

# The Period of Sefira

**R**' Akiva comments on the words V'ahavta L'raocha Kamocha that this is a great rule (Klal Gadol) of the Torah (Vayikro 19:18, Rashi). What makes this a great rule more than others?

During the 49 days of Sefira we work on a different trait each day. Indeed, the term Mida yields a Gematria of 49. Mida means measure and a character trait since that is the measure of a person. The Pasuk tells us V'chamatmonim Tachpesena; search out the Torah as if it were hidden treasures (Mishlei 2:4). Breaking up the word Matmonim we see that it spells Mem Tes Monim; count 49, as these 49 days we count are treasures since in these days we can rectify our character. In regard to Sefira, it states Usfartem Lachem; you shall count for yourselves. Usfartem is related to Sappir- shine, refine (Zohar, Emor, 97b) as this is what we do during Sefira. It is written Sheva Shabosos Temimos Tihyena; seven complete weeks, meaning during the weeks of Sefira we need to be Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha; be wholehearted with Hashem (Devorim 18:13).

The Mishna (Avos 3:1) tells us, know where you come from, where you are going and to whom you will give Din V'cheshbon. We start out with Pesach and conclude with Shavuos. These Yom Tovim are connected with Sefira and as the Ramban tells us that Pesach and Shavuos are like one big Yom Tov and Sefira is like the days of Chol Hamoad that connect the two. This is just as it says Shalach Es Ami V'yaavduni; send out my people that they may serve me (as in Shemos 7:26). On Pesach we were sent out but the purpose is Shavuos [V'yaavduni] (See Sefer Hachinuch, 306). With this introduction we can now appreciate a profound meaning in that Mishna: 'know where you came from' refers to Pesach. 'Where are you headed' hints to Shavuos. Lifnei Mi... Din V'cheshbon is a reference to the days of Sefira as Mi yields a Gematria of 50. So Lifnei Mi refers to Sefira, the days before the 50th day, Shavuos. This is when we give judgment and accounting on ourselves with our Avoda and Middos (Bas Ayin, Acharei Mos).

The Mishna asks, what is the proper way that one

should cling to? Among the traits mentioned, R' Elazar says Lev Tov; a good heart, and the Mishna ends off that Lev Tov includes the other traits mentioned there (Avos, 2:13). The Bnei Yissoschor points out that Lev Tov has a numerical value of 49 which refers to the days of the Sefira. These days are broken up into two parts: the first 32- until Lag Ba'omer- which is the equivalent of Lev and the last 17, the equivalent of Tov. It is with a Lev Tov that we work on our Middos during Sefira. The term Omer means a measure, to gather (as in the Melacha in Hilchos Shabbos- M'omeir) and enslave (as in Lo Sisameir; don't enslave her- Devorim 21:14). This is because this is the time of year we work on our character which takes us out of our enslavement to our bad traits leading us to unity. Indeed, the double Parshiyos that come out this time of year (Tazria-Metzora, Acharei Mos-Kedoshim, Behar-Bechukosai) allude to the concept of unity as it is joined together. Furthermore, the content of these Parshiyos are about Bein Adam L'chaveiro- not to speak Loshon Hora, helping the poor and so on- which brings unity.

The Avoda of the first 32 days of the Sefira is to work on our traits. We are told the students of R' Akiva died during the first 32 days of the Sefira because Shelo Nahagu Kavod Zeh Lazeh; they didn't treat each other with respect. An allusion is found in the word Kavod as it yields a Gematria of 32. They died at this time specifically as this is the time to work on our Middos. This gives us a deeper insight as to why R' Akiva is the one who said V'ahavta L'raocha Kamocha; love your friend as yourself is a Klal Gadol; great rule since he experienced the loss of 24,000 students because of lack of Middos.

If one wants to prove to himself that he was right and didn't make mistakes in a certain decision he would put his calculation under scrutiny and testing. Similarly, the Devash Haseda explains that if one wants to know if his Limud Hatorah is authentic, he should check where his Ahavas Yisroel is holding (V'ahavta).

The last 17 days of Sefira are a preparation for accepting the Torah (The Kedushas Levi [Vayeitzei,

s.v.Vayikro] tells us that from Lag Ba'omer, the light of Maamed Har Sinai; Kabbalas Hatorah begins.). Indeed, the 17th Parsha in the Torah is Yisro- the Parsha of Mattan Torah. In fact, the Torah is referred to as Tov (Avoda Zara 19b).

Sefira is followed by Shavuos, Matan Torah. It states Limnos Yameinu Kein Hoda V'navi Levav Chochma; teach us to count our days, then we shall acquire a heart of wisdom (Tehillim 90:12). Limnos Yameinu; count your days refers to the days of Sefira that we count. The words V'navi Levav Chochma; bring in Chochma refers to Shavuos, Chochmas Hatorah. This pattern follows the dictum Derech Eretz Kodma L'torah (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu, 1), as we work on our Middos (Derech Eretz) and then we have Shavuos (Torah). Now we can have a deeper appreciation of why there was K'ish Echad B'lev Echad before Matan Torah (Shemos 19:2, Rashi), as first we need proper Middos before we receive the Torah. With this, we can grasp V'anshei Kodesh Tihyun Li (Shemos 22:30)- first be a Mench and then Kodesh. The expression goes "Before you can see G-d, you need to see others."

At times we may be critical of one's behaviour. We are instructed to judge favourably. V'ahavta L'raocha Kamocha — just as we love ourselves although we have faults, likewise we should love others even though they have faults. If we love everyone then we are always in the presence of people we love. Now, that is great company! The Nesiim didn't contribute for the Mishkan right away as they said we will complete whatever the people don't bring. The Pnei Menachem (Shemos 35:27, Rashi) explains their sin was that they didn't see their fellow Jew with a Tovas Ayin. How could one think that the Jews wouldn't give everything needed for the Mishkan!

Even when we have to give rebuke it should be because it is our friend- for his benefit as it says Hocheach Tochiach Es Amisecha; reprove your friend (Vayikro 19:17). If one wants to know if his criticism is constructive, he should evaluate if he is willing to help the person overcome that trait or behaviour. Remember, "It is not what you say but how you say it."

**Rabbi Yehoshua Alt**

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