

plague ceased for but one day, the 33rd day of the Omer. Jews traditionally remembered this tragic period by refraining from haircuts and weddings, from celebrations and music. Lag B'Omer was the sole exception.

Parenthetically, in the Holocaust, the Omer was the most intense period of killing. Hungary was invaded by the Germans in March 1944 within ten days of Purim. Passover 5704 was not a time of liberation but of ghettoization and between the 15th of May and the 8th of July 1944, 437,402 Jews were deported on 147 trains – destination Auschwitz. Four of five were gassed upon arrival. So there was a second plague that afflicted the Jewish people at this season and this one was without a day's reprieve. It is appropriate that these days be marked by extra sadness.

How is Lag B'Omer observed? Many a child remembers his hurried trip to the busy barber. Three year old boys, whose hair is not shorn until they are three, receive their first haircut that day – a custom observed to this day in Meron on the site of the grave of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai, and many a Jewish couple eagerly count each of these Omer days leading to their wedding held on this 33rd day, a very special day. Bonfires are lit in Israel especially at Rabbi Shimon's grave.

We who have been shut in, unable to attend school or to go to work, unable to go to attend synagogue or to shop because of the social distancing required to slow the progress of the Covid19 pandemic can appreciate as never before this historical memory and the exaltation that must have marked the day the plague ceased – even if but one day.

For Rabbinic Jews human suffering had a divine message; human anguish is perceived as divine punishment, personal and communal. In truth, this is one aspect of rabbinic teaching that haunts me and that challenges me, one that I protest and one with which I contend. Having spent my life studying

We have seen remarkable heroism by those on the front lines who have *enough regard* to staff and clean our hospitals, to treat those who are ill even as they may pose a danger, to deliver our food, to stock our shelves, to work day and night to identify and combat the disease, to patrol our streets and to identify, order, manufacture and deliver what is needed to save lives and to protect the people saving lives.

And we need leaders who have *enough regard* for the intelligence and the collective wisdom of their people to tell us the truth, to demand the best of us so that we can come through this moment in history together with enough regard for one another.

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