THE HALACHAH SHEET

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Sefiras Ha'Omer

Counting the Omer

The Mitzvah

- There is an obligation for men to count the days leading up to Shavuos. Counting starts from the second night of Pesach and continues for 49 days; the 50th day is Shavuos.
- The source for this is from the pasuk: "And you should count...from the day that you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks" (Vayikra 23:15).
- Nowadays, when there's no Beis HaMikdash¹ in which to offer the korban Omer, we still perform the mitzvah of counting as a mitzvah d'rabbanan. This is in remembrance of the times of the Beis HaMikdash. It is therefore customary to recite the "haRachaman" after counting, a tefillah in which we ask Hashem to speedily return the avodah of the Beis HaMikdash.²

How to Count

- What to say. Counting the Omer consists of 1) saying "today is..." 2) counting days, and 3) counting weeks.³ If you don't say, "today is," you are not yotzei. If you miscount, you have two seconds (תוך כדי דיבור) to correct your mistake.⁴ If you don't correct yourself within that time or only realize your mistake afterward, the halachah is as follows:
 - If you counted the wrong day, count again (that night)
 with a berachah.⁵
 - If you only counted the wrong week, count again with no berachah, and continue counting future nights with a berachah.⁶
- Standing. Stand while reciting the berachah⁷ and counting;⁸ don't sit or lean.⁹ If you didn't stand, you are still yotzei b'dieved.
- **Knowing the count.** You must be certain of what day it is before you make the *berachah*¹⁰ and before you count because **1)** it's forbidden to hesitate for more than two seconds between the *berachah* and the count, and **2)** only an affirmative count is considered counting.¹¹ Therefore:
 - You shouldn't make the *berachah* and then listen to someone else counting to find out what day it is.
 - You shouldn't guess which night it is when you recite the counting.

B'dieved, you are yotzei in both instances.12

- Understanding the count. If you don't understand the
 words that you're saying when counting, you're not yotzei.¹³
 Therefore, you must count in a language that you
 understand.
- Tzibbur. Always try and count the Omer with the tzibbur.¹⁴
 Therefore, you should be especially careful to daven with a minyan during Sefirah. Furthermore, if during Maariv of motza'ei Shabbos you finish Shemoneh Esrei just as the tzibbur is about to count, you should count with them and

only afterward say *viyhi no'am*. However, it's not necessary to rush your Shemoneh Esrei to count together with the *tzibbur*.

Complete Counting ("תמימות תהיינה")

- The Torah requires us to count seven complete ("תמימות")
 weeks. We learn two important halachos from this:
 - **1. Counting at night.** Counting should be done at night (after צאת הכוכבים) so that you are counting a "complete" day. For this reason, it's ideal to count as close to the beginning of the night as possible; however, practically speaking, it should be done as part of Maariv. "Attaching" the mitzvah to Maariv helps avoid mistakes.
 - Forgot to count at night. If you didn't count at night, count the following morning without a berachah.
 Continue counting future nights with a berachah.¹⁷
 - Early Maariv. When davening with a minyan that is counting during בין השמשות, you're faced with the dilemma of when to count. If you delay counting until בים, you might forget. If you count along with them, although b'dieved you would be yotzei¹⁸ (but should count again later without a berachah),¹⁹ it's not ideal because בין השמשות is not "ודאי לילה"."
 - **Solution.** Count with them without a berachah with the following תנאי (condition) in mind: In the event that I forget to count again later, I want to be *yotzei* now. If I remember to count later, I don't want to be *yoztei* now. Then, after צאת הכוכבים, count again with a berachah.²⁰
 - If your minyan is counting before בין השמשות (for example, when making early Shabbos), you must push off counting until later.²¹
 - 2. Missed a day. There is a dispute among the Rishonim regarding the word "תמימות" is the entire Sefirah really just one "complete" mitzvah? Practically, we hold that each day is an independent mitzvah (which would make it 49 separate mitzvos). Therefore, if you missed counting a day of the Omer, continue counting future nights (because each day is its own mitzvah), but don't say a berachah (out of concern for the minority opinion).²² Ideally, have in mind to be yotzei with the berachah of the shaliach tzibbur, and then count yourself.²³
 - Unsure if you counted. If you're in doubt whether you counted, continue counting future nights with a berachah. (If it's still the same day as the count you think you missed, you should immediately count without a berachah.)²⁴

מ"ב שם:סק"ז.5 מ"ב תפט:סקל"ב.4 שו"ע תפט:א.3 מ"ב שם:סק"י.2 מ"ב תפט:סקי"ד.1 שב.6 אבני נזר .11 מ"ב שם:סקכ"ט.10 מ"ב תקפה:סק"ב.9 שו"ע תפט:א.8 מ"ב שם סק"ו.7 שם.6 מ"ב .13 מ"ב רו:סקי"ב, שו"ע תפט:ו, דבר אברהם חלק א' ס' ל"ד.12 יו"ד, רמח' אות ג' מ"ב .13 מ"ב תפט:סקל"ד.17 גר"ז סק"ג.16 שו"ע תפט:א.15 של"ה פסחים ג..14 תפט:סק"ה מ"ב .25 שו"ע תפט:ח.22 ביה"ל תפט:ד"ה מבעוד יום.21 שם:סקט"ז.20 שם.19 שם:סקט"ז שו"ע תפט:ח.24 תפט:סקל"ז

Unintentional Counting

- The poskim debate whether or not mitzvos require kavanah.²⁵ Practically, we hold that they do. Therefore, if you unintentionally count the Omer, you are not yotzei, and you must count again. However, out of concern for the other opinion (that you are yotzei without kavanah), you may not make a berachah on the second counting.²⁶
- "Last night was..." If somebody asks you what night it is, you should answer him "last night was..." in order to avoid unintentionally being yotzei the mitzvah.²⁷ However, if you already counted or if you are asked at a time when you cannot be yotzei (before plag hamincha), you can answer directly. Nevertheless, it is recommended to always respond indirectly to avoid mess-ups. In a situation where you are concerned that by answering indirectly you will cause confusion, you can answer directly with explicit kavanah not to be yotzei.²⁸

• Scenarios:

- o If on Lag Ba'Omer you say, "Tonight is Lag Ba'Omer"
 - You should be careful not to say this because it's debated among the *poskim* whether you can be *yotzei* counting the Omer in abbreviated form.²⁹ *B'dieved*, it's not considered as though you counted, and you can still count with a berachah.³⁰
- "Is tonight the 23rd day of the Omer?" A question is not considered counting.³¹
- Signaling. If you held up the number of fingers of what night it was, you were not yotzei.
- Writing. If you wrote down the count, it is questionable whether you were yotzei. Therefore, this should be avoided.³²

Mourning Customs

The Source

 We practice certain customs of mourning during the period between Pesach and Shavuos. This is to commemorate the death of the 24,000 talmidim of Rabbi Akiva who died during this time because they did not show proper respect toward each other.³³

Which Days

- The specific days on which the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva died are debated among the poskim. The ramification of this determines which days we practice aveilus. Many minhagim have developed based on the different opinions. The most common customs regarding when to practice aveilus are:34
 - From the first day of the Omer until Lag Ba'Omer (widely practiced).
 - From the first day of Rosh Chodesh Iyar until the third of Sivan, excluding Lag Ba'Omer.
 - In Yerushalayim, some observe from the first day of the Omer until Rosh Chodesh Sivan, excluding Lag Ba'Omer.³⁵
- There is an order of priorities when determining which custom to follow: 1) custom of your city;³⁶ 2) family custom;
 3) personal preference (you can change from year to year).³⁷

Forbidden Activities

- **1. Weddings**. You cannot get married during Sefirah, but you can get engaged.³⁸
- **2. Haircuts**. It is the custom not to get a haircut and shave during Sefirah,³⁹ though some *poskim* allow shaving if not doing so could cause a financial loss.^{39a} Plucking hair is permitted. If Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls out on Shabbos, you are allowed to cut your hair and shave on Erev Shabbos.⁴⁰
- 3. Music. Many refrain from listening to any live or recorded music during Sefirah.⁴¹ Nevertheless, in the following two cases you can be lenient:
 - 1) If you aren't listening for enjoyment but rather to help you exercise, 42 to stay awake while driving, for the sake of a spiritual *hisorerus* (*kumzitz*), 43 etc.
 - **2)** Practicing an instrument to keep up your skills. This should not be done in a public setting.
 - Singing is permitted;⁴⁴ dancing is forbidden.⁴⁵

Lag Ba'Omer

The Significance

- Some explain that the talmidim of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying on Lag Ba'Omer.⁴⁶ The cause for celebration is Rabbi Akiva's response to the loss: he did not despair but rather raised five new talmidim, who became the conduits through which Torah Sheba'al Peh was transmitted to future generations.
- Others explain that the significance of this day is that it is
 the yahrtzeit of the Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi).
 Although usually the passing of a tzaddik is not a happy
 occasion, this is an exception. Before his death, he revealed
 to his talmidim mystical secrets of the Torah. These were
 written down and are contained in the Zohar. This
 revelation of Torah is cause for celebration.⁴⁷

Halachos

- Tachanun. Tachanun is not recited during Minchah on Erev Lag Ba'Omer.⁴⁸
- Haircut. You can begin cutting hair and shaving from the day of Lag Ba'Omer.⁴⁹ If Lag Ba'Omer falls out on a Sunday, you can cut your hair on Friday in honor of Shabbos.⁵⁰
- Music. Those who refrained from listening to music should not listen until Lag Ba'Omer morning.⁵¹ An exception would be music accompanying a bonfire in honor of Rashbi on Lag Ba'Omer night.⁵²

Minhagim

- Bonfires. Some explain that bonfires are lit on Lag Ba'Omer to commemorate the light of Torah that Rashbi brought into the world when he revealed Torah secrets.
- Meron. Many have the custom to visit the kever of Rashbi on Lag Ba'Omer.⁵³ Others choose to take advantage of the holiness of the day through tefillah and learning Torah.

ביה"ל תפט:א .29 מ"ב תפט:סקכ"ב .28 שו"ע תפט:ד .27 מ"ב תפט:סקכ"ב .26 שו"ע ס:ד .25 גר"ש וואזנר קובץ מבית לוי בעניני ניסן עמ' פד אות ז'.31 שעה"צ סקכ"ח.30 ד"ה מונה והולך לוח א"י .35 מ"ב תצג:ס"ק יד-טו.34 יבמות סב: .33 שו"ת רע"א ס' כט ד"ה ואין, כה"ח סקכ"ח .33 אג"מ .39 שם ס"ב .39 שו"ע תצג:א.38 אג"מ ח"א ס' קנט ד"ה והנה .37 מ"ב תצג:סקט"ו .36 הליכות שלמה .43 בשם רב בלסקי .49 שלמי מועד עמ' תנג.41 מ"ב תצג:סק"ה .40 ח"ד סי' קב עיין הל' .47 מ"ב תצג:סק"ח .46 ערוה"ש תצג' פ"ב .45 הל' שלמה עמ' שסא הע' 44.53 עמ' שס שו"ת שבט .51 רמ"א תצג:ב .50 הרב נבנצל .49 רמ"א תצג:ב .48 חג בחג פ"ז סלד הע' 117 כף החיים 53.49326 אות ה'