



Averting  
The Return To  
PRE-EXISTENCE

**YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Bamidbar/Shavuos**

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

**Weekly Video:** Averting The Return To Pre-existence

CLICK TO VIEW!



**The Inextricable Connector To Existence**

CLICK TO VIEW!



**Infused by the Spirituality of the Manna**

CLICK TO VIEW!



## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Bamidbar/Shavuos



### Averting The Return To PRE-EXISTENCE

#### **The Manna, the Prerequisite for the Acquisition of Torah**

*Torah:* “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai...” The *Midrash* cites the verse from *Yirimiyah*, “G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘You are the generation that witnessed the Word of G-d. Have I been a desert to Israel, a land of darkness? Yet you came with a claim against Moshe saying: Why did you take us up out of Egypt to die in the desert?’ Did I treat you as if you were in a desert? If a mortal king were to go out into the desert, does he have the tranquility and comfort of his own palace? Does he have the same amount of food and drink available to him? Before you had gone out into the desert you were mere slaves in Egypt. Yet, I had taken you out and placed you in the choicest location in existence...I accommodated you with a setting that is the equivalent of a palace...”

“In addition, I gave you three redeemers who attended to your needs...In the merit of Moshe, you were

provided with the Manna. As it states, “you were afflicted and you were starved...” In the merit of Aaron, you were encircled with the Clouds of Glory... As it states in Psalms, “He (G-d) spread the cloud like a veil (*masach*)...” In the merit of *Miriam*, who sang praises at the Sea, you were provided with the wellspring.”

Regarding the Clouds of Glory being in the merit of Aaron, the *Midrash* cites a verse from Psalms that refers to the clouds being spread like a “*masach* (veil).” The term “*masach*” refers to the *Mishkan* because there was a veil that was spread over its entrance. It is understandable that this verse was chosen because it alludes to Aaron who was the High Priest in the *Mishkan*.

Regarding the living wellspring being in the merit of *Miriam*, the *Midrash* tells us that it was because she had sung G-d’s praises at the Sea after it had split and destroyed the Egyptian armies. Since the sea is comprised of water, it is logical to say that it was in the

merit of *Miriam* that the Jewish people were provided the wellspring in the desert. However, regarding *Moshe*, the *Midrash* tells us that the Manna was provided to the Jewish people in the merit of *Moshe* as it states, “you were afflicted and you were starved...” How does this verse allude that the Manna was in the merit of *Moshe*?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah*: When one ate the Manna, it assumed the nutritional and taste value of any food that the individual wanted it to assume. According to one opinion, the Manna even assumed the texture of that particular food. Nevertheless, since the Manna did not assume the visual appearance of the food item that the individual wanted, it did not satisfy the individual. As the *Gemara* tells us that visual aspect of food enables one to be truly sated. Therefore, the verse “you were afflicted and you were starved” refers to the Manna.

*Torah*: The olive oil that was needed to kindle the *Menorah*, “(G-d said to *Moshe*) Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed/crushed olive oil for illumination (*Menorah*)...” It seems from the words “...that they shall take for you (*Moshe*)...” that the Jewish people were to take for the sake of *Moshe*, the first droplet of pure olive oil for the illumination of the *Menorah*. Why were they commanded to do this for the sake of *Moshe*?

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* citing *Zohar*: The Jewish people were redeemed from the first three of their four exiles in the merit of the Patriarchs. In the merit of *Avraham*, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Babylonian exile. In the merit of *Yitzchak*, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Persian/Mede exile. In the merit of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Greek exile. The redemption of the Jewish people from the fourth and current exile, the Edomite exile (Roman), will come about only in the merit of *Moshe*.

However, *Moshe*, being the personification of *Torah*, will not allow his merit to be utilized to bring about that redemption until the Jewish people are quantitatively and qualitatively engaged in *Torah* study (*I'shma*). Meaning, since the Jewish people have not dedicated themselves sufficiently to the study of *Torah* for its own sake, to the exclusion of all other interests and endeavors, *Moshe* will not allow his merit to be utilized to bring the exile to its completion. Thus, *Moshe* is synonymous with toil and physical sacrifice/deprivation for the sake of *Torah*.

One may say that since the merit of *Moshe* alludes to the dedicated study of *Torah* in a materially deprived state, the verse “you were starved and you were afflicted” alludes to *Moshe*. However, there is another even more cogent explanation.

*Torah*: When *Moshe* had been in heaven to be taught the *Torah* by G-d, he did not eat or drink for that period of time. As *Moshe* had said to the Jewish people, “For forty days and forty nights bread I did not eat and water I did not drink.”

*Midrash*: “Why was it necessary for *Moshe* to tell the Jewish people that he was denied food and drink? *Moshe* was communicating to them that the optimum state of being in which one must acquire *Torah* is to be in a deprived state, just as his own was when he acquired *Torah*. He had said to them, “Just as I sacrificed my blood and fat for the sake of the acquisition of *Torah* (because he did not eat or drink for forty days and nights), so too must you sacrifice your physicality and material comforts in order to acquire *Torah*. Only then will you have the spiritual capacity to come upon its truths.” Therefore, the verse “you were starved and you were afflicted” regarding the Manna, is an allusion to the merit of *Moshe*. If G-d had caused the Manna to miraculously assume every conceivable food value and taste, why did He not cause it to assume the desired visual appearance so that the Jewish people should not be afflicted and starved?

*Chazal*: “The *Torah* was given only to those who ate the Manna.” The *Torah* was given to the generation of the desert who were sustained through the consumption of the Manna, which was a prerequisite to for one to be a repository for *Torah* at the most advanced level. In order to study and process the *Torah* in a context to come upon its truths, it was essential for the Jewish people to be spiritualized. It was only through the eating of the Manna, which did not assume a visual appearance of food, that the Jewish people felt “starved and afflicted.” By doing so, it created a setting in which they sacrificed for the acquisition of *Torah*. Had they not felt deprived in some way physically, they would have not been sufficiently qualified for the acquisition of *Torah*, as we see regarding *Moshe* who was only able to acquire the *Torah* due to his sacrificing of his blood and fat on its behalf.



## The Mishkan, G-d in Concealment

*Torah:* “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai...” The *Midrash* states, “Before the *Mishkan* was erected, G-d spoke to Moshe at the burning bush. As it states, ‘G-d spoke to him from the burning bush...’ He spoke to him in *Midian*... and in *Egypt*...After this G-d spoke to Moshe at *Sinai*...Once the *Mishkan* was erected G-d said, ‘How wonderful is modesty!’ (being in a concealed and modest location is more appropriate). As it states, ‘When one walks with G-d it should be in an unassuming and modest way.’ As King David writes in *Psalms*, ‘The honor of the princess is when she is concealed...’” If modesty and concealment are the most appropriate modes of communication, as King David states, why did G-d openly communicate with the Jewish people at *Sinai*, which was a public setting, in which the entire world was aware of the event?

*Chazal:* The reason the Jewish people were vulnerable to the Sin of the Golden Calf was because, the nations of the world had given them an “evil eye.” It was because they had been aware of the giving of the *Torah* to the Jewish people. Had they received the *Torah* in a more private and contained setting, they would have been protected from the envy of the nations. If this was a consequence of giving the *Torah* in a public setting, why did G-d not choose to give it in a concealed setting?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Zevachim*: When G-d gave the *Torah* at *Sinai* to the Jewish people, the earth had quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to *Bilaam* their prophet. They said to him, “The world is coming to an end!” *Bilaam* responded, “Do you not realize that the world cannot be destroyed again by G-d after the Great Flood, because G-d made a covenant with existence that He would not destroy it.” They replied, “G-d only promised not to destroy the world with water. Perhaps it is being destroyed by fire.” *Bilaam* said to them, “You fools! Do you not realize that G-d is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the *Torah*). It is because of this monumental moment, that the world is quaking.” To this the nations of the world responded, “G-d should bless His people with Peace.”

Regarding a mortal king, it is not appropriate for him to display his affection for his family in a public setting. His personal feelings and affection remain concealed from the public eye, so that he should not be seen within

a human context, not to detract from his reverence. According to Jewish law, even if a king would want to waive his honor, he may not do so. The verse states, “A king establishes justice in the land...” It is only because of his uncompromising persona that the king evokes reverence from his subjects. Therefore, the king does not waive his honor.

*Midrash:* “It is analogous to a king who had a young daughter who he loved. When he walked with her even in a public setting (markets, alleyways, etc.) he would continually speak to her and display his affection for her, regardless of the public setting (because she would not be able to understand why he was withholding his affection). However, when his daughter matured the king said to her, ‘It is no longer appropriate for me to display my feeling for you in public view. I will only show my affections to you when we are alone in a private setting.’”

G-d had taken the Jewish people out of *Egypt* where they had become idolaters. After leaving *Egypt*, they were pursued by the *Egyptians*, who were subsequently destroyed in the *Red Sea*. They continuously complained to *Moshe* in the desert, because they believed that they were not worthy of being redeemed by G-d because of their past pagan beliefs. At *Sinai*, the Jewish people were the equivalent of a young child. G-d needed to allow the Jewish people to be exposed to His Presence at a level of face to face, in order for them to fully appreciate and understand G-d’s love for them. Thus, He needed to give them the *Torah* in a public setting, despite the envy of the nations.

At *Sinai*, it was crucial for the Jewish people to understand the intimate and special nature of their relationship with G-d. After He revealed His exceptional love for the Jewish people when He brought heaven to earth at *Sinai*, it was no longer necessary for Him to demonstrate His love for them any longer in a public setting. He therefore chose to communicate to the Jewish people through the medium of the *Mishkan*, which was concealed and the equivalent of a modest setting.

## G-d’s Unceasing Love for the Jewish People

*Torah:* G-d told *Moshe* that he along with *Aaron* and the princes should take a census of the Jewish people

to know their number. As it states, "From twenty years of age and up - everyone who goes out to the legion in Israel - you shall count them according to their legions..."

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "As a result of the love that He has before Him, G-d continuously counts them (the Jewish people). When they left Egypt G-d counted them. After the sin of the golden calf He counted them...When His Divine Presence came to dwell amongst them, He counted them. On the first of the month of *Nissan*, when the *Mishkan* was erected, He counted them. On the first of the month of *Iyar*, He counted them."

*Rashi* is deliberate in his wordage in his commentary. There are no superfluous words in *Rashi's* commentary. Every word is written with a specific intent. *Rashi* could have stated that G-d continuously counts the Jewish people because of His love for them. However, *Rashi* chose to say that G-d counted them as a result of the love that He has "before Him." What is *Rashi* communicating to us by choosing to use the words "before Him" regarding the special love that G-d has for the Jewish people?

*Torah* at the end of the portion of the curses: "I will remember My covenant with *Yaakov*, My covenant with *Yitzchak*, and I will remember My covenant with *Avraham*..." We see in the verse, that the word "remember" is not associated with the covenant of *Yitzchak*, but rather, it is only associated with the covenant of *Yaakov* and *Avraham*. Why is this so?

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: "The *Torah* does not use the word 'Remember' regarding the covenant with *Yitzchak* because the ashes of *Yitzchak* are continuously piled before Him." If something is before one's eyes one does not need to "remember" it. It is only when something is not continuously before one's eyes that one needs to remember. The *Torah* tells us that *Avraham* was willing to sacrifice his beloved son *Yitzhak* at the time of the *Akeidah* as G-d had commanded him to do so.

However, before the about to slaughter *Yitzchak*, an angel called out from heaven to *Avraham* and told him "do not touch the lad..." *Avraham* wanted to actualize his intent to fulfill G-d's command of the *Akeidah*. G-d therefore presented a ram to *Avraham* to be brought as a burnt offering in the place of *Yitzchak*. By doing so, G-d considered the sacrifice of the ram as if *Avraham* had brought his son *Yitzchak* as a burnt offering. Since the event of the *Akeidah*, the pile of *Yitzchak's* ashes are

before G-d. It is therefore not necessary to remember His covenant with *Yitzchak*.

The love that G-d has for the Jewish people is "before Him." Meaning, He does not need to remember or recall His love for them because they are before Him. Thus, the love for the Jewish people is unceasing. The Prophet *Yeshaya* said to the Jewish people "You should seek out G-d when He is found. Call to Him when He is close."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: The words of the prophet are referring to the ten days of repentance from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur*. Although G-d continuously Wills existence and is involved with every aspect of creation, during the ten days of repentance G-d is closer to the Jewish people than any other time during the year. Thus, the Jew should take advantage of this time of opportunity to supplicate G-d and repent. Although G-d is more available to the Jew at this time, it is also a time of Justice, because G-d is in such close proximity. This is because the Jewish people are "before Him." This state of being, is the equivalent of "a double edged sword." On one hand if one takes advantage of this moment, he will bring about a greater level of reinstatement with G-d. However, if he does not it is considered a greater level of failing.

*Ramah* (*Rabbi Moshe Isserlis*) in his glosses at the beginning of the Code of Jewish Law: When one is in the presence of a king, his behavior is different that when he is not in the king's presence. He comports himself with a certain level of reverence and respect when he is in the presence of the king and thus adheres to all of his wishes. Therefore, *Ramah* explains that because the devoutly righteous continuously sense themselves in G-d's Presence, they behave with the utmost reverence for Him and adhere to His Will.

Since G-d's love for every Jew is "before Him," the Jew must behave differently than the nations of the world. This is because G-d gazes upon the Jew continuously. G-d does not even need to scrutinize the record of the Jew since he is continuously before His eyes. The *Torah* states, "*Moshe* said to the Jewish people, 'You are the children of *Hashem*, your G-d...' " The Jewish people are considered to be the children of G-d. The verse continues, "Just as a father disciplines his child, so too does G-d discipline the Jewish people."

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: If one sees the child of another misbehaving, although he may be bothered by it, he will not discipline that child. It is only when one's own child misbehaves that he will discipline him. This is because the father has a special love and intimacy with his own child, he will only discipline his own child and not that of another. Similarly, because of the nature of the relationship with G-d, He disciplines the Jewish people differently than the nations of the world because they are "before Him."

*Torah*: "Then I assigned the Levites to be presented to Aaron and his sons from among the Children of Israel to perform the service for the Children of Israel in the Tent of the Meeting and to provide atonement for the Children of Israel, so that there will not be a plague among the Children of Israel when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary." *Rashi* cites the *Midrash* that explains that the term "Children of Israel" is mentioned five times in this verse to indicate the great love that G-d has for the Jewish people. Just as when a parent uses the name of his child, it evokes love for the child (rather than using a pronoun), so too does G-d mention the "Children of Israel" to indicate His special love for them. Just as a father has mercy on his child when he is being disciplined, so too are the Jewish people worthy of G-d's Mercy, because His love for them is before Him.

## The Elements for Spiritual Survival

*Torah*: "Hashem spoke with Moshe in the Desert of Sinai..." The *Midrash* states, "Why was the Desert of Sinai chosen to be the setting for the giving of the *Torah*? Our *Rabbis* of blessed memory tell us that the *Torah* was given with three things: fire, water, and desert. Where do we see that there was fire? The verse states, 'Mt. Sinai was billowing with smoke because G-d descended upon it with fire...' It was the equivalent of smoke rising from a fiery kiln and the mountain trembled. Where do we see that there was water? The verse states, 'When You went forth from Seir...the earth trembled...and the clouds dripped water.' Where do we see that it was in a desert? The verse states, 'Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Desert...'

Why was the *Torah* given in the presence of fire, water and desert? It is because all of these elements have no cost associated with them. Fire, water, and desert are free of charge. Just as one may acquire these

things at no cost, so too can the *Torah* be acquired at no cost. As it states, 'The one who is thirsty should go to the water...'

*Yesode v'Shoresh ha'Avodah*: Everything that is needed to sustain man is available in abundance. For example, since man requires air, water, and fire to survive, they are available to him at an unlimited level. In addition, these elements are available without cost. On the other hand, if something is not a necessity for existence, then it is found in lesser quantities. Diamonds, gold, and silver are examples of elements that are not necessary for the survival of humanity and are therefore found in relatively small quantities. The *Midrash* tells us that just as fire and water are necessities and are available gratis so, too is the "desert." It is understandable that fire and water are a necessity for the survival of humanity, but what is the value of desert for one's existence?

*Torah*: Moshe said to the Jewish people, " Behold I have taught you laws and statutes, as G-d commanded me..." The *Gemara* in Tractate *Nidarim* tells us that from this verse we are able to learn that just as Moshe was taught the *Torah* by G-d gratis, and he taught it to the Jewish people gratis, so too must they teach it to others gratis. Therefore, it is not permitted to charge for the teaching of *Torah*. When the Jewish people transmit the *Torah* from generation to generation it must be free of charge just like every necessity of life is without cost.

The *Torah* was given in the context of a desert, to allude to the fact that one must negate himself to assume a persona of humility to be qualified to be the repository and disseminator of *Torah*. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Nidarim* tells us that one merits the gift of *Torah* from G-d, only when one "makes himself ownerless like the desert." Meaning, if one assumes the posture and characteristic of a desert, which has no innate worth, so too the individual who negates himself will be worthy to receive the *Torah* as a gift.

Just as a desert is desolate and has no needs or identity, so too must one negate his own interests and submit himself to G-d's Will to merit the acquisition of *Torah*. *Rambam* writes in the *Laws of Torah Study*, "Every scholarly Jew (*chacham*) has an obligation to teach the son of his fellow *Torah*." One who is qualified to teach must be willing to teach *Torah* to every Jew, regardless of that individual's status or ability, because



it is a necessity for the life of a Jew. He must not deny the study of *Torah* to anyone, because of his own preference due to his ego.

Meaning, he wants to only teach the wise and gifted students and leave the rest to remain unlearned. It is only the one who is truly humble, will merit the gift of *Torah*. The *Mishna* in Tractate *Kiddushin* tells us that one has an obligation to teach his son a trade, how to swim, and *Torah*. *Reb Elchanon Wasserman z'tl* explains that the *Mishna* groups the study of *Torah* along with learning a trade and swimming because they are all necessities for survival. Just as one needs to have a trade for a livelihood and know how to swim so as not to drown, so too must one study *Torah* in order to be a functional and spiritual person.

## The Meteoric Ascent of the Jewish People

*Torah*: On the second day of Passover the *Omer* offering was brought. This offering was comprised of barley flour. On the festival of *Shavuos*, the day on which the *Torah* was given to the Jewish people, the communal offering that was brought was comprised of two loaves of wheat bread. What is the significance of the *Omer* offering being made of barley flour and the two loaves of bread brought on *Shavuos* being made of wheat flour?

The *Mishna* in Tractate *Sotah* tells us that the meal offering (*Mincha*) that is brought by the suspected adulteress was made of barley flour. It explains, "Since her behavior was similar to that of an animal (by sequestering herself with a man other than her husband), the material make-up of her meal offering is the grain used as animal fodder (which is barley)." The majority of barley grain is used for animal consumption.

*Maharal*: When the Jewish people left Egypt they were devoid of spirituality. They were at the point of spiritual extinction, which is the 49th level of spiritual contamination. At that point, the classification of the Jewish people was the equivalent of the animal that has no relevance to spirituality and is totally physical. Therefore, the *Torah* chooses the ingredient of barley for the *Omer* offering to signify the spiritual level of the Jewish people at that moment.

Fifty days later at *Sinai* when the *Torah* was given to the Jewish people, they had reached the pinnacle of their spirituality. At that moment they had achieved the

classification of "adam (man/the perfected human)" whose objective and function is to achieve spirituality. As it states, "You (the Jewish people) are called 'adam (man)' but they (the nations of the world) are not called 'adam'." Adam was the ultimate spiritualized being that was created by G-d Himself. After the Jewish people accepted the *Torah*, their status no longer was the equivalent of the animal, but rather, they reflected the characteristic of Adam. In order to signify their advanced spiritual level at the time of the giving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*, the *Torah* tell us that the communal offering must be comprised of wheat flour. As the *Gemara* in Tractate *Huryos* tells us that the primary consumption of wheat grain is by human beings.

*Chinuch* in his codification of the *mitzvos* explains the philosophical understanding of the counting of the days of the *Omer*. He writes, "The counting of *Sefira* is from the time of the exodus from Egypt to the receiving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*. We count in anticipation of that special moment which culminates on the 50th day after we began counting. Just as the slave who works in the sun longs and yearns for the moment that he will have the relief of the shade, so too is our counting an expression of anticipation and yearning for that moment of the giving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*."

The level of clarity that the Jewish people had achieved at *Sinai* was unique. The *Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos* tells us that when they unequivocally accepted the *Torah* by declaring "Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen" G-d had said, "Who revealed this secret to My children?" The Jewish people were willing to do the Will of G-d even before understanding the extent of the commitment, which is the characteristic of angels. They were able to assume the level of clarity of an angel because they had advanced to the ultimate level of their own spirituality.

We say in the *Hagadah* "If G-d had only brought us to Mt. *Sinai* and had not given us the *Torah* it would have been sufficient." If the objective of leaving Egypt was for the sake of receiving the *Torah* at *Sinai*, why would it have been sufficient for them to merely be brought to the foot of the Mountain? The ultimate achievement of man is to come to the realization that his only purpose and function is spirituality. All that exists is only a means to that end. It was only because the Jewish people had come to their pinnacle of spirituality at the foot of Mt. *Sinai* that they were able to make the

declaration of “*Naaseh v'nishmah*.” This is the meaning of the statement, “it would have been sufficient.”

## Appreciating the Declaration of Naaseh V'nishmah

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos: A Sadducee* (heretic) observed *Rava* engrossed in *Torah* study to such a degree that he was not aware that his hand was wedged under his foot –causing it to bleed. The heretic said to *Rava*, “You impulsive people! Just as in the past your mouth spoke before your ears listened, you are behaving in a similar impulsive manner – not thinking about the consequences of your behavior.” Initially at *Sinai* when G-d offered the *Torah* to the Jewish people their response was *Naaseh V'nishmah* (we will do and we will listen). They had accepted the *Torah* unequivocally – regardless of the extent of the obligation.

The Sadducee had criticized our ancestors at *Sinai* for behaving irresponsibly by accepting something upon themselves although they were not aware of the degree of obligation it entailed. *Rava* responded, “The Jewish people accepted G-d’s *Torah* with a pure and trusting heart. One who loves another assumes that the one he loves would not burden him with more than he can assume. Therefore, we accepted His *Torah* unequivocally because of our faith and trust in Him.”

*Mishlei* (Proverbs): “The innocence of the just will guide them but the corruption of the faithless will despoil them.” *Rava* was able to immerse himself in his *Torah* study, to the point that he was oblivious to his surroundings, because of his trust in G-d. *Rava* understood that G-d would not allow any harm to come to him when he was engaged in *Torah* study. However, the Sadducee, on the other hand, who did not have a trusting heart or faith in G-d, would not merit G-d’s protection. What causes one to be trusting in G-d? Contrastingly, what causes one to be suspicious of Him?

Human beings naturally have many needs and thus feel insecure because of their concern that they may not be able to fulfill them. It is when one focuses on his own needs and insecurities that he becomes suspicious. Whereas, one whose heart is filled with love for G-d does not focus on himself but rather on G-d. The Jewish people at *Sinai* had an unusual level of love for G-d because of their understanding of what they meant to him. Therefore, they had no concern that their needs would not be addressed. It is comparable to a child

who has always been provided for by his father without fail. That child will not be concerned that his father will stop providing. When one knows that G-d has provided for him – even in the most unusual circumstances- that person will not suspect that G-d will offer him anything that would be beyond his capacity.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah*: One merits *Torah* through Divine Assistance. In order to merit Divine Assistance one must have a relationship with G-d, which comes about through trust. If one is distracted while studying *Torah* because of his concern for his material needs, he is failing in an area, which is fundamental to the acquisition of *Torah*. The Jewish people only merited the *Torah* because of their unswerving faith in G-d. If we are to be the proper receptacle to receive the *Torah* at a special level, we must have that unconditional trust and faith in G-d.

*Rava*’s level of immersion in *Torah* had a semblance of the Jews at *Sinai* because of his trust in G-d. He was not concerned that his needs would not be fulfilled. It is because of that unswerving faith/trust and that *Rava* merited an advanced level of Divine Assistance. Contrary to the Sadducee’s claim that the Jewish people impulsively declared their acceptance of the *Torah* with *Naaseh V'nishmah*, it was their level of trust that caused them to accept the *Torah* unequivocally.

## Understanding Choice Within the Context of Torah

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: “*Reb Elazar* says, “When the Jewish people said *Naaseh V'nishma* (we will do and we will listen) a heavenly voice was heard saying, “Who revealed this secret to my children? It is an expression used only by the angels!” As it is alluded to in *Tehillim* (Psalms), “Bless *Hashem* O His angels; mighty in strength who do His bidding to obey the voice of His word.” Meaning, the angel first does the Word of G-d and then listens. Similarly, the Jewish people expressed themselves as angels because of their advanced level of spirituality that they had achieved at *Sinai*. Thus, we see that the Jewish people assumed the posture of *malachim* (angels) at *Sinai* through their own free will.

Throughout the *Torah* when the various levels of obligation are delineated, it is stated in the following order: *Chukim* (Statutes), *Mishpatim* (Commandments),



and *Mitzvos*. *Chukim* (Statutes) are laws that are not able to be understood within a rational context (such as dietary laws, Red Heifer (*parah dumah*), prohibition of wool and linen, etc.). *Mishpatim* are rational laws (such as those pertaining to stealing, murder, charity etc.).

The *Torah* introduces different classifications of obligations in this specific order to communicate that even when one performs a so-called “rational” *mitzvah*, in essence it is being observed as a *Chok*. The fundamental principle of *Torah* is *Chok*. Meaning the Jew accepts the *Torah* only because it is the Will of G-d. In essence this is the equivalent of “*Naaseh V’nishmah*.” The only reason the Jewish people merited the *Torah* and became the nation of G-d was that they had accepted it unequivocally without any need to understand its extent or rational value. The significance of the *Torah* to the Jewish people was only to do the will of G-d.

The Jews at *Sinai* established themselves as angels. Just as an angel’s function is only to do the Will of G-d without any other motive or personal benefit, identically the Jews at *Sinai* assumed that level. We say in the *kiddusha*, “We will sanctify Your Name in this world, just as they (the *malachim*) sanctify it in heaven above.” What relevance do the Jewish people have to the manner in which the angels sanctify the Name of G-d? Since the Jewish people at *Sinai* accepted the *Torah* with the declaration of *Naaseh V’nishmah*, they assumed the status of *malachim*. The only people who are qualified to sanctify G-d’s Name as it is done in heaven is the Jewish people because they possess the innate characteristic of angels.

*Reb Chaim of Volozhin zt’l*, in his work *Nefesh HaChaim*, citing *Zohar*: The angels in heaven cannot say *shirah* (the praises of G-d) until the Jewish people from below have said their *kiddusha* (*shirah*). The *Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin* states, “The *tzaddik* (devoutly righteous person) is greater than the *malach*.” Although the angel has greater understanding of G-d, the *tzaddik* is greater because when he does the Will of G-d it is only through his free choice – which is not the case with the angel (who does not have free choice). The angel was created to perform only the way G-d willed him to function.

The Jewish people at *Sinai* – with the declaration of *naaseh v’nishmah* chose through their own volition to accept G-d’s *Torah*. Thus, the angels in heaven must

wait to sing G-d’s *shirah* until the Jewish people (who are angels at a more advanced level) have sung theirs.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: One of the reasons Jerusalem was destroyed was because the Jewish people disgraced the “*malachei Elokim* – the angels of G-d.” The *Gemara* tells us that the *malachei Elokim* is referring to the *Torah* sages. *Rebbe Yishmael* tells us that there are 13 methods through which the written law can be interpreted. It is only through this methodology that the interpretation of *Torah* is considered accurately the Word of G-d. Any other interpretation, which is not limited to these parameters, has no relevance to the divine. Despite the breadth and depth of proficiency of the *Torah* sage (and the genius that he may possess), he understands that he is bound by a specific structure of interpretation – regardless of his own ability to see it differently. Thus, the *Torah* sage assumes the posture of the *malach* – who is bound by the Word of G-d.

*Acher* (*Alisha ben Avuya* – the *rebbe* of *Reb Meir*) was a *Torah* sage that had reached a unique level of *Torah* knowledge; however, he became a heretic. The *Gemara* explains that the reason for this is that he had “an impurity in his heart.” *Acher* had studied Greek writings, which have a sensual appeal and created a conflict that ultimately caused him to process information differently. He was a man of unlimited ability who wanted to go beyond the parameters that were set by the *Torah*. He rebelled against the concept of limitation – thus giving up his posture of *malach*. A *malach* functions within the context of what he was created to do. Similarly, a Jew, despite his ability to do differently must live within the limits that are set by the *Torah*. The Jew must do the Will of G-d only because it is His Will and not because of his rational understanding.

*Maharal of Prague*: “If the Jewish people had already accepted the *Torah* at *Sinai* with the declaration of *Naaseh V’nishmah* why was it necessary for G-d to hold a mountain over their heads to compel them to accept the *Torah*? The *Maharal* answers that it is true that the Jewish people had said *Naaseh V’nishmah*; however, the mountain over their heads was to demonstrate to them that they must accept the *Torah* because it is the Will of G-d regardless of their own preference.

The world was created only for the sake of the Jewish people who are referred to as “*Reishis* – the first/ chosen” –as the *Torah* is referred to as “*Reishis*.” The

setting for the giving of *Torah* at *Sinai* was one of obligation because G-d was communicating to them that in order to have relevance to the *Torah*, one must assume the posture of an angel. Just as the angel functions as he does only because G-d Wills it to be so, similarly the Jewish people must accept the *Torah* because G-d Wills it to be so. Therefore, if the Jew is able to perform within a similar context in which the *Torah* was given at *Sinai*, (that there is no choice but to do the Will of G-d), he can achieve a level that is even greater than the angel because he has the choice to do otherwise.

## The Human Mind Vis-à-vis G-dliness

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: When *Moshe* ascended to heaven (to receive the *Torah*) the angels said to G-d, "Master of the Universe, why is there a mere mortal among us?" G-d responded, "He came to receive the *Torah*." The angels said to G-d, "This precious treasure that has been hidden away for 974 generations before creation, are you giving it to a mere mortal? What is the value of this undeveloped being that he is even worthy of being remembered? Give Your glory to heaven." G-d spoke to *Moshe* saying, "Answer them."

*Moshe* then responded and refuted the angels' claim by saying, "The *Torah* states, "I am the Lord your G-d who has taken you out of Egypt" – were you ever in Egypt? The *Torah* says, "You shall honor your father and mother – do you have a father and mother?" *Moshe* provided the angels with many examples, which confirmed the fact that the *Torah* was intended for man and does not have relevance to the heavenly body of angels. Thus, *Moshe* acquired the *Torah* for the Jewish people. Why was it necessary for *Moshe* to respond to the angels' claim when the question was directed to G-d Himself? G-d could have responded to them directly.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Bava Metzia*: *Rebbe Eliezer*, the *Chachamim* (*rabbis*) and *Rebbe Yehoshua* debated the status of an earthenware oven that had become contaminated and subsequently severed into parts. The contamination of an earthenware vessel can be removed only if that vessel is broken and thus loses its status as a vessel. The question was if that vessel that was broken were to be reassembled, would it contain the original contamination or would it be considered a new vessel, which is uncontaminated. *Rebbe Eliezer's* position was that the reassembled

oven is considered spiritually pure; however, the majority of his colleagues disagreed and ruled that it was spiritually contaminated.

After a lengthy exchange between *Rebbe Eliezer* and the *Chachamim*, a *Bas Kol* (Heavenly Voice) declared, "The law is according to *Rebbe Eliezer*." *Rebbe Yehoshua* stood up and said, "*Lo ba shamayim he* – *Torah* is not in heaven!" Meaning, the definitive legal rulings of *Torah* were given to man to decide and not G-d. Thus, the declaration of the *Bas Kol* was irrelevant. It is not that the human mind has greater understanding (G-d forbid) than the Divine Mind; but rather, when the *Torah* was given at *Sinai* it was given to be processed and elucidated with the human intellect of the Jew – (within the context of the 13 methods of interpretation).

It was necessary for *Moshe* to participate in the acquisition of *Torah* through his response to the angels in order to establish the principle of "*Lo ba shamayim he* – *Torah* is not in heaven!" The way *Torah* is acquired is through human initiative. For example, the *Vilna Gaon zt'l* shared with his closest disciples that although angels were made available to him to reveal the hidden secrets of the *Torah*, he was not interested. He rejected the offer from the angels.

The *Vilna Gaon* said that if he has the capacity and ability to derive from the *Torah* the information that would be transmitted to him by the angels, he preferred to use his own initiative to bring that about. This is based on the principle of "*Lo ba shamayim he*." *Torah* was given to the Jewish people to toil and understand through their own initiative and intellect.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Megillah*: If a person toils sufficiently in *Torah* he will come upon its truth. Although the human mind processes the *Torah* with its own intellect; nevertheless, one succeeds only through Divine Assistance.

*Chazal*: At *Sinai*, G-d brought down heaven to earth. Why was this necessary? He could have remained in heaven and communicated the *Torah* from there. What is the symbolism of bringing heaven to earth? Before the sin of *Adam*, physical existence was meant to accommodate G-d's Presence and the purity of the world was at such a level that it was able to contain G-d's Presence (no less than heaven could). However, because of the sin of *Adam* a level of spiritual

contamination was introduced into existence that made it unfit for the Divine Presence.

It was only later when the Jewish people were commanded to build the *Mishkan* that G-d's Presence was accommodated in their midst. The *Mishkan* was a microcosm that was symbolic of all existence. G-d's entering into that location was a semblance of the initial intent of Creation. When the *Torah* was given at *Sinai*, the Jewish people were reinstated to the state of pre-sin of *Adam*. Thus, G-d's Presence was able to descend again into this existence. This was the symbolism of G-d's bringing heaven to earth at *Sinai*.

Initially, before the sin, the extent of *Adam's* grasp was touching upon the unlimited. As *Chazal* tell us before the sin, *Adam* was able to see from one end of world to the other. He had a level of clarity that there was nothing occluded from his understanding. Thus, the mind of man initially was the mechanism used to process spirituality. The intent of creation was that *Torah* should not be in heaven because of man's special ability.

The way one acquires *Torah* is only through toiling and applying oneself on a continuous basis. We pray to G-d, "Give us a portion in Your *Torah*." It is true G-d gives us our portion of *Torah* however to be worthy of that acquisition is only through our own efforts.

## The Essence of Shavuos

There is some degree of symbolism associated with each of the Holidays/Festivals. On *Rosh Hashanah* we blow the *Shofar*, which reminds G-d of the merit of the *Akeidah* (the binding of *Yitzchak*) and thus silences *satan's* prosecution of the Jewish people. On *Yom Kippur* we repent and afflict ourselves by assuming the posture of heavenly angels accepting upon ourselves the five areas of deprivation. On *Succos* we commemorate the Clouds of Glory that protected us for forty years in the desert, with the *Succah*. We also take the four species, which symbolize the four segments of the Jewish people being united as one.

On *Pesach* (Passover), we partake of the Pascal lamb and we eat *matzah* symbolizing the transition from bondage to freedom. However, regarding the Festival of *Shavuos*, "the time of the giving of our *Torah*" there is no symbolism whatsoever associated with this important day. It is customary to study *Torah* the

entire night of *Shavuos*; however, this is only a custom and not a law. A Jew is obligated to study *Torah* every available moment throughout the year.

One is obligated to count the days of the *Omer* (*Sefiras Ha'Omer*) from *Pesach* to *Shavuos*. One counts forty-nine days concluding with the fiftieth, which is *Shavuos* – the day the *Torah* was given at *Sinai*. *Chinuch* explains the philosophical aspect and understanding of the counting of the *Sefira*. He writes, "The counting of *Sefira* is from the time of the exodus from Egypt to the receiving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*. We count in anticipation of that special moment which takes place 50 days from the time we begin counting.

Just as the slave, who works in the sun longs and thirsts for the moment that he will have the relief of the shade, so too is our counting towards the giving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*." Thus, *Shavuos* cannot be commemorated through a symbol. The essence of the Festival is the "feeling" of being privileged to be taken as G-d's people through the receiving of the *Torah*. This can only be experienced by the individual who truly values his Jewishness and his relationship with G-d. This is the value and importance of the counting of the *Sefira* to *Shavuos*.

We say in our morning prayers, "Fortunate are we because of our good portion! How pleasant is our lot and how beautiful is our inheritance!" These statements are more than mere words. A Jew should feel fortunate and privileged to have been chosen from among all of the nations of the world to be G-d's people – the people who were given the *Torah*. The *Mishna* in Tractate *Shabbos* states, "All Jewish people are considered princes." The *Torah* refers to the Jewish people as "A kingly, priestly, and holy people." This feeling of being privileged should be experienced as a reality by every Jew.

On *Succos* we dwell in the *succah* to commemorate the reality of being protected by the Clouds of Glory. On *Pesach* we eat the *matzah* to commemorate the reality of leaving Egypt in haste. The reality of *Shavuos* is the sense and feeling of being privileged. That reality is one that exists on an individual basis and cannot be symbolized. Each person will experience the anticipation and excitement of receiving the *Torah* to the extent of his own capacity to internalize the reality of being chosen to receive G-d's "most prized possession."



The only way a Jew could truly experience his Judaism is through the *Torah* itself. The pride of feeling special as a Jew comes not from wearing Jewish symbols or participating in political/humanitarian causes; but rather, it is from immersing oneself and actualizing the *Torah* itself. The blessing recited on the *Torah* states, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who selected us from all the peoples and gave us His *Torah*..." Our privileged status from among the nations of the world is indicated by the fact that G-d gave us, and no other nation, His *Torah*. *Shavuos* is a time of experiencing the privileged feeling of being taken as G-d's people through His *Torah*.

The festival of *Succos* is a seven-day holiday. The day that follows the seven-day period of *Succos* is (*Shemini Atzeres*). The *Gemara* tells us that although *Shemini Atzeres* is juxtaposed to the Festival of *Succos*, which seems to indicate that it is an extension of the holiday, it is considered an independent festival. On *Shemini Atzeres* we no longer dwell in the *succah* or take the four species.

*Yalkut: Shemini Atzeres* should have been celebrated fifty days after *Succos*– similar to *Shavuos* following *Pesach*. However if that were the case *Shemini Atzeres* would fall out in the middle of winter and cause hardship for the Jew to return to Jerusalem in order to visit the Temple. G-d had mercy on the Jewish people and allowed us to celebrate (*Shemini Atzeres*) immediately after *Succos*, since we were already in Jerusalem.

After sitting in the *succah* for seven days commemorating being protected and surrounded by the Clouds of Glory, we celebrate an additional day with G-d – (*Shemini Atzeres*). *Shavuos* is also referred to by the *Torah* as "Atzeres" which means to "hold back." *Chazal* tell us that after seven days of *Succos*, G-d says to the Jewish people, "Please remain with Me an additional day because the parting for Me is difficult." "Atzeres" reflects G-d's love and desire to have an intimate relationship with the Jewish people.

If G-d wants to keep the Jew close to Him on "Atzeres" – on *Shavuos* should we not all feel privileged? If one is able to internalize and experience the privilege of being a Jew and performing *mitzvos* similar to the slave who anticipates the moment that he will be relieved by the shade, then one will be able to experience the essence of *Shavuos*. No symbol can encapsulate that feeling.



**Yad Avraham Institute**

📍 810 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019    📧 [ravkalatsky@gmail.com](mailto:ravkalatsky@gmail.com)    ☎ (212) 259-0300    [YadAvNow.com](http://YadAvNow.com)