

The Soul of a Nation Reborn - Reflections on Shavuot

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Tikkun Leyl Shavuot 5785

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Introduction

We traditionally describe Shavuot as *zman matan torateinu* – *the time of the Giving of the Torah*. This description is not found in the Torah, where the holiday is referred to as either Chag HaShavuot or Yom HaBikkurim. The Gemara in Shabbat 86b-88a develops a scenario in which the Torah was given to Am Yisrael on the 6th of Sivan, but there is no reference to *zman matan torateinu*. It is only in the early siddurim, written during the Geonic era (8th to 9th centuries), that the term first appears.

Each of the three pilgrimage festivals has a corresponding reading from a Megillah: Kohelet on Sukkot and Shir HaShirim on Pesach. Of course, during the holiday of Shavuot, we are honored with the reading of the Megillah of Ruth.

There are different reasons discussed in Rabbinic literature for reading this megillah:

1. Time of the harvesting
2. Events leading to the birth of Dovid Hamelech
 - a. Discussion of the genealogy of David (4:17-22) – Ruth is David's great-grandmother
3. Acts of *Chesed* and their importance. Here are three examples:
 - a. Ruth to Naomi
 - b. Boaz's generosity and protection
 - c. Communal support of Ruth and Naomi
4. Ruth's conversion and its possible application to Matan Torah
 - a. Ruth as the paradigmatic *ger Tzedek* – *righteous convert*
 - b. Her personal acceptance reflecting a spiritual commitment
5. Torah is acquired through hardship and commitment
 - a. Ruth's life of personal sacrifice, dedication, and humility (perhaps as a message to us on this holiday)

Harav Eliyahu Bakshi Doron (1941-2020), *zt"l*, was a Sephardic Rabbi and former Rishon L'Tzion. His leadership efforts focused on uniting and guiding the Jewish people. Born under the British Mandate of Palestine in Yerushalayim, he studied at Yeshivat HaDarom in Rechovot. He served as the Chief Rabbi of Bat Yam in the early 1970s and continued in this role as the Chief Rabbi of Haifa until the early 1990s. He was Rishon L'Tzion from 1993 to

2003 alongside Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau. Known as a moderate and inclusive person, R. Bakshi-Doron promoted dialogue with Jews from diverse backgrounds. He passed away from complications of COVID in April 2020.

His major rabbinic work was a series of volumes called *Binyan Av*, where the word Av, Aleph Bet, referred to his initials – **E**liyahu and **B**akshi-Doron. In *Chelek Bet*, he discusses the relationship between Megillat Ruth and the *Chag* of Shavuot.

Here, he uncovers a strong link between Megillat Ruth and *Zman Matan Torateinu*

6. The essence of the *Chag* is recognizing the conversion of the Jewish people and, thus, the transformation of the Jews to become *Klal Yisrael*

The Megillah celebrates for all time Ruth's desire to find shelter beneath the wings of the *Shechinah*-Divine Presence and, additionally, the merit accorded to her in becoming the great-grandmother of Dovid HaMelech.

Section I

Ka-Chem KaGer

Ruth's conversion serves as the paradigm from which we derive the Halachic process for conversion. The Gemara in *Yevamot* 47b interprets each part of Ruth's response to Naomi's urge to stay in Moav as expressing acceptance of core Jewish obligations (Ruth 1:16):

אמר רבי אלעזר: מאי קראָה — דכתיב: "וּתְרָא כִּי מְתַאֲמָצֶת הִיא לְלֶכֶת אִתָּהּ וּתְחַדֵּל לְדָבָר אֵלֶיהָ". אָמְרָה לָהּ: אָסִיר לָן תַּחּוּם שַׁבָּת — "בְּאֶשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אִלָּי". אָסִיר לָן יְחִוּד — "בְּאֶשֶׁר תֵּלִינִי אִלַּי". מִפְּקֻדֵּינָן שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת וּשְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה מִצְוֹת — "עִמָּךְ עָמִי". אָסִיר לָן עֲבוּדָה זָרָה — "וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ".

The fuller *pasuk* in the Megillah:

וּתְאֻמְרָה רוּת: אֵל תִּפְגַּעֵיבִי לְעִזְבֹּךְ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ, כִּי אֶל־אֶשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אִלָּךְ, וּבְאֶשֶׁר תֵּלִינִי אִלַּי; עִמָּךְ עָמִי, וְאֵלֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ.

"Do not urge me to leave you... For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death separates you from me."

- **"Where you go, I will go"** – Acceptance of **Jewish communal life** and **halachic boundaries** (e.g., Shabbat travel limits).
- **"Where you lodge, I will lodge"** – Acceptance of **Jewish domestic laws** (e.g., kashrut and purity).

- **“Your people shall be my people”** – Acceptance of **national identity** and **Jewish culture**.
- **“Your God shall be my God”** – Acceptance of **monotheism** and **theological beliefs**.
- **“Where you die, I will die”** – Acceptance of **punishments and rewards**, including potential **martyrdom or suffering** for one’s faith.
- **“There I will be buried”** – Acceptance of **Jewish burial practices** and **belief in resurrection or the afterlife**.

These six foundational principles inform how to relate to the prospective convert and encompass the core elements of Judaism, including acceptance and awareness of the Mitzvot. And further, although known to practicing Jews already, it provides a framework that clearly describes the transformation desired by the ger.

While we derive the *gerut* process from the *pesukim* in the Megillah, Rav Bakshi-Doron suggests that we learn the essentials of *Giyur* from Matan Torah.

He quotes the *Gemara* in *Yevamot* 22a:

אמר רב יוסף: גר שנתגייר כקטן שנולד דמי

Rav Yosef notes that the legal status of a convert is akin to that of a newborn child. This is related to the *pasuk* in *Sidrat Nitzavim*, *Devarim* 29:14:

”מֵאִי דְכָתִיב אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ עַד הַיּוֹם וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ פֹה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם”

What is meant by “those who are here with us today and those who are not here with us today”? (Deut. 29:14). The *Gemara*, while discussing the *korbanot-ritual animal sacrifices* that an aspiring convert must bring upon entering the Covenant, explores whether converts were spiritually present at the giving of the Torah. That is to say, were their souls at Sinai?

The Talmud (*Shevuot* 39a) explains:

”כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁנוּ פֹה – אֵין לִי אֶלָּא אוֹתָן הָעוֹמְדִין עַל הַר סִינִי; דּוֹרוֹת הַבָּאִים וְגֵרִים הָעֹתִידִין לְהִתְגַּיֵּר – מִנֵּין? תִּלְמוּד לומר: ”וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנוּ”.

”מלמד שכל הנשמות עתידות להיות”

”This teaches that all the future souls, including converts, were present at Sinai.”

Adds the Bechor Shor (Tosafist period – 12th century):

אשר איננו פה עמנו היום. שעתידין להלוך ולהתגייר, ואתם תקבלו על ידם הברית שיהא על-שאינם-העומדים כעל-העומדים, ורבותינו אמרו (נדרים כה, א) לא אתכם לבדכם: שאמר משה להם: לא על-דעתכם אני משביע אתכם, אלא על דעת המקום ועל דעתי:

The Gemara discusses (*Kritot* 9a) whether a convert (*ger*) must bring a *korban olah* (burnt offering) upon conversion. One opinion says yes, and support is brought from a *gezeirah shavah* (verbal analogy) based on the verse in Bemidbar 15:15, in Sidrat Shlach:

הַקֹּהֵל חֻקָּה אֶחָת לָכֶם וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם כַּכֶּם כִּגֵּר יִהְיֶה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

“the rest of the congregation. There shall be one law for you and for the resident stranger; it shall be a law for all time throughout the ages. You and the stranger shall be alike before יהוה;”

This pasuk equates the **Jew** and the **convert** in the **obligation of *korbanot*** and **observance of *mitzvot***.

- The Gemara interprets this verse as establishing that **a convert is equal to a Jew** in terms of sacrificial law — and **must bring the same offerings**.
- It becomes a **halachic foundation** for equating converts with born Jews in matters of *korbanot* and Torah observance.

The verse "*ka'chem ka'ger*" is cited to affirm that:

- There is **no legal distinction** between Jew and convert regarding commandments.
- The convert is **fully included** in the covenantal obligations.
- It reinforces the **spiritual and halachic parity** between the born Jew and the *ger tzedek*.

So just as the Jew experiences (for males) *milah*, *tevilah*, and the bringing of *korbanot*, so the *ger*.

The Rambam in *Sefer Kedushah*, *Hilkhos Issurei Biah Perek* 13:1 states:

בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְּבָרִים נִכְנסוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבְרִית. בְּמִילָה וּבְטִבְיָלָה וּבְקִרְבָּן

There are three elements that *Klal Yisrael* utilized to enter the *Brit*, *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korbanot*.

- *Milah* was in Mitzrayim

מִילָה הִיְתָה בְּמִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שמות יב מח) "וְכָל עָרֹל לֹא יֹאכֹל בֹּר". מִלְּאוֹתָם מִשֶּׁה רִבְּנוּ שְׁכָלָם בְּטִלוּ בְרִית מִילָה בְּמִצְרַיִם חוּץ מִשְׁבֵּט לְוִי וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר (דברים לג ט) "וּבְרִיתְךָ יִנָּצֵר":

- *Tevilah* was in the *midbar* prior to *Matan Torah* (see in *Yitro*)

וּטְבִילָה הָיְתָה בַּמִּדְבָּר קֹדֶם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה שְׁנֶאֱמַר (שמות יט י) "וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר וּכְבַּסוּ שְׂמֹלֵתְכֶם".

- *Korban*, "*VaYaalu Olot*"

וְקָרְבַּן שְׁנֶאֱמַר (שמות כד ה) "וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת נַעֲרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת", עַל יְדֵי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקְּרִיבוּם

So for all generations: *Kachem KaGer* – the prospective *Ger* follows the same process as all Jews did before *Matan Torah* – the *Ger*'s conversion process culminates in their own personal *Matan Torah* experience.

Continues the Rambam in 13:4:

וְכֵן לְדוֹרוֹת כְּשִׁירְצָה הָעֶכֶז"ם לְהַכְנִס לְבְרִית וּלְהַסְתּוֹפֵף תַּחַת כֹּנָפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה וַיִּקְבַּל עָלָיו עַל תּוֹרָה צִרְיֹן מִלָּה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קָרְבָּן. וְאִם נִקְבָּה הִיא טְבִילָה וְקָרְבַּן שְׁנֶאֱמַר (במדבר טו טו) "כִּכְּכֶם כָּגֹר". מָה אַתֶּם בְּמִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קָרְבָּן אִף הִגֵּר לְדוֹרוֹת בְּמִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קָרְבָּן:

Earlier in 12:17:

כָּל הָעֶכֶז"ם כָּלָם כְּשִׁיתְגִּירוּ וַיִּקְבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶן כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁבַתּוֹרָה וְהַעֲבָדִים כְּשִׁישְׁתַּחֲרוּ הָרִי הֵן כִּי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכָל דָּבָר שְׁנֶאֱמַר (במדבר טו טו) "הִקְהֵל חֻקָּה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם".

This is the **halachic application** of "*Ka'chem Ka'ger*" — **no difference** in Torah obligations.

So – just as the *Ger* is like a *Katan SheNolad*, so *Am Yisrael* at Sinai not only accepted the Torah but experienced *milah*, *tevilah*, and bringing *korbanot* (like *gerim*).

Similarly, the statement of *Naaseh v'Nishmah* is not only an acceptance of the Torah, but rather the first condition that must be met when accepting a *ger*. Thus, we can seow visualize the relationship between both the Megilla of Ruth and the Megila of Gerus to *zman natan torateinu*.

Yet – what is the nature of the brit that we entered at *matan torah*? Why do we have to condition our conversion on desiring to be sheltered beneath the *Kanfei HaShechinah*? Why isn't *Naaseh v'Nishma* enough?

Answers, Rav Bakshi-Doron, the *Gezayra Shava* of *Ka'chem Ka'Ger*, that draws a deep parallel between the prospective *ger* and the transformation of *Bnei Yisrael* to the covenant at Sinai begs us to ask: How do we equate the *ger* with the descendants of the *Avot* and *Imahot* at *Maamad Har Sinai*?

He continues that, according to the Ramban, the status of the Jewish people before the giving of the Torah was that of *Bnai Noach*. The Ramban in *Sefer Breishit*, in discussing the incident of Shechem and Dinah and the resulting actions of Shimon and Levi states:

"Our rabbis of France, of blessed memory, have said that the sons of Jacob were not yet commanded in the Torah's laws, and were only obligated by the Noahide commandments, and therefore they were not liable for the laws of the Torah."

And it was thus only at *Matan Torah* that the Jewish people accepted the totality of *Mitzvot B'Torat Bnei Yisrael*. Accordingly, the entry into the covenant at *Matan Torah* was a genuine *giyur* that established the *Kedushat Yisrael* and its Torah foundation. And the *Gezasas Shava* of *Ka'chem Ka'Ger* is again reinforced – just as *Bnai Yisrael* left the definition of *Bnay Noach* and transitioned to *Kedushas Yisrael* and its Torah, through *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korban*, so also the *Ger* in the future can join the *Kedushat Bnay Yisrael* and remove the moniker of *Ben* or *Bat Noach* through *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korban* (*kabalat HaMitzvot*).

The Ramban also comments in the opposite direction that "at the time that Avraham entered into the *Brit*, the Jewish people were already distinct and were no longer considered as *KaGoyim*" since we were not only *Bnay Noach* but had also accepted into our lives a portion of the *Mitzvot* – in contradistinction to the *Ger* who is a *bat* or *ben Noach* when they desire to convert. Nevertheless, the process of becoming a Jew is still rooted in the Sinai experience of *Am Yisrael*.

Section II

To understand the definition of the *Ger* and the Jew, let's look deeper into the Rambam's presentation of the Halacha to elucidate the essence of the *Brit* further.

In his initial presentation of the laws of conversion (*Hilchot Issurei Biah* 13:1), the Rambam outlines three processes, i.e., *milah*, *tevila*, and *korban*. Here, the Rambam only mentions the *brit*.

בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְּבָרִים נִכְנָסוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבְרִית. בְּמִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְקֶרְבָּן:

In Halacha 4, when he defines what a *ger* is and what distinguishes a *ger* from a Jew:

וְכֵן לְדוֹרוֹת כְּשִׁירְצָה הָעָכוּ"ם לְהַכְנִס לְבְרִית וְלְהַסְתּוֹפֵף תַּחַת כְּנָפֵי הַשְּׁכִינָה וַיִּקְבֵּל עָלָיו עַל תּוֹרָה צִרְיָן מִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קֶרְבָּן. וְאִם נִקְבָּה הִיא טְבִילָה וְקֶרְבָּן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (במדבר טו טו) "כִּכְם כָּגֵר". מָה אַתֶּם בְּמִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קֶרְבָּן אִף הֵגֵר לְדוֹרוֹת בְּמִילָה וּטְבִילָה וְהִרְצָאת קֶרְבָּן:

A *ger* is 1) a person who wishes to enter into the Agreement/Brit, 2) a person who wishes to be sheltered beneath the *kanfei haShechinah*, and 3) a person who wants to take upon themselves the "yoke" of Torah and *Mitzvot*.

Rav Bakshi-Doron observes that these conditions are not the process of conversion per se, but rather preconditions to the *Metziut* of becoming a ger. When an individual is certain that he or she is ready to agree to the conditions just listed, they (to meet condition 1) (if a male) proceed with *brit milah*, followed by *tevilah*, and then *korban*. Conditions 2 and 3 are self-evident in terms of their meaning and process.

Condition 2: A ger wishes to be sheltered beneath the canopy of the *Kanfei HaShechinah*, to believe in HaShem, and to bring themselves to perform the actions that will allow them to benefit from HaShem's glory – this is the basic purpose of a person.

Condition 3: A *ger* wishes to become an *Oved(et) HaShem* by becoming responsible for performing *Mitzvot* and learning Torah. And these two conditions are those that establish the brit concerning the definition of a Jew.

However, from the language of the Rambam, Conditions 2 and 3 are in addition to the entrance into the Agreement/Covenant/Brit that is Condition 1 for *giyur*. Moreover, the practical process steps of *giyur*, i.e., *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korban*, at their root are all elements of entering into the Agreement/Covenant. These steps are not focused on the goals of sheltering beneath the canopy of HaShem's protection (*Kanfei HaShechinah*) and of accepting a Mitzvah-oriented lifestyle (*kabalat ol torah*). For that reason, the Rambam does not mention the other preconditions.

Section III

Notwithstanding the *Gezerat Shavah* of *Ka'chem Ka'Ger* that aligns the process of *Gerut* with *Matan Torah*, one must also make a distinction between the *Gerut* of *Am Yisrael* at *Matan Torah* and the individual *Ger* who desires to convert. There exists a practical, Halachic, and qualitative difference. In practical terms, during the process of *Am Yisrael* becoming *Gerim*, the conditions for their desire to be sheltered beneath the *Kanfei HaShechinah* and to accept the yoke of Torah are met.

Other than their statement of “*Naaseh v’Nishmah*” we learn that HaShem was compelled to place the mountain over their heads like an inverted empty barrel to catalyze their acceptance of the Torah. This leads us to a practical, Halachic consequence, i.e., a *Ger* who converts has the status of a *Katan SheNolad*, but *Am Yisrael* at *Matan Torah*, notwithstanding that they performed the acts of *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korban*, they are not in the class of “*Katan SheNolad*” and they remain in their prior status as Jews, just different Jews.

The Maharal, in his *Sefer Tiferet Yisrael* (his work on *Matan Torah*), Perek 32, quotes the *Gemara* in *Shabbat* 88a that “HaShem held the mountain over them like a barrel” in the following way: Once HaShem placed the mountain over them like a barrel, we do not apply

the phrase that *Am Yisrael* was now *K’Katan HaNolad dami*. In regular *gerut*, an individual who converts is considered a new person. However, *Bnei Yisrael* when they left Egypt, since their acceptance of the Torah was seemingly coercive and they were literally forced to do so, they would not be classified as *Ketanim*.

This distinction presents itself in the difference between a non-Jew who presents themselves to convert and the Jewish people who entered the Covenant at *Matan Torah*. This follows from the fact that the Jewish people are already an “*am Kadosh*” and their entire interaction with HaShem at Sinai was reflective of their relationship as descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Their conversion and acceptance of the Covenant contribute to their *Kedusha*, not to create it from scratch. And further not to sever the relationship with the Divine, as a young child adheres to a parent.

In contrast, the conversion of the non-Jew comes to leave his or her former presence behind and to remove from their persona the status of a *ben/bat Noach*. Only afterwards can the *Ger* enter into the *Brit*.

This critical distinction is emphasized in the way the Rambam describes the necessary conditions for the *Ger*: that they must want to enter into the *Brit*, desire to be sheltered beneath the *Kanfei Shechinah*, and accept the responsibility of a Torah life. For the transformation of *Am Yisrael* at Sinai, the latter conditions were not mentioned and only the *Kenisat HaBrit* is emphasized. For a Jew enjoys a sanctity from the time of their birth. They must then accept the responsibilities of the Torah and desire to be beneath the shelter of the *Kanfei HaShechinah*. So did the people enter into the *Brit* when the mountain was placed over their heads (Is it possible that the mountain over their heads that is both an expression of persuasion but also a metaphor for HaShem’s sheltering his people with love?).

Thus, the three steps of *milah*, *tevilah*, and *korban* exist to assist the *ger* in entering into the Divine Covenant, and not to bring the *ger* beneath the *Kanfei HaShechinah* or to require them to accept Torah and Mitzvot.

The *Gezayrat Shavah* of *Ka’Chem Ka’Ger* states that the *Ger* must desire to be sheltered beneath the Divine Canopy and accept the yoke of Torah. These are conditions for an aspiring *Ger*, allowing them to transition from being a *bat/ben Noach* to becoming *K’katan SheNolad*, a new person.

Then, asks Rav Bakshi-Doron – what is the *Brit* that *Am Yisrael* entered into when they were transformed at *Matan Torah*. And, by extension, what are we commemorating each year when we observe the *Chag* of Shavuot? Other than coming under the Divine Canopy and

accepting the Torah and Mitzvos? To answer this, he turns to a *pasuk* earlier in Shmot 19:3-4:

כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתֶם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל-
כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֹא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי

“So shall you tell the house of Jacob and share with the Children of Israel: You have seen what I/HaShem did in Mitzrayim; I carried you on the wings of eagles, and I brought you to Me.” According to Rashi there, the Targum translates “And I brought you to Me” as “*VaEkra yashon L’pulchani*” – i.e., this is akin to coming under the *Kanfei HaShechinah*.

As a brief aside, the metaphor of what the wings of the eagle do for us is interesting. On the one hand, this *pasuk* is explicit – HaShem carries us upon the wings of eagles. Why? Rashi explains:

כַּנְפֵי הַנּוֹשָׂא גּוֹזְלֵיו עַל כַּנְפָיו, שְׂכָל שְׂאֵר הָעוֹפוֹת נוֹתְנִים אֶת בְּנֵיהֶם בֵּין רַגְלֵיהֶם, לְפִי שְׂמִתָּירָאין
מֵעוֹף אֲחֵר שְׂפוֹרֵחַ עַל גְּבֵיהֶם, אֲבָל הַנֶּשֶׁר הַזֶּה אֵינוֹ מִתְּיָרָא אֶלָּא מִן הָאָדָם שְׂמָא יִזְרַק בּוֹ חֵץ,
לְפִי שְׂאִין עוֹף פּוֹרֵחַ עַל גְּבֵיו, לְכַךְ נוֹתְנוֹ עַל כַּנְפָיו, אוֹמֵר מוֹטֵב יִכְנֹס הַחֵץ בִּי וְלֹא בְּבָנֵי,

that the eagle wishes to protect us with its very body. Thus, during its flight, the eagle places its young above its wings so that if an arrow of a hunter is shot upwards, the mother sacrifices herself for her children.

The *ger*, according to the Rambam and our understanding, wishes “*l’histofef tachas kanfei*” to be sheltered beneath the wings (of the *Shechinah*). Of course, God’s wings are indeed only a metaphor, and we usually think of the Divine as being above us (*min HaShamayim*). Here, the metaphor does not refer to an eagle carrying us on its wings, but rather to a mother bird closing its wings around its young, keeping them warm and close. This is a form of sheltering or protection of a distinctly different type.

The *pasuk* continues, “And now if you will certainly listen to My voice” - this is the cue for accepting the Torah and *Mitzvot*. And then the *pasuk* continues: “and you protect/keep My *Brit*” and what is that *Brit*? “That you (*Am Yisrael*) will be *Segulah*/treasured from all the nations, for the land is Mine and you will be a kingdom of priests and a sacred people” (*Mamlechet Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh*).

The *Brit* is the existential *Kedusha* of *Am Yisrael* as the *Klal* – as a treasured/choosing people. Like a kingdom of priests and a sacred people. What does it mean to be a *mamlechet kohanim*? Perhaps, as the *Kohanim* in principle were, serving HaShem, mediating sanctity, and living lives of elevated moral and spiritual purpose. As we experience Shavuot each year, we can aspire to rededicate ourselves to be a *Mamlechet Kohanim v’goy Kadosh*.

The Ramban notes that Israel is to be like **the *kohanim* (priests) are to Israel**—set apart, tasked with teaching, guiding, and sanctifying.

R. Simshon Refael Hirsch explains that A "kingdom of priests" means that **every Jew has a personal calling to be a spiritual teacher and moral role model.**

What about a “holy people”? A "holy nation" means a people **separated from the ordinary** and **elevated in purpose**, committed to God’s laws and moral vision. The people of Israel is to be **personally and communally sanctified**, living in covenant with God, manifesting that holiness in both ritual and ethical life.

Until *Matan Torah*, even if we were to have been commanded with certain *Mitzvot*, even according to the *Rishonim* who placed our status as *Bnay Yisrael* and not as *Bnay Noach*, and even the *Avot*, who the Midrash teaches observed the entire Torah, fulfilled their responsibilities **as individuals** in serving HaShem. Even if they sheltered beneath the *Kanfei HaShechinah* and fulfilled the pasuk of “V’Avi Eschem Ay-lie” – meaning to serve HaShem, this service, its sanctity, exists from the fulfillment of the *Mitzvos* and drawing close to HaShem.

However, the idea of Kedushas Yisrael as Klal Yisrael, as a Mamlechet Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh, was only established at the time of the Covenant, at Matan Torah, at Har Sinai. Through this Covenant, Am Yisrael was transformed into a single collective – like a holy nation through the sanctity of the Torah and its *Mitzvos*/commandments. From this point onwards, every Jew is responsible one for the other to protect the holiness of the Klal. Not **only as individuals** who serve HaShem. The Kedushah of Klal Yisrael was established through the Brit and penetrated into Klal Yisrael through Milah, tevila, and korban.

It was now inevitable that the people of Israel would collectively answer, “And the entire nation answered together,” and exclaimed, “Naaseh v’Nishma.” The emphasis here is that this event of kabalas haTorah did not occur on an individual level among the Jewish people. This statement is merely a declaration of the desire to accept the Torah. An agreement in principle to accept the Torah wasn’t needed, but “VaYaanu Kol HaAm Yachdav”; this was a Haskamah of the entire nation accepting the mission of the Torah as one nation in order to enter into the Agreement/Covenant and to sanctify and elevate themselves as a Mamlechet Kohanum v’Goy Kadosh.

Section IV

Rav Bakshi-Doron applies the principle of achdut in acceptance of the Torah from the time of Kabalas HaTorah to the present, extending across all generations. One who desires to join the Jewish project cannot merely accept upon themselves the Ol HaTorah and enter beneath the *Kanfei HaShechinah*. The individual must enter into the Agreement/Covenant –

into the divine partnership. First and foremost, they must join the collective called Klal Yisrael. Only afterwards can they enter under the Kanfei HaShechinah and accept upon themselves the responsibilities of a Torah-guided life.

How does one enter Klal Yisrael? To answer this question, we have already seen a solution – KaChem KaGer. Just as the Jewish people amalgamated themselves through milah, tevila, and korban, so too the prospective convert, across all generations, joins with the collective Jewish people through milah, tevila, and korban.

It's essential to re-emphasize how the Rambam initially structures the conversion process by beginning with an entry into the Agreement/Covenant/Brit before proceeding to the individual's desire to be under the canopy of the Shechinah and to accept the yoke of Torah.

Because of the conversion of Am Yisrael at Matan Torah into a people characterized as a Mamlechet Kohanim and a Goy Kadosh, the concept of kabalas Torah and Mitzvot fundamentally changes. Similarly, the individual's entry under the Kanfei HaShechinah cannot compare to the national amalgamation of a people into a Mamlechet Kohanim and Goy Kadosh.

Only after the acceptance of the Agreement/Covenant and joining into Klal Yisrael is it possible to accept the Torah as a complete Jew. So does the Rambam write in his Commentary on the Mishna in Chullin (7:6) which deals with the Mitzvah of Gid HaNasheh:

נוהג בטהורה, ואינו נוהג בטמאה. רבי יהודה אומר, אף בטמאה. אמר רבי יהודה, והלא מבני יעקב נאסר גיד הנשה, ועדין בהמה טמאה מתרת להן. אמרו לו, בסיני נאמר, אלא שנכתב במקומו:

The Rambam writes:

צריך לדעת שכל מה שאנו נזהרים ממנו או עושים אותו היום אין אנו עושים זאת אלא מפני צווי ה' על ידי משה, לא מפני שה' צוה בכך לנביאים שקדמוהו, דוגמא לכך, אין אנו אוכלים אבר מן החי לא מפני שה' אסר על בני נח אבר מן החי, אלא מפני שמשה אסר עלינו אבר מן החי במה שנצטווה בסיני שישאר אבר מן החי אסור. הלא תראה אמרם שש מאות... ושלוש עשרה מצות נאמרו לו למשה בסיני, וכל אלה מכלל המצות

“And know that everything we do today or distance ourselves from doing, we only do because of the Mitzva of HaShem transmitted to us by Moshe Rabbeynu. See also in the Shmoneh Perakim – the hakdamah to Pirkei Avot.

The introduction of Mitzvot before Matan Torah differs significantly from what happened on Shavuot. In earlier generations prior to Moshe, Noach HaTzaddik received a command not to eat the meat taken from a living animal (i.e., Ever min HaChai). However, Moshe Rabbeynu prohibited Klal Yisrael from “Ever Min HaChai.” We don't trace the Mitzvah to

conduct a milah from the command given to Avraham Avinu but rather from the command of Moshe, as it is written, “Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe, Morasha Kehilat Yaakov.”

According to Rav Bakshi-Doron, the Mitzvah of Milah that was introduced to Avraham's generation as an individual command is fundamentally different from the command given by Moshe Rabbeynu after the Jewish people entered into the Covenant as a nation of priests and a holy nation. What's the difference? It's because when they entered the Covenant, the essence of the command and the holiness of the Mitzvah underwent a profound transformation.

Therefore, he concludes, the Rambam introduced the entrance into the Brit before Kabbalat HaTorah and taking shelter under the wings of the Divine Presence.

The foundation of Gerus is the entrance into the Brit and, as a result, then becoming part of Klal Yisrael. Only afterwards comes the acceptance of the Mitzvot exclaimed by Ruth, the mother of Malchut Bais Dovid: “Your nation will be my nation, and your G-d will be my G-d”. Even Ruth first described her wish to be associated with the Nation of Israel “in wanting to part of your nation” BEFORE asking that “Your G-d will be my G-d”. The latter is the desire to shelter under the Shechina and to accept the responsibilities of the Torah.

The reading of the Megilla of Ruth on the Chag of Shavuot emphasizes the essence of the Chag as a celebration of Am Yisrael entering into an eternal agreement with HaShem, as a Chag that celebrates the formation of a holy people, a Mamlechet Kohanim v’Goy Kadosh.

It is worth noting at this point another reason why we read this particular Megillah on Shavuot. We have seen that, according to some opinions, the Jewish people were considered as Bnai Noach up until Matan Torah. We know that Bnai Noach are tasked with seven mitzvot. In order to complete their transformation into an Am Kadosh, they required 606 more mitzvot and those were taught to them at Matan Torah. The Gematria of Rut, explains the Binyan Ariel, is exactly 606. Thus, it is the cry of Ruth – Amech Ami V’Elokayish Elokai” that makes Am Yisrael whole. It is her desire to be part of Am Yisrael that completes not only her transformation but the transformation of Klal Yisrael. Each year, as we read this particular Megillah, our national soul is reborn and our commitment to continue onwards as a Jewish people is reenergized.

We began with the question of how the Chag of Shavuot became “zman matan torateinu” and we can only deduce that our collective celebration of this event, especially by dedicating ourselves to studying and living the Torah, reinstantiates our desire at this special time to be sheltered under the wings of the Divine presence.

The Midrash Tanchuma on Yitro suggests that Har Sinai can be imagined as a Chuppa and thus Matan Torah is symbolically like the marriage between HaShem and Am Yisrael. In Shir

HaShirim 3:11, we read: “The day of His wedding” – this refers to the day of the giving of the Torah. Perhaps we can draw spiritual strength from this Chag from the celebration of the union of HaShem and all of G-d’s people.

The Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael in Parashat Yitro emphasizes that the Torah establishes the freedom and identity of the Jewish people. There is no free person save for the one who engages in Torah (as we do on the night of Shavuot, k’ish echad b’lev echad).

One of my favorites, of course, is the Sfas Emes who teaches that **Matan Torah happens anew each year**, and every Jew has the opportunity to **receive their personal portion of Torah**. Shavuot, in his view, is not about remembering an old event, but about **living revelation**: “In each generation, and each person, the Torah is given again.”

Ultimately, the Ramchal suggests in Mesillat Yesharim that the acceptance of the Torah can be linked to the refinement of our character, our middot. In this sense, Shavuot is not just about learning but about becoming holy.

Finally, we are all familiar with the Rav’s approach to the Agreement/Covenant between Am Kadosh and HaShem. His lecture, entitled “Kol Dodi Dofek,” was initially presented in 1956 at Yeshiva University during the celebration for Yom HaAtzmaut.

The Rav, in formulating an approach to bringing all Jews together in terms of our identity and our obligations, describes two Covenants, one of the Goral/Fate and one of Yeud/Destiny.

The Brit goral describes our shared historical experience of suffering and survival. Much in the same way that R. Bakshi-Doron approaches Megillat Ruth and Shavuot, the Brit Goral connects all Jews regardless of religious observance – we are united by persecution and existential threats, not unlike our precarious situation in the world of today.

Nevertheless, at the same time, there is the Brit Yeud – a covenant based on halakha and a commitment to a transcendent mission, requiring an active dedication to the study of Torah, mitzvah observance, and ethical ideals.

As we experience this Tikkun, this rebirth, this spiritual repair, on the night of Shavuot, may we be blessed with experiencing a fusion of the Brit Goral and Brit Yeud into a simultaneous expression of Emunah and a chorus of Naaseh v’Nishma.