

# OHRNET

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## **Torah Weekly: insights on the weekly Torah portion by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

### ***Hijack!***

*“If you will follow my decrees...” (26:3)*

On September 6, 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked TWA Flight 741 that was flying from Tel Aviv to New York City. The hijackers forced the pilot to land in Jordan. The majority of the 310 passengers were transferred to Amman and freed on September 11th.

The terrorists, however, kept the 56 Jews on that flight hostage. And it wasn't until more than three weeks later, on the 30th of September, that they were finally freed.

Among the hostages was Rebetzin Harari-Raful, who had remained notably calm during the whole ordeal, and had been an inspiration to the other hostages. Someone asked her how it was that she had managed to stay calm for three long weeks with a gun barrel pointing at her in the face and the threat of instant death at every single moment.

She replied: “Whenever I felt panic starting to rise in my throat, I asked one of the terrorists for a drink of water. When he gave it to me, I took the cup and said with all my might, ‘*Baruch Atah Hashem, Elokeinu Melech Haolam, She’HAKOL Niyiyah Bidvaro*. When I reached the word ‘hakol,’ I had the tremendous focus that hakol, everything, really everything, even this terrible situation, was coming from Hashem! And that gave me the strength to carry on.”

Look around. Everything is from Hashem's word. There is nothing else. Every challenge is being sent by Hashem. We are Jews. We don't believe in Dualism.

If it's there, in front of your eyes, Hashem put it there.

The Mesillas Yescharim says that one of the only three reasons we are in this world is to stand up to tests. And everything is a test. Not just walking through downtown Manhattan, but when you're in your local kosher supermarket in your neighborhood, when you're working in your office. It's all *Bidvaro*. It's all coming from Hashem.

Nowadays, the challenge isn't just big cities or vacation places. But when we realize that right now, Hashem, in His great love, is sending me this test, whatever it is, because He wants me to be closer to him – how much easier will that test be! And even more important – how much more meaningful!

### **Talmud Tips** **by Rabbi Moshe Newman**

#### ***No Sleeping and No Eating*** **Shavuot 23-29**

*Rabbi Yochanan said, "One who makes an oath not to sleep for three days, receives lashes, and he is permitted to sleep immediately."*

This person has made a *shevuat shav* — a vain oath — since his words state that he is committing himself to something that is known to be impossible (Rashi). In the words of the *gemara* above, on 21a: "A vain oath is when a person makes an oath to change that which is known to man (to be true). He has transgressed the Torah prohibition: 'You shall not take the name of the L-rd, your G-d, in vain...' (Shemot 20:7)" And although he has transgressed a prohibition *without* an action, which normally is not punishable by lashes, the *gemara* explained above on 21a why this case is different.

A question is asked on Rabbi Yochanan's statement from our *mishna*, which teaches that the oath one makes "not to sleep" is actually a *valid* oath, one that is called a *shevuat bitui*. (Vayikra 5:4) The *gemara* answers that in Rabbi Yochanan's case, the person explicitly states that he won't sleep for "three days," which is impossible, whereas the *mishna*'s case does not specify a time limit, and therefore his oath is to not sleep for only as long as it is possible for him to stay awake. (Tiferet Yisrael)

It is evident, however, that the *gemara* first thought that an oath “not to sleep” would mean “forever.” Based on this “first thought,” Tosefot asks why the *gemara* did not pose this exact same question on the *mishna* above, on 19b, which teaches that an oath “not to eat” is a valid *shevuat bitui*. Accordingly, it should be an invalid *shevuat shav* — vain oath — since the phrase “not to eat” seems to imply “not to eat forever.” This is certainly impossible and not a valid oath.

Tosefot offers two answers. One is that the *gemara* did not ask this question above because it was clear to the *gemara* that an oath “not to eat” is not to be mistaken to mean “not to eat forever,” unlike an oath “not to sleep,” which could be (mis)understood as “not to sleep forever” — as the *gemara* first understood it. Notably, Tosefot does not elaborate on why we would not mistakenly understand the case of not eating to mean “forever,” as opposed to our *gemara* mistakenly understanding not sleeping to mean “forever.”

The second answer given by Tosefot is that it is possible to understand the above *mishna* as speaking about a case of an oath “not to eat forever,” but is dealing with a very specific case of not eating a clearly designated loaf of bread that is in front of the person making the oath.

The Ran discusses the status of an oath “not to eat for *thirty days*.” Is it similar to an oath “not to sleep for three days” — and therefore a vain oath — or not, and therefore a valid oath? He suggests that there is possibly a distinction between the two oaths, despite the fact that both scenarios are “impossible.” Although an oath not to sleep for three days is clearly “in vain,” perhaps an oath not to eat for thirty days is not “in vain.” An oath to not sleep for three days is in vain since the person will certainly sleep within three days. However, an oath not to eat for thirty days might obligate the person to refrain from eating only until his life is endangered, at which time the concept of *pikuach nefesh* — saving life — obligates him to eat, at least as much as necessary to sustain his life.

The Ran also cites the ruling of the Rambam, who equates not eating and not sleeping, and rules that if a person made an oath not to eat for seven days (Laws of Oaths 5:20), the oath is *in vain* and invalid. The Ran concludes that despite the distinction between the two cases which he proposed, the halachic ruling is indeed in accordance with the Rambam: that neither oath is valid. However, unlike the Rambam who reasons that “not to eat for seven days” is impossible and therefore “in vain,” the Ran explains that this oath is invalid for a different reason. He says that an oath to not eat for this time period is invalid since these words constitute a commitment to starve himself to death, which is an “oath to transgress the words of the Torah” — to “guard yourselves very well...” (Dev. 4:15) — and is thereby an invalid oath.

## **COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS**

**By Rabbi Reuven Lauffer**

### **Kriat Shema Al Hamitah**

Kriat Shema al Hamitah continues with verses 2 to 9 from chapter 3 of Tehillim: Hashem, how many are my tormentors! The great rise up against me. The great say of my soul, "There is no salvation for him from Hashem. Selah." But you, Hashem, are a shield for me, for my soul, and to raise up my pride. With my voice I will call out to Hashem, and He answers me from His holy mountain. Selah. I lay and slept, yet I awoke because Hashem supports me. I fear not the myriad people deployed against me from every side. Rise up, Hashem, save me my G-d! For you struck all of my enemies on the cheek, You broke the teeth of the wicked. Salvation is Hashem's, upon Your people is Your blessing. Selah.

This chapter is a part of Kriat Shema al Hamitah because of the verse, "I lay [down] and slept, yet I awoke, because Hashem supports me." This verse is a powerful testament to King David's fortitude and his belief that Hashem is continuously watching over him. Rashi, explaining the words "I lay and slept," writes that after King David was forced to flee from his beloved son Avshalom, who was intent on usurping the throne from his father, he found himself so overwhelmed with worry and fear that he fell into a stupor-like sleep. Despite the dire and desperate reality that he found himself in, King David awoke with certainty that the future would be brighter because he recognized that Hashem's support had never lessened, even for a moment.

The Malbim, in explaining King David's certainty, points out that King David knew that all Avshalom had to do that night was to attack and he would easily overcome the few followers still left in King David's camp. Then he easily could have seized the crown for himself. The fact that he inexplicably chose not to was a clear sign to King David that Hashem had not abandoned him.

After the debacle of the British Expeditionary Forces and its inability to help defend the French from the invasion of the Nazi army, followed by the subsequent retreat and evacuation of more than 330,000 Allied soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk in the summer of 1940, modern-day Britain had never been more vulnerable. It found itself almost entirely exposed to a counter-invasion by a huge and formidable Nazi army with no real way of effectively defending itself. During the withdrawal from France enormous amounts of vital equipment and armaments had been abandoned because there was no way to get them back to Britain. Throughout the entire country the feeling of hopelessness was pervasive until Winston Churchill, the legendary Prime Minister of Britain, gave, perhaps, his most inspirational speech

ever in the House of Commons. As the whole nation waited fearfully for the inevitable Nazi invasion, Churchill described the events that led up to the evacuation as “a colossal military disaster.” Hailing the Dunkirk rescue as a “miracle of deliverance” he then continued with his customary stirringly pugnacious eloquence, “We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender!”

Although they will never know for sure, military historians have offered various different theories over the years as to why the ferocious and murderous Nazi war machine did not cross the English Channel. What it was that possessed Hitler, may his name be blotted out forever, to turn his back on a weak and vulnerable Britain and instead to open a front against his erstwhile ally, Russia. However, my mother told me that Rabbi Shmuel Yitzchak Hillman (1868-1953), the head of the London Beit Din and one of the foremost Halachic authorities in England before moving to Israel, and a close confidant of my grandfather, wrote to my grandfather that there was only one conceivable explanation as to Hitler’s seemingly inexplicable decision. Regardless of how bleak and terrifying any one given moment in Jewish history might seem, Hashem never abandons us. As the “doors of opportunity” seem to be closing and it looks as if Hashem’s nation has lost the capability to escape the manic inquisitions, pogroms and massacres that profusely litter Jewish history, new “doors” open to ensure that the eternity of the Jewish Nation will always endure.

“I lay and slept, yet I awoke, because Hashem supports me.” Such beautifully evocative words portraying King David’s unquestionable trust in Hashem. And who, if not King David, is better qualified to teach us the timeless lesson that, however ominous the present is, Hashem is protecting us. And who better than King David can describe for us with such crystal clarity that, no matter what, Hashem is always with us.

# ***Taamei HaMitzvos*— Reasons Behind the Mitzvos**

## **By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines**

### **Shemitah**

We are commanded to relinquish control over our fields every seventh year, the Shemitah year. This includes ceasing almost all agricultural work and opening the fields to the poor, wild animals, and anyone who wishes to eat from them. The Torah calls this year “Shabbos for the Land.”

*Sefer HaChinuch* explains that resting on the seventh year symbolizes Hashem’s resting on the seventh day of Creation, and that it strengthens our belief that Hashem is the Creator. By relinquishing our control over the produce, we remember that Hashem owns everything and brings forth the produce at His will, and that all beings stand equal before Him. This idea is evident within the word “Shemitah,” which means “release” or “relinquishment.”

The Mitzvah to rest in the seventh year also alludes to the seventh millennium of the world, the World to Come (*Ibn Ezra*). It is a regular reminder about the true purpose of our existence. Just as we rest on Shabbos and are free to engage in spiritual pursuits such as Torah study, which inspires them during the coming week, farmers are free to spend the year of Shemitah in spiritual pursuits like one long Shabbos, which inspires them during the coming six years. So too, it is appropriate for us to think about Shemitah every year, especially when reading about it in the Torah as we do this week.

*Sefer HaChinuch* adds that Hashem instructs us to open our properties to the poor while receiving nothing in return so that we will develop the trait of generosity. Furthermore, giving away the entire annual yield increases one’s trust in Hashem.

Shemitah also cancels loans at its conclusion, and the Torah prohibits us from lending money to a person out of concern that he will not repay by the end of Shemitah. *Sefer HaChinuch* explains here, similarly, that relinquishing debts and being willing to lend despite the risk of this occurring trains us in the traits of generosity and trust in Hashem.

The applications of all the above Mitzvos are limited these days, as most of us do not own fields in Eretz Yisrael and it is customary to “sidestep” the cancellation of loans through a Prozbul document. Nevertheless, the all-important Mitzvos of Shemitah themselves remind us that Hashem is the Creator and Master of this world, that He placed us here temporarily to prepare for the eternal world, and that He expects us to be as generous with our less fortunate brethren as He is with us.

# What's in a Word? — Synonyms in the Hebrew language

## by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### A Window into Widows

In last week's essay we started to discuss the etymology of the Biblical Hebrew word *almanah* ("widow"). In the essay before you, we will continue that discussion and then will treat the words *almanta*, *armela/armalta*, and others that seem to be synonymous with *almanah*. At the end of this essay, we talk about the name of the Jewish anti-Christ figure, *Armilus HaRasha* and speculate on how his name might relate to the discussion at hand.

Moving to the realm of the esoteric, the *Zohar* (*Mishpatim* 102a) talks about how it is dangerous for a man to marry a widow because the spirit of her deceased husband might oppose the union. Rabbi Aharon Berechiah of Modena in *Maavar Yabok* (*Sefat Emet* ch. 9) writes that this danger is alluded to in the very word *almanah* which can be read as a portmanteau of *al* ("no/not") and *manah* ("portion") — a warning that marrying an *almanah* should not be one's lot. It should be noted that Rabbi Mordechai Spielman (in *Tiferet Tzvi* to *Zohar Mishpatim* 102a) writes at great length that this "prohibition" against marrying a widow only exists in Kabbalistic sources, but according to the revealed law as seen in the Talmud, there is nothing wrong with marrying a widow.

The prophet Isaiah foresaw the future downfall of Babylon, saying, *inter alia*, that "cats will inhabit their *almenot*" (Isa. 13:22). The meaning of the word *almenot* in this passage is subject to dispute. One group of commentators sees the word as related to *armenot* ("castles/palaces"). This group includes such exegetes as Targum Jonathan, Rabbi Saadia Gaon, Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Balaam, Rashi, Mahari Kara, Ibn Parchon, and Radak. Their view is predicated on the interchangeability of the letters LAMMED and REISH, with *almenot* viewed as the equivalent to *armenot*. See also Abarbanel and Malbim (to Isa. 13:22) who see the word *almenot* as related to *ulam* ("hall").

However, Ibn Ezra and Ibn Kaspi (to Isa. 13:22) reject this explanation because they (bizarrely) contend that LAMMED and REISH are not interchangeable. Rather, they explain *almenot* as referring specifically to palaces that have been emptied of their denizens. In this way, the City of Jerusalem after the destruction of the First Temple was similarly described as "like an *almanah*" (Lam. 1:1) because it had been emptied of its Jewish inhabitants. Rabbi Moshe Sofer's brother-in-law Rabbi Shlomo Eiger (in *Gilyon Maharsha* to *Ketubot* 2a) inverts this discussion, and argues that since *almenot* refers to "deserted castles," so too does *almanah* refer to a married woman who has been "deserted" by the death of her husband.

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, offers two original avenues of thought to explain the word *almanah*: First, he argues that it is comprised of a fusion of the roots ALEPH-LAMMED (“no/not,” as in *al*) and MEM-LAMMED-(ALEPH) meaning “full/filled,” as in *male*. This serves as a reference to the fact that the widowed wife has become “emptied” of her deceased husband. According to this explanation, the consonants of the latter root underwent metathesis to become transposed. Second, he suggests that the root of *almanah* is the trilateral root ALEPH-LAMMED-MEM, but he creatively drops the initial ALEPH and flips the order of the consonants to connect *almanah* to the root MEM-LAMMED (“cutting,” like in *brit milah*). The way he explains it, this second understanding of the word alludes to the fact that the widow’s voice has been “cut off” as she remains unable to speak up due to her extreme distress, plus she has no husband to speak for her (similar to Ibn Janach’s understanding mentioned above).

In Rabbinic Hebrew, inflections of the word *almanah* are used in passive verb form to denote a woman who had “become widowed” — *nitalmanah* (*Nedarim* 11:9, *Makkot* 1:1). But already in the Mishnah, another form of that word begins to appear — *nitarmalah* (*Yevamot* 6:3, 13:4, *Ketubot* 2:1, 4:2, 5:1). And once we get to the Talmud, a new Aramaic word has emerged as the standard term for “widow,” namely *armela/armalta*. This term is used in both the Jerusalem Talmud (*Shabbat* 1:4, *Yoma* 1:1, *Megillah* 3:1, *Ketubot* 9:3, 10:3, 11:2, *Sotah* 3:4, *Nedarim* 5:3, *Kiddushin* 1:3, *Bava Batra* 9:1, *Shevuot* 6:6, *Avodah Zarah* 2:8) and the Babylonian Talmud (*Taanis* 5b, *Ketubot* 17b, 54a, 97a, 100a, *Nedarim* 50a, *Gittin* 35a, 68a, *Bava Metzia* 71a, *Sanhedrin* 109a, *Avodah Zarah* 22b, 30a, *Niddah* 69a). The Aramaic *armela* is also the standard term in the Targumim used to translate the Hebrew word *almanah* into Aramaic.

Rabbi Chelouche sees the word *armalta* as comprised of the biliteral Aramaic root ALEPH-REISH (“strength,” but in this case it euphemistically refers to the polar opposite) and MEM-LAMMED (“cutting,” per above). According to this, the Aramaic term *armalta* connotes the muted, voiceless state of a widow who is left in a weakened/downtrodden and unable to speak up for herself.

The truth is that while it might be tempting to see the Aramaic word *armela/armalta* as a synonym to the Biblical Hebrew word *almanah*, it is more cogent to argue that they are simply different forms of the very same word. Indeed, linguists have taught us that sporadic changes in dental/liquid letters are very normal, so the appearance and placement of those consonants can be fluid. In fact, other Semitic languages have comparable words that are similar to *almanah/armela/armalta* but are not quite the same, like: *armla/armala* (Arabic), *armalta* (Syriac), *almattu* (Assyrian-Akkadian), *`almnt* (Ugaritic), and *armoma* (Amharic). This means that



*armela/armalta* and *almanah* are not synonyms, they can more accurately be classified as cognates from different, adjacent languages.

Interestingly, the Laws of Shabbat refer to two different types of domains from which it is forbidden to carry an object from one to the other: a public domain (*reshut ha'rabim*) and a private domain (*reshut ha'yachid*). But there it also a third type of domain called a *karmalit*, which is somewhere in the middle. Maimonides (in his commentary to the Mishnah *Shabbat* 1:1) explains that a *karmalit* is called so because it is comparable to an *almanah*. He thus reads the word *karmalit* as *k'armalit*, with the initial KAF serving as a grammatical prefix (and he also sees a hidden ALEPH) to mean "like a widow." He explains that just as a widow is in an in-between status, whereby she is no longer a maiden but is also not a married lady, so too does the term *karmalit* represent an in-between type of domain which is neither fully a *reshut ha'rabim*, nor fully a *reshut ha'yachid*.

Speaking of Maimonides, it is interesting that Maimonides (Laws of *Yibbum and Chalitzah* 4:34) seems to have coined a new word for "widow" to be used in Halachic documents — *almanta*. It is somewhat strange that Maimonides would make up a new word for something so common that already has a word in Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew/Aramaic. Besides for Maimonides, nobody else uses this word, which is clearly just an Aramaicization of the Hebrew term *almanah*. But the truth is that the Rabbi Shabsai Frankel edition of Maimonides' work (*Yalkut Shinuyei Nuschaot* there) reveals that in manuscripts of Maimonides held at the university libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, the word *almanta* does not appear, and instead the regular Aramaic word *armalta* (with which we are already familiar) appears.

Rabbi Ernest Klein, in his etymological dictionary of Hebrew, writes that *almanah* and *armela* are of uncertain origin, but cites that Jacob Barth sees the latter as derived from the trilateral root REISH-MEM-LAMMED (related to the Arabic *murmil/armal* meaning "needy/helpless"), while Theodor Nöldeke and Rudolf Růžicka connect these terms with the Aramaic *`alima* (meaning "feeling pain").

Here's where it gets interesting. Armilus is a mythical anti-Messiah figure described in various late Midrashic and medieval Jewish texts. He is often portrayed as a tyrant or demonic leader who will deceive many, wage war against the Jewish people, and ultimately be defeated by the Messiah ben David. He represents the Jewish version of the anti-Christ and is a fascinating figure who emerges from Jewish apocalyptic literature. The name Armilus appears most famously in the Midrashic text from the Geonic period known as the *Sefer Zerubavel*, a brief yet

haunting work of apocalyptic vision that mixes echoes of Biblical prophecy with later Midrashic traditions.

Throughout the generations, scholars have proposed various theories about the etymology of the name Armilus, and my readers know that any excuse I can find for engaging in onomastics, I will avail myself to do so. One theory proposed thus far connects the name Armilus to the *armillatus Caligula*, which would mean that the anti-Messianic monster received his name from the Roman Emperor Caligula's bracelet. Others have proposed seeing the name as a corruption of the name of the evil Persian-Zoroastrian deity Ahriman or Angro-Mainyus, but most scholars reject these suppositions. The most accepted understanding sees the name Armilus as derived from Romulus, the mythical founder of Rome, or as a corruption of the name Aurelianus (a Roman emperor).

I would like to propose a plausible, though admittedly speculative, etymological approach to understanding the name Armilus as deriving from a Semitic root. One compelling possibility is that this name connects to the Aramaic term *armela*, meaning "widow." If this association holds, the name could function as a potent metaphor for the Jewish people's state of national bereavement in the tumultuous period preceding the Messianic era. Alternatively, it might evoke a sense of spiritual desolation — a collective experience of estrangement or abandonment, as though the Jewish People had been severed from their Divine source of sustenance. This interpretation aligns thematically with eschatological narratives that depict profound dislocation before ultimate redemption, suggesting that the name Armilus may encode a theological commentary on exile and Divine concealment. Even if this understanding is not etymologically or linguistically true, it still makes sense on a *drush* level.

On a related note, I'd like to highlight a unique and invaluable resource for widows and orphans within the Jewish community: *Invisible Tribe* by Sara Miriam Gross. This remarkable compilation offers a tapestry of personal narratives, reflections, and words of strength, specifically tailored to those navigating the profound loss of a husband and father. More than just a book, it serves as a communal lifeline: validating grief, fostering resilience and reminding its readers that they are neither alone nor forgotten. By weaving together voices of shared experience, *Invisible Tribe* becomes both a comfort and a compass, offering guidance and solidarity to families facing the painful void left by absence. It stands as a testament to the Jewish value of *gemilut chasadim* (acts of lovingkindness), extending support to those in one of life's most vulnerable chapters.

## 5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All

### Part XII – *La”G B’Omer on Erev Shabbos*

By Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

As detailed in previous installments in our series, our current year, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down **rarest** of them all. 5785 is classified as a *HaSh”A* year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (*hei*), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being *shalem* (*shin* - 30 day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (*aleph*).

A *HaSh”A* year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in *Tur*’s 247-year calendar cycle, this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between *HaSh”A* years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754/1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805/2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832/2071 and then a 51 year gap in 5883/2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the *Mishnah Berurah* discusses these issues he writes “*ain kan makom l’ha’arich*,” that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This series sets out to detail many of them. Let’s continue on our journey through our unique year.

As discussed in a previous articles in this series, this year hosted a rare and joyous Yerushalayim *Purim Meshulash* as well as the complicated *Erev Pesach Shechal B’Shabbos*. Although these are rare phenomena that always occurs in a *HaSh”A* year, they can also occur in other year combinations as well. In fact, over the entire twentieth century they occurred eleven times, or eleven percent of the time. This

was the fifth occurrence in the twenty-first century. Whenever these occur, another interesting *halacha* applies. But first some background is in order.

### ***Sefirah Restrictions***

The *Gemara Yevamos* (62b) famously and tragically details the deaths of 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva during the time period between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, all for not according each other proper honor. Although there are many different rationales given by the commentaries to explain this catastrophe, the *Tashbetz* (*Shu"t* vol. 1:178) elucidates that the reason they were punished so severely for a seemingly minor infraction is that their not treating each other properly ended up engendering a tremendous *Chilul Hashem*. In fact, according to several authorities, the reason why *Lag B'Omer* is a day of celebration is that it is the day when Rabbi Akiva started teaching his five new students (including Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai), allowing the *Torah's mesorah* to perpetuate; a feat that was previously in jeopardy after the deaths of his *talmidim*.

This calamity is actually the basis of the annual *Sefirah* restrictions, which include not getting married or taking a haircut. Yet, that does not properly explain the different and varied *minhagim* that *Klal Yisrael* keeps regarding the actual time frames of these restrictions.

And there are different *minhagim*. In fact, Rav Moshe Feinstein lists six different customs, and that is not including the Arizal's *minhag*. Yet, practically, the *Pri Megadim* and *Mishnah Berurah* break it down to three main disparate customs. The others are variations on those main opinions.

### ***Minhag # 1 - Sefardic Sefirah***

The *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 493:2) writes that one should not get married between *Pesach* and *Shavuos* until *Lag B'Omer*; likewise regarding haircuts, as at that time the *Talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva stopped dying. Therefore, these restrictions are permitted starting from the next day - *Lad B'Omer*.

## **Minhag # 2 - LaG not LaD**

However, the *Rema* (ad loc.) argues, stating that the *Ashkenazic minhag* is to allow these activities from *Lag B'Omer* itself, and not necessitate waiting until the next day. The reason for the allowance a day earlier than the *Shulchan Aruch* mandates is either due to the dictum of *Miktzas Hayom K'kulo*, that part of a day is considered like a full day, or that he held that the *Talmidim* stopped dying by / on *Lag B'Omer* and not *LaD B'Omer*. Additionally, the *Rema* is following early *Ashkenazic* authorities such as the *Maharil*, *Mahari Weil*, and the *Sefer Haminhagim* of Rav Yitzchak Isaac Tyrnau (Tirna), all of whom allowed haircuts and celebrations on *Lag B'Omer* itself.

## **Minhag # 3 - Second Sefirah**

The *Rema* then mentions another popular *minhag*, to only start the *Sefirah* restrictions from *Rosh Chodesh Iyar*, and not from right after *Pesach*. This *Sefirah* lasts until shortly before *Shavuos*, excluding *Lag B'Omer* itself. This has come to be known colloquially as 'Second Sefirah.'

But why such disparate *Sefirahs*? If we are all keeping the same prohibitions for the same reason, how can there be so many different *minhagim* in its practical application?

## **Halftime Respite**

It turns out that there are two main different rationales expressed by the *Rishonim* as to when the *Sefirah* restrictions should actually apply. The first, mentioned as a 'Midrash' by R' Yehoshua ibn Shu'aib and an 'old *Sefardi Sefer*' by the *Baal Hamaor* and *Tashbetz*, is that Rabbi Akiva's *Talmidim* stopped dying by 'Parus HaAtzeres' or the halfway point before *Shavuos*. Since the *Gemara* states that we should start to learn the *halachos* of a *Yom Tov* 30 days prior to its commencement, which would mean that 15 days before a holiday would be its 'midpoint,' this would squarely place the 'Parus' on *LaD B'Omer* ( $49-15=34$ ). According to this, the *Talmidim* stopped dying on *LaD B'Omer* and therefore all *Sefirah* restrictions cease on this day as well. As mentioned previously, the *Shulchan Aruch* states that he follows this opinion, and therefore he rules that from *LaD B'Omer*, haircuts and weddings are permitted. This is the common *Sefardic minhag*.

## 33 Days

However, there is another opinion, attributed to the *Baalei Tosafos*. They maintain that in actuality the *talmidim* died throughout the entire time period from *Pesach* to *Shavuot*. Yet, they did not die on days when *Tachanun* was not said, including all days of *Pesach*, the *Shabbosos* in between, and *Rosh Chodesh*. This adds up to 16 days. Meaning, of the entire 49 day period, they died on 33 of those days. Therefore, as a *siman* to show that they died for 33 of these days, *Lag B'Omer*, the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the *Sefirah*, was chosen as a day of easing restrictions. This is why the *Ashkenazic minhag* is to allow haircuts on *Lag B'Omer* itself, and not need to wait for *Lad B'Omer*.

### **Lag B'Omer on Friday**

Yet, this year, 5785, *Lad B'Omer* fell out on *Shabbos*, as it would any year that that has a *Purim Meshulash* and *Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbos*. That would mean that, as opposed to *Ashkenazim* who may get a haircut on a Friday *Lag B'Omer L'kavod Shabbos*, *Sefardim* would need to wait until *Motzai Shabbos* to ease the *Sefirah* restrictions. However, getting a haircut only after *Shabbos* would seem an affront to the honor of *Shabbos*. Hence, the *Shulchan Aruch*, citing the *Tashbetz*, adds an exception to the rule: In an uncommon year such as ours, when *Lag B'Omer* falls out on *Erev Shabbos*, *Sefardim* as well can get a haircut on *Lag B'Omer – L'Kavod Shabbos*.

The reason is that just as an *Avel* (mourner) within the thirty day *Shloshim* period after a relative's passing may otherwise not get a haircut, yet may nonetheless do so on *Erev Yom Tov - L'Kavod Yom Tov*, the same *halachic* rationale applies here – on *Lag B'Omer L'Kavod Shabbos*. Since the *Sefirah* restrictions are based on those of mourners, similar leniencies are applicable. So it turns out that practically speaking, whether one is *Sefardic* or *Ashkenazic*, in our rare year one was able to get a haircut *L'Kavod Shabbos* on *Lag B'Omer* itself. Several *Poskim* add that as the leniency is due to *Kavod Shabbos*, in extenuating circumstances one may even get his hair cut on Thursday night if necessary *L'Kavod Shabbos*, as it is already *Lag B'Omer*, even though in a regular year the haircutting *hetter* only starts from the daytime itself of either *Lag* or *Lad B'Omer*, respectively. This interesting incidence of *Lag B'Omer* on Friday, will next occur in twenty years hence, in 2045/5805.

Although a haircutting allowance a day early may not be the world's most noteworthy occasion, nonetheless, in this author's mind, it is quite fascinating that this specifically occurred in our exceptional year.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will *iy"H* be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that "the Jew's catechism is his calendar." It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare *minhagim*, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendarical customs.

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## **Questions - Behar**

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of Shemitta were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses Shemitta food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during Yovel?
5. From where does the Yovel year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo tonu ish et amito" -- a person shall not afflict his fellow?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of Shemitta?
8. If Shemitta is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger toshav"?
15. To what is one who leaves Eretz Yisrael compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

## **Answers**

1. (25:1) To teach us that just as Shemitta was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvot were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. (25:7) Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. (25:10) At the beginning of the year, the Beit Din declares, "This year is kadosh (sanctified)."
4. (25:10) The return of land to its original owner and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. (25:10) From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a Yovel.
6. (25:17) One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. (25:18) Exile.
8. (25:21–22) From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. (25:24) After two years following the sale, until Yovel. At the beginning of Yovel it returns automatically.
10. (25:25) Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. (25:29) Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in Yovel, it does not return.
12. (25:29) The days of an entire year.
13. (25:29) A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. (25:35) A non-Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. (25:38) To one who worships idols.
16. (25:38) The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as G-d discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will G-d discern and punish those who lend with interest while pretending to act on behalf of others.
17. (25:39–43)
  - a. Do not make him perform humiliating tasks
  - b. Do not sell him publicly.
  - c. Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. (25:41) His master.
19. (25:54) No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the Yovel to go free.
20. (26:1) In the Mikdash (Temple).



### Questions – Bechukotai

1. To what do the words "bechukotai telechu" (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain "in its season"?
3. What is the blessing of "v'achaltem lachmechem l'sova" (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse "and a sword will not pass through your land"?
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is "revava"?
7. Which "progression" of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel's state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years did the Jewish People sin in Israel up till the time the northern tribes were exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra "vav." From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words "and I will bring them into the land of their enemies"?
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word "remember" not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 "Torot" (plural) and not "Torah" (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the Beit Hamikdash and doesn't have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says, "The leg of this animal shall be an olah offering," the animal is sold and sacrificed as an olah offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the Beit Hamikdash and fails to redeem it before Yovel, what happens?
18. Where must "ma'aser sheini" be eaten?
19. When a person redeems "ma'aser sheini" what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

### Answers – Bechukotai

1. **26:3** – Laboring in Torah learning.
2. **26:4** – At times when people are not outside (e.g. Shabbat nights).
3. **26:5** – You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. **26:6** – No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. **26:4** – Two thousand.
6. **26:4** – Ten thousand.
7. **26:14–15** – Not studying Torah, not observing mitzvot, rejecting those who observe mitzvot, hating Sages, preventing others from observing mitzvot, denying that G-d gave the mitzvot, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. **26:32** – No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. **26:35** – 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 Shemitta and Yovel years.
10. **26:35** – 390 years.
11. **26:42** – In five places in the Torah, Yaakov's name is written with an extra "vav" and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a "vav." Yaakov "took" these vavs as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov's children.
12. **26:41** – G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies' land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. **26:42** – Because the image of Yitzchak's ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. **26:46** – To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on Har Sinai.
15. **27:8** – The person whose value was donated goes before the kohen, who sets the obligation according to the poor person's ability to pay.
16. **27:9** – The money is *chullin* (non-sacred), except for the value of the leg, which does have *holy* status.
17. **27:16** – It becomes the property of the kohanim who are on rotation at the beginning of Yovel.
18. **27:30** – In Jerusalem.
19. **27:31** – The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. **27:32** – He passes them through a door individually and marks every tenth animal with a rod smeared with red dye

