



MAKE IT COUNT

MRS. HOROWITZ

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ATARA KEEHN (23')

AVICHAJ SHEKHTER (22')

ZEVI KAY (24')

ADAM DENNIS (21')

This week's parsha, Parshat Emor, includes the mitzvah of Sefirat HaOmer that we are, hopefully, right in the middle of fulfilling, which

makes it a perfect topic for a d'var Torah this week! In an effort to understand the essence and purpose of this 49-day count, our mefarshim and halachists offer numerous suggestions.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains that we are counting towards the exciting and epic event of Matan Torah, which we celebrate on Shavuot at the end of Sefirat HaOmer. Because the Torah is the central pillar of our identity as Jews, we constantly yearn for the Har Sinai experience, which we evoke each year on Shavuot. So

we count the days as we progress towards Shavuot as an expression of our yearning, our excitement to reach our goal.

It's almost May, which means it's that time of year where we begin to envision the end of school and the beginning of summer. I'd venture to guess that a large percentage of students are keeping count, knowing exactly how many days of classes are left before final exams, and how many days until camp or other summer plans begin. It's natural to anticipate milestones in our year and to count the days until we reach them. This is not only true of students in the waning weeks of a school year. We all count towards birthdays, vacations, smachot, graduations...all worthy of our excitement and eager anticipation!

One of the lessons of Sefirat HaOmer might be to reflect on our priorities: what are the landmark events that excite us enough to keep count of the days between now and then? The mitzvah of Sefirat HaOmer instructs us to get excited about Torah, to make sure

that Shavuot is an important milestone in our yearly calendar, and to demonstrate that Torah is one of our “landmark” priorities!

The K'tav VeHakabbalah adds an important element to our understanding of this mitzvah. He notes that the Torah commands us: **וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם**, that our counting of Sefirah should be “for ourselves”. This might remind us of a similar formulation, God’s command to Avraham to journey to Canaan, which He phrases as **לֶךְ לָךְ** -- “go for yourself”. Rashi explains that God’s instructions to Avraham are for “himself”, for Avraham’s benefit. Here too, explains the K'tav VeHakabbalah, the mitzvah of Sefirat HaOmer is for “ourselves”, for our own benefit.

Normally, when we count towards an exciting event, we hope for the days and weeks in between to fly by, as they are nothing but a waiting period, an obstacle that stands in between us and our goal. When it comes to Sefirat HaOmer, however, the 49 days that we count have their own intrinsic value. They are more than just a means to the end of Matan Torah, and it’s our job to make them meaningful for ourselves by using this time to reflect on our values and priorities, to ensure that our excitement about Shavuot, when it arrives, is genuine.

The K'tav VeHakabbalah’s explanation is a powerful lesson to us about how to use our time, not only as we eagerly await Shavuot but as we count towards birthdays, smachot, and especially the end of this school year. Instead of letting the days and weeks fly by and slip away, we have the opportunity to make each day count by engaging in meaningful learning and deepening our connection with teachers and friends. By doing so, we ensure that we can look back on this year with genuine satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment.

DESTINATION

ATARA KEEHN (23’)

Israel is known for creating Waze, the best navigation system in the world. All you have to do is plug in where you want to go and it gets you there on the quickest route. What is the navigation system for life? Is there one, and if so, where are we trying to go

and how do we get to that destination? That is what this week’s parsha, Parshat Emor, is teaching us with the map of all of the Jewish holidays. Holidays, or *chagim*, are called *mo’adim*, which comes from the word *mo’ed*, which means destination. They are also called *regalim*, which means feet. This can indicate to us, as the Jewish people, that you get to your destination by going through and keeping the different holidays. On Pesach, the first holiday, we break free from whatever is holding us back in life, which is why it is known as *zman cheiruteinu*, the time of our freedom. Pesach teaches us that you have to first release yourself, but you are never fully free until you know where you are going. That is why Shavuot comes next. When we receive the Torah, the values of our mission become clear and we see from the Torah and all of the mitzvot that our *tafkid* is making this world a better place. Finally, after all of that, we enter the land of Israel with the holiday Sukkot, which represents entering the house of God. That is what our goal and *tafkid* is, to create the perfect society with all of the values learned through the Torah, thereby becoming a light unto the nations.

STRUCTURE

AVICHAJ SHEKHTER (22’)

In Parshat Emor, the Torah commands us to count seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot, also known as Sefirat Ha’Omer. Of our 613 mitzvot, the middle mitzvah, number 307, is Sefirat Ha’Omer. Rav Meilech Biederman asks: what is the significance of Sefirat Ha’Omer being the middle mitzvah?

When you build a tall building you need to have a foundation and structure throughout the building in order for it not to collapse. Sefirah is uniquely powerful as it highlights the power of mitzvot, because even if one floor (mitzvah) of the building doesn’t have a good structure, the whole building will fall. Sefirah is a time of *kedusha* and *tahara*, and that is one of the foundations of Judaism, so if the middle mitzvah doesn’t have a good foundation, then everything around it will also be affected.

We learn from this that if your core isn’t Torah and mitzvot, then nothing else will fit in and everything will fall apart. Rav Turetsky suggests that this is modeled by the time in between Pesach and Shavuot. He says that Sefirat Ha’Omer is like the

glue in the cement, in that the best way to use the time of transition between these two *chagim* is for greater *kedusha* and *tahara*. Just like we need those forty days in the desert before Har Sinai for Bnei Yisrael to become *tahor*, we need the days of Sefirah to strengthen our foundation.

Every week is its own entity and every day is its own as well. If you skip any days or steps the building will fall, so we have to go one step at a time to make our structures and foundations grow so we can become great *yidden*.

CONNECTION

ZEVI KAY (24')

What is the connection between a Kiddush Hashem and leaving Mitzrayim? According to the Sfat Emet, B'nei Yisrael are able to make a Kiddush Hashem that goes beyond the typical nature of humans. This is because when Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, He did so by changing our nature in order for the *nefashot* of the Jews to leave the natural world while leaving Egypt. There is a pasuk (Yeshayahu 43:1) that says: **נִאֲמַרְנוּ אֲתָם עֵדֵי** -- "You are My witnesses, so says Hashem!" This phrase means that the Jewish people are witnesses of Hashem's miracles, so they are able to sanctify His Name because they are testifying to Him.

There is a witness story written by Chana Eibenschutz-Eilenberg called "Fifty Lashes" that is found in a *sefer* about the Holocaust: "Courageously the boy kept his mouth shut. The murderous blows of the whip did not defeat him. He kept silent and bore his punishment proudly. We were counting the blows. Fifty, yes fifty lashes. But it was the *stubenalteste* who was defeated in the end.

When the lashes were all given, the boy still kept his pride and did not let a sound out from his mouth. The infuriated Nazi walked away, routed and ashamed. Later, as I lay on my bunk in the boys' block of Auschwitz, I saw the *stubenalteste* coming with a length of rubber hose in his hand, preparing to beat someone. I jumped up to see who it was going to be.

The *stubenalteste* ordered one of the boys to get

down from his bunk. He came down and bent over, and the Nazi began to beat him. We counted the blows. The boy neither wept nor groaned. Twenty-five blows, forty... The Nazi flipped the boy over and beat him on his head, on his legs. A boy of fourteen, no more. And he made not a sound. When he had finished his course of fifty lashes, the Nazi stormed out of our block. We picked up the boy and saw a huge red mark stretching across his forehead, the mark left by the rubber whip.

When we asked him what he was beaten for, he answered, "It was worth it. I brought my friends some siddurim to pray from!" This courageous lad said no more. Without a sound he got up and climbed back into his bunk."

This story indicates that when the boy delivered the siddur he felt that, despite all the lashes and blows, it was worthwhile because the Kiddush Hashem that he performed attached his *neshama* to Hashem. This strength, this ability to sacrifice his well-being for the sake of some sidduring, came from B'nei Yisrael's experiences leaving Egypt and traveling to Har Sinai, where our *neshamot* learned how to connect with and attach to Hashem.

RELATIONSHIP

REBECCA HENNER (22')

This week's parsha, Parshat Emor, is filled with many important concepts in Jewish life. It lays out the credentials needed to be a kohen, what requirements an animal needs to have to act as a *korban*, as well as a description of several of our beloved holidays. The Torah's description of how an animal must be treated before it becomes a *korban* is extremely noteworthy, and lends itself to greater philosophical ideas that give insight into how the Jewish people should behave towards all beings. In addition, we can learn the importance of *hakarat hatov* to those who dedicate their lives to ours through these halachot.

שׁוֹר אוֹ כֶּשֶׂב אוֹ עֵז כִּי יוֹלֵד וְהָיָה שְׁבַע יָמִים תַּחַת אִמּוֹ
וַיְמִיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי וְהִלָּאָה יִרְצָה לְקַרְבַּן אֲשֶׁה ה'

"When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to

Hashem (Vayikra 22:27).

The Bechor Shor, Baal Haturim, and others offer interesting interpretations, including the idea that the animal must wait a period of time to go from an unholy place, the womb, to a location of ultimate *kedusha*, the *mizbeach*, where it will become a korban. A phrase from the subsequent pasuk creates a parallel that helps construct another strong message in relation to this idea:

וְשׂוֹר אִם שָׁה אֹתוֹ וְאֵת בְּנוֹ לֹא תִשְׁחָטוּ בְּיוֹם אֶחָד

“However, no animal from the herd or from the flock shall be slaughtered on the same day with its young” (Vayikra 22:28). At first, this mitzvah seems logical and compassionate, but if one takes a closer look, it can appear the opposite. Wouldn’t it be better to slaughter both on the same day, so that neither the parent nor the offspring have to go through the pain of living without the other? The thing in life for a parent which is most difficult is to live without their child who they dedicated so much to!

Perhaps an answer can be formulated by looking at both pesukim in conjunction with one another. The first, that a child must be with his mother for a period of 7 days, represents the bond between parent and offspring, which the mother, who carried her young, is worthy of experiencing. The latter is a prohibition which seems to have a greater effect on the person who would normally be doing the killing, not necessarily the animals.

In life, we must recognize the value of the connection between generations. We must be thankful for those who came before us, and paved the way for us to live our lives as we do. Perhaps an animal has to live with its mother for seven days because it must recognize the being who dedicated so much for it. Furthermore, a person cannot kill both parent and offspring at once because this action shows that the individual does not appreciate the importance of generational bonds, and is willing to kill off not only an animal, but a representation of connection and continuity.

The Bechor Shor’s understanding that the **animal** must wait a period of seven days in order to be spiritually purified perfectly fits in with this understanding. It is the realization of the importance of the parent-child relationship that ultimately expands a person’s gratitude and recognition of something greater.

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