

PARSHAS EMOR – R' SHOLOM SEGAL – LAG B'OMER, A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

write that the disciples of ר' עקיבא died during the עומר period, due to their lack of honour for one another. [See (ס"ב:)] This is particularly difficult to understand, for wasn't the maxim of R' Akiva, 'ואהבת לרעך כמוך זה כלל גדול בתורה' Upon further reflection, it would appear that he actually made this his dictum, upon witnessing his tragic loss. What did he mean, though, with the words, 'זה כלל גדול בתורה'?

In the closing chapter of this week's פרשה, we learn of the one who cursed Hashem. The תורה recounts how they awaited instruction on his sentence; stoning. הקב"ה then told משה to teach the בני ישראל the הלכות of such a sin and, as if in the same breath, the subject of not damaging other people and their possessions. The final פסוק then returns to the story, relating that בני ישראל carried out the punishment, as instructed.

Why, in the midst of this atrocity, did Hashem see to warn His people of the importance not to mistreat others and their property?

In מגילת רות (ב'ד'), Boaz returns and greets his workers, 'ד' עמכם'. The מלבי"ם explains that בעז had been newly appointed as שופט of ישראל. As head of the סנהדרין, he sought to right the warped perception of the Jewish people. The beginning of the מגילה, as explained by the מדרש, recounts that there was corruption in the judicial system. People were under the misapprehension that, whereas Hashem is personally involved in the בין אדם למקום, with regard to one's dealings with his fellow Jew, Hashem keeps out. In an attempt to correct this misconception, they enacted a new תקנה, with which he now arrived home and put straight into practice.

He greeted his workers with mention of Hashem's name, as if to say, that even a mere 'good morning' has everything to do with Hashem. On the contrary, such unity will be cause for Hashem's שכניה to reside amongst us.

When learning the above פרשה of the מגדף, one may be so over-awed by the impudence of the individual who cursed 'ד', that he will overlook the other details of the story. Let us remember that this gross sin was rooted in an argument with his fellow Jew. As explained by רש"י, the strife was over the area in which he sought to pitch his tent.

Hashem has just as much relevance to that feud, as to his blasphemy of the Holy name. Yes, it כביכול causes Hashem just as much pain when two people get caught up in a fight, damaging one another and their property, as the hurt when one denigrates His own honour.

One might think that his superior knowledge of תורה automatically brings him closer to Hashem, but, חז"ל warn, one who houses תורה, but lacks מעשים טובים, is as one who is without a G-D. [See (י"ז:)] (611) minus 'גמילות חסדים' (611), results in ... nothing! This is the 'כלל גדול בתורה', the underpinning of the whole תורה. As we prepare to ascend to מתן תורה, we must remember that, despite being spiritually empty, what they had gained from their time in מצרים, was an appreciation of the importance to behave graciously towards one another. With the united front at Mount Sinai, they were ready to receive the תורה.

In the generation of ר' עקיבא, however, if we follow the opinion that the plague ran for 32 days, a simple calculation reveals that, on the average, exactly 750 disciples perished each day. The above said number, one which is exactly half way between base-7 and base-8, is one that represents the connection between the natural and the supernatural, between the physical and the spiritual realms. They were deemed unworthy to make this union.

On the 33rd day, the famous teaching of ר' עקיבא put a stop to the plague and heralded a new beginning. This was a change from דין to רחמים. The wicked אהאב, who had transgressed all that was written in the תורה, was still victorious in battle, due to the unity which prevailed during his reign – for none spoke הרע לשון הודד. He faced בן הדד and 32 other kings, a total of ... 33! And he was the victor!

Following 22 years of indescribable wickedness, מנשה spent a ... 33 year period doing תשובה. Though מדת הדין demanded that his history was far too horrific, חז"ל write that Hashem provided a tunnel through which he could crawl underneath the הכבוד. [See (ק"ג:)] The 33 years had limited the power of מדת הדין and allowed מדת הרחמים to do its work.

Although the connection between the 7 and 8 had been broken, although the תלמידים had lacked the necessary לחיבורו to make it to the 50th day, עקיבא's intervention came just at the right time, for there still remained 17 days, ט"ז, in which to rebuild the world. He immediately set about doing so, with his 5 new תלמידים, and ensured that the link to מתן תורה would never be lost.

Today, as we stand on the eve of בעומר, ל"ג בעומר, we are preparing for the above said transition. As we celebrate ל"ג בעומר, we must take the teaching of ר' עקיבא to heart and then act upon it. With this outlook, we will בעזת שיי"ת be able to enter the matrimony with Hashem on שבועות.

The times of משיח are ones of tremendous דין. However, within the darkness, there is the light of גאולה. If we want to access it, the recipe is ... תורה וגמילות חסדים. [See (צ"ח:)]