

CLASS 6 - PARSHAS EMOR - SEFIRAS HAOMER

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The period between Pesach and Shavuot is marked by counting the fifty days between our exodus from Egypt and the subsequent spiritual growth towards Ma'amad Har Sinai.

The Omer is the barley offering, measuring one Omer, brought upon the altar on the sixteenth of Nissan, immediately following Yetzias Mitzraim.

Why is the Omer a significant factor in our count towards the Torah? Certainly, our reference to these days as Sefiras HaOmer is not mere coincidence, but indicates that Omer is the central theme of this period.

In our shiur this week we will explain this idea, demonstrating how the Omer is a natural foundation of life.

1

"Said Rebbi Yehoshua ben Levi: Hashem is destined to bequeath to every Tzaddik three hundred and ten worlds, as it says: 'L'Hanchil Ohavai Yesh...' [the word YESH equaling 310 in Gimatriya]. (Uktzin 3,12)

This is the last Mishna of the Talmud. As always - 'the last deed is first in thought' - and we should find this concept alluded to at the Torah's beginning. Indeed, the onset of creation is referred to as 'YESH MeiAyin', the blessing to the righteous being the basic premise of existence.

'Omer' B'Gimatriya = 'Yesh'

Explanation: Our sustenance in the desert was the daily manna from heaven, measuring one Omer per individual. "If one eats this measure he is healthy and blessed; less - he harms his stomach; more - he is ravenous." (Mechilta, B'Shalach 16)

An Omer then, is the precise amount needed to nourish man for one day. It was this measure that fell daily, no more and no less.

It is this measure that man brings as first offering of the new year's grain that allows him to partake of the new harvest. Meaning to say: the initial recognition that G-d provides for the world renders all subsequent consumption as mere outgrowths of this beneficence.

The Omer is man's essential meal. All the rest is leftovers, made possible by the acknowledgment of

its heavenly source.

This is true only if man takes what is needed. His grab for more is a move beyond what G-d provides, denying the elevated purpose of the material world. Rather than be satisfied with the Omer that G-d provides, unable to make do with the daily bread that should satisfy all, he hopes to profit on his own to a greater degree. He removes himself from the 'Yesh', the G-dly dimension that defines the essential reality of existence, opting for a universe of his own desires, a fantasy existence of his own making.

2

The Midrash describes the Bais HaMedrash of Mordechai at the moment Haman shamefacedly approached to present the honors of the king.

"...The students sat learning. Said Haman to them: what are you studying? Said they: the Mitzva of Omer that was offered in the Temple on this day.

"This Omer, what was it? Was it gold? Or silver?"

"It was barley!"

"And what was its value? Was it ten Centrins? (a huge weight)"

"It was enough with ten Maneh."

"Arise! Your ten Maneh has defeated my ten thousand Centrins of silver!" (VaYikra Rabbah 28, 6)

Haman had paid off the king with a massive bribe, acquiring the right to destroy Mordechai and his people. G-d as well acquiesced to this arrangement, and from that moment on, the natural forces of life are poised to strike the B'nai Yisrael. It is the Mitzva of Omer that turns the tide, granting us a place in Olam HaZeh, guaranteeing our survival.

Let us explain why this so.

Moshe Rabbeinu desired to understand G-d's handling of life. Hashem, unwilling to reveal all of Himself, allowed this: "...and you will see My back, but My face cannot be seen." (Shemos 33, 23)

"He showed him the knot of His Tefillin." (Rashi, ad. loc.)

The knot at the back of our Tefillin is formed in the shape of the letter Daled. This is no coincidence, for elsewhere on the Tefillin are signs of the letters Shin and Yud, together spelling the Heavenly name Sha-dai. This is reference to He who "said to His world 'Dai' [enough]", and it is this name that is the basis of creation.

Moshe Rabbeinu sees the Daled, the only part of life visible to man, yet this Daled is sufficient, and from there man will grow to recognize His complete Name, to assimilate the Shin and Yud that are

his portion for eternity, the Yesh of true existence.

The Daled then, is man's portion in this world, the fullest extent of his grasp.

The Daled is poor, a Dal being a pauper. Man is granted a limited existence, provided with daily manna from heaven that is enough for one day's bread. It is a trifle, but it is all he really needs.

Picture a poor man standing at the door, reaching out to beseech his benefactor for a sizable donation. If he stretches with his strong right hand, the householder responds with his own weak left, while a request with the left hand is properly met by the owner's right.

We are searching for G-d's right Hand, a hand of kindness and power. To reach out with our own right, grabbing everything in sight, is to court disaster, for G-d must then answer with His own left, the hand of justice and Din, hiding Himself and granting the world a minimal bounty.

Put simply: It is our offering of the Omer, the recognition that daily sustenance is an expression of G-d's blessing that renders us capable of inheriting the infinite Yesh. It is the limitations that we set on our boundless desires that set the stage for the unlimited blessing promised to the children of Ya'akov. By giving the Omer back to Hashem, we acknowledge Him as provider of all we consume, and it is that blessing that sanctifies and defines the balance of our lives.

3

The journey from Mitzraim to Sinai is a process of growth and maturity, as a nation of slaves evolve as G-d's witnesses to the world.

While a child sees jumble and confusion, living from one moment to the next, an adult is capable of seeing the entire picture, relating to the temporal as one element of a unified whole.

This is the function of Sefiras HaOmer, counting each and every day in relation to the ultimate goal. Every trail leads from back to front, all eyes turned to the purpose and destination.

In our modern world of unparalleled material bounty, people grab with abandon at the pleasures of the day. As little children who revel in the immediate satisfaction of every urge, they remain oblivious to the underlying purpose of the natural world.

The world of G-d begins with the Daled, recognition of our weakness and limitations, only an Omer each day. It is this Omer that represents our acknowledgment of G-d, and realization of our purpose, right from the start. In this way, we are assured to reach our objective, the Torah bequeathed to all those who appreciate the taste of manna.

"And you shall count for yourselves, from the day following Shabbos, from the day that you bring the Omer wave-offering, seven complete weeks they shall be" (VaYikra, 23:15)

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