

Why Don't We Recite Shehecheyanu on Sefiras ha-Omer

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We recite the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* before performing most mitzvos that are applicable only at certain times during the year, thereby expressing our excitement and gratitude to God for allowing and helping us reach this moment. *Sefiras ha-omer* stands out as an exception to this rule in that we do not recite *Shehecheyanu*. *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* offers an explanation for this omission. Based on the Gemara's recording of Ameimar's custom:

Ameimar counted the days but not the weeks. He said that [our counting] is a remembrance of the Temple.

Menachos 66a

Regarding sefiras ha-omer, there are those who ask: Why don't we recite Shehecheyanu? Furthermore, why don't we omit the beracha on sefiras ha-omer on the second day of Pesach [out of concern that in the Diaspora we are still observing the first day of Pesach]? ... Additionally, why don't we [in the Diaspora] count two days, similar to our observance of a second day of Yom Tov? The principle that answers these questions is that we don't need to be as stringent regarding sefiras ha-omer, which is only a remembrance. This is the conclusion of the Talmud—Ameimar counted the days but not the weeks. He said that [our counting] is a remembrance of the Temple. Although we count days and weeks, it is only out of tradition [and not an integral part of the mitzvah], and therefore we can't require the recitation of Shehecheyanu ... Sefiras ha-omer is not something which provides any benefit. Rather it is solely for the purpose of evoking emotional sorrow for the destruction of our Temple.

Ba'al ha-Maor, Pesachim 28a

אמימר מני יומי ולא מני שבועי
אמר זכר למקדש הוא.
מנחות סו.

ובספירת העומר יש ששואלין
מה טעם אין אנו אומרים בו זמן
ועוד מה טעם אין אנו סופרים
בלא ברכה ביו"ט שני של פסח
... ועוד מה טעם אין אנו סופרין
שתי ספירות מספק כמו שאנו
עושין שני י"ט מספק וכללו של
דבר אין לנו להחמיר בספירת
העומר שאינו אלא לזכר בעלמא
והכין אסיקנא בדוכתא במנחות
דאמימר מני יומי ולא מני שבועי
אמר זכר למקדש הוא ואע"פ
שאנו מונין ימים ושבועות מנהג
הוא בידינו אבל להטעינו זמן אין
לנו ... ולספירת העומר אין בו
זכר לשום הנאה אלא לעגמת
נפשנו לחרבן בית מאויינו
בעל המאור, פסחים כח.

According to *Ba'al ha-Ma'or*, *sefiras ha-omer*, as it is performed today, is *zecher la-Mikdash* (a remembrance for the Temple), but only a general remembrance of the original practice in the *Beis ha-Mikdash*, whose purpose is to evoke emotion, not one that is meant to remind us of the actual past practice. Since *sefirah* is a general remembrance, it does not rise to the level of a performance that requires a *Shehecheyanu*.

The Rav suggested that there are two types of such remembrances, one that recalls the glory of the *Beis ha-Mikdash* (such as taking the *lulav* for seven days, which reflects the ritual in the Temple when it was standing) and another that reminds us of its destruction (such as putting ashes on the head of a groom under the *chupah*). As *Ba'al ha-Ma'or* indicates, *sefiras ha-omer* is not of the first type, it is therefore meant to remind us of the destruction of the Temple. Tosafos write:

After one recites the beracha on sefirah, one says, "may it be your will [that the Temple be speedily rebuilt]," which we don't do for the blowing of shofar or shaking the lulav because nowadays [sefirah] is only a recitation for [the purpose of remembering] the Temple, but lulav and shofar involve an action.

Tosafos, Megillah 20b

ואחר שבירך על הספירה אומר י"ר
שיבנה וכו' מה שאין כן בתקיעת
שופר ולולב והיינו טעמא לפי שאין
אלא הזכרה עתה לבנין ביהמ"ק אבל
לשופר ולולב יש עשיה.
:תוספות, מגילה כ:

The declaration that we make after *sefirah* is not made after shaking the *lulav*, which after the first day is also *zecher le-mikdash*. Tosafos differentiate between the two by saying that *sefirah* is **only** a *zecher le-mikdash* whereas *lulav* has a specific action associated with it. Both *lulav* and *sefirah* are remembrances, but they represent two kinds of *zecher le-mikdash*. *Lulav* was instituted as a remembrance, but it represents the fulfillment, the *kiyum*, of the mitzvah of *lulav*. On the other hand, both the institution and fulfillment of *sefirah* are *zecher le-mikdash* per se.

That is why we do not recite *Shehecheyanu*, which is an expression of joy. This may also serve as a source for the mourning nature of the *sefirah* period. It is not only a remembrance of the death of Rabbi Akiva's students but an expression of the intrinsic nature of the contemporary mitzvah. According to this rationale, mourning should extend throughout the entire *sefirah* period, which is in fact the opinion of the Ari (cited in *P'ri Eitz Chaim, Sha'ar Sefiras ha-Omer* no. 7).

Rambam (*Temidim and Musafim* 7:22), however, assumes that the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer* is still biblically mandated today and does not differ in this sense from its status at the time of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*. The Rav suggested that it is possible to explain the lack of *She-hecheyanu* even according to Rambam based on the understanding of the *Sefer ha-Chinuch*:

The root of the mitzvah, on a simple level, is that the foundation of the Jewish people is the Torah ... The main purpose of the Jews being redeemed from Egypt was so that they would accept the Torah at Sinai and observe it ... For this reason ... we are commanded to count from the day after the beginning of Pesach until the day of the giving of the

משרשי המצוה על צד הפשט, לפי שכל
עיקרן של ישראל אינו אלא התורה ...
והיא העיקר והסיבה שנגאלו ויצאו
ממצרים כדי שיקבלו התורה בסיני
ויקיימוה ... ומפני כן ... נצטוינו למנות
ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת
התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל

Torah to show our great desire for this glorious day that we have been anticipating ... because counting shows a person that his true longing and desire is to reach that day.

Sefer ha-Chinuch, Mitzvah 306

היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו ... כי המנין
מראה לאדם כי כל ישעו וכל חפצו להגיע
אל הזמן ההוא.
ספר החינוך מצוה שו

The *Chinuch* explains that the count expresses a sense of longing and anticipation for the ultimate goal of accepting the Torah at Sinai, and therefore indicates that we have not yet reached the goal. This is antithetical to the nature of *Shehecheyanu*, which is recited to express gratitude for having reached a particular goal. *Sefirah*, on the contrary, demonstrates that we have not yet reached the goal.

This understanding may also explain why the Torah has us wait until after the first day of Pesach to begin counting *sefiras ha-omer*. The *Chinuch* explains that the first day of Pesach is singled out for the specific purpose of remembering the miraculous Exodus, which in itself was a testament to God's dual role as Creator and Controller of history. Since *sefiras ha-omer* is an expression of our not having yet attained our intended goal, it is inappropriate to perform this mitzvah on the first day of Pesach and mitigate our happiness and joy over the actual Exodus. It is also perhaps for this reason that some people outside the Land of Israel follow the custom of reciting *sefirat ha-omer* on the second night only after completing the seder, so as not to mitigate the joy of the seder with our feelings of sadness for not yet having attained the ultimate goal of accepting the Torah.

The Rav's view concerning the recitation of *Shehecheyanu*—that the mitzvah of *sefiras ha-omer* is characterized by longing and aspiration and reaches culmination only with the arrival of Shavuot—can be applied in other situations as well. *Shach* (Y.D. 28:5) asks why there is no *Shehecheyanu* when a man marries a woman. He does not resolve the question.

Rabbi Shlomo Eiger, *Gilyon Maharsha* ad loc., answers that *kiddushin* (betrothal) itself is only a *hechsher mitzvah* (preparatory stage) necessary to fulfill the mitzvah of *p'ru ur'vu* (procreation). This answer may suffice according to Rabbeinu Asher (*Kesubos* 1:12). However, according to the Rambam (*Ishus* 3:23), who states that the *berachah* on *kiddushin* is a *berachah* on the mitzvah, similar to any other *berachah* on a mitzvah, it is clear that *kiddushin* itself is the mitzvah—so this answer will not suffice.

Aruch ha-Shulchan (OC 223:4) suggests a technical answer. He writes that one cannot recite *Shehecheyanu* at the time of the *kiddushin* because the process is not complete until the *nisuin* (marriage). One cannot recite *Shehecheyanu* at the time of *nisuin* because the other dimension of marriage takes place at the time of the *kiddushin*.

According to the Rav's approach, we could offer a different answer to the question of why there is no *Shehecheyanu* on marriage. The mitzvah of getting married (according to Rambam) does not take place in a moment's time, when the ring is placed on the wife's finger. Rather it is a life-long process, a goal that is fulfilled only with the passage of time as the relationship and the family is built. It is a lifelong endeavor, where the goal is never totally achieved, as the relationship between husband and wife is deepened and hopefully constantly enhanced. Therefore, as the goal is not at hand at the time of the initial marriage, *Shehecheyanu* is not recited.

The notion of the goal always beyond reach, the aspiration for the unattainable, animated the Rav. If there was an occasional somber tone to the Rav's demeanor, it was because of his sensitivity to this inescapable fact of human existence, that the goal is never reachable. Inherent to the human condition is the recognition of the infinite gap between frail, mortal, finite man and the Almighty. This precipitated in the Rav a tremendous sense of humility. This recognition can also lead to an existential frustration due to God's complete unknowability and otherness, hidden behind clouds of infinity.

By the same token, however, the process of striving for the goal banished complacency from the Rav's persona. He could never be complacent; he was always striving to develop new ideas and new insights. Certainly in the world of learning, he would always come to *shiur* with new ideas and approaches. I once quipped that the most noteworthy feature of a *chazara shiur* given by the Rav was that he was *chozer* from what he had said previously. This was part of the Rav's experience and his legacy to us, his *talmidim*—human beings can never attain the ultimate goal, but we bring sanctity to ourselves and into our lives with yearning and striving for that goal.