



SHAVUOT

Chabad's Loud Truth

From Sinai's Thunder to Boldness in the Streets

HOLIDAY OVERVIEW

Shavuot

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The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai more than 3,300 years ago. Every year, on the holiday of Shavuot, we renew our acceptance of G-d's gift, and G-d "re-gives" the Torah.

The word *shavuot* means "weeks." This holiday marks the completion of a seven-week counting period that began during Passover.

The Giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event—one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul for all times. Our sages have compared it to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. *Shavuot* also means "oaths," for on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.

In ancient times, two wheat loaves would be offered in the Holy Temple. It was also at this time that people would begin to bring *bikurim*, their first and choicest fruits, to thank G-d for Israel's bounty.

The holiday of Shavuot is a two-day holiday, beginning at sundown of the fifth day of Sivan and lasting until nightfall of the seventh day of Sivan. (In Israel it is a one-day holiday, ending at nightfall of the sixth day of Sivan.)

Women and girls light holiday candles to usher in the holiday on both the first and second evenings of the holiday.

It is customary to stay up all night learning from the Torah on the first night of Shavuot.

All men, women, and children should go to the synagogue on the first day of Shavuot to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments.

As on other holidays, special meals are eaten, and no "work" may be performed.

It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuot. Among other reasons, this commemorates the fact that upon receiving the Torah, including the kosher laws, the Jewish people could not cook meat in their pots, which had yet to be rendered kosher.

On the second day of Shavuot, the Yizkor memorial service is recited.

Some communities read the book of Ruth publicly, as King David—whose passing occurred on this day—was a descendant of Ruth the Moabite.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Why does Chabad take this loud, brash approach, and why is it embraced so widely and enthusiastically by a community that often shies away from standing out?

TEXT 1

Exodus 19:16

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַהֵיט הַבֶּקֶר, וַיְהִי קֹלֹת
וּבְרָקִים וְעָנָן כָּבֵד עַל הָהָר וְקֹל שֹׁפָר חָזָק
מְאֹד, וַיִּתְרַד כָּל הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה.

And it was on the third day in the morning, and there was thunder, and lightning, and a thick cloud on the mountain. And there was a mighty [continuous] shofar blast. And the people in the camp trembled.

When G-d gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, thunder and lightning erupted across the world and everyone trembled.





Years later, at the same place, G-d revealed Himself to Elijah in silence.

TEXT 2

I Kings 19:11-12

יא. וַיֹּאמֶר צֵא וְעַמְדָּתָ בְּהָר לְפָנַי ה', וְהִנֵּה ה' עֹבֵר וְרוּחַ
גְּדוּלָה וְחֲזָק מְפָרֵק הָרִים וּמְשַׁבֵּר סְלָעִים לְפָנַי ה', לֹא בְרוּחַ
ה'. וְאַחַר הָרוּחַ רֵעַשׁ, לֹא בְרֵעַשׁ ה'.

יב. וְאַחַר הָרֵעַשׁ אֵשׁ, לֹא בְאֵשׁ ה'. וְאַחַר הָאֵשׁ, קוֹל דְּמָמָה
דָּקָה.

11. And He said, "Go out and stand in the mountain to face G-d. Before G-d, you will see a great and strong wind splitting mountains and shattering boulders, but G-d is not in the wind. After the wind, there will be an earthquake, but G-d is not in the earthquake.

12. "After the earthquake, there will be a fire, but G-d is not in the fire. And after the fire, a still, silent voice."

QUESTION

Why was there such a tumult when G-d gave the Torah at Sinai if G-d is found in still silence?
Was G-d just trying to scare the jews into trembling?

The haftarah of Shavuot is about Ezekiel's vision of G-d's chariot. At Mount Sinai too, G-d descended with a chariot.



TEXT 3

Rabbi David Kimchi,
Ezekiel 1:28

וְאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרוֹנָם לְבִרְכָה כִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיוֹם
מִמֶּן תּוֹרָה רָאוּ הַמְּרַכְּבָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁרָאָה אוֹתָהּ
יְחִזְקִאל. עַד שֶׁאָמְרוּ כִּי קִטְנָה שֶׁבְנֵי שֵׁיהֶם גְּדוּלָה
הִיא כִּיחִזְקִאל בֶּן בּוּזִי.

Our sages of blessed memory explained that the Jewish people saw the Divine chariot on the day they received the Torah, just as Ezekiel saw it in his day. They even said that the prophetic vision of the youngest Jewish girl at Mount Sinai was as profound as that of Ezekiel.



The entire Jewish nation saw the Divine chariot at that day just as Ezekiel saw it in his vision.

Isaiah saw G-d's chariot but focused on the Rider G-d Himself while Ezekiel focused on the chariot itself.



TEXT 4

Isaiah 6:1

וַאֲרָאָה אֶת ה' יֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא רָם
וְנִשְׂאָ, וְשׁוֹלְיוֹ מְלֵאִים אֶת הַהֵיכָל.

And I saw G-d sitting atop a high and exalted throne, and the skirts of His robes filled the chamber.

QUESTIONS

1. Isn't Isaiah's vision better aligned with the theme of Shavuot?
2. Why do we read about Ezekiel's vision?

TEXT 5

Talmud, Chagigah
13b

אָמַר רַבָּא: כָּל שְׂרָאָה יְחִזְקֵאל, רָאָה יִשְׁעִיָּה.
לְמָה יְחִזְקֵאל דּוּמָה, לְבִן כְּפָר שְׂרָאָה אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ.
וּלְמָה יִשְׁעִיָּה דּוּמָה, לְבִן כְּרִד שְׂרָאָה אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ.

Rava said, "Everything Ezekiel saw, Isaiah also saw.

"Ezekiel may be compared to a villager who sees the king.

"Isaiah may be compared to a city dweller who sees the king."

TEXT 6

Maimonides, *Guide
for the Perplexed*
3:15

שִׁישְׁעֵיהָ שָׁלֵם יוֹתֵר מִיְחֻזְקָאֵל. וְשֶׁהַשְּׂגָה זֹו
שִׁיְחֻזְקָאֵל נִדְהָם מִמְּנָה, וְשֶׁהִיְתָה נוֹרָאָה בְּעֵינָיו,
הִיְתָה עֲבוּר יִשְׁעֵיהָ יְדוּעָה בְּאוֹפֵן שְׂאִינוּ מִצָּרִיד.
לְסִפּוּר עָלֶיהָ בְּהַפְלָגָה.

Isaiah had a more complete vision of G-d than Ezekiel. The vision that overwhelmed and seemed incredible to Ezekiel was so familiar to Isaiah that he didn't bother to wax poetic about it.

EZEKIEL (VILLAGER)

1. He was amazed seeing the chariot for the first time.
2. Judged G-d's Greatness by the greatness of His chariot.

ISAIAH (CITY DWELLER)

1. He already knew G-d and focused on Him alone.
2. Saw G-d clearly, beyond the chariot.

At Mount Sinai, the Jews experienced G-d as city dwellers, not villagers

TEXT 7

Ezekiel 3:12

וַתִּשָּׂאֵנִי רוּחַ וְאִשְׁמַע אַחֲרַי קוֹל רַעֲשׁ
גָּדוֹל, "בָּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד ה' מִמְּקוֹמוֹ".

And a wind lifted me, and I heard behind me the sound of a great uproar, "Blessed is the glory of G-d from His place."

QUESTION

It's unusual for a *haftarah* to skip across three chapters. What makes this passage so special?

TEXT 8

Rabbi Meir ibn Gabai,
Avodat Hakodesh 4:18

מִתּוֹךְ שָׁרָאָה וְהַשִּׁיג בַּמְרָכָבָה
הַפְּתוּחָה יָדַע בְּעֵלְיוֹנָה . . . כִּי
יֵשׁ כִּסֵּא לְמַעַלָּה מִכִּסֵּא וּמְרָכָבָה
לְמַעַלָּה מִמְרָכָבָה וְרוֹכֵב לְמַעַלָּה
מִרוֹכֵב וְכְבוֹד לְמַעַלָּה מִכְּבוֹד,
וּמִתּוֹךְ שָׁרָאָה אַרְבַּע חַיּוֹת לְמַטָּה
יָדַע וְהִכִּיר כִּי יֵשׁ דּוּגְמָתוֹן לְמַעַלָּה
בְּיִחוּד . . .

וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה כָּל מָה שָׁרָאָה לְמַטָּה
יָדַע שֶׁיֵּשׁ דּוּגְמָתוֹ לְמַעַלָּה . . .
הַפְּתוּחָה . . . וְגִידוֹ בַּפְּתוּחָה
וְיִרְמָזוּ אֶל הָעֵלְיוֹנָה.

Ezekiel arrived at his knowledge of G-d through seeing and understanding the lower chariot. . . . [He grasped that] there is a throne above the throne he saw, a chariot above the chariot he glimpsed, a Rider above the rider he beheld, and a glory above the glory he perceived. By seeing the four angels in the guise of terrestrial animals, he knew and recognized that there are parallel angels in the celestial realm of true unification. . . .

This is true of everything he saw. He understood that everything he saw in the lower sphere was a reflection of the higher sphere, . . . just as the Torah speaks in the lower sphere and alludes to the higher sphere.

EZEKIEL (VILLAGER)

1. He was amazed seeing the chariot for the first time
2. Judged G-d's Greatness by the greatness of His chariot
3. Sees the flashing lights as a testament to the King's honor

ISAIAH (CITY DWELLER)

1. He already knew G-d and focused on Him alone
2. Saw G-d clearly, beyond the chariot.
3. No longer noticed anything but the King



Ezekiel saw all of creation points to G-d. The world itself is His chariot, reflecting His presence everywhere.

TEXT 9

Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, *Tanya*,
Shaar Hayichud
Veha'emunah,
chapter 3

שְׁכָל נִבְרָא וַיֵּשׁ, הוּא בְּאֵמֶת נִחְשָׁב לְאֵין וְאֶפְסֵס
מִמֶּשׁ לְגִבֵי כַח הַפּוֹעֵל וְרוּחַ פִּיּוֹ שֶׁבְּנִפְעָל,
הַמְהִיָּה אֹתוֹ תָּמִיד וּמוֹצִיאוֹ מֵאֵין מִמֶּשׁ לְיֵשׁ.

Every created being appears to have its own existence but is truly nothing compared to the activating force that creates it and the breath of G-d within it. They continuously call upon it to exist and bring it forth from nothingness into existence.

**G-D MAKES AND SUSTAINS
EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD.**

- **Isaiah:** he only noticed G-d himself.
- **Ezekiel:** took in all of creation and had this incredible revelation.



**G-d wanted us to reach this
Ezekiel revelation.**

This moment at Sinai removed
the barrier between heaven and
earth, allowing us to see the
spiritual by looking into the
physical.



TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 11, p. 12

בְּשָׁעָה שְׁנִיתְנָה הַתּוֹרָה, נִתְבַּטַּל הָעוֹלָם מִמְּצִיאֹתוֹ לְגַמְרֵי מַחְמַת עוֹצָם הַגִּילּוּי
שְׁמַלְמַעְלָה. וְהֵינּוּ שְׁבִיטוּל זֶה הָיָה מִיִּרְגָּשׁ גַּם בְּעוֹלָם, כְּמֵאֵמַר רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנוֹם
לְבִרְכָה, "צָפוֹר לֹא צָנוּחַ כּוֹ' אֵלָא הָעוֹלָם שׁוֹתֵק וְכוּ'" (שְׁמוֹת רַבָּה כֵּט, ט) . . .

בִּיטוּל זֶה בְּשָׁעַת מַתָּן תּוֹרָה הוּא שְׁנִתָּן הַכֹּחַ שְׁיֻכַּל הָעוֹלָם לְהִתְבַּרֵּר וּלְהִזְדַּבֵּק
וּלְהִתְעַלּוֹת אַחַר כָּךְ, עַד אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה כְּלִי וְדִירָה לוֹ יִתְבַּרֵּךְ.

When the Torah was given, the world lost its sense of self and was sublimated by the intense supernal Divine revelation. The globe itself experienced this sublimation, as our sages said, "The birds did not chirp. . . . The world as a whole stood still" (Midrash, *Shemot Rabah*, 29:9).

The momentary sublimation that occurred when the Torah was given made it possible for the world to eventually be refined, transparent, and elevated into a vessel and a home for G-d.

ANSWER

The mission of Shavuot is to perceive G-d within the world. It is Ezekiel's vision – the "Villager Perspective," that reflects this theme. Isaiah's vision touches on the experience of Sinai, but not on its purpose.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO WHEEL ANGELS

Seraphim: close to G-d all the time, so they aren't shocked.

Ofanim: like tourists, are overwhelmed by His chariot and cry out.

TEXT 11

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 33, p. 23

הַחִילוּק בֵּין שְׁרָפִים וְאוֹפָנִים הוּא
עַל דְּרָךְ הַחִילוּק בֵּין בֶּן כְּרֵךְ שְׂרָאָה
אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ וּבֶן כֶּפֶר שְׂרָאָה אֶת
הַמֶּלֶךְ.

הַרְעֵשׁ בָּא מֵצַד הַחִידוּשׁ, וְלִכֵּן הֵרִי
זֶה דוֹקָא אֲצֵל בֶּן כֶּפֶר שְׂרָאָה אֶת
הַמֶּלֶךְ, שְׂרָאִיית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְרוֹמְמוֹתוֹ
גּוֹרֶמֶת אֲצֵלוֹ רַעֲשׁ, מִחֲמַת הַחִידוּשׁ
שְׁבַדְבָּר, מָה שְׂאִין כּוֹ בְּבֶן כְּרֵךְ
שְׂאִינוֹ חִידוּשׁ בְּעֵינָיו (כָּל כֶּף), אִין
אֲצֵלוֹ רַעֲשׁ.

וְעַל דְּרָךְ זֶה הוּא הַחִילוּק בֵּין
הַשְּׂרָפִים וְהָאוֹפָנִים.

The difference between seraphim and *ofanim* [wheel angels] is like the difference between the city dweller who sees the king and the villager who sees the king.

The uproar is sparked by the sudden newness, which is why it is only sparked when villagers see the king. The shocking novelty of their sudden encounter with such majesty sparks an uproarious cry. City dwellers, for whom this is not (such) a novelty, don't feel the uproar.

This is the difference between seraphim and *ofanim*.

TEXT 12

Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, *Sefer
Hamaamarim* 5661, p.
198

ההתפעלות שְׁלָהֶם הוּא בְּרַעַשׁ
גָּדוֹל וְהֵינּוּ מִפְּנֵי שְׁמַשְׁיָגִים
הָאֱמִיתִית אֵיךְ שֶׁהוּא הֵיפֹךְ
מֵהֵנְרָאָה. שֶׁהֵיִשׁ נִרְאָה לְיֵשׁ וְדָבָר
מִמֶּשׁ, וּבְאֻמָּת הוּא בָּטֵל בְּתַכְלִית.
וּלְכֹךְ הוּא הֶרַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל כּו'!

וְכִמוֹ לְמִטָּה בְּאָדָם, כְּשֶׁמַּשְׁיֵג הַשְּׂגָה
חֲדָשָׁה שֶׁאֵינּוּ כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּרְאָה לְעֵינַיִם,
יִתְהַוֶּה בְּחִינַת רַעַשׁ בְּלֵב, גְּנוּאֵלָד
עֵשׂ אִיז נִיט אֲזִיִּי.

כְּמוֹ כֵּן בְּאֻפְנֵיִם בְּהַשְּׂגָתָם . . .
מִזֵּה הוּא הֶרַעַשׁ שֶׁלָּהֶם.

They are profoundly moved and let out a roaring cry because they suddenly perceive the truth, which upends everything they have ever known. They assumed that they exist and are of real substance. Then they discover the truth that they are absolute nothingness. Hence, their great uproar.

It is like someone who comes upon a new insight that is the very opposite of every truth that is perceived by our senses. That person would scream, "I am shocked! Everything I ever knew was wrong."

This is the experience of the *ofanim* when they grasp the truth. . . . This triggers their great uproar.



The angels first feel shock at their unreal existence, then awe as they realize they're part of G-d, which is why they cry out.

The Giving of the Torah
shook the world and
forever changed the
perception of reality.



TEXT 13

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schnerson, *Likutei
Sichot* 33, p. 24

שְׁתוּכֵן עֲנִין הַ"רַעַשׁ" בְּמִתְּן תּוֹרָה
(הַקּוֹלוֹת וְרַעַשׁ כּו', וַיִּתְּרַד כָּל הָעָם
אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחְנֶה, וּבְלִשׁוֹן הַכְּתוּב "אֶרֶץ
רַעְשָׁה" (תְּהִלִּים סח, ט)) אִין זֶה רַק
רַעַשׁ הַנְּשָׁמַע לְאוֹזֵן הַגִּשְׁמִי שְׁהָיָה
כְּפֶרֶט נוֹסֵף בְּהַכְּנֶה וְהַקְּדָמָה לְמִתְּן
תּוֹרָה.

אֵלֶּא הוּא רַעַשׁ בְּתוֹכְנוּ הָרוֹחָנִי. מִחֲמַת
הַחִידוּשׁ דְּמִתְּן תּוֹרָה. שְׁבָכָל פֶּרֶט
בְּהַבְּרִיאָה וְכָל הַבְּרִיאָה כּוֹלָה הָיָה
נִרְאָה שְׁאֲמִיתִית מְצִיאֻתָהּ הִיא לֹא מָה
שֶׁנִּרְאָה וְנִגְלָה לְעֵינַי בְּשָׂר, שֶׁהוּא דְבָר
וַיֵּשׁ בְּפִנֵי עֲצָמוֹ. אֵלֶּא מְקוֹרוֹ שְׁנִתְּהוּוּה
מֵאֲמִיתִת הַמְּצָאוֹ דְּהַבּוֹרָא.

The great uproar that occurred when G-d gave us the Torah (the sounds, the noise, the people trembling, and as the Torah puts it, "The very earth trembled" [Psalms 68:9]) was not just a physical sound to set the tone for receiving the Torah.

It was a spiritual, conceptual sound that emerged from the shocking revelation that came with the Torah. It was felt in every pore of G-d's creation. All of existence suddenly discovered that it was not what it always seemed to be. It had no independent existence. It came into being from the truth of the Creator's existence.



Had the Sinai experience been just about closeness to G-d, it would have been experienced as a still, silent voice.

ANSWER

We jump to chapter 3 because it shows the *ofanim* screaming when they realize they're nothing, just like how the world felt at Sinai.



Every street, airport, and stadium belongs to G-d. Chabad reminds us that no place is outside Him, and one day His presence will be clear everywhere.

KEY POINTS

1. The ordinary perception is that G-d created us, and we exist. The Divine perception is that only G-d exists and everything else is part of G-d. Nothing exists on its own.
2. The surprise and shock of this discovery provoke a startled gasp and a roaring cry. The angels roar with shock and delight every day when they pray and enter this state of consciousness.
3. When G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai, the entire world trembled as it attained this consciousness. The roaring surprise gripped the world in the form of thunder, lightning, and deafening sounds.
4. Our task in life is to continually refine and retool our consciousness and the world's consciousness to this metaphysical truth: we don't exist; only G-d exists.
5. When we get over the surprise and internalize this way of thinking, Mashiach will come. The roar will fade, and we will experience the still, delightful silence of G-d's unitary presence.

