

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת [You should count the days...] (23:15). The Torah commands us to count the days between Pesach and Shavu'ot. Counting time is an important concept of Judaism for counting something depicts importance and significance. Chazal reinforced this by their statement in Avot (2:16) היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה [The day is short and the work is plentiful]. The Mishnah is telling us that every single minute of our 120 years is precious and killing time is tantamount to tearing up our hard earned money. Human beings are, by nature “lazy” and will waste time pursuing trivial activities. To this, our parasha addresses us and reminds us of our responsibility to correct these shortcomings and make the most out of every minutes of life that HaShem grants us in this world.

There are two words that express “freedom”; *chofshie*, and *cheirut*. *Cheirut* is the term used to depict both Pesach and Shavu'ot; Pesach encompasses a *cheirut ha'guf*, a physical freedom, while Shavu'ot symbolizes a *cheirut ha'nefesh*-a spiritual freedom. Physical freedom alone does not convey a complete freedom. One can still be enslaved to physical desires, addictions and natural tendencies of laziness. It is the Yom Tov of Shavu'ot that gives the hard earned freedom of Pesach a direction, a goal and a purpose. That is why Shavu'ot is called “Atzeret”, for it is the ultimate climax of Pesach, it is the day we received the Torah. On Pesach HaShem took us out of physical bondage, while on Shavu'ot He released us from spiritual slavery. On that day, G-d broke the shackles that bound our souls to a life of futility with no sense of time, and gave us the most precious gift that enables us to live a life filled with meaning and purpose. According to Rav Sa'adya Gaon, we are a Jewish Nation **because** of the Torah. We are not a nation because we share a common language, culture, or land. Rather, it is because HaShem gave us the Torah. That enabled us to have true freedom.

Furthermore, the Korban Omer, brought on the second day of Pesach, consisted of barley, a course grain that is commonly used as animal food. On Shavu'ot however, the Korban Shetei Halechem was offered, which consisted of wheat, the most basic staple (bread) of human beings. The distinction is, that on Pesach HaShem may have cast off our bonds of physical servitude, but that was not the goal of freedom. Animals, when released from a cage may inherently be free, but that freedom is limited to roaming the wild, and doing only what is instinctual. Human beings, however, have free choice to accept the values of Torah and overcome instinctive desires. The Sefirat HaOmer period should be utilized to reflect on those precious days of life that G-d has granted us and to make every hour and minute meaningful. Studying a little bit of Torah, doing a chesed for someone, saying a kind word to our best friend- our spouse whom we often tend to neglect in our busy world of activities, so much could be accomplished in those spare few moments. . It is not surprising that the very first Mitzvah that HaShem gave to our people was the Mitzvah of החדש הזה לכם (Shemot 12:2)-the concept of time. Slaves have no concept of time, so using our time for meaningful purposes is our demonstration of freedom.