

# RED ALERT!

Shavuot

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## DIVREI TORAH

- On Shavuot morning, we introduce the Torah reading by reciting the liturgical poem of Akdamut, which was written by Rabbi Meir ben Yitzchak, who was the Chazan in Germany during the middle Ages. This is a song of great praise to Hashem:

If the firmament were parchment and the trees were the quills of the scribes and all the waters of the sea were ink and human beings could write the praise of Hashem, it would still not be sufficient to describe the greatness of the Almighty and His splendor. And yet Hashem chose us, the Jewish people, to be His nation. We are the ones who can say K'dusha every morning and evening. Even the angels do not have the freedom to sing the praises to Hashem as frequently as we do. We yearn for Yerushalayim to be rebuilt and the ingathering of the exiled and the gates of Heaven to be opened and all of Hashem's splendor to be revealed. Then, Hashem will make a great banquet for the righteous. Fortunate is he who is strong in his belief of Hashem.

Note: It is amazing how positive and glorified this poem is, considering the

suffering of the time of the author. This was the time of the Crusades and he and his family and community suffered greatly.

- On Shavuot morning (2nd day in Chutz LaAretz) we read the Book of Ruth. This is primarily a book of Chessed. It is the kindness demonstrated by Ruth for her mother-in-law Naomi, as well as the kindness demonstrated by Boaz to Ruth herself. Ruth was a Moabite princess, the daughter of King Eglon, who was killed by Ehud. With her father's death, the princess was no longer a princess. Ruth had lived a life of royalty and aristocracy, and was now immediately demeaned to be in the lower echelons of society. So, too, was her mother-in-law. Ruth was a great, compassionate woman, even though her people were not Ba'alei Chessed. This is why the nation of Moav was cursed by Hashem in the Torah, for they did not display any Chessed whatsoever to Bnei Yisrael when the latter were journeying through the desert. Ruth was a gem; she was different from her family. In actuality we could explain this from a different perspective. Ruth was the offspring of her ancestor Lot, who was a Ba'al Chessed. Lot, the nephew of Avraham, had learned Chessed from his uncle. When Ruth converted to Judaism she was returning to her Abrahamic roots. In so doing, she earned the right to be the Matriarch of the line of King David, and ultimately the Mashiach.

- When Moshe was atop Mount Sinai, the Midrash describes to us the dialogue that took place between HaShem, Moshe, and the angels. The angels were upset that the Torah was being given to Moshe, who was now invited to be in their midst in the presence of the Almighty. The angels questioned Hashem as to why He was giving the Torah to human beings. Hashem then turned to Moshe and told Moshe to answer the angels. Initially Moshe demonstrated fear and intimidation. Hashem told him: Hold onto My throne and respond to their charges. When informed that the Ten Commandments would say “I am Hashem, Your Lord Who took you out of the Land of Egypt”, Moshe turned to the angels and asked them, “Did you go down to Egypt? Were you slaves to Pharaoh? What good is the Torah for you? Do you have idolatry thrust upon you in your community? Do you have business dealings for which you are instructed to be honest? Do you do work which has to cease on Shabbat? ‘Honor your father and mother’ – do you have parents that you are supposed to honor and respect? Is there jealousy among angels, or an evil inclination amongst you?” Immediately the angels acknowledged that the Torah was not meant for them and Moshe was the right person to receive it. The Beit HaLevi (the great-grandfather of Rav Soloveitchik) wrote that the debate between Moshe and the angels was really about the Oral Torah and not the Written Torah. Moshe

was saying that it was humans who would develop the ability to interpret and decide issues of uncertainty in the meaning of the Written Torah. The Beit HaLevi says that the Oral Torah was given on the 6th of Sivan. The Written Torah was given the next day on the 7th!

- “Honor your father and mother.” Our Rabbis extend the obligation of honoring parents to include honoring grandparents and honoring in-laws. They even go so far as to require an individual to honor his older brothers. When a father has remarried, then there is an obligation to honor and respect the stepmother. There is the equivalent situation if the mother has remarried and there is a stepfather. These obligations extend only as long as the father is married to the stepmother. If he passes away, then the children, according to halacha, are not obligated to honor the stepmother, because technically she is no longer the stepmother. Nevertheless I would add that it is a very good idea that there should be honor and respect extended to this woman who was the wife of your father. In all these situations the relationship between parents and children may be strained, but the halacha is clear that it is still the obligation of the child to honor and respect the parent even if there is a bad relationship. Parents should realize that the Torah mitzva is a strong one, and they should try to make it easier for the children to perform this mitzva appropriately. When the Talmud asks

until when the mitzva applies, it responds that the mitzva applies as long as the child is alive; meaning that if the parents have died the children still have an obligation to honor their parents, but there will be a different format. They should still bring a great deal of fame and respect to the parent's name.

- “Do not steal.” The rabbinic definition in the Ten Commandments would be to limit stealing to the situation of kidnapping since all the Ten Commandments are punishable by death and the only case of stealing that would be a capital offense would be kidnapping. In the bigger picture the Talmud spends a great deal of time identifying and giving us a broader view of what the prohibition of stealing is all about. Being deceitful is also a form of this prohibition. When somebody steals a person's time, as in the case of going into a store and spending time with the salesperson even when the customer has no intention of buying, but is just enjoying the experience of window shopping, would be within the prohibition of stealing. One could also steal a person's friendship by leading them on as if there was a true close friendship between you. This is above and beyond the simple case of stealing somebody's money. Suppose you “borrow” a person's jacket because you want to have the experience of trying it on and using it, but all along you have the intention of putting it back where you got it. This would also be a form of theft even if it is just the theft of

the benefit and you have caused no damage to the coat. There are many more cases which we can discuss on this one prohibition, but it is important to note that each of the Ten Commandments is a headline to a broader subject.

- Much has been written about the prohibition of “do not covet” as if it were possible to command a person not to emotionally desire what somebody else possesses. The Ibn Ezra does not even raise the question but obviously is answering it when he described a situation of a low-income villager who is tending to his fields. While he is working he sees the princess being driven in her carriage on the road. He does not look up and desire her because he knows that he is not in her league; he has been brought up in a certain way and educated to distinguish between himself and royalty, therefore the emotion of desire never comes into his being. The Ibn Ezra is stating that through proper education, and lifetime values, it is possible to plant within every individual the feelings through which one would not emote with desires to possess something that does not belong to him. This might have been very well accepted in the times of the Ibn Ezra when the class system in Europe saw a large divide between the regular people and the aristocracy. We, who have been brought up in an era with the idea that it is possible to go from rags to riches; we have been raised to feel that everything is possible. Consequently reading the Ibn Ezra might not

seem as solid as it was in the day when he wrote it. Nevertheless I think his point is well taken.

- The Three Pilgrimage Festivals form a unit. When the people traveled the distance necessary to come to Yerushalayim, having all these people congregate in one town created a festive atmosphere. Shavuot is unique because it seems that the Torah is requiring the Jewish people to travel distances just for the one day experience of Shavuot. Many people stayed after the one day in order to take care of business, so to speak, in the capital city. They had business at the Mikdash in bringing private offerings. (This is a source of our omitting Tachanun for the whole week after Shavuot, since we are noting the extension of the festive atmosphere in Yerushalayim for the days after Shavuot.)

## Questions by RED

1. On what day of the week was the Torah given to Bnei Yisrael?
2. In what month is Shavuot?
3. Who wrote Akdamut and what is it about?
4. What Megila is read on Shavuot and why?
5. Bnei Yisrael is referred to as a GOI KADOSH, a holy nation (Sh'mot 19:6). What does "holy" mean here?

6. How did the people prepare for the Revelation at Mt. Sinai? (Ibn Ezra)
7. What musical instrument was used during the gathering at Mt. Sinai?
8. Name the Ten Commandments in order.
9. Why were the Ten Commandments inscribed on two tablets?
10. Why is this holiday called Pentecost in English?
11. What other Torah names are there for this holiday?
12. Why is there a custom to eat dairy on Shavuot?

## RELATIONSHIPS

- a) Moshe - Yitro
- b) Moshe - Miriam
- c) Moshe - Tzipora
- d) Eliezer - Gershom

## ANSWERS

1. On Shabbat
2. Sivan
3. Rabbi Meir ben Yitzchak, d. 1095, Germany, wrote it. It is praise to Hashem, praise to His Torah, and praise for the Jewish people.
4. Megilat Ruth. Among the reasons are  
a) that is King David's yahrzeit;  
b) it is the time for the wheat harvest;  
and c) it is about Ruth's conversion and

today we are all converts, receiving the Torah.

5. Separate and Elevated.

6. They immersed themselves in a Mikveh.

7. A Shofar.

8.

1) Belief in Hashem.

2) No other gods.

3) Don't take Hashem's name in vain.

4) Shabbat.

5) Honor your parents.

6) Do not murder.

7) Do not commit adultery.

8) Do not steal (kidnap).

9) Do not bear false witness.

10) Don't desire another person's possessions.

9. One set for Mitzvot between Man and Hashem, and one for Mitzvot between man and his fellow man.

10. Pentecost means Fifty. Fifty days after Pesach.

11. Chag HaKatzir (harvest) and Yom HaBikurim (first fruits)

12. Of the answers given, I favor that since the laws of kashrut were just given, there wasn't time to prepare meat.

Relationships

a) Son-in-law & father-in-Law

b) Brother & sister

c) Husband & wife

d) Brothers (sons of Moshe)