

Mesilah



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SHAVUOS

The Significance of Counting

Rabbi Shmuel Zev Lev



מצוה למימני יומי ומצוה למימני גמרא tells us שבועי – there is a mitzvah to count days and a mitzvah to count weeks. This is found in the *posuk*: וספרתם לכם...שבע שבתות תהיינה...הספרו. חמשים יום. - You shall count 7 full weeks... you shall count 50 days. This leads to the question, what is the significance of both counting systems, the weeks and the days. Surely if the point of counting is to determine the date of שבועות, one counting would be enough?

To answer this, let us examine 2 differences between the 2 counting systems. We count from the 2nd day פסח up until שבועות on day 50, 49 counted days later. Meaning that in the counting of weeks, the purpose is to count 7 weeks - 7 groups of 7 totalling 49. However, in the counting of days the focus is to count 50 days. True we don't actively count day 50 in any counting, but the *posuk* refers to the end result of שבועות as day 50, not just 'the day after day 49'. Another difference is the wording of the *posuk* - וספרתם לכם\הספרו. In the counting of weeks, the Torah refers to the counting as a personal mitzva - לכם. The daily count however seems to not be so, it just says תספרו, "you shall count".

This implies that the 7 weeks are counted לכם, for our own purpose, as an עבודה of personal perfection and purification to lead us up to the day after we have completed the 7 weeks. But day 50 is not the end result, rather the completed 7 weeks themselves. This part is our input and responsibility, our preparation for the special day of receiving the Torah. However, day 50 is not included, it is above and beyond our efforts and input. It is the day of receiving the Torah that was given to us by ה'קב above and beyond our direct efforts.

The גמרא tells us, לא יגעתו ומצאתי אל תאמין, יגעתו ומצאתי תאמין - if one does not toil over Torah but claims that he has understood nonetheless, do not believe him. Rather he who toils and does find understanding in his learning, believe him, because the only way to achieve understanding in Torah learning is by toil and hard work. The Vilna Gaon points out that it is interesting to note that the

reference the
גמרא gives
to one's

understanding of Torah is as a מציאה - a discovery, something he had not expected previously. In his toil to understand his learning he did not anticipate a discovery quite as great; his comprehension contains an element of surprise, as he will grasp concepts deeper and above his own hard work.

The idea here is the same. The Torah is the word of Hashem that we cannot access *through* our own efforts. Rather we *receive* it after we have gone through the correct process that is necessary. After 7 weeks of preparation it gets given to us on day 50, the day after we have finished our active preparation. We toil, but the end result is found.

כי ד' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה, from His mouth is knowledge and understanding!

The Power of a Small Deed

Rabbi David Szejhauer



Every *mitzvah* and small act brings us closer to the creator and influences not only ourselves but also the whole world.

The *Gemara* in *Succah* writes that at three times the Torah was forgotten and again remembered and given again: first in the time of Ezra, then in the time of Hillel Habavli, and then in the time of Reb Chia. Asks the *Ritva*, we do not see in any source that the Torah was forgotten at the time of Reb Chia, all the more so judging by the fact that Rabbeinu Hakadosh (known as Rebbe in the Talmud) and his disciples lived at this time!? Answers the *Ritva*, a law in *Hilchot Tummah* (laws of purity and impurity) was remembered and taught through Reb Chia and his students, and whoever helps to ensure that a Halacha is not forgotten is considered as if the whole Torah had been handed down in his generation.

Reb Chia taught a Halacha on *Tumma* laws that in the eyes of many are not very relevant and yet our Sages tell us that for this alone it is as if the Torah was given in that generation. Many times we can ask ourselves, what is the importance of a certain Halacha, or we could say "I have already studied one or two halachot so why read one more?" Each Halacha, each *mitzvah* is of great importance, no matter what the circumstances are around us.

Everyone remembers the tragic incident in Miron on Lag BaOmer two years ago, where 45 people died in a terrible manner. One of the people who passed away was an acquaintance of mine, Menachem Zagbach z"l. Menachem always made a big effort that he would only make *Birkat Hamazon* from inside a *siddur* and not recite it by heart. So much so that at the Shiva they distributed *birkonim*, *le'ilui nishmato*.

One of his neighbors was a *Sofer* who had begun his writing career, but his writing wasn't very good so he couldn't find many customers. When he went to visit the Zagbach family he heard how the young man always made *Birkat Hamazon* with a *siddur* to such an extent that he wouldn't start eating if he didn't know that there was a *siddur* available to be used. After returning to his office, this *Sofer* ate his sandwich and was about to recite *Birkat Hamazon*, but he remembered the stories he heard from his neighbor and told himself that he is going to recite using a *siddur*, but he had none with him. After searching for a few minutes he found a book in which *Birkat Hamazon* was written, but the font used was the font we use when writing a *Sefer Torah*. He looked at the letters and he liked the style so he started copying them, this time writing on parchment, and he wrote the whole *Birkat Hamazon* this way.

At the end of that very same day a friend knocked on his door and said to the *Sofer*, "a very rich person in the United States called Friedman wants to donate 45 Sifrei Torah in memory of the people who died in Miron and he is looking for some scribes; do you have any samples of your work for me to show him? At that moment he remembered the *Birkat Hamazon* that he wrote by copying the *Birkat Hamazon* from the book and gave it to him as a sample of his work. The rich man liked his work very much and asked him to write one of the Sifrei Torah, (a task that brings a significant income to the *Sofer*) asking that this be *le'ilui nishmat* the young Menachem Zagbach z"l.

We see that the seemingly small act that he took upon himself in doing *Birkat Hamazon* from a *siddur* had such a great effect in the Heavens that it helped him to be chosen to write a *Sefer Torah*. The deed brought both him merit, and further merit for the *neschama* of the righteous Jew who had inspired him in the first place.



The First Minute of Silence

A Shavuot Poem by Rabbi Yossi Krausz



Gone was the usual leafy rustle,
Stillness seized every tree or sprout
There was no vehicle no engines hum,
The world went eerie soundless.

The wild refrained roar or grunt,
The tame swallowed a cry or grumble,
No fowl produced no howl,
No bird a sweet soft chirp.

Creation bowed a humble silence,
The people stood in frozen awe,
Struck by earth's majestic splendour,
By the heavens and its splendid grandeur.

Overwhelmed by blatant divinity,
For all distraction was void,
Silence emanated a piercing cry,
"I am G-d your L-rd!"

It was not just words spoken,
But a reality blasting forth,
For when all commotion is shunned,
It just cannot be ignored.

But now the noise is back,
Distraction here to escort,
Who can hear the cry "Creator,"
Which fuels all that we know.

But inside us we access silence,
We can cancel out all the noise,
And then we will truly encounter,
G-d Who is the L-rd.

HALACHA

Birchas Hatorah (on Shavu'os)

Rabbi Ephraim Arnstein



Birchas haTorah consists of two *brachos* which we say daily (before *Shacharis*). Generally, these cover any learning we do throughout the day, meaning that any time during the day or the following night that we sit down to learn, we would not have to say these *brachos* again.

According to a number of opinions it is a *chiyuv min haTorah* (Biblical obligation) to make the blessing before learning; it therefore carries additional stringencies with it.

While reciting the first *bracha* which is '... *la'asok bedivrei Torah...*' we should have in mind and pray that our children follow the ways of the *Torah* and become *Talmidei Chachamim*. The *Tur* writes that when saying the *bracha* 'Asher Bachar Banu...' we should visualize the event of *Mattan Torah*, and concentrate on how *Hashem* has chosen us and gave us His precious *Torah*.

For many people who observe the custom of staying up all of *Shavu'os* night learning, and then *daven Shacharis*, the following question arises:

Can one recite *birchas haTorah* in the morning after having been awake the entire night?

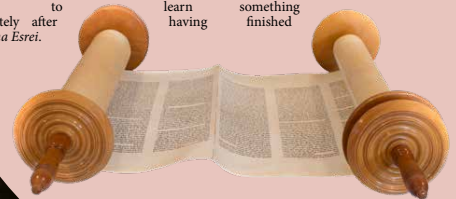
The *Chayei Adam* writes that one does not need to. He maintains that the *birchas haTorah* of the previous morning is still 'valid', since there was no interruption of sleep.

The *Magen Avraham* is of the opinion that one does have the obligation to say *birchas haTorah*, because the *Chachamim* instituted that it should be said daily (in the morning), regardless of whether one slept or not.

Being subject to a *machlokes*, the *Mishna Berurah* writes that the rule of *safek brachos lehakel* should be followed. Which means: when in doubt if a *bracha* ought to be said, we should act with leniency and not say it.

He does conclude, however, that if possible, one should find a person who did go to sleep that night and listen to him saying *birchas haTorah*, then answer *Amen* to their *bracha* and learn something immediately thereafter. This way it is as if he said it himself without actually needing to do so.

Another option is that when reciting '*ahavah rabba*' (before *Shema*) one should have in mind that it should act as a form of *birchas haTorah* (as the theme of this *bracha* is about the mitzvah of learning Torah) and then to learn something immediately after having finished *Shemona Esrei*.





The Study of Torah

Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klyne

One of the novelties of the Sefer Hachinuch is that besides counting out each *mitzvah* and reaching six hundred and thirteen¹, in addition, on each *mitzvah* he writes a 'reason' for the commandment. It goes without saying that the full reasoning for *mitzvois* is beyond our comprehension for they are rooted in a realm that pre-empts the existence of man and the world, which is why many other authors abstained from creating such a Sefer. Still, the Sefer Hachinuch found some relatable reasons which give us a taste of the *mitzvah* and connect us to it. For the *mitzvah* that I wish to discuss here, we will try expound on both elements from the Sefer Hachinuch: the *mitzvah* itself and the reasoning.

In honour of Shavuot when we celebrate the Giving of the Torah we will discuss the *mitzvah* of Learning Torah about which we say each morning 'v'salmud Torah k'neged kulam' – 'and the study of Torah stands more important than all (the *mitzvois*).'

The Active Obligation

The Sefer Hachinuch splits the *mitzvah* into two parts, 1) To learn about all the *mitzvois* in order to know what they are and how to perform them and likewise what is prohibited to do with all its details². 2) To study the laws of the Torah and see the truth within the laws. This part is not strictly 'to know what to do' but rather to possess a grasp on the concepts of the Torah. This may include the study of sections of Torah which might never be applicable to the person studying, for example, the laws of Kohanim if the person is a Yisroel.

The second component is brought as an addition, making the first appear to be the primary one. This makes sense because, as we've mentioned, without knowing what the *mitzvois* are and how to carry them out, the Jew is not functioning properly. In addition, the Gemara relates that Torah study which brings about the performance of *mitzvois* is of great value. It is worth pointing out however that the language used by the Sefer Hachinuch when stating the *Mitzvah* is '*chochmas haTorah*' – 'the wisdom of Torah'. When studying a law book one can simply accumulate the knowledge of the laws until he knows 'the rules' – what to do and what not to do. Would that be considered 'wisdom'? Torah is different; even when we are studying the laws in part one of the *mitzvah*, (sometimes seemingly dry facts) we are always incorporating the infinite wisdom within.

Understanding the Mitzvah

'The only way to Know Hashem and His ways is through the study of Torah' states the Sefer Hachinuch. He goes on with sharp words that one who never studies Torah becomes like an animal, for even if he is performing the *mitzvois* he has not got the tools to lift himself from his human state to the state of the Jew and as is written by many, when a Jew falls, he falls lower than a non-Jew, falling to an animal-like state, hence the reference to animals.

The Torah is largely made up of Hashem's Commandments. When getting to know someone the most meaningful stage is when you know what the person wants – what does he want to achieve in life. When a person performs an act that is self-motivated, at the root of that act is his will. Likewise with Hashem, His Commandments are expressing His will. When we received the Torah, we became privy to the study of His will. When we study His Will, we know Him better and better.

Good Yom Tov.

¹ Which is no easy task – which *mitzvois* to include and which to exclude from the list to reach the exact figure is a vast discussion between the *Rishonim*.

² One may ask on this, surely this part of the *mitzvah* is superfluous for even if I was not commanded to study the laws of the Torah, I would have to do so regardless in order to know how to perform the *mitzvos*? The answer to this is simple. Were it not for the specific commandment to learn about the *mitzvois*, I could have asked a Rabbi what to do; why do I need to know the detail myself?!

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