



# Torah IGNITE

Sefiras HaOmer  
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**Igniting Passionate Yiddishkeit in the Frum Community: Impacting individuals, families and future generations**

Ignite Toronto is a new and innovative organization being launched in Toronto, for Toronto. Its mandate is to give back to the community through offering the best in adult education and inspirational events. Its focus is to provide professional, exciting and pertinent programming that will bring vibrancy and chizuk to all members of the frum community. Ignite Toronto has the support of local Toronto Rabbonim.

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## A Diamond In The Making

Moshe Zionce

A shimmering diamond was once a dark coal. It emerges only through the extreme weight of many tons of the earth's pressure. There is a saying: "The only difference between a diamond and a lump of coal is that the diamond handled the pressure very well."

The slavery of the Jewish Nation in Egypt is the example in the Torah of pain and suffering. For two hundred and ten years, we, the Jewish People, were forced into a bitter servitude. We were beaten mercilessly, and our children murdered. Demoralization and torture seemed to last an eternity without reprieve.

To compound our Nation's ominous situation, the suffering was not only physical and emotional, but we experienced a dramatic spiritual descent as well. Egypt is described as *ervas ha'aretz*/the immorality of the earth. *Mitzrayim* is a combination of two words, *meitzar* and *yam*. *Meitzar*, from the root word *tzar*/pain, means to constrict/to squeeze. The prefix *yam* has a numerical value of fifty. The Arizal explains that the number fifty here is a reference to the fiftieth stage of negativity/the *nun shaarei tumah*. It is the absolute lowest level of impurity – the point of "no return." Under Egypt's influence, we, the Jewish People, were constricted to such an unprecedented level of contamination that we were at the verge of spiritual obliteration.

However, like a diamond's brilliance, the Am Yisroel's radiance did not emerge in spite of the incredible pressure that was inflicted on them from every conceivable side. It was specifically through the very depths of despair that the Jewish People surfaced with tremendous pride and glory. The *pasuk* describes Egypt as a "*mikor habarzel*/iron furnace" - a smoldering cauldron that refines precious metals and extracts impurities. (*Devarim 4:20*) In this apparent eternal abyss, a defeated people forged into the *Am Segulah*/a treasured Nation, becoming the example for all times of a triumphant rise to prominence.

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## Making Every Day Count

Rabbi Paysach J. Krohn

During the *Yemei Ha'sefirah* we are obligated to count days. Forty nine days from Pesach to Shavuos - each night we recite a *bracha* which attests that Hashem Himself commanded us to count every day, signifying that every day is indeed an entity by itself. The *bracha* that we make on Day One is not sufficient for Day Two or Day Thirteen – every day is unique and special.

If this is indeed so, perhaps there is a deeper lesson here, that throughout life we must make every day count. Every day is special, and a day wasted is a day lost forever, never to be regained. That is what Sarah Schenirer told her talmidos in the Bais Yaakov schools she created in pre-Holocaust Europe. She had a clever way of understanding a *pasuk*, written by Dovid Hamelech that we say every Shabbos morning, "למנות ימינו כן הודיע" (Tehillim 90:12) The conventional understanding is that Dovid Hamelech requested from Hashem that he be informed how many days he would still live, so that he would know how much time he had to complete that which he sought to accomplish.

Sarah Schenirer added an insight. She explained that the request in this *pasuk* to Hashem was that we learn how to make our days count! Make every day (and even every moment) worthwhile. She imbued her talmidos with this perspective, and many of them followed her lead as they opened schools across Europe. By the end of the 1930's there were more than 300 Bais Yaakov schools with 35,000 students in existence! And the first Bais Yaakov School was not created until (approximately) 1915! Now that's making the most of one's time.

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We left *Mitzrayim* in haste. Perhaps as an analogy: If you were to squeeze a wet bar of soap, it would shoot out of your hands. We experienced such extreme pressure it was as if we were catapulted out of Egypt, toward the desert and into the *sefirah* period in which we presently find ourselves. The force acted like a rocket tied to our back, launching us out of a state of sheer hopelessness and on our way to receive the glorious Torah.

Dovid Hamelech says: "From the *meitzar/squeezing* did I call out to you Hashem." It is precisely through the pain, grief and despair that the greatness of mankind emerges.

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There is a telling story about a poor woman that would venture every day to the well to fill up two buckets with water. Each hung on the end of a pole, as her shoulders supported the weight for the journey back. One of the pails was cracked and by the time the woman would arrive home, most of its contents were depleted.

One day the cracked bucket was overwhelmed with remorse. It cried out to the woman pleading for forgiveness for losing the water that she carried daily, with great effort. "I feel terrible. I am so sorry," the bucket wept in shame. "I am broken and useless."

The woman smiled and said, "Come, I want to show you something." She took the bucket on the very route that they went on together for years. "Tell me," she asked, "do you see a difference between the right and left side of the path?" The bucket looked around and responded, "On one side is only dirt and mud. However, on the other side is an endless row of beautiful flowers." "Correct," said the woman. "Allow me to explain. I always carry you on my left side. When I noticed that you were losing water I planted flower seeds along the entire left side of the route. It is you that has watered and has given life to all of these flowers! This once grueling walk is now a most delightful experience, thanks to you."

Perspective is everything. In life one may believe that he is broken and losing water. However, Hashem has planted flower seeds beneath his feet. One day he will look back and discover that in the very place that loss was seemingly experienced, is precisely where an endless row of exquisite flowers flourishes.

During spring, a time of rejuvenation, may we all perceive our row of flowers, pushing up through the recently defrosted soil.

Good Shabbos

The Chofetz Chaim (Ahavas Chessed Chap. 12) writes that a person should not let one day go by without having done a *chesed* for another. I would suggest that you keep a notebook and write down one *chesed* that you did for that day. Do not go to sleep until you have done a favour for someone. You will see - if you keep such a notebook, in a month it will become one of your most treasured possessions. Even if you do many favours a day, just write down one - you will always be able to look back at that day as one that was not wasted - you did something for someone.

The Bnei Yissachar writes, (Nisson:12, Iyar:3), that the 49 days symbolize the words *lev tov* (good heart) which has the *gematria* of 49, (*lev* is 32 and *to* is 17). The 49 days are a preparation for *kabbolas haTorah* and the way to prepare is by growing in *chesed*, by showing you have a *lev tov* - because *derech erez kodmah l'Torah*. Hence doing a *chesed* every day is not only making the day count but also laying a groundwork for *kabbolas haTorah*.

Rabbi Pinchus Hirschprung זי"ל of Montreal told how Rav Meir Shapiro זי"ל got the idea for the Daf Yomi. As a child he learned with a private rebbe every day. When the Shapiro family moved to a new neighbourhood to which the rebbe was unable to travel, little Meir's mother contacted a rebbe who lived close to the neighbourhood and told him that she wanted him to learn with her son. He agreed and they made up that he would come on the day the Shapiros moved in.

For some reason the signals got crossed, and the afternoon when the Shapiros moved into the new neighbourhood, the rebbe did not show up. That night Mrs. Shapiro sat down and cried. "Momma, why are you crying?" asked the young Meir. Her answer became embedded in his heart and mind. "A day of learning that is lost, is lost forever. It can never be made up!"

Those tears and that insight were the seeds from which the idea of the Daf HaYomi blossomed. And so indeed, a major way of making our every day count is to make sure we learn every single day. Be it Gemara, Chumash, Tanach, Halacha - whatever you choose, make sure to learn something. The Chofetz Chaim says as well, that just like no day should go without learning, so too should no day go without *chesed*. If indeed we learn Torah and perform *chesed* every day of our lives, our days will have counted gloriously.

רפואה שלמה לר' מאיר זיסל בן חיה שרה

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