

## פרשת אמר-ל"ג בעמר

Lag Baomer is a joyous and festive holiday that we celebrate to commemorate the passing of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai. What is the special significance of this day, and what makes R' Shimon so unique in that we celebrate his Yahrzeit with such excitement? R' Shimon was the redactor of the Zohar Hakadosh and brought to light the secrets of the Torah. The night before he passed away, he gathered his students- R' Abba being his primary student - and gave over many secrets of the Torah which until that day had not been allowed to be disclosed from heaven.

What makes the Zohar so crucial to us? How are we to appreciate and connect with the Zohar when most of us hardly understand even the simple meaning of what the Zohar is saying?? To answer these questions we need to understand a few concepts and to explain certain Gemarachs that speak of R' Shimon.

One Gemarah tells a story of Rabbi Akivah- the rabbi of R' Shimon- who when seating his students in front of him to teach them Torah he sat R' Meir in the front and R' Shimon in the back. When R' Akivah realized that R' Shimon was disheartened because he was placed in the back, he told R' Shimon: "don't worry it is enough that Hashem and I know your value". After hearing this, R' Shimon felt better.

In Another Gemarah, R' Shimon advises his students to study his Torah since his Torah was: "תרומות מתרומות מידותיו של ר' עקיבא"- "a portion of the portion from the Torah of R' Akivah".

In another Gemarah R' Shimon declared that he is able to "exonerate the entire world from judgment"!

To explain these Gemarot we need to understand certain concepts.

There is Chochma and Bina. Chochma represents knowledge, and Bina represents an ability to use this knowledge to extrapolate and apply these ideas to various different topics. Chochma is called Abba (father) and Bina is called Ima (mother). Chochma is called “Abba” (father), because it is knowledge that is self contained, like a father who cannot reproduce. Whereas Bina is called Ima (mother), like the Pasuk says "כי אם לבינה תקרא"-since it takes the knowledge and goes forward and expands it like a mother who reproduces and multiplies.

Aside from being referred to as Ima, Bina is also known as Teshuvah. After sinning, a person repents and does Teshuvah. This is like a child who cries because it realizes that it did something wrong and runs to its mother. The mother represents Teshuvah and as mentioned, the mother also represents Bina. We also see Teshuvah associated with Ima- mother when the Jews sinned with the golden calf, Hashem later instructed them to bring a as a Korban saying: “let the mother come and clean up its child’s mess” the mother is the Teshuvah which cleans up the mess of the child (the sins).

Bina- Ima- Teshuvah are all linked. The Zohar Hakadosh is compared to Bina since it represents the deepest level of the Torah and can therefore be expounded the furthest. Since the Zohar is connected to Bina, it is also connected to Teshuvah (as mentioned Teshuvah is linked with Bina). By simply reading the Zohar one effects Teshuvah for his Neshama. The Hida z'l writes, that a person who has sinned should read five pages of Zohar every day. Even if he has no idea of the meaning of what he is reading, and even if he *misinterprets* the Zohar, it is still beneficial to read!! The Zohar has a detergent like effect that cleans the stains of a person’s sins.

There are fifty levels to the Torah. Moshe Rabeinu had momentarily reached the 50<sup>th</sup> level after leaving Egypt (as hinted to by the fifty plagues Hashem inflicted on the Egyptians at the Yam Suf- fifty corresponding to the fifty levels of the Torah). After the sin of the golden calf Moshe was taken down from the 50<sup>th</sup> level as the Pasuk says לך "לך-lit; “go down”. לך is numerical value of fifty. Hashem was telling Moshe: לך—from the 50<sup>th</sup> level- רד go down!

The 50<sup>th</sup> level of the Torah is free from דינים-judgment and the Satan has no association at all with it. The entire Torah is names of Hashem, but on the 50<sup>th</sup> level, the names are the most clear and revealed.

The Zohar Hakadosh is Torah from the 50<sup>th</sup> level!! It is a level of Torah that even Moshe Rabeinu did not have access to! The Zohar is uniquely referred to as "Hashem's Torah", as the Pasuk in Tehilim says: "גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך" - "open my eyes so that I may perceive wonders from your Torah". The word נפלאות-wonders can be read פלאות-fifty wonders, referring to the 50<sup>th</sup> level that is categorized as **your Torah-מתורתך**.

Hazal explain that Hashem says; "תורה חדשה תצא מאתי" - "a new Torah will emerge from me" this new Torah is the Zohar Hakadosh and it was given on Lag Baomer. Lag Baomer is 17 days before Shavuot. The Pasuk says: "כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם" - "I gave you a good teaching, do not leave my Torah". טוב equals 17 this refers to the "new Torah" that was given 17 days before the date of תורה. Hashem instructs us not to leave **his Torah** which is the Zohar.

There is a hint to this in the Pasuk in Parashat Devarim "ואת גולן בבשן למנשי" - "the area of Golan in Bashan for the people of Menashe". Now, in the Galut, in the Shamayim there is a prosecuting angel that tries to make our Misvot and good deeds "forgotten", but through the reading of the Zohar its sweetens the judgment and we are spared from this prosecuting angel. The word גולן is like the word גלות - exile, and למנשי is like the word נשני - to forget (like it says in the Pasuk when Yosef named his son Menashe "כי נשני" - "made me forget"). In the גולן (Galut), there is an angel trying to make our Misvot מנשי (forgotten), the remedy for this is: בשן. The word בשן stands for נשערי בינה - "50 gates of wisdom" which refers to the Zohar Hakadosh. The Zohar protects us from the prosecuting angel.

The most optimal place for understanding the Zohar and the 50<sup>th</sup> level of Torah is in ארץ ישראל as the Pasuk in Tehilim says; "לקדושים אשר בארץ המה" - "the holy ones that are in the land" the word המה equals 50 showing us that the land (Israel) is the best place for understanding the 50<sup>th</sup> level. There is also the Pasuk regarding the spies that Moshe sent into Israel that says; "ראשי בני ישראל המה" - "they were the heads of the Jews" again we find this word המה which equals 50 in regards to ארץ ישראל.

The רמב"ן wrote in his famous letter to his son ; "אל תטוש תורת אמך" - "do not forsake the Torah of your mother". The רמב"ן was hinting to the importance of the Zohar which as mentioned, is connected to Bina which is Teshuvah-Ima (mother) and therefore called the Torah of **your mother**.

This explains the Gemarah's mentioned above. R' Shimon described his Torah as "Terumah"- "a portion" of the Torah of R' Akivah. Why did he choose this term Terumah? The word Terumah normally refers to the obligation that a person has to the Kohen. The obligation of Terumah is to give 1/50<sup>th</sup> of the produce to the Kohen. We now understand why he chose this word, R' Shimon was explaining that the Torah that he needed from R' Akiva was this 50<sup>th</sup> level of Torah. He had 49, but he was searching for the 50<sup>th</sup> level! R' Akiva was the one who taught the concepts of the Zohar to R' Shimon. It was this 50<sup>th</sup> level - the Zohar Hakadosh - that R' Shimon was alluding to when he described his Torah as: "תרומות מתרומות מידותיו של ר' עקיבא" - "a portion of the portion from the Torah of R' Akivah".

R' Akivah knew the concepts of the Zohar. This was hinted by Moshe Rabeinu when he asked Hashem to give the Torah thru R' Akivah, he specifically chose R' Akivah because he accessed the 50<sup>th</sup> level of which Moshe Rabeinu was taken down from. (If R' Akivah knew of the Zohar why didn't he teach it himself to the people why was only R' Shimon able to teach it? To bring down lofty concepts to the people is a very difficult task. R' Akivah knew the concepts but R' Shimon's greatness was that he was able to make it understandable on many levels and break it so that even the simple people can benefit from the words!)

This also explains the Gemarah of R' Akivah placing R' Shimon in the back row. He put R' Meir in the front to signify that R' Meir was representing the Torah that was until that point revealed. He placed R' Shimon in the back and explained to him that for the time being, it is sufficient that I and Hashem know your value. In other words for right now no one else is to know the knowledge you possess of the Zohar so "stay in the back" and keep it hidden. There will come a time in the future that you will reveal it to the world. It also explains what R' Shimon meant when he said that with the Zohar the Jews will go out from Galut, because the Zohar brings a person to Teshuvah and cleanses the Jews of their sins, this brings the Geulah closer.

We see today a wave of תשובות בעלי and people coming back to religion. It is no coincidence that we also see a proliferation in the study of the Zohar and many Sefarim that explain the Zohar on a somewhat basic level. R' Shimon said; "with the Zohar we will go out from exile", through the study and reading of Zohar we connect with Teshuvah and the 50<sup>th</sup> level of the Torah that is free from judgment and will ultimately end our exile.

This is the cause for the great celebration of Lag Baomer. We celebrate in the receiving of the Zohar and all the holiness and light that it brings us. We light fires on Lag Baomer to commemorate our receiving the Zohar. The word Zohar means; light, or fire. We celebrate in receiving the key to the exit of our exile, and in the Matan Torah-receiving of the “New Torah” which is called “Hashem’s Torah” and its sweetening of our judgment and its power to bring us all to Teshuvah.