



BNEI AKIVA
OF THE UNITED STATES & CANADA

CHAG BABAYIT

Shavuot Edition

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חג הקציר
יום הבכורים
זמן מתן תורתנו
חג השבועות

Rav Shaul Feldman on Shavuot

Like most of our biblical holidays, Shavuot has several names. One of its names is mentioned in Davening “*Zman Matan Torateinu*,” suggesting that on the sixth of Sivan 2448 years after the creation of the world the Torah was given to Am Israel at Har Sinai (Gemara Masechet Shabat 88).

The centrality of Torah in the life of a Jew is represented every morning when we recite Birkot Hatorah.

Two Brachot are recited:

- 1) *Asher Bachar Banu*- we were chosen by G-D to receive his Torah
- 2) *La'asok Bidivrei Torah*- we were commanded to dwell and learn the Torah

Rav Solovechik explains the difference between the two Brachot. In the Bracha about us being chosen, regardless of how much we learn -- we are chosen. Every Jew has that special “Neshama” that was given to him regardless of his actions. That’s what we celebrate every morning with the Bracha of us being chosen. It’s about the potential bestowed upon us. The second Bracha about the actual learning requires our work. That is why one must learn after we recite this Bracha and we therefore recite Shema which fulfills at least the minimum to cover this requirement.

Rav Kook explains this in several places in a similar way, but broadens it to a national level.

הרב זצ"ל אגרת תקנ"ה

שני דברים עיקריים ישנם שהם יחד בונים קדושת ישראל והתקשרות האלוקית עמהם. האחד הוא הסגולה, כלומר טבע הקדושה שבנשמת ישראל מירושת אבות..... והסגולה היא כח קדוש פנימי בטבע הנפש ברצון ה' כמו טבע כל דבר במציאות שאי אפשר לו להשתנות כלל..... והשני הוא ענין בחירה זה תלוי במעשה הטוב ובתלמוד תורה

As a nation, says Rav Kook, we are the Chosen nation “*Am Segula*.” It is part and parcel of who we are, we are born into that naturally and we inherit it. It’s a

spiritual power not a physical one; it demands from us to live on a higher level. This can't change, even if you want to walk away from it.

Then there is the other side, and that is us choosing G-D. That depends on how much we invest in it; how much we learn each day which is inferred from the Bracha we make about our actual learning.

Says Rav kook, we must know that the power of the natural part of us as Jews is much greater than the part of us dwelling and learning. But, says Rav kook, our ability to shine and show the natural spirituality depends on how much we actually Learn!

החלק של הסגולה הוא הרבה, באין ערוך כלל, יותר גדול וקדוש מהחלק התלוי בבחירה,
אלא שברית כרותה היא שהסגולה הפנימית לא תתגלה בזמן הזה, כי אם לפי אותה
המידה שהבחירה מסייעת את גילוייה, על כן הכל תלוי לפי רוב המעשה וקדושת האמונה
ותלמוד תורה

This idea of Rav Kook can connect to the most common name of the holiday "Shavuot," as it says in the Torah that this holiday will be celebrated after 7 weeks on the 50th day of Pesach.

On Pesach we were liberated from Egypt without any real merit of our own, as we know the famous claim of the angels against saving the Jews. "The Egyptians are idol worshippers and the Jews are idol worshippers why save one over the other," yet G-D based on his promise to the forefathers chose again "Am Israel" without us deserving it on our own merit. We then start working for 7 weeks to actually reveal that spiritual powers that G-D has given us. We celebrate that on the holiday of Shavuot, where we commit ourselves to dwell in G-D's Torah - and find true joy in it.

Chag Sameach,

Rav Shaul Feldman

Executive Director Bnei Akiva of the US & Canada

Recipes for the wonderful holiday of Cheesecake, Dairy, and cookies! We hope that you enjoy making these at home, and enjoy them as much as we do!

Two-Bite Chocolate and Cheesecake Cupcakes (Dairy)

Ingredients:

Chocolate Cake Mixture:

- 1 1/2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup water
- 1/3 cup oil, such as canola or grapeseed
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar

Vanilla Cheesecake Mixture:

- 1 (8-ounce) package brick cream cheese, at room temperature
- 1 large egg
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 (12-ounce) bag mini chocolate chips

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350° F. Line two 24-cup mini muffin tins with paper liners. Whisk together the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking soda, and salt. Add the water, oil, and vinegar, and mix just until smooth. In another large bowl, beat together the cream cheese, egg, sugar, and vanilla until smooth. Mix in the mini chocolate chips. Fill the mini cupcake papers halfway with the chocolate mixture. Then spoon 1 teaspoon of the vanilla cheesecake mixture into the center of each cup. Bake the Black Bottoms in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until the cakes are set and the cheesecake just begins to turn golden. Cool in the pans on wire racks for 10 minutes and enjoy!



Israeli Cheesecake

Ingredients:

For the Crust:

- 7 tablespoons/100 grams butter (room temperature)
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 tablespoon decaffeinated instant coffee
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cups cake flour

For the Topping:

- 8 ounces sour cream
- 1 packet vanilla sugar
- 2 tablespoons sugar

For the Filling:

- 3 eggs
- 3 1/3 cups/750 grams Israeli white cheese (Gevina Levana)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 packet vanilla sugar
- 2 tablespoons flour

Instructions:

Instructions: Preheat the oven to 375 F. Spray a 9x13-inch cake pan with non-stick cooking spray. Combine butter, egg yolks, coffee, sugar, and flour with your hands until the mixture is crumbly. Press the mixture into the bottom of the cake pan. In a separate bowl, combine eggs, white cheese, sugar, vanilla sugar, and flour. Pour this mixture on top of the cake base. Bake for 30 minutes or until the cheese does not wiggle. Remove cake and cool for 30 minutes. In a small bowl, mix sour cream with vanilla sugar and sugar. Spread evenly over the cooled cake, then bake again for 20 minutes. Refrigerate until fully cooled and firm, then serve and enjoy!



KREMBO!

A classic Israeli favorite

By: Ori & Aviva Friedmann | Houston Shlichim



Ingredients:

- 20 Oreo cookies (or any other round cookie)
- 3/4 cup cream (needs to be very cold)
- 1 cup cream cheese (softened)
- 2 TBSP butter
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1.5 cups chocolate chips
- 2 TBSP oil

Instructions:

Arrange the cookies on a pan. In a mixer, mix together the cream cheese, butter, powdered sugar and vanilla until combined. Turn the speed up to high, add in the cold cream slowly. Keep mixing until the mixture is stiff.

Put the mixture into a piping bag (or a ziplock bag with a hole cut in the corner), pipe a small “hill” onto each cookie. Freeze for about an hour.

Melt the chocolate with the oil in the microwave in a deep bowl. Take each Krembo and dip it into the chocolate. Put the tray of Krembos back in the freezer. Take out for a few minutes before serving.

Beteavon!



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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition

Cheesecake Pops

Ingredients:

- 8-inch cheesecake (baked, chilled, and very firm)
- 1 pound chocolate candy coating
- Optional: sprinkles, small candies, or chopped nuts

Instructions:

Prepare two baking sheets by lining them with aluminum foil or parchment. Set one aside for now. Using a small cookie scoop, scoop spoonfuls of the cheesecake onto one of the baking sheets. If necessary, wet your hands and roll the cheesecake balls between your palms to make them round. Insert one lollipop stick into each cheesecake ball. If they're too soft, freeze the balls for about 20 minutes until they're firm enough to skewer well. Place the baking tray in the freezer to freeze the balls until they are very firm, at least 2 hours. Microwave the candy coating until it is completely smooth and melted, stirring after every 30 seconds to prevent overheating. Add a little bit of margarine to get a liquid coating that is creamier. Set out your sprinkles or other delicious toppings. Remove the cheesecake pops from the freezer. Working quickly, dip a frozen cheesecake ball into the melted candy coating. Make sure that all of the cheesecake is covered and that the chocolate forms a seal around the stick. With the coating still wet, roll it in the toppings of your choice or sprinkle them on. Place the completed cheesecake pop on the reserved baking sheet with clean parchment. Repeat with remaining cheesecake pops and candy coating. If the coating starts to set, return it to the microwave for a few seconds until it is liquid and smooth again! Serve and enjoy!



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CH[🏠] G BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition

Bringing Chag Home: Feeling Shavuot in Your Own Home

We all know this year may look a little different, with the chaggim, shabbatot and every moment we should be in shul, spent in our home. Many Shuls during this time of year have all night learning, amazing activities and programming, as well as decoration to make the feeling of Matan Torah and Har Sinai really tangible. We have gathered a couple ways that you can bring that into your very own home! From indoor camping to having flowers on the wall, we hope this helps you feel a little more in the spirit of chag. Chag Shavuot Sameach Lkulam!

1. Camp-In: Leil Shavuot

It is written in the Torah “On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone forth from the land of Egypt, on that very day, they entered the wilderness of Sinai. Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain, and Moses went up to God.” (Exodus 19:1-3)

To do: Re-enact Bnei Yisrael camping at the foot of Har Sinai with your own campout! Pitch a tent indoors or build one with chairs and blankets, and sleep there with the whole family! Stay up late telling stories — from the giving of the Torah, to Megillat Rut, to your own memories of camping. Wake up to the sound of a shofar or other horn blasts.

2. The Holiday of Flowers:

On Shavuot there is a custom to decorate the insides of our Shuls and homes with beautiful flowers. Shavuot is also a wonderful opportunity to enjoy some time in nature :) During quarantine, nature is the most exciting thing we have, as most people look forward to the walks we are permitted to take!



Go on a nature walk in your vicinity, or print out beautiful flowers online, maybe cut some out from a magazine. See how many different colors you can find, and how many of the Shivat Haminim you can find in your own home. “A land of wheat and barley and vines and fig and pomegranates a land of olive oil and [date] honey”).

Collect wildflowers and other colorful flowers and fruit to make a centerpiece for your holiday meal, or take pictures of fruits and flowers and create a special Shavuot collage. So many ways we can have the feel of chag, while not being able to be in shul.

3. Create: Arts and Crafts for Shavuot!

At Home Flower Vase!

1 clean and empty plastic container (yogurt containers are good for smaller flowers, larger containers are better for taller flowers)

Paint brush

Tissue paper, construction paper or scrapbook paper

Mod-Podge, make your own, or glue!

Directions:

1. Tear the paper into small pieces.
2. Brush some Mod-Podge (or glue) onto part of the container and cover with a piece of paper.
3. Continue until the entire container is covered. If you're using thinner paper, like tissue paper, you may want to do a second layer.
4. When you're done, gently brush over all the paper with Mod-Podge and set aside to dry. (Mod-Podge has a strong smell, so you might want to put it outside to dry.)
5. Fill with flowers and display!



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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition

Activities, Songs & Games

ALEPH

ZACH

Family Friendly Games!

By: Ori and Aviva Freidmann | Houston Shlichim



With a three day Yom Tov ahead of us, we have compiled these fun games you can incorporate into your meals, afternoons, and evenings! Have fun and may the best player win :)

1. Land, Sea & Air:

Decide with your family which part of the floor is “land” and which is “sea”. If you are using tape, lay down a long piece. The area in front of the tape is “sea”; the area behind the tape is “land”. Just like in Simon says there is one leader. The leader calls out one of three directions: Land, Sea or Air. When they say, “Land!” everyone jumps into the land area. When they say, “Sea!” everyone has to jump into the sea. When they say, “Air!” everyone has to jump as high into the air as they can. The last one standing wins!

2. Fun Fact Israeli Trivia Game!

ZACH

BET

Israeli fun facts quiz

- Where did in Israel grow the world’s largest pepper? (Ein Yahav)
- What is Israel’s national bird? (A Duchifat דוכיפת)
- Who is the famous scientist who was offered to be the first President of Israel and refused? (Elbert Einstein)
- When and where was the only World Cup in which Israel participated? (Mexico in 1970)
- What is Israel’s national flower? (כלנית Kalanit)
- What is the most popular food in Tel Aviv? (sushi)
- In which of the following countries was it proposed to establish the State of Israel?

Argentina (correct) /Uganda (correct)/ Cyprus (correct) / syria (false)

- How long does it take to travel from north of Israel to south? (7 hours)
- What were the other options to call the State of Israel? (Yehuda, Tzabar, Tzion, Ever)
- Is the city of Tel Aviv mentioned in the Tanach?

(Yes- (יחזקאל ג' ט"ו) “כבר נהר על היושבים אביב תל הגולה אל ואבוא”)



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Shavuot Edition



3. Can you guess the Numbers?! How many of these do you know?

By: The Vereshes | Montreal Shlichim



ALEPH

ZACH

BET

SHAVUOT CALCULATION

Try to answer mathematically.
THE ANSWER NEEDS TO BE A NUMBER

=

HOW MANY MEMBERS ARE IN THE ISRAELI KNESSET

+

HOW MANY "MESHUGAIM" ARE IN HIS SONG

+

HOW MANY DAYS DO WE COUNT THE OMER

18	17
26	25
33	32
40	39

+

=

HOW MANY OF THEM ARE ISRAELI INVENTIONS?

+

HOW MANY DAYS DO WE COUNT ON LAG BA'OMER

+

HOW MANY STAIRS DOES THIS MENORAH HAVE?

+

=

THE NUMBER WRITTEN HERE

+

THE YEAR THE FIRST ZIONIST CONGRESS HAPPENED

+

HOW MANY COMMANDMENTS ARE THERE

=

★

THINK YOU KNOW THE ANSWER?

ANSWER: 2119



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Shavuot Edition



4. Song Sheet

Provided by: Oded & Eliyah Pe'er | Shlichim Lower Merion



ארץ זבת חלב מילים: שמות פרק ג, ח לחן: א. גמליאל	ביכורים דודו ברק
ארץ זבת חלב חלב ודבש ארץ זבת חלב חלב ודבש	ראה ימים באים, ימי השמש. שטיחי שדות פרושים הרחק לנגדך. בטרם יעלה בהם הקמש. בלקט, בפאה, בשכחה.
שיבולת בשדה מילים ולחן: מתתיהו שלם	אחוז חרמש ושלח מגל בתלם. זהב חובק אותך מאופק ועד תום. הן אין ימים יפים יותר מאלה, לפני אשר ידאו ימי החום.
שיבולת בשדה כורעה ברוח מעומס גרעינים כי רב. ובמרחב הרים יום כבר יפוח השמש כתם וזהב.	כי לפני קציר - כתם פרח. ולפני מתן תורה - מן מתוק ושלו. ולפני הביכורים - קור וכפור וקרח. ובטרם שבועות - עלה טרף.
עורו הוי עורו שורו בני כפרים קמה בשלה כבר על פני הכרים קיצרו שילחו מגל עת ראשית הקציר	אתה וגם אני, אשר נבואה, אי שם לקציר חיטים, ממש בקצה מואב. ודאי נמצא בצל אילן מרגוע, בטרם קיץ וימי שרב.
שדה שעורים תמה זר חג עוטרת, שפע יבול וברכה. לקראת בוא הקוצרים בזוהר מזהרת, חרש לעומר מחכה.	כי לפני קציר - כתם פרח. ולפני מתן תורה - מן מתוק ושלו. ולפני הביכורים - קור וכפור וקרח. ובטרם שבועות - עלה טרף.
הבו הניפו נירו לכם ניר חג לקמה, עת ראשית קציר. קיצרו, שילחו מגל עת ראשית הקציר	



מלאו אסמינו בר מילים: פנחס לנדר לחן: דוד זהבי מלאו אסמינו בר ויקבינו יין, בתינו הומים, הומים מתינוקות ובהמתנו פורה- מה עוד תבקשי מאיתנו מכורה, ואין, ואין עדיין? מה עוד תבקשי מאיתנו מכורה, ואין, ואין עדיין?	סלינו על כתפינו מילים: לוי קיפניס לחן: ידידיה אדמון סלינו על כתפינו, ראשינו עטורים, מקצות הארץ באנו, הבאנו ביכורים. מיהודה ומשומרון מן העמק והגליל פנו דרך לנו, ביכורים איתנו, הך בתוף חלל בחליל! שדינו וגנינו הבשילו יבולים, כרמינו, מיקשותנו ביכרו פרי הילולים. תאנים תפוחים ענבים ושקדים. פנו דרך לנו, ביכורים איתנו, הך בתוף חלל בחליל! מה טובו מעגלינו, מה יפו הטורים! זימרת הארץ לנו, הבאנו ביכורים, מגולן מבשן מן הנגב והירדן! פנו דרך לנו, ביכורים איתנו, הך בתוף חלל בחליל!
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Song: Hashem Gave Us a Present

A fun song to learn with your family!

Hashem gave us a present, do you know what it was?
He gave us the Torah, so we can keep its laws.
He asked the many nations, do you want this gift of mine?
But they said "no, thank you" the Torah's not for us.
Then to the Jewish people Hashem did go.
We said "Na'aseh Ve'nishma",
Cuz we love Hashem so!

Tune: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPpaGqha4zU>



5. Spot the Clues

The Shavuot Search

1. What is the boy's name?
2. What game did they just play?
3. What city do they live in?
4. Did they just start dessert?
5. Which of the kids like to draw?
6. What is the boy learning?
7. Where were the flowers?
8. At least how many kids are in the family?
9. What are the father and daughter doing?
10. How many things tell us it is Shavuot?



5. Eva. Her name is on the drawing of Har Sinai.
6. Shemot. The set of chumashim on the bookshelf is missing it.
7. On the table. There is a circle of water and some petals there.
8. Three. There are two kids in the picture and there is a high chair, so there must be a baby too.
9. This! If you look closely, they are actually trying to solve this puzzle.
10. 6! They are eating cheesecake, so they must have had dairy. It is night outside and the clock shows it is 1:23, so they must be learning all night. The moon is a quarter full, just like it always is on Shavuot. They have flowers. Eva drew Har Sinai. They are doing this Shavuot search.

ANSWERS
1. Avi. His name is on his kippah.
2. Connect 4. It is half-open and top on the stack of games and there are 3 pieces on the table.
3. Jerusalem. Old buildings and the Chords Bridge are seen in the window.
4. No. The cake is full and there is a piece and crumbs on the table. This should be their second cake and it is really late at night so they must have started dessert a while ago.

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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition



Matza and Chametz: Pride and Humility

By: Jen van Amerongen | Merakezet Chinuch

Tochen (Background):

What do you think of when you think of Matza? It is flat, dry, crumbly, and hard. We keep it flat and don't allow it to rise. What about bread? Bread is yummiier than matza. It's puffy and soft. Usually sweet, sometimes it's made with sugar or honey. Although matza and bread are made from almost the same ingredients, they end up looking and tasting very different from each other. Our chachamim teach that matza and chametz symbolize two different middot (character traits).

Matza, which is small and flat represents humility. Being humble means not showing off what we have or what we have accomplished or being modest. Matza teaches us about humility because it shows us that sometimes it's better to not take up so much space, or make yourself the center of attention. Chametz, or bread, on the other hand, represents pride. When someone is proud they make themselves seem very big and puff themselves up, like bread. It is for this reason, that our chachamim explain that chametz was not allowed to be offered on the mizbeach in the Beit Hamikdash. In the Beit Hamikdash, we can't be proud, because we have to show that Hashem is greater than us, no matter what we can accomplish.

But, there is one time a year that Hashem tells us to bring chametz into the Beit Hamikdash and that is the holiday of Shavuot. On Shavuot the Cohen would bring the Shte Halechem (Two Breads) as part of the process of the korbanot. Why is it that Hashem tells us we can bring chametz on Shavuot?

The reason is because there are ways to be proud. One type of pride is called arrogance, it is when you are so proud that you show off to everyone so that you can get attention. But there is also a good type of pride, when we are proud and celebrate our successes and accomplishments, which is pride balanced with humility. We want to share our celebration with the people around us, not rub it in their faces. While the rest of the year we are humble like the matza, on Shavuot we are allowed to announce that we are proud. We made it from the avdut (slavery) of Pesach, through the period of Sefirat HaOmer, and reached Shavuot. Shavuot commemorates Matan Torah, the peak of our relationship with Hashem, when Hashem chose us, out of all the other nations, and gave us a very special gift- the Torah. The Shte HaLechem teaches us that we have to have balanced amounts of pride and humility- we don't want to make ourselves out to be more special than everyone else and show off our gift from Hashem every day, but at the right time and place, while also being humble, we can show that we are truly proud of ourselves.



Game: Pride and Humility (Chutes and Ladders)

ALEPH

BET

[PRINT PDF](#) - be sure to print, cut out and fold before Chag!

Objective and Rules of the Game:

- Each player has to try to make their way through all 50 squares which represent the 50 day count between Pesach and Shavuot, called Sefirat HaOmer, while learning about Pride and Humility on the way.
- Roll the dice and move your pawn, square by square, the number shown on the dice.
- When you land on a chute or ladder, read the corresponding card to learn why you went up or down. Being proud but humble brings us closer to the Torah on the top of Har Sinai, but being arrogant or too proud, will bring us back down.
- If you land on a star space, pick a star card, answer the question, and you might get to move up a few spaces!



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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition



Hands on Activity: Oobleck

ALEPH

ZACH

Instructions:

Mix 2 cups of cornstarch to 1 cup of water into a bowl. Mix the cornstarch and water until your oobleck is formed.

Oobleck isn't a liquid or a solid, it's a non-Newtonian fluid. At times, it may seem like a solid or a liquid but it acts differently than a normal solid or liquid. If you put pressure on it, It will feel hard and you can even form the oobleck into a ball if you try with your hands. Release your pressure or slowly dip your spoon into the mixture and it will act like it's more like water.

Idea:

Oobleck can remind us of the importance of balancing our pride and humility. If we open our hands too much the oobleck can spill out and get all over and make a mess. If we have too much pride and try to show off it gets messy. But if you have something special and keep it to yourself, or open your hands but not too much, then you can play with your oobleck without it getting everywhere. Of course you can share your oobleck with others to have fun with, but you have to apply the right amounts of pride and humility.

Discussion question:

How does oobleck represent pride and humility?



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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition



Shavuot Names & Story of Rut

By: Ori & Aviva Friedmann | Houston Shlichim



Shavuot at home

Ages- 8-88

Goal: get to know the different customs and names of Shavuot, and the story of Megillat Rut

Start with 3 stage Taboo:

Print the list for taboo, cut out each individual word. Mix them all up and put them together in a bowl.

Each player has 30 seconds when it is their turn to read the word they have and make all the other players guess what it is. After all the notes have been used, return them to the bowl and move on to the next stage.

Stage 1: Describe the word on the note without saying the word itself (you can say anything else to describe it)

Stage 2: Describe the word on the note using only one word (besides the word itself)

Stage 3: Describe the word on the note using only charades

After the game, spread out the words, and try to see how they are all related to Shavuot (you might have to be really creative to find the connection!)

After this, learn the story of Megillat Rut:

The story of the Megillah will be divided into different parts (the full story is enclosed as well). Cut out the story, mix up the cards and try to organize it in the right order.

Once you have organized it- read the story of Megillat Rut together.

Questions to discuss:

- Why do we read this Megillah on Shavuot? There is more than one answer!
- What can we learn from the way that Naomi acts towards Ruth?
- Why do you think David Hamelech, a very important person in Jewish history, descended from Ruth?
- Who are the main characters in the Megillah, the men or the woman? Why do you think it is so?
- In the story of Ruth, we learn that a farmer must leave the edge of his fields for the poor. How can this Mitzvah be adjusted to modern times? And what can we learn from this Mitzva?



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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition



Cut out the notes for Taboo game:

Shavuot	Omer	White clothes	Ruth	Naomi	Cheese cake
Torah	10 Commandments	Flowers	Bikurim	Har Sinai	Wheat
David Hamelech	Boaz	Water	Zman Matan Torateinu	Atzeret	Chag HaKatzir
Beit Hamikdash	Tikkun Leil Shavuot	Summer	Tfilah	3 Regalim	Coffee
Stomachache	Luchot HaBrit	Moshe Rabeinu	Jerusalem	The Golden calf	conversion

Story of Megillat Ruth: cut out each paragraph to organize:

Our story takes place in the time of the Judges, when a famine hits the Land of Israel. Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their 2 sons, Machlon and Kilion moved to Moav where there was food. Elimelech died and his sons 'married out'. Both wed young Moavite ladies; Ruth and Orpah. However, soon Machlon and Kilion also passed away.

The famine soon ended and Naomi decided to return to Israel. Her 2 daughters accompanied her, and despite her asking them to turn back they still continued with her. Naomi again begged them to go home, remarry and start again. Orpah decided to go home, but Ruth was determined and uttered those immortal words:

"Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people are my people, and your G-d is my G-d; where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may Hashem do to me – and more! – if anything but death separates from you." (Ruth 1:16-17)



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Shavuot Edition



They returned to Beit Lechem where Naomi and her family were originally quite wealthy, but now Naomi had nothing, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Ruth went off to the fields of Boaz (a close relative of Naomi and Elimelech) to glean the sheaves of corn and pick up the crops that the harvesters had dropped. Boaz was overseeing the harvesters and saw Ruth. He tried to work out who she was and was told that she was the Moabite girl that had come back with Naomi and had asked to come and glean in these fields and has been doing so since the morning. Boaz went up to Ruth and welcomed her to his fields and told her that he had sorted everything and she wanted a drink or to chill for a bit she should just ask and someone would help her out. Ruth was overcome and when she asked Boaz why he was being so amazing to her he replied that he had heard of all that she had done for her mother in law and hoped that Hashem would reward her actions.

When everyone got a bit peckish, Boaz invited Ruth to come and have a bite to eat with everyone. When she had finished, he told his harvesters to leave her alone and even drop a few extra sheaves for Ruth to collect. When Ruth returned to home that night, loaded with barley, Naomi couldn't understand what had happened. Ruth slowly explained the day's events and recounted all that Boaz had said and done for her. Naomi was overcome with emotion, and told Ruth that Boaz was a 'redeeming' relative and that she should do as he instructed. So, Ruth stayed close to the others gleaning in Boaz's field throughout the barley harvest and the wheat harvest that followed and when that was finished, she stayed at home with Naomi.

After a while Naomi decided that it was time to sort out Ruth's future, so she told her to get all dressed up and 'uncover Boaz's feet'. ("A brother who refuses to enter into levirate marriage, undergoes a ceremony of chalitzah which involves the removal of his shoe. Although Boaz was not Machlon's brother, as his redeemer Boaz had a moral obligation to marry Ruth. Therefore Naomi suggested that Ruth 'uncover his feet' a gesture reminiscent of chalitzah, in the hope that it would make Boaz aware of his moral obligation" Malbim.) Ruth did as she was told, and as you can imagine, Boaz got a bit of a shock to find a young lady lying at his feet...

They had a bit of a chat in which Ruth explained who she was and what she was doing and Boaz told her not to worry. He gave her a nice amount of barley so that she should not return empty handed to her mother and Naomi told her to wait patiently. Boaz explained to the elders of the town that he was ready to redeem the fields of Naomi and Ruth and to also marry Ruth.

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Our 'story' ends with Ruth becoming the wife of Boaz, them settling down and having a son whom Naomi named Oved. He was the father of Yishai who in turn was the father of David Hamelech, from whom Mashiach will come.

The Story of Megillat Ruth:

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CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition



Learning, Limud, and Up All Night

Limud: Divrei Torah, Chaburot, Parent Child Learning

This holiday is all about the giving and getting of the Torah, and our ultimate relationship with Hashem. While typically people stay up all night long in Shul, we have compiled different types of limud for you, as well as Divrei Torah for you to learn and read with your families over the chag! Enjoy!

Words for the table, evening, or simply because: from our tzevet, bogrim and TVA faculty!

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The Ten Commandments: What Do We Need to Know?

Rabbi Aaron Bayer | Director of Yeshivat and Midreshet Torah v'Avodah

The Ten Commandments famously begin with **אֲנִי ה' אֶלֶקִּיךָ** which has puzzled many commentators over the generations. What exactly are we being commanded in this pasuk? Ramban, articulates the mainstream opinion that we are being commanded to believe in God. Ibn Ezra takes a very unconventional approach and suggests that we are, in fact, not being commanded in this pasuk. Rather, Ibn Ezra boldly claims, this is an introduction to who the Commander is before we receive any commandments. Either way, the Ten Commandments begin with an idea, something that we must know and maybe even believe, rather than with something that we must do.

This first commandment stands in stark contrast to the other commandments that tell us what to do or not to do: sanctify Shabbat, honor our parents, and don't murder, and don't steal. The first commandment takes place in our heart and mind rather than in our hands. There is no action to take or to refrain from taking in this commandment.

It is interesting to note, then, that the last and final commandment also has no action associated with it. We are told **לֹא תַחַמּוּד**, don't covet or desire the belongings of others. We must exercise control over our emotions and desires precisely so that we do not come to perform any forbidden action like theft, murder, or adultery.

What do these two commandments have to do with each other? Are they linked in some way? I would like to suggest that just as the Ten Commandments begin with a central idea that we must know and believe about God the Ten Commandments end with a central



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idea that we must know and believe about ourselves as humans. As Jews, we are blessed to know God and have the capability of thinking and internalizing the deepest most important truths about Him. We might be tempted to think that a relationship with God is based only on knowing and believing certain things about God, however, we must know and believe that we are also capable of controlling ourselves and even our desires and not just our actions.

The lesson that emerges from this parallel between the beginning and ending of the Ten Commandments is alluded to in the Mishna in Pirkei Avot:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג משנה יד

הוא (רבי עקיבא) היה אומר חביב אדם שנברא בצלם חבה יתירה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם שנאמר (בראשית ט)
בצלם א-להים עשה את האדם

He (Rabbi Akiva) used to say: beloved is man that he was created in God's image. An additional measure of love is shown to him because he was made aware that he was created in God's image, as it says (Bereishit 9): "In the image of God was man created" It seems that the Ten Commandments begin and end with the image of God. They begin with what we are supposed to know and believe about God and they end with what we are supposed to know and believe about ourselves because we are created in His image.

ZACH

BET

Seeing the Sounds

Chaim Marcus | R"am at Yeshivat Torah v'Avodah

When Hashem gave Am Israel the Tora and told us the עשרת הדיברות, the Tora describes the momentous occasion and states that Am Israel were able to see the sounds of the given Tora. The Pasuk says (שמות כ', י"ד) – "וכל העם רואים את הקולות" – and the whole nation saw the sounds.

Rav Moshe Chaim Efraim of Sladikov in his sefer "Degel Machane Efraim" quotes a משל from his grandfather, the Baal Shem-Tov, to help explain the significance of seeing the sounds. According to this משל, there was once a musician who played a certain instrument in the most beautiful way that anyone who heard it wouldn't be able to hold back and would start dancing with tremendous passion. Those who came even closer to the musician, would dance with even a stronger passion. Amidst all this, a deaf man came and



looked at the people dancing non-stop. To him, they looked insane and in his heart he told himself that there is nothing about the musician and the instrument that could bring anyone joy like the joy displayed by those dancing. The Baal Shem-Tov finishes the משל by saying that if the deaf man would be able to just see the sound, he too would rejoice and dance along with everyone. The משל according to Rav Moshe Chaim Efraim, is that when Hashem gave us the Tora we too had a little bit of the deaf man within ourselves. We too couldn't really understand the beauty and true joy that the Tora has within it. So, Hashem showed us all the light, showed us all the sounds, to make sure that everyone was able to rejoice from the true sweetness and beauty of the Tora.

In the end of davening each day, we say the phrase “ותן חלקנו בתורתך”. This is a request from Hashem to please give us a part in his Tora. We each have our own part of Tora that we personally and individually connect to, that we find speaks to us more, that feels like our own voice of Tora. When Hashem gave us the Torah and showed us all together the voice of and sound of the Torah, it unified all our individual Toras. Hearing the sound of Tora, affirmed the idea that although we each have our own personal “חלק בתורה”- all of Am Israel are together.

ZACH

BET

The Bond Between Food and Torah

Leora Greenberg | HA Member

When one starts preparing for nearly all of the various chagim we have sprinkled throughout the calendar, one can almost automatically think about the special and traditional foods associated with that certain chag. These include honey on Rosh Hashana, sufganiyot on Chanukah, dried fruit on Tu BShvat, and the list goes on. As we now prepare for Matan Torah, we also seem to eagerly prepare various cheesecakes and dairy creations to enjoy over the duration of the Yom Tov.

One might begin to think that we have made our holy chagim so much less by having our focus turned to these various foods and treats. Really, though, we can learn from the mishnah in Avot to teach us the connection between Torah and food.

רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חכמה, אין יראה.
אם אין יראה, אין חכמה. אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין דעת, אין בינה. אם אין קמח, אין תורה. אם אין תורה,
אין קמח



CHAG BABAYIT
Shavuot Edition

In this mishna, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariyah goes through and compares different traits each person needs to be a well rounded person and the lesson of how everything in life works in conjunction with the other. The Rambam explains in this mishnah that one helps the existence and completes the other.

Rav Elazar ben Azariyah ends off the mishnah with the idea that if there is no flour (ie. sustenance) then there is no Torah, and if there is no Torah, then there is no flour. The clear question becomes how does flour, a basic necessity for our physical sustenance, complete Torah, our spiritual sustenance? The question in the other direction seems rather obvious. Of course we know Torah completes flour because Torah completes and enters every aspect of our lives, especially food. Other mishnayot in Pirkei Avot explain the need to have Divrei Torah during meals, regular conversation and fitting Torah into our daily routine (Avot 3:4, 3:7).

A beautiful idea and answer to the question of how physical sustenance and Torah work hand in hand to complete each other can be explained by Rabbi Yonason Goldson, a rav in the St. Louis community. Rabbi Goldson clearly illustrates how man can neither live without Torah nor food. The physical needs of man must be satisfied for man's soul to flourish and spirit to soar. If man was to try and survive only on Torah, he would soon find himself ill and emaciated. So too, if man were to Gd forbid remove Torah study from his life he would not be satisfying his spiritual needs, which would also lead to his demise. There are a plethora of take-aways from each mishna in Pirkei Avot and so much to learn. Our mishnah by Rav Elazar ben Azariyah teaches us the balance we strive to foster and integrate into life. True integration between the physical and spiritual is what keeps man inspired through life. This year, as we share and indulge in our favorite cheesecake, let us remember to share words of Torah and understand the connection that constantly exists between the two

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Chag HaShavuot v'Chag Matan Torah

Yosef Cashdan | Shaliach, Cleveland



There is something very special about Chag HaShavuot: Shavuot has no fixed date! For all the other Chagim the Torah explicitly gives us a date: Pesach starts on the fifteenth of Nisan, Rosh Ha-shana on the first of Tishrei, Yom Kippur on the tenth of Tishrei, and



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CHAG BABAYIT
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Sukkot on the fifteenth of Tishrei, but not for Shavuot! However, the Torah does tell us when to celebrate it: “..from the day on which you bring the sheaf (omer) of elevation offering – the day after the Sabbath – you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week – fifty days, then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord” (Vayikra 23:15-16) - seven weeks after the Omer Offering which takes place on the second night of Pesach.

We see from here that the day that we celebrate Chag HaShavuot is completely dependent on the day that we celebrate Pesach. This connection between Pesach and Shavuot is far from coincidental. Only after we celebrate Pesach and connect to the ideas that the Chag represents are we able to continue to Chag HaShavuot; On Pesach Hashem revealed Himself to us as a Nation for the first time, He struck the Mitzrim and took us out of Mitzrayim. At the Seder, we learn and tell our children our story of how we are Hashem’s chosen Nation - Am Segula, and we build our faith in Hashem.

But that alone, is not enough; we need Hashem’s guidance to show us what to do with this faith. So for the seven weeks that follow after Pesach, we prepare ourselves for our most special moment in our Nation’s history - Chag Matan Torah. Each day, we build another level of preparation towards our wedding day with HaKadosh Baruch Hu - Matan Torah. (that is the reason why we count upwards and don’t countdown - each day matters, each day is another level). On Chag HaShavuot, we receive the Torah from Hashem. We deepen our connection with Hashem and we learn from Him, what our purpose is in this world and how we can bring about the complete Tikkun Olam. Without the faith in Hashem that we acquired at Yetziat Mitzrayim, we would not be able to make it to Matan Torah and receive the deeper faith, and vice-versa, without the Torah, we wouldn’t even be able to sustain our basic faith in Hashem.

We now understand why the Torah didn’t just give us a specific date to celebrate Shavuot. From Pesach to Shavuot we have to go through a process of elevation in order to be worthy of receiving the Torah. As is so, throughout our lives, we are going through a very long process of Teshuva, returning to Hashem, on both an individual and universal level. Hashem gave us the Chagim, so that we can reconnect to those important ideals that each Chag represents. And each year we get closer and closer to filling the world with righteousness, justice, mercy and compassion until finally our world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem.

Chag Sameach!

Chessed & Megillat Rut

Shoshi Fogelman | Midreshet Torah V'Avodah 5780

When someone thinks of Megillat Rut, Shavuot often comes to mind. Chazal provide several reasons why Megillat Rut is read on Shavuot. This story takes place during the time of the harvest, and another name for Shavuot is Chag Hakatzir, the festival of the harvest. Just as Bnai Yisrael accepted the Torah on Har Sinai and became the Jewish nation on Shavuot, so too Rut accepted the Torah and the Mitzvot and converted to Judaism. In addition, since Shavuot is the traditional birthday and yahrzeit of David HaMelech, we read about his genealogy at the end of Megillat Rut.

Before Bnai Yisrael accepted the Torah, they had seven mitzvot, the Sheva Mitzvot Bnai Noach. When they accepted the Torah, they took on the responsibility of 606 more mitzvot. The gematria of the name Rut is 606. This is the same number of new mitzvot for which both she and Bnai Yisrael assumed responsibility. The seven laws of Bnai Noach and the 606 new mitzvot equal 613 mitzvot, which is the total number of mitzvot in the Torah. The Midrash Yalkut Shmoni on Megillat Rut states: Rav Zera says this Megillah does not contain laws of purity and impurity nor laws of what is permitted and what is prohibited. So why was it written? To teach the reward of gomlei chassadim, acts of kindness.

Chessed itself is mentioned by name twice in the Megillah. In perek aleph, pasuk chet, Naomi is talking to her two daughters-in-law, Rut and Orpah, "May Hashem deal kindly with you as you have dealt kindly with the dead and with me." In Perek Gimmel, pasuk yud, Boaz says to Rut, "My daughter, you have made your latest act of kindness greater than the first, in that you have not gone after the younger men, be they poor or rich." However these two psukim are not the only two places that we find chessed in the story.

As I previously mentioned, Megillat Rut is read on Shavuot, the day of Matan Torah. Perhaps chessed is another connection between the story and the chag. The Midrash Lekach Tov says that Megillat Rut teaches us chessed and the Torah is full of Chessed. This is alluded to in Mishlei, perek lamed aleph, pasuk chaf vav, which we sing on Friday night in Eishet Chayil: "V'Torat Chessed Al Lishonah", the Torah of chessed is on her lips.

C

hessed is found throughout Megillat Rut. In the first Perek, we see the reward of those who do chessed by comparing Elimelech and Rut. The Midrash Rabbah teaches that Elimelech



could have been king but instead he died in Moav. Rut left Moav and followed her mother-in-law to Eretz Yisrael where they were poor. However, she married Boaz and became the great-grandmother of David HaMelech. So why does Elimelech lose everything but Rut succeeds? Elimelech could have helped the poor in Eretz Yisrael, but he left to go to Moav to feed his family, whereas Rut left the royal palace of Moav to come to Eretz Yisrael to help her mother-in-law and give chizuk. They were both tested -- Elimelech was punished for not doing chessed while Rut was rewarded for doing chessed. A halacha that is learned from this megillah is matanot aniyim, certain gifts to the poor from the fields. In perek bet, Rut tells Naomi that she will be the one to harvest. There is a big chessed in this. Rut, who was a princess, was not used to manual labor, but she harvested to help her elderly mother-in-law.

Later in the perek, Boaz greets Rut with warmth and with compliments about how considerate she is to her mother-in-law. In the Gemara Baba Batra, daf tet, amud bet, Rabbi Yitzchak teaches that one who give Tzedakah to a poor person is blessed with six brachot, but one who comforts a poor person is blessed with eleven brachot. We learn from Boaz and this gemara that when one does kindness, he or she should make the recipient feel comfortable and happy. In addition, Boaz does not reveal to Rut that he is her relative, he just performs chessed for its own sake.

Several psukim later, Boaz tells his kotzrim, his harvesters, to drop some of the bundles of grain on purpose and not to embarrass Rut. When one does chessed, he or she should do it in a way that does not embarrass the recipient. The Rambam teaches that there are eight levels of Tzedakah. The highest level of Tzedakah is to help a person find employment, because they maintain their self respect. In perek bet pasuk yud tet, Naomi asked Rut where she worked, and Rut answered: "The man's name that I worked for today is Boaz." The Midrash Rabbah states that the pasuk should have said "the man who did for me" explaining that Boaz did chessed for her. The Midrash teaches us that more than the wealthy person does for the poor person, the poor person does for the wealthy person. Although the wealthy person gives Tzedakah in Olam Hazeih, the poor person gives the wealthy person the opportunity to earn a reward in Olam Haba'ah. Finally in perek Daled, pasuk yud zayin, the women in the town comment on the birth of Rut's son: "There is a son born to Naomi." The Gemara in Sanhedrin, daf yud tet, amud bet, explains that Naomi helped to raise the baby, and it was like she adopted him.

We learn that if you adopt a child it is as though you gave birth to it. In conclusion, the story of Rut demonstrates the rewards for people who perform chessed. As I discussed



earlier, this is the connection between this Megillah and Matan Torah and Shavuot. In the Gemara Sotah, daf yud daled, amud aleph, Rabbi Simla'i states that chessed is the essence of Torah. "Rabbi Simla'i explained: the Torah, its beginning is the performance of chessed and its end is the performance of chessed." Chessed is our involvement in the world. We should take this lesson from Megillat Rut and strive to infuse all aspects of our lives with chessed.

BET

Shavuot: The Power of Accepting the Torah

Rabbanit Dr. Tamara Spitz | Rosh Beit Midrash, Midreshet Torah VÁvodah

The Torah tells us to count 49 days from Pesach and on the 50th day we are to celebrate Shavuot. There is no historical reason given for why we celebrate on the 6th of Sivan. The Torah tells us that we celebrate Pesach because that's when Hashem took us out of Egypt, and we celebrate Sukkot because Hashem protected us in the desert for 40 years. The Abarbanel asks this very question. Why doesn't the Torah mention that we are celebrating the giving of the Torah? We mention this in our Tefilot: Shavuot is Zman Matan Torateinu. But nowhere does it say it explicitly in the Torah. Why?

The Maharal explains that it is a mitzvah to rejoice on every holiday. It is understandable that we are commanded to rejoice on Pesach and Sukkot. The historical references are a general cause for celebration. However, explains the Maharal in Tiferet Yisrael, Shavuot is unique. How can Hashem command us to celebrate on the day He gave us the "burden" of the Torah? The other nations didn't want it. We, on the other hand, accepted the Torah and said Na'ase V'Nishma. We are the ones who can call Shavuot "Zman Matan Torateinu".

This acceptance of the Torah was done on a national level. Rav Amital z"tl explains that we need to accept the Torah on an individual level as well. It is said that there is a little Shavuot in Yom Kippur and a little Yom Kippur in Shavuot. On Yom Kippur we received the second Luchot. It is like a mini-Shavuot. Shavuot needs to include a little of Yom Kippur. It needs to be a day of "soul-searching", says Rav Amital. Every person has to ask him or herself "Am I ready to accept the Torah this year?" Are we truly happy to have the Torah in our lives? Are we spiritually ready to accept the Torah? This is the true essence of Shavuot.



The Black-Sheep of the Shalosh Regalim

Mia Raskin | *Midreshet Torah v'Avodah 5780*

I always had a hard time understanding where Shavuot stood within the Shalosh Regalim. Sukkot is so exciting, constantly hosting people in your decorated, temporary living space. Pesach has the whole flip-flop of the kitchens and the experience of recreating the original exodus from Egypt. Then there's Shavuot, which you would think should be a huge deal; it's the giving of the Torah for G-d's sake! However, if Shavuot was as big of a deal as it's supposed to be, then why is it only a one/two day Chag while the other Shalosh Regalim are seven/eight?! Sure, Sukkot we remember the clouds that protected us in the desert and Pesach is the exodus that ultimately brought us to Har Sinai, but what do we make of the downgrade of Shavuot...

This is the encompassing message of Shavuot. After you sit in the sukkah and buy your lulav and etrog, you're done. After you eat your matzah (unless you're an all-year matzah eater), you put away your Pesach dishes and you're done. Shavuot however, is different. The message of Shavuot being one or two days, and Pesach and Sukkot being seven or eight, is that Shavuot shouldn't be confined to just the 6th of Sivan. The messages are not simply for the celebration of Matan Torah, but rather it should be the tone of every day. We should be in awe of the miracles that happened at Har Sinai, make special foods, and say special tefillot to properly commemorate the actual day of receiving the Torah at Sinai. However, we must also make it a point to be surrounded and absorbed in Torah every single day.

The Meaning of the Name

Shabbos Kestenbaum | *HA Member*

Why is this Chag called "Shavuot?"

Literally, "Shavuot" means "weeks." From the time Bnei Yisroel left Mitzrayim, they waited for seven weeks to receive the Torah. In the same light, we count seven weeks to commemorate that giving.

However, perhaps more deeply, the Tur (טור ברקת על שו"ע או"ח) notes that Shavuot also



means promises. Just as Bnei Yisroel promised to commit themselves to a relationship with Hashem, Hashem promised in return he would always remain faithful to us.

The Gemara in Mesachos Menachos 65a records how Sadducee explained to Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai why, according to them, Shavuot is always on a Sunday: “Moshe our teacher was a great lover of Israel. Knowing that Shavuot lasted only one day, he therefore fixed it on the day after the Shabbos so that Israel might enjoy themselves for two successive days.” To the Sadducee, the gift of Shavuot is so precious, it gives the Bnei Yisroel a weekend vacation.

For the Sadducees, who were distanced from the reality of an ever-present God, their commemoration was limited to calendar dates. Yet, when one’s entire persona is cultivated around a life of the validity of Torah, it transcends physical space and time. Indeed, as the Gemara in Meseches Brachos tells us, the Torah is given anew to Bnei Yisroel each day. Although Shavuot reminds us of this giving, it is the rest of the year by which we show our love to it. Similarly, Rav Nachman of Breslov writes in Leuktei Maran that the exodus of Egypt, and indeed the giving of the Torah, occurs in every human being, in every era, in every year, and in every day. It is therefore incumbent on each individual to view themselves personally being given the Torah on a daily basis.

Shavuot is a reminder of a constant reality: namely that we continuously strive to dedicate our lives to fulfilling the Torah, a relationship in which the creation of the world is built upon. Our Matan Torah moment is each and every day, and we must use this time to reaffirm our commitment: **נעשה ונשמע**

BET

Shavuot Sameach

Ilana Rouhani | Midreshet Torah v'Avodah

Shavuot. The holiday in which we declared we will do and we will hear (Shemot 24:7). Let me explain this in simpler terms: we agreed to the commandments and mitzvot before we understood them. This is an extraordinary statement for the Jewish people. Since when were we so committed, that we accepted something that was so powerfully foreign to us without hesitation, question or complaint--because let’s be honest, we can do a whole lot of fussing. However, we throw away our hubris. The famous **נעשה ונשמע**, action, then

faith. It is at this climax point in Jewish History, we realize that when we turn to action, we are acknowledging our empowered unique selves as united human beings in an eternal covenant.

The initial reaction would question this reply--don't we need to understand before we do?-- but this underlying *נעשה ונשמה* formula is genius. We first prepare ourselves physically and externally using our body functions, which actually, in turn, lends a helping hand to our mind and soul afterward when understanding the task itself. We as human beings turn to action because this is something that we can entirely control. The divine gave us a magnificent gift called free will, where we can control our responses. Randy Pausch expresses this in his book *The Last Lecture*, "We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand." When faced with a situation, especially one we cannot understand, it's our duty to play, not to start asking Expert Playing Card Company why the cards are rectangular shaped. Unlike free will, an unlimited and sometimes unapologetic source to choose and decide from, our understanding is limited. We as finite human beings cannot always turn to our knowledge because this is something we do not entirely encompass.

God is all-knowing and omnipotent, so practically speaking He can turn to faith, then action. In Devarim 32:4 the Sifre explains that "A God of faith" means God had faith in the universe and created it. This is a stark opposite to our procedure. Nevertheless, we failed God's faith, repetitively, as He recalls to Noach, *כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו* the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth (Bereshit 8:21).

We must understand the value of Gd's faith, as it's fundamental to us even existing. God's faith in us is more critical than our faith in God. This is a process examined throughout all the trials and triumphs in the Tanach, such as the ten requests to Avraham, the suffering of Job, and the complete essence of the tests of prophets. Akeidat Yitzhak is a complex, mysterious, and troubling story that occurs in the Torah. God began a relationship with Avraham by asking him to relinquish his past – his family and land in *חן* – and now God concludes the relationship by asking him to relinquish his future – his son and heir. The exact words "lech l'cha" are used only twice in Tanach: at these two watershed moments in Avraham's life. Why does God demand this particular demonstration of faith and loyalty? God is testing Avraham and He needed to see faith from his creations at its tipping point, the borderline of trust or abandonment. This is not only an expectation that lives in the scriptures and pages of our history, but God holds this standard in our day to day lives. *He needs to see you have faith**, and that is by action, then faith. Avraham



does not know the extent of God's commandment of *lech l'cha me'artscha*, but Avraham gathers his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, journeys to the land of Canaan, builds an altar and continues to spread the message of one God. Avraham does not comprehend God's word of *lech l'cha el eretz haMoriah*, but he gathers his two young men and his son Isaac, saddles his donkey, propels his legs up the mountain and builds an altar. When faced with a situation, Avraham's immediate response is turning to action. Finally, only afterward, does he understand God's will. Finally, only afterward, does he נעשה after he נשמע.

Finally, God has found his own faith in a leader as he blesses Avraham atop Har Hamoriyah, stating to him that He "will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand that is on the seashore... through your children shall be blessed all the nations of the world, because you hearkened to My voice (Bereshit 22:17-18)." A covenant is born, originating from Avraham. Hashem wants our good faith even more than we do. He is all-powerful, can do anything, and wants to do all He can for us. We are entirely in the hands of the One who is ever looking for ways to help us. It's up to us to bolster our awareness of this and it starts with one action.

The angels question God, asking Him if He really wants to make humans. God dives into a leap of faith, as Rabbi Sacks explains, and "God, by entering the human situation, enters time, and thus uncertainty and risk. The grant of freedom to humanity was a fateful act of self-limitation on the part of God." Therefore, God seeks those who use their freedom to aid in their faith. When faced with a situation, our step one begins with what we are not limited to, our free will and our actions. God starts with what He is not limited to, his faith and trust. And with this, we balance one another out with our opposite procedures. Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm addresses the crux of our covenant, "The two parties to the covenant are inextricably bound together, and existence is impossible and unthinkable without the other. Man cannot exist without God and, while God can certainly exist without man, He needs man to fulfill the purpose of creation." We are partners in the creation of the world. Sheryl Sandberg in *Lean In*, though particularly focusing on the voice of both genders equally in the workforce, eloquently describes a universal message of how having varying perspectives, creates the most flourishing and thriving results for a better tomorrow. Therefore, Man exclaims we will do and we will hear, while God is a God of faith. I guess the angels did provoke some deep thought for God, as we learn that Tehillim chapter eight is glorious praise to God for His kindness to the lowly and mortal human in giving the Torah to the inhabitants of the lower worlds, yet aroused the envy of the celestial angels. In Tehillim 8:5-6 מֶה-אָנוֹשׁ כִּי-תִזְכְּרֶנּוּ וּבֶן-אָדָם כִּי תִפְקְדֶנּוּ וְתַחֲסִירֶהוּ מֵעַט מַאֲלֵהִים "מה-אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן-אדם כי תפקדנו ותחסירה מעט מאלהים", what is man that You should remember him ... yet You have made



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him slightly less than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and majesty.” God made us less than angels in a certain realm, but when you adjust your focus on your binoculars of life, which you only see a small view of the larger picture, He, in fact, did not dump us, as Rav Yair says, but rather he upped us.

When the People of Israel preceded “We will understand” by “We will do,” six hundred thousand angels came to them and tied two crowns to each, one corresponding to “We will do,” the other to “We will understand.” But when the People sinned by worshipping the Golden Calf, one hundred twenty thousand angels came down and removed the crowns. Now, we wear crowns from God of glory and majesty, a sort of magnificence and dignity in us that will mirror God to remember his own confidence in us.

The Kaminker Rebbe once resolved to devote a whole day to reciting Psalms. Towards evening, he was still reciting when a messenger came to tell him that his mentor, the Maggid of Tzidnov, wanted to see him. The rebbe said he would come as soon as he was finished, but the messenger returned, saying that the Maggid insisted that he come immediately. When he arrived, the Maggid asked him why he had delayed. The Rebbe explained that he had been reciting Psalms. The Maggid told him that he had summoned the rebbe to collect money for a poor person in need. He continued: ‘Psalms can be sung by angels, but only human beings can help the poor. Charity is greater than reciting Psalms, because angels cannot perform charity.’ (Hassidic tale). This Hassidic tale delivers a great proposition with respect to action vs. faith. It highlights a unique feature of human beings-- our ability to interact with our world, repairing and improving it, known as Tikkun Olam, because we were “placed in the garden to serve it and protect it.” We have the power with our free will, *bitachon*, to utilize the ability to take action, as it is something exclusive to humankind. Most importantly with this behavior, we possess the award of giving.

The Jewish people belong to a covenant of human solidarity, with Chessed and Tzedakah being central institutions in Judaism. On Shavuot, we study the book of Ruth. ב פסקה יד זעירא א"ר explains the root of the book of Ruth:

מגלה זו אין בה לא טומאה ולא טהרה ולא איסור ולא היתר ולמה נכתבה ללמדך כמה שכל טוב לגומלי חסדים.

Megillat Ruth's message is the rewards we get when we do acts of kindness. Rabbi Sacks explains that when love, friendship, and kindness are shared, these ‘spiritual goods’ are unique in that the more we share, the more we have, not less. Giving it forward and doing good is not an attribute of the soul but a way of acting and creating: creating happiness for other people, mitigating their distress, removing even a fraction of the world's pain.



We worship God *spiritually* by turning to action and helping his creations *physically*. Shavuot is an invitation for the Jewish people to infuse our individual characteristics and physically come together in solidarity on Har Sinai, in order to increase our growth in understanding both God and ourselves.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's book *To Heal A Fractured World* clearly expresses how the geography of Israel exemplifies the influence of action and giving beautifully. There are two seas in Israel: the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. The former is full of life, containing fish birds and vegetation. The latter, as the name implies, contains no life at all. Yet they are both fed by the same Jordan river. The difference is that the sea of Galilee receives water at one end and gives out water at the other. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, receives but does not give. The Jordan river ends there. To receive without reciprocating is a kind of death. To live is to give.

When we give, that is the focal point where we converge our lives with meaning and understanding. If we pay it forward every day, we should be *zoche* to gain new discovery and insights daily. There is only one night of exception from 365 days a year, to the statement that giving is dominant than receiving-- Shavuot. On this night, it is all about receiving, receiving the supreme Torah from God. But do not be mistaken-- it is only to declare once more, we will do and we will hear.

*(the statement God needs us will be addressed another time)

By: Rafi Engelhart, Director of Experiential Education

On Shavuot, we read Megillat Rut, which tells the story of a Moavite woman who marries the son of a formerly prestigious couple from Beit Lechem, and throughout all the tragedies befalling the woman from Beit Lechem, Rut clings to her and partners with her as they return to Beit Lechem, and strive to be re-absorbed into the community.

The story begins by Naomi and her husband moving to Moav while avoiding famine in the land of Yehuda. When in Moav, she marries her two sons to local women, however, shortly afterwards, her husband and two sons die, and she is forced to return to Beit Lechem.

Ruth 1:8 (8) And Naomi said unto her two daughters-in-law: 'Go, return each of you to her mother's house; the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me.	א.1.רות א':ח' (ח) וְתֹאמַר נַעֲמִי לְשֵׁתִי כָלִיתִיָּה לִכְנָה שִׁבְנָה אִשָּׁה לְבֵית אִמָּה יַעֲשֶׂה [יַעֲשֶׂה] יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם חֶסֶד כְּאִשָּׁר עָשִׂיתֶם עִם־הַמֵּתִים וְעִמָּדִי:
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Ruth and Orpah, Naomi's daughters-in-law were escorting her back to the Land of Yehuda, what she referred to as chesed. This may prompt us with the question:

What is Chesed? Is it simply just to escort someone else on a journey, or a nice deed? Or perhaps something more?

Vayikra 20:17 If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace; they shall be excommunicated in the sight of their kinsfolk. He has uncovered the nakedness of his sister, he shall bear his guilt.	ויקרא: כ'; י"ז ואיש אשר ייקח את־אחותו בת־אביו או בת־אמו וראה את־ערוּתה והיא־תראה את־ערוּתו חסד הוא ונכרתו לעיני בני עמם ערוּת אחתו גלה עונו ישא
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While this is translated as a disgrace, the Hebrew term in the Torah is chesed.

Why is this considered a "chesed"?

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In order to answer this question it is necessary to alter our understanding of what 'chesed' actually entails. It seems that chesed is more appropriately understood as a trait that is characterized by overflowing and lack of boundaries. One significant outgrowth of this is kindness in that chesed causes a person to want to unabashedly share with others,

breaking his boundaries of selfishness. However, that is just one manifestation of chesed, and like all character traits, chesed has negative, as well as positive, aspects. One negative manifestation is that a person can lose his appreciation of a proper sense of boundaries. Immoral behavior involves ignoring the Torah's assertion that certain relationships break the appropriate boundaries. Consequently, the Torah describes certain forms of immorality as chesed.

Therefore, according to this explanation, Rut's and Orpah's chesed was that they remained with Naomi to escort her, even though it would have been personally more beneficial to remain in Moav. By Rut and Orpah accompanying Naomi, they put aside their personal benefit, and performed an act of kindness towards Naomi.

Ponder points:

Does this mean that one must “pay a price” in order for it to be considered a chesed? What if doing an act of kindness for someone would be the convenient and most beneficial thing for you as well?

The term ‘Chesed’ is mentioned several times in Megillat Rut.

As Dr. Leila L. Bronner words it:

Hesed is indeed one of the key words controlling the text....

Every character acting in this brief story—from Naomi to Ruth to Boaz to the minor characters—behaves in a manner that demonstrates this heroic concept of some form of hesed. The main actors of the story all act in the spirit of hesed; some perform ordinary hesed, and some—especially Ruth—extraordinary hesed. Their exemplary behavior is somewhat reminiscent of that of the patriarchs and matriarchs.

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The rabbinic sources emphasize the super-abundance of hesed, its “more- than-enoughness.” As Maimonides puts it, the concept of hesed:

“Includes two notions, one of them consisting in the exercise of beneficence toward one who deserves it, but in a greater measure than he deserves it. In most cases, the prophetic books use the word hesed in the sense of practicing beneficence toward one who has no right at all to claim this from you” [Guide for the Perplexed].

While this first pasuk that we have just discussed provided for a starting point to discuss what chesed actually is, it is also teaches us a lot about the Book of Rut itself:



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Rut Rabba 2:14 (14) "God will deal kindly with you (Ruth 1:8)". Rabbi Chanina bar Ada says, "'Will deal' (ya'aseh)" is what is written (k'tiv): [continuation of the pasuk] "as you showed with the dead (ibid)" [meaning] when you [Rut and Orpah] were occupied with their shrouds, "and with me (ibid)" [meaning] when they renounced their ketubot. [so that an impoverished Naomi wouldn't have to pay] Rabbi Zeira says, "This scroll does not have content in it concerned with impurity or purity nor what is forbidden and what is permitted. So why was it written? To teach us the greatness of the reward for acts of lovingkindness."	ד.4.רות רבה ב'י"ד יד) יעשה ה' עמכם חסד ר' חנינא בר אדא אמר: יעשה כתיב. כאשר עשיתם עם המתים שנטפלתם בתכריכיהן. ועמדי שויתרו לה כתובותיהן. אמר רבי זעירא מגילה זו אין בה לא טומאה ולא טהרה, ולא איסור ולא היתר. ולמה נכתבה? ללמדך כמה שכר טוב לגומלי חסדים
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According to the Rabbis mentioned in the Midrash Rut Rabba, the only reason Rut was written is to teach us the reward of Chesed.

The more we delve into the question how much significance Chesed has in our religious life (which emanates from the Torah itself), the more we realize how critical it is to our Jewish religion:

We can see here from these three psukim that there is a really strong case for chesed as one of the key principles of Judaism, and quite easily understood as to why Shimon HaTzadik includes that in his 3 pillars of existence.

Chesed, therefore, is not just doing a kind deed, but rather one of the principles without which the world cannot exist. However, aside from it being an essential value in it of itself, it gained even more significance after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash:

Ponder points:

But why then do we read it on Shavuot? Is Chesed a major theme of shavuot?
 The common theme of Shavuot is Chag Matan Torah (receiving the Torah). Is Chesed a part of this or a completely different theme?

Hosea 6:6 (6) For I desire kindness, and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings.	ה.הושע ו'ו' (ו) כִּי חֶסֶד חָפְצָתִי וְלֹא-זָבַח וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲלוֹת:
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Psalms 89:3 (3) For I have said: All existence is built upon hesed; loving commitment is found even in the heavens.	ו.תהילים פ"ט:ג' (ג) כִּי-אֶמְרָתִי עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבְנֶה שָׁמַיִם תִּכַּן אֲמוֹנָתָךְ בָּהֶם:
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Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good, And what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice And to love goodness, And to walk modestly with your God;	מיכה ו:ח הִגִּיד לְךָ אָדָם מִה-טוֹב וּמִה-יָקוּץ דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ כִּי אִם- עֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְהֶצְנַע לֶכֶת עִם-אֱלֹהֶיךָ:
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Avot D'Rabbi Natan 4:7 How do we know the significance of acts of Chesed?... One time it happened that Rabban Yohannan ben Zakkai was leaving Jeruslaem, and Rabbi Joshua was walking after him. He saw the ruins of Solomon's Temple. Rabbi Joshua said: "Oy! What a devastation for us that the place where Israel atoned for our sins has been destroyed." Rabbi Yohannan replied: "My son, do not fear. We have another form of atonement that is just as effective." What is it? Acts of hesed. This is what the verse from Hosea means when it says: "For I desire hesed, and not sacrifice."	ז.ז. על גמ"ח כיצד הרי הוא אומר (הושע ו) כי חסד חפצתי ולא זבח. העולם מתחלה לא נברא אלא בחסד שנאמר (תהלים פט) כי אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה שמים תכין אמונתך בהם. פעם אחת היה רבן יוחנן בן זכאי יוצא מירושלים והיה רבי יהושע הולך אחריו וראה בית המקדש חרב [ארי"י אוי לנו על זה שהוא חרב] מקום שמכפרים בו עונותיהם של ישראל. א"ל בני אל ירע לך יש לנו כפרה אחת שהיא כמותה ואיזה זה גמ"ח שנאמר כי חסד חפצתי ולא זבח
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<u>Ponder points:</u> How much of your Jewish practice do you devote to Chesed? What acts of Chesed are you able to do? Could you do more?	
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חג שמח!

Chaburah: Rut and Shoftim: Individual Leadership

Translations by Sefaria/JPS

By: Daniel Safran, Thanks to Yael Ziegler for many ideas

Introduction

Guiding Questions: These are the opening psukim of Ruth and Shoftim, respectively. What do they tell us about the context of each of the stories? What is the fundamental issue that is presented in each of these psukim? Is it the same? Is it different?

Ruth 1:1	(1) And it was in the days when the judges were judging, and there was a famine in the land and a man from Bethlehem in Judea went to live in the fields of Moav, him and his wife and his two sons.	א וַיְהִי בִימֵי שְׁפֹט הַשְּׁפֹטִים וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וּלְךָ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה לְגוֹר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב הוּא וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וּשְׁנֵי בָנָיו:
Shoftim 1:1	(1) And it was after the death of Joshua and the Children of Israel asked God; The said “who will rise to lead us against the Canaanites and to war with them?”.	א וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּיקוּק לַאֲמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה לָנוּ אֶל הַכְּנָעֲנִי בְּתַחֲלָה לְהִלָּחֶם בּוֹ:

Let's Recap

- Rut is taking place during the time of the judges!
- In both openings we see that there is a lack of leadership. In Shoftim it is explicit and the people request a leader to help them in battle. In Rut it is a little more subtle but it is clear that Israel is in turmoil and that leaders like Elimelech are moving away.

Questions to Ponder

- Why do you think they are separate books of Tanach? Why not include Rut in the book of Shoftim?
- How do you think these quests for leadership might play out? Why?

Part 1: Will You Feed Me?

Guiding Questions: What is happening in each of these episodes? Why is it significant?

Ruth 2:14	(14) At mealtime, Boaz said to her, "Come over here and partake of the meal, and dip your morsel in the vinegar." So she sat down beside the reapers. He handed her roasted grain, and she ate her fill and had some left over.	יֵד) וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ בַעַז לֵעֵת הָאֲכֹל גְּשִׁי הֵלֶם וְאָכַלְתְּ מִן־הַלֶּחֶם וְטָבַלְתְּ פִתְּךָ בַחֲמֶץ וְתִשָּׁב מִצַּד הַקּוֹצִרִים וַיַּצֵּב־לָהּ קָלִי וְתֹאכַל וְתִשָּׁבַע וְתִתֵּר:
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This episode takes place in the aftermath of Judge Gideon's battle with the Midianites. He is pursuing two fleeing Midianite generals with his troops and he comes across a Jewish town. He asks for food for his soldiers and the following is the ensuing conversation.

Shoftim 8:6-9	(6) But the officials of Succoth replied, "Are Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your troops?" (7) "I swear," declared Gideon, "when the LORD delivers Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, I'll thresh your bodies upon desert thorns and briers!" (8) From there he went up to Penuel and made the same request of them; but the people of Penuel gave him the same reply as the people of Succoth. (9) So he also threatened the people of Penuel: "When I come back safe, I'll tear down this tower!"	ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂרֵי סָכוֹת הֲכֵף זָבַח וְצִלְמֻנֶּעַ עִתָּה בְּיָדְךָ כִּי נִתַּן לַצָּבָאָה לֶחֶם: ז) וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן לָכֵן בָּתֵּת יְקִיָּק אֶת זָבַח וְאֶת צִלְמֻנֶּעַ בְּיָדִי וְדִשְׁתִּי אֶת בְּשָׂרְכֶם אֶת קוֹצֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וְאֶת הַבְּרִקָּנִים: ח) וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם פְּנוּאֵל וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלֵיהֶם כְּזֹאת וַיַּעֲנוּ אוֹתוֹ אַנְשֵׁי פְנוּאֵל כְּאִשָּׁר עָנוּ אַנְשֵׁי סָכוֹת: ט) וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם לְאַנְשֵׁי פְנוּאֵל לֵאמֹר בָּשׁוּבִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶתֶּן אֶת הַמִּגְדָּל הַזֶּה:
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Let's Recap

- These two stories present a stark contrast. In Rut, Boaz goes out of his way to offer food to a poor woman, yet in Shoftim the people who live in the town of Succot refuse to feed the army responsible for saving them!

Questions to Ponder

- What is the significance of sharing food to society? What might it be representing? Why do you think Tanach focuses on this aspect? What do you think it is trying to teach us about Rut as opposed to Shoftim?

Ruth 2:17-19	(17) She gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned—it was about an 'ephah of barley— (18) and carried it back with her to the town. When her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned, and when she also took out and gave her what she had left over after eating her fill, (19) her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!” So she told her mother-in-law whom she had worked with, saying, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.”	יז) וּתְלַקֵּט בַּשָּׂדֶה עַד-הָעֶרֶב וּתַחֲבֹט אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לָקְטָה וַיְהִי כְּאַיֶּפֶה שְׁעָרִים: יח) וּתֵשֶׂא וּתְבֹאָה הָעִיר וּתְרֹא חֲמוֹתָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-לָקְטָה וּתּוֹצֵא וּתְתֵן-לָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-הוֹתֵרָה מִשְׂבָּעָה: יט) וּתֹאמֶר לָהּ חֲמוֹתָהּ אֵיפֹה לָקַטְתְּ הַיּוֹם וְאַנָּה עָשִׂיתִי יְהִי מִכִּירְךָ בְּרוּךְ וּתְגַדֵּל לְחֲמוֹתָהּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתָ עִמּוֹ וּתֹאמֶר שֵׁם הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי עִמּוֹ הַיּוֹם בַּעַז:
Shoftim 19:17-19	(17) He happened to see the wayfarer in the town square. “Where,” the old man inquired, “are you going to, and where do you come from?” (18) He replied, “We are traveling from Bethlehem in Judah to the other end of the hill country of Ephraim. That is where I live. I made a journey to Bethlehem of Judah, and now I am on my way to the House of the LORD, and nobody has taken me indoors. (19) We have both bruised straw and feed for our donkeys, and bread and wine for me and your handmaid, and for the attendant with your servants. We lack nothing.”	יז) וַיֵּשֶׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת הָאִישׁ הָאֶרֶם בִּרְחֹב הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר הָאִישׁ הַזֶּקֶן אָנָּה תֵּלֵךְ וּמֵאֵין תְּבֹאָה: יח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו עֲבָרִים אֲנַחְנוּ מִבֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה עַד יִרְכָתִי הָר אֶפְרַיִם מִשָּׁם אֲנִי וְאַלְךָ עַד בֵּית לָחֶם יְהוּדָה וְאֶת בֵּית יִקְוֶק אֲנִי הֵלֵךְ וְאֵין אִישׁ מְאַסֵּף אוֹתִי הַבֵּיתָה: יט) וְגַם תֵּבֶן גַּם מִסְפּוֹא יֵשׁ לְחֲמוּרֵינוּ וְגַם לָחֶם וַיֵּין יֵשׁ לִי וּלְאִמָּתְךָ וְלַנֶּעֶר עִם עַבְדֶּיךָ אֵין מַחְסוֹר כָּל דָּבָר:

Questions to Ponder

- What is the significance of sharing food to society? What might it be representing? Why do you think Tanach focuses on this aspect? What do you think it is trying to teach us about Rut as opposed to Shoftim?

Part 2: Taking Responsibility for Those Around You

Guiding Questions: What is happening in each of these stories? Which one presents the better model for how one should treat those around them?

Ruth 1:16 -17	(16) But Ruth replied, “Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. (17) Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the LORD do to me if anything but death parts me from you.”	טז) וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אֶל-תַּפְגַּעִי-בִי לְעֲזֹבָה לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ כִּי אֶל-אִשְׁרֵי תִלְכִּי אֵלַי וּבְאִשְׁרֵי תִלְכִּי אֵלַי עִמָּךְ עַמִּי וְאֱלֹהֵיךְ אֱלֹהֵי: יז) בְּאִשְׁרֵי תִמּוּתֵי אֲמוֹתַי וְשֵׁם אֶקְבֹּר כֹּה יַעֲשֶׂה יְקוֹק לִי וְכֹה יִסִּיף כִּי הַמּוֹת יִפְרִיד בֵּינִי וּבֵינָהּ:
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This episode serves as the background to the eventual leadership of Yiftach, and shows the relationship that he had with his family.

Shoftim 11:1-3	(6) But the officials of Succoth replied, “Are Zebah and Zalmunna already in your hands, that we should give bread to your troops?” (7) “I swear,” declared Gideon, “when the LORD delivers Zebah and Zalmunna into my hands, I’ll thresh your bodies upon desert thorns and briers!” (8) From there he went up to Penuel and made the same request of them; but the people of Penuel gave him the same reply as the people of Succoth. (9) So he also threatened the people of Penuel: “When I come back safe, I’ll tear down this tower!”	ו) וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁרֵי סְכוֹת הַכֶּף זָבַח וְצִלְמֻנֶּעַ עִתָּהּ בְּיָדְךָ כִּי נָתַן לְצִבְאָךָ לֶחֶם: ז) וַיֹּאמֶר גִּדְעוֹן לָכֵן בָּתַת יְקֹנָק אֶת זָבַח וְאֶת צִלְמֻנֶּעַ בְּיָדִי וְדִשְׁתִּי אֶת בְּשָׂרְכֶם אֶת קוֹצֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וְאֶת הַבְּרִקָּנִים: ח) וַיַּעַל מִשָּׁם פְּנוּאֵל וַיְדַבֵּר אֲלֵיהֶם כְּזֹאת וַיַּעֲנוּ אוֹתוֹ אֲנָשֵׁי פְנוּאֵל כְּאִשְׁרֵי עָנוּ אֲנָשֵׁי סְכוֹת: ט) וַיֹּאמֶר גַּם לְאֲנָשֵׁי פְנוּאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּשׁוּבִי בְּשָׁלוֹם אֶתֶּן אֶת הַמִּגְדָּל הַזֶּה:
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Let’s Recap

- Both of these are instances of complicated family relationships. And in Shoftim we see Yiftach’s family completely reject him. Rut, conversely, despite the potential hardship of staying with her mother-in-law, commits to it.

Questions to Ponder

- What would you have done in Rut’s situation?
- If you had a family member that needed help but had nothing to offer you do you think you would be able to help them?
- Do you think that that is always the right choice? Is it ever OK to act like Yiftach’s family does and reject people that don’t fit properly into your group?

Ruth 4:1-2	(1) Meanwhile, Boaz had gone to the gate and sat down there. And now the redeemer whom Boaz had mentioned passed by. He called, "Come over and sit down here, So-and-so!" And he came over and sat down. (2) Then [Boaz] took ten elders of the town and said, "Be seated here"; and they sat down.	א) וּבָעַז עָלָה הַשַּׁעַר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם וְהָיָה הַגָּאֵל עָבַר אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-בָּעַז וַיֹּאמֶר סוּרָה שָׁבָה- פֹּה פְּלִנִּי אֶלְמִנִי וְיָסַר וַיֵּשֶׁב: ב) וַיִּקַּח עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים מִזְקְנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁבוּ-פֹה וַיֵּשֶׁבוּ:
Shoftim 12:2-3	(2) Jephthah answered them, "I and my people were in a bitter conflict with the Ammonites; and I summoned you, but you did not save me from them. (3) When I saw that you were no saviors, I risked my life and advanced against the Ammonites; and the LORD delivered them into my hands. Why have you come here now to fight against me?"	ב) וַיֹּאמֶר יִפְתָּח אֲלֵיהֶם אִישׁ רִיב הָיִיתִי אֲנִי וְעַמִּי וּבְנֵי עַמּוֹן מָאֵד וְאַזְעַק אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא הוֹשַׁעְתֶּם אוֹתִי מִיָּדָם: ג) וְאַרְאֶה כִּי אֵינְךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ וְאַשְׁימָה נַפְשִׁי בְּכַפִּי וְאָעֲבֹרָה אֶל בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן וַיִּתְּנֵם יְקֹזֵק בְּיָדִי וְלָמָּה עָלִיתֶם אֵלַי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהִלָּחֵם בִּי:
Shoftim 20:3, 10	(3) The Benjaminites heard that the Israelites had come up to Mizpah.—The Israelites said, "Tell us, how did this evil thing happen?" (10) We will take from all the tribes of Israel ten men to the hundred, a hundred to the thousand, and a thousand to the ten thousand to supply provisions for the troops—to prepare for their going to Geba in Benjamin for all the outrage it has committed in Israel."	ג) וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ בְנֵי בִנְיָמִן כִּי עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמִּצְפָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דַּבְּרוּ אֵיכָה נִהְיָתָה הָרָעָה הַזֹּאת: י) וְלִקְחוּנוּ עֶשְׂרֵה אַנְשִׁים לַמָּאָה לְכָל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמֵאָה לְאֶלֶף וְאֶלֶף לְרַבָּבָה לְקַחַת צֹדָה לָעָם לַעֲשׂוֹת לְבוֹאֵם לְגִבַּע בִּנְיָמִן כָּל הַנִּבְלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל:

Part 3: Acting Kindly (or not)

Guiding Questions: What is happening in each of these stories? Are they parallel? (Do you think that just because we put them next to each other, or do you really think they are?) Why?

Ruth 1:16-17	(8) Boaz said to Ruth, "Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. (9) Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn."	(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּעֵז אֶל־רוּת הָלוֹא שָׁמַעַתְּ בְּתִי אֶל־תִּלְכִּי לִלְקֹט בְּשָׂדֶה אַחֵר וְגַם לֹא תַעֲבוּרִי מִזֶּה וְכֹה תִדְבְּקִין עִם־נַעֲרֹתַי: (ט) עֵינֶיךָ בְּשָׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר־יִקְצְרוּן וְהִלַּכְתְּ אַחֲרֵיהֶן הָלוֹא צִוִּיתִי אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים לְבִלְתִּי נִגְעָךָ וְצִמְתְּ וְהִלַּכְתְּ אֶל־הַכֵּלִים וְשָׁתִית מֵאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂאֲבוּן הַנְּעָרִים:
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Shoftim 8:34-35	(34) The Israelites gave no thought to the LORD their God, who saved them from all the enemies around them. (35) Nor did they show kindness to the house of Jerubbaal-Gideon in return for all the good that he had done for Israel.	(לד) וְלֹא זָכְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הַמַּצִּיל אוֹתָם מִיַּד כָּל אִיְבֵיהֶם מִסָּבִיב: (לה) וְלֹא עָשׂוּ חֶסֶד עִם בֵּית יִרְבֵּעֵל גִּדְעוֹן כְּכֹל הַטּוֹבָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל:
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Let's Recap

- This pasuk in Shoftim is the only time that Chessed is ever mentioned in the book of Shoftim, and it is in a negative context (i.e. it refers to a lack of chessed). And, yet, in Rut we have one of many examples of people being kind to one another. Boaz makes sure to take care of this stranger's physical wellbeing!

Questions to Ponder

- What are the limits of who we have to be kind to? Must we be kind to everyone? Even to complete strangers? What about if it costs us time or money?
- While Boaz definitely acts in a great way here, must we really be that good?

Ruth 4:4	(4) I thought I should disclose the matter to you and say: Acquire it in the presence of those seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you are willing to redeem it, redeem! But if you will not redeem, tell me, that I may know. For there is no one to redeem but you, and I come after you." "I am willing to redeem it," he replied.	(ד) וְאֲנִי אִמְרֹתִי אֶגְלֶה אֲזַנְךָ לֵאמֹר קְנֶה נֶגְדַּד הַיֹּשְׁבִים וְנִגְדַּד זִקְנֵי עַמִּי אִם־תִּגְאָל גְּאָל וְאִם־לֹא יִגְאָל הַגִּידָה לִּי וְאָדַע [וְאִדְעָה] כִּי אֵין זֹולָתְךָ לְגָאוֹל וְאֲנֹכִי אַחֲרָיִךְ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֶגְאָל:
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Conclusion

Guiding Questions: What is happening in each of these stories? Are they parallel? (Do you think that just because we put them next to each other, or do you really think they are?) Why?

Ruth 4:22	(22) Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David.	כב) וְעֶבֶד הוֹלִיד אֶת־יִשִּׁי וְיִשִּׁי הוֹלִיד אֶת־דָּוִד:
Shoftim 21:25	(25) In those days, there was no king in Israel, every person did as they pleased.	כה) בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם אֵין מֶלֶךְ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ הַיָּשָׁר בַּעֲיָנָיו יַעֲשֶׂה:

Let's Recap

- Here we have the conclusion of each of the two books. In Shoftim, as the book draws to a close, society is in ruins. There is a complete lack of leadership, people feel free to act as immorally as they choose. And yet Rut, which takes place at the exact same time, concludes with the birth of one of the greatest leaders in Jewish history.

Questions to Ponder

- How do you account for the difference in endings? What is Tanach trying to teach us about our responsibility even if we live during a time when society is in moral ruins?



Extra points for discussion

Avot 3:2 (Rabbi Chanina the deputy High Priest said, "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without the fear of it, man would swallow his fellow alive." Ethics of the Fathers 3:2 – Aish translation)

Me'iri Bava Kamma 113b

but all of those other nations that **have legal systems and worship some form of divinity** of any type even though their faith is very far from ours, they do not fall in to this category (i.e. the category of idol worshipers) rather they are like complete Israelites (i.e. Jews) in this regard, including the obligation to return their lost objects and all other things of this type with no differentiation [between them and Jews]

הא כל שהוא מעממין הגדורים בדרכי הדת ועובדי האלוהות על אי זה צד אף אל פי שאמונתם רחוקה מאד מאמונתנו אינם בכלל זה אלא הרי הם כישראל גמור לדברים אלו אף באבדה ואף בטעות ולכל שאר הדברים בלא שום חילוק



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Shavuot Edition

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה:

The Torah instructs us to count from the day following the Shabbat (defined as Day 2 of Pesach) for 7 full weeks. Why does the Torah instruct us to count? What is the goal? Here are a few answers to think about:

1. (1) Ba'al HaTurim (R' Yaakov ben Asher, mid 13th-mid 14th centuries) -- a very practical reason: Some commentators believe that the reason the Torah demanded this count is that seeing that these are days when the harvesting in the fields is in full swing, and the farmers during that period are hardly ever at home to receive news from the messengers from the Beit Din. These farmers might not find out when Rosh Chodesh had been declared. For that reason they are commanded to count, and for that reason the count takes place at night, because during the day they are too busy. The farmers are busy with the harvest, busier than ever, and since they are out in the fields day and night working on the harvest, they might miss the announcement of Rosh Chodesh, they might not know if Nissan and Iyar were 29 or 30 day months, causing them to miss observing Shavuot on the right date. The easiest way to keep track of Shavuot -- is to count 50 days from the second day of Pesach!
2. Rambam (R' Moshe ben Maimon, 12th century) We count towards Shavuot to build the excitement of such an important event (Matan Torah). This is like waiting for someone you love to come visit -- you count the days and weeks and even hours out of excitement for the event to come! And we start counting from Pesach because Pesach was the beginning of the Matan Torah process (we had to be redeemed from Egypt so that we could arrive at Har Sinai and receive the Torah).
3. Netivot Shalom (Slonimer Rebbe, 20th century) The Slonimer Rebbe takes this idea one step further. He explains that the Omer offering was a barley offering, while the two loaves of bread brought on Shavuot are made of wheat. The difference here is that barley is animal feed, and wheat is the staple of human life! THIS is the task of the weeks of sefirat haOmer -- to raise ourselves from the level of animal to man, or, in other words, to elevate our existence in preparation for Shavuot, the holiday of Matan Torah.



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Shavuot or *z'man matan torateinu* is all about chesed. The Torah we received on Shavuot begins and ends with the chesed of Hashem. The Torah begins with Hashem clothing Adam and Chava: ויעש להם כתנות עור וילבשם - "And Hashem made garments of skins (for Adam and his wife,) and clothed them," and finishes with Hashem engaged in Moshe's burial before the Jewish people enter *Eretz Israel*.

Megillat Ruth, which we read on the chag, is replete with acts of chesed. First, we read about Ruth's attentiveness to her mother-in-law, Naomi, followed by the chesed of Boaz who cares for the needs of both Ruth and Naomi.

The time of the Judges, in which the story Ruth occurs, is characterized by immorality and idol worship. Especially in these circumstances, the Torah chose to emphasize the story of two simple people who are a beacon of morality, kindness and good faith as the antidote to the nation's shortcomings.

As Chazal said: "This scroll has neither impurity nor purity, neither prohibition nor permission. Therefore why was it written? To teach you: כמה שזר טוב לגמולי חסדים - "How great is the reward for those who engage in acts of kindness." (Ruth Rabah).

We wish you meaningful and enjoyable learning with your family!

How is it Possible to Walk in the Ways of God?

Through the following sources we will try to understand how we can walk in the ways of God, and how we can worship God in daily life, even outside the walls of the synagogue and the Beit Midrash.

בספר דברים (י"ג, ה') נאמר: "אַחֲרַי ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ..."

It is written in Devarim (13,5): "You shall walk after the Lord, your God..."

- The *pasuk* does not give a clear definition of the way of God in which we are commanded to walk.
 - What is the way of God?
 - Is there a way of God in which we are commanded to walk that is not mentioned in the Taryag (613) mitzvot?



- How can humans be expected to walk in God's way?

Rambam's philosophical book *Guide for the Perplexed* provides philosophical explanations and proofs of Jewish faith and even gives rational reasons for the mitzvot.

In the last chapter of the book, Rambam quotes the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

כ"ב) כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי־יִתְהַלָּל חֲכָם בְּחָכְמָתוֹ וְאֱלֹהֵי־יִתְהַלָּל הַגִּבּוֹר בְּגִבּוּרָתוֹ אֱלֹהֵי־יִתְהַלָּל עָשִׂיר בְּעֹשָׁרוֹ: (כ"ג) כִּי אִם־בְּזֹאת יִתְהַלָּל הַמִּתְהַלָּל הַשָּׂכֵל וְיָדַע אוֹתִי כִּי אֲנִי ה' עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד מְשֻׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה בָּאָרֶץ כִּי־בָאֵלֶּה חִפְצֵי נְאֻמָּה: (ירמיהו ט', כ"ב - כ"ג)

(22) "Thus said the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; Let not the strong man glory in his strength; Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But only in this should one glory: In his earnest devotion to Me. For I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and equity in the world; For in these I delight —declares the Lord"

Thought-Provoking Questions

- What are the main ways of knowing God and walking in the way of God according to the prophet Jeremiah?
- What comes first according to the *pesukim*? Knowing God or walking in His ways?
- Why do you think Maimonides chose to end such a complex philosophical work with these seemingly simple insights?
- What does the prophet emphasize through the contrast between the two verses?

In his book *To Heal a Fractured World*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks addresses the question of how to know God and how to follow His ways.

The truths of religion are exalted, but its duties are close at hand.

We know God less by contemplation (understanding) than by emulation (walking in the ways of God). The choice is not between 'faith' and 'deeds,' for it is by our deeds that we express our faith and

make it real in the life of others and the world.

Jewish ethics is refreshingly down to earth. If someone is in need, give. If someone is lonely, invite them home. If someone you know has recently been bereaved, visit them and give them comfort. If you know of someone who lost their job, do all you can to help them find another. The sages called this 'imitating God.' They went further: Giving hospitality to a stranger, they said, is even greater than receiving the divine presence (שבת קכ"ז ע"א). That is



Thought-Provoking Questions

- What is the best way to know God according to Rabbi Sacks?
- According to this interpretation, which comes first: knowing God or walking in His ways?
- Where do you think it's better to start? From נעשה (doing) or from נשמע (knowing)?

To summarize, look at the words of the Gemara in Masechet Sotah (14a), which give examples of following in God's ways:

סוטה י"ד עמוד א

ואמר רבי חמא ברבי חנינא מאי דכתיב (דברים יג, ה) אחרי ה' אלקיכם תלכו וכי אפשר לו לאדם להלך אחר שכינה והלא כבר נאמר (דברים ד, כד) כי ה' אלקיך אש אוכלה הוא. אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב (בראשית ג, כא) ויעש ה' אלקים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם אף אתה הלבש ערומים הקב"ה ביקר חולים דכתיב (בראשית יח, א) וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא אף אתה בקר חולים הקב"ה נחם אבליים דכתיב (בראשית כה, יא) ויהי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלקים את יצחק בנו אף אתה נחם אבליים הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב (דברים לד, ו) ויקבר אותו בגיא אף אתה קבור מתים

Sotah 14a

And Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: What is the meaning of that which is written: "After the Lord your God shall you walk..." But is it actually possible for a person to follow the Divine Presence? But hasn't it already been stated: "For the Lord your God is a devouring fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24), He explains: Rather, the meaning is that one should follow the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Just as He clothes the naked, as it is written: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21), so too, should you clothe the naked. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, visits the sick, as it is written with regard to God's appearing to Abraham following his circumcision: "And the Lord appeared unto him by the terebinths of Mamre" (Genesis 18:1), so too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, consoles mourners, as it is written: "And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son" (Genesis 25:11), so too, should you console mourners. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, buried the dead, as it is written: "And he was buried in the valley" (Deuteronomy 34:6), so too, should you bury the dead.

Thought-Provoking Questions

- According to the Gemara, where in our daily lives can we do chesed and follow God's way?
- We are not able to fulfill mitzvot that appear in the Gemara such as visiting the sick and mourning on a daily basis. How can small kindnesses be incorporated into everyday life such as in the workplace or at school?
- At what moments do you personally feel closer to God?
When you help the poor? When you study Torah? Praying? When you host guests?



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