



FROM GRIEF TO BELIEF

Dear Parents,

Erev Shabbos Parashas Behar-Bechukosai 5781

Professing allegiance to a life based on *Emunah* and imparting that faith to our children is mainly an intellectual exercise, until it is not. We can build our *Emunah* through lessons and stories, but nothing challenges and can perhaps positively impact our *Emunah* like confronting a tragedy. The catastrophe that occurred in *Meron* on *Lag B'Omer* engulfed the Jewish world, shaking our *Emunah*. We have no *Neviim* (prophets) to explain why this happened, so even our greatest spiritual leaders can only shake their heads and shed a tear.

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We cannot fathom why *Hashem* would do such a thing, but we can fathom that *Hashem* did do such a thing, because everything that happens in the world is in accordance with His will. The *Klalos*, curses, are enumerated in this week's *Parsha*. They are clearly from *Hashem*. Our basic declaration of faith is the *Shema*, and the first verse contains the main foundation of our belief. *Hashem* who is merciful is also *Elokeinu*, the G-d of justice. All things good and bad come from the same source – *Hashem*. We reaffirm our faith several times daily, but it takes an earth-shattering experience to really get our emotional attention.

How we are expected to react, and with what attitude we go forward from this time of distress can be learned from *Rabi Akiva*. The *Pri Chadash* in *Hilchos Pesach* (*Orach Chaim* 493:2) discusses the *Simcha* of *Lag B'Omer*. He asks what is the *Simcha* that is celebrated on *Lag B'Omer*? If it is that *Rabi Akiva*'s students stopped dying, how is that a *Simcha*? There were none left to die! The *Pri Chadash* answers that the *Simcha* is focused on the new *talmidim* that *Rabi Akiva* gathered and taught, and that they did not die as the earlier ones.

We need to contemplate the incredible greatness of *Rabi Akiva*. He lost all of his students at the rate of about 750 a day, for 33 days. Talk about unfathomable. What did *Rabi Akiva* do? Did he collapse from grief? Did he berate himself as a failure and that there was no point in teaching Torah if this is the outcome? Just the opposite, he persevered and from these five remaining students, the entire Oral Torah was firmly established and ultimately the continuation of the Jewish People was assured. He turned tragedy into growth.

“Most importantly, we don't despair, we don't give up.”

This is the Jewish reaction to tragedy. We cry, we mourn, we have no words to say. We reach out to the victims and we find some way to serve *Hashem* better. Most importantly, we don't despair, we don't give up. A Jew always looks to the future, with greater resolve than before.

Our children are thirsting for this message. Those who are old enough to understand there was a major tragedy on a special day in the epicenter of the *Lag B'Omer* observance have been shaken and are at a complete loss as to how to absorb and react to such an event. We have a golden opportunity to inscribe this message upon our children's hearts. *Hashem* runs the world and He sometimes does things that appear as bad and we cannot understand. When that happens, we cry but then we look ahead. We redouble our efforts to improve ourselves, our family, community and world.

This lesson has been seared into our national consciousness by the generations who suffered great destruction, but persevered. Most recently, we know of the generation of Holocaust survivors. Those who were strong in their *Emunah* rebuilt a new world of Torah that has in many ways greatly surpassed what came before. Despite the unbearable pain and grief, they looked forward and we are witnesses to what they accomplished. We and our children can do the same. *Hashem* wants us to think and deeply feel the pain and anguish. Then, He expects us to redouble our efforts to bring honor to His name and glory to the Jewish People and our Torah.

“We redouble our efforts to improve ourselves, our family, community and world.”

Emunah is no longer an abstract concept for our children. It is an essential component of their world and through imbibing the lesson of *Rabi Akiva*, we can turn last week's events from the tragedy it was to a giant step forward in strengthening the connection to our Creator.

Best wishes for a *Shabbos* of peace, consolation and *Emunah*,

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