

באש אוכלת – "Like a Consuming Fire"

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Shavuot is the culmination of a journey that begins at Pesach and concludes 7 weeks later with the receiving of the Torah. Following the physical redemption from Egypt on the first day, we then begin the spiritual redemption over the next 49 days, a step by step process of ridding ourselves of the negativity (טומאה) that we experienced and imbibed in Egypt.

יציאת מצרים is mentioned 50 times in the Torah. This parallels the counting of the Omer, as if we leave (יציאה) a little more of Egypt behind us each day. Through a process of introspection and self-improvement, we progressively shed a little more of the influence of Egypt and raise ourselves to a state of readiness to receive the Torah on day 50, the Chag of Shavuot.

The awesome experience at Mount Sinai is described at the end of *פרשת משפטים*: "And the appearance of the glory of Hashem was like a consuming fire on the mountain top in the eyes of all Bnei Yisrael." The *כתב וקבלה* gives a novel interpretation of the pasuk, asserting that the "consuming fire" – *אש אוכלת* – is not an external conflagration, but a reference to the "spiritual combustibility" of each person. The experience of *מתן תורה* at *הר סיני* was not uniform, but differed for each individual depending on the effort invested during the preparatory phase of *ספירת העומר*. The more one invested in the spiritual process leading to that day, the more one was 'fired up' by the event. The less prepared person was simply "warmed" by the experience on *הר סיני* and the well-prepared was "totally consumed".

Like every endeavor in life, the more one puts into the process, the more satisfying and rewarding the results.