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פרשת נשא/שבועות

The Sinai experience

When a Yom Tov comes we actually re-experience it happening and as it says inוהימים האלה נזכרים ונעשים בכל דור ודור; these days should be remembered and celebrated by every single generation.[[1]](#footnote-2)Indeed, the word חג is connected toחוגה; a circle,since when a given Yom Tov comes, we actually experience it.[[2]](#footnote-3) For the same reason, the book which we Daven from on Yom Tov is called a מחזור- from the root חזר; return- as we return to that Yom Tov, literally, each year. In this way, explains the Kedushas Levi, בימים ההם בזמן הזה–the way it was then (בימים ההם), is the way it is now (בזמן הזה), as it is relived.[[3]](#footnote-4)

As a result, when Shavuos comes we are actually experiencing Matan Torah again.With this theme we can grasp the following:

1) It states[[4]](#footnote-5)**ביום הזה** באו מדבר סיני; on this day we arrived at the desert of Sinai. This is also understood that on this day every year we come to מדבר סיני.

2)At Matan Torah Moshe would speak- משה ידבר. Notice it doesn’t say משה דבר; Moshe spoke- past tense- ratherמשה ידבר,[[5]](#footnote-6) future tense. The Arizal explains this is because every year on Shavuos, Moshe speaks to us.

3) In this way we can explain the words of R’ Yosef[[6]](#footnote-7)אי לא האי יומא דקא גרים...; if not for this day (Shavuos) which causes me to learn, how many Yosef’s would there be in the market place.He didn’t say that day, meaning the Shavuos of Matan Torah. Rather he said this day, referring to the Shavuos of every year.

4) The Nesivos Shalom explains why it is calledזמן מתן תורתנו[[7]](#footnote-8) since every year at this time we receive the Torah.[[8]](#footnote-9)

5) The Kedushas Levi writes if one merits, he will hear the אנכי ה' אלה-יך on Shavuos.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Letting the light linger

Each Yom Tov comes with its light. For example, when Pesach comes each of us has the ability to leave our own Mitzrayim, our constraints. When Shavuos comes we each receive the Torah anew. Following Yom Tov we have אסרו חג. The Kedushas Levi tells us that this is a day to tie up the spiritual lights of the Yom Tov and as it saysאסרו חג בעבותים....[[10]](#footnote-11) in this way we can grasp what we say in the Shemona Esrei of Yom Tov והשאנו..ברכת מועדיך as והשאנו is related to משא וטעינה; carry and load, since we want to take the light with us, the ברכת מועדיך.

In light of this we can comprehend that which it states by Matan Torah וקדשתם היום ומחרas מחרcan also refer to the future, as inכי ישאלך בנך מחר, since we want to take this light with us for the remainder of the year.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Lifting up the dejected

In 1846, at the young age of 30, R’ Avraham Mordechai Alter, the son of the Chidushei Harim (1799-1866) became very ill. Seeing his son low-spirited, the Chidushai Harim told him to have a will to live as inובחרת בחיים;choose life.[[12]](#footnote-13) After his father left the room, R’ Avrohom Mordechai pleaded with Hashem to have another few years to his life so he can have another child. He then said that he will call him Yehuda because[[13]](#footnote-14)הפעם אודה את ה'; gratefully praise Hashem, the words expressed by Yehuda’s mother when he was born. The following year- in 1847-Yehuda Aryeh, otherwise known as the Sefas Emes (1847-1905),was born.

In this way we can grasp the words in our Parshaנשא את ראש בני גרשון- lift up those people who feel that they are divorced from Hashem.[[14]](#footnote-15)We see an example of this by Kayin who was told ...למה נפלו פניך הלא אם תיטיב שאת; why are you down, if you improve yourself you will be forgiven.[[15]](#footnote-16)In a day and age where so many feel dejected it is relatively easy to fulfill this. Giving someone a word of encouragement or some advice can go a long way.[[16]](#footnote-17) Even to ourselves we can fulfill this as there are many times when we feel down as well.

Loving the Torah

We know that one of Yisro’s names was חובב since שחבב את התורה; because he loved the Torah.[[17]](#footnote-18) Many others also loved the Torah, so why is this unique name given only to Yisro?

The traits we have are neutral and based on how we channel it, is how it is. This is known as זה לעמת זה.[[18]](#footnote-19) Based on this, we can grasp why the greater a person is, the bigger his Yetzer Hara- כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול הימנו.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Yisro worshipped every Avoda Zara.[[20]](#footnote-21) Consequently, he was immersed in impurity to the extreme. So, when he became Jewish and experienced the Torah, he loved it with such an intensity that couldn’t be matched by anyone else (on a certain level).[[21]](#footnote-22) Is it any coincidence that Matan Torah is in Parshas Yisro, the one who loved the Torah.[[22]](#footnote-23)

Not just 3 sons

1) Analyzing the command to take a census of the 3 sons of Levi- גרשון, קהת and מררי- we notice there are discrepancies. Hashem tells Moshe to take a census of Gershon as well- גם הם. The Chasam Sofer[[23]](#footnote-24)is bothered why these words were necessary?

2) In regard to גרשון and קהת, the termנשא את ראש is used, in contrast to מררי.[[24]](#footnote-25) Why is מרריdifferent?

The 3 sons of Levi hint to 3 periods of our nation. קהתalludes to when we are in unity on our homeland, as in ולו יקהת עמים.[[25]](#footnote-26)The offspring of Kehas areעמרם, יצהר, חברון ועזיאל.[[26]](#footnote-27) At this time period, we were at our peak (hinted to in עמרםas it is a contraction of עם רם) and lit up the world(יצהר related to צוהר; light).חברון ועזיאל-we were connected to Hashem (חברון from the term חבור; attached) and strong (עזיאלsourced inעז; strength) in our Kedusha. For such a period the phrase נשיאות ראש is proper as this infers we were exalted.

גרשוןhints to the time when we are exiled from our land as גרשון means to divorce. Still it says נשיאות ראשsincewe also- **גם הם**- were exalted because we subdued ourselves before the sages and learned from them. This is considered like offering Korbonos as Chazal say.[[27]](#footnote-28) This is the meaning in בני גרשון...לבני ושמעי as our sins were whitened[[28]](#footnote-29) (לבני is rooted in לבן; white) and atoned for since we listened (שמעי) to the sages.

Finally, מרריhints to the bitter times as inוימררו את חייהם, as in the generations of שמד; religious persecution and forced conversion.[[29]](#footnote-30)In this period, we are treaded upon and despised. This is a deeper meaning in that the בני מרריare מחלי ומושי-that we tolerate all types of illness and afflictions (מחלי related to מחלה; sickness) and we were removed from our dwellings (מושי is rooted inמש; to move). Still, we are Moser Nefesh ourselves for Hashem. It therefore doesn’t say נשא את ראשthere since they are greater than their ancestors as Chazal sayהרוגי מלכות אין אדם יכול לעמוד במחיצתן; those executed by the government enjoy such an exalted level in the next world that no other person can stand in their enclosure.[[30]](#footnote-31)

The 48 ways to acquire medicine

Just as a doctor knows what medicine is needed for a patient, similarlyHashem knows the medicine needed for spirituality- that is, to combat the Yetzer Hara. The medicine is the Torah as we are taughtבראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין; I have created the evil inclination and I have created Torah as its antidote.[[31]](#footnote-32)Indeed, thisis how Moshe was victorious in the debate with the Malachim to receive the Torahas he concluded יצר הרע יש ביניכם; is there a Yetzer Hara among Malachim.[[32]](#footnote-33)For this reason,on Shavuos we are toldבעינן נמי לכם.[[33]](#footnote-34)

How do we acquire the Torah?The Mishna[[34]](#footnote-35) enumerates the 48 ways for its acquisition. This is alluded to in אשת חיל מי ימצא[[35]](#footnote-36) which refers to Torah. The wordחיל yields a Gematria of 48,referring to these 48 ways.

Although we put our toil into Torah, the end result is a gift from Hashem as it says כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה; Hashem grants wisdom….[[36]](#footnote-37) It is a מציאה, that which is a find and not the result of the toil we put in as it says יגעתיומצאתיandוהחכמה מאין תמצא.[[37]](#footnote-38)This is how we can comprehend the remainder of the Pasuk מי ימצא- מי has a Gematria of 50, referring to Shavuos. ימצא- the end result is a מציאה. The Pasuk then reads- the Torah, which was given on Shavuos, is acquired through the 48 (חיל) ways. However, we should keep in mind that the end result is a מציאה.

Let us take another look at some of the 48 ways to see other meanings which we may have not noticed at first glance.

1)מעוט סחורה; limited business activity. This can also mean that one should work a little bit because then he could have the peace of mind to learn. Additionally, there are those that make more of their time once they start working since they realize their time is limited. They could then accomplish more in their learning than when they were learning full time.

2) מעוט דרך ארץ; limited activity in worldly affairs- R’ Moshe Schwab would comment that this also means that one should have little Derech Eretz with his Rebbe meaning take full advantage of him- ask him questions in learning without letting him off easy, and so on.

3)מעוט תענוג- limited pleasure. This can also mean one can have some pleasure in order to learn since this can enhance his learning.

4) מעוט שנה; limited sleep. We know many Gedolim who did limit their sleep. However, for many of us, it would help if we would get sufficient sleep. In this way our quality as well as our quantity of learning would be boosted.

5) מעוט שיחה; limited talk. It would do well for many of us to talk less. However, at times we may need to talk things out so that we can have a clear head to learn and as we are taughtדאגה בלב איש ישיחנה לאחרים; when there is a worry in one’s heart he should speak it out with others.[[38]](#footnote-39)

6) מעוט שחוק; limited laughter. At times laughing is necessary for learning as it gets us into better spirits. Indeed, this is why a Shiur would begin with aמילתא דבדיחותא, a joke.[[39]](#footnote-40)

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1. Esther 9:28 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Michtav Meliyahu, volume 2 pg 18. Derech Hashem 4:7:6. Kedushas Levi, Shavuos, s.v. בש"ע. Meor Einayim, Miketz, s.v. זמן and Yisro s.v. איתא בכתבי האר"י, Siduro Shel Shabbos, volume 1, 7:2:3. The word for year, שנה, also means to repeat since we actually experience the yearly cycle. In fact, the Dibras Shlomo brings in the name of the Arizal that when a miracle occurs on a certain day, there is an aspect of that miracle on that day every year. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Kedushas Levi, Chanuka, Kedusha Rishona. The phrase we say in על הנסים- ופרקן כהיום הזה; salvation as this very day, can also be interpreted as יום הזה; this day, now in the present, is פרקן- the redemption is tangible. The סידור לב שמח writes I heard from R’ Shalom Belzer on מה לך הים כי תנוס (Tehillim 114) that it doesn’t say נסת, past tense- that the sea split in the past. This is because this miracle still occurs for us- in a spiritual sense. In this way we can understand that which we recite in the Brachos of the Haftora- ודבר אחד מדבריך אחור לא ישוב ריקם; not one of your words is turned back to its origin unfulfilled, as nothing from the past is empty since we relive it (see Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chaim 284:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Shemos 19:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Shemos 19:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Pesachim 68b [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The Daas Moshe writes that really it would suffice to say זמן מתן תורה so why does it say תורתנו? He explains because on this day each of us receives our portion in Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Nesivos Shalom, Shavuos, Maamar Rishon s.v. עיצומו של יום [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Kedushas Levi, Yisro, s.v. ומשה עלה. See Derech Hashem 8:6. The Nesivos Shalom (ibid) says that the revelations that were at the first Matan Torah come again on Shavuos such as the thunder, lightning and the like. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. דרוש לפסח, s.v. מה שמקשין. Tehillim 118:27. See Kisvei Arizal, Shaar Hakavanos, Inyan Isru Chag. This is how R’ Ahron Karliner (Beis Ahron, Isru Chag, s.v. אמר) would interpret הבוחר בשירי זמרה, to take the Yom Tov with us as שירי is related to שירים; leftovers, remainder. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Shemos 19:10. 13:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Devarim 30:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Breishis 29:35 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Bamidbar 4:22. Although at times it is necessary to give rebuke, it needs to be done in the proper way as otherwise it can cause lots of damage. In this way we can interpretאל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך הוכח לחכם ויאהבך; do not rebuke a scoffer lest he hate you, rebuke a wise man and he will love you (Mishlei 9:8)- don’t rebuke someone by belittling him since then he will hate you. Rather give rebuke by saying you are a חכם, you are too good for this. In a similar vein, we can grasp שמע בני מוסר אביך (Mishlei 1:8) as the biggest Mussar is that we are a son Hashem and that we are too good for negative behavior. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Breishis 4:6,7 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. The Pasuk states מחטב עציך עד שאב מימיך; …from the hewer of wood to the drawer of water (Devarim 29:10). A deeper explanation given is that at times it is more important to give advice- עצות– to someone than to learn- שאב מימיך, as Torah is referred to as water. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Shemos 18:11, Rashi [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Koheles 7:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Succa 52a [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Shemos 18:11, Rashi [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. The Chazon Ish once commented if a non-Jew would know the enjoyment of learning a page of Gemara before Shacharis on Shabbos morning he would convert to Judaism. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. This also teaches that the Torah can raise even the lowliest of people. This is just as Torah is compared to water as it goes into the lowest of places. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Toras Moshe, s.v. נשא [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. 4:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Breishis 49:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Bamidbar 3:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. On the Pasuk בכל מקום מקטר וגו' (Malachi 1:11), we are taught it refers to the Talmidei Chochamim who are engaged in Torah, it is as if they offered all the Korbonos (see Menachos 110a). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. See Devarim 3:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Shemos 1:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Pesachim 50a [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Kiddushin 30b. see Nefesh Hachaim 4:32. We find the phrase צא ולמד many times in Chazal. One way it has been interpreted is that in order to learn, one must leave the shackles of the body and as in הוציאה ממסגר נפשי; bring the soul out of prison (Tehillim 142:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Shabbos 89a [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Pesachim 68b [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Avos 6:6. Parenthetically, R’ Moshe Schwab, Mashgiach of Gateshead once commented: “the definition of a Masmid (one who learns diligently) is not how many hours he learns a day, but how many minutes he learns in an hour.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Mishlei 31:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Mishlei 2:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Megila 6b. Iyov 28:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Yoma 75a [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. The Gemara records that R’ Beroka asked those destined for the world to come, what they did to get that. They responded that they cheer up the depressed (Taanis 22a). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)