

# Sheminni/Tazria

## Seven and Eight

There are certain numbers which would appear to recur repeatedly in the Torah. This repetition leads us to believe that particular numbers might hide deeper layers of meaning. Numbers like 3<sup>1</sup>, 7, 12, 40 are all familiar Biblical motifs. In Sefer Vayikra, the unit of "seven"<sup>2</sup> would seem to recur frequently. Here are some examples:

i. Parshat *Tzav-Sheminni*, describes the **7 days** of *milu'im* – the week of the Mishkan's inauguration. This is followed by the **Yom Hash'minni** – the eighth climactic day (9:1).

ii. In Parshat Tazria the parsha opens with **seven days** of *Tum'a* following the birth of a boy. The **eighth day** is the Brit Mila (12:1-3).

iii. The purification process of the Metzora (14:9-10) Indicates a **7 day** preliminary purification period followed by an **eighth day** which bestows full purity. (There is also the **seven-fold** sprinkling of the blood/water/oil mixture. 14:7,16.)

iv. The purification process of the *Zav* and the *Nidda*, also contain the **7-8** pattern. See 15:13-14; 28-29.

Note that in each case, we are not simply dealing with the number seven, but rather, with a unit of seven followed by "the eighth day." This might not sound particularly remarkable; after all, does the number 8 not always follow the number seven? So let me be a little more accurate. First, the seven unit appears in a single step. There is no build-up of 3 and then 4, or a progression of 1-2-3-4-5-6-7, but rather, the 7 unit is presented as independently robust, an integral unit. Furthermore, there is never a number 9. When we are dealing with the 7-8 pattern, the number eight would appear to be the end of the line, the final destination.

Indeed, our initial thought is to view the unit of seven as a preparatory stage for the climax of the eighth day. After all, the *milu'im* were seven days of preparation and practice. The eighth day was the day of revelation in which fire descended from heaven (8:31-2). The "eighth day" represents the high-point of the process began in the preceding seven days. Likewise, the week after birth leads to the peak event of Brit Mila. The seven days of the cleansing process of *zav/nidda/metzora* lead to the purity of the eighth day. The eighth day represents the target, the end of the process, the conclusion and completion.

### CYCLES

But Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>3</sup>(9:1) sees things differently. He compares the seven days followed by the eighth to a musical octave.

"...by such a counting of seven days, the condition of a previous period is entirely closed, and with the eighth day a new beginning is made, similar to an octave in music, on a higher level."

And in reference to the seven "*miluim*" days, and the Yom Hasheminni, Rav Hirsch comments:

"...with the seven days spent at the entrance to the sanctuary, the condition of mere private, individual meaning of life is closed for those destined for the priesthood. With the eighth day they step into the new elevated character of a life dedicated to belong to God and the nation."

What Rav Hirsch tells us is this. That just like musical octaves, we move in seven-fold cycles. The cycles ascend, up and up. The previous cycle in some way is like a new beginning. Indeed it is only reached by the preceding "seven." However the number eight is not a crescendo, a peak. Rather it is a new beginning of a new cycle, of a new level. It is a gateway into a new reality, higher than the previous reality. But it doesn't stop with eight. Eight becomes the "number one" of the new reality, as we leave the previous existence behind.

How does this apply to the instances that we have presented?

1. The *Yom Hasheminni* is not simply the pinnacle of the preparatory *yemai miluim*. The *Giluy Shechina* of the 8<sup>th</sup> day is not the icing on the cake of the Mishkan enterprise. Rather, the *Giluy Shechina* of the eighth day COMMENCES a life of God's revelation, of communion with God – "*veshachanti betocham*." We reached the eighth day by means of the prior seven. But now, the tome of that eighth day gives colour to the new level, the new reality which Am Yisrael have reached. They now enter into a world in which God is a living presence in their camp.

2. The baby boy who experiences Mila on the eighth day is entering into a world of covenant. This is raised a level higher than his first uncircumcised week, and indeed, he needs that week to gain strength for this particular operation. But the focus is on the 8<sup>th</sup> day as a beginning. He leaves his prior level way behind.

3. and 4. Once again with the Metzora and the *zav* and *nidda*, the emphasis is to detach the day 8 from the prior seven. Day eight symbolises a rebirth, a new identity.

One cannot help but relate this to the process of *sefirat ha'omer*. If each "seven" is an octave, moving us one notch higher up the ladder, then our "seven times seven" counting of the Omer is a powerful recipe for advancement and growth.<sup>4</sup> Once again, the "fiftieth day" of Shavuot is not the END of the process, but rather the BEGINNING of life on a totally different plane, a radically altered starting point.

### Shabbat Shalom

<sup>1</sup> Three days in the wilderness without water (16:22) Three days of preparation for Har Sinai.

<sup>2</sup> See Rav Leibtag's Parsha shiur – [www.tanach.org](http://www.tanach.org) who discusses this relationship from a different perspective than we presented. Rav Leibtag suggests that the number seven is representative of the "natural" world whereas the number eight symbolises the spiritual – that which is "above the natural order".

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to Rav Shuki Rice who brought the approach of Rav Hirsch to my attention.

<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that the Kabbalists perceived this exponential pattern of seven as representative of the perfection of the Sephirot – the channels which link heaven and earth – and that we emerge cleansed and perfect in order to receive the Torah on Shavuot.