

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 22

Emor, Sicha 1

The Siddur:

The Alter Rebbe arranged a prayer book in accordance with the liturgical alterations of the Arizal. Earlier versions of the Ari's prayer book included mystical intentions for the prayers that guided the kabbalist in his quest to rectify the universe. But the Alter Rebbe's Siddur was intended to be used by the layman, and therefore he omitted the complex mystical intentions of the Ari.

In the prayer books composed according to the Arizal, the book ends with the mystical intentions for the holidays of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. But the Alter Rebbe deliberately altered this, and concluded his prayer book with the Counting of the Omer.

All endings reflect the main theme and thrust of the work. In this case, the choice to conclude with the Omer counting must allude to the concept of prayer, especially as it relates to the everyman who engages in

prayer, the intended audience of this particular Siddur.

The Explanation:

There are two general categories of mitzvos: 1) mitzvos which are fulfilled through the performance of an action or with speech, such as eating matzah or reading the megillah; 2) mitzvos which are fulfilled through thought or achieving a certain emotion, such as love of G-d.

The mitzvah of prayer is unique in that it must be expressed verbally, yet the words themselves are meaningless if they are not accompanied with the intention of imploring G-d for aid. The words of prayer themselves are only considered words of prayer when they are said with intention.

Prayer also induces a change in the person. Through the process of preparing for prayer, of leaving behind one's ego and focusing on G-d's presence, the person is elevated to a deeper level of spiritual awareness and becomes a new person.

We find the same two concepts in the Counting of the Omer: 1) The mitzvah is to verbally count the number of days as we advance from Pesach to the Giving of the Torah on Shavuos. But the words alone are not enough. The person must understand their meaning and how many days he is counting. Just like prayer contains words but they must be accompanied with intention, so, too, the recitation of the Omer count must be understood by the person. 2) In the prayer we say following the counting, we explicitly say that the counting of the Omer “purifies our soul... from any blemish,” meaning it, like prayer, has a transformational effect on the person.

The Deeper Explanation:

Another layer of connection between counting the Omer and prayer is in their objective: The purpose of prayer is to beseech G-d to change something in the physical world, yet the person fulfills the mitzvah with the request alone, even without G-d’s compliance with his request. The yearning for G-d expressed in his supplication is the mitzvah.

Similarly, the Counting of the Omer is meant to prepare us spiritually and mentally for the giving of the Torah on Shavous. Yet the mitzvah is fulfilled through counting day by day, and through the counting alone, the person refines and “purifies” his soul. In other words, there is value in the person’s counting itself, regardless of the destination.

This explains the divergence in the focus of the Arizal’s and the Alter Rebbe’s prayer books. The Arizal’s prayer book, written for advanced students of kabbalah, stressed the objective of prayer, to rectify the universe and reunite with its Divine core. Therefore, the Ari’s prayer book opens with the “general principles of repairing and elevating the worlds,” and ends with the mystical intentions concerning the holidays, which are focused on the manifestation of G-d’s light within the worlds.

But the Alter Rebbe’s prayer book is focused on the human efforts to draw close to G-d, and therefore opens with instructions on how to perform the midnight ritual of Tikkun Chatzos, wherein a person strives to be a “servant of G-d,” and concludes with the Counting of the Omer, a mitzvah that expresses the value of human effort, as explained above.

At the same time, a person should not think that their individual prayer does not contribute to the universe. Every Jew creates the sacred time of Shavuos through his or her counting of the Omer, because the holiday is determined as being the fiftieth day after the Jewish people’s counting. Thus, by concluding with the Omer count the Alter Rebbe also alludes to the fact that each Jew, through their prayer, can elicit Divine revelation. As we say in the prayers following the Omer count, “May abundant bounty thereby be bestowed upon all the worlds.”
