

PARSHAS EMOR

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

"And you [the Kohanim] shall not desecrate My Holy Name and I shall be sanctified in the midst of Bnei Yisrael..... who delivered you out the land of Egypt to be your G-d" (Vayikra 22:32-33). This verse concludes the opening section of the parshah that calls on the Kohanim to sanctify their avodah by not defiling themselves through mourning for the dead or through allowing priests who were maimed to officiate or by offering sacrifices that were blemished. In that way the Name of G-d would not be desecrated and this is linked to the sanctification of His Great Name through the Chagim and Moadim that follow. By commanding Israel to gather together in His appointed Holy Place at those times in joy and song, with their enjoined offerings and thanksgivings and mandatory gifts to the poor, they will bear witness to Hashem's providence and so proclaim that He watches and guards over His People. That sanctification of His Name is the reason for the linkage between the instructions to the Kohanim, and this list of Chagim and Moadim.

The Divine commandment of Moadei Hashem are strangely linked to "You shall call them, they are My Moadim" [verse 2]. This means, 'You shall call them [but] they are My Moadim', because all of them are linked to the times of the Sun and the Moon and so are dependent on the human agency of the Bet Din in Yerushalyim who determine Rosh Chodesh and Ibur Hashanah. Therefore, the Bet Din determines the exact dates of Hashem's Moadim. Furthermore, the Bet Din are obligated to send messengers throughout Israel so that all Israel will observe the Chagim at the same time. Otherwise, if each person depended on their own knowledge and expertise to determine dates and times, then we would have the same situation that the Karaites have. There, since the human bet din does not determine the months, they do not observe Yom HaKippurim in Egypt on the same day as in Kushta [Istanbul], and in Damascus different from Yerushalyim. Because Hashem here gave Israel's Sages the power to declare the times of His Moadim, all Israel sanctifies His Name on them at the same dates. The repetition of the phrase "Moadai" before and after the Shabbat separates this day from the others in this respect since this day is not dependent on a human bet din to determine its occurrence, nor does its time vary nor does it mark miracles that occurred to us, rather it is fixed in the sequence of the 7 day cycle to mark the wonders of His Creation and to announce our thanks for His manifold blessings. This day is further distinguished from the other Moadim by the text calling it Shabbat Shabbaton whereas the others except Yom HaKippurim are called Shabbaton only. Thereby we are told that on Shabbat and Yom HaKippurim there is to be perfect rest for the human body, even work connected with chaiyei nefesh is forbidden whereas such work is permitted on the other Moadim. [We find a continuation of this idea in Chassidic thought. "There is no imprint of

Mankind's hands in the Shabbat; only Hashem's work is reflected in it. Therefore we find it easier to understand and relate to the Chagim that are related to the experiences of Am Yisrael. That is why there is simcha and sasson only on the Chagim, whereas there is Oneg that is pure 'seichel' on Shabbat that is Divine Wisdom. So we have Isru Chag to allow the transition to the weekdays but havdalah alone suffices for the transition from Shabbat" (Shem Mi Shmuel)].

The phrase 'shabbaton' is used in connection with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot yet it is not used with regard to Pesach and Shavuot even though we are told that work is not permitted on those days too. Shabbaton denotes a time of rest when people are free in their bodies and spirit. While this is true of these 3 festivals when people are given over to bodily rest and relaxation of spirit, however it is not true of Pesach and Shavuot. In both of them men are eaten up with concern and worry about their livelihoods bound up as they are with their crops in the fields. At the time of these 2 chagim people await reaping and harvesting those crops and are fearful of any dangers or natural mishaps that may occur. They are therefore eager to engage in all the activities connected with their ripening crops and with those ready for harvesting, so that they are hardly ready for a shabbaton. The Torah alludes to this difference when it commands us to go up to Yerushalyim on Pesach and Sukkot in different terms. In Devarim regarding Sukkot chapter 16, verse 15 reads: "Seven days you will celebrate the chag of Hashem in the place that He will choose since He blessed you in all your crops and all your actions". Sukkot is the festival of the ingathering, at the end of the year when all the crops and harvests are safely gathered and stored; then people can be in a state of shabbaton. However, with regard to Pesach we read in the same chapter verses 6-7, "In the place that Hashem chooses to establish His Name you will offer the Pesach in the eveningon the morrow you will return to your tents.....six days you shall eat matzot". Now at the beginning of the harvest with crops to be brought in and threshed and cleaned, only one day in Yerushalyim is required; there is no shabbaton, no peace of mind.

At the very beginning of the harvest [16 Nissan] there is the commandment in our parshah to bring the korban tzibbur of the Omer, to count 7 full weeks and then on Chag Habikurim [these are individual offerings] to bring another korban tzibbur of the 2 loaves of new wheat. In regard to the Omer the phrase "in all your habitations" is used to denote that while the Omer is only brought in Eretz Yisrael, nevertheless the accompanying injunction against eating chadash exists everywhere. In addition to our counting the 7 weeks between the bringing of these 2 korbanot we are also counting in joy the days between the Exodus from Egypt and Matan Torah on Shavuot like one anticipating a great gift or a momentous occasion. Despite this the Torah does not refer to Matan Torah but only to bikkurim on Shavuot. This is because Matan Torah is a constant and an ongoing occurrence not limited to a special time or place whereas bikkurim is. Now the Omer is of Barley that is usually animal fodder and that is given to the animals in its raw form; simply harvested and given to them. On the other hand, the Shnei Halechem brought on Shavuot are of wheat, the food of mankind, and is eaten after it is prepared by milling, refining and baking. When we left Egypt we were unrefined, gross and unlearned like the Omer. Seven weeks later we received the Torah that

taught us to be cleared, refined and purified through its Divine Wisdom and so we offer the 2 loaves on Shavuot. They are brought together with 7 sheep and other offerings just like kings and nobles eat their refined wheaten bread with meat, wine and delicacies; however, the Omer is offered by itself, a sign of reduced spiritual joy .

In order that a person should not think that having brought bikkurim on Shavuot to Hashem, he has completed his obligations, the Torah followed bikkurim with the laws of Peah to denote our obligation to the poor, the weak and the stranger.

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