

# A HOLIDAY MISSING?

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BS"D

Volume 31, No. 28

17 Iyar 5777

May 13, 2017

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the Marwick family  
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The Rutstein family  
in memory of father Mendy Rutstein  
(Menachem Mendel Shmuel ben Nachman Halevi a"h)  
and grandmother Bessie Rutstein  
(Pesha Batya bat R' Zemach a"h)

In this week's parashah, the Torah presents many of the laws of the festivals--Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. R' Yitzchak Arama z"l (Spain; died 1494) asks what he calls a "strong question": Why does the Torah never mention that Shavuot is the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah? He offers several answers:

First, the Torah cannot logically command us to observe the day of receiving the Torah as a holiday. He explains: There is a viewpoint that there cannot be a commandment to believe in G-d, for there cannot be a commandment unless there is a commander. Before one has accepted G-d as the Commander, any commandment to believe in Him would be pointless; afterward, it is unnecessary. Similarly, the Torah [which necessarily was written before it was given] cannot contain a commandment to commemorate the Giving of the Torah as a holiday.

Second, accepting the Torah is not an event that happens once a year. Rather, a person is supposed to do it every day, as we read (Devarim 26:16), "This day, Hashem, your God, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul." Our Sages comment on this verse: Did Hashem give the commandments on this day? Rather, every day a person should view the Torah as if he received it that day.

Nevertheless, R' Arama notes, the Torah does hint to the date when it was given in the section beginning (Shmot 19:1), "In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on

this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai." (Akeidat Yitzchak: Sha'ar 67, Part 2)

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***"After the sun has set, he shall become purified; thereafter, he will eat from the holy things, for it is his food." (22:7)***

Literally, this verse refers to a Kohen eating Terumah at nightfall after he has purified himself.

R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l) writes: It is plain to a thinking person that this verse alludes to the "sunset" of a person's life, when his days in this world conclude. Some people--even those who engage in Teshuvah / repentance all their lives--do not achieve purification until that final moment, which is one reason why there are righteous people who undergo tremendous suffering in their lifetimes. Therefore, one who finds himself in this situation should not lose heart; indeed, doing so would be counter-productive, as it would detract from the purification process. After this purification process, "he will eat from the holy things," i.e., he will receive his reward in the World-to-Come. (Likkutei Halachot: Hil. Birchot Ha'shachar 5:42)

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***"When you slaughter a feast thanksgiving-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it willingly." (22:29)***

R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and Rosh Yeshivah) observes: A person is required to bring a korban todah / thanksgiving-offering if he was in danger and was saved. We read in Tehilim (107:1-2), "Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good; His kindness endures forever. Those redeemed by Hashem will say it, those whom He redeemed from the hand of distress." This verse reflects man's tendency to thank G-d after man has been saved. However, one rarely remembers to thank G-d for not placing him in danger in the first place. Thus our verse teaches, "When you slaughter a feast thanksgiving-offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it **willingly**." Don't wait until you are **required** to thank Hashem. Rather, thank Him **voluntarily**. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David)

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***"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as Mikra'ei Kodesh / holy convocations; these are My appointed festivals'." (23:2)***

An anonymous student of R' Ovadiah Seforno z"l (Italy; 1475-1550) writes in the name of his teacher: In the preceding verses, the Torah discusses the holiness of those who bring sacrifices on the altar [i.e., the Kohanim] and how they must distance themselves from impurity. Now the Torah teaches that every Jew can have a relationship with Hashem.

How so? The Torah calls the festivals "Mikra'ei Kodesh" / holy convocations or gatherings. On the festivals, all of the Jewish People are called upon to gather in the presence of Torah scholars and G-

d-fearing people, in order to be inspired and uplifted. When we do this, rather than spending the entire festival indulging in food and drink, Hashem declares: "These are My appointed festivals." (Amar Ha'Gaon: Shiurei Rabbeinu Ovadiah Seforno)

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***"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'When you shall enter the Land that I give you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring an Omer from your first of your harvest to the Kohen'." (23:10)***

R' Leib Mintzberg shlita (rabbi of the Khal Adat Yerushalayim community in Bet Shemesh, Israel, and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Ha'masmidim) writes: Just like the Mitzvot of Terumah, Challah, Bikkurim and others that involve setting aside the "first" of something, the purpose of this Mitzvah is to express thanks to Hashem; in this case, thanks for the beginning of the harvest. The fact that this Mitzvah is performed on the second day of Pesach, writes R' Mintzberg, is a reflection of the above-stated reason for the commandment. He explains:

On Pesach, we are commanded to eat Matzah, which reflects the hurried nature of our Exodus from Egypt. Matzah reminds us that, in an instant, we went from being slaves of Pharaoh to servants of Hashem. Food is an appropriate way to commemorate this transition because the nature of a slave is to be dependent on his master for food. Previously, we were dependent on Pharaoh for our sustenance, but, with the Exodus, Hashem accepted responsibility for sustaining us.

The relationship we have with Hashem is a special and distinctive one, R' Mintzberg continues. Therefore, we do not commemorate it with just any food, but rather with a special and distinctive form of bread--i.e., Matzah. By eating this special "bread" year after year, we acknowledge that, through the Exodus, Hashem gave us a place at His "table." From the Exodus onwards, we are dependent on Hashem and no one else. Only after we recognize this are we ready to begin the harvest, for we understand that it is Hashem's harvest. We acknowledge this understanding by bringing the Omer, the "first of your harvest" as an offering. (Ben Melech: Sefirat Ha'Omer p.17 & Pesach p.65)

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## **A Torah Tour of the Holy Land**

Rabbi Chaim Vital z"l (Syria and Eretz Yisrael; 1542-1620) writes: Regarding the custom to go on Lag Ba'Omer to the graves of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar, who are buried in Meron, as is known, and to eat, drink and rejoice there--I saw my teacher [R' Yitzchak Luria, the Arizal] go there once on Lag Ba'Omer. He took his entire family and remained there the first three days of that week. This was in the first year after he came from Egypt, and I do not know, R' Vital writes, whether he was yet expert in the wondrous wisdom which he attained [i.e., the Kabbalah of the Arizal].

R' Vital continues: R' Yonatan Sagis testified to me that another year, before I came to study with my

teacher, he [the Arizal] took his young son and his entire family there [to Meron], and there they cut his son's hair, as is the well-known custom, and they made it a day of feasting and joy. (Sha'ar Ha'kavanot: Pesach No.12)

As noted, Meron is the burial place of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar and one of the sages of the Mishnah. (Whenever the Mishnah cites "Rabbi Shimon" without mentioning his father's name, it refers to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.). Nearby are also buried:

1. Rabbi Yitzchak, a leading student of Rabbi Shimon;
2. Hillel the Elder, one of the earliest sages of the Mishnah, together with his wife;
3. Shammai, the contemporary of Hillel, together with his wife;
4. R' Yochanan the Shoemaker, a student of rabbi Akiva;
5. R' Yose ben Kisma, cited in Pirkei Avot;
6. Rabbi Ada Sava, a sage of the Talmud and great-grandson of the sage Shmuel;
7. R' Yeva, another sage of the Talmud; and
8. Rav Hamnunah Sava, the sage of the Talmud referred to whenever the Gemara cites an anonymous student from the yeshiva of the sage Rav ("Amrei d'vei Rav").

A ten minute walk from Shammai's burial place is a rock outcropping known as "Kisei Shel Eliyahu" / Eliyahu's chair. Tradition records that Eliyahu Ha'navi will sit hear and announce good tidings to the Jewish People, in fulfillment of the verse (Yeshayah 52:7), "How beautiful upon the mountains are the footsteps of the herald [i.e., Eliyahu Hanavi], announcing, 'Peace!'; heralding, 'Good!'; announcing, 'Salvation!'; saying to Zion, 'Your G-d has reigned!'" (Ha'mekomot Ha'kedoshim)