

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Emor

The way the Torah lists the Festivals in this week's Torah portion strikes us as being quite different than the manner in which it lists them in Numbers, Chapter 28. There, it lists Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot and delineates the special sacrifices brought on each of these festivals. But here the Torah mentions an omer amount (a Biblical volume measure) of barley must be brought and waved on the second day of Passover, and it also prohibits eating from the new harvest until this waving and bringing the sacrifice accompanying it. In addition, the Torah here requires us to count seven weeks until the holiday of Shavuot. The omer and the counting are not mentioned at all in Numbers, where the Torah focuses strictly on the sacrifices brought on the first and last days of the festivals. Let us focus on a few of the points the Torah adds here.

The author of Akeidat Yitzchak (1420-1494) points out that the passage talking about waving the omer and bringing its accompanied sacrifice is prefaced with, "When you come to the Land that I am giving you." With regards to the sacrifices of the other festivals mentioned in our parsha, the Torah does not mention that we ought to bring them after entering the Land of Israel. It seems obvious that all of the sacrifices are brought in the Temple in Israel. If so, why must the Torah preface the procedure of the omer waving and its accompanied sacrifice with the timing of "When you come to the Land?"

He answers the goal of waving the omer offering, which comes from the first harvest of the spring season, is for the Jewish farmer to recognize that all of his blessings and material wealth come from Hashem. The Torah (Deuteronomy Chapter 8) specifically warns us not to become consumed by the physical beauty of the Land of Israel and its produce to the extent that we forget the Source of it all. Here too, the Torah says that when we come to the Land and start the spring harvest, we should bring an omer amount from the harvest to the kohen so that he will wave it in four directions to show symbolically that this is a gift from G-d. This recognition is so essential that we may not eat from the new harvest until we instruct the kohen to wave the omer from the new crop.

Using this line of thinking, we can understand another unclear phrase in this very passage. The Torah describes the timing of this waving as being on the "day



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continued ...

after the rest day,” which here refers to the day after the first day of Pesach. Although “the rest day” normally refers to the seventh day of the week, the Talmud interprets it here to refer to the first day of Pesach, another day when we must not work. Why does the Torah not simply state we should do this procedure on the second day of Pesach?

Sabbath marks the completion of the natural order of creation, set into motion with the six days of creation in the beginning of time. On the other hand, the first day of the Pesach holiday commemorates how G-d changed the natural course of the world, redeeming the Jewish people in a miraculous way. When we bring the omer to the kohen for him to wave it, we recognize that the yield of the field came from the Hand of G-d, although it appears externally to have come through natural means. The Exodus on the first night of Pesach teaches us that even the grain harvest, which seems to happen automatically through the natural order of the world, only comes to its fruition through the Hand of G-d. The Torah refers to the first day of Pesach as “Shabbat” because Pesach teaches us that the natural order of the world, represented by the Sabbath, comes from Hashem just as much as any miracle. When we bring the omer to the kohen to wave on the “day after the ‘Shabbat,’” we acknowledge that G-d runs the natural order of creation just as much as He creates miracles.

In Numbers Chapter 28, the Torah describes Pesach and Shavuot and delineates the special mussaf sacrifices brought on those days. In our parsha, however, the Torah describes the progression from Pesach to Shavuot, punctuated by the mitzvah to count the 49 days between the first day of Pesach and Shavuot. The first step in the 49-day preparation to receive the Torah on Shavuot is to bring the omer and its meal-offering, which signify our belief that Hashem is present and involved in our lives. If we internalize this, we can properly be on track to receive His instructions on Shavuot.

Shabbat Shalom!

