

Exploring Gender Through Counting the Omer

A guide to counting the Omer, including meditations and blessings in feminine, masculine, and nonbinary Hebrew.

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By Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael and Zora Berman, Keshet

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What is counting the Omer?

There are seven weeks between the two different major holidays of Passover and Shavuot. These seven weeks are called the Omer, and have many meanings in the Jewish tradition. There is an ancient practice that dates back to the Torah of counting each day and week between the two holidays. Counting the Omer begins on the second night of Passover and continues for forty nine days. This word Omer means “sheaf” in Hebrew and is an ancient agricultural practice of tracking the wheat harvest. This seven week journey of closely attuning ourselves to the earth and the ripening of the wheat also has a deeper spiritual counterpart as well. Our tradition teaches us that this time period of the Omer also commemorates the journey from our liberation at the Passover seder to receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai on the holiday of Shavuot.

Kabbalah (a Jewish mystical tradition) has breathed even more meaning into this practice of counting the Omer. The Kabbalists have a complex system of attributes that they have ascribed to God. Each attribute is called a sefirah, and the tradition maps out the relationships between them. Each week of the Omer is associated with a single sefirah, as is each day of the week. As we count the Omer we explore the interplay between these godly attributes.

One powerful LGBTQ read of this practice is to explore gender through these forty-nine days. Each sefirah is also associated with a gender. The Kabbalists that created this system of sefirot (plural of sefirah) understood God to be a complex balance of both masculine and feminine energies. Although they only had access to binary language for describing gender, they understood that a binary conception of gender could not contain or fully describe the Divine. During the Omer, each day represents the interaction between two gendered sefirot – one for the week and one for the day of the week.

This act of counting the Omer can be a portal for opening ourselves to contemplating new notions of divine attributes. It invites us to expand our understanding of what it means to be gendered beings in the world. This complex system of balancing and shifting genders can be an invitation in our tradition to explore and question how we understand our own gendered ways of thinking and being.

How to Count:

1. Set the Intention

Before counting the Omer, many have the tradition of reciting a brief meditation to set their intention. This meditation includes the verses from the Torah ([Leviticus 23:15-16](#)) which describe the process of counting the days.

For the first part of this meditation, select the gendered or gender-expansive language for yourself that resonates most.

(non-gendered Hebrew based on grammar system built by Lior Gross and Eyal Rivlin, available at www.nonbinaryhebrew.com)

Gender Nonbinary:

... הנני מוכנה ומזמנה

Hineni muchaneh um'zumeneh ...

Here I am, ready and prepared ...

Feminine:

... הנני מוכנה ומזמנת

Hineni muchanah um'zumenet ...

Here I am, ready and prepared ...

Masculine:

... הנני מוכן ומזמן

Hineni muchan um'zuman ...

Here I am, ready and prepared ...

All Continue:

לקיים מצות עשה של ספירת העמר כמו שכתוב בתורה וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת ...
מיזם הביאכם את עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהינה. עד ממחרת השבת
השביעית תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם מנחה חדשה ליי

... lekayem mitzvat aseh shel sefirat ha-omer, kemo shekatuv batorah: us'fartem lakhem mimacharat hashabbat, miyom havi'akhem et omer hat'nufah, sheva shabbatot temimot tih'yena, ad mimacharat hashabbat hash'vi'it tis'peru khamishim yom, vehikravtem minkha khadasha l'adonai.

... to fulfill the mitzvah of counting the Omer, as it is written in the Torah: And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the sheaf of the wave-offering, you shall count seven full weeks. Until the day after the seventh Shabbat, you shall count fifty days, until you bring a new gift to the Eternal.

Some Add ([Psalm 90:17](#)):

ויהי נעם יי א-להינו עלינו ומעשה ידינו כוננה:
וידינו כוננה:

Viyhi no'am eloheinu aleinu, uma'aseh yadeinu konnenah aleinu, uma'aseh yadeinu konnenuhu

And may the pleasantness of our God be upon us, let the work of our hands prosper, oh prosper the work of our hands!

2. Recite the Blessing

Feminine Language for God

ברוך את יי א-להינו רוח העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותה וצונו על ספירת העמר

Brukhah at Yah, ru'akh ha'olam asher kidshanu bemitzvotah v'tzivanu al sefirat ha'omer

Blessed are You, Yah, our God, spirit of the universe who has made us holy with Her commandments, and commanded us to count the Omer.

Masculine Language for God

ברוך אתה יי א-להינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו על ספירת העמר

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kidshanu bemitzvotav v'tzivanu al sefirat ha'omer.

Blessed are You, LORD, our God, ruler of the universe who has made us holy with His commandments, and commanded us to count the Omer.

Gender-Expansive Language for God

ברוך אתה יי א-להינו חי העולמים אשר קדשנו במצוותה וצונו על ספירת העמר

Brukheh ateh Adonai, Eloheinu kheh ha'olamim, asher kidshenu bemitzvotah v'tzivenu al sefirat ha'omer.

Blessed are You, Eternal, life of all worlds who has made us holy with Hir commandments, and commanded us to count the Omer.

3. Count the day and week

Today is the _____ day, which is _____ weeks and _____ days of the Omer.

4. Closing Psalm

Psalm 67 contains 49 words, which can correspond to the 49 days of the Omer that we are counting

למנצח בנגינת מזמור שיר:

אלהים יחננו ויברכנו יאר פניו אתנו סלה:

לדעת בארץ דרך בכל-גוים ישועתך:

יְדוּדָךְ עַמִּים אֱלֹהִים יְדוּדָךְ עַמִּים כָּלֵם:

יִשְׁמְחוּ וְיִרְנְנוּ לְאֲמִים כִּי־תִשְׁפֹּט עַמִּים מִיִּשׂוּר וְלְאֲמִים בְּאֶרֶץ תִּנְחַם סְלָה:

יְדוּדָךְ עַמִּים אֱלֹהִים יְדוּדָךְ עַמִּים כָּלֵם:

אֶרֶץ נִתְּנָה יְבוּלָהּ יְבָרְכֵנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

יְבָרְכֵנוּ אֱלֹהִים וְיִירְאוּ אֶת־כָּל־אֲפֹסֵי־אֶרֶץ:

For the leader; with instrumental music. A psalm – a song!

May God be gracious to us and bless us; may God show us favor!

May Your way be known on earth, Your deliverance among all nations.

Peoples will praise You, O God; all peoples will praise You!

Nations will exult and shout for joy, for You grant justice for all peoples, You guide the nations of the earth.

The peoples will praise You, O God; all peoples will praise You!

May the earth yield its bounty; may God, our God, bless us.

May God bless us, and be revered to the ends of the earth.

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