

TorahFax

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Monday, Sivan 2, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 46th Sefirah / May 22, 2023

More on the holiday of Shavuot – the holiday when we received the Torah at Mount Sinai, which begins this Thursday night. The following are questions and answers about the holiday of Shavuot.

Q. Why is there a custom to decorate the synagogue with trees, flowers, and greenery for Shavuot?

A. The Reason: The Torah was given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai which is in the Sinai desert. However, in honor of the Giving of the Torah G-d performed a special miracle and the entire area surrounding the mountain sprouted trees and grass. To commemorate this miracle, we decorate the synagogue with branches, trees, and plants.

Q. G-d doesn't perform any unnecessary miracles. Why did He perform this miracle?

A. Our sages explain that this miracle was to teach us that Torah has the power to transform one's life and surroundings from a spiritual wasteland and wilderness into a fruitful landscape filled with wisdom and purpose.

The Torah teaches us our purpose in this world and gives value and meaning as to what our mission is in this world. Thus, G-d performed this wonderful miracle to make us realize the true purpose of Torah.

The Torah tells us that the Two Tablets and the Ten Commandments in them, "Were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d engraved upon the Tablets."

The lesson: Letters which are engraved are totally one with the stone in which they are carved. Similarly, the connection between a Jew and the Torah should be so strong that they are one. The Ten Commandments were engraved to teach us that the Torah must be engraved in the soul of every Jew.

Q. We know that the Torah has 613 commandments. The Two Tablets had only ten commandments on them. When were the other 603 commandments given?

A. Unlike the Ten Commandments which were engraved on the Two Tablets by G-d, the other commandments were written in the Torah by Moshe, but they were all given at Mount Sinai.

Our sages point out that by delving into the hidden aspects of the Ten Commandments one can find all the other commandments hidden and included in the Ten Commandments.

Q. Why do we stay up on the first night of Shavuot studying Torah?

A. When G-d came down on Mount Sinai to give the Torah, He came very early in the morning, but the people were still asleep. G-d waited for them until they woke up. We stay up the first night of Shavuot studying Torah in order to correct our forefather's error.

Tuesday, Sivan 3, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 47th Sefirah / May 23, 2023

Shavuot, the Holiday in which we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, begins this Thursday night. In Israel, where only one day is celebrated, the holiday is Thursday night and Friday. In the Diaspora the holiday continues also into Friday night and Shabbat.

Q. How many letters, words, verses, and Parshiot are in the Torah?

A. The Torah has: 304,805 letters; 79,847 words; 5,888 verses; 54 Parshiot.

Q. Why, do we read on Shavuot, Megilat Ruth – the story of Ruth who converted to Judaism?

A. Shavuot is the Yartzeit (day of passing) of King David, who was a direct descendant of Ruth. We read the wonderful story of King David's great-great-grandmother, Ruth, who converted to Judaism.

Ruth didn't convert and accept the Jewish faith for any material gain. In fact, she gave up a materially secure life for a life of poverty in order to join her mother-in-law, Naomi, and the people of Israel. Her mother-in-law explained to her that joining the people of Israel at that time would bring great physical hardship for her. Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, for wherever you go, I will go; where you will lodge, I will lodge; Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d; where you die, I will die and there I will be buried!"

The story of Ruth teaches us that we must not learn the Torah and fulfill mitzvot for personal gain. Rather, we should feel fortunate that we were chosen to be entrusted with the Torah and mitzvot and do our best to fulfill G-d's commandments, regardless of the effort or expense involved.

King David, whose yartzeit is on Shavuot, wrote the book of Psalms (Tehilim). It contains the songs and prayers which King David offered to G-d. Jews have always turned to the Psalms whenever they were in trouble and needed G-d's help. David was King of Israel for forty years and died at the age of seventy.

Q. What special role did the Jewish children have at Mount Sinai at the Giving of the Torah?

A. Our Sages say that before G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, He demanded guarantors that the Torah will be studied and cherished.

The people made a number of suggestions which were rejected by G-d. Only when they declared, "Our children will be our guarantors, did G-d agree to give the Torah.

The importance of teaching Torah to children is best described by the following Torah Law, "One may not disturb children from studying Torah even for the purpose of building the Holy Temple."

Giving our children a Jewish education from a very early age is essential to the survival of Torah and thus the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Wednesday, Sivan 4, 5783 (Hakhel Year) 48th Sefirah / May 24, 2023

Questions & Answers on the holiday of Shavuot – the holiday of the Giving of the Torah

Q. Was the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, G-d's first revelation to Moshe at Mount Sinai?

A. Moshe's first encounter with G-d at Mount Sinai was a year earlier. Moshe, who was caring for his father-in-law's sheep, brought his flock to Mount Sinai. G-d revealed Himself to him from a burning bush, commanding him to go to Pharaoh and take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Q. Why did G-d choose Mount Sinai for the Giving of the Torah?

A. Our sages say that the reason G-d chose Mount Sinai, is because it was a small mountain. G-d wanted to teach us that the proper way we can benefit from the Torah is when we are humble. No matter how much Torah knowledge a person achieves, he should conduct himself with humility. But, at the same time, the Torah was given on a mountain to teach us that the Torah does lift a person up spiritually when studying and adhering to the Torah.

Q. Why is the Torah compared to water?

A. 1) Just like water flows from a high place down to the lowest level, the Torah will not stay with those who are haughty and hold themselves high, but rather with those who are humble.

2) Water cleans the body and purifies a person spiritually (by immersing in a Mikvah), so too, the Torah sanctifies and spiritually purifies a person's body and soul.

3) Water is most appreciated when a person is thirsty and the same is with Torah. To truly appreciate its value, one must develop a thirst for it.

4) Just as water (rain) comes down in drops and yet has the power to raise the levels of streams and rivers, so too is true of Torah. If one studies even a little Torah each day, it accumulates and raises the person to great spiritual heights.

The Rebbe of Lublin made the following comparison between Torah, mitzvot and water. "Water has enormous power; it can wash away anything that stands in its path and is always on the move, resembling life. However, if water becomes too cold, it freezes and is like a rock."

"The same is with Torah and mitzvot. If they are performed cold - without any warmth, feeling and personal dedication, then one's spiritual service is lacking and will not accomplish all that it could. However, if one studies Torah and keeps the mitzvot with fire; warmth and enthusiasm, then one can attain great accomplishments and great spiritual benefits."