

Good Shabbos Everyone. Hashem commands us this week saying: "*You shall count for yourselves... seven weeks, they shall be complete.*" (Vayikra 23:15) This is the mitzvah of *Sefiras HaOmer* - the counting of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos, the period in which we currently find ourselves.

The Sages have taught us that the time of *Sefiras HaOmer* is a time of special spiritual importance. Specifically, the Sages tell us that this is a time to work on our character. This is hinted to in the gematria - numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word "*Omer*" which is 49, which is also the numerical value of "*midah*" - character.

Historically, a great calamity befell the Jewish people during this period. Namely, 24,000 students of Rebbi Akiva died during *Sefiras HaOmer* because they did not treat each other with respect. (See, Yevamos 72b) Therefore, this is a special time of the year to work on ourselves. Let us focus this week on one aspect of character which tends to play a very important role in our relationships with others; the issue of money.

The Sages tell us that one of the three ways we can really know someone is by the way he deals with money, (drinking and anger are the other two ways.) (Medrash Tanchuma, Warsaw, Korach 12:2)

There is a common expression, "*don't mix business with pleasure.*" Unfortunately, many of us have found this expression to be a good general rule. Experience is the best teacher. Money has a tendency to bring out the worst in people. Therefore, we have to be very careful in our money dealings so as not to wrong others. Quite simply, if we borrow money, we should pay it back timely. If we buy something (especially from an individual), we should pay for it promptly and completely. If we damage another's property, we should pay the damage. One who follows these general guidelines will avoid problems in his relationships with others. The following story can inspire us in this area of character development.

After the fall of the Evil Communist Russian regime in the 1990's, hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews were finally able to leave the big prison formally known as the Soviet Union. Most of these Jews made their way to Eretz Yisroel. Deprived of even a basic Jewish education, many of these Jews sadly did not know even the "*aleph-beis*" of Judaism.

One such Jew was the elderly Reb Laibel, who left behind his native Russia to arrive in Eretz Yisroel in the 1990's. Even though Reb Laibel did not have much of a background in Judaism, the Jewish spark within his heart still burned bright, and he strongly desired to be more observant. Little by little, Reb Laibel began learning more and more about Judaism. After a remarkably short time, Reb Laibel was learning Torah and praying the statutory three prayers a day.

Reb Laibel was generally a happy person. However, one incident from his younger years weighed heavily on his shoulders. Knowing that he was to give a reckoning of all his deeds in the Supreme Court in heaven above, Reb Laibel wished correct his past misdeeds.

Several years previous, Reb Laibel wrote a letter to the Russian government in which he accused another Jew of wrongdoing. Due to Reb Laibel's incriminatory letter, the other Jew was fined 20,000 rubbles, which was a tremendous amount at the time.

Now, several years later Reb Laibel regretted his behavior. Although there may have been reason to believe that the Russian police had manipulated him, Reb Laibel still believed that he was to blame. Reb Laibel wanted to do *teshuvah* - to correct his ways. However, after so many years he doubted he could find the Jew he had incriminated. Perhaps that Jew was no longer alive. Finding his heirs would be difficult. Reb Laibel did not despair. He prayed that Hashem should help him somehow resolve this issue which weighed so heavily upon his soul.

Reb Laibel hurried to his Rabbi, Reb Shmuel Trebish, of blessed memory, to ask him what to do. After some talking, Reb Laibel asked his Rav to write him a note. Reb Laibel asked that Rav Trebish write in the letter that Reb Laibel had sincerely done all that he could to find the man whom he had wronged. Reb Laibel said then that he wanted to be buried with the later, so that he would have something to show at his trial in heaven.

Rav Trebish later determined that perhaps this letter would not be enough to protect Reb Laibel in the next world. Therefore Rav Trebish told Reb Laibel that he was calling together other Rabonim to consider this issue over the coming 10 days.

Before the 10 days were up, Reb Laibel returned to his Rav with incredible news... *Reb Laibel had rectified his wrong!* Rav Trebish listened intently as Reb Laibel retold the amazing events of the previous couple of days.

Earlier in the week, Reb Laibel had gone to the doctor for a routine check-up. Reb Laibel was not familiar with the way of doctors' offices, so he showed up at 6:30 a.m. and knocked on the door. The office was of course empty at the time. So, Reb Laibel found some shelter under a bus stop and waited.

Soon, another Russian immigrant happened to sit down next to Reb Laibel. The two quickly found themselves in a conversation. It became apparent that the two men both came from Chernowitz, in the former Soviet Union.

Reb Laibel chanced it and asked the man if he knew the family of the man Reb Laibel had wronged so many years ago. Amazing, the Russian immigrant was a son-in-law of the man Reb Laibel had reported to the Russian authorities. Unfortunately, the man himself had passed away. However, Reb Laibel was able to get the names of his heirs.

Thankfully, Reb Laibel had some money in a savings bank in Chernowitz. So, the heirs were able to go to the bank and withdraw their equal portions. Reb Laibel had only asked that the heirs send receipts of the money they had withdrawn from the bank account in Chernowitz.

Later, Reb Laibel instructed Rav Trebish that he wanted to be buried with those receipts. Soon after, Reb Laibel closed his eyes for the last time and returned his soul to its Maker. The Chevrah Kadisha (burial society) dutifully fulfilled the wishes of the deceased and Reb Laibel was buried with the bank receipts in hand. (Heard from Reb Yosef Chaim Greenwald)

How many people do we owe money to? How many people are upset with us over money issues? Let us all use the *Sefirah* days to improve our character for the better, especially in the area of our dealings with money. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**