

Wishing You A Happy Shavuot, June 4-6



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CELEBRATE SHAVUOT

On Shavuot we celebrate the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai exactly 3,334 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
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LOVE IN THE DESERT

by Aharon Loschak

This is going to be, eventually, an article about love.

Wait, love? What can possibly be said about love that hasn't already been said? Am I seriously fooling myself into thinking you haven't read it all?

Perhaps.

So I won't try to pretend there's anything you haven't heard yet, nor will I tell you some magnificent, heart-stopping story that will give you all the feels.

Instead, I'll point you to the Torah portion we read just before the Holiday of Shavuot and show you something fascinating about love that pops right out of the first verse.

And you may actually discover something new.

A Desert Obsession

This Torah portion starts a new book, number four of the Famous Five. While the common English name of the book is "Numbers," the Hebrew name is *Bamidbar*, which means "in the desert." The name comes from the opening verse which reads: "G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after the Exodus from the land of Egypt..."

The obvious question is, what's this obsession with the desert, gaining prominence as the name of an entire book? Surely there are other, more important words in that opening verse? And apparently the Latin people who were giving out names thought so, too - opting for "Numbers" instead. So why are we so focused on the desert aspect?

Moreover, when you think about a desert, it's not exactly a happy place. Deserts are hot, dry, and lifeless. Why is that something we want to spend so much time on?

To make matters even more puzzling, the Midrash describes how G-d is more

right, as a result of that - the feeling ought to breed a complete lack of self-centeredness, an intense level of humility and submission to the Creator Who has created us all.

In simpler terms, when you love G-d very much, you understand that you really don't have an existence apart from Him. As such, there's no room for ego, self-flattery, or any other form of self-obsession.

This, then, is what the Midrash means about G-d only feeling comfortable in the desert. The sea and mountains each possess their own identities, unique qualities that make them stand out in some way. The sea is teeming with life, a sometimes raging, sometimes tranquil mass that ebbs and flows and has beaten even the greatest creatures. Mountains soar majestically into the sky, invoking awe and sparking our imaginations.

Such impressive institutions can be too much of their own big deal to be good hosts for G-dly manifestation.

The scorching hot and lifeless desert is the perfect place: it has no ego, it's completely committed, and full of burning love for G-d.

That merits at least one full book of the Torah.

Warm But Not Self-Obsessed

As with everything in our relationship with G-d, this serves as a wonderful example of how we ought to conduct our interpersonal relationships.

Love is all the rage, and not for nothing. Everyone craves to love and be loved, and it's something we spend a lifetime chasing. Judaism advocates for it as well, and has much to tell us about this powerful human experience.

Take the desert for starters: You should love, and passionately so. Like the blazing sun of the Saharan afternoon, go for it. But remember this: Don't let it become about you and your needs. To love in the appropriate way is to emulate our relationship with G-d. It should be passionate and warm, but never about growing your own profile or feeding your own obsessions.

It's about commitment and giving yourself to the other. Focus on how much you love the other person, how much you wish to give to them, to invest in them and your partnership - avoiding the feeling of "I want to grow from this."

When you do that, you will have set up your own personal Tabernacle.

"comfortable" in the desert than in the sea or on mountains. "When G-d arrived in the desolate desert, it praised Him... G-d said, 'I will build my monument [the Tabernacle] here.'"

What is the meaning of this? How can the desert be the most appropriate place for a G-dly revelation?

Too Hot For Growth

Typically, we understand the intense heat and lack of growth that defines a desert as a negative thing. When you think of getting lost in a desert with no water for miles around, you probably don't get very excited.

But, as with most things in this world, Kabbalah sees these two elements - the heat and the lifelessness - as distinctively positive.

You see, in the context of our relationship with G-d, tremendous heat is the sign of a passionate, burning love. It's an easy metaphor, as many of us are used to the idea of love being a warm emotion. And the greater, more passionate the love, the more it heats up. So a place that is very hot is a metaphor for a devout Jew, who possesses a flaming love for G-d deep in his or her heart.

And here's where the second part of the desert metaphor becomes super important: nothing grows there. In conventional, human iterations of love, sometimes passionate love can breed intense feelings of self-regard, a flaming obsession with one's self that while ostensibly is directed toward another, is in reality an expression of self. It is nothing more than a search for identity and self-expression that is using someone else as the vehicle to realize the depths of self-love.

The desert is very hot, but nothing grows there. A person ought to be passionately and scorchingly in love with the Creator. Together with that - indeed, when done

The Bottomless Barrel

by Hillel Baron

A well-to-do businessman once arrived in Vienna and dispatched his servant to purchase some mead ("honey wine") from a local, Jewish-owned tavern. He returned with a bottle, which the merchant enjoyed so much that he sent his servant out again the next day to get ten bottles of the same vintage. The servant returned empty-handed this time, saying that the owner refused to sell him any. The businessman sent him back with even more money, but the servant returned without a single bottle for his efforts. The merchant decided to visit the tavern himself to see why there was no more mead for sale.

When he arrived, he saw a large crowd of diners reciting the Grace After Meals. When they concluded, the tavern-keeper told the merchant that his mead supply was exhausted. The merchant asked when some more would be available, to which the owner answered that it would never be available again. Seeing the visitor's amazement, he explained:

When we were young, my wife was a midwife and I was a *mohel* (ritual circumciser). I would officiate at every circumcision that came my way, even if it was a long distance from home, relishing the opportunity to bring another Jewish boy into the Covenant of Abraham.

Once, on the day before Yom Kippur, a simple villager came to tell me that his wife had given birth to a boy eight days earlier, and he needed me to perform the circumcision that day. Upon learning that he lived quite a distance away, I requested that he hire a coach for the trip. He refused, claiming he had no money. I was committed, and we started off on foot together. The villager quickly outpaced me, and by the time I

arrived at his home, he had already gone to work, and only the mother and the baby were home.

Now, to perform the circumcision, I needed someone to act as *sandek* - the one who holds the baby during the procedure. So I stood outside the humble home, hoping to find someone to fill the role.

Finally, I spotted a man hurrying past. I ran up to him and asked that he serve as *sandek*. He refused, saying that he was busy running from one synagogue to the next, collecting alms. Having no choice, I asked him how much he expected to net that day and made a deal with him: If he would be the *sandek*, he could follow me home and I would give him that amount!

The beggar agreed.

After the circumcision, we both hurried to my home with barely enough time to eat and prepare for Yom Kippur.

My family was very relieved to see me back, and I gave my last few coins to the man, expecting him to be on his way.

But he was in no hurry, insisting that I first pour him a drink. Eager to move on with the day, I indulged him and opened a fresh keg of mead. After taking a deep draft, he wished me *lechaim* ("to life") and blessed me that the barrel would not run out until the final feast celebrating my youngest child's wedding.

And so it was. Over the years, I have prospered from selling this never-ending supply of high-quality mead.

But just now, thank G-d, we concluded the last of the *Sheva Brachot*, the seven days of celebration for my youngest child's marriage, and the mead just ran dry!



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SLEEPING AT SINAI?



East mosquitoes abound and very often you wake up in the middle of the night to the eeeee... sound. You try and find that mosquito that's not letting you sleep. This can go on and on. But that night at the foot of Mt. Sinai the mosquitoes didn't bother anybody. It was a very sweet and peaceful sleep.

Many have the custom to stay up late on Shavuot night and read the *Tikkun Leil Shavuot*, selections from the entire Torah, including the Five Books of Moses, the Prophets and Writings, Mishnah, Talmud, Zohar, and so on. Some people do not recite the *Tikkun* but simply study the entire night, until morning.

What is the reason for this custom of staying up very late on Shavuot, or not sleeping at all? The Midrash states that the night before the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people went to sleep. Why did they go to sleep the night before getting the Torah? Says the Midrash: "Because sleeping on Shavuot night is sweet, and the night is short!" The Midrash goes on to say that during that night a miracle occurred and mosquitoes did not bite them.

Typically in the Middle

When G-d came in the morning to give the Torah, the Midrash continues, the Jews were still sleeping. G-d says, "I came and there was no one; I called and there was no answer." G-d is ready to give them this great gift and everybody's asleep. G-d has to wake them up and He says, "Nu, it's time to get the Torah."

This is what the Midrash states. But what does it mean? There's obviously more to it than meets the eye.

The Rebbe points out that the Torah is always very, very careful to avoid saying a bad word about anyone. In other words, the Torah in general is very clear to do things in a positive way. When the Torah says something negative, such as calling an animal spiritually impure (*tameh*), this is only for the purpose of



When G-d came in the morning to give the Torah, the Midrash continues, the Jews were still sleeping. G-d is ready to give them this great gift and everybody's asleep. Asleep!?!

practical instruction. Where no practical instruction is intended, the Torah will go out of its way to use positive words.

To illustrate: The Torah describes impure animals as those "which are not pure," rather than as impure. But when it comes to matters pertaining to Kosher, when one has to know the law clearly,

the Torah does use negative expressions. Normally, negative words do not have to cross your lips; use a euphemism, unless you have a specific reason to be blunt and explicit.

Accordingly, why does the Midrash speak so disparagingly about the Jews before the receiving of the Torah? Let's say they didn't do such a good thing - is there any reason to publicize it so that all future generations will know how apathetic they were, that instead of waiting up eagerly for the Torah they went to sleep? That's not such a nice thing to say. The Torah could have overlooked it. What kind of teaching is it for us to know that our forefathers did something that isn't so great? After all, ever since then we're doing a *Tikkun* for it, we're trying to repair it, which means that it wasn't a good thing.

Obviously, there's more to this story with lessons to be learned.

In fact it just doesn't make sense that the Jews went to sleep and overslept on that night, because we know that from the very day they came out of Egypt they started counting the days until Sinai. They were counting because of the excitement of looking forward to the Torah. Our sages say that during each day of the seven weeks of the counting, the Jews in the desert, rose to a higher spiritual level. So you can imag-

ine that by the time they reached the 49th day of counting and the 49th level of holiness, they were on a much higher level than they were the day they began the counting. On the night before they received the Torah, having reached a higher level of understanding and sensitivity - precisely now they went to sleep, and overslept?! It just doesn't make sense.

The Chassidic masters explain that G-d gave us a soul and he clothed the soul in a body. We are fully aware of the fact that our body is what we see and experience. When the soul leaves the body, the body remains lifeless like a doll; there's nothing there. The body is essentially subservient to the soul.

Now, even though there's a great purpose in living in this world in a body, for if there wasn't, G-d would not have created a world and would not have put us in the world - nevertheless, it is clear that the soul is in a sense confined within the body. There is a certain restraint that the soul must undergo because it is in a body. If the soul was not in a body it wouldn't have to stop serving G-d in order to eat and sleep and wash the dishes. There are certain needs that the body has that put a damper on what the soul would want to do twenty-four hours a day. So the

•Continued on page 12

WHY IS SHAVUOT SO EASY?

by Yisroel Cotlar

Question:

Yesterday, I attended a class called "The Laws of Shavuot." Being relatively new to Judaism, I expected a class similar to those before Passover or Sukkot. Many technical laws. Lots of "do"s and "do not"s.

To my surprise, other than going to synagogue to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments, there are very few laws unique to Shavuot. Unlike Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, there are no lengthy prayers. And, unlike Passover and Sukkot, and we can eat whatever Kosher food we like, as well as wherever we like. Sure there are the customs related to flowers, blintzes, and cheesecakes, but hey, it's a piece of (cheese)cake compared to the other holidays.

Am I missing something here? Shouldn't the holiday on which we received the many laws of the Torah have some laws of its own?

Answer:

Great question! To understand one reason why this holiday seems, well, so ordinary, we have to take a step back and examine the Torah-world relationship.

The Torah is often seen as a "bandage" solution for a world that is essentially a dark and scary jungle filled

with all sorts of unhealthy foods, relationships etc. So the Torah keeps us out of trouble.

Essentially, this perspective is saying that there was always a world, stuff, and us. The Torah? That came later on. It wasn't until 2,448 years after creation that G-d decided to work on the glitches, or at least provide us a way to maneuver around them.

With this approach, the Torah is an imposed set of laws - one that clashes with the world around us.

However, here's the way to look at things. The Torah is G-d's own wisdom. It existed long before there was a world. But G-d wasn't satisfied with this wisdom staying in the spiritual realms. He wanted a physical world where this wisdom would be studied and its commandments observed. To make things challenging, He planted obstacles and distractions,



but these are merely masks that conceal the world's true purpose: An activity center for Torah and mitzvahs, a place where every word can be transformed into Torah, every gadget used for holiness, every dollar turned into a mitzvah.

And because this was the intent from the very beginning, it's Torah - not the superficiality on the outside - that is the world's true genetic makeup. We need the Torah merely to reveal what the world always was meant to be: A home for G-d.

This explains the teaching of our sages that when G-d spoke the Ten Commandments at Sinai, His voice had no echo. For an echo is normally created when a sound meets with a substance that resists it. The Torah has no such echo. Every object in the universe is saturated by its message. There is nothing off which it could ricochet. For the Torah is not an imposed reality, but the very DNA of the world.

Each year on Shavuot, when we re-experience Sinai, we show our appreciation for Torah through normal eating and celebrating - without any special rules. For the Torah does not introduce a new reality, but rather sheds light, purpose and sanctity into everything that is already here now. Even cheesecake.

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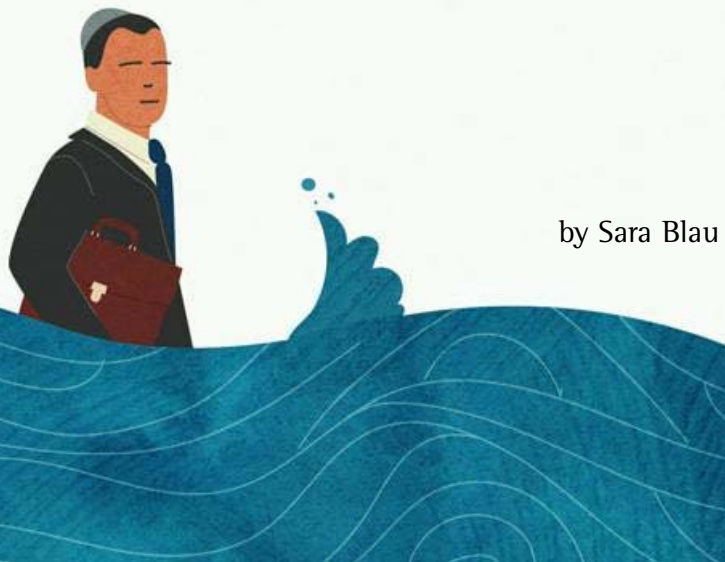
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Keeping Your Head Above Water



by Sara Blau

Pay your mortgage. Make a buck. Scale your business.

No matter your industry, generating an income entails work. The question is: Can all that hard work be compatible with deep spirituality? With prayer and meditation? With a connection to the Divine?

The answer will stun you. Not only is prayer compatible with your business model, it is enhanced by it.

King Solomon said it way back when he wrote: "Many waters cannot extinguish our love (of G-d), and floods do not wash it away" (Song of Songs 8:7). One would think that a flood of deadlines, pressures and stress could completely wash away our ability to feel connected to G-d, or that being immersed in economic competition could override the soul's desire to be close to G-d.

But souls don't work that way. A soul naturally yearns to connect to G-d, and the "floods" of creating a livelihood do not overpower it. The hard work of covering our bills doesn't extinguish the love but actually fans it, creating a fire even hotter than when the soul was in heaven basking in the rays of G-d's light.

How does that happen?

Here's what it looks like:

You feel overwhelmed, in over your head with responsibility, so distant from G-d. And that very feeling of being so far from G-d can give birth to a burning passionate desire to be closer.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Just like being separated from a spouse leads to a yearning and desire that regular, day-to-day interactions don't provide, you can be lovesick for G-d when you feel you have a total lack of connection. Moreover, this love of G-d that you reveal in your heart while struggling to feel connected during a regular business day is much greater than when there is no darkness or spiritual challenges.

But there's a caveat: It doesn't happen by itself. It takes sitting down in the morning as you are about to enter a hectic and challenging day, and contemplating during prayer.

Here's what you need to think about:

You're surrounded by a spiritual desert where the only thing that matters in life is making a dollar. When you think about how life can become so devoid of values and holiness, and how far one

can be from G-d, it makes you desire G-d so strongly! In other words, the very darkness becomes a catalyst for so much light!

And what type of relationship do you desire?

There are those friends or neighbors to whom you nod a token good morning - you may know their habits and what car they drive, and their preferences and tastes. But do you really know them? An acquaintance is someone you know on a superficial level, and it cannot be compared with the intimacy of knowing someone for real. Their essence. Their personality, their dreams, who they really are.

So what type of relationship do you desire with G-d? You don't want to relate to G-d only on an external level. Wow, He knows how to create a world... that is a superficial "knowing" of G-d. Prayer is realizing that just knowing that G-d creates the world is like knowing which car your neighbor drives. It is a true fact, but it doesn't describe His essence. Prayer is recognizing that you want to know G-d Himself! To have an intimate relationship with Him. To learn about Him and know Him in a real way. It's recognizing that the sun itself is a

greater light than just a ray of light, and you want the sun itself.

Though you might be involved in the nitty-gritty of your business all day, the distance you experience makes you desire not just a superficial expression of G-d but a connection with His essence, the deepest part of G-d. Unlike in Heaven, where souls are satisfied with a ray of light, you hunger for the entirety of the sun, the real deal.

You begin to desire and love G-d with a quality that is even greater than the love that the soul had when it hung out in the Garden of Eden and was satisfied with G-d's rays of light. Your prayer has brought you to a level where it's not just about not wanting to be trapped by physicality. Your soul is now

a blazing fire of love; it desires the real thing, a connection with G-d's essence!

The darkness itself is thus the cause of this great desire. It is called *teshuvah*, "returning." Your soul returns to what it really wants, a connection with G-d Himself.

This is why it says: "One hour of *teshuvah* (returning) and *ma'asim tovim* (good deeds) is greater than *olam haba* (heaven)."

Ironically, only down here in this world can you feel so far that you can produce a love that feels so close.

So before you go out into the big world to make some money, pray and meditate until you create this explosive love.

For this, my friend, is the business deal of the century.

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The View From Over The Clouds

by Karen Kaplan

I remember the excitement I felt as a young child as I walked to the gate for my first ever flight. I fastened my seat belt, and after what seemed like an eternity, the plane taxied down the runway and took off. I watched as the ground receded, simultaneously terrified and exhilarated, as only a child can be. I'd been on roller coasters and Ferris wheels, but this was truly awesome! Then we entered the clouds, and it was like being in a huge, white cotton ball.

The plane continued to rise, and we emerged from the clouds. From my window, I could see the most vivid blue sky imaginable and a brilliant sun. Until that day, when I'd looked up from the ground and seen clouds, I'd assumed they extended all the way to outer space. It never occurred to me that above them, the blue sky and sunlight reappeared! Wow, I thought to myself. It's always a sunny day if you go high enough! I'm sure I was too young to know how to spell the word "epiphany," but that was what that moment was. Yes, things may look gray and

dreary down on the ground, but directly above you - if you could look far enough - the darkness turns to light. It's there, just beyond the clouds.

The spiritual message is clear: Humans can only see so far, but if we had the ability to view everything through G-d's eyes, we'd see the "sunshine," the goodness, in all He creates. This concept is so important that the Torah's very first chapter teaches it. G-d created the entire universe in six days. Each day of Creation is described, detail by detail. He created light, and He deemed it "good." He separated the land from the sea and deemed it "good." He brought forth plant life and deemed it "good." And the sun, moon and stars were created and deemed "good." So were fish and land animals. He finished by creating humans and "saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Included in G-d's creations were things we don't ordinarily think of as good. Ferocious beasts. Poisonous snakes. Natural disasters. And

yet, G-d deemed everything "good." The Talmud addresses this counterintuitive concept: "A person is obligated to bless G-d for the bad just as he blesses G-d for the good... whatever measure He metes out to you, whether it be good or bad, you are to thank Him." Why? Because it's always a sunny day if you go high enough. From G-d's view, everything is good.

Decades later, on another flight, I had a different experience. This time, when we pierced the clouds, the sun shone directly at my eyes, and I was blinded by the brightness. At that moment, I had another epiphany: Whether it's very dark, or very bright, the effect is the same. You can't see clearly. Both darkness and bright

light can blind us to what's right in front of us. Sometimes, we're stuck on the ground in the gloom, and we can't see the sunny sky above our heads on the other side of the clouds. And sometimes, life is going well for us, and we're sailing above the clouds, but we're so blinded by the sun that we fail to enjoy and appreciate our good fortune. In either case, we're unable to see clearly.

The Talmud lists many examples of this. We say blessings upon seeing "earthquakes, thunder, winds or lightning" - all natural phenomena that cause great damage. And we also say blessings upon seeing "mountains, hills, seas, rivers or deserts" - natural phenomena whose power and beauty we

might otherwise overlook or take for granted.

These two flights - one as a young child and one as an adult - gave me lasting mental images to help grasp these two spiritual concepts. When I burst through the clouds on that first flight, I understood that no matter how gloomy things may seem, blue skies and sunshine wait on the other side. The clouds may obscure that sometimes, but the blue skies are always there. And on that later flight, I understood that it's just as easy to miss the good times in life - to let all that sunshine blind you to the blessings in your life.

See through the clouds and keep those sunglasses handy...

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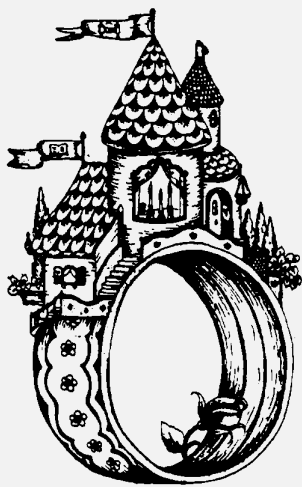
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The Kaballah Of Technology

by Simon Jacobson

Everything G-d created in His world He created to express His glory - Avot 6:11

The computer age and the information revolution have given all of us enormous power and the ability to reach virtually anyone at any time. Yes, technology allows us to live more comfortably and work more efficiently, but can we understand how it makes our lives more meaningful?

On its own, science is neutral; it attempts to give us an objective view of our physical universe and its natural forces, but it does not draw a conclusion as to how we should use these forces. It does not deal with good and evil or with questions of morality. At its best, science acknowledges its own boundaries, recognizing that it is neither the basis nor the code for moral doctrine.

Technology, as with all forces in our lives, can be used either constructively or destructively. Developments in computer technology, lasers, nuclear energy, medicine, and biology - these are all instances of G-dly forces that are manifested in nature. Man has been charged with tapping those resources to refine and civilize the world, to transform our material surroundings into a proper home for spirituality and G-dliness.

We can choose to acknowledge the "Hand inside the glove," understanding where the power truly comes from, and use these forces as tools to lead a more meaningful life. Or we can choose to be distracted by the glove, to see technology only as a means unto itself, using it for indulgent, selfish, perhaps even destructive purposes.

The sweeping technological changes that have taken place during the past several generations are in keeping with the prediction some two thousand years ago in the Zohar, the classical text of Jewish mysticism. The Zohar speaks of the outburst of "lower wisdom," or advance-

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ments in the physical universe, and an increase in "sublime wisdom," or spirituality - which would begin to usher true unity into the world, leading toward the final redemption.

The increase in both types of wisdom - wisdom of the mind and wisdom of the soul - has surely come to pass; where we may have fallen short is in integrating these spheres of knowledge. Only by balancing the scientific with the spiritual can we transform the dream of an ideal future into a functional blueprint for society, for true communication can begin only when human minds and souls interact. With communication comes understanding; with understanding comes compassion; and with compassion comes a natural movement toward universalism.

So the current technological revolution is in fact the Hand of G-d at work; it is meant to help us make G-d a reality in our lives. And as time goes on, science will show itself more and more to parallel the truths of G-d, thereby revealing the intrinsic unity in the entire universe.

The divine purpose of the present information revolution, for instance, which gives an individual unprecedented power and opportunity, is to allow us to share knowledge - spiritual knowledge with each other, empowering and unifying individuals everywhere. We need to utilize today's

interactive technology not just for business or leisure but to interlink as people - to create a welcome environment for the interaction of our souls, our hearts, our visions.

There is much to learn from the technological revolution, as long as we understand its role in our lives and see it as a final step in our dramatic search for unity throughout the universe. After all, developments in science and technology have taught us to be more sensitive to the intangible and the sublime: the forces behind computers, smart phones etc. are all invisible, and yet we fully recognize their power and reach. Similarly, we must come to accept that the driving force behind the entire universe is intangible and sublime, and we must come to experience the transcendent and G-dly in every single thing - beginning, of course with ourselves.

With all our human capacity for technological advancement, we must never forget our higher objective. We must strive to enhance our scientific search for truth by constantly expanding our spiritual search for the divine.

Understanding science and technology as divine tools for our personal and spiritual growth is critical for our well-being. It is well and good to learn to program a computer, but unless a student also acquires a sense of discipline and integrity, he or she might just as easily use that skill to wreak technological havoc as to obtain a job.

The best students - and the best teachers - recognize that there is much to be learned by inspecting the failure of cultures before ours. By doing so, it becomes painfully clear that no amount of wisdom or technology can overcome a value system that encourages selfishness or evil. We must strive, therefore, to transcend humanity by constantly expanding our spiritual search.

Bless You!

by Yanki Tauber

You are ushered into a small room where time has stood still for centuries. An oil lamp flickers on the table; holy tomes cover every inch of the walls. A righteous *tzaddik* with piercing eyes and a gentle voice pronounces the magic formula.

That's the picture that comes to mind when we think about receiving a blessing. Blessings are other-worldly things, resorted to when some drastic intervention is needed in our lives.

The truth is much simpler and much more profound. Everyone needs blessing, each and every moment of his or her life. And everyone can bestow a blessing.

Chassidic teaching explains that the word *berachah* (blessing) literally means "drawing down." Everything in life - health, prosperity, joy, wisdom, peace of mind - needs to be drawn down from its potential, spiritual state into the actuality of our physical existence. It's all there - spiritually we are all healthy, wealthy and wise. The "problems" we experience in life are basically a matter of something gone wrong in the wiring. We're not connecting; our spiritual and physical selves are having trouble communicating.

This is where the blessing can help.

Here's how it works. Let's say that your friend Chaim is experiencing financial difficulties. So you put your arm around his shoulder and say: "Chaim! May G-d grant you the money that you need!"

By saying these words sincerely, with warmth and love and joy, you've blessed him. You've helped to roto-root that clogged supply line, opening up the flow.

We've all had the experience of hearing someone else give voice to an idea or describe a course of action, and suddenly realizing that we've been carrying this idea or action around in our own minds for the longest time. But until that person verbalized it, it was trapped inside our heads. Although we "had" it, we couldn't do it or even consciously think it. We didn't have the words for it, so it wasn't real to us yet.

A similar thing can happen when you bless someone. The potential has been there all along, but saying it can help make it real.

Your friend needs the blessing because he has reached a limit of what he can make real of his spiritual resources on his own. With your caring and compassion, with your love and joy, you bond with him to make an expanded self, thereby broadening the channels and unsnarling the lines of communication between his soul and his body, between his heaven and his earth.

Of course, being a holy person increases your blessing-giving powers. But the only thing you really need is a loving heart. And a nice big smile.

May you all be abundantly blessed with all good things both material and spiritual!

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What Does It Mean To "Bless" G-d?

by Yehuda Shurpin

Question:

Every blessing we recite throughout the day, whether before we eat, during prayers or when we do a mitzvah, starts off with the words *Baruch Atah...*, "Blessed are You, G-d." This begs the question, what exactly are we saying? I can understand blessing people, but does G-d, the Creator and Master of all, really need our blessing? And for that matter, who in the world do we think we are that we can bestow blessings on G-d? Isn't it a tad bit presumptuous?

Answer:

Your question is a fascinating one. It is also completely understandable, given the imprecise translation of the word *Baruch*. "Blessed" does not fully capture or do justice to the richness of the Hebrew word.

A Pool Of Blessings

Rabbi Menachem of Recanati and others explain that the word *baruch* is related to the word *brechah* which means a reservoir of water, in which water (blessings) can be collected and then used as needed.

In this sense, when we refer to G-d as "blessed," we mean to praise G-d as the source of all blessing. Similarly, when we say G-d is "good," "wise" or "strong," we don't mean to use limiting, anthropomorphic descriptions for G-d. G-d, after all, cannot be defined in any way, by any attribute. Rather, we mean to praise G-d as the source of goodness, wisdom and strength.

Drawing Down

The Zohar explains that "blessing" G-d is not simply praising G-d as the source of blessings; rather, it is related to the word *hamavrich* which means to "draw down." In this sense, the word *baruch* means to draw blessings from their source.

Thus, when we bless G-d, we are asking that He draw down His G-dly revelation into the world. For example, when we say, "Blessed are you, G-d, Who heals the sick," we are requesting that G-d express His revelation by

transcending the nature of this physical world and healing the sick. When we say, "Blessed are you, G-d, Who blesses the years" in the blessing for livelihood and produce, we request that G-dliness become revealed, causing rain to fall and vegetation to grow.

The Blessings We Say: Word For Word

The above explanations give us a deeper understanding of the wording of the blessings we make:

Baruch means "draw down".

Atah means "You". The word "you" is used when we are talking directly to someone and there is no need to use a name. By addressing G-d with the deeply intimate "You," we are referring to the essence of G-d, which is higher than any name. If we interpret *baruch* as "coming down," then "*Baruch Atah*" would mean "You (G-d) are coming down!" Thus, the real intent of a blessing is to cause G-d to "come down" to us.

A-donai is a substitute pronunciation for the unutterable four-letter name of G-d. This four-letter name is a compilation of several Hebrew words that mean "was," "is" "and will be" - an expression of eternity. Thus, although we are using a name for G-d, it is one that reflects G-d's transcendence beyond time and space.

Elokeinu means "our G-d." We have a special relationship with G-d, subjecting ourselves to Him and recognizing that there is no true, independent existence other than Him, even in this world, which outwardly seems to imply the contrary. We refer to G-d as "our G-d" because it is due to this special relationship that we are able to draw down G-dliness into the world.

Melech Ha-Olam means "king of the world." We have drawn down blessings and G-dliness from the level of *Atah*, which is beyond names, to the transcendent level of *A-donai*, to the personal level of *Elokeinu*, all the way down into the physical world, where G-dliness is hidden. For the Hebrew word for "world," *olam*, is linked to the word *helem*, which means "hidden."

In short, when we "bless G-d," we are drawing down G-dliness from G-d Himself all the way down into this material world, where His greatness is obscured.

May we all be blessed with the ultimate blessing - the coming of our righteous Moshiach!



Why Say A Blessing?

Few activities are as instinctive as eating: it is a basic bodily need, requires no thought or advance preparation, and is, largely, for us today, readily available. And yet the Torah demands from us that before putting anything in our mouths, we pause for a moment, recite a few words to ourselves, and only then proceed with our eating. And with these words, this simple blessing, we have transformed the most prosaic of acts into something holy.

How? By acknowledging G-d as the source of all sustenance, recognizing that the earth and its bounties belong to Him, and expressing our gratitude to Him for providing it for us. All this with the words: "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe..."

We call a blessing a blessing (or *brachah*) because that is essentially what it is. With the words of the blessing we bless and thank G-d for providing us with the food or drink of which we are about to partake.

Chassidic teachings explain that all food contains a G-dly spark of holiness. When we say a blessing before eating, and eat with the intention to serve G-d, we actually elevate the physical substance of the food into holiness and reunite it with its Divine source.

Six different *brachot* (blessings) correspond to the various categories of food. They belong to the type of blessing called *birchat ha'nehenin* (blessings of pleasure) which we are required to recite before we derive physi-

cal pleasure from G-d's creations.

After we eat, we once again remember G-d as the ultimate source of our sustenance, as instructed in the Torah, "*And you shall eat and be satisfied and you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good land which He has given you.*" (Deut. 8:10) We do this with the blessings after the meal.

Reciting the blessings before eating adds a whole new dimension to something we do every day, in diverse settings. Eating at home, with friends, at work, while celebrating, or hanging out - now transcends the mundane and is transformed into something holy.

Texts of Blessings Before Eating

Before partaking of any food, a *brachah rishonah* (preceding blessing), is said. There are six different blessings, each beginning with the same words, BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM, Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe - and then concluding with a few words related to the type of food eaten. Following are the food groups with examples for each group and a transliteration and translation of the Hebrew blessing for each.

1. **Hamotzi:** The Blessing on Bread

On bread, bagels, challah, matzah, pita and rolls made from any of these five grains: wheat, barley, rye, oat or spelt:

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM HA-MO-TZI LE-CHEM MIN HA-A-RETZ.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

2. **Mezonot:** The Blessing on the Five Grains

On cakes, cereals, cookies, cupcakes, doughnuts, and

pasta - if made of one or more of the five grains listed under the first blessing:

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM BO-RAI MI-NAI ME-ZO-NOT.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who creates various kinds of sustenance.

3. **Hagafen:** The Blessing on Wine & Grape Juice

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM BO-RAI PRI HA-GA-FEN.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

4. **Ha'etz:** The Blessing on Fruits

For all fruits from permanent trees, such as apples, oranges, and peaches, even if these fruits are dried; also grapes, raisins, and all nuts (except peanuts, which are a legume):

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM BO-RAI PRI HA-AITZ.

Blessed are You, L-rd our

G-d, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.

5. **Ha'adamah:** The Blessing on Vegetables

For all vegetables and greens from the ground, peanuts, legumes, and some fruits such as bananas, melons, and pineapples:

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM BO-RAI PRI HA-A-DA-MAH.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, Who creates the fruit of the earth.

6. **Shehakol:** The Blessing on All Other Foods

For candy, dairy, eggs, fish, liquids, meat, mushrooms and everything else not included in the first five blessings above:

BA-RUCH A-TAH A-DO-NOI ELO-HAI-NU ME-LECH HA-O-LAM SHE-HA-KOL NI-H'YAH BI-D'VA-RO.

Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, King of the Universe, by Whose word all things came to be.



**Shavuot Services
@ Chabad
Sunday &
Monday
June 5 & 6
9:30 a.m.**

www.chabadrochester.com/shavuot

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 Calendar 5782-2022

Times are for the Rochester area only
 June 4 Light the Yon Tov candles from a pre-existing flame* after 9:38 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2. Tikun Lail Shavuot during the night.

June 5 Everyone should attend services in the morning & hear the reading of the Ten Commandments. Light the Yon Tov candles from a pre-existing flame* after 9:38 p.m. and recite blessings 1 & 2.

June 6 Yizkor is said during services. Shavuot ends at 9:39 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-ti-vo-nu Le-had-lik Ner Shel Yom Tov.
- 2 Bo-ruch A-to Ado-noi E-lo-hei-nu Me-lech Ho-olom She-heh-che-yoh-nu Vi-ki-ye-mo-nu Ve-he-ge-o-nu Liz-man Ha-zeh.

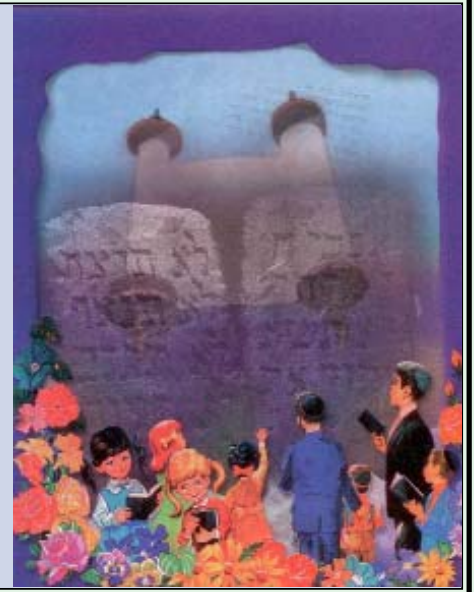
Shavuot Holiday

Be There With Your Children

This year, on Sunday, June 5, 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 3334 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 tzava - 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.

Guide 5782 - 2022

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 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 yearzeit



(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.

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,



NINE FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MOUNT SINAI

by Menachem Posner

1. It Is Where G-d Communicated the Ten Commandments

Mount Sinai is first mentioned by name in Exodus 19, where we read that the newly-emancipated People of Israel gathered around the mountain a month and a half after leaving Egypt. After three days of preparation, G-d Himself descended upon the mountain and struck a deal with them: They would follow His ways, and He would care for them. At that time, the Ten Commandments were communicated as well.

2. The Tablets Were Hewn From Sinai

After the oral communication of the Ten Commandments, Moses ascended the mountain yet again and remained there for 40 days to learn from G-d. At the end of this time, he was given two tablets of stone, etched with the Ten Commandments. Tragically, upon seeing that the people had begun to worship a golden calf in his absence, Moses smashed the tablets. After two more 40-day sessions on the mountain, Moses came down with a second set of tablets, with writing etched by G-d onto stone that Moses had hewn from the mountain.

3. The Entire Torah Was Communicated There

The entirety of the Torah, G-d's instruction for how His people are to live, was given to Moses at Sinai, down to the nitty-gritty agricultural

laws and everything in between. In fact, oral traditions not recorded in the Torah are known as *halachah le-Moshe mi-Sinai*, "law [given] to Moses from Sinai."

4. The Burning Bush Revelation Happened There

Before Moses began the epic task of leading the people out of Egypt, he saw a thornbush that was burning but was not consumed by the fire. Speaking from "within" the bush, G-d told him that he was to free the slaves and take them to "serve G-d on this mountain."

5. Its Rocks Are Etched With Thorns

The Hebrew word for "thornbush" is *sneh*, which is etymologically linked to Sinai. Indeed, Rabbi Moses of Narbonne (14th Century) attests:

"The stones found at Sinai have the image of the thornbush (*sneh*) on them. That is why it is called Sinai... This is a G-dly image. I have split the rock in half and found the image of the thornbush on either side. I broke one half into pieces, and the thorn was again found on the inside of both parts..."

6. It Was a Humble Mountain

Linked to its association with the lowly thornbush, a beloved rabbinic tradition relates that when the time came for G-d to reveal Himself upon a mountain, the

various mountains began jostling for the position, each one claiming it was superior. Only Sinai, which was not remarkable in any way, remained silent. For this reason, humble Sinai was chosen, giving us the eternal lesson that humility is key to accepting G-d and His wisdom.

7. It's Also Called Horeb

At times Mount Sinai is also referred to as Mount Horeb. So which name is the real one? The Talmud relates that Rav Chisda and Rabbah the son of Rav Huna taught that the real name was Horeb, and it was also called Sinai (related to *sinah*, "hatred") because the events that happened there led others to be jealous of the Chosen People. On the other hand Rabbi Abahu was of the opinion that Sinai was the actual name, and it was referred to as Horeb (related to *chorvah*, "destruction") because the revelation at Sinai was the catalyst for the ultimate destruction of idolatry.

8. Elijah Visited There

After the momentous events at Sinai, we read that G-d issued the command: "You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn and journey..." From that moment on, the people never returned. However, we do read of a dramatic visit to the site by Elijah the Prophet, who was fleeing from the evil Queen Jezebel. After Elijah tells G-d about the people's sorry spiritual state of affairs, G-d showed him a strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire, fol-

lowed by "a still small sound," in which G-d was "found".

G-d's message was that His eternal place is not in great noises and rumbling earthquakes. Rather, He can be found in our quiet, humble day-to-day actions. His message was clear: "You don't belong here in the desert. Go back to the people and do your work!"

9. We Do Not Know Where It Is

Unlike the Temple Mount, which remains sacred even though the Holy Temple was destroyed, Mount Sinai did not retain its holiness. On the contrary, we find little importance attached to the location, to the point that it cannot even be pinpointed with relative certainty.

It has been suggested, in the spirit of the abovementioned story of Elijah, that there is good reason for this. We were never meant to remain at Sinai, temporarily elevated by the shock of meeting G-d. Rather, the purpose of Sinai is to take its dramatic spiritual energy jolt and focus it into our day-to-day lives here and now.

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Towards A More Meaningful Kaddish

by Carmi Wisemon

This past Yom Kippur, my grandmother Miriam Weinstein passed away in her sleep at the age of 97. She was an amazing woman who lived a full life and invested great efforts to instill a love of Judaism in her family and students. Since I am her closest male descendant, I have been saying Kaddish for her. After everything she did for me, it is a privilege for me to do something in return.

Kaddish is many people's most emotional - and sometimes last - connection to Judaism. But, as with many aspects of Jewish observance, although we may feel the significance of what we are doing, it can be hard to verbalize it to ourselves or others.

After I'd been saying Kaddish for several months, it occurred to me that I did not understand how the prayer related to my grandmother. With study and research I uncovered some insights that have made it more meaningful for me, and hopefully will help make the experience more meaningful to others as well.

1. Fulfilling the Mission

The primary message of Kaddish is encapsulated in the sentence said by the

mourner and repeated by the entire congregation: "May His [G-d's] great name be blessed forever and ever." Glorifying G-d's name is the goal of every Jew. When the deceased's descendant asks the congregants to bless G-d's name eternally, he is doing so on behalf of his loved one and enabling a completion of the loved one's mission. Doing so reminds us to live lives that glorify the memory of our loved ones and G-d's name.

2. Lifting Spirits

One of the primary sources for the Mourner's Kaddish is a story demonstrating how the positive actions of a person's descendants can bring forgiveness and spiritual reprieve to the deceased:

The great sage Rabbi Akiva met an anguished man collecting firewood, for a fire upon which he was burned every night. He was, in fact, the spirit of an evil tax collector being punished for his misdeeds.

"How can I help?" asked Rabbi Akiva.

"If my son leads the congregation in saying, 'May His (G-d's) great name be blessed forever and ever,' my sins will be forgiven."

Against all odds, Rabbi Akiva found the man's son and taught him the prayer, which he said in public, thereby releasing his father from punishment.

3. Benefit Of The Doubt

In the World to Come, the maximum time of 'cleansing' for the wicked is 12 months. To prevent giving the impression that the deceased needs the full 12 months, Kaddish is recited for only 11 months. (However, for other reasons, the mourning period extends for a full 12 months.)

4. Coming To Terms With Mortality

Mortality is frustrating and can lead to anger and resentment. In Kaddish we affirm,

"May G-d's great name be glorified throughout the world, which He created according to His will." We do not know why G-d chooses when and how a person should leave this world, but we know that everything that happens, even death, is based on His will. By repeating and internalizing the Kaddish prayer, we reaffirm and strengthen our belief in His benevolence and omniscience.

5. Spotlight

Shiva is an intense experience where the spotlight is on the mourners, and it can be challenging to transition back to regular life. Saying Kaddish with a minyan after the shiva brings the mourner back into focus. People may enquire whom you are saying Kaddish for and ask about the deceased. This enables the mourner to continue to discuss their loved ones with others. It may also provide an opportunity to commiserate with others who are also saying Kaddish for a loved one.

6. Connecting

Death of a loved one brings loneliness into our lives. Saying Kaddish with a group three times a day can help to alleviate that feeling. For those who do not usually pray daily with a minyan, it is an opportunity provided to us by our loved ones to reconnect with G-d, Jewish traditions, and our local Jewish communities.

7. Doing Something

Death makes us feel powerless. When our loved ones were alive, we could do something for them. After they pass on, it takes time to realize that although we can no longer help them physically, we can definitely assist them spiritually. Kaddish serves as a daily reminder that we can help our loved ones fulfill their mission by doing positive acts on their behalf and becoming the people they would want us to become.

For more about Kaddish - including a practical guide to the Kaddish, and the "Kaddish Pro," - visit our comprehensive Kaddish Site: chabadrochester.com/kaddish



Soul Talk

What is it that we can give to a loved one who is no longer physically amongst us? With our limited, filtered, compromised, spiritually blurred existence in this world, what can we give to the souls who inhabit the transcendent places of the next world?

The answer is, a great deal. We can give them life.

For what is life in its most essential form, life fulfilling the purpose which G-d created it to fulfill? Life, in the ultimate sense, is a soul in a physical body causing the stuff of this world to be revealed as G-dly. This is what we achieve every time we do a mitzvah, a good and G-dly deed. And when our positive actions are inspired by the life of one who has passed on to a more spiritual state of life, and are motivated by the desire and goal that they be in his or her merit - we give life and growth to a soul of the next world. Through our actions, the souls of those who passed on can attain something they could not achieve on their own. They can "live," in the ultimate sense of what life is about - affecting this world, making G-dliness felt in this world.

This is the main idea behind the recital of the Kaddish in merit of a departed soul. While Kaddish is commonly known as the "mourners prayer," a reading of the text reveals that it is not about death or mourning, but the public proclamation of G-d's greatness. By rising from the depths of anguish and loss to offer praise to G-d, we transform the event of death into an act of life.

Even more important than the recitation of Kaddish is the Torah we study, the mitzvot that we accept upon ourselves, the charity that we give, the good that we do, with the intention that it be *l'iluy nishmat*, for the sake of the "elevation of the soul." If the desire to give to the one who has passed on is what impels us to learn something we would not have otherwise learned, to do a mitzvah we otherwise would not have done, to go higher and further than we would have otherwise gone, then this soul lives on in us. Our hands and feet, mind and heart and mouth become the hands, feet, mind, heart and mouth of the departed soul.



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SLEEPING AT SINAI?
Continued from page 3



Tikkun, Vilna 1840 edition

We're just human beings. So the body "slows" the soul down.

However, when a person sleeps, a totally different thing happens. During the time of sleep, even though the person is obviously still alive, the heart still beats and the person still breathes, nevertheless, a segment of the soul leaves the body during the time of sleep.

During sleep there is a loss of consciousness. One does not fully hear, nor speak, nor see. There is an element of death, a "whisper" of death - the Talmud refers to sleep as "one sixtieth of death". This is because during sleep everything slows down. The heart, the respiration, everything functions at a much slower pace than when the person is awake. During sleep the soul that was inside the body rises to its source above.

During sleep, when the soul is free of the body, it can in a sense go higher and reach revelations that cannot happen during the day, when

a person is awake.

At Sinai, this was the intention of the Jews in going to sleep. They knew that they had been working for seven weeks to elevate themselves and be ready to receive the Torah. But all of their preparations had been done, in a sense, during the day when they were awake and conscious. And they felt that now that they had reached such a high level, maybe now, if they go to sleep, their souls would reach such a high level that they could properly receive the Torah while asleep. This was their true intention - they were hoping that through their sleep they would be able to reach a level of holiness that would be much greater than they could reach while awake.

This is what the Midrash means when it says that their sleep on Shavuot night was very sweet. Sleep can be great and holy and special if you are on the level of Shavuot, if you have done all the necessary preparations. Then you can go to sleep with the hope that great things will happen, that you will experience great Divine revelations during your sleep.

The Midrash continues: "The night was short." Here "night" alludes to concealment. We know that darkness, night, hides things. Have you ever tried looking for your glasses in the middle of the night and then in the morning, there they are just by your night table, two inches

away from your hand? At night you just grope and you can't find your slippers or anything. So what does the night do? The night doesn't change anything. It just hides things. You cannot see. In the day you see it all, it's so simple.

The Jews had reached a level where the concealment was minimal. They had overcome some of the "night" concealment. There was still a bit of a night left but it was much shorter than it was when they had started. So they felt that since they had done what they could with daytime, it was time to see what sleeping could do for them.

G-d, in recognition of their good intentions said, "You know what? They're really so sincere that I will help them along by preventing the mosquitoes from biting." Had G-d been opposed to their sleeping He wouldn't have made this miracle that the mosquitoes which bit last night and the next night, all of a sudden this night didn't bite.

Why, then, do we recite the Tikkun year after year? Why the need to fix what seemed like a good idea? Because G-d says, "I know what your intention was, but you made a mistake. It was an innocent error." We don't see in the Midrash or in the Torah that there was ever any serious reprimand. The only thing G-d said is, "I want you to make a Tikkun. Don't do it again, and to remind you not

to do it again, every year I want you to stay up."

What was their mistake? It was a very innocent error that many people still make today - that the ultimate purpose is the spiritual world, rather than the physical world. G-d, however, wants a "dwelling place in the lowest world", as the Midrash states. Actually, making a dwelling place for G-d in this world was not possible until we received the Torah. With the Giving of the Torah G-d "annulled the decree" separating spirituality and physicality, so that now even the physical can become spiritual through Torah and Mitzvot. Thus, the error of the Jews was entirely understandable, for it took place before the Torah was given.



Tikkun, Vienna 1864 edition

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Five Things Mikvah Taught Me About Myself

by Rochel Holzkenner

1. Listen To My Body

When I was 10 weeks pregnant, I was bent over with excruciating abdominal cramps. I frantically dialed my midwife. "Lie down, Rochel, and try to relax," she told me. "Your body knows what to do. Trust your body."

As counterintuitive as it may have seemed - my body was aborting the fledgling fetus growing inside of me! - I knew she was right. And I surrendered to the pulsating waves of contractions.

After years of keeping *Taharat HaMishpachah* (Family Purity, the laws that govern marital intimacy), I've learned to listen to my body's cues. According to these laws, when a woman begins her menstrual cycle, she and her husband don't touch each other for around two weeks (the time of her flow plus one additional week). After a woman immerses in a *mikvah* (ritual bath), they reunite, until her cycle begins again. (The states of ritual purity and impurity are spiritual, and have nothing to do with physical cleanliness.)

Other than humans, very few primates menstruate. Most mammals either reabsorb the blood that lines the uterus, or maintain it until pregnancy occurs. Women lose a lot of blood and tissue every month during menstruation, and biologists can only guess as to why the body seems so inefficient.

Of course, if you look through a G-dly lens, you can see the absolute beauty and Divine brilliance of the female menstrual cycle - it hardwires marriage with a natural system of separation and reunion. We don't need to guess at when we need to pull back; we just need to listen to our body.

Like a human heartbeat, the universe has a natural pulse, an ebb and a flow. When the prophet Ezekiel describes G-d's supernal chariot, he says, "The angels were running and returning like the vision of a bolt of fire." These angels are called *chayot*, which comes from the word *chai*, "life." To "run forward and retreat backward", explain the Chassidic masters,

is the pulse of life. In our relationship with G-d, the "run" is the warmth of spiritual fulfillment, while the "return" grounds us with a practical mitzvah. In a relationship with another, passion makes us run closer to the other person, while "returning" creates boundaries. Together, "run" and "return" create balance.

Inherent within a woman's body is the guided choreography of a G-d-centered marriage.

There's a visceral respect that grows from distance. It's not about what I can get from you, it's about you. When you own something, you can enjoy it at any time. When something isn't yours, you enjoy it with permission. In a marriage, pulling back creates more momentum for moving forward. Don't be scared to pull back.

2. Think Big

It's hard to remember that there is more to life than getting my kids to brush their teeth. Or get dressed for school. Or do their homework. So much of my energy goes into just keeping them functional. But I hope that won't be my legacy.

Parenting is about more than getting the kids from point A to B. Parenting means cultivating people with emotional intelligence, a strong moral compass and a healthy attitude - and most of all, soulful people concerned with their G-d-given mission.

But it's hard to think big when teeth need to be brushed.

The mitzvah of Family Purity revolves around a woman's immersion in the mikvah and subsequent purity. No one else immerses and becomes pure, not her husband or her children. So why is it called *Taharat HaMishpachah* "Family Purity" and not *Taharat HaIshah*, "Wo-

man's Purity"?

The name of the mitzvah is telling. The mikvah is not about the woman, it's about the family unit. Yes, she's the one who ensures that her flow has stopped for seven days, and she's the one who prepares for immersion; but the goal is bringing G-d into the home. If a child is conceived after she's gone to the mikvah (before her new flow begins), that child is positively affected. It takes her only a few minutes to immerse, but her child is impacted for life. Talk about forward thinking.

I think we often underestimate our long-term impact on others. In describing the woman of valor, King Solomon writes, "She watches the ways of her household." The woman is concerned not just about where her children are going tomorrow, but where they are going in 20 years. "She doesn't eat the bread of laziness," King Solomon continues. The woman of valor is not passive when it comes to her long-term impact.

3. Pull Back

There's an art to pulling back. While fashion magazines may illustrate the art of seduction and exposition, they often neglect to showcase the art of modesty. Modesty breeds respect. A conservative outfit says, "Hey, don't look at me like that; take me seriously!"

When a girl is too available and exposed, she compromises some of her dignity. She is sending a message that she needs a guy to notice her. Chivalry thrives when girls need to be pursued - and this holds true after marriage as well.

Taharat HaMishpachah means that G-d says that a woman is not always available. For almost two weeks out of the month, she's off-limits to her husband for physical affection and intimacy, which builds up excitement for their reunion. But even being apart can be good for the relationship.

Around a year or so after we got married, my husband said, "*Taharat HaMishpachah* really forces a man to respect his wife." I was taken aback. Did he not respect me when he married me? Why would our time of separation earn me respect? It's not like I'd done anything admirable.



But then I got it. There's a visceral respect that grows from distance. It's not about what I can get from you, it's about you.

When you own something, you can enjoy it at any time. When something isn't yours, you enjoy it with permission, in this case permission from G-d. Our relationship isn't mine to milk for pleasure, it's G-d's, and it needs to be treated with respect.

In a marriage, pulling back creates more momentum for moving forward. Don't be scared to pull back.

4. Sensuality Can Be Sacred

Since my husband and I don't touch each other in public, you might assume that we don't have a romantic or passionate relationship. Part of that assumption is that perhaps romance and passion are not nearly as important to G-d as are fidelity and raising a family.

Au contraire! The cycle of *Taharat HaMishpachah* keeps a couple's intimate life on their radar at all times. When they're apart, they're preparing to be together, counting and checking. When they're together, they know that it won't last forever, so they savor that time. Since they can't have any physical contact during menstruation and the subsequent week, the laws themselves make the couple obsessed with touch. If they can't touch because touch is

sensual, then touch becomes sensual. So much focus goes into the laws and restrictions of a couple's intimate life that you'd think it was the most important part of their lives. And it is.

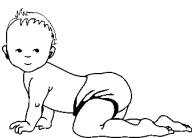
Intimacy is the most private part of a couple's relationship, one of the only things that they share to the exclusion of everyone else. It's the inner circle upon which all other concentric circles are balanced. It's the heartbeat of the relationship, pulsing energy to other parts of their lives. The more private their passion, the more it can be sustained. If the Holy Temple were the home, the Holy of Holies (accessed only on Yom Kippur by the High Priest) would be the couple's bedroom.

When couples fight, they're not interested in intimacy, which can turn into a vicious cycle: they feel distant, so they don't want to be close, but when they're not close, they feel more distant. The girl thinks, Maybe if he feels really alone, he'll change. The guy thinks, I'm too lonely to crawl out of my cave and communicate.

When a couple's intimate life is robust, it's easier for the couple to feel compassion for each other. And when a couple feels close, the kids feel it - everyone can feel it. If G-d values *shalom bayit* (peace in the home), it's obvious that He values the couple's intimate life as well.

•Continued on page 14

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"Thou Shalt Not Be Judgmental"

by Yossy Goldman

I once heard a story about a man who overheard his friend telling his wife on the phone, "Drop dead!"

"How can you speak that way to your wife?!" the eavesdropper fumed. The friend smiled and said, "She just asked me if her new dress was gorgeous, and I answered, 'Yes, drop-dead-gorgeous.'"

Hearing only half a conversation and drawing conclusions can be dangerous. I've lost count of how many times I've heard stories about others that I didn't want to believe, and indeed, upon investigation, they turned out to be either significant distortions or complete fabrications. I'm sure we've all had similar experiences.

In the Torah, we read the words, *Betzedek tishpot amitecha*, "You shall judge your fellow with righteousness." (Leviticus 19:15)

Rashi, the foremost Biblical commentator, first provides the simple analysis, which is that judges must rule righteously, without being swayed by any other considerations. In fact, the full title of a *beth din*, a Jewish court, is not only *beth din*, a "house of law," but *beth din tzedek*, a "house of just law." The law must be just, fair, and objective - otherwise the court itself is not doing justice.

But then Rashi adds a second interpretation, relevant not only for the judiciary but for all of us. "Another explanation is: Judge your fellow favorably" (i.e., give the benefit of the doubt).

The moral imperative to judge people favorably by giving them the benefit of the doubt is discussed in the Talmud, Ethics of the Fathers, and many other Jewish sources.



Too often, people are misjudged and condemned before we have all the facts at our disposal. There are so many stories expressing this theme that we could go on forever, but let me share a few.

My friend and colleague, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, tells the story of his early days in Johannesburg back in the '70s. He was a young, new rabbi in a synagogue frequented mainly by older people who were rather set in their ways. At some point during his first Yom Kippur there, a young man walked into the shul looking very out of place. He was wearing jeans and sandals, sporting long, frizzy hair - the consummate hippie. Rabbi Lipskar asked the *gabbai* to give the unexpected visitor the honor of opening the Holy Ark during the service. The *gabbai* was horrified. Who was this young man who was dressed so inappropriately? To give him such an honor was, to the *gabbai's* mind, unthinkable. But the rabbi insisted, and the *gabbai* acceded, albeit most reluctantly. To make a long story short, that Yom Kippur experience was the beginning of a spiritual journey for the young visitor. Today the former hippie is a respected *sofer* (ritual scribe) in a large American city.

I recently came across a letter to someone who complained to the Rebbe about a fellow who had been called into shul as the tenth man to help make the minyan. The complainant was outraged that this tenth man sat in the back of the shul reading the newspaper throughout the service.

The Rebbe suggested to the letter writer that he should appreciate how special it is that even a Jew who obviously cannot read Hebrew or participate in the service still comes in and gives up his time to help make the minyan.

It's all about perspective and giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Over 200 years ago, the holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev became famous for the lengths he would go to consider others favorably. Of the many stories that highlight his benevolent, non-judgmental attitude, one of my favorites is of his encounter with a young man outside shul on the holiest day of Yom Kippur. This strapping young man was eating publicly, in brazen violation of the fast.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said, "I'm sorry to see that you're obviously not feeling well, and you had to break your fast to preserve your health. I wish you better."

"I'm fine, Rabbi. I couldn't be healthier," replied the young man.

"Well, perhaps you forgot that today is Yom Kippur?"

"Who doesn't know that today is Yom Kippur, Rabbi?!"

"And are you also aware that Yom Kippur is a fast day, and we are not permitted to eat today?"

"Of course, I know! Which Jew doesn't know that, Rabbi?!"

Hearing this, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak looked heavenward and exclaimed, "Master of the Universe, see how special are your people, Israel. I have given this young man so many opportunities, but he absolutely refuses to tell a lie!"

All are innately holy, but how we judge them may make all the difference. I know it's not easy, but if we look at others favorably, then we ourselves will be behaving in a holy way, and this will bring out that innate holiness inside them.

Moreover, our rabbis taught: One who judges his friend favorably will himself be judged by G-d favorably.

FIVE THINGS MIKVA TAUGHT
Continued from page 13

5. There's Power In Being Vulnerable

Just when the moon is swallowed by the black night and disappears, it is reborn, a small sliver of light that, given 15 days, will become a luminous ball. Some things have to die to allow for rebirth. A seed disintegrates into the soil and then a new plant emerges. When I'm forced to concede that I'm wrong, I become open to a new perspective. When my ego feels crushed, something fresh will always emerge.

What keeps a relationship fresh? Humility. It takes lots of humility to keep the discipline of *Taharat HaMishpachah*. I want a hug, but G-d says, "Not now." *Taharat HaMishpachah* is what G-d wants of my marriage, whether I understand it or not. The culminating act of humility is immersion in the mikvah.

The Hebrew word for the act of immersion is *tovel*. Switch around the letters of *tovel* and you get the word *bittul*, "going beyond the self", transcending the ego. That's why, when we prepare for the mikvah, we are careful to remove any obstruction between our body and the water, so that we'll be thoroughly surrounded by the water, "disappearing" within

it. When I'm under the water, holding my breath for an instant, I often meditate on my dependence on G-d for life and for my marriage.

Apparently, G-d feels that a marriage needs a monthly dose of fresh air and rejuvenation. It's not only the separation that can make a relationship fresh, but the immersion in the mikvah itself. If the mikvah symbolizes *bittul*, the post-mikvah relationship is refreshed by that *bittul*.

It's no coincidence that our menstrual cycle is usually 28-30 days long, coinciding with the cycle of the moon. Just like the moon waxes and wanes, the uterine lining sheds its blood and then replenishes again. And when life disappoints us most and we feel vulnerable, we shed our smug self and seek a more humble path. Sometimes being vulnerable is the first step to a new beginning, like the immersion in the mikvah that renews and replenishes the marriage.

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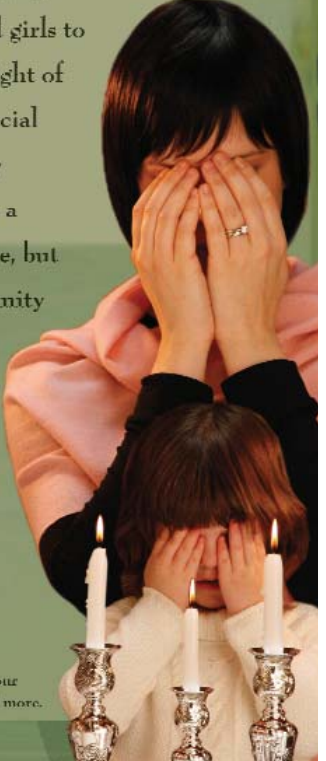
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