

## Lag Ba'Omer

# Lag Ba'omer and the Development of the Religious Personality

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On Pesach we commemorate the demonstration of the basis of our religion, the monotheistic idea. Through the episode of the Exodus we are able to conclude that we owe our existence completely to one Omnipotent Absolute Existent. This allows for the reality of an absolute truth, which leads to the most fundamental tenet of any religion, that it is possible to live our lives according to a higher purpose. We can perceive the nature of that absolute truth and then live in accordance with it.

On Shavuot, G-d gave us the incredible gift of a pure manifestation of His truth/will, the Torah. So instead of blindly groping in a desperate search for G-d, we can simply open up a Bava Kama. Through the study, immersion in, and eventual internalization of the Torah we can come to know G-d and to act accordingly. But of course, there is much more. There were seven weeks between our initial call to a higher purpose and our receiving of the Torah. Apparently, the desires for purpose, meaning and perfection born from the monotheistic idea, in conjunction with the ultimate guidebook for achieving them - are not alone enough for success. The desire and the guidebook had to be melded together through seven weeks of intense preparation.

Many, Jews included, have posited that the ultimate man is the speculative philosopher. But Judaism has never accepted that the intellect could perfect itself through itself alone. Jews say: "*Derech erez kadma la'Torah.*" Before man acquires divine wisdom, man must first attain a completely wholesome personality, and the ability to interact with the world around him in a proper, healthy, and dignified fashion. Rabbi Akiva's students died because they did not show proper respect to one another. They achieved great intellectual and spiritual feats, but it amounted to nothing because they failed in that most basic aspect of human morality, that we must value the other as we do ourselves, or "*ve'ahavta le'reiacha kamocho.*" Without this foundation, per force all we do will be egotistical and narcissistic, and we will amount to no more than highly sophisticated animals. The selfish man worships no G-d or ideals but himself, becoming nothing greater than the matter he is composed of. "*Im ani li, mi ani?* - If I am [only] for myself, who am I?" Only if we strive for and achieve the ability to truly respect others, and we then internalize and follow G-d's will - can we become truly great people.

On Lag Ba'omer Rabbi Akiva's students ceased to die, obviously not a reason for celebration in itself. But on Lag Ba'omer it was finally possible to rebuild and start anew, this time correcting the mistakes of the previous era. On Lag Ba'omer we must refocus our efforts to utilize the *sefira* period towards achieving moral excellence, founded on a recognition of the imperative to treat every individual with due respect, and resulting in a state of complete **Achdut**. Only then will we be able to receive the Torah on Shavuot in a state that will allow us to fully utilize its treasures in our quest to live according to the highest purpose.