

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT YITRO

DVAR TORAH: KEEPING MATAN TORAH ALIVE

The Giving of the Torah, *Matan Torah*, was a massive and awesome national experience. It involved thunder and lightning, Divine revelation to the entire people of Israel. But, like many great experiences, there was a danger of losing the power of that experience, causing the effects of the experience to dissipate.

The Torah counters this problem in five different ways:

1. Once every seven years we are commanded to recreate the Giving of the Torah through the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. All of Israel would gather together in the courtyard of the Temple in Jerusalem on Chol Hamoed Sukkot immediately after the Shemittah year, and the king would read from the *sefer Torah* to the entire nation. This is like the day of Matan Torah, that the Torah calls **יום הקהל**, the day of the gathering (Devarim 10:4).
2. Once every year we keep the experience of Matan Torah alive by celebrating Shavuot, which we refer to as *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of our Torah.
3. Several times each week we read the Torah in public, *kriat ha-Torah*. This, Rav Yosef Solveitchik ztl develops (Uvikashtem Misham pp. 227-228), is a mini-Matan Torah experience. This is how he explains the Maharam of Rotenberg's approach, that we should stand during the reading of the Torah.

All of these are periodic re-creations, but God gave us two ways of keeping Matan Torah alive permanently.

4. The Ramban teaches us that God took the Divine presence on Mount Sinai and put it on a constant low flame in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, and later in the Beit Hamikdash, the Temple in Jerusalem. The Divine presence would permanently rest in the center of the camp of Israel, and later in the land of Israel. Visiting the Beit Hamikdash meant revisiting Mount Sinai.
5. Perhaps the most powerful way of keeping the Matan Torah experience alive is through Talmud Torah. We begin every morning with *Birkot Hatorah*, the blessings over Torah. The last blessing praises God who chose the people of Israel and gave them His Torah – **וְנָתַן לָנוּ אֶת תּוֹרָתוֹ** – in the past tense. But the closing of the bracha is in the present tense – **נִתַּן הַתּוֹרָה** – the one who gives the Torah! The revelation on Mount Sinai was not a one-time peak experience; Hashem continues to reveal Himself to everyone who learns His Torah.

Says Rabbi Chalafta ben Dosa (Pirkei Avot 3:6): When 10 sit together and learn Torah the Shechinah is among them. He goes on to show that the Divine Presence also rests on 5, 3, 2, and even one who learns Torah. One of the goals of the giving of the Torah, says Moshe to the people, is that we should have fear and awe of God and not sin (Shemot 20:17). Hashem gave us the opportunity to receive this *yirat Shamayim* through **learning** Torah – as the Gemara says (Kedushin 30b) God created the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, but He also created its antidote, the Torah.

May we all merit learning Torah in a way that we can experience the Divine Presence as it was revealed at Mount Sinai.

SOURCE GUIDE:

We experienced the giving of the Torah with many of our faculties. We saw fire, clouds, smoke, and lightning; we heard thunder and the sound of the shofar and felt their trembling. What about smell?

The Fragrance of Mount Sinai

1. Shabbat 88b Rabbi Yehoshua son of Levi said: What is meant by the verse, "His cheeks are like a row of spice plants" (Shir Hashirim 5:13). With every statement [of the Aseret Hadibrot] that came out of the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the entire world was full of spices.	שבת פח: ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב "לחייך כערוגת הבושם"? כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא מפיו הקדוש ברוך הוא נתמלא כל העולם כולו בשמים.
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The Shem Mishmuel asks why the giving of the Torah was accompanied by fragrance, and introduces his answer with an observation by Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov ztl, the author of the book Bnei Yissas'char.

2. Shem Mishmuel Bamidbar 5671 This can be understood through what is written in the book Bnei Yissas'char, that all of man's senses (except for one) participated in the sin of Adam: the sense of sight, as it says, "The woman saw"; the sense of hearing, for she listened to the words of the snake; the sense of touch, [as it says,] "She took"; and the sense of taste, for food is pleasant to the palate. But the sense of smell did not participate in the sin and was not flawed.	שם משמואל פרשת במדבר שנת תרע"א הענין יובן עפ"י מה שכתוב בספר בני יששכר דכל החושים שבאדם נשתתפו בחטא אדה"ר, חוש הראי' שנאמר "ותרא האשה", חוש השמיעה ששמעה לדברי הנחש, חוש המישוש "ותקח", חוש הטעם שחיך אוכל יטעם, חוץ מחוש הריח שלא נשתתף בחטא ולא נתפגם, עכת"ד.
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With the giving of the Torah will come a reversal of the sin of Adam Harishon, repairing the world's flaws through Torah:

3. Shem Mishmuel Bamidbar 5671 Based on this we can say that the receiving the Torah –referred to as the Tree of Life, the opposite of the Tree of Knowledge – fixed the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.	שם משמואל פרשת במדבר שנת תרע"א בוזה יש לומר דבקבלת התורה שהיא עץ החיים, היפוך עץ הדעת טו"ר, שהי' תיקון על חטא עץ הדעת.
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Were it not for the sin of the Golden Calf, the process of world recovery would have already been accomplished. But even after that sin, the power of Torah is still the key to recovering from the sin of Adam Harishon. However, the function of Matan Torah as a repair for the sin of Adam necessitated fragrance:

4. Shem Mishmuel Bamidbar 5671 The fixing of the sin had to come about through a sense that was not flawed through the sin, the sense of smell. From there the <i>tikun</i> was able to spread to the rest of the senses that were flawed.	שם משמואל פרשת במדבר שנת תרע"א ... היה צריך להיות בחוש שלא נתפגם שהוא חוש הריח, וממנו מתפשט התיקון ליתר החושים שנתפגמו.
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The world's healing can begin from a place that was never sick. Because smell was never affected by the sin that brought down the world, from there the world's recovery could begin. So fragrances accompanied each of the ten Divine statements at the giving of the Torah, the world's tikun.

Repairing Our Selves

This leaves us with a personal lesson that is both consoling and demanding. It is consoling, because the Bnei Yissas'char's teaching informs us that there is something within us that was and is never flawed by sin, and the Shem Mishmuel shows how God utilized this to begin the world's recovery at Mount Sinai. But this approach demands that in order to heal ourselves we must access our unflawed selves. That is not so simple:

<p>5. Shem Mishmuel Bamidbar 5671 This is a lesson for a person who wants to repair himself – that he must begin from an aspect of himself that was not flawed. This is the innermost point of the heart that is referred to as “the virgin that was never known by a man.” Through great effort one can access that point. When one touches the depths of his heart through his service of Hashem and Torah, the repair can then spread to the rest of his limbs. But this is not the case for one who does not reach deep into his heart, but only to the limbs that have become flawed. If so, how can he begin the tikun?</p>	<p>שם משמואל במדבר שנת תרע"א וזה לימוד להאדם הבא להתקן שצריך להתחיל מאבר שלא נתפגם, והוא הנקודה הפנימית שבלב שנקראת 'בתולה ואיש לא ידעה, והיינו שע"י יגיעה רבה באים לנקודה ההיא, וכשהוא נוגע בעבודתו ותורתו בעומק הלב, ממנו מתפשט התיקון על כל האברים, משא"כ תיקון בלתי בא בעומק הלב רק מהאברים שכבר נתפגמו איך יתחיל התיקון.</p>
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The Shem Mishmuel (both in 5681 and 5678) utilizes the same comment by the Bnei Yissas'char to explain the opening of Yitzchak's blessing of Yaakov, “See how the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field blessed by God” (Bereishit 27:27). But there he quotes Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha ztl, whose message for personal recovery and repair is slightly different:

<p>6. Shem Mishmuel Toldot 5681 From here we draw a lesson for a person who wants to repair himself. The proper approach is to begin with an aspect of himself that was not flawed, and that is the Torah. That is, he should totally immerse himself and all his thoughts in the Torah. This is based on what the Rebbe Reb Bunim of blessed memory of Peshis'cha said – that everything was flawed with the destruction of the Temple except for the Torah. This is what is meant by “The Torah of Hashem is perfect” (Tehillim 19:8) – it is forever perfect, unflawed.</p>	<p>ספר שם משמואל תולדות - שנת תרפ"א ומכאן לימוד לאדם הבא לתקן את עצמו העצה להתחיל בבחינה שלא נפגעה והיא התורה, היינו להטמין את עצמו ואת כל רעיונותיו בתורה, עפ"מ שהגיד כ"ק הרבי ר"ב זצלה"ה מפרשיסחא שהכל נפגם בחורבן הבית חוץ מן התורה, וזהו תורת ה' תמימה שהיא לעולם תמימה בלי פגם.</p>
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Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai Heals Teveriah

The approach developed here – that repair can begin in a place that was never flawed – might explain one segment of the aggadta about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Shabbat 34a. After Rabbi Shimon and his son's skin is cured by the hot baths in Teveria, they want to give back to Teveria and inquire what is needed. The residents tell them that the marketplace is full of unmarked graves, and Kohanim cannot visit the marketplace. Can Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai heal the marketplace?

<p>7. Shabbat 34a He said, “Is there someone who knows a place where purity can be established?” A certain elder said, “Here Ben Zakai cut lupines of terumah.” He (Rabbi Shimon) did likewise.</p>	<p>שבת לד. אמר, “איכא איניש דידע דאיתחזק הכא טהרה?” אמר ליה ההוא סבא: כאן קיצץ בן זכאי תורמסי תרומה. עבד איהו נמי הכי.</p>
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That place became Rabbi Shimon's starting point to mystically determine which parts of the marketplace were pure and which impure, marking the graves so Kohanim could walk there. Rabbi Shimon began the purification process from a place of purity, using the same approach we found Hashem using at a cosmic level and the Shem Mishmuel applying to repairing our personal lives.

THE HUMBLE MOUNTAIN BY RABBI YISROEL CHOLEVA

The Kotzker Rebbe asks a very simple question on a very well-known Midrash. The Gemara teaches us (Sotah 5a) that when Hashem was choosing where to give the Torah, He chose Mt. Sinai, whose defining characteristic was that it was a lowly mountain, lacking in stature and prominence. The commentaries explain, based on this Gemara, that we should emulate Hashem and choose humility over arrogance. The Kotzker Rebbe asks the following question: If Hashem wanted to send a message that we should be humble and lowly, wouldn't it have made more sense for the Torah to be given in a deep valley? Would it not have been more appropriate to have received the Torah in the Grand Canyon, or next to the Dead Sea, the lowest point on Earth? What necessitated the giving of the Torah on a mountain at all?

In truth, Hashem is teaching us what kind of humility he expects from us. For one who is by objective standards lowly and plain, humility is no demonstration of character refinement but rather an accurate picture of who they are. Hashem does not want us to be ordinary people, says the Kotzker Rebbe, He wants us to be great! We should be mountains, great people with great aspirations doing tremendous deeds and mitzvos which positively change the world around us. Yet at the same time, with all of that greatness, we are to take to heart the lesson of humility. Humility means being magnificent without parading it in everyone's faces. The Jewish people should be a light to the nations, but a light which illuminates the surroundings, not one that is focused on the subject and blinds them. Mt. Sinai teaches us that we should all, as individuals and as a community, be rising stars, but to act modestly, not to show off or brag, but to be humble and deferent towards others. This is why the Torah was given on a mountain, albeit a lowly mountain.

The same Gemara states that a Torah scholar is permitted a certain degree of arrogance, an eighth of an eighth. What is the source of this strange number? Our Sages teach us that when Hashem was choosing which mountain to give the Torah on, Mt. Tavor pleaded with Hashem to be given the honor, as Mt. Tavor was a very high mountain. What is the comparison between Mt. Tavor and Mt. Sinai? The Gemara in Bava Basra 73b states that Mt. Tavor was 32000 cubits in height, whereas the Midrash says that Mt. Sinai was 500 cubits in height; the ratio – 1 to 64.

Rabbi Yonason Eibeshitz in his Yaaros Devash helps us to practically understand what it means to have the haughtiness of only 1/64. He writes that since Psalm 119 has 176 verses, eight verses beginning with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the phrase, “an eighth of an eighth” tells us to look at the eighth letter of the psalm that is composed in eighths. This takes us to the letter Ches. One of the verses of Psalm 119 that begins with Ches is verse 63: “I am a friend of all those that fear You, and of them that observe Your precepts.” The Yaaros Devash explains the Gemara's message. The Torah scholar must maintain open and friendly relationships with all those who serve Hashem, even if they don't do so in the same way or at the same level as he does. Whereas he may be tempted to think of himself as greater than those who are lacking in Torah, as long as they are among those that fear Hashem, he should be a “companion” to them. This is the humility that the Hashem is asking of us. We should strive in our daily lives to connect to other Jews. While we may have many differences with them, we are all connected by the unifying desire to fear Hashem and serve Him to the best of our ability, each of us in our unique way.

This issue is dedicated in memory of
Yitzchak ben Dovid Berel ז"ר

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com

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