

In Hilchos YOM TOV

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Now learn the issues & the opinions

Sefiras haOmer and the International Dateline

A summary of the weekly Wednesday night shiur by **Rabbi Shmuel Stein** at the Miami Beach Community Kollel / To receive a copy send an email to InHilchosShabbos@gmail.com

During the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot there is a mitzva to count the forty-nine days of the Omer.¹ The Medrash² writes that “one must not take the mitzva of the Omer lightly as it was in its merit that Avraham Avinu inherited the land of Eretz Yisroel.”³ An interesting question which arises is when someone crosses the international dateline during *Sefiras haOmer* and how this affects his counting. In this chapter we will review the basic halachos of *Sefiras haOmer* and then discuss the history of the international dateline and the opinions on how crossing the dateline affects counting *Sefiras haOmer*.

The mitzva of Sefiras haOmer

The Torah⁴ commands that we count *Sefiras haOmer*: “And you shall count, from the day after the Shabbos (i.e., the first day of Pesach), from the day that you bring the korban HaOmer, seven weeks, complete they shall be. Until after the seventh week you shall count, fifty days, and you shall offer a new meal offering to Hashem.”

Accordingly, the Shulchan Aruch⁵ writes that there is a mitzva, on each day of the Omer, to verbally⁶ count the day of the Omer.⁷ For example, on the first day one would state ‘today is the first day of the Omer,’ and so on for the remaining days of *Sefiras haOmer*.

Counting the weeks and the days. The Torah states in two different places the mitzva to count *Sefiras haOmer*. In one verse⁸ it states, “You should count fifty **days**,” and in the other verse⁹ it states, “You should count seven **weeks**.” The Shulchan Aruch¹⁰ writes that therefore, when we count *Sefiras haOmer*, we count both the days and the weeks which have passed from the offering of the korban haOmer.¹¹

Understanding the Mitzva of Sefiras haOmer

The Sefer haChinuch¹² explains that by counting the days of the Omer we express our anticipation and desire to receive the Torah on Shavuot.¹³ He writes as follows: “The world was created for the purpose of the Torah. The entire essence of the Jewish people is the Torah, and we were redeemed from Mitzrayim to accept the Torah. Thus, we are commanded to count from the Yom Tov of Pesach to the Yom Tov of Shavuot, because a person generally counts toward something which he anticipates. Therefore, we count towards the day of *kabalas haTorah*, to express our greatest desire for this day which our hearts yearn for.”

Why do we count from the korban HaOmer?

The Torah¹⁴ states:

“We begin counting from the day when the korban haOmer is brought.”

The korban haOmer consists of an Omer (a measurement that contains 43.2 eggs) of ground **barley** [hence, this korban is called the korban HaOmer].

The Torah then states:

“One counts for fifty days, until the Yom Tov of Shavuot, when the korban Shte haLechem is brought.”

The korban Shte haLechem consisted of two loaves of bread that were made of **wheat**. The commentaries ask what relevance the korban HaOmer and the korban Shte haLechem have to the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer*? What connection do these *korbanos* have with our counting towards *kabalas haTorah*?

The Aruch HaShulchan¹⁵ explains as follows: “The Torah commands us to count from and towards these *korbanos* in order to teach us, that without the Torah a person is compared to an animal and only with the Torah a person can be compared to a person. Therefore, we begin counting from the korban haOmer, which consists of barley, animal food, and we continue to count until we offer the korban Shte haLechem, which consists of wheat, human food, to symbolize that when we receive the Torah, we can reach levels of elevated people.”

Sefiras haOmer Nowadays

Nowadays, there is no Bais Hamikdash where we can offer the korban Omer and korban Shte haLechem. Thus, there is a dispute as to whether the mitzva d'Oraisa of *Sefiras haOmer* applies nowadays. The majority of *poskim*¹⁶ rule that since the Torah associates the counting of *Sefiras haOmer* to the korban haOmer and korban Shte haLechem, the mitzva d'Oraisa of *Sefiras haOmer* does not apply today. According to these *poskim* the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer* nowadays is only d'Rabanan and serves as a reminder of the

mitzva d'Oraisa which applied during the times of the Bais Hamikdash. Other *poskim*¹⁷ rule however that even nowadays it is still a mitzva d'Oraisa to count *Sefiras haOmer*, as the main purpose of *Sefiras haOmer* is to count towards receiving the Torah, which applies nowadays as well.¹⁸ Although the Torah associates *Sefiras haOmer* with these *korbanos*, it did not intend to make offering these *korbanos* a requirement for the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer*.

The Shulchan Aruch¹⁹ follows the majority opinion and rules that *Sefiras haOmer* nowadays is only a mitzva d'Rabanan. The Mishna Berura²⁰ adds that it is for this reason that after reciting *Sefiras haOmer* we recite a prayer for the Bais Hamikdash to be rebuilt as only then can we fulfill the mitzva d'Oraisa to count the days of the Omer.

Who is obligated in the mitzva of Sefiras haOmer?

Men (over the age of bar mitzva) are obligated in the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer*. [Boys over the age of *Chinuch* are trained to count *Sefiras haOmer* with a beracha.²¹] The Magen Avraham²² writes that women are exempt from the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer*, since it is a mitzvas aseh she'hazman gerama (a positive, time-bound mitzva) which women are exempt from performing. However, the Magen Avraham adds that women have accepted it upon themselves to perform this mitzva, and they may even recite a beracha when doing so (based on the Ashkenazic custom that women may recite a beracha on a mitzvas aseh she'hazman gerama). However, the Mishna Berura²³ cites *poskim* who rule that women should not recite a beracha when reciting *Sefiras haOmer* since it is common for them to forget to count a day of *Sefiras haOmer* and, according to some *poskim*, this would deem the berachos which they have recited to be considered *l'vatala* (in vain).²⁴ The prevailing custom is, that although a woman is not obligated to take upon herself the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer*,²⁵ if she chooses she may do so and recite a beracha.²⁶ Some *poskim*²⁷ recommend that if a woman does take upon herself to count *Sefiras haOmer*, she should set a reminder which will ensure that she does indeed count all of the days of *Sefiras haOmer*.

Is Sefiras HaOmer one long Mitzva or forty-nine separate Mitzvos?

The *poskim* discuss whether the forty-nine days of counting *Sefiras haOmer* are considered one long mitzva, or is each day considered a separate mitzva? A practical difference would be if someone forgot to count one of the days of *Sefiras haOmer* is there a mitzva to continue counting the remaining days? If the forty-nine days are one long mitzva, then missing one day would invalidate the entire mitzva since has not completed the forty-nine days of counting. On the other hand, if each day is viewed as a separate mitzva, then although he missed one of the days of counting, he may still fulfill the mitzva of counting the other days of the Omer.

Most *poskim*²⁸ rule that each day of *Sefiras haOmer* is a separate mitzva and there would be a mitzva to continue counting the remaining days. However, the B'hag²⁹ rules that counting the forty-nine days is one long mitzvah as the Torah states “one must count seven complete weeks,” and thus if one misses even one day it invalidates the entire mitzva.³⁰ The Shulchan Aruch³¹ rules that because there is a dispute about this issue, we take the stringencies of both opinions. For example, if one forgot to count one day of *Sefira* he should continue to count the remaining days, in accordance with the opinions who rule that each day is a separate mitzva. Still, he should not recite a beracha when counting the remaining nights, because according to the opinion of the B'hag (that it is one long mitzva), reciting a beracha on the remaining nights would be a beracha *l'vatala* (a blessing in vain) since he is no longer able to fulfill the mitzva.³²

The Mishna Berura³³ adds that in this situation, it is appropriate to listen to the beracha of the chazzan (or someone else reciting the beracha) to be *motzei* him with his beracha.

If one forgot to count by night, and remembers to count by day

There is a dispute in the *poskim* whether one may count *Sefiras haOmer* only during the nighttime or by daytime as well. Here again, the Shulchan Aruch³⁴ rules that one must take the stringencies of both opinions. Thus, if one did not count *Sefiras haOmer* by nighttime, he may count it by daytime, in accordance with the opinions that one may count *Sefiras haOmer* by daytime. However, he does not recite a beracha when doing so because according to the other opinions one may not count *Sefiras haOmer* by daytime, and thus reciting a beracha would be a beracha *l'vatala* (a blessing in vain).

1 Vayikra 28 2 The commentators seem to understand that this Medrash is also referring to the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer* (not just the korban haOmer), see Bnei Yisasar Nissan, 12 3 Vayikra 23:15,16 4 489:1 5 See Shulchan Aruch HaRav (489:21), who writes “even if one had in mind the number of the day it does not count because the mitzva certainly requires one to count verbally.” See also Kovetz Halachos, Sefiros HaOmer p. 65 where he writes that it is preferable that one should recite the counting loud enough that he can hear what he recites. Regarding whether writing down the day of the Omer is considered an act of counting: The Aruch HaShulchan (489:9) writes, “If someone writes down the day of the Omer, he does not fulfill his obligation. See however, Rabbi Akiva Eiger (on Shulchan Aruch 489:1) that writing would be sufficient. See Kovetz Halachos, Sefiras haOmer p. 45 6 The Aruch HaShulchan (489:1) explains that although when the Torah in other places writes that “one should count” (i.e., nidda, zav) it does not mean that one needs to actually count verbally each day, but that one must keep track of the count. Here, regarding *Sefiras haOmer*, the Chachamim had a mesorah that the Torah is requiring that one count the days verbally. 7 Vayikra 23:16 8 Devarim 16:9 9 489:1 10 The Mishna Berura (489:7) writes that if one counted only the days, and not the weeks, there is a dispute whether he fulfilled the mitzva. Therefore, one should recount without reciting a beracha. However, if one counted only the weeks, and not the days, according to all opinions he has not fulfilled his obligation. 11 Mitzva 306 12 The Aruch HaShulchan (489:2) cites a Medrash: When Moshe Rabbeinu told that Jewish people that they would soon serve Hashem on the mountain of Har Sinai, they asked when that time would be. Moshe answered that it would take place on the fiftieth day. The Jewish people, out of their enthusiasm to accept the Torah, counted for themselves fifty days. 13 The Aruch HaShulchan (489:2) cites a Medrash: When Moshe Rabbeinu came to the Jewish people to tell them that they will be serving Hashem on Har Sinai (i.e. they would accept the Torah there), they asked Moshe: when this would take place? Moshe answered that it would take place at the end of fifty days. At that point each Jew counted to himself the fifty days until he accepted the Torah. 14 Vayikra 23:15,16 15 489:3 16 The Mishna Berura (489:14) and Aruch HaShulchan (489:2) write that this is the opinion of most *poskim*. 17 Including the Ramabam and Sefer haChinuch (Cited in Biur Halacha (489:1, d'h' lispur haOmer) and Aruch HaShulchan (489:3) 18 See Aruch HaShulchan (489:3) 19 See Shulchan Aruch 489:2, Mishna Berura 489:14. See however, Biur Halacha (Biur Halacha

Counting during the remaining days. The Mishna Berura³⁵ adds that when he counts during the remaining days of *Sefiras haOmer* he may recite a *beracha* when counting, as it now is a *s'fek s'feika* (a double doubt): Firstly, according to the opinions that one may count by daytime, he did not miss a day of *Sefiras haOmer*. Secondly, even according to those opinions that counting by daytime is invalid, there are still opinions who rule that even if one missed a day, he may continue counting with a *beracha*.³⁶

The International Dateline

The subject of the International Dateline is somewhat abstract and can be difficult to grasp, but because it has a significant ramification in halacha it is worthwhile to quickly review this topic. Although from both the Torah standpoint and the secular standpoint, there *must* be an International Dateline, they do not necessarily agree on where this line of demarcation is to be drawn. In the following paragraphs we will discuss the different opinions about the International Dateline, and the ramifications of crossing the dateline during *Sefiras haOmer*.

What is the International Dateline?

The International Dateline is an imaginary line that is drawn from North Pole to the South Pole. It is a line of demarcation, a line which differentiates between its two sides. This line separates the Eastern Hemisphere and the Western Hemisphere, and it is at this line that the calendar date changes. For example, for someone standing on one side of the line it will be 6:00pm on *Sunday*, while for someone standing on the other side of the line it will be 6:00pm on *Monday*.

Just to be clear, it is not because one side of the line is an hour ahead of the other side that causes the date to change, rather the two sides are actually a *full day* apart.

Why does there need to be an International Dateline?

As we mentioned, both the Torah and the secular world recognize the necessity to draw an International Dateline, this is something that scientifically must exist due to the fact that the earth is round and the sun circles around it each day bringing a new day. For example, when the sun reaches Point A, it becomes the morning (e.g., 6:00 am) of Sunday. Twenty-four hours later when the sun circles the earth and returns to Point A, it is now the morning (e.g., 6:00 am) of Monday. However, the question which needs to be addressed is, at what point does the arrival of the sun stop bringing in "Sunday," and begins to bring in "Monday"? Meaning, there must be a point in time during the cycling of the sun around the earth when the sun brings in the next day of the week. Now, if the earth was flat, it would be obvious at what point of time the sun begins its new cycle and where it ends, and after each cycle it would bring a new day. But, since the earth is round, and it is not clear at what point the sun began its initial cycling of the earth, we must figure out where to draw the line that marks the beginning of the sun's cycle around the earth. This line of demarcation is called the Dateline.

[To bring out this idea, let us take a look at the following example: When the sun reaches Point A it becomes 6:00 am on Sunday. The sun then travels west, and after six hours reaches Point B. It then becomes 6:00am on Sunday at Point B, but is now 12:00pm on Sunday back in Point A. The sun continues to travel west, and after another eleven hours reaches Point C. It then becomes 6:00am on Sunday at Point C, but it is now 11:00pm on Sunday back in Point A. Now, an hour later when the sun returns to Point A, what time and day will it be when it gets there? We must say that when it reaches Point A it is 6:00am on *Monday*, and back in Point C it is 7:00am on *Sunday*. Meaning that there must be a point in time in the cycling of the sun when the date changes to the next day of the week.]

Determining the International Dateline

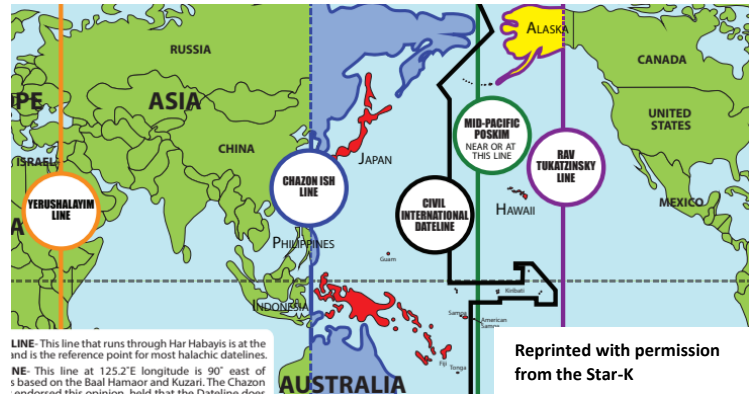
In 1884, at the International Meridian Conference in Washington, D.C., twenty-six countries attended the civil world and created an International Dateline at 180° longitude which runs through the Pacific Ocean (see map below). There was no logical reason why this line was chosen other than the fact that it was the most practical, because for the most part this line does not cut through any land (and circles around the few islands in its path).

The Torah based Dateline

Although the civil world chose an International Dateline, it was necessary to determine the Torah's perspective of where the Dateline should be drawn. This would have great halachic ramifications in determining many halachic questions. For example, depending on where the Torah's Dateline is drawn will determine whether it is Shabbos or Sunday in certain places. For example, in Japan, when it is Sunday according to the International

Dateline, it is Shabbos according to the Torah (based on some opinions). In Hawaii, when it is Friday according to the International Dateline, it is Shabbos according to the Torah (based on some opinions). There are two basic opinions among the *poskim*:

- 1) The Chazon Ish - 90° East of Yerushalayim.** The Chazon Ish³⁷ rules that according to the Torah the sun begins its cycle around the world 90° East of Yerushalayim (see map). He bases his opinion on the opinion of the Ba'al HaMoar³⁸ who says that since Yerushalayim is the center of the world it must be the center of its Hemisphere. Meaning, the cycle of the sun must begin 90° east of Yerushalayim, so that after half of the day passes (i.e., six hours, half of the twelve-hour day), the sun will be directly above Yerushalayim. Therefore, according to the Chazon Ish, the Torah's Dateline is 90° east of Yerushalayim, and it is there where the day of the week changes.
- 2) Rav Yechiel Michel Tukatzinsky - 180° from Yerushalayim.** Rav Yechiel Michel Tukatzinsky³⁹ ruled that since Yerushalayim is the center of the world, the sun begins its cycle directly opposite Yerushalayim. Therefore, according to Rav Yechiel Michel Tukatzinsky, the Torah's Dateline is 180° from Yerushalayim, and it is at this point that the day of the week changes (see map).



There are a number of places that are affected by this difference of opinions, namely, Japan, New Zealand, and Hawaii. If someone must stay over for Shabbos in one of these places he must consult a Rav for guidance as to which day, or perhaps two days, should be kept as Shabbos.

Crossing over the Halachic Dateline

Since the day changes at the Halachic Dateline, someone who travels over the Dateline will lose or gain a day, depending on which direction he is traveling. [If one travels from West to East he will lose a day. If he travels from East to West he will gain a day.] This can create some halachic questions. For example, if one already davened Shachris on Sunday, and he travels West and crosses the Dateline, causing it to become Monday, does he need to daven Shachris again since it is now a new day?⁴⁰ Would he need to put on *tefillin* again, since it is a new day?⁴¹

Sefiras haOmer

At first glance it would seem that crossing the Dateline should not create a real issue regarding counting *Sefiras haOmer*, because even when one travels from East to West and skips a day, there is still sufficient time to count *Sefiras haOmer* for each of the forty-nine days. For example: if he traveled from East to West on Monday by daytime (and thus turns into Tuesday), he can quickly count *Sefiras haOmer* as soon as he crosses the Dateline for Tuesday, since, as we discussed, it is permissible to count *Sefiras haOmer* by daytime (without a *beracha*). Similarly, if one travels from East to West on Monday by nighttime (and thus turns into Tuesday), he can simply count *Sefiras haOmer* before crossing the Dateline (during the nighttime) for Monday, and then as soon as he crosses the Dateline he can count for Tuesday. Indeed, many *poskim* rule this way.⁴² However, the Betzel haChachma⁴³ writes that this is not so simple, since the Torah writes that *Sefiras haOmer* must be seven complete weeks. Meaning, that although he may have technically been successful to count each day of *Sefiras haOmer*, he did not have seven complete weeks of *Sefiras haOmer*, since by crossing the Dateline, he lost a day and did not have forty-nine complete days of the *Omer*. Therefore, the Betzel haChachma writes that he should continue counting, but without a *beracha*. One who crosses the dateline during *Sefiras haOmer* should consult a Rav regarding which opinion to follow.⁴⁴

(489:1, d"h *lispur haOmer*) that since many *poskim* hold that *Sefiras haOmer* nowadays is still a mitzva d'Oraisa it is worthwhile to try to treat the mitzva of *Sefiras haOmer* as a mitzva d'Oraisa. 20 489:10 21 See Shaarei Teshuva (489:20). See also Kovetz Halachos p. 7, note 3 22 489:1 (Aruch haShulchan 489:4) 23 489:3 24 Furthermore, they argue, that very often women do not understand the meaning of the words of *Sefiras haOmer*, and their counting would therefore be invalid. 25 Mikadesh Yisroel, *Sefiras haOmer*, 7 26 Mikadesh Yisroel, *Sefiras haOmer*, 7, Kovetz Halachos p. 646 27 Mikadesh Yisroel, *Sefiras haOmer*, 7 28 See Mishna Berura 489:36, Aruch haShulchan 489:15 29 Brought in Aruch haShulchan 489:15 30 See Biur Halacha 489:8, d"h *sofer b'shaar yamin* regarding how the other opinions understand the verse of "seven complete weeks" 31 489:8 32 The *poskim* discuss a Rav, who typically counts *Sefira* for the congregation, but forgot a day of *Sefira*, whether he may continue counting with a *beracha* in order to avoid the embarrassment of not counting for the congregation. Rav Shmuel Vosner (Shevet HaLevi 3:96:1) rules that in this situation where *kavod HaTorah* is involved, the Rav may rely on the opinions that each day is a separate mitzva and he may recite a *beracha*. However, Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky (Kovetz Halachos p.46, note 11) rules that the Rav may not recite a *beracha*, since the accepted ruling in the Shulchan Aruch is that one who forgets a day should not recite a *beracha*. However, Rav Shmuel rules that the Rav may ask someone in the congregation (who is still reciting a *beracha*) to allow the Rav to make the *beracha* on his behalf and be *motzei* him with the *beracha*. This way, the *beracha* that the Rav recites is not in vain since he is being *motzei* someone in the congregation. (However, see note on Shevet HaLevi *ibid.*) 33 489:37 34 489:7; Mishna Berura 489:33 35 489:34 36 Regarding someone who forgot to count by nighttime and only remembered to count the next day after *bein hashmashos*; is it permissible for him to continue reciting a *beracha* on the remaining days? See Sefer Yisroel V'Hazmanim (vol. 1:43:5) where he cites different opinions on this issue. The Minchas Yitzchak (9:57) rules that, even in this situation, one may still recite a *beracha* on the remaining days. However, once it reaches Tzais Hakoachavim, even according to some opinions (i.e. the opinion of the Geonim), he may no longer count with a *beracha*. See also Sefer Mikadesh Yisroel, *Sefiras haOmer* 20:21) 37 In Kunteres Yud Ches Sha'os 38 Rosh HaShana 20b 39 In Sefer Hayomam B'Kadur Ha'aretz 40 See Yisroel V'Hazmanim vol. 3:13:2:12 for a discussion on this topic 41 See Yisroel V'Hazmanim vol. 3:13:2:12 for a discussion on this topic 42 See Yisroel V'Hazmanim vol. 3:13:2:12 43 5:96, cited in See Yisroel V'Hazmanim vol. 3:13:2 44 The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (Sichos, Chag Shavuot, 5717,5721, brought in Sefer *Sefiras haOmer* p. 206) gave a third opinion: He ruled that when one travels across the Dateline he does not follow the day of the place which he traveled to, rather he keeps his day of *Sefira* which he started with. Therefore, although the people in the place where he traveled to are counting the twentieth day of the *Omer*, he will still count the nineteenth day of *Sefiras haOmer* since he continues with his own counting of days. According to this opinion, he would keep Shavuot a day after the rest of the community that he is residing in. See Yisroel V'Hazmanim vol. 3:13:2:14 where he disagrees with this opinion.