

Counting the Omer-Study Sheet (Jennifer Jacobs)

Parashat Emor: <https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.23.2?lang=bi&aliyot=0>

[Leviticus 23:10-17](#)

(10) Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest. (11) He shall elevate the sheaf before the LORD for acceptance in your behalf; the priest shall elevate it on the day after the sabbath. (12) On the day that you elevate the sheaf, you shall offer as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb of the first year without blemish. (13) The meal offering with it shall be two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD; and the libation with it shall be of wine, a quarter of a hin. (14) Until that very day, until you have brought the offering of your God, you shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh ears; it is a law for all time throughout the ages in all your settlements. **(15) And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: (16) you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the LORD.** (17) You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, as first fruits to the LORD.

[Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 13:17:1](#)

The Holy One Blessed be He did not bring them directly to Eretz Yisrael but by way of the desert, saying: If I bring them there now, immediately each man will seize his field, and each man his vineyard and they will neglect Torah study. Rather, I will keep them in the desert forty years, eating manna and drinking from the well, and the Torah will be absorbed in their bodies. From here R. Shimon would say: The Torah was given to be expounded only by the eaters of manna, and, like them, the eaters of terumah (i.e., the Cohanim).

- According to this text, what was the purpose of making our ancestors wander in the desert for 40 years?
- How do we absorb Torah?

Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: Composed in Talmudic Israel/Babylon (135 CE). Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael (Measure, Rule of R. Ishmael) is a halakhic midrash to the Book of Exodus.

[Sefer HaChinukh 306:4](#)

Now, for this reason, because it is the main core of the Israelites' life and for its sake they were redeemed and rose to all the distinction they attained -- we were commanded to count the days from the morrow after the festival day of Passover until the Torah was given -- to show with our very souls our great yearning for that distinguished day, for which our heart longs 'as a servant eagerly longs for the shadow' and constantly counts when his longed-for time will come when he will go out to freedom. For counting shows about a person that all his hope of deliverance and all his desire to reach that time.

This is why we count omer i.e. 'so many days have passed out of the total' and we do not count 'so many days remain for us to that time' because this shows the mighty desire in us to reach that time. For this reason we do not wish to mention the beginning of our reckoning the great number of days that remain for us, to reach the offering of the two loaves of shavuot.

Sefer HaChinuch: Composed in Middle-Age Spain (c.1255 - c.1285 CE). The Sefer ha-Chinuch (Book of Education), is a work which systematically discusses the 613 commandments of the Torah. It was published anonymously in 13th century Spain.

Rabbi Aryeh Carmel, *Masterplan: Judaism, Its Program, Meanings, Goals, Feldheim* - p. 205 [England (1917-2006)]

The Omer on Pesach was from the barley harvest. The offering on Shavuot was of wheat. Barley is mainly food for animals. Wheat is food for human beings. The Torah hints to us that physical independence by itself still leaves man – from the Torah perspective – on the animal level. The counting of the forty-nine days signifies a sevenfold refining process and marks our progress to full human status with our acceptance of the Torah at Sinai, seven weeks after the Exodus.

Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed) 3:43*

Shavuot is the time of the Giving of the Torah. In order to honor and elevate this day we count the days from the previous festival until it [arrives], like someone who is waiting for a loved one to arrive, who counts the days by the hours.

- When we count the Omer, are we counting down, or counting up?

Kabbalistic Interpretation

Kabbalists, Jewish mystics, interpreted this counting of days between Passover and Shavuot as a spiritual practice, utilizing the 7 lower sefirot to represent the 7 weeks. What are sefirot?

"There are 10 sefirot, linked in a complex figure that some have called the "Tree of Life," significantly a phrase also often used to refer to the Torah . They are Keter (Crown), Hokhmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), Hesed (Lovingkindness), Gevurah (Might) or Din (Judgment), Tiferet (Beauty), Hod (Splendor), Netzah (Victory), Yesod (Foundation), and Malkhut (Sovereignty) or Shekhinah (the Divine Presence). Each of them represents one aspect of the Godhead, a facet of the powers of the All Powerful. Each is also identified with a part of the body or aspects of the human personality, a color, and one of the Names of the Holy One."- *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs & Rituals*

- What is the value of focusing on different aspects of Divinity during the Omer period?
- What if we have done this last year – what does it mean to us the next year?