

THAT GOLDEN PEACE TREATY

by Rabbi Label Lam

That Golden Peace Treaty

Rabbi Elazar said: All agree with regard to Atzeret-Shavuot, that we require that it be also "for you," meaning that it is a Mitzvah to eat, drink, and rejoice on that day. What is the reason? (Pesachim 68B)

On the Holidays, how is our time to be spent? There is a dispute! One opinion says that it is to be entirely spiritually or entirely material (eating and rejoicing) but not both. The other side says that the day is meant to be divided. When it comes to Shevuos everyone agrees that it should be divided between devotion to HASHEM and eating and rejoicing? Why is the holiday of Shevuos different?

To answer a question "why", we need to see a thing in context. One of the most amazing things about being a human is that we are comprised of two completely different, disparate elements- whose needs seem almost irreconcilable. The SOUL and the BODY-are an "odd couple" indeed. While the BODY, like a horse, wishes to run on its horizontal plain in search of food and phillies, the SOUL, like a rider, is much more interested in climbing vertically in pursuit of truth and philosophy. How do we deal with this built in human dilemma? Whose needs dominate over the other's needs? There are four classic approaches.

1-What we'll call the far eastern way is an ideal that the soulful portion dominates the physical body. The successful practitioner finds him-self atop a mountain-aloof. His physical needs have been thoroughly quieted. He feels almost no pain. He can sleep on a bed of nails and fast. He is divorced from his body. Having trained himself to not to hear the whimpers of his own physical being or the temporal world around him, he meditates in that state and transcends the mundane.

2-The second we can refer to as the far western approach. Here the immediate needs of the body drown out the voice of the soul until it is a frail and thin voice, an afterthought called conscience. With plenty of continued practice that voice can be almost entirely annihilated.

It is recorded how the Nazis were sick to their stomachs the first time they carried out the brutal murder of Jews but after a while they could go home and eat dinner as if nothing had happened. The callous that develops with deeds that violate the sensibilities of the human soul grows thicker and darker with each repeated action. Eventually the body is divorced from its soul- Kores- cut off.

3- A third possibility encourages both spiritual and material indulgence but alternately. This "solution" is not a solution. In fact it complicates the human experience. The Talmud says pithily, "Oy

li M'yotzri, Oy li' M'yitzri"- "Woe to me from my Creator (or) Woe to me from my desire!" (Brochos 61A) Either the conscience will ache when violated or the body when deprived. A professor Meier was able to induce neurosis in rats. How? One door offered a food prize and the other a shock. Once the rat figured out which was which, the psychologist switched them. Now the rat crept cautiously from door to door uncertain whether it would receive a delight or an electric shock. At some point the rat parks himself equidistant from both doors and chooses to starve to death rather than risk getting a shock. OY! It's not easy being a laboratory rat or a person that swings easily and too often from top of the spiritual spectrum into the abyss and back again.

4-The 4th- the middle-east emphasizes the spiritual but without negation of the physical. A fellow asked his friend, "Why are you busy caring for your horse all day?" He answered, "He's a dumb horse and I'm a smart person. He needs me!" His friend then replied, "If he's so dumb and you're so smart, why don't you get him to do things for you!?" If the soul can learn somehow to discipline the body in a sensitive and caring way, then a peace plan can be brokered between these two giant and competing forces. A person can happily navigate between the temporal on the way to the eternal in a joyous way. King Solomon had said about the Torah, "Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace." (Mishlei 3:17) So we eat cheesecake and learn Torah too on Shevuot, to honor and reaffirm **that golden peace treaty**.