

Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

Productive Planting

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Among the *mitzvot* in these *parshiot* is the *mitzvah* of *orlah*. The verses state: "When you come to the land and you shall plant any fruit tree ... for three years [the fruit] shall be forbidden to you ... In the fourth year all its fruit shall be sanctified to laud Hashem, And in the fifth year you may eat the fruit so that it will increase its crop for you – I am Hashem your God."

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch explains that the observance of this *mitzvah* is an affirmation of our devotion and commitment to Hashem. Only after we acknowledge and praise Hashem for His involvement in our labor are we permitted to enjoy the fruit ourselves, and the gratitude we acknowledge in the fourth year must carry over to the fifth and all subsequent years as we enjoy the crops He continues to bless us with.

Our responsibility to praise Hashem does not end with bringing the fruit of the fourth year to Yerushalayim; we must continually praise Him with every blessing we say before eating the fruit, says Rabbi Y. P. Bodner.

Yalkut Lekach Tov explains a connection between planting trees and the verse referring to Torah as, "A living tree for those who hold onto it." Planting trees in *Eretz Yisroel* is not a matter of choice but an obligation, just as learning *Torah* is an obligation. And, just as planting trees requires work and support, so

must we support *Torah* scholars and institutions when we come to the land.

Rabbi Y. Salant sees in this connection an affirmation of the relationship between the financial support Zevulun is enjoined to give Issachar who toils in *Torah*, the tree of life. Like the tithes, *orlah* or the proceeds from its sale must be brought to and eaten in *Yerushalayim*. Here the families bringing the gift would be immersed in an environment of *kedushah*, they would observe the *Sanhedrin* and see the *kohanim* involved in the *Beit Hamikdash* service. They would sometimes leave their sons in *Yerushalayim* to study, with the money from the tithe or *orlah* to support them and to share their bounty with *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. In this way, the families would be immersed in *Torah* study and in support of *Torah* institutions in the land.

The *Torah* compares Man to a tree. Rabbi Munk quoting the Ohr Hachaim explains that until the age of three, a child's mind is fairly closed to spiritual development. In the fourth year, he begins his spiritual awakening with learning the aleph bet and beginning praises and *brachot* to Hashem. In the fifth year, as *Pirkei Avot* teaches us, a child starts learning *Torah*.

The Sichot Hitchazkut explains the custom of upsherin with the verse, "The first shearings you should bring to Me." *Bnei Yisroel* is called *tzon kodshecha*, Your holy sheep, and so we bring to God the first shearings of His sheep,

our children at the age of three, as they begin their spiritual awakening.

Asufat Maarachot notes that when Hashem first brought Adam into *Gan Eden*, he started with *chessed*. Adam was created without the necessity of working for his needs. The trees would provide all his food. Only after the sin was man forced to work for his bread. Altruistic *chessed* had to precede *gevurah* and is the first basis of the world, but after the sin we were taught that we need to practice restraint. Therefore, when we enter the land Hashem has promised us, we begin with the same action Hashem started in creation of the world; we plant trees. Only after planting are we commanded to conquer the land, to bring *gevurah*, power, into play. In the same way, we should begin every new stage of our lives with *chessed*.

The *Maor Vashemesh* further explains the idea of *orlah* as grounded in *chessed*. It is as if Hashem is telling *Bnei Yisroel* not to get so caught up in the physical trappings of the new land that they forget about their brothers. Hashem commanded *Bnei Yisroel* not to use the fruit for the first three years to remind them that the fruit and the land belong to Hashem, that they must practice restraint, and that when they have permission to eat of the fruit, they must bring it to *Yerushalayim* and share it with the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, and then continue sharing their bounty with others.

Parshat Kedoshim: Pathways To Holiness

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Kedoshim, the Torah exhorts us, "Kedoshim tehiyu... Be holy, for I Hashem am holy." The Midrash states that this verse parallels the first commandment of the Aseret Hadibrot, "Anochi Hashem, I am Hashem." The Shem MiShmuel asks why this verse is specifically connected to the first commandment, when the phrase "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" appears so many times in the Torah.

He explains that Hashem controls the world in two ways: through the natural and the supernatural. When one natural force

overpowers another, it does not fully reveal Hashem's greatness, as one might mistakenly believe nature has independent power. However, when Hashem changes the very essence of nature, as He did during the ten plagues, it demonstrates that everything exists solely through His will. This is the central lesson of the first commandment, "I am Hashem your God, who took you out of Egypt," teaching us to feel His presence at every moment.

When the Torah commands us to be holy

because Hashem is holy, we might wonder how a human being can be compared to the Divine. The Kotzker Rebbe explains that although a person has physical desires, by attaching oneself to Hashem, one can elevate physicality into spirituality. *Mitzvot* involve physical actions, but with proper intention, they become deeply spiritual experiences.

The Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur is described as *kadosh v'tahor*, holy and pure. *Tahara* means overcoming evil while the physical still exists but is controlled by the spiritual.

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Kedusha, however, is when physicality itself is transformed into spirituality. When Hashem commands “Kedoshim tehiyu,” He is promising that if we recognize His ultimate authority, we can reach this level of transformation.

The Midrash notes that angels describe holiness in the singular, “kadosh,” while the Torah commands humans in the plural, “kedoshim.” The Shem MiShmuel explains that human holiness is multifaceted. Kedusha requires distancing ourselves from many

negative influences while elevating them. Unlike angels, who exist on fixed levels, humans can both rise and fall. We therefore have a dual responsibility: to guard against spiritual decline while also advancing carefully and steadily.

Nadav and Avihu serve as an example of advancing too quickly; they were overwhelmed by spiritual intensity and fell as a result. At Har Sinai, Hashem commanded both separation (prisha) and boundaries (havdalah), teaching

that spiritual growth must be measured and controlled.

Achieving kedusha is a gradual process that requires persistence and steady progress. Small, consistent steps lead to lasting growth far more than sudden, impulsive leaps. “Kedoshim tehiyu” teaches us to grow wisely—understanding our limits while continuing to strive higher in our avodat Hashem, ultimately reaching true holiness.

The Halachic Essence of Sefirat Haomer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

The mitzvah of Sefirat HaOmer appears twice in the Torah. The first time is in Parshat Emor, where it says, “Usefartem lachem mimacharat hashabbat,” that we should count from the second day of Pesach. In Parshat Re’eh it says, “Shiv’ah shavuot tispar lecha,” that we should count seven weeks beginning from the harvest of the new crops.

What is the status of Sefirat HaOmer today without the Beit Hamikdash? Is it still a mitzvah d’oraita or is it d’rabanan?

The word “usefartem” appears in the section of the Yamim Tovim, which we continue to observe even without the Beit Hamikdash. This suggests that sefira remains a mitzvah d’oraita today, and this is the opinion of the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch.

However, the Rashba and the Ran hold that it is a mitzvah d’rabanan. In Parshat Re’eh, the Torah links the counting to the bringing of the korban omer. Since we no longer bring the korban, they maintain that sefira today is only mid’rabanan. The Baal Hamaor adds that we do not recite Shehechyanu on sefira because it is not a time of complete joy, as it serves only as a remembrance of the Beit Hamikdash.

Rabbeinu Yerucham suggests that there are actually two aspects to the mitzvah, counting days and counting weeks, each with its own bracha. According to this view, counting weeks remains d’oraita, while counting days is d’rabanan. This debate appears in the Gemara in Menachot. Abaye holds that both days and weeks must be counted as a Torah obligation, while Ameimar counted only days, viewing sefira as a remembrance of the Mikdash.

The Rambam writes that even today, korbanot could theoretically be brought if there were a mizbeach, because the sanctity of the Beit Hamikdash still remains. Based on this, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik explains that even if sefira is connected to the korban omer, it could still be considered d’oraita, since the obligation to bring the korban still exists in principle.

There are two types of zecher l’mikdash. Sometimes we replicate what was once done, and other times we do something different to highlight what we are missing. Rav Yosef Soloveitchik suggests that everyone may agree sefira is d’rabanan today, and the disagreement is only about how to commemorate it. Abaye held that we should count exactly as before, while Ameimar changed the

practice by omitting the weeks.

Does it make a difference whether sefira is d’oraita or d’rabanan? Practically, we observe it either way, but there are halachic differences. In cases of doubt, we are stringent with mitzvot d’oraita and lenient with mitzvot d’rabanan. Additionally, many Acharonim hold that mitzvot d’oraita require intention, while d’rabanan may not.

The Shulchan Aruch seems to present both perspectives. On one hand, it says one should ideally wait until tzeit hakochovim to count, suggesting a stricter, possibly d’oraita approach. On the other hand, it rules that even someone who unintentionally states the correct count can fulfill the mitzvah, implying a d’rabanan status.

It is possible that the Shulchan Aruch fundamentally holds sefira is d’rabanan, but still encourages stringency where it is easy to do so or where being lenient could compromise the mitzvah. Therefore, although the majority opinion is that Sefirat HaOmer today is d’rabanan, it is proper to wait until nightfall to count.