

## Building Oneself- Sefirat HaOmer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Chazal say, "*Derech erez kadma l'Torah.*" Before we can become a receptacle for Torah we need to work on our middot. The sages say, "If a person says, 'Let me learn, let me be filled with wisdom, and then I will work on my *middot*,' all of one's wisdom and much of one's Torah will be lost." The period of *sefirat haomer* is a time to work on the 48 ways through which the Torah is acquired. The sixth chapter of Pirkei Avot lists these qualities, which include listening attentively, serving Hashem with joy, knowing one's place, and

making a Rebbe for oneself. These 48 ways parallel the 48 days between Pesach and Shavuot. The 49th day is a review.

In Pirkei Avot, Rabbi Elazar ben Arach says that the most important thing is to have a *lev tov* (good heart). The numerical value of *lev* is 32, *tov* is 17; together they equal 49. The first 32 days of sefirah correspond to *lev*. It is a time to focus on our hearts and to internalize the message of the death of the students of Rabbi Akiva. It's a time to work on *mitzvot*

between man and man, to treat others with respect, and to become kinder and more giving people. *Lag Ba'omer* is the turning point. As we approach the last two thirds of *sefirat haomer*, we concentrate on the *lekach tov*, the goodness that is Torah. We should focus on *mitzvot* between ourselves and Hashem and to prepare to receive the Torah anew. Only after we have ascended the 49 rungs of *sefirah*, having worked through all the *middot*, can we stand ready to receive the Torah on Shavuot.

## The Power of the Month of Iyar

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Sefer Yetzira teaches us that each month of the year parallels several things: a letter of the *aleph bet*, a tribe, and a constellation. The month of Iyar corresponds to the letter *vav*, to the tribe of Shimon, and to the constellation of the ox. The month of Nissan corresponds to the tribe of Reuven. Leah said about Reuven, "*Ra'ah Hashem et onyi*. Hashem saw my suffering." When she had Shimon she said, "*Ki shama Hashem ki senuah anochi*. Hashem heard that I am hated." Nissan is about seeing and Iyar is about listening. What is the connection between the two? In Tanach, the month of Iyar is called *chodesh ziv*, a glowing month. In Nissan, Hashem revealed His divine light. Iyar reflects that light. At the Red Sea, a simple maid saw more than all the glorious visions of the prophet Yechezkel. The Jewish people gained a profound level of clarity that gave them the strength for the journey to become the nation of Hashem. But although the month of Nissan was the month of seeing, it was a momentary revelation. When it ended the Bnei Yisrael were still at the level they were at before, but with the added vision of how spiritually wanting they were.

This was expressed in the barley offering that was brought on the sixteenth day of Nissan. Barley is animal food. The Jews felt the dominance of their animalistic side vis a vis the great holiness they had experienced. The verse in Tehilim says, "*Shimi bat ure'i, v'hati ozneich*. Hear daughter and see and understand the depths of what is beyond."

There are many levels of grasping things. When we see Hashem from up close, our vision changes. We understand that spirituality is paramount and everything else is immaterial.

Clarity can inspire motivation. We must then work to make it a part of us. If there is a particle of dirt or dust between two surfaces they will not cling to each other. Desire and inspiration can be blocked by negative character traits. Nissan is about seeing and experiencing. Iyar is about listening and working through it. The seven weeks between Pesach and Shavuot are meant to purify us.

Sivan, the third month, corresponds to Levi, an expression of attachment. Iyar connects Nissan to Sivan which is why it corresponds to the letter *vav*. If we take the inspiration of Nissan to work through our character traits in Iyar, Hashem will attach Himself to us in Sivan.

The constellation of Nissan is a sheep, Iyar has the ox, and Sivan twins. The Jewish nation are called, "*Yonati, tamati*," my dove, my wholesome one. The Midrash says do not read it *tamati* but *te'omati*, my twin. Twins share a partnership, an attachment, and each one gives to the other. Our goal should be to actualize this bond with Hashem.

The sheep and the ox are the medium to get there. The Shem Mishmuel explains that a sheep symbolizes coddling, love, and care. If it is put to work, its production of milk and wool diminishes. That was Nissan. We were not as

yet worthy to take on the mission of bringing the world to its purpose. Therefore, Hashem treated us gently. He revealed His divine light and love before we were worthy to receive it. In the beginning it was necessary to kindle the spark of inspiration, but it would not have brought the Jews to their final purpose. The ox symbolizes hard labor and accepting a yoke. The arduous, inner, work of Iyar makes us worthy to cleave to Hashem in Sivan.

In the introductory blessing, *yehi ratzon*, before counting the *omer* we ask Hashem to purify us, to take away the shell that covers our heart, so that we can connect to Him once again. We begin saying Pirkei Avot in Iyar because these chapters teach us how to elevate ourselves, how to correct our character traits, and how to remove the barriers that prevent us from tapping into the energy of the month.

To the extent we can detach ourselves from materialism and instead trust in Hashem, to that end we can become one with Torah and Hashem. In the desert, the mohn began falling in the month of Iyar. Chazal say that the Torah was given to those who ate *mohn*. *Mohn* was a spiritual food. The Jews had to constantly trust that Hashem would send them what they needed as they could only collect enough for one day. Iyar tells us that by attaching ourselves to Hashem our material well-being improves as well.

The nature of a sheep is to be part of a flock.

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In Nissan, Hashem viewed us on a national level. That is why even the simplest maid could experience the full revelation of the *Shechina*, relying on the merit of the *klal*. The ultimate goal is for every Jew to reach the maximum level he can attain by his own efforts. This is the month of Iyar whose constellation is an ox, an independent solitary animal. In Iyar, we focus on correcting our personal *middot*. We work on rectifying

ourselves on an individual level.

Sivan blends both aspects. On the one hand the Jews had unity at Har Sinai, as the verse says, "*Vayichan sham Yisrael*." But there was also a focus on the individual. At the giving of the Torah, Hashem designated places where each person should stand. Moshe went up to the top of the mountain. Aharon stood lower, Nadav and Avihu still lower, and the rest of the

Jewish people still lower at the foot of the mountain. After attaining national and individual perfection, the Jews were deemed worthy to receive the Torah. Every year on Shavuot, if we utilize the potential of Nissan and Iyar to its fullest, we too can reach the ideal state necessary to accept the Torah.

## Ask the Dayan 3

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dayan Shlomo Cohen

### Question:

Mr. Bloch does business with a number of suppliers. One supplier relies on him to keep an account of how much he is owed. This particular month Mr. Bloch is not sure if he owes the supplier \$2,000 or \$3,000. What is his obligation towards the supplier?

### Answer:

The Shulchan Aruch discusses a case in which a claim is made. Let's say the supplier claims he's owed \$3,000. Mr. Bloch knows there was a debt at some point for \$3,000. He isn't sure whether he already partially repaid \$1,000 and now only owes \$2,000, or if he still owes the full amount. According to halacha, Mr. Bloch must pay the full \$3,000 since at one point there was a debt of that amount. In the case where Mr. Bloch is not sure if he ever owed the supplier \$3,000 he would be required to make a solemn oath that he does not know the exact amount owed. He would then only have to pay \$2,000. In our times, when oaths are no longer made, beit

din may decide on a compromise based on the arguments each side brings.

In a case when the supplier makes a claim, Mr. Bloch can be made to pay a third of the sum in question.

But in the case we are discussing, the supplier is not making a claim. He is relying on Mr. Bloch to determine how much he is owed. Based on the Shulchan Aruch, if Mr. Bloch knows that at some point in time he owed \$3,000, but he is in doubt whether he repaid it or not, beit din cannot make him pay the full amount. However he has a moral obligation to do so. If Mr. Bloch is in doubt whether he ever owed the \$3,000, he is not obligated to pay the full amount and would only need to pay \$2,000. The halacha is the same if the supplier is a Jew or a non-Jew. In fact, if he is a non-Jew, paying back the full amount would be an opportunity to glorify the name of Hashem by showing how honest and morally correct Jews are.

The Shulchan Aruch states clearly that stealing from a non-Jew is prohibited. The Rama cites an opinion that even if the non-Jew forgets about a debt, one should repay it. The Beer Hagolah writes, "I write this for generations. I have seen many people who profited by cheating non-Jews but in the end lost all their money and left nothing after them. On the other hand, I've seen many who returned money to non-Jews in cases where they weren't obligated. In the end they prospered."

There is a famous story of a Jew who bought a house from a non-Jew. While renovating, he uncovered a stash of \$30,000 dollars hidden in a wall. He went to Rav Moshe Feinstein and asked him what to do. Rav Moshe told him that he had no obligation to return the money. However if he did, it would be a tremendous kiddush hashem and much blessing would come from it. The Jew returned the money. As predicted, he became a multimillionaire and a prominent supporter of Torah.