

FIRST DAY SHAVUOS 1990
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Today is the first day of Shavuos. Throughout our prayers we call Shavuos "Man Matan Torahseiuni, the time of the giving of our Torah". However, in the Torah, itself, we find no reference to the fact that the Torah was given on Shavuos, no direct reference. Of course, it is implied because if we count the number of days from Pesach until we received the Torah on Mount Sinai it is obviously that Shavuos is also the holiday of the giving of the Torah, but in the Torah the holiday is just known as "Shavuos, weeks". It is not known as the time of the giving of the Torah. Why should this be so, and why is such a prosaic name given to this great event of the revelation?

We know that in Judaism there are 3 main beliefs that permeate all of Judaism. One is that G-d is the creator and that G-d, because He is the creator, has power, and, therefore, He is worthy to be prayed to. The second idea is G-d the revealer, that G-d wants to have a relationship with man and that G-d, for His own purposes, wants man to help perfect this world. Now, it is possible that G-d could be G-d the creator but have nothing at all to do with His creation the same way man does. If a watchmaker makes a watch and sells it from then on he has no relationship to the watch at all unless maybe it breaks and the person brings it back to him, but the watch could be sold to a second or third person and the original watchmaker would not know where that watch was or in what condition it was, but we say G-d is not like that. G-d has a permanent relationship with His creations, and G-d wants to have this relationship with us and it is a permanent and constant relationship. G-d has given us instruction on how we are to help Him perfect this world. G-d has, so to speak, limited Himself and He has said, "I am not going to perfect the world myself. I am going to have man do it together with Me." G-d has, so to speak, limited His own actions in this world and given us a role to play. Finally, we have the idea of G-d the redeemer, that G-d has a goal to which this world is headed and G-d wants this world

to be a world of peace and understanding and brotherhood in which all physical and moral evil is ended, and He has given us a role in arriving at this redemption, but G-d is there beside us helping us. G-d is G-d the redeemer.

We have 3 special holidays which speak about this. We have Pesach, which speaks about the fact that G-d is the redeemer, and we have Shavuos, which talks about the fact that G-d is the revealer. G-d gave us the Torah on Shavuos. Finally, we have the holiday of Succos, in which G-d is G-d the creator, the G-d of nature. Of course, right before Succos we have Rosh Hashonna and Yom Kippur, which reinforces the idea of G-d the creator. Therefore, we see that these are the main principles of Judaism. They are not only stated in our prayers, for example, we have two prayers before the Shma, one states that G-d is the creator and the other that G-d is the revealer, and one prayer after the Shma, which says that G-d is the redeemer, but we have 3 distinct holidays which speak about G-d being the redeemer, and G-d being the revealer, and G-d being the creator.

However, if we look at the holidays we will see that they are out of order. Even if you want to say that the year begins on Rosh Hashonna when you talk about G-d the creator first, but then on Pesach we talk about G-d, the redeemer. Only later do we come to G-d, the revealer. They are out of order. It should be G-d, the creator, then G-d, the revealer, and then G-d, the redeemer, but that is not the way our holidays are structured. Of course, we know that the first month of the Jewish year is Nisan because we stress the fact that G-d is the redeemer, that the basis of Jewish existence is that the world is going someplace and that we have a role to play and that G-d wants us to help Him perfect this world. Therefore, redemption is the first idea which was presented to the Jewish people as a people when they leave Egypt. They feel it in their bones. They, themselves, experience a redemption,

a redemption which is a paradigm for the future redemption of the world. G-d helps us and G-d wants us to continue to perfect the redemption until the whole world is redeemed. Therefore, He gives us 49 days later the Torah to help us be His partner in perfecting this world, in redeeming this world. Why, though, is it out of order? Why don't we have creation, revelation, and redemption?

The reason for that, the rabbis tell us, is because creation is fixed.

Creation we cannot do anything about. Man is the man that he is. Man is not the man that we want him to be. There is a great Jewish heresy, which later communism took over, which says that man is good, fine, wonderful; it is the environment which corrupts man. It is the social structures which corrupts man. It is government which corrupts man, but if we can remove all these outside influences and sources man can be perfected without any effort at all. All we have to do is structure society so man's goodness shows through. We, of course, do not believe that in Judaism. Judaism believes that man is born neutral. Man can do good or evil, and it is up to us to study Torah so we learn how to be good, so we learn how to want to do what we ought to do. That is the purpose of Jewish education, to teach us character. Unfortunately, there are people who believe that we have to study to be doctors and lawyers and electricians and plumbers, but we do not have to study to be good. That we should know how to be automatically, but it is not so. Man is not born good, and it is not just his environment which corrupts him. Obviously, environment plays a role, but man is born neutral and it is up to us to be good or bad. We do not believe, as other religions believe, that man is born evil, but man is born neutral. If he wants to do good G-d will give him the opportunity to do good. If he wants to do bad G-d will give him the opportunity to do bad. It is all up to him. We must perfect ourselves if we are

going to perfect this world. That is why there are so many people involved in outside causes, causes that are outside themselves: the environment, other causes of government legislation, etc. and they do not feel they have to work on themselves at all. That is one of the fallacies of the new age thinking, that you can have spiritual experiences without really having to work for them, that all you have to do is go to some sort of guru and he will fill your mind and body with all sorts of ideas, and without any effort you can have a spiritual experience. You can take a drug and have a spiritual experience. This we do not believe in. It is hard work to make yourself what you should be, and it is hard work to make the world what it should be. Just passing this law or that law is not going to help. Of course, it is important that we structure society the right way, too. We can see in Israel where they are having difficulties because the society is not structured the way it should be. It is still based on a socialist model and the socialist model does not always work and many industries are floundering. In fact, they found by accident, Mendel Kaplan, the head of the Jewish Agency, that the Russian aliyah now is much more successful because when they come to the airport they give them \$2000, tell them to find their own place, and then they give them \$1000 a month, and it is working perfectly. In fact, they thought they would need many more apartments than they do but many Russian families are very small, sometimes single parent family with only one child, and they have found that sometimes two families will live together in a three bedroom apartment. They live in better conditions than they lived in in Russia and they are happy. So we can see that the structure of society does make a difference, and it is important, but it is not the only thing that is important. We also have to work on ourselves. We have to be moral and good and just people. That takes a lot of effort and a lot of time.

That is why the name Shavuos is the name it is because we have to work at it. It is not just the giving of the Torah that is important. It is not holding the Torah in your hands and kissing it and thinking it is wonderful. It is working at it, incorporating its teachings into your heart and mind which will cause the redemption to come. Therefore, creation is fixed. There is no such thing as a new man. There is no such thing as a new world either. The world is the way it is and we have to accept it the way it is. We wish it would be different. We wish man would be something that he is not, but anybody who has taught kids knows that kids are mean. They have a mean streak and a good streak. You can see this by the way they treat each other. They do not have to be taught to be mean. Some kids are more compassionate and kind than other and some are meaner than others, but we know that we have to work on ourselves. We have to work on ourselves when we are adults also. There are many people who for no reason do things that are beyond belief, like all those financiers who are already billionaires. Why do they have to cheat? Why do they need more? Why do they have to get another billion? They could not stop. There was something in their character which caused them to persist in doing things which would only lead to disaster for themselves and for others. Therefore, it is a continual process, and if we are to bring redemption to the world we have to work on ourselves. It is an old story. People do not like to hear it. They want to hear shortcuts, just like they want to hear that learning is fun. Well, learning is only fun after you learn something, but it is very hard to learn. It is hard to write and do those things you have to do in order to be successful in any occupation. It is hard work. It is not easy. The same thing goes for morality. If we want to be moral people we have to work at it. Those people who work at it succeed much better than those who do not. It is a known fact

that the ultra-orthodox in Israel have the lowest crime rate of any group. It is because they work at it. They also have the highest percentage of giving of charity. Look what happened to many of the families here in Houston who were upright people where you find that many of their children are no longer the way Jewish children used to be. We never had any juvenile delinquency or alcoholism or drug addiction. Unfortunately, we have it now, along with child abuse and wife beating which were unheard of in the Jewish community. In order to have Torah, in order to gain Torah you have to work at it. In order to gain those qualities which are necessary to bring the redemption you have to work at it day in and day out, and it is not an easy task. It is a difficult task.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was sitting in a train opposite another person. It was a long train ride and the very first hour the man every few minutes would giggle, "Ha, ha, ha, ha." Then he would push his hand aside. The other man was curious and after an hour he asked the man, "What are you doing? What is the matter?" The man said, "Well, it is a long train ride and I'm telling myself jokes. That's why I am laughing." The man said, "Okay, well I understand why you're laughing, but why are you pushing your hand aside?" He said, "Because I have heard that joke before." That is, of course, what many people do. They have heard the story before that if they want to be moral they have to work at it and study and have to not take shortcuts and look at situations from the perspective of what is right and wrong and not by whether they want to do it or not. It is difficult to follow the precepts of the Torah. It is difficult to make them our own, but we can with education, with effort, and with study. Let us hope and pray that we will. Let us hope and pray that we will not count on being a new man, but that we will count on creating a new man from within ourselves by taming our evil

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inclination as well as our good inclination so the Mashiach will come
and redemption will come. Amen.