SEFIRAT HAOMER: Counting the days

In the times of the Bet haMiqdash, during the second day of Pesach, an offering was presented in the altar of the Temple which consisted of a preparation of one *'omer* of barley flour, signaling that from that moment the Jews are allowed to consume from the new harvest (*chadash*). *'omer* is a Biblical unit of measurement of approximately one gallon, and by extension, it became the name of that important offering.
Following the Biblical instructions the offering of the *'omer* also indicated the beginning of a period of seven weeks or forty-nine days until the Holiday of Shabuot (Vaiyqra –Leviticus– 23:15-16).
This is known as *Sefirat ha'omer* –the Mitzva of counting 49 days from the 'omer to Shabuot. Thus, the Holiday of Pesach, our physical or political freedom, is connected with Shabuot, when we achieve our 'mental'–spiritual and cultural– freedom by receiving the Tora.

Our rabbis explained that unlike physical liberty, mental freedom does not happen overnight. It is a long process of deprograming. In the case of the people of Israel, it consisted among other things of getting rid of all the former habits of slave-mentality and learning to take charge of their own lives. They also had to recognize and leave aside the pagan and immoral practices of the idol-worshipping Egyptian society (*tum-a*) which were obviously incompatible with the principles of our Tora. In Pesach we got out of Egypt. And during the days of *'omer* we had to get Egypt out of our system in preparation for the big day: The giving of the Torah and the establishment of our covenant (*berit*) with the Almighty celebrated at Mount Sinai.

The counting of the Omer takes place at night and it is preceded by a by a blessing: ...*Asher Kideshanu beMitzvotav veTzivanu al Sefirat ha'Omer*. Then we proceed to count the day and the week. Today, for example, we count 9 days; that is: one week and two days from the *'omer*.

(*to be continued…*)

Preparing ourselves for Yom HaShoa
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