



CHICAGO RABBINICAL COUNCIL

מועצת הרבנים דשיקגו

Divrei Torah for Shavuot 5784



Rabbi Yona
Reiss



Rabbi Eitan
Allen



Rabbi Ari
Marinelli



Rabbi Yosef
Posner

2701 W. Howard Street • Chicago, IL 60645
773-465-3900 • www.crcweb.org

Eating a Dairy Meal on Shavuos

Rabbi Yona Reiss
Av Beth Din



A popular part of the observance of Shavuos is eating dairy, which often translates into having at least one dairy meal. This raises an important question. Generally, there is a preference for the meals of a Yom Tov to include meat. This is based on the principle that אין שמחה אלא בבשר¹ - whenever there is a *mitzvah* of *simcha* (rejoicing), one should eat meat. Since on Yom Tov there is a *mitzvah* of rejoicing, it is appropriate to eat meat at each Yom Tov meal. While there are some authorities who say that the requirement of eating meat to satisfy the requirement for rejoicing only applies to the meat of the sacrificial offering (*Korban Shelamim*) brought on the holidays for celebration purposes,² many rabbinic authorities conclude that the requirement for meat on Yom Tov is still applicable nowadays.³

On the other hand, the custom to eat dairy on Shavuos has a firm basis as well. Numerous reasons are given for this custom, including that the Torah which was given on Shavuos at Har Sinai is compared to dairy⁴ and that the Jewish people were not able to have kosher meat prepared immediately after accepting the Torah which includes the detailed laws of *kashrus*.⁵

In addition, the Rema⁶ brings a source that specifically relates to eating dairy during a Yom Tov meal on Shavuos. According to the Rema, the reason for eating dairy on Shavuos is to commemorate the special meal offering of the שתי הלחם (the offering of the “two loaves”) that was brought on Shavuos in the *Beis Hamikdash*. This offering, which is highlighted in the Torah’s description of Shavuos as חג הביכורים

1 *Pesachim* 109a.

2 See discussion in the *Beis Yosef*, *Orach Chaim* 529; *Magen Avrohom* 696:15.

3 See Rambam, *Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:17-18; *Biur Halacha*, chapter 529, s.v. “keitzad”.

4 See *Shir Hashirim* 4:11.

5 See *Mishna Berurah* 494:12-13.

6 *Orach Chaim* 494:3.

(the holiday of the “first offering” from the new wheat grain) consisted of two loaves of leavened wheat bread as the first offering from the new wheat crop that had taken root during the previous year. While the new crop of grain (previously dubbed as “*chodosh*”) became permitted for consumption by the general public following the bringing of the *Omer* offering on the second day of Pesach, it is only after the offering of the two loaves on Shavuot that the new crop of grain may be brought as an offering on the altar in the *Beis Hamikdash*.

Accordingly, the Rema explains that the reason we eat dairy on Shavuot is to ensure that we consume two loaves of bread at the meal in commemoration of the two loaves brought as the special meal offering on Shavuot (in this way, the Rema explains, it is like having two cooked items on the Seder plate to commemorate the *Pesach* offering and the *Chagigah* offering).⁷ Since

as a matter of *halacha*, one cannot use the remnants of a loaf from a dairy meal at a meat meal or vice-versa,⁸ we eat a meal on Shavuot that begins with dairy (so that one loaf will be necessary for the dairy portion of the meal), and then concludes with meat (so that an additional loaf will be necessary to be eaten with the meat, since the remnants from the dairy loaf will be disqualified).⁹

There is, however, a *halachic* dilemma regarding this practice. Eating dairy and meat at the same meal seems inconsistent with another *halachic* practice regarding the protocols for separating between the eating of dairy and meat. According to the *halacha*,¹⁰ one who eats meat must wait a certain amount of time – our practice is six hours – prior to eating dairy. By contrast, one who eats dairy may eat meat immediately afterwards, provided that the person does three things: (a) washes his or her hands;¹¹ (b) eats some food; and (c) clears out his

7 According to this explanation, it is essential that the loaves be made specifically from wheat and not from other grains. See *Mishna Berurah* 494:17.

8 *Yoreh Deah* 89:4.

9 *Mishna Berurah* 494:14. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 1:38) notes that although the prohibition against eating the same loaf for a dairy and meat meal does not pertain to the remnants of the full loaf that has not yet been broken into pieces, nonetheless it is considered a virtuous practice to bring out a separate loaf for the eating of the opposite kind of food.

10 See *Yoreh Deah* 89:2.

11 However, according to the *Pri Chadash* (*Yoreh Deah* 89:9), one who eats with a fork would not be required to wash his or her hands afterwards prior to eating meat.

or her mouth with water or another drink.¹² Moreover, the *Shach*¹³ cites the *Zohar* as additionally requiring a one hour (generally understood as a half hour)¹⁴ waiting period before eating meat.¹⁵ The same passage in the *Zohar* also rules that one should never eat dairy and meat together in the same meal, requiring that one *bentch* (i.e. recite *birkhat hamazon*) in the interim. Thus, the recommendation of the Rema to eat dairy and then meat during the same meal appears to be contrary to the ruling of the *Zohar*. Furthermore, according to the Vilna Gaon, the Rema himself accepts the opinion of the *Zohar*.¹⁶

As a further complication, the Rema¹⁷ rules elsewhere that one should not specifically *bentsch* after eating meat for the explicit purpose of eating

dairy afterwards, since this would generate an unnecessary blessing. Thus, even if one decided to be strict to *bentsch* after eating dairy and then to wash again and make a new blessing on bread in connection with a meat meal, that could be viewed as generating an unnecessary blessing, along the lines of the Rema's ruling regarding someone who *bentsches* after meat to eat dairy afterwards.¹⁸

In response to these concerns regarding the Rema's recommendations, there are fundamentally four different approaches that are adopted by rabbinic authorities with respect to having a dairy meal during Shavuot:

1. The *Mishna Berurah* is not bothered by the practice of having meat following dairy in the same meal, since he

12 See *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 89:2. The *Darchei Teshuva* (*Yoreh Deah* 89:31) cites the opinion of the Rashash that only cheese requires all three measures, while the drinking of milk only requires the rinsing of one's mouth. See *Yechaveh Da'as* (3:58) for a further discussion regarding this opinion.

13 *Shach* 89:16, citing *Zohar (Mishpatim* 125:1). There are differing opinions as to whether the *Zohar* was referring to all dairy products, or only hard cheese. See *Chaguras Shmuel, Yoreh Deah* 89:18.

14 See *Matche Reuven* (R. Reuven Chaim Klein), chapter 186; *Halichos Shlomo, Shavuot* 12, *Orchos Halacha* n. 49.

15 According to the *Pesakim u'Teshuvos* (*Yoreh Deah* 89:10), if one waited a full hour after eating dairy, most authorities would hold that it is not necessary to perform the other cleansing measures between eating dairy and meat, but that if one only waited a half hour, the cleansing measures would still be necessary.

16 *Biur HaGr"a, Yoreh Deah* 89:6,11.

17 *Yoreh Deah* 89:1. Even though the Rema writes that people are not careful about this stringency, The *Taz* (s.k. 3) strongly reinforces his ruling. Cf. *Pischei Teshuva* 89:2.

18 See *Pesakim u'Teshuvos* 89:10.

holds that the restriction from doing so only applies to a case when one has eaten hard cheese.¹⁹ Therefore, he rules that so long as one cleans out one's mouth with food and water (and presumably washes one's hands if dirty with dairy residue, consistent with the *halacha* as codified in *Yoreh Deah*), it is perfectly fine to observe the Rema's practice of eating dairy and meat during the same meal on Shavuos as a commemoration of the offering of the two loaves of bread that was brought on Shavuos. The tablecloth should also be changed between the dairy portion and the meat portion of the meal.²⁰ Indeed, this is the practice of certain contemporary rabbinic authorities, and was apparently the practice of

past luminaries such as Rav Moshe Soloveitchik zt"l.²¹

A variation of this reasoning is to maintain that while normally dairy and meat may indeed not be eaten in the same meal even if one is consuming dairy that is not hard cheese, an exception is made in the case of Shavuos. Different reasons are given as to why there would be a special exception on Shavuos. Some say that this is to showcase the fact that we only eat meat after dairy at the meal, in contrast to the *Malachim* (angels) who came to visit Avrohom, who ate meat and milk together,²² thus demonstrating that the Torah, which was given on Shavuos, was not appropriate for them but rather for us.²³ Others²⁴ suggest an apparently opposite explanation, arguing that the *Malachim* in fact ate meat right

19 See *Mishna Berurah* 494:16; *Magen Avrohom* 494:6. Our practice (see *Taz, Yoreh Deah* 89:4) is to wait a full six hours after eating hard cheese (which is defined as strong cheese that has been aged for six months, see *Shach* 89:15).

20 *Mishna Berurah*, 494:16.

21 Heard from R. Eric Goldstein, YU Torah.org shiur ("When should one eat *milchigs* on Shavuot?").

22 See *Bereishis* 18:8, and the comments of the *Da'as Zekeinim* ad locum.

23 See *Be'er Heitev, Orach Chaim* 494:8. Another version of this explanation is that of the *Beis HaLevi (Parshas Yisro, s.v. "Hakol Modim B'Atzeres")* who writes that the *Malachim* did not actually eat meat and dairy together, but they did not practice the requisite cleansing measures (such as the rinsing of the mouth) between eating dairy and meat, and we thus demonstrate our greater worthiness than the *Malachim* to receive the Torah by practicing these measures on Shavuos, the day of the giving of the Torah.

24 *Noam Elimelech, Parshas Mishpatim, s.v. "lo tevashel"*.

after dairy, and that on Shavuot we demonstrate that through our receiving of the Torah on this day, we are on the level of *Malachim* and thus, unlike other days, do not need to wait for another meal to eat meat.

Those who observe this practice will sometimes include the stringency of waiting a half hour between the dairy part of the meal and the meat part of the meal, but without reciting *birkhat hamazon* in between the two parts of the meal.

2. The *Pri Megadim*²⁵ adopts the approach recommended by the Rema (with the appropriate cleansing of the mouth and changing of the tablecloth), but with the caveat that one should *bentsch* between the dairy meal and the meat meal, thus effectively generating two successive meals. Those who adopt this approach exercise special leniency on Shavuot with respect to the concern of generating unnecessary

blessings but not without respect to the restriction against having dairy and meat at the same meal.²⁶

3. The *Darchei Teshuva*,²⁷ Rav Shmuel Kaminetsky shlit" a²⁸ and others²⁹ recommend a variation of the Rema's recommended practice in terms of having a "dairy *kiddush*" on Shavuot morning followed by an appropriate waiting period³⁰ (and a washing of hands, and cleansing of the palate, if less than an hour), at which time one would wash on the bread and only have a meat meal with both loaves of bread. The upside of this approach is that one avoids eating both dairy and meat during the same meal, but still connects the dairy part of the meal through *kiddush*. According to this approach, one would also recite a *beracha acharona* after the *kiddush* (so that if one made *kiddush* on wine and then wished to drink additional wine during the

25 *Sifsei Da'as, Yoreh Deah*, 89:6.

26 *Mishbetzos Zahav, Yoreh Deah* 89:3.

27 *Darchei Teshuva, Yoreh Deah* 89:19.

28 *Kobetz Teshuvos, Hilchos Sefiros Ha'Omer – Shavuot*, 11:13.

29 See *Piskei Teshuvos* 494:12.

30 See *Halichos Shlomo*, supra note 14, indicating that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach followed this practice and waited a half hour between the dairy *kiddush* and the meat meal on Shavuot. The *Darchei Teshuva*, supra note 27, recommends waiting an hour or longer.

meal, another *borei pri hagafen* would need to be recited). The downside of this approach is that it does not commemorate the offering of the two loaves through necessitating the eating of two loaves of bread, since only one loaf of bread needs to be eaten in connection with the bread portion of the meal. However, some argue that any cake product that is consumed during *kiddush* serves as an allusion to one of the “two loaves” so that the loaf that is eaten during the ensuing meat meal serves as the second loaf of the “two loaves.”³¹

4. Finally, another common practice is simply to have one dairy meal during Shavuot (potentially this could be done on both days of Shavuot in the Diaspora), preferably at nighttime.³² This practice pays greater homage to the myriad of reasons given by the rabbinic authorities as to why it is appropriate to have dairy on Shavuot, without specifically

observing the Rema’s practice of commemorating the meal offering of the two loaves in the process.³³ The advantage of eating the meat meal at night is that some authorities hold that the *mitzvah* of *simcha* on Yom Tov is primarily during the daytime, so there is more flexibility to eat the meat meal at night.³⁴ However, others³⁵ argue that there is no significant difference between the nighttime meal and the daytime meal in this regard, and that every Yom Tov meal should include meat.

It should be noted that Rabbi Yosef Dov Solovetchik³⁶ pointed out that while our focus on Shavuot is the celebration of *Matan Torah* which took place on Shavuot, the actual Torah description of Shavuot emphasizes as its central motif the meal offering of the two loaves. The Rema’s emphasis upon commemorating this offering should be understood in this spirit. It is thus important for us to appreciate the significance of

31 See *Piskei Teshuvos*, 494 (65).

32 This was the practice of the Steipler Gaon, cited in *Orchos Rabbeinu* 2, p. 98 (paragraph 3).

33 In fact, the version of the *minhag* cited by the Rema only makes sense during the daytime when the *Shte HaLechem* was offered. See *Kobetz Halachos*, supra, Chapter 11(15).

34 See *Sha’ar Hatzion* 546:15; *Sha’agas Aryeh*, *siman* 66.

35 See, e.g., *Darchei Teshuva*, *Yoreh Deah* 89:19.

36 See *Chumash Mesores HaRav*, *Vayikra*, pp. 186-187.

this offering in the context of our celebration of *Matan Torah* during Shavuos.

Some commentators³⁷ explain that the significance of this special Shavuos meal offering lies in the fact that it is a wheat offering, in contrast to the *Omer* offering, which was made from barley, which is generally an animal food. In this sense, the offering of the two loaves highlights the fact that we moved from the simple, animalistic state that we were in at the time that we were emancipated from the slavery of *Mitzrayim* (which is the time of the *Omer* offering, brought on the second day of Pesach), to a more sophisticated, humanly refined state at the time of Shavuos.

This idea also helps to explain why the offering of the two loaves is required to be *chametz* (risen dough), which represents a rising of our intellect in the service of Torah. We were able to graduate to this elevated state by overcoming the forty-nine levels of impurity that characterized us when we left *Mitzrayim*, through the forty-nine days of preparation for Shavuos. In fact, the *Magen Avrohom*³⁸ comments that one major reason that

we eat dairy on Shavuos is because we were going through “seven weeks of cleansing,” akin to the seven days of cleansing observed by a woman who experiences a menstrual cycle, after which, according to rabbinic tradition, the “blood dissipates into milk.”

Thus, the observance of eating dairy on Shavuos takes on greater significance insofar as it represents not only the receiving of the Torah according to the classic explanations comparing dairy to Torah, but also because, through its connection to the offering of the two loaves, it signifies our elevation to a state of spiritual cleanliness worthy of receiving the Torah.

Accordingly, when we sit down to enjoy our cheesecake this coming Shavuos, whether in a *kiddush* prior to a Yom Tov meal, as part of a stand-alone Yom Tov meal, or at the beginning of a multi-part Yom Tov meal, we should be inspired to comport ourselves as members of a “kingdom of princes and a holy nation,”³⁹ just like when we received the Torah. *Chag Sameach!*

37 See, e.g., *Yerach L'Moadim (Shavuos – Ma'amarim)*, chapter 39, pp. 299-302. See also Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky, “*Omer and Shtei HaLechem: Two Sides of Man*,” TorahWeb.org.

38 *Magen Avrohom* 494:6.

39 *Shemos* 19:6 (translation from chabad.org).

How the Torah was Given

Rabbi Eitan Allen
Rabbi-Chaplain,
Park Plaza Retirement Community



We are eternally blessed and privileged to be the *Am HaTorah*. The Torah is our heritage and our wisdom amongst the nations (*Devarim* 4:6). The book of *Bamidbar* begins with the verse “And Hashem spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the tent of meeting on the first of the second month after leaving the land of Egypt.” (*Bamidbar* 1:1) The *Medrash Rabbah* asks the question, why are we told that the Torah was given in *Midbar Sinai*? It answers that from this *pasuk*, the sages learn that the Torah was given with three things: 1) Fire 2) Water and 3) Desert.

With Fire as it says:

וְהָרַסְנוּ סִינַי עֵשֶׂן כְּלוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו ה' בְּאֵשׁ
וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנוּ כְּעֵשֶׂן הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיִּתְרַד כָּל הָהָר מְאֹד.

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke, for Hashem had come down upon it in fire; the smoke rose like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. (Shmos 19:18)

With Water as it says:

ה' בְּצִאתוֹ מִשְׁעֵיר בְּצַעֲדוֹ מִשְׁדֵּה אֲדוֹם אָרָץ
רָעֵשָׂה גַם-שָׁמַיִם נָטְפוּ גַם-עַבִּימִים נָטְפוּ מִיָּם:

O G-d, when You came forth from Seir, Advanced from the country of Edom, The earth trembled; The heavens dripped, Yea, the clouds dripped water. (Shoftim 5:4)

With Desert as it says:

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai. (Bamidbar 1:1)

The *Medrash* continues, why was the Torah given with these three things? Just as these three things are free to everyone in the world so the Torah is free to all. No one should make the mistake that the Torah is exclusive to any one man or place. The Torah is for us all and we all have a part in it. Rav Aharon Dovid Goldberg in his *sefer Shiras David* points to the *Gemara* in *Brochos* (22a) that Torah learning should be equated with the way it was given. If so, our own connection to Torah can still be informed by the words of this *Medrash*. In other words, the three aspects of Fire, Water, and Desert can teach us how to better relate to the Torah.

Let us start by examining the

middah of Fire. Rabbi Goldberg posits that the fire the Torah was given with represents the *Kedusha* of the Torah. Torah is not like other subjects. Torah comes along with a fiery warmth and infuses those who faithfully cling to its teachings with holiness. The *Gemara* in *Sukkah* 28A famously relates that when Rabi Yonasan Ben Uziel was sitting and learning, any bird that passed above him was burnt up in fire. *Tosafos* over there comments that it was because the Torah was given with fire. We see that the original giving of the Torah helps to define its nature and we can still benefit from the Torah's fiery character.

Chazal go further and describe the Torah itself as fire. The *Chumash* (*Devarim* 33:1) describes the Torah as *Aish Das*, in other words, fire. Rashi there quotes *Chazal* that Torah is black fire on white fire. This is to say that the very nature of the Torah is fire and that helps to explain why it was given in fire. Fire can be beneficial or destructive. Torah can be the same way; when used properly it can warm and energize and when misused it can be a lethal force (*Taanis* 7A).

The Torah was also given with water. Water, says the *Shiras David*, is the feeling that goes along with the Torah. The Torah is not simply an add-on to our life but it is life itself.

Chazal in the *Mechilta* tell us that the Jews journeyed from the Sea for three days and found no water; the water in fact refers to *Divrei Torah*. The Jews needed Torah just like a person needs water to survive. The *Gemara* (*Brochos* 61B) relates that Papus Ben Yehuda was surprised that Rabi Akiva was teaching Torah during a time of a Roman ban. Rabi Akiva gave Papus a *mashal* of a fish in the river who was tempted by a fox to come live on the shore and the fox would protect him. The fish was adamant that even with the threat of being caught, he was better off staying in the water which he could not live without. So too, said Rabi Akiva, like the need for water, the Jew cannot live without Torah and so he continued to teach. We can explain, that this is why the *Medrash* highlights that the Torah was given with water. We must always feel that we need the Torah for our very lives. It is as vital as life-giving water.

Finally, the *Medrash* tells us that Torah was given in a *Midbar*. Besides for the aspect that we mentioned earlier that a *Midbar* is open to everyone, there is an additional idea mentioned in the *Gemara* in *Eiruvin* 54a:

אמר רב מתנה, מאי דכתיב (במדבר כא, יח) וממדבר מתנה אם משים אדם עצמו כמדבר זה שהכל דשין בו תלמודו מתקיים בידו ואם

Continued on page 12

Understanding the Dual Nature of Observing Shavuos

Rabbi Ari Marinelli

*Spiritual Care Supervisor/Chaplain and
System Rabbi at Endeavor Health (formerly
NorthShore University HealthSystem)*



The Gemara in *Pesachim* 68b records a dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua regarding the proper approach to celebrating *Yomim Tovim* generally and Shavuos specifically. Rabbi Eliezer maintains that each individual can choose whether to spend *Yomim Tovim* eating and drinking or by dedicating the entire day to learning and fasting. In contrast, Rabbi Yehoshua asserts that the day should be divided, with half of it allocated to eating and drinking and half to Torah learning.

Rabbi Yochanan explains that both positions address a contradiction in the verses. One verse states, “It shall be an *atzeres* for Hashem your G-d,” (*Devarim* 16:8) suggesting that *Yomim Tovim* should be dedicated entirely to Divine service. Another verse says, “It shall be an *atzeres* for you” (*Bamidbar* 29:35), suggesting that *Yomim Tovim* should be for celebration for the Jewish people. To resolve this contradiction, Rabbi

Eliezer suggests that the two verses offer a choice: one could spend the *Yom Tov* entirely engaged in Divine service through Torah learning and fasting, or entirely in celebration through eating and drinking. In contrast, Rabbi Yehoshua believes that each *Yom Tov* should be divided, fulfilling both dimensions: “half of it for Hashem and half of it for you.”

However, Rabbi Elazar explains that for the holiday of Shavuos, Rabbi Eliezer agrees—unlike for other *Yomim Tovim*—that “for you” (eating, drinking, etc.) is necessary because “it is the day on which the Torah was given.” In other words, on Shavuos, eating and drinking are integral components of fulfilling the *Yom Tov*’s precepts even according to Rabbi Eliezer.

This conclusion seems entirely counterintuitive, particularly considering the rationale for Shavuos being exceptional, “The day that the Torah was given.” If anything, one would expect that receiving

the Torah aligns with the spiritual dimension of the human experience and would therefore necessitate Divine service exclusively. Why does Rabbi Eliezer conclude that Shavuot always has a requirement of the concept, “For you,” eating and drinking during the Yom Tov?

Additionally, Rashi explains Rabbi Eliezer’s reasoning that on Shavuot, “We should rejoice with food and drink to demonstrate that this day, on which Hashem gave us the Torah, is pleasant and acceptable to us.” However, the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* 28a states that one who vows not to derive benefit from a *shofar* may nevertheless use it to fulfill the *mitzvah* on the basis of the rabbinic principle that “*mitzvos* were not given for our benefit.” How does one reconcile this concept with the sentiment expressed by Rashi that a basic requirement for Shavuot is about indulgence in order to facilitate one’s enjoyment?

A compelling resolution to this question is that *mitzvos* are for our benefit when benefit is intrinsic to the *mitzvah* itself; physical enjoyment is a fundamental component of keeping the *Yom Tov* of Shavuot as the words “for you” demonstrate. The celebration of receiving the Torah at Sinai encompasses all aspects of Divine service, including the physical dimension. *Chazal*

emphasize this concept significantly when they teach that “You shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart... (*Devarim* 6:5) meaning with both your inclinations, the good inclination and the evil inclination (*Brachos* 54a). The latter includes the biological impulses which are necessary for Divine service since the soul is incapable of fulfilling *mitzvos* without the use of the body. Each one of us is a composite of body and soul; both are worthy of celebration and rest since receiving the Torah is about serving Hashem with our entire being.

Additionally, this explanation may provide insight to Rashi’s commentary in the beginning of *Parshas Bechukosai* in which he explains the verse “If you follow My statutes... (*Vayikra* 26:3) to be referring to “toil in Torah learning.” How does the word “statutes” come to represent the concept of toil in Torah learning, which appears to be a separate category? Perhaps, since Torah learning becomes concretized through the *chukim*, these concepts are deemed interrelated to the extent that the words can be used interchangeably.

Perhaps one of the most moving demonstrations of this theme is found in *Megillas Rus*, which is read on Shavuot. Rus, a Moabite, and Naomi, her mother-in-law, were

returning together to Israel territory after the deaths of their husbands. Naomi attempted to dissuade Rus from coming along, considering that neither the journey nor the destination would be in her beloved daughter-in-law's best interest. Nevertheless, Rus persisted with the powerful words, "Wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you lodge,

I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your G-d my G-d" (*Rus* 1:16). Rus perceived Naomi as the embodiment of Torah virtue through concrete, physical acts, and she desired to emulate those values by joining Naomi on the journey toward complete *kedusha* in all dimensions, no matter the obstacles—body directed by soul.

How the Torah was Given

Rabbi Eitan Allen

continued from page 9

לאו אין תלמודו מתקיים בידו.

To summarize, if one makes himself like a *Midbar* such that everyone treads on him, then the Torah will have permanence within him. The *Midbar* teaches us that one must have humility when acquiring and sharing Torah. In fact the greatest possessor of Torah, Moshe Rabbenu, was also the *anav mikol adam*, the most humble of all people.

Lastly, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l offers that the Torah was given in the *Midbar* before we entered our land. This is to teach us that Torah is not exclusively connected to a land, rather it travels with us wherever we

are. We have been able to weather the storms of exile because the Torah has never left us. Starting from the *Midbar*, the Torah has been there every step of the way as we have built *Klal Yisrael*.

So as we joyously enter *Zman Mattan Torahsenu*, let us learn a lesson from this *Medrash*. Let us recall, that the Torah was given במים ובמדבר באש. May we make use of the fire of holiness and warmth that Torah provides, the life-giving water that the Torah is and to recall the *Midbar*, and that we can take the Torah with us wherever we go as long as we remain humble.

Wishing everyone a *Chag Same'ach!*

What in the World are We Thinking ... When We Learn Torah

Rabbi Yosef Posner
Rabbi, Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie
cRc President



Did you ever notice: You can have many of the same thing, but each thing can only be in one place at a time. You can have a hundred dimes, but if you put one into a *pushka*, you have only 99 left. That dime can have 99 copies in your pocket, but it itself can only be in one place at a time.

Fire is different. You can light a candle from another burning candle and now you have two flames instead of one. And the first flame is not any smaller because some of it has transferred to the second candle. (see Rashi on *Bamidbar* 11:17 “What did Moses resemble at that time? A candle placed upon a candelabrum; everyone lights from it, yet its light is not diminished.”)

What about an idea? You can have an idea in your mind and I can have the same idea in my mind. This can be because one of us shared it with the other, or because we both came up with the same idea independently, or for other reasons. Regardless, it is one and the same idea and it would

make no sense to speak about there being “two” of the idea. And if the idea is patented, it would be unlawful for anyone else to use that idea even if they claim they came up with it on their own and therefore it is not the same.

Now let us consider Torah. Torah is Hashem’s Will and Wisdom. It is filled with His ideas. When we learn Torah and understand it, the Torah idea which is in our mind is Hashem’s idea! We are thinking the exact same thing that Hashem is thinking. True, Torah is infinitely deep and we can never fully understand the full depth of Torah. But that little which we do understand, is nothing other than Hashem’s idea filtered down to be able to enter our finite minds.

This is an amazing thing which happens when we learn Torah. Although Hashem declares (*Yeshayahu* 55:8) that “My thoughts are not your thoughts,” when it comes to Torah study, our thoughts are a way of connecting to Hashem’s thoughts! We are actually containing

Hashem's infinite Will and Wisdom inside our little brains.

It gets better. The truth is that Hashem's thoughts are way beyond our ability to grasp. How can a finite mortal entertain in his mind an infinite idea? How often do we attend a *shiur* or a lecture which is just a bit above our level and five minutes in we are totally lost? How much more so that it is impossible for us to understand Hashem's ideas. What a great kindness Hashem does for us that He shrinks down His infinite Wisdom so that it can be understood by us at least to some degree.

It doesn't stop there, either. We know that "Torah is not in Heaven" (See *Baba Metzia* 59b), meaning that we get to determine the *Halacha* of Torah (using the rules and procedures which are given to us in the Torah) and a prophet or a Heavenly Voice cannot overrule that. In other words, after Hashem has made His Torah accessible to even our small minds, He then takes our meager decisions and makes them part of His Torah, declaring with a smile, "My children have triumphed over Me." People get excited to learn with some great scholar as a study partner. We are even impressed when we hear that so-and-so was a *chevrusa* with a great *Rosh Yeshiva*.

Whenever we learn Torah we are a *chevrusa* with Hashem Himself.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* (2:10) that Hashem and His Wisdom are all one. Unlike our wisdom which is a discrete faculty which we possess and there are many other components to a person besides wisdom, Hashem is not a composite, *Chas Veshalom*, and His Wisdom is one with His Self. The Rambam goes on to say that we cannot begin to comprehend this or even how to say it properly because such a thing is totally beyond the realm of created beings such as ourselves. So, without going into how it works, we accept as a given that Hashem and His Wisdom are one. Now, if when we learn Torah, we have Hashem's Wisdom in our brains and in our thoughts, as explained earlier, and Hashem and His Wisdom are one, then on some level we actually have Hashem Himself grasped in our thoughts and in our minds when we learn Torah.

What could give greater joy than having Hashem Himself at one with the thoughts in our mind. What a gift Hashem gives us every year on Shavuot!

(Loosely based on *Tanya*, Chapters 5, 23, 38 and more)

In This Issue:

Eating a Dairy Meal on Shavuos
Rabbi Yona Reiss

How the Torah was Given
Rabbi Eitan Allen

Understanding the Dual Nature of Observing Shavuos
Rabbi Ari Marinelli

What in the World are we Thinking ... When We Learn Torah
Rabbi Yosef Posner



2701 W. Howard Street, Chicago, IL 60645
773.465.3900 | office@crcweb.org | www.crcweb.org