

EITZ CHAYIM HALACHAGRAM – CUSTOMS OF MOURNING DURING SEFIRA

I. **Sefira Period** – It is customary to observe some expressions of mourning during a 33-day sefira period. The primary basis for this custom is to serve as a sign of mourning for the thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students who died during this time period. Other tragedies also occurred during the sefira period, including massacres of German communities during the First Crusades and the Chmielnicki Massacres in Russia and Poland in the years 1648 and 1649.

II. **The 33-Day Mourning Period** – There are **three different customs** regarding the determination of the 33-day period of mourning:

- A. From the second day of Pesach until Lag BaOmer (even according to this custom, if **Rosh Chodesh Iyar falls on Shabbos**, it is permissible to marry and cut one's hair on the preceding day, for it is influenced by two sacred qualities – the holiness of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh);
- B. From the first day of Rosh Chodesh Iyar until the morning of the first day of the “three days of preparation” for Shavuot;
- C. From after Rosh Chodesh Iyar until the morning of Erev Shavuot.

Sephardim observe the mourning restrictions on Lag BaOmer, but Ashkenazim do not (beginning with dawn). When **Lag BaOmer falls on Sunday**, hair may be cut on Friday.

III. **Customs of Mourning**

A. **Haircuts** are prohibited (even for children). Many authorities prohibit **shaving**, unless one will suffer financial loss or for health reasons. Others allow shaving during this period, and even require it in honor of Shabbos. **Married women** may cut hair that is protruding from their head covering. **Cutting nails** is allowed. A **mourner** who completed *shloshim* during Sefira may shave and take a haircut (if it complies with the rules governing haircuts upon completion of *shloshim*). On the night before a *bris*, the father, *sandak* and *mohel* may take a haircut.

B. **Weddings** are prohibited. **Engagements** are allowed and may even be celebrated with a party or a meal (but only without dancing and music). Social gatherings are permitted as long as there is no music or dancing. One may participate in a wedding during Sefira even if it conflicts with the Sefira period that one observes.

C. **Music and Entertainment** -- It is prohibited to listen to **live music**. Many authorities also prohibit **recorded music**. Singing and listening to **acapella** music are allowed. **Background music** is allowed. A **professional musician** may play music for practice or business. Many authorities permit one to **practice and take music lessons**. Many authorities prohibit attending **movies** (except documentaries) and **sporting events**. Others allow attendance at events where the musical entertainment is incidental to the main event. **Dancing** is prohibited.

D. **Purchasing and wearing new clothing** is permitted. *Shehechyanu* is permitted during Sefira.

E. **Construction** is permitted.

IV. **Some Laws relating to Counting the Omer**

A. **When to count?** – The Omer should ideally be counted after halachic nightfall, but if it was counted after sunset, the counting is valid (in such circumstances, it is preferable to repeat the count without a beracha after nightfall).

B. **Forgot to count** – If a person forgot or thinks that he may have forgotten to count at night, one should count the following day without a beracha and then may continue to count with a beracha on the following nights. One who counted without first making the beracha has fulfilled the obligation and therefore cannot make the beracha afterwards that same evening. One should know the correct number of the day before making the beracha.

C. **Standing** – The beracha and counting should be said while standing, but if they were recited while sitting, they need not be repeated.