

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה להבין ענין ספירת העומר תשמ"ז בלתי מוגה

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REVEALING THE RADIANCE

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO UNDERSTAND THE SERVICE OF COUNTING THE OMER between Pesach and Shavuot. We can consider these three ways in terms of the verse ‘turn away from bad and do good’ (Ps.34.15).

One approach is that during the period of the Counting of the Omer, one is striving on both dimensions: turning away from bad, that means ‘improving’ as regards considering the Negative Commandments, and also positively doing good, achieving more in terms of the Positive Commandments.

This is an understandable process of spiritual preparation for the Giving of the Torah. In this every step, whether turning away from bad, or doing good, is yet another positive step forward in preparation for Sinai.

We refer to this process in the prayer customarily recited after the counting of the Omer, (according to Chabad custom). We ask G-d to purify us and sanctify us with supernal holiness. The discourse explains that to be purified means to turn aside from the negative, and to be sanctified means to do positive actions of the Mitzvot.

A second way of thinking of this process is that during the entire Omer period one is simply striving to move away from bad. This is because our sojourn in Egypt is seen as having dragged us down to the lowest depths, to the forty ninth level of impurity. In order to receive the Torah we have to purify ourselves.

¹ *Lehavin Inyan Sefirat HaOmer 5747*, published in *Dvarmalchut Behar 5774*. The Hebrew text was not edited by the Rebbe.

This means step by step ascending level after level. The Zohar compares this process of preparation for the Giving of the Torah with that of a woman purifying herself in order to be with her husband. She has to count seven 'clean days', and then go to the Mikveh and be purified. Then they can be intimate together. But before then, throughout those seven days she is still considered impure. Only when she finally enters the Mikveh is she purified.

Similarly, looked at from this point of view, we count the forty nine days of the Omer as a steady process of emerging from impurity. It is only at the very end of the process that we really are pure and are then able to experience the boundless spirituality of the Divine on the Shavuot festival.

In this mode, the 'turn aside from bad' is during the entire period of Counting the Omer, and the 'do good' is at the actual moment of the Shavuot revelation, when 'G-d descends on Mount Sinai', a time of intense spiritual revelation.

The Rambam writes in his Guide for the Perplexed² that if there is a mixture of two ingredients, and one of those ingredients is found isolated from the mixture, then according to logic it must be that one can also find the second ingredient on its own.

This applies in our discussion. Since in the second approach above, the service of 'turn aside from bad' is expressed as the sole element in the Counting of the Omer, so too it is logical to suggest there must also be a third way, in which the whole process of the Counting of the Omer is one of 'doing good'.

Consistent with this view is the fact that in a number of Chassidic discourses the Jewish people leaving Egypt are described as Tzaddikim. In this they contrast with our service on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when we are considered Baalei Teshuvah, Repentants.

Further, Midrash Aggadah states³ that the real reason why we count the Omer today is to imitate the Jewish people at the time of the Exodus. As soon as they left Egypt, Moses announced that in fifty days they would be receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai. So the Jewish people began counting the days with excitement, as an expression of yearning for closeness to the Divine. This too expresses our third way, in which our striving is always for a yet higher variety of good.

This is like in the time of the Messiah, when every choice will be, not good versus bad, but one of better as opposed to good.

² Guide II ch.1

³ Rabbeinu Nissim (the R" N) at the end of Tractate Pesachim.

We thus have three approaches: turning away from bad and seeking good; focusing only on purifying ourselves from the bad; focusing only on good, going higher and higher and higher.

The discourse explains that these three aspects of counting the Omer also apply throughout the year. For any Mitzva is eternal and has an eternal effect; so too our Mitzva of counting of the Omer has a constant effect on us. Thus, even though the counting of the Omer is only at a specific point in the year, between Pesach and Shavuot, the three approaches to life in terms of ‘turn away from evil and do good’ apply every day.

Further, this mode of thinking about what we are trying to achieve spiritually is also relevant to women. As regards the preparation for the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, women were actually singled out before the men, with the words ‘thus you should say to the House of Jacob’, meaning the women⁴. Hence the three approaches apply to women as well as men, not only during the time of counting the Omer but throughout the year.

A further point is that through these three aspects of the Counting of the Omer, we achieve spiritual radiance. For the Hebrew word ‘counting’, sefirah, relates to the kabbalistic term Sefirah – referring to one of the sacred Divine emanations – and also to the word Sapphire, which is understood not just as a jewel but as a radiant jewel. In the process of ‘counting’, as expressed in the verse וספרתם לכם ‘you should count for yourselves’⁵ we are making our inner selves radiant.

This means that we should be striving to make our own selves radiant, and all our Mitzvot radiant. This even extends into the practicality of the Mitzvot, as is seen in a story about a woman who polished the coins so that they shone, before she gave them to charity.

In response to this we will reach the time when instead of G-d being ‘charitable’ in that He has scattered us among the nations⁶, there will be the Tzedakah that G-d will express by collecting us all up together, from where we were scattered, with the coming of Moshiach, swiftly in our days.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care

⁴ See Exodus 19:3, and Rashi’s commentary there.

⁵ Leviticus 23:15.

⁶ See Pesachim 87b.