

READING with POMERANZ

OFFICIAL POMERANZ BOOKSELLER NEWSLETTER
IN MEMORY OF THE DEE FAMILY

Sefirat HaOmer



R BENJI ELSON

Contributors

R SHMUEL PHILLIPS

JENNA MAIO, ESQ

R ARI SCHWARTZ

JEREMY PHILLIPS, ESQ

EITAN YAKHIN

R BENJI ELSON

BARLEY VS. WHEAT

In Vayikra, we are told that on the second day of Pesach – “the day after the [Pesach] day of rest” (Vayikra 23:15) – an offering of an omer of barley was brought in the Beit Hamikdash. The passage continues and tells us that after this offering was brought, a daily count was to be performed for seven complete weeks. When this forty-nine-day count was completed, a second offering was to be brought on Shavuot, this time of wheat rather than barley.

What is the meaning behind this subtle yet important difference between these two offerings? Why was each grain brought when it was? In addition, why are we told to count the days between them? And, most importantly, what can we learn from all this, today?

Let’s answer these questions, one at a time, step-by-step.

First, barley and wheat were the two main cereal staples of the Jews in the Land of Israel in ancient times. We know this from their inclusion in the list of the Seven (native and wild) Species of Israel – the others being grapes, figs, olives and dates, and pomegranates. It is often overlooked that these seven species are listed as the ‘Seven Species of Israel’ not because they were “the best” of the produce of Israel but because they were, in fact, the main part of the diet of ancient Israelites. As such, it makes sense: by bringing offerings from the two main cereal staples of our ancient diet, we are reconnecting to the fact that this food - and all sustenance - truly comes from the Source of all Life, Hashem.

However, the question still stands: Why was each commanded to be brought at the time that it was? The answer is that these offerings of barley and wheat, each brought on their respective holidays, follow the agricultural cycle of the Land of Israel. Barley ripens in the fields earlier in the year than wheat - around the same time that Pesach is celebrated. Wheat ripens later in the season, almost two months later, around the time of Shavuot.

The Torah, in fact, tells us this explicitly at the end of its narrative of the Plague of Hail in Egypt: “Now the flax and barley were ruined [by the Hail], for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud, but the wheat and the emmer [spelt] were not hurt for they ripen later [in the year]” (Shemot 9:31-32). As such, these two offerings were

connected to the harvest season: each was brought at the time that it was ripe and ready to harvest; barley in the spring and wheat in the early summer.

However, the question still stands: What's with all the counting? Why not just passively wait until we notice that the wheat in the fields is ripe and ready to harvest and then bring it as an offering? Why are we told to count each day and on the 50th day – presumably regardless of whether the wheat in the fields is actually ripe or not – bring an offering of wheat?

The answer, perhaps, is that these offerings were not only about aligning ourselves with the agricultural cycle of the Land of Israel, nor about reaffirming to ourselves and each other that our food sources are from G'd. Rather, this time period and its offerings had (and still have!) powerful spiritual ramifications about who we are as individuals, a people, and human beings.

Barely is a low-quality grain, cheap and expendable enough to use as animal fodder, which was its primary function and is still often its purpose even today. As the book of Malachim I (5:8) tells us, "Barley and hay for the horses and swift steeds" (Kings I 5:8; see also Pesachim 3b). One reason for this is that barley is harder to digest since each barley seed is enclosed in a strong hull which remains intact even during threshing. It is also a hardier plant and therefore easier to grow, making it less expensive and more expendable as animal food. Wheat, on the other hand, was a more expensive, higher-quality grain, and therefore was traditionally served only to humans. As such, on Shavuot - the holiday celebrating the receiving of the Torah and its directions on how to be good people - two loaves of wheat were offered as a waved offering, meant to both trigger and celebrate a new realization and revelation in 'becoming human'; in becoming our higher, better, truer selves.

This, too, helps answer the question of why we are told to count each day and on the 50th day – regardless of the ripened state of the majority of the wheat in the fields - bring this wheat offering. Spiritually speaking, it is during this time, with the aid of the spiritual technology of "counting each day to make each day count", that we ourselves go through a process of becoming more Human, thereby meriting to receive a new revelation of our own personal and unique purpose in this world on Shavuot. As such, we count each day as a way of taking stock of each day's growth – both of the wheat in the fields as human food and of ourselves as humans.

Yet at the same time, 'becoming more human' is a never-ending process that continues constantly for our entire lives. The reality is that there is no arriving at a 'fully ripened' state. Even so, as I often tell my therapy clients it is crucial to our happiness, growth, and well-being as humans to celebrate the 'micro-victories' in life. And so, the Torah tells us "count, watch the wheat's growth, and your own growth alongside it. But don't wait for everything in the field to be fully ripe to celebrate your existence. After 50 days – after

climbing the 50 levels of holiness – stop, take notice, and celebrate your accomplishments, no matter where they might stand at that moment. This stopping might, in fact, be one level of understanding regarding the name for Shavuot that is most used by the Sages: Chag Atzeret, the Holiday of Stopping (or pausing).

Becoming more Human is what the journey from Pesach through Sefirat Ha'Omer and, ultimately, arriving at Shavuot is all about. It is a dance that is meant to help us process and integrate our baser animalistic parts so as to incorporate them into our being and emerge as our Higher Selves. Shavuot, with its waved offering of Two Loaves of Wheat, the food item that requires the most human effort and is the end-product of countless generations of human progress and development, is a celebration of reaching that goal of becoming more Human.

In fact, we see the theme of a higher vision of individuals and society achieved through Sefirat Ha'Omer and celebrated on Shavuot spelled out in Moshe's final parting speech to the people before he dies:

You shall count off seven weeks, starting when the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall observe the Feast of Shavuot ... You shall rejoice before the Transcendent One, your G'd, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite in your communities, and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your midst, at the place where the Transcendent One, your G'd will choose to establish His name. Bear in mind that you were slaves in Egypt and take care to obey these laws. (Devarim 16:8-12)

This inclusive language of all members of society - citizen, foreigner, landowning, family-less, freeman, and slave - illustrates that the celebration of Shavuot and the consciousness that we are working and counting towards is a society of greater equality, care, concern, camaraderie, and Human-ness. In essence, Pesach, Sefirat Ha'Omer, and Shavuot are a celebration of evolving towards a society in which its individuals are truly Human.

Rabbi Benji Elson, LMSW, is a psychotherapist, educator, author, adventurer, musician, meditation teacher, and transformative experience facilitator living and practicing in Jerusalem. In these capacities, Benji has taught and led transformative experiences around the world including in cities across the US, Israel, Canada, Mexico, Turkey, Indonesia, Finland, and India.

Discover more about these ideas and many others in Rav Benji's widely popular book on Sefirat Ha'Omer titled Dance of the Omer: A Step-by-Step Guide to the Transformational Journey of Sefirat Ha'Omer. (Available at Pomerantz Bookstore!)

Rav Benji is also running an 8-week course over Pesach and Shavuot to help individuals around the world rediscover their higher, truer selves and unique missions in this lifetime. Find out more about that course and Rav Benji's work and therapy services at

www.elson-psychotherapy.com.





Freedom is a Process

HEART ♥ F THE HOLIDAY

Jenna Maio, Esq.

Why do we count the days between Pesach and Shavuos? The Nesivos Shalom teaches that the Omer helps us to continue the process of freedom which begins on Pesach and culminates in Shavuos. How so?

On Pesach, the Jewish people physically left the land of Egypt. However, the impurity of Egyptian culture was still part of us. Hashem gave us seven weeks to purify ourselves; to spiritually free ourselves from Egypt. Only then did we merit to receive the Torah at Mt. Sinai on Shavuos, which was the culmination of “Yetzias Mitzrayim.” (Leaving Egypt)

The Nesivos Shalom states so beautifully: “The attainment of ‘freedom’ encapsulates more than just a release from bondage, but more significantly, an emergence from the grip of Mitzrayim’s spiritual devastation to a state of sanctity and closeness to Hashem. This process is reactivated every year at this time, and it culminates with Shavuos- Zman Mattan Toraseinu (The time of giving of the Torah)...as Chazal state, The only one considered truly free is someone who involves himself in Torah study.”

The Omer is a special opportunity to free ourselves from our own personal Mitzrayim, from the things that are holding us back to being truly free. It is interesting that our Sages teach that only one who is involved in Torah study is truly free. However, if one is familiar with Torah study and its effect on a person, it makes sense.

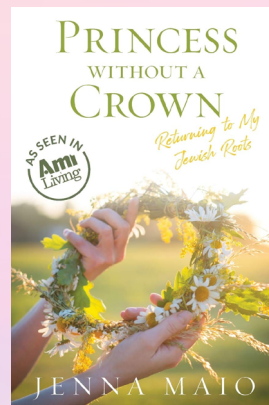
The Torah teaches us how to navigate this physical world so that we can elevate it rather than be enslaved to it. This avodah (service) necessitates a lifetime of work, but it is why we are here.

The Omer is a time when we can work on freeing ourselves spiritually from the things that enslave us. Materialism. Food addiction. Fear. Anxiety. Laziness. Whatever it is. It can feel overwhelming to try to free ourselves from things that feel so oppressive. Yet the fact that we count each day signals that this process happens step by step, day by day.

Rebbetzin Sharon Shenker a”h, one of my Rebbetzins and teachers, recently passed away tragically. Anyone who knew her can testify to her positive presence, her smile, and her sense of humor. She was not bogged down by the fear and anxiety that plagues so many of us from reaching our potential. She joyfully lived to help others and to teach Torah. She lived a life of true freedom; I saw it firsthand.

Rebbetzin Shenker helped me to overcome certain anxieties that I grappled with for years, like driving on the highway. She told me, “I want you to get on the highway, drive one exit, then get off.” I came back and told her I did it. “Good,” she said, “Now next time do two exits.”

I followed her advice and little by little, my anxiety in this area dwindled.



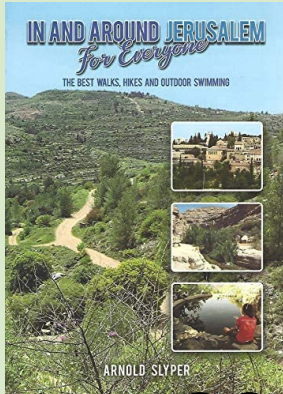
Available at Pomeranz

Her wisdom was in taking small steps; the same approach available to us now during the Omer.

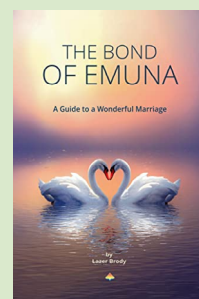
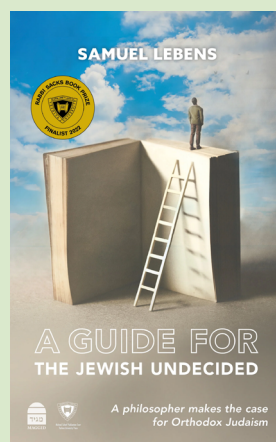
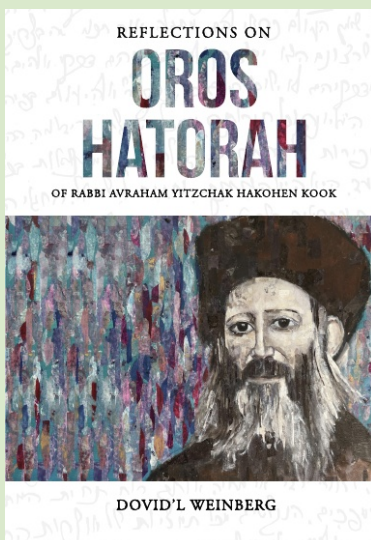
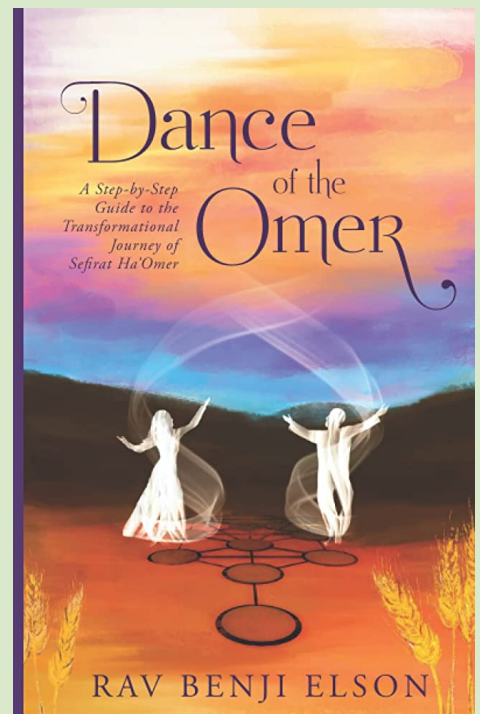
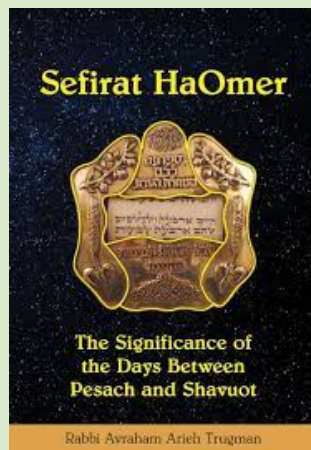
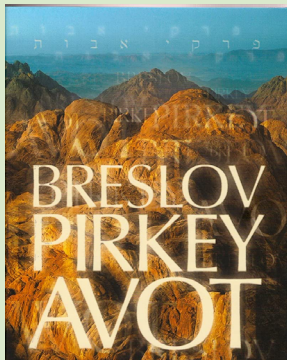
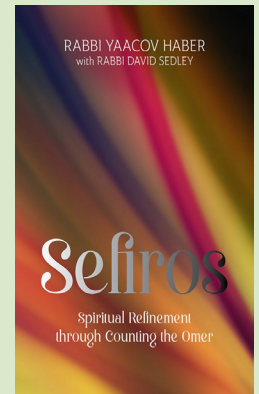
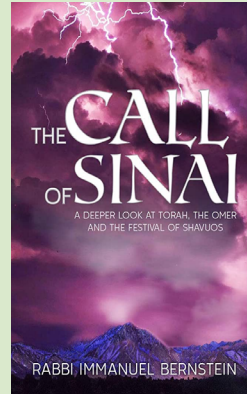
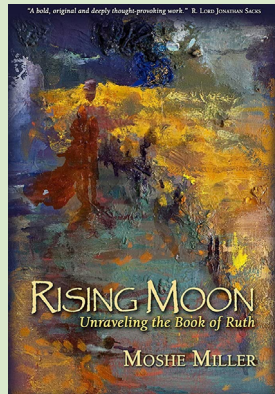
Rebbetzin Shenker loved to say, “You are capable of doing difficult things.” She was right; it is just a matter of whether we are willing to show up to do the work. The Omer is the perfect time to start. We can pick one small thing to work on, day by day, so that when we reach Shavuos, we can feel a bit freer.

*For the Aliyah neshama of
Shayna Lia bas Yehuda Zerach*

OMER CATALOGUE



~~120~~ **80**



NEW

NEW

NEW

Save 02-623-5559 in your contacts to see our status!
We regularly have EVENTS with authors and sales.

To place an order, contact 02-623-5559 or message pomeranzbooks.invoices@gmail.com



**PROGRESSING FROM PESACH:
IT'S THE TORAH THAT COUNTS**



Avot ☺ Today

Jeremy Phillips, PhD

For many of us, the lead-up to Pesach is one of the busiest and most intense periods of our year. Culminating in the retold narrative of the exodus from Egypt, the rich symbolism of the seder and often bringing family and friends together, it can make great demands on our physical, spiritual and emotional resources. Once we get through the first night, it is tempting to heave a sigh of relief and think to ourselves “Phew! We got there in the end!”

In truth we must resist this temptation. There is still a mountain to climb. Exactly seven weeks after we reach Pesach, we celebrate Shavuot, the festival that marks the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Linking Pesach to Shavuot is the mitzvah of sefirat ha'omer, when we nightly count the 49 days from our redemption to our acceptance of the Torah.

The Torah tells us the story of our emancipation from the slavery and our ascent to a level at which God deemed us fit to be His chosen people and keep His laws. But there is also a baraita in Pirkei Avot that tells us about receiving the Torah. Avot 6:6 lists no fewer than 48 things that enable us to acquire Torah. The Jewish Bible explains how we received the Torah as a nation. Pirkei Avot explains how we can receive it personally, as individuals.

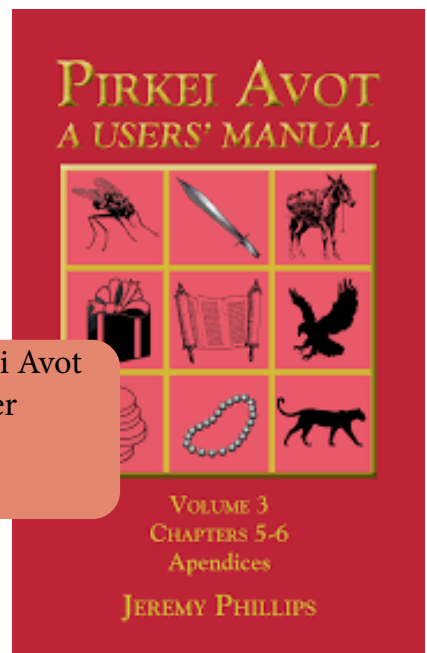
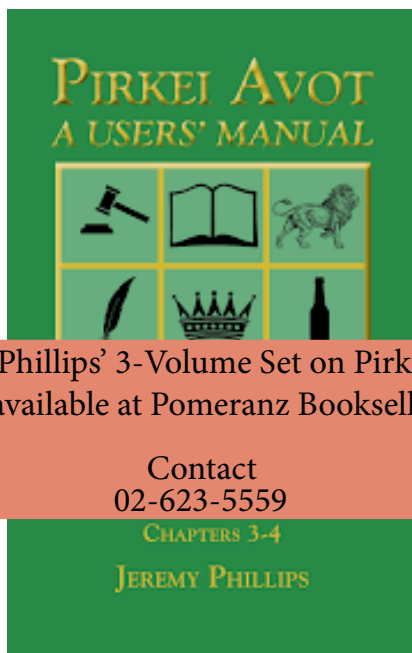
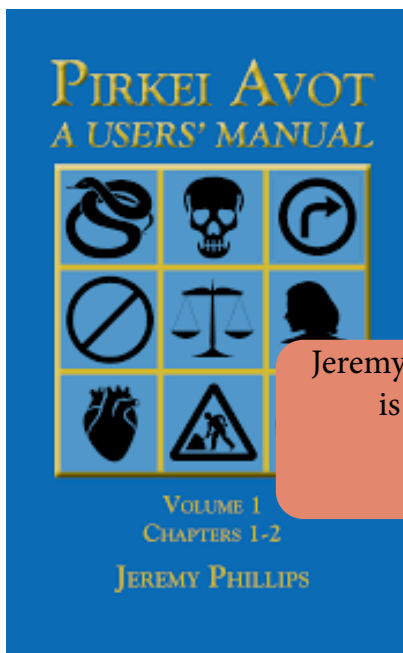
There is almost a one-to-one correspondence between the 49 days of sefirat ha'omer and the 48 means of acquiring Torah. This means that we can focus each day between Pesach and Shavuot on another way to learn, internalize or deepen our understanding of Torah. But what can we do when we reach erev Shavuot, when we

still have one day to count but there is no corresponding device for enhancing our Torah knowledge?

Happily, there is an answer.

There is something else we need to do if we are to acquire Torah thoroughly—but it's not on the list of 48. This “missing” element is chazarah, revision. Whatever we learn in Torah, once is not enough. We should go over our learning again to make sure we truly understand it. So, when Shavuot is almost upon us, we know what we must do!

Heard from Rabbi Eli Brunner, who heard it from Rabbi Elya Lopian.



Jeremy Phillips' 3-Volume Set on Pirkei Avot is available at Pomeranz Bookseller
Contact 02-623-5559

POMERANZ BOOKSTORE WOULD LIKE TO WISH EVERYONE A MEANINGFUL OMER!

The Spiritual Tool of Sefirat HaOmer



Rabbi Ari Schwartz

One of the most frustrating things a person experiences in life is when one agrees with an idea, but cannot find a way to live this idea in one's day-to-day life. A person says to oneself, "I totally agree with the idea of not getting angry, but cannot find a way to practically stop myself from getting angry." Yes, when we preach a theory, but cannot translate it into practice, we often feel like hypocrites and fakes. Yet rather than fall into despair, we must remind ourselves that the path to inner transformation includes two ingredients:

- 1) Understanding an idea.
- 2) Committing to a practical lifestyle that is based on this idea.

According to Jewish consciousness, ideas must always have a practical goal in mind. As the Gemara writes: "Great is study for it leads to action" (Kiddushin 40b).

And thus, Judaism asks a person to celebrate two very different festivals: Pesach and Shavuot.

Pesach gives one the opportunity to

understand the idea of freedom, while Shavuot is a time where one receives the Torah- a practical lifestyle that is based on the idea of freedom.

Pesach is the inspiration, Shavuot is committing oneself to a lifestyle of inspiration. Pesach is the soul, Shavuot is the body. Pesach without Shavuot is a ghost, Shavuot without Pesach is a corpse.

How can a person combine these two very different spiritual energies: the idea of freedom and the lifestyle of freedom?

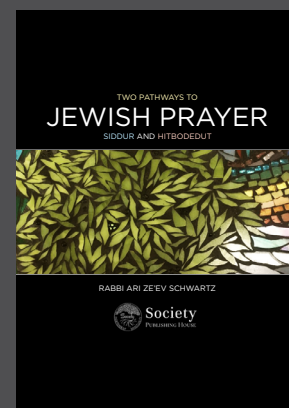
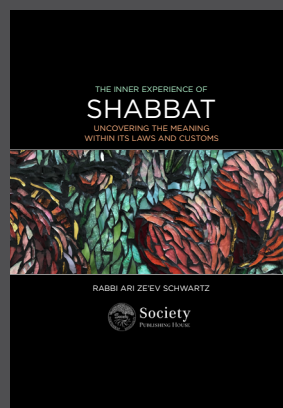
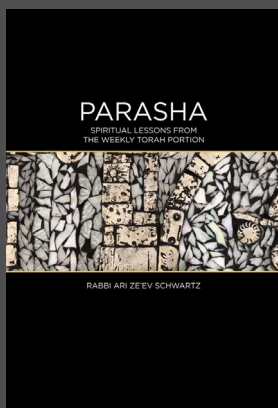
The mitzvah of Sefirat Ha Omer. The Halacha instructs a person to count every day from the second night of Pesach all the way up until the night of Shavuot. One of the spiritual goals of these forty-nine days of counting is to awaken an inner awareness that Pesach and Shavuot are intrinsically connected: ideas and practical living.

In order for the inspiration of Pesach

to transform us, we must commit ourselves to the lifestyle of Shavuot. Sefirat Ha Omer is a spiritual tool that helps a person internalize the attitude that powerful ideas cannot be divorced from day-to-day living. If a person agrees that anger is negative, then one must search for practical tools that help liberate oneself from anger.

And thus, if Pesach is about understanding the idea of freedom, and Shavuot is about committing oneself to spiritual tools that help actualize the idea of freedom, then Sefirat Ha Omer is forty-nine reminders that help a person combine Pesach and Shavuot: ideas and practical living. If Pesach is heavenly, and Shavuot is practical, then Sefirat Ha Omer is a bridge between heaven and earth.

May we be blessed to experience Sefirat Ha Omer as a bridge between Pesach and Shavuot



"Moshe Received the Torah "from" Sinai

Many Mefarshim point out the same oddity: Pirkei Avot starts off by saying "Moshe kibel torah m'sinai". For some reason, it says Moshe received Torah FROM Sinai. As the Maharal notes, it should say "Moshe received the Torah AT Sinai", or maybe "Moshe received the Torah from Hashem." The answer the Netivot Shalom gives is incredible:

Sinai was the lowliest and most humble of the mountain, and therefore qualified in Hashem's eyes to be the place of receiving the Torah. Moshe too, similarly, was considered the humblest of all men, and therefore was understood to be fit to receive the Torah. So when Pirkei Avot tells us Moshe received the Torah FROM Sinai, what it is really saying is that Moshe received the Torah on account of

his humility and self-nullification.

Our first bite into the matzah on the Seder night was the first step in a process of humility and nullification that will culminate in the coming holiday of Shavuot, bringing us to our own states of *aizn*. Matzah, being flat, represents humility and self-effacement. Eating it set us on our journey of refinement.

Throughout the Omer, we count each day, teaching us patience. We learn Pirkei Avot each week, improving our character. We meditate on sefirot in order to better emulate our creator.

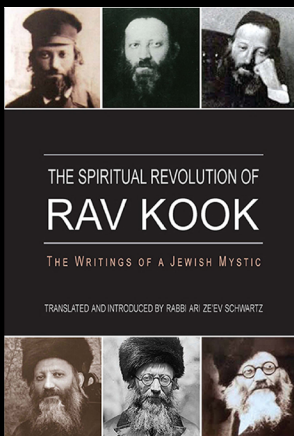
We avoid music, and observe various mourning rites as a reminder of those we have lost, not because we didn't love them, but because we didn't respect them.



During the Omer, We have unique opportunities to be forgiving, to be strong, to exemplify beauty, to be victorious, to make allowances, to strengthen our foundations, and to be open to receiving.

It is critical that these weeks are not squandered.

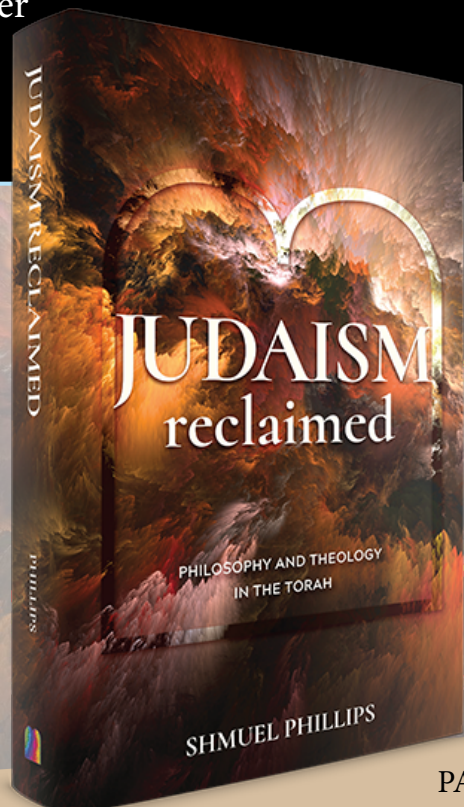
May it be Hashem's will that as we move closer and closer to Malchut She'B'Malchut, he brings upon us Malchut Beit David and an everlasting peace upon this world.



The MUST-READ
Introduction to
Rav Kook's Teachings
Available at Pomeranz Bookseller

The Best-Selling Sefer by
Rabbi Shmuel Phillips:

Available in Israel
exclusively at Pomeranz.



Thank you to
R Benji Elson,
R Trugman,
and
R Dovid'l Weinberg for
the amazing
Rosh Chodesh Nissan
Panel
at Pomeranz.



Sefira: What are We counting for?



Light & Depth with

Rabbi Shmuli Phillips

On what day was the Torah given? On what date do we celebrate the festival of Shavuot? Seemingly simple questions, yet ones for which the Torah's text provides no clear answer.

In a fascinating passage, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that Shavuot is unique among all biblical festivals in that no calendar date is prescribed for it – rather, it is observed seven weeks from the omer offering which was brought on the second day of Pesach. Combining a selection of Talmudic traditions and calculations, Rav Hirsch demonstrates that the Torah was most likely to have been given on the 51st day after the Exodus. As noted by the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 494) the 50th day from the *omer* is in fact the day BEFORE the Lawgiving – which the Torah identifies as having taken place on the sixth or seventh day of the third month.

On this basis, the day that is elevated to a festival is NOT the day of the Sinai revelation, but rather the final day of counting leading up to that great day. This indicates that the 'festival of Matan Torah' does not relate to the actual giving of the Torah; it celebrates our making ourselves

worthy of receiving it.

This insight into the nature of the festival of Shavuot provides us with a greater understanding of the commandment of Sefirat HaOmer, through which we count the days each year in between Pesach and Shavuot. Jewish tradition depicts the nation as having undergone a significant transformation during this seven-week period – from the 49th level of impurity to a level on which they could nationally perceive God's communication to Moshe at Sinai. This process of purification is indicated by the number seven, which is the number of days which the Torah always requires in order to regain purity. (The Torah emphasises that the count consists of 7x7 – seven weeks not just 49 days). As well as achieving this national purity, we are also taught that the Israelites reached a level of perfection in their interpersonal relationships. Rashi comments that they encamped at the mountain "like one person with one heart" – a highly-impressive display of national unity.

This transformative process, which culminated in them camping, pure and united, at the base of Mount Sinai, it what we celebrate as a festi-

val. It is the conclusion of this same seven-week period which both determines the date of the celebration, and accounts for the name "Shavuot" by which the festival is commonly known.

The period of Sefirat HaOmer, meanwhile, instils within our consciousness that such a national achievement is not reached without considerable work. Traditionally, the 49 days of the Omer are associated with the 48 ways in which the Torah is acquired (Avot 6:6) – prompting us to re-enact our ancestors' religious awakening during these weeks in the desert. And the Omer period is also a reminder for us of the importance of maintaining mutual respect for one another as we seek to learn from the fate of Rabbi Akiva's students who died during this period.

May it be God's will that our nation can excel in purifying and unifying ourselves during the Omer weeks this year, and that through this merit we should witness the rebuilding of the Mikdash and the coming of Mashiach.

Follow @pomeranzbooks on Instagram for more Pomeranz content!

Like what you've seen? Contact ethan@easyak.com for details on sponsoring the next printing of 'Reading with Pomeranz' in honor of a loved one.