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THE EVE OF SINAI

From the Talks of
The Lubavitcher Rebbe
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1.

Moshe's Preparation on the Fifth of Sivan

In its discussion of the giving of the Torah,¹ the Gemara states:

On the second [of Sivan], Moshe ascended [the mountain] and descended. On the third, he ascended and descended... On the fourth, he ascended and descended. On the fifth, he built an altar (as the verse states,² "And he built an altar at the foot of the mountain" — Rashi) and offered a sacrifice upon it.

This requires explanation. After the verse states, "And he built an altar...", the Torah goes on³ to describe how Moshe brought the Jewish people into a covenant. The Jewish people accepted the "Book of the Covenant" by declaring, *Naaseh V'Nishma* — "We will do and we will hear." Moshe then took the blood of the sacrifices, "and sprinkled it on the people, and he said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant...'"

This raises the question: why do the Sages mention only that "he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it," while omitting the rest of the account — namely, how Moshe brought the Jewish people into the covenant?⁴

On the contrary, if the Sages sought to express what occupied Moshe⁵ on the fifth of Sivan — and thereby explain why he did not ascend the mountain that day, as he had on the previous days — they seemingly should have mentioned the people's entry into the covenant first and foremost. This was one of the **most central** elements in the preparations for receiving the Torah. One can readily understand why such an event would override Moshe's ascent to the mountain. Beyond that, such an event required considerable time, {leaving no chance for an ascent}.⁶

By contrast, "he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it" does not appear to be especially time-consuming. Nor was this act unique to the giving of the Torah. We already find altars being built and sacrifices being offered by Adam, Noach, the Patriarchs, and

1) *Shabbos* 88a.

2) *Shemos* 24:4. This follows the view that the events described in this section of the Torah occurred prior to the giving of the Torah. (See *Torah Sheleimah* ad loc., and addenda, sec. 27, for a compilation of the opinions of Sages and the commentators on this matter.)

3) *Ibid.*, 24:6ff. (and see *Rashi* ad loc.).

4) See *Mechilta, Yisro* (19:10–11): "What did Moshe do on the fifth [of Sivan]? ... He built an altar ... He

took from the blood of the burnt offering, etc."

5) Note *Chiddushei Aggados* of the Maharsha, *Shabbos*, ad loc.

6) Although it could be argued that since his ascents to the mountain {on the preceding days} took place at daybreak (*Shabbos* 86a and *Rashi* ad loc.; *Rashi, Shemos* 19:3) — {and that early hour was the designated time for the ascent} — once it was deferred (even by a brief matter), it remained deferred {for the remainder of the day}.

others. Why, then, was this act so significant that it prevented Moshe from ascending the mountain?

There is another difficulty. The simple reading of the *Gemara*'s words — “and **he offered** a sacrifice upon it” — implies that Moshe **himself** offered the sacrifice on the altar he built. Yet the verse explicitly states:⁷ “And he sent the **youths** of the Children of Israel, and **they offered** burnt offerings,” indicating that the sacrifices were brought by the “youths of the Children of Israel,” and not by Moshe himself.⁸ (This is unlike the building of the altar, where the Torah explicitly says, “And **he built** an altar.”)

This leads to a striking conclusion: when the *Gemara* says, “and he offered a sacrifice upon it,” it is referring not to the sacrifices mentioned in the verse, but to a separate sacrifice offered personally by Moshe — one not explicitly recorded in the Torah.⁹

This also explains why the *Gemara* uses the singular term “sacrifice” (*korban*), rather than the plural “sacrifices” (*korbanos*), as the verse does: “burnt offerings... peace offerings... bulls.”

It emerges that the *Gemara* not only omits the continuation of the fifth day's narrative that is recorded in the Torah, but adds an entirely new detail that does **not** appear there at all.

This indicates that the core accomplishment of the fifth of Sivan — in the preparations for the giving of the Torah, and particularly in Moshe's own personal preparation — is expressed **primarily** through the act of “he built an altar.”

2.

Moshe's Personal Involvement

The above also explains why Moshe personally involved himself in building the altar, as the following question arises:

It is readily understood why Moshe “offered a sacrifice upon it,” rather than relying solely on the sacrifices brought by the “youths of the Children of Israel.” As is known,¹⁰ a person's thought and intent at the time of the offering is a **fundamental** component of the sacrifice. A sacrifice **personally** offered by Moshe therefore possessed a unique significance and quality compared to those offered by the “youths of the Children of Israel.”

7) *Shemos* 24:5.

8) See *Rashi* and other commentators ad loc.; *Zevachim* 115b (and *Rashi* and *Tosafos* ad loc.).

9) Note *Tosafos*, *Kerisos* 9a, s.v. *Vayishlach*.

10) See *Ramban*, *Vayikra* 1:9; et al. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 17, p. 12ff. (and references there); et al.

The building of the altar, however, would seemingly constitute merely a preparatory act (*hechsher*), especially since it was not located in the *Mishkan* or the *Beis HaMikdash*, and certainly was not an integral part of either. It could easily have been carried out by others, particularly Moshe's attendants, the elders of Israel, and the like. Why, then, did Moshe himself need to build the altar?

Based on the above, this becomes clear:

Since the building of **this** altar possessed a unique significance in connection with the giving of the Torah, as will be explained, it specifically had to be done by Moshe himself, just as all matters related to receiving the Torah were carried out through Moshe.

This also explains why the *Gemara* adds, “and he offered a sacrifice upon it,” emphasizing that Moshe himself offered a sacrifice on the altar. Beyond the unique significance of an offering brought by Moshe in its own right, in this case it was also inextricably linked with his having “**built an altar.**” An altar reaches its completion only when sacrifices are actually offered upon it.

[This is the underlying idea of “the dessert of the altar” (*keitz hamizbe'ach*)¹¹ — that the altar is never left idle without sacrifices, because the very completion of an altar depends on sacrifices being offered upon it.]

Therefore, for the act of “he built an altar” to be complete, it had to be accompanied by Moshe himself offering a sacrifice upon it.

3.

Sinai Before Sinai

The aforementioned concept — that the altar built by Moshe possessed a unique significance for the giving of the Torah — is also reflected in the sacrifices offered upon that altar.

Regarding the verse,¹² “the continual burnt offering (*Olas Tamid*) **which was made at Mount Sinai,**” the *Gemara*¹³ cites Rabbi Akiva's interpretation: “It was offered, and it never ceased.” This means that the *Tamid* offering was already being brought “at Mount Sinai,” for “the burnt offering that the Jewish people sacrificed in the wilderness (on the altar built by Moshe) was a continual burnt offering”¹⁴ — and from that point onward, “it

11) *Shekalim* 4:4 (and *Bartenura* and others ad loc.); *Kesubos* 106b, and elsewhere. {This refers to voluntary burnt offerings purchased with surplus Temple funds, functioning much like a dessert served after the primary sacrifices of the day.}

12) *Bamidbar* 28:6.

13) *Chagigah* 6b. See *Sifrei Zuta*, *Bamidbar*, ad loc.

14) The wording of the *Gemara*, *ibid.* The *Gemara* further notes that Rebbi Akiva shares this view.

never ceased.” Likewise, *Tosafos*,¹⁵ citing the *Sifrei*,¹⁶ explains: “[The continual burnt offering] which was made at Mount Sinai prior to [the giving of] the Torah, namely, on the fifth [of Sivan], when he built an altar.”

At first glance, this is difficult to understand.¹⁷ It is an established principle¹⁸ that even those *mitzvos* from “before the utterance,”¹⁹ {i.e., those commanded prior to the giving of the Torah,} are observed by us today not because of the earlier command, but because “the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded us through Moshe Rabbeinu”²⁰ **at Sinai**.²¹ How, then, does the Torah — the Written Torah itself, no less — attribute the *Tamid* offering, brought for all generations, to the “continual burnt offering which was made at Mount Sinai” — that is, an offering brought at Mount Sinai **prior to [the giving of] the Torah**?²²

Thus, we may reasonably conclude that although this offering was brought “prior to [the giving of] the Torah,” nevertheless, since it was offered on the fifth of Sivan — which marked an immediate preparation for the giving of the Torah — it already possessed the halachic status (*geder*) of the continual burnt offering as it exists after the giving of the Torah.²³ This status was so fully established that the Torah describes the continual burnt offering of all future generations as the **very** offering “which was made at Mount Sinai.”

This explains why the Torah emphasizes “which was made at Mount Sinai.” By doing so, the Torah teaches this very point: the burnt offering brought on the fifth of Sivan already possessed the halachic status of “**Mount Sinai**” — the giving of the Torah.

15) Chagigah, ad loc., s.v. Rebbi Akiva.

16) This does not appear in the prevalent editions of the *Sifrei* (*Bamidbar* ibid.).

17) Regarding the following discussion, see also *Or HaTorah, Mishpatim* (Vol. 8), p. 3042.

18) *Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishnah, Chullin*, end of chapter 7.

19) The language of the *Gemara, Chagigah* 6a–b. In *Yevamos* (5b) this phrase appears concerning the daily offering.

20) *Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishnah, Chullin*, end of chapter 7.

21) See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 8, p. 49, fn. 6 (and Vol. 26, p. 136, fn. 27) which states that the *Rambam’s* intention is to negate even the commands given to **Moshe** prior to the giving of the Torah. See *Gur*

Aryeh on *Rashi, Bamidbar* 15:32 (at the end).

22) It should be noted that regarding the verse (*Devarim* 5:12, 16), “as He commanded you,” *Rashi* comments (based on *Shabbos* 87a), “**before** the giving of the Torah, at Marah.” However: (a) There, the **Written Torah** does not explicitly state where the command was given (and according to several commentators — see *Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bachya*, and *Ramban* — it refers to the original giving of the Ten Commandments {recorded in *Parshas Yisro*}). (b) In our case, the verse does not merely state “as He commanded you,” but rather “**which was made** at Mount Sinai,” indicating that this is **the very same** burnt offering.

23) See *Tosafos, Yoma* 34a, s.v. *Ha’olah*: “It was the first of all communal offerings.”

The Halachic Ramifications

The fact that the continual burnt offering (*Olas Tamid*) of the fifth of Sivan possessed the halachic status of “Mount Sinai” — the giving of the Torah — also carries practical **halachic** implications.

Regarding the “burnt offering that the Jewish people sacrificed in the wilderness,” there is a dispute²⁴ as to whether it required skinning and dismemberment (*hefshet v’nituach*). The *Gemara* explains²⁵ that this depends on the disagreement between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva. According to Rabbi Yishmael, who holds that “the general principles [of the *mitzvos*] were stated at Sinai, while the specific details [of the *mitzvos* were told to Moshe] in the Tent of Meeting (*Ohel Moed*),” the specific laws of skinning and dismemberment had not yet been given at the time the offering was brought. According to Rabbi Akiva, however, who holds that “[both] the general principles **and specific details** were stated at Sinai,” that offering did require skinning and dismemberment, because the specific details of the *mitzvos* — including the laws of skinning and dismemberment — had already been given at Sinai.

On the surface, this is difficult to understand.²⁶ According to both views, this burnt offering was brought on the **fifth** of Sivan, prior to the giving of the Torah. Why, then, should the question of whether the specific details were stated **at Sinai** have any bearing on how that pre-Sinai sacrifice was offered?

We must therefore conclude that this is because the burnt offering of the fifth of Sivan already possessed the halachic status of “Mount Sinai” — the giving of the Torah.²⁷ Thus, Rabbi Akiva, who holds that “[both] the general principles and specific details were stated at Sinai,” would maintain that when the command²⁸ (and special directive) were given to bring a continual burnt offering on the fifth of Sivan, its detailed laws — including the laws of skinning and dismemberment — were given as well, since the commandments of that day fall squarely under this very principle.

24) *Zevachim* 115b. See also *Chagigah* 6b.

25) *Zevachim*, *ibid.* See also *Chagigah*, *ibid.*

26) As Rabbi Akiva Eiger asks in commentary on *Chagigah*, *ibid.*

27) Even according to Rabbi Yishmael, one could argue that the burnt offerings and peace offerings brought at that time possessed the same fundamental status as those offered after the giving

of the Torah (derived from “And you shall sacrifice upon it” — *Shemos* 20:21 — cited in *Rashi*, *Chagigah* 6a and *Zevachim* 115b). However, since the precise details were not yet transmitted, they did not legally require skinning and dismemberment (see conclusion of *Gemara*, *Chagigah* 6b).

28) See *Rashi*, *Chagigah* *ibid.*, s.v. *V’i salka da’atach*: “The obligation for all generations **from the mouth of the Almighty.**”

5.

The Holiness of Erev

Assuming the above is correct, we can offer the following explanation, prefaced by a fundamental premise:

Regarding the concept of *Erev Shabbos* and *Erev Yom Tov* — that preparation for Shabbos and *Yom Tov* begins on the preceding day — this is not merely a matter pertaining to the **person** (*gavra*), in the sense that in order for a **person** to observe Shabbos and *Yom Tov* properly, **he** must prepare himself so as to be ready to absorb the holiness of Shabbos and *Yom Tov*. This follows the teaching of the Sages:²⁹ “He who toils on *Erev Shabbos* will eat on Shabbos; he who did not toil...”

Rather, it also pertains to the object (*cheftza*) — from the perspective of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* themselves. Already on *Erev Shabbos* and *Erev Yom Tov*, there is a “trace” (*me’ein*) — and therefore the halachic status (*geder*) — of the holiness of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*.

However, within the holiness of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* that begins on their respective **eves**, there are several levels. For example:

In the period immediately preceding *Shabbos*, there is the concept of adding “from the mundane to the holy” (*tosafos Shabbos*). In the words of the Sages,³⁰ *Shabbos* is like a “wolf” that “**snatches** from in front of it and from behind it.” As explained at length elsewhere,³¹ this means that adding to *Shabbos* is not merely an obligation upon the person — to add from the mundane to the holy by accepting the additional time³² — but that this expansion stems from **Shabbos** itself and becomes part of *Shabbos proper*. *Shabbos* “snatches” from before and after because the holiness of *Shabbos* extends into the time immediately adjoining it.³³

Even earlier — on *Erev Shabbos* and *Erev Yom Tov* after midday (*chatzos*), when *Tachanun* is not recited — this is not due to a person’s preparation, but because the holiness of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* is already shining then in a manner that entirely precludes its recitation.

The same applies to the **entire** day of *Erev Shabbos* and *Erev Yom Tov*. The Torah designates it with the title *Erev Shabbos* because the sanctity of *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*

29) Avodah Zarah 3a.

30) *Mechilta*, *Yisro* 20:8. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 16, p. 231, fn. 8* for various versions of the *Mechilta*’s wording.

31) *Likkutei Sichos*, *ibid.*, p. 233ff.

32) See *Likkutei Sichos*, *ibid.* for two distinct perspectives on this exact mechanism.

33) See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 19, p. 59.

already begins to emerge on that day.³⁴

In the language of Chassidus: a glimmer of the revelations (*giluyim*) of Shabbos and *Yom Tov* already shines on *Erev Shabbos* and *Erev Yom Tov*.

6.

The Gift from Above

This principle also applies to every *Yom Tov*, including its very first occurrence: since every *Yom Tov* has its *moed* (a fixed time in the year),³⁵ the dynamics of the *Yom Tov* already begin to manifest on its eve (*erev*).

Pesach provides a clear illustration of this. The time for offering the *Korban Pesach* — concerning which it is stated,³⁶ “And you shall say: It is a **Passover** sacrifice to the L-rd, for He **passed over**...” — is on the **fourteenth** of Nissan, even though that event took place only on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, when Pesach³⁷ itself begins.

The same applies to the giving of the Torah,³⁸ which took place on the sixth of Sivan.³⁹ On the fifth of Sivan, the eve of the giving of the Torah, the reality of *Matan Torah* was already manifest.⁴⁰

34) See *Avudraham, Seder Tefillos HaShabbos*, at the beginning: “For on the eves of *Yomim Tovim*... they are accustomed not to fall on their faces [i.e., recite *Tachanu*, even] during **Shacharis**... The reason is... on the eves, the people have already been separated from work, **the day has become sanctified**, and they are forbidden to engage in eulogy and fasting...” He notes that this should theoretically apply to the **eves of Shabbos** as well, but practically, “if we did this for *Shabbos*, we would not say *Tachanun* for half the year.”

35) Note the *maamorim* beginning *Tiku*, 5661, 5691 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, Vol 1, pp. 122a–b).

36) *Shemos* 12:27.

37) As termed in Rabbinic literature (and even in the Torah itself — see *Shemos* 34:25). See *Haggadah Shel Pesach im Likkutei Taamim, Minhagim U’Beurim* (Kehot, 5746–7), p. 668 in the footnote.

38) In fact, regarding the giving of the Torah, this {preliminary illumination} is even more profound than on other festivals, as it is connected to the fiftieth day of the *Omer*, drawing down the “Fiftieth Gate” (*Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 10d; *Shir*

HaShirim, p. 35c; see *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 3, p. 996ff.) — which occurred precisely on **the fifth** of *Sivan* (since the giving of the Torah was on the **51st** day of the *Omer* — *Shulchan Aruch* of the Alter Rebbe, *Orach Chayim*, sec. 494, end of par. 1).

39) Even according to Rabbi Yosi, who maintains that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan* (*Shabbos* 86b), this is solely because Moshe added a day **based on his own perception** (*Shabbos* 87a). From Hashem’s perspective, however, “it was fitting to be given **on the sixth**” (*Tosafos, Avodah Zarah* 3a, s.v. *Yom hashishi*). See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1029, fn. 24, which explains that even according to Rabbi Yosi, the Divine **revelation from above** was **inherently** suited to be given on the fiftieth day of the *Omer* (the sixth of Sivan), since that is the time when the Fiftieth Gate is drawn down (as stated in the previous footnote).

* See *Or HaTorah* (referenced in fn. 17): “Adjacent to the giving of the Torah for two days.”

40) In *Or HaTorah*, *ibid.*, this is connected to the precedence of “we will do” over “we will hear,” which took place on the fifth of Sivan. See also

This explains how the sacrifices of the fifth of Sivan could possess the halachic status of sacrifices brought after the giving of the Torah, because the halachic status, revelation, and effect of the giving of the Torah had already begun at that time.

On this basis, we can also understand why the *Gemara* mentions only, “On the fifth, he built an altar...,” while omitting that Moshe brought the Jewish people into the covenant.

The acts performed by Moshe and the Jewish people to enter the covenant — such as declaring *Naaseh V’Nishma* and the sprinkling of the blood — were merely preparations on the part of the Jewish people. These served to render them **fit** to receive the Torah. However, these acts were not part of **the giving of the Torah itself**.

The giving of the Torah came from Above, in the manner of a gift, on the part of the Giver.

By contrast, the altar that Moshe built, along with the sacrifice he offered upon it,⁴¹ already reflected the very effect of the giving of the Torah to some degree. For this reason, **the building of the altar** was a key innovation of the **fifth** of Sivan, the **eve** of the giving of the Torah.⁴²

7.

Transforming the Mundane

However, this requires explanation: Why was the theme of the giving of the Torah — already present on the eve of *Matan Torah* — expressed specifically through “he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it,” rather than through some other action? This indicates that this act reveals the central theme of the giving of the Torah.

The explanation is as follows: The ultimate purpose of the giving of the Torah was to enable the transformation of mundane objects into objects of holiness (*cheftza d’kedushah*).⁴³ In the well-known expression, this means actualizing the purpose of creation: “to make for Him, Blessed be He, a dwelling place **in the lower realms**.”⁴⁴ That is, one must refine the physicality of the body and the world until one becomes fit to receive

Tzlach, Pesachim 68b.

41) We can posit that Moshe’s sacrifice possessed the significance of the giving of the Torah according to all opinions (unlike the sacrifices of the “youths of the children of Israel,” whose status depends on the differing opinions (*Chagigah* 6a–b) as to whether they were burnt offerings of appearance [*Olas Re’iyah*] or continual burnt offerings. This is not the place for further elaboration).

42) Note the sequence presented in the *Mechilta* (referenced in fn. 4): “This is the sixth day on which the Torah was given. And what did Moshe do on the fifth? He rose early in the morning and built an altar....”

43) See at length *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 16, p. 212ff.

44) *Tanchuma, Nasso*, sec. 16; et al; *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 36.

“the revelation of Hashem’s light that shines upon the Jewish people through the Torah.”⁴⁵

[In this vein, the Alter Rebbe explains⁴⁶ the reason one does not fulfill the *mitzvah* of Torah study through thought alone; rather, the words of Torah must be **spoken**. The ultimate purpose of Torah study is to draw down “Hashem’s light” upon the body and the animal soul, and this is accomplished specifically through the movement of one’s lips, which constitutes a form of action.]

This concept — the refinement of the physicality of the world — is **overtly** apparent in the altar and in the sacrifices: {in the case of the altar,} one takes physical stones and makes them into an **altar for Hashem**. Similarly with sacrifices: one takes a **physical** animal and, by offering it upon the altar, it is elevated from the mundane until it attains a state of **manifest** holiness.⁴⁷ This is why the revelation of the giving of the Torah on its eve was expressed specifically through the act of “he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it.”

8.

The Descent Prepares for the Revelation

We can now understand why the act of “he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it” was what prevented Moshe from ascending the mountain, taking precedence over it.

At first glance, one might ask: Moshe was required to build an altar — “twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel”⁴⁸ — together with all the additional elements⁴⁹ associated with the Jewish people’s entry into the covenant. Even so, could he not have found time on that same day to ascend the mountain beforehand, even if only briefly?⁵⁰

[We see a precedent for this on the fourth day: after descending from the mountain, Moshe nevertheless found time to (a) relate to the Jewish people “all the words of G-d and all the ordinances”⁵¹ — namely, the *mitzvos* of separation and setting boundaries around the mountain, as well as the seven Noahide laws, Shabbos, and the remaining commandments given at Marah⁵² — and (b) write the Torah “from *Bereishis* until the giving of the Torah,” along with “the *mitzvos* they had been commanded at Marah”⁵³ — all

45) Language of the *Tanya* *ibid.*, end of the chapter.

46) *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 37 (47a). See also *ibid.*, end of ch. 49.

47) See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 16, p. 479ff.; et al.

48) *Shemos* 24:4. This is especially significant according to the Sages (*Mechilta*, *Yisro* referenced in fn. 4) who state that there were “twelve monuments for each and every tribe.”

49) The following question becomes even more

poignant in light of the fact that the *Gemara* mentions only that “He built an altar and offered upon it,” and says nothing further.

50) See above, fn. 6.

51) *Shemos* 24:3.

52) *Rashi* ad loc.

53) *Rashi*, *ibid.*, 24:4.

on that very same day.]⁵⁴

The explanation is as follows: The defining feature of the “eve” — the preparation for the giving of the Torah — lies not in “ascending” Above to the mountain, but rather in “descent” and action within the physical world, as explained above.⁵⁵ This preparation consists of service within the “lower realms”: building an altar from physical stones and offering a physical animal upon it.

This reflects the broader concept of the giving of the Torah itself, which took place in a manner in which “Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai and gave the Torah... upon the earth.” Even though “He could have elevated the Jewish people to the heavens and given them the Torah there,” {He did not do so,} because “the underlying intention of the giving of the Torah is that the work of refinement (*avodas habirurim*) must take place **below**, [within the physical world].”⁵⁶

9.

The Wilderness Connection

It is a known principle⁵⁷ that “we (always) read (*Parshas*) *Bamidbar* before *Atzeres* [the festival of Shavuos]. The connection between *Bamidbar* — “in the wilderness” — and *Atzeres*⁵⁸ is **clear**,⁵⁹ as the Sages⁶⁰ state on the verse⁶¹ “and from the wilderness, a gift,” where they offer several explanations for why the “gift” of the Torah is specifically associated with the “wilderness” (*midbar*).

In this context, there is a unique connection between *Parshas Bamidbar* and **Erev Shavuos** (the fifth of Sivan) — {particularly} in years such as this one (5745),⁶² when *Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar* falls on the fifth of Sivan:

One of the defining elements of the “wilderness” — which gives rise to⁶³ the “gift” of the Torah — is expressed in the words of the Sages:⁶⁴ “If a person makes himself like this

54) According to the *Mechilta, Yisro*, loc cit., after building the altar and offering sacrifices, Moshe read (on that very day) from “*Bereishis*, etc.”

55) See also *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 4, p. 1026ff.

56) *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5710, p. 224; et al.

57) *Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Tefillah* 13:2 (“the widespread custom”). *Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, sec. 428, par. 4.

58) See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 8, p. 1, fn. 1; et al.

59) See also *Likkutei Sichos*, *ibid.*, p. 236ff.

60) *Eiruvim* 54a; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 19:26;

Tanchuma, Chukas, sec. 21.

61) *Bamidbar* 21:18.

62) {The year this *sichah* was published.}

63) This does not imply that man’s effort **draws down** the giving of the Torah — for a “gift” originates from **the Giver** (as explained in section 6; see also *Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar*, p. 5a) — but rather, following the prerequisite of self-nullification, the Torah “comes as a **gift** as a matter of course” (*Likkutei Torah* *ibid.*, et al).

64) *Eiruvim*, loc cit.

wilderness, upon which everyone treads,⁶⁵ the Torah is given to him as a gift.” {This refers to the quality of} self-nullification (*bitul*).

Where is this concept expressed most clearly at the time of the giving of the Torah? In “we will do” preceding “we will hear,” which reflects a **complete** self-nullification before Hashem⁶⁶ — making oneself like a **wilderness**.⁶⁷ As mentioned earlier, this declaration took place specifically on the **fifth** of Sivan.

In light of what was explained above — that the defining feature of the fifth of Sivan (in relation to the giving of the Torah) is the act of “he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it” — we must conclude that **this** act, too, is connected to the “wilderness.”

The explanation is as follows:

The reason the Torah was given specifically in a wilderness lies in the very nature of the Torah itself as an object (*cheftza*): as the Sages state, it is ownerless and available to all like a wilderness.⁶⁸ This is in addition to the wilderness-like qualities the person (*gavra*) himself must embody (“one who makes himself like this wilderness,” and the like).⁶⁹ Furthermore, the very **setting** of man’s service resembles a wilderness:

The purpose of the giving of the Torah is to enable the transformation of mundane objects into objects of holiness — to make for Hashem a dwelling place in the lower realms. As the Alter Rebbe explains,⁷⁰ “lower realms” refers to “the lowest level, beneath which there is nothing lower in terms of the concealment of His light... to the point that it is **filled with kelipos and the sitra achra**, which actively oppose Hashem.”

This is why the Torah was given in a wilderness.⁷¹ A wilderness — a place “where no man dwells”⁷² (referring to the Supernal Man)⁷³ — is the very domain of *kelipos* and the *sitra achra*.⁷⁴ This is the ultimate purpose of the Torah: to transform this very “wilderness” of the physical world into a dwelling place for Hashem.

This is the accomplishment of the fifth of Sivan: the service of refining this

65) In *Tanchuma*, loc cit., the wording is “empties himself of everything” (and similarly in *Bamidbar Rabbah*, loc cit.).

66) This concept takes on even greater depth in light of the explanation in *Chassidus* (*Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, p. 14a; *Shir HaShirim*, p. 22a; see *Ibid.*, *Berachah*, p. 39c; **et al**) that this self-nullification is specifically directed toward the **Master** of the Will.

67) See also *Likkutei Sichos*, loc cit., p. 237ff.

68) See *Bamidbar Rabbah* and *Tanchuma* referenced in fn. 60; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7.

69) See *Bamidbar Rabbah*, *ibid.*

70) *Tanya*, ch. 36.

71) See similarly *Likkutei Sichos*, p. 172ff., regarding the spiritual superiority of the *Mishkan* over the *Beis HaMikdash* in Yerushalayim — precisely because the *Mishkan* was situated in the wilderness.

72) *Yirmiyahu* 2:6.

73) *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, p. 4c (and see also p. 2b). *Nasso*, p. 20c; *Re’eh*, p. 32b, et al.

74) *Likkutei Torah*, *ibid.*

“wilderness” had already begun on the eve of the giving of the Torah — by taking physical stones from within it and making them into **an altar**⁷⁵ **for Hashem**.⁷⁶

10.

The Timeless Directive

This also serves as a directive for every individual:

When the fifth of Sivan arrives each year — in keeping with the principle that “these days are remembered and **enacted**”⁷⁷ — one must recognize that the preparation for the giving of the Torah does not consist of withdrawing from the world, but on the contrary, of making the physical world a dwelling place for Hashem.

The power to accomplish this is drawn from Moshe Rabbeinu, who built the altar and offered a sacrifice upon it. Specifically, it is channeled through the spark of Moshe that exists within “each and every soul of the House of Israel.”⁷⁸ Through this spark, one is empowered to engage in the service of “he built an altar and offered a sacrifice upon it,” even as we stand on the fifth of Sivan, **prior** to the giving of the Torah — referring to the Torah as it will be received *this* year. For the Torah is given anew each year, in the spirit of the teaching, “they should be **new** in your eyes,”⁷⁹ reflecting an ascent in holiness relative to the previous year. Through this preparatory service, one actualizes the ultimate purpose of creation: to make the world a dwelling place for Hashem.

*From the sichos of Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar (Erev Shavuos) 5731 (1971),
and the night of Erev Shavuos 5743 (1983)*

75) Note the halachic debate regarding whether the building of an altar requires specific intention (*lishmah*). (See *Mechilta*; *Mechilta d'Rashbi*; and *Rashi*, *Shemos* 20:21. *Tzafnas Paneach* on the Torah ad loc., **and references there**; *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 21, p. 255, fn. 38).

76) Note that during those pivotal days, Moshe did not attend to **his own affairs** (*Mechilta* and *Rashi*, *Shemos* 19:14) — not even to Moshe’s own {spiritual matters} — but acted exclusively as the intermediary “between G-d and you” (*Devarim* 5:5; see the *maamar* entitled *Panim B’Panim*, 5659; et al) — “from the mountain (Hashem) to the people” (*Shemos*, loc. cit.).

77) *Esther* 9:28, in accordance with the teaching of the *Arizal* — see *Ramaz* in *Sefer Tikkun Shovavim*, cited and explained in *Lev David* (by the *Chida*), ch. 29. {The principle states that when we commemorate a specific date, the unique spiritual light that was originally revealed on that day is “enacted” once more, empowering us with the same divine energy that was available at the first historical event.}

78) *Tanya*, beginning of ch. 42.

79) This is all the more so considering that the words of Torah must be viewed as new every single day.