



Source Materials  
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## ① LEVITICUS 29

*The Omer* 9 HASHEM spoke to Moses, saying: 10 Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you shall enter the Land that I give you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring an Omer from your first harvest to the Kohen. 11 He shall wave the Omer before HASHEM to gain favor for you; on the morrow of the rest day the Kohen shall wave it. 12 On the day you wave the Omer, you shall perform the service of an unblemished lamb in its first year as an elevation-offering to HASHEM. 13 Its meal-offering shall be two tenth-ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a fire-offering to HASHEM, a satisfying aroma; and its libation shall be wine, a quarter-hin. 14 You shall not eat bread or roasted kernels or plump kernels until this very day, until you bring the offering of your God; it is an eternal decree for your generations in all your dwelling places.

*The Omer Count and Shavuot* 15 You shall count for yourselves — from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving — seven weeks, they shall be complete. 16 Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering to HASHEM. 17 From your dwelling places you shall bring bread that shall be waved, two loaves made of two tenth-ephah, they shall be fine flour, they shall be baked leavened; first-offerings to HASHEM. 18 With the bread you shall offer seven unblemished lambs in their first year, one young bull, and two rams; they shall be an elevation-offering to HASHEM, with their meal-offering and their libations — a fire-offering, a satisfying aroma to HASHEM. 19 You shall make one he-goat as a sin-offering, and two lambs in their first year as feast peace-offerings. 20 The Kohen shall wave them upon the first-offering breads as a wave-service before HASHEM — upon the two sheep — they shall be holy, for HASHEM and for the Kohen. 21 You shall convoke on this very day — there shall be a holy convocation for yourselves — you shall do no laborious work; it is an eternal decree in your dwelling places for your generations.

22 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them; I am HASHEM, your God.

## ② NOTES (STONE CHUMASH)

**9-14. The Omer.** Before any grain produce of the new crop may be eaten, a measure of ground barley must be brought to the Temple on the second day of Pesach as a meal-

offering, symbolizing that the prosperity of the field — despite the backbreaking labor that is required to wrest it from the soil — is a gift from God, and we thank Him for it. This offering is known as the Omer. Once it is brought, all grain that had taken root prior to that time may be eaten; later grain must wait until the next year's Omer is brought. Nowa-

days, in the absence of the Temple, the new crop may be eaten when the second day of Pesach is over.

**10. עֹמֶר** — An Omer. Omer is the name of a dry measure, containing the volume of 43.2 average eggs. It is the amount of flour that must be brought, and is also the name by which the offering is known. Although the Omer-offering permit-

ted all five species of grain for general use, grain of the new crop could not be used for Temple offerings until the Two Breads-offering, fifty days later, described below (*Menachos* 68b).

By its very nature, physical work in the fields leads one to forget his spiritual nature. The Torah, therefore, surrounded the farmer's chores with commandments, so that he would remain conscious of his true purpose. At the beginning of the harvest, the nation offers the Omer and the Two Breads. When he harvests, the farmer must leave the gleanings and a corner for the poor (v. 22), again making him realize that the crop is not his own. This explains why the latter commandments are included in this chapter, which, otherwise, deals only with the festivals (*Meshech Chochmah*).

③ SEFER  
HA' CHINUCH

(MITZVAH 306)

At the root of the precept, by way of the plain meaning, lies the reason that the entire main element of the life of Jewry is nothing other than the Torah. On account of the Torah, heaven and earth—and Jewry—were created; as it is written, *If not for My covenant [of the Torah] day and night, I would not have set the ordinances of heaven and earth* (Jeremiah 33:25).<sup>6</sup> This is the principal element and the reason why they were rescued and went forth out of Egypt—so that they would accept the Torah at Sinai and fulfill it. As the Eternal Lord said to Moses, *this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you: when you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain* (Exodus 3:12). The meaning of the verse is as though it said: “Your taking them out of Egypt will be a sign for you that you will serve God on this mountain”;<sup>7</sup> in other words, that you will receive the Torah, as this is the great principal purpose for whose sake they were to be redeemed, and this is the ultimate good for them; and this is a greater matter for them than the liberation from servitude. Therefore the Eternal Lord made their emergence from slavery a sign for Moses of their [eventual] acceptance of the Torah: For a less important, subsidiary matter is always made a sign or token for a matter of main importance.

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 that they attained—we were commanded to count [the days] from the morrow after the festival day of Passover till the day 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*<sup>8</sup> (Job 7:2), and constantly counts [and reckons] 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 is to reach that time.<sup>9</sup>

④ HOREB

(R' S.R. HIRSCH)

Beginning with the first day after the Sabbath, you enumerate the days following the Sabbath thus: ‘1st, 2nd, 3rd day after the Sabbath,’ and so on. In this way the sanctity which you acquired on the Sabbath finds its expression in your mode of life in the workaday week and, indeed, the Sabbath itself finds its consummation—it has become the source of spiritual dedication for the whole week (para. 196). So, too, on the day after the first day of the Passover Festival—namely, the 16th of Nisan, you begin to count the days as follows: ‘1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., of the Omer’—in other words, as so many days after the Passover day (para. 303), always, however, denoting every period of seven days as a week. Thus, you treat Passover as you do the Sabbath (Passover really is for Israel what the Sabbath originally was for mankind<sup>1</sup>) and you enumerate seven such weekly periods, linking them with Passover, as you do ordinary weekdays with the Sabbath; and on the day after the seventh such weekly link with Passover you celebrate Shavuoth. In this way you declare and firmly establish for all time that Passover finds its culmination in Shavuoth, that is to say, that freedom with all its inherent blessings (including the possession of the Holy Land) acquires worth, reality and meaning only through the principles of the Torah. For Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt only to serve the Torah, and when Moses was first enjoined to liberate Israel the spiritual purpose of Israel's freedom was declared: ‘When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon the mountain’ (Exod. iii, 12) (cf. para. 167). From paras. 301–4 one can easily understand how this counting is connected with the offering of the Omer.



⑧  
THE  
MINHAGIM

Unfortunately, in later periods other catastrophes occurred during the period between Passover and Shavuot taking the lives of countless Jews. The Crusaders wrought havoc on many Jewish communities during their march from Europe to the Holy Land; there was a mass slaughter of Jews in France and Germany during the twelfth century; Chmelnitzki and his Cossacks carried out massacres and pogroms upon Jews in Poland in the middle of the seventeenth century. All these misfortunes occurred during these weeks. However, the original and main reason for this period of mourning is the epidemic decimating Rabbi Akiva's pupils which, according to tradition, lasted thirty-four days out of the forty-nine days of the *Sefirah*.

⑨  
ETHICS OF  
OUR FATHERS  
6:6-7

[6] *Torah is even greater than priesthood or royalty; for royalty is acquired along with thirty prerogatives, and the priesthood with twenty-four [gifts], but the Torah is acquired by means of forty-eight qualities, which are: Study, attentive listening, articulate speech, intuitive understanding, discernment, awe, reverence, modesty, joy, purity, ministering to the sages, closeness with colleagues, sharp discussion with students, deliberation, [knowledge of] Scripture, Mishnah, limited business activity, limited sexual activity, limited pleasure, limited sleep, limited conversation, limited laughter, slowness to anger, a good heart, faith in the sages, acceptance of suffering, knowing one's place, being happy with one's lot, making a protective fence around his personal matters, claiming no credit for himself, being beloved, loving the Omnipresent, loving [His] creatures, loving righteous ways, loving justice, loving reproof, keeping far from honor, not being arrogant with his learning, not enjoying halachic decision-making, sharing his fellow's yoke, judging him favorably, setting him on the truthful course, setting him on the peaceful course, thinking deliberately in his study, asking and answering, listening and contributing to the discussion, learning in order to teach, learning in order to practice, making his teacher wiser, pondering over what he has learned, and repeating a saying in the name of the one who said it. For you have learned this: Whoever repeats a thing in the name of the one who said it brings redemption to the world, as it is said: 'And Esther said to the king in the name of Mordechai.'*<sup>1</sup>

[7] Great is Torah, for it confers life upon its practitioners, both in this world and in the World to Come, as it is said: 'For they [the teachings of the Torah] are life to those who find them, and a healing to his entire flesh.'<sup>2</sup> And it says: 'It shall be healing to your body, and marrow to your bones.'<sup>3</sup> And it says: 'It is a tree of life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.'<sup>4</sup> And it says: 'They are a garland of grace for your head, and necklaces for your neck.'<sup>5</sup> And it says: 'It will give to your head a garland of grace, a crown of glory it will deliver to you.'<sup>6</sup> And it says: 'Indeed, through me [the Torah] your days shall be increased, and years of life shall be added to you.'<sup>7</sup> And it says: 'Lengthy days are at its right, and at its left are wealth and honor.'<sup>8</sup> And it says: 'For lengthy days and years of life, and peace shall they add to you.'<sup>9</sup>

(10) RASHI

EXODUS 19:3

And there Israel encamped

(The sing. *אִישׁ* is to be interpreted) as }  
one man  
with one heart  
(mind),

but all the other encampments }

(were) with complaints and with strife. }

וַיִּחַנְּם יִשְׂרָאֵל.

כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד

בְּלֵב אֶחָד,

אֲבָל שְׂאֵר כָּל

הַחֲנֻיּוֹת

בְּתַרְעוּמוֹת

וּבִמְחֻלּוֹקֹת:

(11) HOREB

(R' S.R. HIRSCH)

It happened once that between Passover and Shavuoth, a period which is above all dedicated to the honouring of the Torah, nearly all those died who in that particular era were bearers of the Torah. They were all disciples of Rabbi Akiva, and they suffered because they did not show respect for one another (*Yevamoth*, 62b) or (according to *Bereshith Rabbah*, 61) because they were envious of one another; and so through disrespect to those who were bearers of the Torah they showed disrespect to, and lack of love for, the Torah itself. The time was barren of pillars of the Torah until Rabbi Akiva raised new disciples.

And a thousand years later, in these same days which are dedicated to the honouring of the Torah, Israel's sons and daughters, especially in the most beautiful regions of Germany, showed by their deeds that they well understood how to translate into reality the significance of this period of the Omer. Thousands of Israel's offspring demonstrated that life and all that was good in it was of no value if the price they had to pay was forfeiture of the Torah. They bled for the Torah under the blows of the undiscerning madness of the Crusaders (mainly in 1096-4856).<sup>1</sup>

As a result of both these groups of events, this period continues to bear a tinge of general mourning to remind all in Israel, the bearers of the Torah, to be imbued with what is worthy and good, of which they are the bearers; to honour and to love everyone who lives for the same lofty mission; to rejoice in the number of their comrades and in their honour, regarding little their own esteem—to remind every son and daughter in Israel to transform the martyrs' death of their predecessors into new life and to carry forward loyally, as the highest good, that good for which their predecessors gave their lives.

This general mourning finds its expression in the prohibition against weddings during the period. Furthermore, one's outward appearance is disregarded to the extent of allowing one's beard to grow, as is the case with mourners (para. 316 and O. Ch. 493).

#### THE HILULA OF RABI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI

There is an ancient tradition that the demise of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai occurred on the thirty-third day of the Omer, and that the day of his demise was filled with a great light of endless joy through the secret wisdom which he revealed to his disciples that day — and which were written down in the Zohar. That day was to him and his disciples like the day on which a groom rejoices under his *Chupah*. Tradition relates that its sun had not set till he had revealed all that he had been permitted to reveal — whereupon the sun set and his soul ascended on High. (*Zohar Ha'azinu*).

(12) THE BOOK OF OUR HERITAGE

For this reason the day is marked by rejoicing though the day of the death of the righteous is a day for fasting. Such was however the desire of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai, and many of our ancient Sages adopted the custom of investing the day of his demise with a festive character every year.