

עזרי דשע

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

What's in a Name?

וְחָג שַׁבְּעַת תַּעֲשֶׂה לָךְ

You shall make for yourselves the festival of Shavuos. (Shemos 34:22)

Torah Shebichsav refers to the present Yom Tov as Shavuos. Chazal, however, refer to it as *Atzeres*.¹ The *Rishonim*² and *sefarim*³ discuss why the *Chachamim* gave it this new name.

The Gemara (Shabbos 86a) relates that in the days leading up to *Mattan Torah*, Bnei Yisrael “עבוד פרישה - made separation.” *Sifsei Tzaddik*⁴ wonders about the Gemara’s wording: wouldn’t it be more natural to say “פרשו - they separated”? He explains that before *kabbalas haTorah*, one couldn’t simply desist from physicality; one needed to take positive action to separate himself from forbidden matters. That is the meaning of עבוד פרישה.

However, this was only true before we accepted the Torah. After *kabbalas haTorah*, the Torah’s word itself creates a reality of *issur* which stands before a Yid, separating him from *aveiros* like an iron curtain. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a) explains the words (Shir Hashirim 7:3), סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים – enclosed with roses, as meaning that Bnei Yisrael do not need a brick wall to separate them from *aveiros*; even a small warning of the Torah, delicate as a row of roses, is enough to keep them away.⁵ An admonish-

ment of the Torah serves as a fortress for a Yid, protecting him from the *yetzer hara*.

We may now understand why Chazal refer to Shavuos as *Atzeres*. Firstly, one who wishes to attain Torah must make his personal desires עצור, brought to a stop. Secondly, and more fundamentally, before we accepted the Torah, we didn’t have the ability to bring this cessation of material pursuit upon ourselves; we needed to “make *perishah*.” Only when

we accepted the Torah on Shavuos did we gain the power of עצרת, of desisting from seeking *gashmiyus*. When a Yid learns Torah properly, he becomes purified so that he finds himself detached from the desires and attractions of this world. This is the meaning of the statement of the *Zohar hakadosh*:⁶ “For this reason it is referred to as *Atzeres*, since it contains the undoing of the *yetzer hara*.”

But if so, why doesn’t the Torah itself refer to Shavuos as *Atzeres*? It is because Klal Yisrael only attained this *madreigah* of עצרת after accepting the Torah, when they immersed themselves in the Torah and were

cleansed by it of *aveiros*.

There is a disagreement in the Gemara (Pesachim 68b) whether *Yamim Tovim* are meant to be dedicated to spiritual pursuits or to enjoyable activities. The Gemara concludes, “הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם, מאי” – All agree that on *Atzeres* one must also have personal pleasure, since it is the day the Torah was given.” The *mefarshim* wonder about this. The Torah was given amid fear and trepidation; shouldn’t Shavuos be marked by single-minded Torah learning, disregarding our physical wants and needs? Why should we celebrate it

with food and drink?

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**The Torah not only has
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1 See Rosh Hashanah 16a

2 See Ramban and Sforno, Vayikra 23:36

3 See *Kedushas Levi*, *Sfas Emes* and others

4 Shavuos 63

5 See Rashi

6 Vol. 98b

לעילוי נשמת
מרת
עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל

We may understand this with a story. A person once complained to the Chofetz Chaim about the Chofetz Chaim's recently published *sefarim*. Before, this person felt free to speak whatever he wished. But after seeing what the Chofetz Chaim wrote, he felt muzzled, unable to open his mouth, knowing the severity of forbidden speech. The Chofetz Chaim replied, "Actually, the opposite is true. Before, when you didn't have access to the complex laws of *shemiras halashon*, you couldn't open your mouth, lest you inadvertently speak forbidden words. But now it's all in front of you; learn the *sefarim*, and with the knowledge you will gain, you can speak to your heart's content while avoiding all forbidden speech."

The Torah not only has the power to separate us from *issurim*; it also enables us to engage in *gashmiyus*, even where not obligatory, and not become influenced by it. This, then, is why specifically on Shavuos we enjoy this world's pleasures. Even the *Chachamim* who hold that other *Yamim Tovim* should be fully dedicated to *ruchniyus* agree that on Shavuos one should enjoy food and drink. It is because through the Torah that we accepted on Shavuos – *Atzeres* – we gained the ability to elevate physical pleasure without being dragged down by it; it, too, becomes part of *kedushah*.

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The Gemara (Pesachim 68b) relates that Rav Yosef instructed that an *עגל* *אֶלְלָא*, a third calf (third-born to its mother, Rashi) be prepared for him for Shavuos, because "If not for the impact of this day, how many Yosefs would there be in the marketplace."

The Maharsha explains that Rav Yosef's instruction was meant to hint at the Gemara's statement (Shabbos 88a), "ברוך רחמנא דיהב אוריין תליתאי לעם – בריך רחמנא דיהב אוריין תליתאי על ידי תליתאי ביום תליתאי בירחא תליתאי – Blessed be Hashem, Who gave a threefold Torah (*Tanach*) to a threefold nation (*Kohanim, Levi'im, Yisraelim*) through a third individual (Moshe, who was born following Miriam and Aharon) on the third day (*of perishah*) in the third month (*Sivan*)." This was the significance of eating an *עגל* *אֶלְלָא*, a third calf, on Shavuos. The Maharsha adds, "This is what Rav Yosef meant by, 'If not for this day'; he was referring to the above-mentioned 'third day.'"

These last words seem superfluous. It is obvious from the Gemara that Rav Yosef was referring to the day of Shavuos, which is – as is also evident – the "third day" mentioned in the Gemara. What does the Maharsha mean to add with this?

It seems that the Maharsha is reading a deeper meaning in Rav Yosef's statement. Rav Yosef meant that Shavuos is not merely about Bnei Yisrael's accepting the Torah; rather, Shavuos highlights that Bnei Yisrael's very greatness lies in the Torah that they accepted. Rav Yosef's statement, "If not for this day," referred to the "third day" from when Bnei Yisrael began to abstain from physicality. Because of the greatness we achieved on this day, we can engage in the physical world while retaining our *perishus* and *kedushah*. We can eat a "calf" with the *koach* of *perishah* of the "third day," allowing us to enjoy it properly, without being pulled into materialism.

(בנאות דשא - חג השבועות ויומא דהילולא דרבינו האמרי אמת ז"ע תשפ"א)

Standing Tall

The Gemara (Shabbos 88a) states that when Hashem created the world, He made a condition with it: "If Bnei Yisrael will accept the Torah, you will continue to exist; if not, I will return you to nothingness."

This seems difficult to understand. Hashem knew that He would force Bnei Yisrael to accept the Torah by holding a mountain over their heads. This was not a matter of *yediah* and *bechirah*; it was a unilateral action that Hashem would take. So what was the point of the condition?

It seems that this condition, tying Creation to Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of the Torah, has a different meaning. The world's right to exist

would depend on its willingness to bend its nature for one who seeks to fulfill Hashem's will. The world is a place of hiddenness; the word *עולם* derives from *העלם*. The curtain of nature prevents us from seeing the open hand of Hashem. This covertness was made conditional on the curtain being lifted for those who would accept the Torah; nature would be reversed for *ovdei Hashem*.⁷

Chazal say⁸ that Hashem offered the Torah to all the nations before giving it to Bnei Yisrael. Each nation inquired what the Torah says, and hearing its prohibitions, declined to accept it. When the nation of Esav asked what the Torah says, Hashem presented the prohibition of

murder. Esav replied that they couldn't keep that; Yitzchak had promised them (Bereishis 27:40) *וְעַל חֶרֶבְךָ תֵּחִיָּה* - *By your sword you shall live*. The nation of Yishmael was told that the Torah forbids adultery; they retorted that their forebear had been 'blessed' with (ibid 16:12) *וְהָיָה יְהִיָּה* *אֶרְדָּא* - *and he will be a wild man*.

Mahari Molcho asked:⁹ What did the nations gain by not accepting the Torah? After all, murder and adultery are in any case forbidden to all humanity as part of the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*. And what would they have lost by accepting the Torah? Just as they don't keep their present obligations, they could have ignored them in that case too.

7 See *Sfas Emes*, Pesach 5635

8 Avodah Zarah 2b; Sifri, V'zos Haberachah; Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer 40; Zohar hakadosh, vol. 3, 192a

9 See *Korban Chagigah* 44; *Nachal Sorek* of the Chida, *haftarah* of Bechukosai

We may suggest that the nations' objections to the Torah did not concern the straightforward fulfillment of the mitzvos. They objected because they knew that Torah isn't just about following rules and remaining with one's shortcomings; it is about becoming a changed, uplifted person. Of course, the nations could have accepted the Torah and then failed to keep its mitzvos. But they believed that they weren't capable of its very objective; they could not possibly alter their nature as murderers or immoral people, to become good, refined individuals.

But for Bnei Yisrael this wasn't a reason to refuse the Torah. On the contrary, the Torah would empower them to change and improve their nature, because nature itself was made subject to the needs of a Yid who wishes to come close to Hashem.

The pasuk (Vayikra 23:18) states about the *korbanos* of Shavuos, וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עַל הַלֶּחֶם שִׁבְעַת כִּבְשִׂים וְגו' - *With the bread, you shall offer seven unblemished lambs...* The *Baal HaTurim* notes that the expression עַל הַלֶּחֶם appears elsewhere in the Torah (Devarim 8:3): כִּי לֹא עַל הַלֶּחֶם לִבְדּוֹ יֵחִיָּהּ - *that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of Hashem does man live.* What is the connection? The *Baal HaTurim* offers one explanation; we will suggest another.

On Shavuos, when we accept the Torah each year anew, we gain the ability to elevate ourselves above nature. We become עַל הַלֶּחֶם, above bread; we gain full awareness that it is not

physical bread that sustains us, but rather the word of Hashem.

The Gemara (Nedarim 8a) refers to someone who makes a *shevuah* on something already commanded by the Torah as “מוֹשְׁבַע וְעוֹמֵד מֵהָרַ” - סיני - he stands already sworn from Har Sinai.” What is the significance of the word “- וְעוֹמֵד he stands”? On a simple level, the lesson is that the *shevuah* we made on Har Sinai gives us the abil-

have the ability to rule over our material, bodily aspect. We gained this power from the *shevuah* of Har Sinai; we were enabled to stand erect with our heads over our bodies, subjecting all our faculties to Hashem and holding strong over our physical reality.

The halachah is that one must stand when reciting a *berachah* over a mitzvah. This is derived from the pasuk (Devarim 16:9), שְׂבָעָה שְׂבָעַת תִּסְפָּר,

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ity to stand straight and walk the proper path of Torah.

We may explain on a deeper level as well. My father would often repeat the Gemara's statement (Chagigah 16a) that one of the three things that humans have in common with *malachim* is that they stand upright. Certainly, this doesn't refer to our physical posture; in fact, there are animals that stand straighter than humans. It means that our heads are above our bodies; we

לָךְ מִהַחֵל חֲרַמְשׁ בִּקְמָה - *You shall count seven weeks for yourselves; from when the sickle is first put to the standing crop.* Chazal read בִּקְמָה as בִּקְוֹמָה - *standing erect.*¹⁰ Why is this pasuk the source for this halachah? The time of *Sefiras HaOmer*, as we prepare for the מוֹשְׁבַע וְעוֹמֵד *kabbalas haTorah*, is when we begin to stand straight like *malachim*, gaining dominion over all aspects of our humanity.

(שבועות תשפ"א - נעילת החג, מאמר א)

10 See *Beis Yosef*, O.C. 8; *Bach* and *Levush* ad loc.

Setting it Straight

Akdamus speaks of the greatness of Klal Yisrael:

עַד בַּיּוֹם יִקָּר אַחַסְנָתָהּ חֲבִיבִין, דְּבִקְבַעְתָּא, עֲבִידִין לִיהּ חֲטִיבָא בְּדַנְחָ וּשְׁקַעְתָּא

Hashem's precious portion, Bnei Yisrael, are beloved to Him; for consistently they praise him at daybreak and nightfall (by reciting Krias Shema).

Why does *Akdamus* first mention *Krias Shema* of the morning and afterwards that of evening? We know from *ma'aseh Bereishis* that evening precedes morning: וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר. Moreover, regarding *Krias Shema* itself the *pesukim* (Devarim 6:7; 11:19) state וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ - *and when you lie down*

and when you arise. The Mishnah (Berachos 1:1-2), too, precedes the halachos of *Krias Shema* of evening to that of morning.¹¹

We may suggest eight reasons the author of *Akdamus* may have chosen to write it this way.

1. A 'light' explanation: the first time Klal Yisrael recited *Krias Shema* after *kabbalas haTorah* was in the morning, and only afterwards did they recite it in the evening.

11 The author of *Akdamus* didn't need to write it this way for the sake of poetic structure; he could have worded it this way: עֲבִידִין לִיהּ חֲטִיבָא בְּשַׁקְעָה וּבְדַנְחָתָא.

2. The Gemara (Chullin 91b) states that Bnei Yisrael are more beloved to Hashem than *malachim*, since they can sing *shirah* to Hashem at any time while *malachim* can only do so once a day, and additionally, *malachim* can only sing *shirah* after Bnei Yisrael do so. Accordingly, the uniqueness of Bnei Yisrael is more prominently displayed by the morning *Krias Shema*, since *malachim* stand waiting for it so that they, too, can sing *shirah*. Since *Akdamus* speaks, as well, of the praise of Bnei Yisrael vis-à-vis the *malachim*, it mentions the morning *Krias Shema* first.

3. *Krias Shema* is the acceptance of *ol malchus Shamayim*. However, the main part of this is not reciting the words, but taking action that displays one's acceptance of Hashem's dominion. When one lays *tefillin* and wraps himself in its straps, he actively submits himself to Hashem's servitude. This is the meaning of the Gemara's statement (Berachos 14b), "One who recites *Krias Shema* without *tefillin* is as if he bears false testimony about himself (a reference to Hashem)." This means that one who says *Krias Shema* but does not take the action of wearing *tefillin* may just be mouthing the words without truly accepting Hashem's kingship. Accordingly, the morning *Krias Shema* carries more significance than the evening *Krias Shema*, which is said without wearing *tefillin*.¹² Thus, *Akdamus* mentions it first.

4. The Gemara (Yoma 22a) states that originally, there was no need for a lottery to determine who would perform *terumas hadeshen* (clearing the ashes from the *mizbe'ach*), since it was done early in the morning, when there were few *kohanim* available to do it. However, *haktaras eivarim* (burning the parts of the *korbanos*), which was performed late at night, did require a lottery. What was the difference? The Gemara explains that it is much easier to remain awake than to wake up early.

Malachim do not need to struggle with their nature to accept Hashem's kingship; only humans do. *Akdamus* mentions *Krias Shema* of the morning first since it highlights the greatness of Bnei Yisrael, who arise early each morning to accept upon themselves *ol malchus Shamayim*.

5. *Panim Yafos* writes¹³ that the concept of night preceding day began at the time of *Mattan Torah*; previously, day preceded night.¹⁴ I would suggest that in the heavenly spheres the order remains as it was before *Mattan Torah*: night follows day. This seems clear from a statement of *Tosafos*¹⁵ that during the forty days that Moshe was in *Shamayim* atop Har Sinai, night followed day. Shouldn't the order have been reversed, since Bnei Yisrael

had already accepted the Torah? Apparently, day continued to precede night in *Shamayim*. Since this line of *Akdamus* is meant to compare Bnei Yisrael's *Krias Shema* to the *shirah* of the *malachim*, it follows the order relevant to *malachim* – morning before evening.

6. Since our ancestors (for example, the *Avos*¹⁶) recited *Krias Shema* even before *Mattan Torah* – in the times when, as *Panim Yafos* writes, day preceded night – *Akdamus* mentions *Krias Shema* of the morning first.

7. This order of *Akdamus* is meant to highlight that Klal Yisrael's acceptance of Hashem's dominion is not limited to bright, sunny times, when all is well. Yes, it is in the 'morning' – but it is also in the 'evening,' when it is dark and Hashem's ways are hidden from us.

In fact, this is the deeper meaning of *Panim Yafos'* statement that day began following night at *Mattan Torah*; before *Mattan Torah*, people could not discern that behind the darkness of night-like times is the light of the truth of Hashem's ways. It is the *koach haTorah* that gives Yidden the ability to recognize that even in dark times they can hold strong and continue along the proper path, since Hashem's light stands behind the darkness.¹⁷

8. The Gemara (Berachos 2a) asks why the Mishnah speaks of *Krias Shema* of evening before that of morning, and answers that this is learned from the creation of the world, when darkness preceded light.¹⁸ The Gemara elsewhere (Shabbos 77b) states that goats (which are typically black) walk ahead of sheep (which are typically white), because in Creation, darkness preceded light. Indeed, this is the natural way, as illustrated by this example of animals. In a natural state of affairs, one must undergo darkness in order to reach light. But the job of humanity is to elevate this world to a heavenly state of affairs. The pasuk (Tehillim 115:16) says, הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נְתַן לִבְנֵי אָדָם – *As for the heavens, the heavens are Hashem's; but the earth He has given to mankind*; the Kotzker Rebbe taught: "The earth He has given to mankind – to turn it, too, into heaven." When a Yid rises above nature, not allowing himself to become obstructed by its barrier of darkness, and letting go of all the dark nonsense this world has to offer – he has truly accepted upon himself *malchus Shamayim*. In this way, night, too, becomes day. *Akdamus*, speaks of our acceptance of Hashem's dominion first – and primarily – during the luminescent mornings, seeking to stress this greatness of Klal Yisrael, who turn night into day.

(בנאות דשא - חג השבועות וימא דהילולא דרבינו האמרי אמת ז"ע תשפ"א)

12 The action of *kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim* that one takes in the morning by wearing *tefillin* extends to allow him to recite *Krias Shema* at night even without wearing *tefillin*.

13 Bereishis 8:22 and other locations

14 See also *Sfas Emes*, Shabbos 87a ד"ה בגמ' וכו' ואפשר; ד"ה בדרש; *Hafla'ah*, Berachos 9a ד"ה וכשיצאו

15 Shabbos 89a s.v. *l'sof*

16 See Pesachim 56a; Rashi, Bereishis 46:29

17 See Avodah Zarah 8a

18 See Shabbos 77b