

Introduction: The following (Exodus, Chapter 19, verse 1 through Chapter 20, verse 22) is a selection from the Torah portion that is read on the first day of Shavuot (Feast of Weeks), a two-day holiday that begins on Saturday night. A selection from Deuteronomy (15:19-16:17) is read on the second day. Shavuot begins on the 50th day after the first day of Passover; thus, it is also called Pentecost (although that name of the holiday is far less used than its Hebrew names). The holiday is also called Zman Natan Torateinu (the Season of the Giving of our Torah), Yom Ha-Bikkurim (Day of the First Fruits), and Chag HaKatzir (Feast of the Harvest). The article attached at the end of this packet tells you more about the holiday.

Exodus Chapter 19

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| <p>א בַּחֹדֶשׁת הַשְּׁלִישִׁית לְצֵאת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם--בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי</p> | <p>1 In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.</p> |
| <p>ב וַיִּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר וַיִּחַן-שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הַהָר</p> | <p>2 And when they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mount.</p> |
| <p>ג וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן-הַהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתֹגִיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל</p> | <p>3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying: 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:</p> |
| <p>ד אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל-כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׂרִים וְאָבֹא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי</p> | <p>4 You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.</p> |
| <p>ה וְעַתָּה אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-בְּרִיתִי--וְהִיְתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים כִּי-לִי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ</p> | <p>5 Now therefore, if you will hearken unto My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own treasure from among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine;</p> |
| <p>ו וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ: אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל</p> | <p>6 and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'</p> |
| <p>ז וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשֶׁם לְפָנֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה</p> | <p>7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD commanded him.</p> |
| <p>ח וַיַּעֲנוּ כָל-הָעָם יַחְדָּו וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע וַיִּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶת-דְּבָרֵי הָעָם אֶל-</p> | <p>8 And all the people answered together, and said: 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do.'
And Moses reported the words of the people</p> |

ט וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ
בְּעָבַת הָעֲנָנוֹת בְּעָבֹר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדַבְרֵי עֲמֻדָה
וְגַם-בְּךָ יֵאֱמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם וַיֹּגֵד מֹשֶׁה אֶת-דְּבָרֵי
הָעָם אֶל-יְהוָה

9 And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Lo, I come unto you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.' And Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.

י וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵךְ אֶל-הָעָם וְקַדְשָׁתֶם
הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וְכַבְּסוּת שְׂמַלְתֶּם

10 And the LORD said to Moses: 'Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments,

יא וְהָיוּ נְכֹנִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בַיּוֹם
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יֵרַד יְהוָה לְעֵינֵי כָל-הָעָם--עַל-הַר
סִינַי

11 and be ready against the third day; for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai.

יב וְהִגַּבְלָתָ אֶת-הָעָם סָבִיב לְאֹמְרֵי הַשְּׂמֵרָה
לְכֶם עֲלוֹת בְּהָר וּנְגַע בְּקַצְהוּ: כָּל-הַנִּגַּע בְּהָר
מוֹת יוּמָת

12 And you shalt set bounds to the people round about, saying: Take heed to yourselves, that you go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever touches the mount shall be surely put to death;

יג לֹא-תִגַּע בּוֹ יָדָת כִּי-סָקוּל יִסְקַל אוּ-יָרֶה
יִרֶה--אִם-בְּהֶמָּה אִם-אִישׁ לֹא יִתְיַהֵף בְּמִשְׁחָת
הַיִּבְלֹת הַמָּהָת יַעֲלוּ בְּהָר

13 no hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live; when the ram's horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mount.'

יד וַיֵּרַד מֹשֶׁה מִן-הַהָרָה אֶל-הָעָם וַיְקַדְּשֵׁם
אֶת-הָעָם וַיְכַבְּסוּת שְׂמַלְתֶּם

14 And Moses went down from the mount to the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their garments.

טו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-הָעָם הָיוּ נְכֹנִים לְשִׁלְשֵׁת
יָמִים: אֶל-תִּגְשׁוּת אֶל-אִשָּׁה

15 And he said to the people: 'Be ready against the third day; **come not near a woman.**'

טז וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְּהִיַת הַבְּקָרָה וַיְהִי קֹל
וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנָן כָּבֵד עַל-הַהָרָה וְקֹל שִׁפְרַת תְּזַק
מְאֹד וַיִּתְרַד כָּל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה

16 And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder(s) and lightning(s) and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled.

יז וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים מִן-
הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְיַצְבוּ בְּתַתִּית הַהָר

17 And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.

יח וְהָר סִינַי עָשָׂן כְּלוֹת מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יֵרַד עָלָיו
יְהוָה בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עָשָׁנוּ כְּעָשָׂן הַכִּבְשָׁוֹת וַיִּתְרַד
כָּל-הָהָר מְאֹד

18 Now Mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.

- יט** 19 And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice.
- כ** 20 And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mount; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mount; and Moses went up.
- כא** 21 And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.
- כב** 22 And let the priests also, that come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them.'
- כג** 23 And Moses said unto the LORD: 'The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You charged us, saying: Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it.'
- כד** 24 And the LORD said unto him: 'Go, get yourself down, and you shall come up, you, and Aaron with you; but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest He break forth upon them.'
- כה** 25 So Moses went down unto the people, and told them. {S}

Exodus Chapter 20

- א** 1 And God spoke all these words, saying: {S} לאמר {ס}
- ב** 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.
- ג** 3 You shall not make for yourselves a graven image, nor any manner of likeness, of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

- ד** 4 you shall not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me;
- לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם: כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֵל קַנָּא--פֶּקֶד עֲוֹן אָבֹת עַל-בָּנִים עַל-שְׁלִישִׁים וְעַל-רְבִיעִים לְשִׁנְאָי
- ה** 5 and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments. {S}
- וְעֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים--לְאֹהֲבַי וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי {ס}
- ו** 6 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. {P}
- לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לְשׁוֹא: כִּי לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר-יִשָּׂא אֶת-שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹא {פ}
- ז** 7 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ
- ח** 8 Six days shall you labor, and do all your work;
- שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל-מְלֶאכֶתְךָ
- ט** 9 but the seventh day is a sabbath unto the LORD your God; in it, you shall not do any manner of work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man-servant, nor your maid-servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates;
- וַיּוֹמַת הַשְּׁבִיעִי--שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלֶאכֶה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וּגְרִיבְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ
- י** 10 for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. {S}
- כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת-יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת-הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם וַיִּנַּחַת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל-כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת--וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ {ס}
- יא** 11 Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God gives you. {S}
- כַּבֵּד אֶת-אָבִיךָ וְאֶת-אִמְךָ--לְמַעַן תִּלְוֶנָה יָמֵיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ {ס}
- יב** 12 You shall not murder. {S} You shall not commit adultery. {S} You shall not steal. {S} You shall not bear false witness
- לֹא תִרְצַח {ס} לֹא תִנְאָף {ס} לֹא תִגְנוֹב {ס} לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בְרַעַף עַד שִׁקְרָא {ס}

against your neighbor. {S}

יג לא תחמד בית רעהו {ס} לא-תחמד אשת רעהו ועבדו ואמתו ושורו וקמרות וכלת אשר לרעהו {פ}

13 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; {S} you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's. {P}

יד וכל-העם ראים את-הקולות ואת-הלפידים ואת קול השפרת ואת-ההרת עשון וירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחק

14 And all the people perceived [saw] the thundering(s), and the lightning(s), and the voice of the horn, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off.

טו ויאמרו אל-משה דבר-אתה עמנו ונשמעה ואל-ידבר עמנו אלהים פן-נמות

15 And they said unto Moses: 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'

טז ויאמר משה אל-העם אל-תיראו כי לבעבור נסות אתכם בא האלהים ובעבורתה יהיה יראתו על-פניכם--לבלי תחטאו

16 And Moses said unto the people: 'Fear not; for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before you, that you sin not.'

יז ויעמד העם מרחק ומשה נגש אל-הערפלת אשר-שם האלהים {ס}

17 And the people stood afar off; but Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. {S}

יח ויאמר יהוה אל-משה כה תאמר אל-בני ישראל: אתם ראיתם--כי מן-השמים דברתי עמכם

18 And the LORD said unto Moses: Thus you shall say unto the children of Israel: You yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven.

יט לא תעשו אתי: אלהי כסף ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם

19 You shall not make with Me--gods of silver, or gods of gold, you shall not make unto you.

כ מזבח אדמה תעשה-לית וזבחת עליו את-עלתיך ואת-שלמיך את-צאנה ואת-בקרך בכל-המקום אשר אזכיר את-שמית אבוא אליך וברכתך

20 An altar of earth you shall make unto Me, and shall sacrifice upon it your burnt-offerings, and your peace-offerings, your sheep, and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come unto you and bless

you.

כא וְאִם-מִזְבֵּחַ אֲבָנִים תַּעֲשֶׂה-לִּי לֹא-תִבְנֶה אֹתוֹן גָּזִית׃ כִּי חִרְבָּה הִנֵּפֶת עָלֶיךָ וַתִּחַלְלֶנָּה 21 And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shalt not build it of hewn stones; for if you lift up your tool upon it, you have profaned it.

כב וְלֹא-תַעֲלֶה בְּמַעֲלֹתַי עַל-מִזְבְּחִי׃ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִגָּלֶה עֶרְוַתְךָ עָלָיוּץ {P} 22 Neither shall you go up by steps unto My altar, that your nakedness be not uncovered there. {P}

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think the Torah portion describing the preparation for the giving of the Torah and the recitation of the Ten Sayings (or Commandments) was selected for the first day of this holiday?
2. Did you see anything that you had not noticed before during this reading?
3. Chapter 19, verses 8 and 9 raise a question: At the end of verse 8, what Moses probably “reported” to G-d was what the people said earlier in the verse (“All that the LORD has spoken we will do”), but considering that in verse 9, G-d is speaking to Moses, what is it at the end of the verse that Moses “tells” G-d that the people has said? According to Rashi and other Biblical commentators, it was to tell G-d that the people wanted to hear the commandments directly from G-d (that is, “All that **the LORD** has spoken we will do” - the LORD, not Moses). However, see Chapter 20, verse 15 – despite their intentions, they couldn’t handle hearing the Torah directly from G-d! Moses had to be the transmitter.
4. It is always useful to study the differences between repeated conversations in Torah; here, note what Moses added in Chapter 19, verse 15 to what G-d had told him in verses 10 and 11. Why do you think he added that injunction? How might not having sexual relations in the lead-up to Revelation change the experience?
5. If you believe in Revelation on/at Sinai, what do you think was revealed there and then? There is a very large spectrum of Jewish beliefs about Revelation, but even from this text alone, it is not clear that only the Ten Commandments were revealed then – for instance, were the commandments in verses 18 through 22 not given then as well? One belief that all of Torah (in the broadest possible sense – all the Hebrew Bible, and the Talmud, and all Jewish teachings on through the ages) were given then as well!
6. What meanings might the holiday have for a Jew who doesn’t believe in Divine Revelation but rather that people wrote the Torah over a long period of time?

I wrote the following article for the May edition of the Jewish Journal Monthly (please attribute both myself and them if you quote from this; please seek their permission if you want to reprint, of course).

Rabbi Saul's Column: Shavuot, An Underappreciated Festival

It is clear in the Torah what Passover (Pesach) and Sukkot are about; the liberation from Egypt and the dwelling in booths (or tabernacles, the English name for the holiday) that followed the Exodus are easily comprehended ideas. Shavuot, however, which follows Pesach by only seven weeks (hence its name, the Feast of Weeks), is a little harder to get. We now know it as not only *Chag HaKatzir* (feast of the harvest, marking the end of the seven weeks since the standing grain in the fields was first harvested) or as *Yom HaBikkurim* (day of first fruits), but more significantly, perhaps, as *Zman Matan Torateinu* (the season of the giving of our Torah).

However, the Torah says nothing about the latter designation, neither in its references to Shavuot nor when the Revelation is presented. Linking Shavuot to the Revelation at Sinai was a completely rabbinic innovation. Since both Pesach and Sukkot had both agricultural and historical significance as presented in the Torah, the rabbis might have assumed that Shavuot must have a historical tie as well, and since the Revelation was not connected to a precise time (the Torah says that it happened “in the third month”), Shavuot became an appropriate date for the Revelation. This construct has a beautiful balance: Pesach as the festival of liberation followed at the end of the *omer* period (the 49 days between the holidays, when a sheaf of grain was brought each day to count the time) by the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot. In both seasons, we are instructed to place ourselves there and then with all of the Israelites. We all left Egypt on Pesach, and we all stood at Sinai on Shavuot.

And yet, Shavuot, even with this momentous designation, remains a largely unobserved, unappreciated festival on the Jewish calendar. One reason might be that it has a singular lack of visible ritual, a deficiency not in the least felt by its fellow pilgrimage festivals, Pesach and Sukkot. While Pesach has *matzah* and bitter herbs and all the other symbols of the *seder* meals, and while Sukkot has the ultimate religious symbol, the *sukkah*, in which we can actually live the seven days of the festival, and the four species in addition, Shavuot has...what? Dairy foods. A cheese blintze can hardly stand up next to a well-decorated *sukkah* as a powerful religious symbol. Although the reasons for eating dairy on Shavuot are interesting and varied, they still don't make for vivid family iconography in the same way that a Pesach *seder* might. Greater symbolism had accompanied the festival while the Temples yet stood (the grain and first-fruit offerings) but much of it was lost with the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E.

So it seems we have to work a little to draw on the religious meaning in the festival. Luckily, the Jews have always been masters of innovation. The mystics of Safed in the 16th C, the same folks who gave us the kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming the Shabbat) service, invented a fitting commemoration of Shavuot as well – the *tikkun leil Shavuot* – in which a set order of sources (*tikkun* means an established order) was studied all night in anticipation of receiving the Torah at dawn. (Not surprisingly, the introduction of coffee had not preceded this custom by many years!) A modern-day *tikkun* might feature a looser array of study sessions, films, discussions, and, of course, dairy refreshments.

It's fitting, however, that we have to work to draw out the festival's meaning; because Shavuot now commemorates the giving of the Torah, which we cannot simply read and immediately understand fully but which requires diligent study, inquiry, and guidance, the holiday itself asks that we invest ourselves a bit, to use our creative selves to beautify the holiday. This is often done by decorating the *bimah* with

flowers and fresh cuttings; special Shavuot paper-cuttings (called *shavuselehs*) with nature themes became an art form dedicated to the beautification of the holiday.

However you choose to observe the holiday, be it by attending services, or our *tikkun leil Shavuot* at Ohev Tzedek on Saturday night May 23, or by eating a slice of cheesecake while thinking of the giving of the Torah (!), or by simply making a commitment to learn more Torah this year, I hope that Shavuot becomes an even more meaningful holiday for you and your family.

Chag sameakh [Happy holiday],

Rabbi Saul Oresky