



## THE THREE STEPS OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION

*Sefiras ha'omer* marks the time between Pesach and Shavuos, Pesach being when we left Mitzrayim, and Shavuos when the Torah was given. These two events are strongly connected, as the purpose of leaving Mitzrayim was to "serve Hashem at this mountain," *Matan Torah*, and conversely, the *Aseres Hadibros* begin with "I am Hashem...Who took you out of Mitzrayim."

*Sefiras ha'omer* spans the time between these two events, indicating that this is all one continuum. Indeed, the Torah emphasizes that *sefiras ha'omer* should begin "*mi'macharas ha'shabbos*—the day after Shabbos," referring to the first day of Pesach, and that it is immediately followed by "the fiftieth day," Shavuos.

We also find that although all the months of the year are counted from the month of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, it is only Nissan, Iyar and Sivan that the Torah specifically describes as "the time in which you left Mitzrayim" or "the second/third month after leaving Mitzrayim." This indicates that leaving Mitzrayim consists of three stages: first the *Yetzias Mitzrayim* of Nissan, then the *sefirah*, which is primarily associated with Iyar, and finally, the climax, *Matan Torah* in Sivan.

What does this all mean?

### TWO TYPES OF TESHUVAH

*Yetzias Mitzrayim* did not occur thanks to the efforts of *Bnei Yisroel*; it came about entirely from Above. Although *Bnei Yisroel* were devoid of *mitzvos*, Hashem simply revealed Himself, and this tremendous revelation drew them toward Him and created the incredible arousal that carried them out of Mitzrayim. The Jews were inspired to the extent that they followed Hashem into the desert without any regard for the logistics. However, this great inspiration didn't really change them.

To give an example:

There are two ways you can do *teshuvah*. One way is to learn *seforim* that discuss Hashem's greatness and the terrible damage of an *aveirah*. Through learning and internalizing these ideas, you will regret the past and pledge a better future. Alternatively, with no preparation whatsoever, you can be visited by thoughts of repentance.

What's the origin of these sudden thoughts? It's said that there is a Heavenly announcement that calls for *teshuvah*. What is it for if no one can hear it? The Baal Shem Tov explains that our souls are privy to these declarations, and this is what initiates

the inspiration for *teshuvah*.

But which of these two is greater, the inspiration that derives from the Heavenly call, or engaging in personal study and effort? In truth, both are superior in their own way.

On the one hand, the inspiration that originates from Above is much greater. No matter how much effort you will put into focusing on Hashem's greatness and the spiritual harm of an *aveirah*, since our understanding is limited, the *teshuvah* which that inspires will be commensurately measured. However, the Heavenly call isn't constrained and conveys the true severity of the sin, and thus the resulting *hisorerus* is far greater.

But on the other hand, since you didn't do nothing of your own, although the inspiration might be stronger, it won't permeate you as much and won't last as long. However, when you're involved and invest effort, while you might not be as aroused, the inspiration you do feel is part of you and holds for longer.

### THE GAAVAH AND THE TAAVAH

The same is true in every area. Consider *gaavah*, the source of all evil traits. How can one rid oneself of it? One way is by questioning why you hold highly of yourself. If it's because you were blessed with wealth, you can contemplate on the fact that the money isn't yours and isn't an indication of your financial acumen. It's a gift from Hashem's, given to you for the purpose of dispensing *tzedakah* and other noble purposes. To the contrary; you must ask yourself if you're utilizing Hashem's gift properly!

The same is true if you possess spiritual wealth, in the form of Torah knowledge and the like. That's Hashem's gift too, and you must ask yourself whether you're using it properly. In this vein, each person can realize that there's nothing to be prideful about.

Alternatively, you could just note that Hashem despises the haughty and then cease being a *baal gaavah*. But the question is: have you truly changed? As long as the latent motive for *gaavah* is still present, no inspiration will really help. You can tell yourself numerous times that pride is forbidden and that Hashem loathes it, but if you're still convinced of your greatness, you'll remain a *baal gaavah*.

Or take another example: a passion for worldly pleasures. There's only one truly effective way to eliminate your *taavos*, and that is by focusing on how the objects of your desires are not truly good; they are only appropriate for an animal, not for a human. The only genuine good is *Elokus*, "*taamu u'r'u ki tov*

*Havaya*—taste and you'll see that Hashem is good." The more you'll internalize this, the greater success you'll have at reducing your enjoyment of physical pleasures (at least to a certain extent).

But if you never comprehend that materialism isn't desirable, and merely accept that it's wrong because it's against Hashem's will, then the inspiration will not lessen the actual *taavah*, since you've never changed your inner perception of what is considered good.

You can tell yourself numerous times that Hashem loathes arrogance, but if you're still convinced of your greatness, you'll remain a baal gaavah.

reach beyond our limited capacity.

And that's why it says "*u'sfartem lachem mi'macharas ha'shabbos.*" The self-improvement of *sefiras ha'omer* is not a standalone *avodah*; it's a continuation of Pesach, when Hashem revealed Himself to us. In addition to inspiring us to follow Him, Hashem also infuses our *avodah* of *sefiras ha'omer* with a G-dly, unrestricted energy, enabling our subsequent counting to reach greater heights. We thus have both advantages together: the internal effect of our own *avodah*, and the unlimited power of

## INTERNAL CHANGE...

This gives us insight into the difference between the first two steps of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*.

The first was a tremendous Heavenly arousal which involved no effort, and it resulted in incredible devotion to the extent of throwing caution to the wind and following Hashem into the desert. Yet, the Gemara states that the "*zuhama*," the spiritual contamination which originated in *Mitzrayim*, stayed with the Jews until *Matan Torah*. How could both be true at the same time? If they Jews experienced such a great spiritual arousal, how can it be that they still retained the *zuhama*?

The answer is because, as explained above, it's possible to submit yourself entirely to Hashem, yet your individual traits remain unchanged. Although *Bnei Yisroel* expressed incredible devotion to Hashem, their *midos* remained unaffected.

This is why *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was immediately followed by *sefiras ha'omer*. Being inspired isn't sufficient; we must work on improving our *midos*, one at a time. We are given a full week for each of the seven *midos*, each one of which is subdivided into seven. This is the meaning of "*u'sfartem lachem*": *u'sfartem*, to count, can also be translated as "shine." "*U'sfartem lachem*" thus means, "you shall illuminate and elevate yourselves."

divine inspiration.

This combination is the third step, which is the climax of *Yetzias Mitzrayim: Matan Torah*. At *Matan Torah*, "those above descended below," referring to the Heavenly energy reaching us here, and "those below rose above," indicating our efforts to elevate ourselves. And Hashem stated that it would begin with Him: the spiritual revelation of *Har Sinai* occurred first, granting us the ability to "rise above" beyond what we would have been able to achieve on our own.

## THREE DAILY STEPS

Each one of us similarly undergoes these three stages on a daily basis. As soon as we awaken, we say *Modeh Ani*, recognizing that Hashem is our King and surrendering ourselves to Him. That's the *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, following Hashem into the desert.

But that's not enough. We must then begin the process of cleansing ourselves by washing *negel vasser*, learning Chassidus, and davening (not just *Hodu*, but) *pesukei d'zimra* and *birchos krias shema*. It is specifically these efforts that result in "*v'ahavta*," to love Hashem not only with our G-dly soul, but also with our animal soul.

We then reach the climax during *shemoneh esreh*, where the two are combined—the divine arousal and the personal *avodah*.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 1, pp. 265ff.

## ...WITH UNLIMITED IMPACT

Yet, as we successfully alter ourselves, we return to the problem of the inadequate range of our human efforts: alone, we cannot



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