

This coming week, we will observe *Lag Ba'Omer*--traditionally considered to be the *yahrzeit* of the sage of the *Mishnah* and *Zohar*--Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 33b) relates the well-known story of Rabbi Shimon's 13 years as a fugitive from the Romans, during which he hid in a cave with his son and studied Torah. For 13 years, the two scholars had nothing to eat but the fruit of a carob tree. Upon being reunited with his relative, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, Rabbi Shimon expressed how fortunate he felt that he was able to study Torah single-mindedly, with no material distractions, during all those years.

Rabbi Yosef Chaim David Weinberg z"l (1955-2020; *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Be'er Avraham-Slonim, whose *yahrzeit* also falls on *Lag Ba'Omer*) notes that Rabbi Shimon's attitude and experience are consistent with his position that a person should devote himself entirely to Torah study and his needs will be provided for (see *Berachot* 35b). A person like Rabbi Shimon is even exempt from prayer, says the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 11a). R' Weinberg suggests that this exemption is given because a person like Rabbi Shimon has no needs for which to pray; he is already assured that his needs will be met.

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 35b) states that Rabbi Shimon's way is not for everyone; most people need to combine Torah study and work. Nevertheless, writes R' Weinberg, everyone can be like Rabbi Shimon for a short time--setting aside an hour or some other amount of time when he studies Torah and nothing in the world can distract him. We say in *Ma'ariv*: "We will rejoice with the words of Your Torah... For they are our life!"--thus declaring that we share Rabbi Shimon's ideals, and we must follow through in practice. (*She'eir* Yosef)

## Shabbat

**"You shall count for yourselves--from the day after the *Shabbat*, from the day when you bring the *Omer* of the waving--seven weeks, they shall be complete." (*Vayikra* 23:15--in this week's *Parashah*)**

*Rashi* z"l explains: "From the day after the *Shabbat*" means "from the day after the first day of *Pesach*." [Until here from *Rashi*]

The *Gemara* (*Menachot* 65a) relates that a sect known as the *Tzedukim* (Sadducees) insisted that *Shavuot* must always fall on Sunday because, they claimed, our verse places the beginning of the *Omer*-counting on Sunday ("from the day after the *Shabbat*"). They rejected the *Torah She'be'al Peh* / Oral Law, and they therefore rejected the tradition cited by *Rashi* that "*Shabbat*" in our verse refers to the first day of *Pesach*.

Granted that such is our tradition, but why, in fact, does the Torah call the first day of *Pesach* "*Shabbat*"? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) explains:

*Midrash Tehilim* relates that the guardian angel of the Egyptians argued to *Hashem* before the Splitting of the Sea, "How are these (*Bnei Yisrael*) different from these (the Egyptians)? These are idolators and these are idolators!" The *Midrash* relates *Hashem's* answer, but we must understand the angel's question, for the *Gemara* and *Midrashim* indicate in a number of places that *Bnei Yisrael's* act of setting aside and slaughtering the *Korban Pesach* was itself a rejection of idolatry. How, then, could the angel argue, "These are idolators"?

R' Charlap answers: *Bnei Yisrael's* rejection of idolatry in the waning days of the exile in Egypt was not of their own initiative. Rather, it was the product of the overwhelming Presence of G-d that they experienced. Thus, argued the angel, *Bnei Yisrael* are, at their core, still idolators.

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**“But on the tenth day of this month it is *Yom Ha’kippurim* / the Day of Atonement; there shall be a holy convocation for you . . .” (23:27)**

**“On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the Festival of *Sukkot* ...” (23:34)**

Why does *Sukkot* follow so closely after *Yom Kippur*? R’ Don Segal *shlita* (Yerushalayim and Brooklyn, N.Y.; a leading contemporary teacher of *Mussar*) explains:

During the High Holidays, in general, and on *Yom Kippur*, in particular, a person reaches awesome heights. If he needed to re-enter everyday life immediately after *Yom Kippur*, he would lose everything that he had gained in the preceding days. Therefore, *Hashem* gave us *Sukkot* to ease the transition. Eat--but in the *Sukkah*. Sleep--but in the *Sukkah*. Relax--that, too, in the *Sukkah*. In this way, every mundane activity becomes a *Mitzvah*, and we are witnesses to the fact that we can elevate ourselves in everyday life. What we gained on *Yom Kippur* does not need to be lost.

(*Chovat Ha’adam Al Iggeret Ha’Ramban* p.50)

**“Outside the Curtain of the Testimony, in the Tent of Meeting, Aharon shall arrange [the *Menorah*], from evening to morning, before *Hashem*, continually . . .” (24:3)**

Our Sages say that the *Menorah* testifies that the *Shechinah* / Divine Presence rested on the Jewish People. How so?

R’ Kalman Chaim Meitkes z”l (*Skolka Maggid*; Lithuania and New York; died 1932) explains: Commentaries write that the *Shechinah* rested on the *Aron* / Holy Ark, causing it to shine so brightly that a *Kohen* could walk in the otherwise dark Sanctuary by its light. The *Menorah*’s purpose was to create a second light source, so that the *Kohen* would not benefit from the light created by the *Shechinah*’s presence. Thus, the need for a *Menorah* testifies that the *Shechinah* rests on the Jewish People.

(*Chemdat Chaim*)

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R’ Charlap continues: This explains why the first day of *Pesach* is called “*Shabbat*.” What distinguishes *Shabbat* from the festivals is that man has no input into when *Shabbat* comes (unlike the festivals, whose timing *Bet Din* can influence by making leap months and leap years). That first *Pesach* also, when *Hashem* took *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt, took place when *Hashem* was “ready,” with no input from *Bnei Yisrael*. Indeed, the angel had a valid argument that *Bnei Yisrael* were not deserving, for their abandonment of idolatry was, in a sense, forced on them by the fact that they witnessed *Hashem*’s revelation.

Why did *Hashem* “force” their *Teshuvah*? R’ Charlap explains: *Hashem* wanted to demonstrate His love for the Jewish People--a love that is not conditioned on our good deeds. The *Tzedukim*, having distanced themselves from *Hashem*, had no conception of this love; therefore, they could not understand that the Exodus was “*Shabbat*-like” in its timing, and they could not interpret “*Shabbat*” as referring to *Pesach*.

(*Mei Marom* Vol. XV p.73-74)

**“You shall sanctify him, for he offers the food of your *Elokim*.” (21:8)**

The *Kohanim* were divided into 24 *Mishmarot* / “watches,” each of which served in the *Bet Hamikdash* for one week at a time. Each *Mishmar* was further divided into family groups, each of which served for one day of his *Mishmar*’s week. Thus, the average *Kohen* served in the *Bet Hamikdash* only twice a year, one day every 24 weeks.

R’ Avraham Elkanah Kahana Shapira z”l (1914-2007; *Rosh Ha’yeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel) asks: Because a *Kohen* worked two days a year, he should be shown honor and given tithes all year round?!

He answers: In order to be fit to represent the Jewish People in the *Bet Hamikdash* on two days of the year, the *Kohen* must work on himself every day of the year. For that, he deserves honor!

(*Imrei Shefer* p.147)

**“You shall not desecrate My holy Name . . .” (22:32)**

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: Know that the greatest losses that the general populace experiences are caused by the tongue, for people say *Hashem*’s Name in vain, and also without proper awe. Our Sages explained the phrase (*Yeshayah* 1:3), “*Yisrael* does not know,” as a reference to this phenomenon. In addition, people are not careful about the cleanliness of the place where they mention *Hashem*’s Name, and they also are not careful to have clean hands when they do so.

R’ Yonah continues: The *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 7b) ostracizes one who says *Hashem*’s Name in vain, and such a person is not trusted to take an oath. The *Gemara* also says that a person who hears someone say *Hashem*’s Name in vain is obligated to ostracize him, and if he does not, he himself (the one who heard the Name being said in vain) is ostracized by Heaven.

(*Sha’arei Teshuvah* 3:61)

**“You shall not eat bread or roasted kernels or stalks until this very day, until you bring the offering of your *Elokim*.” (23:14)**

R’ Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z”l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) writes: The Torah’s prohibition on eating *Chadash* / the new crop before the *Omer* sacrifice is brought applies to the grain in three different states: bread, kernels, and stalks, as our verse indicates. It is wondrous to note, R’ Mintzberg observes, that we have three *Mitzvot* that involve separating the “*Reishit*” / “first” of the produce, corresponding to the three states just mentioned: When the grain is still on the stalk, we have a *Mitzvah* to separate the *Omer*. When the kernels have been removed, we have a *Mitzvah* to separate *Terumah*. Finally, when it is made into bread (dough), we have a *Mitzvah* to separate *Challah*. This reminds us that, no matter what state the grain is in, it all comes from *Hashem*.

(*Ben Melech Al Ha’Torah*)