

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Dynamite of the Soul

*"Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count." (23:18)*

Staying awake all night may not sound "religious," but there are several times during the Jewish year when the custom is to burn the midnight oil until the sun peeps through the blinds.

Many people stay up after the Seder on Pesach until the time of the morning prayers in order to recount and analyze the great miracles of the Exodus. As the Haggadah says: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria and Rabbi Akiva stayed up all night talking about the Exodus until their *talmidim* (students) came to tell them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema Yisrael*.

On Yom Kippur, those with sufficient strength stay up all night in prayer and supplication, atoning for their sins. On Hoshanah Rabbah, the time when the decrees of Yom Kippur are given over to those agents who will carry them out, there is a tradition to learn all night.

On the night of Shavuot there is also a widely observed custom to stay up all night. The Sages of the Kabbala formulated an order of study call a *tikkun* (lit. "fixing") for the night of Shavuot. This includes passages from the written Torah, the oral Torah, the mystical Zohar, as well as a list of all 613 mitzvahs.

The Zohar commends those who stay awake in anticipation of receiving the Torah. The giving of the Torah was, as it were, the wedding of the Jewish People and the Torah, and so it is fitting that we should be engaged in preparing the ornaments of the bride the previous night.

Another reason: On that first Shavuot morning there were some who overslept and had to be awoken to receive the Torah. In order to rectify this, we stay up.

But there is a deeper reason for our not sleeping on the night of Shavuot.

Sleep is the taste of death.

If fact, the Talmud tells us that sleep is one-sixtieth of death. One part in sixty is the threshold of perception. Similarly, Shabbat is a "taste" of the World-to-Come. It is precisely one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come.

Sleep is the taste of death in this world. King David died on Shavuot. But before he died, he never even tasted the taste of death, because he never fell into a deep sleep. Therefore, on the occasion of his *yartzeit*, the anniversary of his death, we avoid the "taste of death" by staying up all night.

The angel of death came to King David to try and take his life. But it had no power over him since he was immersed in learning Torah, and Torah is the essence of one's life-force in this world. The only way that the

angel of death could take David's life was through cunning. He managed to distract David from his learning, and in that split second he was able to take his life from him. So, on this night of Shavuot, which is both the anniversary of the giving of the Torah and the end of King David's life, we stay awake all night and immerse ourselves in Torah study.

Torah breathes life into Man. But it was not always this way. When G-d first created Man, he was animated by G-d's utterance, "Let Us make Man." It was the power of these words spoken by the Creator that gave Man the ability to live and breathe and think and act.

However, this was only until the Jewish People stood at the foot of Sinai. When Hashem said, "I am Hashem, your G-d" as the first commandment, the life-force that animated Man parted from the body and the entire Jewish People died. Miraculously their souls were put back into their bodies, but what animated them now was a different utterance. No longer was their life-force derived from "Let Us make Man." Now they were like new creations. Their inner essence was powered by "I am Hashem, your G-d." From this moment, the Torah became the animating dynamic of the Jewish Soul.

And when the Mashiach, the scion of King David, arrives to herald the era of the revival of the dead, it will be the Torah, the dew of life, which will be the mechanism to awaken the body from its long sleep.

Then we will finally understand the words we have sung for so long: "*David, Melech Yisrael, chai vekayam!*" David, king of Israel, *lives* and endures!

- Sources: *Tehillim 73:5, Yalkut Shimoni; Talmud Berachot 3b; Tehillim 19:9; Book of Our Heritage, Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, translated by Rabbi Nachman Bulman; Time Pieces, Rabbi Aaron Lopianski*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Shabbat 58-64

### Putting the Best Foot Forward

*Rabbi Yochanan said, "As is with tefillin, so it is with putting on shoes. Just as tefillin is on the left side, so too is the shoe on the left."*

It is learned that *tefillin* is put on the left arm since it is the "weaker" arm, and placing it on the weaker arm is derived from a verse in the Torah. (Shemot 13:16) At first, it would appear that Rabbi Yochanan favors putting on the left shoe first.

However, the *gemara* challenges the statement of Rabbi Yochanan from a *beraita* which says: "When a person puts on shoes, he should put on the right one first and then the left." This concept of showing honor and preference to the right is seen as a basic Torah principle. The Torah teaches to place sacrificial blood upon the thumb of the *right* hand and the big toe of the *right* foot of a *kohen* at his inauguration and for the purification of a *metzora*. (Shemot 29:20, Vayikra 14:14) Accordingly, the right shoe should be put on first.

Based on the divergent views expressed by Rabbi Yochanan and the *beraita*, Rav Yosef teaches that a person can choose to act according to Rabbi Yochanan's ruling and put the left shoe on first, but also is in the right to choose to follow the ruling in the *beraita* and put the right shoe on first. (Rav Yosef asserts this despite knowing that the two teachings might be reconciled as follows: One is that perhaps Rabbi Yochanan had not heard this *beraita*, but if he had heard it he would have agreed with it and retracted his original statement. Or, alternatively, perhaps Rabbi Yochanan was indeed aware of the *beraita*, but nevertheless he did not agree with its teaching since perhaps it was not reported in an accurate fashion according to his tradition and Torah wisdom.

In addition to Rav Yosef's ruling that one may choose which side to prefer, Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak cited a novel approach that accommodates both views. He praised the Sage named Mar the son of Ravna for first putting on his right shoe but not yet tying it – and only then did he put on the left shoe and tie it before proceeding to tie the right shoe.

This solution, which showed honor to the right side in matter of dressing, but also showed preference to the

left side in the aspect of tying was greatly lauded by Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak, "A person who fears Hashem will fulfill both views."

And this is the halacha as codified in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 2:4: Put on the right shoe first without tying it, put on the left shoe and tie it, and then tie the right shoe. The Aruch Hashulchan points out that this halacha is not as self-evident as one might think. Although the method of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak is the ruling of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch, other Rishonim completely omit any teaching regarding the order of putting on shoes. The Aruch Hashulchan justifies this omission from a timeline point of view. The halacha generally follows the one that is last in chronological order. And despite the testimony of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak regarding Mar bar Ravna putting on the right first and tying the left first, there is another opinion in the *sugya*. Rav Ashi states that he saw Rav Kahana not put his shoes on in any particular order. And Rav Ashi was the latest and therefore most authoritative perspective. However, the Aruch Hashulchan notes that since Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said that a G-d-fearing person will show honor to both the right and left in the appropriate manner, it is clear that the ruling in the Shulchan Aruch is the practical halacha.

For the record, how should a left-handed (or left-footed) person put on shoes? Since he is a lefty who ties his *tefillin* on his right arm, the halachic authorities note that the person should tie the right shoe first in addition to putting it on first.

This halachic discussion has ramifications beyond deciding which shoe to put on first. The right side is to show honor and preference in general matters (aside for tying, as with *tefillin*). For example, one should put his right arm through a sleeve before his left, put on his right sock first, and also perform an act of mitzvah – such as giving charity to the needy – with his right hand.

▪ *Shabbat 61a*

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 21:1 - Challalim - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidas* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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*Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*  
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Blemished Imperfections

The Torah mandates that any *kohen* or animal with a *mum* (“blemish”) becomes unfit for ritual sacrifice. The animal may not be brought as an offering, and the *kohen* may not officiate in the Temple’s rituals. To that end, the Torah offers two comprehensive lists which delineate exactly which sorts of physical defects are considered a *mum* (Lev. 21:16-23 for a *kohen*, Lev. 22:17-25 for an animal). In this essay we will explore the etymology of the Hebrew word *mum*, and show how it differs from two seemingly synonymous words: *pgam* and *simpon*. Ultimately, we will see that although the three words in question all relate to “blemishes” in one way or another, their literal meanings actually differ quite widely from one another.

Rabbi Sholomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) explains that the etymological source for *mum/meumah* is the two-letter root MEM-MEM, which denotes the “smallest amount.” The word *meumah* (“something”) usually appears in the Bible in the context of “not even something” (for example, Gen. 30:31; 39:23, I Kgs. 10:21), i.e. “nothing.” Accordingly, he explains that the word *mum* refers to a “something” which is either missing or extra such that it makes the object in discussion less than perfect – either on account of it *lacking* something necessary for completion, or having something extra which makes it *more than* complete, which is also an imperfection. Thus, a body with a *mum* lacks “something” that it is supposed to have, or has an extra “something” that it is not supposed to have.

Along these lines, Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) writes that *mum* (sans the letter ALEPH) is probably derived from the word *mum* (with an ALEPH, see *Iyov* 31:7 and *Dan*. 1:4) or *meumah* which means “something” or a “point.” He explains that this word originally referred to a “dot” or “speck” on an otherwise pristine background, and was later expanded to mean any type of “blemish” or “defective imperfection.” (See Rashi to Gen. 22:12 who offers an exegetical connection between *mum* and *meumah*.)

Similarly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) explains that *meumah* represents the smallest possible smidgen of existence. It is a “something” that is only a bit bigger than “nothing.” He explains its root as ALEPH-MEM, which means “mother” (the source of all life/existence) and “if” (the precondition necessary for anything to exist).

In segue to the word *pgam*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) writes that this word literally means “groove” or “crevice.” He

points to the Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 23b), which refers to the “*pgam* of the moon” as the dark parts of the moon that are visible only at certain phases of its monthly cycle. He also notes that *pgam* is the Talmudic term for a nick in a knife that renders the knife unfit for slaughtering (*Chullin* 10a, 17a). In light of this, Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein’s contention that the Hebrew *pgam* is probably a cognate of the Arabic word *fajama* (“to break off a bit”) makes much sense. [These two words are, by the way, unrelated to the English word *pajama*, which is derived from the Persian words *pay* (“leg”) and *jameh* (“garment”).]

As we will see below, a slew of sources indicate that the Hebrew word *pgam* literally refers to something “lacking” or “deficient.” Its appearances as a synonym to *mum* are only a borrowed meaning:

1. After the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur reads the relevant passages from Leviticus from a Torah Scroll, he then reads the passages from Numbers by heart. The Talmud (*Yoma* 70a) explains that he does not roll the Torah Scroll from Leviticus to Numbers because doing so would needlessly make the audience have to wait, and he does not take out a second Torah Scroll because people would suspect that the first Torah Scroll had a *pgam*. In that context, Rashi explains that *pgam* means “lack,” such that people would think that the first Torah Scroll was rejected because it “lacked” all the requirements which would render it fit for use.
2. Rashi (to *Kesuvos* 84a) defines a “familial *pgam*” as something embarrassing, which essentially detracts from a family’s sterling reputation. When the Talmud uses the word *mum* to mean something that disqualifies a person from serving as a judge, Rashi (to *Sanhedrin* 36b) explains that this *mum* refers to a “familial *pgam*.” This is a more abstract usage of the term *mum* than the Biblical usage, which refers specifically to physical blemishes, or to spiritual blemishes resulting from sin (*Deut.* 32:5, *Prov.* 9:7).
3. The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 73a) characterizes a rapist as somebody who has caused a betrothed woman a *pgam*. Rashi explains this to mean that he “embarrassed” her and “cheapened” her. Indeed, when discussing the monetary payments which a rapist/seducer is obligated to pay his victim, the Mishna (*Kesuvos* 3:4) refers to *pgam* as one of the forms of compensation due to her. The Mishna (*Kesuvos* 3:7) explains that *pgam* is evaluated by comparing a virgin’s theoretical price value on the slave market to a non-virgin’s. Her change in value is then deemed a form of damage and is paid as *pgam*.
4. A less-than-full cup of wine is considered *pagum* and therefore unfit for *Kiddush* (*Pesachim* 106a).



5. Somebody who detracts from the value of a written loan's document by accepting partial payment of that debt is called *pogem* (male) or *pogemet* (female) that document (see *Kesuvos* 9:7-8, *Tosefta Shavuos* 6:5).

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the etymology of *pgam* to the biliteral root PEH-GIMMEL, which means “weakened.” For example, when Jacob was first told that Joseph was still alive and became the ruler of Egypt, the Torah says, “His heart became weak (*vayafag*) because he did not believe them” (Gen. 45:26). As a corollary of this meaning, the word *pag* (Song of Songs 2:13) refers to unripe figs, whose sweetness is “weaker” than fully-ripe fruits. (In Modern Hebrew, *pag* refers to a baby born “prematurely” and to the “expiration date” of, say, a coupon.)

The Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 67a) rules that “taste” from a forbidden food can render otherwise permitted food forbidden. However, if that added taste is *Taam L'Fgam*, meaning it does not improve the taste of the permitted food but actually detracts from it, then the taste of a forbidden food does not prohibit the permitted food. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the Mishnaic Hebrew word *pgam* is also derived from the PEH-GIMMEL root, as all its various meanings relate back to the concept of “weakness,” whether in terms of the “weakness” of taste, “weakness” of a knife’s blade or the “weakening” of a girl’s worth.

We now turn to the word *simpon*. The Mishna (*Kesuvos* 5:3) relates that originally the halacha was that if a *kohen* betroths a non-*kohen* woman with *Kiddushin*, then she may already begin eating *terumah* even before the marriage is fully effectuated. However, the Mishna explains that later courts decreed that a woman betrothed to a *kohen* may not eat *terumah* until she is fully married to him. The Talmud (*Kesuvos* 57b) explains that one of the reasons for this ruling is that we suspect the woman in question may have a *simpon* – ostensibly, a “blemish” – that might retroactively nullify her betrothal, such that she will have been eating *terumah* without having been married to a *kohen*. In order to avoid this situation, the rabbis decreed that women betrothed to a *kohen* cannot eat *terumah* until the marriage is consummated in such a way that a *simpon* cannot retroactively invalidate it.

This discussion leads to the common misconception that the word *simpon* means “blemish,” but as we will see below, it’s not so simple. The Hebrew word *simpon* actually has three different meanings, each of which ultimately derives from a different Greek word:

In the Mishna (*Chullin* 3:1), the word *simpon* appears in the sense of a bronchial artery, which “branches” off from the lungs. In this

sense, *simpon* is actually derived from the Greek word *siphon* – which refers to a “pipe” (like it does in English), and denotes the use of pipe-like blood vessels to carry blood to the lungs.

The Hebrew word *simpon* or *sumponia* is derived from the Greek word *symphonia*, and refers to some sort of musical instrument (possibly a “bagpipe” or “virginal”). Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606-1675) writes that Greek words had already entered the Aramaic lexicon as early as in the times of the Biblical Daniel. To that effect, he cites the word *sumponia* in the Bible (Dan. 3:5, 3:10, 3:15) as an example of this phenomenon. This word also appears in the Mishna (*Keilim* 11:6). The *Sefer HaAruch* explains that the musical instrument in question is a type of wind instrument and comprises of a hollow pipe. This explanation connects *simpon* in the sense of a “musical instrument” to *simpon* in the sense of a “blood vessel.”

In another Mishna (*Bava Metzia* 1:8), the word *simpon* refers to extra clauses or conditions added to a legal document as a sort of postscript. This word is derived from the Greek word *symphoneo*, which means “agreement” or “harmony,” and it refers to all those party to the agreement coming to terms with one another. The Hebrew word *simpon* was later expanded to refer to an implicit stipulation that was not actually added to the text of a legal document but could nonetheless invalidate the contract.

Rashi (to *Kiddushin* 10b, *Kesuvos* 57b, and *Bava Metzia* 20a) explains that the word *simpon* literally means “cancel,” and refers to any sort of clause that can “cancel” a deal – whether implicit or explicit. An early commentary to Targum Onkelos ascribed to Rabbi Yaakov Dienna (published under the names *Patshegen*, *Tzintzenet HaMan*, and *Sefer HaYair*) suggests a Semitic etymology for the word *simpon* by explaining that it is derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic root SAMECH-YUD-MEM, which means “erase” or “destroy,” and *pon* which (somehow) refers to something from the past. Like Rashi, he too understands that *simpon* literally refers to the retroactive cancellation of a deal. Either way, *simpon* does not actually mean “blemish” or “defect,” but rather refers to anything which can void an agreement. A physical blemish on a woman whom one is marrying is just one example of something that can cancel an agreement, but does not reflect the word’s full definition.

To summarize, *mum*, *pgam*, and *simpon* can all mean “blemish” in some sense, but the core meanings of those words differ from one another: *Mum* means “something,” *pgam* literally means “hole” or “lacking” and *simpon* literally means “cancellation.”

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rklein@ohr.edu)

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# ASK!

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## Counting the Omer:

A. Silvers wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My son Akiva has the following question:

*I am 12 years old. At parshat Emor I will be observing my bar mitzvah. Until now I have been counting the Omer with a beracha. When I reach thirteen I will be counting the Omer as an adult, and previously I was only counting as a minor for chinuch (educational purposes). When I become bar mitzvah should I continue counting with a beracha, as I do have a certain level of "temmimut" (completeness), but on the other hand the quality of my mitzvah is not the same as if I had begun at the beginning?*

Thank you for your time.

Alan S. wrote:

Dear Rabbi

*Many people have asked me the following question which can really be a bit perplexing. A boy who has his bar mitzvah during Sefirat HaOmer, may he continue counting with a beracha? This has practical application here right now, so a timely answer would be greatly appreciated.*

Many thanks!

Dear Akiva & Alan,

The Torah says, "From the day after Pesach you shall count seven *complete* weeks..." We therefore count each day for 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, saying "Today is the first day of the Omer, today is the second day of the Omer, etc." Each day we make a blessing.

The authorities differ about whether each day's count is a mitzvah by itself, or if together all 49 days comprise one single mitzvah. The difference would be in a case where someone forgets to count a day:

- If each day is a separate mitzvah, someone who forgot a day continues to fulfill the mitzvah by counting the following days. So he should continue counting and each day say the blessing.

- But if together all 49 days comprise one single mitzvah, someone who missed a day can no longer fulfill the mitzvah. Consequently, he can't say the blessing.

In practice, someone who forgets a day continues to count – in accordance with the first opinion – but does not say the blessing – in consideration of the second opinion.

But what should *you* do? On the one hand, you've counted every day! But since you're not yet *bar mitzvah* and aren't commanded by the Torah to count, perhaps your counting 'doesn't count.' Perhaps your "seven *complete* weeks" are *incomplete*.

Most halachic authorities rule that if you counted every day until your *bar mitzvah*, you continue counting with a blessing.

Interestingly enough, Akiva, the command to count the Omer is found in the Torah portion of *Emor* – your *bar mitzvah* portion. The verse says, "Count after Pesach, the day you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks..." In Hebrew, the word '*complete*' is the 12th word of the verse. Perhaps this hints that even though you are only 12 years old and not yet *bar mitzvah*, your mitzvah of counting is nonetheless '*complete*'!

Speaking of counting: Two professors of theoretical mathematics were debating how many fingers people have.

"Nine!" said one.

"Ten!" the other insisted.

Unable to convince each other through logical induction or proof, they decided to count.

"I say there are ten!" said one, lifting up his hands. "Go ahead and count!"

"Zero, one, two, three..." began the other.

- Sources: *Minchat Chinuch*, Mitzvah 306; *Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim* 489:15; *Sheilot U'tshuvot Ktav Sofer* 99; *Sheilot U'tshuvot Maharam Shick* 260

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman*

## Celebrating Preparation

**A**s the Torah records each of the festivals, a date is provided. Pesach is on the fifteenth day of the first month (Nissan). But for Shavuot, no date is provided. Succot is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishrei). Instead, the Torah teaches that Shavuot will be the culmination of a seven-week count from the Omer offering (the day after Pesach, the 16th of Nissan). After those seven weeks, the fiftieth day is sanctified as a festival.

In contrast to Pesach and Succot, the Torah does not recount the historical event that is commemorated on this festival. By tradition we know that it commemorates the day of the Lawgiving – *mattan Torah*. If our exodus from Egypt was on the fifteenth of Nissan, then, according to the description in the Torah, *mattan Torah* was on or about fifty days later. But was it “on” or “about”?

Rabbinic tradition teaches that *mattan Torah* was on Shabbat. There are two rabbinic traditions regarding the day of the week of the Exodus. According to the *Seder Olam*, it was on a Friday, whereas according to the Talmud (Shabbat 87b) it was on a Thursday. According to *Seder Olam* the Torah was given fifty days after the Exodus, but according to the Talmud, the Torah was given fifty-one days later. In this view, our celebration – fifty days after Pesach – marks not the anniversary of *mattan Torah*, but the day *before* the Lawgiving!

Now that our calendar has been set, Shavuot always falls out on the sixth of Sivan, but in the Torah ideal, where the month was sanctified by observance of the new moon, this was not always the case. Shavuot could fall on the fifth, sixth or seventh of the month, depending on when the new moon was sighted. If the Torah wanted us to celebrate the anniversary of the Lawgiving, it would have

provided a set date, just as the Torah did for Pesach and Succot. But it did not. Instead, the Torah teaches that we are to establish a festival on the fiftieth day after the Omer, without consideration of the day of the month.

The day that is elevated to a festival is *not the day of the revelation at Sinai*, but the final day of counting *leading up to that great day*. According to accepted Talmudic tradition, the fiftieth day was the day *before* the Lawgiving. Thus, we celebrate *our making ourselves worthy of receiving the Torah*. This fiftieth day was the day on which the people were ready for their great mission – to be the receivers and bearers of Torah. Even the name of the festival teaches this: Its name does not commemorate a historical event (like Pesach and Succot), but instead is called “Weeks” – after the preparatory counting leading up to the Lawgiving.

The event of Sinai itself was not the entirety of the Lawgiving. On that day we received only ten of the 613 commandments of the Torah. The rest were taught over a forty-year period. Sinai was an introduction to Torah, which would then be transmitted through Moshe. The purpose of the day was to demonstrate that G-d *can* speak to man, and that He *had* indeed spoken to Moshe. This was made known to us through our own personal experience so that we would receive the whole Torah through Moshe’s transmission with full confidence that it was the word of G-d. This purpose is explicit in the Torah (Shemot 19:9).

Our celebration of Shavuot is not because G-d *gave* the Torah to the Jewish nation, but because we were *prepared* to receive it. As we count the days from the festival of our national birth, we are encouraged to make these days count, so that we celebrate anew our preparedness to receive and bear the Torah.

- Source: Commentary, Vayikra 23:21

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