



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5785 Shavuot
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Hello, Welcome!

**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.***

Thank you for joining us!

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

תשפ"ה Shavuot

The two-day (outside of Israel) Festival of Shavuot begins this Sunday night and concludes on Tuesday night. (*Note:* There will be no Partners next Tuesday.) Shavuot, the 6th of the Hebrew month of Sivan, is the day that the Jewish nation stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and heard Hashem's voice announce to them the first two of the ten Commandments; Moshe then told them the remaining eight. Yet forty days later, because of the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe smashed the tablets containing those ten commandments. Because, in essence, that event was "broken" so-to-speak, why do we, some 3,300 years later, still celebrate it? What still remains of it? Would it not be more appropriate to celebrate the day on which Hashem gave us the second set of tablets, Yom Kippur, since we still have those tablets?

Although we lack the first tablets, *at that event* the Jewish people received many benefits that remain with us to this day, and those benefits are some of what we are celebrating.

For many, one of the favorite parts of a Pesach seder is singing *Dayeinu* with its catchy tune and relatively simple lyrics. One of the statements that we sing is:

אלו קרְבָנוּ לִפְנֵי הַר סִינַי, וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה דִּינֵנוּ

*Had Hashem [only] brought us close to Mount Sinai but had not given us the Torah, Dayeinu, **it would have been reason enough** [to thank Him].*

This begs a question. What benefit did we derive from being close to Mount Sinai without the Torah having been given? Was not the purpose of Mount Sinai to give us the Torah? It seems that just coming close to the mountain was itself an accomplishment.

Our Sages teach us that just coming close to Mount Sinai brought the Jewish people several achievements.

The Jewish people journeyed from *Refidim* on Sunday, the last day of the month of Iyar, reached Mount Sinai on Monday, the 1st day of Sivan, and received the Torah on Shabbat the 6th of Sivan. When the Jewish nation arrived at the Sinai desert, the Torah (Exodus 19:2) tells us:

(ב) וַיֵּסְעוּ מֵרֶפִידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינִי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הָהָר

2) They journeyed from Rephidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.

Because the verse (Exodus 19:2) uses the singular form of the verb וַיַּחֲנוּ, “he camped,” instead of the plural form וַיַּחֲנוּ - “they camped,” Rashi tells us that they were like **“one man with one heart.”**

During their 45-day journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Jewish people underwent an extraordinary transformation, from a people who had worshipped idols to a cohesive group unified in their mission to serve Hashem. This was an amazing accomplishment and a highpoint in Jewish history. They maintained this level of unity for six days until the Torah was given.

The idea of “one man with one heart” implies that in their personal growth, each person had reached a level where he was focused on the singular goal of serving Hashem without giving thought to his own personal ideas or biases. When every individual in the group focuses exclusively on the common goal without personal interest, there is no competition or jealousy among its members. The success of each individual member is experienced as a success by the entire group. Reaching such a high level of harmony was a milestone for the Jewish people and was a prerequisite to receiving the Torah because they would

receive it as purely as it was given, with no interference from their personal biases.

ופירש הרה"ק מהר"י זצלה"ה מווארקא שלשון ויחן הוא נשיאת חן, היינו אף שכל אדם דרכו לפי שורש נשמתו ישר בעיניו מ"מ מצא גם דרך חבירו חן לפניו וע"כ היו כאיש אחד בלב אחד, ודפח"ח

Often what divides people is a difference in approach to how something should be done. Each person sees his approach as the correct one, and the other's as flawed. This is especially true when it comes to serving Hashem. A person always feels that because his way works well for him, it is the one and *only* proper way to serve Hashem, the others having it all wrong. At Mount Sinai, everyone realized that each person has his own unique path through which he is to serve Hashem, recognizing that, while my path is right for me, his path is right for him. In this context, the word ויחן means "*each member of the nation found favor (חן) in the eyes of all the others*" creating total harmony. (R. Yitzchak mi Varka (d. 1848)

This is a good lesson for us, too, to realize that every person has a unique way of serving Hashem. My way may be the only way for me, but the other person is also entitled to have his own way.

The Zohar writes that when Hashem saw them *as one man with one heart* He said, "Now the time has come to give the Torah to my children."

ובזוה"ק שהקב"ה אמר בראותי אותם כאיש אחד בלב אחד, השתא מטיא שעתא ליתן אורייתא לבני

Hence, *had Hashem only brought us close to Mount Sinai to reach the peak of perfect unity, but not giving us the Torah, Dayeinu, it would have sufficed to thank Him for bringing us to that great level of unity.* This is a state that we must always aspire to achieve in our relationships with other Jews.

A second achievement at Mount Sinai, even before formally receiving the Ten Commandments, was the *special way* in which the Jewish people accepted the Torah.

On the 5th of Sivan, a day before receiving the Commandments, Moshe read the Sefer Torah from the beginning, “In the beginning when Hashem created the heavens and the earth,” until that point in time. The Jewish people then responded (Exodus 24:7):

(ז) וַיִּקְחַ סֵּפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְדֹוּד נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע

*7) And he (Moshe) read the Book of the Covenant into the ears of the nation, and they said, “Everything Hashem said we will **do** and we will **listen to**.”*

This response caused great commotion in heaven. The people said that they will do what the Torah said even before hearing what it said! How could they accept to do what the Torah says without knowing what Hashem would demand of them?

אמר רבי אלעזר בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע יצתה בת קול ואמרה להן מי גילה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשין בו דכתיב ברכו ה' מלאכיו גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו ברישא עשי והדר לשמע

*Rabbi Elazar in the Talmud (Shabbat 88a) teaches us that when the Jewish people put “do” before “listen,” a voice came from Heaven and proclaimed: **Who taught My children this secret?** They used the very principle that the angels use.*

Rav Simai taught another reaction to the Jewish people’s response.

דרש רבי סימאי: בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע באו ששים ריבוא של מלאכי השרת לכל אחד ואחד מישראל קשרו לו שני כתרים אחד כנגד נעשה ואחד כנגד נשמע

Rav Simai taught: When the Jewish people said, “We will do” before “We will listen,” 600,000 angels, one for each person, came and tied two crowns on each of them, one crown for “we will do” and one crown for “we will listen.”

What was the secret to which Hashem was referring? And what was so impressive about their response that Hashem commended them for being “angel-like,” and the angels themselves brought two crowns for each person?

An angel is always prepared to do Hashem’s bidding before he hears it because every angel is created to fulfill only one mission. An angel’s entire essence is designed and tuned to accomplish the task for which he was created. A human being, on the other hand, has so many different options that he can pursue. A human being is multifaceted, endowed with many different talents, any of which he can perfect and make the reason for his existence. By putting the “do” before the “listen,” the Jewish people indicated that they saw their sole purpose for creation was, like an angel, to fulfill the Torah. All other endowments of talent were to be used to etch out the unique mission of each person within that mission of keeping the Torah’s laws. In this sense, people are on an even higher level than angels, who are fixed in their created positions and cannot become any greater or advance to a higher level. They have one mission in “life,” and, when that is accomplished, they are done. A human is endowed with a certain complement of qualities, both good and bad, and it is his job to channel them correctly within the framework of the Torah’s laws, to become the holiest person that he can become.

When a person says, “I will do it” even before hearing the request, it is very different than saying “Okay, I will do it” after having heard the request. Announcing “I will do it” after hearing what needs to be done is

saying, “I have considered your request, and I agree to do it.” Saying, “I will do it” even before hearing what has to be done, constitutes saying, “I am prepared to fulfill your request under all conditions. No matter what it takes, and no matter what obstacles I encounter, I will accomplish what you have asked me to do.”

Implicit in this response was a display of the absolute trust that the Jewish people had in Hashem. They were unafraid to accept “*carte blanche*” all of Hashem’s commandments because they knew that He would only give them commandments that were suitable for them.

An “I will listen” that comes after an “I will do” is also very different than the “listening” done before the command. When one listens before committing himself, he is listening to assess whether he wishes to fulfill the request or not. It is subject to *his* will. When one listens after having already said, “I will do it, no matter what,” his listening is to hear every detail of what the mission is so that he can fulfill it perfectly. This is a totally different “listening.”

This was the secret to which Hashem was referring. How did the Jewish people reach such a high spiritual level that they understood their mission in the world so clearly? And this is why the angels were so impressed and gave two crowns to each person. Each response was equal to the way that they would have responded. Here, human beings had reached the level of angels; with so many options to follow, they chose to use all of them to serve Hashem. Figuring out how to use all of one’s talents and endowments to serve Hashem would be the fulfillment of “I will listen.”

*Had Hashem only brought us close to Mount Sinai **where we accepted His commandments with complete faith**, but not given us the Torah, Dayeinu, **it would have been reason enough** to thank Him **for bringing us to that high level of trust in Him.***

When the Jewish people accepted to do the commandments before receiving them, they achieved yet another milestone in their development. Our Sages (Tractate Kiddushin 31a) teach us a counter-intuitive concept.

א"ר חנינא גדול מצווה ועושה יותר ממי שאינו מצווה ועושה

Greater is the one who performs a mitzvah when obligated to do so than the one who does so voluntarily.

Why is that? Should it not be the other way around? Isn't a volunteer who does a mitzvah out of the goodness of his heart being more altruistic and giving more of himself than the one who is *obligated* to do it?

Nachmanides (1194-1270) explains why this is not so. When a person does a mitzvah because he is obligated to do it, he is subjecting his will to the will of the one to whom he is obligated. He is humbling himself and putting himself under the control of the other. This is difficult and uncomfortable. Whereas, when one chooses to do the mitzvah voluntarily, he retains control for himself. He is doing it because *he* has decided to do it for his own reasons, which just happen to concur with the wishes of the other, but he can always change his mind if he so decides. The one doing the mitzvah because of his commitment and obligation is demonstrating Hashem's control over him, and, ultimately, as Hashem's servant, Hashem's kingdom in the world. The volunteer is not.

The Tosafot commentary on the Talmud (12th to 14th Centuries) adds an additional element. A person obligated to do a mitzvah carries with him the burden of how and when he will get it done as well as the worry of what will happen to him if he fails to do it. This pressure to fulfill the mitzvah adds to the burden of being obligated to do the mitzvah.

While carrying the responsibility to get it done, he is actually working harder for Hashem than the volunteer who carries no such responsibility.

There is yet another important difference between a volunteer and someone who is obligated. A volunteer lacks the reliability of someone who has an obligation to do something. With no obligation, the volunteer can back out at any time and leave the deed undone. Someone who is obligated, on the other hand, cannot just back out without suffering a consequence. Therefore, because he has committed himself, and he will suffer a consequence for not fulfilling his obligation, he is more reliable.

*Had Hashem only brought us close to Mount Sinai **where we became obligated to do the mitzvot**, but not given us the Torah, Dayeinu, it would have been reason enough to thank Him for making us obligated as His servants.*

The idea that the Jewish people became obligated to keep the Mitzvot at Mount Sinai plays an essential role in yet another change that Hashem made at Mount Sinai.

Our Sages teach us that every mitzvah that we perform creates a powerful entity of holy spiritual energy, which ascends to the holy places in heaven and returns to this world in the form of blessing and goodness. The opposite, unfortunately, is also true. When we commit a sin, we create a unit of evil spiritual energy, which returns to the world and has a bad effect on it. In other words, Hashem has linked our actions to the way He runs His world. He has put us in control of the bounty and blessings or their lack through our mitzvot. Hashem merely bestows upon the world what it deserves based on our actions. This power was only given to us when we accepted the mitzvot as an obligation. Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and the 12 tribes all kept the Torah before it was given however, since their mitzvot were voluntary, they did not have the power to control the world. It was only after the Jewish people

accepted the *obligation* to keep the Torah that Hashem changed the world's operating system from one where He controls it to one where we control it through our Torah and mitzvot.

*Had Hashem only brought us close to Mount Sinai **where we were given control of the world through our Torah and mitzvot**, but not given us the Torah, dayeinu, it would have been reason enough to thank Him.*

The Jewish people received all of these benefits from just coming close to Mount Sinai. What benefit did they receive on Mount Sinai from the Sinai event itself?

The Torah teaches us (Exodus 19:9).

(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹדְךָ אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעָבִיב הָעָנָן בְּעִבּוּר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדִבְרֵי עֲמֹךָ וְגַם בְּךָ יֶאֱמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם וַיִּגַּד מֹשֶׁה אֶת דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֶל יְדֹדְךָ.

*9) Hashem said to Moshe, "Behold I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, **so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.**"...*

The world had finally come to its purpose for creation: that the Jewish people receive the Torah on Sinai. At the time of creation, Hashem revealed that the entire creation would be hanging in the balance, conditional upon the Jewish nation accepting the Torah. If they do, the world will continue to exist. If they decline, the world, without a purpose, will return to nothingness.

Hashem chose to give the Torah through a human being, Moshe Rabbeinu. How would the people know that Hashem had chosen Moshe to be His agent beyond the shadow of a doubt? After all, the veracity of entire religion depends on the authenticity of Moshe as Hashem's servant and instrument.

The secret lies in the verse quoted above. ***“So that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever.”...***

Hashem elevated each person to the level of a prophet, one holy enough for Hashem to speak to directly. They heard with their own ears how Hashem called Moshe up the mountain and instructed him to relay the commandments to the Jewish people.

Nachmanides in his commentary to this verse writes:

והנכון בעיני שאמר, אני בא אליך בעב הענן, שתגש אתה אל הערפל בעבור ישמע העם דברי, ויהיו הם עצמם נביאים בדברי, לא שיאמינו מפי אחרים, כמו שנאמר באמור ה' אלי הקהל לי את העם ואשמיעם את דברי למען ילמדון ליראה אותי כל הימים (דברים ד י), וגם בך יאמינו לנצח בכל הדורות, ואם יקום בקרבם נביא או חולם חלום כנגד דברך יכחישוהו מיד, שכבר ראו בעיניהם ושמעו באזניהם שהגעת למעלה העליונה בנבואה, יתברר להם ממך מה שכתוב (במדבר יב ו-ח) אם יהיה נביאכם ה' במראה אליו אתודע בחלום אדבר בו, לא כן עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא אל פה אדבר בו, ולכך אמר בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך, כי ישמע דברי מתוך האש וידעו שאני ה' מדבר עמך ויאמינו בדברי וגם בך לעולם וכן מה שאמרו היום הזה ראינו כי ידבר אלהים את האדם וחי (דברים ה כא), לומר הנה נתקיים הדבר אצלינו בראיית עינינו כאשר היה חפץ אלהים, ומעתה קרב אתה שידענו בך שהגעת למעלה הגדולה ושמע כל אשר אמר ה' אלהינו ושמענו מפיו: ועשינו, שכבר נאמנה נבואתך כי היא העליונה על כל הנביאים

The point is, that Hashem said to Moshe, “I am revealing Myself to you in a thick cloud... that you alone should enter the darkness, so that the people should hear my words to you, and themselves become prophets receiving My words directly, not as someone who has heard it second hand... Also, with this they will believe in you, (Moshe as the authentic giver of the Torah) forever in every generation. And if a prophet or dreamer of dreams will rise up against anything you have said, they will immediately contradict him, for they saw with their own eyes, and heard with their own ears that you (Moshe) reached the highest level of

prophecy... This is why Hashem wanted the people to hear Him speak to Moshe. When they hear My voice from the fire, they will know that I am Hashem who speaks to you. And with this they will believe in my words, and in you (as my agent) forever...”

The Torah (Exodus 19:16-20) provides a detailed description of the events that transpired at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given.

(טז) וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיט הַבָּקָר וַיְהִי קֹלֶת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנַן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר חָזָק מְאֹד וַיִּחַרַד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה.
(יז) וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתִּיצְבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר.
(יח) וְהָרַסִּי עֵשָׂן בָּלוּ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו יְדֹד בָּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנוּ כְּעֵשָׂן הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיִּחַרַד כָּל הָהָר מְאֹד.
(יט) וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מְאֹד מֹשֶׁה יְדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל.
(כ) וַיֵּרֶד יְדֹד עַל הָרַסִּי אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיִּקְרָא יְדֹד לְמֹשֶׁה אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה.

*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 shuddered.** 17) Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward Hashem, and they stood at the bottom of the mountain. 18) All of Mount Sinai was smoking because Hashem had descended upon it in the fire; its smoke ascended like the smoke of the furnace, **and the entire mountain shuddered exceedingly.** 19) The sound of the shofar grew continually much stronger; Moshe would speak, and Hashem would respond to him with a voice. 20) Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain; Hashem summoned Moshe to the top of the mountain, and Moshe ascended.*

This was a most awesome event. The thunder and lightning with heavy dark clouds over the mountain coupled with a shofar blast that continuously grew stronger and stronger, struck fear into the hearts of the entire nation. There was also great fire with its smoke billowing into

the heart of the heavens. This event would be etched indelibly in their souls, forever and ever, never to be forgotten. Yet, in the midst of all the trembling, they would always remember that despite the thunder and lightning, the shofar and the clouds, they heard, above all, Hashem's voice talking to Moshe. "Moshe, come up the mountain. Moshe go tell the Jewish people ..."

This is the incredible gift that we received on Sinai: The unshakeable truth that the Torah we have came straight from Hashem, and the pat refutation of any challenge to the authenticity that the Torah came from Hashem to the Jewish people through Moshe, Hashem's loyal and faithful servant. "What are you talking about? Over 600,000 men [more than 3 million people, total] heard Hashem tell Moshe 'Come up the mountain to receive the Torah to give to the Jewish people!' They heard it with their own ears! This is not something that can be falsified.

This idea should fill our hearts with joy knowing that we have the real Torah, Hashem's gift to man, which enables him to lead the most meaningful and productive life in this world, and to reap the greatest benefit in the World to Come.

As we prepare ourselves to receive the Torah this Shavuot, and the same holy energy that was present then, returns every year on that date so we can tap into it to help us with our efforts, let us think about the great gifts that we received as we approached Mount Sinai and that we received on Mount Sinai, and thank Hashem for choosing us to receive them.