

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

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**COMING SOON Bez"H**

**Fascinating Insights—The Sefer (in English)**

## A Humane Human

In this special time of Sefira we are given the opportunity to transform and elevate ourselves from our low animalistic side to becoming a true human. This is how the Beis Avraham explains the difference in Karbonas at this time of year. The קרבן עומר which is brought on Pesach is from barely—animal food.<sup>1</sup> The שתי הלחם which is offered on Shavuos is from wheat—human food. This is the purpose of Sefira—to cleanse and transform ourselves from animal to human.<sup>2</sup>

R' Chatzkel Levenstein<sup>3</sup> writes in the name of the Alter of Kelm his explanation on יעיר פרא אדם יולד:<sup>4</sup> first we are a פרא, wild animal, but we need to give birth to the human, to rule over physicality. This requires effort as is indicated in יולד לעמל יולד to form (יולד) the true human—we need to toil at it (עמל).

R' Yaakov Abuchatzera remarks that והבאתם את עומר ראשית קצירכם,<sup>6</sup> you shall bring an עומר from your first harvest, is called so because we cut off (קציר) the קליפות, shells of impurity, during these days of Sefira. It is of course no coincidence that the Parshiyos that come out

<sup>1</sup> This is shown to us by the Sota in that her Karbon is from barely—animal food—since she did an animalistic act (Bamidbar 5:15, Rashi).

<sup>2</sup> Nesivos Shalom, Emor, Sefiras Haomer. Looking at the Parshiyos of Sefira, we notice it contains the numbers 7 and 8. In Shemini it is indicated in its name. In Tazria, we are told a woman who gives birth to a boy is impure for seven days. The eighth day, he is circumcised (12:3,4). We also see the number seven when the Kohen deals with Tzaraas later in that Parsha. In Metzora, the one with Tzaraas is sprinkled seven times, dwells outside the tent for seven days and so on. On the eighth day he brings a Karbon. This is just one example in Metzora as these numbers also appear by a Zav, Zava and so on. In Acharei Mos we speak of Yom Kippur which is in the seventh month (16:29). In Emor we have Succos and Pesach—the seven day Yomim Tovim—as well as Sefira. The sections of Shemita, which is every seven years, and Yovel, which is after seven cycles of Shemita, is dealt with in Parshas Behar. Behukosai is no exception as it says שבע... (26:18). This is the idea of Sefira as through the seven weeks we rise to the eighth (supernatural) week—Shavuos.

<sup>3</sup> Ohr Yechezkal, Elul, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Iyov 11:12.

<sup>5</sup> Iyov 5:7. It has been said, "If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?"

<sup>6</sup> Vayikra 23:10. Sefer Machsof Halavan, Emor.

during Sefira contain טהרה, purity: Shemini speaks about forbidden foods which can cause blockage to Kedusha,<sup>7</sup> Tazria and Metzora are filled with טהרה, Acharei Mos speaks of Yom Kippur, the day of purity, Kedoshim deals with Kedusha and so on.

We know מואב is from the union of לוט and his daughters.<sup>8</sup> It therefore is no surprise that it yields a Gematria of 49 (levels of impurity) signifying how steeped in impurity they were. Of all people, Dovid Hamelech descends from this union. When is his Yartzheit? On Shavuos.<sup>9</sup> This is because he rose from those 49 gates of impurity to the high level we were on Shavuos, the 50<sup>th</sup>.<sup>10</sup>

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## A Gift in Disguise

Although at times we need to endure suffering we must trust Hashem always as in בטחו בו בכל עת.<sup>11</sup> When one trusts in Hashem, he is able to bear suffering. This is how the Baal Shem Tov interprets אלופינו מסבילים<sup>12</sup> as one who trusts in the אלוף של עולם, master of the world, is able to tolerate suffering—מסובלים.

Rashi teaches in regard to Tzaraas on a house, that the אמוריים, Amorites would hide treasures of gold in the walls of their houses. As a result of the Tzaraas, one would demolish the house and find these treasures.<sup>13</sup> The Piaetzna Rebbe<sup>14</sup> (1889-1943) wonders why the house is initially quarantined for seven days and only afterwards the stones containing the Tzaraas are removed?<sup>15</sup> Since the purpose is to get the treasure, once the Tzaraas is visible, it is known there is a treasure there? He tells us this alludes to that everything Hashem does is good.<sup>16</sup> He writes in regard to his situation then, during the Holocaust, "Not only are we afflicted with physical pain but also with that which distances us from Hashem—no Cheder for children, no Yeshiva, no Beis Midrash to daven with a Tzibur, no Mikva and so on." Just like the house is Tamai for seven days and then the treasure is revealed so too everything is for the best. Thus, by Tzaraas one says בנגע נראה לי,<sup>17</sup> something like an affliction has appeared to me, even if he knows it is certainly Tzaraas. R' Chatzkel

<sup>7</sup> See Yoma 39a.

<sup>8</sup> Breishis 19:37.

<sup>9</sup> This is one of the reasons why we read Rus on Shavuos as it delineates his ancestry (It is also Dovid's birthday as Tzadikim are born and die on the same day).

<sup>10</sup> The Kobriner (Toras Avos, Avodas Hashem) explains (Nedarim 27a) in the following way: If you force (אונס) yourself above your natural capabilities for Hashem, then רחמנא פטריה, the mercy of Hashem is opened up.

<sup>11</sup> Tehillim 62:9.

<sup>12</sup> Tehillim 144:14. It has been said, "Emuna is not, knowing what the future holds but knowing who holds the future."

<sup>13</sup> Vayikra 14:34.

<sup>14</sup> Aish Kodesh, year ת"ש, Parshas Metzora.

<sup>15</sup> Vayikra 14:38,40.

<sup>16</sup> The Smag (17 מצות עשה) writes, "It is a מצות עשה to recognize that everything that happens to you is for the good. I taught this Mitzva publicly...If matters aren't good for him, it is a מצות עשה to think that it is for his benefit."

<sup>17</sup> Vayikra 14:35.

Levenstein writes the situations that gave him pain were the cause of goodness.<sup>18</sup>

The Shomer Emunim<sup>19</sup> tells us if we realized what a kindness it is that Hashem sends us pain—יסורים—in this world, we would dance from Simcha. This can be compared to parents cleaning up after a child soiled himself. The child screams and cries. But if the child would know what the mother is doing he would kiss and hug her.

Suffering can be compared to one who is ill and takes bitter medicine as the medicine cures him. This pain that the doctor is putting the patient through, with the bitter medicine, is surely considered good since it gives the patient life. Likewise, suffering is to cleanse us from our sins in order to merit עולם הבא.<sup>20</sup>

A man who suffered numerous misfortunes in his life (childless for a number of years, after having a child the child got sick and died, etc.) came to the Pnei Menachem (1926-1996) for encouragement.<sup>21</sup> The Rebbe told him, “When I was very young, I went to the bank and saw someone give lots of money to the teller. I felt bad for this man because he was giving away an exorbitant amount of money. Another man came in and received money from the teller. I felt happy for him. When I got older, I realized the one giving money to the teller was better off since it was for investments whereas the one receiving money from the teller was for a withdrawal. Life is the same way as not everything that is taken from you is taken from you and not everything given to you is really given to you.”

We can use the suffering we endure to build us. “Don’t just go through things, grow through it.” Let us keep in mind, “When life gives you rocks, build bridges not walls.” We must utilize suffering so that we don’t fulfill the words לֹשֶׁן לֶקַח, <sup>22</sup>הכיתי...לא לקחו in vain did I strike you since you didn’t accept rebuke. Likewise, it states על מה תכוד תוסיפו טרה, for what have you been smitten since you continue to act perversely.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ohr Yechezkal, Mmichtavim, p. 326. We must remember times of the past where it all worked out for the best and as it says וזכרתי...ואתנחם I remembered your judgements and I was comforted (Tehillim 119:52).

<sup>19</sup> Maamar Hashgacha Pratis, chapter 6, s.v. וכל. See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 59:2. The Shomer Emunim lived from 1894-1946. In 1939, he settled in Yerushalayim. The two-volume Shomer Emunim was his main work. It was written in 1942 in reaction to the news about the Nazi atrocities in Eastern Europe. After his death, the sect split into two groups: Shomrei Emunim which was led by his son—R’ Avraham Chaim (1924-2012)—and Toldos Aharon which was led by his son-in-law. Toldos Avraham Yitzchak later split off from Toldos Aharon.

<sup>20</sup> Siduro Shel Shabbos, volume 2:3,2,4 s.v. וגם.

<sup>21</sup> A wise person once wrote:

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,  
when the road you are trudging on seems all uphill,  
when the funds are low and the debts are high,  
and you want to smile but you have to sigh,  
when care is pressing you down a bit,  
rest if you must but don’t you quit.  
Life is queer with its twists and turns,  
as every one of us sometimes learns,  
and many a failure turns about,  
when he might have won had he stuck it out,  
don’t give up although the pace seems slow,  
you may succeed with another blow.

<sup>22</sup> Yirmiya 2:30.

<sup>23</sup> Yeshaya 1:5.

The following is a poem that can help us in times of pain.

I asked for strength and g-d gave me difficulties to make me strong.

I asked for wisdom and g-d gave me problems to solve.

I asked for prosperity and g-d gave me brawn and brain to work.

I asked for courage and g-d gave me dangers to overcome.

I asked for love and g-d gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for favors and g-d gave me opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted, I received everything I needed. My prayers were answered.

A group of women that were learning Nach came to the Pasuk ומטרה כסף, <sup>24</sup>מצרף ומטהר smelting and purifying silver. The women wondered how this applied to Hashem? This question spurred one of the women to research the process of refining silver. She watched a silversmith at his work where he held a piece over the fire and let it heat up. He did this because in refining silver, one needs to hold the silver in middle of the fire where the flames are the hottest, in order to burn away all the impurities. The silversmith remarked he had to sit there the entire time it was being refined to watch it while it was in the fire since if the silver is left even for a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. Upon being asked how he knows when the silver is fully refined, he said when I see my image in it. So, if today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that you are in Hashem’s hands and that He has His eye on you. He will keep holding and watching you until he sees his image in you.

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#### Weekly Alignment

During Sefira we learn Pirkei Avos. On each week of Sefira we learn that which corresponds to its Midda. The first week of Sefira is Pesach and that is when we read Shir Hashirim, the love song. That is the Midda of Chesed which is the trait we work on that week. The following week we begin Pirkei Avos which starts Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and the Gemara<sup>25</sup> states אבני ולא י-ה-י-ה לך מפי הגבורה שמענום. This is the characteristic of Gevura, Din, that which we work on the second week of Sefira. The third week matches up with the second chapter of Avos which begins what is the דרך ישרה that man should choose for himself. The answer: כל שהיא הנפארת לעשה. **ותפארת...** This is the attribute of Tiferes, that which we improve on in the third week, The fourth week is Netzach and the third chapter starts, consider three things and you won’t come to sin. This helps one be victorious over the Yetzer Hara leading one to an eternal life in the next world. Netzach means victory and eternity. Then comes the trait of הוד. This corresponds to the fourth chapter which opens up, who is wise, one who learns from everyone. That requires submissiveness (הוד). Next is יסוד and the fifth chapter starts that the world was created with 10 utterances. This is just as יסוד brings forth creations. The last Sefira is Malchus and the last chapter is about acquiring Torah as it is called קנין התורה. After we work on these Middos we get to Torah, Shavuos. This pattern is in accordance with דרך ארץ <sup>26</sup>קדמה לתורה as first we work on our Middos and then comes the Torah, Shavuos.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R’ Mordechai Friedlander Tz”l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R’ Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

<sup>24</sup> Malachi 3:3.

<sup>25</sup> Makkos 24a.

<sup>26</sup> R’ Chaim Vital says in Shaarei Kedusha that the Torah doesn’t speak of Middos because it is a prerequisite to Torah as in דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה.