



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Shavuot
תשפג

Authored by Rabbi Avi Cohen
Partners Detroit

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Partners In Torah

Mission Statement:

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Welcome.

Thank you for coming.

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.

The president of the local JCC was once confronted by an angry board member at a meeting. This person was upset because the JCC was closed on all Jewish holidays, including Shavuot. "I understand the JCC being closed on the High Holidays and Passover," he accused, "but what's it doing being closed on all those *Mickey Mouse* holidays?!"

Indeed, to so many Jews the festival of Shavuot doesn't even appear on their calendar, even though it is the most important holiday on the Jewish calendar. Why? Because the entire universe and everything in it, was created one purpose; that the Jewish people accept the Torah on Sinai! If the Jewish nation did not agree to receive the Torah, the creation would have ceased to continue to exist. This concept is revealed in a verse of the Torah.

Hashem created the world in six days, and at the end of the first day the Torah says (Genesis 1:5):

ספר בראשית פרק א
וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד

5) *And it was evening and it was morning day one.*

Similarly, on each of the subsequent days, the Torah says, "*and it was evening and it was morning day two, day three etc.*" Yet when the sixth day came, the Torah added the letter "ה" and said, "*and it was evening and it was morning - the sixth day - יום הששי*. What is the meaning of the extra ה?

In the rules of Hebrew grammar there is the concept of the ה' הידיעה - the identifying ה. We find an example of this concept in the Book of Esther, מגילת אסתר. Our Sages teach us that even though the name of Hashem does not appear explicitly even once in the entire megillah, every time it says "The king -- המלך-- with

the identifying ה , it is a hidden reference to the Ultimate King, Hashem, the King of all Kings. Similarly, ***The sixth day*** – is referring to the most important “sixth day” in the Jewish calendar, the sixth day of the month of Sivan, when the Jewish people would receive the Torah.

What does the sixth day of creation have to do with the sixth day of Sivan?

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף פח/א

דאמר ריש לקיש : מאי דכתיב "ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי?" ה"א יתירה למה לי? מלמד שהתנה הקדוש ברוך הוא עם מעשה בראשית ואמר להם אם ישראל מקבלים התורה אתם מתקיימין ואם לאו אני מחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו!

Reish Lakish taught: What does the extra ה teach us? That Hashem made a condition with creation, saying to it: "If the Jewish people accept the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, you will continue to exist, but if not, I will return you to chaos and nothing.

Since the creation of the world depended on the Jewish people accepting the Torah, it is clear that the nation's fulfillment of Torah is the purpose of the world. Hence, if they did not accept it, the world would no longer be needed.

Rashi expresses this concept on the first verse in the Torah.

ספר בראשית פרק א

א: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

1) *In the beginning of Hashem's creation of the heavens and the earth.*

רש"י על בראשית פרק א פסוק א

בראשית ברא - אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשוני כמ"ש רז"ל (ב"ר) בשביל התורה שנקראת (משלי ח) ראשית דרכו ובשביל ישראל שנקראו (ירמ"ב) ראשית תבואתו

1) *This verse is begging for an interpretation. It is to be interpreted as the Sages have rendered it in the Midrash, “for the Torah which is called ראשית-reishit, and for Yisrael who are called ראשית-reishit.”*

The ב of בראשית is to be translated as **for**, therefore since the Torah and Yisrael are both called ראשית - *reishit*, it comes out saying, “For the Torah and for Yisrael Hashem created the heavens and the earth.”

Right from the start, the Jewish people were part of Hashem’s plan for creation.

There is something very peculiar about the holiday of Shavuot. On this day we received the Torah, the purpose of our existence as a people, and, yet, the Torah makes no mention of a connection between Shavuot and the giving of the Torah. Furthermore, all other holidays have a symbol or mitzvah connected to them. For the whole week of Pesach, which celebrates our redemption from Egypt, we eat matzah and abstain from leaven, something that transforms our life for an entire week. On Sukkot, which celebrates our preservation in the wilderness, we eat in the Sukkah and take a lulav and etrog. On Rosh Hashanah, we blow the Shofar, and on Yom Kippur we fast. How is it that, on Shavuot, we have no symbol of the festival? True, we stay up all night and study the Torah, but that is not mandated in the Torah, unlike the other symbols.

There is yet another peculiarity about the festival of Shavuot. It has no specific date in the Jewish calendar. It occurs 50 days after Pesach, and depending on the configuration of the months of Nissan and Iyar (if they have 29 or 30 days) it could fall out on either the 5th, 6th or 7th day of Sivan. All other Jewish

holidays have a specific day in a specific month on which they must be celebrated.

It would seem from all the above that what happened on Shavuot is unique and special such that it cannot be pinned down to a specific calendar day and cannot be captured in a symbol. How is that?

After giving the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people, Moshe says (Deuteronomy 5:19):

ספר דברים פרק ה
יט) אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה דִּבֶּר יְדֹדְדָאֵל כָּל קְהֵלְכֶם בְּהָר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ הָעֹנֵן
וְהָעֲרָפֶל קוֹל גָּדוֹל וְלֹא יִסֹּף וַיִּכְתְּבֵם עַל שְׁנֵי לַחַת אֲבָנִים וַיִּתֵּן אֵלַי

19) *These words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, from amidst the fire, the clouds, and the darkness, **a great voice that never ended** – and He inscribed them on two stone Tablets and gave them to me.*

What is the meaning of “the never-ending voice”?

Our Sages explain that Hashem didn't stop giving the Torah at Sinai after He completed giving the Ten Commandments to the Jewish people. Rather, the words of the Torah that were articulated and heard by the Jewish people at Mount Sinai are still being spoken by Hashem to this day.

The Maharal says it very clearly in his *דרוש על התורה - Dissertation on the Torah*.

וזהו "ולא יסף", שזה לא יפסוק עוד יותר, כי הש"י משפיע לנו התורה תמיד בכל יום,

This is the meaning of the never-ending voice – Hashem bestows Torah upon us constantly, every day.

The Toras Chaim (ספר תורת חיים על בבא מציעא דף פה/א) explains the implications of this phenomenon:

והענין תמוה! למאי נפקא מינה קול מתן תורה קיים לעולם? ונראה לפרש לפי שבשעת מתן תורה יצא השפע מאתו יתברך והשפיע על הר סיני כל התורה כולה שבכתב ושבעל פה מדרש ואגדה הכל נאמר לו למשה מסיני ואותו השפע קיים לעולם ועד וכל תלמיד ותיק העוסק בתורה לשם שמים השפע ההוא מחזיר עליו ונח עליו וזוכה לחדש חידושי התורה על ידי השפע ההוא שהוא כדמות רוח הקדש

This matter is a wonder! What difference does it make if the voice from Mount Sinai is still present? What this means is that at the time Hashem gave the Torah, Hashem gave forth the entire Torah: Written, Oral, Midrash, and Aggadah - everything was said to Moshe from Sinai. And that information is extant forever. Thus, any serious Torah student who is learning the Torah with all his heart to know the Torah, that information hovers over him, and rests upon him and through that he will merit to see new insights in the Torah.

The giving of the Torah was not a one-time event on Mount Sinai on the 6th of Sivan! Hashem has been giving the Torah non-stop since then to the numerous Torah Scholars and yeshiva students as they struggle to understand the holy words of Hashem's Torah. The Torah hovers over them and provides them with the insights and understanding for which they are toiling.

This is why, says the Maharal, the blessings we make before learning Torah end in the present tense - *נותן התורה* - *The One who gives the Torah*, not the One who gave the Torah, and *המלמד* - *The One who teaches (currently) Torah to His nation Yisrael*. The Torah is still being given and taught to us every

minute of every day; the voice that gave the Torah from Sinai has never stopped. When we study the Torah, we are tapping into the freshly given Torah that is still flowing forth from Sinai.

This idea is the secret to keeping the Torah fresh and exciting, something that we are commanded to do in the Shema that we recite twice a day (Deuteronomy 6:6):

ספר דברים פרק ו
ו) וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לְבָבְךָ

*6) And these matters that I command you **today** shall be upon your heart.*

Rashi comments:

אשר אנכי מצוך היום - לא יהיו בעיניך כדיוטגמא ישנה שאין אדם
סופנה אלא כחדשה שהכל רצין לקראתה

They should not look to you like an old proclamation that nobody cares about. Rather, like a new one that everyone is running to hear.

As we study the Torah each day, we are studying the fresh dose of Torah that was just now given from Sinai! It has just left the mouth of Hashem and has come directly to us, as we toil to tap into it and drink from its sweet, satisfying waters.

This is why the Torah is always current and always relevant. There is always a lesson to be learned about life as we live it here and now. Since it was just given, it contains the instructions for life right now.

This is why the Torah designates no specific day in the Jewish calendar for the receiving of the Torah on Sinai. This process is ongoing and is happening daily.

This idea can help us answer a daunting question. Moshe warns the Jewish people.

ספר דברים פרק ד

ט) רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו:
עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חייך והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך:
י) יום אשר עמדת לפני ידוד אלקיך בחרב באמר ידוד אלי הקהל לי
את העם ואשמעם את דברי אשר ילמדון ליראה אתי כל הימים אשר הם
חיים על האדמה ואת בניהם ילמדון

9) Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life ... 10) the day that you stood before Hashem, your God, at Horeb ...

We are commanded not to forget the day we stood at Sinai and not to let the events that we saw there, escape our hearts. But how can this commandment apply to us? How can we be commanded not to forget something that we never had in our memory? *We never stood at Mount Sinai!* Although our souls were there, we have no conscious recollection of what our soul saw, so how could we forget something we never knew?

The answer is that all the Torah that we learn even today is currently being taught to us from the very same voice that taught the Jewish people the Torah at Sinai and has never stopped. As we learn Torah each day, we are receiving it straight from Sinai.

This concept works two ways. When we learn the Torah and see its brilliant and deep concepts, we realize ever so clearly that this could only have come from Hashem. The Torah that we learn carries the testimony to Sinai within it. One who learns the Torah with the proper attitude cannot help but realize that the Torah must have come from Hashem on Sinai.

Rabbi Noach Weinberg נ"צ told the following story. Two non-Jewish Israeli lawyers, a husband and wife, came to Rabbi Weinberg and asked him to convert them to Judaism.

“Why would two successful non-Jewish lawyers want to convert to Judaism?” asked the rabbi.

“Here’s the story.” they said. “We bought a new apartment and had a party to celebrate. We invited all our lawyer friends to come join us, and, as is customary, they each brought us a gift. Knowing that we were lawyers who specialize in damages, one of our friends brought us a copy of the laws of damages by Maimonides. After a while, we decided to see what Maimonides has to say about the laws of damages, and we were amazed at the breadth and depth of the information. We started applying the formulas we learned from Maimonides to our cases, and they were a bull’s eye every time. We realized that no man could be so smart and that these laws are the divine laws given by God. We want to be part of a religion with such a great God.”

The Sinai event is evident in the Torah. This is something we can see with our own eyes when we learn the Torah and this is what we are being warned not to forget and let slip out of our hearts.

This is also why there is no symbol for Shavuot, and why the day in the Torah is not linked to the receiving of the Torah. That would imply that it only on that specific day did we receive the Torah. But that is not the case. The Torah is given every day, and we can celebrate its receipt every day.

Additionally, the symbol indicating that we received the Torah from Sinai is something that we wear every day, namely, the lifestyle that we live in compliance with the Torah's laws. Once again, this is not a one-time deal; rather, we are displaying the symbol of Shavuot every moment of every day.

All this raises a new question. So, what's the big deal about Shavuot? If we are supposed to celebrate the giving of the Torah anew each day, why are we making such a big deal about Shavuot? It was merely the day that it all started!

One of the highlights of the Pesach seder is singing דיינו *dayaynu* in the Haggadah. One of the lines requires explanation. We say:

אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני, ולא נתן לנו את התורה דינו

Had Hashem brought us close to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, Dayaynu. (It would be sufficient reason to thank You profusely.)

What would have been the purpose of arriving at Mount Sinai if we had not received the Torah there? Why is simply standing at Mount Sinai singled out as something we need to thank Hashem for?

Standing at Mount Sinai was an awesome and terrifying experience, as the verse (Exodus 19:16) teaches us.

טז) ויהי ביום השלישי בהית הבקר ויהי קלת וברקים וענן כבד על
ההר וקול שפר חזק מאד ויחרד כל העם אשר במחנה

16) On the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful, and the entire people that was in the camp trembled.

As the Jewish people stood at Mount Sinai, Hashem opened the heavens, and they all saw Hashem's heavenly court with all the spiritual realms and angels. This event opened the hearts of the Jewish people and created within them a thirst and a yearning to know Hashem. This deep and innate connection that the Jewish soul has with Hashem is what we received when standing at Mount Sinai. This thirst was promptly quenched when Hashem gave them the Torah, for Hashem and His Torah are one, and through the Torah we can know Hashem intimately.

As Shavuot approaches, that holy energy, which instilled the deep connection between the Jewish soul and Hashem, is once again present, and we can harness it for our own growth in Torah. To the degree that we open our hearts to the Torah on Shavuot, we will be able to accept the fresh dose of Torah as it comes forth from Sinai every day. This is why Shavuot is such a big deal. It is the gateway to our success in Torah for the rest of the year.