

LAG BAOMER

With The
Rebbe

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LAG BAOMER 5744



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1. We are gathered here today in honor of Lag B'Omer, the thirty-third day of the Omer. The meaning of Lag B'Omer is recorded in the Oral Torah, which, together with the Written Torah, was given to Moshe Rabbeinu at Sinai. As the Rambam writes in the Introduction to Mishneh Torah: "All the mitzvos which were given to Moshe from Sinai were given together with their interpretations." Moreover, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1), on the words "they (the tablets) were written on both sides," says that the Ten Commandments which were written on the tablets encompassed all of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, including those concepts which future disciples would deduce.

Lag B'Omer in particular is certainly discussed in the Oral Torah, for one of the reasons why — Lag B'Omer is celebrated has to do with the disciples of Rabbi Akiva (as will shortly be discussed) — and Rabbi Akiva is the source of the entire Oral Torah, as the Talmud (Sanhedrin 86a) states, "All of it [all the teachings of the Sages — the whole Oral Torah] is according to Rabbi Akiva [i.e. according to what they learned from Rabbi Akiva]."

There are two main reasons for Lag B'Omer.

1) From Pesach on, Rabbi Akiva's disciples had been dying in a plague; on Lag B'Omer they ceased to die.

2) Lag B'Omer is the yartzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai — Rashbi.

Let us examine each reason separately.

Rabbi Akiva's disciples ceased to die

Rabbi Akiva's disciples died because they did not accord the proper respect and honor one to another. As disciples of Rabbi Akiva, each deserved the greatest of honors, especially since it was Rabbi Akiva who taught that "You shall love your fellow as yourself" is "a great principle in Torah." And because they did not accord each other the proper amount of honor, they were struck down by a plague.

The disciples then rectified their error and began to accord the proper respect one to another; and since the cause of the plague was now eliminated, the plague itself stopped — on Lag B'Omer.

The episode of Rabbi Akiva's disciples teaches us how one Jew should treat another. It is not enough to merely not hurt another; it is also not enough to accord honor to another only lackadaisically; Instead, one must accord every Jew the full measure of honor which the disciples of Rabbi Akiva deserved!

What are the qualities of a Jew which earn him such honor and respect? Every Jew is "an entire world," to the extent that G-d, whom "the whole earth is full of His glory," ignores all else and "stands over him, and watches him, and examines mind and heart [to see] if he is serving Him properly."

This applies to every Jew without exception, for all Jews are descendants of the forefathers, who were the "chariot" to G-dliness. Thus, regardless of a person's conduct, G-d is with him, as He is with all Jews of all generations.

Because G-d "stands over him," and has created and gives life to every Jew, He bestows upon him the full bounty of His blessings. As we have read in the parshah of this past Shabbos: "If you will walk in My statutes ... I shall give your rains in their proper time, etc." G-d asks of every Jew, and grants him the necessary powers, to walk in His statutes and to "keep My mitzvos and observe them." When a Jew does so, G-d bestows upon him all the blessing enumerated in the parshah, including "I shall be your G-d, and you shall be My people" — G-d pledges to take care of each Jew, and each Jew is assured that he will be as a servant and son to our Father in heaven.

The knowledge that a person has the merit to be a Jew, and that he has been given G-d's Torah and mitzvos, infuses a Jew with pride and steadfastness of purpose, as the conclusion of the blessings in the parshah states: "I shall lead you upright."

We thus see-how lofty are the qualities of every Jew, and how much honor and respect must accordingly be given to each one.

Whence does a Jew have the strength to follow such a course? Every Jew is a heir to the whole Torah, as written, "The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Israel," and therefore he receives the powers

and energy to walk in G-d's statutes and to keep all His mitzvos, particularly the mitzvah, "You shall love your fellow as yourself." And because a Jew is G-d's emissary to transform this corporeal world into a fit abode for G-d, to infuse G-dliness into its every aspect, he must carry out the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel in the fullest measure. In the words of Rambam: "It is incumbent on every one to love each individual person from Israel as his own self, as it is said, 'You shall love your fellow as yourself.'" And thence to the ultimate expression of Ahavas Yisroel — according to the fullest honor to every Jew.

The above is relevant to all, men, women and children, for, as noted previously, all Jews inherit the Torah; and since an heir inherits from birth, every child possesses the entire Torah. Moreover, even before birth, a soul that is about to descend into this world is administered an oath to be righteous and not be wicked." And this oath strengthens a person to fulfill his mandate of being righteous and observing Torah and mitzvos fully.

Indeed, children have a greater opportunity to follow the Torah's directives: They are not distracted by the necessity to make a livelihood and other concerns that worry adults, and can therefore easily devote themselves to fully carrying out the Torah's, commands, including "Love your fellow as yourself."

Today's Lag B'Omer parade exemplifies just such conduct. Many, many Jewish children, although of different backgrounds, with parents of differing world outlooks and educational ideals, have gathered together, treating one another respectfully and with honor. All of us together make resolutions to increase in Torah study and observance of mitzvos, including the mitzvah "Love your fellow as yourself" — which includes influencing one's friends to also observe Torah and mitzvos. Such behavior is the antithesis of the conduct of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, and serves to rectify their sin. When Jews accord honor one to another, all undesirable things are eliminated, and a special blessing is bestowed from above.

This special blessing is bestowed upon children, and through them to their parents and their educators who taught them G-d's ways and mitzvos. Thus, in addition to the blessings which parents and educators earn in their own right, they receive blessings for educating the children in the right way.

May it be G-d's will that G-d's blessings be given generously and "from his full, open, holy and ample hand." May they include a blessing for success in carrying



out the good resolutions undertaken as a united body, for, since “you are standing together before the L-rd your G-d,” all are united in one indivisible entity. The unified nature of these resolutions is highlighted by the fact that they concern the fulfillment of the one Torah: Although the Torah comprises 613 mitzvos and innumerable details, all these details are united into one entity, one Torah.

So too Jews: Although blessed to be as many as the stars of heaven, unable to be counted, Jews are nevertheless one people, united with the one Torah, given by the one G-d, for the one goal of making this world a fit abode for G-d. And this goal is advanced by Jewish children increasing their commitment to Torah study and observance of mitzvos.

All of the above hastens the time when “G-d will gather the dispersed of Israel” — dispersed literally, in different places of the globe, and dispersed also in different interests. When Jews joyfully carry out their resolutions, they are working together in G-d’s interests — and then, as at Mattan Torah when “the people answered with one voice,” they are united together in “one congregation.” We will then see the fulfillment of the promise, “A great congregation will return here,” and “You shall be gathered one by one, O house of Israel,” which Rashi explains to mean that G-d takes hold of every Jew individually and leads him out of exile.

2. The second main reason for Lag B’Omer is that this day marks the yartzeit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi), one of the leading disciples of Rabbi Akiva (and one of those who were untouched by the plague). He said that the day on which he would pass away — Lag B’Omer — is “the day of his rejoicing” (as we shall shortly explain), and requested that all Jews celebrate and be joyful together with him on this day.

Our rejoicing on Lag B’Omer adds to Rashbi’s joy — as the Rambam writes concerning the mitzvah of joy on Yomtov, that true joy is when one does not rejoice alone, but invites others to participate. And the more people the better, for “the king’s glory is in a multitude of people.” That is why we all gather together on Lag B’Omer, on “the day of his rejoicing.”

We must derive a lesson from Rashbi’s joy; to do that, we must understand the reason for his joy on the day he passed on. And since it is the Jewish custom that Lag B’Omer is celebrated primarily by children — as we see at this Parade — and through them adults also participate, it follows that the reason for the joy

— and thus the lesson derived from it for one's daily life — must be relevant and comprehensible also to children.

Although we celebrate Lag B'Omer but once a year, and for a particular reason, nevertheless, since Torah is eternal, the theme and spirit of Lag B'Omer applies the whole year round (on Lag B'Omer itself it is in a more open and forceful fashion).

The Zohar states that Rashbi rejoiced on Lag B'Omer for on that day "I am bound [to G-d] with one knot, I am one with Him, I have a passion for Him, I cleave to Him." In other words, in addition to the fact that all his life Rashbi was ready to sacrifice his life for G-d, and was constantly learning His Torah, on Lag B'Omer he felt that he was especially attached and close to G-d.

How is this relevant to all Jews, including children? Every Jewish child can bind himself or herself to G-d: At birth, it is customary to surround the child with G-d's Names so that the child, as soon as he or she is born, sees these holy Names. As the child's body grows, so does his soul and spiritual awareness — and thus so his bond with G-d. Lag B'Omer teaches that no matter how strong this bond was previously, a new and special bond must be forged on Lag B'Omer.

Simply put, a child starts his day by cleaving to G-d: Before — eating, before even uttering a blessing, before even washing his hands, he says "Modeh Ani" — "I offer thanks to You, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great." In the first moment of his day a child feels that G-d has restored his soul and gives him life. And because a person is one with his soul, a child feels that he is one with He who has given him his soul — "I am one with Him, I have a passion for Him, I cleave to Him."

As a result, the entire day becomes devoted to G-d. Every good action — reciting "Modeh Ani," washing one's hands, reciting the morning blessings, learning Torah and observing mitzvos — all contribute to the health of the soul, and thereby to the soul's bond with G-d. In turn, this service to G-d draws down G-d's blessings for a healthy day, a healthy year, and a healthy life both spiritually and materially. Lag B'Omer, then, emphasizes the renewal of the bond between Jew and G-d.

3. There is another important lesson to be drawn from Lag B'Omer. Rashbi was one of Rabbi Akiva's twenty four thousand disciples. Although all were

great men, worthy of being called disciples of Rabbi Akiva, it was specifically Rashbi of whom Rabbi Akiva said, “It is enough for you that I and your Creator recognize your worth” — meaning, that only Rabbi Akiva and G-d were capable of plumbing the greatness of Rashbi. Similarly, Rashbi of all the disciples was singled out as being the one whose “Torah was his sole occupation.”

Despite his lofty eminence, Rashbi was close to every Jew. He said, “I am able to absolve the whole world from punishment,” meaning, with his merits he shields everyone in the world from punishment and thereby assures them that only good shall befall them. Thus every Jew, including children, is associated with Rashbi whose “Torah was his sole occupation.”

This is puzzling: If Rabbi Akiva’s other disciples were not in the category of “Torah was his sole occupation,” how can we say that children have a connection to Rashbi and to his mode of learning? However, it is precisely children, who have no worries and need not worry about making a living, that can devote themselves entirely to Torah study. Also, the “breath [of children] is free of sin” — and therefore the concept of “Torah is his sole occupation” applies even more fully to them.

“He shall return the hearts of the fathers through the children”: When parents see how their small sons or daughters utilize their free moments to eagerly recite a verse from Written Torah or a saying from the Oral Torah, they will be deeply impressed and will follow suit. Further, they will be inspired to make more free time for themselves, to free themselves of worries so that they can devote more trouble-free hours to learning Torah — in which hours Torah becomes their sole “occupation” and “business.” Just as a businessman is totally occupied with his business, in which he sinks his energies and talents, so a Jew’s “business” is — Torah. A businessman’s main occupation is his business; even when asleep, he dreams of business matters. And so a Jew: Even when eating and drinking and sleeping, his business is Torah, the Torah given by G-d to every Jew as an eternal heritage.

It is for this reason that the obligation to study Torah devolves on everyone, even a businessman. During set hours of the day he can devote himself exclusively to Torah, making it his “business” at that time; and since those hours in which he learns Torah are the most important part of the day, permeating and influencing the other hours, it is as if “Torah is his sole occupation” the whole day.

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Again, it is the example set by the children which influences the adults. Before they are old enough to have any worries, children are educated to know that they must talk of Torah matters: As soon as they begin to speak they are taught the verse, “The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Ya’akov”; as they mature, they are educated in other Torah concepts.

Such behavior gives satisfaction to parents, knowing they have healthy children spiritually — which leads to physical health. How? Since a child eats not because he is a glutton but because he wishes to make a blessing over the food and because he wants to have the strength necessary to carry out G-d’s mitzvos, he will certainly not eat harmful foods no matter how delicious looking. And the satisfaction parents derive from their children will in turn influence parents to strive harder to emulate their children and make Torah their occupation — as Rashbi.

4. Not only does the concept of “Torah is his sole occupation” apply to all Jews, especially children, but also Rashbi’s attitude exemplified by his statement, “I am able to absolve the whole world from punishment.” Jews, especially children whose “breath is free of sin,” free the world from punishment through learning Torah and observing mitzvos.

Jewish girls in particular play an important role in this. As soon as they are old enough (— able to recite a blessing and understand the difference between — light and darkness —), girls should be educated to kindle the Shabbos and Yom-tov candles.

All mitzvos are from G-d, and all mitzvos are a “lamp,” shedding spiritual light. Kindling Shabbos and Yomtov candles, however, is a mitzvah which also literally gives light, its purpose being to ensure that on Shabbos there be light in the house so that one should not stumble in the darkness. And if this mitzvah sheds physical light, then it certainly sheds spiritual light, ensuring that none “stumble” in spiritual darkness.

Shabbos and Yomtov candles are thus the equivalent of Rashbi’s statement that “I am able to absolve the whole world of punishment.” Rashbi grants everyone, children also, the merit and strength to remove any “punishment” and in its place shed light and G-dliness.

But how is this possible? Jews live in a world peopled by many nations, a world where “darkness covers the earth” and where in many parts, especially behind the Iron Curtain, the light of justice and righteousness has not yet penetrated. The Jews behind the Iron Curtain encounter great difficulties in educating their children to follow the path of Torah and mitzvos. How can they, and those Jews dispersed among the gentiles, spread light into the world?

Parenthetically, the plight of our brethren behind the Iron Curtain should teach us to appreciate how fortunate we are to live in countries where we are free to educate our children in G-d’s ways. We must learn from the self-sacrifice exhibited by Jews living behind the Iron Curtain: Disregarding all difficulties, they are raising a generation cognizant of G-d; and when G-d will free them and take them out from those countries, we shall then see the “Tzivos Hashem” — the “Hosts of G-d” — the hosts of Jewish children who follow the Jewish path with pride and head held high.

Their example should inspire those in the free countries to educate our children properly, to disregard any difficulties we may have — for our difficulties are as naught compared to theirs, and they stand firm with self-sacrifice! Also, besides disregarding any difficulties encountered in educating our children, every parent should resolve to give their children the maximum education possible, starting from kindergarten. Naturally, this includes parents setting an example for their children, showing them how in every moment of their day the home is a Jewish one and their parents act Jewishly.

To return to our point: How can Jews, living amongst gentiles who mock Judaism and who say that Jewish education is useless for it will not help a person make a living, illuminate the world with the light of G-dliness?

The words of Rashbi provide the answer. He said, “Wherever Jews were exiled — the Divine Presence (“Shechinah”) is with them.” Jews and G-d are not separated, Jews in exile and G-d in heaven. No, Rashbi says, G-d is with a Jew always; thus when Jews are in exile, G-d is there with them! Further, not only is He with them, but He also shares the sorrows of the exile — “In all their troubles, He is troubled.” When a Jew is pained and distressed by the exile, G-d too is pained and distressed. And because G-d partakes of their difficulties, the help Jews receive from G-d is surely enough to overcome all difficulties.

Because G-d shares in the sorrows of Jews in exile the redemption from that exile comes that much more quickly. The Psalmist says, “Not for our sake L-rd ... but for the sake of Your Name ... Why should the nations say, ‘Where, now, is their G-d?’” If the nations of the world taunt Jews with the impotence of their G-d as evidenced by the fact Jews suffer in exile, how much greater is the mockery when G-d Himself suffers in the exile! And thus G-d surely brings the end of the exile quickly.

The knowledge that also the Divine Presence is in exile should affect Jews, causing them to cry out from their depths of their hearts, “How much longer!” When shall the redemption come, when shall G-d leave the exile?!

Yes, G-d is in exile with His people. But do not think that G-d leaves the exile before the Jews, leaving them alone even for a minute. Rashbi continues to say: “Wherever they are exiled the Divine Presence is with them. And when they are redeemed the Divine Presence is with them.” Jews, do not worry says Rashbi. Every moment you are in exile, G-d is with you; He shall not leave the exile before you, but shall go together with each and everyone of you.

But even in exile, before the redemption, Jews will have light, both physical and spiritual — as in the first exile, in Egypt. There, months before the actual redemption, the Jews ceased to work as slaves, and “To all the children of Israel there was light in their dwelling places.”

The relationship between G-d and Jews in exile is described in a parable given by R. Elazor, Rashbi’s son. On the words of the verse in parshas Bechukosai (Vayikra 26:44), “When they [Jews] shall be in the land of their enemies I will not reject them nor will I abhor them to destroy them,” R. Elazor said the following (Zohar, III, 115b): “‘I will not reject them nor will I abhor them to destroy them’ — If a man loves a woman who lives in a street of tanners, if she were not there he would never go into it, but because she is there it seems to him like a street of spice makers where all the sweet scents of the world are to be found. So too ‘even when they are in the land of their enemies’ — which is the street of tanners — ‘I will not reject them nor will I abhor them’...”

What message does R. Elazor convey? Jewry in exile is as a person in it a street of tanners.” a foul place. This itself teaches the qualities of a Jew: A Jew does not become assimilated in exile, reconciled to his fate, for since the exodus from Egypt the Jew has been a free man, free of bondage to any but G-d. A Jew is



744

HEADQUARTERS



merely in a street, a public place, surrounded by a foul smell, the smell of exile — but does not let it become part of him. He remains a Jew, free and proud.

Despite the foul smell, R. Elazor continues to say, G-d is with Jews; moreover, because Jews are there, the exile seems to G-d like “a street of spice makers where all the sweet scents of the world are to be found.” For when G-d sees that Jews, while in a “street of tanners,” still observe Torah and mitzvos and educate their children in the same and even more intense spirit, — i.e., they transform darkness into light — it is a 11 pleasant fragrance” to Him. The foul odors have not deterred Jews from properly educating their children; instead, the harsh and unpleasant conditions of exile have called forth the innermost powers of parents to give their children a proper education. And such behavior, revealing the qualities of a Jew, - hastens the true and complete redemption through our righteous Mashiach.

G-d’s regard for His people is also expressed in this week’s parshah, Bamidbar, which talks of the census taken of the Jews in the desert. G-d, of course, knows how many Jews there are without counting them. Rashi explains (Bamidbar 1:1) that G-d ordered a census taken because of His love for Jews — just as a person constantly counts the possessions he loves. G-d’s counting of the Jews, therefore, is an indication — to Jews and non-Jews — of his love for them. And the greatest expression of this love will occur in the future redemption, when the tenth census of Jews will be taken.

5. The central theme of all the above — the bond between Jews and G-d — is associated with prayer. Prayer is the concept of serving G-d, as our Sages say, “What is service of the heart? — it is prayer.” And through becoming G-d’s servant a Jew is bonded to Him, as our Sages say, “the servant of a king is [as] a king.” Thus, although in exile, a Jew acts as a “king,” allowing none to dictate to him concerning his faith. Also, knowing that his child, every Jewish child, is “the son of the Holy One, blessed be He,” a trust given by G-d to the parents to be raised in the proper path, a Jew does not allow his or her environment to affect the education he gives his children.

The above theme of cleaving and bonding to G-d is also connected to the section of Rambam studied on Lag B’Omer. Rambam writes (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prayer 2:1) that although the blessings in the Amidah prayer originally numbered eighteen, another blessing was later added by the Sages. For “In Rabban Gamliel’s days, the number of heretics in Israel increased, and they were wont to harass the

Jews and seduce them to turn away from G-d. When he [Rabban Gamliel] saw that this [the necessity to remove this evil] was the most urgent of needs, he and his Rabbinical court composed a blessing

In other words, the Sages saw that the “smell of the tannery” — the environment in which Jews lived — was influencing Jews to “turn away from G-d.¹¹ What did they do about it? They composed a prayer to G-d to eliminate this evil, for prayer, Rambam writes (Laws of Prayer 1:2), is the duty “to ask [for G-d] all that he needs.” Since the greatest need a Jew has is to cleave to G-d, the elimination of this evil (“seducing them to turn away from G-d”) was “the most urgent need.”

Cleaving to G-d, then, is of the utmost importance and need to a Jew; and on Lag B’Omer, Rashbi achieved the ultimate union with G-d — “I am one with Him, I have a passion for Him, I cleave to Him.” This is also the goal of prayer: To be “as a servant before his master,” negating one’s ego and self and being one with G-d.

May it be G-d’s will that through prayer and nullifying oneself before G-d’s will we merit to see the fulfillment of the ultimate blessing — “Speedily cause the scion of David Your servant to flourish ... for we hope for Your salvation every day.”



יצא לאור ע"י
Mendy & Leah Schurder
And their Children



לזכות יצחק בן עדינה
וחוה רבקה בת ח' טובה גיטל וכל יו"ח

לזכות

ר' אליעזר חיים וזוגתו רבקה בתי'

יוצאי חלציהם וכל בני משפחתם שיחיו

לפידות

בוענאס איירעס, ארגענטינא