



CHOVERET CHINUCH #14 5784

Torah Va'Avoda



The Choveret Chinuch is a project of Bnei Akiva of the US and Canada's Chinuch department. For comments or questions, please reach out to Rav Avishai Berman at aberman@bneiakiva.org

Hi Madrichim,

Over the next two weeks, we'll be learning about two great Rabbis: Rabbi Akiva, known for his positive outlook, and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, renowned for his rigorous dedication to Torah study. We'll see why the youth movement Bnei Akiva chose to name themselves after Rabbi Akiva, and we'll uncover the interesting life of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who is remembered on Lag BaOmer.

Shabbat Shalom,
Shani Becker



Week One:

Ninety-five years ago, in May, 1929, the Bnei Akiva movement was founded. That's almost a century of making a difference! Bnei Akiva has accomplished so much, but have you ever wondered why we call ourselves the sons of Rabbi Akiva?



Rabbi Akiva:



Akiva lived during a significant time in Jewish history, before the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash. He started his life as a shepherd, not knowing how to read or write. He worked for a rich man named Kalba Savua, whose name meant that anyone who visited his house would leave feeling full and satisfied.

While working for Kalba Savua, Akiva fell in love with his daughter, Rachel. They wanted to get married, but Kalba Savua didn't approve because Akiva was uneducated and had very little money. He even threatened to cut Rachel out of his will if she married Akiva. Despite this, Akiva and Rachel chose to marry anyway, even though they didn't have much money and would live in poverty.

Akiva promised Rachel that one day he would buy her a beautiful golden necklace of 'Yerushalayim Shel Zahav', but Rachel said she would rather he focus on learning Torah. So, Akiva listened to Rachel and started learning Torah from the very beginning, starting with the Aleph Bet, and then moved on to read and study Torah in Yeshiva.

After many years away from his home, with his days filled with hard work studying Torah, Akiva became a famous Rabbi with many students who admired him. When he returned to his hometown, he fulfilled his promise to Rachel and gave her a beautiful necklace of 'Yerushalayim Shel Zahav', thanking her for encouraging him to study Torah.



Kalba Savua, Rachel's father, realized his mistake and asked Akiva and Rachel for forgiveness, which they kindly accepted. From then on, Rabbi Akiva became well-known for his positive outlook on life, always seeing things in a good way.

Rabbi Akiva was one of the Asara Harugei Malchut, one of the ten great rabbis who sacrificed their lives to keep studying and teaching Torah during the Roman rule.

Rabbi Akiva's life teaches us that with determination and hard work, we can achieve our goals, no matter where we start.

Why is Bnei Akiva named after him?



Yechiel Eliash, the founder of Bnei Akiva, when asked why they chose that name stated:

"We gathered with a group of friends, each of us suggesting a name. Among all the names proposed, we were immediately drawn to the suggestion made by Avraham Kastenbaum. He proposed the name 'Bnei Akiva,' which resonated deeply with us.

Rabbi Akiva embodied, more than any other figure, the values of Torah and Avodah. He was not only a scholar but also a worker - a shepherd and a national defender. He devoted himself to Torah and Jewish law. Rabbi Akiva viewed every individual with dignity and respect, reflecting our own belief in bringing people closer together, not pushing them away.

Identifying ourselves as students of Rabbi Akiva means embracing his teachings and values as our own. We strive to emulate his dedication to Torah and Avodah, seeing each person as worthy of respect and kindness. In choosing the name 'Bnei Akiva,' we honor his legacy and commit ourselves to his principles."

Rabbi Akiva's story is one of determination and resilience. Despite facing challenges, like not knowing how to read or write, he became one of the most respected rabbis of his time. His love for learning and his belief in the power of kindness made him stand out. We strive to learn from him in the Tnua of Bnei Akiva.



He showed us the importance of learning, kindness, and standing up for what we believe in. He taught us that no matter where we come from or what challenges we face, we can make a difference in the world, just like he did, while combining his Torah with his Avodah.



Discussion Points:

- Reflecting on Rabbi Akiva's journey, try to think about what aspects of your life you feel motivated you to work on or change? How might you approach making those changes?
- How do you think Rabbi Akiva's life story influenced the decision to choose his name for the Tnua?
- What does it mean to combine Torah study with Avodah like Rabbi Akiva did? How can we do that in our own lives?



Ideas For Activities:

- Story and Discussion
- Chain Tag
- 21 Count

Story and Discussion:

Print out these stories. Split the Chanichim up into groups and give each group one of these stories. Give them time to read them and discuss what they think. Then come together, tell the rest of the story to the group and what they concluded from it.

Hakol LeTova: Once, Rabbi Akiva set off on a long journey, bringing along a donkey, a rooster, and a candle. Each of these had a special purpose: the donkey was for riding when he got tired, the rooster was to wake him up for morning tefilla, and the candle was for studying Torah at night.

As Rabbi Akiva traveled, he arrived at a city at night and hoped to find a place to rest. But there were no hotels available, and when he asked for a place to stay, everyone turned him away. Despite feeling disappointed, Rabbi Akiva stayed positive, saying, “Everything G-d does is for the good.”

With no other option, Rabbi Akiva found a spot in a field under a tree. He lit his candle, took care of his animals, and started studying Torah. Suddenly, a lion came and ate his donkey, then a cat ate his rooster, and a strong wind blew out his candle, leaving him in total darkness.

Even though things seemed bad, Rabbi Akiva still believed that “Everything G-d does is for the good.” And soon, he heard noises from the city. Enemies had come to attack, but because it was dark, they didn’t see Rabbi Akiva and passed him by.

Looking back on the night, Rabbi Akiva realized that if the lion hadn’t eaten his donkey, or the cat his rooster, or if the wind hadn’t blown out his candle, he might have been caught by the enemy. So, he said, “Now everyone knows that what G-d does, He does everything for good.”

He laughed when they cried: Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva were walking towards Yerushalayim. When they arrived at the place where the Bet Hamikdash had stood, but was now totally destroyed and in ruins, they saw a fox running out of the area where the Holy of Holies had been. They began to cry, while Rabbi Akiva laughed.

They said to him, 'Akiva, why are you laughing?'

He responded, 'Friends, why are you crying?'

They said "If we see a fox coming out of the holiest place in the world, how can we not cry?' Then, they continued, "We explained why we cried, now please tell us how you can possibly be laughing?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, 'It is because of the fox that I am laughing. The Navi, Uriah, said that the Beit Hamikdash will be destroyed and foxes will roam through the ruins. When I saw that the Navi's prophecy came true, I knew that likewise another prophecy, of the Navi Zechariah that the Jews will return to their homeland would also eventually come true. Knowing that this promise will come true makes me laugh out of happiness. Hearing that, Rabbi Akiva's colleagues said to him, 'Akiva, you have comforted us.'

Rabbi Akiva's daughter: In Rabbi Akiva's bustling house, his daughter prepared for her wedding day. Yet, beneath the excitement, Rabbi Akiva was deeply worried. The fortune tellers had prophesied that his daughter's wedding day would be her last.

As the festivities unfolded in splendor, Rabbi Akiva could not partake in the Simcha. While guests danced and feasted, his heart weighed heavy with concern. He watched over the festivities with love and apprehension, silently bidding farewell to his beloved daughter, praying for a miracle.

As the night waned and the newlyweds retired, Rabbi Akiva's anxiety persisted. He knew that with the dawn, his daughter's fate would be sealed. Yet, to his astonishment, the morning arrived, and she stood before him, safe and unharmed.

Overwhelmed with relief, Rabbi Akiva embraced his daughter, seeking answers. Had something extraordinary occurred? His daughter recounted a simple act of kindness amidst the celebration—a plate of food offered to a poor man at their doorstep.

In that moment, Rabbi Akiva realized the profound truth: his daughter's life had been spared by her compassionate gesture. The prophecy had been averted by the Mitzvah of Tzedaka. With gratitude and pride, he declared to all, "Charity will save you from death."

In her room, Rabbi Akiva's daughter retrieved a pin she had without thinking lodged in the wall the night before. To her astonishment, it had impaled a venomous snake, poised to harm her. She understood then the magnitude of her act of kindness—a single plate had saved her life.

These next two games emphasize to the Chanichim that even challenging experiences can bring something positive.

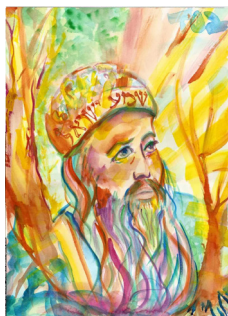
Chain tag: Start with one tagger. When one person is tagged, they join hands with the person who tagged them, and together they try to tag others. As more people are tagged, the chain of linked individuals grows longer, making it more challenging for those not yet tagged to avoid being caught.

21 Count: Have the Chanichim stand in a circle and pass a ball around 21 times. Each time the ball drops the Chanichim need to start from the beginning, but the count gets lower, meaning they only need to pass around the ball 20 times. If the ball falls again they lower the final number.

Week Two:

Last week we learned about Rabbi Akiva, his life-altering decisions and his positive outlook on life. This week we'll learn about one of his Talmidim, who felt very close to Rabbi Akiva and had a difficult life as well.

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai:



As a young boy, Shimon studied at the prestigious academy of Yavneh under the guidance of Rabbi Akiva, forming a close bond with his esteemed teacher. However, these were hard times for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel under the harsh persecution of the Roman Emperor. Torah study was forbidden on penalty of death, casting a shadow over Jewish religious life.

One day, unaware of being overheard by a Roman spy, Shimon expressed his negative feelings towards the Romans to his friends, triggering a chain of events that led to a decree of death against him. Fleeing for his life with his son, Rabbi Elazar, they stayed in hiding in the Bet Midrash, where Rabbi Shimon's wife secretly brought them bread and water. When the search intensified, they decided to seek a better hiding place. Without telling anyone of their whereabouts, they hid in a cave. They had a miracle that a carob tree sprung up at the entrance to the cave, as well as a spring of fresh water. For twelve years, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Elazar lived in the cave, sustaining themselves on carobs and water. They spent their days studying and praying.

At the end of twelve years, the Prophet Eliyahu brought them the good news that they were no longer in danger. Father and son now left the cave. Passing a field where they saw Jewish farmers working the land, they said, "Imagine people giving up the sacred study of the Torah for worldly matters!"



No sooner did they utter these words, than all the produce of the field went up in smoke. Then they heard a heavenly voice saying, "Have you come out to destroy My world? Go back to your cave!" They returned to the cave for another twelve months, and left it again, only after they heard the same heavenly voice calling them to leave.

This time, they came out with a different outlook on life. Seeing a Jew carrying two bunches of myrtle (Hadasim), rushing home on Friday afternoon, they asked him what he was going to do with the myrtle.

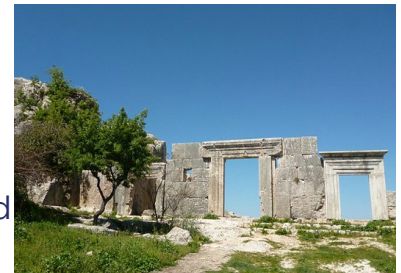
“It is to beautify my house in honor of the Shabbat,” the man replied.

Rabbi Shimon said to his son, “See how precious the people of Israel are!”

Satisfied that despite all the decrees and persecutions of the cruel Roman rulers, the Jews still clung to the commandments and especially Shabbat observance, Rabbi Shimon and his son felt greatly encouraged.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai died on Lag BaOmer in Meron, Israel.

Each year on Lag BaOmer Jewish communities around the world gather to honor his memory and legacy. The day is marked by joyous celebrations, including bonfires, music and dancing. It is a time to reflect on Rabbi Shimon’s teachings of unity and spiritual enlightenment.



Discussion Points:

- What do you think the connection is between Rabbi Shimon’s life and lighting fires on Lag Baomer?
- Can you think of any ways in which a leader like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai might have helped people feel hopeful or connected during difficult times?
- If you could ask Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai one question about his leadership or his life, what would it be?
- How do you think Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai’s experiences might have shaped the way he led and made decisions?



Ideas For Activities:

- Secret Agent Debate
- Shadow Seekers

Secret Agenda Debate:

This activity comes to demonstrate to the Chanichim to stand up for what they believe in.

Chanichim will be called up two at a time and assigned a topic to debate. They will have two minutes to persuade the rest of the group that their stance is correct. After both sides present their arguments, Give each team a secret agenda or goal to achieve during the debate. See if the crowd can guess the secret agenda. The winner is the one who the crowd couldn't guess what the word was.

Ideas for debates:

1. Debate Topic: Should public transportation be free for all residents?

- Secret Agenda for Team A (Pro): Incorporate the word "hammock" into their arguments.
- Secret Agenda for Team B (Anti): Incorporate the word "salt" into their arguments.

2. Debate Topic: Should junk food be banned in schools?

- Secret Agenda for Team A (Pro): Incorporate the word "armchair" into their arguments.
- Secret Agenda for Team B (Anti): Incorporate the word "phone call" into their arguments.

3. Debate Topic: Should professional athletes be role models for youth?

- Secret Agenda for Team A (Pro): Incorporate the word "shark" into their arguments.
- Secret Agenda for Team B (Anti): Incorporate the word "landscape" into their arguments.

4. Debate Topic: Should standardized testing be abolished in schools?

- Secret Agenda for Team A (Pro): Incorporate the word "lights" into their arguments.
- Secret Agenda for Team B (Anti): Incorporate the word "sunhat" into their arguments.

5. Debate Topic: Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

- Secret Agenda for Team A (Pro): Incorporate the word "doghouse" into their arguments.

- Secret Agenda for Team B (Anti): Incorporate the word “fruity pebbles” into their arguments.

Shadow Seekers:

Have the Chanichim scatter and hide throughout the playing area while one player is chosen as the seeker. The seeker closes their eyes and counts to 20 while the other players hide. Once the countdown is over, the seeker begins searching for the hidere. When the seeker spots a hider, they must call out the hider’s name and their shadow direction (for example: “Sarah, to your left!”). The hider must freeze in place. Hiders can try to reach a designated safe zone to avoid being tagged by the seeker. If a hider reaches the safe zone without being tagged, they are safe and cannot be tagged by the seeker. The round ends when all the hidere are either tagged by the seeker or have reached the safe zone.