



B”H

## Canfei Nesharim

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### **Unit: Our Relationship to the Land: Meaning of the Omer**

#### **Lesson One: Everything Comes From The Land** **An Alternative Approach for Older Classes**

**Let’s begin this Study:** As we consider the period of Sefirat HaOmer/ Counting the Omer, Jews are generally aware of the connection between the Hagim at both ends of this period. Pesah/ פסח, the time of our leaving of Egypt/ יציאת מצרים begins this “counting of the barley” which continues for seven weeks and Shavuot/ שבועות, the observance of our receiving of the Torah/ קבלת התורה completes this period of time. In thinking of these celebrations in this manner, we talk about their historical meanings. Additionally, we must also be mindful of the agricultural and land-linked meanings of these Hagim and the time in which they come. The lessons embedded in their very being and the *cycle* of which they are a part are as critical to us as G-d’s protection and instruction through Torah, of which this cycle is a part, actually leading up to our celebration of this defining aspect of our identity.

**To begin this lesson, your teacher will ask you:**

What is the Counting of the Omer/*Sefirat HaOmer* and what does it mean to us as observant and involved Jews?

What exactly is it that we are counting during this period of time? What lessons can we learn about the land and its meaning in our lives from this season and its heightened consciousness about our land and its resources?

**Write your thoughts here:**

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**Your Teacher Says:** Let's read the following narrative and respond to the questions that follow as we consider the meaning of this season and our connection to the land from which so many of our needs are met.

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We should note that as we celebrate our freedom and our profound relationship with and dependence on G-d for taking us out of Egypt on *Pesach*, this was the very time when we began the barley harvest. This represents an agricultural freedom that coincides with our historical freedom. Yet there is something that is incomplete and tentative with both.

Our physical freedom of *Pesach* is truly only fully meaningful when seen in the context of the spiritual freedom and discipline that comes with the acceptance of the Torah, which we celebrate on *Shavuot*. The former freedoms are those of hope and anticipation, much as reflected in the additional name of חג האביב indicating that this is the spring holiday, when so many visible aspects of our environment start anew. *Shavuot* celebrates our maturation, both in terms of having the blueprint for how we live in its celebration of זמן מתן תורתנו, the time of the giving of Torah and in celebrating the readiness of our harvest as חג הביקורים.

As we consider the shared theme of these different aspects of the holidays, we further note that barley is an unrefined offering. As Rav Yaakov Meden points out in his writing in The Agricultural and Historical Significance of Sefirat Ha-Omer (translated by Zev Jacobson),

Barley is used primarily as animal fodder; it is the superior wheat [offering that comes later] that will serve as food for ... [the B'nai Yisrael and their families.] Furthermore, the barley offering permits the current year's grain to be eaten only outside of the Temple; whereas the wheat offering permits it to be used in the Temple itself as part of the sacrificial service [due to its refined nature].

So, the agricultural pattern of the time of **ספירת העמר** is consistent with the historical theme of refinement and “processing” of our spiritual and historical selves. In the combination of these two aspects of this season, we find a great unity of the land, our mission as B’nai Yisrael and what G-d wants us to do in living our lives on the land.

Only the properly refined offering could be brought to the **בית המקדש**  
What lessons do we learn from this? What care do we need to take care of ourselves to present ourselves to G-d? What care must we take of our land and its produce in order that this too continues to be fit for G-d?

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This is a matter of consciously and purposefully living our lives in so many different ways when it comes to interacting with the land and its resources, applying the same element of awareness that we do when engaged in a variety of ritual activities. Let us think about how we live today and how this development can be connected. To be sure, we eat only that which is ***Kosher*** and permitted according to Jewish law. Is it possible that there are additional considerations beyond ***Kashrut*** in terms of the food we consume that could be linked to the lessons indicated here?

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Are there ways in which our food should be refined in the same way as the wheat offering? Can you think of examples?

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Can you think of ways in which our food is “corrupted” or ruined in ways that are not good for us? Think about what types of processing and producing of food are **not** healthy for us or for our environment. (For example, when natural foods are preserved indefinitely through the use of chemical preservatives or fruits are made to look more attractive to us, are these healthy practices for us?)

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- Be sure to check in with the Science teacher and nutrition conscious members of your community in finding meaningful answers to these questions.

Let’s look at our growing awareness of how our food is produced and what it is doing to our bodies. Can you think of some of our eating habits that would **not** follow the pattern indicated here during the period of raised awareness of our being a separate and sanctified and refined people?

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