



Stairway to Accomplishment

Topic

Counting the Omer

Grade Level(s)

3rd – 12th

Big Ideas

Whether one looks forward to what is to come or engages with what they are currently doing can affect one's general outlook.

The time between Pesach and Shavuot can help someone focus to achieve personal goals.

Learning Targets

Students will:

1. Reflect on the purpose of physically going up stairs
2. Connect physical activity to the spiritual act of counting the Omer
3. Create vlogs about their progress towards a personal goal

Materials / Technology Needed

- Stairs or something sturdy to do step-ups.

Relevant Vocabulary

עֹמֶר (Omer)	A unit of measure or a sheaf of grain. In modern parlance "The Omer" refers to the period between Pesach and Shavuot
סְפִירַת הָעֹמֶר (Sefirat Ha'Omer)	Counting the Omer
-ב (Transliteration)	In
-ל (Transliteration)	To
פֶּסַח (Pesach)	Passover
וַיִּקְרָא (Vayikra)	Leviticus
דְּבָרִים (Devarim)	Deuteronomy
תְּשׁוּבָה (Teshuvah)	Repentance through the betterment of the self

Background for Teachers

מעלין בקדש ולא מורידין (משנה מנחות יא:ז, מסכת שבת כא:; וכו')

One elevates in [matters of] sanctity and does not go down. (*Mishnah Menaḥot* 11:7, Tractate *Shabbat* 21b, et al.)

According to the Torah, there is a 49-day/seven-week period from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*.

According to rabbinic interpretation, this period begins on the second day of *Pesach*, which coincides with the ceremony of waving an offering of an *omer* of barley (*Vayikra* 23:11). The Torah puts forth a further *mitzvah* of counting the days from the waving of the *omer* until *Shavuot*



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(*Vayikra* 23:15, *Devarim* 16:9), i.e. from the beginning of the harvest season until the end of the harvest season or from the beginning of the redemption from Egypt until the receiving of the Torah, which is one possible understanding of the completion of the redemption from Egypt.

While the modern custom is often to count down to a particular time or goal (e.g. counting down to a rocket launch or counting down how many days are left until a vacation), counting for *sefirat ha'omer* ascends from one to 49. (It is worth considering how this corresponds to the many schools that count up to celebrate the 100th day of school.) During each day of this period, one counts an additional day of the *omer* with the line:

הַיּוֹם X יוֹם שָׁבָעִים X שְׁבוּעוֹת וְX יָמִים בְּ/לְעוֹמֵר.*

Today is X days, which are X week(s) in/to the *omer*.

Notice that there are two versions for how one can count, either (“in the *omer*”) or (“to the *omer*”). These two possibilities are part of a debate that might seem minor but can speak to a larger consideration about what it means to approach a task. Is the point the task itself or the end result of the task? One who counts “to the *omer*” can be seen as focused on the end result of reaching Shavuot while the one who counts “in the *omer*” can be seen as focused on the activity of counting for its own sake. One possible way to approach this in a practical way is to consider a Hassidic approach to *sefirat ha'omer*, which is that this time is a period for *teshuvah* (e.g. *Maor Vashemesh*, Ruth 3). In this model, counting “in” the *omer* would focus someone on the act of *teshuvah* while counting “to” the *omer* would focus someone on how to better oneself with an eye to receiving the Torah on *Shavuot*.

*Note that there are slight variations in how one says the number of days in the *omer* depending on which day it is. How one begins and ends the statement remains the same.

Description of Activities

1. Students walk up and down stairs. This can also be done as an individual time trial in which students run up and walk down the stairs. Note: Students should not race up the stairs at the same time for safety reasons.
 - a. If doing this activity remotely, students can find their own stairs and time themselves. If students do not have stairs at home, they can grab large blocks, a sturdy box, or a crate and do step-ups.
2. Students reflect on how it feels physically to go up and down stairs.
 - a. How does it feel to go up stairs?
 - b. How does it feel to go down?
 - c. Which is more difficult? Why?
 - d. Which gives more of a sense of accomplishment?



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- e. When engaged in going up and down, are you more focused on your physical activity or reaching the top or bottom?
 - f. How is going up stairs different if you are doing it to get a snack or a device as opposed to if you are doing it for the physical workout?
3. Explain what *Sefirat ha'Omer* is. Focus on the idea that we count up in days and weeks. Emphasize that there is debate about which is the proper way to count the *Omer*, "Today is the X day *ba'Omer* (in the *Omer*)" or "Today is the X day *la'Omer* (to the *Omer*)."
4. Ask students what they think this linguistic debate is really about. What is the difference between counting "in" the *Omer* or counting "to" the *Omer*? How is this similar to being engaged in the activity of climbing stairs or climbing stairs for the purpose of reaching the top? [This might be a good place to mention the old proverb regarding things being about the journey and not the destination.]
 - a. Some other points to consider in this discussion include:
 - i. Does the activity have the same meaning if there is no end goal?
 - ii. How does the purpose motivate someone to engage in the activity?
 - iii. How often do you find yourself missing an activity after reaching the end goal? (Reaching the end of a great book and wanting more is one possible example of this phenomenon.)
5. Students pick something they would like to accomplish by Shavuot. Each day they create a vlog in which they count the *Omer* and report on their progress. Vlogs should also include periodic reflections on how individuals feel about their engagement in their activities and how these activities are helping them towards their goals (though reflections do not need to be daily).
 - a. If students do not have the ability to create vlogs, they can create audio logs of their progress or written journals.
6. At the end of the *omer* (either just before Shavuot or just after), students share their vlogs and celebrate their accomplishments.
 - a. If school ends before Shavuot, either set the goal for the end of the school year and celebrate then or set up a place online where students can post and share their accomplishments.