

## Omer

During this period between the second day of *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, it is a *mitzvah* to count the *omer*. This derives from a commandment to offer a sheaf of barley, called an *omer*, on each of the 49 days between the holidays. The name of the 50<sup>th</sup> day, *Shavuot*, literally means “weeks”, because a week of weeks has passed since *Pesach*. We count each day to prepare ourselves spiritually for the anniversary of the giving of the *Torah* by God on Mount Sinai on the first *Shavuot*. The counting of the *omer* represents our anticipation and desire for *Torah* in our lives.

The biblical source of this custom is in Leviticus chapter 23:

When you come to the land that I am going to give you, and you reap its harvest, you must bring an *omer* of its first reaping to the priest.

He shall wave it in the motions prescribed for a wave offering to God, so it shall be acceptable for you. The priest shall make this wave offering on the day after the first day of the *Pesach* holiday ...

You shall then count seven complete weeks after the day following the *Pesach* holiday when you brought the *omer* as a wave offering.

Until the day after the seventh week, when there will be a total of 50 days. On that 50<sup>th</sup> day, you may present new grain as a meal offering to God.

We first bless the counting of the *omer* with the *bracha al sefirat ha omer*. This blessing is traditionally only said at night, but the count may be repeated night or day:

Today is twenty-seven days, which is three weeks and six days in the *omer*.

The counting of the *omer* is a solemn time, during which weddings are not performed, and even haircuts are postponed. (There is a reprieve from all this earnest seriousness on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day, a minor holiday called *Lag Ba'Omer*, noted this year on May 23.)

During the counting the *omer* we traditionally read *Pirkei Avot*, a selection from the *mishna* whose name translates as the Wisdom of the Ancestors. One particularly pungent passage (6:6) enumerates the 48 ways by which *Torah* is learned, one day for each way plus one day to synthesize them all. Take notes, you will be tested on this later.

1. Learning
2. Attention
3. Clarity of mind
4. and clarity of tongue
5. An intuitive heart
6. Awe
7. Reverence
8. Humility
9. Joy,
10. Simplicity
11. Apprenticeship to sages
12. Friendship with colleagues
13. Challenging students
14. Calm deliberation
15. Knowledge of scripture
16. and knowledge of *mishna*
17. Balance in business,
18. and balance in worldly affairs
19. and balance in sexual intimacy
20. Sufficient sleep
21. Avoiding gossip
22. Maintaining humor
23. Slow to anger
24. With a gentle heart
25. Trusting the sages
26. Accepting suffering
27. Knowing one's calling
28. Rejoicing in one's portion
29. Guarding one's words
30. Not claiming merit for oneself
31. Being loved
32. Loving God
33. and loving charity
34. and welcoming reproof
35. Not seeking out honors
36. Not boasting of one's education
37. Being loath to judge
38. Sharing the burdens of others
39. Giving people the benefit of doubt
40. Leading others to truth and to peace
41. Being meticulous in study
42. Asking probing questions
43. Answering queries honestly
44. Listening and discussing
45. Learning in order to teach and practice
46. Honing one's teacher's wisdom with questions
47. Contemplation
48. Giving credit to those who taught one – whoever credits a teaching to its author brings redemption to the world.

Now, class, it's time for the pop quiz. First question: What is today's count in the *omer*? Second question: What is today's way of learning *Torah*? Answers: 27, knowing ones calling.

What does knowing ones calling have to do with learning *Torah*? Read the *Torah* with the unique perspective you have in life. Then let's come together and in community create an entire understanding.

- ❑ Attorneys, learn the *Torah* with judgment.
- ❑ Physicians, learn the *Torah* with compassion.
- ❑ Writers, learn the *Torah* with clarity.
- ❑ Artists, learn the *Torah* with creativity.
- ❑ Engineers, learn the *Torah* with precision.
- ❑ Accountants, learn the *Torah* with thoroughness.
- ❑ Managers, learn the *Torah* with authority.
- ❑ Workers, learn the *Torah* with diligence.
- ❑ Soldiers, sailors, learn the *Torah* with strength.
- ❑ Children, learn the *Torah* with playfulness.
- ❑ Mothers, learn the *Torah* with caring.
- ❑ Fathers, learn the *Torah* with reliability.
- ❑ Elders, learn the *Torah* with experience.
- ❑ Teachers, learn the *Torah* with mastery.
- ❑ Students, learn the *Torah* with joy.

Wouldn't there be more learning *Torah* if we abandoned our calling, and threw ourselves into study seven days a week? No, we would not, for the *Torah* is absolutely not a manifesto for a disembodied life of the spirit. *Torah* is the plan for recognizing the sacred in everyday living.

In the new week starting tonight, let's go out and earn our livings, sustain our homes, care for our families, and make what marks we can in the affairs of the world. In doing so, let's retain the *Torah* wisdom of *Shabbat*, that every worthy act is a *mitzvah* and an opportunity to remember the Creator of this complex, hectic and magnificent world. Our mission in life is to unite the spiritual with the material. On our path to that goal we must continually grasp the perspectives of our fellows, and we must continually return to our own perspective.

With today's way firmly in mind, we shall read *Parashah Behar*. Learn it from where you are!