



MANHATTAN HIGH SCHOOL
FOR GIRLS

SHAVUOS
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12

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From the desk of the Editors

On *Shavuot*, there is a custom to recite and learn *Megillas Rus*, the tale of a young woman who left her home in order to join *Klal Yisrael*. The *Megillah* begins with the statement *Vayehi B'yemei Shfot Hashoftim*- and it was in the days of the judges. This is an extremely vague statement, one that many *meforshim* examine. Some say it is an allusion to the caliber of the people at the time, and others say that it hints to a difficult era filled with hardships. Others look at this introductory phrase, connect it to the very reason the *Megillah* was written, and relate to us an eternal message about the value of giving.

We know that everything in *Tanach* was transcribed for a reason. As the *Maharal* states, only *nevuot* and stories that are *hutzrechu l'doros*, needed for future generations, are included in the 24 books of *Tanach*. So, except for a detailed record of Dovid Hamelech's lineage, what eternal message does *Megillas Rus* convey to us? Rav Zeira says that *Megillas Rus* is not a *psak halachah* attesting to the sanctity of David *Hamelech's* status as a *yid*, nor is it a treatise on *hilchos tum'ah v'taharah*. Rather, it was written to show us '*kamah s'char tov l'gomlei chesed*'- how much reward is in store for those who perform acts of loving kindness. *Megillas Rus* is a story of pure *gemilus chasadim*, and the main character, *Rus*, embodies this *midas ha'chesed* throughout her entire life; beginning with her *chesed la'meisim* with regard to the bodies of Machlon and Chilyon, continuing with her steadfast dedication to her mother-in-law, and culminating in her relationship with Boaz. Because of this, she received tremendous *s'char*; Dovid *Hamelech* descended from her, and *Moshiach* will emerge from Dovid *Hamelech*.

The *Megillah* does not explicitly tell us the historical context of this story in order to teach us that the message of *chesed* is timeless and applies to every generation, not just the one of *Rus*. *Chesed* can be done anywhere at any time, and we collect *schar* for it in our lives on this earth as well as in *Olam Haemes*. How timely then, that we read this *Megillah* during these difficult circumstances. Covid-19 has wreaked havoc on families throughout the globe, but along with the devastation came a chance for *Klal Yisroel* to perform enormous acts of *gmilas chasadim*. In this Moadim, we have put a spotlight on *Chesed* during Corona. Many people have family and community members who have spent their time giving to others, whether it be first responders in *Hatzalah*, calling the elderly in lieu of visits or cooking meals for affected families. During these difficult times, the entire Jewish community so clearly embodies the spirit of *chesed* portrayed by *Rus* in this *Megillah*.

May we reap the *s'char* of our *chesed* like *Rus* did and merit to have *Moshiach* in our own times. Thank you to everybody who submitted; this would not have been possible without you! This entire year has been an incredible experience for all of us and because of you, our *Yomim Tovim* were overflowing with *Torah* and *Simcha*! We hope this edition of Moadim will bring you *chizuk* and will enhance the inherent *simcha* and inspiration of *Shavuot*!

With love,
Moadim Crew

Message from the Menahel

With its customary flair, our *Moadim* publication heralds the upcoming *Chag HaShavu-os*. As you sit on your patios or porches surrounded by grass dappled with sun and shadow, and sip aromatic coffee accompanied by a scrumptious slab of cheesecake, turn the pages appreciatively. As you read the *Divrei Torah*, revel in the thought that we celebrate our *raison d'être* with a most existential joy. As you pour over the moving accounts of our students who have the good fortune to plumb the depths of *Megillas Rus* with Mrs. Koenig, focus on loving-kindness as a directive of *Toraseinu Hakedoshah*. Recall the breathtaking *chesed* recently displayed by *rabbanim*, *Hatzolah* members, and other *askanim*. Experience a surge of pride as you observe the lovely renditions of mountains and cheesecake by our budding artists. Treasure the biographies of fellow classmates who shared the lives of their beloved grandparents who embodied ideals of Torah, *avodah*, or *gemilus chasadim*. Allow sensations of gratitude and longing for your beloved teachers to wash over you. How apropos on Shavuos, to celebrate the devotion of the transmitters and disseminators of our holy Torah whose teachings are a labor of love. Savor and relish the memories of past lessons: דבש וחלב תחת לשונך.

I recently read a short vignette that I would like to share with you, my beloved students. In the introduction of the *teshuvos* of Rabbi Akiva Eiger, his children describe the guidelines that Rabbi Akiva Eiger gave them for publishing his responsa. Many of the complex halachic dilemmas included in the responsa had been posed by former students who had become *rabbanim* in various communities of central and eastern Europe. Yet, he insisted that none of them be identified as a *talmid*, stating "I never called anyone my student because who can know who learned more from whom; me from them or them from me." Rabbi Akiva said this with utter sincerity. He acknowledged that many times it was the probing questions and chance remarks of his *talmidim* that helped him clarify deep concepts that might have eluded him when he taught a particular concept. This story actually resonated with me very strongly. MHS students are legendary learners. As a teacher I have many a time confronted penetrating questions and insightful comments that have shed new light on the subject matter. I am privileged to experience the magic of MHS classrooms.

Dearest girls, I miss you and look forward to the day when I can personally embrace you.

A special thank you to our superb editorial staff, Tamar Dan, Tova Schwartz, Ilana Katzenstein, Daniella Zlotnick, and Musia Kirschenbaum, who have compiled a spectacular edition replete with *divrei Torah*, artwork and articles, which are truly qualitative.

With great appreciation to Rebbetzin Peshi Neuburger, a brilliant and talented editor who is devoted *לב ונפש* to our students and to Mrs. Sara Tandler, beloved *Moadim* faculty advisor.

Chag Sameyach,
Mrs. Tsvia Yanofsky

Questions posed to our Teachers

One of the main lessons that we can learn from *Megillas Rus* is the importance of *gemilus chasadim*. Can you share any *chessed* that you or your family have either witnessed or been involved in during this challenging time?

Mrs. Badrian: My wonderful friend and MHS colleague has been doing my weekly shopping at the local supermarket. I cannot reveal her identity for fear of embarrassing her, but I am so grateful.

Mrs. Benchimol: I am moved by the selfless devotion of our Shul's office staff member, who volunteers to do the weekly shopping for older people from our community who are homebound.

Mrs. Ferber: My grandmother, Mrs. Hinda Kaisman, was *niftar* on *Shabbos Hagadol* from Covid-19. We felt very close to her because she lived in my parents' house. On the *erev Shabbos* just before she passed away, my family hadn't seen her for many days. A nurse called my parents; she is a frum woman and it was not her job, but she was in so much pain for everyone, that she was just going from room to room to *daven*. She recognized the names of my parents, and called, enabling them to talk to my grandmother on the Friday before she was *niftar*.

Also, during *shiva*, my father was sitting alone in the house, and he called me, quite emotional. He said that he had received a phone call from a stranger who lived in Israel, in a neighborhood where porch *minyanim* were allowed. He was calling my father to offer to say *kaddish* for my grandmother during the week of *shiva*. My father asked him, "how much should I pay you?", and the man answered that he wasn't taking any money. He was just reaching out to people and offering to say *kaddish* on their behalf.

Ms. Lakritz: There's a high school aged boy in my community who has been offering to go to grocery stores to pick up any groceries for people in the community who need help. It's so inspiring to see someone who has no motivation other than helping people in a private way with daily necessities!

Reb. Neuburger: There is a very fine gentleman who used to set up bouquets of flowers in the lobby of our shul after *minyan* every Friday morning. On their way out of shul people would buy flowers from him for their wives, mothers, and hosts, and over time this became a significant (if not the main) source of the florist's income. Naturally, once shuls closed, this man's *parnassah* was in danger. I am embarrassed to say that this did not occur to me at all in the frenzy of people to worry about when the quarantine went into effect. But quite a few kind and sensitive people in our *kehillah* did think about it, and called the florist to place orders: not only for their own wives and mothers. To partially compensate for the decrease in business he would undoubtedly experience, as no one was eating out and there were no hosts for whom to buy flowers, they also ordered flowers to be delivered to a variety of people as expressions of appreciation or warmth - front-line health workers, *rabbanim*, people living alone... I am always humbled by creative acts of kindness, and am doubly awed by this two-pronged kindness!

Mrs. Steinhaus: The widespread wearing of masks which cover people's mouths presents a formidable challenge for the deaf population. Nevertheless, we unite by going on Zoom to have a deaf Rabbi signing *Pirkei Avos*. We recently lost a very special person named Chana, who was deaf, to Coronavirus and everyone worked hard to set up Zoom for the *levaya* with an ASL interpreter. There were about 76



people in attendance on Zoom, aside from a crowd at the *levaya* in Monsey!

Throughout this trying time, there has been a significant increase in *Tehillim* and *tefillah* in *Klal Yisrael*. How has this impacted you personally?

Mrs. Yanofsky: I am filled with pride at the response of our students every time I email a chart to complete Sefer Tehillim. Within moments, students completely fill out the chart, allowing for the recitation of the entire Sefer Tehillim. I may sound biased, but I can state with confidence that our students are one of a kind.

Mrs. Badrian: When I was fighting the virus, so many people - family, friends, students - said *Tehillim* on my behalf. Once I was on the way to recovery and was able to answer the phone, I could hear the emotion in people's voices as they extended their *brachos* for my continued recovery and good health.

Mrs. Benchimol: I am in awe when I see how many people from all backgrounds have become united and display tremendous *Ahavat Yisrael* - by praying as one.

Mrs. Itzkowitz: My brother's shul has a *Tehillim* gathering every night, so now I say *Tehillim* with other people which is a very special way of connecting. I have also started saying more *Tehillim*, and I do so for so many more sick people.

Ms. Lakritz: It's definitely making me ask myself how I can take this feeling of relying on HaShem into my life in other ways after this pandemic.

Mrs. Leitman: Because of Corona, men can no longer go to *daven* in *shul*. Obviously this is a very sad thing, but on the other hand, it has created a beautiful atmosphere at home. When you *daven* in *shul* you are relying on the *tzibbur* because you have their added *z'chuyos* and strength. When we don't have those, though, we are forced to reach deep within ourselves and to truly believe that we can speak to Hashem wherever we are. A big part of my life is that I always go to *shul* on *Shabbos mevorchim hachodesh*. When I was in *shidduchim*, I attended shul on one such *Shabbos*, and my husband's aunt saw me- that was how our whole *shidduch* came about. My kids all know that I never miss a *bentching*, and I never had until last *Rosh Chodesh Nisan* when we were stuck at home. I was forced to real-

ize that Hashem truly listens to us whenever and wherever we are. There was a row of trees planted on a street in Lakewood when Hurricane Sandy hit. That street experienced very heavy winds and half of the trees fell. The company which planted them was very confused as to why only half of the trees fell- the trees had all been planted at the same angle, and at the exact same time. They did some research and it turned out that all of the trees which had been planted with sprinklers had fallen, while those without had not. This is because the trees with the sprinklers had had all their water supplied to them- they had not needed to spread their roots deeper into the ground. The trees without the sprinklers, though, were forced to spread their roots for nutrition, and in the end, when strong winds came, they were able to withstand them. During this time, *Klal Yisrael* does not have sprinklers. We can't be physically in *shul* or in school and we have to keep spreading our roots outward. If we do, then whenever a wind of this sort comes our way, threatening to halt the very activities which define us as Yidden, we will be able to withstand the force, because our roots run deep and wide.

Mrs. Steinhaus: The increase in *Tehillim* has had an impact on me. Whenever I say *Tehillim* for those whom I know, it makes me feel more connected, and able to feel more deeply for others. The more I say *Tehillim*, the more I concentrate on being able to understand the words better.

Can you share any fond memories of a special *Shavuos* from the pre-Coronavirus era?

Mrs. Yanofsky: Fond Yanofsky *Shavuos* memories include scrumptious focaccia, spinach stuffed shells, pomegranate glazed sea bass, fragrant French onion soup, all cooked by our former chef Sara Tandler née Yanofsky. Although her delicacies no longer grace our table, we still savor the taste of those incredible edibles.

Mrs. Badrian: *Shavuos* 1972, my first time in *Eretz Yisrael*. My sister and I woke up early to *daven* "*neitz*" at the *Kotel*. We started walking along with several thousand Jews from all over the world and from all backgrounds. There was so much excitement in the air; I imagined this is what *Bnei Yisrael* must have felt when they were *oleh regel*.

Mrs. Benchimol: Seeing the kids (and parents :) in *Shul* come and stay quiet through *Aseres Hadibros*

and then enjoy the *Shavuos* party.

Mrs. Ferber: This story actually took place one *Motza'ei Shavuos*. I lived in Lakewood for many years while my husband was in *kollel*. During our last year there, my husband encouraged me to go to the Lakewood Yeshiva at the end of *Shavuos* to see the dancing. It was incredible. I saw hundreds of people dancing calmly in place with sheer joy over the *Yom Tov*. These were people who were giving their entire lives to learning, and it really felt as if they were being *mekabel* Torah once again.

Mrs. Itzkowitz: My name is Rus but I grew up in a community where the *shuls* don't read the *Megillah*. I spent the first *Shavuos* of my married life in Baltimore, and that was the first time I ever heard *Megillas Rus* read on *Yom Tov*. This was an experience that was both different and memorable.

Mrs. Steinhaus: We were home for *Shavuos* and we had friends over for the meals.

Mrs. Szpilzinger: We spent a beautiful *Shavuos* with *Oorah* one year. The *ruach* that was there with so many people coming together to enjoy *Yom Tov* and be inspired in Torah learning was amazing. The ability to give to others just by participating, gave us a breath of inspiration that we hadn't felt in years, and it's impact is still evident to us today.

The Torah does not mandate any *mitzvos* on *Shavuos*, as it does on almost all other *yamim tovim*. Yet, there are so many *minhagim* that make *Shavuos* a beautiful *yom tov*. Which *minhag* speaks to you?

Mrs. Yanofsky: In the spirit of our MHS genealogy project, *Shavuos* is very much bound up with my family lore. On *Shavuos*, we relate the following story. My great-grandfather, Rav Chaim Roth, the Rav of Chup, was transported to Auschwitz on *rosh chodesh Sivan*. Presciently, he recited *Akdamus Milin* verbatim en route to Auschwitz for his beloved congregants, in the event that they would not have the opportunity to do so on *Shavuos*. He and his congregants were beaten, degraded, and forced to wallow in their filth, but in that moment they were transported into a sublime world of *ahavas Hashem* and *hakaras haBorei*. I am always inspired at the thought that so spiritual a giant has contributed to my DNA. Many of our students, too, descend from spiritual giants which they uncover as they pursue

their genealogy projects in 12th grade.

Mrs. Badrian: I love flowers - the colors, textures, incredible varieties. Some of the neighborhood *shuls* are decorated with beautiful floral arrangements. Hashem created so much beauty for us to enjoy and *Shavuos* is the time I especially appreciate that!

Ms. Lakritz: My family always tries to find some new recipes for *yom tov*. Sometimes they turn out really fantastic and become recurring dishes.

Mrs. Steinhaus: Our *minhag* is to have a *milchig* meal and cheesecake on the first night of *Shavuos*!

How can we improve as individuals after this Covid-19 experience?

Mrs. Badrian: I believe people will be more appreciative of what we have and less judgemental of others.

Mrs. Benchimol: By keeping in mind what we have experienced through this period: *Ein Od Milvado* - there is only Hashem. To be humble, kind and to know that we can live with less.

Mrs. Ferber: One of the best suggestions that someone shared with me was the following: The most successful way to improve as an individual is to **mark** the moment. **Make a real *kabbalah***. We know that we will easily forget the emotional roller-coaster that we are experiencing, and the only way to hold on to it is to make a real commitment to change. Even if it's small, it makes a big difference. For me personally, this circumstance is teaching me to talk to Hashem more times in my day.

Mrs. Itzkowitz: We cannot forget about this experience and we must take all the positive that has resulted from it, and make it a part of us. The experience has taught me about the value of life, and that we can't forget how delicate life is and how much we have to value it every day.

Ms. Lakritz: I feel that this crisis has made very clear to me which people deserve our thanks and truly help the world function. For me this pandemic has redirected how I view the real change makers in society. Celebrities and media feel so far removed from me at this point. I am so much more in awe of the healthcare workers, farmers, people who have set aside everything to do *chessed*, the teachers, delivery workers and factory workers. They make the

world as we know it function and I feel so grateful for that.

Mrs. Steinhaus: We improve by appreciating what we have is enough. It's not necessary to get or have lavish things. It makes us more aware that Hashem is the one in control over all of us so whatever we have or not, we accept it. Period!

Mrs. Szpilzinger: This *tekufah* has shown me how we can actually make do with a lot less than we have gotten used to. In our house we have tried to "use what we have", rather than "shop for what we are in the mood for" since we can't go to the store as often and that has been a huge lesson and personal exercise for us.

It is important to extract something positive from each experience. What have you been enjoying about quarantine and social-distancing?

Mrs. Badrian: I am enjoying a slower, quieter pace and more time to read and think.

Mrs. Benchimol: What I have enjoyed about quarantine is: multiple daily family meals, *davening* slow-



Tami Eberstark, 9th Grade

כתר תורה

איתכן תלמידותי, רציתי לחלוק רגשות ומחשבות
במצב הנוכחי שבו אנחנו נמצאות.
אמנם בית הספר, שמוכר לכולנו אינו פעיל,
(ה ZOOM הוא רק תחליף זמני)
אך "בית הספר של החיים", זהו לימוד תמידי!
"בית הספר של החיים" מלמד אותנו לראות את הטוב,
להסתכל בפרטים מקרוב,
ולהבחין איך ה' מתכנן את הכל
בשבילנו, שיהיה לנו הכי טוב!
"בית הספר של החיים" מלמד
אותנו שאנחנו בובה על חוט.
לא משנה מה שנתכנן, לאן נלך ובמה נבחר,
ה' כבר הכין בשבילנו את התוכנית כבר.
"בית הספר של החיים" מלמד
אותנו להרים למעלה עיניים,
לתת לאבא שבשמים,
להוביל אותנו באהבה
ולשאת אותנו על כפיים.
לנגיף הכתר - העטרה (קורונה מלשון - כתר)
יש מטרה,
שהבית יתמלא בקדושה, בקול של תורה ותפילה.
זה הכתר שלנו וזוהי העטרה.
התורה - סם החיים (סם = תרופה)
התורה היא תרופה וחיסון לכל נגיף ולכל מחלה,
כי כשלוומדים תורה, מתחברים ל"נותן התורה"
שהוא מקור החיים והברכה,
וכך נשמרים מכל צרה ומכל סכנה.
שנזכה לקבל את המתנה, שמפז יקרה, התורה
נלמוד אותה, ונלך לאורה
כי הם חיינו ואורך ימינו!

באהבה רבה,
מורתכן
א. טווערסקי

ly and with deeper *kavanah*, living at a slower pace, having more time to listen to *shiurim*, and enjoying a good book.

About social distancing: the gift of a daily phone call to an older person, and enjoying family in a whole new dimension.

Mrs. Ferber: You will find yourself doing things that you didn't think were possible. Everyone is doing things that are new and that they never thought they could do. This is helping us realize that we are capable of so much more than we thought, and when things return to normal, we should remember that we can do it!

Mrs. Itzkowitz: Teaching online has connected me to my students in a deep way and forced a connection that may not have happened in any other way. This has been one of the top learning experiences in my life and a time of self-reflection. Everyone has been affected by the virus in different ways but we have all been affected, and that connects us. Also, what I am most grateful for during this time is that I am living under the same roof as my parents so we are in quarantine together and my kids get to see them everyday and we do not have to be apart during this crazy time.

Mrs. Steinhaus: I enjoy spending more time with my husband. I've learned to love my family and friends even without hugs.

Experiencing Kabbalas HaTorah Anew

Expounding upon the teachings of his *rebbe*, Rav Tzvi Hirsh Braude, Rav Eliyahu Dessler taught that time doesn't merely pass us by, אין הזמן עובר עלינו, but rather, that we travel through time, אנחנו נוסעים בתוך הזמן. He explained that while it may seem that every *Shabbos* is just one more *Shabbos* of the year, in fact, *Shabbos* is a stationary point on the cycle of the week, and we return to that point every seven days. So too, *Shavuos* is not just a once a year occurrence. Z'man Matan Toraseinu is a point on the yearly cycle, and every year we come back to it. And each time we return to this *chag*, we are able to tap into the real power of *Matan Torah*; we can actually accept the Torah ourselves, on an annual basis.

Rav Dessler then clarified what it means for us to experience *Kabbalas HaTorah*. He pointed out that in order to receive something, one has to give something in exchange. In order to buy or acquire a product, there must be a store and currency to purchase it with. A potential buyer has to take his money to the shop, and pay for the item he wishes to own. Similarly, as we reach the 'station' of *Matan Torah* each year, we need to go to the *beis hamidrash*, 'pay' with effort, and accept the Torah in our hearts. If we truly desire Torah, and strive to receive it, we can acquire it.



Chaya Trapedo, 10th Grade

This acceptance of the Torah must awaken our souls and penetrate our hearts. We don't want it to be a נתונה בלי קבלה, a gift which is not properly acquired. That, explained Rav Dessler, would be as if it had not been given at all, because it was not personally internalized by the receiver. The Torah is a gift about to be offered to each and every one of us. This *Shavuos*, let's have a real *Kabbalas HaTorah* !

🕊️ Zahava Giloni
Source: Michtav M'Eliyahu

Milchigs on Shavuos

As is well-known, there is a common *minhag* to eat *milchig* foods on *Shavuos*. There are several reasons given for this custom. Famously, *Geulas Yisrael* explains that the Jews were commanded at *Har Sinai* to *shecht* animals properly. Until then, they had been permitted to eat meat that was not ritually slaughtered, or even meat from non-kosher animals. This meant that the pots and dishes they had used were not kosher. They therefore ate dairy foods until they could *kasher* their dishes, and we do the same on *Shavuos* in commemoration.

Others offer different explanations. The *Rama* writes that *Shavuos* is an extension of *Pesach*. Since there is a *minhag* to eat two different cooked dishes on *Pesach*, corresponding to the *korban Pesach* and *korban chagiga*, so, too, on *Shavuos* we have two types of cooked food, a milk and then a meat dish, in commemoration of the *korban Shte Halechem*, comprised of two breads.

Sefer Matamim notes that by eating dairy foods on *Shavuos*, we are recalling Moshe's merit, and remembering how he was drawn from the Nile on the sixth of Sivan (three months after he was born on the seventh of Adar) and would only nurse from the milk of a Jewish woman.

Ta'amei Haminhagim explains that before the Torah was given, the Jews weren't sure whether milk was included in the prohibition of *eiver min ha'chai*, and therefore refrained from eating dairy. Only once the Torah was given did they learn that milk and milk products were permitted, so we eat dairy in commemoration of this.

R' Shimshon of Ostropol points out that *chalav* has the *gematriya* of 40, which is the number of days that Moshe *Rabbeinu* spent at *Har Sinai* before coming down with the *luchos*.

☞ Sara Nordlicht

Adapted from *The Book of Our Heritage* (translation of *Sefer Hatoda'ah*) by R' Eliyahu Kitov



Reggie Klein, 9th Grade

Reading Megillas Rus

There is a well-established custom throughout most Jewish communities to read *Megillas Rus* on *Shavuos*. A number of reasons have been offered to explain this practice, but perhaps we can discover a new insight that ties this particular *Megillah* directly to this *Yom Tov*.

The climax of the *Megillah*, and perhaps its overarching theme, is the delineation of the bloodline of *David HaMelech*. This was not a simple matter at all, as attested to by the *Megillah* itself. Rus was a convert from *Moav*, and the Torah (*Devarim* 23:4) prohibits *Moavi* and *Amoni* converts from marrying into the Jewish nation, "לֹא יָבֹא עִמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בְקִהְלָהּ".

Indeed, this was the reason that *Ploni Almoni* did not want to marry Rus, and he says so clearly "וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֵּאֵל" לֹא אוֹכֵל לְגֵאוּל לִי פֶן־אֲשַׁחֲיֵת אֶת־נְחֻלְתִּי (Rus 4:6, and Rashi there).

Ploni Almoni, however, was unaware (or perhaps there was some debate about this at that time) of the *halachah l'Moshe mi'Sinai* of "Amoni v'lo Amonis, Moavi v'lo Moavis." This means that the *pasuk* prohibiting *Ammon* and *Moav* from marrying into *Klal Yisrael* applies only to the men from these two nations, not to the women. This was a *kabbalah* which, though not explicitly stated in the written Torah, had been passed down as a part of *Torah she'b'al peh*. Boaz had knowledge of this *mesorah*, which allowed him to interpret the *pasuk* accurately, and therefore, to marry Rus with confidence.

Thus, the entire *malchus Beis David*, and ultimately the roots of *Mashiach*, are based on *Torah sheb'al peh* going hand in hand with *Torah she'bichsav*. The powerful culmination of *Megillas Rus* demonstrates that we need each one to complement the other. How fitting it is, therefore, to read it on *Shavuos*, the *Yom Tov* during which we celebrate the giving of the *Torah she'bichsav*. The *Megillah* reminds us that to embrace the fullness of Torah, both are necessary.

Perhaps this can be applied to another interesting phenomenon in *Megillas Rus*, namely, that it contains a number of occurrences of rare presentations in *Tanach*. There are only 10 times in *Tanach* where a word is not written in the text, but is read nevertheless. Two of these appear in *Rus*: the word 'eila' in 3:5 "וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלֶיהָ" כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־תֹּאמְרִי [אֵלַי] אֲעֲשֶׂה" and in 3:17 "כִּי אֶמַר [אֵלַי] אֶל־" תְּבוֹאִי רִיקָם אֶל־חֲמוּתֶךָ" is a *kri v'lo ksiv*; it does not appear in the text, but is read by the *ba'al korei*. Additionally, there are 8 times in *Tanach* where the opposite occurs: a word is written in the text but we are required to skip it. This occurs in 3:12 "וְעַתָּה כִּי אֶתְנֶנְךָ כִּי אִם גֵּאֵל" אֶנְכִּי" where the word 'im' is a *ksiv v'lo kri*, written, but not read by the *ba'al korei*.

There is no other *sefer* in *Kesuvim* which contains either one of these anomalies, much less both of them. All the other occurrences appear in *Nevi'im*, and not in the Torah. Fascinating!

Perhaps it is rooted in the same idea. This *Megillah* was written to impress upon us the importance of *Torah she'b'al peh*. We don't rely exclusively on the text; we rely on our *mesorah* to tell us when our reading of a *sefer* must depart from the written, or unwritten, words. The *mesorah* of *Torah she'b'al peh* tells us how to *read* the written words, just as it told us how to *interpret* them, in the case of "Amoni" and "Moavi" all those years ago.



Fayga Tziporah Pinczower, 10th Grade

Rut Hamoaviah

While discussing the controversy David *HaMelech* faced regarding the legitimacy of his grandmother's conversion, we studied the principle, "עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית". Converts may be accepted from *Ammoni* or *Moavi* women but not from the men of those nations. In class, we learned that when *B'nei Yisroel* traveled through the *midbar* the *Moavi* men were inhospitable. Despite being our cousins, saved by Avraham, they did not offer the Jews food or drink. Because of their lack of *chesed*, Hashem decreed that there could be no converts from *Ammon* or *Moav*. The women, who customarily stay in the home, did not have the opportunity to greet *B'nei Yisroel*, and therefore are not included in this prohibition.

Why didn't the *Ammoni* women go out to greet the women from *B'nei Yisroel*?

The *Gemara* in *Yevamos 77a* gives two answers. One can say "כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה." It is unbecoming for a woman to venture outside. The *Ammoni* women were not expected to go forth to meet the Jewish women. It is also possible to learn from a well-known precedent that women do not leave the house to greet strangers. When the three *malachim* visited Avraham, they inquired as to Sarah's whereabouts. "איה שרה אשתך?" Avraham replied that Sarah had remained in the house. "הנה באהל..." Sarah models for us the praiseworthy path of conducting one's life *b'tznius*. Her conduct proves that women do not venture out to provide guests with food.

In his commentary on *Chumash*, Rav Itzchak Meir of Ger, the *Chiddushei HaRim* (1799-1866), asks why the law of עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית had to be clarified by the three *malachim* prior to destroying S'dom. It was necessary to save Lot because through him would come Rus. Through Rus would come David *HaMelech* and *Mashiach*. If the Torah had not allowed *Moavi* women to convert, sparing Lot would not have led to *Mashiach*. The *malachim* went out of their way to ask Avraham about Sarah's whereabouts, thereby clarifying that women do not greet strangers, and excluding *Moavi* women from the prohibition of converting to Judaism. Once the *halachah* was set, the angels could complete their mission, saving Lot and establishing the beginning of the roots of *Mashiach*.

☺ Rivka Notkin



Chanie Malek, 10th Grade

A Yom Tov Debate

The two *divrei Torah* that follow ask the same question as a springboard for two different thoughts:

The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* cites a disagreement as to the correct way to observe a *Yom Tov*. One opinion is to divide the day in two, half devoted to spiritual matters, like learning Torah and davening, and the other half to physical activities, such as eating and drinking. The other opinion is to choose to dedicate the day either solely for spiritual matters or exclusively for physical ones. The *Gemara* then informs us that on *Shavuos* both schools of thought are in agreement that one certainly needs to engage in some eating and drinking, since this is the day that the Torah was given to *Klal Yisrael*. The obvious question is that one would naturally think that the opposite should be true; on the day when the Torah was given, shouldn't everyone agree that the day must include spiritual matters?!

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein proposes that on the day of *Shavuos* one must recognize that the Torah governs not only matters of spirituality, but also the physical concerns of man. By eating and drinking on *Shavuos*, we demonstrate our willing acceptance of the Torah not just within our souls, but upon our bodies as well.

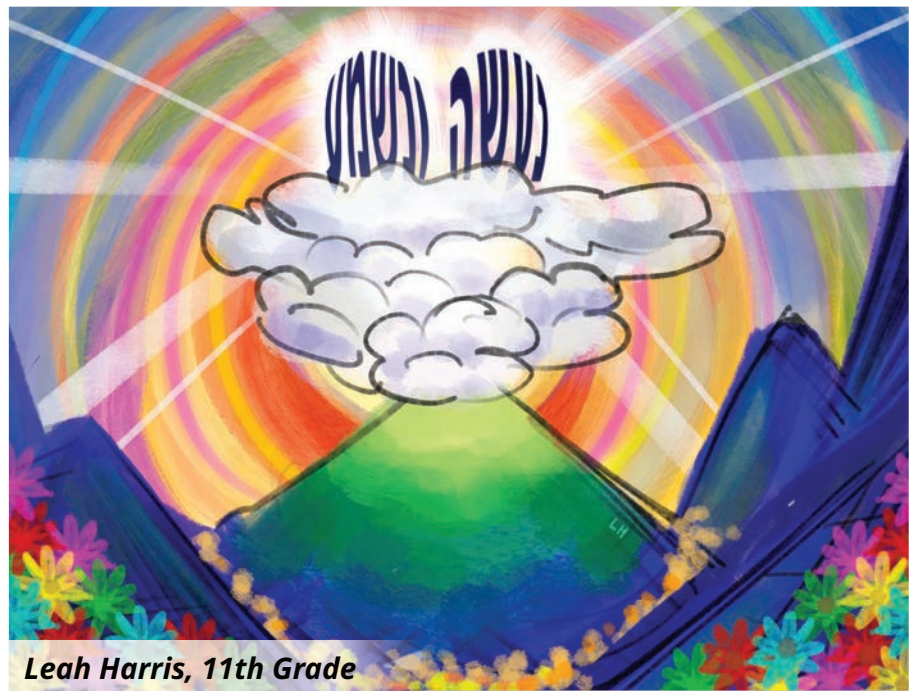
A story is told about a young girl who was possessed by a *dibbuk*. A group of scholars spoke to the *dibbuk* imploring it to leave the girl alone, however, it refused. They then asked the spirit, "If the Vilna Goan who lives a few blocks away from here would order you to leave her body, would you obey him?" "Certainly," replied the *dibbuk*, "I would listen to anything that holy man would tell me to do!" They asked the *dibbuk* why he would obey the Vilna Goan, a man who was not given to fasting and depriving himself of even meat and wine. The *dibbuk* replied, "It is precisely those acts of eating that I fear, for when he eats meat, it is considered as if he is eating the meat of *korbanos*, and when he drinks wine, it is the wine of *nesachim*." The message is clear. When someone lives a life of Torah and holiness, even his physical pleasures become elevated to the highest realms of spirituality. By enjoying food and drink on *Shavuos*, we convey this truth in a most tangible way.

☺ Chava Bamberger



Chavi Golding, 11th Grade

The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* cites a disagreement between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua about the proper way to spend *yom tov*. They debate as to whether *yom tov* should be one-dimensional, meaning, either totally devoted to Hashem (davening and learning) or totally devoted to oneself (through eating and celebration). Rabbi Yehoshua takes issue with Rabbi Eliezer's one-dimensional approach and states that *yom tov* should be spent split- half for one's pleasure and half devoted to serving and connecting to Hashem. However, the *Gemara* explains that this dispute does not apply to *Shavuos*, when all are in agreement that it ought to include some physical celebration because it was "the day the Torah was given."



Leah Harris, 11th Grade

Doesn't the *Gemara* seem counter-intuitive? Shouldn't the exact opposite be true? One would think that the *yom tov* associated with receiving the Torah should be completely devoted to Torah learning! As the *misnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (6:4) teaches us, the way to acquire Torah is to "eat bread with salt, drink a measure of water, sleep on the ground and toil in Torah." Shouldn't *Shavuos* be a day on which we minimize our physical pleasures so that we can be completely immersed in Torah learning, as that is the most ideal way to acquire Torah knowledge?

To answer this, we must examine the *Gemara* in *Shabbos* which records a debate between Moshe and the *malachim*. Moshe wanted to bring the Torah down to Bnei Yisroel on earth, while the *malachim* insisted that this was inappropriate. How could you take the Torah, which preceded the creation of the world, and give it to physical beings of *basar vadam*? Moshe responded, "the Torah commands ואת אבִיךָ ואת אִמֶךָ; do you *malachim* have parents to honor? Additionally, the Torah states אֲנִי ה' אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם; were you *malachim* in *Mitzrayim*?" The *malachim* acknowledged that, in fact, the Torah could be given to *basar vadam*, flesh and blood human beings.

Didn't the *malachim* know initially that Moshe was correct, even before he proved it to them? The *malachim's claim* was that since the Torah is so holy, it could not possibly live within the physical world, and therefore should remain with them in *shamayim*. If that is the case, why then did Moshe *Rabbeinu* win the debate?

Moshe argued that in order for all aspects of the Torah to be fulfilled, it was not only *possible* that it dwell in the physical world, but even *necessary*. Hashem gave the Torah to *Bnei Yisrael* in order to elevate the physical world. Therefore, on the day of *Matan Torah*, when we celebrate the Torah being introduced into the physical world, we elevate the physical aspects of our lives by connecting them to Hashem.

The *Gemara's* statement is now understood. It is *precisely* on *Shavuos*, the day we received the Torah, that we must celebrate in physical ways. In doing so, we are true to our mission, to internalize and actualize the Torah by taking our physical needs and making them loftier through *avodas Hashem*.

☺ Malka Hirsch



My great-grandfather, Zeidie Jack (Diamond), z"l

My great-grandfather, Zeidie Jack (Zelik), was a hero. He was born on June 26, 1922 and raised in the shtetl of Dolhinov, Poland. He was a survivor of the Shoah. He was a hero because of the number of lives he saved in the war. He was a hero because after the war he built an amazing life for himself and his family in a foreign land. He was a hero because after the Holocaust he didn't lose himself; he stayed strong on

the path of Yiddishkeit, even when he was living in Omaha, Nebraska, which did not have such a strong Jewish community at the time.

My great-grandfather was a hero during the war. He was a partisan with the Russian army, and spent years in the forest carrying out missions to stop the German murderers and protect their Jewish victims. He often put his own life at risk to save others. For example, he once learned that the Nazis held twenty people captive in the forest outside of the town. He told his father that he planned to try and rescue the group. His father didn't think he should; he told him it was a suicide mission. But that didn't stop my great-grandfather. He said 'either twenty one people will die or twenty one people will live.' His father wished him well, gave him a kiss, and said 'your mother (who had been killed a month earlier) should watch over you.' Led by my Zeidie, twenty one people were saved.

After the war, so many people were mentally broken, but Zeidie Jack overcame his grief, his suffering, the loss of a whole family, community and half of his nation. He kept on going. He built a home for his family. Not just any home, but a home full of love and laughter. He was a loving and attentive husband to my great-grandmother for almost 74 years. He was an amazing and wonderful father to his two children-my grandmother and great aunt. He showed them what a good work ethic is. He was the top salesman at Nebraska Furniture Mart, the single largest furniture store in the United States, for 58 years. In all those years he was never late for work. He was respected by everyone and was always so friendly that he had generations of customers insisting that only he could assist them with their shopping because they knew the kind of person he was. He was the best kind of person.

After retiring at the age of ninety, he and my great-grandmother, Bubbie Minde, moved to Monsey, New York to live with my grandmother and be closer to the family. Our family enjoyed nearly eight solid years of being able to visit my great-grandparents in Monsey. We were all so close to both of them, and Zeidie Jack was our role model in every way. Sitting at the Shabbos table with him and watching him point to my great-grandmother as he sang Aishes Chayil really showed us his love for her. We always appreciated listening to the stories of courage he would tell us about his time during the war, the songs he taught us from the "alter heim", the games he played with us, and the laugh-



ter he shared. We loved how he would just sit there and listen to us as we talked to him. He would tell us all the time that going through the war he and my great-grandmother never imagined living, let alone having children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He always put the needs of his family first, and was truly grateful for the brachot that Hashem had bestowed upon him.

When I think about my great-grandfather I am in awe of him. He was a very pure and selfless man. There is not one person you will ever meet who would have something negative to say about him. My great-grandparents were once walking on the street. A man stopped to talk to my great grandfather, "Hey Jack how are you?" My great-grandfather stopped and had a long conversation with him about how he and his family were doing. When they walked away, my great-grandmother asked him who that man was. My great-grandfather told her that he had no clue. That just shows you the type of person he was. He could have a talk with a random person on the street because he would never make anyone feel badly. He always made everyone feel important. He would talk to every one of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren as if each was his favorite. Because we were. We were all his favorite.

Zeidie Jack passed away this year on Yom HaZikaron. It is an appropriate day for his yahrzeit because he really did everything in his ability to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people. It seems right that he should be remembered on the same day that we commemorate the soldiers who lost their lives defending Israel. I was his first great-grandchild. I was so close with my great grandfather, and I miss him so much. On the day of his death, Klal Yisroel lost a great man. My family lost our hero.



🌸 Lily Perla

Tehillim Reflections

Our mesorah has it that on Shavuot we commemorate the birthday and *yahrzeit* of David HaMelech, and pay tribute to his eternal kingdom, the Malchus Beis David. It is appropriate, as well, to focus on the priceless gift of Sefer Tehillim which he bequeathed to us. This year, in particular, Jewish communities throughout the world have stepped up their *tefilos* and *tehillos* as we confronted heartwrenching losses on the one hand, but miraculous *yeshuos* on the other. In the comments that follow, our students reflect on the impact that the recitation of Tehillim has had on them over the last months.

I find it beautiful that although we're all in quarantine and alone in our homes, *Klal Yisrael* together, around the clock, is saying *Tehillim*. Personally, this impacted me because it gave me a new appreciation for being part of something larger than myself. I may not be allowed to go out as I please, but I can truly make a difference by saying *Tehillim*. The fact that my simple prayer can save a life always blows my mind. I think it's so important to try to stop whenever we can and think about someone else's pain. Whether it is through the recitation of *Tehillim* or by calling a friend, just the fact that we took a moment out of our busy schedules to think about what someone else may be going through is a powerful *zechus*. *Tehillim* taught me many things, but most importantly it taught me that I'm a part of a *klal* and that I need to sensitize myself to think and feel for others.

🕊️ Daniella Kurzmann

During this time, I have taken it upon myself to complete *Sefer Tehillim* nightly, together with a few other girls. Doing this every day has impacted me immensely, as I now feel more comfortable with *Tehillim*. I know that even though I may not see it, I am helping someone that needs my *tefilos*, and that motivates me to say more *Tehillim*. For a while, my *Tehillim* sat on the bookcase barely touched, because I didn't say *Tehillim* very often. It hasn't been in the bookcase for weeks, because I've learned to not only say a little *Tehillim* when it is asked of me, but more, whenever I can.

🕊️ Hudi Mandel

Because of the long list of *cholim* who have taken ill due to the coronavirus, I have more opportunities to be part of finishing *Sefer Tehillim*. It is very impactful to see people get together to *daven* for people they may not even know. Saying *Tehillim* is comforting because it makes me feel as if I'm doing my part to help the *cholim*.

🕊️ Rikki Genack

It seems to me that during this time of Covid-19 there is more *Tehillim* which needs to be said. Before this I would just say *Tehillim* for a few people and some general things. Now there are many more specific people who need *Tehillim*.

🕊️ Shoshana Brunner

Although I used to say *Tehillim* whenever I heard that someone needed it, now, I find myself saying *Tehillim* with more focus. It's easier to *daven* for someone when you are able to empathize with their situation. Now that we are all in similar situations, when I say *Tehillim*, I can say it with more feeling because I am truly able to feel for the people on whose behalf I am *davening*.

🕊️ Nili Kushner

During the past two months, my great-aunt and uncle have been very sick (אסתר חנה בת רויזא, שמשון בן רויזא). Every day at 6 PM, ever since the beginning of their illness, many of their relatives and friends around the world get together by phone to complete the entire *Sefer Tehillim* a couple of times. We all hope that in this way we may help bring about their *refuah*. I find this very moving because although we are home all day now, it can still be difficult to find time to sit down and say *Tehillim*. There is more work to be done around the house, and there are often little children running around, but despite that, all these special people find the time to help those who are in need of their *tefilos*.

🕊️ Shoshanna Ovitsh

Over the quarantine period, my mother has been saying the entire *Sefer Tehillim* every *Shabbos*. In addition, I realized recently that whenever I hear a siren I, too, start reciting Tehillim. Even in general, I find that I'm saying *Tehillim* more often. I say certain *perakim* daily for coronavirus *cholim*, and have also found myself using *Tehillim* to comfort myself when, sadly, I hear the all too frequent bad news.

☺ Ahuva Mermelstein

"The whole is greater than the sum of its parts." Everyday I partake in completing *Sefer Tehillim* together with MHS. These few *perakim* are more than just a few *perakim*; they help complete an entire *sefer*. My *perakim* give me a sense of responsibility and the gratification that without me *Sefer Tehillim* would not be completed each day.

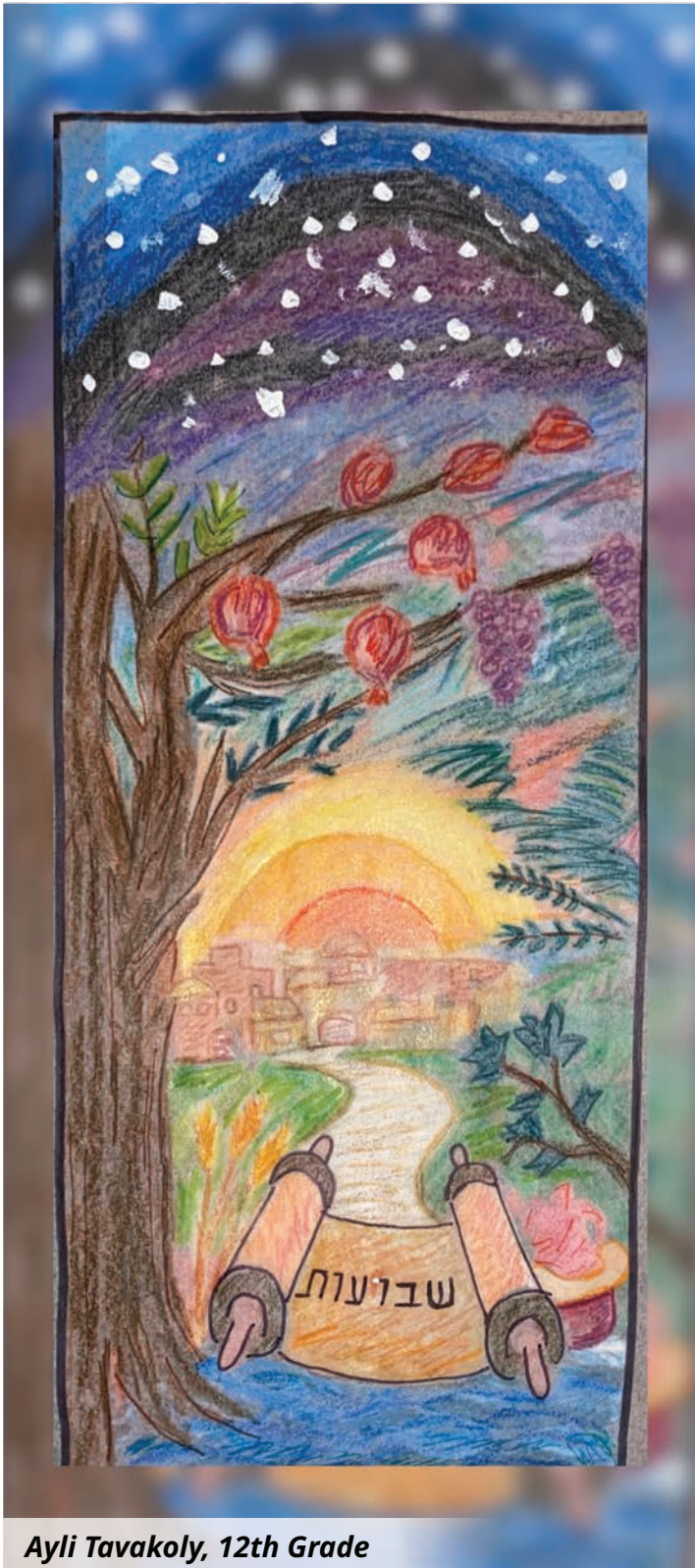
☺ Zahava Laufer

I am finding that I now say more *Tehillim* than I used to. Sadly, I am a part of many *Tehillim* chats, and many people in my community have been in and out of the hospital since *Purim*; both of these factors certainly contribute to the increase in my *Tehillim* recitation. But I have also found that when I'm sad or confused it has become my outlet. *Tehillim* is now the thing I turn to for comfort and guidance, which never happened before. I try to say as much *Tehillim* as I can every day because it makes me feel connected to Hashem during a confusing and hard time like the one in which we now find ourselves. For a while I would always try to find the shorter and easier *perakim* because I was a very slow reader. But now, since I've been saying so much *Tehillim* I find myself looking to say the longer ones as well. I also have a new favorite perek which is ט"ז. I am definitely a changed person because of this experience and I am so grateful to HaShem for allowing me to see the power of *Tehillim*.

☺ Yael Farkas

Unfortunately, because of the constantly rising number of *cholim* due to the virus, I began, early in the quarantine, to say much more *Tehillim* than I ever had before, as a *zechus* for their *refusos*. At this point, *baruch Hashem*, I am happy to say that I am aware of far fewer *cholim*, but I have continued this habit of saying a greater number of *Pirkei Tehillim*, and use it, instead, as a special time to connect to Hashem.

☺ Noa Klein



Ayli Tavakoly, 12th Grade

A Mashal to Explain the Malachim

One of the names we use to refer to the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot* is '**Z'man Matan Torasainu**,' 'the time of the giving of our Torah.' Yet, as we see from the *Gemara* in *Shabbos* 88b, that time was fraught with tension. When Moshe *Rabbeinu* first went up to *Har Sinai* to receive the Torah, he was, we are taught, not very warmly welcomed:

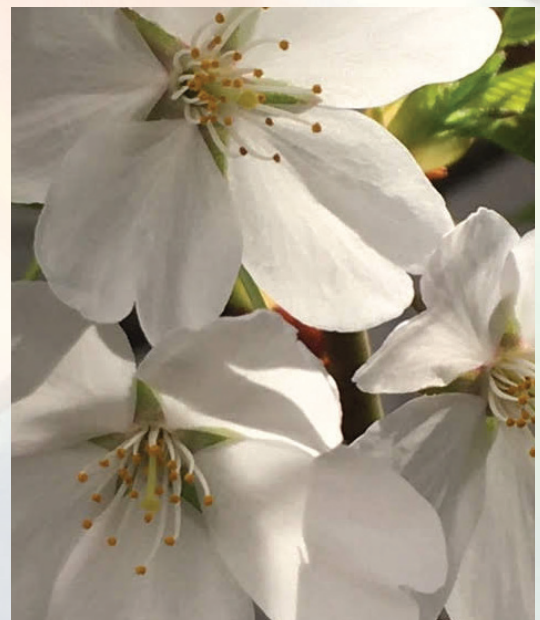
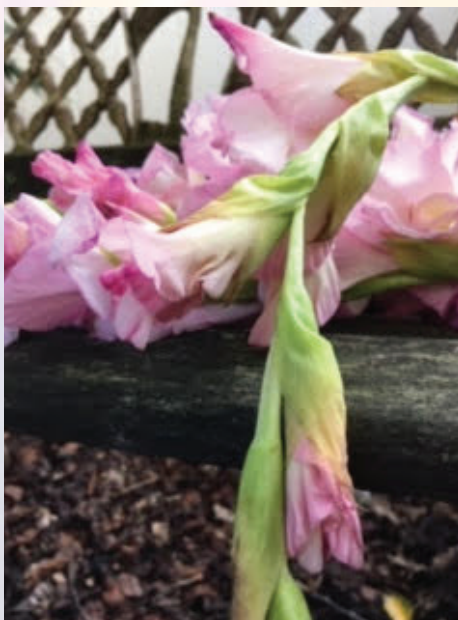
"Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi also said, 'When Moshe went to the heavens, the *malachim* spoke before *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and asked Him, "What business has one born of a woman amongst us?"

"He has come to receive the Torah," Hashem answered.

The *Malachim* replied, "That secret treasure (the Torah), which was hidden by You for nine hundred and seventy four generations before the world was created, You desire to give to flesh and blood?! " (*Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim* 8:5) If the *malachim* were aware that Hashem had already decided to present mankind with the Torah through Moshe, how could they dare to exhibit such *chutzpah*, and forcefully protest the arrival of Moshe to receive it? Should not the *malachim* have served *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* with loyalty, and refrained from casting doubt?

The Dubno Maggid provides us with an answer using the following *mashal*:

A famous rabbinic scholar had served in a large city for many years. As can be imagined, he was involved in a great many issues pertaining to the Jews of that city. Day and night he would settle disputes, answer *halachic* questions, and represent his community when governmental matters arose. As the years went by, the *Rav* grew old, too old to continue to shoulder all of these responsibilities, day in and day out. After careful deliberation with his family, it was decided that the *Rav* would seek employment in a smaller city. There, he could live out the remainder of his life in peace, minimizing the stresses and pressures which he had experienced thus far. The *Rav* called for a town meeting. "As you all know, I have labored hard on your behalf for many years, years which have taken their toll on me. Now that I have grown old, it is impossible for me to continue in this manner any longer. I must seek a less demanding existence. With your permission, I will apply for a rabbinic post in a smaller city, one in which I will not be too heavily burdened with communal affairs" This deeply saddened the community. After several unsuccessful attempts at reversing their spiritual leader's decision, they had little choice but to accept it. After all, the *rav's* health was at stake.



**Photography by
Ettie Guelfguat
12th Grade**

Several days later, the *Rav* sent a letter to a Jewish community in a smaller city, where there was no rabbi occupying the pulpit. "I have given notice to my community that for the sake of my health, I wish to relocate to your city. If you will accept me as your *Rav*, preparations for my departure from here can begin immediately." Needless to say, the people of the smaller city were overjoyed at this news, and eagerly awaited the *Rav's* arrival. They prepared chariots and parades with high government officials to greet their new rabbi.

When the representatives came to escort the *Rav* to the new town, they were met with an angry mob of townspeople who were still unwilling to lose their *Rav* to another city. The officials of the new town fled in terror. The *Rav* was terribly pained by his former community's actions.

"I don't understand, you gave me permission to relocate to a smaller city, and this is how you react?!"

The members of the mob asked to have a word in private with the *Rav*.

"Rabbi", declared the mob leader, "we meant no harm to the representatives of your new town in behaving the way we did. We only acted so for your own good. Perhaps, the community of the city to which you relocate will mistakenly assume that you leave us because we wish it so. In such circumstances, they will treat you with less respect than you deserve. Our aim is to show them that you leave us of your own accord. Only then will they treat you with the respect that is your due."

The *malachim* did not protest and threaten with their words and fire in order to harm Moshe, the *Maggid* taught. Rather, they wished to illustrate their reluctance to transfer the Torah to flesh and blood, who, they believed, would only violate it. With this protest, the *malachim* demonstrated to Moshe that *B'nei Yisroel* should not take the Torah lightly, or deny it the respect and honor it deserves. The very essence of the celebration of 'Z'man Matan Torasainu,' is to realize that we, and only we, the Jewish people, have been given the greatest gift known to mankind, the Torah. And, because we, as a people, have held fast to that Torah for so many thousands of years to this very day, we merit yet another *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot* to commemorate its giving. May we merit, as well, the *Geulah Shelaimah* in our times.

☞ Shana Muller



Avraham Avinu's Role in Receiving the Torah

In *Shemos Rabbah* we learn:

”ומשה עלה אל האלקים... בקשו מלאכי השרת לפגע במשה, עשה בו הקב”ה קלסתרן של פניו של משה דומה לאברהם, אמר להם הקב”ה: אי אתם מתביישן הימני, לא זהו שירדתם אצלו ואכלתם בתוך ביתו”, אמר הקב”ה למשה, **”לא ניתנה לך תורה אלא בזכות אברהם”**.

“When Moshe went up to receive the Torah, the *malachim* sought to harm him. Hashem caused Moshe’s face to resemble the face of Avraham Avinu and asked the *malachim*, ‘aren’t you embarrassed to hurt the one who hosted and fed you!?’ Hashem then proceeded to tell Moshe that the Torah was given to him in the merit of Avraham.”

Why would the *malachim* want to hurt Moshe *Rabbeinu*?

The angels did not understand the concept of *bechirah*, and thought that a human being has within him an innate component of *chilul Hashem* because it is possible for him to make bad choices. They did not understand that it is equally possible for a human being to choose that which is good, and thereby bring a measure of *kiddush Hashem* on to the world.

Why would the *malachim* be embarrassed by the fact that Avraham had given them food and drink and hospitality? *Malachim* do not eat - they merely pretended to eat - so why should they feel indebted to Avraham for the food he served them?

Perhaps it was not *what* he served them that humbled them, but rather, the manner in which he served them. When they watched Avraham Avinu run to make them more comfortable despite the pain he was in, displaying unusual *mesirus nefesh* for the opportunity of performing a *chesed*, they realized that they were incorrect in their assessment of human beings as lesser spiritual beings than themselves. In fact, they began to appreciate that through the performance of *mitzvos* humankind can attain a level of greatness far superior to their own. They conceded that Avraham had actually elevated them. Rav Chaim Friedlander suggests that the Torah alludes to this idea when it describes that Avraham ‘stood **over** the malachim,’ *v’hu omeid aleihem*. (B’reishis 18:8) Through his acts of kindness he was able to bring the angels to a higher spiritual level.

From the words **”לא ניתנה לך תורה אלא בזכות אברהם”** we learn that *chesed* is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. In performing a *chesed*, which involves doing something for one’s fellow for no personal gain, a person displays selflessness. The study of Torah and the acceptance of its *mitzvos* demand selflessness as well. We learn and observe only for the sake of Hashem, and not for the pleasures and benefits which are often the by-products of those commitments.

The relevance of these ideas to our own time is striking. In the past months we have seen an outburst of *chesed* from the Jewish community. There are so many organizations ready to help those in need. I have seen first hand how my father, a member of *Hatzalah*, runs out of the house to transport people to the hospital, offers them tablets to see their family members, and provides Hazmat suits for visitors. The magnitude of *chesed* is well-timed. We are now ready, as a nation, to receive the Torah with open arms. All for Hashem.

🕊️ Yael Weinberg

Based on the *Sefer Sifsei Chaim* by Rav Chaim Friedlander

The Torah Our Constant Connection to Hashem

In *Sefer Yirmiyahu*, there is a *pasuk* which states that the reason for the *churban Bayis Rishon* was “על עוונותינו”, because *Klal Yisrael* had forsaken Hashem’s Torah. The *Sefarim Hakedoshim* explain that this *pasuk* should not be interpreted to mean that *Klal Yisrael* did not learn Torah; rather it means that they did not recite a *birchas haTorah* before learning. The obvious question, of course, is what was so wrong with not saying *birchas haTorah* that it led to the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*? Why specifically this offense? The Jewish people were engaged in *avodah zarah*, *shefichus damim*, and *giluy arayos* - aren’t those far worse sins?

The Bach explains the profound omission of not saying *birchas haTorah*. *Limud haTorah*

is unlike any other *mitzvah* because Torah has the unique ability to really transform, shape, and impact people. The reason that Torah has this singular capacity is that Hashem placed His *Shechinah* into the Torah, and when one learns Torah, he is able to tap into it. The *Ramchal* writes in his *Sefer Derech Hashem* that in order for the Torah to really elevate and impact a person, one must approach the Torah with the mindset and intention that the Torah can, and will, change and perfect him. On the flip side, if one merely learns Torah as an ordinary subject, he will be unable to draw from its *kedushah*, and the Torah will not change him. So, the Bach explains, the failure to recite the *birchas haTorah* resulted in the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* because it was an outright expression that *Klal Yisrael* did not care to tap into the *kedushas haTorah*. Even though they were learning the Torah, it was as if they had left it, because they failed to appreciate that being

a *Yid* is not about the academic pursuit of learning, but rather, about allowing the Torah to transform, uplift, and connect oneself to Hashem.

Klal Yisrael surrendered to their desires, and engaged in the three cardinal sins because they were not shaped by the Torah, and were, therefore, discontent. When one learns Torah and allows himself to grow from it by forging a real connection with Hashem, one becomes content. He becomes “filled” with Torah, and does not need to find satisfaction in the world of material desires.

On *Shavuos*, we mark the day that *Klal Yisrael* received the greatest gift of all time from Hashem. The *Torah Hakedoshah*! When Hashem gave us His precious Torah, chock full of *mitzvos*, it was His way of saying “I want to be with you all the time, always!” That is why He gave us six-hundred-thirteen ways to spend time with Him. Hashem wants to be with us when we learn Torah, when we eat food, and even when we put on our shoes! This *Shavuos*, let us really tap into the *kedushah* of the Torah and *mitzvos*, and allow the *Shechinah* which rests inside each and every word of the Torah to truly have an impact on us. In this way, we will build and strengthen a beautiful relationship with Hashem

🕊️ Emma Cohen

Adapted from an idea by Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum



Abby Harris, 9th Grade

Abby

Lessons Learned from Mrs Koenig's Megillas Rus Class

In Mrs. Koenig's *Megillah* class, we've been delving into the character of Rus. It is awe-inspiring that she gave up a life of luxury and fame for one of poverty and shame. When Rus approached Boaz to ask him to marry her, he praised her for her *middas hachessed*. She could have married someone youthful, yet she chose to marry Boaz as this was the only way to carry on her husband's name. *Shavuot* commemorates the time when the Jewish nation reached the climax of their existence and accepted Hashem's Torah. They chose of their own free will to give up a life of "freedom" and laxity for a life of obligation and restriction. It is crucial that over the *Yom Tov*, we reflect on what we feel is truly important, and that we let go of some of the *gashmius* in our lives. We must come to realize what is truly meaningful, just as Rus, and the Jewish nation at Har Sinai, did.

☺ Sara Lamstein

"ליני הלילה והיה בבקר..." (רות ג:יג)

With these words, Boaz tells Rus, "you're a single woman now, go to sleep, and tomorrow we will take care of the matter with the *go'eil*." Rav Ovadia Bartenura offers a beautiful *drashah* on the imagery of night and day. He explains that 'night' typically refers to *galus* and that 'day' represents the *geulah*. In this statement, Rav Ovadiah points out, lies an amazing *nechamah* for *B'nei Yisrael*: *B'nei Yisrael* are yearning for *geulah* and we turn to Hashem, as Rus did to Boaz, and ask Him to change things, to end the difficult darkness. Hashem answers, though, 'Continue to sleep. The sun will indeed rise but sleep a little longer.' Hashem is reassuring us that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel, we just need to wait and be patient. And on that note, I'd like to add that although this time seems so scary, as no one has revealed to us when it will all be over, it is so important not to give up hope and to have complete trust in Hashem that this darkness will, with His help, turn into a beaming light of *geulah*.

☺ Daniella Kurzmann

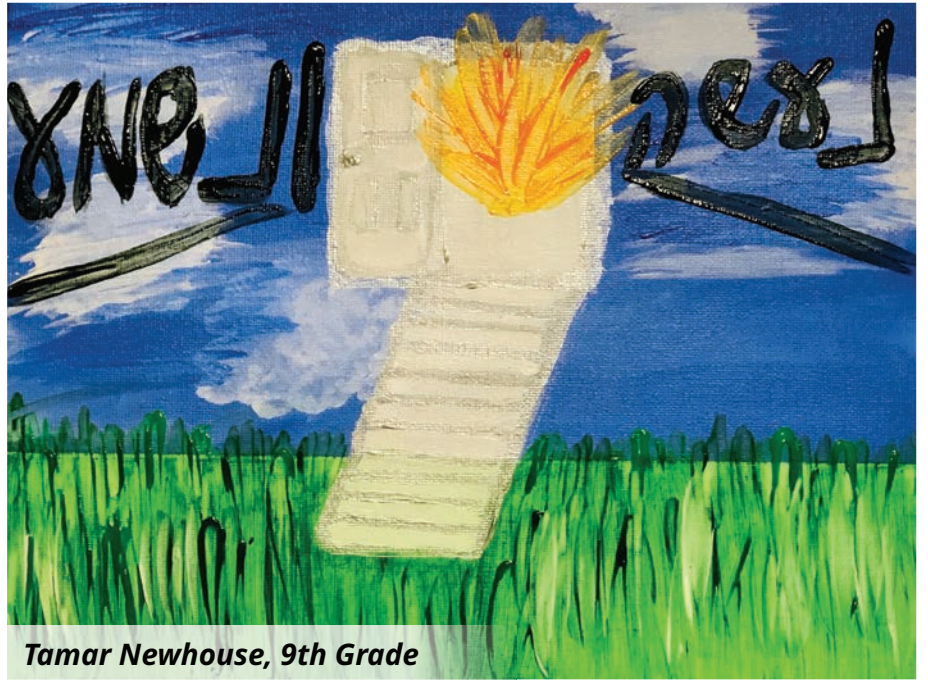
I have gained so many insights in Mrs. Koenig's *Megillas Rus* class this year. The *Bach* teaches that everything said by Naomi in *perek gimmel* was inspired by *Ruach Hakodesh*. This helps us understand why Naomi instructed Rus to do things that were highly unusual. Yet, what is astonishing is that Rus did everything *whatever* "כל אשר תאמרי אלי אעשה", that Naomi asked of her without asking any questions! She responded *you tell me to do I will do*. This reminds me of the moment when Hashem asked *B'nei Yisrael* if they wanted I think it is incredible that Rus "נעשה ונשמע" the Torah. They didn't ask any questions; instead, they said was able to utilize her *middah* of *zerizus* to refrain from asking questions and just do. If we look at life with .outlook we, too, will be able to fulfill the *ratzon* of Hashem with *zerizus* נעשה ונשמע a

☺ Tzirel Shteierman

Megillas Rus was written for many reasons. According to the *Bach*, when Shmuel *HaNavi* wrote it, he intended it to serve as a *p'sak halachah*. This is because the story of Rus, which highlights the permissibility of her "לא יבוא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ה'", conversion despite her *Moavi* background, clarifies that when the Torah decrees it is only referring to the males of those nations. On the other hand, according to Rabbi Ze'ira in *Rus Rabba* ך'למךך 2:36, the purpose of the *Megillah* is not to teach us about *tumah v'taharah* or *issur v'heter*, but rather .to teach us about the tremendous reward for doing acts of kindness - "כמה שכר טוב לגומלי חסדים"

Chesed is consistently modeled for us throughout *Megillas Rus*, and one particular act of kindness from Boaz demonstrates the power of the smallest acts of kindness. When Boaz notices Rus collecting wheat in his field, he invites her to partake of his meal, and, as the *pasuk* states, "וַיַּצִּיבֵהָ לָהּ קֶלֶי" - he handed her grain. The *lashon* of "וַיַּצִּיבֵהָ", stemming from the word *צביטה*, meaning 'pinch,' hints that Boaz gave her just a pinch of grain. While this may seem like a stingy portion of food to offer someone, it was considered a great enough *chesed* to be recorded in the *Megillah*. The *midrash* writes, "ואילו היה יודע בועז שהקב"ה מנתיב עליו ויצבט לה קלי",

“עגלות מפוטמות היה מאכילה” - if Boaz had known that Hashem would praise him for feeding Rus even just a few kernels, he would have given her a satisfying meal of plump cows! At the time, Boaz didn't realize the effect of his actions, but, had he known, there's no doubt that he would have gone above and beyond for Rus. A powerful lesson can be derived from this: we do not know the impact of our own *chesed*. So, when performing an act of kindness, don't merely do it halfway, lazily, or begrudgingly; give it your all. When you do a *chesed*, do it right. You never know what impact it will have on someone else.



Tamar Newhouse, 9th Grade

☺ Becky Bral

נעשה ונשמע

At *Har Sinai*, by uttering *na'aseh* before *nishma*, *Klal Yisroel* indicated that they were accepting Hashem's Torah without needing to first understand it. They accepted the Torah unconditionally, and were prepared, afterwards, to open their hearts and minds to understand it. In the merit of this, Hashem would help them do so.

Yet, from whom did *B'nei Yisrael* learn the importance of this order? How did they know that it was crucial to accept Torah in this way?

This idea was passed down from Avraham *Avinu*. At the *Bris bein Habesarim*, Hashem told Avraham to count the stars. Immediately, Avraham began to count, and Hashem asked him, "Are you able to count the stars?" Hashem was informing him that just as Avraham tried to fulfill Hashem's will immediately, and started the humanly impossible task of counting the stars without questioning, so, too, Avraham's descendants would say *na'aseh* before *nishma*.

We all possess this same spiritual DNA inside of us. Through Avraham's counting of the stars, and our ancestors' declaration of *na'aseh v'nishma* at *Har Sinai*, we all have it within us to readily accept the Torah without prior understanding. If a Jew is ready to accept the Torah in this manner, then Hashem will bless him with the ability to truly understand the Torah.

☺ Ahuva Mermelstein

Adapted from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

The Blessing of a Structured Prayer

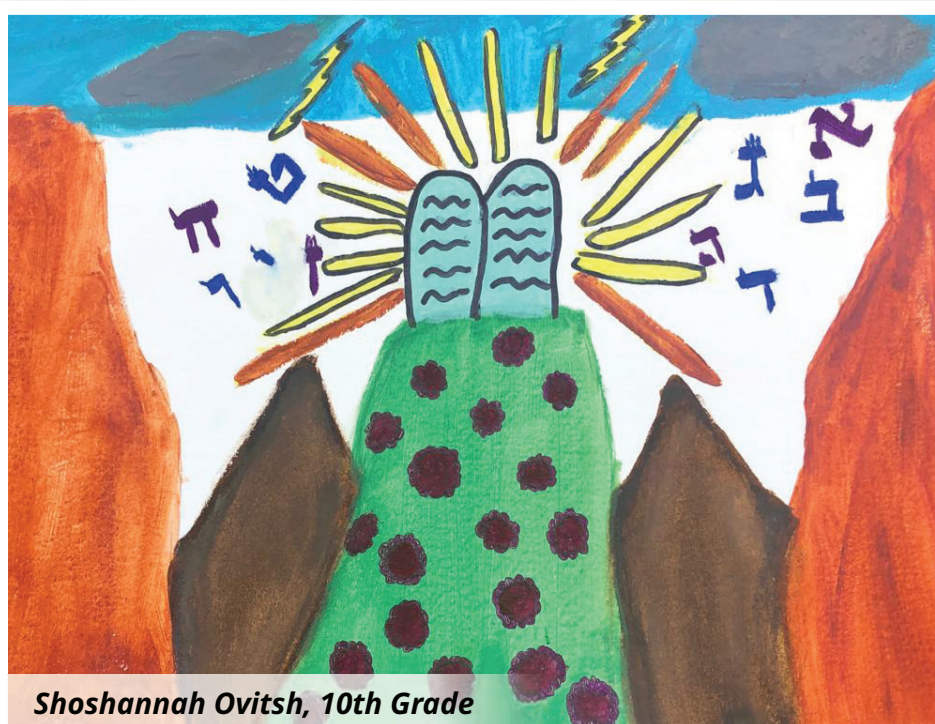
Delivered as a shiur by our esteemed and beloved Reb. Peshi Neuburger as part of OU's *Counting to Sinai* on Day 27 of the Omer.

I often contemplate the challenge of the **Tefilah Tightrope**. The tension that exists between two values that *Chazal* saw as non-negotiable in prayer, and yet which all too often seem in conflict with each other. The first is the requirement to offer a soulful prayer, one which comes from the heart, is emotive and beseeching; the kind of prayer about which we could say 'we were all in.' The other is the mandate which seems so limiting of the first – never to veer from the sacred text and structure of the *Shemoneh Esrei* which was established for us by the *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah*. It is common for teachers to be challenged by thoughtful students of all ages: 'how can I be expected to produce a passionate, concentrated, and genuine *davening* when I recite the exact same formula every day, three times a day?? I could say it in my sleep, and, in fact, I sometimes do!'

Our sages were acutely aware of the almost insurmountable challenge of formulating heartfelt supplications while remaining true to a rigorous established text. One piece of advice they offered was to train ourselves *lechadesh bah davar* – to find some original nuance or meaning in the ancient words each time we recite the *Amidah*. This is often a difficult charge. Yet, I have found that in the most challenging periods of life, both personally and nationally, it is not only *possible* to do this, but, indeed, the very structure which we resist and balk at becomes a gift that directs us to focus on so many different aspects of the *tzarah* at hand – and to have greater clarity as we petition Hashem for the numerous and distinct pieces of the *yeshuah* we seek.

Take a fresh look at *Shemoneh Esrei* with an eye toward *lechadesh bah davar*, and you will find allusions to the moment in which we now live, beginning with the first *brachah*.

How terribly hard it usually is to concentrate on the initial *brachah of Avos*, the blessing which recalls our patriarchs and the *mesorah* they entrusted to us. Yet today, when it is specifically our own patriarchal figures who are most vulnerable and threatened, we find it perhaps just a little more meaningful to say the words *zocher chasdei avos* – Who remembers the kindnesses of our fathers – and feel a tug at our heartstrings.



Shoshannah Ovitsh, 10th Grade

The second *brachah* speaks of Hashem's incomparable strength as a *Mechayeh meisim* Who can bring life to those who have lost life (again, a tug, as we feel too many painful voids that have been recently created,) and as a *Matir asurim* Who can set captives free (how we yearn to be released from our homes!)

Atah Kadosh. Ask any yeshiva day school student to define what it means to be *kadosh*, holy. Most likely, the trained response will be that it requires separation, being set apart. Hashem stands apart from everything in that He needs nothing and no one else to exist...

we, in contrast, now stand, quite literally, separate and far apart from many of our loved ones, and realize how much we need others – and Him – in order to thrive.

Atah chonen l'adam daas. The first official blessing of request, for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Who among us today does not *daven* on behalf of the research scientists who are racing against the clock to gain knowledge of this new and confounding disease and understand how to find treatments and cures and preventions?

Hashiveinu Avinu lesorasecha...Korveinu Malkeinu la'avodasecha ... vehachazireinu . Return us, our Father, to Your Torah....Bring us close to Your service....Bring us back ...to You. The powerful relevance of these words struck me when I heard Rabbi Menachem Penner describe his own *tefilah* experience. As he uttered this *brachah* in shul just moments before the lockdown, he asked the Almighty to bring us back...to our *Sifrei Torah*, to our services, and to Him.

Selach lanu. Help us rectify whatever shortcomings made it necessary for us to endure this devastating crisis, and forgive us for them.

R'ei na v'onyeinu. See our suffering. *Refa'einu.* Heal us. The poignancy of these two at this time is clear.

And when in our lifetimes have we had a greater appreciation of healing as the segue into the next request, *Barech aleinu*, and the restoration of a healthy economy?

We move on to multiple requests for national *geulah*: *teka b'shofar gadol*, sound the great shofar...*hashiva shohteinu kevarishonah*, restore our judges as in former times*v'leyerushalayim ircha b'rachamim tashuv*, return to Your city *Yerushalayim* with compassion...*et tzemach David avdecha meheira tatzmiach*, may the offshoot of David soon blossom.

And while I used to wonder if we would all be ready for *Mashiach* when he arrived (or perhaps ask for another week until after that bar mitzvah or wedding,) none of us has any plans right now, and the time feels ripe for redemption.

Which leaves a few *brachot* for you to work out on your own.

Most importantly, when you get to *Modim*, the *brachah* of thanksgiving, stop for a moment to remember that we, as a community, have set aside all that is dear to us for the preservation of life, which is ultimately His greatest gift.

נודה לך ונספר תהלתך על חיינו המסורים בידיך ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך

We will thank You and tell Your praises, for our lives which are entrusted into Your hands, and for our souls which are in Your charge...

לך מעולם קוינו לך – we forever place our hope in You...



Michali Rosenberg, 9th Grade



Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Bronstein (1911-1993)

Giving voice to the millions of Jews oppressed by Communist tyranny was the life mission of my great grandfather, **Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Bronstein**. Deeply affected by the *Ahavas Yisrael* of the *Amshinover chassidus* in which he was raised, and by the high ethical standards of *Novardok* in which he was schooled, my great-grandfather emerged as a paragon of *mesirut nefesh* for the Jewish people.

After emigrating from Poland in 1933, Zaidy Bronstein served as *rav*, *mohel*, and *shochet* in a number of far-flung North American communities. In 1945, fearful of the toll that these spiritual wastelands would take on his daughters, he moved his family to Brownsville, New York. Between 1958 and 1967, at the bidding of *Agudath Israel*, he made nine visits to the USSR and its satellite countries, where he circumcised thousands of Jewish men of all ages. Touched by their unquenchable thirst for spirituality, he dared the world to hear their silent pleas. In defiance of the oppressive anti-religious governmental policies, he founded the Al Tidom Association. This organization used shrewd tactics to successfully deliver countless religious articles to Jews behind the Iron Curtain. Ultimately, however, Rabbi Bronstein's frequent comings-and-goings aroused the suspicion of the Soviet authorities. The Secret Police officers of the KGB arrested him in 1967, and harshly interrogated him to the point of critical illness. His eventual expulsion from the Soviet Union, though, did not muffle his voice. A short time later he testified before a congressional committee urging them to fight for the physical and spiritual freedom of the Jews of Silence. Beyond that, he dedicated the rest of his life to the rescue of rare and priceless Judaic manuscripts.

On May 12, 1965, Zaidy Bronstein sat at the hospital bedside of the dying *Poltava Gaon*, Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik Krasilschikov. This risky visit was initiated by Moscow's chief Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin; it was a final and desperate attempt to salvage a priceless legacy from oblivion. Fearful that undercover agents of the KGB might be posing as nurses, they spoke little, and in hushed tones. At the signal of the *Gaon*, Zaidy Bronstein removed a thermometer which lay beneath his pillow with one hand, and swiftly stuffed the manuscript alongside it into his sock with the other. The *Gaon* then confided to his distinguished American guest that he had written an entire commentary on the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, twenty volumes consisting of thousands of handwritten pages which were hidden in his daughters' homes. "Promise me," implored the *Gaon*, "that you will get them out of Russia and bring them to print!" Rabbi Bronstein assured him that he would try, and the *Gaon* died the next day.

My great-grandfather spent the better part of three decades keeping his promise. In 1976, he published the *Tevunah* commentary on *Rambam* which had been concealed under the *Gaon's* cushion. The recovery of the 20-volume *Toldos Yitchak* on the *Yerushalmi* proved to be a saga of danger, espionage, and self-sacrifice. By 1993, when Zaidy Bronstein left this world, many more volumes were in print, and his grandsons clutched them tightly at his *levaya*, honoring his wish that the *seforim* escort him on his final journey.

✿ *Rachelle Gelbtuch*





My grandfather Lev Tzyokin z"l

Writing about my grandfather, now that he's gone, just doesn't seem real. As I write, I picture Grandfather's face, reading my words, and smiling. He knew I loved him very much, much as I am sure of his undying love for me. I wish I had gotten to speak with him, or been able to hold his hand when he needed me, the way he always did for me. But during these unprecedented times, things are more difficult. And losing someone you love is much more painful.

I grew up under his loving eye, and a part of him will always be engraved in me. He drove me to drama classes, tennis lessons, gymnastics, ballet, swimming, piano lessons (3 different teachers). His priority was to make my life interesting and not limit me from exploring every opportunity. He was the friendly face that I came home to every day and although I didn't tell him about my difficulties at school, I think he sensed them, and he was a fantastic best friend. He was the light in my life, he made me feel okay when I failed. He was able to just look at me and radiate pride that warmed my insides. I keep trying to focus on how lucky I am that I got to know him so closely; that I had the chance to be both his friend and granddaughter. But it wasn't long enough, no time would ever have been enough. Nor would any words be enough. I could use all the glowing adjectives in the dictionary to describe him, and there wouldn't be enough. They say, though, that a picture is worth a thousand words. So I will try to salvage all the pictures, and post them on my heart.

One of my favorite early memories of Grandfather is our secret excursion to the Dunkin' Donuts three blocks away from my house. I had convinced him to take me, something my mom wouldn't do because she likes to run a healthy household. My mom thinks vegan dark chocolate is an acceptable dessert for a seven year old. In that moment, it didn't feel like he was my grandfather, but more like a friend who was getting into trouble with me, a partner in crime. We both had mischievous looks on our faces for the rest of that day, and no one ever found out. It was our secret.

A special tradition of ours was building the *sukkah* together. The *sukkah* consisted of metal beams which held the structure together, and fabric with an illustration of the Kotel wrapped around it. Unlike my parents, my grandfather enjoyed the music I played on the speakers as we worked together. I passed him the beams while he connected them, it was our perfect system. The whole process took hours, during which I was able to catch him up on all the latest drama in my life. I liked how he really listened to me when I spoke to him, and always took me seriously. When it was time to hang lights in the *sukkah*, I'd support the top from the inside and he'd yell from the outside, asking me when he should stop. Our perfect system. When we finished we always put wooden beams on top so the *schach* wouldn't fly away. I'd always try to impress him by heaving up the beams myself while he'd yell that I'm injuring my back. I know, though, that he was impressed. Of course, afterward, we'd be famished, so I prepared lunch for the two of us. He was one of the only people who appreciated my cooking. Then we ate, while I informed him of my mid-winter vacation plans. Later, when my mom would come home from work he'd humbly tell her that I had done all the work, and I proudly argued that, in fact, he had.

I wish I had even a quarter of his strength, kindness, warmth, and light. He gave everything he could of himself, it was almost as if taking from himself gave him more energy. I'll never forget how he made me feel when I was around him. And I will forever try to make him proud of me.

☺ Naomi Hymowitz

Whats in a Name?

Commenting on the first perek of *Maseches Rosh Hashanah*, the *Chazon Yechezkel* points out a discrepancy between the way *Shavous* is referred to in the *Torah*, and the way that *Chazal* refer to it. In the *Torah*, the term *Azteres* is never used to describe *Shavous*; rather, it is called *Chag Habikurim* or *Chag Hashavous*. In the *Mishnah* (*Maseches Bikurim*,) however, the term *Azteres* is used. What is the distinction between *lashon Chazal* in the *Mishnah* and the *pesuk* in the *Torah*? Moreover, the *Torah* actually does use the term *Azteres*, not to describe the *Yom Tov* of *Shavous*, but rather in reference to the *Yamim Tovim* of *Shemini Atzeres* and *Shevi'i shel Pesach*. The *Chazon Yechezkel* sheds light on the matter with an explanation of the *shoresh* of *Azteres*. Etymologically, *Azteres* is derived from the word *aztur*, to stop, to refrain from doing something. The word *Azteres* is used to describe a *Yom Tov* whose primary function is to refrain from doing *melachah*. An *Azteres Yom Tov* does not have an essential act or *mitzvah* associated with it. Therefore on the first days of the *Yom Tov* of *Pesach* we have a *mitzvah* to eat *matzah* which is a *mitzvas aseh*, a positive *mitzvah*, so we do not refer to this time period as *Azteres*. On *shevi' shel Pesach*, there is no specific *mitzvah* to eat *matzah* so we refer to this *Yom Tov* as *Azteres*. We can apply the same principle to the *Yom Tov* of *sukkos*. On the first days of *sukkos* we have a *mitzvah* to eat bread in the *sukkah* as opposed to the last day of *sukkos* when there is no specific *mitzvah* to eat in the *sukkah*, hence the terminology of *Azteres*. According to the *Chazon Yechezkel* we can now understand why we find a distinction between the way *Chazal* refer to the *Yom Tov* of *Shavous* and the way the *Torah* refers to the *Yom Tov* of *Shavous*. The *Torah* does designate a specific *mitzvas aseh* to fulfill on the *Yom Tov* of *Shavous* namely, the *hakravas shtei halechem*, a *korban* brought on *Shavous*. For this reason, the term *Azteres* was not employed by the *Torah* to describe the *Yom Tov* of *Shavous* as it is associated with a specific *mitzvah*. However,

after the *Churban habayis*, with the cessation of *korbanos*, we no longer brought the *shtei halechem*, hence the appropriate term *Azteres* to describe *Shavous*. In this sense, *Shavous* has now primarily become a *Yom Tov* of refraining from doing *melachah*.

Elke Schwartz

Adapted from Rav Ahron Kotler and the *Chazon Yechezkel's Dvar Torah* on *Shavous*.



Rena Kutner, 9th Grade

The Mysterious Connection between Shavuos and Yom Kippur

The *Torah* commands us to count 49 days from *Pesach* and bring an offering in the *Bais Hamikdash* on the 50th day. Similarly, during the times of the *Bais Hamikdash*, the *Sanhedrin* counted 49 years until the *yovel*, at which time slaves went free and properties reverted to their original owners. The culmination of counting the *omer* ends with *Shavuos* on the 50th day. *Yovel* coincides with *Yom Kippur* of the 50th year. Identifying additional similarities between the 6th of *Sivan* and the 10th of *Tishrei* can provide insight.

While it is not mentioned in the *Torah*, the *Talmud* informs us that *Shavuos* coincides with the giving of the *Torah* at *Har Sinai*. However, *Moshe* destroyed the *luchos* written by *Hashem* that were to be delivered in conjunction with receiving the *Torah*. *Moshe* received the *luchos shneios*, the manmade replacement for the first set, 121 days later, on *Yom Kippur*, the day that *Hashem* forgave *Bnei Yisrael*. The two holidays became forever intertwined. We heard the *aseres hadibros* on *Shavuos* and received the written *luchos* on *Yom Kippur*.

We received the *Torah* amidst fire and smoke accompanied by the sound of the increasingly loud *shofar*. The heavenly *shofar* blasts can not be replicated. No person could approach *Har Sinai* during the giving of the *Torah*. Having received the *aseres hadibros*, *Moshe* blew a *shofar* signaling that *Bnei Yisrael* were free to approach the mountain. *והקולות מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הקלות*. The *Torah's* unusual term for this long *shofar* blast, “*yovel*” fits perfectly with the end of the 50 year *yovel*. The *shofar* blast following *Yom Kippur* of the 50th year of *shemittah* liberated the slaves and restored the land to its original owner.

The proclamation of liberty *ויראתם דרור בארץ לכל יושביה יובל הוא תהיה לכם* makes all of the Jewish nation a free people. *והקלות מעשה אלהים המה והמכתב מכתב אלהים הוא חרות על הקלות*. The verb “*charus*” describes how *Hashem* engraved the words on the *luchos*. Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi (*Avos* 6,2) teaches us to also read the word as “*cheirus*” or freedom. According to a *midrash* (*Shemos Rabba* 41,9), receiving the *Torah* brought us freedom from exile, from the *yetzer hara*, from *yesurim* and even from death. Receiving the *Torah* at *Sinai* restored the world to its pristine state prior to the sin of *Adam HaRishon*. The twofold freedom, both from the physical bondage of exile, and the spiritual bondage from sin, mirrors the freedoms experienced on *Yom Kippur* of the *yovel*. At this time, the *Sanhedrin* freed the slaves and *Hashem's* court forgave one's sins.

On *Shavuos* the aspect of sanctity is more subtle and concealed. On each holiday, a *chattas*, a sin offering, *ושעיר עזים אחד לחטאת* (*Bamidbar* 28, 15) comprises part of the *mussaf* sacrificial service. The *Torah* instructs us differently on *Shavuos*. The *possuk* in *Bamidbar* 28, 30 states, *ושעיר עזים אחד לכפר עליכם*, leaving out the word *chattas* in describing the offering. For all practical purposes, this is a sin offering. The change in language hints at a more refined existence to which we should strive, free from the sin of the *eigel hazahav*. We hope and strive to return to the state of the first *Shavuos* where *Bnei Yisrael* received the *Torah* in perfect purity.

✿ Aviva Notkin

Based on Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl *Sichos I'Sefer Va'Yikra* 259-264.

Making these Days Count!

The Torah doesn't explicitly associate *Shavuot* with the giving of the Torah. As we in the tenth grade learned in Mrs. Eisenberg's class, this is because every day we ought to act as if we just received the Torah. Daily, we are advised to find something - a *chesed*, *pasuk* or *mitzvah* - to which we can personally connect, and thereby re-inject ourselves with the freshness and excitement of the Torah.

While the concept of treating the Torah as an 'ever recurring gift is not new, this year brings to it a novel and personal relevance. In these months of quarantine, we are surrounded by so many distractions and opportunities to be lazy, and it is really difficult to make sure that our days are filled with Torah. Zoom school makes it easier for a student to find diversions which interfere with her ability to soak up the inspiration. It is so tempting to use the *Tefilla* time slot irresponsibly, especially when it's the perfect time to take a nap or make breakfast. Without being forced to be *tzenuah*, *daven minchah*, and behave in a way that would make Hashem proud, it is particularly challenging to maintain the standards we aspire to. With no one on top of us, the *yetzer ha'ra* seems to have a louder voice, and we begin to make excuses for ourselves. The long school day and hours of screen time exhaust me, and when it's over I'm not in the mood to learn, *daven*, help my mom, or play with my siblings. I would much rather spend my day in pajamas, just eating and chilling in my bed. But we - as a nation and as individuals - need to prove that we *are* special, that we can rise up and use our time productively. Our challenge in these anxious, scary, weird times is to fight and overcome our *yetzer*, and in doing so we will become better, stronger people.

Hashem controls the world, and COVID-19 is not a coincidence. It seems that Hashem is giving us a special opportunity to connect to the Torah on a deeper level. We are on our screens most of the day anyway, so let's try to call or text someone who can use a smile. There has never been more free time, so watch a shiur or learn a *sefer*, connect with family or friends. Our parents are stressed, so take your sibling on an adventure in your backyard. Call your grandparents, or adopt a *bubby*, or both! This is more important than any test we will have in school; Hashem wants to see how we act when put into this unusual situation. Let's use the challenge to embrace His Torah in a fresh way, as we approach *Z'man Matan Tora-seinu* 5780.

🕊️ Miriam Abittan



Dassi Mayerfeld, 11th Grade

Reflections on our Chizuk Chaburah

Mrs. M. Cohen's *Chizuk Chaburah* is one of the highlights of my week. Mrs Cohen brings her love for Torah and motivating insights to the forefront here, which make the discussions extremely enjoyable. This *chaburah* does not carry the pressure of being in a real class setting, yet still maintains the seriousness, interest, and the internalizing of takeaway lessons of a regular class. We discuss ideas related to the current troubling times, and learn how to view these topics, and many others, from a Torah perspective. One question that was brought up which made an impact on me was how to connect to Hashem in different ways, such as emulating His conduct (e.g. *chessed*, etc.) I leave class strengthened with practical ways to become a better Jew, and I gain clarity on many issues. The participants in the *chaburah* always leave feeling uplifted!

Another plus of this *chaburah* is that it is discussion based. Although lecture type classes are also great, it is a special treat to have an "open floor," where everyone gets to voice her opinion on the topic. In this way, we come out with many different outlooks on each issue, which is really fascinating and important. A girl in the *chaburah* proposed that when we are trying to work on something, we write down various scenarios (related to that specific area of improvement) in which we might realistically find ourselves. She had noticed that doing so had helped her be better prepared to face difficult situations. Suggestions like these by fellow classmates add so much. Because of the interesting times we are in, it is helpful to discuss the challenges with peers, while at the same time uplifting each other. It is that kind of support which is accomplished in *chaburah* every week!

☺ Rivka Hakimi

Waiting for The World

It is evident from the first word of the Torah, *Bereishis*, that the world was created for the purpose of the Torah, and the world was not complete until the Torah was given to *Klal Yisrael*. Why then, did Hashem wait so many years before presenting us with the Torah and allowing the world to reach its true potential? R' Dicker explains that the Torah could not have been given right away because we were not ready. One cannot just sit down to learn Torah and expect it all to become clear to him, it takes preparation. The Torah is not just a subject that has to be studied and memorized for a test, rather, it is a "spiritual entity that must be properly acquired". Part of this preparation for receiving the Torah was all of the history of *B'nei Yisrael* up until this point of *Matan Torah*, including the *Avos*, *Imahos*, and the slavery in *Mitzrayim*.

This concept serves as an answer to another well known question about the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuos*. If the Torah was given on the 51st day of the *omer* why do we only count up until the 50th day, and exclude the day when the Torah was actually given? As explained before, we were not ready to receive the Torah until we reached a certain spiritual level. That spiritual height was reached on the 50th day. Therefore, we celebrate on the day that we were ready and able to accept the Torah, because that is an accomplishment in itself.

☺ Ilana Katzenstein

Adapted from *Timely Teachings*- Rav Levi Dicker



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