

Educational Resource Center

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INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE PERIOD BETWEEN PESACH AND SHAVUOT

Leviticus 23:15-16 we read:

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of wave offering - the day after the Sabbath - you must count off seven weeks. They must be complete. You must count until the day after the seventh week - fifty days: then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Lord.

The Rabbis agreed that the 'Sabbath' here refers to the second day of Pesach, not to the intermediate Sabbath of Pesach.

And in Deuteronomy 6:9-10:

You shall count off seven weeks; start to count the seven weeks when the sickle is first put into the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Weeks for the Lord your God, offering your freewill contribution according as the Lord your God has blessed you.

From these quotes, we see that the Torah does not designate a specific Hebrew date for the holiday of Shavuot.

Shavuot is seen as the spiritual and agricultural culmination of a cycle which begins on Pesach. On Pesach, the Hebrew slaves experienced their first taste of freedom. Generations of slavery, however, made them incapable of accepting the responsibilities that freedom entails. After seven

weeks of traveling in the desert they received the precious gift of the Torah. The tradition tells us that on Shavuot there was an encounter between God and people of Israel, specifically with Moshe, during which the Torah was given, which concretizes the spiritual connection between Pesach and Shavuot.

Agriculturally, these seven weeks marked the period during which the Israelites were to begin harvesting their wheat crop, at the end of which period they were to bring Bikkurim, the first fruits of the harvest, to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Clearly this would happen only after Israelites entered Eretz Yisrael and settled there. These Bikkurim served as an offering to God to show gratitude for the success of the harvest.

Thus Shavuot's importance is founded in its historical, agricultural and spiritual significance. In the Bible, it is known as Hag HaBikkurim - The Festival of the First Fruits, which symbolizes our connection to the physical land. Later, during the Rabbinic period, it also became known as Zeman Matan Toratenu - The Festival of the Giving of the Torah.

When we teach this period, between Pesach and Shavuot today we find these weeks rich with holidays and special days that we commemorate, special values we want to impart to our students and special events in Jewish history of which we want our students to be aware.

Yom Hashoa, Holocaust Memorial Day, comes just a few days after Pesach. It is soon followed by Yom HaZikaron, the memorial day for those who have died in defense of Israel. The very next day we have Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day. Lag Ba'Omer, based on the tradition that a plague affecting Rabbi Akiva's students ceased on that day, is a day of respite from the overall mournful period of the Omer. Finally, Yom Yerushalayim celebrates the reunification of the old and new cities of Jerusalem in June, 1967.

Common values related to these days are the love of the land of Israel, love of learning Torah, dedication to freedom, respect for courage and heroism, and formulation of a strong Jewish identity.

The last weeks of school are always a very frenetic time, and because the students are becoming increasingly restless, we hope you will take advantage of some of the materials available at www.bjeny.org for teaching these important and meaningful occasions.