

Expiation and Envisioning: Parshat Tazria Metzorah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

After a woman gives birth and the purification process concludes, she must bring two offerings, an *olah*/burnt offering and a *chatas*/atonement offering. How has she sinned? Furthermore, usually the *chatas* is brought first and then the *olah*, why is it reversed? Is the *olah* part of the purification process or the expression of the desire to come closer to God, asks Rabbi Nevenzahl?

It is possible, that the woman did sin during childbirth when she swore not to have any more children which would require atonement. However, Rabbenu Bachye notes that Hashem's original plan was for childbirth to be completely painless but after Chava's sin she was punished with painful childbirth. Since Chava was the prototype and contained within her all future women, each woman inherited part of that sin and is responsible for atoning for that sin. As the *Kli Yakar* notes, the Torah states, "She will be purified from the source of her impurity," that source being Chava's original sin. Yet Chava's sin began with thought rather than action. Therefore, the *olah* which represents intellect and heart is brought first and then the *chatas* representing action.

Oznaim Latorah observes that the woman's offering consists of one turtledove, not a pair. A turtledove is faithful to its mate all its life. By bringing only one dove, the woman is reminded of the love and loyalty she too should feel for her spouse. Why does she also bring an *olah*? Rabbi Nevenzahl cites the Abarbanel that it's a variation of the *korban todah* expressing gratitude for the miraculous birth process and for the special gift of a child. But the *korban todah* should be brought immediately after the event that engendered the feeling. Yet the woman may not bring a sacrifice until she has concluded her period of

impurity, one or two months after the birth. Therefore, there is an opportunity to draw close to Hashem with the *olah* instead.

Surviving the throes of labor, the woman may also have taken upon herself some resolutions to maintain an elevated state of sanctity. Perhaps, as time passed, she failed to live up to that sanctity. Therefore she brings an *olah* as a symbol of her desire to still maintain that elevated level. After the birth, the woman had indeed been in an impure state, so by bringing these sacrifices the woman expresses her desire to regain the closeness with Hashem, writes the Ben Melech. How does one achieve this goal? Rabbi Chizkiyahu Kahn suggests that one must first clarify the goal-to achieve closeness to Hashem and then take steps to achieve it. The *olah* is therefore mentioned first, representing the goal, and is followed by the *chatas*, the method of achieving it. While in practical terms, the work must begin with knowing where we've erred and taking steps to correct our actions, teaches Rabbi Dessler, one must first have a vision of that better state and the *olah* creates that vision says the *Torat Zion*.

Herein lies a major stumbling block for those wishing to do *teshuvah*, writes *Sifsei Chaim*. Not having established a vision of what they want to become, they cannot take the steps to achieve it. The vision must be there; even if he does not achieve it completely, he will come closer to it with each step in that direction. Tefilah becomes an important component. If I want my children to be great, I have to have the desire. They may fall short of the total vision, but they will approach the goal. If, on the other hand, my vision is low, they will fall even shorter of that. One of the *al cheit*'s on *Yom Kippur* is the sin of *tzoraat ayin*/narrow vision, of seeing ourselves as small and sinful.

If we see ourselves as imbued with divine greatness, we can expect to grow and achieve our potential.

The Prophet Hosea refers to *Klal Yisroel* as a *naar*, a youth who is always growing. Therefore, writes the *Ohel Moshe*, "*Chanoch lanaar al pi darko*," educate your children to remain always youthful, always on the road to improvement. In the *mitzvah* of the four species, the *Torah* lists the *esrog* first. In contrast, the *Gemara* begins with the *lulav*. The *Mishchat Shemen* explains that the *Torah* offers us the perfect vision while the *Gemara* provides the practical steps. The *esrog* represents the perfect individual, having purified his body and character. But one achieves that only through focusing on one body part and one character trait at a time. Even though we do not know the depth and purpose of a particular *mitzvah*, we need to accept that the goal is to feel a connection to Hashem and act as an impetus to further observance and closeness.

This incremental process is the purpose of *sefirat haomer* says Rabbi Miller. Certainly, *Bnei Yisroel* reached tremendous spiritual highs as they left Egypt. But the glow waned with each passing day. It was only through personal effort, supported by Hashem's love, that *Bnei Yisroel* again rose to those spiritual highs at *Har Sinai* as they accepted the *Torah* after 49 days of counting. It is only through our own desire and "counting" that we can uplift ourselves spiritually. We must maintain the vision of the *olah*, and then take the small steps of the *chatas* toward achieving sanctity. Even knowing that we may sometimes fail, writes Rabbi Pincus, it is important to have the goal. Every small victory is a positive step in the process.



The Counting of the Omer

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Torah discusses the *mitzvah* of *sefirat ha'omer* twice. First in Parshat Emor where it says, "And you shall count from the day after *Shabbat*." The Oral Law teaches us that this means the day after the first day of Pesach which is called *Shabbat*. "From the day that the *omer hatenufa* is brought." The *omer* is called *tenufa* as it had to be elevated. We count, "*Sheva Shabbatot temimut*-7 full weeks." In *Parshat Re'ah*, *sefirat haomer* is again mentioned and this time the *Torah* tells us we must count, "*Shiva shevuot*-7 weeks." We learn that when the *Torah* says *Shabbatot* it refers to weeks. "*Ad mimochorot haShabbat hashevi tispuru chamishim yom*-You should count till the end of seven weeks, 50 days." On the 50th day, a *mincha* wheat offering was brought from the harvest. We see that the counting is obligatory and that we must count seven weeks. In both places, *sefirat haomer* is mentioned in the context of a discussion about all the *yomim tovim*. There are many connections made here including: the first day of Pesach, the bringing of the *omer*, *Shabbat*, seven weeks and 50 days.

Let's examine the idea of counting based on the *Maharal* who notes something very fundamental. When we count from one point towards another, the counting creates a connection and unifies the two points. The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that we start counting on the second day of *Pesach* and it's called *Shabbat* because the redemption was a gift from above just like *Shabbat*. The Jews weren't fully ready to be redeemed but Hashem took them out anyway. *Pesach* is connected to *Shavuot* because the essence of the Jewish nation is *Torah* and they were redeemed only because they would accept the *Torah*.

When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe asked for a sign so that the Jewish people would believe him. Hashem answered, "For I shall be (*Eh-yeh*) with you. And this is your sign that I have sent you: When you take the people out of Egypt, you will serve [Me] upon this mountain. Hashem gave him a sign that would help the Jews believe for now. The ultimate belief would be at *Har Sinai* when they would hear Hashem speaking to Moshe and telling him to speak to

the Jews. The secondary idea was a sign for the main idea. Hashem wanted to give a sign for *Matan Torah*, so he gave a secondary sign. Just as you left Egypt, believe you can receive the *Torah*. Their concern was that they weren't ready for the spiritual aspect of redemption. They understood that physically leaving Egypt was not what it was truly about. Therefore, Moshe promised them that when they would be redeemed from Egypt, they would receive the *Torah*. They asked Moshe when it would be and he said at the end of 50 days. So they began counting down the days and that is why *Chazal* established *sefirat haomer*.

The same longing the Jews once had for the core redemption of *Matan Torah*, is what Hashem wants us to create within our hearts through counting the *omer*. It's about connecting the physical freedom and redemption of Egypt to the spiritual freedom of *Shavuot* and the giving of the *Torah*. Like a slave toiling in the sun and longing for shade, that is how we should yearn during the days of *sefirah* for the redemption and the spiritual freedom of *Matan Torah*.

The Weightiest Mitzvah of Them All: Part 5D

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Justin Treger

If Warren Buffet would offer you an investment opportunity where he guaranteed the capital plus 40 percent return, would you not run and invest all your available money? We are commanded numerous times in the *Torah* to give *tzedakah*. In addition, there's a negative commandment that one who turns a blind eye to the needy is called a *bli al*, as if he worships idols. The *Shulchan Aruch* tells us that one will ever become impoverished from giving *tzedakah* and that nothing bad will happen as a byproduct of it. Hashem guarantees that we will never lose out because of it. The *Gemara* notes that giving *tzedaka* is like a loan to Hashem. There's no one more reliable and dependable who can settle these debts. The *Shulchan Aruch* says that *tzedakah* pushes aside all harsh decrees and during an economic downturn a *baal tzedakah* will not be harmed. That's incredible

protection and it comes as a byproduct of giving *tzedakah*. The *Rema* adds that *tzedakah* brings wealth in its wake. One may not test Hashem in anything except for this as it says, "*V'chanuni na b'zot*." The *Rema* says, "*Davka benesinat maaser mutar l'nasot Hashem*-Specifically in the area of giving *maaser*, one may test Hashem.

How much are we prepared to give towards this investment? If we would have thrown all our money at Warren Buffet's proposal because we think he's got a big bank account and therefore our investment is totally secure because it's backed by his money and he understands how to invest, how much more so should we be ready to invest in *tzedakah*. Nobody has deeper pockets than Hashem and nobody understands better how to invest. He promises we will become wealthy and that He will look after us. The gap between our

excitement to invest with Warren Buffet rather than with Hashem is bridged by *emunah*. When we can place our trust in Hashem it will make us an incredible investor in *tzedakah*. Sometimes people who are in difficult financial situations tell me that their *Rav* told them they can give the minimum amount of *tzedakah*. I get upset by this. The *Torah* says the way to become wealthy is to invest in *tzedakah*; it should be the last thing you should give up.

The *Gemara* in *Gittin* says, *Rav Avira* taught in the name of *Rav Ami* and sometimes in the name of *Rav Asi*, that if a person sees that their finances are tight he should give *tzedakah* and how much more so when he's got a lot of money, because it's the key to financial success. Hashem promises we will never lose out and He will shower us with blessings *ad bli dai*.