

Parable for Shavuot

Receiving the Torah—Experiencing God

I would like to share a parable with you. The purpose of the parable is to deepen our appreciation of the holy holiday of *Shavuot*.

By way of introduction, *Shavuot* is called “*Zeman matan Toratenu*—the time of the giving of our Torah.” It was on the first *Shavuot* 3300 years ago that Hashem began giving us His Torah, i.e., revealing to us His *plan* for creation. At Sinai, He began teaching us how to play *our* part in bringing the world to its highest fulfillment. It was on that day that we stood at Sinai, “*ke'ish echad be'lev echad*—as one man with one heart” (Rashi, Exodus 19:2).

It was on that day that Hashem opened the heavens and granted us a direct experience of His oneness:

אַתָּה הָרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת פִּי הַהִנֵּה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוֹ:

You have been shown [i.e., you have been granted enlightened awareness] to know [i.e., experience directly and empirically] that *Hashem* [the Infinite One] is *HaElohim* [the Creator and Sustainer of the world]—there is none besides Him (Deuteronomy 4:35).

Rashi, in the name of the Midrash, gives us a peek at what they saw:¹

“הָרְאִיתָ” —כַּשֶּׁנְתָן הַקַּב”ה אֶת הַתּוֹרָה פָּתַח לָהֶם ז’ רִקִּיעִים. וְכַשֵּׁם שֶׁקָּרַע אֶת הַתַּחַתּוֹנִים. וְרָאוּ שֶׁהוּא יְחִידִי. לִכְךָ נֵאמַר “אַתָּה הָרְאִיתָ לְדַעַת...אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוֹ”.

“You have been shown.” When the Holy One gave the Torah [to Israel], He opened the seven firmaments [of the spiritual dimension]. And then, just as He tore open [the “curtains” of] the upper worlds, so too He tore open [the “curtains” of] the lower worlds. They thus saw that He is SINGULAR [above and below]. This is the meaning of, “You have been shown to know...there is none besides Him.”

Besides experiencing Hashem’s oneness visually, we also experienced it audibly. This experience was so powerful that our souls left our bodies:²

אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנוּם לְבִרְכַּת שְׁעֵשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרוֹת כּוֹלֵן בְּקוֹל אֶחָד יֵצְאוּ מִפִּי הַגְּבוּרָה. דָּבַר קֶשֶׁה עַד מְאוֹד. מֵה שְׁאִין הִפֵּה שֶׁל הַדִּיּוֹת יִכּוֹל לְדַבֵּר, וְלֹא הָאֲזוֹן יִכּוֹלָה לְשִׁמּוֹעַ. וְלִפְיֵכֶן כְּתִיב “נִפְשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְרֹו” (שִׁיר ה’ ו’).

Our Masters taught that the *Aseret HaDibrot* (Ten Commandments) were all spoken in One Syllable. They issued forth from the mouth of the Holy One [as one]—something so difficult [to imagine] that no human mouth can utter it, nor any human ear hear it. It is therefore written, “*Yatza nafshi be’dabero*—my soul departed at [the sound of] His Voice” (Song of Songs 5:6) [i.e., our souls were unable to remain in our bodies when we heard God’s Voice at Sinai].

Not once, but numerous times our souls left our bodies and returned, left our bodies and returned:³

וְאָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוִי, כָּל דְּבוּר וְדְבוּר שֶׁיֵּצֵא מִפִּי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, יֵצְתָה נִשְׁמַתָּן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנֵאמַר “נִפְשֵׁי יִצְאָה בְּדַבְרֹו” (שִׁיר ה’ ו’). וּמֵאַחַר שֶׁמִּדְבוּר רֵאשׁוֹן יֵצְאָה נִשְׁמַתָּן, דְּבוּר שְׁנֵי הַיָּאָד קָבְלוּ? הַרִיד טַל שֶׁעֲתִיד לְהַחִיֹּת בּוֹ מֵתִים וְהִחִיָּה אוֹתָם שְׁנֵאמַר “גִּשְׁמֵם נְדָבוֹת תִּנְיֹף אֱלֹהִים נִחְלַתְךָ וְנִלְאָה אֶתָּה כּוֹנֵנְתָ” (תְּהִלִּים ס”ח י’).

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi also taught: With every *dibur* (word, commandment) that emanated from the mouth of the Holy One, the souls of the *bnei Yisrael* departed [from their bodies]. This is the meaning of, “*Yatza nafshi be’dabero*—my soul departed at [the sound of] His voice” (Song of Songs 5:6). [But you might ask:] Since their souls departed at hearing the first *dibur*, how could they have received the second *dibur*? He [Hashem] brought down the dew with which He will resurrect the dead in the future [and He thus

¹ Rashi, Deuteronomy 4:35. See *Devarim Rabbah* 2:31, “Rabbi Eliezer said: There are seven *reki'im* (firmaments)—*shamayim* (heaven), *shmei ha'shamayim* (heavens of the heavens), *rakiya* (firmament), *shechakim* (stratosphere), *maon* (abode), *zevul* (palace), and *arafel* (thick darkness). The Holy One opened all of these for Israel [at Sinai] to show them that there is no other God but Him.”

² *Tanchuma, Yitro* 11.

³ *Shabbat* 88b.

restored their souls back into their bodies each time]. The following verse alludes to this, “Elohim, You poured down *geshem nedavot* (generous rains of bounty); You established [this people as] Your inheritance when they were weary [in the desert]” (Psalm 68:10) [[which the Targum Yonathan re-states as, “When *Beit Yisrael* heard Your powerful voice, their souls flew upwards from fright, but then You, God, poured down *mitrin d’raava* (rains of loving grace, i.e., dew of resurrection) upon Your inheritance, thereby mending [healing] the weary congregation.”]]

Dying (physical death) and reviving (coming back to physical life) numerous times at Sinai means that the revelation was so powerful that we (our souls) merged into the divine oneness. This is why our experience at Sinai is described as bringing us to the same level as Adam before the original sin, i.e., before the decree of death.⁴ We had to die and be revived numerous times, over and over again, so that it would become encoded into our psyche.

One additional tiny peek into what we experienced, but didn’t necessarily understand when it was happening:

וְהָרַרְדּוּ מִכָּל הַרְדָּוָה וְהָרַרְדּוּ מִכָּל הַרְדָּוָה: וְיָהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחִזְקוּ מְאֹד...
Mount Sinai *ashan kulo* (was/became all “smoke”) for Hashem had come down upon it in the fire; its *ashan* (“smoke”) thus went up like the “smoke” of a lime kiln/furnace. The entire mountain *trembled* violently. There was also the sound of a ram’s horn, increasing in *volume* to a great degree (Exodus 19:18-19).

To understand this ourselves, we need first to understand that we don’t understand. When reading words like *ashan* (smoke) and *esh* (fire), we tend to imagine the kind of smoke and fire with which we are familiar. Rashi and Rabbenu Bachya warn us not to make such suppositions. First Rashi starts off by informing us:

“עָשָׂן כְּלִי” — אין עשן זה שם דבר...אלא לשון פעל כמו אמר שמר שמע...

“*Ashan kulo*”—This word *ashan* is not a noun but rather an action verb, similar in construction to *amar* (he said), *shamar* (he guarded), *shama* (he heard).

According to Rashi, *ashan* means “it [the mountain] smoked.” Strange, what could this mean? As we will see momentarily, it does not mean that smoke was coming up from the mountain. Indeed, we are not talking about any kind of physical smoke at all! Rabbenu Bachya confirms this:

“וְהָרַרְדּוּ מִכָּל הַרְדָּוָה” — ההר היה עשן ולא האש. כי האש שהוא לפני כבוד ה', אין לה עשן.

“Mount Sinai *ashan kulo*”—It was not the fire that was producing smoke, but rather that the mountain was “smoking,” for [heavenly] fire that comes forth from Hashem’s glory does not produce smoke.

We are still left wondering, what does it mean that the mountain was not producing smoke, but rather was smoking? And what difference does it make? And again, why is smoke being mentioned if we are not even talking about regular smoke? [We will answer the first question in a moment, after we see what Rashi and Rabbenu Bachya have to say about the last question.]

Rashi and Rabbenu Bachya both answer this last question based on the *Mekhilta* and the *Pesikta* (two ancient Midrashic texts):

“וַיַּעַל עֲשָׂנוּ כְּעָשָׂן הַכִּבְשָׁן” — יכול ככבשן זה ולא יותר? ת”ל “וַתִּקְרְבוּן וַתַּעֲמִדוּן תַּחַת הָהָר וְהָהָר בְּעַרְבָּא עַד לֵב הַשָּׁמַיִם חֻשָּׁף עֲנָן וְעָרְפָל: וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ קוֹל דְּבָרִים אֲתֶם שְׁמַעִים וַתְּמוֹנָה אֵינְכֶם רְאִים זוֹלָתִי קוֹל” (דברים ד' י"א). ומה ת”ל ככבשן? לשבר את האוזן, מה שהיא יכולה לשמוע. נותן לבריות סימן הניכר להם. כיוצא בו “כְּאֲרִיָּה יִשְׁאָג” (הושע י"א י'). וכי מי נתן כח בארי אלא הוא? והכתוב מושלו כאריה! אלא אנו מכנין ומדמין אותו לבריותיו כדי לשבר את האוזן מה שיכולה לשמוע...

“Its *ashan* (‘smoke’) thus went up like the ‘smoke’ of a lime kiln”—Could it be like a mere kiln/furnace, and no more? But another verse states, “You approached and stood at the foot of the mountain; the mountain was burning with a fire reaching the heart of heaven, with darkness, cloud and fog. Then Hashem spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no image; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:11-

⁴ We became free of the *zuhamat ha’nachash* (pollution/contamination of the serpent) which had distorted mankind’s ability to grasp the truth of God’s existence ever since Adam had been expelled from *Eden* (*Shabbat* 146a; *Zohar Ki Tissa*, 2:188b). We overcame the angel of death (*Shemot Rabbah* 32:1).

12). Why then does the Torah use the analogy of a mere kiln/furnace? Rather it is in order to make intelligible to the human ear as much as it can understand. The Torah gives an analogy to that which is familiar. Similarly, the prophet writes, “He [Hashem] roars like a lion” (Hoshea 11:10). But who gave the lion power if not He, and yet the Torah compares Him only to a lion! But again, we describe Him by comparing Him to His creatures in order to make intelligible to the human ear as much as it can understand...

“ויעל עשנו כעשן הכבשן” — ידוע כי אין המשל דומה לממשל. אבל מפני שאנחנו גשמיים אי אפשר לנו שנערוך ונדמה הענינים השכליים רק בדברים הגשמיים שאנו שקועים בהם...ועל כיוצא בזה אמרו חז”ל “דיברה תורה כלשון בני אדם” (ברכות ל”א ע”ב). “Its *ashan* (‘smoke’) thus went up like the ‘smoke’ of a lime kiln”—It is obvious that the analogy is not exact. However, because we are physical, it is impossible for us to imagine purely spiritual realities except by referring to their physical counterparts with which we are familiar (literally, ‘in which we are sunken’)...This is similar to the statement of our sages, “The Torah speaks in the language of human beings.”⁵

The sages are adamant: You think you know what the Torah is talking about? You think that it’s just telling stories? You think that it’s describing a mountain on fire? You think that God literally travels (descends and ascends) in or on clouds? You think that the clouds of glory that surrounded the children of Israel in the desert were regular clouds? The Torah calls them clouds, so aren’t they clouds? Suffice to say that it would be wiser to envision them not as physical clouds (like the clouds we see in the sky) but more like an electromagnetic force field.

The Torah comes from a dimension high above us. It even gives us access to that dimension. It does so, however, through the seemingly familiar. It reveals by dressing up in the familiar, by hiding behind the familiar. Accordingly, our task, when learning Torah, is to learn to think multi-dimensionally.

With this, we can now understand what the Torah means when it says that Mount Sinai was *ashan kulo*. It was really what we might call “the *ashan* effect.” As opposed to physical smoke, it was really the molecular structure of physical reality that began to dissolve, not only in front of our eyes, but over us and under us—and all around us as well. We felt as if the proverbial carpet was being pulled from under us. The high energy of Hashem’s presence revealing itself on Sinai caused the mountain to lose its hard physical appearance and become more like we might describe as a *mirage* in the desert: an undulating mass of energy that threatened to spread and overwhelm us. This is why we said to Moshe, “You speak to us, and we will listen. But let Hashem not speak with us any more, for we will die if He does” (Exodus 20:16). This is why we “stood at a distance while Moshe entered the *arafel* (fog)” (20:18).

This is what we experienced at Sinai. This was the level of prophecy that we tasted on that first *Shavuot*: our consciousness was freed and elevated above its normal physical limitations. Seven layers of filters (“firmaments”) opened up above and below us. The filters that normally protect us were removed. Our souls—usually in a state of deep sleep within our bodies—awakened. We saw and heard and experienced reality from God’s point of view. And even though we couldn’t handle it, and we asked to be relieved of the responsibility of maintaining that awesome state of divine awareness, the seed had been planted. We had been given a collective peek behind the scenes. We had been given a taste of Reality with a capital R. Even when the spiritual would again be clothed within the mundane, it would never be the same.

Shavuot Every Year

This is a little peek into what it means that we *received* the Torah on Sinai on that first *Shavuot*. When read in this way, we understand that the Torah is the repository of the actual experiences it describes. In order to

⁵ *Berakhot* 31b. Similarly, “God borrows terms from His creatures to express His relationship to the world” (Rambam, *Yesodey HaTorah* 1:12). See also the *Shir HaKavod* that is sung after the morning service on *Shabbat*, “I will tell of Your glory, though I have never seen You. I will speak in metaphor, and call You by Your names, though I cannot know You as You are. Through Your holy prophets, the secret assembly of Your servants, You revealed a reflection of the radiance of Your hidden light. They likened Your loving greatness and Your power of restraint to [the same qualities in] Your most powerful creations. They visualized You, but not as You really are. They described You solely in terms of Your actions.”

access this level of experience, we must go inside. There, the garments of the seemingly mundane and the familiar that conceal the bright light of Hashem's presence become transformed.

Ever since that first *Shavuot*, our annual *Shavuot* is that one day of the year on which Hashem continues to flow the awesome light of His Torah down into the world. It is for this reason that we stay up the entire night of *Shavuot* to learn and share Torah,⁶ in preparation for literally receiving the Torah anew on *Shavuot* morning.⁷ This doesn't mean that Torah is not flowing down every day and every second, but that this is the special day every year that *embodies* this.

And not only do we commemorate and even connect with that original revelation at Sinai on this day, but we see that original *Shavuot* as a little hint of a Great *Shavuot* at the end of history, when all mankind will stand together and be lifted up to the heights of prophecy—above death and dying—to merge consciously into Hashem. This is based on a number of sources that I bring in my book, *Pesach Light*.⁸ It is also the meaning of what we sing in *Kedushah* of *Mussaf* every *Shavuot* morning (and every *Shabbat* morning as well):

הוא אֱלֹהֵינוּ. הוא אָבִינוּ. הוא מְלַכְנוּ. הוא מוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ. הוא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ וְיַגְאֵלְנוּ שְׁנִית. וְיִשְׁמַעֵנוּ בְּרַחֲמָיו לְעִנְי כָּל חַי לְאִמֵּר. הֵן
גְּאֻלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אַחֲרֵית כְּרֵאשִׁית לְהֵיטֵ לְכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים. אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

He is our God, He is our Father, He is our King, and He is our Deliverer. He will therefore surely deliver us and redeem us again. In His mercy He will speak to us again, [but this time] in the presence of all that is alive, saying, "Behold, I have redeemed you from this final exile as from the first, to be your God. I am Hashem your God."

This is what Rashi means in his commentary on the second verse of Song of Songs:

"O that He would kiss me [again] with the kisses of his mouth [O that He would reveal the secrets of His Torah to me as He began to do at Sinai]" (Song of Songs 1:2). He [Shlomo, the master author of Song of Songs] uses this example [this image of a groom and bride kissing] to describe how Hashem gave us His Torah [at Sinai] and spoke to us "face to face" ["Face to face Hashem spoke with you on the mountain, from the midst of the fire" (Deut. 5:4)].

Even now, those same demonstrations of love/affection [those same prophetic revelations that He revealed to them when He opened the heavens, which caused their souls to leave their bodies and soar heavenward...] are still sweeter to them than any other delight. They are therefore assured by Him [i.e., He has therefore made an unbreakable promise to them] to reveal Himself to them [again, but this time] to illuminate for them *sod taameha* (the unfathomable-ness of the Torah's innermost secrets) and *mistar tzeefonoteha* (the enigma of its most hidden mysteries). Turning to Him and beseeching Him to fulfill His promise, this is what we mean when we say, "O that He would kiss me with the kisses of His mouth!"

We see that *Shavuot* is not just about something that happened 3300 years ago in the Sinai desert. Rather every new *Shavuot* that we celebrate each year is a piece of a magnificent puzzle of consciousness that we are putting together in our collective soul. Thus no *Shavuot* is ever the same. There is no such thing as "just another year, just another *Shavuot*." Every *Shavuot* is bringing us closer and closer to the Great *Shavuot* at the end of history-as-we-know-it.

⁶ Many learn the *Tikun Leil Shavuot*, a special kabbalistic compendium of verses from the entire *Tanakh* (Bible). Specifically the first three/four and last three/four verses of each *sidra* are read, and then the first three/four and last three/four verses of each book of the *Tanakh*. In all there are *K"D Sifrey Tanakh* (24 books of the Bible), which are also called *K"D Kishutey Kallah* (the 24 jewels/ornaments of the Bride).

⁷ The Torah reading for *Shavuot* morning is Exodus 19-20 where the actual event of receiving the Torah on that first *Shavuot* morning is described.

⁸ We have numerous sources that all say the same thing: The light of the future redemption, the light of *Mashiach*, the light of the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the light of the Great *Shabbat*, the light of Eternity, are all manifestations of the *Ohr HaGanuz*, the Original Light that Hashem stored away in order to create the universe and man in it. The Gaon of Vilna thus wrote (*Aderet Eliyahu*), "The light that was created on the first day was the light with which Adam saw from one end of the creation to the other. This original light is the *ohr ha'sekhel* (light of consciousness), the light that illumines the mind. It is through this that Adam perceived and grasped the entirety of the universe. This is the light that was hidden away for the future when (Isaiah 11:9), "The earth will be filled with consciousness of Hashem as the waters fill the sea." (*Pesach Light*).

The Shavuot Parable

Once, after a great *Shavuot*, some friends were talking about what they had learned on *Shavuot* night, and it turned out that they had been speaking about the same thing. They even compared notes, and it turned out that they had been speaking about the same thing at the same time.

Interested to see if this was simply random synchronicity, they conceived a plan. They would establish a giant network of computers, equipped with the most advanced voice recognition technology, placed in every synagogue, yeshiva, school, and home where people would be learning Torah the following *Shavuot*, and connect them all with a Giant Mega-Computer in Jerusalem.

All these computers around the world would then feed into the Great Computer all the Torah learning and even offshoot conversations that would take place, and produce detailed data regarding any and all synchronicities. They even had a control group in which those who learned Torah did so with the express intention of sharing the same Torah-pipeline with others in other parts of the world (and all the more so with those in the same city). To make a long story short, it worked. Lots of synchronicities! And even more with the control group.

They published their findings and asked people to gear up for next year. And so it was. The data from the following year showed that those who meditated and prayed beforehand to be worthy of sharing the same or similar Torah-pipelines and consciousness-networks with others scored highest.

By the following year, more and more people from all around the world—Jews and non-Jews—prepared themselves for the big day. Guidelines were distributed: Meditate. Breathe slowly and deeply. Feel yourself in your body. Thank the Creator for being alive. Connect to your soul. Feel His presence surrounding you and embracing you. As you begin to hear the angels and souls in heaven singing, sing with them. Know and experience your soul's connection to all the great *tzadikim* who have ever lived. Know that they are alive now, in the dimension above ours, waiting for us to become aware of their presence. Know that Hashem is streaming His Torah down into the world at this very moment just as He began to do at Sinai. Receive the light of the Supernal Torah. Be transformed in the light.

And then it happened. Everybody felt it. We all became as one man with one heart. Nobody paid attention to the computers any more. The energy of prophecy was released and every living being on earth entered into the state of unified consciousness that Israel experienced on that original *Shavuot*. In this state, all realized and experienced that time and space are illusory. We are all still in the *Beit HaMikdash*. We are all still at Sinai. We are all still in Eden. We are all still in Heaven. Heaven is on earth, and there is only oneness.

With blessing
Avraham Sutton
avraham.sutton@icloud.com