

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person

גוסד תורן ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"May there be peace in your wall, tranquility in your palaces" (Psalm 122:6)

L'Chaim



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

The Torah portion of Behar contains the Biblical prohibition against usury: "Do not take from him any usury or increase, and you shall fear your G-d, that your brother may live with you." Immediately following this verse we are told: "I am the L-rd your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt... to be your G-d." Our Sages learned from the juxtaposition of these two verses that when a person accepts the prohibition against lending money with interest, it is as if he accepts the yoke of Heaven. Conversely one who throws off the restriction against usury, simultaneously throws off the yoke of Heaven as well.

What is so significant about usury that the Rabbis used it to illustrate the concept of subservience to G-d? How does charging interest, or refraining from doing so, express the relationship between man and G-d?

Collecting interest on money means making a profit without exerting oneself, at the expense of another person's labor. Once a person lends money to another, that money becomes the property of the borrower, even though he owes the amount to the one who lent it. A person who charges interest is therefore profiting from money which is not his, and is taking advantage of the fact that it once belonged to him.

By understanding this concept, we understand why avoiding usury is so crucial: G-d's goodness and blessings are only bestowed as a direct result of our labor. Both physical and spiritual rewards are only attainable after much toil and effort. The 613 commandments of the Torah are practical expressions of this principle, each one a specific deed to be performed in order to help us reach a higher spiritual level.

But why is all this work necessary? Couldn't G-d, the source of all good, have bestowed that goodness upon us without the labor? The answer is that it is precisely because of G-d's goodness that He chose this system, for we can only truly appreciate that for which we have worked.

An undeserved gift is called "bread of shame," and provides neither joy nor satisfaction. But when a person works toward a goal and then receives his reward, the value of that gift is appreciated and his happiness is that much greater. That is why we are obligated to expend so much effort in our worship of G-d. Spirituality must be attained through hard work and not conferred as a gift.

The mitzva which best illustrates this principle is the prohibition against usury. When a person refrains from it, according to G-d's will, he confirms G-d's plan for the world, that profit may only be accrued as the result of man's work. A person who charges interest defies, with his behavior, this basic principle which is a foundation of the entire Torah.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Lag BaOmer and the Bow & Arrow

Every evening from the second night of Passover to the day before Shavuot, we count another day, marking the 49 days (seven weeks) between these two holidays. This Mitzva is known as Sefirat HaOmer – the Counting of the Omer.

Lag BaOmer, the thirty-third day of the counting of the Omer, is the anniversary of the passing of the great Talmudical sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (circa 165 ce).

Rabbi Shimon was the first to expound upon the mystical secrets of the Divine wisdom. The Chassidic masters have explained that the growing popularity of the inner dimensions of Torah reflect history's progression toward the day when, "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the sea."

Before his passing, Rabbi Shimon instructed his disciples to observe his *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of his passing, as a day of festivity, as it marks the culmination of all he achieved in his life.

On Lag BaOmer it is customary to take children outside to play with bows and arrows to commemorate that in the course of Rabbi Shimon's lifetime, no rainbow appeared in the sky. The rainbow is a sign of human failing: G-d promised that whenever mankind shall be as undeserving as in the generation of the Flood, the rainbow will remind Him of His vow to never again destroy His world.

But as long as Rabbi Shimon was alive, his merit alone was enough to ensure that G-d would not regret

His creation. Hence the connection of the bow (*keshet* in Hebrew, which also translates as 'rainbow') to Lag BaOmer.

Based on the above explanation, the bow independently, representing the rainbow, has a negative connotation. There is, however, a positive aspect to the bow.

The inventor of the bow and arrow conceived how the tension in an arched bough of wood could propel a missile over great distances. To do so, he first had to grasp the paradox that the more the deadly arrow is drawn toward oneself, the more distant a foe it can reach.

Therein lies the deeper significance of the connection of the bow to Lag BaOmer.

The "revealed" part of Torah is like a close-range weapon in that it aids us in meeting the obvious challenges of life. It teaches us to distinguish between the holy and the profane. Do not kill or steal, it tells us; feed the hungry, remember the Shabbat day, eat only kosher foods.

But what about the subtleties of comprehending the Divine essence of reality? This is where the mystical dimension of Torah comes in. Delve into yourself, retreat to your own essence, to the very core of your soul. There you will uncover the "spark of G-dliness" within you that is one with its Creator and His creation. There you will gain the insight and foresight to deal with the most distant and obscure adversary.

Adapted from the teachings of the Rebbe by Yanki Tauber.

SLICE OF LIFE

When the Rebbe Sent His Chassidim to Rafah for Lag B'omer



Rabbi Avraham Meizlish on a Lag B'omer mission.

Over the past few weeks, the city of Rafah, at the border of Gaza and Egypt, has been receiving international attention as Israel decides on its plans for military action in the city. For a small group of Chabad chassidim, however, the city of Rafah brings back warm memories of a very different time, 53 years ago.

At that time, in the summer of 1971, Israel was in control of the Sinai Peninsula, and tensions between Egypt and Israel were at a high, in the lead up to the Yom Kippur War just two years later. Israeli soldiers were stationed in numerous army bases and fortifications all along the country's borders, protecting it from any potential attack from the enemies on all sides.

Meanwhile, in Kfar Chabad, the headquarters of Chabad in Israel, a telephone call came in from the Rebbe's office in New York. The Rebbe requested that chassidim travel to visit the IDF soldiers stationed on the borders, bring them each a special letter from the Rebbe, encourage them, and celebrate the special day of Lag B'omer, which would take place in two days' time.

The celebration of Lag B'omer, the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer, marks the day on

which the plague that killed 24,000 students of the Talmudical sage Rabbi Akiva came to an end. A generation later, the sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, author of the Zohar, the primary work of Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism, passed away on that date. Before his passing, he revealed the deepest secrets of the Torah and commanded his disciples to mark the day as a joyous occasion. Until today, celebrations are held around the world, with the largest of them held at the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron, Israel. When the chassidim received their orders in 1971, they prepared to bring that joy to the soldiers who were risking their lives to protect their brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Avraham Meizlish, a Chassidic mentor in Kfar Chabad who passed away in 2015, recalled the dramatic events of the day in an interview some two decades ago.

“On the eve of Lag B'omer, several of us from Kfar Chabad set out for Sinai, carrying numerous copies of the Rebbe's letter, along with cookies and refreshments. Arriving at their first destination in the morning, they encountered a commander and sought his permission to visit the outposts along the border. Though granted access to all bases in the area, they faced reluctance concerning their journey to the outposts. ‘These shoulders,’ the officer pointed to his insignia, ‘have already sent many soldiers to the frontlines, but I'm concerned about allowing civilians, risking even one civilian's life unnecessarily,’ Rabbi Meizlish recalled.

The chassidim decided to begin their mission and figure out their next steps later on. They were provided with military helmets and vests and proceeded to nearby bases, where they were warmly welcomed. Eventually, they noticed a convoy heading towards the outposts. Seizing the opportunity, they asked the driver, almost casually, “Are you heading to the front lines?” When he replied yes, they jumped on and continued with them.

By midday, they reached the first outpost, where they distributed the Rebbe's letter, along with treats and l'chaims, to the soldiers. Their last stop was a base known as “Tempo.” “Any sweets?” the outpost commander asked

the convoy leader. “Sorry, not this time,” the driver responded. “Too bad, one of the guys is celebrating his birthday today,” the commander said sadly.

“At that moment, we jumped down from the vehicle, and unloaded the sweets and drinks for l'chaims. We arranged a birthday party for the soldier that he will never forget,” Rabbi Meizlish recalled.

On our way back to the army base where they headed out from, the group encountered a sandstorm, making it difficult to keep their eyes open. In the midst of the storm, one of them captured the moment, a memory immortalized in the photograph accompanying this article.

Upon their return to the base, they were thanked by the by the division commander who had given them the initial permission. “I've received reports from various bases about your amazing visits,” he said.

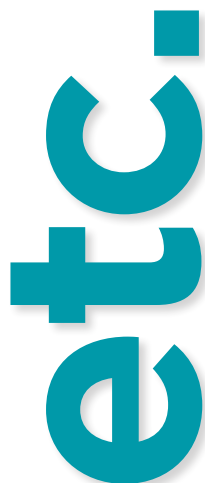
As an expression of thanks, the commander showed them an arial map of all the army bases and outposts, and pointed out each one by name.

“When he pointed to the last outpost, I blurted out unintentionally, ‘That’s the Tempo base,’” Rabb Meizlish said in his interview. “‘How do you know?’ the surprised commander inquired. ‘We just came from there,’ I replied with a smile, and explained our actual whereabouts over the past hours. He chuckled, ‘Well, you're clearly receiving orders directly from the Rebbe.’”

At Rafah, on their way back to Kfar Chabad, the group of chassidim had to wait until additional vehicles arrived since only conveyes were permitted to travel in that area during the night hours.

“Suddenly, a bus pulled over beside us, and the driver called out, ‘What are you doing here on Lag B'omer?’ We recounted our experiences with the soldiers,” Rabbi Meizlish recalled.

The driver became visibly emotional and stepped out of the bus to embrace chassidim. “I heard on the radio today that hundreds of thousands traveled to Meron today. You weren't in Miron, but I'm certain Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was with you today, at the border,” he told them.



At Columbia University Chabad's Seders went On with Joy, Confidence and Extra Security

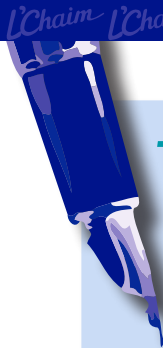
For Jewish students at Columbia University, these are not simple times and in the face of all the chaos and fear, for Rabbi Yuda Drizin, who co-directs Chabad-Lubavitch at Columbia with his wife, Naomi, this meant holding a larger Passover Seder than he'd originally planned.

Before Passover, the rabbi went out on campus to hand out shmurah matzah to students and faculty and to put tefillin on passersby, as he does weekly. “Jewish students walking through campus shouldn't feel like they need to scurry. They see a rabbi handing out matzah proudly with a smile, and they feel like they are not alone” Drizin said.

During Passover, Chabad at Columbia hosted Seders, holiday prayer services and festive kosher-for-Passover barbecue lunches throughout the week. “We refuse to yield to the forces of hate” the rabbi said of the resolve to continue celebrating as proud Jews and not letting evil win.

Lag BaOmer

is a festive day on the Jewish calendar, celebrating the anniversary of the passing of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the Zohar. It also commemorates another event. In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague raged amongst the disciples of the great sage Rabbi Akiva. On Lag BaOmer the dying ceased.



The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

B"H, 12 Iyar, 5709

Greetings and blessings, Your letter has been received. I am [writing to send] the enclosed selection of Likkutei Dibburim for the coming Lag BaOmer holiday. You no doubt will share it with people at large in the most appropriate manner as explained in sec. 2 of that sichah.

Perhaps it is possible to offer the following explanation of that [date]. Lag BaOmer is alluded to in the phrase "the mound of testimony," [which was constructed by Lavan to mark the separation between him and Yaakov].

Two concepts are implied: a mound [separating] between the [transcendent] level of sublime whiteness and the holiness of Yaakov, and a mound [separating] between holiness and the forces of evil, as explained in the Siddur [Im Dach], Shaar HaLag BaOmer.

Accordingly, Lag BaOmer contains two elements: the ultimate ascent experienced by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, [as manifest in] pnimiyus haTorah, that was

revealed on this day, and [the lowest levels of] acknowledgment, which is the Divine service of utterly simple people, as explained in the kuntreis [published] in connection with the Pesach holiday.

It is possible to explain that throughout the time the Baal Shem Tov's [identity] was hidden, he was [functioning] on the level of the sublime whiteness as expressed [above] with the level of holiness.

This is alluded to in the digest [of the Rebbe's talks] ([see] the enclosed [issue] of Likkutei Dibburim, p. 29). When the time that he was to remain hidden ended and it was necessary that he be revealed [as a teacher], the sign was that of gal ed, "a mound of testimony."

It is well known that the Baal Shem Tov writes (printed in Sichos, 20 Kislev, 5693; HaTamim, Vol. IV, p. 18) that after he completed studying the Torah with his master, Achiyah HaShiloni (see Seder HaDoros which writes that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was a reincarnation of him; see the Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachos 9:2), until the phrase "before the eyes of all Israel," he was revealed [as a teacher].

With wishes for everlasting good in all matters,

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

One of Rashbi's (Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai) students went abroad and returned very wealthy. When Rashbi's other disciples saw this, they became envious and also wanted to go abroad so that they, too, could become wealthy. Rashbi took his students to a certain valley, according to some opinions a valley near Meron, and said: "Valley, valley, become full of golden dinars!"

As the valley filled up with golden dinars, he told his students that each of them could take as much as he wanted from the gold. But they should know that by doing this they would be taking from their share in the World to Come. The students, of course, took none of the gold."

When the Midrash relates this story, it doesn't refer to the incident as being of a miraculous nature. How can this be? Because for the Rashbi it wasn't miraculous. He was one of an elite few in every generation who are not affected by the fact that we live in a spiritual and physical exile.

In a similar vein, a story is told of a great rabbi who was informed that Moshiach had finally come. The rabbi immediately opened his window and sniffed the air outside. "No," said the rabbi, "the report is not true."

What a strange way to ascertain whether or not the Redemption has finally come, by sniffing the air! But this rabbi, a great tzadik, was not affected, in a spiritual sense, by the Exile. He was, in a sense, always living in the Garden of Eden and his surroundings were always permeated with the spiritual scent of the Garden of Eden. So, he had to open the window and smell the air outside to note whether the outside, too, had been permeated with this special aroma.

May we all merit, soon, to join those righteous few in every generation who are always in a state of Redemption, with the true and ultimate redemption of all the Jewish people and the entire world.

Shmuel Butman

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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MOSHIACH MATTERS

Through many journeys through many lives, each of us will find and redeem all the divine sparks in our share of the world. Then the darkness that holds such mastery, such cruelty, such irrational evil

that it contains no redeeming value—all this will simply vanish like a puff of steam in the midday air.

As for that which we salvaged and used for good, it will shine an awesome light never known before.

The world will have arrived.
Tanya, chapter 37.



IT HAPPENED ONCE

As Rachel lay on the coarse pallet of straw which now served as her bed she thought back to her life before Akiva. She had been a princess or almost so, the beloved daughter of the wealthy Ben Kalba Savua, and there was nothing she lacked, not the most beautiful dresses, nor the finest delicacies. But, she would not exchange her life with Akiva for even the most precious gem in the world. For her aspirations lay elsewhere--her husband would one day be a great Torah scholar. It didn't matter that her father cast her out of their home, or that people laughed at her and scorned her--she had no doubt that one day Akiva would be a leader in Israel.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Akiva rose to answer and saw on the threshold a man dressed in tatters. "Please, have pity on us. My wife has just given birth and I have no bed for her and the baby." Rachel leapt to her feet, looking helplessly around for something to give him. Sensing her confusion, he said, "Just a bit of straw would help a lot." She gathered a large pile of soft straw and handed it to the grateful man.

"You see, Rachel," whispered her husband, "they are even poorer than we are, but some day I will buy you a golden tiara engraved with scenes of Jerusalem, just like your friends wear." She smiled at him, happy with his loving thoughts.

The days went by and Rachel grew accustomed to her new status. Life was hard, but her thoughts never dwelt on the present; she waited for her dream of the future to be realized.

Akiva knew that his work was cut out for him. Forty years old, he was just now embarking on his education, just now beginning with aleph-beit. Was it possible for him to achieve the heights imagined by his wife? Akiva's thoughts were interrupted by an amazing sight, for there a bit to the side of the road was a huge rock with a large hole bored through the center. He stared at it wondering what kind of tool could have made the hole and for what purpose, when he noticed a small drop of water hitting the hole and then falling again into the depression. He watched as the process repeated itself again and again. Then, he realized that the soft, pure drops had bored the hole in the hard rock. He had stumbled upon the answer to his unspoken question; if water could make a hole in solid rock, then surely the holy words of Torah could work their way into his willing heart, even at the age of forty.

The traits that Rachel had perceived in her shepherd husband matured and his learning advanced, until he reached the stage where he attracted his own students. He was actually acquiring fame as a teacher of Torah and a scholar in his own right. Rachel had encouraged him to go away and immerse himself in further learning; it was hard to believe that twenty-four long years had passed. Akiva the shepherd had become Rabbi Akiva, the teacher of twenty-four thousand students, the greatest of his generation. And the time had finally come for his triumphant return to home and his wife.

The huge crowd thronged around Rabbi Akiva and his disciples. Suddenly a woman emerged from the crowd and reached for the hem of his coat which she kissed. The students surrounded her and attempted to chase her away, but their teacher reprimanded them: "She is my wife! Know that what is mine and what is yours is all hers!"

Also amongst those gathered to welcome the tzadik was Ben Kalba Savua, the father of Rachel. He had suffered the pangs of regret during the many years since he had driven his daughter from his home. Now, the arrival of the tzadik of the generation would give him an opportunity to learn how to right the terrible wrong he had done her. Rabbi Akiva graciously admitted the old man into his presence and listened while he related the story, not knowing that this was his own father-in-law.

As the man's story unfolded, Akiva realized who he was. "If you had known that the poor, ignorant shepherd would one day become a great scholar, would you have acted differently?" inquired Rabbi Akiva.

"I promise you, if I had thought that he would know even one Torah law, I would have permitted the marriage!"

"Then know, that I am that shepherd, and it is only through the merit of your daughter that I have achieved this position!"

Rabbi Akiva was able to nullify the vow Ben Kalba Savua rashly made so many years before. The old man, in his happiness, gave the couple half of his great wealth.

Their dream realized, Rachel and Akiva felt the old pain of separation diminish, overwhelmed by the new joy of their reunion. Rabbi Akiva hadn't forgotten the promise he made many years before--he had achieved greatness; and in addition to the crown of Torah, Rachel wore a golden crown of Jerusalem.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

On the weekly Torah Portion

And if your brother becomes poor...do not take from him any usury or increase (Lev. 25:35, 36)

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar said: "The Psalms say about one who lends money without interest, 'His money was not given to extract usury, and a bribe was never taken against the innocent.' He who does these will never stumble." Conversely, one who lends money with interest is forewarned that his wealth will eventually dissipate.
(Talmud, Baba Metzia)

And you shall not deceive one another (Lev. 25:17)

Can a person really deceive another, especially in spiritual matters? Even if he succeeds in his deception, the victory is only temporary and the deceit is always eventually revealed. The only person, therefore, who has been effectively deceived is the deceiver himself. And is it so difficult to fool a fool?
(Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch)

And you shall return, every man, unto his family (Lev. 25:10)

In the fiftieth, or Jubilee year, the former slave returns to his family, but not, as brought down in the name of Rabbi Yehuda, to his former stature. Everything can be restored to a slave--his freedom, his inheritance, and his family--but the status and honor afforded him before he sold himself into slavery can never be returned. This was forfeited the moment he indentured himself.
(Chavat-Yair)

For strangers and sojourners are you with Me (Lev. 25:23)

The more a person considers himself only a sojourner and a temporary resident of this world, the closer he is to G-d. And, unfortunately, the opposite is also true...
(Rabbi Boruch of Mezhibozh)

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