



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## Sicha Summary

Chelek 17 | Behar -Lag B'omer

### The Context:

In many years we read the fourth chapter of *Pirkei Avos* on the Shabbos of *parshas Behar*. Lag BaOmer, which commemorates the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, also often falls in the week of *parshas Behar*. In the fourth chapter of *Avos*, there is a teaching of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

“Rabbi Shimon would say: There are three crowns — the crown of Torah, the crown of *kehunah*, and the crown of kingship — but the crown of a good name surmounts them all.” (*Avos* 4:13)

Being that this specific teaching was placed in the chapter that is read during the week of Rabbi Shimon’s *yahrzeit*, it must express the fundamental essence of his life work, and it follows that it should align with the theme of *parshas Behar* as well.

### The Preliminary Explanation:

*Parshas Behar* devolves from a plane of spiritual transcendence to describe the possibility of moral degeneration. The name of the *parshah* refers to Mount Sinai, where the Jewish people beheld G-d face to face and received the Torah. Yet the Torah goes on to describe the cascading effects of one negative choice — disobeying the *shemita* laws — which can result in a person eventually selling himself as a slave to a gentile. (*Rashi* to *Vayikra* 26:1)

This structure is deliberate: The deepest divine revelations, “Sinai,” are meant to address and permeate the worldly reality in which a person is capable of falling into the deepest darkness. Torah is not intended to

remain “on the mountain” — it must address the human being in his most spiritually desperate moment.

Rabbi Shimon’s statement in the fourth chapter of *Avos* expresses this same theme, which also embodies Rabbi Shimon’s essential contribution to the world.

### **The Explanation:**

Rabbi Shimon was the prime exemplar of a sage for whom “Torah study was his occupation.” His entire existence was dedicated to Torah study for its own sake. And yet, Rabbi Shimon understood that his role was not to remain ensconced in an ivory tower of Torah, but rather, to influence and uplift others as an outcome of his studies.

To explain: In the grand task of transforming this world into a home for G-d, there are two roles to be played. One segment of the population must engage with the material reality, infusing it with Divine meaning by the performance of physical *mitzvos*. But if they are entangled in the material world, they will be unable to elevate it; instead, they will become prisoners to the reality they are meant to transform.

Those whose primary calling is the performance of *mitzvos* need inspiration from those who are detached from the physical, who are purely devoted to Torah. These spiritual transcendentalists can ignite the souls of the Jews entrenched in the world so that they, too, can experience that transcendence in moments throughout the day, rejuvenating them and empowering them to perform their task of material transformation.

Conversely, for those devoted to Torah study to be able to inspire those devoted to *mitzvah* observance, the former cannot be detached from the people and their reality; they must put the people and their needs at the forefront of their Torah study. The focus and intent of their study must be the impact they hope to have on the rest of the population.

But how to contain two opposing thrusts — to be immersed in Torah exclusively, and to have one’s mind trained on the people engaged in the

world? To do this, a sage must relinquish any personal spiritual ambition; his entire being must be dedicated to fulfilling G-d's will. When the sage's entire existence is infused with G-dliness, he can (like G-d) contain opposites.

Rabbi Shimon personified this fusion — he was involved in deep spiritual exploration, while at the same time, he had a tangible impact on the world around him. The *Talmud* relates that Rabbi Shimon hid in a cave for twelve years, immersing himself in mystical study. After emerging from the cave, his spiritual gaze was so intense that “wherever he gazed was incinerated immediately.” He returned to the cave for another year, after which he emerged once again. This time, “wherever Rabbi Shimon directed his gaze was healed.” (*Shabbos* 33b) His pure dedication to Torah was suffused with an awareness of those engaged with the world.

And at the end of Rabbi Shimon's life, on Lag BaOmer, this theme reached its full expression when he revealed the deepest secrets of the Divine to his students while on his deathbed. (*Zohar, Idra Zuta, 287b*) These secrets were known to other sages, but they would not reveal them. Rabbi Shimon, whose life's work was to fuse the highest spirituality with the lowest physical reality, brought these mystical secrets to light.

This is the meaning of the *mishnah*, which says, “Rabbi Shimon would say: There are three crowns — the crown of Torah... but the crown of a good name surmounts them all.” Commentators explain that the “crown of a good name” refers to those involved with physical *mitzvos*. Rabbi Shimon addresses his colleagues who bear the “crown of Torah” — those who are solely dedicated to pure Torah study — and urges them to place the “crown of a good name” above the crown of Torah, meaning, to orient their Torah study toward the goal of inspiring those engaged with the world.

Thus *parshas Behar*, Lag BaOmer, and the fourth chapter of *Avos* all coalesce around one theme — the need to fuse the highest mystical truths and revelations with the lowest worldly reality.