Shavuot is the feast of weeks. “Shavua” means week in Hebrew, its plural being “Shavuot”, which refers to the seven complete weeks from the second day of Passover to the fiftieth day in which we celebrate Shavuot.

Another name for this festival is “Chag Habbikurim”, the Feast of the First Fruits, since it marked the beginning of the fine harvest, relating the date with the agrarian cycle in Israel.

“Matan Torah”, the Feast of the Giving of the Torah, in remembrance and reliving of the giving of the Tablets of the Law on Mount Sinai, which according to our tradition occurred on Shavuot.

“Shevuot”, respecting the root of the word but changing its vowels, means “promises” in Hebrew.

Is there any relation between these diverse names and meanings of this festivity? I believe so, and will try to develop an explanation.

The festival speaks to us, mostly about times and weeks, seven to be more exact. Forty nine days that mediate between Pesach and Shavuot, between freedom and the giving of the Torah. Time alone causes nothing but age and wrinkles. But without it, nothing can mature, grow or develop. No one can really value immediately the immense gift of freedom, and even less, empower it with Torah, the Law. We need time to value it, this time is the counting of the Omer.

Bikkurim, the first fruits, marks the connection between the calendar and the agrarian cycle of Israel and the need to live harmoniously in and with nature, to thank and wait for each thing in its due time. And for this we need first to prepare the land, then sow, and then reap. Every thing has a season. Times, Shavuot, weeks.

Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah, the Law, the basic norm to live in society. Our identity, what we are and what we are not. Who am I and where am I coming from? Where do I want to go? Past and future, but mostly present. The only thing that depends on me is what I was; what I was is past, and what I shall be depends on me and on the now.

What is a promise? A shevua? It is something that I consider important and have set on doing, to change and to improve, because it is good for me, it improves me, it is cherished and dear to me.

May G-d grant us on this Shavuot to understand better our time and preparation, our effort and our commitment. Our present, our identity, our Torah that was given at Sinai but is received every day, merits promises and to bring these to reality, respecting our times, our cycles, our lands. We live in the now and in the here. In this place and in this momente, I, you, all of us. Let us celebrate Shavuot fully.

Chag Sameach,

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