

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

“The omer permits [the new grain] throughout the land, and the two loaves permit it in the Temple.” The bringing of the omer offering allows people outside of the Temple to partake of the new harvest, whereas in the Temple the new harvest is not permissible for use until the bringing of the two loaves seven weeks later.

Following the details of special sacrifices on Shavuot (23:18-21), we get the laws of *leket* and *peah*, the command to leave the gleanings and corners of the field for the poor (23:22). Although this command applies year-round, it makes sense for it to appear here, when the Torah is discussing the grain harvest. But there may be a deeper message there as well.

The period from Pesach to Shavuot is about more than just the ripening of new grain; it is a time of transition from having nothing to having everything. The cleaning out of chametz on Pesach is a ritual representation of the state of having nothing we experienced in Egypt. In the same way the omer offering that is brought “When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest” is a ritual representation of what it means to have something. The pinnacle of this process is the two loaves, an offering made of processed loaves made of the finest flour. If Pesach is the holiday of *‘lechem oni’* - the bread of poverty - Shavuot is the holiday of plenty and satisfaction.

As the Torah understands, it is best not to go directly from one the other, just like it is best not to eat an enormous meal after a fast. We need a process and this process is the counting of the Omer. During the harvest we set some aside, we bring the first fruits, we even hold off on bringing grain offering in the Temple. We carefully transition from a state of having nothing to a state in which we have everything. The offerings allow us to acknowledge that our bounty is not our own, that we are not solely responsible for our own success. The laws of *leket* and *peah* reinforce this message, ensuring that as we accumulate and take stock of our own success we see those around us who are less fortunate and make sure to make offerings to them as well.

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## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Emor

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Annual (Leviticus 21:1-24:23); Etz Hayim p. 717; Hertz p. 513  
Triennial (Leviticus 23:23-24:23); Etz Hayim p. 727; Hertz p. 522  
Haftarah (Ezekiel 44:15-31); Etz Hayim p. 734; Hertz p. 528

## D'var Torah: From Nothing to Everything

*Rabbi Shoshana Cohen, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

In describing the yearly cycle of festivals, Parshat Emor describes the period we are in now, the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot, commonly referred to as the Omer\*.

According to this description, this time period is all about grain. On Pesach ridding ourselves of chametz means getting rid of **last years grain** products. Having done that we turn to the new grain harvest (23:9-10) and bring an offering of the **first of the grain** (omer) to the priest. Until this offering is brought, which happens according to the Rabbis on the second day of Pesach, it is not permissible to use any of the new grain, as it says in verse 23:14: “You shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God.”

After omer offering is brought, we are to count seven weeks (23:15-16) and then bring another grain offering, know as “the two loaves.” (23:17). These differ from the omer in that the omer is the sheaf itself whereas the two loaves are processed, made from flour ground from the new grain. According to the Mishna in Menachot 10:5 there is another difference between the omer offering and the two loaves.

(\* NOTE: when “Omer” appears capitalized, it refers to the counting of 7 weeks; when it is not capitalized, it refers to the “omer” offering.)

(Dvar Torah continued on back page...)

## D'var Haftarah: The Art of the Possible

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

Ezekiel was an exiled kohen (a priest) from the period of the destruction of the First Temple. As a priest and a prophet, he was familiar with the Temple's inner workings and aware that the Temple, like all institutions, was open to corruption and religious betrayal. He describes the corruption in the verses preceding this week's haftarah: "the Levites, who went far away from Me when Israel strayed, as they strayed from Me after their foul things (idolatry), and they shall bear their punishment. And they shall minister (in a diminished capacity) in My sanctuary, in appointed office, at the gates of the House, ministering in the House... Inasmuch as they ministered to them before their foul things and became a stumbling block of crime for the house of Israel, therefore I have sworn concerning them, said their Master the Lord, and they shall bear their punishment. And they shall not approach Me (God) to serve as priests to Me, to approach all of My sacred things, to the Holy of Holies" (44:10-13)

Their formal positions of authority did not keep these "leaders" from becoming complicit both in the sins of the people and in leading the people astray. Ezekiel sought to demote these leaders and to replace them with leaders with more credibility. These leaders would now be allowed only to serve the people but would no longer be able to directly serve God. This explains why Ezekiel prophesied the reorganization of the leadership of the Temple under new leadership whose integrity he trusted: "But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the watch of My house when the Israelites strayed from Me, they shall draw near to Me and stand before Me..." (44:15) It is interesting that Ezekiel's plans were so realpolitik. He did not intend to totally depose the former leadership, probably because it was not possible; rather he willed to put those who were most loyal to God in charge in order to change the picture.

Ezekiel's message speaks to the relevance of prophecy. We can see that prophets like Ezekiel struggled with problems and challenges like those we see today, with many of us having a fundamental lack of trust in our leaders. We learn from Ezekiel that it is not always possible to attain an ideal solution, and that partial solutions that protect what is most important should not be met with cynicism. Ezekiel could only affect

change in the domain under his control, so he started there, perhaps with the hope that it might lead to better things.

## Parashat Emor Self-Study

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

In our parashah we have 2 major topics (and a few minor ones): The rules pertaining to *Kohanim* (priests), some of which are still practiced to varying degrees, and the holidays on the Torah calendar.

- 1) A Kohen is forbidden to become impure to dead people (come in contact with them) except for to his close kin: his mother, father, son, daughter, brother and unwed sister (21:1-3). Which obvious person seems to be missing from the list (thinking of whom we sit *Shiva* for might help)? What might be the reason?
- 2) A Kohen that has certain physical disabilities or blemishes may not serve. He is entitled to eat from the food provided to the Kohanim from the sacrifices etc. Why do you think that he is entitled to this despite not serving?
- 3) Chapter 23 is dedicated to special times, holidays, during the year. Following the instructions for Pesach (and the Matzot holiday) we are instructed to bring an Omer measurement of the beginning of the harvest, and a sacrifice. Until then we may not eat of the harvest (23:9-14). Why would we not be allowed to eat the new harvest until bringing a portion to God? Can you think of other similar Mitzvot?
- 4) We are then commanded to count 7 full weeks, and on the day after the seventh week, we will bring a grain offering from the new crops. It will also be a holy day (23:15-22). We call this holiday 'Shavuot'. What of all this do we do today? What might be the reason to link Pesach and Shavuot? How is Succoth related to these holidays?
- 5) Several things were ongoing in the Mishkan and in the Temple, one of them was lighting the lamp that was always lit from evening until morning. The people were asked to bring oil (24:1-4), unlike the communal sacrifices, for which they did not donate individual animals. What might be the differences between the lamp and the sacrifices that would explain this?

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