**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**MIDRASH ON THE PARASHA**

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***Parashat Emor*:**

**The Mitzva of the *Omer***

**The Mitzva of Bringing the *Omer* to the Temple**

In our experience of Pesach today, the mitzva of bringing the *omer* to the Temple is but a distant idea or memory. This was true also for the synagogue-goers and yeshiva students in the period of the Amoraim of Eretz Israel in the third to fifth centuries. These two *mitzvot* — the mitzvaof bringing the *omer* to the Temple on the sixteenth of Nisan and the mitzvaof counting the *omer* from that day for seven subsequent weeks until Shavuot — are intricately bound together, as we read in *Parashat Emor*:

The Lord said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest an *omer* of the first grain you harvest.He is to wave the *omer* before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the sabbath…

From the day after the sabbath, the day you brought the *omer* of the wave-offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh week, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. (*Vayikra* 23:9-16)

Literally, an *omer* can be a sheaf of grain (*Devarim* 24:19) or a specific measure of grain, one tenth of an *eifa (Shemot* 16:36). However, due to its connection to these two special *mitzvot*, the term has become synonymous with the special flour-offering of the sixteenth of Nissan and the count which begins on that date.

However, while the mitzvaof bringing the *omer* is expounded in the aggadic literature of Eretz Israel in many different ways, the *mitzva* of counting the *omer* is not expounded at all.[[1]](#footnote-1) It would appear that the considerable occupation with the *mitzva* of bringing the *omer* to the Temple is aimed at reifying the absent dimension of the Temple service for those going to the synagogue and study hall during the period of the Amoraim of Eretz Israel.

*Vayikra Rabba* devotes an entire *parasha* to the *mitzva* of bringing the *omer* to the Temple.[[2]](#footnote-2) Let us examine the last *derasha* appearing in it:

I.

Rabbi Yochanan said: Let not the *mitzva* of the *omer* be light in your eyes; for by virtue of the *mitzva* of the *omer*, Avraham inherited the land.

This is what is stated: "And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings (*Bereishit* 17:8).

Because: "And God said to Avraham: And as for you, you shall keep My covenant" (*Bereishit* 17:9).

II.

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: Let not the *mitzva* of the *omer* be light in your eyes; for by virtue of the *mitzva* of the *omer,* peace is made between husband and wife.

This is what is stated: "Then shall the man bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an *eifa* of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon" (*Bamidbar* 5:15).

And which is that? The *mitzva* of the *omer* which requires waving. By virtue of barley flour, peace is made between husband and wife.

III.

Rabbi Abbahu said: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman and the Rabbis [each offered an explanation].

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: It stood for them in the days of Gidon. As it is written: "And when Gidon came, behold, there was a man telling a dream to his fellow, and saying: Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake (*tzelil*) of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midyan" (*Shoftim* 7:13).

What is a *tzelil*? Rabbi Levi said: It is written *tzalul*, because that generation was clear (*tzalul*) of righteous men. By virtue of what then were they redeemed? By virtue of the cake of barley bread. And which is that? The *mitzva* of the *omer.*

IV.

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman said: It stood for them in the days of Chizkiyahu. As it is written: "And in every place where the appointed staff shall pass, which the Lord shall lay upon him, it shall be with tambourines and harps; and in battles of waving (*tenufa*)will He fight with them" (*Yeshayahu* 30:32).

Were there “battles of waving” in that generation? And which is that? The *mitzva* of the *omer,* which requires waving (*tenufa*).

V.

The Rabbis said: It stood for them in the days of Yechezkel. As it is stated: "Take you also to you wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and spelt, and put them in one vessel, and make you bread thereof" (*Yechezkel* 4:9).

Shemuel said: He gave him much barley.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Things which make the bowels run.

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: There [they said]: They made out of it a cake, but not even a dog would taste it.

A matron asked Rabbi Yosei ben Chalafta: That righteous man suffered all that pain. He had so many manservants and maidservants, but they were disqualified from preparing food and drink.

He said to her: To teach you that as long as Israel is in pain, the righteous suffer with them.

VI.

Rabbi Levi said: It stood for them in the days of Haman.

When Mordekhai saw that Haman was coming towards him, he became afraid.

He was sitting and his disciples were before him.

He said to them: Stand away from me, that you not be burnt by my coal, for this wicked man comes to kill me.

They said to him: In death and in life we are with you.

He said to them: If so, let us stand in prayer and part out of prayer.

They finished their prayer, sat, and occupied themselves with [studying] the *mitzva* of the *omer.*

Haman approached them and said: With what do you occupy yourselves?

They said to him: With the *mitzva* of the *omer* which they would offer in the Temple.

He said to them: That *omer*, was it of gold or of silver?

They said to him: Not gold, not silver, and not wheat, but rather barley.

He said to them: What is its value, ten weighty coins?

They said to him: Enough, enough, [only] ten *maneh*.

When Mordekhai finished praying, Haman approached him and said: Come, put on a royal robe, because your *omer* of ten *maneh* defeated my ten thousand weighty coins of silver.

(*Vayikra Rabba* 28, 6)

### FIrst set: *Derashot* 1-11

The *derasha* is comprised of six *derashot*, five short ones and a long one, which are divided into three groups: I-II, III-V, and VI. Five of them are reported in the name of Amoraim of Eretz Israel of the first three generations: Rabbi Yochanan, Reish Lakish, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman and Rabbi Levi, and one in the name of the Rabbis.[[3]](#footnote-3)The first two *derashot*, which are related in the name of the Amora Rabbi Yochanan or his disciple-colleague Reish Lakish, open with the statement: "Let not the *mitzva* of the *omer* be light in your eyes," and each of them offers a different explanation of the importance of this *mitzva*. Rabbi Yochanan relates in his *derasha* to the national plane, whereas Reish Lakish relates to the marital plane.

***Omer* and Circumcision**

The commentators on the Midrash have difficultly explaining how the verses cited by Rabbi Yochanan relating to the command given to Avraham regarding circumcision ("And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings… And God said to Avraham: And as for you, you shall keep My covenant," *Bereishit* 17:8-9) prove his assertion that "by virtue of the *mitzva* of the *omer* Avraham inherited the land." Rabbi Yochanan makes the first verse dependent on the second one: "And I will give to you, and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings," because: "And God said to Avraham: And as for you, you shall keep My covenant," creating a conditional relationship between inheriting the land and keeping the covenant. However, according to the plain sense of the text, the covenant under discussion is the covenant of circumcision and not the *mitzva* of bringing the *omer.*

The Rashash and Radal (ad loc.) connect this *derasha* to the verse (*Yirmeyahu* 5:24): "Neither say they in their heart: Let us now fear the Lord our God, that gives the former rain, and the latter in due season; that keeps for us the weeks of the rules of harvest." This is cited in an earlier *derasha* concerning the *omer* in this *parasha*:

Rabbi Elazar said:

It is written: "Neither say they in their heart: Let us now fear the Lord our God, that gives the former rain, and the latter in due season" (*Yirmeyahu* 5:24).

[Do not think that] now that God has given you everything [former rain and latter rain], you no longer need Him.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This is what is stated: "that keeps for us the weeks of the rules of harvest" (ibid.).

May He protect us from the heat, may He protect us from injurious dews.

These are the seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot.

(*Vayikra Rabba* 28, 2)

In this *derasha*, Rabbi Elazar points to the protection that God extends to Israel's crops during the period between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest, so that the wheat crop not become ruined.

The Rashash notes the root *shin-mem-reish* appearing in the two verses: "Perhaps he derives the meaning of *shemira* [regarding Avraham in *Bereishit*] from the word *shemira* in [*Yirmeyahu*], ‘That keeps (*yishmor*) for us the weeks of the rules of harvest.’" However, the Divine protection of the wheat in Rabbi Elazar's *derasha* is not at all like the "keeping" mentioned in the verse in *Bereishit*, namely, keeping the covenant on the part of man.

The Radal notes the connection between the “covenant” in *Bereishit* and the “rules” in the verse in *Yirmeyahu*:

"You shall keep My covenant.” Which is that? The *mitzva* of *omer*," as was expounded above: "That keeps for us the weeks of the rules of harvest," regarding a rule which is an eternal covenant, the *mitzva* of the *omer* and counting seven weeks of rules of harvest.

This interpretation ignores Rabbi Elazar's *derasha* on the verse, which emphasizes the Divine protection that is needed from the precipitation ("injurious dews") liable to fall, and explains "the weeks of the rules of harvest" in a different manner, as relating to the *mitzvot* of bringing the *omer* and counting the *omer.*

Both commentators relate directly to the verse and not to the *derasha* relating it to the *mitzva* of the *omer*, and therefore it is difficult to accept their interpretations as Rabbi Yochanan's intention in his *derasha.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

Rabbi Ya’akov Moshe Ashkenazi (*Yad Moshe* ad loc.), identifies the covenant with the *omer*: "The *omer* is called a covenant because the *omer* comes to eliminate the injurious dews, and a covenant was made with the dew that it would never be eliminated." His interpretation, as well, seems far from the wording of the *derasha.*

The Maharazav (ad loc.) is the only commentator who does not try to establish a linguistic connection between the *mitzva* of the *omer* and the word “covenant,” and his interpretation relates exclusively to the conceptual realm. He interprets "My covenant" as referring to the commandment of the *omer*, which is unique in that it is the first commandment dependent on the land of Israel that the people of Israel fulfill after entering the country.[[6]](#footnote-6)

I am inclined to accept the Maharazav’s understanding of the nature of the relationship between the *mitzva* of the *omer* and the covenant in Rabbi Yochanan's *derasha*, but I do not see anything in the wording of the *derasha* that relates it to the historical event of entering the land of Israel. I wish to present a different conceptual interpretation.

The *omer* offering is an offering of the beginning of the barley harvest, by way of which the people of Israel declare their recognition of God as the source of the good that they are privileged to receive, before they begin to use it. As stated by the *Sefer Ha-chinnukh* (#302), the mitzvaof offering an *omer* of barley on the sixteenth of Nissan is given

So that we may contemplate through that action the great act of lovingkindness that the Holy One, blessed be He, performs for His creatures, renewing for them each year grain for their sustenance. Therefore it is fitting that we offer of it to Him, so that we may remember His great lovingkindness and good before we derive pleasure from it.

This mitzvaexpresses the ability of the people of Israel to establish a connection to God even within the natural annual life cycle of producing bread (and barley) from the land. As such, it parallels what is symbolized by the covenant of circumcision, which marks the Jewish people as a nation which breaks through the deterministic cycle of nature to develop an unmediated relationship with God.[[7]](#footnote-7)

This connection is supported by a *derasha* reported in the name of Bar Kappara, a disciple of Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi, who learns from the mitzvaof *orla* in the plant world (treating the first three years of a tree’s produce as forbidden) about removing the foreskin (*orla*) of man:

"And My covenant shall be" (*Bereishit* 17:13).

Rav Huna said in the name of Bar Kappara:

Avraham sat and reasoned by way of a verbal analogy:

It is stated here “*orla*,” and it is stated with regard to a tree “*orla*.”

Just as the *orla* that is stated with regard to a tree is the place that produces fruit, so too the *orla* that is stated with regard to man is the place that produces fruit.

(*Bereishit Rabba* 46, 2)

Therefore, the essence of the *mitzva* of *omer* is characterized by Rabbi Yochanan as a covenant.

***Omer* and *Sota***

The text of the second *derasha*, related by Rabbi Shimon ben (Reish) Lakish, as it appears above, is difficult. The verse that is cited regarding the offering brought by a *sota*, a woman suspected of adultery ("Then shall the man bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an *eifa* of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon," *Bamidbar* 5:15), does not relate explicitly to the bringing of the *omer*, and the mention of the waving of the *omer* offering in the next sentence: "And which is that? The *mitzva* of the *omer* which requires waving," is not understandable in its context.[[8]](#footnote-8) It may be suggested that the *sota's* barley offering is what connects a *sota* to the *mitzva* of *omer*, which also comes from barley.[[9]](#footnote-9) As for the act of waving, the *sota's* offering is also waved by the priest: "And the priest shall take the meal-offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the meal-offering before the Lord, and bring it to the altar" (*Bamidbar* 5:26). A tenth of an *eifa* of barley and the act of waving are the common elements that connect the two *mitzvot* to each other.

Reish Lakish's *derasha* relates, as mentioned earlier, to the marital realm:

Let not the *mitzva* of the *omer* be light in your eyes. For by virtue of the *mitzva* of the *omer,* peace is made between husband and wife… By virtue of barley flour, peace is made between husband and wife.

Rabbi Mordekhai Yafeh, author of the *Yefei To'ar* commentary (ad loc.), explains that the "husband and wife" who are mentioned in the *derasha* are a metaphor for the people of Israel and God, who restore the relationship between them through the act of the bringing the *omer* offering.[[10]](#footnote-10)

And Reish Lakish said that the *omer* offering comes to connect Israel to their father in heaven, like we find that that the meal-offering of jealousy is brought from barley and its purpose is to draw a fit woman closer to her husband, and to distance from him a woman who was defiled.

According to him, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish's *derasha,* like the *derasha* of Rabbi Yochanan, revolves around the issue of the people of Israel's closeness to their father in heaven. Rabbi Yochanan relates to the struggle with the forgetting of the covenant and Israel's Divine mission because of the erosion caused by routine and nature, while Reish Lakish relates to the need to restore the dimension of trust in the relationship after a crisis.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The question may be raised whether it is right to interpret Reish Lakish's *derasha* not in its plain sense but as a metaphor, when it is possible to explain it in its plain sense and not as a metaphor, as we will see below. The ability given to the nation of Israel to express the very connection that it has to God through the act of bringing the *omer* paves the way for restoring the injured family unit, by way of returning to its starting point.[[12]](#footnote-12) This is the meaning that lies in the barley offering appearing in both places. The nuclear unit of the nation — man and wife — which is its strength and foundation, merits direct Divine intervention, so that it will be able to grow anew.

According to this approach, the *derashot* of Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish relate to two different planes — the national plane of taking possession of the land and the personal plane of marriage — as both planes are illuminated by the relationship between God and His people.

**Second Set: *Derashot* II-V**

The third *derasha*, that of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, hangs the miraculous deliverance from Midyan in the days of the Judge Gidon on the *mitzva* of bringing the *omer.* Here too, as in the *derasha* of Reish Lakish, the connection to the *omer* is by way of the motifof barley, which symbolizes, on the one hand, the basic relationship that still exists between Israel and God, and, on other hand, Israel's treachery and being drawn to idol worship.[[13]](#footnote-13) In this sense, the situation of Gidon's generation parallels that of a woman suspected of adulterywho brings a barley offering.

In the fourth *derasha*, the third-generation Amora, Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman, finds in the word "*tenufa*" which appears in the prophet Yeshayahu's description of the miraculous rescue of Jerusalem and Judea from the hands of Sancheiriv, king of Ashur, on the first night of Pesach, an allusion to the *mitzva* of the *omer* which serves as a merit for them in that generation:[[14]](#footnote-14)

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from far, with His anger burning, and in thick uplifting of smoke; His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire; and His breath is as an overflowing stream, that divides even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction; and a bridle that causes to err shall be in the jaws of the peoples.

You shall have a song as in the night when a feast is hallowed; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with the pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. And the Lord will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and will show the lighting down of His arm, with furious anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with a bursting of clouds, and a storm of rain, and hailstones.

For through the voice of the Lord shall Ashur be dismayed, the rod with which He smote. And in every place where the appointed staff shall pass, which the Lord shall lay upon him, it shall be with tambourines and harps; and in battles of waving (*tenufa*) will He fight with them. For a hearth is ordered of old; yea, for the king it is prepared, deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it. (*Yeshayahu* 30:27-33)

The word *tenufa* should be understood in this context in the sense of a storm — that is to say, God will wage war against His enemies in a tempest.[[15]](#footnote-15)According to the plain sense of the verse, the *darshan's* question: "Were there battles of waving in that generation? And which is that?" is difficult, for the miraculous deliverance from the hands of Ashur is precisely that. If so, it seems that like in the case of the *derasha* of Rabbi Yochanan, Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman, who was his disciple, does not come to expound the verse, but to deliver a message.

Still, what is that message? Does even the generation of Chizkiyahu fall short? After all, *Chazal* characterize it as a generation in which "they checked from Dan to Be'er-Sheva and did not find an ignoramus from Gabbat to Antipatris and did not find a boy or a girl, a man or a woman, who was not fluent in the laws of impurity and purity!"[[16]](#footnote-16) Does it see itself as God's nation, but fail to detach itself from the idolatrous culture that surrounds it?

Indeed, these are the words of the prophet in the prophecy that precedes the tidings of the miraculous deliverance from the hands of Ashur:

For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children that refuse to hear the teaching of the Lord; that say to the seers: See not, and to the prophets: Prophesy not to us right things, speak to us smooth things, prophesy delusions; get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. (*Yeshayahu* 30:9-11)

In the continuation, the prophet describes the people's response to the miraculous deliverance from Sancheiriv: "And you shall defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images covered with gold; you shall put them far away as one impure; you shall say to it: Get you hence" (*Yeshayahu* 30:22). The people will then regain their bearings and distance themselves from the worship of idols.

The fifth *derasha* focuses on one of the symbolic acts that the prophet Yechezkel is commanded to perform during the course of his prophetic work. The discussion that develops among the Amoraim points to the barley cake as animal food (Shemuel) or even worse (Rabbi Chiya bar Abba), which injures the body (Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi) and leads to the prophet's humiliation,[[17]](#footnote-17) but the main message arising from it is what is stated at the beginning in the shared formula: "It [the *mitzva* of the *omer*]stood for them in the days of Yechezkel." The act of eating is an act of survival, of continued life; Israel in the Babylonian exile after the Destruction of the Temple continues to live, although at a much lower level. Therefore, the prophet is commanded to mix barley into his food.[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Third Set: *Derasha* VI**

As stated earlier, the sixth *derasha* constitutes the third part of the Midrashic unit under discussion.[[19]](#footnote-19) The uniformity of style that appears in it as well — "It stood for them in the days of Haman" — should be seen as the fingerprints of the redactor of *Vayikra Rabba* sometime in the 5th to 6th century.

Mordekhai's struggle with Haman reflects Jewish survival in the Diaspora, which is subject to the machinations of the enemies of Israel who rise up against it in every generation. The sudden upheaval that Mordekhai experiences — that Haman must lead him through the city streets and show him the honor that is reserved for royalty — does not remove the general danger that hovers over the heads of the Jews; but Haman already understands what it means. Jewish survival, which draws from the springs of eternity through the study of Torah, allows Israel to overcome all who rise up against it. The subject of study is the *omer* offering, that very offering which expresses the people of Israel's connection to God, over and above nature and the schemes of man. In this way, "Your *omer* of ten *maneh* defeated my ten thousand weighty coins of silver."

**The Midrashic Unit: An Overview**

The *Yefei To'ar* (ad loc.) sees this midrashic unit as a collection of explanations of the importance of the *mitzva* of *omer,* without a connecting thread:

That one should not say: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, bother the people of Israel to bring the *omer* offering, when, as it would seem, this *mitzva* has no lofty reason? Therefore, they said that if one carefully considers the *mitzva*, one will find various reasons.

In light of our study, it would appear that a comprehensive review of the six *derashot* that comprise the *parasha* indicates that five of them relate to the possibility of continuing the existing situation, in the face of a threat that endangers its existence. Reish Lakish relates to the continuation of an individual's home, whereas the other Amoraim in the later *derashot* relate to the continued existence of the people of Israel in their land and in exile. By contrast, in the first *derasha,* Rabbi Yochanan relates to the inauguration of a new era that is the fulfillment of an earlier promise made by God to the fathers of the nation.

The merit for bringing the *omer* offering stands for Israel across time. With the survival of the people of Israel by virtue of its covenant with God, through the deepening of its self-identity, may we merit to elevate ourselves to the ability to inherit and hold on to our land, while realizing our destiny in it.[[20]](#footnote-20)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Most of the conceptual expansion surrounding the counting of the *omer* appears for the first time in Kabbalistic literature and in the words of the Rishonim. See *Zohar*, *Raya Mehemna*, *Emor* 97a; *Guide for the Perplexed* III, 43; *Derashot Ri Ibn Shuib*, First Day of Pesach. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Parasha* 28. See the parallel passage in *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Section III opens with a sentence that serves as a preamble to sections III-V: "Rabbi Abbahu said: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman and the Rabbis [each offered an explanation]." In the continuation, however, there is no mention of Rabbi Abbahu, and we find the names of Rabbi Yochanan, Resh Lakish and Rabbi Levi. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See *Vayikra Rabba*, ed. Margoliot, p. 652, note 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rabbi Elazar is probably Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, a disciple of Rabbi Yochanan. Based on the chronological proximity, it can be argued that Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish are familiar with Rabbi Elazar's *derasha*, but according to what we have seen above, it seems more reasonable to interpret Rabbi Yochanan's *derasha* in a different manner. Another point that must be considered is the significance of the redaction of this *parasha* in *Vayikra Rabba* as it is found before us, but this is not the forum to expand on the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See there and *Yehoshua* 5:3-12:

And Yehoshua made himself knives of flint, and circumcised the Israelites at the Hill of Foreskins… And the Israelites encamped in Gilgal; and they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening in the plains of Jericho. And they did eat of the produce of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes and parched corn in the selfsame day.

He notes that the *mitzvot* of circumcision and the paschal offering are observed already in Egypt. In *Bereishit Rabba* 46, 8, we find a *derasha* that parallels the *derasha* of Rabbi Yochanan, but in relation to circumcision, rather than the *omer* offering.

"And I will give to you, and to your seed after you” (*Bereishit* 17:8). Rabbi Yudan said… If your sons accept circumcision they will enter the land, but if not, they will not enter the land.

Rabbi Berakhya and Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rabbi Avin bar Rabbi Yosei: It is written: “And this is the cause why Yehoshua did circumcise” (*Yehoshua* 5:4). Yehoshua told them the reason and circumcised them. He said to them: What do you think, that you will enter the land uncircumcised? For the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Avraham: “And I will give to you, and to your seed after you,” on condition that: “And as for you, you shall keep My covenant." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Ramban, *Bereishit* 17:1, and Malbim ad loc.:

"This is My covenant, which you shall keep… every male among you shall be circumcised.” That is to say, the *mitzva* of circumcision involves not only excising the foreskin, but rather together with the excising of the foreskin, you must remove also the *orla* of the ear, and the *orla* of the lips, and the *orla* of the heart. For as long as there is *orla* in the flesh, it spreads throughout the body, whether to the faculty of the heart and thought, or to the faculty of speech, or to the faculty of listening to the word of God and His commandments. By removing the foreskin in accordance with the *mitzva* legislated by God, you will remove all of the *orla* and you will circumcise yourselves… for you will remove the husk and darkness of matter… and the material *orla* will not separate between you and your God.

The wording of the beginning of Chapter 17 in *Bereishit*, where the word "covenant" appears many times, indicates that it refers to the relationship itself, and only afterwards to the commandment regarding the act of circumcision; see there. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This is the text in the Margoliot edition of *Midrash Vayikra Rabba*, which is based on MS London, British Museum, no. 340. In four other manuscripts (MS Oxford, Neubauer catalog 147 and 2335, MS Paris 149 and MS Jerusalem 245), the last sentence of the *derasha* is missing: "By virtue of barley flour, peace is made between husband and wife," and in the first editions and in MS Paris, also the previous sentence is missing: "And which is that? The mitzva of the *omer* which requires waving." The phenomenon of omitting sentences that appear to be superfluous, clumsy or difficult to understand is common in manuscripts, and the difficult text is usually assumed to be the original one. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The biblical command regarding the *omer* offering does not clearly indicate that it must be brought from barley; see *Vayikra* 23:9-15 and 2:14-16. Bringing the *omer* offering from barley is a *halakha* given to Moshe at Sinai. See Rambam, *Hilkhot Temidin U-musafin* 7:11, and Mahari Kurkus, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It seems that this is also the way the matter is understood by the *Yedei Moshe*, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The metaphor of a *sota* that is used to describe the people of Israel straying after idol worship at the time of the Sin of the Golden Calf is found in *Bamidbar Rabba* 9, 44-48. In Section 49, the *darshan* expands this principle to include also the idol worship practiced by Israel in later generations. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In this process, the woman's drinking of the bitter waters restores the couple's basic trust in each other. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The people of Israel in Gidon's generation define themselves as the people of God, but they are also attracted to idol worship. See *Shoftim* 6:8-10; 13; 25-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The root *nun-vav-pei* appears also in verse 28: "And His breath is as an overflowing stream, that divides even to the neck, to sift (*la-hanafa*)the nations with the sieve of destruction." [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See *Da'at Mikra*: *Yeshayahu*, Vol. 1, pp. 326-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. BT *Sanhedrin* 94b. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See commentators to the Midrash, ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. In light of this *derasha*, one may ask whether there are any other stories or events in *Tanakh* where mention is made of barley, and whether they share the same meaning suggested here. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See the beginning of this *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. This *shiur* was written during the time of massive rocket fire from Gaza. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)