

# SIYUM HARAMBAM:

## The Lag B'omer Connection



*Published in honor  
of the 41st Siyum HaRambam  
erev Lag BaOmer 5782*



# *Preface*

As we approach the Siyum HaRambam on erev Lag BaOmer — concluding the 41st cycle and beginning the 42nd cycle in the three perakim per day track — we are publishing the farbrengen of Lag BaOmer 5745, which the Rebbe devoted primarily to discussing the takanah of daily Rambam study and the importance of making Siyumim.

We thank Vaad Hanachos B'Lahak for allowing us to publish the transcript in Lashon Hakodesh from Hisvaaduyos, and to Sichos in English for the English adaptation.

Included are also several facsimiles of kisvei yad from the Rebbe that are related to this farbrengen.

It is our fervent hope that we will celebrate the Siyum together with the Rebbe, the Rambam, and Rashbi in a physical sense. As the Zohar teaches us, the geulah will come in the merit of learning Pnimiyus HaTorah, and then we will have the fulfillment of the halachos at the conclusion of Rambam, when "the world will be filled with knowledge of Hashem as water covers the sea."

*Vaad Siyum HaRambam HaOlami*

**T**here is a simple reason why we should rejoice today, to share in the joy of Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai) who wanted all who are connected to him to be happy with his joy. It is related in the writings of the AriZal that there was a student of the AriZal who customarily recited the lamentation of "Nachem" every day of the year. He also said it on Lag BaOmer. As a result, the Rashbi was very upset with him and it affected him.

This is a day of great joy which should be observed by all who are connected to the Rashbi — by all the Jews. How so? The Rashbi said: "I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment ..." (Sukkah 45b), which shows that indeed he had a relationship to the whole generation. The generation of the Rashbi needed the tremendous merit of one "super" individual who could single-handedly exempt the world. Some generations need only the lesser combined merit of several tzaddikim to exempt

them, in which case it would have sufficed to invoke only the combined (lesser) merit of the Rashbi and his son. That generation however, needed the superpower of Rashbi, who was ready to take the responsibility.

He did in fact shield the generation. His potential was actualized — which is why his joy is everyone's joy, and there is no greater joy than being freed of all negative aspects.

The Rashbi accomplished this through his Divine service of Torah study — and more specifically by combining the hidden and revealed aspects of Torah, the esoteric and exoteric teachings of Torah. His accomplishment has also been revealed to us through Torah tradition — the Torah of truth and life. And because through Torah we can reach the true unity, it brings still greater joy to all Jews.

It is therefore obvious that everyone should be in a happy state of mind. And since joy breaks through all restrictions, an especially intense joy will

surmount all restrictions and limitations.

Thus, it is *that* joy which radiates here and now, and continues to shine on to that future time, about which the Rambam writes at the conclusion of Mishneh Torah:

At that time ... "the world will be filled with the knowledge of Gd as the waters cover the sea," even the matter of the hidden world will be fathomable for they will grasp a knowledge of their Creator ... (Laws of Kings and Wars 12:5)

May it truly come with joy and gladness of heart.

♦ ♦ ♦

**I**t has been our custom all through this year to find some connection in every farbrengen with the daily Rambam portion. But first we should explain the connection between the Rashbi and the Rambam.

The Rashbi's soul was a spark of the soul of Moshe,

the "faithful shepherd." The Rambam's *theme* was similar to Moshe's, for his magnum opus was the Mishneh Torah — the "repetition of the Torah," or the "second" to the Scriptures, the book of Moshe.

The Talmud (Shabbos 105a) explains that: "I (Ana) Myself (Nafshi) have written the script (Kesovis Yehovis)." In this way the essence of the Torah embodies the spirit of Moshe, just as the spirit of the Rambam is embodied in Mishneh Torah, hence, the connection between Rashbi and Rambam through Moshe.

[Note: Our Sages (Shabbos 105a) say that the four letters of "Anochi" ("I"), the first word of the Ten Commandments, are the first letters of the words "Ana Nafshi Kesovis Yehovis" — "I, My soul (i.e. Myself) have given it in writing." Chassidus (Likkutei Torah, parshas Shelach, p. 96) explains that this can be interpreted to mean that Gd placed His Essence into the Torah (i.e. "I have given My soul in writing"). Thus, through learning Torah, one "possesses"

Gd. Since "The righteous are compared to their Creator," (Rus Rabbah 4:3) it follows that the Rambam placed his essence (his soul) into his work; (and the Rashbi placed his soul in the Zohar) and since Torah is called "Toras Moshe" — it also embodies the essence of Moshe.]

Yet a question arises: the Rashbi's book, the Zohar, is the "soul" of the Torah, dealing with esoteric matters; the Rambam's work gives us halachos (detailed laws) which is the exoteric aspect of Torah. Where do we *see* the commonalty? The answer is that the Rambam does deal with esoterics. Right at the outset the Rambam deals with the "chariot" of Yechezkel:

The exposition of all the principles alluded to in *these two chapters* forms the so-called "Ma'aseh Merkavah" — account of the Divine Chariot. (Laws of Basic Principles of Torah 2:11)

Then at the close of Mishneh Torah:

.. they will know the things that are now concealed ... and will

attain an understanding of their Creator to the utmost capacity of the human mind. (Laws of Kings and Wars 12:5)

This is essentially the knowledge of the chariot! In fact, not only the chariot but the "rider" on the chariot — the true knowledge of Gd.

At the outset of Mishneh Torah the Rambam states: "The basic principle ... to know that there is a First Being ...," to know of the Creator. But the knowledge reaches maturity only after learning *through* Mishneh Torah. Then, at the conclusion, you truly come to know Gd!

You might think that only the beginning of Mishneh Torah and its conclusion deal with these lofty spiritual matters of knowing Gd, and the main text of Mishneh Torah deals with more down-to-earth laws, and as such it would form a barrier between the beginning and end. Therefore it should be clear that the halachos throughout the body of the book of Mishneh Torah do not separate the beginning from the end. Rather

they unite, for "the 'word of the Lrd' means Halachah" (Shabbos 138b), which unites all aspects of the Rambam. For the Halachah reveals the word of Gd and the will of Gd, and thus the *knowledge* of Gd is revealed.

Remembering that there is a connection between Rashbi and Rambam — there is a special significance in learning the Rambam section of today. Lag BaOmer, the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is called the day of "Hillula" (rejoicing or jubilation).

Tanya explains that:

.. All his doings, his Torah, and the Divine service which he served all the days of his life.... It becomes revealed and radiates in a manifest way from above downwards.... (Tanya, Iggeres Hakodesh 27-28)

For this reason the day of death is better than the day of birth, for on the birthday all aspects of the person's Divine service are still in the potential state. At the conclusion of life however, everything has become kinetic, actualized and revealed.





Although in the potential state it is brimming with power and certain to reach reality, yet, since the goal is to effect real action, hence only at the end of one's life can you truly measure the total accomplishments of the individual, and therefore the day of death is richer!

Whether we speak of the Hillula of the Rashbi, or the Rambam, we recognize the vast magnitude of Torah and spirituality of the day. This leads us to question: "What can the study of one more halachah, or one more chapter in Rambam, add to such an illustrious day?"

There is an obvious response to this query. True, all is revealed at

the time of death, but the ultimate goal of existence, to create an abode for Gd in the temporal world, can be realized only by practical,

daily observance of mitzvos. "It must be *done* today." (Eruvin 22a) Quite obviously this cannot happen after death.

This concept applies in all areas of Torah and mitzvos. Doing is special. Take Tefillin for example. We put on Tefillin every weekday, in the daytime; however at night, on Shabbos, Yom Tov, etc., we do not don Tefillin. True, an aura lingers after the mitzvah is completed, but the aura is not the act, and we may not don Tefillin at night.

Some mitzvos even have a continuing presence, such as circumcision. For this reason when Dovid HaMelech first



thought that under certain conditions a Jew might be bare of mitzvos, he rejoiced when he remembered Bris Milah (circumcision). Yet the resultant state of *being* circumcised — although a continuing mitzvah — still does not free one from doing another mitzvah, according to the rule that one who is occupied in fulfilling one mitzvah is free of others. That rule applies only when you are actually *doing, acting, fulfilling* the commandment.

So we see that actually doing a mitzvah supersedes and transcends every other state. Therefore in Zohar we are told that on the day of his passing, the Rashbi said he would reveal: "Holy words not yet revealed ..." and the Zohar relates that: "The holy illuminary (Rashbi) did not conclude to say "chaim" — (life) until..." Clearly the Rashbi had to actually teach Torah till the moment of death, despite the great revelations of the day.

Similarly on the day of Hillula the greatest thing that we can do

is to study the Torah teachings of the tzaddik, e.g. the Zohar of Rashbi, and this act will cause "Gd to study facing him," and bring about the true goal of existence. Studying an halachah of Rambam will likewise effect the same results (as mentioned above, there is a connection between Rashbi and Rambam).

Today's section of Rambam ends with the listing of the Haftorahs read every Shabbos. Why does the Rambam list all the Haftorahs except Vayeilech? This subject needs to be researched and checked further. There should also be a comparison of manuscripts and Siddur R. Amram Gaon, R. Saadia Gaon, etc.

Another point is that after listing all the Haftorahs of the year, the Rambam notes:

It is the accepted custom to read the "Haftorahs of consolation" from the book of Yeshayahu starting the Shabbos after Tishah BeAv until Rosh Hashanah. On the Shabbos after Tishah BeAv the chapter "Nachamu,

Nachamu" is read ... and the seventh one is "Sos Asis B'Hashem."

In other halachic sources it is added that following these seven Haftorahs come the "... two of teshuvah ('Dirshu' and 'Shuvah')," but Rambam does not mention this. Why?

We might think that the Rambam's reason for mentioning the Haftorahs from the chapters of consolation in Yeshayahu is to inform us of this important minhag. The truth, however, is not so. The Rambam already taught the customs of Haftorah reading in Laws of Prayer chapter 13, and he did not have to mention it again here. In fact, however, the Rambam's intention in giving us the rule of the "seven consolation chapters" of Yeshayahu is to end with an auspicious note.

Today's section of Rambam includes chapter 2 of Laws of Shabbos:

The siege of heathen cities should be begun at least three days before the Shabbos, and

thereafter battle may be waged daily — including the Shabbos — until the city is taken, even if the war is a secular one. For it is known by tradition that when Scripture says: "That you may build bulwarks against the city that makes war with you, until it fall," (Devarim 20:20) it means even on the Shabbos. Needless to say the same applies to war waged as a religious duty. In fact Yehoshua did not conquer Yericho — only on Shabbos. (Laws of Shabbos 2:25)

The same topic comes up again later in the Rambam:

It is permitted to lay siege to the towns of the heathens on the Shabbos and to make war with them on Shabbos, as it is said "... until it fall," that is even if (its fall) occurs on Shabbos. What has been said applies both to a war for a religious cause and to an optional war. (Laws of Kings and Wars 6:11)

There is a glaring contradiction regarding the initiation of the siege. In Laws of Shabbos it permits a siege to begin only three days before Shabbos, and



in Laws of Kings it is permitted to start on Shabbos! The commentaries on the Rambam discuss this point and some have emended the halachah in Laws of Kings to read "three days before Shabbos." Others explain that there will be a distinction between religious wars and optional wars. In the former, the siege would be permitted on Shabbos; in the latter, only three days before. In this approach we would interpret the closing words of the Rambam in Laws of Shabbos: "Needless to say the same applies to a war waged as a religious duty ... Yehoshua etc.," that they refer to the permission to start a siege in a *religious* war on the *Shabbos*.

This approach raises several questions:

(A) The siege of Yericho began six days before the walls fell, not on Shabbos. Why does the Rambam bring Yericho as a proof to start a siege on Shabbos?

(B) Yericho shows us that we may make the siege on Shabbos. If so, in telling us of Yericho's fall why does the Rambam use a syntax which indicates a firm condition "only on Shabbos" as if the conquest of Yericho could only have been accomplished on Shabbos. Did they really have to start the war on Shabbos?

(C) There are also differences in the wording of the two halachos.



What significance do we derive from it?

We may propose the following explanation. The Rambam's wording at the start of the halachah in Laws of Shabbos indicates that there are two separate topics: siege and battle: (A) "The siege ... three days before the Shabbos," and (B) ... battle may be waged ... including the Shabbos.

Similarly in Laws of Kings: (A) "It is permitted to lay siege ... on the Shabbos," and (B) "... to make war with them on Shabbos." This is also clear from the fact that

the Rambam did not combine "siege" and "war" in the same clause.

Now, the Rambam rules that an *optional* war may only be started three days before Shabbos and the siege must also be started at least three days before the Shabbos; once *started* it may *continue* on Shabbos.

In a *mitzvah* war however, the siege may be started on Shabbos and even the actual battle may be begun on Shabbos. How do we know that in a mitzvah war you may start the *battle* on Shabbos? from *Yericho*.

What happened at the conquest of Yericho? For six days all the warriors and the Kohanim with the Holy Ark surrounded the city. This was simple siege — no battle, no conquest (when does Halachah recognize conquest? When the vanquished pay tribute and serve you).

Without doubt during that week of siege, the city of Yericho was still under the rule of its own king and ministers. They paid no tax or tribute to the Jews. When did the battle and subsequent conquest start? When the walls fell, on that Shabbos. Then the armed soldiers entered the city:

So that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city ... with the edge of the sword. (Yehoshua 6:20-21)

Therefore, the Rambam tells us that from the war of Yericho we learn that in a *mitzvah* war the *battle* may be begun even on *Shabbos*, which is also what the Rambam means in Laws of Kings. There he says that both

the *battle* and the *siege* may be begun on *Shabbos* in a *mitzvah* war. Later when the Rambam equates a *mitzvah* war to an optional war — that is only with regard to *continuing* the siege or battle. Only in that case does the Halachah apply to both *mitzvah* and optional wars equally — you may continue siege and battle on *Shabbos*.

All of the earlier discrepancies will now be cleared up, and we do not have to emend the Rambam as suggested by the Kesef Mishneh.

Why did the Rambam seem to indicate that *Shabbos* was a condition for the battle, as if it *had* to be on *Shabbos*?

The answer is that it was not a condition. Battle could not be engaged until *Shabbos*, because the walls didn't fall till *Shabbos*. From this we see that you may *start a battle* on *Shabbos*.

The differences in style and language may also be understood when we remember that in Laws of *Shabbos* the case discussed is about an *optional* war, which is

why the language is so detailed: "Battle may be waged daily — including the Shabbos (having started at least three days before Shabbos) until the city is taken." Whereas in Laws of Kings the language is more terse; speaking of a *mitzvah* war — he immediately says, "you may start the siege on Shabbos."

\* \* \*

We earlier connected the work of Rashbi and the work of Rambam. In Kabbalah it is taught that, "With the Book of Zohar we will go out of the galus with mercy."

The Rashbi's essence was Torah, and for that reason he could accomplish great things with relative ease — "Her (Torah's) ways are pleasant." And when the world needed rain, Rashbi spoke Torah, and the rain came, with benevolence. When Choni Hame'agel prayed for rain he had to pray and fast and plead with Gd until the benevolent rain fell.

May Gd grant that by speaking on and on about Zohar we will merit soon to be redeemed from

the galus with mercy. Especially now, since the time of the AriZal and the Baal Shem Tov, that it is a *mitzvah* to reveal the esoteric teachings. And especially as Chabad Chassidus brings understanding to the inner teachings of the Torah, which brings first to knowledge, and then to good attributes, and then to action.

In this manner we complete all our actions in the six thousand years of the world and we take the key and open the chest holding all the treasures, which have been stored up through our actions.

May it be speedily in our time, pleasant and peaceful, the true and complete redemption through our righteous Mashiach, momentarily and instantaneously.

3. While we have begun the study of the new cycle of the Rambam it is still important to organize and arrange additional *siyumim* — celebrations of the Rambam for those who have concluded the first cycle. If there is a city or a community

which has not yet participated in a siyum, then the effort should be made to arrange a siyum of the Mishneh Torah in that place. This will bring many who have not heard about the Rambam, or about studying his works, to take an interest and many more people will be encouraged to study Rambam.

Recently there have been those who have scoffed at the emphasis on Rambam study, claiming that they are protecting the honor of the Rambam (sic). For some reason they do not want the Rambam studied! And the effect

of their scoffing is to turn people away from Rambam study! What honor is that?

The Gemara says:

When a statement of tradition is reported in this world in the name of a [deceased] scholar, his lips move gently in the grave. (Yevamos 97a)

Thus when the average Jew studies Rambam he causes the Rambam to leave his activities in Gan Eden and to move his lips, as if speaking, in his grave in Tiveriah. This movement will affect the atmosphere in



the tomb and it will also affect the atmosphere of the world. By learning an halachah in the Rambam, he will effect an improvement in the entire world!

It would also be proper and advisable to gather the spoken lectures said at the Siyumim and publish them as a collection of scholarly discourses on the Rambam. Certainly even among the smaller groups there were some new thoughts presented or some new questions raised and answered — all these should be published and distributed among the participants in the siyum. This will have a positive impact on those who attended the siyum and on their families.

The Mishnah in Avos tells us:

.. if two sit together and do exchange words of Torah, the Divine Presence rests between them, as it is stated: "Then the Gdfearing conversed with one another, and the Lrd hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lrd and who meditate on the

greatness of His Name." (Malachi 2:16, Avos 3:2)

When two Jews study Torah together, a "book of remembrance" is written before the Holy One blessed be He. How much more so when there is a large attendance, in which case we may quote a further Mishnah:

If ten people sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Divine Presence rests among them.... (ibid:6)

Hopefully, my words will not be in vain, and more siyum celebrations will be organized and the discourses and discussions will be published in journals and books. And, mainly, many more people should be encouraged to study Rambam.

4. It has been mentioned on many occasions that the principle of Divine Providence indicates that there must be some connection between the daily Torah section and the general context of the day.

This raises the question, what connection is there between the Torah section of today



that deals with the holiday of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (fourth reading section of Emor) with the day of Lag BaOmer? Strangely enough, yesterday's section dealt with the mitzvah of Omer while today we read: "The first day of the Seventh month ... The 10th of this seventh month...." (Vayikra 23:23,27)

In discussing the theme of the 33rd of the Omer, Chassidus explains that the specific attribute (Sefirah) assigned to this day is "splendor of splendor" (Hod ShebeHod) — this compound attribute is seen as the,

.. last one and the conclusion of the main emotive attributes esoterically known as the "body" (i.e. relating to self-development). Beyond the attribute of "splendor of splendor" the "body" ends, and the flow of benevolence (influence) goes outside the main "body" till the Sefirah of "royalty of royalty." (Siddur, Gate of Lag BaOmer page 300a ff.)

"Hod ShebeHod" is the conclusion of the main "body" of attributes and it assumes the role

of "praise of praise" in Divine service. But it also is bound to the beginning. Thus, specifically in the compound "splendor of splendor" we see the revelation of the highest level; for the end is bound with the beginning. This is felt at the outset of the day (at nightfall) when Sefirah is counted and we say "May abundant bounty thereby be bestowed upon all the worlds." (Siddur — Sefiras HaOmer) At that point the radiation of the first and last is generated.

Consequently, we realize that while *concluding* the main phase of influence of the compounded attributes (splendor of splendor), at the same time we introduce the next phases — from Yesod to Malchus — and thereby, Lag BaOmer becomes a beginning — a Rosh — similar to Rosh Hashanah.

And for those who seek a pretext and argue that it is better to wait until Shavuot when you reach the final, total purification on the level of "royalty of royalty," the answer is: This will only satisfy one who Gd forbid,

is not bothered by the missing blessings. One who realizes the bountiful benevolence of the completion of "splendor of splendor," will be exuberant and say, "If I can benefit from this blessing today why should I wait for royalty of royalty?"

In addition to the lesson we glean from the daily Chumash section, there is also a lesson to be taken from the general theme of the portion of Emor. In explaining the term Emor, Rashi had indicated:

"Say" and again "You shall say to them" (this repetition is intended) to charge the adults about their children. (Rashi, Emor)

This means that Moshe had to teach the Kohanim in such a manner that they would be motivated to admonish their children. In what area was this warning necessary? In connection to the matters outlined in the preceding portion of Kedoshim. There we explained that Rashi teaches us to be aloof even from sinful thoughts, even from the whole arena of prohibited acts.

When Rashi brought illustrations to explain the meaning of Kedoshim, he quoted verses from Emor. Consequently the admonition embodied in Emor relates to the state of sanctity discussed in Kedoshim; to be aloof from any aspect of transgression.

Rashi's commentary represents both the simple meaning of Scripture as well as the "wine of Torah," which brings us to a deeper interpretation of the admonition "L'hazhir." We find the word "yazhir" in Daniel: "And they who are wise shall shine (yazhir) like the brightness of the firmament..." (Dan 12:3) When the adults will teach the children to be careful, (zahir) they will attain the quality of "brightness."

And for those who seek a clear proof from Gemara we find on the verse:

"The Lrd enlightens both their eyes" (Mishlei 29:13) ... if he teaches him (the student), the Lrd enlightens the eyes of both (the pupil and the teacher). (Temurah 16a)

The ultimate perfection of this brightness and the ultimate state of sanctity will, of course, be attained with the coming of Mashiach, when the only preoccupation will be to know Gd.

May Gd grant that by speaking of the Kohanic role and responsibility we should merit to see the Kohanim in their service in the Temple. For in a split second,

a King will arise from the House of David ... and fight the battle of the Lrd ... and rebuild the Sanctuary on its site ... (Laws of Kings and Wars 11:1)

And if we are really worthy the Bais HaMikdash will not have to be built, for it stands

ready in the Jerusalem above. It just has to be uncovered and brought down by Mashiach — so there are no time limitations — it can happen even at night, even on Shabbos, etc.

Then the true redemption will come, for he will gather all the dispersed Jews, just as the Rambam gathered all the laws of Torah and put them into one book, the Mishneh Torah, which is a preparation for Mashiach.

And may we all come to the Sanctuary and merit to see the Kohanim in their service, as indicated by the words "Say to the Kohanim," — Moshe and Aharon with them.

Speedily and truly in our days with joy and gladness of heart.



