

Good Yom Tov and Chag Sameach, everyone.

The Torah's description of *Mattan Torah* at Sinai begins by informing us that it took place during the third month after the exodus from Egypt.

שמות יט: (א) בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני:

Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim in the middle of Nisan, yet the Torah was not given to them until the beginning of Sivan—seven weeks later. The **Medrash Tanchuma** wonders: Why did Hashem wait so long before giving the Torah? Why didn't He present it to Bnei Yisrael as soon as they left Mitzrayim?

מדרש תנחומא ולמה לא נתנה התורה כשיצאו ממצרי' לא כך אמר למשה בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה Giving the Torah was the fourth stage of redemption—a fulfillment of *לעם לי לעם*. Why not do it immediately, like the other three stages וגאלתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, וגאלתי?

Another question: If we are commemorating *Mattan Torah* on Shavuot, why does the Torah never state explicitly that Shavuot is when we received the Torah? For some reason, the Torah left it to Chazal to explain the connection when they inserted in our tefillos *זמן מתן תורתנו*, thereby indicating that we are celebrating the time the Torah was given.

Rav Hirsch, in his commentary to Vayikra 23:21, writes that the essence of Shavuot is not Hashem's **giving** of the Torah but the Jewish people's **preparing** to accept the Torah. What we are celebrating and commemorating is all the work necessary to receive the Torah. The lesson for all time is that, just as the Jews in the desert prepared themselves to accept the Torah 3,300 years ago, so must we, in our days, prepare ourselves to receive the Torah.

חג מתן תורה איננו מתייחס לעובדה של נתינת התורה; אלא הוא חוגג את הכנת עצמנו להיות ראויים לקבלת תורה.

The Holiday of Mattan Torah is not related to the giving of the Torah, as much as celebrating the preparation necessary to make ourselves worthy to accept Torah.

That is why the Torah calls this holiday Shavuot, highlighting the weeks of preparation leading up to receiving the Torah.

But what were they preparing for? According to the **Gemara in Shabbos 88a** Hashem **forced** them to accept Torah. Does coercion need preparation?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד א: ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם.

The famous **Gemara in Shabbos 88a** teaches that, at Har Sinai, God suspended the mountain above the heads of the Jewish people like a barrel and said *"If you accept the Torah—that is great; and if not—that is where you will be buried..."*

When the Torah was presented in that fashion, **of course** the Jews accepted it. But why were they forced in the first place?

The **Maharal** (*Gur Aryeh*, Shemos 19:17) writes.

אבל העיקר הפירוש אשר נראה פשוט, כי כפה עליהם ההר כגיגית לומר "אם לא תקבלו התורה, שם תהא קבורתכם לומר כי התורה היא הכרחית לקבלה, ואם לא יקבלו התורה" שמה תהא קבורתם. "וידוע כי דברים המוכחרים להיות הם חשובים במעלה יותר, שאי אפשר מבלעדם ואין קיום לנמצא בזולתם, לכך כפה עליהם ההר כגיגית להודיע מעלת התורה, שאי אפשר מבלעדה כלל. ואם לא היה עושה זה, היו אומרים כי התורה אין הכרחית לעולם, רק ברצון קבלו עליהם, ואם לא קבלו "לא היו צריכין. . .

that to accept the Torah as the Book of God's truth, the guide to objective reality, **we must acknowledge** that its acceptance is absolutely essential for the existence of the world... **We must understand that acceptance and observance of Torah is as necessary for our existence as the air we breathe and the food we eat. It is the definition of Reality. The Torah is a necessity and had to be imposed, to show that, without it, the world would revert to chaos—that, ultimately, there really is no choice.**

שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א' י' שאילו לא קבלוה הייתי מחזיר עולמי לתהו ובהו,

The statement that if you do not accept it—your lives will end...was a statement of fact, not a threat. It was presenting the idea that, without accepting the objective truth of Torah, we are literally digging our own graves, we are signing up for a meaningless life, and that keeping Torah isn't something we do because we feel like it—it is something we must do for our spiritual survival, for a life of meaning.

How often do we approach the *mitzvos* as discretionary? How often do we reason that they are important because they will add to our lives, enhance our lives? When we take that approach, the implicit assumption is that there is nothing really missing in our lives without the *mitzvos*. It's as if we observe mitzvos out of the goodness of our hearts, that we want to fulfill only those parts of the Torah that "speak to us" or that will make us happier. This is the message of the Gemara's statement that "God suspended the mountain over them": Torah must be fully accepted with absolute commitment to the word of God (all of the Torah, not just the parts that "feel good"). Teaching Judaism as simply a list of desirable rules and practices is like teaching safety rules or traffic laws, as just a list of nice practices, instead of what they really are--rules made to save lives.

The **Gemara, Brachos 61b**, teaches that when the Romans prohibited Torah study, **Rabbi Akiva** continued to study, despite the risk of his life. When a fellow Jew, Papus, asked why he put himself in mortal danger for Torah study, Rabbi Akiva answered with a parable: A hungry fox, standing on the river bank, called out to a fish, "Fish, why do you subject yourself to such a dangerous existence? Don't you know that a little further down the river are fishermen just waiting to catch you? Join me on the riverbank and you will be safe." The fish replied, "What you say about the fisherman might be true. But if I am not immersed in the water, then surely I will die. My only chance to live is in the water, despite its peril." Rabbi Akiva ended: "Just as a fish cannot live without water, we cannot live without Torah."

God coerced the Jewish people in order to transmit the understanding that we need Torah, that we cannot survive without it; that without it we are like fish without water.

But forcing Torah upon them had a downside. In the same Gemara, Shabbos 88a, Rav Acha bar Yaakov questions this act of coercion because being forced to accept the Torah would give the Jewish people an excuse.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח עמוד א: אמר רב אחא בר יעקב: מכאן מודעא רבה לאורייתא.
רש"י: מודעא רבה - שאם יזמינם לדין למה לא קיימתם מה שקבלתם עליכם - יש להם תשובה, שקבלוה באונס.

The acceptance of the Yoke of Heaven cannot be imposed on a person from the outside.

Indeed, Hashem wanted the Jews to accept the Torah voluntarily...He wanted them to work towards the understanding of accepting the Torah with a sense of joy and love...to reach a place of excitement. But this did not happen until Purim...

אמר רבא: אף על פי כן, הדור קבלוה בימי אחשורוש. דכתיב קימו וקבלו היהודים, קיימו מה שקיבלו כבר.

The **Chasam Sofer** writes that the Torah intentionally does not identify Shavuos with Mattan Torah, because—it was not until the Purim story that there was a full acceptance of Torah, קבלת התורה מאהבה,

תורת משה פרשת צו

ולכן לא נכתב (בפ' בא) שנעשה יום טוב על קבלת התורה, אבל עד שלא קבלו תורה מאהבה [בימי אחשורוש, כשבת פ"ח ע"א], ואמרו מודעה רבה לאורייתא (שם), אז לא יתכן לעשות יום טוב על קבלת התורה

The Torah is something we should accept with love and joy. The Pasuk (Devarim 26:11) says ושמחת בכל הטוב, and that we should be happy with all "the good." The **Baal HaTurim** says that "the good" is referring to Torah, understood from הטוב, which is 22 in *gematriya*, representing the Torah which was given with 22 letters.

בעל הטורים דברים (פרשת כי תבוא) פרק כו פסוק יא

הטוב. עולה כ"ב. בשביל התורה (פסיקתא דר"כ פ' עשר תעשר) שניתנה בכ"ב אותיות (שהש"ר א):

Similarly, commenting on this same *Pasuk*, the **Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh** writes, based on the **Gemara Brachos 5a**, that ultimate *toiv* is Torah...

אור החיים דברים פרשת כי תבוא פרק כו פסוק ח: ושמחת בכל הטוב...ירמוז במאמר בכל הטוב אל התורה כאומרם ז"ל (ברכות ה' א) ואין טוב אלא תורה, שאם היו בני אדם מרגישים במתיקות ועריבות טוב התורה היו משתגעים ומתלהטים אחריה ולא יחשב בעיניהם מלא עולם כסף וזהב למאומה כי התורה כוללת כל הטובות שבעולם:

Then he adds “*that if people really appreciated the incredible unparalleled sweetness and pleasantness associated with the Torah, they would literally go out of their minds to pursue it. Money and riches would have no value. Nothing else would have value, for the Torah includes within it all of the goodness in the world.*”

In the same vein, the **Chayei Adam** comments on the pasuk from Devarim 28:47: תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך: He says in the name of the Ar”i z”l, that if we truly appreciated *mitzvos*, every time we performed a *mitzva*, we would have greater joy than any other pleasure or acquisition...

חיי אדם חלק א כלל סח סעיף יג
השמחה הגדולה במצוה, ופי' האר”י ז”ל שזה שכתוב [דברים כ”ה מ”ז] תחת אשר לא עבדת כו' בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל, רצה לומר שלא שמחת בעבודה יותר מאילו מצאת רוב כל תענוגים ואבנים טובות ומרגליות, ואמרינן [ברכות ל”א א'] אלא מתוך שמחה של מצוה:
:מצוה:

Even the study of *mitzvos* can be a great joy. In his *hakdamah*, preface, to his *Iglei Tal*, the Sochatchover Rebbe, z”l, writes that enjoying the study of Torah is part of the *mitzva* of *Talmud Torah*.

אגלי טל הקדמה: אדרבא כי זה היא עיקר מצות לימוד התורה להיות שש ושמה ומתענג בלימודו ואז דברי תורה נבלעין בדמו. ומאחר שנהנה מדברי תורה הוא נעשה דבוק לתורה.

The study of Torah should engender a heightened sense of joy within a person. The underlying principle of Torah study establishes the ideal that a person should envision the truth and be overwhelmed with joy by experiencing firsthand the depth and clarity of mind achieved through Torah study. The primary objective of the mitzvah of limud haTorah is the pleasure and satisfaction one derives when he understands a passage of his learning.

I am sure we have all had moments in our lives, when we were aware of a feeling of overwhelming joy and connection. But we have so many other priorities; other things that we focus on and look towards to bring us joy, so many distractions, that it is hard to feel this consistently.

But as **Rav Hirsch** writes in *Collected Writings* (Vol I, p. 269):

“... *the Sinaitic Word of God!* אנכי, *It proclaims. “I am your God!” But if I am your God, if you say “yes” with all your heart and soul to the solemn Word of God, then לא יהי לך, you must say “no” to all else. Then this אנכי alone must take possession of your whole internal and external world. Then you are allowed no other god, neither in your heart nor in your soul, and neither in the heaven nor on the earth.*”

This attitude and appreciation takes preparation. As the **Chinuch** wrote in *Mitzva 306* about *sefiras ha'omer*:

שרשי המצוה. על צד הפשט, לפי שכל עקרון של ישראל אינו אלא התורה, ומפני התורה נבראו שמים וארץ, וכמו שכתוב (ירמיהו לג כה) אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה וגו', והיא העקר והסבה שנגאלו ויצאו ממצרים, כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני ויקימוה, וכמו שאמר השם למשה (שמות ג יב) וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה. ופרוש הפסוק הוציאך אותם ממצרים, יהיה לך אות שתעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה, כלומר, שתקבלו התורה שהיא העקר הגדול שבשביל זה הם נגאלים והיא תכלית הטובה שלהם, וענין גדול הוא להם יותר מן החרות מעבדות, ולכן יעשה השם למשה אות בצאתם מעבדות לקבלת התורה, כי הטפל עושין אותו לעולם אל העקר.

It is from the roots of the commandment from the angle of the simple understanding [that] since the entire essence of Israel is only the Torah, and because of the Torah were the heavens and earth created, and as it is stated (Jeremiah 33:25), "Were it not for my covenant day and night, etc." And it is the essence and the reason that they were redeemed and left from Egypt - in order that they receive the Torah at Sinai, and fulfill it. And [it is] like God said to Moshe (Exodus 3:12), "And this will be the sign for you that I have sent you; when you take out the people from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." And the understanding of the verse is [that] your taking them out from Egypt is a sign for you that you shall worship God on this mountain - meaning that you shall receive the Torah, which is the great principle for which they were redeemed and it is their ultimate good. And it is a great matter for them, more than freedom from slavery. And hence God made a sign of their leaving Egypt for the receiving of the Torah; as we always make what is secondary into a sign for what is the essence.

ומפני כן, כי היא כל עקרון של ישראל ובעבורה נגאלו ועלו לכל הגדלה שעלו אליה, נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו כעבד ישאף צל, וימנה תמיד מתי יבוא העת הנכסף אלינו שיצא לחרות, כי המנין מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע אל הזמן ההוא.

And because of this - that it is [the] essence of Israel, and because of it were they redeemed and went up to all of the greatness to which they rose - we were commanded to tally from the morrow of the holiday of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah; to show about ourselves the great desire [we have] for the honored day, which our hearts yearn [for] like 'a slave seeks shade' and always tallies when will come the yearned time that he goes out to freedom. As the tally shows about a man that all of his deliverance and all of his desire is to reach that time. And that which we count to the omer, meaning, "Such and such days have passed from the tally," and we do not tally "Such and such days do we have to the time," is because all of this shows us the great desire to reach the time [of Shavuos].

On Shavuos, we read **Megillas Rus**. Why? We who have been born into a life of Torah and Mitzvos can benefit from remembering that given the choice—we should run towards Torah and *mitzvos*. As Rus famously said to Naomi—*Where you go I will go, where you sleep I will sleep, Your nation is my nation, your God, my God.*: כִּי אֶל-אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלָיוּ וּבְאֲשֶׁר תִּלְיְנִי אֵלָיוּן עִמָּךְ עִמִּי וְאֵל-הָיָה אֱלֹהֵי.

Shavuos was the day that the famous *ger tzedek*, Avraham ben Avraham, was burned at the stake in 1749 in Vilna for converting to Judaism. Avraham ben Avraham was born Valentin Potocki, a child of one the most prominent Polish families in the Kingdom of Poland. His memory and self sacrifice to be a Jew, remains as a reminder of how precious the Torah is and how we never should take it for granted nor approach it from a place of coercion.

The **Aruch Hashulchan** writes that the reason the Torah does not identify Shavuos as the day Torah was given is because Hashem does not want us to understand Torah as an experience that happened only once, long ago. **Shavuos commemorates an ongoing experience—the ongoing communication and relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem through His Holy Torah, something we have an opportunity to accept with *simcha* each and every day!**

ערוך השולחן אורח חיים סימן תצד סעיף ב אף על פי שהתורה לא זכרה עניין מתן תורה בשבועות לפי שהתורה כשניתנה ניתנה לעד ולעולמי עולמים ואין שייך לקבוע יום מיוחד בשביל זה כבכל המועדים שרק ביום זה היה עניין המיוחד לזה כמו יציאת מצרים בפסח וסוכת ענני כבוד בסוכות שהיתה לזמן קבוע בהליכתם במדבר אבל התורה הוא לעד ולעולמי עולמים

Every day of our lives, we have the opportunity to receive the Torah anew. But it takes preparation.

And we must ask ourselves: Are we really ready for *Matan Torah*? Have we prepared ourselves properly? Do we run towards Torah? Do we have within us a deep, serious determination to lovingly and joyfully accept and fulfill all the *mitzvos* of Hashem? When our ancestors were “offered” the Torah, they responded נעשה ונשמע. In their place, would we have readily responded the same way? We are taught that Hashem gave us so many *mitzvos* because of His regard for the Jewish people. רצה הקב"ה לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה. ומצוות. Does this reflect the way we see Mitzvos? Do we see *mitzvos* as precious opportunities?

We are about to recite Yizkor, when we think of loved ones who are no longer here with us. We are here to honor them and their memories ... to continue the precious legacy of the Torah our ancestors bequeathed to us—through the lives they lived, the *mesirus nefesh* they showed, and the values they represented. One meaningful way to remember those who are no longer with us is to use their memory, the lessons from their lives, to inspire us to be better and greater. Let us think about the past, about all those who dedicated themselves to keeping the flame of Torah and Yiddishkeit alive, to transmit their values to us. Let us honor them today by committing to make the Torah **real** in our lives...and live each day cherishing every moment and opportunity to live lives of purpose and meaning with real **happiness**. Let us commit **today** to develop an attitude, of joy and appreciation, towards Hashem, His Torah and His *mitzvos*. May we be *zoche* to appreciate the gift of Torah and Yiddishkeit and connect to Hashem through His Holy Torah each and every day of our lives...amen.