



RABBI JUDAH

MISCHEL

Mashpiah, OU-NCSY
Executive Director, Camp HASC

LAG BA'OMER 

Dedicated L'IluY Nishmas HaChaver
Shlomo Michael ben Meir z'l

Light!

Rav Yisroel Belsky, zt'l, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah VoDaas, was an exceptional Torah personality. One of the great *poskim* of the generation, Rav Belsky was a *gadol* with multifaceted expertise: he was a shochet, a sofer, a musician, and a mohel, and had vast knowledge and interests raging from physics and chemistry, to engineering, astronomy, and botany. However, Rav Belsky's intellectual bandwidth, abilities and greatness in Torah was matched by his love of life and concern for people.

The Rosh Yeshiva's parents, Reb Berel and Mrs. Chana Belsky, were righteous and modest *balebatim* committed to the Yidishkeit of their children. Mrs. Belsky was involved in community affairs and dedicated time and resources to advancing Jewish causes.

Someone once asked the Rav, "What did your mother do to merit a son like you?" Rav Belsky smiled and replied, "I remember from the time I was a young child that

my mother would put me on her lap and sing to me, 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine...' She made me feel so good, so loved. I felt like there was nothing I could not accomplish."

Our sedra is the source of the 'Golden Rule': וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ, "And you shall love your friend as yourself." (19:18) Rashi famously comments in the name of Rebbi Akiva, זהו כלל גדול בתורה, "This is a great principle of the Torah."

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Rebbe Klonymous Kalman Epstein of Krakow, the *Maor v'Shemesh*, understands the notion of "a great principle of the Torah" to mean that this mitzvah is the *yesod kol haTorah kulah*, "the foundation of the entire Torah". *V'ahavta l're'acha kamo-cha* is the most omnipresent of mitzvos; in every encounter with others we have an opportunity to uphold and fulfill it. As the philosopher Martin Buber notes, in the intimacy of our religious lives, *V'ahavta* is

so fundamental to our identity and practice that all of *Yiddishkeit* “lives in its light”, and is animated by this mitzvah.

Indeed, the great *mashgiach*, Rav Shlomo Wolbe, *zt'l*, in *Alei Shur* (Part 1, p. 190) writes: “Every commandment between man and his fellow man is based on a single premise: bringing light to the lives of others.”

Regarding the mitzvah of *V'ahavta*, the Rambam and others ask, ‘How can we be commanded to love, to feel something, to have certain emotions?’ The *Sefas Emes*, on *Parshas VaEschanan*, declares that the question is itself the answer: “There is a natural reservoir of love of Hashem and love of other Jews in every one of us. It is in fact who we are.” As simple, sweet, natural and intuitive it is for a parent to cradle their child and swaddle them with encouragement and love, so it is natural for us to love our fellows and show them generosity whenever possible.

This week, we approach the great day of Lag baOmer, the *hilulah* or celebration of the *Tanna* Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, when Rebbe Shimon revealed the Holy *Sefer haZohar* to his closest disciples before leaving the world. *The Zohar* is much more than the primary textbook of Jewish mysticism, the secrets of the Torah, and a *sefer* of inner light and deep wisdom. It is a guidebook to navigating the world of the soul, and it allows us to see that there is a reality beyond that which we can sense, measure or understand.

The teachings, pathway and *avodah* of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai ‘illuminate’

us with love and positivity, enabling us to enter *lifnai v'lifnim*, ‘into the Holy of Holies’, the innermost depths of a Jewish soul, and to reveal the secret, the highest gates of purity. As Rebbe Shimon himself teaches, אָנן בחביבותא תליא מילתא, “For us, the matter is dependent on love” (*Zohar* II:128a).

May the light of the holy *Tanna* Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, the light of *v'Ahavta*, shine bright, illuminating our lives with confidence and faith that there is nothing we cannot accomplish. ■



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