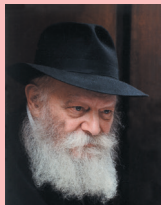


L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

*from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion*

The Midrash relates that the Jewish people slept through the entire night before the Torah was given on Shavuot. Their sleep was so deep and so pleasant, in fact, that we are told that the insects didn't dare to disturb them.

The next morning, the day on which the Torah was to be given, they overslept! G-d Himself had to awaken them. Unbelievably, the Jewish people arrived late for the revelation at Mount Sinai.

In commemoration of this event, it is customary to remain awake the entire night of Shavuot learning Torah in the synagogue. But how could the Children of Israel have allowed themselves to fall asleep in the first place? If the greatest human king had promised to give us a valuable treasure, wouldn't we be too excited to sleep the night before? How much more so a gift that is expected from the King of kings!

In truth, having been told that G-d would be giving them the Torah in 50 days, the Jews yearned with such anticipation that they immediately began to count the days. Each day, as they counted, they ascended one spiritual rung after the other by ridding themselves of the negative characteristics they had acquired in Egypt and transforming them into positive ones. The nearer the day came, the greater was their excitement. And yet, when the day finally arrived, they almost slept right through it!

To explain: The Jewish people did not fall asleep by accident; they did so deliberately, with good intentions. For they were convinced that going to sleep would constitute the final stage in their preparation for receiving the Torah.

When a person sleeps, his soul ascends on high. Thus, the Jews deliberately went to sleep to allow their souls to comprehend even higher levels of the Torah. Nonetheless, G-d did not approve of their behavior, as it missed the point of the entire revelation.

In His Torah, G-d commanded us to utilize physical objects in the performance of His mitzvot. Thinking about giving charity is not enough; we have to actually give a poor person the money. By utilizing physical objects (a lulav on Sukkot, for example) we imbue the world with holiness, thereby connecting the spiritual and material realms.

When a person sleeps, however, his soul is not connected to the physical world, and the spiritual and material realms remain disunited -- the antithesis of G-d's intent in giving us His Torah.

Accordingly, the proper preparation for receiving the Torah should have involved serving G-d on the highest spiritual levels while still awake, the better to fulfill G-d's ultimate intention in creating the world.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Volume 4

From Self-Indulgence to Sacred Structure

Rich chocolate cake is often described as "decadent," a word we associate with pleasure and indulgence. Yet the word has a more complex origin. "Decay" and "decadence" both trace back to the Latin *decadere*, meaning "to fall" or "to sink." Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary defined *decadence* simply as "decay." What feels like pleasure on the tongue carries the meaning of collapse on the page.

Unchecked indulgence ends in decline. Jewish thought teaches that self-indulgence is not neutral. Left unexamined, it can gradually pull a person downward. Growth, by contrast, requires awareness, effort, and discipline.

Personal growth is one aspect of Counting the Omer. The Omer is the 49-day period between Passover and Shavuot, linking two defining moments: the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Each day is a step of personal preparation, climbing one rung higher.

Chassidut teaches that the seven weeks correspond to the seven emotional attributes inside every person: love, restraint, balance, perseverance, humility, bonding, and leadership. Each week, we work through one. Each day, we refine one dimension within it. By Shavuot, we have worked on all 49 layers of our character traits.

The Exodus opened a journey toward purpose and responsibility with Sinai as our destination.

When Hashem first spoke to Moshe at the Burning Bush, He made this connection clear, promising that the people would serve Him at that very mountain after leaving Egypt. Later, at Sinai, Hashem introduced Himself as the One who brought them out of Egypt, reinforcing that the two events are deeply connected.

The Hebrew name for Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, is built from the same letters as *meitzarim*, the word for limitations. So the exodus carries a personal layer alongside the historical one. The constraints we carry inside ourselves, many of them self-imposed, are their own form of Egypt: emotional, psychological, physical. The Omer period gives us 49 days to work on freeing ourselves and moving beyond these constrictions, preparing ourselves to receive the Torah.

Moses himself expressed doubt at the outset of his mission, asking, "Who am I?" (Exodus 3:11). The response was G-d's promise: "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). That reassurance continues to resonate for any Jew working on themselves. The journey toward growth is challenging, but it is supported by both inner strength and a sense of higher purpose. Indulgence promises short-term satisfaction, while discipline and mindful living build something that lasts.

This Shavuot, Friday and Shabbat, May 22 and 23, the Torah is given again. Let's get ready to accept it!



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

TORAH OF TRUTH AND LIFE

3 Sivan, 5711 [1951]

On the approach of Shavuot, the Festival of our Receiving the Torah, I send you herewith my best wishes for an inspired and joyous festival.

The Torah, being G-d-given, is infinite in its aspects. To some it may be a means to gain reward and avoid punishment, as promised in the Torah. To others, the Torah is a guide to good, wholesome living, and an ideal social system. Both views are limited.

Chabad goes deeper than that, delving into the profound inner significance of the Torah. Accordingly, the underlying purpose of the Torah is to serve as the link between the Creator and creation.

To amplify this but very briefly: The Creator is Infinite; creation is finite. There is no common denominator between the two (as is fully explained in Chabad literature). In this respect, there is no difference between the "Four Kingdoms" of creation, between the highest intellect among the men, and the crudest stone, for both are creations, and consequently have no co-relationship with the Creator.

That is why even the most intellectual of men cannot grasp G-d with his intellect. However, in His infinite goodness, G-d gave man a possibility to approach and commune with Him. G-d showed us how a finite created being can reach beyond his inherent limitations and commune with G-d the Infinite.

Herein lies the most important aspect of the Torah and mitzvot, for they provide the ways and means whereby we may reach a plane over and beyond our status as created, mortals. Clearly, this plane is incomparably above the highest perfection which a man can attain within his own created (hence, limited) sphere.

In this deeper sense we may now understand the words of the Torah: "And you who cleave

unto G-d your G-d, are all living this day." Wishing you and yours a happy Yom Tov, with lasting inspiration throughout the year,



Rosh Chodesh Sivan, 5726 [1966]

This year's Annual Banquet is taking place within several days of Shavuot, the Festival of Mattan Torah, the Giving of the Torah at Sinai. I trust that all participants will bring with them to the Banquet a goodly measure of the inspiration and joy of this great Yom Tov, and make the Banquet the success it deserves in every respect.

Our Sages tell us that when G-d was about to give the Torah at Mt. Sinai, He requested guarantors to ensure that the Torah would be studied and observed. All guarantees were rejected, until Moshe Rabbeinu [Moses, our teacher] declared: "Our children will be our guarantors!" Without this guarantee, not even Moshe Rabbeinu could have received the Torah. Henceforth, it became the responsibility of Moshe Rabbeinu and, indeed, of all Jews, to see to it that the Torah and the Torah-way of life would be perpetuated through our children.

The Torah is called Torat Chaim, the Torah of Life, meaning that it is both the source of everlasting life as well as the true guide in the daily life, for Torah means "guidance" and "instruction." It is the Divine and eternal Torah which we receive annually on Shavuot and, indeed, every day throughout the year we renew and reaffirm our eternal bond with it, as it has been throughout the ages, and in all places wherever Jews have lived.

It is the work of the Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch [Central Organization for Jewish Education established by the Previous Rebbe], in many parts of this country and the world over, to strengthen the bond between our Jewish people and the Torah, and particularly, to see to it that the children would be able, not only to receive their great heritage, but also transmit it for future generations. Fortunate indeed is the Jewish community of the Twin Cities [S. Paul and Minneapolis], to have the Merkos in its midst, and to have also, many devoted friends and dedicated partners, in this very vital endeavor.

May the Almighty bless each and every one of you, with success in your efforts in behalf of our children -- "our guarantors" -- for the perpetuation of our Jewish way of life, and, indeed, for our survival and happy future.

MOSHIACH MATTERS

When you look out at the ocean, you see only water. Even though you know that beneath the surface there is a vast

ocean bed and myriads of creatures, you see nothing but water. So too, a person looking out at the world in the Era of Moshiach - what will he see? Only the "water" that covers everything - the knowledge of G-d

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 11 Nissan, 1985)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

In Memory of Rabbi Shmuel M. Butman, Director of the Lubavitch Youth Organization and Founder of the L'Chaim Publication.

From the Archives

This week Friday and Shabbat, we celebrate the holiday of Shavuot, which commemorates the Giving of the Torah. Before the eyes of the entire Jewish people, G-d descended upon Mount Sinai and uttered the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the L-rd your G-d Who took you out of Egypt."

Of all the things G-d could have said at this climactic moment of Divine revelation, why did He choose to remind the Jews that He had taken them out of Egypt? Wouldn't it have been more "dramatic" to refer to Himself as the Creator of heaven and earth, or something equally as "big"? Isn't the fact that G-d created the world more significant than the Exodus from Egypt?

Chasidic philosophy explains that from a certain perspective the answer is "no." The world was created (and continues to be sustained) ex nihilo, "something from nothing." To a person this is indeed miraculous, but to G-d, Who is infinite, it is "no big deal."

The Exodus, by contrast, was an even greater miracle. In order to take the Jewish people out of Egypt, G-d had to alter the natural laws He had already set in place, and to perform supernatural wonders. G-d had to expend even more power, as it were, to break through the boundaries and limitations He had already established.

We see this on a personal level as well. It is relatively easy to accustom oneself to do the right thing from the beginning, but much harder to alter negative habits that are already ingrained.

However, when G-d took our ancestors out of Egypt, He gave every Jew for all generations the ability to transcend personal limitations. This power to overcome negative behaviors and serve G-d to the fullest was rooted within us with the Giving of the Torah, and has been part of our inheritance ever since.

As we celebrate Shavuot, let us accept the Torah anew with an active consciousness of the Giver of the Torah, realizing that the Torah is the purpose of the entire creation. In this manner, we will bring peace and tranquility to each individual Jew and to the world at large.

Shmuel Butman

L'ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקה

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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