

Shavu'ot: The Day of the Giving of the Torah? Source Sheet

Rabbi Hillel Hayyim Lavery-Yisraeli
Conservative Yeshiva, Jerusalem

I. Rosh HaShanah 6b

א. ראש השנה דף ו ע"ב

The Jewish calendar is a lunar one, adjusted so that it doesn't stray too much from the solar year. A lunar month is defined as the time it takes for the moon to make one revolution around the earth: 29 days and slightly more than twelve hours. Jewish months, therefore, have either 29 or 30 days. Back in Talmudic times, the day of Rosh Hodesh was decided by the Sanhedrin, after receiving testimony from witnesses who viewed the New Moon.

Nowadays, we follow a calculated calendar, whereby the months alternate in length – the first is 30 days long, the second 29, the third 30, and so on. Heshvan and Kislev sometimes have 29, sometimes 30, based on fixed formulae.

Even when Rosh Hodesh was set each month by the Sanhedrin, according to most opinions, the rabbis had the power to adjust the months slightly, when necessary.

Shavu'ot occurs fifty days after the second day of Pesah. Since, in Talmudic times, the months of Nisan and Iyyar could vary in length from year to year, the date of Shavu'ot also differed from year to year. Nowadays, Shavu'ot always occurs on the 6th of Sivan. We do, however, have other holy days which sometimes change dates: Shushan Purim (in Jerusalem) gets adjusted if it falls on Shabbat; fast days other than Yom Kippur get moved if they coincide with Shabbat, and the modern Israeli holidays – Yom HaSho'ah, Yom HaZikaron, Yom Ha'Atzma'ut – get shifted to prevent Shabbat desecration as well.

<p>...As was taught in the name of Rav Shemayah: Sometimes, Shavu'ot [is on] the fifth [of Sivan], sometimes on the sixth, sometimes on the seventh. How is this? If both [months between Pesah and Shavu'ot, Nisan and Iyyar] are full [i.e. 30 days] – the fifth. If both are lacking [i.e. 29 days] – the seventh. One long and one short – the sixth. And who is the Tanna who disagrees with Rav Shemayah? It is Aherim ("Others" – a nickname for R. Meir). As was taught in a baraita: Aherim say, The difference between one Shavu'ot to the next Shavu'ot, or between one Rosh Hashanah to the next Rosh Hashanah, is always four weekdays.¹ And in a leap-year, five.</p>	<p>...כדתני רב שמעיה: עצרת, פעמים חמישה, פעמים ששה, פעמים שבעה. הא כיצד? שניהן מלאין – חמשה. שניהן חסרין – שבעה. אחד מלא ואחד חסר – ששה. ומאן תנא דפליג עליה דרב שמעיה? אחרים היא. דתניא, אחרים אומרים: אין בין עצרת לעצרת, אין בין ראש השנה לראש השנה, אלא ארבעה ימים בלבד. ואם היתה שנה מעוברת – חמשה.</p>
--	--

Questions for further study:

1. Why would the date of Shavu'ot change, depending on the length of the months?
2. What is the date of Shavu'ot according to Aherim?

II. Shabbat 86b-87b

ב. שבת דף פו ע"ב – פז ע"ב

While the story of the Revelation mentions the month in which the Children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai, it doesn't mention the date. And, while we celebrate the Biblical holiday of Shavu'ot as the date of the Revelation, the Torah does not indicate that this is one of the themes of this holiday. While our tradition, now, matches the Revelation with Shavu'ot, this precise coupling was not completely clear to our Talmudic sages.

<p>Our rabbis taught [in a baraita]: On the sixth of the month [Sivan], the ten commandments were given to Israel. R. Yossi says – on the seventh. Rava said: All agree that on Rosh Hodesh they came to the Sinai desert. For it says here: "On <u>this</u> day they came to the Sinai desert" (Ex. 19:1). And it says there: "<u>This</u> month shall be for you a beginning of months" (Ex. 12:2). Just as <i>there</i> it was Rosh Hodesh, so too <i>here</i> it was Rosh Hodesh. And all agree that on Shabbat the Torah was given to Israel. For it says here: "<u>Remember</u> the Shabbat day to sanctify it" (Ex. 20:8). And it says there: "And Moses said to the nation, '<u>Remember this day</u>'" (Ex. 13:3). Just as <i>there</i> [he spoke] on the very day being spoken of, so too</p>	<p>תנו רבנן: בששי בחדש ניתנו עשרת הדברות לישראל. רבי יוסי אומר – בשבעה בו. אמר רבא: דכולי עלמא, בראש חודש אתו למדבר סיני. כתיב הכא: "ביום הזה באו מדבר סיני" (שמות יט, 1), וכתוב התם: "החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים" (שמות יב, 2) – מה להלן ראש חודש, אף כאן ראש חודש. ודכולי עלמא, בשבת ניתנה תורה לישראל. כתיב הכא: "<u>זכור</u> את יום השבת לקדשו" (שמות כ, 8), וכתוב התם: "ויאמר משה אל העם, <u>זכור</u> את היום הזה" (שמות יג, 3)</p>
---	--

¹ Aherim's view is that even when the months are set according to moon sightings, the 30-29-30 sequence should be preserved whenever possible. Thus, according to him, Shavu'ot always falls on the 6th of Sivan.

here [He spoke] on the very day being spoken of. They only disagree about [the day of] the beginning of the month.

R. Yossi holds: On Sunday the month began, and on Sunday he [Moses] didn't say anything to them, because of the weariness of the road; on Monday he said "You shall be for me a kingdom of Priests" (Ex. 19:6); on Tuesday he gave them the commandment of separation; on Wednesday they separated [for three days].

And **the Sages** hold: On Monday the month began, and on Monday he didn't say anything to them, because of the weariness of the road; on Tuesday he said to them "You shall be for me a kingdom of Priests"; on Wednesday he gave them the commandment of separation; on Thursday they separated [for two days].²

A challenge: "You shall sanctify yourselves today and tomorrow" (Ex. 19:10) [indicating separation for two days alone]! This calls **R. Yossi's** opinion into question!

R. Yossi would answer you: "Moses decided himself to add another day." As was taught in a baraita, "Moses decided himself to do three things, and God approved: He decided himself to add another day ..."

On what did he base this? "[And you shall sanctify yourselves] today and tomorrow" – 'today' should be equal to 'tomorrow'. Just as 'tomorrow' will have its [previous] night included, so too 'today' should include its [previous] night [i.e. be a full 24-hour period]. But today's night has already passed! So we must have two days excluding today.

And whence do we know that God approved? For God's presence did not manifest until Shabbat morning [which was the fourth day].³

...

Come and hear: In the Nisan in which Israel left Egypt, on the fourteenth they slaughtered their Pesah animals, on the fifteenth they left, and that evening⁴ the firstborns were slain.

(Do you really think it was 'That evening'? Rather, 'the previous evening'.) And that day was Thursday.

If the fifteenth of Nisan was Thursday, Rosh Hodesh Iyyar was Saturday,⁵ and Rosh Hodesh Sivan was Sunday.⁶ This calls **the Sages'** opinion⁷ into question!

The **Sages** would answer, Iyyar of that year was lengthened [to 30 days].

Come and hear, ... In the Nisan in which Israel left Egypt, on the fourteenth they slaughtered their Pesah animals, on the fifteenth they left, and that evening the firstborns were slain.

(Do you really think it was 'That evening'? Rather, say, 'the previous evening'.) And that day was Thursday. Nisan was long,⁸ so Iyyar began on Saturday; Iyyar was short so Sivan began on Sunday.

This calls **the Sages'** opinion into question! According to whom is this source? According to **R. Yossi** alone.

– מה להלן בעצומו של יום, אף כאן בעצומו של יום.

כי פליגי בקביעה דירחא.

רבי יוסי סבר: בחד בשבא איקבע ירחא, ובחד בשבא לא אמר להו ולא מידי משום חולשא דאורחא; בתרי בשבא אמר להו "ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים" (שמות יט, 6);

בתלתא אמר להו מצות הגבלה; בארבעה עבוד פרישה.

ורבנן סברי: בתרי בשבא איקבע ירחא, בתרי בשבא לא אמר להו ולא מידי משום חולשא דאורחא; בתלתא אמר להו "ואתם תהיו לי"; בארבעה אמר להו מצות הגבלה; בחמישי עבוד פרישה.

מיתבי, "וקדשתם היום ומחר" (שמות יט, 10) – קשיא לר' יוסי!

אמר לך ר' יוסי, יום אחד הוסיף משה מדעתו. דתניא, "שלושה דברים עשה משה מדעתו והסכים הקב"ה עמו: הוסיף יום אחד מדעתו ..."

הוסיף יום אחד מדעתו – מאי דריש? "היום ומחר" – היום כמחר. מה למחר – לילו עמו, אף היום – לילו עמו,

ולילה דהאידינא נפקא ליה, שמע מינה – תרי יומי לבר מהאידינא.

ומנלן דהסכים הקב"ה על ידו? דלא שריא שכינה עד צפרא דשבתא.

...

תא שמע, ניסן שבו יצאו ישראל ממצרים, בארבעה עשר שחטו פסחיהם, ובחמשה עשר יצאו, ולערב לקו בכורות.

(לערב" סלקא דעתך? אלא "מבערב" לקו בכורות.) ואותו היום חמישי בשבת היה.

מדחמיסר בניסן חמשה בשבת, ריש ירחא דאייר שבתא, וריש ירחא דסיון חד בשבת. קשיא לרבנן!

אמרי לך רבנן, אייר דההיא שתא עבורי עברוה.

תא שמע ... ניסן שבו יצאו ישראל ממצרים, בארבעה עשר שחטו פסחיהם, בחמשה עשר יצאו, ולערב לקו בכורות.

(לערב" סלקא דעתך? אלא אימא "מבערב" לקו בכורות.) ואותו היום חמישי בשבת היה. השלים ניסן ואירע אייר להיות בשבת, חסר אייר ואירע סיון להיות באחד בשבת.

קשיא לרבנן!

הא מני? ר' יוסי היא.

2 The gemara, here, is discussing Ex. 19. The events there are as follows: (1) Arrival at Sinai Desert, (2) Moses ascends the mountain, (3) God speaks to Moses, saying "...if you listen to my commandments... you will be my special people... And you will be a kingdom of priests..." (4) Moses descends and reports this to Israel. (5) Israel commits to do what God says. (6) Moses returns to God and reports this. (7) God commands Moses to warn the people to separate from their spouses for two or three days. (8) Moses descends and tells the people. (9) The people separate from their spouses. (9) Three or four days later, the Revelation happens.

According to the gemara on the previous page (86a), Moses always ascended the mountain, or descended from it, first thing in the morning. According to R. Yossi, Rosh Hodesh was Sunday, and they separated for three full days before the Revelation (which was on Saturday). According to the Sages, Rosh Hodesh was Monday and they only separated for two days before the Revelation.

3 If God had disapproved, God wouldn't have waited to appear.

4 לערב indicates the evening following the day being spoken of, while מבערב would indicate the previous evening.

5 Nisan normally has 30 days, so 1 Iyyar is normally two weekdays after 1 Nisan. (1 Nisan and 15 Nisan fall on the same weekday.)

6 Iyyar is normally 29 days, so 1 Sivan is normally one weekday after 1 Iyyar.

7 Above, the Sages said that 1 Sivan was on Monday, not Sunday.

8 Unlike the previously mentioned baraita, this baraita explicitly mentions the lengths of Nisan and Iyyar that year.

Come and hear, it was taught in **Seder Olam** [a baraita]: In the Nisan in which Israel left Egypt, on the fourteenth they slaughtered their Pesah; on the fifteenth they left, and that day was Friday.
 Since Rosh Hodesh Nisan was Friday, Rosh Hodesh Iyyar was Sunday, and that of Sivan was Monday. This calls **R. Yossi's** opinion into question!
R. Yossi would answer you: According to whom is this source? According to **the Sages** alone.

תא שמע, דתניא בסדר עולם: ניסן שבו יצאו ישראל ממצרים, בארבעה עשר שחטו פסחיהן, בחמשה עשר יצאו, ואותו היום ערב שבת היה. ומדריש ירחא דניסן ערב שבת, ריש ירחא דאייר חד בשבא, וסיון בתרי בשבא. קשיא לר' יוסי! אמר לך ר' יוסי: הא מני? רבנן היא.

We are left with conflicting b'raitot, and we can say that one is according to the opinion of R. Yossi (that the Revelation was on 7 Sivan), and the others according to the opinion of the Sages (6 Sivan).

Questions for further study:

1. How is it possible that the Torah doesn't record the date on which the Torah was given, and that the Sages disagreed about this?
2. On what day of the Omer was the Torah actually given, according to the Sages, and according to R. Yossi?
3. What does this mean for the festival of Shavu'ot?

III. Megillah 31a

ג. מגילה דף לא ע"א

The following baraita instructs us what portions of the Bible to read on the different holidays. It contains a mahloket regarding the reading for Shavu'ot.

Our rabbis taught [in a baraita] ... On Shavu'ot [we read] "Seven weeks" (Deut 16), and the Haftarah is, "Havakuk" (Havakuk 3); **Aherim** ("Others") say, "In the third month (Ex. 19), and the Haftarah is, The Chariot (Ez. 1).
 And nowadays, when there are two days, we do like both of them, but reversed [i.e. we read **Aherim's** readings on the first day, and the first Tanna's on the second].

ת"ר... בעצרת [קורין] (דברים טז) "שבעה שבועות", ומפטירין (חבקוק ג) בחבקוק; **אחרים** אומרים (שמות יט) "בחדש השלישי", ומפטירין (יחזקאל א) במרכבה. והאידנא דאיכא תרי יומי עבדינן כתרוייהו, ואיפכא.

Questions for further study:

1. The Babylonian Talmud, speaks of the common practice, in their day, in the Diaspora. It was a compromise – a way to observe both opinions. In principle, though, whose opinion do you think was considered correct?
2. How does this affect the meaning/observance of the holiday of Shavu'ot?
3. Do you think the opinions mentioned above, in Source I, affect the opinions mentioned in this source?