

Shavuos 2017

1.

The Gemara in Pesachim (68b) relates a machlokes Tanayim. Rabbi Eliezer holds that one should either eat and drink or only learn Torah. Rabbi Yehoshua argues and holds that one must do both; half of Yom Tov should be dedicated to physical pursuits and the other half dedicated to completely spiritual pursuits. (תניא, רבי אליעזר אומר אין לו לאדם ביום טוב אלא או אוכל ושותה או יושב ושונה. רבי) (יהושע אומר חלקהו חציו לאכילה ושתיה וחציו לבית המדרש.) The Gemara then continues and quotes Rabbi Elazar who says everyone agrees, meaning even according to Rabbi Eliezer, on the holiday of Shevuos, physical enjoyment is an obligation because that is the time we received the Torah. (אמר רבי אליעזר הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם. מאי טעמא? יום שניתנה בו תורה הוא.) Rashi explains that after one eats one will be joyful. This will demonstrate that the Torah was given during this time. The Rambam (hilchos Yom Tov 6, 19) writes that even though we must eat and drink on Yom Tov, nevertheless we shouldn't eat and drink the entire day. Rather, in the morning we should daven and learn. Afterwards we should return home and eat. We should then return and learn etc. The Kesef Mishna points out that the Rambam holds like Rabbi Yehoshua, who says that half of Yom Tov should be dedicated to physical pursuits and the other half dedicated to completely spiritual pursuits. The reason that we hold like Rabbi Yehoshua is based on another Gemara. The Gemara in mesechas Nida (7) says that if there is a machlokes between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua we hold like Rabbi Yehoshua. The Shulchan Aruch (529) also paskens like Rabbi Yehoshua. Because of this reason, the Mishna Berurah writes that we should protest chazanim who drag out the davening after halachic midday.

**Seemingly the halacha should be the opposite. Meaning, in order to commemorate the time the Torah was given we should seemingly fully dedicate ourselves to Torah learning. Isn't the highest form of serving Hashem completely abstaining from the physical and complete dedication to the spiritual?** Rabbi Shimshon Pinkes zasa"l (Sichos 208-210) offers a fundamental answer. The Gra explains that other holidays have specific mitzvos that are attached to that holiday. Shevuos differs in this regard. **On Shevuos there is no specific mitzvah. All we must do is rejoice. This joy is expressed via having a seuda.** Shevuos is really a continuation of seferas haomer. During the days we count the omer we prepare ourselves for matan Torah. In the beginning we strive, and the end is a gift. On Shevuos Hashem descended on the mountain and opened the gates in heaven to give us the Torah. The Torah was a gift that we received from Hashem. Every year we reaccept this gift. We are therefore not obligated to perform other mitzvos. Since the Torah was given as a gift we therefore don't need to perform a physical mitzvah to commemorate this gift. We do however need to want this gift. The pasuk in Shemos (19, 17) says "Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward Hashem." Meaning, since they wanted the Torah they went out to get it. This is analogous to one who gives his friend a very expensive gift because he knows that his friend will treat it carefully. The same applies to Torah. Hashem only gave us the Torah because He knows we will treat it properly. It is for this reason that there are no other mitzvos on Shevuos. Our joy is expressed through the seuda.

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (Lev Eliyahu, Vayikra pages 65-68) offers another reason. There is a fundamental philosophical argument between the Jewish philosophers and philosophers of the other nations. They argue that the highest form of dedication to God is completely spiritual. They

hold that we should therefore completely remove ourselves from the physical. According to them we should even afflict ourselves. By doing this we will also be able to reach a higher intellectual level. The Jewish belief differs in this regard. We certainly shouldn't afflict ourselves. **The proper way to attain true spirituality is to take the physical and elevate it to spiritual.** Why did Hashem create this world in a way that we must eat and drink in order to live? Why weren't we created in a way that wouldn't require us to eat and drink in order to survive? One of the reasons this was done is in order to test us. The test is how will we eat and drink? How will we recite the berachos? Will we eat maturely like humans or like animals? When we eat properly we elevate the physical food to something spiritual. A mundane activity turns into something very spiritual. Adam was created from the ground. If we act improperly we could stoop as low as the ground. We could also reach great heights. Other creations such as insects and animals do not have the ability to uplift the physical to the spiritual. They can't be spiritual. Angels can't be physical. Only humans have the ability to be both physical and spiritual. The pasuk in Berashis (2, 7) says "And Hashem formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being." By Hashem combining the physical, aka the dirt, with the spiritual, aka the soul, we became a living being. Rashi explains that animals are also called alive, but, humans are on a higher level. In fact, Onkelos explains that this pasuk refers to our ability to speak. This is one of the reasons we are greater than animals. Even though we have great potential to reach great spiritual heights, nevertheless we also have the potential to stoop to a low physical level, as low as the dirt, as mentioned above. This is why when we are involved with physical activities such as eating and drinking we must make sure not to forget about Hashem.

Some people think remaining single is holy. We do not believe this. On the contrary, getting married elevates us and is very holy. The physical turns into spiritual. Even though getting married and having relations is seemingly the most mundane act, nevertheless it isn't. This is holy when done properly. If the parents daven that their children should be God fearing and talmedai chachamim and the wife goes to the mikvah etc. then this is very holy. In fact the Kohen gadol who enters into the Kodosh Kadashim on Yom Kippur must be married. The Mishna in Avos (2, 17) says let all your deeds be for the sake of heaven (כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים). Even optional matters that we do can be a mitzvah. For example, if we eat in order to serve Hashem better than this eating is a mitzvah. (See Rabbeinu Yona ibid and Shulchan Aruch (231). This is what קידוש on Shabbos and Yuntif tries to accomplish. We take the physical meal and try to uplift it by making it spiritual. Perhaps this is the explanation of the korbanos. We take something which is so physical and try to uplift it in order to make it spiritual. These korbanos represent our ability to take something so physical and make it spiritual.

With this we can explain why everyone agrees that on Shevuos we are obligated to physically enjoy. **Specifically on Shevuos, when we received the Torah, we attempt to demonstrate that we believe in the physical. It must be controlled and uplifted and must be at the right time however. Since Shevuos is the time we received the Torah, we are therefore obligated to demonstrate the fundamental belief of elevating the physical to the spiritual.**