



## “Hineni Muchan U’mezuman” before Sefirat Ha’omer

**Question:** I am not consistent about saying “*Hineni muchan u’mezuman*” (=hmum) before *sefirat ha’omer*. Should I decide one way or the other, and which way is better?

**Answer:** The practice of saying “*Hmum*” before *mitzvot*, like many “extra” ritual recitations, can be traced to the Arizal (16<sup>th</sup> century) and a small elite group of his disciples until it spread broadly especially among Sephardim and Hasidim. Some *gedolim* opposed this introduction to *mitzva* (sometimes as part of the opposition to mystically-oriented Hasidic practices, although some detractors predated Hasidism— see Chok Yaakov 489:11 and the Maharshal he cites.)

The most prominent critic is the Noda B’yehuda (Yoreh Deah I, 93). His main concern was the recitation’s first line (“*L’shem yichud...*”), which relates to a difficult kabbalistic idea that we want the performance of the *mitzva* to “unite Hashem and His Presence.” The Noda B’yehuda argued that

this concept is too deep and secret to share with the masses, which could be philosophically dangerous. He also reasons that it is unnecessary to verbalize such ideas, as the “unifying” power of *mitzvot* occurs by itself when one does the *mitzva* with the intention to serve Hashem.

Beyond *l’shem yichud*, *hmum* is a statement that we are doing the *mitzva* because Hashem commanded us to do so. The Noda B’yehuda does not see that as bad, but unnecessary. If one indeed is doing the *mitzva* because Hashem commanded it, he does not need to verbalize it. However, his own practice was to distinguish – he would state his intention to do a *mitzva* before *mitzvot* that do not have a *beracha*. When there are *berachot*, we can trust Chazal to compose them with all the worthwhile elements. Instituting a text that Chazal did not disturb him.

The practice of *hmum* is much less polarizing now than it was 200 years ago. While the Mishna Berura does not mention it, the (non-Hasidic) Aruch Hashulchan (OC 489:6) does, noting the opposition to it and his viewpoint that at his time it was widespread and done positively. It has mainly become a matter of communal *minhag* and/or personal preference, which are fine in such a matter, as is reciting it sporadically. Hopefully, you had in mind not to do it as a practice that could bind you through *neder*.

It is interesting that many people recite

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*hmum* regularly before some *mitzvot* and not other *mitzvot*, and *sefirat ha'omer* is one of the more popular times. There is actually more opposition by some (see Yalkut Yosef, Sefirat Ha'omer 1; Teshuvot V'hanhagot II:247) to reciting the standard version for *sefirat ha'omer* – because of the mention of “*mitzvat aseh*” and “*k'mo shekatuv baTorah*” (a positive commandment, as it says in the Torah). *Rishonim* dispute whether *sefirat ha'omer* is a *mitzva* from the Torah in a time when there are no *korban ha'omer* and *korban shtei halechem* to count between (see Vayikra 23:15). While the Rambam (Temidin 7:22) says that it is still from the Torah, Tosafot (Menachot 66a) follows the opinion (ibid.) that it is Rabbinic, and the Beit Yosef (OC 489) views that as the primary opinion. When we ask after counting that Hashem should return us to service in the *Beit Hamikdash*, we infer that only then will *sefira* once again be from the Torah). The Rambam (Mamrim 2:9) says that presenting a Rabbinic law as one from the Torah violates *bal tosif* (adding on to the Torah). Our common text either relies on the possible reading that it is a Rabbinic positive *mitzva* and is thereby an extension of the *p'sukim* or on the fact that the Rambam's contention that it is from the Torah might be correct (Halichot Shlomo, Moadim 11:2).

We will now conjecture why many recite *hmum* specifically for *sefirat ha'omer*:  
1. There are other additional recitations

that one may already be doing (see Magen Avraham 489:5); 2. The mystical elements of *sefirat ha'omer* might be stronger than for most *mitzvot*; 3. It has a catchy tune (which happens not to include “*L'shem yichud...*”) that people like to sing. In any case, there is little halachic importance whether one does or does not recites it. ■

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