



## A LEGISLATED PARTY

**T**he Gemara, *Pesachim* (68b) presents a dispute as to how Yom Tov is to be observed. The dispute revolves about how to reconcile what appears to be two contradictory verses in the Torah.

In Devarim (16:8), the Torah mandates Yom Tov as, “*atzeret LaShem Elokecha*” — an assembly to Hashem your G-D. In Bamidbar (29:35), Yom Tov is described as “*atzeret tihyeh lachem*” — a day of assembly for you.

Which one is it? Is Yom Tov a day primarily focused on spirituality, or a day of celebration for our pleasure? Reb Eliezer, who was a disciple of the school of Beis Shamai, ruled that in essence we have a choice to spend Yom Tov as either a day of assembly for Hashem, engaged in serious Torah studying, or “*lachem*” — friendship, family and food.

Reb Yehoshua, a disciple of Beis Hillel,

disagreed and said that we split the day, half in celebration and the other half in the Beis Hamedrash. Half the day for Hashem, and half the day for ourselves. [Parenthetically, I would like to suggest that while the Rambam in *Hilchos Yom Tov* (6:19) and the Shulchan Aruch (OC 529:1) rule like Reb Yehoshua, I am most envious of those who implement the morning davening and divrei Torah as the fulfillment of “*lachem*,” your pleasure and enjoyment. The requirement of LaShem is then fulfilled when eating and drinking and celebrating with friends and family, good food, zmiros and divrei Torah.]

The Talmud continues to teach that there are certain occasions that are exceptions to the rule, and all agree that they are to be celebrated with a festive meal. The first of the exceptions is Shavuot. Even Reb Eliezer agrees that “*Atzeret*,” the name of the Shavuot holiday as found in Targum

Unkelos, Bmidbar (28:26) — the day of the great revelation, the day that the entire nation of Israel experienced prophecy of the highest level, awake and standing while hearing the first two of the Ten Commandments directly from Hashem — this day is to be commemorated with a festive meal.

At first glance, this is most puzzling and counter intuitive. Just as we anxiously await the daylight hours of Shavuot by intensive study of Torah on the previous night, we would have thought that after a short bite, after davening, we would spend the rest of the day in a marathon of Torah studying. Why must we celebrate the holiday in a physical manner?

The answer I believe is most fundamental to this Yom Tov. Rashi (on the aforementioned Gemara) explains that the necessity for “*lachem*” on Shavuot is to demonstrate that we are overjoyed and privileged to be part

of the Jewish nation that received the Torah on this day. Just as we celebrate significant milestones with food and drink, so too this day is marked with food and drink. The Torah is meant to be studied and lived in an enjoyable surrounding. Torah is meant to be a recipe for this world. The requirement for the physical celebration is akin to a mission statement that the Torah is applicable and uplifting to every area of life, including the physical and material aspects of life that are enhanced and imbued by the study and observance of Torah.

Torah is not meant to be lived and observed in isolation, in a monastery away from society and the pleasures of this world; instead, as we are taught in *Avos* (6:4) “*Ashrecha Baolam Haze*” — it is praiseworthy and wholesome in *this* world. Note, the bracha recited after one is privileged to be called to the Torah is not only thanking Hashem for giving us a Torah of truth, but “*Chayei olam nata betocheinu*” — for implanting in us, in *this* world, the taste of the eternal life.

This idea is further reinforced by the beautiful insight of Rav Eliyahu Lopian Z”L in his sefer *Lev Eliyahu* on Parshat Vayetzei. The Torah informs us (Bereishit 31:2) that Yaakov noticed after he became exceedingly wealthy that his father-in-law, Lavan, was no longer welcoming, but resentful of Yaakov. Yaakov then calls his wives to the field for a meeting of the board. The Torah devotes no less than nine verses to the complete soliloquy of Yaakov:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְהֵן רְאֵה אֲנֹכִי אֶת פְּנֵי אַבְיָכֶן כִּי אֵינְנִי אֵלַי כְּתֹמֵל שְׁלֹשׁם וְאֵלֶי אָבִי הָיָה עֹמְדִי וְאִתְּנָה יְדַעְתֶּן כִּי בְּכָל כּוֹחַ עֲבַדְתִּי אֶת אַבְיָכֶן. וְאַבְיָכֶן הִתֵּל בִּי וְהִחְלֵף אֶת מִשְׁכְּרֹתַי עֲשָׂרַת מָנִים וְלֹא נָתַנּוּ אֵלֶיכֶם לְהָרַע עֹמְדִי ... וַיֵּצֵל אֵלֶיכֶם אֶת מִקְנֵה אַבְיָכֶם וַיִּתֶּן לִי ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי מִלְּאֶף הָאֵלֶיכֶם בְּחֵלֹם יַעֲקֹב וְאָמַר הִנְנִי וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂא נָא

עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל הַעֲתִידִים הָעֹלָמִים עַל הַצֵּאֵן עֲקָדִים נִקְדָּיִם וּבְרָדִים כִּי רָאִיתִי אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לָבֵן עָשָׂה לָךְ. אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל-לִבֵּית אֵל אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁחַתָּ שָׁם מִצְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר נִדְרָתָ לִי שָׁם נִדַּר עֲתָה קוּם צֵא מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב אֶל אָרֶץ מוֹלְדְּךָ.

*And he said to them, “I see that your father’s manner toward me is not as it has been in the past. But the God of my father’s [house] has been with me. As you know, I have served your father with all my might; but your father has cheated me, changing my wages time and again. G-d, however, would not let him do me harm ... G-d has taken away your father’s livestock and given it to me. And in the dream a messenger of God said to me, ‘Jacob!’ ‘Here,’ I answered. And the messenger said, ‘Note well that all the he-goats which are mating with the flock are streaked, speckled, and mottled; for I have noted all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now, arise and leave this land and return to your native land.’”*

His wives respond that they agree:

וַתֵּעַן רָחֵל וְלֵאָה וְתֹאמַרְנָה לוֹ הֲעוֹד לָנוּ חֵלֶק וְנִחְלָה בְּבֵית אַבְיָנוּ. הֲלוֹא נִכְרִיּוֹת נִחְשַׁבְנוּ לוֹ כִּי מִכְרָנוּ וַיֹּאכַל גַּם אֶכּוֹל אֶת כֶּסֶפְנוּ. כִּי כָל הָעֲשָׂר אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֵלֶיכֶם מֵאֲבִינֵנוּ לָנוּ הוּא וְלִבְנֵינוּ וְעַתָּה כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלֶיכֶם אֵלֶיךָ עָשָׂה.

*Then Rachel and Leah answered him, saying, “Have we still a share in the inheritance of our father’s house? Surely, he regards us as outsiders, now that he has sold us and has used up our purchase price. Truly, all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, do just as God has told you.”*

Rav Lopian asks, why all these unnecessary verses? If things were different and Lavan was the perfect welcoming loving host, would they have stayed? Would they not listen to G-D? Why inform us of all the many challenges and difficulties? He

answers that this conversation teaches a very important lesson. The Torah way of life is meant to be enjoyable. We should not believe that this world does not really matter after all, given that we are assured that living a life of Torah and mitzvot will be rewarded in the World to Come. Yaakov and his wives are teaching us that this is not the Torah way. Torah was meant to be enjoyed. Their move away from Lavan wasn't a necessary sacrifice to fulfill Hashem's will. It was so that they can live a better life. Hence, the necessity for “*lachen*” and the enjoyable festivities on Shavous.

In addition, the lesson of “*lachen*” is to teach that Torah is all encompassing, it governs and uplifts any and every area of life. Note, the Jewish people leave Egypt on the 15th of the month of Nisan. Seven days later, they experience the miraculous splitting of the Sea. We read immediately thereafter of their encounter at Marah and their being given a sampling of mitzvot. Why, however, could they not proceed from the high of the splitting of the Sea directly to receive the Torah at Sinai? An answer that I heard from one of my teachers is fundamental to the understanding and appreciation of Torah. The Torah was not meant to be lived in an environment of miracles and the supernatural. Rather, *Bereishit bara Elokim*. This is understood by Rashi to mean that the creation was for Israel and for the Torah, both of which are referred to as *reishit*. Elokim (the name of G-D which denotes the natural world) created the world for Torah and Israel. G-D gave the Torah after the month of Iyar, which is devoid of miracles, to emphasize that the Torah and Israel are to uplift and give meaning and purpose to the natural world.