
SHAVUOT I

What Does Shavuot Commemorate? & the Eternal Impact of Ma'amad Har Sinai

Shavuot is most significant in celebrating Ma'amad Har Sinai (the giving of the Torah), yet also commemorates four other themes. This class will explain those themes and then focus on the eternal legacy created by Ma'amad Har Sinai which defines the essence of the mission of the Jewish people: the Torah, Jewish belief, Jewish identity, and the mitzvot (commandments).

The second Morasha class on Shavuot will focus on the Ten Commandments, preparing for receiving the Torah on Shavuot, Megillat Ruth, and the Shavuot customs of all-night Torah study and eating dairy meals.

In this class we will examine some fundamental questions regarding Shavuot:

- ~ What are the themes that Shavuot commemorates?
- ~ Why is Ma'amad Har Sinai monumental in Jewish history?
- ~ How is its impact eternal and continuous?
- ~ Why is Ma'amad Har Sinai the foundation of Jewish belief?
- ~ How is Shavuot essential to establishing our Jewish identity?
- ~ What role do the mitzvot serve in actualizing our mission?

Class Outline:

Section I. What Does Shavuot Commemorate?

- Part A. Festival of weeks
- Part B. Harvest Festival of First Fruits
- Part C. Day of Judgement for the Fruit of the Trees
- Part D. Festival of *Atzeret*
- Part E. The Festival of the Giving of the Torah

Section II. The Eternal Impact of Ma'amad Har Sinai

- Part A. Torah is the Purpose of Creation
- Part B. *Na'aseh v'Nishmah* – The Commitment to Being Jewish
- Part C. The Foundation of Faith for all Generations
- Part D. Creating a Unique Jewish Identity
- Part E. The Mitzvot were Given to Perfect Individuals and the World
- Part F. Torah is Given Anew Each Shavuot

SECTION I. WHAT DOES SHAVUOT COMMEMORATE?

Shavuot is most famous for the commemoration of Ma'amad Har Sinai – God giving the Torah on Mount Sinai to the Jewish people, yet is also associated with four other themes: the culmination of Counting the Omer, the harvest of the *bikurim* (first fruits), a day of judgment for fruit, and as an “*atzeret*.” Some of these other themes are also connected to Ma'amad Har Sinai.

PART A. FESTIVAL OF WEEKS

1. Devarim (Deuteronomy), 16:9 – Counting the Weeks from Pesach to Shavuot.

You shall count seven weeks for yourselves; from when the sickle is first put to the standing crop shall you begin counting seven weeks. Then you shall observe the festival of Shavuot for the Lord, your God; the voluntary offerings that you give should be commensurate with how much the Lord, your God, will have blessed you. You shall rejoice before the Lord, your God.

שְׁבַעָה שָׁבָעוֹת תִּסְפֹּר לָךְ: מִהַחֵל חֲרֹמֶשׁ בְּקִמָּה תִּחַל
לְסַפֵּר שְׁבַעָה שָׁבָעוֹת: וְעָשִׂיתָ חֹג שָׁבָעוֹת לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
מִסֵּת נִדְבַת יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן: בְּאֲשֶׁר יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
וְשִׂמְחֶתָ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ...

2. Menorat HaMaor, Candle 3, Section 5, Ch. 1 – The name Shavuot (Festival of Weeks) refers to the culmination of counting the seven weeks of the Omer.

This festival is called by the Torah “the festival of Shavuot (weeks)” because it comes after the completion of seven weeks.

זֶה הַחֹג נִקְרָא בַּתּוֹרָה חֹג שְׁבֻעוֹת לְפִי שְׁבַע אַחַר מִלֵּאת
שְׁבַעַת שְׁבֻעוֹת.

PART B. HARVEST FESTIVAL OF FIRST FRUITS

1. Shemot (Exodus), 23:16 – Bringing the *bikurim* offering.

The festival of harvesting of the first fruits of your produce that you planted in the field.

וְחֹג הַקִּצִּיר בְּכוּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ.

2. Sifri Re'eh 189 – Everyone celebrates Shavuot independent of whether or not they harvest produce.

“You should make a festival of Shavuot for the Lord, your God.” But it says: “the festival of harvesting through the first fruits of your produce.” You might think that only someone who has harvested produce has to make the festival, but someone who doesn't, does not make the festival. Therefore the verse teaches, “You should make the festival of Shavuot for the Lord, your God” – whether you have or have not harvested produce.

וְעָשִׂיתָ חֹג שְׁבֻעוֹת לַה' א-לֹהֶיךָ. מִכֹּל לֶשְׁנָאמֹר (שְׁמוֹת
כג) וְחֹג הַקִּצִּיר בְּכוּרֵי מַעֲשֵׂיךָ, יִכּוֹל אִם יֵשׁ לְךָ קִצִּיר
אֵתָה עוֹשֶׂה יו"ט, וְאִם לֹא אֵין אֵתָה עוֹשֶׂה יו"ט?
תִּלְמוּד לֹאמֹר וְעָשִׂיתָ חֹג שְׁבֻעוֹת לַה' א-לֹהֶיךָ, בֵּין שֵׁשׁ
לֹא קִצִּיר וּבֵין שְׁאֵין לוֹ קִצִּיר, אֵתָה עוֹשֶׂה יו"ט.

3. **Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 606 – Bringing the first fruits of the harvest acknowledges that everything one has is from God’s loving-kindness.**

Because a person has thoughts, and imagines in his heart that the truth follows what he says, therefore when God does good for him and blesses him and his land, making fruit, and giving him the merit to bring them to the House of God, it is appropriate to awaken our hearts through the words of our mouths, to recognize that everything comes from the Master of the Universe.

He should relate God’s kindnesses to him, and to the entire nation of Israel in general. Therefore, he begins with how God saved Yaakov (Jacob) from Lavan (Laban), and how the Egyptians enslaved us, and how God saved us from them. After this praise he requests from God to constantly give him blessings, and through this awakening of his soul with praise of God, and the goodness that God blesses him, he receives individual blessing. This is why God commanded us to [bring *bikurim*], because He is a God Who desires kindness.

לפי שהאדם מעורר מחשבותיו ומצייר בלבבו האמת בכח דברי פיו, על כן בהיטיב אליו השם ברוך הוא ובברכו אותו ואת אדמתו לעשות פירות וזכה להביאם לבית א-לקינו, ראוי לנו לעורר לבנו בדברי פיהו ולחשוב כי הכל מגיע אליו מאת אדון העולם

ויספר חסדיו יתברך עלינו ועל כל עם ישראל דרך כלל, ועל כן מתחיל בענין יעקב אבינו לחלצו הא-ל מיד לבן וענין עבודת המצריים בנו והצילנו הוא ברוך הוא מידם. ואחר השבח מבקש מלפניו להתמיד הברכה עליו ומתוך התעוררות נפשו בשבח השם ובטובו זוכה ומתברכת אישיו, ועל כן ציונו ברוך הוא על זה כי חפץ חסד הוא.

PART C. DAY OF JUDGEMENT FOR THE FRUIT OF THE TREES

1. **Mishnah, Rosh HaShanah 1:2 – The world is judged for the productivity of the impending harvest on Shavuot.**

There are four times [each year] that the world is judged ... on Shavuot for the fruit of the trees.

בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון... בעצרת על פרות האילן.

2. **Bartenura, ibid. – We offer two breads made from wheat to God in order that His judgement should result in a bountiful harvest.**

The Torah says to bring two loaves of bread on Shavuot in order that God will bless you for the fruit of the trees. Wheat is called a tree by the Torah, as it says, “From the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” according to the opinion that the tree they ate from [in the Garden of Eden] was wheat.

מדאמרה תורה הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת כדי שאברך לכם פירות האילן. וחטה עץ קרייה רחמנא דכתיב (בראשית ב') ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע כמאן דאמר עץ שאכל אדם הראשון חטה היה.

PART D. FESTIVAL OF ATZERET

1. **Kedushat Levi, Shavuot – Why is Shavuot also called an “atzeret”? It comes at the completion of the forty-nine day counting of the Omer.**

I was asked once, while in Lithuania, why the

נשאלתי במדינת ליטא מפני מה נקרא חג שבועות

festival of Shavuot is called by the name “*Atzeret*.” This name is not used in the Torah except when referring to Shmini Atzeret (the last day of Sukkot)...

We understand that all the festivals have names connected to the event that happened on that day. This is true of all the festivals except for Shavuot, which is named for the mitzvah of counting [which has already been completed]. We must understand why this festival is named after something that has already happened, [and the answer is] because it is the end of the mitzvah ... this is also the reason for Shavuot, that we make a festival at the conclusion of the mitzvah of counting that God gave to us. For this reason it is called “*Atzeret*” (completion).

בשם עצרת, והלא לא נזכר בתורה שם עצרת רק בשמיני עצרת (במדבר כט: לה)...

לפי שאנו רואים בחוש השכל שכל הימים טובים נקרא שמותן על שם המאורע, דהיינו על שם מצות הנוהגת וכן שאר מועדים מה שאין כן יום שבועות אין נקרא על שם המאורע רק על שם מצות הספירה. והנה צריך להבין מפני מה נקרא יום טוב הזה על מצוה שעברה. מפני שהוא כמו סיום מצוה... וזהו גם כן הטעם של החג שבועות שאנו עושין אותו יום טוב על סיום מצות ספירה שזיכה אותנו הבורא ב"ה ועל זה נקרא בשם עצרת.

2. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Pesachim 68b – *Atzeret* also teaches that the Shavuot celebration is divided into two: half for God and half for “you.”

Rabbi Yehoshua ... says that being happy on the festival is also a mitzvah. As it was taught: Rabbi Eliezer says that on a festival a person should either eat and drink, or sit and learn Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua says he should divide the day – half for eating and drinking and half for sitting in the Beit HaMidrash [learning Torah]. They both derive their position from the same verse. One verse says “It is *atzeret* (gathering/ceasing) for the Lord, your God” (Devarim 16:8), and another verse says, “It shall be an *atzeret* for you” (Bamidbar 29:35). Rabbi Eliezer holds either all for God, or all “for you.” Rabbi Yehoshua holds that you should divide the day – half for God and half “for you.” Rabbi Elazar says that everyone agrees that on Shavuot “for you” is also required. Why? Because it is the day that the Torah was given.

ר' יהושע ... אמר שמחת י"ט נמי מצוה היא דתניא ר' אליעזר אומר אין לו לאדם בי"ט אלא או אוכל ושותה או יושב ושונה ר' יהושע אומר חלקהו חציו לאכילה ושתיה וחציו לבית המדרש וא"ר יוחנן ושניהם מקרא אחד דרשו כתוב אחד אומר (דברים טז, ח) עצרת לה' אלהיך וכתוב אחד אומר (במדבר כט, לה) עצרת תהיה לכם ר' אליעזר סבר או כולו לה' או כולו לכם ור' יהושע סבר חלקהו חציו לה' וחציו לכם. א"ר אלעזר הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם מ"ט יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא.

3. Rashi, *ibid.* – We rejoice with food and drink on Shavuot to show our pleasure in receiving the Torah on this day.

We also require “for you” – because a person rejoices with food and drink to show that the day that Israel received the Torah is pleasing and enjoyable.

דבעינן נמי לכם - שישמח בו במאכל ומשתה להראות שנוח ומקובל יום זה לישראל שנתנה תורה בו:

PART E. THE FESTIVAL OF THE GIVING OF THE TORAH

In this final section, we discuss the most commonly known reason for Shavuot – to commemorate the giving of the Torah.

1. Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, *The Thirteen Questions*, p.4 – **The Torah is the ultimate instruction book for life and the strategic plan for the achievement of the Jewish mission.**

God needed a representative in the world and offered the job to Abraham. The position came complete with a mission statement, a detailed strategic plan, and the promise of a gorgeous corporate headquarters in the Middle East. God and Abraham cut a deal. Later, the descendants of Abraham inherited the position but, before they made it to headquarters, they wound up as slaves in Egypt. Eventually, they were liberated by Moses with a little help from The Boss. Seven weeks after liberation, on a mountain called Sinai, God gave the strategic plan, the Torah, (Bible) to the Jews. The Torah is an awesome, totally comprehensive guide to a spiritual and ethical way of life for the Jewish people. It's a plan for the achievement of the Jewish mission.

2. **Siddur – Shavuot is the day the Jewish people received the Torah.**

This day of the festival of Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah

את יום חג השבועות הזה, זמן מתן תורתנו.

Unlike all the other festivals, Shavuot is not identified as a specific day in the calendar, but as the fiftieth day after the Omer-offering. Beginning on the second day of Pesach, when the Omer is brought, forty-nine days are counted, and the next day – the fiftieth – is Shavuot. Furthermore, in the verses describing Shavuot, it does not mention the fact that the Torah was given on that day.

3. **Vayikra (Leviticus), 23:15-21 – Counting the Omer and the offering of the two breads on Shavuot.**

You shall count for yourselves from the day after Shabbat [Pesach], from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving, seven weeks; they shall be complete. Until the day after the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal offering [of two breads] to God. From your dwelling places you shall bring bread that shall be waved, two loaves made of two tenth-ephah, they shall be fine flour, they shall be baked leavened.

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּקְחַרְת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר
הַתְּנוּפָה: שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָעוֹת תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה: עַד מִמִּקְחַרְת
הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֹמְשִׁים יוֹם; וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה
חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה. מִמּוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם תָּבִיאוּ לֶחֶם תְּנוּפָה שְׁתֵּי
שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִים סֵלֹת תִּהְיֶינָה חֶמֶץ תִּאֲפִינָה:

The counting of the Omer for seven weeks from the Exodus of Egypt to Shavuot is the preparation period for *Matan Torah* (the giving of the Torah). What is the connection between the offering of the two breads and the giving of the Torah? And furthermore, why doesn't the Torah explicitly write that Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah?

4. **Kli Yakar, Vayikra 23:16** – The verse omits the fact that the Torah was given on Shavuot so as not to limit the giving of the Torah to a single day. Every day a person should feel as if he just received the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

“You shall offer a new offering [of two breads] to God.” This is a sign of the day of the giving of the Torah because the Torah must be new to a person as if he received it from Mount Sinai that very day.

The reason that the Torah does not explicitly mention that this is the day of the giving of the Torah ... God did not want to limit the giving of the Torah to a single day because a person should feel every single day of the year as if he received the Torah from Mount Sinai on that day ... Similarly, the Sages have said that the words of Torah should be new to a person every day, not like something old which he is fed up with.

The truth is that one does indeed find something new in the Torah every day. Therefore, the Torah did not specify the day that it was given apart from the hint in the word “new,” to teach that the Torah is like a new offering every day.

והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לה' – סימן ליום מתן תורה כי התורה צריכה להיות חדשה אצל האדם בכל יום כאילו היום קבלה מהר סיני.

ומה שלא נזכר בתורה בפירוש כי יום זה מתן תורה... שעל מתן תורה לא רצה ה' להגביל יום ידוע לפי שצריך האדם שיהיה דומה לו בכל יום ויום מכל ימות השנה כאילו באותו יום קבלה מהר סיני... ועל כן אמרו רז"ל (ספרי ואתחנן ו 1) שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך ולא כדבר הישן שלבו של אדם קץ בו.

שהרי באמת אתה מוצא בה דבר חידוש בכל יום ויום, ועל כן אין יום נתינתה מבואר בתורה יותר ממה שנרמז בהבאת מנחה חדשה, להורות שהתורה מנחה חדשה בכל יום ויום.

SECTION II. THE ETERNAL IMPACT OF MA'AMAD HAR SINAI

In this section we delve into the breathtaking significance of the giving of the Torah on Shavuot.

PART A. TORAH IS THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

1. **Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) 33:25** – If the Jews had not accepted the Torah on Mount Sinai, the world would have ceased to exist.

Thus says God: If not for My covenant [of Torah] day and night, I would not place the laws of heaven and earth.

כֹּה אָמַר ה', אִם-לֹא בְרִיתִי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה--חֻקֹּת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ, לֹא-שָׁמַתִּי.

2. **Rashi, Bereishit (Genesis) 1:31** – The world was created because of that auspicious day in the future, the sixth of Sivan, when the Torah would be given.

“The sixth day.” The Torah adds the letter *heh* [the word “the”] at the end of Creation ... [to allude to] the sixth day that everything [in Creation] was dependent upon, until the sixth day, which is the sixth of Sivan, [the day which was] prepared for the giving of the Torah.

יום השישי - הוסיף ה' בשישי בגמר מעשה בראשית... יום השישי כולם תלויים ועומדים עד יום השישי, הוא שישי בסיון המוכן למתן תורה.

3. Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, Horeb, pp. 86-88 – Torah is the foundation of life.

Shavuot represents the foundation of the spirit of the Jewish people. It is the commemoration of the revelation of the teaching with which God, Who had summoned Israel to a national existence by means of physical freedom, now summoned the freed body of the nation to be the bearer of His teaching. This gave spiritual completion to that which had been begun physically in Egypt. Shavuot is thus the commemoration of the Revelation of Sinai, the foundation of life...

Shavuot is the Divine origin and eternal validity of the teaching and way of life which Israel has in its possession as the revealed Law to be guarded and fulfilled. God summons everything in nature and humanity to its task, educates mankind to its mission, aims at having human action as the servant of His Will and reveals His Will for this purpose. In particular: The One God is Israel's Lawgiver. Israel's only task: To bear and fulfill this Divine law and thus to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Torah: Comes from God, is Israel's ground of existence. Resolution: To cling to this Torah – for the fulfillment of which God caused you to be born in the House of Israel more than to your very life. This leads to **יראה**, awe of God.

PART B. NA'ASEH V'NISHMAH – THE COMMITMENT TO BEING JEWISH

1. Shemot 24:7 – The Jewish people proclaimed that they had complete trust in God and His Torah and that they resolved to follow the commandments before fully comprehending them.

Moshe took the book of the covenant and read it in earshot of the people, and they said, "Everything that God has said we will do and we will hear [and understand]."

ויקח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני העם ויאמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע.

2. Mechilta Yisro – God initially offered the Torah to other nations who refused to uphold its moral standards.

God revealed Himself to the children of the wicked Esav and asked them if they wanted to accept the Torah. [They refused] ... He revealed Himself to Amon and Moab [and asked them if they wanted to accept the Torah, but they refused] ... He revealed Himself to the children of Yishmael [and asked them if they wanted to accept the Torah, but they refused] ...

When he came to the Jewish people, "from His right hand He presented the fiery Torah to them." They all opened their mouths and said, "Everything that God has said we will do and we will hear."

נגלה על בני עשו הרשע ואמר להם מקבלים אתם את התורה וכו' נגלה על בני עמון ומואב וכו' נגלה על בני ישמעאל וכו'

וכשבא אצל ישראל מימינו אש דת למו, פתחו כולם פיהם ואמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע.

3. Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 88a – Capability to act like angels.

Rabbi Elazar said: When the Jews said "We will do" before "We will hear" a voice came out of Heaven and said to them, "Who revealed to My

אמר רבי אלעזר בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע יצתא בת קול ואמרה להן מי גילה לבני רז זה שמלאכי השרת משתמשותין בו, דכתיב ברכו

children this secret that the ministering angels use?” As the verse says, “Bless God, O angels of mighty strength, who do His word, to listen to the voice of His word.” First they do, then they hear.

ה' מלאכיו גבורי כח עושי דברו לשמוע בקול דברו.
ברישא עושי והדר לשמוע.

When the Jews stood at Mount Sinai, God's existence was crystal clear. Therefore, there was no question whether or not they would accept the Torah. They implicitly understood that they were created to fulfil God's mission for the world.

4. **Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Moadim, Vol. II, p. 345 – The meaning of “we will do, and [then] we will listen” is that at Sinai we made God's Will our will.**

Saying, “We will do” before “We will hear” represents the concept of complete nullification [before God's Will] ... This is the level of the Jews when they received the Torah ... They completely nullified themselves to God, which is the meaning of saying “We will do” before “We will hear.” Even before they heard any commandment from Him they had already accepted God's Will upon themselves to fulfill. This is complete nullification of our thoughts and will to the Will of God ...

הקדמת נעשה לנשמע הוא ענין התבטלות גמורה...
ובבחי' זו היו ישראל בקבלת התורה... שביטלו אז את
עצמם כליל להשי"ת, שזהו משמעות הקדמת נעשה
לנשמע, שקודם שנשמע ממנו ית' איזה צווי כבר
מקבלים אנו על עצמנו שנעשה.

5. **Rabbi Noson Weisz, Mayanot, Aish.com – Ma'amad Har Sinai brought clarity and unity of purpose.**

The people who stood at Mount Sinai perceived the soul world with absolute clarity, while the physical world receded into the remote distance generally occupied by spiritual matters. A meeting between the Congregation of Israel and God taking place at this high level of spirituality clearly exposed the spiritual connection that exists between all Jews, as well as the connection between God and Israel. It is not by accident that when Moses retells the events of Mount Sinai in Sefer Devarim, he concludes with the classical statement of the absolute unity of God, the unity between God and the Jewish people, and their unity with each other, the Shema: Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

PART C. THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH FOR ALL GENERATIONS

The revelation of God that occurred to the entire nation (some 2.5 million people) at Mt. Sinai is the foundation of our knowledge of God's existence and relationship with us. When God then declared to the entire nation that Moshe is the messenger of His word, the foundation for the truth of Torah was set.

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah (Laws of Foundations of the Torah), Ch. 8:1 – Miracles alone do not instill belief.**

The Jewish people did not believe in Moshe Rabbeinu on account of the miracles that he performed. For someone who believes through miracles remains doubtful that perhaps the

משה רבנו לא האמינו בו ישראל מפני האותות שעשה,
מפני שהאמין על פי האותות יש בלבו דופי, שאפשר
שיעשה האות בלהט ובכישוף.

the miracle was performed using sorcery and magic.

All the miracles that Moshe performed in the desert were done so for a specific need, not to bring a proof for the credibility of his prophecy. When it was necessary to drown the Egyptians, he split the sea and they sunk in it, when they needed food, he brought down the manna. When they were thirsty, he split open a rock [and produced a spring]. When the Congregation of Korach denied his position of leadership, he caused the earth to swallow them. And the same applies to all the other miracles.

And through what did the Jews believe in Moshe? Through the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. And from where do we learn that the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai alone was the proof for his prophecy? As it is written, "Behold I am coming to you in a heavy cloud in order that the Jewish nation should hear as I speak with you, and also they will believe in you forever." We deduce from here that prior to this they did not have an everlasting faith, rather an uncertain belief.

כל האותות שעשה משה במדבר, לפי הצורך עשאו, לא להביא ראיה על נבואתו. הרי צריך להשקיע את המצרים קרע את הים והצלילן בתוכו, הצרכנו למזון הוריד לנו את המן, צמאו – בקע להם האבן. כפרה בו עדת קרח – בלעה אותם הארץ, וכן שאר כל האותות.

ובמה האמינו בו? – במעמד הר סיני וכו': ומנין שמעמד הר סיני לבדו הוא הראיה לנבואתו, שהיא אמת שאין בה דופי? – שנאמר "הנה אנכי בא אליך בעב הענן בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך וגם בך יאמינו לעולם", מכלל שקודם זה לא האמינו בו נאמנות שהיא עומדת לעולם אלא נאמנות שיש אחריה הרהור ומחשבה.

2. **Ibn Ezra, Shemot 19:9 – Before Matan Torah the Jewish people did not have complete faith. But after the entire nation simultaneously heard God speak to them and appoint Moshe as His messenger, their faith became knowledge.**

[At the time of the crossing of the Reed Sea] there were individuals who were doubtful about prophecy. Even though the Torah writes, "They believed in God and Moshe His servant," and "Israel saw," that was not all the people.

That is the reason the entire nation [witnessed and] listened to My speaking to you, the Ten Commandments, and "Also in you they will believe" that "You are my prophet." From Matan Torah onwards, prophecy had full credibility.

היו בישראל אנשים שהיתה להם הנבואה בספק, ואע"פ שכתוב (לעיל יד לא): ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו, שם אמר וירא ישראל, ולא כל ישראל...

וזה טעם בעבור ישמע העם בדברי עמך, עשרת הדברים, וגם בך יאמינו, שאתה נביאי, כי מעתה יתאמת אצלם ענין הנבואה.

3. **Rabbi Yaakov Neiman, Darchei Mussar, pp. 328-9 – Matan Torah created the foundation of eternal Jewish belief.**

As a consequence of the giving of the Torah, everyone believed completely. For they saw clearly that God spoke with Moshe and with the entire Jewish people, and there could not have been even the slightest qualm about it. This is the foundation of total faith, lucid and clear.

במעמד הנבחר האמינו כולם באמונה שלמה, כי ראו בעליל שה' מדבר עם משה ועם כל בני ישראל ולא היה יכול להיות אף צל של מחשבה והרהור שלילי והו' היסוד לאמונה שלמה, בהירה וברורה.

Only total and clear faith that has no doubts or negative afterthoughts, this is the true faith that was found only through the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. As the Rambam explains, “And through what did the Jews believe in Moshe? Through the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.” For only then did they have an everlasting faith, one which was not followed by even the slightest skepticism.

רק אמונה שלמה וברורה שאין אחריה ספקות והיסוסים, הרהור ומחשבה שלילית, היא האמונה האמתית והצרופה, ואמונה ברורה כזו היתה רק במעמד הנבחר כדברי הרמב"ם ז"ל "ובמה האמינו בו במעמד הר סיני" שאז באה "הנאמנות שעומדת לעולם" נאמנות שאין אחרי "הרהור ומחשבה".

4. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, pp. 54-5 – Faith through a tangible, commonly-shared national vision.**

This was faith based on prophetic, tangible, vision, “All the people saw the sounds.” As our Sages explained, they saw things that are normally only heard. Something which is heard is more distant [conceptually] from a person than something which is seen. In their prophecy they saw the revelation of God to Moshe without any barriers and impediments that would prevent them from seeing this revelation. Therefore the Torah testifies that: “Also in you [Moshe], they will believe forever.” Someone who has seen the revelation of God in this tangible way has eternal faith.

היתה זו אמונה מתוך ראייה נבואית וחושית "וכל העם רואים את הקולות" (שמות כ"ט), וכדברי חז"ל "רואין את הנשמע". (מכילתא שם והובא ברש"י). דבר הנשמע הוא כרגיל דבר רחוק יותר מדבר הנראה, והם בנבואתם ראו את הדבר הרחוק באופן מוחשי וקרוב, ראו את גילוי ה' אל משה בלא מחיצה וחציצה שתמונעם בראיית גילוי זה. ועל כן מעידה התורה - "וגם בכך יאמינו לעולם", מי שראה גילוי ה' בכזו ראייה חושית, אמונתו היא "לעולם".

5. **Ibid. Vol. III, p. 65 – Shavuot is the natural opportunity to strengthen our faith.**

During these days in which we celebrate the revelation of Sinai, it is essential to awaken in ourselves this idea, for the opportunity to receive this influence occurs during this time. Just as one must see himself as if he left Egypt [the entire Passover Seder was instituted in order to stimulate these feelings], likewise it is vital to re-live the extraordinary revelation at Sinai.

בימים אלו של זמן מתן תורתנו, יש להתעורר על אותם ענינים, שסגולת השפעתם לדורות היא בימים אלו. וכשם שחייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים, וכדי לעורר רגש זה הרי נקבע ונתקן כל סדר ליל פסח, כך חייב האדם להחיות בו את המעמד הנשגב – מעמד הר סיני.

PART D. CREATING A UNIQUE JEWISH IDENTITY

One of the greatest impacts of the Torah, is that its study and practise changes a person's identity and elevates him on all levels – spiritually, intellectually and emotionally.

1. **Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 86b – Torah makes all the difference.**

On the day of Shavuot Rav Yosef would say: “Make me a [fancy meal of] a three-year-old calf.” He would say, “Were it not for this day,

רב יוסף ביומא דעצרתא אמר עבדי לי עגלא תלתא אמר אי לא האי יומא דקא גרים כמה יוסף איכא בשוקא.

how many Yosefs are there in the marketplace?”
[Without the Torah, which was given on Shavuot,
he would be indistinguishable from every other
person in the world].

2. **Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Ohr Yechezkel, p.9 – The study and practise of Torah gives one a distinguished and elevated identity – this is reason to celebrate.**

Rav Yosef explained that he merited his positive attributes and great stature only through receiving the Torah. Without this, it would not have been possible to reach such a level. For without receiving the Torah there would be no qualitative difference between individuals – everyone would stand on the same level. Therefore, Rav Yosef proclaimed on the eve of Shavuot that he wanted to enjoy a special meal from a fine three-year-old-calf; only in the merit of Shavuot is there a difference between a “Yosef” and a “Rav Yosef.”

שאמר רב יוסף שלכל מעלתו וגדולתו זכה רק
בשביל יום קבלת התורה. ומבלעדי זאת לא יתכן כלל
אפשרות לזכיה, כי ללא קבלת התורה אין הפרש כלל
בין האנשים כולם, והכל עומדים בדרגה אחת, ולכן
אמר רב יוסף בערב שבועות שיעשו לו עגלא תלתא
שרק בזכות ההוא יומא יש הבדל בין יוסף לבין רב
יוסף.

PART E. THE MITZVOT WERE GIVEN TO PERFECT INDIVIDUALS AND THE WORLD

Apart from the fact that Torah study and practice is able to change an individual (as we saw in Part D), the Torah is also able to perfect an individual, and indeed, the entire world.

1. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Bereishit (Genesis) 9:27 27 – The Torah is God’s wisdom that must be applied to life’s changing situations to make this world into His kingdom.**

These spiritual pursuits ... are meant to lead to proper action, to the right response to the ever-changing conditions of life, in order “to prepare the world for the kingdom of God,” as we state in our daily prayers.

2. **Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed), Vol. III: 27 – Perfecting the soul and the body.**

The purpose of the entire Torah is twofold: perfecting the soul and perfecting the body. Perfecting the soul means that a person will attain correct worldviews as much as possible; perfecting the body means perfecting one’s relationships with others.

כוונת כל התורה שני דברים, והם תקינות הנפש
ותקינות הגוף. תקינות הנפש תהיה בכך שתושגנה
להמון דעות נכונות כפי יכולתם.... תקינות הגוף תהיה
בתקינות מצבי חייהם אלה עם אלה.

3. **Rambam, Mishneh Torah, end of Hilchot Temurah – The mitzvot are God’s instructions and advice for living and improving our character.**

And all these matters [the mitzvot] are to [help us to] overcome our negative inclinations and to correct our traits; and most laws of the Torah are instruction from the Great Adviser [to help us]

וכל אלו הדברים כדי לכוף את יצריו ולתקן דעותיו ורוב
דיני התורה אינן אלא עצות מרחוק מגדול העצה לתקן
הדעות וליישר כל המעשים.

to correct our character traits and straighten our ways.

4. **Midrash Rabbah, Bereishit 44:1 – Mitzvot refine humanity.**

What does it matter to God if an animal is slaughtered by cutting its neck through the spine or the throat?

[The answer is] “The commandments were given only in order to refine humanity.”

וכי מזה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי ששוחט מן הצואר או
מי ששוחט מן העורף?

לא נתנו המצוות אלא לצרף בהם את הבריות

5. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive for Truth, Vol. IV, pp. 31-32 – Focus on spiritual growth vs. materialistic stagnation.**

On this day [Shavuot] we bring to God a “New Offering” of two wheaten loaves. This is called a “New Offering” because it is the first offering brought from the new wheat crop. There is also a deeper reason. This offering celebrates our attainment of the spiritual level known as “receiving the Torah,” and every spiritual attainment is completely new – a new world in fact – compared to the level previously attained. In the world of materialism nothing is really new. Gratifying one physical desire is very much like gratifying another. The pleasure soon wanes and the chase is on for something “new,” but the result is always the same. A surfeit of physical pleasure eventually causes revulsion and a reduction of enjoyment all around. But achievements of the spirit never pall. The sweetness felt in the study of Torah and the inward service of God is constant. This is the greatest and most convincing proof of the truth of our spiritual heritage.

PART E. TORAH IS GIVEN ANEW EACH SHAVUOT

In this final section, we describe how the giving of the Torah not only happened in the past, but still happens in the present.

1. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive for Truth, Vol. IV, p. 49 – Listening for Matan Torah today.**

Each Shavuot ... we spiritually arrive at that same point of sanctity experienced by our forefathers at Mount Sinai. It is once again, in a real sense, “The time of the giving of our Torah,” and we are invited to accept it anew, as they did 3,300 years ago.

On Shavuot we have to work in order to receive the Torah. We have to struggle to acquire it in our hearts. We have to appreciate its truths as unchangeable verities ... the nation still harbored lingering doubts ... Only when they heard God's voice at Sinai was doubt replaced by absolute certainty. So too, when we learn Torah today and especially at Shavuot time, can we, if we wish, still hear that same voice.

2. **Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Moadim, Vol. II, p. 334 – The Torah was given in the past, but the ability to receive it occurs each year on Shavuot.**

It is written in the holy books that just like the Torah is eternal, the ability to receive the Torah is eternal. Each and every year on Shavuot the ability to receive the Torah is rejuvenated.

איתא בספה"ק דכשם שהתורה הק' היא נצחית, כך
קבלת התורה היא נצחית, שבכל שנה ושנה יש ביום
הזה קבלת התורה מחודשת. וזה שאנו אומרים בתפלה

This is what we recite in our prayers and in Kiddush, “The time of the giving of our Torah.” The explanation is not that we have a festival that reminds us that God gave us the Torah in the past. Rather, each and every year on Shavuot is now the time of the giving of the Torah.

ובקידוש זמן מתן תורתנו, אין פירושו שנקבע כעין זכר ליום שבו נתן לנו הקב"ה את התורה בעבר, אלא בכל שנה ושנה החג הק' הזה הוא זמן מתן תורתנו האידנא.

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol.III, p. 169 – The giving of the Torah is eternal and continuous.**

The giving of the Torah at Sinai is eternal and continuous. In the words of the Midrash: “A person must see himself as if he personally received the Torah at Sinai, as it is written, ‘On this day you have become a nation’” (Devarim 27:9). The deliverance of the Torah was not a one-time occurrence; rather it influences us daily.

In the words of the Nefesh HaChaim: “When a person is involved and attached properly to the Torah, it brings joy just like when it was given at Sinai.” This idea is also found in the Zohar: “One who is engaged in Torah is as if he receives the Torah at Sinai each day, as the Torah writes, ‘On this day you have become a nation...’” One who makes an effort in Torah is as if he stands each day on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

נתינת התורה בסיני נצחית היא ונמשכת כל הזמן, וכך אמרו: “חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו מקבל תורה מסיני שנא’ (דברים כז, ט) היום הזה נהיית לעם” (פסיקתא זוטא פר’ ואתחנן), הרי שנתנית התורה לא היתה חד פעמית... אלא היא מושפעת עלינו בכל יום.

וכך כתב בנפש החיים (שער ד פי"ד): “...ובכל עת שהאדם עוסק ומתדבק בה כראוי, הדברים שמחים כנתינתן מסיני, כמש"כ בזוהר (ריש פ' חוקת קעט) מאן דאשתדל באורייתא כאילו קאים כל יומא על טורא דסיני לקבל אורייתא הה"ד היום הזה נהיית לעם” וכו' – מי שמשתדל בתורה כאילו עומד כל יום על הר סיני לקבל תורה.

4. **Ibid. Vol. III, pp. 180-181 – On any day one can merit the influence from Mount Sinai.**

We can appreciate the teaching of our sages (Rashi, Shemot 19:1): “On this day Israel came to the desert of Sinai...” It would have been more fitting for the verse to state “On *that* day,” why write “On *this* day”? Rather, to teach that the words of Torah should be new to you as if they had been given today.

In practice, whenever one studies Torah in the appropriate manner he receives inspiration from God, similar to the atmosphere which prevailed at Sinai. For this reason the Torah states “On *this* day” – just like the day they came to the desert of Sinai.

מוסברים היטב דברי חז"ל (שמות יט, א, ברש"י) “ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני... לא היה צריך לכתוב אלא ביום ההוא, מהו ביום הזה, שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך כאילו היום ניתנו”.

דהיינו, כי בכל עת שאדם לומד את התורה כראוי מקבל שפע חדש מאת השי"ת ממש כבעת נתינת התורה בסיני, לכן תמיד הוא כיום הזה, כאותו היום שבאו למדבר סיני.

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