



# TAL

## ACHAREI- KEDOSHIM

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### The Fire Within

**Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky**



Before every holiday, we as parents need to examine what messages we wish to focus on for ourselves as adults and for our children. It should not be enough to light the menorah again, or just listen to the megilla again. We need to recognize, as the Maharal explains, that we are supposed to be living a life that is like a spiral – going over the same ground every year, but always on a higher level.

Lag B'Omer is a day that we know is filled with deep spiritual significance. Somehow this doesn't always seem to come across to our children. The truth is, it's often hard for us adults to appreciate it as well.

What is Lag B'Omer? We are familiar with two aspects of the day. First, we know that the students of Rebbe Akiva who were being decimated by a plague stopped dying on this day. As such it is celebrated as a happy day. Additionally we know it is the yahrtzeit

of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar. How, we may ask, does this relate to us?

The Pri Chadash on his commentary on Shulchan Aruch, asks the following question: why is Lag B'Omer a happy day? If it is because Rebbe Akiva's students stopped dying, it didn't make a difference because they all died in the end anyway! Imagine someone has a relative with a fatal illness. The relative recovers for a day and then relapses and passes away. It is unlikely that the person would make the day he recovered into a day of celebration. The Pri Chadash gives a cryptic answer to this question. He suggests that perhaps it is a happy day because of the five students that Rebbe Akiva got after the other 24,000 died. But if that is the reason, why celebrate on Lag B'Omer? He didn't get those students on that day, but rather at a later date. Lag B'Omer as a happy occasion remains a mystery.

To complicate matters, the way Lag B'Omer is celebrated is also something of a mystery. When I was growing up in the New York area, Lag B'Omer was the official school sports day. We would go to a local park and play baseball and kickball and volleyball and machanyim. There were special games between different grades and between the faculty and the students. Needless to say, none of this was filled with deep religious significance.

Of course, I didn't appreciate at the time how relatively healthy that experience was until I came to Eretz Yisroel. Weeks before Lag B'Omer, all loose wood began disappearing. Then wood began disappearing from construction sites, then tree trunks, furniture, household appliances and the like. Soon I began seeing them reappearing in gigantic pyres throughout my neighborhood. Some of these towered fifty feet into the air. I couldn't imagine what would be done with them, because, having grown up in America, no one ever made their own bonfires. You needed many permits just to have a campfire, and a small one at that. Even then, only professional licensed fire-makers were allowed to make the

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fires. The size and materials were heavily regulated. Sometimes, because of insurance reasons, children were not even allowed near the fires. We would merely watch from a safe distance, eating the hotdogs we had already cooked at home!

What then, could these giant pyres, apparently designed to burn the remains of Greek kings, possibly mean? And to make matters worse, all the fires seemed to be constructed by children, many of them preschoolers. Shouldn't the professional firemakers warn these children away?

On the day before Lag B'Omer I began to notice frightened adults scurrying about. They were removing their laundry from their lines and closing windows and trissim, as though preparing for some natural catastrophe. And as twilight arrived I realized why. Quiet sedate Yerushalayim turned into a spectacle known as "The Night of the Burning Children". Children, many of them young and unsupervised, set these giant biers on fire. Some of the fires raged out of control. One year, I watched as the flames of a fire reached up to the street above and destroyed a bus shelter! Another time a fire burnt the telephone wires in another neighborhood, and it took days to repair them.

In the morning, a haze hung over the city and the streets were covered in ash. Silently, the adults came out of hiding like the survivors after a nuclear war, prepared to rebuild the world.

Of course, I'm exaggerating. But not to the extent, I hope, that people can't relate to the concept. Where, as I asked earlier, is the deep spirituality in all of this?

I would like to suggest the following idea. Imagine, if you will, the situation of Rebbe Akiva. An ignorant shepherd, he sets out to learn how to read at the age of forty, sitting in preschool with the little children. Slowly, he masters Tanach and the intricacies of the Oral Law. At the end of twelve years, he

has gained renown as one of the leading Torah scholars, and he returns home to his loyal wife. Imagine his love and appreciation for her! She gave up wealth, ease, family, reputation: all in order to see her husband succeed in Torah.

As he returns home he overhears a neighbor berating him to his wife. What kind of a person abandons his wife to live a life of such poverty and hardship! Rochel defiantly responds that if Akiva were here right now she would tell him to go back and learn for another twelve years. Without hesitating, without waiting to say hello to his beloved loyal wife, he turns around to fulfill her wish that he grows in Torah.



Another twelve years pass. He is now an undisputed Torah leader of the Jewish people, with 24,000 students. He now finally returns home to his wife. Can you imagine the feelings of love and appreciation bursting from his heart? Arriving with his thousands of students, his wife tries to approach but is held back by the students until finally, Rebbe Akiva spots her. He then announces to his students that all of my Torah and your Torah belongs to her. A happy ending if there ever was one.

And then, after Pesach one year, the plague began. By the hundreds, then by the thousands, finally by the tens of thousands, his students perish. Rebbe Akiva and the Jewish people faced over seven hundred levayos a day.

Can we imagine what a loss this was for Klal Yisroel? There was no Shulchan Aruch, no gemera, not even the mishna! The Torah was oral, and it was entrusted to a large extent to Rebbe Akiva and his talmidim.

When the tragedy was finally over, there wasn't one student of Rebbe Akiva's left alive. His life's work had collapsed around him – all his accomplishments went up in flames; Rebbe Akiva was left in ashes. Could you really blame him if he decided that chinuch was not for him? Let him go away alone and mourn the loss of his precious students.

But not Rebbe Akiva. He picked himself up, brushed himself off and started over again with only five students. Perhaps some people would find it hard to start over again with so little after they had had so much. Perhaps their confidence would have been shaken. Not Rebbe Akiva. Klal Yisroel needed him and so he persevered.

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg in his work on the Mussar Movement, entitled "The Fire Within," writes that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he spends the last day of his life. Reb Yisroel Salanter spent his final day alone in a strange town, reassuring the shomer because he was frightened to be left alone with Reb Yisroel's lifeless body. The Alter of Novardek spent his, caring for his students who were dying from a plague.

Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai knew he was dying. The last day of his life he spent with his students, working to bring down the great light of the Torah's mystical understanding to the world. Whatever he was trying to accomplish, he didn't believe his last day was too late. We can always do more with whatever time we have.

I heard from my wife's uncle, Rabbi Michel Klughaupt of Lakewood, New Jersey, the following story. An avreich needed advice on an important matter. He called HaRav Mordechai Shwab zt"l to set up an appointment.

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Rav Shwab asked him what day was good for him and the young man answered he was available on Monday. Rav Shwab agreed, but insisted it must be before seven in the evening. The young man said he could come at six. Rav Shwab agreed, insisting, however, that they must be finished by seven pm sharp.

The young man began to have regrets that he was bothering Rav Shwab, who was, after all, well on in years and not well. So on Sunday he cancelled his Monday appointment. On Tuesday morning, he read the notice in Yeshiva that Rav Mordechai Shwab had passed away the night before – at seven pm.

Somehow this tzaddik knew how much time he had left. And he was willing to give that last hour to someone in need. Because he knew, as long as there is life, there is hope. You can still do something. It is never too late.

Lag B'Omer is a time to reflect on this idea. Perhaps that is what the Pri Chadash meant when he said that the simcha of Lag B'Omer is because of the five students Rebbe Akiva received afterwards. When all was consumed and there were only ashes, like the ashes that fill the sky and cover the ground on Lag B'Omer morning, Rebbe Akiva didn't give up. And at night, when the fires blaze, we can focus on the great light that Rebbe Shimon Bar

Yochai, one of those five students, managed to bring down on the day of his death. A tzaddik shows us that life is a gift, and death need not be a tragedy when we use every moment to bring down the light to the world.

By Lag B'Omer, the Omer is two thirds over. Some think that they may not have used the time well to prepare for Matan Torah, that it may be too late. Maybe, they think, they will just have to try again next year. So we remind them that it's never too late. Even from the ashes, life can grow again. As long as there is life, there is hope.

## The Fire Of Respect

### Rabbi Shmuel Kimche



would gaze, burned". They saw people neglecting the purpose of life with their critical

No-one can help but feel warmth at the very mention of the name "Rebbi Akiva". Certainly one of the most interesting superheroes that The Jewish People have ever had, saved us with his leadership, Torah, Love and Positivity through one of the darkest hours of our Jewish History.

Rabbi Akiva who marries Rachel (daughter to wealthy Kalba Savua), and is sent off (penniless) to Yeshiva to study at her request. Rabbi Akiva who comes back after 24 years of study, teaching his students that "all my learning and your learning – belongs to her". [Ketuvot 62b] Rabbi Akiva who had 24,000 students, who all die during the Omer. [Yevamot 62b] Rabbi Akiva who teaches us that the most important principle in the Torah is "VeAhavta LeReacha Kamocha". Rabbi Akiva who is tortured and killed by the Romans for teaching Torah, and dies reciting the Shema proudly, because he has waited his whole life to Love Hashem "with all your Soul". None can help also being awed by the Power and Depth of the life of Rabbi Akiva's prime Talmid – R' Shimon Bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar.

Rashb"i who is chased by Romans, hides in a cave where Hashem arranges a carob tree and a stream of water to provide for him and his son Elazar. After 12 years in hiding (and Torah study), R' Shimon leaves the cave with his son. "Wherever they

eye. A message comes from Above "Did you leave your cave to destroy My world? Go back to your cave." After another 12 months, they leave. Wherever Elazar's gaze burns, R' Shimon's gaze heals.

I was thinking about these two gemaras, about these 2 giant figures, about the Rebbe (R' Akiva) and his student

**"12,000 pairs of students die in a plague for "Not acting with enough Kavod/honour to one another". All are students of Rabbi Akiva who taught the message of "Love Your Neighbour Like Yourself"**

(Rashb"i): It seems too co-incidental that our Lag Baomer celebrates both the end of the deaths of R' Akiva's students [midrash], and the "Yom Hilula" or "yahrtzeit" of R' Shimon Bar Yochai some decades later.

12,000 pairs of students die in a plague for "Not acting with enough Kavod/honour to one another". All are students of Rabbi Akiva who taught the message of "Love Your Neighbour Like Yourself", but none of them manage to give each other 'personal space' or 'dignity'. Similarly, R' Shimon Bar Yochai, when he comes out of the cave the final time, he is able to validate (heal) accept

and love people, despite the fact that in his eyes, they are missing the point [See Brachot 35b].

Lag BaOmer was a Chag to celebrate Torah Sheb'al Peh - to celebrate R' Akiva and R' Shimon Bar Yochai. What do we celebrate about them? Yes, of course the continuation of our tradition, but more than that – The Fire of Respect for one another.

Interesting, of course, is that "Kavod/respect" has the numerical value of 32, and according to the midrash, after 32 days, the students stopped dying.

But 32 has another amazing value: [Rabbi Yochanan] said to [his students]: Go and see which is the best trait for a person to acquire. Said Rabbi Eliezer: **A good eye**. Said Rabbi Yehoshua: **A good friend**. Said Rabbi Yossi: **A good neighbor**. Said Rabbi Shimon: **To see what is born [out of ones actions]**. Said Rabbi Elazar: **A good heart**. Said He to them: **I prefer the words of Elazar the son of Arach to yours, for his words include all of yours. [Avot 2:10]**

"**A good heart**" is the end goal. During the Omer, we try to acquire a 'good heart'. With a "Lev Tov" we can give respect to each other. "**Lev**" has the gematria of 32, "**Tov**" has the gematria of 17. Together they make the 49 days of the Omer.

May we find within ourselves the 'Good Heart', to be able to see the good and have respect for one another, so that by the time it comes to Shavuot, we can once again accept the Torah united "Ke'ish Echad, BeLev Echad" – Like One Person with One Heart.

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A man living in Eretz Yisrael was laid off from his job where he was worked for many years. As each day passed he became more and more depressed. He received many offers for different jobs, but he refused all of them since none could compare to his previous job, which was pleasant work in a quiet accounting office.

One morning, he realized that he should face reality, and he decided that he would willingly accept the next job offer he received. Later that day, he met an old acquaintance who was a principal of a Tal-mud Torah, and when he heard he was out of work, he offered him a job as a supervisor on the school bus.

The next morning, he started his new work. Despite his decision to accept any work willingly, he could not hide his dismay at the contrast to his previous work in front of a computer in a quiet office. Now he was expected to control a bunch of rambunctious children, who did their best to make sure to give the supervisor a run for his money. The children could sense his negative feelings, and were even more rambunctious than usual.

One day, the driver told him an interesting story. A few decades ago, the doors of the small school buses were opened manually by a handle

near the door. On one school bus, the supervisor found it very difficult to constantly get up to open and close the door for each boy as he got off. The supervisor began a dispute with the driver, claiming that it was the driver's responsibility to open and close the door. Eventually, they decided to approach the Gadol, Rav Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul, zt"l, for his opinion on the dispute.

When Rav Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul heard the question, he arose from his seat, and said fervently, "Young school children (tinnokost shel rabban) are compared to Sifrei Torah, and since Sifrei Torah are placed in an Aron Kodesh, the school bus for the children is considered an Aron Kodesh. Opening and closing the door is considered like the mitzvah of hachnasah and hotzaah -the great mitzvah of opening the heichal before reading the Torah and closing it afterwards." Then Rav Ben-Tzion Abba Shaul raised his voice and said, "According to what I know, Yehudim usually fight over the important mitzvah of opening the heichal since everybody wants to merit it. And you, who are standing before such a mitzvah tens of times a day, when you open and close the door of the bus, are fleeing from it and arguing that the mitzvah should fall on the shoulders of the other one?!"

The man who had been laid off was very affected by this story. From then on, he began greeting the children with expressions of affection, such as, "Good morning, my little Sefer Torah." The children were affected by his positive attitude and affection, and even their parents reported that the children were especially happy when they arrived home. In time, the man's depression lifted, and he was happier and enthusiastic about his life.



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A cruel husband once approached his wife and told her "I'm the boss and you're nothing." She instantly replied, "Well I guess then... that makes you the boss of nothing!"

How much wisdom was captured in those few lines and wasted on a joke. The wife's response didn't deny that he was the boss - in fact, she readily agreed with him. She merely explained to him over what he was the boss. In other words, if you treat a wife like she's nothing, then you are the boss of nothing. Treat her like a person then you are the boss of a person. Treat her like a queen, then you are the boss of a queen - that is a King. Would you like to be a king? Fine - just treat her like a queen!

In this weeks Parsha we read one of the most famous statements that has resounded for generations - "VeAhavta LeReacha Kamocha - you should love your neighbour like yourself". So famous is this statement that R Akiva said this is a Klal Gadol BaTorah - a great rule in the torah.

This is a profound mitzvah. We all love ourselves, very very much! The torah seems to command that we take that same love and focus it on all those around us.

Yet the Ramban finds this hard to accept. How can it be that you should love your friend equally to yourself? There is a rule in the Gemara: "Chayecha Kodmin." - Your live always takes precedence.

The Gemara Bava Metziah (62a) states that if two people in the desert finding a canteen with enough water in it to keep only one person alive. The one who has it uses it, and is not supposed to give it to his friend. He must tend to his own life first, thus it seems he must love himself more than others.

Thus asks the Ramban how can it be that we're instructed here to love a friend equally to our love for our self, when we know that the Torah supports a person's survival instinct and says that ultimately your own life comes first? What is

the real meaning of VeAhavta LeReacha KaMocha?

The Ramban explains that the Torah is commanding us here to love our friends also, in a **similar way** (Kamocha) that we love ourselves. The Ramban takes the phrase Kamocha as an overstatement for emphasis. That desire that we have regarding ourselves, to live and be well, should carry over to others. The Ramban supports his view by the fact that Torah doesn't say "et reacha", rather "lereacha." "LeReacha means towards your friend, but not exactly the same. We know that we are not expected to love the person of our neighbour as much as we love our own self. However, we are expected to love our fellow in all areas, as we love all good for ourselves. Similarly the Rambam (Mada 6:3) writes that we should speak in praise of our neighbours, be careful with the honour and the property of others - as we are with our own.

***"When a man comes home from work he should not expect the dinner on the table, he should not view this as the woman's obligation, rather he should see it as kindness"***

VeAhavta LeReacha KaMocha is a very hard mitzvah to complete. It is a constant mitzvah, and requires much self inspection before applying it to others. We meet so many people in our daily lives, and we immediately form views about them. We relate to different people differently, yet we are told with one blanket statement - treat them all with love, put yourselves in their shoes and look out for their interests just as you would for your own.

The Chida writes that this Mitzvah is most manifest between a husband and wife. In the outside world, it

might be easy for us to show our kindness, after all, everyone is watching, so we need to impress. Yet when it comes to behind doors, that is when we are really being put to the test. When a man comes home from work he should not expect the dinner on the table, he should not view this as the woman's obligation, rather he should see it as kindness, she worked hard for it and spent quality time; put himself in *her* shoes. Similarly the women should not take for granted the husbands work, she should view it as Chesed.

We can now understand why this mitzvah was placed in the Parsha of Kedoshim.

What does holiness have to do with loving your neighbour. Ofcourse by doing the mitzvah you bring unity and happiness but does that lead to holiness. The answer is that to acquire holiness two things need to occur. The first is to love your neighbour exemplify in Ben Adam LeChavero and the second is to do it in a manner of Kedusha.

A true Torah-observant home is certainly most conducive to the Divine Presence. However, we should remember that as important as observance of Mitzvot is, it is possible as Ramban says (19:2) for a person to be in technical compliance with every halachic requirement, and nevertheless be a vulgar person. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba 13:3) states that the Mitzvot were given to us for no reason other than to refine our characters.

R Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was accompanied by a student before he entered his home, R Shlomo Zalman paused to brush the dust from his coat. He explained to the student, "The Talmud says that the Shechina dwells amongst man and wife. Do you think it is respectful to be in the presence of the Shechina with a dusty garment?"

If we were to approach married life with VeAhavta LeReacha KaMocha constantly on our minds, seeking the best for our partner as well as for ourselves, really understanding what they have been through that day, and infuse our relationship with Kedusha then we will ultimately become One.

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Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May

Rabbi Jonathan Rietti

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1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshas Acharei Mos* was taught after the death of Aaron's sons?
2. What is the punishment for a *Kohen Gadol* who inappropriately enters the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
3. How long did the first *Beis Hamikdash* exist?
4. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear when he entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
5. How many times did the *Kohen Gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on *Yom Kippur*?
6. How many times did he wash his hands and feet from the *Kiyor* (copper laver)?
7. The *Kohen Gadol* offered a bull *Chatas* to atone for himself and his household. Who paid for it?
8. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *Azazel*. What is *Azazel*?
9. Who is included in the "household" of the *Kohen Gadol*?
10. For what sin does the goat *Chatas* atone?



1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* except on *Yom Kippur*.
2. 16:2 - Death.
3. 16:3 - 410 years.
4. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *Kohen*.
5. 16:4 - Five times.
6. 16:4 - Ten times.
7. 16:6 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
8. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
9. 16:11 - All the *Kohanim*.
10. 16:16 - For unknowingly entering the *Beis Hamikdash* in the state of *tumah*.

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