

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר ה !

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כ"א אייר תשפ"ו · בהר/בחוקותי

49 and 50

By Anna Szalat '28

This past week we celebrated ל"ג בעומר, the 33rd day of ספירת העומר. For many people, ל"ג בעומר feels like the end of the journey. The mourning restrictions lift, we can finally listen to music again, get haircuts, and return to normal life. But in reality, this is only a checkpoint, it is only day 33 out of 49. We are still in the middle of preparing ourselves for שבועות and for receiving the תורה. Interestingly, this same idea appears in this week's פרשה בהר-בחוקותי, פרשיות שמטה and יובל. For six years the Jewish people may work the land, but during the seventh year the land must completely rest: וּבְשָׁנָה "and in the seventh year it should be a rest for the land (ויקרא כ"ה:ד)". This cycle repeats seven times. Seven cycles of seven years, totaling 49 years. Then comes the 50th year, יובל, a complete reset in which slaves are freed, debts are canceled, and the Jewish nation and the land are able to completely rest.

After introducing שמטה, the תורה asks the question everyone is wondering: how will the people survive an entire year without planting or harvesting? Hashem answers that He will provide enough produce in the sixth year to last for three years; the sixth, seventh and beginning of the eighth year. This idea connects directly back to the מן in the desert. The Jewish people depended completely on Hashem for food every single day in the desert. שמטה reminds the Jewish people that our success and survival ultimately

come from Hashem and not only from our own effort. For one year, the nation stops working the land and learns trust, faith, and dependence on Hashem.

This also explains the deeper meaning behind the numbers 49 and 50. Both ספירת העומר and יובל are built on the same structure: seven cycles of seven leading to 50. The number 49 represents the process of growth, effort, preparation, and self-improvement step by step. But 50 represents something beyond just us; it represents a level of holiness that comes directly from Hashem. It also represents a reset. All debts and slaves are returned in the 50th year and, similarly, the תורה is re-given every year on שבועות for us to accept once again. We count 49 days from פסח to שבועות because leaving Egypt and being free physically is not enough. The Jewish people had to spiritually free themselves before re-receiving the תורה on the 50th day at the receiving of the תורה. In the same way, after 49 years of ordinary life in Israel, the יובל year reminds the nation that everything ultimately belongs to Hashem and that we are meant to live lives of freedom, holiness, and purpose.

This also explains the deeper meaning behind the counting of 49 and 50. The Rav explains that when the תורה teaches seven weeks of seven days, which is 49 days, it is unnecessary to say 49 days, because the תורה already said seven times seven. Rather, the תורה is teaching that the 49 years are not just a progression, rather they are individually significant.

This is why the days after ל"ג בעומר are so important. Once ספירה ל"ג בעומר passes, it is easy to feel like ספירה is

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basically over and that we can finally move on. But spiritually, these last days may actually be the most important part of the journey, because now we are fully focused on preparing ourselves for the תורה.

תמורה מצוה The

By Eitan Orkaby '27

A person who sets aside an animal as a sacrifice and sees another animal that is better looking than the original immediately wants to swap it out. It is fatter, healthier, and, seemingly, more fit to be brought as a sacrifice to Hashem. However, one is forbidden to switch out the original animal "טוב בָּרַע אוֹ רָע בָּטוֹב" "good for bad or bad for good" (ויקרא כ"ז). This is counterintuitive, as one would expect a larger animal to be suggested as the required switch. It is further counterintuitive as there are other instances in which one is expected to switch one thing for another; for example, when one has too much fruit to bring to ירושלים one can transfer the holiness from the fruit to money and bring that instead. What makes a sacrifice not able to do a similar transfer?

The רמב"ם, in תמורה ד"יג, prefaces this question with an acknowledgment that, at the end of the day, we do not know the true reason behind this law, rather we can only give possible options. The option that he proposes is that the whole purpose of the sacrifice is to distance oneself from a money focused life. When one brings a sacrifice they are giving up money to show their belief in Hashem, by giving an animal which helps to symbolize this connection. However, one who decides to switch the animal for one of less quality is choosing to show how they care for their money over G-d. This is also shown when one

switches an animal for a fatter one, as they return to their money focused attitude that the best animal must be the best sacrifice.

The רמב"ם is clearly focused on the message that each law is trying to teach us, even going so far as to say that most of the laws are to make oneself a better individual. The ספר החינוך agrees to this, yet gives an entirely different explanation.

The ספר החינוך says that one is not allowed to make this switch out of people losing sense of the specialness that is associated with something holy. This is felt especially when an animal, which has no inherent holiness and one has to instill holiness upon it, is swapped with another animal. Unlike with fruit, where it is an obligation to choose which ones become holy from a pile of other fruits, animal sacrifices can be entirely optional. Thus, if one is told that they are allowed to randomly instill holiness upon an animal and then transfer that to another animal, the holiness becomes frivolous.

Both the רמב"ם and the ספר החינוך share the same road of thought, they are just in two separate lanes. Both agree that the law of תמורה comes to teach the Jewish people to not associate bringing sacrifices with the wrong mindset, yet one says this is relating to holiness, whereas the other holds that it is about money. The law of תמורה comes as one of the final laws to an entire ספר of sacrifices, giving a fitting book end; bringing a sacrifice is more than giving money to Hashem, its holiness is not something to be thrown away, rather it is a sacred practice to become closer to Hashem.

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