



Parashat Behar 5771 - #186

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

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Attn: Mordechai Tzion

On Sefirat Ha-Omer...

A Boy who Becomes Bar Mitzvah during Sefirat Ha-Omer

Q: If a boy becomes a bar mitzvah during the period of Sefirat Ha-Omer, should he continue to count Sefirat Ha-Omer with a blessing after his bar mitzvah?

A: He may continue to count Sefirat Ha-Omer with a blessing based on three reasons:

1. Although he did not have an obligation to count before his bar mitzvah, he nonetheless counted. Counting is counting.
2. He had a rabbinic obligation of "chinuch – education" to count before his bar mitzvah and the mitzvah of Sefirat Ha-Omer is a rabbinic mitzvah in our time. Both obligations are therefore rabbinic in nature, and one rabbinic obligation can join with the other rabbinic obligation. Nonetheless there can be discussions whether these obligations are equal since perhaps before

he is a bar mitzvah there are two rabbinic laws and after he is a bar mitzvah there is only one rabbinic law.

3. There is also an opinion among the Rishonim (early authorities) which states that each day of Sefirat Ha-Omer is a separate mitzvah. There is a dispute whether there is one mitzvah to count all forty-nine days or whether each and every day is a mitzvah in and of itself. In this dispute, the halachic authorities rule that we are strict not to continue counting with a blessing if we forget to count one day because of a doubt which opinion is correct (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 489:8). In our case, however, since we are combining a few reasons together, we can say that perhaps the opinion which states that each day of counting is a mitzvah in and of itself is the correct one.

There is in fact a dispute regarding our question. Some authorities rule that a bar mitzvah should not continue to count with a blessing. These include: Shut Pri Ha-Aretz (3:1), Shut Har Tzvi (2:76) and Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef in Shut Yechaveh Daat (3:29). Other authorities rule that a bar mitzvah should continue to count with a blessing, including: Shaarei Teshuvah on the Shulchan Aruch (ibid.), Shut Ketav Sofer (Orach Chaim #99), Aruch Ha-Shulchan (ibid. #15) and Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot of Ha-Rav Moshe Sternbuch (1:313).

Based on a combination of the three above reasons, I say that one should follow the authorities who rule that a bar mitzvah should continue to count Sefirah with a blessing. Even though the basic mitzvah is to count and one who counts even without a blessing fulfills the mitzvah, the reality is that one who counts without a blessing feels that he is not really counting. This idea is mentioned in "Shearim Metzuyanim Ba-Halachah" (vol. 3 p. 129). This feeling is not correct and it is not a halachic factor, but it is an additional incentive to rule that a bar mitzvah should continue to count Sefirat Ha-Omer with a blessing.

Rav Aviner on... Has the Vine Flowered?

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Emor 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

“Let us go early to the vineyards. Let us see if the vine has flowered, if its blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give My love to you.” (Shir Ha-Shirim 7:13)

Let us see if the Land has begun to flower. Have we reached the stage of G-d's promise: “I will turn the desert into ponds, the arid land into springs of water” (Yeshayahu 41:18)? Let us go out and see whether we have already merited the prophecy of, “But you, over mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My people Israel, for their return is near” (Yechezkel 36:8). We entreat G-d. We want to return to the land, to the field, to the earth, to the farm, to the Kibbutz, to the village, to the Moshav. This, after all, is the well-known sign: "Rabbi Akiva said: you have no more obvious sign of the end of days than that of Yechezkel (ibid.): ‘But you, over mountains of Israel, shall yield your produce and bear your fruit for My Nation Israel, for their return is near’” (Sanhedrin 98a). Rashi explains: "When the Land of Israel yields its fruit bountifully, then the end will be near, and you have no more obvious sign of the end of days than that."

The Redemption, the Messianic Era, begins with the Land yielding its fruits. In 5641, the Land began to yield fruits for its returning sons. The end of the exile began a little more than 100 years ago. The Jewish people are waiting for the Land to yield its fruits: “Let us go early to the vineyard. Let us see if the vine has flowered, if its blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom.” The exile is described as a time of "No grapes left on the vine,

no figs on the fig tree" (Yirmiyahu 8:13). We chant these words in the Haftarah of Tisha B'Av.

One time our master, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, mentioned this verse on Tisha b'Av. He wept and said, "Now there are grapes on the vine and figs on the fig tree. Now we have reached the stage of, 'the vine flowering, its blossoms opening, the pomegranates in bloom'."

"There I will give my love to you": G-d responds: "There, in the Land of Israel, I will give you My love." The great repentance of the Jewish people, the great linking up between the Master of the Universe and the Jewish people occurs in the Land of Israel (Orot Ha-Teshuva 17a). Now that the blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom, there I will give My love to you." "The green figs form on the fig tree. The young grapes [Hebrew: Semadar] give off fragrance. Arise, my darling. My fair one, come away!" (ibid. 2:13). "The green figs form on the fig tree": There still aren't any mature figs, only unripe ones. Matters still are not complete. "The young grapes give off fragrance." The grape plants as well are very young. Rashi explains: "When the flower falls off, and the grapes become separated from one another, and each grape can be individually recognized, that is called 'Semadar'. On the surface, this verse describes a young man enticing his fiancée to follow after him." The verse describes a young man inviting his fiancée on an outing. "Come," he says to her. "This is not the time to remain at home. The winter is over. There is fresh air outside, birds and budding plants. The green figs and young grapes are forming." The metaphor is of God telling us, "Come! Come!" As Rashi says: "'The green figs form on the fig tree' – The time has come for the first fruits to be brought, that you should come into the land. 'The young grapes give off fragrance' – The time of wine libations is drawing near."

G-d is saying to us, "Come to the Land of Israel." Amongst the Jewish People there were some in despair, hardly still believing. "The Israelites left Egypt well prepared [Chamushim]" (Shemot 13:18). Rashi comments, "Only one in five [Chamesh] left Egypt." Four out of five were not privileged to leave, because they did not believe in the Redemption. Eighty percent remained there.

In our days as well, only twenty percent of the Jewish People understand that the blossoms have budded, and those twenty percent are in the Land. Eighty percent do not understand as well, and they remain in the Diaspora. G-d is rousing us, saying, "Come! There is already a beginning. The Spring has begun." "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, for our vineyard is in blossom" (Shir Ha-Shirim 2:15).

All the same, a problem arises. Within the Jewish people there are Jews who do harm, little foxes, small people of small faith, a small perspective lacking in wisdom and intellect, small, destructive people. "Catch us the foxes," these are foxes who ruin the vineyard, the vineyard of Israel. "Our vineyard is in blossom." Our vineyard is still in blossom. It is weak. It is only starting out. And that is the problem. Were the vineyard of Israel stronger, if they were in the full redemption, who could stand against us?! Yet everything is just starting out. It is only a blossoming. Therefore, there are small foxes who ruin it.

There are all sorts of foxes. There are Egyptian foxes, Jewish foxes, American foxes, Russian foxes and Arab foxes. We have known many sorts of foxes in our history. Some were more powerful like Hitler. Others were small like Arafat. Compared to Hitler, Arafat was a minor fox. Some nations are foxes. There are elegant American foxes and there are also Jewish foxes. A fox is a sly but cowardly creature. Within every individual as well, there are inner, personal foxes. These are our inner passions, which sometimes ruin the vineyard -- the national vineyard, or the individual vineyard. The vineyard is in danger of ruin, especially when it is young. As Shir Ha-Shirim, Chapter 1 teaches, "My mother's sons quarreled with me. They made me guard the vineyards. My own vineyard I did not guard" (1:6). But there is no need to worry. When the vineyard becomes stronger, no fox will succeed in ruining it. When we left Egypt we were like unripe fruit. That is why we had so many problems.

And today as well, we are like unripe fruit. There is a certain logic to waiting until everyone becomes righteous and only then to build the State, but it's not always possible to wait. The Belzer Rebbe met Rabbi Natan Ra'anan, the son-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook, and said to him, "All the Jews we wanted to turn into saints before they came to the Land of Israel were consumed in the crematoria." You can't wait. The State of Israel

today is like unripe fruit. People who are not enormous saints in Torah or in their understanding of the Land of Israel or even in mundane matters are running this country. Yet even they will ultimately "give off fragrance". Even their deeds provide a good fragrance for G-d. Unripe food is not the same as a fruitless shade tree. The latter will never have fruit. By contrast, the unripe fruit will eventually ripen. You just have to wait patiently. Therefore, unripe fruit is precious and its fragrance is good, enough so for God to tell us, "Arise my darling! Come away!"

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #54-55

[adapted by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

#54

The second blessing of the Shemoneh Esrei is called "Gevura" (strength). It discusses Hashem's heroic strength and power. This "Gevura" is always present, even if it is sometimes hidden. The greatest example that we will ever see of this is Techiyat Ha-Meitim - the Resurrection of the Dead, which will occur at some point after the coming of the Mashiach. This miraculous event could certainly only be performed by Hashem. We know that this will eventually happen, even if it may be a long way away. We wait and never give up.

It is important to note that Techiyat Ha-Meitim applies not just to individuals. It also applies to nations. Exile is filled with terrible pains and suffering. People have thought for centuries that the Jewish People would disappear. But the Jewish People are being reborn even stronger and greater than before. Hashem restores us to life, both as individuals and as Klal Yisrael.

#55

In the third blessing of "Ha-Kel Ha-Kadosh", we say to Hashem that "Kedoshim praise you daily." Who are these Kedoshim? One explanation is that these are the "Melachim" (angels). Another explanation is that we are the Kedoshim. Am Yisrael is the Kedoshim. These aren't necessarily contradictory explanations. The Ramchal explains that someone who becomes a Kadosh becomes like an angel. Hashem made angels and He also made people that can become like angels. We can become Kedoshim through our actions, thoughts and treatment of others. Learning Torah is a part of this. But we also have to act in a holy way. If someone learns a lot of Torah but acts improperly or dishonestly, it is a tremendous desecration of Hashem. People question if the Torah and its mitzvot are worth anything if someone who is supposedly a Torah Jew acts badly.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

She'eilat Shlomo

Women and Aliyah to the Torah

Question: Is it permissible for a woman to receive an Aliyah to the Torah?

Answer: The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 282:3) rules that she may not.

Women's Tefillah Group

Question: May women organize a Women's Tefillah Group with a Torah reading?

Answer: No. There is no such concept, it is a new creation. We may not invent Halachot. See what Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter wrote: that there are 12 prohibitions violated by doing so (Be-Ikvei Ha-Tzon pp. 21-37). See also Ha-Rav Soloveitchik in Mi-Penini Ha-Rav pp. 67-68).

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Educating During Adolescence

We mentioned that a child should not begin school until the age of six. But even before the age of six a child should not be abandoned. The Sefer Ha-Chinuch (Mitzvah #419) writes that when the child begins to talk, we teach him the verse "Torah Tziva Lanu Moshe" and the first sentence of the Shema, and teach other verses little-by-little.

The verses of the Torah are not only sustenance for the intellect: they are primarily for the soul. They help the soul grow.

But, all-in-all, it must be done without pressure. The Sefer Ha-Chinuch, whose author is unknown (some say it is Rabbi Aharon of Barcelona), continues that one should not overburden a child in learning since his limbs and heart are gentle. When he grows and strengthens himself, physically and spiritually, he will be able to withstand the rigors of learning.

This is the general principle that during adolescence: the foundation must be laid with love and pleasantness, without coercion, in order to awaken his desire to learn.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

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