

Lamplighter

16 Iyar
Bechukotai
983
20 May
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

Bechukotai, this week's Torah portion, contains the curses and punishments to be meted out upon the Jewish people if they do not obey G-d. Even a casual reading of these misfortunes in the Torah makes our hair stand on end. Chasidic philosophy, however, teaches that by delving more deeply into the meaning of these curses we can understand that they are actually blessings.

Furthermore, these "curses" are not only blessings, but blessings of such a high order that they can only manifest themselves in their seemingly opposite form!

A perfect illustration of this concept is found in the Talmud. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai once sent his son to two Sages for a blessing. When his son returned he complained that the Sages had cursed him. "What did they say?" asked Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. "You shall sow, but not reap," answered the son. The father patiently explained that the rabbis had meant that he should grow to be the father of many children who would be healthy and strong and not die during their father's lifetime. Likewise, every example the son gave of the rabbis' "curses" were similarly interpreted to contain great blessings.

But why did the rabbis go through the trouble of disguising their good intentions in such a convoluted manner? Chasidut explains that ultimate good is sometimes clothed in an outer garment of its exact opposite, precisely because it is too lofty to come into this world in any other form.

If, then, the rabbis' blessings were so lofty that they had to be "disguised" as curses, how did Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai recognize their true content?

Tanya, the basic book of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, explains that everything we perceive as evil in this world is, in reality, so good that we cannot absorb it in its true form (much in the way that an intense light hurts the eyes if one looks directly at its source). This good therefore takes the form of human suffering, just as we avert our eyes from a brightness which is too intense.

This, however, is only true at the present time. When Moshiach comes, the concealed good hidden within our afflictions will be revealed for what it is - utter and absolute blessing.

A Jew must, therefore, always accept whatever is decreed from Above, for when Moshiach comes we will see that the suffering of the exile was in truth a good of such magnitude that it could only be bestowed in such a way.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai possessed a soul capable of discerning this truth even before the coming of Moshiach. Likewise, Chasidut affords us a "taste" of the Messianic Era, enabling us to understand these inner truths which will soon become apparent, speedily in our days.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Thirteen Years in a Cave, Now What?

By Levi Avtzon

What's the first thing you do after you leave the cave you've been hiding in for the past thirteen years?

You spend some time with your family (which hopefully has not deserted).

Arrange a news conference.

Sign a book deal.

Negotiate a major motion picture.

Make the front cover of every tabloid magazine.

End up in rehab.

If you are of more humble stock, you try to return to your humble life, and count your blessings for years to come.

Sentenced to death after talking against the Roman regime, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai hid in a cave for thirteen years together with his son Elazar. For thirteen years they wallowed in sand – they were filled with painful sores upon exiting – subsisting only on carobs and water from a tree and stream that miraculously appeared at the cave's entrance.

They exit after thirteen years. What is the first thing on Rabbi Shimon's agenda?

The townspeople tell him about a road under which there is a lost grave. As *kohanim* (priests) are not permitted to come in contact with or even pass over a corpse, they had to take a detour when wishing to travel that route. Rabbi Shimon discerns the location of the body, the grave is marked, and the problem corrected.

Think about it.

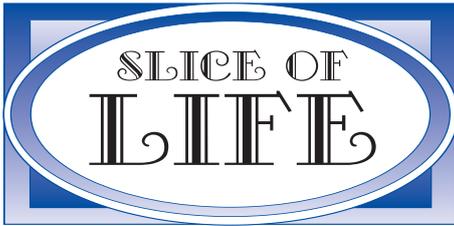
A person who was "inconvenienced" by living in a cave for thirteen years would presumably feel that he has a monopoly on pain and discomfort, and scoff at the younger generation who call every triviality a trauma.

To try to ease their pain? Forget it.

But here we find Rabbi Shimon doing just that, spending his first moments of freedom helping some *kohanim* get rid of a relatively small inconvenience!

Is there nothing bigger and more important than helping a person with some minor nuisance after being locked up in a cave for almost a decade and a half?

No there isn't.



Miracle in Meron

By Yerachmiel Tilles

On the eve of 18 Iyar, the thirty-third night of Counting the Omer in 5683 (1923), as every year, an enormous crowd was assembled on the roof of the building in Meron that enclosed the tomb of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. The huge annual bonfire was throwing off heat and smoke, radiating light that could be seen as far away as the streets of Safed and casting shadows on the circle of chassidim and leading members of the community that danced energetically in front of it. All the other men stood off to the side and sang and clapped enthusiastically to the pulsating beat of the traditional Lag B'Omer songs. Below, in the large courtyard, the women and children also sang and rejoiced, in honour of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai.

Lag B'Omer is the anniversary of the passing-on more than eighteen hundred years ago of the renowned Mishnaic sage and foremost Kabbalist, *Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai*, whose teachings comprise the text of the primary Kabbala sourcebook, the *Zohar*. (This of course is in addition to its halachic significance as a cessation in the semi-mourning observances that obtain between Passover and Shavuot.) The *yahrzeit* is celebrated with great joy in accordance with the recorded express wishes of Rebbe Shimon himself. Written accounts from more than five hundred years ago cite the tradition and the great virtue of attending the tomb site in the village of Meron, situated in the northern Galilee of Israel.

Sages and common folk alike attest that anyone who prays to G-d sincerely there on Lag B'Omer will surely be answered in Rebbe Shimon's merit. The barren, the poor, and the critically sick have all made the pilgrimage there and found salvation.

As always, the "stars" of the Lag B'Omer festivities that year were the little three-year-old boys, whose proud parents had brought them to have their first haircuts and *peyot*-shaping at Rebbe Shimon's tomb site on "his day". As the children were transferred from mothers' arms to fathers' shoulders, the scissors would be passed around to relatives, friends and bystanders, so all could share in the merit of snipping the long strands and curls, while leaving the *peyot* untouched.

That year Lag B'Omer fell on a Thursday night-Friday. Many of the celebrants elected to stay on for Shabbat, knowing that the holy day emerging out of Lag B'Omer in the presence of Rebbe Shimon would be an extraordinarily exalted occasion.

Friday evening everyone prayed together, and the holiness and joy of the Shabbat spirit was palpable. Then everyone turned to their lodging places, where the pleasure of the holy day continued unabated throughout the evening meals.

Early Shabbat morning, as soon as the first streaks of light infiltrated the sky, the Sephardim returned to the tomb site for the sunrise minyan. After them, the "regular" minyanim took place, and finally, the chassidim arrived for the late-morning shift in their own inimitable ecstatic style. Afterwards, when they too returned to the large communal eating area, the happy singing of the earlier arrivals left no doubt that the spirit of Shabbat joy was continuing to expand with each passing moment.

But then, a loud bitter wail shattered the shimmering atmosphere of Shabbat joy. A little boy, who had come with his mother for his first haircut, had unaccountably fallen sick and stopped breathing. Aid was given, but to no avail. He was dead, and his broken mother was screaming uncontrollably. All the women around her were crying too.

The word spread quickly. Almost instantaneously, melancholy gloom replaced the exuberant rejoicing. The singing stopped, the dancers froze; the mother's loud cries pierced every heart.

Before they could recover from their shock, a further development struck. The British Mandate police assigned to keep order suddenly, without any warning, locked the gates of the courtyard. They then announced that they were forced to take this precaution because maybe the disease that had struck down the hapless child was highly contagious, and they were obligated to do everything possible to prevent it from proliferating.

Pandemonium spread. Many families were divided by the padlocked gate; numerous little children were cut off from their parents. The British police didn't seem to care, and turned a deaf ear to every appeal. Masses of Jews were being prevented from reaching Rebbe Shimon on the day of his celebration.

The stunned Jews still inside pushed closer to the tomb site, to express their crushed hearts in fervent prayer. Suddenly the crowd rippled, and like at the Splitting of the Red Sea, a clear path miraculously opened. The grieving mother was staggering determinedly towards the place of Rebbe Shimon, carrying her dead son in her arms.

The sight was enough to break every heart. Some sighed, some cried, others nodded their

heads as if to show understanding and empathy.

The distraught mother came up to the tomb. She placed her son on the ground. Seemingly unaware of all the people around her, in a quivering voice she spoke out through her tears, "Oy! *Tzadik!* I, your humble maidservant, came here to honour you. Only you know that in bringing my son here to you, I was fulfilling the vow I made on this spot four years ago, before I merited to be a mother for the first time. Yesterday we inaugurated him with joy and song in the mitzvah of leaving *peyot*. And now, woe is me! How can I go home without my son!?"

All those present choked back their sobs. No one dared to make a sound that might interfere with her words.

The mother stopped crying. She straightened up and took a deep breath. In a firm clear voice, she pronounced: "Rebbe Shimon! I have laid my son on the ground next to you, dead. Please do not disappoint me. Return my son to me alive and healthy as he was when I brought him here to you. '*Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmei rabbah*' - 'Exalted and blessed is His great name', and also the name of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. Everyone knows that you are holy and He, our G-d, is holy. Please give me back my son!"

She stopped speaking, then spun and exited the structure built around the tomb. Every other person present followed her out. They closed the door after them, leaving the dead child behind, unattended.

A few minutes passed. From inside, behind the closed doors, a weak voice was heard. "Mommy, water. I'm so thirsty."

Everyone stood as if paralysed, trembling with conflicting emotions of fear and disbelief, of shock and delight. The mother burst through the doors and swept up her child into her arms. Everyone ran in and surrounded them, and spontaneously burst out with overflowing hearts, "Blessed is He who enlivens the dead!"

The bewildered British quickly re-opened the courtyard gates. The throngs of Jews impatiently standing outside streamed back in. When they heard about the great miracle that had just taken place, the thanksgiving and celebration multiplied sevenfold.

The sound of their enthusiastic singing of the most popular "Bar Yochai" song (composed by the Kabbalist, Rabbi Shimon Labia approximately 450 years ago) could be heard for miles around - and, no doubt, penetrated to the highest heavens, including the celestial abode of Rebbe Shimon.

"*Bar Yochai, nimshachta ashrecha, shemen sasson meihavarecha*" - "Bar Yochai, fortunate are you, anointed with joyous oil over and above your companions."

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ISSUE 983

MOSHIACH MATTERS

The Baal Shem Tov taught that when the Messiah arrives, he will explain the entire Torah from the perspective of each and every letter, starting from the first letter of the Torah to the last. Then he will join all the letters together into one long Name of G-d and explain the entire Torah from the total perspective. Meaning to say, first he will explain the Torah according to the unique view of every individual, so that each one will hear an explanation of Torah that rings harmoniously with the root of his soul. Then he will join all the letters together, and reveal the unity of the entire Jewish People through the Torah. (*Eliezer Shore-Bas Ayin*)

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



A WORD from the Director

Pesach Sheni
14th Day Of Iyar, 5740
April 30, 1980

To the Sons and Daughters of our People Israel, Everywhere —

G-d bless you all!

Greeting and Blessing:

As we are approaching the auspicious day of Lag B'Omer, the day of rejoicing of the Tanna, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochoi (RaShBy) — of whom his teacher Rabbi Akiva said, "(Only) I and your Creator know your powers,"

Let us reflect on one point, at least, of the inestimable powers of Rashby — a point that is especially relevant even to the most ordinary Jew, and certainly to one of higher standing.

As is well known, Rashby had to hide in a cave for twelve years, then for yet another year, because of his uncompromising stand in preserving Yiddishkeit under Roman rule and persecution. When he finally regained freedom, one of the first things he set out to do was to inquire, "Is there anything that needs to be rectified?" Upon learning of such a situation, he immediately sets out to rectify it, though it only meant saving Jews the trouble of making a roundabout way. Yet, since it was a matter of concern to Jews, it deeply touches him, and he spares no effort and time until he actually remedies the situation.

Consider: After spending thirteen years in a cave, with only sand to cover his body, and finally emerging painfully scarred by his ordeal — how does he begin his free life? He goes out to inquire immediately what there is to rectify, and — true to the principle that "action is the essential thing" — he throws himself into the task and does not rest until it is accomplished.

Needless to say, no one can compare to Rashby, but since the above (Talmudic) account is part of Torah, Torah shebe'al Peh, and "Torah" means "instruction," it is certain that every Jew has the capability to carry out the moral lesson of this account, too; namely, to act in the spirit and direction of it, and with assured success, all the more so since Rashby has shown the way and paved it for all of us.

If to do a Jew a favour materially — be it only to shorten the way for him to reach his destination — is such a great thing, how much more so is it to be able to show the way, and shorten the distance, in the spiritual sense, — "to the end that he may instruct his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of G-d, to do righteousness and justice." For it is the sacred duty of every Jew to walk in the way of G-d and to bring up his children to follow in this way, and to do all he can to spread Yiddishkeit, Torah and Mitzvos; including the teachings of Rashby in his Sefer haZohar, Pnimiyyus haTorah, which has a particular relevance to our generation awaiting the imminent footsteps of Mashiach, for "with this Sefer haZohar Jews will be delivered from the Galus with Divine mercy."

And here we come to a further point connected with Rashby, which comes to light right in the beginning of the Preface to his work, the Zohar.

In the Beginning: Rabbi Shimon opened, 'The blossoms have appeared on the earth, etc. What sustains the world ... is the voice of young children learning Torah, and because of them the world is saved...

In Torah-true education of Jewish children, the above two points of Rashby's teachings converge and come to fruition. It calls for the utmost effort, until every Jewish child, boy and girl, is provided with the kind of education that will ensure their keeping the way of G-d in the fullest measure, and passing it on to their children and children's children. In the words of the Psalmist: "So we will tell Your praise (transmit Your heritage) to generation from generation" — to all the children of the present generation and to all the children of the next, and so on.

May G-d grant that everyone should be actively involved in all the above, within the overall effort to spread Torah and Mitzvos, and do it with great joy. And the merit of Lag BaOmer, the day of Rashby's rejoicing, and it was his wish that all Jews participate in his rejoicing, will surely stand everyone, man and woman, in good stead, to succeed in their efforts in matters of Torah and Mitzvos in general, and in the above matters in particular; and acting with joy and inspiration assures even greater success. Moreover, the Zechus Horabbim helps, too.

This week's parsha describes in vivid detail all of the great blessings G-d offers us for our devotion to the study of Torah and the observance of its commandments. One of the blessings that stand out is "I will grant peace in the land, and you will go to sleep with nothing frightening you. I will eliminate wild animals from the Land and swords will not pass through your land."

Rashi explains that the last blessing implies that an army will not even pass through your land to wage war elsewhere. So pervasive will the peace be that even the mere image of war will be removed from our sight.

This Torah reading always coincides with the Festival of Lag B'Omer—which we will be observing this Sunday—which marks the passing of the great Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar, the principal work of Kabbalah.

The connection between the Zohar and the emphasis on absolute peace that we read about in this week's parsha is that in Torah there are also two dimensions. There are the legal aspects of Torah that deal with the realities of life in an imperfect, discordant and even violent world. And there is the spiritual and mystical dimension of Torah that deals with G-dly matters. These two dimensions parallel the two states of war and peace. When we study the legal aspects of Torah it gives us the strength to deal with the hardships and struggles of life. When we study the spiritual dimension of Torah it helps us cultivate the part of our soul that is above and beyond the harsh realities of life—the peaceful and tranquil G-dly dimension of our identities.

This explains why the spiritual teachings of the Zohar and Chassidut are considered the means to bring about the Messianic Age, at which time we will see the fruition of the blessings of unmitigated peace. By studying these mystical teachings that help us cultivate the inner workings of our soul we help bring about the time when G-d's Essence will be fully revealed. In its wake we will experience eternal peace and revealed G-dliness.

J. I. Gutnick

Lag BaOmer Customs

1. It is traditional to light bonfires on Lag BaOmer eve. These commemorate the immense light that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai introduced into the world via his mystical teachings. This was especially true on the day of his passing, Lag BaOmer, when he revealed to his disciples secrets of the Torah, whose profundity and intensity the world had yet to experience. The Zohar relates that the house was filled with fire and intense light, to the point that the assembled could not approach or even look at Rabbi Shimon.

2. Children customarily go out into the fields and play with imitation bows and arrows. This commemorates the midrashic tradition that no rainbow was seen during Rabbi Shimon's lifetime. Rainbows first appeared after Noah's flood, when G-d promised to never again devastate the world. When the world is deserving of

punishment, G-d sends a rainbow instead. Rabbi Shimon's merit protected the world, rendering the rainbow superfluous.

3. The Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged the practice of arranging children's parades on Lag BaOmer in celebration of Jewish unity—a major Lag BaOmer theme.

4. All the Omer mourning practices are suspended on Lag BaOmer. Permitted are weddings, haircuts, music, etc.

5. Some eat carobs commemorating the carob tree which grew at the entrance of the cave which Rabbi Shimon and his son hid in for 13 years.

CUSTOMS CORNER

It Happened Once...



A certain rabbi in Russia owned a pair of *tefillin* that had been written by Rabbi Moshe of Peshevarsk. It is known that Rabbi Moshe wrote every word of *tefillin* in holiness and purity, so every existing pair is considered extremely valuable.

One day, as a *sofer* [writer of Torah, *tefillin* and *mezuzah* scrolls] at the request of the rabbi was inspecting the *tefillin*, he noticed a letter that seemed to be broken off, as though unfinished. The rabbi asked the scribe to complete the letter so that the *tefillin* would not be invalid, but the *sofer* said he could not touch his quill to *tefillin* scrolls written by the Rebbe of Peshevarsk. The rabbi then brought the *tefillin* to another scribe with the same request. This *sofer*, too, declined.

In desperation, the owner of the *tefillin* finally took them to a *sofer* without telling him who had written them. When the *sofer* dipped his quill in ink and extended his hand to repair the letter, a book suddenly flopped out of the nearby bookcase, landing on the scroll of *tefillin* that lay spread out before him and covering it with dust.

Those present were startled. But this was nothing compared to the amazement they felt when they picked up the book. After brushing away all the dust from the *tefillin* parchment, they saw that the seemingly broken letter was actually complete!

But even that astonishment paled beside the emotion they felt when, about to replace the book that had fallen, they discovered that it was none other than the famous *Ohr P'nei Moshe*, written by Rabbi Moshe of Peshevarsk himself!

Going to India is almost a rite of passage for many secular Israelis after completion of their mandatory army service. The Chabad emissaries in the Asian country are accustomed to rescuing young *neshamot* (souls) from cults and Eastern religions which often attract young Israelis with promises of "enlightenment." Rabbi Shaul, director of Chabad house in Dharamsala India, had the privilege recently of also saving a Jewish body. On a daring rescue mission in the Himalayas in the dead of night, he succeeded in utilizing skills he gained as an Israeli Army paramedic.

Rabbi Shaul's Chabad house is located at the foothills of the breathtaking Himalayan Mountains, which attract many Israeli hikers. Even veteran hikers do not approach these peaks with absolute confidence and warn novice hikers to proceed with caution.

Recently, an Israeli climber fell into a ditch at a high altitude, and his condition was potentially fatal. A fellow hiker ran to the Chabad house to alert Rabbi Shaul. As the young man was fighting for his life in the cold and the darkness, the young rabbi and his assistants prepared bandages and IV infusions, and phoned the Indian army and police to request an emergency helicopter. The family in Israel and the Israeli ambassador in Delhi were also informed.

Ten strong men braved their way up the mountain. While a jeep would have been the fastest mode of transport, all the Indian drivers were drunk. The path was dark and treacherous, but a trip that would usually take 4 to 6 hours was completed in only two hours. Three of the men couldn't reach the destination, and had to be left behind. The remaining seven and Rabbi Shaul, finally found Ronny, who had fallen 35 meters and had lost a dangerous amount of blood. Rabbi Shaul gave Ronny an IV infusion and bandages and warned the Indian army that a helicopter was the only way Ronny could be saved. They promised to provide one at dawn.

The men spent the cold night in the mountains with no blankets or sleeping bags, and gave their only blanket to Ronny, who was thankful to have been rescued. The helicopter arrived at 7 am, but searched for an hour before it was able to spot Ronny. He spent another two hours on the helicopter before landing at the hospital and surviving a life-saving operation.

"Indeed, the Dharamsala Chabad house is the address for saving not only spiritual lives but physical lives too!" said Rabbi Shaul.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

If you walk in My statutes. (Lev. 26:3)

The Baal Shem Tov taught that a person must never become settled in his habits and fixed in his ways, for G-d's laws are meant to be "walked in." The service of G-d should never be static, but should lead us to higher and higher levels of sanctity. (*Keter Shem Tov*)

I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and my covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember. (Lev. 26:42)

The Patriarchs are not mentioned in chronological order in this verse, but rather in the order of the attributes and eras they personified. After the Torah was given, the Jews entered the era of Torah, personified by Jacob who was the pillar of Torah. When the Holy Temple was built they entered the era of "service" and Isaac embodied the attribute of service. And these last generations of the era before Moshiach are connected to Abraham who was the epitome of loving-kindness. The Baal Shem Tov explained that now, in the final era before Moshiach, emphasis must be placed on deeds of kindness to hasten the redemption. (*Rabbi Ben Tzion of Bobov*)

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS BECHUKOTAI • 17 IYAR • 21 MAY

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	4:58 PM
	MINCHA:	5:10 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	5:40 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9:47 AM
	MINCHA:	5:00 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	5:57 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS SUN-FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	5:05 PM
	MAARIV:	5:50 PM

CANDLE LIGHTING: 20 MAY 2011

Begins		Ends
4:58	MELBOURNE	5:57
5:00	ADELAIDE	5:58
4:47	BRISBANE	5:42
6:11	DARWIN	7:02
4:45	GOLD COAST	5:39
5:07	PERTH	6:03
4:42	SYDNEY	5:39
4:47	CANBERRA	5:45
4:41	LAUNCESTON	5:42
5:01	AUCKLAND	6:00
4:50	WELLINGTON	5:52



Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

צוקללה"ה נבג"מ ז"ע

May he succeed in imploring the Almighty to redeem His people speedily in our days.