

kol chovevei TORAH

PARSHA PONDERINGS

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Shavuot: Making Connections

By Rabbi Yonah Berman

When teaching us about the holidays, the Torah generally tells us the dates for various celebrations. Rosh Hashanah is meant to take place on the first of Tishrei, Yom Kippur on the tenth, and so on. The Torah's prescription of specific dates for the holidays is crucial, since it is not enough for us to be aware of what we must do; we must know when as well. Otherwise, we could find ourselves celebrating holidays in the wrong seasons. Imagine celebrating Passover in the fall, or Chanukah during the summer!

The Torah's directive regarding Shavuot therefore stands out in that we are not given a specific date for its celebration. We are told simply to count from the second day of Passover, and that the 50th day will be a holiday. This commandment is the root of our practice of Sefirat Ha'omer - counting the Omer from Passover until Shavuot.

But why doesn't the Torah specify a date for the Shavuot festival? Would it not have been simpler than instructing us to count every evening for close to two months?

Perhaps the Torah has purposefully omitted the date of Shavuot in order to teach us that this holiday is inextricably linked to Passover. Passover, the Omer period and Shavuot can be seen as a single "mega-festival" beginning with our redemption from Egypt, taking us through the growth and preparations required prior to the revelation at Sinai, and ultimately culminating as we stand at the mountain and receive the Torah from God.

There are two lessons for us to learn here. First of all, we learn that Passover – the beginning of the redemption process – warrants celebration in itself. We do not need to wait for our complete transformation from slaves into a nation of stories, laws and traditions. Rather, we are commanded to celebrate God's miracles as they happen.

And second, we see the link between the first stages of our redemption and its final stages as well. Just as Passover is not complete without Shavuot, we are not complete if we are merely free people. We require a means of connection to God and to humanity. That connection is the Torah.

As we stand together this Shavuot as one community – *k'ish echad b'lev echad* - and receive the Torah anew, let us commit ourselves to celebrating each and every day – to learning and growing together.

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