

SHAVUOS

תש"פ

Shavuos is different than the other two regolim in that it relates to Yetzias Mitzrayim in a different way than the others do. On Pesach, on the first night we must psychologically put ourselves in a mindset as if we are now leaving Egypt. But this is not true for the rest of Pesach. The seventh day of Pesach is only a zecher to kriyas yam suf. Succos is only a zecher of the succos we lived in when we left Egypt 3500 years ago.

Shavuos is zman matan Toraseinu. We have two yomim tovim which are celebrated over the Torah – Shavuos and Simchas Torah. The Beis Halevi explains the difference between the two simchos. The first time we received the Torah, Klal Yisroel reached the highest level, which was the level of Odom Horison before the chet. There was no need to receive Torah Shebaal Peh separately. All of Klal Yisroel were given the ability to derive all of Torah Shebaal Peh directly from within Torah Shebichsav when they said naaseh venishmah. However after the chet ho'egel and their level went down, they needed a separate receiving of Torah Shebaal Peh. They received this format of Torah that we have today on Yom Kippur with the second luchos. On Yom Kippur we do not celebrate the second kabbolas haTorah. We delay it until Simchas Torah.

But the Torah we received on Shavuos is not the Torah in the form that we have today. If this is the case, what are we celebrating on Shavuos? We are celebrating the fact that we received the Torah and entered an unbreakable bris with Hashem.

One can ask: is our celebration on Shavuos one of commemoration of an event that happened 3500 years ago? The gemara in Shabbos teaches us that we are not allowed to perform dangerous medical procedures on Erev Shavuos. It is a time of sakono. Why?

Rashi in Chumash quotes the ma'amar Chazal that when Hashem created the world, he conditioned its existence on the future fact that Klal Yisroel would accept the Torah. The ultimate acceptance of the Torah by Klal Yisroel was the very reason that Hashem created the universe in the first place. The universe was not created on a whim. The acceptance of the Torah was the ultimate goal and purpose. But at the same time, this placed an awesome responsibility on Klal Yisroel's shoulders. If they failed to accept the Torah, the world would lose its entire purpose of existence and it would revert to tohu vavohu! The security of the world was held in abeyance until we accepted the Torah more than 2,000 years later. When we accepted it, the world became justified.

But the gemara in Shabbos is telling us an unbelievable thing. This was not a one-time event. Every year, the existence of the world is again in abeyance. It is waiting to see if we accept the Torah properly on Shavuos. Then the world again becomes justified to continue to exist. If not, there is no purpose and the whole world is in danger and will revert to tohu vavohu. The gemara is telling us that our avodoh on Shavuos is to reaccept the Torah and there are dire consequences if we don't.

At what point of the day do we re-accept the Torah?

The Mogen Avrohom says there are two ways to read the Aseres Hadibros – taam hatachton and taam ha'elyon. Taam ha'elyon splits the aseres hadibros according to the dibros. Each one is a separate unit. In taam hatachton, each posuk is a separate unit.

One common minhag is to read the parshiyos of Yisro and Voes'chanon

– and certainly on Shavuos – with the taam ha'elyon. Some normally read taam hatachton during the normal kriyas haTorah during the year, and only on Shavuos we read with taam ha'elyon.

Rav Chaim explained the reasons behind these two minhogim and why everyone reads with taam ha'elyon on Shavuos.

One minhag views the regular kriyas haTorah of the year as a form of limud Torah berabim. If so, we sit while learning Torah. The unit of Talmud Torah is a single posuk. This is the reason behind the taam hatachton.

The other minhag views the regular kriyas haTorah as a reacceptance of each parsha of the Torah as if we reaccept the Torah week by week. If so, we stand for kriyas haTorah and the reading of Aseres Hadibros is dibroh by dibroh – just as we received it at Har Sinai.

But on Shavuos, all are in agreement that we are reaccepting the Aseres Hadibros again as if we are on Har Sinai and we stand and read it with taam ha'elyon. When the baal korei reads those pesukim on Shavuos morning and says Klal Yisroel said naaseh, we are accepting the Torah with naaseh and naaseh venishmah. Our avodoh on Shavuos is kabbolas haTorah.

Why does this kabbolah justify the existence of the entire world? Rashi says the whole world was created for the Torah – it is called reishis – just like terumoh, and just like bikkurim. What is the idea of bikkurim? One planted and worked his entire field and finally gets to harvest the first crop. He dedicates the best part to be kodesh kodoshim and the rest is chulin. This kodosh part justifies the rest of the field. It means that Hashem did not intend that all the population become kodesh and dedicated to avodas Hashem. Only part of the population would become kodosh and justify the existence of the rest of the world.

What would have been if chas vesholom, Klal Yisroel hadn't accepted the Torah? A very strange thing would be happening. There would be no kodosh part of the world and there is no justification to the existence of any of it. Hashem created the world on a specific condition that a certain part is dedicated to avodas Hashem.

What is the reason behind the strange minhag we have of staying up all night learning on Shavuos? It is to be so involved and so immersed in limud haTorah, that when the baal korei reads those pesukim of kabbolas haTorah, we are in the proper mindset to be ready to make our own personal kabbolas haTorah at that moment. It should shake us to the core just as it did at Har Sinai. We didn't just nod our heads in agreement. We were blown away – we were transformed on a fundamental level by our genuine kabbolah of each and every dibroh.

What is the meaning of the first dibroh – Anochi Hashem? What is the mitzvah? It is to recognize that Hashem's hashgocho runs the entire world completely – down to the finest detail. Rabbeinu Bachaye's peirush on Chumash talks about the mitzvah of emunoh in terms of believing in hashgocho protis. The Rambam's first mitzvah in Sefer Hamitzvos is to believe that the cause of anything and everything that happens in the world is from Hashem.

Where did Klal Yisroel see this hashgocho? We see it from two things.

First, from the ten makkos. We saw incredible nissim – nissim upon nissim within nissim. One after the other.

I often wondered – how could Pharaoh deny everything that was going on and maintain his illusion that he was still in control? Well, after going

through the coronavirus, the one thing I learned is about Pharaoh. This virus has defied all previous understanding of how viruses work and spread through populations. It violates all the rules. The doctor who ran the coronavirus department in Shaarei Tzedek said that it is totally unique. There is no way to treat it with any uniformity from patient to patient. It is all guesswork and managing symptoms. Nature is uniform and follows certain rules and patterns. The makkos violated all laws of nature and it was intended to send a message. There is a plague of locusts migrating from Africa to Asia and they have no way of dealing with it. Hashem is sending us messages and He is showing us that He runs the world. It is not Nature – it is Hashem getting involved to make radical changes in the world. But people can't let go of their illusions. They convince themselves they are able to control this virus. This is Pharaoh.

They were able to maintain these illusions for the ten makkos. But then came kriyas yam suf and the Gilui Shechinoh. At that moment, there was absolute clarity. This was not Nature – this was Hashem fighting the Egyptians on Klal Yisroel's behalf. It was clear to everyone.

When they came to Har Sinai, and heard the first two dibros, they had absolute clarity that Hashem is the only power in this world and He is running this world with hands-on hashgocho protis. There is no other force in this world. Once we understand this, we can go on to mitzvos. This is why we need kabbolas ol malchus shomayim before we have kabbolas mitzvos.

Klal Yisroel stood at Har Sinai. They saw the kolos and brakim and the cloud over the mountain. They saw all this and realized that Hashem is taking us as His mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh. What do we do with it? We take all of this on ourselves and say naaseh venishmah. If you are zoche this year to have a kriyas haTorah in a tzibbur, you will listen to the aseres hadibros. And even if you aren't zoche this year, remember you are now being mekabel a deep understanding that Hashem is the only power in this world. All the seeming sources of power that we got used to relying on have collapsed with this pandemic. All the experts have thrown up their hands. All the politicians don't have a clue as to what will come next with this virus. Hashem is running everything and this is the first thing we are mekabel with Anochi Hashem. This is our job on Shavuos

But, are we really ready for such a deep acceptance that He is running everything? What would happen if tonight at midnight the heavens would open up and a thundering voice came out saying Anochi Hashem? People would demand the meshugenah stop making these illusions and let us go back to sleep.

But our kabbolas haTorah means understanding that everything that happens is because Hashem has a purpose for Klal Yisroel and the world – we need to re-accept the Torah. The first dibroh is to accept Hashem's power and this goes through all the dibros. The second five dibros aren't just to keep society stable. It is all because of Anochi Hashem. This realization goes away very quickly. We are surrounded by the message that the world runs by science.

The second level of kabbolah is that we are re-accepting that Hashem took us as His people and we represent Hashem in this world. This is our avodoh. It is similar to renewing our vows. But it is not just some sentimental gesture. The very existence of the world rests on our reacceptance of the Torah every year on Shavuos. Without us and our kabbolah as Hashem's mamleches kohanim, there is no purpose to the world. The gemara in Brochos says Hashem has no interest in this world outside the daled amos of halacha. It is not just the purpose of creation 6,000 years ago. The Rambam in Peirush Hamishnayos explains that it is the reason behind everything that has happened and is happening in the world since creation. We are at the center. It is a responsibility to represent Hashem in this world. This means we have to live our lives on a different level – this is the rest of the 8 dibros.

We have to think seriously what our personal avodoh is on Shavuos. It isn't just a commemoration of our original acceptance of our ancestors 3500 years ago. Every generation since then re-accepted the Torah year after year. Without that reacceptance, there is no purpose to the ongoing existence of the world.

What is the introduction to this kriyas haTorah/kabbolas haTorah? Akdomus. Find a translation and study it. It describes the fact that Hashem made a bris with us and there is an unbreakable bond between us and Hashem to carry out His mission in this world.

Don't take this avodoh lightly. It may not be easy being stuck in your house learning on zoom. You don't have the social structure and environment of serious limud haTorah around you. It means Hashem is trying to get us to look deeper into ourselves. How does our commitment to Torah and mitzvos measure up now – without any external pressures and incentives? Maybe we were coasting and relying on the atmosphere of a yeshiva in our kabbolas haTorah of previous years? This Shavuos, it's time to deepen that commitment and make it our own. It is a serious avodoh.

We did two things over the past month. On the one hand, most people weren't able to daven with a proper minyan. On the other hand, the limud of the Yeshiva so far has davka focused on the halachos of tefillah betzibbur and the importance of davening in a shul or a beis midrash with a minyan. It helped us all appreciate what we were missing during this time and gave us a deeper understanding of the immense value of tefillah betzibbur in a place of limud Torah.

This is part of our kabbolas haTorah – to take the Torah we learn seriously and integrate it into our lives and make it a part of who we are. We need a zechus to stand in front of Hashem on erev Shabbos and declare that we are the purpose that justifies the existence of the entire universe – from the biggest black hole to the smallest virus. It is by accepting the Torah. Understand the responsibility we have and the zechus we have in accepting upon ourselves to be the mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh.

We should be zoche have a genuine kabbolas haTorah this Shavuos and be zoche to the bi'as hago'el soon.