Parenting from the Parsha- Parshat Emor

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In the second half of Parshat Emor, the Torah outlines the Chagim, the Holidays that mark the Jewish calendar. In the midst of this outline, the Torah describes the period in which we currently find ourselves, the period of Sefirat Haomer. We are commanded to begin counting from the second day of Pesach (ממחרת השבת), the day on which the Omer sacrifice was brought, until the Chag of Shavuot.

A particularly striking detail of this commandment is the fact that the Torah instructs us to count, not only days, but weeks, as well-to count both a period of fifty days, as well as a period of 7 weeks. This phenomenon is noted explicitly in the Gemara, and one of the great Rishonim, Rabbeinu Yerucham, even suggests that the counting of days and the counting of weeks are two independent mitzvot entirely. This analysis serves as the basis for our custom to explicitly mention both days and weeks in our own counting of Sefirat Haomer- though we consider both countings to be part of one unified mitzvah.

While much is written concerning the details of these laws, a fundamental question can be raised. Why does the Torah require the counting of both days and weeks? It would seem that either of these counts alone should be sufficient- by counting one, we can easily determine the other, as well, using elementary arithmetic?

Perhaps the answer to this question can be gained through a better understanding of the basis for counting Sefirat Haomer, as a whole. A common explanation for the mitzvah of Sefirat Haomer is that, as we transition from Pesach to Shavuot, we take a moment to count each day to remember the power and potential of each and every day. We focus on each day, one day at a time, in order to set goals to accomplish that day, even as we move towards Matan Torah.

I once heard from mori v’rabi, Rav Michael Rosensweig, that based on this explanation of the overall mitzva, we can understand the importance of counting both days and weeks. If the purpose of counting each day is to encourage us to establish and achieve short term goals for each day, then the counting of weeks is to meant to encourage us to establish long term goals as well. Aside from setting a daily goal, we also must set our weekly goals- we must take both a short-term and long-term perspective. This day I am going to do X, and this week I want to accomplish Y.

In this way, suggests Rav Rosensweig, Sefirat Haomer acts as a model for the entire year. This mitzva teaches us the importance of setting both short-term and long-term goals continuously, and of the need to balance between them. On the one hand, we should set goals for ourselves on a daily basis, as we consider what hope to accomplish today, the singular potential that can be achieved on this particular day. At the same time, our focus on our daily goals must never cause us to lose focus on the big picture- as we consider our long-term objectives, as well. Sometimes, our short-term and long-term goals will build off of, and complement, each other. At other times, there may be a clash between the two- and it is our job to navigate between them.

The importance of setting both short-term and long-term objectives, and finding the right balance between both, is a crucial aspect to successful parenting. As we raise our kids on a daily basis, we will often have a particular vision, of how we want our children to act or behave. If they fail to live up to those standards, then we react accordingly in order to encourage our children to act in the way that we want and expect of them.

We must also remember, however, in addition to setting short-terms goals for our children, to set for them long-terms goals as well. And as we mentioned above, we must pay attention to when the short- term and long-term goals build off of each other, when they might clash with each other, and how to find the right balance between them.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe, in his classic sefer זריעה ובנין בחינוך, stresses the importance of taking a long-term approach to raising children. He argues that from the very beginning, we must consider the overall vision that we have for our children, and develop our chinuch methods accordingly. While we may naturally have expectations of our children when they are younger as well, we must make sure not to lose sight of our global goals- and we should never allow our short-term approach to get in the way of our overall objectives.

Rav Wolbe mentions, for example, the way in which relate to our kids when they misbehave when they are young. Our automatic reaction may be to assert our authority intensely in order to get our child to behave appropriately. From a short-term perspective, this may achieve our desired goal. At the same time, however, it may have negative ramifications on our long-term goals. If we are too harsh or strict with our children when they are younger, it will impact upon the type of relationship that we will be able to build with them later; and when the more challenging adolescent years arrive, much conflict will result. Our goal during the early childhood years, suggests Rav Wolbe, is to create a warm and loving relationship with our child. While this may mean that certain immediate goals will not be fully achieved during the younger years; it will help ensure that, as our child grows older, a loving relationship will be the framework through which all future conflict and disagreement are addressed. We will create a wonderful base for resolving any issues that arise long-term.

The period of Sefirat Haomer carries many beautiful messages and lessons. Among them, as we have seen, is the lesson that emerges from the fact that we count both days and weeks. Establishing both short-term and long-term goals, and striking the proper balance between them, is important in all areas of life. Particularly in parenting, it is crucial to make sure that we don’t sacrifice long-term relationships simply to accomplish short-term objectives. Only by thoughtfully striking the proper balance will we successfully fulfill our role as parents.

Shabbat Shalom!