

THE KTM DAF PARASHA

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TORAH תורה
מִצִּיּוֹן MITZION
KTM MONTREAL

PARASHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI
22 IYAR 5786
9 MAY 2026
CANDLE LIGHTING: 7:52 P.M.
HAVDALAH: 9:03 P.M.

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COUNTING AND GROWING

BY RAV ARI FAUST (ROSH KOLLEL)

We live in a world of outsourcing. We outsource our food, our transportation, our thinking. With the rise of AI, tasks that once required effort, creativity, and sustained attention can now be handled in seconds. AI can draft our emails, summarize our thoughts, generate our ideas. We listen to podcasts about self-improvement, follow curated routines, and adopt systems designed by others, hoping that if we just plug ourselves into the right framework, we will somehow become better. But beneath this remarkable efficiency lies a deeper question: can growth itself be outsourced?

There is a subtle linguistic nuance in our parasha that opens a window into two very different models of growth. In our parasha, regarding the Yovel year, the Torah commands (Vayikra 25:8)

וְסָפַרְתָּ לְךָ שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת שָׁנִים שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שָׁבַע פְּעֻמִּים וְהָיָה לְךָ יָמֵי שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת הַשָּׁנִים תִּשְׁעָה וָאַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה

You shall count for yourself seven weeks of years - seven times seven years - so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years.

“וְסָפַרְתָּ לְךָ” - you shall count for yourself - is in the singular.

Yet when the Torah introduces Sefirat HaOmer, it says (Vayikra 23:15-16):

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּזְבַּח הַשָּׁבֹת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה: עַד מִזְבַּח הַשָּׁבֹת ... הַשְּׂבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering - the day after the sabbath - you shall count off for yourselves seven complete weeks, Until the day after the seventh week - fifty days...

“וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם” - you shall count for yourselves - this is in the plural. In contrast to the Yovel counting which requires only one counting, there are plural counts when it comes to Sefirat HaOmer. The Gemara (Menachot 65b) famously derives from here: שְׁתֵּהָא סְפִירָה לְכֹל אֶחָד וָאֶחָד - each individual must count for themselves.

Why the difference? Why does Sefirat HaOmer demand such radical individualization, while Yovel is framed as a more collective count? Moreover, according to many authorities (see Mishna Berura 489:5), one cannot discharge their mitzvah by listening to another person count as we often can in other mitzvot. There is no outsourcing Sefirat HaOmer - and the question is why?

To answer this, we need to understand what counting really is. Counting, in the Torah's language, is not merely technical. It is not about tracking time - it is about transforming time. The act of sefira is an act of preparation, of growth, of becoming. It is the deliberate process of drawing out inner capacities that had not yet been manifest.

This is why we count up, not down. If counting were simply anticipation, like a countdown to an event, we would count backwards. But that is not how the Torah teaches us to count. Instead, each day is another step forward, another layer added, another dimension uncovered. It is less like a countdown and more like a disciplined process - a training regimen, or even a diet - where each day builds upon the previous one.

The word “ספירה” itself hints to this deeper meaning. It echoes the word “אבן ספיר”, a sapphire gemstone. A stone does not become beautiful instantly. It must be cut, polished, refined. Only then does its brilliance emerge. The beauty was always there - but hidden, latent, waiting to be revealed through effort and precision.

So too with sefira. It is the polishing of the self. Each day is another stroke, another refinement, another exposure of the inner light that had not yet been visible.

And this explains why Sefirat HaOmer must be individual. You cannot outsource growth. You cannot ask someone else to become you. To refine your character. To unlock your potential. In many mitzvot, there is a concept of shomea ke'oneh - hearing is like responding. One person can recite Kiddush, and others fulfill their obligation through listening. But sefira is not about recitation. It is about transformation. And transformation cannot be delegated.

Each person must count because each person must grow.

In this sense, Sefirat HaOmer is profoundly subjective. It is about discovering one's own inner landscape, one's own strengths, one's own resistance, one's own capacity for development. Sefirat HaOmer is growth that is internalized, lived. It is not about checking a box; it is about becoming a different person.

And here we return to the contrast with Yovel.

Yovel also involves counting - seven cycles of seven years, culminating in the fiftieth year. But the Torah frames this counting differently:

“וְסָפַרְתָּ לְךָ” - in the singular. Chazal explain that this counting is the responsibility of the Beit Din, of the collective leadership of the nation.

Why? Because Yovel is not about individual refinement. It is about societal recalibration. Yovel resets the economic and social structure of the Jewish people. Land returns to its original owners. Slaves go free. The playing field is leveled. It is a moment of collective realignment, of restoring balance and justice to the system.

This is not a process that depends on the inner work of each individual. It is a function of the community as a whole, orchestrated through its institutions. The counting leads not to personal transformation, but to a societal reboot.

And so the language reflects the essence. Sefirat HaOmer: plural, individualized, each person counting, each person growing. Yovel: singular, centralized, collective, the nation moving as one.

Counting, then, is not about numbers. It is about direction. About movement. About becoming. Each day of the Omer asks: Who are you becoming today? Each year of the Yovel asks: Who are we becoming? Sefira teaches the responsibility placed upon us - individually and collectively. Because growth cannot be outsourced.



SHABBAT'S GREATEST HITS: BARUCH EL ELYON

BY EVYATAR KERNER

The most tragic event in our history can teach us about the way God runs the world.

In the song Baruch El Elyon, attributed to Baruch ben Samuel of Mainz (c. 1150 – 1221), we sing:

מֵאֵת פֶּל סוּכָה שׁוֹכֵן בְּעֵרְפָּל

From all who gaze upon Him who dwells in the thick darkness

Does God dwell in darkness? What does this mean? God dwells in the thick darkness, not in glowing light or clear revelation, but in a fog. He exists in something that hides, that is blurred, and does not allow us to see clearly.

The song “Baruch El Elyon” provides us with a key to understanding reality. It is not a simple answer or a philosophical explanation that settles every question. Rather, it is an objective principle, a key, a way to understand how God operates in the world.

God is in the thick darkness. He does not act openly in our world. This is why the world is called “Olam” in Hebrew, which shares the root letters with the word “He’elem,” meaning hidden. This is because God hides Himself. He does not reveal Himself clearly. He does not perform open miracles every day. He acts in concealment. He works through what appears to us as nature, as coincidence, or as history. He carries out His actions in the world through channels like people, events, and processes that lead reality toward its ultimate repair.

This does not mean God is not acting. It means He acts in a way we do not always see. He leads the world toward restoration, but not in a way that is clear to us or in a way we can immediately understand. He does this through the thick darkness.

Consider the Holocaust: The Holocaust is the thickest fog we have ever known. It was a moment when it seemed God was entirely absent, that evil had won, and that there was no justice, no leadership, and no meaning. However, the fog over reality does not deny God’s existence. It only clouds our own vision and our ability to see eternity, the future, and the restoration that is taking shape.

For what happened after the Holocaust? After the darkest fog? The State of Israel was established. A nation that survived the impossible, that went through hell, recovered. Not only did it recover, it established a state. It built homes. It raised children. It continued. The world, which thought it could erase the People of Israel, was proven wrong. The nation lives. The nation continues. The nation builds.

This does not explain the pain. It does not justify the loss. But it demonstrates how restoration occurs even through the darkness. It shows that God leads the world forward even when human choices attempt to lead otherwise, even when it looks to us like absolute darkness.

“He who dwells in the thick darkness” — God dwells in the fog. Not absent. Not far. He dwells. He is present. He is acting. But He does so in a way we do not always understand, in a way that requires faith,

trust, and the understanding that the big picture is larger than what we can see right now.

This idea finds a powerful expression in the life of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Rashbi, who spent years hidden in a cave, experienced firsthand a world of darkness and concealment. Yet it is he who becomes the great revealer of the deepest light of Torah. Lag BaOmer, the day associated with his passing, is marked not by mourning but by fire and illumination. Rashbi teaches that the darkness is not empty - it is the very place where hidden light resides. “He who dwells in the thick darkness” is not distant; He is present, waiting to be revealed. The fog is not the absence of God, but the condition that demands a deeper kind of vision.

We cannot understand everything. We cannot see the full plan. We stand inside the fog, trying to understand, trying to see. But the fog does not mean no one is there. The fog means someone is there whom we cannot see clearly. Someone is acting, leading, and repairing, even when we do not understand how.

Shabbat Mission

This Shabbat, when you sing “Baruch El Elyon” and reach the line “From all who gaze upon Him who dwells in the thick darkness,” stop for a moment. Share a time when you did not understand what was happening, when everything seemed like a fog, and only later did you see how it led to a positive outcome. Try to understand together that the fog does not mean God is not there; it only means we do not yet see the full picture.

SHAVUOT ALL-NIGHT LEARNING

Shavuot Night 5786
May 21, 2026
Details to follow...

at **KTM**



HALACHIC Q&A

BY RABBI YOSEF ZVI RIMON - NASI, WORLD MIZRACHI

Question: If the bar mitzvah boy and his grandfather are both Levi'im, and we would like to call them both to the Torah, what should be done? Is it acceptable for them to receive the first and third aliyot?

Answer: I understand that the case here is during the weekday, and you would like two of the three aliyot to be the bar mitzvah boy and the grandfather.

Here are the general rules. When there is a kohen present, he must go first (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 135:3). A levi should go second, and then specifically a Yisrael must go third, as you cannot call up a levi after a levi due to concern that people may think there was a halachic issue with the first one's status. Therefore, the bar mitzvah boy and grandfather cannot get the second and third aliyot.

In this case, the bar mitzvah boy must receive an aliyah (Biur Halacha, Siman 136), and the family also wishes to honor the grandfather. We can consider this a makom tzorech (case of great need), and in such circumstances, we allow a kohen to waive his right to the first aliyah. The proper way to do this is to arrange for the kohen to leave the synagogue for the first aliyah until after the concluding beracha (Shu"t Yabia Omer O.C. 6:23).

If the kohen has left, or if there is no kohen at all, the bar mitzvah boy and grandfather may receive the first and third aliyot.

Levi receiving the first aliyah: While some opinions discourage this (lest people think he is a kohen), the Rema (O.C. 135:6) permits it, provided it is announced that he is receiving the aliyah "in place of a kohen."

Levi receiving an aliyah after another levi: This is more complex for Ashkenazim. The Rema (135:10), quoting the Maharil, records a custom not to call a kohen or levi for subsequent aliyot even if a Yisrael is called in between, due to concern that people may not hear the announcement clarifying his status. However, in a makom tzorech, one may rely on the Shulchan Aruch, which permits it when properly announced. In this case, since it is a known bar mitzvah celebration, there is less concern for confusion.

Question: Can a soldier daven when his hands are dirty but he does not have enough water to clean them fully? Can one who has not showered in days daven, even though he would not appear before a king that way?

Answer: Seeing how our soldiers strive to daven in every situation is remarkable.

Washing hands: The Biur Halacha (O.C. 92) writes that one who prayed with dirty or sweaty hands has fulfilled his obligation bedieved. Based on the principle that sha'at hadchak k'dieved dami (Mishnah Berurah 199:3), if one cannot clean himself, he may even pray lechatchila in this situation. It is still preferable to rub one's hands with something that cleans (e.g., tissues or cloth), even if not fully effective, as this removes impurity (Tehillah L'Dovid 4:24).

Showering: Ideally, one should not pray without proper cleanliness (Shabbat 50b; Mishnah Berurah 4:2). However, in pressing circumstances we again apply sha'at hadchak k'dieved dami. Even if there is body odor, we may rely on the Rambam (as explained by Kesef Mishneh), that unpleasant smell is relative to normal human standards. Since soldiers in the field are accustomed to such conditions, they may pray.

Important: This leniency does not apply if there is actual dirt or the smell of waste present - in such cases, prayer is prohibited.

Question: Can I squeeze lemons on Shabbat? If not, can I squeeze them into sugar intending to mix it into a drink?

Answer: Shu"t HaRosh writes that it is permitted to squeeze lemons, but the reasoning is unclear, and it is uncertain whether it applies today when lemons are commonly squeezed for juice in mass production.

According to Rav Ovadya Yosef, the leniency still applies (because lemon juice is considered halachically a spice rather than a beverage). However, many Ashkenazic and Sephardic poskim rule that nowadays one may not squeeze lemons into an empty vessel or directly into a drink—and this is the accepted practice.

It is, however, permitted to squeeze directly into a salad.

Shu"t Radbaz writes that he would squeeze lemons onto sugar and then add that to a liquid. The Mishnah Berurah and Ben Ish Chai rule accordingly. The Chazon Ish disagrees, arguing that since the intent is to produce a drink, this constitutes extracting a liquid from food (a forbidden act of sechitah).

Although some authorities are lenient—even permitting squeezing into an empty vessel—it is preferable to follow a stricter approach. One may rely on the Mishnah Berurah's leniency of squeezing onto sugar, but it is better to place a slice of lemon directly into the drink (ensuring the peel is cleaned well of insects), thus satisfying all opinions.

PARNESS HAYOM :: IYAR

- 3 IYAR | Mrs. Jewel Shoham and Family, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Harry Naimer z'l (Zvi ben Moshe Yosef).
- 14 IYAR | Adrienne and Shlomo Drazin, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his grandfather, Mayer Sand z"l
- 22 IYAR | Kamal Gabbay, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father, Menashi Gabbay z"l



Before it's Too Late



Daniel was really struggling with his French work. Jake noticed, but thought it would be ok...

Jake finished the work, and beginning discussing the hockey game with Simon.

In the meantime, Daniel never managed to figure out the work – the teacher scolded him...



Jake tried to help Daniel out, but he was already too frustrated to really listen.

Imagine Jake had helped Daniel right away when he noticed his friend struggling...

Daniel may have been able to learn quicker and succeed in his work!

Our parasha teaches (Vayikra 35:35) that we should help someone who becomes poor. Rashi points out that this even means helping them when they begin to fall, so that they don't become so poor that it is harder to help them later.

It's much easier to help someone before their problem becomes big than after it gets worse. The Torah teaches us to notice when someone is just starting to struggle and step in early, because small help at the right time can make a huge difference. If we wait too long, it becomes much harder to fix—but if we act early, we can really help someone succeed.