



**Emor: Free but Priceless**

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

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From the time we are young children, we count down to exciting life events. We count the days until a birthday and the end of school. As we get older, we still count down. We count the days until graduation, a wedding, a much-needed vacation, or other life milestones. In this week's Parsha, God commanded us to count the days from Pesach leading up to Shavuot when we would receive the Torah at Mount Sinai.

*"And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete. You shall count until the day after the seventh week, [namely,] the fiftieth day, [on which] you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord (Vayikra 23:15-16)."*

But why the need to count? How does counting imbue these days with any additional holiness? On a basic level, we are taught that our exodus was not an end; it was a means to receive the Torah. We were not taken out of Egypt simply to be free and without a human master. We were emancipated because we had (and have) something to contribute. Our nation has the ability to be a light unto the nations. But in order for the light to burn and illuminate, there must be fuel. The Torah is our fuel, the commandments are the oil for our national wick, allowing us to burn bright and dispel the darkness. We count the days from *Pesach* to *Shavuot* to remind ourselves that our freedom must be used for spiritual accomplishment. We count the days of the *Omer* to remind ourselves of our national mandate to make this world a better place.

There is something very interesting about the verbiage used in the verse quoted above. The Torah does not simply tell us "to count," rather, God instructs us, "And you shall count for yourselves, *U'Sfartem Lachem*." What is the meaning of this phrase "*Lachem, for you*"?

It is intriguing that a number of our initial commandments and *mitzvos* share a common theme – time. The first national *mitzvah* was *Kiddush HaChodesh*, sanctification of the new moon. God told Moshe, "*HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chodashim, this month is for you the first of all months (Shemos 12:2).*" Again, we see this same word "*Lachem, for you*." Two of our initial commandments – both focused on time. Perhaps, Hashem was trying to convey to us an all-important lesson for meaningful living. *Kiddush HaChodesh* (sanctification of the new month) reminds us that we control our months and *Sefiras HaOmer* (the counting of the days between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*) reminds us that we control our days and our weeks. We control our time.

Time humbles all men. Influence, power, and connections can get you many things. But the one thing that no amount of "*protexia*" can procure and acquire for you – is time. Time is a finite, non-renewable resource. No matter how much you yearn for more – you simply can't create it. Although we can't generate additional quantities of time, we can most definitely control the time we have been given. Time is the greatest treasure God bestowed upon us as a free nation. It is the currency of accomplishment and self-advancement. Without it you can do nothing, go nowhere; with it, the sky is the limit. People often say, "*if only I had more time - there are so many things I would like to do.*" These *mitzvos* remind us that we have complete autonomy over how we use our time. It is true – there may not be enough time to accomplish everything you want to accomplish – so choose carefully. Decide what is important and focus your energies. We are limited in the duration of our time in this world but have sole discretion as to how to use the time we are given. Time is the start-up capital for our greatest initiative – life. Invest it wisely.

Perhaps, this is why the Torah uses the word "*Lachem, for you*" by both of the aforementioned commandments. God is not simply telling us to count. He is instructing us to "*make it count for ourselves.*" The month is yours – decide what you are going to accomplish. The week is yours – decide what needs to get done. The day is yours – contemplate how to maximize and squeeze precious meaning and productivity from every holy moment.

Not a week goes by without a new "time saving device" being introduced in the technological marketplace. We are constantly connected, wired, and plugged in. Ostensibly, the goal of our devices is to maximize productivity and "save time." But have we really saved any time? And even if we have, how do we use this newfound time-windfall? The reality is that for many of us, the time saved is just used for more work. The additional time has not gone to our families, to our

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learning or to acts of chessed. It has gone to more emails, more meetings, and more deals. For others this additional time has led to more time spent online wandering the internet, posting every last bit of information (much of it too personal for public consumption) on Twitter or Facebook, or chas v'shalom losing one's self in inappropriate sites and material. As William Penn wrote, "*Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.*" Our time on this earth belongs to each of us. My hours and minutes belong to me, and it is up to me to use them purposefully.

As we count the days until Shavuot, let us find the courage and strength to maximize our weeks, find the meaning in each day, and take advantage of every moment.