

## Shavuos

We are about to celebrate *Shavuos*, the *Yom Tov* which we refer to as the “Time of the Giving of our Torah.” The timing of this holiday is not coincidental. We celebrate *Shavuos* in the middle of the spring, the heady time of year when the weather is warming up, the trees are blossoming and all of nature seems to be singing. This time of year necessitates a “mission realignment” since the world around us is beckoning to us in a most alluring way.

The *Gemara (Avodah Zarah 2b)* tells us that *Hashem* offered the *Torah* to the other nations to give them an equal opportunity in gaining the strong antidote to the *Yetzer HaRah* - evil inclination - which the *Torah* provides. The nations responded by identifying challenges in the *Torah* to their national vices. One nation said we cannot abide by the commandment not to murder. Another said we cannot refrain from adultery, etc. Although the Jewish people are considered the fiercest of nations (see *Beitza 25b*), they responded with *נעשה ונשמע* - we are ready to commit. The Jewish nation had the trust that the gift of *Torah* would help them overcome the challenges posed by their moral weaknesses, and furthermore, it would help them channel those weaknesses to a higher purpose.

*Hashem's* response to our bold decision was one of great joy. The *Mishna* refers to the giving of the *Torah* as *Hashem's* “wedding day.” We cemented an enduring relationship with *Hashem* by making the leap and committing ourselves to Him unconditionally. This relationship has had many ups and downs but His loyalty to us is unwavering and will eventually culminate in a blissful future when the time is right.

The *Torah* was given to us not as a series of challenges to demonstrate our fidelity and sacrifice for *Hashem*. It was given to us to ennoble us and to give us a life of meaning and purpose. This is a critical belief which we must have if we are to rejoice in our Jewishness and to reap the attendant benefits. If we think that *Torah* life is a burden we must endure for eventual reward, we will miss out on all the beauty and fulfillment that the *Torah* offers along the way.

This *Yom Tov*, we need to focus on our joy in having received this wonderful gift of *Torah* learning and of *Torah* life. This will make us much more receptive to the hidden beauty that the *Torah* affords us, and it will make us better people for it. If we choose to access the *Torah's* wisdom with joy and anticipation, it will make our lives special and worthy of *Hashem's* blessings.