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# The Voice of Orthodox Washington This Shavuos

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This Shavuos, we're not just remembering—we're renewing.

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We didn't just stand at Sinai. We still do—together.

*Alex Gross*

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# Harbinger of Immortality



**RABBI AARON LOPIANSKY,**  
ROSH YESHIVA, YESHIVA OF GREATER  
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The three *regalim* (pilgrimage festivals) — Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos — each mark an important and seminal event in the formation of *Klal Yisrael*. Not only do they each commemorate a past event, but they each reawaken and bring to the fore a national characteristic that is somehow associated with those historical events. Thus, our capacity for *geulah* is heightened on Pesach; our bond with Torah is strengthened on Shavuos; and we have an unrivaled opportunity to grow in *emunah* and *bitachon* (faith and trust in G-d) on Sukkos.

Our sacred literature discusses more traits and other phenomena in connection with these festivals, each one echoing yet another aspect of the original core event that served to bring about the *yom tov*. Many *sefarim*, for example, draw parallels between the three festivals and the patriarchs, and the pillars of Divine service they represent. They associate Pesach with Avraham and *gemilus chasadim*, Sukkos with Yitzchak and *avodah* and *tefillah*, and Shavuos with Yaakov and Torah. Let us examine another set of three concepts that find their expression in the *yamim tovim*, with a special emphasis on the festival of Shavuos.

Many chassidic *sefarim* dwell on a concept mentioned in *Chazal* called “*ashan*,” an acronym for *olam*, space; *shanah*, time; and *nefesh*, being or essence. These represent three basic dimensions of existence by which anything in the world can be described. Let us clarify this concept and its application.

## I. Transcending Mortal Limitations

The Creator is boundless, limitless, timeless; in short, infinite. We refer to Him as “*Ein Sof*” (without limit). There is no place without Him. He is eternal and has always existed, and all else that exists is contained within His existence. By contrast, whatever has been created is limited and finite, and it is through its limitations that it is defined. For example, by tracing the boundaries of a picture or an object, we describe the object. Thus, a line drawing or a picture of an

object is essentially a representation of its boundaries or physical limits.

But there are different kinds of “boundaries,” other definitions to employ in delineating different aspects of creation. Let us examine three basic dimensions of creation, beginning with the one just described:

- **Place or space:** Our most elementary concept of boundary and definition is the physical space that something occupies. Describe to me the length, width, height, and depth of an object, its contours and topography, as well as its coordinate position in the universe, and I have before me a clearly delineated physical reality. It is axiomatic to us that no two objects can exist in the same place, so by delineating the space occupied, we know the object contained within the space. Thus we have *olam* — a framework of creation known as space or place.
- **Time:** Creations cannot be described exclusively in terms of space or place. Two objects can occupy an identical spot at different times. Therefore, we need a different coordinate — time — to define things that exist. Everything that is non-Divine — created, that is — is bound by the limits of time: it started at a specific time, lasts for a period of time, and at some time will cease to exist. Time, then, is our second framework of coordinates for creation, known as *shanah*.
- **Soul:** This is a more elusive, yet most critical definition of a “creature,” as contrasted to its Creator. The *neshamah* is not a physical entity and consequently does not occupy space. The *neshamah* of a Jew, as a “*cheilek Eloki mima’al*” (portion of G-d from Above, so to speak) is virtually eternal, at least from our perspective. How, then, do we define one *neshamah* and distinguish it

from other *neshamos*? The answer is that each *neshamah* is endowed with *bechirah* (free will to choose for itself), which distinguishes it, at least in its own understanding, from G-d. A person might be aware intellectually of the fact that he is a “portion of G-d,” but emotionally and mentally he feels as if he is a separate being, capable of acting independently of Divine dictate. Thus, he is defined by his *bechirah* as a creature limited and finite, rather than part of the Infinite Divine. It is this consciousness of self that separates, defines, and distinguishes one *neshamah* from another. While we are told that *Klal Yisrael* is in actuality one all-embracing, all-inclusive *neshamah* — elements of a great unity — our feelings are otherwise. “I” am “I” and “you” are “you.” The Ba’al HaTanya (ch. 32) explains that “Love your neighbor as yourself” is not fulfilled simply by drawing closer to a fellow Jew, but through the realization that all of *Klal Yisrael* is one. Yet one need not go to great lengths in describing the difficulty encountered in incorporating this concept into one’s emotional makeup. Thus we have an additional boundary that separates and defines different parts of creation. It is metaphysical and subtle rather than overt and concrete, but it is no less real. It is a boundary that contains man, separating him from his Creator, dividing him from his fellow man; it is the element of *bechirah*, that consciousness and awareness that one is an independent being, the dimension called *nefesh*. These three dimensions, then, represent limitations, barriers separating finite man from the spiritual absolute. Three times a year, however, we are privileged to have our tethers loosened, and for a brief instant we have the singular good fortune of

overcoming these barriers to some degree — to catch a glimpse of that which is beyond, giving us the means to transcend the limitations of *olam*, *shanah*, and *nefesh*.

## II. Sukkos: Beyond Space

Sukkos represents man’s mastery over place. The *mitzvah* of *sukkah* itself involves leaving one’s regular place of dwelling for a temporary hut. On a deeper level, the *sukkah* represents Israel’s forty-year journey through the desert, an experience that transcended the conventional limitations of place. There are other examples where the events of Sukkos show transcendence over place:

- The desert itself represents an area beyond the specifics of place. It is not inhabitable and cannot support people. Rather, people support themselves in a desert in spite of where they are.
- The Gemara (*Eiruv* 55b), in a discussion of the requirements for gaining the status of residency — usually a matter of thirty days — says that although nomads have no permanency in any locale, members of the “generation of the desert,” following the Exodus, were considered permanent residents wherever they happened to be. This is because they traveled and rested in accordance with G-d’s command. Rav Chaim Shmulevitz, *zt”l*, explained this with a parable: A child in the arms of a mother who has flown from Los Angeles to New York does not feel as though he has traveled across the continent. He was in his mother’s arms from the outset of the journey until its conclusion. He senses no change in location. Only his mother feels the toll of having traveled. The child relates to his mother, not to the places she passes through.
- The pillar of cloud moved ahead of the Jews in the desert, smoothing out the way ahead of them, obliterating the specific characteristics and individual features of each place. All places of sojourn, then, were “beyond place.”
- Mount Sinai did not remain holy after the giving of the Torah. Perhaps this was because the generations of the desert were above “place,” and thus did not leave an imprint on any place.

## III. Pesach: Release from the Shackles of Time

Pesach preparations and rituals focus on getting rid of *chametz* and eating matzah. *Chametz* is a product of the passing of time — when dough of grain meal is left lying around for a sufficiently long period of time, the leavening process sets in. On the symbolic level, this represents the workings

of the *yetzer hara*, man’s evil inclination, which tends to become activated whenever a person delays purposeful action. By limiting our diet to matzah, as opposed to *chametz*, we remove from ourselves the effects of time.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner, *zt”l*, explains that the concept of *zerizus* (alacrity) in the Pesach preparations and practices is not meant to be understood merely in the conventional sense. Usually, *zerizus* is contrasted with *atzlus* (slothfulness), but on Pesach it refers to transcending the effects of time in our worship of G-d. There are many examples of this in Pesach:

- The exile in Egypt was decreed to be of four hundred years’ duration. Yet Hashem began the count toward the redemption from an earlier starting point, and the Jewish people left Egypt in half the time decreed — after only 210 years.
- The *mitzvah* of *kiddush hachodesh* (the *beis din*’s jurisdiction over declaring the start of each month in accordance with its sighting of the New Moon) was given in Egypt. Jurisdiction over the calendar is thus completely in the hands of man. But that is not all. Even the physical effects of time, such as levels of maturity, are often determined by the passage of discreet units of time, and these in turn are controlled by the declarations of the terrestrial *beis din*. With the redemption from Egypt, man became master over time instead of its subject.

## IV. Shavuos: A Light of Immortality

The soul is not encumbered by the physical limitations of space and time; nonetheless, it also seems to come to an end. After a person’s earthly existence is over, his soul returns to his Creator, terminating its existence from our perspective. True, the soul does not disintegrate or vanish, but its capacity for initiative and accomplishment is gone. Most important, its gift of *bechirah* is gone and to a great degree has become part of the great Unity.

For this, too, there is rectification: *techiyas hameisim* (resurrection of the dead), when each soul will be reunited with its physical self as a free-standing individual; but instead of serving as a barrier to spirituality, the body will be illuminated by the soul, extending beyond the limitations of life as we know it, serving as a vehicle for reaching up toward the *Ein Sof*. In *Derech Hashem*, Rabbi

Moshe Chaim Luzzato elaborates on the deep, paradoxical question of how, after *techiyas hameisim*, one will regain a sense of self, but on the other hand, one will achieve total harmony and complete unity with G-d. With our present limited capacities, we cannot comprehend such a state.

The Torah is the agent through which *techiyas hameisim* will be effected, as the Gemara says, “The dew of Torah revives a person.” Indeed, this is alluded to in *Tehillim* 19:9 (from the chapter read on Shavuos) that describes Torah as “*meshivas nefesh* — restorer of life.” Other examples:

- Rav Hutner once explained that from the fact that a *talmid chacham* who has forgotten his studies is still respected as a *talmid chacham*, we see that Torah leaves an indelible impression on that which once contained it long after the receptacle appears to have been emptied of its contents. Torah so permeates the soul of the person who studies it that even after its wisdom has been forgotten on the conscious level, evading any semblance of having been retained, it is nonetheless present as part of the person’s essence. One might say that Torah’s eternity transcends the ephemeral nature of the vessel that holds it. The Gemara (*Menachos* 99a) learns this from the placement of the broken *luchos* alongside the complete ones in the Holy Ark, demonstrating that even after the first tablets were broken, the Torah that impressed itself on them was still present. By the same token, the Torah absorbed by a person is also indestructible.
- *Chazal* tell us that upon hearing each of the first two of the Ten Commandments, the soul of every Jew in *Klal Yisrael* left him, only to be restored to him again. From that time onward, the soul is no longer an entity separate from the Torah but is melded with it. At that moment, the command of “*Na’aseh adam* — Let us make a man,” as the force that animates man, was supplanted by “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha* — I am the Lord, your G-d,” and Torah became the inner







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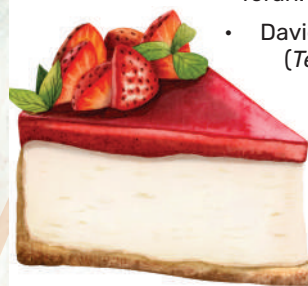


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## SHAVUOS

essence of the Jewish soul. Thus, Torah is the very dew of life and serves as its means of resurrection. The Talmud (*Shevuos* 34a) teaches that the soul of each and every member of Klal Yisrael was present at the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It could not have been otherwise, for Torah is not an additive to *nishmas Yisrael*; it is its essence.

- We know that Moshe Rabbeinu, the giver of the Torah, died on 7 Adar, but his place of burial is hidden from us, as if to indicate that in some ways he is not gone. The *Zohar* explains that Moshe's spirit retains a presence in all generations, so as to guide and teach the Jews. While his body had to leave the world, as the giver of Torah and paradigm of Torah knowledge, he gained an immortality of spirit possible only through the Torah.



- David HaMelech, who died on Shavuos (*Tehillim* 73:5, *Yalkut Shimon*), is destined to usher in the era of *techiyas hameisim*.<sup>\*</sup> His own demise is actually related to the yom tov of Shavuos. According to *Chazal* (*Berachos* 3b), David never sank into deep slumber. For sleep is a taste of death, and David was not sullied by death or its associate experiences. Indeed, we declare,

לארשי רלמ דוד מייקו יח "David, king of Israel, lives!" It is most appropriate, then, that on the night of Shavuos – the occasion of his *yahrtzeit* – we, too, avoid the "taste of death" and stay awake the entire night to study Torah, the essence of eternity. (We also stay awake on the night of Hoshana Rabbah – the night when David is the *ushpizin*!)

*Chazal* also tell us that when the angel of death came to kill David HaMelech, it had no power over him, because he was immersed in Torah study. It was only through a ruse that he succeeded in distracting him and, taking advantage of his momentary vulnerability, was able to overpower him.

*It is the thick of night. A world lies in slumber. Some have gone to their eternal sleep, while others, in their own way, sleep away those few years called life. There is but one person who does not sleep; he seems to drift off for a few minutes at a time, napping yet remaining alert. At the head of his bed hangs a harp ready to catch the slightest hint of a breeze. A soft whisper of a northern wind caresses the harp strings, and David HaMelech is up, taking the harp in his hands to play the melody that will awaken the entirety of creation. "David, king of Israel, lives!"*

<sup>\*</sup>While the actual *techiyas hameisim* will be performed by Eliyahu HaNavi, the era will be ushered in by Mashiach.



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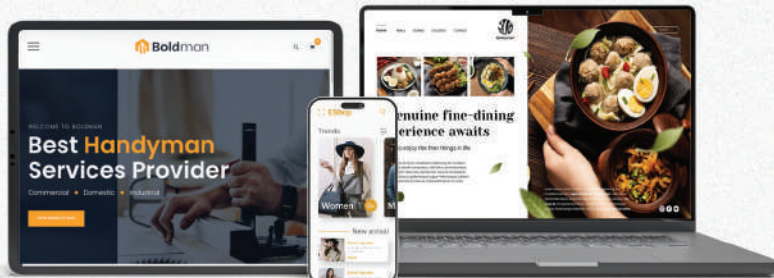


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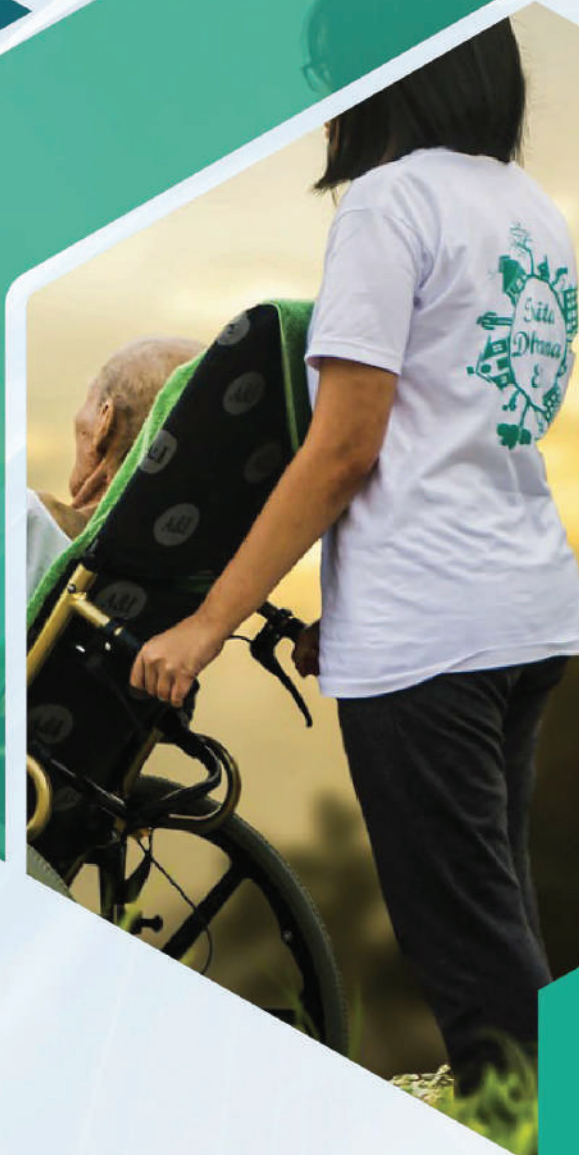


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# THE WINGS WE NEED TO FLY IN TORAH

When our inner world is shaped by truth and humility, Torah gives us wings to rise.

I have long been struck by a beautiful image about the interdependence of Torah and moral character taught by the Slonimer Rebbe, Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky<sup>1</sup>, in his Sefer Netivot Shalom:

*Character traits are the wings of our service of Hashem. Just as winged creatures cannot rise and fly without their wings, so too humans who engage in Torah and mitzvot cannot rise without the purification of their character traits which are their spiritual wings. The more a person purifies and refines his character traits, the more his entire existence is elevated and the more his Torah and Divine service is elevated to a higher level as well.*<sup>2</sup>

I love that image of the purity and sincerity of our characters acting as the wings that help us to fly and soar in Torah. The image is deeply empowering, highly optimistic, and one that underscores the connectedness of Torah to the lives we live and the people that we are. The Netivot Shalom is suggesting that we do not learn Torah as robots processing information, but as real human beings attempting to make the Torah part of our identity. For that kind of integration to occur, our souls and characters must be refined, attuned, and purified enough to absorb the Divine teachings and bring us closer to Hashem. If the Torah enters a being whose holiness of character is not on par with what is expected, then that Torah may well fall flat and lose the potency

required to elevate the individual.

Rabbenu Yona<sup>3</sup> offers an interpretation of a well-known Mishna in Pirkei Avot that supports this teaching of the Slonimer Rebbe. The Mishna states: Rebi Elazar ben Azarya says: If there is no Torah, there is no Derech Eretz and if there is no Derech Eretz, there is no Torah.<sup>4-5</sup>

There are many interpretations of what "Derech Eretz" means in this context. However, Rabbenu Yona defines it as the moral imperative of character refinement. Rabbenu Yonah explains that Rebi Elazar ben Azarya believes there is a codependent relationship between Torah and character refinement: Torah is necessary to build character, but character is also necessary for the acquisition of Torah. While there must be a simultaneous and reciprocal process of Torah study and character refinement informing each other, Rabbenu Yona does suggest that having a certain basic level of moral character is a necessary pre-requisite for the acquisition of Torah.

Based on this teaching, we can infer that one of the critical ways that we must prepare for the re-acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot is through the perfection of our character traits. We might want to work on general traits as the Rambam lays out for us in Hilchot Deot. We might want to work on specific traits that



**RABBI BRAHM WEINBERG**

are associated with the acquisition of Torah such as the forty-eight pathways stated in Pirkei Avot 6:6 such as awe, fear, humility, joy, truth etc... We might want to work on the trait of Chesed so prominent in our Halachic and Hashkafic tradition and so central to Megilat Rut which we read on Shavuot. If we can work on developing our midot, our character traits we will, hopefully, sprout the wings that will allow us to not only absorb the Torah to its fullest, but also soar to the heights of spiritual accomplishment.

**Rabbi Brahm Weinberg** is the Rabbi of Kemp Mill Synagogue (KMS) in Silver Spring, Maryland, and plays a leading role in the Vaad Harabanim of Greater Washington, helping guide halachic standards and communal direction for the region. He is known for his warmth, thoughtfulness, and commitment to Torah and community. Rabbi Weinberg delivers multiple daily *shiurim*, including his renowned "Rashi a Day" and "5-Minute KMS Divrei Halacha" series—available on Apple Podcasts—with close to over 1,000 *shiurim* published online. He and his wife, Elana, are beloved figures in KMS and the broader community, admired for their kindness, approachability, and deep devotion to Torah, people, and Klal Yisrael.

<sup>1</sup>Rav Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000) was born in Belarus and was a descendant (on his mother's side) of the rebbes of the Slonimer Hasidic dynasty. He was educated in the Slonimer yeshiva in Baranovich which combined both Hasidic and Mitnagdic approaches to Torah study. Rav Shalom Noach came to the Land of Israel right before the Holocaust and, in 1941, established the Slonimer Yeshiva in Yerushalayim. After most of the dynasty was wiped out in the Holocaust, R. Shalom Noach was a big part of its revival and rejuvenation through his Torah teachings, his prolific writing, and his dynamic personality. His magnum opus, Netivot Shalom (on Chumash, Pirkei Avot, Moadim, and Midot) has become wildly popular in many Hasidic and non-Hasidic circles.

<sup>2</sup>Netivot Shalom, Netivei Taharat Hamidot – Kedoshim Tiheyu

<sup>3</sup>Rabbenu Yonah Gerondi (d.1264) was from the city of Gerona in northern Spain and then later lived in Toledo in southern Spain. He was a cousin of Ramban. He published many works on a few of which have been preserved including his students' notes on certain sections of the Rif on Berachot, his famous work Shaare Teshuva, and his commentary to Pirkei Avot. We know of more of his teaching since they are quoted by later scholars such as Rashba and Shita Mekubetzet.

<sup>4</sup>Pirkei Avot 3:17

<sup>5</sup>This teaching is similar to the famous rabbinic aphorism of "Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah," "Derech Eretz" must precede Torah. There is no exact source in early rabbinic literature that mentions this phrase verbatim. There are similar phrases and the closest one is from Vayikra Rabba (9:3)

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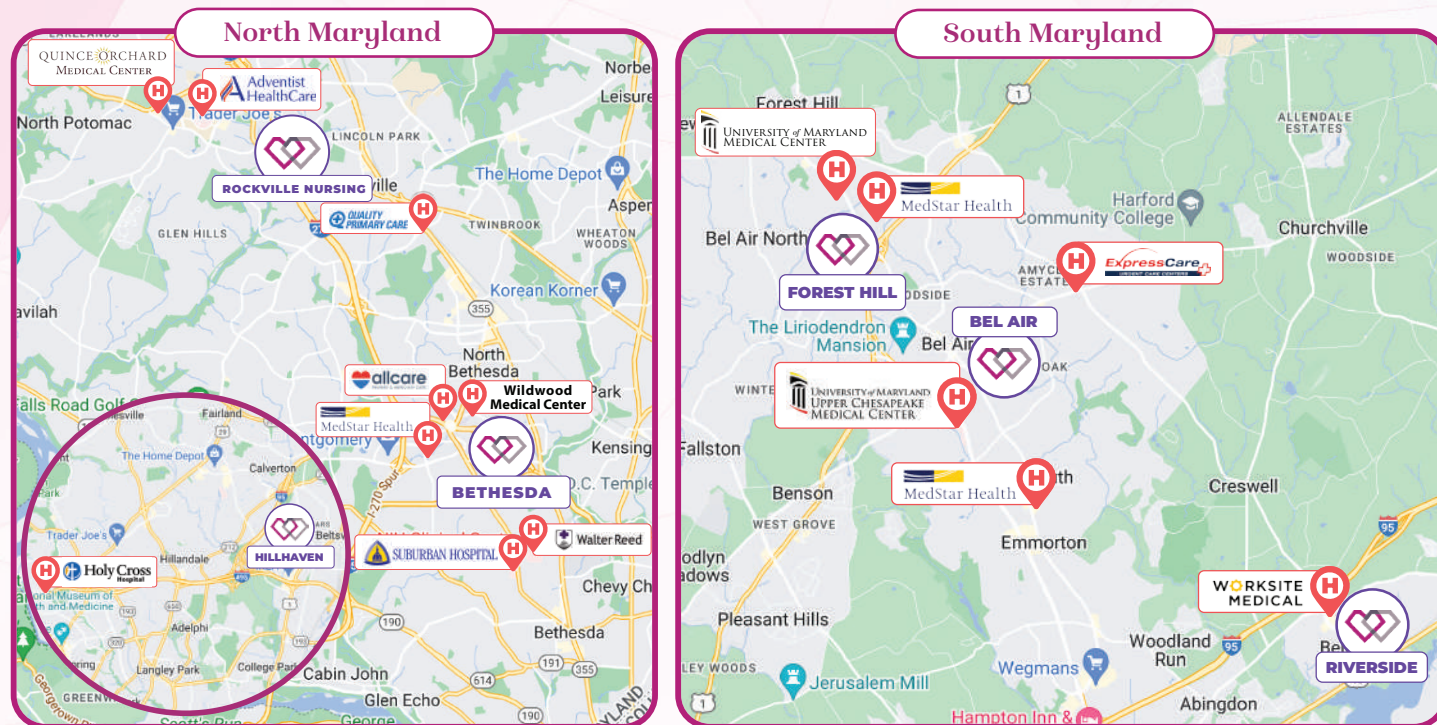
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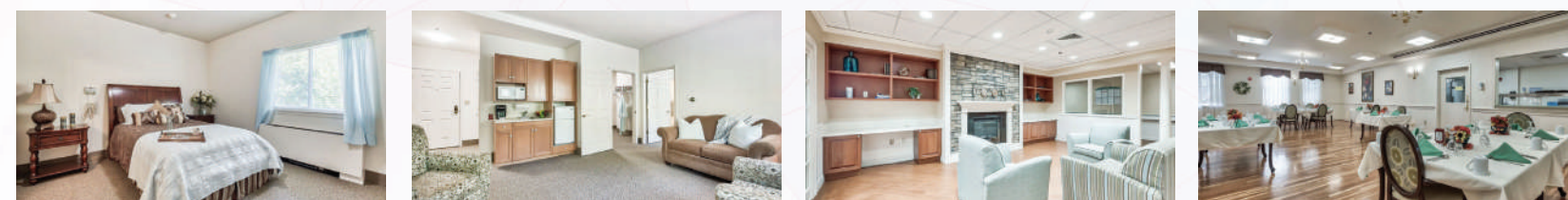


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## SHACHARIS

6:15 AM	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	M-F
6:20 AM	Silver Spring Jewish Center	M, Th
6:25 AM	Southeast Hebrew Cong., Knesset Yehoshua	M-F
6:30 AM	Beth Sholom Congregation	M-F
	Chabad of Silver Spring	M-F
	Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah OLNEY	M-F
	Silver Spring Jewish Center	TW, F
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	S
	YGW	M, Th
6:35 AM	Ohr Hatorah	M, Th
6:40 AM	YGW	S, M, Th
6:45 AM	Kemp Mill Synagogue	M, Th
	Ohr Hatorah	T, W, F
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	M, Th
	Magen David Sephardic Congregation	M-Th
6:50 AM	Woodside Synagogue/Ahavas Torah	M, Th
	Silver Spring Jewish Center	S-F
6:55 AM	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	T, W, F
7:00 AM	Chabad of Upper Montgomery County	M-F
	Kemp Mill Synagogue	T, W, F
	Southeast Hebrew Cong., Knesset Yehoshua	S
	Woodside Synagogue/Ahavas Torah	T, W, F
	Young Israel Ezras Israel of Potomac	M-F
7:05 AM	Keshet Israel	M, Th
7:15 AM	Kemp Mill Synagogue	M, Th
	Keshet Israel	T, W, F
	Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah/The National Synagogue	M-F
	Ohr Hatorah	S
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	M-F
7:30 AM	Chabad of DC	M-F
	Chabad of Potomac	M-F
	JROC	M-F
	Kemp Mill Synagogue	T, W, F
	Southeast Hebrew Cong., Knesset Yehoshua	M-F
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	S
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah (Sfardai)	S-F
7:35 AM	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	S-F
7:45 AM	YGW (Yeshiva Session Only)	S
7:50 AM	Magen David Sephardic Congregation	F
8:00 AM	Beth Sholom Congregation	S
	Kemp Mill Synagogue	S
	Keshet Israel	S
	Magen David Sephardic Congregation	S
	Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah OLNEY	S
	Southeast Hebrew Cong., Knesset Yehoshua	S
8:00 AM	Ezras Israel Congregation of Rockville (Days of Mussaf)	
	Woodside Synagogue/Ahavas Torah	S
	YGW (High School; School-Contingent)	S
	Young Israel Ezras Israel of Potomac	S
	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	S
8:05 AM	Ezras Israel Congregation of Rockville	M, Th

8:15 AM	Ezras Israel Congregation of Rockville	S-F
	Ohr Hatorah	M-Th
	Silver Spring Jewish center	M-F
8:20 AM	Ohr HaTorah	M-F
8:30 AM	Beth Joshua Congregation / Berman Hebrew Academy	S-F
	Chabad of DC	S
	Chabad of Potomac	S
	Chabad of Upper Montgomery County	S
	JROC	S
	Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah/The National Synagogue	S
	Silver Spring Jewish Center	S
	YGW (Summer Only)	S-F
8:45 AM	Young Israel Shomrai Emunah	S-F
9:00 AM	Chabad of Silver Spring	S
	Kemp Mill Synagogue	S

## MINCHA

1:00 PM	Silver Spring Jewish Center	M-Th
1:50 PM	YGW	Summer
2:20 PM	YGW	School Days
2:45 PM	YGW	S-Th
4:30 PM	Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah OLNEY	S-Th

## MINCHA/MAARIV Before Shkiah, S-TH

Beth Sholom Congregation
Chabad of Potomac
Chabad of Silver Spring
Chabad of Upper Montgomery County
Ezras Israel Congregation of Rockville
JROC
Kemp Mill Synagogue
Keshet Israel
Magen David Sephardic Congregation
Ohev Shalom Talmud Torah/The National Synagogue
Ohr Hatorah
Silver Spring Jewish Center
Southeast Hebrew Congregation, Knesset Yehoshua
Woodside Synagogue/Ahavas Torah
Young Israel Ezras Israel of Potomac
Young Israel Shomrai Emunah (Ashkenaz)
Young Israel Shomrai Emunah (Sfardai)

## MAARIV

8:15 PM	OSTT (OLNEY)	S-Th
	SHC, Knesset Yehoshua	M-Th
8:45 PM	YGW	
9:00 PM	Silver Spring Jewish Center	Fall/Winter
9:30 PM	YGW	Summer
	Silver Spring Jewish Center	Spring/Summer
9:45 PM	Ohr Hatorah	M-Th
10:00 PM	YGW	



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Chabad of Potomac [Ar]  
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# Why Doesn't the Torah Mention the Torah?



RABBI MICHOEL FRANK  
KEHILLAS OHR HATORAH

***If Shavuos commemorates יום מתן תורתנו, why is that never stated explicitly in the Torah? Three deep answers that shape how we understand the day.***

We know that Shavuos is a Yom Tov instituted because we received the Torah on this day. We say it in davening: יום מתן תורתנו. But strangely, the Torah makes no mention of this at all. The Torah calls it חג השבועות, חג הביכורים, or חג הקציר—but makes no mention of Torah! Why would the Torah leave out this crucial point about the Yom Tov?

Pesach is called חג המצות, and its purpose—to remember leaving Mitzrayim—is repeated multiple times in the Torah. The Torah makes clear the purpose of Sukkos—כי בסכות הושבתי את בני ישראל—when we left Mitzrayim. But why Shavuos? No one learning the Torah would know, other than by making the calculation and correlation between the dates. The truth is that the Torah doesn't even give a date—it only commands us to count 50 days

and make Yom Tov. What is the reason for this secrecy?

We have to explain the reason the Torah doesn't say it—yet we do in davening.

I saw three answers to this question, which complement each other, and I think are all integral to internalizing what Shavuos is all about.

The first answer is given by the Kli Yakar in Parshas Emor, and I saw it was quoted as well from a sefer called מדרשי התורה written by Rav Shlomo Ashturk zatzal, who lived during the end of the Rishonim period. He writes two reasons why the Torah didn't refer to it as Mattan Torasainu. One: the Torah didn't want to tie the Torah to a day! We could and should accept the Torah every single day. The second thing he writes is that Hashem wants that the To-

rah should be beloved to us every day as if that is the day it was initially given, because we find new Chiddushim—novellae in the Torah, new depths, and new ideas. And that's why it is called חג הביכורים, the Yom Tov when things ripen—symbolizing the Chiddushim one can perceive in Torah.

We can understand this sentiment: the Torah is something we are meant to find fresh insights and depth in each time we learn. Still—why the secrecy?

The second answer is given by the Akaidah, and essentially by the Avudraham: that the other Yomim Tovim are there for us to remember something that happened. But Torah isn't a past event! We don't need anything to remind us of the Torah—we have a constant mitzvah of והגיתם בו יומם ולילה. The Torah is eternally

something we have, learn, and appreciate!

But still, how can you say Shavuos isn't celebrating Mattan Torah?

The third answer I saw is from the Shem Mi'Shmuel, quoting his father, the Avnei Nezer. He asks: why would the Yom Tov be called שבועות, if the "weeks" we counted have already passed? He says that essentially, every single person is unique in their character traits and personality. Each person has strengths and weaknesses: one person may be kind but lacks courage, and another may be strong but impatient, and so on. We have been given the days of Sefira to improve our middos, but he writes:

This is the concept of Sefira, as it says in seforim: to purify our Middos. And it doesn't make sense! How can a mere 49 days be sufficient to rectify all our Middos? I wish our whole life would be enough time! (That made me feel a lot better.)

He explains that the key is: שיקנה האדם—מדת הביטול לדעת השי"ת ולתורתו—for acquir-

ing the trait of subjugating ourselves to Hashem's wisdom and His Torah. That is the concept of Shavuos—just as in those days, Klal Yisrael managed to achieve a level of subservience to Hashem, and they said נעשה ונשמע, which is the ultimate "bittul," that is the power of these days which we strive to connect to. The "Shavuos"—the weeks of preparation—are utilized by working on our desire to be filled with Toras Hashem, submitting our minds and hearts to His will. We celebrate the seven-week preparation for Torah, because purity is achieved through opening our hearts and minds to Torah. Torah itself represents the purity of Hashem's will.

Now we can really understand what all the answers are trying to say. Shavuos is here so that we can realize what we have all year! We always have the Torah and are always obligated to learn it and grow through it. But with the passage of time, we lose the appreciation for what we have. On Shavuos, we work towards once again recognizing how much we

need the Torah, how empty we are without it. We celebrate the work we invested in the weeks prior to Shavuos, and we try to achieve a level of saying נעשה ונשמע, just as the Jews did then.

The Torah doesn't want to call it a Yom Tov of Mattan Torah, because indeed, we always have the Torah—and we are always obligated to learn it, accept it anew, and feel like it is new. However, every year we are required to revive the feeling and memory of how much we need the Torah!

**Rabbi Michoel Frank** is the *Mora D'Asra* of Kehillas Ohr HaTorah in Kemp Mill, Maryland. Renowned for his depth in *Halacha* and clarity in teaching, Rabbi Frank plays an integral leadership role in the Greater Washington community. He serves on the Vaad Harabanim of Greater Washington and is the primary *posek* for the Chevra Kadisha of Greater Washington, where his halachic expertise guides sensitive end-of-life matters with care and precision. A prolific teacher, Rabbi Frank has over 1,000 recorded Torah shiurim—on almost every topic—new uploaded shiurim weekly are available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and TorahAnytime. Rabbi Frank and his wife, Rivkie, are known for their warm hospitality and deep dedication to community building, fostering a strong sense of belonging and spiritual growth among their growing *kehillah*.





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# Greater Washington Daily Shiurim Guide 2025



## SUNDAY

6:30 a.m.	Sunday Morning Daf Yomi with Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:15 a.m.	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney
Following 7:15 a.m. Shacharis      Sunday Morning Kollel Zichron Amram @ Ohr HaTorah	
8:45 a.m.	Mishnah Brura – Shabbos with Rabbi Ben-Horin @ OSTT Olney
8:15 a.m. (Approx.)	Daf Yomi (Rabbi Uriel Charlap) @ Ohr HaTorah
9:30–10:30 a.m.	Sunday Brunch & Learn (For men) @ YISE, 1132 Arcola Ave, Kemp Mill
	Illuminating Inquiries in Halacha      – Rabbi Mandel
	Judaism 102      – Rabbi Shaps
	Navigating Navi      – Rabbi Grossman
9:45 a.m.	Tanya Class (Rabbi Wolvovsky) @ Chabad of Silver Spring (Zoom)
7:30 p.m.	Parsha Exploration (Rabbi Yitzchok Grossman) @ KMS (Zoom)
	ID: 655-813-1022, Password: 365636
8:15 p.m.	Tehillim Expositions (Rabbi Schwartz) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (Zoom)
8:00–8:45 p.m.	Hilchos Shabbos (Teens) (Rabbi Zaks) @ SSJC (Ma'ariv follows)
8:45–9:30 p.m.	Daf Hashavua (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah
9:00–9:45 p.m.	Night Kollel (Ma'ariv follows) @ Ohr HaTorah

## MONDAY

6:00–6:45 a.m.	Morning Kollel and Daf Yomi (Rabbi Uriel Charlap) @ Ohr HaTorah
6:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:30 am	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney
11:00 a.m.	“Da’s Atzmeinu” (Laura Goldman) @ KMS (Zoom, Classroom B)
12:00–12:15 p.m.	Rashi a Day (Rabbi Weinberg) @ KMS (Zoom)
8:30–9:30 p.m.	Evening Learning @ SEHC (For men) @ 10900 Lockwood Drive, Silver Spring
	Michtav M’Eliyahu – Rabbi Musicante
8:45 p.m.	Semichas Chaver Program (Rabbi Shaps) @ YISE (For men)
9:00 p.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
9:15–9:45 p.m.	K’tzos Hachoshen (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah

## TUESDAY

6:00–6:45 a.m.	Morning Kollel @ Ohr HaTorah
6:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:30 am	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney
12:00–12:15 p.m.	Rashi a Day (Rabbi Weinberg) @ KMS (Zoom)
8:00 p.m.	Jewish Unity Learning (Greater Washington Community Kollel, For men and women) @ KMS (In Person)
8:00 p.m.	Machshava Shiur (Chazon Ish: Emunah/B’tachon) (Rabbi Zaks) @ SSJC (Ma'ariv follows)
8:00 p.m.	Halacha Class (Rabbi Wolvovsky) @ Chabad of Silver Spring (In Person)
8:15 p.m.	Inspired Tefillah (Mrs. Sara Malka Winter) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (Zoom, For women)
8:30–9:30 p.m.	Evening Learning @ SEHC (For men) @ 10900 Lockwood Drive, Silver Spring
	Timely Topics in Halacha – Rabbi Grossman & Rabbi Mandel
9:00 p.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
9:15–9:45 p.m.	A Deeper Understanding of Tefillah (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah

## WEDNESDAY

6:00–6:45 a.m.	Morning Kollel and Daf Yomi (Rabbi Uriel Charlap) @ Ohr HaTorah
6:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:30 am	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney
9:00 a.m.	Siddur Class (Esther Dziadek) @ KMS (Zoom)
	ID: 970-1398-4837, Password: 613
12:15 p.m	LINKS Learning (Rabbi Shaps) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (Zoom)
8:00 p.m.	Bereishis: An In-Depth Study (Mrs. Sara Malka Winter) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (For women)
8:00 p.m.	Hilchos Shabbos Class (Rabbi Weinberg) @ KMS (Zoom, Classroom B)
8:00–8:45 p.m.	Hilchos Shabbos (Teens) (Rabbi Zaks) @ SSJC (Ma'ariv follows)
8:30–9:30 p.m.	Evening Learning @ SEHC (For men) @ 10900 Lockwood Drive, Silver Spring
	Yesodei Hatorah: Gemara Skills Building – Rabbi Sussman
9:00 p.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)

## THURSDAY

6:00–6:45 a.m.	Morning Kollel and Daf Yomi (Rabbi Uriel Charlap) @ Ohr HaTorah
6:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney
7:30 p.m.	Thursday Night Shiur with Rabbi Ben-Horin @ OSTT Olney
8:45–9:05 p.m.	Halacha/Parsha Shiur for Women (Rabbi Frank) @ Zoom
8:15 p.m.	Yesodei Hatorah: Gemara Skills Building (Rabbi Sussman) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (Zoom, For men)
8:30 p.m.	Parashas Hashavua (Rabbi Grossman) @ Greater Washington Community Kollel (Zoom)
9:15–9:45 p.m.	Tanach Shiur (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah
9:20 p.m.	Daf Hashavua (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah
After 10:00 p.m.	Ma'ariv – Chumash Shiur (Rabbi Riengold) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington

## FRIDAY

6:00–6:45 a.m.	Morning Kollel and Daf Yomi (Rabbi Uriel Charlap) @ Ohr HaTorah
6:30 a.m.	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
7:30 am	Daf Yomi with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney

## SHABBOS

9:00 a.m.	Chassidus Class (Rabbi Wolvovsky) @ Chabad of Silver Spring (Before Davening)
Post-Kiddush	5th/6th Grade Boy Learning @ Ohr HaTorah Beis Medrash
20 Minutes Before Later Mincha	Iyun Chaburah (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah
25 Minutes Before Ma'ariv	Motzei Shabbos    Mishna B'rurah Shiur (Rabbi Frank) @ Ohr HaTorah
10:30 a.m. (Winter Only)	Daf Yomi (Mr. Judah Lifschitz/Rabbi Hess) @ Yeshiva of Greater Washington (Beis Medrash)
3:40 p.m.	New Series! Bitachon Gems with Rabbi Rappaport @ OSTT Olney

## Motzei Shabbos Parent Child Learning and Melave Malka (Winter)

@ KMS (Grades 1–6) | @ YISE (Grades 1–6) | @ SSJC (Grades 1–6) | @ YGW/Ohr HaTorah (Grades 1–6)

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Contact [editor@washingtonjewishlife.com](mailto:editor@washingtonjewishlife.com)  
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# SHAVUOS Q&A



RABBI YITZY FOX

- During which time of year did Naomi and Rus return to Beis Lechem?
- What was the name of the Shofeit (Judge) in the times of Rus as it appears in *Shoftim*?
- What was Rus doing when she met Boaz?
- Which 2 people gave a kiss in the megillah?
- Which three people does the Megillah call the son of Naomi?
- Who did not want to redeem the field and marry Rus?
- Which activity in *Megillas Rus* required a minyan?
- What bracha do the elders give to Boaz?
- How many generations are listed between Peretz and Dovid at the end of the megillah?
- Whosaid "Baruch Hashem" in Megillas Rus? **Bonus Question:** Which three people in the Torah said "Baruch Hashem"?
- The beginning of the barley harvest season, which is around Pesach (1:22, Rashi).
- Ivtzan, who was Boaz (*Rashi* 1:1, *Bava Basra* 91a; *Shoftim* 12:8).
- She was collecting leket and shichichah from the field of Boaz. (2:2-2:7, Rashi)
1. Naomi kissed Orpah and Rus. (1:9) 2. Orpah kisses Naomi before she leaves her. (1:14)
1. Machlon, 2. Kilyon (1:2), 3. Oved (4:17)
- Ploni Almoni, the unnamed brother of Elimelech. (4:1-7; See Rashi, Rus Rabbah 6:2)
- The *sheva berachos* at the marriage ceremony of Boaz and Rus (4:2; *Kesubos* 7a – this is the halachah!).
- That the woman he is marrying (Rus) should be like Rachel and Leah. Also, his house should be like the house of Peretz. (4:11-12)
- Ten. (4:18-22)
- The women of the village said it to Naomi after Rus gave birth to a son (4:14).

**Rabbi Yitzy Fox** serves as a Rebbi at Berman Hebrew Academy and is a member of the Chofetz Chaim Kollel at the Silver Spring Jewish Center. Renowned for his dynamic and engaging approach to Torah learning, he is dedicated to making Torah accessible to all ages. His forthcoming sefer, *The Ultimate Parsha Challenge: Shabbos Table Q&A for All Ages*, set for release this Shavuot (May), offers engaging questions and discussions to elevate the Shabbos table. For any questions, comments, or to subscribe to the weekly Parsha Q&A newsletter, please contact [rabbiyitzyfox@gmail.com](mailto:rabbiyitzyfox@gmail.com).

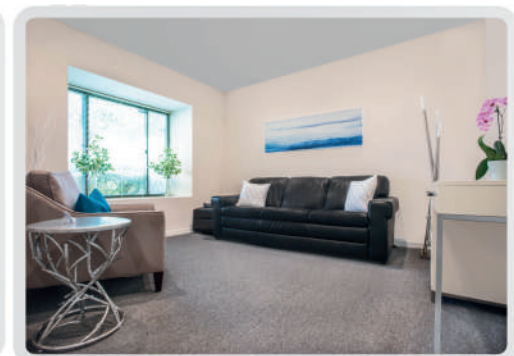
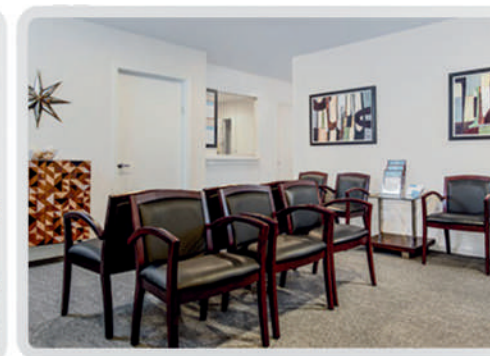
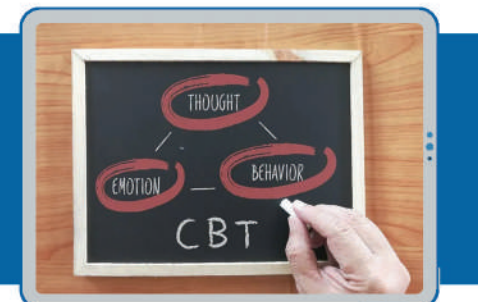
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# Truth Without Swearing: The Torah's Mechanism for Ensuring Witness Reliability



**RABBI URIEL CHARLOP**  
DAF YOMI MAGGID SHIUR  
KEHILLAS OHR HATORAH

Our daf yomi class is currently learning Masechet Shevuot, which addresses various types of oaths. For instance, there is *shevuat bituy*, in which a person can take an oath to either perform an action or refrain from doing so, and there is *shevuat hadianin*, which is administered by a *beth din* (a

court) when a litigant admits part of a claim but denies the rest.

One type of oath that is notably absent is the oath taken by a witness to affirm that their testimony is truthful—an oath that can be found in almost every society. I believe that the reason the

Torah and Chazal do not require such an oath is the concern that a person might be swayed into swearing their testimony is true, genuinely believing it to be truthful, even if it is actually false. Therefore, requiring someone to take an oath before testifying could lead to *shavuot sheker* (perjury)—even

if they genuinely believe they are telling the truth.

Although the Torah and Chazal do require individuals to take oaths, this requirement is limited to cases where the person swearing is directly affected by the issues at hand. In these cases, individuals pay closer attention to whether the events actually occurred.

This raises an important question: how can the Torah guarantee the reliability of witnesses and the truthfulness of testimonies when the use of an oath is not an option? The answer can be found in a central concept that we discussed in the last tractate we learned, Masechet Makkot.

## Edim Zomemim

Masechet Makkot begins with the topic of *edim zomemim* (conspiring witnesses). When a pair of witnesses testifies that someone has committed murder or owes money, the *beth din* is obligated to accept their testimony and issue a verdict accordingly. However, what occurs if a second pair of witnesses (*edim mazimim*) testifies that the first pair was not present at the scene of the crime or at the location of the financial obligation? In effect, the second pair reveals that it was impossible for the first pair to have witnessed what they claimed to have seen.

According to the Torah, the punishment for the first pair of witnesses is “ועשיתם לו כאשר זמם,” meaning that the first pair of witnesses, the *edim zomemim*, would receive the punishment that they conspired for the subject of their testimony to receive. To illustrate, if they testified that someone committed murder and deserved capital punishment, they themselves would receive capital punishment. If they conspired to impose a debt of one million dollars, they would be required to pay that amount to the individual they conspired against.

Rabbi Chaim Rabinovich, also known as Reb Chaim Telzer, analyzed the punishment of *edim zomemim* (Bava Kamma, shiur 10). He explored the underlying cause of this punishment: is it primarily due to their conspiracy to harm the individual affected by their testimony, or is it due to the act of lying in their testimony? In other words, is the wrongdoing directed against their fellow



human beings (*bein adam lechaviro*) or against the court (*bein adam lamakom*)?

Reb Chaim Telzer concluded that the latter was correct. The cause for the punishment of *edim zomemim* is that they gave *edut sheker* (false testimony). To put it more broadly, the main evil that the concept of *edim zomemim* is directed against is the abuse and the undermining of the judicial system, rather than the individual harm that may have occurred as a result.

Since there are no other means, such as an oath, to ensure the reliability of a witness, the concept of *edim zomemim*, which deters and punishes dishonest witnesses, serves as the Torah's alternative mechanism to ensure the truthfulness of testimony. This explains the halacha that states, “עדות שאי אתה יכול להזימה – לא שמה עדות” (testimony that cannot be refuted is not considered valid testimony). Witnesses who cannot be potentially contradicted by a second pair of witnesses are disqualified from giving testimony in the first place. The ability to be refuted and held accountable provides a witness with credibility. In cases where refutation is impossible due to a technicality, there is no deterrent against witnesses lying,

and, consequently, there is nothing to validate their trustworthiness.

## כאשר זמם - ולא כאשר עשה

The concept of *edim zomemim* presents a perplexing halacha for many. Chazal state, “כאשר זמם - ולא כאשר עשה,” meaning that *edim zomemim* are punished only when the *beth din* has not yet acted on their testimony. If their conspiracy succeeds and the false testimony is ultimately carried out, then the *edim zomemim* are exonerated. This is often referred to as *גזירת הכתוב* (a decree of the written law), but even a *גזירת הכתוב* must have some underlying logic, even if a counterintuitive one.

I believe that once we view *edim zomemim* as a punishment for undermining the judicial system, the halacha becomes clearer. If the Torah were to punish these witnesses after their testimony caused harm to an individual, we might mistakenly believe that the punishment is solely for the damage inflicted on that person, failing to see the broader issue. The halacha specifies that they are punished only when their testimony is unsuccessful, emphasizing that the focus of the punishment is indeed on the abuse of the judicial process.

*Ohr Hatorah's daf yomi shiur meets on Mondays through Thursdays at 9 PM, on Shabbos 45 minutes before Mincha, and on Sundays at 8 AM.*





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BUSINESS BEHIND THE LENS

# Captured for Generations

A Conversation with One of Greater Washington's Most Trusted Videographers  
— Jeffrey Reches, Founder of RC Video



Ilan Cohn

For over 35 years, Jeffrey Reches has been the man behind the camera at thousands of simchas. As the founder of RC Video, his work has become a staple at weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, and community events across the Greater Washington region.

## How did you get started?

Great question. In the early '80s, my grandfather bought us a VHS camcorder. I became the family videographer—and later the unofficial NCSY Shabbaton filmer. When my sister's wedding video didn't come out great, I realized I could do better. I filmed my first wedding soon after—and RC Video was born in 1990.

## What's your style?

People say my videos are clean, natural, and timeless. I blend traditional, photojournalistic, and cinematic elements. It's all about capturing the simcha in a way that feels real—and fun to rewatch.

## What's changed over the years?

Almost everything! From VHS tapes to Vimeo links. From shoulder-mounted cameras to sleek mirrorless gear. But the goal hasn't changed—deliver something families will treasure.

## Will you personally be at the wedding—and do you edit the videos yourself?

That's a question I get a lot. Most of the time, yes—I'm behind the camera myself. When I'm double booked, I have a team of cameramen who've trained with me and understand exactly how to capture a frum simcha the RC Video way. My son Mordy has been filming with me for 8 years.

As for editing—I still review every video myself. Even with in-house editors helping, nothing goes out the door without my approval. I take real pride in the final product.

## How can people reach you?

Call 410-585-0007 or visit  
www.RechesVideo.com.  
I'd love to be part of your next simcha.

**Jeffrey Reches** is the founder of RC Video, a leading production company capturing weddings, mitzvahs, and community events since 1990. Based in Baltimore, he has filmed thousands of simchas across Greater Washington and nationwide, known for his artistry and cultural insight. He can be reached at 410-585-0007.



## THE BRIEFING



## Dr. Phil: "Israelis Don't Have PTSD—They're Living It in Real Time"

At a major pro-Israel event in New York, Dr. Phil McGraw delivered an emotional show of support for Israel and its people. His words struck a nerve—capturing what so many around the world still don't fully grasp: in Israel, the trauma isn't past tense. It's the present.



## Hegseth and Trump Unveil \$175B 'Golden Dome' to Shield the U.S. Homeland

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and President Trump have announced plans to build a cutting-edge missile defense system—nicknamed the "Golden Dome"—to counter rising threats from adversaries like China and Russia. Inspired by Israel's Iron Dome and powered by next-gen U.S. tech, the \$175 billion initiative marks a bold step toward restoring American strength and security.

It's not just defense—it's deterrence with American backbone.

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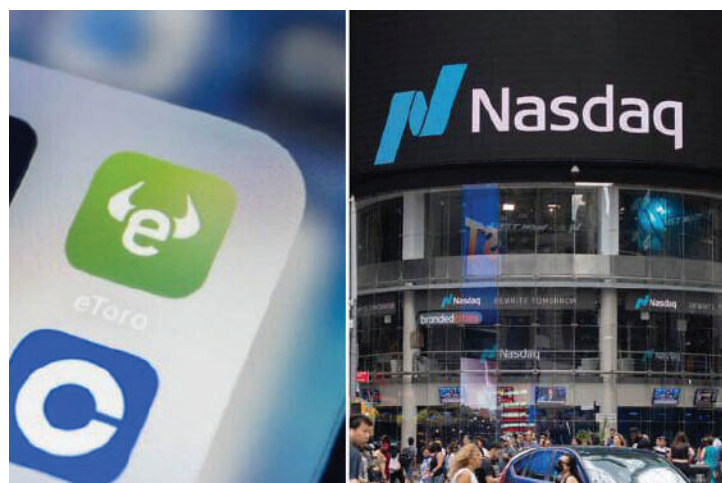
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THE BRIEFING



## Israeli Trading Giant eToro Goes Public with \$4.3B Nasdaq Debut

Israeli-founded eToro—a social trading platform that lets users buy and sell stocks, crypto, and commodities—hit the Nasdaq with a \$4.3 billion valuation, marking the biggest Israeli IPO since Mobileye. With \$620M in sights, the online trading powerhouse puts Israel back in the Wall Street spotlight.

As global eyes turn to Tel Aviv's tech scene—who's next to make the leap?



## Musk: "You'll Fall Asleep, Wake Up There." Teslas to Drive Themselves by 2026

Elon Musk says hundreds of thousands of fully self-driving Teslas will hit U.S. roads by the end of next year—no hands, no eyes, just sit back and take out a sefer. He's doubling down as Tesla CEO and brushing off political baggage, saying demand is surging again. If Musk's vision lands, your next road trip might not need a driver's seat.

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THE BRIEFING



## NYC Mayor Adams Launches Business & Tech Alliance with the Startup Nation

At a high-profile signing with Israeli Economy Minister Nir Barkat, Mayor Eric Adams unveiled the NYC-Israel Business & Tech Alliance—backing Israeli companies, driving innovation, and bringing future-facing jobs to New York. "You're no longer going all the way to the West Coast," said Adams. "We're the top partners."

As NYC doubles down on Israel, the question is—will Maryland step up?



## OpenAI Recruits iPhone Legend Jony Ive in \$6.5B Deal

OpenAI—the brains behind ChatGPT—is joining forces with design icon Jony Ive to build its first AI hardware. With a \$6.5B deal on the table, sleek is about to meet smart in a whole new way.

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# THE DATING ROOM



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Aliza M., M.Ed.  
Teaneck, NJ

**THE REBBETZIN**  
Nechama G., LCSW  
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**THE SEMINARY TEACHER**  
Chaya S., MSW  
Yerushalayim

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53 Shidduchim Made

## This Month's Question:

*“What If the Good Isn't Good Enough?”*

Dear Dating Room,

I've been dating someone on and off for two years. He's kind, funny, and people really like him. But every time we try again, I hit the same wall. He doesn't seem driven—no job plans, no direction—and he's convinced things will just fall into place. I get drawn in by his charm, but the same issues always resurface.

Is it possible to make peace with someone's weaknesses if their strengths really shine? Or am I holding onto a dream?

### THE SHADCHAN

Rivky S., LCSW — Baltimore, MD

This question comes up more often than people realize. Chemistry and comfort are important—but so is vision. If someone's not showing personal ambition or initiative after two years, that's not a small thing. It's not about looking for a perfect resume; it's about whether he wants to grow, and whether you trust that growth will come from within, not just pressure from you.

You're clearly drawn to his good qualities. The question is whether those outweigh your core concerns—and only you can answer that. But I'll say this: waiting around hoping he'll change isn't a plan. It's a wish.

### THE SEMINARY TEACHER

Chaya S., MSW — Yerushalayim

I believe every neshama enters your life for a reason. And sometimes, that reason is to teach you what matters most.

In Israel, I see girls go on one or two dates and already ask, “Can he lead me in ruchniyus?” Not just “Is he charming,” but “Can I rely on his inner compass?” That's a powerful question. You're clearly someone with clarity—you're noticing red flags for a reason.

Daven for guidance. Ask Hashem to help you see not just what's in front of you, but what lies ahead. Hashem doesn't confuse us—He nudges us gently. If this man is for you, peace will follow. If not, trust that your heart is being prepared for something deeper.

Dear Readers,

Every month in The Dating Room, we bring you real dating questions—answered by a diverse group of voices from across our community. No two perspectives are the same, and that's the point. Some answers might challenge you, others may resonate deeply—but together, they paint a fuller picture of the choices we face in dating.

**We'd love to hear from you, too!**

**If you'd like to be featured in an upcoming “My Take” spot, email us at [datingroom@washingtonjewishlife.com](mailto:datingroom@washingtonjewishlife.com) with the subject line “My Take.” We'll send you a future question, and your response might appear in print.**

**Have a dating dilemma of your own? Send it our way—totally anonymous.**

Looking forward,

Rivky S., LCSW — Baltimore, MD  
**THE SHADCHAN**

### THE PRINCIPAL

Aliza M., M.Ed. — Teaneck, NJ

I'm going to say it straight: you're already answering your own question. The same issues keep coming up. That's not chemistry—that's a cycle. I know relationships can be complicated, and I'm not discounting what's good here. But if you're feeling stuck now, marriage will only magnify that.

He may be sweet, but that's not enough. If he doesn't have drive or direction at this stage in life, you'll end up carrying the emotional and practical weight of two people. You don't want to parent your spouse. Trust your discomfort—it's there for a reason.

### THE REBBETZIN

Nechama G., LCSW — Lakewood, NJ

Okay, so I asked my husband what he thought—and after 37 years of marriage, I know better than to ignore his reaction. He gave me the look, like “We've seen this before.”

There's a reason Chazal emphasize middos and responsibility over charm. I once dated someone sweet, idealistic, and aimless. Nicest guy—but I remember thinking, “Do I want to build a home, or babysit?” Baruch Hashem, I walked away.

You don't need a CEO, but you do need a partner who sees life as a mission. And yes, people grow, but not everyone grows in the direction you need. I'd sit down and ask: if nothing changed—no job, no motivation—would I still be at peace ten years from now?

And if the answer is no? That's your answer now.

### THE BUBBY

Shaindy R. — Flatbush, NY | 53 Shidduchim Made

Oh sweetheart, I had a girl come to me 30 years ago with almost your exact story. A kind boy, no direction, lovely smile—but deep down, she was always anxious. I remember I told her, “You're not marrying a moment. You're marrying a future.”

Fast forward—she broke it off. It wasn't easy. But today she's married to a man who may not be flashy, but he's steady, reliable, and brings out the best in her. And she tells me every Yom Tov, “Bubby, thank you. You saved me from settling.”

You want to build a bayis ne'eman. That takes more than liking each other. It takes shared goals, grit, and knowing that if the baby's crying at 3 a.m., you're not the only one getting out of bed. Don't ignore the small voice inside. It's often Hashem whispering: You deserve more.



# Pinny for Your Thoughts



Insights from Pinny Roth, LCSW-C on Love, Connection, and Mental Wellness  
**PINNY ROTH, LCSW-C**



## From Roommates to Soulmates *Simple Habits to Reignite Connection*

**Q:** We're a frum couple in our late 30s with four children, ages 2 to 12. Between work, carpools, bedtime meltdowns, and endless laundry, we feel more like roommates managing a household than a husband and wife. We're not fighting; we're just not really connecting. It's like we're living parallel lives. We want to be closer, but we genuinely don't know how to make time for each other. What can we do?

**A:** With six children of our own, my wife and I can certainly relate. What you're describing is extremely common in today's fast-paced modern culture, especially among frum couples raising large families. The combination of communal obligations, limited alone time, and relentless parenting tasks can leave even the most devoted couples feeling like ships passing in the night.

The good news is that rebuilding connection doesn't require grand gestures or marathon therapy sessions; it simply requires intention.

Renowned relationship researchers, Drs. John and Julie Gottman, have spent decades studying what makes love last. Through their work at The Gottman Institute and their famed "Love Lab," they've observed thousands of couples to identify the key habits that lead to lasting connection and satisfaction. Their research shows that the happiest couples don't revolutionize their marriage overnight. Instead, they invest consistent and meaningful time into the relationship, ideally six hours a week.

For many busy couples, six hours may feel like a luxury. While a substantive amount of time does matter, keep in mind that what's most important is the consistency and intention behind it.

So how can you do this in real life—with kids banging on the bathroom door and your phone buzzing with work messages?

Try these actionable and achievable activities:

### 1. The Admiration Journal (Time investment: 3 minutes a day)

Let's start with perhaps the most transformative practice: The Admiration Journal.

This exercise is based on the principle that love is not just a feeling but something we practice. Simply put, love is the emotion we feel when we focus on the virtues of our spouse. Many couples drift apart emotionally because they stop noticing what's beautiful in each other. Not because those things are absent, but because they're too tired to look for it. The Admiration Journal helps change this by prompting continuous recognition and appreciation.

Here's how it works: Once a day, take 2–3 minutes to jot down something you genuinely admire about your spouse. Its best to tie it to an action you saw the previous or same day, such as, "I saw you give our son a second chance to calm down without yelling. I admire your patience so much. You model such compassion."

This practice isn't about flattery. Rather, it is meant to train your brain to look for virtue. When you consistently recognize your spouse's strengths, emotional intimacy will naturally deepen over time.

Pro tip: Read your journal entries to each other once a week on date night and see how powerful it can be!

### 2. Intentional Partings and Reunions (Time investment: 2 minutes in the morning, 10–20 minutes in the evening, 5 days a week)

Even when life is full and busy, you can strengthen your connection through simple, intentional moments at the start and end of each day.

#### Partings – Morning Check-In

Before you each head into your separate lives, take just two deliberate minutes to ask about your spouse's upcoming day. Try not to just ask about logistics, such as, "What time's your meeting?" but something deeper: "How are you feeling about the phone call you need to make to your client?" or "Anything you're nervous or excited about today?"

You don't need a long conversation—just a brief, heartfelt moment to say: I see you and care about your world.

#### Reunions – Evening Check-In

When you reunite at the end of the day, resist diving straight into coordinating dinner or parenting. Instead, greet each other with a six-second kiss to signal that you're still connected.

Then, take 10–20 minutes to talk. The focus should not be on strategizing to solve the day's problems, but rather to

simply be present and empathetic. Ask: "How was your day, really?" or "What was the hardest or best part of it?" When your partner responds, try to just listen without offering advice.

These small rituals offer daily reminders that even amidst chaos, there's an oasis of connection.

### 3. Physical Closeness with a Calendar (Time investment: 5 minutes a day)

Simple touch offers comfort, reassurance, and is incredibly grounding. These gestures communicate, "I'm here. I'm your person." However, when life is overwhelming, physical affection is often the first thing to go. And when it disappears, it can quietly create distance. One partner may feel rejected or unseen, while the other feels emotionally or physically depleted.

The solution? Don't leave physical connection to chance—schedule it! Affectionate touch deserves a spot on the calendar. It may feel forced at first, but reframing it as a purposeful choice can shift your perspective. Here are some examples you can plan for:

- A cuddle on the couch
- A warm hug
- Sitting side-by-side drinking tea
- Resting a hand on each other's leg or shoulder

Pro tip: I would suggest the same approach for marital intimacy as it also needs intentional space in our lives. Although spontaneity has its place, relying solely on it can lead to frustration. While your daily focus should be nurturing, non-sexual affection that builds emotional safety, try also scheduling marital intimacy interspersed throughout the week.

### 4. Date Night (Time investment: 30 minutes to 2 hours once a week)

Having one dedicated evening out together a week isn't just a nice idea—it's essential maintenance for your marriage. Date night is where you can reconnect as a couple—not as co-parents or co-workers. Without this regular time carved out for just the two of you, your relationship can become a business partnership about administrative tasks and survival.

When arranging the time together, remember that the goal isn't performance but rather presence. Don't feel that you need to dress up or go to a fancy restaurant. Just turning off your phones and

trying some of these simple activities will do the trick:

- A 30-minute walk after the children's bedtime.
- Sharing dessert on the porch.
- Playing a card game.
- Listening to music together.
- An instructional at-home dance class.

The key here, again, is to be intentional. Do not multitask or talk about the to-do list. Rather, be curious, make eye contact, reminisce, and dream. Using open-ended questions can help keep you on track, like:

- "If we could design our dream Shabbos getaway, where would we go?"
- "What's something you've been thinking about that I might not know?"
- "What would you love more of in our life right now?"

### 5. The State of the Union: Talk Before You Explode (Time investment: 30 minutes to 1 hour a week)

Once a week, set aside one hour of structured space to talk about your relationship. Bills and errands should not be on the agenda, instead, this weekly State of the Union should focus solely on your connection. Think of it as emotional maintenance for your marriage that is meant to stop small annoyances from piling up to becoming blowups.

To be effective, it is important that the session is not used for boundless venting, criticism or an attempt to fix everything. Instead, it should be used for:

- A time to connect, reflect, and speak with empathy.
- A safe space to be honest without fear of attack.
- An opportunity to grow by speaking truth with love.

Try gentle prompts, such as:

- "How are we doing this week as a couple?"
- "Is there anything I did that hurt or frustrated you?"
- "What did you appreciate about me this week?"
- "Is there anything you need more of from me?"
- "What's one thing we can do better next week?"

Remember that the goal here isn't perfection but connection through a process

of growth. Take turns and listen without interrupting your spouse or defending yourself. Try validating each other even if you don't agree.

Pro tip: End with something positive, such as a moment you're proud of, grateful for, or excited about.

### 6. Halachic and Emotional Considerations (Ongoing, variable time investment)

In a frum home, our lives are shaped by powerful values, such as taharas hamishpacha, modesty, and kedushah. These values are meant to uplift our marriages, not create emotional distance.

Sometimes, however, the boundaries that bring holiness can unintentionally feel like barriers—especially during times of niddah. Couples may slip into emotional detachment, mistaking physical separation for relational separation. Over time, this can engender loneliness and disconnection, even amid spiritual commitment.

Let's be clear: **Halacha separates bodies, not hearts.**

The challenge isn't just to get through these weeks, but to remain emotionally close year-round, even when physical closeness is limited. Some ways you can be intentional about your non-physical connection are:

- Using words of admiration: "I noticed your patience today. That meant a lot."
- Laughing: Share an inside joke or something funny you saw.
- Engaging in teamwork: Cook together, tag-team bedtime, or tackle a family project.
- Reinforcing a spiritual connection: Learn a short sefer, share a Dvar Torah, or discuss inspiration in your service to Hashem.

Remember that emotional intimacy is the foundation of physical intimacy. By staying warm, curious, and engaged throughout these weeks your physical reunions will be so much richer!

In short, to halt the slip into parallel lives, your marriage doesn't need a total overhaul. Rather, it needs small, meaningful shifts that are consistently maintained. I challenge you to **choose just one practice** from the list above and commit to it for the next 40 days. That's it. Don't fix everything. **Just start somewhere.**



**Richard "Pinny" Roth, LCSW-C**, is a Silver Spring-based therapist who uses his gifts of connectedness, warmth, humor, and deep insight to help his clients make sense of their emotional patterns. Trained in Emotionally Focused Therapy under master instructor George Fallor, Pinny integrates his clinical expertise with innate ability to create clarity, guiding his clients toward achieving their goals. When he's not in session, he's focused on his "inpatient" caseload—his six lively boys and markedly outnumbered wife!

Want your question published? Text it to **(301) EFT-6353** or email **info@eft.center**.





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## SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

### Your Perfect Palette: The World of Color

*Discover how color analysis helps you shop smarter, feel better, and glow from within.*



RIVKA SIDORSKY

**T**here is a beautiful world of color out there—so why do so many women wear so much black? Does black really look good on everyone?

The truth is, while black is common and convenient, there are likely many other colors that are far more flattering for you.

That's where color analysis comes in. But what exactly is it? And how do you find the perfect hue, shade, or tone?

#### What is Color Analysis?

Color analysis is a process in which a trained consultant compares your skin, hair, and eye color to fabric drapes or color chips to determine which shades are most harmonious and flattering for you. The process looks at hue, value, undertone, and intensity to help identify your best palette.

#### Why Get Your Colors Analyzed?

Every woman wants to feel confident in how she looks. Many turn to black because it's easy to find, especially for *tzniut* clothing, and it's often considered slimming or neutral. But black can be harsh—and for many women, it's simply not flattering.

With a personal color analysis, you'll walk away with a custom palette of your most flattering colors. This makes shopping for clothes, makeup, and accessories so much easier—and more enjoyable.

#### What Are the Benefits?

My clients consistently report that shopping becomes far less stressful. They know which colors to look for and which to avoid. Some had previously dreaded shopping because they felt discouraged by how things looked on them. Others wasted money on pieces that were neutral or "safe," only to never wear them.

With color analysis, clients save money by only buying what truly works for them.

Most importantly, women tell me they feel more confident and beautiful—without needing makeup or changing their style. Just by wearing the right colors, they feel radiant and receive more compliments.

#### A Colorful World, Created for You

Hashem created a beautiful world of color—and made each of us unique, with our own features and tones. By embracing the colors that suit us best, we reflect that beauty and feel more connected, confident, and vibrant.

Let's celebrate the gift of color and the way it can help us shine.

#### Want to discover your perfect palette?

Visit [www.yourperfectpalette.com](http://www.yourperfectpalette.com) to book your personalized color analysis with Rivka Sidersky.

Rivka Sidersky is a color analyst who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland. Book your in-person color analysis today through the website. Groups, events, and group pricing are available.

## Save the Dates!



**Silver Spring, Md.**  
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**Sunday, October 5**  
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# The Profound Principle Of The Torah



NATHAN WITZTUM

We find that there is a big emphasis on working on our *bein adam l'chaveiro*, our interpersonal relationships, during the period of Sefiras Ha'Omer. There is a *minhag* to learn the six chapters of Pirkei Avos, which deal primarily with *middos* and interacting with others, on the six *shabbosos* between Pesach and Shavuos. We also read Parshas Kedoshim during this period, which contains the bulk of the more fundamental *mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro*, including their crown jewel, *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha*, loving your fellow as yourself. And perhaps most starkly, Rashi teaches us that immediately prior to Matan Torah, B'nei Yisrael were "*k'ish echad b'lev echad* – like one person with one heart." Evidently, Sefiras Ha'Omer is a time primed for growth and improvement in the area of *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

The question is: why? Why would the lead up to Shavuos constitute a time period during which it's necessary to work on the aspect of *bein adam l'chaveiro*? Shavuos is the day in history when Hashem gave us the Torah on Har Sinai. What do interpersonal relationships have to do with the giving of the Torah?

Invariably, Shavuos falls after Parshas Bamidbar, when the Jewish People are counted. It is said that the word 'Yisrael' is an acronym for "*Yesh shishim ribo osiyos l'Torah* – There are 600,000 letters in the Torah." Now, there aren't actually 600,000 letters in the Torah. Not even by a longshot. So what exactly are we supposed to learn from this? The idea is that there were approximately 600,000 Jews in the count, and hence, there is a letter in the Torah corresponding to every Jew.

The holiday of Shavuos is referred to by Chazal as "*zman matan toraseinu* – the time of the giving of our Torah." We actually employ a similar phrase throughout the year – "*v'sein chelkeinu b'sorasecha* – grant us our portion in Your Torah." On Shavuos, we as a nation were collectively gifted the Torah. But in addition, every Jew was granted their own unique portion, a

distinctive "letter" in the Torah that is theirs and theirs alone. This is what the 600,000 letters symbolize. Yes, everyone in principle received the same Torah. We all have the same Tanach and Gemara and Mishnah Berurah. But every person connects to the Torah in a different way. Everyone finds the particular areas of Torah that animate them. And it is in that one-of-a-kind combination that a person can find their special "letter", their *chelek* in Torah which has been gifted to them. When a person is *mechadesh* Torah, they are truly bringing out their letter of Torah to its full potential.

Thinking about this more deeply, we see that this must be the case. The Zohar teaches: [Hashem] looked into the Torah and created the world באוריתא וברא עלמא אסתכל

The source for everything in the world is in the Torah. Consequently, if the Torah is the blueprint for the world, and every Jew is unique, then we must all have a unique portion, a unique "letter" in the Torah. By attaching ourselves to our *chelek* in Torah and bringing it to fruition, we are connecting with the source of our very existence!

The person in history who perhaps best understood, and even personified this idea, was Rabbi Akiva. In Menachos 29b, the Gemara relates that Moshe Rabbeinu could not fathom some of the Torah that Rabbi Akiva would later expound. The explanation is that this was Rabbi Akiva's unique portion of Torah. Not even Moshe Rabbeinu could access that *chelek* that was set aside for Rabbi Akiva to develop centuries later.

We can now begin to understand why improving our *bein adam l'chaveiro* is a necessary prerequisite for Matan Torah. If every Jew has a special "letter" in the Torah, then it behooves us to treat our fellow Jew with the appropriate respect and esteem. Comprehending the idea of the Zohar, we recognize that there is a letter in the Torah that was written to create this person! Our fellow Jew only exists because there is an irreplaceable part of the Torah which is their source of existence! Therefore, when we fail in the realm of *bein adam l'chaveiro*, we are also implicitly denigrating the Torah and accusing it of having a deficiency, *chas v'shalom*. In order to truly appreciate and

deserve the Torah, we are obligated to value our fellow Jew who represents a part of the Torah.

This is the deeper meaning of what Rabbi Akiva meant when he commented on the mitzvah of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha* by saying, "*zeh klal gadol b'Torah* – this is a profound principle of the Torah." It is a foundational tenet of the Torah itself to love your fellow as yourself. By acknowledging someone else's potential to bond with the Torah in a unique way, we recognize the completeness and perfection of the Torah itself.

This is why it was specifically during the period of Sefirah that Rabbi Akiva's students died. The Gemara gives the reason as "*lo nahagu kavod zeh bazeh* – they did not treat each other with respect." Besides failing on the basic level of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha* which we must show to every Jew, these *talmidim* were actively connecting with their own portions in Torah and realizing the potential latent in each of their letters. Hence, their failure demonstrated their complete inability to understand what the Torah is really about and its infinite nature. For this reason, their sin was of such magnitude that it dictated that they not be the bearers of Torah for the next generation, for they didn't appreciate what the Torah is!

As mentioned, there is a custom to learn Pirkei Avos between Pesach and Shavuos. Remarkably, the first five chapters deal almost exclusively with how we should relate to others. Yet, the sixth and final chapter is entirely devoted to the study of Torah, and more specifically, the acquisition of Torah. The takeaway is obvious. In order to acquire Torah, which is what we are hoping to do on Shavuos, we must learn to respect someone else's *chelek*; that they were also given a part of the Torah. In order to truly appreciate the Torah and our connection to it, we must recognize that it is infinite and everyone has a unique portion of it. Only then are we capable of receiving our *chelek* on Shavuos.

**Nathan Witztum** is the author of Marchiv Gad: A Haggadah Companion and writes the weekly Imrei Shefer parsha sheet. He initiated the Daf Yomi shiur at Ohr HaTorah, which he delivered for two years. Professionally, Nathan is a senior ship systems engineer for the U.S. Navy, designing and optimizing cutting-edge naval systems that power the fleet. He has lived with his wife and children in Kemp Mill since 2019.

## URU ADVENTURE

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# Awaken in the Woods of Silver Spring



RABBI DANIEL MOSES, M.ED

**U**ru Adventure gives kids a break from the norm—connecting them to nature, to Hashem, and to themselves through hikes, mud, fire-building, and real friendship.

## A Conversation with Rabbi Daniel Moses, M.Ed., AMI-Certified Educator and Uru Adventure Founder

Rabbi Daniel Moses is on a mission to elevate Jewish education—one child, one hike, and one moment of wonder at a time. With over 20 years in the classroom, an M.Ed., AMI Montessori certification, and a reputation for warmth and honesty, he's helped students grow not just academically, but personally. As Founder and Lead Guide of Uru Adventure, he brings learning outdoors, blending Torah, nature, and confidence-building experiences that stick for life. From guiding youth at KMS to inspiring kids across the DMV, his message is clear: when you meet kids where they are—and take them somewhere great—they rise.

### How did Uru Adventure Start?

We created Uru Adventure as a response to a need in the community for alternative extracurricular programming beyond organized sports, that provides physical activity and social connection for elementary school-aged children. It began with Sunday programming, which consisted of weekly local hikes, and eventually morphed into a summer camp. The goal of all programming, regardless of the format, is to give children the opportunity to explore nature independently, gain skills

and confidence in the outdoor environment, and connect to the people and environment around them. The inspiration for the name of our camp comes from Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4, where he writes that message of the shofar is to wake' עורו ישנים משנתכם... וזכרו בוראכם, "up those who slumber...and remember your creator". Our goal is to give children a break from the typical programming of their lives and provide an encounter with the inherent spirituality of nature on their own terms

### What draws children to participate in



### your program?

We firmly believe that the skills and experiences we offer are valuable for any child, however, the children intrinsically drawn to our program are those who are interested in being active, are curious, and enjoy exploration. Since we give children more choice and freedom in how they choose activities, children who crave more personal autonomy enjoy Uru Adventure.

Specifically, children who love climbing trees, running in the forest, throwing rocks in creeks, digging in mud, building fires, clambering over rocks, breathing fresh air, feeling humbled by the array of Hashem's handiwork, being involved with a group that welcomes them non-judgmentally and tries to bring out their best qualities are attracted to Uru Adventure.

### How do children benefit from outdoor education and Uru Adventure in particular?

Children gain internal confidence through accomplishing obtainable goals. The actual experience of completing a long hike, or walking through a natural setting in the rain fills children with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Children learn how to observe the world as it is and perform useful survival tasks through their own hard work. They learn to see the splendor and complexity of the beautiful world Hashem has created for us and understand their small place in it.

### What skills do kids build/develop in your program?

Children learn how to communicate with one another in constructive ways as they work as a team to complete a hike or task together. They develop physical strength and stamina. Children also learn survival skills and how to assess risky situations. As children are bombarded with varying messages of how to assess risk, gaining experience with how to think of risk independently and with guidance is invaluable in the modern world. Many of the activities we do with children also

develop skills of observation, analysis, and appreciation. Exploration, curiosity, and awe are all qualities that children need nurtured, and that they can gain through activities in nature.

### Considering the range of extracurricular activities available, how costly is it to engage with the activities Uru Adventure promotes?

An important goal of Uru Adventure is to inspire children and their families to take the adventurous spirit beyond our guided programs. We aim to make the activities we do accessible and sharable. There is some investment in a decent pair of shoes and some rain gear for specific weather situations, but the main cost is time, curiosity, and a positive attitude towards exploration. A story that emerged multiple times and embodied so much of what we are aiming to accomplish, happened during the Covid shutdown when children who attended Uru led their families on local hikes. There are innumerable adventures and microadventures waiting for children and families to discover wherever you look.

### What advice would you offer parents when choosing an extracurricular program for their kids?

Uru Adventure was created to help fill a void for physically challenging programming with a non-competitive, explorative spirit for children. At the time, in our community, there were children who craved and needed this type of program. When deciding on how to complement your child's school experience, think of what the child's interests and developmental needs are. It may be different from what you want or experienced yourself. But if we nurture the unique healthy interests and souls of our children in ways that honor the way they were created by Hashem in a constructive way, we will only help develop them into fulfilled and happy people who will have the strength to fulfill their *tafkid* in life.





# Built to Solve: Navigating Success

## A Conversation with Uri Levine, Co-Founder of Waze

Uri Levine helped millions of drivers beat traffic by co-founding Waze — then sold it to Google for over a billion dollars. But for him, it was never just about building an app. It was about solving real problems, staying curious, and never falling in love with your first idea. In this conversation, he shares how Waze came to life, why failure is part of the journey, and what still keeps him waking up excited every morning.

**Let's start from a big moment — what was your first reaction when Google came to buy Waze?**

Uri Levine:

It was crazy. Totally surreal. You build something from nothing, putting in years of sweat and doubt, and suddenly one of the biggest companies in the world wants it.

We were proud, for sure — but we were also very protective. We didn't create Waze just to cash out. We created it to solve a huge pain point for drivers. Google really understood that, and that's why it felt right. They respected what we had built, and more importantly, they respected the community behind it.

**Was it emotional when you actually closed the deal?**

It felt like handing over your child. We had built a company, but more than that, we had built a movement — drivers helping drivers, in real time, to make life just a little bit better.

Even after the deal, what mattered most to me was seeing that the community stayed strong. That meant everything.

**Waze has so many cool features now. If you had to pick, what's your personal favorite?**

The real-time traffic updates. No question.

Before Waze, navigation apps were basically static. You got directions, but they didn't know what was happening five minutes ahead of you.

Waze changed all that. We turned every driver into a live sensor. Suddenly, your app could tell you there's traffic, or an accident, or even a police car up ahead — not because a satellite said so, but because another driver just like you reported it. That real-time community feedback — it's still the heart of Waze.

**You've talked a lot about "falling in love with the problem, not the solution." What do you really mean by that?**

A lot of entrepreneurs fall in love with their product. They think, "This thing I built is amazing."

But if you focus only on your solution, you stop listening. You stop adapting.

You have to fall in love with the problem. If you deeply understand the problem you're trying to solve, you'll find a way. You'll pivot when you need to, you'll improve when you have to. But if you're just obsessed with your own idea, you'll get stuck.

It's the biggest difference between startups that survive — and startups that don't.

**What was the exact problem you fell in love with at Waze?**

Traffic.

I hated sitting in traffic. Everyone hates sitting in traffic. It's one of those universal frustrations — wasting time, burning fuel, getting stressed out.

Once we really focused on that pain point — not maps, not navigation, but saving people



time and frustration — everything else clicked into place. That was the compass for every decision we made.

**After Waze, you got involved in a lot of other startups. How do you choose which problems to work on next?**

It usually starts with my own frustration.

If I find myself saying, "Why isn't there a better way to do this?" — that's a red flag for opportunity.

Then I ask two things: is this a big problem for a lot of people, and are the current solutions terrible? If both are true, that's where you want to be.

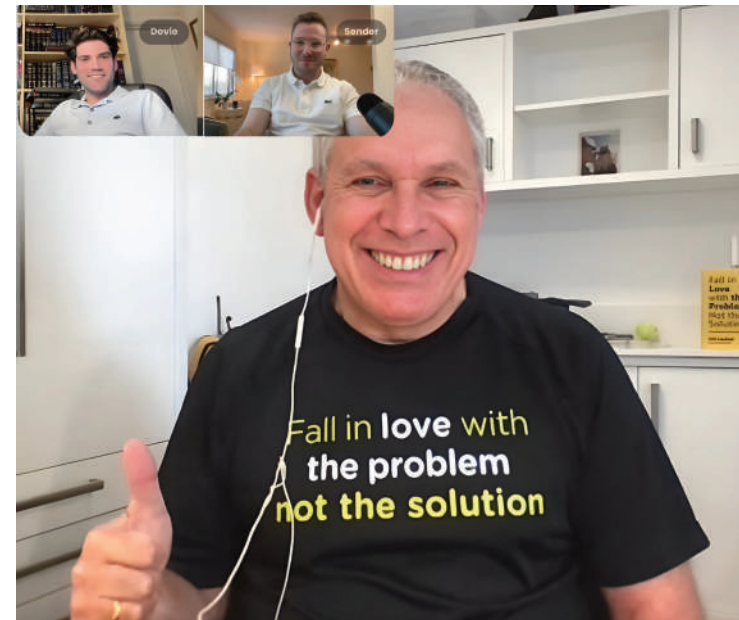
That's where real startup ideas come from — not brainstorming in a room, but living real life and getting annoyed enough to want to fix something.

**A lot of people think you have to invent something totally new to succeed. Do you agree?**

Not at all.

Uber didn't invent taxis. Airbnb didn't invent vacation rentals. Waze didn't invent maps.

What we all did was take something broken — something frustrating — and make it better.



You don't have to reinvent the wheel. You just have to make the ride smoother.

**You wrote a book recently, *Fall in Love with the Problem, Not the Solution*. Why did you feel it was important to write it?**

I wanted to give people a real guide — not the Instagram version of entrepreneurship, but the real thing.

Entrepreneurship is messy. It's full of failure and doubt. You have to be obsessed with the problem you're solving, because that's what will pull you through the tough times.

The book is basically everything I wish I had known when I started out — and everything I want the next generation of entrepreneurs to know.

**What's one piece of advice you'd give to someone starting out today?**

Solve a real problem that you personally care about.

Don't build something just because it's trendy or cool.

And don't be afraid of failure — because honestly, if you're afraid to fail, you've already failed.

Every success story you see — Waze, Uber, Airbnb, whatever — they all have a hundred failures behind them. What matters is learning, adjusting, and staying relentless about the mission.

**You've built companies out of Israel, often called the "Start-up Nation." How did growing up there shape the way you approach business?**

Israel teaches you two things from a young age: resilience and creativity.

We grow up knowing that things don't always go according to plan. You have to think fast, adapt, and figure out another way. That's built into our DNA.

The military plays a huge role too. You're given responsibility at a young age. You learn teamwork, decision-making, leadership. You learn to solve problems under pressure.

And maybe the most important thing: you're not afraid to fail. You know it's part of the process. That mindset — move fast, fix things, solve real problems — is why Israeli startups punch way above their weight. It definitely shaped me.

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# As If It Was Given Today: Approaching Mitzvos with *Zerizus*



**Rabbi Hillel Shaps**  
Director, Greater Washington  
Community Kollel  
www.gwckollel.org

In our last article (Tu Bishvat edition), we discussed the trait of *zerizus* (alacrity) and the importance of being a *doer*—someone who rises to the occasion and seizes opportunities to perform *mitzvos*. We identified several hindrances that may prevent us from engaging in these opportunities, such as sluggishness, feelings of inadequacy, and distractions. Overcoming these tendencies, however, is only part of the picture. To truly become doers, we must also cultivate an appreciation and excitement for the *mitzvos* themselves.

The Torah recounts the arrival of the Jewish people at Har Sinai, six days before *Matan Torah* (the giving of the Torah), with the verse: “On *this* day, they came to the Desert of Sinai.” (Shemos 19:1) Rashi wonders why it says, “on *this* day,” rather than “on *that* day.” He explains that the verse says “on *this* day” to teach you “that the words of the Torah shall be new to you, as if they were given today.” In other words, by using the words “*this* day,” the Torah is teaching us that *today*, in the year 5785, we should approach our Torah learning with a sense of freshness as if the Torah was given *this* day. There is an obvious difficulty with this Rashi. This verse is referring to the day they arrived at Sinai, *Rosh Chodesh Sivan* – before the Torah was given! How could the words “on *this* day,” which call for us to relive that very day, be teaching us to view the Torah like it was just given, if on *that* day the Torah had not actually been given yet?

The *Imrei Emes* (Bamidbar) offers an enlightening resolution. The Torah is not teaching us how to view the words of the

Torah *while* we are learning, rather, how to approach them *before* we begin to learn. Once a person is engaged in Torah study, its depth and beauty will naturally captivate us. The challenge for many, however, is making the time for learning. For that we must develop the proper mindset. We must appreciate the incredible opportunity that learning Torah affords us and how each time we learn, we are absorbing the word of Hashem. It is specifically *before* we receive the Torah – before we begin to learn – that we must inculcate within ourselves an excitement for learning – as if the Torah was given today.

The same can be said for other *mitzvos* as well. Is a request for help an annoying interruption or an exciting opportunity? The answer will depend on our preparation. If we train ourselves to remember that we were put in this world to help others, then when a call comes to offer assistance to an individual in need or volunteer for a community organization, we won’t hesitate to step up. If we contemplate the power of *tefillah* and realize that each time we daven we are having a personal encounter with the Master of the Universe, we’ll more easily tear ourselves away from distractions and run to daven.

*Zerizus* is not only essential at the outset of a *mitzvah*. As the *Mesilas Yesharim* (Chapter 7) teaches, it is also critical for seeing a *mitzvah* through to completion. One who truly values a *mitzvah* will hasten to finish it, lest the opportunity be lost.

But the possibility that we might not complete the *mitzvah* is not the only reason it should be performed with *zerizus*. The

Midrash (Mechilta Bo 12:17) elaborates on the verse, “And you shall guard the matzos.” “Rabbi Yoshaya says: Don’t read it that way, rather, ‘And you shall guard the *mitzvos*.’ Just as we don’t allow matzah to ferment and become *chametz*, so too we shouldn’t let a *mitzvah* ferment; rather if a *mitzvah* comes to your hand, don’t delay it.”

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (Pachad Yitzchak, Pesach) draws an astonishing conclusion from this Midrash. By equating a *mitzvah* that is done with delay – with dough that became *chametz*, the Midrash is implying that a lack of *zerizus* in the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* does not simply mean a lack of the positive addition of alacrity, but rather it represents an actual detriment in the fullness of the deed; it is like *chametz*! Why is this so?

The reason can perhaps be understood based on the words of the Orchos Tzadikkim: “One who performs his deeds with *zerizus* demonstrates that he loves his Creator... For *zerizus* is dependent on a person’s heart. When a person clears his heart of all foreign thoughts and focuses on one thought, then he is zealous without any doubt.” A *mitzvah* done with *zerizus* is a *mitzvah* done with love of Hashem. A person who delays the fulfillment of a *mitzvah* has allowed themselves to become distracted – an indication that the deed wasn’t being performed with the proper love.

As we come to the holiday of Shavuot, let us contemplate the special opportunity that every *mitzvah* affords us and jump to fulfill it with *zerizus* from beginning to end!

You’ve accomplished so much already. What still drives you forward every day?

Curiosity, without a doubt.

I still wake up asking, “What’s broken? What can be better?”

There are so many problems out there waiting to be solved. And every time you find one – every time you help make life a little easier, a little faster, a little better for people – it’s the most rewarding feeling there is.

That’s what keeps me going. It’s not about the exit. It’s not about the title. It’s about solving the next problem.

“The world doesn’t need more ideas. It needs more people who care enough to fix things.”

Anything you’d like to leave readers with?

If there’s one thing I hope you take away, it’s this:

Don’t wait until you have the perfect idea. Don’t wait for perfect timing. Start now.

Find a real problem that frustrates you, and fall in love with solving it.

If you stay focused on that – not on being fancy, not on getting approval – but on truly helping people, you’ll be amazed at what you can build.

The world doesn’t need more ideas. It needs more people who care enough to fix things.



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# Uncomfortable Truths, Unshakable Convictions

**How one woman left the classroom, entered Congress, and never stopped fighting for the Jewish people**

**A conversation with Sarah Stern, President and Founder of EMET**



**Sarah Stern**

As the President and founder of the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET), Mrs. Sarah Stern has made it her mission to confront the blind spots in Washington, sound the alarm on Iran, expose rising antisemitism, and remind the West what Israel is truly up against. For over 30 years, Sarah has moved through the halls of Congress with one goal: tell the truth—even when it's unpopular, uncomfortable, or inconvenient. In this conversation, she opens up about how it all began, what the world still misunderstands, and why standing for Israel is not just about Jews—it's about the survival of civilization. This is her story—and the lessons we all need to hear.



## Your path started far from Capitol Hill. What was the moment that changed everything for you?

It really began in 1993, right after the Oslo Accords were signed. I was stunned at how fast people embraced Yasser Arafat as a peace partner. Here was a man responsible for decades of terror, suddenly treated like a statesman. It felt like overnight, the world had decided to forget who he really was—and I couldn't sit by silently while that happened.

At the time, I was a school psychologist and volunteering with WINPAC, a pro-Israel political action group. I had become friends with people in the Israeli Embassy under Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. After Oslo, three of them reached out—

Ambassador Yoram Ettinger, the Minister of Congressional Affairs; Yossi Ben-Aharon, the Director General of Yitzhak Shamir's government; and Yigal Carmon from the Shin Bet.

They told me, "We know in our stomachs that Yasser Arafat will not live up to a single clause of the Oslo Accords, and we are no longer in power. We need you to tell the truth about what Arafat is actually saying to his people in his own language."

So they gave me videotapes—Yigal Carmon himself did the translations—and I started bringing them around Capitol Hill. I met with staffers, members of Congress, anyone who would listen. I was carrying around hard evidence—unedited, unfiltered—of what Arafat was actually saying to his people in Arabic.

But back then, most people weren't ready to face that. There was this overwhelming desire to believe in peace, and confronting the truth felt inconvenient—almost disruptive.

## Did you find people were open to what you were showing them?

Some were. But many simply didn't want to hear it. Everyone was eager to believe that Arafat had changed. He was being treated like a visionary, a reformer—people thought he was the best thing for the Jews since sliced matzah. But I had been following him for years. Even though I was still a school psychologist, I had long been immersed in the politics of the Middle East. I knew the script people were embracing didn't match the facts. It wasn't reality.

## And it was that disconnect that led you to create EMET?

Exactly. I realized how few voices in Washington were speaking up—really speaking the truth without apology. There was a huge need for an organization that could educate policymakers honestly, consistently, and without spin. The silence was costing us, and I couldn't ignore it.

At EMET, we put everything in the framework of what's dangerous not only to Israel but also to America and the entire Western world. The way I see it, the Israelis are on the front lines of defending the West. That's why this isn't just about Israel—it's about civilization.

## Let's talk Iran. You sounded the alarm years ago. What's the latest, and how serious is it?

It's critical. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency's February 2025 report, Iran has more than 278 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60%. It only takes about a week to go from that to 90%—weapons-grade. That's enough for seven nuclear bombs. This point has only become more critical in recent years, given everything.

People think Israel can absorb a hit. It can't. It's 0.01% of the size of the 22 Arab countries surrounding it. One nuclear bomb would be catastrophic. This is an existential threat.

## You've spoken often about moral clarity. What does that mean today?

It means recognizing that Israel is still fighting the same war it fought in 1948—just with different names and technology. The October 7 massacre woke a lot of people up. But many Israelis already knew. They've always lived with this threat.

The IDF is the most moral army in the world. It's feeding its enemies while fighting them. They've held back from decimating Hamas not only because of the hostages, but because every innocent Palestinian civilian that dies weighs against the core values of the Jewish heart. They've sacrificed soldiers to avoid civilian deaths. That kind of morality is rare—almost incomprehensible to most.

## On the U.S. side—what's happening on college campuses? You've been a strong advocate for the Antisemitism Awareness Act. What's it about?

Jewish and pro-Israel students are under attack. They're being ostracized, bullied, physically threatened. They don't have the same

protections as other minority groups. That's why we've been fighting so hard for the Antisemitism Awareness Act. It's not just legislation—it's about restoring justice in a space that's completely shifted.

This bill gives schools a tool—a definition of antisemitism using the IHRA framework—so they can recognize when criticism of Israel turns into discrimination against Jews. It passed the House. We're pushing to get it through the Senate. It's bipartisan, and it's essential.

## What's driving the anti-Israel sentiment in education? What's been fueling this campus hostility?

Money. Massive amounts of money from places like Qatar. They've poured billions into our education system—universities, even K-12 public schools. With that comes influence. Whole curricula, entire departments, endowments. The extent of foreign ideological control is staggering and deeply overlooked.

There's a textbook called *The Arab World Studies Notebook* by Audrey Shabbas. It's very slick—designed to make students feel like Israel is immoral. That's how deep it runs. This is psychological warfare. It starts early.

## You've worked with many members of Congress. Any memorable relationships?

Oh, so many. Senator Joe Lieberman was a mensch—he was a true gentleman. He and Senator John Kyl signed so many

bills together people used to joke and call them "Kyl Lieberman." He was always deeply principled, incredibly respectful, and consistent.

Ritchie Torres is another gem. He's so pro-Israel that people call him "Ritchie Torah." He once told me someone tapped him on the shoulder at a fundraiser and warned him, "Don't eat that—it's not kosher." That shows how much he identifies with the Jewish people.

## Why do you care so deeply about this mission? This work feels personal for you. Why?

I'm named after my aunt Sarah, who was murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust. She lived in a small town in Poland and was married to a rabbi. When the Nazis came, they humiliated and tortured her.

My maiden name was Newberger—hers too. I carry her name, and I carry her memory. It's always been part of who I am, and it's part of why I do this work.

## What's the one message you hope our readers will walk away with?

Tell the *emet*—the truth. Even when it's uncomfortable. Even when people don't want to hear it.

We are a tiny people surrounded by powerful forces. But we have truth on our side. Speak it. Fight for it. Not with anger, but with strength, compassion, and clarity.

Because if we don't tell our story—someone else will. And they won't tell it right.





# ASK THE RABBI:

## Shavuot Edition



**RABBI EPHRAIM MIRETZKY**  
Regional Executive Director  
Greater Washington NCSY

### "One Nation. One Torah. A Thousand Questions."

Every year as Shavuot approaches, my inbox, DMs, and coffee shop conversations start lighting up. Some are from teens at NCSY, others from college students, young professionals, or parents I bump into at Starbucks in Rockville or late-night *kumzitzes* in Kemp Mill. They're not always religious—but they're real, thoughtful, and looking for connection.

So, in the spirit of Torah being for *everyone*, here are some of the most common—and most thought-provoking—Shavuot questions I've been asked lately.

Got your own? Email me at [Rabbi@WashingtonJewishJournal.com](mailto:Rabbi@WashingtonJewishJournal.com). It might just show up in next month's edition.

#### "Why do we eat dairy on Shavuot?"

– Rebecca A., Woodside

After we received the Torah at Har Sinai, we became responsible for keeping all the kosher laws, including how meat must be slaughtered and prepared properly. Since we didn't have kosher meat ready or the right utensils yet, we ate dairy instead.

Many also point out that Torah is compared to milk—pure, nourishing, and sweet—like it says, "*like honey and milk under your tongue*" (Shir HaShirim). Eating dairy reminds us of that sweetness and the special connection we have to Torah. Eating dairy reminds us of the beauty and sweetness of Torah itself.

#### "Did we really stay up all night at Har Sinai? Is that why we stay up now?"

– Ari K., Arlington

Actually, quite the opposite. The Midrash says the people *overslept* on the morning of Matan Torah! So today we stay up learning Torah to show we're alert, eager, and ready for the moment.

#### "Do I have to go to shul to accept the Torah, or can I just connect from home?"

– Daniel M., Alexandria

You can connect anywhere. Torah can be accepted anywhere—but hearing the Ten Commandments read publicly in shul connects us back to the moment all of Klal Yisrael stood as one at Sinai. Being together matters. It's not just about personal connection—it's about showing up with your people to say, once again, "We will do and we will listen."

#### "What is the Torah? Just the Five Books?"

– Rachel S., Aspen Hill

The Five Books of Moses are the written core, but Torah is much broader. It includes the Oral Torah—passed down and later written in the Mishnah and Gemara—which explains how to live the written part. Think of it as the blueprint *plus* the instruction manual.

#### "Is Shavuot a happy holiday? It doesn't feel like it has much going on."

– Eli M., Washington, D.C.

It's got a quiet power. We don't blow shofars or build huts—we just celebrate the biggest moment in Jewish history: the giving of the Torah. No props needed when the message is that epic.

#### "What does cheesecake have to do with God?"

– Sophie G., Baltimore

Great question. Cheesecake's just one tasty way we honor the day—but dairy itself is symbolic of Torah's purity and sweetness. It also connects to the laws we received, which made meat a lot trickier overnight.

#### "What bracha do I say on cheesecake?"

– Maya R., Potomac

Great question—and it depends. If the crust is prominent (like a full layer of graham cracker or cake), you'd say *Mezonos*. If it's a plain slice without real crust, you'd say *Shehakol*. But here's the pro tip: if you're not sure, and you're eating a mezonos snack with it, just have that in mind when making the bracha. (Ask your local rav if you're still unsure—it can depend on how it's made!)

#### "If we got the Torah at Sinai, what did people follow before that?"

– Jonah B., White Oak

Our ancestors had a sense of right and wrong—some even knew divine laws prophetically. But they didn't have the 613 mitzvos. Sinai turned values into a national covenant, with shared laws and responsibilities.

#### "Why do we read Megillas Rus on Shavuot?"

– Lily C., Fairfax

Rus left her entire world behind to join Am Yisrael and accept the Torah's way of life. Just like us at Sinai, she said "yes" before asking questions—"Where you go, I will go." She's also the ancestor of King David, who was born and passed away on Shavuot. Her story is all about loyalty, kindness, and choosing Torah with love.

#### "What's different about Jewish law versus secular law?"

– Ava K., North Bethesda

Secular law maintains order. Torah law builds people. It guides our actions *and* shapes our character, with God as both the source and the standard.

#### "Why was the Torah given in a desert? Wouldn't a city make more sense?"

– Shira B., Takoma Park

The desert has no distractions, no ownership, no ego. Hashem gave the Torah there to show it's for everyone—rich or poor, insider or outsider. It's about humility, not location.

#### "If every Jewish soul was at Sinai, where was I?"

– Max S., Chevy Chase

According to our tradition, your *neschama*—your soul—was there. You may not consciously remember it, but you're spiritually wired to respond to Torah. That spark is real.

#### "Why doesn't Shavuot have any mitzvos like a sukkah or matzah?"

– Rina G., Baltimore

Because *Torah itself* is the mitzvah. Shavuot is like getting the master key—every other mitzvah flows from here. No extras needed when you're celebrating the source.

#### "If God knows everything, how is free will real?"

– Yonatan F., Arlington

Great question. God exists beyond time—He *knows* what you'll choose, but doesn't *force* it. You still make choices freely; He just sees the full picture before you do.

#### "I love Torah ideas, but I don't keep everything. Am I a hypocrite?"

– Nina S., Kemp Mill

Not even close. Wanting to grow and struggling is what makes you *authentic*, not fake. Torah is a path, not a pass/fail test.

#### "Why is Shavuot only one or two days—when Pesach and Sukkos are much longer?"

– Avi D., North Bethesda

Excellent question. Shavuot celebrates one event—the *giving of the Torah*—and it happened in one day. Pesach and Sukkos represent longer journeys (freedom and protection), so their timelines reflect that. But one day doesn't make it less powerful. Shavuot is the root of everything—we get Torah, we get our purpose, and we say "yes" again every year.

Shavuot isn't just about remembering a moment—it's about *reliving* it. Every question we ask, every answer we learn, is another way of standing at Har Sinai and saying, "I'm in." Whether you're pulling an all-nighter in yeshiva or sneaking in a page of Torah before bed, you're part of the story. So keep asking. Keep learning. Keep showing up. And if something's on your mind, email me anytime at [Rabbi@WashingtonJewishJournal.com](mailto:Rabbi@WashingtonJewishJournal.com). Because Torah was given to *all* of us—and there's always more to discover.

Rabbi Ephraim Miretzky serves as Regional Director for Greater Washington NCSY, leading impactful programs that inspire Jewish youth and foster leadership. Rabbi Miretzky can be reached at [Miretzkye@ncsy.org](mailto:Miretzkye@ncsy.org).



# FLYING WITH Faith:

## An Orthodox Jew's Journey in the U.S. Navy



**Ilan Cohn**

*WJJ sat down with Captain Cohn to hear his inspiring journey from neuroscience to naval aviation, overcoming challenges, embracing his faith, and serving with pride in the U.S. Navy.*

**C**aptain Cohn's career took an unexpected turn from the world of neuroscience to the cockpit of naval aviation. As an Orthodox Jew in the United States Navy, he navigated unique challenges, from keeping kosher to observing Shabbat while serving his country. In this exclusive interview, Captain Cohn shares his remarkable journey, the values that guided him, and his advice for other Orthodox Jews considering military service.

**Ilan: Captain Cohn, it's an honor to speak with you today. Your journey—from the world of neuroscience to the cockpit of naval aviation—is nothing short of extraordinary. As an Orthodox Jew navigating the unique challenges of military service, your story is one that few have experienced. I'm excited to dive**

**into your time in the U.S. Navy and hear how you balanced faith, duty, and adventure.**

*Captain Cohn: It's a pleasure to be here. Please, ask away.*

**Tell me a little about your background before you joined the Navy.**

Originally, I was training as a neuroscientist at the University of Illinois. My main interests at the time were biology and math, so I completed a bachelor's degree in biology. I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do, so, like most people in my position, I applied to graduate school.

I started a graduate program in immunology at Brandeis University, but I quickly realized I wasn't interested in lab work and the traditional path of a biologist. Fortunately, I

had an advisor who guided me through my uncertainty. He suggested that instead of leaving, I make a list of the top five things I was interested in. My list included math, biology, computer science, and robotics—that's only four, but he took that and told me about a new neuroscience PhD program starting the next year. He offered me the opportunity to be one of its first graduate students, which was phenomenal.

I pursued the program and focused on nonlinear dynamics—chaos theory—which was quite popular in the late '90s. However, when it came time to do my postdoctoral research, I wasn't sure if academia was the right fit for me.



**Clearly, you didn't end up in academia. What motivated you to serve in the military? Was it a specific event, person, or value that drove you?**

Good question. I had been training my whole academic career to become a professor, and one of the purposes of a postdoc is to test yourself in an academic environment before fully committing. However, I realized I was not interested in academia. It wasn't the long hours or the challenging problems that deterred me—I actually enjoyed those. Instead, I wanted to work on broader, more impactful issues rather than focus on a single, highly specialized theory.

I strongly support academia and believe in the power of scientific research, but I felt there were other ways I could contribute to our country in a more immediate way. While searching for different career opportunities, I came across a Navy program that offered to send candidates to flight school and integrate them into the Navy aviation enterprise—provided they had a PhD in neuroscience or psychology. That caught my attention, and the rest is history.

**Tell me a little bit about flight school. What was your initial experience like when you joined?**

Before flight school, I had to attend Officer School. The type of Officer School I went to was designed for professionals with degrees or expertise that the Navy specifically needed—such as doctors, lawyers, physical therapists, and scientists. Our training was slightly different from that of "line officers," who serve in combat roles.

Because of my professional background, I entered with a mid-level officer rank and attended Officer Indoctrination School, which is a six-week program. It teaches the fundamentals of being a naval officer—military history, how to wear the uniform, and a phenomenal amount of physical training.

Flight school itself was in Pensacola, Florida, the "cradle of naval aviation." Both Officer School and flight school were incredibly exciting and unlike anything I had ever experienced. I was the only person out of 400 officers wearing a kippah. Fortunately, I met the school chaplain, Chaplain Carney,

who approached me on my second day and asked how she could help make my experience more accommodating for my religious needs. She helped me navigate challenges, including observing Shabbat.

For example, Officer School was in Newport, Rhode Island—home to the oldest synagogue in America. I asked if I could get a pass to walk there on Shabbat and spend the entire day at the synagogue. She made it happen, which was amazing. Similarly, in flight school, training was often 24/7, including evenings and weekends. However, I was able to request a "snivel" to avoid flying on Shabbat, and my superiors were very accommodating.

**How did you keep kosher while in training? I assume the meals they provided weren't kosher.**

In Officer School, we ate meals together with our classmates, so my diet was limited to yogurt, fruits, vegetables, and various cereals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The moment I was allowed to leave base, I went shopping for kosher food.

In flight school, I had more flexibility since I lived in my own apartment. My wife, Debbie, and I got an apartment on the beach in Pensacola, on a cliff overlooking the bay. Occasionally, we would drive to New Orleans to pick up kosher food.

**Were there other Jewish service members in your flight school class?**

Yes, there were other Jewish students in both Officer and flight school, and we definitely connected. However, I was the only Orthodox Jew. Most of the other Jewish service members were from Reform or Conservative backgrounds.

**Now that you've honorably retired, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment in the Navy?**

That's a tough one. I would say my most rewarding accomplishment was during the last three years of my military career when I served as the specialty leader, or head, of my community.

My specific naval community was aerospace experimental psychologists, which is part of a larger group called aeromedical officers. Our community consisted of about 30 members. Along with my assistant, I helped navigate significant personnel challenges, ensuring we retained the critical people needed to keep our community viable. I was proud to retire knowing I left behind a strong, capable team to continue supporting naval aviation.



**Looking back on your service, what lessons or thoughts stand out to you?**

Over time, I realized that the best way to guide my career, personal growth, and leadership development was by learning from the wisdom of my mentors. There were three key principles I carried with me throughout my career:

1. Own your mistakes.
2. Never lie, cheat, or steal.
3. Excellence, not arrogance.

These values shaped the way I served and led others.

**What advice would you give to Orthodox Jews considering a career in the U.S. military?**

The most important thing is to approach military service with a solutions-oriented mindset. I never went in saying, "I'm a religious Jew, and you have to accommodate me." Instead, I would analyze the challenges ahead—whether it was standing watch on Shabbat or flight training conflicts—and find a way to balance my religious observance with my military duties.

I always found a way to make it work, and my superiors respected that approach.

**Final question—would you recommend the Navy to other Orthodox Jews?**

It depends on the role. There's a big difference between serving as a line officer in combat and serving as a staff officer in a specialized field. Staff officer roles—like mine—offer more flexibility to navigate religious observance.

Before committing to military service, you have to be honest with yourself. Are you willing to go the extra mile to balance faith and duty? If you're up for the challenge, the Navy offers an incredibly rewarding and diverse career path.





# SPRING REFRESH

*Little changes, big difference—just in time for guests.*

AVIVA WAXMAN

**S**pring weather is officially here! We have all been hibernating in our homes for the last 4 months and realized all the changes and updates we want to make to our home. Following that spring/ summer is the most popular time for home reno projects so if you are ready for some good face-lifting tips here we go!

Updating a living room can be super simple with just a change of accent pillows and window curtains. For accent pillows, I usually go for 5 pillows: 2 on each side that meets up with one in the middle. I like to choose an accent color from inside the room and purchase two matching throw pillows in this accent color. Next you want to get 2 matching accent pillows in the same color as the sofa or another neutral color in the room. The single pillow in the middle can typically be a nice solid white pillow. The pillows will be arranged with each of the matching sets separated in mirror image on either side of the sofa and then meets up with the white pillow in the center. For curtains, I always recommend using a 2 panel curtain, no valence, in either the accent color or the wall color. Curtains should be hung at ceiling height to give the room a tall, grand appearance.

An easy update for the dining room is artwork. I find that the dining room is the best place for a stunning piece of artwork, typically hung above the buffet. The artwork should be  $\frac{3}{4}$  up to the full length of the buffet that it is hung above. Secret tip, Etsy.com is a fantastic resource for artwork. They have a large selection of handmade art from modern paintings to metal artwork to Judaica artwork.

The kitchen can have an entirely new look with one change; add wallpaper. I would choose a nice bold pattern with a color that coordinates with the kitchen cabinets to hang on any painted wall. Wallpaper takes a standard wall and turns it into a showstopper artwork. Your kitchen just turned from bland to grand.

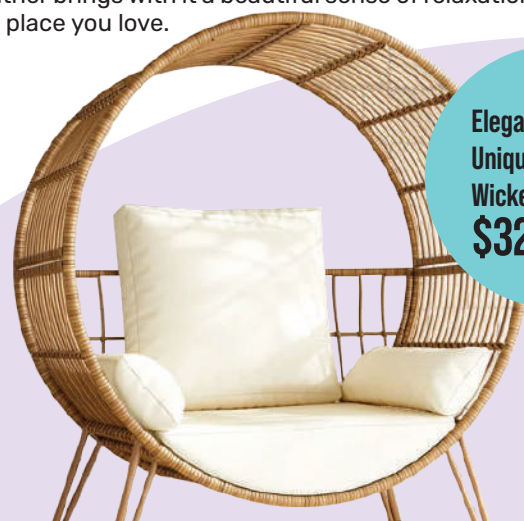
The nice weather brings with it a beautiful sense of relaxation. Use the time to make your space a place you love.

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Aviva Waxman is the owner of Sheva Interiors, an interior design firm covering Maryland and DC. Aviva loves to work with her clients to bring out their style in a contemporary and You-nique way. She can be reached at 443-272-5879 or shevainteriors@gmail.com

## The Great Cheesecake Dilemma: A Slim Chance Indeed

**How a once-simple dessert became the unlikely symbol of a deeper, more personal Shavuos experience.**



YONI PRAFF

Cheesecake. This minhag has become such an ingrained part of our Shavuos that no one ever stops to consider its pros and cons. I'll be the first to agree that cheesecake is likely the most delicious dessert in the world and that if it weren't for my wife having civilized me, I would eat it for breakfast, lunch and dinner (but not for dessert, because one mustn't overdo it).

At the same time, cheesecake likes to conceal its dark side. Behind that fair façade lurks a plethora of calories, sugar and fat. Is cheesecake almost irresistible? Yes. Is it the best way to celebrate Matan Torah? Yes and no.

Now before the cheesecake industry comes after me, I want to confess that perhaps like others out there, I have put on some extra heft in recent years, and I would like to shed these pointless pounds. I wish I could say that I want to lose weight solely lishma, but let's get real. I want to prevent scenarios like what happened the other day:

We had guests on Shabbos and one well-meaning fellow noticed the wedding photo hanging on our wall.

"Is that you?" he asked, incredulously.

"Yes," I answered, trying not to be perturbed by his scarcity of subtlety.

"You look so, so..."

"I know, I know, I was thinner back then."

"No, I was just going to say, you, you look so...different!"

Well, let's give him partial credit, despite the delay in his diplomatic dexterity.

Look, if having a dad-bod is against the law, then consider me a crime kingpin. I want to lose weight, I honestly do. It's just that the cheesecake substitutes out there, shall we say, leave much to be desired, such as having a taste that I am able to tolerate.

What's that you say? The solution is to enjoy one piece of cheesecake on Shavuos and then stop? Well, I hadn't thought of that.

I guess losing weight is literally a piece of cake.

**Yoni Praff** is a humorist (even though the word "humorist" is dry and not very funny). He performs for children and adults alike and is the host of not one, but two podcasts! He is available to perform stand-up comedy. Contact him at jmp raff@gmail.com.

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# Shavuot: Monumental Steps



*Rabbi Shmuel Leigh*  
*Director*  
*The Golden Network*



The Yerushalmi states that each Shavuot, we accept the Torah anew. On reflection, though, how can we undertake the immense responsibility that the Torah demands of us?

We all know that time flies by quickly when you are having fun. When engaged in an enjoyable activity, we do not tire so quickly and can keep going, even when the activity requires much effort. On the other hand, a task we dislike feels burdensome from the start. The key to accepting the Torah is to appreciate it.

I was privileged to study in Kollel at the Yeshiva of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, zt"l, a legendary educator. The Rosh Kollel was his illustrious son, R Elimelech, and it was established to bring a real Torah environment into the yeshiva. The kollel members dedicated their time to learning and didn't interact much with the students or other faculty, including Rabbi Trenk. Yet, the excitement, respect, and love that Rabbi Trenk had for each word of the Torah were contagious. He could never get enough of it, and he made the kollel members feel like they were the greatest gift to the world. It was evident that he understood the sanctity of each word.

Shavuot is about significant commitments. But to achieve one's spiritual goals, it's essential to appreciate every letter, word, and moment spent learning.



**Rabbi Shmuel Leigh**, the director of The Golden Network (TGN), studied at Beth Medrash Govoah, and the Greater Washington Community Kollel before founding TGN in 2011. TGN offers retirees and seniors a variety of engaging programs, including classes, learning, and entertainment at private homes and senior facilities.



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# From Stressing to Blessings™: Modeh Ani as a Wake-Up Call for All Yisrael

## How Music Can Bring Back Our People

"...transforming the Yetzer Hara (stressing) into the Yetzer Tov (blessing) through Shirat HaTorah™, The TorahSong Experience™."  
— Rabbi Eli Meir Zaks

### Stress kills.

It is the root cause of up to 90% of disease and mortality.

From generation to generation, we as Yidden face both external and internal stress.

Externally, we endure persistent antisemitism—spread by *oyvim* seeking to build kingdoms by destroying ours.

The enemy chants "Kill the Jews" and "Death to America" throughout the nations simply because we will not submit to their will.

Internally, we are at a serious tipping point.

### Jewish continuity is in crisis.

The number of Yehudim who open a Tanach to read, learn, and daven may be at an all-time low.

That's why I've dedicated my life to *The TorahSong Experience™*—a daily musical journey that shares original *niggunim* and melodies set to the holy words of the *Siddur*. With over 1,000 compositions, the *Song of the Day* currently reaches more than 12,000 free online subscribers.

*B'ezrat HaShem*, this project—a new song from the *Siddur* for each day of the year—might even be worthy of the Guinness Book of World Records.

But the goal is deeper than that.

The mission is to spark a global *Baalei Teshuvah* movement by using over six decades of music experience to reconnect millions of Jews—especially those who've gone *off the derech*—back to Torah through TorahSongs™.

### Imagine:

Every Jew waking up and singing *Modeh Ani* as their first act of the day. From there: *Shacharis*. *Mincha*. *Maariv*. A Torah-centered life.

Eventually, becoming *Shomer Shabbos*.

*B'ezrat HaShem*, we can do this—together.

The path toward Shabbos observance starts with a "Wake-Up Call" to all of Klal Yisrael—literally: *Modeh Ani*.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, writes in Chapter Nine of *The Essence of Chassidus*:

"...It is incumbent upon every person to accustom himself to say *Modeh Ani* immediately upon awakening from his sleep, and thereby remember G-d who stands over him, and arise with zeal.

This statement is the foundation and beginning of a person's service—the fulfillment of all the teachings of Torah—and of his life for the rest of the day...

The service of man to his Maker begins through man's awakening from sleep, from his slumber in the vanities of the world, to use the well-known expression of Maimonides."

This is how we fight both the internal and external *Yetzer Hara*: through **transformation by praise and prayer**.

The Torah teaches us not to despair.

Our #1 weapon against all forms of stress and opposition is **the joy of Torah and the power of song**.

"*You (HaShem) dwell in the praises of Yisrael.*"  
— Tehillim 22:4

### The Four Primary Keys to Overcoming Our Enemies (Internal and External):

1. **L'Kasher** – Connect to HaKadosh Baruch Hu
2. **L'Dabek** – Attach yourself to Him
3. **L'Tahare** – Purify before Him
4. **L'Avod** – Serve Him wholeheartedly

When we sing new TorahSongs™ daily, we transform the Yetzer Hara into the *Yetzer Tov*—because **HaKadosh Baruch Hu dwells within our praises**.

As Rabbi Mandel of Shaarei Bitachon in Lakewood, NJ writes in his Parashas Eikev edition of Bitachon Weekly

**Chaim Baruch (aka Howard Samtur)** is a coach, author, speaker, composer, pianist, and vocalist who delights audiences and communities with his unique, joyful, and inclusive style. He is the founder of the *Modeh Ani Movement™*, *The TorahSong Experience™*, and *Shirat HaTorah™*. He serves as artist-in-residence at the Hebrew Home of Greater Washington and has worked with Jewish communities throughout the East Coast. He is the author of *How To Be Stress Free: Go From Stressing To Blessings* and the creator of the one-man musical comedy revue *My Big Bronx Beatles Bar Mitzvah*. To receive free selections from *The TorahSong Experience: Song of the Day™* and join the movement to reconnect friends and family who are "off the derech" through the power of music and Torah, email: [HowardSamtur@gmail.com](mailto:HowardSamtur@gmail.com) – **Am Yisrael Chail**



CHAIM BARUCH AKA  
HOWARD SAMTUR

"The life of a Yid is a symphony of thanking and praising HaShem. Rashi, in the name of Chazal, says that the word *ashteret* comes from a root meaning 'wealth.'

In *Shir HaShirim*, he explains how every part of a sheep is used for *Kedusha*:

Horns become *shofars*, skin becomes drums, foot bones become flutes, intestines become harps.

**Klal Yisrael is compared to sheep**—HaShem is our Shepherd, we are His flock.

And what do sheep become? **Music!** The message is clear: A Yid is completely music!

Just look at our *Shacharis*, especially *Pesukei D'Zimra*—so many songs to HaShem.

When a Yid sings, it's not a fleeting moment. It's our essence.

The very word *Yehudi* means one who gives thanks.

When a Jew has *tzuris*, perhaps he isn't being his truest self—he isn't singing and praising HaShem enough!

Everyone knows that learning Torah is the sweetest thing in the world. In fact, the Gemara says that learning without song is like dry bread—lacking any *geshmak*.

A true connection to HaShem is forged through **praise and gratitude**."

"*A voice cries out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of HaShem, make straight in the desert a path for our G-d.*"

— Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 40:3

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# The Torah's Mysterious Name for Shavuos (and Why It Matters)

**Shavuos marks the giving of the Torah—but the Torah itself never says that outright. Instead, it calls the day “Yom Habikkurim,” focusing on two loaves of bread. Why does the Torah highlight bread instead of Sinai?**

When we look at the Torah's description of the holiday of Shavuos, something startling emerges. Despite Shavuos being traditionally related to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Torah never directly connects these together. Instead, the name the Torah (Bamidbar 28:26) designates to the holiday is “Yom Habikkurim”, a reference, according to most commentaries, to the unique offering brought on Shavuos called the Shte Halechem, the two loaves of bread.

While Chametz, leavened bread, is generally prohibited from being brought as part of an offering during the rest of the year, Shavuos is an exception, and we are explicitly commanded to bring two loaves of bread to Hashem. The question is why? Additionally, if Shavuos is the day that we received the Torah, why not say so explicitly? Why name it after the offerings brought on that day?

**“The Torah doesn't name the day after Torah—because this day is really about you. Who you choose to become matters most.”**

To answer these questions, we first have to understand the significance of the two loaves that were brought on Shavuos. On the second day of Pesach, we are commanded to bring the Omer offering from barley, count seven whole weeks, and bring the Shte Halechem from wheat on the 50th day.

Why do we bring a barley offering on

Pesach and a wheat one on Shavuos? The Maharal (Tiferes Yisrael 25) explains that barley is animal fodder, and on the holiday of Pesach, when we were just freed from Egypt without a Torah to guide us, we were like animals. Only with the giving of the Torah on Shavuos did we receive the ability to bring out our human potential, and therefore, only at that point are we able to bring an offering of human food (wheat).

**“The Torah wasn't just given—it was planted in us. And every act of kindness, patience, or faith is how it grows.”**

Using this explanation of the Maharal, perhaps we can now explain why Shavuos is deemed “Yom Habikkurim” without any explicit mention of receiving the Torah. The very fact that we are commanded to bring the Shte Halechem is in itself the greatest testament to the giving of the Torah on Shavuos, alluding to the reality that only now, once we have received the Torah, can we truly become the people that Hashem desires from us. What greater sign is there of inner elevation than our ability to sanctify even chametz, that which was previously disqualified? The Torah is not simply a set of laws—it is a refining fire that transforms the very material of our lives. Bread, in this context, is not mundane—it is elevated, intentional, and deeply symbolic. So too are we: transformed from passive recipients into active partners with Hashem in creation. For this reason



Matan Friedman

as well, the Torah's name for Shavuos, “Yom Habikkurim”, truly reflects what the essence of Shavuos is all about.

This name, “Yom Habikkurim,” also invites us to ask: what are our bikkurim—our first fruits? What do we offer from the best of ourselves, from the growth we've cultivated since Pesach? It is not only the wheat that ripens—it is the heart, the mind, and the soul that mature through the weeks of Sefirah. Shavuos is not the end of the count—it is the moment that gives the count meaning. We arrive not only with loaves in hand, but with a readiness to live with purpose, depth, and connection.

May we learn from the message of the Shte Halechem and Shavuos, and achieve our potential through the wisdom and guidance of our Torah! Let us recognize that our offering is not merely symbolic—it is deeply personal. Every relationship we invest in, every challenge we rise above, and every moment of spiritual clarity we embrace is a form of our own Shte Halechem. Torah is not just learned—it is lived. And through it, we become the offering that brings light and meaning into the world.

**Matan Friedman** currently serves as the Assistant Rabbi at The Roslyn Synagogue. A Kemp Mill native, he graduated Yeshiva University with honors in Mathematical Economics and Biology and is currently pursuing Semicha at RIETS. Matan has recorded over 520 shiurim, totaling more than 5,000 hours of Torah, reaching thousands of daily listeners around the world through YU Torah. He is also the author of 12 seforim and advanced Torah monographs presenting original insights in areas such as Talmud, Halacha, and Machshava—many of which have received haskamos from leading Gedolim. Matan is available for private tutoring and can be reached at Matan@WashingtonJewishLife.com.



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