



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 came on a person was because of ayin ra (a negative eye). The letters of tzaraat can be rearranged to read tzarat ayin, narrow vision. The Torah describes that "the one to whom the house belongs will come to the kohen," and the Gemara explains this refers to someone who wanted everything for himself. Since the foundation of the world is chesed, a person who lives selfishly corrupts his soul.

When a person found a nega, he had to empty his house before the kohen came. Everyone would see his possessions and realize he had been stingy. This was a fitting lesson—we are meant to share what we have

with others. The essence of ayin tova is to actively seek opportunities to give. The Siftei Chaim explains that the root of tzarat ayin is the ego—the "I." By thinking of others, offering a sincere compliment, and making people feel valued, a person steps outside of himself. Even a simple smile is an act of giving, creating a home filled with kindness where Hashem's presence can rest.

The Rambam says ayin tova means being content with what one has. A person with an ayin ra is always jealous and dissatisfied, lacking emunah and humility. True emunah means believing that what each person has is exactly what they need. A humble person recognizes everything as chesed and uses it to

elevate Hashem's name. The Leket V'halibuv notes that moving the letter ayin in nega creates oneg (pleasure): perspective shapes experience. When we cultivate a positive outlook, life becomes more joyful.

Rashi explains that ayin tova is about honoring others, which begins with honoring oneself. Recognizing the spark of divinity within allows us to respect others as well. When Rabbi Akiva's students failed to show kavod, it reflected a lack of recognizing their own greatness.

May we seize every opportunity to give, recognize the blessings in our lives, and treat ourselves and others with honor.

Sefirat Haomer Liberation of the Mind

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoach Teller

There are two terms for work in Hebrew, avodah and melacha. The Ramban explains that melacha is purposeful work which produces a finished product, while avodah is labor that has no defined objective. The term eved, a slave, is a derivative of avodah. An eved is one who works with no goal or accomplishments to show for his efforts. His agenda is that of his master's. When Hashem redeemed the Jews from Egypt he not only freed them from slavery, but from the senseless avodah they were forced to do.

The Jews were commanded to erect two cities, Pitom and Ramses. The Gemara teaches that they were built on quicksand. As soon as they were completed, they sunk into the earth. The Egyptians intended to torture and degrade the Jews with senseless labor. When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt they were finally freed of this avdut. They gained new purpose and became true servants of Hashem.

Erich Fromm noted, "Freedom without freedom for, is not freedom at all." The seder, the feast of liberation, is bound by laws. There are halachot about the matzot, the korban pesach, the wine, and the marror. Chazal understood that for one to be truly free there must be a purpose. Otherwise a person

becomes enslaved to his passions. On the first night of Pesach we savor the freedom to chart our own destiny. On the next night we start counting the omer, working our way towards the goal of matan Torah.

Freedom and discipline are partners. Self-control is achieved by establishing a point of contentment. Chazal say, "Eizehu ashir hasameach b'chelko." A rich man is someone who rejoices with his lot. If we constantly look at others and what they have, we will never be happy.

The Baal Shem Tov told a story of a man who was climbing up a mountain with a heavy load on his shoulder. He looked up at the summit and saw that he was still very far away and he began to feel despondent. The Baal Shem Tov then said, "Instead of looking ahead, look back and see how far you've traveled. That will give you the strength to keep on going."

A person should look inside himself to see who he can become. The happiest people are so busy doing things. They have no time to think if they are happy. One must train oneself to always be joyous and not make it dependent on anything.

Many things happen beyond our control, but you can always control how you will react. The most important component to achieve happiness is gratitude. Gratitude is related to expectation. The more you expect the less grateful you'll be. The less you expect the more grateful you'll be.

We have the obvious edge. Judaism is based on appreciation. The Gemara says, "Mishenechnas Adar marbim b'simcha." (When Adar comes we increase our joy.) It also says, "Mishnenchnas av m'mamatim b'simcha." (When Av comes we decrease our joy.) The Kotzker Rebbe questions, should it not say marbim b'aveilut (mourning is increased)? He explains that the baseline for a Jew is always simcha (joy).

Start your day off with gratitude by saying Modeh Ani with passion. Say the blessings with intention and train your children to do so too.

The days of sefirah are an auspicious time to work on yourself. Avoid comparing yourself to others, and having high expectations. Engage in self-discipline and develop gratitude. May we reach sheleimut (perfection) in our avodat Hashem (serving Hashem).



Omer: Oneness

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

The Torah commands us to count the omer from the second day of Pesach until Shavuot. The omer is not the animal sacrifice being offered but a measure for the grain that is part of many of the sacrificial rituals. Why then is only this offering called the omer and none of the others? What is the connection between this offering and counting the days leading up to Shavuot? Further, the Sichot Eliyahu notes we count the days either ba'omer or la'omer. Since the counting begins from the time of the offering on the second day of Pesach, shouldn't we be counting me'omer, from the omer? Why do we bring a barley offering on Pesach and a wheat offering on Shavuot?

Rabbi Sheinberg explains that we count from that which resembles the food of animals to that which represents the food of human beings to remind us that we are meant to move from a purely physical state of existence to a spiritual state just as our physical redemption from Egypt brought us closer to receiving the Torah and fulfilling our spiritual purpose. We count each day because the process proceeds one step at a time. The underpinnings of this process go back to the time of creation. Hashem created Adam in a perfect spiritual state which he lost when he ate of the forbidden fruit. Hashem cursed him that thorns and thistles would constitute his food. Adam cried profusely that he would them be on the same level as his chamor, his donkey, completely physical. Hashem then relented and allowed him to eat bread, albeit through the sweat of his brow. The state of mankind, however, was permanently damaged until Bnei Yisroel stood at Sinai and returned to that spiritual level only to lose it again with the sin of the golden calf. The omer offering is the symbolic reminder of our leaving the physical mindset of Egypt and beginning the process of elevating our physicality toward that spiritual state. The process begins with the waving of the omer offering to God. The Torah commands the omer offering to be brought "on the morrow of the Shabbat," rather than "on the morrow of Pesach" to remind us of creation, of Adam's sin, and of his and our desire for a more spiritual life, culminating with the bread offering on Shavuot that can only be produced through a strenuous process of refinement. We begin the counting when the barley is

upright, ready for the sickle to harvest. Similarly, writes the Me'ein Beis Hashoeva, we should feel that we too are standing upright, ready to be cut from the physicality of the ground. Every day, with each count, as we physically stand when we recite the blessing, we separate further from the lower elements of our being and rise upward and that is why we count la'omer, toward the omer. Sefirah is in the agricultural season. As we view our barley crop, we give thanks to Hashem for our bounty while we simultaneously ask Him to continue blessing us in the future. The Abudraham notes that the two ideas are actually complementary. To grow spiritually, one needs proper sustenance as Chazal say, "If there is no flour, there can be no Torah."

So why not begin counting on the first day of Pesach? The Sefer Hachinuch notes that one doesn't intermix one celebration with another. On the first day of Pesach, we celebrate our physical redemption from Egypt. This leaves the following day to begin celebrating our imminent receiving of the Torah. Nevertheless, it seems strange that the blessing for this counting is tied to the omer when the omer seems not to be the purpose of the counting. On the contrary, writes the Be'er Yosef, while indeed other korbanot were accompanied by an omer of meal, only this one, the day after Pesach, is singled out as a special omer offering with its own ritual. In the desert Hashem provided each individual with one omer of mohn, to fill his daily needs. Yet, Hashem requests only one omer from the entire people. During the forty years in the desert, it was obvious Who was providing for all the needs of the people. However, once the people entered the land, they could easily forget Hashem's providence and attribute it to nature. By highlighting the importance of the omer we affirm our continued faith in Hashem's providence. Indeed an omer of mohn was kept in the aron alongside the luchot as a constant reminder of Hashem's chessed.

We count the first day of the omer as yom echad, one day, rather than the first day. There are two other times that the ordinal number "one" is used when the serial number "first" would seem more appropriate. In the story of creation it says, "And there was evening and

morning one day." All the other days of creation are in serial form while the first day is in ordinal form. When describing the High Priest's Yom Kippur service, each sprinkling of blood is counted in the ordinal number, but each sprinkling begins with "one." "One and two," "One and three," etc. The Sichot Eliyahu explains that when one counts with ordinal numbers, one counts each one as an individual. Alternatively, when one counts in serial numbers, one is relating each individual as part of the larger group. Prior to creation there was nothing in the world except Hashem. Starting on the second day, however, there were already angels. Therefore the second day of creation cannot exclude day one which, although it stood on its own on that day, now has a second day to include in the process of creation and to reflect back to the Creator. Therefore, this day becomes a second day rather than day two, thereby connecting back to the origin. Similarly, the kohen gadol who while individualizing each sprinkling is nevertheless still returning to the one, the beginning. When we count the omer, we may be tempted to think that all the grain in the field is the result of our own hard work. By starting with "one" instead of "the first," we are linking the whole series to that ineffable One and acknowledging that all our bountiful harvests come from Hashem. That's why when one misses one day of counting, one can no longer count with a blessing, for he has broken the chain.

The term b'omer denotes a process and the process is in the omer itself. The Ketav Vehakbalah notes that that the word is used in the verb form when the Torah commands the behavior toward the isha yifat toar, "Lo titamer boh – You shall not put her in servitude." During the period of counting the omer we are putting ourselves completely in servitude to Hashem. Understandably this is not an easy achievement, so each day we take little steps and count another day of achievement in the process.

These days of sefirah haomer are among the most powerful days of the year. They are a time of building our connection to Hashem, a time to reflect on our dual nature and subdue our animalistic instincts so that we can rise ever higher towards receiving the Torah.