**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Deracheha: Women and Mitzvot**

***Sefirat Ha-Omer***

What is The Nature of the mitzva to count the omer*?* Are women obligated in it? Do the customs of the time apply to women?

**By Deracheha Staff; Laurie Novick, Director**

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# **Three Elements**

Every year, we count the days and weeks from the second night of Pesach until Shavuot. We call this count *sefirat ha-omer* (lit., the count of the sheaf),[[1]](#footnote-1) after the barley offering brought on the second day of Pesach.

The Torah presents this mitzva in both *Vayikra* and *Devarim*:

*Vayikra* 23:15-16

Count for yourselves from the day after the Shabbat [in this context, the first day of Pesach], from the day on which you bring the *omer* of the wave-offering. Seven complete *Shabbatot* they will be. Until the day after the seventh Shabbat, you will count fifty days and offer a new grain-offering to God.

*Devarim* 16:9-10

Seven weeks shall you count for yourselves, from when the sickle is first upon the standing grain you will begin to count seven weeks. And you will observe the festival of Shavuot for the Lord your God, that you will give the portion of the voluntary offering of your hand as the Lord your God will bless you.

In these verses, we can identify (in order) three distinct elements to *sefirat ha-omer*: festive, sacrificial, and agricultural. Each element suggests a different purpose for the count.

**I. Festive** The count begins on the day following the first day of Pesach, "the day after the Shabbat," and it ends with the celebration of the holiday of Shavuot.

Why count from one holiday to the next? Rambam explains that the count builds anticipation for Shavuot and reflects a love of Torah:

*Moreh Ha-nevuchim* 3:43

Shavuot is the day of giving the Torah, and to make this day great they counted the days from the first festive day to it, like someone whose most faithful lover waits for him and counts days and also hours. This is the reason for *sefirat ha-omer* from the day of our departure from Egypt until the day of giving the Torah, which is the intention and purpose of their exodus….

**II. Sacrificial** The count begins with the offering of an *omer* of barley and ends with the bringing of a "new grain-offering" of two loaves of bread on the festival of Shavuot.

**III. Agricultural** The verse in *Devarim* describes the beginning of the count in purely agricultural terms, "from when the sickle is first upon the standing grain." The count begins in conjunction with the harvest of the new barley crop and ends at the time of the wheat harvest, marking the transition from one to the other.

Rabbi Akiva explains that the *omer* offering brings blessing upon the field produce, including the wheat from which the Shavuot loaves are made.

*Rosh Ha-shana* 16a

Why does the Torah say to bring the *omer* on Pesach? Because Pesach is the time of produce. God said, 'Bring an *omer* before Me at Pesach, in order that the field produce be blessed for you.'…

The Torah commands us to bring the *omer* sacrifice specifically at the opening of the harvest season. Here, the agricultural element[[2]](#footnote-2) shapes the sacrificial obligation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# **The Obligation**

Halachic authorities disagree about whether *sefirat ha-omer* remains a Torah-level requirement even when *Beit Ha-mikdash* is not standing. Their disagreement may depend on which element of the mitzva we emphasize.

**I Torah Level** Rambam maintains that the count is a Torah-level obligation even today:

*Mishneh Torah*, Daily Offerings and Additional Offerings 7:24

This mitzva [of *sefirat ha-omer* is obligatory] upon every man of Israel and in every place and at every time.

This stands to reason, since on his view as expressed in Moreh Nevuchim, the deeper significance of the count is the connection between the festivals and not the *korbanot* that were brought in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Rambam does include the sacrificial obligation in his laws of daily and additional offerings, but without the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, the count's nature as a festive ritual comes to the fore.

**II Rabbinic** Other authorities, such as Tosafot[[5]](#footnote-5) and Ran, maintain that the obligation without the *Beit Ha-mikdash* is rabbinic.

Ran on Rif *Pesachim* 28a

Most commentators agree that *sefirat ha-omer* nowadays, when there is no bringing [of the *omer*] and no offering, is only rabbinic as a remembrance of [what was in] the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

This viewpoint emphasizes the centrality of the sacrificial element to the *omer* count.

**Timing**

The verses discuss three distinct *mitzvot*: harvesting the *omer*, counting the *omer*, and bringing the offering. We learn from the Sifra at which time of day to perform each:

*Sifra Emor* 10

Could it be that one would harvest the *omer* during the day and count during the day and bring the offering during the day? The verse teaches "they shall be seven complete (*temimot*) weeks." When are they *temimot*? When one begins at night. Could it be that one would harvest at night and count at night and bring [the offering] at night? The verse teaches "from the day of your bringing." Bringing [the offering] is only during the day.

To be complete (*temimot*), the seven weeks must consist of 49 full days. In the Jewish calendar, each day is counted from one sunset to the next. Therefore, the first act of counting must take place at night, when the day begins, to ensure that the first day – and thus the entire count – will be complete.

It is not clear whether the act of counting subsequent days must also take place at night. Rambam rules that we should ideally count each night, but someone who missed counting at night should count during the daytime:

*Mishneh Torah*, Daily Offerings and Additional Offerings7:22-23

We count from the beginning of the day. Therefore, one should count at night, from the night of the sixteenth of Nissan. If one forgot and did not count at night, one counts during the day.

Notably, Rambam does not state that one should omit the *beracha* when counting during the day. That means that there is no concern of making a *beracha* in vain, because counting at night every time is not essential to fulfilling the mitzva.

In contrast, Rabbeinu Tam maintains that we recite a *beracha* only when we count at night:

*Tosafot Megilla* 20b s.v. *Kol*

Rabbeinu Tam says that if one forgot to recite a *beracha* at night, he should not recite a *beracha* during the day….for it is written "*temimot*," complete [days]. *Temimot* occur only when you count at night [the onset of the halachic day]…Behag wrote that where one forgot to recite a *beracha* at night, he should count the next day without a *beracha*, and this is the halacha. But if he forgot a night and day, he should not count any further with a *beracha*, because we require *temimot* and do not have them.

Rabbeinu Tam views *temimot* – and thus, counting at night – as obligatory on each individual day. A daytime count is better than nothing and maintains continuity, but a *beracha* on a daytime count might indeed be a *beracha* in vain.

Tosafot quote Behag, who explicitly applies *temimot* even further, to the entire count. To Behag, *temimot* requires us to ensure we miss no full days of the count, creating a continuous, complete number series. Someone who omits a full day of the count can no longer recite a *beracha*, because the count has been interrupted and comes up short. While other ge'onim disagree with Behag,[[6]](#footnote-6) Shulchan Aruch follows his position, as well as that of Rabbeinu Tam:

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 489:7-8

If he forgot and did not recite a *beracha* [or count] all night, he should count during the day without a *beracha*. If he forgot to recite a *beracha* on one of the days, whether the first day or other days, he counts the rest of the days without a *beracha*…

# **Women's Obligation**

Are women obligated to count the *omer*? This question, too, relates to which element of the count we emphasize.

**Is the Mitzva of Sefirat Ha-Omer Time Bound?**

Whether women have an obligation to count the *omer* depends on whether it falls under the category of positive time-bound *mitzvot*, from which women are [often exempt](https://www.deracheha.org/positive-time-bound-mitzvot).

In theory, the requirement to count at night could make *sefirat ha-omer* time-bound. However, as we saw above, it is unclear whether counting at night is essential to fulfilling the mitzva, or merely preferable. If it is merely preferable, as Rambam maintains, a preference for counting at night may not suffice to make the mitzva time-bound.

Does the fact that the *omer* is only counted during a specific time of year mean that the mitzva is time-bound? Early halachic authorities fall out on both sides of this question.

1. **Time Bound** Rambam rules that women (and bondsmen) are exempt from *sefirat ha-omer*:

*Mishneh Torah*, Daily Offerings and Additional Offerings 7:24

This mitzva [of *sefirat ha-omer* is obligatory] upon every man of Israel and in every place and at every time. Women and bondsmen are exempt from it.

Rambam does not specify a reason for the exemption. However, we have seen that he emphasizes how *sefirat ha-omer* creates a bridge between the festivals. Presumably, he considers it time-bound just like other holiday rituals that come at specific times of year.

1. **Not Time-Bound** In contrast, Ramban maintains that *sefirat ha-omer* is not time-bound, and that women are obligated in the mitzva:

Ramban, Novellae to *Kiddushin* 33b

He [the sage in the mishna listing mitzva categories] stated some cases and left others out….and regarding a positive commandment that is not time-bound, he left out a lot, [including] …*sefirat ha-omer*.

What is Ramban's rationale?

A number of explanations have been offered.[[7]](#footnote-7) Most authoritatively, Maharam Chalava, a student of the son of Ramban's most prominent student, explains that *sefirat ha-omer* is *Beit Ha-mikdash*-bound, not time-bound, and thus obligatory for women. The count begins and ends with sacrifices, and the timing is a function of when those sacrifices come, not an independent explanation for the mitzva.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Responsa Maharam Chalava, p. 335

Ramban wrote that women are obligated in *sefirat ha-omer*. This is the essential [halacha], for we only exclude them from time-bound *mitzvot* and time does not determine *sefirat ha-omer*; rather, the act of offering the *omer* does. Even though the *omer* depends on a specific time, the count only depends on the act of offering and time does not determine it.

The *omer*, and not the date of 16 Nissan, determines when we count.

In fact, Ramban himself, when explaining the language of the *beracha* on *sefirat ha-omer*, describes the count in a similar way, emphasizing its sacrificial element over the festive one:

Ramban, Novellae to *Pesachim* 7a

For the *omer* was already offered, and they count from it.

**Kabbalistic Reservations**

The Zohar asserts that the days of the *omer* are mystically connected to the masculine realm, and the mitzva to count them is therefore unique to men:

Zohar, *Ra'aya Mehemna* 3, *Emor* 97b

Because these days are days from the realm of the masculine, this count was only given over exclusively to men.

Sefaradi halachic decisors who take kabbala into account in their halachic rulings are split as to whether this means women may not perform the mitzva voluntarily.[[9]](#footnote-9)

# **In Practice**

In practice, halachic authorities treat Ramban as a minority opinion and consider *sefirat ha-omer* a time-bound mitzva from which women are exempt.

*Magen Avraham* 489:1

Women are exempt from counting [the *omer*] because it is a positive time-bound commandment…Nevertheless, they have already accepted it upon themselves as an obligation.

Note what Magen Avraham adds to his mention of exemption. In his experience, women were so careful to perform *sefirat ha-omer* voluntarily that it became a binding custom. (For more discussion on this point, including dissent about the possibility of voluntary performance becoming binding in any way, see [here](https://www.deracheha.org/voluntary-mitzva-performance).)[[10]](#footnote-10)

Mishna Berura reports that, to his knowledge, the custom in his locale was different:

Mishna Berura 489:3

It seems that in our lands women are not at all accustomed to count.

A gulf of 250 years and 600 kilometers could mean a world of difference in women’s halachic practice.

Mishna Berura goes on to quote Shulchan Shelomo, who lived in the era between the two rabbis, but, like Mishna Berura, in Belarus. Shulchan Shelomo rules against women reciting a *beracha* over *sefirat ha-omer*:[[11]](#footnote-11)

*Shulchan Shelomo* 489:3

It seems to me that in any case they [women] should not recite a *beracha*, for they certainly will err with one day and not know the law, and furthermore [a woman] does not understand what she counts. And with this [mitzva], one needs to be very careful to understand what he is saying, for otherwise he has not fulfilled his obligation…

Shulchan Shelomo does not express any reservations about a woman performing the mitzva of counting the *omer*. He is concerned about her reciting a *beracha* over her voluntary performance, lest she come to recite a *beracha* in vain, for two reasons:

**I. Error:** A woman is likely to miss a full day of counting at some point, and not know that she should omit *berachot* thereafter, in which case she would wind up reciting those *berachot* in vain.

**II. Ignorance**: The count of someone who does not know enough Hebrew to understand what the count means might not fulfil the mitzva. In that case, a woman's *beracha* over her count would be a *beracha* in vain.

Contemporary halachic authority Rav Asher Weiss argues that neither concern is relevant today:[[12]](#footnote-12)

Rav Asher Weiss, "Women in the Mitzva of Sefirat Ha-Omer"

In any case, it apparently seems that these two concerns do not apply in our time, for our women are wise and all of them understand the sacred tongue [Hebrew] well. There is no concern that they will err with the count or with the words since they can read from the siddur and the like. Further, in every home there are calendars and the like and so too in the Charedi newspapers the day of the count is written daily. For this reason, our wives and daughters are well accustomed to recite a *beracha* over the count, and act correctly. Still, in any case, in my humble opinion, a woman who knows that she likely will not complete the count correctly should not begin reciting a *beracha* over the count at all, since there are later authorities who maintained that if one skips a day, the earlier *berachot* were retroactively said in vain…I considered my opinion further and decided that a woman in this case should recite the *beracha*…But if it is clear to her that she will not complete the count, it is better that she not begin with a *beracha*, but even in this case one who is lenient has not lost anything…

In the end, taking into account women's literacy and the proliferation of calendars, Rav Weiss permits any woman to recite the *beracha*. One imagines that the numerous apps or reminder services for email and mobile devices would only strengthen this case.

It's also important to note that Aruch ha-shulchan, a contemporary of Mishna Berura, writes that women do count the *omer* with a *beracha*, without reservation:

Aruch Ha-shulchan OC 489:3

Women are exempt because it is a positive time-bound commandment. In any case, they are accustomed to recite a *beracha* and to count, like any positive time-bound commandment that women practice, like *shofar* and *sukka* and *lulav*.

Aruch Ha-shulchan considers the halacha of women counting the *omer* no different from any other case of voluntary mitzva performance.

## Why are women sometimes discouraged from counting the *omer*?

*It is striking that women are sometimes taught not to count the* omer, *and that active encouragement is not more widespread.*

*Some of the discouragement may arise from a tendency in some communities to privilege Mishna Berura over Aruch Ha-shulchan, even though Mishna Berura merely quotes the opinion against women counting without explicitly agreeing to it. Some of it may be in response to the kabbalistic discussions of masculine and feminine. Some of it may be because, before the era of cellphone reminders, women who did not recite* ma'ariv *might really have been prone to forget it. Some of it may be a matter of tradition. And some of it may be because a woman unsure whether she will complete the count may not realize that this should not get in the way of counting without a* beracha*.*

*Especially taking into consideration that Ramban reportedly maintains it is an obligation for women, that Magen Avraham reports that women took it upon themselves as an obligation, and that concerns about reciting the* beracha *should not affect the act of counting, we would expect more women to be encouraged to count the* omer*.*

*Uniquely, Rebbitzen Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, of Bat Ayin, who has personally relinquished fulfilling this mitzva for kabbalistic reasons, expresses the power she sees in the count, and in the* omer *period, even when not counting:[[13]](#footnote-13)*

Rebbitzen Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, The Controversy of Women and Counting the Omer

Counting the Omer teaches us the concept of the ascending pattern, where one day builds upon the next. In effect, the whole point of the ritual is to collect days. By using a simple and short act of consciousness, we prevent our days from blurring into each other. We can make every day count….Each day of counting the Omer, from Pesach to Shavuot, we have the opportunity to add a new layer of refinement to our character. Counting the Omer is an elevating ripening process that culminates on Shavuot in our ability to receive the Torah and become complete. This time-period reflects the process of the building and flowering of the surrounding nature, here in Israel where we, like the fruits, are gradually ripening to become the perfect crop, ready to be picked on Shavuot as Hashem's holy bride…I believe that the feminine focus during the Omer season is to meditate on the daily Sefirah combinations and internalize their messages….

# **Customs During Sefirat Ha-Omer**

Through the time of the second *Beit Ha-mikdash*, the days of *sefirat ha-omer*, were a festive period as we moved from Pesach to commemorating receiving the Torah. However, following the destruction of the second Temple, tragedy struck during those same weeks. The Talmud teaches us that 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students died between Pesach and Shavuot.[[14]](#footnote-14) As a result, the period of *sefirat ha-omer* has since then also been associated with sadness and mourning over their loss, amplified by other losses over the years that occurred in this season.

Mourning customs to commemorate this tragedy are recorded as early as the Geonic period:

Responsa of Ge'onim- *Sha'arei Teshuva* 278 Rav Natronai Ga'on

That which you asked why we don't betroth or get married between Pesach and Shavu'ot, whether it is a matter of prohibition or not. Know that it is not due to prohibition, but rather due to customs of mourning, for thus said our sages: Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students, and they all died between Pesach and Shavuot because they did not conduct themselves [with honor] to each other. It is taught regarding this that they all died a difficult death of diphtheria and from that time onward early generations have the custom not to marry during these days.

The [customs of mourning](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/sefirat-haomer-practices-mourning-during-sefira) slowly expanded over time, eventually including not listening to music and also refraining from getting a haircut until *lag ba-omer* (the thirty-third day of the *omer*), when the deaths were said to have ceased:

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 493:2

We have the custom not to get haircuts until *lag ba-omer*, for they say that that is when they stopped dying. And one should not get a haircut until the thirty-fourth day in the morning …Rema: In these countries we don't act in accordance with his words, but rather get a haircut on the thirty-third day.

Since Shulchan Aruch rules that women, even when in actual mourning over a relative, need not refrain from getting haircuts,[[15]](#footnote-15) common custom among Sefaradi women is to cut hair as desired.

Rav Ovadya Yosef*, Chazon Ovadya, Sefirat Ha-omer* 36

The custom has spread not to get a haircut during the days of *sefira*,…and women are not included in this prohibition.

Rema, however, does maintain that a woman in mourning should not get her hair cut. Regarding *sefirat ha-omer*, Rav Moshe Feinstein rules that women should ideally refrain from haircuts, but there is room for leniency. Why? There are leniencies for a woman to get a haircut during *sheloshim* (the first thirty days of mourning), and in this case, not cutting the hair during the *omer* is a custom, not proper mourning.

*Iggerot Moshe* Y.D. II 137

Regarding a haircut for a woman in the days of the *omer* count, even though it is reasonable to permit it, since even in mourning after *shiva* within *sheloshim* many early authorities permit it…since it is only a matter of custom, one should be lenient like those who permit it, but in any case it seems that the law is that it is proper to be stringent if it [a haircut] is not terribly necessary.

Following Rav Moshe's logic, a woman can remove body hair, too, when she find it necessary.[[16]](#footnote-16)

There is no constraint on a woman's removing hair that she is particular about for mikveh, and the rules regarding women removing facial hair are even more lenient.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Righteous Women** A related, lesser-known, custom during the *omer* that has fallen out of practice involves refraining from performing labor (such as that prohibited on *chol ha-mo'ed*) from sunset until morning, because burying the students took people away from their labors at night:

Abudarham *Tefillot Pesach* s.v. All four

Rav Hai wrote in a responsum, that the custom not to perform labor between Pesach and Shavuot from sunset until *shacharit* is because of the students of Rabbi Akiva, for all of them died after sunset and were buried after sunset and the people did not engage in labor. Further, it is written “seven complete weeks [*Shabbatot*] they will be,” from the language of *shevut* [desisting from labor] and the sabbatical year, as it is written “seven sevens [*Shabbatot*] of years.” Just as agricultural labor is prohibited during a sabbatical year, so too during *sefirat ha-omer*, after sunset, one should desist from labor.

In addition to mourning, Abudarham notes that a custom to refrain from labor adds a dimension of Shabbat rest to the count of seven "*Shabbatot*." Rest for this reason would only be from sunset until the time that one counts.

Centuries later, Aruch Ha-shulchan rules that, regardless of the rationale, this custom applies only from sunset until one has counted.

*Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 493:9

They [women] only desisted from labor after sunset until after the evening prayer, after the count. …Even now there are women who maintain this custom.

While Abudarham does not single out women, Aruch Ha-shulchan does. So does Shulchan Aruch (who also keeps the timing till morning and extends the custom beyond *lag ba-omer*, though others disagree):[[18]](#footnote-18)

*Shulchan Aruch* OC 493:4

Women had the custom not to perform labor from Pesach until Shavuot, from sunset onward.

Shulchan Aruch leaves open the question of whether this custom applies to men.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Why do these sources focus this custom around women? Centuries earlier, Shibbolei Ha-leket connects the custom specifically to women:

*Shibbolei Ha-leket* Pesach 235

They [women] are rewarded with acclaim in every generation, for they were the first to come to those [deceased] students and honor them and take care of them. Therefore they [women] were accustomed not to perform labor at that time as a commemoration of the righteous women of that generation.

The merit of righteous women is a trope in the Exodus midrashim.[[20]](#footnote-20) There, women receive credit for bringing about redemption. Here, refraining from labor is a reward for meritorious women who rushed to perform the ultimate act of loving-kindness for the deceased.

Aruch Ha-shulchan notes that not all women of his day observed the custom. It is worthy, however, of consideration by women of our day, as a nod to the significance of the righteous women's actions.Through this custom, even women who did not count the omer would have a way to observe it.

**Further Reading**

## Rav Daniel Feldman, In Time, Out of Time, or Beyond Time? Women and Sefiras HaOmer, YU Torah To-Go

Available here: [https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/855407/rabbi-daniel-z-feldman/in-time,-out-of-time,-or-beyond-time-women-and-sefiras-haomer/](https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/855407/rabbi-daniel-z-feldman/in-time%2C-out-of-time%2C-or-beyond-time-women-and-sefiras-haomer/)

Rav David Brofsky, Sefirat Ha-omer (1), VBM Shiur, available here: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/sefirat-ha-omer-1>

Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Practices of Mourning During Sefira, VBM Shiur, available here: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/sefirat-haomer-practices-mourning-during-sefira>

Rebbitzen Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, The Controversy of Women and Counting the Omer, available here: <http://www.berotbatayin.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EmorWomenOmer.pdf>

Rav Asher Weiss, Nashim Bisfirat Ha-omer, [available here.](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8-%D7%A0%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%A8/)

1. The term *omer* has two meanings in Biblical Hebrew: a sheaf, or a measurement of 1/10 of an *eifa* (approximately 2.2 liters). Both meanings are relevant here. The *omer* sacrifice was harvested as sheaves of barley. The barley was coarsely ground and one *omer* of the meal was offered as a sacrifice (see Mishna *Menachot* 10:3-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The agricultural year in Eretz Yisrael begins with the first rains, after Sukkot, when crops are planted. Pesach, when the rains end, marks the beginning of the harvest season. Barley ripens first, followed by wheat. Over the summer, most fruits are harvested, concluding with the olive harvest in late autumn. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ba'al Ha-Turim connects the agricultural to the festive aspect, instead of the sacrificial.

On his reading, the count meets the needs of those engaged in agriculture who wish to observe Shavuot at its proper time:

Tur on the Torah *Vayikra* 23:15

“And count for yourselves”: There are those who explain the rationale of *sefirat ha-omer* as follows: since they are the days of the harvest and the people are busy and are not at home to hear the emissaries of the rabbinical court who go out [to declare the new month], they did not know when the court sanctified the month. Therefore, [God] commanded counting. For this reason also the count is at night, because by day they are busy [with the harvest]. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Aruch Ha-shulchan* OC 489:3

The Torah commanded counting to the [Shavuot] sacrifice, but the primary intention is for the giving of the Torah and therefore the mitzva is also [in full force] today. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Tosafot Megilla* 20b s.v. *kol*

After he has recited a *beracha* over the count, he says "May it be Thy will that it will be rebuilt" etc, which is not the case with blowing *shofar* or *lulav* and the reason is because it [counting the omer] is now only a commemoration of the building of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Tur O.C. 489

Behag wrote that if he forgot to recite a *beracha* [and count] on one of the days, that he should no longer recite a *beracha* on the subsequent days…Rav Sa'adya Ga'on wrote that if he forgot on one of the days, that he should recite a *beracha* on the subsequent days, with the exception of the first night, on which, if he forgot and did not recite a *beracha*, he should no longer recite *berachot*. Rav Hai wrote that whether it is the first night or other nights, if he forgot and did not recite a *beracha*, he may recite a *beracha* on the remaining nights. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Avnei Nezer, for example, suggests that an obligation in *sefirat ha-omer* might be an extension of a woman's obligation to perform the *mitzvot* of the *seder* night:

Responsa *Avnei Nezer* OC 384

The time of “Shabbat” which determines the mitzva, is the fifteenth of Nissan. Are not women obligated in all the *mitzvot* of the “Shabbat” – the Pesach [sacrifice], *matza*, and *maror*….This is also the law regarding the *omer*. You cannot exempt them [women] from because the time of Yom Tov determines it, since women are obligated in all the *mitzvot* of this Yom Tov.

Seridei Eish offers another explanation for why the count may not be time-bound. The mitzva is inherently about time, so that time-bound status cannot apply in the usual way. Responsa *Seridei Eish* 2:90

A “time-bound mitzva” is a mitzva that has a fixed time, the time is the context for the mitzva, like *matza*, *lulav*, *sukka*, etc. This is not the case with *sefirat ha-omer*, where time is the substance of the mitzva; one is obligated to count those days between Pesach and Shavuot, The concept of “time-bound mitzva” does not apply here. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Available here: <http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=16259&st=&pgnum=14> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Birkei Yosef* OC 489:22

It seems to me that if they act according to Rabbeinu Tam [who permits women to voluntarily perform *mitzvot* from which they are exempt] with *lulav* and the like, regarding *sefira* as well they may act according to their custom.

Responsa *Rav Pa'alim* I *Sod Yesharim* 12

Our Rav [Arizal] had to explain specific reasons regarding *sefirat ha-omer*, that they are not applicable to women, to teach us that they [women] are not permitted to fulfill them voluntarily like other positive time-bound commandments. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In our discussion of reciting a *beracha* over voluntary mitzva performance, we noted Magen Avraham's reservation when there is no mitzva act distinct from the *beracha*. Here, he presumably considers counting verbally to be the mitzva act. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=8023&st=&pgnum=183> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Available [here](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8-%D7%A0%D7%A9%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%9E%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%A8/).

See also Rav Eliezer Melamed, available here: <https://ph.yhb.org.il/05-02-09/>:

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, Women and the Omer Count

Therefore, a woman who knows that she can make it through the entire count, and even if she misses a day, she knows to continue counting without a blessing, may count with a blessing, according to Ashkenazi practice.  This is especially true regarding a woman who prays Ma’ariv every evening or whose family members are in the habit of reminding her to count.  She may count with a blessing, if she is Ashkenazi and so desires, because the chances of her forgetting to count are relatively small. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Available here:

<http://www.berotbatayin.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/EmorWomenOmer.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Yevamot* 62b

They said, Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students from Gevat to Antiperas and they all died in the same period because they did not treat each other with honor…It was taught: They all died between Pesach and Shavuot [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 390:5

A woman is permitted to remove her hair after shiv'a. Rema: There are those who prohibit even a woman, and this is the fundamental Halacha. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bach is lenient about body hair even during sheloshim:

Bach YD 390:6

For in a place where a woman normally shaves these hairs [body hair], like proliferation of hair at the temples, she may remove them after *shiv'a.*

See also Responsa Le-horot Natan 2:32, available here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=14686&st=&pgnum=58> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Rav Tzvi Cohen, *Bein Pesach Le-Shavuot*, p. 241, in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach and Rav Shemu'el Ha-levi Wosner. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Peri Meggadim Mishbetzot Zahav* OC 493:4

After *lag ba-omer* and after one has counted the *omer*, one can permit performing labor. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Shulchan Aruch specifies women, but Mishna Berura, among others, rules that the custom also applies to men:

*Mishna Berura* 493:4

Women—and this also applies to men. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Sota* 11b

Rav Avira expounded: As reward to righteous women of that generation, Israel were redeemed from Egypt [↑](#footnote-ref-20)