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The Beis Chana

Shavuos Reader

Celebarating Mattan Torah #3332

Shavuos 5780



The Shavuos Reader

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Letter of the Rebbe for Shavuot

Torah is our life

FREE TRANSLATION

By the Grace of Hashem
In the Days of Preparation
5720—200th Anniversary of
the Histalkus-Hilulo of the
Baal Shem Tov, of blessed
memory.

Brooklyn, N.Y.



“To the House of Jacob” - the women “And to the Children of Israel” -
the men, Hashem be with you.

Greeting and Blessing:

The Days of Preparation for the receiving of our Torah call for special,
deep-felt reflection on what the Torah is.

The holy Torah is not a collection of laws for special occasions. It
embraces the totality of the Yid, from his first moment to his last, and
in all the minute aspects of his day-to-day life.

This is the essential meaning of the Torah, Toras Chayyim, the “Law of
Life.”

Furthermore, our sages of blessed memory explain that the Torah
embraces the totality of creation, citing the example of an architect
who, before erecting a building, draws up blueprints and plans,
covering every detail of the structure. So the Creator used the Torah

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as a “blueprint,” as it were, for the Creation, down to the minutest particle in the inanimate material world.

This, indeed, is one of the basic doctrines of General Chassidus as expounded by the Baal Shem Tov, based on his interpretation of Scripture: Forever, O Hashem, Thy words standeth firm in the heavens (*Tehillim 119:89*), and explained at length in the teachings of Chassidus Chabad by the Alter Rebbe, of blessed memory, author of the *Tanya* and *Shulchan Aruch*, especially in his *Shaar Ha-Yichud Veha-Emunah*:



“Everything—in the heavens above and down to the earth below, in all their particulars—exists only by virtue of the “word” of Hashem (“Let there be a firmament,” and the other Divine fiats), which created, creates and vitalizes all things continuously, every instant, without interruption.”

From this follows the next basic doctrine:

Hashgocho Protis - Hashem’s direct knowledge of, and Providence for, all particular things - extends to each and all minute details of the Creation, from individual man, the supreme creature, to the lowest thing in the inanimate world.

From the above there follows yet another corollary, which is likewise basic to the teachings of Chassidus and which was especially emphasized by the Baal Shem Tov, although it is, of course, a law in the *Shulchan Aruch*, namely, that

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It is incumbent upon the Yid to serve Hashem in and with all details and aspects of his life and surroundings, beginning with the study of the Torah and the fulfilment of the 613 Divine precepts, down to the simplest acts and conditions of the daily life, and that

Everything in one's surroundings is a lesson in love of Hashem and fear of Hashem, the primary wellsprings from which the Yid draws the proper inspiration to fulfil the Torah and *Mitzvos*, the positive commandments (*Mitzvos-Asseh*) and prohibitions (*Mitzvos-Lo Taaseh*), permeated with true vitality and fulfilled with perfection".



The concentrated reflection on all that has been mentioned above, reflection with intensity, animation and illumination, especially in these auspicious days, on the eve of *Mattan Torah*, which is also the anniversary of the Histalkus-Hilulo of the Baal Shem Tov, and transforming it into the detailed aspects of the daily life, both in one's personal life as well as in one's surroundings, and in all aspects of the world, according to the dictum - Let thy fountains spread forth outside, whereby the fountains of Chassidus, that is, the Inner Light of the Torah, will overflow and irradiate even the "outside"—the external and most distant details and aspects of the entire Creation—

Will speedily bring the true and complete Geuloh, the Redemption through our righteous *Moshiach*, when the whole Creation will recognize and experience the meaning of I am the L-d, thy Hashem.

With prayerful wishes to receive the Torah with joy and Pnimius (inwardness) and a happy Yom Tov /signed

Divrei Torah

Humble Pride



The Torah was given freely, in an ownerless public place. If it had been given in the land of Israel, the nations of the world would say that they have no portion in it. Anyone who wishes to properly accept it is welcome to do so.

Why was Har Sinai chosen to be the site for the giving of the Torah? The conventional answer is that the choice of Har Sinai was to teach us humility, since Har Sinai was the most humble of all mountains.

If so, why was it not given in a low lying valley? Surely that would have been a stronger lesson in humility?

Hence, we learn that a Yid must be able to distinguish between being proud and being arrogant. Arrogance is distasteful. Being proud of one's roots is a virtue. The Torah therefore, was given on a humble mountain.

In the desert



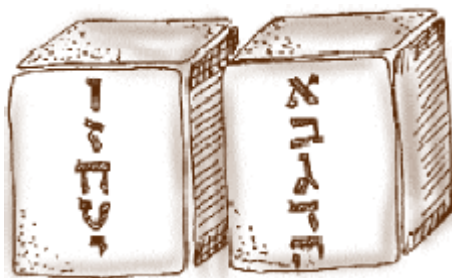
In the desert there are no office buildings or factories. So if you lived in the desert, chances are you wouldn't have a job. There'd be no boss bossing you, and no underlings under you.

In the desert there are no towns or neighbourhoods. No old money, no new money, no social climbers and no social climbed-overs. In the desert there aren't even any department stores or groceries. You'd eat manna from heaven and wear the same pair of shoes for forty years. That is why, say our sages, Hashem gave us the Torah in the desert.

Wouldn't it have been great to stay in the desert?

But as soon as Hashem was sure that we'd gotten the message—that we understood that the Torah is not the product of any particular age, environment or cultural milieu, and that it belongs, absolutely and unequivocally, to each and every one of us—he sent us to the cities and the towns of His world, to its farms and marketplaces, to its universities and office buildings. He told us that now that He's done His part, it's up to us to make His Torah relevant in all these places and in all these contexts.

The Luchos



The Torah comes in two forms: written and engraved.

On the last day of his life, Moshe inscribed the Torah on parchment scrolls. But this written Torah was preceded by an engraved Torah: forty years earlier, at Har Sinai, the Divine law was given to us in the form of Ten Commandments etched by the hand of Hashem in two tablets of stone.

When something is written, the substance of the letters that express it—the ink—remains a separate entity from the substance upon which they have been set—the parchment. On the other hand, letters engraved in stone are forged in it: the words are stone and the stone is words.

By the same token, there is an aspect of Torah that is "inked" on our soul: we understand it, our emotions are roused by it; it becomes our "lifestyle" or even our "personality"; but it remains something additional to ourselves. Yet there is a dimension of Torah that is engraved in our being. There is a dimension of Torah which expresses a bond with Hashem that is of the very essence of the Yiddishe soul.

5 Timely Lessons From Rus



By B. Brackman

Shavuos, the Yom Tov that celebrates the Giving of the Torah, has always been a favourite of mine. We eat scrumptious dairy meals with family and friends, enjoy pleasant weather, listen to the Aseres Hadibros, and discuss how the Torah is relevant to our daily lives.

This year, as I prepared to celebrate Yom Tov in quarantine, I knew that I would have to seek inspiration in order to find meaning and pleasure in this lonely, unusual Shavuos.

I found it in a woman who lived 3,000 years before I was born: Rus of Mo'av, whose life-story is read on Shavuos.

Her story is a statement of enduring faith in the face of unexpected hardship. Rus, the princess of Moav, left a life of luxury in the royal palace and wound up a poverty-stricken widow. Yet, she made every twist of her story into a turn for the better.

1. Rus Didn't Let Her Eyes off the Goal

When Naomi, Rus's mother-in-law, was prepared to return to her home in Bethlehem, she beseeched her widowed daughters-in-law to remain in the comfort of their homes, the royal palaces. There, they would have had the opportunity to remarry and start their lives anew. Orpah hesitated but chose to return, while Rus was determined to follow her mother-in-law, even if it meant struggling and poverty.

Rus was inspired to attain her goal: To live the life of a Jew. And to achieve that goal, she left behind all she had. She abandoned her royal past and followed her mother-in-law Naomi to a foreign land. With the hope of joining with the Jewish people, and with a firm commitment to G-d's laws, she set off confidently on the long road ahead.

Rus famously told Naomi, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried."

Like Rus, I can look beyond the challenges of today and remain focused on the long term. Yes, quarantine is uncomfortable and inconvenient, but I can see the big picture: the precautions we are taking are saving lives.

2. Rus Rose Above Social Isolation and Scarcity

Rus accepted upon herself a life of bitter poverty, and, upon arriving in Bethlehem with her mother-in-law, became the object of gossip instead of the warmly welcomed friend and sister.

Rus and her mother-in-law lived a lonely existence. To keep from starvation, Rus went to collect fallen barley sheaves during the

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harvest. The Torah commands us that an owner of a field is not to cut the corners of his field but to leave them for the poor. Similarly, if one dropped grains while reaping, they were to be left for the needy. Rus and Naomi lived from these meager gleanings and were happy with what they had.

Like Rus, I can be happy even if I cannot get the exact product I am used to finding at the supermarket, and even if my Shavuot table is not surrounded by anyone beyond my immediate family.

3. Rus Articulated Her Gratitude

Even when relegated to collecting leftovers, Rus demonstrated gratitude. When an impressed Boaz instructed his workers to leave extra barley for this modest woman, Rus did not take his largesse for granted. She lay at his feet, seeking his protection, recognizing that he held the keys to her future.

Rus demonstrated gratitude towards Boaz and Naomi even when her world seemed to have turned upside down.

Rus ultimately married Boaz and once again enjoyed a comfortable life. She later became the great-grandmother of King David, greatest king of Israel, whose anniversary of passing is commemorated on Shavuot.

Rus's idea of cultivating a sense of thankfulness and gratitude has been an important lesson for me. Giving thanks and recognizing our blessings increases joy and can lead to a calmer outlook during a stressful time. Thanking our essential workers and recognizing their sacrifice for all of us has been at the forefront of all of our minds.

4. Rus Knew That True Wealth Is Spiritual Richness

Rus's outstanding commitment to moving forward in her spiritual and personal development is a powerful lesson for each of us as we prepare to once again receive the Torah on Shavuot.

Life is a continuous learning experience, and as we keep rising and falling, like Rus, we will recommit to our purpose and shine our unique individual light into the world.

5. Charity Is a Major Focus

The Torah's laws are eternal and the lessons from Rus's kindness are inspiring reminders during the current spread of this pandemic. Charity, kindness and giving back have taken on new meaning and have had a positive, rippling effect.

It has been inspiring to see what so many organizations have done and how they answered the needs of others. I've seen people offer to pick up groceries, run errands, organize online programs, find ways to remotely cheer up friends, celebrate happy occasions and even toast l'chaim over zoom.

Rus's faith and loyalty, coupled with a tremendous inner strength, is a source of inspiration for me. During our current coronavirus hardships or the everyday dips and curves of life's journey, I hope, like Rus, to always be heading to a greater place in my life, to stay positive, to focus on the silver linings, and to plow ahead with joy and content.

Stories

To polish every Yid's



In the 1940's, the Frierdiker Rebbe sent emissaries to visit various Yiddische communities. Their purpose was not to collect funds for the Rebbe's sacred institutions; in fact, these emissaries would refuse even unsolicited donations.

Fund-raising was not the function of these special emissaries; these emissaries had a purely spiritual assignment: to bring Chasidic warmth, with new inspiration and vitality, to the communities they visited.

An elderly Chassid related the following story:

When I lived in Chicago, I was privileged to join in the hearty welcome of the distinguished emissary whom the Frierdiker Rebbe had sent to Chicago.

In the midst of his crowded schedule, the emissary inquired after a certain individual, a Mr. L. He told us that the Rebbe had specifically instructed him to pay a visit to this Mr. L., who happened to come from a long line of distinguished Lubavitcher Chasidim.

However, having arrived in this country when he was a young boy, he gradually became "Americanized" and drifted somewhat from Judaism.

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The Rebbe, therefore, sent his emissary to give him a spiritual "shot in the arm." It turned out that Mr. L. was a prominent businessman, with whom some of us had a nodding acquaintance. This information seemed encouraging to the Rebbe's emissary.

We put through a call to Mr. L.'s office and an appointment was arranged. Several local rabbis, including the rabbi of the Lubavitcher shul where Mr. L. was a dues-paying member, accompanied the emissary to Mr. L.'s house. I was also one of the visiting party.

Mr. L. received his visitors with sincere warmth. An intimate and animated conversation followed, in the course of which the emissary reminisced about his acquaintance with Mr. L.'s grandfather.



Mr. L. warmed up, and he too, spoke nostalgically about his parents' and grandparents' homes, where the Chasidic customs were a daily experience, and where Shabbat and Yom Tov were truly joyous occasions of lasting inspiration.

The mission accomplished, the venerable emissary rose to take leave, whereupon Mr. L. brought out his cheque book, and asked to whom he should make his check payable.

"My dear friend," the emissary told him, "I did not come to solicit financial contributions, and I trust you will not be offended if I absolutely decline to take any money from you."

This obviously puzzled Mr. L. "Surely you did not come all the way from New York in order to pay me a social visit," Mr. L. said.

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"Let me explain it to you," the Rabbi of Mr. L.'s shul replied. You know that a Torah scroll is written in a special way, by a scribe, with a quill and special black ink on special parchment.

"It sometimes happens, especially when the Sefer Torah is not used for a length of time, that a letter fades, and if a letter is missing in the Torah it is no longer 'kosher.' It therefore must be repaired by a scribe.

The Rebbe has taught us that every Yid is a Sefer Torah.

"There are letters and words, which the Yid spells out in his daily conduct — Shabbat, keeping kosher, Yiddishe Marriage Laws, raising children to a life of Torah and



mitzvot — all these are the 'letters' which make up the living Sefer Torah, namely, the Yid. Sometimes it happens that one of these letters becomes faded.

So the Rebbe sends us, the 'scribes', from time to time, to freshen up some of the faded letters, and make each one of us a perfect Sefer Torah."

Moved and grateful, Mr. L. bade us farewell, and we left him to digest the food for thought which was so aptly provided for him. When the emissary returned to New York, he reported to the Rebbe on his activities and included a detailed description of what had transpired at Mr. L.'s home.

The Rebbe said, "It was indeed a very interesting explanation that was given to Mr. L, but the analogy was not true in all respects. It is true that a Yid is a Sefer Torah, but with a difference."

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The Rebbe went on to explain: **"There are two ways of making an inscription. One can write with a quill or pen and ink, or one can engrave like the Ten Commandments which were engraved in stone.**

"What is the difference between these two methods? Writing with a pen, or quill, means applying ink to paper or parchment. The ink and the parchment are separate entities, but they are skillfully joined by the writers. But because they are separate entities, it is possible for the ink to fade, or be erased.

On the other hand, engraving means forming letters and words within the very stone itself; nothing is superimposed upon the material — the material and the letter are one. Such letters cannot be erased, nor can they fade.



"So long as the material exists, the letters are there. However, while no actual fading or erasure is possible in this case, there is a possibility of dust and grime gathering and covering up the engraved letters. If this happens, one must only clear away the dust and grime, and the letters will again be revealed in their original freshness."

The Rebbe concluded:

"A Yid is a Sefer Torah, but not a written one. He is rather like the Ten Commandments — engraved. The Torah and mitzvot are an integral part of the Yiddishe soul; they are engraved in his mind and heart.

"You do not have to `rewrite' a Yid; all you have to do is help him brush away the dust and grime of environmental influences which have temporarily covered up his true self - the 'pintele Yid'.

This is why a Yiddishe heart is always awake and responsive."

The power of a Psak

Told by The Rebbe

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, the famed author of Nodah B'Yhudah, served as the rabbi of Prague from 1754 to 1793.

Once, a group of scholars who wished to contest his rabbinic qualifications presented him with a series of questions in Torah law. These fictitious "cases" were carefully constructed to be as complex and as misleading as possible, so as to ensnare the rabbi in their logical traps and embarrass him with an incorrect ruling.



Rabbi Yechezkel succeeded in resolving all the questions correctly — all, that is, but one. Immediately his detractors pounced on him, showing how his verdict contradicts a certain principle of Torah law.

Said Rabbi Yechezkel: "I am certain that this case is not actually relevant, and that you have invented it in order to embarrass me!"

"How do I know?" the rabbi continued. "Because I know that G-d's Torah is true. You see, whenever a human being is called upon to decide a matter of Torah law, we are faced with a paradox: how can the human mind possibly determine what is G-d's will? The laws of

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Torah are the wisdom and will of G-d and the most basic laws of reality, preceding and superseding even the laws of nature. How is it that the finite and error-prone intellect is authorized to decide such Divine absolutes?

"But the Torah itself instructs that 'the Torah is not in heaven' but has been given to man to study and comprehend; and that whenever a question or issue of Torah law is raised, it is the human being, employing his finite knowledge and judgment, who must render a ruling. In other words, when a person puts aside all considerations of self and totally surrenders his mind to serve the Torah, G-d guarantees that the result would be utterly consistent with His will.



"However," concluded Rabbi Yechezkel, "this 'guarantee' only applies to actual events, when a rabbi is called upon to determine what it is that G-d desires to be done under a given set of circumstances; but not if his personal honor is the only issue at hand. Had you presented me with a relevant question, I know that I would not have erred, since I approached the matter with no interest or motive other than to serve the will of G-d. But since your case was merely a hypothetical question designed to mislead me, my mind was just like every other mind, great and small alike — imperfect and manipulatable."

The fox and the fish

Once, the wicked government [of Rome] decreed that the Jewish people were forbidden to study Torah. Pappus ben Judah saw Rabbi Akiva convening gatherings in public and studying Torah [with them]. Said he to him: “Akiva, are you not afraid of the government?”

Said [Rabbi Akiva] to him: “I’ll give you a parable: A fox was walking along a river and saw fish rushing to and fro. Said he to them: ‘What are you fleeing?’

“Said they to him: ‘The nets that the humans spread for us.’



“Said he to them: ‘Why don’t you come out onto the dry land? We’ll live together, as my ancestors lived with your ancestors.’

“Said they to him: ‘Are you the one of whom it is said that you are the wisest of animals? You’re not wise, but foolish! If, in our environment of life we have cause for fear, how much more so in the environment of our death!’

“The same applies to us. If now, when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is said (Devarim 30:20), ‘For it is your life and the lengthening of your days,’ such is our situation, how much more so if we neglect it . . .”

Based on Gemara Berachot 61b

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Children's section: Dvar Torah.

Please tell me what the Rebbe said.



Just before *Mattan Torah*, all of the *Yidden* gathered around Har Sinai. The mountain was surrounded by fire, and a heavenly cloud settled on top. The entire world came to a halt as the sound of the *shofar* was heard; thunder roared and lightning flashed in the background.

In the *Gemoro* and in the *Medrash*, our Sages tell us more about what happened then. Rabbi Akiva tells us that the *Yidden* could actually “see the thunder and hear the lightning.”

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Why does Rabbi Akiva tell us this?

Many other miracles took place at that time: All the birds stopped chirping precisely at the moment the Torah was given, flowers and fruit-bearing trees sprouted forth from the desert mountain, and most important the Jewish people actually heard *HaShem* tell them the *Aseres Hadibros*. Is Rabbi Akiva just adding another miracle?

No. Rabbi Akiva is teaching us something very important. He is teaching us how a Yid should look at the Torah and the world around him.

We usually see physical things, but not ideas or thoughts. Yet our ears can listen to ideas even deep and holy thoughts about *HaShem*.

The Torah guides a Yid to gaze deeper into the things which appear before his eyes and to look for the things which his ears have heard about. *HaShem* hides His holiness in the things around us. Even though we cannot see it, it is still

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there. It is our job to look deeper, to find that holiness, and to reveal it. Every *mitzvah* which we perform helps us reveal that hidden holiness.

For example, a delicious red apple. The Korean grocer says, “Its colour is so red, its shape is perfect and it tastes delicious!” He sees the apple as a nice,



tasty fruit. But a Yid who makes a *Berachah* on the apple is looking at more than just a fruit. He sees the blessing of *HaShem*, and thanks Him for making the fruit grow.

This is what Rabbi Akiva meant when he said that the Yidden could see what is heard. The Torah makes it possible for us to look deeper and see the holiness in the world around us.

In his own life, Rabbi Akiva set an example of how to look deeper than what our eyes can see. He once accompanied a group of *Chachomim* who passed the site of the *Beis HaMikdash* after it was destroyed. Suddenly, a fox darted

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out from the rubble. Spotting the fox, the sages burst out in tears.

“How terrible! Look what has happened to our holy place!” they cried.

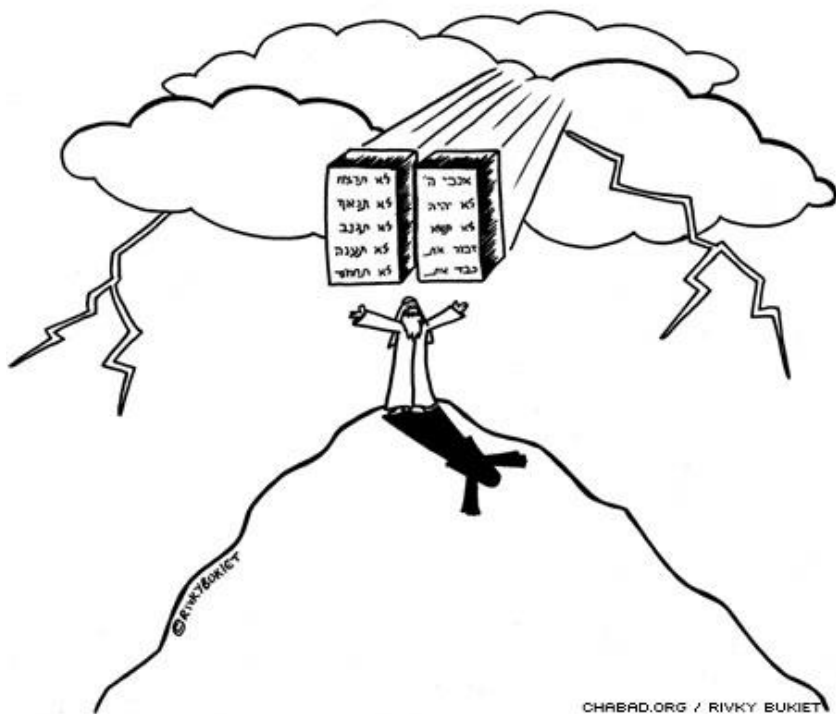
But Rabbi Akiva did not cry; instead the Sages saw him smiling. “How can you possibly rejoice while seeing this destruction?” they asked him in wonder.



“I am happy because I am looking beyond what my eyes see,” replied Rabbi Akiva. “Just as *HaShem* carried out His warnings to destroy the city, He will also fulfill His promise to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. The destroyed *Beis HaMikdash* helps me see the rebuilt city of Yerushalayim and hear the sounds of *geulah* approaching.”

(Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 6, *Parshas Yisro*)

Colouring page for children



This reader is brought to you by: Lubavitch Shul, 115 Stamford Hill, London.
Compiled by: Beis Chana, Jewish Women's Centre. 19 Northfield Road.

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