



Parshat Behar 5775
Shabbat Shalom Weekly by Rabbi Kalman Packouz

“The man who can drive himself further once the effort gets painful is the man who will win.”

– Roger Bannister

GOOD MORNING! Saturday evening, May 23rd, begins the two day holiday of Shavuot (or Shavuos in the Ashkenazic pronunciation). (Yizkor is on Monday, May 25th.) It is the anniversary and celebration of the giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai to the Jewish people 3,326 years ago. It is a time of rededication and commitment to learning Torah.

Q & A: What is Shavuot and How is it Celebrated?

The Torah calls Shavuot the "Festival of Weeks" (Numbers 28:26). The very word "Shavuot" is Hebrew for "weeks"; it refers to the seven weeks that one counts from the second day of Passover (when the Omer [barley] offering is brought) until the holiday of Shavuot. It is one of the three Regalim, holidays, (Pesach and Succot are the other two) where every man in the land of Israel was commanded to come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival when the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, stood in Jerusalem.

Torah is the life blood of the Jewish people. Our enemies have always known that when we Jews stop learning Torah, our assimilation is inevitable. Without knowledge there is no commitment. One cannot love what he does not know. A person cannot do or understand what he has never learned.

A Jew is commanded to learn Torah day and night and to teach it to his children. If a Jew wants his family to be Jewish and his children to marry other Jews, then he must integrate a Torah study program into his life and implement the teachings into his home and his being. One can tell his children anything, but only if they see their parents learning and doing mitzvot, will they inherit the love for being Jewish. Remember: a parent only owes his child three things -- example, example, example.

How can we utilize this opportunity to grow and strengthen our self-identity as Jews? Just as a baby crawls, then toddles and then walks, likewise with the mitzvot (commandments). A person should undertake one more mitzvah, do it well and then build on it. For some mitzvot that you might enjoy taking on...

A Few Suggestions

1. Read the Torah! The Almighty gave it to you as a gift. It is the instruction book for living -- how to be happy, choose the right spouse, make your marriage work, raise your children with values, get more joy out of life. I highly recommend the Artscroll Stone Chumash (Five Books of Moses)
2. Attend a Torah class or buy a copy of Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) and read one page a day. It contains concentrated wisdom about life!



3. Make sure you have a Kosher mezuzah scroll on at least your front door. (A Jewish home should have mezuzot on all doorposts except for the bathrooms). Learn the deep, inner-meaning of mezuzah and reflect on it when you look at the mezuzah. *To Be a Jew* by Rabbi Hayim Donin nicely explains a lot of things.

4. Pick one non-kosher food item that you won't eat -- just because you're Jewish.

5. Say the Shema and its three following paragraphs at least once a day. Learn what the words mean and the ideas included. It will change your outlook and attitudes. Artscroll publishes a book on the Shema -- or look at the commentary in the Artscroll Siddur. Lisa Aiken's book, *Hidden Beauty of the Shema*, is spectacular!

6. Do something to make Shabbat special -- light two candles with the blessing before sundown, have a Shabbat Friday night family dinner and make Kiddush and HaMotzei (the prayer before eating the Challahs -- the special loaves of bread). You might want to buy *Friday Night and Beyond* by Lori Palatnik which is a hands-on guide for the novice wanting to enjoy Shabbat.

The Talmud says, "All beginnings are difficult."

On Shavuot there is a custom to stay up all night learning Torah. Virtually every synagogue and yeshiva have scheduled learning throughout the night ending with the praying of Shacharit, the morning service. The reason: the morning the Jewish people were to receive the Torah on Mt. Sinai, they overslept. We now can rectify the tendency to give in to our desires by demonstrating our resolve through learning the whole night. It is a meaningful experience to share with your children. It would be wonderful if you could find a synagogue, JCC or yeshiva with a program that night; at very minimum, how about reading the story of the giving of the Torah to your family (Exodus 19:10 - 20:23).

Torah Portion of the Week

In the second year of travel in the desert, Moshe and Aharon were commanded by the Almighty to count all male Israelites between 20 and 60. There were 603,550 available for military service. The tribe of Levi was exempt because of their special duties as religious leaders. (It is probably from here that countries give divinity deferments to clergy and divinity students.)

The twelve tribes were directed regarding the formation (three tribes were on each side of the Portable Sanctuary) in which they were to camp and travel.

The 22,300 Levites were commanded in the Sanctuary service. The family of Gershon was to transport the coverings of the Sanctuary. The family of Kehos carried the Ark, Table, Menorah and Altars. The family of Merari transported the boards, pillars, bolts and sockets.

Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin

The Torah states:

"And the Almighty spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai" (Numbers 1:1).



Why does the Torah specify "the wilderness" of the Sinai desert? It would have been sufficient to say "in the Sinai desert"; everyone knows that deserts are wildernesses.

The Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah comments on this verse, "Whoever does not make himself open and free like a wilderness will not be able to acquire wisdom and Torah". This refers to having the trait of humility which allows a person to learn from everyone and to teach everyone.

An arrogant person will only be willing to learn from someone he feels is befitting his honor. A humble person is only concerned with gaining Torah knowledge and will be grateful to learn new ideas even from one who has less overall knowledge than himself.

The Midrash teaches that the Torah was given on Mt. Sinai because Mt. Sinai was the lowest of all the mountains. This symbolizes that if a person wants to receive wisdom he must be humble. If he is full of himself there is little room for anything else.

Shabbat Shalom!

