



# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

Dedicated to the hatzlacha of  
Dan Benishu and her Family

# ...*~* PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL *~*...

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## Parshat Emor

### Avoiding Strife and Division

Rabbi Menashe Yisrael Reizman shared the following story:<sup>1</sup>

The shocking news spread like wildfire and stunned all the Jews of Lithuania and its neighboring lands: the saintly Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, of blessed memory, Rosh Yeshivah of Telz, had passed away suddenly—on foreign soil, far from his home and his community.

According to the reports, the Rosh Yeshivah had traveled to the distant city of London on a fundraising mission to support the yeshivah under his leadership. And there, while staying in the British capital, he returned his pure soul to its Maker. His funeral was held on a dark and gloomy day, and he was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery in London.

The Rosh Yeshivah's name was well-known and revered, and many mourned the great loss to the Torah world. Those who were privy to additional details regarding the purpose of his journey did not hold back from voicing their questions and surprise about this final journey from which he did not return.

The report claimed that a debt of approximately five thousand rubles burdening the yeshivah administration was what compelled the Rosh Yeshivah to embark on his fundraising journey to London. But those with knowledge of the workings of the yeshivah were taken aback by this: Rabbi Eliezer was deeply admired by all, and many of the world's wealthy

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elite considered it a privilege to support his illustrious yeshivah. Wealthy magnates from Petersburg and Moscow were among the steadfast pillars of the Telz Yeshivah, and a sum of five thousand rubles was well within their means. Had Rabbi Eliezer merely sent them a letter requesting the sum, they would have gladly transferred the full amount to him. Why, then, did the Rosh Yeshivah see fit to travel in person to distant England, a place he had never before visited, to collect this relatively modest amount with such great effort?

This question lingered for many days—until one day, an acquaintance of the Rosh Yeshivah happened to arrive in London and met the local rabbi of the observant Jewish community, who shared with him, in a trembling voice, the unfolding of the episode of great Divine providence that had orchestrated the arrival of the righteous Rabbi Eliezer Gordon to the faraway land in the twilight of his life:

Several decades earlier, Rabbi Yehoshua Heller served as the rabbi of Telz, and Rabbi Shlomo Levi (a pseudonym) acted as the Av Beit Din (chief justice of the religious court).

In time, Rabbi Yehoshua Heller retired from his position and moved to Vilna, leaving the rabbinic seat of Telz vacant.

A number of the city's prominent members set their sights on Rabbi Shlomo Levi and began to promote his candidacy for the position of chief rabbi. His name was raised in the meetings of community leaders, who visited their peers to garner support for appointing the Av Beit Din as the new rabbi of Telz.

However, other candidates were also considered, and at a general meeting of the city's leaders, it was resolved that an election would be held to determine who would become the community's next halachic authority.

As the election date approached, it appeared likely

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that Rabbi Shlomo Levi would win the majority vote. But shortly before the decision was finalized, one prominent community activist suggested the renowned Rabbi Eliezer Gordon as a candidate—hoping that he would agree to take the post and relocate to the prestigious city of Telz.

This new suggestion was received with great enthusiasm by the community leadership, who promptly dispatched a delegation to the rabbi's home to offer him the position without holding elections and to ask whether he would accept their invitation to lead the city.

Rabbi Gordon consented to their request and agreed to move and dwell among them. Rabbi Gordon was unanimously chosen to serve as the rabbi of Telz, and Rabbi Shlomo Levi was demoralized. He had been the favored candidate, and now the city had chosen an outsider over him, the Av Beit Din.

He felt unwanted by his community, and he resolved that, should another offer arise to serve

as rabbi or Av Beit Din elsewhere, he would relocate to a place where he was more adequately honored and appreciated. Although he harbored some resentment toward the new rabbi, he righteously suppressed his feelings and never uttered a word of complaint.

A few months passed, and one day, a stranger knocked on Rabbi Shlomo Levi's door, introducing himself as an emissary of the Jewish community in distant Finland. The man produced a formal letter requesting that the esteemed rabbi—whose reputation had reached even their remote country—accept the position of rabbi and Av Beit Din of their Jewish community in Helsinki, Finland. Though he hesitated momentarily—Finland being a cold and distant land—he soon agreed, sensing the opportunity to leave the city where he had been rudely bypassed.

Rabbi Shlomo Levi served in Helsinki for a time, until he was invited to become the rabbi of the newly established “Machzikei

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Hadass” congregation in London—a Torah-observant community of Eastern European Jews who had settled in the British capital. He readily accepted the offer and soon relocated to London to serve as their spiritual leader.

At this point in our tale, let us return to Telz...

Reb Mendel Cohen (also a pseudonym) was a devout and upright Jew who had served as a shochet and bodek (ritual slaughterer and inspector) in Telz for many years. Since the days of Rabbi Heller’s tenure as chief rabbi, Reb Mendel had been ordained as a qualified shochet, and the entire city trusted his work implicitly. The rabbis and dayanim of Telz attested to his meticulousness, consistently finding his knives to be flawless.

When Rabbi Gordon first arrived in Telz, Reb Mendel respectfully presented to him his knives for inspection. The rabbi gently ran his fingernail over the blade, but to the shochet’s dismay, he let out a slight hum of dissatisfaction. Reb Mendel was

devastated. Though the rabbi ultimately declared the knife kosher with a nod of approval, the shochet was deeply shaken. He returned home crushed, and though he thoroughly re-examined the blade, he could find no possible flaw. Nonetheless, being a man of profound fear of Heaven, he resolved on the spot to retire from ritual slaughter forever. He packed up his belongings and left Telz, relocating to London in the hope of finding new employment that would allow him to support his family without bearing the immense responsibility of the profession of shechitah.

After a difficult transition, Reb Mendel adapted to his new surroundings, entering local commerce and quickly becoming a respected and prominent figure in the community.

Returning to the fundraising mission of Rabbi Eliezer Gordon—although he was renowned across Lithuania—he was not widely known in far-off London. When the Rosh Yeshivah arrived there on his

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fundraising mission, he found to his dismay that few had heard of his yeshivah at all, and even fewer could properly pronounce his name. Only a small handful recalled hearing of the Telzer Rav, and they made no effort to host him or assist him in his campaign.

Reb Mendel, who had known the rabbi back in Telz, stepped in to help. He graciously opened his spacious home to the Rosh Yeshivah and even became his personal attendant for the duration of his stay. Despite harboring a buried resentment toward the rabbi, who had been responsible for uprooting him from Telz and forcing him into exile, Reb Mendel served him with honor and devotion, in deference to his great Torah stature.

As the two spent time together, they reminisced about old times, and at one point, Reb Mendel opened his heart and revealed that it was the rabbi's reaction during that initial knife inspection that had driven him

to abandon his profession and leave his hometown.

Rabbi Gordon was thunderstruck. "Reb Mendel!" he cried out, choking back tears. "You've carried this pain in your heart for thirty years—and it was all because of me!"

The rabbi burst into uncontrollable sobs, and he grasped Reb Mendel's hand, embraced him, and tearfully pleaded, "Please, Reb Mendel! Forgive me! I had no ill intent—it was a complete misunderstanding."

The two were fully reconciled, and any lingering bitterness was dissolved in heartfelt love and friendship.

The Rosh Yeshivah stayed in East London, the heart of the observant community, and he prayed regularly at the local synagogue under the leadership of Rabbi Shlomo Levi—his old acquaintance. The two scholars saw each other daily and engaged in discussions of Torah study and halachic analysis.

Over time, their friendship deepened. One morning after

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prayer, Rabbi Shlomo Levi confided in Rabbi Gordon and finally revealed the true reason he had left Telz to take up the rabbinate in Finland—sharing the pain he had silently borne for decades. As he spoke, a single tear escaped his eye and rolled down his whitening beard—revealing the deep wound he still carried.

Rabbi Gordon sat silent, aghast. His face turned pale, and with torrents of tears that fell from his eyes, long minutes passed in breathless silence.

Then, as if breaking through a wall of dread and anguish, the Rosh Yeshivah whispered in a trembling voice: “Rabbi Shlomo, my dear! I had no idea... Woe is me! For decades, I caused anguish to an honorable Torah scholar!”

Rabbi Shlomo quickly cried out reassuringly, “Rabbi, I forgive you! I forgive you with a full heart!”

The thirty years of pain, wandering, and distance from Torah came to an end; the bitterness was healed and finally erased.

That very day, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon fell ill in the foreign and distant city so far away from home.

In an ironic twist of Divine providence, he was nursed with devotion by Rabbi Shlomo and Reb Mendel, until after several days, sadly, the Rosh Yeshivah of Telz returned his soul to his Maker—pure, cleansed, and redeemed.

G-d had sought to bring to Heaven a righteous soul after first crowning it with complete reconciliation. And so, without any other obvious reason, He dispatched Rabbi Eliezer Gordon to distant London—all in order to complete his soul’s mission in perfect peace.<sup>2</sup>

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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2. G-d loves and cherishes each and every Jew, regardless of their spiritual state, and He constantly sends them

signs and hints that say, “I’m waiting for you. Return back to Me.” At times G-d even moves a person from

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place to place in the world for this purpose.

This, essentially, is teshuvah: returning to a Jew's natural place.

On this subject, Rabbi Tuvia Litzman relates ('Sippurim She'ahavti Le'saper,' vol. 1, p. 190):

Michel Weiss was born to a Jewish family in France, a fact that meant very little to him. He saw himself as fully French. He became a public figure and politician, and was so consumed with networking and career advancement that he never even found time to marry.

His work took him to many countries, and then one meeting in New York changed his life.

One Friday, walking through crowded Manhattan, he heard clarinet music rising above the traffic. The sounds grew louder. He saw a large van with loudspeakers, parked half on the sidewalk and half in the street, with bearded young men moving around it.

Curious, he approached. Some spoke with passersby; others were strapping black bands on people's arms. Before he could speak, one of them asked, "Excuse me, sir, are you Jewish?"

"Jewish?" Michel answered. "Yes, I suppose. I'm French, but..."

"Is your mother Jewish?" the chassid asked. Michel nodded.

"Then you're Jewish. Mazel tov. Come put on tefillin." He held out a small black box with black straps.

Michel had never seen tefillin. He was an assimilated Frenchman, and the whole thing felt completely foreign to him.

"What is this, something religious?" he said, with a look of distaste.

"No," the young man replied. "It's Judaism."

Michel waved him off and started to leave. The young man called him back with a witty comment, and Michel relaxed. He liked sharp minds. They soon began chatting like old friends.

When Michel mentioned he was in the U.S. on political business, the young man brightened. "Politics? Then you must meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe. All the politicians come to him on Sunday."

"Lubavitch? Rebbe?" Michel said. "All the politicians you say? No, I'm afraid that I have never heard of it. Are you sure?"

Interested, Michel gave him his hotel and phone number.

Early Sunday, Michel's phone rang. The chassid was waiting downstairs to take him to the Rebbe.

Before long, Michel stood with him in a long line outside 770 Eastern Parkway, and after an hour or so, they stood before the Rebbe.

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“This is Michel, a politician from France,” the chassid said.

Michel was deeply impressed. He had come to meet politicians, but sensed something far greater.

“What is your Jewish name?” the Rebbe asked.

“My Jewish name? I’m Michel,” he said.

“No, the name given to you at your brit milah.”

“Oh. My family name is Weiss,” Michel said.

“No,” the Rebbe replied. “Call France, and ask your mother regarding your given Jewish name, and then come back and tell me.” The Rebbe gave him a dollar bill to give to charity.

Outside, Michel, still dazed, asked the chassid, “Very impressive. But how does this intersect with politics, as you promised?”

“Look, everything depends on the Jewish name of an individual,” the chassid said.

“You must begin first with that.”

Michel returned to his hotel and phoned his mother.

“Your Jewish name?” she said. “Where are you right now, Michel? Are you all right?”

He assured her he was fine. She told him to call Aunt Paulette, the “religious”

one in the family who sometimes fasted on Yom Kippur. She might know.

Michel hurried back the next morning, and at the appointed time he met the young man, shared with him the news of his Jewish name, and they waited by the Rebbe’s door before the Mincha prayers. The door opened. Michel approached and whispered, “Honored Rebbe, my Jewish name is... Menachem Mendel.”

The Rebbe smiled. “Menachem Mendel, be a good Jew and follow the day-to-day laws of the Shulchan Aruch,” he said before proceeding to the next room for the afternoon service.

Michel later said that in that moment he became a different person. Until then he had lived for himself and his career, but after the Rebbe’s words he began to think, “How can I help Jews?

How can I improve the world?”

Politics no longer interested him. Upon arriving back in France he connected with the local Chabad center and began to study Judaism. Soon after, he married a Jewish woman and gradually began to keep mitzvot.

He soon became a go-to address for Jews in distress, often helping them at the cost of his time, energy, and money, at times even risking his career.

Michel Weiss (a pseudonym) related how the Rebbe continued to guide his observance. One of his hardest choices was to eat only kosher. For a French

## Do Not Bring Us to Trial

Each day, in *Birkot HaShachar* (the morning blessings), we beseech and plead before G-d, with two requests: “Please, Master of the Universe—do not bring us to *nisayon* (trial), nor to *bizayon* (disgrace).”

The masters of *Mussar* explained that we ask G-d not to bring us to a test, even though enduring trials is essential to one’s spiritual labor, because when we are tested, there is a high risk—particularly that we may fall into sin and, as a result, we will also be ashamed.

Given this, it is no great feat to sit on the sidelines and pass judgment upon others, for who knows how we ourselves would behave under the same trial? Perhaps we would be even more disgraced, and perhaps we would have acted far worse.

Nonetheless, it is imperative that we draw lessons from the failures of others—not to cast judgment upon them, but rather to learn how to act and what to avoid. In fact, this is the way to make real progress in *avodat Hashem* (Divine service), as was

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*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*

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gourmand whose career meant dining with prominent non-Jews in elite, non-kosher restaurants, giving up French haute cuisine seemed impossible.

He chose to do so—but not for long. Months later, dining with a Polish businessman at a luxury seafood restaurant, he faltered. The aromas, the lively diners, the thought of losing refined cuisine forever—all proved too much. He ordered a full spread of the sea delicacies he loved.

As they nibbled nuts and fruit before the main course, the businessman asked, “Tell me, Michel, your last

name is Weiss, isn’t it Jewish?” Michel nodded, puzzled. The man pulled out a newspaper: “This article caught my eye yesterday, about a rabbi named Lu-ba-vitch.” Before him lay a photo of the Rebbe—the same look he remembered when told years earlier, “Menachem Mendel, be a good Jew.”

The waiter arrived with a tray of seafood. “Your order, gentlemen.”

“Hmm,” Michel said. “I’m sorry. I suddenly have a stomachache. I’ll have tea.”

Thus the Rebbe once again helped him live according to the Shulchan Aruch.

## Parshat Emor - Ultimate Exile – Emotional Exile

famously the practice of the saintly Rabbi Yisrael of Salant, of blessed memory.

With that in mind, let us now reflect upon the story we recounted earlier and examine the actions and responses of its

main characters: Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, the Av Beit Din, and the shochet. To preserve their dignity, we have changed the names of the latter two to pseudonyms: Rabbi Shlomo Levi and Reb Mendel Cohen.

### Ultimate Exile – Emotional Exile

As is well known, human beings are composed of five dimensions, from highest to lowest: intellect, emotion, thought, speech, and action.

Our Sages divide these into two general categories: *guf* (body) and *neshamah* (soul).

The three lower faculties—thought, speech, and action—are classified as “body.”

The two upper faculties—intellect and emotion—are classified as “soul.”

Accordingly, when the lower faculties are cut off from the upper ones, they are like a body without a soul.

A Jew whose inner life is devoid of holy feelings is like a walking corpse, being that the

soul, vitality, and pulse of his life are found only in the dimensions of holy and refined intellect and emotion—a Divine awareness of the highest order.

Broadly speaking, there are seven core emotional traits: love, awe, compassion, persistence, simplicity, belonging (the desire to feel part of someone or something), and humility.

Each of these seven core emotions is further subdivided into seven subtypes—forty-nine in total.

These emotions exist both on the side of *kedushah* (holiness) and they also exist on the side of *tumah* (impurity).

Corresponding to them are 49 Gates of Holiness and 49

**Parshat Emor - Preparation For Matan Torah**

Gates of Impurity. Each emotional trait opens one gate—either holy or impure.

As is well known, the forces of *tumah* are termed “death,” because they contain no vitality or divine delight.<sup>3</sup> Thus, each impure gate intensifies

one’s sadness, bitterness, and depression—G-d forbid.

It follows, then, that when a person’s emotions are unrefined, he falls under the dominion of impure forces, and he finds himself in an inner *galut*—exile.

**Preparation For Matan Torah**

Our holy Sages revealed that during the Egyptian exile, the Israelites descended into all 49 Gates of Impurity. All their sacred emotional faculties disappeared completely.

When they were redeemed from Egypt on the fifteenth of Nisan, they longed to receive the Torah immediately. But the Holy One, blessed be He, told them, “Wait—you are not yet ready!”

“When will we be ready?” they asked.

He answered, “When you have refined all of your emotions.”

Thus, the people of Israel began a spiritual purification process, during which sparks of anger, arrogance, and sadness were gradually shed.

Each day, they exited one gate of impurity and entered through one gate of holiness. Thus, by the end of forty-nine days, their refinement was complete, and G-d declared: “You are now worthy. Tomorrow you shall receive the Torah!”

—*Wellsprings of Wisdom*—

3. These are the powers referred to in the verse, “Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Have you seen

the gates of deepest darkness?” (Job 38:17). See also the Zohar, Vayetze 160b.

## Sefirat Ha'Omer – Soul Preparation

Although we already received the Torah at Mount Sinai, this same process of receiving the Torah repeats again every year, for every Jew.

When a Jew counts the *Omer*—with intentionality, yearning, and effort—his soul departs and is elevated from one gate of impurity and enters into one gate of holiness. Then, by the festival of *Shavuot*, he becomes fit to receive the sublime light of *Matan Torah* (the Giving of the Torah).

We bring an excerpt from a talk by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of blessed memory (Imrei Noam – Festivals, Sefirat HaOmer, Discourse 1):

On the night that follows the Seder night, we begin counting the *Omer* for forty-nine days, until we reach *Shavuot* on the fiftieth day. This is explained in *Shibolei HaLeket* (Seder Atzeret, sec. 236):

A Midrash Aggadah asks: Why is the festival of *Shavuot*

uniquely counted down to, unlike other festivals? Rather, when the Jewish people were informed of their upcoming Exodus, they were also told that they would receive the Torah fifty days later, as it says: “When you bring the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d on this mountain” (Shemot 3:12). The seemingly superfluous final letter *nun* (whose numerical value is fifty) in the word *ta'avdun* — “you shall serve,” hints at the fifty-day count until the giving of the Torah. Out of immense yearning, the Jewish people began counting the days: “One day has passed... two days...” and so on. For them, the wait felt interminable—and thus, this count was memorialized and established for all generations.

The reason why G-d made them wait fifty days is because the Israelites had sunk into 49 Gates of Impurity while in Egypt. To be worthy of receiving the Torah, they had to first ascend into the 49 Gates of Holiness.

Parshat Emor - Sefirat Ha'Omer – Soul Preparation

Each day, as they counted, they exited one more impure gate and entered another holy gate, and by the day of *Matan Torah*, they had fully purified themselves.

And so it is with us, to this day. When a Jew counts the *Omer*, his soul emerges from yet another gate of impurity and enters another gate of holiness—so that by *Shavuot*, he becomes a worthy vessel for the radiant light of Torah.

As the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, of saintly memory (Likkutei Torah, Parashat Emor, folio 35a), interprets the verse in this week's Torah portion, Parashat Emor, "And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath..." (Leviticus 23:15), to mean that you must illuminate and refine your character traits until they shine like a sapphire stone that gleams.

Thus, the verse is interpreted: "U'sefartem"—"And you shall count"—you must make luminous, like a shining

sapphire, "for yourselves" (lachem), that is, your own personal character traits.

On the Seder night, a tremendous, boundless light descends upon every Jew without exerting any special effort on his part, yet immediately at daybreak, this light withdraws back to the heavens. Our task during the following days of the counting of the Omer is to strive to acquire that light again by our own strength (not merely as a gift from Heaven), not all in a single moment, but slowly through steady labor day by day over the course of the forty-nine days of the counting.

One may ask: if this light initially departs from us, why was it given to us at all in the first place on the Seder night?

A similar question can be asked regarding what our Sages have said (Niddah 30b): that when the fetus is in its mother's womb, a lamp burns over its head and it gazes and beholds from one end of the world to

the other, and an angel teaches it the entire Torah. Then, before it emerges into the air of the world, an angel comes and strikes it on its mouth and makes it forget the entire Torah it had learned, so that it will toil to learn it again throughout its lifetime by its own powers.

At first glance, it is entirely baffling; for what purpose at all was it taught the Torah, only to be forced to forget it?!

But in fact, the answer is: the angel studies with the fetus the entire Torah so that when he comes to study the Torah again over the course of his life, it will not be an entirely new study that is completely foreign and impossible to comprehend, but rather a review of something he has already learned in the past.

In precisely the same way, if it were demanded of us to acquire, through our own labor in the days of the Counting of the Omer, an entirely new divine light, this may have been exceedingly difficult to attain;

therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, gives us this light as a gift on the Seder night. Even though afterward it is taken back, as a result of this illumination, it is only required of us to once again claim the light that has already been ours, one that is more readily attainable.

During the times of the Temple, on the first day of the Omer count, an *Omer offering* was brought in the Temple from barley. At the conclusion of the count, during the festival of Shavuot, the Two Loaves offering, which was made of wheat, was brought.

The inner meaning of this is as follows: at the beginning of Pesach, a person's *nefesh behemit* (animal soul) still dominates within him. Thus, the Omer offering is brought from barley, which is animal fodder (Sotah 14a).

But after ascending, step by step, during the days of the Omer—refining his soul, departing from 49 Gates of

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Impurity, and entering into the 49 Gates of Holiness—the person’s character is no longer analogous to that of an “animal.” He has become an “adam”—a human being—and now his *nefesh Elokit* (Divine soul) dominates. Therefore, the offering that is then brought is of wheat, human food.

Externally, the Omer days appear to be regular weekdays, but in their inner essence, they are profoundly sacred days—akin to the sanctity of *Chol HaMoed* (as explained by the Ramban on Vayikra 23:36). Thus, even one who does not typically immerse in a mikveh daily should strive to do so throughout the days of the Omer.

These days are saturated with heavenly outpourings of *si’ata diShmaya*—Divine assistance—in *avodat Hashem* and in refining one’s character traits, more than any other period in the year. Therefore, it is proper to minimize extraneous travel and involvement in worldly affairs during this time, and to instead dedicate oneself fully to Torah study and spiritual work, clarifying and refining the *middot* (traits), so that each of us may become a worthy vessel to receive the luminous, boundless light of *Matan Torah* on *Shavuot*.

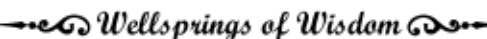
We must wisely make use of this time and be cautious not to waste any time during this period.

**Ever Upward**

As stated, in our *parashah* we are commanded to count the Omer, as it says: “And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day you bring the sheaf

of elevation offering—seven complete weeks” (Vayikra 23:15).

The Rebbe Rayatz of Lubavitch, of blessed memory, explained:<sup>4</sup>



4. Sefer HaSichot 5703 (Hebrew ed., p. 80). See also Hayom Yom, 1 Iyar.

Parshat Emor - Ever Upward

“When we say during the Omer count, 'Today is day such and such,' the intention is: may this day be a true *day*—radiant and purposeful. One should know what one has accomplished each day—what was achieved yesterday, and what must be achieved today.

This is the essence of spiritual service and labor: hours must be counted and meaningful, and then the days will also be counted. This is the message that is especially pertinent to the days of Sefirat HaOmer.

As each day passes, one must ask: What have I done? What must I do now? In general, one must ensure that tomorrow is even more beautiful than today.”

Let us expand upon this.

As is known, Creation is divided into three general realms: the souls of Israel, the angels, and all of the other creatures on Earth.

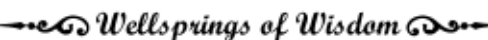
These three realms contain billions of beings—but almost all of them share the one trait: none can depart from the mold in which they were created. All that is, except for the Jewish people.

The Jewish soul is the only being that is granted the ability and privilege to transcend from its initial form and to evolve.

Therefore, the souls of Israel are called *mehalchim*—walkers—whereas angels are called *omedim*—standers. As it says, “And I will grant you walkers among these standers” (Zechariah 3:7).

To explain further:<sup>5</sup>

The distinction between a walker and a stander is not merely that the former changes spiritually while the latter remains static. After all, angels—and also the souls before their earthly descent—engage in continuous spiritual elevation as well.



5. Based on commentary to *Hemshech Tof Resh Samech Vav* (vol. 1, p. 251) by Rabbi Zalman Gopin.

**Parshat Emor - The Soul's Earthly Mission**

Rather, the distinction is that even their ascent is merely from one level to the next within the same general framework. They never transcend and break through the structure in which they were created to be. Their movement is relative—and thus, spiritually, they remain ‘standing’ in place.

But once a soul descends into this world, it is capable of a different kind of ascent altogether: a quantum leap from one reality to another—an advance beyond all proportion. This is called *true movement*.

**The Soul's Earthly Mission**

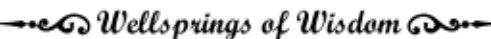
As is well known, the souls of the Jewish people were created before the world itself. Already at that ‘time,’ each soul was assigned its unique mission—its individual task to fulfill.

This great forward leap is evident both in the work of *teshuvah*, where one can leap from one spiritual essence to an entirely new one, and in a Jew's daily Divine service as well—whether in prayer or Torah study.

In every prayer (when one prays as one should), a Jew transforms from a material being to a spiritual one.<sup>6</sup> Torah study, too, demands effort and the sacrifice and the putting aside of one's previous understandings, in order to rise to new heights and levels in grasping the Torah.

Let us continue to another point...

Already then, each soul was endowed with the capacity for advancement and was told that this capacity will be activated only when it descends into the physical world.



6. Hayom Yom, 29 Iyar: “The ascent of the soul occurs three times daily during the three prayers; this is

especially true with the souls of the righteous, who ‘go from strength to strength.’”

**Parshat Emor - The Soul's Earthly Mission**

Ever since, all of the souls above have been waiting for their turn—they know that this descent is critical, fateful, and decisive.

They know that their eternal destiny hinges on how they perform their duties during their time sojourning here on Earth.

To illustrate this idea, let us consider the following story:

There was once a man blessed by G-d with extraordinary blessings—twelve sons and twelve daughters.

Thank G-d, he merited to marry off twenty-three of his children, but with one daughter, he got stuck.

They tried every method, every *segulah*—but nothing worked. The daughter remained unmarried.

The parents' pain was indescribable, and contrary to the common saying that “time heals all wounds,” in this case, time only deepened their anguish.

Each passing day that their beloved daughter remained “in

the nest” only intensified their heartache.

“What will come about this wonderful girl, who is so full of virtues? When will the right one come along? Who will merit having her, and when?”

Days passed. Months. Two years... The immense pain only intensified and grew.

She yearned to marry, and her parents too stormed the heavens with prayers. They wanted her to leave home so that she could finally build her own life.

At last, the long-awaited day arrived. G-d sent a most worthy young man—refined and noble. A perfect match. He blended seamlessly with her and with the family. He was a true gift from Heaven.

Yet, most ironically, before the wedding celebrations were over, her parents were already inviting her over to their home for Shabbat—as is customary. This was the same daughter

**Parshat Emor - The Soul's Earthly Mission**

whom they wished to set free to go and build her own family.

The parable aptly describes the ordeal of the soul.

Before descending to Earth, the soul is like a mature daughter living in her parents' home. She lives on their account—but cannot sell the house or conduct business with it, because she has no stake or ownership of it. She is wholly dependent upon the father's table.

Only once she marries does she move out and acquire a house that becomes hers.

The soul, while still Above, is like that daughter. Everyone is waiting for her to “leave home.”

But after she comes down to this world and successfully fulfills her mission, it is like a married daughter coming home for Shabbat—with her children. The parents are overjoyed; their whole week is charged with anticipation. They wait every waking moment for that visit; their hearts race with happiness.

This world has many unique virtues: it enables one to attain things that can only be acquired here—nowhere else. It is only that many illusions may distract a person from reaching his divinely ordained goal.

It says the following in *Hayom Yom* (3 Elul):

“One who believes in Divine Providence knows that a person's footsteps are established by G-d, and that every soul has a particular mission—to refine and rectify a specific element in a specific place.

Only that soul can fulfill its unique task. And at times, that particular element has waited for centuries, and even since the dawn of creation, for that soul to descend and to refine it.

That soul, too, has waited eagerly, ever since it was emanated and created, for the moment it would descend and fulfill its assignment.”

Every soul, before descending to this world, waited thousands of years by G-d's throne,

**Parshat Emor - Sefirat Ha'Omer – Solemn Days**

longing to arrive here—for it knows that this world is the most precious place of all. Only here can one increase in Torah and good deeds, and gather spiritual gems and pearls, each person according to his abilities and spiritual reach.

Only then can the soul return—after a long life—with hands full of merit, before its Father in Heaven.

As our Sages have said (Pesachim 50a): “Fortunate is he who arrives [in the next world] with his Torah learning in hand.”

We have been granted a wondrous gift—the power to ascend spiritually—we must not squander it!

Let us return to the discussion of the days of the Omer...

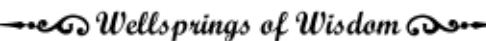
**Sefirat Ha'Omer – Solemn Days**

From the very first time that the Jewish people were commanded to count the *Omer*, they fulfilled this mitzvah with great joy. We find the following in the writings of the Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib of Gur, of blessed memory (Sefat Emet, Parashat Emor, 5642):

“The days of the Omer are mentioned amidst discussion of the festivals, for they are holidays as is *Chol*

*HaMoed*, which has holy days both before and after—the days of the Omer likewise begin with the Exodus and culminate with the Giving of the Torah...<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, these days are referred to as the ‘seven weeks’ and the word used here for ‘weeks’ is Sabbath (Vayikra 23:15), implying that these days possess a dimension of the holy Shabbat-like sanctity.



7. In Leviticus 23:1–44 the Torah lists in order: Shabbat, Passover, the Omer offering, the counting that commenced following the Omer offering, Shavuot,

Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot. By placing the Omer days in the midst of a festival list, the Torah assigns them a semi-festive status, akin to *Chol HaMoed*.

These days assist in one's purification, and as it is written (Yoma 38b): 'One who comes to purify himself is assisted.' During this time after the Exodus from Egypt, when we were born anew and removed from the domain of the *sitra achra* (the powers of impurity), we must seek purity. G-d therefore prepared for us these days of counting, and as it says: 'And you shall count for yourselves'—as a divine gift granted for our own benefit, to help us reach our necessary purification. Our entire year depends upon these days, just as the growth of all crops occurs during this period. So too, the vitality of man is revealed now—and all that is revealed is but a hint to the inner workings of the soul."

It stands to reason, then, that these days, similar to the days

of *Chol HaMoed*, were originally celebrated with song, dancing, and festive dress.

But some 1,400 years later, a tragic event occurred, as stated in *Bereishit Rabbah* (Parashah 61:3):

The saintly *Tanna*, Rabbi Akiva, served as Rosh Yeshivah for forty consecutive years—from age eighty to one hundred twenty.

The fame of his yeshivah spread across the world, and from all directions of the Jewish world came the finest minds, the strongest intellects.<sup>8</sup>

His Torah academy flourished and grew, until it boasted twenty-four thousand students.

But then, as a result of them "not showing respect to one another," they all died within thirty-two days (an average of 750

—*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*—

8. Even Rabbi Meir Baal HaNes, though exceptionally sharp, at first could not grasp Rabbi Akiva's lessons. He studied Torah under Rabbi Yishmael, and only then returned to Rabbi Akiva.

"At first he came before Rabbi Akiva, but since he could not follow his reasoning, he came before Rabbi Yishmael and learned and received the tradition, and only afterward Rabbi Akiva returned and learned the reasoning" (Eruvin 13a).

**Parshat Emor - Satisfaction and Contentment**

funerals every single day!).<sup>9</sup> And the Jewish world was left desolate.

To memorialize this catastrophe, a custom spread throughout the Jewish world<sup>10</sup>—and was eventually codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chaim 493:1)—to avoid performing marriages in the

period of time between Pesach and *Shavuot*, and to refrain from haircutting.

To understand why our Sages chose to restrict these two things in particular, marriage and haircuts, let us first return to what we mentioned earlier.

**Satisfaction and Contentment**

As we explained earlier, the emotional dimension of a person's life is the primary force in a person. The forty-nine Gates of Holiness and the forty-nine Gates of Impurity depend on and are influenced by this emotional plane.

This is the dimension in which the *neshamah* is expressed, and it serves as the vitality, and the very pulse of life. Therefore,

only when one's emotions are refined—with faith, love, and fear of G-d, and joy—does G-d derive pleasure from our actions, speech, and thoughts.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout our lives, we are called upon to constantly ascend spiritually, without weariness or fatigue. Nevertheless, this aspiration to grow must not create within us bitterness, anxiety, or depression.

—*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*—

**9.** And the Tur, Orach Chayim 493, adds: Rabbi Akiva's students died near sunset and were buried after sunset, and the Jewish people refrained then from work, as is customary.

**10.** In the words of Rav Natronai Gaon (Teshuvot HaGeonim, Sha'arei

Teshuvah §278): "From that time and on, the early authorities enacted the practice these days not to marry in these."

**11.** The Arizal taught the great power of feelings of joy, as he states in Sha'ar Ruach HaKodesh 8b:

Parshat Emor - Satisfaction and Contentment

Our Sages have taught (Nedarim 64b), “A poor man is like a dead man,” and by “poor,” they meant one whose soul constantly feels unrest and inner turmoil, whereas being “rich” refers to one whose soul is constantly saturated with joy, contentment, and satisfaction.<sup>12</sup>

G-d assures those who serve him to be granted this sense of contentment, as it is written

(Yeshayahu 58:11): “And G-d will guide you always, and satisfy your soul in drought.”

Thus, we are called to find the balance between a thirst for growth and progress and a sense of inner satisfaction.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, of blessed memory, teaches in *Likutei Moharan II:24*, how this balance is possible:

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

“When one performs any mitzvah, studies Torah, or prays, one must be glad and of good heart, more than when earning a vast fortune. As we find with Abaye (Berachot 30b), who stood before Rabbah in joy and great cheer and explained, ‘I am wearing tefillin.’”

The saintly Rabbi Aharon Roth, writes in *Shomer Emunim* (Tzahali veRoni, ch. 5): “Through holy joy your nefesh, ruach, neshama, and heart are elevated—‘his heart was exalted in the ways of G-d’ (2 Chronicles 17:6)—joined with shame and humility before G-d. Through joy one can give life to many, strengthening a friend to have trust in G-d and to be joyful. In fact, sometimes ‘one acquires his world in one hour’ (Avodah Zarah 10b).”

In Tzafnat Paneach (Bo) it is further explained that all of the Arizal’s

spiritual attainments came from his great joy in the performance of mitzvot.

This too was the service of the holy Baal Shem Tov, who revealed a direct path of serving through joy. When a person seeks joy in serving G-d, the Satan, the divine adversary of the Jew, pushes him to experience sadness over his sins, claiming that such frivolous joy seems to feel like an undesirable outcome.

The Baal Shem Tov taught his disciples and followers that joy is no sin; to the contrary, it is through joy that one truly becomes a baal teshuvah and attains a ‘heart of flesh.’

**12.** As the Mishnah states, “Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot” (Avot 4:1).

**Parshat Emor - Contentment Requires Benevolence**

“As a steadfast principle, one must strive with all one's strength to always be joyful. Human nature tends to lean toward melancholy and sorrow due to the hardships and trials of life, and every person experiences suffering. Therefore, one must force oneself, with great power, to always be joyful, and to cheer oneself in whatever way possible—with all kinds of merriment.

Although a broken heart is also very good, it must be limited to a designated time. One should set aside a specific hour each day for brokenheartedness and to pour out one's heart before G-d. But the rest of the day must be spent in joy; from a broken

heart, it is very easy to fall into depression, more so than to fall into forbidden frivolity from joy.

Therefore, one must be constantly joyful, and reserve brokenheartedness for specific limited hours only.”

Thus, we learn that for all hours of the day, a person must live in a state of inner spiritual wealth—only for one hour should he allow himself to feel dissatisfaction and bitterness with his spiritual state, and during that one hour, he should speak with G-d in seclusion and pour out his soul over his lowly condition and spiritual chaos.

Let us continue further...

**Contentment Requires Benevolence**

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, of blessed memory, merited to illuminate the world with many astounding teachings that purified and refined the souls of his students for generations to come.

One of these profound teachings is the tale he shared

called *The Wise Man and the Simpleton* (*Sippurei Ma'asiot*, Story 9). In this deep and insightful tale, Rabbi Nachman lays the human psyche bare on the surgical table.

Reading the story allows the reader to better perceive, and it becomes clear that the key to

**Parshat Emor - Contentment Requires Benevolence**

character refinement is having a sense of satisfaction and contentment. A person who feels emotionally full and satisfied is a person who is good to others.

A person who feels a sense of inner contentment does not “look around” to belittle or poke at others.

As Rashi writes (Bereshit 41:2): “In years of plenty, people look favorably upon one another, for no one envies his fellow.”

To illustrate this, let us quote from the tale itself (for a deeper understanding, the reader is encouraged to study the entire text):

“The practice of the Simpleton (the protagonist of the story) was to be in great joy at all times. He was always satisfied with his lot and full of joy.

He would say to his wife: ‘My dear wife, please give me something to eat!’ and she would hand him a piece of bread, and he would eat it with great pleasure, and he would say: ‘Please give me sauce with legumes!’ and she would give him another piece of bread, and

he would eat it, and he would praise her and say: ‘How delicious and good this sauce is!’ And so too with meat and other delicacies, for each item, she gave him a piece of bread, and he derived great delight from it, praising each dish as though he had actually eaten it. And indeed, because of his simplicity and great joy, he truly tasted many varied flavors in the plain bread.”

Rabbi Nachman continues to describe the intense joy and delight that the Simpleton experienced constantly.

Once, his wife asked him: “If you are so satisfied with yourself and you feel that your actions are complete, why then haven’t you attained the same level as your peers?”

He answered: “What concern is that of mine? His path is his, and this is mine!”

People mocked him and made him their object of ridicule, thinking him to be mad. But the Simpleton would just say: “Just don’t make a

**Parshat Emor - Contentment Requires Benevolence**

mockery.” If they agreed, he would listen to their questions and speak with them, but he wanted no part in abstract, sophisticated thoughts—to him, that too was a form of mockery.

In the heart of the holy Simpleton was a constant state of joy—pure, radiant joy. He experienced delight in the fulfillment of every mitzvah, in Torah, and in prayer (this was also the spiritual service of the Arizal, as mentioned elsewhere).

Thus, he achieved inner contentment and satisfaction, and he was not bothered by the opinions of others. He stood firm in his holy service, bold like a lion.

Now, let us tie the threads of our discussion:

The students of Rabbi Akiva lacked a sense of inner contentment. This caused them to “seek out” and disrespect their peers.

Our holy Sages, recognizing this root cause of disunity, chose to designate these days of the Omer for cultivating emotional richness—*shefa nafshi*.

As long as a person defines himself according to his external surroundings, he will never attain this contentment—the external world cannot bestow it.

Only when a person connects to his true essence—that he is a portion of the Divine Above—and realizes that in every act, word, and thought of Torah and mitzvot, in every step he takes in G-d’s ways, he brings pleasure to the Creator—only then will he attain that contentment.

Therefore, our Sages ordained that during this time, one should not take a haircut or marry. This creates an external “disheveled” appearance—which helps a person abandon the pursuit of external honor.

It is specifically then, when a person stops relying on the outer world for validation, that he can focus on his inner world, discover the goodness within himself, and achieve inner contentment.

Hence, it becomes clear that the responses of the characters in our story who were deeply

**Parshat Emor - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

offended—the Av Beit Din and the shochet—were not wholly appropriate. Had they possessed a sense of emotional contentment, they would not

have been affected by what others thought of them.

For one who lives in inner contentment lives in *Gan Eden*—even in this world.<sup>13</sup>

***Summary and Practical Conclusions***

1. In His abundant mercy, G-d granted us the precious mitzvah of Sefirat HaOmer. Through its observance, a Jew’s soul departs from the gates of

impurity and enters the gates of holiness. Then, at the culmination of this process—on *Shavuot*—he receives the wondrous light of *Matan Torah*.

—*❧ Wellsprings of Wisdom ❧*—

**13.** Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky related (Lehagid, Bereishit, p. 239):

I once attended a seminar for returnees to Judaism.

A young journalist came to interview participants. When one speaker, a former leading national entertainer, described the powerful experience and announced his decision to begin a life of Torah and mitzvot. The journalist asked: “Where did you find the strength to give up the status, honor, and money that your former lifestyle afforded you? That is nothing less than true self-sacrifice.”

The former national entertainer replied: “You call this self-sacrifice? True self-sacrifice is in fact a yeshivah student who learns with perseverance and purity.

I know the “outside world” well. I tasted its offerings and found nothing of substance there. Behind its glitter lies dark emptiness

without real joy. Beneath its seductive veneer sits anxiety, dissatisfaction, and a constant sense that the soul lacks something. I tried many ways to fill it and failed. After every success, an inner voice said, “This is not it.”

However, here with the study of the Torah, I learned that within me is a Jewish soul that is satisfied only by Torah and mitzvot. Even in this short time, I felt a wondrous contentment and a meaning to rise up early each morning.

So please tell me, what self-sacrifice is needed to understand and feel the urgent need to flee a murky swamp?

However, an observant youth raised with Torah and mitzvot sees only the glitter of the world, smells its allure, and his imagination wanders. If he nevertheless overcomes these distractions and remains in the world of Torah, it is he who truly sanctifies G-d’s Name every second”.

**Parshat Emor - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

2. To merit the spiritual illumination of these days of the Omer, we are further commanded to refine and illuminate our *middot* (character traits), as it is written: “And you shall count for yourselves (sefartem lachem)” —which, according to the Chassidic interpretation, means: “You must invest effort to make your ‘selves’ shine like a precious stone of sapphire (safir).”

3. A core message of the Omer period is the preciousness of time. One must always ask: What is my mission today? What did I accomplish yesterday, and what must I now accomplish today? And in general: Is tomorrow going to be more radiant and luminous than today?

4. If we wish to truly and inwardly receive the Torah on *Shavuot*, we must joyfully enhance our divine service during the Omer. For true *teshuvah* must emerge from deep joy, and a sign that one’s *teshuvah* is accepted on High is specifically when joy begins to enter one’s heart.

If, G-d forbid, *teshuvah* is accompanied by sadness, it is not as lovingly accepted Above. And as it is written: “No one may enter the King’s gate wearing sackcloth” (Esther 4:2). Thus, *Teshuvah* rooted in sorrow belongs to the realm of unholiness.

In fact, there is the concept called joyful weeping, when one realizes

that G-d Himself is calling him to return, and that His right hand is outstretched to receive him.

A person who feels great joy during prayer, Torah study, or when listening to a Torah lecture—his joy can rectify hundreds of forgotten and omitted details of observance. For when one serves G-d with joy, that joy erases all of one’s undesirable past.

As it is written: “For in joy you shall go forth” (Yeshayahu 55:12); that is: through joy in *Avodat Hashem*, one emerges from all that is unworthy.

To hint at this idea, the Hebrew word *b’simchah* (בשמחה, “with joy”) is an acronym for:

מחוק ברחמיך הרבים שטרי חובותינו  
—“Erase, in Your abundant mercy,  
our debtor documents.”

One who lives with the constant joy of repentance—even if he has in the past committed many misdeeds and is laden with sins like a pomegranate—none of his sins are recalled in Heaven.

G-d has a rule: He does not contend or seek to punish joyful people.

Whoever fulfills the verse “I will rejoice in G-d” (Chabakuk 3:18) will also merit the fulfillment of the following verse: “Sins shall cease from the earth” (Tehillim 104:35)—meaning: his sins will dissolve and become erased on their own.

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## Shabbat Times Emor

15th of Iyar ,5786



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	7:34 pm	8:38 pm	9:05 pm
Miami	7:34 pm	8:29 pm	9:05 pm
Los Angeles	7:20 pm	8:18 pm	8:50 pm
Montreal	7:43 pm	8:52 pm	9:14 pm
Toronto	8:02 pm	9:09 pm	9:33 pm
London	8:06 pm	9:24 pm	9:37 pm
Jerusalem	7:04 pm	7:55 pm	8:46 pm
Tel Aviv	7:01 pm	7:53 pm	8:43 pm
Haifa	7:01 pm	7:56 pm	8:47 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:00 pm	7:54 pm	20:44 pm

### Pathways to the Heart

From the Words of

**HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l**

*Anyone who is careful to not stumble in forbidden foods, and who is exceptionally careful with the blessings recited before and after eating, merits that the three "conduits" remain clean: the main vein that connects the brain to the heart, along with the windpipe and the esophagus.*

*In this way he subdues the "butcher" (the vein), the "baker" (the esophagus), and the "cupbearer" (the windpipe, which is connected to the lungs and draws in all kinds of drink).*

*When these three are clean, and the brain receives pure blood from the heart—one's mind becomes thoroughly refined, and one will never stumble in matters of transgressions.*



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