

CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

THE HATFIELDS AND MCCOYS READ THE OMER

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Nowadays we count the Omer but in the days of the Temple, they reaped the Omer. And it wasn't your average "bringing in the sheaves." There was an enormous ceremony that went with it, involving everyone in the area.

How did they make the omer ready? The messengers of the Court used to go out into the field on the eve of the Festival of Passover and tie up the upper part of the grain by handfuls in bunches while it was still connected with the soil in order that it should be easier to reap And the people of the towns close by assembled there in the evening at the end of the first day of Passover that it should be reaped with great ceremonial display.

When it grew dark the appointed reaper called out to the bystanders: Has the sun set? And they replied: Yes. He says again: Has the sun set? And they answer again: Yes.

He then asked: Is this the sickle? And they responded: Yes! He repeated the question and they said: Yes.

He asked: Is this the basket to hold the corn and they said yes. Is this they basket? And they answered: Yes.

If it were Saturday night he asked them: On Shabbat? On this Shabbat? And they said: Yes.

And finally he called out: Shall I reap? And they said: Reap!. Three times he called out for every separate matter and they reply: Yes! Yes! Yes!

And why was all this procedure carried out? Because of the Baitusi who used to maintain that the omer must not be reaped at the conclusion of the first Festival day of Passover. (M. Menachot 10:3)

The Dead Sea Scrolls were only found in 1947 and their full contents were not known till some 15 years later. And it is only with two key pieces of information from these scrolls that we can fully understand this mishnah. (1) The DSS folks' major holiday was Shavuot and (2) The DSS folks set the calendar differently than did the establishment in the Jerusalem Temple.

Discussion Questions:

1. The DSS folk believed in a solar calendar wherein the holidays would come out on the same day of the week, and in the same season, every single time. They believed they were completely right and that the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem were utterly corrupt. They did not think that the omer should be reaped at sundown at the

close of the first day of Passover. Hence we have this ritual, affirming that this is, indeed, the right time to reap the omer. Eventually Shavuot shrank to the holiday we have today: the ten commandments and dairy food for a group with a genetic lactose intolerance. Why did this happen? Could it have anything to do with the dying out of the DSS folk and a conscious desire to suppress any vestige of their practices?

2. Is the reaper saying a blessing before cutting the omer? If so, what would the blessing be? Why isn't it mentioned in this mishnah?
3. Can you imagine it in your heads? Who's doing the call and who the response? What role do the women play in this ritual? What are the children doing? Are they singing? If you were a Hollywood director, how would you stage it? How could incorporate this ritual in your Shavuot observance?