

Parshat Tazria: Narrow Vision

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

The Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah teaches that one of the ten reasons *tzaarat* (leprosy) came on a person was because of *ayin ra* (a negative eye). The letters of the word *tzaarat* can be transposed to read *tzarat ayin*, narrow vision. When the Torah discusses the *negaim* (different types of blemishes) it says, "The one to whom the house belongs will come to the *kohen*." The Gemara explains that *tzaarat* came upon a person who intended to have his home all to himself. The foundation of the world is *chesed*. Hashem created man so that he would give. If he is egotistical and thinks only of himself, he corrupts his soul.

When a person would find a *nega*, he had to empty his entire house before the *kohen* came. Everyone would see what he had and they would know that he had lied and been stingy with his possessions. This taught the sinner a fitting lesson. We are meant to share what we have with others.

The essence of *ayin tova* (a good eye) is an orientation of doing *chesed*. A person should look for opportunities to give to others. This is

emulating Hashem. The Siftei Chaim notes that the root of *tzarat ayin* is one's ego, the I, which is the source of all negative *middot*. Thinking of others, giving a sincere compliment, and making people feel special, involves shrinking your I and stepping out of your me. When you smile to someone, you give a part of yourself to the person. This is what Hashem desires. The Gemara says the walls of a person's home will testify before him. When we fill our homes with acts of loving kindness, we create an abode where Hashem's presence can rest.

The Rambam says *ayin tova* means being content with what one has. A good eye denotes a wholesome acceptance of yourself and your lot in life. A person with an evil eye will always be jealous and dissatisfied. He lacks *emunah* and *anavah* (humility). If you have *emunah* you will believe that whatever a person has is meant for him. Being jealous means that you doubt Hashem's ability to decide what is best for the person. A humble person will say, "I don't deserve anything." Everything Hashem does is *chesed*. Instead of

feeling dissatisfied and wanting more, a humble person will thank Hashem and use what he has been given to elevate Hashem's name. The Leket V'halibuv notes that if you move the letter *ayin* to the beginning of the word *nega*, you get the word *oneg* (pleasure). If a person looks at everything in a negative way, he will have *negaim*. In contrast, if he works on attaining an *ayin tova*, life will be pleasurable and joyous.

Rashi explains that *ayin tova* is about honoring others. The Alei Shur writes that this begins with honoring oneself. Recognizing that there is a spark of divinity within each of us, leads a person to respect others too. When the students of Rabbi Akiva didn't treat each other with *kavod*, it was symptomatic that on their level they lacked the ability to recognize the greatness within themselves.

May we merit to seize every opportunity to give, may we discern the goodness and blessing in our lives, and may all our interaction with ourselves and others be honorable.

The Halachic Essence of Sefirat Haomer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

The mitzva of *sefirat haomer* appears twice in the Torah. The first time in Parshat Emor where we read, "*Usefartem lachem mimacharas hashabbos*." You shall count from the second day of Pesach. In Parshat Re'eh it says, "*Shiv'ah shavuos tispar lecha*." You shall count seven weeks when you begin to harvest the newly grown crops.

What is the status of *sefirat haomer* today in the absence of the Beit Hamikdash? Is the mitzva still *d'oraita* or is it *d'rabanan*? "*Usefartem*" appears in the parsha of the *yamim tovim* that are observed even though we do not have the Beit Hamikdash. This implies that *sefira* is a mitzva *d'oraita* that remains in effect till today. Indeed, this is the position of the Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch.

However, the Rashba and the Ran hold that it is a mitzva *d'rabanan*, because when the Torah mentions the mitzva in Re'eh it says to begin counting when the *korban omer* is brought. This implies that since no *korban* is brought today, *sefirat haomer* is *mid'rabanan*. The Baal Hamaor notes that we do not recite *Shehechi-*

yanu on the first night of *sefira* because this mitzva does not evoke great happiness. It is linked to the *korban omer* and since we cannot bring any offering it is only a *zecher l'mikdash* today.

Rabbeinu Yerucham suggests that there are two different mitzvot with two different *brachot*, one for counting days and one for counting weeks. The mitzva to count weeks remains a *d'oraita* and the mitzva to count days is *d'rabanan*. This *machloket* is discussed in Gemara Menachot. Abaya said there is a mitzva *d'oraita* to mention both days and weeks in the count. However, Ameimar counted only days and not weeks because he maintained that the mitzva of *sefira* was only *zecher l'mikdash*.

The Rambam in Hilchot Beit Habechira writes that technically, if we had a *mizbayach* we could offer *korbanot* even without the Beit Hamikdash, because the kedusha of the Beit Hamikdash remains till today. Based on this, Rav Chaim Soloveitchik maintains that even if one held that the mitzva of *sefira* is linked to the

korban omer, it could still be a *d'oraita* today because the mitzva is not connected to the actual bringing of the *korban*, but to the obligation to bring the *korban*, which is still in force today.

There are two different types of *zecher l'mikdash*. Sometimes we remember what was once done by replicating it exactly. At other times we perform an action to remind ourselves that we can no longer do what was done in the Beit Hamikdash. Rav Yosef Soloveitchik suggests that both opinions agreed that *sefira* is *d'rabanan*. The *machloket* was only on what type of *zecher l'mikdash* to perform. Abaye held to do it exactly how it was once done, while Ameimar held to do it differently by leaving out the weeks.

Does it matter whether *sefira* is *mid'rabanan* or *mid'oraita*? We keep all the mitzvot anyway. There are differences in halacha between these two categories of mitzvot. There is a principle, *safek d'oraita l'chumrah*, *safek d'rabanan l'kulah*. One acts stringently when there is a doubt concerning a mitzva *d'oraita*, while one

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acts leniently when there is a doubt concerning a *d'rabanan*. Additionally, the Achronim hold that *mitzvot d'oraita* require *kavana*, awareness, while one can fulfill a *mitzva d'rabanan* without *kavana*.

The Shulchan Aruch seems to contradict itself. In one section he mentions that one should preferably wait till *tzait hakochavim*, the time

when it is definitely night, in order to count the omer. This implies that he agrees with the Rambam that *sefira* today is *mid'oraita*. In another section he writes that even if one did not intend to count but answers his friend's question as to what number to count that night, he is *yotze* the *mitzva*. This implies that he agrees with the Ran that *sefira* is *mid'rabanan*.

Perhaps the Shulchan Aruch does in fact agree with the Ran. However, in areas where one can be stringent without much effort or where being lenient will eliminate the *mitzva*, one should be stringent with *mitzvot d'rabanan* too. Indeed, the majority opinion is that *sefira* is a *mitzva d'rabanan* today. However, since one can easily wait until dark to count, it is proper to do so.

The Students of Rabbi Akiva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Sefirat haomer is an odd combination of the joy of Pesach and Shavuot and the mourning over the death of the students of Rabbi Akiva. Normally we do not say the *Av Harachamim* prayer on the Shabbat that we bless the new month. However, on the Shabbat when we bless the month of Iyar, we do say *Av Harachamim* because of the many tragedies that happened during the *sefirah* period.

Chazal tells us that the students of Rabbi Akiva died because they did not give proper respect to one another. Surely they were great and righteous people. How can we understand this? The Shem Mishmuel explains that Pesach signifies the concept of a nation while Shavuot symbolizes the idea of the individual. On Pesach we were worthy of revelation on a national level. Each year, when the holiday comes, each of us excelling in a different area, merge as a united entity, so that the Divine Presence can dwell among us.

Hashem's ultimate wish, however, is that every individual should be worthy of Hashem's presence. Therefore, he gives us the *sefirah* period to work on ourselves. The students of Rabbi Akiva were exceedingly humble. They thought they didn't deserve the Divine Presence as individuals, so they joined

together as a part of a larger entity. They viewed each other as limbs of one's body. They felt at home with each other to such an extent that they did not give each other proper respect. As this happened during *sefirah*, when there is special emphasis on growth in character, they were judged more strictly and sentenced to death.

Prior to every holiday one can sense the energy of the Yom Tov in the air. At *Matan Torah*, the Jews attained perfect unity as the verse says, "*Vayichan sham Yisrael*." On *Lag Ba'omer*, two weeks before Shavuot, the students of Rabbi Akiva picked up on this message. They realized there was something lacking in their respect. They repented and the plague ceased.

Hashem looks at the cause of our failures and engineers the environment that will help us to correct the particular failing. On Shavuot, Hashem sealed a *brit* (covenant) with us and we became eternal partners. A *brit* in which only one side is committed will not work. A marriage that has only one committed partner brings no joy – for either side. There must be two equal partners giving and receiving.

Hashem gave us free choice. We couldn't be forced into the covenant. He enabled us to be

a full partner with Him. In Shir Hashirim, Hashem describes Himself to us as, "Your father, your wife, and your sister." When something hurts us, it hurts Him as well. He is with us in our pain, "*Imo anochi b'tzara*." If we remain loyal and connected to Him, He will carry us till the end of time to the eternal redemption.

When Hashem redeemed us from Egypt, we didn't deserve the level of closeness and revelation that He showed us. A true relationship cannot last unless one invests. Therefore, he gave us the interim period of *sefirah* so that we could merit the covenant. Between Pesach and Shavuot our people has endured many trials and tribulations, and this pattern continues through time. Weathering challenges cements a bond. There's a Yiddish saying, "You know you have the right husband when you can eat a sack of salt with him."

So there are two way to prepare for Shavuot. The first way is counting the *omer*, working on one's character traits and removing the obstacles between ourselves and the flow of goodness from Hashem. The second way is transcending challenges. The Almighty's covenant lives on in His chosen people who despite the travails of exile, remain committed and dedicated to His name.