

זכור את יום השבת לקדשו.  
ששת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך,  
יום השביעי שבת לה'

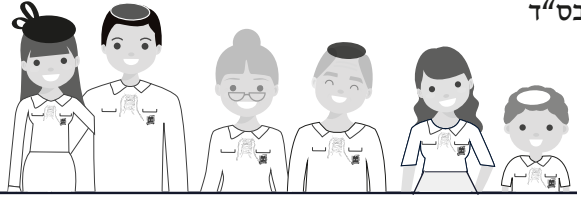
PARASHAT YITRO  
20<sup>TH</sup> SHEVAT 5783  
10<sup>TH</sup> & 11<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2023  
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בס"ד

# SHABBAT LASHEM

THE VOICE OF BNEI AKIVA UK



## LIVING INSPIRED SAMMY GARFINKEL SHEVET SEENAI

In this week's *parasha* we are reintroduced to Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law, whom Moshe left behind in Midian to save the Jewish people.

The first *pasuk* says:

וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חָתָן מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֲלֵהֶם לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ בְּיְהוּצָאָה הָאֵת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם  
'Now Moshe's father-in-law, Yitro, the chief of Midian, heard all that God had done for Moshe and Israel His people - that the Lord had taken Israel out of Egypt.'

The *pasuk* states specifically what Yitro heard that caused him to take this journey - the exodus. But why do we need to know the specific reason? The *pasuk* could have just ended, without going into specifics about what Yitro heard! The answer can be found in the last few *pesukim* of the previous *parasha*, *Beshalach*. Here, the Torah describes Amalek's attack on Bnei Yisrael:

וַיָּבֹא עֲמֹלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרֵפִידִים

'And Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim.'

The commentators pick up on the juxtaposition between Amalek and Yitro. Both heard about God's actions towards Mitzrayim, and both had a resultant reaction towards Bnei Yisrael, but there are interesting differences between the two. The Torah outlines Amalek's act as 'coming' (*vayavo*), not 'hearing', but for Yitro the Torah describes the act as 'hearing' (*vayishma*). Furthermore, the Torah highlights the place where Amalek came to Israel but leaves out the reason for them coming, whereas the opposite is true for Yitro. It seems the language of the Torah is a purposeful ploy to highlight these differences. This answers our first question. But the more potent question is: what is the point of these parallels?

It seems the Torah is trying to get us to look at the reason for both Amalek's and Yitro's actions. We are told how Yitro came to the camp not because he felt like visiting his son-in-law, but because he understood the significance

of what had happened to the Jewish people (he may also have wanted to visit Moshe, but this is not explicitly outlined). Yitro didn't just hear what God had done for the Jews, but he internalised it, as he later proclaims to Moshe 'Now I know that Hashem is greater than all gods' and then brings multiple offerings to Hashem.

The Amalekites on the other hand are different. The Torah simply uses the word '*vayavo*' to emphasise the lack of thought Amalek devoted to their actions. Of course, the Amalekites heard what happened to the Jews, but they turned a blind eye to it. They did not internalise the obvious miracles which occurred and chose to see a narrative that excluded divine intervention from the picture. This allowed them to go out of their way to attack Bnei Yisrael. This could also be why the Torah mentions the place that they came to rather than the intent towards their coming - it was a thoughtless, shallow attempt to wipe out a weakened and tired people.

From understanding the juxtaposition between the narratives of Amalek and Yitro, we can learn a beautiful lesson. One can drift through life labelling all the events that occur to them as a probability, leaving no room for any deeper thoughts or retrospective action. Such a person might say, 'If everything is up to luck, then there is no significance of anything that befalls me, whether it be good or bad.' We see from the unlikely defeat of Amalek, that this is not the correct way to live; Yitro's approach is the correct way. Yes, it is great to live in the moment, and one shouldn't constantly philosophise over each small thing that happens to them. But sometimes, it is important to truly 'hear' the world around us, to internalise the deeper meaning of events, and to ask why life often thrusts situations onto us. And if one does, they may find Hashem to be present in all areas of life, which can only enrich it. May we all have the wisdom to realise when we have experienced a modern-day miracle and truly be grateful for every second we spend on this planet. Shabbat Shalom!

**SAMMY GARFINKEL IS IN SHEVET SEENAI AND WAS A MADRICH ON ALEPH CHALUTZI MACHANE**

London	In 16:51 Out 17:56	Leeds	In 16:53 Out 18:02	Birmingham	In 16:58 Out 18:06
Manchester	In 16:56 Out 18:06	Nottingham	In 16:54 Out 18:02	Liverpool	In 17:00 Out 18:09
Thaxted	In 16:50 Out 17:57	Brighton	In 16:55 Out 18:01	Bristol	In 17:03 Out 18:10
Cambridge	In 16:51 Out 17:58	Oxford	In 16:57 Out 18:04	Jerusalem	In 16:45 Out 18:00

# SHALIACH'S CORNER: UNDERSTANDING OUR ROOTS

## RABBI AKIVA PART 1



"A few friends and I gathered around, and each of us threw out some names. Out of all the names, by far the one that caught on the most was the suggestion of Avraham Kastenbaum z"l, who was a member of the world centre for Mizrahi and *Hapoel HaMizrachi*.

He suggested the name 'Bnei Akiva', and it really got us excited. Rabbi Akiva represented in our eyes, more than anyone else, the concept of '*Torah Va'Avoda*'. He was a worker and a shepherd, a patriotic warrior and a *talmid chacham*, and he invested himself into the '*dalet amot*' of Torah and *Halakha*. Rabbi Akiva saw every person as a human being – and that was our belief as well: not to drive away, but to draw close. We are the students of Rabbi Akiva – we are Rabbi Akiva." (Taken from an interview with Yechiel Eliash, founder of Bnei Akiva Israel.)

These words taken from the founding father of Bnei Akiva make perfectly clear the deep and profound connection between the identity and ideology of our *tnua*, and the heroic, giant, one-of-a-kind personality that was Rabbi Akiva. But who actually was Rabbi Akiva? What did he do? And how did he manage to be all of these different things, together?

When we stop and think, we may realise that we know a little bit more about this historical figure than we realise, even if we hadn't put all the pieces of the puzzle together. Remember the story of that Rabbi who only started learning after 40 years when he saw how drops of water could make a hole in the rock? That was Rabbi Akiva. Or that other story about the rabbi who's wife sent him away to learn for 24 years and returned home

with as many thousands of students? Rabbi Akiva. Or maybe that other story about a Rabbi who thought that Bar Kochba was the *mashiach*? Or who laughed upon seeing the ruins of the *Beit Hamikdash*? Or who cried out '*Shema Yisrael*' as he was being tortured to death by the Romans? You guessed it. All Rabbi Akiva.

But Rabbi Akiva wasn't just a man of wonderful tales. He was a serious *talmid chacham*, and one of the foremost scholars of his time, featuring prominently throughout the Mishna and Gemara. In fact, you might be familiar with some of his teachings, too:

- Precious are all people, who were created in the image of Hashem, and more precious are Israel, who are called the children of Hashem (*Avot* 3:14)

- Love your fellow as yourself - this is the fundamental principle of the Torah (*Yerushalmi Nedarim* 9:4)

- Praiseworthy are you Yisrael, for before whom are you purified, and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven! (*Yoma* 8:9)

- All of *Ketuvim* are *kodesh* (holy), but *Shir Hashirim* is *kodesh kodashim* (holy of holies) (*Yadaim* 3:5)

All of the above are mere highlights, and only scratch the surface of encapsulating the great personality that was Rabbi Akiva.

**"RABBI AKIVA REPRESENTED IN OUR EYES, MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE, THE CONCEPT OF 'TORAH VA'AVODA'. HE WAS A WORKER AND A SHEPHERD, A PATRIOTIC WARRIOR AND A TALMID CHACHAM."**

Over the coming weeks we will take a deep dive into this giant among giants, to try and distil some of the central teachings and beliefs of Rabbi Akiva, and what made him stand out amongst even the others of his time. Through exploring his life story, his hashkafic teachings, and his halakhik rulings I hope that we will come out on the other side with renewed appreciation for the namesake of our *tnua*, and with a renewed pride to be the bearers of his legacy in the Jewish world, today.

**ELAD ESHEL IS IN SHEVET LEHAVA AND IS ONE OF THE NORTHERN SHLICHIM OF BNEI AKIVA. TO CONTACT ELAD, PLEASE EMAIL [NORTH@BAUK.ORG](mailto:north@bauk.org)**

## THIS MONTH IN PICTURES



Left to right: Neturim thank-you dinner, bogrot learning with R' Shalvie Friedman at Lishmah, and Student Bet Midrash with Rav Da'vid Sperleng.



Clockwise, from top left: Kinloss BA Movie Night, Gimmel thank-you dinner, Tu Bishvat Seder in Manchester, Birmingham SBM, bogrim enjoying nachos at the Goodmans, and the Mazkir catching up with Kivun.



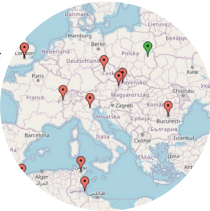
## TORAH FROM AROUND THE WORLD MENACHEM MENDEL MORGENSZTERN | YOM HILLULA 22<sup>ND</sup> SHEVAT

From Piešťany we board two trains to Ružomberok, where we catch a bus that gets into Radom just six hours later. A couple more trains and we're in Lublin, from where we catch a bus on the Lublin-Lukow route that crosses Kotzk. Now we just have to find Joselewicz St, where lived...

One of the most controversial figures of *chassidut* is Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgensztern, the Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859). Many legends surround him, and it can be difficult to sift out historical fact from hagiographic fiction – not least because, according to legend, towards the end of his life he burnt all of his works on *erev Pesach* along with his *chametz*. But his influence of thought can be seen in the Chassidic teachings of Gur, Sochatchov, Aleksander and Izhbitz, to name but a few.

Menachem Mendel of Kotzk was known for his sharp, sarcastic comments and penetrating insights. This stemmed from a fanatical pursuit of truth, integrity and authenticity at the cost of anything else. This is encapsulated in one of the well-known aphorisms accredited to him: 'If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am I because you are you and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you.' He also hated indecision and mediocrity, stating that 'only horses walk in the middle of the road.' According to a (historically questionable) article published in *HaMizrachi* in 1920, his two favourite books were *Kohelet* and *Guide of the Perplexed*, and after his death a copy of Rambam's *Treatise on Logic* was found in his room, with the commentary of Moses Mendelssohn inside.

The Kotzker Rebbe's thought needs to be understood within the context of the school of Peshischa out of which it was borne. R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa was an unusual character himself; he was a qualified apothecary who frequented the theatre and played cards with the businessmen with whom he interacted. He preached a strong understanding and development of personal identity, with regular introspection in order to uncover a person's deep-seated motivations and intentions. The aim of this was to remove external pressures and inauthentic motivations in one's *mitzva* performance. R' Simcha Bunim also introduced the study of Rambam, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi and Ibn Ezra in order to further philosophical understanding. He was staunchly opposed to the idolised and self-aggrandising 'tzaddik' at the centre of the Chassidic dynasties, viewing this as an easy way out for the individual to avoid thinking for themselves. He was also critical of stories of miracle-workers, quoting the passage from *tefilla* 'אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים בְּאֶרֶץ חָם בְּיַד הָאֱלֹהִים', which refers to God's 'signs and wonders [which he performed] in the land of the children of Cham [i.e., Egypt]' and reinterpreting it as 'signs and wonders – they are for those living in the land of the children of Cham,' i.e. non-Jews; Jews should not be seeking tales of miracle-workers. All of these positions were taken to a radical extreme in the teachings of Kotzk – referred to by Elie Wiesel as 'the dark side of Chassidism.'



Kotzk chassidim developed a reputation for behaving in ways that were distinctively 'un-chassidic'. Since adherence to social constructs interfered with ultimate individuation, they discarded many conventionalisms, including the traditional chassidic garb. The chassidim of Peshischa were known for prioritising *kavana*, intention, over saying *tefilla* at the correct time; better to miss the time and pray later in the correct mental state. However, the chassidim of Kotzk reportedly did not even put *tefillin* on or pray at all, should their intentions be less than authentic; to pray merely out of habit would be to sin, as it would be untrue.

In 1839, after an altercation with his student the Izhbitzter, the exact details of which remain unknown, the Izhbitzter split off from Kotzk, and the Kotzker retreated almost completely from public life, remaining in his room for the next 20 years until he died. At random points, he would burst forth from his room and scream at his chassidim, criticising them in various ways, before returning to his room. Few Jewish thinkers have been as dedicated to truth and authentic service of God as he.

# WHAT'S GOING ON?

- Shabbat shoutout to **Golders Green** and **Mill Hill BA**, who have their **Shabbatot Ha'irgun** this week!

- Bnei Akiva have begun our **Campus Roadshow!** We visited **Birmingham** and **Nottingham** this week, with more to come!

- **Birmingham SBM** continues this **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February!** Join us at the usual location.

- **Lishmah** for bogrot and sixth-form women continues next **Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February!** Join this **dynamic makom torah** for women!

- Learn some Israeli slang at this month's **Shlichim Chill** on **Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February!**

- **London SBM** continues next **Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February** from 7pm at Kinloss! Make sure to sign up so that we can order enough food.

- **Shabbat Bogrim** is happening on **17<sup>th</sup> March!** Join us for a Shabbaton in Coventry catered by **Met Su Yan!**

- **Summer Machane** applications are open! Visit **bauk.org/camps** to sign up.

- **Tafkidim** for **Summer Machane** are open! Visit **bauk.org/tafkid** to sign up.

- To give any **comments** or **suggestions** to Bnei Akiva, please visit **bauk.org/feedback**.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ANY OF THESE EVENTS, PLEASE CONTACT BEN AT CHINUCH@BAUK.ORG**

Join us for Shabbat in Coventry

**SHABBAT BOGRIM 17 MARCH**

Catered by Met Su Yan

Bonus Boating On Sunday Only £20.00 for weekend with mas chaver

[www.bauk.org/bogrim](http://www.bauk.org/bogrim)

**APPLICATIONS OPEN SUMMER MACHANE**

[www.bauk.org/camps](http://www.bauk.org/camps)

**Slang With The Goodmans**

Sixth formers and Bogrim! Join us this month at the Goodmans for some Israeli slang, food, games and just a general chill.

This Wednesday 15 Feb at the Goodmans' House!

Check social media and Whatsapp for updates every month!

**BNEI AKIVA CAMPUS ROADSHOW**

Keep your eyes peeled as we come to you for some learning/shmoozing with the mazkirut and shlichim

FEB 2023

MANCHESTER BIRMINGHAM OXFORD LEEDS NOTTINGHAM CAMBRIDGE LONDON

BNEI AKIVA CHINUCH

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