

# DAYS THAT COUNT

*by Rabbi David Begoun*

Although Passover is referred to as "the time of our freedom," it is actually the commencement of our time of freedom. It does not reach completion for another seven weeks, until the Jewish People receive the Torah on the holiday of Shavuot. Indeed, Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers) teaches us that the only truly free person is the one who has the Torah to guide him (6:2). In order to connect the commencement of the period of freedom (Passover) to its culmination (Shavuot) the Torah commands us to count the interim days to demonstrate our eager anticipation toward receiving the Torah. Sefer HaChinuch (1) likens this to a slave who eagerly counts the days leading to his emancipation. Our contemporary equivalent is a school child ticking off the remaining days until summer vacation. The difficulty, however, is that according to the Sefer HaChinuch, the mitzvah (Divine command) of counting should be to count down the days towards Shavuot and not to count up, as we actually do.

When the Jewish People left Egypt, they were not yet on the level of spiritual refinement required to receive the Holy Torah. They first needed to go through a purification process that involved tremendous diligence and effort towards spiritual advancement. Each day of the count was a tireless investment in self-perfection, striving to cleanse the vessel destined to receive G-d's Torah. These were days of acquisition through which, with enormous effort, the Jewish People were able to develop and advance themselves spiritually, each day reaching an entirely new level.

A parallel can be found where the Torah notes, regarding the seven years that the Patriarch Yaakov (Jacob) had to work for his beloved wife Rachel, "and they seemed to him like a few days because of his love for her." (2) This seems contrary to what we know of human psychology, that the more one eagerly anticipates an event, the longer the waiting period seems. Rabbi Shimshon David Pinkus explains this with a parable of two individuals who were both promised that before 100 days would pass each would receive one million dollars. The first person would receive nothing until the final day, at which point he would be given the amount in a lump sum, while the second was given \$10,000 per day for each of the 100 days. Both received the same amount of money by the end of the allotted time. However for the first individual the 100 days seemed like an eternity. The days were nothing but an obstacle between him and the money and he could do nothing but wait. For the second person, the 100 days sped by in utter disbelief as he was handed his daily \$10,000 check. Jacob was not simply waiting out the seven years idly; if he were, then indeed they would have seemed an eternity. Rather, he spent those years building himself and developing his character and

spiritual prowess until he was prepared to assume the mantle of patriarchal leadership. Each day was filled with new acquisitions and achievements and, as a result, the days sped by.

Likewise, the days of the counting are not merely a countdown towards receiving the Torah. Each day was one of attainment, whereby, through great investment, the Jewish People were able to enhance themselves spiritually, each day achieving new heights. Emulating their commitment to growth, we do not count these days down and check them off, rather on these days of acquisition we count up, recognizing each precious new asset. These are auspicious days for us in preparation for our reacceptance of the Torah on Shavuot. Let us make sure that not only do we count these days, but that we make these days count!

*Have a Good Shabbos!*

(1) classic work on the 613 Torah commandments, their rationale and their regulations, by an anonymous thirteenth century Spanish author

(2) Beraishis/Genesis 29:20

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