

THE NAMES OF SHAVUOS

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As mentioned in the previous class, Shavu'os is on the fiftieth day of the Omer counting. When looking in the Torah, one will find that Shavu'os is referred to as Chag Ha'atzeres. One will also find that the Torah makes no connection whatsoever between Shavu'os and the receiving of the Torah, although we know that Shavu'os IS the anniversary of our receiving the Torah. Why are there different names for Shavu'os and why is there no mention of our receiving the Torah in conjunction with Shavu'os?

Many reasons are given for why Shavu'os has the names that it does. The Ta'amei Haminhagim explains that the holiday is called "Shavu'os" because "shavuos" means oaths. He explains that when we accepted the Torah, Hashem "promised" not to "exchange" us for any other nation, and we promised Hashem that we would not leave and "exchange" Him. Because of these oaths, the Holiday which is the anniversary of our receiving the Torah is called Shavu'os.

Another reason given for the name Shavu'os (as mentioned by the Aruch HaShulchan) is that this is the holiday that occurs after we have finished counting the weeks, the word for weeks being "Shavu'os."

Why is Shavu'os also referred to as Chag Ha'atzeres? The Ta'amei Haminhagim explains that on all other holidays, there are two types of service to Hashem that we perform. One type of performance is doing the commandments specifically associated with that holiday, such as eating matzo on Pesach. The other service is that which we find on all holidays - refraining from "work" or "melacha." On Shavu'os, there really is only one type of service being performed, that being the cessation of work. One of the meanings of the word "atzeres" is "a cessation, a stopping." Shavu'os is called Chag HaAtzeres because it means that it is the Holiday of "Cessation" and cessation only, while all other holidays have observances specific to it as well.

The Ramban explains that Shavu'os is to Pesach as Shemini Atzeres is to Succos. (Shemini Atzeres is what might be called the eighth day of Succos, although technically, it is a holiday separate from Succos. We will discuss this holiday further when the time comes.) Just as Succos has a holiday called "atzeres" at its end, so too does Pesach have a holiday called "atzeres" at its "end." Hence, the name "atzeres" for Shavu'os.

According to the Aruch HaShulchan, the reason why the giving of the Torah is not associated with Shavu'os, while our departure from Egypt is associated with Pesach and our sojourn in the desert is

associated with Succos is because there is a major difference in what is being commemorated on these holidays. Our departure from Egypt is an event which can be associated with one specific day, the day on which it occurred. The sojourn in the desert with the special clouds to protect us was an occurrence that had a set time. It is not happening any more. We therefore have a set day to commemorate it. The Torah, however was given for eternity. We are to live by it and study it every day. It is therefore impossible to establish a specific day to remember the giving of the Torah, being that we will always have the Torah. For this reason, the observance that the Torah associated with Shavu'os is the bringing of the Shte Ha'lechem, the two loaves (see the previous posting), an event that occurs only on this day. However, the fact that we do not have a holiday to commemorate the giving of the Torah does not mean that we therefore do not acknowledge that this is the day that we received the Torah.

As we will see in the following classes, there are many customs that we observe to commemorate this special day in our lives as individuals and as a nation.