

# Walking with *Light*

אור לְנֵתִיבְתִי

*Daily Reflections Along  
the Sefiras HaOmer Journey*

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# The Journey from Pesach to Shavuos

*An Introduction to Sefiras HaOmer*

## On Beginning the Journey

One of the greatest challenges we face with Sefiras HaOmer is that we often find ourselves caught in a recurring pattern: in the weeks leading up to it, we're typically absorbed in Pesach preparations—focused on the Seder, cleaning our homes, and koshering our kitchens. Despite our best intentions, the first precious days of the Omer slip by, overshadowed by the fanfare of Yom Tov, special guests, and Matzah-covered tablecloths.

Then we wake up after Pesach, and it's already the eighth day of the Omer. We suddenly realize: *What about Sefiras HaOmer?* We've missed the critical opening scenes of this spiritual journey.

Just as it would be disorienting to skip the first fifteen minutes of a film, or arrive late to a conversation, and miss that foundational context, so too is it challenging to engage with Sefiras HaOmer when you've missed the crucial beginning. We find ourselves trying to catch up, often failing

to integrate the spiritual threads that began during Pesach itself.

Here, we aim to prevent that disconnection; to ensure that each day's unique Sefirah is explored as part of an unfolding tapestry that begins with the exodus and culminates at Sinai. Each day offers a meditation along the shore of Torah's boundless ocean, navigating the threads of Midrashic wisdom alongside practical tools for steady character refinement.

This introductory chapter aims to provide the essential groundwork to properly orient ourselves to this journey, such that when we begin counting the Omer on the second night of Pesach, we do so with full awareness of the transformative process we are embarking upon.

### **The Arc of Freedom**

We refer to Pesach in our prayers as “זמן חרותנו”, *the time of our freedom*, yet we often fail to realize that this freedom is only the beginning of a process that culminates at Shavuos. The Mishnah (Avos 6:2) offers a profound insight into the nature of true freedom:

“וְהַלְחַת מֵעֵשָׂה אֱלֹקִים הַמָּה וְהַמְכַתֵּב מִכְתָּב אֱלֹקִים הוּא חֲרוּת עַל הַלְחַת”  
(שמות לב:טז), אֵל תִּקְרָא ‘חֲרוּת’ אֶלָּא ‘חֲרוּת’, שְׁאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוֹרִין אֶלָּא מִי  
שְׁעוֹסֵק בְּתַלְמוּד תּוֹרָה.”

*“And the tablets were the handiwork of God, and the writing was the writing of God, etched upon the tablets” (Shemos 32:16) – do not read it as “Charut”, etched, but rather “Cheirut”, freedom – for there is no truly free person but he who engages in the study of Torah.*

The Mishnah reveals a crucial understanding: true freedom doesn't come from the mere absence of physical bondage—it comes through Torah. If Shavuos marks when we received the Torah, and Torah study represents the ultimate

expression of freedom, then what begins at Pesach finds its fulfillment only in Shavuos.

What we witness here is a developmental arc: freedom itself undergoes maturation during these forty-nine days. The initial freedom of Pesach is like a seed that must be nurtured and developed to reach its full potential at Shavuos. The Arizal (Sha'ar HaKavanos, Pesach, Drush 8) explains this process in kabbalistic terms:

”גְּדֻלוֹת הַהוֹדָה... הָיְתָה לְפִי שְׁעָה בְּלַיִל רִאשׁוֹן שֶׁל פֶּסַח כְּדֵי שְׂיֻכְלוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל  
 לְגֹאֵל, וְאַחַר יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן שֶׁל פֶּסַח מִסְתַּלְקִין כָּל הַמּוֹחִין הַנּוֹצְרִין וְחוֹזְרִין  
 לְקִדְמוּתוֹ... וְאַחַר כֵּן מְלִיל שְׁנֵי וְאַיִלָּךְ אֲנִי חוֹזְרִים לְהַמְשִׁיךְ הַמּוֹחִין הַנּוֹצְרִין  
 שְׁנֹכְנְסוּ בְּלַיִל פֶּסַח וְנִסְתַּלְקוּ. וְעַתָּה חוֹזְרִים לְכַנֵּס כְּפִי סֵדֶר הַמְדְּרָגוֹת, כָּל  
 מְדְרָגָה בְּיוֹם שְׁלָהּ, עַל יְדֵי מִצְוַת סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר בְּחֻמְשֵׁים יוֹם שְׁבִינְן פֶּסַח  
 לְעֶצְרָתוֹ.”

*This state of gadlus, expanded consciousness... was only temporary, on the first night of Pesach, in order that Israel could be redeemed. After the first day of Pesach, however, all the mentioned mochin, states of consciousness, depart, and everything returns to its prior state... Then, from the second night onward, we begin once again to draw down those same mochin that entered on the [first] night of Pesach and then withdrew. Now they return to enter again, in an ordered and gradual manner—each level on its designated day—through the mitzvah of counting the Omer, during the fifty days spanning Pesach to Shavuos.*

On Pesach, we experience a momentary flash of מוֹחִין גְּדֻלוֹת, the *expanded consciousness* of divine illumination—a lightning strike that briefly reveals the entire path ahead of us. In that moment of expanded consciousness, we gain clarity about our identity, purpose, and destiny.

But then the lights dim. Our task during Sefiras HaOmer becomes reconstructing that illumination through our own

efforts, drop by drop, day by day, in a paradigm of *מוֹחֵין דְּקִטְנוּת*, *constricted consciousness*. We must walk the path that was momentarily revealed to us, regenerating the light through our own spiritual work, gradually reclaiming that expansive light.

### Torah as Self-Creation

This journey toward complete freedom through Torah involves much more than the acquisition of knowledge—it is literally a process of self-creation. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 19b) teaches a remarkable concept about teaching Torah:

”כָּל הַמְלַמֵּד בֶּן חֲבִירוֹ תוֹרָה, מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב בְּאֵילוֹ יְלָדוֹ.”

*Whoever teaches his friend's son Torah, it is as if he bore him.*

Teaching Torah is compared to giving birth—it breathes life into another person. Yet the Midrash (Tanchuma, Ki Savo 1) takes this concept even further:

”אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: כָּל הַעוֹשֶׂה תוֹרָה לְאַמְתּוֹ, מֵעֵלָה עָלָיו הַכְּתוּב בְּאֵלוֹ עָשָׂה אֶת עֲצוּמוֹ, שְׁנֹאֲמַר, 'וְאֵתִי צִוָּה ה' בְּעֵת הַהוּא לְלַמֵּד אֶתְכֶם חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים לַעֲשׂוֹתְכֶם אֲתֶם...' (דְּבָרִים דִּיד). 'לַעֲשׂוֹת אֲתֶם' לֹא נֶאֱמַר, אֶלָּא 'לַעֲשׂוֹתְכֶם אֲתֶם'; מִכָּאן שְׁמַעְלִין עָלָיו בְּאֵלוֹ הוּא עָשָׂה וּבְרָא אֶת עֲצוּמוֹ.”

*Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who performs the Torah truthfully, the Torah ascribes it to him as if he had made himself, as it says (Devarim 4:14), “At that time God commanded me to teach you laws and rules so that you perform them...” – It does not really say, “to perform them” but rather “to make you, do them”. From here [we learn] that the Torah ascribes it to him as if he made and created himself.*

The Midrash offers nothing short of a revolutionary perspective: through authentic Torah engagement, we don't merely learn something external to ourselves—we literally

create ourselves. Torah doesn't simply change what we do: it transforms who we are.

If the period from Pesach to Shavuos brings us progressively closer to true freedom—a product of Torah study—and if Torah itself enables self-creation, then each day of the Sefiras HaOmer becomes an opportunity to create more of ourselves. Through deepening our connection to Torah each day, we gradually build toward becoming an “אדם שׁלם”, *a complete person*. By Shavuos, having rectified every aspect of ourselves through this systematic process, we stand ready to receive the Torah in a state of wholeness and freedom.

### Knowing God Through His Ways

Yet this journey of self-creation through Torah raises a fundamental question: How can we truly transform ourselves to align with our *צַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים*, *the image of God*, if we don't understand what that image reflects? The qualities we work on during Sefiras HaOmer aren't arbitrary self-improvement goals—they are windows into understanding how HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself relates to His creation. To properly engage in this transformative process, we must first grasp what these divine attributes represent and how they manifest in our world.

To understand how Sefiras HaOmer leads to knowledge of God, let us examine the Rambam's foundational words in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (2:1-2). The Rambam presents the dual obligations of loving and revering God and asks a follow-up question: If these are mitzvos, then surely there is a prescribed way to fulfill it. So, what is the path that leads to loving and revering God? His answer illuminates our journey:

“הַיֵּאל הַנִּכְבָּד וְהַנּוֹרָא הַזֶּה מִצְוָה לְאַהֲבוֹ וּלְיִרְאָה אוֹתוֹ... וְהַיֵּאֵף הִיא הַדֶּרֶךְ  
לְאַהֲבָתוֹ וְיִרְאָתוֹ? בְּשִׁעָה שִׁיתְבוֹגֵן הָאָדָם בְּמַעֲשָׂיו וּבְרוֹאֵיו הַנִּפְלְאִים

הַגְּדוּלִים וְיִרְאָה מִהֵן חֲכָמָתוֹ שְׂאִין לָהּ עֶרְפָּךְ וְלֹא קֶץ, מִיָּד הוּא אוֹהֵב וּמְשַׁבַּח וּמְפָאֵר וּמְתַאֲוֶה תַּאֲוָה גְּדוּלָה לִידַע הַשֵּׁם הַגְּדוֹל. כְּמוֹ שְׂאֵמַר דָּוִד (תהילים מב:ג) 'צִמְאָה נַפְשִׁי לְאֱלֹקִים לְאֵל חַי'. וְכִשְׁמַחֲשֵׁב בְּדַבְרֵי הָאֱלֹהִים עֲצָמוֹן, מִיָּד הוּא נִרְתַּע לְאַחֲרָיו וַיִּפְחַד וַיִּוָּדַע שֶׁהוּא בְרִיָּה קִטְנָה שְׂפֵלָה אֲפֵלָה עוֹמֶדֶת בְּדַעַת קְלָה מְעוּטָה לְפָנֵי תַמִּים דְּעוֹת. כְּמוֹ שְׂאֵמַר דָּוִד (תהילים ח:ד-ה) 'כִּי אֲרָאָה שָׁמַיִךְ מַעֲשֵׂי אֲצַבְעֶיךָ... מַה אֲנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרֵנִי.'"

*This glorious and awesome God—it is a mitzvah to love and revere Him... How does one come to love and revere Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous creations and deeds, seeing within them limitless and infinitely valuable wisdom, he immediately begins to love, praise, and glorify Him, filled with intense desire to know God's great name, as David said: "My soul thirsts for God, the living God" (Tehillim 42:3). When reflecting deeply on these matters, one immediately recoils in awe, knowing he is but a small, lowly, dark creature standing with limited intelligence before the Perfect Mind. As David said: "When I see Your heavens, the works of Your fingers... What is mortal man that You make mention of him?" (Tehillim 8:4-5).*

The Rambam teaches us that knowledge of God comes through contemplating His creation and recognizing that the fabric of the world itself reveals God's nature. God is known through His handiwork: the cosmos in all its details—from the vastness of galaxies to the intricacy of a single cell—manifests divine wisdom. In a responsa (Pe'er HaDor, 53), the Rambam provides his source:

"מָה שֶׁשְּׂאֵלְתָם מָה תוֹעֵלַת יֵשׁ בְּיַדִּיעָה זֶה – כְּבָר רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֹמֵר: הַתְּבוּנָה בְּמַעֲשָׂיו שֶׁמִּתּוֹךָ כָּךְ אֵתָה מְבִיר מִי שְׂאֵמַר וְהִיא הָעוֹלָם."

*That which you asked, "What benefit is there in this knowledge?" – Rabbi Meir has already said: Contemplate God's works, for from this you will recognize He Who spoke and created the universe.*

During Sefiras HaOmer, as we reflect on how HaKadosh Baruch Hu expresses Himself in the way He creates and runs

the world, we're engaged in precisely the contemplation that the Rambam describes here. By studying how God runs the world through Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferes, and the other attributes, we gain the very knowledge that leads to love.

The Rambam clarifies this connection between knowledge and love in his concluding remarks of Hilchos Teshuva (10:6):

”דְּבַר יְדוּעַ וּבְרוּר שְׂאִין אֶהְבֵּת הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא נִקְשֶׁרֶת בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם עַד שִׁישְׁגָה בַּה תַּמִּיד כְּרֵאוּי וְיַעֲזֹב כֹּל מֵה שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם חוּץ מִמֶּנָּה. כְּמוֹ שֶׁצִּוְהָ וְאָמַר בְּכֹל לִבְכָּהּ וּבְכֹל נַפְשָׁהּ. אֵינּוּ אוֹהֵב הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶלָּא בְּדַעַת שִׁיֵּדְעָהּ. וְעַל פִּי הַדְּעָה תִּהְיֶה הָאֱהָבָה אִם מְעַט מְעַט וְאִם הִרְבָּה הִרְבָּה. לְפִיכָּה צְרִיךְ הָאָדָם לִיַּחַד עֲצָמוֹ לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשְׁכִּיל בְּחֻכְמוֹת וּתְבוּנוֹת הַמוֹדִיעִים לוֹ אֶת קוֹנֵה כְּפִי כַּח שִׁישׁ בְּאָדָם לְהִבִּין וּלְהַשִּׁיג כְּמוֹ שֶׁבְּאַרְנוּ בְּהַלְכוֹת יְסוּדֵי הַתּוֹרָה.”

*It is a well-known and clear matter that love for the Holy One, blessed is He, is not firmly bound in a person's heart until they are constantly and properly immersed in it, forsaking everything else in the world except for this [love], as He commanded and said: “with all your heart and with all your soul” (Devarim 6:5) – only with the knowledge one has of Him. According to the level of knowledge will be the level of love – if little, then little; if much, then much. Therefore, a person must dedicate themselves to understanding and comprehending the wisdoms and insights that make their Creator known to them, according to the capacity that humans have to understand and grasp, as we explained in the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah.*

Our capacity to love God is directly proportional to our knowledge of Him. We can only love what we know, and the depth of our love corresponds to the depth of our knowledge. If we know little of God, we can love Him only a little; if we know much, we can love Him deeply.

Yet before we can properly engage with these attributes, we must address a fundamental paradox: How can we speak of

separate ‘attributes’ in God, who is absolutely One and indivisible? The answer lies in understanding that these Sefiros are not divisions within the Divine essence, but rather the various ways His unified will becomes manifest to us as it enters the realm of creation.

### Understanding Divine Attributes

When we speak of God’s attributes, we must recognize that this discussion emerges only from our finite perspective. HaKadosh Baruch Hu exists in absolute unity without separate parts or distinct character traits. It is only inasmuch as He creates a finite world that, from our limited human perspective, we perceive the divine expression as it segues from infinite into the finite as having different aspects.

The Rambam makes this absolutely clear in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (1:7,11-12):

”אלוהי זה אחד הוא... וכיון שנתברר שאינו גוף וגויה, יתברר שלא יאָרעו ולא אָחד ממאָרעות הגוף... ואין לו לא מוֹת ולא חיים כחיי הגוף החי, ולא סבלות ולא חכמה כחכמת האיש החכם; לא שנה ולא הקיצה, ולא בעס ולא שחוק, ולא שמחה ולא עצבות, ולא שתיקה ולא דבור כדבור האדם... והואיל והדבר כך הוא, כל הדברים הללו וכיוצא בהן שנאמרו בתורה ובדברי נביאים – הכל משל ומליצה הן.”

*God is absolutely one... And since it has been clarified that He is not a body nor a physical form, it is likewise clear that none of the events associated with physical bodies can be attributed to Him... He does not experience death, nor life in the way that a living body does; He does not possess foolishness nor wisdom in the manner of a wise human being; not sleep nor waking, not anger nor laughter, not joy nor sadness, not silence nor speech like the speech of a human being...*

*Since this is the case, all such expressions and similar ones that appear in the Torah or in the words of the prophets are entirely metaphor and allegory.*

In the Moreh Nevuchim (1:54), the Rambam further clarifies this idea:

”וְאִין הֶעֱנִין כָּאֵן שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל מִדּוֹת, אֲלֵא עוֹשֶׂה פְּעֻלוֹת הַדּוֹמוֹת לְפְעֻלוֹת הַנִּעְשׂוֹת עַל יְדִינּוּ בְּתוֹצְאָה מִמִּדּוֹת, כְּלוֹמֵר מִתְּכוּנוֹת נִפְשׁוֹת. לֹא שֶׁהוּא יִתְעַלֶּה בְּעַל תְּכוּנוֹת נִפְשׁוֹת... לֹא שֶׁהוּא יִתְעַלֶּה מִתְּפַעֵל וּמִתְּרַגֵּשׁ. אֲלֵא כְּאוֹתָהּ הַפְּעֻלָּה הַבָּאָה מִצֶּד הָאָב כְּלִפֵּי הַבֵּן שֶׁהִיא תוֹצְאָה שֶׁל רְגִישׁוֹת וְחֻמְלָה וְהִתְפַּעְלוֹת בְּהַחֲלֵט, תְּבוּא מִצֶּדוֹ יִתְעַלֶּה כְּלִפֵּי חֲסִידָיו לֹא מִתּוֹךְ הַתְּפַעְלוֹת וְלֹא מִתּוֹךְ שְׂנוּי.”

*The point is not that He possesses character traits, but rather that He performs actions similar to those that result from character traits in us—that is, from psychological qualities. Not that He, may He be exalted, possesses psychological qualities... not that He is affected or stirred emotionally. Rather, the same action that comes from a father toward his son as a result of feelings, compassion, and emotional response, comes from Him toward His devoted ones without any emotional response or change.*

The philosophical distinction between God’s unified essence and the multiplicity of His perceived actions forms the conceptual foundation for understanding the Sefiros. Indeed, the Kabbalistic tradition expresses this same principle through its own language of divine light and emanation. It teaches that what appears to us as distinct attributes are actually refractions of a single, undifferentiated source viewed from a human lens: The Zohar (II:176a) articulates this as follows:

”תָּאנָא: בּוֹלֵי הָאֵי לָא אֲתִקְרִי אֲלֵא מִסְטָרָא דִּילָן, וּמִסְטָרָא דִּילָן אֲשַׁתְּמוּדַע כְּלָא, וְלַעֲיֵלָא כְּלָא בְּחַד מִתְקָלָא סְלָקָא, לָא שְׁנֵי וְלָא יִשְׁתַּנֵּי, כְּמָה דְכִתְבִּיב, (מִלְאכֵי גו: אָנִי ד’ לָא שְׁנִיתִי. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה: כְּלָהוֹן בּוֹצִיגִין נְהִירִין מִחַד, וּמִחַד תְּלִין, וּבּוֹצִיגִין אֵינְהוּ חַד כְּלָא. דְּהָא לָא בְּעוּ לְאַתְפָּרְשָׁא, וּמֵאן דְּפָרִישׁ לוֹן, כְּאֵלּוּ אֲתִפְרֵשׁ מִן חַיִּי עֲלֵמָא.”

*We learned: All these descriptions cannot be said except from our side (i.e. perspective), and it is from our side that everything is*

*known. Above, everything ascends as one measure, unchanging and unchangeable, as written: "I am Hashem, I have not changed" (Malachi 3:6). Rabbi Yehuda said: All the lights shine from one source and depend on one, and the lights are all essentially one, for they do not wish to be separated. One who separates them is as if separated from eternal life.*

Rabbi Yehuda's analogy of a candelabra beautifully illustrates this concept. Just as a candelabra's various branches all radiate a single form of light, the seven Sefiros are all manifestations of God's unified essence. Indeed, the Menorah is often seen as representing both the seven Sefiros as well as the seven branches of human wisdom through which we come to know God (cf. Ya'aros Dvash 2:7; Chasam Sofer, Bamidbar 12:12).

The Ramchal (Klalim Rishonim, 1) further clarifies the nature of the Sefiros:

"ענין הספירות: הנה הספירות הם מדותיו יתברך, המדות שחדש לעצמו לצרך הנבראים; שאינם מדות לפי ענין שלמותו ומציאותו האמתי הקדום, אלא מדות מחדשות מרצונו ורצונו, לפי מה שמצטרף לנבראים שרצה לברא. והם כלל כל התארים המתיחסים לו על שם פעולותיו, בכל מה שנבחן בפעולותיו, דרך משל, הממשלה, הרחמנות, הכעס, המשפט, החנינה, הידיעה, וכל שאר הפעולות הרבות שהוא פועל.

"אמנם צריך לדעת, כי הנה אלה המדות בנפש האדם הם תכונות חקיקות בה ממש, אך באדון ברוף הוא לא יכין לדבר בו, ואי אפשר לנו לומר שהם תכונות בו, כי תכונה הוא ענין נופל רק בנבראים, לא בבורא. אמנם אלה המדות בבורא אינם אלא מיני השגחה שהוא משגיח, והארה שהוא מאיר אל נבראיו..."

*The concept of the Sefiros: The Sefiros are His attributes, blessed be He—attributes He innovated for Himself for the needs of creation.*

*They are not attributes according to His perfection and true primordial existence, but rather new attributes from His will and*

*desire, according to what the creations He wanted to create would need...*

*However, one must know that these attributes in the human soul are qualities actually engraved within it. But regarding the Master, blessed be He, we cannot speak this way. We cannot say they are qualities within Him, for a quality is a concept that applies only to created beings, not to the Creator. Rather, these attributes in the Creator are only types of providence with which He supervises, and illumination with which He illuminates His creations...*

When we speak of divine attributes, we are not describing God's essence but rather how He relates to creation according to our needs. The Sefiros aren't qualities inherent in God in the way character traits are ingrained in humans. Rather, they represent the different ways His providence and illumination manifest in the world.

When we study these attributes during Sefiras HaOmer, we are not claiming to understand God's essence; we are learning to recognize how divine providence operates in the world and how we can align ourselves with these patterns.

The Ramchal continues with a profound insight about how these divine illuminations relate to creation:

”וְכָל הַהָאֲרוֹת הָאֵלֶּה נִכְלָלִים בְּעֵשֶׂר, וְכָל חֲקוּמֵיהֶם הוֹלְכִים עַל פִּי הַסֵּדֶר הַזֶּה. וַיֵּשׁ לָנוּ לְהַבְחִין מִיַּי הַהָאֲרוֹת הָאֵלֶּה לְפִי הַנוֹלָד מֵהֶם, וְהַקָּשֶׁר וְהַיַּחֲסוּ שְׂבִין מִיָּן לְמִין, וְזֶה מֵה שְׂאֲנוּ מִפְּרָשִׁים בְּחֻמַּת הַקְּבִלָּה.

”וְהִנֵּה מְכַלֵּל מִיַּי הַהָאֲרָה הַזֹּאת בְּכָל פְּרִטְיָהֶם יוֹצֵאת הַתּוֹלָדָה, שֶׁהִיא כָּלֵל הַבְּרִיָּאָה הַזֹּאת בְּכָל מִשְׁפָּטֶיהָ; וְלֹא עוֹד, אֶלֶּא שֶׁהַבְּרִיָּאָה עֲצֻמָּה הַנוֹלָדָת, הִיא עֲצֻמָּה דְגָמָא אֶל כָּלֵל מִיַּי הַהָאֲרָה הַמוֹצִיָּאִים אוֹתָהּ, שֶׁחֲלָקֵי הַבְּרִיָּאָה מְקַבִּילִים אֶל מִיַּי הַהָאֲרָה בְּכָל פְּרִטְיָהֶם, וְהִנֵּה הֵם כָּלֵם מִיַּי הָאֲרָה אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם יַחֲסוּ זֶה עִם זֶה, לְפִי דְרָךְ הַהַשְׁפָּעָה וְהַהָאֲרָה. וּמִזֶּה נִמְשָׁכִים הָאֵיכוֹת וְהַעֲצָמִים בְּטַבַּע, לְפִי עֲנִין הַנְּבָרָאִים, עַד שְׁנוֹזְבִיר בְּסַפִּירוֹת כָּל מֵה שְׁנוֹזְבִיר בְּנְבָרָאִים...”

*All of these [divine] illuminations are encompassed within the ten [Sefiros], and all their laws follow this order. We can distinguish between the types of illumination according to what results from them, as well as the connection and relationship between each type—and this is what we explicate in the wisdom of Kabbalah.*

*Now, from the totality of these types of illumination in all their details emerges the outcome: the entirety of this created reality, with all its structures and laws. Moreover, the created reality itself mirrors the full range of illuminations that brought it forth. Each element of creation corresponds to a specific type of illumination in precise detail. All of these [elements] are types of illumination that relate to one another through the pathways of influence and emanation. From this relationship flow the qualities and substances found in nature, according to the nature of the created beings—so much so that whatever we say about the Sefiros, we will likewise find its parallel in the created entities.*

Everything in creation—from natural laws to biological systems, from psychological patterns and metaphysical realities to physical structures—derives the gradual unfolding of God’s will as manifest through the Sefiros. Creation itself exemplifies the collective illumination that produced it, with each part corresponding to specific types of divine expression. It is for this reason that Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (Machshavos Charutz, 11) can proclaim:

”וְזָכַרְתִּי, כִּי הָעוֹלָם כֻּלּוֹ הוּא סֵפֶר שֶׁעָשָׂה ה' יְתִבְרָךְ, וְשֶׁהַתּוֹרָה הוּא פֶּרוֹשׁ שֶׁעָשָׂה וְחִבֵּר עַל אוֹתוֹ סֵפֶר.”

*Such have I received: the entire world is a book that Hashem has made, and the Torah is a commentary that He composed upon that book.*

Creation is not merely a backdrop for divine interaction—it is the very medium through which the God is made known. Every element of existence reflects an underlying blueprint,

encoded in the structure of the Sefiros and expounded through Torah. To live with this awareness is to read the world with Torah's eyes, discovering a commentary on divine wisdom in every detail of creation.

### Emulating Divine Attributes

Beyond knowing God, Sefiras HaOmer invites us to emulate Him. The Rambam teaches (Hilchos De'os 1:5-6):

”מִצְוֵינוּ אֲנִי לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכֵי הָאֱלֹהִים הַבְּיָנוּנִים וְהֵם הַדַּרְכִּים הַטּוֹבִים וְהַיְשָׁרִים שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים כח:ט) וְהִלַכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו. כִּי לְמַדּוֹ בְּפִרוּשׁ מִצְוָה זֹאת מֵהוּא נִקְרָא חֲנוּן אִם אֶתְנֶה הֵיחָד חֲנוּן, מֵהוּא נִקְרָא קְדוֹשׁ אִם אֶתְנֶה הֵיחָד קְדוֹשׁ. וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה קָרְאוּ הַנְּבִיאִים לְאֵל בְּכָל אוֹתָן הַכְּנוּיִין: אֶרֶף אִפִּים וְרַב חֶסֶד צְדִיק וְיֵשֶׁר תַּמִּים גְּבוּר וְחֹזֵק וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְּהֵן. לְהוֹדִיעַ שֶׁהֵן דַּרְכֵי טוֹבִים וְיֵשָׁרִים. וְחַיֵּב אָדָם לְהִנְהִיג עֲצֻמוֹ בְּהֵן וּלְהִדְמוֹת אֱלֹהֵי כְּפֵי כָחוֹ.”

*We are commanded to walk in these balanced paths, the good and straight ways, as it says: ‘And you shall walk in His ways’ (Devarim 28:9). Thus they explained this mitzvah: Just as He is called gracious, so you be gracious. Just as He is called merciful, so you be merciful. Just as He is called holy, so you be holy. In this manner, the prophets described God with all these attributes—patient, abundant in kindness, righteous, straight, perfect, mighty, strong, and the like—to teach that these are good and straight paths. And a person is obligated to conduct himself in them and emulate Him according to his ability.*

These Sefiros through which God operates aren't just subjects for theoretical study—they are pathways we're commanded to walk. When we work on Chesed during the first week of the Omer, we aren't merely improving our character; we are fulfilling the Biblical obligation of “וְהִלַכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָיו”, *walking in His ways*. Each attribute we refine brings us closer to emulating divine conduct in our own lives.

As we traverse the path from Pesach to Shavuos, climbing towards celebrating the ‘marriage’ between the Almighty and people of Israel, we set our sights on genuine love and connection. This love depends on knowledge, which in turn comes through studying how HaKadosh Baruch Hu expresses Himself. By immersing ourselves in the study of the daily Sefirah, the Sefiras HaOmer provides the perfect opportunity for growing in our knowledge of God while learning to embody His attributes in our own conduct.

### The Forty-Nine Step Journey

With this understanding of how divine attributes shape both creation and our own spiritual development, we can now examine the specific structure of the Omer period. Why forty-nine days? The answer lies in the very architecture of spirituality – a structure that mirrors our nation’s historical journey from slavery to revelation.

The Ramban (Vayikra 23:36) offers a stunning insight that reframes our entire understanding of this period. Rather than viewing Pesach and Shavuos as two separate holidays with a counting period between them, he reveals them to be two parts of a single, extended festival:

”עֲצֶרֶת הַיָּא: ... וְצִוָּה בְּחַג הַמִּצּוֹת שֶׁבַע יָמִים בְּקִדְשָׁהּ לִפְנֵיהֶם וְלֵאחֲרֵיהֶם, כִּי בָלֵם קִדְשֵׁים וּבְתוֹכָם ה', וּמְנָה מְמַנּוּ תְשַׁעָה וָאַרְבָּעִים יוֹם, שֶׁבַע שָׁבוּעוֹת בְּיָמֵי עוֹלָם, וְקִדְשׁ יוֹם שְׁמִינִי בְשְׁמִינֵי שָׁל חַג, וְהֵימִים הַסְּפוּרִים בִּינְתֵימֵם כְּחֵלוֹ שָׁל מוֹעֵד בֵּין הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְהַשְּׁמִינִי בְּחַג, וְהוּא יוֹם מֵתָן תּוֹרָה, שֶׁהָרֵאָם בּוֹ אֵת אֲשׁוֹ הַגְּדוּלָה וּדְבָרָיו שְׁמָעוּ מֵתוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ. וְלָכֵף יִקְרָאוּ רְבוּתֵינוּ וְלֵב כָּכָל מְקוֹם חַג הַשָּׁבוּעוֹת 'עֲצֶרֶת', כִּי הוּא כְּיוֹם שְׁמִינֵי שָׁל חַג שֶׁקָּרָאוּ הַכְּתוּב בּוֹ.”

*Atzeres (Shavuos): ... He commanded seven days of Matzos in holiness before and after them, for all are holy and God is among them. From it He counted 49 days, seven weeks like the days of the world, and sanctified the eighth day like the eighth day of Sukkos. The counted days between are like the Chol HaMoed between the*

*first and eighth days of the festival. It is the day of giving the Torah, when He showed them His great fire and they heard His words from within the fire. Therefore our Sages everywhere call Shavuot 'Atzeres', for it is like the eighth day of the festival that Scripture calls by this name.*

Just as Shemini Atzeres serves as the culmination of Sukkos, Shavuot functions as the culmination of Pesach. The days of counting between them are a form of Chol HaMoed—a sacred intermediate period connecting the beginning and end of a unified festival of growth.

To understand the structure of this seven-week journey more deeply, we must examine its roots in the exodus from Egypt. Chazal tell us (Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 5) that Egyptian culture was engulfed in promiscuity and corruption. The Zohar Chadash (Parshas Yisro) tells us that by the time the nation of Israel was on the cusp of the redemption from Egypt, we had descended to the 49<sup>th</sup> level of טְמֵאָה, *defilement*:

“דְּיִדְאֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּדִ הָוּוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם, אֶסְתָּאבוּ וְאֶתְטַנְפוּ גְרַמְיָהוּן בְּכָל זִינֵי מְסָאבוּ, עַד דְּהָוּוּ שְׂרָאן תַּחֲוֹת אַרְבַּעִים וְתִשְׁעַ חִילֵי דְמְסָאבוּתָא. וְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא אֶפִיק יִתְהוּן מִתַּחֲוֹת פּוּלְחָן כָּל שְׂאָר חִילִין. וְעוּד, דְּאֶעִיל יִתְהוּן בְּמִטְרַעֵי דְסוּבְלָתְנֹו לְקַבְלֵיהוּן. מַה דְּלֹא אֶתְנֵי עִם אַבְרָהָם, אֶלָּא לְאַפְקוּתְהוּן מִמִּצְרַיִם, וְהוּא עָבִיד טִיבוּתִיָּה וְחֶסְדִּיָּה עִמְהוּן. וּבְגִין כֶּף תִּשְׁכַּח בְּאוּרֵיָתָא, חֲמִשִּׁין זְמַנִּין יִצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, לְאַחֲזָאָה לְכָל בְּנֵי עֲלָמָא, חֶסְדָּא דְעָבַד קוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּאֶפִיק יִתְהוּן מְאִינֹון חִילִין דְמְסָאבוּ, וְאֶעִיל לֹון לְגוּ חִילִין דְדְכִיּוּ, דְהִינֵנו חֲמִשִּׁין תְּרַעִין דְסוּבְלָתְנֹו. וְהָא אִיהוּ דְאֲנֹן מִנֵּן לָהּ, מִיּוֹמָא טְבָא דְפֶסְחָא. וְאֲנֹן מִנֵּן יוֹמֵי וְשַׁבּוּעֵי, וְהָא אִיתְעָרוּ חֲבֵרֵיָא, מִצְוָה לְמִמְנֵי יוֹמֵי, וּמִצְוָה לְמִימְנֵי שַׁבּוּעֵי. כִּי בְּכָל יוֹמָא אֶפִיק לָן מִחִילָא דְמְסָאבוּ, וְאֶעִיל לָן בְּחִילָא דְדְכִיּוּ.”

*Certainly, when Israel was in Egypt, we were dirtied and contaminated with all forms of impurity, dwelling under 49 forces of contamination. The Holy One Himself redeemed us from under all these powers. Furthermore, He brought us into the 49 gates of*

*understanding that correspond to them. This wasn't something promised to Avraham; God promised only to free us from servitude. This spiritual transformation was pure divine kindness. Therefore you find in the Torah exactly 50 mentions of the Exodus from Egypt, to reveal God's kindness in taking us through these 50 levels to the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of understanding, which is the 50 gates of understanding. That is why we count from the holiday of Pesach, counting days and weeks—as our colleagues taught, there is a mitzvah to count days and a mitzvah to count weeks—because each day He takes us out from a power of impurity and brings us into a power of purity.*

This wasn't part of the original promise to Avraham: Hashem had only committed to freeing us from physical servitude. The spiritual elevation was an additional gift of love from our Creator. What's noteworthy is that this wasn't a process of first removing all impurity and then beginning to add holiness. They did not need to reach a neutral point before beginning their ascent. Rather, each day served a dual purpose: as our ancestors were freed from one level of impurity, they simultaneously attained a new level of understanding and purity.

This dual nature illuminates the special prayer recited after counting the Omer each night, “רבונו של עולם” – *Master of the universe*. In this prayer, we request of God that our daily spiritual work simultaneously purify ourselves from “קלפותינו וּמַטְמָאוֹתֵינוּ” – *negative and impure traits*, while opening ourselves to receive “שִׁפְעַת רַב בְּכָל הָעוֹלָמוֹת” – *divine flow* and sanctity. Each negative trait represents an animalistic aspect that prevents us from fully expressing our divine image. We are simultaneously engaged in סוּר מֵרַע, *turning from evil*, as well as עוֹשֶׂה טוֹב, *doing good*, with each day's spiritual work. Every day of counting addresses another layer of blockage while simultaneously drawing down another level of divine light.

This explains why missing even a single day's count is so significant. When we skip a day, we leave one area of ourselves unrectified while moving on to another part of ourselves. Like trying to dye a cloth while one section of the material is sullied, the divine flow cannot fully permeate our being because we've left a blockage unaddressed.

The Ramchal really draws this all together in another one of his lesser-known writings (Choker u'Mekubal):

“ענין ספירת העומר הוא, כי חמשים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, והשגת משה רבנו עליו השלום היתה תשעה וארבעים שערים, ועצמות הבינה היא שער החמשים לא השיג, והם תשעה וארבעים ימים של ספירת העומר, וביום החמשים נתנה התורה.

”כי כמו שיש תשעה וארבעים שערים של בינה וקדשה, כן יש תשעה וארבעים שערים של טמאה, ואת זה לעמת זה עשה האלקים, יצר טוב ויצר הרע, זה בטהרתו וזה בטמאתו בבחינות מחלקות, כחות הטמאה נגד כחות הקדשה.

”וכשישראל היו במצרים, היו שקועים ומלכלכים בתשעה וארבעים שערי טמאה, והצרכו ליצאת מהם, ורצה הקב"ה להוציא את ישראל מהם ולהכניע המ"ט שערי טמאה בהדרגה, על ידי שהאיר עליהם כנגד כל שער טמאה את שער הקדשה שמקביל, בכל יום ויום שבין א' דפסח לשבועות. ותקון זה מתעורר מחדש בכל שנה על ידי ספירת תשעה וארבעים ימים לעמר מבין פסח יום היציאה עד שבועות יום מתן תורה, שהוא הארת שער החמשים דבינה וקדשה על ישראל.”

*The matter of Sefiras HaOmer is as follows: Fifty gates of Understanding were created in the world. The attainment of Moshe Rabbeinu reached forty-nine gates, but the essence of Binah is the fiftieth gate, which he did not reach. These correspond to the forty-nine days of the Counting of the Omer, and on the fiftieth day the Torah was given.*

*Just as there are forty-nine gates of Binah and holiness, so too there are forty-nine gates of impurity. “This one opposite that did God*

*make” — the good inclination and the evil inclination — each with its own characteristics, one in purity and the other in impurity, in opposing qualities: the forces of impurity paralleling the forces of holiness.*

*When Israel was in Egypt, they were sunken and defiled within the forty-nine gates of impurity. It was necessary for them to be removed from them. The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to extract Israel from that impurity and to subdue the forty-nine gates of impurity gradually — by illuminating for them, on each day from the first day of Pesach until Shavuot, the corresponding gate of holiness that paralleled each gate of impurity. This process of rectification is reawakened each year through the counting of the forty-nine days of the Omer, from Pesach, the day of the Exodus, until Shavuot, the day of the giving of the Torah — which is the illumination of the fiftieth gate of Binah and holiness upon Israel.*

Just as there are forty-nine gates of understanding and sanctity, there are corresponding forty-nine gates of impurity. When the Jewish people were in Egypt, they needed to be elevated from these levels of impurity gradually, with each day between the exodus and Sinai addressing a specific aspect.

The beauty of this system is that it awakens anew every year through our counting. As we count each day between Pesach and Shavuos, we participate in the same process of purification and illumination that our ancestors experienced, ultimately preparing ourselves to receive the Torah through the illumination of the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of understanding.

### **Why the 49<sup>th</sup> Level Was Necessary**

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh (Shemos 3:8) raises an intriguing question: Why did HaKadosh Baruch Hu wait until Klal Yisrael had descended to the 49<sup>th</sup> level of impurity before redeeming them? Wouldn't it have been better to rescue them earlier, perhaps from the 48<sup>th</sup> or 47<sup>th</sup> level? He explains:

“עקר הגלות הוא לברר הניצוצות שנטמעו בנ' שערי טמאה וכמו שצינתי דבר זה כמה פעמים, בזה ינוח דעת בב' השאלות. כי אם היה מוציאם קדם זה היו מפסידים ברור החלק ההוא, ותדע שעם ה' השיגו בבחינת כללותם הכליל במשה שנתחם בשם עמו השגת מ"ט שערי בינה, וטעם שלא השיג שער החמשים הוא לצד שאין המשג אלא בהשתדלות המשיג ולצד שישראל לא נכנסו בני' שערי טמאה לברר אותו לא השיגו בחינת הקדש שכןגדו, והבטחנו כי לעתיד לבוא ישפיע בנו אל עליון תורת חיים שבשער החמשים, והשגתו הוא באמצעות הגלות ובפרט גלות האחרון אנו משיגים הדבר.”

*The primary purpose of exile is to refine the holy sparks that became embedded within the fifty gates of impurity. As I have pointed out on multiple occasions, this explains and resolves both fundamental questions [regarding exile]. For if God had redeemed them earlier, they would have forfeited the clarification and elevation of that portion [of divine sparks]. Know that the people of God, in their collective aspect as embodied in Moshe—who represents the soul of the nation—attained the understanding of forty-nine gates of understanding. The reason he did not attain the fiftieth gate is because comprehension is only possible through the striving of the one seeking, and since Israel had not entered into all fifty gates of impurity to clarify the corresponding holiness, they could not attain the aspect of holiness that corresponds to that fiftieth gate. However, we have been promised that in the future, the Most High will bestow upon us the Torah of Life that is contained within the fiftieth gate, and that its attainment will come through the medium of the exiles—especially this final exile—through which we will achieve this revelation.*

The Ohr HaChaim reveals that the very purpose of exile is the clarification of divine sparks embedded in the deepest levels of impurity. Had the redemption occurred earlier, the sparks at the deepest depths would have remained unredeemed. This may sound abstract, but consider the idea as it pertains to our own lives in the way we view our personal

difficulties and challenges. In this view, our struggles aren't arbitrary suffering but rather opportunities to redeem aspects of holiness that could be accessed in no other way.

This also explains why Moshe Rabbeinu attained forty-nine gates of understanding but not the 50<sup>th</sup>. Since the Jewish people didn't enter the 50<sup>th</sup> gate of impurity, they couldn't attain the corresponding level of holiness. Attainment comes only through the effort of clarification—we can only elevate what we've personally encountered and transformed.

What this means for us is that the 49-day structure of Sefiras HaOmer provides a complete system for addressing every aspect of our spiritual makeup. Since our ancestors experienced all 49 levels in Egypt, we now have access to a comprehensive spiritual playbook for purifying and rectifying every area of brokenness within ourselves. By the time we arrive at Shavuos, having walked this 49-step journey with intention and awareness, we stand ready to receive the Torah in a state of renewed wholeness.

### From Pesach to Shavuos

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Abudarham (Pesach, Minhagei Yemei HaSefirah) saw a connection between Sefiras HaOmer, the season in which it occurs, and the custom of studying Pirkei Avos this time of year:

“וְנוֹהֵגִין בְּסִפְרֵי לְקִרְוֹת מִסְכַּת אָבוֹת וּפְרָק קִנְיֵן תּוֹרָה בְּשַׁבָּתוֹת שְׁבִין פָּסַח לְשָׁבוּעוֹת, בְּכָל שַׁבַּת פָּרָק אֶחָד. וְכָתַב הָרַב רַבֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהֵטַעַם שְׁקוֹרִין אוֹתָם בְּאֵלוֹ הַשַּׁבָּתוֹת לְפִי שֶׁהֵם יָמִים מְנוּיִים לְמַתַּן תּוֹרָה, וְלָכֵן נִמְנָה אֲנַחְנוּ אֵלּוֹ הַיָּמִים כְּמוֹ הָאוֹהֵב שֶׁהוּא מְמַתֵּן בֵּיאת אֲהוּבוֹ מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ וְהוּא מוֹנֵה הַיָּמִים וְהַלִּילוֹת עַד שְׁבִיבָא, וְרַב עֲנִינֵי הַמִּסְכָּתָא הֵם הַזְּרוּ עַל קְרִיאת הַתּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשֵׂה הַמִּצְוֹת. וְגַם זֶה הַזְּמַן שֶׁהוּא זְמַן הַקְצִיר הוּא זְמַן וּמוֹכֵן לְנוֹעַע הַחֶלֶק הַמִּתְעוֹרָר מִן הַנֶּפֶשׁ וּלְלַהֲטוֹ אַחֲרֵי רַב הַתְּאַוָּה וּבְקִשְׁתֵּי רַב הַהֲנָאוֹת, וְצָרִיךְ לְהִשְׁקָטוֹ וּלְתַקְּנוֹ בְּמָה שֵׁישׁ בְּזֹאת הַמִּסְכָּתָא מִן הַמוֹסְרִים

הַמְבִיאִים לַפְּרִישׁוֹת וְהַכְנַעַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְשִׁבְרוֹנָה וּמְנִיעָתָהּ מִלְבַקֵּשׁ מָה שִׁיזִיקָנָה  
כְּדֵי לְהַצִּיל אוֹתָהּ וּלְתַקֵּן נְהִיגַת הַמַּדּוֹת לְהִיוֹתָם הוֹלְכִים עַל קוֹ הַמוֹסָר  
וְהַדַּעַת.”

*In Spain, the custom is to read Maseches Avos and the chapter Kinyan Torah on the Shabbosos between Pesach and Shavuos, one chapter each Shabbos. Rabbi Yisrael ben Yisrael wrote that the reason for reading them during these Shabbosos is because these are days that are counted in anticipation of the giving of the Torah.*

*Therefore, we count these days just like a lover who awaits the arrival of their beloved from a journey, counting the days and nights until they arrive; most of the concepts in this masechta are arousals toward Torah study and the performance of mitzvos. Furthermore, this season—being the time of the grain harvest—is particularly conducive to the stirring of the soul’s lower faculties and its tendency to pursue passions and abundant [physical] pleasures. It is necessary to calm and repair those [impulses] through the ethical teachings in this masechta, which lead one to separation [from material desires], humility, the breaking of the ego, and the restraint from pursuing that which is harmful to the soul in order to save the soul and correct the conduct of one’s character traits, walking the path of ethical discipline and understanding.*

The Maharsha (Chiddushei Aggados, Rosh HaShanah 16a; cf. Aruch HaShulchan, Orach Chaim 489:3) offers a fascinating insight about the nature of our development from Pesach to Shavuos:

“אָמַר הַכְּתוּב, ‘מִהַחֵל חָרַמְשׁ וְגו’ (דְּבָרִים טו:ט) שֶׁהוּא קָצִיר שְׁעוּרִים, וְתַחֵל לְסַפֵּר שְׁבַעָה שְׁבַעוֹת, שֶׁהוּא יוֹם קָצִיר חֲטִים שֶׁהֵם ב’ הַלֶּחֶם. וְהַכּוֹנֵה בּוֹ כִּי בְּצִאתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ חֲמוּרִים וְהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּם בֵּן בְּלֹא מִצּוֹת לֹא הָיוּ רְאוּיִים רַק לְמַאֲכָל בְּהֵמָה שֶׁהֵן שְׁעוּרִים כְּמָה שֶׁכְּתוּב ‘צֵא וּבָשֵׂר לְחֲמוּרִים’ (פְּסָחִים ג.). עַד סְפִירַת ז’ שְׁבֻעוֹת עַל שֵׁם ‘וְכַמְטָמוּנִים תַּחֲפֹשְׁנָה’ (מְשָׁלִי ב:ד) שֶׁהוּכְנּוּ אֹז לְדַעָה שֶׁמְבִיא מַאֲכָל חֲטִים שֶׁאֵז קָבְלוּ הַתּוֹרָה, וְעַל כֵּן מְבִיא ב’ הַלֶּחֶם מִחֲטִים שֶׁמְבִיא הַדַּעַת כְּדָאֻמְרִימָן בְּפָרֶק בֶּן סוּרֵר. וְעַל כֵּן אָמְרוּ בְּפָרֶק

מִי שְׁמַת יוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל עֵצְרַת בְּרוּר – זָרְעוּ חֲטִיִּים (בבא בתרא קמ"ז.),  
 בְּמִפְרֵשׁ שָׁם. וְעַל כֵּן אָמַר יְמִהּיֵל חֲרֹמֶשׁ בְּקָמָה' שֶׁהוּא קִצִּיר שְׁעוֹרִים מְאֻכָּל  
 בְּהֵמָה, תִּסְפֹּר נ' יוֹם עַד הִבָּאָת ב' הַלָּחִם שֶׁבָּאָה מִן הַחֲטִיִּין לְקַבֵּל יָדְעָה  
 וְחֻכְמַת הַתּוֹרָה."

*The verse says, "From when the sickle begins [to cut the standing grain]" (Devarim 16:9), referring to the barley harvest, "you are to begin counting seven weeks", which leads to the wheat harvest—the time of the offering of the Two Loaves. The intent is this: When [Israel] left Egypt, who are called "donkeys", and Israel themselves were lacking mitzvos—they were only suited for animal food, which is barley, as it says: "[When the barley crop arrives,] go and inform the donkeys" (Pesachim 3a). But through the counting of the seven weeks, in the manner of "[If you seek it as silver] and search for it as hidden treasures" (Mishlei 2:4), they became prepared for knowledge (daas), which is symbolized by wheat, for it was then that they received the Torah. Therefore, the Two Loaves are brought from wheat, which represents knowledge, as the Sages say in Ben Sorer u'Moreh (Sanhedrin 70b). This also explains what is said in Perek Mi Shemet (Bava Basra 147a): "If the festival of Atzeres (Shavuos) is a clear day, plant wheat", as is explained there. And so, the verse says: "From when the sickle begins on the standing grain"—referring to the barley harvest, animal food—you are to count fifty days until the bringing of the Two Loaves from wheat, in receiving the knowledge and the wisdom of Torah.*

We start at Pesach in a "barley state"—free, yet crude and appetite-driven by our undeveloped passions. By counting with anticipation, with an eagerness to grow each day, we use each Sefirah to prepare ourselves for דַּעַת, a mature state of mind. Shavuos and its offering of the Two Loaves then signal more than a date: they mark a change from animal energy redirected into human wisdom, freedom harnessed to covenant, instinct clarified by Torah. Sefiras HaOmer thus becomes a process of cultivation—cutting, refining, and

redeeming the self so that, when we arrive at Shavuot, we are fit to “plant wheat,” to receive and live by the knowledge of Godliness we have worked to attain.

Indeed, the Noam Elimelech (Bamidbar, 2) teaches that this redemptive process isn't limited to our ancestors' historical experience—it is available to each of us today:

“כִּי הָאָדָם הַזֶּה הוּא נִתְחַדֵּשׁ ב' פְּעָמִים, הָאֶחָד בַּיּוֹם שֶׁנּוֹלָד, וְהַשֵּׁנִי בַיּוֹם שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְנִתְכַפֵּר לוֹ. ”בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם” (במדבר א:א) גַּם כֵּן עַל הַדֶּרֶךְ זוֹ, כִּי הַשִּׁית ב"ה הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, הֵם הַקְּלָפוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת מ"ט שְׁעָרֵי טְמֵאָה, וְתָמִיד כְּשֶׁאָדָם עוֹשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה עַל חֲטָאָיו הוּא יוֹצֵא מִהַקְּלָפָה אֶל הַקְּדוּשָׁה וְנִקְרָא גַם כֵּן יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, וְזֶה נִקְרָא “בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית” כִּי הָעוֹלָם נִקְרָא “שָׁנָה” כַּנֶּזְכָּר בְּסֵפֶר יְצִירָה (ו:א), לוֹמֵר שְׁגַם בְּשָׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית, פְּרוּשׁ בְּעוֹלָם עֶכְשָׁו, גַּם כֵּן יֵשׁ יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם שְׁנִית, וְהֵינּוּ בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה אָדָם תְּשׁוּבָה.”

*A person is created twice: on the day you are born, and on the day you do Teshuva and are atoned. “In the second year of their exodus from Egypt” (Bamidbar 1:1) also refers to this—The Blessed God took us out from Egypt, from the great shells of the forty-nine gates of impurity. Whenever a person does Teshuva for their sins, they leave the husk [of impurity] for holiness – and this is also called an ‘exodus from Egypt’. This is [what is] referred to as “the second year” (ibid.) because the world is called a ‘year’ as mentioned in Sefer Yetzira (6:1); teaching us that even in the second year—meaning, in our current world [post-exodus]—there is still a second exodus from Egypt, when a person does Teshuva.*

Our personal exodus from Egypt occurs whenever we engage in Teshuva. Each time we work on another Sefirah, address another spiritual blemish, and elevate another area of our lives toward kedusha, we experience our own personal *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Sefiras HaOmer thus becomes an active process of Teshuva—examining our deeds, reflecting on our

ways, identifying our shortcomings, and systematically realigning ourselves with the Almighty.

Teshuva is so innate to the process of Sefiras HaOmer that the Sfas Emes (Parshas HaChodesh 5639) offers the following striking perspective in the name of the Zohar (II 183b) about the power of rectifying one's character during this period:

כְּתוּב בַּזֹּהַר הַקְדוּשׁ (ע"י תַּצְוֵה קַפְג): דְּמֵאָן דְּנִטִיר הֲנִי יוֹמֵי מִפְסַח עַד עֶצְרַת  
אֵין צְרִיךְ לְבוֹא בְּמִשְׁפֵּט בְּתִשְׁרִי, עֵינֵן שָׁם כִּי קִצְרִיתִי."

*It is written in the Holy Zohar (cf. Tetzaveh 183b) that one who guards these days from Pesach until Shavuos does not need to enter judgment in Tishrei. See there, for I have shortened [the citation].*

Astoundingly, he cites the Zohar as teaching that one who properly engages in the spiritual work of Sefiras HaOmer, attaining the levels of kedusha possible during this time, doesn't really need judgment on Rosh HaShanah—the work has already been accomplished! The Teshuva process we associate with the High Holidays can be equally achieved during these forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuos.

In the Mishnah (Avos 2:9) we find that the greatest trait a person can cling to is having a “לב טוב”, *a good heart*. Bringing us full circle, the Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3:1) notes that לב טוב bears the Gematria equivalence of 49. It is this time of year which is dedicated to developing a whole, feeling heart – a heart rooted in and guided by Torah, the ultimate goodness:

“צִוְנוּ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְסַפֵּר קֶדֶם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה מִטּוֹ יָמִים מִזֵּינֵן לְבַב טוֹב – אֵין  
טוֹב אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה, כְּמָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר ‘כִּי לֶקַח טוֹב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם תּוֹרָתִי [אֶל תַּעֲזוּבוּ].  
וְעַל כֵּן נִקְרָא הַתּוֹרָה ‘טוֹב’ מִפְּנֵי שֶׁבָּה נִגְנְזוּ הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב.”

*Hashem commanded us to count forty-nine days before the giving of the Torah, corresponding to the numerical value of “lev tov”, a ‘good heart’ — for ‘good’ refers only to the Torah, as it is stated: ‘For I have given you a good teaching; My Torah, do not forsake it’*

*(Mishlei 4:2). Therefore, the Torah is called 'good', because within it is hidden the light that is called 'good.'"*

The primordial light – that initial raw expression of God's desire to share Himself with a creation – was a most powerful entity indeed. It was this light from which the entirety of creation subsequently unfolded (Midrash Tanchuma [Buber], Bereishis 1). The Gemara (Chagigah 12a) tells us that with this light a person may see from one end of the world to the other. Although this light was hidden away, deemed unfit for the sinners of this world, it is this very light that God will ultimately reveal in the World to Come for the righteous to bask in its delight (Bereishis Rabbah 11:2).

And yet, the light does not remain beyond our reach. The Ba'al Shem Tov's grandson, Rabbi Ephraim of Sudilkov (Degel Machaneh Ephraim, Bereishis 7; cf. Sefer HaBahir 147) reveals from his luminous grandfather where the light was hidden:

"וְשָׁמַעְתִּי מִפִּי אֲדוֹנָי אָבִי וְקִנִּי נִ"ע וְלֵלָהּ הִיא הֵיכָן נִגְנוּ הָאוֹר הַהֵיא, וְאָמַר  
שְׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ גִּנְזוּ בַתּוֹרָה."

*I heard from my grandfather, of blessed memory, where this light was hidden. He said: The Blessed God hid it in the Torah.*

With this key in hand, our engagement with Torah during these forty-nine days becomes a process of uncovering the radiance which infuses all of reality. Each day of the Omer refines another layer of the heart, preparing us to receive anew the light that was first revealed at Sinai through cultivating a לֵב טוֹב: a heart illuminated by Torah, receptive to the divine light concealed within it, and made whole enough to contain the radiance through which the world itself came into being.

### 49 Days of Growth

The Arizal (Sha'ar HaKavanos, Drushei Pesach 11) provides practical guidance for how to engage with this process:

”גם טוב לְאָדָם לְכוֹן בְּמִ”ט יָמִים אֵלּוּ לְתַקֵּן כָּל אֲשֶׁר חָטָא בְּכָל הַזֶּה סְפִירוֹת. וְהַמְשָׁל בָּזֶה בְּהֵיאוֹתוֹ בְּשָׁבוּעַ א’ יְכוֹן לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וּפָגַם בְּסְפִירַת הַחֶסֶד, וּבְשָׁבוּעַ הַבִּי יְכוֹן לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וּפָגַם בְּסְפִירַת הַגְּבוּרָה, וּכְעֵין דֶּרֶךְ זֶה כּוֹן הַשָּׁבוּעוֹת.”

*It is good for a person to focus during these 49 days to rectify all he has sinned in all seven Sefiros. For example, in the first week he should intend to fix what he sinned and damaged in the Sefirah of Chesed, in the second week to fix what he sinned and damaged in the Sefirah of Gevurah, and so on for the seven weeks.*

Each week of the Omer focuses on rectifying one of the seven Sefiros, and within each week, we address specific aspects of that Sefirah. This creates a 7x7 matrix of spiritual refinement, where each day addresses a particular combination.

What’s particularly significant is that each Sefirah contains all seven Sefiros within it. Understanding Chesed requires grasping how Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus all function as building blocks within Chesed itself. In truth, this pattern continues deeper, for each of the 49 combinations contains seven more micro-elements. When we calculate 49 times 7, we get 343, which in Gematria equals מַשָּׂא, meaning *matter* or *physicality*. This indicates that the entire physical universe embodies all these Sefiros in their various permutations, as explained previously.

Several of our sages emphasize the unique magnitude of this period. The Rashash (Nahar Shalom 32b) teaches:

”כִּי פֶסַח וְיָמִים אֵלּוּ יָמֵי סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר הֵם שָׂרֵשׁ לְכָל יְמֹת הַשָּׁנָה, וּבְדֶרֶךְ שֶׁהוּלָךְ בָּהֶם, בָּה מוֹלִיכִים אוֹתוֹ כָּל יְמֹת הַשָּׁנָה.”

*Pesach and these days of Sefiras HaOmer are the root of all the days of the year. The way one conducts oneself during them influences the entire year.*

The days of Sefiras HaOmer aren't merely a countdown to Shavuot—they constitute the very root of the entire year. How we conduct ourselves during this period influences our spiritual state throughout the entire year ahead.

The Chida (Lev David, 30:12) similarly emphasizes the special nature of these days:

“בימי העמר צריך לזהר ביותר בעבודת ה' בתורה ובמצוות, מפני שהם ימי דין. וכשיצאנו ממצרים היינו מתטהרים בימים הללו לקבל התורה הקדושה, וכשם שבמים ההם על ידי התעוררות ישראל לטהר ממרום שלח שפע קדוש להיות עזרם ומגנם, כן עתה אם ישים אליו לבו ויקיץ מתרדמת יצרו, יהיה לו עזר, כי 'הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו' (שבת ק"ד א'). ומה גם כי הימים האלה מסגלים לזה, עת שהגיעו אבותינו לטהר. ואנחנו נחליץ חושים לעשות כמעשיהם, ולזהר בכל סדרי טהרה.”

*During the days of the Omer, one must be especially careful in serving God through Torah and mitzvos because they are days of judgment. When we left Egypt, we were purifying ourselves during these days to receive the holy Torah. Just as in those days, through Israel's awakening to purify themselves, Heaven sent sacred effluence to help and protect them, so now if one sets his heart and awakens from his inclination's slumber, he will receive help, for 'one who comes to purify himself receives assistance' (Shabbos 104a). Moreover, these days are especially suited for this, as this was when our ancestors arrived to purify themselves. We should gird ourselves to act as they did and be careful in all matters of purity.*

These are days of judgment, requiring special care in our service of God. Just as our ancestors purified themselves during these days to receive the Torah, we too can receive divine assistance in our purification if we awaken from our spiritual slumber. These days are particularly conducive to this work, as they correspond to when our ancestors were engaged in the same process of purification.

Elsewhere, the Chida (Lechem Min HaShamayim, Terumah 21) offers a creative hint to the opportunity for divine connection during this season, in the name of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Tosafist, Rabbeinu Ephraim. He finds this hint in the construction of the curtains of the Mishkan:

”וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹלְאוֹת חֲמִשִּׁים (שמות כו:י) – בְּנִגְדַת חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם שְׁבִין פָּסָח לְעֶצְרָת, שְׁבָעָהּ נִתְחַבְּרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַבְיָהֶם שֶׁבְשָׁמַיִם כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִקְרָשִׁים מִחֲבָרִים הִירִיעוֹת.”

*“And you shall make fifty loops” (Shemos 26:10) — these correspond to the fifty days between Pesach and Shavuos during which Israel bond with their Father in Heaven, just as the boards [of the Mishkan] connected the curtains.*

Ultimately, this is a season of divine connection, one in which we set our sights on fortifying a lasting bond with the Almighty. Rav Chaim Palagi (Mo’ed L’Kol Chai 4:45) further underscores the importance of this period:

”הָאִישׁ הַיָּרֵא וְחָרַד רָאוּי לְהִיּוֹת זָהִיר וְזָרִיז לְעִמּוּד לְשֶׁרֶת בְּשֵׁם ה' בְּיָמֵים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלֹאֲחֵר הַפֶּסַח יִתֵּר עַל כָּל הַיָּמִים, בְּקִדּוּשָׁה וּבִטְהָרָה וּבִירְאָת ה' כָּל הַיּוֹם וְלֹא יִפְנֶה יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל, וְיִרְא וְיִפְחַד מִמִּדַּת הַדִּין הַמְתוּחָה שְׁלֹא יִכּוּהַ בְּגַחְלִתָּהּ, חֶסֶד וְשְׁלוֹם. וְאָמְרוּ הַקְּדוּמוֹנִים כִּי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה הֵמָּה לְאוֹת וּלְמוֹפְתַת לְכָל הַשָּׁנָה כְּלָהּ, כִּי אִם יִרְבֶּה בָּהֶם בְּתוֹרָה וּבְמִצְוֹת בֶּן יִהְיֶה מֵרָאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית הַשָּׁנָה, וְכֵן בְּהִפְכוֹ חֶסֶד וְשְׁלוֹם.”

*The God-fearing person should be careful and zealous to stand and serve in God’s name during these days after Pesach more than all other days, in holiness, purity, and fear of God all day, not turning right or left, fearing the stretched attribute of justice lest he be burned by its coal, God forbid. The early ones said these days are a sign and wonder for the entire year—if one increases Torah and mitzvos during them, so it will be from the beginning to the end of the year, and the opposite, God forbid.*

Rebbi Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan, 182) offers a fascinating insight into how the Sefiros permeate reality during this season, even while we may be unaware of their effects:

”דע שכל מה שהעולם מדברים בספירה בכל ימי הספירה הם מדברים רק מהספירה של אותו היום. ומי שהוא מבין יוכל לשמע ולדע זאת. אם יטה אָזְנוֹ הַיָּטֵב לְסִפּוּרֵי דְבָרֵיהֶם, יִשְׁמַע שֶׁהֵם מְדַבְּרִים רַק מֵהַסְּפִירָה שֶׁל אוֹתוֹ יוֹם.”

*Know that everything people speak about during the Sefirah, throughout all the days of the Sefirah, they speak only about that day's Sefirah. One who understands can hear and know this. If he inclines his ear well to their conversations, he will hear they speak only about that day's Sefirah.*

According to Rebbi Nachman, the entire world is animated by each day's particular Sefirah. Every conversation, interaction, and experience on a given day relates to that day's specific Sefirah combination. Our interactions at work with colleagues, or at home with family, connect to that particular attribute, whether we're conscious of it or not.

All this to say, the Sefiros we encounter during these forty-nine days are not distant theological concepts; they are the very patterns through which divine providence flows into our world moment by moment. Collectively, they are the fabric of our lives, and each day's counting represents a present opportunity for our own metamorphosis.

As we turn now to explore each day's unique spiritual signature—beginning with Chesed ShebeChesed, the purest expression of divine lovingkindness—we do so with the understanding that this is no mere exercise in character development. It is nothing short of an annual invitation to participate in our own creation, to clarify the divine image within us, and to prepare ourselves as proper vessels for

receiving the Torah anew. The journey from Pesach to Shavuos awaits, each day a step closer to the freedom that comes not from the absence of bondage, but from the presence of purpose.

We now stand at the threshold of the journey itself. Forty-nine days await us, each with its own unique counting, each with its own opportunity for repair and growth. As we move through the seven weeks, from Chesed all the way through Malchus, we aim to reveal not only the beauty of the Divine attributes, but also the limitless potential that lies within each of us.

Let us begin to count.

Let us begin Walking with Light.



### **Punchline:**

*Sefiras HaOmer transforms us from spiritual slaves to free beings through forty-nine daily steps of character refinement, teaching us to know and emulate how God runs the world, ultimately preparing us to receive the Torah as complete human beings.*



### **Practical Takeaways:**

- **Begin counting from day one:** Start your Sefiras HaOmer journey with a full awareness of the seven-week transformative process ahead, rather than waking up a week late wondering what you missed.
- **Recite the daily prayer with intention:** Don't just count the Omer – say the accompanying prayers

mindfully with intent to prioritize the inner work of that day's Sefirah.

- **Live the Sefirah throughout the day:** Each day of Sefiras HaOmer is animated by its particular attribute—find Hashem's expressions in your conversations, interactions, and experiences, and make every day count.