

Omer: Oneness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Torah commands us to count the *omer* from the second day of Pesach until Shavuot. The *omer* is not the animal sacrifice being offered but a measure for the grain that is part of many of the sacrificial rituals. Why then is only this offering called the *omer* and none of the others? What is the connection between this offering and counting the days leading up to Shavuot? Further, the Sichot Eliyahu notes we count the days either *ba'omer* or *la'omer*. Since the counting begins from the time of the offering on the second day of Pesach, shouldn't we be counting *me'omer*, from the omer? Why do we bring a barley offering on Pesach and a wheat offering on Shavuot?

Rabbi Sheinberg explains that we count from that which resembles the food of animals to that which represents the food of human beings to remind us that we are meant to move from a purely physical state of existence to a spiritual state just as our physical redemption from Egypt brought us closer to receiving the Torah and fulfilling our spiritual purpose. We count each day because the process proceeds one step at a time. The underpinnings of this process go back to the time of creation. Hashem created Adam in a perfect spiritual state which he lost when he ate of the forbidden fruit. Hashem cursed him that thorns and thistles would constitute his food. Adam cried profusely that he would them be on the same level as his chamor, his donkey, completely physical. Hashem then relented and allowed him to eat bread, albeit through the sweat of his brow. The state of mankind, however, was permanently damaged until *Bnei Yisroel* stood at Sinai and returned to that spiritual level only to lose it again with the sin of the golden calf. The omer offering is the symbolic reminder of our leaving the physical mindset of Egypt and beginning the process of elevating our physicality toward that spiritual state. The process begins with the waving of the *omer* offering to God. The Torah commands the *omer* offering to be brought "on the morrow of the *Shabbat*," rather than "on the morrow of Pesach" to remind us of creation, of Adam's sin, and of his and our desire for a more spiritual life, culminating with the bread offering on Shavuot that can only be produced through a strenuous process of refinement.

We begin the counting when the barley is upright, ready for the sickle to harvest. Similarly, writes the Me'ein Beis Hashoeva, we should feel that we too are standing upright, ready to be cut from the physicality of the ground. Every day, with each count, as we physically stand when we recite the blessing, we separate further from the lower elements of our being and rise upward and that is why we count *la'omer*, toward the *omer*. *Sefirah* is in the agricultural season. As we view our barley crop, we give thanks to Hashem for our bounty while we simultaneously ask Him to continue blessing us in the future. The Abudraham notes that the two ideas are actually complementary. To grow spiritually, one needs proper sustenance as Chazal say, "If there is no flour, there can be no Torah."

So why not begin counting on the first day of Pesach? The Sefer Hachinuch notes that one doesn't intermix one celebration with another. On the first day of Pesach, we celebrate our physical redemption from Egypt. This leaves the following day to begin celebrating our imminent receiving of the Torah. Nevertheless, it seems strange that the blessing for this counting is tied to the omer when the omer seems not to be the purpose of the counting. On the contrary, writes the Be'er Yosef, while indeed other *korbanot* were accompanied by an omer of meal, only this one, the day after Pesach, is singled out as a special omer offering with its own ritual. In the desert Hashem provided each individual with one omer of mohn, to fill his daily needs. Yet, Hashem requests only one *omer* from the entire people. During the forty years in the desert, it was obvious Who was providing for all the needs of the people. However, once the people entered the land, they could easily forget Hashem's providence and attribute it to nature. By highlighting the importance of the omer we affirm our continued faith in Hashem's providence. Indeed an *omer* of mohn was kept in the *aron* alongside the *luchot* as a constant reminder of Hashem's chessed.

We count the first day of the *omer* as yom *echad*, one day, rather than the first day. There are two other times that the ordinal number "one" is used when the serial number "first" would seem more appropriate. In the story of creation it says, "And there was evening and

morning one day." All the other days of creation are in serial form while the first day is in ordinal form. When describing the High Priest's Yom Kippur service, each sprinkling of blood is counted in the ordinal number, but each sprinkling begins with "one." "One and two," "One and three," etc. The Sichot Eliyahu explains that when one counts with ordinal numbers, one counts each one as an individual. Alternatively, when one counts in serial numbers, one is relating each individual as part of the larger group. Prior to creation there was nothing in the world except Hashem. Starting on the second day, however, there were already angels. Therefore the second day of creation cannot exclude day one which, although it stood on its own on that day, now has a second day to include in the process of creation and to reflect back to the Creator. Therefore, this day becomes a second day rather than day two, thereby connecting back to the origin. Similarly, the *kohen gadol* who while individualizing each sprinkling is nevertheless still returning to the one, the beginning. When we count the *omer*, we may be tempted to think that all the grain in the field is the result of our own hard work. By starting with "one" instead of "the first," we are linking the whole series to that ineffable One and acknowledging that all our bountiful harvests come from Hashem. That's why when one misses one day of counting, one can no longer count with a blessing, for he has broken the chain.

The term *b'omer* denotes a process and the process is in the *omer* itself. The Ketav Vehakbalah notes that that the word is used in the verb form when the Torah commands the behavior toward the *isha yifat toar*, "*Lo titamer boh* – You shall not put her in servitude." During the period of counting the omer we are putting ourselves completely in servitude to Hashem. Understandably this is not an easy achievement, so each day we take little steps and count another day of achievement in the process.

These days of *sefirah haomer* are among the most powerful days of the year. They are a time of building our connection to Hashem, a time to reflect on our dual nature and subdue our animalistic instincts so that we can rise ever higher towards receiving the Torah.



Mesilat Yesharim: The First Step: Caution

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The Mesilat Yesharim tells us that the purpose of man in this world is *l'hisaneg el Hashem* -to derive joy by coming closer to Hashem. The Ramchal based his sefer on the words of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair in the Gemara Avoda Zarah which lists the steps of how we can reach this goal. The first step is *zehirut*, being careful with how one acts towards Hashem and others. It refers to the negative commandments, that which is forbidden. *Zerizut* which is the next step refers to positive commandments that which one must do with alacrity and enthusiasm. *Zehirut* comes before *zerizut*. One should be very cautious about sinning. Perhaps I will do something that will put my soul in danger.

Imagine a banquet hall filled with a thousand people. Every person has two drinking

glasses at his setting, one filled with water and one with champagne. Someone gets up and announces that he put a bit of poison in one of the glasses and it's not recognizable which one. The chances that the poison is in your glass is close to nil. Would you drink it? Of course not. *Zehirut hamitzvot* means being thoroughly scrupulous, making sure your clear of any doubt of sin whether in your relationship with people or your observance of *mitzvot*.

Every morning we recite, "The soul you placed within me is pure..." If one perceives sin as a blemish on the soul much like a stain on a beautiful dress one will be extra careful to stay far away from wrongdoings. *Yisrael* can be read as *sar kel* - the ambassadors of Hashem. We are the representatives of Hashem in this world. Therefore a person must be mindful of how he acts so as not to destroy Hashem's

image along with his own soul. Emulating Hashem is our purpose. Therefore the Mesilat Yesharim tells us, if you walk through life without ever thinking- how will I perfect myself, how will I become a better individual, then you have never practiced *zehirut*. If you need to get somewhere and you hear there's a backup of traffic 15 miles from your destination, you begin to think of alternative routes. So too one should think, what will be if I find myself in a situation of sin, what other path can I take? *Hisbonenut* is thinking- How will I get to my destination? How will I live this day? How will I eat, talk, sleep, and relate to people? How can I perfect myself? It's contemplating and thinking about alternate possibilities. The first step is *zehirut* -being careful. This will set us on the road to higher levels in avodat Hashem.

Make It Count 11

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenabum

The attribute of Day 11 is *netzach sheb'gevura*. *Gevurah* is powerful energy. *Netzach* means to conduct as in *lamnatzeach* - conducting an orchestra. Beautiful music doesn't only come from pressing keys in the right sequence. A person needs to know how softly or strongly to push down on the keys. If you bang hard, it'll be noisy. If you press too lightly the music won't be heard. Similarly, too little electricity will not power a machine, too much might cause electrocution. *Netzach sheb'gevura* is channeling energy in the right way.

Rabbi Yossi says, "*Yehi mamon chavercha chaviv aleich kishelach*." Your friend's money should be as precious to you as your own. This means treating it with the same dignity and respect as one would one's own possessions. To many people, money represents power and creates an illusion of being in control. The temptation to cross boundaries, to gain more, and to be disrespectful towards others possessions is very great. Not respecting someone else's boundaries could be a form of manipulation. It's crossing limits and putting oneself where one doesn't belong. The

midah of netzach sheb'gevura tells us that we must live according to *halacha*. The Torah tells us exactly what we're allowed to take and when, how to borrow and how to return. So let us resolve to working on respecting other people's possessions, money, and dignity. Let us make an accounting of any borrowed items or loans that should have been repaid and repay them. Let us commit to live our lives in a measured way according to Torah and thereby channel our inner powers *l'tova*.