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# PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Emor  Rabbi Daniel Yarmush

## Counting the Days

*“And you shall count for yourselves from the day following Shabbos (Pesach) . . . seven complete weeks they shall be.”*

Hashem Yisborach commands us to count the days from Pesach until Matan Torah. Why?

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 306) explains that we were only freed from [Mitzrayim](#) in order to receive the Torah at Har Sinai and to fulfill its mitzvos. Through Sefiras HaOmer we count from the anniversary of the day we were redeemed from Mitzrayim to the anniversary of the day we received the Torah. This counting generates excitement that a great event is approaching. It creates feelings of anticipation and longing for reliving our receiving the Torah at Har Sinai. It is important to generate these feelings for on that day we “met” our Father in Heaven and experienced an amazing closeness to Him.

Let us reflect for a moment on the words of the Chinuch. A mitzvah is devoted to awaken our longing and anticipation of receiving the Torah. Such feelings of longing are essential to our spiritual growth. If a person’s every fiber longs for a particular objective, it is evident in everything he does. When he looks at something mundane such as a simple glass of milk, he’ll somehow find in it some connection to his dream. It will be the only thing he wants to talk about. Anyone who knows him will know about his dream. His life will be overtaken by it.

So it should be with our desire to serve and connect to

Hashem. Every fiber of our being should long to attach to our Creator. When we awaken in the morning we should think only of how to grow in our Avodas Hako-desh. When we see a glass of milk we will see an opportunity to thank Hashem for what He gives us. Anyone who knows us will know of our dream.

This is the message of Sefiras HaOmer. On Shavuos (3321 years ago) we were connected in the greatest way ever to our Father in Heaven. On that day Hashem gave us His cherished Torah. We have the ability to reconnect to that day by studying its laws and performing them. The more we learn and engross ourselves in Torah and mitzvos, the greater our connection will be. We were all there at Har Sinai and deep inside we all wish we could be back in that situation of closeness to Hashem. The mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer is a way for us to bring out that yearning. Each day we count: Today is one – one day closer; Today is two – two days closer; Today is seven – a whole week closer. We demonstrate our longing to reconnect. B’ezeras Hashem this can greatly affect our lives, sowing seeds of growth and aspirations.

May we take to heart the message of Sefiras HaOmer and assure that each day is one step closer to the arms of our Father. May we grow step by step, bit by bit, until we reach the shadow of His wings and He once again takes us in His arms as a mother holds her child and brings us back home to Yerushalayim.

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# HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

## Sefiras HaOmer

*Rabbi David Greenberg*

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 306) explains that because Hashem had taken the Jews out of Egypt with the express intent of giving them the Torah, they were commanded to count from their exodus from Egypt until the day they were to receive the Torah to demonstrate their anticipation for receiving the Torah. (See adjoining article.) Although it would have been appropriate to begin counting from the beginning of Pesach, because that day was set aside for appreciating Hashem's miracles which took us out from Mitzrayim, the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer, therefore, begins on the second day of Pesach. Because it is easier to begin counting from a special event rather than just from the second day of Pesach, the counting starts from the only unique event of that day, the bringing of the Karbon Omer. This barley offering, which permitted the new grain (Chodosh) to be eaten, has therefore no real connection with the Counting of the Omer. That would explain the opinion of the Rambam that, Sefiras HaOmer remains a Biblical requirement, although the Korban HaOmer is no longer offered.

However, many authorities, including the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 489:21) hold that, in the absence of the Omer offering, the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer is only Rabbinical in nature. The question is: What's the connection between the Omer and the Count? Another question to consider is: While most names of korbanos reflect the korban's nature, (i.e., a Chatot is brought because of a Chet – sin) the word Omer just refers to a certain measure!

The Sefer Be'er Yosef explains that the Omer refers to the Omer of manna that the Jews received daily during their forty-year sojourn in the desert. This miraculous food taught the Jewish people tremendous lessons in faith and trust in Hashem. Regardless of the amount of manna that was collected, there was exactly one "omer" per person upon reaching home. Also, no manna ever remained over night. This taught the B'nei Yisrael that all their sustenance was directly from Hashem, and human intervention is only a mirage. However, soon after entering Eretz Yisrael, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, their supply of manna ran out. Consequently, on the 16<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan the Jews were forced to eat from the produce of the land. At that time, the danger that the people would forget where their sustenance really comes from became a concern. Therefore, the B'nei Yisrael were commanded not to eat from the new crop until a Korban Omer was brought, to demonstrate that food from a farmer is intrinsically the same as an "omer" of manna from the Heaven.

The Mechilta (Beshalach) states that only the generation who ate from the manna could have received the Torah. This was so because the people needed to be inculcated with the proper trust in Hashem to merit that Divine gift. Because every year on Shavuot we are presented with the opportunity to receive the Torah anew, we prepare during the days of Sefira by mentioning the Omer and internalizing this message of faith and trust.

### The Procedure

One should stand when reciting the beracha and Counting the Omer. Prior to reciting the beracha the person must know what number day is that day. One counts both the days and the weeks of the Omer. If one forgot to count the weeks, he has still fulfilled the mitzvah, though if he remembers that day he should recount without a beracha. However, if the days were forgotten, i.e., on the seventh day one counted, "Today is one week," the mitzvah has not been fulfilled. One must understand the words he uses to count to perform the mitzvah. If necessary, one should count in English.

### The Time

The pasuk states that one should count "seven complete weeks." The Gemara (Menachos 65b) explains that for the count to be considered complete, one must count at night because it is the beginning of the Jewish day. Hence, one should attempt to count at the earliest time after nightfall (Tzeis Hakochovim). Nonetheless, per the principle of Tadir Kodem (the more frequent mitzvah comes first), one should first daven Maariv. There is an argument amongst the poskim if the concept of 'tadir' applies when one is not ready to fulfill both mitzvos at the current time. Still if one regularly attends a later minyan, the Poskim recommend that he wait to count the Omer together with that minyan rather than count earlier on his own because reciting the sefira in a public forum supersedes an early recital (see IGM vol 4 S.99 and Minchas Yitzchak vol.9 S.56).

### Missing a Day

The BaHaG opines that the law of "temimus" – completeness – implies that there is one mitzvah to count a complete succession of days. Therefore, if one day was not counted, the mitzvah can no longer be fulfilled. However, many other Rishonim hold that each day is its own separate mitzvah. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid 5.8) paskens that if one failed to count a day, he should continue to count. Nevertheless, out of concern for the BaHaG's ruling, he many no longer recite the beracha. In such a case, he should try to be yotzei with another's beracha. In the event that he remembers before the end of the day that he forgot to count, he should count during the daytime without a beracha, and then he may resume to count that night with a beracha. If one is not sure if he skipped, he may continue counting with a beracha.

### If Asked

If someone is asked what the coming Sefira will be after Bein Hashmashos right after sunset, he should not answer that today is "x" day of the omer because there are opinions that one may fulfill the mitzvah b'dieved (ex post facto) at that time. If he answered the correct sefirah, he will not be able to count with a beracha that night.

The proper response to such a question is that yesterday was "such." One who did not mention that "today is," rather he just said the number, may still count with a beracha. Someone who mistakenly said, "Yesterday was 'five'" when in fact that was the number for that day, may still count with a beracha, for he clearly showed his intent not to fulfill his obligation at that time.

### When in Doubt

If one is unsure of the proper Sefira he should not count both potential days. (Avnei Nezer Y.D. 248:3; Shut B'Tzel HaChochma vol. 5 s.2) This is not considered a count because counting means making a definitive statement. This explains why there is no rule of sefeika d'yoma, keeping two days out of doubt in the diaspora regarding Sefira as we have by the rest of the Yomim Tovim.

However, the Baal Hamaor (end of Pesachim) explains that we don't count in this fashion because if we would count from the *safek yom* of the 16<sup>th</sup> Nisan, we would end up counting the 49<sup>th</sup> day on Shavuot. That would belittle the Yom Tov, for such a count is declaring that day as a weekday. It appears from the Baal Hamaor's refusal to answer that a doubtful count is invalid, that he believes such a count to be valid. Consequently, the D'var Avraham (vol. 1 s.34) rules that one should count even in doubt, though without a beracha.

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