



Counting the Omer: The Gift of Practice



Originally created by Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael and Zora Berman on April 14, 2020. Updated by Rabbi Micah Buck-Yael in March 2022.

What does it take to be your best self? The kindest, most thoughtful, most intentional version of your self?

What does it take to be this thoughtful, intentional self when the world keeps opening up new possibilities, offering new challenges, and demanding that we grow?

For many of us, there is something grounding in consistent repetition and practice. New habits grow through practice. New language feels comfortable in our mouths through practice.

The Omer counting ritual below is an ancient practice, inviting us to count the days between Passover and Shavuot. We offer you this updated gender-ful liturgy for the ritual as an invitation to practice getting some new language into your mouth. Whether you are working to expand the language you use to address and think of the Divine, to find affirmation for your own beautiful gendered or non-gendered self in prayer language, or simply to feel more comfortable with gender-expansive Hebrew, we invite you to practice the language of your choice for these 49 days.

Give it a try — [bookmark this page to make it easy to come back every day!](#) — and see what new habits and new language become real for you.



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 a grammar system built by Lior Gross and Eyal Rivlin, available at www.nonbinaryhebrew.com)

Gender Nonbinary:

Hineni muchaneh um'zumeneh ...
Here I am, ready and prepared ...

... הנני מוכנה ומזמנה

Feminine:

Hineni muchanah um'zumenet ...
Here I am, ready and prepared ...

... הנני מוכנה ומזמנת

Masculine:

Hineni muchan um'zuman ...
Here I am, ready and prepared ...

... הנני מוכן ומזמן

All Continue:

לְקַיֵּם מִצְוַת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁל סִפִּירַת הָעֹמֶר כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת ...
מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שַׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶנָּה. עַד מַמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת
הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה

... lekayyem 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):

וְיִהי נָעַם יי אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ כֹּנֵנָה עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ כֹּנֵנָה:

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

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

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר

Brukha 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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melek 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

בְּרוּכָה אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ חַי הָעוֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתֶיךָ וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר

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 Her 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

לְמַנְצַח בְּנִגִּינַת מְזֻמּוֹר שִׁיר:
אֱלֹהִים יִחַנְנוּ וְיִבְרַכְנוּ יְאֵר פָּנָיו אֶתְנוּ סֵלָה:
לְדַעַת בְּאֶרֶץ דֶּרֶךְךָ בְּכָל־גּוֹיִם יִשְׁוּעֶתְךָ:
יִדְוֹךְ עַמִּים אֱלֹהִים יִדְוֹךְ עַמִּים כָּלָם:
יִשְׁמְחוּ וְיִרְנְנוּ לְאֻמִּים כִּי־תִשְׁפֹּט עַמִּים מִיִּשְׁוֹר וּלְאֻמִּים בְּאֶרֶץ תִּנְחָם סֵלָה:
יִדְוֹךְ עַמִּים אֱלֹהִים יִדְוֹךְ עַמִּים כָּלָם:
אֶרֶץ נְתָנָה יְבוּלָהּ יִבְרַכְנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֵינוּ:
יִבְרַכְנוּ 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.