

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Torah Wellsprings - Emor

Everything is for the Good

In this week's parashah¹ the korban todah, a korban brought to praise Hashem for His kindness and salvations, is discussed. It states in the pasuk (22:29-30) וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבֶח תודָה... בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יֵאָכַל לֹא תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בֹּקֶר אֲנִי ה' "When you slaughter a *korban todah*... it must be eaten that day. You shall not leave it until the next morning, I am Hashem." The חתן סופר (קונטרס ניות ברמה עמוד האמונה והבטחון) explains that people praise Hashem when they see His kindness and miracles revealed. Sometimes, they praise Hashem when they look back and discover that even their hardships were for their good. However, the ultimate level in *avodas Hashem* is when people praise Hashem for His kindness, even before they see His kindness. The *midas hadin* is strongly seen in the world and their

lives, yet they praise Hashem because they believe that beneath the din is Hashem's immense kindness.

The Gemara (Nidah 31a) tells us that a businessman wanted to travel for business. As he rushed to catch the ship, he stepped on a thorn. He had to stop to remove the thorn, and the boat left without him. He was distraught, but later he heard that the ship sank at sea, and he praised Hashem for arranging the thorn, which prevented him from going on this voyage.

This man praised Hashem when he discovered the good that came from the trouble, but the ideal level is to praise Hashem even when going through the hardships of the tzarah, due to his strong emunah that it is undoubtedly for his good.²

1. The first pasuk of the parashah states וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבֶח תודָה. The Ateres Yeshua zy'a writes, "אָמור... is like the word אָמור is written twice, which is gematria פרו רבו (494). This is a hint that this parashah is mesugal for bearing children. Therefore [Rashi writes] להזכיר גדולים על הקטנים, which hints that this parashah is mesugal for the barren to bear young children."

2. The following story happened a year ago. An older bachur of forty-six works as a melamed in one of the chedarim in New York. When he was younger, everyone assumed he would get married immediately after he entered shidduchim because he was an excellent bachur with good middos and yiras Shamayim. But things didn't go so smoothly, and he was still single.

Generally, this cheder conducts PTA meetings, when the fathers come to the cheder to discuss their children's progress with the melamdim, during the week. Last year, the *menahel* scheduled the meetings for Motzei Shabbos.

The single melamed approached the menahel and requested whether he could reschedule PTA for a weekday, as usual. "Why is this important to you?" the menahel asked. The melamed explained that during the week, he and all other melamdim dress in the same way – they all wear jackets and hats – and it isn't noticeable that he is still a bachur. But on Shabbos and Motzei Shabbos, he wears a regular hat, while the other melamdim wear a shtreimel. He didn't want to endure the embarrassment of everyone discovering he was still a bachur.

The menahel understood his concern but said it was too late to reschedule. However, to avoid embarrassing this melamed, the menahel said he would ask some of the melamdim to come to the meeting without their shtreimel. That way, he won't be the only one without a shtreimel.

As planned, on that Motzei Shabbos, some melamdim arrived at the cheder, placed their shtreimel on a table so that they could speak with the parents without a shtreimel on their heads. The bachur held his hat on his knees, under the table, and no one knew he was still a bachur.

The Chasan Sofer explains that this is implied in the abovementioned pasuk. Some people bring a *korban todah* when they see the kindness and the salvation, but the pasuk tells us *בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יֵאָגֵל*, on the day something happens to you – be it good or bad – praise Hashem then. Believe that *יֵאָגֵל*, you will yet have *pleasure* from the matters that are transpiring now. *לֹא תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד בִּקְרָה*, don't

wait until *בִּקְרָה*, when it is bright, and you know how it was for your good. Even now, praise Hashem for His kindness.

The final words of the pasuk are *אֲנִי ה'*. *ה'* is Hashem's name of compassion and kindness. The pasuk is urging us to praise Hashem even when things appear bad, because we believe *אֲנִי הוֹי"ה*, everything that happens to us is Hashem's kindness.³

However, one parent asked the bachur, the melamed, why he wasn't wearing a shtreimel. (This parent remembered from other years that the melamdim wore a hat during the parent/teacher meetings, and he wanted to know why this year was different.) The melamed revealed to him that he is still a bachur. This father immediately thought of a shidduch idea that might be suitable for him. Indeed, the shidduch happened.

In this story, a problem resulted in the salvation. At first, it appeared like a problem, an embarrassment. Everyone would wear a shtreimel, except for him. But it resulted in his salvation. This is how it always is – the salvation is concealed behind the trouble.

3. Chazal (Brachos 60b) say, *לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד*, "A person should be in the habit of saying, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good.'" The Ben Ish Chai (Ben Yehoyada) asks that the Gemara could have said *לעולם יהא אדם אומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד*, "A person should say, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good'" and leave out the word *רגיל*, that he should *be in the habit of saying it!*

He answers that the Gemara is telling us that even if a person goes through many hardships, one tzarah after the next, and he has to say many times "it is for the good... And this, too, is for the good... And this is also for the good..." he should continue saying it. He should get used to saying this phrase, "Everything Hashem does is for the good," even if he will have to say it many times.

He explains that when a person goes through many tzaros, he might think that he actually has it bad, that Hashem decided to mistreat him. Therefore, Chazal say *לעולם יהא אדם רגיל לומר כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד*, "A person should get used to saying, 'Everything Hashem does is for the good.'" He shouldn't stop saying it – because it is the truth. Everything is for the good. And although (Tehillim 118:13) *דחה דחיתני לנפלי*, "You pushed me hard – again and again," as implied by the double expression *דחה דחיתני* – even so, *וה' עזרני*, "Hashem assisted me," and it was all for my good.

The Gemara goes on to tell a story of Reb Akiva, who passed a village during his travels. The locals refused to provide him with a place to stay overnight, and he was forced to spend the night in the forest. Furthermore, the wind blew out his candle, a cat ate his rooster, and a lion devoured his donkey. Each time, Reb Akiva said that it was for the good, and in the end, when thieves attacked the city and Reb Akiva was saved, it was proven that it was so. (Had he been in the town, or if he had a lit candle, a rooster, or a donkey, his hiding place would be discovered.) In this episode, it seemed that four bad things occurred, but Reb Akiva was *רגיל*, accustomed to saying *כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד*, that everything is for the good, and indeed it was so.

Some ask, Reb Akiva probably had a flint stone with him. Why didn't he rekindle the candle that was blown out? The answer is Reb Akiva knew that the wind didn't blow out his candle. It was from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hashem sent the wind to blow out his candle. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu did it, it must be for the good, so why should he rekindle it? This is why he chose to remain in darkness that night. He accepted Hashem's will with love, knowing that *כל דעביד רחמנא לטב עביד*, everything Hashem does, it is for the good." (This explanation is said in the name of the Ben Ish Chai; Reb Yankele Galinsky zt'l would often repeat it.)

The Torah (Devarim 6:5) states, *ואהבת את ה' אלקיך... וקבל נפשך*, "You shall love Hashem your G-d... with all your soul..." The Mishnah (Brachos 9:5) explains that this means *אפילו הוא נוטל נפשך* – "Even if He takes your soul."

This means that if goyim force someone to worship avodah zarah (or another of the three cardinal sins), and

It states (21:6) קְדָשִׁים יִהְיוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִחַלְלוּ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, "They shall be holy to their G-d, and they shall not desecrate their G-d's Name". Noam Megadim explains that אֱלֹהֵיהֶם is

Hashem's name, and represents מִדַּת הַדִּין, strict judgments and punishment. קְדָשִׁים יִהְיוּ teaches us that a person becomes holy when he endures Hashem's din. Noam

threaten to kill him if he disobeys, the person must allow them to kill him. Due to his love for Hashem, he must be prepared to be *moser nefesh*.

The Alshich HaKadosh asks that the Mishnah should have stated אִפְּלוּ נֹטְלִים נַפְשָׁךְ, that even if **Goyim** will take away his life... he must be *moser nefesh* for Hashem. Why does it state אִפְּלוּ הוּא נֹטֵל נַפְשָׁךְ, "Even if **He** takes your soul away"?

The Alshich answers that the Gemara is teaching a tip to help a person pass this ultimate test and be willing to sacrifice his life for Hashem. The method is to remember that no one can harm him, and certainly not kill him, if it isn't Hashem's will. Ultimately, only Hashem can take his soul. With this awareness, combined with the knowledge that everything Hashem does is for the good, he will have the strength to pass this difficult test and be *moser nefesh* for Hashem.

Even when a person causes harm to himself, due to his poor decisions and the like, he should remember that it is all from Hashem. The Midrash Mishlei states, "Everything is from Hashem, and not from man. Even a person's thoughts and what he says are from Hashem. It states (Mishlei 16:1) לִאֲדָם מַעֲרָכֵי לֵב וּמִוֶּה' מַעֲנֶה לְשׁוֹן, "The preparations of the heart are man's, but the answer of the tongue is from Hashem." This means that every word a person says is from Hashem.

In Lakewood, a mother called Hatzalah because her child had difficulty breathing. The Hatzalah volunteers rushed over and examined the child. They discovered that everything was well, and the child was breathing perfectly. They explained to the mother that probably when the child cried, she thought he had lost his breath, but everything is fine.

The mother insisted that there is a medical issue and that her son must go to the hospital.

Hatzalah contacted the child's doctor. The doctor confirmed that the child was fine. Nevertheless, since the mother insisted on going to the hospital, the Hatzalah members decided to take the child there to calm the mother's fears. So they took the child to the hospital in an ambulance.

After checking the child, the hospital said everything was fine, and they could return home. By that time, it was already late at night.

On the way back, one Hatzalah member asked the driver to stop the ambulance. He said that he saw an adult bending down near the road, holding the hand of an infant, and it appeared like a medical emergency.

"You are tired, so you are imagining things," the ambulance driver said.

But his colleague insisted, so he stopped. There was indeed an emergency. The mother was with her infant child, who was experiencing a severe asthma attack. They grabbed the infant and sped to the hospital. The mother said, "When you arrived, I was trying to call an ambulance, but I was having trouble describing my exact location, because it was on a highway. Before I could complete my request, your ambulance stopped right before me!"

The mother said she planned to go to Chicago that night, but the plane was sold out, and she had to return home. She was grateful she wasn't on the flight, because who knows if the child would have survived the asthma attack without proper medical care.

The Hatzalah members added that there was another part to the miracle. They thought they wasted their time going to the hospital for no reason at all. But it was to save a Jewish child.

The lesson is that a person should never complain about missing a flight or going somewhere for what turns out to be for no reason. Everything we do or don't do is planned from above, and is for our benefit.

Megadim teaches: "The pasuk is teaching people that the yesurim that come to them sanctifies them immensely. As Chazal (Brachos 5a) say, 'Whoever Hakadosh Baruch Hu desires, He humbles him with yesurim.' The pasuk is therefore saying, קְדָשִׁים יִהְיוּ לְאַלְקֵיהֶם, they will become holy due to אַלְקֵיהֶם, the din that comes to them. The pasuk then says וְלֹא יִחַלְלוּ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, 'They shall not desecrate their G-d's name.' This means שְׁלֹא יִבְעֲטוּ בִּיסּוּרִים, that they shouldn't refuse to accept the yesurim, for that is a disgrace to the gift that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is giving. Because it is only for the good, although it appears to be din, and thus called אַלְקֵיהֶם."

Help the Poor

This week's parashah discusses the yomim tovim of the year, the mitzvos and the korbanos we perform in them. In the middle of this section (after Shavuot and before Rosh Hashanah), there is a pasuk that seems out of place because it discusses the gifts we are obligated to give to the poor. It states (23:22) וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֶךְ בְּקַצְרְךָ וְלִקְטַת וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֶךְ בְּקַצְרְךָ וְלִקְטַת, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely remove the corner of your field during your harvesting (פֶּאֶה), and you shall not gather up the gleanings of your harvest (לִקְטַת). You shall leave these for the poor person and the ger..."

Chazal (Toras Kohanim) states, "Why is this pasuk placed in the middle of the yomim tovim? To teach us that whoever gives לקט to the poor, it is as if the Beis HaMikdash is standing and he brought korbanos on it. And whoever doesn't give these gifts to the poor, it is like the Beis HaMikdash is standing and he isn't bringing these korbanos." (Rashi writes something similar.)

Reb Nosson Gestetner zt'l (להורות נתן) explains that the Beis HaMikdash is the place Hashem chose to reside. In our times, poor people are the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal (Sotah 5a) say אֲנִי אֲשׁוּכֵן אֶת דַּכָּא, that Hashem dwells with those who have broken hearts. Therefore, the poor, those who feel low and broken,

they are the Beis HaMikdash, and we must help them. If a person doesn't help the poor, it is like he isn't bringing korbanos in the Beis HaMikdash.

It is wondrous how close the poor are to Hashem. When Nevuchadnezzar set siege on Yerushalayim and sent the residents into exile, it states (Malachim 2:24:14) וְהִגְלָה אֶת כָּל יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאֶת כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְאֶת כָּל גְּבוּרֵי הַחֵיל עֲשָׂרַת אֲלָפִים גֹּלָה וְכָל הַחֲרָשׁ וְהַמְסַגֵּר לֹא נִשְׁאַר וְזֹלַת דָּלַת עִם הָאָרֶץ, "He exiled all Yerushalayim and all the officers and all the mighty warriors, ten thousand exiles, and all the craftsmen and the sentries of the gates. No one remained except the poorest of the people of the land." Me'il Tzedakah (אות תתקנ") writes, "Come and see the greatness of the poor. The enemy was able to rule over the officers and the great people of Yisrael, but those of a low rank, they didn't have permission to harm, because the Shechinah is with them. They remained in Eretz Yisrael because Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't want them to leave Him. It was Hashem's plan that Nebuchadnezzar should decide to leave them in the land, because they are the מְרַכְבֵּה for Hashem (the place where Hashem resides)."

Great scholars were sent into exile. The pasuk states that וְכָל הַחֲרָשׁ וְהַמְסַגֵּר went into exile, and Chazal (Gittin 88a) tell us that this refers to the scholars. חֲרָשׁ means silence, because when they taught Torah, everyone was silent before them. מְסַגֵּר means closed, because when a question was asked to them and they didn't know the answer, they "closed" the discussion; no one opened it again. They were great talmidei chachamim, yet they, too, were sent to galus. However, דָּלַת עִם הָאָרֶץ, the poor remained in Yerushalayim. Hashem protected them, for they are the Beis HaMikdash, during the days of galus.

So, from this lesson, we discover the greatness of the poor and those who suffer, and we understand from this the importance and the obligation we have to help them!

The Greatness of a Yid

It states (21:1-2) לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַמִּי, כִּי אִם לְשֹׂארוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו. Literally, this pasuk is talking to the kohanim, telling them that they may not become tamei to human corpses, unless it is a close relative.

There is a lesson concealed in these words that teaches the correct path for teshuvah, to do teshuvah without falling into *yeush*.

The Noam Megadim teaches, "Some people become very sad when they commit an aveirah, chas veshalom. Actually, they are acting foolishly. Although one must certainly regret, very bitterly, the aveirah he performed, it is solely for a short time in the day. After the teshuvah, he must have bitachon and trust that Hashem will forgive him.⁴ He must push away the *atzvut*, because *atzvut* is a great tumah, and it causes the Shechinah to leave."

This is alluded to in the words לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא, a person shouldn't fall into the tumah of sadness, בְּעַמִּי when his kedushah wanes and becomes weaker due to his aveiros. (בְּעַמִּי can be translated like גְּחָלִים עֲמוּמִים, extinguished coals. It alludes to when his spirituality has left him due to his aveiros. Even then, the Torah warns לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא יִטְמָא, he shouldn't make himself tamei with the tumah of sadness.)

What should he do? כִּי אִם לְשֹׂארוֹ, with the kedushah that he still has within him (הַשְּׂאֵרָה הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁנִּשְׁאָר בּוֹ), he should come close to Hashem.

The Torah (21:4) states לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַל בְּעַמִּי לְהַחֲלוֹ. The pasuk is saying that although a kohen may become tamei to relatives (such as to attend

the burial of his wife, etc.), this is solely a wife he was permitted to marry. However, לְהַחֲלוֹ, if he was married to a woman who was forbidden to him (such as a divorced woman), he may not become tamei to her. He may not go to her levayah. A kohen is holy, and he may not desecrate his holiness.

The Beis Yisrael zt'l asks, what holiness does this kohen still have? This kohen was a great *baal aveirah*. A marriage is publicly known, so his aveirah – to be married to a divorcee – was known to many, and this is a chilul Hashem.

Furthermore, it states (21:8) וְקִדְּשְׁתּוּ, "You shall sanctify him," and Rashi explains that the beis din must make certain the kohanim keep the laws of kehunah. Rashi writes, "If he refuses to divorce [a divorced woman, lash him and chastise him until he divorces her." So, we can assume that beis din tried to stop this aveirah, and he brazenly continued with his marriage to a divorced woman.

So, why does the Torah warn לֹא יִטְמָא, that this kohen may not make tamei and tarnish his kedushah? What kedushah could he possibly have?

The Beis Yisrael replies that this teaches us about the holiness of a Yid, including those who commit severe aveiros. No matter what low level a Yid falls to, he remains with his divine holiness, and he must be cautious with it.

Taam Tzvi (from Reb Tzvi Abramovitz zt'l) adds that when Onkelus writes the prohibition for a kohen to attend the levayah of his wife

4. The Divrei Chaim zy'a said in the name of Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz zy'a that one doesn't say, "Ploni committed an aveirah" rather, the proper way to express it is "Ploni has an opportunity to do teshuvah."

There was a person who wanted to commit suicide, r'l, and was ready to jump off a roof. Rebbe Dovid'l of Tolna approached him and said, "It isn't hard to jump down. Even a child can do that. Let's see whether you can jump up, from the ground to the roof."

The man laughed at the humorous comment, and this helped him overcome his urge to take his life, r'l.

A lesson for us is that to fall is easy. It is easy to fall into depression and to go around with one's nose turned down. The trick is that when one is down, he should pick himself up and rise to high levels again.

(a divorcee), he writes (21:4), **לֹא יִסְתַּאֲבַר כֹּהֵן בְּעַמּוֹ**, **לֹא־חָלוּתָהּ**. Ramban translates **כֹּהֵן בְּעַמּוֹ** to mean **נִכְבָּר**, "Honored in his nation." So, according to Onkelus's translation, the pasuk (21:4) is saying, "The kohen who is honored in his nation may not become tamei to the woman [who was forbidden to him]."

This is telling us a wonderful chiddush: This kohen, even after his grave aveirah, he remains **כֹּהֵן בְּעַמּוֹ**, honored in his nation. This is a lesson for all Yidden: You have holiness in yourselves. You are **כֹּהֵן בְּעַמּוֹ** honored in your nation, and therefore, you should be cautious with your kedushah.

A false form of humility is when one thinks he is a sinner anyway, so he can perform more aveiros. The Bas Ayin tells us that when the pasuk says (21:4) **לֹא יִטְמָא בָּעַל** (21:4) **לֹא יִטְמָא בָּעַל**, [warning the kohen, the sinner, from becoming tamei]. It states **עַמּוֹ**, and the gematria of **עַמּוֹ** is **עֲנִי**, humble. The pasuk warns the kohen – and any other Yid – not to have the false and damaging form of humility, to think that he fell so low, he can desecrate his kedushah. He also shouldn't think that since he fell so far, he can't return to the realms of kedushah anymore.

Instead, he must know (21:2) **כִּי אִם לְשָׂאֵרוֹ** (21:2) **כִּי אִם לְשָׂאֵרוֹ**, **הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו**, "his relative who is close to him." This means he must know that he has a close relative, and that relative is Hashem.

The Bas Ayin explains, "He should comfort and encourage himself with what Hashem said (Devarim 14:1) **בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם**, 'You are children to Hashem'. Just as a father has compassion on his son, Hashem will have compassion on us and accept our *avodah*, as it is. Therefore, the pasuk concludes, **כִּי אִם לְשָׂאֵרוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו**, 'his relative who is close to him.' This means he should remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is close, and He calls us with several expressions of love, such as **בָּנִים**, sons, and... **בְּתִי**, daughter (Shir HaShirim 3:2)."

Reb Moshe Kobrin's rebbetzin asked her husband to promise she would share in his portion of Gan Eden. Reb Moshe Kobrin

replied, "How do I know whether I will merit Gan Eden? Why should they give me Gan Eden? However, I trust and I believe in what Chazal say, **כָּל הַשּׁוֹנֶה הִלְכוֹת בְּכָל יוֹם מוֹבְטָה לוֹ**, 'Whoever studies halachos every day, he is guaranteed Olam Haba'. What does **שׁוֹנֶה הִלְכוֹת** mean? **הִלְכוֹת** means 'to go', to go in the path of *avodas Hashem*, and **שׁוֹנֶה** implies that he does so again and again. Even when he didn't see any success until now, he wanted to go in the way of *avodas Hashem*, but he failed; nevertheless, he is **שׁוֹנֶה הִלְכוֹת בְּכָל יוֹם**, every day he tries again. Someone who has this attitude is a **בֶּן עוֹלָם** **הַבָּא**."

The Gemara (Megillah 28b) states, **אֵל תִּקְרִי**, **אֵל תִּקְרִי**. We can explain that **אֵל תִּקְרִי** implies that he doesn't consider himself to be going in the ways of *avodas Hashem*. With everything he has tried to do until now, he finds it insufficient, and he doesn't even consider himself to be going in that direction. Even so, **אֵל תִּקְרִי**, keep going on this path, as we wrote above, be a **שׁוֹנֶה הִלְכוֹת**, keep trying, and you are guaranteed to be a **בֶּן עוֹלָם** **הַבָּא**.

Chinuch with Pride

We should train our children and students to be cautious with all forms of tumah, as it states (21:1), **אֱמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא יִטְמָא בְּעַמּוֹ**, "Say to the kohanim... You shall not become tamei..." We are referring to the tumah of aveiros, to the tumah of the internet, and so on.

The primary protection is "not to want it." The rabbanim make rules and safeguards on how to be cautious about the ills of technology, but their words will only be effective when we recognize the need to be careful and want to be distant from tumah.

The question is, how do we train children not to *want* all the impurities that are out there?

The answer is **אֱמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אֹהֶרֶן**; tell your children that they are *kohanim*. Tell them that they are **בְּנֵי אֹהֶרֶן**, descendants of

tzaddikim. Tell them they are holy people, Hashem's servants, destined for spiritual greatness, and therefore *tumah* isn't good for them.

If one restricts a child without explanation, he won't understand why he can't enjoy the world like others. But when parents explain to their child how special he is, and how much he will gain, even in this world, when he lives as a Yid should, he will despise lowliness. On his own, he won't want lowliness. That is the greatest protection against the *tumah* of the world.⁵

Spiritual Growth During the Days of Sefiras Ha'Omer

The Or HaChaim explains the *pasuk* (stated in this week's parashah, 23:15), וספרתם לכם, to be derived from the word ספיר, which is a sapphire stone. He writes, "Chazal say that the *neshamos* of Bnei Yisrael are like the *luchos*... which were made from sapphire stone. But due to sin, the *neshamos* become dirty and lose their luster.... Therefore, it says, וספרתם לכם because by counting the *omer* their *neshamos* will shine again like sapphire stones."⁶

5. There was a melamed who sold esrogim before Succos as a side job. The Pnei Menachem of Gur zt'l told him, "You don't work with esrogim only before Succos, you work with esrogim the entire year because each student is a precious esrog. A savvy esrog merchant knows how to clean an esrog so it appears beautiful. A careless esrog merchant can scratch and ruin a beautiful esrog. Students are the same. Handle them with care, and they will shine. Mishandle them, and you ruin them, r'l."

It states in this week's parashah (23:40), ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדור, "You shall take for yourselves on the first day a beautiful fruit of a tree." Chazal tell us that פרי עץ means the tree and the fruit should have the same taste. (This refers to an esrog because it and its tree taste the same.)

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l said that fruit connotes children, and the tree indicates the parents. Our goal is, ענין ופרי שווה, the tree and the fruit should be the same. The children should be as good as their parents (or better).

The four children at the Seder are the chacham, rasha, tam, and the she'eino yodeia lish'ol. We can explain that these children symbolize four generations, and the yeridas hadoros, the decline of generations. The first generation is the chacham, someone who is too smart for his own good. He asks too many questions and is unwilling to listen to the answers and accept the rules of the Torah with simple faith. The next generation will be a rebellious son, the rasha. After that, the third generation will be a tam, who knows very little about Yiddishkeit. Then comes the she'eino yodeia lish'ol, the fourth generation, who knows nothing at all about Yiddishkeit. They don't have questions because they know nothing at all. It all began with a chacham, who asked too many questions and didn't want to accept the Torah with simple faith.

6. Counting the Omer also serves a preventive function. The *rishonim* say that the *yetzer hara* becomes stronger during the summer months, when the sun shines brightly and the world becomes warmer. We count the *omer* at the beginning of the summer as a remedy that helps us overcome the *yetzer hara*. (This is also why we learn *Pirkei Avos* this time of the year.)

It can be compared to a child who is vaccinated shortly after birth so he shouldn't become ill. Similarly, at the beginning of the summer, HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives us Sefiras Ha'Omer to strengthen us so we won't become sick with sin.

It states (Devarim 10:12) ועתה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׂאֵל מֵעַמְּךָ בִּי אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, "And now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d..." We can say that this *pasuk* refers to the days of sefiras ha'omer. This is because the days of sefiras ha'omer are days of teshuvah and fear of Hashem, and this *pasuk* alludes to teshuvah and fear of Hashem. בִּי אִם לִירְאָה is fear of Hashem, and ועתה, Chazal say, is an expression of teshuvah.

These two aspects – fear and teshuvah – are the theme of the sefira period.

These are days of teshuvah. Reb Aharon of Zitomer said that these days correspond to Aseres Yemei

When counting the omer, we say the tefillah רבונו של עולם אתה ציוותנו... לספור ספירת העומר "Ribono Shel Olam, You commanded us... to count sefiras ha'omer, to purify ourselves from our *klipos* and our tumah..." But it isn't enough to say the words; the central part is our kavanah when we say this tefillah. As the Or HaChaim writes on (Devarim 26:7) וְנִצַּעַק אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ "We shouted out to Hashem, the G-d of our fathers..." The Or HaChaim writes, "The Torah hints that a person must pray to Hashem every day to be saved from the yetzer hara."

However, it isn't only about saying the words, but rather the kavanah that comes along with the words, and the plea of the heart to Hashem that we should become clean from the tumah that has enveloped us.

The siddurim of the Sefardim add into the l'shem yichud the pasuk ואומר לך בדמייך חיי "I said to you, 'With your blood, live.' I said to you, 'With your blood, live.'"

Blood indicates all one's strength, heart, and soul. One should be prepared to sacrifice his self and his desires to Hashem, and then it will be בדמייך חיי, that he will attain life and chiyus.

The Beis Avraham zt'l says that ספירה is gematriya בשמחה. This is because counting the sefirah grants us kedushah (as we say in the l'shem yichud, ולקדשנו), and attaining kedushah is a great joy. The Zohar (beginning of parashas Kedoshim 81a) teaches, "When the friends came to this parashah [which discusses kedushah] they were happy." Therefore, ספירה is בשמחה gematria.

The Zohar (Titzaveh 183b) states, "Whoever is cautious [from aveiros and he performs mitzvos] between Pesach and Shavuos, he won't be judged in Tishrei."

The Imrei Emes (ד"ה וספרתם) writes in the name of the Arizal that just as fruits and grains grow between Pesach and Shavuos, so is it a time for the spiritual growth of the human soul.

This is also written in the Maharal (Chidushei Agados, Rosh Hashanah): He explains that the yomim tovim resemble the crops. Pesach is in חודש האביב, the month when the crops are fully grown, and Shavuos is called חג הקציר, when the crops are harvested. This is because just as it is the time for the growth of agriculture, it is also the time for the soul's development. These are days mesugal to grow spiritually.

Teshuvah. The Beis Avraham zt'l also compared the days of sefira to Aseres Yemei Teshuvah.

They are also days of yiras Shamayim. The Maharsha (Avodah Zarah 3a ד"ה בתוס') writes that Bnei Yisrael acquire pure fear of Hashem during the days of sefiras ha'omer.

It states in this pasuk מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שִׂאֵל מֵעַמּוֹךְ, that Hashem is asking from us מָה, and Chazal (Menachos 43b) teach מָה, one hundred. We can explain that we shouldn't consider these days מָה, which represents something small, rather 100, מֵאָה, implying these are very special and important days. Furthermore, when a person acts in these days as he should, it will be considered as though he rectified one hundred years of his life.

When we reach the fiftieth day of sefiras ha'omer, Shavuos, everyone pleads to Hashem וְתן בְּלִבֵּנוּ בִּינָה לְהִבִּין, and we daven for comprehension and success in Torah study. We can explain this with the expression that the בעל המאה is the בעל הדעה, "the one who has a hundred – a lot of money – he is the one whose daas, opinion, matters." Literally, the expression means that the one who pays the bills decides how things should get done. That's how it generally is. But we can also say that when one counts the sefirah, and serves Hashem during these days, it is like he rectified one hundred years of his life, and he meirts daas, understanding in Torah. Thus, the בעל המאה is the בעל הדעה; he rectified a hundred years of his life and attained wisdom in Torah.

The Reshash (Nahar Shalom p.32b) writes, "Pesach and these days [of sefiras ha'omer] are the root of all days of the year. How a person acts these days is how he will be led the entire year."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* writes that everything that happens to man throughout his lifetime depends on the days of sefiras ha'omer.

The Chida (in the name of Rabbeinu Efraim) writes that the fifty hooks on the covering of the Mishkan (*Shemos* 26:10, ועשית חמישים לולאות) represent the fifty days of the *sefirah*, days when the Jewish nation becomes connected and attached to their Father in Heaven.

We can tell a story of a person, a *shlamazel*, who never succeeded in earning money. One day, he came to his Rebbe and said, "I made a shlissel challah [the custom to place a key in the Shabbos chalos]. I heard it is mesugal for parnassah, but the segulah didn't work. My bank account is still empty, and I am falling deeper and deeper into debt."

The Rebbe replied, "The segulah works; the problem is that *you* don't work. You have to work and make hishtadlus to earn your parnassah."

We write this story as a mashal for what happens during the days of sefiras ha'omer. The days are mesugal to grow spiritually. We say every day after sefiras ha'omer ואטמר ואתקדש בקדושה של מעלה, that in the merit of the mitzvah of sefiras ha'omer, we should receive holiness and purity. But sometimes, a person doesn't see any spiritual growth at all. He says to his Rebbe, "The segulah doesn't work."

The Rebbe replies, "The segulah works fine, the problem is that you aren't working." A person has to toil in avodas Hashem and try to grow these days, and then he will succeed.

The Mishnah (*Idiyos* 2:10) states, "[Reb Akiva] said: Five things are for twelve months: (1) The *mabul* was for twelve months. (2) Iyov

suffered for twelve months. (3) The ten plagues were for twelve months. (4) The punishment for Gog and Magog in the future will be for twelve months. (5) The *resha'im* are punished in Gehinom for twelve months... Reb Yochanan ben Nuri disagrees with the fifth statement, and says מן הפסח ועד העצרת, the *resha'im* are punished in Gehinom from Pesach until Shavuos..."

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* quotes the *Shibolei HaLeket* (and other commentaries) who say that מן הפסח עד העצרת is literal. There are forty-nine days of *sefirah* – between Pesach and Shavuos – when Gehinnom is active and the *resha'im* are punished.

The purpose of Gehinnom isn't to punish but rather to purify. The Chidushei HaRim teaches that just as in heaven, the purification term takes place between Pesach and Shavuos, so too, we purify ourselves in these weeks. If people take advantage of this time, they won't need the purification in Gehinnom.

In conclusion, we are learning that we should take advantage of these holy days of sefiras ha'omer. Every hour of these days is like two weeks of a person's life, and when he has many good hours, he can reach very high levels.

Lamnatzeach (Tehillim 67)

Many say the chapter למנצה בנגינות (Tehillim 67) after counting the omer. In some siddurim, this chapter is written in the form of a menorah. The Maharshal quotes the Rokeach who says, "Whoever says this chapter from a design of a menorah, and he does so every day at *netz hachamah*, no bad *gezeiros* will befall him. The Creator of the world, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, will consider it as if he lit the lamps in the menorah in the Beis HaMikdash. He is guaranteed Olam HaBa. And whoever says it after Birkas Kohanim, in the morning, during the seven weeks of sefiras ha'omer, לא יקרה לו שום נזק כל השנה, he won't have any damage the entire year, and he will succeed with everything he does. This chapter discusses seven topics, corresponding to the seven branches of the

menorah, they are חנינה, ברכה, אור, ישועה, הודאה, שמחה, רננה. All of these matters will be the portion of Bnei Yisrael in the future. Whoever says it seven times with kavanah when he is traveling, he will travel in peace and with success."

Reb Chaim Palagi writes in the name of Igeres HaRamban, "All days of sefiras ha'omer, one should say during the birkas kohanim the chapter למנצח בגינות in the form of a menorah, and this is a segulah to succeed in all matters, and he won't be damaged the entire day... Shevet Mussar (31:11) writes this segulah without defining that it is meant for the days of sefiras ha'omer. It seems he understood that the segulah is for the entire year."

Chol Ha'Moed

The Gemara (*Chagigah* 18.) asks, "How do we know that it is forbidden to work on *chol hamoed*?"

Reb Yonoson makes a *kal vechomer* and says that since *chol hamoed* is preceded by a *yom tov*, when one is forbidden to work (the first day of Pesach), and is followed by a *yom tov* (the seventh day of Pesach), we can deduce that also in between, on *chol hamoed*, one is forbidden to work.

According to this explanation, the Ramban (this week's parashah, 23:36) writes that the days of *sefirah* are also like Chol Hamoed, as they are in between two holidays- Pesach at the beginning and Shavuos at the end. These days are also holy, just like chol hamoed.

The Ramban writes, "The days of the *omer* are like chol hamoed. Chol hamoed are the days between the first and last day of a holiday. Similarly, the days of sefiras haomer are between Pesach and Shavuos."⁷

The Torah connects the *yomim tovim* to agriculture. Pesach is called חג האביב, the holiday of bloom, because it arrives in the season when the grains in the fields reach their full height. Shavuos is חג הקציר, the holiday of harvest because it is celebrated when the crops have ripened and are ready to be cut. Succos is called חג האסיף, the holiday of ingathering, because it is celebrated when the produce drying in the fields is brought into the home.

It seems to be interesting that these holy days should be directly connected to agricultural themes.

The Maharal explains that, indeed, there is another intention. The happenings in the field mirror what happens with an individual's spirituality. In the months between Pesach and Shavuos, the grains bloom and grow until they are ready for harvest. For the individual, this means that these days are days of growth.

Preparing for Shavuos

Most *yamim tovim* are named for the miracles that occurred then. פסח means compassion or to skip, and commemorates Hashem's mercy on us as He skipped over the homes of Yidden during *makas bechoros*. Similarly, other holidays are named for the

7. The Shulchan Aruch (489:1) states that we don't get married during the sefirah because they are days of mourning.

The Rebbe of Ruzhin zy"l asks that there should be another reason we don't make chasunos during sefirah. The days of sefirah are like chol hamoed. Just as we don't celebrate chasunos on Chol HaMoed, we shouldn't celebrate chasunos during sefirah.

The answer is that it depends on each individual and how they treat the days of the omer. If he is engaged in Torah, tefillah, etc., during the days of sefiras ha'omer, the days are like chol hamoed for him. He won't make weddings these days just as one doesn't make weddings on Chol Hamoed. If someone doesn't sanctify himself on the days of sefiras ha'omer, he also must refrain from making a wedding during the days of sefira, but for him, the reason is that they are days of mourning.

miracles or salvation that occurred. However, the meaning of Shavuos, is "weeks," named for the seven weeks of sefiras ha'omer that preceded it. We wonder, why isn't Shavuos named for the miracles that surrounded *matan Torah*?

Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin *zt'l* answered with a *mashal*:

A king was in the process of building and decorating a new palace. He hired four artists to decorate the walls of the grand room, where he would sit on his throne and greet visitors. Each artist was assigned to decorate one wall.

Three of the artists worked hard and created stunning masterpieces. The fourth artist didn't show up to work at all. The other artists often wondered about that foolish artist who would certainly be severely punished for neglecting his duty to paint the fourth wall of the king's throne room.

The deadline was approaching, and the fourth artist finally showed up at the palace. He installed a wall-to-wall mirror, covering the entire fourth wall of the room.

His wall was more beautiful than the others because it reflected the other three walls.

The king admired the three artists' artwork, but the beauty of the fourth wall was extraordinary. The artist explained to the king that he could have painted the wall, but he knew a mirror would be even more beautiful. The king awarded him generously.⁸

Shavuos is like a mirror; it reflects all our improvement and good *middos* we attained in the weeks leading up to Shavuos.

It states in this week's parashah (23:16) עד מחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום, "You shall count until the day after the seventh week..." Tzaddikim say that this hints that until Shavuos, you can still rectify. Even if you didn't improve your ways during most days of the omer, you can utilize the final few days leading up to Shavuos to grow in avodas Hashem and improve your middos.

The Arugas HaBosem *zt'l* adds that even if one came to Shavuos and he didn't improve his ways at all during the seven weeks of *sefiras ha'Omer*, it also isn't too late. As it states (about Shavuos, *Vayikra* 23:21), וקראתם, בעצם היום הזה מקרא קודש יהיה לכם. This *pasuk* implies that even בעצם היום הזה in the middle of Shavuos you can make a decision מקרא קודש, to draw yourself towards holiness, and that will be sufficient.

Each year, Shavuos is on the fiftieth day of counting the omer. Still, the first Shavuos, the day that Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai, the Torah was given on the 51st day after the omer, as Chazal (*Shabbos* 87.) tell us, Moshe added on one more day, to provide the nation with an extra day to prepare for *matan Torah*. The Arugas HaBosem explains that this was to show that Shavuos isn't exclusively connected to the omer. One can make all the preparations he needs on Shavuos itself.⁹

8. According to a different version of the story, the king hung a bag of gold coins on each of the three walls to reward the artist who designed that wall. Then the king turned to the fourth artist and said, "Look at the mirror. See the reflection of three bags of gold. That's your reward."

9. The Arugas HaBosem writes, "Moshe Rabbeinu foresaw that the Jewish people would be at a very low level in *galus* and they won't be able to properly prepare themselves to receive the light of the yom tov of *matan Torah*. He yearned for each Yid to experience the light of the King's face that shines on Shavuos... Therefore, Moshe added another day on his own... If *Matan Torah* immediately followed *sefiras ha'omer*, one would have assumed that it's impossible to receive the light of the Torah without keeping the *sefirah* properly. But since *Matan Torah* wasn't immediately after the *sefirah*, this proves they are not interdependent... Even if a Yid failed to purify himself properly [during *sefiras ha'omer*], he can still benefit from the light of *matan Torah*."

Sefer HaChinuch (306) writes, "We are obligated to begin counting the *omer* following [the first day of] Pesach until we reach the day we received the Torah to show our strong desire for this special day. It can be compared to a slave who counts the days towards his freedom. Counting demonstrates yearning and waiting for the arrival of something great."

The Chinuch asks why we count the days that have passed. To show our anticipation for Shavuot, wouldn't it be better to count the remaining days?

The Chidushei HaRim l'tz answers that each day of *sefiras ha'omer* brings us to a higher level of purity. Thus, we aren't only excited about the approaching matan Torah but also happy with each passing day and its unique accomplishments.

The Chidushei HaRim l'tz adds that the korban omer, brought on the first day of *sefiras ha'omer*, was made from barley, animal fodder. The counting culminates with Shavuot, when the *shte halechem* were brought, a korban made from wheat flour, a food fitting for humans. This demonstrates that these days, we rise from being like animals to human beings. This is why we count the passing days. We are happy with each passing day as it brings us closer to our goal.

"The Greater One Shines on the Smaller One" (להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים)

Rashi (21:1) writes, להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים, which can imply that the youths must never forget who the elders are. They must remember whom they must respect.

Once, at the Seder of the Kotzker Rebbe zt'l, someone broke the middle matzah and measured the pieces, trying to figure out which part was larger. The Kotzker quipped, "A *gadol* (the larger one) that needs to be measured isn't a *gadol*." Similarly, if one has difficulty recognizing who the father is and who is the child, the father isn't behaving

like a father. This hierarchy should always be evident without the need to be measured.

We can also say that להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים is teaching a lesson for those who are active in *kiruv rechokim* (to draw irreligious Yidden to Yiddishkeit). להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים means that the person who is in a better spiritual state must know that he is the גדולים, at a higher place, and he shouldn't get confused regarding who is influencing whom.

Reb Eliyahu Dessler zt'l described it this way:

If someone falls into a pit, you should stand outside and try to pull him out. Don't go down into the hole and try pushing him out because you might also remain stuck in the pit.

The same is true with *kiruv*. You must stand outside the *tumah*, be firm with your religious commitment, and pull others up to your level from that safe spot.

There used to be a *kiruv* organization called P'eylim, and a yeshiva *bachur* asked the Steipler Gaon zt'l whether he should join the P'eylim activities during *bein hazmanim*. The Steipler replied that he shouldn't participate because it would cause *bitul Torah*.

The *bachur* responded, "I wasn't referring to the middle of the *zman*. I was referring to *bein hazmanim*, when I don't study that much anyway."

The Steipler still felt that he shouldn't go. The Steipler raised one of his *tzitzis* of his *talis katan* and showed the *bachur* that the *shamesh*, the long string that wraps around the others, was the same length as the other strings. The Steipler commented, "Initially, it was longer than the others, but since it was going around the others, it became smaller." The message was, if you go out to perform *kiruv*, and hang around people at lower levels, it might affect your own level. (Each case must be considered individually because *kiruv rechokim* is a great mitzvah.)