

SEFIRAS HAOMER

Background

The life of a Jew in Mitzrayim was one of misery and suffering. They had no rights. They had no life. They couldn't own property, choose their own destiny, or protect their own children. They didn't even have the right to their own time. A Mitzri could at any moment demand a Jew's utter and complete compliance to do his bidding. If a Jew walked in the street, it was every Mitzri's right to whisk him away, without question or recourse, and force him into slave labor for whatever he saw fit.

Waking in the early morning to the crack of the Mitzri's whip, the Jews were pushed to the limit of human endurance until late night when they fell asleep in the fields. Without rest, without breaks, the Jews lugged heavy loads and lifted huge rocks. Sweat, tears, and bloodshed were their lot. In the heat of the sweltering sun and in the cold of the desert night, at the risk of life and limb, the Jew was oppressed with a demon-like fury. A beast of burden is treated wisely to ensure its well-being, but not the Jew who was pushed beyond all limits... Finally, when Pharaoh was asked to let the Jewish people go, he increased their load, taking it from the impossible to the unimaginable.

Questions

How is it possible to imagine anything in the world being more desirable to the Jews than freedom? How could it be that anything, even something as great as receiving the Torah, could mean more to them than being redeemed from slavery?

ספר ויקרא פרק כג

(טו) וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת תהיינה:

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after Pesach. From the day of the bringing of the omer, seven complete weeks they should be.

ספר החינוך - מצוה שו

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה

שהיא העיקר הגדול שבשביל זה הם נגאלים והיא תכלית הטובה שלהם. וענין גדול הוא להם, יותר מן החירות מעבדות:

ומפני כן, כי היא כל עיקרן של ישראל ובעבורה נגאלו ועלו לכל הגדולה שעלו אליה, נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו, כעבד ישאף צל, וימנה תמיד מתי יבוא העת הנכסף אליו שיצא לחירות

The concept behind the mitzvah is that the primary purpose of the Jewish people is to learn Torah. This was the reason that they were redeemed from Mitzrayim. Receiving the Torah was a greater good to them than even going free from slavery. Therefore, we are commanded to count from the day after the first day of Pesach until the giving of the Torah to awaken within ourselves the desire for this greatly awaited day.