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WEEKLY MAGAZINE

Daily Thought

The Personality Thing

You need to be honest with yourself: Are these feelings of guilt and inadequacy based in reality, or just a personality issue? Does G-d really have it in for you, or is this just the pessimism of an anxious beast inside?

If it is the latter, take a break from your self-derision and nurture confidence in the Director of this universe. He carries you through every moment, but only as close as your trust in Him will allow. <p>As for the personality issue -- channel that in positive ways. People of such nature are generally apt to serious study, deep and creative thought and dogged persistence.

COMMENT: THE OBJECT *Yanki Tauber*

Man turned away from G-d, searched for G-d, discovered truth, attained holiness. But the physical world had no part in this; it was just scenery, a backdrop painted with patches of withheld light, against which G-d/man saga played

STORY: THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S PREVIOUS LIFE *From the Chassidic Masters*

Late one night, there was a knock on his door. On his threshold stood an old man with a long white beard and a countenance as radiant as the heavens

VOICES: WHAT JEWS DO *Hannah B. Geshelin*

She looked me up and down as though I were a bug on a pin. Then she said the words that still reverberate through my mind...

IDEA OF THE WEEK: THE TORAH: AN ANTHOLOGY *Compiled by Yanki Tauber*

40 essays, stories, meditations and readings, each offering a glimpse into something the Torah says about itself and its place in our lives

PARSHAH: BAMIDBAR *Numbers 1:1 - 4:20*

Numbers in the Book of Numbers: 4 camps, 12 tribes, 273 surplus first-born, 22,300 Levites, 603,550 Israelites -- each of whom count. Plus how to take apart G-d's home, transport it across the desert, and put it back together again

One who learns from his fellow a single chapter, or a single law, or a single verse, or a single word, or even a single letter, he must treat him with respect

--Ethics of the Fathers 6:3

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THE OBJECT

By Yanki Tauber

COMMENT

First, there was only G-d.

Then, at a finite time-point within His timeless infinity, G-d created man.

For thousands of years, there was only G-d and man. Man lived in "a world," but that was just scenery, a backdrop painted with "matter" -- patches of withheld light -- against which the G-d/man saga played. Man was evil and righteous; he turned away from G-d, searched for G-d, found Him, discovered goodness and truth, attained spirituality and holiness. The physical world played no significant part in this saga -- it was just there to provide the context.

Then, one bright and stormy Shabbat morning, the world became real.

On the 6th of Sivan of the year the year 2,448 from creation, G-d descended upon Mount Sinai and instituted the "mitzvah," the divine commandment. An act that unites three elements -- commanded by G-d, enacted by man, utilizing a physical object.

After Sinai, the physical world is a partner in the G-d/man saga: the leather that becomes a pair of *tefillin*, the wool that becomes the strings for *tzitzit*, the ink that becomes the letters in a Torah scroll, the wheat that becomes the matzah eaten on Passover eve, the copper that becomes the coin given to charity. These objects become "holy," which means that they become connected to G-d, which means that they become something real.

The Tzaddik's Sin

In the third chapter of *Ethics of the Fathers*, the mishnaic sage Akavia ben Mahalalel teaches:

Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from

where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting. From where you came -- from a putrid drop; where you are going -- to a place of dust, maggots and worms; and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting -- before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

The Mishnah is known for its concise wording -- every extra word or phrase is interpreted by the Talmud to unfold many layers of meaning and instruction. On the face of it, the above-quoted Mishnah is just using lengthy, repetitious wording to convey a single idea. Upon closer examination, however, the Mishnah includes three sentences, which can be interpreted as three separate messages:

- 1) "Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression."
- 2) "Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting."
- 3) "From where you came -- from a putrid drop; where you are going -- to a place of dust, maggots and worms; and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting -- before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Akavia ben Mahalalel is in fact speaking to three different types of people: the

materialist, the spiritualist, and the *tzaddik*.

The third and last part of our Mishnah is addressed to the materialist, who sees nothing higher -- indeed nothing other -- than the body and its needs, wants and desires. It's all but useless to speak to the materialist about his soul. So we talk to him about his body -- about the fact that it's nothing more than a bag of flesh with a slimy beginning and a maggoty end, and that there's a higher authority before which it will one day be taken to

task for all it did during its earthly life.

The second and middle part of the Mishnah is addressed to the spiritual person. To him, we need not speak of the lowliness of the body; instead, we extol the virtues of the soul: "Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgment and accounting." We speak of the soul's life origins as "a very part of

G-d above," of the "World to Come" to which it is propelled by the good deeds of a virtuous life, and of the day it will merit to give "a judgment and accounting" before the Source from which it came and to which it shall return.

And then there is the *tzaddik*, the perfectly righteous individual. To the *tzaddik* we don't speak of the lowliness of the body, for the *tzaddik's* body is refined and rarified, as holy, perhaps even holier, than his soul. Nor do we speak to the *tzaddik* about his soul -- the *tzaddik* doesn't care about his soul. He's not interested in spiritual development. He's not interested in the World to Come. All he desires is to lose himself within the all-embracing reality of G-d,



(c) Sarah Kranz

like a tiny candle-flame absorbed and nullified within a great fire.

Still, the *tzaddik*, too, can "come to the hands of transgression." The *tzaddik*, too, can sin -- not in forgetting about G-d, but in forgetting about the world. The *tzaddik* may backslide to the pre-Sinai reality, when there were only two things -- only G-d and man, and their quest for each other.

So the *tzaddik* is admonished: "Reflect upon three things." Remember that Shabbat morning at Sinai when G-d descended upon the mountain and decreed that the world shall henceforth be made real. Remember the day on which G-d decreed that your purpose in life is not to lose yourself within Him, but to bring Him into the world and uplift the world to Him.

By Yanki Tauber: based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

About the artist: Sarah Kranz has been illustrating magazines, webzines and books (including five children's books) since graduating from the Istituto Europeo di Design, Milan, in 1996. Her clients have included The New York Times and Money Marketing Magazine of London

THE BAAL SHEM TOV'S PREVIOUS LIFE

From the Chassidic Masters

STORY

"Many years ago," Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov told his disciples, "in the holy city of Safed, there lived a simple but G-d-fearing Jew. Though not blessed with a great mind or with any exceptional talents, he served G-d with a whole heart and a humble spirit.



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"Late one night, there was a knock on his door. On his threshold stood an old man with a long white beard and a countenance as radiant as the heavens. 'I am Elijah the Prophet,' said the visitor. 'I have come to open your mind and heart and teach you the deepest secrets of creation.'

"On the day of your Bar Mitzvah,' continued Elijah, 'you did a great and wondrous deed, a deed which reverberated through all the universes.

The angels and souls that dwell on high all wondered: what has this man done that has flooded the heavens with this magnificent light, such as has not been seen for many generations? But your deed was too radiant for us to behold.

"Tell me what it was that you did,' said Elijah, 'and I will reveal to you things that only the greatest souls are privy to.'"

"What I did,' replied the Safedian, 'I did for G-d alone. It is not for the knowledge of any creature, man or angel.'

"Elijah pleaded and cajoled, promising even greater spiritual gifts. But the man was steadfast in his refusal, and the prophet-angel departed empty-handed.

"In my previous life," concluded the Baal Shem Tov, "I was that man."

Editor's note: This Shavuot marks the 244th yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), founder of Chassidism. For more on the Baal Shem Tov [click here](#).

As rendered by Yanki Tauber

WHAT JEWS DO

By Hannah B. Geshelin

VOICES

The route of every Jew who becomes observant is unique. One of the turning points on my journey occurred at a large Iowa university with a minuscule

Jewish population, where during my freshman year of 1963-64, I was the only undergraduate female who identified herself as Jewish.

Among my roommates during my first term was a junior taking a child

development class on cultures. She decided to join the committee researching the Jewish culture because she had a ready-made resource to interview - me. As a fourth-generation American descendent of Reform Jews who emigrated from Germany before the U.S. Civil War, I didn't know much

about Judaism, but I did my best to answer her questions. The relief that I felt when she finished questioning me was short-lived, however. Every term after that, the child development professor gave my name to the committee studying Judaism. To meet this challenge, I would have to learn something about my heritage.

The college library had two shelves of books on Judaism. I started at one end of the upper shelf and began reading. They gave me basic information about Jewish history, tradition and beliefs. With the help of the books I managed to get through the questions during the winter term. Then, in the spring of my freshman year, I met Janet.

Janet was a Southern Baptist from a small town in Iowa. Like many students at college, she came from a family for whom church was a major focus. Her beliefs guided her behavior in all aspects of her life.

I was the first Jewish person she'd ever met. She told me that she had chosen to write about the Jewish culture because she wanted to learn about the origins of her faith. Could she come with me to synagogue?

The town had a small Reform congregation that met Friday evenings in the parlor of one of the churches. I agreed to take her, and as we strolled through the quiet streets she asked me about my religious life. "Where do you eat?" she asked suddenly.

Mystified, I gave the name of the dorm dining hall.

"How do you manage?" she asked.

"What do you mean? I just eat."

With an edge to her voice she said, "How can you 'just eat?' We get ham, pork or shellfish three or four nights a week, and most of the rest of the time there's meat and milk at the same meal."

"Oh," I said confidently, "You mean kosher. I'm Reform, and we don't keep kosher."

"You don't keep kosher? But from everything I've read, kosher is one of the cornerstones of Judaism. Why don't you keep it?"

I shrugged. "I don't know, we just don't."

Janet stopped and turned to face me, hands on her hips. I can still picture her standing there in the light of a street lamp, dressed the way she would for church in a navy suit, a small white hat and white gloves. She looked me up and down as though I were a bug on a pin. Then she said words that still reverberate through my mind: "If my church told me to do something, I'd do it."

In the long silence that followed, I rolled the words over and over through my mind. And I wondered, why did the Reform movement say keeping kosher wasn't important? I decided to find out.

The next day I found, on one of those shelves of Jewish books, a history of the Reform movement. Breaking bread with others, said the book, is a universal gesture of friendship and goodwill. Keeping kosher prevents Jews and non-Jews from breaking bread together; thus it prevents casual communion between "us" and "them." When Jews stop keeping kosher and eat non-kosher with their neighbors, anti-Semitism will end and Jews will be fully accepted into mainstream society.

I thought of the Jewish history I'd been reading, of Moses Mendelsohn and the Emancipation; of my mother's family, which hadn't kept kosher in at least four generations; and I thought of the

Holocaust, which began in Mendelsohn's and my great-great-grandparent's home-land, Germany. I turned to the title page of the book and saw that originally the book had been published in German in Berlin in 1928.

Maybe in 1928 German Jews could say that eating with non-Jews would end anti-Semitism. But they were about to be proved disastrously wrong. Could I continue to eat in a non-Jewish fashion, when the reasoning for permitting Jews to eat non-kosher was based on a complete fallacy?

"If my church told me to do something, I'd do it." Janet's words took one end of my Yiddishe

neshama (Jewish soul) and the book's glaring fallacy took the other end, and they shook me until I had to sit down, right there on the floor beside the library stacks. When I stopped shaking, I knew that until I could find a good reason, a true reason, to not keep kosher, I had no choice. I was a Jew, and the Jews kept kosher. It was that simple.



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My complete transformation from a secular to a Torah observant Jew took many years and many more lessons in faith. But my first big step began that Shabbat night, when a Christian girl challenged me to stand up and act like a Jew.

Originally published on the [Ok Kosher website](#)

THE TORAH: AN ANTHOLOGY

They call us the "People of the Book" because of our legendary devotion to it. When a child is born, we wish its parents, "May you merit to raise him/her to Torah," and the first words that a Jewish parent teaches his or her child are: *Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehilat Yaakov* ("The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob"). Jewish law states that we are obligated to pursue the study of Torah every spare moment of our day and night.

For thousands of years, the study of Torah has been our life's occupation and our highest mark of achievement.

The Torah is our mandate as a people, the marriage contract of our special relationship with G-d as His chosen "kingdom of priests and holy nation." But it is not only that: to the Jew, the Torah is nothing less than the basis and objective of all existence. In the words of the Midrash: "G-d made a condition with the work of creation: if the people of Israel accept the Torah, you will exist; if not, you will revert to chaos and nothingness." "G-d looked into the Torah," says the Zohar, "and created the world. The Jew looks into the Torah, and sustains the world."

For 40 days and nights Moses sat on the summit of Mount Sinai, as G-d taught him the Torah; for the next 40 years, Moses taught it to the people of Israel. Thus our sages have said: "a person does not attain the mind of his master until after 40 years [of study]." We don't have 40 years to explain Torah; we only have an anthology of 40 essays, stories, meditations and readings, each offering a glimpse into something the Torah says about itself and its place in our lives:

Essays:
The Spark of all Truths
by Mattis Kantor

Reality and its Shadow
by Yaakov Brawer

Law, Truth and Peace
Three essays on three fundamental

roles of Torah, adapted from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks by Yanki Tauber

The Third Knot
adapted from the Rebbe's talks by Yanki Tauber

Reasoning the Stone
adapted from the Rebbe's talks by Yanki Tauber

The Mathematics of Marriage
adapted from the Rebbe's talks by Yanki Tauber

Yes and No
adapted from the Rebbe's talks by Yanki Tauber

How Do We Know that We Heard G-d at Sinai?
by Tzvi Freeman

The Torah-Science Debates
by Professor Velv Greene

Insights:
Is G-d Religious?
by Simon Jacobson

Where the Roads Meet
by Andre Haijdu

The Lady, the Tiger and Freedom of Choice
by Yanki Tauber

In the Desert
by Yanki Tauber

The Breakthrough
by Yanki Tauber

Say It in Your Own Words
by Yanki Tauber

Our Goodly Tents
by Yanki Tauber

Oxen and Cows
by Yanki Tauber

The Ten Commandments series
by Yanki Tauber

Meditations:
Condensed from the Wisdom of the Lubavitcher Rebbe by Tzvi Freeman

Inner Engravings

Stories:
A Cheder in Siberia
as told to Eliyahu Touger by Reb Mendel Futerfass

Original Ideas
by Yanki Tauber

Zaidy Pinchas' Torah
by Chana Weissberg

Echos
by Jay Litvin

The Problem
by Tuvia Bolton

The Survivor
by Shmuel Marcus

The Master of Song
by Yanki Tauber

The Cat
by Yanki Tauber

The Sinai Files
by Tzvi Freeman

Readings:
What is the Torah?
From *To Be a Jew* by Rabbi Hayim HaLevi Donin

THE DAY THAT NOTHING HAPPENED

By Yanki Tauber

Man, as the most sophisticated of that which was created, must be central in [On the 1st of Sivan,] Moses did not say anything at all to the Jewish people, since they were weary from the journey

Talmud, Shabbat 86b

On the first day of the month of Sivan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), six weeks after Exodus, the people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai. Six days later, the entire nation stood at the foot of the mountain as G-d revealed Himself to them and gave them the Torah. Ever since, we celebrate the festival of Shavuot (Sivan 6-7) as "The Time of the Giving of Our Torah."

The 19th chapter of the book of Exodus describes this final week of preparation for the revelation at Sinai. Analyzing the Torah's account, the Talmud (Shabbat 86b-8a) pieces together the following chronicle of events for these six days, the 1st through the 6th of Sivan:

Sivan 1: Moses did not say anything at all to the Jewish people, since they were weary from the journey.

Sivan 2: At dawn, Moses ascends Mount Sinai. He brings back the following message from G-d: "You have seen what I have done to Egypt, and how I bore you upon the wings of eagles and brought you to Myself. Now, if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6). With these words, G-d expressed His desire that we become His chosen people. The day is accordingly marked in our calendar as *Yom HaMeyuchas*, "The Day of Designation."

Sivan 3: G-d commands Moses to fence in Mount Sinai, marking the boundaries where everyone is to stand when G-d

reveals Himself upon the mountain and gives them the Torah. The *kohanim* (priests) may approach closer than the rest of the people, Aaron may approach closer than the *kohanim*, while Moses alone will be summoned by G-d to ascend (ibid., verse 12)

Sivan 4: The Jewish people are instructed to purify and sanctify themselves in preparation for the giving of the Torah by suspending marital relations and immersing in a *mikveh* (v. 14).

Sivan 5: Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain and seals the covenant between G-d and Israel. The entire people proclaim, "All that G-d commands, we shall do and we shall hear (comprehend)." (Exodus 24:4-8)

Sivan 6: The Giving of the Torah. "When morning came, there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the mountain... The voice of the shofar sounded, growing stronger and stronger... G-d descended upon Mount Sinai ... and spoke the following words, saying: "I am the L-rd your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt..." (Exodus 19:16-20:2).

Mysterious Blank

The revelation at Sinai was the culmination and fulfillment of the Exodus. Many months earlier, also at Sinai, when G-d first appeared to Moses in a burning bush and commanded him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, He had said: "This is your sign that I have sent you: when you take this nation out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain" (ibid., 3:12)

From the moment that Moses brought them word of the promised redemption, the people of Israel eagerly awaited the revelation at Sinai. For Moses had promised them more than an escape from Egypt and their hard labor in mortar and bricks; he had promised them the ultimate freedom -- freedom from their own mortality, freedom from the finiteness and mundanity of a material-bound existence. He had

promised them a vision of the divine reality and the empowerment to incorporate its boundlessness and eternity into their lives.

So from the day they left Egypt, the people of Israel literally counted the days to the morning on which they would gather to "serve G-d on this mountain" and be granted the liberating truth of truths. To this very day, we reenact their 49-day count with our own "Counting of the Omer".

In light of this, the events -- or rather, the non-event -- of the 1st of Sivan is most difficult to understand. According to the Talmud's calculations, this was the day on which "Moses did not say anything at all to the Jewish people, since they were weary from the journey." But human nature is such that the closer one comes to an anticipated point in time, the stronger one's yearning and desire becomes. After six weeks of anticipation and preparation for the great day, would everything come to a halt merely because the Jewish people were weary from the journey? Is it possible that on the very day on which they arrived at Mount Sinai they did not do *anything at all* in preparation for their receiving of the Torah?

The Silencing of the Jewish Mind

But let us take a closer look at what the Torah tells us about the doings of the Jewish people on the 1st of Sivan:

In the third month of the Children of Israel's exodus from the land of Egypt, on that day, they arrived in the Sinai desert. They journeyed from Rephidim and came to the Sinai desert, and camped in the desert; and Israel camped there, before the mountain. (Exodus 19:1-2)

In his commentary on these verses, Rashi notes the grammatically unconventional use of the singular *vayichan* ("and he camped" rather than *vayachanu*, "and they camped") in speaking of the entire Jewish people.

Rashi explains that the Torah wishes to inform us that "They camped as a single man, with a single heart, unlike all other encampments, which were accompanied by dissent and dispute." Indeed, we find many instances of quarreling and even rebellion in the course of the Israel's journeys in the desert. Still, was it really as bad as that? Were *all* other encampments (there were 42 of them altogether, as enumerated in the 33rd chapter of Numbers) ridden with strife, and Sinai the only peaceful exception?

But the dissent and dispute which characterized the Jewish camp need not be understood only in the negative sense. Our sages tell us that G-d created man in such a way that "Just as no two are alike in their features, no two are alike in mind and character" (Talmud, Berachot 58a). Each individual's distinct mindset and temperament leads him to apply the same truths in his own unique way. So differences of opinion do not necessarily stem from selfishness and animosity; they can also arise out of a sincere search for the truth and the desire to fully realize one's potential as an individual. In fact, when not corrupted by self-interest, dissent and differences of opinion can prove positive and constructive.

Nevertheless, what was acceptable, even desirable, in the other 41 encampments, was intolerable at the encampment at Sinai. For an important part of our preparations to receive the Torah was--and remains--the eradication of all differences in outlook and understanding.

The reason for this is best understood by examining the difference between pre and post-Sinaitic study of Torah. Also before Sinai, the Torah was studied and observed by our ancestors: Shem, the son of Noah, headed an academy for Torah study together with his great-grandson, Eber, at which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob studied; the three Patriarchs also established yeshivot of their own. And all through the Egyptian exile, the tribe of Levi (who were not enslaved) occupied themselves with the study of Torah (see Talmud, Yoma 28b; Rashi on Genesis 26:5 and 46:28; Chizkuni on Exodus 5:4).

This means that at Sinai, contrary to what is perhaps a common perception, we were not granted a code of law or body of wisdom which had not been previously known. What did happen was that we were the recipients of a revelation that completely transformed the nature of our relationship with the Torah.

Prior to Sinai, the human intellect was the tool with which to access the Torah. The divine wisdom had been put into words and ideas comprehensible to the human mind, and the human mind labored to grasp and digest them -- to the extent that it was capable. Since every mind is unique in both its strengths and its weaknesses, the scope and depth of each student's understanding differed. Obviously, *no* mind was capable of apprehending the entirety of Torah, as the infinite wisdom of G-d could never be contained by the finite human mind.

But at Sinai, G-d gave us His Torah. All of it. He chose to impart the whole of His wisdom to us, regardless of the limits of our intellect. At this moment, Moses and the most simple Jew were equal: equal in their inability to grasp the essence of G-d's wisdom with their own intellect, and equal in that G-d had granted them this understanding as a gift -- that He inserted the infinity of His wisdom into the simplest of Torah's verses in the mouth of the simplest of Jews.¹

To prepare for the divine *giving* of the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people had to abnegate their individual intellects and faculties. They had to make the transition from active apprehension of Torah to passive reception of a gift from Above.

So the 1st of Sivan, the day on which the Jews arrived at Sinai, was far from an uneventful day. On the contrary, it was a day of intense preparation, involving an unprecedented activity: to establish a camp that was "as a single man with a single heart." To not only reach a consensus on a unified course of action ("as a single man"), but that each should also surrender his or her individual approach, outlook and intuition to a singular egoless receptiveness ("a single heart") that is the most important prerequisite to the divine granting of the Torah.²

This was a most wearying journey. It was not the physical journey from Rephidim which so drained them,³ but the psychological and spiritual transition from a six-week active preparation to utter passivity. On this day, Moses did not say anything at all to them, and his non-verbalization of the order of the day was its strongest articulation: to transcend one's individual comprehension of Torah and make oneself an empty vessel to receive what G-d would bestow.

Return to Self

Following the great non-event of Sivan 1st came five days of active preparation for Sinai.

Initially, the individuality of the human mind is an impediment to receiving the infinite essence of the divine wisdom. But after we open ourselves to receive G-d's Torah, we must reactivate our individual faculties in order to absorb and assimilate what we have received. Once again, differences will emerge. Moses, Aaron, the priests and the common folk -- each will have their boundaries clearly marked. For each must now take the very essence of Torah, which they all received equally, and apply it to his own life with the tools of his/her own cognition and experience.

Footnotes:

1. Thus the law states that one who reads a single verse of the Written Torah, even if he merely mouths the words without understanding their meaning, recites the obligatory blessing on Torah study -- "Blessed are G-d... Who gives the Torah" (Hilchot Talmud Torah (by Rabbi Schenur Zalman of Liadi) 2:12-13, and sources cited there).

2. Hence the supreme importance of reciting a blessing over the Torah before approaching to study it (see previous note), thereby acknowledging that it is, first and foremost, something that is *given* to us from G-d. Thus our sages have said, "The Land of Israel was destroyed only because they did not first make a blessing on the Torah" (Talmud, Nedarim 81a)

3. In fact, the day that Jewish people arrived at Sinai was either a Sunday or a Monday (see Talmud, Shabbat 86b), shortly after the 24-hour rest of Shabbat.

THE SPARK OF ALL TRUTHS

By Mattis Kantor

SEASONS OF
THE SOUL

He created the world. There must be a purpose.

Man, as the most sophisticated of that which was created, must be central in this purpose.

It makes sense to say, then, that somehow, somewhere, this purpose is, was, can be, communicated to man.

If archaeologists today were to find a brilliant description, carved on a rock, of a grand battle fought between two mighty kings and their great armies, three and a half thousand years ago, we would assume that such an event occurred.

The description could have been the fanciful dream of an opium smoker -- but how are we to know?

If, however, historians had other clues, or related information, that would indicate that this battle did take place, the rock-carved description would take on an air of validity.

If there were a **similar** description, found many hundreds of miles away, it would become a historical fact.

Imagine, though, that there were hundreds--no, thousands--of families who owned rock-carved descriptions, in all parts of the world, each one describing the battle in exactly the same way.

And every family telling how their parents told them in the name of their parents, etc., that this event happened to their ancestors.

This would certainly be the most valid historical fact ascribed to that time.

Such a document actually exists.

The Torah.

It has been all over the world, amongst Jews who have not communicated for centuries.

Each is exactly the same as the other, hundreds, thousands of miles away.

It even describes the Jewish people at that time as being disgruntled and dissenting.

Two million dissenting people (they counted 600,000 of draftable age) saw the revelation on Mount Sinai. It is described in the Torah. Yet there is no dissenting version.

Only the one Torah.

"And [Moses] was there (on Mount Sinai) with G-d forty days and forty nights; bread he did not eat and water he did not drink" (Exodus 34:28).

Very interesting. Have you ever tried it?

Imagine you are sitting with a few other people, attempting to solve a problem. Each one thinking on his own.

Suddenly you have the answer.

You jump up and exclaim, "I have it! I have it!"

"What is it? What is it?" everyone asks.

"Sh! Sh!..."

You brush them off. You push them out of your mind. You don't want to talk.

You just close your eyes and signal with your hands for them not to disturb you.

But you had the answer, didn't you? How can they disturb you by asking you to tell it to them?

Yet you can't. You know that you have the answer, but you can't (yet) explain it to anyone. You have to think about it. You don't even know yourself how it answers the question.

All you know is that you have the answer, and if those people don't stop bothering you, you'll forget it.

Forget it? Why? How?

Because the answer is still too intense to be completely understood by the conscious mind.

It is like a bolt of lightning-a bright and intense flash that can disappear if not given the proper attention.

(Small wonder, then, that an idea is symbolized by a flashing light bulb.)

Yet in this small point, ray, or flash of intellectual concept lies the answer to the problem at hand -- that is certain. You can feel it.

How it will answer the problem is not yet consciously known, but what is certain, at this stage (in our *intellectual faculty to conceive*) is that this is the answer.

Given the undisturbed time to contemplate this bright and flashing idea, we can relate it to the problem at hand; the details begin to emerge, but the brightness, and the sheer thrill and delight, begins to dissipate.

We are now using our intellectual *faculty to comprehend*, and it is a different intellectual experience.

First we *conceive* of the new idea, and then we *understand* what it was that we conceived -- how that bright conceptual flash relates to this problem. We can also relate it, with our *comprehension*, to another problem, and another and another, even though it may take opposing positions in different problems.

Many questions can be answered, many problems solved, and many theories may evolve from one such conceptual flash.

It is only that the details of all this intellectual content were completely outshone by the brilliance of the initial concept. But they were there -- in a pure and intangible form. Everything, including the specific word choices we later use to articulate these details, is included within, and dictated by, the initial flash of illumination.

All knowledge, in all its details, be it mathematics, philosophy, physics, psychology, geology, or anatomy, comes from one perfectly pure and abstract, inconceivably intense and bright, inhumanly all-encompassing and self-complete spark of conceptual light.

No human can reach this *spark of all-truths* on his or her own -- that is, it cannot be grasped by anyone's faculty of intellectual conception.

If one idea, in one subject, related to a specific area in that field, can be, for us humans, an intense and thrilling experience to the extent that we may forget our surroundings, how is it possible for a human to accept in his size-six, -seven, or -eight head a single concept that holds in it all existing (past, present, and future) knowledge?

It is humanly impossible.

But this was given to Moses as he stood at the top of Mount Sinai.

... Forty days and forty nights, bread he did not eat and water he did not drink.

The absent-minded professor is well known to all of us. He misses his train stop, forgets where he parked his car, loses his coat, forgets to eat lunch, etc., etc. All because he is often so deeply involved in thinking.

He was so immersed in the solution of a mathematical problem when he was taking his coat off that he forgot where he took it off and where he put it. A new idea occurred to him half an hour before he was due to go for lunch, and he didn't even realize that two hours had passed while he was theorizing.

Yes, the absent-minded professor is a very familiar person to all of us because we see him in ourselves so very often.

It is human nature that when we are struck by the lightning of intellectual conception, we can become so absorbed as to forget our surroundings.

The brilliance of conceptual inspiration can also give us a new surge of physical energy, even at a time when we are most tired and hungry. Not to mention that *time*, in such instances, often passes completely unnoticed.

Imagine, then, that a man was given to conceive the most pure and sophisticated concept--that one all-encompassing concept -- the *spark of truths*.

Surely this would be the experience of experiences. It would be an abnegation of the physical, for the physical cannot receive it -- but if it were **given** to him, it would be the supreme inspiration.

Time would not exist for the duration of that experience. Food and physical matters would never enter his mind. For

this experience, with its inspirational surge, would provide more than enough energy for life.

It could take days of a continuous trance for a human to accept this pure flash of knowledge --but after it was over, this human could recall it as a *split-second-experience* that had not drained him of either time or energy.

And so it was with Moses.

Had we been there to ask him why he was on the mountain so long, he might well have replied, "Long? I was only up there for a couple of seconds!"

For forty days... he did not eat and... he did not drink.

This *spark of all-truths* is the essence of Torah.

This Moses received on Mount Sinai. He then proceeded, by command of G-d, to write the Torah--to convey what he had grasped with his *faculty of concept* via the particular words of the Five Books of Moses.



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If we were to have watched Moses as he wrote the Torah, we might have assumed that because the words were flowing naturally, they were his own (personal) selection. In truth, however, he was speaking and writing (as we all do) with words chosen and arranged as his *faculty of concept* dictated; but his conceptual faculty was totally dominated by the essence of Torah, so that the selections, although from **Moses'** conceptual faculty, and thus having passed internally through him, were still dictated by G-d's *concept*, the *essence of Torah*--the *spark of all truths*.

If I were stranded on an island with barely enough room to move about, with a breadfruit tree and a spring of fresh water, and nothing else except a spy-thriller to read, I would learn, after a very short time, that I must spend my time doing something lest I go mad.

I read the mystery-thriller once. I read it again.

It isn't so interesting to read a mystery that you have seen solved, but I read it a third time for lack of anything else to do.

On the fifth reading it occurs to me that the author could have ended it in a more cheerful way. I later discover that his character portrayals are all somewhat cynical. I reread and reread the book, and I become more and more familiar with the personality of the author through his writing. By his descriptions, it sounds as if he is short and would have liked to have blue eyes...

When I am rescued by a ship twenty-five years after I was stranded, I know the author as one knows a personal friend -- his attitudes, his personality, and even his physical appearance...

After all, this is all that I did, day in and day out, for twenty-five years. I used the details and descriptions of the book, even the word selections, to abstract (assuming I had the proper skill) and to understand the author.

In studying the Torah, we take the words dictated by G-d through (to) Moses, and study their literal meaning, **then** reread and reread, abstract and understand, until we can reach and transcend to (or as close as humanly possible to) the *pure essence of Torah*. Ultimately we can, through the Torah, understand G-d, for He is the real author.

This, of course, requires a great amount of skill and know-how -- and more than a lifetime.

As all possible knowledge is embodied in this *spark of all-truths*, it must be possible--theoretically (if not practically within the human lifetime)--to transcend from the words of the Torah to the essence of all knowledge, and from that vantage point to know and understand **everything**.

So it is that although it is impossible now to practice some of the laws spelled out in the **Five Books of Moses**--those regarding a Jewish king, the sacrifices, etc.--the very words are *holy* for the deep content that they convey of the *essence of Torah*.

From Chassidic Insights: A Guide for the Entangled by Rabbi Mattis Kantor

The Parshah in a Nutshell

Bamidbar

Numbers 1:1 - 4:20

For the week of May 16-May 22, 2004

In the Sinai **Desert**, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts **603,550** men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The **Levites** are to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the **firstborn**, whose number they approximated, who were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to **redeem** themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and **transported** the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kehatites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed **coverings** on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merrari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's **entranceway** to its east were the tents of Moses, Aaron and Aaron's sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the **twelve tribes** camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Menasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while **traveling**. Each tribe had its own *nassi* (prince or leader), and its own **flag** with its tribal color and emblem.



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WEEK AT A GLANCE

s u n d a y Iyar 25 | May 16

40th day of Omer count

On this Date: Toledo massacre (1355)

1,200 Jews were massacred by a Christian and Moslem mob attack on the Jewish section of Toledo, Spain, on this date in 1355.

Count "41 days to the Omer" tonight

m o n d a y Iyar 26 | May 17

41st day of Omer count

On this Date: Yahtzeit of R. Saadia Gaon (942)

Iyar 26 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892?-942), author of *Emunot V'deot*, one of the earliest works of Jewish philosophy. ("Gaon" was the title given to the leading Sages of Babylonia in the post-Talmudic period).

Ramchal (1746)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (known by the acronym "Ramchal"), philosopher, kabbalist and ethicist, was born in Padua, Italy, in 1707. At a very early age, he began to study Kabbalah under the tutelage of Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, one of the foremost Kabbalists of his generation. While still in his twenties, he authored numerous works of Torah scholarship, including *Derech Hashem* ("The way of G-d"), a systematic exposition of the fundamentals of Judaism. In 1735, Luzzatto left his native Italy and, avoiding public life, set up shop as a gem cutter in Amsterdam. His fame nevertheless caught up with him, and in 1740, (at the turn of the Jewish century 5500), he published his most famous work, *Mesilat Yesharim* ("Path of the Just"). Like many other great men of his age, Luzzatto longed for the Holy Land, and in 1743 he settled in Acco. He was not to enjoy a long stay there, however, and on Iyar 26, 5506 (1746), at the age of 39, he and his entire family died in a plague. According to most traditions, he was buried in Tiberias, next to the tomb of Rabbi Akiva.

and R. Eizik of Homel (1857)

Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik Epstein (1770-1857), who served as the rabbi of the town of Homel in White Russia for 58 years, was a leading figure in the first three generations of Chabad Chassidism. As a young man, he became attracted to the teachings of the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, and remained a devoted

follower of the 2nd and 3rd Rebbes, Rabbi DovBer and Rabbi Menachem Mendel. He authored a number of Chassidic works, including *Sh'tei HaMeorot* and *Chanah Ariel*.

Link: [One on One](#)

Six Day War (1967)

In spring of 1967, the Arab capitals paraded their arms and openly spoke of overrunning the Land of Israel and casting its inhabitants into the sea. The international media was almost unanimous in its feeling that the small Jewish state, outflanked and outgunned by its enemies, stood little chance of survival. It seemed that, for the second time in a generation, the world was going to stand by and allow the enemies of the Jewish people slaughter them in the millions.

On Iyar 26 (June 5, 1967), Israel launched a preemptive strike on its southern and northern frontiers. In just six days, the Jewish army defeated five Arab armies on three fronts and liberated territories of its promised homeland amounting to an area greater than its own size, including the old city of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount (see "Iyar 29" below).

The openly miraculous nature of Israel's victory spawned a global awakening of Jewish soul, fueling the already present and growing teshuvah movement of return to G-d and Jewish traditions. The Lubavitcher Rebbe called it a moment of biblical proportions, an "opportunity the likes of which has not been granted for thousands of years." Many thousands of Jews flocked to put on tefillin and pray at the newly liberated Western Wall of the Temple Mount.

Count "42 days to the Omer" tonight

t u e s d a y Iyar 27 | May 18

42nd day of Omer count

Count "43 days to the Omer" tonight

w e d n e s d a y Iyar 28 | May 19

43rd day of Omer count

Count "44 days to the Omer" tonight

t h u r s d a y Iyar 29 | May 20

44th day of Omer count

On this Date: Passing of Samuel (877 BCE)

The prophet Samuel (931-877 BCE) was one of the most important figures in Jewish history; our sages describe him as the equivalent of "Moses and Aaron combined." Samuel was the last of the Shoftim ("Judges") who led the people of Israel in the four centuries between the passing of Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy, and the author of the biblical books of "Judges", "Samuel" and "Ruth"

Samuel was born in the year 2830 from creation (931 BCE) after his barren mother, Chanah (Hannah), prayed for a child at the Sanctuary at Shiloh and pledged, "O L-rd of hosts... If You will give Your maidservant a man child, I shall dedicate him to G-d all the days of his life..." (I Samuel 1:11). At age two, his mother brought him to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow, where he was raised by Eli the High Priest; shortly thereafter, Samuel had his first prophetic communication (described in I Samuel 3). In 890 BCE, Samuel succeeded Eli as leader of the Jewish people.

After ten years under Samuel's guidance, the people approached him with the request, "Appoint for us a king... like all the nations around us." Samuel disapproved of their request, believing that the people of Israel should be subject only to G-d and not to any mortal king; but G-d instructed him to do as the people ask. Samuel then anointed (879 BCE) Saul as the first king of Israel. When Saul disobeyed G-d during the war on Amalek, Samuel proclaimed David the legitimate king in Saul's stead. Shortly thereafter, Samuel passed away at age 54 in his birthplace, Ramah, in the hills of Judah.

Jerusalem liberated (1967)

The Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were liberated during the 1967 Six Day War (see close). The day is marked in Israel as "Jerusalem Day."

Count "45 days to the Omer" tonight

f r i d a y Sivan 1 | May 21

Rosh Chodesh; 45th Omer

On this Date: **Encampment at Sinai (1313 BCE)**

On the 1st of Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), six weeks after their exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai in the Sinai Desert and camped at the foot of the mountain "as one man, with one heart" in preparation for the receiving of the Torah from G-d. On this day, however "Moses did not

say anything to them, because of their exhaustion from the journey."

Laws & Customs: **Rosh Chodesh observances**

Today is Rosh Chodesh ("Head of the Month") for the month of Sivan, the third month of the Jewish Calendar. Special portions are added to the daily prayers: Hallel (Psalms 113-118) is recited -- in its "partial" form -- following the Shacharit morning prayer, and the Yaaleh V'yavo prayer is added to the Amidah and to Grace After Meals; the additional Musaf prayer is said. Tachnun (confession of sins) and similar prayers are omitted. Many have the custom to mark Rosh Chodesh with a festive meal and reduced work activity. The latter custom is prevalent amongst women, who have a special affinity with Rosh Chodesh -- the month being the feminine aspect of the Jewish Calendar.

Light Shabbat Candles before sunset

Count "46 days to the Omer" tonight

s h a b b a t

Sivan 2 | May 22

46th day of Omer count

Torah reading: Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20) Haftarah: Hosea 2

On this Date: Chosen People (1313 BCE)

Sivan 2 is marked on the Jewish calendar as Yom HaMeyuchas ("Day of Distinction"); it was on this day that G-d told Moses -- when Moses ascended Mount Sinai for the first time -- to tell the people of Israel: "You shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6).

Laws & Customs: **Ethics of the Fathers, ch. 6**

In preparation for the festival of Shavuot, we study one of the six chapters of the Talmud's Ethics of the Fathers ("Avot") on the afternoon of each of the six Shabbatot between Passover and Shavuot; this week, being the Shabbat before Shavuot, we study Chapter 6. (In many communities -- and such is the Chabad custom -- the study cycle is repeated through the summer, until the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah.)

Count "47 days to the Omer" tonight