

THE CHABAD WEEKLY

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❖ SHAVUOT

The Unity of the Jewish People: The festival of Shavuot begins Thursday evening, June 9th.. What does it mean? The joys of cheesecake? Or the real beginning of the Jewish people... Shavuot celebrates the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. This was indeed the beginning of our full identity as Jews, and the entire Jewish people was present. Clearly, every individual alive at the time was there. Who could miss this phenomenal event? But also, the Rabbis tell us, the souls of all Jews who would ever be born, including all future converts to Judaism, were present.

The Giving of The Torah is the expression of a bond which unites all Jews who have ever lived or will ever live. For this reason those who were living in the time of Moses were inspired by an atmosphere of peace, unity and brotherly love as soon as they came to the Sinai region. This was the preparation for the Giving of the Torah a few days later. The Zohar says: "G-d, the Jewish people and Torah are one". Torah is the bond. This means that from Sinai onwards, every thought, word or action in fulfillment of the Torah is both a connection with G-d and a link with all other Jews. Every time we fulfill a Mitzva (Command) we are therefore bonding with the Creator and also expressing the inner and eternal unity of the Jewish people.

Shavuot celebrates the day when the Jewish people heard the Ten Commandments. It was a moment of total awareness of the Presence of G-d, with the knowledge that every step in our daily lives should be in harmony with that Divine eternal Oneness. The ten statements of The Ten Commandments concern both laws between man and G-d (such as Shabbat) and laws between man and man (such as not to steal). Laws concerning action; concerning speech (do not take My Name in vain) and even concerning thought and feeling (do not covet that which belongs to another). The Ten Commandments function as a summary of the entire Torah: the Sages point out the text of the Commandments has 613 letters, hinting at all the 613 Mitzvot.

Later, Moses ascended Mount Sinai and was there for forty days and forty nights, neither eating nor sleeping, beyond time. He learnt every aspect of Torah with all its levels of application. This included all the details of the 613 Mitzvot and how they would be applied in Torah guidance throughout the ages. Later on Moses began imparting his knowledge to Joshua and the elders, a process which continued throughout the forty years in the desert. In this, he was transmitting his inspired awareness of the entire Torah. He transformed his pupils, so that they like he, had the power to transmit Torah in its entirety through the generations in an unbroken chain.

Why do we eat cheesecake and other milk foods on Shavuot? One answer is: the Torah is compared to milk. In the same way that milk totally sustains a young child, providing all the vitamins and proteins he or she needs, so the Torah provides total guidance about how to live. Whatever situation we may be in, whether in the age of the long-bow or the micro-chip, Torah gives full advice, guidance and direction to our lives. (A project of Chabad-Lubavitch World Headquarters, Produced by Lubavitch News Service, chabadonline.com)

In The Desert: In the desert there are no office buildings or factories. So if you lived in the desert, chances are you wouldn't have a job. There'd be no boss bossing you, and no underlings under you. In the desert there are no town or neighborhoods. No old money, no new money, no social climbers and no social climbed-overs. In the desert there aren't even any department stores or groceries. You'd eat manna from heaven and wear the same pair of shoes for forty years. That is why, say our sages, G-d gave us the Torah in the desert. Had He given it to us on Wall Street, He would have had to decide whom to appoint to the board and who should retain a controlling interest. Had He given it to us in the Holy Land, He'd have had to decide if

He wants it in religious Jerusalem, mystical Safed or hi-tech Tel Aviv. Or perhaps He'd have preferred a Marxist kibbutz or even a neo-Zionist settlement?

G-d wanted no shareholders in his Torah, no corporate structure, no social or political context. In fact, no context whatsoever. Just us and the Torah. Wouldn't it have been great to stay in the desert? But as soon as G-d was sure that we've gotten the message--that we understood that the Torah is not the product of any particular age, environment or cultural milieu, and that it belongs, absolutely and unequivocally, to each and every one of us--he sent us to the cities and the towns of His world, to its farms and marketplaces, to its universities and office buildings. He told us that now that He's done His part, it's up to us to make His Torah relevant in all these places and in all these contexts. Still, it's nice to come back to the desert once in a while. At least for a visit. (By Tzvi Freeman, author of Bringing Heaven Down to Earth: 365 Meditations of the Rebbe, chabadonline.com)

Ink and Stone: The Torah, comes in two forms: written and engraved. On the last day of his life, Moses inscribed the Torah on parchment scrolls. But this written Torah was preceded by an engraved Torah: forty years earlier, at Mount Sinai, the Divine law was given to us in the form of Ten Commandments etched by the hand of G-d in two tablets of stone. When something is written, the substance of the letters that express it--the ink--remains a separate entity from the substance upon which they have been set--the parchment. On the other hand, letters engraved in stone are forged in it: the words are stone and the stone is words.

By the same token, there is an aspect of Torah that is "inked" on our soul: we understand it, our emotions are roused by it; it becomes our "lifestyle" or even our "personality"; but it remains something additional to ourselves. Yet there is a dimension of Torah that is engraved in our being. There is a dimension of Torah which expresses a bond with G-d that is of the very essence of the Jewish soul. (By Tzvi Freeman, chabadonline.com)

Torah & Reality: Our sages tell us that when G-d spoke the Ten Commandments at Sinai, the Divine voice had no echo. Our mission as a people, entrusted to us at Sinai, is to implement the ethos and ideals of Torah in our world: to teach humanity that no matter what the conditions of a particular time or society might be, there is a transcendent, unequivocal, divinely ordained truth and code of behavior to adhere to. But often one may feel challenged by a seemingly unresponsive and resisting world. It may appear that one or another of Torah's precepts does not "fit in" with the prevalent reality. So the Torah tells us that the voice which sounded G-d's message to humanity had no echo.

An echo is created when a sound meets with a substance that resists it; instead of absorbing its waves, the substance repels them, bouncing them back to the void. The voice of the Ten Commandments had no echo, because it permeated every object in the universe. So any "resistance" we might meet in implementing them is superficial and temporary. Ultimately, the essence of every created being is consistent with, and wholly receptive to, the goodness and perfection that its Creator desires of it. (Ibid)

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. (Ibid)

ON THE EVE OF SHAVUOT 5557 (1797) THE ALTER REBBE TAUGHT:

SANCTIFY THEM TODAY AND TOMORROW AND THEY SHALL CLEANSE THEIR GARMENTS. "SANCTIFY THEM TODAY AND TOMORROW," IS DONE FROM ABOVE, BUT "THEY SHALL CLEANSE THEIR GARMENTS" - ONE MUST DO HIMSELF. THIS WAS THE ENTIRE TEACHING.

THE TZEMACH TZEDEK ELABORATED: "SANCTIFY THEM " WAS SAID BY G-D TO MOSHE. THE EXTENSION OF MOSHE IS IN EVERY GENERATION AND THEY ARE ABLE TO SANCTIFY THE "TODAY" AND THE "TOMORROW"; BUT FOR THIS IS NEEDED",...AND THEY SHALL CLEANSE THEIR GARMENTS" - THE GARMENTS OF THOUGHT, SPEECH AND DEED. THIS MUST BE DONE BY EACH PERSON ON HIS OWN. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, SIVAN -5).