

# Wishing You A Happy Shavuot, May 16-18



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# celebrate Shavuot

On Shavuot we celebrate the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai exactly 3,333 years ago. Your ancestors stood at the foot of the mountain. You, too, stood at the foot of the mountain together with your parents and grandparents - for the souls of all Jews from all generations came to hear the Ten Commandments from G-d Himself.

This year, attend the Reading of "The Ten Commandments" in synagogue on Shavuot and reaffirm our Covenant with G-d and His Torah.

**Shavuot Services @ Chabad**  
**Monday, May 17, 9:30 a.m.**  
**followed by Deluxe Dairy Pizza Kiddush**

# Free Trial Period

by Sara Esther Crispe

I've come to the conclusion that G-d offers free no-risk-no-obligation trial periods. There are various packages available: some are 90-day promotions, others even longer, some may be shorter. And the welcoming gifts are unbelievable. Are you following me? You see, I figured out that this is how people who are not raised in observant homes or environments become actively observant.

This revelation came to me recently, when I was teaching a group of seminary girls, all of whom were raised in religious homes. They wanted to know how it was that I first became interested in living an observant life. As I began to describe the transformation that took place in my life more than ten years earlier, I realized that it was the commercial that must have initially attracted me. Then there were the bonus gifts, and by the time my free-trial was up, I forgot that my credit card was being billed monthly. Originally I had thought I would stick around long enough for the freebies and remember to cancel in time, but I was so hooked that I never even realized the trial was over. Before I knew it, I was a full-paying member, paying my dues and enjoying benefits far beyond my greatest expectations.

Yup, I'm convinced that G-d knows marketing better than the best of us. He knows how to sell His product well - He's a real pro. Otherwise, why would any sane, successful and intelligent human being choose to give up a comfortably "free" secular life for one seemingly dictated only by rules, regulations and customs?

You see, I had no intention of ever leading a religious life. I actually had no intentions whatsoever. I just figured that I would live day-by-day and make decisions as they come. I liked the idea of being open-minded and open to any possibility, and feared restriction on any level. Then again, I was in college, so what better time for such an attitude?

Yet G-d had other plans for

me (doesn't He always?) and my content, little life suddenly became quite difficult and confusing. It didn't help that I was spending my junior year in Israel, far away from friends and family, and in the midst of a falling-out with my immediate family to the extent that we were not speaking. Along with my vow of silence came a closed wallet, which meant that I was also on my own for all my financial needs.

I found a job as a waitress in a hotel. I was the only Jew and only woman working alongside fifty Arab men. I worked 45 hours a week and was enrolled in five classes. My schedule didn't leave much time for a social life, but at least it paid the bills.

So I wasn't exactly in a position where I was spiritually searching. I was simply surviving. And even though I was brought up in a traditional household that was kosher and grew up going to shul on Shabbat, I was, if anything, less connected to Judaism once I came to Israel. I actually was paid double regular rate for working on Shabbat, so of course, I was always the first to volunteer.

And then I "saw the commercial". I met these spiritually enlightened, intellectually developed and emotionally fulfilled people. I was jealous. I had many questions, but no real answers. These people, meanwhile, were all connected to this Torah thing and seemed to have intimate and personal relationships with the big and only G-d.

Up to that time, I'd figured that He was hardly aware that I existed. I never made much of an effort to get to know Him, and when we did communicate, our relationship was always very one-sided. When I needed something, badly, I called to Him, and promised to change certain things that were wrong with my life. In return, I expected to be saved from my predicament.

The interesting thing is that I always took these "deals" quite seriously. If I made a promise to G-d, I never broke it, and He, too,



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always kept His side of the bargain. I tried not to make too many of these promises, but when I did, I held to them. I remember one incident in particular, when I was stranded all alone late at night in a dark alleyway in a really bad neighborhood in downtown LA in a stalled car. I remember feeling utterly helpless. Suddenly, I began to murmur the *Shema*, something I hadn't done since I was a child having nightmares. And then I made one of those unbreakable promises. I promised that if He saved me from this situation, that I would never ride in that car again. And I didn't. My friends thought I was crazy, but I never got back into that car.

But then, once those moments of need had passed, I would more or less forget about Him. And, since I thought that I was the one who always initiated our occasional engagements, I assumed that He forgot about me, too.

Anyway, to get back to that commercial, it really got to me to be watching all these people who seemed to be on such buddy-buddy terms with Him. But more than a relationship, I really wanted answers. I wanted to understand the meaning and purpose in my life, and figured there was no better place to start than with the One who put me here.

And this is where that "free-trial" started. After the "commercial", there was no immediate commitment that needed to be made, no contracts to sign, just a request for a bit of interest. And I had the interest. So, I called the toll-free number, introduced myself, mentioned that we had been in touch a few times before, and said I would like to find out more about this Creator. The problem was that my life was really busy, and I didn't know how I'd squeeze Him in. Between my work hours and school, there didn't seem to be a moment to spare.

And that is when those "free gifts" started pouring in. I made a request and BOOM, there was the answer. It was like the genie in the bottle. I was working too much? Hated my job? No problem. The next day a friend took me out to lunch, the place needed a waitress, and before I knew it I was working half the hours for double the pay of my previous job. Only one catch - I couldn't work on Shabbat. They were actually closed on Shabbat.

The bonus gifts just kept pouring in. When the classes on Judaism I wanted to attend conflicted with my university schedule, the schedule changed. So now I was making good money, had my weekends free, could attend Shabbat meals with

local families (very popular thing for university students in Jerusalem to do), and went to the local yeshiva in the morning for some learning. Not bad.

It started getting scary. I'd made a request, either verbally or even just in thought, and give or take 24 hours, I saw a result. For a while I thought it was quite cute. I liked being the recipient of daily miracles. It felt empowering to have an open line to the One Above. But then I realized that this was no longer a purely one-sided relationship. Granted, I was being given my space, but I was expected to give something back.

At this point the academic year was about to end, and I had some serious choices to make. I knew I was at a crossroads in my life; I just wasn't sure which road I was going to take.

I had definitely fallen in love with Judaism. I had never felt more alive or more in-tune with my life and the world around me. Yet I was far from ready to make the transition from a life of no rules or boundaries to one of structure. The festival of Shavuot - commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai - was approaching and I figured I would use the opportunity for serious reflection and introspection.

•Continued on page 10

## Retire your way

Let your goals be your guide



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# How To HAVE



own. They are beyond you; they belong to a reality greater than yourself. Being gifted these things means that you have transcended your limitations.

Finally, certain things are yours because they are inherently, intrinsically, yours. They are your birthright, your inheritance. You did nothing to earn them and no one gave them to you: you possess them by virtue of who and what you are. Your soul. Your mind. Your inborn talents. Your homeland. Your traditions.

Perhaps these things do not afford you the depth of fulfillment you get from the things you earn. Perhaps you do not experience the intensity of desire and striving for them evoked by the "gifts" of life. But these are more yours than anything else you possess.

Your earning power will fluctuate as you traverse the rises and dips of life, as you grow or diminish in strength, mental proficiency and spiritual sensitivity. The gifts you receive will always depend on forces beyond your control. But the things that are inherently yours will be yours in all circumstances and under all conditions. Even if you reject them and disavow them, they will remain ever, irrevocably yours.



On the sixth day of the Hebrew month of Sivan in the

year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), the newborn nation of Israel assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai to receive the Torah from G-d. Ever since, the event is referred to in the language of our sages as the "Giving of the Torah." Indeed, the Torah calls itself our "gift from the desert" (Numbers 21:18).

The Torah, however, also describes itself as Israel's "acquisition" (Proverbs 4:2), as well as "the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4).

So which is it - gift, acquisition or inheritance?

The Torah is an acquisition for which we must struggle and toil, which becomes ours through diligent study and meticulous observance. As such, we experience the deep sense of fulfillment that only a fully-earned achievement can bring.

The Torah is also a divine gift, for its wisdom is above and beyond anything our finite selves could attain. As such, it awakens our most transcendent strivings, elevating us above our temporality and mortality, making of us infinitely more than we are on our own.

And the Torah is also our inheritance, our birthright. As such it is always ours. Even when we do not earn it. Even when we close ourselves to the gift of it being bestowed upon us from above. For it is of a piece with our essence.

negative phenomenon. There is nothing intrinsically bad in G-d's world: every evil is a perverted good, every psychosis a healthy instinct gone awry.

So before we get all riled up over that woman with the two secretaries, let us try to understand the tendency of humans to splurge, flaunt and luxuriate in their wealth. We understand why we need food; we understand why we need shelter; but why do we crave gold?

In essence, the craving for gold is a yearning for transcendence. It is man saying: I am not content to merely exist and subsist; I want to exalt in life, I want to touch its magnificence and sublimity.

Of course, flying your palm trees to Miami each winter is not sublime. It's pathetic. The answer, however, is not to squelch these strivings, but to purge them of their negative expressions. Use your yearning for gold to make your world into a home for G-d.

Adapted from the works of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, The Lubavitcher Rebbe

by Yanki Tauber



## THE TORAH IS...

### THE TORAH IS A MANUFACTURER'S MANUAL.

Valuable things come with a book of instructions on how to properly and optimally use them. Lawn mowers, smart phones, minivans all have a guidebook. The same applies to the valuable (and complicated) thing we call Life - the Manufacturer accompanied it with an instruction book.

### THE TORAH IS A CONTRACT.

When two parties enter into a partnership, binding their financial futures to a joint destiny, they draw up a contract that spells out their respective duties and commitments. When two people marry, a marriage contract, called a *ketubah*, is drawn up that does the same. The Torah is our marriage contract with G-d, the document that details the commitments and duties we assumed toward each other when G-d chose us as His people and we chose Him as our G-d at Sinai.

### THE TORAH IS IDENTITY.

What connects the red-bearded chassid in Moscow with the black-skinned Yemenite Jew? What does the West Coast Jewish filmmaker have in common with his peddler grandfather or his olive-growing ancestor? Nothing. They share no common language, facial features or diet. Any two Jews can be as culturally or even genetically diverse as any other two members of the human race. But the *Shema* recited today in a Canadian synagogue is the same *Shema* that was proclaimed in the desert 3,333 years ago; the criteria for the mikvah built at Masada is the same as for the one in Brazil and Rochester. Torah bridges continents and removes generational gaps to serve as our single common expression of our Jewishness.

### THE TORAH IS VISION.

Why are we here? Where are we going? "An architect who builds a palace," cites the Midrash, "has scrolls and notebooks which he consults to know how to place the rooms, where to set the doors. So it was with G-d: He looked into the Torah and created the world." Torah is the divine blueprint for creation, the vision that illuminates the foundations of existence, its purpose and its significance. To study and live Torah is to understand and experience the soul of reality.

# GOOD AS GOLD

A recent New York Times article examined what Americans are doing with their money these days. One family installed palm trees on their Hamptons property which they fly to Florida each winter (the palm trees, not the property). A woman hired a "personal secretary" to tend to her hairdresser appointments, and then hired an assistant to the secretary. "It's like cats," she explained. "You need two of them so that they can keep each other company while you're away."

A similar problem plagued the Children of Israel more than 33 centuries ago. They had drained Egypt of its wealth, and then the Red Sea spewed out the jewels that had adorned the drowned Egyptians. So they, too, had too much gold. But back then,

people had a more direct approach to things. Instead of devising all these ingenious ways of saying, "Hey, look! I have more money than I know what to do with! But don't worry! I'll keep on doing my best to have even more!" they cast a calf of pure gold, put it up on a pedestal, and worshiped it.

How did G-d address the gold-sickness of His newly chosen people? He didn't abolish gold. He didn't even take away theirs. He told them to use their gold to build Him a Sanctuary.

Compulsive overeating is a horrible disease: it's unhealthy, it can even kill you. But the urge to eat is not only healthy - it's vital to life itself.

The same is true of every

☆ Happy Shavuot ☆

Michael M. Phillips, CPA



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# He's Got Your Back

by Rochel Holzkenner

"My friends claim that I got into religion because it makes me feel safe," Danna commented.

It was Shabbat afternoon, and Danna, Beth and I were lounging on the sofa.

"I get that a lot, too, ever since I started keeping Shabbat," interjected Beth. "I honestly don't know what to say. Maybe it's true, maybe religion is my escape."

We sat quietly for a moment. The question weighed down our buoyant dialogue.

"I agree with your friends," I finally said. "Belief in G-d should make us feel safe. But that's not why we believe. We believe in G-d because it makes sense. If there is a world, there must be a creator. Our brilliantly designed universe has G-d's signature written all over it.

"Even the authenticity of the Torah is logical. The Torah claims that three million people experienced the miracles and revelation at Mount Sinai. Who would construe such a risky lie? For a people that constitutes less than 1 percent of humankind, our Torah should be an obscure account. But quite the contrary - our Torah is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. We believe in G-d's Torah because it's true. If it also happens to make us feel safe - that's a bonus!"

I wish that I felt safe all of the time. Observing the Torah's laws doesn't automatically make people feel safe; it doesn't transport them into a

world of serenity. If only it were that easy! Instead, faith in G-d is like a muscle that needs constant exercise. It takes conscious meditation on G-d to push back against stress and fear. Faith pulls everything together into a purposeful mosaic, while skepticism wonders if there is any purpose at all.

If there was one Jewish leader who challenged the notion that you can be ultra-religious and still ultra-uptight, it was Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov. He told practically anyone who would listen to him that the basis of our observant practice is the belief that G-d desperately loves us and cares about the goings-on in our lives. The mitzvahs are our way of connecting back to G-d. That's how we love Him back.

The Baal Shem Tov was not without critics. (Can a Jewish leader ever be without critics?) Many people, even other respected leaders, felt that he'd gone too far by assuming that G-d was so intimately involved in the life of every creature.

But the Baal Shem Tov insisted that G-d cares, that He animates every creation at every moment, that He purposefully micromanages every detail of the universe. The Baal Shem Tov taught about Divine providence from mystical Kabbalistic writings and from Talmudic stories. He even claimed that the Torah itself was full of references to G-d's concern for our everyday affairs.

There was another scholar, a Talmudic sage, who also



**Rabbi Yochanan was inspired by the cormorant. Whenever he'd see a cormorant, he would spontaneously praise G-d for providing every creature with his needs. Why did the cormorant so deeply inspire him?**

saw G-d's love for humanity in the most simple verses of the Torah. His name was Rabbi Yochanan. He inferred G-d's deep concern for us from the most unlikely of places - the Torah's list of non-kosher birds: "And among birds, you shall hold these in abomination; they shall not be eaten; they are an abomination: the eagle [or the griffin vulture], the kite, the osprey... the owl, the cormorant, the little owl..."

After studying this verse, Rabbi Yochanan was inspired by the cormorant. Whenever he'd see a cormorant, he would spontaneously praise

G-d for providing every creature with his needs. Why did the cormorant so deeply inspire him?

The Torah calls the cormorant a *shalach*. According to the Midrash, the word "*shalach*" is derived from the word "*sholeh*" which means "draws up." The cormorant is a fish-eater - it catches its prey by diving from the surface, drawing out the fish that G-d has preordained to die that day.

Rabbi Yochanan was so taken with the *shalach* and its meaning that whenever he noticed a cormorant, he marveled, "G-d, your judgment reaches the depth of the sea. Even the deaths of fish are predetermined by G-d."

If G-d controls the life of each fish, then it's obvious that G-d manages the events in our lives.

Which sounds nice, but how does it jibe with the fact that a variety of factors contribute to our circumstances? What about society, politics, the economy - don't those factors play a huge role in our lives? What about our own choices that we make?

That was precisely why Rabbi Yochanan would marvel at the cormorant. The cormorant reaches its beak beneath the water's surface as schools of fish swim by. The cormorant eats some but not others, and that is the story of our lives.

Life beneath the sea represents the complex labyrinth of systems that govern our lives. "Why did I get a flat tire? It was punctured by a nail on the road." "Why did I get the job? Demand exceeded supply and I'm qualified." But if we could view our lives

from the inside out, we'd see that every experience was custom-made for us. G-d humbly couched His master plan in a natural chain of events. "Yes, I met my Sally as a freshman, we both ended up in Calculus." Ha! If only you knew how G-d enticed both of you to go to that college, and how He put you in the same class just so that you'd meet each other.

G-d's hand is "submerged," so to speak, underneath the sea of nature. In fact, the Hebrew word for nature is "*teva*", which is very similar to the word "*tubu*", "submerged." Nature intentionally drowns out our ability to recognize the hand of G-d as the cause of every single event in our lives. That facade allows us free choice.

Every time we recognize the hand of G-d directing the natural course of events, we mimic the cormorant. We "draw the fish out of the water," or expose G-d's plan from within the natural circumstance. The mere recognition of Divine providence in our lives is an accomplishment.

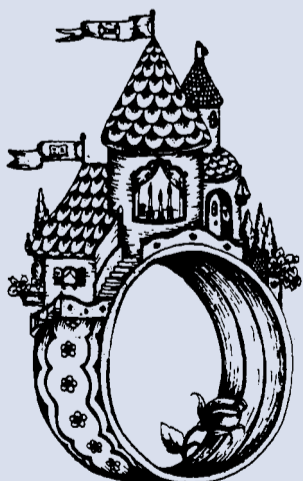
The Baal Shem Tov taught that pessimism and stress is indicative of a lack of belief, no matter how religious one may be. If G-d is in control then He's got your back and everything that happens is an important part of your journey. The soul is optimistic and self-confident, and sees right through other factors that obscure G-d's control.

When Moshiach comes, it'll be clear as day that every event in our lives, life-changing or mundane, was set into place by G-d for us, with very specific intent and a lot of love.

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# The "I" In Sinai

## Be A Star In His-Story

by David Aaron

The Torah, in the Book of Genesis, makes an outlandish assertion. It says that G-d created man in His image. What's that supposed to mean?

G-d created man in His image in the same way that an author creates all his characters in his image. Each character in the story expresses a different aspect of the author. Even the interaction between the characters is in some way an unfolding of the truth of the author.

On the other hand, there are other characters that the author doesn't identify with. Every good story has an antagonist, a villain. Every good book has a problem character who creates all the tension. Why is that character there? Because the villain plays the essential role of bringing out the inner selves of all the other characters. That's an important role. The role of the evil people in the story is to help the good people in the story reveal their deepest selves, demonstrate extraordinary courage, tremendous fortitude, new commitment, etc.

The antagonist in every story is actually providing the opportunities for the other characters to make great choices that embody great goodness. The villain is actually serving the best interest of all the other characters, and, of course, the author.

Therefore every character is serving the author. However, some characters are serving the author directly, as direct expressions of himself into the world he created. And some are serving the author indirectly - by creating opportunities for others to be of direct service.

This is the essence of all choices of every character. To serve or not to serve is not the question, and it is not the choice. Every character serves the author. The choice is only about how you serve - directly, playing the good guy, or indirectly, playing the villain.



(c) Sarah Kranz

And what difference does it make if you serve directly or indirectly? Although the story will be written either way, it sure does make a difference to you, the character. Your choices not only determine the outcome of your final scene but also the quality of your life throughout the whole story.

As we all know, the good guys win in the end. Sure, they might lose some battles along the way but they always win the war. However, even when they appear to be losing, often they are really winning, because in every moment of their struggle they achieve personal transformation and enjoy a profound sense of identification with the author. This is not the case for the villain. Worse than the great demise that awaits him in the final scene is the pain he suffers daily. His soul is alienated from its Divine Source and his inner world has no connection with G-d and is therefore void of any lasting value or meaning.

Now we have a better understanding of the true meaning of "serving G-d" or not "serving G-d." Generally, when you pick up the Torah, and you read about serving G-d, you may feel put off. Why would I want to serve G-d? Be servile? It seems kind of demeaning. But if you're a character in the story, how could you not want to serve the author? It's who you are. And it's the greatest honor in the world.

What does it mean to serve the author directly? It means that I am a vehicle for the expression of the author into his story. The more I serve the author, the more the author's presence permeates my very being, and the more I discover that I am actually a spark of the author and I play a role in HISStory. It's not just about obedience. It's about self-expression. It's about who you are, why you are, who is G-d and why He creates.

When G-d offered the Torah and its commandments to the Jewish people they recognized that the Great Author of life was presenting them not only Holy Scripture but the Script of daily life. Without hesitation they responded, "We will do it." They understood that the Torah was, is, and always will be the guiding force of the universe at the core of all being. They realized that the principles and the commandments of the Torah empower them to play the best part, be all we can be, serve and experience our story as part of His-Story.

## The Weekday Holiday

by Elisha Greenbaum

Aspiring Olympians train for years, focusing everything they do on the one day. They spend thousands of hours of pressure and preparation in the hope that they'll peak at precisely the right moment. To a lesser degree, students do the same; their yearly mark depends on the final exam and can often determine their future profession.

What are the highlights of your career? When you look back at the photo album of your life, which moments will you most treasure or regret, and which will you struggle to even remember?

Certain days just mean more - your wedding day, the birth of your first child, and Yom Kippur all loom large in life's pantheon, while other days just seem to sweep by.

The big moments in life don't actually last that long; it's hard to maintain the intensity. An athletic event is usually over in seconds, while most exams are over within hours. Even the most schleppeled out wedding ceremony finishes eventually, and the actual moment of birth is usually quick, no matter how many hours of labor preceded it. Most of us coast to the finish line, and then collapse in an exhausted heap immediately after bursting through

the tape.

The holiday of Shavuot is literally translated as the "Festival of Weeks." It seems like a misnomer; the festival itself is two days (or one, if you're living in Israel), and the "weeks" refer to the time we've spent preparing for the big day. You'd never refer to your wedding as a "Celebration of our 14-Month Engagement," or the Super Bowl as the "Festival of the Football Season," so why name this holiday after its preparation period?

The lesson of the Festival of Weeks is that weekdays can become festivals. Unlike the Olympics, where you only get one chance at the gold medal, Jews are granted a never-ending chance at immortality. According to Judaism, you don't just have a one-time chance for redemption, rather the weeks and days of our life are expected to become festivals of G-d.



There is a famous quote, "Spectacular achievement is always preceded by unspectacular preparation," but the Torah teaches that the preparation itself is an integral, spectacular part of the journey. The days and weeks of our lives are far more than mere stages in our long journey toward a goal, but are unique opportunities to access eternity.

But how do we tap into this rich vein of purpose? Isn't it natural to invest certain moments with greater gravitas than others? The way to recognize the inherent value of each point in time is to count the days, to fill up each moment of every day with meaning, and then the weekdays will become holidays.

Often, we focus on the future and ignore the here and now. But the lesson of Shavuot is that every moment of every day counts.

## Hello, Am I Home?

by Baruch Epstein

Every teenager has asked himself at some point, "Who am I?" Chassidic thought teaches us to ask an even more fundamental question: Am I?

Can I genuinely exist in a world created by the Infinite? Does G-d's omnipresence leave any room for me?

In the Ten Commandments, G-d declares "Anochi" - "I Am." I truly am; I preceded Creation and am independent of it. As mere humans, your existence is fleeting. Your "I am" is subject to accomplishment and is all too easily erased like sand castles swept away by the tide.

G-d continues. He has not simply come to boast of His superiority. He invites us to share in His authentic existence: "Who am I? I am the one who took you out of slavery - in order to entrust you with My mission and grant you substantive existence through heeding My instructions."

It's as if G-d is saying: "Let's get one thing straight from the beginning: I am. The

stars and the planets, the animals and the green trees and even humanity exist only because I am, and to serve My 'I am.' If you follow these Ten Commandments, you will join me in 'I am.'"

So (with apologies to all English teachers), we "am" because G-d - the genuine "I am" - has enabled us to be. G-d's existence is genuine, not fleeting. He is not created. Human existence is granted substance through connecting to - not competing with - G-d. It may be counterintuitive, but the more compliant I am, the more "I am."

The essence of conflict is competing assertions of self: I want, I deserve, all derivatives of "I am." Fearing a loss of one's "I am" can lead to aggression.

Being in a relationship means putting aside my "I am" for the other's "I am" and - here is the most difficult part - trusting that the other in turn will care for my "I am." It means allowing the other to be, and not fearing being diminished thereby.

That's what happened at Sinai. We accepted this responsibility without reservation. When I am only willing to trust 90%, holding 10% back to ensure I control my "I am," the result is an equal

and opposite reaction; G-d "withholds" from us. Panicked, we begin to withhold even more, and so it spirals. The "I am" statement asks us for total commitment, implying that G-d will offer the same to us.

A Chassidic student once asked an elder for a path towards humility. Sensing the sincerity of the question, the rabbi advised him to try an exercise: Remove the word "I" from your vocabulary for a week. Replace "I studied an interesting lesson" with "There is an interesting lesson."

Every year on Shavuot, G-d assembles us, reveals Himself to us, beckons to us to partner with Him, to transform the world through caring for His and others' "I am."



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# I Almost Killed Her Husband, But She Forgave Me

by Rifka Chilungu



I was just a teenager when I was involved in a major car accident; and I caused it. I was 16, distracted and speeding. It was a very dark night; it was raining and the red light didn't register, and I hit another car, twisting and crushing metal. In what in hindsight seems like an unrealistic, poorly written script, I walked away without a scratch. But the driver I hit wasn't so lucky.

Standing on the side of the road in a daze, I watched as the street filled with flashing lights reflected in the wetness of the road. Businesses emptied as people came out to look. There was debris spread as if it had fallen from the sky with the rain rather than exploded from what was a car.

The other driver was extracted from his demolished vehicle with the Jaws of Life and eventually flown by helicopter to a hospital that could handle his trauma. I don't remember speaking with the police, but I must have. I don't remember how I got home. I don't remember anything about that night after staring at the shattered bits of plastic and metal in the middle of the street.

When the shock wore off, what was left in its place was worry and crushing guilt. In the morning, after a sleepless night, I stood in the kitchen and watched the clock on the stove tick off minutes. I was frozen. My mind was blank save for the thought that the next minute could be the minute where I am informed of the man's death. It was at times difficult to breathe; it was fully impossible to eat, impossible to sleep.

There was a burning existential horror; a knowledge that I had violated a law

beyond our earthly laws and now stood in a place somehow outside of everything. I was at the time completely alienated from G-d, yet I felt a deeply buried instinct to pray (but denied it). I wanted to hide. I wanted to vanish. I wanted to undo what had happened.

**The other driver was extracted from his demolished vehicle with the Jaws of Life and eventually flown by helicopter to a hospital that could handle his trauma... I don't remember anything about that night after staring at the shattered bits of plastic and metal in the middle of the street.**

What I wanted more than anything was to switch places with the man - to be the one hurt by my stupidity. How could I have been so careless? How could I have been so wrapped up in my worries that I could behave so recklessly? What right did I have to live if this man dies? How could I possibly be permitted to feel joy or laugh should I be guilty of taking away another person's ability to ever feel those same feelings again? And even if he lives, would he recover? Would he spend the rest of his life impaired? What have I condemned him to through simply not caring enough?

It was a great unfairness, and I had unleashed it. I craved silence and refused to

discuss anything with anyone. I felt, and was, desperately alone.

Aloneness - so different from mere loneliness - is a very dangerous place to be as a human being, a being designed to thrive in the company of another, to feel empathy, to feel a part of something. To know that separation is a silent torture. Disconnection is an attack felt at the core of a human being - an attack that strikes at the soul and radiates outward - and I was being pulled into a place of increasing disconnection.

Guilt has a tremendous destructive power. It has the ability to shape and destroy to the same degree as rage; it just does it quietly. Rage is a fire, guilt is a rot. It can hollow a person out if they don't hear its quiet decay and answer it with action. It can be a powerful force for change, and yet the way forward is often unclear.

I have been full of fury and full of guilt, and I find guilt equally as dangerous as rage to the one being swallowed by it. It swirls with sadness and hopelessness, and dulls everything. It can lead to lashing out at others just as easily as it can lead to a crumbling of the one afflicted. Guilt folds you in on yourself, collapsing you.

As the hours ticked by into

a day and beyond, I began to feel this collapse. My parents sheltered me from news of the man's situation. Was he alive because of a machine? Was his brain injured? Would he ever be the same? No matter how long he lives, I wondered how many years I took from him. My guilt for my carelessness joined with a self-hatred. Turning inward, I chastised myself for daring to fear the loss of my future while I feared the potential loss of the other driver's life. How vile, to think of oneself at such a time, I thought. Just hours previously, I thought myself invincible. Now, I stood motionless, terrified, desperate to change the past, to write the future, to shrink into nothing.

While my memory of the exact timeline is unclear, it was some time after the accident - the ultimate fate of the driver still unknown - that I heard from his wife. She reached out to me, her voice strong, unwavering, but peaceful and calm. She asked how I was. I couldn't speak. Speaking would be an acknowledgment of my being. She continued and

spoke with a soothing confidence. She demanded I listen and hear without raising her voice, a voice completely void of anger or resentment.

She told me simply that no matter what, it was going to be OK, and that I would be OK. That she and her husband knew it was a mistake - that she was praying for me, that they forgave me. I felt a warmth spread over me, and while the guilt and knowledge that I did a great wrong was still there, its rot no longer threatened to consume me, and most importantly, the feeling of isolation was gone.

I was reminded that I was still a part of this world. I wasn't rejected. Her strength and trust pulled me back to a place where I could turn the twisting emotions I felt into a push to become a better person - a person who understood mercy, compassion, the value of life, the beauty of our interconnectedness. What this woman had in that moment is the amazing power to forgive, and it is a power that we all have if we choose to reach for it.

•Continued on page 12

## Light Over Darkness

by Seena Elbaum

My mother stopped lighting Shabbat candles when I was 10 years old. Up until then, every Friday night my two sisters and I stood alongside her, watching her cover her head with a flowy silk scarf as she drew the light in and recited the blessing. This was always followed by Mommy bending over and giving each of us a kiss on top of our heads.

Seeds were planted, watered, and now, the tree has matured, and the message and meaning of this memory feel eternal.

When I was 10, my family experienced a devastating

tragedy - my 13 year-old sister was killed in a camp bus crash. No more candle-lighting.

It was an immeasurably difficult time. My mother's blistering pain was so deep and incomprehensible. The fallout from this was shattering, and my family as I knew it was no longer. Joy was replaced with sadness, laughter with tears, forgiveness with anger, unity with isolation, conversation with silence and light with darkness. Every-thing felt hard and heavy.

Fast-forward to 2013, after my father died. My mother

was still living in New York, alone, scared and broken. I knew she was safe because of stellar caregiving around the clock, yet I could not find any rest at night knowing she was crying herself to sleep until her tears ran out. I was making several trips a week to see her, and life was feeling unmanageable.

My supportive, kind and very gracious husband suggested that my mother move into our home. He was so convincing and certain that this was the right thing to do - and I wanted to believe him, but I had my doubts. Old family dynamics and our personal histories had me questioning what to do. With abundant trust, I left my thinking brain and switched to my doing brain. Two months later, she was all moved in.

The adjustments were enormous, for all of us. My mother and I were still grieving, though it was too painful for her to talk about. She and I did many things together, and my goal was to show her love and care. I'd cook her favorite foods, take her on long walks, bring her sweet treats, make silly jokes, tell her how pretty she looked, take her for manicures and haircuts, and sit with her and hold her hand.

This approach helped me feel better, and while I knew that she was grateful, her energy remained heavy, and alas, the darkness prevailed.

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**CAMP GAN IZZY!**  
see back page

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# SEEING THE SOUNDS

by Tzvi Freeman

## The Experience

I woke up late on the day of the Ten Commandments. Look, stuff happens. When I finally jolted out of bed and ran towards the scene, I met someone coming from there. "Hey, I missed it!" I said. "What went on?"

I'll bet you're thinking he told me something like, "G-d said He's G-d, no other gods, and we shouldn't steal, kill or commit adultery."

But he didn't. It was more like this:

"You can't imagine it! There was this bizarre thunder! And freaky lightning! The whole mountain was glowing in some weird fire-like light! And this shofar sound didn't stop getting louder and louder and louder! We heard a voice coming from all directions at once. Then, next thing you know, it was like nothing existed but G-d - I mean nothing. The whole world became totally unreal, and all there was was Him! The whole experience was such a knockout - over and over again. And you missed it?!"

Okay, so I made this up. Everyone was there, men, women and children, and all the souls of all Jews who will ever be. I'm just out to make a very Marshall McLuhanesque the-medium-is-the-message point: That event at Mount Sinai wasn't so much about content as it was about the experience. It wasn't about hearing commands. It was about seeing G-d. And that experience was the message - that there's nothing but G-d.

And it was an interactive experience; it had to be interactive, because the Torah introduces the Ten Commandments with the words, "G-d said all these words, to say."

Usually, "to say" means that Moses was to say this over to the Jewish people. But in this case, the Jewish people

were right there (even this sleepyhead). So here, "to say" means something else - that the people were supposed to say something.

What were the people supposed to say? Depends on who you ask: Rabbi Yishmael or Rabbi Akiva.

## The Dispute

Before we get into their dispute - which you can find in Mechilta, one of the most ancient collections of commentary on the book of Exodus - let me describe something of the personalities involved. Two diametrically opposed personalities.

Rabbi Yishmael was born into the priestly class. Some say he was the high priest. From childhood, he looked more like an angel than a human being.

Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of converts. As a youth he scorned Torah scholars and until the age of 40, he was an ignorant shepherd. Then he turned around and worked his way up to become the greatest Torah teacher of his time, and one of the greatest of history.

When these two sages argue, it's not just two personalities clashing. It's two faces of Torah looking in two opposite directions, one from the top down, one from the bottom up. And at the point of their intersection, we discover what Torah is all about at its very core.

Now back to what the people had to say to each of the Ten Commandments.

Rabbi Yishmael answers our question simply: Each time G-d told them they were supposed to do something, everyone answered "Yes!" Each time G-d told them they were not supposed to do something, everyone answered, "No!"

As in "I am G-d . . ." receives "Yes, You are the only G-d!" and "Don't have

other gods" receives "No, we won't have any other gods!"

Rabbi Akiva disagrees. For every positive there was a "Yes!" And for every negative there was also a "Yes!" As in, "Yes, we will not have other gods!"

**Rabbi Yishmael was born into the priestly class. From childhood, he looked more like an angel than a human being. Rabbi Akiva was a descendant of converts. As a youth he scorned Torah scholars and until the age of 40, he was an ignorant shepherd.**

There's something deep behind this argument. Where Rabbi Yishmael sees the negative as negative, Rabbi Akiva sees even the negative as positive. What's going on?

## Seeing Voices

Human interactivity is not their only topic of dispute concerning Sinai. They also argue over the multimedia experience itself. It makes sense that the two disputes are related.

The verse reads, "All the people saw the sounds and the lightning and the mountain aflame."

Hold on: They saw the sounds?

Rabbi Yishmael says it's not literal, it's just poetically licensed language. They heard the sounds and they saw the sights.

Rabbi Akiva disagrees. They saw the sounds. And not only that: they heard the sights.

Dear Rabbi Akiva, what's the point in that? Okay, we

get the whole "medium is the message" idea. But what is the message of such a medium? In what way does seeing thunder or hearing lightning enhance the experience of Sinai? And what makes it so crucial to receiving Torah?

Without getting into what sounds might look like, or how sights might sound (there are people who experience this - it's called synesthesia), let's strip this dispute of its superficial wrappings and get into what these two Torah titans are really discussing. Let's look at how these two mediums - hearing and seeing - impact the human being.

Neurons devoted to visual processing occupy about 30 percent of the brain cortex, as compared with 8 percent for touch and just 3 percent for hearing. No wonder why if it's visible in front of us, we take it as an objective reality. No wonder why, for us humans, seeing is believing.

For a dog, smelling is believing. For a shark, electroreception is believing (well, a major part of it). For a bat, hearing is believing. But when we humans hear something, it's more of a secondhand, subjective experience. We're not so convinced. It could have been all sorts of things that we heard. Or maybe we didn't hear anything at all.

We use "hearing" in a different but similar sense: When we know about something because we heard it from someone else, or even read it in a blog or news story, we say, "Yes, I heard about that." So hearing, to human beings, is a kind of secondhand experience.

And yet, that secondhand experience of hearing information has a certain advantage over seeing something in front of you. When you see something, you grasp it as a "thing that is." When it's not visible to you, but you hear the sounds it makes, or just hear about it, in a certain way you are more capable of dealing with the information this thing contains. Its "isness" is less real, it remains more abstract - and therefore it leaves more room for your imagination.

In court, we refer to secondhand evidence as "hearsay." And here's a fascinating fact: In a Jewish court - which is generally a tribunal -

the judges can decide the case only if their experience of that evidence is hearsay. The witnesses must be eyewitnesses, having seen the deed firsthand. But if any of the judges was there watching at the scene of the crime, he's off the bench.

Why is that? Because the Torah demands that a court must attempt to exonerate the accused before incriminating him - and you can't exonerate someone when you yourself saw him do the act. It's become too much of a reality for you. You're trapped within your own perception.

Which takes us back to Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva: When they argue over seeing and hearing, they're really talking about something far more abstract. Seeing means it's real to you. Hearing means it's something you only induce from the evidence before you. So the argument really is about the message of Sinai. It's about a shift that experience made in our perception of reality.

## Existence By Implication

Rabbi Akiva says they saw the sounds. When G-d said He's the only G-d, they didn't just hear that. They "saw" that.

Up until then, they had heard about an underlying reality beneath this world of sensation and tangible stuff. Intuitively, it made sense. But it was nowhere as real as the rocks on the ground and the sun in the sky. Now, suddenly, that reality burst into center stage. G-d said, "I am," and that became their reality. Wherever they looked, all they saw was a world of

•Continued on page 15



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## The Holiday of Shavuot

Shavuot is the second of the three major Jewish festivals, (the others are Passover and Sukkot) commemorating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai 3330 years ago. Shavuot marks the beginning of the Jewish people as a nation. It is the time when G-d pronounced the Israelites as His "chosen people" and "a holy nation".

The Torah was given seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt, and is considered the culmination of the "birth" of the Jewish people, which began at the exodus on Passover.

The word Shavuot means weeks, for it marks the completion of the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot during which the Jewish people were extremely eager, counted the days and prepared themselves for the giving of the Torah. During this time they cleansed themselves of the scars of slavery and became ready to enter into an eternal covenant with G-d with the giving of the Torah.

Now, too, as commanded in the Torah, we count the 49 days between the first day of Passover and the festival of Shavuot.

Shavuot also means "oaths". The name indicates the oaths which G-d and Israel exchanged on the day of the giving of the Torah to remain faithful to each other forever.



The Torah is the very essence of the Jewish people. It is our way of life and the secret of our freedom, our nationhood and our existence. Even before the redemption from Egyptian bondage, G-d told Moses that He would redeem the Jewish people in order that they would receive the Torah. For there can be no true sovereignty for a Jew without Torah.

## The Ten Commandments, The Torah, & the Mitzvot

At Mount Sinai, the entire Jewish nation, millions of men, women and children, witnessed the revelation of G-d as He spoke the words of the Ten Commandments. It is this event, the revelation of

# Shavuot Holiday

## Be There With Your Children

This year, on Monday, May 17, in synagogues across the world, the Jewish people will stand together once again to experience the Giving of the Torah with the reading of the Ten Commandments. Wherever you are, you are invited to take part - just as you did 3333 years ago.

Our Sages recount that when the Jewish people came to receive the Torah, G-d asked for guarantors. They offered every responsible party they could imagine, but G-d was not satisfied; until they declared, "Our children will be our guarantors!"

So make sure to bring along your guarantors - the children, right down to the newest sponsors - when you come to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments at the Giving of the Torah on Shavuot.



G-d Himself, without a mediator, that established for all of the people, the truth and eternity of the Torah.

After the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses ascended to the peak of Mount Sinai, and stayed there for forty days and nights. During this time, G-d taught him the entire Torah, as well as the principles of its interpretation for all time. He also gave him the two precious stone tablets, in which He engraved the Ten Commandments.

Upon his descent, Moses taught the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah was then taught and transmitted from generation to generation, until this very day.

## What is the Torah?

The word "Torah" means instruction or guide. The Torah is composed of two parts: the Written Law and the Oral Law. The written Torah contains the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and the Writings. Together with the Written Torah, Moses was also given the Oral Law, which explains and clarifies the Written law, much like a constitution and its bylaws. It was transmitted orally from generation to generation and eventually transcribed in the Talmud and Midrash.

## The Torah & Its Commandments

The Torah relates how G-d created the universe, how the human race came into being from Adam and Eve, how our Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob fared, how the Jewish people became a nation, chosen by G-d to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' through receiving and observing the Torah. The Torah contains 613 commandments, of which 248 are positive (what to do) and 365 are negative (what not to do). Masorah (Tradition) In addition to the precepts, commandments and prohibitions written in the Torah, G-d taught Moses more laws, which he was to memorize and orally convey to his successors, who in turn were to uphold this tradition from generation to generation. Many laws and customs have thus been practiced by us traditionally, as if they were actually written in the Torah.

## The Prophets

Following the passing of Moses, as G-d promised, He revealed himself to individuals of great piety and spirituality. These are the prophets who recorded G-d's instruction and messages. In all there are 19 books of the prophets. In all we had 48 prophets and 7 prophetesses whose prophecies were recorded for their everlasting importance.

## The Holy Writings

These include the books like Psalms, Song of Songs, Ruth and Esther, 11 in all. All of which were written by one or another of our prophets by divine inspiration ("Ruach Hakodesh")

## The Revealed & Hidden Parts of the Torah

The Torah in its origin and essence is G-d's infinite wisdom and will. And it is the infinite G-dly wisdom that is concentrated in the human logic and practical laws of the Torah addressing mundane worldly matters.

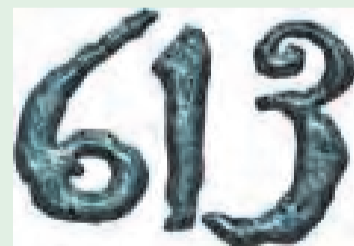
The Torah, as it deals with practical laws, is the revealed part of the Torah. The internal and mystical element of the Torah, focuses on the G-dly dimension of the Torah and mystical significance of the Mitzvos, which are the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidut. They are, as referred to in Jewish tradition, the neshama (the soul) and essence of the Torah. Both the hidden and revealed are inseparable parts of the Torah, received from Sinai and transmitted from generation to generation throughout our history.



## The Mitzvot

There are 613 Divine commandments embracing every facet of our lives, both the duties to fellow man and the way to worship G-d. The positive commandments, numbering 248, equal the number of organs in the human body, implying that a person should serve the Creator with every part of his being.

The 365 negative commandments are equivalent to the number of blood vessels in the human body, indicating that when we guard ourselves from transgressing these prohibitions, as we might be tempted to do by desires inherent in the blood, each one of our blood vessels, remains "unblemished" and pure. The negative commandments also equal the number of the 365 days of the year.



## The Significance of Mitzvot

Mitzvah literally means commandment. However, it also means companionship (from the Aramaic tzavta - companionship). Upon fulfilling a commandment one becomes united with G-d, who ordained that precept. For, regardless of the nature of the commandment, the fulfillment of G-d's desire, creates a relationship between the creator and the human who executed it. By fulfilling His wish a person accomplishes an infinite purpose and is in G-d's "company".

This is the interpretation of our sages' statement (Avos 4:2) "the reward of a mitzvah is the mitzvah", indicating that the mitzvah itself is the greatest reward, for this sets us in a companionship with the eternal and infinite G-d. All other rewards are secondary in comparison to this great merit.



## Shavuot Calendar 5781-2021

Times are for the Rochester area only

- May 16 Light the Yom Tov candles at 8:10 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2. Tikun Lail Shavuot during the night.
- May 17 Everyone should attend services in the morning & hear the reading of the Ten Commandments. Light the Shabbat & Yom Tov candles from a pre-existing flame\* after 9:19 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2.
- May 30 Yizkor is recited during services. Shavuot ends at 9:20 p.m.

\*A pre-existing flame is a flame burning continuously since the onset of the Shabbat such as a pilot light, gas or candle flame.

### BLESSINGS FOR CANDLE LIGHTING

- 1 Boruch A-toh Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom A-sheh Ki-de-sho-nu Be-mitz-vo-sov Vetz-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Yom Tov.
- 2 Bo-rukh A-to Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-heh-che-yoh-nu Vi-ki-ye-mo-nu Veho-ge-o-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh.



# Guide 5781 - 2021

## From Our Tradition About The Torah & The Giving Of The Torah

### Kesser - A Crown

The Ten Commandments consist of 620 letters, equaling the number of the 613 Mitzvos and the 7 Rabbinical Mitzvos (such as Chanukah, Purim, etc.).



620 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word "Kesser"- a crown.

Each mitzvah is considered a part of G-d's crown. When fulfilling a mitzvah a person offers a crown to the Almighty.

### The Lowest Mountain

We all know that the Ten Commandments were given on Mount Sinai. Why Sinai? Say the Sages: Sinai is the lowest of all mountains, to show that humility is an essential prerequisite to receiving the Torah.

Why then on a mountain? Why not in a plain - or a valley? The Code of Jewish Law states at the very beginning: "Do not be embarrassed by mockery and ridicule." For to receive the Torah you must be low; but to keep it, sometimes you must be a mountain.

### Purpose Of The Torah

The Midrash relates that when G-d was about to give the Torah the heavenly angels argued that He should offer it to them. Upon G-d's request Moses replied, "Have you been in Egypt? Do you have an evil inclination?"

This implies that the Torah was given in order to elevate humanity as well as the world in general. Precisely for those who have an evil inclination and need to be refined, was the Torah given.

### "Na'aseh V'Nishmah"

Our sages relate that when G-d was about to give the Torah, He offered it first to all of the nations of the world. After inquiring what was written in it, each of them found in the Torah something not agreeable to their system and way of life. When He offered the Torah to the Jewish people, without even asking what it contained, they immediately exclaimed, "We will do and listen." This unconditional devotion and acceptance of G-d's law, prompted G-d to give them the Torah.

### A Triple Torah

Everything connected with the giving of the Torah was of a triple nature: the Torah consists of Chumash (the five books), Prophets, and the Holy Writing (TaNaCH). It was given to Israel, comprised of Kohanim (priests), Levites and Israelites, through Moses, the third child in the family, after three days of preparation, in the third month (Sivan).

### Three Knots

The Zohar declares "three are interlocked together: Israel, the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He."

### 49 Days Of Counting

Upon their leaving Egypt, when Moses related to the Jewish people that G-d will give them the Torah, the Jewish people were extremely eager and impatiently counted the days. Hence the Mitzvah of counting the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot.

### As One Man, With One Heart

Our Sages relate, that when the Jews camped before Mount Sinai, they were "as one man, with one heart". Many of their other journeys were characterized by differences of opinion and even strife. However, when they prepared to receive the Torah,



the Jews joined together with a feeling of unity and harmony. This oneness was a necessary prerequisite to the giving of the Torah.

### Sight and Sound

The Book of Exodus relates that when G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai, "The people saw the voices." "They saw what is ordinarily heard," remark our sages, "and they heard what is ordinarily seen."

As physical beings, we "see" physical reality. On the other hand, G-dliness and spirituality is only something that is "heard"—it can be discussed, perhaps even understood to some extent, but not experienced first hand.

But at the revelation at Sinai, we "saw what is ordinarily heard" - we experienced the Divine as an immediate, tangible reality. On the other hand, what is ordinarily "seen" - the material world - was something merely "heard", to be accepted or rejected at will.



### Shavuot Customs

#### Tikun Lail Shavuot

On the first night of Shavuot, it is customary to stay up all night and study Torah. Our sages relate that on the night of Shavuot the Jewish people went to sleep, in preparation to receiving of the Torah. At day break, when G-d appeared to give the Torah they were sleeping. In contrast, we now prepare ourselves by studying Torah all night, ready to "receive the Torah" once more when G-d again offers us the Torah with renewed vigor.

#### Dairy Foods & Blintzes

It is customary to eat dairy products on Shavuot. A number of reasons have been given for this custom. Among them: the Torah is compared to milk. Also on Shavuot, immediately after receiving the Torah, the Jewish people were required to eat kosher. The only foods available for immediate consumption were milk products.

The custom to eat cheese blintzes on Shavuot is based on a play of Hebrew words. The Hebrew word for cheese is Gevinah, reminding us of the "controversy" of the taller mountains, each claiming to be worthier than Sinai for the privilege of receiving the Torah. They were therefore called Gavnunim - "humps," because of their conceit, while Sinai, small and humble, was chosen for its humility.

#### Ruth

In many synagogues the book of Ruth is read on the second day of Shavuot. There are several reasons for this custom: A) Shavuot is the birthday and yahrzeit



(day of passing) of King David, and the book of Ruth records his ancestry. Boaz and Ruth were King David's great grandparents. B) The scenes of harvesting, described in the book of Ruth, are appropriate to the Festival of Harvest. C) Ruth was a sincere convert who embraced Judaism with all her heart. On Shavuot all Jews were converts having unconditionally accepted the Torah and all of its precepts.

### Fruits, Flowers & Greens

It is customary on Shavuot to adorn the synagogue and home with fruits,



greens and flowers. The reason: Fruits- In the time of the Temple the first fruits of harvest were brought to the Temple beginning on Shavuot. Greens- Our Sages taught that on Shavuot judgment is rendered regarding the trees of the field. Flowers- Our Sages taught that although Mount Sinai was situated in a desert, in honor of the Torah, the desert bloomed and sprouted flowers.

### Yizkor

On the second day of Shavuot the Yizkor memorial service is recited



### Additional Names of Shavuot

Shavuot is also called Atzeret, meaning The Completion, because together with Passover it forms the completion of a unit. We gained our freedom on Passover in order to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

Another name for Shavuot is Yon Habikurim or the Day of the First Fruits. In an expression of thanks to G-d, beginning on Shavuot, each farmer in the Land of Israel brought to the Temple the first wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates that grew in his field.

Finally, Shavuot is also called Chag HaKatzir, the Festival of the Harvest, because wheat, the last of the grains to be ready to be cut, was harvested at this time of the year. On Shavuot two loaves of wheat bread from the new harvest were offered at the temple in Jerusalem.

### Cheese Blintzes

Cheese blintzes are a special favorite on Shavuot when it is customary to eat a dairy meal. They are served hot, with sour cream or applesauce.

Batter:

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 1 Tbsp. sour cream
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package vanilla sugar
- pinch of salt

Filling:

- 16 ounces cottage cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 2 Tbsps. margarine or butter, melted
- 2 Tbsps. sugar
- 1/4 cup raisins (optional)
- 1/3 cup oil for frying

Batter: Combine eggs and milk. Add sour cream and blend well. Add flour gradually. Mix well until batter is smooth. Heat on a low flame a small amount of oil in an 8 inch frying pan, until hot but not smoking. Ladle a small amount of batter (approx. 1 ounce) into pan, tipping pan in all directions until batter covers the entire bottom of the pan. Fry one side until set and golden, (approx. 1 minute). Slip pancake out of pan and repeat until all batter is used. Add oil to pan as necessary.

Filling: In another bowl mix all ingredients for filling. Fill each pancake on golden side with 3 Tbsps. of filling. Fold in sides to center and roll until completely closed. Replace rolled blintzes in pan and fry for 2 minutes, turning once.

FREE TRIAL PERIOD  
Continued from page 2

But then again, my plans and my reality were not exactly the same. A few days before Shavuot one of my best friends arrived in Israel to surprise me. She was only around for the week and desperately wanted to travel to Egypt with me. I didn't know how to explain to her that I had really intended on spending the night of Shavuot studying and then walking to the Western Wall along with the sunrise. She would not have understood and I was not going to try and explain.

So, there I was, the day before Shavuot, in Dahab, Egypt. Dahab is on the Sinai desert's southeastern tip, and is known for its beautiful beaches and extremely relaxed atmosphere. I must admit that it didn't take me long to forget that I had not wanted to come. As I soaked in the sun and ate incredible food, Shavuot became a distant memory. That is, until I was suddenly jarred awake by the woman next to me.

"So, where are you from?" she asked, nicely enough. Though I was not really in the mood for conversation, I answered that I was studying in Jerusalem for the year. To my great surprise, her eyes lit up and she started asking me about Judaism. I started to share my limited knowledge and instantly found myself passionately and intensely describing how incredible I found Judaism to be emotionally, spiritually and intellectually. We spoke for over five hours until we realized that we were sitting in the dark. She had to leave, but before doing so, innocently asked whether or not there was some Jewish holiday that night. My heart stopped. It

**So, there I was, the day before Shavuot, in Dahab, Egypt. Dahab is on the Sinai desert's southeastern tip, and is known for its beaches and relaxed atmosphere. As I soaked in the sun and ate incredible food, Shavuot became a distant memory...**

was the eve of Shavuot. I had completely forgotten, and I was in Egypt.

For the first time in my life, I cared. I felt that I was losing out. It was as if I had been invited to a very special meeting with G-d, and I simply decided to do something else. As far as I could see, the damage was irreparable.

I was quite depressed and felt trapped in this "resort." I dragged myself to dinner with my friend and a group of others. To my great surprise, I ran into Mike, who attended Hebrew University with me. Although he wasn't what one would describe as religiously observant, he was quite spiritual. He joined us for dinner, and then said he had to leave. I couldn't imagine what he had to do in Dahab, so I asked.

He told me that he had specifically come to Dahab for Shavuot, as it is very close to the site believed by many to be Mount Sinai. He wanted to spend the night learning and asked if I cared to join him. I couldn't even respond, but the tears rolling down my cheek sufficed for my "yes." We bid our friends goodbye and were off.

We found a small hut that was illuminated by candlelight. Mike had brought with him an English/Hebrew Bible, and we took turns reading. We had no idea what we were doing but felt we should say some kind of blessing. So we washed our hands as we had seen people do when eating bread, and pronounced a blessing of my own, "Baruch Atah... al HaTorah."

We spent the night taking turns reading the Ten Commandments in Hebrew and English with the commentaries. Somehow it worked out that every time there was something about honoring one's parents, it was my turn to read. I knew that I needed to speak with my mother and father and work through our issues, but I didn't feel ready and I didn't know how. And yet, as I read, I learned that if I wanted a true relationship with my Creator, I needed to respect the people He chose to bring me into this world.

As the candle began to flicker out, I realized that it was no longer needed. The sun was about to rise and we had spent the entire night learning Torah. I resolved during that time that I would stay in Israel for the summer to enroll in a full-time program. I resolved that I would speak with my parents and repair our damaged relationship. And I resolved that I would no longer view Judaism and its observance as an outsider, but would do my best to keep G-d's Torah and His commandments.

It was Shavuot and I had merited to receive the Torah. I walked out toward the ocean and said the *Shema* with all the power of my heart, soul, and mind. I knew G-d was listening, always had been, and always would be.



LIGHT OVER DARKNESS  
Continued from page 6

After 60 years of marriage, the loss of her husband was truly crushing. I desperately wanted something to lift her out of it and replace that space with light. Her energy spilled over into my home, creating challenges for my husband and son. I had more emotional fragments to navigate, and therefore, I came to realize, a greater opportunity to become a better version of myself.

Every Friday, when I set out my candlesticks, I also set out two for my mother, even though it had been decades since she kindled the Shabbat lights. Every Friday night, I would bring my mother down to the kitchen before candlelighting and find a special sweetness to say, "Mommy, these candles are for you. Would you like to light?"

I suspected her answer would be just what it was the week before, and for some reason that I can best explain as an expression of my will, determination and faith that things can change, I kept believing that one Friday night she would surprise me with an affirmative reply. Maybe this would be the space where the light would rekindle and replace the darkness. As much as I wanted to hear a different answer, I knew I could not make her change her mind. She had to come to that on her own.

For many many months, her answer remained "not tonight." Watching my mother's sadness gave me a chance to feel sad as well, and to practice awareness of gratitude that it did not disempower me; on the contrary, it strengthened my resolve to persevere and pursue the light.

In an unspoken way, our weekly exchange had felt like a partnership. Though I didn't see any observable indication that she would say, "Yes, I'm

going to light candles this Shabbat," I sensed that we were moving in that direction. As long as I didn't stop my simple efforts and loving acceptance of the answer I did not want to hear, I felt there was hope.

Lo and behold, after several months, she completely surprised me, and before I even asked her, she said, "Seena, bring those candles over to me." Initially, I acted undaunted, though the truth is my heart was pumping with adrenaline; it filled my body with excitement and my soul with joy.

I wondered, what changed? "Why tonight?" I asked my mother. And all she replied was, "Why not?"

For me, it felt herculean. From that moment, she continued to light candles until the Shabbat before she took her last breath. In some hard-to-explain way, in this moment of change, I arrived at the thought that my mother came to live with us so that she could find her way to light.

Years ago, a teacher introduced me to the Jewish idea that "growth happens in the darkness." When life is easy and things happen with little effort, our spiritual muscles don't get tested; there are no winds of struggle. This is not so, however, when we feel torn with fear, emptiness and uncertainty after a painful experience or loss. In our heaviness, we might lack the interest, motivation or clarity to pursue what we want, and we might even feel sad about this lacking. We have to work that much harder to achieve what we desire, putting our spiritual muscles to work to make things happen that seem impossible.

This feels like what took place between my mother and I. Though it was in many ways replete with uncomfortable soreness, look at the light and satisfaction that prevailed!

## FIND YOUR INNER PEACE

Welcome to FridayLight, a campaign encouraging Jewish women and girls to illuminate the world with the light of Shabbat. By observing this special tradition each and every Friday night, you will not only bask in a personal moment of inner peace, but also connect to a global community of Jewish women who together hold the power to bring light to the world.

Join us, won't you?



Visit [FridayLight.org](http://FridayLight.org) to get candle lighting times for your location, share your feelings, invite a friend to join, and more.



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# The Mitzvot You Don't Enjoy

by Aharon Loschak

Are there some parts of Judaism you prefer over others? Do certain rituals, practices or customs excite you, while others . . . not so much?

If your answer is yes, then here's a follow up question: What do you do about the unexciting parts? What happens when you don't have an emotionally satisfying explanation for why you must do this or can't do that?

There are different ways of approaching this, and if I had to guess, I would split them into two general camps: the "reject" vs. "accept" camps.

The former camp is disinterested, uninspired or just plain turned off - so they turn their backs on what they don't like and focus on the things they like. After all, Jewish practice is quite vast, so they'll make do with the fun stuff.

The latter camp shudders at the prospect of outright rejection, yet is still emotionally or intellectually unable to fully embrace the entire package. So it's a begrudging acceptance, a sort of inner push to "just do it anyway," regardless of whether or not they like it. While admirable, this approach is not ideal.

So what should you do about those parts of Judaism that you (so far) find uninteresting or uninspiring? Rejection and forced acceptance both sound fairly bleak, so what's the solution?

A third way, of course.

## An Unseemly Job

This third way is buried in an interesting detail in a story retold in the Torah. After the Jews finally finished constructing the Tabernacle in the desert, the inauguration festival kicked off. It was a glorious day, a moment when G-d's holy presence rested on this edifice and the Jews returned to divine grace after the catastrophe of the Golden Calf.

Among all this tremendous joy, a terrible tragedy occurred. Nadav and Avihu,

sons of Aaron the High Priest, got carried away with the spiritual ecstasy of the moment and offered up an illegitimate incense offering to G-d, leading to their demise. So, during one of the most joyous moments of the newly minted Jewish nation, two corpses lay at the holy site.

Moses had to act quickly - the corpses needed to be removed. So "Moses summoned Mishael and Eltzaphan, the sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and said to them, 'Draw near; carry your kinsmen from within the Sanctuary to the outside of the camp.'" Rashi explains, "As a person would say to his fellow [when someone had died at a wedding feast], 'Remove the deceased from before the bride so as not to disturb the joyous occasion.'"

## Why The Relatives?

That the corpses needed to be removed seems reasonable enough. What doesn't seem so reasonable is the people chosen to carry out the task, Mishael and Eltzaphan - for two reasons:

First, as we read in the verse, they were the deceased's cousins, making them Levites. Why would Moses ask Levites to carry out the task of removing the bodies? Coming in contact with dead bodies would render them impure and unable to reenter the Tabernacle - effectively slamming the door of ritual service on them for the next several days. Why would Moses deny them that opportunity of being part of the inaugural team of Levites? Why couldn't he give the job to ordinary Israelites who, regardless, don't serve in the Temple?

What's more, they were first cousins of the deceased! Why would he choose such close kin for such a ghastly job?

## There Are Many Ways To Serve G-d

By specifically choosing

Levites, and first cousins no less, Moses was broadcasting an important message about what it means to "serve in the Tabernacle": It's not only the glamorous jobs of singing, praying or offering sacrifices. Rather, it's whatever needs to get done. Period. If that means removing corpses, well, then, that's just as much a form of "service" as swaying in a long robe and singing sublime hymns to the L-rd.

Mishael and Eltzaphan carried out the job without a word of dissent - amplifying this very message.

Just think about the conflicting emotions that must have been raging through their minds and hearts. Today was the day. Finally, the nation had been brought back into G-d's grace and the Divine Presence was manifest in this new, majestic structure. They were joyfully anticipating stepping into the role of divine servant on behalf of the entire people.

How marvelous it must have felt to be gifted with such a task!

And yet, here they were. Moses had pulled them aside and rendered them undertakers, excluded from the festivities and relegated to tending to two corpses.

And the corpses of two dear cousins, no less! While the entire nation sang and rejoiced, they were with their departed cousins.

How could anyone undergo such an experience without a wee bit of resentment



and reluctance, not to mention grief?

Yet they did it nonetheless. Without any fuss.

How could they do it?

Because they understood that serving G-d has many formats. One moment you're singing in the Temple, the next moment you're removing a corpse to facilitate that singing. Doesn't matter. Whatever G-d throws at you, you do. If you like it, amazing. If not, well, then, you relish the opportunity to do something for G-d, not yourself.

## Dancing At The Waste Bucket

There's a well-known Chassidic tale of two holy brothers, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk and Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli, who were thrown in jail one night on some trumped-up charge. When they noticed an overflowing trash pail in the corner of the room, they realized they would not be able to pray, for it is forbidden to do so in the presence of such filth.

Reb Elimelech was distraught. His brother Zusha turned to him and said, "Elimelech, why are you down? The same G-d who instructed us to pray, instructed us that we cannot do so in the presence of filth. Tonight, we are serving G-d

by not praying!"

With that, the two brothers joined hands and burst into song and dance at their newfound opportunity for divine service.

They understood the same thing Mishael and Eltzaphan understood: G-d doesn't need you to serve Him in one particular way. There are many ways, and if we treasure the Being whom we serve, it doesn't matter what specific method is on the menu for today. You may very well never understand why today's connection to G-d is through tending to crying children and why tomorrow's calling is helping a random friend whose car broke down - but it really doesn't matter. The main thing is that in the larger scheme of things, you're doing your part in fulfilling G-d's master plan.

So if you're struggling to come to terms with various parts of Judaism, if you're trying to appreciate why it's so important to do certain things or why it's so wrong to do others, remember the noble acts of Mishael and Eltzaphan along with those two dancing rabbis at the waste bucket: everything is just another way to connect with G-d and His plan.

And what can be more divine than carrying out G-d's master plan?

# Why Wash Hands For Bread?

by Aron Moss

## Question:

I've always wondered why we do the special hand washing before eating bread, and why we are not allowed to speak from when we wash our hands until we eat bread. It can't just be about hygiene, so what's it really about?

## Answer:

The Talmud explains that in Temple times, the priests lived off donations of produce from farmers, called *terumah*. Farmers were required to separate this portion, and it could only be

eaten by a *kohen*, and only in a state of ritual purity. So the priests made sure to always wash their hands ritually before eating to ensure that they were pure. The custom was then adopted by non-priests in deference to the *kohanim* who were obligated to do so. And even though we no longer have those foods that need to be eaten in purity, we continue to wash our hands before bread.

Is that it? Two millennia ago people started washing their hands because the priests washed theirs, that's why we, today, wash our

hands every time we eat bread? There must be more to it...

The bread we eat is the end product of a long process. Think about the myriad steps that it takes to get bread on the table. We work and toil, create and invent, cook and bake, and finally we eat.

So our hands represent human ingenuity, the work we do. Bread represents human achievement, the food we eat. After all, we work hard to make the dough.

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24/6

I ALMOST... BUT SHE FORGAVE  
Continued from page 6

It would be years before I fully comprehended the impact of my brief conversation with the woman. I had to learn many things the hard way, and the person who stood paralyzed with fear and guilt had a long way to go. Still, when my own father - a complicated man with whom I had an often challenging relationship - was dying, I used her lessons. What happened years before on that rainy night, and the phone call that followed it, had allowed me to spend time with my father in his last days in peace, shielded from anger or resentment, and I ended my time with him with no regrets. The lessons the forgiving woman and her husband gave were a great gift.

Eventually, the driver recovered from his wounds, though the road was very long. I hope he and his wife are blessed, and if they have left this world, I hope they are remembered for their tremendous mercy. She may have, as she faced an uncertain future, been filled with rage or hate directed at me. I won't ever know, but I can say with certainty that I wouldn't blame her if she did. At some point, however, she chose to trust, to accept and to forgive.

I admit that I don't know if I could be the person that she was in the face of what she was dealing with. I hope I

could be, though I also hope I am never tested. But her example has stayed with me, never dismissed: to ease suffering where you can, bring calm to where there is unrest and wrestle with what is pulling you down so that you may use it as a catalyst to grow and to help others grow.

Not only is forgiving precious, it is also vital for our spiritual health. The Torah forbids hating your fellow in your heart, a private, quiet place. I know all too well that feelings such as resentment, anger and indignation - all feelings that are understandable in a case where one has been wronged by another - can easily grow to hate when it is tucked away inside. Most people can readily justify having these feelings because, after all, they were wronged. But the reality is that these feelings have the potential to cause us damage in the end just as much as an outside force has.

We are taught that G-d deals with a person measure for measure, and He will reflect the mercy we show our fellow in His treatment towards us as we stand before Him with our own list of errors and transgressions.

Forgiving allows us to move forward. To be released from a consuming guilt is an opportunity for growth and great development, and to be the one forgiving, truly forgiving, is a freedom.

# Dear Chabad



Thanks so much for the Purim treats! How uplifting to receive this surprise at our door! We so appreciate your kindness - for this gift as well as for all you do for our community year in and year out. Happy Purim! Best always,  
Lisa & Bill Keeley



Friends, I just want to thank you all for my Purim Box. It was a pleasant surprise and made my day. Sincerely yours,  
Carol Gumer



Thank you Chabad Lubavitch for the wonderful box of Purim treats. What a great surprise. We read your newspaper and use your calendar. Thank you so much. We also made Hamentaschen and dressed in costume. A wonderful holiday! Best wishes,  
Judy & Lee Adnepos



You all are such an inspiration. Thank you so much for the Purim box. You can't imagine how much it meant to me, especially during these difficult times... In closing, thank you again, "Living is Giving" so I am enclosing a donation - for you to use as you see fit. Thank you again,  
Judy Wolbert



Thank you for the Purim gift box. It literally brought tears to my eyes.

I wasn't able to make any contributions to your organization last year because I was unemployed and basically living on savings.

I'm still basically unemployed but want to send you the enclosed check. You have kept me in your database and have sent me the calendar that I love, along with your periodicals. For that I am eternally grateful. I don't live in a Jewish community (I'm probably the only Jew for

miles around) so it's nice to be remembered. Sincerely yours,  
L.C.



I am very grateful to you for the very thoughtful and tasty Purim Hug goodies. In appreciation for your thoughtfulness, I am enclosing a donation to the Chabad. Sincerely,  
Carol Shulman



Enclosed is my payment for "Journey of the Soul". It was excellent! Thank you & Chag Sameach.  
Scott Bauman

P.S. I'm also enclosing a check for \$18 as a "Thank You" donation.



Thank you for your kind sympathy letter on the passing of my Father, Burt. He thought great things as do I relative to how much you do for the Jewish Community.

Your thoughtfulness will help my healing during this difficult time. We do feel that we have been fortunate to have him in our life for so long.

At 96 we will celebrate his life and continue the legacy behind that he has instilled on us all. Thank you again,  
Michael Gordon



Thank you so much for the delicious Purim treats! I enjoyed them all. It was very kind of you to send them to me. I hope that you and your family had a joyous Purim! Sincerely,  
Tziporah-Pam Yosim



Wishing you and your family a very Happy Chanukah. I'm looking forward to see you again after I am released next week. Sincerely,  
J. M.

Dear Friends, Thank you for remembering us at holiday time. We enjoyed the Purim goodies, and we will use the special matzah at Pesach. Please accept this small gift to help you continue your good work. Shalom,  
Marcia & Harry Rosenfeld



Thank you so much for all you do! I enjoyed my calendar, Purim treats and my Passover Matza. Thank you for continuing to help the Jewish community, especially all the love and support you gave my father (Hersch Bornstein). Love & prayers,  
Jenny Bornstein



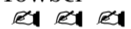
Thank you so much for conducting a Community Seder this year. I could not have gone through another one alone again after the isolation of COVID. May the Moshiach arrive soon and dispel all darkness and suffering.

Thank you for everything Chabad Rochester has done during the pandemic to keep our community's spirits up. Please accept this donation in memory of Barak (Marty) Sherman...

G-d Bless You and Your Families,  
Michal Ventimiglia



A package of Shmurah Matzah - imagine that! Thank you so much. Extended Passover greetings to you and your family. Have a happy & kosher Pesach.  
Joyce Towber



With our best wishes for a Happy and Healthy Passover,  
Raquel & Avi Seidmann



I want to thank you for the "Shmurah" Matzah. Also, for receiving the "Chabad Times". I enjoy reading it very much. With my love & blessings,  
Dan Shapiro

P.S. Your Passover (Pesach) message was very inspiring. Thanks again.



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Thank you for the Purim goodies. I wish you all a happy Purim.

Irma Bernstein



Please accept this donation in appreciation of your reciting Kaddish in memory of my beloved Mother, Esther S. Cohen, who recently passed away. It has been a comfort to me and my family. Thank you for all the hard work you do to keep our community thriving. With gratitude,

Rochelle Cohen Lempert & Family



Thank you for all you have done for our family. May you and your family stay well. With warmest regards,

Michael, Carolyn, Neal & Beth Garver



Enclosed is a Purim contribution to help Chabad continue its amazing work in our Jewish Community - Chag Purim sameach.

Miriam Weidenfeld



What a special thing to receive the shmurah matza in the mail. We are supposed to be giving to you to help those less blessed than us. It meant a lot to me, especially this year when we have been so isolated from family, especially at holiday time. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Stay safe. Shalom,

Andrea & Stu Berger



Thank you for all you do for our community. Chag

Sameach!

Joanne Prives



I would like to thank you for the Purimunity Box. That was a pleasant surprise. Happy Purim,

Renate Livingston



Thank you for the Mishloach Manot! Chag Purim Sameach! Best wishes,

Jeremy & Hilda Grace



Enclosed is a donation for Purimunity Box. Thank you for thinking of us at this time.

Carlotta & Les Lustik



Such a delightful surprise to be blessed with the Mishloach Manot I received. The essence of Purim most assuredly is reflected by the Chabad of Rochester and Pittsford presence within our community. With kindest regards, love and appreciation...

John Callaghan



Wishing all of you a Happy Purim.

Susan Esan



Enclosed please find a donation for Chabad. Thank you for all the great work you do! Best wishes for a joyous & meaningful Pesach.

Janine & Arnie Shapiro



Thank you for your kind-

ness in reaching out with the Shelach Manot. I was certainly surprised! You are amazing. Your JLI classes on the soul and mourning give me so much to think about and consider. I'm appreciative of your giving me the opportunity to study - if only from afar. The cure of living in "interesting" times is also a blessing. So much kindness and community reaching in many directions; it has been a time of such compassion and love that I know G-d is giving us opportunities to give & receive. Thank you! Most sincerely,

Rochelle Cresov



Thank you for the Purim package. Please accept the enclosed check for others to receive Shalach Manos. Sincerely,

Nina Chazanoff



Thank you so much for your Purim treat. We appreciate your thoughtfulness and thinking of us.

Sally & David Robbins



Thank you for all your good deeds that you provide year after year. Happy Hanukkah!

Michael Wolkoff



Enclosed is a contribution to support all of the wonderful things Chabad does for our community. You all bring light in this time of darkness. Be well and stay safe. Happy Chanukah!

Amichai, Michelle, & Ed Sassaman



Thank you for Shmurah Matzah. Hope you had a lovely Pesach.

Deena Ambush



In appreciation for the wonderful gifts which you sent for Purim and Passover. The shmurah matzah will enhance the Seder celebration! Happy Passover,

Anne Korenstein



...Enclosed you find the donation & may it go to good use! Hopefully, you & your family & your congregation will keep up your exceptional job!

Millie Natal



For the good work you continuously do,

Elliot Fix



You are all wonderful. A good year.

Anita Calderon



Thank you for everything you have always done and continue to do for my Family and Friends in Rochester. I grew up in Rochester and haven't lived there in more than 30 years. But I still remember my first introduction to Chabad - a Sukkah on a pick-up truck at the University of Rochester. Tizku L'Mitzvos

Judith Schnidman



Thank you for "Seeds of Wisdom". I am learning from the responses and insights of the Rebbe. Be healthy and be safe.

Martin Eichman



Thank you for your time & wisdom. I enjoy our Talmud learning sessions very much.

Alan Harris



Just to let you know how much I appreciate your call! Thank you so much!! Stay safe & best regards,

Rachel Levy



Enclosed is the balance of my 2020 pledge. Thank you and Chabad for all that you do, and have done, especially during this past year, a very, very dark time, indeed. Happy Hanukah to you and yours. Sincerely,

Adryann Strauss



Thank you for always creating the celebrations, holidays - LeChaim! Present moment - NOW, Positive Attitude, Remember to Remember ....Never Ever Forget, G-d reveals truth, kindness, open heart. Thank you for being.

Susan E. Weiss



Thank you for arranging the Sale of Chametz. I believe you will know of a family which is having a difficult time preparing for Pesach during Covid. I will leave the decision about where the money needs to be up to you. Thank you for your help. With good wishes to you and your family for Pesach.

Marcia Nabut



Thank you for the Shmurah Matzah - I enjoyed it very much. Here is a contribution for your wonderful work.

Lynn Nate-Angel



What a smile the surprise of "Purimunity" put on my face! Community is so important and I felt community with this sweet gift from Chabad.

Jennifer Litwak

Thank you for the delicious and plentiful Pesach food that you prepared for my mother-in-law and father-in-law. She described in detail each and every delicacy that they enjoyed and is still raving about how delicious it tasted. You have added years to my in-laws' lives - truly!

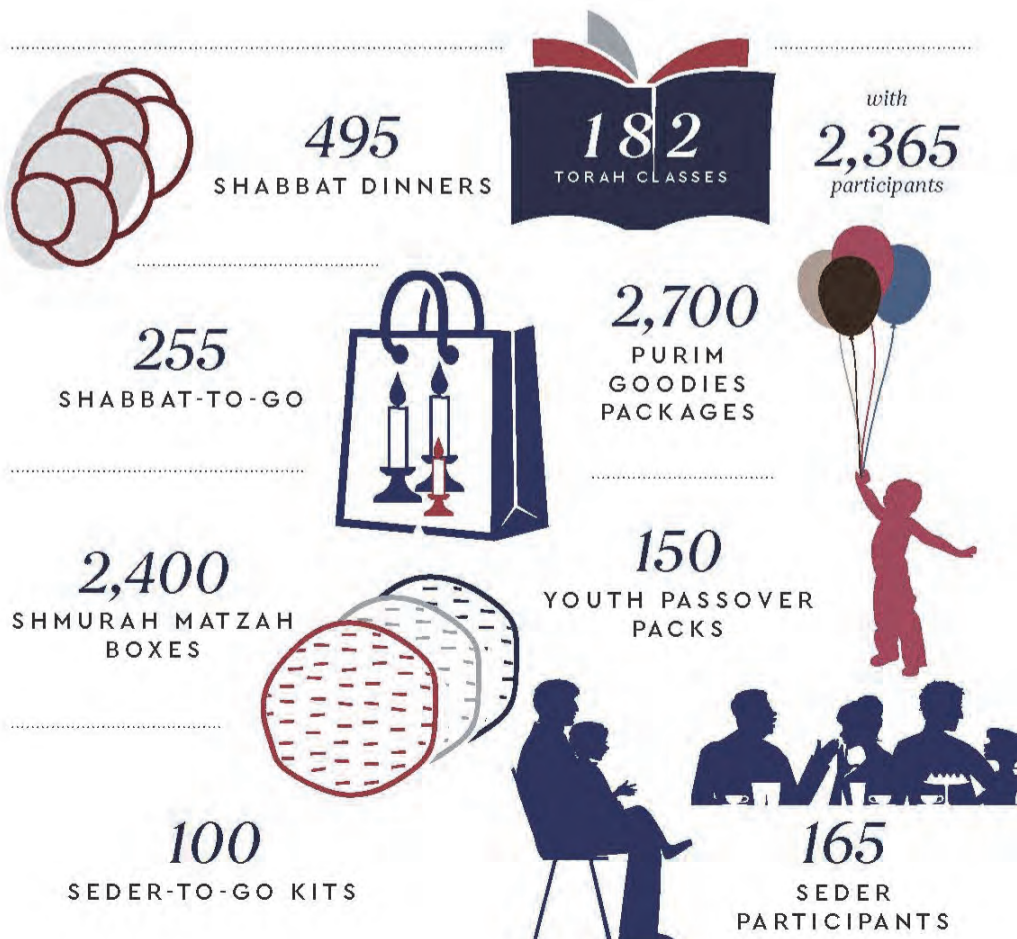
A happy & healthy Pesach. Warm regards,

Barb Morris



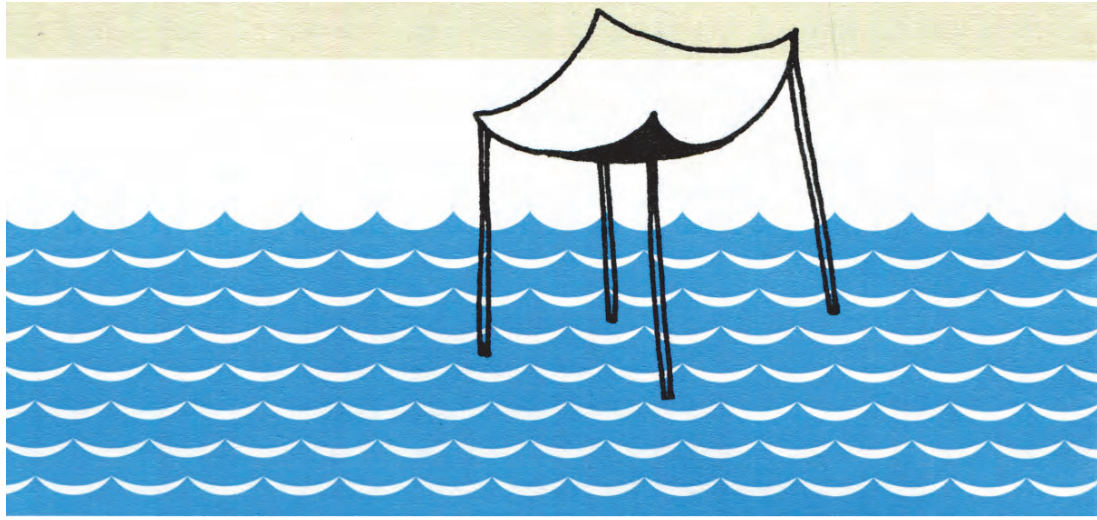
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## The Monthly Marriage

by Rabbi Manis Friedman

There are two kinds of human love: the intrinsic, calm love that we feel for people to whom we're related by birth; and the more intimate, fiery love that exists in marriage. This is why the husband-wife relationship is very different from the parent-child relationship.

The love within a family, between relatives who are born of the same flesh, is innate. The love between a mother and child, a brother and sister, two brothers, two sisters, comes easily. Since they're related by nature, they feel comfortable with each other. There's an innate closeness between them, so their love is strong, solid, steady, predictable and calm. There's no distance that has to be bridged, no difference that has to be overcome.

The love between a husband and wife isn't like that. Their love wasn't always there; they didn't always know each other; they weren't always related. No matter how well they get to know one another, they aren't alike. They are different from each other physically, emotionally and mentally. They love each other in spite of the differences and because of them, but there isn't enough of a commonality between them to create a casual, calm love. The differences remain even after they are married, and the love between them will have to overcome these differences.

This acquired love is naturally more intense than the love between brother and sister. When love has to overcome a difference, a distance, an obstacle, it needs energy to leap across and bridge the gap. This is the energy of fiery love.

Because the gap between husband and wife will never really close, their love for one another will continually have to reach across it. There will be distance, separation, then a bridging of distance, and a coming back together, again and again. This sense of dis-

tance intensifies the desire to merge and makes the heart grow fonder.

If a brother and sister were to have a fiery love, their relationship would suffer. It's not the appropriate emotion for a brother and sister to have. Their love thrives when it's unbroken, unchallenged, constant, and calm. Not that they can't have disagreements, but those disagreements don't disrupt their love. On the other hand, if a husband and wife develop a calm love for each other, their relationship will not thrive. If they are too familiar with each other, too comfortable with each other, like brother and sister, their love will not flourish. True intimacy in marriage - fiery love - is created by constant withdrawal and reunion.

If a husband and wife are never separate, their love begins to sour because they are not creating an environment appropriate to that love. The environment of constant togetherness is not conducive to man-woman love; it's the environment for brother-sister love or parent-child love.

That's why the ideal blessing for a married couple is, "Your honeymoon should never end." A honeymoon - when two people who were once separate come together for the first time - should never end, because that's what a marriage thrives on.

The love between a man and a woman thrives on withdrawal and reunion, separation and coming together. The only way to have an environment conducive to that kind of relationship is to provide a separation.

So G-d gives us a gift to extend our honeymoon period - the gift of physical separation. That separation is created by observing a collection of Torah laws deriving from Leviticus 15, called "the laws of Family Purity" or "the laws of mikvah." The word mikvah refers to the ritual bath in which traditional Jewish

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women, since the days of the Bible, have immersed themselves following their monthly period and before renewing sexual relations with their husbands.

According to these laws of mikvah, during the time that a Jewish woman is menstruating, and for one week afterward, she is physically off-limits to her husband. For those days, the physical separation is total: no touching, no sitting on a swing together, and no sleeping in the same bed.

Through the ages, all sorts of explanations have been given for these laws, but all of them have one thing in common: separation protects and nurtures the intimate aspect of marriage, which thrives on withdrawal and reunion.

This understanding is not unique to Jews. In most cultures throughout the world, the ancients practiced varying degrees of separation between husband and wife during the woman's menstrual period. Some, such as cer-

tain tribes of American Indians, actually had separate living quarters, menstruant tents, where a woman would stay during her period. Later, these customs deteriorated into myths, taboos, fears, superstitions, hygienic arguments and other rationalizations, in an attempt to make sense of a delicate and sensitive subject. But separation was such a universal practice that I wonder if human beings knew instinctively that male-female love thrives on withdrawal and reunion, on coming together following a separation. The body is actually respecting an emotional state. Just as the love between man and woman cannot be maintained at full intensity all the time, but needs a certain creative tension without which it will not flourish, the body has a similar need.

As far as Jews are concerned, we know these cyclical changes were created for that very purpose. This is much more than a coincidence: it is how the body reflects the soul, how the body is created in the image of the soul.

Like everything else that exists in our lives, the cycle of withdrawal and reunion that exists in marriage is meant to be a reflection of our relationship with G-d. The two kinds of love, calm love and fiery love, exist not only among human beings, but between ourselves and G-d.

When we refer to G-d as our Father, it's an innate and intrinsic relationship. We don't have to work for it; it's just there. It's a steady, constant love, an indestructible love, a love compared to water-calm love.

But we also talk about how G-d is infinite and we are finite; G-d is everything and we are barely something. Because of these differences, we feel a great distance from

G-d and the need to create a relationship with Him. Establishing a relationship in spite of the differences, in spite of the distance, is more like a marriage. That's a stormy relationship - fiery love.

More precisely, our soul loves G-d like a child loves a parent, because our soul is of G-d. That love is innate and calm. When G-d tells this soul to go down into a body, that's a separation. Then our soul loves G-d with a fiery love, which, like the love between a husband and wife, does not come automatically. Acquired love is by nature intense and fiery.

Eventually, the soul will be reunited with G-d more intimately than before, just as the intimacy between a husband and wife is deeper when they come together following a separation. Therefore, when G-d says that a husband and wife should be together and then separate, come together and separate again, according to a monthly cycle, it's not an artificial imposition. It may produce discipline, which is nice. It may keep the marriage fresh, which is important. But there's more to it than that. It is, in fact, the natural reflection of the type of love that must exist between husband and wife. In order to nurture that stormy, fiery love, our way of living has to correspond to the emotions we are trying to nurture and retain.

If there's going to be a separation - and there needs to be one - consider the following: rather than wait for a separation to develop, where a husband and wife get into a fight or lose interest in each other, let's take the cue from the body and create a physical, rather than an emotional, separation. Everyone is saying, "I need my space." It's true. Keeping the laws of mikvah, when they apply, is one way of creating that space.

### WHY WASH HANDS? Continued from page 11

But we need to remember that the work of our hands alone does not give us bread. It is G-d's blessing that feeds us. We should not think, "It is my own strength and the power of my hands that has made me this wealth." Our work is a vessel, a receptacle, a container, but an empty container until G-d fills it with His blessing. "The smartest people don't necessarily have bread." Our success is not dependent on our own talents, but on G-d's blessing.

That's why we wash our hands before eating bread. We are cleansing ourselves of any sense of entitlement, arrogance, or complacency. We have bread on the table, but it is G-d's blessing that

brought it to us. We should be humbled and grateful for the dough He provides.

For this reason we don't interrupt between washing our hands and eating the bread. We create a direct connection between recognizing the true source of the bread and enjoying it. As soon as we have cleansed our hands of arrogance, we can eat. Nothing should distract us in between.

This is why our sages said that we should wash our hands the same way the priests did. The *kohanim* did not work in the fields. They worked in the Temple, and relied on the tithes people donated for their upkeep. A *kohen* couldn't fool himself and think that he had worked for his bread. It was clear that he was being fed by the kindness of others. We should all feel that way. It is not our own work and effort; it is all a gift from G-d.



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SEEING THE SOUNDS  
Continued from page 7

endless divine energy, a perfect oneness of a Creator beyond all existence.

And they "heard" the sights. G-d said to have no other gods, and thus otherness vanished. The busy world of multiple things and sensations which until now had been their obvious reality dissolved within this divine harmony, and could only be induced from the evidence.

What evidence? Well, if G-d was saying they must work for six days and rest on the seventh, then there must be something called "work" that's necessary to do, and time must exist. If G-d was saying they must not worship idols, then there must be a world where the concept of something other than one G-d must be thinkable. If G-d was speaking to them and requiring that they respond, then they too must somehow exist.

Amazing - there is a world! G-d, after all, desires we do something with it, and that desire renders it real. Somehow. By implication. Yet, once this radical paradigm shift of Sinai had taken place, what was previously obvious suddenly demanded a great deal of evidence and imagination.

Sinai was a revolution that turned the entire cosmic order on its head. Reality as we know it was shattered to reveal a deeper, singular truth behind all things.

Rabbi Yishmael hears out Rabbi Akiva and nods. Yes, Sinai exposed the façade of physicality. Yes, at Sinai infinite light poured down upon us. But with a goal: So that we earthly beings, within our earthly limitations, might welcome that light and allow it entry into our finite, natural world. And in a natural world, people don't hear sights or see sounds. And you have to know that yes is yes and no is no - there's stuff that's good that must be embraced, and stuff that's bad that must be rejected.

That's Rabbi Yishmael. That's what a kohen and a

tzaddik-all-his-life is all about - channeling light, nurturing the world.

But Rabbi Akiva is a "master of return," a man whose life is a perpetual exodus of leaving behind the person he was the day before, pulling back the curtains of the reality he has known until now.

For him, life is about seeing a higher reality, beyond the horizon that the eye can perceive. He has transformed the darkness of his past into a great light, and so in all darkness he is able to perceive light. And when you do that, you see G-d everywhere - not only in the "yes," but in the "no" as well.

Because there is only yes. There is only One.

If Torah is to enter our world, if Sinai is to have its effect, if we are to fulfill our mission in this life, we must have at least an ounce of the vision of Rabbi Akiva - to see that G-d is found not only in the light, but in the darkness

as well. Not only in the "yes," but in the "no" just the same. Because there is nothing else but G-d, and He is good.

As David sang, "Even darkness will not obscure anything from You, and the night is light like day; darkness and light are all the same."

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