



TOWARD A



MEANINGFUL LAG B’OMER

A Personal and Spiritual Guide to Lag B’Omer
 Making Lag B’Omer Relevant

E X C L U S I V E
 FOR SHLUCHIM

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WHAT IS LAG B'OMER?

Lag B'Omer - literally translated as the "33rd in the Omer" - is a festive day of rejoicing that coincides with the 33rd day in the counting of the Omer. Customarily, it is celebrated with public events, such as outings in parks, bonfires, concerts and parades; special focus is placed on gathering children together in joy and harmony.

ANNIVERSARY OF R' SHIMON BAR YOCHAI'S PASSING

R' Shimon Bar Yochai, known by the acronym of his name, Rashbi, passed away on Lag B'Omer, the 18th of Iyar, in the year 160 CE. Before his passing, the Rashbi requested that this day be celebrated as a festive holiday.

In the words of the Rashbi:

It is my wish that all shall be one on this day of my passing and that all shall celebrate in this world on the day of my passing - Zohar III 291a; see also Zohar I 218a

On the day of Lag B'Omer...it is a mitzvah to rejoice the joy of Rashbi

- Mishnat Chassidim, Iyar 1:6; see sources in foot-
notes Likkutei Sichot vol. 7 p. 343

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE LAG B'OMER?

- 1** Lag B'Omer is the anniversary of R' Shimon Bar Yochai's passing. Before ascending on high, R' Shimon requested that his *Yartzeit* be a day of celebration.
- 2** During the weeks of the Omer (between the holidays of Pesach and Shavuot), the students of R' Akiva perished for disrespecting one another. Consequently, the time of the Omer is designated as a mourning period. On Lag B'Omer the students ceased dying and Lag B'Omer came to be known as a day for celebrating life.

Hillula

In the Zohar (III 287b. 291a), the Rashbi calls the day of his ascending on high his "day of *Hillula*." *Hillula* literally means a "marriage celebration". It is derived from the word, Hallel, which means to "praise", and at weddings it is customary to bless and praise the bride. By referring to it as the "day of my *Hillula*," the Rashbi saw Lag B'Omer not as a day of dying - a sad day - but as a day of "marriage," of unity, which is the ultimate celebration of life - marrying two opposites, man and woman, body and soul, heaven and earth, inner torah and outer torah - and this is what Rashbi's life was all about.

BEFORE HIS PASSING - LIGHT

On Lag B'Omer Rashbi "reached the peak and pinnacle of all his levels... and this is the significance of his learning

Torah with his *chavraya* at the time... and in him was radiating a reflection of the light of Moshiach" (Siddur im dach, Shaar ha'Lag B'Omer)

Hints for Lag B'Omer in the Torah:

- הגל הזה גו' עד (גלעד) ויצא לא, (מח)
"Ha'gal hazeh..ad gilad" (Vayetzei 31:48) - Siddur im dach 304c
- גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות (מתורתך) (תהלים קיט, יח) - "Gal aynei v'abitah neflaois m'torescho" (Tehillim 119:18) - Chayav Odom L'vorech 5638 ch. 25 (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5710)



BIOGRAPHY



RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI (Rashbi) - 80-160 CE

Rashbi is a Mishnaic Tanah and the author of the classic Kabbalistic work, the *Holy Zohar (Book of Splendor)*, first published in 1558. Transcribed by his student R' Abba, the *Zohar* lays out the foundations and core principles of mysticism and contains, often in cryptic form, the cosmic secrets. An extraordinary scholar and miracle worker, Rabbi Shimon was renowned for his mastery of both the revealed and the hidden dimensions of Torah.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 80CE: Born in Israel shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple (67CE).
- As a young boy studies in the great academy of the scholars of Yavneh, founded by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.
- His principal teacher is Rabbi Akiva, whose academy is in B'nei Brak. Rabbi Akiva calls him "my son."
- Due to persecution against Jews led by the Roman Emperor Hadrian, R' Shimon is sentenced to death for defying the government. Forced to flee, he hides in a cave for thirteen years together with his son, R' Elazar, where they study Torah day and night. A carob tree and a spring of fresh water miraculously spring up at the entrance to the desert cave and they are sustained

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STORY

Rashbi upset that R' Avrohom Halevi, student of the Arizal, was sad on his "day of rejoicing"

R' Avraham Halevi related, that in the aforementioned year [the first year], he too went [with the Arizal to Meron on Lag B'Omer]. It was R' Avraham Halevi's custom to recite Nachem every day when saying the Tishkon prayer. And he recited it on [Lag B'Omer] in Meron as well. When he finished the prayer, the Arizal told him that he saw the Rashbi awake, standing on his burial spot, and told him: tell this person, Avraham Halevi, why does he recite Nachem [a consolation prayer] on the day of our rejoicing?

(Shar Hakavanot, Sefirat Ha'Omer, Drush 12)

until the Emperor dies and the decree is annulled.

- Establishes an academy in the town of Tekoa. The greatest Torah scholars gather there, including Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi who compiled the Mishnah.
- 160CE: Passes away on 18th of Iyar in Meron, a village near Tzfat, Israel. On Lag

B'Omer, thousands of Jews make a pilgrimage to his grave where they pray and celebrate. There is also a tradition to light bonfires. At R' Shimon's request, Lag B'Omer is a day of great celebration and an opportune time for miracles.



Rashbi's Published Writings

ZOHAR

Book of Splendor, perhaps the most important Kabbalistic work, first published in 1558

SIFRI;

MECHILTA OF RASHBI

Midrashic teachings, circa 2nd century CE

Rashbi is also distinguished by the fact that he is mentioned in every Talmudic tractate.

R' AKIVA'S STUDENTS CEASED DYING

R' Akiva had 12,000 pairs of students [24,000 total], from Givat to Antipatris, and they all died in one period for not showing respect to one another. The world was desolate (because Torah was forgotten - Rashi) until R' Akiva came to our teachers in the south and taught them - R' Meir, R' Yehuda, R' Yosi, R' Shimon, and R' Elazar Ben Shamma - and it was they who erected the Torah in that time. We learned that they all died from Pesach to Atzeret (Shavuot) (Talmud, Yevamot 62b. See Meiri there in the name of the Geonim). On Lag B'Omer they stopped dying.*

*) It is customary not to marry between Pesach and Atzeret [Shavuot] until Lag B'Omer, because in that time the students of R' Akiva passed away...we do not cut our hair until Lag B'Omer because they say that they stopped dying then (Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 493:1-2). And we add a little joy, and we do not say Tachnun (Rama ibid. Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chayim 493:5)

Connection of Rashbi's passing to R' Akiva's students

The Rashbi was one of the five students of Rabbi Akiva who survived and "reestablished the Torah" after the plague that killed 24,000 of them for "not respecting each other" (Yevomot 62b). By doing this they "preserved the world's existence" (Mishnas Chassidim Mesechta Nissan Iyar ch. 1:6). Rashbi stands out amongst the five students as the one who fused the "hidden", "inner" Torah with the "revealed" and "outer" Torah - which renews the world's existence through connecting it to its inner energy source (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5711)

Reasons for the plague killing 24,000 student of Rabbi Akiva for "not respecting one another:"

How is it possible that such great students of such a great master should stoop to not respecting each other? Especially considering



that Rabbi Akiva taught that “love your fellow like yourself” is a “great fundamental in Torah”! It was not despite but because of their greatness that one could not tolerate the other’s position. People who are not that powerful and intense in their positions can find it easier to compromise and co-exist with their colleagues. But brilliant students who are extremely passionate about their interpretations and opinions in Torah - they require far more humility, care and sensitivity to ensure that one does not get “burned” by the intensity of their colleague (Likkutei Sichos vol. 7 p. 342).

When Torah is studied by students who respect and love each other, they are in it together and their personal iniquities are somewhat compensated for by their unity and synergy. When this unity is lacking, G-d forbid, as it was by the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva, their lack of brotherhood magnified the focus on their personal iniquities, making them vulnerable to judgment (Sichas Lag B’Omer 5713).



LAWS AND CUSTOMS



Celebration

Fulfilling Rashbi’s request to rejoice on the day of his passing



Pilgrimage to Miron

The largest Lag B’Omer celebration takes place in and around Rabbi Shimon’s burial place in the Northern Israeli village of Miron. Tens of thousands of people from all over the world celebrate all through the night, dancing, singing, and rejoicing in the life and unity of the Rashbi.

THE ARIZAL

Regarding this custom, which is customary by Jews to go on Lag B’Omer to the burial-site of Rashbi and R’ Elazar his son, buried in the city of Meron, and to eat and drink and rejoice there: I saw my teacher [the Arizal] go there one time on Lag B’Omer with all the people of his house, and he sat there for the first three days of that week. And this was the first time that he came from Egypt.

- Shar Hakavanot, Sefirat Ha’Omer, Drush 12;
Pri Etz Chaim, Shar Sefirat Haomer, Perek 7



LAG B'OMER CUSTOMS

1. Upsherinish - Cutting a three-year-old boys hair for the first time.

Harav Yosef Sarug testified to me, that one year before I knew him, the Arizal went to Meron to cut his sons hair with festive feast and rejoicing (Pri Etz Chaim, Shar Sefirat Haomer Perek 7)

2. Lighting Bonfires on Lag B'Omer eve - These commemorate the immense light that the Rashbi introduced into the world via his mystical teachings. This was especially true on the day of his passing, when he revealed to his disciples secrets of the Torah, whose profundity and intensity the world had yet to experience (Zohar III pp. 287b-296b). The Zohar also relates that, on the day of Rashbi's passing, the house was filled with fire and intense light, to the point that the assembled could not approach or even look at the Rashbi.

3. We do not say Tachnun, mourn or fast (Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 493:1-2).

4. Weddings and music - Throughout the Omer we do not celebrate festive events, such as weddings or musical affairs. On Lag B'Omer, the Omer mourning practices are suspended: many people get married and there are concerts, dancing and singing.

5. Food - In some circles it is customary to eat carobs on Lag B'Omer. This commemorates a lifesaving miracle that Rabbi Shimon experienced. For a period of thirteen years, Rabbi Shimon and his son were fugitives from the Roman regime, in hiding in a cave in Northern Israel. Miraculously a carob tree grew at the entrance of the cave, providing nourishments for its two holy occupants.

(for more customs see Bayn Pesach L'Shavuot Chapter 18)



Day of Miracles

Lag Ba'Omer was one of the Mittlerer Rebbe's particularly noteworthy festivals. He and the Chassidim would go out to the fields that day, and although he did not wash and break bread,

he did partake of mashkeh (strong drink), which he was not allowed to do for health reasons. Many wonders were seen at that time, most of them involving the blessing of children for childless couples - and all year long people waited for Lag Ba'Omer. Hayom Yom, 18 Iyar

THE REBBE'S LAG B'OMER DIRECTIVES



Wherever possible organize Lag B'Omer parades and outings to celebrate the “day of my - Rashbi's - rejoicing,”

and the end of the terrible plague that killed so many of Rabbi Akiva's students due to their disrespect to one another.



These events should focus on children, celebrating Jewish unity and pride, and inspiring them to embrace our heritage, through loving devotion to Torah and Mitzvot. Especially in the spirit of Rashbi - uniting both parts (the revealed and

hidden) of the Torah. And doing so with respect and love for others, including the responsibility to encourage friends to grow in all matters of Judaism. Children lead the way - and have the power to inspire their parents and educators as well - toward the geulah. (see below for more on the special role of children)



Every Lag B'Omer parade or celebration should include all three pillars upon which the world stands: Words of Torah, prayer and good deeds - giving the children candies and gifts, as well as money to distribute to charity. It would also be worthwhile publishing albums of these events, with pictures etc. (Sichas Shabbos Parshas Emor 5740)

SPECIAL ROLE OF CHILDREN

From days of yore the custom on Lag B'Omer has been to preoccupy ourselves with children, taking them out to the field, organizing for them a parade or a party, to honor and celebrate Rashbi's day of rejoicing (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5746)

Reasons for Lag B'Omer's special connection with children:

- 1 Children, who are provided for and free of worries, are in a state where “Torah is their full preoccupation” - similar to Rashbi (Shabbos 11a).
- 2 Children are connected with the Inner Torah (the special role of Rashbi): “As

we get closer to the days of Moshiach even children will easily discover hidden wisdom” (Rashbi - Zohar I 38a). Similarly, in the times of Rashbi, children revealed secrets of the Torah (Zohar III 171a).

- 3** Children are the foundation of the universe, as Rashbi says in the opening of Zohar: The saplings appeared on the earth (Shir Hashirim 2:12), who preserves and holds up the world? The voice of children who study Torah.
- 4** Every new mother prays that her newborn child should be like Rashbi (Makot 17b).
- 5** Just as the children were guarantors for Mattan Torah given at Sinai (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:2), so too regarding Mattan Torah of Pnimityus HaTorah on Lag B’Omer (V’sefartem Lochem 5666).
- 6** On Lag B’Omer the Mitteler Rebbe would go out in the field... many miracles were witnessed then. Most miracles were around children.
- 7** Rashbi would bless and cause barren women to have children (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:4, Zohar II 169b)

VITAL LESSONS:

Lag B’Omer offers all Jewish children the opportunity to dramatically improve their Torah education.



For those children attending Jewish schools, this day gives you strength to intensify and grow in your study.



For those children who, for whatever reason, do not as of yet attend a Jewish school, Lag B’Omer - which celebrates the power of the Jewish child to hold up the universe - is an ideal time to enroll in a Jewish summer camp and a Jewish school for the new upcoming semester
(Sichas Lag B’Omer 5730)

THE POWER OF CHILDREN

In the times of Rashbi as well as in the times of Moshiach children will know and teach secrets of the Torah (Zohar I 92b). Children need to know their great responsibility and opportunity - through their

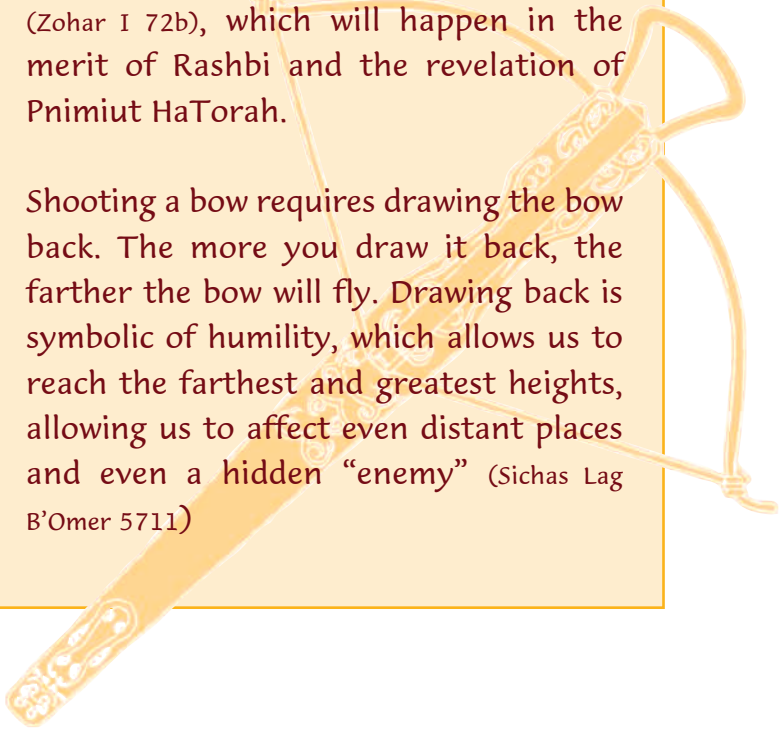
Torah study and mitzvoth, and the good example that they set for their family and friends, they have the power to bring the Geulah for the entire Jewish nation and the entire world!
(Sichas Lag B’Omer 5717)

BOW & ARROW

On Lag B'Omer children go to the park and play with a bow (keshes). The reason given: To remind us that during Rashbi's entire lifetime a rainbow (keshes) never appeared, because his merit protected his generation (see Yerushalmi Berochos 9:2). So we play with a bow to remind us that after Rashbi's passing, when we don't have that merit, we need a bow as a good sign (Bnei Yissachar Mamorei Chodesh Iyar 3:4). A positive connection between the bow and Lag B'Omer: To remind us of the bow in

the sky, as a sign of Moshiach's coming (Zohar I 72b), which will happen in the merit of Rashbi and the revelation of Pnimit HaTorah.

Shooting a bow requires drawing the bow back. The more you draw it back, the farther the bow will fly. Drawing back is symbolic of humility, which allows us to reach the farthest and greatest heights, allowing us to affect even distant places and even a hidden "enemy" (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5711)



INNER MEANING AND PERSONAL RELEVANCE OF LAG B'OMER

Unity

Be it in his personal life - as one of the students of R' Akiva that showed unifying respect to his colleagues - or in his scholarship - bridging and unifying the inner and outer dimensions of torah - the Rashbi epitomized oneness and unity.

Cleaving to the Divine: In One Knot

Said R' Shimon: "I am to my beloved and His desire is towards me" (Shir Hashirim 7:11): all the days that I was connected in this world, in

one knot was I connected with G-d - my soul in unity with Him, glowing with Him, attached with Him - Zohar III 288a, 292a (see Sefer Hasichot 5748, p. 440, notes 9-12)

Unity in Torah

As one of the greatest Talmudic sages (who Rabbi Akiva compared to himself), as well as the master of *Pnimitus haTorah* (author of the Zohar), Rashbi breached the gap and united the hidden (*nistar*) and revealed (*nigleh*) dimensions of Torah.

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All the Lag B'Omer lessons from Rashbi and the students of Rabbi Akiva are relevant to every one, regardless of their

status and level of service, because each Jew has a spark of Rashbi (and of Rabbi Akiva and his students) within him, similar to the spark of Moses in each Jew (Tanya ch. 42) - Sichas Lag B'Omer 5733. 5738.

Healer: Iyar and Lag B'Omer

Lag B'Omer is on the 18th (*Chai/Life*) of the month of Iyar. The Hebrew word *Iyar*, is an acronym for "*Ani Hashem Rofecha*", I, G-d, am your healer. I split (struck) and I will heal (Haazinu 32:39). Rashbi healed the split between the revealed Torah and the hidden Torah (see Sefer Hasichot 5750 p. 446, note 42; Hemshech Chayav Adam L'varech 5638 Ch. 25, pp. 151)

The Unifying Power of Torah

The world was once in need of rain. They came to Rashbi and he said a Torah on the verse (Tehillim 133:1) "behold how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together also as one" and it began to rain (Zohar II 59b).

LESSONS:

Unlike prayer which takes effort and can at times cause the blessing to come too fast or too slow, Rashbi's Torah has the power to seamlessly bring blessings in our lives in a way that is tailored exactly to our needs. We learn from this the power of our Torah study, which can draw down without effort all the blessings we need (Lag B'Omer discourses. Sichas Lag B'Omer 5738)

This verse has an obvious connection to Lag B'Omer, as the Talmud says that on this day the plague ended due to disrespect of the students, signifying the beginning of a new state of unity, "brothers sit together as one" (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5733).

What is the addition of the word "also (as one)," "*gam yachad*"? Rashbi offers two explanations in Zohar: 1) "Brothers sit together" refers to *yichud Kudsha Brich Hu* and *Knesset Yisroel (Shechinta)*, the unity of the Divine with Israel (source of souls), the transcendent dimension of the Divine fused with the immanent dimension. This unity affects also (*gam*) the souls as they descend and manifest in physical bodies on earth, that even in the material universe, where the Jewish people are like a "sheep surrounded by seventy wolves," they are protected and unified. 2) "Brothers sit together" refers to the Jewish people, who reconcile and unite together even after they may disagree and have conflicts with each other. This unity affects also (*gam*) G-d, causing our Father in heaven to unite with us when He sees his children uniting even when they may have different perspectives and conflicts (see Sichas Lag B'Omer 5722)



Love Your Fellow

Lag B’Omer signifies the end of the plague due to the disrespect of Rabbi Akiva’s students - teaching us the importance of treating everyone with respect and love.

One of the students that survived was Rashbi, who defined Lag B’omer (the day of his passing) as “the day of my rejoicing.” Due to the dark decrees of the time, G-d sent Rashbi to reveal to selected students the “hidden” dimensions of Torah, in effect demonstrating His deep love for Jews, by revealing to them, through Rashbi, His messenger, not just the “outer,” but also the “inner” dimensions of Torah and of their souls. This teaches us that our love for others should be not only in addressing their “outer” needs, but also their “inner” ones, even reaching the depths of their souls.

This message is amplified in our times: As our challenges intensified over the centuries, G-d then sent the Baal Shem Tov to reveal to everyone the “inner” dimension of Torah (not just to some people, as the Rashbi was charged to do). Which emphasizes the need today to reach to everyone with love - not just externally, but also internally, in the depths of their souls (Sichas Lag B’Omer 5720)

When One Jew Hurts All Jews Hurt

Rashbi’s analogy: Many different people were traveling in a boat. One of them began to drill a hole beneath his seat. Said his companions to him: “Why are you doing this?” Replied the man: “What concern is it of

yours? Am I not drilling under my own seat?” Said they to him: “But you will flood the boat for us all!” (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 4:6).

Concise Sermon

JEWISH UNITY

Rabbi Akiva taught that “Love your fellow as yourself” (Kedoshim 19:18) is a “cardinal principle in Torah” (Torat Kohanim on verse); indeed, this is perhaps the most famous of his teachings. One would therefore expect that Rabbi Akiva’s disciples would be the foremost exemplars of this principle. How was it that they, of all people, were deficient in this area - to the extent that 24,000 perished for not fulfilling this axiomatic Torah principle?

Rashbi was from the five students of R’ Akiva that remained, upholding his dictum of *Ahavat Yisroel* as a *klal godol b’Torah*. How did the Rashbi differ from the rest of R’ Akiva’s students?

When the Roman rulers of the Holy Land placed a price on the heads of Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar, they hid in a cave for twelve years. During this time, they spent every minute of their day studying Torah. When they emerged from the cave, they were shocked to discover people plowing and sowing: How could people set aside the eternal life that is

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Torah and occupy their days with the transitory life of the material? So intense was their wrath at such folly that whatever met with their burning glance went up in flames. Proclaimed a voice from heaven: "Have you come out to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" Rabbi Shimon's thirteenth year of study, while increasing his knowledge and appreciation of the eternal truth of Torah, also taught him the value of endeavors other than his own. Now, wherever he went, his look would heal rather than destroy.

The 4,000-year history of Jewish learning has known many great and diligent students of Torah; yet none epitomized the absolute devotion to the pursuit of the divine truth to the extent exemplified by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Throughout the writings of our sages, his example is cited as the ultimate case of one "whose study of Torah is his sole vocation." (Talmud, Shabbat 11a)

Certainly, Rabbi Shimon's commitment to truth was no less absolute than that of Rabbi Akiva's other disciples. Yet his truth was true enough to love. In his thirteenth year in the cave, he attained a dimension of the divine truth that tolerates, indeed embraces, the many and diverse avenues of connection that G-d has provided to a humanity whose minds, characters and temperaments are as diverse as their number. In his thirteenth year in the cave, Rabbi Shimon attained a level of truth in which he could utterly devote himself to

the "eternal life" that is Torah and advocate such devotion for everyone else, and at the same time appreciate and respect the path of those who serve G-d via the "temporal life" of material endeavors.

So the very same day that celebrates the end of the plague amongst Rabbi Akiva's disciples celebrates the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The Chassidic masters explain that the passing of a righteous person marks the point at which "all his deeds, teachings and works" attain the pinnacle of fulfillment and realization and the point of their most powerful influence upon our lives; the "deeds, teaching and works" of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai are the ultimate rectification of Rabbi Akiva's disciples' tragic failure to achieve the proper synthesis of love and truth that would make their love true and their truth loving.

PRACTICAL LESSON

We must learn from their virtues as well as from their mistakes. We must learn to care enough for our fellow man not to indulge his errors and accommodate his failings; this might be the easiest and most socially comfortable way to behave, but, rather than "tolerance," it bespeaks an indifference toward his welfare.

On the other hand, we must never allow this to lessen in the slightest our respect

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and esteem toward him, no matter how misguided and unresponsive he might be.


If this seems paradoxical, it is. But regarding ourselves, it is a paradox with which we are quite comfortable—every psychologically healthy person loves himself and, at the same time, incessantly strives to improve himself. So it is a paradox that we must also cultivate in our relationship

with others. To either temper our efforts to enlighten and better our fellow man out of respect for his views and feelings, or to allow these efforts to compromise our love and respect for him, is to fail to love him as we love ourselves—a principle which Rabbi Akiva considered fundamental to G-d's blueprint for life and of which Hillel said: "This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary" (Talmud, Shabbat 31a).



SEFIRA OF THE DAY Hod of Hod

Every day of the Omer count has its corresponding *Sefira*. Lag B'Omer's *Sefira* is **Hod of Hod, Humility in Humility.**

 Lag B'Omer is the completion and culmination of the core attributes, because from *Hod of Hod* and on, the levels of *Yesod* and *Malchut*...are separated from the level of essential attributes (Siddur im Da"ch, Shar HaLag B'Omer)

Lag B'Omer is unique according to both orders in the counting of Omer: From the top down (the way we regularly count, beginning with *Chesed of Chesed*) Lag B'Omer is *Hod of Hod*. From the bottom up Lag B'Omer is *Tiferes of Tiferes* (see *Sichas Lag B'Omer* 5701). Ultimate humility and selflessness (*Hod of Hod*) achieves the ultimate beauty (*Tiferes of Tiferes*) - *Sichas Lag B'Omer* 5710.



Exercise

**Day 33 in the Omer count -
Hod of Hod: Humility in Humility**
Everyone has humility and modesty in their hearts, the question is the measure and manner in which one consciously feels it. Am I afraid to be too humble? Do I mask and protect my modesty with aggressive behavior? Humility must also be examined for its genuineness. Is my humility humble? Or is it yet another expression of arrogance? Do I take too much pride in my humility? Do I flaunt it? Is it self-serving? Is my humility part of a crusade or is it genuine?

Exercise for the day:
Be humble just for its own sake.



Lag B'Omer and Moshiach

With this book (Zohar) of yours, the people will be redeemed from exile with mercy - Zohar III, 124b

In the sixth century of the sixth millennium, the gates of the supernal wisdom will be opened, as will the springs of the earthly wisdom, preparing the world to be elevated in the seventh millennium - Zohar I, 117a

LESSONS FROM RASHBI'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Rashbi: Torah is His Total Occupation - Toraso umnos (Shabbos 11a).

Lessons:

- 🌀 Even when involved in other activities, like eating, sleeping and business, we must remember that these are all secondary to our primary “business” and “occupation” - Torah study.
- 🌀 Every one should achieve a measure of total focus in Torah study, so that in those moments at least there are absolutely no distractions (a “taste” of “*Toraso umnos*”).
- 🌀 This is especially true for children who are provided for and have the opportunity to dedicate most of their time to Torah study.
- 🌀 Use every free moment to study Torah. Enroll children in summer camps, where they are surrounded by Torah.

🌀 Designate time to study Torah regularly. Special emphasis to begin new Torah classes for those that may have never learned Torah before.

🌀 Special emphasis should be placed on intensifying and adding in the study of *Pnimiyus haTorah* - the function of Rashbi (Sichas Shabbos Parshas Emor 5734. Lag B'Omer 5737. 5738. Shabbos Parsha Bechukosei 5741. 5743)

Torah Scholarship and Refined Characteristics

Said R' Shimon to his students: my children, learn my midot for my midot are derived gifts from the gifted midot of R' Akiva - Talmud, Gittin 67a

“Midot” are explained in two ways:

1. “My *midot*” means “my Torah” (Rashi).
2. *Midot* literally, attributes, character, personality.

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R' Moshe, the Alter Rebbe's son, was learning the above Talmud with the Tzemach Tzedek and they were unsure which explanation of the word "midot" was correct - *midot* as Torah or *midot* literally? They did not have the courage to ask the Alter Rebbe. Suddenly, the Alter Rebbe walked in and began singing a *Niggun*...The Alter Rebbe said: Torah, which was given to us from heaven, epitomizes all fine character traits (*midot tovo*). Even the punishments are truly kind and good. Both opinions are one and dependant on each other: there cannot be *Midot Tovot* without Torah and there cannot be Torah without *Midot Tovot* - *The Friediker Rebbe* (Sefer HaSichos 5700 p. 107, paraphrased)

Rashbi and His Son R' Elazar Hiding in the Cave

Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Jose, and Rabbi Shimeon were sitting together, and Judah, a son of proselytes, was sitting near them. Rabbi Judah commenced the discussion by observing, "How fine are the works of this people [the Romans]! They have made streets, they have built bridges, they have erected baths." Rabbi Jose was silent. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai responded: "All that they made, they made for their own benefit. They built market-places, to set harlots in them; baths, to rejuvenate themselves; bridges, to levy tolls for them." Judah the son of proselytes went and related their talk, which reached the government. They decreed: "Judah, who exalted us, shall be exalted, Jose, who was silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris; Shimon, who censured us, shall be executed."

Rabbi Shimon and his son went and hid themselves in the study hall, and his wife brought him bread and a mug of water and they dined. When the decree became more severe... they went and hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob-tree and a wellspring of water were created for them. They would remove their garments and sit up to their necks in sand. The whole day they studied; when it was time for prayers they robed, covered themselves, prayed, and then put off their garments again, so that they should not wear out. Thus they dwelt twelve years in the cave.


Then Elijah the Prophet came and stood at the entrance to the cave and exclaimed: "Who will inform the son of Yochai that the emperor is dead and his decree annulled?" So they emerged.

Seeing a man plowing and sowing, they exclaimed: "They forsake eternal life and engage in temporal life!" Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately incinerated. A heavenly echo came forth and announced: "Have you emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" So they returned and lived there another twelve months, saying, "The punishment of the wicked in *Gehenna* is limited to twelve months." A heavenly echo then came forth and said, "Go forth from your cave!"

Now wherever Rabbi Elazar harmed [with his look], Rabbi Shimon healed. Said Rabbi Shimon to his son, "My son! You and I are sufficient for the world."

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On the eve of the Sabbath before sunset they saw an old man holding two bundles of myrtle and running at twilight. “What are these for?” they asked him. “They are in honor of the Sabbath,” he replied. “But one should suffice you?” they asked. “One is for ‘Remember [the Shabbat day]’ (Exodus 20:8) and one is for ‘Keep [the Shabbat day]’ (Deuteronomy 5:12)].

Said Rabbi Shimeon to his son: “See how precious are the *mitzvot* to people of Israel.” Thereupon their minds were put at ease - Talmud, Shabbat 33b

Lessons/Exercises:

✿ Overcoming Obstacles

Though we live today, thank G-d, in good times, free from the decrees of the past, we all still face the “decree” of the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) that conspires and tries to convince us to be lax in our commitment to Torah and *Mitzvhas*. Teaches us the story of Rashbi (his miraculous survival despite the harsh Roman decree), that when a Jew determines to do whatever it takes to fight for his devotion to G-d and to G-d’s Torah, G-d Himself protects him and provides for him all his needs and resources to survive and thrive. (Sichas Lag B’Omer 5726)

✿ Repairing the World

After leaving the cave, where he was forced to hide for 13 years, Rashbi would ask “is there anything that needs repair?” Love your fellow means not just with you heart and words, but in action: Wherever you go,

whomever you meet, find a way to help and repair anything that may make another’s life easier (Sichas Lag B’Omer 5743)

UNIQUE POWER OF RASHBI: Facing Challenges

Foundation of the World

Once Rav Shimon bar Yochai went out and saw that the world was dark and cloudy and all the lights had been sealed. He said to his son Reb Elazar, “Let us go and see, what G-d has planned for the world.” They went and came to one angel that looked like a large mountain, with thirty large torches of fire in its mouth. Rav Shimon said: “What are you planning to do?” He said, “I came to destroy the world, because there are not thirty righteous people in this generation, for G-d had [thus] decreed to Abraham...” Rav Shimon said to him, “I order you go in front of G-d and say to Him “Bar Yochai is in the world.”

The angel went in front of G-d and said: “Master of the universe, it is known to you what Bar Yochai said to me.” G-d said, “Go destroy the world and ignore Bar Yochai.” When he (the angel) returned, Rav Shimon saw the angel, and said, “If you do not leave I will decree on you that you will not return to heaven, rather you will be in a place of *Aza* and *Azael* (Hell). Go to G-d and say to Him: ‘If there are not thirty righteous, then twenty should suffice ... if not twenty then

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ten should suffice ... if not ten then two should be enough, and there is me and my son ... and if two is not good, then one should be enough, and that is me as it says A righteous man is the foundation of the world." At that moment a voice rang out of heaven and said, "Fortunate is your portion Rav Shimon, for G-d decrees above, and you rescind below. Certainly about you the verse is written "The will of those who fear Him is done." - Zohar I 105b; 255a

G-d is With Us in Pain

Rashbi: *Come and see how special and beloved is Israel by G-d, that wherever they were exiled the shechinah is with them...and also when they will be redeemed in the future the shechinah will be with them* (Talmud, Megillah 29a).

Lessons:

- 🌟 No matter what situation a person finds himself in, regardless of the formidable challenges he may be facing, the Divine presence is always there with him at his side, helping him along (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5740. 5747).
- 🌟 In every situation we can and must always feel ready - and yearn - for the *Geulah* (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5738)



Whenever it says simply R' Shimon, it means R' Shimon Bar Yochai
- Rashi, Shavuot 2b; Rambam's intro to Mishnayot



Rashbi: "I have seen the sons of heaven and they are but few. If there be a thousand, I and my son are among them; if a hundred, I and my son are among them; and if only two, they are I and my son" (Sukkah 45b)

Rabbi Akiva to Rashbi: Suffice it that I and your Creator know your power (Talmud Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 1:2. See Likkutei Sichos vol. 7 p. 346).

No Destruction

For Rashbi there was no destruction (of the Temple) - Pelach Harimon Shemos p. 7. When we connect with Rashbi on Lag B'Omer we can achieve a level that transcends destruction and exile.

Exempting the World from Judgment

Rashbi: "I am able to exempt the whole world from judgment from the day that I was born until now, and were Elazar, my son, to be with me [we could exempt it] from the day of the creation of the world to the present time, and were Yotam the son of Uzziah with us, [we could exempt it] from the creation of the world to its final end" (Sukkah 45b)

Why is Rashbi, more than all the other great *tzaddikim*, able to exempt the world from

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judgment? It's insufficient to say that Rashbi earned this right due to his suffering, because there were other tzadikim that suffered greatly. One explanation may be that Rashbi was unique in his ability to draw down to an earthly plane the blessings from above. Which is why his *yahrzeit* (on Lag B'Omer) is distinguished from all others in it being a day of rejoicing. So too Rashbi is able

to draw down the mercy necessary to nullify and exempt any judgment on earth (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5730).

Difficult times

Rashbi is worthy to be depended upon in difficult times (Berochos 9a), "difficult times" includes the difficult times of exile (Shaar Yissachar, end of Lag B'Omer discourse)

Rashbi's disciples - the Chevraya-

Many of his teachings were passed on orally to his close associates and disciples, called the *chevraya*, and to their disciples, and they committed some of his teachings to writing, probably over a period of several generations. Among the *chevraya* were Rabbi Shimon's son, R. Elazar; his scribe R. Aba; R. Yehuda; R. Yossi ben Yaakov; R. Yitzchak; R. Chizkiya; R. Chiya; R. Yossi; and R. Yaakov bar Idi.



BLESSING IN DISGUISE?

Story and lesson

Rashbi once sent his son, Rabbi Elozor, to a couple of distinguished sages for a blessing. Rabbi Elozor returned to his father shocked: "Not only did they not bless me, he exclaimed, "they have caused me anguish!" When Rashbi heard the words that the sages stated to Reb Elozor, he declared "All their words are really blessings!" (Moed Koton 8a). Rashbi, the master of the "inner Torah," was able to see the inner and deeper blessings embedded in these words. (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5746)

A DEEPER PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Lag B'Omer: Celebrating the Unconscious

To understand the deeper meaning of these blessings dressed up in the "garments" of "curses" requires a penetrating look into the forces that lay beneath the surface of existence in general.

There are two types of wisdom, which correspond to two types of experience:

- 1 Conscious or revealed wisdom - which comprehends conscious or revealed experience. This is the wisdom of most sciences - physical, social and political - the understanding of our empirical and sensory experiences (what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell).
- 2 Unconscious or hidden wisdom - which relates to the unconscious and hidden dimensions of reality, the supersensory energy that makes existence tick.

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The Torah too has these two corresponding dimensions: The Outer Torah, it's revealed dimension (*nigleh*), and the Inner Torah, hidden beneath the surface (*nistar*). The deeper meaning - and inner dimension - of all experience is to be found in what is called the "inner wisdom."

On the surface things may appear one way. Beneath the surface they may appear entirely different, sometimes even diametrically opposed as to the way they seem on the outside.

Take yourself as an example: How much of your outside (body language, facial expressions, conversations) expresses your inner self? Indeed, the deeper you travel into the intimate recesses of your psyche, the fewer words we have to express yourself. Sometimes a laugh, a cry, an "oy-vey" expresses more than volumes can. On the deepest level silence is often the most profound expression of all (the "silent voice" in the words of the Zohar).

This is because the outer world and the inner world are two entirely different, even dichotomous, paradigms. How does your conscious match up with your unconscious? Do you even want to know?

This explains why Rabbi Shimon was the one to recognize the profound blessings bestowed on his son, Rabbi Elazar:

R' Shimon is the primary source of the "Inner Torah." Coupled with his Talmu-

dic genius, Rabbi Shimon is the preeminent mystic of his times, the author of the Holy Zohar - the classic text of the inner wisdom of *Kabbala*. R' Shimon therefore was most fittingly able to see beneath the surface of the sages' expressions and reveal their inner meaning - the profound blessings they carried, blessings that come from the "hidden" and "unconscious" cosmic levels, greater than blessings that are expressed in a revealed way.

Powerful Personal Lesson

Lag B'Omer helps each of us can recognize that in our lives we receive two types of blessings, corresponding to our two forms of experience: Conscious and unconscious.

There are blessings that are apparent and revealed for all to see. But then there are blessings that are camouflaged, sometimes in "garments" that don't appear to the naked eye to be blessed.

But the naked eye is just that: Naked. It sees very little and understands even less.

Lest it be misunderstood, by all means we always ask for revealed blessings, and we deserve to see with our naked eyes the gifts of life. Yet, when we are faced with a seemingly insurmountable difficulty, never underestimate the possibility of it containing profound blessings, and your ability to reveal them.

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Yes, after all is said and done, we were given the power to reveal the “unrevealed.” G-d created and gave us the resources, but He concealed them in this world of ours. Everything valuable in the world lies hidden. From precious stones to oil, from hidden potential to genius

talents. We have the ability - and responsibility - to excavate these resources and bring them to the surface.

On Lag B'Omer, the Rashbi's ability to see and reveal the inside becomes more accessible to us.

Translation of Zohar describing Rashbi's Final Day on Earth

We have learned: On the day that R' Shimon was to depart the world he began arranging his teachings. The Disciples gathered together at the house of R' Shimon. Before him were R' Elazar his son, R' Abba and the other disciples, so that the house was filled. When R' Shimon looked up and saw that the house was full, he wept and said, “On another occasion, when I was deathly ill (as mentioned in the *Addenda to Zohar Devarim*), R' Pinchas ben Yair was with me. While I was choosing my place [in the Garden of Eden] they granted me until now. When I returned, a fire surrounded me and it never ceased, so that no person could come in to me without permission. Now I see that it has ceased, and so the house has filled up.

While they were sitting R' Shimon opened his eyes and saw what he saw. Then fire surrounded the house, so that everyone fled outside leaving only R' Elazar and R' Abba. The remainder of the disciples sat outside. R' Shimon said to R' Elazar his son, “Go outside and see if R' Yitzchak is here. I made a promise to him [that he would live until the day of my passing and that I would take him into the Garden of Eden (see Zohar I, 118a). Tell him to put his affairs in order and then come and sit with me. Happy is his lot!”

R' Shimon arose. He then sat again, smiling and happy, and he asked, “Where are the Disciples?” R' Elazar arose and brought them in. They sat down before R' Shimon.

R' Shimon raised his hands in prayer and made his supplications with great joy. Then he said, “Those who were in the *Idra* [Rabba] are invited. They all went out and only R' Elazar his son, R' Abba, R'

Yehuda, R' Yose and R' Chiya remained. Meanwhile, R' Yitzchak arrived, and R' Shimon said to him, “How fortunate is your lot. How much joy should be added to you on this day!” R' Abba was sitting behind R' Shimon's shoulders and R' Elazar before R' Shimon.

R' Shimon said, “Now is an auspicious time. I wish to enter the *World to Come* without shame. For the holy matters that I did not reveal until now, I wish to reveal in the presence of the *Shechina*, so that no one will say that I left the world without fulfilling my task and that I concealed in my heart until now so that they would come with me to the *World to Come*. I will present them to you; R' Abba shall write, and R' Elazar my son will review them, and the remaining Disciples must whisper them in their hearts.” R' Abba rose from behind R' Shimon's shoulders. R' Elazar continued sitting before R' Shimon. R' Shimon said, “Arise, my son, for another will sit in that place.” R' Elazar arose.

R' Shimon wrapped himself [in his *talit*]. He sat down and said: “ 'The dead do not praise G-d, nor do those who go down into Silence (Psalms 115:17).' 'The dead do not praise G-d...' - this surely means those who are called 'dead' [even when they are alive], for G-d is called '[eternally] living', and He dwells among those who are also called 'live' [the righteous] and not among those who are called 'dead' [even during their lifetimes, for they do not cleave to G-d, the Source of Life]. The end of the verse states, '...nor do those who go down into Silence' - those who descend to Silence will remain there. [i.e., only those who descend to Silence permanently will not praise G-d, whereas those who experience a temporary spiritual anguish (*Gehinom*) after death do return to utter G-d's praises.] But those who are called alive are different; the Holy One, blessed be He, desires their honor.”

Idra Zuta, Zohar III, 287b-296b
(Translated by Moshe Miller)