

# YOMTOV, VOL. II, # 9 - THE COUNTING OF THE OMER - OUR FOCUS

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Starting the second night of Pesach, we begin counting seven weeks, 49 days, until the holiday of Shavuos. This counting is called Sefiras Ha'Omer, The Counting of the Omer. (For more information on Sefiras Ha'Omer, see [I:16](#), [I:18](#)) This counting connects two holidays which commemorate major events in the history of the nation of Israel. Pesach commemorates our freedom from slavery and the birth of the Jewish nation. On Shavu'os, we commemorate the day on which we, as a nation, received the Torah, and became a chosen people - the people chosen to receive the Torah. The Counting of the Omer links these two events. There is clearly a significance to linking these two events. The question is what should our perspective be when trying to understand the significance and hence the focus of this link?

The question can be better understood by looking at the two linked events.

One event was a liberation, a grant of freedom and the birth of a nation. The other event was a dedication, a commitment to keeping the Torah which G-d gave to the newborn nation. The connection between these two events can be viewed in two ways. Our departure from Egypt could be viewed as the turning point in our nation's history. The nation of Israel had the yoke of slavery lifted from upon them, and they became independent and free. The giving of the Torah to the nation of Israel served as a completion or a perfection of this new status. What would a society be without a set of laws and rules that the people would live by, in order to maintain the existence of this new free nation? The Torah acted as a societal structure for the new nation, a structure which was to preserve the freedom which had been recently obtained after years of suffering and oppression.

Another way of viewing the connection between these events is by categorizing the giving of the Torah as the primary turning point in our nation's history.

Hashem wanted to single out the nation of Israel and give them a special gift - the Torah. With this gift, there would be created an everlasting bond between G-d and the nation of Israel. However, it would be impossible to create this bond while the nation of Israel was still subjugated to a human master. The Jewish people therefore had to be freed from the slavery in Egypt. In order to receive the Torah and keep its commandments, the nation of Israel had to be liberated so that they would be free to serve G-d by adhering to His Torah.

These two perspectives share a common theme: The Torah and freedom are inextricably

connected. However, the great commentator the R"an tells us which is primary: the Torah. There is a great danger inherent in the first perspective. It gives much weight to the value of freedom. When freedom in it of itself is revered and held above all, it leads to a free-for-all attitude. Once the freedom is granted, there is a tendency to exploit it, to do what one's heart desires without regard for the actions effects or implications. We must remember that freedom carries with it great responsibilities. We were not freed from Egypt so that we could go live our lives in any way we saw fit. Our freedom was granted so that we could enter the service of G-d. We were freed so that we could do G-d's will, so that we would treat our fellow man with proper respect, so that we could make the most of this freedom. We were liberated so that we could receive the Torah.

When we count the days in the Omer, we are in essence counting the days until we reach the purpose for our liberation. It is therefore fitting that during these days, we prepare ourselves for this turning point, for this climax. We should prepare ourselves for Shavu'os by increasing our study of the Torah, by improving our relationship with our fellow man, and by strengthening our closeness to G-d. The time between Pesach and Shavuos, the Counting of the Omer, is a time for us to reflect on why we were freed from Egypt, and what we are to accomplish with our status as free men.

(from the book Hegyonai Halacha)