Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Bamidbar - Rabbi Meyer Stern

Heavenly Aspirations

"Ish al diglo – Each man by his banner" (Bamidbar 2,2)

egarding this *posuk*, the Midrash says that when Hashem came down to *Har Sinai* he was accompanied by 220,000 angels who were arranged into *degalim* – distinct divisions. When Klal Yisroel saw this, they proclaimed that they too wanted to be divided into *degalim*, at which point Hashem commanded Moshe to go and arrange the *degalim*.

The Shem Mishmuel provides a novel interpretation of the concept of degalim, on the basis of which he explains the above Midrash. He explains that there is a constant flow of blessing descending from the heavens to this world. However, our materialistic world is incapable of receiving these spiritual gifts in their original form, and the heavenly angels are given the task of transforming the flow of blessings into a physical form which our world is capable of receiving. Conversely, the angels must also cleanse and purify our prayers and mitzvos of all the materialism inherent in this world before they can ascend to the heavens where only spirituality exists.

For this reason, the *Shem Mishmuel* explains, there is a need for *degalim* -classification of angels. There must be different divisions of angels - angels of mercy, angels of judgment, and angels of kindness - so that the appropriate angel, depending on the type of blessing from Heaven or the quality of the mitzvah, can be assigned the task of transforming it into a suitable form

As the Midrash says, when Klal Yisroel saw the *degalim* of angels by *Matan Torah* they requested to be made into *degalim* as well. The implication of this request is that Klal Yisrael wanted that there should no longer be any intermediaries between them and Hashem. After experiencing a close connection to

Hashem at *Matan Torah*, they sought to maintain a close relationship of direct interaction with Him, just like the angels.

With this request, Klal Yisroel corrected and repented from a sin they had previously committed. At the time of Matan Torah, they had told Moshe Rabeinu that they feared hearing the Aseres Hadibros directly from Hashem and preferred to have Moshe serve as an intermediary. By now asking to become degalim and relate directly with Hashem, Klal Yisrael demonstrated that they no longer feared a close connection to Hashem and were willing to accept the possible consequences of such a relationship. Their love for Hashem helped them overcome all their hesitations to the extent that they where willing to give up their lives in order to come closer to Him. As a result of this commitment. Klal Yisrael in the Midbar did in fact achieve, to some degree, a direct closeness to Hashem without the need for intermediaries.

Chazal say there will come a time when Klal Yisroel will reach such high levels of purity and spirituality that we will once again have no need for intermediaries in our relationship to Hashem, and instead we will serve as the intermediaries between the angels and Hashem. May we be *zoche* to that time speedily in our days.

Rabbi Meyer Stern learns Night Seder in the Kollel.

Halacha Encounters

Sefiras Haomer Uncertainty

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

f one is uncertain as to which night of the Omer it is – i.e., he isn't sure if it's the fourth day or the fifth day – can he fulfill his obligation by counting both days?

The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 589:2) says that one must count sefiras ha'omer in a language that he understands. If one counts in lashon hakodesh and doesn't understand what he is saying, he has not fulfilled his obligation. Rav Yaakov Emden (Sheilos Ya'avetz, Responsa 139) argues and holds that just like it is with Kiddush and Hallel where one has fulfilled his obligation by reciting it in lashon hakodesh, even if he doesn't understand what he is saying, so too, this applies to sefiras ha'omer.

The *Dvar Avraham* (Volume I, Chapter 34) explains that the essence of the argument is about what kind of mitzvah *sefiras ha'omer* is. Rav Yaakov Emden holds that the mitzvah is the mere "reciting" of the *omer*, and as long as you recite the proper number, you are *yotzei* and fulfill your obligation. Therefore, even if you don't understand what you saying, it's okay. The *Magen Avraham*, on the other other hand, holds that the mitzvah is "counting" which entails a conscious awareness of which day one is counting, and not a simple recitation of words.

The answer to our original questions, maintains the *Dvar Avraham*, would depend on whether the mitzvah is to recite or to count. If one is uncertain if it is the fourth day of the *omer* or the fifth day, according to Rav Yaakov Emden, he can recite both days and fulfill his obligation since he recited the correct day. But according to the *Magen Avraham*, one must count, and it is not considered counting if one is unsure as to which day it is, even if one recites both possibilities.

According to the Dvar Avraham, logic dictates

that the mitzvah is to count and therefore one must be certain of what day of the omer it is. However, he brings a proof from an early authority, Rabbeinu Zerachia HaLevi (Ba'al Hamoar), also quoted by the Ran, that seems to hold otherwise. The Ba'al Hamoar asks that just like we keep two days of Yom Tov outside of Eretz Yisrael (because during the times of the Bais HaMikdash they were unsure as to which day was Yom Tov), so too with sefiras ha'omer, we should count two numbers every night. This very question seems to offer strong support for Rav Yaakov Emden's position. If the Ba'al Hamoar held that you must be positive as to which number of the *omer* it is, how could he suggest that we should count two numbers every night? Clearly, he holds that the mitzva is only to recite the omer. Therefore, says the Dvar Avraham, if one was unsure as to which day of the *omer* it is, he can say both days and fulfill his obligation.

However, many Acharonim (Avnei Nezer, Yorah Deah 248; Sha'arei Yosher, sha'ar ha'spheikus, chap. 5) agree with the opinion that one must be sure of what day it is in order to be called "counting." The Taz (Orach Chaim 589:8) holds that one must know what night he is counting even before making the bracha. L'hatchila, one should conduct himself in accordance with this view.

Rabbi Langer learns full-time at the kollel. To dedicate a Parsha Encounter contact the kollel office at (773)262-9400