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**Parashat Acharei Mot**

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## THE LESSON OF THE HE-GOAT

by *Rabbi Michael Hoenig*

In Parashat Acharei Mot, Hashem tells Moshe the laws of Yom Kippur to tell over to Aharon. Hashem tells Moshe that at the start of Yom Kippur day, the Kohen Gadol would select two he-goats that would provide atonement for the Jewish people. One goat, the Sa'ir LaShem, would be gathered up in holy vessels and brought into the Kodesh HaKodashim in order to serve as a national sin offering. The other goat, the Sa'ir LaAzazeil, would not gain admission into the Kodesh HaKodashim; instead, it would be sent into the desert. In order to determine the status of each goat, the Kohen Gadol would place two lots in a box, one marked "LaShem" and one marked "LaAzazeil." Then, while having one goat to his left and one goat to his right, he would draw one lot with his right hand and place it on the head of the animal at his right, and take the other lot with his left hand and place it on the other goat.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch beautifully explains the underlying meaning and depth of this event. There were many similarities between the Sa'ir Lashem and Sa'ir LaAzazeil: The two he-goats were similar in appearance, height, and value (Shevuot 13b). Additionally, at the threshold of the Kodesh HaKodashim, they were identical creatures who ultimately proceeded on two entirely different paths. Lastly, both goats had the possibility of having either status.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch continues by saying that the he-goat represents the power of resistance. Each one of us is a Sa'ir that has the ability to resist and oppose the countless demands made on our willpower. Rav Hirsch explains that "it is on the way we use this power that the worthiness or worthlessness of our moral existence depends." We can use this power to attach to

Hashem by resisting all external and internal temptations which deviate us from Hashem. This positive resistance would label us a Sa'ir LaShem. Conversely, we can use our willpower to disobey Hashem and the Mitzvot which He requires us to do, thus labeling us a Sa'ir LaAzazeil.

We live in a temptation-filled world that often times causes people to become like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil. There are also some people who desperately yearn to be free of an evil inclination and have the opportunity to serve Hashem with more ease and comfort. They feel that a life without constant pitfalls would allow them to reach a more elevated existence. However, as we see from the he-goats, this should not be our way of looking at life. Rav Hirsch notes that "the whole height and dignity and worth of human beings lies just in the ability to sin, in the possibility which has been given to him to disobey the will of Hashem." The equal ability to be both a Sa'ir LaShem and a Sa'ir LaAzazeil is the very reason that man can reach exalted heights.

At each and every moment of the day and every stage of life, we have the opportunity to be LaShem or LaAzazeil. The decision to be like the Sa'ir LaShem only has meaning and value because at the same moment, we could have swayed to be like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil. Conversely, the decision to be like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil is a disgrace only because at the same moment, we could have become attached to Hashem. As we reflect on the two different he-goat offerings, we should realize that although it might be tempting to act like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil, we all have the strength and fortitude to consistently lead a life committed to Hashem.

## A LESSON FOR SEFIRAT HAOMER

by *Zev Jarashow ('16)*

We currently find ourselves in a very interesting time period between Pesach and Shavuot, during which we count the Sefirat HaOmer. The first thirty-three days of the Omer are a time when we mourn the loss of Rabi Akiva's 24,000 students. As recorded in the Shulchan Aruch (493:1), "The practice is not to get married between Pesach and Shavuot – until Lag BeOmer, because during this time the students of Rabi Akiva perished."

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The Gemara (Yevamot 62b) tells us that Rabi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students from Gabbata to Antipatris, and they all died on the same day because they did not treat each other with respect. The Gemara goes on to say that the world remained in a desolate state until Rabi Akiva went to the south and found five new Talmidim (Rabi Meir, Rabi Yehudah, Rabi Yosi, Rabi Shimon and Rabi Elazar ben Shammua) who helped him create his new Yeshivah.

There are some very odd components about this story that need to be understood better. For one, how is it that the students of Rabi Akiva were not treating each other with respect? Every grade school student knows the song lyrics, "Amar Rabi Akiva, Zeh Kelal Gadol BaTorah, 'VeAhavta LeRei'acha Kamocha,'" meaning that Rabi Akiva says that the most important thing in the Torah is to love others as one loves oneself (VaYikra 19:18). How then could it be that Rabi Akiva's students did not love each other. A second question to ask is why the Gemara use the Lashon of 12,000 pairs of students? Why not just say 24,000 students? There must be a reason for the Gemara's usage of the Lashon of 12,000 pairs – what is it?

Last year, in an Aggadah Shiur given at Torah Academy of Bergen Academy, Rabbi Jachter developed the following idea that can help us answer our questions: When Rabi Akiva had his first Yeshivah, he had so many students that he was not able to personally know all 24,000 of them. He would set them up in pairs (12,000), and each pair would learn in competition with the next. This style of teaching encouraged growth through competition. The students were learning a tremendous amount of Torah, but they weren't satisfied with their learning. They were merely learning to acquire more knowledge than their peers. After all these students died, Rabi Akiva opened up a much smaller Yeshivah, with only five Talmidim, where he was able to have a Keshar (relationship) with all of his students. These Talmidim no longer learned out of competition, but rather out of love for the Torah. It was only after Rabi Akiva opened his new Yeshivah that he made his famous statement that "VeAhavta LeRei'acha Kamocha" is the most important principle in the Torah.

There are two main lessons that we can take away from the story of Rabi Akiva. For one, we should learn that one must teach Torah out of love for his Talmidim. Secondly,

and maybe even more profound, everyone needs to ask himself if what he is doing is correct; if not, perhaps that person needs to change some aspect of his life. Rabi Akiva initially assumed that what he was doing was correct, since he was teaching 24,000 students Torah! It took this horrible plague for Rabi Akiva to realize that his way of teaching had to change. Rabi Akiva was successful in changing his ways. We must remember that in order to grow in our Avodat Hashem, we must follow Rabi Akiva and make major or minor changes throughout our lives in order to improve ourselves. By taking after Rabi Akiva, we will hopefully have an easier time accomplishing this goal.

## HESPEID FOR MORI VE RABI HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN ZT"l – PART TWO

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter (Yeshivat Har Etzion '81-'83)

### Introduction

In last week's issue, we began our Hesperid for Rav Lichtenstein and pointed out a handful of his many exemplary characteristics. This week, which marks the Yahrzeit of Rav Lichtenstein, we will conclude our Hesperid by highlighting ten more aspects of his life which can serve as inspirations.

1. **Kibbud Av VaEim** – Talmidim who learned in the Yeshivah in the years when Rav Aharon cared for his elderly parents witnessed the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch come to life in the manner in which our Rebbe fulfilled the Mitzvah of Kibbud Av VaEim. We saw how Rav Aharon treated his parents with such kindness, sensitivity and joy. A few years ago, I witnessed Rav Aharon's children treating him with the same kindness when our Rebbe was frail.
2. **Outstanding Parenting** – Rav Lichtenstein exhorted us to follow his well-known example of devoting time to learning Torah with our children. I witnessed a lesser known facet of his parenting at a Sheva Berachot of one of his children who chose a Chareidi lifestyle. Rav Lichtenstein openly and candidly acknowledged this difference and even embraced it. He noted that a parent's job is to set a child on a Torah path and the child then has the legitimate choice as to which Torah path to continue. How remarkable is this attitude, especially in light of the fact that many parents do not react in this manner when a

child chooses to follow a somewhat different Torah path. Rav Lichtenstein set an example of healthy parenting which allows a child to follow the Torah path best suited for his personality.

3. A Loving and Caring Spouse – Although the Lichtensteins adhered to the highest levels of modesty, the mutual feelings of deep respect, love and affection of the Rav and the Rabbanit for each other was obvious to Talmidim.
  
4. A Doctorate in English Literature from Harvard University – Rav Lichtenstein on many occasions stated that he found his intense secular education to have been spiritually enriching, famously quoting Chazal (Midrash Eichah 2:13) that “there is wisdom among the nations of the world” and adding that “we ignore it at our loss.” There is, however, another mostly unstated spiritual side of Rav Lichtenstein’s secular accomplishments. Rav Lichtenstein’s impressive secular credentials have fortified the Emunah of many Talmidim including this author. I will speak of my own experience of my family’s becoming observant when I was a child. We had a relative who was highly respected and regarded as the family intellect. He had earned a doctorate in mathematics from New York University and even helped design the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. This relative, however, ridiculed Torah observance and the Talmud. It was difficult to resist such proclamations by an admired relative, but my faith was sustained in great part by Rav Lichtenstein’s doctorate from Harvard. As a very impressionable youngster, I had confidence that my Rebbe, who had earned a doctorate at a more prestigious institution than did my uncle, understood life better than my uncle. If such a learned, brilliant and saintly man believed in Torah, then it surely must be true.
  
5. The Crown of Torah – Rambam (Hilchot Issurei Bi’ah 21:32) explains that one should not marry a daughter of an Am HaAretz since “She does not recognize the crown of Torah.” Rambam teaches that it is crucial for every Jew to have an appreciation for the greatness and profundity of Torah. Perhaps the most important aspect of an extended

period of time devoted to learning from Rav Lichtenstein was experiencing the crown of Torah. I do not think that there is in any other discipline, Lehavdil, such parallel depth and profundity. The crowning experience of the Keter Torah was the two hour Shiur Kelali Rav Lichtenstein delivered at Yeshiva every other week. One can reasonably say (paraphrasing Sukkah 51b) that “one who never heard a Shiur Kelali from Rav Lichtenstein never fully experienced and appreciated the crown of Torah.”

6. Religious Zionism – Rav Lichtenstein’s passion for Eretz Yisrael was contagious. Who can forget the stirring conclusion of Rav Lichtenstein’s magisterial essay (Tradition Fall 1981) extolling the virtues of Yeshivot Hesder, which combine intense Torah study with service in Tzahal: “Standing in tears atop Har Hazeitim, the bleak sight of Kol HaMekudash MeHavera Harev Yoter Mehavera stretching before him, what would the Ramban have given to head a Yeshivat Hesder?” What courage it took to leave a secure and prestigious position in New York, without the encouragement of his great Rebbe and father-in-law Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, to assume a position at a little known Yeshivah located on a sparsely populated bleak hill in Israel! Who can be unmoved by merely contemplating this awesome move? Moreover, Rav Lichtenstein changed the face of Religious Zionism, infusing it with the vision of loving Torah no less than his Chareidi peers, but loving Eretz Yisrael more. Rav Lichtenstein insisted that we not forsake great achievement in our beloved Torah in our devotion to our beloved homeland. Great contemporary Religious Zionist Torah leaders such as Rav Yosef Rimon and Rav Re’eim HaKohein, not to mention Rav Moshe and Meir Lichtenstein, have emerged in the decades since the Lichtensteins made

Aliyah, following the bold example set by Rav Aharon.

Rav Amital refused to shake Rav Lichtenstein's hand, instead planting a kiss on Rav Lichtenstein's forehead.

7. **Dedication to Am Yisrael** – Only a heartless individual could have failed to be moved by Rav Lichtenstein's stirring speech delivered immediately before Megillah reading of Purim eve 5443. Rav Aharon exhorted us to follow the example of Esther, who risked everything to save her people in their hour of need. Rav Lichtenstein's cry, "Chayavim Litrom LeAm Yisrael," "one must contribute to Am Yisrael," still rings loudly in my ears.
8. **Tolerate the Intolerance** – During a particularly moving and meaningful question and answer session with North American Talmidim at the conclusion of our two years of learning at the Yeshivah, Rav Aharon was asked how to react to those in the Chareidi community who disparage Religious Zionist and Modern Orthodox Bnei Torah. Rav Lichtenstein immediately responded, "Tolerate the intolerance." This was but one example of Rav Lichtenstein's consistently taking the "high road" in a situation of internal conflict. What a shining example of pure and unadulterated Ahavat Yisrael!
9. **Morality, Integrity and Authenticity** – These powerful words most appropriately portray the exemplary character of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein.
10. **Two Kings Wearing One Crown** – Rav Neriah was once asked if there are Nissim Geluyim (open miracles) in our time. Rav Neriah quipped that in order to witness miracles in our time, one need only visit Yeshivat Har Etzion and witness Rav Amital and Rav Lichtenstein jointly lead the Yeshivah without rancor and jealousy, but rather in peace, harmony and love. I have heard of situations when Rav Lichtenstein was asked a question to which he stated that he feels he must consult Rav Amital, and when Rav Amital was asked a question and he responded that he must consult Rav Lichtenstein. Perhaps the greatest moment of my period of study at the Gush was witnessing a dramatic scene at the end of Yom Kippur 5444: Rav Lichtenstein came with a big smile to wish Rav Amital a hearty Yasher Kochacha for leading the Ne'ilah service.

#### *Conclusion*

It was so sad to see our Rebbe slowing down in later years. Rebbe was so strong dashing to Shiur while carrying his not-so-mini Shas and Rambam under his arm. It was so sad to see such a powerful man deliver his last Shiur at Torah Academy of Bergen County in 2010 during which he struggled to walk and deliver the Shiur.

Father is gone. A great man has gone. Chazal (Chullin 7b) teach that "Tzadikim are greater in death than during their lifetime." We never fully appreciate the greatness of those who dwell amongst us until they leave us.

Father expected much from us. We hope that we met, at least partially, his lofty expectations. Rav Lichtenstein continues to serve as a powerful role model for all of us. Rav Lichtenstein will serve as a role model even for those who were born after his death in the manner in which Rav Lichtenstein stated that Rav Chayim Soloveitchik served as a powerful role model for him, even though he never met Rav Chayim. May all of us continue to act in a way that pleases father so that we may please Father, Avinu SheBaShamayim.

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