During Sefirat HaOmer, we count each day towards Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah. So why do we call this period Sefirat HaOmer rather than Sefira LeKabbalat HaTorah?

Furthermore, Rabbi Yochanan says in the Midrash: “Never let the mitzvah of the omer be light in your eyes.” Even though the omer comes from barley, which is animal fodder, one might consider it a mitzvah of low significance and therefore deal with it leniently. But Avraham Avinu only received the Land in the merit of the omer, as it says, “And to you, I gave this Land” [on condition] “You keep my covenant,” referring to the brit of the omer. In other words, Chazal teach us that the omer is not simply a mitzvah, but a brit.

A mitzvah with the status of brit influences all of the other 612 mitzvot, as indicated by the gematria of the word ברית. What is so special about the mitzvah of the omer that bestows upon it the status of brit? Other mitzvot with this status – mila, Shabbat, learning Torah – influence our lives in major ways. But why does omer receive this status as well?

The answers to these questions lie in the definition of the word omer. In Hebrew, the root ע-מ-ר has three definitions:

1. עומר, a measurement – in the desert, Bnei Yisrael were commanded to eat an omer of manna, one-tenth of an eifah;
2. מעמר, gathering together twigs and the like – one of the 39 melachot prohibited on Shabbat, and
3. להתעמר, to misuse an object in one’s possession – the Torah bids one who takes an אשת יפת(beautiful woman) captive in battle and decides not to marry her to keep her as a slave, saying, לא תתעמר בה.

These three definitions complement one another, providing a more accurate definition of omer.

During the 40 years Bnei Yisrael traveled the desert, the manna fell every day except Shabbat. Once they crossed the Jordan, the manna stopped and they no longer received their bread effortlessly but became partners in its creation. Partnership with G-d is certainly advantageous but contains a great risk as well. When a person toils and succeeds, he may mistakenly conclude that his own efforts caused his success, not any input from G-d.

The mitzvah of omer counteracts this misperception. The Torah commands us to sacrifice barley, animal fodder, so we understand that even the lowliest of foods comes from G-d. In order to amplify this lesson, the Torah commands us to count up to the omer for 49 days. When a person lives in such a way, he can gather (מעמר) as much as he wants with no danger of missing it (להתעמר); quite the contrary, he will meter it out in proper measurements (עומר).

This may be the depth behind the phrase לכרות ברית, to cut a deal. There is no greater oxymoron: לכרות means to sever, while a ברית is something that connects. The idea is that the two parties to the brit must cede a little bit in order to receive. G-d desires to cede something to us, and He wants to cede even more. The more we use what we have properly, the more He desires to give us. The brit of the omer is, therefore, the brit through which Avraham Avinu merited Eretz Yisrael. To inherit the Land is only possible if we truly feel that everything not only came from Him but continues to come from Him: “When you come to the Land that I give you,” in the present tense.

May G-d grant us the ability to truly feel that everything emanates from Him, and through this may He grant us evermore.

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