

Weekly Teaching

April 25, 2019

According to Torah (Leviticus 23:15-16 and Deuteronomy 16:9-10), we are obligated to count fifty days, beginning on the second day of Passover and ending just before the festival of Shavuot.

This special period of time is called “counting the omer”.

An omer is the Hebrew term for a unit of grain and it was the way sheaves were measured and then brought to the Temple in Jerusalem for a special offering to God.

The offerings began on the second day of Passover and continued through the spring harvest—the time of Shavuot, when we recall our receiving God’s Torah at Mount Sinai.

There are different reasons why we still count the omer.

- 1) To quote Tevye: “Tradition!” The reality being that when we count the omer, we connect ourselves to what Jews have always done historically, and across the world still do today. Common practice of ritual anchors us in our Jewish identity and our sacred heritage.
- 2) While we don’t live in the more challenging era of our spiritual ancestors, we still confront the uncertainties of our own lives. Counting the omer is a ritual structure that has us pay closer attention to what is most important in our lives. When we count our days, and our blessings, we help foster an inner peace.
- 3) When counting the omer, we help connect the holidays of Passover and Shavuot; the time of our liberation from Egyptian bondage until our time of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. It’s a concrete reminder that we are liberated so as to pursue freely more sacred endeavors. Freedom without the anchor of Godly values is merely a life adrift. We need to grasp on to the buoy that is our Torah amidst the Sea—sometimes choppy—that we constantly swim.
- 4) Finally, counting the omer fulfills the challenge that the Psalmist gave us: “Teach us to count our days, that we may obtain a wise heart.” Fulfilling this mitzvah lets us better appreciate the gift that is each day; it truly lets us live with the “present” that is our daily lives.

There are two parts to the traditional “counting of the omer”.

Each evening, beginning on the second night of Passover, and continuing through the night before Shavuot, we first recite this blessing:

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu Melekh ha’Olam asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tizivanu al sefirat ha’omer

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments and commanded us to count the omer.

Then, we say out loud the day, and eventually the week and day of our count.

For the first six days, we say:

“Today is the first [second...third...etc...] day of the omer.

Starting with the seventh day (the end of week one), we also include the number of weeks that we have counted.

For example, on the ninth day we recite: “Today is nine days, which is one week and two days of the omer.”

[Click here](#) for a link created by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of an omer calendar. Each day contains a life-changing idea, taken from Rabbi Sacks’ Covenant and Conversation essays on the weekly Torah portion.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Passover,

Rabbi Mitch

rabbimitch@templesholom.com