



FUN FACT!!! – *Shavuot is the only holiday that does NOT have a set date on the calendar. IT takes place after the Omer count of seven weeks; which is one reason why the festival is called SHAVUOT with a literal translation of weeks.*

SHAVUOT – The Eternal Marriage

The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai more than 3300 years ago. As you all may have noticed, we are still here. This is no coincidence. The giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event—one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul for all times. Shavuot also means oath and on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.. *forming an everlasting covenant, not to forsake one another.*

Our Sages have compared it to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. And on weddings we rejoice, we stay up late celebrating a wonderful event. So it is also customary to stay up all night studying Torah and rejoicing the most wonderful event of all...

Every year on the holiday of Shavuot we renew our acceptance of G-d's gift and G-d "re-gives" the Torah. Essentially, we get married again.

But what makes a marriage work? Or better put, what is the making of a good marriage?

Aren't there some marriages that end up disastrous?

Newlyweds think these questions don't apply to them and never will: they are the first to discover marriage and the final authorities on it too, I speak from experience. After the honeymoon wears off, things change...3300 years go by and who remembers the vows!

This is all part of the reason why each year we celebrate Shavuot and re-read the 10 commandments, to remind us of our vows, to relive, remember and revitalize our marriage with Hashem (and each other) every year. The less you put into a marriage, the less you get from it. Eventually, being cheap with your loved ones ends up coming right back to you. A lack of loving kindness ends in a hollow pointless existence. This is not what was intended for us, nor what we signed up for.

But we can't JUST get married each year and recite a few vows and expect everything to just fall into place.

Successful marriages have two qualities in common even though the marriages themselves are as diverse as the couples in them: acceptance and faith. The honeymoon ends when the spouse in question (always the other spouse) does something thoroughly inexplicable and totally at odds with the logic of the judging spouse. “ How could they do that? “

Something that they cannot put themselves in that somebody else's shoes and come up with any justification for what they did. At this point they simply say, "I don't understand what s/he did but who says I have to understand everything to live with it?"

I take a section from Parshat Re'eh of the book of Deuteronomy (Devarim)

16:11 You shall rejoice before God your Lord in the place that God your Lord shall choose to be designated in His name. You [shall rejoice along] with your sons, your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites from your settlements, and the proselytes, orphans and widows among you.

16:12 You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and thus carefully keep all these rules.

As seen in 16:11, the torah lists 8 categories of people that a Jew should include in his own joy. Four of them are poor . Four are members of the person's own household. G_D says your 4 i.e., those of your own household, correspond to my four i.e. the poor. If you gladden my four, I will gladden your 4. Don't stop love with the people you are comfortable with or those in your family, or those with status...love all equally.

My wife and I didn't have many vows, but one thing we read to each other in Hebrew was, Ani Ledodi, veh le dodi Li....I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me. In the verse above we see the same distinction. Once again we see a marriage between Hashem and us. Just like I tell my wife everyday that I love her, so I do the same with Hashem. But I don't JUST tell her. I do so with loving kindness. Well, maybe not all the time, but if at first you don't succeed...try try again! Anyone can just **say** “ I Love You “.

As seen in 16:12 you shall remember..... if you remember that G_D freed you from Egypt in order to keep his commandments, their observance will not be a burden to you!!!

A marriage should not be something we take for granted or grow weary from. It is also not a place of bondage, it is a place we freely chose to be. Why do I have to take the garbage out? Is there a reason I have to go to work todaywhile he/she stays home? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY!!! This...does not work. This is not what a marriage was intended to be, but we still end up here sometimes.

In the Talmud, Shavuot is also called "Atzeret," which means "The Stoppage," a reference to the prohibition against work on this holiday. This has many meanings...I interpret it as...the sanctity of marriage, the truth of Torah, the covenant with Hashem should not be entered into or lived with the idea that its HARD WORK...we leave the feeling of working at the door. This is not a job we leave or go to. This is a journey of tikun olam (repairing the world) and great possibilities filled with adventures of chessed....one **we chose** with **FREE WILL**.

Simon the Just was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly. He used to say, The world stands on three things: On Torah, on Service [Avodah], and on Loving Deeds [Gemilut Chassidim].

I am going to turn my focus to the third pillar. Unless we behave lovingly towards others, our involvement in Torah and Avodah becomes mere passionless mechanistic piety. Gemilut Chassidim is the loving practice of Torah and Avodah; it is what transforms our encounters with others into relationships between persons.

I love going to work each day knowing I can support the ones I love, come home to them and enjoy the “ Fruits of my labor “ . And as Shavuot is also the celebration of the wheat harvest and the ripening of the first fruits,.. *This discussion can be brought full circle with a text from the prophet Hoseah: "Sow for yourselves according to charity, but reap according to your loving-kindness" (Hoseah 10:12). Shavuot is a holiday originally linked to the agricultural rhythms of sowing and reaping. Today we no longer trek to the Temple to offer the first fruits of our harvest; many of us have no regular interaction with the earth. But...by treating those around us with loving-kindness, we can plant and nourish positive relationships. The fruits we reap will be bountiful: a world based on treating others with dignity, respect, kindness, and love. This Shavuot we can be reminded that reaping can take place in our time; that we, too, can harvest the first fruits of our kind interactions and offer them to Hashem.*

*Accept the Torah and its entirety, Have faith while operating in the realm of Tikun Olam (repairing the world) , and do so with acts of loving-kindness.



FUN FACT!!! – At Sinai, G-d rescinded the "decree" and "divide" (gezeirah) that had been in force since the 2nd day of creation separating the spiritual and the physical into two hermetic worlds; from this point on, "the higher realms could descend into the lower realms, and the lower could ascend to the higher." Thus was born the "mitzvah" -- a physical deed that, by virtue of the fact that it is commanded by G-d, brings G-dliness into the physical world.

***"THESE ARE OUR 10 MARRIAGE VOWS.... LET US NOT FORGET THEM FOR THEY BIND US IN WAYS WE KNOW...WAYS WE DON'T KNOW AND WAYS WE DON'T KNOW WE DON'T EVEN KNOW... "*

1. "I am the Lord your G-d, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
2. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, nor any manner of likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them. For I the Lord your G-d am a jealous G-d, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments.
3. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your G-d in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.
4. "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath unto the Lord your G-d. On it you shall not do any manner of work -- you, your son, your daughter, your man-servant, your maid-servant, your cattle, and your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day, and hallowed it.
5. "Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your G-d gives you.
6. "You shall not murder.
7. "You shall not commit adultery.
8. "You shall not steal.
9. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, his manservant, his maid-servant, his ox, his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's."