



An Illuminating Teaching from the Arizal

There Are כ"ר Letters in the First Aseres HaDibros We Read Them on Shavuos to Reveal the Light of the Keser

In honor of the auspiciously approaching Chag HaShavuos—Zman Matan Toraseinu—I would like to present to our royal audience an important concept related to the Aseres HaDibros. We will rely on an intriguing revelation from our master, the Arizal, concerning the light of the “keser” that is revealed on Chag HaShavuos. We will also introduce several related, illuminating teachings from our sacred teachers—Rishonim and Acharonim. May Hashem guide us on the path of “emet”!

Now, our sages of blessed memory teach us that by reading from the Torah annually, on Shavuos, the depiction of the revelation of Matan Torah, we are privileged to relive that revelation, and it is considered as if we are receiving the Torah anew each and every year. Here is a pertinent passage from the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Yisro, 271) regarding the first passuk of the narrative (Shemos 19, 1): **“בחדש השלישי לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים ביום:—in the third month from the exodus of Bnei Yisrael from the land of Mitzrayim, on this day, they arrived in Midbar Sinai.**

HKB”H said to Yisrael: If you read this passage annually, I will view it as if you are standing in front of Har Sinai and receiving the Torah, as it states: “On this day, they arrived in Midbar Sinai.” When? “In the third month.” This is an explicit reference to Chag HaShavuos, which is celebrated in the third month.

This Midrash accords with the teaching of the Gemara (Menachos 110a): **“כל העוסק בתורת חטאת כאילו הקריב חטאת, וכל העוסק בתורת אשם כאילו הקריב אשם—anyone who studies the Torah of the “chatas,” it is considered as if he actually brought a “chatas-offering”; and anyone who studies the Torah of the “asham,” it is considered as if he actually brought an “asham-offering.”** Practically speaking, this teaches us that by reading a pertinent passage in the Torah related to a particular mitzvah, with proper “kavanah”—focus and intent—it is viewed as if we actually performed said mitzvah. Thus, in this case, by reading the depiction of the revelation of the Torah at Har Sinai annually on Shavuos, it is as if we are reliving that phenomenal experience and are receiving the Torah anew.

We can suggest that this is alluded to by the wording of the passuk: **“ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני.”** As Rashi notes: **It should have sufficed to write “ביום ההוא”—“on that day.”** So, what is implied by **“on this day”**? **That the words of Torah should be new to you, as if it (the Torah) was given today.** Hence, based on the Midrash, we can interpret this as a reference to the annual reading of this passage on Chag HaShavuos **“in the third month.”** And as the Midrash asserts, it will be viewed as if **“we arrived in Midbar Sinai on this day”** to receive the Torah anew.

**Since You Accepted
the Yoke of Torah upon Yourself
I Consider It as if You Never Sinned**

With immense pleasure, I would now like to introduce an incredible teaching in the Talmud Yerushalmi (R.H. 4, 8):

”בכל הקרבנות כתיב חטא [בפסח (במדבר כח-כב): ”ושעיר חטאת אחד לכפר עליכם”. בסוכות (שם כט-טז): ”ושעיר עזים אחד חטאת”] ובעצרת אין כתיב חטא [כי אם (שם כח-ל): ”שעיר עזים אחד לכפר עליכם”], אמר להן הקב”ה מכיון שקיבלתם עליכם עול תורה, מעלה אני עליכם כאילו לא חטאתם מימיכם.”

All of the other korbanos—such as those brought on Pesach and Succos—are associated with the act of sinning. As such, a korban-chatas is brought. Sin—”חטא”—is not mentioned, however, in association with Atzeres (the festival of Shavuos). It is as if HKB”H is telling Yisrael that **“for having accepted upon themselves the yoke of Torah, I view you as if you never sinned in your lifetimes.”**

The Korban HaEidah comments on this statement in the Gemara (ibid.): **“Since every year on Atzeres, it is like the day we stood at Har Sinai, and we are receiving the Torah anew . . . Therefore, there is no “chatas” on this day.** The Pnei Moshe comments (ibid.): **HKB”H said to them, “Since you accepted upon yourselves the yoke of Torah that was given on Atzeres—to labor and exert yourselves in it to the best of your abilities—I view you as if you never sinned . . . because the Torah provides atonement for you.”**

The message is clear! Annually, on Chag HaShavuos, it is essential that we intend to receive the Torah anew. Doing so grants us atonement for all of our iniquities. In sefer HaRokeiach (Hilchos Shavuos 295), Rabeinu Elazar of Garmiza, zy”a, one of the Tosafists, declares based on this Yerushalmi that this is cause for all Jews to rejoice on Shavuos.

**Chag HaShavuos Is Both a Day of Judgment
and a Day of Celebration**

Let us now add a precious point concerning the joy associated with the atonement of transgressions on Chag HaShavuos. We are taught in the Mishnah (R.H. 16a):

”בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון, בפסח על התבואה, בעצרת על פירות האילן, בראש השנה כל באי עולם עוברין לפניו כבני מרון... ובחג נידונין על המים.”

The world is judged at four junctures during the year: On Pesach for the grain, on Atzeres for the fruits of the tree, on Rosh HaShanah all who come to the world pass before Him like “bnei maron” . . . and on the Festival, they are judged for the water.

The Shela hakadosh (Maseches Shevuos) writes in the name of the Tola’at Yaakov that Chag HaShavuos is the Day of Judgment related to Matan Torah. On this day, the neshamos of Yisrael—referred to in the Mishnah as **“the fruits of the tree,”** since they emerged from HKB”H’s tree of neshamos—are judged as to whether or not they occupied themselves with the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos as they were supposed to.

Understood in this light, we can now truly understand why we require atonement on Shavuos. After all, being remiss in the study of Torah is a serious matter, and that is what is being judged on Shavuos. As we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 5a): **“אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו: יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה’, פשפש ולא מצא יתלה בכיטול תורה, שנאמר אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרגו י”ה ומתורתך יפשפש במעשיו, שנאמר נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה’, פשפש ולא מצא יתלה בכיטול תורה, שנאמר אשרי הגבר אשר תיסרגו י”ה ומתורתך יפשפש במעשיו.”** If a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, he should scrutinize his deeds, as it says (Eichah 3, 40): **“Let us search and examine our ways and return to Hashem.”** If he scrutinized and did not find any shortcomings, he should attribute his afflictions to **“bitul Torah”** (neglect of Torah-study), as it states (Tehillim 94, 12): **“Fortunate is the man whom G-d afflicts, and whom You teach from Your Torah.”** Rashi explains that if a person is remiss, HKB”H afflicts him to encourage him to study Torah.

Hence, HKB”H provided us with a treatment prior to the ailment. By reading the passage of Matan Torah on Shavuos and committing ourselves to study Torah properly, HKB”H promises us: **“I will view you as if you never sinned in your lifetimes.”**

This teaches us the sacred duty that is required of us on Chag HaShavuot. On the one hand, it is a Day of Judgment on which we are held accountable for our Torah-study during the entire past year. Did we fulfill our obligation properly? On the other hand, we celebrate the fact that HKB”H is giving us a golden opportunity to renew the acceptance of the yoke of Torah. In that merit, the sin of being remiss in the study of Torah will be forgiven and atoned for on this day, and we will be spared the concomitant afflictions.

**On Chag HaShavuot
which Is the Fiftieth Day We Can Attain
the Illumination of the Fiftieth Gate**

I had a fabulous idea! I would like to connect the teaching of the Midrash and the teaching of the Yerushalmi. We learned from the Midrash: **HKB”H said to Yisrael: If you read this passage annually, I will view it as if you are standing in front of Har Sinai and receiving the Torah.** According to the passage in the Yerushalmi, HKB”H says to Yisrael: **“For having accepted upon yourselves the yoke of Torah, which was given on Atzeres, I view you as if you never sinned in your lifetimes.”**

Now, let us introduce the text related to the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer (Vayikra 23, 15): **“וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהינה, עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו המישים יום—from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the “omer” of the waving—seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days.** In Netivot Olam (Netiv HaTorah 12), the Maharal of Prague teaches: **The Sefirah is 49 days until Matan Torah, because the Torah transcends (ascends) up to the fiftieth gate. Therefore, the Sefirah is seven weeks, step by step until the fiftieth gate.** In Tiferes Yisrael (25), he writes: **And therefore, the counting must be until fifty. For, then one reaches the level of the Torah, which is transcendent wisdom, since the Torah is from the fiftieth gate, which is beyond man’s grasp.**

Let us elaborate. We know that the Torah encompasses fifty levels (gates) of “binah.” This is taught in the Gemara (R.H. 21b): **“חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה חסר.” Fifty levels of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated (Tehillim 8, 6): “Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine.”** Accordingly, the Maharal asserts that the 49 days we are commanded to count correspond to the 49 levels of “binah” that are attainable and accessible to us. However, Chag HaShavuot, the fiftieth day on which the Torah was given to Yisrael, corresponds to the fiftieth level of “binah,” which is beyond human comprehension.

This is somewhat problematic. As we have learned, even Moshe Rabeinu, the preeminent teacher and prophet, did not attain the “sha’ar hanun”—the fiftieth level. So, if he did not attain it, clearly, Yisrael did not attain it. In the words of the Gemara (Niddah 62b): **“רבי לא שנה, רבי חייא מנא ליה—if Rebbe did not teach it to him, where did Rabbi Chiya get it from?!** This being the case, what is the significance of HKB”H giving us the Torah on the fiftieth day corresponding to the “sha’ar hanun,” if it is unattainable and beyond our comprehension? The Sefas Emes (Shavuot 5644) explains that while it is true that it is impossible to access the “sha’ar hanun” thoroughly, nevertheless, on Chag HaShavuot, we are privileged to receive inspiration and illumination from it. It is analogous to a person receiving the light of the sun through many filters.

In this light, the Sefas Emes goes on to interpret the remark of HKB”H to Yaakov Avinu as he prepared to go down to Mitzrayim (Bereishis 46, 4): **“אנכי ארד עמך מצרימה ואנכי אעלך גם עלה—I shall descend with you to Mitzrayim, and I shall also surely bring you up.** The term “גם” is seemingly superfluous. It can be explained, however, in keeping with the passuk (Koheles 7, 14): **“זה לעומת זה עשה”—G-d created the world with corresponding equal and opposite forces.** So, when HKB”H took Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, where they sank in the 49 levels of tumah;

correspondingly, He immersed them in the 49 levels of “binah” during the 49 days of the Sefirah.

On Chag HaShavuos the Heavenly Keser Is Revealed

The source for the notion that the “sha’ar hanun” is revealed on Chag HaShavuos is the Arizal’s Sha’ar HaKavanos (Chag HaShavuos). He asserts in his own impeccable way that by staying up all night studying Torah on Shavuos, during the final third of the night just before daybreak, a Jew is able to connect with the light of the keser, which is the “sha’ar hanun” of the fifty gates of “binah.” This imbues us with an additional dose of kedushah.

Based on this, we will proceed to explain the rationale for reading the Aseres HaDibros on this festival. Let us begin with what the Ba’al HaTurim writes (Shemos 20, 14) regarding the Aseres HaDibros: They are comprised of כתר (620) letters. **This symbolizes the Keser (crown) of Torah, informing you that if a person learns Torah l’shma, it is a crown for his head.** It is important to point out that in the second Aseres HaDibros, which HKB”H instructed Moshe to inscribe on the second luchos, there are many more letters. So, we will endeavor to explain why HKB”H inscribed specifically כתר letters only in the first version of the Aseres HaDibros.

It appears that we can explain the matter based on the aforementioned Gemara: **Fifty levels of “binah” were created in the universe, and they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one, as it is stated: “Yet You have made him only a little less than the divine.”** Why do Chazal depict what Moshe received in this roundabout way: **“And they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one.”** Seemingly, it would have been more accurate to simply say: **“And only forty-nine were bestowed upon Moshe.”**

The answer can be found in Likutei Torah (Vaeschanan). There, the Arizal teaches us that at Matan Torah, Moshe was privileged to receive all fifty gates of “binah.” After the

“cheit ha’eigel,” however, the “sha’ar hanun” was confiscated from him. This is alluded to when HKB”H says to him (ibid. 32, 7): **“לך רד כי שחת עמך”—go, descend; for your nation has acted corruptly.** The numerical value of the word לך is 50. So, HKB”H is instructing Moshe to descend from the fiftieth level of “binah.” For this reason, Chazal stated explicitly: **“And they were all bestowed upon Moshe except for one.”** Because in reality all of the levels were initially bestowed upon Moshe, but one was subsequently taken away from him—the “sha’ar hanun.”

This illuminates for us why HKB”H insisted on inscribing precisely כתר letters only on the first luchos. For, as we have explained, the “sha’ar hanun” is the heavenly “keser.” We have also learned that at Matan Torah, Moshe Rabeinu was granted access to the “sha’ar hanun” before Yisrael sinned with the eigel. Therefore, HKB”H revealed the “sha’ar hanun” to him via the כתר letters of the first Aseres HaDibros.

This coincides with the teaching in the Zohar hakadosh and the Midrashim of Chazal that the first luchos contained all of the secrets and esoterica of the Torah. This is because they encompassed all fifty gates of “binah.” Yet, as explained, after the “cheit ha’eigel,” HKB”H instructed Moshe: **“לך רד”**. As a consequence of the people’s corruption, he was compelled to descend and relinquish the “sha’ar hanun.” This explains very nicely why there were not כתר letters in the second Aseres HaDibros; it is because they were inscribed after the “cheit ha’eigel”—after the “sha’ar hanun” was confiscated from Moshe.

The One Thousand Lights that Vanished when the Luchos Were Shattered

With immense pleasure, I would now like to introduce a fascinating matter brought down in the sefer Yalkut Yashar (40, 4) in the name of the brilliant Rabbi Shalom of Kaminka, ztz”l. He addresses an idea discussed by the kabbalists, originating in the Arizal’s Sha’ar HaKavanos (Mizmor Shir L’Yom HaShabbas). As we know, tradition dictates that the

letter “**aleph**” of “ויקרא” in the passuk (Vayikra 1, 1): “ויקרא אל משה”—is written with a small “aleph.”

The Arizal explains the reason for this tradition. At the time of Matan Torah, Moshe was awarded one thousand holy, magnificent lights. Due to the “cheit ha’eigel,” these one thousand lights were confiscated. Only one light remained with him. This is alluded to by the tradition of writing “ויקרא אל משה” with a miniature “**aleph**.” It indicates that of the אָלף—one thousand—lights bestowed upon Moshe at Matan Torah, only a miniscule portion remained with him--אלף זעירא—only one out of the one thousand.

The great Rabbi Shalom of Kaminka goes on to explain the nature of these one thousand lights that were confiscated from Moshe Rabeinu based on an idea presented by the Sifsei Kohen in his commentary on the Torah in parshas Eikev (Devarim 9, 17) regarding the shattering of the luchos. We are taught in the Gemara (Shabbas 104a): “מ”ם וסמ”ך שבלוחות בנס היו עומדין”—**the (final) “mem” and the “samech” on the luchos stood miraculously** suspended in air. This is how they explain the shattering of the luchos. As a consequence of the “cheit ha’eigel” that miracle ceased, all the closed “mem”s and “samech”s flew off of the luchos, and they no longer held the luchos up.

Accordingly, the esteemed Rabbi of Kaminka points out an astonishing fact. In the Aseres HaDibros, there are exactly 22 final “mem”s and 2 “samech”s; their gematria adds up to one thousand (22x40=880; 2x60=120; 880+120=1,000). This is the key to the one thousand lights that were initially bestowed upon Moshe Rabeinu when he received the Torah; however, when the letters flew off of the luchos due to the “cheit ha’eigel,” those one thousand lights were confiscated from him. This concludes his fascinating insight.

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to add a little spice of my own to his insight. Our sacred sefarim teach that the heavenly keser is referred to

as “פלא”, which is an anagram of אל”ף. This concurs with the assertion that when the heavenly keser was revealed to Moshe at Matan Torah, prior to the “cheit ha’eigel,” it was associated with “**eleph**”—**one thousand**—lights. This explains why exactly 22 “mem”s and 2 “samech”s with a total gematria of 1,000 were suspended miraculously on the first luchos. They corresponded to the אל”ף lights from the פלא known as the heavenly keser. Yet, afterwards, due to the “cheit ha’eigel,” when the “sha’ar hanun” associated with the heavenly keser was confiscated from him, the 1,000 lights also vanished resulting in the shattering of the luchos.

This explains magnificently why Moshe Rabeinu shattered the first luchos when he came down from the mountain and witnessed the travesty committed by Yisrael. In fact, as we know, HKB”H approved of this act and applauded Moshe with the words (Shabbas 87a): “יישר כוחך ששיברת”—**bravo for breaking them!** After all, the first luchos were from the “sha’ar hanun.” So, when the “sha’ar hanun” was taken away from Moshe, so that he would not deliver it to the people of Yisrael, the luchos had to be shattered. Hence, HKB”H instructed Moshe to step down from his lofty status—“לך רד” – so that Yisrael would subsequently receive the second luchos of lesser status associated with only 49 levels of “binah.”

At this point, we can begin to appreciate the importance of reading the first Aseres HaDibros on Shavuos. Moshe Rabeinu was privileged to attain the “sha’ar hanun” at Matan Torah via the spectacular transmission of the Aseres HaDibros comprised of כתי”ר (**620**) letters. The purpose of this revelation was to inspire Yisrael with an illumination from the “sha’ar hanun.” Unfortunately, as a consequence of the “cheit ha’eigel,” Moshe was compelled to forfeit the “sha’ar hanun.” Therefore, annually, on Chag HaShavuos, we read the first Aseres HaDibros with its כתי”ר letters propitiously to evoke the illumination from the “sha’ar hanun” that was present at Matan Torah on Har Sinai.

The connection between the passage in the Midrash and the passage in the Yerushalmi should now be apparent. According to the Midrash, by reading the Aseres HaDibros annually on Shavuos, HKB”H views us as if we are standing at Har Sinai eager to receive the Torah. According to the Yerushalmi, annually on Shavuos, we are granted atonement for the ever-present stain of the “cheit ha’eigel” and are afforded an illumination from the “sha’ar

hanun.” In this merit, may we be privileged to welcome the arrival of the complete geulah, at which time HKB”H will return the revelation of the “sha’ar hanun” to us, as it is written (Yeshayah 51, 4): “כי תורה מאתי תצא”—**for Torah will come forth from Me.**” In the Midrash (V.R. 13, 3), the sages expounded on this passuk: **HKB”H said: “A new Torah will come forth from Me.”** May we be “zocheh” swiftly, in our times! Amen.



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