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Chayah *bas* Eliezer *a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Yom-Tov Preparations

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR 5778

Shavuos is familiar to us as the festival celebrating the giving of the Torah – “*Zman Matan Toraseinu*.” At the same time, however, there are certain aspects of this *yom tov* – many of them actually quite basic, it would seem – that may have escaped our consciousness.

The Countdown

One of these issues relates to the very title of this *yom tov*. Normally, and quite sensibly, the title that is conferred on a given festival speaks to its essential nature or primary *avodah* (service). Hence, the Torah refers to Pesach as “*Chag Ha'matzos*” (Festival of Matzos) and Sukkos as – well – “*Chag HaSukkos*.” Even the Torah’s name for Rosh Hashanah, “*Yom HaZikaron*” (Day of Remembrance), reflects its function as the day upon which our merits and deeds are recalled before Hashem as He presides in judgment over the world.

But Shavuos seems to be a different matter entirely. The Torah does not call this festival anything along the lines of “*Chag HaTorah*” or the like. Instead, it chooses a title – “Shavuos (Weeks)” – that doesn’t seem to reflect the actual *yom tov* at all! This is obviously a reference to the counting exercise that precedes the *yom tov*, as the Torah directs us to count seven “weeks,” beginning with the second day of Pesach. The morrow of the completion of this period is the *yom tov* of Shavuos. What emerges, then, is the curious situation whereby the title of this holiday – instead of referring to the actual occurrence of this date – does more to reflect the period that *precedes* it.

But there is another unique aspect of this *yom tov*’s title, as it appears in Parshas Pinchas. The precise title of the festival is not even “Shavuos,” but actually שְׁבַע־תִּיכָּם – which means “**your** weeks.” This is an anomaly that does not occur in connection with any other holiday. We don’t find any mention of “*Chag Matzoseichem*” or “*Sukkoseichem*”; why is it only Shavuos that is singled out for this distinction?

The truth is, however, that this title in fact does have everything to do with the nature of this festival as the “*Zman Matan Toraseinu* – Time of the Giving of Our Torah.” It is further reflective of the unique *avodah* that pertains to this time, for the reasons that shall be clarified below.

Receiving the Torah

There is yet another aspect of this *yom tov* that differentiates it from the “average” festival – and that is in regard to the *mitzvos* associated with the day, or, more precisely, the lack thereof. Pesach is replete with its special observances, including the mitzvos of matzah and *maror* and relating the Exodus narrative; Sukkos is marked by the *mitzvos* of dwelling in the *sukkah* and taking the *arba minim* (four species); on Rosh Hashanah, the solemn blowing of the *shofar* is prominent. When it comes to Shavuos, however, there is no real tangible mitzvah that we observe to commemorate its featured event of Matan Torah. Why is there no mitzvah-act to perform, such as climbing a mountain or the like?

But this, in fact, is precisely the point. R’ Aharon Kotler would explain that Shavuos requires no such commemorative acts because the “event” is ongoing. While matzah and *sukkah* recall

the Exodus from Egypt, there is no specific mitzvah to “commemorate” the giving of the Torah – because the giving of the Torah is continuous, occurring anew each year on this particular festival.

One way in which this notion manifests itself can be gleaned from a classic teaching of the *sefarim hakedoshim* (sacred volumes), which consider Shavuos to be a “*Yom HaDin*” (Day of Judgment) for Torah. R’ Berel Schwartzman explained exactly what this entails. We know that there is a “*cheilek haTorah*,” a certain share in the Torah, that is designated for each and every individual. Actually, we beseech Hashem each day at the close of *Shemoneh Esrei* to acquire this portion. The text of the prayer is based on a passage in the Mishnah, which states (*Avos 5:20*):

הָיָה רָצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ שֶׁתִּבְנֶה עִירְךָ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְתֵן חֵלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ.

“May it be Your will, Hashem our G-d, that You shall rebuild Your city (Yerushalayim) speedily in our days; and may You grant **our portion in Your Torah.**”

But the nature and scope of this *cheilek* are what are determined on this “*Yom HaDin*” of Torah. Will it be grander or more modest? Will one attain clarity or be befuddled? These are the deliberations that occur at this time, and it is on this day that Hashem grants each person the *cheilek* that has been designated for him – to be uncovered over the course of the coming year.

How does one ensure that his “judgment” in this regard will be favorable? How indeed does one merit to receive the full measure of his *cheilek* in Torah? This, then, is a primary function of the multi-week lead-up period to the day of *Matan Torah*. The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains the mitzvah of counting the *Omer* as a reflection of our yearning for the arrival of this monumental day. A laborer in the hot sun pines for the end of the workday, when he collects his wages and rests in the cool shade. In a similar manner, the *Chinuch* declares, we go through the *Omer* period in eager anticipation of its culmination – receiving the Torah.

What emerges, then, is that the *avodah* of this period is to build up and increase our yearning for the Torah and our eagerness to receive it. And this, explains R’ Aharon, is the precise formula for meriting one’s share in the Torah. As Shlomoh Hamelech declares: אֲנִי אֶהְבֵּי אֶהָב – “I (the Torah) love those who love me; and those who seek me out shall find me” (*Mishlei 8:17*). Indeed, we see that the measure in which a person can merit to acquire Torah is in direct proportion to the level and intensity of his own yearning and regard for Torah.

R’ Yeruchem Olshin thus explains how, in light of the above, the title of this *yom tov* is indeed most fitting. This is, of course, the time of *Matan Torah*; and the primary means of meriting this is by preparing for it, in the manner prescribed above, during the preceding weeks. This is the time to build up one’s *cheishek* (drive) for Torah acquisition – the climactic granting of which is set to take place on Shavuos. And emphasis is placed on the personal aspect – “*Shavuoseichem*” – for this is indeed the case. As we have seen, the event of *Matan Torah* each Shavuos is in fact a personal matter, dependent on the preparatory efforts invested by each and every individual.

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