

# Ohr SHABBOS

*Shavuos*

*R' Gedalia Rand*



The Torah commands that we count, *sofer*, in three separate instances. A woman counting her days of *tahara*, the community counting the days between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, and the years of *shemittah* counted until we reach *yovel*. The counting is all in sets of seven – seven days, seven days and weeks, and seven sets of seven years. And in all three cases – we count up to something, but what is that exactly?

Unsurprisingly, that something is a common theme between these three seemingly separate *mitzvos*. The *Yovel* is clearly described in the Torah. It is a time when the land bought and sold over the last fifty years is returned to the families to whom it was originally parceled out to by *Yehoshua*. The Jewish slaves, even ones who have elected to stay as slaves in their master's home, go free. Because we are the servants of Hashem, not the servants of His servants. *yovel* is a time when things go back to the way Hashem intended

them. They way Hashem originally meant for them to be.

In the same vein, the purpose of the *Yidden* accepting the Torah at *Har Sinai* was to revert creation back to its form before the *chet* of *Adam HaRishon*. To revert the Jewish people, in the place of *Adam*, and the entire world around him. To renew the intent, the *ratzon* of Hashem for creation. So *Kabbalas HaTorah* is something more than just accepting to do the *mitzvos* and learn the Torah. It is accepting Hashem's *ratzon* as our own. Severing our focus from all the externalities and frivolities we have busied ourselves with over the last year. Reconnecting with the way things ought to be – the way our Father in Heaven planned for us when He wrote the Torah. May we all merit to be *m'kabel* the Torah in a way that brings Hashem *nachas* and return the whole world definitively back to the form it had at the beginning of Creation.



*R' Yosef David Rothbart*

## *Halachic Insights*

*Rema* brings the popular *Shavuos* *minhag* of decorating the shuls and homes with grass. This is done to commemorate the joy of *matan torah*, when Hashem covered *Har Sinai* with grass. *Magen Avraham* adds another reason for this custom: the grass reminds us that on *Shavuos* we are judged on the fruit that grow on trees for the coming year, and this will inspire us to daven.

The *Gr"a* abolished this *minhag*, when it became customary for non-Jews to put up trees on their holiday, and those who follow the *Gr"a*'s customs do not decorate their shuls (or homes). Some say that the *Gr"a* only abolished the custom of putting out trees, but decorating with grass is permitted (*Steipler Orchos rabeinu* vol. 2 pg. 99, *Shalmei Moed Shavuos* pg 459). Others maintain that the *Gr"a* abolished the entire custom. (*Kovetz Halachos Shavuos* chapter 11 fn 3)

Over time, the custom evolved and people began to buy ornate flowers *Shavuos* time. What is the reason to decorate shuls and homes with flowers?

It seems that placing flowers in shuls and homes is a fulfillment of the original *minhag*. *Shulchan Aruch* writes that before smelling a rose, one must recite the *bracha* of *atzei besamim*. *Mishnah Berura* adds that if the flower grew on a

tree, then the *bracha* is *atzei besamim*, but if the flower grew from the ground, then the *bracha* is *isvei besamim*. It follows then, that flowers growing from the ground are seen as grass, and ones that grow on a tree (such as roses) are viewed as a tree. And decorating shuls (and homes) with either such flowers is a fulfillment of the custom to decorate the shuls (and homes) with grass and flowers (perhaps this is a *hidur* in the *minhag*).

Branches, grass or flowers (that are detached) being used for decorative purposes are not *muktza*. If such plants get removed from a vase (with water), they may be returned to the vase. On *Shabbos*, one may not add water to the vase; while on *Yom Tov*, if needed, one may add up to 50% new water.

If the flower buds are closed, and returning them to the water will cause them to open, one may not do so. *Rav Shmuel Kaminetzky* (*Kovetz Halachos Shavuos* chapter 11 footnote 6) explained that doing so is forbidden *miderabanan* since this has the appearance of *zoreia* (planting). However, because doing so is not an *issur Torah*, if the buds already opened, although placing them back in the water will cause them to open more, doing so is permitted.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky related: I was once in London, and heard the following from one of the Roshei Yeshivah there. There was a bachur in the yeshivah who was not blessed with great intellectual gifts; he was what Chazal describe as "slow to learn and quick to forget." His friends advanced in their studies, while he sat on the sidelines. Had he been anyone else, he would have been sent on his way; but this bachur was the son of one of the yeshivah's major supporters... Nevertheless, at a certain point one cannot fool himself. The Rosh Yeshiva asked the father of this bachur to come to the yeshivah for a meeting. He showed him this Rashi, and said, "I want to make you aware of the fact that Chazal accept the possibility that one will simply not be able to succeed in his studies. Your son has been enrolled in the yeshivah for more than five years, and I am sorry to say that he does not seem to be showing signs of success in his learning. If you want him to remain here, I have no objection, but you should be aware of the reality of the situation!" The father countered by saying that he is no expert in chinuch, and cannot take the responsibility of making such a fateful decision. After discussing the matter, they reached an agreement: The father would pay for the Rosh Yeshivah to fly with the bachur to Eretz Yisrael, to ask the advice of the gadol hador, the Steipler Gaon. So it was. The two flew to Eretz Yisrael, prayed for success in their mission at the holy sites, and traveled to

Bnei Brak. The Rosh Yeshivah wrote the particulars of the case in a note, and handed it to the venerable sage. The Steipler Gaon read through the note twice, while the pair waited with pounding hearts. He then turned to the bachur with a kind smile. "Do you learn in yeshivah?" the Gaon asked. The bachur answered in the affirmative. "What is it that you learn there? Do you learn Gemara?" "No," the bachur admitted. "I cannot understand Gemara." "What about Mishnah?" asked the Gaon. The bachur shamefacedly whispered that he couldn't understand Mishnah either. Nevertheless, the Gaon's face continued to shine with love and kindness. "So tell me, what is it that you learn?" "I learn halachah," the bachur said. "I sit with a Kitzur Shulchan Aruch or a Chayei Adam." "Do you understand that?" the Gaon asked. "Sometimes," the bachur said. "But when I don't, I ask others to explain it to me, and I am able to understand their explanations. I then write summaries and charts, which I review to help me remember the halachah. The Steipler Gaon's smile grew broader, and he warmly blessed the bachur with continued success in his studies. He then turned to the Rosh Yeshivah and said, "If you worked for me, I would fire you. How can you despair of a bachur who is learning halachah every day? The Gemara says that a person who learns two halachos daily is guaranteed a place in the World to Come - is that what you describe as seeing no success in learning?"

## Knowing Our Sages

### Rav Yehuda Loew - The Maharal

The Maharal was born to rav Betzael Loew in 1525, in Posen (now Poznan), Poland. In 1553 he moved to Nikolsburg (now Mikulov), Czech Republic to become the Chief Rabbi of Moravia, serving in this capacity until 1573. Later, the Maharal served as the Rav of Prague, Czech Republic. In Prague, the Maharal established the Klaus yeshiva, which became famous throughout Europe. His works include Gur Aryeh on Rashi, Derech Chaim on Pirkei Avos, and Nesivos Olam. The Maharal's students include the Tosafos Yom Tov and the Tzemach Dovid. He passed away in Prague in 1609. According to legend, the Maharal created a golem using his knowledge of Kabbalah to protect the Jews of Prague from gentile persecution. It is said that the lifeless remains of this golem are still located in the attic of the Altneuschul of Prague.

First Day	
Mincha	8:28
Shkiah	8:46
Maariv	9:31
Brachos	4:55
Barchu	5:28
Neitz Hachama	5:43
Shacharis (601 Clark)	8:45
Sof Zman Krias Shema -	8:53
Sof Zman Krias Shema -	9:29
Second Day	
Mincha/Maariv #1	6:58
Candlelighting	7:13 to 8:29
Mincha/Maariv #2	8:29
Shkiah	8:47
Shacharis	8:30
Shacharis (601 Clark)	8:45
Yizkor (approx.)	10:30
Mincha	7:45
Shkiah	8:48
Maariv	9:43
72 Minutes	10:00