

Emor - Rabbi Lerner - April 21, 2013

The Omer - A Korban or a Time Period?

There is a famous machlokes on how one is to count sefiras ha'omer - either using the word **la'omer** or **ba'omer**. The **Mishna Berurah** says you are yotzei your counting without actually saying the entire word omer by mistake. **Shulchan Aroch**: you count standing, you say the berachah, and then count with the proper number of days followed by the word Ba'omer - which is in parenthesis; the commentaries say that most meforshim say the proper word is La'omer. There is a big difference in using the different words. The korban omer, a stalk of barley, was cut that moment in the night and brought the next day as an offering in the Bais Hamikdash - it is the very first harvest, the harvesting of the barley crop. The mitzvah is detailed in our parshah, 23:9-14. In addition to this barley, you bring a lamb and meal offerings (a Minchah) and a libation of wine; but the most important part of this offering is the bringing of the first stalks of this modest barley. Those who count La'omer have a meaning that it is that number of days since the bringing of that korban. Those who say Ba'omer have in mind to mean the number of days of this period - this season of the omer. This is a reflection on a major machlokes: if one counted too early one day, then he should count again when it gets dark; the really careful people don't count when it just begins to get dark - they wait until tzais hakochavim to make sure there are no mistakes and that it is clearly the next day. The **Rambam** and other Rishonim say the mitzvah of sefiras ha'omer is de'oraisa, and you must wait until it is definitely night - you don't do a mitzvah de'oraisa at a time of safek - you wait until it is definitely night. Those who say it earlier rely on this mitzvah being de'rabanan - they say it is linked to the korban; and if there is no korban omer anymore, there is no mitzvah de'oraisa to count. It would seem that la'omer vs ba'omer is an outgrowth of whether sefiras ha'omer is now de'oraisa, linked to the korban, or whether it is derabanan, linked to the time period. If you say ba'omer you must wait until it is definitely night. One can understand the link to the korban Omer, commanded in the Torah. Why is the season called a season of Omer?

Rav Baruch Simon: The **Shelah** (Rav Horowitz) on parshas Lech Lecha says that there was a preordained period of suffering in Egypt, as detailed in the Bris Bain Habesarim, for a reason - Hashem had to implant the concept of avdus in our hearts, to accustom us to the concept of being an eved because that is what life is about - the question is being a slave to whom. Hashem took us out of Egypt, freeing us from that slavery, but He says in 25:55 "***For Bnei Yisrael are servants to M, they are my slaves whom I took out from the land of Egypt - I am Hashem your God.***" It was about conditioning us to the concept of slavery, but to Hashem. **Rav Simon** says this is the reason behind mitzvos leading up to the seder night in Egypt. Hashem told us before we were freed we had to reject Avodah Zarah by killing their gods; and to do bris milah, to create a sign of slavery on our bodies to Hashem; this shows that God controls our life - we negate the masters of Egypt with the korban Pesach, and we admit there is a new master in our life, Hakodosh Baruch Hu, with Bris Milah. We say we are Tamim to Hashem with Bris Milah.

There are two midrashim that relate to this. What was the merit of our inheriting the land? It is the mitzvah of Omer. We see this from 23:10 where it says ***When you enter the land that I give you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring an Omer from your first harvest to the Kohain.*** It is brought on the second day of Pesach, the korban ha'omer. Hashem is saying that is why He is bringing us to Eretz Yisrael, to bring this Omer. Another opinion is that of Rav

Yochanan who says that the mitzvah of omer should never be small in our eyes, since it was because of this mitzvah that Avraham was given the Bris Bain Habesarim - the land was given on the condition that we guard *that covenant*; we would normally think that it is the covenant of bris milah; but he says it was the covenant of the mitzvas ha'omer.

So, the whole concept of the counting from the bringing of the omer - right after the commemoration of our exodus from Egypt on Pesach - is very important. **Rav Epstein**: when you look at the mitzvos that are tied to the land, the very first mitzvah we perform is the mitzvah of omer; all other mitzvos, like terumah, are after you bring in and process the grains; with the omer you take the raw crop that you cut in the field. This is the first, the earliest mitzvah, tied to agriculture in Eretz Yisrael each year. The **Sefer Hachinuch** says that the philosophy behind the mitzvah is that we should contemplate with this first harvesting the incredible chesed that God does with His creations, recreating the miracle of nature each spring - that we can just plant tiny grains in the ground that will grow into something conferring tremendous pleasure and giving us a wealth of crops. This barley is the first of all the growths each year, so we take the first of the first, harvest it at night, and bring it the very next day to the bais hamikdash and say praise and gratitude to Hashem; we thank him for enjoying the produce of the land by first bringing the very first produce to acknowledge His great chesed to all living beings through the power of the nurturing earth. This is what is behind the mitzvah of the omer.

So, the symbol of the korban ha'omer is that we are negating our arrogance, our power, in front of God by showing the very first crop should be given to God in acknowledging that He is the master, we are servants; He is giving us wealth and a parnassah - it is not our power; it is all God's doing. We negate ourselves in front of Hashem, we show how we are His slaves. So we experienced the galus mitzrayim, we endured slavery, to get used to that concept; but Pesach changed us from Pharaoh's slaves to being God's slaves. That is the story of life - God got us used to being slaves, but changed us to being His slaves. We acknowledge this with the very first mitzvah we do after Pesach with the korban ha'omer. We don't take the pleasurable item out of the earth without first thanking God. This is the connection between Pesach and what follows - both show submission to Hashem. This takes us to Shvuos.

If we say La'omer, it connects us to the korban; why do we keep counting 49 days? Because shvuos is the further connection to the same concept - God tells Moshe at the burning bush that He is taking us out of Egypt to serve God on Har Sinai - we are to become God's slaves. That is why we need the continuity, linking Pesach to Shvuos - we are not free. The symbol of the korban is to continue the concept of being slaves to God which will be concretized on Shvuos. The ideal accolade is being Eved Hashem, like Moshe - this will happen at Har Sinai. The **Shlah** further says that after Har Sinai, we should have entered right into Eretz Yisrael which is often called Eretz Canaan - why is it called that? Canaan had one characteristic - Noach cursed Cham and his offspring, Canaan, saying they should always be slaves. The word Canaan connotes slavery. Eretz Canaan is being taken away from those people and given to us, but it is still referred to quite often as Eretz Canaan - it maintains that name even after the Jews are in control of the land many years - we see this in Sefer Shoftim, perek 21 after the story of Pilegish Begivon - it talks about Shiloh being in the land of Canaan. Why is it still called Canaan? Because it is always the land of servitude, the land of submission to the master. The name remains to tell us that we are always slaves to God.

The **Rambam** would say Ba'omer, because in our time it is not tied to the korban anymore; it is a mitzvah tied to the time period. What makes it so important, the season of the Omer? There is a pasuk in Ki Saitzah 24:7 that says if a Jew kidnaps a fellow Jew, **Vehisomer**

Bo- meaning treating him like a slave. So, Yemai Ha'omer means the period of slavery. We are becoming slaves to God during this period of time. We work on becoming slaves to God during this period between Pesach and Shvuos. There is yet another mitzvah of Omer that is tied to God - that was involving the manna - each person was allowed to gather a particular measure of manna each day - an Omer. The whole entity showed our dependence on God. This is the period of recognizing that we did not become free when we left Egypt; we became the slaves of God. That is what is represented by the Omer.