



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד מרדכי מלכא שליט"א נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Chief Rabbi of Elad, Israel MORDECHAI MALKA, Founder & President of Institutions "Or Hamelech"



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Emor

The Secret Behind the Mitzva of Omer – Unity

Question:

1 – In this week's *parasha*, we learn about the commandment to count the days of the *omer*. Why does the Torah command us to do this, and what is the essence of this mitzva? 2 – Furthermore, our Sages teach us that we are required not only to count the days of the *omer*, but the **weeks** as well. What is the significance of this? 3 – Why is the *korban* that sets off this count called the *Korban Ha'omer*? The word *omer* is related to the word *arima*, which means "a pile." What is the connection between this *korban* and a pile? 4 – Even the mitzva of **counting** is called *omer* – surely this is not coincidental. What does it mean? The day on which we commemorate the passing of R' Shimon bar Yochai is also called *Lag Ba'omer*. We must understand the significance of the *omer*.

The Jewish Nation's Secret to Success

There is a tremendous lack of awareness of the fact that the secret to the Jewish Nation's success lies in its unity. Sadly, all of the misfortune and persecution that plagues the Jewish Nation is due to their lack of unity and strife. Therefore, we must realize that the opposite is also true. To the degree that we increase unity, so too, will we increase our security and financial situation, as well as increasing peace. Instead of investing effort in making peace with our enemies, we should direct our efforts towards uniting the different factions that comprise our nation. Our strength lies in our unity, and it is the true Iron Dome which has the power to protect the Jewish Nation from every harsh decree. Much to our sorrow, we are plagued by strife, and there are those who only wish to see the downfall of their fellow man. This is only to our detriment, for our relationship with our enemies mirrors our relationship with our fellow Jew. This is what the Torah is teaching us with the commandment to count the *omer*, as we will explain.

Counting the Omer and the Korban Omer Symbolize Unity

We are presently in the middle of *sefirat ha'omer*, which are days that are especially ripe for contemplating one's level of unity with his fellow Jews. The mitzva of the *omer* is comprised of two parts: the *korban ha'omer* and the *sefirat ha'omer*. This *korban* was called *omer*, which means "a pile," because the barley was cut and made into piles. The fact that they were piled up hints to the fact that these are days when the Jewish Nation must be like "piles," in other words – unified. This is the secret to the Jewish Nation's success. Similarly, the theme behind counting the days of the *omer* is also related to the idea of loving one's fellow Jew. For this is the deeper idea behind counting, as explained in the *Drashot* of the *Ben Ish Chai*, who expounds on the *pasuk*, "*Al kein yomru ha'moshlim, bo cheshbon*," Regarding this the poets would say, 'Come to *Cheshbon*.'" Our Sages expound that *moshlim*, which can also mean "rulers," refers to those who control their *yetzer hara*. The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that when it comes to making a numerical calculation [or a *cheshbon* in *lashon ha'kodesh*], the way to do it successfully is by joining the correct numbers and organizing them in a proper sequence. If one takes the number 1 and places a zero next to it, it is increased 10 times. Furthermore, if one places the larger number before the smaller one, it will increase the value significantly. He therefore explains that those who rule over their *yetzer hara* perform a *cheshbon ha'nefesh*, spiritual accounting, by drawing a parable from a numerical equation. Numbers teaches us the great benefit and success accrued by joining two of them together, and this is a lesson that can be applied to Jews as well. The days of *sefira* are preparation for *Matan Torah*, which the Jewish Nation merited only after they reached a level of unity, as our Sages teach us that they were like one man with one heart. Therefore, unity is a basic requirement to merit receiving the Torah.

The Deaths of Rebbi Akiva's 24,000 Students

Therefore, it was specifically during these days that 24,000 students of Rebbi Akiva died because of not honoring one another sufficiently. As mentioned, more than any other time, these days are ripe for increasing love and unity. Every Jew is required to fulfill the Will of Hashem and try to increase harmony amongst Jews. This is as the Mishna states at the end of *Masechet Uktzin*, that Hashem did not find a better vessel to contain blessing than



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peace, as the *pasuk* stated, "Hashem blesses His nation with peace." Our Sages (*Yerushalmi Nedarim perek 9*) described unity when discussing the negative prohibition of exacting revenge and holding a grudge. The *Yerushalmi* draws a parable to someone who was cutting meat with a knife and accidentally cut his hand. Would he ever think to exact revenge against his hand for yielding the knife that cut his other hand? Of course not. So too, are the entire Jewish Nation considered one body. The same way that he would not strike back against his own body, so too, should he view his fellow Jew as his own body and not take revenge.

The Difference Between the *Dor Hamabul* and *Dor Haflaga*

We have stated many times that in *Parashat Bereishit*, Hashem reveals the secret to success in this world to man. In relation to the *Dor Haflaga*, the Generation that was Dispersed, Hashem said, "Behold they are one nation with a unified tongue, will it not be withheld from them all that they planned to do?" In other words, it is as if there is no power in the world that can defeat a unified people, and the only strategy, therefore, is to divide and conquer. This is why Hashem dispersed them. We see, then, that unity is the best protection against harsh decrees. This can also be learned from the words of the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Tzav 7*) which states that when the Jews are a unified whole, even if there is idolatry amongst them, Hashem does not punish them. How much more so does this apply when Jews unite to perform a mitzva or any holy matter. Hashem will most certainly join them and help them, and then they will be successful. Therefore, any group that wishes to accomplish something that will last must be united, and then nothing will deter them. In the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Nitzavim 1*), our Sages compared this to a bundle of reeds. As long as they are bound together, even the mightiest of men cannot break them. But when they are separate from one another, they can easily be broken.

A Chassidic Tale

A Jew once entered the study of the *Chozeh* from Lublin [Rebbe Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz zt"l] and poured out his suffering heart before the Rebbe. He was beset by one misfortune after another – what should he do? The holy *Chozeh* answered, "The *pasuk* states, 'There is no *tzaddik* who only does good and has not sinned' – everyone knows that they are guilty of something! Anyone who thinks a little about his spiritual state will realize how he has sullied his soul with his many sins. However, as long as there is unity amongst a family, the Attribute of Strict Judgment is silenced, as it were! But what can I do with your home?" said the *Chozeh* with *ruach ha'kodesh*. "The disagreements in your home do not stop, and this is why you are constantly being punished." Hashem should guard us from strife.

The Power of the *Korban Ha'omer*

Our Sages praise the *korban ha'omer*, stating that it saved the Jewish Nation in the Purim story. Haman entered the *beit midrash* and found the Jews studying the laws of the *korban ha'omer*. When he saw this he exclaimed, "In merit of the handful of grain, equaling the amount of a tenth of an *eifa*, you have defeated the 10,000 silver coins that I gave to Achashveirosh." The handful of barely flour that is offered and the piles that preceded it, represent the unity of the Jews, as we explained previously. This is what guarantees their victory and protects them from all bad things. Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz drew an insight from the words of Haman, who said (*Esther* 3:8), "There is one nation that is scattered and spread out amongst the nations, and it is not worth it for the king to let them remain." The Rebbe asked: when are the Jewish people united? When they are in their homeland, "each man beneath his vine and his fig tree." However, if the nation is scattered and spread out or dwelling amongst the nations of the world, then they are entrenched in a bitter exile. Haman was aware of the fact that the only way he and the nations of the world would be able to harm the Jews was if they would be in a state of disunity, scattered and spread out. When Esther recognized that danger was imminent, she told Mordechai that redemption was pending upon the Jews uniting like before the exile and upon them distancing themselves from the gentiles. She therefore instructed (*ibid.* 4:16), "Go and gather the Jews." She wanted them to specifically be gathered together, for this was the most essential ingredient. Indeed, it was in the merit of this unity that they were redeemed, as the *pasuk* states (9:1), "The Jews prevailed over their enemies."



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The Reason Behind Napoleon's Defeat

In the year 5572, Napoleon had conquered all of Europe and was now in Russia. He understood that victory there would be critical. During one of the cold Russian winters, Napoleon's troops passed through the town of Volozhin. Towards evening, the general staff and at their head, Napoleon, decided to encamp the army in Volozhin for a number of days. Most of the houses in the town were deserted and the streets were dark. Only the Jewish population remained in the town, as did their *Rav*, R' Chaim of Volozhin, who did not wish to leave his flock without a shepherd. Napoleon's assistant searched for houses where the tired soldiers could rest. Suddenly, he noticed a dim light flickering in the *beit midrash* of the town. When he entered, he saw that it was totally empty except for one man. In the corner sat a short individual, leaning over his Gemara, while holding a candle. It was R' Chaim. When he noticed the general standing before him in his colorful army uniform, he jumped up. He was frightened to hear the French language, which was unfamiliar to him. "Do you understand German?" asked the General. "I am not an expert in this language either," answered R' Chaim, "but I will try to respond in this language." "So please tell me then," continued the general, "where does your Rabbi, whose name is Chaim, live? We have been told many wondrous things about this Rabbi." R' Chaim remained silent. "The Emperor himself, wishes to get to know him personally." "Chaim is standing before you," answered R' Chaim. "But I do not perform wonders. I am a simple Jew, who sits at night and studies Gemara." The general spoke with R' Chaim for several more minutes and then left, feeling great affection for R' Chaim. Shortly thereafter, R' Chaim found himself inside Napoleon's massive tent. He spoke with R' Chaim in a very friendly manner. As he concluded speaking, he turned to ask R' Chaim one last question, "Rabbi, I see that you are neither a sorcerer nor a miracle worker; rather you are a wise man with great foresight. Please tell me then, what will be the results of my war with Russia? You can speak freely, without fear of being harmed." "Your honor," answered R' Chaim, "I will answer the way our teachers answered – by telling a story: There was a great prince travelling in his glorious chariot that was drawn by four mighty steers. Suddenly, one of the horses tripped and pulled the other horses down with it. The chariot and the passengers inside fell into the mud. All of the efforts of the driver, the servants escorting the prince, and of the prince himself, to pull the chariot out of the mud, were in vain. They remained stuck in the mud. A poor farmer passed by, his wagon being pulled by three weak horses. When they reached the muddy area, they too, fell into the mud, but with one crack of the farmer's whip, the horses gathered up their remaining strength and pulled the wagon out of the mud. The prince called out to him angrily, 'How could it be? These weak horses were able to succeed at doing what my strong horse could not!' Excited, the farmer answered, 'Where did Your honor get these beautiful horses from?' The prince began to list the types of horse they were and the land he bought it from. This one was from Persia; the Sheik himself had ridden on it. The next, was a horse from Arabia. The third came from the stables of the Emperor of Petersburg. The fourth was a Hungarian horse of supreme quality. Each one cost a fortune. The farmer then understood the problem. 'That's just it,' he called out. 'Every horse is a different type; they have no connection to one another. When this one pulls the chariot in the direction of Petersburg, the second one pulls in the direction of Persia, and the third to Hungary. However, my horses are from the same family. They consist of a mother and her two sons, and each one worries about the other. I just wave my whip and they instantly start pulling together. However, none of your horses feels the hardship of his fellow horse.' Your Honor's army is too large," continued R' Chaim, "and is comprised of too many types of people. It is an army consisting of mighty soldiers, princes, and kings. Russia is a weak and poor land, but they are a united nation under one dictator. I am therefore doubtful about your chances to defeat Russia." As is well known, the great Torah giant foresaw exactly what eventually happened. The emperor Napoleon was defeated, and his glorious army was scattered in every direction when they flew from the sword of Mother Russia. This is the power of unity.

Present Times

Historically, these days are difficult ones for the Jewish Nation. Approximately 2000 years ago, 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva died. Therefore, our Sages enacted various practices of mourning during this time period. It is also the time when we remember the Holocaust, when millions of Jews were slaughtered simply because they were Jews.

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We recall the reestablishment of *Eretz Yisrael* and the ingathering of exiles 69 years ago, years which have been plagued with wars and persecution, with tens of thousands being killed *al kiddush Hashem* to protect the Holy Land. We are required to think about what our Sages have taught, that in these days we must increase *ahavat Yisrael*. This is hinted to by the name of the month *Iyar* [איר], the *roshei teivot* of which spell *ישראל*, increasing *ahavat Yisrael*. There is no greater way to protect ourselves from our enemies who rise up against us every generation than unity. Therefore, *Rashbi's yom hilula* is called *Lag Ba'omer*, because it joins all of Israel together like an *omer*. This is as our Sages have taught, that there is no vessel that can contain blessing like peace, as the *pasuk* states "Hashem blesses His nation with peace."

Shabbat Shalom,
Rav Mordechai Malka