

THE END, OR THE MEANS TO AN END

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Tazria - Metzora

R' David Avudraham z"l (see page 4) writes: The reason that Hashem commanded us to count the omer is that during this period, people are busy with the harvest and are dispersed in the fields. In order that people not forget to travel to Yerushalayim for Shavuot, Hashem instructed us to keep count of the days.

Another reason for counting the omer is that Hashem decrees the year's grain output on Pesach and its fruit output on Shavuot. (See Rosh Hashanah 16a). We count off the days between these two days of judgment to remind us to repent.

Yet another reason, R' Avudraham writes, is found in the midrash: To what may the exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Egypt be compared? To a prince who was imprisoned in jail and who screamed for the king to release him and to give him the king's daughter as a wife. After the prince was released, he counted the days until he would marry the princess. Similarly, after Bnei Yisrael were freed from Egypt, they counted the days until they would receive the Torah. (Sefer Avudraham: Sefirat Ha'omer)

As part of our preparations for receiving the Torah, we read a chapter of Pirkei Avot every week during this period. R' Avudraham explains (in the name of R' Yisrael ben Yisrael z"l) that since we are eagerly awaiting the arrival of our loved one - the Torah, we study the chapters of Pirkei Avot which encourage us to behave in the way that loved one would expect. (Sefer Avudraham: Seder Yemei Ha'omer)

Rashi introduces this parashah with the statement that just as man was created after all of the animals, so the laws pertaining to man are discussed (in this and future parashot) after the laws of the animals (which were discussed in last week's parashah and those preceding it.)

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l notes that there are two possible reasons for why the last element in a list might hold that place. The last thing may be the "end" and everything preceding--it means to that end. Alternatively, a thing may be the last on a list because it is incomplete without that which came before.

Chazal give two reasons for why man was created last in the order of creation. If he is meritorious, we say to him, "The entire world was created before you so that everything would be ready for you when you arrived on the scene." In this case, man is the "end" and all other creations are the means which serve man's goal.

On the other hand, if a person is not worthy, we say to him, "Even the puny gnat was created before you." In such a case we may say that man is incomplete; only if he takes a lesson from the gnat that came before him does he redeem and "complete" himself.

(Latorah U'lemoadim)

"On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (12:3)

The gemara (Nedarim 32) says, "If not for the mitzvah of circumcision, Hashem would not have created the heavens and the earth." The gemara also says, "If not for the mitzvah of Torah study,

Hashem would not have created the heavens and the earth." Both of these are learned from the verse (Yirmiyahu 33:25), "If not for My berit (covenant) day and night, the laws of the heavens and the earth I would not have put into place."

R' Akiva Eiger z"l asks: How can this verse refer to circumcision, when that mitzvah may not be performed at night? Also, it appears that the gemara is equating circumcision and Torah study. What is their relationship to each other?

The answer is that circumcision is a prerequisite to obtaining a proper grasp of one's Torah studies. The mitzvah of milah is the "outer" circumcision, while Torah "circumcises" the heart, i.e., it removes the blockages which prevent knowledge of G-d from entering. Thus, because successful Torah study day and night is possible only if one is circumcised, circumcision may be called "My covenant day and night."

(Teshuvot Rabbi Akiva Eiger No. 42)

"He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." (13:46)

The Torah instructs that a metzora must leave the camp or city for seven (or more) days and sit alone. Chazal say that this is a punishment for the antisocial behavior of speaking lashon hara.

R' Yaakov Emden z"l points out the many benefits which man can attain only when he is part of society. Indeed, Chazal say, "Give me a friend or give me death," and the Torah says (Bereishit 2:18), "It is not good for man to be alone."

All alone, man could not obtain all of his physical needs, including proper food, drink, clothing, and shelter. A person also could not fulfill the Torah if he were alone. For example, he could not carry out the laws of property, the laws of marriage, and the laws of child-rearing.

A person who is all alone can never pray with a minyan or have his Torah questions resolved by scholars, and thus he cannot properly practice a single one of the six pillars (listed in Pirkei Avot) on which the world stands: justice, truth, peace, Torah, prayer, and acts of kindness. Also, how can man emulate Hashem if he is all alone? For example, just as Hashem is merciful, man must be merciful to his fellow men.

Of course, there are times for being alone, but even in those times, man should not roam too far from home. Man is even capable of achieving the concentration that comes from solitude while he is surrounded by people.

(Migdal Oz: Perek Aliyat Habedidut)

"For the person being purified there shall be taken . . . ezov/hyssop." (14:4)

One of the "pieces" of the metzora's sacrifice was an ezov, a type of grass. Chazal say that it must be a plain ezov, not an "ezov romi," nor an "ezov kuchli," and not any other type of ezov that has an adjective modifying its name.

R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita explains that the lowly grass represents humility. True humility is "plain," with no conditions (i.e., the adjectives). It is not "romi" ("high"), i.e., a false humility. It is not "kuchli" ("makeup"--from "kechol," a type of eye shadow), i.e., something that one "puts on" for others to see. (Ta'am Vada'at)

R' David Avudraham a"h
Late 13th - 14th centuries

R' David ben Yosef Avudraham was the author of one of the most popular and influential works ever written about tefilah/prayer. It contains a clear and insightful commentary on the prayers and blessings, a compendium of rituals and customs, and many laws. The author introduces his work by saying that he perceived the need for such a popularly written book that would acquaint the masses with the meaning and laws of the prayers. His work remains popular to this day both as a halachic source and as a basic text on the prayer book. (An excerpt from Sefer Avudraham appears on page 1.)

The sources used by R' Avudraham include both the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, geonic writings (from the 6th through 10th centuries), and all the halachic codes down to his own time, both Ashkenazic and Sephardic. To these he adds his own comments, sometimes deciding the halachah based on his original explanations of the sources. In turn, R' Avudraham's halachic rulings are quoted by many later authorities.

R' Avudraham lived in Seville Spain, but little else is known about his background or personal life. Some have suggested that R' Avudraham was a student of Rabbenu Yaakov Ba'al Ha'turim, but others have noted that R' Avudraham quotes Rabbenu Yaakov without using the title "my teacher." (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim p.104; Shem Hagedolim; Introduction to Sefer Avudraham)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#)

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