

## REBBETZIN SHIRA

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# Shavuot Symbols

Many of us find the *chag* of *Shavuot* challenging since in contrast to other *chagim* we have no tangible mitzvah of the day to grasp and focus on. We tend, instead to spotlight the cheesecake and dairy dishes. Let us explore some ways to make the most of this *chag* in a practical, meaningful way.

*Shavuot* itself is an anomaly. Why is it that we celebrate receiving the *luchot* which, 40 days later were broken? It seems that it would make more sense to celebrate on Yom Kippur, when the second set of *luchot* were given to last eternally. We therefore must say that *Shavuot* is less about celebrating receiving the Torah and rather more about the relationship that was established with Hashem at the moment we were given the Torah. We are celebrating being chosen as Hashem's special nation, being elevated to the status of "*metzuveh veoseh*", not simply doing *mitzvot* voluntarily. Accordingly, the *chag* abounds with *mitzvot* that reflect the essence of the day. Indeed, **every mitzvah** that is done on *Shavuot* is a statement of our new status! On *Shavuot*

we can live more mindfully. We can ask ourselves before saying *brachot* or any other mitzvah we do, "what am I about to do?" and "for whom am I doing this?". Asking these questions will enable us to properly focus on our special role and unique relationship with Hashem.

*Dovid Hamelech describes himself as "ani tefillah"; his entire being was tefillah*

The Gemara (*Pesachim 68b*) actually does suggest one mitzvah of the day, that is having a yomtov meal. Whereas on other holidays there is a discussion how to divide the day between spiritual and physical pursuits, everyone agrees that *Shavuot* must have a physical component. Rav Salomon in *Matnat Chayim* explains that having a festive meal reflects the joy we feel in receiving the Torah. Further, the Slonimer Rebbe tells us in *Netivot Shalom*, *Shavuot* is a time when the fruits of trees undergo judgement. Symbolically, our *neshamot* are the 'fruit' of the Great Tree. It is decided on *Shavuot* how many spiritual experiences we will have in the coming year. How many times, for example, we will daven, learn, feel connected and inspired. All these potential spiritual experiences

that will attain us eternity are decided and allocated on *Shavuot*. We can show Hashem how important spirituality is in our lives and how much Torah is beloved to us by rejoicing with our Yomtov meal, spending time learning and cherishing each opportunity as a mitzvah.

Finally, aside from Torah learning, we have another immensely powerful way to connect with this special day. *Shavuot*, notes Rav Biderman in *Be'er Hachayim*, as the *yahrzeit* of *Dovid Hamelech*, is a time of intense *tefillah*. *Dovid Hamelech* describes himself as “*ani tefillah*”; his entire being was *tefillah*. *Shavuot* is a time to focus on the entirety of our davening, particularly those parts that describe our desire to learn Torah. The *birkot haTorah* in the morning should be said with intensity, specifically our request for Torah to be sweet in our mouths. We should say the paragraph of “*Ahavah Rabbah*” with slow concentration since it includes a wellspring of requests to connect with learning and living *Torah*. Rav Pincus notes that the *Mussaf* prayer on *Shavuot* can evoke the same power of closeness to Hashem as *Neilah* on *Yom Kippur*; it is a time when the gates of heaven are open to our entreaties. Many people have the custom to recite the entire *Sefer Tehillim* on *Shavout* in honor of *Dovid Hamelech* as well.

Truly it is a day filled with much to contemplate and much to do. May our *chag* be infused with tremendous meaning so that we merit a year with abundant spiritual encounters and deep connection to our Source. ■



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