

But...How Do We Prepare to Listen?

Day 1 Shavuot 5786

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1. Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch

The essence of Shavuot is not the giving of the Torah but the preparedness of humanity to accept the Torah. Just as the Jews in the desert prepared themselves to accept the Torah, so must we. This would alleviate the difficulty of assigning the date of the holiday to the sixth day of the month, which is not necessarily the day the Torah was given, but was, in fact, the day the People of Israel prepared themselves to receive it. This understanding is borne out by the choice of Torah reading for Shavuot, Chapter 19 of Exodus, which begins with the preparations made to receive the Torah.

2. Exodus 19:9-15

And God said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after." Then Moses reported the people's words to God, and God said to Moses, "Go to the people and warn them to stay pure today and tomorrow. Let them wash their clothes. Let them be ready for the third day; for on the third day God will come down, in the sight of all the people, on Mount Sinai. You shall set bounds for the people round about, saying, 'Beware of going up the mountain or touching the border of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death without being touched—by being either stoned or shot; animal or person, a trespasser shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain." Moses came down from the mountain to the people and warned the people to stay pure, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the men, "Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בָא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעַבַּיִת עָנָן
 בְּעָבֹר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדַבְרֵי עֲמָךְ וְגַם־כִּי יֹאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
 וַיֹּאמֶר ה' וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר ה'
 לְךָ אֶל־הָעָם וְקִדְשָׁתֶם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וּכְבֹּסוּ שְׂמַלְתֵּם: וְהָיוּ
 נִכְנְיִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי כִּי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יֵרֵד ה' לְעֵינֵי
 כָּל־הָעָם עַל־הַר סִינַי: וְהִגַּבְלֹתָ אֶת־הָעָם סָבִיב לְאָמֹר
 הַשְׁמְרוּ לָכֶם עֲלוֹת בְּהָר וּנְגַע בְּקִצְהוּ: כָּל־הַנִּגַּע בְּהָר
 מוֹת יוּמָת: לֹא־תִגַּע בּוֹ יָד כִּי־סִקּוֹל יִסְקַל אוֹ־יָרֵה יִיָּרֵה
 אִם־בְּהֵמָה אִם־אִישׁ לֹא יִחִיָּה בְּמִשְׁרַף הַיַּבֵּל הַמָּה יַעֲלוּ
 בְּהָר: וַיֵּרֵד מֹשֶׁה מִן־הַהָר אֶל־הָעָם וַיִּקְדָּשׁ אֶת־הָעָם
 וַיְכַבְּסוּ שְׂמַלְתֵּם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־הָעָם הָיוּ נִכְנְיִים לְשִׁלְשֶׁת
 יָמִים אֶל־תִּגְשׁוּ אֶל־אִשָּׁה:

3. Rabbeinu Bahya on Exodus 19:10

AND THEY SHOULD WASH THEIR GARMENTS - From the instruction that they were to wash their clothing we derive that they were also to immerse

וכבסו שמלותם. מכבוס הבגדים למדנו טבילת הגוף, וכן דרשו רז"ל במכילתא אין לך כבוס בגדים שלא יהא טעון טבילה.

<p>their bodies in a ritual bath...wherever the Torah mentions the requirement to wash one's clothing, the need to immerse one's body in a ritual bath is an automatic corollary.</p>	
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4. Ha'emek D'var on Exodus 19:11

<p>AND THEY SHOULD BE READY ON THE THIRD DAY...According to our words, that sanctity was separation from their wives...[But] This includes preparing their minds and solitude for each person according to their ability.</p>	<p>והיו נכונים ליום השלישי. לפי דברינו דבכלל וקדשתם הוא פרישות מן האשה... עוד בכלל זה הכנה למחשבה והתבודדות כל א' לפי כחו</p>
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5. Ibn Ezra on Exodus 19:11

<p>AND BE READY - Its meaning might be that no person among them should sleep during the night, after the manner of the high priest on Yom Kippur, as Israel would hear God's voice in the morning.</p>	<p>והיו נכנים. אולי לא יישן אדם בהם בלילה. שישמעו קול ה' בבקר. כדרך כהן גדול ביום הכפורים</p>
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6. Talmud Bavli Yoma 87a

<p>It is related that when Rabbi Zeira had a complaint against a person who insulted him, he would pace back and forth before him and present himself, so that the person could come and appease him. Rabbi Zeira made himself available so that it would be easy for the other person to apologize to him.</p>	<p>רבי זירא כי הוה ליה מילתא בהדי איניש, הוה חליף ותני לקמיה וממצי ליה, כי היכי דניתי וניפוק ליה מדעתיה</p>
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7. Shemot Rabbah 29:9

<p>R. Abahu said in the name of R. Yohanan: When the Holy Blessed One gave the Torah, birds didn't tweet or fly, oxen didn't moo, the ofanim (angels) didn't fly, the serafim (another kind of angel) didn't say "Holy! Holy!," the sea didn't ripple, people didn't speak—the whole world was deafeningly silent. And the voice went out: "I am the Lord your God."</p>	<p>אמר רבי אבהו בשם רבי יוחנן, כשנתן הקדוש ברוך הוא את התורה, צפור לא צוח, עוף לא פרח, שור לא געה, אופנים לא עפו, שרפים לא אמרו קדוש קדוש, הים לא נזדעזע, הבריות לא דברו, אלא העולם שותק ומחריש, ויצא הקול: "אנכי ה' אלקיך"</p>
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