



MOOR LANE MORE TORAH

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שבועות One Day Out

By Rabbi Moshe Stamler

The festival of שבועות is unique in that it is the only festival where a specific date is not given in the Torah. Rather it is the fiftieth day after the bringing of the Omer on the 16th of Nissan. This leads Rav Moshe Sopher [חתם סופר אורח קמ"ד] to say that the second day of שבועות is actually more strict than other second days of Yomtov. This is because whereas the second day of any other Yomtov is because originally there was a doubt as to which day had been declared as Yom Tov in the Land of Israel, this is not the case with regards to שבועות. He writes that since שבועות will always be the fiftieth day after the 16th of Nissan, there was never a doubt about what day שבועות would fall, because there was always enough time for the message to reach the communities in Exile. Rather the reason for the second day of שבועות is as a decree not to differentiate from פסח and סכות. This, he says makes the second day stricter, not more lenient than the other second days of שבועות in Exile.

The special nature of שבועות also gives rise to a halachic discussion which

has become relevant in the days of international travel: if somebody crosses the date line during the time between פסח and שבועות, a question arises both regarding ספירת העומר and the date of שבועות.

Since שבועות will always be the fiftieth day after the 16th of Nissan, there was never a doubt about what day שבועות would fall



If someone crosses the date line in an easterly direction [e.g., from China to the USA], he will find that on the night after his journey the locals will be counting a day he has already counted. If he crosses the date line

in a westerly direction, he will find that on the night after his journey the locals will be one day ahead of him – he will have missed a day. Should he continue to count their ספירת העומר according to the way he has been counting up to now, or should he adopt the new counting of the place where he now finds himself? The Lubavitcher Rebbe [ע' קובץ יגדילתורה ק"ה] was of the opinion that the person should continue his own counting, ignoring the counting of the community where he is now. Not only that, but he points out that the Talmud says that in the days before we had a fixed calendar, שבועות could fall on the fifth or on the seventh of Sivan, depending on how many days Nissan and Iyar had. He was of the opinion that since שבועות depends on the counting from the 16th of Nissan, this person should keep שבועות according to his own personal counting, which he will have continued, regardless of the fact that he has crossed the date line. This means that somebody who crossed the date line travelling in an easterly direction, for example from China to the United States, will keep שבועות one day ahead of the people in the United States where he is

staying now, i.e., on the 5th and 6th of Sivan. Someone who travels in the other direction, from the USA to China, will find that he is one day behind, and in the opinion of the Lubavitcher Rebbe should continue his own personal counting and keep שבועות one day later than the people in China, where he now finds himself, i.e., on the 7th and 8th of Sivan. He strongly advises one to plan one's journey to avoid crossing the dateline at this time of year to avoid such a scenario.

This pesak is strongly contested by many. Yalkut Yosef [Hilchot Shavuot O.C. 494] summarises some of the questions raised by this approach: [Free translation.]

"1] Who says that ספירת העומר depends on one's individual counting up to now; maybe it depends on the counting that the Jewish people as a whole are counting.

2] It is not definite that the date of שבועות depends on ספירת העומר, especially as the festivals require the sanctification of the Bet Din, and the fixed calendar instituted by the amora Hillel means that Hillel sanctified the festival of שבועות for all generations on the sixth of Sivan.

3] Since nowadays most early commentators are of the view that counting the Omer is rabbinical in nature, how can it be that the festival of שבועות which is a Torah command will depend on a rabbinical counting.

4] The Lubavitcher Rebbe himself pointed out that it could be crossing the date line affects one's counting of days but not his counting of weeks and therefore one would have to consider whether regarding the fixing of שבועות the counting of the days is the main thing or the counting of the weeks."

Dayan Weiss [מנחת יצחק חלק ה' סימן ג] was of the opinion that שבועות must be kept on the 6th and 7th of Sivan according to the date of the community where one is staying for the festival irrespective of having crossed the date line. He points out that if one were to say otherwise, in the times of the בית המקדש one could have a person who has arrived in ירושלים from overseas - having crossed the dateline - still counting the 49th day of the Omer when in the בית המקדש they are bringing the שתי הלחם which belongs to the שבועות sacrifices brought after the end of the Omer counting, a situation he regards as untenable.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch [מועדים ומנינים חג שבועות סימן רל"ז] also ruled that שבועות must be kept according to the locality where one is, and that regarding the counting of the Omer a person who missed a day due to a westerly crossing of the dateline adopts the local counting but from now on without a ברכה, and a person who has experienced the same day twice due to an easterly crossing of the dateline counts the 'doubled-over' night again without a ברכה and from then on counts with a ברכה.

This very brief treatment of the subject is merely scratching the surface of the arguments and counter arguments of the great פוסקים and is intended only to present the issue of this fascinating topic for thought. It also does not enter into discussion as to where the halachic dateline is, which is another fascinating and even more relevant discussion, as it affects the Jewish calendar of many places in the world where Jews live or visit.

Remember to do Eruv Tavshilin