

Parshas Emor

In this week's Parsha, we have the Torah reading that is read on Succos and Pesach, the famous "Shor O Chesev", beginning 22:27. The holidays are called Moadim, which means appointed times, from the word to stand, but it also has the root word Eid, meaning testimony.

The holidays are celebrated at a specific time in the calendar, but they also serve as a testament to a particular event, beyond their significance as a holiday. For example, Pesach marks the beginning of the initial planting, and Sukkos represents the harvest. In addition to this significance, there are the holiday-specific mitzvos, such as refraining from eating Chometz and eating Matzah on Pesach, and the four minim on Sukkos and sitting in the Sukkah.

Chapter 22 finishes with another testament: I took you out of Egypt to be your G-d. To understand G-d's greatness, shouldn't it be better said that I am Hashem who created the Heavens and Earth, and all that is in the universe? Because, for some, this can be a point of contention, Chas Vishalom, people can argue against G-d creating the heavens and earth, and belittle our King of Kings. Whereas the posuk says, I took you out of Egypt to be your G-d, there is no argument. This, in turn, connects to the holidays, which serve as a testament to our servitude to Hashem. Those days represent a fixed day in the calendar, and commemorate additional events as practiced in the Mitzvah of the day.

Rashi explains in Chapter 23 posuk 1, that the Rabbanim were empowered to modify the calendar to ensure the holidays fall out in their specific time. These days, with their particular mitzvos is critical to the service. Even if someone wanted to celebrate the day outside of the allotted time, or for example, eat matzah on Sukkos and take the 4 minim on Pesach, this would be forbidden, and as the pesukim of 22:32, you cannot profane Hashem's name. You must guard them, i.e., study them as stated in 22:31 and consult Rashi.

The importance of the day is so critical, in that there is a commandment to count 49 days, i.e. 7 complete weeks from the beginning of Pesach, which brings us to the Holiday of Shavuos. On that day, we also received the Torah (and the Gemara in Pesachim 88 discusses on which day the Torah was actually given). This means there are processes and methods to get us to achieve "the giving of the Torah", i.e. in our time, achieving the revelation of Mashiach. Meaning, the counting happened according to the Torah, as part of the Mitzvah of the Omer, and the waving of the crop, etc. But that time, also was the path the Jews, who were brought out of Egypt as the posuk says, followed to achieve the ultimate gift of the Torah physically on Earth for all of us to serve Hashem.

Finally, we get to the auspicious and serious High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, then there's the holiday of Sukkos, which Hashem specifically tells us to celebrate with happiness, in case we decided that from the High Holidays, Sukkos should be solemn, quite the opposite.

All this is to remind us, as I mentioned earlier, that Hashem tells us He took us out of Egypt to be our God. These Mitzvos with their specific laws are there to empower us and guide us through our time on Earth, as we refine the space more and more until we welcome Mashiach. Similarly, a tangible understanding that Hashem is our God, based on testimony such as the redemption from Egypt, provides a tangible, real way for us to connect to Hashem. These festivals are spread throughout the calendar for that reason, so that we should have anchors to keep us connected to Hashem.

Good Shabbos