

Shavuos 5786

Tonight, we celebrate Shavuos, the holiday that culminates our 49-day count, from the deliverance and redemption from slavery to the giving of the Torah, the defining moment in Jewish and, for that matter, human history. By the Torah being given in a real, tangible, physical way, both the higher and lower (our worlds) were eternally bound, so that with every act in this world, we attain ever-greater spiritual closeness to Hashem. With the Torah, we can cleave directly to the source (Hashem) actively, rather than through a passive connection (which is always there). The Torah, the blueprint, is the script for this existence. Ultimately, creating a dwelling place in this realm can only be achieved through Torah and Mitzvos.

Interestingly, there is a law that one must count the 49 days of the Omer, and each day we make a Bracha. If one misses the Bracha or forgets to count and, on the same day, remembers to count, one can still say the Bracha. If a full 24 hours pass without counting, the opportunity to continue making the Bracha is lost. The BaHag (Baal Halachos Gedolos) and Tosfos debate whether it's one continuous mitzvah or 49 separate Mitzvos. According to the BaHag, based on Vayikra 23:15, "seven complete weeks" refers to a 49-day unit, and if the chain is broken by missing a full 24 hours of counting, the chain is broken. By contrast, according to Tosfos, it is a new

mitzvah every day, in which case, even if you missed it, you are still required to continue counting on subsequent days, since each day stands on its own. This raises the question, why then, if we follow Tosfos, don't you pick up saying a Bracha, unlike other Mitzvos? For example, if you missed a day of Chanuka or started late, you can start the Berachos from that day, or if you missed shaking Lulav on the first day of Yom Tov, you can still say the Bracha any day of the holiday until Hoshana Rabbah. The answer is that the halacha here is a compromise. We follow Tosfos in requiring you to continue counting (per the Shulchan Aruch, one is still chayav to count on the remaining days), since each day stands as its own mitzvah. But we are also choshesh for the BaHag's view that the chain is broken; under that view, saying a Bracha would be a Bracha L'vatala (blessing in vain). Out of safek brachos l'hakel, the Rabbonim ruled not to make the Bracha after a missed day. You are still yotzei the mitzvah of counting itself; you remain in the game, but without the Bracha. So two confounding opinions shaped how we practice today, drawing on other principles to support it.

The point here goes back to the opening idea that there are passive and active ways of being a Jew. There is the passive, in which our soul, in and of itself, is connected to Hashem, even if we don't know we are Jewish (as drawn from the Rebbe's Maamar on "V'amech Kulam Tzadikim"); this is why every Jew will

ultimately be worthy of Mashiach. And then there is the active mode, the pursuit of connecting with Hashem through Torah and Mitzvos. Prior to the Torah, the world was passively connected to Hashem, except for the few in the world (our forefathers) who were able to connect to Hashem actively, and even in a moment of a Mitzvah, use it for the purpose, but without structure (for example, Yakov using a stick as tefillin that retained no inherent holiness). In the world after the Torah was given, through the active pursuit of Torah, Mitzvos, and Halacha, items like cowhide can be turned into something holy that remains so even after use, such as tefillin. The interplay between BaHag's and Tosfos' views mirrors this active/passive structure. The mitzvah of counting itself, which, per Tosfos, continues even after a missed day, is the passive baseline that always remains. The Bracha is the active form layered on top of it, which, out of deference to BaHag, falls away once the unbroken chain is broken. The Mitzvah of Sefiras Haomer is to count, and every day there is a renewed opportunity to count, even if we missed it. The Mitzvah remains, and you count without a Bracha. Much like you can put on tefillin and not say anything (and, according to Rambam, be yotzei the mitzvah), but then there is saying the Bracha, saying the prayer, and an active version that reflects the pursuit of our existence to imbue the world with holiness by making the opportunity to make a Bracha. So the Halacha remains

that you must still be in the game, even without a Bracha, if you missed a day. The point, though, is that our Mitzvos can be active or passive, and regardless, we can and will connect with Hashem. This day is commemorated and celebrated on Shavuos. It should be the holiest day on the calendar and the best-known holiday, because it celebrates the giving of the Torah, which guides everything that follows. It is incumbent on us, then, to make it an active, known Mitzvah in the world, and to continue, through learning, spreading Torah, and doing Mitzvos, to bring that light of Torah and Hashem into this world, ultimately to receive the new Torah with Mashiach, speedily in our time.

Good Yomtov and good Shabbos!