

## DVAR TORAH LAG BA'OMER AND LOVE

Lag Ba'omer is not singled out in the Chumash, nor is there any clear mention of it in the Talmud. But in post-Talmudic times the tradition is not to say Tachanun on Lag Ba'omer, and it has emerged for many as a day of rejoicing. Why?

Most either see it as the day when the plague that took its toll on Rabbi Akiva's 12,000 pairs of students ended, or as the *hilula*, the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to the upper worlds. The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai, Jerusalem 1724 – 1806) suggests that Lag Ba'omer was the day when, after the plague, Rabbi Akiva began teaching his second group of students (Marit Haayin 493). What is so significant about this and why is it cause for celebration?

Harav Asher Weiss, shlita, (Minchat Asher Vayikra pp. 488-490) explains: Lag Ba'omer was a major day in the history of the Oral Torah, in the history of the Jewish people. The great Rabbi Akiva was charged with passing the Torah on to subsequent generations in a way that would preserve its integrity, depth, and character. And he had a central teaching: that loving relationships are at the Torah's core – *ואהבת לרעך כמוך זה כלל גדול בתורה*, that "Love another as yourself" is the unifying principle of Torah. The members of that first group of students, who had not sufficiently internalized the heart of Rabbi Akiva's teachings and did not have the necessary mutual respect, were not to be the ones to pass on his Torah.

"The world was desolate until Rabbi Akiva went to 'our rabbis of the south' and taught them. Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yossi, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua were the ones to put the Torah back on its feet" (Yevamot 62b).

Listen to some of the teachings of that later group:  
 "Anyone who blesses another Jew is as if he blessed the Shechinah (Divine Presence)" – Rabbi Meir.  
 "Anyone who welcomes friends is as if he welcomed the Shechinah" – Rabbi Yehudah.  
 "Even someone who illuminated even one Mishnah: you should treat him as your teacher" – Rabbi Yossi.  
 "Better to jump in a fiery furnace than embarrass another" – Rabbi Shimon.  
 "Your students' honor should be as your own; and your friends' honor as the awe of your rebbi; and the awe of your rebbi as the awe of Heaven" – Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua.

The rabbis of the south, who had grasped the spirit and heart of Rabbi Akiva's teachings, were the ones destined to bring Rabbi Akiva's Torah to all subsequent generations. On Lag Ba'omer we celebrate a Torah that is integrated with mutual love and respect and pray that we too can be worthy bearers of Rabbi Akiva's tradition.



Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky at the Kinloss Community Kollel at the Finchley Synagogue in London - His shiur, "Lag B'omer: the Challenge of Mutual Respect," was the first of the 3-part Middos Series on Monday nights at 8:30 PM. Next shiur - Rabbi Yitzchak Shurin, "Korach: The Challenge of Machlokes L'Shem Shamayim" this coming Monday, June 16<sup>th</sup>. (Thanks to Adrian Salt for the photo.)

## GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN: 3 PARABLES

### #1 – THE DRUNK IN THE MOVING HOUSE

In his comments on the beginning of this week's parshah and its stark contrast between keeping the mitzvoth and going against them, the promise of the blessing and the threat of the curse, Rabbi Yaakov Krantz, the Dubno Maggid (1740-1804) tells the following parable:

A drunk was once sitting at a feast and started screaming, "The house is moving and going to collapse!" People laughed at him and said, "Are you crazy? How could such a great building with sturdy walls move?"

He then told them, "Look – I'll show you," and he began to walk and said, "Look how I sometimes walk this way and sometimes stagger that way. It must be that the building is moving."

One of those at the feast got up from his chair and walked back and forth in a straight line. He said, "Look, you good-for-nothing, I can walk straight. How would that be possible if the building was moving? It must be that you are drunk and your head is spinning!"

This parable illustrates the following verse, Hoshea 14:10:

... כִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַךְיְהוָה צְדָקִים יָלְכוּ בָם וַפְשָׁעִים יַפְשֹׁלְוּ בָם.

... For the ways of G-d are straight, and the righteous shall walk in them, and the sinners shall stumble on them.

Here is how to now read the verse: The ways of G-d are straight. **The proof?** The righteous shall walk in them and **only** the sinners shall stumble on them.

#### Think about the following:

- What does "the sinner stumbling on the ways of G-d" mean? See Rashi and see Hoshea 14:2, earlier in the same chapter.
- Identify all the elements of the *nimshal* (what the parable is alluding to in real life): Who is the drunk and who are the sober people? What is the feast and what is the building? What is "walking straight" and what is "walking crooked"? What is the drunk's warning?

Compare the Dubno Maggid's parable with the following modern story:

### #2 – THE ELDERLY COUPLE ON THE FREEWAY

Marvin and Myrna, an elderly couple, were driving on the freeway, listening to the radio. Suddenly they hear on the radio: "We interrupt our normal programming for a serious traffic warning: Beware of a car driving the wrong direction on I-94!"

Marvin looks out the windshield and exclaims: "Myrna, it's not just one car – there are hundreds going the wrong way!"

- Can you think of any significant differences between the two stories?
- Imagine, if in the Dubno Maggid's parable, it was not **one drunk** at a party, but **one sober person** being warned by all the drunks that the building is tottering and will fall. What would that allude to?

We will now see a third parable, that of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav:

## #3 – THE KING, HIS MINISTER, AND THE TAINTED GRAIN

The king told his beloved prime minister that he foresees that in the near future a plague will strike the grain in the kingdom and anyone who eats it will go mad. “So what do you advise we should do?” the king asked.

The prime minister said, “I think we should save enough of this year’s grain so we don’t have to eat from next year’s.”

“But,” said the king, “then everyone else will be crazy except for us and they will think that we are crazy and they are sane. And there is not enough to save for everyone. So we must ourselves eat of next year’s harvest. But let us both make marks on our foreheads so we at least know that we are mad. That way when you look at me and see my sign, and I look at you and see yours we will both know that we are mad.”

- Compare the relationship between the drunk and his sober friends, the elderly couple and the rest of the drivers, with the king & prime minister and the rest of the kingdom.
- Which life situations might these three stories help us change our perspective about?



### TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY

#### TRAGEDIES AND TRIUMPHS, BY MENUCHA CHWAT

The days between Pesach and Shavuot, the period of the counting of the Omer, are a time of conflicting emotions. We count the Omer joyously, expectantly leading up to the giving of the Torah, yet observe customs of mourning for the students of Rabbi Akiva who perished during this period.

A noteworthy custom fitting the mood of the Sefira period deals with the prayer Av Harachamim. Av Harachamim, recited on Shabbat after the Torah reading was written in response to the Crusades. In it we memorialize the righteous martyrs and pray for retribution for their spilled blood. Av Harachamim is generally not recited on Shabbatot which have an added celebratory nature – such as Shabbat Mevarchim (the Shabbat in which we bless the new month). In many congregations during the Shabbatot of Sefirat Haomer, Av Harachamim is recited even on the Shabbatot in which we bless Iyar and Sivan. The Mishna Brura (284,18) adds, that even if there is a Brit Milah that Shabbat, giving us a second reason why Av Harachamim should not be recited, Av Harachamim is still said, since this was the season of the tragedies.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, in a Sicha given in 5743, explains that the Av Harachamim prayer may be understood in two ways. The first is as a source of inspiration to repent. “When we see that the ‘Father of Mercy’ (G-d) is dealing harshly with His children, a Jew should realize it is for the purpose of cleansing His children of their

sins – which inspires repentance. However, although this indicates G-d's great love for His children, it is still not an evident good – for while G-d deals harshly for a good purpose (to cleanse), the behavior itself is still harsh. The second, ultimate level in saying Av Harachamim is in transforming the undesirable events to good – that there is only evident good, the superiority of light which comes (specifically) from previous darkness.”

This understanding of Av Harachamim can give us insight into the contemporary special days many have added to the Jewish calendar during this period. Many end the month of Nisan with Yom Hashoah – established by the government of the State of Israel to commemorate the Holocaust. In Iyar we have Yom Hazikaron – Remembrance day for the soldiers and victims of terror, followed by Yom Haatzmaut – Israel Independence Day. Finally on 28 Iyar we have Yom Yerushalayim, a day celebrating the liberation of Jerusalem during the Six Day War.

These days take us from tragedy to triumph, from mourning to joy. We mourn the fallen and exult in our victories. We do not see the tragedies and triumphs as separate entities, but rather, as all coming from Av Harachamim – The Father of Mercy. Decrees against the Jewish people, whether past or present, must bring us to teshuva – repentance. As we read in Devarim (30, 1- 5):

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt bethink thyself among all the nations, whither Hashem thy G-d hath driven thee, and shalt return unto Hashem thy G-d, and hearken to His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul; that then Hashem thy G-d will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the peoples, whither Hashem thy G-d hath scattered thee. If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will Hashem thy G-d gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee. And Hashem thy G-d will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and He will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.”

We pray for Hashem to “before our eyes exact retribution for the spilled blood of His servants” and hope for a time when the month of Iyar, called in Tanach the month of Ziv – Splendor, will be a time of joy and unity for all Am Yisrael.

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This issue is dedicated  
in loving memory of  
**David ben Tzvi z"l**

אכ חֲרַחְמִים שׁוֹכֵן מְרוּמִים בָּרוּתָנוּ  
הַעֲצָמוֹת דּוֹאִיפָּקָד בְּרַחְמִים  
הַחֲסִירִים נִתְחַמְּפִיט וּחַשְׁרוֹתִים קִדְרוֹתִים  
הַקּוֹרֶשׁ שְׁטָפָרּוֹ נִפְשָׁס עַל קְרַתְחַתְּשָׁם  
הַגָּאָהָבִים וְהַגְּנָעִים בְּחַעַינִים וּבְכַעַתִּים לֹא  
גְּפָרוּוּ: מַנְשִׁירִים קְלוּוּסִים אַרְיוֹת גְּבוּרוּ  
לְעַשְׂוָתְרָצְזָן קוֹנְסְׁחַפְצָצָרָם יְוֹבָרָם  
אַלְהָנוּ לְטוּבָה עַם שָׁאָר אַרְיוֹקָעָלָם  
וְיִקְרָם בְּיִמְנָנוּ לְשִׁינְעָנוּ גְּקַפְרָעָדָס עַכְבָּיו<sup>ר</sup>  
הַשְּׁפָוֹרִי. בְּפֶתַחְבָּחָרָת פְּשָׁא אִישׁ  
הַאֱלֹהִיסְרָגְנוֹנוּס עַמּוּבִירָס עַכְרָיו<sup>ר</sup>  
קוּסָם וְנִקְסָס יִשְׁכַּב לְצִרוּוֹבָר אַרְמָחָוּ  
עַמּוֹ. גְּעַלְיָרִוּ עַבְרִיקָה תְּנִבְיאָים כְּתוּבָה  
לְאַטְרָוּנְקָחִירָס לְאַנְקָתִיוּלָל שִׁיבָּנְבָּזָיוּ  
וּבְפַתְּבָבִי הַקּוֹרֶשׁ נְאַטְרָלְסָהָיָטָרוּ הַגְּנוּסִים  
אַיְהָנָא אַלְתִּיחָם. יְוֹדָע

יְוֹרָעָפְנוּס לְעַנְיָנוּנְקָסָתָלָס עַלְיָהָה שְׁפָרָעָה  
וְאַוְפָרְבָּדְוָרְשָׁדָטָס אַוְתָּחָבְכָרְוָוָא  
שְׁבָחָא עַקְתָּחָעָנוּוּס וְאַוְפָרְבָּדְוָרְנָנוּס מָלָא  
נוּוֹתָחָפְחָזָרָשׁ עַל אַרְזָוְבָּהָפְנָחָל בְּגָנָר  
שְׁתָחָה עַלְגָּזְנִירָים רָאָשׁ אַשְׁרָי

The Av Harachamim prayer, as it appears in a siddur printed in Krakow, Poland in 1596.

