

GROWTH THROUGH READING

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Shavu'os is the holiday on which we celebrate the giving of the Torah to the nation of Israel. This holiday is not merely the commemoration of an anniversary. Rather, it is the day upon which we commit ourselves once again to accept the Torah and treat it, through study, with the honor and dignity this precious gift deserves. This re-acceptance each year carries with it major ramifications.

On each Shabbos we read a Parsha, a portion, of the Torah. We start each yearly cycle on the Shabbos following the holiday of Simchas Torah, with the very first Parsha, that of Bereishis. However, come the holidays, there are special portions of the Torah read. These portions deviate from the yearly cycle. Instead, the subject of the portion read relates to the particular holiday in some fashion. Rav Moshe Chayim Luzzato, in his *Derech Hashem* (4:8) explains further the concept of reading the Torah.

He writes "the reason for (the reading of the Torah) is that the Torah consists of something that was given to us by G-d to read. It was furthermore designated so that His holy light should be transmitted to us through such reading On certain special days, it is also appropriate that special portions be read, relating to the concepts of those days. In this way, the special holy light of these days is strengthened through the power of the Torah, which is the strongest power that we have."

The Torah was given to us to read, to study, and to explore. So that we maximize our spiritual benefit from this reading, it was ordained that we read the Torah every week and on special days. On these special days, our spiritual benefit is increased: we receive not only the holiness that comes from the reading of the Torah, but also that from the holiday itself.

Besides the regular topical portion read on the holiday, we read a special Maftir, final and concluding verses. The Maftir describes the special offerings that were brought in the Bais HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, on that holiday. The Talmud (Yerushalmi, Rosh HaShana 4:9) notes that the description of the offerings for Shavu'os differs from that of the other holidays. "Rav Mesharshia said in the name of Rav Idi - by all of the offerings it (the Torah) writes "Chayt" (an expression of sin) but regarding Shavu'os it does not write "Chayt." This is to tell us that Hashem said 'Since you accepted upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, it is considered to me as if you never sinned in your days.'"

The P'nei Moshe explains this passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi. He writes that by the offerings of the various holidays, the Torah usually writes "one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you," or something similar. However, by Shavu'os, the Torah states (Bamidbar 28:30)

"And one kid of the goats, to make an atonement for you." This offering is not described as a sin offering. The reason for this is because the Torah was given to the nation of Israel on Shavu'os. They accepted upon themselves this burden, to delve into and toil in the study of the Torah. Hashem, because of this acceptance, views the nation of Israel as if they never sinned in their lives. Hence, a sin offering is not needed on Shavu'os.

The Yalkut Shimoni (Shemos 271) adds tremendous insight regarding the extent of this forgiveness. The Torah (Shemos 19: 1) writes: "In the third month, when the people of Israel went out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came into the wilderness of Sinai." On this verse, the Yalkut explains in expository fashion that "Hashem said to the nation of Israel: 'My children, you read this portion (about the giving of the Torah) every year, and I will view it as if you yourselves stood before Mt. Sinai and accepted the Torah,' as it says 'On the same day they came into the wilderness of Sinai,' - when (is one to read the portion)? In the third month."

By merely reading the passages concerning the giving of the Torah, according to the Yalkut, it is as if we ourselves stood at Sinai and accepted the Torah. Therefore, when this is taken together with the Yerushalmi quoted above, an amazing fact becomes evident: by reading the events concerning the giving of the Torah on Shavu'os, it is as if we ourselves accepted the Torah at Sinai, and therefore G-d views us as if we never sinned! This truth was clearly contemplated by the Yerushalmi: The special offerings brought on Shavu'os were obviously not brought on the day the Torah was given - this was a commandment from then on and for generations to come. Never, in any generation, was the offering to be termed a "sin offering." This is because, as the Yalkut states, by reading about the giving of the Torah, it is as if we, in each and every generation, accepted the Torah upon ourselves at Sinai, and are therefore deserving of the special "non-sinning" status.

On Shavu'os, we are presented with an unparalleled opportunity to achieve spiritual greatness. As Rav Luzzato points out, the mere reading of the Torah bestows upon us spiritual benefit. When the reading of the Torah we conduct concerns the giving of the Torah, it is possible for us to reach a level where G-d views us as if we have not sinned! Of course, it is clear to all that if, come the conclusion of Shavu'os, we regress and do not strive to grow in our commitment to the Torah, the spiritual gain afforded by Shavu'os will be lost. We can not afford to suffer such a loss. Therefore, preparation for Shavu'os is needed. If we strengthen our commitment and intensify our study of the Torah before Shavu'os, we can be assured that we will maximize the gain realized come that time when we read about the giving of the Torah on Shavu'os day.

Check out all of the posts on the Shavuot! Head over to <http://www.torah.org/learning/yomtov> to find the newly redesigned YomTov Home Page, and click on the holiday you are interested in to find all of the archived posts on that topic.