YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**PARASHAT EMOR**

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In Memory of William (Yeshai Zev) Rosenfeld *z”l* on his yahrzeit

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In blessed memory of Tsarna bat Morthe Lowenstein Reiter *z”l*

of Debrecen, Hungary, whose yahrtzeit is on 15 Iyar.

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**Appointed Times and Processes**

**Rav Shimon Klein**

**Introduction**

These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy gatherings, which you shall proclaim in their seasons. (*Vayikra* 23:4)

The above verse serves as a heading for the section dealing with the laws and sacrifices of the various holidays: Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Ha-Shana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. The Torah begins by discussing Pesach and the Festival of Matzot, which fall in the first month; the unit concludes with Sukkot, which falls in the seventh month.[[1]](#footnote-1) In this *shiur*, we will focus on two festivals, the Festival of Matzot and the Festival of Sukkot. We will examine their common skeleton, as well as the differences between them. The similarities and differences will provide a window onto the broader perspective – the development of consciousness that is facilitated by this calendrical structure and the spiritual process that takes place over the course of the festivals themselves.

Let us compare the verses pertaining to the two festivals in the form of a table:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Festival of Matzot | Festival of Sukkot |
| On the fourteenth day of the first month, towards evening, is Pesach unto the Lord. |  |
| And on the fifteenth day of the same month  | The fifteenth day of the seventh month  |
| is the Festival of Matzot unto the Lord; seven days you shall eat *matzot*. | shall be the festival of Sukkot for seven days to the Lord. |
| On the first day you shall have a holy gathering; you shall do no servile work. | On the first day shall be a holy gathering; you shall do no servile work. |
| And you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days. | Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. |
| On the seventh day is a holy gathering; you shall do no servile work. | On the eighth day shall be a holy gathering to you, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord; it is a solemn assembly; you shall do no servile work. |

Before examining similarities and differences, a few words of background. The above verses indicate a clear division between “Pesach” and the “Festival of Matzot.” The “Festival of Pesach” refers to the Pesach sacrifice, and it falls on the date when the Pesach sacrifice is offered – the 14th of Nissan. The name “Festival of Matzot” reflects the commandment to eat *matza*; the festival when *matzot* are eaten lasts for seven days, starting on the 15th of Nissan (paralleling the dwelling in the *sukkah*, which lasts seven days).

Let us now consider the similarities between the two festivals:

1. Both festivals fall on the fifteenth of the month (first month/seventh month).
2. Both festivals last for seven days.
3. In both instances, the first day of the festival is a “holy gathering” (*mikra kodesh*), and work is prohibited.
4. An offering made by fire throughout the seven days characterizes both.

Differences:

1. In the first month, there is a “Pesach unto the Lord” on the 14th. This serves as a sort of initial stage of the Festival of Matzot, and it has no parallel in the seventh month.
2. On the eighth day, after the seven days of Sukkot, there is another “holy gathering.” This addition has no parallel in the first month; the Festival of Matzot concludes at the end of the seventh day.
3. As we shall see below, the climax of the “Festival of Matzot” is to be found at its start, whereas the climax of the Festival of Sukkot is at its conclusion.

Let us now take a closer look at the nuances of the formulation of each festival and try to discover what they tell us about the fundamental essence of each.

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| The Festival of Matzot | The Festival of Sukkot |
| “On the fourteenth day of the first month towards evening is Pesach unto the Lord.” The unit opens with the Pesach sacrifice, which is offered to God on the fourteenth of the month, right before the Festival of Matzot. The name “Pesach” recalls God’s passing over (*pasach*) of the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, choosing them and sparing them. | There is no special initial event or occasion on the fourteenth of the month.“The fifteenth day of this seventh month” – the 15th of the seventh month is the starting point, with no prior festival. |
| “**And** on the fifteenth day **of the same month**” – the conjunctive “*vav*” at the beginning of the verse serves to connect the Festival of Matzot back to the festival of the Pesach. The Pesach also represents a starting point in the context of the reference to “the same month” – i.e., the month referred to in the previous verse. |
| “… is the **Festival of Matzot unto the Lord**” – the attribution “unto the Lord” concerning the Festival of Matzot is made explicit only in relation to the fifteenth of the month. The rest of the days of the festival are indicated by a practical directive: “**Seven days** shall you eat *matzot*.” | “…shall be the Festival of Sukkot for **seven days unto the Lord**” – the festival of Sukkot lasts seven days, and all seven days are “unto the Lord”. In contrast to the Festival of Matzot, where a practical law concerning the eating of *matzot* covers the seven days, when it comes to Sukkot there is no practical directive to eat in the *sukkah*. |
| “**On the first day** you shall have a holy gathering” – a “holy gathering” (*mikra kodesh*) means an acknowledgment and proclamation of the sanctity of the day.[[2]](#footnote-2) The expression “you shall have” (literally, “there shall be unto you”) attributes the essence of the day “to you”. This unique dimension appears in relation to the first day, but not the seventh day. | “On the first day shall be **a holy gathering**” – the mood or theme accompanying the day does not yet exist; it will develop and come to fruition only on the eighth day. |
| “You shall do no servile work” – the sanctity of the day is expressed in the prohibition on work. | “You shall do no servile work” – in terms of the prohibition on work, there is no difference between the Festival of Matzot and the Festival of Sukkot. |
| “And you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord for seven days” – the command is given in two stages. First comes the actual obligation to offer sacrifice; afterwards the text notes the duration of this obligation: “seven days”. The focus is on the act of sacrifice, which lasts for seven days, thereby imbuing this with significance. | “Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord” – the text starts by noting the seven days, and only afterwards commands the offering made by fire. The priority given to the “seven days” imbues them with an independent existence and importance, even before there is an instruction to make an offering of fire. This is a more mature and developed stage of the seven days. |
| “On the seventh day is a holy gathering” – following the development of the natural reality over the course of six days (as at the time of Creation), there comes a seventh day, which gives meaning (the “seventh” testifies to the One Creator of everything). In contrast to the first day, concerning which the text says, “there **shall be** a holy gathering **unto you,**” here the attribution “to you,” expressing a behavioral stance, is omitted; it is no longer accompanied by the spiritual inspiration that existed on the first day. In addition, on this day there is no special command regarding an “offering by fire to the Lord”; this day is simply included as one of the “seven days”. In the context of the prohibition on work, as well, we note that the words “You shall do no servile work,” expressing the sanctity of the day, radiates from the character of the seventh day, which is different from its more holy context on the first day.  | There is nothing special about the seventh day; it is simply one of the seven days of the festival. Instead, the significance of the conclusion of the festival is a level higher, and moves to the eighth day: |
| “On the eighth day **there shall be** a holy gathering **unto you**” – the weekly cycle consists of seven days; the eighth day is already the first day of the next week. In practical terms, it is one of the days of the week; on the other hand, it rests upon the week that has just gone by, which gives it extra stature as a point of departure that is not part of the system of seven that is the foundation of the created world. This allows it to approach the world from a higher vantage point, rather than being captive within it.[[3]](#footnote-3) |

This unit gives no historical or agricultural context for the Festival of Matzot or the Festival of Sukkot.[[4]](#footnote-4) The subject is the dates. The festivals of the year are organized on an axis of 1st month/7th month,[[5]](#footnote-5) and the dates highlighted are the 14th, 15th, seven days, and the eighth day. Some explanation is needed to clarify the significance of this structure.

There are two modes of sanctity that appear repeatedly in the Torah. One is the sanctity of “the first;” the other is the sanctity of “the seventh.” The sanctity of “the first” exists at the starting point, in the transition from “nothing” to “something.” In this sense, the beginning represents existence itself, as a concept, preceding any concrete entity. For example: the firstborn, unlike his siblings, creates the reality of continuity for his parents, at the same time bestowing their new parental status. Looking at it from a different angle, we might say that “first-ness” represents closeness to the source, and this lends it a primal, lofty position that precedes the later processes that happen in reality. To use the terms characterizing chapters 1 and 2 of *Sefer Bereishit*, “the first” is closer to the dimension of “creation” (*beri’a*),[[6]](#footnote-6) the primal Divine act, prior to any process or development or maturity. The Torah commands that we observe the sanctity of “the first,” thereby testifying to its special status. For example, the command, “Sanctify unto Me every firstborn” (*Shemot* 13:1) reflects this dimension and creates an inherent tension between the position of the firstborn and that of the other siblings. The firstborn radiates a certain essence, a tension is created, there is interaction, and finally there is a process by means of which something of that special quality or essence influences the other siblings, as well.

The sanctity of “the seventh” tells a different story. This is a sanctity that comes with conclusion. The six days of Creation come to an end, each day representing a world in its own right and serving as its own justification. At this stage, there is nothing that will connect the different parts and creations of the different days. This is the role of the “seventh,” which comes to tell the single, unified story of everything. It testifies to the One God Who created everything, to the unity that encompasses everything, and to the moral and spiritual significance arising from that oneness.[[7]](#footnote-7)

While “the first” precedes everything, standing apart from its peers and serving as a model for emulation, “the seventh” comes at the end, imbuing an existing reality with meaning. “The seventh” says less about itself than about the specialness of the preceding six. It tells their story and lends it depth.

Accordingly, our textual unit sets forth God’s “appointed times” in two months of the year – the first month and the seventh month. We propose that this structure points to two different essences, and hence two different moods of Divine service. The first month is the time when *Am Yisrael* came out of Egypt. It represents the beginning of the road, the very choosing of *Am Yisrael* by God. The festival of Sukkot belongs to the seventh month and embodies the idea of maturity and summing up. The focus of our service must therefore be different.

As noted, the Festival of Matzot has as its starting point the “Pesach,” recalling God’s act in passing over the Jewish houses in Egypt. The “Festival of Matzot” recalls the act of *Am Yisrael*, which is of lesser significance, deriving its significance from the first. The first day (15th Nissan) has a special status in the context of the concept of “there shall be **unto you**” – a concept which does not exist on the seventh day. Accordingly, there are events related to the first day that are not set forth in this unit: this is the day of the Exodus from Egypt, and the events of the day took place both at night and by day.[[8]](#footnote-8) On this festival, the seven days are not yet attributed to God, and the level of the last day is not as high as the level of the first (and the expression “there shall be unto you” is thus omitted).

Sukkot embodies the service of the seventh month. Its essence is a summing up, not a beginning. Expressions of this essence include the fact that the fifteenth is the starting point, with no parallel to the “Festival of Pesach,” representing the higher, primal Divine act. The seven days of the festival are all attributed to God, and they are treated in a mature, conceptual manner conveying meaning, with no mention of the command to physically sit in the *sukkah*. The sacrifices – “offerings made by fire to God” – are offered on days that serve as an important, existing unit of time. Above all, there is the climax of the seven days – on the eighth day.

**“These are the appointed times unto the Lord”**

The unit on the festivals in *Sefer Vayikra* speaks of God’s “appointed times” (*mo’adim*):

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them: The appointed times of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy gatherings – these are My appointed times… (*Vayikra* 23:1-2).

The “*mo’ed*” speaks to the encounter, or convocation (*hitva’adut*, derived from the same root – *vav, ayin, daled* – as the word ‘*mo’ed*’), that occurs on these occasions. This concept also appears in the context of place:

It shall be a continual burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord, where I will meet you (*iva’ed lachem*), to speak there to you. And there I will meet (*ve-no’adeti*) with *Bnei Yisrael*, and it shall be sanctified by My glory. (*Shemot* 29:42-43)

And you shall put it [the incense altar] before the veil that is by the Ark of the Testimony, before the covering that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you (*iva’ed lekha*). (*Shemot* 30:6)

The difference is that in the dimension of space, the text describes an actual encounter between God and man, while in the dimension of time the concept is abstract and more open, with the time itself referred to as the meeting, the “*mo’ed*.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The “*mo’ed*,” then, is “a time of *hitva’adut*,” and the attribution of this time to God is, as it were, introducing His Presence into that “*mo’ed*.” In addition, we might speak of the encounter that takes place in a broader sense – the encounter between different and perhaps distant elements which come together on this day.

As noted, the two modes of introducing God’s Presence are represented by the first month and the seventh month. We may now refer to them as two modes of “*hitva’adut*” – encounter – and go a step further. The point of departure for both “*mo’adim*” – the Festival of Matzot and the Festival of Sukkot – is the fifteenth of the month. This day falls in the middle of the month, at full moon. The start of the “*mo’ed*” at this point turns our attention to the light of the “recipient” (the moon, receiving and reflecting the light of the sun) when it is at its best – symbolizing man, who works and creates in this world. God holds an encounter with man at the time when man (as represented by the moon) is at his best. In other words, man’s role in both of these festivals is central. There are two modes of Divine service, of partnership with God, producing two parallel processes. The first begins with a great convocation that illuminates all of the “seven;” the other is a process of summing up that gradually develops and matures up until the eighth day. The additional preliminary encounter on the fourteenth of the month (Pesach) indicates God’s Presence even before man is ready and prepared. It is God Who brings the process into being, “passing over” and choosing; only as a second stage does man take part in the events. The additional encounter on the eighth day serves as an additional, significant link in the process of maturity, the higher level to which man ascends until he reaches the “*atzeret*” – a day that embodies the concept of “encounter” at its finest.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. In fact, all the festivals set down in the Torah fall either in the first month (Nissan) or in the seventh month (Tishrei), with the exception of Shavuot, which falls in the month of Sivan. However, the verses do not mention the date of Shavuot explicitly; it is presented as a continuation or development of the festival of Pesach, which falls in the first month (Nissan). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. From these words, *Chazal* deduce a unique law according to which the time of the holiday is actually dependent on the acknowledgment and proclamation of the *Beit Din*. The Sifra (*Emor* 9:2-3) discusses what happens if there was a year that should have been a leap year, and the *Beit Din* discussed it but did not declare it a leap year in time. The year is then not to be treated as a leap year – in keeping with the verse that states, “The appointed times of the Lord **which *you shall proclaim* to be holy gatherings**, these are My appointed times” (*Vayikra* 23:2). If you – *Bnei Yisrael* – proclaim them, then they are My appointed times. If you do not proclaim them, they are not My appointed times. Similarly, if a year was not supposed to be a leap year but was so proclaimed, whether out of force of circumstance or through miscalculation or error, then it is indeed a leap year, based on the same verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The concept of “eight” embodies the ability of the Divine Presence to be present within our world. Examples: it was on the eighth day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* that the Divine Presence came to rest in it (*Vayikra* 16); the *Kohen Gadol*’s entry into the *Kodesh* *ha-Kodashim* on Yom Kippur recalls the Divine Presence coming to rest on the eighth day (*Vayikra* 16); the Jubilee year (50th year) brings freedom after seven cycles of seven (*Vayikra* 25); “When a bullock or a sheep or a goat is brought forth then it shall be seven days under its mother, and from the eighth day onwards it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire to the Lord” (*Vayikra* 22:27) – only from the eighth day is it accepted as a sacrifice, with God’s Presence made manifest through its sacrifice; “If a woman conceives and bears a male child then she shall be unclean for seven days… and on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (*Vayikra* 12:2-3). The foreskin is a covering, a blockage, and its removal allows an encounter with a transcendent sanctity. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The additional unit dealing with Sukkot (*Vayikra* 23:39-43) offers both an agricultural and an historic context for the festival. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is nicely illustrated in the fact that the introduction to Pesach, serving as the introduction to the entire unit on the festivals, notes the month before the date: “In the **first month**, on the **fourteenth of the month**, towards evening, is Pesach unto the Lord” (*Vayikra* 23:5). Then comes the Festival of Matzot, and here the date is mentioned before the month: “And on the **fifteenth day** of the **same month** is the Festival of Matzot unto the Lord; seven days you shall eat *matza*” (ibid. 6). The festivals of the seventh month, starting with Rosh Ha-Shana, are similarly introduced with a noting of the month: “Speak to *Bnei Yisrael*, saying: in the **seventh month**, on the **first day of the month**, you shall have a Shabbat, a memorial of sounding of the shofar; a holy gathering” (ibid. 24), while later on – in reference to Yom Kippur (v. 27) and again in reference to Sukkot (34) – the date is mentioned before the month. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For a discussion of the contrast between “creation” (*ex nihlo*) and “formation” (out of what already exists), see our shiur on *Parashat Bereishit*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As in the verse (*Malakhi* 2:10), “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers?” The fact that we all have the same Father, the same One God, creates a bond and sanctified meaning – the sanctity of the covenant of the fathers. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At night, *Bnei Yisrael* ate the Pesach sacrifice, their loins girded and all ready to set off. At midnight, God appeared in Egypt, struck the Egyptian firstborn, and passed over the houses of *Bnei Yisrael*. The next day – “in the midst of that day” – they left Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Any encounter in this world takes place subject to two conditions: time and place. I may schedule a meeting with someone at a certain place, and while each of us indeed arrives at the agreed spot, we are not there together to meet. Similarly, we might schedule a time, and at the same moment each of us presents himself for the meeting – but each in a different place. Everyone is located somewhere in the spatial dimension, and also somewhere in the dimension of time. A person is born in space – he exists and lives in a certain place. Similarly, he is born in time – his life coincides with a certain period. The story of Choni Ha-Me’agel, who slept for 70 years (*Ta’anit* 23a) illustrates this concept. When he awoke, he felt the same as before, but reality had moved on; he found himself “somewhere else.” The passage of time had created a new platform, a new reality of life, and he was not part of it. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The encounter that takes place on the eighth day finds beautiful expression in the following *midrash*: “R. Elazar taught: The seventy bullocks [offered over the course of Sukkot] correspond to the seventy nations of the world, while the single bullock [offered on Shemini Atzeret, the eighth day] corresponds to one sole nation. This may be compared to a mortal king who told his servants, ‘Make me a great banquet.’ On the last day [of the banquet] he told his close friend, ‘Make me a small, intimate banquet, that I might enjoy your company’” (*Sukkah* 55b). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)