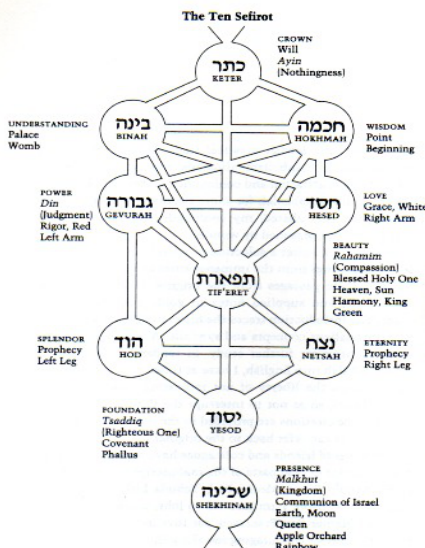


Iyar: Counting to Infinity

Introduction: 7 x 7 = Everything

Between Pesach and Shavuot, the Torah asks us to count each of these forty-nine days that the Omer (barley sheaf) offering was brought in the Temple. This mitzvah of “Counting the Omer” has many layers of meaning, including a sefirotic one: every day corresponds to a certain combination of the seven lower sefirot, beginning with Chesed and concluding with Malchut. Bear this map of the sefirot in mind, or refer back to it, as we proceed to explore the origins and spiritual meaning of the Omer.



Leviticus 23:15-16

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven weeks. They must be complete: you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the Eternal.

ויקרא כג:טו-טז

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשִּׁבֹּת
מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאֲכֶם אֶת-עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה
שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֻעוֹת תַּמְיַמֵּת תִּהְיֶינָה
עַד מַמְחֲרַת הַשִּׁבֹּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית
תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם
וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיקוֹק

R' Moses ben Nachman (Spain and Israel, 1194 – 1270), also known as Nachmanides or Ramban, was a leading Torah scholar, philosopher, physician and kabbalist. His commentary on the Torah is second only to Rashi's in popularity and importance, and includes many kabbalistic teachings.

Ramban on Exodus 21:2

Seven is the chosen among days (i.e. Shabbat) and years (i.e. the sabbatical year) and of the sabbatical years (i.e. the Jubilee). And this is all one matter, which is the secret of the days of the world from “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) to, “And they were completed” (Gen 2:1).

רמב"ן על שמות כא:ב

השביעי נבחר
בימים ובשנים ובשמטות
והכל לענין אחד
והוא סוד ימות העולם
מבראשית
עד ויכלו

R' Chaim Vital (1542 – 1620) was the foremost disciple of the Arizal, R' Isaac Luria (1534 – 1572), a leading kabbalist in Tzfat (Safed) in the Galilee, and the father of contemporary Kabbalah. In these two passages from his works, we find two of the Arizal's key teachings about the Omer.

Pri Etz Chaim, Gate of Pesach 1

[The redemption from Egypt] had to be performed at that very moment, supernaturally, taking them out from slavery to freedom. After they left, there was no need for this any more, so everything returned to its original nature, to enter into each level until the festival of Shavuot.

פרי עץ חיים - שער חג המצות א

אז הוצרך לעשות זה ברגע ההוא
שלא כדרך הטבע
כדי להוציאן מבית עבדות לחירות
ואחר שיצאו לא הוצרך הענין ההוא
וחזר הדבר לטבעו הראשון
לכנס כשאר המדרגות עד חג השבועות

Sha'ar HaKavanot, Pesach 11

During these forty nine days it is good for a person to intend to repair all that they have wronged in relation to the seven sefirot. For example, during the first week they should intend to repair whatever they have wronged or damaged in relation to the sefirah of Chesed. In the second week they should intend to repair whatever they have wronged or damaged in relation to the sefirah of Gevurah, and so on through the seven weeks.

שער הכוונות - דרושי הפסח יא

טוב לאדם לכוין במ"ט ימים אלו
לתקן כל אשר חטא בכל הז' ספירות
והמשל בזה
בהיותו בשבוע א' יכוין לתקן
את אשר חטא ופגם בספי' החסד
ובשבוע הב' יכוין לתקן
את אשר חטא ופגם בספי' הגבורה
וכעד"ז בז' השבועות

R' Yisrael Hopstein (1737 – 1814), also known as the Maggid of Kozhnitz, was an important leader of Polish Chasidism and founder of the Kozhnitz dynasty. He was a student of the Maggid of Mezritch and R' Elimelech of Lizhensk, and wrote many works. How does this teaching, and the following excerpt from Rav Tzadok, present our spiritual work during this season?

Avodat Yisrael on Pesach

On the [first] night of Pesach, all of the great healings were illuminated in one moment, in order to take out the Israelites from the “iron furnace” of the forty-nine levels of impurity to the forty-nine levels of sanctity. And this is the meaning of, “for you departed from the land of Mitzrayim in haste” (Deut. 16:3), in this way it was not from our side, as the Zohar explains: It was like an engagement party, in the bride-to-be's father's house... Therefore after Yitziat Mitzrayim, they needed to purify their character traits little by little through their spiritual work, until Shavuot.

עבודת ישראל לפסח

בליל פסח האירו כל התיקונים והגדלות
ברגע אחד כדי להוציא עמו בני"י
מכור הברזל
ממ"ט שערי טומאה למ"ט שערי קדושה
וזהו כי בחיפזון יצאת ממצרים
ובחי' זו לא היתה מסטרא דילן
כמבואר בזוה"ק והיה אז היחוד
בחי' ח"ו הסועדין סעודת אירוסין בבית אביה
...
אכן אחר יצ"מ הוצרכו לברר המדות
מעט מעט
עפ"י עבודתם עד חג השבועות

R' Tzadok haKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (1823 – 1900), usually referred to as Rav Tzadok, was a major figure in Polish Chasidut. He was won over to Chasidut by R' Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica, known as the Mei HaShiloach, who became his teacher. Dover Tzedek is a compilation of his teachings on Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and Talmud.

<p>Dover Tzedek, Selections 4</p> <p>The number forty-nine is always a complete purification.</p>	<p>דובר צדק - ליקוטים ד</p> <p>מספר מ"ט הוא בירור השלם בכל מקום</p>
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Section 1: Iyar as the Connecting Heart

Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Formation) is the earliest extant work of Kabbalah. It is traditionally attributed to Abraham (18th Century BCE) and/or R' Akiva (2nd Century CE). In it, each month is associated with a Hebrew letter, a constellation, a part of the human body and a human emotion, sense, or faculty. Here we see the ancient, mystical roots of our inner work for this month.

<p>Sefer Yetzirah 5:7 (GRA version, tr. R' Aryeh Kaplan)</p> <p>He made the letter Vav king over thought And He bound a crown to it And He combined one with another And with them He formed Taurus in the Universe And Iyar in the Year.</p>	<p>ספר יצירה ה:ז</p> <p>המליך אות ו' בהרהור וקשר לו כתר וצרפן זה בזה וצר בהם שור בעולם ואייר בשנה</p>
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Rav Tzadok's classes on Shabbat and festivals were transcribed by his students and compiled in Pri Tzadik after his death. How does he understand our month's spiritual practice of counting the Omer?

<p>Pri Tzadik on Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5:1</p> <p>The distinction between [two words for thought] <i>hirhur</i> and <i>machshavah</i> is that <i>machshavah</i> is in the brain, and <i>hirhur</i> is in the heart.</p>	<p>פרי צדיק לראש חודש אייר ה:א</p> <p>ההבדל שבין הרהור למחשבה דמחשבה במוח והרהור בלב</p>
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<p>Pri Tzadik on Rosh Chodesh Iyar 3:1</p> <p>Vav relates to the “hooks of the pillars” [of the tabernacle] (Ex. 38:10) and its shape is also that of the hooks, for it binds and joins two things together. And Vav is “the central bar” which extends “from end to end,” (Ex. 26:28) from the uppermost Keter to the quality of Malchut, which is called World.</p>	<p>פרי צדיק על ראש חודש אייר ג:א</p> <p>אות ו' מלשון ווי העמודים וגם צורתו כצורת ווי העמודים והוא מלפף ומחבר ב' דברים ביחד וזה ו' הבריח התיכון שהוא מבריח מן הקצה אל הקצה מכתר עליון עד מדת מלכות שנקרא עולם</p>
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<p>Pri Tzadik on Parshat Pinchas</p> <p>As it says in the Zohar (3:230a), all ten sefirot relate to the letters of the four-letter Divine Name, Havayah. The Yud and Heh are Chochmah and Binah, the Vav is the six [middle] attributes and the final Heh is Malchut.</p>	<p>פרי צדיק על פרשת פינחס</p> <p>איתא ברעיא מהימנא דחשב כל העשר ספירות שנרמזים בהשם הוי"ה י"ה חכמה ובינה ו' השש מדות ה' אחרונה מלכות</p>
<p><i>R' Chaim of Chernowitz (1760 – 1816), also known as Hayyim ben Solomon Tyrer, was a leading disciple of the Maggid of Mezritch. After he served several communities in Ukraine and Belarus, he settled in Jerusalem. His best known work is Be'er Mayim Chaim, a Chasidic commentary on the Torah. In the teaching below, what does he add to our understanding of this month's work?</i></p>	
<p>Be'er Mayim Chaim on Exodus 1:1</p> <p>When a person merits to turn a negative character trait to good, that is much better than when someone only serves G'd with their positive traits. As our sages say on the verse, “[And you shall love the Eternal your G'd,] with all your heart...” (Deut. 6:5), it means with your two drives: your drive to do good and your drive to do evil. (Brachot 54a). Here too it is good when someone is sunk in the depths of impurity, then they merit to ascend from Mitzrayim and turn every one of their negative traits to good.</p>	<p>באר מים חיים על שמות א:א</p> <p>כשאדם זוכה להפך מדת הרע שבו לטוב הוא טוב מאוד יותר ממי שעובד ה' במדת הטוב לבד וכאומרם בכל לבבך בשני יצריך ביצר טוב וביצר הרע</p> <p>וכן כאן זה טובה היתה מה שנסקעו בשערי הטומאה כי אחר כך כאשר זכו לעלות ממצרים הפכו כל מדת הרע שבהם לטוב</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Section 2: The Work of Tiferet, Netzach, Hod and Yesod</u></p> <p><i>The third sefirah in the Omer is Tiferet (beauty or harmony), also called Emet (truth) and Rachamim (compassion or mercy). It is a radiant synthesis of Chesed and Gevurah, which relates to the archetype of Jacob. The episode below is often cited as demonstrative of Jacob's embodiment of this quality.</i></p>	
<p>Genesis 28:11 with Rashi (based on B.T. Chullin 91b)</p> <p>And he arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set, and he took some of the stones of the place and placed [them] at his head, and he lay down in that place.</p> <p>“And placed [them] at his head”: He arranged them in the form of a drainpipe around his head because he feared the wild beasts. They [the stones] started quarreling with one another.</p>	<p>בראשית כח:יא עם רש"י</p> <p>וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם כִּי בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מֵרָאשָׁתוֹ וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא</p> <p>וישם מראשותיו עשאו כמין מרזב סביב לראשו שהיה ירא מפני חיות רעות התחילו מריבות זו עם זו</p>

<p>One said, “Let the righteous man lay his head on me,” and another one said, “Let him lay [his head] on me.” Immediately, the Holy One, blessed be He, made them into one stone. This is why it is stated (verse 18): “and he took the stone [in the singular] that he had placed at his head.”</p>	<p>זאת אומרת עלי יניח צדיק את ראשו וזאת אומרת עלי יניח מיד עשאו הקב"ה אבן אחת וזהו שנאמר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו</p>
<p>Genesis 28:12</p> <p>And he dreamed, and behold! a ladder standing on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of God were ascending and descending on it.</p>	<p>בראשית כח:יב</p> <p>וַיַּחְלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מְצֹב אֶרְצָה וְרָאָשׁוֹ מֵגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהִנֵּה מַלְאֲכֵי אֱלֹקִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ</p>
<p><i>What is the relationship between Chesed, Gevurah and Tiferet/Rachamim in this teaching?</i></p>	
<p>Rashi on Genesis 1:1 (based on Genesis Rabbah 12:15)</p> <p>In the beginning it was [G!d's] intention to create [the universe] with the Attribute of Justice; but He perceived that the world would not endure, so He preceded it with the Divine Attribute of Mercy, and joined it with the Divine Attribute of Justice.</p>	<p>רש"י על בראשית א:א</p> <p>שבתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראתו במדת הדין ראה שאין העולם מתקיים הקדים מדת רחמים ושתפה למדת הדין</p>
<p>Zohar 2:176a (translation adapted from Matt)</p> <p>R' Simon said, “...Isaac emerged from Chesed, and so with all of them: Din emerged from Rachamim, and Rachamim from Din!</p> <p>...</p> <p>It has been taught: All this is only from our perspective, and this is just how it looks to us. For above, everything is perfectly balanced, not changing or changeable, as it is written, “I, the Eternal, have not changed...” (Malachi 3:6).</p> <p>R' Yehudah said, “All those lamps shine from one, and upon one they depend. They are completely one and must not be separated...”</p>	<p>זוהר ב:קעו:א</p> <p>אמר ליה רבי שמעון... והא יצחק מגו חסד נפק והכי כלהו דינא מגו רחמי נפקא ורחמי מדינא תאנא כולי האי לא אתקרי אלא מסטרא דילן ומסטרא דילן אשתמודע כלא ולעילא כלא בחד מתקלא סלקא לא שני ולא ישתני כמה דכתיב אני ה' לא שנית אמר רבי יהודה כלהו בוצינין נהירין מחד ומחד תליין ובוצינין אינהו חד כלא דהא לא בעו לאתפרשא</p>

R' Menachem Nachum Twersky of Chernobyl (1730 – 1797) is also known as the 'Chernobyl' Rebbe' or the Me'or Einayim, after the name of his most important book. He is one of very few who learned with both the Besht, and his successor, the Maggid of Mezritch.

Me'or Einayim on Parshat Va'era

[When the Shema prayer is recited] a unification is made between Havaya [the 4-letter Name], which is Compassion, and Elohim, which is Judgement. Because the reciter accepts the blessed Divinity of both, as in, “the Eternal our G'd, the Eternal is One” (Deut. 6:4), whether He interacts with them as Havaya or Eloheinu, everything is the Eternal and His Loving Oneness, may He be blessed.

And when a person serves with this Da'at, Judgement is also made into Compassion.

מאור עינים על פרשת וארא

נעשה יחד הוי"ה
 שהוא רחמים
 ואלקים שהוא דין
 מאחר שמקבל אלהותו יתברך בשתייהן
 וזהו ה' אלקינו ה' אחד
 בין שמתנהג עמו ובמדת הוי"ה
 בין במדת אלקינו
 הכל ה' שהוא חסד האל יתברך

וכשעובד כך בדעת זה
 נעשה גם כן הדין רחמים

R' Simcha Bunim Bonhart of Peshischa (Poland, 1765 – 1827) learned with the Chozeh of Lublin and the Yid HaKodosh, whom he succeeded as leader of the Peshischa Chasidic school. His most famous teaching is a beautiful and practical path forwards for us in our work with Netzach and Hod, and a fitting conclusion to this exploration.

What is the error he describes, and how might we best avoid it?

From 'Frequent Sayings'

Everyone needs two pockets, so they can reach into one or the other, depending on the need. In one pocket should be a note saying: 'For my sake was the world created' (M. Sanhedrin 4:5). And in the other pocket should be a note saying: 'I am but dust and ashes' (Gen. 18:27). Many people err, and use the opposite pocket to the one that they need.

מרגלא בפומיה

לכל אחד צריכים להיות שני כיסים
 ובהם ישתמש כשיצטרך לכך
 בכיס אחד יהיה כתוב
 בְּשִׁבְלֵי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם
 ובכיס השני
 וְאֲנִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר
 הרבה טועים ומשתמשים בכיס ההפוך
 מזה שהם צריכים לו