

Every Day Counts

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May 1, 2019



If you've ever *davened* (prayed) in a Breslov shul during these days of counting the Omer, then you've witnessed the incredible intensity and devotion that Breslov Chassidim invest in their Omer counting. The whole service, perhaps one page long, can take up to an hour for them to recite. Obviously, this practice must be very meaningful and tremendously important. (If you have a chance, go to a Breslov shul and experience it for yourself!)

What exactly is the Omer offering? The offering is barley; on the second day of Pesach, an Omer (a measure equal to approximately 2 quarts) of barley was waved in the six directions (north, south, east, west, up and down). Barley is traditionally considered animal food. What kind of offering is this, anyway?

Moreover, the 49 days of the Omer correspond to the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot. These days are considered preparatory days, when we ascend from the 49 levels of impurity in Egypt and rise to the 50th level of holiness,

becoming fit to receive the Torah on Shavuot. What is the connection between counting the Omer and building our personal capacity for receiving the Torah?

Part of the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt was not just the destruction of our enemies, but also our spiritual rescue: a spiritually despondent nation became elevated to incredible new heights. When we tasted our awesome potential, not only were our bodies redeemed, but so were our spirits. However, this presented a problem. Since we didn't initiate this process, we weren't capable of permanently maintaining our new connection with God. Just as it's unhealthy for a nutritionally destitute person to immediately overload on nutritionally dense food, so too, we are incapable of maintaining this new, elevated level. We have to take a few steps back and begin to build strong enough vessels to hold the awesome light. These are the 49 days.

We need animal food in order to build our spiritual muscles. We must become strong enough to lift even the lowest, most challenging encounter and wave it in all six directions, symbolizing that God is everywhere and in everything.

Life is not just about experiencing miraculous revelations of Godliness, but about seeing God and connecting to Him even when the worst perceived "garbage" is thrown at us. There are only seven days in a week. The Kabbalah explains that each day can be subdivided further to include all seven days within it. The 49 days of the Omer are therefore a microcosm of every conceivable type of day that's possible to experience. In order to rise to the level of being able to receive the Torah, we must first learn to appreciate each and every day as being a unique and worthy vessel with which to experience Godliness. During the Omer counting, we are correcting our "free ride" out of Egypt and engaging in the process necessary to build a true connection with our Creator.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once abducted by the Soviet

authorities and taken in the middle of the night to Siberia without even his coat. After his release, he met a great Rabbi who asked him, "How did you manage to keep going during such a difficult time?"

Rabbi Abramsky answered that he was taken with nothing but the shirt on his back, no overcoat, *tallit* or *tefillin*. When he woke up in the morning and wanted to say "*Modeh ani*," thanking God for His many kindnesses, he found this most difficult. What was there to be thankful for? But then he reached the words "*rabbah emunasecha*" (great is Your faith) and realized, "I still have my faith!" The most precious and powerful thing in the world still remained with him.

The Rabbi replied, "It was worth you experiencing this entire horrible ordeal in order to attain this level of faith."

The laws of the Omer counting stress that one should not miss counting even a single day. This is the law of life itself. Each person has awesome spiritual potential; each of us can reach the 50th level of holiness – the level of personally receiving the Torah at Sinai. But first, we must learn to count today. Have you counted yet?

Based on Likutey Halakhot, Pikadon 4