

# The Dynamics of Bracha & Kedusha

by David Bar-Cohn

Two of the most central concepts in Torah are *bracha* and *kedusha*. Here we will try to understand their distinct functions as well as how they relate to one another.

## Bracha as Expansion

Bracha is commonly understood to mean “blessing,” the experience of success, good fortune. Similarly, it refers to the act of blessing, the wishing of success upon another. But it also has a more specific meaning which relates to the act of expansion.

The Maharal explains that *bracha* has to do with doubling or multiplicity, citing the root *gematria* “222” (ב=2, ר=200, כ=20). The word *bracha* suggests increase, as it says in Hallel:

יְבָרֵךְ יְרֵאֵי ה'... יִסֹּף ה' עֲלֵיכֶם

*“He will bless those who fear Hashem... Hashem will increase upon you”*<sup>1</sup>

When something increases, it expands in size, spreads out to occupy more space. Likewise, we see that bracha refers to propagation. The Torah’s paradigm for *bracha* is the proliferation of life, the directive for species to reproduce, expand, and occupy the skies, the seas, and the earth. This is explicit in the first *bracha* mentioned in Torah, regarding fish and birds (and later to human beings):

וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים לְאִמֹר  
פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

*“Elokim proliferated them (gave them a Bracha), saying:  
Bear fruit and multiply.”*<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the book of Bereshit, the *bracha* of abundant offspring is echoed to specific individuals: Avraham, Sarah, Yitzchak, Rivka, Yishmael, and Yaakov, as in:

וַיְבָרֵךְ יְהוָה אֶת זַרְעֲךָ

*“I will proliferate you and increase your offspring.”*<sup>3</sup>

But *bracha* does not only refer to reproductive expansion. It is also used to convey material expansion (i.e., increase of wealth) and creative expansion (i.e., increase of building and productivity), as it says:

וַיְהִי בְרִכְתּוֹ ה' בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יָשׁ לוֹ בַּבַּיִת וּבַשָּׂדֶה

*“The blessing/expansion of Hashem was on everything of his,  
in the house and in the field.”*

ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְרַכְךָ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ

*“Hashem Elokecha blessed/expanded you  
in every product of your hands.”*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tehilim 115.2-3

<sup>2</sup> Bereshit 1.22, 1.28

<sup>3</sup> Bereshit 26.24 (re: Yitzchak) See also: Bereshit 12.2 (Avraham), 17.16 (Sarah), 17.20 (Yishmael), 24.60 (Rivka), 26.3, 28.3 (Yaakov).

<sup>4</sup> Bereshit 39.5; Devarim 2.7

### Bracha & Mitosis – the Doubling Effect

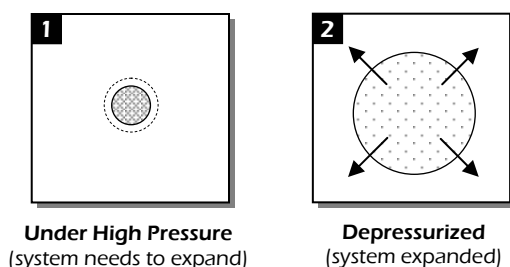
The expansive property of *bracha* is carried in the word itself. The numerical values of its root letters (ב=2, ר=200, כ=20) and its overall value (222) implies “doubling.” Additionally, the word *bracha* shares the same root as the word *berech*, “knee.” The knee is the joint which “doubles” the leg, bending it into two distinct segments.

The growth of organisms is a product of doubling, called mitosis. One cell divides in two, each of those new cells divide in two, and so on. *Bracha* is occurring in our bodies at every moment.

### Bracha & Diffusion – the Pressure to Expand

What brings about *bracha*, expansion? Physically, expansion can be understood as a means of alleviating pressure. When a room becomes too crowded, there is a tendency for people to spill over into the next room. It is a more tolerable, more *stable* situation. Or when an organization has too much work, it will expand its staff and find a larger office space in order to take some of the pressure off. That is, there is a tendency for a system under high pressure to expand outward, diffuse itself, so as to alleviate pressure. When this happens, the system depressurizes, reaches equilibrium. And so *bracha* can be understood as a *release of pressure*, whereby barriers are extended, and the system is spread across a wider area.

Fig. 1.10 Dynamics of Bracha



Now that we have an initial understanding of *bracha* as expansion or diffusion, we can understand it in relation to *kedusha* – concentration or infusion.

### Kedusha as Concentration of Energy

The word *kedosh* is usually translated “holy” or “sacred,” sometimes “separate,” “Godly,” or simply “special.” But in what way is *kedusha* special? To try and create a more precise definition, let’s first understand what it means that the word *kodesh* is taken to mean the opposite of the word *chol*, as in the *pasuk*:

וְלִהְבְּדִיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֹל  
“(In order) to distinguish between the Kodesh and the Chol”<sup>5</sup>

The word *chol* (usually translated “secular” or “mundane”) shares its root with the word *chalal* – an empty space or vacuum, the absence of *obr* (light, energy). According to our tradition, the creation of the universe began with a *chalal panyu*, an empty space (vacuum) that was opened up within the Creator’s boundless sea of *obr* (energy). Since we can identify the word “*chol*” as implying the *absence of energy*, then by extension we should understand the word “*kodesh*” (its opposite) to mean the presence or *concentration of energy*.

<sup>5</sup> Vayikra 10.10

### Mikdash – Place of Concentrated Energy

Although it is possible to talk about *kedusha* in the abstract, the overwhelming use of the term in Tanach (Bible) is in reference to the *mikdash* – the Temple (which also includes the *mishkan*, the mobile Temple described in the Torah). The term *mikdash* literally means “that which has *kedusha*.” That is, it is a place where energy is concentrated. The Ark is the hub, the nucleus of the *mikdash*. The word “*aron*” (ארון, Ark) can be understood literally to mean “container of *obr*” (אור, energy).<sup>6</sup> It is considered, along with the *shechina* (the “localization” of Hashem), to be the primary power source of the *mikdash*, as it says:

קוֹמָה ה' לְמִנוּחֶיךָ אֶתָּה וְאֶרֶן עֲנֵךְ

“*Arise, Hashem, to your resting place – you and the Ark of your power.*”<sup>7</sup>

The *mikdash* is essentially an energy bank, a place where people can deposit and withdraw energy on an as-needed basis. (For more discussion of the *mikdash*, see Part 2: “Korbanot.”)

### Separation – Protecting People & Conserving Energy

The *mikdash*, its components, its *korbanot* (offerings), and the Kohanim (priests) who work there all have the status of “*kodesh*.” For practical purposes, this means there are rules that apply only to them, in effect enforcing a degree of separation from things/people/places that are not considered *kodesh*. Because *kedusha* is kept separate, it is easy to see why one might even define *kedusha* as “separate.” But this would be something like looking back several thousand years at nuclear energy, observing the shielded reactors, the special clothing and equipment used, the careful handling procedures, the limited access, the warnings, and concluding that “irradiated” means “separate,” or even “holy.” Unless you were there to see the blue incandescent glow, to measure the effects of the radiation, and to benefit from the energy produced by the nuclear reactor, it might seem fairly abstract.

But *kedusha* is not abstract – it is very concrete. It is a high concentration of energy, and when managing such energy we likewise need to exercise caution, limit access to it, primarily for two reasons:

1. **Safety** – to protect people from being harmed by the energy
2. **Conservation** – to prevent energy from being lost or wasted

These precautions are explicit in the laws of the *mikdash*. For example:

וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם אֶת מִשְׁמַרְתְּ ה' וְלֹא תָמוּתוּ

“*Guard the safeguard of Hashem, so that you won't die*”<sup>8</sup>

וּמִן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא יֵצֵא

וְלֹא יִחַלֵּל אֶת מִקְדָּשׁ אֱ-לֹהֵיוֹ

“*[The Koben] should not exit the Mikdash,*

*so that he won't drain (de-energize) his Creator's Mikdash*”

### Kedusha of Yisrael

Klal Yisrael (the People of Israel) is also referred to as *kadosh* (infused):

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְּלַכְת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ

“*You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a Kadosh nation.*”

<sup>6</sup> As opposed to the word “*chalon*” (חלון, window), literally “container of *chol*” (חול, vacuum). That is, a *chalon* is not a pane of glass but rather a hole, an empty space carved out of the wall.

<sup>7</sup> Tehilim 132.8

<sup>8</sup> Vayikra 8.35; Vayikra 21.12

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֶ-לֹהֵיכֶם

“You will be *Kadosh*, since I – Hashem your Creator – am *Kadosh*.”<sup>9</sup>

The same idea applies here. While practically speaking there may be a need to effect a certain amount of separation between Yisrael and the nations, the goal is not separation. Yisrael (our people and our land) is not meant to exist as an island. Just the opposite – we function as *kobanim*, whose job it is to serve others, to bring *ohr* (vitality and awareness) to the nations, as it says:

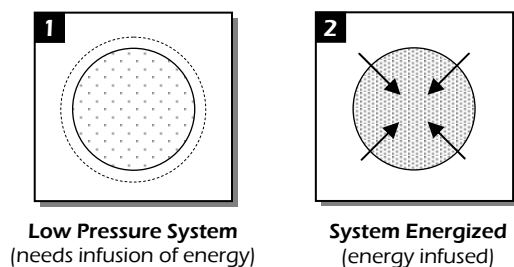
וְאֶתְּנֶנּוּ לְבְרִית עִם לְאוּר גּוֹיִם

“I assign you (*Yisrael*) to a national contract: to be the energy-source of the nations.”<sup>10</sup>

#### Kedusha & Infusion – Alleviating Inward Pressure

After a system has expanded, spread out by means of *bracha*, it is by definition less concentrated than before. If spread too thin, the system will actually enter a low-pressure state, a relative vacuum. We spoke about an organization that expands in order to alleviate pressure. But one of the possible consequences of such expansion is that now there is *not enough* work to go around. So in order to support the larger staff, to pay the rent on the larger office, a new infusion of clients and revenue must be sought. Likewise, any system in a state of vacuum, lack, will draw energy into itself in order to restore equilibrium, to bring stability and health. This infusion and resulting state of concentration is *kedusha*.

Fig. 1.11 Dynamics of Kedusha



Growth (of organisms and other systems) is therefore a product of both *bracha* and *kedusha*. When a system becomes concentrated, it expands, alleviating high-pressure (excess). After expanding, the system will input new energy, alleviating low-pressure (lack) – until it becomes concentrated once again. This is a continuous cycle, a dynamic equilibrium that provides stability while also engendering movement and development.

Let’s now see how *bracha* and *kedusha* figure into the act of Creation.

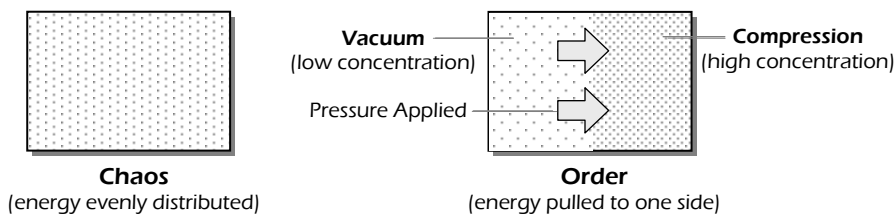
#### Pressure – Creating Order out of Chaos

Pure chaos (*tohu va’vohu*) is strictly speaking an utter lack of organization. It is 100% random distribution. According to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, energy systems tend towards the state of maximum entropy, random dispersion. The reason for this tendency is simple: Chaos is less expensive. Order requires an expenditure of energy to maintain. And why is it that order requires energy? Because to make order out of chaos one must exert force, apply pressure. Randomly distributed “stuff” must be compressed, so that you now have two distinct areas adjacent to one another: that of high-concentration (compression) and that of low concentration (vacuum).

<sup>9</sup> Shemot 19.6; Vayikra 19.2

<sup>10</sup> Yeshaya 42.6

Fig. 1.12 Chaos & Order



**Tzimtzum & the Pressures of Creation**

The act of creation, at its simplest level, is really about drawing distinctions. Without distinction there is nothing, literally “no thing” that is separable, identifiable. Distinction, order, and “things” are achieved by applying pressure. In this sense, we can understand why the tradition sees the creation of the universe as beginning with the act of *tzimtzum* – constriction. In the *tzimtzum*, the energy of Hashem (אור עליון) is consciously compressed, leaving within it an area of vacuum, relatively devoid of energy. We mentioned this space earlier as the *chalal ha’panuy* (empty vacuum).

Now that we have two distinct areas, one of high-concentration (“energy”) and one of low-concentration (“vacuum”), the action moves in the opposite direction. Like a rubber band that has been stretched and wants to snap back, the energy of Hashem seeks to decompress, to diffuse into the vacuum. And so the pressure is released, energy explodes into the vacuum, and with this energy the content of the universe is produced.

Fig. 1.13 Compression – Creation, Part 1

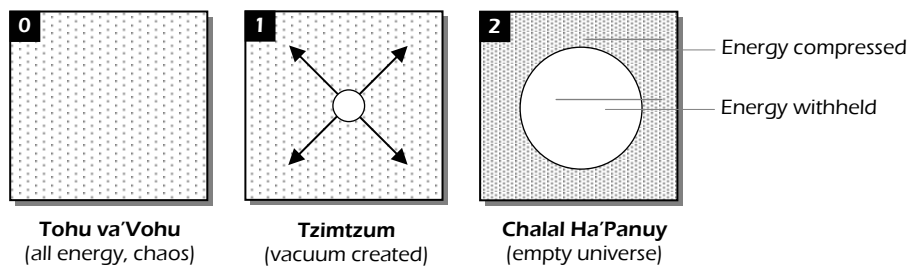
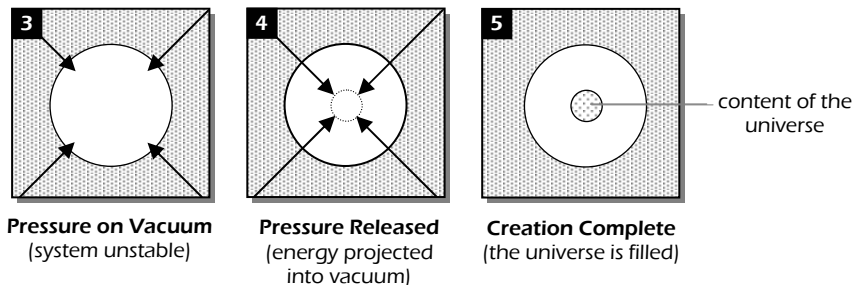


Fig. 1.14 Decompression – Creation, Part 2



**Bracha & Kedusha in Creation**

The sequence of compression and decompression, from the perspective of the *ohr Hashem*, is experienced as *kedusha* and *bracha*. Compression (*tzimtzum*) causes the energy of Hashem to become more concentrated – constituting *kedusha*. Decompression (release of

energy) causes the energy of Hashem to expand outward, occupy more space – constituting *bracha*. From the perspective of the *chalal* however, the experience is just the opposite. First the universe expands and opens outward – constituting *bracha*, and then the universe is infused with energy – constituting *kedusha*. In short, the Creator's *kedusha* (infusion) is the Creation's *bracha* (expansion), and the Creator's *bracha* (expansion) is the Creation's *kedusha* (infusion).

### **Bracha & Kedusha in Time**

The Torah says regarding the seventh day of Creation:

וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ  
“*Elokim expanded the seventh day, and be energized it.*”<sup>11</sup>

The first action is “*vay’verech.*” Shabbat was given a *bracha* – it was expanded. Shabbat is an island in time, not connected with the other six days of the week. In this sense, although it is technically twenty-four hours, the time is stretched out, expanded. The next action is “*vay’kadesh.*” Shabbat was given *kedusha* – it was infused with energy. The cycle of Creation is six units of building a system for deriving energy, followed by a unit of deriving benefit from that energy. Shabbat is that experience of infusion, vitalization.

### **Holidays – the Mikra’ei Kodesh**

The holidays of Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret are all called “*mikra’ei kodesh*” – times during the yearly cycle when energy is invoked, felt with particular intensity. We will discuss all these in later sections, but now let’s focus on Pesach and Sukkot, the two week-long holidays. Pesach is a season of growth and outward movement – *bracha*. Sukkot, which comes exactly half a year later, is a season of aggregation of energy, inward movement – *kedusha*.

### **Pesach & Expansion**

The first holiday mentioned in the Torah, occurring in the “first month,” is Pesach, which commemorates the exodus from Egypt and birth of Yisrael as a national entity. Pesach is the time of *bracha* – expansion. Yisrael experienced tremendous *bracha*, a great population explosion in Egypt, as the *pasuk* says:

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד  
“*Bnei Yisrael bore fruit and teemed and multiplied and strengthened very very much.*”<sup>12</sup>

In order to keep Yisrael from continually expanding, Egypt placed pressure on us in the form of brutally hard labor, and the decree that all newborn males of Yisrael would be killed. The word *Mitzraim* (מצרים – Egypt), is literally “that which exerts *tzar* (צַר), pressure.” When Moshe produced the plagues, the pressure began to move in the opposite direction, against Egypt. The structure holding Yisrael in began to buckle. When the plague against the Egyptian firstborn ensued, this pushed Mitzraim over the edge – its grip was broken. *Am Yisrael* was born – bursting forth from Egypt. All the pressure was released. And this may be why Hashem repeatedly “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” – so that pressure would keep mounting, and the ensuing depressurization would be more powerful, more destructive to Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

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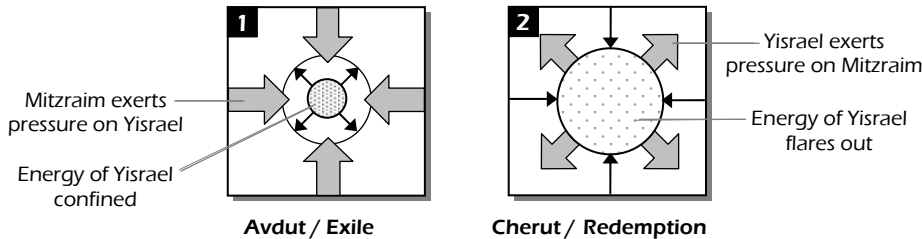
<sup>11</sup> Bereshit 2.3

<sup>12</sup> Shemot 1.7

<sup>13</sup> This is the idea of the *pasuk*: “*When the wicked bloom like grass...it is to destroy them eternally.*” (Tehilim 92 – Mizmor Shir of Shabbat)

Pesach is called the “*ז’man cheruteinu*,” the time of our freedom. The word for freedom, *cherut* (חרות), is from the root *chara* (חרה) – flaring or opening. That is, freedom is literally a flaring out, an expansion. It is *bracha*.

Fig. 1.15 Pesach – time of Bracha, expansion

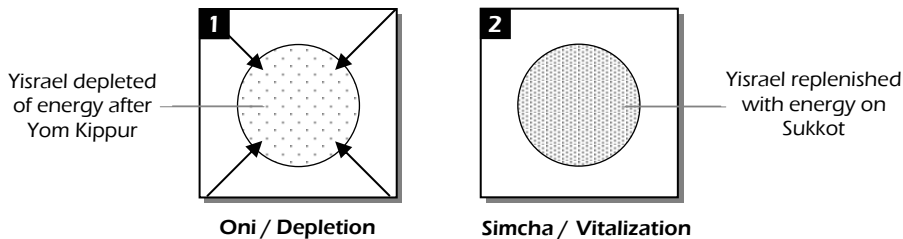


### Sukkot & Infusion

Sukkot is on the exact opposite end of the calendar. It is the time not of expansion, spreading out of energy, but of condensation, infusion of energy. Sukkot is the time of *kedusha*. The *sukkah* (temporary dwelling) we build is designed to draw energy within and infuse everything – and everyone – inside it. This is why everything done in the *sukkah* (eating, sleeping, learning, or just plain sitting there) is considered a *mitzva* (command) – because a *mitzva* is that which functions to bring *kedusha*.<sup>14</sup> (More on this concept in Section 1.13, “The Mitzvot.”) Also, the *sukkah* is supposed to recreate the experience of the *ananei ha’karod*, the clouds of the *shechina* (Hashem’s tangible presence) that vitalized and protected Am Yisrael in the desert. It is the *shechina* that rested atop the Ark in the *mikdash*, and which gave the *mikdash* its *kedusha*, its powerful intensity. So too, that which replicates the effect of the *shechina* will by definition bring *kedusha*, concentrated energy.

Sukkot is called the “*ז’man simcha’teinu*,” the time of our joy. As we said previously, *simcha* is an energized state. Sukkot and *simcha* are about infusion of energy, *kedusha*. And because Sukkot comes in the wake of the energy depletion on Yom Kippur, this makes the infusion all the more pronounced. The *tzom* (צום) of Yom Kippur works like the *tzimtzum* (צמצום) – it creates a vacuum in the person that is subsequently filled with energy.

Fig. 1.16 Sukkot – time of Kedusha, infusion



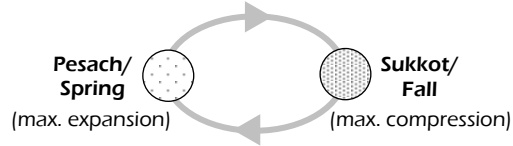
### Growth Cycles in Klal Yisrael and Nature

The cycle of Pesach and Sukkot is one of growth for *Klal Yisrael*. During Pesach, Yisrael expands, until we eventually require an input of energy. During Sukkot, Yisrael is energized, until once again we require expansion. This cycle is mirrored in nature and in agriculture. The Torah mentions explicitly that Pesach must be celebrated in the springtime. Springtime is the season of birth – animals and plants reproduce, expand, proliferate. Crops burst forth from the ground. Sukkot comes in the fall, the season of aggregation, drawing inward. The leaves

<sup>14</sup> As in the *bracha* formulation: אֵשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו – “who infused us through his commands.”

and seeds fall from the trees, drawn back to the ground, their energy coalesced for later growth. We gather in the harvest, take in the food energy that will carry us through the winter.

Fig. 1.17 Pesach / Sukkot energy cycle



### Expansion & Contraction of Time & Sephirot

Although we typically regard the three pilgrimage holidays (*shalosh regalim*) as encompassing three holidays, in fact it really consists of four holidays (*yomim tovim*) in two primary cycles. One cycle begins with Pesach and concludes with Shavuot; the other begins with Sukkot and concludes with Shemini Atzeret. The Pesach cycle is expanded, comprised of seven weeks followed by a *yom tov*, and the Sukkot cycle is compacted, comprised of seven days followed by a *yom tov*. This contrast of expansion and contraction is particularly apparent in the “*sephirot*” correspondences in each cycle.

On each of the seven days of Sukkot, we invite into the Sukkah one of the seven guests (*ushpizin*), and each guest is associated with one of the seven “lower” *sephirot*, as follows:

Fig. 1.18 Sukot/Sephirot correspondences

Day	Guest	Sefira
1	Avraham Avinu	Chesed
2	Yitzchak Avinu	Gevura
3	Yaakov Avinu	Tiferet
4	Moshe Rabeinu	Netzach
5	Aharon ha’Kohen	Hod
6	Yosef ha’Tzadik	Yesod
7	David ha’Melech	Malchut
8	Shemini Atzeret	

Each *sefira* (literally “quantity”) counts one day towards the closing *yom tov* of Shemini Atzeret.

During the Omer (the time between Pesach and Shavuot), this time is expanded, multiplied to the power of two. Rather than seven days, the period is seven days times seven or 49 days. The *sefirot* expand correspondingly. Each week is associated with a primary *sefira*, and each day within that week is associated with an expanded, secondary *sefira*.

Fig. 1.19 Omer/Sephirot correspondences

Week	Sefira	Day	Sefira Expansion
1	Chesed	1	Chesed
		2	Gevura
		3	Tiferet
		4	Netzach
		5	Hod

Week	Sefira	Day	Sefira Expansion
		6	Yesod
		7	Malchut

...week 2=Gevura, 3=Tiferet, etc...

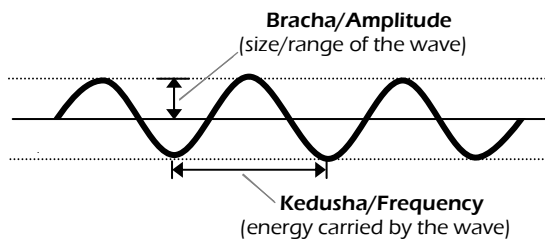
8	Shavuot	50	
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And so the period from Pesach to Shavuot is one of *bracha*, multiplicity, as demonstrated by the expansion of time (7x7) and expansion of the *sefirot* (7x7). By contrast, the period between Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret is one of *kedusha*, concentration. Time is compacted, and the *sefirot* are condensed.

#### Bracha & Kedusha as a Wave

Expressed as a wave, *bracha* might correspond to *amplitude*, the size (expanse) of the wave crest, or wave trough. The more *bracha*, the greater the volume, or range of influence, of the wave. *Kedusha* would correspond to *wavelength*, the distance between crests. The more *kedusha*, the greater the frequency (cycles per second), and the more energy is carried by the wave.

Fig. 1.20 Bracha & Kedusha expressed as a wave



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