

The Counting of the Omer (Sefirat HaOmer)

A1

Before we get started I want to explain why we commence the counting of the Omer and subsequently observe Shavuot on a different day than Orthodox Jews. This might surprise some people considering how much we align with many other rabbinical perspectives.

I want to assure everyone who might be wrestling with this subject, that I am open to discussion, as I want to find the truth rather than have my way or win a debate. Now many of you are new to the Counting of the Omer and have never observed Shavuot before, so I'll explain this only briefly and am happy to discuss the subject further at the end of this lecture. I want to cover some deeper aspects about Counting the Omer, not just lecture on when it starts (though that's important). I want to inspire people to count and get as much out of it as possible and I don't think either observance times will condemn anyone as they both have solid arguments.

There has been a controversy that goes all the way back to ancient times to today. It surrounds the commencement of the Counting of the Omer. It's over how to interpret the command to begin the count on "the day after the Shabbat" (Leviticus 23:11) One view, is that it refers to the weekly Shabbat and the other view is that it refers to the First day of Unleavened Bread (Bikkurim).

If we say the verse speaks of the weekly Shabbat, then the waving of the First Fruits will always be on a Sunday and Shavuot will always fall on a Sunday – exactly seven Shabbatot plus one day, or 50 days later. The Hebrew word used is Shabbat, the same word used for the weekly Shabbat and the Hebrew word used to describe feast days is Shabbaton. The only exception is Yom Kippurim and the weekly Shabbat is sometimes called Shabbat Shabbaton.

What's an Omer Anyway?

Between Bikkurim (meaning "the Feast of First Fruits") and Shavuot שבועות (meaning "weeks" A.K.A. Pentecost *πεντηκοστή* meaning "to count 50"]) we enter a strange time. It is a time when we are instructed to "count."

B2

(Slide) "And you shall count (ספירה sefirah) for yourselves from the day after the Shabbat, from the day that you brought the sheaf (עומר Omer) of the wave offering: seven Shabbatot shall be completed. (Leviticus 23:15)" Notice the expressions "for yourselves" and "that you brought." Keep that in mind as I want to look into this later.

Count to what? We are to count to the 50th day, which is called Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks. It's a Holiday given a name that comprises the days that proceed it, the completion of seven Shabbatot. Also interesting is the fact that it's the only Feast that is never plainly given a date for its observance in the Torah.

As with many of the Hebrew High Holidays, it was an agricultural festival.

When the Temple was standing, barley was the first agricultural crop in Israel to be ready for harvest in the early spring. During Scriptural times, a sheaf of barley (known as the Omer), selected from the choicest of the barley grown within the land of Israel, was brought to the Kohanim as an offering (Leviticus 23:10-12). The process of harvesting this barley offering involved an elaborate ceremony, described in detail in the Mishnah, which is an early rabbinic commentary on the Torah.

The people would choose the most select first-cut barley, harvest it carefully, and bring it to the Temple as an offering to Yahweh. The Priests would wave this sheaf of barley, the Omer, in the six directions, North, East, South, West, Up and Down. (This waving process is similar to the formula still used today for shaking the lulav on Succoth). Only after that ceremony, called the wave offering, was completed, was the rest of the community permitted to enjoy the barley crop or any new produce from the spring harvest. In this way, the people acknowledged the role of the Divine in creating the grain.

c3

(Slide) The Omer was brought to the Temple each day for the next 49 days, during which time the next and most important grain, the wheat, was ripening. Counting these 49 days is known as Counting the Omer. These 49 days of the counting of the Omer culminate on the 50th day, the first day of Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks. In Hebrew, shavuah means week -- shavuot is plural. Shavuot originally marked the end of the seven weeks of counting the harvest season between the first harvest, the barley, through the growth of the wheat crop and culminating in the harvest of the wheat. Another name for the Festival of Shavuot is Hag HaKatzir, translated as the Holiday of Harvest.

So now we don't have a Temple, a Priesthood, or any unifying Sanhedrin authority and the fact that most believers aren't farmers anyway, why do we need to pay the Omer any attention at all? Let's just count off 50 days from the closing of Pesach and come together on the 6th of Sivan or if you follow the alternative method, and count after the next weekly Shabbat after Pesach, find the appropriate date, and just meet then?

Since the destruction of the Temple, this offering is brought in word rather than deed. Now, it's not a tradition or simply a memorial of an old commandment we are unable to do anymore, because the Torah says principally to "count" and then mentions to do it in step with the bringing in of the sheaf of the wave offering.

d4

(Slide) Yahweh always commands outward ritual actions to provoke inner refinement and improvement in behaviour.

Yahweh wants you to absorb each day as you journey from Bikkurim (First Fruits) to Shavuot (Pentecost).

When we do an outward ritual action that Yahweh commands, but do not allow them to see how they can improve our behaviour, He despises when we do them.

So do we simply shout “Today is day 1 of the Omer” every day until Shavuot? Kind of. In fact, we do so by acknowledging the day and the week as they accrue. We do it at sundown each night, because Scripturally a day starts at sundown.

e5

(Slide) Now, the idea of counting is to build anticipation for the giving of the Torah! We count up as opposed to count down, because we are wanting to get a sense of ascending not descending.

f6

(Slide) “For those blessed by [You] shall inherit the earth, but those cursed by [You] shall be cut off. The steps of a righteous man are ordered by Yahweh, and [You] delight in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for Yahweh upholds him with His hand.” (Psalm 37:22-24)

The overriding principle in the mind of a Torah observant believer who has come to it through faith in Yahshua HaMoshiach should be to continue to strive to make him the sovereign of his entire life. If that is truly the goal, then that should be achieved by striving to attain knowledge and understanding and implementation of the Creator’s Divine wisdom. Yahweh’s chochmah (wisdom) is symbolically assigned a female gender in Sefer Mishlei (The Book of Proverbs) and reads, “Blessed are those who find chochmah (wisdom), those who gain da’at (understanding), for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are shalom. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.” (Proverbs 3:13-18)

If the Torah, Yahweh’s Divine Wisdom arranged in a counselling form peculiar to the needs of individuals in this sphere of his creation, were to be arrayed in tangible picture graph, it would look somewhat like a tree. This tree is the product of the infinite, piercing into a finite realm and manifesting itself in a tangible and ordered way. Appendages of this tree are exhibited in the Torah.

g7

(Slide) “For Yahweh gives wisdom (Chochmah): out of his mouth comes knowledge (da’at) and understanding (Binah).” (Proverbs 2:6)

"Blessed are You, Yahweh, Elohim of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness (yesod), the power (geverah) and the glory (hod), the victory (netzach) and

the majesty (tiferet); for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom (malkut), O Yahweh, and You are exalted as head over all (keter). (1 Chronicles 29:11,12)”

“Yahweh is good to all: and his tender mercies (chesed) are over all his works. (Psalm 145:9)”

If we were to map these attributes out we would get a pattern that looks something like this.

h8

(Slide)

(Click through attributes) “For Yahweh gives wisdom (Chochmah): out of his mouth comes knowledge (da’at) and understanding (Binah).” (Proverbs 2:6)

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These are all what’s called, the Emanations, and they are the 10 attributes through, which Yahweh, whose enormity is incomprehensible, chooses to reveal Himself to mankind.

This graph is known as the Tree of Life, the sefirot, and is the ten-faceted glory of Yahweh. That’s why it’s called sefirah. It’s where we get the name “sapphire.”

i9

(Slide) Unfortunately, the dark forces have hijacked this concept, and is the reason some of you are thinking to yourself, ‘isn’t this new age nonsense?’

Here is a short video that describes the sefirot.

Insert Video (Click/Start video)

j10

(Slide) Have you ever sat down by yourself, having come from a social event, and really cringed and travailed over something you thought, said or even did and you say, ‘I wish I was a little more tactful’ or ‘I wish I was a little more respectful’ or ‘I wish I was a little more modest’ or ‘thoughtful’ or ‘caring.’ Perhaps you’ve felt fed up by having a bigmouth, a negative attitude or a selfish trait. You sit in sorrow and wish you could change. We are followers of the Messiah and yet so often we find ourselves not reflecting this same love that he has in our own nature.

At times, you might have thought, 'If only the Scriptures would micro-manage me sometimes. If only the Torah could get into the small moments in my life and give me guidance as I go through life.'

Everyone who seriously wants to carry the same yoke as Moshiach must go through a time of trial and preparation. That is why Shavuot is named after its preceding days. It's not called the Day of the Giving of the Torah. It's literally called, The Preparation Weeks!

Each day of the Omer is a step through the wilderness as we leave our own personal Egypt. Each one of us have a personal pharaoh that we need to flee from. We gain our physical freedom at Pesach and we gain our spiritual freedom at Shavuot. Pesach speaks of individual atonement, while Shavuot speaks of a spiritually unified embodiment. The entire nation of Yisrael is referred to being as a single man by the time they reach their destination at Mt Sinai. The Ruach HaKodesh only fell on the disciples when they were unified, together in one spirit and in one accord!" Stop thinking that being committed to a community of Yahweh is optional, it's not! If you don't do this, you can't do anything!

You're not making Yahshua the sovereign of your life if you're not prepared to externally do what Yahweh tells you to do and you're not making Yahshua the sovereign of your life if you're not prepared to allow what Yahweh asks you to do externally to change you internally.

Each day of Counting the Omer, we are to stop, and proclaim, "Baruch Atah Yahweh Elo-hai-nu Melech Ha-Olam, Asher kid'shanu B'Mitzvatov V'tzi-vanu al Sefirat Ha-Omer."

"Blessed are you Yahweh our Elohim, King of the Universe, Who has made us holy with his Commandments, and commanded us concerning the Counting of the Omer."

"Today is day one of Counting the Omer." And so on. When we get to a week, we say, "Today is week one of Counting the Omer" and the next day we say, "Today is week one and day one of Counting the Omer" and so on.

Thus for 49 days we are given the opportunity to climb, one step at a time, up the Ya'avok's ladder of personal growth and refinement. In particular, this is the ladder of emotional growth.

k11

(Slide) On each day of Sefiros HaOmer, we focus on one of our seven basic graces, and over seven weeks (49 days) cover each grace in combination with itself and every other (7 times 7 equals 49). At the end of this period, we celebrate the receiving of the Torah (Matan Torah), having fully achieved the refinement of all of our spiritual faculties.

l12

Week one is Chesed (Loving Kindness).

Day 1 is Chesed of Chesed (Loving-kindness in loving-kindness), which is Yahweh's mercy acting upon our attribute of mercy.

Day 2 is Gevurah of Chesed (Discipline in Loving-kindness), which is Yahweh's judgment acting on our attribute of mercy.

Day 3 is Tiferet of Chesed (Compassion, Harmony in Loving-kindness), which is Yahweh's beauty acting upon our attribute of mercy.

Day 4 is Netzach of Chesed (Endurance in Loving Kindness), which is Yahweh's victory or endurance acting on our sense of mercy.

Day 5 is Hod of Chesed (Humility in Loving-kindness), which is Yahweh's glory acting upon our attribute of mercy.

Day 6 is Yesod of Chesed (Bonding in Loving-kindness) is Yahweh building His foundation with which to support our attribute of mercy.

Day 7 is Malchut of Chesed (Nobility in Loving-kindness), which is Yahweh teaching us Kingdom principles to act on our attribute of mercy.

...And so on to Gevurah in week 2, Tiferet in week 3, Netzach in week 4, Hod in week 5, Yesod in week 6 and Malkut in week 7.

So we treat each day like a devotional reading, dealing with each aspect of our attributes all together in unison, one step at a time. At the end Yahshua will Tabernacle with us on Shavuot, but only if we make the effort to walk there as a body, every step of the way, not wasting our days, but imbuing them with profound meaning and value.

This is why it says in Genesis 25:7, "these are the days of the years of Avraham's life. . ." - that is, that he lived with all of his days intact. Similarly, of about Sarah it is said [in Genesis 23:1]: "the years of the life of Sarah"- that all of her years were years of life.

This is spiritual accounting. If you count the Omer, you won't just be counting the Omer. You will be making the Omer count. The Torah is a Torah you can count on, so start counting on it. Quit mucking around! Counting the Omer is like pruning your own spiritual tree. If you keep a tree pruned, it will stay healthy. Pruning by definition cuts away dead things. "For as the days of a tree shall be the days of my people." (Isaiah 65:22)

"He will be like a tree planted near water..." (Jeremiah 17:8)

m13

(Slide) "Happy is the man . . . who delights in the Torah of Elohim, and in his Torah he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in season; his leaf shall not wither, and in whatever he does he shall prosper." (Psalms 1)

n14

(Slide) “(Yahshua) took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, ‘Do you see anything?’ He looked up and said, ‘I see people; they look like trees walking around.’” (Mark 8:23-24)