



# A Taste of Torah Make It Count

By Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

Confusion reigned. Moshe had ascended to heaven to receive the Torah, and it seemed he would never return. A Golden Calf was created to lead the people in his stead. It was a terrible mistake; the following day, Moshe would return. Satan had made it appear as if Moshe had died. That mistake cost us dearly, as thousands of Jews died on that day.

All was not lost, however. The Jews repented, and G-d forgave. It was then that we received a special gift, a show of G-d's love. As Rashi in this week's parsha (Bamidbar 1:2) writes, "Because of [Israel's] dearness before Him, He counts them at all times. When they departed from Egypt He counted them. And when they fell at the [Sin of the Golden] Calf, He counted them."

A star rose up amidst the Jewish People, Rabbi Akiva. Once a simple shepherd, he was a great leader. And this great leader had great students, twenty-four thousand of them. But a tragedy occurred; his students began

dying. Ultimately, they all passed away, during the period between Pesach and Shavuos.

A most troubling and perplexing event, to be sure... but what does all this mean for us? What are we to learn from the calamity? Our Sages (Yevamos 63b) tell us that they died because they didn't show each other proper respect. And we, in turn, discover the importance of how we relate to others.

We are enjoined to follow in the ways of G-d. So let us be reminded, for a moment, how G-d dealt with the Jews. Shortly after the great Sin of the Golden Calf, G-d counted us. He showed us then that each Jew is important.

There are moments that we can make a difference in someone's life; countless such moments. In these days between Pesach and Shavuos, days during which the students of Rabbi Akiva passed away, let us show each Jew that he counts. Much as G-d showed us, even after that great Sin of the Golden Calf.

# Ask the Rabbi Omer: Counting Up

From: Yehuda

Dear Rabbi,

What is the connection between counting the Omer and working on ourselves and self-improvement? I imagine it has to do with getting ready for Shavuos, but I'm not sure how that works.

Dear Yehuda,

According to the Zohar, as a result of exile and the spiritual impurity of ancient Egypt, the Jewish people sank to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. This was so much so, that if they had stayed there any longer, they would not have

been deemed worthy of redemption at all. After the Exodus, during the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuos, they elevated themselves from each level of tumah (impurity) to the corresponding level of tahara (purity).

This is commemorated with the period of the counting of the Omer - Sefirat HaOmer - in preparation for the receiving of the Torah in purity on Shavuot.

The Torah refers to this with the verse: "u'Sefartem lachem...sheva sha-vo'ot" - "count for yourselves seven weeks". The word "yourselves" seems unnecessary. Wouldn't it be enough to

## Stories For The Soul

### Every Jew is Precious

Mrs. Celia Rosen lived in a Williamsburg apartment house with six families to a floor. One of her neighbors was the Salganick family. Although they had a cultural connection to Judaism, they sent their son, Al, to public school, even though they lived only one block from the Torah Vodaath Yeshiva.

Mrs. Rosen, upset at the situation, befriended the Salganick family, and soon Al became her "adopted nephew." One day, she marched into the Salganick apartment and announced that a Jewish boy belongs in yeshiva. At first, the Salganicks refused. After nudging (badgering) the apprehensive parents long and hard and smoothing over every objection, Mrs. Rosen succeeded in her mission.

The next day Mrs. Salganick went to the yeshiva. She told the rabbi that perhaps her son wouldn't be welcome because his parents were uneducated and not religious.

The Rabbi responded, "Mrs. Salganick, yours is exactly the type of family we want," and the boy was enrolled on the spot.

The Salganicks and the Rosens were extremely proud at Al's graduation. Torah was learned and lives were changed because one woman cared and dared.

Hashem counts the Jewish people over and over again in the Wilderness. Rashi explains that this is a sign of chiba, affection. Just as a King continually counts his precious treasures, every Jew is precious to Hashem.

*Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.*

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## Kollel Happenings

### FATHERS & SONS

The Denver Community Kollel invites all fathers and sons to its Fathers & Sons program at the DAT Minyan, 6825 E Alameda Ave., Sunday, May 12th. Shacharis begins at 8 am, followed by breakfast and fathers and sons learning until 9:30. There will be a story and great prizes raffled off at 9:30. Bring a friend, get a coupon for a free Slurpee! For more info, email [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org) or call Rabbi Dovid Schwartzberg at 732-779-1297.



### LEARN TO LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. All classes take place in the Aish Bais Medrash, 9550 Belleview Ave. There are other opportunities to join this program outside of the current program, as well. For more info, email [rmm@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmm@denverkollel.org).



### A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issues, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at the Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.

## Interpersonal Issues The Laws of Lashon Hara (Slander)

Lashon hara is not limited to speech, but includes any means of communicating negative information about another, be it through writing,

motions, or facial expressions.

Disgracing oneself along with another is not grounds to permit lashon hara, either.

## Omer: Counting Up

*Continued from front*

say “count seven weeks”? What’s the meaning of the additional “lachem”? Similarly, the verse states that these weeks are to be “temimot” – complete. This also seems superfluous. Isn’t a week by definition 7 days, and therefore complete?

Obviously, the emphasis is on the idea that the counting is to be for us – for our benefit. But in what way?

The commentators explain that the answer to this lies in our understanding of “sefartem”.

Of course, the simple meaning of sefira is count – this is the count-up in anticipation of Shavuot, the receiving of the Torah, which is certainly in our collective benefit.

But many commentators refine our understanding about how this is to be done based on various other meanings of sefira: “Sefar” refers to an outlying area – we are to push ourselves in self-improvement to the limits of our ability. This meaning also implies “border” – we are to limit/control ourselves within the confines of the Torah and mitzvot. Yet another meaning is related to “safir” or sapphire – we are to beautify, purify and polish ourselves in preparation of receiving the Torah.

Other commentaries add an additional understanding based on the kabbalistic idea of the sefirot. The basic idea is to use the meaning, light and energy of the sefirot to guide us in achieving all of the above: maximizing our potential within the framework of Torah and mitzvot in order to make ourselves as luminescent gems in the crown of G-d’s glorious Coronation – which is Shavuot.

While it’s beyond our scope to go

into this last explanation in depth, generally, the seven lower sefirot are associated with 7 attributes or character traits. Thus, each of the 7 weeks of the Omer corresponds to one of these 7 sefirot, where each week highlights the improvement of that (Omer-specific) attribute: week 1 – Chesed/lovingkindness; week 2 – Gevurah/self-control; week 3 – Tiferet/spirituality; week 4 – Netzach/consistency; week 5 – Hod/gratitude; week 6 – Yesod/sanctity; week 7 – Malchut/consolidation (of all of the above).

In truth, our work of self-improvement during the Omer is intended to be even more fine-tuned and specific. This is what’s suggested by the Torah’s referring to 7 complete, full or perfect weeks. Each week is to be complete through the perfection of its individual days. Thus, each week and sefira is subdivided into the 7 days of each week such that there are 49 permutations of sefirot corresponding to each of the 49 days of the Omer.

Also, in the special service of Sefirat HaOmer found in all siddurim [including Ashkenaz, and ArtScroll], this corresponds to the 7 verses of “la’menatzeach” (Psalm 67), often portrayed in the form of the 7-branched menorah, which has a total of 49 words; the central verse of “la’menatzeach” starting with “yismachu” corresponding to the central branch of the menorah, which itself has 49 letters (including vav’s in “tishpot” and “mishor”); the seven lines of the “ana b’koach” prayer which have 7 words each for a total of 49 (including the phrases made by the first letters of the words in each line [which, by the way, form the 42 letter name of G-d]).

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