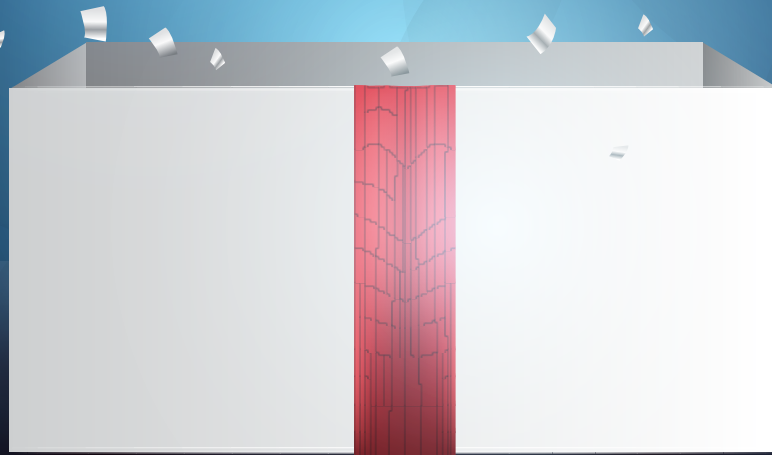


FRIDAY SESSION



TREASURE YOUR GIFTS



“Who is the wealthy person? The one who is happy with his portion!” (Pirkei Avos 4:1).

Each and every one of us has so much to be grateful for. It is not always easy to think about our gifts when we are going through challenging times such as the global pandemic we still find ourselves in. But it is specifically at times like these, when focusing on our blessings and learning to treasure our gifts; will strengthen us and keep us in a constant state of happiness.

Rabbi Noach Weinberg, Happiness (www.aish.com) – Master the art of noticing, appreciating and consciously enjoying what you already have, then you will always be happy.

Happiness is a universal longing, yet so many people are unhappy. Why? We often perceive happiness as the outcome of what we achieve and acquire.

- “My whole life would improve if I had a new car ...”
- “I just need a better job and then I can relax and be happy ...”
- “If only I could meet the right girl ...”

You get the car and what happens? For a whole week you’re walking on air. Then you go right back to being unhappy. Sound familiar?

Happiness is not something that happens from the outside. Happiness is a state of mind. You can have everything in the world and still be miserable. Or you can have relatively little and feel unbounded joy.

The Mishnah says: “Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has.” (Pirkei Avos 4:1) That’s why the morning prayers begin with a series of blessings thanking God for the simple and obvious:

- “Thank you, God, for giving me life.”
- “Thank God, I can see.”
- “Thank God, I can use my hands and feet.”
- “Thank God, I can think.”

Once you master the art of noticing, appreciating and consciously enjoying the gifts you have, then you will always be happy.

Rabbi Chaim Vital, Sha’arei Kedushah 1:2 – Rejoicing with what one has and knowing that God only acts for our benefit is the medicine against sadness.

The opposite of sadness is the trait of rejoicing with what one has, because everything that God does is for the good.

מידת העצבות בכל פרטיו והפכם והשמחה התדירית בחלקו, כי כל מאי דעבדין מן שמיא לטב.

PART I. THE GIFT OF HEALTH



One of greatest gifts we are given each day is our health. Throughout our lives, all aspects of a person’s health are under God’s constant awareness and maintenance; even the smallest details. God’s constant management of the human body is what enables it to continue functioning normally. Any time we feel thankful for our health, it reminds us that God is involved in every aspect of our lives and is constantly watching over us. The continued functioning of the human body is nothing short of miraculous.

Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Salant, Be'er Yosef, Parshas Vayishlach – Even mundane occurrences and bodily functions are in God’s immediate awareness.

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| <p>Vilna Gaon (in the book Imrei Noam) says regarding the part of the blessing of <i>Asher Yatzar</i>, “It is well known before You”: The purpose of this the blessing we recite after using the bathroom, is to counter those that say that it is impossible that God is interested, supervises and directs the world in such mundane ways. Therefore, we say this blessing to say that even from there God’s holy throne, He is supervising such mundane things.</p> | <p>וכעין זה כתבו בשם הגר"א (בס' אמרי נעם) על מה שאומרים בברכת אשר יצר, גלוי וידוע לפני כסא כבודך וז"ל: מה שמזכירים כאן כסא הכבוד בברכת עשיית צרכיו, הוא לאפוקי מדעת האומרים כי אי אפשר שהקב"ה ישגיח על עולם שפל כזה. לכך אנו אומרים שאפילו לפני כסא הכבוד. אפילו משם הוא משגיח על דברים שפלים כאלה.</p> |
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PART II. THE GIFT OF FAMILY



There is almost nothing more important than family. But because we spend the most time with our siblings and parents, it is easy for us to take them for granted.

1. Rabbi Menachem Schlanger, Ohel Yaakov VeLeah, p. 157 – Family is a means for a sense of personal and collective identity.

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| <p>From the earliest age, a child sees himself as a part of a greater family. Through this, when he matures, he feels a connection to the rest of the Jewish people. Parents should also involve their children in the spiritual and ethical content that distinguishes their particular family, as well as the Jewish people in general.</p> | <p>מינקותו רואה הילד את עצמו כחלק ממשפחה מורחבת, וכשהוא מתגבר הוא מרגיש השתייכות לעם ישראל. ההורים צריכים לשייך אותו גם לתוכן הרוחני המייחד את המשפחה ואת העם.</p> |
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The Torah encourages warm family bonds. Family provides an emotional, social and spiritual framework in which children are raised and grow up. A person's life is strongly influenced by his or her parents and siblings – their behavior and their personalities.

Our parents are not randomly determined; they are given to us by God as part of the Divine plan for our lives. Although the gift of family comes from God, we focus that energy of gratitude on our parents. In fact, the most basic reason for honoring our parents is to show gratitude to them for all they have done for us.

2. Sefer HaChinuch 33 – The root of honoring parents is gratitude.

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| <p>It is only appropriate for one to recognize and reciprocate kindness to those who have dealt kindly with him or her, and certainly not to act in a negative way. One should appreciate the fact that his parents are the source of his very existence in this world, and it is therefore appropriate for him to act as respectfully and beneficially as he can. Besides having brought him into the world, they also used tremendous effort in raising him or her as a child.</p> | <p>משרשי מצוה זו שראוי לו לאדם שיכיר ויגמול חסד למי שעשה עמו טובה, ולא יהיה נבל ומתנכר וכפוי טובה, שזו מדה רעה ומאוסה בתכלית לפני אלקים ואנשים. ושיתן אל לבו שהאב והאם הם סיבת היותו בעולם ועל כן ראוי לו באמת לעשות להם כל כבוד וכל תועלת שיוכל, כי הם הביאוהו לעולם. גם יגעו בו כמה יגיעות בקטנותו.</p> |
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Although we can all come up with a list of things for which we are grateful to our parents, it may not always be easy for us to express that gratitude. When we take a step back and remind ourselves that nearly everything we have is because of our parents, we learn to treasure the gift of family.

PART III. THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP



Each of us can think of that one friend who has positively impacted our lives in many ways. No matter how many friends we have, we know that one of the greatest gifts in life is having one true friend. One friend who loves us unconditionally and is there for us during our struggles. Someone who is always there to listen, give advice and help us in times of need.

1. Pirkei Avos 1:6, Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura, Rabbeinu Yonah– A close friend is a necessity for getting advice and helping one grow.

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| <p>Acquire a friend for yourself! <i>Rabbeinu Yonah:</i> One needs a good friend for several purposes. One benefit is that of receiving sound advice. When one has a good friend, he is able to take counsel with him and seek assistance in all areas. A friend also serves as a confidant.</p> | <p>וקנה לך חבר רבינו יונה: לשלשה דברים צריך האדם אל החבר הטוב. השלישי לענין העצה שיקחנה להיות לו מעיר לעזור לו בכל עניניו ולקחת ממנו עצה טוב ולהיות בן סודו.</p> |
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A true friend is so valuable. Therefore, our Torah reminds us to treat each friend with the same love that we would want to receive from them.

2. Sifra 2:12 – A fundamental Torah principle.

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| <p>And you shall love your friend as you love yourself: Rabbi Akiva said, “This is a fundamental principle of the Torah.”</p> | <p>ואהבת לרעך כמוך, רבי עקיבא אומר זה כלל גדול בתורה</p> |
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PART IV. THE GIFT OF IDENTITY



Each of us have our own personal mission to achieve in this world. Any morning that you wake up thanking God for giving you another day to fulfill your life’s purpose, you learn to treasure the gift of your unique identity. You begin to remember how special and important you are.

1. Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Sanhedrin 37a – Judaism affirms the importance and uniqueness of each individual.

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| <p>Therefore, man was created alone, in order to teach that destroying one life is tantamount to destroying an entire world; and sustaining one life is tantamount to sustaining an entire world. Therefore, every individual is obligated to say, “The world was created for my sake.”</p> | <p>לפיכך נברא אדם יחיד, ללמדך שכל המאבד נפש אחת ... מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו איבד עולם מלא וכל המקיים נפש אחת ... מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיים עולם מלא .. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר, בשבילי נברא העולם.</p> |
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2. Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, Netivot Shalom, Parshas Lech Lecha, pp. 62-63 – Every person’s mission is unique.

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| <p>No two people are alike, from the time the world was created until now. No person can fulfill that which his friend must fulfill. That is, each person has a destiny and purpose that it is his job to fulfill in his life. This includes the specific matter that he came into this world to accomplish. God sets up each individual’s life with the specific challenges and conditions necessary to fulfill his purpose, to achieve his unique destiny and purpose.</p> <p>All the conditions of a person’s life – whether in physicality or spirituality, the good as well as the bad – are granted to him in order to fulfill his unique purpose in the world. And under these specific circumstances, a person will be able to reach his destiny, and without them he would not be able to. And since every person has his own specific purpose</p> | <p>אינו דומה אדם לאדם מיום בריאת אדם והלאה ואין אדם אחד יכול לתקן מה שעל חברו לתקן. והיינו שלכל אדם יש את ייעודו ותפקידו אותו עליו לתקן בחייו, ובכלל זה גם העניין המיוחד עבורו ירד לעולם לתקנו כידוע. והקב"ה מעמיד לכל אחד את כל הנסיבות והתנאים שיוכל לתקן את אשר מתפקידו לתקן, ולמלאות ייעודו ותפקידו בעולמו.</p> <p>כל תנאי החיים של האדם – בגשמיות וברוחניות, הטובים והרעים, כולם נתנו לו כפי השייך לתיקון עולמו, שרק ע"י תנאים אלו יוכל להגיע לייעודו, ובלעדיהם לא יוכל להגיע לייעודו, ובלעדיהם לא יוכל לתקן את אשר תפקידו לתקן. וכיון שלכל אחד יש תפקיד וייעוד מיוחד, לכך שונים תנאי החיים של כל אחד, וזה חיי קלים ולשני החיים קשים יותר.</p> |
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and destiny, each one has his unique life conditions, some easier and some more challenging.

Self-actualization demands self-knowledge. If you don't know your potential, then you are not likely to fulfill it. One way to discover our unique identity and mission is by focusing on our skills and talents and thinking about how I can use those strengths to improve the world.

PART V. THE GIFT OF GIVING



Most of the gifts that we have in life are given to us. However, there is a gift that we treasure that is not something we receive. Rather, it is the gift of giving. Our ability to give to others. This may mean giving material things, giving our time, or perhaps giving a positive word or kind gesture to help uplift another person.

1. Rabbeinu Yonah, Sha'arei Teshuvah (The Gates of Repentance) 3:13 – Making an all-out effort to help others is one of person's main tasks in life.

One is obligated to work hard and put in all the effort they can on behalf of others, **This is one of the most crucial and important things that we are called upon to do.**

חייב אדם לטרוח בעמל נפשו על תקנת חבריו אם דל ואם עשיר וזאת מן החמורות ומן העקרים הנדרשים מן האדם.

2. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. I, p. 93 – Even the small things count.

A nice word, a smile – these can give new life to someone who has given up on himself! A word of encouragement can bring joy. These are such small things [yet so significant!]. In general, there are so many acts of chesed that are easily within our reach – if only we would notice that they are needed!

חיוך ומילה טובה בכחם להחיות מיואשים, דבר עידוד בכחו להביא אושר. אלה הם דברים קטנים מאד. ומלבד זה – מה רבים הם החסדים שבכחנו לגמול – לו ראינו שהם חסרים!

What is the proper attitude to develop when performing chesed?

3. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Alei Shur, Vol. II, p. 205 – When one loves chesed, he will perform true chesed.

The Sages teach that “love of chesed” refers to the entire gamut of chesed (Sukkah 49b). We learn from this that a love for chesed is an intrinsic aspect of chesed itself. Chesed done without this love is not full-fledged chesed.

וביארנו חז"ל אהבת חסד זה גמילות חסדים (סוכה מט:). נמצאנו למדים מכאן, כי גמילות חסדים צריכה לצמוח מאהבת חסד דוקא. מעשה חסד בלי אהבת חסד. לפי הגדרת חז"ל עדיין אין זה חסד גמור.

It is often when we infuse others with joy that we become happier ourselves. When we view the opportunity to give as a privilege, we learn to treasure this gift of giving and we develop a love for it.

PART VI. THE ULTIMATE GIFT

*Out of all the gifts we are given, there is one that trumps all. It is the eternal gift that guides us in every aspect of our lives and teaches us to treasure all other gifts. This gift is the secret to our nation’s survival and is what shapes our identity. Without it, we would not be here. The ultimate gift we have been given is the gift of the **TORAH**. And it is through all of the gifts we have discussed until now, the gift of Torah comes alive.*

We are approaching the holiday of Shavuos, the day that celebrates the moment we first received this gift.

The best-known aspect of the holiday of Shavuos is the fact that it commemorates Ma’amad Har Sinai – the day on which God gave the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai.

1. Siddur – Shavuos is the day the Jewish people received the Torah.

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| This day of the holiday of Shavuos, the time of the Giving of the Torah. | את יום חג השבועות הזה, זמן מתן תורתנו. |
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Unlike all the other holidays, in the Torah, Shavuos is not identified as a specific day in the calendar but rather as the fiftieth day after the Omer-offering. Beginning on the second day of Pesach, when the Omer is brought, forty-nine days are counted, and the next day – the fiftieth – is Shavuos.



Also, the Torah does not explicitly mention that the holiday of Shavuos is the anniversary of Ma’amad Har Sinai. If that is the significance of the day, why doesn’t the Torah mention that fact?

2. Kli Yakar, Vayikra 23:16 – The pasuk leaves out the fact that the Torah was given on Shavuos so as not to limit the Giving of the Torah to a single day.

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| <p>The reason that the Torah does not explicitly mention that this is the day of the Giving of the Torah. God did not want to limit the Giving of the Torah to a single day because a person should feel every single day of the year as if he received the Torah from Mount Sinai on that day ... Similarly, the Sages have said that the words of Torah should be new to a person every day, not like something old which he can no longer tolerate.</p> <p>The truth is that one does indeed find something new in the Torah every day. Therefore, the Torah did not specify the day that it was given, apart from the hint in the word “new,” to teach that the Torah is like a new offering every day.</p> | <p>ומה שלא נזכר בתורה בפירוש כי יום זה מתן תורה. שעל מתן תורה לא רצה ה' להגביל יום ידוע לפי שצריך האדם שיהיה דומה לו בכל יום ויום מכל ימות השנה כאילו באותו יום קבלה מהר סיני. ועל כן אמרו רז"ל (ספרי ואתחנן ו 1) שיהיו דברי תורה חדשים עליך ולא כדבר הישן שלבו של אדם קץ בו.</p> <p>שהרי באמת אתה מוצא בה דבר חידוש בכל יום ויום, ועל כן אין יום נתינתה מבואר בתורה יותר ממה שנרמז בהבאת מנחה חדשה, להורות שהתורה מנחה חדשה בכל יום ויום.</p> |
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To celebrate the Giving of the Torah, we treat Shavuos as a truly festive occasion and celebration, complete with lavish holiday meals. In fact, the Talmud tells us that on Shavuos, more than any other holiday, there is a requirement to celebrate with food and drink.

On the simplest level, this requirement to eat, drink, and celebrate on Shavuos can be understood as an indication of the great importance and significance of the Torah to the Jewish people.

3. Pele Yoetz, “Atzeres” – The anniversary of the Giving of the Torah is an occasion that warrants tremendous celebration and rejoicing.

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| <p>Shavuos is a very holy holiday, when God sanctified us with His Torah and mitzvos and selected us from amongst the nations to be His treasured nation. If not for this day, we would have been like Sodom and Gomorrah, and the heavens and earth would not have been able to exist. Thus, it is appropriate to rejoice on this day. It is impossible not to rejoice, because the Torah and mitzvos are better for us than all the good things of this world and the entire life of the Next World.</p> | <p>עצרת הוא חג קדוש מאד, אשר בו קדשנו השם יתברך בתורתו ומצותיו ובוחר בנו מכל העמים להיות לו לעם סגלה, ואי לאו האי יומא דקא גרם, כסדם היינו לעמרה דמינו וחקות שמים וארץ לא נתקימו, באפן שראוי לשמח ביום הזה. ואי אפשר שלא לשמח, כי טוב לנו טובת התורה והמצוות מכל טובות העולם הזה ומכל חי העולם הבא.</p> |
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Both the act of Torah study and the observance of its commandments are known to immeasurably enhance the quality of one’s life in this world. There is no life as joyous as a life devoted to Torah and mitzvos.

Our appreciation of Shavuos would be lacking a very important dimension if we did not make mention of one more important point. Shavuos is not merely a day that commemorates a significant event in the past. It is more than that: it is the day when that very event recurs and is recreated every single year. There is tremendous spiritual potential inherent in each of our holidays; the same spiritual forces that were present thousands of years ago, on these very dates, return every year at the same time.

4. Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Moadim, Vol. II, p. 334 – The Torah was given in the past, but the ability to receive it occurs each year on Shavuos.

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| <p>It is written in the holy books that just as the Torah is eternal, the ability to receive the Torah is eternal. Each and every year on Shavuos our ability to receive the Torah is renewed. This is what we recite in our prayers and in Kiddush: “The time of the Giving of our Torah.” This does not mean merely that we have a holiday that reminds us that God gave us the Torah in the past. Rather, each and every year on Shavuos is again the time of the Giving of the Torah.</p> | <p>איתא בספיה"ק דכשם שהתורה הק' היא נצחית, כך קבלת התורה היא נצחית, שבכל שנה ושנה יש ביום הזה קבלת התורה מחודשת. וזה שאנו אומרים בתפלה ובקידוש זמן מתן תורתנו, אין פירושו שנקבע כעין זכר ליום שבו נתן לנו הקב"ה את התורה בעבר, אלא בכל שנה ושנה החג הק' הזה הוא זמן מתן תורתנו האידנא.</p> |
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5. Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive for Truth, Vol. IV, p. 49 – Listening for Matan Torah today.

Each Shavuot we spiritually arrive at that same point of holiness experienced by our forefathers at Mount Sinai. It is once again, in a real sense, “The time of the Giving of our Torah,” and we are invited to accept it anew, as they did 3,300 years ago.

On Shavuot we have to work in order to receive the Torah. We have to struggle to acquire it in our hearts. We have to appreciate its truths as unchangeable values and principles. Only when we heard God’s voice at Sinai was doubt replaced by absolute certainty. So too, when we learn Torah today and especially at Shavuot time, can we still hear that same voice.

This upcoming Shavuot, let us remember the ultimate gift that we were first given on this day 3,300 years ago and that we receive again every day of our lives. Every time we learn Torah, we relive the Revelation at Sinai; the moment that changed the course of mankind. Every word of Torah we learn or hear brings us closer to the purpose of creation.

This gift is the blueprint of the universe and our personal GPS to a life of success, meaning, purpose and joy. It is the gift that has been passed down from generation to generation while many of our ancestors gave up everything they had in order to remain committed to its truths, values and Mitzvos. No matter what challenges we are dealing with, we can always turn to the Torah to find comfort and seek guidance. This is the ultimate gift that we receive every day.