



The Stages of Counting the Omer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

The Torah tells us, “*Kedoshim tiheyu...*—Be holy...” The translation of holy is transcendent, not held down by physical limitations. The fact is we are driven to be holy. Our souls thirst for spirituality much like a thirsty person looking for water. If your life has no meaning, you lose the will to live. Because of this, every person no matter at what level, will always have a line they won't cross. There are things we just don't do and things we aspire to do.

We cannot grasp Hashem's infinity but in the period between Pesach and Shavuot, He moves us towards being able to say *Naaseh V'nishma*. On Pesach we brought the barley offering, animal fodder. On Shavuot we offered the *shte'i halechem*, human food. During *sefirah* we move from an animal state to a human state by working on our middot. It's also a time when we mourn the passing of Rabbi Akiva's students. They died because they didn't properly respect each other. Respect is about taking someone seriously by recognizing their inherent divine image. The students of Rabbi Akiva died of choking. The illness impeded their ability to speak and breathe. The *Torah* tells us, Hashem blew a living soul into Adam which Targum translates, a speaking being. Something was blocking Rabbi Akiva's students. Their sense of spirituality didn't come through to their speech. The way you give someone *kavod* has to do with the way you speak to them. The students were a reincarnations of the 24,000 people who died as a result of

worshipping the idol, baal peor. It was all about worshipping the body and of failing to see anything human that deserved respect.

There are 7 primary *middot* represented by the 7 *sefirot* of Hashem that interact with each other ($7 \times 7 = 49$). Every day reflects another *midda* in which we will be challenged. You could choose to let it come forth either by saying no, this is where I won't go, or doing something positive.

The first *midda* is *chesed*. Hashem created the world in order to pour forth His goodness. Everybody has things that are beautiful within them. *Chesed* is finding expression for goodness. The next *midda* is *gevura*-strength. The *Maharal* points out that this is the most corruptible of all *middot*. It's overcoming one's *yetzer hara*. It's being strong enough not to fall in the trap of self-acceptance or blaming one's upbringing or background. The third *midda* is *tiferet* which is honor, beauty, and integrity. It's everything beautiful about the spiritual world. During the days of *tiferet*, seek to do things beautifully. If you have to deal with people who are difficult, speak to them nicely. Try to beautify the *mitzvot*. For instance, if you're cooking for *Shabbos*, do it calmly and with spiritual joy. Treat yourself as a significant person. You deserve to give yourself enough time to daven in the morning, to breathe in and out and think about the miracle of life and to reflect on the beauty in other people.

The next *midda* is *netzach* – eternity. Try to leave an imprint that's eternal. On the days of *netzach*, attempt to give *tzedakah* for something that will leave an everlasting impression on the world. Try to do good deeds that might change things for someone. It could be something simple such as stopping to smile and talk to a pitiful woman. You're telling her she's human and that could be life changing. The next *midda* is *hod* which is splendor. It could also mean gratitude or confession. No man is an island. We're all dependent on others for our spiritual, material, and emotional needs. It's very easy to be grateful to a perfect person, not so easy when he's imperfect. Truth is the whole picture which is seldom one color. Whenever you can say thank you to Hashem or people, find a way to do so. Grateful people are happy people.

The next *midda* is *yesod* which is laying a foundation. Whatever your reality is, find a way to leave something of yourself after you. It could be an expression of any attribute, but it should be something that endures beyond yourself. The last *midda* is *malchut*. If *yesod* is a funnel, *malchut* is the vessel beneath it. It's using all your characteristics and capacities to make Hashem rule in the situation He places you. David was called *hamelech* even though there were so many kings after him because no matter where he was in life, he brought Hashem into the picture. Let us strive to be able to do the same.

A Balanced Life Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

I spent eight years in yeshiva and during that time I'd never read a business book. One of my Rebbes told me, “Soak yourself in *Torah* first. Afterwards you can study secular books and see what they have to say on business matters.” And I did that.

I'll never forget when I started my first job and my boss handed me the book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. It was the first secular book I'd read

in at least 8 years. I was shocked by the stark contrast between the way the book was written and the *Torah* I'd been learning. Don't get me wrong. It was a great book and I thoroughly enjoyed it. But there was never a source brought for anything. It was solely the observation of one man regarding the lifestyle, behavior, and decision making methods of successful people and trying to find the common thread that made them all reach the top. I wasn't used to that. The Gemara I learned would ask a question. Where do you

know that from? And it would say, “*D'ksiv...* it says in the *Torah...* the *Navi* said it.. it's a *Mishna* which was given to us at *Har Sinai...*” Every statement in the *Torah* was substantiated by one crucial fact -Either Hashem said it, or it was transmitted from Hashem to us and therefore we know it's true.

All the business books I read since then all followed the same pattern, trying to distill the secret ingredients that made people reach

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success so that you can mirror your life off them to build a business career. The other thing I noted about these books was that it was only the study of hishtadlut -just strategy on approaching leadership, management, and decision making. And we know as Jews that that's not the primary cause of success in business. Therefore, I chose the best business books in this world- the *Chumash*, *Pirkei Avot*, *Chovot Halevovot*, *Gemara*, *Rambam* ... because there's something there that you'll never find in any business book- the word of Hashem. It doesn't focus on hishtadlut which is a minor component, but on the fundamental idea of what makes a person

succeed.

There's a profound paragraph in the *Chovos Halevovos* where it speaks about how to transform your life from *meorot haTorah* to *meorot hasechel*-from a life which is self-centered, where you do *mitzvot* for your own reward, to doing it so that you can develop a relationship with Hashem. When Hashem speaks to you through your mind, a relationship is formed. He opens you up to see and know Him and to grasp His incredible wisdom. This gift comes from Hashem to someone who makes the *Torah* his guiding light. When you push your mind to the absolute nth degree and you grasp things as clearly as you can through

Torah and then you reach your limit, but you still want to rise up to higher levels of *chasidut*; at that point Hashem will open your mind and give you *siyata d'shmaya* to see things in this world that others don't. That *siyata d'shmaya* is felt in business more than anywhere else. But it's only granted to a person who makes *Torah* his center point. When the *Chumash* is what dictates your decisions at work, when the *Mishnayot* shapes the way you build your business and hire employees, then you will merit *siyata d'shmaya* to build your business; and more importantly you will be engaged in a most incredibly, deep relationship with Hashem.

Traveling the Journey of Life Accompanied by the Book of Tehillim Part 20 Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

There are two stages in developing a spiritual relationship with Hashem. The first is the understanding that this bond is the essence of life and the source of joy. The more we invest in the relationship the more fulfillment it will give us. It will help us transcend the difficulties of life so that we remain joyful even while we are suffering. The second level is translating it into action and actively seeking positive spiritual experiences. For example, if a person finds it hard to give, step one would be to learn and understand the value of giving. Step two would be looking for opportunities to give and forcing oneself to give at the beginning until it becomes a source of fulfillment. When we fill our hearts with positive experiences, it propels us to grow.

The *Kesav V'hakabla* adds that one who is bound to Hashem with strong cords of love will view physical desires as insignificant with no intrinsic value. He'll take from the world what he needs to exist, but it won't consume his thoughts. Every soul has its own way of connecting, whether through *Torah* study, prayer, or acts of kindness. When the soul

experiences the lofty levels of closeness to Hashem, anything below that becomes trivial and physical desires loses its appeal. With this, we can understand the commandment of *Lo sachmod*. The greatest delight one can experience is *kirvat Hashem* and that makes physical desire irrelevant. David Hamelech tells us, if you want to ascend the mountain of Hashem, you have to differentiate between what's intrinsic and what is not and know where to invest one's efforts. Of course, we need to live in a physical world but that's not where our hearts should be nor is it the essence of life.

The Brisker Rav offers a different explanation. Imagine a person with a fire inside of him pushing him to sin. He's overwhelmed by desire and while he's running across a frozen river bent on getting to his destination, he slips. In the very moment he's about to fall the burning desire just disappears because the fear he had as he was going to fall took it away. The *Torah* tells us we cannot covet what is not ours. If we would fear doing something against the will of Hashem, we wouldn't desire.

We tend to mistakenly think that because since we have a tremendous urge for negativity, we're excused from sinning. That's not true, because with a little fear of Hashem, the *yetzer hara's* power would be nullified. It tries to make us forget this. Amalek's darkness is forgetfulness. If we would keep Hashem's presence in our mind and heart constantly, the *yetzer hara* wouldn't be able to overcome us.

Hashem give us guidelines through the *Torah* to climb the mountain of Hashem. There are many stages, but as long as we're endeavoring to get there, we're that much closer. We have to remember where we want to put our efforts. Rav Hirsh says, the obligation not to covet is the signature of Hashem. The *Torah* doesn't just speak about actions, but goes to the root of the matter. It forbids us to come to a point where our heart is full with sin and desires what is not ours. It teaches us how to uproot negativity by bringing Hashem into our hearts, working on loving and trusting Him and recognizing His awesomeness. We know that Hashem is with us not by what we have, but by what and who we've become.