



# ל"ב Laws & Customs: Sefiras Haomer

For the year 5785

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## WHEN

*Sefiras Haomer* is performed right after *Tzeis Hakochavim*, at the conclusion of *Maariv* (just before *Aleinu*).

From half an hour prior to sunset until after one (*davens Maariv* and) counts the *Omer*, one may not eat more than a *K'beitzah* (57 grams) of bread or *Mezonos*. If, for whatever reason, one began a meal before sunset, he is not required to interrupt it when the time of *Sefirah* arrives. However, if one began eating after sunset, he must interrupt to count *Sefiras Haomer* as soon as the time arrives.

If one appoints a *Shomer* (guardian) to remind him to count the *Omer*, or he will be attending a later *Minyan* where he regularly *davens*, he may eat prior.

One may not perform manual labour from sunset until after he counts the *Omer*.

If one realized that he forgot to count the *Omer*, he may still count with a *Brocho* the entire night until dawn, but should hurry to do so as soon as possible.

If, for whatever reason, one counted the *Omer* any time between *Plag Hamincha* and *Tzeis Hakochavim*, he should count again after *Tzeis Hakochavim* without a *Brocho*.

The same applies when one heard someone else counting the *Omer* any time between *Plag Hamincha* and *Tzeis Hakochavim*, even if he had no intention to be *Yoitzei* from him, unless he had explicit intention to **not** be *Yoitzei*.

If one must *daven* with a *Minyan* that is *davening Maariv* between sunset and *Tzeis Hakochavim*, he should count along with them without a *Brocho*, stipulating as follows: "If I forget to count later tonight, then I fulfil my obligation with this count; if I do not forget to count later tonight, then I do not fulfil my obligation with this count". After *Tzeis Hakochavim*, he counts again with a *Brocho*.

## HOW

One should stand for *Sefiras Haomer*. In extenuating circumstances (such as infirmity), or after the fact, one is *Yoitzei* even if he was sitting or reclining.

Before reciting the *Brocho*, one should ensure that he knows which night of the *Omer* it is. [Therefore, the congregation waits to recite *Sefirah* until after the *Chazzan* recites it.] Nevertheless, if he recited the *Brocho* without knowing which night of the *Omer* it is, or even if he

intended to count the wrong night, he does not need to repeat the *Brocho*.

After reciting the *Brocho*, one should not pause or speak before counting the *Omer*, even to answer *Omen* to someone else's *Brocho*. If one did speak, he needs to repeat the *Brocho* only if his words were unrelated to the counting.

When reciting the actual *Sefirah*, one must know its meaning; otherwise, he does not fulfil his obligation. If necessary, one may recite *Sefirah* in any language that he understands.

The chapter of *Tehillim* that follows *Sefiras Haomer* contains 49 words (excluding the first *Posuk*). The *Posuk* of *Yismechu* in that chapter contains 49 letters. The next paragraph, *Ono B'Choach*, contains 49 words. When counting the *Omer*, one should have in mind the words and letters corresponding to that night. [These are printed in the *Siddur* alongside each night's *Sefirah*.]

If one recited the wrong *Sefirah*, he should correct himself as soon as possible. He does not need to repeat the *Brocho*, unless he already diverted his attention from the *Mitzvah* of *Sefirah*.

## WHO

Women are exempt from *Sefiras Haomer*. Even so, they may still count with a *Brocho*, and it is customary for them to do so.

Boys from the age of *Chinuch* must recite *Sefiras Haomer*. [If necessary, they may count the *Omer* before *Tzeis Hakochavim*, as long as it is after *Plag Hamincha*, and preferably after sunset.]

A child who became *Bar Mitzvah* during the period of *Sefiras Haomer* continues counting the *Omer* with a *Brocho*.

## IF ONE FORGOT

If one forgot to count the *Omer* at night, or is unsure, he should recite *Sefirah* during the day, without a *Brocho*. [For this reason, it is appropriate for a *Shacharis Minyan* to count the *Omer* without a *Brocho* if some of its participants either don't *daven Maariv* with a *Minyan*, or they *daven Maariv* before sunset.]

If one forgot to count the *Omer* over the course of an entire night and day, and didn't remember until the following night, he continues counting all subsequent nights of the *Omer*, but without a *Brocho*.

If one is unsure whether he counted the *Omer* throughout an entire night and day,

he continues counting the subsequent nights of the *Omer* with a *Brocho*.

## OTHER LAWS

When one listens to someone else counting the *Omer* before reciting it himself, he should have explicit intention to **not** be *Yoitzei*. If he had no such intention, he may no longer recite a *Brocho* when reciting it himself. However, when listening to the *Chazzan* (or someone else) count the *Omer* solely to verify which night to recite, it is regarded as if he had explicit intention to **not** be *Yoitzei*, and he may therefore recite a *Brocho* when reciting it himself.

If one did not yet perform *Sefirah*, and is asked what night of the *Omer* it is:

- If it is before *Plag Hamincha*, he may answer the question directly.
- If it is after *Plag Hamincha*, he should not answer directly, but should instead state what last night's *Sefirah* was.

If, after *Plag Hamincha*, one answered the question directly:

- If it is before sunset, one may still count the *Omer* with a *Brocho* (after *Tzeis Hakochavim*).
- If it is after sunset, then it depends: If he prefaced his response by saying "tonight is..." or "today is...", then he should count the *Omer* without a *Brocho* (after *Tzeis Hakochavim*).
- If he did not preface his response by saying "tonight is..." or "today is...", then he may still count the *Omer* with a *Brocho* (after *Tzeis Hakochavim*).

One who is reciting *Sefirah* without a *Brocho* (for whatever reason) should try to hear the *Brocho* from another male over *Bar Mitzvah*. The one reciting the *Brocho* should have in mind to be *Moitzie* the listener. The listener should have in mind to be *Yoitzei* the *Brocho*, answer *Omen* (but not *Boruch Hu U'Voruch Shmo*), and count the *Omer* immediately afterwards, without interruption. For this reason, it is appropriate that the *Chazzan* has in mind anyone who cannot make the *Brocho*. Nevertheless, one who needs to hear the *Brocho* should not take this for granted, but should explicitly ask the *Chazzan* (or someone else) to be *Moitzie* him.

One should not cross the International Dateline (one-way) during *Sefiras Haomer*, unless absolutely unavoidable. If one did so, he counts the *Omer* – with a *Brocho* – in line with his personal count. He will

therefore be either a day ahead of the people at his destination (if he travelled east), or a day behind the people at his destination (if he travelled west).

Polar flight routes can be even more problematic. If it is absolutely necessary to fly such a route, or after the fact, one should seek guidance from a *Rav* familiar with these matters.

### 🕊️ CHODOSH

The *Torah* forbids the consumption of new grain (*Chodosh*) until after the *Minchas HaOmer* was offered in the *Beis Hamikdash* on the second day of *Pesach*, or in our times, the third day of *Pesach* in *Eretz Yisroel*, and the fourth day in *Chutz Lo'oretz*. After this time, the grain becomes permissible and is known as *Yoshon*.

One opinion maintains that *Chodosh* applies only to grain grown in *Eretz Yisroel*. Another opinion holds that *Chodosh* applies only to grain owned by a Jew at the time of harvest. The majority of *Poskim* disagree and hold that *Chodosh* applies even to grain grown outside *Eretz Yisroel*, and even if owned by a non-Jew. Nevertheless, the centuries-old custom in *Chutz Lo'oretz* is to rely on the lenient views, and this is *Minhag Chabad*.

### 🕊️ DAYS OF THE OMER

*Pirkei Avos* is studied each *Shabbos* afternoon between *Mincha* and *Maariv*, from the *Shabbos* after *Pesach* until the *Shabbos* before *Rosh Hashanah*. As per the *Rebbe's* directive, one *Mishna* is studied in depth along with its commentaries.

*Tachnun* is not recited until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of *Iyar*.

It is *Chabad* custom to learn one *daf* of *Masechta Sotah* each day of the *Omer*. On the first day, the "*Sha'ar Blatt*" is learned.

It is not *Chabad* custom to be particular about including the day of the *Omer* when dating a letter or other correspondence.

The period of the *Omer* is a time of mourning, commemorating Rabbi Akiva's 12,000 pairs of students who passed away due to insufficient respect for each other. Obviously, it is an opportune time to emphasise the *Mitzvah* of *Ahavas Yisroel*.

During the period of the *Omer*, one should not recite the *Brocho* of *Shehecheyanu* (except for a *Pidyon Haben*), unless on *Shabbos* and *Lag Bo'Omer*. Therefore, new fruits should not be eaten during the week. [It would appear that one who celebrates a birthday during the period of the *Omer* should eat the customary new fruit on the *Shabbos* before (or after).]

The following activities are prohibited from the conclusion of *Pesach*:

- Weddings (until the second and third nights of the *Shloshes Ymei Hagboloh*).

- Haircuts (until *Erev Shavuos*). Even a *Chosson* or the *Baalei Habris* should refrain from haircuts. [A woman may groom or wax her legs or eyebrows, and may also cut her hair for *Tznius* purposes. Similarly, one may remove nasal hair or hair of the ear.]
- An *Opshernish* is deferred to the earliest opportunity (i.e. *Lag Bo'Omer* or *Erev Shavuos*). However, the other associated aspects of *Chinuch* (such as training the child to wear *Tzitzis* and to recite *Brochos*, *Shma* and *bentching*) should not be postponed.
- Listening to music (until the *Shloshes Ymei Hagboloh*).
- Dancing (until the *Shloshes Ymei Hagboloh*) outside of the context of a *Chassidische Farbrengen* or on *Shabbos*.

The following activities are permitted, but without music or dancing:

- Engagements (even with a feast).
- Feasts and celebratory gatherings.

### 🕊️ FASTS OF BEHA" B

The *Rebbe* personally would observe the fasts of *BeHa" B* (this year on Monday 7 *Iyar*, Thursday 10 *Iyar* and Monday 14 *Iyar*). However, the general *Chabad* custom is not to fast. The *Rebbe* explained that this aligns with the fact that we are so close to the times of *Moshiach*, when all fasts will be nullified. [Nevertheless, the *Rebbe* encouraged those already accustomed to fasting to continue doing so.]

These days should be marked by increased *Teshuvah*, *Torah*, *Tefillah* and *Tzedokoh*, with joy and happiness.

### 🕊️ PESACH SHENI

*Tachnun* is not recited on *Pesach Sheni*, but is recited the afternoon before.

One should eat *Matzah* during the day to commemorate the offering of the *Pesach Sheni*. [Some maintain that the *Matzah* should be eaten specifically after midday.]

Some also eat *Matzah* the night after, to commemorate the eating of the *Pesach Sheni*. [The *Rebbe* mentions this custom, and some say that the *Rebbe* himself ate *Matzah* at night in addition to eating *Matzah* during the day.]

### 🕊️ LAG BO'OMER

*Lag Bo'Omer* is a two-fold celebration. First, the students of Rabbi Akiva stopped (or paused) dying. Second, it marks the passing of *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai*, who instructed that the day be celebrated.

*Tachnun* is not recited on *Lag Bo'Omer*, nor the afternoon beforehand.

The day's celebratory nature already begins at night, and the *Shule* is lit up brightly.

The *Arizal* was particular not to take haircuts even on *Lag Bo'Omer*, and this is the widespread *Chabad* custom. Nevertheless, the *Opshernish* of any boy who turned three between *Pesach* and *Lag Bo'Omer* is conducted on *Lag Bo'Omer*.

It is customary to light bonfires.

It is customary to eat carobs in order to commemorate how *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai* and his son were sustained when hiding in the cave.

One should give extra *Tzedokoh*.

It is customary to go out to the fields. [Many of the *Rebbeim* would do so. Most notably, the *Mitteler Rebbe* conducted a *Farbrengen* in the fields, which included a light meal with hard-boiled eggs. Even though his health did not permit it, the *Mitteler Rebbe* would say *L'Chaim*. There was much singing and dancing, the recitation of *Maamarim*, and many miracles were seen then, particularly relating to fertility.]

It is customary for children to play with bows and arrows to commemorate the fact that no rainbow was seen in the lifetime of *Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai*.

The *Rebbe* strongly encouraged arranging parades worldwide, striving for the participation of every Jewish child, and utilizing the opportunity for *Mivtzoim*.

A *Farbrengen* should be held.

A wedding may be conducted during the day of *Lag Bo'Omer*, and it should be timed so as not to interfere with *Shabbos*. If necessary, a wedding may also be held the night prior, but the *Chuppah* (and music) must not begin before *Tzeis Hakochavim*.

### 🕊️ SHABBOS MEVORCHIM / CHAZAK

The *Baal Koreh* receives the *Aliyah* containing the *Tochecha*, and he recites the *Brocho* both before and after it. He is not formally called up to the *Torah*, but he does receive the *Mi Sheberach* afterwards.

The *Tochecha* is read more quietly and quickly than usual. Obviously, one must still hear every single word clearly.

The *Aliyah* of *Chazak* is given to a prominent person. The congregation stands for the final *Posuk*, after which they all proclaim *Chazak Chazak v'Nischazek*.

Unlike every other *Shabbos Mevorchim*, *Av Harachamim* is recited on *Shabbos Mevorchim Sivan*, due to the tragedies that occurred during this month. [It is therefore recited even when there is a *Bris*.]

On *Shabbos Chazak*, it is customary for the *Gabboim* to arrange a *Farbrengen* with the goal of increasing resolutions in *Torah* study, observing *Mitzvos B'hidur*, and rejoicing in the completion of the *Torah*.