



Keviyut

of the Yom Tov of Shavuot

There are two *parshiot* in the Torah that mention *Sefirat HaOmer*, and there is a significant difference between them. In *Parshat Emor*, the Torah says וספרתם לכם ... ממחרת השבת – “You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Rest Day ... you shall count 50 **days**” (Vayikra 23:15-16). In *Parshat Re’eh*, we read, שבעה שבועות – “Seven **weeks** you shall count for yourself” (Devarim 16:9).

Rav Soloveitchik noted an additional distinction between these two *parshiot*, aside from whether the unit of time to be counted is days or weeks. They also differ in terms of whether the *mitzvah* is directed to *Bnei Yisrael* in the singular or in the plural form. We can understand this in light of a *Beraita* cited in the *Gemara* (Menachot 65b), which appears more fully both in the *Sifra* (Emor) and in the *Sifrei* (Re’eh): “Seven weeks you shall count for yourself” – in *Beit Din HaGadol*. And from where do we derive [the obligation of *sefirah*] on each individual? The Torah states, “You shall count for yourselves” – [the *sefirah* must be performed] by each and every individual.

The basis of this *drasha* is a rule quoted in the name of the Vilna Gaon (*Divrei Eliyahu*, p. 94). Whenever a *mitzvah* is repeated in the Torah, once in the singular and once in the plural, the singular form is addressed to *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, while the plural form devolves upon the individual. In the case of *Sefirat HaOmer*, the *Beit Din HaGadol*, which represents *Klal Yisrael* as a whole, fulfills the obligation upon the **single** unit of *Klal Yisrael* when it counts the seven

weeks from Pesach until Shavuot. The purpose of this *sefirah* is to be *kovea* (establish) the correct day of the Yom Tov of Shavuot. As such, it is part of the more general *mitzvah* of *keviat haLuach* (establishing the calendar), which is the responsibility of the *Sanhedrin*. A second aspect of the *mitzvah*, reflected in its being repeated in the plural form, is directed to each and every individual, who should engage in a count of days during this time.

Based on this analysis, the Rav explained why the Torah calls the Yom Tov by the name שבועות – the “Festival of Weeks” – and not חג הֵחֳמִישִׁים – the “Holiday of the 50th Day.” It is because the component of *sefirah* that is *kovea* the Yom Tov is not the counting of days by each individual, but rather the counting of **weeks**, which *Beit Din* performs as part of their mandate to take responsibility for *keviat haLuach*.

The *Rambam* (*Hilchot Temidin UMussafin* 7:24) includes the counting of days and weeks in the *mitzvah d’oraita* of *sefirah*, even nowadays. If, as we have seen, the *sefirah* of weeks is a *mitzvah* on the *Beit Din HaGadol*, how could that *sefirah* be *d’oraita* nowadays, when we lack the presence of a *Beit Din HaGadol*?

Rav Soloveitchik explained (*Shiurim LeZecher Abba Mari z”l* I, pp. 129-131, 137-139; *Kovetz Chiddushei Torah*, pp. 52-56) that when the *Rambam* holds that *Kiddush haChodesh* requires the authorization of the *Sanhedrin* (*Sefer HaMitzvot, Aseh* 153; *Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:1-2), it is not in their capacity as the Supreme Court of the Jewish people, rendering the

final legal decision on any halachic question. The Rav explained that *Kiddush haChodesh* does not necessarily involve a complicated *psak halacha*, requiring the greatest legal minds of the Jewish nation. The necessity of the involvement of the *Sanhedrin* here is due to its second role – its decision represents the majority opinion of the Jewish nation. In this sense, the *Sanhedrin* fills a role akin to that of the Congress in the United States.

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The Rav elaborated by explaining that the responsibility of *keviat haLuach* ultimately rests upon the entity of *Klal Yisrael*. When there is a *Beit Din HaGadol*, it performs this task as the representative of *Klal Yisrael*. Accordingly, we understand that when the *Beit Din HaGadol* ceases to exist, the responsibility of *keviat haLuach* shifts back to *Klal Yisrael*. This is the basis of the *d’oraita* obligation, according to the *Rambam*, to count days and weeks. The counting of weeks by *Klal Yisrael* accomplishes the *keviat Yom Tov* of Shavuot even in the absence of a *Beit Din HaGadol*. [See *Eretz HaTzvi*, pp. 9-14, 231.]

Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Moadim.

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