LIVING WITH THE PARSHAH 5780,  
PARSHAS EMOR  
THE PRECARIOUS BALANCING ACT  

By HARAV YAAKOV FEITMAN, KEHILLAS BAIS YEHUDAH TZVI

For almost two months now, we have been practicing our Yiddishkeit in a kind of b’dedev – worse comes to worse form. We daven without a Minyan, we learn on Zoom, we make believe that we are reading from a Sefer Torah. On the surface this seems to be a very poor way of being religious Jews. Yet, one antidote is actually this week’s Parshah. It is brought down in many Chassidic seforim that in days of old, Chassidim used to travel to their Rebbeim for Parshas Emor. The reason was that this Parshah includes Shabbos and all of the Yomim Tovim, so learning it properly, may be considered as if one had visited his rebbe on every Shabbos and Yom Tov of the year. This, too, could be considered a b’deved, but as long a Jew does his very best under the circumstances, that is actually the lechatchila, the best way to perform a mitzvah. That being said, our Parshah also strongly stresses the tremendous need to make a Kiddush Hashem and to avoid a Chilul Hashem, chas vesholom. As everyone knows, until recently, I have strongly chastised those who conducted illegal Minyanim on porches and private properties. There may now, in my opinion, be sufficient evidence that it is possible to conduct these Minyanim legally and safely. The rabbonim will soon be sending out new facts based upon governmental studies and CDC guidelines. If these are correct, the fear of making a chilul Hashem has fallen if these Minyanim are held according to the very limited guidelines as published. I am therefore offering a limited “hetter,” based upon these new approaches. It’s not as if the Halacha has changed or, G-d forbid, some pressure has been applied. I believe that we are now in a new reality where, with the greatest of care, we may begin following slightly more lenient guidelines.

The story is told of the Gerrer Rebbe, who used to take early morning walks for his health. One day, he stopped at a red light and waited patiently for it to change from red to green. Some workers who were repairing the road called out to the Bais Yisrael, “Rebbe, you don’t have to wait for the light now; there is no traffic anyway.” Nevertheless, the rebbe continued to wait until the light had completely changed. As he finally crossed, the rebbe overheard one of the workers remarking wonderingly to his friend, “Now that’s a Rav; even when there’s no one watching, in the dark of night, he obeys the law scrupulously.” The rebbe turned smilingly to his Shamosh, “Did you hear Reb Ezriel? Today we have been reduced to making a Kiddush Hashem and simply avoiding a chilul Hashem.” I believe that until now, we, too, had no choice but to make that Kiddush Hashem and avoid any hint of Chilul Hashem. The mayor of New York was wrong to single out religious Jews for non-cooperation in social distancing, but on the other hand, as the rebbe said, sometimes all we can is to avoid a chilul Hashem. The Bais Yisrael’s grandfather, the Sefas Emes (5638 and 5641) makes an extraordinary point about this posuk (22:32). He points out that the posuk first warns not to make a chilul Hashem and only then presents the mitzvah of making a Kiddush Hashem. Why this order? He answers that one who is constantly vigilant not to make a chilul Hashem will be rewarded by making a Kiddush Hashem and causing kovod Shomayim wherever he goes. In all the difficult decisions we must make these days, let us keep this in mind.

A GUTTEN SHABBOS TO ALL
This week we will focus on the upcoming day of Lag B’omer, which falls out this Tuesday iyH.

**Question:** What exactly happened on Lag B’omer and what is its significance?

**Answer:** The 33rd day of the Omer always falls on the 18th of Iyar. Although a number of things happened on this day, we will focus primarily on one of them: 1) The Monn started falling. 2) The Jewish revolt against the Romans began. 3) Rav Shimon Bar Yochai and his son Rav Eliezer emerged from the cave where they had spent 13 miraculous years, learning and writing the Zohar Hakodesh. 4) After the tragic death of the 24,000 talmidim of Rebbe Akiva, Rav Shimon and his chaveirim received semicha from Rebbe Akiva. 5) Rav Shimon Bar Yochai passed away on this day. 6) Many years later, Rav Moshe Isserlish, the Rama, also passed away on this day. 7) On this day, the talmidim of Rebbe Akiva stopped dying.

**Question:** If the joy of Lag B’omer is connected to the cessation of Rebbe Akiva’s talmidim passing away, how can this have become a day of celebration? Surely, the tragedy of so many tzadikim dying in so short a time could not become a Yom Tov so rapidly. Perhaps the tragedy would slowly begin to wane somewhat, but how could this day become a simcha?

**Answer:** Your question is actually asked by the Pri Chodosh (493:2). He answers that indeed, the joy is not only because of the cessation of the deaths but because Rebbe Akiva added 5 new talmidim, who did not pass away.

**Question:** Why is it that Moshe Rabbeinu’s petirah on the 7th of Adar is considered a sad day, whereas Rav Shimon’s petirah is considered a Yom Tov?

**Answer:** The Zohar itself (3:291b) answers this question. The Gemara (Temurah 16a) tells us that the day that Moshe Rabbinu passed away, 3 thousand Halachos were forgotten and lost until Osniel Ben Kenaz restored them. However, on Lag B’omer Rav Shimon taught the Idra Rabbah, a major part of the Zohar, just before he passed away. Thus, Moshe Rabbinu’s yohr zeit was a day of intense sadness, because of his actual passing but also because of the 3,000 lost Halachos. However, although Rav Shimon’s passing was also tragic, but on that day, Torah was added to the world, not reduced, so the day became a Yom Tov.

**Question:** Are there any other reasons that this day is considered a Yom Tov?

**Answer:** Yes. The Shoel Umeishiv (5:39) is actually against making this day into a Yom Tov because the day a tzadik passes away is always a sad day. However, the Shem Aryeh (Orach Chaim 14) states that since there was a governmental edict against Rav Shimon and he died a peaceful death, it was a great miracle and should be celebrated. Furthermore, Moshe Rabbinu cried on the day of his passing because he wanted to go into Eretz Yisrael to fulfill its mitzvos but Rav Shimon was happy to reveal the Zohar that day and passed away b’simcha, so it became a day of joy.

**Question:** How important is to do a chalaka or upsheren on Lag B’omer, especially in these days when it is extremely difficult to do so?

**Answer:** It seems from the Arugas Habosem that that one should not cut a boy’s hair earlier than three but one may delay it until later if necessary, such as these days. However, the Rama (Yoreh Deah 245:8) seems to hold that we should try to do it on the closest Lag B’omer, whether earlier or later. One should certainly not endanger a child, chas vesholom, to have a haircut on Lag B’omer.

A GUTTEN SHABBOS AND A GUTTEN LAG B’OMER