

This coming week, we will observe *Lag Ba'Omer*--traditionally considered to be the *yahrzeit* of the sage of the *Mishnah* and *Zohar*--Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 33b) relates the well-known story of Rabbi Shimon's 13 years as a fugitive from the Romans, during which he hid in a cave with his son and studied Torah. For 13 years, the two scholars had nothing to eat but the fruit of a carob tree. Upon being reunited with his relative, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, Rabbi Shimon expressed how fortunate he felt that he was able to study Torah single-mindedly, with no material distractions, during all those years.

Rabbi Yosef Chaim David Weinberg z"l (1955-2020; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Be'er Avraham-Slonim, whose *yahrzeit* also falls on *Lag Ba'Omer*) notes that Rabbi Shimon's attitude and experience are consistent with his position that a person should devote himself entirely to Torah study and his needs will be provided for (see *Berachot* 35b). A person like Rabbi Shimon is even exempt from prayer, says the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 11a). R' Weinberg suggests that this exemption is given because a person like Rabbi Shimon has no needs for which to pray; he is already assured that his needs will be met.

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 35b) states that Rabbi Shimon's way is not for everyone; most people need to combine Torah study and work. Nevertheless, writes R' Weinberg, everyone can be like Rabbi Shimon for a short time--setting aside an hour or some other amount of time when he studies Torah and nothing in the world can distract him. We say in *Ma'ariv*: "We will rejoice with the words of Your Torah... For they are our life!" We thus declare that we share Rabbi Shimon's ideals, and we follow through in practice. (*She'eir* Yosef)

Shabbat

The following is an excerpt from a public proclamation issued by R' Yechezkel Sarna z"l (1890-1969; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the *Chevron Yeshiva* in *Yerushalayim*) in *Kislev* 5708 [December 1947]:

We call even upon *Shabbat* observant people to elevate the holiness of *Shabbat*. It is not enough to seek ways to reduce *Shabbat* desecration. Rather, we must sanctify *Shabbat* in our thoughts and our hearts so that it will return to being the source of blessing and cause the soul of *Shabbat*, the *Neshamah Yeteirah* (literally, "extra soul"), to rest upon us--on all of our 248 limbs and 365 sinews--so that the blessing and holiness of *Shabbat* will influence all aspects of our service of *Hashem* . . . If all of our deeds are seasoned with the goodness of *Shabbat*, then the holiness of *Shabbat* will rest to the fullest extent on the multitudes who observe it. Even if it is only individuals who sanctify *Shabbat* completely, that will have a major effect on reducing *Shabbat* transgression, for the great person will influence the person close to him, who will influence the person close to him, until soon, the influence will spread to those who are quite distant. But, this will not happen if *Shabbat* is observed by rote; then the most we can expect is that the *Shabbat*-observant person will avoid literal *Shabbat* transgression, but it will have no influence on others. In that case, even those who observe *Shabbat* will have indirect responsibility for others' transgressions, like anyone who has the opportunity to influence another and fails to do so. To absolve ourselves, we must strive to the maximum extent possible to elevate the holiness of *Shabbat* and to keep the *Mitzvot* on a high level.

(*Dalio* Yechezkel II p. 434)

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Pirkei Avot

“Ben Zoma says, ‘Who is wise? One who learns from every person.’” (4:1)

R’ Dov Cohen z”l (1911-2005; first Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force; believed to be, at the time of his death, the last surviving student of R’ Nosson Zvi Finkel z”l, the *Alter* of Slabodka z”l, who died in 1927) writes that there is a double meaning here: How does one become wise in the first place? By learning from every person. But, that is not enough! A wise person continues to learn from every person even after he has become wise. Perhaps, suggests R’ Cohen, this is why we refer to a Torah scholar as a *“Talmid Chacham”* / “a wise student,” for a truly wise person is always learning from every possible source.

R’ Cohen continues: “From every person” means even from a gentile, because one can learn valuable lessons from such a person’s life experiences (see *Kiddushin* 33a; *Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 244:7).

Why must one try to learn from every person? R’ Cohen answers in the name of his teacher R’ Yehuda Leib Chasman z”l (1869-1936; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Lithuania; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Telz and Chevron *Yeshivot*): It is because no two people share the same perspective. Indeed, one cannot imagine the musings and thought processes of another person. Just as people do not look alike, so they do not think alike.

(Avot El Banim p.264)

“Who is strong? One who subdues his Yetzer / inclination.”

R’ Cohen writes: There is an implication here that one must be strong in order to subdue one’s negative inclinations. Approaching this task in a lackadaisical way cannot succeed, as we read (*Devarim* 25:18), “When you were faint and exhausted and did not fear *Elokim*.” A “faint and exhausted” person will not have the strength to withstand the challenging winds that blow his way. Rather, one must stand strong! *(Ibid p.267)*

“Who is honored? One who honors others [literally, ‘the creations’].”

R’ Cohen asks: Why is the *Mishnah* promoting the pursuit of honor?

He answers: The *Mishnah* is not speaking of the type of honor that vain people pursue [e.g., being recognized in public gatherings]. Rather, the *Mishnah* means: Who is deserving of basic respect as a product of G-d’s handiwork? One who gives that same respect to all other creations merely because they, too, are G-d’s handiwork. Note, writes R’ Cohen, that the *Mishnah* does not speak only of respecting people; it speaks, rather, of respecting all of G-d’s creations. *(Ibid p.274-275)*

“You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified ‘B’toch’ / amongst *Bnei Yisrael*; I am *Hashem* Who sanctifies you.” (22:32)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 21b) derives from this verse that *Kedushah* may only be recited in the presence of ten men, as follows: This verse uses the word ‘*Toch*.’ Likewise, we read regarding Korach’s assembly (*Bemidbar* 16:21), “Separate yourselves ‘*Mi’toch*’ / from amid this assembly!” The word the verse uses for “assembly” is “*Eidah*,” the same word that the Torah uses to describe the ten Spies who spoke ill of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Bemidbar* 14:27). Just as they were ten, so a congregation in which G-d’s Name is sanctified should be ten. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) comments: This reminds us that even when other Jews behave in a way that requires us to distance or separate ourselves from them, they nevertheless retain their inherent holiness. *(Mei Marom: Nimukei Mikraot)*

“You shall not eat bread or roasted kernels or stalks until this very day, until you bring the offering of your *Elokim*.” (23:14)

R’ Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z”l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: The Torah’s prohibition on eating *Chadash* / the new crop before the *Omer* sacrifice is brought applies to the grain in three different states: bread, kernels, and stalks. It is wondrous to note, R’ Mintzberg observes, that we have three *Mitzvot* that involve separating the “*Reishit*” / “first” of the produce, corresponding to the three states just mentioned: When the grain is still on the stalk, there is a *Mitzvah* to separate the *Omer*. When the kernels have been removed, there is a *Mitzvah* to separate *Terumah*. Finally, when it is made into bread (dough), there is a *Mitzvah* to separate *Challah*. This reminds us that no matter what state the grain is in, it all comes from *Hashem*. *(Ben Melech Al Ha’Torah)*

“Outside the Curtain of the Testimony, in the Tent of Meeting, Aharon shall arrange [the *Menorah*], from evening to morning, before *Hashem*, continually . . .” (24:3)

Our Sages say that the *Menorah* testifies that the *Shechinah*/ Divine Presence rested on the Jewish People. How so?

R’ Kalman Chaim Meitkes z”l (*Skolka Maggid*; Lithuania and New York; died 1932) explains: Commentaries write that the *Shechinah* rested on the *Aron* / Holy Ark, causing it to shine so brightly that a *Kohen* could walk in the otherwise dark Sanctuary by its light. The *Menorah*’s purpose was to create a second light source, so that the *Kohen* would not benefit from the light created by the *Shechinah*’s presence. Thus, the need for a *Menorah* testifies that the *Shechinah* rests on the Jewish People. *(Chemdat Chaim)*