

7 Weeks of the Birth of the Nation of Kohanim

by Dr. Meir Tamari

The forging of a nation which is intrinsically different from every other nation requires a birth that is unique and special. Its territory was not a matter of geo-politics nor of military adventures nor of national choice but part of the covenant between Hashem and the father of this nation. This covenant bestowed sanctity and holiness independently on the nation and the land; together they would fulfill the nation's mission of making Heaven out of the material, gross and unrefined earth. It was a covenant entered between free men and women and Hashem, the Creator who is free of all and any bonds.

Seven is not a random number in Jewish thinking but rather one constituting a complete entity just as the other numbers which appear repeatedly in our sources like 10 or 50. Seven completes 6 days of Creation by preceding and following a weekly cycle, thereby freeing mankind from the yoke of materialism and stimulating us to sanctify even the most prosaic of our activities. Shmita is the seventh year which in the same way gives holiness to our economic and social creativity. Yovel, seven of such years whereby social, economic and political rifts and disruptions are healed. Yet 7 belongs to the natural and material world so it needs an 8 to elevate and spiritualize it. So there is a natural growth after a son is born and then on

the 8th day, mila makes our very body a vehicle for kedusha. So too, the 7 weeks from the physical and materialistic Exodus from Egypt were crowned by the sanctity of Matan Torah. This is the same pattern as counting 7 weeks from Korban HaOmer to Sh'tei HaLechem of the 50th day. Through the former the individual acknowledges Hashem as the sole and real source of his wealth; the latter is the nation's acknowledgment of that truth.

Everything in life, even mitzvot, needs preparation otherwise they become misused or perverted. So these 7 weeks of preparation were essential if a kingdom of kohanim, a holy nation could really emerge from slaves freed from Pharaoh, symbol of knowledge, and from Egypt the cesspool of idolatry and immorality. It is significant that this spiritual and religious preparation is during the sefira period of acknowledging Hashem as the source of our wealth and material success. Here is another indication that the yetzer hara for wealth and materialism is the most powerful of the yetzarim. Our sages taught that, "the more one gives in to the sexual yetzer the greater is the desire, while abstinence minimizes it. However, while the desire for wealth is strong when one is poor, nevertheless when one has plenty, one still wants more. "One [already] has a 100 coins but still wants 200."

Since all the Shalosh Regalim are described by the Torah as being of agricultural significance, it is very easy to see them as nature festivals; Pesach - chag hakatzir, Shavuot - chag haBikurim and Sukkot - chag ha'asif. Indeed,

the secular kibbutzim, not desiring to cut themselves off from Jewish traditions but to reject the religious basis of these traditions, tried to celebrate them as nature festivals. However, by korban HaOmer, shte HaLechem and the Arbaa Minim, the Divine source and ownership of all agricultural wealth, indeed of all wealth is made explicit and public. In this way, Torah came to deny any other source of power, prosperity and satisfaction of human needs and wants.

By linking these Regalim to the political and social history of Am Yisrael, this denial was extended beyond the individual to include all the nation's successes and prosperity. We did not revolt against Egypt and thereby free ourselves, we did not make our way through the wilderness by our own wisdom and did not enter Eretz Yisrael by our own power or strength. All of these are testimonies in human history of the greatness of Hashem and His Kingship.

Tragically, the period of Sefirat HaOmer became a period of national persecution and suffering in many centuries, primarily in Christian Europe. Already in Roman times after the Churban, there was the aftermath of the Bar Kochba rebellion in which the last vestiges of independence were lost. However, in addition, plague killed many of Rabbi Akiva's students. Chazal attributed this to their lack of mutual respect. How is it possible for such a lack to exist among great and pious men? "They do not respect each other's learning or piety" (Netziv, Introduction to B'reishit). "They forget

that there is a Giver of the Torah [who demands different behavior]" (Shem MiShmuel). They forget the national element of Birchat HaTorah" (Harav Y. HaKohen Kook) 🌸