



BADERECH

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Always Holy!

The saintly Rebbe Aharon of Belz, zy'a (d. 1957), was a beloved *tzadik*, revered for his piety and kindness, respected for his *ayin tovah* and *ahavas Yisrael*, and for setting the stage for rebuilding Chasidus in the Holy Land after the Holocaust.

After escaping the Holocaust, the Rebbe settled in Tel Aviv, and often came in contact with Jews who had a very different way of life than the Chasidic community that he led. Reb Aharon was known to say, *Kulam kedoshim*, "they are all holy," and refused to call Jews who didn't keep Shabbos *mechalelei Shabbos*, 'Shabbos profaners'. Rather, he would refer to his neighbors as *shochechei ikar Shabbos* "forgetters of the principle of Shabbos."

While walking home one Shabbos morning, Reb Aharon encountered a Jewish doctor who did not keep Shabbos, who, seeing the Rebbe from afar, hastily discarded his lit cigarette. Another Rebbe was present and derided, "Here are your righteous 'forgetters of Shabbos'! If he truly 'forgot' that today is Shabbos, why did he throw away his cigarette when he

saw us?" Reb Aharon Belzer responded, "The moment he saw us wearing our *shtrimmelach*, he remembered that it's Shabbos!"


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Upon hearing that members of a *Kibbutz* had begun raising pigs, a transgression so egregious that the Rambam writes that *chazal* pronounced a curse on one who raises them (Laws of Property Damages, 5:9), a couple of *chevreh* looking to stir up controversy brought the unfortunate news to Reb Aharon. They were surprised to hear the Rebbe's response.


Said Reb Aharon, "There is an opinion that in the Era of Moshiach the world will be uplifted to such a higher spiritual plane that pigs, the most 'unclean' non-Kosher animal, will become permissible to be eaten. Our brothers and sisters believe so deeply in the imminent Redemption that they are preparing for the celebratory feast! (See *Ohr haChaim haKadosh*, Vayikra, 11:7)


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The detailed description of the laws of "Yom Kippurim" in this week's sedra outlines the pathway for Am Yisrael to realign with Hashem through the service of the Kohen Gadol. In terms of the narrative, this is sequentially appropriate as it follows the death of Aharon's sons. Yet, delving into the experience of Yom Kippur in the middle of the Spring feels a bit out of place. Our process of national atonement includes the procedure of the scapegoat, sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice in the direction of the Holy of Holies as Teshuva for having entered there in a state of *tumah*:


"And he shall effect atonement... from the


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ritual impurity of Bnei Yisrael and from their rebellions and all their unintentional sins. We shall do likewise in the Ohel Moed — השוכן תומאתם — where G-d's Presence dwells amid their impurity.” (16:16)

Rashi offers the *p'shat*, the simple understanding of the verse: “אך על פי שהם טמאים, שכינה ביניהם, Although they are ritually unclean, nevertheless, the Divine Presence dwells in their midst!” What does this mean for us, today, in our exile, while we are still lacking a *Beis haMikdash*?

While Yom Kippur is ‘just’ one special, elevated day of the year, the *Avodah*, the essence of the service of the Kohen Gadol, is relevant all year round. Throughout the year, the ‘Kohanim’ are represented by the true *Tzadikim* of the generation who are able to go *lifnai v'lifnim*, to “enter the inner chambers”, the inner world of Nishmas Yisrael, the soul of every Jew, and see the Divine goodness there. Along these lines, one aspect of being a *mamleches Kohanim*, ‘a nation of priests’, is that each of us is able to channel this potential, and acknowledge the Divine Presence within one another, even in our so-called communal ‘impurity’.

This week we also study the *mitzvah* to judge others favorably, בצדק תשפוט עמיתך (19:15)), and to love our fellow as ourselves, ואהבת לרעך כמוך. These two *mitzvos* are access points into the inner world of a Jew, opening a portal to go *lifnai v'lifnim*.

In these days of *Sefiras haOmer*, we mourn the loss of the talmidim of Rebbe Akiva, and it was Rebbe Akiva who taught that *Vahavta l'reiacha kamocha* is the *Klal Gadol baTorah*, the cornerstone and fundamental principle of the Torah. He taught as well regarding Yom Kippur: *Ashreichem Yisrael...* “Fortunate are you, Israel! Before whom do you purify yourself and who is it that purifies you? *Avinu*

Sh'bashamayim, our Father in Heaven.”

In advance of *Lag BaOmer* we celebrate and bind ourselves to the soul of ‘Rashbi’, the holy Tanna, Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. The 16th Century Kabbalist Rebbe Shimon Lavi zy'a composed a *piyut* extolling the virtues of Rashbi:

“*Bar Yochai, nimshachta ashrecha...* “Anointed are you, fortunate are you....”

Bar Yochai, baKodesh haKodashim... “You reached the Holy of Holies...and revealed the secret of the Seven Weeks (the Forty-Nine Gates of Understanding)....”

The teachings, pathway and *avodah* of Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai, enable us to enter *lifnai v'lifnim*, into the Holy of Holies, the innermost depths of a Jewish soul, and reveal the secret, the highest gates of purity, there.

The Gemara relates that Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai, the Holy Tanna, said: “See how beloved Israel is to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, for wherever they went into exile, *Shechina imahen*, the Divine Presence went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and *Shechina imahen*; they were exiled to Babylon, *v'Shechina imahen*. And when Am Yisrael will be redeemed in the future, the Shechinah will be redeemed with them....” (Megillah, 29a)

May we also look inward and realize that in our own soul, Hashem dwells with us and within us, regardless of any ‘impurity’ we might be involved in or surrounded by. We are all, as the Rebbe Aharon Belzer said, *Kedoshim!* ■

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Excerpt from Rav Judah's upcoming “Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah” (Summer 2026/5786)

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