

“Lag Ba-Omer and Counting the Omer”

As Lag ba-Omer approaches, it is timely to call attention to a halachic problem which can easily arise. People frequently ask each other what day of the Omer it is. If one gives the correct answer - even though he does not intend to fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer by answering his friend - it is considered as if he fulfilled his obligation to count the Omer. This halachah, which is recorded in the Shulchan Aruch, is based on an opinion in the Talmud that holds that mitzvos eimam tzrichos kavanah, mitzvos can be fulfilled even without specific intent to fulfill them. By uttering the correct day's count of the Omer, he has lost the opportunity to recite a blessing over the counting since he has, in the eyes of the halachah, already counted the Omer, albeit unintentionally. One should, therefore, not give a direct answer when asked for the day of the Omer; rather one should say: Yesterday's count was such and such. Of course, this advisory applies only from sunset and onwards, since counting sefirah before sunset is invalid.

The danger of inadvertently counting the Omer by a causal response or comment regarding what day of the Omer it is, is most prevalent on Lag ba-Omer. The very name "Lag ba-Omer" states that it is the 33rd day of the Omer count (as Lag is the letter equivalent for the number 33). Thus on the evening of Lag ba-Omer after sunset, one should be careful not to express that "today is Lag ba-Omer" until after he counts the Omer with the blessing.

(Daniel Neustadt, torah. org. For final rulings, consult your Rav.)