

Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future
Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Shavuot To-Go

5771



Featuring Divrei Torah from

Rabbi Elchanan Adler | Rabbi Azarya Berzon
Rabbi Reuven Brand | Rabbi Joshua Flug
Rabbi Shmuel Goldin | Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky
Mrs. Deena Rabinovich | Rabbi Dr. Andrew Schein
Dr. Lawrence Schiffman | Ms. Shuli Taubes

And a collection of insights from members of the Graduate Program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation at Stern College

**Dedicated in memory of Ruth Buchbinder Mitzner, Chaya Rivka bas Harav Yaakov Tuvia,
A Teacher of Torah and a Lover of Zion**
The Mitzner Family, Houston, TX

**Dedicated in honor of our dear father Robert Segal and in loving memory of our dear
mother Susan Jane Buchalter Segal (Sara Charna bat Shmuel Gershon) z"l**
Shirah and Chuck Davidson, Gershon and Devora Segal, Yonina and Andrew Schein, Miriam and Aharon Haber, Michael and Aliza Segal, Ari and Atara Segal, and Aaron and Chaya Segal



Sivan 5771

Dear Friends,

It is my sincere hope that the Torah found in this virtual ספר may serve to enhance your שבועות (Shavuot) and your לימוד (study).

We have designed this project not only for the individual, studying alone, but perhaps even more for a חברותא (a pair studying together) that wish to work through the study matter together, or a group engaged in facilitated study.

With this material, we invite you to join our *Beit Midrash*, wherever you may be, להגדיל תורה (to enjoy the splendor of Torah) and to engage in discussing issues that touch on a most contemporary matter, and are rooted in the timeless arguments of our great sages from throughout the generations.

Bivracha,

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---------|
| Yearning for Salvation | |
| <i>Rabbi Elchanan Adler</i> | Page 4 |
| The Two-Fold Nature of Chag HaShavuot | |
| <i>Rabbi Azarya Berzon</i> | Page 8 |
| Converting to Kindness | |
| <i>Rabbi Reuven Brand</i> | Page 13 |
| Torah Study: Results Are Also Important! | |
| <i>Rabbi Joshua Flug</i> | Page 17 |
| Why Break the Tablets? | |
| <i>Rabbi Shmuel Goldin</i> | Page 22 |
| Aliyah Laregel Bzman Hazeh | |
| <i>Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky</i> | Page 27 |
| How is this holiday different than all others? | |
| <i>Mrs. Deena Rabinovich</i> | Page 32 |
| A Brief History of Tikkun Leil Shavuot | |
| <i>Rabbi Dr. Andrew Schein</i> | Page 40 |
| Yatziv Pitgam, One of Our Last Aramaic Piyyutim | |
| <i>Dr. Lawrence Schiffman</i> | Page 43 |
| Habakkuk: The Man, the Mission, the Haftarah for the 2 nd Day of Shavuot | |
| <i>Ms. Shuli Taubes</i> | Page 47 |
| Collected insights from members of the Graduate Program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation at Stern College | |
| <i>Ruthie Braffman, Shlomit Cohen, Meira Rubin, Miryam Spiegel</i> | Page 58 |

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Aharon Haber, Michael and Aliza Segal, Ari and Atara Segal, and Aaron and Chaya Segal**

Yearning for Salvation

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

The theme of *emunah*, faith, lies at the heart of *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, the first of the Ten Commandments. This commandment¹, which is an imperative for every Jew to believe in Hashem's existence, has a lesser known aspect especially relevant for our times. According to the medieval work *SeMaK* (*Sefer Mitzvos Katan*, authored by Rabbeinu Yitzchak of Kurvil), this commandment requires us to cultivate *tzipiya liYeshu'a*, yearning for salvation:

Just as we must believe that He took us out of Egypt, as it says, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt" ... Since this is one of the Ten Commandments, it must mean that just as I wish you to believe that I took you out, I wish you to believe that I am Hashem your G-d and that I will gather you and save you in the future. As indeed, He will in His mercy save us again, as it says, "He will return and gather you from all the nations."

Sefer Mitzvos Katan, §1

שכשם שיש לנו להאמין שהוציאנו ממצרים
דכתיב אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך וגומר.
ועל כרחיך מאחר שהוא דיבור, הכי קאמר,
כשם שאני רוצה שתאמינו בי שאני הוצאתי
אתכם כך אני רוצה שתאמינו בי שאני ה'
אלהיכם ואני עתיד לקבץ אתכם
ולהושיעכם. וכן יושיענו ברחמי שנית,
כדכתיב (דברים ל') ושב וקבצך מכל העמים
וגו'.

ספר מצוות קטן א

The element of yearning for Hashem's ultimate salvation is a recurring theme in our liturgy. Each day in *shemoneh esrei* just before concluding the blessing of *ישועה* קרן we say *כי מצמיח קרן ישועה* because for Your salvation we yearn all day.²

Of the Rambam's thirteen fundamentals of faith, the twelfth, which deals with the belief in the coming of Moshiach, emphasizes not only belief in Moshiach's coming, but also "longing" for this to happen each and every day: *ואף על פי שיתמהמה עם כל זה אחכה לו בכל יום שיבא* - even though he delays, nonetheless I long for him each day, that he should come³. This notion is echoed in the poem of *Yigdal*, recited at the outset of our prayers, which encapsulates the thirteen principles: *ישלח לקץ* - He will send our Moshiach at the end of days to redeem those who long for His ultimate salvation. Similarly, this affirmation appears in the *shacharis kedusha* for Shabbos: *ותמלוך עלינו כי מהכים אנחנו לך* - reign over us because we long for You.

Anticipating the Redemption: Dogma or Virtue?

Let us explore the Talmudic discussion about this longing; what it suggests, and its significance.

¹ According to many *rishonim*, the dictum "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*" constitutes an actual commandment to believe in a Creator, rather than being merely an axiomatic statement.

² This expression, as explained by Abudarham and Rabbeinu Yehuda b. Rav Yakar, is based on two Biblical verses: Bereishis 49:18 - "איתך קויתי כל היום" and Tehilim 25:5 - "לישועתך קויתי ד" -

³ The wording is based on *Chavakuk* 2:3 "אם יתמהמה חכה לו כי בא יבא"

R. Shmuel b. Nachmani said, R. Yochanan said, "a blight on those who calculate ends, for they say, 'since the end arrived and Moshiach did not come, he will no longer come.' Rather, long for him, as it says, 'if he tarries, long for him.' Perhaps you will say that we long for him, but He does not long for us? The verse says, 'Hashem therefore will long to be gracious with you, and He will rise to show you mercy.' Now that we long, and He longs, who is to stop [the redemption from occurring at once]? The midas haDin (strict attribute of justice) stops [the redemption]. Now that the attribute of justice stops the redemption, why long for it? To receive reward, as it says, 'praiseworthy are those who long for him'."

Sanhedrin 97b

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: תיפח עצמן של מחשבי קיצין, שהיו אומרים: כיון שהגיע את הקץ ולא בא - שוב אינו בא. אלא חכה לו, שנאמר אם יתמהמה חכה לו. שמא תאמר אנו מחכים והוא אינו מחכה - תלמוד לומר ולכן יחכה ה' לחננכם ולכן ירום לרחמכם. וכי מאחר שאנו מחכים והוא מחכה, מי מעכב? - מדת הדין מעכבת, וכי מאחר שמדת הדין מעכבת, אנו למה מחכים? - לקבל שכר, שנאמר אשרי כל הוכי לו.

סנהדרין צז:

Even without delving into the full depth of this enigmatic passage, we glean several important ideas:

1. While one should not engage in specific calculations regarding the time of Moshiach's arrival, one should actively await his coming.
2. It is not only we who wait; Hashem, Himself, does the same.
3. The delay in Moshiach's coming is caused by *midas haDin*, making the process of anticipation something of a struggle in futility; yet, precisely for this we are assured special reward.

In contrast, the Rambam writes:

Anyone who does not believe in him, or who does not long for his coming, denies not only the prophets, but denies the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu. For the Torah testifies about Moshiach, as it says, "Hashem will return your captivity and have mercy upon you; he will return and gather you ... even if your scattered ones are at horizon's edge ... Hashem will bring you." These explicit words of the Torah include everything spoken by the prophets.

Rambam, Hilkhot Melachim 11:1

וכל מי שאינו מאמין בו, או מי שאינו מחכה לביאתו, לא בשאר נביאים בלבד הוא כופר, אלא בתורה ובמשה רבינו, שהרי התורה העידה עליו שנאמר ושב ה' אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך וגו' אם יהיה נדחך בקצה השמים וגו' והביאך ה', ואלו הדברים המפורשים בתורה הם כוללים כל הדברים שנאמרו על ידי כל הנביאים.
רמב"ם הלכות מלכים יא:א

The plain sense of the Rambam's words suggests that not only is belief in Moshiach's coming a critical tenet of Jewish faith, but that the process of anticipating his arrival is equally critical. One who does not actively await Moshiach's arrival is considered to have denied the Torah. How can this be reconciled with the passage in Sanhedrin which implies that the process of anticipation is inherently irrational, and serves only as a means of earning extra reward?

Two Tiers of Yearning

Sefer Siach Yom, a commentary on *Shemoneh Esrei*⁴, suggests that there are two distinct aspects of longing for Moshiach. The first is referred to as *tzipiya beRu'ach*, a spiritual vision of longing. This means that one is not merely required to believe in the coming of Moshiach, but one is

⁴ Authored by Rabbi Yosef Roth and Menachem Stein (Bnei Brak 5760), pp. 300-304.

equally obliged to recognize the deficiency of a world which has yet to be perfected by G-d's salvation. The Rambam's attribution of a rational element to the process of longing for Moshiach refers only to this *tzipiya liYeshu'a*. It is quite possible for one to wholeheartedly subscribe to the Messianic doctrine, yet mistakenly believe that fulfillment is found in achieving personal goals, not in the larger picture of *tikun olam*. Such an individual is deemed *eino mechakeh leBi'aso* - he does not truly await the arrival of the Moshiach because he does not perceive the vacuum that exists in a world lacking Hashem's salvation.

The gemara in Sanhedrin, on the other hand, is discussing a higher order of yearning. Not only should a Jew be cognizant, in a general sense, of the void that exists in an unredeemed world; he should reinforce such sentiments on a daily basis with an eye to becoming consumed by awareness of the real possibility that the Moshiach could come at any moment. This kind of anticipation is exemplified by such saintly figures as Rav Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev whose son's wedding invitation stated that the wedding would take place, G-d willing, in Yerushalayim, but in the event that Moshiach would not yet have arrived, then an alternate site would be designated in Barditchev. This level of yearning, while perhaps not indispensable as an article of faith, is something for which every Jew should strive and for which one accrues special merit. This is why, when we petition G-d in the *Shemoneh Esrei* to bring the salvation, "*es tzemach David meheira satzmiach*," we append to this request the affirmation of "*ki liYeshu'ascha kivinu kol hayom*" – because for Your salvation we yearn all day. We ask that Hashem bring redemption in merit of the fact that we passionately yearn for it. This form of yearning, which flows from the heart rather than the intellect, is not dimmed or squelched by the *midas hadin* which inexorably delays Moshiach's coming.

Tikva and *Tzipiya*

The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) teaches that one early question asked of each departed soul by the heavenly tribunal is "*tzipisa liYeshu'a*" - have you yearned for salvation? The Chofetz Chaim explained the distinction between the terms *tikva* and *tzipiya*, both of which mean "hope," along the lines of the two levels of yearning described above. *Tikva* refers to a sense of hope which is consistent with an inner vision, while *tzipiya* which derives from the word *tzofeh*, an onlooker, suggests the image of someone who, as a result of his intense yearning, rushes outside constantly to see if the dream has been realized. It is this second level which the gemara describes as *tzipiya liYeshu'a*, longing for salvation. And it is this notion that is apparently alluded to in "*ki liYeshu'ascha kivinu kol hayom*." (The additional words "*kol hayom*" are meant to transform the first level of *tikva* into one of *tzipiya*.) Indeed, *nusach Sefard* siddurim contain two additional words here, as if to accentuate the point: *uMetzapim liYeshu'a*.⁵

Existential Perils in Israel

While we cannot expect to understand the reasons for the existential challenges that we face in Eretz Yisrael on a daily basis, and the heavy toll that it has fraught over the years, there can be no doubt that it all serves, in some mysterious and inexplicable way, to help bring about the

⁵ *Sha'arei Teshuva* to *Orach Chayim* 118 notes that when we recite the words "*ki liYeshu'ascha kivinu kol hayom*" we should think of this question, *tzipisa liYeshu'a*, which will be asked in the afterlife, and prepare to respond in the affirmative. This may have been the origin of the two words that appear in *nusach Sefard*.

ultimate redemption. The ongoing crisis in Israel should serve as an impetus for us to intensify our quest for salvation and sharpen our inner vision. We must constantly remind ourselves that if Eretz Yisroel is not whole then we are not whole, and that without peace in Israel we too cannot experience true fulfillment in our personal lives. Rav Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005), the great musar personality, once noted regarding the sequence of blessings in *bircas haMazon* that after thanking Hashem for our food in the first *bracha*, we speak about the land of Israel in the next *bracha*, and then, in the third *bracha*, proceed to request mercy for Yerushalayim. The message is clear: so long as Eretz Yisroel is in spiritual exile, so long as the *Beis Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim is yet to be rebuilt, our own fulfillment is also lacking.

But beyond reinforcing an inner vision of hope, we must also strive to embrace the dimension of *tzipiya liYeshu'a*, generating an ever-present awareness that salvation can come literally at any time. In one sense, nurturing this kind of anticipation is difficult in the face of the many heartbreaking events we have witnessed in recent years, and in the context of a political situation that holds little promise for solution. But on the other hand, ironic though it may seem, it is precisely the darkness and despair that can give rise to passionate hope. It is always darkest before dawn, but dawn inevitably shines forth.

Rising From the Ashes: The Symbol of the *Menorah Shel Aish*

The son of the Chofetz Chaim quotes a beautiful thought in the name of his father to illustrate this point. Of all the Mishkan's utensils, there was one – the *menora* – which Moshe had particular difficulty visualizing. Hashem repeatedly showed Moshe the manner in which the *menora* was to be made, but to no avail. Finally, Hashem said: “Hurl the gold into the fire and then you will see the *menora* emerge from it. “What was it about the *menora* in particular” asked the Chofetz Chaim, “that gave Moshe such difficulty?” He answered as follows. As is known, each of the vessels in the Mishkan contained some symbolic representation. (The *aron* symbolized divine wisdom, the *shulchan* corresponded to the material sustenance of the Jewish people, etc.) The *menora*, explained the Chofetz Chaim, is the *ner tamid* of our people – the symbol of the eternity of the Jewish people. According to the Zohar, the light of the *menora* in the Mishkan was meant to correspond to a heavenly light which illuminated the continued survival of the Jewish people. Why did Moshe despair with respect to the *menora*? Because he saw through divine inspiration the millions of *korbanos* throughout the millennia – all the terrible tragedies that would befall us and the deep sense of despair that would exist. So Moshe asked incredulously: “How can I construct a *menora* whose purpose is to light up the nation when all I see is darkness?” Hashem's response was “Moshe, throw the gold into the fire and see what emerges.” The symbolic message is that while man can only see things superficially, in reality it is precisely those periods that seem bleakest – when destruction surrounds us, when we seem to be consumed by the blazing fire of our enemies – that the *menora* will emerge and shine forth. Just as the founding of *medinat Yisroel* came about miraculously out of the ashes of the Holocaust, there is no doubt that all the trials and suffering that we have witnessed in Eretz Yisroel are meant somehow, in the divine scheme, to pave the way for a glorious future. We must intensify our efforts to support *acheinu bnei yisrael* in Eretz Yisrael during these trying times, while at the same time look beyond the immediacy of the moment and perceive with *tzipiya* the seeds of *geulah* which are already implanted.

The Two-Fold Nature of Chag HaShavuot

Rabbi Azarya Berzon

Co-Rosh Beit Midrash, Zichron Dov Yeshiva University

Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

And you shall count from the day following the Shabbat, from the day you have brought the Omer, seven complete weeks. Until the day following the seventh week you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring the new mincha offering for your God.

Vayikra 23:15-6

Seven weeks shall you count, from the bringing of the Omer shall you begin to count seven weeks. And you shall celebrate Shavuot to the Lord your God.

Dvarim 16:9-10

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום
הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע
שבתות תמימת תהיינה: עד ממחרת
השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים יום
והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לה':
ויקרא כג:טו-טז

שבעה שבעת תספר לך מהחל חרמש
בקמה תחל לספר שבעה שבעות: ועשית
חג שבעות לה' אלהיך
דברים טז:ט-י

The counting of the *Sfira* connects Pesach with Shavuot. What is the nature of that linkage?

When does the counting begin and when does it end? What does the counting reveal about the character of *Shavuot*? Let us study the words of one of the *Rishonim*, *Rabbenu Yerucham*:

We should recite two brachot over the mitzvah of sefirat haOmer because there is one mitzvah to count weeks, and a second to count days. Just as we recite two brachot over tfillin since the tfillin worn on the arm and the tfillin worn on the head are two independent mitzvot, the same applies to the counting of weeks and the counting of days.

... However, since the Torah introduces the commandment to count weeks with the words "from the day you have brought the Omer", this mitzvah depends upon the Omer which is not brought in our times. Only the mitzvah of counting days, which is introduced by the words "from the day following the Shabbat", and is not dependent upon the Omer applies

ליל שני של פסח מברכין אק"ב על ספירת העומר ותמה
הוא שהיה לו לומר על ספירת הימים כי ספירת העומר
אינו שום דבר וה"ל לומר על ספירה לעומר או על ספירת
הימים ועוד למה אין מברכין ב' ברכות אחת לימים ואחת
לשבועות שהרי ב' מצות הן והן כתפילין של ראש ושל יד
דאמר ב' ברכות אפילו לא שח ועוד איך אנו סופרין היום
י"ד יום שהם ב' שבועות והיום כ"א יום שהם שלשה
שבועות והיה לנו לומר היום י"ד יום והיום ב' שבועות אבל
מה לנו לומר שהן ב' שבועות וכי אין אנו יודעין שי"ד יום
הן ב' שבועות. ונראה לן משום דכתיב ז' שבועות תספור
לך וגו' וכתיב נמי מיום הביאכם את עומר וגו' ז' שבתות
תמימות תהיין נמצא שלא נכתבה ספירת שבועות כי אם
גבי העומר אבל ספירת הימים לא כתיב גבי עומר נמצא
דספירת הימים הוא מן התורה אפילו בזמן הזה וספירת
השבועות בזמן דאיכ' עומר והיו מברכין זה על זה בזמן
שבית המקדש קיים והיינו דכתיב עד ממחרת השבת הז'
תספרו נ' יום וה"ל למכתב עד מחרת אלא ר"ל ממחרת

in our day. It is for this reason that we only recite one blessing over the mitzvah of counting 49 days. Today we only count weeks in order to remember the Mikdash.

Rabbenu Yerucham, Netiv 5, Part 4
(translation of underlined section only)

הספור ועד מחרת ר"ל שלא תלה מיום הביאכם אלא ממחרת ובזמן הזה אנו סופרים לשבועות זכר למקדש ובדב' שהוא זכר למקדש לבד אין מברכין עלין מדי דהוה אכריכ' דליל פסח ואערבה דז' של סוכות לכך אנו אומר' שהם כך וכך שבועות שאין זו ספירה ממש וכו' רבינו ירוחם - תולדות אדם וחיה נתיב ה חלק ד

From the words of Rabbenu Yerucham we learn that the mitzvah of *Sfirat HaOmer* is in fact not one, but two distinct mitzvot. There is one mitzvah to count weeks, and another to count days. In the formulation of the Torah, the mitzvah of counting weeks begins with: מיום הביאכם את עמר והתנופה, and ends with: והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לה'. The mitzvah to count days, on the other hand, begins with: עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום, and ends with: ממחרת השבת.

It would seem that the difference between the two is fundamental and goes beyond the distinction between counting weeks and counting days. The mitzvah of counting weeks is engendered by, and dependent upon, the bringing of the *Korbanot* in the *Beit HaMikdash*, the *korban haOmer* at the beginning of the seven-week period, and the *korban shtei haLechem* at its end. In our day, lacking the *Beit HaMikdash*, the mitzvah of counting weeks is no longer active, and we mention the weeks only to remember the *Mikdash*. The mitzvah to count days, on the other hand, is engendered by the holiday of Pesach, “*mi-machrat HaShabbat*”, and ends with the completion of the counting of seven cycles of seven days each, “*ad mi-machrat HaShabbat*”, for a total of forty nine days. This mitzvah is not dependent upon the *Mikdash* and is still in force in our day.

We suggest that these two mitzvot define the dual nature of *Chag HaShavuot*. One dimension of *Shavuot* is reflected in the connection between the two *korbanot*, the *Omer* at the beginning of the seven weeks and the *Shtei HaLechem* at their conclusion. The second dimension of *Shavuot* is inherent in the concept of Shabbat; it is the day following the Shabbat of Pesach, and the day following the seventh Shabbat which defines the nature and goal of *sfirat haOmer*. In the formulation of the mitzvah of counting days, the Torah replaces the word “Pesach” with the word “Shabbat.” This change is critical as we shall see.

The Nature of *Chag HaShavuot*

Rabbi Eliezer offers two options for the fulfillment of Yom Tov; to dedicate oneself totally to prayer and Torah study, or to dedicate the day to eating and drinking. He agrees, however, in the case of Shavuot, that the first approach is not acceptable. On the day which commemorates the giving of the Torah, one must enjoy the physical pleasures of eating and drinking.

Pesachim 68b

A person's table atones for him.

Berachot 55a

רבי אליעזר סבר או כולו לה' או כולו לכם. ורבי יהושע סבר חלקהו, חציו לה' וחציו לכם. אמר רבי אלעזר הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם. מאי טעמא - יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא. פסחים (סח:)

שולחנו של אדם מכפר עליו ברכות נה.

Unlike *Pesach* and *Sukkot* that are colorful holydays, there are no special *mitzvot* that mark the day of *Shavuot*. On the one hand, the mitzvah of *Simchat Yom Tov*, of eating and drinking,

applies on *Shavuot* and highlights the physical enjoyment of the day. On the other hand, there is a special dedication to the study of Torah, emphasizing the spiritual character of the day. These performances appear to be inconsistent, yet they reflect a dual approach to the holiday of *Shavuot*. Let us examine the origins of these elements of the *kedushat hayom*.

Why does mortal man deserve the Torah?

The Gemara (Shabbat 88b) records the great debate that took place on high regarding the giving of the Torah. The heavenly angels demanded the Torah for themselves. Moshe was called upon to counter their claims and defend the rights of mortal man to receive the Torah. According to one version of this episode – as recorded in the *Medrash* – Hashem caused the countenance of Moshe to appear as that of Avraham Avinu, and asked the angels, “are you not embarrassed in the presence of Avraham [to deny man his rights to the Torah]? Didn’t you partake of the meal that he offered you [a reference to the episode recorded at the beginning of Parshat Vayeirah]?” The underlying idea of this Midrashic presentation is that man has the capacity to transform physical bread into manna, the bread that even angels can consume. Man has the capacity to elevate the physical and convert it to the spiritual. Man is not meant to flee from the physical world; on the contrary, his challenge is to bring spirituality down from the higher spheres into the physical realm and transform this world into an abode for the Divine *Shechina*.⁶ The concept of the *Beit HaMikdash* represents the ability of man to bring G-d into the material world. The central goal underlying the practical observance of halacha is to convert this world into a *Mikdash* of *Shechina*.

This mission of man is rooted in the concept of the Divine ownership of the universe. As King David declares, *LaHashem HaAretz U’Meloah*, Hashem is the *Adon Kol*, master and owner of the universe. Man’s ability to elevate the world he inhabits is dependent upon his success in enjoying G-d’s world in accordance with the rules and guidelines set down by the Master of the universe.

And God commanded Adam ‘from all the trees in the garden you may eat; but from the tree of knowledge you shall not eat’.

Bereishit 2:16-17

ויצו ה' אלקים על האדם לאמר מכל עץ הגן
אכל תאכל: ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל
ממנו

בראשית ב:טז-יז

By observing the Divine decree and abstaining from those pleasures from which he is enjoined, man acknowledges the sovereign authority of the Master of the universe and sanctifies the mundane aspects of this world.

The Mitzva to Count Weeks

There is a three-stage process of sanctification that begins with *issur*, moves on to *heter*, and culminates in *kiddush*. The entire enterprise is symbolized by the mitzvah of the *omer*.

And bread or roasted kernels or plump kernels you shall not eat until this very day, until you bring the [omer] offering of your God.

Vayikra 23:14

ולחם וקלי וקרמל לא תאכלו עד
עצם היום הזה עד הביאכם את
קרבן אלהיכם
ויקרא פרק כג:יד

⁶ See Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, *Assufat Maarachot* on Sukkot, and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik, *Halachik Man*

Man is enjoined from eating of the new produce harvested from the fields. The *omer* is the *matir* which lifts the prohibition, permitting man to enjoy the grains. The waiving of the *omer* in the presence of G-d represents a symbolic declaration that all belongs to Him; He is Creator, Master, and Owner of the universe. Now man is permitted to partake of the new crop. The process, however, is incomplete and will only culminate when the *shteí halechem* is offered on the holiday of *Shavuot*. The message of this offering is that we must connect our physical eating with the *mizbe'ach* of HaShem in His *Mikdash*. Thus we are taught to elevate our *achila* to the level of *achilat mizbe'ach*.

Once we have brought the *omer* on the second day of Pesach and have acknowledged G-d as Master and Owner, we are permitted to enjoy His universe. However the Torah commands us to go beyond the level of *matir*, and ascend to the level of *kiddush*, of holiness.

To bridge the gap between *heter* and *kiddush* will require of man a process of hard work extended over a long period of time. Just as in the realm of the farmer in Israel where the achievement of *kedushat shvi'it* requires a gradual process extended over a period of seven years culminating in the sanctification of the produce in the *shmitah* year, so too, in the personal realm of the *kiddush* of one's eating and drinking, a period of gradual growth is required to ascend the ladder of sanctification. For the farmer the unit of time is the year; each year is counted until the seventh is reached and the fruits are sanctified. In the private sector, however, the unit of time is the week, and the process realizes its fruition at the end of seven weeks. In both cases, the ultimate *kiddush* is achieved when the number 50 is attained. The *shteí halechem* offered on the day following the seventh week represents man attaining a new spiritual height of *kiddush* which makes him worthy of receiving the Torah. The goal of the Torah is the enterprise of transforming the mundane into the holy. The linkage between the *omer* [the *matir*] and the *shteí halechem* [i.e. the *kiddush*] is demonstrated by the mitzvah of counting weeks.

The Mitzva to Count Days

There is a second dimension to the goal of man and the receiving of the Torah and this one is represented by the mitzvah of counting days. In the context of this mitzva, the *Mikdash*, a physical structure in a particular location, is replaced by the Shabbat. The mitzvah of counting days is engendered by "*mi-mochrat haShabbat*". Both Shabbat and *Mikdash* represent the essential goal of man, i.e. *kiddush*. In the case of *kedushat haShabbat* the time unit is the day, as we count each day of the week "today is the first day of Shabbat", etc. What does Shabbat represent? Man in search of G-d! Whereas in *Mikdash* man endeavors to bring Divinity down to the secular realm through human activity, in Shabbat man strives to discover G-d within nature itself. Rav Soloveitchik, zt"l, emphasized the contrast between Pesach and Shabbat. Pesach is the holiday which commemorates the great miracles of the redemption from *Mitzrayim*. But the ultimate goal of this redemption was achieved seven weeks later at the moment of the giving of the Torah. The Torah teaches man how to live in the world of nature, not in the supernatural world of miracles. The challenge is not to find G-d when He acts in a way that is contrary to the cosmic order, when He reveals Himself by abrogating the laws of causality, but rather to discover G-d within the natural order. This is a more difficult task. Shabbat represents the world of nature, the Divine revelation through the daily sustenance which He provides for all of creation, for the sunrise and the sunset. Shabbat is the celebration of the orderliness of creation and

demands that man discover G-d within the physical world. This is why the Torah used the phrase “*mi-mochorat ha-Shabbat*” to indicate that our celebration of *Matan Torah* would reflect our observance of the Shabbat. The process of man preparing himself for the challenge of receiving the Torah would require 49 days of hard work. Day by day man must ascend the ladder of spirituality until he is ready for the challenge of receiving the Torah.⁷

Whereas the *sfira* of weeks linking the *omer* with *shte haLechem* represents the world of action, man’s challenge to penetrate the physical and elevate it to the spiritual, the *sfira* of days that begins and ends with Shabbat, represents the world of thought and feeling, the all-encompassing mitzvot of *ahavat HaShem* and *liMud HaTorah*. The connections between Shabbat and Torah in the statements of *Chazal* and in our liturgy are manifold, and reflect a single underlying principle. How is man expected to discover G-d in the natural universe? What wisdom can guide man through the dark alleyways of sunrise and sunset, the world of causality, and allow man to reveal Divinity? Where are the tools? They are in the Torah, they are embodied in the 613 mitzvot which represent the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of physical man. Halacha teaches man – sometimes explicitly more often subtly – how to connect to the world in which he lives and to reveal G-d everywhere. The *sfira* of 49 days represents the ongoing process of discovering G-d through the study of His Torah. The mitzvah of *sfira* is very demanding; “don’t miss a single day!” Although the ultimate goal is achieved at the culmination of the 49 days, each day must be designated by the act of *sfira* as a day dedicated to the search for and the service of HaShem. The principle which underlies the mitzvah of counting days can be formulated simply: love of Torah equals love of HaShem. As the Ramban has expounded in his famous essay “*Torat HaShem Temima*” [the Torah of Hashem is perfect], the ideal method of discovering G-d is the study of His Wisdom embodied in His Torah. Yes, find HaShem in nature, but know that the faultless way to find HaShem is through His Torah. The holiday of *Shavuot* represents the realm of the intellectual and the emotional service of HaShem, of *Ahavat HaTorah* and *Ahavat HaShem*. It is readily apparent why no special mitzvot are necessary on this day. It is a day of rendezvous between the Jew and the Torah, the Jew and Almighty G-d. But as we have seen, *Shavuot* also represents the *Mikdash*, the link between the *omer* and the *shte haLechem*, and the world of sanctification through action. Thus the *kedushat hayom* of *Shavuot* is an integration of *tfillin shel yad* and *tfillin shel rosh*, the hand representing action, the head representing intellect; it is a merger of the counting of weeks and the counting of days. Even *Rabbenu Yerucham* grants that in our day, lacking the *Mikdash*, we nevertheless count the weeks of the *omer*, albeit as a rabbinic requirement. This is an application of the principle of *zecher leMikdash*. Although today we lack the actual *korbanot* of *omer* and *shte haLechem*, we do experience the abstract idea they represent, and we are motivated by the act of counting weeks to achieve the same goals that were instilled in us by the counting of the *omer* at the time the *Mikdash* stood.

To reflect the dual nature of *Shavuot*, we observe the day in two realms. On the one hand, we rejoice through eating and drinking [“*chetzyo lachem*”], and at the same time, we rejoice through the study of His Torah [“*chetzyo laShem*”]. We strive to increase sanctity in this world by elevating our mundane activities and to reveal His presence in the causal order of the natural universe.

⁷See Rabi David Shapiro “*Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer and Shavuot*”, page 205

Converting to Kindness^s

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Gifts to the poor

R. Zeira said, this megila [Ruth] has not in it any [issues of] purity or impurity, nor prohibited or permitted [items], and [so] why was it written? To teach the reward for performing acts of kindness.

Ruth Rabbah 2

א"ר זעירא מגלה זו אין בה לא טומאה ולא טהרה ולא איסור ולא היתר ולמה נכתבה ללמדך כמה שכר טוב לגומלי חסדים.
רות רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב

This Midrashic statement explains the essence and message of Megillat Rut, the enchanting and inspiring tale we read each year on Shavuot. Our custom to read various Megillot on specific holidays is recorded in Masechet Sofrim (Chapter 14), and we are left to explore the connection between each Megillah and its holiday. In light of our Midrash, we wonder, what the thematic connection between Rut and Shavuot is. In the phrasing of our tefillot on Shavuot, we refer to this Yom Tov as the time of the giving of our Torah. It is quite curious, then, that on this day that commemorates the revelation at Sinai, at which we received the Ten Commandments, we read a tale that contains no laws at all?! Moreover, why is kindness so essential to the story of Rut?

An oblique connection between Megillat Rut and Shavuot can be found in the Torah's description of the holiday itself. In Parshat Emor, in its section dedicated to the holidays, the Torah describes this day as the culmination of a period of counting, beginning with the Omer offering and concluding with the Shte Halechem offering forty-nine days later. The capstone of the counting is our festival, which is described immediately before the Torah's introduction of Rosh Hashana, the ensuing holiday on the calendar. Yet, a peculiar law appears in this context:

And you shall make proclamation on the selfsame day; there shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall do no manner of servile work; it is a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations. And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor, and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God.

Vayikra 23:21-22

וקראתם בעצם היום הזה מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו חקת עולם בכל מושבתים לדרתיכם: ובקצרכם את קציר ארצכם לא תכלה פאת שדך בקצרך ולקט קצירך לא תלקט לעני ולגר תעזב אתם אני ה' אלהיכם:
ויקרא כג:כא-כב

This Biblical prescription of מתנות עניים- gifts to the poor- plays a key role in the story of Rut, for it was while collecting these gifts that Rut first encountered Boaz, her future redeemer and husband. The development of the relationship between Boaz and Rut was formed on the backdrop of this

I am grateful to מורי ורבי, Rav Hershel Schachter, shlit"א, for his helpful insights in the preparation of this essay.

mitzvah. However, the inclusion of the principles of gleanings for the poor at this point in the Chumash is perplexing. We have already been taught this law in Parshat Kedoshim, so why is it being repeated and why in the middle of the Torah's section of the festivals?

Another fascinating instance when we find a specific reference to gifts to the poor is in the guidelines regarding the process of conversion. While the acceptance of each and every mitzvah is the essence and definition of conversion, the convert is not required to learn all of the Torah's precepts in advance of conversion.

It was taught: A convert who comes nowadays to convert is asked "what did you see that motivated you to convert? Don't you know that the Jewish people today are wanderers, pushed, beaten and ravaged, and suffering befall them"? If he says "I know, and I am not worthy" we accept him immediately. We tell him some of the light mitzvos and some of the heavy mitzvos, and we tell him the punishment for [not giving] leket, shichacha, peah and maser ani.

Yevamot 47a

תנו רבנן: גר שבא להתגייר בזמן הזה, אומרים לו: מה ראית שבאת להתגייר? אי אתה יודע שישראל בזמן הזה דוויים, דחופים, סחופים ומטורפין, ויסורין באין עליהם? אם אומר: יודע אני ואיני כדאי, מקבלין אותו מיד. ומודיעין אותו מקצת מצות קלות ומקצת מצות חמורות, ומודיעין אותו עון לקט שכחה ופאה ומעשר עני
מסכת יבמות דף מז.

Why are the mitzvot of gifts for the poor singled out of all the possible choices as necessary for the convert to accept in specific? To understand the role of gifts to the poor in the context of conversion, we must examine the roots of conversion itself and who was the first convert to Judaism.

Conversion and Kindness

At the conclusion of our seder, many have the custom to sing a poem with the refrain, "and it was in the middle of the night." In this poem, the anonymous author makes reference to an unnamed גר צדק - an authentic convert. Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (12th c. France) in his commentary on this poem identifies this convert as Avraham Avinu. The Gemara supports this by noting:

"The precious ones of the nations were gathered with the God of Avraham." The God of Avraham and not of Yitzchak and Yaacov? Rather, the God of Avraham who was the first to convert.

Chagiga 3a

(תהלים מז) נדיבי עמים נאספו עם אלהי אברהם. אלהי אברהם ולא אלהי יצחק ויעקב? אלא אלהי אברהם שהיה תחילה לגרים.
מסכת חגיגה דף ג.

It is not coincidental that Avraham Avinu was historically the first convert and the founder of our faith. We know that the foundation of our universe is kindness, as Tehillim (89) teaches: כי אמרתי "as I have said, the world, on kindness will be built". The world of Judaism, too, is built upon kindness, as Avraham, the first convert, is the quintessential paragon of kindness:

"He who runs after charity and kindness will find life, charity and honor." Runs after kindness refers to Avraham, as it says "And he kept the ways of Hashem to do charity" kindness is the kindness he did for Sarah, will find life, [as it says] the number of years of Avraham's life were 100 years, and 70 years and 5 years.

Bereishit Rabbah Parshat Chaye Sarah 58

(משלי כא) רודף צדקה וחסד ימצא חיים צדקה וכבוד, רודף צדקה זה אברהם שנאמר ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה, וחסד שגמל חסד לשרה, ימצא חיים, ושני חיי אברהם מאת שנה ושבעים שנה וחמשה שנים
בראשית רבה פרשה נח

The prophet Micah sums up this notion with his attribution: “חסד לאברהם,” kindness is to Avraham, our founding father. All future converts to Judaism continue the tradition of Avraham, building the foundation of their Judaism, their connection with Hashem, upon the precept of kindness, embodied by our first convert.⁹ We now understand why the specific mitzvot that we share with a potential convert are those of kindness, the trait of Avraham the convert. This can also shed light on why the Torah includes this theme in its description of Shavuot, our anniversary of the revelation at Sinai, as we will explore.

Conversion at Sinai

The Torah outlines several fundamental tenets of Jewish faith that were established at the revelation of Matan Torah, yet the Talmud views it as a model for a Halachic process as well. According to the Talmud, Matan Torah and the revelation at Sinai is the model for conversion for generations as it culminated the conversion process of the Jewish people:

Rebi said: Like you, like your forefathers. Just as your forefathers entered the covenant with mila, immersion and a blood-gift, so too they will enter the covenant with mila, immersion and a blood-gift ... A blood gift, as it is written “and the young ones of the Jewish people were sent...” and what is the source for immersion? As it is written “Moshe took half the blood and sprinkled it on the people” and there is no sprinkling without immersion.

Keritot 9a

רבי אומר: ככם - כאבותיכם, מה אבותיכם לא נכנסו לברית אלא במילה וטבילה והרצאת דם, אף הם לא יכנסו לברית אלא במילה וטבילה והרצאת דמים ... הרצאת דמים, דכתיב: (שמות כ"ד) וישלח את נערי בני ישראל, אלא טבילה מנלן? דכתיב: (שמות כ"ד) ויקח משה חצי הדם ויזרק על העם, ואין הזאה בלא טבילה
מסכת כריתות דף ט.

The Talmud describes that when the Jewish people stood at Har Sinai they immersed for Tevilah and offered korbanot, which completed their conversion to Judaism. Ramban (Shemot 24:1) explains that their response of נעשה ונשמע - we will do and we will listen- was the fulfillment of a key step in conversion: the acceptance of Hashem’s mitzvot. Our experience at Sinai was history’s first communal conversion to Judaism and the model for the future. In light of what we have learned, an essence aspect of this national conversion is a culture of kindness, one that became embedded in our national identity, as the Talmud (Yevamot 79a) relates, Jewish people are marked with three qualities: merciful, bashful and ambassadors of kindness.

The Torah’s inclusion of a reference to the gifts to the poor at the onset of the harvest season heralded by the holiday of Shavuot is fully in consonance with the theme of Matan Torah- conversion to Judaism and its character of kindness. This is the bridge to understanding its connection with the reading of Megillat Rut.

A Tale of a Convert

Rut is the shining example of a convert to Judaism. The Megillah describes her insistence on becoming part of G-d’s covenant, in contrast to her sister, who returned to their Moabite origins.

⁹ Hence, Hillel the elder, when approached by a potential convert who wanted to learn the entirety of Torah while standing on one foot, responded with a summative dictum guiding interpersonal relationships. See Shabbat 31a.

And she said: 'Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people, and to her god; return after your sister-in-law.' And Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, and to return from following after you; for where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if only death will part us.' And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her.

Ruth 1:16-18

ותאמר הננה שבה יבמתך אל עמה ואל אלהיה שובי אחרי יבמתך: ותאמר רות אל תפגעני בי לעזובך לשוב מאחריך כי אל אשר תלכי אלך ובאשר תליני אליו עמך עמי ואלהיך אלהי: באשר תמותי אמות ושם אקבר כה יעשה יקוק לי וכה יסיף כי המות יפריד ביני ובינך: ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל לדבר אליה:

רות א:טו-יח

This steadfast commitment, despite Naomi's discouragement, becomes the framework for future converts and the litmus test for their sincerity, as the Talmud teaches:

[The potential convert] is not to be persuaded, or dissuaded too much'. R. Eleazar said: What is the Scriptural proof? It is written, And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left off speaking unto her. 'We are forbidden', she told her, '[to move on the Sabbath beyond the] Sabbath boundaries!' 'Where you go I will go'. 'We are forbidden private meeting between man and woman!' 'Where you lodge, I will lodge' 'We have been commanded 613 commandments!' 'Your people shall be my people'. 'We are forbidden idolatry!' 'And your God my God'. 'Four modes of death were entrusted to Beth din!' 'Where you die, will I die'. 'Two graveyards were placed at the disposal of the Beth din!' 'And there will I be buried'. Immediately she saw that she was steadfastly minded...

Yevamot 47b

ואין מרבים עליו, ואין מדקדקים עליו. אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי קראה? דכתיב: ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה ותחדל לדבר אליה, אמרה לה: אסיר לך תחום שבת! באשר תלכי אלך. אסיר לך יהוד! באשר תליני אליו. מפקדינן שש מאות וי"ג מצות! עמך עמי. אסיר לך עבודת כוכבים! ואלהיך אלהי. ארבע מיתות נמסרו לב"ד! באשר תמותי אמות. ב' קברים נמסרו לב"ד! ושם אקבר. מיד, ותרא כי מתאמצת היא וגו' **מסכת יבמות דף מז:**

We learn that Rut is the paradigm of a true convert. Hence, explained Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik in the name of the Gaon of Vilna, Megillat Rut is the perfect fit for Shavuot.¹⁰ Megillat Rut is the story of conversion and Shavuot is the anniversary of our national conversion to Judaism. Furthermore, the personality of Rut and her embrace of Judaism are all about kindness. In contrast to Moab, a nation that is described in the Torah as cruel and uncaring (Devarim 23:5) Rut seeks a new lifestyle, a religion of kindness, which she finds embodied in Boaz and Hashem's people. We now appreciate that just as at Har Sinai we entered into the covenant of Avraham, the conversion of kindness, for all future generations, we read the story of Rut, the individual who entered into this covenant. The Midrash with which we began underscores that the central motif of the story of the Rut, the story of her conversion and the story of the founding of our nation is keenly focused on kindness.

¹⁰ Rabbi Soloveitchik delivered this talk on Megillat Rut in 5728. Notes from the talk were published in Beit Yitzchak vol. 24 by Alan Rothman.

Torah Study: Results Are Also Important!

Rabbi Joshua Flug

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Torah study plays a prominent role in the holiday of Shavuot. There is a tradition to spend the entire night of Shavuot studying Torah and many synagogues provide additional opportunities to study Torah on Shavuot. In this article, we will explore some of the aspects relating to the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, the mitzvah to study Torah.¹¹

How Much is One Required to Learn?

The Mishna, *Pe'ah* 1:1, lists *talmud Torah* as one of the *mitzvot* that has no set amount. The Talmud Yerushalmi, *Pe'ah* 1:1, explains that these mitzvot have no minimum amount and no maximum amount. The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797), *Sh'not Eliyahu* ad loc., applies this comment to *talmud Torah* and notes that one can fulfill the mitzvah by learning a single word of Torah. Yet, no matter how much one knows, there is always an obligation to continue one's studies and actively pursue more knowledge.

This dichotomy is expressed in the resolution of an apparent contradiction between two statements of R. Shimon B. Yochai. The Gemara discusses the requirement that the *Lechem HaPanim* (showbreads) maintain a constant presence in the *Beit HaMikdash*:

The Beraita stated: R. Yosi said: it is valid even if one removes the old [breads] in the morning and places the new [breads] in the evening. How do I understand (the verse, Shemot 25:30) "Constantly in front of me"? That the table should not go the entire night without bread. R. Ami stated: From the words of R. Yosi we learn that even if a person only studied one chapter in the morning and one chapter in the evening, he has fulfilled the commandment (in the verse, Yehoshua 1:8) "This Torah shall never leave your lips." R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai, even if he only read Sh'ma in the morning and Sh'ma in the evening, he has fulfilled this mitzvah.

Menachot 99b

תניא רבי יוסי אומר אפי' סילק את
הישנה שחרית וסידר את החדשה
ערבית אין בכך כלום אלא מה אני
מקיים לפני תמיד שלא ילין שלחן
בלא לחם א"ר אמי מדבריו של ר'
יוסי נלמוד אפילו לא שנה אדם
אלא פרק אחד שחרית ופרק אחד
ערבית קיים מצות לא ימוש (את)
ספר התורה הזה מפיו אמר רבי
יוחנן משום ר"ש בן יוחי אפי' לא
קרא אדם אלא קרית שמע שחרית
וערבית קיים לא ימוש.
מנחות צט:

¹¹ This article is an expanded version of an article written for yutorah.org.

According to R. Shimon bar Yochai, one can fulfill the commandment to constantly study Torah by reciting *Sh'ma* in the morning and *Sh'ma* in the evening. Yet, R. Shimon bar Yochai seems to take the exact opposite approach. The Gemara cites a dispute between R. Yishmael and R. Shimon bar Yochai regarding how much time should be devoted to *talmud Torah*:

Our rabbis taught: [The verse (Devarim 11:14) states] "You shall gather your grain." What does this teach? Since it states "This Torah shall never leave your lips," one may think that this should be taken literally; therefore the verse states that you shall gather your grain- follow the ways of the land. R. Shimon bar Yochai states: Is it possible for someone to plow at the time of plowing, plant at the time of planting, harvest at the time of harvesting? ... What becomes of (his study of) Torah? Rather, when the Jewish people follow the will of God, their labor is performed by others ... and when they don't follow the will of God, they must perform the labor themselves.

Berachot 35b

ת"ר ואספת דגנך מה ת"ל לפי שנא' לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיו יכול דברים ככתבן ת"ל ואספת דגנך הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ דברי ר' ישמעאל ר"ש בן יוחי אומר אפשר אדם חורש בשעת חרישה וזורע בשעת זריעה וקוצר בשעת קצירה ודש בשעת דישה וזורע בשעת הרוח תורה מה תהא עליה אלא בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מלאכתן נעשית ע"י אחרים שנא' ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם וגו' ובזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מלאכתן נעשית ע"י עצמן שנא' ואספת דגנך ולא עוד אלא שמלאכת אחרים נעשית על ידן שנא' ועבדת את אויביך וגו'.

ברכות לה:

R. Yishmael is of the opinion that although the verse states that the Torah shall never leave your lips, one must follow the ways of the land (*derech erez*) in order to earn a livelihood. R Shimon bar Yochai disagrees and maintains that if one were to spend his whole day earning a livelihood, he will never be successful in his study of Torah. How is it possible that the same R. Shimon bar Yochai, who states that recitation of *Sh'ma* fulfills the mandate of the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*, does not subscribe to R. Yishmael's opinion that this mandate allows one to earn a livelihood?

R. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kuntrus Acharon, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:1, explains that there are two aspects to the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*. The first aspect is to constantly learn Torah such that the Torah never leaves one's lips. Regarding this aspect, R. Shimon ben Yochai teaches that constancy can be achieved through consistency. If one learns a small portion of Torah in the morning and a small portion in the evening, one achieves constancy.¹² This first aspect of *talmud Torah* represents the idea that there is no minimum for *talmud Torah*.

The second aspect of *talmud Torah* is to master Torah to the best of one's ability. Mastery is a never ending process. Even if one learned the entire Torah, he must constantly review it in order not to forget anything that was learned. R. Shimon bar Yochai's objection to R. Yishmael's opinion is not regarding the requirement for constancy. His objection is that the more time one spends earning a livelihood, the more difficult it will be to master the Torah. This dispute focuses on the idea that there is no maximum for *talmud Torah*.

¹² R. Shimon bar Yochai learns this from R. Yosi's opinion that although the *lechem hapanim* require constancy, if one removes the old breads in the morning and replaces them in the evening, it is nevertheless considered constant. Similarly, one who studies Torah in the morning and evening is considered to be constantly studying Torah.

R. Yishmael doesn't disagree with R. Shimon bar Yochai's principle. He too is of the opinion that one must attempt to master Torah. However, he is of the opinion that one must master Torah while factoring in his obligation to sustain himself and his dependents. In fact, Rashi (1040-1105), *Berachot* 35b, s.v. *Minhag*, explains that R. Yishmael is of the opinion that one who is poverty stricken cannot focus on his learning and won't learn to the best of his ability. R. Yosef Karo (1488-1575), *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 156:1, rules in accordance with the opinion of R. Yishmael.

Choosing between *Talmud Torah* and performance of a mitzvah

R. Shneur Zalman notes an important difference between the first aspect of the mitzvah and the second. Rambam states:

If one has the opportunity to perform a mitzvah or to study Torah, if it is possible for the mitzvah to be performed by someone else, one should not interrupt one's study. If not, one should perform the mitzvah and continue studying.

Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:4

היה לפניו עשיית מצוה ותלמוד תורה אם אפשר למצוה להעשות ע"י אחרים לא יפסיק תלמודו. ואם לאו יעשה המצוה ויחזור לתלמודו.
רמב"ם הל' תלמוד תורה ג:ד

If one is learning Torah and there is a mitzvah to perform that can only be fulfilled by the individual who is learning, he must break from his learning to perform the mitzvah. Rambam's ruling is codified in *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 246:18.

There are a number of Talmudic discussions which seem to present a challenge to the idea that one should stop learning Torah in order to perform a mitzvah. First, the Gemara, *Kiddushin* 29b, cites a dispute as to whether one should learn Torah and then get married or whether one should get married first and then learn Torah:

Our rabbis taught: If one has the option of studying Torah or getting married, he should study Torah and then get married but if he can't study without a wife, he should get married first and then study Torah. R. Yehuda said in the name of the Shmuel: The law is that one should get married and then study Torah. R. Yochanan said: How can he study Torah properly with a yoke on his neck? And there is no dispute (between Shmuel and R. Yochanan)- there is a difference between them and us.¹³

Kiddushin 29b

ת"ר ללמוד תורה ולישא אשה ילמוד תורה ואח"כ ישא אשה ואם א"א לו בלא אשה ישא אשה ואח"כ ילמוד תורה אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל הלכה נושא אשה ואח"כ ילמוד תורה ר' יוחנן אמר ריהיים בצוארו ויעסוק בתורה ולא פליגי הא לן והא להו.
קדושין כט:

¹³ According to Rashi, s.v. *Ha Lan*, the residents of Babylonia would travel to Israel to study and were not burdened by the needs of their family when in Israel. Therefore, it was preferable for them to marry first and then go to Israel to study. The residents of Israel would stay at home and therefore, it was preferable to study prior to getting married. According to Rabbeinu Tam (cited in *Tosafot*, ad loc., s.v. *Ha Lan*), the residents of Babylonia should study first because they can't leave their families to study in Israel once they get married. Furthermore, the residents of Babylonia were not as wealthy. The residents of Israel should get married first because they can remain close to home and they have the financial resources to study while married.

The argument presented against getting married first is that it will be too difficult to learn Torah with all of the responsibilities of marriage. One can ask: according to Rambam's principle, one should not forgo the mitzvah of getting married (or the mitzvah of having children) in order to perform the mitzvah of *talmud Torah*. Why then, does the Gemara conclude that in certain situations it is permissible to delay marriage in order to learn Torah? Furthermore, Ben Azai (cited in *Yevamot* 63b) states that he never got married because he had a desire to learn Torah. Rambam, *Hilchot Ishut* 15:3, and *Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer* 1:4, both rule that if one is steeped in Torah like Ben Azai and he never gets married, he doesn't violate any transgression. How can one totally abrogate the obligation to get married because of a desire to learn Torah?

Second, the Talmud Yerushalmi records the following incident:

R. Avahu inquired regarding his son R. Chanina who was studying in Tiberias. They told him that his son is spending his time helping to bury the dead. R. Avahu responded: Are there not enough graves in Caesaria that I had to send you to Tiberias?

Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 3:7

רבי אבהו שלח לר' חנינה בריה
 יזכי בטיב ריה אתון ואמרון ליה
 גמל הוא חסד שלח ומר ליה המבלי
 אין קברים בקיסרין שלחתיך
 לטבריא.
 תלמוד ירושלמי פסחים ג:ז

R. Shneur Zalman asks: if in fact there were no other people available in Tiberias to perform these services, why was R. Avahu bothered by his son's actions? Shouldn't his son break from learning in order to perform a mitzvah that cannot be performed by anyone else?

R. Shneur Zalman answers that the principle that one breaks from learning in order to fulfill a mitzvah only applies to the first aspect of *talmud Torah*, the daily obligation to learn Torah. It does not apply to the second aspect of *talmud Torah*, the obligation to master the Torah. Therefore, one must break from his learning in order to perform a mitzvah that arises on an occasional basis. However, if performance of the mitzvah is going to significantly impact one's ability to master Torah, one should not perform the mitzvah. This is why the Gemara entertains delaying marriage in order to study Torah. Since marriage will significantly impact how much one is able to learn, he may delay performance of the *mitzvot* associated with marriage in order to continue his studies. Furthermore, if one's dedication to Torah is on the level of Ben Azai, he may forgo these *mitzvot* altogether.

R. Shneur Zalman further explains that the reason why R. Avahu was bothered by his son's decision to perform burial services is that his son was at a stage in his learning when daily performance of burial services would significantly impact his ability to master the Torah. Therefore, even if there was nobody else available, his son should not have performed these services on a consistent basis.¹⁴

Quantity vs. Quality

The dual nature of the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* is relevant to other discussions.

¹⁴ According to *Kesef Mishneh, Hilchot Talmud Torah* 3:3, R. Avahu's argument was invalid and his son was acting properly because there were no other people to perform these services.

A person should always split his years into thirds: One third for the study of Tanach, one third for the study of Mishna and one third for the study of Talmud. How is one to know how long he will live? Rather it is referring to days.

Kiddushin 30a

לעולם ישלש אדם שנותיו
שליש במקרא שלישי במשנה
שליש בתלמוד מי יודע כמה
חיי לא צריכא ליומי
קדושין ל.

Tosafot, *Kiddushin* 30a, s.v. *Lo Tzricha*, understand that the conclusion of the Gemara is that each day one should split one's learning between Tanach, Mishna and Talmud. According to Tosafot, the requirement to split one's learning into thirds seems to be a function of the requirement of the mitzvah to learn Torah on a daily basis.¹⁵

Rambam seems to view this obligation differently. Rambam writes that the obligation to split one's learning into thirds only applies at the beginning of one's studies. Once one has advanced, one can focus on Talmud while reviewing Tanach and Mishna periodically. Rambam seems to view the obligation to split one's learning into thirds as a function of the obligation to master Torah. For this reason, there is no obligation to split one's learning once one has mastered Tanach and Mishna.

Second, R. David HaLevi Segal (c.1586-1667), *Taz, Even Ha'Ezer* 25:1 discusses the practice of those who sleep very little because of their dedication to Torah study. He notes that there is no advantage to sleeping less when one can get more sleep and be more alert for one's studies. Why does *Taz* state that there is no advantage for the person who sleeps less? Wouldn't that person have a greater fulfillment of the mitzvah of *talmud Torah* simply by spending more time dedicated to the mitzvah?

The answer to this question is addressed in a comment of R. Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883), *Ohr Yisrael* no. 27, who states that the mitzvah of mastering Torah supersedes the mitzvah to constantly study Torah. He notes that the mitzvah to constantly study Torah would not provide an allowance for someone to seek out a means of improving the quality of one's study such as travelling to a yeshiva in another town or sleeping more in order to focus. It is only because of the mitzvah to master Torah that one can spend less time studying in order to focus on the quality of one's studies. As such, one can explain that *Taz* is of the same opinion and therefore, if sleeping less is going to impact the quality of one's studies, quality should not be sacrificed for quantity.

R. Yisrael Salanter notes that the mitzvah to master Torah only supersedes the mitzvah to constantly learn Torah when the individual is someone who has refined character traits and *yirat shamayim* (fear of heaven). This is because the mitzvah to master Torah is focused on the result more than the actions taken to achieve that result. If one has mastered the Torah but is not a refined individual, his mastery of Torah is devalued and all of the time spent focusing on quality didn't produce the proper result. For this individual, it would have been better to focus on quantity. *Talmud Torah* is not simply a means of collecting information. It is part of a process of becoming a complete individual who lives the ideals of the Torah.

¹⁵ Tosafot also note the opinion of Rabbeinu Tam that the Talmud Bavli contains Tanach, Mishna and Talmud and therefore study of Talmud Bavli fulfills this requirement.

Why Break the Tablets?

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God informs Moshe, on the summit of Mount Sinai, of the Sin of the Golden Calf and commands him to descend the mountain and confront the nation. After beseeching God to forgive the people, Moshe complies, carrying with him the divinely created Tablets of Testimony upon which God has inscribed the Ten Declarations.¹⁷

When Moshe nears the Israelite encampment, however, and sees the nation dancing before the Golden Calf, he becomes enraged and "casts the tablets out of his hands and smashes them beneath the mountain."¹⁸

In the book of Devarim, nearly forty years later, when Moshe recalls this event before the nation, he emphatically declares: "I grasped the two Tablets and threw them from my two hands, and I smashed them before your eyes."¹⁹

In the wake of the destruction of these Tablets, God commands Moshe to carve a second set upon which: "I (God) will inscribe the words that were on the first tablets *asher shibarta* (which you shattered)."²⁰ The Talmudic sages perceive in the two words '*asher shibarta*' divine approbation of Moshe's actions- *Yiyasher kochacha sheshibarta*, "You are to be congratulated for shattering [the first set of Tablets]." The rabbis thus identify the breaking of the Tablets as one of three actions which Moshe performed of his own accord, to which God retroactively gives His stamp of approval.²¹

So powerfully does Rashi identify with this rabbinic observation, that he cites it in his final commentary on the Torah.²² The Torah ends with the statement: "Never again has arisen a prophet like Moshe, who knew God face-to-face; as evidenced by all the signs ... and by the strong hand and great power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel." Rashi maintains that the very last words of the Torah, "... before the eyes of all Israel," allude to the breaking of the Tablets; an event which Moshe describes as having occurred "before the eyes of the people."²³

Questions

The classic, familiar image of Moshe breaking the Tablets of Testimony at the foot of Mount Sinai demands a second look.

Excerpted from *Unlocking the Torah Text* (Gefen Publishing, 2008)

¹⁷ Shmot 32:7-16

¹⁸ Ibid 32:19

¹⁹ Devarim 9:17

²⁰ Shmot 34:1

²¹ Talmud Bavli Yevamot 62a

²² Rashi Devarim 34:12

²³ Devarim 9:17

Simply put, why does Moshe shatter the Tablets? Why does he take his anger out, in seemingly misdirected fashion, upon an object of such overwhelming sanctity? The destruction of any sanctified object is a grievous sin; how much more so the shattering of the God-created Tablets of Testimony.

Compounding the problem is the apparent positive judgment of the rabbis concerning Moshe's actions. Why do the rabbis believe that God congratulates Moshe for breaking the Tablets? Why, in addition, would Rashi see this action as so commendable and significant that he would cite it as his final comment on Moshe's life and close his monumental work on the Torah specifically by recalling this event?

Approaches

So serious are the issues raised by Moshe's breaking the first set of Tablets of Testimony, that a wide range of often diametrically opposed views concerning this event are proposed by the commentaries.

A. Strangely enough, it is the Rashbam, *pashtan* par excellence, who veers sharply away from the straightforward explanation of the Torah text. Maintaining that Moshe did not shatter the Tablets at all of his own accord, the Rashbam states:

"When Moshe saw the Calf, his strength ebbed and he only had enough power to thrust the Tablets far enough away that they would not damage his feet as they *fell* from his hands."²⁴

As the Rashbam himself indicates, he builds his position on earlier statements found in the Midrash which postulate a sudden inability on Moshe's part to carry the Tablets. A source in Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer explains, for example, that the Divine inscription on the tablets miraculously enables the stone to "carry itself and Moshe with it." When, however, the Golden Calf and the rejoicing Israelites come into view, the inscription "flies" from the Tablets. With God's words gone, Moshe can no longer carry the heavy stone and the Tablets fall from his hands.²⁵ Similar explanations are found elsewhere in Midrashic literature.²⁶

While the Rashbam does translate these Midrashic traditions into less miraculous terms, he nonetheless, seems to contradict the clear intent of the Biblical text, both here and in the book of Devarim. The Torah indicates that Moshe does not drop the Tablets but actively thrusts them from his hands, destroying them at the foot of the mountain. The Rashbam must have struggled deeply with the concept of Moshe consciously shattering the Divinely created Tablets, to have adopted a Midrashic position so clearly at odds with the straightforward meaning of the text.

B. The Ramban believes, like the Rashbam, that the breaking of the Tablets simply could not have been a conscious, premeditated action on Moshe's part. Attempting to remain more clearly within the boundaries of the text, however, the Ramban maintains that Moshe is overcome not by physical but by spiritual and emotional weakness when he comes into sight of the celebrating Israelites:

²⁴ Rashbam Shmot 32:19

²⁵ Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 45

²⁶ Midrash Tanchuma Devarim Eikev 11

Moshe did not hesitate to shatter the Tablets, for he was so angered when he saw this evil deed, he could not control himself.

Ramban Shmot 32:16

לא נמנע משה בכל זה מלשבר אותם, כי חרה לו בראותו המעשה הרע ההוא, ולא יכול להתאפק.

רמב"ן שמות לב:טז

C. Numerous other authorities, however, are unwilling to accept the breaking of the Tablets as an involuntary action on Moshe's part. Strange as it might seem, they claim, Moshe consciously destroys the Tablets of Testimony in response to the sin of the Golden Calf. For this deliberate act, they continue, Moshe receives the Divine approbation recorded in the Talmud (see above).

While the sources agree, however, on the deliberate nature of Moshe's act, his motivations remain the subject of ongoing debate.

Some Midrashic authorities maintain that Moshe is motivated by a desire to protect the nation from the full effect of their sin. He reasons:

If I give the law to the people, they will be held fully culpable for their actions under that law. Far better that they should be judged as inadvertent rather than as deliberate sinners.

Moshe, therefore, smashes the Tablets to avoid presenting them to the Israelites.²⁷

Another Midrash suggests that Moshe goes even further in a self-sacrificing attempt to save the nation. He deliberately sins by breaking the Tablets so that his fate will be bound up with the fate of the Israelites.

True, Moshe says to God, The people have sinned- but so have I. If you will forgive them, then forgive me as well. If you will not forgive them, then do not forgive me. Instead, "erase me from the book that you have written."²⁸

At the opposite end of the interpretive spectrum, Rashi sees Moshe's motivation as condemnatory of the Israelites actions. Moshe deliberates:

If the Torah states with regard to the Pesach sacrifice, which is only one mitzva, 'no apostate may eat of it,' (Shemot 12:43) - Now, when the entire Torah is involved and all of Israel are apostates, shall I give the Torah to them?

Rashi Shemot 32:19

אמר מה פסח שהיא אחת מן המצוות, אמרה תורה (שמות יב מג) כל בן נכר לא יאכל בו, התורה כלה כאן, וכל ישראל משומדים ואתננה להם: רש"י שמות לב:יט

Yet other commentaries interpret Moshe's actions as consciously educative in intent. Moshe wants, through the smashing of the Tablets, to 'shock' the Israelites back to their senses. The Netziv goes so far as to claim that Moshe deliberately refrains from breaking the Tablets at the summit of Mount Sinai, when God first informs him of the *chet ha'egel*. He, instead, bides his time and waits until his actions will have the greatest impact upon the people at the foot of the mountain. When the nation witnesses his destruction of these overwhelmingly sanctified

²⁷ Midrash Rabba Shmot 43:1

²⁸ Shmot 32:32;Midrash Rabba Shmot 46:1

objects, Moshe reasons, they will be so shocked and aggrieved that they will, without objection, accept the punitive measures necessary in response to their sin.²⁹

D. The broadest and boldest classical suggestion concerning Moshe's motivation in breaking the Tablets of Testimony is offered by the 19th-20th century scholar, Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen of Dvinsk, in his insightful work, the *Meshech Chochma*. Rabbi Meir Simcha maintains that Moshe wants to convey to the people one simple truth: *There is only one source of holiness in existence: God, Himself.*

Moshe recognizes that at the core of the sin of the Golden Calf lies the nation's erroneous belief in sources of sanctity outside of God. The Israelites perceive Moshe as inherently holy and essential to their relationship with the Divine. When Moshe apparently disappears they feel compelled to create another source of supposed holiness in an attempt to reach God-hence, the creation of the Golden Calf.

Realizing that he must try to cure the nation of its misconceptions, Moshe turns to them and effectively says:

I am not holy. I am a man just as you. The Torah is not dependent upon me. Even had I not returned the Torah would have continued in my absence.

The Sanctuary and its utensils are not intrinsically holy. Their sanctity derives from God's presence in our midst. If you sin, these objects lose their holiness.

Even these Tablets of Testimony-the word of God-are not holy, in and of themselves. Their sanctity derives from your relationship with God and your willingness to observe his law. Now that you have sinned, these tablets are mere stone, devoid of any sanctity. As proof of my point, I shatter them before you!

Moshe, Rabbi Meir Simcha continues, is deeply afraid that the Tablets of Testimony will be misused by the nation in its present state. He is concerned that the people will deify the Tablets themselves. By shattering the Tablets, therefore, Moshe directly addresses a root cause of the *Chet Ha'egel* as he teaches the Israelites that God, alone, is the source of holiness.³⁰

E. One final approach to Moshe's actions can be suggested if we consider the fundamental differences between the two sets of tablets received by Moshe on Sinai: The first set, destroyed as a result of the *Chet Ha'egel* and the second set, mandated by God to take their place.

The most obvious distinction is that the first set of Tablets were both carved and inscribed by God while the second set were carved by Moshe at God's command and then Divinely inscribed on the summit of Mount Sinai.

A second, more subtle yet fascinating, distinction between the two sets emerges as part of Moshe's recollections in the book of Devarim. Recalling the flow of events at Sinai for the people, Moshe states that, accompanying the commandments to carve the second set of Tablets and to ascend the mountain with them, was an added Divine directive: "And make for yourself a

²⁹ Ha'amek Davar Shmot 32: 15-20

³⁰ Meshech Chochma Shmot 32:19

wooden ark [in which to place these tablets]."³¹ So important is this ark (which, strangely, is not mentioned at all when events occur in the book of Shmot) in Moshe's mind, that he mentions it no less than four times within the span of five sentences.³²

Perhaps the message of the second Tablets and the ark into which they are placed is the *message of context*. The Torah is valueless in a vacuum. Its words are only significant when they find a ready home in the heart of man; only when those words are allowed to shape and form the actions of those who receive them.

Moshe, descending the mountain and witnessing the celebrating Israelites, recognizes that the Tablets and the law which they represent have no context within which to exist. The nation is simply unready to accept God's Word. Were that Word to be given to them in their present state, the Torah itself would become an aberration, misunderstood and even misused. Moshe, therefore, publicly destroys the Tablets of Testimony and, then, at God's command, begins the process of re-educating the people.

Central to that process of re-education will be the symbolism of the second set of Tablets of Testimony, themselves. God will inscribe upon them his word but, this time, only on stone carved by Moshe. The Tablets themselves will thus represent the word of God, finding a home in the actions of man.

These new Tablets must also immediately be placed into a symbolic home—a simple ark of wood. Only if the words of those Tablets find their home, as well, in humble hearts of man—only if the Torah finds its context—will that Torah be worthy of existence.

Points to Ponder

One of the first personal mottos I developed for myself in the early years of my rabbinate was: *You can't judge Judaism by the Jews.*

This motto has, unfortunately, come in handy more times than I can count during the years since.

We cringe when we are confronted with individuals who claim to be observant Jews but whose actions belie their faith. "How," we are asked, or ask ourselves, "can a religious person act this way? If this is what Judaism produces"

The appropriate responses to these challenges are, of course, clear. *If an individual acts in a way which contradicts the values that Judaism represents, then that individual is not an observant Jew and, even more importantly, what he practices is not Judaism.* The problem is not with the law but with the context. Judaism cannot exist in a vacuum. For Jewish law to take concrete root in this world it must rest in the hearts and shape the actions of those whose very lives reflect its goals.

The partnership with which God challenges us is full and our relationship is, on some level, symbiotic. We are the vehicles divinely chosen to bring God's presence into this world. *Just as the law must give meaning to our lives—our lives must give meaning to the law.*

³¹ Devarim 10:1

³² Ibid 10:1-5

Aliyah Laregel Bzman Haze

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Each *Yom Tov* of the *Shalosh Regalim* we are reminded of the Torah (Devarim 16:16) commandment of *aliyah laregel*, of our collective pilgrimage to Yerushalayim.

Three times in a year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose; on Pesach, and on Shavuot, and on Sukkos; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty;

Devarim 16:16

שלוש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך
את פני ה' אלהיך במקום אשר יבחר
בחג המצות ובחג השבועות ובחג
הסכות ולא יראה את פני ה' ריקם:
דברים טז:טז

Upon receiving an “aliyah” during the *Keriat HaTorah*, the Gabbai blesses the *oleh* that he should merit to go up on the *regel* with the rest of the Jewish People. In order to analyze whether this *mitzvah* applies today, it is necessary to define the parameters of the *mitzvah* in terms of its connection to the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Connection Between the Korban and Aliyah Laregel

The Rambam summarizes the *mitzvah* as follows:³³

The definition of reiyah which the Torah mentions refers to being seen in the Temple courtyard on the first day of the holiday and to bring with him a korban olah from a bird or animal. A person that comes to the courtyard on the first day and does not bring the korban olah not only does he not fulfill a positive command (of reiyah) but he violates a negative command of ‘And donot see my face empty-handed.

Hilchos Chagiga 1:1

הראייה האמורה בתורה היא שנראה
פניו בעזרה ביום טוב הראשון של חג
ויביא עמו קרבן עולה בין מן העוף
בין מן הבהמה, ומי שבא לעזרה ביום
ראשון ולא הביא עולה לא דיו שלא
עשה מצות עשה אלא עובר על לא
תעשה שנאמר לא יראו פני ריקם.
רמב"ם הלכות חגיגה א:א

The Rambam views the obligation of *aliyah laregel* and of offering a *korban* as two parts of a single *mitzvah*. If one enters the *Beis Hamikdash* without a *korban* he commits a sin and does

³³ See also the Rambam in his *Sefer Hamitzvot* #20 and #53

not fulfill any positive command for his effort to travel to Yerushalayim for the holiday and be seen in the Beis Hamikdash.³⁴

The gemarah takes a similar approach by implying that without a Beis Hamikdash there is no obligation of aliyah laregel. In the context of finding witnesses for a *get* in Eretz Yisrael it states,

*Also from one state to another one should not fear that he could not find the witnesses in Eretz Yisrael since there are olei regalim we can surely find them. That may be true during the times when the Beit Hamikdash stood, but in times without a Beit Hamikdash what would we say?*³⁵

Gitin 4b

לעולם ממדינה למדינה בארץ
ישראל נמי לא צריך, דכיון דאיכא עולי
רגלים מישכח שכיחי. תינה בזמן שבית
המקדש קיים, בזמן שאין בית המקדש
קיים מאי איכא למימר?
גיטין ד:

This implies that there no longer were people performing aliyah laregel in the times after the *churban*. Also, there is no mention of this mitzvah in classic halachik works such as the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, which codify halachos applicable in the post-*churban* era.³⁶

Therefore, it seems clear from the Rambam,³⁷ Talmud Bavli, and from the fact that this halacha of aliyah laregel is not codified in the Tur or Shulchan Aruch, that the mitzvah does not apply in our times.³⁸

Accordingly, the Noda Beyehuda explains why the mitzvah of visiting one's Rebbe on Yom Tov cannot apply in post *churban* times as it would than obligate us to visit our teachers more than Hashem!

Therefore, since today due to our sins the statement that 'I will destroy your sanctuary' has been fulfilled... and we cannot go to receive the countenance of Hashem there since the Torah does not obligate us unless we also have a korban chagiga, there cannot be an obligation to visit one's Rebbe... because then it would make his honor greater than that of Hashem's.

Noda Beyehuda Orach Chaim #94

וא"כ לפי זה בזמן הזה שבעו"ה נתקיים
והשימותי את מקדשיכם... ואין אנחנו
הולכים לקבל פני השכינה שמה כלל כי
לא חייבה אותנו התורה כ"א בקרבן
חגיגה ועולות ראי', אין מקום להטיל
חיוב לקבל פני רבו כלל... דאם כן
כבודו גדול מכבוד שמים
נודע ביהודה או"ה צד

³⁴ The Turei Even (Chagiga 2a) understands the Rambam as saying that a condition in the obligation of aliyah laregel is to bring a korban, whereas the Sefas Emes (Chagiga 2a) views this as a *mitzvah haba beaveirah*. See also Minchas Asher Devarim #24.

³⁵ See also Nedarim 23a for a similar support to this approach.

³⁶ As opposed to the Rambam, who although lived only a few hundred years before, incorporated within his *Mishneh Torah* all halachos including those that only relate to the times with a Beit Hamikdash.

³⁷ However, a novel approach to the Rambam's position is found in Journal Bikkurim (5758, p. 133-148) by Rabbi Avraham Yehuda Weisberg in which he concludes that the sin of visiting Har Habayit without korbanos is designated to the first day of Yom Tov (as he cites Rambam Chagiga 1:4 and 2:6) and therefore if one were to visit during Chol Hamoed he would fulfill the mitzvah of aliyah laregel. See also Minchas Chinuch concerning fulfilling the mitzvah at night at a time when korbanot cannot be brought.

³⁸ It should be noted that the Talmud Yerushalmi (Chagiga 1:1), although not accepted *lehalacha*, takes a different approach to that of the Rambam and separates the mitzvah of aliyah laregel from that of the korban offered at the time.

But there is another approach found in a few later *achronim*⁴³ that even today if one were to visit the Beis Hamikdash area during the *chagim* one would be in fulfillment of a Biblical mitzvah, albeit a different mitzvah from aliyah laregel per se, namely that of *kabalas pnei hashechina*. We assume that even after the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, although the structure no longer stands on Har Habayis, the *shechina* still resides in that very place, just as it did during the time of the second Beis Hamikdash. Rabbi Menashe Klein goes even further and concludes

Perhaps today the mitzvah (to visit the shechina) is even greater today, as it says 'Zion has no seekers' which implies that it requires seekers and those that come bring joy to the Shechina and fulfill a great mitzvah indeed, this seems to me to be obvious and true.

Meshaneh Halachos 12:482

ואולי כעת המצוה יותר גדולה
 כמ"ש ציון דורש אין לה מכלל דבעי
 דורש ואם בא הדורש משמח כביכול
 השכינה ומקיים מ"ע גדולה וזלפענ"ד
 ברור ואמת
 שו"ת משנה הלכות חלק יב סימן תפב

Application to us today

There are a few practical applications that are borne out of this discussion as to whether the mitzvah of aliyah laregel applies today. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Yechave Daas 2:10) addresses the question regarding the halachos pertaining to the insertion of *tal umatar* which was instituted by Chazal to commence after the seventh of *Cheshvan* in order to allow travelers to return home from their aliyah laregel before praying for rain. It is interesting to note that this time delay still exists according to halacha today presumably because people maintain the minhag to continue the mitzvah of aliyah laregel.⁴⁴ However, Rabbi Yosef assumes that if one were to begin saying *tal umatar* immediately after Sukkot he would not have to repeat the *shmone esrei*.

A second source of note is the Sefer Yeraim (#425) who defines the verse “and you shall not see me empty handed” as referring to “empty from *tzedakah*” as opposed to the conventional definition of without a korban in hand. As such, it may be possible to fulfill the mitzvah of aliyah laregel and not transgress coming “empty-handed” as the aforementioned Ramabam assumes, provided that one hands out *tzedakah* when visiting the Kotel.⁴⁵

Another halacha that relates to Sukkos is the fulfillment of taking *daled minim* beyond the first day of Yom Tov. The Torah says⁴⁶ “You shall take for yourself on the first day... and you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d a seven day period”. This implies a differentiation between the obligation in the Beis Hamikdash and outside of the Beit Hamikdash. Chazal teach that the Biblical obligation is only fulfilled in the Beis Hamikdash all seven days and outside the Beis Hamikdash only on the first day. This leads some later poskim⁴⁷ to encourage us to make an

⁴³ Tzitz Eliezer 10:1 and more explicitly in Rabbi Menashe Klein’s Mishne Halachos 12:482

⁴⁴ However the Ran (Taanis 10a) explains that today it is better for the summer crop to delay praying for rain until a later date.

⁴⁵ Perhaps this explains why there are so many opportunities to perform this mitzvah when one visits the Kotel. This may however still pose a problem on Yom Tov itself.

⁴⁶ Vayikra 23:40

⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion see Bikurei Yaacov (658:1), Mikraei Kodesh (Sukkos 2:19), Moadim Uzemanim (5:348) and the long essay by Rav Yeruchem Fishel Perlow at the end of the third volume of his notes to the Rasag (Miluim #5).

effort to daven at or visit the kotel during chol hamoed and to shake the *daled minim* there to fulfill the Biblical command.

What is clear from this discussion is the unity and centrality of the Beis Hamikdash, “the spiritual headquarters” of the Jewish nation. The mitzvah of aliyah laregel affords us the opportunity to maintain a broader perspective on the Jewish community and focus our *avodas Hashem* during the times of the year when we are not able to bask in the glory of the shechinah. Even today when the Biblical obligation may not exist, the themes and messages of the mitzvah should permeate our Yom Tov experience.

Rabbi Soloveitchik⁴⁸ pointed out that in all three places where the Torah describes the mitzvah of aliyah laregel⁴⁹ there is a notation in the *trup*, cantillation marks, when we *lein* those *pesukim* of a *psik*, which indicates a stopping point, between the words of *Adon* and *Hashem*. This indicates to us the duality of the mitzvah. The first stage is that of *Adon*, to go to Yerushlayim and to view the towering structure that is the Beis Hamikdash and its vessels, which we do not have today. The second is that of *Hashem*, to be with the shechinah, and that we are fortunate to have both in terms of the kedushat hamakom and through our learning of Torah and the *daled amos shel halacha* as the gemarah states

From the days that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed the area (in which the shechina dwells) in this world is the four cubits of halacha.

Berachos 8a

מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקדוש ברוך הוא
בעולמו אלא ארבע אמות של הלכה בלבד
ברכות ה.

⁴⁸ Cited in Harerei Kedem Volume Two, page 349.

⁴⁹ Shemos 23:17, Shemos 34:23, and Devarim 16:16

How is this holiday different than all others?

Mrs. Deena Rabinovich

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The laws of Pesach dorot - Passover for the ages - are set out in some detail as part of the recounting of the Exodus story itself (Ex. 12:14-20). In the collection of laws, civil and religious, in parashat Mishpatim, which are situated between the Exodus story and the Mishkan/Golden calf narrative, we learn that Pesach is to be one of three annual pilgrim festivals. This is the first that we hear of the other two festivals.

Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto Me in the year. The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep; seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, at the time appointed in the month Abib--for in it thou camest out from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty; and the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which thou sowest in the field; and the feast of ingathering, at the end of the year, when thou gatherest in thy labours out of the field. Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord GOD.⁵⁰

Ex. 23: 14 -17

שלוש רגלים תחג לי בשנה: את חג המצות תשמר שבעת ימים תאכל מצות כאשר צויתך למועד חדש האביב כי בו יצאת ממצרים ולא יראו פני ריקם: וחג הקציר בכורי מעשיך אשר תזרע בשדה וחג האסף בצאת השנה באספך את מעשיך מן השדה: שלוש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך אל פני האדן ה':
שמות כג: יד-יז

In this initial description of the cycle of three festivals, the festival of the Matzot (no mention of the Pesach here unless the end of verse 15 is an oblique reference: but cf. Rashi, *ad loc*) recalls the historical events of the Exodus, while the introduction of the feasts of the early harvest and of the ultimate gathering of the crops presents no historical markers. As we read the other sections of the Torah that deal with the pilgrim festivals (Lev. 23: 1-44, which includes a discussion of all of the holidays of the seventh month (Tishrei); Num. 28 :16-31 and 29:12-38, detailing the sacrifices to be brought on the festivals; and Deut. 1-18 focusing, as in Ex. 23 only on the three festivals and in the same order) the gathering holiday- Sukkot - begins to come into clearer

⁵⁰ The translations of Biblical verses throughout follow those of the New Jewish Publication Society (Philadelphia, 1985). Other translations are by the author.

focus. It, too, commemorates the Exodus by requiring one to relocate, for a week, from one's house to a temporary structure recalling the encampment of the Jews in the wilderness. Our tradition has connected the early harvest festival – Shavuot – with the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, but there is no mention of this in the text itself.

Certain parallels emerge between Pesach and Sukkot in parashat Pinhas:

And in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, is the LORD'S passover. And on the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast; seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. In the first day shall be a holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work;

Num. 28: 16 -18

ובחדש הראשון בארבעה עשר יום
לחדש פסח לה': ובחמשה עשר יום
לחדש הזה חג שבעת ימים מצות
יאכל: ביום הראשון מקרא קדש כל
מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו:

במדבר כח: טז-יח

And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no manner of servile work, and ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days;

Num. 29: 12

ובחמשה עשר יום לחדש השביעי מקרא
קדש יהיה לכם כל מלאכת עבדה לא
תעשו והגתם חג לה' שבעת ימים:

במדבר כט: יב

Also in the day of the first-fruits, when ye bring a new meal-offering unto the LORD in your feast of weeks, ye shall have a holy convocation: ye shall do no manner of servile work;

Num. 28: 26

וביום הבכורים בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה
לה' בשבעתיכם מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל
מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו:

במדבר כח: כו

In the verses from parashat Emor we again sense a certain consonance between the laws of Pesach and Sukkot. On Pesach one refrains, for a week, from eating breads and other leavened products – mainstays of the diet – while on Sukkot one moves out of one's home; both of these laws relate to the Exodus as does the commandment to eat Matzah on the first night of Pesach, which matches up with the obligation to eat a meal in the Sukkah on the first night of Sukkot. Sukkot is also enhanced by the arba minim which connect the holiday to the agricultural cycle. Here, the connection to Pesach is not as clear, but we are told (Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:2) that the time of divine judgment (or confirmation of that judgment) for grains is on Pesach, connecting a key Pesach symbol with the agricultural cycle. Shavuot lacks the memorable symbols of the other two pilgrim festivals.⁵¹

Moreover, Pesach begins on the fifteenth of the month, when the moon is at its fullest. It lasts for seven days with the first and last a *מקרא קודש*, a day on which no *מלאכה* is performed. Sukkot also begins on the fifteenth of the month also lasts for seven days, and also begins and ends with a *מקרא קודש*. Of course, Pesach is in the first month (Nissan) and Sukkot in the seventh month

⁵¹ Shavuot is also mentioned in the Mishna Rosh Ha-Shana 2:2 as a time period in which judgment is made on the year's fruit crop, and that could tie in with the commandment regarding Bikkurim, particularly since the holiday is called Hag ha-Bikkurim and Shavuot is the opening of the season for Bikkurim (Mishna Bikkurim 1:3). There was also mention of Bikkurim in some Yotzrot or Ma'aravot for Shavuot (See, e.g., Shu"t *Havvoth Yair* no. 238.) But the majority of the Yotzrot deal with the giving of the Torah or the Ten Commandments (See, A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Liturgy and its Development* (1995 reprint) p. 330 and ff), and there is no traditional focus on Bikkurim as a mitzvah tied to Shavuot.

(Tishrei). Pesach is identified as a holiday in the first month of the year; Sukkot is identified as a holiday in the seventh month of the year. Rabbi Yohanan (*Sukkah* 27a) cites an earlier gezerah shava centered on the common date (the 15th of the month) that Pesach and Sukkot share.

By contrast, Shavuot lasts for only one day and is not marked by any particular mitzvot by the general public. (There was the “Two Loaves” (Shetei ha-Lehem) presented in the Temple to which we will return). Shavuot, most remarkably, is not set for a particular date. This, of course, set the stage for generations of dispute between the Rabbis and the Sadducees, discussed below, and between traditionalists and various sectarian groups on the timing of Shavuot.⁵²

The various descriptions of the festivals that we have looked at also make historical references. In the verses in Shemot we are reminded that we celebrate Pesach in the spring since that is when we left Egypt, [שמות כג:טו]. In Va-Yikra we are told to dwell in Sukkot so that our children will know how God housed us in temporary structures when He took us out of Egypt [ויקרא כג:מג]. There is no historic aspect listed for the holiday of Shavuot, though we are told that the mitzvah of עומר from when we begin to count towards Shavuot begins when [ויקרא כג:מג]

So, Shavuot is a holiday of a different length than the other festivals, at an undetermined time, for an undetermined historic reason, perhaps connected to our arrival in the land of Israel.

There are, though, a series of links between Pesach and Shavuot. The famously ambiguous Lev. 23:15 featuring the phrase “mi-maharat ha-Shabbat” as the date when the countdown to Shavuot begins was the occasion for a celebrated controversy between Hazal and the Sadducees.⁵³ An example of “inner biblical exegesis” is found in Joshua 5:11 where the phrase “Mi-maharat ha-Pesach” (the day after the Pesach) is substituted, tying the date of Shavuot to that of Pesach. Here are the verses from Emor:

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the waving; seven weeks shall there be complete; even unto the morrow after the seventh week shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall present a new meal-offering unto the LORD

Lev. 23:15-16

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום
הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות
תמימת תהיינה: עד ממחרת השבת
השביעת תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם
מנחה חדשה לה':
ויקרא כג:טו-טז

⁵² Book of Jubilees and Qumran list the holiday as occurring on the 15th of the third month, an interesting parallel to Pesach and Sukkot which the Torah prescribes, respectively, for the fifteenth day of the first and seventh months. There is a large literature on this question and the significance of the calendar to the struggles between the various groups in Second Temple times. See, for instance, Steven D. Fraade, “Theory, Practice, and Polemic in Ancient Jewish Calendars,” in *Dine Israel: Studies in Halakha and Jewish Law*, Vol. 26-27 (Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University and Tel Aviv University Law School, 2009-2010), pp. 147- 181; Liora Ravid, “The Book of Jubilees and its Calendar,” *Dead Sea Discoveries*, Vol. 10, number 3 (2003), pp. 371-394.

⁵³ The Sadducees believed that the word שבת should be taken at face value and placed the date for the Korban Omer on the Sunday following the beginning of Pesach. The Talmud (Menahot 65a-66a) sets out various responses by the Rabbis to the Sadducean approach.

The descriptions we have seen for Pesach and Sukkot distinguish between the dates (including the months) on which the festival falls and the respective seasons of the year. The Jewish calendar is famously and uniquely a hybrid of the lunar and solar systems. The lunar approach, ostensibly determined by the rotations of the moon and the earth, must be confirmed by the Sanhedrin on the basis of human testimony. Two witnesses must observe the new moon in its correct position in the sky and come to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem so that the rabbis can dedicate the day as the first of the month. There is, to be sure, at most a choice of two days on which the new month can be declared and if it is not declared by Sanhedrin on the first of the two days, it will automatically be declared for the second, but the human element is unmistakable in the legal process.

The seasons of the years are based on the revolution of the earth around the sun. We see indications of four seasons- spring, summer, fall and winter [though ancient civilizations tended to think in terms of three seasons (Assyria) or two (Mesopotamia)]. There is no human intervention in their determination. The seasons of the year appear, inevitably, as days with no human confirmation required.

This distinction between months and seasons follows a pattern with respect to the Torah's description of the festivals. The designation of the month is identified with the historic component of the holiday. Thus, Pesach takes place in the first month and reminds us of the fact that God took us out of Egypt in that very month. Sukkot takes place in the seventh month and reminds us of the houses God provided for us during our sojourn in the desert. The agricultural element of the holiday, on the other hand, is reflected in the season in which the holiday occurs. Pesach takes place in the spring and the unique mitzvah is to make an offering, mi-maharat ha-Shabbat, of barley, the first grain to ripen in the field. Sukkot takes place in what we call the fall, at the end of the agricultural year when we celebrate the bountiful harvest with which we have been blessed. The two aspects of the calendar are represented by the two luminaries that were created on the fourth day of creation, and reflect the division of labor, so to speak, in our partnership with God. Lunar, we dedicate, based on the moon. Solar, God dedicates, with no human intervention. We see this partnership alluded to for Sukkot and Pesach - but since Shavuot must follow naturally fifty days after Pesach, where is the human element? Moreover, if Shavuot requires no reference to a month or date - no human involvement - why do the others?

Let us examine the commentary of R. David Zvi Hoffman to the verses in Mishpatim where he explains the necessity of incorporating both calendars into the celebration of our holidays.

Here (Ex. 23:14-17) it is specifically emphasized that each holiday is to be celebrated in its particular season of the year, and that there is an agricultural component to the holiday as well. The arrival of a recognizable change of seasons mandates Israel to gather around God in the Place that is called by His Blessed Name, in order to recognize Him as the Creator of Nature and Nature's Master... Nature and history must join together to determine the timing of the holiday, for God who

כאן מודגש במיוחד שכל חג ייחגג בעונה מסוימת השנה, ושיש בכל גם משום משמעות חקלאית. כל עת שמגיעה עונה חשובה לטבע, על ישראל להתאסף סביב אלוהיו במקום אשר בו ייקרא שמו יתברך, כדי להכיר בו כבורא הטבע ואדוניו... טבע והיסטוריה גם יחד צריכים לקבוע את מועד החג, כי אותו הא-ל אשר ברא את הטבע, המפעיל את כוחותיו על פיקוחים נצחיים, הוא גם זה המכוון את גורל יושבי תבל באחראי להתרחשויות המגוונות

created nature and directs eternal intelligences is the same One who determines the fate of mankind and guides the varied events of history.

Commentary on Ex. 23:14-17

של ההיסטוריה.
רב דוד צבי הופמן על ספר שמות כג: יד-יז

Rav Hoffman explains why Israel must come together to celebrate. The fact that the historic events are connected to the lunar calendar and the agricultural events connected to the solar calendar help remind us that history and nature are connected.

How does this help us understand the lack of both calendar references for the holiday of Shavuot? Perhaps the answer can be seen in the answer to another question-what is the purpose of counting the fifty days to Shavuot? Sefer ha-Chinuch sees it as the fulfillment of the original promise made to Moshe in the beginning of parashat Va'era

The reason behind this mitzvah, in terms of its simple meaning, is that the main purpose of Israel is the Torah. It is for the sake of the Torah that the Heavens, and the Earth, and the People of Israel were created... and this is the main reason for which they were redeemed from Egypt- in order to receive the Torah on Har Sinai and to keep its precepts... And for this reason, we have been commanded to count from the day following the Yomtov of Pesach until the day of the Giving of the Torah, to show in our souls how strong the desire is for this honored day, ... since counting shows man that all of his salvation and hope will come at the designated time.

Sefer ha-Chinuch Mitzvah 306: Sefirat HaOmer

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה, ומפני התורה נבראו שמים וארץ וישראל... והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני ויקיימוה... ומפני כן, ... נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו, ... כי המנין מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע אל הזמן ההוא.
ספר החינוך מצוה שו: ספירת העומר

Pesach was only the beginning of the redemption process. We are not truly free until we have accepted the Torah and entered into a covenant with God. We show this connection by counting from one to the other, and by linking the date of Shavuot to the holiday of Pesach.

Rav Hirsch sees another reason. He combines two observations- the fact that Shavuot is named after the act of counting of weeks in preparation for the holiday, and the fact that the Talmud (in one view, anyway) dated the original Shavuot as the seventh of Sivan, the fifty-first (!) day following the Exodus. He notes:

It is not the fact of the revelation of the Torah, but our making ourselves worthy to receive it, that our מתן תורה Festival celebrates. It is the day before the Lawgiving, the last day of the הגבלה and פרישה, the day on which the nation finally presented itself as ready and worthy for the great mission to the world, to be the receivers and bearers of the Law of God, it is that day which the fiftieth day of the counting of the עומר represents. As we have remarked elsewhere, this Festival, differently to all the others, is not called after that which characteristically has to be done on it, but שבועות, after the counting of the weeks which preparatorily lead up to it. The Lawgiving, too, was in no way concentrated on the day of Sinai. The Lawgiving and the receipt of the laws lasted during forty years, and the Ten Commandments received at Sinai have no greater divinity or holiness than any of the other six

hundred and three commands and prohibitions which God gave through Moses. Quite clearly God Himself has explained the meaning and importance of the revelation on Sinai as being only an introduction to the laws, which were to be transmitted through Moses. This Sinai-day was to be a proof by personal experience that God can speak to Man and had spoken to Moses, so that we would receive the whole Torah from the mouth of Moses with full confidence that it was the Word of God... So that as the "Ten Commandments" received no special place in the order of the daily public divine services, מפני תרעומת העם, so as to give no support to the non-Jewish idea that the 'Ten Commandments' form the whole of God's laws, or even that they had only a greater degree of godliness and holiness. [Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, Sefer Vayikra, 23:21]

Shavuot, then, is an extension of Pesach, a culmination of the original promise of redemption. It is not only about receiving the Torah; after all, we received various mitzvot over the next forty years. Rather Shavuot is about the beginning of receiving the commandments and, more importantly, our preparations to receive the mitzvot.

That helps to put into perspective the ambiguity of when Shavuot is to fall, and why it is relatively unimportant whether the date is the fifth, sixth, or the seventh of Sivan. But why the ambiguity over when to start counting the fifty days? Why leave open for debate the date of bringing the Korban Omer and with it the first of the fifty days by designating the first day of counting as ממחרת השבת? Rav Hirsch suggests:

Perhaps the whole difficulty may be solved by the following consideration. In the verse immediately preceding, the עומר is called: ראשית קצירכם. Thereby, before it is brought, or at any rate before it is cut, any cutting of the new produce of the land is forbidden, as well as also up to this day, eating or using this new produce in any form is prohibited. So that up to the day of the עומר, a pause in the agricultural activity is called, the grain stands ready on the stalks, but may not be cut or used. Such a stop in agriculture is simply called שבת... On the 15th ניסן it was still שבת הארץ, and the 16th, the day after of the עומר, with which this 'Sabbath' came to an end was in quite a literal sense, מחרת השבת. [Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Sefer Vayikra, 23:11]

The word Shabbat in the pasuk highlights the fact that there is a point in time where the grain is ready to be harvested but we must wait for the designated time before we can use it.

Rav Soloveitchik, in a recently published collection, offers another approach by looking at the more generally understood concept of Shabbat as the seventh day of the week and connecting it to the different manners in which we praise God. We praise God through recitation of the Hallel, known as Hallel HaMitzri, for the "supernatural disruption of the natural order for our benefit."⁵⁴ We also praise God to "emphasize God's revelation to us through natural law, through the daily sunrise and sunset, through the sustenance that He provides daily for all creatures."⁵⁵ To confuse the two, to believe that we can only perceive the wonder of God through the reversal of the natural world, is akin to blaspheming the name

⁵⁴ David Shapiro ed., *Rav Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer and Shavuot*, (Urim Publications 2005) p. 198.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 200

of God, as the Gemara (Shabbat 118b) says, one who recites Hallel every day blasphemes God.

On Shabbat, the end of the natural week, we add to our recitation of Tehillim in Pesukay Dezimrah, extolling further the work of God in nature. Thus,

Pesach and Shabbat symbolize, respectively, these two types of Hallel. Pesach symbolizes cosmic disorder, cosmic chaos, abrogation by Hakadosh Baruch Hu of the laws of nature. Shabbat on the other hand, represents cosmic order, a lawful world, a predictable world. [Ibid, p. 200-201]

The fact that Shavuot is listed as ממחרת השבת, and not ממחרת החג, notes the Rav, highlights the fact that Benai Yisrael are to realize the transition from the open miracles that were done for them during the Exodus and their lives in the desert, and the natural or unrecognized miracles that will occur once they enter the land of Israel. They will eat from the bread of the land, and no longer be provided with Manna. They will need to fight their own battles. They will have to replace their worn out clothing and provide financial support for their families.

We began looking at three holidays and noting that two seemed similar and one stood out. Perhaps it is time to reexamine the initial question. Rather than look at three holidays, perhaps what we are actually experiencing is a set of two holidays, each with an extension. We have the holiday of Sukkot and its culmination, Shmini Atzeret (which is described as “Yom tov bifnei atzmo,” a separate holiday). As suggested earlier, Shavuot is the culmination of the Exodus as the giving of the Torah- or the preparation for the receipt of the Torah- is what gives true significance to the removal of the bonds of slavery to Pharaoh. Hazal (Menahot 68a) compared the Minhat haOmer brought on Pesach to the shte ha-lehem, the two loaves brought on Shavuot. There is a unified theme running through Pesach and Shavuot which perhaps explains the absence of both historical context and unique mitzvot in the Torah’s description of Shavuot. Shavuot completes and perfects the themes of Pesach.

Why, though, is Shmini Atzeret only seven days removed from its ‘parent’ holiday while Shavuot is fifty days removed from its?

You will find that the same way that the Atzeret of Pesach is fifty days away, so too the Atzeret of [Sukkot] should have been fifty days removed [from Sukkot]. Why then does it follow Sukkot immediately? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, to what can this be compared? To a king who had many sons. Some were married and lived in a far away place and some were married and lived nearby. When he would ask the sons who lived close to come and visit, they would come, and when they would seek to go home and return, they would go back and return since the journey was short. Every day that they would seek to go they would go and return. But the married sons who lived at a greater distance- when they would seek to return home, the king would insist that they remain another day. So, too, when they departed following Pesach, which is in

אתה מוצא כשם שעצרת של פסח רחוקה חמשים יום אף זאת היתה צריך להיות רחוקה חמשים יום, ולמה היא סמוכה לחג, אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי משל למה הדבר דומה למלך שהיו לו בנים הרבה מהן נשואין [במקום רחוק ומהם נשואין] במקום קרוב [כשהיו מבקשים אותם שהיו נשואים במקום קרוב] באין אצלו וכשהיו מבקשין לילך ולחזור היו הולכין ובאין ומניחין, למה כך שהדרך קרובה, וכל יום שהן מבקשין לילך [היו הולכין ובאין] אבל אותן שהיו נשואין במקום רחוק באין אצלו וכשהיו מבקשין לילך היה כובשן עוד יום אחד אצלו, כך בפסח ימי הקיץ והן עולין

the spring, Benai Yisrael could expect to return to Yerushalayim for the Atzeret fifty days later. But since the Chag [the holiday of Sukkot] occurs in the rainy season (i.e., winter) and travel is difficult, God decreed that Atzeret should immediately follow [Sukkot].

Yalkut Shimoni Pinchas 782

בעצרת לירושלים אחר חמשים יום אבל
עכשיו אחר החג ימות הגשמים הן
והדרכים טרחות, לפיכך אמר הקב"ה
עד שהן כאן יעשו את העצרת.⁵⁶
**ילקוט שמעוני פרשת פינחס רמז
תשפב**

There are then three “regalim,” three annual occasions for the pilgrim to celebrate in Jerusalem. But there are four holidays which break into two pairs. The differences that we have highlighted between Shavuot on the one hand, and Pesach and Sukkot, which offer the primary mitzvot and themes, serve to remind us that there is no fixed date for receiving the Torah, that we are never truly done receiving the Torah, but we must always prepare ourselves for rising to new spiritual heights and facing new challenges. They remind us that God’s glory is not just seen in the נסים גלויים, the supernatural miracles, but in the נסים נסתרים, the natural miracles that occur on a daily basis. And they remind us that our redemption is not complete until we have reached the Land of Israel where we put aside the Manna and the miraculous and begin to live by both the sweat of our brows and the light of the Torah.

⁵⁶An alternate version of the midrash is found in Pesikta deRav Cahana:

פסיקתא דרב כהנא (מנדלבוים) פיסקא כה - ביום השמיני עצרת א"ר יהוש' /יהושע/ בן לוי ראוייה היתה עצרת של חג להיות רחוקה חמשים יום. מושלו משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך שהיו לו בנות נשואו' במקום קרוב ובנות נשואות במקו' רחוק, אילו שנשואות במקום קרוב אית ביומא דייזלון וייתון, ואלו שהן במקום רחוק לית ביומא דייזלון וייתון, א' המלך אני ואתם נשמה יום אחד. כך בפסח על ידי שישר' יוצאין מן החורף לקייץ ואינה טרחות דרכים קשה לפיכך היא רחוקה ממנו חמשים יום, דאית ביומא דייזלון וייתון, אבל בהג על ידי שישר' נכנסין מן הקייץ לחורף וטרחות דרכים קשה לפיכך אינה רחוקה ממנו חמשים, דלית ביומא דאזלון וייתון. א' הקב"ה אני ואתם נשמה יום אחד. לפיכך צריך לומר ביום השמיני עצרת תהיה לכם במדבר כט: לה

A Brief History of *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*

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One of the popular customs on Shavuot is to stay awake all night learning Torah. This custom is not mentioned in the Mishnah, the Gemara, by the Gaonim, the Rambam, the Tur, in the Shulchan Arukh (though see below) and by the Rama. What is the basis for this custom and how did it develop?

The oldest source for this custom is from Philo who mentions that the Essenes (1st century) used to stay awake the night of Shavuot praying.⁵⁷ However, it is unlikely that their practice had any influence on our present custom since the Essenes were not part of mainstream Judaism, and this source is never referred to again.

The next mention of this custom is in the Zohar (on Vayikra 23), which records that a select group of people, Hasidim, used to stay awake the night of Shavuot learning Torah in order that the bride (the *Shekhinah*? the Jewish people?) would be adorned appropriately to meet the King (G-d) in the morning.

In Spain, in the 14th and 15th centuries it is possible that there were some individuals who stayed awake all night on Shavuot, but it was definitely not a common practice.⁵⁸ R. David Abudraham (Spain, late 13th, early 14th century) in his book on prayers and customs, makes no mention of the custom even though he records in detail the prayers and customs of Shavuot.

In the 16th century there was a new stage in the development of the custom. In the beginning of the 1530s, R. Yosef Caro (1488-1575), a refugee from Spain and the future author of the Shulchan Arukh, was living in Turkey. R. Caro was also a mystic, and he had trances where a "maggid" would speak through his mouth.⁵⁹ On one Shavuot night (in 1530 or 1534),⁶⁰ R. Caro studied with Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of *Lekhah Dodi*.) Alkabetz's experience that night with R. Caro was very interesting, and he recorded his recollection of the events of the night, which was later incorporated into the book the Shelah. Alkabetz relates that when he was learning with R. Caro on Shavuot night, he heard this unique speech from R. Caro's mouth, and one of the things said was

⁵⁷ See sources in Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah in Liturgy, Halakah and Customs*, Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2000, p.595.

⁵⁸ Hallamish, pp. 596, 597.

⁵⁹ R. J. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, p.22 refers to this speaking as automatic speech. The collection of these speeches is recorded in the book *Maggid Mesharim*.

⁶⁰ Werblowsky, p.111.

that R. Caro should move to Israel. Apparently, R. Caro was one of the individuals who knew of this custom to stay awake on Shavuot night, but he did not want to impose this custom on everybody and hence he left it out of the Bet Yosef and the Shulchan Arukh.

After R. Yosef Caro moved to Sefat (1537), the custom of learning all night on Shavuot became widespread in the town. R. Avraham Galanti (d. 1589) recorded that all the congregations in Sefat would gather on the night of Shavuot to stay awake and learn Torah until the morning when everybody would go to the mikveh and pray.⁶¹ From Sefat, the custom spread to the Mediterranean basin, and from there northwards throughout Europe. Towards the end of the 17th century, the Magen Avraham (R. Avraham Gombiner, 1637-1683, Poland, Orah Chayyim 494) wrote that most scholars stayed up all night to study Torah. And, a little bit afterwards, R. Yaakov Reischer (1661, Prague -1733, Metz) in his commentary on the Shulchan Arukh (Chok Yaakov, Orah Chayyim 494) noted that the custom had also spread to the general population.

There are several reasons why the custom spread. First, R. Caro was a great rabbi, and coupled with Alkabetz's testimony concerning his learning with R. Caro, knowledge of the custom became well-known. Secondly, in Sefat in the 16th century, it became popular to regularly arise at midnight to recite *tikkun hazot*, prayers to mourn the destruction of the Bet ha-Mikdash and to pray for its redemption. This custom was independent of staying awake on Shavuot night, but still, if one regularly practiced the *tikkun hazot*, then one would naturally be more inclined to stay awake on Shavuot night as well. Thirdly, there developed the claim, which was attributed to the Ari (for example, see Mishnah Bruruah 494:1), that if a person stays awake the entire night and learns Torah throughout the night, then no harm will come upon the person in the following year. (The Ari was born in Jerusalem in 1534, came to Sefat to live in 1569 or early 1570, and died on July 15, 1572.)

In a fascinating article, Elliot Horowitz also credits the introduction of coffee for the spread of the custom of staying awake at night.⁶² In the 15th century, the drinking of coffee originated in Yemenite Sufi circles in order that they could stay awake for their nocturnal rituals, and by the end of the 16th century coffee had spread throughout the Muslim world. Horowitz points out that both coffee and the custom of *tikkun hazot* spread westward from Sefat to Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

There were two new developments with the spread of the custom to Europe. One, while the Magen Avraham's quotes the Zohar as the source for the custom, he suggested a new rationale for the custom. The Magen Avraham writes that the simple reason for the custom is to rectify a mistake of the generation who left Egypt who slept the night before G-d declared the Decalogue at Mount Sinai. This idea is based on the Midrash of Shir Hashirim (Chapter 1, 12:2), which records, "Israel slept all night, because the sleep of Shavuot is pleasant and the night is short. R. Judan said: Not a flea worried them. G-d came and found them sleeping, so He began to rouse them with trumpeters, as it says in Shemot 19:16, 'there were thunders and lightings' ... It was for this that He taunted them through the mouth of Yeshayahu, in Isaiah 50:2."⁶³ Meir Bar Ilan notes that this Midrash was known for generations, but prior to the Magen Avraham nobody had felt that there was a need to

⁶¹ Hallamish, p.598.

⁶² Coffee, coffeehouses, and the nocturnal rituals of early modern Jewry, *AJS Review*, 1989, pp.17-46.

⁶³ Translated by Maurice Simon, London: The Soncino Press, 1961, p.79.

rectify this error by staying up all night.⁶⁴ It seems that the Magen Avraham was looking for a new non-mystical reason for the custom in order to replace or complement the mystical reason of the Zohar.

This new reason also adds a new sin to the generation who were at Mount Sinai, which prompted Eliyahu Kitov to defend the Jews who left Egypt.⁶⁵ He writes, "This is not a condemnation of the Jews of that generation- all of whom eagerly awaited hearing the Divine Word. They were however, physically weak, and they feared that they might lack sufficient strength for hearing the Divine teaching without sufficient rest the previous night ... It is for this reason that also today not all stay awake during the night."

A second development concerns what is to be studied during the night. R. Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570, Sefat, Shlomo Alkabetz's brother-in-law) recorded a specific order of study, first sections of the Torah, then Nevi'im (Yechezkel), Ketuvim (Shir Hashirim, Ruth and Tehillim chapter 68), Mishnah (usually Pirkei Avot), the poem Azharot, and in the end, and mostly, Kabbalah.⁶⁶ This order was considered the appropriate study to adorn the bride based on the rationale of the custom in the Zohar. R. Isaiah Horowitz (1565, Prague -1630, Sefat, in the Shelah) slightly changed this order to briefly include all the books of Tanakh and the Talmud and other small variations. This basic order has remained until today as the official *tikkun leil shavuot*. However, already by the end of the 17th century, R. Yaakov Reischer (Chok Yaakov 494) asserted that the official order was only for the "simple" people who did not know how to learn. This contention implies that people can learn what they choose. This explanation is incorrect historically since in Sefat everybody followed the official order, but it seems that for those of the non-kabbalistic bent, the official order was not sufficiently appreciated and they wanted to study other subjects.

Accordingly, the custom of staying awake on Shavuot night and studying Torah began as a kabbalistic practice, and started to become popular in the 16th century. The custom was quickly accepted even amongst the non-kabbalistic population, but for them a new non-mystical reason for the custom was proposed and the learning was changed from being a set order to being at each person's discretion.

⁶⁴ Tikkun Leil Shavuot, *Mehqere Hag*, 1997, vol. 8, p.29.

⁶⁵ *The Book of Our Heritage*, Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1978, Vol. 3, p.76.

⁶⁶ Hallamish, pp. 605, 606.

Yatziv Pitgam, One of Our Last Aramaic Piyyutim

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How many times have you been in a shul on the second day of Shavuot and noticed confusion at the beginning of the haftarah? Either the person called up to maftir suddenly finds out that after the first verse of the haftarah he is to recite an Aramaic text that he may never have seen before and/or the melody of which he does not know, or if the maftir does indeed know what he is doing, the congregation is flustered when he begins to chant the unfamiliar text that is often not in their Siddurim. This situation results from a combination of historical tendencies but gives us the opportunity to learn about, and be inspired by, a very beautiful poem that is part of our yom tov Machzor.

In ancient times, after Hebrew gradually gave way to other languages as the spoken language of the Jewish people, the custom of translating the Bible into the vernacular became common. Already in Hellenistic times, in the 3rd century BCE, the process of translating the Bible into Greek began, leading to the creation of the Septuagint. The Dead Sea Scrolls preserve not only fragments of Greek translations of parts of the Bible, but also a fragment of a Targum (an Aramaic translation) of Vayikra as well as large parts of a Targum to Job. The Mishnah (Megillah 4:4) discusses the custom of translating Torah and Haftarah readings into Aramaic, the former verse by verse and the latter in groups of three verses. This custom spread to the Diaspora and flourished especially in Babylonia way into the Geonic period (c. 640-1050 CE). The rise of Arabic as the vernacular of Jews in the Middle East as well as dialects of Judeo-German (later Yiddish) practically drove this custom out of use by the Middle Ages, except that it has persisted until today among Yemenite Jews.

Medieval Ashkenazic Jews, as we learn from the Machzor Vitry and other sources, for some reason retained this ancient custom on Pesach and Shavuot. But they went even further: in Byzantine times when Aramaic flourished in the land of Israel and in Babylonia it became customary to write poetic introductions to important portions and Festival readings, as well as to insert poetic and prose expansions into the text. This is a further development from what can be seen by comparing Targum Onkelos and the Targum Eretz Yisrael, usually titled Targum Yonatan, in a standard Mikra'ot Gedolot. This pattern of expansion eventually resulted in more extensive poetic and prose passages being added to the Targum. Such poetic expansions continued to be composed in the Middle Ages, and two of them survived in our Machzor for Shalosh Regalim, *Akdamut* before the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot, and *Yatziv Pitgam*, an introductory poem for the haftarah of the second day of Shavuot.

The survival of these two Aramaic poems is no doubt due to their beautiful content and to the traditional melodies associated with them. (The melody for *Akdamut* is also used for the Kiddush for Shalosh Regalim and that for *Yatziv Pitgam* used to be used also for *Ya-h E-li*.) Otherwise, we would have expected them to have fallen out of disuse. Two factors might have led to their elimination from our liturgy. First, as already described, is the fact that the Aramaic translations to which these poems are introductions are no longer part of our service. However, the second factor is the overall elimination of most of the piyyutim (liturgical poetry) for the Shalosh Regalim. While some halakhic justifications have been given for this process, it is clear today that daveners have no patience for complex, medieval praises of God, no matter how beautiful they may be. The reality is that special prayers for holidays have been in decline in the Ashkenazic Jewish community for several hundred years. Nonetheless, these two poems remain part of the tefillot of most communities.

Yatziv Pitgam is intoned after the reading of the second verse of the haftorah, Habakkuk 3:1, since it is an introduction to that chapter of Habakkuk. (The first verse of the haftarah is Habakkuk 2:20, the last verse in the chapter.) In a similar way, *Akdamut* used to be recited after the first verse of the first aliyah on the first day of Shavuot, since it is an introduction to that Torah reading. Since translations are no longer recited as part of the Torah reading, *Akdamut* was considered a *hefsek* (interruption) by poskim and is now recited before the kohen says the blessing before the kri'ah. Because the reading of the haftorah is treated more leniently, *Yatziv Pitgam* was left in its original place.

The poem *Yatziv Pitgam* consists of sixteen stanzas, only fifteen of which appear in our Machzor and are recited. The extra stanza is omitted because it refers specifically to the recital of the Targum that follows, no longer the case in our ritual. Each stanza is composed of two lines of one or two words each which rhyme with each other, followed by a third line of 3 or 4 words. The third line of each stanza ends with the syllable “*rin*.”

The initial letters spell out the name of Jacob ben Meir Levi, most probably a reference to Rabbenu Tam (c. 1100-c.1171) from Orleans in France, the grandson of Rashi. Many have speculated that the popularity of this poem, like that of *Akdamut*, stems in part from its composition soon after the First Crusade in 1096. *Yatziv Pitgam* describes the majesty of the revelation that took place at Har Sinai and closes with a prayer for the protection of those who keep the Torah.

Here is an original translation and some comments on this beautiful hymn:

Firm is the praise (of God) Who is the sign and mark, (Who stands out among) the myriads of myriads of angels.

I do here chant In the presence of a quorum, Of those who have hewn through the four mountains.

Before Him, Into His cisterns, Does flow and proceed a river of fire.

In a mountain of snow And flash of light, And shooting stars, fiery flashes and torches,

He created and perceives What is (concealed) in darkness, While with Him there reposes light.

He observes what is distant With nothing unnoticed While to Him are revealed hidden things.

I ask of Him His permission, And then that of men,

Those who know the laws, Mishnah, Tosefta, Sifra and Sifrei.
 The King Who lives Forever, May He protect the people who place their hope in Him.
 Of these it was stated, "They will be as sand, And will be innumerable like (grains of) dust."
 White as sheep May their valleys be (filled with grain), And may their vats overflow with wine.
 Grant their wishes; May their faces be joyous, May they shine like the morning light.
 Grant me strength And lift Your eyes, And see Your enemies who deny You.
 Let them vanish as straw Within the brick, May they be silenced like a stone in shame.
 (While I stand (here), I (will) translate The words of the greatest of all books.)
 God gave (the Torah) (through) the humble one (Moshe), Therefore to Him let us express our gratitude.

Who is the sign and mark. Based on the explanation of the description of the revelation at Sinai in Devarim 33:2, as explained by Bavli Hagigah 16a, God revealed Himself surrounded by myriads of angels, yet nonetheless His presence could be distinguished from the angels. His presence was considered to be a sign or mark that the Torah was truly given by God.

I do here chant in the presence of a quorum. The reader is about to chant the haftarah in the presence of a minyan.

hewn through the four mountains. This refers to those who have studied the four orders of the Babylonian Talmud, Mo`ed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodashim, since most of Zera`im and Tohorot have no gemara.

a river of fire. The entire stanza is derived from Daniel 7:10 describing a river of fire that comes forth from before God's throne. The stanza seems to emphasize divine control of all power in the universe.

In a mountain of snow. This entire stanza is influenced by the visions of the divine throne in Daniel 7:9 and Yehezkel 1:13. The greatness and power of God are symbolized by bright lights in these passages that represent prophetic mystical experiences and are not to be taken literally.

He created. This stanza is simply a paraphrase of Daniel 2:22. This and the following stanza emphasize that God is omnipotent and omniscient.

And then that of men. Before reading the haftarah, the reciter asks permission from the congregation to proceed. It is forbidden to serve as chazzan or read from the Torah or haftarah without the permission of the congregation.

Mishnah. This stanza, as well as the reference above to those learned in the four Sedarim of the Talmud Bavli, indicate that the author of the poem intended it to be recited before a very learned audience. The medieval Ashkenazic tradition of piyyut generally assumes a very high level of learning on the part of communities who would have understood and been inspired by complex poems in difficult Hebrew.

Tosefta. A collection of tannaitic statements and traditions not included in the Mishnah but arranged in the order of the Mishnah.

Sifra. Literally, "the book," referring to the tannaitic, halakhic midrash on Vayikra.

Sifrei. Literally, "the books," short for Sifrei deVe Rav, referring to the tannaitic, halakhic midrashim to Bemidbar and Devarim. Omission here of the Mechilta, the tannaitic midrash to Shmot, may be because the author intended it to be included under the heading Sifrei, a phenomenon sometimes observable in medieval texts.

May He protect the people. In the next few stanzas, the author prays for the welfare of the Jewish people. No doubt, in the circumstances of medieval Franco-German Jewry, the reader would have thought directly about the welfare of his own and surrounding communities.

it was stated. Bereshit 13:16, 28:14, 22:17, 32:13.

White as sheep. In this stanza, the author prays for the economic welfare of his community.

Grant their wishes. On the Festival, the author asks God to grant joy to His people. While today Ashkenazic synagogues recite this prayer on Shavuot, in the Middle Ages, some recited it as well on Pesach.

And see Your enemies who deny You. This is clearly a reference to Christian persecutors of the Jews. Their attacks on God's people are seen as tantamount to denying Him.

While I stand. This stanza, originally part of the medieval version of the poem, has been omitted in our Machzor since it refers directly to the translation of the haftarah into Aramaic that used to follow when the old custom was maintained in the Middle Ages on Pesach and Shavuot. Since all that follows today is the reading of the haftarah in Hebrew, with no Aramaic translation, this line does not appear in modern versions.

God gave (the Torah). Hebrew *yeho-natan* (normally the name Jonathan). This is likely a play on the name of Yonatan (Jonathan) ben Uzziel who translated the prophets into Aramaic (Bavli Megillah 3a). Actually, the title Targum Yonatan refers directly only to this Targum. It was from a version of this text that medieval Jews read when they continued to recite the translation in between the verses of haftarah readings on the festivals.

The humble one (Moshe). Bemidbar 12:3 describes Moshe as the humblest of all human beings.

Therefore to Him let us express our gratitude. The expression is derived from the very last words of Bavli Bava Metzia 119a, the end of the tractate. The reference in *Yatziv Pitgam* is clearly to giving praise to God, not to Moshe to whom He had given the Torah. It is possible that this poem was originally intended to be recited before the brachah before the haftarah that thanks God for giving Israel the Torah through Moshe and the Prophets. In this case, the reference to "gratitude" specifically refers to reciting of the benediction before the haftarah.

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Habakkuk: The Man, the Mission, the Haftarah for the Second Day of Shavuot

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In the midst of the exciting subjects highlighted in all of the other Scriptural portions which we read over the holiday of Shavuot, including *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, *Mattan Torah*, the Ten Commandments, and Yechezkel's vision of the Chariot of God (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*), one Shavuot reading can easily get lost in the shuffle. On the second day of *Yom Tov*, the *haftarah* comes from the Book of Habakkuk, one of the *Trei Asar Neviim*. The entire work is only three chapters long and takes up a topic with which religious individuals often struggle; namely, why God allows evil to prevail in the world. The particular context of his question is the rise of the Neo-Babylonians (identified in the book as the *kasdim*, or Chaldeans), and their ruthless conquest of the Ancient Near East, eventually including, of course, Judea and Jerusalem.

The Man

Who was Habakkuk? The texts give us absolutely no biographical and the only canonical knowledge we have of him thus comes exclusively from the book that is named for him. In the opening verse, Habakkuk is identified solely as a prophet (of the other prophets in *Trei Asar*, only Hagai and possibly Zechariah are similarly introduced) and he apparently lived his life as one of God's called prophets, serving primarily in this capacity:

The prophecy which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

Habakkuk 1:1

הַמְשָׂא אֲשֶׁר חִזָּה חֲבַקּוּק הַנְּבִיא:

חֲבַקּוּק א:א

He was not, it seems, engaged in any secular profession as was, for example, the prophet Amos:

The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

Amos 1:1

דְּבַרֵי עֲמוֹס אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְּנִקְדִים מִתְּקוּעַ
אֲשֶׁר חִזָּה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמֵי עֲזִיָּה מֶלֶךְ
יְהוּדָה וּבְיָמֵי יִרְבֵּעָם בֶּן יוֹאֵשׁ מֶלֶךְ
יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַתִּים לִפְנֵי הָרָעַשׁ:

עֲמוֹס א:א

Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah: 'I am no prophet, neither am I a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of

וַיַּעַן עֲמוֹס וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אֲמַצִּיָּה לֹא
נְבִיא אֲנִי וְלֹא בֶן נְבִיא אֲנִי כִּי
בֹקֵר אֲנִי וּבֹלֵס שְׂקָמִים: וַיִּקְחֵנִי

sycamore-trees; and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me: Go, prophesize to My people Israel.

Amos 7:14-15

ה' מאחרי הצאן ויאמר אלי ה' לך
הנבא אל עמי ישראל:
עמוס ז:יד-טו

Amos clearly was not a prophet by trade, but a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees who was called by God for a particular mission. Habakkuk, on the other hand, as the first *passuk* seems to indicate, was a prophet by profession. It is therefore likely that he in fact said much more than merely that which is contained in the three chapters of this Book, but it is only this small selection that has been preserved and was canonized in Tanakh.

Some have deduced from the final statement of the book that Habakkuk was also a Levite and a member of the Temple choir, or that he was in some other way connected with the Temple worship in Jerusalem (see, for example, the comment of Rashi there):

God, the Lord, is my strength, and He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and He makes me walk upon my high places. For the Leader. With my string-music.

Habakkuk 3:19

ה' אדני חילי וישם רגלי
כאילות ועל במותי ידרכני
למנצח בנגינותי:
חבקוק ג:יט

There is, however, no other definitive evidence of this.

One thing we do know for certain, of course, is his name, Habakkuk, which probably comes from the Hebrew root “חבקק,” meaning “to embrace.” At the end of his book, it becomes clear that this name is indeed an appropriate one for a man who chooses to embrace and cling to God regardless of the current political circumstances and despite what is happening to his people, as will be discussed below.

In light of this etymology of Habakkuk’s name, there is an interesting passage in the Zohar (I:7b) according to which Habakkuk was the son of the *Shunammite* woman mentioned in *II Kings* Chapter 4. Scripture relates that the prophet Elisha had made a habit of staying as a guest at the home of a certain woman, referred to by the text simply as the *Shunammite* woman, whenever he passed through the town of Shunem. This woman, out of tremendous respect for the man of God, built Elisha his own room so that he might be comfortable whenever he came to stay with her and her husband. Elisha, wanting to show his gratitude to this kind woman, asked her if there might be something which he, being in a position of power, could do for her. Despite her demurring and expressing her contentment with life, Elisha, upon being told that she had no children, said that within a year she would in fact give birth to a son.

And he said: 'At this season, when the time comes round, you shall embrace a son.' And she said: 'No, my lord, man of God, do not lie to your handmaid.'

II Kings 4:16

ויאמר למועד הזה כעת חיה את חבקק
בן ותאמר אל אדני איש האלהים אל
תכזב בשפחתך:
מלכים ב ד:טז

A son is indeed born to the woman as Elisha had promised, but the boy unexpectedly and tragically dies as a young child. His mother, however, refuses to accept his demise and eventually Elisha himself resurrects the child. Apparently struck by the odd formulation of Elisha’s

prediction, "את הבקת בן" – “you shall embrace a son,” rather than the more usual formulation, “you shall bear a son” or “a son shall be born to you,” the rabbis suggests that the particular usage of this verb hints that this young child eventually grew up to be the prophet Habakkuk.

This narrative shares many similarities with the stories of other barren women in *Tanakh*, such as Sarah, Rachel, the wife of Manoach, and Hannah. Yet there is a striking difference. In all of those other cases, the child of the formerly barren woman grows up to play a major role in the destiny of the Jewish people as a father or a leader. The *Shunammite* woman’s child, on the other hand, remains, like his mother, unnamed, and according to the text assumes no significant position in the history of Israel. The above interpretation, however, allows for this particular gap to be filled, stating that the child of the *Shunammite* woman as well was indeed a major figure who impacted Jewish thought and with whom God had an intimate relationship, namely, the prophet Habakkuk.

Two other traditions relating to the identity of Habakkuk bear mention here. Each has its own proofs and can be examined closely; what follows is a brief summary.

Some identify Habakkuk with the “watchman” described by the prophet Yeshaya. This is based on a possible connection between the verse describing the job of this watchman and a declaration made by Habakkuk himself:

For thus has the Lord said to me: Go, set a watchman; let him declare what he sees!

Isaiah 21:6

כי כה אמר אלי אדני לך העמד המצפה אשר יראה
יגיד:
ישעיהו כא:ו

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look out to see what He will speak by me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

Habakkuk 2:1

על משמרתי אעמדה ואתיצבה על
מצור ואצפה לראות מה ידבר בי
ומה אשיב על תוכחתי:
הבקוק ב:א

Moreover, the prophecies of Yeshaya deal with certain issues that are very much like those dealt with in Habakkuk and certain additional parallels can be identified.

Further legendary biographical material may be extracted from the pages of the Apocryphal book *Bel and the Dragon* (verses 33-42). The tale of *Bel and the Dragon* was incorporated as Chapter 14 of the extended *Book of Daniel*. (There are a number of sections of *Daniel* that are included in the Septuagint translation of that book which are not found in our Masoretic text, and are thus considered Apocrypha; this is one example.) It is thought to have been written in Aramaic around the late second century BCE. In this particular section, an angel carries the prophet Habakkuk by his hair to Babylon to bring food to Daniel in the lions’ den:

Now the prophet Habakkuk was in Judea; he had made a stew and crumbled bread into the bowl, and he was on the way to his field, carrying it to the reapers, when an angel of the Lord said, 'Habakkuk, carry the meal you have with you to Babylon, for Daniel, who is in the lion-pit.' Habakkuk said, 'My Lord, I have never been to Babylon. I do not know where the lion-pit is.' Then the angel took the prophet by the crown of his head, and carrying him by his hair, he swept him to Babylon with the blast of his breath and put him down above the pit. Habakkuk called out,

'Daniel, Daniel, take the meal that God has sent you! 'Daniel said, 'O God, thou dost indeed remember me; thou dost never forsake those who love thee.' Then he got up and ate; and God's angel returned Habakkuk at once to his home. On the seventh day the king went to mourn for Daniel, but when he arrived at the pit and looked in, there sat Daniel! Then the king cried aloud, 'Great art thou, O Lord, the God of Daniel, and there is no God but thou alone.' So the king drew Daniel up; and the men who had planned to destroy him he flung into the pit, and then and there they were eaten up before his eyes.

We are, in general, infinitely curious about Biblical personalities. The rabbinic commentators from the Midrash and on thus grasp onto every thread which might give us some insight into any information about a character, especially one to whom we, reading *Tanakh* so many years later, turn to for guidance and reflection. In the Book of Habakkuk, we have an extremely powerful prophecy and some beautiful and complex writing and thought, and yet we are left to wonder – who was this man behind the prophecy? At first blush, as mentioned above, we seem to get no biographical information at all. We do not even know his father's name! All we know for sure is that he was a prophet.

Historical Background

When did Habakkuk present this prophecy? To what was he responding? To whom was he speaking? What is the context? Once again, we have so little textual information that it is hard to be sure about any of this either. In the case of many prophets, the text itself provides a certain amount of historical context, often identifying the king during whose reign he prophesied, but there is no such information given about Habakkuk. Many of the classical commentaries, based on an earlier rabbinic statement (see *Seder Olam* Chapter 20 and *Yalkut Shimoni* on the opening *passuk*), say that Habakkuk prophesied during the reign of the evil Judean king Menasheh, in the middle of the 7th century BCE. Menasheh was a king who did that which was “evil in the eyes of the Lord” (*II Kings* 21:2), reversing the religious reforms of his great father Chizkiyahu, and reinstating pagan worship in Jerusalem and the Temple. This took place many years before the Chaldeans (later to be known as the Babylonians) came to power; Habakkuk's prophecy is thus about the future rise to power of Nebuchadnezzar.

Other commentaries, as well as more modern scholars, place the prophet Habakkuk in the late 7th century BCE, after the Babylonians had already defeated the Assyrian empire and not long before the Babylonians' siege and capture of Jerusalem; he thus lived during the time of the events which he is describing.

At issue is the following statement:

*For I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and impetuous nation,
that march through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling-
places that are not theirs.*

Habakkuk 1:6

כי הנני מקים את הכשדים הגוי המר
והנמהר ההולך למרחבי ארץ לרשת
משכנות לא לו:
חבוקק א:ו

According to the second group of the aforementioned commentaries and scholars, this verse should be read in the present tense. The reference to the rise and advance of the Chaldeans in

this and the following five verses thus possibly places Habakkuk during the reign of Yehoyakim, from 609-598 BCE, as it was during his reign that the Babylonians were indeed growing in power. The Babylonians actually marched against Jerusalem in 598 BCE (at which time the elite members of the Jewish community were exiled; see *II Kings* 24:14); Yehoyakim died while the Babylonians were advancing upon Jerusalem and his son Yehoyachin, who was 18 years old at the time, assumed the throne. Only a short time after the Babylonians had reached Jerusalem, Yehoyachin and his advisors surrendered the city. This understanding of when Habakkuk lived allows for a reading of the text which demonstrates Habakkuk's sense of a personal and intimate knowledge of the Babylonian brutality.

Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One? Let us not die. O Lord, You have ordained them for judgment, and You, O Rock, have established them for correction. You that are of eyes too pure to behold evil, and that can not look on mischief, wherefore do You look when they deal treacherously, and hold Your peace when the wicked swallow up the man that is more righteous than he; And [you] make men as the fish of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them. They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice and exult. Therefore they sacrifice to their net, and offer to their drag; because through them their portion is fat and their food plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and without compassion slay the nations continually?

Habakkuk 1:12-17

הלווא אתה מקדם ה' אלהי קדשי
לא נמות ה' למשפט שמתו וצור
להוכיח יסדתו: טהור עינים
מראות רע והביט אל עמל לא
תוכל למה תביט בוגדים תחריש
בבלע רשע צדיק ממנו: ותעשה
אדם כדגי הים כרמש לא משל
בו: כלה בחכה העלה יגרהו
בחרמו ויאספהו במכמרתו על כן
ישמח ויגיל: על כן יזבח לחרמו
ויקטר למכמרתו כי בהמה שמן
חלקו ומאכלו בראה: העל כן
יריק חרמו ותמיד להרג גוים לא
יחמול:

חבקוק א: יב-יז

Within a period of approximately 20 years, the Chaldeans swept over the Kingdom of Judea in successive waves and ultimately destroyed the country and took all but a tiny number of its inhabitants away into captivity in 586 BCE. In addition, of course, they destroyed the Temple. Throughout this time, the people of Judea were struggling with both religious and social decay and confusion, as the prophet Yirmiyahu makes clear in his prophecies at that time; it is perhaps in this context that Habakkuk too flourishes.

Outline of the Book of Habakkuk – The Mission

Chapter 1 contains an outline of Habakkuk's central problem of theodicy, questioning how God can allow evil to prevail in this world. This is a different kind of theodicy question than that which we are familiar with from the Book of Iyov, which will be discussed below; here the prophet takes issue with how God could allow evil in the form of the Chaldeans, or neo-Babylonians, to triumph without end. This chapter is a description of faith in a state of conflict. Chapter 2 contains God's response to that problem and Chapter 3 is a prayer/psalm composed by Habakkuk. It is this last chapter that we read as the *haftarah* on the second day of Shavuot. The final message of Habakkuk is that we must allow God to be God, and allow Him to do things His way and in His own good time. Our job is to trust Him and to live by faith! Chapter 3, then, is about faith triumphant.

... the righteous shall live by his faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

... וצדיק באמונתו יחיה:

חבקוק ב:ד

On some level, this is the key phrase of the entire book (see the Gemara in *Makkot* 24a regarding the general importance of this statement). Although things do not always turn out as we would like, yet we will rejoice in the Lord anyway! This is how the book ends as well. But it takes time to get to that conclusion.

Before arriving there, Habakkuk actually seems at first glance to be almost a bit presumptuous at times! He is more confrontational than would seem proper:

Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me? And there is strife, and contention arises. ... You that are of eyes too pure to behold evil, and that cannot look on mischief, wherefore do You look when they deal treacherously, and hold Your peace when the wicked swallow up the man that is more righteous than he.

Habakkuk 1:3, 13

למה תראני און ועמל תביט ושד
וחמס לנגדי ויהי ריב ומדון
ישא: ... טהור עינים מראות רע
והביט אל עמל לא תוכל למה
תביט בוגדים תחריש בבלע רשע
צדיק ממנו:
חבקוק א:ג, יג

Clearly, this is a man who is full of passion! The *Midrash Shochar Tov* (to *Tehillim* 90) states “There were four who prayed and spoke harshly to the Lord out of their love for Israel: Jeremiah, Habakkuk, David and Moses.” This statement allows us to understand Habakkuk’s motive as more pure than as reflective of a personal faith conflict by placing him in exalted company. And, his style is powerful. He is very detailed and picturesque in his description. One can almost see the prophet standing at a post, scanning the heavens for the glimmer, for the shadow, of a response to his theological inquisition. Note, furthermore, his description in the following verse:

Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are fiercer than the wolves of the desert; and their horsemen spread themselves; their horsemen come from far, they fly as a vulture that hurries to devour.

Habakkuk 1:8

וקלו מנמרים סוסיו וחדו
מזאבי ערב ופשו פרשיו
ופרשיו מרחוק יבאו יעפו
כנשר חש לאכול:
חבקוק א:ח

The Chaldean army, that unstoppable force, becomes not an abstract, untouchable idea, but an image in our mind!

Habakkuk wants us to feel what he feels; to be troubled by what is troubling him.

Chapter 1 – The Problem

How long, O Lord, shall I cry, and You will not hear? I cry out to You of violence, and You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to behold mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me? And there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is slacked, and right does not go forth; for the wicked does beset the righteous; therefore right goes forth perverted. Look among the

עד אנה ה' שועתי ולא תשמע
אזעק אליך חמס ולא תושיע:
למה תראני און ועמל תביט ושד
וחמס לנגדי ויהי ריב ומדון ישא:
על כן תפוג תורה ולא יצא לנצח
משפט כי רשע מכתיר את הצדיק

nations, and behold, and wonder marvelously; for, behold, a work shall be wrought in Your days, which You will not believe though it be told to You.

Habakkuk 1:2-5

על כן יצא משפט מעקל: ראו בגוים והביטו והתמהו תמהו כי פעל פעל בימיכם לא תאמינו כי יספר:
חבקוק א:ב-ה

The depraved Chaldeans are an unstoppable force and seem to be totally out of control. Even if one could argue that they are but a tool of God being used to punish a disobedient Israel, they have taken advantage of their instructive and even punitive position and are now acting out of malicious and unstoppable wickedness. It may have been necessary for God to raise them up but it is even more necessary now for God to put them down! They were supposed to punish wickedness but how will their own wickedness get punished? The Chaldeans completely fascinate Habakkuk! He is obsessed with them to the point that he seems to forget his own people. He is completely absorbed in the contemplation of this evil nation.

For I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and impetuous nation, that march through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their law and their majesty proceed from themselves. ... Then a spirit does pass over and they transgress and become guilty; they impute their might unto their god.

Habakkuk 1:6-7, 11

כי הנני מקים את הכשדים הגוי המר והנמהר ההולך למרחבי ארץ לרשת משכנות לא לו: אים ונורא הוא ממנו משפטו ושאתו יצא: ... אז חלף רוה ויעבר ואשם זו כחו לאלהו:
חבקוק א:ו-ז, יא

The Chaldeans make themselves into gods and thus represent Godless might. But not only are the Chaldeans successful against the Jews, they are successful against everybody! No one can stand up to them. This is Habakkuk's problem – what is it about the Chaldeans that makes them so superior to everyone else? The nations they subdue are not particularly righteous, but it seems that the Chaldeans are worse than everyone! They are the most wicked people on earth and yet they prevail!

Chapter 2 - God's Response

God's response, quite simply, is - be patient for they will get theirs in the end. God acknowledges Habakkuk's problem, but assures him that the current situation will not last forever.

And the Lord answered me, and said: 'Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that a man may read it swiftly. For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it declares of the end, and does not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay.'

Habakkuk 2:2-3

ויענני ה' ויאמר כתוב חזון ובאר על הלחות למען ירוץ קורא בו: כי עוד חזון למועד ויפח לקץ ולא יכזב אם יתמהמה חכה לו כי בא יבא לא יאחר:
חבקוק ב:ב-ג

Mark it clearly, says God. The Chaldeans last only three generations: Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and then his grandson Belshazzar, whose whole court, known to readers of *Tanakh* from the book of *Daniel*, was wiped out in one night. God says: you do not see what I see. Man's vision is limited. Their defeat will be the worst defeat of all – they will be wiped off the earth and never

heard from again. The rest of this chapter elaborates on that point. Habakkuk's problem was how God allows such an evil nation to prevail, why evil appears to triumph, and God's response is that every nation will get what they deserve, that justice does in fact reign, even if it is not apparent in every generation.

Chapter 3 – The Prayer; The Haftarah for the Second Day of Shavuot

In the third chapter, Habakkuk seems to be trying to reconcile himself with God through prayer. To do so, he recalls everything that had transpired between God and the Jews since the beginning of time to show how God's justice has in fact always prevailed:

You march through the earth in indignation; You thresh the nations in anger. You come forth for the deliverance of Your people, for the deliverance of Your anointed; You wound the head out of the house of the wicked, uncovering the foundation even unto the neck. Selah.

Habakkuk 3:12-13

בזעם תצעד ארץ באף תדוש
גוים: יצאת לישע עמך לישע את
משיחך מחצת ראש מבית רשע
ערות יסוד עד צואר סלה:
חבקוק ג:יב-יג

In Habakkuk's psalm, he makes it explicit that God judges the wicked for what they have done – it just might take a while. In Rashi's view, Chapter 3 is a confession of failure. As is obvious from the past, the future will hold compensatory events that will show that there is indeed justice in the world. Habakkuk's assertions in Chapter 1 were wrong and in most of Chapter 3 he describes God's power in an exquisite fashion:

He stands, and shakes the earth, He beholds, and makes the nations to tremble; and the everlasting mountains are dashed in pieces, the ancient hills do bow; His goings are as of old.

Habakkuk 3:6

עמד וימדד ארץ ראה ויתר גוים
ויתפצצו הררי עד שחו גבעות עולם
הליכות עולם לו:
חבקוק ג:ו

Rashi actually understands the beginning of the chapter as describing God's relationship with the world and then asserts that two verses in particular specifically describe events relating to *Mattan Torah*:

God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah His glory covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. And brightness appears as the light; He has rays at His side; and there is the hiding of His power.

Habakkuk 3:3-4

אלוה מתימן יבוא וקדוש מהר
פארן סלה כסה שמים הודו ותהלתו
מלאה הארץ:ונגה כאור תהיה
קרנים מידו לו ושם חביון עזה:
חבקוק ג:ג-ד

Rashi relates this to the well known Midrash (*Sifrei* 343) which teaches that God offered the Torah to other nations before giving it to the Jews amidst great fanfare. This is one of the reasons we read this chapter as the *haftarah* on the second day of Shavuot (see the Gemara in *Megillah* 31a with Rashi there).

One may ask, though, why there is in fact such an elaborate description relating to *Mattan Torah* in Habakkuk's prayer at all. The answer may be that in Chapter 1, in the midst of his complaint against the prevailing evil, Habakkuk states:

Therefore the law is slacked, and right does not go forth; for the wicked does beset the righteous; therefore right goes forth perverted.

Habakkuk 1:4

על כן תפוג תורה ולא יצא לנצח
משפט כי רשע מכתיר את הצדיק
על כן יצא משפט מעקל:
חבקוק א:ד

The law is stagnant! Habakkuk sees injustice reign and says that Torah is failing. He accuses God of not keeping true to His promises. The Torah is false! In his prayer, then, he is perhaps describing the majesty of *Mattan Torah* because he is admitting that he was wrong. He is asserting that the Torah, with its promises and affirmations, is indeed an insurance policy, no matter what is going on in the world. We can celebrate the covenant with God, Habakkuk asserts, no matter what the circumstances. We may look around the world and see that things seem chaotic, that evil has power and that the covenant feels broken. But, the prophet says, remember Sinai. The Torah is forever true.

Conclusion: Habakkuk's Place Among the Prophets

As noted above, parallels between the Book of Habakkuk and the Book of Iyov are quite striking. Without elaborating on many details here, it is clear that the central issue of both works is that there is a problem of evil prevailing, and both works include God's response to this theological dilemma. The major difference is that Iyov's dilemma is based on his personal experiences; he suffered badly even though he was a good person. Through most of Habakkuk's book, however, he is an observer; he perceives a global problem. His perspective is like that of someone looking at the world in 1940 and wondering why God is allowing Germany to succeed. Habakkuk cannot make sense of God allowing the Chaldeans to perpetrate their evil. The Book of Iyov, on the other hand, has nothing to do with global problems – the global situation is not important – Iyov simply wants to know why good individuals like himself suffer.

But what is also striking when examining these two books is that while the book of Iyov is found in *Ketuvim*, the section of *Tanakh* known as *Writings*, Habakkuk is found in *Neviim*, *Prophets*.

In general, it is important to examine the distinction between *nevuah*, prophecy, expressed in the works found in *Neviim*, *Prophets*, and *ruach hakodesh*, Divine inspiration, expressed in the works found in *Ketuvim*, *Writings*. While a full treatment of this issue is well beyond the scope of the present discussion, it is worthwhile to consider a Midrash in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* (1:1:7) which offers an understanding of *ruach hakodesh* by means of an instructive parable. A person has a container filled with all kinds of wonderful and precious items. As long as the container is sealed, nobody can perceive what is inside. But if the seal is removed, all can see that there is something wonderful inside; the good stuff is now accessible. The bestowal of *ruach hakodesh* is like the removal of the seal from the container; what is inside the person now blessed with the *ruach hakodesh* is able to emerge. King David represents a good example of what this means. He was a poet of exceptional, unparalleled ability and power, but not until *ruach hakodesh* settled

upon him was he able to compose the book of Tehillim. *Ruach hakodesh* is the instrument that brings out what is within the human capacity to achieve in a heightened form.

If the book of Habakkuk were written with *ruach hakodesh*, then it could well be said that *ruach hakodesh* gives a stronger voice and greater power to Habakkuk's questioning! And it does so very well. We are left with no doubt as to the problem which Habakkuk is experiencing here, and the problem is indeed a very serious, deep and troubling one.

But in reality, this must be a book of prophecy, as evidenced from its placement in *Tanakh*! The thoughts expressed are not those of the human being, unveiled with greater potency by the presence of *ruach hakodesh*, but rather, like all prophecies, a presentation of a message which a prophet has received from God. How in the world, then, does God pose a question to which He knows the answer? Why does He send Habakkuk a message that poses such a problem?

Perhaps the answer is that in prophecy God is also a teacher. He comes at us the way a teacher does. A teacher tries to motivate his or her students by posing a difficulty which should generate problems in the mind of the student and when the student has grasped the problem completely and on a very deep level, the teacher can then give the solution. If the student has had a true understanding of the difficulty, the solution is magnified in his mind. It will permeate his way of thinking because he has struggled and grappled with the problem. The beauty and grace of the solution will thus always remain a permanent part of him. So it was actually God speaking in Chapter 1, posing the question through the prophet and answering the problem in Chapter 2. Habakkuk's mission is to make the people understand the situation and provide God's response.

While plausible, this answer apparently did not satisfy Rashi. Chapter 3 begins:

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet. Upon Shigionot.

Habakkuk 3:1

תפלה לחבקוק הנביא על שגינות:

חבקוק ג:א

The meaning of the word *Shigionot* is uncertain, perhaps it implies a kind of supplication. Rashi says that in Chapter 3, Habakkuk is begging for mercy for himself because he spoke so disrespectfully to God in Chapter 1. Habakkuk complained bitterly that the character of judgment had been perverted; now he is praying for his failures – his error in questioning the justice and judgment of God. But if we wish to claim, as suggested above, that the first chapter was in fact an expression of prophecy and Habakkuk was simply describing what he perceived in a prophetic vision, this does not make sense! Why would he have to beg forgiveness for presenting what was essentially God's own question? And indeed, if we look at the very first Rashi on the opening verse of the book, we see that he translates the word "המשא," which introduces Habakkuk's message, as a burden or load, reflecting a personal, human feeling. This was the burden of Habakkuk the prophet. It seems, then, that it was thus in fact *ruach hakodesh*, not prophesy, that is being expressed here! In Chapter 3, then, according to Rashi, Habakkuk must make amends with God for his disrespect.

But the question must then be asked that if the majority of this book is truly reflective of *ruach hakodesh*, why is it indeed found in *Neviim* and not in *Ketuvim*? Now, it is clear that Chapter 2 is certainly prophecy, as it contains the response of God to Habakkuk's question. Perhaps it may

be suggested, then, that Chapters 1 and 3 actually represent the narrative context for Chapter 2. In *Neviim*, we are often given biographical information that gives us insight into the prophet himself. We thus read, for example, of Yirmiyahu's abuse at the hands of the people, and of Amos's confrontation with priest at Beit El. If we accept Rashi's approach that Chapters 1 and 3 are expressions of *ruach hakodesh* and thus represent a Divinely inspired outpouring of the prophet's inner thoughts and feelings, we do indeed know a lot more about Habakkuk than we first supposed. Those chapters serve as a window into the personality of this man, this prophet, whose prophetic message is in Chapter 2.

Habakkuk was a man of moral passion. He was a master rhetorician and a poet, who had a close relationship with God, and who questioned God harshly and with intensity. But he was a man who accepted God's will and who in the end humbled himself before God. He admitted his own humanity and through this experience, he offers a message of hope in times of bitter despair.

The essence of the book is certainly the prophecy given by God in Chapter 2 that evil nations will not rule forever and that God is indeed controlling the big picture of history. The book is thus rightly found in *Neviim*. The rest of the work is simply the narrative context and insight into the man called Habakkuk, who struggled with the same issues which many human beings struggle with when they look at the world, and in the end he reaches a conclusion based on God's words. It is this message, that one can come to terms with difficulties through a proper understanding of God's words and actually rejoice, with which God and Habakkuk leave us. It is this message which the rabbis chose for us to read every year as we reaffirm our covenant with God on Shavuot.

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength, and He makes my feet like hinds' feet, and He directs me to walk upon my high places. For the Leader. With my string-music.

Habakkuk 3:18-19

ואני בה' אעלוזה אגילה באלהי ישעי:
ה' אדני חילי וישם רגלי כאילות ועל
במותי ידרכני למנצח בנגינותי:
חבקוק ג:יח-יט

Collected insights from members of the Graduate Program in Biblical and Talmudic Interpretation at Stern College

Temples in Time

Ruthie Braffman

There is a fascinating commonality between the selections of the ancient near eastern texts that retell the Genesis story: several of these accounts end the process of creation with the construction of a temple. In one example, Enuma Elish, a Babylonian myth from the 12th century BCE, begins, “When in the height, heaven was not named, and the earth beneath did not yet bear a name ... and [there reigned] chaos, Tiamut” and continues the daily account of the creation story over seven cuneiform tablets, closing with, “I will create man who shall inhabit the earth, that the service of the gods may be established and that their shrines may be built ... They rejoiced...In Upsukkinnaku they set their dwelling... They seated themselves and in the assembly they named him...They all cried aloud, they exalted him...”. The final act of creation is the building of the temple where Marduk, the Babylonian god, is to dwell and where he is established as the supreme lord of the heaven and earth. The temple is to be a place of praise, exaltation, and recognition of Marduk and the establishment of the people’s covenant with him. The house of worship is a place of contact where the people dedicate their service to Marduk and renew their covenant with him via visitation and ritual.

And yet our Torah recounts for us the days of Creation, walking us through the seven days of Genesis, and ending, not with a construction of a temple, or even a command to do so, but rather with the creation of Shabbat. Although the Torah respects the sanctification of space (for central to our history and religiosity is the Mishkan we had in the desert, and the Beit Hamikdash in Israel) Judaism also values a sanctification of time as well. While the other ancient near east Genesis stories conclude with the construction of a temple, our Torah ends Creation with Shabbat: a temple in time. As Joshua Heschel notes in his eloquent and timeless work, *The Sabbath*, “Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year the

Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn.”

Shabbat, like a house of worship, is intended as a time for a recognition and renewal of a covenant with G-d: on Shabbat we testify as witnesses to G-d's creation of the world (Shmot 20:11), as well as His creation of the Jewish people as we are commanded to remember yetziat Mitzrayim (Devarim 5:14). The first time Shabbat is mentioned as an sign or covenant it is not in the Ten Commandments, but later in parshat Mishpatim where the Torah also discusses the Divine presence of the Mishkan. Appropriately, when the Torah discusses the Divine presence in the context of space, it also mentions a Divine presence in the context of time through Shabbat. Only when we view Shabbat as our Mishkan in time do we understand that it is truly a day meant for recognition and renewal of our covenant with Hashem.

It is quite fitting then that the time allocated for Shavuot in the Torah (Vayikra 23:15) is called “after the Shabbat,” since Shavuot is when we received our covenant as a nation with Hashem, and like Shabbat, it is our yearly celebration, recognition, and dedication to that covenant with our Creator. Shavuot is a time for us to recommit our loyalty and devotion to Hashem and sanctify our lives through temples in time.

The Imperative of Chesed

Shlomit Cohen

Rav Zeira explained “Megilat Rut does not contain the laws of impurity or purity, nor the laws of that which is forbidden or that which is permitted. Why, then, what is written? To teach us the reward accorded to those who engage in acts of kindness.”

Rut Rabbah 2:14

א"ר זעירא מגלה זו אין בה לא
טומאה ולא טהרה ולא איסור ולא
היתר ולמה נכתבה ללמדך כמה
שכר טוב לגומלי חסדים
רות רבה ב:יד

What is it about the Book of Ruth that prompted Rav Zeira to assert that its primary message is that of chesed? What is the significance of reading this scroll on the holiday of Shavuot in particular, the day that we also celebrate matan Torah? In order to fully answer each of these questions it is critical that we develop a deeper understanding of chesed from a Torah perspective.

When we consider the imperative of *chesed* there are two primary sources that the commentators point us to; the passage commanding us “to love your neighbor” and the passage of “*halachta b'drachav*” which directs us to emulate the kindness, or acts of kindness, displayed by God.⁶⁷

Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzburger explains that Rambam understands emulation of the Divine, or *imitatio Dei*, as the cultivation of an ethical personality that mirrors the attributes commonly associated with God. Rabbi Wurzburger terms this approach towards *imitatio Dei* as “virtue-ethics” which he explains “focuses on the ethical quality of the state of mind of the agent”. The originality of the Maimonidean approach, explains Rabbi Wurzburger, is elevating the

⁶⁷ For a more developed discussion see the introduction to Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman's *Divine Footsteps: Chesed and the Jewish Soul*. (New York: 2008).

“imitation of God through the cultivation of moral dispositions as a specific religious imperative.”⁶⁸

Rabbi Yitchak Blau points out that the formulation of *imitatio Dei* as virtue-ethics, or “shifting the ethics from the act to the agent” results in a number of significant implications.⁶⁹ On the one hand, it transforms our attitude towards legally mandated acts of chesed and tzedaka; as a result of absorbing and emulating God’s ways the primary motivation in one’s act of chesed is internal compassion and care for another rather than any specific legal obligation. In this way giving tzeddakah with a compassionate attitude would fulfill both the mandate of “love your neighbor” and *imitatio Dei*. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, *imitatio Dei* as virtue ethics extends **beyond** halakhically mandated chesed. A person who is compassionate will be inclined toward action above and beyond his or her legal obligations. And in turn, any act of chesed that results from this heightened sensitivity takes on religious import as an expression of *imitatio Dei*.⁷⁰

Armed with a new understanding of chesed and virtue-ethics we are able to return to the Book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot.

On the most basic level, the megillah interlaces the two realms of chesed; the halakhic and super halakhic. The second chapter of Ruth makes extensive reference to the biblical commandment of leket, allowing the poor to collect fallen grains, as Ruth’s initial connection to Boaz is through this very mitzvah. But the more significant theme of the scroll is the supererogatory chesed, the chesed that stems from *imitatio Dei*, which Ruth and Boaz display. Ruth willingly leaves her family and her homeland to follow Naomi, her destitute mother-in-law, into a foreign land while Boaz commits to marry Ruth in order to perpetuate the name of her deceased husband. Neither character was obligated to act as they did and in doing so they remind us that the chesed of *imitatio Dei* extends far beyond the letter of the law. The Book of Ruth, therefore, represents chesed par excellence.⁷¹

If we go a step further, however, we can understand why it is this megillah in particular that we read on the holiday of Shavuot. In order to do so it is important to consider the holiday of Shavuot in the context of Pesach. The fundamental message of Pesach is one of redemption and nationhood. We are enjoined to relive the exodus and once again experience the dramatic shift from slavery to freedom, from an oppressed people to a redeemed people. Not only does this message shape our self-image as a Jewish nation, we are informed that our origin as slaves must also frame our relationship with those who are suffering amongst us. And while the notion that we were once slaves in Egypt appears in the context of specific mandates to alleviate the suffering

⁶⁸ Pg 94 of Rabbi Dr. Walter Wurzbürger’s essay, “The Centrality of Virtue Ethics in Maimonides”, in *Covenantal Imperatives: Essays by Walter S. Wurzbürger on Jewish Law, Thought and Community*, edited by Eliezer Jacobs and Shalom Carmy (New York: 2008)

⁶⁹ Yitzchak Blau, “The Implications of a Jewish Virtue Ethic”, in *Torah U-Madda Journal* volume 9 (2000): 19-41

⁷⁰ Although Wurzbürger posits that Rambam’s conception of *imitatio Dei* is limited to the realm of character traits rather than action, these broader acts of chesed will still have instrumental value in as much as they cultivate a more sensitive personality and Wurzbürger acknowledges other thinkers who do view *imitatio Dei* more expansively. See his article “Imitatio Dei in the Philosophy of Rabb Joseph B. Soleveitchik” also in *Covenantal Imperatives*.

⁷¹ In this context it is important to note that Boaz even went beyond the letter of the law within his fulfillment of lekhet, leaving extra grains for Ruth to glean. See Ruth 2:16.

of others the power of this narrative is primarily in the way that it shapes our attitude towards suffering, towards otherness. We have been there, we know what it means to be outsiders, to be destitute and broken, and therefore we can both empathize and help.

Fifty days later Shavuot, *zman matan Torateinu*, is upon us and we celebrate that our commitment to God and to community is given expression through clearly defined obligations and laws. Yet, there is a real concern is that our dedication to the letter of the law will replace the powerful message of the Exodus narrative and that narrow legalism will limit and perhaps even undermine the values we imbibed during Pesach.

How appropriate, then, that it is on Shavuot that we celebrate and extol the importance virtue-ethics, of *imitatio Dei*, specifically in regard to how it shapes our commitment to community. How incredibly powerful that theme supererogatory chesed that is woven throughout the megillah gently remind us that receiving and keeping the Torah is one manifestation of our commitment to God, but certainly does not exhaust the ways in which we are encouraged and expected to express *imitatio Dei*.

In this way Shavuot is transformed into a unique opportunity to reflect on how to expand our individual and collective commitment to emulating God through our engagement with community. How can we better inculcate chesed oriented personalities such that acts of kindness, compassion and social justice become second nature and extend above and beyond formal legal categories?⁷² May this Shavuot be an opportunity for us to recommit to the chesed of *imitatio Dei* in the fullest way.

Bringing the First Fruits of Torah

Meira Rubin

In the biblical account, the holiday of Shavuot seems to be a celebration of bringing bikkurim and matan Torah is not explicitly mentioned. Even in the Gemara, where matan Torah is said to have occurred on either the sixth or seventh of Sivan (Shabbat 86b) and the psukim about

⁷² Although the dichotomy between “love your neighbor” and *imitatio Dei* as sources of chesed can be distinguished by an action oriented approach where the alleviation of suffering is critical to the fulfillment of “love your neighbor” while the realm of *imitatio Dei* is primarily concerned with appropriate intentions, the mere intention to do good does not necessarily fulfill the mandate of *imitatio Dei*. If through *imitatio Dei* we are expected to emulate God’s love and concern for those in need to the degree that our actions will reflect a natural commitment to the other, then what underlies the fulfillment of *imitatio Dei* is genuine concern *for the other*. While the quest for *imitatio Dei* may serve as the initial impetus to cultivate a chesed oriented personality, the very fulfillment of this mandate depends on our ability to shape our chesed acts around of the individual in need rather than our own moral development. This in turn suggests that we have to be critical and constantly re-asses how we use our time and resources in pursuit of chesed. Are our actions truly about *the other* or are they governed by an internal quest for refined middot? Although these impetuses are not mutually exclusive, the concern is that our desire for personal refinement may replace a more outward approach towards chesed.

I would like to suggest that engaging in meaningful dialogue with those who are in need is the most effective way to insure that we are truly fulfilling *imitatio Dei*. If we formulate acts of chesed in communication with the recipients it not only transforms the hierarchy of giver and receiver into a more meaningful partnership⁷², it insures that our acts of chesed are truly oriented towards those in need rather than simply fulfilling our own (well-intentioned) desires.

Shavuot are expounded such that Shavuot also falls out on the sixth of Sivan (Menachot 56a-b), these two events are not explicitly connected. Why is this holiday of the first fruits nonetheless an appropriate time for us to celebrate our receiving of the Torah?

Perhaps the beginning of an answer can be found in one of the first places that matan Torah and Shavuot are explicitly connected. The midrash first relates the drash from the Gemara about matan Torah being on the sixth of Sivan and then continues:

And on Shabbat which was the sixth of the month, they received the Ten Commandments and that was the holiday of Shavuot, the day of the giving of the Torah, the fiftieth day of going out of Egypt, that's why it says 'under a fruit tree I woke you up' (Shir HaShirim 8:5) and 'like a fruit in the forest' (ibid. 2:3), as this fruit gives fruit fifty days after it blossoms, so the Torah was given 50 days after going out of Egypt. And the Torah was given at the end of even generations...

Pesikta Zutra, Shemot 19:10

וביום השבת שהוא ששי בחדש, קבלו עשרת הדברות והוא יום חג השבועות, יום מתן תורה, יום חמשים ליציאת מצרים, לכך נאמר תחת התפוח עוררתיך (שה"ש ח ה), ואומר כתפוח בעצי היער (שם ב ג), מה תפוח זה מוציא פירות לחמשים יום משתפרח, כך התורה נתנה לחמשים יום לגאולת ישראל, ונתנה תורה לסוף שבעה דורות, אברהם, יצחק, יעקב, לוי, קהת, עמרם, ומשה, שהן סוף שבעה שבועות לגאולתן, שהוא יום שביעי המקודש, כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו
פסיקתא זוטרא שמות יט:

Here matan Torah is dependent on going out of Egypt. It is not a one-day event, but rather a process contingent upon preparation. As fruits need cultivation and time to develop and blossom, so to our receiving the Torah is dependent upon study and cultivation. This idea that receiving the Torah is a process taking time, could be an explanation for the ambiguity of the date of matan Torah and its connection to Shavuot in the Torah. God could give us the Torah on one day, but our own receiving it and internalizing it is a process which takes much longer.

The declaration given when bikkurim are brought emphasizes this idea of process: It doesn't begin with picking the fruits or even planting the seeds, but rather with our ancestors going down to Egypt, becoming a nation, and then God bringing them out of Egypt and to the land of Israel (Devarim 26:1-11). It also emphasizes the fact that these fruits, which the bikkurim-bringer has cultivated, cared for and harvested for months, ultimately come from God, "and thus I have brought the first fruits of the land which the Lord has given me" (Devarim 26:10). Like cultivating crops and bringing bikkurim, receiving the Torah takes work and investment but at the same time, recognition that our knowledge and understanding ultimately comes from Hashem. Perhaps we celebrate His giving it to us on one day, to remind ourselves to be engaged in the process of receiving it every day.

Ruth's Yibbum

Miryam Spiegel

If two brothers dwell together, and one of them dies without a child, his wife shall not go to an outside man, her Yavam shall take her for a wife. The eldest [brother] shall establish his deceased brother's name, and his name

כי ישבו אחים יחדו ומת אחד מהם ובן אין לו לא תהיה אשת המת החוצה לאיש זר יבמה יבא עליה ולקחה לו לאשה ויבמה: והיה הבכור אשר תלד יקום על שם אחיו המת ולא

shall not be erased from the Jewish people.

Devarim 25:5-6

ימחה שמו מישראל:

דברים כה-ה-ו

The laws of yibbum, as introduced in Devarim, introduce a section of family rituals which apply in the case of the death of a sibling who has left no heirs. As described in the pesukim, it is the role of the oldest brother to marry the wife of the deceased, in an effort to continue the legacy of his brother's name in the nation of Israel. The pesukim continue to describe the process of chalitzta, the ceremony through which the brother obligated in yibbum may remove himself from his duty to continue his brother's name.

Such a case lies at the heart of megillat Ruth. The megillah opens with the story of Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons Machlon and Kilyon. Together, the family ran away from Israel to escape a famine that swept across Israel. However, rather than finding a reprieve in the land of Moav, the family was met with destruction:

And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. And they married Moabite women, one named Orpah and one named Ruth, and they lived there approximately 10 years. And they too, Machlon and Kilyon, died, and the woman was left without her husband and two children.

Ruth 1:3-5

וימת אלימלך איש נעמי ותשאר היא ושני בניה: וישאו להם נשים מאביות שם האחת ערפה ושם השנית רות וישבו שם כעשר שנים: וימותו גם שניהם מחלון וכליון ותשאר האשה משני ילדיה ומאישה:

רות א-ג-ה

Naomi first loses her husband, followed by the intermarriage and ensuing deaths of her two sons. Broken and despairing, Naomi decides to return to her homeland. In a monumental act of commitment, Ruth decides to abandon her life in Moav to join Naomi in her lifestyle and accompany her to Israel. Having no property left, Naomi's only hope is to have her land redeemed through a relative. Ruth is introduced to Naomi's relative Boaz, first as she collects leket from his field, and later, upon meeting him in his place of dwelling. Upon recognizing Ruth's self-sacrifice for the sake of her mother in law, Boaz sets on a mission to redeem Naomi's land:

And he said: 'Blessed be you of the Lord, my daughter; you have shown more kindness in the end than at the beginning, inasmuch as you did not follow the young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do for you all that you say; for all the men in the gate of my people do know that you are a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am a near kinsman; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.

Ruth 3:10-12

ויאמר ברוכה את לה' בתי היטבת חסדך האחרון מן הראשון לבלתי לכת אחרי הבחורים אם דל ואם עשיר: ועתה בתי אל תיראי כל אשר תאמרי אעשה לך כי יודע כל שער עמי כי אשת חיל את: ועתה כי אמנם כי אם גאל אנכי וגם יש גאל קרוב ממני:

רות ג-י-יב

Boaz approaches the closest relative to Ruth, the aptly named Ploni Almoni, who, unwilling to continue the lineage of Elimelech and thereby establishing his name, refuses to take part in yibbum, following Boaz's insistence that the land must be redeemed through the marriage of Ruth, a Moavite, in order to uphold the inheritance of the deceased. In contrast with the stated

goal of the process, Ploni Almoni puts his fears of losing his own land ahead of the need of his deceased relative.

The irony of the situation is clear; the very man who refuses to uphold his brother's name is rendered irrelevant and nameless in future generations. Whereas the stated goal in Devarim is that the resolution of the problem should come from within the family, the result in this case is a disconnect between brothers.

In redeeming Naomi's land and taking Ruth as a wife, Boaz was able to see beyond the immediate scope of the situation and understand the greater picture that awaited the Jewish future.

A different perspective is offered by Rashi and the Malbim, who relate that the missteps of Ploni Almoni lay in his refusal to correctly understand Ruth's role within the Jewish people, due to her status of being a Moavite. Although the teachings of the oral Torah clearly state the legitimacy of Ruth's conversion, by refusing to delve deeper, Ploni Almoni's lack of understanding left him unable to act, leaving him an insignificant character in the greater Jewish story.

The as the final chapter of the megillah closes with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, the new couple is made aware of their role in Jewish history.

And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said: 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman that is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and did worthily in Ephrath, and be famous in Bethlehem; and let your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give you of this young woman.'

Ruth 4:11-12

ויאמרו כל העם אשר בשער והזקנים
עדים יתן ה' את האשה הבאה אל
ביתך כרחל וכלאה אשר בנו שתיהם
את בית ישראל ועשה חיל באפרתה
וקרא שם בבית לחם: ויהי ביתך
כבית פרץ אשר ילדה תמר ליהודה
מן הזרע אשר יתן ה' לך מן הנערה
הזאת:

רות ד:יא-יב

In clear contrast to the misgivings of Ploni Almoni, Ruth's clear role in the nation of Israel is reaffirmed following her marriage to Boaz. Ruth receives the blessing of following in the footsteps of Rachel and Leah, matriarchs who each experienced marital strife, yet who went on to continued serve as the foundation of Am Yisrael. Peretz, son of Yehuda and Tamar, was the child of a union forced by discontent, and whose story recalls earlier justice that was served to Tamar through a case of yibum. Years later, as Ruth and Boaz take their places on the stage of Jewish history, justice is once again restored through yibum, and the grandfather of the Davidic dynasty is born.

The megillah closes with a summary of the generations from Peretz to David:

These are the offspring of Peretz, Peretz begat Chetzron, and Chetzron begat Rahm, and Rahm begat Aminadav, and Aminadav begat Nachshon, and Nachshon begat Salma, and Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Oved, and Oved begat Yisha, and Yishai begat David.

Ruth 4:18-22

ואלה תולדות פרץ פרץ הוליד את חצרון:
וחצרון הוליד את רם ורם הוליד את
עמינדב: ועמינדב הוליד את נחשון ונחשון
הוליד את שלמה: ושלמון הוליד את בעז
ובעז הוליד את עובד: ועבד הוליד את ישי
וישי הוליד את דוד:

רות ד:יח-כב

The structure of the psukim is similar to the familiar formulation of ספר בראשית:

These are the offspring of Yitzchak the son of Avraham, Avraham begat Yitzchak.

Bereshit 25:19

ואלה תולדת יצחק בן אברהם אברהם הוליד את יצחק:

בראשית כה:יט

The toldot structure, as presented in Tanach, represents the establishment of a lasting family structure within the House of Israel. Through commitment to the ultimate goal of ensuring the continuation of the name of Elimelech, Boaz and Ruth lay foundation for the future of the Davidic dynasty and the ultimate redemption of Israel.

The message of megillat Ruth extends far beyond the story of Ruth and Boaz; it is incumbent on each member of Knesset Yisrael to renew a strong commitment to the ongoing development of the Am Yisrael through engagement with its people and its living Torah. It is through the study of Torah and engagement with our nation that we can ensure both the continuation of our own legacies as well as the strong renewal of our nation in every generation.



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