

Parshat Emor-The Power of Speech

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Avishai David

Parshat Emor primarily focuses on three topics. Initially the Torah discusses the halachot of Kohanim and that which relates to their service in the Beit Hamikdash. Subsequently it devotes the bulk of the parsha to the holidays, and then ends with the tragic episode of the *megadef*-the blasphemer. What is the common thread running through these three elements?

The answer is embedded in the name of the Parsha itself-*"Emor"* which comes from the root word *"Amira"*-to speak. When the Torah introduces the topic of Kohanim it says, *"Emor el hakohanim..."* The *moadim* are described

as *bikurei kodesh* and the Targum explains that this refers to a particular time that has great significance. The Rambam notes that these are the holy days when Klal Yisrael would gather to thank and praise Hashem. Our main focus and *avodah* on Yom Tov is *amirah*-saying *shir v'shevach* to Hashem. Similarly, we see the great negative power of speech through the story of the *megadef*.

In Breishit the Torah portrays the creation of man, *"Vayehi adam l'nefesh chaya."* Man became a living being. Targum translates *nefesh chaya* as *ruach m'mimaleleh*-the power of speech. Hashem gave man the ability to

express himself and to articulate his ideas. This makes him unique over all segments of creation.

"Emor v'amarata." The Kohanim followed the dictums of Hashem. Through *amirah* one can come to unbelievable levels. And indeed during the *moadim*, when a Jew communes with Hashem, he can scale very great heights. Conversely, corrupted speech causes a person to fall to the lowest depths as evidenced by the blasphemer. The lesson of Parshat Emor is the potency of speech. May we merit to use this gift correctly.

Sefirat Haomer-The Inner Count Part 2

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

What should our focus be during *sefirah*? Every individual must introspect and find the points that are lacking in his own individual *avodat Hashem*. It may be different for every person. Yet there are three approaches we can all take.

The first approach is the Mishna which tells us that Torah is acquired through forty eight ways. The Baalei Mussar recommend that a person work on a different *middah* every day. The forty ninth day is *chazara* (review).

The Bnei Yissachor offers a second approach. The Mishna in Avot tells us - Rav Elazar teaches that a *lev tov* is the most important *middah*. *Lev* is equivalent to thirty two. The first thirty two days of sefirah should be devoted to rectifying *mitzvot ben adam l'chavero* (between man and man). The last seventeen days corresponding to *toiv* should be dedicated to *mitzvot ben adam l'makom* (between man and man).

The third approach is based on a maxim by Rav Elazar Hakefar, "Jealousy, desire, and

honor, remove a person from this world." Just as we must repent for evil actions, we must repent for evil thoughts. The Beer Yosef writes that the *korbon omer* was brought at the very point when the mann ceased falling. The mann teaches us an important lesson connected to *sefirah*. Everyone received the exact portion of *mann* that they needed. From this we can deduce that there is no room for jealousy. If a person believes that what is meant for him he will receive and that no one can take what is his without Hashem's consent, he will never suffer from envy. The second aspect is desire. Rav Shwab points out that when we count we must see ourselves as the barley being cut from the ground. We must lift ourselves off our materialism so that we can become a chariot for Hashem. The third dimension is respect. If we sensitize ourselves to our Divine image, our own internal aspect of *kedusha*, we will in turn recognize it within others and treat them with the proper *kavod*.

We begin with *mashcheini* - Hashem takes the lead. We then immediately move to *narutza*-we work towards coming back to the

spiritual high of Pesach. Only then can we experience *heve'ani*-the lofty level of *kabbalat ha'Torah*. Yet we still need another Shabbat-an outpouring from Hashem, to raise us to the final pinnacle. That is why *mi'macharat hashabbat* is written twice. The first Shabbat hints to Pesach and the second Shabbat alludes to Shavuot.

Sefirat haomer is a mini paradigm of life-inspiration, hard work, and then inspiration again. We need not finish anything, but we must invest effort. Then Hashem will lift us up and help us finish the task. Whether it is working on the forty eight ways, acquiring a *lev tov*, or uprooting jealousy, desire, and honor, we must toil and never give up. Then we will be blessed doubly with *"mimacharat hashabbat,"* with the *siyata d'shmaya* (divine support) to complete our destined mission.



Lag Ba'Omer: Connecting to Our People

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Gemara says that the 24,000 students of Rabbe Akiva died because they didn't honor one another. This seems puzzling. Rabbi Akiva taught, "*V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha zeh klal gadol ba'Torah*". One of the greatest principles in the Torah is brotherly love. How could his own students not live up to his teachings?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that every Jew has a double role. He is an individual; an *olam maleh*-a complete universe with his own unique personality, challenges, and responsibilities. But he is also a part of Klal Yisrael, the collective of Israel.

The Torah says when the Jews came to Har Sinai, "*Vayichan sham yisrael neged hahar*." Israel encamped next to the mountain. *Vayichan* is in the singular form. Earlier, the Torah uses the word, *vayachanu*, they encamped, in the plural form. Rashi explains the switch of forms. As *matan Torah* approached, they united as one man with one heart. In a sense, they forfeited their uniqueness and individuality to become a single unit.

Shem Mishmuel teaches that when we are a part of the *klal* (collective), we are compared to the limbs of one body. Whatever honor one gives oneself is automatically accrued to all the limbs of the body because they are all a part of one whole. When Rabbe Akiva taught *V'ahavta l'rei'acha*, he emphasized the individuality of every person. Honoring one's friends and neighbors is a function of recognizing that the other person is different and that I can honor and admire the qualities that he has and I don't. Giving *kavod* means recognizing another person's uniqueness. Every person has something special about him that can serve as a model for others.

The students of Rabbe Akiva interpreted "*V'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha*," as connected to the *klal* rather than respecting the *prat* (individual). They thought it meant loving one's neighbor as oneself because we are all one, a part of the greater entity of Israel. They forgot about the individuality of each person, and that is why they didn't give proper honor to each other.

When the Torah was given to Am Yisrael it was given on two levels, as a single unit and to each individual person. If the *klal* falters and turns off the Torah path, the *yachid* must still remain committed. Every person bears his own responsibility. Although Hashem wants us to be one, he still wants us to function as individuals.

When we count the omer we go from Pesach to Shavuot, through the months of Nissan, Iyar, and Sivan. The respective astrological signs of Nisan, Iyar and Sivan are sheep, ox, and. Shem Mishmuel explains that sheep function as part of a flock. Nisan is the month of the *klal*. The individual Jew didn't deserve to be redeemed. It was only in the merit of the nation that they left Egypt. Iyar represents the ox. Bulls don't live in herds. Each has its own territory, which it will defend to the death. This represents the individual. Sivan is twins. When we received the Torah we received it on two levels, as a nation and as an individual. A Jew must actualize these two in his daily life.

The mitzva of *sefira* has a two-fold component too. Counting days represents the improvement of the individual. Every day is unique and has its own rectification. But we also count the weeks. All the days merge into weeks as one unit. During *sefira*, we must work on ourselves

as individuals, but also as a group to achieve *ahavat yisrael*, love of every Jew as a unique person and as a part of the single unit called Israel.

Lag Ba'Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer, is exactly a day after two thirds of the count. The Gemara says the night is divided in three. In the last third of the evening, we begin to feel the approach of dawn. In these last sixteen days of *sefira*, we start to sense the light of the *tikun* (rectification) of the *klal* and the *prat*, which culminates on Shavuot.

Most of *sefirat haomer* is in Iyar. Iyar is the ox, the individual. When the students of Rabbe Akiva realized that they had emphasized too much the *klal* and not enough of the individual, the epidemic stopped.

In our own lives, we must try to attain this balance. When we study Torah, we must learn from our predecessors and our great teachers, the Torah of the nation of Israel. At the same time we must bring to bear our own thinking and sensitivities to what the Torah is saying.

The same is true of marriage. The Torah says that Chava was created to be an *ezer knegdo*, a helpmate opposite her husband. Although she is meant to become one with her spouse, sometimes she must use her *knegdo*, her individual self, in order to save the unit. The challenge in marriage is to find that right balance. This also relates to raising children. We have to train our children as part of a *klal* and also as individuals.

May we merit to live the lesson of Rabbe Akiva, to love every Jew as one, but to respect their unique merits and strengths.