

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OMER

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

"RavFrand" - Rabbi Frand on the Omer

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Y. Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 996, "Kovod Habrios": The Concept of Human Dignity. Good Shabbos!

The Key To Understanding the Significance of the Omer

In this week's parsha we find the mitzvah of the Offering of the Omer. The Torah says that on the 16th of Nissan, on the second day of Pesach, the Jewish people were obligated to bring an Omer offering. The bringing of the Omer offering permitted all types of new wheat crops (Chadash) to be eaten.

Then the Torah gives us an added command: "And you shall count unto yourselves from the morrow after this sabbath, from the day of your bringing the omer of the waving, seven sabbaths shall it be" [Vayikra 23:15].

There are many difficulties that we find in connection with the Omer offering.

Number one: What does the word 'omer' mean? Omer was just a measure. It was the amount of grain that they had to bring. Is it not strange that the Korban should be called by the name omer? That is, in effect, like calling it the "Quart Offering" or the "Liter Offering." Other offerings are called names: Pesach, Todah (Thanksgiving), Shelamim (Peace), Shte HaLechem (Two Loaves). They have descriptive names. Omer is a measure. Why should that be the name of the Korban?

Number two: What is so crucial about this offering, that we tie our entire counting between Pesach and Shavuot to this Offering: The first day of the Omer, the second day of the Omer, etc.?

Number three: Why was the omer brought on the 16th day of Nissan? This is not one of the special

days of Pesach -- it is neither here nor there. What happened on the 16th of Nissan that this Korban should be brought specifically then?

The Medrash elaborates on the great merit and significance of the Omer Offering: In its merit Avraham received the land of Canaan; in its merit the Jews were saved in the days of Gideon; in its merit they were saved in the days of Chizkiyahu; in its merit they were saved in the days of Haman; in its merit they were saved in the days of Yechezkel. The Medrash goes on and on and on about how this Omer offering saved the day.

What is so meaningful about this Korban HaOmer?

The Be'er Yosef says that the key to understanding the Omer is the following Medrash: "G-d said to Moshe 'In the wilderness I provided a daily Omer of manna for every Jew. As payment, let the Jews now bring for Me an Omer offering every year on the 16th of Nissan.'"

This Medrash is telling us that the purpose of the Korban Omer is to remind us of the Omer we that we all received in the wilderness. That is why it is called by the name Omer -- to remind us of the famous Omer of the manna.

As we mentioned many times, the manna that we received in the wilderness is our reminder that it is G-d who provides us with bread from Heaven. Just as in the wilderness we clearly saw, without a shadow of a doubt, that it was G-d who gives us our livelihood, so too in all generations we must remember that as much as we work and as successful as we think we may be, it is G-d that gives us bread from Heaven. That is the lesson of the manna.

That is what the Omer Offering is all about. When we are harvesting our new wheat crop and we might tend to think that "my might and the power of my hand, brought me all this wealth" we are commanded to bring a Korban HaOmer to remember the manna.

That is why the omer is brought on the 16th of Nissan. We have it by tradition that the manna stopped falling on Adar 7 (the day of Moshe's death) and they had left over in the vessels until the 16 of Nissan. On the day they ran out of manna they had to bring the Omer Offering.

That too is why we count Sefirah for 7 complete weeks and tie it to the Omer Offering. If we brought an Omer Offering only one day of the year, perhaps the crucial lesson that it teaches us would be lost. The Halacha therefore requires that we review this lesson 49 times, over and over, until it becomes second nature.

That is why the Medrash goes on and on and mentions how in the merit of the Omer the Jews were saved so many times. If we learn the lesson of livelihood -- that it is only G-d who gives us the ability to make a living -- this is indeed a lesson that can cause us to merit the acquisition of the Land and all the other salvations enumerated by the Medrash.

Glossary

korban -- offering (on the altar)

Personalities & Sources:

Be'er Yosef -- Rav Yosef Salant, early 1900s, Jerusalem.

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