

Points to Ponder

Shavuos 5778

בשבוועותיכם Your Shavuos (Bamidbar 28:26) – In the Maftir of Shavuos we note that we offer a new Mincha to Hashem on our Shavuos. Why is Shavuos referred to as ours (i.e. in the plural)? **Rav Shabsi Rosenthal Shlita** suggested that when one does an accounting from an outside firm, the audit is sterile and the numbers recorded and generated. However, when one is the CEO or CFO of a business, the accounting becomes a personal experience to know how one is doing. The same is true when one counts Sefirah. It is a personal experience for each person to know how one is doing and where one's personal progress is. When we culminate, with Shavuos, we can individually experience the holiday in a totally different place and on a high.

אקדמות Akdamus – One of the defining moments of the early morning davening on Shavuos day is the recitation of Akdamus. Why are we introducing the leining of Matan Torah with a human construction – a long poem? **Rav Michael Taubes Shlita** suggested that now that we have prepared for, and received the Torah, we receive an opportunity and an obligation in properly interpreting it and perpetuating it. We also are accepting the responsibility to adhere to its lofty standards. After the poetic descriptions of the greatness of Hashem and the songs of his Malachim, which we do not always get, we turn to a description of the Jewish nation and their (our) commitment to serve and praise Hashem despite the world's attempt to dissuade us from doing so. This trip – from things so other-worldly and making them relevant in THIS world, is the power of Torah in general, and a theme that runs through the holiday of Shavuos.

כפה עליהם הר כגיגית He held the mountain over their heads – It seems odd that the Torah needed to be forced onto the people since they said “Naaseh V’Nishma”. However, the **Midrash Tanchuma (Noach)** explains that the forcing was on accepting the Torah She’Baal Peh. The people readily accepted Torah She’b’Ksav. **Rav Asher Weiss Shlita** explains that at Maamad Har Sinai the experience was so majestic that the people were experiencing Hashem like the Malachim do – and they did so willingly – putting Naaseh first which earned them 2 crowns (See Shabbos 88a). Rav Asher adds that Hashem lifted the mountain because he wanted the people to know that the Torah was not another gift like the spoils of Mitzayim or the Mon – it was a responsibility and a covenant that they still accepted willingly and with love and joy. **Rav Yonasan Sacks Shlita** added that the ultimate beauty of the Jewish nation is that we serve Hashem with love like servants who serve without the desire to receive reward. This relationship was solidified on Shavuos at the time of Matan Torah.

מעשה מרכבה (הפטרה ליום א) Maaseh Merkava – The Haftorah of the first day of Shavuos describes the composition and workings of the heavenly throne and the Malachim who surround it. The concepts are ones that are far from human comprehension. One concept is the idea that the Malachim of the Merkava have a single straight leg. **Rashi** notes that a Malach does not need joints because he is always standing – he gives up his growth for the growth of the will of Hashem. **Rav Pam ztl.** likened the Rebbe to a Malach meaning that in order to be successful at his task, he sometimes becomes an Oimed in his own spiritual growth or so it seems. However, when the Rebbe considers the opportunity to grow from his Talmidim's questions and experiences, he too, discovers a growth within himself as well as the inspiration to go even further. Part of the Matan Torah experience is the recognition that our Mechanchim and Morot are real angels in our midst.

Megillas Rus – In a famous midrash, the Gemara (Bava Basra 91b) notes that the reason why this Megillah was written. After all, it contains no rules of Tumah and Tahara and no nuances in Halacha. Rather, says the Gemara, it was written to tell us what the reward for Gemillas Chessed is. **Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht ztl.** would ask us that if this is indeed the theme, what is the Chessed of Orpah? After all, she is promised Chessed from Naomi? Rav Goldvicht would then recognize that the Gemara rewards her for the 40 steps she took with Naomi, with 40 days that Goliath was terrorizing the Jewish nation. Why is this a reward? Rav Goldvicht would remind us that Chessed has a negative side to it. That negative side comes out when the person appears as though the Chessed is selfless but the Chessed is really self-serving. Initially it appears as Chessed, and is strong – but then it is seen as Chessed Shel Tumah and is open to rejection.

Some Questions for your Yom Tov table:

- 1) The Gemora in Shabbos (88a) teaches that when the Jewish people were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, Hashem lifted the mountain above them like a barrel and threatened them that if they won't accept the Torah, שם תהא קבורתכם – there will be your burial place. If Hashem's intention was to frighten them so that they would accept the Torah, why did He transform the mountain into a barrel, which isn't particularly scary, instead of simply picking it up and leaving it looming over their heads like the scary mountain that it already was?
- 2) Many mitzvos may be performed by appointing an agent to do so on his behalf (Kiddushin 41a). Can the mitzvah of honoring one's parents (Shemos 20:12) be done via an agent?