

# LAG B'OMER & THE BIG PICTURE

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

Once again, Lag B'Omer is upon us, this year, b"H, on a Motzei Shabbos. And Lag B'Omer, is all about THE BIG PICTURE.

First of all, it is the celebration of the day on which Rebi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed the Zohar to his students, just before he ascended to a holier world. He was one of Rebi Akiva's premier students, and he shared with the world that which he had received as hidden transmission of Torah. The time had come to reveal much of it, and he had been Heaven-sent to fulfill the mission.

It is pointed out that the 33rd day of the Omer-Count comes after 32 days, which is the gematria of "leiv," or "heart." After Lag B'Omer, there are 16 days left to count, the 17th day being Shavuot itself, when Torah was given. The number 17 is the gematria of the word "tov," or "good," and when combined with the word "heart," they become, "good heart."

Hence, it is said, that the goal of Sefiras HaOmer is develop a good heart, the ultimate positive trait a person can incorporate into their world perspective (Pirkei Avos 2:13). And, that is exactly what the Jewish people developed by the 50th day of the Omer when God spoke to them on the sixth day of Sivan, 2448 from Creation, as it says:

They traveled from Refidim and came to the Sinai Desert, and they camped in the desert; they (written: he) camped opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:2)

He camped opposite the mountain: k'ish echad, b'leiv echad-like a single person with a single heart. (Rashi)

The only question is, what did Lag B'Omer have to do with the process?

True, Lag B'Omer, as we know it, did not come to be until the end of the Second Temple period. However, according to some, it was a special day already in the desert back then, for it is the day on which the mann began to fall for the Jewish people,<sup>1</sup> just after the matzah they had baked on the way out of Egypt ran out.

Why on Lag B'Omer? Just the way it happened to work out? Obviously not, especially given the sod of mann and of Lag B'Omer, and the fact that the mann fell in the merit of Moshe Rabbeinu, whose soul, it is said, also went into Rebi Shimon bar Yochai (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 36).

The mann, of course, was extremely Kabbalistic. Even its two letters, Mem- Nun, are the abbreviation for one of the most Kabbalistic concepts of all, Nitzotzei Kedushah-Holy Sparks. They stand for "Main Nukvah," literally "Female Waters," which are the Holy Sparks that have to be elevated up from the level of the Malchus, which is feminine, to the upper realms in order to trigger a process that will eventually draw down additional Divine Light to the lower worlds, rectifying them.

Less deep is the way that the mann was totally absorbed by the body leaving no waste to be rejected. It also fell based upon the spiritual level of a person, a Divine sign of approval or of the need to do teshuvah (Yoma 75a). And, the extra portion of mann for Shabbos was supposed to be the miraculous result of saying, "To honor the holy Shabbos!" at which point, one omer of mann miraculously became two (Ze'ev Yitraf).

In other words, the mann was not first and foremost food. Rather, it was a daily dose of the entire meaning of the Jewish people, and the spiritual level upon which they were meant to live:

Remember the way God, your God, led you for these 40 years in the desert in order to test you, to see what you really thought, and whether you would keep His commandments or not. He afflicted you, and caused you to go hungry, and gave you mann to eat which you did not recognize, nor did your ancestors experience it-so that He could teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but by whatever God says should exist does man live. (Devarim 8:1-3)

In other words, the mann belonged to the reality of THE BIG PICTURE. If a person bought into its vision, then the mann elevated him and brought him closer to God. It allowed him to rise above the mundane reality of everyday life that can make a person petty, and care for things that are not really worth that much attention. This, the Talmud says, is the essential difference between a righteous person and an evil one:

In the Time-to-Come, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will bring the yetzer hara and slaughter him before the righteous and the evil. To the righteous it will appear like a high mountain, and to the evil it will appear like a thread of hair. Both will cry; the righteous will cry and say, "How were we able to overcome this high mountain?" The evil will cry and say, "How were we not be able to overcome this thread of hair?" (Succah 52a)

Hence, it fell as a omer per person each day. And, though usually "omer" is spelled: Ayin-Vav-Mem-Raish, this time, in the Torah it is spelled without its Vav (Shemos 16:36), giving the word a gematria of 310-the numerical value of the word "yaish," which means "have," and "shai," which is the amount of worlds the Talmud says righteous people will received in the World-to-Come (Sanhedrin 100a). In other words, for being satisfied with yaish, that is, their own personal portion in life, something which can only be done with a BIG PICTURE vision, they merit their portion in Eternity.

Thus, the mann was not only food for empty stomachs, it was primarily food for thought, that is, to

make the Jewish people think. It was to help them develop the ultimate the ultimate and most valuable asset in life: a leiv tov.

This is where Lag B'Omer comes into the picture, or at least what happened on the 33rd day of the omer, Hod Sh'b'Hod-Glory that is in Glory. For, the Kabbalah that the Rashbi revealed that day is essential for developing a leiv tov, if not in practice, then at least in theory. Because, though everyone may not merit to learn Kabbalah, everyone can still benefit from the principles of Kabbalah.

Everything goes wrong in life when priorities are confused. The essential difference between righteous people and evil people, explained the Talmud above, is that righteous people have the same priorities as God. They make important that which is important to God, and minimize that which God finds trivial. Evil people, then, do just the opposite.

As the Ramchal, one of the greatest Kabbalists in the last 300 years, explains in his Introduction to Derech Hashem, the path of the righteous is the result of an organized context, what is really called the Aitz HaChaim-the Tree of Life, another name for Kabbalah. He explains that the necessary insight to put life and its issues into the proper perspective comes from knowing what we call THE BIG PICTURE, an organized, intellectual framework into which all of the nitty-gritty details of everyday life can be accurately placed and recognized in context of everything else.

And, it is not only about being organized. Obviously, the more sophisticated your mental infrastructure is, the more you can put into it, and the better organized it will be. It's like the difference between a normal PC, and a Supercomputer, part of whose tremendous speed at finding and analyzing information is the method by which it is stored and tagged.

Kabbalah is the supercomputer of life, if you will. It is the structure into which all other information, holy and secular, fits. It is the intellectual skeleton meant to be fleshed out by all other information. It is the sum total of all knowledge, known and hidden, that is relevant for man to know, and therefore, it is the true organizing factor of life.

If only everyone knew it, the world would be perfect.

In Yemos HaMoshiach, everyone will know it, and the world, then, will be perfect.

On that day, God will be one, and His Name, one. (Zechariah 14:9)

What about in the intervening time? Even for those who learn Kabbalah, it is long and arduous process-a labor of love to be sure-just to accumulate, let alone assimilate, all that has been gifted to us from Heaven. Are we doomed to fail in the meantime just because of built-in human and historical limitations?

No, not necessarily.

For, there are two ways to know something. The Talmud says that the chacham is greater than the

navi (Bava Basra 12a), and the reason is simple. What the prophet retains as a gift from God the wise man accumulates as a result of his own efforts and intellectual struggle. Thus, whatever the chacham gains is truly his own, as opposed to a direct gift from Heaven, as in the case of the prophet, which is always better, as it says:

According to the effort is the reward. (Pirkei Avos 5:24)

However, it is wonderful, and important to know that, when one's opportunity in life limits his ability to be a chacham, gifts from Heaven, when it comes to Da'as Elokim-Godly knowledge-are still possible. It is extremely helpful to understand that the will to know, and the desire to be a vessel for higher levels of spiritual awareness, are enough to prompt Heaven to send down additional Heavenly light.

This is the leiv tov to which Sefiras HaOmer refers, and builds. Just trying to be a nice person and having a more generous spirit helps, but it won't necessarily make a person into a navi, so-to-speak. However, by seriously desiring to be a conduit for the light of God, to such an extent that one's life reflects that desire, one can warrant a gift of Divine light, of an intellectual and emotional appreciation of what may be far beyond the person's present intellectual ability to understand.

The normal process is to learn an idea, which, at the beginning, may be too abstract to relate to. However, as the person delves deeper into the concept and builds a relationship to it, he increasingly becomes one with it, until it is a part of his way of looking at life. On this level, he may no longer need to verbalize it, for his very life has become a verbalization of such knowledge.

Hence, the first 32 days of the Omer-Count is for developing such a leiv, that is, such a desire to know, but not just any knowledge, but specific knowledge that reveals God, and helps a person to correctly prioritize the matters of life.

If after 32 days he accomplishes this, then on the 33rd day of the Omer, when the Upper Wellsprings of Divine Knowledge open up, and they seek out appropriate candidates for its light, then they will find him, and gift him with knowledge far beyond his learning. For, just as the Rashbi, on Lag B'Omer that year, was the conduit for his students to receive the light at that time, Lag B'Omer each year also acts as a conduit for Divine light to those who desire, and are fitting, to receive it.

For the person who merits such a gift from Heaven on the 33rd day of the Omer-Count, it becomes possible to use the following 17 days to transform his leiv into a "leiv TOV." As a result of what he has developed on his own during the first 32 days of the Omer, combined with the influx of Divine light-THE BIG PICTURE-received on Lag B'Omer, the following 17 days can become the time to integrate and assimilate that light into his being, until his leiv reaches the level of "tov," first used in the Torah in reference to such light (Bereishis 1:4).

Reb Shimon bar Yochai was a chacham who made himself into the navi. But, his students, and those after them, have been less so, inasmuch as the knowledge they have received has been gifted to

them from Heaven, via the Zohar. Nevertheless, on Lag B'Omer, the two realities converge in one spectacular flow of Divine light, allowing chachamim to become nevi'im, and nevi'im to become chachamim.

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1. According to the Chasam Sofer, the Jewish people finished the matzah they had taken with them when they left Egypt on the 15th of Iyar, after which they went hungry for three days. At that time, on the 18th day of Iyar, or the 33rd day of the Omer-Count, God sent down the mann.

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