

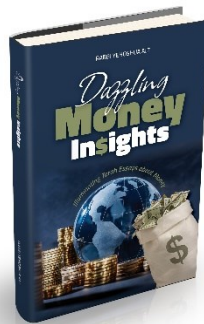
Fascinating INSIGHTS

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Tremendous Torah

Shavuot, the day of Torah. What a gift! The Shelah¹ writes that we must be especially happy on Shavuot because we merited the crown of Torah...

The following are just some of the many gifts that we can benefit from through Torah.

1) The Chazon Ish² writes in a letter that one who merits *Yedias Hatorah* appears as a man but is actually like a Malach on high.



¹ Mesachta Shavuot.

² Igros Chazon Ish, 1:13.

2) The Maharal³ teaches that there is nothing that connects someone more to Hashem than Torah.

3) It is through Torah that the world continues to exist.⁴ For this reason, it is called a Toras Chaim. In the yeshiva of R' Chaim Volozhiner, there was a shiur continuously learning throughout the night. This was so that there would always be someone learning. In fact, R' Chaim Volozhiner would visit the Beis Midrash a few times throughout the night to encourage those learning. Even when he was old and couldn't give a shiur, he still kept up his nightly visits. Additionally, after Yom Kippur, while everyone would break their fast, R' Chaim himself would learn in order to continue the existence of the world.



We are taught that Shavuot⁵ is the day of judgement for Torah. Just as we were judged when the world was created, similarly we are judged on Shavuot, because Torah was given on this day. In fact, there were great Torah personalities who were more fearful of Shavuot than Rosh Hashana. This was because on Rosh Hashana our physicality is judged whereas on Shavuot it is our spirituality that is at stake.

The Mishna teaches that we are judged on Shavuot for fruits of the tree.⁶ The tree refers to Torah, the tree of life — עץ חיים.⁷ The fruits of the tree refer to our חידושי תורה,⁸ novelties of Torah.⁹ Indeed, the Sefas Emes tells us that on Shavuot each Jew receives what he will understand and be מחדש in Torah¹⁰ for the year — כל אחד ואחד מישראל בחג הזה כל מה שעתיד להבין ולחדש בתורה.

³ Gevuros Hashem chapter 8.

⁴ Nefesh Hachaim 4:25. For this reason there are different time zones. When, for example, people are sleeping in America, there can be people learning in Eretz Yisrael.

⁵ One explanation given for staying up Shavuot night is the following: One who is reading an exhilarating, stimulating novel that draws him, finds it difficult to put down. In a similar vein, *l'havdil*, it is with the Torah, which we received on Shavuot.

⁶ Rosh Hashana 16a.

⁷ Mishlei 3:18. In regard to writing on Chol Hamoed, the Mishna Brura (545:47) writes about the loss of chidushei Torah that אין לך דבר האבד גדול מזה, there is no greater loss than this.

⁸ The Nachalas Yaakov (Hakdama to Mesachta Sofrim) cites the comments of the Alshich (to Mishlei 2:4). He says that one shouldn't despair from engaging in that which he desires whether it is in Chumash, Mishna, Gemara or Aggada and to even have insights (chidush). One shouldn't say, "Who am I? And if it is such a great chidush, why didn't the earlier generations come up with it? Maybe this is his portion of Torah from Sinai."

⁹ We can interpret it this way since essentially, we have a question on the simple meaning. On Pesach, we daven for טל, dew because we are judged for grain. On Succos, we daven for rain as that is when we are judged on rain. So, why on Shavuot do we not daven for the fruits of the tree since that is what we are judged on then?

How do we receive Torah? through davening,¹¹ as Chazal tell us ...יבקשו רחמים...מה יעשה אדם ויחכם, what should one do to become a scholar, plead for mercy from Hashem.¹² The Tzror Hachaim¹³ says יום זה של חג השבועות מסוגל לאיש הנלבב לבקש ולחנן על נפשו שתמצא חלקה הנחלק לה בסיני, the Yom Tov of Shavuot is *mesugal* to request and beseech to find our portion in Torah¹⁴ that was given to us by Sinai. If we ask for it, we can get it, like the Sefer Chasidim¹⁵ tells us that if one requests something such as Torah learning, and pours out his soul, Hashem listens to his tefillah even if he doesn't possess good deeds.

Italian Tennis

In 1560, R' Moshe Provencal¹⁶ (1503–1576) responded to a halachic question as to whether or not it was permitted to play ball on Shabbos and Yom Tov. In his response, he discusses the game of tennis which was popular then even among the Italian Jews. From the discussion in his response, we discover that special buildings and courts were constructed to house tennis clubs. One issue was that since those buildings contained windows there was a concern of the possibility that the balls may bounce from a private house into the public domain, thereby violating a Shabbos prohibition. Another interesting fact was that different arrangements were devised to pay for the maintenance of the tennis courts. Some clubs were supported through user fees paid by the players while others were run as gambling establishments, with the owners taking a percentage of the prize money. R' Provencal also notes with dismay that the matches were often scheduled to coincide with the delivery of the shiurim in shul.



Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander zt"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg zt"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of five books including the recently released *Magnificent Marriage Insights*. His writings, some of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:27]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁰ The Nefesh Hachaim (4:12) writes that each word one is *mechadesh* from his mouth, Hashem kisses and crowns and builds an entirely new world from it (see the Zohar he quotes for an in-depth description).

¹¹ R' Dessler cites R' Yisrael Salanter that there is one tefillah that gets answered at any time and any situation — a tefillah for heavenly assistance in spirituality (Michtav M'elياهو, volume 4, p. 77).

¹² Nida 70b. This works in tandem with spending more time studying and less time engaged in business as the Gemara there says. Besides personal tefillah, we can also daven for Torah — at Birchas Hatorah, Atta Chonein in Shemoneh Esrei, in Uva L'tzion among other places.

¹³ בי דינא לחג השבועות, תרע"א (brought in Sefer Binyan Olam on the Mitzva of Talmud Torah, chapter 16).

¹⁴ The Chassam Sofer says that while everyone has a share in the Torah as in חלקנו בתורה, if he doesn't take his share, a descendent of his will — a son, grandson, etc. Consequently, it will never be lost. In this way we can grasp ...לא ימוש מפיד ומפי זרעך, it won't be withdrawn from your mouth, or your offspring's mouth or your offspring's offspring... (Yeshaya 59:21).

¹⁵ 131.

¹⁶ Shu"t Rabbeinu Moshe Provencal. He was Chief Rabbi of Mantua in Italy. In 1535, he composed a poetic guide to the rules of Hebrew grammar entitled B'shem Kadmon, which was later published in Venice by his grandchildren in 1596.