



SHAVUOT

TORAH TZIVA LANU MOSHE MORASHA KEHILAT YAAKOV

*Moshe commanded us to observe the Torah,
the heritage of the congregation of Israel.*

by Rabbi Jacob Benzaquen

From an early age we teach our children to believe in *Hashem* and His holy *Torah*. Even the youngest of children are taught to recite *Mode Ani Lefanech* and

Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe... As the child grows and matures, his studies are elevated to a more sophisticated level with each advancing grade.

The ability to ponder more complex questions by growing minds was never made more clear to me than when a 6th grade student posed the following question: "On Shavuot we read the ten commandments. What do I have to do in order to fulfill the first commandment: *Anochi Hashem Elokecha Asher Hotzeticha Meeretz Mitzrayim Mibet Avadim?*" (I am the Hashem your G-d Who brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of pharaoh where you were slaves.) "I know how to fulfill the other nine commandments," the child remarked. "For example, we have to honor our parents to fulfill the commandment of *kibud av va em*; we have to rest on shabbat in order to fulfill the commandment of *zachor et yom hashabat lekadesh*. I shouldn't give false testimony in order to fulfill *lo taane bereaja ed shaker*, and so on."

With G-d's help I answered my student in the following way: First of all, we cannot help but notice that the first commandment contains a redundancy as it refers to G-d with two names: *Adonai* and *Elokecha*. When G-d divided the sea, an Egyptian female slave saw what Yechezkel Hanavi didn't see in *Maase Hamerkava*. "What did she see?" our Rebeim asked, to which the Midrash responded that she saw *Hashem* in the form of a young strong warrior who took Egyptian cars and threw them into the sea with

such ease, it was as if he were throwing a mere toy. On the third month after departing from Egypt, *Hashem* came down at Sinai to give His people the *Torah*. Jews saw Him in the form of an elder man, with a white beard and a venerable presence.

At this point, the entire class became mesmerized by the story. I invited the other children to participate in our discussion. Pretend - I told them- that you were slaves in Egypt and you saw G-d as if he were a young warrior (*Elokim*) fighting against the Egyptians, and after a while (Sivan the 6th), you saw Him (*Adonai*) as an elderly, merciful figure. What would you think?

I received many answers: A child explained that *Hashem* has the power of Metamorphosis and that is why we can see him in different ways. Another child indicated that *Hashem* was the first name and *Elokim* was the last name. A third boy candidly responded, "I think there were two G-ds." At this moment, I responded, BRAVO! This is what other people might think, but *Hashem* wanted us to know that He is the only G-d: I am *Hashem* your G-d, the same one who brought you out of Egypt.

Thus, the way to fulfill the first commandment is by believing in G-d's unity and not, *Chas Veshalom*, by believing that there are two G-ds. This is why we declare twice a day, *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokenu Hashem Echad*. Hear, O Israel, *Hashem* is our G-d *Hashem*, the One and Only.

In closing, I would like to share the following about Shavuot, also known as *Chag Habikurim*. One of the most beautiful interpretations given by the Midrash to the word *bikurim* is that it derives from *bechor*, firstborn. This implies that Shavuot is a time of rebirth and renewal, when the world's spiritual resources were rejuvenated as the *Torah* was given at Mount Sinai.

The Midrash further elaborates on the idea by making a distinction between the physical and the spiritual aspects of the universe. The internal dynamic of the universe is driven by spiritual forces rather than materialistic ones. It is believed that during this holiday, the Jew undergoes a spiritual renewal and can take a vital part in seeking out this radiant internal beauty. *Chag Sameach* to all of you!



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