

2,132 is a big number. If you collected, 2132 Pokemon cards, that would be a vast collection. Admittedly, I have no idea if there are that many Pokemon in the Pokemon taxonomy. If you run 2,132 miles in a year that would mean you average just under running 6 miles a day. That is quite the feat.

2,132 is a streak in sports that almost assuredly will never be broken. Cal Ripken, in 1995 broke what was long thought unbreakable, Lou Gehrig's consecutive games played streak. Lou Gehrig's nickname was the Iron Horse. If you're beating a streak owned by someone with that nickname, then you know you've done something pretty unbelievable.

Ripken took it a step further as he continued to play 2,632 games, 500 beyond Gehrig's record. Beyond any other record in baseball, DiMaggio's hitting streak or whichever homerun king you claim, steroid aided or not, it seems fairly clear Ripken's record will remain. Those have come close to being broken. Ripken's? No chance.

That's about the extent of baseball knowledge you'll need for this d'var torah. One more important note from Ripken when he reflected on playing that many games in a row:

In that one way, it truly is like life: You can deal with far more — endure more, create more, recover from pain or disappointment more, be your best more often — in one-day increments. It's almost as if there is no such thing as a “life” and its “meaning.” There are just todays. But, with work and luck, they sure can add up.

This screamed Jewish to me. The notion of “*hayom*-this day” is rampant through so many different aspects of Judaism.

On this day, you were redeemed.

On this day, the world was created.

And perhaps there is no stronger link to a ritual and its daily requirements than counting the *Omer*, in which we currently find ourselves on day 15.

A brief refresher: from the 2nd night of Passover, we are instructed to count every night, with a blessing, until we reach the holiday of Shavuot. The obligation is sourced from the Leviticus 23:15 where we are told the following:

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּתְחַרַת הַשָּׁבֹת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת-עֶמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה:

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete:

There are two important things to note about this verse. The counting is not just a general counting but it is לְכֶם , for you, a seemingly superfluous word. And the counting must be complete, an ambiguous albeit important description of the count. Three levels of commentary will help us unpack this *pasuk*.

The Ramban, Nachmanides, homes in on the usage of the word “for you.” He relates it to the commandment around the taking of the Lulav/Etrog on sukkot which is an obligation on every person. A distinguishing characteristic here though, unlike other countings is that the counting need to be done audibly. Other countings can happen internally without the formality of the external count. Here, in order to make it “yours,” you’ve got to say it out loud. He reasons that an extra amount of sanctity is imbued with the task when you hear yourself counting it. With each passing day, you become more and more aware of the “streak” that you are building.

Think about when you’re on a run/jog/walk and with each passing mile, you announce it to yourself. The sense of accomplishment and pride grows. If you’ve ever tracked a

diet on an app or in a journal and you look back with each passing day, your sense of confidence and self-belief grows. So too here, hearing yourself continue to count makes you aware of the potency of the act of counting the Omer. And, as he notes, every one can do it.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, the 19th century German Torah commentator known as the K'tav V'hakabbalah, was a unifier of worlds. He fused together the *pshat* interpretations, the literal readings of the Torah with the *drash*, the more hidden interpretive meanings of the Torah.

He too focuses on the notion of this being “לְכַחֵם -for you,” but he connects it to a different moment of the Torah, that being Avraham’s journey centered around Lekh Lekha. We’re not just counting in general here. This is a unique form of counting.

It alludes to the soul’s benefit — becoming sanctified and purified from all materialistic desires and lowly thoughts during this seven week period. For even the word תַּסְפּוּר (count) does not connote merely to know how many days and weeks, rather, it implies analysis and watchfulness... Similarly, here too, the meaning of “you shall count for yourselves” is that you should inspect your lives, think deeply about yourself — what is the true good you

should choose and the true evil from which you must flee. The “for you” from Avraham is the same “for you” here. It implies that there is a goodness and betterment that comes from this process.

As many commentators note on Avraham, that “*lekha*” indicates that Avraham’s life is going to be improved from going on this journey. In other words, *it’s not just for you but it’s to make a better you*. The counting here is a method to think intensely about our lives and ask the big questions:

Am I improving 1% every day?

Am I treating people kindly?

Am I moving forward and not backward?

Every counting is an opportunity for self-betterment.

Finally we turn to Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, also known as the Mei Hashiloach who first argues that the Israelites were not able to fully comprehend what happened to them in Egypt. It would’ve been impossible at the time. They needed space and processing time to reflect. He then relates the following parable:

This is like a parent on a journey with their child, and they found a secret treasure filled with precious stones and pearls. The child wasn't capable of comprehending how precious they were. So the parent told them to gather as many as they could carry. The child asked "how much are these worth?" The parent responded that now wasn't the time to think about that. Rather, just be courageous and expeditious and take as many as you can. When you get home, take note and count what you collected and then I will tell you how valuable they are. So too every year God shines a light on us on the first night of Pesach. From every night forward, we begin to understand a bit more each day until we get to Shavuot and we fully comprehend the preciousness of that original light.

We are not fully capable of comprehending the grandeur of the journeys we find ourselves on. There's too much happening; we take too many steps forward, backward, and sideways. There's too much noise.

But if we can just focus on the "today-ness" of it, and every day build on top of it another day, then by the end of the process, we can also build an awareness of the immensity of what we've done. We will also reach a level of receiving that we weren't

capable of before, which is why the end of the counting results in the gift of revelation once more.

The daily act of counting is so much more than a rote and perfunctory listing of a number. It's why I think the counting of the Omer is one of the more accessible and potent rituals that we have for Jews everywhere. The Omer is the perfect antidote to the "I am a bad Jew" mentality that I hear so often. You're just counting something, but you're also doing something that is so much more than just counting. There's even tons of apps these days that will remind you to count it. So you have no excuse to forget!

Yet, if you do, one of the beautiful hidden treasures about the Omer is there to save us. It gets us back to the notion of it needing to be complete. In a diet or in regard to physical fitness, the worse thing you can do after a "cheat day" is to fall totally off the wagon. You think, "well, what's the point now?"

The point is actually to keep going.

Similarly, missing a day in the Omer might not be as catastrophic as you might imagine.

There are tons of different commentaries that delve into the permutations of what happens if you miss a count:

What if you counted during the day time?

If you miss a day, should you keep counting just without a blessing?

If you miss a day, can you keep counting at all?

Disagreements abound. I am always heartened to learn each year that there are plenty of authorities that say, even when you miss a day, you can get back on the count because *temimot*, that word used in the original verse for complete *could indicate that the count is really 49 individual acts as opposed to one long counting.*

This means potentially that if you mess up, you can just keep counting. Because each day is a new opportunity to connect, ask questions, and improve. That is what forms the basis of this powerful act.

Research identifies [three elements of a ritual](#). First, it consists of behaviors that occur in fixed succession – one after another – and are typified by formality and repetition. Secondly, the behaviors have symbolic meaning and lastly, these ritualized behaviors generally have no obvious useful purpose.

Sure, you could look at the counting of the Omer and think to yourself, what's the point? I'm not getting anything from this. Or, you could look at it as 49 different



opportunities to reawaken yourself to the treasures of your life. The process is uniquely yours.

Within each day, we might not realize the value of it. But taken as a whole, one building on top of the other, it allows us to reach the mountaintops at the end ready to come to the moment of revelation. It's no Ripken-like feat but it sure is powerful and it's one we can match each and every year.

Shabbat Shalom,

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