related to her, he immediately turned to her and addressed her as he would anyone else. Rut expected no recognition, and asked Boaz why he even paid attention to her in the first place. He responds by highlighting her loyalty to Naomi and her family. And because of that connection, he goes above and beyond what halachah and social norms dictate is due to a gleaner, giving her extra grain and allowing her to join in the meals of his workers.

When Rut wakes Boaz in the middle of the night, his first words are, “You are blessed to Hashem my daughter, your subsequent loyalty is greater than your first, that you didn’t go after the young men, whether rich or poor”. From his perspective, Rut is the one who is performing the chessed, towards him.

As the end of the book emphasizes, the Davidic dynasty is descended from the child of Rut and Boaz. David showed this same quality of loyalty before and during his reign. He refuses to harm Shaul, out of a sense of loyalty that was due to the one whom Hashem anointed. After a successful raid on Amalek while running away from Shaul, David insisted that the spoils be shared equally, rather than being split only among the men who fought in that battle. He realized his duty to reward even the members of his group who stayed back to make sure nothing of theirs got stolen. He took care of Mefiboshet, a descendent of Shaul, because his father, Yonatan, had been a friend to and helped David.

King Yoshiyahu, near the end of the period of the first Beit HaMikdash, also showed loyalty. He was told that no matter what he did, destruction would come. All he could do was push it off. However, he showed chessed towards his people by insisting on widespread teshuvah in spite of that prophecy. He is the only king who is compared to David with no exceptions. Because of his loyalty to Hashem, his people, and what he believed to be right, he was the last good king of Yehudah. The Davidic line was preserved through him and his children.

As we navigate a world full of unease, we should look at the traits of the line of Rut and Boaz and find our own ways to incorporate those values of chessed. Because from the line of Rut and Boaz, David, and Yoshiyahu mashiach will come. By creating a world of people who look to connect, help, and do whatever they can for others out of a sense of loyalty, we prepare the world to accept the traits of ben David.

all translations are my own

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Does Shavuot Have any Special Mitzvot?

Can you think of any Biblical mitzvot specific to Shavuot? I am thinking about activities that are different from ones done on other holidays even if they are independent mitzvot (see Sefer HaChinuch 308, 309 on abstaining from work on Shavuot).

The most common observances that we'll think of may include eating dairy (custom), reading Ten Commandments (many assume all of Torah reading except Zachor is Rabbinic; see Tosafot Megillah 17b), and staying up all night learning (custom).

The answer is that there is likely no Biblical mitzvah nowadays specific to this holiday, but there were several at the time of the Beit Hamikdash. These included bringing the mussaf offering (Chinuch 404) and bringing the two loaves of chametz from new wheat (שתי הלחם) along with extra burnt-offerings, sin-offering, and peace offering (קרבן שלמים) (Chinuch 307).

I would like to talk about this peace offering. What is unique about it?

This is the only peace offering that is communal (Rashi Zevachim 54b). The other peace offerings such as the thanksgiving offering or offerings brought as part of visiting the Beit Hamikdash on Yom Tov are individual offerings.

This affects who is allowed to eat it. In the case of most peace offerings, the parts of the animal that are not offered on the altar are split between the kohanim (some portions) and the people who brought it (nearly the whole animal). However, the two lambs brought on Shavuot - in addition to being communal peace offerings, are considered most holy (קדשים קלים) and may therefore be eaten only by male Kohanim (as representatives of the nation).

What is the reason for this offering? The Torah doesn't give a reason, but the commentators on Parshat Emor give some explanations. The Seforno says that the two lambs are brought along with the שתי הלחם as a kind of thanksgiving offering. What are we thanking Hashem for? He, as well as the Ramban, say for protecting the harvest. The Ramban also says that because Shavuot is the day of the giving of the Torah and an עצרה (usually translated as day of gathering or day of restraint), we bring a קרבן תודה. He doesn't explain why this is, but I would like to suggest that we thank Hashem because we received the Torah that helps us guide our lives throughout all of the ups and downs just like the thanksgiving offering was given upon surviving dangerous travels, illness, and imprisonment.

Although we don't have the Beit Hamikdash and don't bring these offerings nowadays, we can still take the opportunity to thank Hashem for giving us the Torah as well as for supporting us throughout all the difficulties and successes in our lives.

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Thoughts on the Omer Year 5780—Leora Lasson

On the second night of the seder, we began the first counting of the Omer. From then on, we found ourselves counting up to the days of Shavuot when we prepare to receive the Torah. During the time between Pesach and Shavuot, some have a custom to study the 48 ways of wisdom. So let's take a look at one of those ways and how it applies in our own lives.

We start off with Yisro, who came to give advice to Moshe, and Moshe sends him away. The next pasuk indicates that it is "bachodesh hashlishi," when Bnei Yisrael came to Har Sinai and accepted the Torah. The sequential order was that first, Moshe sent Yisro away, and then the Jewish people received the Torah.

The question is, why did Moshe send Yisro away? Why couldn't he be there to witness this monumental moment?

The Yalkut Shimoni comments as follows. Moshe says, my sons were subjugated in Mitzrayim. Yet, Yisro was home in Midyan and wasn't building and working as a slave in Mitzrayim.

In order to be worthy of being at Matan Torah, working and laboring in Mitzrayim apparently was a prerequisite. That presents a significant problem because we know that Shevet Levi were not part of the subjugation and hard work. Yet we know that of course they were present at Matan Torah.

Yes, it is in fact true that Shevet Levi did not take part in the servitude of Mitzrayim. However the pasuk says "Eileh Moshe bnei Adam" it says the names of the different tribes etc. But with Levi it says here are the names of the sons of Levi. There appears to be an emphasis on the names of the son's of Levi.

The Shlah Hakadosh writes- The Torah is coming to stress that the custom was for Shevet Levi to name their children after the subjugation of the labor in Mitzrayim.

For example:

Gershon-We are strangers in this land.

Kahat- From the difficult work they are grinding their teeth.

Marari- Which means bitter

Furthermore, the Yalkut Shimoni comments that the name "Miriam" represents bitterness. An example of another family was named "Livni"- named after the bricks.

What happened with Moshe? The pasuk says he went out and saw the burden of Bnei Yisrael and wanted to experience what they were doing. The Midrash in Shmot Raba says he gave a shoulder to every person to help out. He wanted to feel the pain of his brothers.

Therefore, we see that Shevet Levi was ultimately allowed to be at Matan Torah because they went out of their way to feel the pain.

Levi was exempt because Pharaoh saw in the astrology that the savior of the Jews was going to come from this group. And if the savior is supposed to come from this group, and he didn't cause them pain, then there will be no motivation to save his brethren. But with Jews, even if we don't physically feel the pain, we emotionally feel the pain of our brothers as if one was suffering himself.

During World War I, it was known that the Chofetz Chaim would not sleep on a bed. He slept on a bench instead because he said "how could I be comfortable when all these people are being murdered?"

When Yosef and Binyamin finally reunited after so many years, they cried in each other's shoulders. Yosef saw the two Batei Mikdash in the chelek of Binyamin that were going to be destroyed and Binyamin saw that the Mishkan in Yosef's chalek that was going to be destroyed. Why were they crying on each other? Sometimes when your own world is destroyed, there is no point of crying. But

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when your friend is in tza'ar, that is when you need to feel their pain and cry with him.

This is one of the 48 ways with which to receive the Torah. If we only care about our own lives, and we can't look outside ourselves, we will not be ready to receive the Torah.

That is what Shevet Levi did in Mitzrayim. When one is selfish and thinks about one's own world, it doesn't work. ONLY, when the person enters into someone else's world, then the Jewish people are like one. "Vayichan sham Yisrael negged hahar" is the description of how Bnei Yisrael were at Matan Torah.

Many times, we attempt to focus on our own growth and learning which has its place. However we need to be able to also take a look outside of ourselves. This includes looking around for the people struggling that might need our encouragement and support.

This year, we find ourselves in an unprecedented time during a global pandemic. Often the common response in such scenarios is to behave selfishly, hoarding toilet paper, masks etc. Our first instinct is to tell us that we need to take care of ourselves, and our own family members. However, let us remember how 49 days earlier, when we broke the matza during Yachatz, it was a symbolization of us breaking off a piece for the less fortunate, or those suffering in difficult circumstances.

Through this, one can perhaps rectify the sins of Rabbi Akiva's students, and prepare ourselves to accept the Torah on Shavuot.

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Geirus in the Time of Geulah—David Tanner

Geirus is one of the central themes of Shavuot. We read Megillas Rus, which describes Rus' joining the Jewish people, and commemorate Matan Torah, when the Jewish nation collectively "converted" to Judaism with the acceptance of the Torah (in fact, Chazal learn certain aspects of hilchos geirus from the Chumash's description of Matan Torah). But the question I've long wondered about is, is geirus the ideal? As Jews, do we actively seek the conversion of Gentiles?

The short answer is clearly no. The Gemara in Yevamos 47a says that not only do we not actively encourage non-Jews to convert, but we actually initially discourage them if they try to do so. The answer to our question seems very simple then; case closed. But among other religions, lehavdil, part of their doctrine is that in messianic times, all of humanity will convert to their religion. Do we believe such a thing? Will non-Jews convert when mashiach comes?

There is a shocking Gemara in Avodah Zarah which describes the coming of mashiach (based on the second perek of Tehillim):

Rabbi Yosei says: In the future, the nations of the world will come and convert. The Gemara asks: And do we accept them as converts at that time? But isn't it taught in another baraita: The court does not accept converts in the days of the Messiah; similarly, they did not accept converts either in the days of David or in the days of Solomon, due to a concern that these people wanted to convert for ulterior motives, because the Jewish people were mighty and respected?

Rather, Rabbi Yosei means that they become converts who have attached themselves (geirim gerurim) to the Jewish people, and they don phylacteries on their heads, phylacteries on their arms, place ritual fringes on their garments, and a mezuzah in their doorways.

When these converts see the war of Gog and Magog, every convert of this sort will say to Gog and Magog: For what purpose did you come? They will say to him: We came to fight against the Lord and against His Messiah, as it is stated: "Why are the nations in an uproar? And why do the peoples mutter in vain. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Messiah" (Psalms 2:1-2).

And then every one of these converts will tear loose his sign of performance of a mitzva and leave, as it is stated: "Let us tear their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psalms 2:3). And the Holy One, Blessed be He, sits and makes sport, i.e., laughs or rejoices, as it is stated: "He that sits in heaven makes sport, the Lord has them in derision" (Psalms 2:4).

This Gemara seems to say that we will absolutely reject any geirim at the time of mashiach, and, whatever it means, Hashem Himself will laugh at those who try to do so for ulterior motives. The Meiri, however, understands this as saying that we will very carefully investigate the motives of any converts, but if they pass the vetting they will actually be accepted.

The question this Gemara raises is, what is the alternative to conversion? There are countless places in Tanach and davening where we pray that Hashem remove idol worship from the earth and make all nations recognize Him as God (for example, the second perek of Yeshayahu, much of the Yom Kippur tefillos, and the prayer Aleinu Leshabeiach recited thrice daily). By what mechanism will they do this if not via geirus?

The answer seems to be, that there is no difference between now and messianic times when it comes to this question. Judaism's vision for non-Jews is the observance of the Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach: the prohibitions of murder, sexual immorality, idolatry, blasphemy, stealing, eating eiver min hachai, and the obligation to establish a system of laws. The Rambam says in Hilchos Melachim 8:11 that a non-Jew who accepts these mitzvos before a beis din and is careful to observe them is called a

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ger toshav, is considered one of the chasidei umos ha'olam, and has a share in olam haba.

The institution of ger toshav is not merely theoretical or ancient. Even today, there are organizations (such as Chabad and the Noahide World Center in Israel) which encourage observance of the Sheva Mitzvos and the formation of "Noahide communities," such as the ones in the Philippines, which in 2018 had nearly 2000 members! These organizations, both of which hope to bring about the geulah through their efforts, have turned the arcane concept of ger toshav into a reality for many non-Jews worldwide.

As we celebrate the Torah and our status as Am Yisrael this Shavuot, let us contemplate that the Torah's wisdom on how to live a Godly life applies not only to us, but, in a different form, to all of humanity. Rather than looking to convert others, this should reinforce in our minds the special privilege we have in being Jewish and thereby tasked with bringing the Torah's messages to the whole world. Chag Sameach.

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The Many Names of Shavuot—The Goldson Family

The Festival of Shavuot is known under many different names. Although these names are all synonyms for the holiday, each name focuses on a different aspect of Shavuot, and, by elaborating on the meanings of the holiday's different names, we can gain a better appreciation for the ideas associated with the holiday.

Its kinda like nicknames, when you have an endearing name for someone, it shows a kind of love or caring you might have for them - other than some random person you meet off the street.

Ask: What are the different names for the Yom Tov — Festival?

The Yom Tov has five different names. In the Torah SheBichtav, the Yom Tov is called by three different names.

1) Chag Shavuot — Festival of Shavuot: וְהָיָה שִׁבְעַת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָךְ בְּכוּרֵי קִצִּיר הַטִּיבִים: You shall make a Festival of Weeks for yourself with the first-fruits of the wheat harvest. (Shemot 34:22)
וְעָשִׂיתָ חַג שִׁבְעוֹת לַיהוָה: Then you shall make a Festival of Shavuot for Hashem your G-d. (Devarim 16:10)

2) Yom HaBikkurim — Day of the First-Fruits:

וּבְיוֹם הַבִּיקוּרִים בְּהַקְרִיבְכֶם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה: On the day of the first-fruits, when you offer a new meal-offering to Hashem, on your [Festival of] Weeks, it shall be a holy convocation to you. (Bamidbar 28:26)

3) Chag Hakatzir — Festival of Harvest:

וְהָיָה חַג הַקִּצִּיר בְּכוּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע בַּשָּׂדֶה: And the Festival of Harvest of the first-fruits of your labors that you sow in the field. (Shemot 23:16)

4) Atzeret: In the Mishnah, (Rosh Hashanah 16a) and Gemara (Pesachim 68b) it is called “Atzeret.”: The Targum to Bamidbar 28:26, interprets the word “beshavu’oteichem” — “your Festival of Weeks” — “be’atzrateichon.”

5) Zeman Matan Torateinu: In the Kiddush and Amidah prayers recited during Yom Tov, it is referred to as “zeman matan Torateinu” — “the time of the giving of our Torah.”
Today we are going to focus on the name, Chag HaAtzeret.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810) writes in Kedushat Levi that the reason behind calling the holiday Shavuot, and calling the holiday Atzeret is the same. Both names view the holiday in the context of completing a certain span of time, Shavuot as completing the weeks leading up from Pesach, and Atzeret as the festive finale of Pesach itself.

The Hebrew word, Atzeret, comes from the word Atzor. You might find this on a stop sign in Israel - because it means both “stop” and “gather”. We can take these two and apply them to Matan Torah, the Jews stopped (as in refrained from touching the mountain) and gathered, (as in gathering together to accept the Torah from Hashem).

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky (1886-1976) notes that the two holidays which are called Atzeret (the eighth day of Succot and seventh day of Pesach) are notable in that they do not have any specific commandments associated with them. This is in contrast to every other holiday prescribed by the Bible, which has at least one specific mitzvah that is to be done: On (at least) the first day of Succot one must take the lulav; on the first day of Pesach one must eat matzah; on Rosh Hashana, blow the shofar; on Yom Kippur, fast.

But on the days called Atzeret the only demand made of celebrants is to refrain — “stop” — from doing work.

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Following this thought, Rabbi Abramsky notes that when the Beit Hamikdash stood, the holiday of Shavuot also had a special commandment associated with it, i.e. offering two goats and two leavened loaves (Lev. 23:16-20). However, when the First Temple was destroyed and this commandment was no longer in effect, the holiday of Shavuot lost its special commandment and became like the eighth day of Succot and seventh day of Pesach, which have only a prohibition against doing work, but no special commandment to do something. For this reason, in later times, people began to call Shavuot, “Atzeret”.

So we have no commandment to do anything on Shavuot, rather simply a commandment against doing something. What can we learn? What can we do? What can we take away from this?

As we said before: “Shavuot” means “weeks”: From the time the Jews left Egypt they waited for seven weeks and eagerly counted the days in anticipation of the day when they would be worthy of receiving the Torah. We, too, count Sefirah for seven weeks starting from the night following the first day of Pesach, and then we celebrate the Festival of “Shavuot” — “Weeks.” “Shavuot” also means “promises”: When Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish people, they promised to obey it and remain faithful to Him. In return, Hashem promised that He would cherish the Jews and not exchange them for any other people.

So during this crazy time, where everything is literally stopped - we can’t do anything, go outside, we are stopped and focusing on this chag - we can take a moment to atzer - gather our thoughts and think about how we want to use this time to improve and build off this.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chassidut, interpreted the verse, “ ‘You shall make the Festival of Shavuot’ ” (Devarim 16:10) as follows: ‘Shavuot’ in Yiddish means ‘vachen’ — ‘weeks’ — and is the root of the word ‘vachedigkeit’ — the quality of weekdays, i.e. secularism or profaneness — and this must be converted into a festival.” The message is that one should endeavor to change and elevate vachedigkeit (the profane) into Yom Tov, for the goal of Torah is to sanctify the mundane.

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Under the Mountain: When did we actually accept the Torah

For those learning Daf Yomi, you will soon see a world famous Aagaadic Gemara that has caused much ink to be spilled on its behalf. This gemara is difficult to understand and truly can serve as a difficulty for aspects of our theology. The gemara I am referring to can be found on .א"א. The gemara expounds upon שמות יט:יז which states

"ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלהים מן ההמה ויתצבו בתחתית ההר" – what does it mean that Bnei Yisroel stood “under the mountain?”

א"ר אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כנגיית ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב "ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם

“Rav Avdimi the son of Chama the son of Chasa said that it is to teach us that Hashem flipped over the mountain like a barrel and said to Bnei Yisroel- if you accept the torah, great! But if not, there will be your graves.”

The gemara continues in an even more challenging fashion:

א"ר אחא בר יעקב מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא אמר רבא אעפ"כ הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש דכתיב קימו וקבלו "היהודים קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר

“Rav Acha the son of Yaakov says that it is from here that there is a strong caveat to fulfilling the Torah”- since we were coerced.

However, “Rava says that Bnei Yisroel accepted the Torah again in the days of Achashveirosh, as it says (אסתר ט:כז) קימו וקבלו היהודים, that Bnei Yisroel took upon themselves that which they had accepted earlier- meaning the Torah.”

This gemara is challenging for several reasons. On a basic level, we know from שמות כד:ז that Bnei Yisroel uttered the famous words נעשה ונשמע – we will do then we will listen. Bnei Yisroel were so ready to accept the Torah that they did not even want to hear what was in it! We teach this to our youngest of children, how could this gemara say that we were coerced!

Not only that, the very same gemara continues and says (this gemara can also be found in עבודה זרה (זרה)

דאמר ריש לקיש מאי דכתיב ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי ה' יתירה למה לי מלמד שהתנה הקב"ה עם מעשה בראשית ואמר "להם אם ישראל מקבלים התורה אתם מתקיימין ואם לאו אני מחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו

Reish Lakish says, why does the posuk says and it was evening and day the 6th day- why do I have the extra letter ה? This teaches us that Hashem made a condition with the world and said if Bnei Yisroel accept the Torah then the world will continue and if not, then the world will return to pre-creation status.

How does this condition make any sense if Bnei Yisroel were coerced to accept the Torah?! Obviously, we were going to say yes!

Furthermore, the gemara in ע"א עבודה זרה דף says ב"ב אלא כך אומרים לפניו רבש"ע כלום כפית עלינו הר כנגיית ולא קבלנוהו כמו שעשית לישראל"

The other nations of the world will say to Hashem “did you overturn the mountain on us like You did for Bnei Yisroel?”

The Gemara here is dealing with how the other nations feel that they were given the “short straw” in this world and they claim that they never were coerced into getting the Torah like Bnei Yisroel was- implying that they were not given a fair chance. The gemara there goes through why these claims are unfounded but for our purposes, the question stands- how could it be that we were coerced into accepting the Torah!

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Finally, one of the fundamentals in Judaism is the concept of בחירה חפשית - Free Will. The fact that we as humans have free will is at the core of our beliefs, literally placed within us during the creation of humankind as many explain in פרק א of בראשית. If human beings have free will, how could it be that the most seminal moment in our history, literally the moment that made us Jews happened against our will!

Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank Z"l answers these questions in מקראי קודש. It could not be that we were coerced into accepting the Torah, however, this is what occurred; the mountain was flipped over us. He explains as follow:

At the end of Torah, Moshe blesses Bnei Yisroel, the 3rd פסוק in הברכה reads as "אף חַבְב עַמִּים כָּל־קִדְשׁוֹ בְיָדְךָ וְהֵם תָּכוּ לְרַגְלְךָ יִשְׂא מְדַבְרֶתֶיךָ"

"Lover, indeed, the people are holy in Your hand, they followed You and accepted Your Words" Rashi on תָּכוּ לְרַגְלְךָ explains that Bnei Yisroel are deserving of all blessing this b/c we took it upon ourselves to stand underneath the mountain. Meaning that Bnei Yisroel requested to have the mountain flipped over them like a barrel. The question is why, why did we request to put ourselves in a life and death situation if we had already said וְנִעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע?

תוספות on our gemara "כפה עליהן הר כגיגית" explains that we requested for Hashem to flip the mountain over us b/c we were afraid of saying no. Perhaps after we now said וְנִעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע we would regret our decision and want to back out. Why would we back out? The Torah speaks of the awesome event that was מתן תורה in שמות כ:טו-יז

"וְכָל־הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת־הַלַּפִּידִם וְאֶת־קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת־הַהָר עֹשֵׂן וְיָרָא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמָדוּ מֵרָחֵק וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־יְהוָה לֹא־דַבֵּר אִתָּנוּ עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאֵל־יִדְבַר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים כִּי־נָמוּת"

All the people saw the sounds, the flames, the blasts of the shofar, the mountain in smoke, they trembled, and they stood at distance. They said to Moshe- you should speak to us and we will listen, and Hashem should not speak with us anymore for we will die.

Bnei Yisroel was afraid that once all the flames started to appear that there would be buyer's remorse and we would want to return the Torah out of fear. That is why we asked of Hashem to hold the mountain overhead. With free will we chose to accept the Torah and with free will we asked to be put into a situation in which we could not revoke our choice. It is in this way that we accepted the Torah. Fearful of what was to come, we asked to be placed in a situation in which we could not say no.

Often in life, we are put into situations that may not seem like the best for us or situations that make us nervous/fearful. However, it is precisely these types of situations with which we rise. During these last few months, there are few words that can accurately describe what the world has been going through. People losing loved ones, occupations, literal lives torn apart by this virus, and yet our faith has remained. Our schools and shuls have closed and yet people continue to daven and learn. The lengths in which people have gone to adapt to the situation cannot be matched. Zoom bar/bat mitzvahs, shiurim, weddings, shivas, bris's- every aspect of Jewish life has continued. Quarantine has been one of the most challenging periods of all our lives and yet as we emerge from it, we are better parents, better siblings, better children, better co-workers, and just better people.

Unlike Matan Torah, no one asked for this, no one would ever want to be stuck inside for months on end along with all the incredible loss that our community has endured. Yet, for some of us, this exactly what we needed to reconnect to our families and our faith. As we approach Matan Torah, we must remember that life may not always go on exactly as we want it to. There are always bumps in the road and challenges that lay ahead. However, like our ancestors we must accept these challenges and do whatever we can do push through them. The power displayed at Matan Torah prompted us to

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say do not let our fear get the better of us, make us stay with it and accept the Torah. Now it is our mission to do the same, we may be apart, but we will always be together.

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Is it Okay to Abstain from Meat on Shavuot and Shabbat Shavuot?—Gabby Miller

It is a well-established assumption that a shabbat and yom tov table should include a beautiful roast chicken or succulent cut of meat. That idea is completely turned on its head on Shavuot when we share tables laden with cheesecake, rich lasagna, and other tantalizing dairy delicacies. But is it acceptable to abstain from including chicken and beef in our yom tov meals?

The Rambam states “אכילת בשר ושתית יין בשבת עונג הוא לו”, “eating meat and drinking wine on the Sabbath is a form of pleasure for a person.” According to the Rambam’s opinion, can one fulfill the obligation of oneg shabbat without meat? The Shulchan Aruch maintains that “oneg” is subjective. If an individual feels pain from eating extravagantly on shabbat, for example, he/she is permitted to eat a smaller portion of food. Further, if one feels discomfort from eating even the smallest amount, such as one who fasts during the week and feels pain from eating on shabbat, that individual may continue fasting and need not eat anything at all. Rabbeinu Yonah holds that on shabbat, an onen (one whose immediate relative has died but has not yet been buried) may drink wine and eat meat but is not required to do so if he does not desire. This is another proof that one is not obligated to consume meat in order to fulfill the mitzvah of oneg shabbat.

Now that leniencies have been established regarding the abstention of meat consumption on shabbat, we can analyze the laws surrounding eating meat on yom tov. Regarding yom tov, the Torah, in D’varim, commands “ושמחת בהגך.” The Rambam explains that we observe this commandment by feeding sweets to children and by adults indulging in wine and meat - , לפי שכלל הוא אין שמחה אלא עם בשר , “as a rule, there is no simcha but with meat and wine.” These indulgences help to instill the sweet spirit of the holiday.

The Beit Yosef, however, proves that rejoicing can possibly involve only wine. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah comments that rejoicing in the time of the Beit Hamikdash required eating sacrificial meat but since the destruction of the Temples, it is sufficient to rejoice with wine.

An interesting proof can be found in in the Gemara in Baba Batra. The Chachamim suggested that after the destruction of the Temple, marriage and the consumption of meat should be stopped. Tosafot questions how marriage could be forbidden when it is a מצוה מן התורה . Because Tosafot does not ask the same question about meat, one can infer that eating meat is not a מצוה מן התורה . The Shulchan Aruch therefore states that one is not obligated to eat meat on Yom Tov.

In conclusion, it is certainly permissible to enjoy meals on Shavuot laden with pasta, fish, and cheesecake, but some opinions would urge consuming meat during a meal on yom tov to truly be “ושמחת בהגך.”

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A Consult with Naomi— Sarah Rosenfeld

Spiritual Care professionals, aka Chaplains, work in many domains, caring for the soul of institutions and the individuals they comprise. A central part of professional chaplaincy training involves the “verbatim” process i.e. reconstructing a challenging or interesting patient/client consult and reflecting on the process (often sharing with a small multifaith peer group and accredited supervisor) in order to enhance our professional practice with people of all faiths and none.

Towards the end of the first unit of training, our supervisor invited each of us to imagine a consult with a Biblical Character. Hope you enjoy mine.

Chaplaincy Verbatim

Clinical Site: Moabite Home for the Destitute

Alias or Initials of Resident/Client? Naomi Marah

Date of Visit: Sivan 6, 1080 BCE (Shavuot) **Visit #:** 1st

Referral: Yes from her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

If yes, why? She was deeply concerned about her mother-in-law’s condition and felt it would be helpful if someone could get her to talk about her troubles. (Sidenote: evidence of enmeshed relationship between Dtr in-law and MIL.)

Personal Data:

Age about 50-55 years **Gender** F **Ethnic Background:** Middle Eastern

Family Widow, no surviving children; two daughters-in-law

Occupation Unemployed, homeless **Religion** Jewish

Medical Data:

Date Admitted ~6 days earlier

Diagnosis Depression, nervous condition, fainting spells, thought to be brought on by major stress, anxiety, and poor diet.

Consult

Chaplain1: Good morning. I am Chaplain Sarah. I am just making my rounds and thought I would check in on you. How are you doing today?

NaomiM1: How am I doing? I don't know how to answer that question. I wouldn't even know where to begin.

(Pause)

C2: I see that you are dressed in your street clothes. Are you leaving?

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NM2: Yes. I am going home.

C3: Can you tell me what home means to you?

NM3: Excuse me. I don't understand what you're asking me.

C4: Well, home means different things to different people. For example, for me, home means my favorite chair and other such comforts. I wonder what home means for you?

NM4: Well, for me, home is surely nothing to look forward to. You see, my husband and I and our two sons, Makhlon and Khilion, left Bethlehem about 10 years ago when a famine descended upon our land, and we set forth to the fields of Moab. We had so much back then, before we went into exile: a family, money, servants...really, we were the wealthiest people in town. Everyone admired us. And I had my looks...well I was never a beauty mind you, but I was always pleasant to look at. I was so happy then. I had so much.

I don't want to even think about what awaits me back home in Bethlehem! I can already envision the crowds of people there when I arrive. I am sure they will be aghast at what I have become. They will see that I have turned into a lonely, sad, old woman, a pauper. Oy how they will pity me... or perhaps they will mock me. I just can't bear the thought.

C5: It seems like you've had a tragic reversal of fortune...

NM5: You don't know the half of it. My husband died shortly after we arrived in the land of Moab. Then, there I was, stuck in a place where I had no friends, no family...not even a fellow Jew to be found. I had to mourn alone.

C6: I once had a significant loss in my life, and I know how important it is to have a support system around you to buffer the loss. It must have been terribly lonely to endure such a tragedy without having people to support you..

NM6: (Nods her head in agreement and sighs.) I cannot even begin to tell you how difficult it was for me, having to raise two young sons as a single mother...and in a strange land, no less. And if that wasn't enough of a curse, I had to watch both of my sons intermarry because the only women they met were Moabites. Imagine that I should have two daughters-in-law who are not Jewish...that I, of all people, should not be able to provide future generations of our people!

C7: So you feel cursed... Can you say more about this?

NM7: Yes, I do (She begins to rage...) God is afflicting me. It is so harsh, so unfair that I should suffer like this. Do I deserve this punishment Chaplain?

C8: Why would you think God would punish you?

NM8: I can't get it out of my head that maybe God is paying me back for my husband's wrongdoings...or because I did not do anything to stop him. I should never have let Eli take us out of Israel. We had plenty of money to survive the famine. But I know that the reason he wanted to leave is because he was afraid that we would have to share what we had and then we ourselves would have

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been reduced to poverty...or hungry mobs would have robbed us of our fortune. It was selfish to leave, and I knew that at the time. We turned our backs on them. And now God has driven me into poverty; I suppose that She is making me suffer the misfortune that the others did, those that we left behind. If we had acted more generously, it might all be different now. Maybe She would have spared us.

C9: It sounds like you are feeling some regret...

NM9: I suppose I am..Yes. And actually, I haven't even told you everything. The story gets even worse. First one of my sons died, and then the other one died. (Begins to sob). I don't understand... I was a caring mother, and I sacrificed so much them... I did everything I could to protect them and make the best out of our unhappy circumstances.

C10: My goodness. You've had SO much heartbreak in your life... And I'm also hearing how you gave so much of yourself to protect your sons, and that you were a devoted and nurturing mother.

NM10: But alas, no reward. Here I am...left childless. I don't even have the possibility of ever having a grandchild. Oh, if only I could have had a grandchild! That alone would have given me a reason to live.

C11: I cannot even begin to imagine what it must feel like to have your whole identity stripped from you.

NM11: That is true. Just look at me. I'm a shell of what I once was. It's gotten so that I don't even recognize myself. If someone were to call me by my name, Naomi, at this moment, I doubt that I would even turn around.

C12: it seems like you are finding it impossible to reconcile who you are now with who you were before all these tragedies...

NM12: Yes. That's why I need to leave. Start over. I really have no choice. Both of my daughters-in-law want to leave with me. But I tell them, why leave your home, all that you know, a chance to marry again and have children? Why??? Just to follow an old woman who cannot care for you? Its ridiculous!

I think I have finally talked some sense into one of them, Orpah. It seems she understands that she will be better off if she stays behind. But the other one, Ruth...she has literally been clinging to me...refusing to let go. She claims that she wants to go wherever I go, live wherever I live, die wherever I die. She even wants to convert and become a Jew. I know that she's just being kind, but frankly, the way I feel right now, I just want to be left alone.

C13: I'm wondering if you are feeling so broken that it's hard for you to appreciate or receive any gestures of *chesed* that Ruth might be expressing toward you...

NM13: Hmm... (nodding)... I am feeling so disgusted and empty that I can't envision ever caring about anyone or anything again.

C14: If I were in your place I think I would be feeling sick at heart.

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NM14: (Silence. Tears begin to form again in her eyes.)

C15: May I offer a prayer on your behalf?

NM15: I can't imagine what good it will do. But sure, if you want to. I suppose it can't make things worse than they already are.

C16: What would you like me to ask God to focus on for you?

NM16: Again, I'm not sure it can make a difference, but...if I could ask for anything, it would be...that something good could happen to me again, that there might be an end to this terrible suffering.

C17: Let me take a moment to reflect on what you've just said. As I pause, I invite you to close your eyes and listen to your breathing. (I close my eyes and take a few deep/audible breaths before continuing...)

Dear God, I am here with Naomi, at the Moabite Home for the Destitute. Naomi is feeling so much anguish after having experienced unimaginable suffering over the past ten years. She left her homeland, endured the painful loss of her husband and two children, and now finds herself homeless and alone. Please God, may she feel your loving compassion, emerge from this exile, and find the will and the strength to move on with her life. May she begin to recognize and accept the goodness and kindness of others. Grant her a safe journey back to the land of Israel...and also towards healing and wholeness in her life. Amen.

NM17: Amen, From your mouth to God's ears, Chaplain. Thank you.

Post-visit follow-up:

Chaplain entered a chart-note into the patient's record and made a referral to Psychiatry for evaluation and Social Work for supportive resources including housing, bereavement, and employment.

Chaplain's Theological Reflection

I have always focused on Ruth in the story that bears her name and been fascinated that she leaves a place that is familiar in order to journey to a new place, as an act of faith and love. Ruth chooses to take the more challenging and risky path, seeking, in order to find, something bigger and more meaningful in her life.

Previous to this verbatim, I had not really concentrated on Naomi. But, by doing so, I have learned about a truly tragic character who gains redemption at the end of her story—with the birth of her grandchild Obed, who grows up to become the ancestor of the royal house of David. As Naomi begins to accept Ruth's closeness, devotion, and loyalty, she begins to find life again, to find purpose, and ultimately to find fulfillment.

To enhance my spiritual growth and my work with future clients, I'll be asking myself this Shavuot:

1. What or who do I need to accept into my life?
2. What does redemption look like for me, and what steps can I take towards it

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Shavuot Recipes:

Tilapia Spinach Casserole

Ingredients:

- 1 pound tilapia filets
- olive oil
- 1 onion
- 1.25 cups rice
- 2.5 cups water
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 10.5 oz. (1 soup can) of milk
- 10 oz. frozen spinach.

Directions:

Sautee the fish in some oil until it is nearly cooked. Set aside. Chop onion. In a pot with a lid, use the rest of the oil to sauté the onion. Once the onions are almost clear, add the rice and toast for 1 min. Then add water and bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer for 15-10 min (until the rice is done). Defrost the spinach and preheat oven to 350 degrees. When rice is done, remove from fire and stir in the soup, milk, and spinach. In a 9x13 pan, layer the rice mixture with pieces of the fish. Bake uncovered for 20 minutes. Serves about 6

No Bake Easy Cheesecake

Servings: 10

Yield: 1 - 8 inch pie pan

Ingredients:

- 2 (16 ounce) package cream cheese
- 1/3 cup white sugar
- 1 (8 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1 (9 inch) prepared graham cracker crust

Directions:

In a large bowl beat together the cream cheese and sugar until smooth. Gently fold in the whipped topping. Pour into the prepared crust. Refrigerate 3 hours, or until set.

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Blintz Kugel (Helene Wicentowski)

Ingredients:

Batter:

- 4 large eggs
- 1 ¼ c. milk
- 2 T sour cream (or plain yogurt)
- ¼ c. butter
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract\
- 1 1/3 c. all purpose white flour
- 1-2 T sugar
- 1 ¼ teaspoon baking powder

Filling:

- 1 lb Farmer cheese
- 1 lb cream cheese
- 2 eggs
- ¼ c. sugar
- Juice of 1 lemon (2 tsp)
- Pinch of salt

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. In a blender of a food processor (fitted with the steel blade) combine all the batter ingredients. Process until very smooth, scraping down the sides of the container once or twice. Measure out 1 ½ cups of the batter and pour it into the bottom of a buttered or non stick spray coated 9x13 baking dish. Bake in the oven for about 10 minutes, or until it is set.

Mix filling ingredients in the mixer. Pour over dough batter in pan and smooth until even. Give the remaining batter a brief stir to resuspend the ingredients; then very slowly pour it over the cheese filling so the filling is completely covered. Carefully return the casserole to the hot oven and bake it 35-40 minutes or until the top is set. Let casserole rest 10-15 minutes before serving.

Butternut Squash Cream Sauce over Noodles from "Secrets of Skinny Cooking"

Ingredients:

- 1/4 c. cooked mashed butternut squash
- 3 Tbsp. low fat milk
- 1 tsp salt, or to taste, divided
- Pasta
- 3/4 ounce shredded mozzarella cheese

Instructions:

In a blender, combine butternut squash, milk and 1/2 tsp. salt; blend until smooth. Heat a saute pan over medium-high heat, coat with non-stick cooking spray. Add noodles, season with remaining salt and saute for 1 minute. Add butternut squash mixture and mozzarella; stir until cheese is melted - about 5 minutes.

puree freezes well, can defrost quickly in microwave