



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 22 | Lag BaOmer

Loving without Consuming

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1.

UNDERSTANDING LAG BAOMER

Among the several reasons given to account for the joy of Lag BaOmer:

- a) Rabbi Akiva's disciples (who were dying "in the period between Pesach and Shavuot")¹ "stopped dying."²
- b) The festival of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai³ — the anniversary of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's passing⁴ (who instructed us to rejoice on the anniversary of his passing).⁵

Everything in the Torah is precise. Thus, we must say that the content of both events is connected, aside from Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai being Rabbi Akiva's disciple.

This requires clarification: What connects the untimely deaths of Rabbi Akiva's disciples with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's passing?

For, seemingly, on the contrary, the two events are paradoxical: Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was among Rabbi Akiva's five surviving disciples, and "they upheld Torah."⁶ Meaning, the joy stemming from the end of the untimely deaths of Rabbi Akiva's disciples underscores Lag BaOmer as the day on which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the other (last remaining) disciples of Rabbi Akiva survived — the opposite of (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) passing away!

We can posit the following explanation: On the anniversary of a tzaddik's passing,⁷ "all his deeds, Torah and Divine service that he accomplished during

¹ *Yevamos* 62b.

² *Meiri* on *Yevamos* 62b, citing the Geonim; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch* (and Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*), "Orach Chaim," sec. 493, sec. 2 (and sec. 5 in Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*).

³ *Zohar*, vol. 3, 296b; see also *Zohar*, vol. 1, 218a.

⁴ *Pri Eitz Chayim*, "Shaar Sefiras HaOmer," ch. 7; **and in many other places.**

⁵ See *Pri Eitz Chayim*, "Shaar Sefiras HaOmer," ch. 7; Alter Rebbe's *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5564, p. 101, s.v., "lehavin inyan hilula deRashbi."

⁶ *Yevamos* 62b.

⁷ *Tanya*, "Iggeres HaKodesh," ch. 27.

his lifetime” converge. These (his deeds, etc.) constitute his actual **life**.⁸ Therefore, it is understood that on the day of his passing, a tzaddik attains his perfection,⁹ which shines openly.

Since the *avodah*¹⁰ of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was antithetical to the *avodah* of those (24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva) who died,¹¹ it was his *avodah* that brought about the **cessation** of their deaths (as explained below). Therefore, the anniversary of his passing (when his *avodah*’s perfection shines openly) is on the day the disciples stopped dying — on Lag BaOmer.

Nonetheless, this requires clarification: Since Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was the only one among the remaining five disciples to pass away on Lag BaOmer, we must say that the phenomenon that “they stopped dying” shares a special connection with him, more so than with the other four disciples.

How did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai differ in **this** respect from Rabbi Akiva’s other four disciples?

⁸ See the *biur* of *Iggeres HaKodesh*, *ibid*: “As known the life of the righteous is not a fleshly life, but a spiritual one.”

⁹ See Alter Rebbe’s *Siddur im Dach*, “*Shaar HaLag BaOmer*” (end of 304b ff.), where this concept is discussed in the context of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

¹⁰ {Divine service.}

¹¹ Note *Zohar*, vol. 2, 190b.

2.

LACK OF RESPECT

We will understand the answer after prefacing with an explanation of what our Sages taught about the 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva:¹² “They did not treat one another respectfully.” This teaching is perplexing:

Rabbi Akiva was the author of the dictum,¹³ “*Love your fellow as yourself* — this is a major principle of the Torah.” As such, how was it possible that his disciples — whom the Torah of Truth calls **Rabbi Akiva’s disciples** — would treat each other disrespectfully?

One of the answers offered: Each of his disciples had his particular way of understanding the Torah imparted to him by their mentor.¹⁴ Each disciple naturally served Hashem accordingly. (For one disciple, the primary *avodah* was the love of Hashem, while for a second, it was the fear of Hashem, and so on.) Each disciple was so immersed in his learning style and *avodah* that anyone who did not follow their path was deemed imperfect.

As disciples of Rabbi Akiva, who was passionate about the commandment to “love your fellow as yourself,” they did not focus on their personal growth. Instead, each disciple strove to influence his colleagues to serve Hashem in his distinctive way.

When other disciples failed to adopt his approach (as they were immersed in **their** own approach to serving Hashem) — {the relationships deteriorated, and} “they did not treat one another respectfully.” Since they were men of integrity (not, Heaven forbid,¹⁵ “espousing one sentiment verbally but harboring another in their hearts”), they could not genuinely respect one another if they believed their colleagues were **derelict** in their Divine service.

¹² *Yevamos* 62b.

¹³ *Vakira* 19:18; *Sifra*, “*Vayikra*” 19:18.

¹⁴ For their minds are not alike (see *Berachos* 58a; *Sanhedrin* 38a).

¹⁵ Rashi on *Bereishis* 37:4.

3.

RABBI AKIVA'S AVODAH

Since they were the **disciples** of Rabbi Akiva, understandably, their system of *avodah* — each of these disciples being fixed firmly in his particular approach to *avodah*, to the extent of rejecting the possibility that another approach might have merit — was rooted in Rabbi Akiva's own *avodah*.

On this basis, the following may be the explanation: **His entire life**, Rabbi Akiva longed for *mesiras nefesh*.¹⁶ As the Gemara relates, Rabbi Akiva told **his disciples**¹⁷: “**My entire life**, I have been **troubled**... when will I have the opportunity to fulfill it?”

Mesiras nefesh permeates a person's **entire** being. When a person is in a state of *mesiras nefesh*, nothing of his soul remains that is not infused with *mesiras nefesh*.

This deep feeling also characterized the *avodah* of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples:

Their yearning for *mesiras nefesh* was modeled to them by Rabbi Akiva. Consequently, every aspect of their Divine service was with *mesiras nefesh*; it took hold of and infused their entire existence. They were so devoted to this ideal, with all their hearts and souls, that (at the moment) no alternative was conceivable.

¹⁶ {In this context, literal self-sacrifice.}

¹⁷ *Berachos* 61b.

4.

THE ULTIMATE INTENT

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the greatness of the *avodah* of Rabbi Akiva's disciples, their *avodah* did not align with the ultimate intent.

On its own, the *avodah* of *mesiras nefesh* brings a person to “*ratzo*”¹⁸ — a desire to “leave” the world and reach Hashem with *klos hanefesh*.¹⁹ Therefore, although, for **these disciples**, *avodah* with *mesiras nefesh* was wondrously praiseworthy, it did not fully satisfy Hashem's intent. The Divine intent is for *mesiras nefesh*, “*ratzo*,” to gravitate to and lead to “*shov*,”²⁰ eliciting G-dliness **into the world**.²¹ This aim is achieved only through methodical *avodah* grounded in reasoning.

The above explanation, perhaps, is the (deeper) explanation of what our Sages taught:²² “They {these disciples} all died... because they did not treat one another respectfully, and **the world was desolate**.” Since their *avodah* was performed with *mesiras nefesh* and *ratzo*, the **world**, this world below, was “**desolate**” — uninhabitable — not a place “where man **dwelt**.” Instead, the world resembled a **desert** of holiness.²³ Divinity was not elicited in a way that, in the main, it would be fixed **below**.

This was the accomplishment of the five disciples: “They **upheld Torah**” — the *avodah* of *shov*.

¹⁸ {Lit., “running”; *ratzo* is a state of longing to cleave to Hashem; the soul's passion to transcend its material existence, and cleave to its Source.

¹⁹ {Rapture of the soul; a state in which the soul leaves the body due to an overwhelming desire to unite with Hashem.}

²⁰ {Lit., “returning”; *shov* is the soul's sober determination to “return” and fulfill its mission in the body, the resolve to live within the context of material reality, based on the awareness that it is Hashem's ultimate intent for us to refine the world, rather than try to escape it.}

²¹ See *Torah Or* 25b; Alter Rebbe's *Sefer HaMaamarim Es'haleich Lazniya*, p. 33, s. v., “*kasuv be'or ha'chaim*”; at length — *Or HaTorah*, “*Acharei*,” vol. 2, p. 538, s. v.. “*vechol halevavos*”; *Sefer HaMaamarim* 5649, s. v.. “*acharei mos*”; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 988 ff.

²² *Yevamos* 62b.

²³ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 2c, 4c ff.

These five disciples, being disciples of Rabbi Akiva, certainly had *mesiras nefesh*, as well. **On the contrary**, their *mesiras nefesh* was **perfect**, reflecting the *mesiras nefesh* of Rabbi Akiva, their teacher. Rabbi Akiva's "*ratzo*" was such that **"He entered in peace and** (and consequently, enabled) **he left in peace."**²⁴ **From the outset**, his *mesiras nefesh* and *ratzo* were of the sort that when "He entered (in a manner of) in peace," "he left in peace" — "*shov*." His approach when entering led Rabbi Akiva to depart later in peace. His desire to cleave to Hashem with a boundless *klos hanefesh* fueled him with increased vitality to the extent that his *avodah* of drawing down G-dliness **into the world** was perfected.

5.

THE 18TH OF IYAR

We can posit, by way of *remez*,²⁵ that for this reason, Lag BaOmer occurs on the 18th of Iyar:

There is a well-known adage²⁶ of our Rebbeim that the 18th of Elul "invigorates"²⁷ the *avodah* of Elul. The same can be said in our discussion: The 18th of Iyar (Lag BaOmer) "invigorates" the *avodah* for the month of Iyar.

The explanation of this adage is as follows: Regarding the months Nissan and Iyar, we know²⁸ that Nissan — the first month — represents the attribute of *chessed*,²⁹ and Iyar — the second month — represents the attribute of *gevurah*.³⁰

This is among the reasons offered for the connection between Rabbi Akiva's disciples dying and the days of counting the *omer* (which are mainly in

²⁴ *Chagigah* 14b (the version in *Ein Yaakov*; *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Chagigah* 2:1).

²⁵ {*Remez* is a method of commentary based on hints and allusions, sometimes based on the numerical value of letters.}

²⁶ *Sefer HaSichos* 5705, p. 122; et al.

²⁷ {The numerical value of יח, life, is 18.}

²⁸ Arizal's *Likkutei Torah*, "*Vayaitzei*," s. v., "*inyan hazayin kochvei leches*."

²⁹ {The attribute of kindness.}

³⁰ {The attribute of severity.}

the month of Iyar):³¹ It is because the *avodah* of Iyar is in the mode of *gevurah*, elevating from below to above, *ratzo*.

Lag BaOmer comes and “**invigorates**” this *avodah*, ensuring that the *ratzo* and elevation do not lead to death and “a desolate world.” On the contrary, Lag BaOmer **enlivens this** *avodah* so that it leads to the *avodah* of *shov* — “(He entered in peace, and) he left in peace.”

6.

RABBI SHIMON’S AVODAH

We find this method of *avodah* was **openly** employed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

For the thirteen years that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai dwelt in the cave, he was detached from the world. In fact, he couldn’t perform many practical mitzvos, and performed them only spiritually.³² This was an aspect of “*ratzo*.”

However, this brought about³³ that upon leaving the cave, his typical *avodah* was not about isolation and forsaking worldly habitations. On the contrary, “Any place stricken by Rabbi Elazar, Rabbi Shimon would heal”³⁴ — Rabbi Shimon sought to heal the **world**. And moreover, “He asked, ‘Is there something needing repair?’”³⁵ He **searched** for what he could set right **in** the world.

³¹ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 263 ff; et al.

³² *Likkutei Torah*, beg. of *Shemini*.

³³ Note that *Likkutei Sichos*, loc. cit., states that Rabbi Shimon’s spiritual excellency in this regard occurred only after he spent **thirteen** years in the cave. (In contrast, after twelve years, he remarked {about those cultivating the land}, “They abandon eternal life {of Torah study} and engage in temporal life {for their own sustenance}.”) It was specifically his additional year of seclusion that enabled his conduct of **healing** {what was stricken} **and resolving** {all difficulties}.

³⁴ *Shabbos* 33b.

³⁵ *Shabbos*, *ibid.*, at the bottom of the page.

This is because Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai — who said,³⁶ “My *middos* {which can be translated as attributes}³⁷ are the finest of the finest *middos* of Rabbi Akiva” — openly exhibited the consummate form of *avodah* practiced by Rabbi Akiva, his teacher: “He entered in peace, and he left in peace.”

Entering and remaining in the cave (*ratzo*) led him to the “*shov*” — repairing and settling the world.

An example of this approach was evident in his Torah learning: Before his long seclusion in the cave,³⁸ “Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai would **raise a difficulty**, and Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair would reply” with “twelve answers.”

In constrastm after Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai exited the cave, “Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair would raise a difficulty, and Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai **would respond**” with “twenty-four answers” — with “a double measure of wisdom.”³⁹

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Emor*, *erev Lag BaOmer* 5740 (1980)

³⁶ *Gittin* 67a.

³⁷ {In the original Gemara source, the word *middos* denotes rabbinical rulings.}

³⁸ *Shabbos* 33b.

³⁹ {*Iyov* 11:6.}