

# SHAVUOT *...in a nutshell*

## The Omer Count to Shavuot

The holiday of Shavuot - which literally means "weeks" -- is connected to Passover. From the second day of Passover, we count 49 days (7 weeks) to reach Shavuot. This corresponds to the 49 days the Israelites traveled from Egypt through the desert until they received the Torah on the 50th day on Mount Sinai. It also represents the journey from slavery to freedom. The Israelites were not fully free until they chose to accept the mandate of the Torah. Every year we have the chance to re-enact this journey from the slavery of our own lives to the recognition that our own freedom comes from embracing our Jewishness. Other commentaries have noticed that Passover is at the time of the barley harvest, but the wheat harvest only ripens at Shavuot. Hence, we make the journey from animal food (barley) to human food (wheat), or from our own animal instincts to our higher humanity, from immaturity to maturity, from physicality to spirituality. A final image from Chassidic sources -- is that of a courtship and engagement. The omer period is when the Jewish people were betrothed to God and Shavuot is the ceremony of the wedding. This adds to the element of passion and excitement of this holiday.

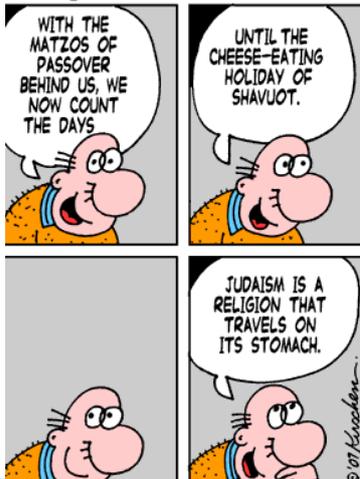
## The Giving of the Torah

Shavuot is called "the time of the giving of our Torah" and the holiday commemorates this unique gift of love. The synagogue Torah reading for Shavuot is the Ten Commandments, which were given to us on this day as our ancestors stood before Mount Sinai. These incredibly important messages have profoundly changed the world. As we rise to listen to them, we can imagine the fear and excitement of watching God's presence dwelling on Mount Sinai and Moshe ascending into the cloud to receive the two tablets. This is also an auspicious time to re-affirm our commitment to the Torah and to learning by starting a learning program at whatever level we are on. Whether it is reading one section of the weekly parsha in English each week, going to a Torah class or starting a tractate of Talmud, we can all make a learning commitment to last us from Shavuot to Yom Kippur.

## A Holiday Without "Stuff"

Passover has matza and a seder. Sukkot has the Four Species and sukkahs. But Shavuot has no "stuff" to go with it. Some suggest that this is because it is ALL about the Torah. In other words, we don't need any other stuff, just the words of the Torah.

### Dry Bones FOOD FOR THOUGHT



## Staying up all Night

Contrary to popular belief, staying up all night on Shavuot is not to show how tough you are (5 am, baby - I am still awake!) or how young you are (it's like being an undergraduate again!) but to study the Torah. We should try to spend less time socializing or visiting and more time learning something new and profound. In Kabbalistic thought, the night has a special potential for deep study and understanding; many kabbalists stay up all night frequently to pray and learn, tapping into this spiritual energy. It was the mystics of Tzfat who first started the custom in the 16th century of staying up all Shavuot night.

Another reason we stay up all night is because the Jewish people overslept! Like missing the most important job interview of your life, our ancestors were late Shavuot morning to get to the mountain. As a sort of apology or message that WE are eager to receive the Torah, we stay up all night, excited about the morning and unwilling to take the risk of not waking up. Some oppose the practice of staying up all night as it messes up your schedule and makes it hard to stay awake for morning prayers, but what the practice lacks in wisdom, it makes up for in enthusiasm.

## Eating Dairy

Some people, think God commanded us to eat cheesecake on Shavuot and - while it would be an amazing mitzva to fulfill scrupulously - I have checked and the word 'cheesecake' is not found in the Torah. Rather, there is an ancient custom of eating dairy on Shavuot. Many reasons have been given -- here are two: a) The Torah is sometimes said to be as sweet as milk and honey, so the verse from Song of Songs that says "milk and honey are under your tongue" is interpreted to mean the sweetness of receiving and learning the Torah. b) After the giving of the Torah, the laws of kosher were in full effect, but they did not have time (it was Shabbat) to prepare meat until later. Hence, their first meals as Torah-observing Jews were dairy meals. Interestingly the custom is really only to eat one dairy meal over the holiday and - in order to celebrate the holiday properly - other meals should be fineat affairs.

## The Scroll of Ruth

It is customary to read about Ruth on this holiday, as it happened at this time of the year. Ruth was a Moabite woman who showed deep conviction in coming to Israel (with her mother-in-law Naomi) and becoming a Jewess. Since everyone “converted” to Judaism when they stood at Sinai and accepted the Torah, we relate to Ruth’s journey. Among the honors due to Ruth’s greatness is that she was the forebearer of King David and, ultimately, the Messiah.

## Basic Practices of the Shavuot holiday

- 1) Shavuot is 1 day in Israel, but celebrated for 2 days in the Diaspora.
- 2) Shavuot, like all holidays, begins at night. This year, it begins at nightfall on Thursday night May 28 and continues until Saturday night, May 30th.
- 3) On Thursday night, when the candles are lit, the blessing of “l’hadlik ner shel yom tov.” is said, along with the blessing of Shehecheyanu. On Friday night, May 29th, the candles are lit from an existing flame and the blessing of “l’hadlik ner shel Shabbat v’shel Yom tov” is said, along with along with the blessing of Shehecheyanu.
- 4) Like all holidays, one may cook and carry on Shavuot as long as the food is to be eaten on the same day of the festival as it is being cooked. One may not light a flame, but may transfer fire from an existing flame.
- 5) There are synagogue services and Torah readings for both days of Shavuot. Festival meals are eaten as on Shabbat.
- 6) The special insertion of ya’aleh v’yavo is added in Grace After Meals. The amida (silent devotion) is a special one for festivals.
- 7) Havdala is made on Saturday night, May 30th, and it is a regular Shabbat Havdalah.
- 8) Yizkor, the prayer for the deceased, is said on Saturday, May 30th, after Shachrit.

## Advanced topics

If you would like to know more about the Shavuot holiday, please consult these classic volumes:

- 1) To Be a Jew - by Donin
- 2) The Book of Our Heritage - by Kitov

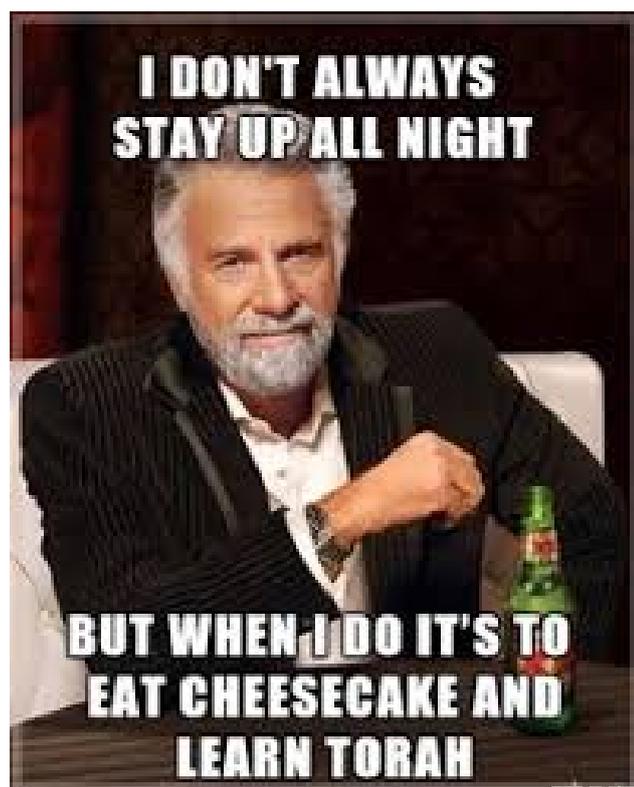
They will discuss topics such as:

- a) the 3 days of encirclement,
- b) The poem akdamut,
- c) the 2 special loaves
- d) the custom of spreading grass and flowers in the synagogue, and others.

Have a meaningful and Torah-filled Shavuot!

“And Israel encamped there’ - like one person with one heart”

(Rashi, Exodus 19:2)



# Got Food?

In need of food for Shavuot? Check out these great options (who deliver near and far):

- **RKM- Riverdale Kosher Market** - <https://files.constantcontact.com/724302f3101/e525388c-f4e1-4105-b134-1e7f401537ba.pdf>
- **RAM CATERERS:** [https://www.ramcaterers.com/shavuot?fbclid=IwAR0--lvBnTwK614JoPjcYQqcAdsTIYIzJrw-rFv2Z41h5i4uxPk\\_Qdk5P\\_Q](https://www.ramcaterers.com/shavuot?fbclid=IwAR0--lvBnTwK614JoPjcYQqcAdsTIYIzJrw-rFv2Z41h5i4uxPk_Qdk5P_Q)
- **TALIA'S STEAKHOUSE:** <https://taliassteakhouse.com/holidays/jewish-holidays/shavuot>
- **IZZY'S SMOKE HOUSE:** [HTTPS://WWW.GREATKOSHERRESTAURANTS.COM/KOSHER\\_IMAGES/UPLOADS/917100734MENU\\_YOM\\_TOV\\_FLYER\\_CONTENT.PDF](https://www.greatkosherrestaurants.com/kosher_images/uploads/917100734MENU_YOM_TOV_FLYER_CONTENT.PDF)
- **A FULL LIST OF PLACES IN NY TO ORDER FROM:** <https://www.greatkosherrestaurants.com/blog/shavuot2020>

FREE DELIVERY IN NYC 5 BOROS, NASSAU, WESTCHESTER, NJ, & BALTIMORE  
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MINIMUM ORDER OF \$300.00 REQUIRED



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Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup> uws and Manahattan  
Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup> Long Island and Atlantic Beach

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- 1) From the 'Order Online' tab, select "Out of town & Shabbos takeout"
- 2) On the pop-up, select 'Delivery'
- 3) Put in central address of location
- 4) Select *Schedule for later*
- 5) Use dropdown and select date
- 6) Select 5pm (Delivery will be sometime between 5pm-7pm)

If you have any questions email:  
[sales@izzysmokehouse.com](mailto:sales@izzysmokehouse.com)

\$50 min order. No delivery Fee!  
CENTRAL PICKUP LOCATION

# TALIA'S Steakhouse

## Prix Fixe Dinner Menu Option 1

\$58  
PLUS TAX

### APPETIZERS

Choice of one

- Matzo Ball Soup
- Potato Leak Soup

### ENTREES

Choice of one

The following main dishes come with mashed potatoes or quinoa and sautéed vegetables

- Roasted Yemenite Chicken
- Chicken Marsala
- Grilled or Moroccan Style Salmon

### DESSERT

- Fruit Salad
- Chocolate Dome

## RIVERDALE KOSHER MARKET

### Shavuot 2020 Menu

Under the strict supervision of the Vaad HaRabbonim of Riverdale

<h4>Antipasto Platters</h4> <p><b>CRUDITES</b> 12" - \$45 (serves 10-12) 16" - \$65 (serves 15-20)</p> <p><b>ROASTED &amp; GRILLED VEGETABLES</b> 12" - \$45 (serves 8-10) 16" - \$65 (serves 10-15)</p> <p><b>MIXED CHEESE &amp; FRUIT</b> 12" - \$65 (serves 8-10) 16" - \$85 (serves 10-15)</p> <p><b>MIXED CHEESE, FRUIT, OLIVES, &amp; DRIED FRUIT</b> 12" - \$75 (serves 8-10) 16" - \$95 (serves 10-15)</p> <p><b>MIXED CHEESE, FRUIT, OLIVES, DRIED FRUIT, &amp; VEGETABLES</b> 18" - \$125 (serves 15-20)</p> <h4>Soups</h4> <p><i>all soups sold by the quart</i></p> <p>AMBROSIA (Fruit Soup) \$9.99 CREAM OF BROCCOLI AND CAULIFLOWER SOUP \$9.99 CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP \$9.99 FRENCH ONION SOUP \$9.99 ROASTED GARLIC ZUCCHINI SOUP \$9.99 WATERMELON SOUP \$9.99 STRAWBERRY MANGO SOUP \$9.99 GAZPACHO \$9.99</p>	<h4>Dairy Entrees</h4> <p>All entrees are Cholav Yisrael served in a 24oz oven-ready pan serves 2-3 people</p> <p>FETTUCCINE ALFREDO \$14.99 BAKED ZITI \$14.99 VEGETABLE LASAGNA \$14.99 PENNE ALA VODKA \$14.99 MACARONI &amp; CHEESE \$12.99 STUFFED SHELLS MARGARITA \$15.99 EGGPLANT ROLLATINI \$15.99 EGGPLANT PARMESAN \$15.99 PASTA PRIMAVERA \$14.99 ASSORTED BUREKAS (cheese, potato, mushroom, spinach \$3.00/piece) 8" PERSONAL GOURMET PIZZAS \$9.99 add toppings \$11.99 (rainbow peppers, mushrooms, caramelized onions, broccoli, green olives) CHEESE BLINTZ SOUFFLE \$14.99 BAKED FARMERS CHEESE (served in a 12oz oven-ready pan) plain, blueberry, cherry, strawberry, pineapple \$9.99</p> <h4>Quiches</h4> <p>served in a 9" crust</p> <p>SPINACH   MUSHROOM   MUSHROOM &amp; ONION   ZUCCHINI \$15.99 TRIPLE CHEESE \$17.99</p>	<h4>Fish</h4> <p>TILAPIA STUFFED w/ SPINACH \$17.99/lb BEER BATTERED TILAPIA \$17.99/lb BREADED FLOUNDER \$21.99/lb TERIYAKI SALMON \$18.99/lb POACHED SALMON w/ CUCUMBER DILL SAUCE \$18.99/lb CAJUN PANKO CRUSTED SALMON \$19.99/lb MAPLE BOURBON GLAZED SALMON \$18.99/lb SEARED AHI TUNA \$21.99/lb PAN SEARED BLACKENED RED SNAPPER \$19.99/lb</p> <h4>Sushi</h4> <p>12" platter serves 4-6 people and 16" platter serves 8-10 people</p> <p>VEGETABLE PLATTER- ASSORTED VEGETABLE ROLLS - 12" \$4.99, 16" \$59.99 ASSORTED PLATTER-COMBINATION OF SPECIALTY AND REGULAR ROLLS- 12" \$54.99 &amp; 16" \$69.99</p>	<h4>Blintzes</h4> <p>contains 4 pieces</p> <p>CHEESE \$12.99 BLUEBERRY \$12.99 CHERRY \$12.99 POTATO \$12.99 COMBO \$12.99</p> <h4>Salads</h4> <p>serves 4-6 people your choice of dressing (Caesar, Italian, balsamic vinaigrette, red wine vinaigrette, coleslaw)</p> <p>CAESAR SALAD WITH GARLIC CROUTONS \$15 GREEK SALAD \$20 AVOCADO SPINACH SALAD \$20 STRAWBERRY MANGO MASCULINE SALAD \$20 GREEN APPLE KALE SALAD \$20</p> <h4>Desserts</h4> <p>7" CHEESE CAKE \$12.99 7" CHOCOLATE CHEESE CAKE \$12.99 7" FRUIT CHEESE CAKE (cherry, strawberry) \$13.99 FRESH SEASONAL FRUIT PLATTER 12" - \$45 (serves 10-12) 16" - \$65 (serves 15-20) Large cheesecakes available by request</p>
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# SHAVUOT 2020

## SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, MAY ,  
EREV SHAVUOT/FIRST NIGHT

**8:00 PM** Candle Lighting for Yom Tov

**8:10 PM** Minchah/Maariv

FRIDAY, MAY  
SHAVUOT DAY 1

**10- 11:00 AM** Morning Services

**7:05 PM** Mincha

**8:01 PM** Candle Lighting Shabbat/Yom Tov  
from an existing flame

**8:05 PM** Mincha/Kabbalat Shabbat  
(Shortened Version)/Maariv

SHABBAT, MAY  
SHAVUOT DAY 2

**10- 11:00 AM** Morning Services

**7:05 PM** Mincha/ 3rd Meal

**9:08 PM** Shabbat & Yom Tov Concludes/  
Maariv and Havdalah

# **Shavuot: Two Very Different Texts**

**By Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

The Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth are two very different biblical texts, yet they both will be read on the upcoming festival of Shavuot. In Israel, where Shavuot is celebrated for just one day, they are even read on the very same day. Outside of Israel, we read the Ten Commandments in synagogue on the first day of our two-day festival, and we postpone the story of Ruth for the second day. Nevertheless, both texts are essential to our holiday experience. These two texts are as important to the intellectual appreciation and religious experience of Shavuot as blintzes and cheesecake are to the culinary celebration of this beautiful holiday. Yet they are strikingly different from each other. We are puzzled to find them sharing the center stage of this holiday. After all, it is “The time of the giving of the Torah”! What connects the Book of Ruth, a simple pastoral tale, to the central theme of this festival? Would not some other biblical passage serve as a more apt companion to the Ten Commandments? Why commemorate the momentous occasion of God’s Revelation on Mount Sinai with this charming, but surely not momentous story? To answer this question let us ponder the plot of the Book of Ruth. It is often included in anthologies of the world’s greatest short stories where it is erroneously classified as a tale illustrating that good deeds lead to happy endings. But a careful reading of the book, which I encourage all of you to undertake in preparation for Shavuot, reveals that this story is by no means merely an idyllic morality tale. The characters of the Book of Ruth suffer almost every conceivable human tragedy: famine, betrayal, exile, sudden death, bereavement, widowhood, loneliness, poverty and shame. The book begins with the depiction of a demoralized nation of Israel, devastated by famine. One noble family deserts its brethren and betrays its homeland. The family soon experiences the pangs of exile. Its sons marry women of an alien culture, further betraying their heritage. Death strikes swiftly, leaving three widows, and one bereaved mother. Two of the women return home in shame and loneliness, with a life of poverty in store for them. Both women, mother-in-law Naomi and daughter-in-law Ruth, return home with hope. Naomi’s is the hope of desperation. She has no choice but to hope. But Ruth’s is the hope of courage and commitment: “Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you dwell, I will dwell; your people shall be my people and your God my God” (Book of Ruth 1:16). This makes for a stirring and inspirational narrative. But the question remains: What does this drama have to do with *zman matan Torateinu*, the “time of the giving of the Torah?” Does this tale match up to the majesty and power of the Ten Commandments? What connection is there between God’s Universal Laws, His do’s and don’ts for the human race, and this sad tale? How does this story, in which God barely plays a role, find its way into the liturgy of a day which celebrates the most foundational religious experience? God Himself utters the Ten Commandments, but His name appears only incidentally in the Book of Ruth! For me, the answer is apparent. Two texts are chosen for Shavuot. One tells of the laws, standards, and requirements of a just and successful society. The Ten Commandments incorporate, as our Rabbis have demonstrated, the Torah’s highest values: compassion, generosity, loyalty, and responsibility for each other. The Book of Ruth proffers but one example of a society which defies those values with disastrous consequences, but achieves inspiring results when it abides by them. The Rabbis (Yalkut Ruth, 594) tell us that the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, to teach us that one must be prepared for suffering and poverty in one’s search to master Torah. Mastery of Torah does not come easy, and a life led according to the Torah’s precepts calls for significant sacrifice. But eventually, the difficulties entailed by a total commitment to the Torah’s demands prove to be the very sources of a life of happiness and fulfillment. The tragic circumstances of the Book of Ruth gradually recede. The loneliness is overcome by a caring community, the shame is lifted by understanding and forgiveness, the poverty is ended by charity, and the widowhood is overcome by love. Even the bereavement is eventually softened by rebirth. Rabbi Zeira in the Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 2:15) wonders: “This scroll teaches us nothing about ritual purity or impurity, nor does it inform us about what is forbidden and what is permissible. Why then was it given a place in the Biblical canon?” To which he answers, “It is in order to teach us about the benefits which ensue from a life lived with compassion and loving-kindness.

"The Ten Commandments describe the ultimate encounter of Man with God. Our sages teach us that the Book of Ruth was written by the Prophet Samuel. In it he tells us a story which is but an illustration of the lesson that our father Abraham taught us by his example centuries before Samuel: "Loving-kindness, exemplified by simple hospitality, pre-empted even the direct experience of the Almighty's Presence!" The Ten Commandments declare God's expectations of His people. The tale of Ruth and Naomi epitomizes His people's history. Our people have known all of the tragedies described in the story, and more. But as we have persisted through those tragedies we have come to glimpse what a truly benevolent society can resemble. We have experienced, albeit thus far never yet completely, the blessings of redemption. Those blessings result from our adherence to the values of the Ten Commandments, one of the texts we read on Shavuot. One example of those blessings is described in the other text we read on Shavuot, the exquisitely uplifting Book of Ruth, which culminates in the birth of King David, the symbol and progenitor of the Messiah, with whom will come the final redemption.

## **Seasons of Love**

### **Rabbi Sacks on Shavuot**

If you look at the Shalosh Regalim, the three pilgrimage festivals, you find something very remarkable, specifically if you look at the megilla that we read on each. On Pesach we read Shir HaShirim, the song of songs. On Shavuot we read Megilat Ruth, the book of Ruth. And on Sukkot we read Kohelet, the book of Ecclesiastes. And the fascinating thing about those three megilot is that they're all about love. But they're about different seasons of love. So Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs, is about love in the springtime, love when you're young. The whole book of Shir HaShirim is a duet between two lovers who are obsessed with one another. There's no mention in the whole book about marriage, children setting up home, responsibilities to the future; all there is is their passion for one another. Turn to Kohelet, at the other extreme, Kohelet is about the autumn of the year, and it is about the autumn of life. The author of Kohelet is now an old man – Kohelet contains one of the most moving descriptions of old age in all of literature. And he's looking back and he's asking what really was worthwhile. And in the end it wasn't all the houses he built, or the possessions he accumulated. He says, "Re'eh chayim im isha asher ahavta," "See life with the woman you love." This is love grown old, grown serene, but it's still love in the autumn. Between the two though, at the threshold of summer, is the story of Ruth. Love as chessed, loving-kindness, love as deed. And it is that chessed that, according to the sages, permeates the book from beginning to end. The chessed that Ruth had to her mother-in-law whom she sees as bereaved and bereft, and returning alone to her people, and she says, no, you can't go alone. I will not leave you. And then Boaz, moved by this kindness he sees on the part of Ruth, and that moves him to extraordinary kindness of his own, taking her as his wife, caring for Naomi, and making sure that they will have a marriage, which will have children, which in the end, four generations down the line has David haMelech, the greatest of Israel's kings. This is love as loyalty. This is love as chessed. When [William] Tyndale in 1535 sat down to write the first full English translation of the Hebrew Bible, he had to coin a new word, loving kindness, to translate that word, chessed, which is the very essence of the book of Ruth. And it is that chessed that epitomises the relationship of Israel and God that happened on Shavuot at Mount Sinai. What happened on that extraordinary moment when God made a covenant with a people was described by the Prophet Hosea as an erusin, "ve'erastich li", I betroth you to me forever, I betroth you to me in justice and righteousness and kindness and compassion. I betroth you to me in faith, and you will know the Lord." That is faith as marriage, love as loyalty, and that is what Shavuot is all about. In a world where religion is too often associated with extremism, with harshness, with prejudice, and with violence, we would do well to remember that essential message of Shavuot epitomised in the book of Ruth, that at the heart of faith is that faithfulness that binds us to one another in the love that is loyalty, and the loyalty that is love. We need more of it today; live it and experience it. Chag sameach.

# SHAVUOT

## **Rabbi Berel Wein**

There is a long standing tradition that connects the book of Ruth with the holiday of Shavuot. The book of Ruth is the book of Jewish kindness and compassion, especially towards those individuals in society who feel themselves weak and disadvantaged because of life and societal circumstances. This includes the widowed and the orphaned, the alien and the stranger, the poor and the otherwise hopeless. Ruth and Naomi, the heroines of the book and the mothers of Israel are befriended and saved by Boaz, a man of stature and power, who risks a great deal in saving them from penury and abandonment. From this act of compassion and kindness sprouts eventual love, marriage and a child who will be one of the founders of the Davidic line of royalty of the kingdom of Judah and of all messianic hope and yearning. Judaism views all seemingly small things as being great and important in their own right for no one can estimate or foretell the consequences of even the smallest act of courtesy to others. The rabbis give examples of "if only so and so knew the consequences of the small act of goodness that he performed" he would have acted with even greater fervor and intent to do greater good in performance of that act. In the book of Ruth the "menu" of the lunch that Boaz gave Ruth to eat is recorded minutely. Had Boaz realized the cosmic and generational importance of this act of kindness of giving a defenseless widowed stranger food he would certainly have provided a more elaborate menu and fare. The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that goodness, courtesy, kindness, a compassionate "way of the land," precedes Torah. Thus the holiday of Shavuot marked as the commemoration of the granting of the Torah to Israel at Mount Sinai is introduced to us through the book of Ruth. The Torah is not only laws and commandments; it is a value system as well. To understand and appreciate the Torah itself, its value system must be discerned and appreciated first. Otherwise one runs the risk, in the words of Ramban, of being an obnoxious person and yet seemingly remaining within the limits of Torah law. The book of Ruth, though written many centuries after the granting of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is really the preface to the Torah. The Jewish people begin with Avraham and Sarah, our father and mother, whose basic characteristic that allowed them to spread the message of monotheism in a pagan world was their kindness and hospitality towards others. The palace of Torah is entered through the garden of goodness. This goodness and concern for others has been the hallmark of the Jewish people throughout our existence. It has guaranteed that the Torah has remained with us and has forged the eternal link with Mount Sinai that the holiday of Shavuot represents and commemorates. The rabbis of the Talmud again characterized Israel as being a compassionate and kind generous people. All of this is represented in the book of Ruth and the holiday of Shavuot. The holiday of Shavuot has many meaningful traditions associated with it. However, lest we become lost in the dairy meals and all night study sessions without realizing the true importance of this holiday of Torah, the book of Ruth comes to place it all into proper perspective. The idea of the acceptance of Torah through kind and compassionate behavior towards others is basic to Judaism. The nineteenth century Mussar movement attempted to make this idea widespread amongst the Jewish society of Lithuania and parts of Eastern Europe. It is worthy of support today, especially in a society that has become more and more self-centered. From nineteenth century Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement to twenty-first century life in our societies there is an enormous distance in time and attitude. But human problems remain constant as do our failures and shortcomings. The Torah attempts to raise our field of vision to see what can and should be noble in our lives and society. How to pursue this vision is through the actions that we exhibit towards others. The Torah emphasizes this message in myriad ways. The book of Ruth is the perfect guide to this accomplishment. We should be aware that Ruth, Naomi, Boaz, Elimelech, Machlon, Chilyon, Ploni Almoni and all of the characters that appear in the book of Ruth still walk among us. Realizing this will make our acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot most meaningful and sincere. Chag sameach and Shabat shalom.

# **Barmidbar: To be a Desert in Bloom**

**Dr. Samuel Lebens**

When the annual cycle of weekly Torah-readings was designed, it was very important to the Rabbis that we begin the book of Numbers, every year, the week before the festival of Shavuot. Some years certain Torah readings are to be doubled up, and some years those same readings are separated out -- all so that the book of Numbers, every year, should begin the week before Shavuot. Why should the book of Numbers and the festival of Shavuot be tied up in this way? To answer this question, we need to know something more about the festival of Shavuot. This festival is something of the odd one out. How so? Each festival has its own date, its own sacrifices, and a distinctive ritual. Rosh Hashana has its Shofar. Yom Kippur has its afflictions of the soul, such as the fast. Pesach has its matza. Sukkot has its booths, and its lulav and etrog. But Shavuot is different. First of all, we're not told its date. Instead, we were commanded to count 49 days from Pesach to Shavuot. In ancient times, the length of each month wasn't firmly fixed. Accordingly, the festival couldn't be given a set date in the calendar. Instead, the date of Shavuot would depend upon how long the months of Nissan and Iyar would be. Its date is not its own. Its date is tied to Pesach. Secondly: unlike the other festivals, the Torah gives Shavuot no distinctive rituals (other than its sacrifices). The other festivals all have a story. Admittedly, the Torah doesn't tell us that Rosh Hashana is a day of judgement, or a new year, but the shofar easily conjures the image of a people crowning their King. Yom Kippur is a day of atonement. Pesach is about the exodus from Egypt. Sukkot, we're told, commemorates our living in booths in the wilderness. But what about Shavuot? We're not told. Shavuot is a festival in search of an identity. According to the Rabbis, of course, Shavuot remembers the revelation at Mount Sinai. This teaching generated its own rituals: we learn Torah all night, so as not to be late for the revelation; we read the Ten Commandments, to re-enact it; and we decorate our shuls with flowers, to commemorate the eruption of flowers on the rocky mountain. But why is all of this hidden in the Torah itself? And why must we, so to speak, open the book of Numbers before we can celebrate this festival? Nothing all that obvious connects the opening of the book of Numbers to the revelation at Mount Sinai. Perhaps the Rabbis were drawing a connection between the festival of Shavuot and the Hebrew name of the book of Numbers -- Bamidbar, which means "in the desert". Perhaps the idea is this: we have to enter the desert before we can stand, on Shavuot, to receive the Torah. Perhaps that's the idea. But why? Why do we need to, symbolically, enter the desert before we can receive the Torah? Before I get to this week's Midrash, let me share a couple of much later responses to our question. Both of these answers suggest that the Torah had to be revealed in the desert. That would explain why the book of the desert has to be opened before the festival of the revelation. According to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the Torah was given in the desert to teach us a crucial lesson about our national identity. We had to learn that our peoplehood doesn't depend upon a government, or a building, or a homeland. Our peoplehood depends solely upon the Torah. Even without the Temple, or worldly belongings, or sovereignty over our land, we would remain God's people. Even in a desert, we have the Torah. Perhaps that's why we have to open the book of Numbers before we can celebrate Shavuot. The Maharal of Prague makes a very different suggestion. If we care only about the laws of the Torah, he argues, we will create a society worthy of destruction. He writes: "This is commemorated by the fact that the Torah was given in a place of destruction, namely, the desert" (Hidushei Agada BM 30). The Written Torah is not enough. Law is not enough. Instead, we must embody the spirit of the law; in order to make the desert bloom. There's a Midrash we could cite in connection with this suggestion of the Maharal, in which a king had two servants (Seder Eliyahu Zuta, 2). "He gave each of them a small measure of wheat, and a small bunch of flax.

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"One of them took the flax "and weaved a cloth, and took the wheat and made some flour, which he sifted, ground finely, kneaded, and baked into bread, placed on the table, and spread the cloth over it." The other one did nothing with his gift. But the King wanted his gift to be used. So too: "when the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, it was given to them as wheat with which to produce flour, and as flax with which to produce a garment." We were not supposed to leave the Torah on the bookshelf. We were supposed to engage with it. And if we don't engage with the Torah; if we merely take it as we find it, and blindly follow its laws without delving deeply into its spirit, then we'll find that we live in a desert. Following this line of thought, from the Maharal through to this Midrash about the flour and the flax, we finally receive an answer to our other question: our question regarding the seemingly hidden identity of Shavuot. The festival of Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah. And for that reason, it cannot have an identity, unless we, God's partners in revelation, are involved in giving it its meaning. That sort of partnership is the essence of Torah. It is a living tradition and it calls upon us to stand up and to engage with it. Shavuot couldn't be the festival of the Torah until we say that that's what it was; until we take the flour and make into bread. But now I want to share a Midrash on this week's reading which carves out a very different relationship between the desert and the revelation at Mount Sinai. The prophet Isaiah (42:11) foresaw that, in the end of days, the "desert and its cities" would lift up their voice in praise of God. The Midrash comments: [The matter] is comparable to a prince who entered a metropolis. When the inhabitants of the metropolis saw him, they fled. He entered a second one, and [again] they fled from him. He entered into another city that was ruined; and when the inhabitants saw him, they praised him. That prince said, "This [ruined] city is better than all the metropolises. Here I will build myself a lodging place; here I will dwell." Similarly, when the Holy One, blessed be He, came to the sea, it fled from Him, as stated (in Ps. 114:3), "The sea saw [Him] and fled." He revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, [it also] fled, as stated (in Ps. 114:4), "The mountains danced like rams" [which is to say, Mount Sinai danced away]. When he came to the desert wasteland, it received Him and praised Him, as stated (in Is. 42:11), "Let the desert and its cities lift up [their voice]." He said, "This city is better than all of the cities. Here I will build a lodging place." When He came down into its midst, they began rejoicing, because the Holy One, blessed be He, was dwelling in their midst, as stated (in Is. 35:1), "The desert and the arid land shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice and blossom like a crocus."

think this Midrash gives rise to a very different connection between Shavuot and the book of Bamidbar -- the book of the desert. According to the Maharal and Rabbi Hirsch, the basic point is that the Torah was given in the desert. That's undeniably true. And yet it's also true that it was given on a Mountain top; in a national revelation of unforgettable sights and sounds. After that moment, the Jewish people wandered in the desert for forty years, and God lived in their midst, in the Tabernacle. We all need our moments at Sinai; moments of dazzling religious intensity. But Sinai is fleeting. It "dances" off "like the rams" that skip on their merry way. The Jewish people had one prior experience like it, at the Sea. The waters split. The entire people walked between walls of water on dry land. They sang a prophetic song. According to a famous Midrash, "a [simple] slave-girl beheld at the Red Sea what was not beheld by Ezekiel and the other prophets." It was momentous. But it didn't last long. Just like the sea, which fled from the presence of God, the religious experience of the Jews at the sea was also fleeting. It fled. Moments of religious ecstasy, and clarity, sustain us. But it's the daily grind, as we wander in the desert, that really shows our religious mettle. It's easy to praise God from the mountain top. But it doesn't mean as much as our praising him in a spiritual wasteland. It's easy to feel inspired at the shore of the ocean, and much harder to feel God's presence calling us to serve him among the ruins of a broken world.

The parable of the Midrash is strange. Why do the citizens of the metropolis flee from the king? And why do the residents of the broken down city run to his praise? Perhaps the idea is this. They didn't flee. They praised him too. But the praise meant nothing. It's easy to praise the king when the going is good. So their praise, so to speak, fled from his memory. It didn't stick. It meant very little. But when the residents of the slum came to praise him, he was taken aback by their sincerity; so the prince settled in the slum and made it flourish. Perhaps the idea is this: as we approach Mount Sinai, on the festival of Shavuot, we shouldn't forget that, however important these moments of spiritual inspiration may be, it is from the wasteland rather than from the mountaintop, where our service of God counts most. Yes, God revealed his glory on the festival of Shavuot. But he dwelt in our midst for forty long years as we built a society in the wilderness. And that is the story of the book of Numbers. Moreover, if we want God to dwell in our midst, we need to make ourselves like a desert. When God's presence appears atop the mountain, we need to make room for it in our hearts; we need to become like a desert. We must destroy our arrogance and our ego, leaving them in ruins. We must make room. And only then can we flourish. The only way to be a flourishing human is to be a desert in miraculous bloom; a desert that made room for God.

## **More Than A Number**

### **Zahava Schwartz, based on the Torah of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

You can't count on much staying the same in life. However, you can count on the Torah portion of Parshat Bamidbar to be read before the holiday of Shavuot. You can also count on the Jewish people being counted multiple times throughout the 5 books of the Torah. Right in the opening verses of Parsha Bamidbar, Hashem commands Moshe to "lift the heads of the people", which is interpreted as a commandment to count the people. It is because of this counting of the Jewish people that the fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar, which though it literally translates to "In the Desert", is referred to in English as "Book of Numbers". Counting them must be of importance if the whole book is named after it. The Medieval French Biblical Commentator, Rashi, immediately comments that it's actually a good thing that God is counting Bnei Yisroel; it's a sign of God's love for them, for when someone loves something of theirs dearly, they count it often. But, in a previous counting of Bnei Yisroel, counting doesn't have such a positive connotation. The verses in Exodus 30:11-12 say, "Then God said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to G-d a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them", which implies that counting people on their own is bad, but if they pay rations, they make up for it. So what is the deal with counting? Is counting people good or bad? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks asks this very question, and resolves it beautifully. The answer is in how the Torah commands Bnei Yisroel to be counted. The Torah doesn't use a normal phrase to command the counting be done, such as "to count" or "take a census". Rather it uses a phrase that means "to lift the heads". Why would this out of the norm phrase be used?

When counting people en masse, one runs the risk of devaluing those they're counting. They begin to focus on the total number of the people they're counting. The more people Bnei Yisroel have at the end of the count, the stronger a nation they have. It is this very attitude, one that focuses on the group rather than the individual, which causes the people to feel devalued and unimportant. When counting people and assigning each person a number, it is not about that specific person, or that specific person, and it's not about him, and it's not about her, but rather it's about reaching that end number. If someone feels like they are just a number, then they may also feel like they can be replaced. It is clear why this would be forbidden and frowned upon, and why in Judaism, we specifically don't assign people numbers; rather, when counting people, we count by saying "not one, not two". Judaism focuses on the strength of each individual, and how they can use their individual strength to contribute to the community, and the nation, as a whole. While we do care about our end total number as a nation, we care very much about each individual and recognize the unique qualities they have. That's why Hashem commanded Moshe to "lift the heads of the nation", and show them their strengths and how much they, as an individual, matter and count.

We're celebrating Shavuot, a holiday in commemoration of receiving the Torah. It is very appropriate that Parsha Bamidbar is the Torah portion we read right before this holiday, as it is by utilizing the Torah that we can really display our unique strengths and individual personality. There are areas, in regards to keeping the Torah commandments, that you may be better in than others. You may be someone who really enjoys giving charity and helping out a friend in need, and therefore you display great strength in doing Chesed. Someone else may really enjoy visiting the sick in hospitals, therefore they display great strength in the mitzvah of Bikor Cholim, visiting the sick. Whatever it may be, the Torah is the way we find out how where our strength lies in terms of serving God and growing close to Him, as well as growing closer to who we really are and to letting our true strength shine. While this year's Shavuot programming, or lack thereof, will differ from previous years, there is a lot of Torah learning that can be done before it (#MJEClasses, #notsponsored) and much learning that each of us can do on our own. I hope that if you have not yet found out what your own strength is, then this Shavuot you will merit to discover your unique individual strength that can help you grow closer to God, and closer to your true self.

# **Rabbi Weinreb's The Person in the Parsha: Shavuot**

## **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Rabbi Weinreb's The Person in the Parsha Weekly Column: Shavuot For those of us living outside the State of Israel, there is no "portion of the week", parshat hashavua, this coming Sabbath. The two-day holiday of Shavuot falls on Friday and Saturday and preempts the regular reading. Instead, I will devote this weekly column to the book of Ruth, which is read in the synagogue this Sabbath. There is hardly an example of human tragedy, which is not a part of the story of Ruth. Famine, exile, bereavement, widowhood, loneliness and poverty all occur to Naomi and Ruth. But there is one aspect of human life, not at all a tragic one, which I think is the central theme of the story and which I would like to discuss as a worthy example of "the person in the parsha". I refer to the act of personal choice, of making a decision. We have all had numerous occasions to choose between two courses of action, between seemingly equally beneficial options for our future. Sometimes these have been of momentous importance, and other times, as trivial as deciding between chocolate and vanilla ice cream. For me, the phenomenon of choice defines the human condition. Only humans choose. Choice and decision distinguish us from the rest of the animal world. It has been claimed that what makes human beings distinct is our capacity to think and speak; homo sapiens. Others maintain that it is our ability to use tools which distinguishes us; homo faber. And others even go so far as to claim that it is our ability to play which renders us unique; homo ludens. But if the popular philosophical movement of existentialism taught us anything about the special nature of the human person, it is that we are creatures who choose. We are "condemned" to make choices. Nevertheless, the responsibility of making decisions is something we try to avoid. In the catchy phrase of Erich Fromm's book, we wish to "escape from freedom". We wish to escape, but we have no choice but to choose. Ruth is a perfect example of someone who faced the choices in her life and made some very painful ones. They turned out to be part of her heroic destiny and proved to be of singular importance to the Jewish people and to all humanity. Rabbinic legend tells us that Ruth and her sister-in-law, Orpah, were Moabite princesses. They could have married anyone in their society, but they chose to marry the Jewish "greenhorns", albeit noble "greenhorns", and thus made a choice which distinguished them from their sister princesses. They both bucked the tide and married members of the minority in their land. But they exercised choice, and that begins the story. Their husbands, Machlon and Kilyon, then died, confronting them with yet another crucial life decision. Would they remarry? Would they now conform to their peers and marry Moabite men, or would they continue to irrationally seek Jewish mates - even if that meant choosing to leave their homeland? Choice, painful choice. It has been said that all important decisions are made on the basis of insufficient data. Of course this is true, because when there is truly adequate information, choices are obvious and apparent, and the decision-making process is of little consequence. But if it is true that all important decisions depend upon insufficient data, then all heroic decisions are made on the basis of contrary data. The realistic data which lay before Ruth and Orpah certainly would have justified very different choices for them. The data would argue, "stay home"; remain within a familiar culture; marry someone who is socially and religiously compatible with you. Do not marry a stranger, and certainly do not enter voluntary exile in the attempt to find a mate equal to your first love in a distant and alien environment. This was essentially Naomi's argument to both women. She urged them to consider the data and to make "realistic" choices. Orpah initially persisted in her choice. But then, her rational, practical nature understandably prevailed. She chose to return home. Ruth, on the other hand, persisted beyond that point. And she chose, consciously and courageously, another nation, another people, and another god. What an awesome choice! What a dazzling, truly unpredictable decision! Moment by moment, each of us faces a range of options and choices. We struggle to base our decisions upon sufficient data, although disappointingly, such data is usually not forthcoming. In the absence of sufficient data, our choices must sometimes be "leaps of faith". Occasionally, they must be based upon an inner voice, the voice of our conscience, or perhaps the voice of our dreams. Ruth provides a model for those of us who, when we reach a crossroads in our lives, understand that our decisions cannot just be based upon lists of pros and cons, upon rationally weighing advantages versus disadvantages. Rather, we look within, or look Above, for guidance, recognizing that we have no guarantees that these voices are authentic. The lesson of Ruth, the person and the book, is that such choices, guided by intuition and inspiration, if not by certainty and information, result in significance to the person, and can determine the course of history: Ruth was the ancestress of King David. Like the poet Robert Frost, we may look back with regret at "the road not taken", but alternatively, we may find that the "less travelled road" is the most meaningful one of all.

# Humility: The Essential Ingredient in Great Leadership

**Mr. Charles Harary, J.D**

Leadership is one of the most coveted qualities in the world today. In business, academia and communal affairs, leaders play an invaluable role, and as such we go to all lengths to develop and prove our leadership ability and capacity to others. Students join clubs just for the sake of demonstrating their leadership skills on their resume. Universities market themselves as building the leaders of tomorrow. Businesses try to breed leaders from the moment their newly hired employees walk through the door. It is almost irrelevant who you lead and what you're leading them toward; strong leadership is, in itself, viewed as an independently valuable quality. At the same time, the term "leader" has all but lost its meaning. We don't really know what we want in leaders anymore. On the one hand, it seems that our most prized leaders must have strength, intelligence and charisma. Celebrities, politicians and CEOs are the people society looks to as its leaders. On the other hand, we often hear that they cause turmoil in their own lives and the lives of others. If leadership is not about strength, intelligence and charisma, then what are we looking for in a leader? You cannot achieve a goal if you cannot define it. If we all want to be leaders, whether in our community, business or personal lives, we have to understand what exactly we're looking for. The place to get the answer is the Torah, where the Creator of the Universe teaches us what makes the perfect leader. The Torah is filled with strong leaders: prophets, scholars, kings, queens, heroes and villains. You can't turn a page without reading an intimate account of the dramatic trials and triumphant victories of Jewish leaders. Yet, the Torah is clear that among all of these impressive leaders, one rose above the rest. That person is Moshe, and G-d refers to him as the greatest leader in history. The Torah states In Devarim 34:10 Never again did a prophet like Moshe come up in Israel, who G-d knew face to face. No one ever did or ever will achieve what Moshe achieved. Moshe was the leader at the most monumental moments in Jewish history. He led a group of slaves to become a nation poised to conquer the Promised Land. He fought Pharaoh, one of the most powerful men in history. He was G-d's agent to bring the plagues, split the sea, make bread fall from the sky and make water flow from a magical well. Moshe was the liaison between the Jews and G-d in the giving of the Torah. Moshe was the leader of leaders. However, it seems that Moshe was unqualified for the position as a savior for the Jewish people. His resume was less than impressive. To highlight a few seemingly disqualifying factors: 1. The Jews were enslaved and oppressed by the very person that Moshe called "Dad." 2. Moshe wasn't "of the people." He grew up in the palace, protected from the pain and agony the Jews faced. 3. He had no Jewish education. 4. He was a convicted felon. 5. He married the daughter of an idolatrous priest from another country. 6. He wasn't articulate or charismatic. In truth, if Moshe was alive today, he probably wouldn't even get an aliya in shul, let alone be our leader. There was a nation full of people that G-d could have chosen to be the leader. Why did He choose Moshe?

The answer, I believe, is found in Parshas Beha'aloscha.(1) At the end of the parsha, there is a short story that gives us an insight into the essence of Moshe's leadership quality. Moshe, Miriam and Aaron were all siblings and prophets. Miriam and Aaron had normal marital relationships with their spouses, but Moshe disengaged conjugally from his wife, Tzipora. Miriam disapproved of Moshe acting differently from them, and commented to Aaron: Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he married, for he married a Cushite woman. And they said: Has G-d only spoken to Moshe? Hasn't He spoken to us too? And G-d heard. (Bamidbar 12:1-2). The Torah then does something unusual. It interrupts the flow of the story with commentary: Moshe was more humble than anyone else on the earth.

(Bamidbar 12:3)

Weren't we in the middle of the story? Why did we suddenly shift to commentary?The Torah, the ultimate lesson book, was highlighting a fact that we would have otherwise overlooked. Initially, it seems that the conversation was between Miriam and Aaron, and nobody else. But that wasn't the case.

(1) This idea is based on a comment of Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, "Covenant and Conversation 5768: Beha'aloscha-Humility," available at: <http://www.chief Rabbi.org/2008/06/14/>.

There were actually three people present. Moshe was sitting quietly as Miriam was wrongly criticizing him. Moshe had every reason to defend himself. He knew that Miriam was wrong. He understood that his relationship with G-d was different from theirs. His prophetic ability was "face to face" and therefore he needed to take precautions that the other prophets didn't need. So why didn't he interject when Miriam accused him? In the past, Moshe showed no hesitation in standing up for truth. He confronted Pharaoh, the Jewish people and even G-d. Anticipating the question, the Torah jumps in with commentary to make sure we don't miss the point. It explains that Moshe's lack of protest was due to his unique quality of humility. We mistakenly associate humility with being passive or incapable. In fact, the English word humility stems from the Latin word humilitas, which means "grounded," "from the earth," or "low." However, according to Jewish thought, humility is not meekness. A humble person can be strong, assertive and proactive. Humility is not downplaying our strengths. Humility is appreciating our G-d-given talents and focusing them on the needs of others. Moshe knew Miriam was wrong. However, he just didn't care to defend himself. He had little concern for his honor or reputation. In fact, he had little concern for himself. This quality of humility seems to be what separates Moshe from the rest. From the moment we are introduced to Moshe, the Torah shows us just how much he sacrifices his own well-being for others. The first time we meet Moshe as an adult, the pasuk states: And Moshe grew up." (Shemos 2:11). Rashi on that verse asks the obvious question: The previous verse already stated "the boy grew up." Why does the very next verse repeat the fact the Moshe grew up? Rashi explains: Didn't it already state "the boy grew up"? R. Yehuda b. Ilai answered: The first time refers to his physical growth and the second time refers to his stature, Pharaoh appointed him a leader of his house (Rashi, Shemos 2:1). According to Rashi, the first time the verse mentions growth was referring to when Moshe grew in age. The second mention of growth was in stature. He rose in the ranks of the Egyptian monarch. He became a man of stature, responsibility and power.

What was the first thing Moshe did in his newfound status? Order new business cards? Buy a leather couch for his corner office overlooking the Nile? No. The verse continues: "He went out to his brethren and he saw their suffering." He was completely unconcerned with himself. He went out and focused on the pain of the Jewish slaves. Remember that Moshe was a prince living in a luxurious palace. He could have turned a blind eye. He could have read the horrible stories about Jewish bondage in the Egyptian newspapers and, over coffee and eggs, shrugged his shoulders the way many of us do when we read about someone else's suffering. In the book *Timeless Healing*, Dr. Herbert Benson, famous for his studies on the connection between medicine and spirituality, shows that what we focus on can actually change our reality. Moshe chose to focus on the pain of the Jewish people because that's who he was. He couldn't focus on himself. He couldn't turn a blind eye. He just cared about others too much. The Midrash on this verse states: What is meant by the words, "And he (Moshe) saw"? He would see their suffering and weep, "Woe is to me for you, would that I could die for you." For there is no work more strenuous than molding bricks; and he used to shoulder the burdens and help each one of them ... Rabbi Eliezer the son of Rabbi Yose the Galilean said, "He [Moshe] saw a child carrying the load of an adult, and an adult bearing the load of a child; a woman bearing a man's load, and a man bearing the load of a woman; a young man carrying the load of an old man, and an old man with a young man's load. He would overlook his high office [as Prince of Egypt] and go and rearrange their burdens and pretend he was doing it for Pharaoh's sake ... Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'You put aside your own affairs and went to share in Israel's suffering and acted like their brother. Therefore, I will put aside the higher and lower worlds and speak only to you.'" (Shemos Rabbah 1:27) Moshe is introduced to us with this unique quality of caring for others more than himself. Moshe's humility becomes the *raison d'être* for his role as a leader. Because of his sacrifice, Moshe went from being an Egyptian prince to a Midianite shepherd almost overnight. It started when he saw an Egyptian officer hitting a Jewish slave. Undeterred by the disastrous personal implications of attacking an Egyptian in defense of a Jew, Moshe killed the Egyptian. After fleeing Egypt to escape persecution, Moshe ended up in the neighboring country Midian.

You would think that these consequences would have changed his approach to conflict, namely avoiding it. Not Moshe. When Moshe arrived to Midian he saw male shepherds harassing the daughters of Yisro. True to his character, he came to their defense. Upon realizing his inherent selflessness, Yisro invited him to their home and eventually gave him one of his daughters, Tzipora, to marry. There is another Midrash that demonstrates Moshe's profound care for others: Once, while Moshe Rabbeinu was tending Yisro's sheep, a lamb ran away. Moshe ran after it until it reached a small, shaded place. There, the lamb came across a pool of water and began to drink. As Moshe approached the lamb he said, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You must be tired." So he put the lamb on his shoulders and carried him back. The Holy One said, "You tend the flock which belongs to a human [Yisro] with such overwhelming compassion. I swear to you, as you live today, that you will tend the flock which belongs to Me – Israel." This is what is meant by the verse, "and Moshe was a shepherd." (Shemos Rabbah 2:2) It was immediately after demonstrating this tremendous humility—by putting the needs of his flock over his own comfort—that G-d appeared to Moshe in the burning bush and chose him as the leader of the Jewish people. The Torah seems to be pretty clear that the core ingredient for leadership is humility. The more you think you should be a leader, the less you are qualified. The more your leadership role involves your own interest, the less of a leader you are. Leadership, according to G-d, is stewardship. Leaders serve the people, and not vice versa. Therefore, the most appropriate leader is the one who cares less for himself—the one who is humble. This applies to every dimension of life. It applies to our roles as parents, spouses, teachers, friends, Jews and humans. Even the business world has recognized the impact of humility. Jim Stengel, in his book *Grow: How Ideals Power Growth and Profit at the World's Greatest Companies*, created an index called the "Stengel 50," based on a ten year study of 50,000 brands. He found that the world's 50 highest performing businesses were financially successful in proportion to their ability to connect with consumers' emotions and values. Consumers that felt that they were being given to, not being taken from, created a deeper affiliation with the brands, which led to increased success for the business. Bestselling business author Jim Collins, who wrote the blockbuster *Good to Great*, studied almost 1,500 companies' performance over 40 years. In his research, he isolated the qualities of top business leaders. His findings were that one of the top two qualities of a great business leader is humility. The other is fierce resolve. Famed author and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi found similar findings in his research. As discussed in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Csikszentmihalyi discovered that business people that are the most likely to get the highest ratings are the ones that think about their organization or their colleagues before themselves. He found that every single indication of long-term strategic growth in the personal, communal and business lives all align on the same principles. Victor Frankel wrote in *Man's Search for Meaning*, "Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be it must ensue ... as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself." Each of us is a leader, whether it's for a business, an organization, a family or even ourselves. To be great leaders we have to examine the motivation behind our actions. Is it for our glory? Is it for our grandeur? If it is, we won't be able to be successful leaders. Are we pushing our kids to succeed at school or sports for their sake or for ours? Are we upset with our spouse because he/she is not doing what we want? Are we frustrated with our communal leaders because they're not serving our needs or the community's? Are we positioning our professional lives to get as much as possible or give as much as possible, to our employers, colleagues and customers? Do we turn to G-d when we want something? Do we ever consider what we can do for Him? When our outlook is focused on how a set of circumstances will affect us, it is impossible to become the leaders we are meant to be. To be real leaders, we have to think about others' needs. Our own desires become a faint backdrop to our mission in life, which is to serve others. Humility is not something that we turn on in shul and turn off in the boardroom

Humility is a form of true strength to be used at every moment of life. It is the secret to a great marriage, business, friendship and ultimately, a strong relationship with G-d. As much as we endlessly chase after and worry about our own needs, the legacy of Moshe teaches us that there is only one way to truly lead: to strive, with all your strength, to worry about someone else's needs. Shavuot reminds us not just that we received the Torah, but how we received the Torah. The Torah was given to the Jews as a group, not by chance, but specifically to show us that our greatness as individuals is dependent on our ability to humble ourselves to each other. On a grand scale, we are servants of Hashem, but we are also servants of each other—from the people closest to us to the strangers on the street. When we live with this credo, when we model the qualities of Moshe, the Jewish über-leader, we will merit to truly reach the level of “בלב אחד כאיש אחד” as one man with one heart.”

## **Magic of Shavuot 1967**

**Larry Domnitch**

1967 200,000 Jews converged on the Western Wall that day. Over the last two millennia, Jews have visited Jerusalem in honor of the festivals, in lieu of the biblically-ordained pilgrimages. On the holiday of Shavuot, there was also the custom to visit the purported grave of King David on Mount Zion, since the date of his death was on Shavuot. When Shavuot arrived in 1948, it was a month after the establishment of the State of Israel, and Jews could no longer continue to make the pilgrimage to the Western Wall. The Jordanians, who occupied the eastern half of the city since the War of Independence, blocked all rights of passage to the Jews. However, the pilgrimage to King David's tomb on nearby Mount Zion, located on the Israeli side of divided Jerusalem, continued. Over the next 19 years, crowds made their way to Mount Zion, where across barbed wire they could view the Old City and the Temple Mount. On the morning of Shavuot, June 15, 1967 – just six days after the liberation of the Old City of Jerusalem in the Six Day War – the Old City was officially opened to the Israeli public. (The army wanted to be sure there were no landmines or snipers still in the Old City.) For the first time in almost 2,000 years, masses of Jews could visit the Western Wall and walk through the cherished streets of Judaism's capital city as members of the sovereign Jewish nation. Each Jew who ventured to the Western Wall on that unforgettable day was realizing their ancestors' dreams over the millennia. It was one of those rare, euphoric moments in history. From the late hours of the night, thousands of Jerusalem residents streamed toward the Zion gate, eagerly awaiting entry into the Old City. At 4 a.m., the accumulating crowds were finally allowed to enter the area of the Western Wall. As the sun continued to rise, there was a steady flow of thousands who made their way to the Old City. The Jerusalem Post described the epic scene: Every section of the population was represented. Kibbutz members and soldiers rubbing shoulders with Neturei Karta. Mothers came with children in prams, and old men trudged steeply up Mount Zion, supported by youngsters on either side, to see the wall of the Temple before the end of their days. Some wept, but most faces were wreathed in smiles. For 13 continuous hours, a colorful variety of all peoples trudged along in perfect order, stepping patiently when told to do so at each of six successive barriers set up by the police to regulate the flow. In total, 200,000 visited the Western Wall that day. It was the first pilgrimage, en masse, of Jews to Jewish-controlled Jerusalem on a Jewish festival in 2,000 years, since the pilgrimages for the festivals in Temple times. An eyewitness described the moment: "I've never known so electric an atmosphere before or since. Wherever we stopped, we began to dance. Holding aloft Torah scrolls we swayed and danced and sang at the tops of our voices. So many of the Psalms and songs are about Jerusalem and Zion, and the words reached into us a new life. As the sky lightened, we reached the Zion gate. Still singing and dancing, we poured into the narrow alleyways beyond." On Shavuot, 3,279 years earlier, the Israelites stood at Mount Sinai and forged a unique relationship with their Creator. On the day of Shavuot following Israel's amazing victory in the Six Day War, multitudes ascended to the Western Wall, and they, too, felt the eternal magic of this moment. After all, "For from Zion shall come forth Torah, and the Word of God from Jerusalem." This "pedestrian pilgrimage" has now become a recurring tradition. And on this year as well, early on Shavuot morning – after a full night of Torah learning – the streets of Jerusalem will be filled with tens of thousands of Jews, walking with and anticipation and awe to the Western Wall.