

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

SHABUOT and BEHA'ALOTECHA

JUNE 4-7, 2014

6,7,9 SIVAN 5774

DEDICATIONS: To Grandma Chantelle and her partner Baby Chantelle

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

We say Yehi Shem through the 13th of Sivan

I hope you will join us for Shavuot

Tuesday Night , June 3 - Candle Lighting – 8:05,
Mincha Services – 7:45pm - Do not begin Kiddush at home if possible until 8:45
Tikun LeI Shavuot – 11:00pm
Rav Aharon, Rabbi Yosef and Rabbi David will interject derashot and ideas into the reading
Desserts, Fruits, tea and Coffee will be served throughout the night

Wednesday, June 4 – 1st Day of Shavuot -
Sunrise Minyan begins at 4:30 AM, Sunrise at 5:24.34 -
Regular services begin at 9AM – As many of those who typically arrive early will be at the first minyan we need commitments from ten for the second Minyan.
B'H – as usual Uri Lemberger will lead this minyan and read the Torah
He needs help! Who will be there?
We need ten guys to commit to the late minyan.

No Meal in the SynagogueBut something better -
Phyllis invites everyone for Kiddush with home-made desserts after services.
Return for Azharot and Mincha at 7:15 followed by Arbit Candle Lighting – After 9:05pm

The most distinctive Shavuot custom is undoubtedly the recital of the Azharot and the Book of Ruth that takes place before the Mincha service. The main poem is a precis of the 613 commandments written by R. Shelomo ibn Gevirol (c. 1020-1058). The first section, summarising the positive commands, is read on the first day, and the second, summarizing the negative ones, on the second. It is a beautiful custom and we sing it in a special tune. Please join us.

Thursday, June 5– 2nd Day of Shavuot -
Morning Services – 9:00am,
Yizkor – about 10:30AM –
Gala Kiddush sponsored by the sisterhood follows.
Azharot and Ruth 2nd Day and Mincha – 7:30 pm Holiday ends – 9:06

Candle lighting Friday evening June 6th is at 8:05 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE
Shaharit Sunday 8:00AM, Mon and Thurs at 6:55, Tues, Weds and Fri at 7:00

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited
Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM (ADDITIONAL NEW TIME Sunday Mornings 7:30)
Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through October 30th – Please join us! 212-289-2100

Editors Notes

Dairy or Not

We were reviewing the various opinions on eating dairy on Shavuot. I recalled that as a child we had dairy, but when I was older we were of the opinion that we needed meat to celebrate the holiday. I was curious as to what the custom was. I spoke with Mr. Silvera at the Safra Synagogue and he recalled eating dairy specifically on the first night of the holiday. Later that day I was sitting with Mr. Elie Sutton and when we had a private moment I asked him what he recalled. He agreed that the first night, they all ate dairy and could even tell me the menu.

I was discussing it with my brother Victor and he forwarded the following via his brother in law Albert Setton. It was written by Michael Arking who gave me permission to post it. Let me know your thoughts and your recollection.

My article on Behaalotecha follows.

DAIRY ON SHABU'OT By Morris Arking

Many have the custom of eating dairy on Shabu'ot. What is the origin of this custom? Eating dairy on Shabu'ot is not mentioned by the Gemara or any of the Sephardic or Middle-Eastern Rishonim. In fact the only two Rishonim that mention it are the Kol Bo and MoHaRI Tyrna. The author of the Kol Bo is not known, but it closely resembles the Orhot Hayyim (by R Aharon Ben Ya'aqob HaKohen) that was compiled in Southern France in the late 13th century. The Kol Bo (Siman 52) wrote that it was customary to eat honey and milk on Shabu'ot because the Torah is compared to honey and milk, as the Pasuq in Shir HaShirim (4:11) says "D'bash V'Halab Tahat L'shonekh" ("Honey and milk under your tongue"). The commentators explain that this verse is allegorically referring to one who is speaking words of Torah. It's not clear from the Kol Bo when they ate

honey and milk since normally Yom Tob meals are meat meals.

The MoHaRI Tyrna lived in 14th century Austria and he merely brings the acronym for milk in the Torah's instruction for the Shabu'ot offering as the pasuq (BaMidbar 28:26) describes it as a "Minhah Hadashah LaShem B'Shabu'otekhem" (a new offering to Hashem on your Shabu'ot). The acronym of Hadashah LaShem B'Shabu'otekhem is HaLaB (milk).

The next record of this custom is by R. Moshe Isrelish (16th century Poland), commonly known as the RaMA, in his notes on Shulhan 'Arukh (OH 494). He wrote that it is customary in several places to eat dairy on the first day of Shabu'ot. And he continued that it seemed to him that the reason for this was in order to have two breads. First eat dairy with bread, and then eat meat with another bread, since you can't eat bread with meat, after that bread was served on the table with dairy. The two breads are reminiscent of the two breads that are brought on the altar in the Miqdash on Shabu'ot. Interestingly he makes no mention of honey like the Kol Bo, and here he specifies that it was served on the first day, prior to the meat meal. So we see from this early record of the custom, that dairy on Shabu'ot did not replace the meat that is ordinarily served on Yom Tob as part of the Misvah of Simhat Yom Tob.

Subsequent to the RaMA's note on Shulhan 'Arukh, we begin to see this custom documented in Sephardic sources as well. R Hayyim Benveniste (17th century Turkey), in his Shiyere' K'nesset HaG'dolah (Ot Gimal), wrote that his custom was to eat dairy with honey, make Birkat HaMazon, and then after an hour he would eat meat. Another Sephardic source is the P'ri Hadash, R. Hizqiyah DeSilva, from Italy and later in Jerusalem (he lived during the latter part of the 17th century). He does not state what his custom was, he just comments on the RaMA's reasoning for the custom (OH 494). He did not agree with the explanation of having two breads, so he attributed the custom to the Gemara's comparison of the Torah to milk. In Masekhet Ta'anit (7a/b) the Gemara stated that the Torah is compared to three liquids; to water, wine and milk. This is either because these liquids are stored in simple earthenware jugs just like the Torah that stays in humble people. Or because these liquids spoil if they are not attended to, like the Torah which is forgotten without constant study and review. The P'ri Hadash also cited the reason of "D'bash V'Halab Tahat L'Shonekh". And both the Shiyere' K'nesset HaG'dolah and the P'ri Hadash were quoted by R

Yoseph Molkho (18th century Greece) in his Shulhan Gaboha (OH 494 Zayin/Het).

R Hayyim Palaji who was the Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Empire in the 19th century also discussed the custom of eating dairy on Shabu'ot (Mo'ed L'Kol Hai Siman Het Ot Mem). He explained that we eat dairy and then meat, to show that we are worthy of receiving the Torah, since we are careful not to eat dairy with or after meat (only before meat). This reason is based on the Midrash that said, that when the angels saw that Hashem was going to give the Torah to the Jewish people, they protested on the grounds that angels are more worthy of receiving the Torah. Hashem answered that they weren't, since they ate meat and milk when they went to visit Abraham Abinu! R Hayyim Palaji also added that it is more important to have meat than dairy on Shabu'ot (if you're not going to have both.)

The reason, that they could not have meat after receiving the Torah because their dishes weren't kosher, and that meat required more preparations, such as a special slaughtering knife, a salting process etc. was not recorded until the 20th century by the Mishnah B'rurah (OH 494:12). His source is an anonymous Rabbi, meaning that there is no Midrashic source that indicates that reason.

R Abraham Hamway, who was born in Halab in the 19th century, quotes several of the sources cited above in his Mahzor Bet HaB'hira for Pesah and Shabu'ot (pgs 281b/282a). But his last line on the subject was: "A man is obligated to rejoice on this holy holiday and there is no happiness unless there is meat, therefore after eating dairy foods, make Birkat HaMazon, and then the righteous should eat (meat) until they are satisfied!" (Ot Yod Tet) So we see from the RaMA, the Shiyyere' K'nesset HaG'dolah, R Hayyim Palaji and H Abraham Hamway that dairy was only served before a meat meal, not instead of a meat meal on Shabu'ot. Likewise H 'Obadyah Yosef wrote, "Our custom is to eat dairy first, then eat something (parve) and drink something (parve to wash away the dairy) and then we have meat." (Hazon 'Obadyah-Yom Tob pg318)

What was the custom in Middle-Eastern communities? In the Keter Shem Tob's compendium of customs for Shabu'ot (by R Shem Tob Gaguine) he writes that the custom in the Land of Israel, Syria, Turkey and Egypt was to have cheese dishes and foods cooked with butter, milk and honey for breakfast as was the custom in Germany, but that the Sephardic communities in London and Amsterdam were not meticulous in that matter (volume 4 pgs 15/16 published in 1954). So again we see that in these communities the custom of eating

dairy did not come at the expense of eating meat at any of the official Yom Tob meals, as they only had it for breakfast, not as a dinner or lunch.

Furthermore the Yemenites never adopted the custom of eating dairy at all on the holiday of Shabu'ot (see Halikhot Teman by R Yoseph Qafih and Halakhhot and Minhagim of the Jewish People by R 'Obadyah Melamed). In fact the Gemara in Masekhet Pesahim (68b) states that Rab Yosef instructed the members of his household to prepare him a third-born calf for the Shabu'ot meal. He explained that if it wasn't for the Torah that was given on that day, "Kammah Yoseph Eeka B'Shuqa" (he would be one of many Joe's in the market place) Since the Torah elevated him to the special status of being Rab Yoseph, it is fitting to celebrate Shabu'ot with a special meat meal!

So what about the Halabi custom of having an actual dairy meal on the holiday of Shabu'ot? In Halab some families would serve dairy on the first night of the holiday and others on the first day of the holiday. It was common to serve Rishta B'Kalsoneess, cheese Sombusak, Riz ib Halib (rice with milk) and Riz ib 'Assal (rice with honey). It was also customary to serve Krabeej which is a pastry with marshmallow fluff. The fluff is known as "Natef" in Arabic and it is reminiscent of the pasuq that is recited in the Mizmor for Shabu'ot ; "...Af Shamayim Nattetu MiP'ne' Elokim Zeh Sinai"(Tehilim 68:9). Those that serve dairy on the first night, feel that a lighter meal facilitates staying up all night. Eating dairy at night instead of the daytime is also consistent with the Rabbinic teaching regarding Shabbat and Yom Tob meals of, "K'bod Yom Ukhbod Laylah, K'bod Yom Qodem" (Pesahim 105a) which means that the daytime meal takes precedence over the nighttime meal. Maran brings that L'Halakhah in OH 271:3. Furthermore Hakham 'Obadyah Yosef wrote (Hazon 'Obadyah-Yom Tob pgs 96-98) that according to Maran and other posqim the Misvah of Simhat Yom Tob is MiD'Rabbanan on the first night of Yom Tob as opposed to the first day when it is D'Orayta. (See Masekhet Sukkah 48a where the word "Akh" in the pasuq "V'Hayita Akh Sameah" excludes the first night, and the Yerushalmi Sukkah 84:5 states "...Lel Yom Tob Rishon Patur MiSimhah".) Still in all some served a dairy meal for lunch.

So is this custom of serving dairy for an actual Yom Tob meal problematic Halakhically? HaRambam wrote in MT Hilkhhot Yom Tob (6:18): "The men eat meat and drink wine as there is no happiness unless there is meat and there is no happiness unless there is wine." However Maran did not rule like HaRambam in this matter, since it seems from the Gemara

(Pesahim 108a) that meat was only a requirement in the times of the Bet HaMiqdash, when they ate the meat of the Qorban Sh'lammim, but now that we don't have the Bet HaMiqdash we fulfill the obligation of Simhat Yom Tob by drinking wine. In Shulhan 'Arukh Hilkhhot Yom Tob (OH 529:1) Maran wrote; "And one is obligated to (make HaMossi) on two loaves of bread (for Lehem Mishneh) and establish every meal on the wine." He makes no mention of an obligation to have meat, which is consistent with his discussion in the Bet Yosef (OH 529 Dibbur HaMat-hil "Katab HaRambam") where he differs with HaRambam on this point, based on his understanding of the Gemara in Masekhet Pesahim.

So from a Halakhic perspective dairy may be served any time for a Yom Tob meal, provided that they also drink wine. However from all the sources cited above, we see that it was important to them to have meat for every Yom Tob meal. Therefore we must put the custom of eating dairy on Shabu'ot into proper perspective. It originated as an Ashkenazic custom, and after the RaMA's notes were printed with Shulhan 'Arukh it was adopted by Sepharadim in a limited way. Either as a prelude to a meat meal, or as a breakfast, or not at all in some Middle-Eastern communities. Our community adopted the custom of having one dairy meal, which is permissible according to Maran, but based on all of the above-mentioned sources it is not suggested to replace more than one meat meal with dairy.

The Greatest Generation

My daughter Mariyah who is 13 asked me on Shabbat when the next documentary about the community would be out. She recalled that she saw Both "Coming to America" and "Bensonhurst" sitting between my parents at Lincoln Center. The former covered the years between 1900 and 1920 and depicted a bit of the life they left behind in Syria and what they found in America. The latter showed the community moving from the lower east side to Brooklyn.

What was special for her was that my dad was featured in both films and both he and my mom gave her a running commentary both during and after each feature.

I told her that the third film (which is the fourth episode – the first episode is still in the works) was released last year and depicts the war years between 1940 and 1945. And we could arrange to see it. Unfortunately it will be shown in Manhattan on June 17th, the night of her graduation, but I explained there will be other showings. "Is grandpa Joe featured in

this movie too?" she wondered. "Grandpa Joe is", I answered. "Although Grandma Adele, the spy catcher would have been too had she agreed". My mom caught two German spies working in the US as part of her work with Army intelligence.

One item that all of us and especially the children took from the films is the self-sacrifice of those who came before us. We spoke about picking up from a place where your family lived for hundreds or thousands of years and boarding a caravan and then a ship to an imaginary world. We tried to imagine what it would be like to come to a country where you could neither understand the language, nor read or write it. We discussed the struggles they encountered during the depression. And we talked about uncle Moe being one of the guys who invaded Normandy.

We also spoke about those who were in Europe and survived the Holocaust and came to the new world, often with no relatives, no friends, no real support system and who built a world here.

"The Greatest Generation" is a term coined by journalist Tom Brokaw to describe the generation who grew up in the United States during the deprivation of the Great Depression, and then went on to fight in World War II, as well as those whose productivity within the war's home front made a decisive material contribution to the war effort.

No sacrifice was too great for the better life they hoped to give their children and grandchildren.

In this week's portion, Hashem tells Moshe to assemble seventy Elders, who would receive some of his prophecy and assist him. One wonders, who are these elders? The Rabbis teach that they were chosen from the foremen who had been the Jewish taskmasters in Egypt. These men, who were ordered by Pharaoh to tattle on and punish the Israelites, allowed themselves to be beaten in lieu of opening their mouths and inflicting punishment on their brothers. These elders certainly represented, "the greatest generation" to those who traveled for forty years through the desert. And as a reward they were endowed with a spiritual piece of Moses.

I often feel that our "greatest generation" was also endowed with some higher spirit.

Some years back the Israeli papers told an amazing story.

All she had wanted was to give a nice surprise to her mother. Anat, a Tel Aviv resident, threw out her mothers' ratty old mattress and bought her a lovely

new one. As people age, they need a firm mattress, not a lumpy old one. Those lumps were not clumps of distorted wool or loose springs. They were dollar bills. Over the years, Anat's mother had stashed away American dollars and Israeli shekels in her mattress, and now Anat had thrown away her life savings

Back in 2009, the papers reported that a massive search is under way at the city dump, where security has been beefed up to keep out treasure-seekers who have heard Anat's story in Israeli media. Anat, who did not want to reveal the rest of her name, told Israel Army Radio that she woke up early Sunday to get a good deal on a new mattress as a surprise for her mother. She fell asleep that night, exhausted after lugging up the new mattress and hauling down the old one to be taken out with the trash. When her mother realized the next day what her daughter had done, she told her that she had been using the mattress to stash away her life savings and had nearly a million dollars padding the inside of the worn-out mattress.

Anat ran outside to discover the bedding had already been taken away by the garbage men, sparking a frantic - and so far fruitless - search through tons of waste at three landfill sites in Tel Aviv.

The Israeli daily Yediot Ahronot published a picture of the woman searching through rubbish at a dump in southern Israel. Yitzhak Borba, the dump manager, told Army Radio that his staff were helping the woman, saying she appeared "totally desperate." He said he increased security at the site to keep would-be treasure hunters away. The woman said the money had been stashed in a mattress because she had had "traumatic experiences with banks" in the past. She would not elaborate. She said she was trying to remain hopeful the money would be recovered, but she feared someone may already have found it. She said it could be worse. "People have to take everything in proportion, and thank God for the good and the bad," she said.

The money was never found. (When I told the story back in 09, more than one cynic suggested that there probably was no money in the mattress But let's believe there was.)

The most interesting part of the story was the mother's reaction. She focused on the fact that they still had each other and in life there are many things more important than the money. It was a generation of people with values.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about my experience in Denver. The article you may recall was on the power

of hello. I complimented one synagogue and rabbi who went well beyond the call, because I compared that Synagogue with two others. And although I did not name any of the other Synagogues, I did cause some heartache among people who thought I was speaking about them.

I decided to seek out criticism among some of the community elders. Most thought that too much was being made of nothing ... but then a colleague of my father z'sl interjected. He told those present, "Gentlemen, Close your eyes for a moment and hear the voice of Mr. Bibi." (Referring to my father.)

And I could see and hear my dad saying ... "Although I understand the desire to contrast one situation with another for literary effect and to go down in order to build up, our way should not be to go down. There is a way to make your point as strongly as you made it focusing only on the positive. We don't need to break in order to build."

A few days later, I came back to thank this man as I really heard my father's voice in what he said.

He told us that that generation was so special that doing and saying the right thing was often ingrained into their very being.

My thirteen year old understood what a special generation her grandparents were part of. She appreciated and valued all that they had done. And I am sure in cherishing and treasuring their outlook on life, their lessons will stick with her as she graduates middle school into high school and beyond.

Shabbat Shalom
David Bibi

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Why should we be left out by not offering Hashem's offering in its appointed time?" (Bemidbar 9:7)

The Torah tells us that if one was unable to bring the Pesah sacrifice on the correct date he had the option to bring it a month later on the 14th of Iyar. This is known as Pesah Sheni. This is a puzzling concept. Usually there are no second chances. How come here they get a second chance? The answer is that they said, "Lamah nigara – why should we be left out?" The people came to Moshe and refused to accept the fact that they were no longer obligated to perform the misvah. They wanted a second chance

and incredibly they got it. This development paved the way for all those in the future generations who desired a second chance.

Listen to amazing true story told by Rabbi Yechiel Spero. Once, right before Rosh Hashanah, the great mekubal, Rav Shimshon of Ostropoli met the Satan, and noticed that his adversary was full of despair. When Rav Shimshon asked him what was wrong, the Satan replied that it is always difficult to get the Jewish people to sin during this period of the year. Obviously, Rav Shimshon did not feel all that bad.

However, when he met the Satan immediately after Yom Kippur, he was shocked to find that he seemed quite happy. Rav Shimshon was confused. If the Satan's concern before Rosh Hashanah was because the Jewish people were going to do teshubah, then he should have been despondent after Yom Kippur.

Rav Shimshon asked him why he was smiling. Hadn't the Jewish people repented? The Satan admitted that normally he was in a dejected state at this time of year. Indeed the Jewish people had done teshubah, which caused him distress. For that reason, he had asked Hashem to allow him to bring about some chaos and havoc. And now he hoped that Hashem would allow him to sink the ship that was bringing the lulabim and etrogim to the Eastern European countries. That was why he was so happy. He knew that he had been defeated up until this point, but he also knew that so many Jews would be unable to perform a precious misvah. Nothing could bring him greater joy.

Rav Shimshon was very concerned. When he heard the news a few days later that the ship had sunk, his heart sank with it. Indeed it was very challenging. Many cities did not have even one full set of lulab and etrog, and had to borrow from people in other cities. The crisis was very real. Rav Shimshon was certain that the next time he would meet the Satan he would see him grinning from ear to ear.

But when Rav Shimshon crossed paths with the Satan just a few days after the holiday, he noticed that he was terribly upset. Shocked at his mood, he asked his nemesis why he was so troubled. If the ship sank, which was what the Satan had asked for, then why was he upset? Hadn't his plan worked? Didn't thousands have their holiday inconvenienced and disturbed?

The Satan looked at the pious Rabbi and responded, "You are right. My plan worked. I could not have been happier at the time. But then the disaster struck. Do you know what those Jews did? They did not despair. Instead they traveled to the closest town that had a lulab set. They stood in long lines for hours, for their chance to use one set.

"They refused to be denied. So my plan backfired on me. And that is why I am so upset. After all my efforts, I realized that the Jewish people cannot be overcome. They refuse to be told no. They always seem to find a way."

This is the key to our survival. This is why the Jewish people will last forever. We will always find a way. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

"Moshe heard the people weeping in their families" (Bemidbar 11:10)

When the Jewish people complained to Moshe about the manna, the Torah says that Moshe heard them crying "uh", «j%PŞJ'in%ok - in their families." The Rabbis explain that in reality they were complaining about their family lives. They were really complaining about the fact that, after they received the Torah, their relatives had become forbidden to them to marry. But on the surface they were just using the manna as an excuse to be unhappy. That's why there were such devastating results in this episode. Because when one is bothered by something and yet uses something else as an excuse, we can never appease him fully, since we are only addressing the issue he mentioned and in reality the problem lies somewhere else.

It is always wise to remember this lesson when listening to complaints or criticism. We must learn to read between the lines and see whether there is some underlying problem rather than the one which is apparent. This applies both on a personal and on a communal level, and when addressed correctly, will provide a great chance of solving the real problem. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Summer Vacation

The Torah in Parashat Behaalotecha tells of Beneh Yisrael's departure from Mount Sinai, where they had been stationed for nearly a year: "Va'yis'u Me'har Hashem" ("They journeyed from the Mountain of G-d"). The Gemara comments that this departure from Sinai was a calamity. It was such a grave calamity, in fact, that the Torah had to insert two Pesukim after this verse to serve as a "buffer" between it and the next story, which tells of the tragedy of Kibrot Ha'ta'ava. Reporting two tragedies one after the other would be a source of great shame to Beneh Yisrael, and therefore the Torah made an interruption between these two terrible misfortunes – the nation's journey from Sinai, and Kibrot Ha'ta'ava.

The obvious question arises, why is this calamity? Were Beneh Yisrael meant to remain at Sinai forever? Didn't G-d want them to leave Mount Sinai and proceed to the Land of Israel?

Tosafot answer that the calamity lay not in the departure itself, but rather in the mindset with which Beneh Yisrael left. In Tosafot's words, Beneh Yisrael left "as a child flees from school." They left Sinai joyfully, as though "escaping" school.

Rav Mordechai Gifter (1915-2001) explained Tosafot's comments by noting that when the school bell rings at the end of the day, the children "escape" in the sense of feeling free from school until the next morning. Throughout the day, they are bound by a schedule and set of expectations and responsibilities. The moment the bell rings, they are free from the school's demands until the next day. And this was the tragedy of Beneh Yisrael's departure from Sinai. They relished their perceived newfound "freedom." They felt that their journey from "the Mountain of G-d" meant their "release" from the constraints and obligations which the Torah demands. They felt "free" like a child who hears the bell at the end of the last class.

This is indeed a tragedy, because a Jew must never feel "free" from the Torah's obligations. We are bound by G-d's laws when we are in yeshivah, at home, in the synagogue, in the office, at a social event, or on vacation. Even when we "journey from the Mountain of G-d," when we – for entirely legitimate reasons – leave our familiar religious surroundings, the obligations and values which were taught at Mount Sinai must accompany us in our travels.

Unfortunately, many people – children and adults alike – approach summer vacation as "a child fleeing from school." They see it as a time to relax their religious standards, to take a break from the regular schedule of prayer and study, and to enjoy a period of "freedom." As Gemara teaches us, this is tragic.

There is never a break or vacation from religious commitment. When it comes to spiritual growth, momentum is critical. Once the momentum is broken, we can fall back to where we were at the outset. We all know that it is far easier to break than to build. An exquisite crystal vase can take days or weeks to make, but can be smashed in a split second. And this is true of spirituality, as well. We can all attest to the fact that it takes time and hard work to grow in Torah and in our connection to Hashem. But losing our achievements is very easy. It takes a lot less time than the 75 days of summer vacation.

As the summer unfolds, many of us will "journey from the Mountain of G-d," and spend some time outside our ordinary framework of Torah and Mivot. We must ensure that even during this period of

departure, we maintain our momentum of religious commitment. There is a beautiful initiative undertaken by a group of men in our community called the "Torahbus," a special bus into the city every morning where Torah classes are given. This is just one example of how growth in Torah can continue even during the summer months. Each and every one of us must find his or her own way to keep up the momentum and ensure even as we "journey from the Mountain of G-d," we will not, Heaven forbid, journey from G-d Himself.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A Double Celebration

The festival of Shavuot is a mystery wrapped in an enigma. Here is how Shavuot is described and defined in parsha Emor:

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord . . . On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live." (Leviticus 23: 15-21)

These are the difficulties. In the first place, Shavuot, "the feast of weeks", is given no calendrical date: all the other festivals are. Pesach, for example is "on the fifteenth day" of the "first month". Shavuot has no such date. It is calculated on the basis of counting "seven full weeks" from a particular starting time, not by noting a date in the year.

Secondly, as long as the New Moon was determined on the basis of eyewitness testimony (i.e. until the fourth century of the Common Era), Shavuot could have no fixed date. In the Jewish calendar a month can be long (30 days) or short (29). If Nisan and Iyar were both long months, Shavuot would fall on 5 Sivan. If both were short, it would fall on 7 Sivan. And if one were long and the other short, it would fall on 6 Sivan. Unlike other festivals, Shavuot is (or was) a moveable feast.

Thirdly, the point at which the counting of days and weeks begins is signaled in a profoundly ambiguous phrase: "From the day after the Sabbath". But which Sabbath? And what is the reference to a Sabbath doing here at all? The previous passage has talked about Pesach, not the Sabbath. This led to one of the great controversies in Second Temple Judaism. The Pharisees, who believed in the Oral Law as well as the Written one understood "the Sabbath" to mean,

here, the first day of Pesach (15 Nisan). The Sadducees, who believed in the Written Law only, took the text literally. The day after the Sabbath is Sunday. Thus the count always begins on a Sunday, and Shavuot, fifty days later, also always falls on a Sunday.

The fourth mystery, though, is the deepest: what is Shavuot about? What does it commemorate? About Pesach and Sukkot, we have no doubt. Pesach is a commemoration of the exodus. Sukkot is a reminder of the forty years in the wilderness. As our sedra says: "Live in booths for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in booths so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

In the case of Shavuot, all the Torah says is that it is the "Feast of the Harvest", and the "Day of Firstfruits". These are agricultural descriptions, not historical ones. Pesach and Sukkot have both: an agricultural aspect (spring/autumn) and a historical one (exodus/wilderness). This is not a marginal phenomenon, but of the essence. Other religions of the ancient world celebrated seasons. They recognised cyclical time. Only Israel observed historical time – time as a journey, a story, an evolving narrative. The historical dimension of the Jewish festivals was unique. All the more, then, is it strange that Shavuot is not biblically linked to a historical event.

Jewish tradition identified Shavuot as "the time of the giving of the Torah", the anniversary of the Divine revelation at Sinai when the Israelites heard the voice of God and made a covenant with Him. But that connection is not made in the Torah itself. To be sure, the Torah says that "In the third month after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai" (Ex. 19: 1), and Shavuot is the only festival in the third month. So the connection is implicit; but it is not explicit. For this, as for the festival's date, we need the Oral tradition. What then was the view of the Sadducees? It is unlikely that they linked Shavuot with the giving of the Torah. For that event had a date, and for the Sadducees Shavuot did not have a date. They kept it on a Sunday – they observed it on a specific day of the week, not on a specific date in the year. How did the Sadducees view Shavuot?

There is a fascinating episode recorded in the rabbinic literature (Menachot 65a) in which a Sadducee explains to R. Yochanan ben Zakkai why, according to them, Shavuot is always on a Sunday: "Moses our teacher was a great lover of Israel. Knowing that Shavuot lasted only one day, he

therefore fixed it on the day after the Sabbath so that Israel might enjoy themselves for two successive days." Shavuot gave the Israelites a long weekend!

From this starting point we can begin to speculate what Shavuot might have meant for the Sadducees. The late Louis Finkelstein argued that they were landowners and farmers. In general, they were wealthier than the Pharisees, and more closely attached to the State and its institutions: the Temple and the political elite. They were as near as Judaism came to a governing class.

For farmers the agricultural significance of Shavuot would have been clear and primary. It was "the festival of the harvest, of the firstfruits of your work, of what you sow in the field" (Ex. 23: 16). It came at the end of a seven-week process that began with the bringing of the Omer – "a sheaf of the first grain of your harvest" (Lev. 23: 10), i.e. the first of the barley crop. This was the busy time of gathering in the grain (this is the setting of the Book of Ruth, and one of the reasons why we read it on Shavuot). Farmers would have a specific reason to give thanks to God who "brings forth bread from the ground". They would also, by the end of harvesting, be exhausted. Hence the Sadducee's remark about needing a long weekend.

We can now see the outline of a possible Sadducean argument. Pesach represents the beginning of the Israelites' journey to freedom. Sukkot recalls the forty years of wandering in the desert. But where in the Jewish year do we recall and celebrate the end of the journey: the entry into the promised land? When, in fact, did it take place? The Book of Joshua (5: 10-12) states: "On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover. The day after the Passover, that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. The manna stopped the day after they ate this food from the land; there was no longer any manna for the Israelites, but that year they ate of the produce of Canaan."

It is this text that Maimonides takes as proof that "the day after the Sabbath" in fact means, as the text states here, "the day after the Passover". Seen through Sadducean eyes, however, this text might have held a quite different significance. The Omer recalls the day the Israelites first ate the produce of the promised land. It was the end of the wilderness years – the day they stopped eating manna ("bread from heaven" – Exodus 16: 4) and started eating bread from the land to which they had been traveling for forty years.

The reason Shavuot is given only agricultural, not historical, content in the Torah is that in this case agriculture was history. The fifty day count from the first time they ate food grown in Israel to the end of the grain harvest represents the end of the journey of which Pesach was the beginning and Sukkot the middle. Shavuot is a festival of the land and its produce because it commemorates the entry into the land in the days of Joshua. So the Sadducees may have argued. It was Israel's first Yom ha-Atzma'ut, Independence Day. It was the festival of entry into the promised land.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sadducees rapidly disappeared. How do you celebrate a festival of the land when you have lost the land? How do you predicate your religious identity on the State and its institutions (Temple, priests, kings) when you have lost those institutions? Only a movement (the Pharisees) and a festival (Shavuot) based on the giving of the Torah, could survive. For the Torah was not completely dependent on the land. It had been given "in the wilderness". It applied anywhere and everywhere.

To be sure, the Pharisees, no less than the Sadducees, loved the land. They knew the Torah in its entirety could only be kept there. They longed for it, prayed for it, lived there whenever they could. But even in exile, they still had the Torah and the promise it contained that one day Jews would return, and recover their sovereignty, and rebuild what they had lost.

The argument about Shavuot turned out to be fateful for Jewish history. Those who celebrated it as "the time of the giving of the Torah" ensured Jewish survival through nearly 20 centuries of exile and dispersion. And we, who live in the era of the return, can rejoice in a double celebration: of the Torah and of the land.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z"TL
"Why should we be held back from offering the offering of Hashem". (9:7)**

In this episode, Hashem teaches a principle. Even when a man is absolved from any obligation to perform a Mitzvah, yet he should desire the opportunity to be obligated. These men had not been able to participate in the Pesach sacrifice, since they were ritually unclean. Therefore they were blameless, according to the principle "The Torah absolves in unavoidable circumstances" (Baba Kama 28B).

But it is not sufficient to be absolved, for the loss of the Positive achievement is in itself the cause of intense regret in the minds of the Righteous. Because of the merit of these righteous men who longed for opportunities to be obligated in Mitzvot, Hashem contrived that the subject of the Pesach Sheni be revealed at their instigation. Otherwise, had they not inquired, Hashem would have taught the laws of the Second Pesach-Offering to Moshe together with the laws of the First Pesach-Offering (Shemot 12) without their inquiry.

Similarly, the poor man that has no money should regret the loss of opportunity to perform the Mitzvah of charity to the poor. Jews in exile should regret the loss of the Mitzvot of Terumah and Maaser. Today we regret that "We are not able to go up and to do our obligations in Your chosen House (Bet Hamikdash) (Mussaf Yom Tob).

In a certain sense, the failure to perform a Mitzvah is more regrettable than the sin of performing a transgression. "There is no peril as great as this peril" (Mesilat Yesharim 7), when the loss of a Mitzvah is imminent. By proper Repentance, a sin may be forgiven by Hashem, but a lost opportunity to perform a Mitzvah is "That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is lacking cannot be counted in" (Kohelet 1:15, Hagigah 9B).

In Gehinnom the sinner is cleansed of the stains of his iniquities after a period of chastisement, and then he goes to enjoy the reward for his Mitzvot in Eternal happiness. Thus the punishment for some sins is limited, but the payment for Mitzvot is unlimited and eternal. Gehinnom can help clean sins, however it is not able to help make up for not seizing the lifelong opportunities to do Mitzvot. Quoted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L

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