



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

Sefirat Haomer תשפ"ה

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By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult
education program
focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy
to our lives by studying text most interesting
to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1
hour each week, friendships are forged
between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in
participating so that we may grow together as
a community.**

Sefirat Haomer – The Counting of the Omer

When the Holy Temple stood, a daily sacrifice was brought every morning and evening. The morning prayer שחרית - *Shacharit* corresponds to and substitutes for the morning sacrifice and מנחה - *Mincha*, the afternoon service, corresponds and substitutes for the afternoon sacrifice. On Shabbat and each of the festivals and holidays in the Torah, there is an *additional* sacrifice, called the קרבן מוסף - *Mussaf sacrifice*, brought in honor of the Festival or holiday, and the Mussaf service added to the Shabbat and holiday prayers corresponds to that sacrifice.

On the second day of Pesach, the 16th day of Nissan, a special sacrifice called the קרבן העומר - the *Omer sacrifice* - was added. It consisted of a one-year old sheep, and an omer - a unit measure of 3.5- 5 pounds - of barley flour, sifted 13 times mixed with oil and a small measure of incense. A Cohen would wave the flour offering in all six directions, and touch it to the south west corner of the outside altar. Then, a small amount of the mixture was taken off by the Cohen and burned in the fire on the altar. The remainder of the mixture was divided among the Cohanim who would eat it.

The Torah commands us to count each of the 49 days from the day the Omer offering was brought until the festival of Shavuot which is the 50th day.

The mitzvah in the Torah to count the Omer is stated in Leviticus 23;15,16.

טו) וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הִבִּיאֲכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה
שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימָת תִּהְיֶינָה
טז) עַד מַחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׂבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה
חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה

*15) You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, (the first day of Passover) from the day when you bring the Omer of the waiving – **seven weeks, they shall be complete.** 16) Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, **fifty days;** and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem.*

Notice that the Torah mandates seven complete weeks of counting as well as a counting of fifty days. This is why when counting the Omer we are careful to mention both the weeks and the days.

To fulfill this mitzvah, at the beginning of each day of the omer, after the stars come out, we make a blessing stating that Hashem has commanded us to count the Omer, and then on the 29th day, for example, we would say: “Today is the 29th day of the omer, which is three weeks and one day.”

The counting of the omer culminates with the Festival of Shavuot, the day the Jewish nation received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The counting of the Omer from Pesach to Shavuot creates a connection between these two holidays, where Pesach begins a process which culminates with Shavuot.

What is the relationship between these two Festivals? The Sefer HaChinuch, (attributed to Rav Aharon Halevi of Barcelona of the 13th century) a work that counts and explains each of the 613 mitzvot, explains in Mitzvah #306, the Mitzvah to Count the Omer.

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה, ומפני התורה נבראו שמים וארץ וישראל, וכמו שכתוב [ירמיהו ל"ג,

כ"ה] אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה וגו'. והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני ויקיימוה, וכמו שאמר השם למשה [שמות ג', י"ב] וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה ... נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו

The simple understanding of this mitzvah is that since the main focus of the Jewish people is the Torah and it was for the sake of the Torah that Hashem created the heavens, the earth and the Jewish people, ... and that was the purpose for which they were freed from Egypt, in order to receive the Torah on Sinai and fulfill it... , we were commanded to count from the day after Pesach until the giving of the Torah, to show in our souls the tremendous desire and yearning for that great day.

Just as we naturally count the days to an event that we are very excited about and can't wait for, so too the Jewish people counted the days until they would receive the Torah.

The question is, when we can't wait for something, we usually count down; only 40 days left until my vacation, now it's only 35 days etc. Why here are we counting up?

When we count down the days to a vacation, for example, what we really want is, that the day of our vacation, be here now. The problem is, that the date of my departure is forty days from now, and those 40 days are blocking me from fulfilling my desire. As the days go by, the interruption becomes smaller, and my dream comes closer. The numbers reflect how big the interruption is, and how close the fulfillment of my dream is to me.

In the case of counting the Omer, the days preceding the receiving of the Torah were needed to prepare the Jewish people

for that great event. When they left Egypt, they were not on the proper level to accept the Torah on Sinai. They needed to purge themselves of the negative influences of Egypt which were still so much part of them.

When they left Egypt, they were at the very lowest level they could possibly be at. Our Sages teach us that there are 49 levels of evil in the world, and 50 levels of holiness. Just before leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were at evil level #49. Had they slipped into the 50th, it would have been too late, and they would never have been able to leave Egypt. This is the reason the Jewish people had to leave Egypt in such a haste. Had they stayed in Egypt any longer, they would have descended to the point of no return and would no longer have been worthy of leaving Egypt.

Each day the Jews travelled away from Egypt, they transferred over from a level of evil to a level of holiness, thus when the 49th day came, they were ready to accept the Torah which is the 50th level of Holiness.

Therefore, since the days between Pesach and Shavuot are days of growth and preparation, we count up, charting and assessing our growth. Each passing day represents a greater distance from the past and a new level of closeness to Hashem.

As the Jewish people travelled from Egypt to Sinai, it is easy to imagine the high they were on. They miraculously walked on dry land through the Reed Sea with the water forming walls around them, and then they saw how the Egyptians were drowned in that very sea, as the water came crashing down on them. They had special clouds that protected them from the sun and enemies, that led the way during the daytime as well as a pillar of fire that guided them during the night. Their food, the mana, came directly from

heaven and the water they drank came from a rock that looked like a doughnut that rolled with them, and fell on its side to create a well. They were being pampered in the cocoon of Hashem's loving embrace, and their relationship with Him grew stronger with every moment.

The Jewish nation did not bring the Omer sacrifice during the forty years they travelled through the desert; the mitzvah was only to begin once the Jewish people entered the land of Israel. Nevertheless, they would relive the events each year, as they made their Pesach seders, and re-enact the counting of the 49 days as they did to reach the great day they received the Torah.

But, how were the Jewish people in the future, throughout the ages, to experience those same feelings of growth and preparation for the auspicious day of Shavuot? Enter "The counting of the Omer" the mitzvah designed to help us with this great task. How is that?

There is one more law we need to know about the omer sacrifice, before we can appreciate its message to us. It was forbidden to eat newly grown grain, that was harvested before Pesach, until after the Omer sacrifice was brought on the second day of Pesach. The bringing of this sacrifice is what permitted all new grain to be eaten. Nowadays, new crops are permitted after the second day of Pesach even without the Omer sacrifice.

Once again, the Sefer Hachinuch enlightens us about the meaning of the mitzvah of the Omer sacrifice in Mitzvah #302, the Mitzvah to bring the Omer Sacrifice.

משרשי המצוה, כדי שנתבונן מתוך המעשה החסד הגדול שעושה השם ברוך הוא עם בריותיו לחדש להם שנה שנה תבואה למחיה, לכן ראוי

לנו שנקריב לו ברוך הוא ממנה, למען נזכור חסדו וטובו הגדול טרם נהנה ממנה ומתוך שנהיה ראויין לברכה בהכשר מעשינו לפניו תתברך תבואתינו ויושלם חפץ השם בנו, שחפץ מרוב טובו בברכת בריותיו

The understanding of this mitzvah is, that through this act, prior to partaking of the new crop of wheat, we acknowledge and remember the great kindness and goodness of Hashem that He provides grain and sustenance for his creatures each and every year. And through doing this worthy deed, we make ourselves worthy of Hashem's blessing, and He will bless our wheat and thus fulfill His desire to bestow blessing upon his creatures.

This is very much like the concept of reciting a blessing on food or a beverage before partaking of it. The short blessing acknowledges Hashem as the source of our blessing, and in turn, because we have acted appropriately and connected to Hashem, He bestows more blessings upon us.

The Midrash adds an additional insight into the matter.

מדרש רבה ויקרא - פרשה כח פסקה א

א"ר ינאי בנוהג שבעולם אדם לוקח ליטרא אחת של בשר מן השוק כמה יגיעות הוא יגע כמה צער הוא מצטער עד שבישלה והבריות ישנין על מטותיהן והקדוש ברוך הוא משיב רוחות ומעלה עננים ומגדל צמחים ומדשן את הפירות ואין נותנים לו אלא שכר העומר הה"ד והבאתם את עומר ראשית קצירכם אל הכהן

Rabbi Yanai said: When a person buys a pound of meat from the store, how much work and toil must he put into preparing it before it is ready to eat. And while people are sleeping in bed, Hashem makes the winds blow that bring the clouds that irrigate the earth to bring forth delicious fruits and vegetables for us to eat, and all we give in return is one omer of barley.

The offering of a few pounds of barley flour, the Omer sacrifice, shows that we understand that crops don't grow by themselves. They cannot grow without Hashem's love and care to create the proper climate and conditions for its growth. Although it occurs while we are sleeping in bed, we know it is the great kindness of Hashem that allows it to happen.

A different Midrash adds yet another dimension to the Omer sacrifice.

מדרש רבה ויקרא - פרשה כח פסקה ג

אמר רבי ברכיה אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה לך אמור להם לישראל
כשהייתי נותן לכם את המן הייתי נותן עומר לכל אחד ואחד מכם הה"ד
(שמות טו) עומר לגלגולת ועבשיו שאתם נותנים לי את העומר אין לי אלא
עומר אחד מכלכם

Rabbi Brachia said: Hashem told Moshe. Tell the Jewish people that when I gave them the mana, I would give a full omer of mana for each one of you, but now, when you give me an omer, I ask only one omer from all of you.

The Midrash connects the Omer offering that the Jewish people brought after entering Israel, to the omer (measure) of mana that Hashem gave per person during the 40 years that the Jewish people travelled through the desert. The measure of grain that we are offering up to Hashem as a sacrifice, is our way of expressing to Hashem that we understand that our daily bread, is exactly like the ration of mana that You gave the Jewish people in the desert, an omer per person. And although it is not an open miracle like the mana was, we know that it is You, Hashem, who manipulates nature such that we receive our daily bread.

This lesson was only necessary once the Jewish people entered the land of Israel, where the miraculous existence they enjoyed for forty years, would no longer be the norm. Hashem used this open-miracle policy, only when He was in the mode of establishing the foundations of the Jewish nation. Once and for all, through the ten plagues, and through the constant miracles that accompanied the Jewish people throughout their journey in the desert for forty years, Hashem established the fundamental tenets of our Torah: That He created the world, that He controls the world, and that He is involved with each individual in the Jewish nation. These foundations were ingrained in our grandparents for the forty years they spent in the loving, miraculous cocoon of Hashem.

However, once they would enter the land of Israel, these miracles would stop, and the people would have to go back to the conventional ways of procuring their food. They would plant, they would water, they would weed, etc. it sure looks like it's me who is doing everything around here! The danger of forgetting Hashem, and thinking "It's all me!" would be very great. Therefore, the need for the lesson of the Omer to set us straight, and prevent us from losing sight of the reality, that Hashem is behind the scenes making everything work out perfectly, so that we have our daily food, just like the mana. The same is true as far as all our other blessings is concerned.

The Sefer Hachinuch addresses one more question. Why don't we start the counting from the first day of Pesach? Since the purpose of the exodus was to receive the Torah, that started on the very first day of Pesach!

ואם תשאל, אם בן למה אנו מתחילין אותו ממחרת השבת ולא מיום ראשון, התשובה כי היום הראשון נתייחד כולו להזכרת הנס הגדול והוא יציאת

מצרים, שהוא אות ומופת בחידוש העולם ובהשגחת השם על בני האדם, ואין לנו לערב בשמחתו ולהזכיר עמו שום ענין אחר, ועל כן נתקן החשבון מיום שני מיד

The answers is, that the first day of Pesach is set aside to remember and celebrate the great miracle of our release from Egypt, which provides testimony and proof that Hashem created the world, and that He is involved in people's lives, and we cannot dilute this message by mixing in other ideas.

This last piece, completes the picture and gives us the understanding of the process that is unfolding from Pesach to Shavuot.

We begin our journey on the Seder night and the first day (in the diaspora the first two days) of Pesach when we focus very intensely on the miracle of the exodus from Egypt, and throughout the forty years in the desert. These miracles show us with perfect clarity the reality of Hashem the Creator, and His love and involvement with His people. Once we have securely integrated this lesson, we can apply it to nowadays, the times when Hashem is in His hidden mode. We need to take the next step and realize that Hashem is doing the same, even though we do not see open miracles. He is providing the mana and the water in a miraculous way, only we do not see His involvement behind the scenes. This is the lesson of the omer of barley, which also grows in a miraculous way.

Imagine the scene in a typical Jewish home after the Jewish people have entered the land of Israel. The kid wakes up in the morning and excitedly tells his mother.

“Ma, I’ll go out and get the mana this morning!”

His mother says, "Son, we are now in the land of Israel, there is no more mana."

"What? No mana? What will we eat?" he asks incredulously.

"Here's what we are going to do. We are going to take a kernel of wheat, place it into the ground where it will disintegrate. After a few weeks, a sprout will begin growing out of it, and soon that sprout will turn into a strong stalk with many kernels of wheat on top of it. We will take those kernels and shell them, grind them into flour, mix that flour with water and make a dough, let the dough rise and shape it into loaves, then we will put them into the oven and bake them. After all of that, we will have delicious bread to eat!"

"WOW! Ma, that's a miracle!" exclaims the kid.

This is the lesson of the omer that we need to review and assimilate as we count the omer forty nine consecutive nights between Pesach and Shavuot. This is a daunting concept to absorb, and we need consistent thought and learning before it will become part of us.

This concept is the proper preparation for receiving the Torah, because when we deeply understand that everything comes from Hashem, there can be no jealousy, or strife between people. If someone has more than me, I cannot be jealous of him, that's the way Hashem wants it. If someone hurts me, since that is what Hashem decreed, I obviously deserve it. The person was only the messenger.

When the Jewish people received the Torah on Sinai, the Torah tells us they were like *"One man with one heart"*. Completely unified in their mission as a people and completely at peace with

one another. During the days between Pesach and Shavuot, the Jewish people were working on this concept as well, and they achieved their goal, as they stood unified as *“one man with one heart”* at Sinai. The holy energy of that period of time in the Jewish calendar, returns every year and is made accessible to us during these times. Let’s harness this holy energy when we count the omer this year, and try to acquire this concept so that we may once again stand united as ***“one man with one heart”*** when Shavuot arrives and we receive the Torah.