

The Torah Any Times

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Rebbetzin Chaya Sorah Gertzulin The Winner

It is now the period of Sefirah, counting the days from the second night of Pesach until Shavuot, the time that the Jewish nation received the Torah on Mount Sinai.

“U’sfartem lachem, And you shall count for yourself.” (Vayikra 23:15) Sefirah has the power to be a transformative experience. Seven weeks. Forty-nine days. The Sefirah count is a “count up”. One day to the Omer... four days... a week... In contrast to a “count down”... Ten...nine...eight...seven... By counting up, each day builds on the previous one. Each day comes with new opportunities for spiritual growth and elevation.

The word Sefirah shares a common root with the Hebrew word “sapir”, meaning sapphire, a crystal. Sefirah is a time of introspection, a time to crystalize our goals, our mission in life.

In the prayer following the counting of the Sefirah, we beseech HaShem “U’le’kadesheinu b’ke’du’shas’chah ha’elyonah, To be sanctified with kedushah, holiness of the Above...” At times, we feel so far away from where we want to be, from our life goals, from being close to HaShem, thinking we will never get there. As we count Sefirah, we realize that it is doable, we can make life changes, day by day. If we set our goal, make a plan, and stick to it,

we can accomplish great things.

This Shabbos, we read Achrei Mos-Kedoshim, a parshah which teaches us the importance of living one’s life as a kadosh, a holy person.

A robotics competition was held in Houston, Texas this past week. It is an annual international event drawing the brightest young minds from high schools throughout the world, emphasizing innovations in STEM studies – science, technology, engineering, and math.

I came across a story written by Sivan Rahav-Meir, a well-known and admired Israeli journalist. She wrote about the Israeli team from the Amit High School in Modi’in who reached the final stage of the competition. But there was a problem. The finals were scheduled for Shabbos.

Come Shabbos morning, the team was not to be found alongside their booth. Instead, they left behind “a Shabbos table” – Shabbos candles, challah, a Kiddush cup and an Israeli flag. The team also penned a letter explaining their absence, and what Shabbos means to them.

The announcer at the competition read their letter for all the other teams and the thousands of participants to hear.

“We come from religious backgrounds. Our faith is an integral part of who we are. Saturdays – Shabbat holds a special significance in the Jewish faith. It is a time when we disconnect, and focus on our spiritu-

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al well-being, families, G-d and community.

Because of this, our team will not be present and competing during the remainder of the competition.

We are thankful for the opportunity to be here. We congratulate all our peer teams who made this event so inspiring for us.

We wish all teams the very best of luck."

It was at that moment that a great Kiddush HaShem happened. Students from all over gave a standing ovation and cheered for the Israeli team. The announcer then said: "Thank you for the reminder that there are other things outside the world of robotics that are also important."

How proud I was, and how proud we should all be, of a group of high school students who put Shabbos first. Students who gave up the chance of "winning it all" sticking to their convictions and living their ideals. Young people, who in their own way made a Kiddush HaShem. They lived by the words of kedoshim te'he'yu, to be a holy, sanctified nation, and answered to a Higher Authority.

As we count the days towards Shavuot, a time when we renew our commitment to Torah and mitzvos, we can all learn from these young

people who truly lived the words of "Na'aseh v'nishmah, We will do and we will listen".

Being a kadosh isn't just between man and HaShem, but also includes man's relationship with his fellow. The teaching of "V'ahavtah l'rei'ah'chah ko'mo'chah, And you shall love your fellow as yourself" can be found in Parshas Kedoshim. (Vayikra 19:18). In fact, Rashi on this posuk comments, "So says Rabbi Akiva. This is a fundamental principle in the Torah." The Kopitchnitz Rebbe, zt"l adds, that the commandment to love your fellow is not limited to loving holy and pious people, people who are easy to love. Rather, HaShem is telling us to love everyone – even those whom we may find it difficult to get along with.

The Maharal notes that from Pesach to Lag B'Omer we count 32 days. Thirty-two is the gematria of both lev, heart, and kavod, respect. During these days of Sefira, we should internalize the lesson of Rabbi Akiva. A lesson of showing love and respect to all others.

V'ahavtah l'rei'ah'chah ko'mo'chah. To love your fellow as yourself. To honor the G-dly neshamah in each person, thereby creating a true Kiddush HaShem. To live a life commit-

ted to HaShem's mitzvos.

Kedoshim te'he'yu, to be a holy people. When we live our lives as kedoshim, we are the beneficiaries. It shapes and molds us. We become better people. We learn honesty and integrity. Kindness and compassion. Love and understanding. Patience and tolerance. We elevate our very being. To live as a kadosh not only leaves an impression on those around us, but has an effect on us as well.

The Talmud teaches "Sheh-ye'hei shem Shomayim mis-ahev al yodecha, That the name of Heaven should become beloved through you." (Yoma 86a) That was the message proclaimed loud and clear by the high school students in Houston. Ultimately, they were the real winners.

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Forgive

In the 1970s, there was a young couple in Brooklyn who were having a hard time having children, so they went to the Lubavitcher Rebbe for a blessing. The Rebbe gave them a blessing, but it wasn't for a child.

Time passed and still Hashem did not bless them with a child and their friends were now beginning to marry off their children. The pain grew with every simcha

that they went to. Again, they went to the Rebbe for a beracha and he managed to give them a blessing for everything except the one thing they were asking for: a child. Eventually, they managed to arrange a yechidus, personal meeting, with the Rebbe, and as they came into the room, the wife broke down in tears and begged the Rebbe to know why Hashem was withholding the thing that

they most wanted, that was most dear to them. She implored him for a direct way to some way remove this terrible decree.

The Rebbe paused and then said. "Long ago, one of you hurt someone very much, and that person has never forgiven you. You must find this person and beg him for forgiveness." They left the room. Try as they might, they could not think of anyone that they'd hurt so badly.

And then the husband suddenly remembered something that had happened when he was a yeshiva student.

One of the students in the yeshiva was getting married in Chicago. The yeshiva had a van, and all the friends went out by bus. On the way back, they traveled overnight. Now, one of the students was careful to always put a basin with water next to his bed as negel vasser. And this trip was no exception. He curled up in his seat with water in a bowl on the seat next to him. The husband of this childless couple was a bit wild when he was young, and he thought that putting negel vasser in the next seat in a bus was a bit extreme. So when the student fell asleep, he took the basin and hid it. After some hours, the driver turned into a truck stop so everyone could get down from the bus, but the student wouldn't

get down because he was careful not to take up 3 steps without washing his hands. He started to bang on the window of the bus so the other boys would hear him and bring back his negel vasser. Everyone began laughing at him until the bus driver said, "Come on, that's not nice. Give it back to him." The bachur was so upset that he said, "I'm not mochel (forgive), not in this world and not in the next."

The husband searched and he found the man who was still living in Brooklyn. He went over to his house and he asked him if he remembered him. "Sure," he said. "And I also remember what you did to me on the bus. You should know I don't forgive you. I'm not mochel." The husband explained that he was childless. "If you cannot have compassion on me, please have compassion on my wife and forgive me for her sake." The man was unmoved.

Finally, the husband said to him, "The Rebbe has sent me." "I'll forgive you," he finally said, "because of the Rebbe."

A year later, their first child was born.

We are all so sensitive. We have to be so careful with the feelings of other people. For me, the most difficult prayer of my day is Kriat Shema al Hamitta that is said right before I go to sleep. Sometimes I never make it to the end because I'm so tired. But if washing our hands is the first thing we do in the morning to remove the impurity from our hands, surely the last thing at night that we should do is to remove resentment, grudges and hate from our hearts before we give ourselves to the hand of Hashem in sleep. In the merit of forgiving others, we will touch the hearts of those we have wounded and they will forgive.

Mr. Charlie Harary

Nothing for Granted

Early on in my career, I was given several pieces of advice that have stayed with me to this very day. They were business tidbits that successful business people and companies always live by, and factually work. They are the keys to tried and true success.

But what I have also learned throughout my entrepreneurial career is that many of these business tips also apply to life as a Jew. We tend to divide our lives at work from our lives at home. Yet, in fact, tremendous-

ly insightful nuggets of wisdom exist within the business world, which if applied to our lives at home with our families and communities, offer us paths to success.

Of the many secrets and strategies I learned, here is one that stands above all else: Successful business people and companies never take anything for granted. You can never sit in a meeting and say, "Well, they were our customers last year, so of course they will be our customers this year." Or, "We practiced real estate this way for the past year; we can continue using the same strate-

gies for the next twenty years." Having this attitude is a recipe for disaster, for you can expect that the world will change even overnight and life will look different. What was is not what will be. It is absolutely true that businesses discuss the implications of life with self-driving cars and convertible homes. If these considerations were overlooked and the status quo was taken for granted, by the time they would finish constructing a building, its design would be obsolete.

The key fundamental distinction between successful businesses and

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unsuccessful ones is this very point. Nothing is taken for granted. You cannot rest on your laurels and allow life to happen to you.

Applying this principle to our personal lives with our families, we are clued into a perspective we've all heard before, yet never gets old. We shouldn't take anything for granted. This is true for all of us, no matter what age or stage we are up to in life. If we are grandparents, we cannot expect our grandchildren to appreciate the vibrancy and richness of Jewish tradition of old, but must rather teach and tell them of it. If we are parents, we cannot expect our children to be devotedly religious just because we are. We must actively instill and inculcate them with Jewish values and ideals, and model and nurture a vibrant Torah life for them and with them. And as children, we must make considerable personal strides to ensure that our love and connection to Judaism remains alive and meaningful, regardless of our upbringing.

It is the line to hang up on your wall, pen in your notebook and repeat to yourself again and again. Take nothing for granted. Why, though, is this so important? Why is it the key to successful companies and Jewish life? It is because with this attitude, we step up to become the business people of our families and the marketers of Yiddishkeit to all those we come in contact. Our grandchildren and children may be attending a Jewish school, yet we do not assume that we can simply sit

back and relax. "They are learning everything they need in school; why would they need my help? What more could I offer them?" That is regressing to an attitude of expectations and assumptions. And assumptions lead to disappointments.

You may turn around when your child is past high school and wonder why they know little about European Jewry and the Holocaust. They know little about basic life skills or your family's history. The list is endless. The question we must ask daily is, "If I were the only one responsible for transmitting Jewish tradition and life to my children, what would I do? How different would my Shabbos table look? How different would I talk and teach my children?" Perhaps you would set aside special time from your hobbies and activities to devote to your children's education and community development.

This equally applies to our personal lives. Every step we take is not to be taken for granted. We made the effort to wake up early enough to daven before we headed off to work, and we ought to pat ourselves on the back. Even if we have done it for years or decades, it doesn't mean it was granted that we would do it today. Compliment yourself and feel positive. The same is true in the reverse. Just because we prayed today doesn't mean we will pray tomorrow. Perhaps an unforeseen event will arise, and we will be derailed. Take nothing for granted.

The economy fluctuates, inno-

vations originate, ideas shift and the world changes. Nothing in this world stands still, and we must recognize our personal responsibility as bearers of the Jewish future and take matters into our own hands. Look at life similar to the perspective of businesses. Yes, we are growing as individuals, our children are attending schools and our communities are burgeoning. But status quo by definition means an unaltered condition. And we all know that life conditions alter.

The solution is to always be thinking and rethinking of how we and others are doing. You learned something once; do not take for granted that you will remember it. Your child looks happy; do not take for granted that he or she is actually happy. Make sure it is true. Your student raised their hand to answer a question; do not take it for granted. You have no idea how much courage it took for them to make that move. Your friend helped carry your luggage up to your hotel room; do not take it for granted. Look them in the eye and heartfully say, "Thank you." Your husband or wife feels the support they need; check in with them to verify that such is the case.

It is so powerful a motto and the true ticket to success. Take nothing for granted. That is how we will achieve personal, familial and communal growth and greatness.

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