



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Omer Revisited

The Torah reading for the second day of Pesach is Parshat HaMo'adim, from this week's sedra of Emor. That was the first day of the Omer and reading in the Torah about the mitzva to count from that day until Shavuot, was perfect timing. This Shabbat is the 30th of the Omer and we read about the mitzva to count, again. So let's take the opportunity to revisit the Omer period - specifically, the mournful nature thereof.

Once upon a time - and IYH soon in the future, the Omer period was kind of joyous, something like Chol Ha-Mo'ed, the days between Pesach and the culmination of Pesach, namely Shavuot. It is clear from the flow of the holidays in Parshat Emor that Shavuot takes that role as the Atzeret of Pesach; in the sedra, Shavuot does not have a name of its own and never has a date identified with it - it is the 50th, culminating day of that which began on Pesach.

The count from the Exodus to Matan Torah - joyous. The count from the Barley Offering to the Two Loaves offering - joyous.

And then came the Churban. No Beit HaMikdash (temporarily, albeit a

sadly long temporary), no Omer HaT'nufa, no Mincha Chadasha - empty.

That emptiness has been partially filled with mourning the tragic deaths of 24,000 talmidim of Rabi Akiva. (and the Crusades).

Let's look at that the mourning aspect more closely.

First of all, most opinions are that the mournful aspect of the Omer period is only 33 days thereof. This has two main variations - from the beginning through Lag BaOmer or from Rosh Chodesh Iyar until Shavuot (with a break on Lag).

Second, unlike the Nine Days (and the Three Weeks) which is a period of Aveilut with several restrictions, the mournful Omer period (MOP) is noticeably lighter. Fewer restrictions and more exceptions to the restrictions. Marriages, no, but engagements are permitted. And if one went ahead and married during the MOP, he is not sanctioned for it. And the father, sandak, and mohel of a Brit during MOP are permitted to take haircuts and shave in honor of the Brit. And when Lag BaOmer is on Sunday, haircutting and shaving is permitted on Erev Shabbat, the 31st of the Omer.

Now look at the days of the whole Omer period. The first six days are Pesach. No mourning there. There are three days of Rosh Chodesh. Seven

Shabbatot. Pesach Sheni. Lag Ba-Omer. The three days before Shavuot. No Tachanun on the first 16 days of the Omer. Nor for the last five days of the Omer. Nor on Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh.

And in our time, let's not forget Yom HaAtzma'ut and Yom Yerushalayim.

And that's my point. The Omer period, once bright, became dark. But not black. Gray. And gray only for two-thirds of the time. And with bright spots even in those two-thirds.

Look at what many say right after counting: May the Merciful One restore to us the service of the Beit HaMikdash speedily in our time.

That colors even the gray with a bright future that is not just a dream and a hope - it is an ironclad promise from HKBH.

Add all that to our kavanot and perspective. **PTDT**