

\*\*\*\*\*  
**THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org**  
**In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag**  
**Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag**  
\*\*\*\*\*

**for SHAVUOT & Matan Torah**

**INTRODUCTION**

Even though we all know that the holiday of Shavuot commemorates the events of Matan Torah, for some reason, in the Torah's presentation of Shavuot we find no mention of that event! The following questions deal with this topic; and can provide a framework for study on "leil Shavuot".]

However, before we begin the battery of questions, we will provide a little 'agricultural' background concerning 'nature' and the yearly agricultural cycle in the land of Israel.

The wheat crop, which is planted in the winter, usually begins to ripen (and hence it becomes ready for harvesting) in late April or early May. The harvest season itself usually lasts about five to six weeks, i.e. until mid-June. Hence, late May (or early June) is the time of year in Eretz Yisrael when the grain harvest nears completion.

**THE BIBLICAL SOURCES**

1. Carefully review the following sources, as they include every mention of Shavuot in the Torah:

As you study each of these sources, make note of the:

\* NAME that the Torah calls this holiday;

\* DATE (or time of year) of Shavuot;

\* REASON for celebrating Shavuot;

\* MITZVAH that we are commanded to observe.

When you do find a mitzvah, note if this mitzvah is unique to Shavuot, and if so, explain why.

A. Shmot 23:14-17 / 34:22-24;

B. Vayikra 23:15-21;

C. Bamidbar 28:26;

D. Devarim 16:9-12.

2. Can you explain why the Torah never specifies the exact (lunar) date on which we must celebrate Shavuot, as it does for all the other holidays in Parshat Emor and Pinchas?

[In your answer, relate to "kidush ha'chodesh" by bet-din.]

3. In any of these above sources, does the Torah mention any connection between Shavuot and Matan Torah?

If so, where?

If not, can you explain why there is no mention?

4. In your opinion, does the agricultural reason that the Torah does provide for celebrating Shavuot provide sufficient reason for celebrating this holiday every year? If so, what in your opinion the agricultural reason for why God commands Bnei Yisrael to celebrate Shavuot?

Attempt to explain why this harvest would require a holiday of thanksgiving to God? Relate to the importance of the wheat harvest in regard to the food that will be eaten for the entire year; and how many chances a year there are to reap a wheat harvest.

[Note Shmot 23:13, and how it relates to 23:14-17!]

**WHEN DID MATAN TORAH TAKE PLACE?**

1. Carefully review Shmot chapter 19 (without Rashi!), and attempt to determine if Chumash ever mentions the precise day on which Matan Torah took place.

If not, does the Torah provide us with enough information to allow us to make a rough estimate? [Be sure to relate to Shmot 19:1-2.]

What can be inferred from Shmot 24:15-16 in regard to the amount of time which elapses at Ma'amad Har Sinai?

[Note Rashi (and the other commentators) concerning when in Sivan those 'seven' days transpired.]

2. Review the dates of the various holidays as they are described in Vayikra chapter 23, noting that each lunar date seems to have a very logical reason, with the exception of Yom Kippur - which falls out on the tenth of Tishrei. [Note that the first day of the month is a 'logical date' to mark a celebration, as is the 15th - when there is a full moon, and ample lighting in the evening.]

In your opinion, is there any logical reason for why the Torah chose the 10th of Tishrei for Yom Kippur? In your answer, relate to the three sets of forty days at Har Sinai, as discussed in Devarim 9:9,18,25 & 10:10; as well as to the forty days described in Shmot 24:14-16.

Note as well a thematic connection between those events and Yom Kippur based on Shmot 32:30-32!

Using those three sets of forty days, and working 'backwards' - attempt to determine a more precise 'lunar date' for when Matan Torah took place!

**BIBLICAL DATING & COMMEMORATION**

3. Does the Torah tell us the precise date of when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt? Is that date commemorated? [Note Shmot 13:2-8.] How many specific mitzvot can you recall from the Torah that commemorate Yetziat Mitzraim?

In contrast, how many specific mitzvot can you recall that commemorate Matan Torah?

In this regard, how and why would you say that the Torah relates to the event of Matan Torah in a different manner than to Yetziat Mitzrayim?

Can you suggest a reason why these events are so different?

[See Rashi Shmot 19:1! Relate this to the Midrash of "ben Zomah" in the Haggadah of Pesach concerning our daily obligation to 'remember' the events of Yetziat Mitzraim.]

4. Review Devarim 4:9-15, noting how these psukim describe the events that transpired at Ma'amad Har Sinai. According to these psukim (in their context), does there appear to be a mitzvah to 'remember' the events of Matan Torah? If so, on what day are we to remember those events; or does it appear that our obligation is to remember those events on every day?

[See Ramban on 4:9 and his opinion that this pasuk should be considered a MITZVAH. See also Ramban in his "hasagot" to the sefer ha'mitzvot of the Rambam - Lo'Taaseh - hasaga #2!.]

5. In the Torah's presentation of the other two "shalosh regalim" (i.e. chag ha'matzot and chag ha'succot), we do find the mention of a certain historical aspect (see Shmot 13:3-7, Vayikra 23:43) in addition to their agricultural perspective. In what manner is Shavuot different? [Is its historical aspect ever mentioned?] Can you suggest a reason why (or why not)?

6. Carefully review Vayikra 23:10-19. Note the connection between the korban ha'OMER and the korban SHTEI ha'LECHEM. Study the details of the special korban that must be offered together with the "shteI ha'lechem" (see 23:17-19), noting especially the centrality of the "korban shlamim" that must be 'waved' ["tenufah"] with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM.

Is there any other holiday (or any other time during the year) when the "tzibur" offers a korban SHLAMIM?

[Don't spend too much time looking, the answer is NO!]

Why should this point be significant?

7. Note as well in those psukim (see 23:17) that the SHTEI ha'LECHEM are to be baked "chametz", as opposed to every other type of flour offering in the Mikdash, which must be "matzah". [See Vayikra 1:11!]

Would you say that this is significant? If so, how?

Does this suggest a thematic connection to chag ha'matzot"?

In general, how do the special agricultural mitzvot of the "shalosh regalim" relate to the nature of the historical events which they commemorate?

8. In case you forgot, the very first time in Chumash where we find that Bnei Yisrael collectively offer a korban SHLAMIM is at Har Sinai. Review Shmot 24:4-8, noting how those offerings were part of the very same ceremony when Bnei Yisrael declared "na'aseh v'nishmah"!

Can you relate this event to the special korban SHLAMIM that is offered on Shavuot with the SHTEI ha'LECHEM?

9. Review Vayikra 9:1-5, noting how Bnei Yisrael were instructed to offer a korban SHLAMIM - at the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan on "yom ha'Shmini" - most probably to mark the return of the SHCHINA to the camp of Bnei Yisrael.

Can you relate this special korban to the korbanot described in Shmot 24:4-6 at "brit na'asseh v'nishma"?

How does the dedication of the Mishkan relate to Matan Torah? (See previous shiurim on Parshiot Terumah & Tezaveh.)

10. Note as well that the other special korbanot brought on "Yom Ha'Shmini" (the seir l'chatat of the Am and "par chatat" of Aharon etc.) find a parallel in the "korban tzibur" offered on Yom Kippur (see Vayikra 16:1-5, compare with 9:1-5). Relate this to the connection between Matan Torah and Yom Kippur (the day Moshe descended Har Sinai with the second luchot!).

Use this parallel to explain how the two aspects of the "yom ha'shmini" ("korban chatat" - as atonement for chet ha'egel, and "korban shlamim" for re-creating Ma'amad Har Sinai), relate to our annual celebration of both Yom Kippur and Shavuot!

11. Relate the primary points raised by the above questions to explain our custom to commemorate Matan Torah on Shavuot!

b'hatzlacha,  
menachem