



My Sefira Calendar



TEACHER'S GUIDE





DEAR TEACHER,

The elevated days of Sefirah beckon with opportunity for unprecedented growth. As we prepare ourselves for Kabbalas HaTorah, it is our duty to imbue our talmidos with the meaning and message of Sefiras Ha'Omer and the heights to which they can rise during these days.

The Sefiras Ha'Omer Calendar presents a practical and age-appropriate approach in preparation for Kabbalas HaTorah.

Teacher's Guide Includes:

- A sample student calendar
- An Introductory lesson plan
- Materials for the Introduction lesson (Sapphire board sheets, Seven-Story Building board sheets)

Student Calendar Includes:

- A Sunday-Friday calendar for the seven weeks of Sefiras Ha'Omer
- A set of stickers

Following along with the Sefiras Ha'Omer Calendar enables students to explore practical steps they can take toward becoming greater.

Each calendar page features the name of that week's Sefirah – the "Middah of the Week", along with a basic definition based the sefer 'וספרתם לכם' by _____.

At the bottom of the page, there is a section titled "Bringing it home", which is a practical explanation of the middah.

For each week, students receive a set of stickers with examples of concrete actions they can implement to improve that week's middah. To track their progress, students stick in the stickers showing what they accomplished in the space provided on the calendar.



INTRODUCTORY



LESSON

ANTICIPATORY SET: THE SAPPHIRE STONE'S JOURNEY

Teacher holds up/hangs images of diamond mining steps on the board.

Q: Where do we get diamonds from?

A: Diamonds and precious gems are mined from deep in the earth. They are formed when particles of carbon turn into crystals under very high pressure and extreme heat.

The gem you see up here is easily identifiable by its blue color – it's a sapphire stone. Looking at the final picture, what you see is a perfect, breathtaking and very expensive diamond. This is a picture of a genuine sapphire ring on sale for close to 18,000 dollars! Moving backwards, however, the origins of this diamond are far from perfect...

The diamond, as we just mentioned, comes from deep in the earth. It's very dirty and dusty down there, to the point that you often can't tell the diamond from its surroundings – that is precisely why there's a whole mining industry, where diamonds are found by using very sophisticated tools and methodology.

Look at the first picture – you see a pile of dirt-encrusted, blue-tinged rocks. Hardly what you would imagine a sapphire first looks like when it's mined!

After that stage, the sapphires are sorted, cut, chiseled, polished and re-polished.

Teacher writes or puts up a sentence strip with "ספירת העומר" on the board.

We are currently in the special days known as Yemei HaSefirah – literally translated as the "days of counting" – the days of Sefiras Ha'Omer – "the counting of the Omer".

The process we go through during Sefirah is very similar to the transformative sapphire-production process you just saw on the board.

How?

SEFIRAS HA'OMER

Before we dig a bit deeper about what we can accomplish during these exalted days, let's clarify a bit so we all understand what Sefiras Ha'Omer is in actuality.

Teacher writes or puts a sentence strip on the board:

**וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה עד ממחרת השבת השביעית
תספרו חמישים יום" (ויקרא כ"ג:ט"ו)**

We are commanded to count seven weeks from “*macharas haShabbos*”, from the time that we bring the “*Omer Hatenufah*”. This requires some explanation.

We start counting from “*macharas haShabbos*” – the morning [day] after “Shabbos.”

Q: Does anyone have a question about this timing?

A: Which Shabbos? Is it always on a Sunday?

This year, we started counting Sefirah on _____ night – it wasn’t the morning after Shabbos!

Our *chachamim* explain: “Shabbos” in this *passuk* means “Yom Tov,” and there are various explanations why the Torah uses the word “Shabbos” specifically to describe the first day of Pesach. Because we learn and follow *Torah She’baal Peh*, which is the way chazal explain the *Torah Shebichsav* according to an exact mesorah all the way back from Moshe Rabbeinu, we know that we start counting Sefirah on the second night of Pesach, which is *mimacharas haShabbos*, right after the first day of “Shabbos” - the first day of Pesach in this case.^[1]

WHAT IS THE ‘OMER HATENUFAH’?

Moving on to the second description of the time that we start counting.

Q: Is anyone familiar with what the “Omer” refers to?

A: The Korban Omer.

In the times of the Bais HaMikdash, a very special ceremony would take place each year on the second night of Pesach – יוֹם הַבֵּית, which in Eretz Yisrael would be the first night of Chol Hamoed Pesach, and in Chutz La’aretz would be the second Seder night.

Different crops have different seasons during which they ripen and grow. In Eretz Yisrael, the crops of barley begin to ripen in Chodesh Nisan, and so the harvest season for barley takes place in this month. No one was allowed to begin harvesting his grain, however, until the Ketziras Ha’Omer, the cutting of the Omer, was performed. The harvesting season was opened with a great celebration as this mitzvah was performed on behalf of the *klal*.

On the night of יוֹם הַבֵּית, the Beis Din, escorted by respected members of the community, would go out to

[1] During the times of the Second Bais Hamikdash, there was a group of apikorsim known as the Baitussim that denied the Torah She’baal Peh. They translated everything from the Torah Shebichsav literally, without following any of the halachos our chachamim have taught us. They heretically counted Sefirah “*mimacharas haShabbos*” literally following the weekly Shabbos – only on a Sunday.

a field at the edge of the Yerushalayim. It was a very big honor to have one's field chosen for the mitzvah. There, they would harvest a specific amount of the barley with great joy.^[2]

When the barley was harvested, it was soft and wet, and had to be dried. The barley was put in a pan over fire to dry it out completely. Once dry, it was ground into a very fine flour – it was ground thirteen times, in fact, to ensure it was truly finely ground without the slightest bit of chaff remaining.

The next day, from the flour produced, the Kohen would bring the Korban Omer. What does “omer” actually mean? An omer is a specific measurement, and the Korban Omer is named for that amount of barley flour used for the *korban*.

How much is an omer? It equals to about 2 liters – approximately 68 ounces, or 8 cups in US measurements. The omer of flour was mixed with oil before it was brought as a korban.

There's another very important detail about the Korban Omer that we learn from the name it's given in the passuk: “מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה”

What is the meaning of the “Omer Hatenufah”?

Tenufah – l'hanif – means to wave.

The Korban Omer was only brought on the *mizbeach* after the Kohen held the *kli shareis*, the vessel, containing the omer of barley flour and waved it in all directions – north, south, east and west. There are many deep reasons behind this waving; one of them is that it served as a protection against any evil that could befall the new harvest. There is so much that can go wrong when a farmer plants his crops and harvests them, and this waving brought a special *shemirah Elyonah* to the new crop of the season.

From the time that this special, once-a-year *korban* was brought, on the second day of Pesach – ט"ו סיון – that is when we start to count שבע שבתות תמימות – seven full weeks, forty-nine days.

These forty-nine days end precisely when?

The last day of Sefiras Ha'Omer is ה' סיון – the day before Shavuos, ו' סיון.

[2] A very important and interesting part of the ceremony, done to refute the kefirah of the Baitussim, was a series of questions and answers before the actual harvest was performed. The three Yidden appointed to harvest the wheat would turn to all the Yidden standing around them and ask,

“Has the sun set?”

“Yes,” the bystanders answered.

They would ask again, “Has the sun set?”

“Yes,” the people answered again.

Once more, the harvesters asked the same question, “Has the sun set?”

“Yes,” they answered.

They asked this question because according to Torah She'baal Peh, the mitzvah begins at night, not in the morning, as the Baitussim believed. The repetition of the question and the emphatic “Yes!” each time was to serve as a powerful negation of the Baitussim and their skewed beliefs.

In the same vein, the following questions were each asked three times and answered with a “Yes!” by the people each time:

“Should I cut with this sickle?”

“Yes.”

“Should I put the harvest in this basket?”

“Yes.”

If it was Shabbos, they would ask, “Is it Shabbos today?” [Meaning, should we harvest even on Shabbos?]

SEFIRAS HA'OMER TODAY

We no longer have a Bais Hamikdash, nor do we have Ketziras Ha'Omer or the Korban Omer. But we still count Sefirah. What does this counting mean to us today?

Our counting takes us from the Yom Tov of Pesach straight until the Yom Tov of Shavuos.

Obviously, there is a strong connection between these two Yamim Tovim. In fact, there is such a strong connection that the Ramban tells us that the days of Sefirah have the *kedushah* of Chol Hamoed, because it connects Pesach and Shavuos, which are like one long Yom Tov. Pesach is like the "first days" of the Yom Tov, then there's the "Chol Hamoed" of Sefirah, and then "second days" are Shavuos.

There must be something very special and specific that we are supposed to be accomplishing during this lofty time – not just counting, but making each of those 49 days count.

Of course, the fundamental purpose of our counting is in anticipation of Kabbalas HaTorah – we are counting up with excitement to the moment where we will receive the Torah. Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim on Pesach, and from when they left, they were counting to Shavuos, when they would receive the most precious gift ever given on this earth.

THE SEVEN "FLOORS"

The teacher holds up/hangs on the board a cartoon of two buildings with seven floors each. One has 7 floors with seven stairways leading to floor #7. The other one has seven floors but no steps.

Two contractors were hired to build a building each. After spending months on the infrastructure, layout and interior design, the boss was invited to come view the buildings. The anticipation was palpable as the boss toured each structure. His personal quarters were located on the seventh floor of each building.

When the boss entered the first building, he was enamored by the detail and design. The pleasure was evident on his face as he went from floor to floor.

The second building was magnificent as well, yet, when he wanted to go to the second floor, there were no steps! The entrances didn't lead anywhere and the boss was left bewildered, wondering how he was supposed to reach his office on the seventh floor.

Every floor is a level closer to the top. In order to reach floor seven, one has to have reached the lower floors before it.

So too, when we count the days of Sefirah, each day is like a step that leads to the next. Each week is a floor

"Yes." [Because the mitzvah of Ketziras Ha'Omer is docheh Shabbos – it is permitted.]

Once all these questions had been asked, each harvester separately asked the people, "Should I harvest now?" and everyone answered, "Yes!"

that ultimately brings us to Matan Torah.

When we count Sefirah, every day counts. Every week is preceded by the week before it until we reach the culmination of seven complete weeks.

”וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה, שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה, עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום.”

When we count the days of Sefirah, each day leads to the next and when that week is complete, we are elevated to the next week.

GETTING THERE ON OUR OWN

What are the weeks of Sefirah all about? Why are we climbing the seven floors we mentioned now, specifically between Pesach and Shavuot?

There’s a story behind these seven floors we have to climb...

We were actually on the seventh floor once before!

When Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, our nation was born. Hakadosh Baruch Hu redeemed us from Mitzrayim and lifted us out of the 49th level of *tumah* to which we had sadly sunk. We were elevated to incredible heights – all the way to the 49th level of *kedushah*!

At the Yam Suf, we are told , (מכילתא דשירה) , “ראתה שפחה על הים מה שלא ראה יחזקאל בן בוזי!”

Yechezkel Hanavi saw visions and received *nevú’os* that no being in his generation had ever experienced. Yet, a *shifchah*, a maidservant, at the Yam Suf saw more wonders and experienced a higher level of *gilui Shechinah* than the Navi Yechezkel! Every single Yid who left Mitzrayim was on the level of a giant Navi! What Bnei Yisrael experienced at that time was pretty much a miracle. They had been at the lowest point possible, and overnight, they went to the highest level possible for a human being to experience on this earth! And they had done nothing at all for it!

Imagine if your baby sister, or even your little sister, would climb up to the piano and start composing the most complex, intricate and masterful pieces of music. It would be nothing short of a miracle! There is no logical way for her to have reached this level of talent, knowledge and capability at such a young age.

L’havdil - to be on such an incredible level was a true gift for Klal Yisrael, but it was a gift they felt extremely undeserving of. In His great kindness, Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us back down from that spiritual high, until we were back at “ground level.”

No longer were we at the 49th level of *tumah*, we weren’t -49; we dropped from 49 to 0.

How is that a kindness? It sounds like something terrible!

Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent us back down from the 49th level of *kedushah* for the purpose that we should get right back up there again – but through our own work. Not with miracles, not as a gift – on our own, like that little sister on the piano sitting through hours and hours and hours of lessons and being able to compose and play the music she worked so hard to learn.

Going back to our two seven-story buildings, when we left Mitzrayim, it was as if Hakadosh Baruch Hu took us all the way to the seventh floor in the building without steps – miraculously, He just picked us up and placed us on the seventh floor even though there was no way to get there.

Once we got a glimpse of what it was like to experience that exalted level of connection to Him, Hakadosh Baruch Hu placed us at the foot of the stairs “in the other building” and charged us with the special challenge of getting up there ourselves, by foot, so that we could earn the *madreigos* and truly own them.

THE SEVEN SEFIROS

What are those seven “staircases”?

It took seven weeks of *avodah*, of deep internal work, for the Yidden to reach that spiritual level. Once they got there, they were finally able to receive the Torah.

During these seven weeks, we ascend the seven ספירות.

You may have heard this term before, and many of you can most probably list the seven ספירות for me.

Q: What are the seven *sefiros*?

The teacher can get answers from students and write them on the board or hang up sentence strips with the names of the seven Sefiros on the board.

A: The Sefiros are:

חסד

גבורה

תפארת

נצח

הוד

יסוד

מלכות

Each week of the Sefiros Ha'Omer corresponds to a different *middah*, referred to as a Sefirah.

Before we explain the significance of each of these Sefiros, it's important that we understand that these



Sefiros go beyond just the seven weeks of Sefirah. They are seven *middos* with which Hakadosh Baruch Hu runs the world, and they are the foundations of our lives and our *neshamos*. There are endless esoteric *sodos* and lofty concepts surrounding these Sefiros in the teachings of Kabbalah, which are, of course, beyond our simple comprehension.

Although the explanation we will give for each of the Sefiros is just one aspect of an endlessly deep definition, let us try to understand what the Sefiros stand for.

חסד – **giving**; selflessly giving to others

גבורה – **strength**; strength of character to do what’s right

תפארת – **splendor**; bringing splendor to Hashem’s Name

נצח – **eternity**; choosing eternity over things that are temporary

הוד – **glory**; can also be understood as coming – מלשון הודאה which is expressing השוב הכרת הטוב.

יסוד – **foundation**; elevating *gashmiyus* to *ruchniyus*.

מלכות – **royalty**; the *emunah* that Hashem is מלך and we’re here to serve Him.

This seventh level of מלכות is the ultimate level that we reach when we are acquire all Sefiros.

As we work on developing our *middos* and elevating ourselves in preparation for *Chag HaShavuos*, we are building a “seven-floor” *binyan* and thus becoming ready for Kabbalas HaTorah.

MIDDOS WE LEARN FROM THE SEVEN SEFIROS

So what do these *middos* mean for me, a ___ grader, and how can I use them to become a better Bas Yisrael and Oved Hashem?

[3] Just to understand a bit of how much deeper significance there is to these Sefiros, let us take the concept a step further.

We know that in general, the number seven has myriad significance in Yiddishkeit.

The teacher asks students for examples:

Sefiras Ha’Omer

Seven days a week – the seventh day is Shabbos

Seven years of Shmittah

Seven times seven years is Yovel

The seven Sefiros are deeply interconnected with many of these special “sevens”:

Another very significant set of seven are the ז' רועים – the “Seven Shepherds”.

They are a group of seven tzaddikim who were all shepherds, a group of tzaddikim you can easily list me because they are also grouped together during another time during the year...

The seven Ushpizin!

Who are they?

אברהם אבינו

יצחק אבינו

יעקב אבינו

משה רבינו

[Definitions based on _____]

- חסד: I can think beyond myself and give to others what they need.
גבורה: I am strong; I can do what's right even if it's hard for me.
תפארת: I can use my talents to make a Kiddush Hashem.
נצח: I can choose to do things that have eternal value over temporary pleasure.
הוד: I acknowledge and express my hakaras hatov to Hashem and to people around me.
יסוד: I can serve Hashem with everything I do.
מלכות: Throughout the day, I can work on making Hashem a bigger focus of my life. [3]

SEFIRAH AND THE SAPPHIRE STONE

As we go through the seven weeks of Sefirah, we will explore each of these *middos* and explain how we can make them a part of our lives, so that we will come prepared for Kabbalas HaTorah.

The Baal HaTanya tells us a beautiful meaning to the word "Sefirah" that conceptualizes our *avodah* for this unparalleled time of growth.

He explains the words "יוספתם לכם" to mean "תאירו לכם" – make bright for yourselves. The word ספירה shares the same root as the word ספיר – a sapphire gemstone.

Refer back to the diamond-mining process pictures on the board.

During Sefirah, we are taking the magnificent, priceless sapphire – our *neshamah* – and brightening and polishing it. We remove the grime; we shake off the dust; we shave off the imperfections; we cut it to a gorgeous shape; and we buff it and shine it until it sparkles with blinding brilliance and is ready to be "showcased" at our personal Kabbalas HaTorah on Shavuos.

אהרן הכהן
יוסף הצדיק
דוד המלך

Each of the Sefiros is directly linked to another one of the Seven Shepherds, with a clear connection.

[Once again, the explanation as to why each Sefirah relates to each of the zayin ro'im is far deeper than the basic one we will learn.]

אברהם אבינו is called "איש חסד". As we know well, Avraham Avinu personified chessed in its truest form, with guests coming in and out of his tent with its four entrances all day long.

אבינו is called "גבור בגבורה", girded with strength. Yitzchak Avinu symbolizes strength. He was ready to be an oleh temimah on the mizbe'ach by the Akeidah.

יעקב אבינו is called "יעקב אבינו". כליל תפארת is a perfect combination of the chessed of Avraham Avinu and the gevurah of Yitzchak Avinu, which is called תפארת, splendor.

The Sefirah connected to משה רבינו is נצח. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah through Moshe Rabbeinu. Torah is נצח, forever.

The Sefirah connected to אהרן הכהן is הוד, splendor, the splendor of Kehunah and shalom.

יוסף הצדיק is called "צדיק יסוד עולם". Even in the darkness of Mitzrayim, Yosef HaTzaddik served Hashem and withstood the ultimate nisayon of Eishes Potiphar.

דוד המלך is "מלכא משיחא" – he was the greatest ישראל מלך, from whom the משיח descends.

During Sefiras Ha'Omer, we seek to attain perfection through emulating the middos of the רועים.



LESSON

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MATERIALS

[ROUGH SAPPHIRE STONES]



[POLISHED SAPPHIRE STONES]









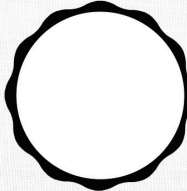
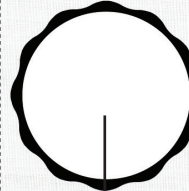
SAMPLE

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STUDENT
CALENDAR




SAMPLE CALENDAR PAGE - WEEK ONE

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חסד | מידה

of the week

חסד is selflessly giving to others.



Bringing it home:
I can think beyond myself and give to others

TORAHUMESORAH

students place stickers here



TORAH**UMESORAH**

