

Rabbi's Article II

When Intention is the Action

Our Torah-portion states (-Leviticus 23:15-16), "And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of... seven weeks... until the day after the seventh week, the fiftieth day..." There are commentaries¹ that explain (Sefer Hachinuch (-[Link](#)) -Mitzvah 306), "We were commanded to tally from the morrow of the holiday of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah; to show about ourselves the great desire (we have) for the honored day, which our hearts yearn (for) like (Job 7:2), 'a slave seeks shade' and always tallies when will come the yearned time that he goes out to freedom. As the tally shows about a man that all of his deliverance and all of his desire is to reach that time." This more spiritual concept of the Counting also manifests itself in *halacha* (the laws) of *Sefirat HaOmer* (-[Link](#)), as it is the reason as to why we do not make the *Shechayonu Blessing* (-[Link](#)), being that it includes a sentiment of suffering² of *not yet having the Torah*, as well. Nevertheless, in the times of the *Holy Temple* (when there were the *omer* and *Shavout* offerings) *Sefirat HaOmer* was a *Biblical* mitzvah, and after the destruction (there are different opinions of whether it remains a *Biblical Mitzvah*, *Rabbinic Obligation*, or but a *Remembrance of the Temple*) we still make a *Mitzvah Blessing* on the counting, every day of the 49 days, for (-Minochos 65b), "There should be a counting by each and every (person)," through which we reach the 50th day being a holiday³.

We see that on the one-hand it is a *physical* mitzvah of *verbally Counting the Omer*, while on the other-hand, it is a mitzvah of *intention*, "We were commanded... to show about ourselves the great desire (we have) for the honored day. With this we can understand why the *Alter Rebbe* (-[Link](#)) set up that *Sefirat HaOmer* be the closing of the *siddur*⁴. Even though the *Alter Rebbe* writes that his *siddur* is, "In accordance with the text of the *Arizal* (-[Link](#)), nevertheless, being that the *Alter Rebbe* made his *siddur*, "Equal for all people," therefore, (he omitted certain of the *Arizal's Intentions*, and likewise) has a specific order to the prayers: The *often*, before the *not-often*, and within the *not-often*, those that happen *once a year* (holidays) are set according to the Jewish calendar (Chanukah, Purim, Passover, *Sefirat HaOmer*). And nevertheless, the *Alter Rebbe* made sure that his *siddur* is in accordance with *halacha* and with the *mystical intentions* of the *Arizal*. Hence, the order of the *siddur* is not just in accordance with practicality, but also with the content, on both, the *mystical* and *revealed* dimensions of the prayer. We must therefore say that the *Alter Rebbe's* choosing *Sefirat HaOmer* as the closing^{5,6} of the *siddur* is because it captures the essence of *prayer*, on both, the '*object of prayer*' and the '*worshipper*' dimensions.

Introduction: Mitzvot are generally divided into two categories: (a) *Action* (i.e. putting on Tefillin), and *Speech* (i.e. reading the Megilla), called (-Sanhedrin 65a), a "*Small Action*", and (b) *Duties of the Heart* (i.e. Love G-d), in which the main component is the *intention* and *feeling* in the *thought* and *heart* of the person.

Prayer (-Maimonides, Laws of Prayer, 1:1), "Is a positive Torah commandment to pray every day, as states (-Exodus 23:25), 'You shall serve G-d, your L-rd.' Tradition teaches us that this service is prayer, as states (-Deuteronomy 11:13), 'And serve Him with all your heart' and our Sages said: Which is the service of the heart? This is prayer." Practically (-ibid 1:2), "This commandment obligates each person to be plead (which entails *heartfelt intention*) and pray every day and utter praises of the Holy One, blessed be He; then petition for all his needs with requests and supplications; and finally, give praise and thanks to G-d for the goodness that He has bestowed upon him; each one according to his own ability." Hence, this mitzvah is unique in that, even though it is a commandment of *Action* (speech; "utter praises...petition... requests"), nevertheless, the *Action* of the mitzvah ("serve Him with all your heart") is the *Intention* ("to plead and pray")! Other mitzvot, in which the *intention* is obligatory, and without the *intention* one has not fulfilled the mitzvah, nevertheless, the *intention* is not the ("Object"; *Action of the*) mitzvah, only that the mitzvah demands that there also be *intention*. By prayer, the "object" (*Action*) of the mitzvah is the *intention*! And for this *intention* one needs to prepare himself (-Maimonides, Laws of Prayer 4:16), "One should clear his mind from all thoughts and envision himself as standing before the Divine Presence," which, without (-ibid Law 1), "Any prayer that is not with proper intention is not prayer!"

Sefirat HaOmer, is where this concept of prayer (that the very "object" of the mitzvah is the *intention*), openly expresses itself (-Shulchan Oruch ADMUH"Z 489:10), "If one does not understand the language in which he counts, even if one counts in the Holy Tongue, if he does not understand, he does not fulfill his obligation." Since he does not understand ("intention") how many days he counted, he is not considered as having counted ("object"; *Action*) at all."

1. The verses simply peak of an agricultural holiday process, in which the *new grain* is brought as an *omer* offering the day after Passover (when there is the sprouting), after which we count 49 days ("*Sefirat HaOmer*"), and on the 50th day is the holiday of *Shavout* (lit. *Weeks*), when the wheat is fully matured, and an offering is brought. However, on the very first year that Israel left Egypt, and knew that (Exodus 3:12), "When you take out the people from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain," they counted the days in anticipation to receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. This counting also served for Israel to cleanse themselves of the "49 Gateways of Impurity," which attached itself to them in Egypt.
2. Just as a woman who has the mitzvah to count 7 days after her menstrual cycle, which, "And because these days of counting are days of pain, therefore, it was not established to make a blessing at the onset of the counting... but immediately at the time of the completion of days of purification..."
3. so much so, that if one crosses the dateline, and hence reaches number 50 before or after his local community, he must celebrate the holiday on his 50th day!
4. The *Alter Rebbe* had 60 different versions of the text and order of the *siddur*, and he carefully chose and clarified the text of his own *siddur*. Additionally, we find the *Rebbeim* not allowing for any changes in the order of the prayers in the *siddur*.
5. See Berochot 12a, "The general principle is: Everything follows the conclusion."
6. So too, with how the *Alter Rebbe* starts the *siddur* (-Eitz Chaim, Gateway 4, Chapter 4), "Everything follows the beginning," as will explained later on.
7. So too with the mitzvah of *Teshuvah* (repentance), in which the "object" of the mitzvah is the intention of the heart, remorse of the past and resolve for the future.

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Prayer, being that the "object" of prayer is the *intention* of the person, hence, it is based upon a transformation within the "worshiper." The mitzvah of Prayer is primarily the *Amidah* (-[Link](#)), which demands that the "worshiper" praying must stand (-Shabbat 10a), "as a slave before his master," and, "envision himself as standing before the Divine Presence," after which he can then, "plead and pray," transforming him into a "worshiper." Meaning, that through the process of prayer's, "clear his mind from all thoughts," the "worshiper" changes and ascends to a higher level, creating an absolute "newness" within the "worshiper."

Sefirat HaOmer too, we find the transformation of the "counter." Everyday after counting one recites, "Master of the universe, You have commanded... to count Sefirat Ha-Omer, in order to purify us from our evil and uncleanness. As You have written in Your Torah... so that the souls of Your people Israel may be cleansed from their defilement."

Prayer, has yet another uniqueness. By all other mitzvot, the primary concept of the mitzvah is the Action of the mitzvah (and for total fulfillment, the *intent* as well), with which the mitzvah ends from man's perspective. However, with prayer, the primary concept of the mitzvah is that man, "pleads and prays," that G-d grant him his needs. This is not a side outcome of prayer, rather, this is the sought-after intention of prayer! Nevertheless, the observance of the mitzvah of prayer is not at all dependent upon the actual fulfillment of his prayer! In other words, the "preparatory" part of prayer, which is one *pleading* of G-d to provide us with our needs, in itself (void of our prayer being answered), is of great importance, emphasizing man's service in itself.

Sefirat HaOmer too, "Count 49 days" the "preparatory" part of "his desire is to reach that time," and, "to cleanse themselves of the '49 Gateways of Impurity,'" is focused on us reaching the 50th day being a holiday. Nevertheless, the very counting of each of the 49 days, in itself (void of it leading us to the "50th day") is the mitzvah, and of great importance, emphasizing man's service in itself.

With this we can appreciate the differences between the *Alter Rebbe's siddur* (albeit, "in accordance with the liturgy of the Arizal") and the *Arizal's Siddur* (of all the different versions, Rabbi Shabsi Marshkov's is the most reliable, and so too, there is the *Kol Yaakov* version from Rabbi Yaakov Koppel, student of the Baal Shem Tov): The *Arizal's Siddur* begins with, "Generality of the Correction and Elevations of the Worlds." The *Alter Rebbe's Siddur* begins with, "Be aware of this, the virtue of arising at midnight... Therefore, one should strengthen himself to arise at midnight on any night that he can, and be among the servants of G-d..." The reason is that the *Arizal's Siddur* was intended for outstanding individuals, who know the *mystical intentions* and how to cause (supernal) *unifications*. For them, prayer is not only about the *service* and *ascent* of man, but rather, primarily about the goal of prayer, to bring, "Correction and Elevations of the Worlds," which is the source of all that prayer draws down into the world, spiritually and physically (healing the sick, blessing the produce, etc.). This is why the *Arizal's Siddur* does not culminate with *Sefirat HaOmer* (service and ascent of man), but with the *Three Holidays* (-[Link](#), the fulfillment of, "Correction and Elevations of the Worlds"). Not so the *Alter Rebbe's Siddur*, which is, "equal for all people" (for which the 'secrets -mystical intentions' are not openly revealed), the emphases is more on the *service of man*, within (i) the 'object' of prayer, and (ii) the ascent of the 'worshiper.' Hence, the *siddur* begins with arising at midnight and being of the servants of G-d. So too, it concludes with *Sefirat HaOmer* (service and ascent of man), rather than, with the *Three Holidays* (the fulfillment of, "Correction and Elevations of the Worlds").

Hence, (from the perspective of the *Alter Rebbe's Siddur*) one may think that the *service of one individual Jew* alone, and especially so, in the 'preparatory' service of 'counting days,' is not capable of influencing a "correction of the worlds," hence, *Sefirat HaOmer* (culmination and completion of the *Siddur*) shows us the effect of an individual's service, more than with any other *service* to G-d! Holidays, even though, "Israel sanctifies the seasons," nevertheless, holidays are sanctified through the *Courthouse's* (and not the individual Jew) establishing the *New Moon*, from which the individual Jew's sanctification of the holiday (through his prayer) is but an *outcome*. (So too with Shabbat, which was sanctified by Heaven, from which the individual's "to sanctify it," is but an *outcome*.) However, in the way *Sefirat HaOmer* establishes the holiday of *Shavout*, it is through the *counting* of each and every individual Jew (See [Footnote #3!](#)). So much so, that in various details of the *Second Day of Holiday*, *Shavout* is stronger than the other holidays, since it is established with a definitiveness of the individual's counting, and not (as other holidays, which are) out of doubt of when the *Courthouse* established the *New Moon*!

With this (*Sefirat HaOmer* power of the individual's service creating a holiday), we see the power of prayer, which (unlike a holy man's *blessing*) does not only draw down from *Above* that which already exist in its *source*, but rather, prayer is all about, "Yehi Rotzon -May it be Your (new) Will...", even though this did not, so to speak, exist within its *source*. Hence, *prayer* creates a change (the *sick* are *healed*), while other mitzvot do not (the parchment of the Tefillin do not change through one donning the Tefillin).

And yet another bond between *Prayer* and *Sefirat HaOmer* is now understood: The *Alter Rebbe* explains (-Likkutei Torah, Balak 70d) the reason why *Prayer* isn't counted among the 613 *Mitzvot*⁸, is because *Prayer* is the *intention* of all Torah and *Mitzvot*, and is as the *Spine* upon which all 613 *Mitzvot* stand. *Prayer* is about drawing the *Infinite Light* (beyond the *Finite Light of the Order of Evolution*) into the world, to which the *Amidah Blessings* (*Heal the sick, Bless the produce, etc.*) are then its worldly *Vessels*. So too, *Sefirat HaOmer*, which is, (i) "May abundant bounty (*Infinite Light*) thereby be bestowed upon all the worlds," and, (ii) "May it rectify our nefesh, ruach and neshamah from every baseness and defect (its worldly *Vessels*)."

8. This is an argument between the codifiers, such as Maimonides (Biblical Mitzvah), Nachmanides (Rabbinic Ordinance), and others.