



CHICAGO RABBINICAL COUNCIL

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

Divrei Torah for Shavuot 5783

DIVREI TORAH FROM



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Toras Chesed

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We know that Shavuos is the time in which we celebrate *Zeman Matan Toraseinu* – the day in which the Torah was given to us. It is in commemoration of this event that we read and re-enact *Ma'amad Har Sinai* on the first day of Shavuos, and stay up all night to learn Torah.

Seemingly unrelated to this theme is the practice of reading *Megillas Rus* on Shavuos. The story of Rus at first glance does not seem to relate to the monumental event of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. One explanation as to why we read this Megillah at this time is that Dovid Hamelech, who descended from Rus, died on the holiday of Shavuos (see *Yerushalmi Chagigah* 2:3). Another explanation given by the Avudraham is that it took place during the time of the harvesting of the fields, which is consistent with the identification of Shavuos in the Torah as *Chag Hakatzir* (*Shemos* 23:16) – the holiday of the harvesting season.

Nonetheless, the Avudraham also notes that there is one clear

connection between Rus and the acceptance of the Torah insofar as Rus in fact accepted the Torah in her personal capacity as the cornerstone of her conversion to Judaism. In fact, the *Gemora* (*Kerisus* 9a) derives the laws of conversion for all generations from the act of conversion by the entirety of the Jewish people that took place at Har Sinai. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik *zt"l* explained that the acceptance of the yoke of commandments that is required of each conversion candidate is based upon the recitation of *na'aseh v'nishma* (we will do, and we will hear) that was recited by the Jewish people at the time of the giving of the Torah.

Others note that there was a major controversy over whether Dovid was viewed as legitimate since his ancestor Boaz had married a Moabite woman until it was finally decided by the Rabbinic authorities (see *Yevamos* 76b-77a) that the correct interpretation of the verse in the Torah (*Devorim* 23:4) that prohibits marriage with a Moabite (even post-conversion) only applies

to Moabite men and not to Moabite women. Thus, the ability of Rus to marry legitimately was ultimately a manifestation of the singular importance of *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (the oral Torah) which is celebrated on Shavuot.

Rav Yerucham Olshin points out (*Yerach L'Moadim, Shavuot, ma'amar* 43) that there is perhaps a more central theme that connects Rus with the giving of the Torah, and that also relates to the fact that the Megillah took place during the harvesting season, which is when a portion of crops was made available to the poor. The *Yalkut Shimoni* cites R. Zeira who notes that Megilas Rus was written for one reason – ללמדך שכר – של גומלי חסדים – to teach the great reward of those who perform acts of benevolent kindness (*Chesed*). The entire Megillah is replete with acts of *Chesed*, including the compassion that Rus displayed towards her bereaving mother-in-law who lost both her husband and her two sons, and the kindness bestowed by Boaz upon Rus when he found her gleaning sheaves in his field until he eventually took it upon himself to be the redeemer of Naomi's family and marry Rus.

Rav Olshin cites from a sermon of R. Eliezer Yitzchak of Volozhin (published in the famous collection of responsa from Rav

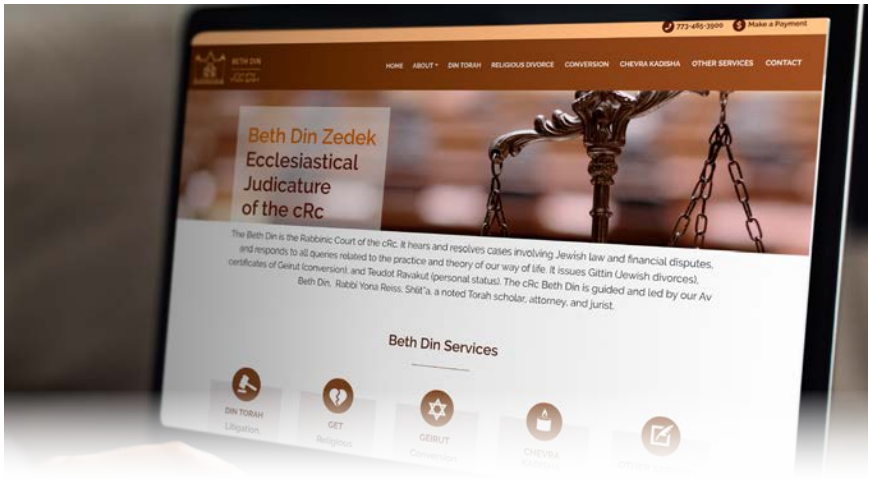
Chaim of Volozhin, entitled *Chut Hameshulash*), which notes that the *Gemora* in *Sota* (14a) states that תורה תחלתה גמילות חסדים וסופה גמילות חסדים – the Torah begins with an act of kindness (in which Hashem provided clothing for Adam and Chava) and ends with an act of kindness (in which Hashem buried Moshe). R. Eliezer Yitzchak explained that these character traits of kindness that are bookended in the Torah constitute the foundation and purpose of the Torah, upon which the entire Torah is premised. Similarly, we learn from Rus that to make a true acquisition in Torah, we must be suffused with the character traits of kindness and benevolence endowed to us by Hashem. As the *Gemora* in *Sota* indicates, just as Hashem clothes the naked, visits the sick, and comforts mourners, we must do so as well. This is the ultimate message of *Megillas Rus*. As R. Eliezer Yitzchak writes, אשר זה הוא – *Chesed* is the most essential ingredient for the proper fulfillment of the Torah.

We are familiar with the Talmudic statement that at the time that we stood at *Har Sinai*, we were כאיש אחד – אחד בלב אחד – like one person with one heart (see, e.g., Rashi, *Shemos* 19:2). Rav Olshin notes that it was this readiness to care about each other that enabled us to be ready and worthy of receiving the Torah.

So too when we read about the *Chesed* in *Megillas Rus*, it should inspire us towards a renewed sense of togetherness and caring about each other. Based on this theme, R. Eliezer Yitzchak explained that the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is specifically underscored in the section of the Torah related to Shavuot (*Devorim* 16:10) because it is only through a focus upon *Chesed* that we are truly worthy of Torah.

It is, thank G-d, a hallmark of the Chicago Jewish community and

many other Jewish communities throughout the world that alongside the *yeshivos*, seminaries and *kollelim*, there are major organizations devoted to *Chesed*, sometimes even combining Torah and *Chesed* institutions under the same roof. The message of *Megillas Rus* is that we should reinforce our dedication to the blending together of Torah and *Chesed* to ensure that we be worthy of the highest attainment of *kabbalas HaTorah*.



The cRc Beth Din Website

The cRc Beth Din website is a rich resource of information and practical tools for the community to better access the expert services of the cRc Beth Din. The site includes dedicated sections for **Jewish Divorce (Get) • Jewish Conversion • Adjudication Chevra Kadisha • Other services**

**For more information,
please email bethdin@crcweb.org**

Creating An Everlasting Memorial

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

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Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the *bechorim* (first born males) were the ones in charge of the *avodah* and *korbonos*. After the incident of the Golden Calf, Hashem commands Moshe to transfer the *kedusha* of the first-born males along with their rights to the *avodah* to the Leviim. There were a total of 22,273 *bechorim* and exactly 22,000 Leviim. How would these extra 273 *bechorim* be redeemed? Instead of having their *kedusha* transferred to the Leviim, these *bechorim* would give money towards their redemption. Moshe was concerned that the “extra” *bechorim* will refuse to give money as they would complain that their *kedusha* be transferred over to the Leviim just like the other *bechorim*. Hashem solves the issue by telling Moshe to make a raffle as to which 22,000 *bechorim* will be able to have their *kedusha* transferred while the remaining 273 will have to pay money. The *sefer Likutei Yehuda* asks that when it comes to the *mitzvah* of *Pidyon Haben*, everyone is very excited to fulfill this once in a lifetime *mitzvah*. Why then over here is

Moshe concerned that the *bechorim* will complain with regards to this *mitzvah* of redeeming themselves? The *Likutei Yehuda* answers that it wasn't the loss of money that the 273 *bechorim* were concerned about, rather it was the concept of not having someone else continue their life's work. The *avodah* of *korbonos* was very dear to the *bechorim*; if it had to be taken away from them, each *bechor* desired, at the very least, that a Levi perpetuate his life's mission.

On a similar note, the Chofetz Chaim in the introduction to his *sefer Shem Olam* says that most people want there to be some continuity of themselves in this world – not to be forgotten. This could be accomplished to an extent through one's children. However, not all are *zoche* to have children, or to have children that follow in their footsteps. Some people will give money to a Torah institution and have a plaque put up with their name; others may donate a *Sefer Torah*. The best way to create an “everlasting remembrance” for oneself, the Chofetz Chaim says, is to follow the advice of the Navi:

ואל יאמר הסריס הן אני עץ יבש, כי כה אמר ד' לסריסים אשר 1) ישמרו את שבתותי 2) ובחרו באשר חפצתי 3) ומחזיקים בבריתי. ונתתי להם בביתי ובחומותי יד ושם טוב מבנים ומבנות, שם עולם אתן לו אשר לא יכרת.

'One who is not capable of having children should not feel rejected by saying that they are just a dried up piece of wood. Rather, says Hashem to those who are sterile: 1) Guard the Shabbos, 2) choose that which I desire (*Chesed*- acts of kindness), 3) hold fast to My covenant (Torah). I will give in My house, within My walls a monument and a memorial, better than sons and daughters, I will give an **everlasting memorial** that shall not be cut off.'

One who wants to have an everlasting remembrance of themselves in this world should strengthen in Shabbos, *Chesed* and Torah.

When Moshe Rabeinu finished building the *Mishkan*, he gave the following bracha ויהי נועם ד' אלוקינו עלינו, ומעשה ידינו כוננה עלינו ומעשה ידינו כוננהו – 'May the sweetness of Hashem be upon us, and may the work of our hand (our *avodah*) be **established**'- i.e. there should be continuity to it. Perhaps we could suggest based on the teachings of the Chofetz Chaim as to why we recite this *possuk* at *Maariv* after Shabbos and during *krias Shema* recited upon going to sleep at night. The Chofetz Chaim taught us based on the words

of the Navi that the three *mitzvos* that will give us an everlasting memorial are Shabbos, *Chesed* and Torah. Accordingly, it is at the end of Shabbos, and as we retire from a day filled with Torah study and acts of kindness we beseech Hashem for the blessing of continuity – 'may the work of our hand be established.'

This year, as the second day of Shavuot falls out on Shabbos, we celebrate these three *mitzvos*. In addition to Shabbos, the Yom Tov of Shavuot commemorates our acceptance of the Torah at Har Sinai. We also learn *Megillas Rus*. Why do we learn *Megillas Rus*; what does Rus have to do with *Matan Torah*? The *Yalkut Shimoni* comments that the reason *Megillas Rus* was written is to teach us the reward of those who do kindness. Rus stood by her mother in-law, Naomi's side, and refused to abandon her. She took care of her and even allowed Naomi to rear her son. Her reward was that she was *zoche* to have a descendant, Dovid Hamelech, and ultimately Moshiach, come from her. Perhaps this is why we learn *Rus* on Shavuot, to teach us that together with Torah one must also be kind and sensitive to others.

There was once an individual who was thought to be a great *tzaddik*. People would flock to him to receive his *brachos*. The highlight of his year

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Heaven on Earth

Rabbi Yosef Posner

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The *Mekhilta*, quoted by Rashi asks: In the Torah portion which we read on Shavuot it says (*Yisro* 19:20) “And Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai.” A later verse (20:19) says “From the heavens I spoke to you.” So, which one was it? Did Hashem speak to us from heaven or did He come down to earth to speak to us? The *Mekhilta* resolves this with a third verse (*Va’es’chanan* 4:36) which reconciles the apparent contradiction: “From the heavens, He let you hear His voice to instruct you, and upon the earth He showed you His great fire.” We see from this verse that both of the previous verses are true. In the words of Rashi: “Hashem lowered the heavens and spread them out upon the earth like a bedcover and spoke to them.”

What does it mean? What does the question signify, and what does the answer teach us?

We can understand that there is a tension between “heaven” and “earth.” It is the clash between body and soul, material and spiritual. They are quite different from each other,

perhaps mutually exclusive. One has to choose whether to indulge one’s body and pursue material gratification, or to please the soul and seek out the G-dly and holy.

This is the issue presented in the form of the two seemingly contradictory verses. Hashem is “in the Heaven,” in the realm of holiness. How can He speak to us down on the earth?

Most religions recognize this tension and they resolve it in favor of one or the other.

Some pagan cults are all about engaging in physically gratifying activities. To the degree they have deities, they are powers which personify material and physical attributes, and which bestow material largesse. They have no room for holiness and spirituality in their pantheon.

On the other hand, there are religions which see asceticism and withdrawal from material pursuits as the only path. They eschew engagement in the world, and see holiness and spirituality as synonymous with poverty and deprivation – a total lack of material possessions.

Some religions try to resolve the question of material vs. spiritual by assigning roles. Some (most) people will engage the material world and produce the food, shelter, and progeny which the human race needs to survive, and others will refrain from all that and live lives of piety, sealed away far from general society.

But these are not reconciliations of the conundrum posed by the *Mekhilta*; they are admissions of defeat, declaring it is not possible to be both. It is one or the other.

The reconciliation provided by the third verse tells us that heaven and earth are not opposites, poles apart. Hashem created them both as distinct and separate entities and then showed how they are to be brought together. "Hashem lowered the heavens and spread them out upon the earth like a bedcover." Heaven and earth are different but in close contact.

One can live a material life, eating, sleeping, and working. However, one can also live a spiritual life of eating, sleeping, and working ... all in service of Hashem. We do that by, for example, making sure the food we eat is kosher, making *Brachos* before eating, eating for a *Mitzvah* purpose such as eating on Shabbos, and using the energy to serve Hashem. The same is true of the entire gamut of human activity. When a soul arrives on high after completing its sojourn

on this world it is held accountable for all of the opportunities to partake of this world which were forgone (*Yerushalmi*, end of *Kiddushin*), because they were all opportunities to bring heaven and earth together, which is the purpose of existence.

In light of this we can understand a *Halacha*. The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 68b) brings two opinions about Yom Tov. One opinion is that a person should spend half the day in davening and learning Torah and the other half in eating and drinking etc. The other opinion is that a person can choose to either devote the entire day to Torah study or to eating and drinking. The *Gemara* then states that with regard to Shavuot all opinions agree that one must spend some time eating and drinking and cannot devote the entire day to Torah study because ... it is the day the Torah was given!

What is the reasoning here? It would seem that the opposite should be true, that because Shavuot is the day the Torah was given, it should be acceptable according to both opinions to learn Torah all day!

In view of the above, we can understand this *Gemara*. The idea of Torah is that the material and spiritual are not an either/or proposition. The purpose of Torah is to bring them together and incorporate the eating and drinking into the realm of Torah. To not eat on Shavuot would be to

miss the whole point of giving the Torah.

Even as people who are observant of *Mitzvos*, it can be challenging to seamlessly join the spiritual and material parts of our lives. We give time to learning and davening and Shabbos, etc. but think that other parts of our life such as work and pastimes are not related to Torah. The idea that Torah is involved in every detail of the minutiae of our day might seem hard to grasp.

Shavuot is the time for us to give this

some thought. Every moment of our lives and every penny of our assets are all meant to be part of our service of Hashem. They are all holy in fact or holy in potential.

Through our renewing our commitment to bringing heaven down to earth in every sense, we raise the earth up to heaven and thus make it ready for the time when that G-dliness will be revealed in this world, visible to the physical eye (see *Yeshayahu* 40:5), with the coming of Moshiach NOW!

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was *Simchas Torah* when he would dance clutching the *Sefer Torah* with tears of *dveikus* flowing from his eyes. One year, the Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, zt”l, wanted to view this *tzaddik* do his *hakafos* on *Simchas Torah*. He came with a number of his chassidim and watched the *tzaddik* dance with tremendous *dveikus*. After a few minutes of observing, the Satmar Rav told his chassidim that this “*tzaddik*” is a fake and left the *hakafos*. A few years later an incident occurred revealing to all that indeed this individual was phony and not a *tzaddik* at all. The chassidim asked

Reb Yoel how did the Rebbe know? The Rebbe replied, “When I saw him dancing with the tears streaming down his face, he was also stepping on people’s toes, and it didn’t seem to disturb him. One cannot have *dveikus* with Hashem and at the same time step on others.” This is the lesson of Rus – Torah must be accompanied with *Chesed* and sensitivity to others.

On this Shavuot let us all resolve to strengthen our commitment to Shabbos, Torah and *Chesed* and with that be zoche to a שם עולם אתן לו אשר לא יכרת.

K'Ish Echad B'Lev Echad: Is it Attainable?

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In the Torah reading we read on the morning of Shavuot, we read:

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהֵיטֵב הַבִּקֹּר וְהָיָה קֹלֶת
וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד עַל־הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר
חֹזֵק מְאֹד וַיִּחָרַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֶה
... וְהָיָה קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מְאֹד.

We get the feeling, as we read these *psukim*, that we are witnessing an awesome moment in the history of the Jews; a defining moment. This was, as we know, the only moment of *K'ish Echad* (a completely unified people) in our history, and it revolved around Torah. Since then, it is painfully obvious that we are NOT *K'ish Echad*, by any stretch of the imagination. I hope that that you will indulge me as I share some of my strong opinions on this subject, which all come, I believe, from a place of love.

Over the millennia since *Matan Torah*, we have had many divisions among Klal Yisrael. Mitnagdim and Chasidim come to mind. At least both are what we would call “frum.” However, the Reform movement, which represented the greatest attack and challenge to Orthodox values and lifestyle, is a non-Torah based

movement. No, we are certainly not *K'ish Echad*!

We might naively feel that things are better now than in the time of the Tzedukim/Perushim or during the rise of Chassidut and Mitnaged philosophies. We might mistakenly think that we are in better shape spiritually than those generations. We might err greatly by thinking that Judaism—Orthodox Judaism—is in fine shape.

The Torah tells us *לֹא תתגודדו*, “*lo tit'godedu*” and we interpret it to mean “do not make *agudot, agudot*” (i.e., do not become fractious and thereby fracture the Jewish people). Unfortunately, the reality is that, in fact, this may be the one thing we ARE good at in Orthodox Judaism—rifts and making “*agudot, agudot*” (subdivisions).

Where does this stem from? Why is it that we are so fractured in our days? Why are we not *K'ish Echad*?

I believe it comes from certain language we use and various approaches to *Hashkafa*.

Let's try some words first: “Frummy,

black hatter, *ch'nyuk, charedi*, Modern Orthodox, *Sruggy, Am Ha'aretz, Ziyoini*.”

Or how about *Hashkafa*? I refer to the mistaken belief that I have Torah, and only my Gedolim are true Torah personalities. This includes the belief that one who says *Hallel* on Yom Ha'atzmaut is “branded” a bad Jew or that one who does not say *Hallel* is branded a “*Kofer*.”

This includes the *Hashkafa* that only a certain kind of Yeshivishe background “entitles” one to be a *Posek* and having a different *Hashkafa* makes one a “*meikal/a lenient posek*.”

We are so far afield from *K'ish Echad* that we can't even recognize it!

When any one group feels that their group is the **true** Torah way and the others are mistaken; when any one group thinks that the other group is just a bunch of “*ameratzim/ignoramus*” or they are just a bunch of “*frummies*”; when any one group thinks that they hold a monopoly on Torah, **that** is when we fly as fast as possible away from Matan Torah, and what Hashem intended for all of us.

The Torah was given to all Jews. As long as one is living a Torah-based life, as long as he is living his life based on the *Shulchan Aruch*, he is worthy of the respect of being an observant Jew. I guarantee you that every single family has members in

the immediate family and extended family who do not subscribe to the same exact values as the rest of their family. But as long as these people are living their lives based on the *Shulchan Aruch*, their beliefs and philosophies should not be negated!

Those who do not keep Torah and *Mitzvot* (yet!) are due the respect of a fellow Jew, but they also should be individuals whom we encourage and assist to find Torah and *Mitzvot*.

Do we really want to be *K'ish Echad*? To paraphrase a famous line...“You couldn't handle *K'ish Echad*!!!”

Not in today's reality.

And here we are, over 3000 years since Matan Torah. We are celebrating what we call *Z'man Matan Torateinu*. One need not be a big *dikduk* scholar to know that the word *Torateinu* means OUR Torah. It is yours, and mine, and the property of all Jews. As long as we are *shomer* Torah and *Mitzvot*, it is our gift from Hashem.

Do we really want to be *K'ish Echad*? Then maybe it is time we begin to act *K'ish Echad*. This means ending the feeling of not acknowledging another opinion or *Hashkafa* in Judaism. It means not negating a fellow Jew because he wears a hat or he wears a *kippah seruga* or has his *tzitzit* out or doesn't have his *tzitzit* out. As long as we are working within the parameters of *Halacha*, we apply the principle of אלו ואלו דברי א-לוקים חיים !

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