

# The Invitation to Relationship



Dear Friend,

It's the day we've been waiting for, counting towards. The fragrance of flowers, roses and lilies, the fresh smell of greenery, the air filled with expectation. It's a day of **celebration, closeness and commitment**. A day of drama and uplift and love. As well, Shavuot is a journey.



We tread the same path as klal Yisrael, who journeyed from Refidim to Sinai. Or, as the Medrash and commentaries tell us, Refidim, a place of spiritual lethargy and conflict to a place where they were open to revelation. They left behind weariness and lassitude and **embraced unity and wholeness**.

And then came the moment.

Against the backdrop of the raw beauty of the desert came life, death, and the dew that would restore them to the world of the living. Thunder, lightning, and deafening silence. Thick cloud and revelation.

But just how does this transformation take place? **Can we access it in our own lives?** Can Shavuot gift us with more than pretty flowers and lavish meals? Where and how can we be touched by its energy? Can we really come out of Shavuot different from the way we entered? Can it form an impression on our

hearts and souls, so that we can take it into our lives?

## Sound and Light

Thunder and lightning. Sound and noise.

A summer storm: rain lashes down, the sky lights up with the brilliant white flash of lightning and the ominous distant rumbling turns into a mighty clap of thunder. The drama playing out high in the clouds, as electricity builds up and prepares to shoot towards the earth, is actually seen as two separate phenomena: a flash of lightning and the great rumble of thunder. There is light. And there is sound. But a deeper investigation reveals otherwise: **thunder and lightning are two manifestations of one thing**. As light travels quicker than sound, we see the lightning first, and only then hear the thunder.

Miles away from the clouds where they originate, we experience both thunder and lightning as

two separate things. One lights up the world, and the other is a noise that fills us with awe. It's a sensory extravaganza, but if we were to travel upward **and find the origin**, the storm at root, then we would experience just one thing.

As they stood at Har Sinai, surrounding the mountain, we are told that klal Yisrael "saw the sounds". Even without knowing what that means, it summons up a feeling that everything was larger than life, that this was an experience etched into their skin. In fact, the Kli Yakar tells us that the words that Hashem uttered—Anochi—appeared in the heavens, so that as the Aseres HaDibros were uttered, **there was a visual manifestation of these words**.

But it goes further. Returning to our thunder and lightning analysis, although the thunder and lightning look like two things here on earth, at the point of origin, it's one. So, here's the thing. When the Jews "saw the sounds" it means that they saw the unity of the creation. They went back to the root, to the core, to the point of origin. That's the crux of Shavuot. **An invitation to "see the sounds"**. To look at the different manifestations of the world and find the unifying factor. To see the root, and open ourselves up to experiencing it in its beauty and awe.

## Point of Origin

**B**ut what is the point of origin?

It all starts with one word. **Anochi**.

The first word of the Aseres HaDibros, Anochi, is the bedrock of Yiddishkeit, **the foundation**

**of our belief**. But it's not simply a philosophical declaration about the existence of Hashem. Rav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch writes: The Anochi contains: "Not the fact that there is a G-d, also not that there is only one G-d, but that this One, unique, true G-d is to be **my** G-d, that He created and formed **me**."

He continues, explaining that *Anochi* is an **invitation to a relationship**: "[Hashem] goes on creating and forming me, keeps me, watches over me, leads and guides me... Every present breath that I draw and every coming moment of my existence is a direct gift of His Almighty and Love...." (Rav Hirsch on Shemos 20: 2)

Let's unpack this. Anochi - one word is a distillation of everything that we live for:

Anochi. He goes on creating me.

*My life is worthwhile. My minutes and days may at times feel like they are scattered or even burdensome, but I'm not just moving in circles. There is a pathway, though I may not always see it. **I have a purpose in this world and my life is meaningful**.*

Anochi. He watches over me, leads and guides me.

*Hashem is with me, even when I feel alone. Life may be overwhelming, **but I can reach out and hold on to Him**, for not only does He have my back, He is charting my path. He takes me by the hand, and just like He led klal Yisrael through the desert, He leads me through periods of confusion and pain, not letting go even when I arrive at a place that is lush and verdant.*

Anochi. Every breath is a direct gift.

*Hashem's kindness permeates my being and enables me to live and thrive. His love is my oxygen. I thank Him for every breath, for each inhale contains my total dependence and every exhale shows that He has given me life, choice, the ability to act and create and shape my life, my family, my world. Instead of running away from my dependence, I can embrace it **because it gives birth to our relationship, my need for Him, our essential bond.***

Our return to essence is our renewed acceptance, realization and internalization of Anochi, that invitation to enter into a relationship with Hashem that shapes who we are and suffuses every moment.

## Only Human

**B**ut let's take this one step further. Although it can be painful to be reminded, we're all too aware of our frailty and limitations. We're only human. We make mistakes. We have limited strength. Limited patience. If Anochi means to enter into a relationship, it seems one sided by nature: Hashem gives; we take. **Is there really space for us?** Can I, in my littleness, be in a relationship with the All-powerful, All-knowing Creator? Can I really journey from Refidim, the place of conflict, weariness, numbness to a space of *Anochi*?

To answer this, let's take another look at the word *Anochi*. Chazal (Shabbos 105a) tell us that *Anochi* is a contraction of the message:

אֲנִי נָפְשִׁי כְּתִבִּית יְהִיבִית - *I Myself wrote and gave.*

The meaning remains cryptic.

Anochi, explains the Kedushas Levi (Yisro 25; see also *Likutim L'Avos* 17), is the core not only of the Aseres haDibros, but of our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Enfolded within the letters of Anochi is a secret communication: My Will is in the Torah, and I am giving it to You. Nafshi, explains the Kedushas Levi, is synonymous with ratzon—my spirit is my will. It follows that these words could mean **I wrote my desire and gave it to you.**

In giving us the Torah, and in giving us the ability to interpret the Torah, to pasken, to act, to impact those around us, to engage ourselves and others in spreading light, Hashem gave us the secret of relationship. He made us His partners. He gave us the capacity to shake the Heavens, to give Him pleasure—even, to make Him laugh and declare, "My children have won." He **carved out a space for us to do His work, to spread His light.** Confident in our abilities, He asked us to be His ambassadors, to reach inward and figure out how to react to different situations, how to hold onto integrity, to find the balance between giving and receiving, to find the wisdom to let go and the energy to shape and create and make change.

The *mazel* of the month of Sivan is twins, hinting at a new relationship: reciprocity. Mutual love and respect. Interdependence. The first 26 generations of the world relied entirely on Hashem's kindness and compassion, but with Matan Torah a new paradigm was born:

Anochi. Relationship. And a relationship takes two. It goes in both directions. Not only do we receive from Hashem, **but we give back to Him**. We give Him pleasure. We give Him our words of prayer. We take the gift of Anochi and use it to shape our reality, internal and external, and in doing so become His twin, His beloved partner in creation.

*Anochi* was said long ago, from a mountain in a desert, **but it beats in all of our hearts**. And comes Shavuot, we hear that Anochi and respond with our own. Yes, we want what You want, and we know that You want what we want, too. Sound and light become one. Thunder and lightning fuse in one heart stopping moment when we know, really know, not just what we want, which is what You want, but also, who we are, in relationship - Yours.

### The Inverse of Anochi

Each of the Aseres HaDibros stands alone, but they also form relationships with each other. The inverse of Anochi, Chazal tell us, is the tenth and final command: *Lo Sachmod*. Commonly translated as do not *covet*, it cautions us against allowing natural desire to deteriorate into greed and run amok. In fact, Rav Chaim Vital in Shaarei Kedushah writes that *Lo Sachmod*, do not covet, as the tenth command, **bears the equivalence of all of them**. It is “the source of all impurity” leading to hatred, jealousy, and the gamut of negative actions.

How can we understand this? Why is *Lo Sachmod* the negative equivalent of Anochi?

What insight can this give us into our bond with Hakadosh Baruch Hu?

When Hashem created Adam and Chava, He blew life into them: a part of Himself was now lodged in a physical body that walks around on this physical earth. That part, deep inside—the essence of who we are—**longs to reconnect with its Source**. It is homesick for the place where it belongs, and hungry for nourishment.

But the soul's messages **are quiet and subtle**. They can be drowned by the clamor of the world, by the flurry of work, life, obligations. They can take on a different shape: hunger can become greed. Yearning can become craving for more, for something, anything that will fill the emptiness. And then, instead of seeking connection, we try to simply numb the pain, the call of a searching soul.

*Lo Sachmod*. Don't go there, the Torah warns us. Don't allow spiritual hunger to degenerate into greed. Because it's so easy **for a burning desire for connection, for meaning, for worthiness** to become distorted. Our *kisufim*, our soul's natural yearning, can so easily become *kesef*, a drive for money, consumerism, external validation, desire for approval. We are born with a spiritual dissatisfaction, with a feeling of displacement, with a healthy hunger for love and meaning and self-expansion. When this is misread, misinterpreted, misunderstood, it becomes a craving for attention instead of love, a hankering after materialism instead of meaning.

Instead, Anochi. Return to relationship. Return

to the voice inside which whispers, ***I created you and sustain you because I believe in you.*** *You are worthy because you are my beloved child and I have chosen you as My partner. Your actions are meaningful. And above all, You are loved.*

What does Shavuot mean to us? **It's an invitation to return to essence. To who we are at core.** We read the word Anochi, it echoes through us. And yet, Anochi isn't the title of an unknown and distant G-d. It's the word used to connote relationship. Like Naomi and Ruth: where you go, I go, where you die, I die. We're together. Our life is never going to be the same anymore because it's a life that takes place and is shaped by relationship.

## To See the Sounds

**O**n Shavuot, we saw the sounds. Two distinct physical phenomena blurred and merged into one. We returned to root, we found the core that unites. And today, as well, we can hear the voice that emerges every single day from Har Sinai. The Anochi that enjoins us: *reconnect to Me and in doing so, you will reconnect to Your essence. **Choose to enter into a relationship, be My valued partner** and you will leave behind weariness and lethargy, you will travel away from Refidim to a place of unity and revelation. I have been waiting for this and I know that You have, too, for you have been counting the days. You*

*have spent forty-nine days preparing, anticipating the moment of our bond. And that fills Me with joy and nachas from you, My beloved child.*

Yom tov can take many shapes and forms; it can look and feel different for each and every one of us. Some are absorbed in the tefillos, in shiurim and Tehillim. Some are occupied with young children, and popsicles and long mornings of keeping little people quiet. Some are alone, some are with company—and feeling that challenge, as well. It can be overwhelming or busy or lonely or frustrating. But here's the thing. Anochi is just one word. It's just one word that we can see, we can whisper, we can repeat to ourselves wherever we are, in whatever situation. **In the kitchen or around a crowded table or in the park: Anochi. We can find the freedom to connect to our essence.** We can enter into a place of relationship. We can invite Hashem into my moment, right now. We can spread His radiance. We can tap into our drive for meaning, for significance, for the things which last.

My bracha to all of us is that this Shavuot, we are *zocheh* to see the sounds, to be among those who are *ro'im es hakolos*, and take up this invitation to return to our point of origin, to discover our core. **The core which is the call of Anochi, that call for relationship, that sound from Har Sinai—that echoes in all of our hearts.**

Sincerely,  
Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

