

SHAVUOT & MATAN TORAH

When the Torah wishes to inform us of the 'historical' reason for a holiday, it certainly knows how to do so. Take for example the two other pilgrimage holidays - "chag ha'matzot" & "succot": Even though these holidays are also presented from their 'agricultural' perspective (see Shmot 23:14-17), the Torah informs us of their historical perspectives as well (see Shmot 12:17, 13:3 etc. and Vayikra 23:42-43).

Therefore, it is simply baffling that the Torah presents Shavuot ONLY from its agricultural aspect, without mentioning even a word about its connection to events of MATAN TORAH!

In this week's shiur, we attempt to understand why.

SHAVUOT IN THE BIBLE

Before we begin our shiur, let's verify our statement that Shavuot is presented solely from its agricultural perspective by quickly reviewing the five 'parshiot' in which it is mentioned:

- I. **Shmot 23:15** = "v'et chag ha'KATZIR bikurei ma'asecha"
[the HARVEST holiday - the first fruits of your work]
- II. **Shmot 34:22** = "v'chag shavuot... bikurei KTZIR CHITIM"
[Feast of Weeks, the first fruits of the wheat harvest]
- III. **Vayikra 23:15-21**: "u'sfartem lachem..."
"And you shall count from the time you offer the OMER offering (from your first harvest/ see 23:10) seven weeks... and you shall offer a new MINCHA to God..."
- IV. **Bamidbar 28:26** = "u'v'yom ha'BIKURIM..."
"And on the day of the first fruit offering, when you bring a new MINCHA to God on Shavuot..."
- V. **Devarim 16:9-12** = "...m'ha'chel chermesh b'kamah..."
"Count SEVEN weeks, starting when the sickle is first put to the standing grain, then you shall celebrate the holiday of SHAVUOT to God..."

As you review these five sources, note how in each instance Shavuot is presented solely as a harvest holiday, when we must thank God for our grain crops; while its connection MATAN TORAH is never mentioned - not even once!

However, when we study the above sources, it also becomes quite clear that there is ample reason to celebrate SHAVUOT, even without the events of MATAN TORAH. Considering that grain is man's staple, it is only logical that we are commanded to celebrate its harvest together with God, in order to thank Him for His providence during this most critical time of the year.

[Recall also that the custom of the nations of Canaan was to relate the growth of grain to various local gods such as Baal & Ashera and Dagon etc. This made it even more important to celebrate Shavuot, to assure that Bnei Yisrael would thank the proper God and not fall into the traps of AVODA ZARA. For more detail, see Hoshea chapter 2 (which just so happens to be the Haftara for Parshat Bamidbar). See especially Hoshea 2:7,10,14-18 & 23!]

Based on these sources, should we conclude that it is only coincidental that Shavuot falls out on the date of Matan Torah? Would that explain why Chumash makes no connection at all between that event and this holiday?

To answer this question, we must first take issue with our original assumption that the Biblical date of Matan Torah indeed coincides with the holiday of Shavuot.

THE DATE OF MATAN TORAH

When the Torah wishes to inform us of the precise date of a certain event, it certainly knows how to do so. Once again, take for example the events of Exodus. Review Shmot 12:6,12-14,17-18 and 13:3-8, noting how the Torah informs us of the precise date (and even the time of day) when the Tenth Plague struck

and when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt! Later on, the Torah even records the precise date when Bnei Yisrael arrived at Midbar Sin (on the 15th of Iyar, see Shmot 16:1).

However, in regard to Matan Torah, the Torah is quite vague. Indeed we are told that Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai in the third month (Sivan), but we are not told on what DAY of the month they arrived:

"In the third month of Bnei Yisrael's departure from the Egypt, ON THIS DAY, they came to Midbar Sinai." (19:1)

Not only is the phrase "on this day" ambiguous, it is quite difficult to determine how many days actually transpire between their arrival at Har Sinai and Matan Torah (see Shmot 19:3-16).

Even if we assume that Bnei Yisrael arrived on the first day of the month (see Rashi 19:1-"b'yom hazeh"), the lack of a clear chronology in the subsequent events still makes it impossible to pinpoint that date. Even though it is recorded how Moshe goes up and down the mountain several times, and that three days are required to prepare for that special occasion; we never told how many days elapse in the interim.

In the Mechilta (and in Mesechet Shabbat 86b), Chazal calculate that the Torah was given on either the sixth or seventh of Sivan (see also Rashi on 19:2->19), yet the fact remains that the Torah clearly prefers to obscure the precise date of this event.

CALCULATING 'BACKWARDS'

However, there is an additional manner by which it is possible to calculate the approximate date of Ma'amad Har Sinai. If we assume that tenth of Tishrei was chosen as 'Yom Kippur' specifically because it marks the date when Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second "luchot" [See further iyun section for a discussion of how we can prove this.], then we can calculate 'backwards', using the three sets of 'forty days' that are described in the story of chet ha'egel in Devarim chapter 9.

Working 'backwards' from the tenth of Tishrei; we can arrive at the following approximate dates of these three sets of forty days:

The last forty days - from 1 Elul until 10 Tishrei.

[when Moshe receives the second Luchot.]

The middle forty days - 19 Tamuz until 29 Av

[when Moshe's prayer for their forgiveness.]

The first forty days - from either 6 or 7 Sivan until 17 Tamuz.

[when Moshe receives the first Luchot.]

These calculations leads us to the conclusion that the Torah was given on either the 6th or 7th of Sivan (depending if the month of Sivan that year was 29 or thirty days).

However, even if all of the above assumptions are correct, the fact still remains that the Torah never explicitly mentions the date of Matan Torah, even though it has ample opportunities to do so!

Thus, we really have a double question. Not only is it strange that Torah makes no connection between Shavuot and Matan Torah, it doesn't even tell us WHEN Matan Torah took place!

Again, the question remains - why?

To answer this question, we must consider a fundamental difference between the very nature of these two monumental events in our history: Yetziat Mitzraim and Matan Torah.

MATAN TORAH: AN UNCOMMORATED EVENT

In the Torah, we find numerous mitzvot through which we commemorate Yetziat Mitzraim, both on the:

ANNIVERSARY of the Exodus: e.g. eating matzah, telling of the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, korban Pesach etc.; and **ALL YEAR ROUND**: e.g. "mitzvat bikkurim" (bringing the first fruits to Yerushalayim), tfillin, shabbat, and the daily recital of "kriyat shma", etc., all of which the Torah relates to the Exodus (i.e. "zecher l'yitziat mitzrayim").

In contrast, in Chumash we do not find even one specific mitzvah whose explicit purpose is to commemorate the events of Matan Torah. [Sefer Devarim does require that we not forget the events that transpired at Har Sinai (see 4:9-16), but does not

command us to perform any specific positive mitzvah in order that we do not forget that event! Certainly, those psukim do not require that we commemorate that event on any specific day. See Further Iyun section for additional sources on this topic.]

Why does the Torah call upon us to commemorate these two events in such dramatically different ways?

One could suggest that by this manner of presentation, the Torah is sending a complex message. Even though the Torah provides us ample information to calculate the approximate date of Ma'amad Har Sinai, its deliberate obfuscation of that date may suggest that we should not treat Matan Torah as a historically bound event. Instead, from a certain perspective, each and every day one should feel as though the Torah has just been given.

This concept is reflected by the famous Midrash, quoted by Rashi on 19:1:

"... it should have been written: 'ON THAT DAY'. Why does the pasuk say: 'ON THIS DAY'? This comes to teach us that the words of the Torah should be considered new to you - as though they were given TODAY!" (see Rashi Shmot 19:1)

In other words, we should not view Matan Torah as a one time event. Rather, every generation must feel as though they have just entered into a covenant with God (see Devarim 5:1-3). Every generation must feel that God's words were spoken to them no less than to earlier generations. To celebrate the anniversary of Matan Torah as a single moment in our history could diminish from that meta-historical dimension.

Similarly, in our study of the Mishkan, we showed how the primary function of the Mishkan was to perpetuate the experience at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [See Ramban on Shmot 25:1, and the TSC shiurim on Parshiot Terumah & Tezaveh.] From that source as well, it appears that the Torah would rather we treat Matan Torah as an event that needs to be perpetuated, more than commemorated.

In contrast to Matan Torah, the Exodus is not an event that must be re-lived. Rather it is an event that the Torah emphasizes over and over again that we must REMEMBER. Even if we must ACT as though we went out of Egypt on the seder night (See in the Hagada - "b'chol dor v'dor chayav adam lirot atzmo k'ilu..."), it is in order that we put ourselves in the proper frame of mind to praise God and thank Him for our redemption.

Yetziat Mitzrayim was, and should remain, a one time event in our history - our national birth. As such, it needs to be commemorated. Matan Torah is totally different! It is an event that must be constantly RE-LIVED, not just remembered, for it is the essence of our daily existence.

So is it wrong to commemorate Matan Torah on Shavuot? Did Chazal make a 'mistake' (chas v'shalom) by connecting a 'purely agricultural' holiday with the historical event of Matan Torah?

Of course not! Is it possible that the most important event in our national history not be commemorated on its yearly anniversary?!

In this regard, Chazal strike a beautiful balance between Torah "sh'bichtav" (the Written Law) and Torah "sh'baal peh" (the Oral Law). Chumash emphasizes one perspective, the inherent danger of commemorating this event, while tradition balances this message by emphasizing the other perspective, the historical significance of remembering that day, by re-living that event.

Therefore, Chazal instituted that just like on "leil ha'seder" (Passover eve), when we spend the entire evening 're-telling' the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, on "leil Shavuot", we spend the entire evening engrossed in the study of Torah, 're-living' the experience of Ma'amad Har Sinai!

SOME BIBLICAL 'HINTS'

Even though the connection between Matan Torah and Shavuot is not explicit in Chumash, we do find several interesting 'hints' to their connection in Parshat Emor.

THE SHTEI HA'LECHEM

Recall how Parshat Emor is the primary source for the specific details of the special laws of Shavuot (see Vayikra

23:15-21). That parshia discusses the special offering of the "shte ha'lechem" – two loaves of bread, baked as "chametz" from the new wheat harvest -, offered at the conclusion of the 50 days of counting ["sefirat ha'omer"].

As the primary reason for this holiday is to thank God for our wheat harvest, it certainly makes sense for the Torah to command that we offer special korban from wheat. However, together with this "shte ha'lechem", the Torah also instructs the "tzibur" (the community of Israel) to bring some additional sacrifices, including an olah, chatat, & shlamim.

[The Olah is 7 sheep, 2 rams, and 1 bull, together with the standard goat for the chatat offering. For the shlamim the tzibur offers 2 sheep, whose meat is waved ('tnufa') together with the "shte ha'lechem". / See 23:18-20.]

Even though similar offerings are brought on every other holiday (see Bamidbar chapters 28 thru 29), Shavuot is unique for it is only time of the year when the "tzibur" offers a korban shlamim!

Let's summarize these two unique laws regarding the "shte ha'lechem" - the special korban of Shavuot.

- 1) It is the only korban 'mincha' offered by the tzibur which is baked 'chametz' (all other flour offerings must be baked 'matzah').
- 2) It is the only time during the entire year when the "tzibur" offers a korban SHLAMIM.

We will now explain how these two laws may relate to the fact that the agricultural holiday of Shavuot coincides with the time of year when Bnei Yisrael first received the Torah.

1) CHAMETZ U'MATZAH

As we explained in earlier shiurim, matzah symbolizes the initial stage of a process, whereas the fully risen 'chametz' symbolizes its completion. Thus, the mitzvah to bake the shte ha'lechem as 'chametz' may indicate that Matan Torah should be understood as the culmination of the redemption process which began with Yetziat Mitzrayim. Just as the "shte ha'lechem" marks the culmination of the wheat harvest, the staple of our physical existence - the historical process which began with the Exodus culminates with Matan Torah, the essence of our spiritual existence.

In this manner, the agricultural time of year of Shavuot alludes to an educational message that can help us appreciate the historical event that we commemorate.

[In our shiur on Parshat Emor, we provided similar explanations of significance of the agricultural time of year of Pesach & Succot.]

2) KORBAN SHLAMIM

As we noted above, Shavuot is the ONLY holiday when the "tzibur" must offer a korban SHLAMIM, i.e. the two kvasim which are offered with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM.

To appreciate why this is significant, we must uncover its Biblical precedent.

The FIRST instance where we find a korban SHLAMIM is at the end of Parshat Mishpatim (Shmot 24:4-8) when the Torah describes the special covenantal ceremony that takes place at Ma'amad Har Sinai. At this ceremony, Bnei Yisrael proclaim "na'aseh v'nishma" while entering into a covenant to become God's special nation by accepting the laws of Matan Torah.

That ceremony included the offering of special korbanot: OLOT and SHLAMIM (see Shmot 24:5). The blood from these korbanot, sprinkled both on the mizbayach and on the people, symbolized Bnei Yisrael's entry into the covenant (24:6-8). [The meat of the shlamim was eaten at the conclusion of the ceremony (24:11).]

Thus we find that the very first korban SHLAMIM is offered as a symbol of Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of MATAN TORAH. Recall our explanation (see shiur on Parshat Vayikra) of how a SHLAMIM reflects a joint feast shared by covenantal partners. Therefore, the korban SHLAMIM, which is presented together

with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM on Shavuot, may serve a symbolic reminder of MATAN TORAH.

In fact, we find two additional instances in Chumash when Bnei Yisrael offer a special collective SHLAMIM offering - and once again, both relate to Ma'amad Har Sinai:

- 1) During the YOM ha'SHMINI ceremony (see Vayikra 9:1-5)
- 2) On Har Eival, when the generation that enters the land re-enacts Ma'amad Har Sinai and studies its laws!
[see Devarim 27:1-8]

1) In many ways, "Yom ha'Shmini"- the day of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan - can be considered as an extension of Ma'amad Har Sinai. Considering that God's SHCHINA, which had left Bnei Yisrael in the aftermath of chet ha'egel, now returns to the Mishkan, and God begins once again to teach Bnei Yisrael mitzvot - now from the Ohel Moed instead of from Har Sinai - we can view this event as parallel to the day of MATAN TORAH.

Furthermore, this day marks the first time that God appears to Bnei Yisrael (see 9:4-5) since He appeared to them on the day when they first proclaimed "na'aseh v'nishma" (see 24:9-11).

Once again, the korban SHLAMIM offered during this ceremony may reflect the re-establishment of the covenant of Har Sinai, which was broken due to chet ha'egel.

2) The purpose of the ceremony which God commands Bnei Yisrael to perform on Har Eival (to teach Bnei Yisrael the Torah and offer korbanot OLOT & SHLAMIM) is clearly to re-create the experience of MATAN TORAH for the new generation (for most of them were not present at the original event). Here once again, we find a thematic connection between the korban SHLAMIM and MATAN TORAH.

Therefore, it is only logical to assume that special korban SHLAMIM that the Torah obligates us to offer with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM on Shavuot alludes to the deeper thematic connection between SHAVUOT and MATAN TORAH.

If so, these Biblical 'hints' remind us that Shavuot remains as "ZMAN MATAN TORATEINU", even according to Chumash.

chag sameyach,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Based on the above shiur, can you find a deeper meaning to the popular phrase "im ein kemach - ein Torah" [If there is no flour then there is no TORAH.]

2. In regard to Devarim 4:9-10. Note how these psukim could be understood as an introduction to the prohibition to make any image to represent God, as explained in 4:11-22. Therefore, this may not be considered as an independent mitzvah to remember Matan Torah. Only Ramban counts it as a mitzvah - See his pirush on 4:9 and the Hasagot HaRamban to Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam- Lo Ta'aseh #2. Note, that even if it is counted as a mitzvah, it does not require any specific action by which we are to commemorate that event. We are simply commanded never to forget it.

3. Our assumption that the specific date of the tenth of Tishrei was chosen for 'Yom Kippur' because it marks the date when Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second "luchoth" is based on several thematic parallels.

First and foremost, the very concept of "kappara" was first introduced when Moshe first petitioned God to forgive Bnei Yisrael for their behavior at chet ha'egel - see Shmot 32:30 - "...u'lie ACHAPRA b'ad chatatchem". Furthermore, during Moshe's forty days and nights on Har Sinai, he did not eat or drink (see Devarim 9:9). This may relate to our need to fast on Yom Kippur.

Finally, the specific date of the TENTH of the month would

have no logical reason, other than if it commemorated a certain event that happened on that day. [A holiday on the fifteenth of the month (Pesach & Succot) would be because of full moon, or Rosh ha'shana, because it is a new moon. However a holiday on the tenth would require a reason for that specific day.]