

# *Seder Shel Sefiras Ha'Omer: A Means of* Developing Awareness of הקב"ה

שיחה delivered in KBY

Each year, we perform a unique *Mitzva* called *Sefiras Ha'omer*. Unlike many other *Mitzvos*, there are a lot of other things printed in the standard *Siddur* alongside the basic *Bracha*. Let's understand what these different elements are.

The first thing is the *L'sheim Yichud*. Let's explain this. There are many prayers in the *Siddur*. The major ones were formulated by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*, meaning Ezra and his *Beis Din*. They made the *Seder Ha'tefilla*, with *Shevach*, *Bakasha*, and *Hodaya*, along with a *Bracha Techila Vasof. Pesukei D'zimra*, at least its basic framework, was established during that time as well. The *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* crafted the *Tefilla* in such a way that whether you understand what you're saying or not it works. You should understand what the words mean, but the meditations and anything beyond that are not needed. The Jew who says the words of *Tefilla* properly, aware that he is standing before *Hashem*, changes the world. There is meaning in the words even if you don't know what you're saying.

I'm emphasizing this because the *L'sheim Yichud* we say in the context of *Sefiras Ha'omer* that is not sourced the Gemara nor even the Geonim. It's found in *Talmidei Ha'Arizal*. There are many *Tefillos* that originate with them. The fact that you say *Ribbono Shel Olam* on Yom Tov before you take out the *Sefêr Torah* is because to them. Another example is the *Yehi Ratzon* that we say during the last part of *Birkas Kohanim*. Yet, because it's not from the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*, the prayer works to the extent that you understand what you're saying.

Some *Poskim*, like the *Noda B'yehuda (Yoreh Deah Simon 93)*, argue that we should not say *L'sheim Yichud* because many people don't know what they are saying. But it's found in our *Siddur*, and many people today say it. But it's only meaningful to the extent that you know what you're saying. Let's try to understand what it means.

We start off saying לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה. That means we are doing this *Mitzva* for the יחוד of קודשא בריך הוא, the Transcendent One, blessed be He, and His שכינה. What exactly does this mean? How does this *Mitzva* create a bond? *Kadosh* means transcendent. It means above

and beyond perception. When we say *Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh*, we're saying that G-d is "beyond, beyond, and beyond" all reality. He's the G-d who created logic, and therefore, by definition, he can't be encompassed by logic. *Bri'ch Hu* comes from the word *berech*, knee. The knee comes down. We ask G-d to "come down." We want the Transcendent One to be more in our lives. We wish for the Entity that is so far away to be so much closer.

שכינתיה means the G-d that resides among us. What does that mean? In simple terms, use your own experiences as metaphors. As much as people know or have an image of you, you are ultimately the only one who knows there is more. There is some part of you that no one has touched yet. Maybe when you meet the right girl, you'll share a greater part of that inner self, and someone else at least will know there is more to you. Every person has something more than what he projects. Every person projects those images in different ways in different places. It can be expressed depending on if it you are in the role of teacher, friend, parent, etc. But there is always more.

Beyond what you consciously are aware of, there are levels of consciousness you don't even know about, too deep articulate or experience. As life continues, you will become more and more aware of those parts of you that are hidden deep down. Life is all about discovering that. In other words, the term "you" has many dimensions. There's you in the social reality, and then there's you as in the pure and pristine, never previously touched. It's all "you," but experienced in different settings and contexts.

*Shechina* is the idea of the Infinite G-d who resides among us. ועשו לי משכן ושכנתי בתוכם. The *Shechina* is *Shochein*, resides in our midst. When we say *L'sheim Yichud*, we are asking for G-d to allow us through this act to make a union between the aspect of G-d as the Infinite G-d, Who is incomprehensible, and the aspect of G-d Who dwells with us, Whom we feel is present. We're saying, "I wish for a deeper connection of Infinity in my finite, logical, and tangible existence." It's saying that you want more of this feeling of the Infinite G-d in your finite world. That's beautiful. That's all we're asking for.

בדחילו ורחימו. These words very difficult to actualize. דחילו means awe, and רחימו means love. Again, this *Tefilla* was not formulated by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*. If you can't mean what you say, don't fake it. At least say that you want to reach this level. The idea of doing things out of love doesn't mean you're doing it all glassy-eyed. It means you're thirsty to know more and get closer. Each of us can get that, at his own level.

ליחד שם י"ה בר"ה. This union connects these two names: the *yud* and *heh* with the *vav* and *heh*. What does this mean? When we talk about the name of G-d, the letters used to write the name symbolize this idea very well. *Yud*, the smallest letter, denotes the beginning. The beginning of a line is a dot. Any existence exists initially as a dot. Afterwards, it extends into lines with dimensions. But it all starts with a point. *Yud* is that mathematical point. Then we have a *heh*. the letter *heh* has a *daled* surrounding a *yud*. *daled* is four, connoting four sides, like the four walls of a house. The ך, the initial point of existence, now has form. The raw idea, the *Chochma*, now has some flesh to it, also known as *Bina*. After you have developed the form, you can now translate that into an interactive *Mida*. This is a *vav*. The *vav* is a hook; it's the connecting letter. The *vav ha'chibur* connects two entities together. The ך is now extended and translated. The idea became a perception, and now it's becoming translated into a reality in terms of how you interact. The Rambam doesn't call character traits *Middos*. He calls them *Dei'os*. *Middos* are nothing more than the external expression of a perception. *Yud* and *heh* are the intellectual parts. You think it and formulate it. Then the ך connects it to the real world to take on a new form, the final *heh*. You now act.

The *Shela* writes that the name of *Hashem* has the letters *heh-vav-heh*. *Mehaveh* means to bring into being. *Yud* added to the beginning denotes something that is ongoing and constant. This name of *Hashem*, then, refers to Him as the Ongoing, Constant Source of reality. Now, reality has two forms. There is the intellectual reality, the ideas. Then there is G-d of the world we see. We live in a world of *vav-heh*. We see a nice world. But how much of the ideas of G-d do we see in the world? How much of the dreams of the architect do you see when you see the building? Or do you just see a building? Do you see the *yud-heh* along with the *vav-heh* reality, or have you divorced reality from what G-d really wants it to be? When we talk about seeing the Artist in the picture, the Author in the book, we mean connecting the *yud-heh* with the *vav-heh*.

Then we say בייחודא שלים, in a full union. What is this adding? There are marriages that are sporadic. Sometimes they're on, and sometimes they're off. Sometimes, we see G-d in the sunset, and some days, we're thinking of other things. What we are saying here is that we don't just want to connect the transcendent G-d reality, but that we want the connection to be constant. *Mitzvos* create a constant atmosphere. Rav Chaim *Volozhiner* would tell his students that if one is lax in his learning, someone is lighting a cigarette in Paris on Shabbos. Everything we do has a ripple effect

on the entire world. We're not aware of what we do. Our capacity to change the climate of the broader community in terms of G-d-awareness is quite incredible. That's what we're saying.

I think the last three words are the most poignant. It says **בשם כל ישראל**, that we do this in the name of all Jews. We usually assume that the *Mitzvos* we perform are private. It's *my Mitzva*, my individual obligation. What does it mean to do the *Mitzva* on behalf of the community? What we're saying is in fact something quite profound. At the level of *Mitzva*, it's very personal. But the capability you have, through your *Mitzvos*, to connect *yud-heh* to *vav-heh*, to change the climate of this world and infuse it with more G-d-awareness, is not because of who you are as an individual, but rather because we all are part of a nation. It's *Klal Yisrael* that changes the world, and each of us is a member of that community.

We do *Mitzvos* because G-d told us to do them. It's *Kabbalas Ol*. But the aspect of the *Mitzva* that creates a greater awareness of G-d we do as representatives of the nation. G-d-awareness comes out via a national awareness. The *Arizal* writes that you should start your day by saying, **הנני מוכן מזומן לקיים מצות ואהבת לרעידך כמוך**. It's only through the mass that there is a big change. That's why prayer is in the plural. It's like the *Ba'al Hatanya* writes that the way one fulfills the *Mitzva* of *V'ahavta L'reiacha Kamocha* is by seeing himself as part of the body known as *Klal Yisrael*, and all Jews are part of that unit. It's all one identity that is expressed in multiple ways. That's a *Tzibbur*.

Then we say **הנני מוכן ומזומן**. The word *Muchan* means prepared, and *Mezuman* means set aside. There is a difference. Prepared means I'm willing to do it. Set aside means I am not doing it just because I have to. I stopped doing anything else and am focused. This prayer, as you can see, has a critical function in the performance of the *Mitzva*. The first sentence deals with connecting oneself with *Klal Yisrael* and aspiring for the goal of *Yichud Sheim Hashem*. The second sentence has a completely different purpose. We are now preparing and focusing. It's a very powerful thing. We are now stopping and focusing.

**כמו שכתוב בתורה**. This has *Halachic* problems. Many *Rishonim* hold that since we don't have the *Korban Ha'omer*, the *Mitzva* of counting can't be activated. That's why the Ramban (*Kiddushin* 33b s.v. *Eizehu*) writes that women are obligated in the *Mitzva*, since it's not dependent on time, but rather on the *Korban*. So, if the *Mitzva* nowadays is only rabbinic, seemingly we can't say, "I'm doing the *Mitzva* as is written in the Torah." Those who authored this *Tefilla* obviously follow view of the Rambam that *Sefiras Ha'omer* is an independent *Mitzva* that applies even absent

the *Korban*. The *Klausenberger Rebbe* suggested to not say the words *מצות עשה כמו שכתוב בתורה* and rather say just *מצוה* without the word *עשה*, and then to say *וכתוב בתורה* to avoid the issue.

ויהי נועם. “The pleasure of the Presence of G-d should be upon us. Let our actions be established upon us. And let our actions establish it.” What does this mean? You say this quite often, every *Motza’i Shabbos*. What is the “it” in this *Pasuk*? And what’s the connection to what we said before? The source of this prayer is found in Rashi (*Vayikra* 9:23), who writes that when the *Mishkan* was being inaugurated, Moshe prayed these words, asking that the *Mishkan* be meaningful. He prayed for the external edifice to embody, genuinely, *Hashra’as Hashechina*. Let the fruit of our labor establish that Presence of G-d upon us. The building that we just made for You, our labor, should establish on it the pleasantness of the Presence of G-d. We are praying that our work should establish G-dliness in us via the *Mikdash*. The obvious question is what it is doing here and on *Motza’ei Shabbos*.

The *Rishonim* write that we recite this prayer as we start our week and return to the workforce. We pray that the fruits of our labor should create this *Noam Hashem*, a sense of spirituality, in us. The actions themselves become the seat of *Hashra’as Hashechina*, G-d- awareness. I want my daily interactions with the people in the office to be a source of being aware of G-d. It’s not just in *shul*, *yeshiva*, etc. I want to extend this into my week. But what does this have to do with *Sefiras Ha’omer* specifically?

After the *Mitzva* is performed, we say, *הרחמן הוא יחזיר לנו עבודת בית המקדש למקומה במהרה* בימינו אמן סלה. Why do we say this? It’s because the *Mitzva* doesn’t exist on a Torah level without the *Korban Ha’omer* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, like we explained earlier. The reason we count nowadays is to remember that once there was a *Beis Hamikdash* and a *Mitzva* of *Sefiras Ha’omer*. We use this *Mitzva* to remind ourselves of what once was, and we are dying to have the real thing. It’s similar to the *Koreich* we eat during the Seder. The *Halacha* doesn’t require that we need to eat the sandwich; rather, it reminds us of the *Beis Mikdash*. It seems that the *Mitzva* of *Sefiras Ha’omer* nowadays is connected to the *Beis Hamikdash*. a

This is something unique, because later on in the liturgy, we say *Ana B’koach*, a *Tefilla* written by Rabbi *Nechunya Ben Hakaneh*. He was the author of a major kabalistic work that the Ramban sometimes cites in his commentary on *Chumash*. If you look at this *tefilla*, you’ll notice that there are abbreviations on each line of the first letters in each word. Those lines represent the names of *Hashem*. These names are expressed in this poem with specific expressions of G-d. When

do we find this prayer? We say it after *Korbanos* at *Shacharis*, *Kabbalas Shabbos*, and *Sefiras Ha'omer*. There is a common denominator between all these three instances.

When we say *Korbanos* in the morning, we fulfill a *Mitzva* called וּנְשַׁלְמָה פְּרִים שְׁפִתֵינוּ. It's a pseudo-*kiyum* of *Hakravas Korbanos*. Although most people are not *Kohanim*, it's an attempt at *היא דורש אין לה, מכלל דבעי דרישה*, an attempt to recapture the experience of the *Beis Hamikdash*. At that point, we say *Ana B'koach*. It seems that *Ana B'koach* comes in conjunction with a need to remember the *Beis Hamikdash*.

On Friday night, we recite several chapters of *Tehillim*, and then we say *Ana B'koach*, coinciding with the onset of Shabbos. What's the relationship between *Ana B'koach* and Shabbos? The answer is that the *Behag* and the *Yerei'im* write that there is a *Mitzva* called *Mora Shabbos*, to have a certain sense of awe of Shabbos. What is there to be fearful of? And what is the source for this *Mitzva*? The *Pasuk* says, 'אֵת שַׁבְּתוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשֵׁי תִירָאוּ אֲנִי ה', to guard Shabbos and have awe of the *Beis Hamikdash* (*Vayikra* 19:30). Rashi explains that the juxtaposition indicates that building the *Beis Hamikdash* does not override Shabbos. The Ramban, however, writes that the connection is that just like there is a *Mikdash* in place, so too there is a *Mikdash* in time. The *Mikdash* in place is found in Yerushalayim, and the *Mikdash* in time is found on Shabbos. *Mikdashi Ti'rau* doesn't just refer to the *Mikdash* of place, but also to the *Mikdash* of time. You must have awe of the Shabbos. It's saying that if you have a conflict between the *Mikdash* of place and the *Mikdash* of time, the *Mikdash* of time takes precedence.

The term *Mikdash* refers to a place or time that is conducive to walking away from the confines of the finite world and trying to focus on what's real and transcendent. It is a place of meditation and focus, the way the Rambam describes it in *Moreh Nevuchim*. The word *Kadosh* means transcendent, beyond the mundane. *Mikdash* therefore means is the place for that reality. It's a place where one can think about what is found in the *Luchos* inside the *Aron*, finding a deeper connection with *Hashem* what He means to you. It's a place to stop the world and to think about where you are coming from and where you are going. All the *Korbanos* are metaphors and symbols for this idea, and if you are attuned to the culture that embodies these symbols, you'll have a heightened connection to all of this. To do that, you need to be able to hear the rhythm behind the music.

Shabbos is a time you can use to read a novel and eat a hardy meal. But it's also a time that is for something else, for man to walk away from his creativity and to go into his own cocoon.



Then comes the next prayer. ארץ נתנה יבולה יברכנו אלוקים אלוקינו יברכנו אלוקים וייראו אותו כל. אפסי ארץ. We want *Hashem* to “come down,” to increase recognition of Him in this world. We want to see Him in nature, in our lives. When I look at science, history, and all the various disciplines in life, I want to see Him. I want to train my mind to develop a perspective of G-d-awareness. You stand in awe of the perfect and precise system of reality. Then it’s again יודוך עמים אלהים יודוך, עמים כלם.

The first prayer is a request to have a grasp of history and understand it to admit and thank G-d for it. It’s not enough to acknowledge G-d as the Orchestrator of history; we want to see that it was something so good that we will thank Him for everything that happened. Today, we can’t do that. We don’t see the full picture. But eventually, we will. The second prayer is a request to generate an awareness for G-d in the world we live in. One deals with the chaos of history, and the other deals with the incredible order of science. Both prayers ask of G-d to allow us understand, and both prayers ask for יודוך עמים אלוקים. This is the purpose of existence. The Ramban at the end of *Parshas Bo* writes that the goal is שידע האדם שהק-ל בראו ויודה על כך. You need to know and internalize the fact that G-d created me to the extent that you will thank Him for it. That’s what all of creation is for. It’s to generate a consciousness that we are here for a super-reason, and we live our lives with that purpose in mind. But the focus is not just the Jews. It’s also יודוך עמים. It’s a universal call for G-d-awareness. The Jews might be the vehicle that allows for this awareness to come to fruition, but it’s is a global reality.

These two prayers converge with a single *passuk*, ישמחו וירננו לאמים כי תשפט עמים מישור ולאמים. בארץ תנחם סלה. When we finally acknowledge this reality, we will be very happy. There is a goal in all of this. It’s not just to be aware. It’s actually to feel an enormous sense of joy. The goal is not just to know. G-d wants the knowledge to be so vivid and real that it should cause an emotional reaction of happiness. That’s the goal. Again, this is for the entire world. It’s a universal reality. Why is everyone happy? כי תשפט עמים מישור. The pain and sadness of *Tzadik V’ra Lo Rasha V’tov Lo*, things that life is full of, brings man down. Man has *Yisurin* in life. For whatever reason, it’s part of His plan. Man wants to see his life making sense. At the end of history, we finally will see the pattern and form in history. People are unhappy when there is confusion. Only in hindsight, at the end, will man see how everything fits and was needed.

What does *Sefiras Ha’omer* contain that opens us up to the quest for knowledge of these two things? Obviously, it has to do with this time between Pesach and Shavuot. The Ramban



writes that this period is like the *Chol Ha'moed* between the seven days of Pesach and the last day of Shavuos, the *Atzeres*. The term *Atzeres* means to hold back and stop. It's a time to think and internalize those experiences that one gained on the Yom Tov. Shavuos is the internalization of whatever we gained on Pesach. Pesach is the means towards the end of תעבדון את האלוקים על ההר הזה. *Kabbalas Hatorah* is the goal. During that in-between period there is some *Kedushas Hazman*. It's during this time that we are to work on these themes, to try to see G-d in history and experience Him in the natural phenomena we see. I want to see the Author in the book. Why? Because I want to be happy, and there's an inherent value of being happy with *Hashem*. The more you understand, the more you'll be happy. This is the goal of Torah and *Mitzvos*. They are means of heightening our awareness of *Hashem*.