

## Parshat Acharei Mot: Fear Before Love

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Shem Mishmuel asks, why does the Torah juxtapose the story of the death of Nadav and Avihu with the subject of Hashem instructing Aharon how to enter the kodesh kedoshim on Yom Kippur? On a simple level, Hashem is telling Aharon to be very careful to do the service of Yom Kippur following an exact procedure. Chassidic thought interprets this episode on a deeper level as well.

Hashem's love is the root energy of the world. It is also the way in which He relates to the Jewish nation. The Arizal says that Hashem created the world as an act of ahava – love. Hashem's love was concentrated most strongly in the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan. When the High Priest entered the inner sanctum on Yom Kippur he was completely engulfed in the love of Hashem. However, love is not the only

emotion involved in our relationship with Hashem. The system of the world and of Torah is not just a system of love. Fear of Hashem and strict judgment also comprise important components of the overall system.

The Kotzker Rebbe was asked an intriguing question. If the Baal Shem Tov was the soul of ahava and taught that avodat Hashem required passion and love, why did the later chassidic followers struggle so much? He replied that the chassidic master, Rav Levi Yitzchok Berditchever opened the gates of love in heaven. However, the Jewish people did not channel this outpouring of love for kedusha, so it was automatically diverted to the non-Jewish nations. They utilized it for impurity. Therefore the tzaddikim of that generation decided to close the gates of love so this holy and pure force

would no longer be desecrated. We see that unbridled love has tremendous power, but it can easily be distorted if used in the wrong way.

Nadav and Avihu were great tzadikim. Their error was that they entered the Holy of Holies, with a consuming passion of love for Hashem, but they were missing fear of Hashem. They thought that ahavat Hashem was everything. They came without trepidation, hesitation, and awe of Hashem. Therefore, they were punished by death.

Ahava without yirah creates a terrible distortion. To serve Hashem correctly, one needs to temper passion with discipline and halacha. Only in the era of Mashiach, when evil will cease to exist, will we merit that ahavat Hashem will reign completely supreme.

## 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

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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. 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.

## Dimensions of Sefirat Haomer

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

The time period of Sefirat Haomer is a golden opportunity to elevate our middot. Each of the 49 days of the Omer rectifies another week in the year. It is written that if you truly work on changing yourself during this time, you do not need to worry about the yom hadin (day of judgement).

Rabbi Tatz writes in his book, *Living Inspired*, "In Torah terms, counting towards a goal is the building of that goal. That is why we count from Pesach and not towards Shavuot. We cannot cause Shavuot. We can build a path. When we have built 49 days, we have built Shavuot. Counting is about building. It's about working on ourselves step by step."

Rav Wolfson writes that we need to utilize the time of sefirah to sanctify ourselves. We need to get rid of our bad middot in order to become a fitting vessel to accept the Torah. Our sages

say, "Derech erez kadma l'Torah" (proper middot come before Torah). A person's Torah learning and avodat Hashem will be limited if his middot are found lacking. The Alter of Kelm explained that there are 48 ways to acquire the Torah. Each of the 49 days of sefirah is meant to be dedicated to one aspect of these ways, and the 49th day is review. The Gra notes that since it is impossible for one person to perfect himself in all 49 ways, the most essential middah to work on is ahavat habriyot – love of your fellow man. When you love others, you can learn from them, and then you can come to a composite whole of all the 48 ways.

Middot are the principle upon which Torah rests. The 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva lacked proper middot. Therefore there was a deficiency in their Torah and that is why they died. Rav Bunim writes in his commentary on Pirkei Avot: Ben Zoma saw a multitude of Jews and pronounced the blessings,

"Blessed is He who knows secrets," and, "Blessed is He who created all these people to serve me." Was Ben Zoma so haughty to deem people his servants? Ben Zoma saw a pool of potential teachers and an opportunity to learn. They were not his rivals. Rather, they were fellow teachers in the great school of human experience.

Rav Stern explains that a person's greatness depends on how he values his time. A person's mission in this world is to transform the present into the future, to turn passing moments into something lasting and eternal. If a person uses his moments for fleeting pleasures he has turned his moments into the past, which is useless. Our challenge is to take the 49 days, and build one day upon the other. You can grow closer both to your fellow man and to Hashem, and gradually change yourself to become a fitting vessel for Kabbalat HaTorah.