



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego-Los Angeles**  
**Study Guide**

*Emor*

*תשפ"ג*

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*Partners Detroit*

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## *Partners In Torah*

### *Mission Statement:*

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

*Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.*

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

This week's portion contains the mitzvah to "count the *omer*," one we are in the midst of fulfilling. Starting from the second day of Passover, we make a blessing every night thanking Hashem for sanctifying us with His mitzvot and for commanding us to perform the mitzvah of counting the *omer* by saying, "today is the (current #) day of the *omer*."

These verses in Leviticus (23:15,16) teach us about this mitzvah:

טו) ויספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע  
שבתות תמימות תהיינה  
טז) עד ממחרת השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם מנחה חדשה  
לידוד

*15) And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the shabbat, from the day you bring the omer of the waving, seven complete weeks. 16) Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to Hashem.*

Around the year 235 BCE, Tzadok and Baytus, students of Antigonus Ish Socho, misunderstood their teacher to say that there is no reward in the World to Come, for performing mitzvot. As a result, they rejected the traditional teachings of Judaism. They called themselves Tzaddukim, and they started a new approach to Judaism. They claimed that Hashem did not give Moshe an Oral Torah that explains the Torah's laws, rather, the Torah is to be interpreted literally. Whatever it says, that is what we do. As a result, they would place their tefillin on the bridge of their noses because in the Torah it says, "*between your eyes.*" The Oral Torah teaches us that the correct place for the tefillin is **on their heads between their eyes**. They would also not allow any fire in their homes on Shabbat, not even a pilot light, because the Torah says, "*Do not burn a fire in all your dwelling places on the Shabbat day.*"

The Oral Torah teaches that this prohibits solely starting a fire on Shabbat; but if it is already lit, there is no problem in letting it continue to burn. This is why we can have heat in our homes and hot food on Shabbat.

Indeed, this is the source for the Jewish custom to have *cholent* or some other hot food on Shabbat day, to show the Tzaddukim that we do not subscribe to their erroneous interpretation of the Torah. We have fires going in our homes all night keeping our food piping hot for the Shabbat day meal.

Unfortunately, their misplaced idea caught on, and the Tzaddukim became a very powerful force in the times of the Mishna.

The law of the *omer* was another area where the Tzaddukim argued vociferously with the Sages. The verse says, *ממחרת השבת - on the morrow of the Shabbat*. The Tzaddukim took the word *שבת - Shabbat* – literally, to mean the seventh day of the week. Thus, they would always start counting the *omer* on a Sunday. The Oral Torah, given to Moshe by Hashem, explains that “Shabbat” here refers to the first day of Pesach, when most *מלאכה* (weekday activities) is forbidden, and therefore is like Shabbat. Even though Moshe was given the law, Hashem did not indicate to Moshe where in the Torah the law was written, hence, in the Talmud (Tractate Menachot 66b) eight different sources are provided for this law. Each source is a bona fide source, so while Moshe was given the law, the Sages derived the source for the law from the Torah’s words.

The Tzaddukim, who claimed that there is no Oral Torah, alleged that the Sages invented the laws, and claimed that mere mortals cannot be the source of Hashem's wisdom. The only source of truth is Hashem, and Hashem said it as He meant it. People are unqualified to modify Hashem's literal words, and they need to be accepted without modifications. According to their thinking, when the Torah says ממחרת השבת - *on the morrow of the Shabbat*, the only possible meaning is *the seventh day*, the Shabbat which comes after six days of creation.

According to the Oral Torah and the sources in the Torah that the Sages provided, if the first day of Passover was Thursday, the "sefira week" would start on Friday (the day *after* Shabbat) and end on Thursday (Thursday would be "Shabbat"). How could the Sages through their interpretations create Shabbat on Thursday??? There is no such thing! Hashem has imbued only the seventh day with holiness, and the only option is that the seven weeks begin, every year, on Sunday, the morrow of the "Shabbat" created by Hashem.

The Sages however, received the correct understanding of the Torah's words from Moshe, who received it from Hashem on Mount Sinai in the form of the Oral Torah. Moreover, Hashem placed many hints in the Torah to underscore this interpretation, which came directly from Hashem.

The Sages were also granted the right to amend or add laws to the Torah from Hashem Himself in the Torah. We see this from the Rabbinic mitzvah to light Chanukah candles.

When we light the Chanukah candles, we make the blessing, *"that Hashem has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to light the Chanukah candles."*

The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) asks: The Chanukah story happened long after the Torah was given, the idea to light Chanukah candles being conceived by the Rabbis. How then do we say “Hashem ... commanded us *to light the Chanukah candles?*” The Talmud answers with a passage from the Torah (Deuteronomy 17:11):

יֵאָדָע עַל פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יוֹרוּךְ וְעַל הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר יֹאמְרוּ לְךָ תַעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר  
מִן הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יְגִידוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל

*11) According to the instructions that they give you, and according to the judgements that they tell you, you shall do. Do not vary from what they tell you, right or left.*

Because Hashem has commanded us to listen to the Sages, when doing so we are also listening to Hashem. Thus, as amazing as it seems, the Oral Torah as transmitted by the Sages has created a whole new “set” of weeks. Just as Hashem created Shabbat after six days of creation, through the Oral Torah, Hashem created a second Shabbat, after counting six days of the *omer*. This is a profound lesson in the power of the Oral Torah.

The mitzvah to count the *omer* begins the day after Pesach and culminates with the festival of Shavuot, the day on which the Jewish nation received the Torah on Mount Sinai. The counting of the *omer* from Pesach to Shavuot creates a connection between these two holidays, Pesach beginning the process for which Shavuot is the end.

What is the relationship between these two Festivals? The *Sefer HaChinuch* (attributed to Rav Aharon Halevi of Barcelona of the 13<sup>th</sup> century), a work that counts and explains each of the 613 mitzvot, explains in mitzvah #306, the mitzvah to count the *omer*:

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה, ומפני התורה נבראו שמים וארץ וישראל, וכמו שכתוב [ירמיהו ל"ג, כ"ה] אם לא בריתי יומם ולילה וגו'. והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני ויקיימוה, וכמו שאמר השם למשה [שמות ג', י"ב] וזה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה ... נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו

*The simple understanding of this mitzvah is that since the Torah is the main focus of the Jewish people, and it was for the Torah's sake that Hashem created the heavens, the earth, and the Jewish people, ... and that was the purpose for which they were freed from Egypt, to receive the Torah on Sinai and fulfill it... , we were commanded to count from the day after Pesach until the giving of the Torah to show in our souls the tremendous desire and yearning for that great day.*

Just as we naturally count the days to an event that we are very excited about and can't wait for, so, too, the Jewish people counted the days until they would receive the Torah.

This being the case, it is easy to understand why there would be a mitzvah to count the days leading up to Shavuot. After all, that's how many days stand between us and the anticipated event. Why is there a mitzvah to count the weeks as well (for example, on day 30 we count "today is day 30, being four weeks and two days")? And what is the significance of the Shabbatot that the Sages created?

The length of a *year* is determined by the time it takes the earth to make one complete revolution around the sun. A *day* is fixed by the time that it takes the earth to make one complete revolution on its axis. The length of a Jewish *month* is determined by the time from one new moon until the next. But how is the length of a week determined? Nothing in nature corresponds to a cycle of seven days. What makes this question even more daunting is that today, the

whole world subscribes to a seven-day week! How did this begin? Why should there be a week at all? What made the entire world unanimously decide that this is the right number of days for a repeating cycle of days?

The seven-day cycle began with the world's creation. Each day was an independent unit of creation, which contributed specific elements necessary for the world. Each of the six days of creation brought forth a myriad of new and more complex creations, adding layer upon layer of complexity and completeness to the world. At the end of the six days when all components were in place and the world was perfect, Hashem created man, the ultimate purpose for this amazing creation. There was just one thing missing - Shabbat. There had to be a day of rest to acknowledge and focus on the Creator of this magnificent world. This would also be a great source of blessing to man.

(The Sefer HaKuzari [written circa 1140 by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi] proves from this that the world started from Adam as described in the Torah because how else could almost the entire world agree on a seven-day week, with one day of rest? Additionally, the days of the week are the same anywhere you go in the world.)

Each new day of creation was built on the creations of the previous days, and the earlier days of creation integrated the new creations of the subsequent days. Since it is only through the creations of all seven days working in tandem with each other that the world can operate, each day needs every other day for its completion. Therefore, since each day contains components of the other six days, the entire creation actually comprises  $7 \times 7 = 49$  different components. *(There is an allusion here to the 7 sefirot that are printed in the Siddurim on the various days of the omer)*



This is whence the concept of a seven-day week derives. Each day of creation embodies the unique contribution of what was created on that day to the world, in the step by step process that Hashem used when creating the world. Hence, a week of six days and one of rest contains the full spectrum of blessing that Hashem, through His creation, wished to bestow upon man. From then until today, each consecutive day of the new week shares the same unique character as that day of creation.

The prophet Yechezkel (16:4) describes the emergence of the Jewish people from Egypt as a birth:

ד) וּמוֹלְדוֹתַיִךְ בְּיוֹם הַוִּלְדוּת אֶתְךָ לֹא כָרַת שֵׁרֶךְ וּבְמַיִם לֹא רָחַצְתָּ לְמַשְׁעֵי וְהַמֶּלַח לֹא הִמְלַחְתָּ וְהַחֲתִיל לֹא חֲתַלְתָּ

*4) And as for your birth: On the day you were born your umbilical cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to smooth [your skin], nor were you salted, nor were you swaddled.*

When the Jewish people left Egypt, they were spiritually at the lowest level they could possibly be. Our Sages teach us that there are 50 levels of holiness and 50 levels of spiritual contamination in the world, but the 50<sup>th</sup> is the point of no return. Just before leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were at the bottom rung, number 49, of the contaminated spiritual levels. Had they slipped just one more to number 50, it would have been too late, and they would have been unable to leave Egypt. This is why the Jewish people had to leave Egypt in such a haste. Had they remained a moment longer, they would have slipped into the point of no return and would no longer have been worthy of leaving Egypt.

Perhaps this gives us the insight needed to understand the significance of the seven *Shabbatot* that the Sages derived [?] from the Torah, and the purpose of counting seven weeks from Pesach and Shavuot. The Jews were marching to Sinai where they would receive the Torah, the irrevocable covenant with Hashem. These seven weeks prepared them for that auspicious occasion. How so? These seven weeks served to make the Jewish nation into the holy nation they needed to become to receive the Torah. Each seven-day week, which embodied all the qualities of the seven days of creation, added its essential qualities to the nation and provided the crucial elements necessary to prepare it to receive the Torah. Each day that they travelled, they crossed over from a level of spiritual contamination to a level of holiness. It was a difficult process that required 7 cycles of 7. However, when day 49 came, they were ready to accept the Torah, which is the 50<sup>th</sup> level of holiness. \*

As we count the *omer* during the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, we, too, by harnessing the holy energy that was present in the world then, can recreate ourselves step by step just as the Jewish nation did during these days.. Putting thought into how we can better our relationships with our loved ones and friends, do more mitzvot and learn Torah, will go a long way to make us better people.

Counting the *omer* is a great way to focus on these special days between Pesach and Shavuot. As we count each day, we should ask ourselves, "Have I taken a step today to prepare myself to accept the Torah on Shavuot?" Even if someone has not been counting until now, he can still count until the end of the *omer* (without reciting a blessing). It is also acceptable to count in English. So, tonight being the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the *omer*, we say, "Tonight is 26 days in the *omer*, which is 3 weeks and 5 days."

But why, under these circumstances, is the counting done without a blessing?

There seems to be a contradiction between the two verses cited above. The first says to count seven complete weeks ( $7 \times 7 = 49$ ), whereas in the second verse it says to count 50 days (We really count only 49 days so the words mean count *up to* the 50th day, but not to count it). So, what do we count--the weeks or the days? The answer is that we must count both, weeks *and* days. How so? When we reach the seventh day of the *omer*, we say "today is seven **days** to the *omer*, which is **one week**." As we progress, we count all the days in this fashion; on the 8th day we say "today is the 8th **day** of the *omer*, which is **one week** and **one day**."

This contradiction in the verses between the weeks and days is the source of a disagreement between the Sages in how to define the mitzvah of counting the *omer*. Is it one commandment to count seven complete weeks? Or is the counting of each day its own commandment, making the *omer* 49 separate commandments? What's the difference? There is a very significant difference. If the *omer* is one mitzvah to count seven complete weeks of seven days each, a person who failed to count one night hasn't completed the count and has lost the mitzvah. Whereas, if each night is an independent mitzvah, if he missed a night, he loses only that night, so he must continue counting the remaining nights since they are independent mitzvot, and unaffected by the miss.

Before performing a mitzvah, one must recite a blessing thanking Hashem for sanctifying us through His mitzvot. If the *omer* is one big mitzvah and a person missed a night - thus losing the mitzvah, he would not be permitted to recite the blessing for future nights.

However, if counting the *omer* is 49 independent mitzvot, he would continue counting the upcoming mitzvot with a blessing, since the loss of one night does not affect the others.

Because there is no clear decision in favor of either opinion, in practice, when one misses a night, he continues counting but without reciting the blessing. The reasoning is that according to the opinion that he has lost the mitzvah, he does not need to continue counting. Whereas, according to the opinion that he hasn't lost the mitzvah, he must continue counting. Thus, there is a doubt whether he is actually fulfilling the mitzvah when he counts. That places the blessing that precedes the mitzvah in doubt also. The rule as far as blessings is: "When in doubt, do without!" The reason for this is that when making an unwarranted blessing, one is saying Hashem's name in vain, a biblical transgression. Moreover, reciting a blessing before performing a mitzvah is only a rabbinic ruling, and omitting it when otherwise necessary, transgresses a rabbinic law. In a conflict between a biblical law and a rabbinic law, the Rabbis have ruled that you transgress the rabbinic law, not the biblical one. Therefore, in this situation where there is a doubt if the mitzvah is actually being done, the blessing is also in doubt, and we do without.

There is, though, a way for a person who has missed a night to count with a blessing. Here's how.

Have someone who *is* reciting the blessing have you in mind while reciting his blessing. You also should have in mind that his blessing is being said for you. Hence, when you say "amen" to the other person's blessing, it is as if you have said the blessing yourself. This is based on the concept that "*Every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow Jew.*"

Since every Jew is responsible to help his fellow Jew fulfill his spiritual obligations, when he has you in mind when reciting his bracha, his bracha works for you as well. So, if one is in the presence of someone who is reciting the blessing on counting the *omer*, he can request that person have him in mind with his bracha, and when he has in mind that his friend's bracha should apply to him, and it is as if he has counted the *omer* with a bracha.

Counting the *omer* helps us keep track of where we are holding in preparing for Shavuot, the day we will receive the Torah. Let's use each day to the fullest!