

Counting The Omer

For this project I chose the mitzvah of Counting the Omer. I chose this mitzvah because I have always observed it without knowing why and I wanted to make the experience more meaningful for myself. My mitzvah is a mitzvah bein adam lamakom because it helps us mark the time of when God guided us from Egypt to Mount Sinai in 49 days.

Some questions I had before I started this project were, what is the Omer, why do we count the Omer, why do we count it at this particular time of year, and why are the countings of the weeks and the days of the Omer not two different mitzvot? To answer this question I used Rashi, Sefer Hachinuch, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and Sefer Haagadah. All of these sources helped me to complete my research.

One of the Guiding research questions was what did my sources think the Mitzvah was. My first source was Rashi. Rashi to answer this question first states a midrash. The midrash says that we must give the Omer offering every single day of the Omer for fifty days. Then Rashi gives an interpretation that instead we count for fifty days. Sefer Hachinuch said that the mitzvah is the mitzvah of the Omer offering from the fields on the second day of Pesach. My third source Kitzur Shulchan Aruch was my only source that said the mitzvah was to count the Omer. It said the mitzvah was to count seven full weeks from the day that you bring the Omer offering. Sefer Haagadah did not give an answer to this question. Lastly, I think that the mitzvah is the mitzvah to count seven full weeks every night when we can see the stars. Overall most of my sources think that the mitzvah has to do with the Omer offering.

Another one of our guiding questions was when we observe the mitzvah. Rashi says that when the text says from the morrow of the sabbath, it means after Yom Tov. Sefer Hachinuch says that we must offer the Omer on the second day of Pesach as an additional offering to the Musaf offering. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch had a very elaborate answer, it says that we should start counting from the sixteenth of nissan in synagogue when you can see the stars. It also says that if you blessed before the stars appeared you count later at night with no brachah. Sefer Haagadah says that we should observe it on the night following the first night of Pesach. I think that we should observe it on the second night of Pesach until Shavuot. Every night you should count when you can see the stars. No one is exempt from this mitzvah, but everyone must count for themselves. Overall my sources had very interesting opinions as to when we observe this mitzvah. I agree the most with Kitzur Shulchan Aruch.

One of the other guiding questions was very similar to one of my research questions. The question was why do we observe this mitzvah. Rashi says that we observe the mitzvah because the Torah commands us to count for seven full weeks. Then on the fiftieth day we give the Omer offering. Sefer Hachinuch approaches it in a very different way. It approaches it with a simple “because we are obligated to give the offering.” I think that we should observe this mitzvah because God commanded us to and it is a way of remembering and thanking God for bringing us to mount Sinai. I find the different opinions as to why we observe this mitzvah to be very interesting.

The last guiding question was how do we observe the mitzvah. Rashi says that we observe the mitzvah by counting for seven full weeks. Sefer Hachinuch says “Now this, in substance, was the minhah: Three se’ah of barley would be brought, and out of

the whole, one issaron would be taken which had been sifted through thirteen sieves.” Then it goes into a deep call and response between the high priest or kohen with the people. Sefer Haagadah says “Messengers of the High Court used to go out on the day before Passover and tie the unreaped stand of barley grain in bunches to make it easier to reap.” This is talking about the preparation for the Omer offering. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch says that we must all count for ourselves and no one can count for anyone else. I think that we should count every night when we can see the stars and we must make a bracha and then count the weeks and the days. Overall my sources had a lot to say about this question.

I think overall my experience of observing this mitzvah in a different way has been a very meaningful experience. Because I have always observed this mitzvah my goal has been understanding why I observe it and to make it more meaningful. As I said in my journal entry I think I am fulfilling the mitzvah in a whole different way. I think that I am doing a better job of observing it. If I know what I am doing it is more important. If I have something to pray about then my prayers will be way more meaningful. If you know what you are doing you have a different mindset. That's how I feel about observing this mitzvah. I knew that God would accept it in a different way if I knew what I was saying. It made me feel like what I was saying was important and meant something.

This mitzvah has affected and will affect my life because it has become more meaningful and I have taken the time to study and learn about it. It has taught me that if I really take time to learn something, it can become more significant and more present

in my life. It has also affected me because now when I count to the Omer it has been and will continue to be more significant.

Because I have always observed this mitzvah I think I will continue observing it in a different way than I have. Instead of running right in and doing it, I am going to stop and think and ask myself why am I doing this again? In my journal entry I said, I will review what I have learned, and will continue observing this mitzvah like I always have and will make it as meaningful as it is while I am studying it. That is exactly what I want to do. I want to be able to keep it as meaningful as it has been.

Overall, this experience has been very interesting, fun and it had an impact on me. The main goal was to make the mitzvah become more meaningful to me by learning more about it. In the end I think that I definitely accomplished that I was able to use all of this information and make it into something better. I will definitely continue to think about all of what I have learned to keep this mitzvah meaningful. It has been a great experience.

My sources were definitely a big part of my research. I think that they really helped me to at first gain a basic understanding of the mitzvah which then allowed me to understand the more complicated parts. They also were very helpful with my journal entries and my main goal of making this mitzvah more meaningful to me. They also gave me some background research for my research question. Overall they helped me gain a much better understanding of the mitzvah as a whole.