

R' Avraham Abele Gombiner z"l (author of the important *Halachic* work "*Magen Avraham*"; Poland, died 1682) asks: Why do we say in our prayers on the sixth of *Sivan*, "The time of the Giving of our Torah," when, in fact, the Torah was given on the seventh of *Sivan*?

R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva*) answers: In *Halachah*, "day follows the night." For example, *Shabbat* begins at sunset and consists of a night followed by a day, not the other way around. Moreover, according to *Halachah*, the "daylight" portion of the day begins at dawn. Thus, for example, one can, if necessary, perform the *Mitzvah* of *Lulav* or read *Megillat Esther* beginning at dawn.

However, before the Torah was given, *Bnei Yisrael* were not "Jewish" and were not bound by *Halachah*. For them, the night followed the day, and the day began at sunrise, not dawn.

We read (*Shmot* 19:16), "On the third day when it was morning," *Hashem* came to give the Torah. When did this occur? After dawn, but before sunrise, on the seventh day of *Sivan*. Thus, for *Bnei Yisrael*, it was still the sixth day of *Sivan*, R' Gruenwald explains.

R' Gruenwald adds: Our Sages say that we stay up all night on the night of *Shavuot* because Moshe needed to awaken our ancestors to receive the Torah. How is it conceivable that they "slept-in" when it was time to receive the Torah? Just yesterday, they had said, "*Na'aseh Ve'nishmah*" / "We will do and we will hear." The answer is that, as explained above, it was not yet time, according to *Bnei Yisrael's* calendar, for the Torah to be given. (*Keren L'David Al Mo'adim* p.577)

"Our Father, the merciful Father, who acts mercifully, have mercy upon us, instill in our hearts to understand and to elucidate, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform, and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, attach our hearts to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name, and may we not feel inner shame for all eternity."

(*Birkat Ahavah Rabbah*, the blessing before *Shema*)

R' Binyamin Yehoshua Zilber z"l (1916-2008; an influential *Halachic* authority in Israel) writes: Performing *Mitzvot* and clinging to *Mitzvot* are two separate concepts. In the blessing of *Ahavah Rabbah*, we pray about both: first, about performing the *Mitzvot*, then about clinging to them. Specifically, we pray:

- "Instill in our hearts to understand and to elucidate": First, remove the "blockage" and the foolishness from our hearts.
- "To listen": Next, remove the stubbornness that prevents us from listening to parents and teachers.
- "To learn, to teach" -- for an ignoramus cannot fear sin.
- "To safeguard, to perform . . .": Help us to observe the entire Torah, both the negative commandments ("to safeguard") and the affirmative commandments ("to perform").
- "Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah:" Help us to find the light in the Torah, not just to know what it says, but to know G-d's ways and His Will. (This is necessary because the Torah merely tells us the minimum that is expected of us. Beyond that, we need to understand where it is meant to lead us.)
- Finally, "Attach our hearts to Your commandments, and unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name": Help us to cling to Your *Mitzvot* so that we love You deep inside, not just through external actions.

In *Shemoneh Esrei* on *Shabbat* [and *Yom Tov*], continues R' Zilber, we elaborate on this prayer: "Gladden us with Your salvation, and purify our heart to serve You sincerely. And grant us a heritage . . ." Help us to cling to Your Torah *and Mitzvot*, as long as we do our share first. Then, make this purity of heart our permanent inheritance.

(*She'eilot U'teshuvot Az Nidberu* 14:24)

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“Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Every day, a *Bat Kol* / Heavenly voice emanates from *Har Chorev*, proclaiming and saying, ‘Woe to them, to the people, because of their insult to the Torah.’ For whomever does not occupy himself with the Torah is called, ‘Rebuked’.” (Avot Ch.6)

R’ Chaim of Valozhyn z”l (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes: The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 89b) states that Har Sinai has five names. One of them is “*Har Chorev*,” because from there “*Chorvah*” / “destruction” descended on the idolaters who refused to accept the Torah. Also, “destruction” descends on the Jewish People, G-d forbid, if we do not observe the Torah.

R’ Chaim continues: In our time, many people leave the Torah, claiming that they are too busy earning a living to study and observe the Torah. However, that was the argument of the gentiles who refused to accept the Torah: “I earn my living by murdering!” “I earn my living by stealing!” We, in contrast, said in unison, “*Na’aseh Ve’nishmah*” / “We will do and we will listen” -- no questions asked! It follows, writes R’ Chaim, that we accepted the Torah unconditionally, even if it seems to impinge on our livelihoods.

(*Ruach Chaim*)

A related thought from the same work:

“Ten miracles occurred for our ancestors in the *Bet Hamikdash*: ... The rains did not extinguish the fire on the altar.” (Avot Ch.5)

R’ Chaim of Valozhyn writes: This miracle is meant to teach us that a person should never give in to forces that try to distract him from serving *Hashem*, just as the fire on the altar never “let” the rain interrupt it from performing its duty. In particular, “rain” alludes to sustenance, while Torah is referred to as “fire” (see *Devarim* 33:2; *Yirmiyah* 23:29). If a person concentrates when he studies Torah, distractions will not succeed in interrupting him.

Of course, continues R’ Chaim, earning a living is not only necessary -- it is a *Mitzvah* to support one’s children (see *Ketubot* 50a). Nevertheless, one must make sure that he earns his living consistent with his Torah obligations, especially the obligation to be honest and the obligation to make time for Torah study.

Another related thought:

R’ Yosef Yozel Horowitz z”l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) writes: Many mistakenly think that Torah study “steals” their lives. They base this on the *Gemara*’s teaching (*Berachot* 63b): “The Torah can only be acquired by one who kills himself over it.” They do not understand that the *Gemara* is not referring to sustaining a lifestyle of deprivation. Rather, the *Gemara* is teaching the degree of commitment that a person must be willing to make. Afterwards, however, “Its ways are ways of pleasantness” (*Mishlei* 3:17).

(*Madregat Ha’adam: Ma’amar Chesbon Ha’tzeddek* Ch.9)

“You shall make the festival of *Shavuot* for *Hashem*, your *Elokim* ...

“You shall rejoice before *Hashem*, your *Elokim* -- you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levite who is in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are among you -- in the place that *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will choose to rest His Name.

“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall guard and perform these decrees.” (Devarim 16:10-12 – from the Torah reading for the second day of *Shavuot*)

R’ Nosson Lewin z”l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) writes: In connection with *Pesach*, we speak of the “Four Expressions of Redemption,” and we drink four cups of wine to recall them. In connection with *Shavuot*, also, we find four expressions in the verses above. They are:

- “ועשית” / “You shall make the festival of *Shavuot*”;
- “ושמחת” / “You shall rejoice before *Hashem*”;
- “וזכרת” / “You shall remember”; and
- “ושמרת” / “You shall guard.”

Granted, we do not drink four cups of wine to recall these expressions. Nevertheless, writes R’ Lewin, they do teach us important principles.

“ועשית” / “You shall make [literally, ‘do’] the festival of *Shavuot*”: There are those who claim that it is not necessary to perform *Mitzvot*; it is sufficient to be a Jew in one’s heart. That is not the Torah’s perspective. Rather, *Mitzvot* are meant to be “done.” Of course, our thoughts are important too. Indeed, a complete *Mitzvah* consists of an action -- the *Mitzvah*’s “body,” so-to-speak -- and a thought -- the *Mitzvah*’s “soul.” The reason G-d put us in a physical world, however, is to perform physical actions.

“ושמחת” / “You shall rejoice before *Hashem*”: The emphasis here is on “before *Hashem*.” Unlike frivolity, joy “before *Hashem*” includes a measure of trepidation, as we read (*Tehilim* 2:11), “Rejoice with trembling.” How is this joy expressed? The verse answers: By sharing our joy with those who are in need, “the Levite who is in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are among you.”

“וזכרת” / “You shall remember”: The foundation of our faith is remembrance; specifically, remembering the miracles and acts of kindness that *Hashem* has performed for our ancestors and for us. This remembrance leads to thanksgiving. How do we express our gratitude? By keeping the *Mitzvot* in their minutest details. Indeed, that is all *Hashem* asks of us.

“ושמרת” / “You shall guard”: Be on guard not to do anything against G-d’s Will. Remember! Actions that hurt other people are also contrary to His Will. (Bet Nadiv p.99)