

SEFIRAS HA-OMER

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Question: Are there any restrictions against reciting the blessing of shehecheyanu during the mourning period of Sefiras ha-omer?

Discussion: The poskim agree that from a halachic point of view there is no reason not to recite shehecheyanu during the days of sefirah[1]. It is, therefore, permitted to eat new fruit in season and to buy new clothing or dishes during this time period[2].

Still, there are communities where shehecheyanu is not recited during sefirah. Some communities are even stricter and refrain from buying new clothes during sefirah altogether, even basics which do not require the blessing of shehecheyanu. Since these restrictions have valid sources — some can be traced as far back as to the Rishonim[3] — they should be upheld by the communities or families whose traditions they are. But those who do not have these customs are not required to observe them, as the halachah makes no such stipulations[4].

[One who was under the impression that it is halachically prohibited to recite shehecheyanu during sefirah, but learned subsequently that this is not the case, does not need hataras nedarim in order to change his custom and recite shehecheyanu during sefirah[5].]

Moving into a new house or apartment during sefirah is another case in point. The halachah permits one to move during sefirah[6]. It is also permitted to paint or decorate one's home during sefirah[7]. But if one's family practice is to refrain from moving or making home improvements during sefirah[8], one should follow the principle of not deviating from family custom, as is true in all matters of halachah.

Note: The above halachos apply only to the days of sefirah. During the Three Weeks, which take place before Tishah b'Av, the halachos are more stringent; see The Weekly Halachah Discussion on Parashas Pinchas.

Question: May a husband and a wife observe different periods of mourning during sefirah, each following his/her family's custom?

Discussion: Generally speaking, once a woman gets married, she follows her husband's customs — both leniencies and stringencies. Marriage signifies a wife's entrance into her husband's domain, and that entry obligates her to follow his customs[9].

But it is permitted for a husband to allow his wife to continue practicing her parents' customs even

though they differ from his own. For instance, it is permitted for a wife to continue praying in nusach Sefarad even though she married a husband who prays in nusach Ashkenaz, as long as her husband does not insist that she change her custom to his[10]. In our case, too, it is permitted for a wife to observe her family's mourning period, as long as her husband does not object[11].

Question: Is nail-cutting permitted during sefirah?

Discussion: Yes, it is[12]; only hair cutting and removal is forbidden during sefirah. It is also permitted to trim a mustache that interferes with eating[13], to tweeze eyebrows or eyelashes[14], and to comb one's hair even though some hair will get pulled out in the process[15].

Married women may cut hair that is protruding from their head covering[16].

Question: If one forgot to count one day of the Sefiras ha-Omer, may he continue to count?

Discussion: There is a major dispute among the poskim of the Geonic era over whether or not forgetting to count one day invalidates the entire count. Some are of the opinion that the Torah's command to count "seven complete weeks" renders the entire count as one entity, one long mitzvah. Consequently, forgetting to count one day destroys the entire sequence and no further counting is possible. Most other poskim hold, however, that each day is considered a separate mitzvah. One (or several) day's omission, therefore, has no bearing on counting the other days.

The Shulchan Aruch[17] rules like the majority opinion, that one day's counting has no connection to the other days'. One must, therefore, continue to count the sefirah even when a day [or several days] was omitted. The blessing over the count, however, should not be said, in deference to those who hold that omitting a day invalidates the entire mitzvah. The Mishnah Berurah recommends that one hear the blessing from someone else, so that he can fulfill the mitzvah in the proper way, with a blessing.

If a person is uncertain as to whether he missed the previous day's count, he is permitted to count the remaining days with a blessing[18].

One who forgot to count during the night should count during the following day without a blessing. He may then continue to count on the following evenings with a blessing.

One who forgot to count on a Thursday night but remembered to do so on Friday afternoon after kabbalas Shabbos and Maariv but before sunset, may count on the following days with a blessing[19].

There is a dispute among the poskim[20] concerning one who forgot to count one evening, but remembered to count the next day after sunset but before nightfall (the time period known as Bein ha-shemashos). Most poskim allow him to count on the following days with a blessing while a minority opinion does not[21].

1. *Mishnah Berurah* 493:2 and most other poskim, quoted in *Bein Pesach l'Shavuos* 16:1.
2. Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Mevakshei Torah 19).
3. Rabbeinu Yerucham, quoted by Eliyahu Zuta 493:1; *Leket Yosher*, pg. 97, quoting *Terumas ha-Deshen*; *Tzror ha-Mor*, *Parashas Emor*.
4. *Ta'amei ha-Minghagim*, pg. 251; *Tosafos Chayim* on *Chayei Adam* 131:12; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (*Shalmei Moed*, pg. 441).
5. *Yechaveh Da'as* 1:24.
6. Satmar Rav (quoted in *Piskei Teshuvos* 493, note 6); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (Mevakshei Torah 19); *Tzitz Eliezer* 11:41.
7. *Yechaveh Da'as* 3:30; *Tzitz Eliezer* 11:41.
8. This custom is recorded in several sources; see *Piskei Teshuvos* 493, note 1.
9. *Igros Moshe*, O.C. 1:158; *Minchas Yitzchak* 4:83.
10. Harav S.Z. Auerbach (*Minchas Shelomo* 1:1-7). It is advisable, though, that for the sake of the children's chinuch, both husband and wife pray in the same nusach (Harav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in *Tefillah k'Hilchasah* 4, note 4).
11. In addition, see *Igros Moshe*, O.C. 1:159 and 2:95, who maintains that observing different sefirah mourning periods is not — halachically speaking — considered as practicing different "customs" at all.
12. *Kaf ha-Chayim* 493:16.
13. O.C. 551:13.
14. *Bein Pesach l'Shavuos*, pg. 241, quoting oral rulings from Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav S. Wosner.
15. *Mishnah Berurah* 551:20.
16. *Mishnah Berurah* 551:79. When necessary, women may shave their legs; Harav M. Feinstein (*Oholei Yeshurun*, pg. 9). See also *Igros Moshe*, Y.D. 2:137 where he allows women to take haircuts when necessary during the Three Weeks. When necessary, a girl of marriageable age may have her hair cut; Harav S.Z. Auerbach (*Halichos Beisah*, pg. 371).
17. O.C. 498:8.
18. O.C. 489:8.

19. Sha'arei Teshuvah 489:4; Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:99-3. 20. See Beis Shelomo 1:102; Birkei Yosef 489:17; Sha'arei Teshuvah, 489:4; Sho'el u'Meishiv 4:3-127.

21. See Kaf ha-Chayim 489:83 who rules not to say a blessing, while Minchas Yitzchak 9:57 and Yabia Omer 4:43 rule that a blessing may be said. Surely, one who remembered to count within 9 minutes after sunset, may count on the following days with a blessing; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:62.

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