

Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Whole Numbers

Rabbi Simcha Zaiv Baum

וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאכם את עומר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה. עד ממחרת השבת השביעית תספרו חמשים יום וגו' (ויקרא כג' טו' – טז')

You shall count for yourselves – from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the Omer of the waving – seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count, fifty days...

These verses teach of the *mitzvah* of *sefiras haomer* – the counting of the *omer*. (Although the verses make no mention of a connection to *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and the receiving of the Torah, commentators explain that this counting is indeed connecting those two events). Tosfos in Menachos 66a quote the opinion of the Bahag that one who neglects to count any of the days of *sefira* has forfeited the *mitzvah*. This ruling is based on the language of the *pasuk*: שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה – seven weeks, **they shall be complete**. If one missed counting even just one day, his count of seven weeks is not complete. In essence, the Bahag opines that the *mitzvah* to count forty-nine days is one large *mitzvah* that begins on the first night and concludes after the last of the forty-nine days; if a piece is missing, the *mitzvah* is incomplete. Most other authorities disagree with the Bahag, maintaining that each day's counting is an individual *mitzvah*; if one forgot to count one of the days, he can still fulfill the *mitzvah* of counting the following days. The Shulchan Aruch (489, 8) rules that if one forgot to count one of the days, he may continue to count the following days; however, in deference to the opinion of the Bahag, he must count without a *beracha*.

The Bais Halevi (1, 39) suggests that even according to the Bahag, there are times throughout *sefira* when one who forgot to count a day may still count with a *beracha*. He cites the Gemara in Menachos (66a), which states: אמר אבוי מצוה למימני יומי ומצוה למימני שבועי – Abaye says, it is a *mitzvah* to count the days and [also] a *mitzvah* to count the weeks. Abaye's view is based on two verses that tell us of the *mitzvah* of *Sefiras Haomer*. One verse states שבע שבתות תמימות תהיינה – seven **weeks**, they shall be complete; the second verse states **יום** תספרו חמשים – you shall count fifty **days**. Based on these two verses, Abaye concludes that there are two *mitzvos* of counting: There is the *mitzvah* to count seven weeks, and an additional *mitzvah* to count forty-nine days. Now, the *mitzvah* to count days is fulfilled when we count each day. On the first day, we say, "Today is the first day of the *Omer*"; on the second, we say, "Today is the second day of the *Omer*"; and so on. The *mitzvah* of counting the weeks, however, is fulfilled only seven times. For example, when we reach the seventh day of the *Omer*, we say, "Today is the seventh day, which is one week of the *Omer*". When day fourteen arrives, we count the second week; the third on day twenty-one; and so on. As such, the Bais Halevi argues, if one forgot to count one of the days that does not correspond to the conclusion of one of the weeks (day 12, for example), the Bahag would say his *mitzvah* of counting the days is no longer complete; however, his *mitzvah* of counting the weeks is still untainted. His "weeks" are still complete; he hasn't missed counting one! Therefore, on the remaining nights that correspond to the completion of one of the weeks, one may count with a *beracha* (in our example, once he gets to day 14, and again on day 21, and so on).

The Wizard of Oz and the Jewish Mission

Jeffrey M. Albert

The classic movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, has enchanted viewers of all ages since its release in 1939. Over the years, the movie (based on the book by L. Frank Baum) has become ingrained into American culture. It is hard to imagine a literate person who has not heard of the Yellow Brick Road, the Wicked Witch of the West, and the ruby slippers. What has not been appreciated, however, is a connection of this fanciful tale to Judaism. This article seeks to correct this matter and reveal the story of the *Wizard of Oz* as an allegory for the Jewish mission.

In the familiar story, Dorothy, a Kansas girl, is whisked off by a tornado and deposited in Oz. On her way to obtain the Wizard's help making her way back home, she is joined by the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. When they finally confront the Wizard, they see that he does not have special powers; it is up to Dorothy herself to realize her goal of returning home.

Here is the hidden meaning: Dorothy is a *neshama* (soul) residing in *Shamayim* (heaven). The tornado is the tumult of coming down into the world through the birth process. As the tornado approaches, Dorothy (along with her dog, Toto, representing the animal soul) retreats into her house (the womb). The tornado transports the house to a faraway place. Upon landing, Dorothy and Toto step out of the house and into a strange new world – the physical world.

The house, it turns out, lands on and kills the Wicked Witch of the East. This fortunate event represents the *Bris Milah* (circumcision), which kills part of the *Yetzer Hara* (the Evil Inclination). As for Dorothy being female, this is because the *Neshama* is feminine.

After exiting the house and deposited in Munchkinland, Dorothy is visited by two powerful beings. The first is Glinda the Good Witch, representing the *Yetzer Hatov* (the Good Inclination), who watches over and guides Dorothy throughout her journey. The next, less

friendly visitor is the Wicked Witch of the West, representing the (remaining) *Yetzer Hara*. The Wicked Witch blames Dorothy for killing her sister, the Wicked Witch of the East, and vows to destroy her. Most of all, the witch seeks the ruby slippers that Dorothy acquired from the witch's sister. The ruby slippers represent the *mitzvos* (commandments) – which the *Yetzer Hara* wants to keep away from the Jewish person. Lacking the power to harm Dorothy in this protected environment (Munchkinland, representing the childhood home), the Wicked Witch leaves.

Dorothy's only wish is to go back home – that is, to do *teshuvah* ("return," or come close, to G-d) – but it is not so easy. She hears about a powerful wizard who can help her, representing the *rebbe* (spiritual guide). She will have to travel far to find this wizard, and is advised to "follow the yellow brick road" – the halacha (Jewish law).

On the road, Dorothy collects three companions, each representing a vital dimension that must be developed in a person. They are the Scarecrow (intellect), the Tin Man (compassion), and the Lion (courage). Together with Dorothy and Toto, the group makes up a complete human being.

The Wicked Witch tries relentlessly to thwart the team; for instance, she uses poppies to put Dorothy to sleep. (Inducing a person to inertia through drugs and other means is a common ploy of the *Yetzer Hara*.) Luckily the Good Witch intervenes, sending a snow fall to wake up Dorothy.

The group finally arrives in Emerald City. After much insistence, they are granted an audience with the Wizard, who appears as a large head with fire around it. The Wizard demands they bring him the witch's broomstick before he will grant their requests. The demand is purposeful: the group – who, when unified, comprise the whole individual – must defeat the *Yetzer Hara*.

The Wicked Witch/ *Yetzer Hara* detects the group's approach and sends her minions. The winged monkeys, representing bad thoughts and influences, snatch Dorothy and Toto and bring them to the witch. When Dorothy's friends arrive to rescue her, the witch attacks the Scarecrow (intellect) with fire. Instinctively, Dorothy grabs a bucket of

water and douses her friend – and, accidentally, the witch as well. Amazingly, the water causes the Wicked Witch to melt. Water, as our sages tell us, represents Torah, and Torah is the antidote to the *Yetzer Hara*.

Upon returning to the Wizard, the group discovers that the image is being controlled by an ordinary man behind a curtain. After admitting his humble status, this man – the real "wizard" – explains to the group that they do not need him to grant them anything. Intellect, compassion, and courage are not given from the outside but are acquired through proper action.

Being only human, the Wizard is unable to bring Dorothy home. At this point, the Good Witch appears. She informs Dorothy that the power to return is, and always was, in her hands. Dorothy is instructed to click together the heels of the ruby slippers and repeat "there's no place like home." This repetition represents *tefilah* (prayer).

Her journey complete, Dorothy returns to *Shamayim*, where she reunites with her loved ones and where her experiences in the physical world seem like a dream.

By the way, Dorothy's name provides a hint to the hidden meaning of the story. Written in Hebrew letters, her name becomes *daled – vav – resh – vav – tav – yud*, translating as "my generations." The story is about reincarnation: the soul enters the world to complete a mission, and then returns to heaven. This is repeated as necessary, so the soul comprises multiple generations.

As an interesting footnote, this translation of Dorothy's name provides a reference to the rock band, The Who, whose classic hit song, "My Generation," was released in 1965. The connection explains why, before the Who's performance of this song on *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*, lead singer Roger Daltrey introduced himself as "Roger from Oz."

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in memory of our father,*

Herman Levinson

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