The Torah of Yerushalayim

D’id Klal Yisrael embrace Torah or was it foisted upon us? Are we G-d’s people because of our enthusiastic embrace of that mission, or because G-d held the mountain threatening over our heads, making us fear for our lives? Apparently, there is a dual nature to our relationship with G-d and Torah, that includes both choice and destiny. Our destiny, our free choice, defines the extent to which we embrace Torah in our lives, allowing mitzvah, Halacha, and Torah ideals to guide our decisions and actions. Our destiny, on the other hand, does not require our consent and is defined by G-d, by G-d’s choices guiding us towards our rightful place in the world and its history. Thus, from the outset we needed to embrace the commandments of the Torah voluntarily, as this was representative of the ultimate gift of Torah – documents both G-d’s word and His deed. It includes the Divinely guided path of his word and His deed. It includes the mitzvot, the mitsvah of Sefirot HaOmer. The Exodus had been framed by G-d and by Moshe in terms of two end goals, one of destiny and the other of mitzvah. On the one hand, we were leaving Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, to the Land promised to our forebears; the Land flowing with milk and honey. On the other, we were leaving Pharaoh’s bondage to instead serve G-d on Mount Sinai. Thus, the counting of the Omer, which represents the eager anticipation of reaching the goal of our liberation from Egypt, has two dimensions. Explicitly, we count from the offering of the barley on Pesach to the offering of the wheat loaves, the ha’eshet, of Shavuot. These offerings symbolize our bond to the Promised Land and begin the season of offering Bikkurim. Implicitly, however, we are counting towards Sinai. As the Midrash records, when we left Egypt, we immediately asked Moshe when we would have the promised opportunity to serve G-d on his mountain. When Moshe responded that it would be after 50 days, every member of the Jewish people started counting on their own towards that day. It is that yearning, that striving towards G-d, towards both the destiny He has charted for us and the word He would share with us, that we perpetuate through our own counting of the Omer.

It is no surprise therefore that when we crossed the Red Sea and sang the song of redemption, the Hallel, the festival when we begin to offer the first fruits, celebrating the gift of Eretz Yisrael, the place of our destiny, this duality within Shavuot is specifically manifest in the process we begin the day after we celebrate leaving Egypt, the mitsvah of Sefirot HaOmer. If Har Sinai represents G-d’s word and Eretz Yisrael represents our destiny, there is one place that represents the blend of the two, and that is Yerushalayim and its Har Habayit. If Har Sinai represents G-d’s word and Eretz Yisrael represents our destiny, this is the place that was always meant to serve as the center and source of Torah learning and halachic rulings, as well as the city that is the blend of the center and capital of the land of our destiny. It is this blend of Torah and destiny that we bear in mind on Yom Yerushalayim, as we commemorate the invisible Divine hand of destiny that 54 years ago granted us the renewed gift of Yerushalayim. We recall the joyful and torrential flow of Jews returning to the Kotel on Shavuot 1967, and we celebrate and embrace the renewed and revitalized connection to our Torah and the approaching fulfillment of our destiny.

The Temple Mount.

1. Shabbat 86a.
7. Rabin at conclusion of Pesachim; Sofer Hachinuch no. 306.

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