

Emor - Rabbi Lerner - May 6, 2012

Korban Ha'Omer in the Torah

23:10: *Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them 'When you come to the land I am giving you and you reap the harvest, you shall bring an Omer (a measure) from your first harvest to the Kohein'.* An Omer is the amount of manna that fell for each person in the desert. This korban relates to the harvest of the barley, the first crop that grows each year in the agricultural cycle. By Shvuos, seven weeks later, they harvested the wheat.

23:11: *He shall wave the Omer before Hashem to gain favor for you; on the day following 'Shabbos,' the Kohein shall wave it.* We know that this doesn't really mean Shabbos (as the Tzedukim asserted, it means the Yom Tov of Pesach - we bring this korban the day after Yom Tov.

Rambam: It was on the second day of Pesach, the 16th of Nissan, that in addition to the Musaf korban that was being brought, they would bring a lamb for an Olah with the barley for an Omer. We see this in pasuk 23:12 where it says that there is an animal sacrifice, an Olah, that is brought with the Omer. It is a clear, set time that this korban is brought on the 16th of Nissan; should this day fall out on the Shabbos, it would be brought on that day, overriding the Shabbos. This crop of barley has to come from produce grown in Eretz Yisrael. They should try to bring it from a place that was close to Yerushalayim, but if not available, anywhere from Eretz Yisrael is fine. Why do we count Sefirah from the night of the 16th if we bring the korban during the day? The bringing of the korban was during the day, but the cutting of the barley was done the previous night; we start counting from the cutting of the grain - the pasuk says 'when you cut the harvest,' so we count from that point. If something happened and they could not cut it at night and they did it during the day, it would still be good.

Abarbanel: When the Jews came out of Egypt they were like animals (sexual depravity, immoral) with no Torah, minimal values and understanding; therefore, God commanded that this korban should be a barley crop; but on Shvuos, after receiving the Torah, we became people of intelligence and understanding, we bring a different korban Minchah, one of wheat. At this time we had a new spirit, one of holiness and intelligence; that Minchah was the two loaves of fine flour, the food of chachamim - wheat is for human consumption, barley is animal feed. So, the first Minchah is like an animal diet that we place on the mizbeach, because we were like animals; after spiritual growth we brought a more refined korban. That is what this whole count is about - it is a count of transformation - it is the counting of the yearning, the anticipation of when God will speak to us. This count is that of the transformation of the nation from beasts to humans.

Oznayim LaTorah: this Minchah is strange, different from all others. All others come from refined wheat, and are brought in to the Kohein already prepared - the wheat is pounded, filtered, and made into a fine flour - it is brought to the Bais Hamikdash and mixed with oil. This Minchas Ha'Omer is different - you are bringing in the stalks of barley - we first have to process it there. Why? Barley in this form is animal food, as it says in the Gemorrah Pesachim, where it says just as we have to feed the animals before we feed ourselves (as in the pasuk in the second Perek of Shema that says 'Venasati Eisev Besadechah Livhemtechah Ve'Achaltah Vesavatah') - we have to feed our animals before us - Hashem acts in the same way - He makes animal food grow sooner and ripen sooner to feed the animals - He too takes care of animals first. And animals don't need refined foods - they eat the stalks as is, without any processing.

Rabbeinu Bachya: the essence of this mitzvah is from the beginning of the counting from the 16th of Nissan, when we harvest the barley, and ends with the harvesting of the wheat when we bring a Minchah of wheat. The essence of this mitzvah are the Minchah korbanos, not the animals, even though the animals are larger and far more costly. The two Minchah korbanos sandwich this mitzvah; the animal korbanos were only brought because of the Minchos - they accompanied the Minchah korbanos. What is this all about? Why are these korbanos so significant?

Midrash Rabbah: Hashem told Moshe to tell the people that when He provided the Jews with the manna, He really took care of them completely with a large amount of food (an Omer) for each person. Now Hashem wants payback, but only a token amount - one single Omer from the entire nation. And not only that, it doesn't have to be a quality Omer, like that of wheat; He just asks for something from lowly barley. He is just asking for token recognition for all that He did for us.

Midrash Rabbah: Rabbi Yochanan: we should not cheapen, make light of this korban in our eyes. Because of this mitzvah of the korban Ha'Omer, Avraham was given the deed to the land of Eretz Yisrael. How do we see this? In Lech Lecha 17:8 in the Bris Milah it says *I will give you and your descendants this whole land as an everlasting possession* - an Achuzas Olam. Even if you are kicked off the land, you will still own it for all time. In 17:9 Hashem says that this is a Bris to you and your offspring throughout the generation; the deed to the land is symbolized by Bris milah. Why is Hashem giving us the land? Because of our observing the covenant, the covenant of Omer. The Bris mentioned there is the covenant of the Omer. How do we see this?

Sefer Hachinuch: the root of the mitzvah of Omer is so that we should clearly understand from our actions the tremendous chesed that Hashem does of making the crops grow year after year in Eretz Yisrael. We show our thanks by bringing the very first of the crops, before we can have any benefit from it - we first bring a token to Hashem. Even though we do all of the work involved with farming, we acknowledge that Hashem made these crops grow. We are commanded to do wait until the second day of Pesach so that we do not mix one Simchah with another. We must show appreciation for the harvest, for the natural miracle of food growth from the ground, as early as possible, immediately after Pesach, the holiday of our freedom. We acknowledge the miracle of getting sustenance from God on a daily basis.

Rav Nissan Alpert: there are three aspects to the bringing of the Omer, all derived from the Midrash Rabbah: 1) It is a korban Todah, one of thanks, for all of the produce of the land; this allows us to benefit from the new crops coming in; just as we don't take a bite of any food without first saying a brachah to thank Hashem, so we show thanks this way for the crops. 2) Why only an Omer? It provides sufficient food only for one day, not an over the top amount; we should not become too materialistic. 3) The Omer is similar to the execution of a covenant, the Bris Milah. When we cut the barley harvest, the first growth of the land, it is like a Bris Milah, the same cutting of the baby. This cutting is like the foreskin of the land. It is to avoid the materialism of the land - we should not get too caught up with it, as it is not our efforts that bring the food with our hard work - it is always from Hashem. This korban Ha'Omer symbolizes this. The Midrash Rabbah says that this mitzvah was the first mitzvah tied to the land that was performed historically - we crossed the Yarden into the land on the tenth of Nissan, brought the korban Pesach on the 14th; on the night of the 16th we cut the barley for this korban. It was the first mitzvah the Jews did that was Teluyah Ba'Aretz, tied to the land. It was symbolic that we were about to take over the land, a very rich land, we had to first show thanks to Hashem to

acknowledge that it all came from Him. We count the 49 days, each day focusing on the word Omer, because it was a critical lesson for us; this was a mitzvah of celebrating the land of Israel. This mitzvah was the zechus of Eretz Yisrael.