

A New Yavneh Publication

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Obscure Halacha

How Frum are You?

By Menachem Lazar

Some of you may wonder why Prof. Cohen gets two aliyote every time we read the Torah. The short of it has something to do with the dearth of levi'im on campus. The longer answer though starts in the first psukim of our parsha: "And you shall sanctify him [the kohen] because he sacrifices the bread of God, he shall be holy to you because holy am I, God, who sanctifies you" (Leviticus 21:8). What does this mitzvah entail?

The Talmud explains that when reading the Torah, the kohen is called up first. When eating a meal, we must ask a kohen to make hamotzi and lead grace after meals. From these two examples you may think that such honors are limited to religious, ritual ones. And yet, many of the early commentators understood that this preferential treatment extends to mundane, everyday life as well. For example, Rashi and Tosfos understand that if you're sitting with a kohen at a meal with two steaks on the table, the kohen should have first choice.

The Mordechai, a 13th century German halakhist, tells a story in which a kohen poured water on the hands of Rabeinu Tam. The students of Rabeinu Tam, surprised, quoted a passage from the Jerusalem Talmud which expressly prohibits using a kohen even for mundane matters. After some discussion, Rabbi Peter, a contemporary of Rabeinu Tam, explained that although we are instructed to respect a kohen in this manner, a kohen has the ability to forgo this honor.

The Rema quotes these opinions as normative practice: "It is forbidden to use a kohen unless he forgoes his honor" (O.C. 128:45). The 17th century Polish Taz, based on other sources, limits this allowance to cases in which the kohen benefits from what he does. However, allowing a kohen to serve you in a situation in which the kohen has no personal benefit, would be forbidden, even when the kohen is "mochel" his honor. So, next time a kohen offers to mow your lawn or give you a lift, perhaps you'll remember this Taz, and instead of saying, "Thank you so much," you'll find yourself saying, "Thanks, I wish I could, but I've got this obscure halacha to keep."

Announcements

- This Friday evening, after dinner in the CJL—around 9 PM—upstairs in the CJL library, there will be Yavneh's annual Senior Shabbat Ceremony. Bewildered freshmen will present gifts to their elders, snarky juniors will offer accolades, good times will be had by all. It's a fun evening—come on by.
- Kiddush this week is sponsored by the Class of 2008. There will be ice cream!

Things to Anticipate

- Good-bye parties for the Rosses and Solomons. You'll hear about them on approximately Monday of this coming week.

Minyan Times

Friday Mincha	6:20 PM
Kabbalat Shabbat	After Mincha
Saturday Shacharit	8:45 AM
Saturday Mincha	7:35 PM
Saturday Maariv	8:46 PM

A Quick Thought

By Rabbi Yosef Goldstein

"You shall then count seven *perfect* weeks after the day following the [Passover] Holiday when you brought the Omer as an offering, until the day after the seventh week, when there will be a total of fifty days." (Vayikra / Leviticus 23:15)

Rabbi Chiya taught: "Seven *perfect* weeks" When will they be perfect? When the Jews do the will of G-d. (Medrash Rabbah 28:3) One could ask regarding this Medrash as follows. Why does the mitzvah or commandment of "Sefirah", counting the Omer, depend on one's doing the will of Hashem more so than any other commandment? Why isn't the counting of the Omer by itself enough to make the seven weeks "perfect"?

There are two answers I would like to share with you.

The K'sav V'hakabala (Written by Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, Rov of Koenigsberg) explains the Medrash by first analyzing the exact wording of the verse and through that analysis he shows that the words of the Medrash are the true meaning of the Posuk.

The K'sav V'hakabala's first question is: Why does the verse say, "count for yourselves" Why not say "Count on the day etc." What does G-d want to teach us by adding the extra word "lochem", for yourselves? He answers that it is to teach us that the commandment of counting the forty nine days between Pesach and Shavuous is not just to count the days. There is a higher purpose in counting those days, and that purpose is to elevate oneself and perfect oneself. (As he puts it, the purpose is not quantitative but qualitative.) To understand this, he points out that all throughout the Torah whenever the term "for you" (lecho) is used, it connotes a purpose meant for you.

The first place we see this is in Parshas Lech Lecho where G-d told Avrohom "Go for yourself". Rashi explains, "For you, for your own good. I will give you children in Israel, but here you can not merit having children." The same thought can be applied to most verses where the word "lecho" (for you) is used. There is no benefit for G-d in the performance of the action, rather it is done only for the person or because he needs it done. Here too, the purpose in counting is not just to know when Shavuous is coming, but rather to use those days to refine and purify oneself. The word used for counting, "vesofarto" (and you should count), connotes more than just counting. It connotes study and supervision. We are enjoined to count the days *and* perfect ourselves. (Additionally sefirah has the same root as sapphire, a clear jewel. This is the time to "shine" and refine ourselves.)

The Torah tells us to count seven "perfect" weeks. Rabbi Mecklenberg asks why does the aforementioned verse use the term "perfect", as opposed to the word "complete"? The seven weeks should be complete, a full forty-nine days. What does the Torah mean to tell us with the term perfect? With the Medrash we quoted earlier, and according to Rabbi Mecklenberg's translation of the beginning of the verse, we can understand the use of the word "perfect." If the entire purpose of counting is to perfect ourselves, and as Reb Chiya points out, they are not called "perfect" unless we do the will of G-d, then everything is very clear. When we do the will of G-d, and we work on perfecting ourselves, then we have truly fulfilled the purpose of Counting the Omer, and

the weeks can be called perfect.

Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, better known as the Dubno Maggid, gave the following explanation. Once there were two poor people who went from door to door collecting alms. They travelled together, begged together, and received equal donations from every person who was kind enough to help them. However, one of the poor people was industrious, and he scrimped and saved every penny he received, and spent as little as possible. Every time he saved a few pennies, he changed it into a nickel, his nickels into dimes and so on until he had dollar bills in his pocket. The other poor person was not as disciplined as his friend and he was constantly spending the money he collected. He was never able to gather enough pennies to change into nickels or dimes since he was constantly spending his money.

The same contrast can be made between a "Tzaddik", a righteous man, and a "Rosha", an irresponsible person. A Tzaddik makes every day count. Every day is full of meaningful activities. Each day is connected to the other in continuation of their service to G-d. That service ties days together making them a week. The goals accomplished over four weeks turn into an month of meaningful effort. The accomplishments of twelve months translate into a year, and so on. However, an irresponsible person does not have that continuity. He lacks a goal which connects one day to another. The Rosha truly lives from day to day. All he has is the present day. All the past days are lost! There is no continuity between the present, and the days which have past.

The same concept can be applied to the counting of the Omer. G-d commanded us to count forty-nine days between Passover and Shavuous, because it was during that period of time that the Jews purified and elevated themselves in preparation for accepting the Torah on Mount Sinai. It is during this same period of time that we are also encouraged to prepare ourselves and use this time to elevate ourselves in preparation for the Shavuous Holiday.

Therefore, just like the poor person who was able to take every single penny and combine it into a large sum of money, we are supposed to make use of every day of Counting the Omer to prepare for our acceptance and rededication to the Torah. We don't just "count" each day, we make each day "count". That is why the Medrash explains our period of counting can not be considered "perfect" unless we do the will of G-d and we make proper use of our time during these weeks.