

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. **Rina** bat Reb **Moshe Yosef** עי"ה **Aaron**
Passed away on Lag B'Omer - 18 Iyar, 5775

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*

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LIKKUTEI SICHOS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF TALKS

by the
Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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The simple lesson regarding the actions which a Jew must do to further hasten the Redemption is:

In addition to the activities in his part of the world, until it includes the whole world, to reveal that G-d is the Master¹ of the world - in the world and in every part of the world, particularly through making use of all aspects of the world "for the sake of heaven"² and in "knowing Him,"³ so that everything in the world reveals "the glory" of G-d,

There must also be a specific increase in studying and learning the Torah - particularly the inner teachings of the Torah as revealed in the teachings of Chassidus, in a manner of comprehension and perception, in wisdom, understanding and knowledge.

And also, to have influence on others around him - through spreading Torah and Judaism, and the spreading of the wellsprings.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Emor, 20 Iyar 5751)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** ע"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"ד
Shagalov
Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** ע"ה
Ekman
Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** ע"ה
Marenburg
Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** ע"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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Executive Director

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1. [The Hebrew word for "Master" used here is also the name of the first letter of the alphabet, and indicates unity and oneness. Translator's note.]
2. Avos chapter 2 mishneh 12. And see Rambam, *Hilchos Deos*, end of chapter 3. *Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, section 231.
3. *Mishlei* 3:6. And see *Rambam* and *Tur Shulchan Aruch* there.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FREIND
Reb **Yosef Yisroel** ben Reb **Sholom** ע"ה **Rosner**
Passed away on 7 Menachem-Av, 5777
ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.
*
DEDICATED BY HIS FRIENDS
Mr. & Mrs. **Gershon** and **Leah** שיחי **Wolf**
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי **Shagalov**

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)



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.

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

•

Volume VIII: *Vayikra*

•

In English rendition
by
Rabbi Eliyahu Touger

EMOR

EACH PERSON AS AN INDIVIDUAL

As has been mentioned,¹ the counting of the *omer* is a preparation for the giving of the Torah. Therefore, directly after the 49 days of the *omer*, we celebrate Shavuos, the festival commemorating the event on Mount Sinai.

The connection between *Shavuos* and the counting of the *omer* is underscored by the fact that both relate to every Jew individually. The *Talmud*² emphasizes that the counting of the *omer* is incumbent on every Jew as an individual (in contrast to the *Shemittah* and *Yovel*³ years, which are counted by the Jewish court⁴).

Similarly, with regard to the giving of the Torah, the revelation was not merely for the Jewish people as a whole, but for every individual Jew. This is reflected in the phrase:⁵ “I am G-d, your L-rd,” which uses the singular form of the term “*your*,” for G-d grants the Torah to every Jew individually, as it were. He conveys to each person the obligation to study Torah, and to observe the 613 *mitzvos*,⁶ and empowers each

1. See the *sichah* to *Parshas Shemini* in this series and the sources cited there.
 2. *Menachos* 65b; *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 489:1. See also the *sichos* to *Parshas Bamidbar* in this series.
 3. [Sabbatical and Jubilee.]
 4. *Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Shemittah VeYovel* 10:1.
 5. *Shmos* 20:2. See the commentary of the *Ramban*, and the *Pesikta Rabasi* 21:6.
 6. See *Tanya, Iggeres HaKodesh*, Epistle 29; *Kuntres Acharon*, the passage beginning *Lehavin Pratei HaHalachos*.

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

one (as implied by the term *e-lohecha*⁷) to fulfill that obligation.

WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT IS ABOVE OUR CAPABILITIES

Based on the connection between the counting of the *omer* and *Shavuos*, the Alter Rebbe explains⁸ the apparent contradiction between the command:⁹ "And you shall count 50 days," and the fact that in practice we count only 49. By counting the 49 days, and in this manner drawing down 49 Gates of Understanding (*Binah*), we prepare for the opening of the fiftieth gate — the revelation that came with the giving of the Torah.¹⁰

On each day of the counting of the *omer*, a different Gate of Understanding is drawn down. This enables us to understand the wording used when counting: "one day..., two days..., three days...", rather than "the first day, the second day, the third day." For every day includes the previous days

7. As mentioned in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 5:1), the name *E-lohim* is associated with G-d's potential as "the Master of strength and power."

8. *Likkutei Torah*, *Bamidbar* 10d, *Shir HaShirim* 35:3.

9. *Vayikra* 23:16.

10. For through the revelation of the fiftieth Gate of Understanding, the level of *Anochi* (associated with the Giving of the Torah) is drawn down.

The fiftieth Gate of Understanding is associated with the giving of the Torah despite the fact that as long as the calendar was established by the sighting of the moon, it was possible for the fiftieth day of the counting of the *omer* to be the fifth or seventh of Sivan, and for *Shavuos* to be celebrated on that day rather than the sixth of Sivan, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah (*Rosh HaShanah* 6b).

As are all the concepts of *P'nimiyus HaTorah*, this concept is also alluded to in *Nigleh*, the revealed discipline of Torah law. Thus *Shavuos* is described as "the day on which the Torah was given" (*Pesachim* 68b, the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Rosh HaShanah* 4:8).

See also the comments of the *Divrei Nechemiah* (*Hashlamus LiShulchan Aruch HaRav*, sec. 581, *Kuntres Acharon*). Nevertheless, as pointed out in notes 14 and 16, there are differences between the *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and the *Divrei Nechemiah*.

and the Divine energy which they drew down. On the first day, we have access to the first Gate of Understanding, on the second day, we have access to two gates, etc.

The fiftieth gate, however, cannot be opened by our own initiative, for it represents a potential which cannot be attained by the Divine service of created beings. Nevertheless, our endeavor to draw down the 49 Gates of Understanding creates a setting in which the fiftieth is drawn down on its own initiative. For this reason, it is considered *as if* we have counted 50 days, for the fiftieth gate is made accessible by our counting of “seven perfect weeks.”¹¹

TWO DIMENSIONS OF SHAVUOS

The fiftieth Gate of Understanding, drawn down on the fiftieth day of the counting of the *omer*, shares a connection to the giving of the Torah. But there is a distinction between them. Thus the Alter Rebbe rules¹² that the description of *Shavuos* as “the season of the giving of our Torah,”¹³ is appropriate only in the present era, when we follow a fixed

11. Cf. *Vayikra* 23:15.

There is an alternate explanation of the expression “count 50 days” which fits the wording of the verse more closely, showing how our endeavor to count also includes the fiftieth day.

There are several levels within the fiftieth gate. For each individual, that level which is above his comprehension is considered the fiftieth gate, although a more developed person would place this level within the 49 gates; for him, the fiftieth gate refers to a still higher peak.

Moreover, this same concept applies with regard to a person himself. For a person must constantly endeavor to ascend to higher spiritual rungs. Thus after counting — and attaining — 49 levels of holiness, he must begin to climb the 49 levels of a higher plane. And with regard to this higher plane, the level which he originally considered the fiftieth rung, above his comprehension, can now be attained by him through his Divine service (*Sichos Shabbos Parshas Bechukosai*, 5722, based on the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, as cited by *Toldos Yaakov Yosef, Parshas Devarim*).

12. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 494:1.

13. *Siddur Tehillat HaShem*, p. 250, 253, 258.

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 Orah* 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

calendar and *Shavuos* is always celebrated on the sixth of Sivan, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah.¹⁴ When, however, the monthly calendar was established by the testimony of witnesses who had sighted the new moon, *Shavuos*, the fiftieth day of the *omer*, could also fall on the fifth of Sivan (if both Nissan and Iyar were months of 30 days) or on the seventh of the month (if both Nissan and Iyar were months of 29 days).¹⁵

For as reflected in this week’s Torah reading, the observance of *Shavuos* is not dependent on a particular day of the month (as is the case with the other holidays), but on the conclusion of the counting of the *omer*. In previous eras, when *Shavuos* fell on a day other than the sixth of Sivan, it was not referred to as “the season of the giving of our Torah.”¹⁶

14. For the *halachah* follows the opinion of the Sages and not that of Rabbi Yossi (*Shabbos* 86b).

This explanation does not follow the approach of the *Divrei Nechemiah* (*loc. cit.*). The *Divrei Nechemiah*’s hypothesis that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan is based on the Alter Rebbe’s statement (*Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 430:1) that the Jews left Egypt on Thursday. This hypothesis is refuted by the Alter Rebbe’s own words (*Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 494:1), where he states that even the Sages maintain that the Jews left Egypt on a Thursday. In that year, both Nissan and Iyar contained 30 days. See also the *Machtzis HaShekel* (*Orach Chayim*, ch. 494) who states that even the Sages agree that the Jews left Egypt on a Thursday.

15. *Rosh HaShanah* (*loc. cit.*)

16. This also differs from the conclusion of the *Divrei Nechemiah* (*loc. cit.*), who maintains that even when *Shavuos* was celebrated on a day other than the sixth of Sivan, it was referred to as “the season of the giving of our Torah,” because at that time the fiftieth Gate of Understanding is revealed.

Questions are also raised by the *Divrei Nechemiah*’s statement that despite the fact that the Torah was given 51 days after the exodus from Egypt, every year *Shavuos* is celebrated on the fiftieth day of the *omer*, because at that time the Torah could also have been given on the fiftieth day; its giving was postponed because of certain factors.

This is difficult to understand, because every year on a holiday, the same spiritual influences revealed at the time of the original event are expressed once again. Thus according to this explanation, two spiritual influences

From the above, two things are evident:

a) The giving of the Torah is associated with the fiftieth day of the *omer*, the day on which the fiftieth Gate of Understanding is drawn down;

b) The giving of the Torah is associated with the sixth of Sivan,¹⁷ and this is why we refer to *Shavuos* as “the season of the giving of our Torah.”

The difference between these two dimensions of the holiday can be explained as follows: The aspect of the giving of the Torah which is associated with the fiftieth day of the *omer* comes after man’s Divine service. It is true that our Divine service is not sufficient to draw down the fiftieth Gate of Understanding; that comes as a result of G-d’s initiative. Nevertheless, G-d acts after man has completed his Divine service to the fullest extent of his capacity.¹⁸ After counting 49 days, man has created a vessel fit to receive the influence of the giving of the Torah.

The aspect of the giving of the Torah which is connected to the sixth of Sivan, by contrast, is not at all connected with man’s service. It refers to an initiative that stems from the Torah itself. The time for this initiative is the sixth of Sivan.¹⁹

should be expressed each year: the fact that everything was prepared for the Torah to have been given, and the fact that the Torah was actually given, each one on the day originally associated with it.

17. Note our Sages’ comments (*Avodah Zarah* 3a) with regard to the phrase (*Bereishis* 1:31): “The sixth day,” that until the sixth of Sivan, creation was incomplete.
18. See note 11.
19. Therefore the expression “the season of the giving of our Torah” is associated with the sixth of Sivan. The fiftieth day of the counting of the *omer* does not bring about “the season of the giving of our Torah,” relating to the Torah as it exists in its own context. Instead, it reflects the connection between the Torah and man’s Divine service.

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.

WHEN PAST AND PRESENT MEET

The fact that the two dimensions of *Shavuos* — the fiftieth day of the *omer* and the sixth of Sivan — are not necessarily dependent on each other is relevant also at present, not only in the era when the calendar was established according to the testimony of witnesses. According to the fixed calendar we follow, Nissan always has 30 days, and Iyar, 29; thus *Shavuos* will always fall on the sixth of Sivan. But there are still situations in which an individual is required to celebrate *Shavuos* on the fifth or seventh of Sivan.²⁰

To explain: Since the earth is shaped like a ball²¹ and the sun travels across its horizon, there must be a line on the earth (the international dateline) at which the days differ. The date for a person standing on one side of the international dateline is different from the date for a person standing on the other side. By crossing that line, a person can "skip" a day. Thus if someone steps from east to west, he could for example proceed from Sunday to Tuesday. Conversely, by stepping from west to east, he will "repeat" a day, e.g., he will have two Sundays.

These concepts do not usually affect our ritual observance. With regard to the counting of the *omer*, however, the international dateline can make a significant difference.

As mentioned above, the counting of the *omer* is a *mitzvah* incumbent upon every individual. Thus when a person crosses the dateline in the middle of the counting, he must

20. The *Halachic* texts explain that this phenomenon is limited to the time when the calendar was established by the testimony of witnesses, because they are referring to the celebration of the holiday by the Jewish people as a whole. The discussion to follow refers to the celebration of the holiday by an individual or group of individuals.

21. The *Jerusalem Talmud* (*Avodah Zarah* 3:1, cited by *Tosafos*, *Avodah Zarah* 41a); *Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:14; *Zohar*, Vol. III, p. 10a.

continue according to his own reckoning, although everyone around him is counting a different day.

For example, Pesach falls on *Shabbos*. On Monday, the second day of the counting of the *omer*, a person travels from east to west [e.g., from U.S. to Australia]. Although he leaves on Monday, when he crosses the dateline, Monday becomes Tuesday. That night [the night between Tuesday and Wednesday], he is required to count the third day of the *omer*, while the local people will be counting the fourth day.

Conversely, if a person crosses the dateline from west to east [e.g., from Australia to U.S.], leaving Monday and arriving on Monday, on the night between Monday and Tuesday, he must count the third day of the *omer*, although the local people will be counting the second day.²²

The rationale is that, as explained above, the counting of the *omer* is not incumbent on the Jewish people as a collective entity, but upon every individual *as an individual*. Everyone must count the days of the *omer* which *he* has experienced.²³

An individual must observe the *Shabbos* and other festivals according to the reckoning of the locale in which he finds himself. The fact that he may have crossed the dateline is not significant. The seventh day of the week is the same for all, for the determination of that day is not dependent on an individual's reckoning,²⁴ but on the passage of the days of week. Similarly, the observance of Pesach, Sukkos, Rosh

22. [For this reason, the Rebbe has counseled all those traveling from the U.S. to Australia and the Far East or from these lands to the U.S. during the Counting of the Omer to travel through Europe so that these questions will not arise.]

23. This explains the parallel drawn by the *Zohar* (Vol. III, p. 97b) between the counting of the *omer* and the days counted by a woman in her personal process of purification.

24. An exception to this is made with regard to a person lost in the desert, who has forgotten which day of the week it is (*Shabbos* 69b). Since he does not know when *Shabbos* is to be observed by the world at large, he relies on his own reckoning.

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.

“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.

HaShanah, and Yom Kippur depends on the calendar established by the *Sanhedrin* for all Jews (or, today, on the fixed calendar.)

With regard to the counting of the *omer*, however, since this *mitzvah* is incumbent on every individual, a person must count the days which he himself experiences.²⁵

CELEBRATING SHAVUOS ON A DIFFERENT DAY

As the Torah relates,²⁶ the holiday of *Shavuos* is not dependent on a particular day of the month, but on the counting of the *omer*. The fiftieth day of the *omer* is celebrated as *Shavuos*. For this reason, as mentioned previously, when the calendar was established according to the testimony of witnesses, it was possible for *Shavuos* to fall on the fifth, the sixth or the seventh of Sivan.

The intent is not that the counting of the *omer* (or the obligation to count the *omer*) should *bring about* the holiday of *Shavuos*. For even individuals who were not obliged to count the entire *Omer* — for example, a minor who came of age or a person who converted during the counting — are obligated to celebrate *Shavuos* on the fiftieth day after *Pesach* according to Scriptural Law. (Moreover, there are opinions — and indeed, these are accepted as *halachah*²⁷ — which maintain that, in the present era, the counting of the *omer* is

25. It is not logical to say that although there is an obligation on each person to count the days of the *omer*, that obligation involves counting the days as they are counted in the locale in which a person is located. For the entire significance of the counting of the days of the *omer* is that the *mitzvah* obliges every individual to count as an individual.

Moreover, we are commanded to count “seven perfect weeks.” How is it possible to say that a person’s counting of the *omer* will be “perfect” if, when crossing the dateline from east to west, he skips a day, or if, when crossing from west to east, he counts one day twice?

26. *Vayikra* 23:16.

27. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* 489:2.

merely a Rabbinic obligation. The holiday of *Shavuos*, by contrast, is according to all opinions mandated by Scriptural Law.) Were *Shavuos* to be totally dependent on the counting of the *omer*, the question would arise: How is it possible for individuals who had not counted to celebrate *Shavuos*?

The explanation that the holiday is brought about by the Jewish nation's counting of the *omer* is unacceptable; as mentioned above, our Sages define the counting as a *mitzvah* which relates to the individual, and not to the collective. Therefore we must conclude that *Shavuos* is not brought about by the counting of the *omer*. Instead, the explanation must be that although *the need* to observe the holiday is mandated by Scriptural Law, *the time* when that holiday is observed is determined by the counting of the *omer*, and as stated above, the counting serves as an indicator on an individual basis.

Thus, whenever a person finishes his counting of the *omer* — even if it is before or after the conclusion of the counting in his present locale — he should celebrate *Shavuos*.²⁸ We cannot say that the person should follow his own reckoning with regard to the counting, but with regard to the celebration of *Shavuos* he should celebrate with those around him, for the date on which *Shavuos* should be celebrated depends entirely on the counting of the *omer*. And the

28. It is improper to say that, although he counted the 49 days of the *omer*, since the total did not include (or included more than) 49 x 24 hours, the weeks of the *omer* are not considered “perfect weeks,” and therefore he should not observe *Shavuos* at this time. This is evidenced by the fact that all agree that when a person travels from west to east without crossing the dateline, he must begin observing *Shavuos* as soon as the sun sets after the fifth of Sivan, despite the fact that his 49 days of counting of the *omer* did not include 49 x 24 hours.

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.

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

counting of the *omer* is given over to each individual as an individual, and not to the Jewish people as a collective.²⁹

Nevertheless, if a person celebrates the holiday on a date other than the sixth of Sivan, he should not refer to it as “the season of the giving of our Torah,” for this description is appropriate only to the sixth of Sivan.

This applies even when a person crosses the dateline after Rosh Chodesh Sivan — and thus celebrates *Shavuos* on the sixth day after he celebrated Rosh Chodesh, for the fixation of the calendar is not an individual matter.

THE HALACHIC RULING

Based on the above, the following conclusions can be reached: When someone crosses the dateline from west to east, the fifth of Sivan is the fiftieth day of his counting of the *omer*. As such, he must observe *Shavuos* on that day with regard to all matters except the reference to the holiday as “the season of the giving of our Torah.” If he lives in the Diaspora, he should observe the sixth of Sivan as the second day of the holiday.

Conversely, if someone crosses the dateline from east to west, he should observe *Shavuos* on the seventh of Sivan. If he lives in the Diaspora, such a person should observe the eighth of Sivan as the second day of the holiday.

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29. Nevertheless, certain obligations result from the counting of the *omer* as individuals, e.g., the additional offerings sacrificed on *Shavuos*, which are incumbent on our people as a collective.

To cite a parallel: Although different principles apply regarding monetary law (*dinei mamanos*) and laws regarding capital punishment (*dinei nefashos*), at times a decision regarding monetary law will have repercussions with regard to the laws regarding capital punishment, and vice versa.

FROM THE MATERIAL TO THE SPIRITUAL

The above concepts are reflected in our Divine service. The service appropriate for the counting of the *omer* is the refinement of our emotional qualities. We count seven weeks, corresponding to the seven emotional qualities, and also 49 days (7x7), for each of these qualities is related to the others. The objective is to make these weeks — and the corresponding emotional qualities — “perfect.”

When a Jew finishes refining his emotional qualities, he is granted the Torah as a gift from above. This is totally dependent on him; it makes no difference what is happening with the people around him. When he has refined his 49 emotional qualities, he is granted the Torah, the fiftieth Gate of Understanding, even if those around him have not yet reached this degree of preparation.

Conversely, if his process of personal refinement is slower, he must wait until he has completed the task, even if those around him have already been granted the Torah.

But this refers only to the dimension of the giving of the Torah which is dependent on man’s Divine service. The ultimate aspect of the giving of the Torah transcends any connection to man’s service. This level is revealed for

everyone on the sixth of Sivan, “the season of the giving of our Torah.”³⁰

(Adapted from *Sichos Chag HaShavuot*, 5717 and 5721)



30. The new dimension brought about by the giving of the Torah is the connection between the upper and lower realms. (See *Shmos Rabbah* 12:3 and the *sichos* to *Parshas Yisro* and *Parshas Mishpatim* in this series, where this concept is explained.)

With regard to our Divine service, this implies that the *kabbalas ol* which stems from the essence of the soul (the higher realms) must be extended to man’s conscious powers (the lower realms). This implies that there are two dimensions to the giving of the Torah:

a) The revelation of the essence of every individual’s soul, reflected in his joining with others and thus rising above his individual self (see *Tanya*, ch. 32). This dimension of the giving of the Torah applies to the Jewish people as a collective. Therefore, at the giving of the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, two factors were necessary:

- i) that the entire Jewish people, all 600,000, be present (*Mechilta, Shmos* 19:1; *Yalkut Shimoni*, sec. 280);
- ii) that the Jewish people camped before Mount Sinai “as one man, with a single heart,” (*Mechilta, Rashi, Shmos* 19:1).

b) The effect on our conscious powers. This affects each person as an individual, and is relevant to every person according to his own rung of Divine service.

See also the *sichah* to *Parshas Bamidbar* in this series, where these concepts are also discussed.