

# Emor: Prayer and Counting the Omer - A Unique Relationship

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

The Torah reading of *Emor* contains the commandment of *Sefiras HaOmer*, counting the 49 days between the second day of Passover and the festival of *Shavuos*.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Siddur* of the Alter Rebbe, we find a seeming anomaly with regard to *Sefiras HaOmer*. Although the text and order of his *Siddur* is based on that of the *AriZal*,<sup>2</sup> the Alter Rebbe concludes his *Siddur* with *Sefiras HaOmer*, unlike the other *Siddurim* of the *AriZal* that conclude with the festivals of *Shemini Atzeres* and *Simchas Torah*.<sup>3</sup>

We must perforce say that since “All goes according to the conclusion,”<sup>4</sup> the Alter Rebbe desired to conclude his *Siddur* with *Sefiras HaOmer*, inasmuch as it sheds light on and is uniquely related to the entire concept of prayer. But what relationship is there between the two?

*Mitzvos* are generally divided into two categories: commandments that require specific actions or speech, such as wearing *tefillin*, relating the tale to the Exodus, etc., and *mitzvos* that are “duties of the heart,” such as love and fear of G-d — commands that are dependent upon the person’s intent and feeling.

The *mitzvah* of prayer is unique<sup>5</sup> in that, although prayer must be verbalized,<sup>6</sup> nonetheless the *act* of prayer requires “that the person *supplicate* and *pray* daily,”<sup>7</sup> i.e., it is a manner of service that is entirely related to the individual’s feeling — without this feeling of supplication the person’s speech and words of prayer are not considered prayer at all.

Herein lies a striking parallel to *Sefiras HaOmer*. The Alter Rebbe rules: “It is permissible to count [the *Omer*] in any language that he understands. However, if he fails to understand the language with which he counted, then, even if he counted in Hebrew... he has not fulfilled his obligation, for since he does not know the count, *it is not considered counting at all*.”<sup>8</sup>

In other words, with regard to *Sefiras HaOmer*, the commandment lies not in verbalizing the count (although it is indeed necessary to verbalize it),<sup>9</sup> but rather in the person’s *knowledge* of the actual count, without which “it is not considered counting at all.”

There is yet another strong similarity between prayer and *Sefiras HaOmer*. Prayer places the person on a very holy plane;<sup>10</sup> when a person prays, he is on a much higher spiritual and sanctified level than usual.

This aspect of holiness too is stressed in *Sefiras HaOmer*, for each night after counting the *Omer*, we say: “You have commanded us...to count *Sefiras HaOmer* in order to *purify* us...and *sanctify* us with Your supernal holiness.”

Prayer also differs from other *mitzvos* in that most other commandments are fulfilled by doing the deed itself — and in a more comprehensive state, by doing the deed accompanied by its proper intent.

Prayer, however, is very different: On the one hand, prayer involves supplicating G-d that He fulfill the person's request; on the other hand, fulfilling the commandment of prayer is not at all bound up with the person's supplication and request actually being granted — his very supplication entirely fulfills the commandment of prayer.

Here, as well, *Sefiras HaOmer* bears a striking resemblance to prayer:

According to many of our sages,<sup>11</sup> the concept and *mitzvah* of *Sefiras HaOmer* serves as a preparation to the festival of *Shavuos*, the time when G-d gave us the Torah. In the words of the *Chinuch*: “We were commanded to count from the morrow of the festival of *Pesach* until the day of the giving of the Torah, in order to demonstrate our great desire to reach that revered day...For counting [the days until a given day] demonstrates that the person's entire yearning and desire is to reach that particular day.”

Notwithstanding the fact that *Sefiras HaOmer* acts as a preparation to *Shavuos*, it nonetheless is a *mitzvah* unto itself, with its own individual blessing, etc. — just as prayer involves beseeching G-d to fulfill a request, and nevertheless is considered a completed commandment, even if the person has yet to merit that his request be granted.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXII, pp. 114-119

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Vayikra* 23:16:17.
2. As stated in the faceplate of his *Siddur*.
3. See *Siddur HaRash m'Rashkov*; *Siddur HaAriZal Kol Yaakov*.
4. *Berachos* 12a.
5. Cf. *Beis Elokim* of the *Mabit*, *Shaar HaTefillah* ch. 3.
6. See *Magen Avraham, Orach Chayim* 101:2; *Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZakein, ibid.*, subsec. 4.
7. *Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah* 1:2.
8. *Shulchan Aruch Admur HaZakein*, 489:10.
9. *Ibid.*, subsec. 1.
10. See *Likkutei Torah, Chukas* 66a.
11. See *Moreh Nevuchim* 3:43; *Chinuch, Mitzvah* 306; *Ran*, conclusion of tractate *Pesachim*.

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