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Parsha

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Gematria on the Parshah - Sefirat HaOmer: The Journey to Shavuot



By: Reb Moshe Herskovits

Sefirat HaOmer is a transformative journey in which we count from Pesach to Shavuot, refining a different middah each day.

The act of counting itself raises fundamental questions.

Why do we count specifically between Pesach and Shavuot, something not found between other Yamim Tovim?

What is the connection between counting and the Omer barley offering?

Why do we prepare for Shavuot by counting days rather than directly reflecting on our character? The Connection Between Pesach and Shavuot The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Pesach and Shavuot are not isolated events, but two stages of a single process.

Pesach was an itaruta dileila, an awakening from above. Without Hashem, we could never have freed ourselves from the spiritual impurity of Mitzrayim.

Chazal teach that had Am Yisrael remained in Mitzrayim any longer, we would have fallen to the fiftieth gate of impurity, beyond recovery. This is alluded to in gematria, as שער נ (the fiftieth gate) equals 620, the same as כרת (spiritual excision), the punishment for the most severe sins, where a person's soul is cut off from Hashem.

Sefirat HaOmer is the real process, because it comes from our own effort. On Pesach Hashem woke our souls up, but as Rambam teaches, an awakened soul can fall back into spiritual sleep. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that Sefirah is about internalizing the message of Pesach. Can we carry the holiness of the Seder into everyday life?

On Shavuot the 50th gate of holiness will be revealed, the level of Keter, a connection to Hashem beyond intellect. Rav Zusha says that each day we work on ourselves is like refining another jewel for Hashem's crown. The way we "crown" Hashem in our daily life shapes the revelation of the crown we receive on Shavuot. Amazingly, שער נ (the fiftieth gate) is also the gematria of כתר (crown).

Rav Saadia Gaon says that 620 also corresponds to the number of letters in the Aseret HaDibrot, the revelation given to Yisrael at Sinai.

The Connection Between Counting and the Omer

This idea is reflected in the Omer offering itself. Rebbe Natan of Breslov says barley was used for the Omer because it is animal food, while on Shavuot bread is offered because it is human food. The Lubavitcher Rebbe says the message of the Omer is about transforming the animal soul within us. The gematria of שער נ (barley) is

575 the same as יצר הרע (evil inclination). Each step of the Omer we identify what holds us back and elevate the animal within us.

The Effect of Counting

If Sefirah is about transforming who we are, we still need to understand what counting actually accomplishes. Counting creates both awareness and yearning.

When a person begins to count an action, whether positive or negative, it leads to real change. This is hinted to in gematria, as מצרים (Egypt) is 380 the same as מספר (Number). Through counting, we can free ourselves from our personal Mitzrayim.

Chazal say Shavuot is compared to a wedding between Hashem and Am Yisrael. Just like a person preparing for their wedding begins to reflect deeply on themselves: what do I need to improve in order to build a successful life with the person I am about to marry? So too, the counting of the Omer is a time of inner preparation and self-refinement.

But beyond preparation, it is also a time of yearning. Just like two people who are in love count the days until they see each other again, the counting of the Omer is meant to arouse our deepest yearning for Hashem.

In a marriage, a spouse expresses their love not only through affection, but by refining themselves and removing anything that could harm the relationship, resulting in deeper love and connection. That is what we are trying to achieve during Sefirat HaOmer.

Challenge

During Sefirat HaOmer, choose one middah or habit that you want to improve. Each time you succeed mark it down, and keep an accounting until Shavuot. Have in mind that each time you succeed you are placing another jewel in Hashem's crown.

The Story You Tell Yourself

By: Reb Adam Klasner



One of the deepest struggles in life is not only what we carry, but what we call it.

A person can go through pain, confusion, failure, fear, jealousy, shame, or inner darkness, and still remain whole. But the moment he turns that struggle into an identity, something shifts. The challenge is no longer something he is facing. It becomes who he believes he is.

This is one of the powerful ideas that emerges from this week's Parsha.

The Sfias Emes explains that the word metzora can be read as motzi ra, bringing out the bad. On the surface, Chazal explain this as speaking negatively about others. But the Sfias Emes takes us deeper. He teaches that every person contains both light and darkness, both clarity and confusion, both longing and resistance. That is part of

Where in your life have you mistaken a struggle for your identity?

being human. The danger begins when the "ra" is pulled out of its deeper context and given a life of its own.

In other words, the problem is not that a person struggles. The problem is when he looks at his struggle and decides: this is me.

I am angry.
I am broken.
I am hopeless.
I am beyond repair.

That is motzi ra. Taking a part of the story and turning it into the whole story.

The Torah's vision is far more compassionate and far more demanding. It asks us to see our darkness in the context of the soul that holds it. It asks us not to deny the wound, but also not to worship it. Not to run from it, but not to become it.

The Sfias Emes says something radical. Even the yetzer hara is not evil in its deepest root. In its source, it too is part of the wholeness of the person. It only becomes destructive when it is isolated from that wholeness, when it is stripped from its place and turned into a separate identity. The craving, the fear, the insecurity, the sadness, the impulse, all of it may be distorted. All of it may need healing. But none of it is your essence.

Your essence is deeper than your confusion.

This helps explain another teaching he brings from Miriam. The Torah tells us to remember what happened to Miriam. Usually we hear that as a warning. Be careful what you say. But the Sfias Emes hears something deeper. Miriam's inner distortion could not remain buried. It surfaced. It came out. And that itself was part of her purification.

Sometimes we think that when painful material rises to the surface, it means something has gone wrong. But often the opposite is true. Something is finally ready to be healed. The soul no longer wants to hide it. What was buried begins to emerge, not because a person is falling apart, but because he is ready to become more whole.

That is a very different way of seeing struggle.

It means that when old pain rises, when old patterns come back, when uncomfortable truths surface, the response is not immediately panic or shame. The response can become curiosity, humility, and courage. What is this showing me? What is this asking of me? What part of me needs compassion, truth, repair?

The third Sfias Emes in the transcript takes it even further. He speaks about Eretz Canaan, a place saturated with spiritual distortion, and says that the reason the Jewish people were brought there was not despite its darkness, but because they had the power to transform it. There are places that only a holy soul can enter and redeem.

That means that sometimes the places in life where a person feels most challenged, most ashamed, most bewildered, are not signs that he has been abandoned. Sometimes they are signs of the exact opposite. Sometimes they reveal the kind of soul he has been given, and the kind of

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work he came here to do.

This does not romanticize pain. It does not justify dysfunction. It does not mean every behavior is holy. It means that the soul beneath the struggle is holy, and that changes how a person meets what rises within him.

A Jew's task is not to pretend he has no darkness. It is to refuse to let darkness tell the final story.

The work is to recognize that every inner battle can either become a prison or a path. If I collapse into it, it defines me. If I meet it honestly, with truth and with God, it can refine me.

This week's Parsha asks us to be careful not only with what we say about others, but with what we say about ourselves. The names we give our struggles matter. The story we tell ourselves matters. We can describe our wounds in a way that seals us inside them, or we can begin to see them as part of a much larger story, the story of a soul trying to return to its wholeness.

The Covenant She Bears

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



This week's double Parsha opens with the laws of the Yoledes – a woman who has given birth. The Torah prescribes a seven-day period of Tumah following the birth of a son, and fourteen days following the birth of a daughter. In both cases, this is followed by a longer period of the Yemei Taharah – thirty-three days for a son, sixty-six for a daughter.

Two questions present themselves immediately. Why are the periods doubled for a female birth? And why is the Mitzvah of Bris Milah – the circumcision on the eighth day – inserted in the middle of these laws?

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch suggests that this interruption is not incidental – it is the key to understanding the entire passage. The eighth day of Milah does not merely punctuate the mother's Tumah; it transforms it. The son's entry into the Bris draws the mother forward with him, closing the initial stage of Tumah and opening the period of Taharah that follows.

This, Rav Hirsch explains, is precisely why the periods double in the case of a daughter. Without Milah, there is no external covenantal marker to close the first stage and open the second. The entire cycle therefore extends. But Rav Hirsch goes further. The doubling reflects a deeper responsibility that falls upon the mother of a daughter. With a son, the mother's spiritual transition is, in a sense, shared – his Bris carries her forward. With a daughter, the mother must make that journey herself, and for her daughter as well. She is not only her child's caretaker – she is her living model of purity and character.

Just as Bris Milah inscribes the covenant on the body of a son, these extended days inscribe something onto the mother of a daughter – and through her, onto the daughter herself. A son enters the covenant through a singular moment. A daughter enters it gradually, through watching, absorbing, and internalizing the life her mother leads. The mother's Tznius, her Shalom Bayis, her relationship with Taharah – these become the daughter's inheritance. In a sense, the mother of a daughter is not merely a parent; she is a living covenant.

From "OY" to "JOY!"

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Your deepest agony can fuel your greatest triumph!

In Parshas Tazria and Metzora we read about a person afflicted with a spiritual malady called Tzaraas. Tzaraas is a disease that manifests as a blemish on a person's skin. The afflicted person shows the mark on his skin to a Kohen to determine the status of the plague (the nega "נֶגַע" in Hebrew).

If you rearrange the Hebrew letters of the word nega (נֶגַע) – plague, they spell the word oneg (וֶנֶג). Oneg means profound delight. Although they consist of the same Hebrew letters, the meaning of these two words couldn't be more different. The lesson here is that our most brutal challenges (our negas) are associated with pleasure-inducing oneg. But how could this be? How could the cruel pain of a deep struggle be associated with radiant euphoria? How do we find delight while buried under crushing struggle?

The answer becomes obvious when we remember that G-d is the sole architect of our hardship; that He is the one orchestrating every ounce of our pain. And, since G-d is the source of all good, the sting is intended to push us toward our ultimate greatness. The negative circumstances are a clever camouflage for the blessing we must become. The nega is oneg disguised.

Once the Birkas Avraham of Slonim heard his son let out a loud, despondent "OY!" His father advised him that whenever he cries out in pain with the word "Oy," he must immediately add the word "Du." Du means "You" in Yiddish. "You" refers to G-d. When you use the word Du, it implies that you are speaking directly to the Creator. The Du following the Oy is the recognition that G-d deliberately authored this specific mountain for you to climb. When you say "Oy Du" together, it sounds like the Hebrew word for "praise" (אֹדָה, "odeh"), which means "praise." That sigh of despair is instantly transformed into a powerful song of gratitude when you recognize the benevolent, loving source behind every experience in your life.

Speaking of the word "Oy" it is fascinating to me that the word אִי"י (when written in Hebrew) shares the exact same numerical value (17) as the word טוֹב ("Tov"). Tov means GOOD!

If occasionally your situation feels completely overwhelming, you must remember that G-d absolutely believes in your infinite capacity. He custom-designed your current challenges to forge the masterpiece that you must become. Embrace the intense pressure. Let it shape you into the diamond you were born to be. You have the power right now to overhaul every painful nega and rebuild it as a fabulous oneg; to transform every OY into powerful JOY.

Hidden Growth, Hidden Revelation

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



These parshiyot, at first glance, seem disconnected. One opens with the miracle of birth; the other with the unusual affliction of Tzaraat. One is חַיִּים emerging into the world, the other appears to reflect breakdown and distance.

But the Torah is teaching a single, foundational principle:

What is hidden does not stay hidden. It develops—and eventually reveals itself.

The parsha of Tazria begins: "אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיָלְדָה..." — conception, pregnancy, and birth. The Ramban explains that the Torah begins here to emphasize that formation begins long before anything is visible. Everything essential is taking place beneath the surface.

The Maharal of Prague expands this into a broader חֶסֶד: all beginnings are rooted in hidden. Not only are they hidden—they must be hidden. True formation cannot happen in the open. It requires a stage where things are developing without interruption, without external pressure, and without being prematurely defined. What is revealed later is simply the unfolding of what was already built in that concealed stage.

Immediately after, the Torah turns to tzaraat. The Arizal teaches that spiritual deficiencies begin in the deepest פְּנִימִיּוֹת of a person and only later work their way outward. By the time something appears physically, it is already the סוּף of a long internal process.

This is why the Torah describes the progression of tzaraat in such a striking way. It does not begin with the person. It begins with the house, then moves to clothing, and only then to the body. Rashi, based on Vayikra Rabbah, explains that this is a סִדֵּר שֶׁל הַתְּרָאוֹת—a system of warning. The Sforno notes that it progresses inward only if the earlier signs are ignored.

The Ohr HaChaim deepens this idea significantly. He explains that this process is not merely about warning—it is an expression of רַחוּמִים. Hashem does not expose a person all at once. Instead, He reveals what is hidden in stages, giving a person the opportunity to recognize, reflect, and correct before the issue reaches their very self. The חֶסֶד is structured in such a way that internal realities are slowly brought outward, so that a person has the space to respond.

The Zera Shimshon adds a powerful dimension: what is inside a person cannot remain concealed forever. At some point, it will emerge. Tzaraat is not creating something new—it is revealing what was already there. In that sense, it is an act of חֶסֶד. By bringing the פְּנִימִיּוֹת to the surface, it gives a person the clarity and opportunity to do תְּשׁוּבָה.

This is not only a Torah idea—it is something we see in life.

During difficult times, what is inside a person comes out. During COVID, people asked how others could act with such selfishness—hoarding, price gouging, taking advantage. But at the same time, we saw extraordinary generosity—people giving, supporting, stepping up in ways they never had before.

The circumstances did not create these traits.

They revealed them.

When things are calm, a person can maintain an image. But when pressure comes, the external layers fall away, and what is פְּנִימִי becomes visible.

This is exactly the message of these parshiyot.

The Metzora is sent outside the camp:

"בְּדֵר יֵשֶׁב מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבוֹ." The Gemara in Arachin 16b explains this as measure-for-measure, but it also creates something deeper: a space without distraction, where a person can finally confront what has been revealed.

Taken together, Tazria and Metzora teach:

There is no such thing as something staying hidden forever.

Growth that is nurtured quietly will eventually become visible greatness.

And patterns that are ignored internally will eventually surface as well.

The question is not whether what is inside will come out.

The question is: what are we allowing to develop there in the first place?

