

HILLEL ACADEMY HYPE SHAVUOS VISIONS



**INSIGHTS AND INSPIRATION
FROM THE
HILLEL ACADEMY FAMILY
2015-5775**



Dear Hillel Academy Family,

During the past few weeks we've been busy learning about Shavuos at Hillel Academy. Many commentators ask the following question: what was so special about מתן תורה, the giving of the Torah? Only 10 מצוות were actually given to the Jews at Har Sinai. The rest of the commandments were given at other points in the Torah. For example, all the laws relating to the Korbanos were given at the entrance to the אהל מועד, the Tent of Meeting. The very first verse in Sefer Vayikra begins, "וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים מִשָּׁמַיִם וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לְאַמֵּר" "He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying." If the majority of commandments were not given at Har Sinai, what made it such a momentous occasion that we commemorate it every year with a special holiday called Shavuos?

The Sifsei Chaim answers that part of the extraordinary experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai is contained in the following verse, "וַיִּחַן-שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגֵד הַהָר" "and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain." Rashi, explaining the singular nature of the word וַיִּחַן, writes that the Jews encamped next to the mountain as one nation. "כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד" "like one man, with one heart." When the Jews declared their loyalty and adherence to Hashem and His laws with the famous proclamation of "נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע" "We will do and then we will listen," they came together and united as one nation under Hashem. Everyone, no matter their personality, physical appearance, gender, or age, united to accept the Torah. That is one aspect of Ma'amad Har Sinai that we celebrate on Shavuos. Of course, we commemorate Shavuos by learning Torah and renewing our acceptance of the מצוות; but, perhaps most importantly, we also commemorate Shavuos by coming together as one nation, united in a common cause despite our personal differences.

This message hits home for me particularly as we approach the end of the school year. As I look back upon the wonderful experiences and HYPE programs we've had, I'm in awe of what we have accomplished together. Over 90% of our families came together for a school wide Shabbaton, with family Kabbalas Shabbos and a luncheon with the entire school under one roof enjoying Shabbos together. We had -- and continue to have -- shiurim throughout the year on various topics relating to Jewish life including the Chagim, Parsha, Pirkei Avot, Tanach, Talmud, Jewish Philosophy, and Ulpan Ivrit. Once a month, on Sunday mornings, families get together for breakfast and a chance to learn some Torah with their children. More recently we began N'shei HYPE; a chance for women to get together monthly and share words of Torah and companionship.

Hillel is a unique place where families of all backgrounds come together under the banner of Torah and Gemilas Chesed to educate and pass on to our children the important values and lessons we received as a nation at Har Sinai. Here in Pittsburgh, this doesn't just happen on Shavuos; this happens every day of the entire year!

Chag Sameach and I look forward to another great year of fun, learning, and of course achdus!

Rabbi Oren Levy
HYPE Director

RABBI SAM WEINBERG

Hillel Academy Parent, Alumni and

Hillel Academy Principal and Educational Director

The Talmud in Pesachim (68b) cites an argument between two great scholars, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, regarding the proper way to celebrate Yomim Tovim, our holidays. According to Rabbi Yehoshua, we must divide the day *chetzyo la'Hashem v'chetzyo lachem* - half for Hashem and half for yourself. Rabbi Yehoshua felt that half the day should be devoted to spiritual pursuits such as davening and learning, and the rest of the day should be spent with physical pursuits such as eating, drinking, and napping. On the other hand, Rabbi Eliezer maintains that if one desires to divide the day the way Rabbi Yehoshua prescribed, he may; however, he does not need to follow this ratio, and may devote the entire day to either himself or Hashem.

The Gemara then adds the following caveat:

Every agrees that on Shavuot [even Rabbi Eliezer would say] you need to have part of the day for you. Why? Because that is the day G-d gave us the Torah.	הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם מ"ט יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא
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Rabbi Mayer Twersky, one of my Rebbeim in YU, points out an obvious question with this assertion of the Gemara. At its face value, the Talmud seems to be saying that because we received the Torah on Shavuot, there is a greater need for physical simcha. However, if anything, you would think the opposite to be true, and we should instead celebrate Shavuot with study and prayer. Why do we treat this day with merriment and physical pleasure? Rav Twersky cites the Gemara in Kiddushin (30b) to answer this question.

And G-d said to them, to Israel, "My children, I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah to season it."	כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין
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In this context, Rav Twersky defines the Yetzer Hara as the inclination for the physical. Based on this Gemara, he explains that this Yetzer Hara is not something that should be suppressed; it should be seasoned with *Tavlin*, flavored, and then enhanced. The discipline and ability to redeem the physical and make it holy is an integral part of the Torah. On Shavuot, therefore, when we celebrate Hashem's gift of the Torah, even Rabbi Eliezer would agree that this must be done with engaging in at least some physical indulgence.

On Shavuot we accepted the Torah as a collective nation. The purpose of the Torah is to be our guide and to serve as the lens through which we live our lives. At this moment we are reminded that it is not only important to study Torah, but to also live a life that partakes in the blessings that this world offers which is enhanced and experienced through the prism of the Torah.

With summer vacation upon us it is important to remember this lesson. Even though we have breaks from school, we do not have breaks from Torah and Mitzvot. It is imperative for us to enjoy and take advantage of vacation by imbuing Torah into everything that we do.

Chag Sameach!

RABBI DANIEL WASSERMAN

Hillel Academy Parent and Spiritual Leader of Shaare Torah Congregation

The observance and celebration of Shavuot comprises a number of aspects of the Yom Tov. The Torah calls the holiday Shavuot (“weeks”) which represents the seven weeks of the Omer count, which sets the date for Shavuot. The Torah also calls Shavuot the Yom Habikkurim – “day of the first fruit” because it begins the time period of bringing the Bikkurim to the Beit HaMikdash, and also the Chag HaKatzir – “holiday of the harvest” because Shavuot is the time of the wheat harvest. The Talmud also calls Shavuot simply Atzeret, which means to stop or cease activity. Since there are no specific articles or artifacts to Shavuot, unlike the other holidays (such as Sukkah, Shofar, Matzah), the Talmud simply identifies the Yom Tov as a day that weekday activity (Melacha) stops. Yet in our davening on Shavuot, and in terms of our central consciousness on the Yom Tov, we identify the day as Zman Matan Torateinu – the time of the giving of our Torah. This becomes the central theme of Shavuot.

What is interesting is that the Torah gives us a vivid description of the events at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah but does not identify a specific date for the occurrence. The Torah does not say that it was on the 50th day after the Exodus, on the holiday of Shavuot, that Hashem came down onto Mount Sinai and spoke to the Jewish people and gave them the Aseret HaDibrot (The Ten Statements) and the Torah. That is left for us to know by extrapolation and inference. What can we learn from this?

In Tehillim 136, as part of the “Hallel HaGadol” (The Great Praise) the pasuk says that we offer praise “To Him Who made great lights, for His kindness is forever.” In the davening every morning we understand that to mean, God Who “in His goodness renews the creation of the world at every moment of every day.” The world is recreated every moment with all its possibilities and opportunities for us to grow and to be better and correct our mistakes, and that is God’s ultimate kindness. What powers and validates that constant renewal is the Torah

– our study of Torah and our faithful upholding of the Mitzvot in the Torah. As Yirmiyahu reported (33:25), “If not for the covenant of [that which is studied] day and night, the laws of heaven and earth I have not placed.” And as King David proclaimed in Tehillim (19), the heavens and earth declare God’s glory and His handiwork, and what validates the creation is the perfect and trustworthy Torah of Hashem.

So in our prayers on Shavuot we focus on the theme that is most important to us on Shavuot – the giving of the Torah. God, however, writes the Aruch HaShulchan (494:2), did not specifically attach the giving of the Torah to Shavuot, to a specific time and place and event, because the Torah is timeless and eternal. The Torah powers and validates the very existence of the world and of time as we know it, and the recreation of the world and each and every instant of time, not to one moment or event in time. May our lives be filled with the endless opportunities that Torah study and the performance of Mitzvot and good deeds provide in this world, and the constant opportunities to start fresh and new that God, in His kindness, provides to us at every moment of life.

MR. JAMES JOSHOWITZ

Hillel Academy Parent, Alumni and School Board President

We read the book of Ruth on Shavuot. Ruth converts or re-converts to Judaism, reaffirms her acceptance of Judaism and the Torah and settles in Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people. Most important of the values she adopts, Ruth proactively makes continuity of her husband’s name and the Jewish people her priority.

We recently read parshat Acharei Mot which begins with the pasuk:

1 And the Lord spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the Lord, and they died.

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיָּמָתוּ:

The Zohar raises a question -- if the pasuk reminds us at its beginning that Nadav and Avihu died, why does it also restate this point at its end, when it reads, וַיָּמָתוּ, “and they died”? The Zohar teaches that the two brothers died two deaths. One death was a physical death and the other death was that they left no surviving children.

Chapter I of the Book of Ruth employs a similar teaching device. The second pasuk identifies Machlon and Kilion as the sons of Elimelech. The fifth pasuk tells us that they died and restates their names. The Iggeres Shmuel states that their names are repeated to emphasize

they died two deaths. One death was a physical death, and the other death was the loss of their respective names and future generations.

We can understand that the loss of life and the loss of future generations is sad and very tragic. Why would Torah sources in different books of Tanach teach the same lesson when we could understand the point on our own, or certainly with one source?

The haftorah portion read with Parshat Achrei Mot is from the prophet Amos (Chapter 9). The haftorah ends with a promise. Hashem promises that the days will come when the people of Israel will have an abundance of sustenance and economic success in the land of Israel, and that he will return the Jewish people from captivity/exile and they will build cities and settle in them.

יִדְוֹשְׁבֹתַי אֶת שְׁבוּת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנוּ עָרִים נְשֻׁמוֹת וַיָּשְׁבוּ וַנְטַעוּ כְרָמִים וַיִּשְׂתּוּ אֶת יַיִן וְעִשׂוּ גִנוֹת וְאָכְלוּ אֶת פְּרִיהֶם

14 And I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall rebuild desolate cities and inhabit [them], and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their produce.

טו וַנְטַעְתִּים עַל אֲדָמָתָם וְלֹא יִנְתָּשׁוּ עוֹד מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָהֶם אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

15 And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no longer be uprooted from upon their land that I have given them, said the Lord your God.

The prerequisite for this promise to occur is the existence of the Jewish people. The promise can only be fulfilled through our efforts to ensure Jewish continuity from one generation to the next generation. Hence, we can understand why the Torah includes this teaching in various sources. We cannot afford the loss of future generations. We expect Hashem to abide by His promise and covenant, but in truth if we, the Jewish people, fail to ensure continuity, we will have failed to give Hashem the opportunity to gather in those souls.

DR. MOSHE (MICHAEL) KAMINSKY
Hillel Academy Parent and Board Member

Curses and Counselors

“Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches that Ezra (who was responsible for a number of the laws related to public Torah readings) established that the curses (the *tochacha*) in *Ki Savo* should be read before Rosh Hashana and that the curses in *Bechukosai* should be read before the holiday of Shavuot. What's the reason? So that the year should end and its curses [with it].”

(*Megillah* 31b) The Gemara then asks how Shavuot is considered a new year, and it answers that Shavuot is the day on which the fruits of the tree are judged, so it too is called a rosh hashana.

The Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch both codify this requirement, and our fixed calendar today ensures that we always read *Bechukosai* and its curses before Shavuot. The entire arrangement of the weekly Torah readings—which ones are doubled and which ones are not—is at least in part designed to fulfill Ezra's enactment. Why is it so important that “the year should end and its curses”?

Perhaps the lesson is this: Every new year is an opportunity to take stock of where we've been and where we want to go, to make new goals and new resolutions, to think about what we've done right and what we want to improve. Rosh Hashana comes at the end of Elul, a month focused on *teshuvah* and introspection, when we try to put the negative parts of the previous year behind us and look with hope to a fresh start. The Gemara says to make sure to read the curses as part of the previous year—before Rosh Hashana—and leave them behind, so when we begin the new year, we are beginning a year full of blessing, a year committed to self improvement.

Pesach recalls how Hashem took us out of Egypt and made us His nation; Shavuot is when He gave His new nation its national mission—to serve the Almighty, to perform His *mitzvos*, and to keep His Torah. Shavuot comes at the end of *sefiras ha-omer*, a time that is also set aside for self improvement. On Shavuot, we re-dedicate ourselves to a life of Torah, and we set new personal goals in our learning. Whatever obstacles prevented us from learning more last year, or from taking the next step in our spiritual climb—we put that behind us. Like the curses in *Bechukosai*, we leave the impediments and negativity with the previous year and make Shavuot our personal rosh hashana for growth in Torah.

The Gemara often presents two or more statements from the same sage back-to-back that appear unrelated. But statements in the Gemara were not arranged at random, so Rav Yerucham Levovitz *zt”l* teaches that we should assume there is some thematic connection.¹ After teaching that we read the curses before Rosh Hashana and Shavuot, Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches a second idea: “If the elders say to destroy and the youths say to build, then one should destroy and not build, because the destruction of the elders is building and the building of the youths is destruction. The example of this idea is Rechavam ben Shlomo (Rechavam the son of King Solomon).”

¹ For another example, see *A Gift for Yom Tov* (R' Yisroel Miller), “Peripheral Vision,” for Rav Moshe Feinstein's *zt”l* explanation of the relationship between the maximum height of the Chanuka menorah and that the pit into which Yosef's brothers threw him was empty, two adjacent statements both taught by Rav Kahana.

When Rechavam assumed the throne after his father's death, his older advisers recommended that he rule leniently with the people, to relax some of the harsher decrees; his younger advisers, however, suggested that he act strictly. Rechavam ultimately followed the advice of the younger advisers, eventually leading to his downfall and Yeravam ben Nevat's rebellion that split the kingdom.

Perhaps Rabbi Shimon's second teaching is there to provide an additional insight, a cautionary note to complement his first teaching. Shavuos is an opportunity to start anew, to put the past behind us, to let the curses—stumbling blocks, excuses, procrastination, and other obstacles—remain part of the previous year. But knowing what to leave behind and what to take with us on a spiritual journey requires a guide who has been down that path before. Knowing how to make changes and how fast, where to grow and when, requires thought and thoughtfulness—and experience. Shavuos is a tremendous opportunity for personal spiritual growth in Torah, if used in the right way; but knowing the right way *for you* requires guidance that is backed by experience. Rabbi Shimon says, remember Rechavam! Seek out the elders, a rav or a mentor, those who have made this journey, who have been down this or similar paths before you. Find a teacher with the wisdom that comes only with age and experience, who can make sure that it's really the *curses* that stay behind with the previous year.

Shavuos is also the time of year that we read about Ruth, the Moabite princess, who left behind a life devoid of meaning for one filled with Torah and mitzvos—a commitment that ultimately gave us King David. Ruth's journey, however, would not have been possible without her mother-in-law, Naomi, teaching her what it means to be Jewish and guiding her spiritual growth.

Shavuos is an opportunity to re-dedicate ourselves to a life of Torah and to set new goals, to seek out spiritual mentors and reconnect with old ones. In that merit, may Hashem help us to leave all of our curses in the past, and grant us blessings and joy that will last the whole year 'round.

RABBI YISROEL SMITH

Hillel Academy Parent and Assistant Principal Boys High School

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 306) explains the reason for the Mitzvah of counting Sefiras HaOmer. He says that the purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt, was to give the Jewish people the Torah. In fact, he says, to the Jews leaving Egypt, the idea of receiving the Torah was even greater than the Exodus from Egypt. To commemorate that, we count from Pesach to Shavuos to relive that excitement and anticipation.

When analyzing this explanation we can ask the following question: The situation for a Jew in Egypt was unbearable. They were worked day and night. Any Egyptian, at any time, had the full authority to take any Jew and put him to work for whatever, and however long, he wanted. Their sons were slaughtered, their babies placed in bricks. It was a terrifying existence. To leave that and finally live life as a free person must have been the most incredible experience! How is it possible that they could view anything as better than that?

Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier explains that for the last ten months in Egypt, the Jewish people witnessed the most unbelievable series of miracles that has ever been known to mankind, all of them predicted in advance by Moshe Rabeinu. This experience shifted their entire outlook on life and forced them to rethink their value system. During that time it became crystal clear that their ultimate priority was to serve Hashem in the best way possible.

Rabbi Shafier gives the following parable: Years ago, in order to harvest grapes, a team of people would work from daybreak until nightfall, trying to harvest as many as possible. Timing was critical, as there was only a small window before the grapes would spoil. This all changed in the 1960's with the invention of the grape harvester. Suddenly, the teams were unnecessary, as the machine could do the work of 30 men. When it comes to the Mitzvah of learning Torah we have the equivalent of a grape harvester! Every word of Torah is another Mitzvah and we can gather innumerable Mitzvos with each word of Torah that we speak. This idea became so clear to the Jews in Egypt that their values shifted: freedom was no longer the ultimate goal; instead, Matan Torah was the most important thing they could possibly strive for.

Another interesting answer to this question is a well-known idea that was eloquently explained by former-Senator Joseph Lieberman in an article he wrote for the Wall Street Journal. In the article, Senator Lieberman explains the connection between Pesach and Shavuos. Pesach is a celebration of freedom from slavery, but freedom alone can actually be detrimental, as he writes, "... the freedom of Passover without the law of Sinai would bring chaos. A society of only freedom and no rules would have no norms for behavior, no distinctions between right and wrong, and couldn't enforce such conventions even if it had them." Shavuos, on the other hand, is the celebration of the structure that Hashem gave us through His gift to us, the Torah. Only with the combination of the two, the freedom to do as we choose and the Divine structure that the Torah provides, can we truly fulfill our purpose in life.

Perhaps during those ten months the Jewish people in Egypt recognized the incredible necessity of structure and therefore viewed Matan Torah as greater than the Exodus. The consequences of full freedom without rules can lead to such an upheaval that it would not be much better than slavery.

A final answer to this question is from my Rebbe, Rabbi Shaya Cohen, shlit”a. שיר השירים, the Song of Songs, is a parable representing the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people in exile. Shlomo HaMelech felt that the best way to describe that relationship was through a love story between estranged lovers. In פרק א, פסוק ב the woman (the Jewish people) says “יִשְׁקֵנִי מִנְּשִׁיקוֹת פִּיהוּ כִּי טוֹבִים דְּדֹיֵךְ מִיַּיִן” “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine.” Rashi explains that the first part of the Passuk, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” is reminiscing about the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai, which was given in an intimately close fashion, described as פנים אל פנים, face-to-face. Rashi says that the second part of the Passuk, “for your love is better than wine,” is meant to convey that this love was so powerful that it overshadows any pleasure that we have today. Rabbi Cohen explains that we have this communal memory of Ma’amad Har Sinai, and that memory is so powerful that, in comparison, all the pleasures of this world will never make us truly satisfied.

It could be that in anticipation of such an ecstatic feeling, which would be unmatched by any pleasure to follow, even the Exodus from Egypt paled in comparison.

How do we feel upon reflection of these three powerful feelings? We may look at our lives and lament that we don’t share these feelings -- we don’t count every Mitzvah, we don’t appreciate the structure the Torah provides, or we don’t feel that passionate relationship with Hashem which was experienced at Har Sinai. We may wish we could, but we feel it’s unattainable.

Nevertheless, we can be reassured, for in Shir HaShirim פרק א, פסוק ד the Passuk says “נִזְכְּרָה דְּדֹיֵךְ מִיַּיִן מִיִּשְׁרָיִם אֲהַבִּיךָ” “We will recall your love more fragrant than wine; they have loved you sincerely.” Rashi explains that this is referring to the Jewish people in exile, who are reminiscing about the time we trusted Hashem and followed after Him in the desert. Despite all of the hardships and afflictions we have in our lives, the thought of the glorious state of that original relationship brings us joy, even today, through delighting in His Torah.

Rabbi Cohen explains this Rashi to mean that, even today, through the learning of Torah, we can reconnect to that same exhilarating feeling of joy that was felt when the Torah was given. When we’re involved in learning Torah it actually brings us back to that moment, where we can once again feel that tremendous appreciation of the Mitzvos, the Torah, and our relationship with Hashem.

With that thought in mind, may we all merit to join in the incredible simcha of Kabbalas HaTorah!

MR. ANDREW JOSHOWITZ
Hillel Academy Alum

It is generally accepted that all canonized texts must showcase the involvement of God in the world.^[1] The narratives and prophecies in the Tanakh all seem to reiterate the idea that God is the force causing every event. “God has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom reigns over all” (Psalms 103:19). This emphasis on God’s influence on all events is found all throughout Tanakh. The famous exception to this rule is Megillat Esther, within which God’s name is not mentioned at all. Bible commentators generally agree, however, that God’s name is omitted from Megillat Esther because it deals with the period of the Second Temple during which there was no prophecy within Israel. Others theorize that the Megillah’s very purpose is in fact to demonstrate God’s control over the fate of humanity, even when it is not done through glaringly obvious intervention. In fact, many Midrashim give God credit for many of the miraculous events that take place in the Megillah, interpreting the events of the Megillah as the parts of God’s well conceived plan. The idea is that nothing is pure coincidence. Adam Smith’s Invisible Hand is none other than the Hand of God.

Megillat Ruth, however, stands out. While God isn’t omitted completely as in Megillat Esther, His presence is minor. Contrary to the events of Esther, those of Ruth seem to be brought about through the actions of man without any involvement of God. God is rarely mentioned in the text of Ruth. The few actions performed by God in the story are either passive or dismissed by the text as natural occurrences:

וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכַלְתֶּיהָ וַתָּשָׁב מִשְׂדֵי מוֹאָב כִּי שָׁמְעָה בַשָּׂדֶה מוֹאָב כִּי פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת עַמּוֹ לָתֵת לָהֶם לֶחֶם.
She, along with her daughters in law, arose to return [to Israel] from the fields of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that Hashem had remembered His people by giving them food.

(Ruth 1:6)

Here, God is credited with remembrance, but this is hardly an action. God’s next action isn’t found until the very end of the Megillah.

יָגַד וַיִּקַּח בְּעֵז אֶת רוּת וַתְּהִי לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וַיֵּתֶן יְהוָה לָהּ הַרְיוֹן וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן.
And Boaz took Ruth as a wife and he came to her; God let her conceive and she bore a son.

(Ruth 4:13)

God’s apparent insignificance in the story of Ruth is an exceptional phenomenon in Tanakh, since on the whole the Tanakh does not lend itself to chance occurrences. What, then, is the message that Megillat Ruth is coming to express?^[2]

One of Megillat Ruth's other anomalies is its striking resemblance to Sefer Iyov, the Book of Job.^[3] Unlike any other biblical narratives, both tell the story of a character who lost all of his/her children and possessions due to tragic circumstances. In the story of Ruth, Naomi suffers the untimely loss of her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons, Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:3-5). In Job, Job's children die and his wealth is lost at the hands of the Satan (Job 1:13-19). To make matters worse, Job is afflicted with a bad case of boils (Job 2:7).

Job and Naomi have similar responses to their misfortune. In their sorrow, both recognize God's hand in their tragedies. Job said, "As God lives, Who has taken away my right, and the Almighty, Who has embittered my soul" (Job 27:2). Meanwhile, Naomi mourns, "The Almighty has embittered my soul greatly" (Ruth 1:20).

Not only do the characters react similarly to their personal tragedies, but their communities react in a similar manner. When Job's friends come to console him, the text describes their reaction, "And they lifted up their eyes from afar and they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept" (Job 2:12). Upon the return of Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, the citizens of Beth Lehem react with identical confusion, "And the whole city was astir at their arrival, and they said: 'Is this Naomi?'" (Ruth 1:19).

Despite the catastrophic circumstances in each story, they both end positively. Job's end is described by the text, "God added on to all that Job had had [prior to tragedy] until there was double ... God blessed Job's end more than [He had blessed] his beginning" (Job 42:10-12). Megillat Ruth ends with Ruth's marriage to Boaz, bringing her and Naomi out of poverty, and subsequent birth to her first child, Obed.

There is a parallel as well in the way in which salvation is reached: Job lived to see four generations of sons and Megillat Ruth ends with the fourth generation descendant of Naomi, King David. To Job seven sons were born (Job 42:13), and paralleling this in Megillat Ruth, the women of Beth Lehem give testimony about Ruth: "[She] is better to you than seven sons" (Ruth 4:15).

Despite their similar endings, however, the author of Megillat Ruth utilized these comparisons to sharpen an important difference between the two stories.

One of the major concepts that the Book of Job struggles with is that of *Tzadik V'Ra Lo*, the idea that God causes even the most righteous people to suffer. Job and his friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu, debate the nature of God's methods and philosophies. Despite their intense discussion, Job never finds out that all the troubles which befall him are only a result of the bet between God and the Satan as to whether Job would remain faithful, which only the reader has the liberty of knowing. Simply put, the the story ends with God informing Job that

he can never know His reasons and that some things are simply above Job's clearance level (Job 38).

Only after Job admits that "I know that You can do everything and that no plan of Yours can be thwarted ... therefore, I have said things which I did not understand, things too wondrous for me that I knew not" (42:2-3), does God remove Job from his state of suffering. Not only is Job's wealth restored, but "God gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10). It would appear that just as there was no obvious reason for the calamity to begin with, there was also no apparent reason for the extent of Job's reward.

The Book of Job seems to consider human tragedy from God's perspective. The idea is that humans, who have limited perspective and short life spans, cannot judge God, like Job had tried. Man's actions will not always directly determine his destiny. Sometimes fate isn't entirely in human hands.

Contrary to Job, in Megillat Ruth, a Megillah in which God does not act directly at all, it is humans who change the course of history and repair their own shattered fate. The ending is only positive because of various acts of kindness and proactivity by the characters in the narrative.

The first sign of a turnaround occurs directly after the tragedy. Ruth and Orpah (who were also mourning) remain with the lonely and mourning Naomi after the death of her husband and sons (Ruth 1:6). Next, after Orpah returns to her native Moab, Ruth continues on with Naomi to Beth Lehem, thereby leaving her home, family and god in order to live with her mother-in-law Naomi in an entirely foreign country, despite not having any money or practical means of building a family and establishing herself in Israel.

Ruth's amazing favor to Naomi quickly leads to the beginning of her success. Upon meeting Ruth, a wealthy local farmer named Boaz *kindly* invites her in and allows her to glean with a generous hand, because, "It has been fully told to me all that you have done for your mother-in-law after your husband died, and how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth, and have come to a nation whom you did not know before" (Ruth 2:11).

Naomi is so grateful to Ruth that, in an attempt to return the favor, she initiates a more formal meeting between Ruth and Boaz that ultimately results in their marriage.

The story ends with the birth of Ruth and Boaz's son, Obed, who was the grandfather of the future King David, who brought the Jewish nation to glory and from whom the Messiah will stem.

The characters of the Megillah each make contributions that are vital to the book's positive outcome. Without the proactivity of Ruth, who did not by any means need to accompany Naomi to Beth Lehem, she never would have been introduced to Boaz, who was kind and hospitable to her, and then eventually married her.

While the purpose of Job is to demonstrate God's ability to control the fate of humanity, Megillat Ruth's purpose is to highlight man's control over his own fate. Unlike Job, Megillat Ruth demonstrates the ability of man to bring about change and reform in the world. Man has a significant power to make a difference. It is impossible that a person of kindness such as Ruth would not come to the fields of Boaz, a man of kindness, exactly on the day that he arrives at the field. It is impossible that the kinsman would not pass by the gate of the city at the exact moment that Boaz was trying to complete the circle of kindness.

As the Midrash observes, "Because Boaz did what he had to do, and Ruth did what she must do, and Naomi did what she was supposed to do, God said: I shall do My part" (Midrash Ruth Rabba 7:7). After humanity completes their work, God does His part behind the scenes with His only action in the entire book, "And God gave her a pregnancy and she bore a son" (Ruth 4:13).

^[1] Bazak, Amnon, *Ad Hayom Hazeh*.

^[2] Introduction to the "Da'at Mikra" commentary on Megillat Ruth, pp. 3-6 expounds on this issue.

^[3] Zakovitch, Yair. *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, introduction, pp. 30-31

RABBI DOV NIMCHINSKY

Hillel Academy Parent and Assistant Principal K-8

Shavuos: A Secret Handshake

Ask just about any Hillel Academy student why we celebrate Shavuos and they will tell you that it is when we received the Torah. Shavuos is called *Zman Matan Toraseinu*, "the anniversary of when we were given the Torah" in the Shalosh Regalim Amidah.

This simple idea is not so simple for the following reasons:

1. The Torah never refers to Shavuos as *Zman Matan Toraseinu*, "the day we were given the Torah."

2. The holiday of *Shavuos* is mentioned five times in the Torah. Twice it is referred to as the time of the wheat harvest, twice with regards to the Mitzvah of counting the Omer and the Omer offering, and one with regard to the Mitzvah of *Bikkurim*. The common denominator between these five references is that they are all connected to agricultural Mitzvos. From the words of the Torah, Shavuos is purely an agricultural holiday.

3. Not only is there no connection between Shavuos and Matan Torah, there is no explicit basis to say that Matan Torah took place on Shavuos. In fact, the date of Matan Torah is never mentioned in the Torah at all! The actual date of Matan Torah is a matter of dispute in the Gemara (Maseches Shabbos 86b) as to whether it was the 6th or 7th of Sivan.

4. Lastly, unlike *Yetzias Mitzrayim* which has numerous Mitzvos commemorating the event (both on Pesach and Sukkos), there are no Mitzvos commemorating Matan Torah. If we are indeed commemorating the most significant event in our history, why are we not surrounding it with Mitzvos?

I believe that the answers lie in having a clearer understanding of the relationship between *Torah SheBichtav* (the written Torah) and *Torah SheBaal Peh* (the Oral Law). Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explained that relationship with a parable. Imagine taking a high level college course. As the professor delivers the lecture, the students diligently take notes. A good note taker does not record every word said by the professor; instead, the best notes are filled with abbreviations, examples, technical jargon specific to that field of study, and oblique references to larger discussions and conversations held during class. If those notes were read by someone not taking that course of study, he would find them confusing and cryptic at best! To a student in that class those notes serve as a record and as a reminder of what transpired in class.

When comparing the lecture to the notes, which is the primary vehicle for teaching and communicating the material?

The lecture!

Which contains and presents more information?

The lecture!

Rav Hirsch explains that the lecture is analogous to the Oral Law and the notes are analogous to the Written Torah. The Oral Torah is arguably the more critical of the two.

The Written Torah tells us to not do *melacha* on Shabbos, but does not define what *melacha* is. How do we know what we may and may not do? The answer is in the Oral Law.

The Written Torah tells us to afflict ourselves on Yom Kippur, but does not define affliction, nor does it instruct us to fast. How do we know that we are to fast on Yom Kippur? The answer is in the Oral Law.

The Written Torah instructs us to slaughter animals "as I have commanded you" yet the Torah never mentions a single detail as to how an animal must be slaughtered in order to be Kosher. Where does this information (which G-d tells us He commanded us) come from? The answer once again is the Oral Law.

Without *Torah SheBaal Peh* (the Oral Law), *Torah Shebichtav* (the Written Law) is unintelligible.

There is another equally important facet to the Oral Law. It is uniquely ours! Unlike the Written Torah, it cannot be packed up and taken by another group. The Written Torah can and has been copied, translated and taken by other religions who have reinterpreted it to meet their own agendas. The Oral Law must be transmitted orally and explained father to son, *rebbe to talmid*. It must be discussed, explained, argued and lived. It cannot be copied. Jewish groups like the Tzedokim and Karaites rejected the Oral Law and tried to follow only the Written Torah. They have come and gone and have proven that such a system is unsustainable. The Oral Law is uniquely Jewish; it is uniquely *us*.

The source that establishes Shavuot as the celebration of *Matan Torah* is from the Oral Law. One who celebrates Shavuot exclusively as an agricultural festival is missing out on the entire *Torah SheBaal Peh* side of the picture. How we understand and define Shavuot is based on *Torah SheBaal Peh*. Defining Shavuot as *Zman Matan Torahseinu*, the imperative to celebrate the day of *Matan Torah*, and defining Shavuot as the date of *Matan Torah*, all come from *Torah SheBaal Peh*.

Shavuot is a celebration of the full Torah: both *Torah Shebichsav* and *Torah Shebaal Peh* for those who abide by and live in accordance with both. It is like a secret handshake or an inside joke. The uninitiated outsider cannot and will not get it.

RABBI SHIMON SILVER

Hillel Academy Parent and Spiritual Leader of Young Israel Congregation

בענין מודעא רבה לאורייתא

שבת פח. ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר א"ר אבדימי בר חמא מלמד שכפה הקב"ה עליהם את ההר כגיגית ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם. א"ר אחא בר יעקב מכאן מודעא רבה

לאורייתא. אמר רבא (רבה) אעפ"כ הדר קבלוה בימי אחשורוש דכתיב קימו וקיבלו היהודים קימו מה שקיבלו כבר ע"כ.

וע"ש תוס' ד"ה כפה כו' ואע"פ שכבר הקדימו נעשה לנשמע שמא יהו חוזרים כשיראו האש הגדולה וכו'. וע' תוד"ה מודעא וכו' הקשו מברית שבהר גריזים ותי' דע"פ הדיבור הוה כבעל כרחם כו' ע"ש. והנה קשה מכמה טעמים:

א. אם יש כאן מודעא מה הועיל הקב"ה כלל.

ב. אם הקדימו נעשה לנשמע ברצון איך יחזרו בהם.

ג. לכאורה לא עשה ד' כלום כאן מענין כריתת ברית אלא שאיים אותנו ואח"כ השיב ההר למקומו והמשיך בנתינת התורה. וכן נראה מתוס'. וא"כ האיום שבא אחר הקבלה דנעשה ונשמע מהו כלל.

ד. הרבה פעמים אח"כ קיימו התורה ובע"כ שקבלוה וא"כ לכאורה ביטלו המודעא.

ה. הרי נענשו כגון בחורבן ראשון ולמה לא טענו שהקבלה היתה ע"פ מודעא.

ו. לכאורה מודעא צריך להיות לפני ההסכם והקבלה ולא לאחרי.

ז. מה עשו יותר בימי אחשורוש באהבה מבשאר ההזדמנויות במשך הזמנים והדורות.

ונראה פשוט דכל קבלה בכה"ג עד שיתחיל במלאכה יכול לחזור בו וכדאיתא פ' השוכר אבל משהתחיל אינו כפועל יום אלא כקבלן ואינו יכול לחזור. והוה ההתחלה כקיום על קבלתו וכמו קיום שטרות. וא"כ כיון שקיבלו בנעשה ונשמע שייך שקודם דיבור הראשון כשיראו כל האש יחזרו אבל משישמעו דבור ראשון שאינו אפי' מצוה מעשית אלא שכלית ומיד יתחייבו ויתחילו שזה מצוה תמידית של אמונה – ואם עינינו רואות כחו כביכול ממילא מאמינים עכ"פ אותה שעה והוה התחלת המלאכה ושוב אין יכולים לחזור בהם. וע"כ איימם השתא דוקא וא"כ לא יחזרו. ויקיימו מצוה ראשונה. אלא שכיון שהיה באיום ויש להם לטעון שהיה במודעא א"כ על כלל הקבלה יש להם לטעון ולהפטר. אבל היו להם עוד בריתות וכגון על הארץ, שהם כמו בריתות פרטיות, ועל אלו קבלו וגם קיימו ונענשו בעברם על קבלתם. ומ"מ על כלל התורה כמו על אבדן כל ישראל משום עברם על התורה עדיין לא קיימו הקבלה. ומשום המודעא א"א להם לקיים כי בשעת נתינת התורה עשו מודעא ושוב לא היתה נתינה על כלל התורה.

וע"ז הק' בתוס' ממה שהיה בהר גריזים ותי' דזה היה ע"פ הדיבור וע"כ אין זה כקיום קבלתם של נעשה ונשמע כי לא באו מכח רצון נפשם אלא כקיום אחד ממצות התורה – שהיא גופא נמסרה מודעא עליה. אבל בימי מרדכי כשחידש מצוה חדשה מדרבנן והם קיבלוה כולם מאהבה – הרי בזה היתה להם ההזדמנות לקיים מה שקיבלו מקודם ובלא מודעא. והיינו דכתיב קיימו קודם קיבלו.

וגם שכל ישראל קיימו וקיבלו פי' קיימו יו"ט זה וקיבלוה לדורותם לעולם וע"כ נתקיימה הברית הראשונה. ובפרט שקיום וקבלה זו תלויה על כח החכמים מלא תסור. וכאן עשאוה כולם ביחד ודייק הגר"א דקיימו כתיב חסר הוי"ו (קים) שהיו כולם כאיש אחד בלב אחד. ובשאר מצות דרבנן לא תלו אותם בקבלת כל ישראל אלא גזרום עליהם וקיימום. וכאן קיבלום וא"א לחייב דורותם אא"כ הוא כקבלת התורה שמתחילה – כל ישראל יחד כאיש אחד וע"פ הקבלה של נעשה ונשמע.

RABBI LEVI LANGER

Hillel Academy Parent and Rosh Kollel of Kollel Jewish Learning Center

The Jerusalem Talmud teaches that after the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem wanted to take back the luchos which He had given to Moshe. But Moshe seized hold of the luchos and his hand overpowered that of the Almighty. Hashem then said, "Peace be unto the hand which was stronger than Mine."

Like many Midrashic teachings this is clearly a metaphor. And what it says is this: now that we've sinned and we know that we're human and possess human frailties, we cannot afford to take Torah for granted. We don't automatically deserve to attain G-dly wisdom and we don't have some natural born right to it. We need to think, then, about what a special privilege it is to receive the Torah, and to exert ourselves emotionally to really desire it. If we do this then the "hand of Moshe" will be strong, and we will succeed in bringing Torah into our consciousness and our daily lives.

MRS. ELKY LANGER

Hillel Academy Parent and K-12 Curriculum Coordinator

The very first word of the Torah tells us the purpose of creation.

The first possuk in Beraishis is, of course, בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ - in the beginning Hashem created the Heavens and the Earth. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, tells us that the word בראשית can be understood to mean בשביל ראשית - for the sake of "ראשית." And what is ראשית?

בראשית דרכו - for the sake of Torah, which is called, "The first of His way."
בראשית תבואתו - and for the sake of Yisroel, which is called, "The first of His produce."

The world was thus created for the sake of Torah and for the Jewish nation, into whose hands are given the fulfillment of the world's purpose.

Just as the creation narrative begins with a reminder about the purpose of life, the universe, and everything, the final verse in the first chapter ends with a similar reminder.

וירא אלקים את כל אשר עשה והנה טוב מאד ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי - and Hashem saw everything He created, and behold, it was very good; and it was evening and morning, the sixth day.

Rashi notes that the expression הששי is different from the numbering format used for the other days of creation, which do not include the definite article by each day. The ה is significant -- referring either to the 5 books of the Torah, or the sixth day of Sivan, the date of the giving of the Torah. כולם תלויים ועומדים עד יום הששי - the world was suspended, hanging by a thread, its physical existence dependent on an event that would only take place years later at Har Sinai. Only if the Jews accepted the Torah would creation be complete, established upon a firm foundation.

Shavuos is the anniversary of this event, the day the world's physical creation could breathe a sigh of relief with the knowledge that it would endure and fulfill its purpose. We were all present at Har Sinai when we proclaimed נעשה ונשמע and pledged to keep the Torah's commandments. Now -- this Shavuos -- is the time to renew that pledge, to reaffirm our commitment and accept the responsibility that we were given on that first Shavuos.

MRS. LISA COOK

***Hillel Academy Parent, Co-Director of Aish Pittsburgh
and Hillel Academy GHS Faculty***

Preparing for Shavuos

There is a basic life lesson that the more we put into something, the more we get out of it. The dollar earned through hard work will always be put to better use than the dollar won or gifted to us. This holds true all the more so in our Judaism. The greater our intensity in preparing for a Shabbos or Yom Tov, the greater our ability to harness its energy and grow from it. Each year as we approach Shavuos, the more effort that we make in crafting our own personal crown of Torah, the more radiant that crown will be.

The spiritual legacy of our ancestors, who spent the seven weeks post-Exodus in intense preparation for receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, is our ability to access great potential for spiritual growth in the weeks leading up to Shavuos. This can be accomplished, according to Rav Chaim Shmulevitz (on Shemos 19:2), in three specific ways: by strengthening ourselves in our Torah learning; by building our positive character traits; and by unifying the Jewish people.

In the world of Jewish outreach, the advice generally given to someone striving for growth in Judaism is to start slowly, to take on one small thing at a time. The hastier and wider-reaching a person tries to be, the greater his or her tendency to become overwhelmed, and then backtrack or fall into despair. This would certainly be the case in regard to increasing or expanding oneself in the areas of Torah learning and *middos* work. However, when it comes to increasing or expanding love and unity among *klal Yisroel*, one should not feel any sense of holding back. The stakes are too high.

What does it mean to work on unifying the Jewish people in the most practical sense? While many of us have good intentions, as we go about our busy lives we sometimes find that there is a disconnect between what we know is the true and right way to live and act, and our actual decisions and actions. Upon encountering a fellow Jew in the supermarket or in shul, the reaction may be to ignore rather than to engage, to judge negatively rather than judge favorably, to turn away rather than draw close. What we want to aim for is simply to be kind to others, to take an interest in their lives, to provide a listening ear, to open our homes, to use pleasant words and expressions. While our baseline may be to ensure that every interaction we have leaves the other party with positive feelings, our loftier goal must be to revert our individual selves and our community to the state of *VaYichan: KeIsh Echad beLev Echad*, which facilitated our ability to receive Torah at Har Sinai 3,000 years ago.

We can learn much from Mrs. Rachel Fraenkel, whose teenage son Naftali was found murdered together with two other teenage boys in Eretz Yisroel last summer, 18 days after being kidnapped. During those days, thousands on thousands of Jews were united in prayer, *chessed* and other *mitzvos* in the merit of bringing home the three boys. In the aftermath of these events, Mrs. Frankel mused the following:

“Those 18 days were filled with the darkest hours, but also amazing hours. We discovered our family, our friends, our community, our country, our people ... People all over were saying, these are not just *your* boys. These are *our* children. Sometimes I ask myself - was this just an illusion? And I have this image of a person walking in the dark, and it’s raining, and they’re stumbling and they ... don’t see anything. And for a second there’s lightening. In that lightening, they see the reality of their surroundings. It helps them guide their way. We had days and days of lightening. It’s no illusion. What we saw there ourselves, we’re part of something huge, we’re part of a people, of a true family. That’s for real. Somebody called our home and said, ‘You know, I’m considered a non-affiliated Jew. I want to tell you: I feel so affiliated.’ Cain asks: Am I my brother’s keeper? I think our answer came out loud and clear. We are one family, and I AM my brother’s keeper. It’s no illusion. Even if day-to-day life doesn’t feel like this, what we saw was real ... It was said, we went out searching for the boys, and we discovered ourselves.”

As we approach Shavuot this year, let us draw upon the “lightning” moments in our lives - those times that we have felt drawn to one another – and harness this inspiration to connect and to unite. This is the hard work that we need to do to build the Jewish world as a whole, and ultimately to build ourselves. May the light from our beautiful Torah crown shine throughout the world.

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