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TEACHING BY EXAMPLE: APPRECIATING THE GOOD

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The *parasha* opens with a census of the Jewish people. Virtually every child in a middle school yeshiva will be taught Rashi's question: If we counted the people when we left Egypt and again after the sin of the *eigel*, why are we counting yet a third time? The answer we are given is that Hashem loves us and therefore counts us repeatedly. Each *rebbe* will then search for relevant examples of things that we find precious and count often. Jewelers count their diamonds, bankers count their money, counselors count their campers, teachers count their students, etc. The problem is, we count these things because we are anxious about the things we hold dear and are nervous that perhaps we might have missed one of them. Hashem, however, has no such anxiety. He knows who and where His sheep are at all times. Nevertheless, he counts us. Why? Also, one could ask, why is it that Hashem makes Moshe go through the quite time consuming counting process? Isn't Moshe busy with so many other things? Why make him do all this if Hashem could have just given him the total and told him to write it down? There simply could have been an accounting of the tribes listed in the Torah, as we find many times in Tanach. Here, however, Moshe is told to go with the Nesi'im and go to each and every household to bring the men out and give their names along with proof of their lineage via witnesses or a birth certificate.

In this process, the Jews were not just counted: they were acutely aware that they were being counted. This makes all the difference in the world. Teaching by example is not the best way to teach. It is the only way to teach. Hashem demonstrated for all of us that when we appreciate the people that we love we should do it in a way that they are

aware of it. How often we have seen fathers who kill themselves working all hours of the day and night to take care of their families. Such a father might be shocked to find that his son or daughter thinks that he doesn't like them. After all, he comes home after they go to bed and leaves before they wake up. On Shabbos he's so exhausted that he can barely stay awake Friday night at the table. Shabbos day he invites company over to the *seudah*, which is adult conversation, and then he goes up for a nap and asks his son to wake him for *minchah*. During Shalshudis he sits with his friends and catches up. After Havdalah at home he opens up his bills.

Sound familiar? Yes, but there really are bills to pay and all this is necessary! Maybe. When chided by his wife for not spending enough time with his children his response is "Are you kidding? Do you have any idea how many calls I have made to the *yeshiva* to follow up on his progress? Why do you think I work so hard to give him all of these things? Don't you know how I have him on my mind every day?" "Of course I do," she responds, "but *he* doesn't." It sounds simple enough, but it means that our children must hear what we're doing for them and how much we care about them. They must know how we would like to spend more time with them if we could and that all of our efforts are on their behalf. In *Maseches Avos* we are told that Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakai had five students and he used to sing their praises (2:8). Each had his own unique talent and excellence. It only dawned upon me a few years ago that the most significant thing in this *mishnah* was not the specific attributes of the students but rather the fact that their *rebbe* regularly used to praise them. If we only pay attention we can see that Hashem does this throughout the Chumash, showing us what to do by example.

The quickest examples that come to mind are when those that were carrying Yosef's *aron* were *tamei* and couldn't participate in the Korban Pesach (Bamidbar 9:6). Rather than just opt out with an exemption, they wanted to be able to fulfill this *mitzvah*. When they asked Moshe about it, he didn't

know the answer because Hashem wanted this new Halacha to come into the world in a conspicuous way, highlighting their intense desire to serve Hashem passionately. Hashem could have just told Moshe and the answer earlier, and Moshe would've been able to tell them "Don't worry, you can do a makeup *korban* in a month". However, this would have been a lost opportunity to praise those who deserved it. Likewise, when Benos Tzelafchad asked Moshe about inheriting their father's estate (Bamidbar 27:4), as they had no brothers, Moshe didn't know the answer. Again, Chazal tell us that Hashem wanted to take the opportunity to highlight their intense desire to acquire a part of Eretz Yisrael. Another opportunity to give praise where it is due.

During my fifteen years working as a high school youth director in the Great Neck Synagogue while also being a *rebbe* in middle school, I had the *zechus* to get to know the late Rabbi Ephraim Wolf, who really put the community of Great Neck on the map. I would watch in awe as he would do such unusual things. On one such occasion I was asked by the *shul's* Rabbi to cover the Gemara shiur before Shabbos Minchah, as he had other pressing responsibilities. I readily agreed and prepared that afternoon. Like most pre-*minchah* *shiurim*, I first got the regulars and then more and more people trickled in as the time of *minchah* approached, since the *shiur* was given in the sanctuary where we would daven. Rabbi Wolf was in attendance. By this time, he was an elderly gentleman and given the title of Rabbi Emeritus. No sooner had he opened his Gemara then he fell asleep. I was not insulted, as he was an elderly man and such things happen. However, as the shiur came to a close and there was a Kaddish Derabanan the crowd began to move and Rabbi Wolf woke up and then joined us for *minchah* (after stepping out to wash his hands). After *minchah* and before Shalshudis, Rabbi Wolf approached me in front of a few of the *balebatim* and told me how "thrilling" my shiur was. He went on to comment upon my "*koach hesber*" and emphasized how lucky our community was to have such talented young rabbis who could say *shiurim* with such short notice. Meanwhile, I'm thinking "You've got to be kidding, you slept through the whole thing!" That weekend I realized the greatness of Rabbi Ephraim Wolf. For him, what I had said in the *shiur* was not nearly as significant as the opportunity that presented itself to him to make a young rabbi feel appreciated and loved.

I have never forgotten this and try to convey this every day to my Talmidim. The truth is that the first time I walked into the resource room in middle school, where kids who need a little extra help go to learn, I saw the same idea illustrated.

There was a picture of a woman in school who clearly was the teacher. She was bending down and whispering something into the ear of a young child who had a tremendous grin. The caption was "words of praise seldom go in one ear and out the other". Let's not waste any more of these precious opportunities that are always around us, to follow Hashem's lead and acknowledge the good others do.

SHAYUOS: CULMINATION OF SEFIRAH OR ITS OWN ENTITY?

Tani Finkelstein ('17)

If one takes a look at the *pesukim* in Parashas Emor regarding Sefiras Ha'omer (Vayikra 23:15), an obvious discrepancy stands out. First the *passuk* says that one should count "*shevah shabason*," or "seven weeks," and then it says one should count "*chamishim yom*," or "fifty days." Anyone who knows basic arithmetic knows that seven weeks equals forty-nine days, which is not the same as fifty days. So which one is it, and why does the *passuk* say both? Multiple answers have been given to this question, and in discussing them, I believe we will come to a better understanding as to the connection of Shavuos to Sefiras Ha'omer.

Tosafos (Menachos 65b) takes up this question and answers that obviously we only count Sefiras Ha'omer for 49 days. When the Torah says 50, it means *until* 50, upon which we bring the two-loaves offering. They explain this based on the immediate juxtaposition in the *pesukim* of "*tisperu chamishim yom*," the counting of the 50 days, and "*v'hikravtem minchah chadashah lashem*," the bringing of the new meal offering (Vayikra 23:16).

The Rosh in the end of Pesachim, however, offers another explanation. He says granted, of course the Sefirah is only actually 49 days, but the Torah says 50 days because that is the way of the Torah to round off a number ending with a nine to make it an even, whole multiple of ten. For example, points out the Rosh, the Torah says that "seventy souls" descended from Canaan to Egypt, but in reality, there were only 69. We often hear explanations for the count of 70, such as that Yocheved, born as they entered Mitzrayim,

was the seventieth soul, or that Hashem was the seventieth, but the Rosh says more simply that there were, in fact, only

69, but the Torah just rounded it off to 70. Another example of this, he points out, is that the Torah says that when one incurs the penalty of lashes, one gets forty lashes, when in fact the Rabbis tell us that one only gets thirty-nine. Sefiras Ha'omer too, explains the Rosh, is really only 49 days, but the Torah merely rounded it out to 50 days. According to both of these explanations, though, the 50th day is not included in Sefiras Ha'omer.

A third idea is pointed out by many Acharonim, but perhaps finds its roots as early as the Rokeach, Rav Eleazar of Worms. The Rokeach (Siman 294) writes that we count 49 days, but on the 50th, we do not need to count, since we mention the day in the *tefillah* and *kiddush* on Shavuos. Rav Yosef Engel explains that even though he does not state it explicitly, it appears the Rokeach's intention is to answer our very question, and his answer is that there is in fact an obligation of Sefirah on the fiftieth day, but it is just accomplished in a different fashion than the other forty-nine days.

This idea that Shavuos is not merely after the Sefiras Ha'omer, but is part and parcel of it as the fiftieth day and culmination of the Omer, says Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, can be extracted from the language of the Rambam. The Rambam (Hilchos Temidim u'musafin 8:1) writes that "on the fiftieth day of the Sefiras Ha'omer is the festival of Shavuos." Clearly, the Rav reasons, the Rambam also takes this view that Shavuos is in the fact part of Sefiras Ha'omer.

Why don't Tosafos, the Rosh, and others give this answer? Perhaps because, as Rav Soloveitchik points out, few besides the Rambam can say that Shavuos is part of Sefiras Ha'omer. Why? Because the Rambam has the unique opinion that Sefiras Ha'omer is still a Torah obligation even today. The position that Sefirah is only a Rabbinic obligation today, held by most authorities, is based on the understanding that Sefirah is a law dependent on the Korban Ha'omer, the Omer offering, and nowadays Sefirah is only Rabbinic in nature since there is no longer a Beis Hamikdash to allow us to bring the offering. According to that line of reasoning, you cannot say that the holiday of Shavuos is part of the Sefiras Ha'omer, because Shavuos is clearly a Torah obligation even today! If, however, you hold that Sefirah is still a Torah obligation, as the Rambam does, which means that you hold that Sefirah is not a law dependent on the bringing of the Omer offering, then you can consider Shavuos as part of the

Sefirah, as it will always apply even today without the Beis Hamikdash.

This fundamental question, whether the holiday of Shavuos is a culmination of Sefiras Ha'omer or a holiday in of itself, can be seen in other elements of Sefiras Ha'omer as well. The Ran Al Harif, at the end of Pesachim, points out a possible reason for Sefiras Ha'omer from a *midrash* that after Yetzias Mitzrayim, when Moshe told Bnei Yisrael "*ta'avdun es ha'elokim al hahar hazeh*, you shall serve G-d on this mountain (Shemos 3:12)," they asked Moshe when this would be, and he replied that it would be after fifty days. At that point onward, every single member of Klal Yisrael personally counted fifty days until the receiving of the Torah. If this would be the source for Sefiras Ha'omer, then Shavuos would seem not to be part of the Omer, as the counting was merely an anticipation and Shavuos was the time of execution, the time of receiving the Torah. If you say more classically that the source of Sefiras Ha'omer is the counting between the time of the bringing of the barley Omer offering until the time of the two-loaves offering on Shavuos, than Shavuos would seem to be more of a culmination of Sefiras Ha'omer.

The Sefer Hachinuch asks, why do we count Sefiras Ha'omer by the days that have passed since the bringing of the Omer, and not by the days we have left until Shavuos? He answers that by counting in the way we do, we build more excitement to getting to Shavuos. If we would count how many days were left, Shavuos would seem very distant and out of reach, but if we count how many days have passed, we excite ourselves that we are making progress towards Shavuos, no matter how far away it is. Perhaps this practice of counting days passed would seem to indicate that Shavuos is a culmination of the Sefiras Ha'omer, as it is the fiftieth day of the Omer, whereas counting remaining days would have indicated that Shavuos is its own day, as saying "today is (blank) many days until Shavuos" implies that Shavuos is something that happens afterwards, its own holiday, not part of Sefirah.

The Ramban famously calls Sefiras Ha'omer a "Chol Ha'moed" between Pesach and Shavuos. Such an idea would indicate that Sefirah and Shavuos are interconnected, but very

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distinct in nature. On a more simple level, the fact that Shavuos is a unique holiday in that its date is not based on the sanctification of the month by the Beit Din (and in fact, its date is not even mentioned explicitly in the Torah), but rather is based on the Sefiras Ha'omer, perhaps indicates its intrinsic link to Sefiras Ha'omer, rather than being a separate holiday that follows from it.

Either way, as Sefira wraps up and Shavuos dawns upon us, let us prepare ourselves and ensure that we are fully ready to re-accept the Torah from Sinai once again.



שבת שלום!