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ISSUE #24 | MAY 23, 2026 | י"ד סיון תשפ"ו

We want to wish everyone a Chag Sameach!

Gematria on the Parshah-Shavuot: Feeling the Fire of Sinai

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits



On Shavuot, we once again prepare to receive the Torah anew. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Shavuot is not merely about commemorating the past; it is about hearing Hashem call to us from Sinai every single year. Furthermore, the Rebbe quotes Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who teaches that not only should we experience the giving of the Torah anew each Shavuot, but every day we should learn Torah as if it were given today.

How can we experience the giving of the Torah in the present? How can we feel the fire of Sinai each and every day?

The Only Jew in the World

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov speaks about the greatness of Avraham Avinu. He asks: How was Avraham able to serve Hashem when the entire world stood against him? Rebbe Nachman explains that Avraham viewed himself as the only person in the world.

Imagine if Hashem called out to you and said, "I have a mission in this world that only you can accomplish." With what excitement and enthusiasm would a person run to fulfill it!

This is the mistake we often make. We see ourselves as just another Jew, a day as just another day, and a mitzvah as just another mitzvah. The Chafetz Chaim teaches that a Jew must view himself as the only Jew, each day as the only day, and every mitzvah as the only mitzvah.

opt this perspective if we know it is not literally true?

The answer is that, in the eyes of Hashem, every single Jew is treated as if he or she is the only Jew in the world. Hashem calls to each of us personally and entrusts us with His unique mission.

Sinai is the Heart of the World

The Torah reveals that this responsibility is not merely symbolic. The existence of the entire world depends upon the Jewish people accepting and living by the Torah.

Rashi asks a famous question: Why does the Torah add a hei to the sixth day of creation? The Torah first says Yom Echad, Yom Sheni, and so on. Then suddenly it says Yom HaShishi. Rashi explains that this refers to the special sixth day, the sixth of Sivan, when the Jewish people accepted the Torah. Rashi says that had the Jewish people not accepted the Torah, the world itself would have ceased to exist. Amazingly, the gematria of **יום הששי** (the sixth day) is 671, the same as **ישראל+סיני** (Israel+Sinai). How can Rashi's explanation inspire our avodat Hashem?

Chazal teach that every Jew is a letter in the Torah. Without even one letter, the entire Torah is invalid. So too, Hashem wants us to realize that if even one Jew is disconnected from Torah and mitzvot, the whole nation is incomplete.

We read these words and imagine they are speaking about someone else. The Torah wants us to realize that they are speaking about us.

We must recognize that our Torah and mitzvot mean the world to Hashem. He would have created the entire world for the mission of even one Jewish soul. This is why, when Hashem gives the Aseret HaDibrot, He speaks in the singular: "Anochi Hashem Elokecha," "Lo yihyeh lecha." The Torah says lecha and not lachem because Hashem entrusted His mission personally to every individual Jewish soul.

Shabbat: the Soul of the World



This idea does not apply only to receiving the Torah at Sinai. It applies to the continued existence of the world every single week.

The Or HaChaim HaKadosh asks why the Torah uses the word **vayinafash** regarding Shabbat. The word is commonly translated as "rested," yet it comes from the word **nefesh**, soul, rather than from the more common word for rest, **menuchah**.

He explains that Hashem created the world to exist one week at a time. The continuation of creation depends upon the Jewish people keeping Shabbat. When the Jewish people keep Shabbat, the world receives a **nefesh**, a soul, and continues to exist. Otherwise, the world would cease to be.

Amazingly, the gematria of **שבת וינפש** (Shabbat and He rested) is 1248, the same as **קבלת התורה** (Receiving the Torah).

When Jews keep Shabbat and study Torah, they are literally giving a **nefesh** to the world itself. Think about every moment of joy and blessing taking place anywhere in the world right now. All of it exists only because Jews are keeping Shabbat and learning Torah.

This is why the reward for Shabbat is so great. Through Shabbat, a Jew is sustaining the entire world and bringing life to all of creation.

Every Jew is Saving the World

There is a famous story about the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef Yeshiva, Chacham Ben Zion Abba Shaul. He was a tremendous tzaddik who knew the entire Talmud by heart and was renowned for the power of his blessings.

He was once asked how his blessings came true so consistently. He answered, "I love Jews so much that if my blessing did not come true, I would not be able to continue living."

One day, he was walking and noticed one of his more serious students staring at an advertisement by a bus stop. Suddenly, Chacham Ben Zion cried out, "Someone please help me!"

Without hesitation, the student ran over in panic. "Rabbi, what is wrong?"

Chacham Ben Zion replied, "Baruch Hashem, nothing is wrong. But I want to teach you something. If you were an ambulance driver on duty and received a call that someone needed help, would you stop for even a moment?"

"Of course not," the student answered. "So too with Torah study," Chacham Ben Zion explained. "Torah is not something you pause. It is life itself. It is like oxygen. Through learning Torah, you sustain life and bring blessing to the entire world. Never forget this."

Amazingly, the gematria of **למוד תורה** (studying Torah) is 691, the same as **השמים+הארץ** (heaven+earth), because Torah is sustaining and bringing blessing to the entire world.

This is how we can feel the fire of Sinai. We must remember that Hashem entrusted each of us with the mission of sustaining the world. If only one Jew existed, that alone would be enough for the world to exist. We are that Jew.

The Courage to Be Seen

By: Reb Adam Klasner



On Shavuot, we celebrate the giving of the Torah. But one detail always stands out to me.

The Torah was not given in a palace. Not in a beautiful city. Not in a place filled with comfort or certainty. It was given in the desert.

A desert is raw. Empty. Ownerless. There is nowhere to hide there.

And maybe that is exactly the point.

Most of us spend our lives trying to avoid the inner desert. We run from uncertainty. We run from vulnerability. We run from the places inside of us that feel empty, ashamed, afraid, or unseen. We hold back our love. We hold back our voice. We hold back our truth because we are terrified of how people will interpret us.

This week I was learning a powerful Medrash connected to Shavuot and Megillas Rus. The Medrash says something shocking.

If Reuven would have known the Torah would record that he tried saving Yosef, he would have carried Yosef home on his shoulders.

If Aharon would have known the Torah would record that he rejoiced for Moshe becoming the leader, he would have greeted him with drums and dancing. If Boaz would have known the Torah would record the kindness he showed Rus, he would have given her a royal feast.

At first glance, the Medrash sounds strange. Were these great people looking for publicity? Validation? Credit? But the deeper explanation is life changing.

They were not lacking goodness. They were lacking certainty.

Each one was afraid of how they would be perceived. Reuven feared his brothers would judge him. Aharon feared people would think he was pretending. Boaz feared people would misunderstand his kindness toward Rus.

So they held back. Not completely. But enough.

And that is the story of so many of our lives.

We love carefully. We speak carefully. We hide parts of ourselves. We stay emotionally controlled because somewhere deep inside, we are afraid.

Afraid of rejection. Afraid of being misunderstood. Afraid of looking foolish. Afraid to fully show up.

The Medrash says if they would have known how Heaven saw them, they would have acted differently.

Not because of ego. Because being truly seen gives a person courage.

Sometimes we think Hashem watches us to judge us.

But maybe the deeper truth is that Hashem watches us the way a loving parent watches a child learning to walk. Every movement matters. Every act of courage matters. Every moment of kindness matters.

You matter. Your struggle matters. Your effort matters. Your small acts of love matter. And most of the time, we have no idea how much hangs on one moment of courage.

Boaz did not know he was helping build the lineage of David HaMelech and Mashiach. Aharon did not know he was strengthening the man who would take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Reuven did not know history itself was hanging on his decision.

And neither do we. You do not know what one moment of presence can do for your child. You do not know what one honest conversation can do for your marriage. You do not know what one act of compassion can awaken in another human being.

Shavuot is not just the anniversary of receiving the Torah. It is the reminder that Hashem believes in us far more than we believe in ourselves.



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The question is whether we are willing to stop hiding long enough to receive that truth.

Maybe this Shavuot is an opportunity to soften.

To stop living so guarded. To stop withholding love. To stop shrinking your soul because of fear.

The Torah was given in the desert because real transformation begins the moment a person is willing to stand honestly in the wilderness and finally allow themselves to be seen.

Shavuot and the Taste of Torah

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



Eating Milchig on Shavuot is one of the most familiar Minhagim of the Yom Tov, yet it is also one of the most misunderstood. The Poskim offer a remarkable range of explanations for the custom, and each carry their own emphasis and practical ramifications.

The Mishna Berura (494:3:12) explains that when Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah, they immediately found themselves unable to continue eating meat the way they had until then. Suddenly, the laws of kashrus applied. Their pots had become unusable, having been used within twenty-four hours for food that no longer met the Torah's standards. Meat now required shechitah with a properly checked knife, removal of forbidden fats and blood, rinsing and salting procedures, and properly kashered utensils. None of that could be prepared immediately. Dairy, however, required none of these complicated procedures. Thus, dairy became the practical choice of food.

According to this approach, eating Milchig on Shavuot is historical. We recreate the first meal Bnei Yisrael were able to eat after Matan Torah, commemorating the moment Torah instantly transformed ordinary life into a life governed by Halacha.

The Chok Yaakov (494:3:9), citing the Kol Bo (52:10), explains that Torah is compared in Tanach to honey and milk (see Shir HaShirim 4:11). Eating dairy on Shavuot becomes a physical expression of the sweetness and nourishment Torah symbolizes.

The Bnei Yissaschar (Chelek 1, Ma'amar 4) pushes the symbolism a step further. Milk's white colour represents Divine kindness and mercy, and the opening letters of the verse "להגיד בבקר חסדך" spell the word "חלב". Torah was not earned, but given as an act of Divine Chessed. Dairy therefore symbolizes not merely Torah itself, but the manner in which Torah was given.

The Rama (Orach Chayim 494:3) codifies this practice, but interestingly intertwines it with the unique Korban of the Yom Tov. He points out that just as on Pesach there are two cooked foods to correspond with the Korban Pesach and Korban Chagigah, on Shavuot as well, if dairy and meat are eaten, each accompanied by a separate loaf of bread, they jointly correspond to the Shte HaLechem brought historically on Shavuot.

The Be'er Heitiv (494:3:8) shares that he heard that we eat milk and afterwards meat, specifically unlike the three angels that visited Abraham, who ate meat and milk together, because it was on account of this that the Torah was given to Yisrael.

Let's unpack this idea.

The Gemara in Shabbos 88b tells us that when Moshe ascended to receive the Torah, the angels protested that it should remain in Heaven. The Midrash (Midrash Tehillim 8; see also Tosfos, Bava Metzia 86b) records the following defense: Hashem said to the angels: You ask that the Torah remain in Heaven, but was it not you who, when you visited Abraham, ate meat and milk? Even a child, when he comes home from school and his mother gives him bread and meat and cheese, says: "Today, my Rebbe taught me, 'Do not cook a lamb in its mother's milk'" - and the angels had nothing to respond.

On Shavuot, we demonstrate precisely that point. By consciously separating dairy and meat according to Halacha, we affirm why Torah belongs with human beings and not angels. The Torah is meant to be lived, not stay theoretical in a tower in the clouds.

The Magen Avraham (494:3:6) cites the Zohar's reason: the seven weeks of Sefirat HaOmer parallel the seven clean days a woman counts towards her Tahara. Just as blood transforms into milk, so too this represents the movement from Din to Rachamim.

The Aruch Hashulchan (494:5) makes the metaphor more concrete: Bnei Yisrael were transformed from the impurity of Egypt to the holiness of Kedusha. We therefore eat milk - which itself forms from blood - as a hint that strict judgment was transformed into mercy.

The seven weeks were not merely a calendar countdown. They were a process of internal transformation, mirrored in the physical reality of milk forming from blood.

A final explanation connects the Minhag directly to Moshe. The day Moshe was drawn from the Nile by Basya and refused to nurse from an Egyptian woman - insisting instead on being nursed by his own mother Yocheved - fell on Shavuot, exactly three months after his birth on the 7th of Adar (Sotah 12b, Shmos 2:7, Rashi there, Kiddushin 38a). The mouth that would one day speak the words of Torah would drink only Jewish milk. We eat dairy on Shavuot as a commemoration of this act of sanctity, as we continue to learn the words of Torah transmitted by Moshe Rabbeinu.

This range of reasons is not merely academic. Different reasons yield different practical conclusions, and the distinctions between them are real.

According to the Mishna Berura's historical approach, dairy is not inherently required - it's simply what Bnei Yisrael happened to eat because meat was unavailable. One could theoretically fulfill the commemoration by refraining from meat. But according to the Chok Yaakov and Bnei Yissaschar, where dairy symbolizes Torah itself or Divine kindness, eating dairy becomes essential.

The Be'er Heitiv's explanation - that we separate dairy and meat to demonstrate why Torah belongs to humans - requires eating both. Similarly, the Rama's connection to the Shte HaLechem requires both dairy and meat, each accompanied by bread, mirroring the two loaves brought in the Beis HaMikdash. But according to the mystical approach of the Zohar, where milk represents the transformation from judgment to mercy, dairy alone may suffice.

If the custom recalls the first meal after Matan Torah (Mishna Berura), it would logically belong to the day - when the Torah was given and they first confronted the new laws of kashrus. But if dairy symbolizes Torah as "honey and milk" (Chok Yaakov), it could be eaten at either the night or day meal, whenever one wishes to express that sweetness. The Rama's parallel to Shte HaLechem, however, connects specifically to the day, when the Korban was brought.

The Rama explicitly requires two separate loaves of bread - one for the dairy meal and one for the meat meal - corresponding to the Shte HaLechem. This detail matters only if one follows the Rama's reasoning. According to the other explanations, a single loaf with the dairy meal would suffice.

Each explanation reveals a different dimension of Matan Torah and of what Torah itself means, reflecting "שבעים שנים" This is part of the essence of Matan Torah and the message of Shavuot itself. This is also reflected in the words we say every single morning in Birkas Ha-Torah: "וְהָעֵרֶב נָא ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת דְּבָרֵי תוֹרָתְךָ בְּפִינוּ" - "Please make the words of Your Torah sweet in our mouths." We are not only asking to understand Torah; we are asking to taste it - and find it sweet.

At Har Sinai, Am Yisrael declared

"כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע"

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



On the surface, the order seems backwards. Normally, a person first understands, and only then commits.

Yet Am Yisrael said: first נעשה - we will do, and only afterward נשמע - we will hear.

The Gemara in Talmud Bavli teaches that when the Jewish people placed נעשה before נשמע, angels descended

and crowned them.

Why was this so extraordinary?

The Zohar calls this moment: "רוח דמיה מנותח" - "the secret of faith." This was not irrationality. It was something far deeper. The Zohar explains that Am Yisrael connected themselves to something beyond ordinary intellect - a recognition that Torah originates from a level higher than what the human mind can fully grasp at the outset.

Some truths can only be understood after a person enters them. The Tiferet Yisrael (ch. 29) explains that Torah is Divine wisdom. If a person insists on fully understanding it before committing to it, he will never truly receive it - because finite intellect alone cannot contain infinite wisdom.

First comes attachment. Then comes understanding.

This is not only philosophical. It is the structure of all spiritual growth.

The Arizal teaches throughout Etz Chaim: "אין אור בלי כלי" - there is no light without a vessel.

In the language of Kabbalah: נעשה is the building of the כלי (vessel), and נשמע is the reception of the אור (light).

Every mitzvah builds spiritual vessels - every berachah, every act of restraint, every moment of Torah learning, every act of honesty or chesed.

Holiness is not merely inspiration. Holiness is construction. This is why Judaism emphasizes action so heavily.

The Sefer HaChinuch writes: "האדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו" - a person is shaped according to his actions.

We often think: first feel inspired, then change. Torah teaches the reverse: first act, then the heart follows.

The Derech Hashem (Part IV) explains that mitzvot are not merely symbolic. Human actions below awaken spiritual influence above. First the act. Then the revelation. נעשה precedes נשמע.

This also sheds light on the Arizal's teaching of שבירת הכלים - the breaking of the vessels. The vessels shattered because the light entering them was greater than what they could contain. Light without vessels becomes destructive.

Perhaps this is one of the central spiritual struggles of our generation. People seek: inspiration without discipline, spirituality without structure, emotional fire without boundaries. But uncontrolled fire destroys.

The Ben Ish Chai explains that fire can either illuminate or consume. The difference lies in whether there is a vessel capable of containing it. This is the deeper contrast between Sinai and Nadav and Avihu.

At Sinai there was: awe, boundaries, preparation, humility, structure. And therefore, the revelation endured. Perhaps this is also why Torah was given on a low mountain.

The Gemara in Talmud Bavli Ta'anit teaches: "מה מים מניחין מקום נבוה והולכין למקום נמוך, אף דברי תורה אין מתקיימין אלא במי שדעתו שפלה"

Just as water flows downward, so too Torah rests only within one who is humble.

Humility creates space for revelation. The ego fills space with itself. Humility leaves room for Hashem.

The Arizal explains that the days of Sefirat HaOmer are a process of refining the seven middot: חסד, גבורה, תפארת, נצח, הוד, יסוד, מלכות.

Shavuot is therefore not merely the anniversary of Matan Torah. It is the completion of becoming capable of receiving Torah.

And perhaps the deepest point of all is this: The light itself was never missing. The אור of Sinai never disappeared.

Hashem is constantly giving. Torah is constantly flowing. The voice of Sinai never truly ceased. The problem is not that the light is absent. The problem is that we are often not prepared to receive it.



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