

You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. (23:15)

The *mitzvah* of *sefiras haOmer*, counting of the *Omer*, is the injunction to count every day (49 days) from the second day of *Pesach*, when the *Omer* is brought, until the fiftieth day, which heralds the Festival of *Shavuos*. Every single day of *sefiras haOmer* is an individual period of preparing oneself, refining one's spiritual attributes, yearning for the moment when we receive the Torah. The seven-week period comprised of forty-nine days follows in the Torah's tradition of dealing with a transition from a lower to a higher standard of morality, from a primitive, raw condition to one of advanced purity and sanctity, to pass through a seven-fold cycle of time before the elevated level of purity commences. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that a male, in fact, can be initiated into *bris milah* only after seven days; an animal can be sacrificed only after seven days of life have passed. One who is ritually contaminated, *tamei*, can enter the environs of the Sanctuary after seven days. Likewise, married life can continue after seven days of purification. The Jewish People, having recently been liberated from bondage in the spiritual stench that was Egypt, required a seven-cycle ritual of purification prior to receiving the Torah.

Rav Hirsch explains that the Torah is not the starting point of *Klal Yisrael's* world historic development; the acceptance of the Torah, was not the beginning and end of our relationship with Judaism. Rather, the entire Jewish history of the last 3,000 years is but an application of the purification process through which we pass before *Kabbolas HaTorah*, accepting the Torah, on what became the Festival of *Shavuos*. The purpose of our history is our education and preparation for the fulfillment of the verities and ideals of the Torah. In summation, *Kabbolas HaTorah* is not the process of receiving the Torah, but rather, the preparation and yearning to fulfill its commandments. *Shavuos* is not something that we have already achieved, but it is a goal for which we aim. Receiving the Torah means to prepare for our fulfillment of its mandates. It is a process renewed continuously when we study and constantly refine our character for more and deeper study. *Shavuos* is not fettered to a specific time and place. It occurs on the fifteenth day after the seven-week counting. Its meaning and goals transcend time and place.

Having said this, we now understand that each and every one of us is *mekabel Torah* individually, commensurate with his input of passion for learning and diligence in fulfilling his overwhelming desire for Torah. An entire volume of stories could be written about this – and that would only be scratching the surface. Clearly, diligence and yearning change with generations and its exposure to the culture and society in which they live. *Horav Eliezer Halevi Turk, Shlita*, writes about *Horav Hirsch Michel Shapiro, zl*, who was one of the Torah giants who made their home in the small alleys of Yerushalayim in the early twentieth century. These giants of the spirit knew nothing but Torah and *avodah*. Their lives revolved around it. He quotes from a tribute to him rendered by *Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl*, *Rav* of Shaarei Chesed and one of *Rav Hirsch Michel's* premier *talmidim*. *Rav Hirsch Michel* was a student of the *Zayis Raanan* of Kutna and a close

confidante of both the *Imrei Binah* and *Maharil Diskin*. Rav Charlop writes that following the *petirah*, passing, of his *Rebbe*, the *Zayis Raanan*, Rav Hirsch Michel no longer went to sleep in his bed. He would only nap, and, regardless of where he put his head down, he was up by *chatzos*, midnight, to learn both revealed and esoteric Torah/commentary. He would learn while standing. His idea of sleep was to put his hand against the wall and lean on it. He asked his students to wake him after ten minutes. He then went to the *mikveh* prior to reciting *Tikkun chatzos*, the prayer of mourning over the *Bais Hamikdash*. After that, he rose from the floor (*Tikkun chatzos* is recited while sitting on the ground like a mourner) and learned the rest of the night, all the while standing. He would *daven vasikin* at sunrise and then start his day by learning.

Rav Hirsch Michel's son became gravely ill and passed away on *Shabbos*. Since the laws of *aveilus* are not in force on *Shabbos*, Rav Hirsch went to a different home and spent the day learning. He returned after *Shabbos* and commenced his *aveilus*, mourning. Rav Charlop conjectures that, for Rav Hirsch Michel to cease learning, was more painful than *aveilus*.

Rav Hirsch Michel became seriously ill in 1903. The doctors despaired for his life, and they told the family that the end was near. The *tzaddik* who would stand for hours learning was now relegated to bed, suffering debilitating pain and weakness. This did not put a halt to his learning. He called over his *talmid*, Rav Charlop, and asked him quickly to fetch the *Chidushei HaRan* on *Meseches Pesachim*. When Rav Charlop looked at him incredulously, Rav Hirsch Michel replied, "If not now – when?" Rav Charlop read to him from the Rav's commentary. Rav Hirsch Michel's eyes lit up and shone brilliantly, to the point that Rav Charlop forgot that his revered *Rebbe* was gravely ill. Next, Rav Hirsch Michel asked to be read from the *Shaagas Arye's* commentary on the topic discussed by the *Ran*. When this was done, he had one little favor: that the *Mekor Chaim's* questions on the *Shaagas Arye* be read to him. Following the reading, Rav Hirsch Michel lay there deep in thought – until he smiled – and offered his response to these questions. This is but one example of the extreme thirst these Torah giants had for the Torah. May we merit to be as enthused for Torah, so that "*Shavuos*" can be celebrated every day of the year.