

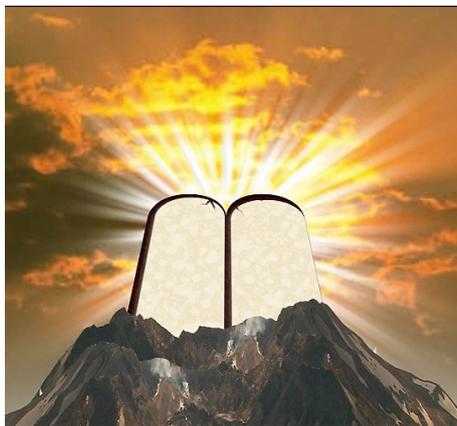
Setting the Stage

The Sefat Emet tells us that our entire spiritual year is dependent on the days of *Sefirat HaOmer*. Just as our physical sustenance is determined during this wheat harvesting period, so our spiritual sustenance is set during these weeks. If our lives are dependent on this *mitzvah*, shouldn't it involve a lot more than just a minute or so of a short liturgy? Obviously more is hidden beneath the surface.

What is the power of *Sefira* that gives us the ability to make ourselves pure and whole again? We find that Shavuot is the only holiday that has a Torah-mandated period of preparation. There is something very pivotal embedded in these weeks. Our counting during *Sefira* expresses our yearning for *Matan Torah*. The actual counting leaves an imprint on our soul and opens a pathway of desire to acquire the Torah in our hearts. The holiday of the giving of the Torah is called Shavuot – weeks, because our efforts determine how we will experience the holiday. We will receive the Torah in a more meaningful way only with the proper preparation.

In the Haggadah we read, אילו קרבנו לזהר סיני דיינו, “If You had brought us close to Sinai it would have been enough.” The Alshich and the Shelah explain that the process of purification and preparation was so precious, that if G-d would not have given us the Torah, it would have been enough.

Each year, in our individual and collective lives, we relive the experience of coming closer to G-d. Torah and *mitzvot* are not just knowledge and good deeds, but a catalyst for transformation. It is about making us into better people and bringing us nearer to His presence. The preparation of *Sefira* is bringing ourselves to a level of appreciating the greatness of



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Torah and awakening within ourselves a yearning for *deveikut baHashem*.

Shavuot is the ‘*Yom HaDin*’ of our *ruchniyut*. It is a time to take a good hard look at our spiritual state and ask ourselves, “Is this all I’ve achieved? What am I capable of?” It is a time to look at the disparity of who we are and what we can be if only we desire it enough. Not only is *Sefirat HaOmer* a time to work on respecting our fellow Jews; it is also a time to sensitize ourselves to *kavod haTorah*.

During the building of the Mishkan, G-d said, ובלב כל חכם נתתי חכמה, “I have given wisdom in the hearts of all the wise

people.” Rav Nebenzhal explains that G-d gives wisdom only to those who have the wherewithal to hold onto it, otherwise it is a wasted investment.

The way to guard our Torah is through working on our *middot*. That is why the first *omer* sacrifice was barley, an animal food. It was meant to teach us to subdue our animalistic desires and evil traits.

Rav Pincus says that in G-d’s lexicon, a “day” hints to *yichud Hashem* – oneness of G-d, similar to the very First Day of Creation, when there was no other reality except G-d. The 49 days of *Sefira* are about reminding ourselves that each day must be completely dedicated to *yichud Hashem*, to feeling G-d’s presence at every moment in our lives.

When we count each day, we must ask ourselves, “What am I doing to make this day different?” By counting upwards, we show that each day is one of building and working towards the goal of becoming a fitting receptacle for Torah.

Sefira is called שבוע שבתות, seven Shabbatot. Shabbat is the source of blessing. The Sefat Emet tells us that every day of *Sefira* carries a vestige of Shabbat, and G-d gives us injections of *kedusha* to help us come close to Him. If we are successful in arousing ourselves out of our apathy, these days become a model of holiness for the entire year. When we recite the *beracha* of *Sefirat HaOmer* it should inspire us to feel more sanctity and to strive for greater heights. When we say *hayom yom...* we must think about committing ourselves to live that day in the best possible way.

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