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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

On the Air with Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Rav Aviner answers questions of Jewish Law and faith on the radio in Israel on Tuesday & Thursday nights (To listen: www.kimizion.org/shiur/shut.html). On the Air presents a sample each week.

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Women reciting a blessing on Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: Can an Askenazic woman recite a blessing on Sefirat Ha-Omer (Sefardic woman do not generally recite a blessing when performing a time-bound positive mitzvah)?

A: The Mishneh Berurah (489:3) writes that she should not recite a blessing since she may forget to count on one of the nights and some authorities say that the past blessings will have been in vain. Women have incredible responsibility and burdens. A woman's time is not her own. You cannot tell a baby not to cry between certain hours. Babies and children need their mothers. The Torah therefore exempts women from time-bound positive mitzvot. Since there is concern for reciting a blessing in vain, the Mishneh Berurah rules that if women count it should be without a blessing. If a woman is positive, however, that she will not forget and she has a system for remembering, she may recite the blessing (for example, see Sefer Orchos Rabbenu vol 2, p. 94 that the Steipler Gaon's would remind the women and girls in his home to count each night).

Moving during Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: Is it permissible to move to a new apartment during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer?

A: Some authorities rule that one should not move during this period, because there is great joy in moving. Other Rabbis rule, however, that no such problem exists since there is not immense joy in moving (Shut Yechaveh Daat 3:30). These authorities also permit moving when one has an apartment and he wants to move to a nicer place, and all the more so when there is a real need. As far as the "chanukat ha-bayit – the dedication of the house," one should have the essential chanukat ha-bayit of having the first use of the house be Torah learning or praying during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer. The custom of inviting people to the new home should be done after Sefirat Ha-Omer.

Painting a house during Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: Is it permissible to paint a house during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer?

A: There is no prohibition against painting between Pesach and Shavuot. We do not paint during the Nine Days before Tisha Be-Av, and many of the laws and customs of the Nine Days have been transferred to the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer, but no such prohibition exists. The Mishnah Berurah (493:2) says that one should not increase joy during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer, and there are therefore authorities who say that one should not have a "chanukat ha-bayit – the dedication of the house" with inviting guests since there is great joy, but painting does not cause such joy (Yechaveh Daat 3:30).

Mourning for the students of Rabbi Akiva and the Holocaust

Q: Why is there such lengthy mourning during the Sefirat Ha-Omer for the students of Rabbi Akiva while there is such limited mourning for the Holocaust?

A: There is a major principle that we cannot mourn for every tragedy of the Jewish People, since if we did so we would be mourning every day of the year. The Mishnah in Ta'anit (4:6) says that five tragedies occurred on Tisha Be-Av (9th of Av) and we mourn for all of them on that day. This list includes the destruction of the First Temple and the Second Temple even though one was destroyed on the ninth of Av and the other was destroyed on the seventeenth of Av (see Gemara) since our Sages decreed that would mourn over all of these tragedies on Tisha Be-Av. Tisha Be-Av includes all of the tragedies of the Jewish People, and in fact many shuls include lamentations for the Holocaust. In Sefer Orot, Maran (our revered teacher) Rav Kook writes that we mourn during "Tikun Chazot" (special prayers recited at midnight) specifically for the destruction of the Temple because we distinguish between the results and the source. The source of all of the destruction is the exile of the Divine Presence from the Temple. On account of the exile of the Divine

Presence, the First Temple was destroyed, the Second Temple was destroyed, the Crusades occurred, the Holocaust occurred, etc... Everything is included. All of the four days of mourning for the destruction of the Temple (Tisha Be-Av, Shiva Asar Be-Tammuz, Asara Be-Tevet and Tzom Gedaliah) include all of the destructions – including the Holocaust – because they are in essence the same destruction.

Grooming a cat during Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: Is it permissible to groom my cat which includes a haircut during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer?

A: Yes, a cat is not obligated in the mitzvot, the laws and the customs.

New clothes during Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: Is it permissible to wear new clothes during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer?

A: When one wears new clothing he recites the blessing of "Shehechyanu." The issue involves whether one may recite the blessing of "Shehechyanu" – which blesses Hashem who has brought us to this time – during Sefirat Ha-Omer since it is not a good time of the year. There are three opinions: 1. Some authorities rule that it is forbidden to wear new clothing during this period even on Shabbat. 2. Some rule that it is permissible to wear new clothing even on a weekday. 3. Others provide a middle position: It is permissible to wear new clothing, but only on Shabbat (because it is appropriate to recite "Shehechyanu" on Shabbat). Since this entire ruling is either a rabbinic law or a custom and has not been definitively decided, one may be lenient. Therefore, the basic law is that one may wear new clothing even on a weekday, but it is proper to do so only on Shabbat.