

KOL MEVASSER

Yeshivot & the Toy Industry: The Art of Imagination

By Rabbi Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo
(Parashiot Aharei Mot and Kedoshim)

One of the most unique talents with which human beings are blessed with is the faculty of imagination. Unlike any other creature, the human has nearly unlimited potential for constructive fantasy.

In fact, our civilization is built on imagination. Without this capacity, no progress could ever be made, whether in science, literature, philosophy, art, music or commerce. Our world would be unable to sustain itself and develop properly if human beings did not continuously explore new and uncharted paths. It is for this reason that every generation must ensure that its youngsters are provided with enough opportunities to develop a healthy imagination.

Despite this, we find that children's toys have become a major industry. In the last few decades, we have witnessed a boom in the manufacturing of the most sophisticated toys. Today it is possible to buy dolls that can walk, sing, speak with other dolls, sleep, cry, smile, and even need diapers. One gets the impression that in just a few years the industry will confuse its clients with even more lifelike dolls – to such an extent that their manufacturers will rush to City Hall and register them as new births! Similarly, electric trains, boats, planes and other modes of transportation

have become more and more like the real thing. Some of the electric cars available in toy stores can travel at a speed of 50 kilometers an hour, are equipped with radios, computers and windshield wipers, and can operate on solar power. While our society welcomes these new innovations and regards them as greatly beneficial to our children and grandchildren, this is a major educational mistake.

The Torah is often referred to as a toy. King David said: "Had Your Torah not been my plaything, I would have perished in my affliction." (*Tehillim* 119:92)

This analogy is found a number of times in *Tehillim* (Psalms). Just as playing brings joy to a human being, so does busying oneself with the Torah. But, what does this joy comprise? No doubt, one of the many elements that contribute to the pleasure of playing is the use of imagination. Joy is the art of seeing great possibilities.

When people learn Torah, it is not just the information they assimilate that is enjoyable, but above all, they thrive on the possibility of creating *chiddushim* (new insights) by developing their own imagination in the pursuit of understanding the Torah. This is one of the reasons why the Oral Torah was never completely recorded and why the Torah — and later the Talmud — were written in a most cryptic script, requiring the student to read between the lines in order to fully

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KJ Schedule Aharei Mot & Kedoshim

Erev Shabbat / Friday, May 1st
Shaharit / Morning Prayer ... 6:30 am
Minha / Arvit..... 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:18 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer, Twenty-eighth Night

Shabbat

Saturday, May 2nd
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 8:30 am
Rabbi Avraham Navah, Guest Speaker
Minha & Arbit..... 6:30 pm
Havdalla..... 8:22 pm
Sefirat Ha'Omer, Twenty-ninth Night

Pesah Sheni / Sunday, May 3rd
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 7:30 am
Talmud Torah 10:00 am
Sefirat Ha'Omer, Thirtieth Night

Weekdays

Mon to Wed, May 4th to 6th
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am
Sefirat Ha'Omer, 31st to 33rd Nights

Lag Ba'Omer

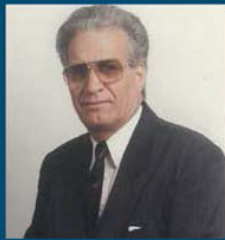
Wed Eve May 6th & Thurs, May 7th
Shaharit / Morning Prayer .. 6:30 am
Sefirat Ha'Omer, Thirty-fourth Night

Erev Shabbat / Friday, May 8th
Shaharit / Morning Prayer ... 6:30 am
Minha / Arvit..... 6:30 pm
Candle Lighting 7:24 pm

Torah & Haftara Readings

Vayikra / Leviticus: Aharei Mot
480-493; Kedoshim 497—508
Haftara Yehezkel/ Ezekiel 511 to 512

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parents on your accomplishment

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Moselle Amron • Maurice Ovadia • Tilda Levy
Esther Duke • Abe Abraham • Sassoon Ezra

In Memoriam

We remember these yearzeit anniversaries May 2,
to 9, 2015. It is customary to light a memorial candle,
donate tzedaka, & attend Shabbat services.

13 Iyar / Shabbat, May 2nd

Devorah Lubovsky *Devorah bat Aharon*
Joseph Robert Shaul
Violet Aziza Sheeri

14 Iyar / Sunday, May 3rd

Sally Ekaireb *Salha Matana bat Matooka*
Tala Eradat *Tala bat Javaher*
Amir Ghoulia

Salman Khadoori Shaby *Salminan ben Kadoori*
Eliyahu Shamash *Eliyahu Hai ben Avraham*

15 Iyar / Monday, May 4th

Rivka Matana bat Miriam
Rachel Yitzhaki *Rahel bat Chana*

16 Iyar / Tuesday, May 5th

Eliza Moses *Aziza bat Chana*
Albert Abraham Gazal Sassoon
Joseph Yehudah *Yoseph ben Yehudah*

18 Iyar / Thursday, May 7th

Rachel Judah *Rahel bat Tifaha*
Seemah Sofaer Shemash *Seemah bat Hanna*

19 Iyar / Friday, May 8th

Helen Ezra Shemtob *Habiba bat Lulu*
Sulman Haroun Zanki *Sulman Haroun*

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grasp the profundity within. This allows the mind to expand, demanding much creativity. “It is impossible that a Beth Midrash will not contain a *chiddush*.” (Chagiga 3a). One needs to use one’s own imagination to encompass what the text itself does not reveal.

One of the most important benefits of playing with toys is the fulfillment of children’s need to pretend. Children do not play with the toy itself, but rather with what they imagine while they are playing. The greater the distance between the toy and the product of the child’s imagination, the more intensive and beneficial is this pursuit to the child. The child will have to use all her imagination to create the world in which she wants to find herself and will, literally, have to think out of the box.

For this reason it is highly undesirable for toys to approximate reality too closely. A doll that can speak, cry, or smile is not a real doll, precisely because it is so “real”. The child is unable to pretend because the manufacturer has already done it all for him. Adults, who do not possess the same degree of imagination as do children, mistakenly believe they need to produce toys that look real. What they do not understand is that the children themselves will imagine the part that is missing. To be sure, the child will initially be very pleased with the state-of-the-art doll that can sing and smile, but a child is unaware of his own psychological makeup and will ultimately become bored. There is, after all, very little left to the imagination. In fact, more and more parents complain that

the more expensive the toy, the sooner it is likely to be neglected.

Many Torah institutions today have fallen victim to the same problem as the toy industry. They now offer classes where questions become nearly impossible. The teacher delivers his discourse as a well prepared dish to which nothing more can be added and about which no further questions can be asked. Instead of encouraging imagination, they kill every opportunity to imagine. From being the great plaything—the source of endless imagination—the Torah becomes a sophisticated but sterile toy. And just as the child will drop the toy, so the student will drop the Torah.

Toy manufacturers are certainly making more money than ever before. Similarly, many Yeshivoth are producing students with a phenomenal amount of Jewish knowledge. But are these booming industries serving the child’s needs? And are the Yeshivoth producing real Torah scholars, or just walking encyclopedias? The famous Chazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (1878-1953) is reported to have said: “Trying to raise gedolim b’Torah, great Torah scholars, in yeshivot is like trying to raise trees under a table.”

For a healthy future—for humanity and for Judaism—we will need adults who will be gifted with fertile imaginations. For that we need simple educational dolls for our children. And we need Torah teachings that consist of open-ended inquiry and a willingness to undergo a renaissance, which challenge us to grow.

Whether we succeed in the first task will depend on the toy industry’s understanding of human psychology. Whether we succeed in the second will depend on the will of the leaders of our Yeshivoth to make space for their students’ imagination. After all, Toys R Us. And so is Torah.

What is Pesach Sheni?

from Chabad.org

A year after the Exodus, G_od instructed the people of Israel to bring the Passover offering on the afternoon of the fourteenth of Nissan, and to eat it that evening, roasted over the fire, together with matzah and bitter herbs, as they had done the previous year just before they left Egypt.

“There were, however, certain persons who had become ritually impure through contact with a dead body, and could not, therefore, prepare the Passover offering on that day. They approached Moses and Aaron . . . and they said: ‘. . . Why should we be deprived, and not be able to present G_od’s offering in its time, amongst the children of Israel?’” (Numbers 9:6–7).

In response to their plea, G_od established the 14th of Iyar as a “Second Passover” (Pesach Sheni) for anyone who was unable to bring the offering on its appointed time in the previous month.

The day thus represents the “second chance” achieved by *teshuvah*, the power of repentance and “return.” In the words of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch, “The Second Passover means that it’s never a ‘lost case.’”

It is customary to mark this day by eating matzah, *shmurah* matzah if possible

What is Lag Ba'Omer?

(from Aish.com) In Israel, months before the advent of the festival of Lag B'Omer -- the 33rd day of the Omer, the 49 days that bridge between Passover and Shavuot -- one can see youngsters dragging all types of combustibles, from fallen trees to broken chairs to old mattresses. Their destination? The nearest empty lot, where they pile their treasured possessions to impossible heights and wait with eager anticipation until the night of Lag B'Omer, arguably their favorite time of year, when they turn the piles into enormous conflagrations. Ask anyone what the bonfires are for, and you'll be told they are in celebration of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a great sage who lived and taught approximately half a century after the destruction of the second Temple.

What lies behind this rather enigmatic festival of Lag B'Omer? What's so special about the 33rd day of the Omer? And who was Rabbi Shimon, to whose name Lag B'Omer is inextricably tied, and why do we celebrate him? And why the bonfires? The first 33 days of the Omer are observed as a period of mourning. We do not cut hair, perform weddings, or listen to music. What's this all about? Rabbi Akiva, the towering sage of the Mishna, exerted a powerful influence on the Torah scholars of his day, to the point that he had 24,000 disciples. Great as the members of this group was, they had one short-coming: They failed to show proper love and respect for one another. The tragic consequence of this shortcoming was a brief but cataclysmic epidemic that claimed the lives of these students -- all 24,000 of them. The period during which the epidemic took place was none other than the first 32 days of the Omer.

As we shall see, the Torah we have was then transmitted to us by Rabbi Akiva via the five new students whom he taught after the loss of his first group of disciples. The Torah we study today is endless. One can study for a lifetime and not "finish" it. The demise of the first group of students essentially resulted in our receiving only a fraction of Rabbi Akiva's Torah. Instead of its full amplification by 24,000 great human beings, we have only the interpretations of five. So, we are also mourning the lost dimensions of Torah.

It is significant that the death of the first group students was the result of a lack of love and respect amongst themselves. The Oral Torah can only exist on the basis of continuous absorption and incorporation of new perspectives. No Jew on his own, no matter how smart, talented or advanced, can reach the totality of Torah. Therefore a prerequisite for connecting fully with the Torah is the ability to appreciate the contribution of another. As the Sages ask, leading into an invaluable teaching "Who is wise?" Their response: "One who learns from every person" (Ethics of the Fathers, 4:1).

The 33rd day of the Omer signified a new period in the life of Rabbi Akiva. The last students of his aborted legacy died, and he established a new venue for his legacy. This consisted of five sages. Their names were Rabbi Meir; Rabbi

Yehuda; Rabbi Elazar; Rabbi Nechemiah; and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. All of these names are familiar to any student of Mishna or Talmud, but the most prominent among them is the sage Rabbi Shimon. These five new students were able to survive and keep the chain going, so there must have been a qualitative difference between them and their fellow disciples of Rabbi Akiva. If the first group failed in their interpersonal relationships, the second were able to rectify that defect. We celebrate the reclaimed dimensions of Torah learning that were made possible by devotion to one another.

So on a deeper level, we mourn that part of ourselves which refuses to recognize the fact that someone else might have something valuable to add to our lives or understanding of Torah. Once we have internalized the depth of the destruction this tendency can cause us, we are ready to begin again with a fresh awareness of the greatness of our peers and acquaintances. We are now ready to celebrate our integration into the totality of the Jewish people and to use that wholeness as background for understanding the Torah. Additionally, we celebrate Rabbi Akiva's legacy, which is what sustains us in our commitment to Torah study and observance until this day. Rabbi Akiva was destined as the man who would transmit the Torah to posterity. If not for this re-establishment, there would be no Torah.

Significantly, it was Rabbi Shimon, most prominent of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, who affirmed the immortality of the chain of transmission of the Oral Torah. As the Talmud relates (Gittin 67a) Rabbi Shimon was the member of the group who most fully internalized the lessons of his great mentor. It was he who revealed the inner depths of the Torah and unlocked the secrets of its innermost dimensions through his teachings. These teachings later served the basis for the Book of the Zohar, the primary work of Kabbalah, or hidden aspects of Torah.

Once, when Rabbi Shimon's students gathered for a lesson, their mentor noticed the good humor present among them and the absence of tensions. He remarked, "It is because you maintain an atmosphere of love and brotherhood that you have merited to participate in revelation of Torah secrets." Lag B'Omer is a time for reinforcing our unity and appreciating that Torah study, and all Divine service, is a joint effort. The more we appreciate this, the more the wellsprings of the Torah, and our own souls, will open up to us.

On Lag B'Omer, we honor Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's memory by lighting candles or bonfires, symbolic of the light provided by the eternal fire of the Torah, particularly its inner dimensions revealed by him.