

Festivals In Nature Which Are The Antithis Of Nature

(part 4)

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Although tradition and scholarship have ascribed many different reasons and important ideas for it, basically, Sefirah remains the counting of the 7 weeks from the bringing of one sacrifice, HaOmer, to the bringing of another sacrifice, Bikkurim. Behind this counting there are important religious and spiritual lessons which flow from the nature of these 2 sacrifices. These lessons concern our wealth and all the efforts we continuously make regarding them, irrespective of the actual level of wealth we enjoy or strive for. We lose, not gain, by allowing these lessons to be obscured or replaced by the later additional thoughts or ideas concerning the Omer.

The Omer was the measure of barley brought by the Cohanim on behalf of the nation. Bikkurim were the first fruits offering brought by the individual farmer from the yields of their fields. The bringing of the Omer was mandated for a specific time, the first day of Chol Hamoed Pesach whereas bikkurim were brought at various times in addition to those brought on Shavuot. Bringing of the Omer [but today merely its date] permitted the nation to eat the new barley which is the first grain to ripen and then later of the wheat crop. Bikkurim were simply individual expressions of thanks and gratitude for that bounty.

We should realize that the first ripe grain is not a widespread event but rather occurs spasmodically in various fields in different parts of the country and

therefore requires research as to where such grain is to be found. Such publicity was heightened in ancient times by the fact that the Omer was performed by the Cohanim, representatives of Am Yisrael, amidst great ceremony as befits a national sacrifice. On the first day of Chol Hamoed the Cohanim went to a field in which there was enough grain to harvest an Omer, even if that day was Shabbat. This harvest was one of the first controversies regarding the power of the Oral Law in Judaism.

The Torah says that on the morrow of the Shabbat, Yisrael was to harvest the Omer. The Sadducees of Bayit Sheini who believed only in the Written Torah, held that this meant literally the Sunday following Pesach. We, the Pharisees, learnt from Torah she be'al Peh, that this was the first day of Chol HaMoed. In order to publicize and to anchor this truth in Jewish thought and practice, great ceremony was attached to harvesting the Omer during Pesach. The Cohanim would question aloud whether they held sickles, whether this was grain, whether it was a Shabbat, and finally whether they should harvest it. When the public cried out 'harvest', the Cohanim would reap the Omer. This simple agricultural act reaffirmed once again the validity and supremacy of Torah she be al Peh.

All our religion is a constant synthesis of the individual's worship and the national-group behavior. It seems that this can never be stressed enough given not only our galut but also our national tendency to individualism. Each individual Jew and Jewess prays, yet the preferred form is for communal prayer couched in the plural and conducted in our national language. We may be scattered all over the world, but pray for



rain at the season required in Eretz Yisrael irrespective of the country in which we happen to be. This idea is repeated here where alongside the nation's Omer there is Bikkurim which is an avodah of a completely different nature, an expression of personal piety and devotion. "A person goes into his field or orchard and sees a fig or a bunch of grapes which have ripened and says, this is bikkurim, they become bikkurim, even if they are not completely ripe; it is his verbal expression which determines their status "(Hilchot Bikkurim 2, 19).

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, see how great is the power of speech. A person simply says, "This article, animal or money is holy and it becomes something holy, sanctified and consecrated. So, if it would have been left up to me I would have created mankind with 2 mouths each, one for things holy and the other for lashon harah. The Divine Wisdom is greater and knows that if man would have been created with 2 mouths, they would have spoken lashon harah with both of them".

While the Omer is only a ritualistic memory for us, the concept of bikkurim remains relevant to our everyday thinking and retains its religious and spiritual nature. So a person should know that Hashem is the real source of every new development in their lives and of all the success they enjoy. This is a form of knowledge to which it is easy to pay lip service but extremely difficult to really accept; there is no such thing as a self-made man. 🌸

