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A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת קדושים – ספירת העומר

נוהגים שלא לשא אשה בין פסח לעצרת עד ל"ג לעמר, מפני שבאותו זמן מתו תלמידי רבי עקיבא.
(שו"ע או"ח תצ"ג, א)

It is customary not to marry during the period between Pesach and Shavuos until the 33rd day of the Omer, because during that time the talmidim of R' Akiva died. (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 493:1)

The Shulchan Aruch brings the widespread practice not to hold weddings during the Omer, due to the deaths of the *talmidim* of R' Akiva. However, he notes that this restriction is only until Lag B'Omer, which was the period of their deaths. This *halachah* is based on the Gemara (*Yevamos* 62b) that states: *בין פסח לעצרת עד לעמר, תנא כולם מתו מפסח עד לעצרת*, they all died between Pesach and Shavuos.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* raises a question regarding the apparent discrepancy between the Gemara and the Shulchan Aruch concerning the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students. Did they die throughout the Omer or only during the first part until Lag B'Omer? And if we were to assume that the Gemara did not mean that they died during the whole period between Pesach and Shavuos, but only until Lag B'Omer, what is the significance of their dying in relation to the period of "between Pesach and Shavuos"? In addition, the terminology that the Shulchan Aruch uses - *בין פסח לעצרת עד ל"ג לעמר* - is somewhat misleading. If it was only until Lag B'Omer, then why does he mention that it was between Pesach and Shavuos?

Chazal teach that the cause of the deaths of R' Akiva's *talmidim* was *לזה לזה כבוד* - their lack of respect for one another. It is evident from the Gemara that this fault was not limited to the time between Pesach and Shavuos, rather they acted this way throughout the year. If so, the question arises as to why they were punished specifically during this time of the year?

The Rosh Yeshiva brings a question from the Rishonim regarding the proper wording of the *berachah* recited before counting the Omer. Why do we say *על ספירת העמר* which means that we are counting the Omer. Would it not be more appropriate to say *על ספירת הימים* - counting the days, or *על ספירה לעמר* - counting from (the bringing of) the Omer?

R' Yakov Tzvi Meklenburg *zatsal*, the author of the *Kesav VeHakabalah*, offers a unique interpretation of the word *עומר* used in *Sefiras HaOmer*. While it is commonly understood to refer to the measure of flour used in the Korban Omer, the *Kesav VeHakabalah* explains that it also means "work" or "toil". This meaning can be found in the *possuk* (*Devarim* 24:7) regarding a kidnapper - *והתעמר בו* to describe enslavement and forced labour. This meaning is also found (*Devarim* 21:14) regarding the prohibition to mistreat a Jewish maidservant - *לא תתעמר בה*. R' Meklenburg explains that the days of the Omer are a time for spiritual "work" and "toil", as we prepare ourselves to receive the Torah on Shavuos. Accordingly, we count each day of the Omer as a day of development and progress towards our goal of becoming more fitting to receive the Torah.

Similarly, R' Elyah Lopian *zatsal* famously explains how the 48 קְנִיּוֹת הַתּוֹרָה - qualities with which Torah is acquired, as listed in Pirkei Avos, correspond to the 48 days of the Omer, with one *middah* to focus on each day. The final day is dedicated to reviewing and mastering all of them for complete perfection. The days of the Omer are not just a time span between Pesach and Shavuos, but rather a period of growth and self-improvement.

With this understanding of the theme of the Omer, the Rosh Yeshiva resolves the original question. One must develop certain qualities such as מִתְרַחֵק מִן הַקְּבוֹד, *derech eretz*, דְּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, *closeness to friends*, and *avoiding honour* to acquire Torah. These specific areas are the focus of the period of the Omer, which is meant to be a time for spiritual growth. The *talmidim* were punished during this time because they failed to grow in these areas. The period between Pesach and Shavuos, which is designated as a time of spiritual work and growth, is when the *middas hadin* struck and they were held accountable for not living up to the ideals required by those striving for a life dedicated to Torah.

Although, according to the Shulchan Aruch, the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students only occurred until Lag B'Omer, however, there is still a strong connection to their deaths happening between Pesach and Shavuos. These days are dedicated to preparation and self-improvement, and require exemplary conduct. Since (on their *madreigah*) their behaviour was found to be lacking, it led to punishment.

May we internalise this message and use these crucial days to prepare ourselves. By taking advantage of these special weeks we will be *zoche* to an elevated Kabolas HaTorah during the upcoming Yom Tov of Shavuos.

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