

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

Lesson One: Everything Comes From The Land

Estimated Time: One to two class sessions, approximately 40 – 45 minutes, depending on which options are used

Suggested for Upper Elementary and Middle School Grades

Let's begin this Study: As we consider the period of Sefirat HaOmer/ Counting the Omer, let us be aware of the connection between the holidays (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.

To begin this lesson, the teacher asks students:

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

- Students brainstorm for a few moments about each question in turn and then the class composes a list of answers that should be kept to be reconsidered later. The teacher and class can revisit this list briefly at the end of this lesson, or preferably at the end of the three lessons indicated here.

Examples of ideas that can come from this exercise are:

- We are waiting for the giving of the Torah.
- We are remembering the barley and wheat harvest of our past and thinking of the farmers who still depend on it; after all we depend on their work.
- We are waiting for and observing the budding of trees and plants.
- We are waiting for the world to be in full glorious bloom.

- We are waiting for the delicious fruits we eat in the summer.
- We are waiting for the daily warmth of the sun and the longer days.
- We are waiting for

[Time Frame: 10 – 15 minutes]

The Teacher Says: So, we have been looking at aspects of our lives as Jews and as human beings that we may not generally be as attentive to given the daily rhythm of our lives. In thinking about this new awareness, we come closer to the land that produces all that we need as well as G-d and the notion that G-d brings all of this to us. Let's think about this as we read the following story together.

The Bracha and the Bread Basket

An adapted story

Dan came home from school as he did every day and offered to help his mother prepare dinner for their entire family. They set the table, prepared the food and when everyone was home, they sat down to eat. They all sat at the table and took bread from the bread basket and said together:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹ-הֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Dan's sister reported that in school that day, her second grade class visited a bakery and learned about the process of how bread is made. They talked about where bread came from and how it was processed to the point where they bought and consumed it. The youngest child in the family, Rebecca explained that "Well that's simple silly. We all know where bread comes from. It comes from the grocery store, of course." All agreed that this was an absolutely appropriate answer from one so young. However, pensiveness set in as the older members of the family began to go mentally through the chain of events that brought the bread to their bread basket and table.

At this point, the family became involved in a conversation tracing the bread from its source as reflected in the *Bracha* (blessing) they said. They explained for Rebecca that the bread that we have on our table did not by any means begin its journey in the supermarket...

