Good Shabbos,

I want to start by thanking everyone here for inviting me here, welcoming me here and hosting me. Hachnasas orchim, setting up guests, is a way of Abraham and Sarah, and I appreciate it.

They say over a story of a Chassidic Rebbah, who would always speak for seven and a half minutes every Shabbos. The chasidim were always curious what the significance of seven and a half minutes were. Finally, one of the chassidim went over and asked the Rebbah, “Rebbah, what is the significance of a seven and a half minute speech?” The Rebbah answered back, “You see, I live seven and a half minutes from home, and the walk to shul is seven and a half minutes. During that time, I prepare what to say, so my speech ends up being seven and a half minutes.”
I remember hearing a story, of a man who was looking for employment in Jerusalem. He passes by the Jerusalem zoo, where he sees a sign, “help wanted”. He walks in and asks them, what do you need, and they tell him, that they cannot afford a gorilla, and they need him to dress in a gorilla costume and pretend to be a gorilla. “No, it is beneath my dignity”. He can’t find employment, and comes back a week later and takes the job. He starts enjoying it and swings around, when the branch breaks and he falls into the lion enclosure. The lion comes over, and this man in the gorilla costume screams out, “shma Yisroel”, to which he hears from inside the lion, “Baruch shem”.
The lesson being, no matter how scared the Rabbi trying out is of the congregation, the congregation is just as scared of the trying out rabbi having a long speech. But you needn’t worry, it only took me an hour drive up, and I only had an hour to prepare what I am planning to speak about.

I am sure many of you noticed that this week reading of the Torah, Parshas Pinchus, is the longest reading of any single Parsha. In the second half of Pinchus, the Torah discusses the Jewish Holidays, Pesach, Shavous, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur & Sukkot. During the yearly cycle, we **re-visit** and **re-live** the **triumphs** and **anniversaries** of our people, celebrating our joyful times with **gratitude** to Hashem for all that he has given us. It is a time where we unite with our family, and bring the entire community together, connecting each one of our generations from the beginning of our being a nation, through every generation. However, most important, it is a time where we can reflect on our **purpose**, our **destiny**, and our **importance**. It is a time where we can understand how Hashem **cares** for us, for all that he has done and continue doing for us. We can raise a toast in **appreciation** and **celebrate** our **gratitude** to our Father. The rabbis tell us, that not only is each holiday a celebration of the past, but for each holiday that we relive, Hashem Himself, as if it were, celebrates as well, and decides and gives out the **blessings** of that original holiday. It is so much more than an anniversary and a reenactment. It is both a time of deep reflection of Hashem’s particular blessing of that anniversary, as well as a time for us to continue to receive that particular blessing, for each and every year.

As we look through the names of each holiday, we can easily understand its anniversary, its celebration, its blessings and how we can utilize its time and message in order to grow our **connection**, **love** and **relationship** with Hashem. Pesach is referred to in the Torah as the holiday of Pesach, where Hashem had mercy on us, and the holiday of Matzos, where we commemorate Hashem taking us out from slavery into freedom. Sukkos, as the name connotes is when Hashem housed us during our travels in the desert. Hashem protected us from the heat and cold, from the elements and from our enemies. Hashem took care of our every need, bringing us the manna as food, and the water from the travelling wellspring of Miriam. And we acknowledge and thank Hashem for the entire year for taking care of us, for enabling us to live in the comforts of our life, for the food, water and housing for the entire year and our entire life. Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, is self-explanatory, the day where Hashem enables us to **restart** and **rebuild**. It is a day where Hashem tells us to return to Him, make a game plan, and Hashem will rekindle the relationship and “forget” our past mistakes. And of course, Shavous, is the awesome day where we, as a nation witnessed the Creator of the World giving us the Torah, His laws, a masterplan and blueprint of how we should live our lives.

However, what is quite puzzling and has bothered me since a child, is understanding the name of this holiday, of Shavous. Being the anniversary of the giving and receiving of the Torah, I would assume that the Torah would designate a name that implies this. The Holiday of the Torah, the Holiday of Hashem’s Revelation. Yet that is not the name that the Torah calls it. The Torah calls this holiday the Holiday of weeks, as the Torah was given after a complete seven weeks from when He redeemed us from Egypt, and the Holiday of the First Fruits, since Shavous is the time where we can start to bring the Bikkurim, the offering of First fruits which we bring to Hashem. While both of these are important in their own aspect, they would appear at first glance to be a minor aspect of the Holiday, overshadowed by the receiving of the Torah. So why would the Torah call it with these names.

After much thought, I realized that the Torah called this holiday with these names, in order for us to have a greater appreciation and a more profound understanding of the holiday of Shavous, as well as the Torah itself. Let us take a deeper look at the Mitzvah of Bikkurim. Each year, if we grow grain or fruit in Israel, we reserve the first choicest fruits for Hashem and celebrate bringing them up to the Beis Hamikdash. We bring this basket, and after acknowledging our humble beginnings where we thank Hashem for giving us our freedom, the land of Israel, a land flowing of milk and honey, and its bounty, and offer these fruit in gratitude to Hashem. The medrash summarizes this mitzvah as follows, “The choice nation (the Jewish people), takes choice fruit, from the choice land (Israel) and brings them to the choice location (the Beis Hamikdash, the Temple Mount).” The offering of the first fruit is a celebration of the culmination of that which is prime and exceptional, the chosen people, the chosen land, the best fruit and the chosen location. This offering represents the giving of the Torah, an event which was the pinnacle and highest point in our history.

When Hashem offered the Torah to the Jewish people, He prefaced it by letting us know what the purpose of these laws are. He told Moshe, “Go tell the Jewish people, You **witnessed** how I brought you close to Me as if on the wings of **eagles**. If you decide to accept this Torah, this covenant, you will be to Me a **treasure** amongst all of the nations, a kingdom of **leaders** and a holy nation.” The Torah is not just a list of laws and commandments, in order to have a proper civil society, and in order to be a light unto the nations. It is a **marriage** contract, a **blueprint** for a **relationship**. Everyone who has had a **healthy** relationship, either through marriage with their husband or wife; or with a father and mother; a daughter or son, understands that in order to maintain that relationship there are guidelines that they must adhere to. But you can all attest, that the guidelines are not the relationship, rather a way of maintaining the relationship. That which a spouse must refrain in respect for the other, or must take upon themselves for the other, is a **miniscule** **sacrifice** for what is gained in the **warmth** and **love** and that **relationship**. I think that the Torah calls the Holiday of the giving and receiving of these guidelines, the Holiday of first fruits, in order to impress onto us this understanding. We should not look at the commandments as a bunch of **restrictions**, but rather as a **pathway** to building a relationship of **love** with Hashem. On Shavous we had reached our greatest moment in our history. It is the anniversary of our marriage as a nation to Hashem, when we **exchanged** our **vow** to be His **treasured** people and He will be our Lord. And Hashem gave us a list of mitzvot that we can use to not only transform ourselves to pure and holy people, but as a way for us to grow in our service and love to Hashem. Every time that we give **charity**, light the **Shabbos** candles, respect our **parents**, give **joy** to our husband or wife, teach the **ways** of Hashem to our sons and daughters, visit the **sick** and **downtrodden**, we are increasing that **love** that Hashem loves us. Hashem cherishes each and every kindness and mitzvah that we perform and eagerly awaits each one. We may only feel that these acts are just a small step for man, but in reality they are a huge leap in our relationship with Hashem. The purpose of the Torah is to understand that the Torah is a **book** of **love**, a handle on what is the proper way to **create**, **maintain**, **blossom** and **grow** that love and relationship with Hashem. Like a husband and wife who truly love each other. And this holiday is an **anniversary** where we reflect on its greatness and where we strive to grow in our love and relationship with Hashem. We thank Hashem for this understanding of closeness as well as the way it was given, and we **dance** around the **blueprint** and **guidelines** on how to continue this closeness for the **entire** **year** and our **entire** **life**. We are reminded on the depth of the giving of the Torah, and stive to keep that amazing **greatness** and **heights** that we achieved on the original Shavous **alive** for all **eternity**.

Good Shabbos.