

Do the Wave

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For approximately the next three months, there will be an inside/outside discrepancy in the *Parashat HaShavua* (weekly Torah reading), because here in Eretz Yisrael Pesach ended on Friday, whereas “outside the Land” it ended on Shabbat. So during this period, the topics of our *Dvar Torahs* will be summery rather than weekly.

We are still in the first weeks of *Sefirat HaOmer*, the 49 days of the *Omer*-count that culminates with Shavuot, the *chag* (festival) on which we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Here is a parable describing the Torah and mitzvahs (and our Sages and the tzaddikim throughout history), and why God gave them to us:

Once upon a time there was a king. He wanted to give each of his beloved subjects precious gifts and rare, exquisite presents at a certain time and place. Because he loved them so much, he made his wish known. This would allow them ample time to prepare, so they would come bathed and well-groomed for the occasion where the king and his retinue would be present. (Many of them worked in professions that involved handling various kinds of dirt and filth.)

Furthermore, they would have to prepare clothing and finery appropriate for such an august occasion. They would need to be

perfumed and wearing medallions or jewelry to enhance their appearance. Could one otherwise enter the palace and the presence of the king and his ministers and nobles? Only then would they be ready and fit to receive the king's largesse.

His love moved the king to provide all the necessary materials for his subjects, for bathing and dressing. He warned them to use every available moment to prepare themselves for the special day. The king also sent trustworthy emissaries to teach his subjects the protocol and etiquette, down to the finest details, so that they would suffer no shame or disgrace due to ignorance or poor manners.

These emissaries were also charged with teaching the king's subjects what to avoid in order not to become filthy in the first place. Through these messengers, this loving king also provided cleansing spas and formulas for those who became dirty, even as a result of their own careless negligence. They would be able to clean their person and their clothing from even the most entrenched filth and foulest odors.

Again and again the king encouraged his subjects to use all he provided fully and freely, and to not hold back. Each should use his time wisely so that the king would be able to lavish upon him as many gifts as possible from the royal treasury, such gifts as no one had ever seen before.

To say that we are very fortunate is true, but an understatement. To say that we have a responsibility to show our appreciation for this opportunity and take full advantage of it is likewise true, but an understatement. What does *Sefirat HaOmer* teach about preparing ourselves to use these gifts?

The *omer* was a measure (approximately 2 quarts/1.9 liter). The *Omer*-offering consisted of barley, an archetypical animal food. On the second day of Pesach, the *Omer* was waved in the six directions of space (up, down and to the four winds). This

taught and showed that all of our work in this world, wherever we are, is dedicated to the One Who creates and fills space. With the *Omer*-count, we mark all of time (seven times seven, days and weeks, so that we have a week of Sundays, of Mondays, etc.). The entire count is *la'Omer* and *ba'Omer*, from and attached to that waving. The counting implants within us the awareness that wherever we are located in time, what we choose at that moment needs to be dedicated to the One Who created and fills time.

Why wave barley? Why not wave wheat, human food? The baseline for preparing ourselves to receive the Torah is our self-control in eating. Why eating? Because eating is the means of connecting body and soul. One can survive without money or sexual activity, but not without eating. One needs to move away from animalistic eating—from using food only for the pleasure of taste or a full belly, for self-satisfaction, for comfort or self-medication, or for *noshing* and *fressing*.* Wrong-eating is an indication (or clear proof!) that one holds the body and material concerns in higher esteem than the soul and spiritual concerns.

May we successfully prepare ourselves at every moment, wherever we are. Amen.

* Snacking and overeating, respectively.

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

(Based on *Likutey Halakhot*, *Matanah* 4:7)