

# IT'S THE TIME...

*by Shlomo Katz*

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**Shavuot**

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Today's Learning:  
(for Shabbat)  
Shevi'it 1:7-8  
Orach Chaim 107:3-108:1  
Daf Yomi: Sukkah 51  
Yerushalmi Megillah 4

The special offering brought in the Bet Hamikdash on Shavuot was the "Korban Shte Ha'lechem"/"The Offering of Two Loaves of Bread." This offering was brought from wheat.

The gemara (Menachot 69b as explained by Rashi) asks: If a ship carrying wheat was lifted by a storm and the wheat rained down from heaven somewhere else, may that wheat be used for the sacrifice? When the Torah (Vaykira 23:17) required that this sacrifice be brought "from your dwelling places," did it mean to exclude wheat that came from outside of Eretz Yizrael or even wheat that was grown in Eretz Yisrael, but that most recently came from the heavens?

Why does the gemara even ask this question? R' Avraham Shimon Halevi Ish-Horowitz z"l (1877-

approx.1942; mashgiach of Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin) wonders. Such an occurrence is far-fetched at best. Why does the gemara, in general, discuss many far-fetched situations?

He explains: In fact, much of the halachic material in the Talmud deals with situations that never have and never will occur. However, the nature of Torah study is to investigate what Hashem's Will would be in every conceivable situation. When one studies the Torah, his physical mind attaches itself to the Will of G-d. Whether one is studying the laws of the animal or flour sacrifices, the laws of bailments and torts, or the laws of ritual purity and impurity, it is all the Will of Hashem. Studying these laws elevates a Jew higher and higher without limit, whether or not he will ever have an opportunity to practice what he has learned. (Naharei Eish: Likutei Dibburim No. 86)

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*At the time of the giving of the Torah, Hashem said to Bnei Yisrael, "Give me a guarantor."*

They said, "Our ancestors will be our guarantors," but Hashem rejected them. They said, "Our prophets will be our guarantors," but Hashem rejected them too.

Finally Bnei Yisrael said, "Our children will be our guarantors," and Hashem accepted them. Thus it is written (Tehilim 8:3), "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings you have established strength [i.e., Torah]." (From the Midrash)

R' Yaakov Abuchatzera z"l (Morocco; 1807-1880) asks: Why does Hashem need a guarantor that Bnei Yisrael will keep the Torah? He is everywhere and can easily punish anyone who fails to observe the Torah's laws! Also, why were the children better guarantors than the ancestors and the prophets?

He answers: The gemara (Shabbat 88b) relates that when Moshe ascended to the Heavens to receive the Torah, the angels objected, saying that the Torah should not be given to mortals. "What is frail man that You should remember him," they asked (in the words of Tehilim 8:5, the same chapter as quoted in the above midrash). Moshe answered the angels by demonstrating that the Torah contains practical mitzvot which are irrelevant to purely spiritual beings such as they.

What were the angels thinking? R' Abuchatzera asks. Surely they knew that the Torah is made up of practical mitzvot! The answer is that the angels wanted to divide the Torah in two, with the practical part of the Torah being given to man and the mystical part remaining with the angels. No, Moshe told them, the two parts belong together. Just as the human body clothes the soul, so the practical side of the Torah clothes the mystical side. And, just as the soul needs the body in order to function, so the mystical part of the Torah needs the practical side. [Based on this idea, R' Abuchatzera explains the discussion between Moshe and the angels in greater depth.]

Although the angels acquiesced to Moshe's argument, they were not convinced that man could be holy enough to receive the Torah. It was to show the angels their mistake that Hashem demanded guarantors. Why did He accept the children as guarantors rather than the adults? Because adults, no

matter how holy, have still sinned. Even the Patriarchs and other prophets were not perfect. Children, however, are completely pure, for Hashem does not hold them accountable for their deeds. So pure are they that Chazal teach that the world exists only because of the Torah study of children. (Doreish Tov: Drush Rishon Le'matan Torah)

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### **"Zman Matan Toratenu"**

In the prayers and in kiddush, we refer to Shavuot as "Zman Matan Toratenu"/"The time of the giving of our Torah." But is it really? It is generally accepted that the Torah was given on the seventh day of Sivan, while the first day of Shavuot - the only day in Israel - falls on the sixth of Sivan! How then can we call the sixth day, "The time of the giving of our Torah"?

R' Yerachmiel Zeltser shlita has collected 100 answers to this question, three of which are presented here:

#6g. The work Divrei Nechemiah explains: "Zman" does not mean "day," it means "time." The sixth day of Sivan may not be the day when the Torah was actually given, but it is the "time" that is propitious for receiving the Torah anew each year. This is because Hashem would have given the Torah on the sixth of Sivan if Moshe had not asked Him to delay one day (as related in the gemara, Shabbat 87a).

What makes the sixth of Sivan a good time for receiving the Torah is the fact that it is the "fiftieth day" of the Omer. The days of the Omer represent the first 49 of the 50 "Gates of Understanding," and after we have ascended through those 49 gates we are ready to receive the Torah. The proof that the "time" for receiving the Torah is determined by the Omer count and not by the calendar date is the fact that before we had a fixed calendar (i.e., during the era when the new month was announced based on witnesses' sighting of the new moon), Shavuot could fall on the fifth, sixth or seventh day of Sivan.

#41. R' Avraham Mordechai Alter z"l (the "Gerrer Rebbe"; died 1948) explains similarly that our practice is based on the rule, "That which Heaven gives It does not take away." Thus, once Hashem planned to give the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, the resulting spiritual aura became a permanent feature of that day, even though the Torah was not given then.

#86. Chazal teach that the soul of every Jew who would later be born was present at the giving of the Torah. Indeed, those disembodied souls far outnumbered the living people who were present.

Based on this we can answer: True, the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan, but that detail is irrelevant to us (the embodiment of those souls) because souls exist "above" time. As far as the soul is concerned, what determines when the Torah should be given is not the calendar date, but one's preparedness to receive the Torah. This, as noted above, is determined by the completion of the Omer count. (Ner L'meah: Shavuot)

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## Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the "Klausenberger Rebbe"; died 1994) just before Shavuot 5719 (1959). As is apparent from the letter, the author was traveling from Israel to his home (Union City, New Jersey) when he wrote the letter.

The letter is printed in Michtavei Torah, Volume II, page 248 (letter 137). In the first paragraph, the author appears to compare the pleasant weather that he had left in Israel with the weather he found in Switzerland, concluding that one would expect to find unpleasant weather when one is distanced from the Land over which G-d watches. He then relates this point to Shavuot.

We have arrived in Zurich in peace, thank G-d. Our trip passed well, thank G-d; may He allow us to continue on for a good life and in peace to our home until we can return to our Holy Land, amen, may it be His Will. Here, the rain has passed, and we have fallen [in the words of a Talmudic phrase] "from a high summit to a deep pit." I now understand that which we say (in the Yom Tov musaf), "Because of our sins we were distanced from our Land," as Chazal have said, "Why is it called 'Eretz'/'Land'? Because it wants/'ratzah' to do the Will of its Creator." This refers to our Holy Land, and is a result of its spirituality. "We were distanced from our Land," i.e., from the "Land that flows with milk and honey."

The Bach (R' Yoel Sirkes z"l; 1560-1640) writes in chapter 208 regarding the words [in the berachah which is said after eating one of the Seven Species], "And satiate us from its [i.e., Eretz Yisrael's] goodness," that the fruits of Eretz Yisrael have in them holiness, whereas in the Diaspora [in the words of Devarim 31:20], "You will eat, be sated, and grow fat, and turn to gods of others." . . . This is why we are obligated by halachah to have a remembrance of the destruction of the Temple [and the resulting exile] during every meal. [See Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 560:2]

This is why [in the words of Pesachim 68b], "All agree that Shavuot must be partially 'For you'" [i.e., one must have good food on Shavuot, whereas some sages hold that this is not required on other holidays]. This represents our understanding that through receiving the Torah one merits to eat from the table of our Father. Maybe this is why we eat dairy on Shavuot, to show that in the merit of accepting the Torah we earn the Land that flows with milk and honey.

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