

## Emor - Shabbat 09 May 2015 - by Rabbi Yehudah Black

Counting plays an important role in Jewish thought. Every week we count the number of days in anticipation of Shabbat. The agricultural cycles of the years are counted in Israel, and every seventh year is called Shemittah, when the land lies fallow. Following this, the Beth Din in Yerushalayim would count the seven year cycles seven times and on the fiftieth year they would proclaim a Jubilee year to God.

In this week's Sedra the Children of Israel are instructed to count the seven weeks from Pesach to Shavuot- the Counting of the Omer, which is also the period we are now in.

The mitzvah of the Omer counting still applies today and is independent of the command to bring the Omer (measure of barley) which only applied in Temple times. Jews across the world dutifully count the days and the weeks every night until Shavuot. But what do we accomplish through our counting?

Every festival commemorates two different facets of service to God. Firstly there is the agricultural celebration. Pesach is called the Chag HaAviv the Spring festival, and indeed Pesach has to take place in that season. Shavuot celebrates the first fruits which had to be brought to the temple. And Sukkot marks the harvest festival and ingathering of the crops into the barns before the onset of winter. Each Chag, the Children of Israel were reminded not to appear in the Temple empty handed. We therefore understand how the Jews were reminded through the Omer count not to come to celebrate before God devoid of gifts.

However, there is also a second aspect of each festival; and that is its historical characteristic. Pesach celebrates the Exodus from Egypt. Sukkot marks the time when the Children of Israel were protected by God during their sojourn in the desert. Shavuot commemorates the most important celebration in our history; the Giving of the Torah at Mt Sinai. Indeed The Sefer Hachinuch writes that this is the inner meaning of Omer counting. When the Children of Israel were in the desert they had been told that God would give them the Torah in fifty days, they counted the days with excitement and enthusiasm in preparation and anticipation, refining themselves to be in a state of spiritual readiness to receive the Torah. The message is practical and simple; every week, day, hour, minute, indeed every second counts. Seize the moment!