



Thursday will be Lag B’Omer and bonfires will burn brightly all over the Land of Israel as well as throughout the Jewish world as we celebrate the *yahrzeit* of the great Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai. The little village of Meron in the upper Galilee is buzzing with happy activity as hundreds of little three-year old boys gather with their families for their first haircuts. They are following the instructions of Rabbi Shimon himself who enjoined his disciples to mark the day of his passing with great joy. This custom has been honored throughout hundreds of generations to our very day.

But while we remember Rabbi Shimon with festive gatherings, the times in which he lived were filled with suffering and harsh repression. The Romans were cruel rulers in the Jewish land, and their aim was to stamp out the practice of Judaism. Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues continued teaching their devoted students despite the threat of death which hovered over them all. And Jewish scholarship blossomed in spite of the Roman menace.

One of the greatest and most beloved of Rabbi Akiva’s students was Rabbi Shimon, whom he called “my son.” Even while his master, Rabbi Akiva was in prison, Rabbi Shimon visited him to serve and to continue learning Torah.

Once during those difficult days, Rabbi Shimon sat with his fellow rabbis, Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yose ben Chalafta, discussing the Roman rule. Rabbi Yehuda spoke first saying, “The Romans aren’t all bad. They have invested in dozens of beneficial projects--beautiful cities, bridges and roads, which all serve to enhance public life.” Rabbi Yose shook his head in disagreement, but said nothing. Only Rabbi Shimon spoke up in fearless disdain of the wicked conquerors. “How can you say that? Why, everything they have done was only to satisfy their own greedy desires. Of course they have built cities--to contain their houses of vice; and bridges--an excellent source of revenue to fill their coffers!”

But as Rabbi Shimon spoke, an informer was sitting nearby, paying close attention to his words. This man was only too happy to repeat the rabbis’ conversation to the authorities. As a result, Rabbi Shimon and his son, Eleazer were forced to flee. They eventually found a hidden cave where they remained for twelve years, constantly learning Torah. They achieved such an exalted level of holiness that when they emerged at last, their gaze alone was enough to scorch the surroundings which appeared mundane to their holy eyes. G-d sent them back to their cave for yet another year, for fear that they would destroy His world.

When they emerged for good, Rabbi Shimon’s body was covered in painful sores from sitting immersed in the sand of the cave for so many years. (He had removed his clothing to preserve it, and so, had to cover himself up with sand.)

After some time Rabbi Shimon was cured of his sores by the Tiberian mineral springs. He established a yeshiva in the village of Tekoah in the Galilee. There, the most brilliant students of the age, including Rabbi Yehuda, gathered to learn Torah from the Master. Amid the silvery olive groves they learned not only the revealed Torah, but the esoteric, mystical Torah as well, laying the groundwork for the *Zohar*; the fundamental work of the *Kabala*. Of Rabbi Shimon it is said that he restored the study and knowledge of the Torah.

Rabbi Shimon’s disdain for the worldly and mundane was well known. The Talmud relates a story about Rabbi Shimon’s students, one of whom had managed to amass a fortune in a foreign country. When he returned, his fellow students were eager to do the same as he had, and make fortunes of their own. Rabbi Shimon took his students into a valley and prayed that the valley fill up with gold. When his prayer was answered, he told the students that they could take as much gold as they wished. The only drawback was that what they took would be subtracted from their eternal reward. The students learned the lesson well. They replaced whatever they had taken, unwilling to trade gold for their real treasure.

In the later part of his life Rabbi Shimon travelled to Rome at the behest of the other Sages to petition the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, to repeal the anti-Jewish decrees which were set in place by his predecessor. The Talmud describes the manner in which he achieved his success in this mission. When Rabbi Shimon arrived in Rome, the daughter of the emperor

was gravely ill. No doctor had been able to cure her, and it seemed that she would die. Rabbi Shimon was able to effect a cure, and as a reward, the Emperor offered him his choice of a precious object from the royal treasure vault. Rabbi Shimon entered and was able to find the scrolls which contained the evil edicts. He took them and tore them up in front of the Emperor. In this way, he was able to restore to the Jewish people the right to practice circumcision as well as to observe the Sabbath.

THOUGHTS
THAT COUNT
on the weekly Torah portion

You shall not profane My holy name, so that I may be sanctified among the Children of Israel (Lev. 22:32)

From this verse we learn the commandment to sanctify G-d’s name, even sacrificing our very lives if need be. We are commanded to observe certain mitzvot at any price, including the forfeiture of our lives. These mitzvot include the prohibition against the worship of idols, not engaging in adulterous relationships, and the prohibition of murder. When a Jew gives up his life rather than commit any of these transgressions, G-d’s name is publicly sanctified. Conversely, the desecration of G-d’s name is taken just as seriously. The Prophet Ezekiel refers to the exile of the Jewish people as a desecration of G-d’s name. The ultimate sanctification of G-d’s name, however, will take place when Moshiach comes and the entire world is redeemed, at which time “My great name will be sanctified...and all the nations will know that I am G-d.” (*Likutei Sichot* Vol. 27)

The Hebrew word for “profane”– “*t’chal’lu*” – is related to the word meaning “empty” or “void.” “Do not cause a void or emptiness to come between us,” G-d cautions, referring to transgressions which place a barrier between a Jew and G-d. “Furthermore, make sure that no place is void of Me.” Haughtiness pushes away the Divine Presence, which is incompatible with pride and lack of humility. (*Likutei Torah*)

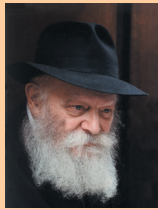
And you shall take...willows of the brook (Lev. 23:40)

The willow, one of the four kinds we take on the holiday of Sukkot, has neither fragrance nor taste. It symbolizes those Jews who have in their possession neither Torah learning nor good deeds. Their only merit is the fact that they are descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Maimonides teaches that even a willow that did not grow on the banks of a brook, say, one that was found growing in a desert or on a mountain-top, is kosher and may be used to perform the mitzva. Likewise, a Jew who did not grow up close to his roots in Judaism and was raised in a foreign culture, through no fault of his own, is also kosher, just by virtue of his being a Jew. (*The Rebbe*)



7:46 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
12 Iyar/May 13
Torah Portion Emor
Ethics Ch 3
Shabbat ends 8:52 PM



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

In this week’s Torah portion, *Emor*, we read about the care of newborn animals. “When an ox, a sheep, or a goat are born, for seven days it should remain under its mother’s care, from the eighth day and on it will be acceptable as a sacrifice to G-d.”

Later, the Torah commands us, “You should not desecrate My Holy Name, that I may be sanctified amongst the children of Israel...”

What could possibly be the connection that brings these two laws together?

On a deeper level the newborn animals are symbolic of our emotions that our intellect, the mother, gives birth to. Rather than allow your emotions free reign, “Seven days it should remain under its mother’s care.” Allow your mind time to develop the emotion before expressing it.

This is especially important to remember in situations that are out of our control, meaning that they are clearly and directly from G-d. Especially when it is impossible to make sense of. Here we need to let our thought process the notion that G-d knows what and why He does these things. Our job is to find a way to sanctify G-d through these events, so that it changes us in a positive way.

This Sunday is *Pesach Sheini* (the “second” Passover). If one was impure or far away when the Passover sacrifice was to be brought, he was supposed to bring it on Pesach Sheini, a month later.

A unique aspect of this *mitzva* (commandment) is that the Torah tells us how it came to be. “There were people that were impure... They came before Moses... Why should we lose out?... ” Another unique thing is that the Jews only asked for this dispensation if they were impure, which was through no fault of their own. However, G-d added that if the individual is far, which is understood to mean a minimal distance, this too can be made up on Pesach Sheini.

What is the lesson from these two oddities, the story behind the mitzva and the addition of being far which is not really far at all?

There is the possibility to be close and far at the same time – near in distance yet detached and distant in attitude. Being here in body and elsewhere in mind, for example when praying, you are saying the words but your mind is wandering. G-d wants us to be close to Him, to love Him and yet, it is possible to be so close and totally ignore Him. To this G-d is saying, “I still want you to be close to Me, try again, do it better.” Only like the people in the story of Pesach Sheini, you need to really want it. If you do, it will always be possible to get close to G-d.

At home too, our family yearns for our love and closeness. While we might be with them physically, they often feel ignored because our attention is not focused on them. How do we observe Pesach Sheini today? By realizing what you are missing out on and truly wanting to change. When it comes to family, know that they yearn for connection and will welcome your love. Don’t give up on the best thing you have.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

For the Love of Fish

by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

A large fish was caught by the count’s servants. Gasping for breath, the fish took some comfort in the words he overheard: “What a beauty! The count will be so happy. After all, the count loves fish.”

Although he suffered all the way to the castle, the fish consoled himself in the expectation of better things to come, for everyone who saw him exclaimed: “The count will be so happy. He really loves fish.”

To his surprise, however, when they reached the castle, instead of being placed in a lagoon or, at the very least, in a large tank, he was brought to the kitchen. There again, he heard the people exclaim: “The count will be so happy. He really loves fish.”

Realizing his fate, the fish cried out to the butcher who had raised his knife over his head: “The count does not love fish. He is not thinking about me at all. He loves himself!”

Often, when we speak of “loving another person,” what we are really loving is what we can get out of that person or how loving the person makes us feel good.

This story serves as a good introduction to Lag B’Omer, one of Judaism’s days of festive celebration. One of the reasons we celebrate is that on this day, a plague that killed thousands of Rabbi Akiva’s students ended.

What was the reason for the plague? our Sages explain that Rabbi Akiva’s students did not show respect for one another.

That explanation has raised many questions. Rabbi Akiva placed great emphasis on sharing and unity. It was he who taught: “Love your fellowman as yourself” is a great general principle in the Torah.” How then could his students depart from their master’s path and fail to show each other respect?

The answer is that really loving someone

means going beyond yourself, relating to the person for the person’s sake, not for what you can get. Even with the best intentions – and surely Rabbi Akiva’s students had the best intentions – our self-interest can get in our way. Quite possibly, we will fail to show a person – even one whom we are trying to love – proper respect and consideration.

Lag B’Omer also commemorates the passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, one of the foremost sages of the Talmud and author of the Zohar, the primary text of the Kabala.

Rabbi Shimon perceived these two areas of knowledge not as distinct, self-contained disciplines, but as one composite unit. The legal aspect – Talmud, serves as the body and the mystical element – Zohar – the soul, of one integrated Torah.

This unity within the Torah enabled Rabbi Shimon to perceive the Divine unity within our material world, and moreover, to see this unity expressed even in the material dimensions of his life.

When Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai completed the Zohar, the fundamental text of Jewish mysticism, he was told from heaven: “With this text of yours, the Jewish people will leave exile with mercy.” There is a cause and effect relationship here. As people appreciate the mystic truths taught by the Zohar, they will understand the G-dly nature of their own souls, the souls of the people around them and the souls of all of existence.

When people begin thinking and living according to these insights, the society that they produce will reflect the prophecies of knowledge, peace, and unity that accompany the Era of the Redemption. The Redemption will not merely be an abstract ideal; it will be a motif that ripple by ripple makes its way into the fabric of our lives.

Reprinted from Keeping in Touch, sie.org

SLICE OF LIFE

Shabbat Magic

by Chanie Chein



Rabbi Peretz and Chanie Chein during their Podcast

Chanie Chein and her husband Rabbi Peretz founded and direct the Chabad House at Brandeis in Waltham, Massachusetts.

On the quieter Shabbat afternoons during covid we began a tradition where instead of referring to Shabbat lunch by that name, we started to call it a “Farbrengen.”*

A Farbrengen has a start time, but no end time. It needs at least two people, but the space is open for many more participants who have curious and open hearts and minds. It nurtures conversations, musings and wonderings—aloud whose beginnings and endings are unknown. It contains songs which aren’t prepared on a song list, more like melodies being sung in endless loops, spiraling higher and higher. It contains yummy food to satiate the body, and drink to ‘lubricate the soul’ (a Peretz phrase).

We choose this experience to celebrate Shabbat over, because it’s so much more vibrant than a lunch and it lasts often way past the official end

of Shabbat, reflecting its vibrancy.

And when alumni, friends or family join us for the weekend – ah, what a soaring experience.

This spirit also spills over to the students who dip into it.

If you’d enter the first floor of 54T on a Shabbat afternoon, you may find...

...A group of students cozying up on the circle of couches by the sunlight windows, connecting over joyous or serious conversations. Some are sitting on the carpet or lounging on pillows, playing a game with the Chein kids, laughing at some absurd joke or move.

Step in further where students gather around the chess table, enjoying moments of respite or a stimulating experience.

Take a few more steps in (don’t worry at all about the snow on the floors) and you’ll be greeted by the square wood dining room table, where Peretz, myself and whichever Chein kids remain. Peretz is wearing the black long tuxedo coat girdled by the waist in a woven sash and wrapped from the neck down in the talit he wore for morning prayers which often lasts for a few hours. Our family is most often not even up to the *cholent* (a traditional Shabbat stew (contact us for Peretz’s famous recipe!), because we’ve gotten carried away in the Farbrengen.

You can pull up a seat, take a plate and help yourself to the family-style dishes. You can listen (a deep kind of listening) to whatever topic is being explored, respond to a question, share a point of view, or join a melody.

Turn the corner into the kitchen, and there’s more noisy conversations, some hushed ones too, as students share private moments, while helping themselves to tea, cholent, and whatever food is left on the counters.

Cholent is eventually brought to the table too, where second helpings are the norm.

The sounds of clinks of cutlery against glass dishes, *l’chaim* (on water too) being raised, hopes and wishes being toasted, add to the song of the afternoon. All this time, the door could be opening and closing as students come and go and warm hellos and good-byes are heard. The noise of all this delightfulness comes together in a song. A new kind, each week – it’s magical.

Take a step back and you’ll discover a cozy room off the kitchen, where students who want to learn in a quieter space, curl up on the couch.

Descend the stairs down into the library, where you’ll encounter many more students in lively conversations and some reading quietly on their own as part of the m54 student experience. It’s certainly not a quiet library on a Shabbat afternoon. Take a look at the couch, where just last Shabbat, four students were sitting on it, each immersed in a different book. Headlines, a book where contemporary events encounter traditional Jewish text, Joseph Telushkin’s book, *The Rebbe*, a third student studying the Talmud and the fourth, understanding Nechama Leibowitz’s (a woman scholar) commentary on the weekly Torah portion.

Around the repurposed drafting table, students are laughing, learning and talking. More students are browsing thousands of books, selecting ones that pique their interest. And in one corner, an armchair can even create space for two students, who are browsing the more unexpected books in our library.

Up and down, around the house students go, tasting a library vibe, a farbrengen vibe, a Shabbat vibe.

Sometimes I step back into a quiet corner and watch. I feel a deep satisfaction in knowing we created a space where Shabbat can come alive in such personalized ways.

**Yiddish for “spending time together.” A Farbrengen is an informal, inspirational Chasidic gathering where words of Torah are shared and melodies are sung over refreshments.*

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

13th of Iyar, 5730 [1970]

Greeting and Blessing:

I was pleased to be informed of the forthcoming auspicious day Lag b’Omer activities...

The story of Lag b’Omer, as related in the Gemoroh, is well known. Our Sages tell us that the disciples of Rabbi Akiva were stricken by a plague because they were not respectful towards one another. But on the thirty-third day of *Sefirah* [counting the Omer] – Lag b’Omer – the plague stopped.

As in the case of all stories of the Torah, which are also part of the Torah, meaning “instruction,” the story of Rabbi Akiva’s students contains a lesson for each and every one of us, particularly pupils, boys and girls.

To begin with: Since the *Gemoroh* testifies that they were “disciples of Rabbi Akiva,” it is clear that they were worthy of this title. This means that they were dedicated to the Torah and *Mitzvos* [commandments] with devotion, diligence and *Mesiras Nefesh* (self-sacrifice), as the great Tanna and exalted Sage had taught them. It follows that their lack of respect for one another could not have been due to trivial matters, but was motivated by the high level of their spiritual standing as “disciples of Rabbi Akiva.”

The explanation of their conduct is to be found in the saying of our Sages, of blessed memory, that people generally have different minds and different concepts. Each individual has therefore his own approach in serving G-d, studying the Torah and observing the *Mitzvos* with “*Hiddur*” [in an enhanced manner]. For example, one person may do it primarily out of love for G-d, another person may do it primarily out of fear of G-d, a third may do it primarily out of a sense of complete obedience and submission to the Will of G-d and so forth, though in actual practice, all of them, of course, fully and meticulously observe the Torah and *Mitzvos* in the daily life.

Now, being disciples of Rabbi Akiva, they were surely “men of truth,” who served G-d with the utmost sincerity and devotion, which permeated their whole being. Thus, it seemed to each one of them that his particular approach was the right one, and anyone who had not attained his level was lacking in perfection.

Moreover, being disciples of Rabbi Akiva, who taught, “Thou shalt love thy fellow Jew as thyself – this is the great principle of the Torah,” they were not content personally to advance from strength to strength in their own way of serving G-d, but they wished to share this with their friends and tried to influence them to follow their path. Seeing that the others were reluctant to accept their particular approach, they could not respect them to the degree that was to be expected of the disciples of Rabbi Akiva.

In the light of the above, we can see that the story of Lag b’Omer in the *Gemoroh* teaches us what should be the right conduct of each and every one of us, and the instruction is threefold: Serving G-d, studying the Torah and observing the *Mitzvos*, both the *Mitzvos* between man and man, and the *Mitzvos* between man and G-d, must be perfect with true inspiration and vitality, which permeate the whole of the person and his daily conduct.

The above includes, of course, the great *Mitzvah* of *V’Ohavto L’Reacho Komocho* (love your fellow Jew as yourself), which must also be fulfilled with the utmost vitality and in the fullest measure.

Together with the above, a person must look kindly and most respectfully upon every Jew who is fully committed to all the Torah and *Mitzvos* but differs only in the manner of worship, whether it is out of love, or out of reverence, etc.

A further instruction from the above is that even if one meets a Jew who has not yet attained the proper level of Divine service, the approach must still be that of respect and affection, in accordance with the teaching our Sages, “Judge every person favorably.” It is necessary to bear in mind that the person lacking in commitment to *Yiddishkeit* [Judaism] may not be responsible, and that he simply may not have had the opportunity to receive the proper Jewish education. On the contrary, in such a case, one must pity such a person all the more, and it is necessary to make the utmost effort to help him come closer to *Yiddishkeit*, and to do so with love, respect and in a pleasant manner...

May G-d bless each and every one of you, in the midst of all our people Israel, that you should live and act in accordance with the spirit of Lag b’Omer, as mentioned above, and that you should do so with the utmost measure of true *Ahavas Yisroel*, with joy and gladness of heart; and that you should go from strength to strength in all your affairs, to hasten the realization of the words of the (Lag b’Omer) week’s *Sidra* [Torah portion]: “I will break the bars of your yoke (in exile) and make you go upright” – in fulfillment of the true and complete *Geulo* [Redemption], through our righteous *Moshiach*.

With blessing for *Hatzlocho* [success] and good tidings in the aforementioned,

MOSHIACH MATTERS

G-d has provided ample and abundant blessings in the world He created “with kindness, love and mercy.” He has called on mankind to emulate these qualities by sharing G-d-given

benefits with others, helping them materially and spiritually. Once mankind realizes that G-d has provided abundance for everyone, there will be no motivation for war or even strife. Similarly, this approach will refine the world and hasten the coming of the era which will express its ultimate state of perfection, when “One nation will not lift up a sword against another, nor will they learn war any more.” (*Likutei Sichos* vol. 1, p. 218)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

Sunday is “Pesach Sheini.” Pesach Sheini, the Second Passover, was instituted the year after the Jews left Egypt while they were still in the desert. On Passover of that year, G-d commanded our ancestors to bring the special Passover offering. However, since some of the Jews were ritually impure at that time, they were not permitted to bring the offering. They protested and G-d told Moses that all those who were unable to bring the offering on Passover could bring it one month later. This date became known as the Second Passover.

The Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn wrote: “The theme of Pesach Sheini is that it is never too late. It is always possible to put things right. Even if one was ritually impure, or far away, and even in a case when this impurity or distance was deliberate – nonetheless it can be corrected.”

It’s never too late. What an inspiring and optimistic thought! There’s always a chance to improve, to become better, to learn and do.

This is truly a motto worth memorizing (and hanging on the refrigerator). Rather than muttering about yourself or another person, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” realize that it’s never too late.

You didn’t put on tefilin yesterday? Today’s a new day and it’s never too late.

You didn’t light candles for Shabbat last Friday night? Do it this week, it’s never too late.

You never went to Hebrew school, so you can’t read Hebrew? Enroll in an adult education course; it’s never too late.

You never knew that Judaism had so much to offer? Now that you know, do something about it, because it’s never too late.

Shmuel Beilman

L’ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקא

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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EnerJew

The Chabad-Lubavitch program for teens in the former Soviet Union and other Chabad teen programs like CTeen enable teens who are fleeing the war in Ukraine to get their bearings and feel a sense of normalcy in the cities where they are now refugees. At a recent Shabbaton for EnerJew members in Estonia and Latvia that took place in Vienna, refugees from Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Chernihiv participated.

New Center

The Cabo Jewish Center in Cabo, Mexico, recently had its grand-opening. Founded and directed by Rabbi Benny and Sonia Hershcovich, the new home of Chabad of Cabo includes a large sanctuary, wedding hall, a mikva, restaurant, and three guest rooms. There is also space for classes for adults and teens, and Shabbat meals.



Today Is...

13 Iyar

“Know what is above you.” Know that everything “above” in the Divine emanations and configurations, all derives “from you” Man’s actions are independent and real, and from Above, G-d reacts to Man, “reflects” Man’s actions. Man may be insignificant from one perspective, but his importance is cosmic from another. “I am dust and ashes” expresses one view; “The universe was created on my account” expresses the second; it all depends on man’s service.