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## BaChodesh HaShelishi: Shavuos - Introduction

From the teachings of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi; adapted by Eli Touger

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Each of us faces an age-old struggle: How do we overcome our fundamental material tendencies and live a life of spiritual purpose?

In the following *maamar*, a classic chassidic text taken from *Torah Or*, the Alter Rebbe offers a resolution, explaining that Torah study empowers a person's spiritual sensitivities and weakens his orientation to physicality.

Historically, the Giving of the Torah represented the culmination of the exodus from Egypt, as it is written:<sup>1</sup> "When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain." As frequently explained in chassidic thought,<sup>2</sup> the Hebrew name for Egypt, *Mitzrayim* (מצרים), is virtually identical to the word *meitzarim* (מיצרים), which means "straits" or "limitations." In other words, our personal exodus from Egypt involves self-transcendence; lifting ourselves out of our natural limitations. Torah study epitomizes this inner journey, for it lifts one out of the boundaries and constraints of the body and animal soul and initiates a deeper and stronger relationship with G-d.

### Man Speaking G-d's Word

The Torah we study concerns itself with material matters — containing laws governing our crops, our business affairs, and the like. Nevertheless, even as it descends from the spiritual peaks to relate to our day-to-day reality, it is, in essence, one with G-d. When a man or woman studies the Torah, the words being recited are not his or her own. Every word uttered is G-d's word, as it were. The thunder and lightning of Sinai is lacking, but the core of that revelation — that G-d's word is being drawn down to this material world — remains the same.

The Sinai experience overwhelmed the Jewish people, imbuing them with "fear, awe, and trembling." When a person realizes that by studying the Torah, he draws down essential G-dliness, similar feelings will be evoked.<sup>3</sup> He will be overcome by *bittul*, stepping beyond self-consciousness and self-concern, and, as a consequence, will devote himself to carrying out G-d's will. In such a state, the changes mentioned above — the weakening of his physical desires and the highlighting of his spiritual potential — will flow as a matter of course.

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In several *sichos* in the month of Sivan, 5748, the Rebbe emphasized the importance of studying this *maamar* as a preparation for the holiday of *Shavuos*, asking that it be studied by men, women, and children as a catalyst that enables us to receive the Torah with happiness and inner feeling.<sup>4</sup>

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## FOOTNOTES

1. *Shmos* 3:12.
2. *Torah Or* 71c; see also *Basi LeGani* 5710 (English translation, Kehot, N.Y., 5750), ch. 13.
3. *Berachos* 22a.
4. The blessing traditionally given by the Rebbe for the *Shavuos* holiday.

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### FROM THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI SCHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI; ADAPTED BY ELI TOUGER

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (18 Elul 1745-24 Tevet 1812), known as "the Alter Rebbe," was one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, and the founder of the Chabad Chassidism. He is the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

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