

# Making Each Day Count

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S'firat HaOmer commands us to make time count. We count each day, to make every day count. My friend and mentor, Rav Chaim Wilschanski SHLITA explains in his book that the word S'FIRA (to count) is related to the word SAPIR (Sapphire). Each day should be cherished, treasured and unwrapped like a precious sapphire.

The counting of the Omer links the physical freedom of Pesach to the spiritual freedom of Shavuot. Therefore the birth of Judaism was in two stages:

- 1) The Exodus from Egypt - Yetzi'at Mitzrayim, for which we celebrate Pesach, followed fifty days later by:
- 2) The Giving of the Torah - (Revelation at Sinai), for which we celebrate 'Shavuot'. These two festivals together form the foundation and establishment of the Jewish People as a nation (see Sh'mot 19:56; D'varim 26:16-19).

This was best expressed in the classical statement by Rav Saadia Gaon, (Emunot V'Dei'ot 3:7) "We are a Nation only by our Torah", meaning that we are a nation NOT by the sharing of a common land, language, history or culture, etc. as are all other nations, but by the uniqueness of having been

given G-d's Torah.

The Kabbalists tell us that the 7 week interim period between Pesach and Shavuot has a symbolic character of Chol-haMoed, the interim days between the first and last days of Pesach itself (Ramban to Vayikra 23:36 and Rabeinu. Bachya Vayikra 23:16). This means that Pesach and Shavuot are not simply two separate holidays, but they are in a deeper sense like the beginning and the end of one and the same holiday. How is this to be understood?

Throughout Tanach and the Talmud, the relationship of G-d to the Jewish People is compared allegorically to that of husband and wife, as we know from Shir HaShirim which we read on Pesach. The Prophet Yirmiyahu says, "Thus says G-d, I remember... your love as a young bride, when you went after Me in the wilderness..." In the Mishna (Taanit 4:8), the verse "YOM CHATUNATO", (Shir HaShirim 3:11), the day of His (G-d's) marriage, is referred to as Yom Matan Torah, the day of Shavuot.

So Pesach was the betrothal (Erusin) and Shavuot was the marriage (Nesu'in) between G-d and the Jewish People, with the natural period of yearning in between.

This idea goes further. Pesach is the time when the Jews separated themselves from the sheep worshiped by Egypt (Sh'mot 8:22), (as for example, even today the cow is considered

sacred and is worshiped by the Hindus in India). That's why Phil Rizzuto, the New York Yankee's broadcaster, when he got excited, shouted Holy Cow!

The Mishna (Shabbat 9:1) says that idols, avoda zara, have the tum'ah - defilement of a NIDA. A NIDA must count seven days before immersing in the mikva for her tahara - purification, to her husband.

So, here too, after the Jews rejected idolatry on Pesach, we needed seven weeks (not just days, because this was a whole nation) of counting to become purified to accept the Torah. And then we did the ritual immersion - tevila, to be purified for Matan Torah, as stated in Yevomot 46b.

These are the two stages of how Judaism was formed. This represents the Eternal Covenant between G-d and His people - His Nation, allegorically composed of the betrothal and marriage, Pesach and Shavuot, with the interim counting period connecting the two Festivals.

When we realize that the Torah is G-d's Love Letter to us and His authorized manual for living, then every day of our lives is infused with fulfillment, satisfaction, purpose and meaning. 