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## Canfei Nesharim

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### Unit One: Our Relationship to the Land: Meaning of the Omer

#### Lesson Three: Lessons of Sefirat HaOmer In Working Towards Izzun

##### Let's begin this study:

Think about the purpose of counting the Omer in our lives. Clearly, it is difficult to feel as connected to the land on an ongoing basis, given the reality of our lives and how different it is from that of our ancestors. So, in terms of our own lives, let's focus on taking account of our resources and what it takes to produce them as a potential applied lesson from this season and its activities.

Look at the following text from VaYikra, chapter 23, verses 15 and 16:

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת־עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַ שַׁבָּתוֹת  
תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה : טז עַד מַמְחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם  
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַ'ה':

- Count for yourselves from the day after Shabbat when you bring an *omer*/measure of the wave offering seven weeks; they must be complete weeks. You must count until the day after the seventh week, fifty days; and then you will come close to offer to G-d a new grain offering.

Note that this reading comes from *Parshat Emor*, which is one of the weekly Torah portions during this period of time.

##### **Think About This:**

1. What effect does “counting the measures of wave offering” have on the *B’nai Yisrael*? Does counting what comes from the land make us more conscious of it?

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2. What types of counting can we do in our own lives that are meaningful as we think about the coming season of receiving the Torah and the types of behaviors that our Torah wants us to take on in our lives?

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3. If the offerings that the *B’nai Yisrael* kept them simultaneously connected to G-d and to the land that G-d gave them on an ongoing basis, how can we do that for ourselves in our lives today?

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So, if we find it very challenging to relate completely to the meaning of the *Sefirat HaOmer* given that we are not living with our *Beit HaMikdash* or generally not in a land based economy, what can we think of that does remind us daily and throughout the day about our connection to and responsibility for proper use of the land and the resources?

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Consider the following examples:

בְּרָכָה עַל הַפֶּתַח :  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמּוֹצֵא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

על תבשיל מחמשת מיני דגן :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיַּי מְזוֹנוֹת.

על הַיַּיִן :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

על פְּרֵי הָעֵץ :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ.

על הַיִּרְקוֹת :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

על דָּבָר שֶׁאֵין גְּדוּלוֹ מִן הָאָרֶץ :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדָבָרוֹ.

על ריח טוב שבפירות :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַנוֹתֵן רִיחַ טוֹב בַּפְּרוֹת.

על ריח טוב שבעצים ושיחים :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֵצִי בְּשָׂמִים.

על ריח טוב שבעשבים :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא עֲשָׂבֵי בְּשָׂמִים.

על ריח טוב שאינו מן הצומח :  
ברוך אתה ה', אל-נוּ. מְלַךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא מִיַּי בְּשָׂמִים.

We learn from our sages, *Chazal*, that we MUST say the appropriate *Beracha* before enjoying and/or partaking of any parts of the land's produce and resources. If we fail to do so, it is as if we are stealing from G-d. According to *Berachot 35a* in the *Talmud*, before we say a *Beracha* the item we are holding belongs to G-d. Only after we say the *Beracha* is it ours to enjoy and use. Do you understand this notion? Why are we taught this importance of *Berachot*?

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How/can saying the appropriate *Beracha* for each thing that we use and enjoy increase our awareness of our environment and its elements that G-d has given us as part of the land on which we live and depend?

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**Let's think about this together:** What purpose can these *Berachot* serve in reminding us of the many different things that are part of the land and resources that G-d created? How can this practice serve to connect us to the land and our need for it as well as our responsibility to care for it in a daily and ongoing manner much the same as *Sefirat HaOmer* reminded the community so long ago of everything that G-d has given us and of the most delicate balance and relationship between G-d, us and the land that G-d has created for us?

Consider the following statement:

The biodiversity of planet earth is severely endangered. Edward O. Wilson, a Harvard University zoologist, estimates that "If we continue at the current rate of deforestation and destruction of major ecosystems like rainforest and coral reefs, where most of the biodiversity is concentrated, we will surely lose more than half of all the species of plants and animals on earth by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Quoted from "Our Relationship to Other Creatures" by Ora Sheinson, in **Etz Chayim Hee: A Torah Commentary for Environmental Learning and Action**, Canfei Nesharim Publication, sponsored by the Gaia Fund, 2008., p. 105 (*Parshat Emor*).

What are the main ideas in this quote?

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Where have we seen these ideas in our Torah based texts that we have studied?

**Let's think about this together:**

Why is it important for us to work to maintain and protect the balance in our environment and ecosystems?

What have we learned in these lessons about what G-d wants us to do in terms of this balance in our environment and ecosystems?

How is this a specific Jewish responsibility?

**Moving Forward From Teaching to Actions: Taking Initiative and Putting Learned Lessons into Action: Now what can we do to act in a manner that is coherent with the texts we have just explored?**

So what can we do to achieve this *Izzun* in our environment? Let's consider the following possibilities:

