



Sefirat Haomer



English version

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THE WORLD'S GREATEST ARTIST

I heard the most beautiful idea from my neighbor, Dan Gordon, one of the best landscapers in Jerusalem and a Shemitta specialist. This idea is an idea that one can meditate on for hours. Chana praised G-d, saying: **אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלמה, ואין צור** *There is none that is holy like G-d, for there is no one else except You... and there is no Rock like our G-d.* The Talmud asks **מאי "אין צור באלקינו"?** - *אין ציר באלקינו* *What does it mean, that there is no rock [Hebrew, tzur] like our G-d? It can be interpreted as saying, "there is no - tzayyar- , there is no artist like our G-d (Berachot 10a).* The Talmud gives an explanation as to what that means.

Dan shared his own twist to this, a brilliant concept. Every artist in the world attaches his signature to his work – otherwise, you can't know who the artist is. But G-d is different. He does not put His signature on anything. *Because everything is His signature.* I felt that this is a great intro to the following life lesson.

Rachel, daughter of the philanthropist Kalba Sabua, knew she was doing the right thing by marrying Akiva, the shepherd. How did she know not to listen her father, that she should reject all the great rabbis she could have married, and, instead, give her hand to the divorced, 40-year-old shepherd who worked for her father?

The Talmud tells us. She saw that he was modest. **צניע ומעלי** (Ketubot 62b) The Pele Yoetz writes that the first thing a girl dating should look for in a husband is modesty. After modesty, see if he is a Talmid Chacham (Pesachim 49a). And next, see that he has a Rabbi he listens to. The Pele Yoetz goes on to warn that a woman should *never* marry a boy because of money, and she should not turn down a boy because of lack of money. Money comes, and money goes. But the boy she marries will stay with her forever (Pele Yoetz 109:2).

Modesty and humility are very different, although they are interconnected. Modesty is the reluctance to flaunt oneself, to put oneself on display or to attract attention. Humility is about how you perceive your strengths and your G-d-given gifts.

As Dan beautifully illustrated, G-d is the most modest artist, and He commands us to be modest along with Him. **וְהִצַּנְעַ לְפָנֶיךָ** *אֱלֹהֶיךָ*. Micha the prophet taught that Modesty is one of three fundamental principles of our religion (Makkot 24a). Why is modesty so crucial? Why is the virtue of modesty the key to all other virtues and spiritual success?

Avoiding external honor is one of the basic tenets of Judaism. Bear with me, as I take you



for a ride. The ride of your life. This is the soul of each and every Jew. Literally.

We sing each day in our prayers, לְמַעַן יִזְמְרֶךָ כָּבוֹד וְלֹא יִדָּם So that Kavod (honor) will sing to You and will not be silent. All of the commentators explain that Kavod, honor, in this context, refers to the soul. The Nefesh. Why is your soul "honor"? What is the connection? עוֹרָה כְּבוֹדִי עוֹרָה הַנֶּבֶל וְכָבוֹד אֶעֱיֶרָה. Again. The word honor is used in reference to the soul. Why is the soul called honor? And why did G-d create the concept of honor, anyway? How many lives were ruined because of it? How many people were not able to achieve their life's destiny, for they lived their lives with their eyes on the rear-view mirror, worried about what people might say about them, if they drove on to reach it? Each day in Shacharit, we say יֵצֵר כָּבוֹד לְשֵׁמוֹ טוֹב Good He created, honor for His Name. What does this mean? In what way do G-d create honor for His Name?

One of the most fundamental questions of Judaism is the question R Yosef Kairo asked the Maggid-angel who taught him. If the soul came from such a high place, from under G-d's throne, and the soul received there great pleasure from being close to G-d... Why did G-d send the soul down to this world, into a body, to do Mitzvot? If anyway, in the end, if the soul accomplished its mission on Earth, it will return to the place of the souls, next to G-d's throne?

The Maggid answered R' Yosef Kairo that there is a concept called Nahama D'kisufa. Embarrassed bread. Nahama D'kisufa is a parable of a poor man that got bread from a rich man. Despite the fact that he enjoyed his meal, he is embarrassed that he is eating "bread of kindness". A man who works for his bread, who paid for his meal with the sweat of his

brow, does not feel embarrassed about the bread he eats. The lesson is that reward without effort, as in the case of the soul being close to G-d's throne, is "embarrassed bread". G-d therefore sends the soul down and commands it to keep the Torah and Mitzvot. By fulfilling G-d's commands, the Heavenly reward for one's spiritual toil will be much greater than the original pleasure of the soul, for it will no longer have the component of feeling embarrassment.

Now, we can understand why G-d made the emotion called honor. In His infinite mercy and endless goodness, He wants the souls of mankind to have the ability to enjoy the ultimate pleasure of a deserved closeness to G-d. The purpose of honor is to enable you to enjoy your closeness to G-d in the next world at a whole new level, a more honorable level, a level of respect. This emotion of honor is the fundamental reason for which your soul came down to this world. Therefore, the soul is referred to as Honor.

Your choice in life is which honor you pursue. There are two types of honor in this world. There is the pursuit of internal, eternal honor, where a person focuses on a life of value, virtues and victory over the Evil Inclination. And there is temporary, external honor, i.e., looking to draw attention, to flaunt oneself, or to put oneself on display. The two types of honor are diametrically opposed and work like a seesaw. If a person lives with purpose, he does not need external honor. Modesty is the way to tap into your soul. Into eternity. Into a life of values, virtue, and victory over inclinations.

All of life's blessings flourish when they don't attract attention (Bava Metziah 42a). If you want to flourish, you need to pick the type of honor you want. A healthy ego is an ego that



does not get its nourishment from external sources. A healthy ego does not need to take credit, in order to feel accomplished. Quite the contrary. A healthy ego gives credit and honor to others, as R Akiva taught his students, שלי

ושלכם שלה. *All of my learning, and all of my student's learning, is all in the credit of my wife Rachel.*

Be G-dlike. Stay modest.

A Lag B'Omer Lesson

I got a call the other day from New York. It was from a girl who was dating, who was confused. "I want to marry a boy that is learning. The boy I am dating wants to learn in Kollel for a few years. But I do not want to take on myself responsibility for the financial department of the family. My parents will support us, and I want to be honest to my future husband about how long I am okay with him staying in learning. My parents are willing to help for a limited amount of time, but then, what? I do not want my husband to expect me to get money from my parents for him to stay in learning longer, if they are not ready to continue their support..." (see Rama EH, 2;1)

There is no one answer to this question, and the subject is very, very complex. There are many girls who approach this dilemma by somehow saying to the boy they want to marry exactly what the boy would want to hear. And they hope for the best. This girl, though, wanted to be honest, open and fair.

This is what I told her. I hope that it was the right answer. Learning in Kollel, dedicating the first few years of marriage to learning Torah, has great advantages. The learning after marriage is totally different from the learning before marriage, and if one takes it seriously, he will merit to start his marriage on the right foot. Something that is invaluable.

But this girl was talking about more than just a year or two. So I told her what I learnt from my Rebbe. The Rambam says, "And why did

the Tribe of Levi not merit a portion in the Land of Israel along with their brothers? Because the Tribe of Levi was set apart to serve G-d and to teach His straightforward ways to the People, and that is why Levites do not go to war, and G-d is their portion. And not only the Tribe of Levi is such, but each and every man of the world, whose spirit is uplifted, and his intellect is capable of grasping this concept, to stand before G-d and to serve Him, to know G-d,... and he throws off his shoulders the burdens of calculations that people make for themselves; this person becomes sanctified as holy of holies, and G-d will be his portion, and his inheritance, for ever and ever. And he will deserve to have his needs met in this world, just as the needs of the Kohen and Levi's needs were met by G-d." (Shmitta Vayobel 13; 12 -13)

Of course, it makes sense that if you can't pay bills and you do not have a way – a source from which to pay back loans, your husband will have to consider getting a job. If he can swing it, a job in Kodesh would be great, like teaching, or something similar. But the honest answer of how the Kollel person, or the person in Kodesh live, is that he lives without planning. As long as he can make it through the month, he can stay in Kollel. But the essence of a Kollel person, the essence of working in true Kiruv, or in true teaching, is not worrying about where you will have next month's money from. Of course, live with a plan. But if the plan is taking over the learning, teaching, etc., then this is not the real Shevet



Levi. Part of working for G-d is knowing that you will not know how G-d will set up your future. Tell the boy, that you are supportive of having him learn, not supporting him to learn. As long as he is dedicated, and you aren't borrowing money you can't pay back, you are willing to live on as tight a budget as you can, while still feeling "normal".

This is something that we learn from R Shimon Bar Yochai. R' Ovadia M'Bartenurah, R' Chaim Vital, the Chidah and Sdei Chemed say that R' Shimon passed away on Lag B'Omer, and it is a day of celebration. Why do we celebrate Lag B'Omer, the 33rd day of the Omer? If R' Shimon died on that day, shouldn't we be sad, not happy? And aren't we supposed to be sad that the students of R' Akiva perished?

The Chattam Soffer explains that Lag B'Omer was 33 days after the Jews left Egypt. It took them 30 days to finish the supply of Matza they carried on their back. And, for three days they went without bread. Day 33 was the day they received the Mannah.

R' Shimon Bar Yochai in the Mechilta (D'Rebbi Yishmael, Parashat Beshalach) writes that the Torah was given only to those who ate the Mannah. The reason why the ones who ate the Manna merited receiving the Torah is because the only way to really learn the Torah well is by not worrying about tomorrow's bread. If you saved some Mannah

for tomorrow, it got wormy. The more engrossed in Torah you became, the more conveniently the Mannah was available to you. This is what kept R Shimon and his son alive in the cave.

The Talmud in Berachot(35b) brings the opinion of R Shimon Bar Yochai, that when someone studies Torah, and does the Will of G-d, their work will be done by other people. Not everyone is cut out for this. But those who take upon themselves responsibility to bring G-dliness to the World have a firm basis to support their decision.

This day of Lag B'Omer is the day that R Akiva taught the Oral Torah and ordained his last five students. (Kaf Hachaim תצג:כ) That was the only link of the chain of the Oral Torah from Har Sinai, to the Torah we have today.(Sanhedrin 86a) In the merit of this day, we have all of the Oral Torah. And on his last day, Lag B'Omer, R Shimon allowed his student R' Abba to write the Hidden Torah. Being that R Shimon was the greatest of R Akiva's five students, and being that despite the hardships R' Shimon went through, he died a *natural* death, Lag Baomer is a day of celebration. A day to commemorate the light of Torah we have in the world, in the merit of those people who dedicate their lives to Torah learning.

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