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*HAMETZ AND MATZAH ON THE FESTIVALS OF PESAH, SHAVUOT, AND IN THE BREAD OFFERINGS**

Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun

H*ametz* (leavened foodstuffs) and *matzah* (unleavened bread) appear many times in the Torah as a pair, often opposing one another. There are times when consuming *hametz* is forbidden and eating *matzah* is obligatory; there are other times when it is *hametz* that is required as a core component of the commandment. There are also cases in the middle, where both *hametz* and *matzah* are mixed, and must be used as a single unit. By examining the various places where *hametz* and *matzah* appear in the Torah we can begin to understand what these two items represent, how they relate to one another, and their place within a methodical system of thought.

Any explanation of *hametz* and *matzah* must take into account the contexts of their appearance in the text, along with the actual commandments, both positive and negative, related in these texts. The following is a list of the times *hametz* and *matzah* are mentioned in the Torah:

1. PASSOVER: *Hametz* is forbidden by force of a negative commandment, and there is a positive commandment to eat *matzah*.¹ The context for this prohibition is in relation to the Paschal Offering brought on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nisan,² and may also apply to the week that follows.³

2. THE FESTIVAL OF MATZOT: One who eats *hametz* during this festival is liable for *karet*, spiritual excision from the people of Israel. There is also a positive commandment to eat *matzah* during the festival. These commandments are jus-

* First appeared in Hebrew in *Megadim* 13, Adar 5751. Translation into English for *Milin Havivin* by Benjy Myers of Yeshivat Hakibutz Hadati.

¹ Exodus 12:18-20; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; *Pesachim* 120a.

² See above, and cf. Numbers 9:2-3.

³ See Deuteronomy 16:1-8, where the festival is called only by the name of *Pesah*. Also mentioned there, however, is the prohibition to eat yeast and the obligation to eat *matzah* on all seven days.

tified by the historical account of the Exodus story found alongside them: “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay . . .” (Exodus 12:39).

3. THE TWO LOAVES (*SHTEI HALEHEM*) ON THE FESTIVAL OF THE FIRST FRUIT (*SHAVUOT*): This offering, brought along with the first fruits of the harvest, is certainly connected to the barley measure (*omer*) brought in what the Torah calls “the spring month,” and is also indirectly connected to the Festival of Passover and the Festival of *Matzot*, for it is dependent on counting fifty days from “the day after the Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15). In addition, the Torah states, “You shall count seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put to the standing grain” (Deuteronomy 16:9). The Sages explain⁴ that this verse refers to the day after the “day of complete rest,” which is the first day of the Festival of *Matzot*. However, as opposed to the Festival of Passover and the Festival of *Matzot*, where *hametz* is forbidden, its use here is obligatory: “You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, as first fruits to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:17).

4. THE MEAL OFFERING (*KORBAN MINHAH*): All meal offerings that are offered on the altar are made of *matzah*, and may not contain *hametz*: “No meal offering that you offer to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for no leaven or honey may be turned into smoke as an offering by fire to the Lord. You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of choice products (i.e., the Offering of the First Fruit—YBN); but they shall not be offered up on the Altar for a pleasing odor” (Leviticus 2:11-12).

5. THE THANKSGIVING OFFERING (*KORBAN TODAH*): Here there is a selection of both *hametz* and *matzah*: “If he offers it for thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked. This offering, with cakes of leavened bread added, he shall offer along with his thanksgiving sacrifice of well being” (Leviticus 7:12-13). In all, this offering combines three types of *matzah* and one type of *hametz*.

6. THE OFFERING OF ORDINATION (*KORBAN HAMILUIM*): Similar to the Thanksgiving Offering, here there are also three types of *matzah*: “Also unleavened bread, unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, and unleavened wafers spread with oil—make these of choice wheat flour...” (Exodus 29:2; Leviticus 8:26). The Mishnah (*Menahot* 7:2) in fact stresses the parallel between these two offerings: “The *matzot* brought during the Offering of Ordination were like those of

⁴ *Menahot* 65a-b.

the Thanksgiving Offering: bread, cakes and wafers.” However, *hametz* is not a part of this offering.

7. THE RAM BROUGHT BY THE NAZIRITE: “On the day that his term as a Nazirite is completed” (Numbers 6:13) the Nazirite brought a Burnt Offering, a Sin Offering and a Peace Offering, and together with the Peace Offering he also brought: “a basket of unleavened cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; and the proper meal offerings and libations” (*ad loc* v. 15). That is, two types of *matzah* were brought, as the Mishnah (*Menahot* 7:2) explains: “The Nazirite Meal Offering consisted of two-thirds of the unleavened cakes of the Thanksgiving Offering; namely: cakes and wafers, but not soaked loaves.”

8. THE OFFERING OF DEDICATION (KORBAN HAMESHAHAH): This is the offering brought by priest upon his “dedication” to Temple service, and by the high priest before he enters his ministry. Like the Offering of Ordination, this offering also contains *matzah* but no *hametz* (Leviticus 6:12-16).

9. THE PROHIBITION OF BRINGING HAMETZ ONTO THE ALTAR: “. . . for no leaven or honey may be turned into smoke as an offering by fire to the Lord. You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of choice products (e.g. the Offering of the First Fruit); but they shall not be offered up on the Altar for a pleasing odor” (Leviticus 2:11-12). As a result, the “two loaves offering” brought on the Festival of the First Fruits (which are *hametz*, as described above), is brought up to the altar and waved before God, however, it does not ascend upon the actual Altar. The same is true of the first offering of honey, that is, the honey of the sweet fruits.

In order to understand the above sources, we must analyze the character and nature of both *hametz* and *matzah*, with an eye toward appreciating the relationship between these texts.

Bread and honey (of sweet fruits) represent the culmination of everything that farmers yearn for from the very beginning of the agricultural cycle. The leavened bread and the sweet, ripe fruit both are expressions of the much longed-for end of the farming process. To have them is a sign of health, success, blessing and plenitude for the hard-working farmer and his family. In contrast, *matzah* represents the stopping of a process mid-way, before the dough reaches its normal final state, bread. It represents a deficiency that still yearns for completion and wholeness.⁵

We can further expand upon this point and state that *matzah*—both as an actual article and as a symbol—is the bread of the poor: the bread of ones who do not have the power and ability to bring the physical process to its conclusion

⁵ Salt also represents the early stages of matter; it is something that the hand of man has not yet touched and is therefore wholly a gift from Heaven.

due to a lack of wealth or physical strength. In contrast, the yeast that causes the dough to rise until it is a wholesome cake is the symbol of the wealthy, able and fruitful individual.

“FOR YOU SHALL BURN NO LEAVEN NOR ANY HONEY IN ANY OFFERING”

The sacrifice that a person offers on the altar is, like prayer, man’s standing before God with a sensation of smallness and insignificance and with the feeling of: “Yours, O Lord, are greatness, might, splendor, triumph and majesty...who am I and who are my people, that we should have the means to make such a freewill offering? For everything is from You and from Your hand we have given to You” (I Chronicles 29:11-15). It is impossible to stand before the Altar with a sentiment of haughty riches that says “I have,” or “my own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me” (Deuteronomy 8:17). In fact, such an arrogant offering is considered one of the worst transgressions within Scripture.⁶

Leaven and honey, the symbols of wealth and contentment, may not be offered as part of a sacrifice. Nonetheless, “You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of choice products (the Offering of the First Fruit)” (Leviticus 2:12), and these offerings that are “of every first fruit of your land” (Deuteronomy 26:2) are offered together with the festive proclamation. Within this dialectic, the objective is to arrest the danger lest the feeling of contentment lead to deviating from the correct path and ultimate expulsion from the land: “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked” (*ad loc* 32:15). However, the first fruits are still not to be considered within the category of: “A prayer for the lowly man when he is faint and pours forth his plea before the Lord” (Psalms 102:1), and therefore one may not sacrifice them on the altar: “they shall not be offered up on the altar for a pleasing odor” (Leviticus 2:12).

In a symbolic manner, success and the feeling of ownership that expresses success can be compared to a ripe, sweet fruit and to leaven – they are very delicate and can be ruined and rapidly disintegrate. It is the rich person “who is most tender and fastidious,” and also the woman “who is most tender and daintily . . . that she would never venture to set a foot on the ground” (Deuteronomy

⁶ This is how, in my opinion, one needs to view the beginning of Cain’s downfall. Bringing an offering to God “from the fruit of the land” (Genesis 4:3) expresses the ultimate haughtiness of the landowner in that “he has.” This is as opposed to the wandering shepherd. Therefore God was disdainful towards the haughty offering and accepted the offering of the lowly. And having reached the stage of haughtiness as rich, valiant man, he also reached the stage of anger, and was unable to digest his rejection until he reached the stage of murder.

The sin of haughtiness is considered to be one of the worst sins in the eyes of the prophets, and it is the sin of all the idolatrous kingdoms (cf. Isaiah 2-10, 13-14, 22, 36-37; Micah 6-7; Nahum 3; Habbakuk 2; Zephaniah 2-3; Jeremiah 48-51; Ezekiel 26-28 *et al*).

28:54-56) who are fragile and spoiled. They can be contrasted to an individual who has felt suffering and has been forged through hardship. Similarly, *matzah*, the bread of affliction, like salt, lasts infinitely longer than leavened bread and than a sweet, ripe fruit.

It is not unintentional that *hametz*, the yeast that is in the dough, is identified throughout rabbinic literature with the evil inclination. One who possesses in his body, house and pocket all the good of the land, even if he is in possession of the Land of Israel and its Torah, may fall into the false feeling of power and independence and come to forget the Lord: "...for **He** is the one who gives you the power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18). This is precisely the drive of the evil inclination that entices a person, especially in the Land of Israel, to leave the correct path (Deuteronomy 8, and see the Song of Ha'azinu, Deuteronomy 32).

It is therefore critical for a successful farmer in the Land of Israel to remember his days of affliction and oppression in Egypt and God's subsequent miraculous deeds on his behalf in the wilderness. "Remember the long way that the Lord your God has made you travel in the wilderness these past forty years, that He might test you by hardships to learn what was in your hearts, whether you would keep His commandments or not. He subjected you to the hardship of hunger and then gave you manna to eat, which neither you nor your fathers had ever known, in order to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but that man may live by anything that the Lord decrees" (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). This is also the meaning of the pronouncement made when bringing the first fruit (Deuteronomy 26) that comes to remind the person of his days of affliction and of the wandering of the Children of Israel from the time of the Forefathers, specifically during the celebration of plenitude and the success of the harvest and the bringing of the first fruit.

THE THANKSGIVING OFFERING

The Thanksgiving Offering is brought by a person who was in trouble and was saved from his ordeal. Therefore, it is proper that at the time of his salvation there should be both leavened and unleavened bread: the *matzot* – to symbolize the tribulations that he had faced, the cry for help and the process of redemption from dire straits to freedom and relief; and the *hametz*—to symbolize the final deliverance and the tranquility that he now has.

There is an interesting parallel between this sacrifice and its components and Psalm 107, which describes four cases of deliverance from trouble to tranquility. Although from a legal, halakhic, perspective we learn from this Psalm regarding the "four who need to give thanks,"⁷ from a literal perspective the Psalm speaks

⁷ *Berakhot* 54b; *Shulhan Arukh Orach Hayyim* 219:1.

entirely of the ingathering of the exiles—“Let the redeemed of the Lord say, those who He redeemed from adversity, whom He gathered in from the lands, from east and west, from the north and from the sea” (vv. 2-3). The Psalm describes four stages on the route from trouble to thanksgiving: a) the trouble and calamity; b) the cry to God; c) the salvation; d) the thanksgiving.

The first salvation discussed in the Psalm (vv. 4-9) describes the escape from a desolate desert: “Some lost their way in the wilderness, in the wasteland”—this is the trouble; “In their adversity they cried out to the Lord”—this is the cry; “He showed them a direct way to reach a settled place”—the salvation; and finally, the thanksgiving: “They will thank the Lord for his kindness, for His wondrous deeds for mankind, for he satisfied a thirsty soul, and a hungry soul He filled with goodness.”

Similarly, the second passage related in the Psalm (vv. 10-16), which describes “those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron,” has four stages—trouble, cry, salvation, and thanksgiving. Likewise with the third passage (vv. 17-22), which describes “. . . fools who suffered for their sinful ways,” who stand by the mouth of the grave and who “reached the gates of death.” And likewise again with the fourth passage (vv. 23-32), of those who “go to sea in ships, who ply their trade in heavy waters,” whose boat is thrown about by the stormy waves. All of these passages follow the same pattern of trouble, cry, salvation, and thanksgiving.

It may be possible to explain the three *matzot* of the Thanksgiving Offering as comparable to the three stages that precede the thanks – the trouble, cry and salvation (that in itself is a difficult process that is characterized by stages and a lack of tranquility). In contradistinction to these pre-thanksgiving stages stands the leavened bread, that is parallel to the fourth stage, the praise sung to the Master of the Universe, the redeemer of mankind and its savior, after the person has reached “the rest and the inheritance” (Deuteronomy 12:9).

THE OFFERING OF ORDINATION AND THE OFFERING OF DEDICATION

These offerings are brought by the priests as they begin their service in the Tabernacle. They are the seals of entry into the service, the beginning of the priestly service that continues henceforth and forever with no borders or end-points. Therefore, it is appropriate to offer only *matzot*, as this is the beginning of a journey without end, without a sense of rest or arrival for which *hametz* would be appropriate.

The Mishnah (*Menahot* 7:2) compares the Offering of Ordination and the Thanksgiving Offering: “The Offering of Ordination consisted of unleavened cakes like the Thanksgiving Offering, namely, cakes, wafers and soaked cakes.” However, by close examination of the simple meaning of the verses themselves

(as opposed to the understanding rendered by the Mishnah), it may be possible to distinguish between the contents and the ideas behind “. . . unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, well soaked . . .” (Leviticus 7:12) that are mentioned regarding the Thanksgiving Offering, and the “. . . unleavened cakes with oil mixed in . . . and one cake of oil bread . . .” (Exodus 29:2, 23, Leviticus 26:8) mentioned regarding the Offering of Ordination. The fact that the Mishnah draws a parallel between them is not yet conclusive proof for all that we have claimed, though it is nonetheless proof that the Mishnah understood the essence of the offerings along the same lines that we have suggested, namely one of comparison and parallelism between all the types of *matzot* and *hametz* mentioned in the Torah.

THE OFFERING OF THE NAZIRITE

Examining the offering of the Nazirite in light of the principle set forth above, we will explain Naziritehood in its true light: the period of abstinence is not a goal in itself, but rather it is a period of preparation for a more correct and loftier lifestyle afterward. Its entire essence is focused on the future: “. . . and afterwards he shall drink wine” (Numbers 6:20)—that is, the Nazirite will return to a normal life, but on a higher level, with an improved self-protection system against the desire to lust after wine. It is then that he will be able to drink wine—in moral purity.

Therefore, “on the day his term as a Nazirite is completed” (Numbers 6:13), the Nazirite brings only *matzot* without bringing any *hametz*. The end of his abstinence is not the culmination or the ultimate peak (which would be represented by *hametz*), but rather it is the beginning of a corrected and improved life, and his laboring to live a proper life only begins at the end of his being a Nazirite. There is no reason for the Nazirite to celebrate, satisfied with leavened bread. Rather he should act similar to the priest on the day that he begins his service in the Sanctuary, and he offers two of the *matzot* that are part of the Offering of Ordination.

There is a Tannaitic dispute regarding the essence of the “sin”⁸ of the Nazirite. R’ Elazar haKafar is of the opinion that the sin stems from the fact that “he distressed himself by abstaining from wine.” R’ Yishmael stated that “. . . Scripture speaks of an impure Nazirite . . . for he came into contact with the dead (and is thus impure).” The simple meaning of the verses is clearly according to the opinion of R’ Yishmael, for v. 11 is to be viewed in the context of the subject matter: “If a person dies suddenly near him, defiling his consecrated hair . . .” (v. 9). The opinion of R’ Elazar, on the other hand, seems to be far removed from the simple meaning of the verse. However, in light of what we

⁸ Numbers 6:11: “. . . and he shall atone for him, for that which he sinned by the corpse.”

have stated previously, R' Elazar's opinion strikes at the root of the issue. The 'sin' of the Nazirite is that the abstinence that he enacted was not received and it did not bring him to the level and the goal that he was attempting to attain. Therefore the Torah states that ". . . the first days shall be void, for his abstinence became impure" (v. 12), and he must begin his period as a Nazirite from the beginning. Due to the fact that in and of itself being a Nazirite is of no value, he is therefore called a sinner for abstaining from wine. If there were any value to abstinence itself (as there is, for example, in Christianity) in that he abstains from wine for a certain period of time, why should we have any complaints against him? However, the Torah teaches that being a Nazirite is only to be viewed as an opening to a more complete and pure life, and therefore one should see that in becoming defiled to the dead, it is a sign from Heaven that his attempt to achieve this level has not been accepted. Abstinence from wine did not truly lead to the desired goal and the abstinence in itself is a sin. Therefore he is called a sinner especially when his attempt fails due to coming into contact with the dead.⁹

Although there is a similarity between the offering brought by the Nazirite who is at the beginning of his journey and the Offering of Ordination brought by the priest at the beginning of his journey, the Torah made a certain distinction between them. The offering brought by the priest contains three types of *matzot*, whereas the offering brought by the Nazirite contains only two types of *matzot*—the latter lacks the cake soaked in oil. The reason for this distinction may be found in that the priests change their standing essentially for the better, and they attain a unique status among the Jewish people. Therefore they are deserving of an oil soaked cake. The status of the Nazirite, however, does not change after his period as a Nazirite, but rather he returns to his normal life and normal status after his momentary spiritual elevation. This is further reflected in the fact that, while as a Nazirite he seems to be on a similar status to that of the High Priest, about whom it is stated: "He shall not come into contact with a dead body, and he shall not become impure for his father and mother. He shall not leave the Sanctuary, nor shall he defile the Sanctuary of his God, for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him, I am the Lord."¹⁰ Nonetheless, after his period as a Nazirite he returns to being an ordinary person.

THE *MATZAH* OF PASSOVER AND THE FESTIVAL OF *MATZOT*

In light of all we have discussed, we now aim to show that the *matzah* and

⁹ We can therefore bring a proof for our principle outlined above from the opinion of R' Elazar.

¹⁰ Leviticus 21:11-12. Compare to Numbers 6:6-7: ". . . for the crown of the Lord is upon his head."

hametz—on the Festival of Passover on the one hand and on the Festival of Shavuot on the other—also belong to the system of differentiation set out above. Furthermore, that which *hametz* and *matzah* represent—the bread of wealth and the bread of affliction—is not merely a homiletic idea, but rather is a methodical approach that is incorporated in the halakhic network that is *hametz* and *matzah* in the Torah.

There is a verse that categorically states this approach: “You shall not eat anything leavened with it, for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread—the bread of affliction—for you came out of Egypt in haste . . .” (Deuteronomy 16:3). *Matzah* is not called the bread of affliction merely because of the speed in which it was baked, but rather because the people who were leaving Egypt behaved in the manner of poor refugees who leave for a long journey into the desert. Since *matzah* is the bread of affliction, it surely follows that *hametz* is its opposite, the bread of wealth.

On the night of Passover the Children of Israel were still in Egypt. Until midnight they were still the slaves of Pharaoh. Therefore, in such a situation – both regarding the first Passover in Egypt, and all future observances of Passover—there is no place whatsoever for *hametz*, as the Torah demonstrates in prescribing that the Paschal lamb be eaten with *matzah* and *maror*. It is the sentiment that the Rabbis famously express in the Passover Hagaddah: “This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate when they were in Egypt.”

At midnight that night, God smote all the firstborn of the Egyptians and delivered His people from the house of bondage. In an instant, generations of physical and spiritual captivity reached the desired goal of salvation. In theory, it should have been possible at that moment to sit comfortably as free people, to set a festive table and to bless and praise the Redeemer, in tranquility and peace of mind, while eating the rich bread.

But suddenly, at that moment, the Israelites understood how far their salvation was from being a complete salvation: “The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country . . . and the people took their dough before it was leaven, their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks upon their shoulders” (Exodus 12:33-34). They now begin a long and arduous journey, full of hardships “in the great and terrible desert, with its fiery snakes and scorpions, a parched land with no water in it” (Deuteronomy 8:15). Before having the opportunity to sit comfortably, to rest and fill their lungs with the air of freedom, they are breathing heavily under the strains of a quick trek in an arid and tired land with no water.

The *hametz* was far from the Israelites, beyond the horizon, and when they left Egypt they only had the bread of affliction with them: “And they baked unleavened cakes of dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves” (Exodus 12:39).

Such was the rest of their maintenance and livelihood during their time as

refugees—not from their own means, but rather as mercy bread that came down from heaven, each one according to his or her own request: “They asked and He brought quails, and satisfied them with bread from heaven. He opened the rock and water gushed out, it flowed in the arid places like a river” (Psalms 105:40-41).

From all of this it emerges that redemption is an ongoing and difficult process, one that requires patience and a high pain threshold. Therefore it is clear that *hametz* must be forbidden with all its strictures specifically in the days following the Exodus from Egypt—so that we not be fooled into believing that full redemption is at hand. This is redemption, but it is only the beginning. The *matzah* of the seven days of the Festival of *Matzot* expresses the true redemption with all its trials and hardships, an ongoing redemption made up of several stages.

The differences between Passover before the Exodus from Egypt and the Festival of *Matzot* that marks the Exodus itself are now clear. On Passover, the main obligation is the positive commandment of offering of the Paschal Lamb and eating it together with *matzah* and *maror* as a reminder of the end of the slavery in Egypt that immediately preceded it. The prohibition of *hametz* is merely a negative commandment: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened, and the sacrifice of the Festival of Passover shall not be left lying until the morning” (Exodus 34:25). In contradistinction to this, the main obligation during the Festival of *Matzot* is the complete abstention from all things leaven, to the point of “it shall not be seen nor shall it be found,”¹¹ and the eating of *matzah* is not even a positive commandment, but is merely permissible. One who eats *hametz* during the Festival of *Matzot* is punishable by *karet* (spiritual excision from the people of Israel). Likewise, on the day of Passover, one who does not offer up the Paschal Lamb is also punishable by *karet*, a distinctive punishment for the failure to keep a positive commandment, akin to the punishment regarding the commandment of circumcision. The essence of the Festival of *Matzot* is therefore the severe warning against the misnomer that redemption can happen in an instant, as if the *hametz* that is to be found on the Festival of Shavuot is attainable immediately after Passover. The anticipation of immediate *hametz*, a natural anticipation for a newly redeemed nation, serves as the background for the strict prohibition against *hametz* both in Scripture and in the *halakhah* throughout the generations.

This winding process, beginning with the disgrace of slavery and continuing through the redemption and the yearning to reach the ‘rest and the inheritance’ that is the Land of Israel, is also expressed in the counting of the fifty days from the beginning of the harvest (Deuteronomy 16:9), the day that the wave offering (*omer*) is brought, until the Festival of the Harvest, that is, the day of the bringing of the first fruit, the day after the seventh week. Completing the count-

¹¹ *Pesahim* 5b, 48a.

ing of the *omer* and the bringing of the bread offering is also the completion and the goal of the Exodus from Egypt.

FROM THE DAY AFTER THE SABBATH

It is worthwhile to pause here and explain the unique phrase, “From the day after the Sabbath” (Leviticus 23:15), that is connected with the *Omer* offering, the counting of the *Omer* period, and the festival of Shavuot. In order to do so, we must focus our attention on the ‘Chapter of the Festivals,’ Leviticus 23.

The construction of the chapter demands attention. It is a ‘dual structure,’ parallel to the dual structure of the calendar and the dual meaning of the festivals themselves. The duality is clearly evident in the chapter’s openings and endings, and is especially evident with regard to the Festival of *Sukkot* – the Festival of Ingathering:

Verses 34-36

On the fifteenth day of
this seventh month

There shall be the Festival of **Booths**
(*Sukkot*) to the Lord for seven days.

The first day shall be a
holy convocation

You shall do no labor

For seven days you shall bring
offerings of fire to the Lord -

On the eighth day it shall be a
holy convocation for you

Verses 38-41

However, on the fifteenth day
of the seventh month

When you **gather** the produce
of the land

You shall celebrate the festival
of the Lord for seven days,

A complete rest (*shabbaton*) on the
first day

And also on the eighth day it shall
be a **complete rest** (*Shabbaton*)

And you shall take for yourselves
on the first day . . .

And you shall rejoice before the
Lord for seven days.

And you shall celebrate it as a fes-
tival before the Lord, for seven
days in the year . . .

Immediately following the conclusion of the list of holy convocations (v. 38) come the commandments for the Festival of Ingathering. The days that had just been referred to as a “holy convocation” are now called *Shabbaton*. At first glance this would seem a superfluous repetition, but in fact this duality emanates from the fact that the Hebrew calendar is itself a duality.

The Hebrew calendar is a dual calendar: lunar and solar. The lunar calendar is regulated corresponding to the Exodus from Egypt: “This month¹² shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (Exodus 12:2). On the other hand, the solar/agricultural calendar defines the times of spring, harvest and gathering in the Land of Israel. According to the solar calendar, the beginning and end of the year are identified with the season of plowing, planting and rain, and the end of the gathering of the produce (from the threshing floor and from the vineyards), respectively. This agricultural chronology is most pronounced in the following passage from Deuteronomy: “For the land that you are about to enter and inherit . . . it soaks up its water from the rain of heaven . . . the eyes of the Lord are with it from the beginning of the year till the end of the year. And it shall be if you surely hearken to My commandments . . . I will give the rain of your land at its appointed time, the early rain and the late rain, and you shall gather in your grain and wine and oil” (Deuteronomy 11:10-15).

The Torah requires us to keep these two calendars simultaneously. It does so in reference to *Pesah* and the spring season: “Observe the spring month”—the agricultural season of the barley harvest in the Land of Israel—“and you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God, for it was at night, in the Spring month”—of the Land of Israel—“that the Lord your God took you out of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 16:1).

The Torah’s insistence on merging these two calendars is driven by the deeper significance of their duality: The lunar, monthly calendar marks the times of holy convocation that are a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt, and thus form the historical/national calendar of the Jewish people, while the solar calendar defines the times of rest (*Shabbaton*), the agricultural/ritual festivals of the Land of Israel, when one rests from working the land (as agriculture is dependent mainly on the seasons of the solar year). The lunar relates to the national identity, while the solar relates to the nation’s identity in its homeland.

When we look at the entire structure of the “Chapter of Festivals” (Leviticus 23), we see this duality played out in full:

The Calendar of	The Calendar of the Times
Holy Convocations:	of Rest (<i>Shabbaton</i>):

The People of Israel at the	In the Land of Israel
Exodus from Egypt	

¹² *Hodesh* from the word *hadash* (= new), the renewing moon.

Opening: Shabbat (v.1-3)

“These are the times of the Lord,
holy convocations”

Passover

The Festival of *Matzot* (v.4-8)

“When you **come to the land**
that I am giving to you, and
you shall reap its harvest . . .”

The *omer*—from the day after the
Sabbath (v.9-14)

“You shall proclaim in the midst of
this day, it shall be for you a holy
convocation . . .” (v.21-22)

The counting of the *omer*—
seven *shabbatot* (**weeks**)

The two loaves of Show-Bread—
from the day after the seventh
shabbat (**week**) (v.15-20)

A Holy Convocation – the Day of Remembrance—*Shabbaton*

A Holy Convocation – the Day of Atonement – *Shabbat Shabbaton*

The Festival of Sukkot (v.33-38)

The Festival of Ingathering:

“On the first day it shall be a
complete rest (*shabbaton*), and
also on the eighth day it shall be a
complete rest (*shabbaton*)”

“These are the times of the Lord
that you shall call holy
convocations . . .” (v.37)

“You shall dwell in the booths for
seven days . . .

in order that all you generations
should know

that I made the Children of Israel
dwell in booths

**when I took them out of
the land of Egypt**

I am the Lord your God” (v.42-43)

“And you shall take for yourselves
on the first day the fruit of a
goodly tree, branches of palm
trees, boughs of leafy trees
and willows of the brook
and you shall rejoice before
the Lord for seven days” (v.39-41)

And Moses declared the times of the Lord to the Children of Israel (v.44)

According to this layout, it is clear that the Sages were correct—both according to the simple meaning of the text and according to its deeper exegesis—when they expounded the phrase “the day after the Sabbath” to mean the day after *Yom Tov*—the first day of the Festival of *Matzot*. For it is clear that the *omer* is linked in its essence to the first fruits and to the harvest. Therefore it is clear that “the day after the Sabbath” is related to the *shabbaton* that is mentioned later in the chapter, and there is no reason to connect it with “*Shabbat Bereishit*” and

understand the verse to refer to Sunday, as the Sadducees did. *Shabbat Bereishit* does indeed appear at the beginning of the chapter as a holy convocation, but only in a ‘technical’ sense, as the introduction for the sanctified times, and as expressing the sanctity of time from the moment of creation. From verse 4 onwards, the chapter is about the calendar of festivals, months and the seasons of the year, to which *Shabbat Bereishit* is unconnected.

From here it is also clear why it is not written “from the day after Passover” (as in Joshua 5:11). The passage describing the *omer* begins a new theme in the chapter, namely, the calendar of agricultural/ritual festivals of the Land of Israel. It is not a continuation of Passover and the Festival of *Matzot*, but rather is parallel to them. From a ‘technical’ perspective, due to the force of the commandment to institute leap years, the day of the bringing of the *omer* is obviously “from the day after Passover,” as is clearly proven by the verse in Joshua and by its parallel here (Leviticus 23:14). Its time is from the day after the Sabbath, that is, the first *shabbaton* of the month of spring, with the beginning of the barley harvest in the Land of Israel. It is then that the counting of weeks begins, until we reach the two wheat loaves of showbread, baked leaven, marking our arrival at our destination.

THE TWO LOAVES OF SHOWBREAD—*HAMETZ*

The Day of the Bringing of First Fruit in itself expresses the end of the process, the attaining of the final goal. This completion is expressed in two manners: the first leads from the Exodus from Egypt to standing at Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah. The second ends not at Sinai, but in permanent settlement in the Land of Israel. Both these themes meet at and are tied together through the Day of the Bringing of the First Fruit.

The entry into the Land of Israel and its permanent settlement are explicitly mentioned: “. . . When you come to the land that I am giving to you, and you shall reap its harvest, you shall bring a measure of the first harvest to the priest . . . and you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring the sheaf of elevation . . . until the day after the seventh Sabbath [week] you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord. From your settlements you shall bring two loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, as first fruits to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:9-17). The Festival of *Shavuot*, that is also the Festival of Reaping and the Festival of the First Fruit, is an agricultural festival in all its names, the beginning of the first fruit of the wheat harvest specifically in the sanctified Land of Israel.¹³ It is also

¹³ See Mishnah *Keilim* 1:4-9: “There are ten sanctities: the Land of Israel is sanctified more than any other land. What is its holiness? One brings from it the *omer*, the first fruits and the two loaves of bread, and they are not brought from any other land.”

the day of the bringing of the two leaven loaves of bread from the settlements on the fiftieth day, the peak of the beginning of the harvest process that has its initial stages in the *omer* offering.

The first theme, of the completion of the Exodus narrative in the Israelites' receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is also connected in an indirect way to the date of the Day of the Bringing of the First Fruit. Admittedly, the connection is not explicit as in the case of the agricultural festival connected with the land. However, it is nonetheless alluded to in Scripture and in the extensive parallels between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the Land. We will expand upon this theme due to its essential importance, one that is firmly ensconced in the Sages' identification of the Festival of *Shavuot* as the time of the giving of the Torah.

1. The date of the arrival of the Children of Israel at Mount Sinai in preparation for the giving of the Torah is explicitly mentioned: "In the third month after the Children of Israel were gone out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came into the wilderness of Sinai...and Israel camped before the mountain" (Exodus 19:1-2). That day, it would appear, is the first day of the third month (Sivan) in the first year of the Exodus from Egypt. Even one who is extreme in explaining the text according to its plain meaning and is of the opinion that the exact date in the third month is missing, must confess that the day of the giving of the Torah occurred close to the fiftieth day after the Exodus (which took place on the fourteenth of Nisan);¹⁴ however, the marking of the date for all generations was established only by counting fifty days.

In direct parallel to this one must examine the original plan for the arrival of the Children of Israel at Kadesh Barnea, the southern gateway into Canaan. The original travel plan seems to have aimed for the same date as that of the giving of the Torah, one year later—that is, the beginning of the third month (Sivan) in the second year: "In the second month of the second year, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud was lifted from the Tabernacle of Testimony, and the Children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai...and they journeyed for the first time at the bidding of the Lord through Moses" (Numbers 10:11-13). We add to this the verse that clearly concludes the journey: "Eleven days from Horeb through the Mountains of Seir until Kadesh Barnea" (Deuteronomy 1:2) and we arrive at the conclusion that the Children of Israel were supposed to have reached the gateway into Canaan—Kadesh Barnea—on the first day of the third month in the second year, exactly a year after the stood at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Both these journeys flow from Passover itself. It is obvious for both the Children of Israel and the Egyptians that the giving of the Torah is a continuation of the Exodus from Egypt, for both were told that the goal of the Israelites

¹⁴ This is the Festival of *Shavuot* and the Festival of the Bringing of the First Fruit.

is to worship God in the wilderness on their way out of Egypt: “this shall be as a sign for you that I indeed have sent you, when you take the People out of Egypt you shall worship God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). Therefore, this is not merely an excuse offered to Pharaoh, but rather the true goal from the beginning, as this verse and indeed the events that later took place at Mount Sinai prove. Similar to the Exodus from Egypt, the journey to Canaan in the second month of the second year also comes as a continuation of Passover in the wilderness and includes *Pesah Sheini*¹⁵ on the fourteenth day of the second month (Numbers 9:1-14).

2. The description of the giving of the land in the book of Joshua is similar in style to the account of the giving of the Torah in the Torah.¹⁶ Although Deuteronomy presents the covenant in the Plains of Moab as parallel to the covenant at Horeb (Deuteronomy 4-5; and in parallel *ad loc* 27-28), we find the description of the event most reminiscent of the event at Mount Sinai at the conquest of Jericho (Joshua chapters 5 and 6).

The first parallel to note is in the beginning of the process in Joshua. Immediately before their arrival at Jericho the people pass over the Jordan River in a scene highly reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea: the waters of the Jordan split apart. Indeed, it is explicit in the words of Psalm 114: “The sea saw and fled, the Jordan moved backwards.” The general heading for both these events is “When Israel left Egypt.”

Next comes the circumcision at the Hill of *Orlot* (Foreskins) in Gilgal. In this we find a renewed Exodus from Egypt, in that it served as the sign of total detachment from Egypt and all that Egypt stood for: “The Lord said to Joshua: “Today I have banished from you the disgrace of Egypt”” (Joshua 5:9), “. . . for all the people that left [Egypt] were circumcised, and all the people that were born in the wilderness on their way out of Egypt were not circumcised” (*ad loc* v. 5).¹⁷

Finally, the festival of Passover that took place in the plains of Jericho on the fourteenth day of the first month—*Pesah Gilgal*—did not merely precede

¹⁵ The day set aside to bring the Paschal Lamb for those who were unable to do so at the proper time, cf. Numbers 9:6-14.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the original plan of arrival at Kadesh Barnea was delayed about one month (Numbers 11:19-20) due to the complaints and misbehaviors of the Israelites. They therefore arrived at Kadesh Barnea not during the wheat harvest, but rather during the “days of the first ripe vines” (Numbers 13:20)—the heat of the summer. It was at this moment—the seventeenth of Tammuz, rather than the sixth of Sivan—at the peak of their tiredness and weakness, that they reached their lowest point.

¹⁷ It is in the parallel drawn between the Exodus from Egypt and the entry into the Land of Israel that lies the explanation of “the disgrace of Egypt” that many commentators, expounders and researchers have been troubled with, and it is here that the circumcision that preceded the Exodus from Egypt is truly alluded to, although it was only explained in a circuitous manner in the Book of Exodus itself.

chronologically the capture of Jericho upon entry into the Land. Rather, this observance of Passover was essential to the moment. Just as the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed in preparation for the Exodus from Egypt, so a Paschal Lamb was sacrificed in preparation for receiving the Land.

Seeing as the inheritance of the Land of Israel did not come to fruition during the time of the generation of those who left Egypt, the fresh attempt a generation later under the leadership of Joshua begins with the splitting of the River Jordan, circumcision and *Pesah Gilgal*. It is like a renewed Exodus from Egypt.

As we stated above, the Exodus from Egypt serves as the starting point for a two-part process. On the one hand, the aim was to receive the Torah; on the other, it was to inherit the Land of Israel. If the account of Passover in the book of Exodus culminates in the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the account of *Pesach Gilgal* in Joshua culminates in the giving of the Land. The parallelism between the two culminations is clearly attested to in the description of the giving of the Torah in the Exodus, and the capture of the Land of Israel in Joshua:

1. Both Mount Horeb and Jericho are described as ‘holy ground’ upon which an angel of the Lord appears to the prophet, the messenger of God. This occurred to Moses at the burning bush: “An angel of the Lord appeared to him in the eye of a flame that came out from the bush . . . and he said: ‘remove your shoes from your feet, for the place that you are standing on is holy ground’” (Exodus 3:1-5). In Joshua we find: “It was while Joshua was in Jericho that he lifted up his eyes and saw a man standing before him, with his sword drawn in his hand . . . and he said: ‘. . . I am a captain of the host of the Lord, I am now come . . . take off your shoe from your foot, for the place upon which you are standing is holy’” (Joshua 5:13-15).

2. The narrative in the build-up to the giving of the Torah states: “. . . there were thunders and lightning strikes and a heavy cloud was upon the mountain, and the sound of the *shofar* was exceedingly loud, and all the people who were in the camp trembled” (Exodus 19:16). The idea behind the sounding of the *shofar* in this instance was to proclaim the revelation of God, His unique appearance in order to let His word be known and to give His people Israel His Torah.

For the duration of the time that the cloud was upon the mountain, no one was allowed to climb it.¹⁸ All Israel were commanded to “take heed, lest you go up the mountain or touch its border; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be killed. No hand shall touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or shot through, be it beast or man, it shall not live. When the horn sounds long, they shall come up to the mountain” (Exodus 19:12-13). The horn announces the revelation of God and His departure, and from that moment the people may go up the mountain. Not only is the verse speaking of the physical ascent of the mountain,

¹⁸ Except for Moses who was the only one permitted to come to the “mist where the Lord was” (Exodus 20:18).

but also of a spiritual climb, that is, actualizing all that was hidden at the marvel that was the giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments, that contain within them the core for the whole of the Torah.

A short examination of the Book of Joshua will show that a similar and indeed parallel event is described, although in this instance the subject is the conquest and giving of the Land to the Children of Israel. Everything that takes place in the wars of conquest after Jericho should be viewed as the actualization of the potential of the first, defining event, in Jericho, with the appearance there of the Divine Presence.

In parallel with the *shofar* at the beginning of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and the sounding of the horn at the end, so it was in Jericho: “Let all your troops march around the city and complete one circuit of the city, and so you shall do for six days . . . On the seventh day march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing on the horns. And when a long blast is sounded on the horn, as soon as you hear the sound of that horn, all the people shall give a mighty shout and the city wall will collapse, and all the people shall advance, every man straight ahead” (Joshua 6:3-5). These verses are parallel in content and style to the giving of the Torah, and this includes also the parallel of the six days and the seventh day: “The presence of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai and the cloud hid it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud” (Exodus 24:16). It is interesting to note that according to opinions frequently stated in the Midrash, the two events—the giving of the Torah and the conquest of Jericho – took place on *Shabbat* itself.

The main explanation for the parallelism is that at Jericho, like at Mount Sinai, the appearance and descent of the Divine Presence is portrayed as an event whose essence is God’s judgment—upon Israel in one instance and upon the Land of Canaan and its inhabitants in the other instance, for “the sin of the Amorite is complete” (cf. Genesis 15:16) “. . . the Ark of the Lord, sovereign of all the earth” (Joshua 3:13), that circles the city and the blast of “the priests bearing the seven ram’s horns in front of the Ark of the Lord” (*ad loc* 6:13) are the cry that “For the Lord Most High is awesome, great king over all the earth . . . God is seated on His holy throne” (Psalms 47:3,10) and that “. . . a ruling of the God of Jacob” (*ad loc* 81:5). Therefore, at that time it is “holy ground!”

It may also be possible to explain the description of the city in this light: “Jericho was shut up tight because of the Israelites, no one could leave or enter” (Joshua 6:1)—not only because of the technical difficulty of the closed gates, but also because the place of the appearance of the Divine Presence was removed from the domain of man, just as it was at the time of the giving of the Torah: “set bounds around the mountain and sanctify it” (Exodus 19:23) “. . . lest they break through to gaze at the Lord and many of them perish” (*ad loc* v. 21) and therefore no man could approach the city. The blast of the ram’s horn, similar to that at Mount Sinai, is the signal that the appearance of the Divine Presence has ended, the judgment of the nations has been completed

and the verdict has been decreed—the Holy One, blessed be He, has taken from them the Land of Canaan and given it to the ones who found favor in His eyes. From now on, the Israelites are permitted, and indeed obligated, to go up to the place that the Lord has said, for there is a God among them, and therefore they will not be beaten back by their enemies.

All that happened afterward to the thirty-one Canaanite kings is the actualization of the decree given at Jericho, and therefore the Midrash viewed all the kings as having been concentrated in Jericho when, by the hand of God, it fell—For the Lord Most High is awesome, great king over all the earth. He subjects peoples to us, and nations at our feet. He chose heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved, *Sela*” (Psalms 47:3-5).

Let us return to our main discussion. We find that the Day of the Bringing of the First Fruit, fifty days after Passover, expresses the essence of both the beginning of the harvest in Israel, and the Exodus from Egypt—both from the perspective of the giving of the Torah and from the perspective of the giving of the Land of Israel. Furthermore, both perspectives are already connected in Scripture, and not merely in the works of the Sages.

Therefore, the uniqueness of the day is in the two, specifically leaven loaves, in which no *matzah* is to be found. This is a sign that the Exodus from Egypt has been completed. It is the time to set the festive table and celebrate the completion of the Exodus and of the counting of the harvest in the place of rest and inheritance, and to bring the leaven bread that is waved before the Lord, the first fruits, as a unique public offering, from the land west of the Jordan.

INDIVIDUAL BRINGING OF FIRST FRUITS

The public bringing of the first fruit is obviously connected to the individual bringing of first fruits that one may begin to bring from this day forth, and to the scriptural passage that is recited at the same time: “It shall be when you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of your land. . . . You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him: ‘I acknowledge this day before the Lord your God that I have entered the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us’” (Deuteronomy 26:1-3). The core of this festive statement is the declaration that the process has also come to end for the individual: “You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: ‘My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt. . . . The Egyptians dealt harshly with us. . . . We cried to the Lord, God of our fathers. . . . The Lord freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. . . . He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the first fruits of the land which you, O Lord, have given me.’ You shall leave it before

the Lord your God and bow before the Lord your God. You shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and your household, you and the Levite and the stranger that is within your midst” (*ad loc* 5-11).

This is neither the prayer nor the supplication of a lowly man standing in the doorway, nor is there any distress in the declaration. Rather it is a festive declaration, a ‘retelling’ from the position of richness, ability and the power of ‘one who has’. The person exclaims that all is good, though at the same time he must remember and state his origins, the place from where the long and difficult process began, from where it is that he has fields and fruits that his forefathers did not have. He declares that all that he has comes from the Master of the Universe who took his forefathers out of Egypt, and it is He who gave him fruits in his field, the land of his inheritance, the inheritance of our forefathers.

This is an essential expansion of the blessings recited before and after meals. There we bless God “who brings forth bread from the land” and “for the land and for the food,” and here we expand the theme and say for the land that the Lord gave us after taking us out of Egypt as a nation, and for the field and fruits that God gave the individual who now brings them and who now recites this passage. In this there is a clearly expressed connection between the belief in the Lord, God of Israel, from the national/historical perspective of the Exodus from Egypt, and in the belief in God from the religious/cosmic perspective as the One who feeds and nourishes the world. These characteristics are entrenched in the basic duality of the Hebrew calendar and of the festivals. The dual contents of the bringing of the first fruits and the Exodus from Egypt are therefore explained in the passage recited upon the bringing of the first fruits.

In this, the difference between the bringing of the first fruits and prayer are emboldened: “A prayer of the lowly man when he is faint and pours forth his plea before the Lord” (Psalms 102:1), “the prayer of the destitute” (*ad loc* v. 18) that is said as a cry for help “on a day of trouble” (*ad loc* v. 3) out of distress and a sense of helplessness. As opposed to this, the sweet, ripe, leaven, first fruit that is never offered as a sacrifice upon the altar, brings with it the passage of ‘the first fruits’ that is recited as a ‘retelling’ out of a position of wealth and happiness: “You shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and your household” (Deuteronomy 26:11).