

What Will You Do With Your Minute?

Today is Lag BaOmer, a very special day for many reasons - one of them being that it is the yahrzeit of Rav Shimon bar Yochai (Rashbi). The day Rav Shimon bar Yochai passed away was called a joyous day, a Hilulah, *celebration*. When his neshama went up to shamayim (*Heaven*), they rejoiced in shamayim.

The Chiddah wrote that one should rejoice and be happy on Lag BaOmer. A person should strive to do teshuva, *repentance*, on Lag BaOmer and the neshama of the Rashbi will assist the person with their teshuva.

In Judaism, there is no such thing as "I can't". Lag BaOmer is our ability to break through our inhibitions of "I can't". Each and every one of us has great inner potential we can unlock. As Rav Shimon bar Yochai ascends in shamayim every year coming closer to Hashem, so too do we increase our own inner potential. As Rav Shimon ascends, he is not moving farther away from us while we remain stagnant. Each year we too grow and have greater potential than we did the year before.

Today is the 33rd day of the Omer. **32** days preceded today representing לב (gematria = 32), **heart** and in **17** days, representing טוב (gematria = 17), **good**, it will be Shavuot. Pirkei Avos (2:13) states: ...לב טוב... - *He [Rabban Yohanan] said unto them: go forth and observe which is the right way to which a man should cleave? ...Rabbi Elazar said, a good heart.*

One's heart is his emotional control center. From a good heart flow all good actions and character (Rav). R' Yonah defines a good heart as the ability to be patient with people and to contain anger. A good-hearted person always responds to people softly and considerately and is always ready to do them favors (Tiferes Yisroel).

One can deal with the difficulties of life if he possesses a good heart. King Solomon teaches in Mishlei (15:15): וְטוֹב לֵב מִשְׂתֵּה תַמְחִיד - *A good heart is always at a banquet*. In fact, this verse is quoted as the very last words in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim (697), signifying that it should be one's goal to achieve a happy frame of mind throughout life. This means that one who is happy with his lot in life is always in a festive frame of mind, never fazed by life's vicissitudes (Beis Avos).

The following is taken from *The Wisdom of the Hebrew Alphabet* by Rabbi Michael Munk on the significance of these two special words:

- The letter ל spelled לָמַד is also the word for *learning* לָמַד and is roshei teivot for לב מִבֵּין – *a heart that understands wisdom*. The goal of learning Torah is to absorb its teachings into one's לב (Osios R' Akiva).

- The Torah begins with the ב of בראשית and ends with the ל of ישראל. Therefore, the entire Torah is contained between the letters of לב. In their proper alphabetical order, ב and ל read לב, *don't*, representing an awareness of what to avoid. (Osios R' Akiva)
- In the Aleph Bet, the letters ב and ל of לב are preceded by א and כ forming אך, *but* - a term that generally indicates a limitation. The ב and ל are followed by ג and נ, forming גם, *increase* - a term that generally indicates an addition to whatever has been specified. This alludes to the verse וְלֵב חָכָם לְיָמִינוֹ וְלֵב כְּסִיל לְשִׁמְאֹלוֹ – *A wise man's heart tends to its right, while a fool's heart tends to its left.* (Kohelet 10:2) A wise man looks to the right of לב and finds אך, *limitation*; he is satisfied with his lot and does not seek more than he has. A fool, on the other hand, looks to his left to find גם, *increase*, for he is never at ease with his possessions, but always wants more and more.
- The 32 threads of tzitzit allude to the word לב because the tzitzit are reminders of the mitzvos contained in the Torah. (Hadar Zekeinim, Bereishis)
- The first time the word טוב appears in the Torah is Bereishis (1:4) – אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב – *...that the light was good.* The word טוב is the 33rd word written in the Torah because you can only have טוב once you open your heart, לב (32).

The Torah continues regarding the third day of Creation after separating the water and land and creating vegetation in Bereishis (1:12) וַיֹּרֶא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב – *And Hashem saw that it was good.* The separation of the water and land speaks to Hashem's setting proper limits – to Creation itself and for people. The concept of Hashem determining what is sufficient and setting limits is alluded to in His name שֶׁ-דַּי, from the word דַּי, *enough, or sufficient.*

With the one word דַּי, *enough*, Hashem fixed the measure of all objects, established the boundaries of all forces, and set the moral limits within which people are to live. Gemara Chagigah (12a) explains that if Hashem had not called out דַּי to the heaven and earth, they would have continued expanding and developing as if they were the product of blind physical forces. Through the establishment of fixed laws in the universe to protect the integrity of Creation as He intended it to be, Hashem revealed Himself in His attribute of *enough, sufficient.*

This pasuk 12 in Bereishis starts with the words וַתֵּצֵא הָאֲרֶץ – *And the earth brought forth (vegetation).* In Gemara Chullin (60b) Rav Assi explains that the herbs began to grow on the third day, as they had been commanded, but stopped before they broke through the soil. It remained for Adam HaRishon to pray for them, whereupon rain fell and growth was completed. This teaches that Hashem longs for our prayers.

The Gemara Berachos (16b) cites different examples of personal prayers that righteous men appended to their Shemoneh Esrei prayers. Rav's prayer has been adopted as the preface to Birkas HaChodesh, the blessing of the new month we recite the Shabbos preceding Rosh Chodesh. It concludes: חַיִּים שְׂתַמְלֵא לָנוּ אֶת כָּל מִשְׁאָלוֹת לִבֵּנוּ לְטוֹבָה – *(May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d that You give us)... a life in which You will fulfill for us all our heart's desires for good.*

The Rashash explains that since a person may desire something that he regards as good, but in reality is detrimental to him, Rav prayed that only those requests that Hashem knows are good should be fulfilled.

The Gemara Berachos (17a) further teaches: *גָּמֹר בְּכָל לֵבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ לִדְעוֹת אֶת דְּרָכַי* - *Hashem urges us to Learn with all your **heart** (לֵבָבְךָ) and all your soul to know My ways.* The Maharsha explains this to mean that according to the best of one's intellectual abilities, one should contemplate Hashem's reality, unity and omnipotence.

Rav Shimon bar Yochai lit up the fire inside people's hearts. If someone wants external change, they need to change themselves first internally. When our hearts are open to understand who we are we can then appreciate the relationship we have with Hashem. Each one of us is an ambassador of Hashem. We are all a manifestation of Hashem in this world. *אֵין עוֹד מִלְבָּדוֹ* - *There is none besides Him (Hashem).* At our core we are invincible, radiant, and hopeful as we are a part of Hashem. Rav Shimon bar Yochai teaches us that Lag BaOmer is a day of light. Our mission is to bring light into the world where there is darkness.

Under the current circumstances we have endured for the last few months it has been harder to spread light when we are relegated to the confines of our homes. However, if we look with our emunah glasses, Hashem has given us the opportunity to hit Control + Alt + Delete, to hit the reset button. We are creatures of habit, but let's take advantage of this unique situation in our lifetimes and build into our daily schedules and habits newfound opportunities to share our talents and help others.

Last week was Pesach Sheni a day that was created for the opportunity not to miss out on a mitzvah and have a second opportunity to serve Hashem. During the second year in the desert, when Bnei Yisrael brought the korban pesach, there were two people who were contaminated and couldn't take part. Most opinions hold that they became *tameh* (ritually impure) when they carried out the bodies of Nadav and Avihu who died on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and they couldn't purify themselves. They came to Moshe Rabbeinu and said two words (Bamidbar 9:7): *לָמָּה נִגְרַע*: – *Why should we miss out?*

Every soul has hope - no matter how far away you are from your potential you have hope. That's the lesson of Pesach Sheni. We have the ability to cry out to Hashem and He can create a new opportunity for us that didn't exist before.

This very special day comes to teach us that a human being is unique in their desire to improve themselves and better their circumstances. Plants, animals, rocks, and other parts of the natural world do not strive to change. A flower does not wish it were a fish and a rabbit does not wish it were a rock. Man has untapped potential that is our mission to delve into and change for the better.

We just read parshas Emor this shabbos. The first pasuk says ואמר... אמר. I learned that אמר stands for אש (fire), מים (water), and רוח (wind) - three of the four foundational building blocks of the world.

These three building blocks correspond to the three pillars on which the world stands (Pirkei Avos 1:2) of תורה (Torah), עבודה (service for Hashem), and גמילות חסדים (kind deeds).

The word ואמר is made up of the word אמר plus the letter ת. The last letter of the Alef Bet is ת, so it represents the lowest foundational building block of עפר (earth).

The message here is for us to bring down the three pillars of the world - עבודה וגמילות חסדים - down to earth in tangible and practical ways especially during these special days of Sefirat HaOmer.

Sefirat HaOmer teaches us several important concepts. Two that stand out to me are that first we should illuminate time making time shine thereby elevating it. The second is to make time important. We are counting each day – let's treat our time like precious, sparkling jewels and savor each moment by making the most of it.

A buzzword today is for someone to be mindful. Mishlei taught long ago that when a person is doing something they want to be doing and they know it's the right thing to do – they will be happy. They won't want to be anywhere else. They are present in the moment. Whatever they are doing is the most important thing they should be doing in that particular moment. Once someone knows whatever must get done – they will want to do it themselves. The desire will be there from within them and not sought from some outside influence.

With Hashem's help may we know what we should be doing to unlock the inner greatness we all have and open our **hearts**. What is **good** for us and fulfills our potential. How we are needed and how we can serve others. That is what gives depth and meaning to our lives. Let's celebrate life by embracing it with joy, taking an active role in how we spend our time.

These are esoteric and lofty concepts that I for sure do not fully understand and struggle with every day. My hope is that by sharing these ideas with you perhaps we can just touch these ideas, however briefly and however lightly, and that we will be better for it today than we were yesterday.

On that note I offer two secular resources that I have found particularly helpful for making lasting changes.

Stephen Guise, author of *Mini Habits: Smaller Habits, Bigger Results*, teaches that if you're tired of wrestling with yourself to change, it's because you're fighting an internal battle — humans are neurologically built to resist change. But mini habits slip right under this resistance because they're too small to resist.

Over time, mini habits destroy resistance in much the same way that termites destroy trees. Individually, they're small, but when combined over time, they have a huge impact. Mini habits work so well because they generate momentum and reprogram your subconscious.

The reason mini habits work so well is that they are simple and easy to implement. Otherwise, like with other strategies, when we have a bad day, get overwhelmed, or run out of willpower, we'll drop our goal and lose our progress. Mini habits have no ceiling, so do as much as you want when motivation is high.

But what happens when you aren't motivated at all? No problem. **Mini habits allow you to succeed even on your worst day.** The low bar to action is a safety net to allow remarkable consistency. Would you rather have impressive goals and embarrassing results or embarrassing goals and impressive results?

If you can succeed on your worst day, what's there to stop you?

James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits: Tiny changes, Remarkable Results* discusses the One Percent Rule. Small differences in performance can lead to very unequal distributions when repeated over time. This is yet another reason why habits are so important. The people that can do the right things more consistently are more likely to maintain a slight edge and accumulate disproportionate rewards over time.

You only need to be slightly better than yesterday, but if you are able to maintain a slight edge today and tomorrow and the day after that, then you can repeat the process of winning by just a little bit over and over again.

Over time the majority of the rewards will accumulate to the people that maintain a one percent advantage over the alternatives. You don't need to be twice as good to get twice the results. You just need to be slightly better.

What I have learned over the last few weeks is to make a commitment so easy that I cannot break it. Imagine if we take one minute out of the day and make one positive change. There are 1,440 minutes in 24 hours - let's find just one of them and own it.

I have committed to reading a book for one minute a day. With that goal, I have read hundreds of pages and finished a handful of books already. There has never been a day when I couldn't find at least one minute to read.

See what changing 60 seconds can do for you. Let me know. I want to hear about it.

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