



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Nofei HaShemesh
Maggid Shiur, Daf Yomi, OU.org
Senior Ra"m, Kerem B'Yavneh

The Significance of the Omer

S*efiras HaOmer* is a very special commandment, according to which we count the days between Pesach and Shavuot- the day that we received the Torah.

The count begins on the day that the *Omer* offering is made. This offering serves an important function: only after this offering has been made is it permissible to eat from the new crop of grain (“*hadash*”). The word “*omer*” itself is a measurement, an amount – specifically, the amount of grain that constitutes this offering of barley. No other offering derives its name from its measurement, and very few offerings are from barley. What is the significance of the *omer* offering?

Rabbi Yosef M'Salanat – the Be'er Yosef – offers an amazing perspective on the

underlying meaning and purpose of this offering. He suggests that the *Omer* should remind us of the tremendous kindness of HaKadosh Barukh Hu, who provides us with grain every year. It is similar to *bikkurim* and *halla* in that all of these commandments require us to devote the first of something – our first fruits, the first part of what we bake, the first harvested grain of the year – to Hashem, as an expression of gratitude and an acknowledgment that He provides us with whatever we have.

This idea is reinforced when we consider where else the *omer* measurement appears in the Torah. The manna that fed the nation in the desert appeared each morning in a particular quantity: one *omer* per capita. An *omer* was enough to sustain one person for one day.

The *Omer* offering can thus be seen as a continuation of the manna. Just as it was clear through the miracle of the manna that Hashem sustained the Jews in the desert, so too, even when it is not as obvious, we must recognize that our sustenance comes from God. This is accomplished by offering the same measurement that was provided in the desert. In fact, we were sustained by the manna until Yehoshua led the nation

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into Eretz Yisrael. The **exact date** that the manna ceased was the second day of Pesah – the **very day** on which the *Omer* offering is brought and on which we begin to count the *Omer*. This is no coincidence. Rather, it indicates clearly that the *omer* of manna, the *Omer* offering, and *Sefiras HaOmer* are connected and serve a similar purpose: helping us recognize that all our sustenance is from HaKadosh Barukh Hu.

On each of the 49 days, we focus on another aspect and try to ascend the ladder of serving God

A portion of manna was kept in the Aron, in the center of the Mikdash. The annual *Sefiras HaOmer* is the reminder that it is not just the first grain of the season that is from Hashem – everything we have is a gift from Hashem. That is the acknowledgment we should cultivate as we prepare to receive the Torah.

***Omer* and Servitude**

Another reason why the *Omer* offering is referred to as such, drawing attention to its measurement, is suggested by Rabbi Mecklenberg in *HaKesav VeHaKabbala*. In *Parshas Ki Setzeh*, when the Torah is discussing the prohibition of kidnapping, it states: “If a man is discovered kidnapping any person from among his brothers, of children of Israel, and treats him as a

slave (*vehisamer bo*) and sells him...” (*Devarim* 24:7).

The term “*vehisamer*,” which connotes slave labor, is related to the word “*omer*.” It is as though we say, as we wave the *Omer* offering before Hashem, “You are in charge. We are here only to serve You!” Our material, temporal success is not an end in itself. Rather, it means to the ultimate end of serving HaKadosh Barukh Hu.

This is why, we refer to the period as *Sefiras HaOmer* instead of “the countdown to Shavuot” or “the count up from Pesah.” The entire period is about our accepting our servitude. On each of the 49 days, we focus on another aspect and try to ascend the ladder of serving God.

Perhaps the word is also connected to *me’amer*, one of the 39 (prohibited activities on Shabbat (39 *melachos*), gathering in and creating heaps of grain, because servitude means gathering in all of our strength and directing it toward the service of Hashem.

By examining where the root “*omer*” is used elsewhere in the Torah, we are able to derive a better understanding of the significance of *Sefiras Ha’omer*. During the *omer* period, may we focus on all these elements, recognizing the gifts bestowed upon us by Hashem and strengthening our connection and *avodas Hashem*, as we lead up to the commemoration of the receiving of the Torah. ■