

בעזהש״ת

# Parshah Insights

Pertinent Inspirational  
Insights on the Parshah

פרשת שמיני

Translated from the outstanding Lev Shomaya Parsha series that contain highlights of the lectures and deroshos given by:

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## פרשת שמיני - ספירת העומר

### שִׁבְעַ שַׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימֹת

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאְכֶם אֶת  
עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַ שַׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה. עַד  
מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם  
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה (ויקרא כג-טו)

And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day, from the day you bring the *Omer* as a wave offering, seven weeks; they shall be complete.

You shall count until the day after the seventh week, the fiftieth day, when you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord.

### *Counting in Anticipation*

We were commanded to begin counting from the day the *korban Omer* was brought, counting seven weeks, culminating with the *yom tov* of *Shavuot*. The *Rishonim* explain that counting is an anticipatory act; we joyfully calculate and prepare for the most momentous day - the day we received the Torah.

(ספר החינוך מצוה שו)

The *Ran* quotes a source from Chazal, stating that *Klal Yisroel* had already counted *sefira* in the year they left Mitzrayim, even before the Torah obligated them to. Whilst still in Mitzrayim, Moshe Rabbeinu informed the *Yidden* they would be redeemed, and that the purpose

of their redemption was so that they would be free to serve their Creator. Hashem told Moshe, (שמות ג יב) *וְתֵצְאֶנּוּ אֶת הַיִּדֶּן מִמִּצְרָיִם* - when you take the Yidden out of Mitzrayim, you will serve Hashem on this mountain (Har Sinai).

After their miraculous redemption, the Yidden approached Moshe and asked him, *אֶמְתִּי עֲבוּדָה זֹאת* - when do we start the *Avodas Hashem* you spoke of as the reason for our redemption? Moshe Rabbeinu replied, *לְסוֹף חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם* - in another fifty days. *Klal Yisroel* immediately began counting toward this monumental day, the day they would receive the Torah.

(ר"ן סוף מס' פסחים)

## The Counting Cleanses

Many *seforim* quote the *Zohar*, stating that the seven weeks we count are like the seven days counted as part of the ritual to cleanse oneself of *tumah* - impurity.

Before Yetzias Mitzrayim, *Klal Yisrael* performed the mitzvah of *Bris Milah*. This mitzvah separated them from the *Mitzrim*, and the pervasive *tumah* of their idolatrous, sinful surroundings no longer had an effect on them. However, the earlier impact of the *טְמֵאָה* they had reached through being amongst the *Mitzrim* up until then still clung to them. Therefore, they had to count seven weeks. This slowly purified them, elevating them from the forty-ninth level of impurity to the exalted forty-ninth level of *kedusha*. In this way, they were able to approach *Kabbolas HaTorah* ready to become Hashem's Nation.

The *Kedushas Levi* quotes this *Zohar*, answering a question many ask regarding the mitzvah of *sefiras ha'omer*: why is the *bracha* of *שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ* not recited when counting *sefira*? Every mitzvah that is set for a specific time of the year is an occasion when we thank Hashem for having brought us to the given time and place. We say *שְׁהַחֲיֵנוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ* *וְהִגִּינוּ לָזֶמַּן הַזֶּה* - You have kept us alive, and sustained us, and brought

*us to this special moment.* How does the *mitzva* of *sefira* differ from the other *mitzvos* in that this *bracha* is not recited?

He answers that, according to the explanation of the Zohar, the counting of *sefira* is not a specific period or important juncture where we have arrived. Rather, its significance is that it is a journey, an anticipatory journey to a most crucial destination - *Matan Torah*. Therefore, the *bracha* of *Shehecheyanu* is not recited, for this *mitzvah* is not a point of arrival, but a means of preparation. It is an expression of our yearning to reach the day we will receive the greatest treasure of all - the *Torah Hakdoshah*.

(קדושת לוי לספירה)

## *Yearning and Desire*

The *Bnei Yisaschar* dissects the *posuk* commanding the *mitzva* of *sefira*, and identifies some difficulties with its phrasing. The *posuk* says *שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה* - *seven whole weeks they shall be*. The *Bnei Yisaschar* asks what is the significance of the word *תְּמִימוֹת*, whole? Is the fact that the *posuk* says "seven weeks" not enough to obviously mean "whole weeks"? Would we then think the *posuk* to mean partial weeks?

Furthermore, what does *תִּהְיֶינָה* - *it should be*, come to mean? Only Hashem can bring something into being. We can only count, and Hashem creates the days.

Lastly, the *posuk* tells us to count seven whole weeks, which would total forty-nine days. But it then continues, instructing us *תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם* - *you shall count fifty days*. Are we to count forty-nine or fifty days?

The *Bnei Yisaschar* then quotes his *mechutan*, the *Kedushas Levi*, whose explanation of the *sefira* as an anticipatory journey answers the above questions. He says that since the counting of the days is a means of coming closer to *Kabbolas HaTorah*, all 49 days are connected in their shared purpose. Therefore, the *posuk* instructs the weeks to be *תְּמִימוֹת* - *whole, complete in their nature of yearning*. *תִּהְיֶינָה* - *they shall*

*be*; each day is to be spent in equal longing and preparation for *Kabbolas HaTorah*. We must turn every day into a significant time of passion, desire, and anticipation for the day we receive the Torah.

Thus, because the entire purpose of counting these forty-nine days is to reach the pinnacle, the fiftieth day, the Torah says to count fifty days even though we are previously instructed to count only forty-nine. This is because the purpose of the forty-nine days is to reach the fiftieth day in a state of appropriate readiness.

When the Torah describes how Avraham Avinu performed the mitzva of *Bris Milah* for his son Yitzchok, the *posuk* says וַיִּמַּל אֲבִרְהָם אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶת יָמִים - *and Avraham circumcised his son Yitzchok at eight days old* (בראשית כא ד). The *sefarim* tell us that the term שְׁמוֹנֶת יָמִים, as opposed to the regular שְׁמוֹנָה יָמִים, not only means "on the eighth day," but includes all previous eight days, too. Understandably, Avraham didn't circumcise Yitzchak on each of the eight days. Why then does the Torah use this expression?

The expression epitomizes Avraham's attitude in regard to the mitzva he was commanded to do. Avraham did not sit back and wait for the eighth day to approach so he would be able to perform the mitzvah of *Bris Milah*. Rather, he joyously prepared for the entire eight days prior, waiting longingly to be able to perform this great mitzvah. Therefore, it is reckoned as though he actually performed the mitzvah on all eight days.

Through the forty-nine days preceding *Kabbolas HaTorah*, *Klal Yisroel*, too, actively prepare and lovingly await this awesome day. If indeed these days are used in reverent preparation, each and every day of *sefira* can be reckoned as a *Kabbolas HaTorah* of its own, hence the above.

## Replacing Slavery with Avodas Hashem

Meforshim expound upon the first mitzvah of the *Aseres Hadibros* - אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים (שמות כ ב) - *I am Hashem, Your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*. The Torah explicitly uses the term **מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים**, implying that we became *Ovdei Hashem* because Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. He redeemed us from exile under the Egyptians for us to become His עֲבָדִים.

(רמב"ן, אבן עזרא, אור החיים שם)

As aforementioned, ridding ourselves of *tumas Mitzrayim* was a process of seven weeks. The counting of the *sefira* had a dual effect. Not only did the count of count forty-nine days slowly rid the *Yidden* of every last vestige of *Mitzri* impurity, but the counting towards *Kabbolas HaTorah* actually enabled them to elevate themselves. Because they yearned to become *Ovdei Hashem*, every additional day of counting towards becoming *Ovdei Hashem* meant their servitude to Paraoah was slowly diminished. Their desire to come closer to holiness, displayed through their anticipatory counting, naturally expelled the earlier effects of the base desires that clung to them in Mitzrayim.

The *posuk* says וַיַּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרִיִּם (דברים כו ו) - *and the Mitzrim treated us cruelly*. They afflicted us and imposed hard labor upon us. The *Ohr Hachaim* says that וַיַּרְעוּ also means they made us רע - evil. They implanted within us their wicked traits and they fashioned us in their image. They wished to change the nature of *Klal Yisroel*, and turn us into an evil, depraved nation. Indeed, they almost succeeded, and *Klal Yisroel* were just one step before the lowest level of impurity, from which there is no escape.

In the *parsha* of נָזִיר, the *posuk* says כִּי נֶזֶר אֱלֹהֵי עַל רֹאשׁוֹ (במדבר ו ז) - *the crown of his G-d is on his head*. The *Even Ezra* explains that human beings are all slaves; they are enslaved to their constant needs and physical desires. The *Nazir*, who denied himself these physical



pleasures, became a king. He was no longer a slave to his temptations, but a king who ruled over his heart. And in that manner, he came closer to the crown of Hashem.

The *Sefer Chareidim* says that the seventh *bracha* in *Shemonei Esrei* - גואל ישראל - in which we daven for the *geulah*, is also a *tefilla* for redemption from our *yetzer hara*. Because the worst and most pervasive enslavement is that of the shackles of our evil inclination, we must constantly *daven* to be redeemed from that *golus*. He relates the supplication of a *Chassid*, who used to daven: 'I want to be an עבד ליצורי, a servant of my Creator, rather than an עבד ליצר, a servant of my evil inclination.

(ספר חרדים עה"ת - תפלה)

When we look towards *Matan Torah* with joy, when we yearn to accept upon ourselves the dictates of the Torah and to become true *Ovdei Hashem*, we become less of a slave to Pharaoh every day. We free ourselves from enslavement to our *ta'avos*; our physical pleasures, and basest desires.

Understandably, because the *tumah* was so pervasive, the process of cleansing took time. Therefore, forty-nine days were counted, in which we yearned to finally reach *Kabbolas HaTorah*. Through this process of anticipation, we were completely purified and ready to become the Nation of Hashem. So too, every year at this time we go through the same process, ridding ourselves of previous impurities and undesirable 'enslavements', readying ourselves to once again receive the Torah and become true *Ovdei Hashem*.

## Understanding the Treasure

As discussed above, *sefira* is a time of anticipation and preparation for *Kabbolas HaTorah*. But how does one actually prepare for such an awesome moment? Perhaps the answer is contained within the question. It is our desire to prepare, our overwhelming yearning to become servants of Hashem, that are the best preparation.



A person is where his heart desires him to be. If our strongest desire, our greatest wish, is to come closer and closer to *Kabbolas HaTorah*, that in itself makes us a Torah Yid. Our תַּאֲוָה and תַּשׁוּקָה, our hope and will to become closer to Hashem automatically replace our lowly desires, creating a most fitting preparation for *Kabbolas HaTorah*. The counting towards *Kabbolas HaTorah* is its preparation because it is a display of our love towards Hashem and His Torah.

When Moshe Rabbeinu was preparing Klal Yisroel before *Matan Torah*, he said וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי... וְהֵייתֶם לִי סֻגָּלָה (שמות יט ה) - *and now, if you will listen to Kol Hashem, you will reach an exalted status*. Rashi expounds on the word וְעַתָּה - and now, saying כָּל הַתְחָלוֹת קָשׁוֹת - *all beginnings are difficult*, and מִכָּאן וְאֵלֶּה יִעֲרֹב לָכֶם, *and thereafter it will become sweet for you*. The start of the commitment is difficult; each decision to choose *Avodas Hashem* over self-serving desires is hard, but it is followed by a rush of sweetness that is incomparable. The superficial sweetness of worldly pleasure is replaced by a joy that cannot be described.

Indeed, this yearning will be our preparation for our 'arrival at *Har Sinai*'. Working on recognizing the joy of *Avodas Hashem* and making this the central tenet of our lives will help us to hone our senses to understand and feel that Torah is the ultimate joy, and that nothing can ever be remotely compared to it. This understanding, this clarity of thought, is surely the greatest cleansing process in preparation for *Kabbolas HaTorah*.







