



Is Israel's Independence Day Hinted in Holidays of Parashat Emor?

Windows for Illuminating Our Daily Day

Coming out of *Parashat Kedoshim*, which means 'holy,' we keep rising in holiness through the Hebrew holidays described in *Parashat Emor*. Thinking back about my secular Jewish upbringing, I have no recollection of Shavuot or Tisha be'Av whatsoever, and only a faint memory of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, I vividly remember the holidays of Pesach, Sukkot, Simchat Torah, Chanukah and Purim. They were childhood highlights, if not of spirituality then at the very least of family togetherness and fun. As a child, I experienced these holidays with my senses. The matzo and my aunt's gefilte fish gave me a taste of the exodus. The scent of the Sukkah of the Jewish school I attended still lingers. In vain I have searched for that scent in my Israeli Sukkah. Simchat Torah was our once a year synagogue holiday, when we children would walk in circles with open bags, and the men would fill them with all kinds of sweets and candies! The sparkling light of Chanukah is etched within my eyes, whereas my ears still recall the sound of Purim laughter. These childhood memories are like pilot lights waiting to be reignited, with greater intensity, in a mature Torah setting, where the vitality and intention of each aspect is appreciated. Now we can celebrate the holidays in a much deeper way, as portals of Divine connections – windows of illumination – opening into our daily day. How fortunate we are to be celebrating holy days as a holy nation, in our Holy Land!

Working as a Team with Hashem in Establishing the Hebrew Holidays

I find it interesting that Yom Ha'atzma'ut always falls between *Parashat Kedoshim* – where we learn that community i.e. Jewish national unity is prerequisite for Holiness – and *Parashat Emor* – in which are repeated all the holidays. As opposed to Shabbat, Hashem desires that we be partners with Him in establishing the holidays. In this week's *parasha* He commands us twice that we, the Jewish people must designate the holidays:

ספר ויקרא פרק כג

(ב) דַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי הַשָּׁם אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי:
 (ד) אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי הַשָּׁם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם:

“Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: Hashem’s appointed [holy days] that you shall designate as holy occasions. These are My appointed [holy] days: These are Hashem’s appointed [holy] days, holy occasions, which you shall designate in their appointed time” (*Vayikra* 23:2,4).

Rashi explains, that in verse 2, Scripture is referring to our proclamation of a leap year, while in verse 4, Scripture refers to the Jewish people’s sanctifying the new month. Both “designations” impact the particular dates of each holiday. In establishing the holidays, Hashem empowers us to work with Him in a team. Another paradigm for this teamwork is the institution of the holidays Chanukah and Purim, which are not mentioned in the Torah. Esther had to really insist to get the rabbis to agree to include the holiday of Purim in the Jewish calendar (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 7a). We experience a similar rabbinic opposition to establishing the holiday celebrating the return of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel after nearly 2000 years of exile.

Future Holidays Hinted in Torah Texts

As I skimmed through the list of holidays mentioned in *Parashat Emor*, looking for hints for the Rabbinic holidays, it struck me that perhaps the repetition of “These are Hashem’s appointed holy occasions, which you shall designate in their appointed time” could be an allusion to Purim, since it was designated at a later time. This future holiday, would then be referred to in the sequence of the holidays right before Pesach. Likewise, there is a clear allusion to Chanukah immediately following the entire order of the holidays:

ספר ויקרא פרק כג פסוק מד
וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִעֲדֵי הָשֵׁם אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

ספר ויקרא פרק כד

(א) וַיְדַבֵּר הָשֵׁם אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) צוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֵיךָ שֶׁמֶן זַיִת זָךְ כְּתִית לְמָאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד: (ג) מְחוּץ לְפָרְכֵת הָעֵדוּת בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יַעֲרֹךְ אֹתוֹ אַהֲרֹן מֵעֶרֶב עַד בֹּקֶר לִפְנֵי הָשֵׁם תָּמִיד חֻקֵּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

“Moshe told the children of Israel [these laws] of Hashem’s appointed [holy] days. 1 And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 2 Command the children of Israel, that they shall take for you pure olive oil, crushed for lighting, to kindle the lamps continually. 3 Outside the dividing curtain of the testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aharon shall set it up before Hashem from evening to morning continually. [This shall be] an eternal statute for your generations” (*Vayikra* 23:44-24:1-3).

The command to Aharon to ignite the menorah by, an eternal statute for generations, right after the description of the holidays ending with Sukkot, undoubtedly hints to the holiday of Chanukah – enacted by the Chasmonaim – who were Kohanim and direct descendants of Aharon. The “eternal statute” of lighting the menorah, is moreover, ensured even when our Temple lies in ruin through the Chanukah candelabra, lit in the small Temple of every Jewish home. Now what about the holiday of Yom Ha’atzma’ut? Could it also be hinted in *Parashat Emor*? When I searched the Torah verses following Pesach, it was, thank G-d, not in vain. Right after the description of the holiday of Pesach (*Vayikra* 23:5-8) I noticed the prediction of our entering the land of Israel:

“...on the fifteenth day of that month is the Festival of Matzot to Hashem; you shall eat matzot for a seven-day period. On the first day, there shall be a holy occasion for you; you shall not perform any labor. Then you shall bring a fire offering to Hashem for a seven-day period. On the seventh day, there shall be a holy occasion; you shall not perform any labor. Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When you come to the Land which I am giving you...” (*Vayikra* 23:6-10).

Yom Ha’Atzma’ut in the Hebrew Calendar

There is another amazing support that strongly predicts Yom Ha’atzma’ut being part of the Jewish calendar, way before the light of that day had been actualized in the year 1948. We have a tradition of how to know in advance the weekdays on which the various Jewish holidays will fall. This can be found in many *sidurim* (prayer books). Each of the Jewish holidays parallel one of the seven days of Pesach by means of a numerological system called the *Atbash*. Through a simple substitution cipher for the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph* (the first letter) is substituted for *tav* (the last letter), *bet* (the second) for *shin* (one before the last), *gimel* (the third letter) for *resh* (the third to the last letter) and so on, reversing the alphabet. Hence the name, *אֶתְבַּשׁ/Atbash* – ‘*aleph-tav-bet-shin*.’

1. **The first day of Pesach** (*alef*) corresponds to the last letter *taf*, which is the first letter of the fast day *Tisha b'Av*. Thus, whatever weekday the first day of Pesach falls is always the same weekday as *Tisha b'Av*.
2. **The second day of Pesach** (*bet*) corresponds according to *atbash* to the *shin* – the first letter of the holiday of Shavuot. Thus, whatever weekday the second day of Pesach falls is always the same weekday as Shavuot.
3. **The third day of Pesach** (*gimel*) corresponds to the *resh*, which is the first letter of the holiday of Rosh Hashana. Thus, whatever weekday the third day of Pesach falls is the same weekday as Rosh Hashana.
4. **The fourth day of Pesach** (*dalet*) corresponds to the *kuf* – the first letter of the word *Ke'riat HaTorah* – the reading of the Torah, which we complete on *Simchat Torah*. Thus, whatever weekday is the fourth day of Pesach falls, is the same weekday as *Simchat Torah*.
5. **The fifth day of Pesach** (*heh*) corresponds according to *atbash* to the *tzadik* – the first letter of *tzom*, which means 'fast,' corresponding to Yom Kippur – also called *Yom Tzom Kippur*. Thus, whatever weekday the fifth day of Pesach falls is the same weekday as Yom Kippur.
6. **The sixth day of Pesach** (*vav*) corresponds to the *peh* – the first letter of the holiday of Purim. Thus, whatever weekday the sixth day of Pesach falls is the same weekday as Purim.
7. **The seventh day of Pesach** (*zayin*) corresponds according to *atbash* to the *ayin*, which was traditionally explained as corresponding to the holiday of Tub Av. The reason is that *ayin* is the first letter of *עץ/etzim* – 'trees,' or 'wood.' They used to complete cutting the wood for the Temple on *Tu b'Av*. Thus, whatever weekday the seventh day of Pesach falls is always the same weekday as *Tu B'Av*. However, in recent times a more direct holiday connection has been discovered. The Hebrew letter *ayin* is the first letter of *אצמא'ut/Atzma'ut* in Yom Ha'atzma'ut. Amazingly, this has been verified in the calendar. Whatever weekday the seventh day of Pesach falls is always identical with the weekday of the Fifth of Iyar (Yom Ha'atzma'ut).

The First Yom Ha'atzma'ut Celebration by the Students of Vilna Gaon

There are several indications that the fifth of Iyar – the day that part of the Land of Israel was returned to the Jewish nation after nearly 2000 years of exile – has the status of a true Jewish holiday. When students of the Vilna Gaon originally immigrated to Israel in the year 1809, they laid the cornerstone for the *Beit Midrash Eliyahu* (the first name of the Vilna Gaon) in Jerusalem on the 5th of Iyar. The students of the Vilna Gaon believed that at that very moment opened the first window of the iron curtain to reconnect with the merit of the covenant of our patriarchs (Rav Hillel of Shklov, *Perek Chadash*). That very day was the 20th of the Omer – *Yesod of Tiferet*. The first Jewish settlement in Jerusalem made a foundation (*Yesod*) and reconnected it to *Tiferet* of Jerusalem – a connection that had been broken ever since the destruction of our glorious Temple. History is cyclic. It is not by chance that the first day of establishing the Jewish community in Israel by the very first Zionists became the very day that the State of Israel would be established less than a hundred and forty years afterward. The day itself has a special light being *Yesod of Tiferet* – the foundation of balanced beauty. May we merit to celebrate Israel's Independence Day with united Rabbinic consensus under the leadership of Mashiach!