Jewish Tribune – Shemini/Sefiras Haomer

**Making the Days Count**

Chazal teach that the period of Sefiras Ha’Omer is meant to be one of introspection and growth. Some try to work on one of the 48 kinyonei Torah (as set out in the 6th perek of Pirkei Ovos) each day of the Omer (leaving erev Shavous for chazora!).

I once heard an insightful question on the Omer from Rabbi Zev Leff shlita. Rabbi Leff noted that there seems to be a contradiction in the way we count. We count the days at the beginning of each day and the weeks at the end of each week. To be consistent we should either do both at the beginning or both at the end.

Rabbi Leff answered that the way we count teaches us a lesson of how to best use the Sefira. Often when we embark on a journey of teshuva or spiritual growth, we take too big a jump. Mechanchim in the kiruv yeshivos discourage rapid movement as it is difficult to maintain. It is far better to make small, concrete strides.

When Dayan Ahron Dovid Dunner shlita met Rav Shach ztl during the Gulf war in 1991, he asked the Godol Hador what message he should convey to Klal Yisroel. Rav Shach told him that we should do teshuva, but to only take small steps. And in a moment of personal disclosure, he added “Do you know what I took on last Rosh Hashona?” “To bentsch with a bentscher. And only when I am at home and only until Pesach”. If it is true for the Godol Hador, it is certainly true for all of us.

Our counting each day reflects this. We count at the beginning of each day to show that each day is a separate small unit. We want to improve but recognise that the best way to do so is in small strides.

However, in order not to become despondent by the seemingly small successes, it is important to sometimes take stock of our achievements. We therefore look back at the end of each week and assess our progress. That is why we count at the end of each week. Slowly slowly, the small successes add up to something quite substantial.

Take Daf Yomi. Each day another page. But not before too long, many perokim and masechtos are covered.

Shlomo Hamelech observes that “**לֵב חָכָם לִימִינוֹ וְלֵב כְּסִיל לִשְׂמֹאלו** - the heart of the wise is to his right, and the heart of the fool to his left” (Koheles 10,2). The Vilna Gaon explains that when one is learning a text in Hebrew, what he has already learned is on his right side and what he has yet to learn is on his left. The wise person looks to the right to see what he has already accomplished and takes encouragement from his accomplishments. This gives him the incentive to continue onward and upward. The fool only looks to the left – looking at what he has not accomplished – and instead of giving him the incentive to achieve, it depresses him and causes him to give up ever reaching his goals.

The way we count, therefore, guides us as to how we should utilise the precious days of the Sefira. Counting at the beginning of each day reminds us to make small goals and counting at the end of each week encourages us to take stock and hopefully look back with pride at our achievements.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**