Not everyone can count

In general, the act of counting numerically is related to the fact that we believe ourselves to be the owners of that that we count. We count our money, we count our years of life, and we count the time we invest in our daily activities. Counting is a symbol of possession. All we can count is ours, or can be in the future.

The Torah in these days shows us a different facet in the act of enumerating or counting.

After the second night of Passover, the Torah asks us to count seven full weeks and thus arrive at the feast of Shavuot. In these seven weeks, every Jew living in Israel would bring their first fruits of the field, the Omer, to make offerings at the Temple of Jerusalem.

We call this counting process today "The Counting of the Omer."

It seems like a simple process but it comes with a profound message. If we put ourselves in the place of the owner of the field at that time we would see the difficulties to obtain fruits when sowing. Not always fertile soils, adverse weather conditions, rustic work tools. All these factors transformed the expected harvest in a miracle. Too many odds to overcome. I imagine that at the time the first fruits appeared, the farmer’s first instinct was to take the results of his hard work home to his family. It is a natural and understandable impulse. Work and effort deserve an immediate reward. But the Torah, through the count of the Omer, stops us for a moment and asks us to identify and recognize that apart from us and above us, God is the creator of everything. Prior to taking our harvest home we had to take it to the Temple in an act of recognition and humility to God.

The act of counting the seven weeks of the Omer is an act of generosity and gratitude to God and not an act of possession. We count and number in order to let go and not to possess. The Omer reminds us that we must first recognize that, in spite of our valid personal efforts, we wouldn’t be able to harvest if it weren’t for the existence of God. And the Omer is not meant for everyone, not everyone can count, because we are generally inclined to believe that everything is due to our efforts and that the hand of God is secondary. The Omer makes us aware of what our place is and what is God’s.

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