

FROM THE EDITOR

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Without a doubt, the giving of the Torah, our portable constitution which we have carried with us wherever we have travelled over the last 3329 years since receiving it on the mountain named Sinai, stands out as one of the most significant events, if not the most significant event, in the history of the Jewish people – as well as the world. It was an awesome scene complete with thunder, lightning, shofar blasts, smoke, and fire. The earth quaked and Hashem spoke directly to all of us.

And yet, the Torah itself is stunningly silent about the exact date on which this incredible, earth shaking event took place. In fact, the date is even the subject of an argument in the gemara¹, with two possibilities offered: the 6th or 7th of Sivan. Shavuot, the chag on which we commemorate and celebrate the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, is also the only one of the chagim for which the Torah does not give a specific date on which to celebrate it each year.

We are told to celebrate Pesach on the 15th of Nisan and Sukkot on the 15th of Tishrei, but Shavuot we are told to celebrate after counting a period of seven weeks from the date on which the Omer offering was brought, the 16th of Nisan, aka the second day of Pesach.

Although nowadays the date of Shavuot is fixed firmly in our calendar as the 6th of Sivan, back when each new lunar Hebrew month was instead determined by witnesses coming and testifying before the Sanhedrin that they had seen the appearance of the new moon, Shavuot could have fallen out on either the 5th, 6th, or 7th of Sivan, depending on whether the months of Nisan and Iyar, which both fell out during that seven-week period of counting, were each 29 or 30 days in length (ie. whether the months which followed them had a one or two day beginning to the month, aka Rosh Chodesh).

All of this could help to explain why we don't refer to Shavuot in our davening as "yom matan Torahseinu", "the day of the giving of our Torah", which would seem to be a more accurate description of this one day festival (two days outside of Eretz Yisrael), and instead refer to it as "z'man matan Torahseinu", "the time of the giving of our Torah", which clearly refers to a period of time larger than just a single day.

And to all of this we can add: we don't even know precisely where the Torah was given. No landmarks. No monuments. No GPS coordinates.

Our Sages derive many lessons from this unusual state of affairs.

Although there are particular mitzvos that are dependent on specific times and others that are dependent on specific places, for example being present in the land of Israel, the Torah itself is eternal, dependent on neither time nor place, applying at all times and in all places. Moreover, by not specifying the precise date on which it was given, we learn that the giving of the Torah actually never stopped and is, likewise, without end, as though it was given anew each day to us. And we see this expressed in the blessing that we make each morning regarding the study of Torah. We end the blessing in the present tense with, "Blessed are You, Hashem, [who] gives the Torah", not in the past tense "...[who] gave the Torah". Hashem gives the Torah to each and every one of us on a daily basis.

And therein lies our greatest challenge: making the Torah feel like something new and fresh each day, as if this gift has just been given to us – and treating it that way, making the time each day to examine it, study it, and plumb its depths like the incomparable treasure and lofty wisdom that it is.

From everyone here at *Jewish Life*, we wish you a good yom tov and chag sameach.

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

¹See Shabbos 86b

Based upon ideas from Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, Rabbi Baruch Epstein, the Maggid Mesharim, and the Sochatchover Rebbe in Itturei Torah.

ON THE COVER: A PICTURE OF FIGS, ONE OF THE FRUITS - ALONG WITH DATES, GRAPES, OLIVES, AND POMEGRANATES - FROM WHICH THE FIRST RIPPENED FRUITS GROWN IN ISRAEL, AKA BIKKURIM, WERE SELECTED AND BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM TO BE GIVEN TO THE KOHANIM WHEN THE BEIS HAMIKDASH (TEMPLE) STOOD. THE FIRST TIME THESE FRUITS COULD BE BROUGHT WAS ON SHAVUOT, HENCE THE CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THAT CHAG AND ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THE CHAG IS REFERRED TO AS CHAG HABIKKURIM.



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