



THE NEKUDA TOVA

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לזכות עלקא דבורה בת מרים רבקה חנה

I have given Myself **אני**
over to you in words

עלי

כתיבת

יהבית

Rede.
2026



REJOICE, MY SOUL



R' Chaim Davies

There is a longing at the center of every human life. We feel it most acutely in the quiet moments: in the still moments before sleep, in the sudden lapse of activity between one task and the next. It is not a longing for anything in particular; not for more comfort or greater achievement. It is a longing to be more fully *ourselves*; to live, not merely to function. It is the ache of a soul that senses it has not yet become what it was always meant to be.

Yiddishkeit does not dismiss that ache. It takes it seriously. It gives it a calendar.

The forty-nine days of Sefiras HaOmer have been, at their deepest, a reckoning with precisely this longing. Each day a refinement, each week a dimension of character: *Chesed shebeGevurah*, *Yesod shebeMalchus* — the names themselves sound like a map of the interior life. The count is a journey of becoming.

And this has been the journey of the Yid from time immemorial. Avraham's opening quest to Eretz Yisrael, לך לך, is explained by the Kli Yakar as "לך לעצמותך", *go to your own essence*, on a journey toward the fullness of your own identity. We are always, in some sense, *en route* to ourselves.

And yet: what could complete such a journey? How does one *arrive* at oneself?

A well-known Midrash at the very opening of the Torah (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1) offers an unexpected answer by describing how creation came into being: "*HaKadosh Baruch Hu* gazed into the Torah and created the world."

The Torah is the blueprint of the cosmos. Before a single thing existed, Hashem looked into the Torah — and from that gaze, a universe emerged. But what we do not always pause to consider is that the universe is not the only thing Torah was meant to build. The *Tikunei Zohar* (130b) teaches that each person

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is an "עולם קטן" — a microcosm, a world in miniature. If the cosmos is built from Torah, and man himself is a cosmos in miniature, then the Torah that serves as the blueprint of creation must also be the blueprint of the self. And if Hashem gazed into the Torah to create His world — perhaps we are meant to gaze into the Torah to create ours.

So it is that the Midrash Tanchuma (*Ki Savo*, 1) records something that must stop us in our tracks. Rabbi Yochanan teaches: "*Whoever*

Art by Yitzchok Mouilly

THE YID BENDING OVER A PAGE OF GEMARA, WRESTLING WITH ITS LOGIC UNTIL THE SUGYA OPENS UP, IS WRITING HIMSELF INTO EXISTENCE, BINDING HIMSELF TO THE CREATIVE POWER THROUGH WHICH HASHEM CREATED ALL OF EXISTENCE.

fulfills the Torah in its fullest truth, it is as though he fashioned and created himself.”

At its depth, Torah study is not the acquisition of information. It is an act of self-creation. The Jew who bends over a page of Gemara and wrestles with its logic, who sits with a difficult *sugya* until something opens — he is not merely learning. He is, in some profound sense, *becoming*. He is writing himself into existence, binding himself to the creative power with which Hashem brought the cosmos into being. And if this is true on any ordinary Tuesday, how much more so on Shavuot — the day when the Torah itself was given and its power was pressed into the fabric of time, available to draw on once a year, every year, forever. This is the secret of Shavuot.

On the morning the Torah was given, Hashem opened with a declaration: **אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ** — *I am Hashem your God*. The Gemara (Shabbos 105a) explains that the word **אֲנֹכִי** is an acronym: **אֲנִי נִפְשִׁי כְּתִבִּית יְהִיבִית** — *My very self I inscribed and gave to you*. The Torah is Hashem's own self-disclosure, His very soul, as it were, inscribed in letters of fire and shared with His chosen people.

The Noam Elimelech (*Parshas Yisro*) brings us further into this idea. He explains that the entire Torah is really one long introduction to Hashem. Every *halacha*, every narrative, every verse in Tehillim — all of it comes to bring you into relationship with the One who said *Anochi*. Here I am. Come and know Me.

But here is where the gift becomes staggering in its implications. The Ibn Ezra, in one of his most bold formulations (Shemos 31:18), explains what it really takes to know Hashem: *“One cannot know Hashem without first knowing one's own soul, one's own spirit, one's own body. For one who does not know the nature of his own soul, what wisdom does he have?”*

The divine and the human are not strangers to each other. We are created *b'tzelem Elokim*, and so the path toward knowing Hashem runs, inevitably, through knowing ourselves. These two journeys, the journey inward and the journey toward Hashem, are not separate roads. When guided by Torah, the journey inward becomes part of the journey toward Hashem, a unified path walked along in a single gait. It is within the sway of those synchronized steps where we *arrive*.

This is why the *chiyus*, the vitality, that flows from genuine Torah learning and the *chiyus* that comes from genuine self-knowledge are not two different things. They are one and the same flame. The Torah is the place where the *tzelem Elokim* within us encounters the Creator Whose image we bear. Every act of learning is, at its root, an act of recognition; of coming home to oneself and to one's Source simultaneously.

Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa would tell newcomers the story of Reb Eizik, son of Yekel, of Krakow. Reb Eizik dreamt three times of a treasure buried beneath a bridge in Prague. After dismissing it for weeks, he finally traveled the long road there, only to find the bridge guarded day and night by soldiers. After many days of pacing, the captain of the guard confronted his suspicious behavior and asked what he was doing. Reb Eizik told him about the dream. The captain laughed: “Foolish Jew! If I followed my dreams, I would have set out long ago for Krakow, because I once dreamt of a treasure buried beneath the stove of a Jew named Eizik son of Yekel.” Reb Eizik quickly returned home, dug beneath his own stove, and found the treasure. With it he built the *Reb Eizik Reb Yekel's shul*. Reb Bunim would conclude: The treasure is not in Prague. It is in your own home; but to find it, sometimes we must take the long road.

No one lived this truth more visibly than Rav Sheshet. The Gemara (*Pesachim* 68b) tells us that every thirty days, after completing his review of Torah, he would stand at the doorpost and call out: **חֲדָאִי נִפְשָׁאִי, חֲדָאִי** — *Rejoice, my soul! Rejoice, my soul! For you I have read, for you I have studied*. This is not a man congratulating himself on his scholarship;

it is the cry of a man who has encountered himself and His Creator, and returned bearing something real and luminous. He is addressing his nefesh directly, as one would address a beloved: I did this for you. You are more yourself now than you were before.

Chazal (ibid.) instruct that each Shavuos must bear this quality. “הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם” – “Everyone agrees that on Shavuos, you must enjoy yourself.” Rashi comments: “To show that this day of receiving the Torah is cherished and accepted by Klal Yisrael.” Torah does not feel like an imposition to the one who has truly received it. It feels settled, at home, like we’ve arrived.

Indeed, the *Gemara* continues to tell how Rav Yosef expressed this from his own angle. Each Shavuos he would call for a feast to be prepared, and would explain: “אי לא האי יומא דקא גרים, במה יוסף איבא בשוקא?” – *If not for this day and what it caused, how many Yosefs are there in the marketplace!*

His question is not rhetorical. It is the most personal question a human being can ask. Rav Yosef knew that Torah didn’t simply teach him information; Torah made him *Yosef*. It made him who he was.

We thank Hashem for this every evening, in the *brachah* before *Shema*: “כי הם חיינו וארץ ימינו ובהם נהגה” – *for they [Torah and Mitzvos] are our very life and the length of our days, and upon them we will meditate day and night.* Torah is life itself. It is the oxygen of the *neshamah*.

And Shavuos is the annual moment when we stand at the source of that oxygen, ready to breathe it in anew. As the *Shem MiShmuel* writes (Shavuos 5671), each member of Klal Yisrael is given a fresh infusion of *chiyus* on Shavuos.

But such life cannot be received casually. Before a person can receive Torah as *chiyus*, he must become capable of *holding* it.

The legendary Rav Zvi Hirsch of Rimanov asks: what were Bnei Yisrael actually *doing* during the *shloshes yemei hagbalah* before Matan Torah, those three days of drawing close around the foot of Sinai?

He answers: they were davening, over and over again: והאר עינינו בתורתך ודבק לבנו במצותיך – *Illuminate our eyes with Your Torah and cling our hearts to Your Mitzvos.* They were begging Hashem to help them create the *kli*, the vessel capable of receiving His gift.

And that, too, is our *avodah* each year. To ask Hashem: *Ribbono Shel Olam, let me see the world clearly through the brilliant lens of Your Torah; bind my heart with love for Your Mitzvos.* For, every year, each Jewish soul stands again at Sinai and receives the guiding inner light we need for the year ahead. As Rav Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, the *Me’or Einayim* writes

WHAT WERE THE YIDDEN DOING FOR 3 DAYS BEFORE RECEIVING THE TORAH? THEY WERE DAVENING, BEGGING HASHEM TO BE WORTHY VESSELS CAPABLE OF RECEIVING HIS VERY ESSENCE.

(*Drush l’Chanukah*): “On Shavuos, each person receives the Torah, meaning, the *seichel*, the animating spiritual intelligence, with which he will go on to serve Hashem throughout the coming year.”

A year of spiritual vitality is not only achieved through our daily effort. The *chiyus* is here now, on Shavuos, but it must be *received*. The Torah was given, and each year the giving repeats itself; but the receiving is always our act, always our choice. And, in that moment, we settle into our truest self.

Ashreinu! Ma Tov Chelkeinu! How fortunate we are to be *Banim LaMakom*, children of the One who gives Himself to us over and over again. “הדאי נפשי” – Let each of our souls rejoice in being chosen – for, in receiving His Torah, we receive the gift of becoming ourselves. 👑

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