Have You Ever Wondered...

Pesakim heard from Maran Harav Shmuel Kamenetzky, Shlita, and Harav Moshe Heinemann, Shlita

Q: Why is there a *Minhag* in some places for the Rav/Rosh Yeshivah/Rosh Kollel count aloud before the קהל, and not the *Chazzan*?

A: In regard to counting, if someone forgot and missed a full night and day, he should continue to count going forward (like most *rishonim* that each day is a new *mitzvah*), however, without a *brocha* (out of concern that perhaps all the days of counting are one long *mitzvah* and ספק ברכות לקולא). The best would be for such a person to hear and be יוצא the *brocha* from someone else. In order not to be מבייש a שליח ציבור that can no longer make a *brocha* on his own, we have the Rav or Rosh Yeshivah count aloud. There are two different rationales in doing so: 1) They probably did not miss a night. 2) They are more likely to have the proper כוונה to be מוציא those who are relying on them. If the Rabbi himself cannot make a *brocha* anymore, then there are two options. 1) The *chazzan* should make the *brocha* out loud instead (RMH). 2) He can ask someone in the crowd (who has not missed yet) not to make a *brocha* and the Rav will have in mind to be *motzi* that person (RSK based on a Beis Halevi).

Q: Is the proper way of counting לעומר or בעומר?

A: It seems to be a *machlokas rishonim* already (בית יוסף and רן). "*L'omer*" would mean, "this is the first day from the counting of the עומר". On the other hand, "*b'omer*" is saying "this is the first day of the counting of the עומר". Each person should follow his *minhag*. Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky, *shlita*, himself counts twice, reciting both, *b'omer* and *l'omer*. The good news is that even if someone skipped the entire word, he is still יוצא. There is no way to bring a ראיה from the נוסחאות of old *Siddurim* unless the *Siddur* is 2000 years old. A *SIddur* which is 100 years old will be printed with the way *Sefirah* was counted in that particular place (RMH).

Q: Is there a דין of ברוב עם הדרת מלך when it comes to ספירת העומר?

A: Yes, If one has the ability to count בציבור later on, it is worthwhile to wait and count with a *Minyen*. If one is not sure whether he will have that opportunity, he should count immediately, once it's the זמן. Rav Elyashiv זצ"ל points out that one who habitually davens a long *Shemoneh Esre*i and will not count with the ציבור anyways, should count as soon as he can in the evening (RMH)

Q: What should one do if he recited ברכת המפיל and then remembered that he did not count?

A: An *ehrliche* Yid can definitely count after reciting *Hamapil* because you can do anything which is לצורך שינה, such as asking for salt after washing for a סעודה despite the הפסק of speaking because it is *l'tzorech ha'seuda* (*OC* 167:6) since לכתחילה one should have salt on the table (Rama 167:5). Therefore, if one remembers that he didn't count *Sefirah*, how can he possibly fall asleep without counting? Hence, it is *l'tzorach sheina* because he needs to do so in order to fall asleep (RMH).

Q: Is one allowed to listen to *a capella* music during the ספירה?

A: Yes, *a capella* music is similar to שירה בפה, which was never forbidden, though it may be an issue of מראת עין for others who think you may be listening to music. Nonetheless, מעיקר הדין it is מותר to listen to *a capella*, but it is not in the spirit of the mourning for the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva (RMH).

Q: May one make a ברכת שהחיינו during ספירה?

A: Yes. The מנהג is to refrain from weddings,

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dancing, music, and haircuts. However, חז״ל never included cutting nails, washing oneself, or purchasing new items/clothes, even those items which requires the buyer to make a *Sh'hecheyanu* (RSK & RMH).

Q: May one play music to keep himself awake while driving? If yes, must one take others into account before turning on the music?
A: In general, the מנהג of not listening to music during ספירה, is only if done for enjoyment. Therefore, one does not need to leave a waiting room or can shop in a store where music is being played over the speakers (RSK). One who exercises better while listening to music may do so for the same reason (RSK). It goes without saying that if one is driving and feels drowsy, he can put on music to help keep himself awake. He should take others in the car into account by listening to music, staying awake, and thereby keeping them safe while he is driving (RMH).

Q: We know that there are different *minhagim* of זמן ספירה. Can one switch which days to observe from year to year?
A: Switching one's מנהג is not so simple. Rav Moshe Feinstein, זצ״ל, (*OC* 1:159) rules that one can change from his family *minhag* if he has a legitimate reason to do so. This leniency is based on the fact that the 33 days that people are accustomed to keep are not the actual days that the תלמידים of Rabbi Akiva died. We have a קבלה that they only passed away on days that we say *Tachanun* בעצם (which excludes Shabbos, Chol Hamoed, Rosh Chodesh, and the end of חודש ניסן, etc.). Nevertheless, the Magen Avraham tells us to keep 33 consecutive days for the *aveilus* to be recognizable. Therefore, either of the 33 days suffices (RMH).

Q: May one shave for a job interview or date during ספירה?
A: If one feels that it will make a difference, then one is allowed to shave during *Sefirah* for an interview. Additionally, a *meshulach* collecting for a *Yeshivah* may shave during *Sefirah* if he feels that it will affect his *parnasah* because non-frum individuals might give less due to his unkempt appearance (RMH). In regard to dating, one can argue that a frum girl would not be bothered by a boy who has not shaved during *Sefirah*, since that is the הלכה. On the contrary, it may have the opposite effect and turn her off! However, if one is convinced that it is something that he needs to do, then he can shave because you are not required to lose a *shidduch* by not shaving (RMH). Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky, *shlita*, would recommend his *talmidim* to be freshly shaved for the first date only.

To leave off with an unanswered question:

Q: The *halacha* is (*OC* 489:4) that if someone asks about the *Sefirah* count, and his friend answers "tonight is day 5," the one who responded can no longer count that night with a ברכה. The reason is because we are concerned that מצות אינם צריכים כוונה and that perhaps he was יוצא already, even though that wasn't his intent. The *MB* (*OC* 489:22) qualifies this *halacha* and explains that all the above holds true for the first week. However, once we begin with counting the weeks, and the friend only answers with the day, he can still make a ברכה, since it is clear that he did not want to be *yotze* and it is as if he had כוונה להיפך.
Why do we not focus on many other differences that often exist and extrapolate from those actions/words that he does not intend to fulfill the מצוה now. For example, if the friend always 1) counts while standing, 2) waits until nightfall and does not count earlier during בין השמשות,
3) counts with a brocha, 4) counts in *lashon hakodesh*, 5) counts with a *minyan*, etc.?

If you have a good explanation, please respond to RabbiCHeinemann@gmail.com. We will feature the best answers next time.

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