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WEEKLY SHMUESS

Parshas Emor

Vignettes on
Sefiras HaOmer

DRASHAS FROM THE
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Emor - Vignettes on Sefiras HaOmer

From 48 Ways 010 – Serving The Wise

The 49 days of the *Omer* represent the “49 Gates of Understanding”. The 50th Gate of Understanding, the *Ramban* writes, is described as “knowing of G-dliness.”

The 50th Gate of Understanding is above all the other 49, and it is the innermost point of our soul – to only know of Hashem. It is there that we can receive the perfect level of Torah, the Torah that was given in a world which did not sin yet.

We can use this innermost point in our soul – otherwise known as the “50th Gate of Understanding” within us – to prepare for the receiving of the Torah that comes each year on Shavuos.

The way we prepare for the Torah is by realizing that we have a G-dly spark in us. According to the amount that we recognize the G-dly spark within us, that is how much Torah will be revealed to us.

Each of us receives Torah “on our own level” – we are not all receiving the same exact level of Torah. And the way we can each receive Torah “on our own level” is by realizing that we have an inner, “G-dly spark” in us that is pure.

This is the inner *avodah* of preparing for Shavuos. After 49 days of counting the Omer, we reach the “50th day” – Shavuos. The first 49 days of the Omer represent the “49 Gates of *Binah*/Understanding), as is well-known; and Shavuos represents the “50th level of Understanding”. On the 50th day, Shavuos,

we can come to the “50th Gate of Understanding”. This is the depth to why there is no more recitation of *Sefiras HaOmer* after 49 days because the 50th day is on such a high level that it cannot be verbalized by the mouth at all.

May we merit to prepare our heart and purify it, so that we can properly receive the Torah, and to reveal the perfection of Torah in our souls – the kind of Torah that is “one” with Hashem and Yisrael.

From 48 Ways 024 – Patience In Learning

We know that the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer* are a way for us to rectify the sin of the students of Rabbi Akiva, who did not properly honor each other in Torah learning; the 24,000 students were killed out as a punishment for this. Although we have no comprehension of these great students who were killed, *Chazal* revealed to us that there was some infraction on their part when it came to respecting others’ opinions with regards to Torah, and because of this, they were severely judged and punished.

We can rectify the sin of Rabbi Akiva’s students through using the trait of *erech apayim*. Simply, it means we shouldn’t get angry – which is hard to do of course, and it merits a discussion for itself. But we aren’t addressing that aspect of “*erech apayim*” right now. We are discussing a different aspect of *erech apayim*: to be patient and willing to

accept the truth when others disagree with us in Torah.

It is to be able to continue in our understanding of Torah, and to never remain complacent with what we understand, because there always more ways to understand the Torah.

From Shavuos 029 – The Spiritual Light Of Shavuos

We count 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*, but the day of the giving of the Torah, which is the 50th day, is not counted. The depth of this is because Torah is above time.

We find this revealed as well in terms of our soul: our souls left us at every word of Hashem that we heard at Sinai¹. It was because the Torah is above our soul, therefore our souls could not bear its light.

There is exertion in Torah – physical exertion in Torah – which we must have. That is one level of receiving the Torah by preparing for it by exerting ourselves in its study. But the more complete level of Torah is reflected in the words of our Sages, “One must ‘kill’ himself, in the tents of Torah.” It means to be at the level of standing at Sinai - when our souls left us. This is the depth of how we see that Torah is above our soul.

It was above all space as well, for Hashem opened all the heavens and showed us the Torah; in other words, it is above the world - it is above any place. It is also above all of time, as we see from the fact that the day of the giving of the Torah is not counted in

Sefiras HaOmer. And it is above our soul, for our souls left us at Sinai when we heard it.

When we understand this properly, we can perceive that “receiving the Torah” is essentially for one to leave the sphere of human comprehension; to leave place, time, and soul; to leave all of man’s own *hasagah* (comprehension); to leave the entire life he recognizes.

As long as a person remains connected to his current level of life and he does not know how to aspire beyond it, he can only receive the Torah from where he stands which will be very limited.

The day of receiving the Torah, in a certain way, is the loftiest day of the year. This is because throughout the year, we are in the state of after the sin of Adam. But once every year, when it comes the festival of Shavuos, we return to the level of before the sin of Adam. When we stood at Sinai, the spirit of impurity that had been on us since the first sin was removed. That spiritual light returns to us every year on Shavuos.

(On a more subtle note, there are really two points in time during the year in which we return to the state of pre-sin: Friday afternoon, which was the time in Creation where Adam didn’t sin yet; and on Shavuos, when we were rectified from the sin of Adam, and it was before we sinned with the Golden Calf.)

The time of the giving of the Torah is the day of the year that is designated specially for the Jewish people, when Hashem set us apart from the other nations in giving us the Torah. It is the day of the year that is unique to the Jewish people. It is also the day in which we return to the pre-sin. It is the holy day of the

¹ *Shabbos 88a*

year in which it is revealed a world in which there is no reality of sin. It is the one day of the year where the soul can connect itself to a level beyond where it normally is.

How can our soul go beyond its normal level? When our soul deeply connects to Torah and to its Giver that is found in it, Hashem, it can go above the normal constraints of place and time (and itself).

Normally, during the rest of the year, there is exertion in Torah, in which one strives to reach his own place in the Torah, which is reached through his own *hasagah* (comprehension). During the rest of the year, each person strives to reach his *individual* portion in the Torah, his own place in Torah that's unique to him, which he reaches through toiling to understand it.

But on Shavuos, the time of the giving of the Torah, which is above all time and place and soul, it is the day where we *all* received the Torah, thus there is a level of Torah revealed on this day that goes *above* the individual's role in Torah. It reveals a level of Torah that is on a higher and collective level, as opposed to a Torah on the individual level.

When searching to reach true level of Torah, firstly, we have an *avodah* to reveal more and more Torah upon the world, exerting ourselves day and night in it, each of us trying to reach our own *hasagah* in it. When it comes to this, each person can come to his own revelation of Torah, using his own intellect and soul; each person has an individual place in the Torah, which he can reach through exerting himself in it.

But on Shavuos, a level of Torah that is above the individual is revealed. If one is truly

connected to that place, he connects to the Torah that is above his normal *hasagah*.

Therefore, the depth of “receiving the Torah” is not just to exert ourselves in it and try to understand it. It is to connect to it in a way that reflects the statement, “To part from it, I cannot” - to deeply connect to it. That is the true spiritual light contained in the festival of Shavuos.

As we are in exile, our own soul is in exile as well. It is ‘exiled’ in two ways.

Firstly, it is exiled by the bad *middos* that tarnish its outer layers. The days of *Sefiras HaOmer* come to rectify our bad *middos* and can help us come out of the inner imprisonment which bad *middos* place us in.

But the other aspect of the soul's exile, which is a deeper kind of inner exile, is the fact that each person only seeks to understand his own personal comprehension in Torah. This limits and constricts a person to the level of his own individual understanding.

When we stood at Sinai, we all stood “with one heart”. The exile of the soul, on a deeper level, is that each person is stuck within himself, and he is not unified with others.

Currently, our level of “receiving of the Torah” is at the level of the second Tablets/*Luchos*, which contain a drawback: it is a Torah that is individually understood, each person according to his own understanding. But the truer understanding of Torah, the Torah we received with the first set of *Luchos* (which is contained in the festival of Shavuos that returns each year), is the level of Torah that goes beyond our own personal level of attainment/*hasagah*. It was the kind of

Torah that was given to all of us collectively, as opposed to individually.

The festival of Shavuos reveals a point that is above the level of our souls, so we can return to the level of pre-sin every Shavuos. We cannot reach it perfectly, though – only in the times of *Moshiach* will we live in it totally. But although we cannot reach it perfectly and we cannot live it, we can still have some access to its light, by directing our lives towards it.

We can direct our lives towards this point of perfection that exists above all space, time, and soul - by *yearning* for it. In that way, we are at least somewhat connected to it.

From Tefillah 0159 – Real Spirituality – Yearning For Hashem

When we prepare for the time of the giving of the Torah, during the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*, we must know clearly where we are heading. The point is not to reach deep spiritual revelations and high levels of purity and holiness. The point of purifying ourselves during this time is so that we can merit a greater goal: to prepare ourselves for the King.

Every year, when Shavuos returns, the light of the giving of the Torah returns with it, so it is not just the ‘time’ when the Torah was given. The entire event of Sinai returns! That means that “Our desire to see our King” returns each year on Shavuos. But we have to be aware of this and prepare for it.

If a person isn’t aware of this, then he thinks that preparing for the giving of the Torah means to prepare for the “Torah” alone. But the true way to prepare is to realize that there is not only a *giving* of the Torah

that is coming – there is a Giver behind it. Shavuos is called *Zman Matan Torah* (the time of the giving of the Torah) as opposed to *Zman Kaballas Torah* (the time of receiving the Torah), so that we can remember the One who gave it to us.

When a person only prepares for Torah - but not for Hashem – then he has a hard time understanding why he should want the Name of Hashem to be revealed, as we ask in *Shemoneh Esrei*. He will wish for more Torah in the world, more purity and holiness in the world – all of these are good things – but he is missing the main yearning.

If a person doesn’t deeply desire “to see the King”, he merely awaits a more purified kind of world, he awaits the resurrection of the dead and the coming of *Moshiach*, and he thinks that the goal of Creation ends there... Although the times of *Moshiach* will be times where we are free to learn the wisdom of Torah all day, this is not all there is to it. There is also the desire to “see our King.” When a person is missing this yearning, he is not yet yearning for the purpose of Creation which he is supposed to long for.

Thus, yearning for more Torah, without a yearning for Hashem, is missing the point. Such a person is missing the main yearning to have on this world. He might spend his life learning Torah and doing all the *mitzvos*, but he is not searching for Hashem in all of it. He yearns for more and more revelation of Torah, but he is blank from yearnings for Hashem!

So we must know that these are two very different yearnings. The truth is that all is rooted in Hashem at the root of everything, so Torah and Hashem are ultimately intertwined. “Hashem and the Torah are

one.” But this is not always revealed in a person’s life, so he does not always see Torah as being “one” with Hashem.

When we separate from materialism and we yearn for spirituality and for more Torah, this is but half of our *avodah*. Of course, we must certainly yearn for more spiritual levels and for more Torah, as we explained before; but it is not yet everything. The greater part of our *avodah* on this world is to yearn for the revelation of Hashem on the world. We can keep moving back and forth between these two yearnings (revelation of Torah, and revelation of Hashem), which, on a deeper level, is really an integration of our yearning for Torah with our yearning for Hashem.

This deep place in the soul is described by the Rambam as “the desire for Hashem’s Name”. We can awaken in ourselves a yearning for Hashem. Not only does the thought of His existence awaken this yearning, but even the mention of His mere name can awaken it. "לשמך ולזכרך תאות נפש" “*For Your Name and mention, is the desire of [my] soul*” – even the mention of Hashem’s Name can awaken our soul’s yearning for Him.

The more a person lives his life in this way, the more he yearns for the revelation of Hashem’s Name on this world, and then he can feel great pain at the tremendous *chilul Hashem* (desecration of His Name) in our times: the void of feeling Hashem’s Presence on this world.

It is also called the “pain of the *Shechinah*.” The *Shechinah* has pain over the fact that people are not keeping Torah and *mitzvos* and don’t know of Hashem. But there is also pain of the *Shechinah* over people who know of

spirituality, yet they don’t have a desire to see the King.

The *Shechinah* is described by our Sages as the revelation of Hashem on this world. There is His reality, and there is His revelation. When He is revealed on this world, this is called *Shechinah*. The pain of the *Shechinah* is the fact that His presence is hidden and not revealed in the world.

But when we have a “desire to see our King”, then the words we *daven* in *Shemoneh Esrei* of ועל כולם יתברך where we *daven* that Hashem’s Name be revealed, it is a prayer emanating from our soul. We are not only asking that Hashem be revealed to *Klal Yisrael*, but that He be revealed in the entire world.

Especially during these days, when we prepare for the Torah, we need to reveal this yearning, the desire to see our King. Along with it, it must cause us to feel pain over the fact that Hashem’s Presence is not yet revealed on the world. Then we can really mean it when we say the words, ועל כולם יתברך יתרום, ויתנשא שמך תמיד לעולם ועד.

The concept here is far from the comprehension of most people in the world now, who are entrenched in materialism, and even those who seek spirituality are not in always in touch with the desire to see Hashem. There are only a few people who truly yearn to find Hashem Himself.

May we merit to desire this as we go along in our *avodah* throughout life, especially as we prepare for the time of receiving the Torah. And when the time of the giving of the Torah comes – as well as before it – we can merit, all

of *Klal Yisrael*, as well as the entire world, the recognition of Hashem, alone.²

***From Rosh Chodesh Mahut (Essence) Sivan
003 – Walking Into The Endless***

There are “50 Gates of Understanding” to the Torah. There are 50 days of *Sefiras Ha’Omer*, and the inner reason for counting each day of the *Omer* is so that one can keep entering deeper and deeper into the spiritual realm within him; until the innermost gate is reached.

The Vilna *Gaon* says that each of the 50 gates of understanding contain 50 levels, so when one reaches the 50th gate, he will find himself before another 50 gates to pass through. Thus, the depth of *Sefiras Ha’Omer* is to keep entering deeper and deeper into one’s inner spiritual realm, until one gets to the “giving of the Torah” that is reached when one gets to the recognition of *Ain Od Milvado* (“There is nothing besides Him”).

Counting *Sefiras Ha’Omer* is therefore not just a verbal act of the mouth, but a matter of the soul. When the Torah says, “Count fifty days”, the intention is to keep entering deeper, past another gate and another gate, into one’s inner spiritual dimension.

That is the depth of the concept of “*hiluch*” (walking). It is about digging deeper and deeper, into everything. In everything we encounter, there is always more depth to

uncover, because there are always “50 gates of understanding” in everything.

The first 49 days of *Sefiras Ha’Omer* represents the external part of our task in preparing to receive the Torah. What is the preparation that we need to make in order to receive the Torah? To reveal more and more depth in whatever we see! *Sefiras Ha’Omer* is about revealing depth, to enter into another gate and into another gate.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that the root of Creation is that the Torah reveals all of Creation. The depth of this matter is that Torah can be found in any place where one is – it is not limited to any one place. A Torah scholar can see, in everything he comes across, the “50 gates of understanding”. He doesn’t only see it in one particular place; he can see it in any place, in anything he sees.

In order to reveal the depths of the Torah, one must reveal the “50 gates of understanding” in his own heart. The heart contains 50 gates. When one reveals his heart, he can enter into the 50 gates that are within the heart. Shlomo *HaMelech* said, “My heart has seen much wisdom.” The 50 gates of the heart became opened to Shlomo, and that is how he was able to reach the 50th gate of the Torah, for his heart became a proper vessel that could receive the 50 gates of understanding in everything.

In order to see the 50th gate of understanding in anything, one cannot reach it through his intellect. The intellect is not capable to reaching the 50th gate of understanding in anything, because the 50th gate is always beyond intellectual comprehension. Only the heart, which contains 50 gates of understanding, can reach

² See also *Tefillah #0121 – Yearning For Revelation of Shechinah and Torah*

it. The Torah speaks of those who are “wise of heart”, and this is not referring to intellectual wisdom, but “heart” wisdom. Only with this “heart wisdom” can a person reveal the depths of understanding in something.

It is written, “*A pure heart you created me with.*” If a person wants to comprehend the Torah, he first needs to go through an inner process, of revealing the depths of his heart.

The spiritual structure of the heart is a complicated because it is not one single layer. The “heart” itself is not the emotions of a person; it is a deeper dimension than just emotion, and there is depth upon depth to it. If a person has not yet purified his heart, he will only feel the outer dimension of his heart, which is the emotions, and if he stays that way his entire life, he will remain at the same emotional level of a child, yet he will feel certain that he’s using his heart.

When a child feels happy, or when he feels sad, he feels that this is all there is to his heart. All of his recognition is based on the level he is at. But true “heart recognition” is only when one reveals new depth within his heart; one can keep entering deeper and deeper into it, traversing through the 50 gates that are hidden in his heart. That is where a person receives the “wisdom the heart”.

This is the meaning of Shlomo *HaMelech*’s words, “*My heart has seen much wisdom.*” The wisdom he uncovered was the depths of the Torah, and he saw more and more depth in everything in the Torah.

The level of one’s Torah learning will depend on the level he has reached in his own heart. When a person truly comprehends anything in Torah, it is not reached due to any intellectual prowess. If one is intellectually

gifted when it comes to Torah learning, that is only the external part of Torah learning. One reaches true understanding in Torah only to the degree that he has revealed the depth within his heart. The more one uncovers the depth of his heart, the more understanding he will reach in Torah. The highest point one can reach is the “heart” itself. Beyond that, we are not able to know.

And so, preparing to receive the Torah is through *hiluch*, “walking.” It doesn’t mean to “go” from one “place” to another “place”, which is the perspective of the ignoramus. Rather, it means to keep walking/going further and further into our own depths; to the depths of recognition in our heart. That is the vessel that one needs in order to contain the depths of the Torah’s wisdom.

“*My heart has seen much wisdom*” – to the degree that one has purified his heart, that is how much wisdom he will reach in Torah. Any of our previous sages and *Gedolim* who merited to receive much wisdom did not reach this from any of their intellectual abilities, but according to the degree that they purified their hearts. They therefore merited to become a “*maayan hamisgaber*” (mighty wellspring) that can reach understanding in Torah.

May Hashem give us the ability to go from one spiritual accomplishment to another, to reveal more and more depth in the Torah, and the Creator Who lays hidden in it.

From Derashos 066 – Torah In A Working Person’s Life

In order to really want the festival of Shavuot, we need to prepare for it a lot. The

Sefer HaChinuch says that the *mitzvah* of *sefiras haomer* is to count down the days to Shavuos, when we receive the Torah, so we see that we need 49 days of preparation for Shavuos. In order to really gain from Shavuos, we have to prepare for it and want it.

takes a lot of time, but when achieved, we are able to reach our very soul.

From Preparation of Hisbodedus 011 – Alternative Ways Of How To Reach The Soul

One of the ways to get through to our soul is by discovering our worst *middah* (character trait) and then uprooting it.

How do we discover our worst *middah*? As we have mentioned, Rav Chaim Vital writes that there are four elements in the soul, and these elements are the roots of our *middos*. They are: fire/conceit and anger; wind/idle speech, falsity, and flattery; water/desires and jealousy; and earth/sadness and laziness. Each person has a particular bad *middah* that is mainly dominant in his life.³

If you work to discover our own personal worst *middah* and we uproot it, you will get through to our *neshamah*. Be willing to have *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice) in order to uproot the bad *middah*.

As our Rabbis teach, each of us came down onto this world to fix a particular *middah* that we need to work on.⁴ If we want to work on our *middos* realistically, we can't do it by working on a different *middah* every day for 40 days, or to work on a different *middah* for each of the 49 days of *Sefiras HaOmer*. This

³ See *Getting To Know Your Soul* to learn about the 4 elements in the soul and how to recognize which element is mainly dominant in your life.

⁴ As taught by the Vilna Gaon [in *sefer Even Shelaimah*]

In order to do it, a person needs to be able to have a bit of sensitivity to self-awareness – both intellectually, as well as emotionally, and to use his inner sensitivity to discover what his worst *middah* is. Most people, in fact, do not develop this inner awareness. A person must become both intellectually and emotionally **aware** as to what his worst *middah* is, and this takes a lot of time, as well as lot of inner refinement. But if a person perseveres with this, with *mesirus nefesh*, he will be able to reach his very soul.

From Fixing Your Fire-Conceit 003 – Knowing Your Aspirations

Know exactly *what* you are aspiring for.

For example, are you working mainly on acquiring love for Hashem or fear of Hashem? Are you working to fix the trait of conceit or anger? Whatever it is that you really want to work on, first *become aware* of what exactly you want to work on.

This is the first step you must be clear in. Without first clarifying this, there is no order to your *avodah*, and you work on one area and then another area each day, with no *seder* (order). There is supposed to be a *seder* to our *avodah*. (Working each day of *Sefiras HaOmer* on a different *middah* is therefore not recommended, because it lacks a *seder* of *avodah*).

You might realize that you need to instead work on different areas, and that you made a mistake. If so, you can then reevaluate your priorities. And you should also know that it takes at least *a few weeks* to work on any one area of improvement!

From Pesach 031 – Internalizing Your Knowledge

The depth behind why we count *Sefiras HaOmer* for 49 days is, that by repeating to ourselves that today is another day towards Shavuos, the knowledge of this eventually internalizes in our heart. Through the power of constant verbal repetition, the facts of our brain settle into our heart and become internalized.

From Shavuos 031 – Preparing To Receive The Torah

We count 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, and then we come to the 50th day which we do not count. The 50th day is not part of the count, because it is above the count. It is referred to as "*echad*" (one) in the *Shir HaYichud*. The 50th day of the Omer [Shavuos], the day of the giving of the Torah, it is the day where "Hashem, Torah, and Yisrael are one" – it is the *echad* (oneness), or the *raishis*/beginning, of all reality.

The *avodah* of a person throughout the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, in order to properly enter the day where the Torah was given, is to reach the *reishis*/beginning of one's soul.

There are garments upon garments in our soul, and if a person remains at the level of the garments of his soul and he does not penetrate past those garments, he lives life like a child, who lives superficially and who never experiences his own inner reality. When a person gets older, sometimes he becomes even more superficial than when he was a child, and sometimes he becomes a bit more spiritual and inward, each person on his own level. Whatever a person's situation, one must have a goal to reach the inner layer of his own soul, which is the *reishis*/beginning in his soul.

Our Sages wrote that the 49 days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* are days of clarifying our soul, getting deeper and deeper into the soul's layers, until we eventually reach the deepest and most hidden point in our soul, which is really the point of "*reishis*" (beginning) in the soul. It is in that deep place in ourselves where we can stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah there. But in order to reach it, one needs to keep penetrating further and further into the layers of the soul.

From Pesach 034 – Essence of the Three Festivals

We count 50 days of the *Omer* until we get to the giving of the Torah, in which we have hopefully become accustomed to the Torah by then, when we have hopefully reached our aspiration of "*And we should become accustomed in Your Torah.*" At first we search ourselves out on the night before Pesach, and this is the beginning aspect of the *regel* (festival). In between Pesach and Shavuos, we have hopefully become more accustomed to going to the *Beis Midrash*, that our feet are naturally taking us towards the *Beis Midrash* [as Dovid *HaMelech* describes in *Tehillim*]. On Shavuos, we ideally reach the apex of getting used to holiness, which is the purpose.