
Sichos in English Classics 15

Is there a Generation Gap?

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LAG BAOMER 5750



Sichos In English
788 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11213
www.sie.org

IN PLACE OF AN INTRODUCTION

At the Shloshim of R' Yonah Avtzon A"H, Director of Sichos in English, a resolution was taken to reprint the original weekly Sichos in English publications.

To fulfill this, a weekly booklet including a translation of a *farbrengen* as it was first published will be distributed. Our intention is to reprint the entire set in the near future.

Following the Sichos we will include an addendum with pictures, notes, and insights into the process of its publication.

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INTRO

This week we bring you a fascinating Sicha of the Rebbe whose translation was then edited by the Rebbe. In behind the scenes, in this issue and in coming issues, we bring some of the Rebbe's handwritten edits on this Sicha.

This essay addresses some fundamental ideas of Judaism and Chassidus. Here are a few examples:

On Unity: “Difference need not lead to division. On the contrary, true unity comes from a synthesis of different — and even opposite — thrusts.”

On Charity: “Tzedakah does not mean merely giving a charitable donation to a needy person, but rather offering another all the assistance that is necessary, be it material or spiritual, thereby removing the factors which may disrupt the unity between individuals or between nations.”

Removing strife from the world: “Once mankind realizes that G-d has provided abundance for everyone, there will be no motivation for war or even strife.”

Generational gap: “Judaism has always emphasized the importance of the continuity of tradition, denying the justification for a gap between generations.”

What is a parade: “The essential aspect of a parade is the expression of pride in one's beliefs and values and provides an opportunity to demonstrate it to others. In a parade, furthermore, one does not stand still, indicating each individual's need to continually proceed further in positive activities.”

These insights and so many others fill the coming pages.

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Lag BaOmer is a day of rejoicing on which Jews celebrate their unity by gathering Jewish children together. Significantly, it is the *yahrzeit* (the anniversary of the passing) of the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose teachings highlighted the concept of unity by drawing attention¹ to the verse, “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to sit together.”²

Unity stems from shared roots, as with brothers who are bound together because they “share” the same father. Although they lead separate and sometimes very divergent existences, their fundamental common identity remains.

This concept is reflected in the vision of the prophet Zachariah in which the *menorah* symbolizes the Jewish people.³ The candelabrum which extends in seven branches symbolizes seven different paths of Divine service. Yet it was made of a single piece of gold,⁴ indicating that the Jewish people remain one unified entity despite their different qualities.

Difference need not lead to division. On the contrary, true unity comes from a synthesis of different — and even opposite — thrusts. Thus, we see that the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represented different approaches to Divine service — Abraham represented the love of G-d; Isaac, the awe of G-d; and Jacob, the harmony between these opposites. Yet together, they established the one and unique spiritual heritage of our people.

1. *Zohar* III, 59b.

2. *Psalms* 133:1.

3. *Zachariah* ch. 4.

4. See *Exodus* 25:31-40 and commentaries for a description of the *menorah*.

This unity has a broader scope, encompassing all of mankind — non-Jews and Jews. Indeed, it extends beyond the human realm to include the totality of existence, since we all are G-d’s creations.⁵

BROTHERLY OUTREACH

Our awareness of this fundamental oneness affects our relations with our fellow men and the world at large. The various differences between people are thereby overshadowed by what is common to all of us. Therefore, a person need not feel “threatened” by the difference between him and others. Instead, he should reach out to him with love and seek to help him. Should he see an undesirable quality, rather than reject his colleague, responding with negative feelings, his feelings of compassion should be aroused and he should try to help him correct his fault, thus allowing the oneness between them to be complete.

This is one of the meanings of *Tzedakah*, which properly signifies “righteous behavior”.⁶ *Tzedakah* does not mean merely giving a charitable donation to a needy person, but rather offering another all the assistance that is necessary, be it material or spiritual, thereby removing the factors which may disrupt the unity between individuals or between nations.

HARMONY IN THE COSMOS

This approach is the key to peace and unity in the world at large. G-d has provided ample and abundant blessings in the world He created “with kindness, love and mercy.” He has called on mankind to emulate these qualities by sharing G-d-given benefits with others, helping them materially and spiritually.

Recognizing the abundance of G-d’s blessings and man’s role in their preservation and appropriate use will remove the basis for strife and division among nations. Once mankind realizes that G-d

5. Furthermore, as quoted in *Tanya, The Gateway of Unity and Faith*, Chapter 1, the Baal Shem Tov explains that creation is not a one-time event of the past, but a continuous process. At each moment G-d is bringing our existence into being anew.

6. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. II, p. 210.

has provided abundance for everyone, there will be no motivation for war or even strife.

Indeed, adopting this approach adds to the blessings G-d grants in the world at large and avert the “need” for Him to use temporary measures — earthquakes and the like — to remind us of His constant presence and His control.⁷

Similarly, this approach will refine the world and hasten the coming of the era which will express its ultimate state of perfection, when “One nation will not lift up a sword against another, nor will they learn war any more.”⁸ This unity will be extended even beyond the human realm, spreading into the animal kingdom, as it is written, “A wolf will dwell with a lamb and a leopard with a kid.”⁹ Indeed, it will encompass every aspect of existence.

THE FAMILY AS A CHAIN

The goodness and blessing which G-d grants will be reflected within the personal “world” of each individual, and in particular, in what is the most important wish of each man, his home and his family, so that he will derive genuine *nachas* (“pleasure”) from his children and grandchildren.

Judaism has always emphasized the importance of the continuity of tradition, denying the justification for a gap between generations. Rather, every family — be it Jewish or non-Jewish — should be an integral entity, communicating and passing down true values from generation to generation.

Indeed, we are beginning to notice in the world at large a restoration of communication between generations, a realization of the great resource we have in our parents and grandparents. This awareness enables the present generation to transmit the knowledge, experience, and values of the past to the future.

7. This address was delivered some six weeks before the recent earthquakes in Iran. (— Translator’s note.)

8. *Micah* 4:3.

9. *Isaiah* 11:6.

CHANGE OF REGIMES

This process of communication is the essence of education. It has been the positive force shaping the progress of civilization throughout history. Similarly, it is the desire for an environment conducive to education that is at the core of the turn of events which we have witnessed in the past months, and which are characteristic of this unique year, ה'תש"ו (5750), a “year of miracles”.¹⁰ Regimes based on an educational system which employed force and fear to transmit their values have given way to a system which allows for an environment conducive to the natural motivation for development possessed by every child.

Through the establishment of an environment of warmth, love, joy, and disciplined freedom, we will enable all children to develop their G-d-given potential without intimidation or hindrance by fear and inspire them to dedicate themselves to a life of positive activity, spreading good throughout the world.

THE MEANING OF A PARADE

The essential aspect of a parade is the expression of pride in one's beliefs and values and provides an opportunity to demonstrate it to others. In a parade, furthermore, one does not stand still, indicating each individual's need to continually proceed further in positive activities. The main participants in this parade are children, who reflect the concepts of progress and growth more noticeably than adults. Each year, and even each season of the year, their bodies grow. This physical growth should be accompanied by spiritual growth, which in turn, should be reflected in changes of behavior, in an increase of good deeds.

Joining in this parade are representatives of the city, state, and national government, indicating that they share the desire to spread love, brotherhood and peace. This is further emphasized by the manner in which they have participated — by sending also bands — for music spreads happiness and encourages communication and

10. For the date of this year (5750) is expressed by the Hebrew letters ה'תש"ו, and these are the initials of the four words, ה'י תהי' שנת נסים — “This shall surely be a year of miracles.”

peace. This will be accomplished by encouraging education — in particular, by promoting the observance of the seven universal laws commanded to Noah and his descendants, and by spreading the practice of *Tzedakah*, righteous and charitable conduct.

ELEVATING MATERIALITY

To inspire these activities, a special silver coin has been minted in connection with this occasion, to be distributed to all the participants. In the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and in its service, silver and other material goods were used to create a dwelling for G-d. In a larger sense, the totality of our involvement in the material world should be dedicated to this purpose.¹¹ This coin will serve as memento of this occasion and inspire us to use money, and all other material objects likewise, for good purposes, and, in particular, for *Tzedakah*.

* * *

May all these activities lead to the revelation of the ultimate good within the world, the realization that “everything was created for His glory.”¹² This will herald the coming of the age when “G-d will reign forever and ever”¹³ — with the coming of *Mashiach*, who will bring the complete and ultimate redemption.¹⁴ May it be imminently, Amen.

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11. The above concepts are reinforced by one of the fundamental points of Chassidic philosophy which teaches that the world is essentially good. Other approaches teach that one has to fight against the world to improve it. In contrast, Chassidic philosophy trains us to appreciate the good in the world and use it — and all the world — for positive purposes.
 12. *Avos* 6:11.
 13. *Exodus* 15:18.
 14. The Messianic redemption is also associated with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, for it is through the teachings of his classic text, the *Zohar*, that “Israel will be redeemed from exile in mercy” (*Zohar* III, 124b).

ADDENDUM

Behind the Scenes of Sichos in English

Some edits on the beginning of the essay:

Originally the Sicha started like this: “Lag BaOmer is a day of rejoicing on which Jews celebrate their unity by gathering Jewish children together. Significantly, it is also the *yahrzeit* (the anniversary of the passing) of the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai”...

Unity in Diversity

Lag BaOmer is a day of rejoicing on which Jews celebrate their unity by gathering Jewish children together. Significantly, it is ~~also~~ the *yahrzeit* (the anniversary of the passing) of the great Talmudic sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose teachings highlighted the concept of unity by drawing attention¹ to the verse, “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to sit together.”²

Unity stems from shared roots, as with brothers who are bound together because they share ^{“”}the same father. Although they lead separate ^{sometimes very} and divergent ^{ways} existences, their fundamental common identity remains.

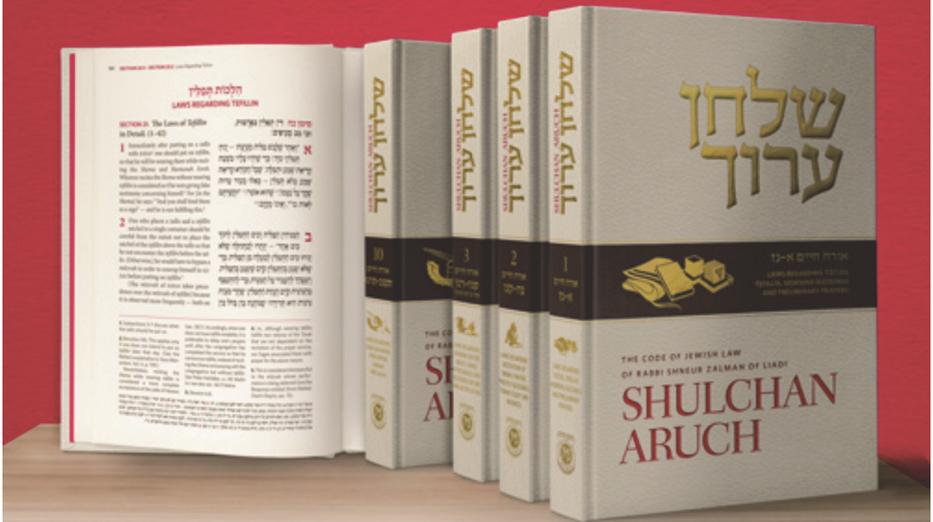
The Rebbe removed the word “also”, seemingly implying that the *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Shimon is the main story of the day.

In the next paragraph the Rebbe added some words:

Unity stems from shared roots, as with brothers who are bound together because they [*the Rebbe added quotation marks around the word share*] “share” the same father. Although they lead separate and [*the Rebbe added the following two words “sometimes very”, which seems to highlight the closeness of brothers, that even when their lives are very divergent, the inherent bond*

remains] sometimes very divergent existences, their fundamental common identity remains.

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