

Seven Weeks of Seven Days - Making Our Time Meaningful

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Shavuos is the only holiday in the Jewish calendar which is not given a date. It always falls out on the 6th of Sivan, but is described as being the day after counting seven weeks of seven days from Pesach. A very similar phraseology can be found in the laws concerning the mitzvah of yovel.

And you will count seven Sabbaths of years to you seven times seven years, and the space of the seven Sabbaths of years will be to you forty-nine years: Then you will sound the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month on the Day of Atonement will you sound the shofar throughout all your land: And you will hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it will be a jubilee to you; and you will return every man to his possession and you will return every man to his family

Vayikra 25:8-10

וספרת לך שבע שבתות שנים שבע שנים שבע פעמים והיו לך ימי שבע שבתות השנים תשע וארבעים שנה: והעברת שופר תרועה בחדש השבעי בעשור לחדש ביום הכפרים תעבירו שופר בכל ארצכם: וקדשתם את שנת החמשים שנה וקראתם דרור בארץ לכל ישיביה יובל הוא תהיה לכם ושבתם איש אל אחזתו ואיש אל משפחתו תשבּו: ויקרא כה:ח-י

The commentaries ask if there is a mitzvah for us to count 49 years like we count for sefiras ha'omer leading up to Shavuos. Tosfos in Menachos 64b explains that there is an obligation upon beis din (Jewish court) to count each year with a bracha (blessing), "ברוך אתה ה'... על", ספירת שני היובל, Blessed are you Hashem/ Master of the Universe/ on counting the years to the jubilee." The Ramban in parashas Emor questions whether beis din has to verbally count the years or just keep them in mind. The Chizkuni writes that since the obligation is on beis din and not the individual, no bracha is recited.

By contrast, we learn about the obligation to count the days and weeks of the omer in two different places. The repetition of the mitzvah implies that there are two parts to sefiras ha'omer. There is the obligation of beis din to count without a bracha, and the obligation of the individual

to count with a bracha. The Sifrei on parashas Re'eh supports this idea based on the two sources of sefiras ha'omer.

Seven weeks you shall count for yourself (singular) from the time the sickle is first put to the standing corn you shall begin to count seven weeks

Devarim 16:9

שבעה שבועת תספר לך מהחל חרמש
בקמה תחל לספר שבעה שבועות:
דברים טז:ט

And you shall count for yourselves (plural)...

VaYikra 23:15

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עמר
התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת תהיינה:
ויקרא כג:טו

The singular form in the passuk in Devarim refers to the general counting of the beis din, and the plural form used in VaYikra refers to the obligation on each individual.

The Abarbanel points out that everything in Judaism is seven. Pesach and Sukkos are seven days, bris milah (circumcision) is after seven days, and sefiras ha'omer consists of seven weeks of seven days. The idea behind this is that time in this world is precious and must be used properly. When we find in Tehillim 90:10, "The days of our years are seventy," we realize that this became the paradigm of a lifetime in Tanach. Thank God, people live longer nowadays, but Judaism constantly gives us categories and classifications of sevens to remind us that these are microcosms of life; the week and the holiday. That is why we always find sevens in the Torah; they are all constant reminders of the ticking clock. As such, the Abarbanel explains that people should be more conscientious of losing time than losing money.

Yovel also represents the progression of life. The 49 years represent the productive years of youth, while 50 represents the slowing down of aging. Men return to their fields, to the dust from which they came. The Abarbanel explains that these mitzvos are constant reminders of the finite nature of life and that we must constantly strive to be productive in our lives. This fits with the dual obligations of sefiras ha'omer, the responsibility of the individual and beis din. In every one of us there exists this dichotomy of personal versus communal life. We must always be involved in both spheres, because as life progresses we must take into account what we have done for ourselves and for others. This is the sefiras hayachid (individual counting) and sefiras bet din (communal counting). Sometimes we forget one or the other. While some people give so much of themselves to the community that they neglect their own family, others are so wrapped up in themselves, obsessed with the sefiras hayachid that they never give anything to the community. In the microcosm of our lives in the 49 days or years, we need to fulfill the communal accounting and the personal accounting. One must always make sure that he is active in both of these areas.

This duality of individual and communal responsibility can be seen elsewhere in the Torah. The Yaaros Devash examines the difference between the curses in Bechukosai and in Ki Savo. The gemara (Megillah 31b) says that the curses in Bechukosai were spoken by Hashem, while the curses in Ki Savo appear to be spoken from Moshe's vantage point. The curses in Bechukosai are because the Jewish people will have disgust for the Torah and commandments, "And if My laws

havel disgusted you” (VaYikra 26:15). In Ki Savo it shows an emphasis on doing the mitzvos, “to guard, to keep all My mitzvot” (Devarim 28:1). The curses in Bechukosai have to do with our personal attitude toward Torah and mitzvos, which is why it is spoken from Hashem's vantage point, as only He can know our innermost thoughts and feelings. The curses in Ki Savo are spoken from Moshe's vantage point, because a human being is able to see whether someone is doing mitzvos. Hashem is the One who can tell whether you are disgusted by the mitzvah or take pleasure in it. The Abarbanel writes that you have to fill up those "fifty years" of life. You are only going to be able to fill them up if you take pleasure in what you do. You have to make sure that you are enjoying the activities you are involved in for your personal and communal obligations.

Sometimes people do things they don't enjoy, but as long as the general feeling is one of enjoyment and fulfillment the years will be filled with individual and communal involvement. Everyone has to see in their life what they can contribute in a meaningful and enjoyable way. People serve Hashem as doctors, rabbis, and many other professions. There is room for everything, and everyone can contribute to the community with little expense to his personal life. If you don't find your niche in life, the "sevens" of the Torah serve as a constant reminder that the clock is ticking, as the Abarbanel points out.

The sefiras ha'omer's seven weeks of seven represents life. Just as the weeks fly by, life vanishes in the blink of an eye. B'ezras Hashem, everyone should merit to find in his life where he belongs. Rav Herschel Schachter explains, (based on the gemara in Chagigah 5b) that Hashem sheds tears every day for misplaced people. He cries over people that are learning Torah and shouldn't be learning Torah, and people who aren't learning Torah but should be. The mitzvah of yovel, which represents the minimal 50 years of productivity, tells us that we have to fill our lives with meaning. The Chizkuni explains that filling our lives with meaning only comes from doing things both for our own personal lives and for the good of the community. The key is to find the proper balance between the two, filling all the years of our life with productivity.

We stand now shortly before the time of receiving the Torah on Shavuot. All seven weeks preceding Shavuot are considered preparation for accepting the Torah. They are a time of teshuvah (repentance) and aveilus (mourning), irrespective of the deaths of Rabbi Akiva's students. These seven cycles remind and warn us of the passing of time. Shavuot is a time of introspection. It is an opportunity to look around us at where we are and where we are going. May we enjoy and gain from the full meaning of the yom tov of Shavuot.

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