
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

for SHVII SHEL PESACH

[revised 5765]

We are all familiar with the historical reason for celebrating the 'seventh day of Passover' - for (according to the Midrash) the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea took place seven days after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt.

Yet, to our surprise, that reason never appears in the Chumash. In fact, the Torah simply commands that we eat matza for **seven** days, and then to make a special celebration on that last day, without explaining why. [See Shmot 13:3-7.]

In regard to other Jewish holidays, SEVEN also seems to be a 'magic' number. Not only is Pesach is 'seven' days; we also count 'seven' weeks to Shavuot; then in the 'seventh' month - we celebrate several holidays including the 'seven-day' holiday of Succot!

So why do so many holidays revolve around the number seven? It is simply because there are seven days in a week?

In the following shiur we attempt to answer this question, as we search for a thematic connection between the 'historical' reasons for the holidays and the agricultural seasons when they are celebrated.

INTRODUCTION

In general, we are usually more familiar with the historical reasons for the holidays more than their agricultural perspective. For example, on Pesach we commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, on Shavuot - the giving of the Torah, and on Succot - God's special providence during our forty-year sojourn in the desert.

In regard to the historical reason for celebrating the 'seventh day of Passover', the Midrash informs us that the miracle of "kriyat Yam Suf" [the splitting of the Red Sea] took place seven days after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt. [See Mechilta quoted by Rashi on Shmot 14:5..]

[Hence, our custom to read "shirat ha'yam" (Shmot chapters 14 & 15) for the Torah reading on "shvii shel Pesach".

See also Ibn Ezra on 12:15-16, where he takes for granted that the reason for the seven days of chag ha'matzot is because "kriyat yam suf" took place seven days after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, even though it's not clear how he reaches that conclusion.]

Nonetheless, the Torah itself never connects the events of "kriyat Yam Suf" with the seventh day of Passover. In fact, the Torah first discusses these seven days in Shmot chapter 12 (see 12:15-20 and 13:3-8) way before the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea, as detailed in chapter 14, ever took place!

[This does not mean that "kriyat yam suf" did not happen on "shvii shel pesach"; we are simply suggesting that there may be a different, or at least an additional reason for the seven day length of the holiday. (For a discussion of when and how the events of "kriyat yam suf" took place, see TSC shiurim on Parshat Shmot and Beshalach.)]

Therefore, if we follow the 'simple meaning' of the text, there should be an independent reason for the celebration of these SEVEN days, unconnected to the historical events of the miracle at the Red Sea

In our shiur, we will search for that reason by examining several additional instances (later on in Chumash) where the Torah presents the laws of Passover within the wider framework of the three pilgrimage holidays [= "shalosh regalim"].

THE BIBLICAL NAME FOR 'SHVII SHEL PESACH'

In our introduction, we have referred to this holiday by its popular name - "shvii shel Pesach" [lit. the seventh day of Passover]. However, to be 'Biblically correct', the proper name for this holiday should be the seventh day of "chag ha'matzot". Let's explain why:

Technically speaking, Passover (in the Bible) is only a 'one-day' holiday - beginning on the 14th of Nisan in the afternoon, and ending on the 15th in evening - when the korban Pesach is offered (see Shmot 12:3-14). In addition to this holiday, the Torah also commands that we eat matza (and don't eat "chametz") for the next seven days (see 12:15-20, see also Vayikra 23:5-7 and Bamidbar 28:16-18!). Therefore, we refer to this holiday as "chag ha'matzot", and hence the celebration of the final day should be called "shvii shel chag ha'matzot".

[Note that in tefillah, the name of the holiday is chag ha'matzot - and not chag ha'Pesach.]

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN PARSHAT MISHPATIM

Even though the seven days of "chag ha'matzot" are first mentioned independently in Parshat Bo, and apparently as part of an historical holiday; in Parshat Mishpatim they are presented once again - but this time as the first of a set of three agricultural holidays:

"Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me.

Keep:

* CHAG HA'MATZOT - SEVEN days you shall eat matza as I have commanded you [i.e. in Parshat Bo 12:15-10 & 13:2-8] at its set time in the [first] month of the **spring** ["chodesh ha'aviv"] - for in [that month] you left Egypt...

* CHAG HA'KATZIR [the **Harvest** holiday] - the first **grain** of your labor from what you sow in the field, and

* CHAG HA'ASIF [the Fruit Harvest holiday] when you **gather in the fruits** of your toil from the field.

* **THREE TIMES** a year, all your males shall appear before the Lord - Hashem..."
(see Shmot 23:14-17)

Review these psukim once again, noting how they present the "shalosh regalim" as a unit, and how the names of each holiday focus primarily on its agricultural aspect. Furthermore, these holidays are described solely by their 'seasonal' date, without even mentioning the precise lunar date.

It's rather obvious how each of these three holidays corresponds to a critical time in the agricultural year in the land of Israel:

(1) a spring holiday [chag ha'matzot, b'aviv] - when the fruit trees blossom, and the grain begins to ripen.

(2) the grain harvest holiday [chag ha'katzir - early summer] - when most of the barely and wheat harvest is complete

(3) the fruit-gathering holiday [chag ha'asif - late summer] - after most of the grapes, figs, and dates have been gathered.

These seasons are especially important in the Land of Israel, where it rains only in the winter, and hence its produce is harvested only once a year (during the summer).

For example, all of the grain that will be consumed during the course of the year is harvested during a short time, between the late spring and early summer. If that grain harvest fails, a famine will likely result, for the grain will not grow again until the next spring.

Similarly, the trees bear their fruit only once a year, towards the end of the summer. If that short fruit harvest season fails, the next crop will not grow until the next year.

Based on these observations, it appears that these "shalosh regalim" are simply 'agricultural' holidays, not very different than holidays found in the culture of other nations, especially in agrarian societies.

So why are they 'special times' for God's 'special nation'?

THE 'DANGER' OF WORKING THE LAND

In ancient societies, it was very common to relate the success or failure of crops (or agriculture in general) to a pantheon of gods who controlled the various powers of nature. For example, historians inform us that the ancient Canaanites believed in a god who controlled the rain - known as *Baal*; and another who controlled fertility, known as *Ashera*.

Recall as well that God had taken Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order that they would conquer the Land of Canaan, and establish therein a special nation that would represent Him. Towards that purpose, God brought Bnei Yisrael to Har Sinai, where they entered a covenant and received a complete set of laws that would guide their behavior in the Land of Israel - which include the laws in Parshat Mishpatim! Therefore, we should not be surprised to find laws in the Torah that relate to the danger of following other gods, especially in relation to the agriculture of the land.

Even though God had proven His existence to His people via the miracles of the Exodus, and by providing for their physical needs in the desert with the manna (& water); there remained a serious fear that this belief would wane once the nation conquered the land, and their livelihood became dependent instead on cultivation of the land. This included the reasonable fear that Bnei Yisrael would follow the local customs of the other peoples living in Eretz Canaan, and begin to worship other gods.

THE SHALOSH REGALIM & AGRICULTURE

With this in mind, let's consider the transition pasuk (23:13) in Parshat Mishpatim that introduces the laws of the "shalosh regalim". Recall how Parshat Mishpatim presented a complete unit of both civil and ethical laws, that began back in chapter 21 (see Shmot 21:1 thru 23:12/ see also TSC shiur on Parshat Mishpatim). At the conclusion of that unit, we find a short 'summary phrase', followed by a very interesting additional command:

"... and ALL [these mitzvot] which I have told you be sure to keep, and the NAMES of other gods do not mention; their names should not be heard on your lips. - "shalosh regalim" - you shall celebrate [instead] for Me!... (see 23:13-14)

Note how immediately after this summary phrase (in 23:13) God warns Bnei Yisrael: 'DO NOT even mention the NAMES of these other gods (and certainly don't worship them), instead - celebrate before God three times a year - during these three critical times of the agricultural year!

Clearly, these 'NAMES of other gods' refer to the 'agricultural gods' such as the Canaanite gods of Baal and Ashera. This would explain why the laws of the "shalosh regalim" that follow focus on how God expects His nation to celebrate these agricultural holidays. Let's examine those psukim once again to identify the primary mitzvah associated with these holidays:

- "Three times a year you shall hold a festival **for Me**. Keep
- (1) CHAG HA'MATZOT - SEVEN days you shall eat MATZA... in the [first] month of the SPRING ["chodesh ha'aviv"] - for in [that month] you left Egypt...
 - (2) CHAG HA'KATZIR [the Harvest holiday] - the first [grain] of your labor from what you sow in the field, and
 - (3) CHAG HA'ASIF [the Fruit Harvest holiday] when you gather in the fruits of your toil from the field.

THREE TIMES a year, **all your males shall appear before the Lord** - Hashem..." (Shmot 23:14-17)

[Later in Devarim 16:1-17, in a parallel passage, the Torah explains that this "aliyah la'regel" must take place "ba'Makom asher yivchar Hashem" - or better known as the bet ha'Mikdash in Jerusalem.]

Clearly, the primary mitzvah that links all of these holidays together is the obligation to 'visit' [lit. 'to be seen'] by God - what we refer to as "aliyah la'regel".

At each of these three critical times of the agricultural year, the Torah obligates us to 'visit God'.

Apparently, God wants Bnei His nation to gather at His Temple during these critical times of the agricultural year - not

only to thank God for their harvest, but also as a preventive measure to make sure that Bnei Yisrael would not worship other gods at these key times of agricultural year.

A similar fear is spelled more explicitly in Sefer Devarim, also in relation to Bnei Yisrael's imminent entry into the land:

"And it shall be, when God shall bring you into the land which He swore unto thy fathers...., and give you great and goodly cities, which you did not build... and cisterns hewn out, which thou the didst not hew, **vineyards and olive-trees**, which you did not plant, and you shall eat and be satisfied-- then **beware lest thou forget HASHEM, who brought you out of the land of Egypt...**

Do not go after other gods, of the gods of the peoples that are round about you.... lest the anger of God be kindled against you..." (see Devarim 6:10-15, see also 8:1-15!)

Based on this interpretation, there is ample reason to celebrate these three pilgrimage holidays, even had no significant events taken place in Jewish history during those times of the year. Nonetheless, the Torah goes out of his way to emphasize how Bnei Yisrael must remember their Exodus - specifically in the spring: Recall Moshe Rabeinu's first speech to Bnei Yisrael, immediately after they left Egypt and camped in the desert:

"And Moshe said to the people: 'Remember this day that you are leaving Egypt... today you are leaving **in the month of the SPRING**. [Hence,] when you come to Israel... keep this custom in this month. **Seven days eat matza...**"

[See Shmot 13:3-6, note also Devarim 16:1-2.]

Therefore, it would only be logical to conclude that it was not simply incidental that God took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in the spring. Rather, it appears that God intentionally wanted our annual celebration of the Exodus to coincide with the beginning of the spring. In fact, God seems to have orchestrated those events, to make sure that our holiday of redemption would fall out in the spring!

With this mind, let's return now to the 'seven' days of "chag ha'matzot", and attempt to explain why this 'historical/agricultural holiday' should last seven days.

WHY SEVEN?

Considering that the agricultural holidays relate to 'nature' and its yearly cycle of fruit production, the Torah demands that we relate these powers of nature to the one God who created them. But how do we express this belief?

Recall from our shiur on Parshat Breishit how we explained that this very point was the primary message of the first chapter of Sefer Breishit. The Torah's use of the name 'Elokim' to describe God, even though it is written in the plural form [lit. all of the powers], emphasized how all the 'powers of nature' that appear to work independently - are truly the work of **one** God. Stage by stage, the organized world of nature was created by Elokim, one day at a time - for six days. By keeping Shabbat, once every seven days, we remember this point; and by refraining from work (or any 'creativity'), we show our belief that it was God Himself who created nature and continues to oversee it.

From this perspective, any time in the Bible where we find 'seven days', it would be safe to assume that it relates in some manner to that same concept that there is only one God, and He is the true power behind all the phenomena that we refer to as nature.

This can explain why "chag ha'matzot" is celebrated for seven days, in the beginning of the spring. By celebrating for 'seven days' at the beginning of the spring when nature blossoms in full force, and then counting 'seven weeks' until the grain harvest is complete; and then celebrating yet another 'seven days' and the conclusion of the fall fruit harvest - we relate all these phenomena of nature to God Himself.

[Note how almost every ancient [and even modern] culture relates its prosperity to powers of various gods. In Judaism, we declare that there is only one God, and our prosperity is a function of His will. (See Devarim 11:10-21!)]

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN EMOR

To support this explanation, let's take a look at how the holidays are presented in Parshat Emor.

In our study of Parshat Emor (Vayikra chapter 23), we noticed how each of the "shalosh regalim" included a special law that relates to agricultural, and the specific season of each holiday.

On chag ha'matzot - the OMER offering / see 23:9-14; from the first barely harvest, the first grain to ripen.

On Shavuot - the SHTEI HA'LECHEM / see 23:15-21; an offering brought from the first wheat harvest.

On Succot - the ARBA MINIM [four species] / see 23:39-41; the lulav, etrog, hadas and aravot are waived

Note also how in each of these mitzvot the holiday itself is referred to as a 'shabbat' or 'shabbaton'! [See 23:11,15,& 39!] One could suggest that the Torah's use of the word 'shabbat' to describe these holidays also relates back to "shabbat Breishit" and the creation of nature in seven days.

[See the TSC shiur on Rosh ha'Shana which discussed the agricultural aspect of Rosh ha'Shana & Yom Kippur as well, i.e. the beginning of the autumn rain season.]

As we would expect, each special mitzvah relates to the specific time of the agricultural year in which it falls.

THE SHALOSH REGALIM IN SEFER DEVARIM

Finally, the Torah's presentation of the "shalosh regalim" in Parshat Re'ay (see Devarim 16:1-16), also emphasizes agriculture as a primary theme of these holidays, as well as the number **seven**:

Its opening phrase reminds us to "keep the month of the SPRING - and celebrate Passover". Then, we are commanded to eat matza for the SEVEN days that follow the Passover offering (see 16:3). Then, note how Sefer Devarim then presents the mitzvah to celebrate the seventh day of "chag ha'matzot" in a manner very similar to the mitzvah of Shabbat:

"Six days you shall eat matzot, and on the SEVENTH DAY there shall be an ATZERET [a gathering] for the Lord your God, you shall not do any work."

(see Devarim 16:8, compare w/Shmot 20:8-10)

Similarly, Shavuot as well is presented as follows: "Count SEVEN weeks from the beginning of your grain harvest..." While Succot begins with: "Keep the holiday of Succot for SEVEN days, when you gather your harvest..."

Once again, we find thanking God for our produce, and the number seven, as the primary theme of the "shalosh regalim".

BACK TO HISTORY

Based on our above explanation, it appears that the agricultural seasons alone provide reason enough to celebrate before God on the "shalosh regalim".. So why must each holiday include a historical aspect as well?

The reason why may be quite fundamental. As we explained above, God intentionally planned for Am Yisrael to leave Egypt in the spring - but we did not explain why.

One could suggest that by celebrating our redemption and freedom in the spring, Bnei Yisrael will better appreciate what our freedom is all about. As spring fills the air with hope and high expectations [what we call 'spring fever'] and signals the beginning of a new season; we must assess the appreciation of our freedom as well. By remembering how (and why) God granted us our freedom - we become inspired, for it enables tremendous opportunities (& raises our hopes) for national and spiritual growth. It's a 'new start' - with all its excitement and potential, if nurtured properly!

The celebration of our redemption from Egypt in the spring may reflect this very purpose. Yetziat Mitzraim can be understood as the initial stage in a long and complex historical

process leading towards the next two key stages of our national destiny:

* Matan Torah - the giving of the laws at Har Sinai - which we celebrate on SHAVUOT; and

* Entering the Promised land - where the nation will be established - which we celebrate on SUCCOT.

Furthermore, by adding historical significance to key agricultural times of the year, the Torah helps us recognize that the same God who oversees our national history [i.e. who performed the miracles of Exodus etc.] is also the same God who oversees nature (and will provide the produce of the land).

[In our previous shiurim on Shavuot and Succot, we discussed the connection between those holidays and their agricultural time of the year as well. It should be noted the Torah itself only provides historical reasons for chag ha'matzot and succot. However the historical reasons for Shavuot [Matan Torah] and Yom Kippur [the second luchot] are rather obvious. (The question is actually quite the opposite, i.e. why doesn't Chumash mention explicitly the rather obvious historical connection?) Therefore, it only makes sense that Chazal would assume that the seventh day of chag ha'matzot should have historic significance as well, and "kriyat yam Suf" becomes the most obvious candidate.]

BACK TO KRIYAT YAM SUF

One could even suggest a thematic connection between the historical event of the splitting of the Red Sea and the seventh day of chag ha'matzot. From an agricultural perspective, the spring marks a new beginning, and clearly marks a new start. In a similar manner we can view the events of "Kriyat Yam Suf".

Recall how Bnei Yisrael, expressed their fear of the Egyptians as they felt that they had been trapped at the Red Sea: "As Pharaoh drew near, Bnei Yisrael lifted their eyes and saw the Egyptians advancing. Greatly frightened, Bnei Yisrael cried out... saying: 'Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the desert?'"

... Is this not what we told you back in Egypt - LEAVE US ALONE and let us serve Egypt... Moshe calmed the people saying: 'Have no fear... for in the MANNER which you view Egypt today, you will no longer see them in this way ever again...'"

[See 14:10-14 (and previous shiur on Be'shalach).]

Up until that point in their history, Bnei Yisrael still viewed themselves as subservient to Egypt. That was the only existence that they ever experienced. The miracle of "kriyat Yam Suf", just like the spring, marked a new beginning for the nation of Israel, as they now march into the desert, totally cut off from their Egyptian masters.

FREEDOM FOR SERVITUDE

What would Bnei Yisrael do with their freedom?

Would they wisely reap its 'fruits' - to properly serve God?

During the seven weeks of intense experiences in the desert, from the Exodus until they arrive at Har Sinai, God consistently 'tests' the His people, preparing them for the challenge of Matan Torah.

Just as it will take another seven weeks from the early spring barley harvest ("omer") until we can reap the fruits of our wheat harvest ("shetei ha'lechem") in the early summer - it will take us seven weeks of preparation, to internalize the spiritual message of Passover - until we are ready once again to re-accept the covenant at Har Sinai on Shavuot. That in itself would be reason enough to set aside a special holiday [an "Atzeret"/ see Devarim 16:8] on "**shvii** shel Pesach" - to contemplate the purpose of our freedom - and a sense of direction for the year that has just begun.

Something to think about when counting Sefirat ha'omer!

chag samayach,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

=====

BACK TO BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM

A. In our shiurim on chag ha'matzot and Magid, we discussed the thematic connection between the process of Yetziat Mitzraim, and God's original covenant with Avraham Avinu - brit bein ha'btarim - which already forecasted that process of enslavement and redemption. With that background, one could view the manner by which Bnei Yisrael crossed thru the Red Sea as thematically parallel to that covenant.

The most basic parallel is simply passing in between two parts (see also Yirmiyahu 34:18!) as a symbol of entering into a covenant. Note also the word "gezarim" (split into two parts) as it is used in Breishit 15:17 and Tehillim 136:13 (in a description of "kriyat yam suf").

Note also "tanur ashan v'lapid aish" (in 15:17) which reminds us of the "amud anan & amud ha'aish" that protect Bnei Yisrael at the Red Sea and lead them through the desert (see Shmot 14:24).

Finally see Breishit 15:6 - "v'he'emin b'Hashem", parallel to Shmot 14:31 - "v'hae'eminu b'Hashem uv'Moshe avdo".

OTHER REASONS FOR SEVEN DAYS

B. See Chizkuni on Shmot 12:15 (in the middle of his pirush) where he explains that chag ha'matzot is specifically seven days to correspond to the seven days that each plague lasted.

Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim Part III chapter 43, in his explanation of the various holidays, explains that if we only eat matza (or sat in the Succah) for one or two days, the change would not be noticed. Only by eating matza (and not eating chametz) for a full seven days does it become clear to everyone that we are changing our routine to eat ONLY matza - and by doing so we recall the events of Yetziat Mitzraim.

A PARALLEL "ZACHOR V'SHAMOR"

C. When we hear "zachor v'shamor", we immediately relate these two commands with SHABBAT, for they are the two opening statements which introduce the mitzvah of shabbat in the Ten Commandments in Yitro (see Shmot 20:8) and Ve'etchanan (see Devarim 5:12).

However, we find a similar pattern by chag ha'matzot:

When Bnei Yisrael first receive the mitzvah in Shmot we find:

"ZCHOR et ha'yom ha'zeh asher yatzata m'Mitzraim..." (13:3) compare with the mitzvah in Devarim:

"SHMOR et chodesh ha'aviv, v'asita PESACH... shivat yamim tochal alav MATZOT..." (see 16:1-3)

Relate this to the above shiur.

Note also the 'conflicting' reasons for shabbat in the Ten Commandment in Yitro & Ve'etchanan.

"... Six days you shall work, but on the SEVENTH day you shall rest, in order that your ox and donkey may rest and that your bondsman and the stranger may rest as well.

"CHUKAT OLAM..."

D. Notice in Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23) how each of the agricultural mitzvot ends with the pasuk:

"chukat olam l'doroteichem b'chol MOSHVOTEICHEM"
[Note this after the mitzvah of omer, shte ha'lechem, yom kippur, and succot!]

Note however how succot is different, for it is missing "moshvoteichem". But look at the pasuk that follows! Can you now explain why!?

A YOM TOV FOR CHAG HA'MATZOT

E. One could understand the holiday on the seventh day as the primary holiday of chag ha'matzot (see Devarim 16:8) and the holiday on the first day of yom tov as the holiday of 'korban Pesach'. This could explain the need for two yom-tovim on chag ha'matzot. Relate this possibility to the above shiur.