

In our liturgy, thoughts, and rabbinic writings, the connections between Matan Torah, and the holiday of Shavuot are ubiquitous. From a certain perspective, this connection is very natural. On the one hand, we find a similar dual significance for all three of the pilgrimage festivals. The agricultural significance of the holidays is clear from the Torah: Sukkot as the holiday of the grain and fruit harvest, and start of the rainy season, Pesach as the barley harvest and conclusion of the rainy season, and Shavuot as the wheat harvest, and time of the Bikkurim, the first fruits. In addition to the agricultural significance, the holidays of Sukkot and Pesach are given religious meaning. Pesach celebrates freedom from slavery, and Sukkot celebrates God's presence in the wilderness. It seems only natural that Shavuot as well should have a dual significance, and it makes sense for this significance to be the cardinal event of the Torah, which takes place in between the freedom from slavery and wandering in the desert, namely Matan Torah.

Several pieces of evidence support this connection. The most powerful one is the time of year: Shavuot falls out on the 6th of Sivan, the time of year when the Torah was given. Further, the counting of the Omer is often viewed as a preparation period, anticipating the reenactment of the Sinaitic Revelation on Shavuot. Rabbi David Forman connects the two even further, by drawing the parallel from Shavuot to Yovel, which is also followed by a preparatory set of seven groups of seven, and by drawing many parallels between Yovel and Matan Torah. Further, in Divrei Hayamim II 15:-15, we find the Bnei Yisrael celebrating a rededication to the Torah around Shavuot time. Rabbi Menachem Leibtah notes that Shavuot and Matan Torah are the only two times a Korban Shelamim is offered on behalf of the community. The Zohar, 3:98b, further connects the Shte Halachem offering brought on Shavuot with the two Luchot Habris. It thus makes sense why we so closely associate Shavuot with the giving of the Torah.

However, upon a closer examination, this connection seems to encounter very severe problems. The most basic problem is simple. Despite a large number of pesukim discussing the dual nature of Sukkot and Pesach, and many pesukim discussing the agricultural significance of Shavuot, *not once anywhere in the written Torah is Matan Torah ever connected to Shavuot.* This is a startling fact, worthy in its own right of throwing the above association into question.

A second question relates to the dating of Shavuot. Shavuot, unlike all biblical holidays, is not given a date in the Torah. Instead, we are given an offset: Shavuot occurs fifty days after the bringing of the Korban HaOmer. This fact is remarkable, and is reason in its own right to reject the connection to Matan Torah, since one would expect, if the two were connected, for Shavuot to be given the date connecting it to Matan Torah, and not simply as an offset from Pesach. However, there are even worse problems. While in the modern period, Shavuot always falls out on the 6th of Sivan, that is only because of the fixed lunar calendar, and indeed based on the analysis in Rosh Hashana 6b that prior to the fixing of the calendar, any month could contain thirty days, it seems that Shavuot could have fallen out as early as the fifth of Sivan, assuming the Korban HaOmer was brought on the second day of Pesach, and both Nissan And Iyyar were full thirty day months. Conversely, there is a debate in Shabbat 86b about whether the Torah was given on the sixth or seventh day of Sivan. So, in summary, according to one opinion, Shavuot is simply not the same day as Matan Torah, and even according to the other opinion,

the two are only guaranteed to overlap as the result of an oddity of our modern calendar, and this was not the case before the end of the Second Temple Period.

And finally lets add a third wrench into the mix: the question of when exactly do we begin counting the Omer. The Torah is famously unclear on this issue, referring to the start date as "Mimacharas Hashabbos." Indeed, this was the subject of a massive debate between the Perushim and Baytusim, as recorded in Menachot 65a. The Perushim, our intellectual ancestors, argued, as we practice today, that Shabbos refers to Pesach. The Baytusim however, declared that Shabbos means Shabbos, and that all the Torah is telling us is that the Omer count must begin on a Sunday. Thus, while of course we follow the opinion of the Perushim, it is clear that for a large segment of Jewry during the Second Temple Period, Shavuot did not have a fixed time at all, and certainty was not associated with Matan Torah!

One more point, a bit more minor than the rest, is that many, including I believe the Ramban, although I do not have the source in my memory, posit that Shavuot is the Atzeret of Pesach, much like how Shemini Atzeret is to Sukkot. According to this, it would be strange for Shavuot to have an independent meaning from Pesach, beyond its agricultural meaning.

So how can we resolve this issue? Why, if Shavuot is the holiday of Matan Torah, do we find all these powerful questions?

Several attempt to answer this by giving reasons for why the Torah would choose to omit this information. Rav Hirsch posits that this was done to give extra validity to the Oral Torah, and to predicate the celebration of the Written Torah on an oral tradition. Rav Yitzchak Arama and others suggest that, since the Torah should always be fresh in our eyes (midrash quoted by Rashi in Shemos 19:1), the Torah did not want to explicitly fix a date for the commemoration of its giving. Maharal and Chasam Sofer explain that the Torah is a yoke of obligation, and thus while the Torah did not legislate its celebration, we are still justified in celebrating it ourselves. Similarly, Sforno, R. Moshe Alshich (to Leviticus 23:6) and R. Zadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin (Pri Tzaddik, Pesah no. 5), write that since Matan Torah was initially a failure due to the Golden Calf, the Torah did not explicate its celebration.

While all these answers are interesting, they mostly address the problem of the Torah's lack of connection, and do not deal with the date problem. To address the date problem, I believe I have seen some discussion (I don't remember where I saw this) of this being evidence for a Torah approval of the Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galil, since Matan Torah was either day 6 or 7 of Sivan, and Shavuot in exile is day six and seven. However, this is a stretch, and still does not address the problem of Shavuot potentially falling out on the fifth day of sivan.

In light of the above, I want to discuss an alternative approach, one that may be very surprising to some, and perhaps controversial, but that answers all the questions raised above. The idea is simple but shocking: the Torah did not connect Shavuot to Matan Torah explicitly, because they were not connected.

While this is certainly not the mainstream approach, this idea is found in three very mainstream Rishonim: The Rivash, the Ritva, and the Kuzari, also known as Rabbi Yehuda Halevi.

The Rivash (Teshuvah 96) and Ritva (to Shabbos 86b) imply that the connection to Matan Torah only began once the calendar was fixed, with the obvious further implication being that this is a Rabbinic connection. Kuzari, in 3:41, makes an even more out there assertion: he claims that possibly the Baytusim were correct in their assertion that Memacharas Hashabbos meant Sunday, but they were incorrect in their understanding. The Torah, writes the Kuzari, was giving an example of the simplest way to count weeks, and not the day it must begin. To counter this erroneous understanding, the Rabbis, or perhaps the Prophets, fixed the Korban HaOmer to be on the second day of Pesach. While this opinion is shocking for many reasons, including arguing on the simple read of the Mishna, and on Talmud Bavli, it also implies, like Rivash and Ritva, that the connection to Matan Torah came later. While far less clear, Shadal to Vayikra 23:11 writes that he believes Ibn Ezra, in his cryptic comment to the same verse, is of the same opinion and Kuzari.

This leaves us with three giant interpreters, Rivash, Ritva, and Kuzari, and perhaps a fourth, Ibn Ezra, all of the opinion that the connection between Shavuot and Matan Torah is not biblical but rabbinic in origin. We can also add Shulchan Aruch Harav to the mix, who seems to cite this idea favorably. This raises a few questions:

1. Why did the Rabbis do this?
2. What then can we make of all the parallels and connections between Shavuot and Matan Torah noted in the beginning of this essay?
3. What implications, if any, does this have for how we today should celebrate Shavuot?

A few speculations have been offered for the first question. Rabbi Menachem Kasher suggests that the Rabbis deliberately did this, emphasizing Matan Torah, to undermine the opinion of the heretical Baytusim. Matt Lubin, in an article for The Lehrhaus, suggested this was done to give the holiday new meaning in exile.

I however, want to suggest a third approach, that answers all three questions above. Chazal, or the Prophets, made this connection precisely because there are so many hints to it in the Torah. Perhaps the Torah does not make the connection clear, but I want to argue that, based on all the connections and secondary evidence, *God wanted us to make this connection ourselves*. There is no greater celebration of the Oral Torah than this. The Oral Torah is about man's role in the divine process, and by Hashem having us declare Shavuot as the day of Matan Torah's celebration, we fully embrace our beautiful role as active members of divine revelation.

The implications for Shavuot, and for our own celebrations, is to make sure we make the Torah our own, make sure we each have a chelek in the Torah. God gave the Torah to us, and we each have a role to play in that process. May we all have a chag sameach.