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BS"D

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from: Shabbat Shalom <[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)>

date: May 6, 2021, 9:57 PM

subject: Tragedy in Meron; Significance of Yerushalayim; Election Day on a Chag?

YOM YERUSHALAYIM

**From Meron To Yerushalayim: Reconciling Tragedy with Celebration**  
**Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

May 6, 2021

It has been a week of tears and of numbness. Every time I read the list of 45 I become dizzy and faint, wincing in disbelief. Too many names to remember and too many tears to hold back. My eyes are fatigued from withholding tears and throat is soar from choking the pain. Standing with thousands at the funeral of Danny Morris z"l, we all looked to Heaven for answers we knew would not come. Our people have been gashed with sorrow and our nation throbs with grief. At this point additional words are pointless.

Life sometimes moves quickly, and this upcoming Yom Yerushalayim we will relive the great miracles of the six-day war and of our triumphant return to Yerushalayim. We will abruptly transition from suffering to national joy. These two experiences feel so antithetical but life is complex and often demands that we merge sadness and joy. Can we fuse these two adverse experiences? As the intense grieving for the Meron tragedy subsides, how can we merge this disaster with the celebration of Yom Yerushalayim? Here are three recommendations:

1. Rendezvous with Holiness

For a Jew, not all locations are created equal. The land of Israel possesses unique sanctity and, within Israel, Yerushalayim and the Mikdash are vested with even greater holiness. Our three Avot ascended this mountain and ever since, Jews have journeyed to these points of encounter with G-d. Our spiritual landscape isn't a flat grid; there are spiritual highlands!! Exile altered all that. We were dislocated from holy sites and, sadly, most of these locations were vacated of their formal holiness. For thousands of years,

most Jews were severed from these summits of encountering G-d. For many, Torah study and

prayer were sufficient. The Talmud (Tamid 32) announces that G-d's presence visits anyone studying Torah. Similarly, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 26) equates prayer on Rosh Hahsanah to entering the inner sanctum of the Mikdash. Torah study and prayer thrust us into a different realm- a location-independent zone standing in the presence of G-d. For some however, these spiritual "mindspaces" are not sufficient. Many continue to yearn to stand in "actual" land spaces which could serve as bridges to a higher spiritual realm of connectedness. Grave-sites of tzadikim and the righteous provide these platforms. Platforms for prayer, spirituality, hope and connection. Full disclaimer: I don't visit Rebbi Shimon's grave on Lag Ba'omer. In general, visiting graves isn't part of my tradition. I visit graves of close relatives or personal Rabonim and I time my visit to the guidelines of Shulchan Oruch – around Yomim Noraim. When I do visit, I visit alone so that my experience is private and, for me, more profound. Despite this, I encourage and support those who are drawn to Meron and to the spiritual connection which it bridges.

That does the experience of visiting graves share in common with 1967?

When the state was founded in 1948 we witnessed miracles and tasted national triumph. However, lost amidst the euphoria, was the sorrow of being expelled from our historical holy sites. During the Holocaust it appeared as if G-d had turned His attention away from Jews in Europe; just a few years later Jews in Israel were expelled from His private quarters. We could no longer access the Kotel, the grave of Rachel or Me'arat Hamachpeilah. It is difficult, in historical hindsight, to fully appreciate the frustration of being evicted for those 19 intervening years.

In 1967 we returned to these holy wards. We were invited back to the land of Tanach, back to the graves of our ancestors and back to the wall of history. Inviting us back to His home, G-d also invited us back into history and back into redemption. The 1967 invitation convinced us that we were returning to an earlier period in our history when we actively stood before G-d in holy sites. The Meron pilgrims were expressing a longing we all feel – to climb the mountain and encounter G-d. Tragically so many lost their lives fulfilling this common longing.

My Rebbe, HaRav Yehuda Amital was once questioned about the historical accuracy of Kever Rachel. Evidence has emerged that Rachel may not even be buried there, perhaps diminishing the value of prayers at this site. Rav Amital responded that even if Rachel isn't buried at this site, the tears shed by Jews throughout history have invested this tomb with historical sanctity. I believe the same about Meron. Many connect with the kabbalistic lore of this mountain. Even for those who don't actively live Kabbalah, Jewish tears throughout the centuries have consecrated this mountain. Sadly, there is a new river of tears streaming through this mountain. That river has 45 streams.

2. Thronging

The day on which Torah was delivered is nicknamed as the day of "gathering" since millions amassed beneath the mountain and spoke directly with G-d. The Sinai gatherings were re-dramatized every seven years during the Hakhel ceremony. Likewise, throngs of Jewish pilgrims flocked to Yerushalayim during each chag. Our tragic exile dispersed Jews around the globe and suspended these gatherings. The Talmud (Berachot 58) mandates that a blessing be recited when witnessing a Sinai-sized crowd of 600,000 Jews. For two thousand years Jews must have chuckled at this prospect- never imaging gatherings which could approach that size.

Finally, back in our homeland, our generation has, once again, experienced mass gatherings. The experience of thronging together with large crowds of Jews has returned to our lives. Sometimes we gather to mourn, other times to celebrate. One day soon, we will assemble upon Yerushalayim to jointly celebrate three national holidays. Throngs of Jews in Israel is one step toward Messianic redemption.

One of the first mass gatherings in the modern state occurred a week after the victory in 1967. For a week, teams worked feverishly to remove the rubble and pave the plaza-entrance to the Kotel. Finally, on Shavuot, Jews were invited back and over 200,000 streamed to the wall of Jewish dreams which had been off-limits for 19 dark years. This may have been the largest mass crowd of Jews in thousands of years!

The pilgrimage to Meron is part of this historical revival. Masses of Jews standing shoulder to shoulder searching for connection and spirituality was unimaginable outside our homeland. Sadly, the existing infrastructure in Meron wasn't able to support this crowd and horror ensued. We all hope to continue mass Jewish gatherings under safer conditions and, one day, we will gather, at the end of time, along with all of humanity to celebrate the conclusion of history. It is so sad that those who gathered at Meron had their lives cut so short.

### 3. A City of Unity

The Talmud (Yerushalmi, Chagiga 3) famously portrays Yerushalayim as a "unifying city. The city was never allocated to a particular tribe and, as a public commons, was an instrument of national unity. Throughout our diaspora, Yerushalayim united Jews across the globe who all prayed in a common direction. Our return to Yerushalayim in 1967 was a signature moment of national unity. Secular and religious each sensed the "moment" of Jewish triumph and of national destiny. The national solidarity was unlike any unity which had been experienced until that point. Sadly, that unity has long since frayed. Israeli society and the broader Jewish world are both badly splintered along many "lines of division". Sadly, we haven't even preserved the unifying potential of the Kotel as we haven't been able to fully include all who are drawn by this historical magnet. What type of event will it take to unify our people? In theory, the devastating viral pandemic should have unified us but, instead, it fractured us. Sadly, a disaster of the magnitude of Meron seems to be the only event we can experience 'jointly'. If we can't cry together over the loss of innocent life, we share little in common.

Don't ruin this unity. In the upcoming days and weeks our mourning will abate and we will begin to unpack the causes of this tragedy.

Understandably, we will analyze logistics, event-management, ideology, culture and their respective roles in this unspeakable tragedy. This conversation is not only legitimate but extremely necessary on many levels. However, the conversation must be kept respectful, sensitive and constructive. Lives have been shattered and our conversation will be conducted in the shadow of death and tears. Positions should be asserted with intellectual humility and sincerity. If we convert the tragedy into a launching pad for scorn, rivalry and derision, we dishonor the memory of those who perished and we travel further away from the day we returned to Yerushalayim.

The words of this author reflect his/her own opinions and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Orthodox Union.

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from: **Rabbi Sacks** <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

#### **"We the People" (Behar-Bechukotai 5781)**

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah. In the final parsha of the book of Leviticus, in the midst of one of the most searing curses ever to have been uttered to a nation by way of warning, the Sages found a fleck of pure gold.*

Moses is describing a nation in flight from its enemies:

Just the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to running, and they will run scared as if running from a sword! They will fall even when no one is chasing them! They will stumble over each other as they would before a sword, even though no one is chasing them! You will have no power to stand before your enemies. (Lev. 26:36-37)

There is, on the face of it, nothing positive in this nightmare scenario. But the Sages said: "They will stumble over each other" – read this as 'stumble because of one another': this teaches that all Israelites are responsible for one another." [1]

This is an exceedingly strange passage. Why locate this principle here? Surely the whole Torah testifies to it. When Moses speaks about the reward for keeping the covenant, he does so collectively. There will be rain in its due season. You will have good harvests. And so on. The principle that Jews have collective responsibility, that their fate and destiny are interlinked – this could have been found in the Torah's blessings. Why search for it among its curses?

The answer is that there is nothing unique to Judaism in the idea that we are all implicated in one another's fate. That is true of the citizens of any nation. If the economy is booming, most people benefit. If there is law and order, if people are polite to one another and come to one another's aid, there is a general sense of well-being. Conversely, if there is a recession many people suffer. If a neighbourhood is scarred by crime, people are scared to walk the streets. We are social animals, and our horizons of possibility are shaped by the society and culture within which we live.

All of this applied to the Israelites so long as they were a nation in their own land. But what about when they suffered defeat and exile and were eventually scattered across the earth? They no longer had any of the conventional lineaments of a nation. They were not living in the same place. They did not share the same language of everyday life. While Rashi and his family were living in Christian northern Europe and speaking French, Maimonides was living in Muslim Egypt, speaking and writing Arabic. Nor did Jews share a fate. While those in northern Europe were suffering persecution and massacres during the Crusades, the Jews of Spain were enjoying their Golden Age. While the Jews of Spain were being expelled and compelled to wander round the world as refugees, the Jews of Poland were enjoying a rare sunlit moment of tolerance. In what sense therefore were they responsible for one another? What constituted them as a nation? How could they – as the author of Psalm 137 put it – sing God's song in a strange land? There are only two texts in the Torah that speak to this situation, namely the two sections of curses, one in our parsha, and the other in Deuteronomy in the parsha of Ki Tavo. Only these speak about a time when Israel is exiled and dispersed, scattered, as Moses later put it, "to the most distant lands under heaven." (Deut. 30:4) There are three major differences between the two curses, however. The passage in Leviticus is in the plural, that in Deuteronomy in the singular. The curses in Leviticus are the words of God; in Deuteronomy they are the words of Moses. And the curses in Deuteronomy do not end in hope. They conclude in a vision of unrelieved bleakness:

You will try to sell yourselves as slaves—both male and female—but no one will want to buy you. (Deut. 28:68)

Those in Leviticus end with a momentous hope:

But despite all that, when they are in enemy territory, I will not reject them or despise them to the point of totally destroying them, breaking my covenant with them by doing so, because I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with the first generation, the ones I brought out of Egypt's land in the sight of all the nations, in order to be their God; I am the Lord. (Lev. 26:44-45)

Even in their worst hours, according to Leviticus, the Jewish people will never be destroyed. Nor will God reject them. The covenant will still be in force and its terms still operative. This means that Jews will always be linked to one another by the same ties of mutual responsibility that they have in the land – for it was the covenant that formed them as a nation and bound them to one another even as it bound them to God. Therefore, even when falling over one another in flight from their enemies they will still be bound by mutual responsibility. They will still be a nation with a shared fate and destiny.

This is a rare and special idea, and it is the distinctive feature of the politics of covenant. Covenant became a major element in the politics of the West following the Reformation. It shaped political discourse in Switzerland, Holland, Scotland and England in the seventeenth century as the invention of printing and the spread of literacy made people familiar for the first time with the Hebrew Bible (the “Old Testament” as they called it). There they learned that tyrants are to be resisted, that immoral orders should not be obeyed, and that kings did not rule by divine right but only by the consent of the governed.

The same convictions were held by the Pilgrim Fathers as they set sail for America, but with one difference, that they did not disappear over time as they did in Europe. The result is that the United States is the only country today whose political discourse is framed by the idea of covenant.

Two textbook examples of this are Lyndon Baines Johnson’s Inaugural of 1965, and Barack Obama’s Second Inaugural of 2013. Both use the biblical device of significant repetition (always an odd number, three or five or seven). Johnson invokes the idea of covenant five times. Obama five times begins paragraphs with a key phrase of covenant politics – words never used by British politicians – namely, “We the people.”

In covenant societies it is the people as a whole who are responsible, under God, for the fate of the nation. As Johnson put it, “Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rest not upon one citizen but upon all citizens.”[2] In Obama’s words, “You and I, as citizens, have the power to set this country’s course.”[3] That is the essence of covenant: we are all in this together. There is no division of the nation into rulers and ruled. We are conjointly responsible, under the sovereignty of God, for one another.

This is not open-ended responsibility. There is nothing in Judaism like the tendentious and ultimately meaningless idea set out by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* of ‘absolute responsibility’: “The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man, being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders, he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being.”[4]

In Judaism we are responsible only for what we could have prevented but did not. This is how the Talmud puts it:

Whoever can forbid their household [to commit a sin] but does not, is seized for [the sins of] their household. [If they can forbid] their fellow citizens [but do not] they are seized for [the sins of] their fellow citizens. [If they can forbid] the whole world [but do not] they are seized for [the sins of] the whole world. (Shabbat 54b)

This remains a powerful idea and an unusual one. What made it unique to Judaism is that it applied to a people scattered throughout the world united only by the terms of the covenant our ancestors made with God at Mount Sinai. But it continues, as I have often argued, to drive American political discourse likewise even today. It tells us that we are all equal citizens in the republic of faith and that responsibility cannot be delegated away to governments or presidents but belongs inalienably to each of us. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.

That is what I mean by the strange, seemingly self-contradictory idea I have argued throughout this series of essays: that we are all called on to be leaders. One may fairly protest: if everyone is a leader, then no one is. If everyone leads, who is left to follow? The concept that resolves the contradiction is covenant.

Leadership is the acceptance of responsibility. Therefore if we are all responsible for one another, we are all called on to be leaders, each within our sphere of influence – be it within the family, the community, the organisation or a larger grouping still.

This can sometimes make an enormous difference. In late summer of 1999 I was in Pristina making a BBC television programme about the aftermath of the Kosovo campaign. I interviewed General Sir Michael Jackson, then head of the NATO forces. To my surprise, he thanked me for what “my people” had done. The Jewish community had taken charge of the city’s 23 primary schools. It was, he said, the most valuable contribution to the city’s welfare.

When 800,000 people have become refugees and then return home, the most reassuring sign that life has returned to normal is that the schools open on time. That, he said, we owe to the Jewish people.

Meeting the head of the Jewish community later that day, I asked him how many Jews were there currently living in Pristina. His answer? Eleven. The story, as I later uncovered it, was this. In the early days of the conflict, Israel had, along with other international aid agencies, sent a field medical team to work with the Kosovan Albanian refugees. They noticed that while other agencies were concentrating on the adults, there was no one working with the children. Traumatized by the conflict and far from home, the children were lost and unfocused with no systems of support in place to help them. The team phoned back to Israel and asked for young volunteers. Every youth movement in Israel, from the most secular to the most religious, immediately formed volunteer teams of youth leaders, sent out to Kosovo for two-week intervals. They worked with the children, organising summer camps, sports competitions, drama and music events and whatever else they could think of to make their temporary exile less traumatic. The Kosovo Albanians were Muslims, and for many of the Israeli youth workers it was their first contact and friendship with children of another faith.

Their effort won high praise from UNICEF, the United Nations’ children’s organisation. It was in the wake of this that “the Jewish people” – Israel, the American-based “Joint” and other Jewish agencies – were asked to supervise the return to normality of the school system in Pristina.

That episode taught me the power of chessed, acts of kindness when extended across the borders of faith. It also showed the practical difference collective responsibility makes to the scope of the Jewish deed. World Jewry is small, but the invisible strands of mutual responsibility mean that even the smallest Jewish community can turn to the Jewish people worldwide for help, and they can achieve things that would be exceptional for a nation many times its size.

When the Jewish people join hands in collective responsibility, they become a formidable force for good.

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subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha

**By Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Parshas Behar**

**Cheating is Forbidden -- Honesty is the Best Policy as Well**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:

#1160 – The Mahram of Padua, The Ramo, and l’Havdil the Pope. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Behar contains the Torah’s prohibition against cheating: “When you make a sale to your fellow or when you buy from the hand of your fellow, do not victimize one another (Al tonu ish es achiv).” [Vayikra 25:14] Rashi explains that “Al To’nu” refers to deception regarding monetary matters.

It is not a coincidence that this prohibition against cheating immediately follows the section of the Sabbatical year requirements. If there is one lesson that emerges from the parsha of Shemittah, it is that the Ribono shel Olam provides man with his livelihood needs. In the seventh year, farmers (and in Biblical times the economy was almost totally agrarian) were asked to stop working for an entire year, and they were somehow supposed to survive.

How can they do that?

The answer is that the Ribono shel Olam promises that He will take care of them. The takeaway lesson of the parsha of Shmittah is that the Almighty provides our parnassa, and in the seventh year a person can in fact not work, not plant, not harvest, and yet survive – and according to the Torah he will do even more than survive!

If we believed that with all our hearts and souls, we would never be tempted to cheat. Why do we cheat? We cheat so that we can make a couple of extra dollars. However, if we fully internalized the idea that a person's income is determined by the Almighty each Rosh HaShannah, and whatever we are destined to get will come our way and not a penny more, we would have no reason to cheat and try to deceitfully make those couple of extra dollars! This idea is sometimes very hard for people to accept in practice.

I read a very interesting story about Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l. As we have mentioned countless times, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky exemplified and personified what it means to be an honest person. It is no coincidence that he named his sefer on Chumash Emes L'Yaakov. This is what he preached, and this is what he practiced.

One of Rav Yaakov's sons was Rav Noson Kamenetsky. Rav Noson wanted to trace his family's roots and went to visit the little Litvishe European town in which Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky had been the Rav. While he was there, he discovered a very interesting historical fact: Even though much of Lithuanian Jewry was wiped out during the Shoah, to a large extent, the Jews of that particular city survived the war and escaped the Nazi Holocaust.

Rav Noson Kamenetsky went to the mayor of the town and asked him if he could explain how the Jews of this town were successful in saving their lives. The mayor said, "I can tell you exactly why the Jews escaped." He said that before the war, the fellow who eventually became the mayor was the postmaster of the town. He would have a test for the clergy members of that town – both Jews and non-Jews. The test was that when they would come in to buy postage, he would purposely give them more change than they deserved, and he would see whether they would return the money or not. That was his acid test of what type of people he was dealing with.

He did this three times with Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky. Each time he gave Rav Yaakov more money than he was entitled to in change, Rav Yaakov would always return the money. This postmaster was so impressed with Rav Yaakov, who was the head of the Jewish community, that when years later he was mayor of the town – any time he became aware of a German action which would have wiped out the Jews, he would notify the Jews and they would go hide in the forest or wherever, and that is how the Jews of the city were saved.

When Rav Noson Kamenetsky returned to America from his trip to Europe, he asked his father if he had any recollection of the post office, if he remembered the postmaster, and if he recalled these incidents. Rav Yaakov said that he did not remember the particular story about being tested, but all he remembered was that the postmaster in town did not know how to count. The Strength of the Shomer Shmita

There is pasuk in Tehillim [103:20] "Bless Hashem, O His angels; the mighty men who do His bidding, to obey the voice of His word." Basically, Dovid HaMelech invokes a prayer that the people who do the will of G-d should be blessed.

The Medrash comments: Who are these "mighty men" who obey the Word of the Ribono shel Olam? Rav Yitzchak states: The pasuk is speaking about those individuals who observe the laws of the Shemita. Normally a person will do a mitzvah for a day, a week, or a month. But the Sabbatical year continues for an entire twelve-month agricultural cycle, during which you cannot as much as prune your tree! This is a tremendous nisayon (test) and it is ongoing. It is not a passing test that lasts a day or a week. It lasts a year! The farmer sees his field—his entire source of income—lie fallow for a whole year and he keeps quiet! Is there a greater "mighty person" than this? However, we must ask a question: When the Torah commands the Jewish people to keep Shemita, it says that in the year before the Shemita, they will be blessed with a bounty of a crop, and their fields will yield double their normal produce. So, let us say that the after-expense profit of a farmer is normally \$100,000 per year. In the sixth year of the Shemita cycle he suddenly earns \$200,000. Therefore, he is set for the next two years! What then is the great "strength" alluded to by the pasuk in Tehillim? He is getting

his payment "up front"! He has his money in the bank – so where is his nisayon?

Rav Ahaon Kotler explained – someone who asks this question does not understand human nature. If a fellow in the sixth year makes \$200,000, he says to himself, if I could only plant in the seventh year, imagine how much income I would have then! I am not forgoing just \$100,000—perhaps I am forgoing \$200,000 or more! That is the nature of human beings.

This is how life works. Say you bought Apple stock at \$100 a share. Apple then goes up to \$300. You don't sell. Apple goes up to \$600. You don't sell. Why don't you sell? Because Apple is going to go higher. Apple goes up to \$700. "Ahh! You see what a Chochoch I am? I did not sell!" Now Apple falls back down to \$400. You see what a shotech you are! But why didn't you sell at the peak? It's because you always expect to make more money and more money.

That is what this farmer is thinking. Yes, I had a banner crop in the sixth year. I could have done even better in the seventh year! To walk away from that natural aspiration and expectation qualifies one as a Giborei Koach.

That takes a strong person!

Ribis Is Not Just Another Lav

Parshas Behar contains the prohibition of charging another Jew interest. The Medrash records a scary result of engaging in this prohibition: "See how great the punishment is for one who lends with interest: He will not rise up at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead."

Ribis is a lav—a negative commandment—one of 365 such "Thou Shall Not" commandments in the Torah. This is not a lav that is punished by Kares (spiritual excision); it is not a lav that is punished by misah b'dei Shamayim (Death at the Hands of Heaven); it is not a capital offense at all. It is simply a "regular negative commandment." I am not belittling that, but it is just a lav. Nowhere are we told that for wearing clothes made out of wool and linen (shatnez) that we will not get up at the time of Techiyas HaMeisim. Nowhere are we told that for eating pork (chazir) we will not get up at the time of Techiyas HaMeisim. Why is Ribis so severe that the Medrash warns that for violating this prohibition, a person forfeits his chance for resurrection? Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld once gave an explanation for this: We know that there is a mitzvah called Shiluach HaKen (the prohibition of taking a mother bird together with her chicks from their nest). A person must first send away the mother bird and only then take the eggs. The rationale behind this mitzvah, according to many commentaries, is the following: Normally, a person can never catch a bird. (When I was a little boy, they told me that if you put salt on the tail of a bird, you can catch it. I tried this experiment. In theory it might work, but it is impossible to put salt on the tail of the bird! The bird flies away!)

So, what kind of prohibition is this to not take a mother bird? Mother birds are not catchable! The answer is that in this case, it is possible to catch the mother, because the mother bird does not want to abandon her nest. She is vulnerable when sitting on top of her chicks. The Torah teaches: Do not take advantage of someone's vulnerability, because if not for her mercy on her chicks she would fly the coop—literally and figuratively.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld explained that it is the same when a person comes to ask to borrow money. Generally speaking, the person needs the money badly. He will do anything to get it. "I need the money. If not, my business will collapse, the bank will take away my house, my property will be foreclosed. I need the money!" The natural response of a man with capital to such a plea might be, "Okay, I'll lend you the money, but I want 13%" "Thirteen percent!?" "Listen, do you want the money or don't you?"

The Torah does not want us to take advantage of vulnerable people. When a person is down and out, the Torah frowns upon taking advantage of his desperation. The prohibition of Ribis is an expression of the Torah's strong displeasure with such behavior. Therefore, the Torah is far stricter by the prohibition of charging interest than it is by other issurim.

Bechukosai's Blessings Are Conditional; Kohanim's Blessings Are Unconditional



When we recite the kedusha and the words of קדוש קדוש קדוש, we elevate our bodies. Why? The answer is that order to acquire holiness and become sacred, one must be willing to sacrifice some earthliness and materialism. The same applies to achdus. Physical objects separate and blind us from seeing the source of all neshamos to which we all belong and nurture from. Physicality creates jealousy, strictness הקפדות, pettiness, animosity, greediness, hatred, resentment, anger selfishness etc. The Pri Tzadik writes (Kedoshim 5)

שכתב בזוהר הקדוש דהנשמה היא דנקראת אדם והגוף נקרא בשר אדם והנשמה טרם התלבשה בגוף היתה נקיה וטהורה והגוף מושכה להמדת עולם הזה

The Zohar writes that the neshama is called אדם and the body is called בשר אדם. The neshama before it was clothed in the body it was pure, and it is the body which schlepps it to earthly pleasures.

One of the mitzvos that helps a person to seek less earthliness is Shemitta. The Torah commands that six years you could work the land but on the seventh it must be a Shabbos to Hashem. During this year the landowner must renounce his ownership to these properties and it becomes ownerless for everyone to use it even male and female slaves. You are no longer the proprietor and everyone else possesses equal rights. The Shemitta emphasizes that Hashem is the real proprietor on your property from beginning to end. Interesting that the words one and own really should be pronounced the same. There is no letter v before the word one only the letter o. This says that the only owner of everything in the universe is the power called ONE אהד ה'.

This awareness frees the neshama from the clutches of the body and its gravity to earthliness. Then neshama during Shemitta regains its reign over the body and the Yid gets a refresher course in what true achdus means which is portrayed by the title אדם. Yovel brings a deepening of this awareness since your land that you owned and worked on for years must be returned to the original owner way back then.

There is a story (I cannot verify its truth) of two close brothers who came before a Rav arguing the issue of ownership of a particular property after their father passed away. No one could bring proof that it was him whom the father told it was his ירושה. So the Rav said please take me to the land and I will ask it who is the rightful owner. They both showed him the property and he bent down and put his ear to the earth as if it was telling him something. They stood there astonished because they never saw anything like this before. As he rose he told them that the earth informed him that you both belong to it. What he meant to convey was that here we have a situation where no one has proof and yet because of this earthliness that you both possess you are allowing this machlokes to separate your two families forever and for generations to come when you won't even be here. My advice to you is to split the land and don't split your brotherhood.

This is why Shemitta in particular is connected to Har Sinai. It was the standing opposite Har Sinai when Am Yisrael attained the highest level of achdus אהד בלב אהד. They reached such a level of spirituality that their bodies were like neshamos. They experienced being bonded to the source neshamah above. This learning experience of achdus is repeated every seven years during the Shemitta.

Chazal (Baba Metziah 114b) tell us אתם קרויים אדם. You Yisrael are called אדם כי ימות באהל אדם. This derasha is applied to the passuk באהל (Bamidbar 19,14) that that if a person enters a tent where there is a corpse he becomes tamei. באהל applies only to Yidden since the Torah used here the word אדם to exclude goyim. What is so special about this title אדם? The meforshim explain that there are four words in Lashon Hakodesh which express the term man: איש גבר אנוש אדם. They all possess a plural form except the term אדם which possesses the singular form. Only Am Yisrael merits this reality because we all originate from the same one neshama.

I am always amazed that with all the friction that existed and exists today between the different sects in Klal Yisrael, when it comes to Lag B'omer there is an unbelievable achdus between everyone, young and old, Chassidish, Litvish, Mizrachi, Sefardim, Ashkanzim, Dati Leumi,

Chareidim, Baalei Teshuvah etc. On this day no one looks at the type of clothing, shoes, sneakers, payos, dialect, yarmulke, hat or color of skin. Why is that? I humbly think because Rav Shimon revealed the סוד התורה, the deep secrets of the Torah, those which are concealed under many layers. On his yartzzeit when he revealed these inner secrets, we too can merit to take an inner look and peek behind those layers of every Yid, to feel beyond the external surface, connect to our brethren's inner neshama, and to draw light from the place where all Yidden are one. On Lag B'omer everyone is שחורה black and beautiful. On the outside I might look in your eyes as an undesirable which doesn't fit into your mold because of my struggling, but you should recognize that inside in my core I am as beautiful as you.

In the shir of יהוא בר בעשור נעשה אדם נאמר בעבורך "Let us make man" was said because of You. Why do we attach the creation of אדם to Rav Shimon? According to above, אדם is the title given to highest level of achdus. The sefarim tell us that Adam Harishon contained all the neshamos of Am Yisrael in his body. Each neshama was situated in a different part of his body but they were nevertheless all bonded as one. For example, if one accidentally hit his hand with the other one, he doesn't think of reacting negatively to his hand that hit since it is the same body and why would he hurt himself? The neshamos in Adam Harishon were in full achdus mode even inside his body. This is how it was meant to be even with different bodies כמוך ואהבת לרעך.

Until we had the revelation of the secrets of the Torah, Klal Yisrael as a whole did not merit to see, or even realize the reality of this secret that lies in every Yid. There was a shortcoming in the shelaimus of this achdus until Rabbe Shimon and the revelations of the סודי התורה. On his yartzzeit when he revealed these secrets, that is the day that we are infused with his lenses and we can glean from this achdus even though our bodies are separated. נעשה אדם. The manner in which Adam Harishon was created with the achdus of all neshamos of Am Yisrael, was made possible for all Klal Yisrael on the day when Rabbe Shimon revealed the Zohar Hakadosh.

Lag B'omer is the day when title of אדם becomes prominent and available for everyone. But why does it leave so fast the day after? Every time when there is Lag B'omer of incredible insane achdus. Yet in contrast, the division between all the varying sects in Klal Yisrael gets increasingly worse as days and months pass which enlarges a kitrug against our title אדם. In the tragedy of this past Lag B'omer of which we are still reeling from, an exact number of 45 neshamos died. This maybe points to the gematriah of אדם. Rabbe Shimon brings to us every year the awareness to our מעלה of achdus נעשה אדם נאמר בעבורך, and yet we find ourselves losing grip on this unique crown day by day.

It took 45 neshamos gematriah אדם to bring this message home. How many incredible stories and displays of achdus, mesiras nefesh, chesed, tzedakah emerged from the moment that the tragedy began until today. A Talmid told me a story that I can't get out of my head. One Yid ztl, as he was already lying on top of others and being trampled by more who were falling, could be heard saying over and over again "I am mocheil everyone for stepping and falling on top of me". Only a Yid could be thinking and talking this way during his last breaths of life. I am not makpid!!!! ישראל ומי כעמך ישראל.

Unfortunately tragedy unites. By happening on Lag B'omer in the height of the simcha, we now carry this achdus of Lag B'omer further than usual, into days when we would have normally fallen back into the old פירוד behavior. The passuk mentioned above alludes to this tragedy. זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל. This is the Torah – אדם. It was given to Yisrael who are called אדם the title of achdus אהד בלב אהד. Every Yid corresponds to a letter or part of a letter in the Torah. If it is missing, the Torah is passul. If one י"ו despises another Yid and would rather get rid of him, it is tantamount to erasing that letter or part of it. The passuk continues באהל כי ימות אדם that in order to bring Klal Yisrael back on the track of achdus, and fight against the kitrug, אדם that 45 neshamos ימות will die in the Ohel of Rabbe Shimon. אהל means light as it says in (Iyuv 29,3) בהלו נרו על ראשי. At the Ohel of Rabbe Shimon where it is known that on Lag B'omer for minhag Yisrael is to be bountiful with displays of fires.

Please don't stop what you are doing for the deceased and for their families. Everyone's heart is broken and saddened yet at the same time whole and united with Klal Yisrael. Hashem is sending us a window of tikkun during these remaining days of sefirah leading up to Matan Torah where we once stood with the acdus of אחד בלב אחד. כאיש אחד בלב אחד. How can we celebrate the Yom Tov of Matan Torah if we have letters or parts of letters missing in the Torah. Hashem is giving us today the opportunity of experiencing the original Matan Torah אחד בלב אחד. כאיש אחד בלב אחד. Give the niftarim z"l the zechus that they, by being the sacrifices, have once in for all permanently united us to be אחד במדבר ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ and may we merit to the fulfillment of the passuk (Yechezkail 34,31) ואתן צאני צאן מרעייתי אדם אתם אני אלהיכם  
- Rav Brazil Gut Shabbos

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**Parshas Behar-Bechukosai**

**Rav Yochanan Zweig**

Mi Field Es Su Field

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai, saying... (25:1)

Parshas Behar begins with an in depth discussion of the laws of shemittah. Rashi (ad loc) famously asks: Why is the discussion of the laws of shemittah juxtaposed with "Mount Sinai"? In other words, why are the laws of shemittah specifically attributed to being given on Mount Sinai when all the other mitzvos were also given at Mount Sinai?

Rashi answers that it is to teach us that just as shemittah was taught at Mount Sinai, with all of its general rules and specific rules, so too all the mitzvos were given at Mount Sinai with their accompanying general and specific rules. Yet Rashi does not explain why shemittah is chosen as the representative example of this concept. Why was shemittah picked as the specific mitzvah to teach us what was taught at Mount Sinai?

When the Torah relates the events leading up to Kabolat HaTorah, Rashi comments on the verse "and there Yisroel camped before the mountain" (Shemos 19:2). Rashi explains that a remarkable change had come over the Jewish people; "It was like a single man with a single purpose."

There are two methods in which groups of people can come together. The first way is when a disparate set of personalities unite because they have a singular purpose; this is how Rashi describes Pharaoh rallying his Egyptian nation to chase down the Jewish people who were escaping Egypt – "a single purpose, a single man" (Shemos 14:10).

The second way is when people come together and unite as individuals and merge their identities into "a one," and afterwards find a common purpose to fulfill the desires of the merged identity. This second method is what happened at Mount Sinai. Rashi (ad loc) explains that the encampment at Mount Sinai was without any fighting or bickering. In a similar fashion, a person's left hand doesn't feel imposed upon by the right hand nor is the right hand jealous if the left hand is being massaged, because they both serve the greater "whole." So too, at Mount Sinai Bnei Yisroel achieved a oneness that allowed them to live together in absolute harmony. This is how Bnei Yisroel received the Torah.

This kind of oneness applies to the family unit as well. Upon entering your parents' home, you feel perfectly comfortable going into their fridge or taking food from their pantry. However, the biggest challenge of keeping the mitzvah of shemittah is that of letting others come into one's field and take whatever they desire. The first Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parsha describes the violators of shemittah (those who profited by selling the fruits in their field instead of letting whomever wanted to enter their field and collect it for free) as having a "begrudging eye." Meaning, instead of feeling that we are all one big family and that we need to take care of each other, each landowner felt imposed upon by other Jews. We were NOT a united whole. Shemittah is the one mitzvah where we need the unity that we

attained at Mount Sinai. That is why it is the representative mitzvah chosen to convey what happened at Mount Sinai.

Unfortunately, this "begrudging eye" was an epidemic of epic proportions. Rashi, in the second half of this week's double parsha (26:35), makes the calculation that NOT A SINGLE SHEMITTAH was observed once the Jews entered Eretz Yisroel. In fact, our first exile, after the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdosh, lasted for seventy years – exactly one year for every shemittah that Bnei Yisroel failed to keep. Of course our current exile, which led to the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdosh, was because of sinas chinom – baseless hatred between Jews.

Nevertheless, shemittah is the representative mitzvah for all that ails the Jewish people because it represents the loss of the lesson that we learned on Mount Sinai. The Torah is teaching us that the only way to ever recover from our painful and way-too-long diaspora is to start treating all Jews as family and begin caring and looking out for each other. When we recognize that we are all cells of a single body there will be no more fighting or disagreements and this will bring the ultimate redemption.

Here and There

If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them... (26:3)

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the possuk would first list "statutes" (chukim in Hebrew) and then use the catch-all phrase of "commandments" (mitzvos in Hebrew) in the second half of the possuk. After all, the Torah's statutes are all included in the commandments of the Torah; so why mention statutes at all? Rashi answers that the word "chukim" here refers to the concept of being immersed in Torah study. That is, each person has an obligation to become seriously involved with the study of Torah.

Targum Yonason Ben Uziel (ad loc) is seemingly bothered by the same question, but he takes a different approach: "chukim" refers to those laws that are given without a discernible (or an accompanying) reason for doing them, the way a chok is commonly understood, whereas the word "mitzvos" refers here to dinnim (laws of social justice). But Targum Yonason's understanding of the word mitzvos seems a bit problematic, after all the word mitzvos is all encompassing as there are many types of mitzvos; why should it be limited to the laws of social justice?

The Mishna in Peah (1:1) reads: "... These are things the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the principal remains for him in the World to Come: Honoring one's father and mother, acts of kindness, and bringing peace between a man and his fellow. But the study of Torah is equal to them all."

Maimonides, in his commentary to this Mishnah, states a very interesting principal of how a person is rewarded for doing the mitzvos: "There are two types of mitzvos; 1) those mitzvos that are between an individual and Hashem such as tefillin and tzitzis, observance of Shabbos, and the prohibition against idol worship, and 2) those that are between an individual and his fellow man, such as the prohibition against stealing and otherwise hurting another, the obligation to love others, and honoring one's parents."

Maimonides continues: "Those mitzvos that are between man and Hashem are rewarded in the next world. Mitzvos that are between an individual and his fellow man are rewarded both in this world and in the next." Maimonides is explaining a basic principal of reward; mitzvos as they relate to the development of the human soul, in general, are an eternal concept. Therefore, their proper reward is in the next (eternal) world. But there are also mitzvos that have substantive benefits to others in this world. These mitzvos are also rewarded in the next world, but because they have positive effects in this world, the "interest" on the "principal" is paid to the individual in this world as well. This is what the Mishna means by the "fruit" is enjoyed in this world but the principal remains for the World to Come.

This week's parsha is introducing all the benefits in this world of keeping the mitzvos. The reason Targum Yonason Ben Uziel translates mitzvos as the commandments related to social justice is because he agrees with

Maimonides that those are the only mitzvos that are rewarded in this world as well as the next.

Fascinatingly, the Mishna equates the study of Torah to all the mitzvos. In other words, there are tangible benefits to this world through the study of Torah. Perhaps this is what the Gemara (Brachos 64a) means when it says “Torah scholars increase peace in the world.” The Gemara in brachos ends with the statement explaining that those scholars are builders of the world and increase the peace within it. This might also explain why Rashi understands “Bechukosai” to mean immersion in Torah study.

Did You Know...

This week’s parsha contains many important themes that were often repeated in the Jewish people’s history. Bechukosai opens with a bracha, a very generally-termed promise of the good things that will happen if we do what we are supposed to do (studying Torah and keeping certain mitzvos). Then, it tells of the bone-chilling tochacha, the five stage admonition that tells us in very specific and certain terms what will happen to us if we fail to earn the bracha, each more severe than the last.

Finally, we learn of Hashem’s promise to preserve us, even when we are at our lowest.

The Mishnah, in Megillah 31a, relates that we are to read the tochacha on fast days (not our custom) and that one may not divide the tochacha (according to Rashi referring to that of Parshas Bechukosai) into more than one aliyah. Interestingly, the halacha not to break up the tochacha only applies to the one in Vayikra, not to the tochacha in Devarim. This is also taught in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 428:6). The Gemara there gives two reasons for this rule. One is based on Mishlei 3:11, “My son, don’t be disgusted with Hashem’s mussar.” Rashi explains that if we divide the tochacha, it will appear as if we stopped in the middle because the person receiving the first aliyah was disgusted with it.

The second reason is offered by Reish Lakish, who explains that one should not recite a bracha on punishments. Therefore, we begin the aliyah a few posukim before the tochacha and don’t stop reading until a few posukim after it is completed. If we would separate it, the second aliyah would invariably have to recite a bracha on punishments.

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subject: Perceptions - Bigger Picture

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

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Behar

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[Friday Night](#)

ON ONE HAND I’d rather not talk about it, especially so soon after it happened. I do not know all the facts, nor can we know all of them. Our insatiable need for meaning, especially when it comes to tragedy, compels us to look for it everywhere we can. But without prophecy, who can really know why God does what He does, and why one person is saved when another is not?

On the other hand, it doesn’t seem right not to say something, and act as if it is business as usual when it clearly is not. It is like what happened when Nadav and Avihu died, when the Jewish people went from the heights of spiritual celebration to the depths of tragic mourning. The video clip taken right before the catastrophe in Meron shows an area packed with Jews feeling tremendous achdus and singing heartfully for the coming of Moshiach. It makes this even more painful.

Some would argue that this was an accident waiting to happen, that the potential for it to occur has been there every year. The safety conditions were

not great, especially during the time of Corona and at a time that mutations are making rounds. It’s as if the miracle simply ran out.

The Gemara says that during the years of Rebi Elazar ben Shimon’s suffering, no one died prematurely (Bava Metzia 85a). But how does the Talmud even know this, when it says that one’s day of death is a secret not shared with man (Shabbos 153a)? It also says that Moshe died earlier than he should have though he lived exactly 120 years, something that was decreed back in Noach’s time (Sha’ar Hapesukim, Noach).

In Sha’ar Hagilgulim it says that people die “young” because their soul has finished its rectification for that lifetime. Since it cannot get its next level without first dying and reincarnating, they are taken “early” for their own benefit, so they can get on with their overall tikun.

But their family does not know this. As far as parents are concerned, their child is destined to live a full lifetime, to grow up, mature, marry, and have a family of their own. We always worry about the safety of our loved ones, but do not anticipate those concerns coming true. Certainly not when those loved ones go to a Lag B’omer gathering at the kever of one of the greatest tzaddikim to have ever lived, on his very yahrzeit...on a day that also marks the time Rebi Akiva’s talmidim stopped dying. May God comfort all of them.

I once spoke to someone who told me that he adds to the list of his daily prayers that when his time comes, God should take him while in the middle of doing a mitzvah. He said that he hoped it would be while in the middle of the Shemonah Esrai, while praying with a lot intention, and ideally, during the blessing that praises God. One of his greatest fears is not dying, but breathing his final breath while doing something meaningless.

Even the evil Bilaam came to appreciate this idea, with the help of prophecy, saying:

“May my soul die the death of the upright and let my end be like his.”

(Bamidbar 23:110)

Maybe the miracle simply ran out. Or maybe God has something else in mind yet to unfold, and it just cost us the lives of these elevated 45 souls. “Eretz Yisroel,” it has been said, “was built on the ashes of the Holocaust.” There will be discussions about safety. There will be finger pointing to distribute the blame. There will be criticism about the behavior of those involved directly and indirectly. But how many people will rise above all of it, and accept that the cheshbonos of God are beyond us?

Shabbos Day

THE SECOND HALF of this week’s reading is Parshas Bechukosai with its blessings for obedience and its 49 curses for disobedience. The Talmud teaches that God works middah-k’neged-middah, measure-for-measure (Sanhedrin 90a). A Torah Jew is raised with the idea that getting good usually means we have done good, and getting bad usually means that we have acted badly.

Hester panim, when God hides His face from us, does not mean that the rule changes, as Rashi explains. It just means that we won’t be able to see how the “measure” we received was in response to the “measure” that we did. But as the Talmud says, God is not a vatran, meaning He never usually ignores the thing we do right or wrong. If He does, that person is in worse shape than the one getting punished.

So when 45 people die “tragically,” many naturally assume that someone is being punished for something. Nadav and Avihu may have been greater than Moshe and Aharon, but the Talmud cites at least three reasons why they warranted death. As the Talmud states, God deals with righteous people to a hairsbreadth (Bava Kamma 50a), making insignificant sins to us reprehensible sins to God.

Chizkiah Hamelech almost died in this world and the next one because he held off having children (Brochos 10a). And it wasn’t as if he didn’t want to have children so he could travel lighter, like many today. He had learned through prophecy that his son would turn the nation to idol worship, and had denied himself the mitzvah and pleasure of fathering children to save the nation.

And yet God's response was not only to cut Chizkiah—the man who was almost Moshiach (Sanhedrin 94a) — down in this world, but to cut him off from the next world as well! After being told that he was wrong to try and second-guess God by Yeshaya Hanavi, he did marry and fathered Menashe who, as prophesied, turned the nation to idol worship.

Aharon had it right. After his two sons died before his very eyes, and though Moshe consoled him by speaking highly of them, Aharon chose silence as his response. Yes, his sons had erred gravely, but he too had made the mistake of being involved with the golden calf, even though he had done it for all the right reasons. In fact, he may have known that all four of his sons were supposed to have died, and would have had it not been for the prayer of Moshe.

The bottom line? There were a bunch of straws on the camel's back, and who knows which one broke it? And when you factor in concepts like "alilus" and similar ideas that emphasize the hidden and mysterious ways of God, is there any better response than silence?

The blessings and the curses teach us that God takes note of and cares about what we do, so we should as well. But by no means do they open a clear view of God's reactions to the actions of man. The only clear thing we can count on with complete faith is that everything God does is just and good (Brochos 61b). Not because we believe blindly, but because God made a point of telling us, and that He showed us that this is true (Devarim 4:35). What happened in Meron on Lag B'omer, like every last thing in history, was set in motion at Ma'aseh Bereishis. Forty-five people were meant to die as they did. And God, being above time, even knew which 45 people specifically would die that day, at the precise moment they did. Not knowing this, and not even suspecting it would happen, we can only experience shock and great sadness. We are forced to call upon levels of emunah we haven't had to for some time now, especially the families and friends directly affected.

Seudas Shlishis

THE OTHER THING people forget to do is consider the "Big Picture." Life is so involving, so incredibly distracting, that we lose sight of the overall plan for Creation. This year is 5781. The Roman Exile began around 3698, over 2,000 years ago. To us that is ancient history, but to history it was the beginning of the fourth and final exile that we are now in the process of completing. We're as connected to that time period as we are to the one just before our own. It's all one history.

But why stop there? The Roman Exile is just one of the four hinted to in the second verse of the Creation story, the one about null and void, etc. What happened last week in Meron, and countless other places around the world we don't even know about, is rooted in that second verse about Creation.

But why stop there? Everything that goes wrong in history is rooted in what went "wrong" in history before our world even began. Even the Talmud talks about the "974 Generations" that "existed" prior to Creation, though it seems from the Talmud that they never really existed until after Creation (Shabbos 88b; Chagigah 13b).

Kabbalah says differently. According to Kabbalah, not only did the 974 Generations exist, but they were the first to actualize evil, making possible the sin of Adam Harishon and expulsion from Paradise. Expulsion made possible the world we now know in which God's Presence seems to fluctuate, confusion seems to reign, and all kinds of things go wrong in every generation since.

That's why, as the verse says at the beginning of Behar, God took us out of Egypt to bring us to Eretz Canaan, to be our God. From Day One history has been about Tikun Olam—World Rectification. And once Adam failed to do that, a story unto itself, then history just seemed to whip about like a hose pipe that has gotten out of hand. The question since then has not been, "Why did that bad thing happen?" but, "How come more bad things haven't happened?"

Melave Malkah

WHEN A WATER pipe bursts, it usually catches us by surprise. Since the walls of the pipe do such a good job at keeping the water inside contained, we forget about the pressure they "feel" moment-to-moment from the water inside. The walls say, "No, no, no, we must not let you go!" but the water says, "Yes, yes, yes, we will burst through you with much stress!"

History is the water in the pipe, crazily anxious to fix the world and bring Moshiach. It only knows exile and redemption, hates the former and yearns for the latter. If only we could say the same thing about ourselves.

But we can't. For reasons we cannot control, and for some that we can, we lose our focus. One of the most uplifting things about being exposed to Kabbalah, is how it helps a person to remain focused on the BIG Picture, on the need to end exile and actualize redemption, even while enjoying the niceties of the world. It reminds you about the pressure inside the "pipe," and makes you wary of potential "leaks."

I particularly found it moving to hear those at Meron singing in unison about awaiting Moshiach's arrival. It was one of those moments, one of those rare moments these days, when people were focused on the right thing. I didn't wonder how this could happen to them because of it, but it occurred to me that it specifically happened because of it. It was as if it made them fitting more than everyone else that day to become the missing sacrifice to greatly further the cause of redemption.

I'm not saying that this is what happened. Vayidom Aharon—and Aharon was quiet. I'm just wondering out loud, not because I need to find meaning in tragedy, because we have emunah for that, and "All that God does, He does for the good." I am just saying that big events such as this one do not belong to our narrow-minded subjective realities of everyday life. They belong to a much larger picture of history that most people do not even recognize...but really ought to.

May God comfort all the families and friends of those who have suffered, which should be all of us on some level, and may the loss signal the imminent arrival of Moshiach Tzidkaynu and Geulah Shlaimah.

Note: I have, with the help of God, just completed my translation of Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim of Sha'ar Hapesukim, and have decided to dedicate it in memory of those who died in Meron, especially since I finished on the same day. It was suggested to me that others might want to have a part in this, which they can do by using this link:

[https://www.paypal.com/donate?hosted\\_button\\_id=JNTUTEMPJ9QBU](https://www.paypal.com/donate?hosted_button_id=JNTUTEMPJ9QBU).

Money dedicated will be passed on to funds set for families directly affected by the tragedy.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

**Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

**Parshas Behar - No One to Hide From**

This week we read the Tochaha, a series of unimaginable curses that, with prescient clarity, foretold the horrors that were destined to befall our people in its wanderings in exile.

Listen to the tales of the inquisition, the cruelty of the crusades, and the horrors of the Holocaust. They reflect the Torah's stern admonitions of a wayward nation cast asunder from the land of its inheritance. It tells of the destruction of cities and the starvation their citizens. And one of those curses is about running from our enemies. "And you shall run the flight of one who flees from a sword, yet no one is pursuing you" (Leviticus 26:36). Simply explained, the Torah is telling us of the inherent fear that we shall have from the suffering that we have endured. We shall run at the slightest thought, even when there is no one in pursuit. Recently I saw a question: Is it not better to run from a figment of imagination than having to flee an actual pursuer? All in all, the imagination can not brandish a weapon!

As I listened to a survivor tell the tale of his survival and its aftermath, I wanted to offer a homiletic interpretation.

Al Feurstein is a retired businessman who volunteers in our yeshiva's financial office. But more than that, he is a Holocaust survivor who recently told the story of his ordeals of concentration camps and death marches that wracked his 16-year-old body but were unable to conquer his faith and conviction.

After enduring years of unspeakable horrors, the war ended and Al arrived in the United States. With the help of relatives, he resettled in Laurelton, New York. A few weeks after his arrival, he was invited to speak at his cousin's synagogue.

As he recounted his personal story and detailing the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis and their willing civilian executioners, mouths fell open in literal disbelief. News had reached the US of mass murders and barbarism, but never had these congregants heard in full detail how men born to human mothers performed such horrific crimes.

What happened after his talk back then was most depressing, compounding the terror of his experience a hundredfold. A few prominent members of the congregation approached him. "Al, my dear boy," they coddled him. "You couldn't have seen and experienced those tales you told! We are sure you are shell-shocked from the terrible hardships you endured. After all, it could not have been all that bad."

The worst curse may actually be when no one believes that the other calamities happened. Perhaps that is also included in the curse "no one shall pursue you."

A great Rosh Yeshiva was complaining bitterly about not feeling well. Some colleagues did not take him seriously at first, and humored him by saying that the pains were more in his mind than in his body. Before those pains were actually diagnosed as the disease that eventually claimed his life, he lamented: "The Talmud in Bava Basra (15a) debates the historical timeframe of the story of Iyov (Job). Some say he lived during the time of Moshe, while others maintain he lived during the period of the Judges, and yet others even claim that he lived during the period of Purim. However, there is one opinion that Job never existed at all and the entire episode is only a parable." Painfully, the Rosh Yeshiva sardonically commented, "that opinion was Iyov's worst tzarah (distress). Imagine, after all the pain and suffering Iyov endured, there is an opinion that he did not even exist!"

Perhaps this week, the Torah alludes to another form of curse. "When there is pain and suffering, when there is persecution and oppression, yet the world ignores the cries of those suffering – as if" no one is pursuing," — that is a terrible curse, too. Perhaps that curse is as unfortunate as when the aggressors are clearly recognized for whom they are. Often our greatest enemies are not recognized as such. We are told that they are our partners and our fears are nothing but paranoia. Even our past experiences are being discredited by deniers, scoffers and skeptics.

We cannot control the ears and eyes of our detractors, but we can do our utmost to tell the story and make sure that they live on. And we can do our best to hear, too, the pain and suffering of those who cry to us, to make sure we understand the pursuers behind the pain.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Elias Lauer HaRav Eliezer ben Aharon Dovid of blessed memory — 26 of Iyar by the Lauer Family

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Unfathomable on Every Level

by Jonathan Rosenblum

Mishpacha Magazine

May 5, 2021

<http://www.jewishmediaresources.com/2106/unfathomable-on-every-level>

UNFATHOMABLE ON EVERY LEVEL

By Yonoson Rosenblum | MAY 4, 2021

Finally, we are united, if briefly. United, if only in anguish I have never felt such a pall fall over the Torah community in Israel as that in the wake of the Meron nightmare.

The scene of the tragedy is a familiar one to all of us. Each of us has been to Meron many times to pour out our hearts at the kever of Rabi Shimon bar Yochai. And hundreds of thousands have joined the Lag B'omer festivities at one time or another. Even those of us with a fear of crowds, such as myself, have had arguments with yeshiva-age children eager to go to Meron on Lag B'omer, and when we lost those arguments, spent nights filled with apprehension of a disaster like that which occurred last Thursday night. At least two close family members told me after being in Meron on Lag B'omer that they would never go back; the feeling of being crushed was too frightening.

Beyond our ability to visualize the scene and imagine ourselves or those closest to us having been there, we are all feeling implicated in another way as well. When the v'nahafoch hu (turnabout) of Purim is itself reversed, and a day of celebration turned into one of mourning, who can avoid asking themselves the question, "What did I do to bring this about?"

On Leil Shabbos, my rav shared a story of Rav Elyashiv ztz"l during the 1982 Lebanon War. Every day, Rav Elyashiv would ask for the names of the wounded so that he could daven for them. One day, he was informed that a rocket had fallen on Meron and killed a Jewish woman.

"If someone was killed in Meron," he said, "then there is a powerful kitrug against Klal Yisrael in Shamayim."

And Rav Elyashiv was speaking of one death, not 45; and of one day during the year, not of a day when we joyously celebrate the cessation of the deaths of the talmidim of Rabi Akiva.

No segment of the religious community was excluded from the pain: chassidim and Litvaks, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, chareidi and national-religious, Israelis and those from abroad who excitedly came to join with tens of thousands of their fellow Jews at Meron. Finally, we are united, if briefly. United, if only in anguish.

LATE ON MOTZAEI SHABBOS, I join hundreds of other Har Nof residents at the levayah of Elazar Yitzchak (Azi) Koltai, a recent bar mitzvah boy. His father is an acquaintance with whom I share many friends.

The levayah takes place in the main building of the cheder in which my grandsons learn. I've been there many times before for happier occasions — sidur parties, siyumim on the completion of a sefer of Chumash. Tonight, however, the only sound heard, as we approach the building, is that of heartrending wailing.

I cannot make out much of the hespedim, through the sobbing of Azi's brother, brothers-in-law, and father, even though they are largely in English. But I do learn — and this was confirmed by friends of mine who are much closer to the Koltai family — that he was an unfailingly friendly, upbeat, and enthusiastic young man. No family member could remember him ever being angry. He was once brought to tears by the fear of hurting someone's feelings because everyone in the class wanted to sit next to him. That is fully believable as I survey the stunned faces of his classmates, still not quite at ease in their bar mitzvah hats, as they approached the mitah to ask mechilah. As we exit the building, one of the father's closest friends relates how just less than a year ago, the father turned to him at Azi's bar mitzvah and expressed his pride and joy in his youngest child — the only one fully educated in Eretz Yisrael, after the family made aliyah from Passaic. "This one we really got right," he said.

At the shivah house, I hear more stories about Azi "h that bring out his unique chein. Yesterday, the mailman was crying outside the building. He told a passerby, "He always helped me distribute the mail, and stopped to speak to me." A day katter, three street cleaners came to offer condolences. "He always stopped to thank us for cleaning the streets," they explain.

A building contractor who worked on the Koltais' apartment related that his Arab workers won't tolerate children around when they are working, but they let Azi follow them and observe what they were doing. One of the members

of the shul in which the Koltai family daven pays a large amount each year to retain an empty seat next to him for the Yamim Noraim. But he was delighted to have Azi sit next to him. They had bonded, as chavrusas on a ski vacation, when Azi was eleven.

Azi seems to have had a premonition that his sojourn in this world would be a brief one. Last week, he rushed home from his nearby cheder every day to spend his 20-minute lunch break with his father, even though he did not eat. And he kept telling his mother in recent months, "I'm going away soon" — an ostensible reference to going to yeshivah ketanah, though he never explicitly mentioned it in those terms.

The pain reverberating from the families of those killed — parents, siblings, children — has touched each and every one of us. And that suffering does not even include the tens of thousands who were at the scene and will require a very long time to heal from the trauma.

THERE ARE TWO CLASSIC Jewish responses to tragedy. The first is that of Aharon HaKohein after the death of his two sons, on the joyous day of the dedication of the Mishkan: "Vayidom Aharon — Aharon was silent." The other, that described by the Rambam in Hilchos Taanios (1:3), where he warns against those who fail to cry out and who dismiss tragedies as a natural part of existence. That is the path of cruelty, writes the Rambam, for it risks bringing yet greater tragedies in the wake of the current ones.

Both responses are correct, and both are necessary. We cannot know all Hashem's ways and calculations, and must not pretend otherwise. Please, no emails calling for the recitation of the following kapitlach Tehillim, as if that recitation is somehow the tikkun for what brought about the tragedy.

And yet we must each grasp for such hints in the Torah as we can, and seek to apply them to our own lives.

As I returned from delivering Shabbos food to my mother, the rabbi speaking on the radio relayed the words of one of the gedolim, who told him, "Before all explanations and all cheshbonos, we must first be much quicker to fargin our fellow Jews — slower to anger, quicker to sympathize, less jealous. On a day when so many Jewish neshamos have been lost, and so many others still hang in the balance, at the very least, let us value more highly all those Jewish neshamos that remain."

Here are a few of the hints I gleaned over Shabbos. In the Tolna Rebbe's Chumash shiur last week, delivered before the tragic events of Lag B'omer, he stressed how much each of us must strive to avoid causing any pain to a fellow Jew. The Rebbe began with the Rashi at the end of Emor (Vayikra 24:12). Rashi informs us that the mekallel was not placed in custody together with the mekoshesh. That the latter was going to be put to death was already known; all that remained to be determined was the form of execution. The din of the mekallel, however, was not yet known. If he were not to be subject to the death penalty, then he would suffer from being placed together with the mekoshesh, as he would anticipate that he was also to be executed. Such is the degree of sensitivity that must be shown even to one who has sinned greatly (and the mekallel was, in fact, put to death). Similarly, we are commanded to help our "enemy" reload his donkey if we should see his donkey stumble and fall. And why is he our enemy? According to the Gemara (Pesachim 113b), it is because he falls into the category of an evildoer whom the Torah commands us to hate. And yet the Midrash (Tanchuma) brings a case of a donkey driver who stopped to help his enemy reload his donkey, and how through the fulfillment of the mitzvah, the two became reconciled. The implication, said the Tolna Rebbe, is that it is the will of the Torah that we should be on good terms even with one whom it is legitimate to consider an enemy.

In his Leil Shabbos drashah, my rav informed us that every one of gedolei hador who had been asked about the tragedy had identified, in one form or another, sinas chinam (causeless hatred) as the culprit. Even a drop more hatred than is justified is an expression of the sinas chinam for which the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. Similarly, any hatred of another that has in it some element of personal interest is an expression of sinas chinam.

The Tolna Rebbe told the story of a group of yeshivah bochurim who were going to confront someone they felt had spoken disparagingly of their rebbe. Along the way, they met Rav Gad Eisner ztz"l, the late mashgiach of Yeshivas Chiddushei Harim. He asked them whether they were going to confront that individual because he had spoken negatively about a great Torah leader, or because he had spoken negatively about their rebbe. The bochurim heard the message and turned back from their mission; they realized that it was also their own kavod they intended to avenge, not just the kavod haTorah.

In a shiur on the deaths of the talmidim of Rabi Akiva, given 20 years ago, Rav Moshe Shapira ztz"l put it bluntly — anyone who thinks their sin of not showing kavod to one another was some failure in mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro is a fool. Rather, their failure to give the kavod (honor) due to one another was a much finer, more dakasdig failure, a lack of kavod haTorah. They viewed one another as just one more talmid chacham in the beis medrash, but not as a unique expression of Torah.

When we count something, we show how dear it is to us, and it takes on an importance such that it cannot be mevatel b'rov. The 32 days that we count during the Omer, which correspond to the deaths of the talmidim of Rabi Akiva, are the gematria of kavod. Our counting is the tikkun for the failure of Rabi Akiva's talmidim to properly understand what was singular, and therefore important, about every member of the beis medrash.

As the names of those neshamos lost at Meron were publicized, we sought out every detail available about them to be able to grasp something of their lives. We stared at their pictures and contemplated the magnitude of the loss. Two sets of brothers; fathers of eight, nine, and eleven children; the new father of an infant daughter. And we cried.

But had we seen those lost on the street the day before, especially if they did not belong to our particular group within the Torah world, we would likely not have noticed them at all. They would have been for us just another member of the collective of Torah Jews, but not unique individuals. And therein lies an aspect of the corrective — to learn to seek out the individuality of every fellow Jew.

I confess to an instinctive and powerful aversion to all attempts to map terrible tragedies to specific aveiros. But at the very least, we can use what has befallen us as a wake-up call to value each and every one of our fellow Jews as a singular expression of Klal Yisrael, with a unique contribution to make to revealing kavod Shamayim in the world. But to do that, we must first enter into the world of our fellow Jews and, at the very least, be sensitive to every drop of pain that they experience.

And if the lack of the most refined sensitivity to the kavod of their fellows as a unique expression of the tzelem Elokim, among the talmidim of Rabi Akiva, brought about, in Rav Shapira's words, a loss of Torah such that the world was almost returned to its original state of tohu, and Bar Kochba did not realize the potential that Rabi Akiva saw in him to be Mashiach, can we be surprised if we witness terrible tragedies in our day in the wake of blatant acts of disgrace to talmidei chachamim and open violence between factions, even during the days of Sefirah?

Enough already to machlokes; enough to all petty divisions.

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**What is a Tree?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1:

Eggplants grow on a woody stem. Does this make the eggplant a tree and prohibit the fruit that grows during its first three years as orlah or not? Although this idea may seem strange to most people, at least one prominent posek held that eggplant is prohibited as orlah.

Question #2:

What is the correct beracha to recite when smelling carnations, lilies, or mint?

Question #3:

What is the correct beracha to recite before eating papaya, cane sugar, or raspberries?

Question #4: Question:

May someone plant tomatoes in his vineyard in Eretz Yisroel?

Although these questions seem completely unrelated, each query revolves around the same issue: What is the halachic definition of a tree?

It is usually easy to identify a tree. We know the obvious characteristics that define oak and apple trees, and it is clear that trees differ from plants that grow in a vegetable patch. However, from a halachic standpoint it is not always obvious whether many of Hashem's botanical wonders are trees or not.

It is critical to determine what fits the definition of a tree in order to clarify the following halachic issues:

1. What beracha one recites on its fruit.
2. What beracha one recites on its fragrance.
3. Whether the prohibition of orlah applies to its fruit.
4. How severe is the prohibition to destroy it (ba'al tashchis).
5. There are several agricultural halachos concerning kelayim, shemittah, and maaser, all of which are relevant only in Eretz Yisroel.

Let us clarify these five areas of halacha before we discuss the main focus of our article, in order to understand the ramifications of why we must know which plants are considered trees.

1. What beracha one recites on its fruit.

As the Mishnah teaches, the beracha before eating the fruit of a tree is borei pri ha'eitz, whereas the beracha on fruit that grows from the ground, such as peas, beans, cucumbers, and melons, is borei pri ha'adamah. (The botanical definition of a fruit is the fleshy part [technically, the developed ovary] of the plant that nourishes the developing seed. Many of the foods that we colloquially call "vegetables," are in reality "fruits of the ground.") Thus, it is important to ascertain how certain fruits such as bananas, papayas, and berries grow in order to determine whether they grow on what is halachically classified as a tree, in which case their beracha is ha'eitz, or whether the plant upon which they grow is not a tree and the correct beracha is ha'adamah.

2. What beracha one recites on its fragrance.

Chazal established five different berachos on fragrances, one of which is "borei atzei besamim," "He who created pleasant-smelling wood (or trees)," and another, "borei isvei besamim," "He who created pleasant-smelling grasses." Just as one must recite the correct beracha on a food before eating it, so it is important to recite the correct beracha on a fragrance before smelling it. We will see later that whether the closest English translation of atzei besamim is pleasant-smelling wood or pleasant-smelling trees depends on an interesting dispute.

Determining whether the correct beracha is atzei besamim or isvei besamim is even more significant than determining whether the correct beracha is borei pri ha'eitz or borei pri ha'adamah for the following reason: If one recites borei pri ha'adamah on a fruit that should have been borei pri ha'eitz, one fulfills the minimal requirement bedei'eved (after the fact) and should not recite an additional beracha of borei pri ha'eitz. The reason for this is that every tree grows from the ground -- thus praising Hashem for "creating the fruit of the ground" when eating a fruit that grew on a tree is not inaccurate. Therefore, someone who is uncertain whether a certain fruit is "of the tree" or "of the ground" should recite borei pri ha'adamah before eating it.

However, when in doubt whether to recite atzei besamim or isvei besamim on a specific fragrance, one may not recite either beracha. This is because trees and grasses are mutually exclusive categories -- if something is a grass, it is not a tree and vice versa. Thus, reciting the beracha praising Hashem for creating pleasant-smelling grasses before smelling a tree is a beracha levatalah, a beracha said in vain, because it is inaccurate.

When someone is uncertain whether a plant is considered a tree or a grass, he should recite a third beracha, borei minei besamim, "He who created types of pleasant-smelling items," even though this is certainly not the optimal beracha on this fragrance. This is equivalent to reciting the beracha of shehakol before eating an apple. One has fulfilled the mitzvah, albeit not in the optimal way, since an apple "deserves" a more specific praise.

3. Whether the prohibition of orlah applies to its fruit.

The Torah prohibits eating fruit that grew within the first three years of a tree's life.

Thus, if a particular plant is a tree, the fruit produced in its first three years is prohibited; if it is not a tree, the fruit may be eaten immediately.

Although orlah is an agricultural mitzvah, it applies outside Eretz Yisroel. However, there is a major difference between orlah on fruits that grow in Eretz Yisroel and those that grow in chutz la'aretz. In chutz la'aretz only fruit that is definitely orlah is prohibited, and one may eat fruit that is questionably orlah. This fact has major halachic ramifications. There is also a mitzvah of re'vai that requires redeeming the fruit of the fourth year. Ashkenazim follow the ruling that in chutz la'aretz the laws of re'vai apply

only to grapes (Rema and Gra, Yoreh Deah 294:7), whereas Sefardim require the laws of re'vai on all fruit trees.

4. How severe is the prohibition to destroy it (ba'al tashchis).

Destroying a fruit-bearing tree without gaining benefit in the process is prohibited min HaTorah. Although one may not destroy anything without purpose, the Rambam rules that destroying a tree is a more serious prohibition (Hilchos Melachim 6:8, 10). Some poskim explain that only destroying a tree is prohibited min HaTorah, whereas destroying other items, including plants, is prohibited only miderabbanan, and therefore would have some leniencies.

5. There are several agricultural halachos concerning kelayim in a vineyard (kil'ei hakerem), shemittah, and maaser, all of which are relevant only in Eretz Yisroel. There are also halachos related to grafting one species onto the stock of another (harkavas ilan), which applies equally in Eretz Yisroel and in Chutz LaAretz.

One may not plant vegetables in a vineyard in Eretz Yisroel because of the prohibition of kil'ei hakerem, mixing species in a vineyard (Rambam, Hilchos Kelayim 5:7), although one may plant trees in a vineyard (Rambam, Hilchos Kelayim 5:6). In addition, if something is categorized as an edible plant, one must be careful not to plant it too close to another edible plant because of kil'ei zera'im, mixing species when planting. This mitzvah does not apply to trees.

#### OTHER LAWS

How one determines the year in which a plant grows differs between trees and plants.

The cut-off point for determining the years of tree fruits is usually determined by Tu Bishvat, whereas for plants it is Rosh Hashanah. This affects the halachos of maaser and of shemittah.

In addition, which year of the maaser cycle a fruit belongs to is determined by whether its chanatah, which refers to a stage early in the fruit's development, took place before Tu Bishvat or after; for a plant, it is determined by whether it is harvested before Rosh Hashanah. Furthermore, a plant that grew uncultivated during the shemittah year would be prohibited because of the prohibition of "sefichin," whereas the fruit of a tree would not be affected by this concern.

We now understand why it is important to determine whether a particular plant qualifies as a tree or not.

#### WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF A TREE?

The Random House dictionary I have on my desk defines a tree as, "a plant having a permanently woody main stem or trunk, ordinarily growing to a considerable height, and usually developing branches at some distance from the ground." If we exclude the qualifiers, "ordinarily" and "usually," then this definition does not consider a grape vine to be a tree since it lacks height if not supported and does not develop branches some distance from the ground. Since we know that halacha considers grapes to be fruits of the tree, this definition will not suffice. On the other hand, if we broaden the definition of "tree" to include all plants that have a "permanently woody stem or trunk" we will not only include grape vines, but also probably include eggplant, pineapple, and lavender which all have woody stems. On the other hand, several plants, such as the date palm and papaya, fit the Random House definition as a tree and yet grow very differently from typical trees. Are all of these plants trees?

Having demonstrated that the dictionary definition of tree is insufficient for our purposes, let us explore sources that may give us a halachic definition. The Gemara (Berachos 40a) states that one recites borei pri ha'eitz if "when you remove the fruit, the gavza remains and produces more fruit; but if the gavza does not remain, the beracha is not borei pri ha'eitz, but borei pri ha'adamah". What is the "gavza" that remains to bear more fruit from one year to the next?

Among the major commentaries, we find three interpretations. Rashi translates gavza as branch, meaning that any plant whose branches fall off one year and then grow again the next is not considered a tree, even if the root and trunk (or stem) remain from one year to the next. There are berries whose stem remains from one year to next, but whose branches fall off during the winter (Tehillah Ledavid, Chapter 203). According to Rashi, the correct beracha on these berries is ha'adamah.

A second opinion, that of Tosafos, explains that "gavza" is the trunk or stem of the plant that remains from one year to the next and produces fruit (Ritva, Sukkah 35a). A plant whose root remains from one year to the next, but not its stem, is not a tree.

Many perennial fruits do not have a trunk that remains from year to year. (A perennial is a plant whose root remains from one year to the next and grows each year without replanting.) A banana plant is a perennial whose entire structure above ground dies each year and then grows again the next year from the root. According to Tosafos, bananas are not trees but plants; therefore their beracha is ha'adamah, not ha'eitz, and there is no orlah prohibition.

A third opinion, that of the Rosh and the Tur (Orach Chayim, Chapter 203), explains that any perennial is considered a tree and its beracha is ha'eitz. If the plant must be replanted each year (i.e., it is an annual) to produce fruit, then the beracha is ha'adamah, not ha'eitz. According to this understanding, the correct beracha on strawberries and

bananas is ha'eitz since they are both perennials (not annuals), whereas according to the other opinions, the beracha on strawberries and bananas is ha'adamah.

The Shulchan Aruch and the Rema (Orach Chayim 302:2) rule that one recites borei pri ha'eitz if there is some type of stem that remains from year to year and produces fruit, but that the beracha is ha'adamah on perennials whose stem dies each year. However, it is disputed whether the reason we recite ha'adamah is because the Shulchan Aruch concluded like Tosafos, or because it is uncertain whether the beracha should be ha'eitz (like the Rosh and the Tur), or ha'adamah (like Tosafos), and we recite ha'adamah because of this uncertainty (Maamar Mordechai 203:3). There are several halachic ramifications that result from this question as I will explain later.

IS A TREE ALWAYS A TREE?

Is the definition of a tree the same for the halachos of orlah and kelayim as it is for berachos?

Tosafos (Berachos 40a) cites a passage in Talmud Yerushalmi (Kelayim 5:7) that something may not qualify for the definition of a tree for the laws of berachos and yet be considered a tree for the laws of kelayim, whereas the Ritva (Sukkah 35a) contends that the definition of the Gemara (Berachos 40a) for berachos applies to orlah as well. Tosafos concludes that the beracha on most perennial berries is ha'adamah because the bush does not remain from year to year, even though the bushes have the status of trees concerning kelayim and therefore may be planted in a vineyard.

IS HEIGHT A FACTOR?

Are there any other factors that define a tree other than what the Gemara mentioned? Must a plant grow tall to be considered a tree?

The Magen Avraham (203:1) rules that even if a tree grows very short, the correct beracha on its fruits and berries is borei pri ha'eitz. However, the prevalent minhag is to make a pri ha'adamah on berries that grow on plants which are less than three tefachim tall (about nine or ten inches), even though they meet all the other requirements of trees. The reason for the minhag is that a plant with such short stature is not considered significant enough to be a tree (Chayei Odom 51:9; Mishnah Berurah 203:3).

However, we should note that although the custom is to recite ha'adamah on the fruit of these small perennial bushes, the fruit grown in the first three years of the tree's life is nonetheless prohibited because of orlah (Ritva, Sukkah 35a). Cranberries would fit into this category since they are perennial, yet grow on the ground of a bog. Thus, orlah applies to them, yet their beracha is borei pri ha'adamah.

We have now covered most of our opening questions, and plan to continue this discussion in a future article.

Man himself is compared to a tree (see Rashi, Bamidbar 13:20); and his responsibility to observe orlah, terumos, and maasros are intimately bound with the count that depends on Tu B'Shvat. As Rav Hirsch explains, by observing Hashem's command to refrain from the fruits of his own property, one learns to practice the self-restraint necessary to keep all pleasure within the limits of morality.

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**Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits**

**United in Grief**

Tragedy is not to be dealt with by blaming others, but rather by doing our own personal soul searching.

Forty-something hours later and it's still not possible to digest.

Lag Ba'Omer commemorates the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the Mishnaic scholar and author of The Zohar, the source book of Torah mysticism. On the day of Rabbi Shimon's passing, the Jewish nation celebrates our endless potential of understanding beyond where logic can take us, and our ability to elevate ourselves and connect with the infinite source of all existence, The Creator.

In Israel where Rabbi Shimon is buried, tradition marks the day with bonfires and song, telling of the greatness of Rabbi Shimon. At his tomb in Meron, hundreds of thousands of Jews come to pray, to sing and dance around bonfires, and to connect with The Creator and with their fellow Jews. Unquestionably, the most beautiful aspect of the Lag Ba'Omer celebrations in Meron is the way Jews of every flavor come to celebrate together. Nothing warms the heart more than joining in a circle to dance with Jews of every

ethnic origin and every Jewish affiliation. Not to mention the abundance of free food and drink provided by Jewish organizations and individuals from around the globe. It is perhaps the most vivid expression of that unspoken awareness that at the core we are all one and the same, and despite our ideological and cultural differences there is a deep love we all have for one another.

May the Almighty soothe our pain and may the Jewish nation united in grief remain united forever.

And that is what makes the tragedy so much more painful. How could this most pronounced festival of Jewish unity be marred by our inadvertently crushing one another to death?

Tradition has taught us that tragedy is not to be dealt with by blaming others, but rather by doing our own personal soul searching.

Yes, those who were trusted with the responsibility for the safety of the tens of thousands will have their performance investigated. But for the rest of us, the question of what went wrong must send us thinking about the sincerity of the love for one another that we were exhibiting. Do we perhaps crush one another with our statements and actions without considering the consequences?

For the families of the victims and for the young and old that were seriously hurt, life will never be the same. Let us all be sure that we not return to daily life as if nothing happened. We must internalize the destruction we are capable of causing, and teach ourselves to disagree when necessary but never to feel or express hatred.

May the Almighty soothe our pain and spare us from all tragedy in the future. And may the Jewish nation united in grief remain united forever.

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<http://nleresources.com/2021/05/the-lag-bomer-tragedy/#.YJTEWrVKiMo>

The Lag B'Omer Tragedy

by Rabbi Avraham Edelstein | May 3, 2021

Any tragedy that happens to the Jewish people – or to the world in general – requires us to pause, check ourselves and do Teshuva on everything that needs it. The tragedy that just happened in Meron is no different. But there was surely something deeper going on.

The period between Pesach and Shavuot was originally meant to be a happy time. We became a nation at Pesach and we marched in seven short weeks to get the Torah, the purpose of that nationhood. The death of the students of Rebbe Akiva introduced an element of semi-mourning. An entire generation of scholars – 24,000, were wiped out – their Torah gone forever. For those who keep the first part, this ends with the joy of Lag B'Omer. Their Torah may be gone, but the light of the Zohar shone into the world through another student of Rebbe Akiva, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

The tragedy this Thursday night happened on Lag B'Omer, at the grave of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. It is a tragic mystery made more so by the contradiction of what this time in that place means. We cannot fathom the reasons, because such things come from the hester Panim of Hakadosh Boruch Hu. Perforce, they are hidden. Perforce, they represent that part of our relationship with G-d where I realize that I cannot reduce G-d's thoughts to the level of mine. And I am relieved that G-d is so much bigger, deeper, more profound .... than that.

In the Daas Tevunos, the Ramchal states that at the end of time, G-d will need to speed up history at the end of days to make sure that everything is completed in time for Moshiach. History, said the Chofetz Chaim, will go faster and faster. In order to do this, G-d will activate a special hanhaga through which He will run the world. Let's call this the "fast-track hanhaga."

Part of this is for G-d to use the suffering of Tzadikim to create the final Tikunim (lit. fixings) that we need in order to ensure the general Tikun – the Tikun Haklali – that is needed for Bias Ha'Mashiach.

The Holocaust, says Rav Chaim Friedlander, was just such an event. The Kedoshim who suffered and died produced a staggering amount of Kedusha, that ripple effects of which were felt in the unprecedented wave of Torah learning (when we would have expected the opposite to have taken place),

the baal-teshuvah movement, and more. (Nesivos Shalom).

The event of Lag B'Omer – in its timing, in its place, in the way it unfolded, and the people to whom it happened – all have the signs of just such an event. We must feel the tragedy and our tears must flow. And, simultaneously, we must feel the unleashing of the powerful Kedusha that the death of these Kedoshim – and the suffering of those injured – unleashed.

[Rabbi Avraham Edelstein is the Education Director of Neve Yerushalayim College for Women and a senior advisor to Olami. Many of Rabbi Edelstein's foundational publications addressing the world of Kiruv appear on OlamiResources.com: Series on Kiruv and Chinuch, Commentary on Chumash and Yom Tovim, The Laws of Outreach, as well as contributing articles. Rabbi Edelstein has just published The Human Challenge available from Mosaica Press. ]

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from: matzavblasts@gmail.com <matzavblasts@gmail.com> via smtp18.ymlpsvr.com

date: May 3, 2021, 6:42 PM

subject: Boy Won A Trip To Meron As A Prize For Learning. He Never Came Home

As the heartbreaking photos of the 45 men & boys lost in Meron continue to circulate, one face stands out in the particular. That of one of the smallest boys lost in the tragedy, 14-year-old Moshe Levy. Moshe, who parents describe as an "angel," had begged his parents for years to attend the Meron festivities. As a reward for his learning, his dream came true: He would go to Meron with his rebbi & the rebbi's son.

The rebbi, R'Avigdor Hayut, enjoyed the evening of singing and dancing with his 13-year-old son Yedidya, and his beloved talmid Moshe. As it became clear that the crowd was getting out of control, Hayut made the decision to head out, to keep the boys safe. He had no idea that the exit from the main concert area would become the site of the crush.

As they descended the metal ramp, Hayut and the boys were thrown to the floor despite holding hands. As the crowd overtook them, Hayut began to lose feeling in his body. It was only on Friday morning, as he regained his strength in the hospital, that he was able to attain the news he feared most: The two young boys were killed

**CLICK HERE TO HELP THE FAMILIES OF THOSE LOST IN MERON**

Reporters recorded heartbreaking footage as Hayut arrived in a wheelchair to pay a shiva call to Moshe Levy's father. Both men are carrying the unbearable burden of losing a young son. Hayut, however, seems crushed by the responsibility of having been their caretaker at the time of tragedy.

"I did everything I could," said the cheder rebbi, breaking down into sobs. In a moment of inspiring warmth and strength, father David Levy places his hand on Hayut's lap to comfort him, and nods knowingly. Despite his overwhelming grief, he understands that no one person is at fault for the unthinkable tragedy.

Their interaction encapsulates a greater theme which has arisen since the disaster took place. Where resentment, anger, and blame were possible, Jews around the world have risen up to unite and support each other. Crowds of Israelis of all stripes lined up to donate blood to the wounded, secular TV anchors wept on live television, and hundreds have united to donate money to the victims' families as well.

Funds are being urgently raised by charity organization Vaad HaRabbanim to help the mothers, wives, and children of those lost in Meron on Thursday. The fund says that 42 young children lost their fathers.

**CLICK HERE TO HELP THE FAMILIES OF THOSE LOST IN MERON**  
<https://ymlpcdn2.net/82ee7qsuavaewubypayqqaaambyqh/click.php>

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

date: May 6, 2021, 9:57 PM

Donny Morris Memorial Program

All of Klal Yisrael is mourning the loss of the 45 precious souls that were taken from us on Lag BaOmer. We are particularly pained by the loss of Donny Morris z"l (נחמן דניאל בן אריה צבי ז"ל).

Donny was known for his מדות, sensitivity, passionate davening, and love of learning. In his limitless pursuit of growth in עבודת ה', Donny Morris z"l established a rigorous schedule for himself, aimed towards maximizing his daily learning, as well as covering a broad range of Torah study. Donny's ambitious schedule serves to inspire each one of us to maximize our own potential in לימוד התורה.

The "Donny Morris Memorial Program" seeks to emulate Donny's strong commitment to living a life of growth in dedication to לימוד התורה and cultivating the most refined מידות טובות. This initiative seeks to fill the void that now exists following Donny's פטירה.

The goal of this project is threefold:

To take upon ourselves to improve and refine our character, מדות, and sense of בין אדם להבירור;

To complete שלושים תנ"ך, ש"ס, משניות, and ש"ס;

To have as many people as possible take upon themselves to learn a סדר of לימוד on Donny's schedule - for Thirty Days.

Please insert your name in any of the slots in the spreadsheets below, to follow in Donny's footsteps and continue to journey down the path that Donny set for himself. May all the learning done through this initiative serve as an נשמה עליה for Donny's sweet זמנה

<https://sites.google.com/view/donnymorris/home>

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Home Weekly Parsha BEHAR – BECHUKOTAI 5781**

**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The reading of these two sections of the Torah concludes the book of Vayikra – the book that contains most of the commandments given to the Jewish people on Sinai and for all eternity. One of the central commandments that appears in this week's reading is that of shmita – the rules regarding the sabbatical year that the Jewish people were to observe when they were in the land of Israel. This commandment, in many of its forms, remains viable today, at least as a rabbinic ordinance.

There is discussion that as the present Jewish population here in the land of Israel continues to grow and expand, there is a possibility that this sabbatical year ordinance will revert once again to its original status as a Torah commandment. But even in its present circumstance, as a rabbinic ordinance, it has strong influence over the everyday life of citizens of the State of Israel. Special arrangements must be made regarding agricultural produce grown in the Holy Land in this sabbatical year, and various ways have been found to enable the agricultural economy to continue to function according to Jewish law and tradition, even during the sabbatical year.

But the idea behind the sabbatical year remains fixed in the minds and hearts of the Jewish people wherever they may live. And that basic idea is simple: that the world and all its land belongs to and is subject to the will of the Creator, and that human beings are only temporary trustees over the land.

One of the most difficult ideas to for people to accept is that life itself is transitory and temporary. We pretend we will be here forever and we live our lives accordingly, even though we are all aware of our mortality and the transient nature of human existence. We are always saving for tomorrow, even when we are quite old and advanced in years, and logically, really do not need to save for a tomorrow that, deep down in our hearts, we know we may never see.

We involve ourselves in future projects that can only benefit future generations, because we believe that somehow that future benefit and achievement will accrue to our credit when heaven balances the books, so to speak. It is this contradictory nature of human beings, to plan for a future

that instinctively one knows one will not actually witness in this world, that really fuels all human progress and is the basis for the advancement of civilization over the ages.

All of this is based upon the realization that the sabbatical year imposes upon us, that there is no permanence for anything, and what we do achieve does not permanently belong to us. We are merely temporary custodians of the riches of the Almighty that He has bestowed upon his creatures in this world. This is really the sublime and internal message that the sabbatical year, with all its laws, ordinances, and adjustments, imposes upon us, and makes it a year of renewal and uniqueness.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

### **Home In My Opinion TRAGEDIES**

#### **Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

It seems that, in spite of the best efforts of human beings and societies, tragedies are unavoidable in the regular course of human existence. The tragedy that we in Israel suffered on Lag B'Omer is still too fresh and the wound is too open to be able to assess it properly. There will be the commissions of inquiry, recommendations as to future security and crowd control, as well as a frenzied attempt to allocate blame for what occurred. But tragedies occur on a regular basis in all human societies, and they have done so since the beginning of recorded human history.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods form an integral part of the new meta-narrative of life. People still build homes near volcanic mountains and on the shores of rising dangerous waters. Florida and Texas in the United States are the two fastest growing states in the country. Both are prone to severe hurricanes and the tragedies that accompany those storms. Yet people still willingly move there, knowing the danger, and convinced that, somehow, it will not affect them. That is the nature of human beings, and, perhaps, human life could not continue and be of any purpose, if our nature on these matters was any different.

We all know that tragedy eventually awaits us in one form or another, but we do not and cannot live our lives based on the fear of impending tragedies or inevitable troubles. That is not how human beings operate, for human beings are basically optimistic, hopeful, and somehow convinced that they will escape the tragedies that have gone before them.

Built into the human personality and character is the ability to withstand tragedy, and even, to a certain extent, overcome it. It is this enormous gift of resilience, which is so characteristic of the human race, generally, and certainly of the Jewish people, particularly, that provides the impetus for life itself, and for civilization to expand and improve. It has been said that human beings are the only creatures who are constantly aware of their mortality. As such, they should be the least adventurous risktakers on the face of this planet. Yet, we know that this is not true, and that human beings follow the words of the great prayer that we recite on the high holidays, i.e., we risk our lives for our bread.

As human beings, we, somehow, can cope with tragedy of personal and national significance, and to move on with life and its demands. In fact, it is almost no exaggeration to state that the nature of human beings is to ignore tragedies, and not plan for them in advance as we move forward in life. I think that this is part of the makeup of the human personality, simply because we sense that within us there is immortality. No matter how great the tragedy and how severe the anguish, the ability to go forward is almost instinctive within human beings.

There will undoubtedly be many important lessons that will be learned from examining and dissecting the events that led to the great tragedy of this past Lag B'Omer. But after time passes, there will still be a demand by multitudes to visit the mountain of Meron on Lag B'omer, irrespective of the tragedy that occurred there. In fact, there probably will be a greater incentive to visit in the future, simply to illustrate and emphasize the resilience of the human spirit that lies innately within all of us.

I know that all of this sounds counterintuitive, perhaps unrealistic and irrational, but I think it is clear to all of us that human beings do not behave

rationally and do not always see things realistically and accurately. In fact, it is the drive of unreality within us that pushes us forward and is the engine for human progress in all fields of human endeavor. Judaism has always viewed the commemoration of tragedy, not so much as a demonstration of the helplessness of human beings and a propensity for error, but, rather, as a beginning point for further self-improvement and human development. It encourages the dominance of this natural resilience that lies within us, and always points us in pursuit of a better society in the world with justice, compassion, and modest behavior. May it be the will of heaven to spare us from tragedies and help us develop our progress on our own initiative.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

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