

## Reveling in Confusion

The Jewish Calendar is fascinating, if these kinds of things interest you. It is governed by specific rules applied consistently. The last time there was an ambiguity and an ensuing controversy was over 1000 years ago. On the other hand there are always new and fascinating patterns which emerge. Take, for instance, Shavuos occurring on Friday and Shabbos as it does this year. The last time this happened was eleven years ago, but a few years before that we can find a series of five occurrences in eight years. This relationship of Shavuos and Shabbos is quite interesting so let us try to unpack it a little.

As mentioned in yesterday's speech, the original Giving of the Torah was on Shabbos, according to the Gemara in Tractate Shabbos. In fact, the Gemara there relates that there is a dispute as to the date of the Giving of the Torah: The Sages say it was the sixth of Sivan. R. Yosi says that it was the seventh of Sivan. The Gemara explains that "Everyone agrees that the Torah was given on Shabbos."

It turns out that everything is subject to being disputed. Even a definitive statement like "Everyone agrees that ..." may turn out to be, "There is an opinion that says everyone agrees that ... but there is also another opinion which disagrees with that." And in fact there is a less known opinion that the Torah was given on Friday. (That is a possible answer to the question we raised yesterday of how could they cook either meat or dairy on Shavuos if it was Shabbos. That question would disappear if Shavuos was on Friday.) But let us stick with the prevailing opinion that everyone agrees that the Torah was given on Shabbos.

Today, we are celebrating Shavuos on Shabbos just as it was when the Giving of the Torah occurred. Well, at least we, outside of Eretz Yisrael, who observe two days of Yom Tov (See the speech for the Second Day of Pesach for more on that), are celebrating Shavuos on Shabbos. The first of Shavuos (and the only day in Eretz Yisrael) can never occur on Shabbos according to the calendar rules. That is pretty interesting, that Shavuos can never occur on the same day of the week as the original occurrence.

Here is another oddity. The departure from Egypt on the Fifteenth of Nissan occurred on a Thursday, just as Pesach occurred for us this year on a Thursday. (This is also a fact that "everyone agrees on" according to that same Gemara in Tractate Shabbos.)



Counting the days from then to today, Shabbos (being the Second Day of Shavuos), you would come up with 51 days, not fifty as the Torah commands.

Here is something else: King David died on Shavuos according to the Tamud Yerushalmi. The Talmud Bavli says that he died on Shabbos. If they are not in dispute with each other, we explain that by simply noting that until about 1500 years ago the calendar was not fixed and determined exclusively by rules as is the case today. In the times of King David the beginning of each month was determined by a visual sighting of the new moon whereupon the Beis Din declared that the new month had begun. That would allow any date to occur on any day of the week.

Another related interesting tidbit about the second day of Shavuos. We are accustomed to the idea of having two days for each Yom Tov outside of Eretz Yisroel. The reason that outside of Eretz Yisroel the practice was to keep two days is that since the calendar depends upon a declaration from the Beis Din in Yerushalayim in order to turn the calendar page to the next month, people who were far away could not get the news of when the first day of Nissan was declared in time to know the exact day of Pesach, for example. To be sure they kept Pesach on both possible dates.

This would typically not happen on Shavuos. The day on which Shavuos occurs is not determined by the date on the calendar. It is set by counting 50 days from the second day of Pesach which is 16 days from Rosh Chodesh Nissan. In the course of those 66 days there is plenty of time for word to get out to Jews just about anywhere in the world as to when the countdown to Shavuos started. Therefore, in those days, Shavuos was only kept for one day even outside of Eretz Yisroel.

Once it was no longer possible to maintain a functioning Beis Din with the authority to declare the months, the switch was made to a fixed calendar. At that point the question arose as to whether there is any point in continuing the two day observance of Yom Tov outside of Eretz Yisroel. Now that everyone is working off the same calendar why keep extra days? The Gemara concludes that those communities which kept two days before should continue keeping two days. As a result of this, where previously Rosh Hashanah, Sukkos and Pesach were observed for an extra day and Shavuos was kept for one day, now Shavuos, too, became a two day holiday outside of Eretz Yisroel. (See the speech for the Second Day of Pesach to refresh your memory of the Alter Rebbe's explanation for the need for a two day Yom Tov outside Eretz Yisroel.)



So, here we are, observing Shavuos on Shabbos, just like the first Shavuos, even though the calendar rules don't allow for Shavuos to fall on Shabbos at all, which is OK because it is the second day of Shavuos, which shouldn't really have a second day at all. If that seems confusing, then you are following right along with me.

But, all the things in Torah or in life which we think we understand, in truth are just as difficult to truly comprehend. All of Torah is G-d's Wisdom which way beyond the ability of our finite intellects to grasp. Similarly, the events and circumstances of the world are so because of Divine Providence which is way beyond our ability to comprehend. So, if there is something which we think we do understand, we are probably getting it merely on a superficial level, or worse, we are fooling ourselves into thinking that we understand when in truth we don't. And, the more significant it is, the less likely we are to understand it.

Many communities have the custom of reading Megilas Rus on Shavuos. One reason is because it is the story of a woman who converted to Judaism, and Shavuos is the story of the Jewish people become Jews (as we explained yesterday). Another reason is because it gives the lineage of King David. I suggest that you read the Artscroll introduction to Megilas Rus. There, they explain at great length that the story of Rus is only one link in a chain of unlikely (and seemingly unsavory) events in the circuitous path that Hashem chose in order to bring Moshiach into the world. Moshiach's lineage includes the dubious *yichus* of Lot and his daughters, Yehudah and Tamar, Rus the Moabitess, Dovid and Batsheva. One would have thought that Moshiach would be the offspring of the finest pedigree possible. But, one would have thought wrong.

And, that is one of the messages of Shavuos in general and particularly on a confusing Shavuos day such as today:

The Torah was given on Shavuos with a definite end game of bringing G-d's Holiness into the world. The game is won when we cross the finish line into the Messianic era. Like any game, we are on a team and we all have our positions on the field and have a mission of offense and/or defense. Every player is unique and is needed to play that particular position. The quarterback can't play shortstop and the pitcher can't act as the goalie, if the game is going to end successfully. The players get the signals from the coaches and act on them. It is not the players' responsibility to figure out the strategy but to execute it. Don't get distracted by how we got here, or how we will get from here to there. Somehow, even as it may seem to us that we are carrying the ball in the wrong



direction, the Coach knows what He is doing, and we are steadily moving forward to the finish line.

This is something for us to have in mind as some of us say Yizkor today. We are where we are in the game, not because we have been in the game from the beginning. We were born late into the game and much closer to winning the game than any generation before us. The few baby steps we take that get us over the line are able to do that because we started off with such a head start, thanks to our parents and those who came before us. We need to be thankful to them, and remember that we are moving forward the game that they left in middle, relying on us to bring the win closer for all of us and all of them. We thank them for that and for all they did for us, and we pledge to do for them by pledging to Tzedakah and committing to moving onward.

This is an especially useful idea in the present time. It used to be simple. The right thing to do was to go to Shul to daven, to go to Shiurim, to celebrate with others at Simchas, and support each other by being there at the sad events in life. Then several months ago, we learned a new set of rules: Stay at home, the Shuls must be closed, classes can only be on Zoom, don't seek a Minyan, don't think of visiting in case of Shiva r"l.

We managed to reorder our way of thinking and acting to follow that. Everyone across the spectrum was united in this decision and once again things were simple.

We are now used to that, only face the next complication. Some Rabbis say that it is time to reopen the Shuls; others say that it is still an imperative to avoid going to shul or joining a Minyan. What are we supposed to think or do now? Confusing, huh?

Not at all! We don't have to figure out the big picture; for that there are the coaches and assistant coaches and managers and umpires and referees. We have to each focus on covering our corner of the turf, on playing our role for the team. Each of us has his/her signals being sent to us and each of us will make the right play at the right time. (If any one of us is not sure we are reading our signal correctly, feel free to consult a fellow, a mentor or a Rabbi.) And what is right for one may not be right for the next person. If we truly want to make the right move, Hashem will guide us to it. Just keep going forward.

And, as we move forward through these confusing times we are bringing ever closer the coming of Moshiach NOW!

