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on the occasion of his birthday, 15 Nissan

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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LIKKUTEI SICHOT

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

RELATING TO THE WEEKLY SECTIONS OF THE TORAH AND
SPECIAL OCCASIONS IN THE JEWISH CALENDAR

by the

Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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Volume VIII: *Vayikra*

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In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Mrs. **Roneete Mona Mina** bas Reb **Zev** ע"ה **Kurtzman**

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BEHAR

THE COST OF LENDING AT INTEREST

This week's Torah reading includes the prohibition against giving or taking interest.¹ The passage concludes:² "I am G-d your L-rd who took you out of the land of Egypt... to be your G-d."

On this verse, the *Sifra* comments:

From this verse [we may derive the principle]: Whoever accepts the yoke of [the prohibition of] interest accepts the yoke of heaven. Whoever casts off the yoke of [the prohibition of] interest casts off the yoke of heaven....

For whoever acknowledges the *mitzvah* of interest acknowledges the exodus from Egypt. Whoever denies the *mitzvah* of interest is as if he denies the exodus from Egypt.

We must understand: Why is the prohibition against interest so closely related to the exodus from Egypt and the acceptance of the yoke of heaven? *Rashi*³ explains that just as at the time of the exodus, G-d differentiated between the first-born and all others, so too, He will be able to pick out a Jew

1. Both the lender and the borrower are liable, as reflected in *Devarim* 23:20. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Ribis*.
 2. *Vayikra* 25:38.
 3. In his commentary to the above verse, based on *Bava Metzia* 61b.

are presently standing ready to greet our righteous Redeemer [Moshiach]. This is particularly true now that we have reached the milestone of forty years⁸ concerning which the Torah says, "G-d gave you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."⁹ Additionally, we are now situated in the fifty first year [5751], which in Hebrew forms the acrostic (It shall be a year of) wonders which I will show him [נפלאות אראנני - Niflaos Avenu].

The Jewish people should, therefore, be encouraged and their spirits uplifted by declaring that G-d says daily, and literally, anew, that, "**I have indeed remembered you,**" and that your righteous Moshiach "stands behind the wall"¹⁰ and that "this one is coming."¹¹ Accordingly we should prepare ourselves to greet him by increasing our observance of Torah and Mitzvos, **in consonance with the ruling of the Rambam**¹² (whose anniversary of passing is the 20th of Teves, the night after this Sabbath), that through "one Mitzvah, one can favorably alter the balance for oneself and for the entire world, causing oneself and them salvation and deliverance."

(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Shemos, 19 Teves 5751)

8. [I.e., forty years since the passing of the Previous Rebbe, a milestone which enables us to fully realize the intention and depth of the teachings that were said forty years earlier. - Translator's note.]

9. *Tavo* 29:3 [Moses said this to the Jewish people who were about to enter into the Promised Land, explaining that they were now capable of realizing that which they were taught by G-d forty years earlier. Translator's note.]

10. *Shir HaShirim* 2:9.

11. *Ibid* 8. See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on this verse (ch. 2:8(b)).

12. *Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4.

12

All of the signs mentioned by our sages indicate that we are currently situated **at the very end of the period of exile**. We have "passed all the deadlines."¹ We have also performed Teshuvah [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption]. Indeed, my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, declared (several decades ago) that we have already concluded all the service [necessary for Redemption], including the "polishing of the buttons,"² and we now stand ready ("All of you stand ready") to greet our righteous Moshiach.³

* * *

Despite the difficult and protracted final exile, which has lasted more than 1,900 years (in stark contrast to the duration of the Egyptian bondage which lasted 210 years), the nature of "the Children of **Israel**" has essentially **transcended exile**. Thus, every additional moment we remain in exile is a form "having **now come** into Egypt,"⁴ "as if they had that very day entered into Egypt."⁵

The Jewish people, therefore, stand with firm faith and conviction that G-d will immediately fulfill his promise that "I have indeed remembered you"⁶ by bringing the genuine and complete Redemption, especially when hearing from the Moses of our generation,⁷ my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, that we have already concluded all matters of Divine service and

1. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

2. Talk of Simchas Torah, 5689.

3. Cf. *Hayom Yom*, among others, 15 Teves.

4. *Shemos* 1:1.

5. *Shemos Rabbah*, beginning of our Parsha (8:14), *Tanchuma*, loc. cit. 3.

6. *Shemos* 3:16.

7. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 56:7: "There is no generation in which there is none like Moses." See also *Zohar* 3:273a. *Tikkunei Zohar* 69 (112, beginning of side a. 114, beginning of side a). *Tanya* chapter 44. Ibid. *Iggeres HaKodesh*, elucidation of sec. 27, end.

who lends money to a colleague and attempts to excuse himself by saying that the money belongs to a non-Jew.

This insight is, however, insufficient, because it relates only to one aspect of prohibition against interest — lending with interest while claiming that the money belongs to a gentile. Moreover, even in that instance, it does not apply in an instance when the lender makes that statement to mislead a mortal, e.g., if the borrower knew that the money belonged to a Jew, he would not take the loan, or the court would not allow the loan to be given. It is applicable only when the lender states that the money belongs to a non-Jew, thinking that G-d will not make a distinction regarding the matter. As such, he denies the exodus at which time, G-d did make fine distinction.

Moreover this does not, however, deal with the connection between the prohibition against interest and the exodus as a whole, nor does it mention the connection between interest and the denial of the yoke of heaven.

There are commentators who explain that when a Jew lends a fellow Jew money without interest, he does not consider the profit he could have made with the funds. Helping a fellow Jew without seeking profit thus reflects his trust in G-d and his acceptance of the yoke of heaven. In contrast, when a person lends money at interest, he shows that he does not trust G-d, and thus casts off the yoke of heaven.

But this interpretation leaves room for questions:

a) It places the emphasis on the person's trust in G-d (or lack of it), and not on his acceptance or rejection of the yoke of heaven;

b) This trust — or lack of trust — is not directly connected with the question of interest, but rather with the *mitzvah* of doing deeds of kindness. Before mentioning the

prohibition against taking interest, the Torah reading states:⁴ “When your brother will become impoverished... you should support him.” This implies that one should lend him money without interest.

When a person, concerned about his own livelihood, refuses to give an interest-free loan because he desires to do business (or earn money) with every last penny of his resources, he shows a lack of trust in G-d. He has not, however, violated the prohibition against interest, since he did not give the poor person the loan.

A TWOFOLD DYNAMIC — EARNING ONE’S KEEP

Accepting G-d’s yoke as expressed in the observance of the *mitzvos* implies that G-d takes an active role in a Jew’s Divine service. This is hinted at in the blessing we recite before performing a *mitzvah*, when we praise G-d “who sanctified us with *His* commandments,” i.e., the *mitzvos* we perform are *His mitzvos*; He *also* performs them.⁵

There are two dimensions to G-d’s performance of *mitzvos*:⁶

a) G-d’s performance of the *mitzvos* precedes the performance of the *mitzvos* by the Jewish people, as reflected in our Sages’ statement:⁷ “*What He does*, He commands Israel to do”;

b) His performance of the *mitzvos* is in response to the observance of the *mitzvos* by the Jewish people, as reflected in

4. Vayikra 25:35.
 5. See Likkutei Torah, Devarim 9d, Shir HaShirim 12a.
 6. See the *sichah* for Pesach in this series, where this concept is explained and sources are provided.
 7. *Shmos Rabbah* 30:9; the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Rosh HaShanah* 1:3.

king”¹¹ has acquired an exclusively **positive** connotation, one that is **visibly and manifestly good, even to eyes of flesh**. In the words of our sages:¹² The Holy One Blessed be He says to Israel, “My children have no fear. All that I have done¹³ I have done exclusively for you... the time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The emphasis of this generation - particularly this year, the year designated as “It shall be a year of wonders I will show him” - should be placed on the concept of G-d’s support of those who have fallen,¹⁴ to strengthen and encourage the Jewish people, emphasizing particularly the support and encouragement acquired through faith in the coming of Moshiach and the implicit trust that “behold he (our righteous Moshiach) is coming.”¹⁵ This should be accompanied with enhanced preparation for his arrival by way of teshuvah [repentance, return] and observance of Torah and mitzvos. In the words of the pronouncement of my sainted father-in-law - the leader of our generation: “immediate Teshuvah, immediate Redemption.”¹⁶ “Return, O, Israel, unto G-d your G-d; prepare yourselves and your family to greet our righteous Moshiach, who shall arrive soon, in the most literal sense.”¹⁷

*(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi
 (and Asara b'Teves, may it be transformed into joy) 5751)*

11. *Yechezkal* 24:2.
 12. *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yeshayahu* 499.
 13. This includes the efforts of the Babylonian King, who is merely an ax in the hands of the one who chops with it. [i.e. He is G-d's instrument.]
 14. [The phrase סומך נופלים - “supports the falling” - is similar to the expression mentioned before - סמך מלך בבל - the Babylonian King besieged,] which the Rebbe interpreted in a positive vein to mean that “he supported.” *Translator's note.*
 15. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8. See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on this verse (2:8(b)).
 16. In his *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 5, end of p. 361 ff., 377 ff., 408 ff. and in other places.
 17. *Hayom Yom* - 15 Teves.

were previously a perfectly wicked person, she is betrothed, for perhaps he had a thought of teshuvah."

Considering the above, it is with utmost certainty that our righteous Moshiach must arrive **here and now, immediately, [mamosh] in the most literal sense.**

Now, this exercise of finding merit⁷ in and of itself should suffice to bring about the Redemption. Moreover, in addition to the finding of merit, the imminence of Moshiach's arrival constitutes a **definitive ruling issued by many rabbis and halachic authorities.** Further, since Torah "is not in heaven,"⁸ this ruling issued by the earthly courts "obligates," so to speak, and affords a unique privilege to, the heavenly courts. **And so it will be confirmed!**

* * *

In our day and age, after G-d has vented His rage with the destruction of the Holy Temple, and after all of "our deeds and actions throughout the duration of exile,"⁹ and after all the decrees of oppression and persecution - may Hashem, indeed, shield us and protect us from them - the Jewish people have endured throughout the protracted and arduous final exile, particularly the Holocaust of the very last generation, the process of refinement and purification has, without any doubt, been achieved in full, "enough and even too much." Consequently, the [current¹⁰] "siege of the Babylonian

7. [i.e., that we have already passed all the deadlines as well as satisfying the condition of Teshuvah. Translator's note.]

8. Netzavim, 30:12. See Bava Metzia 59b.

9. Tanya, beginning of chapter 37.

10. [The Hebrew term *Samach*, which means "besieged," can also be rendered "supported." This talk was delivered on the fast day *Asara b'Teves* (the Tenth of the month of Teves), the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king. The Rebbe here is alluding to the threats of the modern day Babylonian dictator, which are actually the events which serve as preludes to the Redemption. Translator's note.]

our Sages' statement:⁸ "Whenever a person studies the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, studies opposite him."

Of course, the fact that our deeds prompt G-d to perform the *mitzvos* is no indication that we are independently capable of causing G-d to act. Rather, the causation is possible only because G-d desires that our deeds influence Him, so to speak.

This requires explanation: Why does G-d want the Divine service of mere mortals to exert influence in the spiritual realms? The first phase of the dynamic — that His observance of the *mitzvos* brings about *our* observance — can be understood; His deeds generate the power needed for us to act. But what is the explanation for the second phase — that our observance prompts His?

Before going any further, a basic question must be answered: Why is Divine service necessary at all? Let G-d give us everything as a reflection of His beneficence! We are taught that the world was created because of the Divine initiative "to act benevolently to His created beings."⁹ Since G-d is the ultimate good, and "it is the nature of the benevolent to act kindly,"¹⁰ why shouldn't He grant His creations everything they need without demanding anything in return?

In response, *Chassidus* explains that the ultimate expression of kindness is to have the recipient *earn* the good which he receives. A gift dispensed gratis, without the recipient having to exert himself, is regarded as "bread of shame."¹¹ G-d desires to give the Jews the *ultimate* good. Therefore He struc-

8. Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu Rabbah, ch. 18; Yalkut Shimoni, Eichah, sec. 1034.

9. Eitz Chayim, Shaar HaKlallim.

10. Chacham Tzvi, Responsa 18; Shomer Emunim 2:14.

11. Cf. the Jerusalem Talmud, Orlah 1:3; Likkutei Torah, Vayikra 7d.

tered the world in such a manner that they *earn* Divine influence.

On this basis, we can appreciate why the Jews' Divine service creates repercussions in the spiritual realms. Were a person to receive payment for work which did not benefit his employer, the payment is still tainted. For when the recipient knows that the work for which he is being paid is of no consequence, he feels that he does not deserve any reward; he has not truly earned it.

For this reason, G-d structured existence in such a way that the Divine service of the Jewish people has an effect in the spiritual realms, bringing about a spiritual equivalent to the actions performed on earth. Therefore the reward a Jew receives is not "bread of shame," but payment received for doing something of value to his Employer.¹²

WHEN THERE IS NO GRAIN TO CUT

There is another dimension to the above concept: When a task is not productive, a worker will not derive any satisfaction from his labor even if he is amply rewarded. He will work, but without energy or pleasure. The task will become burdensome, "backbreaking toil."¹³

My revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, illustrated this concept with an analogy.¹⁴ A landowner once called a peasant and

12. The value of our deeds is not inherent to the deeds themselves, for as mentioned above, the Creator cannot be compared to the created, though the latter is endowed by virtue of His will. Nevertheless, G-d's will has endowed the deeds of the created beings with importance. As such, once that will has been expressed, this pattern is ingrained within existence. See a parallel concept cited in *Derech Mitzvosecha*, p. 54b.

13. See *Toras Kohanim, Vayikra 25:43*, quoted by Rashi. See also the *maamar* entitled *Karov Havayah*, 5690, sec. 2 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, Vol. I, p. 105b).

14. *Sefer HaSichos 5696*, p. 114ff.

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

11

With respect to Gideon, we find that: "In his days¹ the Jewish people were in distress. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sought a person who would find merit in them. When He found Gideon to be meritorious, because he found merit in them, an angel immediately appeared to him, as it says: "And the angel of G-d appeared to him and said to him, 'Go with this power, with **the power of the merit you have found in my children.**'" "Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is within your capacity to find a defense for Israel. **In your merit they shall be redeemed.**"²

...The merit which will hasten the Redemption is the following:

Even in the Talmudic era it has been said that "all the deadlines have passed."³ Certainly now that we have endured a lengthy and arduous exile, the duration of which has exceeded 1,900 years, **and he has still not arrived...** And in regard to Teshuvah ("It depends only on Teshuvah³) [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption], they have already done Teshuvah. Indeed, there is no Jewish person who has not entertained a thought of Teshuvah, (not just once, but) several times in the course of his lifetime. This [thought of Teshuvah] can transform "instantaneously"⁴ a perfectly wicked person into a perfectly righteous individual, in accordance with the Talmudic ruling⁵ that one who would betroth a woman "stipulating that I am a (perfectly⁶) righteous individual, even if he

1. *Tanchuma, Shoftim 4*.

2. *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim 62*.

3. *Sanhedrin 97b*.

4. *Zohar I*, 129, end side a.

5. *Kiddushin 49b*. Rambam, *Hilchos Ishus*, 8:5. *Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even HoEzer*, 38:31.

6. Based on the version cited on *Or Zarua 112*.

who stood above the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* — is spread throughout the world.

Rabbi Shimon's teachings must be spread everywhere, even in places which need correction, even in places which are ritually impure. And this will lead to the fulfillment of the prophecy:⁴³ "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the world," making even such places fit to serve as dwellings for the Jewish people — Israelites, Levites, and priests.

Thus the world will be fit for the Jewish nation, of whom it is said:⁴⁴ "And you shall be a nation of priests for Me," and for G-d Himself, of whom it is said: "Your G-d is a priest."⁴⁵ For *Eretz Yisrael* will spread throughout the entire world,⁴⁶ making the world into a dwelling for G-d.

(Adapted from *Sichos Lag BaOmer*, 5722)



asked him to work for him. The peasant would "harvest" grain, but instead of swinging his sickle in the field, he would swing it in the landlord's drawing room. The landowner promised to pay generously for this "work."

At first, the peasant eagerly agreed, but he soon begged to be relieved, explaining that he had nothing to show for his work.

Similarly, in the analogue, when a Jew knows that his Divine service evokes a similar response in the spiritual realms, this knowledge infuses his efforts with energy and satisfaction, giving him the power to overcome the challenges posed by the evil inclination.¹⁵ For he senses that his Divine service affects the very essence of G-d, as it were.

TAKING G-D AS A PARTNER

All the Divine influence felt in this world depends on the efforts of the Jewish people. Every *mitzvah* has a unique influence, for the expression of a particular *mitzvah* in the spiritual realms is dependent on the performance of that *mitzvah* by the Jewish people. Moreover, in a more general sense, the very fact that the Divine service of the Jewish people has an effect in the spiritual realms is also a function of that Divine service, and is reflected in the *mitzvah* prohibiting interest.

What is interest? Receiving profit for lending money, i.e., the lender receives profit because the money lent once belonged to him. By giving the borrower money, the lender enables him to do business, and that is considered reason enough for the borrower to pay interest.

Thus observing the prohibition against interest means taking profit only from one's present possessions. This is the

43. *Zechariah* 13:2.

44. *Shmos* 19:6. See the *Mechilta* to this verse, which emphasizes that this applies to each and every Jew.

45. *Sanhedrin* 39a.

46. See *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yeshayahu*, sec. 503; *Pesikta Rabasi*, *Parshas Shabbos VeRosh Chodesh*; *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar*, p. 89b.

15. See the *maamar* entitled *Vayikach Haman (Hosafos L'Torah Or)*.

dynamic underlying a *heter iska*, which allows one to receive a certain return from the money one invests. In a *heter iska*, a certain portion of the money that changes hands remains the lender's; it is merely entrusted to the borrower. So when the borrower does business with the funds, he is also doing business with the share belonging to the lender, and the profit the lender receives is thus earned by the money which actually belongs to him. Similar principles apply with regard to the renting of animals or utensils.

The relationship between one Jew and his colleague is mirrored in the relationship he shares with the spiritual realms. If he transgresses the prohibition against interest, i.e., if he takes profit for resources only because they were once his, a similar pattern is followed in the spiritual realms. There is no active investment from above in his Divine service.¹⁶ He

16. On this basis, we can appreciate why a person who lends money at interest will not arise at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead (*Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchos Ribis*, Law 2; see *Shmos Rabbah* 31:15; *Hosafos liYerushalmi*, the conclusion of the tractate *Berachos*; *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, the conclusion of ch. 33).

A *mitzvah* involves taking a material entity (whose existence is temporal, identified with death) and making it a medium for holiness (identified with life and eternity). See the *maamar* entitled *Shuvah Yisrael*, 5695 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntresim*, Vol. II, p. 658). This in turn brings about the resurrection of the dead in the world at large.

The Divine service of created beings is by nature limited. The dimension of timelessness and infinity drawn down by the *mitzvos* (see *Tanya*, ch. 25) is endowed by the connection established by the *mitzvos* with G-d, who is described as “the G-d of life.” (Indeed, the very word *mitzvah* is associated with the term *tzavsa*, meaning “connection.”) This connection draws down eternity from above, causing G-d to perform the spiritual parallels of the *mitzvah*.

When a person lends money at interest, he prevents the investment of G-dly energy in his efforts. Thus his conduct constitutes the direct opposite of the resurrection of the dead.

Indeed, he thereby saps the energy of holiness. This is implied by the Hebrew term for interest, *neshech*, which literally means “bite.” And by sapping holiness in this manner, “from the destruction of Jerusalem is built Tzur” (*Yahel Or* 15, 1:4), a city identified with *kelipah* and death.

the same time, he will occupy himself with the poor, as it is written:³⁷ “He shall judge the poor with righteousness.” Indeed, he will even influence the viper, causing it to cease harming people.³⁸

All this depends on our efforts. We must raise a generation in which children will study *P'nimiyus HaTorah*. As Rabbi Shimon said: “In the generation in which *Mashiach* comes, children — both children in a chronological sense and children in knowledge — will study *P'nimiyus HaTorah*.”³⁹

Our Sages comment:⁴⁰ “Rabbi Shimon is worthy enough to rely on in a time of difficulty.” Beyond the simple meaning of the statement in its source, there is room for an extended interpretation. In an era when we are beset by the hardships of exile, we should rely on Rabbi Shimon. Indeed, Rabbi Shimon himself said that he, together with Achiyah of Shiloh, were worthy of “acquitting every Jew from the attribute of judgment until the days of *Mashiach*.”⁴¹

Rabbi Shimon has been promised:⁴² “With this composition of yours, the *Zohar*, Israel will be redeemed from exile in mercy.” This promise involves a logical sequence; the Redemption will come when the outlook of Rabbi Shimon —

in the present age is empty when compared to the Torah to be taught by *Mashiach*.”

37. *Yeshayahu* 11:4.

38. *Ibid.*:8. See also *Sichos Simchas Torah*, 5690, sec. 39ff. (*Likkutei Dibburim*, Vol. II, p. 633ff).

39. *Zohar*, Vol. I, 92b, *et al.* See also *Kedushas Levi*, *Parshas Vayechi*.

40. *Berachos* 9a.

41. This is the version cited in the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Berachos* 9:2, *Bereishis Rabbah* 35:2, *Pesikta d'Rabbi Kahane*, *Vayihi Beshallach*.

With regard to the connection between Rabbi Shimon (and the Baal Shem Tov, who revealed *P'nimiyus HaTorah*) and Achiyah of Shiloh, see *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5709, p. 172 in the note, and *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. II, p. 512, in the note.

42. *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 124b; see *Tanya*, *Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 26, which discusses this issue.

must develop empathy for him,³³ and advance arguments to acquit such individuals.

Moreover, this descent was not mandated from above, as was G-d's command to Moshe:³⁴ "Go and descend." Instead, Rabbi Shimon made the choice on his own initiative, out of his desire to "acquit every Jew from the attribute of judgment."

Rabbi Shimon was willing and able to descend to such a low level because he was among "the superior men who are few in number."³⁵

ANTICIPATING REDEMPTION

As are all the stories in the Torah, the stories about Rabbi Shimon's conduct serve as a directive for every Jew in later generations. This has been particularly true ever since the teachings of *P'nimiyus HaTorah*, the wisdom of Rabbi Shimon, were revealed.

Following Rabbi Shimon's example, it is necessary for us to "spread the wellsprings [of *Chassidus*] outward," to join the two ends of the spiritual spectrum. We must take not only from the river, but from the wellspring itself — the very heart of the teachings of *P'nimiyus HaTorah* — and spread the "water" to the most extreme peripheries.

This will prepare the world for the coming of *Mashiach*, who will likewise join two extremes. On one hand, he will study Torah with the Patriarchs and Moshe our teacher.³⁶ At

33. See *Tanya*, ch. 30.

34. *Shmos* 32:7; see *Berachos* 32a.

35. *Sukkah*, *loc. cit.* On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the two quotes. Significantly, they are both attributed to the same source: "Chizkiyah, in the name of Rabbi Yirmeyah, in the name of Rabbi Shimon."

36. See *Likkutei Torah*, *Vayikra*, p. 17a; *Shaar HaEmunah*, ch. 56; *Menachos* 29a. See also *Vayikra Rabbah* 11:5, which states: "The Torah which a person studies

is given resources, — i.e., the *mitzvos* are performed in the spiritual realms — before he begins his Divine service, endowing him with power, but he is given no more than that.

When, by contrast, a person observes the prohibition against interest, G-d invests in him. Not only does He endow the person with potential before he begins his Divine service, but G-d remains an active partner. "The Holy One, blessed be He, studies opposite him."

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between the prohibition against interest, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven, and the exodus from Egypt. The prohibition against interest is of all-embracing significance,¹⁷ reflecting the active partnership of G-d in one's Divine service, an expression of the acceptance of G-d's yoke. And by establishing such a connection with G-d, a person transcends all limitations — the spiritual counterpart of the exodus from Egypt.

"THE RIGHTEOUS RESEMBLE THEIR CREATOR"¹⁸

As explained, G-d does not remain content with providing a Jew with the energy needed to observe the Torah and its *mitzvos* at the outset, but remains an active partner at the time the Jews observe the *mitzvos*, performing the same *mitzvos* as they perform. This pattern is also displayed by the righteous,

The person is thus punished "measure for measure." He will not arise in the resurrection. This explanation also explains why a person who lends interest is not mentioned in *Perek Cheilek* (ch. 10) of *Sanhedrin* as one of those who does not have a portion in the World to Come. A person who lends with interest acts contrary to the motif of resurrection. Hence, he is included among the category of those who deny the resurrection which is mentioned there (*Sichos Shabbos Parshas Mishpatim*, 5723).

17. On this basis, we can understand our Sages' statement (*Shmos Rabbah* 31:4) that a person who lends money without interest "is considered as if he fulfilled all the *mitzvos*." For the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* against taking interest brings about the active participation of G-d in our Divine service — an element fundamental to our observance of all *mitzvos*.

18. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 10:5.

and in particular by the *Nesi'im* of the Jewish people, who help connect the nation to G-d.¹⁹ Not only do they empower their emissaries to carry out the missions with which they are charged, but they engage in the same tasks themselves.

This approach was especially apparent in the case of my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe. Not only did he send out emissaries and empower them to strengthen Jewish observance in general, and spread the wellsprings of *chassidus* in particular, he remained an active partner, dedicating himself to this work. And this applied not only in his earlier years, but in his later years, when he had disciples — and disciples of disciples — who were equipped to perform these tasks.

This serves as a lesson to all those who are bound to him, and who follow in his footsteps. They should not remain satisfied with the fact that they have raised students who are involved with spreading Torah and *Chassidus*. They should not excuse themselves by calculating that, since the work being carried out by their students is a result of their influence, they are entitled to the additional light generated by their students' efforts. If this is their attitude, they might feel that they need not continue to involve themselves with others, and will instead spend their time studying Torah themselves.

Receiving “profit” (additional spiritual light) for one's previous efforts in this way smacks of taking interest. Instead, a person must be ready to both work on himself and involve himself with others *continually*. He must himself perform the labor which he demands from his students.

The reward which we will receive from foregoing such “spiritual interest” will be that my revered father-in-law, the

19. See *Sefer HaSichos — Toras Shalom*, p. 158.

When was Rabbi Shimon able to make such a contribution? After he had reached the highest peaks through his 13 years of Torah study in the cave.²⁸ Following the principle:²⁹ “It is the highest levels that can descend to the lowest depths,” it was at this time that he was best able to descend to worldly concerns, including the rectification of situations that were in need of correction.³⁰

ISRAEL'S ADVOCATE

Our Sages³¹ also quote Rabbi Shimon as saying: “I can [find a defense that will] acquit every Jew from the attribute of judgment.” Although there are people who have committed undesirable acts, Rabbi Shimon was able to find grounds for their defense.

This reflects an even greater descent than that involved in rectifying a problem involving the impurity which stems from contact with the dead. After the Sin of the Tree of Knowledge, death (and the resulting impurity) became part of the natural pattern of this world, independent of man's free choice. Sin (and the judgment that accompanies it) is thus lower than death, being the product, not of nature, but of a Jew's unwise choice. Nevertheless, Rabbi Shimon was able to descend to that level,³² for in order to act as an advocate for someone one

of impurity,” because not only does a person who comes in contact with it become impure, that person himself becomes an *Av Tumah*.

28. Before he reached these peaks, not only did he not seek to improve the world, he (like his son, Rabbi Elazar afterwards) sought to lay waste to the world because of man's lack of spiritual involvement (*Shabbos* 33b).

29. Cf. *Shaarei Orach* 58a.

30. This concept is also reflected in the narrative recorded in *Shabbos* 33b, which quotes Rabbi Shimon as saying: “Since a miracle [i.e., a revelation of G-dliness above the natural order] occurred, I will go and rectify a problem.”

31. *Sukkah* 45b.

32. See the letter printed at the beginning of *Kuntres* 30 (*Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntresim*, Vol. II, p. 712).

literal fulfillment of the charge “This Torah scroll shall not depart...” — and a person incapable of studying more than “one verse in the morning and one verse in the evening.” Rabbi Shimon’s teaching reflects how the infinite dimensions of the Torah are invested in even the tiny segment which such a person is able to read.

TO MEND WHAT NEEDS MENDING

Rabbi Shimon’s achievements are even greater; he was able to draw down the unlimited dimensions of the Torah even into worldly matters. For the Torah itself mandates activity of this nature, as it commands: “And you shall gather your grain.”²⁵ (People at large are not expected to make an all-encompassing commitment to the study of the Torah, as Rabbi Shimon told his son, “you and I are enough for the world”.) And furthermore, he “mended” the world, rectifying difficulties that existed beforehand.

He did not wait until he saw a problem, and then set out to correct it. Instead, he sought out problems to correct, asking others:¹⁹ “Is there anything that I could rectify?” And when he was told that there was a place which priests avoided because of a question of ritual impurity²⁶, he set out to correct the difficulty. Although the question involved impurity contracted from a human corpse — the most serious form of ritual impurity²⁷ — Rabbi Shimon was able to make the place suitable even for priests.

25. *Devarim* 11:14.

26. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Metzora* in this series, where this point is discussed.

27. See *Rashi*, *Pesachim* 14b, and the commentaries to the *Mishnah* in *Keilim* and *Ohelos*, who employ the term *Avi Avos HaTumah*. To explain: Generally, a substance which imparts ritual impurity is referred to as an *Av Tumah*, “a father of impurity,” for just as a father begets children, this substance imparts impurity. A human corpse is considered *Avi Avos HaTumah*, literally, “a father of a father

Rebbe, will continue to invest himself in our efforts. And through him — for he “stands between G-d and yourselves”²⁰ — is drawn down G-d’s active participation, the acceptance of the yoke of heaven. This in turn will lead to an exodus from Egypt, a sundering of all the limitations which we face.

(Adapted from *Sichos Behar-Bechukosai*, 5710)



20. Cf. *Devarim* 5:5.

LAG BAOMER

RABBI SHIMON'S DAY

As is well known,¹ Lag BaOmer² was instituted as a day of rejoicing³ because Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai died on that day.

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1. There are several reasons given* for the celebrations of Lag BaOmer. The reason which concerns us is the rationale stated in the writings of the *AriZal* and quoted in *chassidus*** that the day is set aside as the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai*** (a letter of the Rebbe, *Pesach Sheni*, 5711).

* See *Mishnas Chassidim*, *Masechtes Iyar ViSivan*; *Pri Chadosh*, *Orach Chayim*, 493; *Maros Ayin* by the *Chida*, *Likkutim*; *Shem Aryeh*, *Orach Chayim*, Responsum 14; *S'dei Chemed*, *Asifas Dinim*, *Mareches Eretz Yisrael*, *Peas HaSadeh* sec. 6.

** See *Pri Etz Chayim*, *Shaar Sefiras HaOmer*, ch. 7; the *maamar* of the Alter Rebbe cited by *Divrei Nechemia*, *Orach Chayim*, Responsum 34, sec. 7 [*Maamarei Admur HaZaken* 5564, p. 101]; *Siddur Shaar Lag BaOmer*. To quote the *Divrei Nechemia*: “The celebration of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on Lag BaOmer has been publicized throughout the world for several generations.”

*** See *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 296b, see also *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 218a. The question has been raised: Traditionally, it is customary to fast on the day of the passing of a *tzaddik*. Why then is the day of Rabbi Shimon's passing celebrated?

This question can be resolved even according to *Nigleh*, the revealed dimension of Torah law, because Rabbi Shimon himself instructed that the day of his passing be set aside for celebration (see *Pri Etz Chayim*, *loc. cit.*). As stated by *Rabbeinu Yeruchum* (quoted in the *Shach*, *Yoreh De'ah* 344:9), when a person makes such a request, his request must be honored. This is not the place for discussion of this issue.

2. The day is usually referred to with the name *Lag BaOmer* although in his *Siddur*, the Alter Rebbe states that days of the *omer* should be counted with the expression *LaOmer*. This is also the expression used in the *Siddur* (a manuscript copy) from which the *Baal Shem Tov* would pray, i.e., the *Siddur HaAriZal*. (See also *Rabbeinu Nissim* at the conclusion of tractate *Pesachim*; the *Responsa of the Rashba*, Responsum 126; *Tanya Rabsi*, sec. 50; *Kol Bo*, sec. 55; *Sheloh*; *Shaarei Teshuvah*; *Chok Yaakov*, and others.)
3. *Mishnas Chassidim*, *Masechtes Iyar*, states” “On Lag BaOmer, it is a *mitzvah* to rejoice in the celebration of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.” The *Mishnas Chassidim* does not quote any source other than the *AriZal*. (The Alter Rebbe as quoted

den for 13 years (an experience which elevated their spiritual level immensely), Rabbi Elazar saw people engaged in worldly concerns and destroyed them with his glance. “How can they abandon eternal life for temporal matters?” he exclaimed. [He then with a glance destroyed those people.]

But “whatever Rabbi Elazar destroyed, Rabbi Shimon healed.” Not only did he not destroy as did his son, he mended what his son had devastated. For as he explained to his son: “You and I [who study in a manner of ‘his Torah is his occupation,'] are sufficient for the world.”

Moreover, we find that it is Rabbi Shimon who stated:²¹ “Even if all a person did was read the *Shema* in the morning and the evening, he has fulfilled the charge, ‘This Torah scroll shall not depart....’”

According to certain opinions, the *mitzvah* of reading the *Shema* involves only the first verse.²² Rabbi Shimon maintained that when a person is unable to study Torah the entire day because he has other concerns with which the Torah requires him to be occupied, or because he is ignorant and incapable of studying,²³ he fulfills the charge “This Torah scroll shall not depart...” with the recitation of the *Shema* alone.²⁴

This reflects the unique ability of Rabbi Shimon to encompass the most complete devotion to Torah study — a

21. *Menachos* 99b.

22. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 58:1, the conclusion of sec. 60.

23. See *Tanya*, ch. 8, which speaks of “*devarim betalim* [‘empty words’] which are permitted to be recited, e.g., by an ignorant person.” A question could be raised, however, for seemingly such a person should be obligated in the recitation of verses from the Written Law (see *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, the conclusion of ch. 2). This, however, is not the place for the discussion of this issue.

24. See *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, *loc. cit.*, *Kuntres Acharon*, the conclusion of ch. 3, where the Alter Rebbe reconciles the apparent contradiction between these two statements of Rabbi Shimon.

ULTIMATE DEDICATION TO THE STUDY OF TORAH

This fusion of opposites is reflected in Rabbi Shimon's rulings in the realm of *Nigleh*, the revealed dimensions of Torah law. For example, with regard to the verse:¹⁷ "This Torah scroll will not depart from your mouth," the *Talmud*¹⁸ mentions a difference of opinion between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon.

Rabbi Yishmael explained that the verse is not meant to be understood in an absolutely literal sense. We must follow the ordinary pattern of the world, he argued — ploughing, sowing, and the like — even though this requires a departure from the study of the Torah.

Rabbi Shimon, by contrast, maintained that the verse should be understood in its most literal sense: *the entire day* should be devoted to the study of Torah. Moreover, he said that if Jews dedicate themselves to G-d's will in this manner, their work will be accomplished by others.

The *Talmud* concludes that many followed the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael and were successful. In contrast, many who followed the opinion of Rabbi Shimon were not successful. This indicates that Rabbi Shimon's approach is above the level appropriate for this material world.

Personally, however, Rabbi Shimon followed his own opinion. "His Torah was his occupation."¹⁹ His days were filled with study alone.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Shimon did not compel others to follow his example. The *Talmud* relates²⁰ that when he and his son, Rabbi Elazar, emerged from the cave where they had hid-

17. *Yehoshua* 1:5.

18. *Berachos* 35b.

19. *Shabbos* 11a.

20. *Ibid.*, 33b.

On the day of a person's passing, his entire lifework and all his labor in Torah and *mitzvos* are gathered together and ascend to the spiritual realms.⁴

Therefore, at the time of his passing, Rabbi Shimon declared: "With one bond, I am bound to Him; in it as one, in it aflame."⁵ He was connected to G-d, the source of life, in an eternal bond. And thus, when he was in the midst of the verse:⁶ "There G-d commanded the blessing of life..." "the light of holiness did not complete saying the word 'life' before his voice was hushed."⁷ Rabbi Shimon became eternally bound to the attribute of life.

Every year, the spiritual heights reached by Rabbi Shimon on the day of his passing are "recalled and relived."² And thus, every year, Lag BaOmer is a day of celebration.

FROM THE HIGHEST PEAKS TO THE LOWEST DEPTHS

The *Jerusalem Talmud* states⁸ that when Rabbi Akiva ordained his students Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Shimon, he asked Rabbi Meir to sit before Rabbi Shimon. At this, Rabbi Shimon's face soured. Rabbi Akiva consoled him by saying:

by the *Tzemach Tzedek, Piskei Dinim, Yoreh De'ah*, sec. 116.) See also the *Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar Sefiras HaOmer*, ch. 7.

This rationale also explains why the day is marked, not only by the absence of mourning, but by rejoicing. (See also *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 287b.) This resolves the questions raised in the Responsa of the *Chasam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah*, Responsum 233, *Shem Aryeh, Orach Chayim*, Responsum 14, and others. See also the commentaries to the *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, sec. 493.

4. *Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 27.

5. This wording is cited in several sources in *Chassidus*. It appears to be a fusion of two statements from the *Idra Zuta, Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 288: "R. Shimon began [speaking], saying:... "With one bond, I am bound to the Holy One, blessed be He," and *ibid.*, p. 292a: "My soul is at one with Him; it is aflame with Him." See the *maamar* entitled *VaYichulu HaShamayim*, 5666.

6. *Tehillim* 133:3.

7. *Zohar, loc. cit.*, p. 296a.

8. *Sanhedrin* 1:2.

“It is sufficient for you that I and your Creator appreciate your potential.” This implies that Rabbi Shimon’s potential could not be appreciated even by Rabbi Akiva’s students.

To put the matter in perspective: With regard to Rabbi Meir, our Sages state:⁹ “His colleagues could not appreciate the depth of his knowledge.” Rabbi Meir’s colleagues were, however, able to appreciate that he possessed wisdom. With regard to Rabbi Shimon, however, even Rabbi Meir could not appreciate his wisdom; only “I [Rabbi Akiva] and your Creator.”

Rabbi Akiva’s level was (as explained in *Chassidus*) higher than that of Nadav and Avihu, as evidenced by the fact that he “entered in peace and left in peace.”¹⁰ And similarly, it is explained that, among the ten martyrs, Rabbi Akiva is identified with G-d Himself.¹¹ Therefore it was Rabbi Akiva and the Creator alone who recognized Rabbi Shimon’s potential.

So even while alive, Rabbi Shimon’s level was incomparably higher than that of his contemporaries. Surely we can appreciate that at the time of his passing, he reached an even higher peak. One might then think that because he was on such a rung, his happiness on Lag BaOmer is too elevated to be meaningful to ordinary people. As the following story¹² illustrates, this is not the case.

The *AriZal* had a disciple who would include the prayer *Nacheim*, recited for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*¹³

9. *Eruvin* 13b, 53a.

10. See *Chagigah* 14b. Note the *sichah* to *Parshas Acharei* in this series, where this concept is explained.

11. *Likkutei HaShas* by the *AriZal*, the conclusion of tractate *Berachos*.

12. See *Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar Sefiras HaOmer*, ch. 7; *Shulchan Aruch HaAriZal, Kavanas HaOmer* 3.

13. *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, p. 100.

as part of the Grace¹⁴ after Meals, every day. From the wording of the story, it appears that the student would make this addition even on *Shabbos* and festivals.

On Lag BaOmer, the student came to Meron to pray at Rabbi Shimon’s grave, and as was his practice, he recited *Nachaim* at that time as well. Rabbi Shimon’s spirit was disturbed at the recitation of *Nacheim* on the day of his celebration, and this caused the student to suffer.

To explain: Rabbi Shimon’s spiritual level was above even the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*.¹⁵ Therefore on the day of his rejoicing, when his spiritual level is revealed, it is not appropriate to focus on the destruction.

This story underscores two points:

a) Lag BaOmer possesses a quality above that of even *Shabbos* and the festivals, for the *AriZal*’s student suffered negative consequences for reciting *Nacheim* on Lag BaOmer, but not on any other occasion.

b) The celebration of Lag BaOmer should encompass all Jews, even those affected by the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* as reflected in the daily recitation of *Nacheim*.

This points to the uniqueness of Rabbi Shimon’s Divine service: he was able to fuse polar opposites, drawing down the highest levels — the level of “With one bond, I am bound to Him” — to the lowest depths.¹⁶

14. *Shulchan Aruch HaAriZal*. The *Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar HaKavanos*, and the *Siddur HaAriZal* state that the student would make the addition in *Shemoneh Esreh*, in the blessing, *Tishkon* [*Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 22, p. 330].

15. See *Pelach HaRimon, Shmos*, p. 7, in the name of the Alter Rebbe.

16. This is also reflected in the fact that Rabbi Shimon’s passing is associated with the *Sefirah Hod ShebeHod*, which as explained in the Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur, Shaar Lag BaOmer*, is associated with the lowest levels.