## **Unit: Our Relationship to the Land: Meaning of the Omer**

## Lesson One: Everything Comes From The Land

**Let's begin this Study:** As we consider the period of Sefirat HaOmer/ Counting the Omer, we will examine the connection between the Jewish holidays at both ends of this period. Peasch/ ספר, the time of our leaving of Egypt/ יציאת מצרים begins this "counting of the barley" which continues for seven weeks and Shavuot/ begins this "counting of the barley" which continues for seven weeks and Shavuot/ שבועות, the observance of our receiving of the Torah/ התורה עבולת התורה between this manner, we talk about their historical meanings. Additionally, we must also be mindful of the agricultural and land-linked meanings of these holidays and the time in which they come. The lessons embedded in their very being and the *cycle* of which they are a part are as critical to us as G-d's protection and instruction through Torah, of which this cycle is a part, actually leading up to our celebration of this defining aspect of our identity.

### To begin this lesson, your teacher will ask you:

What is the Counting of the Omer/*Sefirat HaOmer* and what does it mean to us as Jews?

What exactly is it that we are counting during this period of time? What lessons can we learn about the land and its meaning in our lives from this season and its heightened consciousness about our land and its resources?

### Write your thoughts here:

The Bracha and the Bread Basket

#### An adapted story

Dan came home from school as he did every day and offered to help his mother prepare dinner for their entire family. They set the table, prepared the food and when everyone was home, they sat down to eat. They all sat at the table and took bread from the bread basket and said together:

# בָּרוּך אַתָּה ה', אֶלֹ-נוּ מֶלֶך הָעוֹלָם, הַמְוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָָרֶץ.

Dan's sister reported that in school that day, her second grade class visited a bakery and learned about the process of how bread is made. They talked about where bread came from and how it was processed to the point where they bought and consumed it. The youngest child in the family, Rebecca explained that "Well that's simple silly. We all know where bread comes from. It comes from the grocery store, of course." All agreed that this was an absolutely appropriate answer from one so young. However, pensiveness set in as the older members of the family began to go mentally through the chain of events that brought the bread to their bread basket and table.

At this point, the family became involved in a conversation tracing the bread from its source as reflected in the *Bracha* (blessing) they said. They explained for Rebecca that the bread that we have on our table did not by any means begin its journey in the supermarket...

YOU TRY THIS FIRST .... With one or two of your classmates, try to trace the steps that the bread goes through before it gets to you. Be sure to include all of the steps involved.

Now, have you included the farmers, the transportation steps, the packaging of the bread, the use of a variety of resources and content elements, need for use of energy forms, the mixing of the ingredients, and so forth?

To help this process along, you might want to check out a web source or two regarding this process. While one that is exactly to this point has not been located yet, these two are suggested:
 <u>http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UjUWfwWAC4</u>
 <u>http://www.madehow.com/volume2/Bread.html</u>

What is the primary ingredient of the bread? Where does this come from? How is this reflected in the *Bracha* we say?

What are the lessons to be learned about our connection to the land from this experience?

Suggested Follow Up Activity: Watch and discuss *The Story of Stuff*. This is a twenty minute film about our use, misuse and abuse of resources and the negative impact of this cycle. Clearly, this is related to the Jewish requirement to not be wasteful, בל תשחית. It points to the need for refinement and conscious understanding of the *limited resources* we are working with in our daily lives. Go to www.storyofstuff.org for more information and the video.

Here is some space to write your own reactions. You can also list actions to take that will increase responsible stewardship of our environment and its elements and work towards the intended goal of maintaining a healthy and sustainable *system of interdependence*.

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