

# WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

לרפואה שלימה ליוסף יצחק בן ברכה

## PARSHAT EMOR

### Sefirat HaOmer

The mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer (the counting of the Omer) is found in Parshas Emor, which is always read during Sefira. It is also read on the second day of Pesach, the day that we begin the counting of the Omer.

Sefiras HaOmer is a unique mitzvah in certain ways, which will be the discussion of this article.

What is the reason for the count? According to many, it is a preparation and readying ourselves for the holiday of Shavuoth.

The Chinuch tells us, "We are commanded to count from the day after the first day of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah, to give guidance to our souls, to have great yearning for the honorable day in our hearts, 'like a servant who yearns for shade,' constantly counting, when will come the time that he pines for, to go free, because the counting shows about the person, that his whole hope and yearning is to reach that day."

This will help us understand why we don't say Shehecheyanu at the start of the count. First, because it is a preparatory mitzvah, and

we don't say Shehecheyanu on a mitzvah that is a preparation for something else. For example, when we search for chametz before Pesach, we don't say Shehecheyanu because it is a preparation for Pesach.

A second reason is because the count represents a longing and anticipation for something you don't have now. Therefore, it is associated with discomfort, and we don't say Shehecheyanu on something that is painful.

Today, according to some opinions, the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer is "zecher l'mikdash," meaning that it is not the same

as in Temple times when we brought the Omer offering. Now that we don't have the Temple, we do it in remembrance of Temple times, but we still say the blessings, and it has the same spiritual effect on us, as we will mention later in this article.

The Zohar says that the seven weeks we count are like the seven days that are counted before mikva. Through this, we purify ourselves so that we can enter the chupa on the day of the Giving of the Torah, Shavuoth.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, when putting together the siddur that Chabad uses, was very particular in every detail, the liturgy, the order, etc., that it should be able to be used by every Jew. It follows the nusach (system of prayer) of the Arizal but leaves out the deep spiritual meditations that he added to his siddur because it is beyond most people to understand and follow, and the siddur was

meant to be for every Jew. When he made his siddur, he had sixty nusachs of the siddur that he compared and referenced before coming up with his final product.

One of the changes he made to the siddur, whereas the Ari's siddur ends with meditations, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi put Sefiras HaOmer last. Why did he make this change?

The end of the siddur is not arbitrary, especially when we know how particular he was about every detail. The end of a book is the culmination of the work, and in it, you can find the essence and the central purpose of the work.

The Ari's siddur ends with meditations of the higher spiritual realms because it is a siddur that was made for a particular few who are at the high level; their prayers affect the world and the higher spiritual realms, bringing everything in sync with Hashem's purpose. The essence and the central purpose of that siddur is not so much the person praying but rather the effect it has on the world. Therefore, it ends with meditations.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi's siddur is for every individual Jew. Its central theme is the effect on the individual, and it culminates with Sefiras HaOmer because somehow Sefiras HaOmer encapsulates the central theme of the siddur. How does it do that?

Mitzvahs generally fall into one of two categories. The first are mitzvahs that require action, like putting on Tefillin, lighting Shabbos candles, eating matzah, etc. Or even a minor action, like speaking, saying words, like reading the Megillah, retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, etc.

The second type of mitzvah is the kind that is in the heart, like love and fear of Hashem, etc.

The mitzvah of prayer is unique in that while it requires action (it has to be said with the lips), it also is in the heart, as it has to be pleading and beseeching with meaning. As the Rambam says, "The obligation of this mitzvah is as follows, that a person should beseech and pray every day, by saying praises of Hashem, followed by asking for his needs through requesting and beseeching, and after that, to give praise and thanks to Hashem for the good He has given him." Requesting and beseeching require that you understand what you are saying, and it comes from the heart; if not, it isn't prayer. So prayer has both the qualities of action and heart.

While other mitzvahs require proper intent, the intent itself isn't the actual mitzvah, but by prayer, the intent itself is the mitzvah.

The same is true about Sefiras HaOmer. The law is that you have to say the count, but if you don't understand the Hebrew, you could say it in any language you understand because if you don't know what you are saying, you are not counting. So Sefiras HaOmer is like prayer in that it has both qualities of action and heart.

Another way prayer and Sefiras HaOmer are alike is in their effect on the individual.

## YOUR PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH GOD THROUGH PRAYER CAN TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE AND THE WORLD AROUND YOU.



When praying, we are meant to stand before Hashem "like a servant before his master." And as the Rambam says, "One should clear his heart of all thoughts and see himself as if he stands before the Shechina." When you pray in this way, it changes you and lifts you to a higher level than before until you are a completely different person.

The same is true about Sefiras HaOmer. The purpose of Sefiras HaOmer is to change ourselves spiritually; every day, we work on a different aspect of our spiritual makeup. As we say in the "Ribono shel olam" prayer, that we say following Sefiras HaOmer, "You have commanded us... to count Sefiras HaOmer in order to purify us from our evil and impurities... so that the souls of Your people Israel may be cleansed from their defilement." Just like prayer, the counting of the Omer changes you.

There is a third way that prayer and Sefiras HaOmer are alike and different from most other mitzvahs. Most mitzvahs require action and after you do them, they are done and complete.

When it comes to prayer, the point is to beseech and pray for your needs, even though you don't know if and when your requests will be fulfilled, which would be the completion of what you are praying for. The act of prayer, asking for your needs, although it is not complete in its fruition, is the mitzvah. In a way, prayer is the preparation for the fruition of your requests, and it is this preparation that is the actual mitzvah.

The same is true with Sefiras HaOmer. It is only a preparation for receiving the Torah, for Shavuoth, and the preparation, the counting, longing, and anticipation is the actual mitzvah.

You might think that individual prayer is not as powerful as the special few that pray with the Ari's siddur meditations. But Sefiras HaOmer teaches us otherwise.

When you think about it, you will realize that this counting is very powerful, and we see its strength in the holiday it brings, Shavuoth.

Shabbos is established by Hashem; no matter what, every seven days you have Shabbos, it is totally out of our control. Most holidays are set to a date on the calendar, we sanctify the months of the year, establishing when the new month begins, but it generally follows the cycle of the moon. In that, we have some control.

However, Shavuoth is not set to a date on the calendar, rather it is set to the count of the Omer. We count forty-nine days, and the fiftieth is Shavuoth; it is totally in our control.

We see the power of Sefiras HaOmer in a few ways. First, outside of Israel, instead of every holiday being one day, we add an extra day. The reason for this is because in the times that we would sanctify the new month according to the testimony of two witnesses that saw the new moon, the community outside of Israel wouldn't know exactly when the new month began until a while later. To deal with this doubt, it was established that outside of Israel, they would celebrate a second day, just in case the new month began a day later. So the extra day of every holiday is because of doubt.

The exception to this rule is Shavuoth. Since Shavuoth is after forty-nine days of counting the Omer, there is never a doubt when Shavuoth is, it is always on the fiftieth day, irrespective of the date it falls on. If so, why do we have a second day of Shavuoth? Because the rabbis made all the holidays the same. Different than Sukkos and Pesach, the extra day of Shavuoth was never because of a doubt, therefore, it is stricter than the extra days of the other holidays.

It is Sefiras HaOmer that establishes when we celebrate Shavuoth.

The second way is how our individual counts affect Shavuoth. According to many, if someone crosses the International Dateline during Sefira, and his count is off by a day, he will have to celebrate Shavuoth according to his count, either a day earlier or later than everybody else.

And finally, Sefiras HaOmer draws Hashem's blessing into the world, as the prayer after Sefiras HaOmer continues, "And through this, abundant bounty will be bestowed in all the worlds." And these blessings are drawn into the details, as the next words tell us, "And rectify our nefesh, ruach, and neshamah from every baseness and defect, and purify and sanctify us with Your supernal holiness."

Similarly, the individual prayers of every single Jew is very powerful, even though it is focused on his needs. Prayer is not just to draw down the blessings that are already in the world. In prayer we say, "It should be the will before You," because we, so to speak, draw from beyond existence a new will that didn't exist in the world before. And this new will is drawn into the details, to heal someone who wasn't meant to be healed, to grant children to someone who was meant to be barren, to rain on a place where there was supposed to be a drought, etc. When a new will is drawn into the world, it affects all of existence, raising it higher than it ever was before. So, like Sefiras HaOmer, the prayers of an individual are extremely powerful. It changes the world.

Now we can understand why Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi put Sefiras HaOmer last in his siddur because it encapsulates the essence and the central theme of individual prayer, which is the point of his siddur.

Through our counting Sefiras HaOmer, which is "zecher l'mikdash," and through studying its laws, we will merit the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of our Holy Temple, the Beis Hamikdash, in Jerusalem. And we will certainly be able to count the Omer in its proper way, as we say right after counting every night of Sefiras HaOmer, "May the Merciful One restore unto us the service of the Beis Hamikdash to its place, speedily in our days; Amen, Selah." May it happen soon.

*"Dear Rabbi Yitzi,*

*I recently ran into one of your readings on the Chabad Omer app, and I was hooked and had to learn more.*

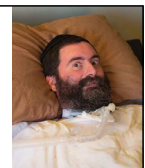
*When I learned you had ALS I was amazed at how much you can share with us via typing!*

*I work with the disabled and I am in the process of converting. I am very grateful to have found you, your team, and your writings at this stage in my life when I seem to need them the most "*

**- Anonymous, Lake Tahoe**

RABBI YITZI WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! SEND YOUR MESSAGE TO:  
(937) 770-4802 | TORAHFROMMYEYES@GMAIL.COM

Despite facing one of life's most difficult challenges, Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz continues to spread joy and faith to thousands around the globe. Diagnosed in 2012 with ALS, Rabbi Yitzi is now 95% paralyzed and no longer able to speak or breath on his own. Thanks to the miracle of technology, Rabbi Yitzi continues to spread his wisdom through his eyes, focusing on each and every letter of these Torah articles. Rabbi Yitzi, his wife Dina and their seven children are the Rebbe's Shluchim to Temecula, California.



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