

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash  
(office@etzion.org.il)

**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT EMOR**

**The Parasha of the Festivals:  
Its Structure and Significance**

**By Rav Elchanan Samet**

**A. THE TWO HALVES OF THE PARASHA OF THE FESTIVALS**

The order of the parasha of the festivals follows the order of the festivals themselves in the annual calendar. The parasha consists of seven masoretic sections, as follows:

1. (1-3) General introduction and the mitzva of Shabbat
2. (4-8) Pesach and the Festival of Matzot
3. (9-14) The mincha offering and its sacrifice
4. (15-22) The offering of the two loaves and its sacrifice, and the declaration of a holy convocation on the day when it is brought
5. (23-25) A day of remembrance and sounding of the shofar on the first day of the seventh month
6. (26-32) Yom Kippur
7. (33-44) Festival of Sukkot and the Eighth Day; conclusion of the parasha

In previous shiurim, we have seen that many parashot discussing a single subject are divided into two equal and clearly distinguishable halves, which sometimes parallel one another. Is it possible to analyze a halakhic parasha such as ours, which is simply a list of dates, in terms of literary structure?

The answer is a resounding yes. Our parasha comprises 44 verses, and is clearly divided into two equal halves of 22 verses each (sections 1-4 and sections 5-7). This division is reflected both in style and in content, as follows:

1. Each half concludes with the declaration, "I am the Lord your God" (verse 22 and verse 43, which precedes the concluding verse: "And Moshe told the holy days of God to Bnei Yisrael"). This declaration does not appear elsewhere in the parasha of the festivals.
2. The festivals addressed in the first half (except for Shabbat) are those that fall in the spring and the harvest season. The festivals treated in the second half all fall in the seventh month, Tishrei.  
The connection between the festivals included in the first half also finds expression in their musaf (additional) sacrifice, as we learn from Bemidbar 28-29. On each of the days of the Festival of Matzot, and on Shavuot, the same musaf sacrifice is offered: TWO BULLS, a ram and seven lambs (Bemidbar 28:19, 27). The festivals of the second half – other than Sukkot, which is an exception to all the other festivals in terms of its musaf sacrifices – likewise share the same musaf: on Rosh Ha-shana, Yom Kippur and Shemini Atzeret the prescribed offering is ONE BULL, one ram and seven lambs (Bemidbar 29:2, 8, 36).
3. Each half mentions four "holy convocations" when labor may not be performed; on three of them it is "labor of work" that is forbidden – i.e., labor required for preparing food for the festival is permissible – and on the fourth, called a "Shabbat shabbaton," ALL labor is

forbidden – even those activities required for preparing food.

Let us now examine the connection between the festivals mentioned in each of the two halves, leaving out Shabbat, which is an exception here and which we shall treat later. The festivals of the first half are divided into two types:

- i. Festival of Matzot – lasting seven days, with the first and the last day being "holy convocations."
- ii. Two single days – the day of waving the Omer, and the day of bringing the two loaves – that are clearly related to each other.

The festivals of the second half are divided in a similar way:

- i. Sukkot, followed by Shemini Atzeret – lasting a total of eight days, with the first and the last being "holy convocations."
- ii. Two other festivals that are single days: the "shabbaton for remembrance with the sounding of the shofar" (Rosh Ha-shana) and Yom Kippur. These two are also related to one another, but their connection is less obvious.

The connection between the day of waving the Omer and the day of bringing the two loaves finds expression, inter alia, in the fact that a "closed parasha" separates them, as well as in the fact that the parasha of the two loaves has no introduction. The hidden connection between Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur is reflected in a similar way: they are separated by a "closed parasha," and the parasha of Yom Kippur has only a partial introduction.

**B. THREE DIFFICULTIES REGARDING THE PARASHA'S STRUCTURE**

Even upon a cursory reading of the parasha of the festivals, three difficulties relating to its structure become immediately apparent.

1. The parasha of the festivals opens with verses 1-2:

"And God spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them: The festivals of God, which you shall call as holy convocations – these are My festivals...."

Then, in verse 3, we find the mitzva of Shabbat, and this concludes the first masoretic section. The next section opens anew, again introducing the entire parasha of the festivals:

(4) "These are the festivals of God, holy convocations, which you shall call at their appointed times."

This second opening is followed (verses 5-8) with the mitzvot of the Pesach and the Festival of Matzot.

What is the meaning of this double introduction – first at the beginning of the parasha as a whole, and then again at the beginning of the second masoretic section? The similarity between verse 2 and verse 4 is obvious, such that the second introduction seems to add nothing new.

2. At the conclusion of the first half, closing the parasha of bringing the "bikkurim bread" (the two loaves) and calling that

day a holy convocation, there is a verse that appears to depart entirely from the subject of the festivals:

(22) "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not finish the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I am the Lord your God."

This verse repeats what we were already mentioned in parashat Kedoshim (19:9-10), among the laws of gifts to the poor. Why does the Torah repeat here a law that has nothing to do with the festivals, in the middle of a parasha that deals with the festivals and nothing else?

3. The conclusion of the parasha of the festivals is located in a strange place - in the middle of the laws of Sukkot:

(37-38) "These are the festivals of God which you shall call as holy convocations, to offer burnt offerings to God – a burnt offering and a meal offering, a sacrifice and a drink offering, each thing on its given day. Besides the shabbatot of God, and besides your gifts, and besides all your vows, and besides all your freewill offerings that you may bring to God."

Following this conclusion, the first part of which (beginning of verse 37) repeats almost verbatim the introduction to our parasha (verses 2 and 4), the Torah goes on to elaborate on the laws of Sukkot:

(39-43) "But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the festival of God for seven days... And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree... and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God for seven days, and you shall celebrate it as a festival to God, seven days in the year... You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days... in order that your descendants may know that I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in sukkot when I took them out of the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God."

Now, after the concluding words, "I am the Lord your God," there is a final conclusion to the parasha of the festivals: (44) "And Moshe told the festivals of God to Bnei Yisrael," corresponding to the command at the beginning of the parasha (2): "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them: The festivals of God..."

Why are there five verses dealing with Sukkot (39-43) in between the first part of the conclusion (37-38) and the second part (44)? And why are all the laws pertaining to Sukkot not grouped together?

In the following sections we shall attempt to answer these questions.

C. "WHAT HAS SHABBAT GOT TO DO WITH THE FESTIVALS?"

In order to clarify the reason for the double opening of the parasha, we must first define in what way Shabbat is related to the festivals.

Shabbat is called a "holy convocation," as are the other festivals, and "all labor" is forbidden on Shabbat, as on Yom Kippur. On Shabbat a musaf sacrifice is offered, as on the other festivals. It is on the basis of this broad similarity that some commentators have attempted to explain Shabbat's appearance at the beginning of our parasha.

On the other hand, Shabbat is also fundamentally different from the festivals. It is not connected with any specific date; rather, it was established at the beginning of the world's existence as falling every seventh day. This establishes the Shabbat as independent of any human factor (the nation of Israel and their courts), in contrast to the other festivals, whose establishment depends on the recognition and sanctification of the New Moon. The Ramban comments:

"It appears to me that the verse, 'The festivals of God which you shall call as holy convocations – these are My festivals' (verse 2) refers to those listed thereafter – 'in the first month...' etc. (verse 5 onwards), and therefore the Torah then repeats (verse 4), 'These are the festivals of God,' because THE LIST IS INTERRUPTED AT SHABBAT. For we are told [by means of this pause created by the subject of Shabbat]: 'The festivals of God which you shall call as holy convocations, these are My festivals' – labor of work [may not be performed, but on these festivals we are permitted to prepare food for the festival]. However, Shabbat must be observed as a 'Shabbat shabbaton,' refraining from every type of labor... This hints... that EVEN WHEN SHABBAT FALLS ON ONE OF THE FESTIVALS, IT (Shabbat) MAY NOT BE SET ASIDE TO PREPARE FOOD [by performing one of the forbidden types of labor]."

(See also the Ramban's analogous comments on Shemot 35:1.) Thus the Ramban explains why the second section of our parasha opens with the verse, "And God spoke to Moshe, saying" (verse 4) – the same opening as every new law in our parasha:

"For the first command (verses 1-2) ITSELF was the mitzva of the festivals [rather than an introduction to the mitzva of Shabbat, as other commentators maintain]. Shabbat is mentioned only in order to negate the law of the festivals [i.e. license to prepare food for the festival] in its regard, and not in order to elaborate on its commandments. Therefore with regard to Shabbat we are not told, 'And you shall offer a burnt sacrifice to God,' as on the festivals, and at the end the Torah mentions (verse 38), 'BESIDES the Shabbatot of God'... And this is what is meant by the question posed by the Midrash of our Sages (in the Sifra), 'What is Shabbat doing among the festivals?' FOR SHABBAT IS NOT ONE OF THE FESTIVALS OF GOD AT ALL; the Torah only juxtaposes it to them."

According to this explanation of the Ramban, which requires no further substantiation, the appearance of Shabbat at the beginning of the parasha of festivals is not meant to include Shabbat among them. On the contrary – it comes to limit the license for preparing food for the festivals when they fall on Shabbat, just as in parashat Vayakhel the Torah mentions Shabbat in order to limit the command of building the Mishkan, such that labor will not be performed on Shabbat. The reason for first presenting the warning concerning Shabbat is also similar in both cases: like the construction of the Mishkan, preparation of food for the festival on the festive days themselves is also derived from the command to rejoice on the festive days, and therefore it is possible that one would mistakenly assume such labor to be permissible on a Shabbat that coincides with the festival. Therefore, the Torah precedes the discussion of the festivals with a warning that ALL labor is forbidden on Shabbat, even when it coincides with one of the festivals to be discussed in the rest of the parasha.

This explanation by the Ramban illustrates a unique stylistic phenomenon in the formulation of the mitzva of Shabbat here. In eight places in the Torah, Shabbat is defined in a similar style: as the seventh day – a day of rest – that follows six days of

activity. In five of these places, the verse addresses the command in the second person, thus making him the subject of these commands, and the labor performed during these six days is HIS labor. There are only three instances where there is no appeal to a person; simply "labor" is forbidden. The labor itself is the subject of these verses, and its performance on the six weekdays appears in the passive form ("... shall be performed"). The first two of these three verses are to be found in parashat Ki Tisa (31:15) and parashat Vayakhel (35:2), and they forbid the building of the Mishkan on Shabbat. The third verse is the one with which chapter 23 of our parasha opens.

(Shemot 31:15) "Six days shall labor be performed and on the seventh day – a Shabbat shabbaton."  
(35:2) "Six days shall labor be done and on the seventh day... a Shabbat shabbaton."  
(Vayikra 23:3) "Six days shall labor be done and on the seventh day – a Shabbat shabbaton."

What is common to these three verses? It is only in these three instances that the Torah does not prohibit "YOUR labor" – a person's own weekday work - but rather prohibits labor for the sake of heaven – labor performed in the fulfillment of a mitzva: the construction of the Mishkan, or the preparation of food on the festival, for the sake of rejoicing on that day. Although these are considered labor for the sake of heaven, they are permissible only on the six weekdays – not on Shabbat.

#### D. BEGINNING VS. END OF THE HARVEST

The verse that concludes the parasha of bringing the two loaves – "And when you reap the harvest of your land..." – comes to close the two masoretic sections that precede it: the section of verses 9-14, dealing with the Omer meal offering, and the section of verses 15-22, dealing with the mincha offering of the two loaves. In fact, these two sections form a single unit in the parasha of the festivals, as becomes clear from their content and as expressed in the division between them in the form of a "closed parasha," with no new introduction to the second section. The concluding verse – verse 22 – likewise contributes towards the unity of these two sections AS DEALING WITH THE MITZVOT PERTAINING TO THE HARVEST SEASON. The root "k-tz-r" appears as a verb or as an object in two places in this unit:

At its opening -

(10) "When you come to the land that I give to you AND YOU REAP ITS HARVEST, then you will bring the Omer – the beginning of YOUR HARVEST to the kohen."

At its conclusion -

(22) "AND WHEN YOU REAP the HARVEST of your land, you shall not finish off the corners of your field WHEN YOU HARVEST, nor shall you gather the gleanings of YOUR HARVEST...."

In total, this root appears within the double parasha seven times (and nowhere else in the body of the parasha).

The connection between these two verses extends beyond the mention of the harvest. The word "land" also appears in both: "the land which I give to you," and "your land," and the harvest is referred to in both places as "the harvest of the land" (but also as "your harvest"). The term "THE FIRST of your harvest" is a contrast to the command "You shall not FINISH OFF the corners of the field." Finishing off the corners, and gathering the gleanings, represent the end of the harvest. Concerning this contrast, Rav David Zvi Hoffmann writes (p. 168):

"There is no doubt that the law (in verse 22) is closely connected to the first mitzva of this parasha – that of the Omer. That mitzva pertains to the BEGINNING of the harvest, while the conclusion of the parasha is related to the actions at the END of the harvest. The beginning of the harvest is to be dedicated to God, and the remainder is not to be gathered in its entirety by the owners of the field. Rather, the corners, and whatever falls to the ground during the gathering, are to be left for the poor. The recognition of God as the ultimate Owner of the land, which finds expression in the dedication of the first of the harvest, requires that the corners and gleanings of the field be given to the poor. 'I am the Lord your God' – thus the text concludes: I am the Master of both rich and poor. It is for His honor that you are to dedicate together the first of your harvest."

#### E. WHY TWO COMMANDS CONCERNING SUKKOT?

The conclusion of the parasha of the festivals in the midst of the laws of Sukkot is also explained in Rav Hoffmann's commentary. At first he addresses the phenomenon, found in several places in the Torah, where following the conclusion of a halakhic parasha, a few laws are then noted to complement that parasha. He brings a few examples, and maintains that verses 39-43, which conclude the laws of Sukkot, likewise represent a "complement" or appendix to the parasha as a whole:

"The reason why verses 39-43 are given in the form of a complement is simple. The laws pertaining to the kohanim and to ritual purity (the parts of Sefer Vayikra preceding our parasha) are 'desert laws' in the most precise sense of the word: not only were they GIVEN during the desert period, but they are also MEANT FOR THAT PERIOD. Let us take, as an example, the laws of 'tzara'at.' The victim of tzara'at is always described as being located outside of the CAMP (13:46, 14:3, 8). Where the law in question is meant for the future (tzara'at of houses), then the text opens with the formulation (14:34), 'When you come to the land of Canaan...'. The fact that the same principle applies to the laws of the festivals is evidenced by the law of the Pesach sacrifice (Shemot 12), the law of Pesach Sheni (Bemidbar 9:1-14), the laws of Yom Kippur (Vayikra 16:26-28), and the introduction to the law of the Omer (Vayikra 23:10).

But specifically Sukkot is a festival whose special mitzvot cannot be fulfilled in the desert. In particular, [one could not observe] the joyous celebrations adjacent to the Mikdash, holding a lulav as a sign of thanks for God's blessing at the gathering of the produce, and the dwelling in sukkot in memory of God's protection during the desert wanderings. This part of the Sukkot celebrations therefore required its own special, separate complementary section."

In other words, the division of the laws of Sukkot into two parts occurs because there are two different sets of instructions for two different time periods. In verses 33-36, the text is commanding the celebration of the festival of Sukkot IN THE DESERT. What is included in this instruction? In his explanation of these verses, Rav Hoffmann writes as follows:

"It appears that the mitzva of dwelling in a sukka was meant for the generations that would live in the land, and therefore it is brought in a special appendix, whereas here only those mitzvot that could also be fulfilled in the desert are given: 'On the first day shall be holy convocation; all labor of work you shall not do; the various sacrifices of each day – compare Bemidbar 29; a holy convocation again on the eighth day, on which another sacrifice is brought.

The text uses the name 'festival of Sukkot' here (verse 34) for the purposes of the future, for in future the festival will be called 'Sukkot.'

Verses 39-43, on the other hand, instruct as to the celebration of Sukkot from the time of entering the land and dwelling in it. This distinction is made explicit in verse 39: "...when you gather the produce of the land" – this describes not only the season when the "festival of God" occurs, but also the historical period when certain mitzvot of this festival begin to become applicable.

We may perhaps add another explanation: the expression "when you gather the produce of the land" also explains the idea of these mitzvot. The taking of the four species on the first day and the rejoicing before God for seven days are expressions of thanksgiving and joy for the good land to which He has brought us, and for the ingathering of produce that we have merited. The Rambam writes as follows in his Guide of the Perplexed (III:43):

"What is represented by the four species of the lulav is the joy and gladness at their leaving the desert, which is not a place of fertility, of figs, grapes, pomegranates, and where there is no water to drink (according to Bemidbar 20:5), for a place of fruit trees and rivers. Therefore, in memory of this, the most beautiful of the land's fruits is taken, and the one with the best fragrance and the most beautiful leaves, as well as the most beautiful of its herbs – the willow. And these four species are... [selected because of] their commonness in Eretz Yisrael at that time [the season of the ingathering], and they are easily obtainable...."

The mitzva of dwelling in the sukka is related, obviously, to dwelling in Eretz Yisrael. This is not only for the simple reason that it is meant to remind us of the (contrasting) period of desert wandering, but also because of what the Rashbam writes concerning the reason for this mitzva in his explanation of verse 43:

"The festival of Sukkot you shall make for yourselves for seven days, when you gather in your corn and your wine' (Devarim 16:13) – When you gather in the produce of the land, and your houses are full of all kinds of goodness – grain, wine and oil - in order that you may remember 'that I made Bnei Yisrael dwell in sukkot' in the desert for forty years, with no dwelling place and no portion. FROM THIS (remembrance) SHALL YOU GIVE THANKS TO HE WHO HAS GIVEN YOU A PORTION AND MADE YOUR HOUSES FULL OF ALL KINDS OF GOODNESS, and you shall not say in your hearts (Devarim 8:17), 'My strength and the power of my hand have made me all of this valor'... And therefore we leave our houses full of all kinds of goodness at the time of the ingathering, and dwell in sukkot, as a reminder that they had no portion in the desert, nor houses in which to dwell. And it is for this reason that the Holy One established the festival of Sukkot at the time of the ingathering of the corn and the wine...."

Thus, the character of Sukkot as celebrated in Eretz Yisrael is indeed qualitatively different from the festival as celebrated in the desert, and therefore two different commands are given for it, separated from one another by means of the concluding verses 36-38. Rav Hoffmann still has difficulty with this explanation, and writes as follows:

"However, the proper place for this complement (verses 39-43) should then perhaps be PRIOR to the concluding verse (37), 'These are the festivals of God...,' in order that the entire discussion of the festivals would conclude with that."

But the answer to this appears simple: had the concluding verses appeared after the laws of Sukkot that are applicable only in the land, then we might mistakenly assume that the mitzva of bringing the burnt sacrifices to God on the festivals is likewise dependent on entering the land. The conclusion therefore appears where it does in order to teach us that these laws apply even in the desert, and only the laws that follow them are restricted to the land.

## F. PARALLEL BETWEEN THE TWO HALVES

Let us return to the structure of the parasha of the festivals as a whole. In section A. above, we discussed how the parasha may be divided into two equal halves. The division of biblical literary units into two equal halves usually helps us to compare them to each other. How, then, can we draw a parallel between the two halves of our parasha? In section A. we noted various possible parallels between the two halves, but hinted at the fact that the main and most important parallel becomes apparent only at the conclusion of the discussion, after solving various questions related to the structure of the parasha.

Does the first half of our parasha also address festivals whose mitzvot apply only upon entering the land? There can be no doubt in this regard:

(9-10) "And God spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: When you come to the land which I give to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the Omer – the first of your harvest – to the kohen."

How far do the mitzvot of the festivals that apply only in Israel continue? Here, too, the answer is clear: up to the conclusion of this half, in verse 22. This entire section of verses (9-22) is a single unit, dealing with the mitzvot of the harvest in the land of Israel. A literal reading of the text would suggest that not only the waving of the Omer and the bringing of the two loaves are mitzvot that apply in Eretz Yisrael, but that the very days upon which these sacrifices are brought are not commemorated in the desert. The festival of Shavuot, after all, is altogether dependent on the counting of fifty days from the waving of the Omer, and when there is no day of waving then clearly there can be no festival of Shavuot!

Hence, each of the two halves of the parasha is built in a similar way. First we find the laws of the festivals that apply in the desert as well, and thereafter we find those that apply only from the time of entering the land onwards. The schedule of festivals is therefore a double schedule: one is valid already in the desert, while the other becomes applicable only in the future. The two halves of the parasha correspond directly with one another:

Half A:

In the desert:

(1-3) Shabbat  
(4-8) Pesach and the Festival of Matzot

In Eretz Yisrael:

(9-14) The day of waving the Omer  
(15-22) The day of bringing the two loaves

Half B:

In the desert:

(23-25) Day of Remembrance (Rosh HaShanah)  
(26-32) Yom Kippur  
(33-38) Sukkot (in the desert)

Although the corresponding sections of the two halves are not identical in length, other aspects the parallel are obvious. There is a clear linguistic and thematic parallel between the "long" festivals that are commemorated even in the desert – i.e., between the Festival of Matzot (5-8) and the festival of Sukkot in the desert (34-36).

Concerning the festivals that apply in Eretz Yisrael, there are a number of connections:

1. It appears that the description of the time of Sukkot in the land (39) – "When you gather in the produce of the land" – refers back to the introduction to the corresponding section (10): "WHEN YOU COME TO THE LAND and reap its harvest." This may be deduced from the similarity between the verse, "When you gather in the produce of the land" and verse 22 – "when you reap the harvest of your land." Just as the verse "And when you harvest" clearly refers back to "When you come to the land," so likewise the verse "When you gather in...."
2. The two sections dealing with the Eretz Yisrael festivals conclude in a similar way: "I am the Lord your God."
3. The expression "before God" occurs both in the parasha of the Omer and in the parasha of the two loaves:

(11) "And he shall wave the Omer BEFORE GOD"

(20) "And the kohen shall wave them (the lambs of the peace offering) with the bikkurim bread as a wave offering BEFORE GOD."

We find this expression occurring again in the laws of Sukkot in Eretz Yisrael:

(40) "And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of the citron tree... and you shall rejoice BEFORE GOD you God for seven days."

In each of the three places where the expression "before God" is mentioned here, the reference is to the Temple.

4. In the two sections dealing with the festivals celebrated in Eretz Yisrael, no mention is made of the bringing of musaf sacrifices (the "burnt sacrifices to God"), for this law is not specific to Eretz Yisrael, and applied also in the desert. For this reason, no mention is made in the discussion of Shavuot of "you shall offer a burnt offering to God," as appears in all the other festivals of our parasha, even though the musaf sacrifice of this festival is set down explicitly in the parasha of the musaf sacrifices in Sefer Bemidbar (28:26-31).

In my previous shiur on Parashat Emor (5760), I noted the significance of the Oral Law establishing the first day of the harvest as the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. The analysis of the parallels between the two halves of the parasha of the festivals teaches us an additional significance to this ruling. Just as in the second half, verses 39-43 serve as a sort of "Eretz Yisrael version" of the Sukkot festival celebrated in the desert, as described previously in verses 33-36, so verses 9-22 in the first half serve as an "Eretz Yisrael version" of the Pesach celebration in the desert, described in the preceding verses (4-8). The day of the waving of the Omer – the beginning of the harvest – is simply a new aspect of the Festival of Matzot, expressed upon having entered the land, while the festival of Shavuot now becomes simply a sort of "atzeret" to Pesach.