

"A CHASUNA TO REMEMBER"

Shavuos 5780

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THE WHITE SHUL

ק"ק כנסת ישראל

Especially during *Z'man Matan Toraseinu*, our musing over names beckons the following: Where did this momentous event take place? On a humble mountain known as *Sinai*. The very word carries tones of *sin'ah*, hatred, stirring us to ponder why a mountain selected for *Matan Torah*- "*dirache'ha darchei no'am*," whose ways are pleasant (*Mishlei*, 3:17)- connotes nothing but this pejorative trait. And is *Har Choreiv* (*churvah*, destruction), the name by which we are first introduced to it in the Torah, any better? Are we missing something here?

The Symbol of Sinai

Allow me to turn your attention to a fascinating narrative in *gemara Shabbos* (89a). It is there that we find the *amoraim* already having struggled with our latter question. The *gemara* there records that Rav Kahana was asked why *Har Sinai* bore such a name.¹ His responses revolved around the miracles and good signs that accompanied the auspicious occasion, but both answers were quickly dismissed because the name should then have been "*ni'sai*" or "*si'ma'na*" respectively.² Two other *amoraim* finally explain that the unusual title was on account of the *sin'ah* that descended upon the nations of the world³ who did not receive the Torah.⁴

Knowing full well the word's correct spelling, why would Rav Kahana hesitate to provide an explanation based on *Sinai's* clear association to *sin'ah*? It appears that Rav Kahana understood that the name of *Sinai*- in line with all names in *lashon ha'kodesh*- must necessarily encapsulate the essence of what transpired on that humble mountain.⁵ Surely it must highlight the miracles, the favorable omen- something of that nature- but definitely not carry a negative overtone that might detract from *Sinai's* true significance. And yet the *gemara* concludes that indeed it is hatred that lies at the root of what occurred at *Har Sinai*. Even the title of *Har Choreiv*, the *gemara* continues, was thus accorded because it was there that destruction descended upon the nations of the world.⁶ This is the true essence of what *Matan Torah* was all about?!

Yes, indeed. It was at this very mountain that we entered into an eternal covenant with *HaKB"H*. But only we- the Jewish People- and no others. Until this point in time, writes the *Ramchal* (*Derech Hashem*, 2:4), the nations still had the opportunity to espouse the single religious truth and thereby

¹ See also the *Ba'al HaTurim*, parshas Beshalach, 16:1. In addition, see the fascinating idea appearing in *Ta'amei HaMinhagim*, *Inyanei Chag HaShavuot*, footnote to #615 (p. 279)—citing R' Yaakov Emden's *Migdal Oz*.

² See the *Ben Yehoyada*. See also the question bothering the *Noam Elimelech*, parshas Yisro (p. 82, "*ba'chodesh ha'shilishi*"). Regarding the precise nature of the miracles and good signs present at Sinai, see R' Tzaddok HaKohen's *Pri Tzaddik*, *Shavuot*, #21 (vol. 4, pp. 54-55).

³ See the brief insight of R' Zelig Epstein appearing in the Torah journal, *Yishurun*, that was published in honor of his Yeshiva's *Yarchei Kallah* in *Sh'vat* 5777, p. 390.

⁴ See also *Pirkei D'R' Eliezer*, chapter 41, and the commentary *Vi'lo Od E'lah* by R' Eliyahu Ha'Itamri. In addition, see the interesting article appearing in the Torah journal, *Sinai* (#32, pp. 168-174), regarding the origins of the names of "*Sinai*" and "*Choreiv*."

⁵ For some fascinating *remazim* regarding the choice of "*Sinai*," see the *B'nei Yissaschar*, *Ma'amarei Chodesh Sivan*, *Ma'amar* 2, #13.

⁶ See also the *Maharal's Derech Chaim* on *Avos*, 6:2.

elevate themselves from their lowly levels. They, too, were offered the Torah,⁷ but upon their refusal thus closed the gate to spiritual growth, and sealed their eternal fate as outside of G-d's all-encompassing embrace. While an individual gentile may still opt to undergo an exhaustive process of conversion, as nations they would forever be the outsiders.⁸

And that is the essence of what transpired at *Sinai*: it was by that mountain that the Jewish nation was eternally branded as G-d's treasured nation, His beloved people, to the exclusion of all others.⁹ There we became the "*Am HaNivchar*," the title itself connoting the immediate disqualification all those not "chosen."¹⁰ And thus every single day, before sitting down to learn, we first highlight this idea and recite the *bracha* of "*asher bachar banu mi'kol ha'amim, vi'nasan lanu es Toraso...*"¹¹—based on the *pasuk*, "*...u'vicha bachar Hashem li'hiyos lo li'am segula mi'kol ha'amim...*" (*Re'eh*, 14:2).¹² The gentiles were cast aside from before *HaKB"H*,¹³ and will henceforth detest the lone cherished nation of *HaKB"H*,¹⁴ as envy will combine with the hatred- and the sense of destruction- that perpetually envelops them.¹⁵

So yes, ideally, we prefer to abstain from names that focus on the negative—except when that name captures the essence of the matter better than any positive sounding substitute. To highlight the precise nature of this division between us and all other nations, the optimal choice must emphasize the sheer hatred and contempt resulting from being cast totally aside from a unique union with *HaKB"H*. Such a relationship belonged solely to the Jewish People.

Exclusivity

It was this eternal separation, the utter division between one nation and all others, that was foremost in Moshe *Rabbeinu's* mind. The *gemara* in *Brachos* (7a) relates that Moshe presented three requests to *HaKB"H*, and they were all subsequently answered. The first was that the *Shechina*, G-d's Divine

⁷ *Rashi, V'zos HaBracha*, 33:2, based on the *Sifri*.

⁸ Even in the end of days, when all nations will fully recognize and revere *Hashem* and His Torah, the Jewish People will still remain the "*Am Segula*" to the exclusion of all others—see *Meshech Chochma, Yisro*, 19:5.

⁹ I later saw that R' Tzaddok *HaKohen* expresses the same idea-- see *Dover Tzedek*, 85b. See also his comments in *Divrei Sofrim*, 8a. For an alternate approach, see R' Y. L. HaLevi Ashleig's (*Ba'al HaSulam* on the *Zohar*) *Pri Chacham* collection of *ma'amarim*, p. 200.

¹⁰ See R' Yisroel Taub's *Dorshei Rishumos*, p. 195.

¹¹ Banishment from G-d's "home" (the *Beis HaMikdash*) to live among the other nations in *galus* understandably arrives on the heels of not reciting such a *bracha* with full meaning and love and appreciation for Torah...(*Nedarim* 81a, and see the *Ran's* comments). See also R' Meir Belsky's brief remarks in his *Citadel and Tower: Quest for Jewish Majesty*, vol. IV, p. 31.

¹² See the *Avudraham, Shacharis shel Chol*.

¹³ See the terminology of *Shemos Rabba*, 2:4.

¹⁴ See R' M. Lombarsky's *Al Har Sinai*, p. 20, footnote #22, contrasting the terminology appearing in the *medrash Lekach Tov* with that of *Shemos Rabba*.

¹⁵ See also the *Maharal's* *Gevuros Hashem*, beginning of chapter 23. In addition, see the *Ben Yehoyada*, and see the novel interpretation presented by the *Imrei Emes, Shavuos* (5672). See also R' Noach Oelbaum's *Gilyonei Minchas Chein* on the *gemara*, and see R' Ephraim Greenblatt's *Shu"t Rivivos Ephraim*, vol. 1, *OC"H, siman* 338 (*os beis*).

Presence, should descend upon *B'nei Yisroel*. But Moshe wasn't yet done. For his second plea, he asked that the *Shechina* not rest upon any of the other nations. Moshe obviously felt the need to delineate a separate request to ensure that the *Shechina* not rest at all upon any other nation besides the Jewish People.¹⁶ It would not suffice to merit the embracing proximity of *Hashem* if we would not always remain the *exclusive* heirs to the Divine Presence.¹⁷ It is something way too precious to share with any other.¹⁸

How appropriate, therefore, to find throughout the Torah the constant emphasis on the covenantal relationship established between *Hashem* and His people at *Sinai*. We read of the Torah described as the "*Sefer HaBris*," and encounter, as well, the "*Luchos HaBris*,"¹⁹ the "*Aron HaBris*," and even the "*Dam HaBris*" that was sprinkled upon the Jewish nation while at *Har Sinai*. *Matan Torah* was certainly about the wondrous gift of the infinite Torah, but the mountain upon which it was given would not be named for that event. It would be, rather, the eternal covenant²⁰ established *through* that giving of the Torah that would unite the Jewish People inextricably with their Creator- and thus occupy the spotlight at *Har Sinai*.²¹ That was the essence underlying the giving of the Torah, and that would thus be forever embedded within the name, the very essence, of the mountain as well.

Every covenant, in fact- explains the *Maharal*- is described as a *kri'sas ha'bris*, for a *bris* can only be achieved between two parties if each side is willing to "cut off" (*ka'reis*) a piece of himself.²² When both are willing to make sacrifices, or perhaps to give up something held dearly to them, they allow for a complete merging together, a harmonious union.²³ The unique time we now find ourselves in is regarded throughout our *tefillos* as "*Z'man Matan Toraseinu*." Notice how it is not referred to as the

¹⁶ See the *Gra's* commentary on *Shir HaShirim* (1:3), and see *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Pesach*, *Ma'amar* 37. See also R' Hutner's related remarks in *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Rosh HaShana*, *Ma'amar* 4, #3 (and *Ma'amar* 21, #3).

¹⁷ See the insight appearing in *Chasam Sofer HaChadash al HaTorah, Likutim, Brachos* 7a (p. 246).

¹⁸ See also R' Meir Belsky's *Citadel And Tower: Quest for Jewish Majesty*, vol. 4, p. 27.

¹⁹ Only the first *Luchos* given at *Sinai* are referred to—in *parshas Eikev*—as the "*Luchos HaBris*." See the *Chiddushei HaGra/Imrei Noam* on *Brachos* 32a, and the *Gra's peirush* on *Sefer Yetzira*, 1:8. See also *Drashos Chasam Sofer*, vol. 2, 384b.

²⁰ Regarding the *lashon* of "*bris*," see the *Ibn Ezra* and *Ramban* on *parshas Noach*, 6:18.

²¹ See the comments of the *Ramban* on *parshas Mishpatim*, 24:1. See also the *Maharal's Chiddushei Aggados* on *Sanhedrin* 99a (vol. 3, 225a- and see his comments on *Nedarim* 32a, vol. 2, 6b), *Netzach Yisroel*, chapter 9, and *Tiferes Yisroel*, chapter 9 (and several other places throughout). See also R' Hutner's *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Rosh HaShana*, *ma'amar* 30 (#2), and see the collected *Sichos* of R' Shimshon Pincus on *Shavuot*, p. 238.

²² See also the *Gra's* commentary on *Sefer Yetzira*, 1:8.

²³ To accept the Torah was, ultimately, the biggest decision the Jewish People would ever have to make: the word "decision" comes from the Latin root "cide" which implies the act of "cutting off" (as in homicide, suicide, etc.). To make our decision to fully accept the Torah and *HaKB"H* Who offered it to us, we first had to "cut off" and sacrifice a part of our physical selves and desires. Very often, having to make extremely difficult decisions places us in a state of "crisis" (a decisive point or condition)—and, interestingly enough, "the word for 'crisis' in our own language derives from the Greek word for 'decision'" (Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time*, p. 159). Perhaps it is no coincidence, then, that a "crisis," a state of feeling compelled to decide, to "cut off," a perceived need or sense of self, seems clearly connected with the Hebrew "*kareis*," the idea of being cut off (crisis and *kareis/ke'risus* sound quite alike)...

time of our *receiving* the Torah—“*kabbalas haTorah*”²⁴—but as the time when *HaKB”H* decided to give it to His cherished nation.²⁵ Hashem gave us- “*nasati*,” *lashon matana*²⁶- the special, closely guarded, gift of His Torah: “*Ki lekach tov nasati lachem, torasi al ta’azovu*” (*Mishlei*, 4:2). And yet we do not refer to the *Yom Tov* merely as “*Z’man Matan Torah*”²⁷ or, perhaps even more appropriately, as “*Z’man Matan Toraso*.” Why not? Because *Chaza*²⁸ tell us that if we sacrifice many of our needs and desires to toil incessantly over Hashem’s Torah, we can then boldly even call it our own: *toraseinu*.²⁹

Matan Torah saw an everlasting *kri’sas ha’bris* between Hashem and His people, only as Hashem gave us His most precious possession- and a piece of Himself, *kaviyachol* (*Shemos Rabba*, 33:1, and see *Shabbos* 105a)³⁰- and we responded with a “*na’aseh vi’nishma*,” a sincere willingness to sacrifice many physical desires and comforts for the sake of His Torah, in an effort to make it “ours” as well. “*Torah mi’u’rasa li’Yisroel*,” the *Sifri* (*V’zos HaBracha*, #4) writes, the Torah is ‘engaged,’ ultimately ‘wed,’ to the Jewish People. And only to us, and none other: “...*nasati lachem, lachem vi’lo lish’ar a’mim*” (*Zohar*, vol. 3, 73a).

It was indeed- and always will be- the *z’man* of *Matan Toraseinu*.

The Holiest Wedding of All

Is this treasured relationship not what every marriage must entail, *nissu’in* serving as the paradigmatic *kri’sas bris* between two parties (see *Sanhedrin* 22b- and *Tosfos* in *Kesuvos* 4a)—thus rendering the appellation, “*eishes b’risecha*?”³¹ Certainly both halves of the greater whole must make sacrifices to allow the halves to fuse, ultimately, into one cohesive *neshama*. It therefore comes as no surprise to

²⁴ Although we did not receive the *luchos*, *bi’po’el*, in actuality, we still did absorb the messages of the *luchos* figuratively chiseled into our *neshamos*—see R’ Tzaddok HaKohen’s *Pri Tzaddik*, *parshas Mattos*, beginning of #8.

²⁵ I later came across others who note and elaborate upon the same *diyuk*: See R’ Shlomo Kluger’s *Kehillas Yaakov* on *Shavuos*, *Drush* 44 (pp. 373-373), and *drush* 47 (pp. 382-383); *Afikei Mayim*, *Shavuos*, *Inyan* 31, for R’ Moshe Shapiro’s understanding; *Chiddushei HaRim*, *Likutim* on *Shavuos*; and *Amud HaEmes*, *Shavuos*, p. 176, for the *Kotzker Rebbe*’s remark and that which he quotes in the name of R’ Simcha Bunim *MiParshischa*. See also *Ramasayim Tzofim* (*Chiddushei HaRim*), #24.

²⁶ See also *Shu”t His’orirus Teshuva*, vol. 1, #102.

²⁷ See *Ta’amei HaMinhagim*, *Inyanei Chag HaShavuos*, #614 (p. 279)—*kuntrus acharon*, quoting the *Da’as Moshe*.

²⁸ *Kiddushin* 32b; *Avodah Zara* 19a. It certainly should not surprise us that such an idea appears, quite appropriately, in specifically these two *Masechtos*: *Kiddushin*—getting married [to *HaKB”H*]- and on *daf* 32= “*lev*,” as we give all of our heart to Hashem; and *Avodah Zara*—a reminder of the exclusive nature of our relationship with *HaKB”H* (and there on *daf* 19= “*ha’Dod*,” the Beloved (Hashem) of “*Ani l’Dodi v’Dodi li*”).

²⁹ See also the short insight of R’ Dessler in *Michtav Mei’Eliyahu*, vol. 4, p. 285. See, as well, the insight of R’ Yaakov Kaminitzky appearing in footnote #11 of his *Emes L’Yaakov*, *parshas Shoftim*, 17:18 (p. 500).

³⁰ See, as well, *Nefesh HaChaim*, 4:10- and see R’ Aharon Dovid Goldberg’s *U’vacharta B’Chaim* commentary. See also R’ Shlomo Kluger’s *Kehillas Yaakov* on *Shavuos*, *drush* 60, p. 417, and *drush* 65, p. 431. See also the *ma’amar* of R’ Gedalya Schorr printed at the back of *Ohr Gedalyahu*, vol. 1 (after *Sefer Shemos*), p. 162.

³¹ *Mal’achi*, 2:14-- and see *MiMa’amakim*, *parshas Ki Savo*, p. 190.

find *Chaza*³² describing *Matan Torah* as the *nisu'in* between *HaKB"H* as the *Chosson*, *kaviyachol*, and we as His *kallah*.³³ To quote the *mishna* in *Ta'anis* (26b), "*B'yom cha'sunaso- zeh Matan Torah*."³⁴ A slightly different terminology appears in *Vayikra Rabba* (20:10), as the *medrash* notes, "*B'yom cha'sunaso- zeh Har Sinai*."³⁵

The *Ba'al HaTurim* and the *Rokeach* (*Yisro*, 19:4) both add that the Torah itself was *HaKB"H*'s *kinyan kiddushin* through the means of a *shtar*,³⁶ the marriage contract between Him and the Jewish People: "...*Morasha kehillas Yaakov*," the *gemara*³⁷ explains, should be read "*mi'urasa*,"³⁸ as through the Torah we became 'engaged' to *HaKB"H*.³⁹ And thus *Rashi* writes that the *Shechina* came to greet *Klal Yisroel* by *Har Sinai*, "just as a *chosson* goes to greet his *kallah*" (19:17).⁴⁰ Naturally, therefore, such a precious gift from "groom" to "bride" was given "*bi'lashon chi'ba*," out of love and accompanied with a warm embrace (*Pirkei D'R' Eliezer*, chapter 41).⁴¹

The mention in our *birkas ei'rusin* of *HaKB"H* being "*mi'kadeish a'mo Yisroel al yi'dei chupah vi'kiddushin*," notes the *Maharsha*,⁴² is actually a reference to *Matan Torah*. R' Dovid Luria,⁴³ R'

³² *Shir HaShirim Rabba* (#4), *Pesikta Rabbasi* (#37). See also *Metzudos Dovid* on *Yirmiyahu*, 2:2. In addition, see the *Maharash MiLublin's Sefer Gematrios, parshas Noach*, pp. 2-3, and *parshas Vayigash*, p. 28.

³³ See also *Nesivos Shalom, Shavuos*, p. 334. I later saw that in the Torah journal, *Kol Mei'heichal (Shavuos 5766*, pp. 100-102), additional ideas related to this theme are presented, as well as in an article appearing in the journal, *Kol HaTorah (Nissan 5767*, pp. 310-312).

³⁴ Although the *gemara* in *Ta'anis* (30b- and *Rashi* on the *mishna*) explains this as referring to *Yom Kippur*, it is only because the sin of the golden calf tainted the initial *chasuna* of *Shavuos*. Had we not sinned, then the *Matan Torah* of *Shavuos* would have been the "*chasuna ha'shaleim*." See R' Ehud Rakovsky's *Da'as Shabbos*, p. 305, footnote #22. Commenting on the *pasuk* in *Shir HaShirim* (3:11), *Rashi* writes that the *pasuk* indeed refers to the *Matan Torah* of the sixth day of Sivan. (See also footnotes #61 and #62 later on in this essay.) See also *Nit'ei Gavriel, Hilchos Chag HaSuccos*, chapter 102, footnote 1 (quoting the *Toras Emes*), discussing the obvious connection to *Simchas Torah* as well.

³⁵ See also R' Baruch Dov Puvarsky's *Bad Kodesh, Pesach*, p. 211.

³⁶ See also *Emunas I'techa, parshas Eikev*, p. 229, based on *Avos D'R' Nosson*.

³⁷ *Brachos 57a; Pesachim 49b* (and see also *Sanhedrin 59a*). See, especially, the understanding of the *Meshech Chochma, V'zos HaBracha*, 33:4 (pp. 327-328 in Kuperman edition).

³⁸ R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik said about his grandfather, Rav Chaim, that while all the *Rabbanim* were "engaged" to the Torah, Rav Chaim was "married" to it (and was himself entirely *chesed* and *rachamim* just like the Torah)—R' Yitzchak Alfasi, *Sarei HaTorah*, p. 111. See also *sefer Halichos HaGrach* (p. 3, #4—from *Peninei HaGriz*).

³⁹ The *haftora* read for *parshas Bamidbar*- almost always the week directly preceding *Shavuos*- is taken from chapter two of *Sefer Hoshea*, and concludes with three mentions of "*vi'ei'rastich*," an emphatic reminder that *HaKB"H* established an eternal marital-like relationship with us alone. But why only "engaged"—why not label the relationship with the stronger title of "*ni'suin*" highlighting an even closer bond? See R' Aryeh Leib Baron's *Yi'samach Chaim, siman 47* (pp. 136-137).

⁴⁰ See also the *lashon* in *Pirkei D'R' Eliezer*, chapter 41, and the *Radal* (#44).

⁴¹ See the commentaries of the *Radal* (#21) and *Maharzu*.

⁴² *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Kesuvos 7b* (and see also his *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Brachos 6b*). See also the *Shita Mikubetzes*.

Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz,⁴⁴ and the *Aruch HaShulchan*⁴⁵ comment that *HaKB"H*'s lifting of the mountain over the heads of *Klal Yisroel* (*Shabbos* 88a) represented the "*chupah*"⁴⁶ whereby a *nisu'in* with *HaKB"H* took place.⁴⁷ And we remained for a full year at the piedmont of *Sinai*, writes the *Maharal*,⁴⁸ because that represented our "*shana rishona*" of *simcha* after the *nisu'in* between us and *HaKB"H*.

Nisu'in, of course, is the culmination of the *kiddushin*, that which earned its name for the *chosson* has thereby "made her forbidden to the entire world as *hekdesh* (things consecrated to the Holy Temple)"- *Kiddushin* 2b. Marriage hinges on the notion of exclusivity, as its name, its essence, is formed when the *kallah* becomes exclusive to her *chosson*. The woman only becomes man's wife precisely at the very moment that all other men are henceforth completely out of the picture. And that was the essence of *Matan Torah* as well: the giving of the Torah atop a mountain forever labeled as *Sinai* because of the *sin'ah* that descended upon all those who were left out of the close relationship forged between the *Chosson* and His exclusive *kallah*.

And which *Masechta* in *Shas* concludes with the emphatic statement of R' Nehorai on the primacy of Torah learning—"I put aside every trade in the world and I teach my son only Torah, etc."? Naturally it is *Maseches Kiddushin*, as our *ma'aseh kiddushin* with *HaKB"H* was fashioned solely through our acceptance and utter devotion to His Torah.

Eternal Bonding with HaKB"H

At *Sinai*, we truly got to "know" *HaKB"H* like never before— through the exodus from Egypt that led us to *Matan Torah* and the actualization of, "*ve'datem ki Ani Hashem Elokeichem*" (*Va'eira*, 6:7)—just as the first human marriage of Adam and Chava culminated in "*Vi'ha'Adam yada es Chava ish'to...*" (*Beraishis*, 4:1). To fully and deeply connect with another, to create a concept of "*ish'to ki'gufo*"—that is a "*yedi'a*,"⁴⁹ and that is what was finally achieved in the midst of *Matan Torah*.

We stood together around *Har Sinai*, encircling the *Shechina* that descended upon the mountaintop. Just as the *kallah* walks around her *chosson*- "*ni'keiva ti'soveiv ga'ver*" (*Yirmiyahu*, 31:21)- so did we, as we entered our marital covenant with *HaKB"H*, encircle the "*Chosson*" at *Sinai*. With an eye towards the future, we recall the *gemara* at the end of *Ta'anis* (31a) that, in eschatological times, *HaKB"H* will

⁴³ Commentary of the *Radal* on *Pirkei D'R' Eliezer*, chapter 41, #44.

⁴⁴ Introduction to his *Sefer HaMikneh* on *Kiddushin*, #3; see also his *Sefer Hafla'a* on *Kesuvos* 7b.

⁴⁵ *EVE"H*, *Hilchos Kiddushin*, 34:4. See also the *sefer*, *Yi'tav Leiv*, *parshas Bo*, elaborating on this idea, and see R' C. M. Y. Shapira's *Shu"t Nachalas Meir*, *Divrei Aggadah*, pp. 34-35. See also R' Shimshon Pincus's *Tiferes Shimshon*, *parshas Yisro*, 251-253.

⁴⁶ See especially the terminology appearing in *Gittin* 36b: "*Aluva kallah she'zinsa b'yom chupasa*"—and see *Rashi* there.

⁴⁷ R' Isser Zalman Meltzer further added that one of the reasons why many have the custom not to recite *tachanun* during the seven days after *Shavuot* (*OC"H*, 494:3) is because they serve, allegorically, as the "*shiv'as yi'mei ha'mishte*" after the *chasuna* of *Matan Torah*. (Quoted in R' Natah Freund's *Chayei Olam Natah*, p. 57.) I later came across the same idea in R' Zinner's *Nit'ei Gavriel* on *Shavuot*, p. 221, citing the *Yalkut Avraham* (*OC"H*, 494:126).

⁴⁸ *Gur Aryeh*, *Beha'aloscha*, 10:11. See also the end of his comments in *Gur Aryeh* on *Emor*, 24:10.

⁴⁹ See especially R' Hutner's remarks in *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Rosh HaShana*, *Kuntrus Reshimos*-1, p. 219 (#5).

fashion a circle around Him for the righteous among us. The *Ben Yehoyada* explains that such a circle expresses the unique relationship we have with *Hashem*, as the “*ni’keiva*”, the righteous in *Klal Yisroel*, once again encircles the “*Ga’ver*”, highlighting our special bond with the *Shechina* in our midst.⁵⁰ And just as the *gemara* (*Yevamos* 62b) cites this very *pasuk* to highlight that a wife erects a figurative wall around her husband, so does our encircling create a formidable wall that prevents all other nations from interfering in our exclusive relationship.

Thinking “exclusivity,” yet another dimension to the many associations of Yitzchak *Avinu* to the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuos* comes to mind.⁵¹ Quoting his brother, R’ Yehuda, the *Tur* (*OC”H*, #417) writes of the Yitzchak/*Shavuos* connection, noting that the *shofar* blown at *Matan Torah* came from the ram sacrificed in Yitzchak’s stead at the *Akeida*.⁵² A lifetime of dedicated service by “Avraham **O’havi**” (*Yeshaya*, 41:8)⁵³—who was **ko’reis bris** with *HaKB”H* at the *bris bein ha’besarim*—peaked in the wake of the ultimate sacrifice, the willingness to give his very own son to *HaKB”H*. And it was Yitzchak who readily offered himself as the “*o’lah temimah*,” demonstrating complete *bitul atzmi*, ‘cutting off’ more than just a piece of himself to unite fully with his Creator.

The *bris* between G-d and Avraham thus reached a whole new level through *Akeidas Yitzchak*-- just as the *kiddushin* that began *Pesach* time culminated in the *nisu’in* of *Shavuos*. The *shofar* blown during the *bris* at *Har Sinai* was, most appropriately, taken specifically from the ram that gave its life in Yitzchak’s stead on the altar.

It is not at all surprising, therefore, to remember that only one of the *Avos* gave himself *exclusively* to one woman: Avraham wed Sarah, but took Hagar as well; Yaakov wed both Rachel and Leah (and

⁵⁰ See also the comments of the *Radak* on the *pasuk*.

⁵¹ See also my essay on *parshas Toldos*, “Laughing into the Future.”

⁵² In *Hilchos Rosh Chodesh* (*O”CH*, #417), the *Tur* quotes his brother as noting that the three *Avos* correspond respectively to the three *regallim*: Avraham to *Pesach*, Yitzchak to *Shavuos*, and Yaakov to *Succos*. The same appears in the *Shiltei HaGibborim* on *Pesachim* (17a in *da’pei haRif, os beis*). See also the *Shlah*’s (and his father’s) *Eimek Bracha*, pp. 239-241, and see the *Shlah ha’kadosh* on *Maseches Succah, perek Ner Mitzvah*, #43. See also the *Gra*’s *Aderes Eliyahu* on *parshas Balak* (third *mahadura*), where the same correlation appears, albeit with a slightly different *nusach* (and see the *Sefer HaBahir*, #105). See also R’ Yitzchak Isaac Chaver’s *Yad Mitzraim* commentary on the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, p. 149 (*Yad Chazaka* on “*shi’losa asar me yodei’a*”), and see R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s *Pri Tzaddik, parshas Masei*, #8 (p. 294). See also the *Tzeida L’Derech, parshas Balak*, 22:28. R’ Gedalya Schorr (*Ohr Gedalyahu, ibid.*), cites the same correlation in the name of the *medrashim* (and the *Tur*—see also p. 74 quoting the “*seforim ha’kedoshim*,” and see p. 120 quoting the *Pirkei D’R’ Eliezer*). In his *Ohr Gedalyahu* on *chumash* (vol. 3, p. 218—see also p. 67 (*parshas Emor*)), discussing “*Simchas Beis Ha’sho’aiva*,” he again cites the *Tur* and elaborates on the connection of Yaakov to *Succos*. See also *Bi’er Moshe* (Kozhnitz), *parshas Emor*, and *Ohr HaMeir, Drush L’Shavuos*. See also R’ A. D. Rosenthal’s *Be’er HaMelech* on the *Rambam*, introduction to vol. 6, and see *Minchas Yitzchak* on the *Moadim*, p. 67. See also *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Succos, Ma’amar 22* (and *Ma’amarei Pachad Yitzchak* on *Succos, Ma’amar 7* and 9). In addition, see the *Zohar*, vol. 3, 100b, and see the remarks of R’ Aharon Rokeach in *Mahar”a MiBelz*, p. 35. See also R’ Tzvi Hersch from *Ziditchov’s Beis Yisroel*, p. 169. The *Panim Yafos (Vayishlach)* and others also discuss the Yaakov/*Succos* connection. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Yaakov *Avinu* was brought to burial specifically on the first day of *Succos*—see *sefer “Tziyuni,” parshas Vayechi*, 50:11 (“*Va’yar*”). See, however, the way the *Ben Yehoyada* (last piece on *Megilla* (32a)) matches them up, see the *Sheim MiShmuel (parshas Balak, 5676*—and see also *Succos, 5673*, p. 146, regarding *Succos* and Aharon (and see p. 176)—and see his comments on *parshas Tazria, Shabbos v’Rosh Chodesh, 5671*), and see again R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s *Likutei Ma’amaram*, 106a. Lastly, see R’ Aharon Lopiansky’s *Time Pieces*, p. 207 (and see R’ Weinbaum’s *Sefer Sarasi*, p. 52).

⁵³ See also *Mechilta, Yisro* 8:12 (and see *Meshech Chochma* on *Yisro*, 20:6).

Bilhah and Zilpah). But Yitzchak married solely Rivkah- no second wife, no concubine.⁵⁴ The one who sacrificed all and had given his entire being over to *HaKB"H*, now gave of himself to one woman, and one woman only. And that is *Shavuos* as well: We, the "*kallah*" accepted exclusively *HaKB"H*, while *HaKB"H*, the "*Chosson*," made us exclusively His. No one else in the picture. *Yitzchak ki'neged Shavuos*...

Additional Hints of a Wedding

The *Ramban* (*Yisro*, 20:13) discusses the *medrash* (*Shemos Rabba*, 41:7)⁵⁵ that the *luchos* were given as two distinct tablets rather than as one to allude to the *bris* forged between *chosson* and *kallah*,⁵⁶ as well as alluding to the two groomsmen escorting *HaKB"H* as the groom and *B'nei Yisroel* as the bride.⁵⁷ The "*shi'nei luchos ha'bris*," the centerpiece of *Matan Torah*, would themselves serve to highlight its true essence as the fusion of two parties into an eternal covenant...⁵⁸ They would consist of two separate tablets fused together: one corresponding to *mitzvos bein Adam l'Makom-HaKB"H's* '*cheilek*'- and the other corresponding to *mitzvos bein Adam l'chavei'ro*- man's '*cheilek*'.⁵⁹ And they would eventually be housed in the *aron ha'bris*, shielded by the enveloping wings of the *keruvim*, the two cherubic forms corresponding, naturally, to male and female...

Interesting, as well, is *HaKB"H's* declaration to us specifically at *Har Sinai* that, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers and a holy nation" (*Yisro*, 19:6). We must realize that we are a nation that is *kadosh*, holy, consecrated, set apart from all others⁶⁰ on the heels of our *kiddushin* (and ensuing *nissu'in*) with *HaKB"H*. And what helps inculcate that lofty concept into our minds? The recognition that we shall be a "*mamleches kohanim*." We find in *Chazal* that specifically a *chosson* is likened to both a

⁵⁴ See also the comments of the *B'nei Yissaschar* in his *Igra Di'kallah*, *parshas Toldos*, 25:20.

⁵⁵ See also R' Chaim Falaji's *Chaim Li'gufa*, chapter 1 (*os "beis,"* #1), citing *Medrash Rabba*, end of *parshas Eikev*.

⁵⁶ See also R' Yisroel Yaakov Fisher's *Even Yisroel*, *parshas Toldos*, p. 22. In addition, see the *Sefer Gematrios L'Maharash MiLublin*, *parshas Va'eira*, p. 36 (regarding the two *avanim* of *Titzaveh*, 28:11).

⁵⁷ The Torah also refers to these two tablets as "*luchos ha'even*" (*Mishpatim*, 24:12) and "*luchos ha'avanim*" (*Eikev*, 9:9,10,11(*ibid.*, 10:1,3- "*avanim*")). The *dibros* were not just engraved on stone- the fact that they were stone made it into their name, became an intrinsic part of their very essence: they are *luchos* defined *bi'etzem* as "*ha'avanim*." (See also the terminology appearing in *Vayikra Rabba*, 35:4 (and *Shir HaShirim Rabba*, 6:17)- "*Torah ki'ruya even*...") Perhaps this also serves to further highlight the notion of a close relationship. Commenting on the mention of "*even Yisroel*" in the blessing given by Yaakov to Yosef (*Vayechi*, 49:24), *Rashi*- basing himself on *Targum Onkelos*- writes that "*even*" is a fusion of the two words, *av* and *ben*, father and son. The close-knit father and son relationship is likened to the solid stone whose particles are tightly bound up with one another. The *luchos* were thus two tablets representative of a relationship, as opposed to a single tablet; and they were also "*luchos ha'avanim*," highlighting the close-knit nature of that relationship; and finally, that relationship was even more specifically defined as "*luchos ha'avanim*" juxtaposed with "*luchos ha'bris*" in *Eikev*, 9:9,11. This was a covenantal relationship between two parties built on the combined father-son, groom-bride analogies. (See also R' Reuven Grozovsky's remarks appearing in *Sichos R' Reuven*, *sha'ar haTorah*, *ma'amar* 5.)

⁵⁸ See *Maharal*, *Netzach Yisroel*, chapter 9; *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Sanhedrin* 99a; *Tiferes Yisroel*, chapters 9, 16.

⁵⁹ See the *Maharal's* *Tiferes Yisroel*, chapters 35, 43, and see R' Hutner's *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Shavuos*, *Ma'amar* 41 (#5). (See also *Ma'amar* 15, chapter 2 (#24).)

⁶⁰ See R' Shimon Sofer's *Michtav Sofer*, *parshas Yisro*, pp. 102-103.

melech, a king, as well as to a *kohen*, a priest (minister)-- *Pirkei D'R' Eliezer* (chapter 16) and *Moed Katan* (28b), respectively.⁶¹ Already in the written Torah, then, we have an allusion to the *chosson/kallah* metaphor that *Chazal* invoke when referring to *Matan Torah*... And when this “*mamleches kohanim*” collectively declared at Sinai, “*na’aseh vi’nishma*,” the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 88a) relates that the heavenly angels descended and placed crowns upon the heads of the members of this new “kingdom”- after all, *chosson domeh li’melech*...⁶²

It therefore comes as no surprise to find the *Tashbeitz Kattan* (end of *siman* #467) informing us that the various customs witnessed at a *chasuna* are all inferred from the sundry details of the special *chasuna* that transpired at *Sinai*.⁶³

“One who derives pleasure from the festivities of the groom but does not gladden him, transgresses five *kolos*, five ‘sounds’ (“*kol sasson vi’kol simcha*...”)-- *Brachos* 6b. If he does make the groom happy, continues the *gemara*, one opinion claims that he merits the Torah that was given [while accompanied] with five *kolos*.⁶⁴ Interesting... As reward for rejoicing with a *chosson* he is blessed with Torah- simply because certain sounds surrounded the giving of the Torah?! In light of the above, however, the correlation is quite clear: One who understands what it means to make a *chosson* happy, is one who can truly appreciate how ‘happy’ we made *HaKB”H*, the “*Chosson*” of the Jewish People, when we declared our willingness- “*na’aseh vi’nishma*”- to enter into an eternal covenant with Him through the giving of His Torah to us. And thus, a re-enactment of sorts of *nesinas haTorah* allows such a person to merit the Torah, as the *Chosson*, *kaviyachol*, reciprocates with a blessing of His own...

The Two Halves of the Whole

And what about the way in which we celebrate the day itself? The *gemara* (*Pesachim* 68b, *Beitzah* 15b) presents a Tannaic dispute whether or not every *Yom Tov* must be divided “*chetzyo l’Hashem vi’chetzyo lachem*,” between G-d-like, spiritual pursuits, and man-centered, physical ones. Everyone agrees, however, that on *Atzeres*, the *yom tov* of *Shavuos*, the day must be divided equally⁶⁵ between the two for, as *Rashi* explains, one should rejoice with food and drink to demonstrate that the day of *Matan Torah* has been accepted and viewed as pleasant by *B’nei Yisroel*.

Even with *Rashi*’s understanding, it still seems perplexing that, among all the Biblical festivals, the only one⁶⁶- according to all opinions- mandating that we rejoice with physical pleasures is one which

⁶¹ See also the introduction to the *sefer*, *HaNissu’in KiHilchasam*, p. 15.

⁶² And *kallah domah li’malkah* as well—see R’ Yitzchak Sternhill’s discussion on the matter in his *Shu”t Kochvei Yitzchak*, vol. 3, *Kuntrus Kivod Melachim*, #32. Regardless of any *halachik* ramifications, the one who weds the king automatically becomes the queen, and thus deserves- at the very least- to don the crown as well...

⁶³ See especially the remarks of R’ Yitzchak Hutner in his *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Igros U’kesavim*, #76.

⁶⁴ This is the only opinion, in fact, cited in a parallel passage appearing in *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yisro*, #282- but understandably so. After all, the *memra* is brought in the context of *parshas Yisro* and *Matan Torah*: the “*chasuna*” between *HaKB”H* and His nation. (See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yirmiya*, #277, and take note of some interesting discrepancies in the text- the *Yi’feh Einayim* (*Brachos* 6b) remarks on but one of them.)

⁶⁵ The wording of the *Rambam* seems indicative of a (somewhat literal) equal split, but see *Pri Migadim*, 242:1, that “*chetzyo*” is *lav davka*. (See also *Chiyucha shel Torah*, *parshas Emor* (23:7), quoting the *Kotzker Rebbe*.)

⁶⁶ See *Tosfos* in *Rosh HaShana* 9b (“*Ki’ilu*”) who address the *mitzvah* to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*. See also R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s *Pri Tzaddik*, *Erev Yom HaKippurim*, #4.

centers solely on the spiritual, on the receiving of our sacred Torah.⁶⁷ In addition, let's not forget that we never even *received* the actual Torah on that day; we had sinned with the golden calf and the original tablets were broken in full view- the Torah didn't reach our hands until *Yom Kippur* came around. So what is it really that we're celebrating-- and with half the day dedicated to mundane festivities?

Perhaps this only further corroborates that it is not **Kabbalas haTorah** that we're celebrating, but the "*chasuna*" between us and HaKB"H via **Matan Toraseinu**. The *kri'sas bris*, the covenantal relationship forged between HaKB"H and His people atop the mountain, was the chief highlight of the Sinai experience. HaKB"H gave us His precious Torah and we sacrificed, as well, by subjugating ourselves eternally to His will and the myriad laws of the Torah. This "*chasuna*" was, like all others, a two-way relationship, each side making sacrifices to the other. Corresponding to HaKB"H's contribution, therefore, we certainly have to dedicate half of the *Yom Tov* of *Matan Torah* to Him: "*chetzyo l'Hashem*." But half the day, understandably, corresponds to the other partner in this special relationship, the Jewish People, and thus: "*chetzyo lachem*."⁶⁸

But we're not yet done. Listen to a fascinating *gematria* of the *Gra*.⁶⁹ According to the opinion of R' Yehoshua who posits that every *Yom Tov* is divided half and half, one better appreciates why we refer to these days by the seemingly vague title, "*Yom Tov*."⁷⁰ If we divide the *gematria* of "*l'Hashem*" (*lamed* (30)+*sheim Hashem* (26)=56) in half, we end up with 28; and if we do the same with the word, "*lachem*" (=90), we end up with 45. Half of "*l'Hashem*" (28) plus half of "*lachem*" (45) equals 73, the same *gematria* as "*Yom Tov*!"⁷¹

Beautiful. But what about R' Eliezer, the dissenting opinion who agrees with R' Yehoshua only with regard to *Shavuot*— according to him, why should specifically *Shavuot* be associated with the appellation of "*Yom Tov*" more than any other day? Based on the above *gematria*, it is only *Shavuot* that could appropriately be labeled a "*Yom Tov*"- the remaining festivals appear to merely borrow the term- so why the uniqueness?

It's Not Good to be Alone

For a possible answer, let's head back to *Beraishis*. It is there that we find the first, and one of the rare instances in all of *Tanach* in which the Torah labels something as being, "*lo tov*," not good:⁷² "...**Lo tov he'yos ha'Adam li'vado, eh'eh'se lo ei'zer ki'negdo**" (2:18). Only once Adam is provided with his "other

⁶⁷ See, however, *Tosfos* in *Pesachim* 68b ("*Ha'kol*"), and see the remarks of the *Chiddushei HaRim*, *Shavuot*, p. 194, and see R' Tzaddok HaKohen's *Pri Tzaddik*, *Shavuot*, #5 (vol. 4, p. 36), and #24 (ibid., pp. 56-57). See also the *Gra*'s insight cited in *HaMe'or HaGadol*, vol. 2, p. 640. In addition, see the *B'nei Yissaschar*, *Ma'amarei Chodesh Sivan*, *Ma'amar* 2 (#11), and *Ma'amarei Chodesh Nissan*, *Ma'amar* 3 (#12). See also R' Yitzchak Isaac Sherr's *Leket Sichos Mussar*, vol. 2, *Shavuot*, pp. 234-236; *Ma'ayan HaMoed*, *Shavuot*, pp. 308-314; and R' P. Roberts's *Timeless Seasons*, pp. 223-224.

⁶⁸ See also the comments of R' Shlomo Gantzfried in his *Apiryon*, *parshas Pinchas* 29:35.

⁶⁹ *Peninim MiShulchan HaGra*, *parshas Re'eh*, 16:8 (p. 223). It is also brought in *HaMe'or HaGadol*, vol. 2, pp. 639-640, and see footnote 11.

⁷⁰ See also *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Pesach*, *Ma'amar* 30, and see R' Vosner's brief remarks appearing in the Torah journal, *Kol Mei'heichal* (*Nissan* 5768, #3, p. 36).

⁷¹ See also the *Arizal*'s *Sha'ar HaKavanos*, 77a, regarding "*Yom Tov*"=73.

⁷² Is it merely "not good" or is it actually considered extremely wrong, perhaps even sinful? See the *Chida*'s *Pesach Einayim* on *Yevamos* 61b (discussing the *diyuk* of the *Ein Yaakov*), and his *He'Elam Davar*, #117.

half,” his soul-mate, can he reach his destined potential and attain *shi’leimus* (see *Yevamos* 62b)--only then will all finally be truly “good.”⁷³ If marriage brings two individuals together in such a way that all is now said to be *tov*- for only now, as a cohesive unit, can they both reach their spiritual potential⁷⁴-then the monumental “marriage” between us and *HaKB”H* at *Har Sinai* must be the ultimate manifestation of an inherent “*Yom Tov*.”⁷⁵ It is a day upon which an eternal covenantal relationship was established wherein we can now attain the lofty spiritual levels that await us, while bringing honor and glory to Our Creator at the same time. The *chasuna* that marks *Shavuos* indeed transforms it into the quintessential *yom* that is, by definition, more about a “*Yom Tov*” than any other...

According to all opinions, the nature of *Yom Kippur*, of course, cannot possibly allow for eating, drinking, and physical pleasures⁷⁶- *chetzyo lachem*- while the nature of *Tu Bi’Av* makes no demands whatsoever on the *chetzyo l’Hashem*;⁷⁷ the only change, in fact, is the omission of *tachanun*,⁷⁸ as we curtail, rather than lengthen, the *tefillos*.⁷⁹ And yet, it is specifically these very two days that are described in the *mishna* (*Ta’anis* 26b)⁸⁰ as being the best “*yom tov*”s around: “*Lo ha’yu yamim tovim li’Yisroel ki’chamisha asar bi’Av (Tu Bi’Av) u’ki’Yom HaKippurim*.”⁸¹ Keeping in mind the *gematria* of the *Gra*, why would we refer to these days that are ‘all for G-d’ or ‘all for us,’ respectively, not only as “*yamim tovim*” but as the archetypal ‘good days?’ Are they really much ‘better’ days than all others?⁸²

Based on what we presented a short paragraph ago, I believe the *mishna*’s usage of “*yamim tovim*” alludes to the essence of these two festivals as days exemplifying the notion of perfecting “*tov*.” That

⁷³ See especially the *Kli Yakar*’s *O’lilos Ephraim*, *Ma’amar* 324 (vol. 2, pp. 22-23).

⁷⁴ Based on the *Maharal* (*Gur Aryeh*, *Beraishis*, 1:4- and see *Rashi* on 1:7) that “*tov*” implies an entity having been completed, having reached its potential— in the same way that each day of creation was said to be “*tov*” for all was completed, all was set in place for the potential of that day’s creations to be reached. (But see also his *Gur Aryeh* on *Beraishis*, 2:18.) See also the *Maharal*’s *Derech Chaim* on *Avos*, 1:2 and 2:11.

⁷⁵ See also the remarks of the *Netziv* in *Ha’Emek Davar*, *parshas Shemos*, 3:8 (and *Shelach*, 14:7): “*tov*” emphasizes specifically the spiritual...

⁷⁶ The *Sfas Emes* (*Erev Yom Kippur*, 5662—“*Ha’seuda*”) writes that since we are prohibited from eating on *Yom Kippur*, the *seuda* appropriate for that *Yom Tov* is pushed up one day; hence, the special *mitzvah* to eat on *erev Yom Kippur* (*Brachos* 8b).

⁷⁷ See also the interesting insight of R’ Moshe Wolfson in his *Emunas I’techa* on the *Moadim*, *Tu B’Av*, p. 94.

⁷⁸ *Shu”A*, *OC”H*, 131:6—and see *M”B*, *Maharil* (*Minhagim*), and *Leket Yosher*.

⁷⁹ See also the interesting insight of R’ Avigdor Nebenzhal in his commentary on *Megillas Eichah*, 1:4 (*Yerushalayim B’Moade’ha: Bein HaMetzarim*, p. 37).

⁸⁰ See also *Pesichta D’Eichah Rabba*, #33 (and *Bava Basra* 121a).

⁸¹ See also R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s *Dover Tzedek*, 85b. In addition, see the *Apta Rav*’s *Oheiv Yisroel*, *L’Tu B’Av U’L’Yom HaKippurim* (*Machon Sifsei Tzaddikim* edition, pp. 286-287), and *Likutim Chadashim*, comments on the *gemara* in *Ta’anis* 26b (pp. 344-345); *Sheim MiShmuel*, *parshas Va’eschanan*, 5670, p. 34; and the *Gerrer Rebbe*’s *Lev Simcha*, *Va’eschanan*, 5743, pp. 24 and 26. See also *Ohr Gedalyahu* on *Yom Kippur*, pp. 23-24, and R’ Moshe Wolfson’s *Emunas I’techa* on the *Moadim*, *Tu B’Av*, p. 99. See also R’ Meir Belsky’s *Citadel and Tower: Quest for Jewish Majesty*, vol. 2, p. 120.

⁸² See also the enlightening remarks of R’ Chanoch *HaKohen* Ehrentreu in his *Iyunim Bi’divre Chazal U’vi’lishonam*, pp. 79-80.

is, *Tu Bi'Av*, the day when *shidduchim* would materialize (ibid., and see 31a),⁸³ and when the tribes were permitted to intermarry with one another (*Ta'anis* 30b- and see *Tosfos*), is a day all about the two halves of a *neshama* reuniting—when the “*lo tov*” of *Beraishis* is finally brought to a state of ultimate *tov* as man’s *eizer ki'negdo* joins him by his side. The very name, *Tu Bi'Av*, even spells “*tov Av*”—this is, after all, the day highlighting the “*tov*” of the month of *Av*...

Yom Kippur, continues the *mishna*, is classified as “*Yom Chasunaso*” (see *Rashi*), the day that echoes the *Matan Torah* of *Shavuot*⁸⁴ and sees the culmination of the wedding begun then,⁸⁵ as the second set of tablets makes its way into our hands: the greatest ever *chasuna* gift- “*ki lekach tov⁸⁶ nasati lachem*”—completes the greatest ever *chasuna*.⁸⁷ “*Vi'ein tov e'lah Torah*” (*Brachos* 5a; *Avos*, 6:3⁸⁸)⁸⁹: The “*tov= Torah*” received on *Yom Kippur* transformed the day into one that personified *tov*,

⁸³ In his commentary on the *Pesichta D'Eichah Rabba*, the *Maharzu* writes that *Chazal* established *Tu Bi'Av* as a day for marriages precisely because it was the day when the tribes were permitted to intermarry.

⁸⁴ See also *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Yom HaKippurim*, *Ma'amar* 1, chapter 2 (#10).

⁸⁵ See also R' Dovid Cohen's *Birchas Ya'aveitz*, vol. 1, pp. 276-277. (See also *Beis Avraham* (Slonim), *Shavuot*, p. 155, regarding the interconnection of *Yom Kippur* and *Shavuot*.) While numerous *seforim* write of *Pesach* as the *eirusin*, *Shavuot* as the *nisuin*, and *Succos* as the *yichud*, perhaps we could suggest the following based on what we have hitherto presented: From another perspective, *Shavuot* clearly represented the *eirusin* (through the *Torah* we became *morasha= mi'ureses...*); *Yom Kippur* is the choice day termed in the *mishna* as “*Yom Chasunaso*,” the *nesuin* completing the *eirusin* begun on *Shavuot*; *Purim*, the ultimate culmination of what *Shavuot* began- “*hadar kiblu'ha bi'mei Achashveirosh* (*Shabbos* 88a)- represented the *yichud*. No coincidence that *Yom Kippurim*, writes the *Arizal* (based on *Tikkunei Zohar*), is only “like” the day of *Purim* as *Purim* represented the pinnacle of the process just as *kabbalas haTorah* reached an all new level then. And regarding a *Purim/yichud* connection, is it not quite fascinating: 1) *Purim* is the time when “*HaMelech*” allowed Esther to enter the king’s private inner chamber (beg. of chapter 5); 2) *Purim* is referred to in the *Targum* and the *gemara* as “*Puria*”—though its Aramaic equivalent, the same Aramaic word is also the word for a “bed,” as the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 77b; *Kesuvos* 10b) explains: “*she'parin vi'ravin ale'ha*”. *Ha'mevin yavin*. (I subsequently saw that the *Chida* also points out the *Purim=puria=bed* association—see his *Divash L'fe, ma'areches “peh,”* #39, for his understanding. See also the *Maharsha*’s *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Bava Metzia* 23b (“*Bi'Puria*”).)

⁸⁶ See *Likutei Mahartza al HaTorah* (the *B'nei Yissaschar*), end of *parshas Beshalach*, p. 96.

⁸⁷ Although the *mishna*’s statement of “*Yom Chasunaso*” as referring to *Yom Kippur* is based on the “*Matan Torah*” aspect- the day when the *luchos she'ni'yos* were given (and see the *Ritva*’s comments on the *mishna*)- the *gemara* (30b) notes that the “*yom tov*” label of the day refers to both the *luchos* and the “*selicha u'mechila*” aspect. (See the comments of the *Gevuras Ari*- “*bi'shlama*”- and see *Ohr Gedalyahu, Yom Kippur*, p. 23 (#4).) It is on the day of the wedding when, the *Yerushalmi* (*Bikkurim*, 3:3) informs us, a *chosson* is forgiven for all his sins... (The *kallah* is likewise forgiven for her sins - *EVE"H*, #61:1 (*Rama, Beis Shmuel*): see *Tashbeitz Kattan* (*siman* 465), and the commentary of the *Ra"sh Sir'li'yo* on the *Yerushalmi* (ibid.), and see *Shu"t Maharam Mintz* (#109) and *Shu"t Mahari Brona* (#93), regarding the fasting of the *chosson* and *kallah* on their wedding day. See also the introduction (*Kuntrus Kevod Melachim*) to R' Yitzchak Sternhill’s *Shu"t Kochvei Yitzchak* (vol. 3, p. 22), and see *Shu"t Yabia Omer* (vol. 3, *EVE"H, siman* 9 (#2)), R' Yaakov Chaim Sofer’s *Zechus Yitzchak* (*siman* 59), and *Minhagei Yisroel* (Sperber), vol. 8, p. 47, for a multitude of sources and detailed discussion on the issue. In addition, see *Rashi: Peirushei HaTorah* (*Mossad HaRav Kook*), p. 130, note #190. See also R' Wilhelm’s *Sheha'simcha Bimi'ono*, p. 121.) R' Sternhill also raises the issue of whether or not the *chosson* must actively repent, or if the wedding day itself- together with the yoke of marriage- suffices to procure atonement. See R' Yechiel Michel Stern’s *Otzar HaYedi'os*, vol. 1, p. 250, quoting the *Si'dei Chemed*, the *Drashos of Mohar"i Pinto*, and the *Shu"t Do'vev Meisharim*. (See also R' Abba Tzvi Neiman’s *Edrei Tzohn, parshas Toldos*.) See also R' Chaim Kaniyevsky’s remarks in *Derech Sicha, parshas Shoftim*, p. 579.

⁸⁸ See also the *Ohr HaChaim ha'kadosh, parshas Ki Savo*, 26:11. See R' Yitzchak Sorotzkin’s question appearing in *Koveitz Iyun HaParsha, Gilyon* #135 (5776), p. 133.

bi'etzem, more than any other. Fascinating to add is that it is only the second set of tablets given on *Yom Kippur* that mention outright the word “*tov*” (*Bava Kamma* 55a),⁹⁰ and, to quote the *Ba'al HaTurim*⁹¹ and the *Rokeach*,⁹² there are exactly “*tov*” (*gematria*= 17) extra words contained in the second set over the first.⁹³

How appropriate, as well, that before the *chasuna* of *Yom Kippur* comes to close, we *lain* specifically from the *parsha* detailing the laws of *arayos*...⁹⁴ Just as the *parsha* of *Matan Torah* itself- the beginning of the *chasuna*- concluded its very last *pasuk* with a reminder of, “*lo si'galeh er'vasicha a'lav*,” do not reveal any “*ervah*” by the altar (*Yisro*, 20:23), so too do we enter the conclusion of *Yom Kippur*, the *chasuna*'s grand finale, with *pesukim* of *issurei gi'lui arayos*... A special marital relationship, after all, mandates total exclusivity.

These are two days revolving around the notion of *chasuna*: *Tu Bi'Av* marks the union of man and woman, *Yom Kippur* the union between man and G-d. Interestingly enough, after noting in the *mishna* that the women went out on *Tu Bi'Av* and danced in circles for *shidduch* purposes, the *gemara* in *Ta'anis* ultimately concludes with mention of the circle that *HaKB"H* will make for His *tzaddikim* in the future: *HaKB"H* will be in the middle encircled by the righteous among *Klal Yisroel*.⁹⁵ The *Chosson*, *kaviyachol*, will be surrounded by His beloved *kallah*... An appropriate end, indeed, to a narrative discussing the circles and *shidduchim* between mortal man and woman.

Though not the typical “*Yamim Tovim*” in the sense of “*chetzyo l'Hashem vi'chetzyo lachem*,” these are the quintessential days, indeed, that best fit the title of “*yamim tovim*” in the sense of when “*tov*” is at the forefront, as the “*lo tov*” of man's solitude is ultimately corrected for...⁹⁶

⁸⁹ See R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver's *Ohr Torah* commentary on R' Avraham *achi haGra*'s *Ma'alos HaTorah*, p. 8.

⁹⁰ See R' Yechiel Michel Stern's *Otzar HaYedi'os*, vol. 2, p. 22, quoting the *Ramban* and *Chasam Sofer*. See also *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Rosh HaShana*, *ma'amar* 14, #5.

⁹¹ *Parshas Va'eschanan*, last comment on 5:16.

⁹² Commentary on *Shir HaShirim*, 1:1.

⁹³ The ‘*tov* aspect’ of the first set of *luchos* appears to be manifest in the very act of their breaking, as it began the atonement process for the sin of the golden calf. See R' Chaim Kaniyevsky's comment in *Teshuvos HaGrach*, *parshas V'zos HaBracha*, p. 26.

⁹⁴ See also *Rashi* and *Tosfos* on *Megilla* 31a.

⁹⁵ In his *Igra D'Pirka* (#314- see also *B'nei Yissaschar*, *Ma'amarei Tamuz/Av*, *Ma'amar* 4 (#1), and see the *Apta Rav*'s *Oheiv Yisroel, likutim* (113a)), the *B'nei Yissaschar* quotes the following from R' A. Y. Heschel: The name *Tu Bi'Av* itself alludes to this idea of the circle, as the “*tu*” of “*av*,” the letter “*tes/vav*” of the “*aleph-beis*”- the fifteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet- is the *samech*, the letter that appears exactly as a circle...

⁹⁶ Interesting to note is that *Tu Bi'Av* is listed in the *mishna* before *Yom Kippur*, even though the latter is a Biblical *Yom Tov* while the former is only Rabbinic; the latter is at least a *Yom Tov* that is “*kulo l'Hashem*,” while *Tu Bi'Av* doesn't really have any clear guidelines of a typical *Yom Tov*; *Yom Kippur* is considered- right after *Shabbos*- to be the holiest, and perhaps most crucial, day of the year. Although one could suggest that the preceding discussion in the *mishna* centered around *Tisha Bi'Av* and therefore R' Yehuda HaNassi juxtaposed mention of the fifteenth of *Av* to draw the contrast, the ideas are actually separate *mishnayos* that were consolidated into one long *mishna* in the *gemara*. Were one still to claim that the mention first of *Tu Bi'Av* most sensibly follows the previous *mishna* discussing *Tisha Bi'Av*, one might counter- see commentary of *Tosfos Yom Tov*- that the contrast is really between the giving of the *luchos she'niyos* on *Yom Kippur* with the destruction of the first set on *Shiva Asar Bi'Tammuz*, the fast day mentioned together with *Tisha Bi'Av* in the *mishna* just

Our Daily Reciprocation

In his commentary on *Shir HaShirim* (1:2),⁹⁷ the *Vilna Gaon* builds on this *chosson/kallah* metaphor of *Chazal*. On the *pasuk*, “*yi’sshakei’ni me’nishikos pihu*,” the *Gra* explains that *Chazal* understand the words to be referring to *Matan Torah* when *HaKB”H* expressed his abounding affection for His beloved nation.⁹⁸ When He spoke the first two of the *Eseres HaDibros*,⁹⁹ He instilled the Torah within the Jewish People,¹⁰⁰ and removed from their midst the evil inclination.¹⁰¹ “*Anochi*” encompassed all the positive commandments¹⁰²—which are rooted in *ahava*—while “*Lo yehi’yeh licha...*” encompassed all the negative ones, those rooted in *yir’ah*.¹⁰³

These were the “*neshikos*”- *peh el peh*¹⁰⁴—that *HaKB”H*, the “*Chosson*,” bestowed upon *B’nei Yisroel*, His *kallah*. Just as a *neshika* expresses the intimacy and affection, the deep attachment (*chi’bur*

before. In addition, as seen from the *gemara*’s discussion on 30b, the *Yom Tov* joy of *Yom Kippur* was far more readily understood than the joy of *Tu Bi’Av*, yet another reason to first mention the more obvious *Yom Kippur*.

Perhaps, then, we might suggest that *Tu Bi’Av* is listed before *Yom Kippur* because the chief intent of the *Tanna*—as noted above—is the stress on the concept of “*tov*.” And if “*tov*” implies heading towards *shi’leimus* as inferred specifically from the *pasuk*, “*lo tov he’yos ha’Adam li’vado*,” then it is most appropriate to first highlight the *yom tov* dealing with the *tov* achieved in the literal marital union before moving on to the figurative one between G-d and man on *Yom Kippur*.

⁹⁷ See also *Peninim MiShulchan HaGra*, *Shir HaShirim* (p. 272); *HaMe’or HaGadol*, vol. 1 (p. 496); and *Yalkut Avanim* (*likutim* from the *Gra*- R’ M. Rosen’s edition), pp. 32-33.

⁹⁸ See *Shir HaShirim Rabba*, 1:2, and see the many fascinating *remazim* of the *Rokeach* in his commentary on 1:2.

⁹⁹ *Makkos* 24a—but see the remarks there of the *Aruch Li’ner* (based on the *Ramban*), and the *Yi’feh Einayim*.

¹⁰⁰ See especially the comments of the *Shlah ha’kadosh* on *Maseches Shavuos* (p. 39).

¹⁰¹ See also the commentary of R’ Elisha Galiko (student of R’ Yosef Karo) on the *pasuk*, and see R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s remarks in his *Pri Tzaddik*, *Shavuos*, #18 (vol. 4, p. 51).

¹⁰² See R’ Tzaddok *HaKohen*’s *Pri Tzaddik*, *Pesach*, #47 (vol. 3, p. 81).

¹⁰³ See *Tikkunei Zohar*, *tikkun* 22. See also the comments of the *Ramban* on *Yisro*, 20:8, and the *Gra*’s *Aderes Eliyahu* on *V’zos HaBracha* (*ofen sheini*), 33:5. See also the *Chiddushei Chasam Sofer*, *Bava Kamma* 9b (and see *Shu”t Chasam Sofer*, vol. 8, *Koveitz Teshuvos*, #60 (“*kasav sham...*”). (See also R’ Elchonon’s *Koveitz Ha’aros* on *Yevamos*, *siman* 36, #2.) In explanation of the *Ramban*, see also *Meshech Chochma*, *V’zos HaBracha* (34:12), and *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Pesach*, *ma’amar* 54, #2 (and on *Shabbos*, *ma’amar* 2 (#2), and on *Succos*, *ma’amar* 21 (#6)). See also the sources cited in Chavel’s footnotes in the *Mossad HaRav Kook* edition of the *Ramban*. (See also the brief comments appearing in the journal, *Kol HaTorah*, *Nissan* 5767 (vol. #63, insights on *Maseches Yevamos* (7a), pp. 20-21.)) In addition, see the comments of the *Maharsha*, *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Makkos* 23b (“*Taryag*”) and 24a (“*She’ba Chavakuk*”). See also *Ma’ayan HaChochma*, *Tehillim* 111, and see the comments of the *Kedushas Levi*, *Aggados*, *Sidduro shel Shabbos*. See also *Sefer HaTanya*, chapter 4, and see the related comments of R’ Yitzchak Isaac Chaver in his *Ohr Torah* commentary on the *Ma’alos HaTorah*, #1, (p. 9).

¹⁰⁴ Parenthetically, see the comments of the *Maharsha* in *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Brachos* 8b (“*e’lah*”). See also R’ Moshe Einstadter’s *Yesodos*, *parshas Vayishlach*, pp. 129-130.

vi'divuk),¹⁰⁵ that one feels toward another,¹⁰⁶ so too did *HaKB"H* shower us with an expression of His love¹⁰⁷ as He presented us with His treasured gift of the Torah-- while simultaneously removing the *yetzer hara* who tries so assiduously to divide us.¹⁰⁸ The "*hish'to'kikus*," the intense longing to connect with His beloved nation, manifested itself in these metaphorical *neshikos*.¹⁰⁹

But when do we reciprocate? When do we give these *neshikos* back to *HaKB"H*, *kaviyachol*, to express our emotional and spiritual feelings toward Him— to manifest the immense affection the *kallah* has for the *chosson*? When exactly can we highlight our recognition of the coveted relationship of exclusivity that we share with *HaKB"H*?

Tosfos in *Brachos* (12b) cite the *Yerushalmi* (*Brachos*, 1:5) that all the *Aseres HaDibros* are alluded to in the course of our daily *kri'as Shema*.¹¹⁰ The first two *dibros*, in fact-- as noted by several *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*¹¹¹ - are alluded to in the very first *pasuk* of *Shema*.¹¹² The words, "[*Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu*]" correspond to "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*,"¹¹³ while the concluding "*Hashem Echad*" corresponds to "*Lo yehi'yeh licha elohim acheirim*...". Perhaps, then, we could suggest that we reciprocate to *HaKB"H* at least twice daily with our proud acknowledgment of having accepted the full onus of what the first two *dibros* mandated. (It is surely no coincidence, as well, that the *pasuk* of *Shema Yisroel* appears in *parshas Va'eschanan*, very soon after the repetition of the *Aseres*

¹⁰⁵ See the *Maharal's Gur Aryeh*, *parshas Vayetztei*, 29:13; *Chiddushei Aggados* on *Bava Basra* 16a (vol. 3, p. 72). See also R' Yosef Zundel MiSalant: *Toldos U'kesavim*, p. 265, quoting R' Chaim Volozhiner's comments on *Shir HaShirim*. See also R' Yechiel Michel Stern's *Lishon Limudim*, p. 315. In addition, see R' Moshe Eisemann's comments in his *Ramban as a Guide to Today's Perplexed*, chapter 4 (p. 17).

¹⁰⁶ In his *Chadrei Ba'ten* (*Vayechi*, 2:13), the *Chida* cites the *sefer O'mer HaShi'chi'cha* that when the *Rambam* was eight years old, he kissed the hands of the *Ri Migash* before the latter's *petira*. The *Rambam* later said that he was only *zocheh* to what he had accomplished in life because of that kiss and an accompanying *bracha* as he drew from the wisdom of such a *chacham* and *tzaddik*.

¹⁰⁷ See the commentary of R' Moshe Dovid Vali (*talmid chaver* of the *Ramchal*) on the opening *pasuk* of *Shir HaShirim*, and see R' D. P. Weinstock's (author of *Kol Dovid*) *Shira L'Dovid* commentary on 1:2.

¹⁰⁸ In the wake of such *neshikos*, we were once again without blemish on the lofty level of Adam *HaRishon* before the first sin. Just as the *chosson* and *kallah* of all subsequent *chasunos* are forgiven for all their sins...(Yerushalmi *Bikkurim*, 3:3—see above, footnote 57)

¹⁰⁹ These two Hebrew words, *hishtokikus* and *neshikos*, share a similar *shoresh* and are thus closely related—see R' Eldad Neker's *Atzmotai Tomarna*, p. 237.

¹¹⁰ Where exactly they are all hinted to, is explained by *Tosfos Rabbeinu Yehuda* [*Mei'Sirlion*], the *Meiri* (*Beis HaBechira*, *ibid.*, p. 29) *Avudraham* (see R' Yissachar Yaakovson's *Nesiv Binah*, vol. 1, p. 240), and the *Gra*—see *Peninim MiShulchan HaGra* (and *HaMe'or HaGadol*, p. 334), *parshas Va'eschanan*. See also the *Gra* on *Mishlei*, 14:5, and *Siddur HaGra* (*a"d ha'nistar*), p. 92. See the *M"B*, *OC"H*, 61:2, citing the *Eliyahu Rabba* who quotes the *Kol Bo*, and see the *Chida* (*Moreh Bi'Etzvah*, *siman* 2, #23) who also delineates the associations. See, as well, the *Anaph Yosef* commentary in the *Otzar HeTefillos* (on *kri'as Shema*). In addition, see *Minhagei Yisroel* (Sperber), vol. 8, chapter 11 (pp. 149-150).

¹¹¹ See previous footnote.

¹¹² See also the *Ramban* and *Rashbam* on the *pasuk* in *Va'eschanan*, 6:4.

¹¹³ See also R' A. S. HaLevi Ish Horovitz's *Naharei Aish*, *ma'amar* 6, p. 31 ("*Vi'henai yadanu*..."), and *ma'amar* 10, p. 49, and see *Pachad Yitzchak* on *Pesach*, *ma'amar* 32.

HaDibros.¹¹⁴) The very first *pasuk* of the *Shema* seems to play the part of our “*neshika*” back to *HaKB”H*. And no wonder, therefore, to find R’ Yehuda *HaChassid* write: “*Toras Hashem Bi’ficha*” - zu *kri’as Shema*.¹¹⁵ *Peh el peh* indeed...

In addition, one of the previous *Belzer Rebbes* noted the following: When *B’nei Yisroel* stood at *Har Sinai*, they replied “*hein*” to each *mitzvas aseh* and “*lav*” to each *lo sa’aseh*. But what occurred when they heard the first two *dibros* of *Anochi* and *Lo yehi’yeh licha* uttered simultaneously; if “*bi’dibbur echad ne’emru*,” then what could they possibly respond upon hearing both an *aseh* and *lo sa’aseh* at once? Explains R’ Shalom from Belz, it must be that they answered a most befitting “*Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*!”¹¹⁶ How very apropos as we have just seen that *Shema Yisroel* actually corresponds to, and acknowledges, the very first two *dibros* that we absorbed at *Sinai* from *HaKB”H*.¹¹⁷

To delve a bit deeper, however, why should specifically *kri’as Shema* be that which represents our *neshikos* back to *HaKB”H*? Even if we are correct that *Shema Yisroel* assumes the role of our reciprocation for having received the first two *dibros/neshikos* directly from *HaKB”H*, where might we find it clearly associated with the concept of *neshika*?

The Neshika of Shema Yisroel

Let’s consider the following: Throughout *Sefer Beraishis*, it is specifically Yaakov Avinu who appears to possess the *koach ha’neshika*. (We exclude, of course, the questionable- and evil-intended- *neshikos* of the nefarious Lavan and Eisav.¹¹⁸ It seems as if they, too, realized that the true *koach ha’neshika* was solely in Yaakov’s possession, and they wished to kiss him in order to attach themselves to his unique *koach*. Yaakov, naturally, did his utmost to prevent them from making such contact- see *Kallah Rabbasi*, chapter 3.) The very first *neshika* mentioned in the Torah appears as Yaakov displays his affection (see *Radak, Toldos, 27:26*¹¹⁹) requested by his father as Yitzchak prepares to bestow the firstborn blessings upon him.¹²⁰ The very same Yaakov then later meets up with Rachel for the first time, and once again we encounter the manifestation of his *koach ha’neshika* (*Vayeitzei, 29:11*).¹²¹ As

¹¹⁴ See also the comment of the *Ba’al HaTurim* on *parshas Mishpatim, 24:3*—precisely in the context of *Matan Torah*.

¹¹⁵ See *Sefer Gematrios L’R’ Yehuda HaChassid*, pp. 464, 468.

¹¹⁶ The insight appears in a collection of *divrei Torah* on *Zemiros Shabbos*; regarding “*u’faschu vi’anu Hashem Echad*” (“*Yom Shabbason*”), the *Likutei Mahariach* is cited who quotes the above explanation in the name of the *Rash MiBelz*. I subsequently saw it quoted, as well, in the *Ta’amei HaMinhagim (Inyanei Chag HaShavuos, #618 (p. 280)—kuntrus acharon*).

¹¹⁷ See also the *Mechilta, parshas Mishpatim (#20)*; *Yalkut Shimoni, #357*. The *pasuk* of *Shema Yisroel* highlights our unique relationship with *HaKB”H* who was *miyacheid* His name upon us.

¹¹⁸ See especially the related comments of R’ Shlomo Volbe in his *Shiurei Chumash, parshas Vayeitzei, 29:13 (pp. 249-250)*.

¹¹⁹ See, however, *Rabbeinu Ephraim’s* comment on *parshas Vayechi, 48:10*.

¹²⁰ See R’ Gamliel Rabinowitz’s insight in his *Tiv HaTorah, Toldos, 27:26-27 (p. 376)*.

¹²¹ See R’ Moshe Dovid Vali’s *Ohr Olam* commentary on the *pasuk*. See also the interesting related remark in *Naftali S’vah Ratzon/Ayalah Shi’lucha*. See also R’ Shlomo Arieli’s *Rapiduni B’Tapuchim, Vayeitzei, p. 74*, connecting the *neshika* and *bechiya*. In addition, see the interesting insight of R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap in his *Mei Marom, vol. 5, p. 87*.

he hears his demise, he will express that *koach* yet again as he bestows his own blessing upon Yosef's two sons (*Vayechi*, 48:10).¹²²

This unique *koach* interestingly appeared first when he received the blessings destined for his father's true *bechor*. Rachel was destined to be his chosen wife and her son, Yosef, ultimately his true *bechor*. The special blessings would thus eventually make their way specifically to the two sons of Yosef, Menashe and Ephraim's own respective tribes serving to manifest Yosef's selection as Yaakov's true firstborn. But what about a *neshika* to Yosef himself? Yitzchak he kisses, then Yosef's mother, and finally Yosef's two sons. Why skip over a most deserving and uniquely beloved Yosef *ha'tzaddik*?

At the powerful moment when Yaakov finally met up with his cherished son after a twenty-two year hiatus (*Vayigash*, 46:29), *Rashi* cites the *Chazal* (*Medrash Aggadah*)¹²³ that Yaakov did not give Yosef a *neshika* because he was in the midst of reciting *kri'as Shema*.¹²⁴ The *Maharal* (*Gur Aryeh*)¹²⁵ explains that Yaakov wanted to channel and direct all the abundant emotions swelling within him to his love for *HaKB"H*.¹²⁶ He yearned to give his greatest moment of unbridled love and exhilaration directly over to G-d.¹²⁷

And what have we thus just witnessed at this special encounter? That Yaakov, right when he wanted nothing more but to express his indescribable feelings of affection towards his beloved son, instead

¹²² Although the *neshika* was a bit different this final time: See the *Ohr HaChaim ha'kadosh* on the *pasuk*, and the explanation of R' Shimshon Pincus in his *Tiferes Torah al HaTorah*, p. 81.

¹²³ See R' Menachem Kasher's *Torah Shi'leima*, footnote to #177. See also *Teshuvos HaGeonim*, *siman* 45.

¹²⁴ According to some opinions, Yaakov then continued straight into the *Shemoneh Esrei*—see the *Rama MiPhano's Asara Ma'amaros* (*Ma'amar Chikur Din*, 1:23), and the *Shinaver Rebbe's* comments in *Divrei Yechezkel HaChadash*. Why did Yosef not likewise recite *kri'as Shema* at that time? Besides the forthcoming understanding of the *Maharal*, see also: *Devek Tov* and *Sifsei Chachamim* on *Rashi*; *Maskil L'Dovid*; R' Moshe Dovid Vali's *Ohr Olam*; *Malbim*; *Chasam Sofer al HaTorah*; *Shu"t K'sav Sofer* (*OC"H*, #37); *Chiddushei HaGriz* quoting R' Chaim Brisker; *Tiferes Shlomo*; *Minchas Chaim* (*cheilek* 1, 1:3); the *Steipler Gaon's Birchas Peretz*; R' Gedalya Schorr's *Ohr Gedalyahu*, *Vayigash*, pp. 139-140, and *Vayechi*, p. 149; R' Mordechai Carlebach's *Chavatzeles HaSharon* (p. 673); R' Chaim Shlomo Abraham's *D'var Torah* (pp. 273-276); and R' Chaim Shaul Schmahl's *I'yunei Chaim*, p. 37. If indeed Yaakov was reciting the *Shema*, why would Yosef “fall on his neck” right away and not wait for his father to finish? See R' Yosef Chaim's *Bi'nayahu al HaTorah*, p. 223.

¹²⁵ The same idea is also cited in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*. See, for example, the *Kaliver Rebbe*, R' Menachem Mendel Taub's *Peninei Kol Menachem al Shas*, vol. 1 (*Mahadura Tinyana*, 5757), on *Brachos* 6a (p. 15). See a similar concept in the name of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* appearing in *Naftali Sivah Ratzon/ Ayalah Shilucha, parshas Vayeitzei*. Similar remarks also appear in *I'lana D'Chaye* (R' Menachem Mendel Mi'Rimanov and the *Yehudi ha'kadosh*), *Vayigash*, p. 47, in the name of “*kadosh echad*.”

¹²⁶ This is based primarily on the *Sfas Emes's* understanding of the *Maharal*—see his comments on *Vayigash*, 5637, and see the *Steipler Gaon's Birchas Peretz* on *Vayigash*. See also R' Yissachar Dov from Belz's *Maharid MiBelz*, p. 68. See also R' Avraham Yafin's *HaMussar Vi'Hada'as*, vol. 1, p. 232; R' Dovid Puvarsky's insight in his *Maskil L'Dovid*, *Vayigash*, p. 269; and see R' Shimshon Pincus's discussion on this *inyan* in his *Tiferes Torah al HaTorah*, pp. 78-79. (See also R' Moshe Shmuel Shapira's *Zahav Mi'Shva*, *Vayigash*, p. 65.) In addition, see *Ohr Gedalyahu* on *parshas Vayeira* (p. 64), regarding Avraham giving his love for Yitzchak over to *HaKB"H* during the test of the *Akeida*. (See also R' Dr. Salomon Breuer's *Chochma U'Mussar, parshas Vayechi*, pp. 125-126.) See, however, R' Chaim Brisker's remarks cited in *Chiddushei HaGriz*, *Vayigash*, 46:29.

¹²⁷ See also the terminology appearing in *Kallah Rabbasi*, chapter 3. In addition, see the comments of R' Dovid Cohen in his *Mas'as Kapai*, vol. 3, pp. 26-27.

directs his unparalleled *koach ha'neshika* in the form of a potent *Shema Yisroel* to *HaKB"H*! No wonder that the *Sfas Emes* (*Vayechi*) quotes often the *medrash* that it is Yaakov Avinu who gave the Jewish People the gift of *Shema*.¹²⁸ He certainly showed us what its essence is all about.¹²⁹ The Yaakov "*ish emes*" is forever intertwined with the *Shema Yisroel* that also concludes with "*emes*." And thus, at the time of his death, what do his sons invoke but a resounding "*Shema Yisroel*" (*Pesachim* 56a) to demonstrate that they are indeed all righteous,¹³⁰ having fully absorbed the teachings of their father's precious gift.¹³¹

Quite intriguing, as well, is that Yaakov was *mi'sakein* the *tefilla* of *Ma'ariv* (*Brachos* 26b). He corresponds to the darkness of night, his *tzaros* and eventual descent to Egypt metaphorically linked with the gloom and dimness of the long and bitter *galus*.¹³² Including *kri'as Shema al ha'mitah*, there are four times, notes the *Siddur HaArizal*,¹³³ when one recites *Shema Yisroel* in every twenty-four hour period, and, fascinating to consider, is that—when said in their ideal times—all recitations take place in the nighttime hours. Following the *Vasikin*, with *Shi'moneh Esrei* commencing at sunrise, the earlier *Shema* of *karbanos* and the one directly preceding *Shi'moneh Esrei* are both recited while still 'night'; the *Shema* of *Ma'ariv* and that of *kri'as Shema al ha'mitah* are naturally said during the darkness of night. Hence, all four times coincide with the '*erev*' hours that correlate with the life and times of the Yaakov who also gave us the special gift of *kri'as Shema*. Yaakov's *Shema Yisroel* is ideally said during Yaakov's *erev*.

Shema Yisroel, the very words alluding to the first two *dibros/neshikos* of *HaKB"H*, seems to be our means of reciprocating our appreciation of the exclusive covenantal relationship with *Hashem* established atop *Har Sinai*. The *Arizal* notes that the holy R' Akiva was a *gilgul* of Yaakov Avinu, their names comprised of the identical letters serving as a subtle reminder.¹³⁴ How fascinating, then, that it was R' Akiva who demonstrated to us all what it means to live one's life with the constant desire to sacrifice all for *HaKB"H* (*Brachos* 61b).¹³⁵ And how appropriate, therefore, that his sacred soul departed the world just as the powerful *neshikos* of the words of *Shema Yisroel* escaped his lips...¹³⁶

¹²⁸ See *Devarim Rabba*, 2:35. (See, however, *ibid.* 2:36 and 2:31 (and the commentaries of the *Rashash* and *Maharzu* on the latter).) See also *Beraishis Rabba*, 98:3, and see R Tzaddok *HaKohen's Pri Tzaddik*, *parshas Vayechi*, p. 229.

¹²⁹ For more on the deeper connections of Yaakov (and Dovid *ha'melech*...) to *Kri'as Shema*, see my *ma'aracha*, "From Majestic Royalty to Royal Redemption."

¹³⁰ And Yaakov responds with the *pasuk* of "*Baruch Sheim*..." Together these two *pesukim* contain twelve words corresponding to the fully righteous twelve sons of Yaakov, and a total of forty-nine letters, corresponding to the forty-nine letters contained in the respective names of his sons, the *shivtei kah*. (See *Likutei Moharan*, 36 (#3).) See especially R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver's *Drashos Siach Yitzchak*, *Drush L'Shabbos Parshas Beshalach*, p. 271.

¹³¹ See also the *Radomsker Rebbe's Tiferes Shlomo*, *Vayigash*, 46:29. In addition, see *Living Inspired* (Tatz), p. 203.

¹³² See especially the *Ropshitzer Rebbe's* (R' Naftali Tzvi Horowitz) *Zerah Kodosh*, beginning of *parshas Vayitzei*.

¹³³ See also *Megaleh Amukos*, *parshas Balak* (bottom of p. 559).

¹³⁴ See *Likutei HaShas* on *Brachos* 61b- see also *Sefer HaLikutim* of the *Arizal* (*Vayechi*, 49:24), *Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, chapter 41, and the commentary *Meir Ayin* on the *Rama MiPhano's Gilgulei Nishamos* ("Kazbi") quoting *Kavanos HaAri*. See also R' Dovid Tebel from Lisa's *Nefesh Dovid*, end of *parshas Vayishlach*. See also the fascinating *remez* of the *Rizhiner Rebbe* (R' Yisroel from Rizhin) recorded in *Doleh U'Mashkeh* (*tinyana*), *parshas Vayishlach*, p. 32.

¹³⁵ See also the remarks of the *Shlah HaKadosh*, *parshas Vayeishev* (p. 297b, Amsterdam edition).

Deserving souls depart from this world through *misas neshika*,¹³⁷ as *HaKB"H* descends to give the *tzaddik* a *neshika*, *kaviyachol*, while gently drawing out the very soul that He had earlier blown in at birth. The *neshama* that entered man's body through *HaKB"H*'s "*neshima*" ("*Va'yipach bi'apav...*"), is now drawn out by *HaKB"H* through the breath of a *neshika*. To prepare oneself for such a *neshika*, is it any surprise that we must first give *HaKB"H* a *neshika* that will then warrant reciprocity— and thus the recital just before death of what else but *Shema Yisroel*...

This *Shavuot*, as we prepare to recite the *Shema* on the heels of a special night of continuous learning and *di'veikus*, let us tap into our own wellsprings of emotions and use this unique opportunity to express our abounding *ahavas Hashem* above and beyond our daily recitations of *kri'as Shema*. Let us relive the special closeness with *HaKB"H* achieved at *Sinai* once again to the fullest degree.

¹³⁶ To quote but a line I later came across in R' Tzaddok HaKohen's *Pri Tzaddik*, parshas *Vayechi*, p. 227- discussing R' Akiva's death: "*Rak mi'tzad she'he'gea az li'tachlis shi'leimus ha'ahavah vi'achduso, yisbarach shemo, yatz'a nishmaso bi'echad bi'neshika...*"

¹³⁷ *Brachos* 8a— and see the understanding of *Rabbeinu Bechaye* in his introduction to parshas *Emor*.