



Combining the Fantastic Insights of the Avodas Yisrael and His Son Rabbi Moshe Having in Mind All the Days of the Sefirah on the First Day and the Last Day

In this week's parsha, parshas Emor, we find the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer, which we are observing at the present time (Vayikra 23, 15): **וְסַפַּרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת עוֹמֵר הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שָׁבוּעוֹת תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה, עַד מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׂבִיעִית. You shall count for yourselves—from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the “omer” of the waving—seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering (minchah) to Hashem.**

We will begin our discussion by introducing two interpretations of these pesukim, one from the incredible teachings of the holy maggid of Kozhnitz—the author of the Avodas Yisrael—and the second from his esteemed son, Rabbi Moshe of Kozhnitz, zy”a. Their insights teach us a valuable principle concerning the service of Hashem and the observance of all the mitzvos.

The Avodas Yisrael (Pesach) comments on the second passuk: **“Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days.”** Upon reaching the conclusion of the period of the Sefirah, a person should do a self-assessment and reckoning. He should consider how he could have observed the mitzvah of the Sefirah better and more perfectly. HKB”H will view this constructive thought as an actual deed, and it will be considered as if he had fulfilled the entire mitzvah of Sefirah on the last day. In other words, until the last moments of the Sefirah, one is still able to count all of the fifty days. In this light, the continuation of the passuk—**“and you**

shall offer a new meal-offering (minchah) to Hashem”—implies that with this constructive thought, you are offering Hashem a new Minchah—namely, the entire fifty days all over again, anew.

In the commentary *Match Moshe* on the Haggadah, his son, the esteemed Rabbi Moshe, zy”a, adds the following: My father taught that if a person reaches the end of the Sefirah and feels that he has not yet made amends properly and completely, he encourages such a person not to despair, chas v’shalom. This is the implication of the words: **“Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days”**—one has the opportunity to make amends and illuminate all fifty days until the very last moment of the fifty days.

I, the son of the Maggid, say: When the holy Torah says: **“You shall count for yourselves—from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the ‘omer’ of the waving—seven weeks, they shall be complete”**—it is teaching us a valuable lesson. Immediately, from the first day of the Sefirah, it is possible to illuminate and rectify all seven weeks, so that they will be perfect. The passuk employs the word **“לכם”**, implying that we should perfect ourselves starting on the very first day of the Sefirah. Thus, all seven weeks will be as complete and perfect as they should be.

Perfecting the Entire Sefirah Twice

Thus, we have learned that there are two ways to fulfill the mitzvah of counting all fifty days of the Omer in thought. According to the Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy”a, we can have this

intent on the last day of Sefiras HaOmer. According to his son, Rabbi Moshe, zy" a, we can have this in mind already on the first day of Sefiras HaOmer.

Let us now delight in the sacred words of the Imrei Yosef (Moadim Sefiras HaOmer). He concludes that both methods are acceptable and are consistent with the word of Hashem. Let us summarize what he writes: Both methods are true. At the beginning of the Sefirah, on the very first day of the counting, a person should strive to illuminate and rectify all the days of the Sefirah, so that they will be seven perfect, complete weeks. Similarly, when the days of counting are at an end, he should not despair, feeling that he failed to accomplish the necessary tikun. Instead, he should reassure himself that even on the fiftieth and last day of the Sefirah, he can still rectify and illuminate all of the fifty days.

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: **"You shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day (the day following the first day of Pesach) . . . seven weeks, they shall be complete."** It is informing us that we should have in mind to rectify the entire Sefirah period immediately on the first day of the counting—to make all seven weeks perfect and complete. Yet, if one sees that most of the Sefirah has passed, and he has neglected to correct everything that he should have, he should not despair, chas v'shalom. For the passuk specifies: **"Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days"**—even on the last day of the Sefirah, it is still possible for a person to rectify and illuminate the entire fifty-day period.

Fulfilling the Mitzvah in Thought Facilitates Fulfilling It without Obstacles

The Imrei Yosef goes on to add a vital detail. He refers to a fundamental principle concerning the service of Hashem taught by the holy Admor, Sar Shalom of Belz, zy" a, related to the passage of the Korban Tamid (Bamidbar 28, 4). At the beginning of the passage, it says: **"את הכבש אחד תעשה בבוקר ואת"** **"the one lamb you shall make in the morning and the second lamb you shall make in the afternoon."** Further on it says (ibid. 8): **"ואת הכבש השני תעשה"** **"the second lamb you shall**

make in the afternoon, like the morning meal-offering and like its libation. Why does the Torah repeat itself?

He explains that this is the strategy of the yetzer hara. It attempts to curb a person's enthusiasm and desire to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos with the proper intent and focus. Therefore, it is advisable that when a person sets out to perform a particular mitzvah, he should have in mind that when Hashem enables him to actually perform the mitzvah, he will do so with the same desire and alacrity intended by Hashem. When a person has this intent from the very outset, HKB" H will combine this intent with the actual deed; it will be viewed as if he already fulfilled the mitzvah. Subsequently, HKB" H will help him actually complete the deed with that commendable intent.

Thus, we can interpret the pesukim as follows: **"The one lamb you shall make in the morning and the second lamb you shall make in the afternoon"**—in other words, when you make the offering of the first lamb in the morning, you should already have in mind to make the second offering in the afternoon. If you have this commendable mindset, the Torah assures you that it will indeed come true: **"The second lamb you shall make in the afternoon"**—you will succeed in performing the mitzvah properly. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

Let us now apply this idea to the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer. Essentially, the completion and fulfillment of the mitzvah is only at the end of the days of counting. In fact, according to the poskim, if a person misses even a single day of counting, he is no longer able to continue counting with a berachah. Thus, there is a concern that perhaps he will encounter obstacles that will prevent him from fulfilling the entire mitzvah.

To which the Torah advises: **"...שבתם לכם ממחרת השבת"** **"שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה"**—from the outset, at the beginning of the days of the Sefirah, a person should have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of counting all the days of the Sefirah. In keeping with this principle, HKB" H will combine his good intent with the actual deed, and it will be considered as if he already counted seven complete weeks. Hence, the Torah assures us that if one adopts this practice: **"עד ממחרת השבת"**

that when a person performs a mitzvah, he receives divine assistance enabling him to perform another mitzvah. The reason being that the performance of a mitzvah endows a person's body with an aura of kedushah that inspires him to perform another mitzvah.

Accordingly, this explains the advice of the Mahari, zy" a, very nicely. When a person initially accepts upon himself mentally to fulfill a mitzvah, the yetzer is yet unaware of his plan; hence, it does not present any opposition. Additionally, since HKB" H combines his good intent with the actual deed, it is considered as if he actually performed the mitzvah. As a result, he is imbued with an aura of kedushah that enables him subsequently to actually perform the mitzvah, in keeping with the concept of: **One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah**. Thus, he will encounter minimal opposition while performing the mitzvah.

In this vein, we can interpret the continuation of the Mishnah very nicely: **בן עזאי אומר הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה, ושכר מצוה ובורח מן העבירה, שמצוה גוררת מצוה ועבירה גוררת עבירה, שכר מצוה ובורח מן העבירה, שמצוה גוררת מצוה ועבירה גוררת עבירה.** **Ben Azai says: One should run to perform a minor mitzvah just as he would to a major mitzvah, and he should flee from performing an aveirah; for one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one aveirah leads to another aveirah.** This statement raises an obvious question from what we have been taught in another Mishnah (ibid. 2, 1): **והוי זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה, שאין אתה יודע: מתן שכרן של מצות—be as scrupulous with a trivial mitzvah as with a serious one; for you do not know the reward associated with each mitzvah.** Since a person does not know the reward associated with any mitzvah, he has no way of truly knowing what is categorized as a trivial mitzvah. So, how can Ben Azai encourage a person to **"run to perform a minor mitzvah just as he would to a major mitzvah"**?

In keeping with our current discussion, we can suggest that committing to a mitzvah in thought is what Ben Azai refers to as a minor mitzvah. Whereas the actual performance of the mitzvah is what he refers to as a major mitzvah. Thus, he teaches us: **"הוי רץ למצוה קלה כבחמורה"**—strive to also fulfill the mitzvos in your mind prior to performing the actual deed; **"ויבורח מן העבירה"**—and avoid even contemplating an aveirah in your mind.

Why? **Because one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one aveirah leads to another aveirah; for the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah and the reward of an aveirah is an aveirah.** Thus, it turns out that by performing the mitzvos and committing to them mentally, it assists a person to subsequently actually perform them. This concurs with the advice offered by the Mahari, zy" a: **If you accept it upon yourselves now, , it will be pleasant to you from now on.** In contrast, if a person commits an aveirah mentally, he is imbued with tumah that influences him to actually commit aveiros, chas v'shalom.

The Will Generates a Malach Who Helps Complete the Deed

We will continue to elaborate on this idea. It states in the Gemara (Makkos 10b): **מנ התורה ומן הנביאים ומן הכתובים, בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו, מן התורה דכתיב [אצל בלעם] (במדבר כב-יב) לא תלך עמהם, וכתיב (שם כ) קום לך אתם. מן הנביאים דכתיב, (ישעיה מח-יז) אני ה' אלקיך מלמדך להעיל מדריךך בדרך זו תלך. מן הכתובים From the Torah, from the Neviim and from the Ketuvim, we learn that they lead a man in the direction he wishes to go.** The Gemara proceeds to quote pesukim from each of these sources to prove this point.

In Chiddushei Aggados, the Maharsha explains why the plural form **"they lead him"**—is used. Why wasn't the singular used indicating that HKB" H leads him? It is because a man's every thought, utterance and deed generates a related malach. The type of malach generated depends on the person's choices. If he performs a mitzvah, a good malach is generated; if he commits an aveirah, chas v'shalom, a bad malach is generated. This is the implication of the phrase **"מוליכין אותו"**. In other words, those malachim that were generated by that particular desire and thought assist him to complete what he began. The proof from the Torah relates to the incident with Bilam.

This then is the lesson of the Mishnah: **"One mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one aveirah leads to another aveirah."** As the Tiferes Shlomo (Megillas Ruth) writes, when a person performs a mitzvah, a holy malach is created who is sustained by the performance of mitzvos.

That malach helps him perform and observe additional mitzvos. Conversely, when a person commits an aveirah, a destructive malach is created who persuades him and draws him to another aveirah.

This explains beautifully HKB”H’s declaration to Yisrael: **“ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים—and now, if you hearken well to Me and you will keep My covenant, you will be a treasure (“segulah”) to Me from among all the peoples . . .”** Rashi comments: **If you accept the Torah upon yourselves now, it will be pleasant to you from now on; for all beginnings are difficult.** When Yisrael accept upon themselves in their minds to accept all of the precepts of the Torah, that positive will and acceptance generates malachim that will assist them afterwards to fulfill the mitzvos in actual deed, in keeping with the notion: **“They lead a man in the direction he wishes to go.”**

This is indeed what happened, as we learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 88a): **“בשעה שהקדימו ישראל נעשה לנשמע באו ששים רבוא של מלאכי השרת לכל אחד ואחד מישראל, קשרו לו שני כתרים אחד כנגד נעשה ואחד כנגד נשמע, וכיון שחטאו ישראל ירדו מאה ועשרים רבוא מלאכי חבלה ופירקום.”** **At the time Yisrael proclaimed “na’aseh” prior to “nishma,” sixty myriads of ministering angels came to each and every Jew. They tied two crowns to him—one corresponding to “na’aseh” and one corresponding to “nishma.” But when Yisrael sinned, one hundred twenty myriads of destructive angels descended and removed them.** In keeping with this discussion, this can be interpreted as follows: Because Yisrael proclaimed “na’aseh” prior to “nishma,” they accepted upon themselves the obligation to abide by and perform all the precepts of the Torah before actually doing so. Hence, 600,000 good malachim were generated; they each tied two crowns to every individual member of Yisrael to help him actually fulfill the mitzvos. When they sinned, however, other malachim were generated who removed and confiscated their crowns.

Remove the Satan from before Us and from behind Us

We can now shed some light and achieve a better understanding of the recommendations of the holy Maggid

of Kozhnitz and his son Rabbi Moshe, zy”a. On the one hand, if a person fulfills the mitzvah at the outset in his mind, it portends that the yetzer hara will not succeed in preventing him from subsequently fulfilling the actual mitzvah. For, he already fulfilled the mitzvah theoretically, and one mitzvah leads to another.

On the other hand, even if he subsequently performs the actual mitzvah, the yetzer hara is liable to lead him astray with all sorts of improper, misguided intents, causing him to perform the mitzvah “lo l’shma.” Therefore, it is advisable, toward the conclusion of the fulfillment of the mitzvah, to be concerned that one failed to fulfill the mitzvah properly. At that point, one should yearn sincerely with all of one’s being that he had succeeded in fulfilling the mitzvah properly and ideally. In this manner, he will complete the mitzvah and correct any flaws as if he had done so from the outset.

With this in mind, let us propose an interpretation of the formula we recite in Ma’ariv (in the berachah of Hashkiveinu): **“וזהסר טון מלפנינו ומאחרינו”—and remove the adversary from before us and behind us.”** **“From before us”** refers to the fulfillment of the mitzvah in thought and mind prior to the actual performance of the mitzvah. **“From behind us”** refers to the fulfillment of the mitzvah in thought and mind after the actual performance of the mitzvah. By employing both tactics, we are able to thwart the efforts of the Satan, the adversary attempting to prevent us from fulfilling Hashem’s mitzvos properly.

It is with immense pleasure and delight that we can apply this concept to better comprehend the message of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist (Tehillim 62, 12): **“אחת דבר אלקים—שתים זו שמעתי כי עוז לאלקים, ולך ה’ חסד כי אתה תשלם לאיש כמעשהו”—one thing has G-d spoken, these two have I heard: that strength belongs to G-d; and Yours, O Lord, is kindness, for You repay each man according to his deeds.** Here is the interpretation: **“One thing has G-d spoken”—HKB”H commanded us explicitly only once with regards to the fulfillment of the mitzvah. Nevertheless: “These two have I heard”—I have understood that it is advisable to fulfill the mitzvah two more times—once, in one’s thoughts prior to the actual performance of the mitzvah, and a second time, in one’s thoughts after the performance of the mitzvah.**

He explains the advantage of fulfilling the mitzvah in this manner: "כי עוז לאלקים"—because only G-d possesses the power to know man's thoughts. The yetzer hara, on the other hand, does not know man's thoughts; hence, it is powerless to prevent a person from fulfilling the mitzvah in his mind. Now, one might ask what the advantage is of fulfilling a mitzvah twice mentally without an actual deed. To which he answers: "**Yours, O Lord, is kindness, for You repay each man according to his deeds**"—this is a tremendous chesed that Hashem performs on our behalf; He combines a person's good thought and intent with an actual deed and rewards the person as if he actually performed the mitzvah.

We will conclude by suggesting an allusion to this idea in kedushah of Keser recited in Mussaf on Shabbas: "הן" "גאלתי אתכם אחרית כראשית". HKB"H is promising Yisrael that they will merit the future geulah when they also fulfill the mitzvos in thought at the conclusion of a mitzvah—"אחרית"—wishing that they had hopefully fulfilled the mitzvah properly and ideally; just as they should have fulfilled the mitzvah in thought prior to performing the mitzvah—"כראשית". If they do so, the promise of the Melech HaMashiach will become a reality (Sanhedrin 98a): "היום אם" "בקולו תשמעו"—**today, if you heed His voice**. May we merit the complete geulah, swiftly in our times! Amen.



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