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SEFIRA READER

Chapter 1

***Sfiras HaOmer* – Preparing the World for Torah**

Beginning with the second night of Pesach we count forty-nine days until Shavuos. This Torah commandment is known as the *mitzvah* of *Sfiras HaOmer*. We will begin our discussion with a couple of basic questions concerning the *mitzvah*, and in answering these we will attain a small grasp of the depth of what we accomplish by counting *Sfiras HaOmer*.

Firstly, the manner in which we count, in ascending order, begs a question. In counting between Pesach and Shavuos we are excitedly counting the days until we receive the Torah Moshe promised Hashem would give us. This being so, wouldn't it make more sense to count in descending order, counting down in anticipation? **Shouldn't we want to focus on the fact that we are getting closer and closer, as opposed the amount of days in between?** Additionally, *Sfiras HaOmer* gets its namesake from the *korban Omer* (a barley offering) brought on the second day of Pesach, what's the connection? Why is the first day of Pesach left out of the count?

Pesach and *Matzah* – Beyond Cosmos

As we have previously explained (see Even Shesiya Pesach reader) ***Chametz* represents the dimensions of time and space** because it is with **time** that the dough rises and takes up more **space**. The dimensions of time and space is the **place** that allows for the potential of the existence of evil. The physical dimension of time and space is controlled by the Law of the Jungle – **first** come **first** serve. The **inflated ego** of *chametz* is the rule of the day.

On Pesach we do not eat *chametz*, only *matzah*. *Matzah* represents the dimension above time and space – it doesn't take up space the way *chametz* does. It therefore takes much less time

to make, and due to a lack of leavening it lasts much longer than bread. In addition to this representation of timelessness, the fact that it doesn't decompose in the same way as bread represents *chametz's* potential for evil as opposed to *matzah's* pure essence. When Pesach enters there is a '**דילוג**', a jump to a higher level of existence beyond the physical realm.

The seven days of Pesach exist outside of the "*chametz* dimensions" and within the realm of *matzah*, but this isn't where we stay. Our ultimate purpose is to imprint the "**SEDER**" – **pattern of Pesach** onto this universe of time and space. The physical realm must be prepared for this goal. The same way metal must be smelted, purified and molten in order to receive its shape; the physical realm needs to undergo a refinement process in order to be imprinted with the intellectual order of the Torah. *Sfiras HaOmer* is the process of refining this universe so it can receive a higher dimension and a more lofty form. **The Zohar (Emor 97b) compares the seven weeks of the Omer to the seven days a niddah**, a ritually unclean woman, must keep in purity¹. **Seder night is like the hefsek tahara**, but just as a process of purification must occur before husband and wife can be reunited, so also during *Sfira* the physical world undergoes purification in order to receive the Torah. On Shavuos when receive the Torah, the universe is imprinted, this realm and the one above are fused together. **To express this unity between the two realms the Shtey HaLechem offering was brought in the Temple – the only chametz found in the regularly scheduled Korbanos of the whole year.**

On Pesach, **תג חרותינו**, there is no *chametz*, we are **free** of the evils of this world, and in the realm that is beyond evil. On Shavuos the two dimensions – *chametz* and *matzah* – are merged as one. *Sfiras HaOmer* is the stage in the middle which is necessary to prepare the physical realm to receive the dimensions we unnaturally lived in during Pesach.

¹ There is even a minority opinion that holds a woman should count each day, just like the *Sfira*.

Seder Night – The Catapult

The Seder night isn't part of the *Sfirah* is because it is like the *hefsek tahara* – it functions to get us out of the realm of *chametz* so that we have the capacity to rectify the physical realm. This is along the lines of what the *Chazal* tell us in *Gemora Brachos* (5b) "One who is imprisoned cannot liberate himself" i.e. he can only be helped by someone on the **outside**. During the following days of Pesach, **we work to rectify this world from the outside**. On the seventh day of Pesach we reach a major milestone in affecting the physical realm as we reconcile the physical system with the spiritual system (see Even Shesiya Pesach Reader end of Chapter 18). The first day of Pesach catapults us beyond the physical, the rest of the days of Pesach infuses us with supernatural energy, which is the secret why the Zohar (Shemos 183B) refers to Matza as *מזתה* medicine – or fortification against the "Yetzer Hara" and after the big tikkuun of the 7th day of Pesach with Kerias Yam Suf – breaking the shapeless physical world represented by water, we can **keep our heads above water** – literally and figuratively – and start fixing physically from within. This explains why the barley *korban Omer* was brought at the beginning of *Sfirah*. Barley was usually used as animal fodder, and bringing the *korban* expressed the intent to begin raising up our animal natures to receive the intellectual and spiritual dimension necessary to receive the Torah.

Why Count?

But what does the rectification of physical existence have to do with counting?
The universe of time, space, and matter is not complete by itself – it must take on the unifying form of the Torah. When physicality lacks the Torah's form it lacks unity because without the purpose that Torah provides, it has no internal coherence. Without the Torah the world lacks intellectual design, as all design is the product of thought, all of which point to purpose.

It is no coincidence that any shape can be expressed mathematically. From circles, triangles and parabolas, to complex geometrical shapes. All form is expressed by numbers, and that form is then imprinted on matter. **Numbers are a mental**

When we say there are three objects, whether the **construct**. When we say there are three objects, whether the three items have anything in common or not, it is only our minds that group them together and assign them the value three. From a physical standpoint each object stands alone. It is the mind that draws objects together and assigns them a number. **Numbers are the language of pure thought**. In this vein, the Vilna Gaon said that root of the Hebrew word for math, **למד**, is **למד** meaning thought. When matter has an intelligent design it is "**למד**" – important. The Torah's definition of "importance" is that it has **thought** invested in it.

This idea is reflected in *halachah*. There is a concept "**למד**" **למד** – something un-kosher that is normally sold by **number** objects, even if it constitutes less than one sixtieth of the pile. Since it has an assigned number it has the power of thought, which gives it importance, and hence cannot be annulled.

Counting Middos

During the days of the Omer we are working on refining our "middos" - character traits. Why are character traits called "middos" which literally means 'measures'? Character traits are very distinct traits that have their 'boundaries' in definition and in action. For instance: kindness is only kindness. Kindness is not inclusive of toughness. Toughness is only toughness and not inclusive of kindness. Kindness is a character trait that will produce a very specific type of actions. Toughness is a character trait that will produce a totally different type of specific actions. They are indeed 'concrete measurements' with rigid definitions of distinct personality traits. Another aspect of their **limitations** is that they are purely traits, habits, programming, and instincts but **not moral values**. **Moral values are a matter of conscience!** The Gemara (Eiruvin 100b) says that even if Torah would not have not been given we could have learned Mitzvos from the world around us. We could have learned not to steal from the ant. Ants do not steal from each other! If an ant touches something another ant will stay away even if the first ant is no longer holding it. But here's the catch: **they don't steal from each other but they steal from us!** If we leave food out on the counter they will invade it! Ants don't steal because of instinct, not as a matter of conscience. They have

a certain “middah” which is only a ‘measure’ – a specific program, not a moral value. Their ‘programming’ is only as far as each other, they have no ‘programming’ regarding other species. The Jewish people are not meant to copy the ants but to observe that the ants have this trait and **Abstract that trait into a moral value and as a matter of conscience.** When it becomes a moral value then you don’t steal from anybody! All character traits could be forces for good if they’re under the guidance of a conscience that’s making moral decisions. **Without a conscious even “good middos’ can be propelling forces for destructive acts.** During the days of the Omer we count a different “middah” every day. By counting we are investing thought into the middos. We are connecting them to the realm of thought and subjugating it to the conscious. Such a character trait is important (“chashuv”) because it is thought out – not a habit!

Addition

In our count we are adding up. Not the 3rd day of the omer but rather “**3 days in the omer**”. When character traits are distinct measurements onto their own they could be evil simply because they’re not balanced with the other character traits. There’s a time and place for each character trait. **In the adding we are connecting them to each other through thought. The conscience will be the arbitrator when it’s time for a character trait to be active and when to give way. Through the adding the character traits go beyond their distinct measurements to be cooperative and supplement each other.** By no coincidence there are 49 days to the omer. **The numerical value of the word “Middah” (“Mem” “Dalet” “Heh”) is 49. In course of these 49 days we are connecting these distinct measurements (Middos) to the realm of thought and through that to each other.** That’s what converts character traits into moral values.

Forty-nine has the numerical value of the words **לב טוב**, a good heart. Rav Yochanan Ben Zackai proclaimed this to be the most important positive character trait, as it includes all other positive traits². A person with a “good heart” means that he has a good

center of orientation, and therefore will eventually attain all other good traits.

The *B’nei Yisaschar* explains that this is what we are imprinting on physical reality in course of the forty-nine days of the *Omer*. Every day we are rectifying a particular trait that makes up the full scope of what having a “good heart” entails. Any other trait is merely a finer detail of these forty-nine.

Absorbing Days

In what way is the Sefira a construction of 50? Seemingly every day is alone and does not coexist with the day that came before it, or the day that comes after it. **Where does all this time coexist? In the “Tzelem” of the Jewish people!** The effect of any day of the Omer does not disappear into the past, it becomes a part of us and with every new day, we have more days in our construct. It is in the Jew and the Jewish collective that the days are piling up upon each other. **The construct that is being formed is the renewed “Tzelem” of the Jewish people and that new “Tzelem” is the vessel that will receive the Torah.** Counting the *Omer* is like the artist’s brush strokes across a canvas. After the first and second strokes there is not much to look at, but as the number of strokes compound a form emerges.

Seven-fold Commitment

The seven weeks of the Omer are parallel to the seven forces of nature, which are the same seven middos that make up the human personality. The Chiddushei HaRim explains that to swear is called a “**Shevua**”, which is from the same root as “**Sheva**” – 7 because it is a commitment with all the facets of your personality. Less than all 7 would not be a full commitment that qualifies as “**piv v’libo shavim**”- his mouth fully reflected everything that was in his heart. With this he explains why Maseches **Shavuos** has **49** “dapim” parallel to the days of the Omer because you need all 7 aspects of all 7 middos to be committed and **our commitment to the Torah has the Halachik standing of a “Shevua”** as we find

² See the *Mishnah Avos*, 2:13

throughout Chazal "Mushbah v'Omeid M'Har Sinai" – He already took an oath to uphold the Torah at Sinai.



Chapter 2

Chodesh Iyar – An Aura of Connection

Nissan and Sivan contain days of *Sefira*, but Iyar is the only month which is completely contained within *Sefiras HaOmer*. This month must have a special relationship with the concept of counting the *Omer*. What unique energies characterize the month of Iyar, and how are we changed when we enter this special month?

The Vav Connection

To understand the nature of Iyar and what it represents, we will look to the mystical text, *Sefer Yetzira*. *Sefer Yetzira* tells us "האורח בראשון" "the letter 'Vav' in thought". In order to understand this enigmatic idea, we must first understand the function of a 'Vav', as well as its symbolism. In Hebrew grammar the 'Vav' functions as a connector. When added to the beginning of the word it means "and". The "vav" *ha'mehapach – switching vav*, turns a verb from the past tense to the future tense and from future tense to past tense. By changing its tense to the opposite time frame, it effectively connects the past to the future.

³ When used in this way it is called the "vav ha'chibur – the connecting vav."
⁴ *Tiferes Yisroel*, chpts. 25,26. Only this basic idea was taken from his essay.

Physical connectors are also called **ד"ו"ו** *vavim*. The "Vav" *ha'amudim* in the *Mishkan* were pieces on the pillars that held the curtains. The word *vav* also means hook. Even the linear shape of the letter *vav* indicates the idea of connection – a line serves to connect two points.

The "Vav in thought" therefore refers to the power of connection in thought. This is the idea of "counting": "Assigning numbers" is a conceptual connection that we make in our minds. If three distinct objects are sitting on table, what says there are "three" items? The mind conceptually groups them together to say there are "three". There is no physical relationship between them; it is only the power of thought that connects them.

The energy of Iyar and the period of *Sefiras HaOmer* are one and the same, because counting itself is the connecting power of thought.

Shedding More Light

Iyar is referred to as *chodesh ha'ziv*, the month of the aura.

Maharal explains the usage of the word aura in regards to Iyar in this way: Iyar is the last month of spring before summer. It is a time when the world is filled with a distinctive glow. It's hot, but not too hot. Iyar doesn't have the same intense light and heat of summer, but it has the warm glow of late spring. The month is like a bridge between spring and summer.

Chazal use the word *ziv*, aura in a more spiritual context. They tell us that in the World to Come the righteous will sit and bask in the *ziv* of the *Shechinah*. *Ramchal* explains that the righteous benefit from the aura of the *Shechinah* only because the *Shechinah* itself is utterly intangible and beyond human comprehension. This is analogous to the experience of looking at an object. An aura describes the light that spreads from an object to our eyes. We can only see the reflected light rays, never the essence of the

object. Even if the object itself is what is giving off the light, all we see is the aura of the light that has been dispersed and reached our eyes.

Ramchal's explanation of the *ziv* of the *Shechinah* is in line with Maharal's explanation of the *ziv* of Iyar. A direct experience of the *Shechinah* would be too much to handle, so the righteous experience the *ziv* alone, similar to how Iyar's *ziv* is a lower, more subdued heat than the summer itself.

The *ziv* of Iyar also indicates how it functions as a connector between spring and summer, just like an aura connects an object with its observer. The whole month of Iyar is dedicated to connection. Besides connecting Nissan to Sivan and Pesach to Shavuot, in the coming chapters we will see how within Iyar we experience two more transitions, like passing over a double threshold leading through chamber within inner chamber.

Glorious Vav

According to the Kabbalistic understanding, every week of the *Sefira* is associated with one of the seven *Middos*, the seven modes Hashem uses to act in this world. On *Rosh Chodesh Iyar* we begin counting the week of *Tiferes* – the *Middah* associated with Yaakov Avinu.

The four letters of the *Shem Havaya*⁵ correspond with Avraham (*yud*), Yitzchak (*hey*), Yaakov (*vav*), and Dovid (*hey*). Yaakov is the *vav* because he connects the *Middos* of Avraham and Yitzchak. This trait of *Tiferes* gave him the status of "*Bechir She'B'Avos* – Chosen of the Patriarchs" because it gives him the ability to hold on to both extremes (Avraham being associated with *Chessed* – kindness, and Yitzchak with *Gevurah* – withholding and discipline) balancing the best of both, in addition to his own unique quality. When Yaakov was given the name Yisroel he closed the circuit of the *Avos*, thus allowing for the continuation of a Jewish people. This is why, unlike his father and grandfather, Yaakov had only Jewish children.

Rebbi said that the straight path is one that is "*tiferes* – glory for him and for people." Rambam explains that this is the middle path, which draws its power from a balance of opposite extremes.

Yaakov's letter is *vav* because *Tiferes* is the central *Middah* that holds all the edges together. It connects and unifies all extremes. The central theme of Iyar is the concept of *Tiferes* and connection. This month is contained entirely within *Sefiras HaOmer* because the whole concept of counting is only possible by being "in the middle." Being centered allows one to pull diverse things together, and connect one item to another through counting. This month we start to feel the aura, the *ziv* of our deep connection.

Iyar gives us the power of connection. We have the ability to be in touch with the Torah's aura, and we strive to reach it. We connect day by day, bringing us ever closer to the infinite.



⁵ Tetragramon: Y-H-V-H. The name associated with God's Being.

Chapter 3

Rebbe Akiva's Legacy

Rebbe Akiva vs Hillel

"And you should love your friend like yourself" Rashi brings from the Toras Kohanim the famous statement of Rebbe Akiva: "This is a **K'NAL GADOL**? - great inclusive principle in Torah". What does this mean? If he means to say that this encases the entirety of Torah, then what is he adding above and beyond what was said generations earlier by Hillel? The Gemara in Shabbos (31 A) relates that someone came to Shammai and asked to be taught the whole Torah whilst standing on one leg. Shammai pushed him away with "*Emes habinyan*" – a measuring stick used in construction. He went to Hillel who said, "what you hate do not do to your friend and the rest is commentary, go learn". What was Rebbe Akiva adding to what Hillel had already said? What was the person really asking when he said, teach me the whole Torah "on one leg"? What is the significance that Shammai pushed him away with this tool called "*Emes habinyan*"?

As much as myself?!

The *meforshim* are troubled by this great demand that the Torah placed on a person to love someone else as much as himself. How can this be fulfilled literally? This is especially troubling because we know it goes against the halacha of "*chayecha kodmin*", you must look out for your own safety first (Bava Metzia 62 A - see Ramban here). We can further ask this as a contradiction between statements of Rebbe Akiva. His statement brought by Rashi that "this is a great inclusive principle in Torah" would sound like it is to be taken literally. However, **Rebbe Akiva himself was the one who gave the ruling of "*chayecha kodmin*" and that one should not share his water if he needs it for his own survival**. How do we reconcile the contradiction to uphold the law of "*chayecha kodmin*" and yet fulfill love your friend like yourself literally?

Talmidei Rebbe Akiva

There is an irony here. Rebbe Akiva was the one who said to love your friend like yourself is a great inclusive principle in Torah and yet, he had twenty-four thousand students that died during the Omer because they did not conduct themselves in a manner of honoring each other. There is much that begs explanation in this story that's recorded in *Yevamos* 62b. First of all, the Gemara says there were "**twelve thousand pairs of students**". Why didn't the Gemara just say twenty-four thousand individual students? What is the significance that they were in 'pairs'? the Gemara tells us that they died in the Omer period. *Chazal* tell us elsewhere that they actually stopped dying on Lag B'Omer which is the reason for the joy and the cessation of the mourning. Why did they die during the Omer period which is the time to prepare for receiving the Torah? One would have thought that they should have died during the Three weeks, as that is when we were taken to task for "*sinas chinam*" - baseless hatred. Why were they taken to task for this during the Omer period and what changed mid-Omer on Lag B'Omer? A clue to all this is in the words of Rebbe Akiva that Rashi brings "this is a great inclusive principle **in Torah**" as if this command has something to do with preparing to receive the Torah, which is what we do during the Omer.

Why Fight?

Before we can analyze and explain **Rebbe Akiva's legacy**, that in the words of the Arizal, made him the "**pillar of Torah shebaal peh**", we need to make an observation about an interesting phenomenon that we find in Torah shebaal peh. The Gemara says (Kiddushin 30 B) "...even a Rebbe and talmid and even a father and son when they learn Torah become enemies to each other. But they do not move from there until they love one another". Why must this happen? It seems that this is not just an occupational hazard of learning Torah, but Chazal actually actively sought it out. When Rav Yochanan lost his chavrusa Reish Lakish, they set him up with Rav Eizar ben Padas who supported everything Rav Yochanan said with a b'raisa. Rav Yochanan didn't like that and said that he missed Reish Lakish, who would raise 24 questions on everything said and Rav Yochanan would have to give 24 answers and "**with that the learning expanded**" (Bava

Metzia 84A). We find that Rav Shimon bar Yochai in the Zohar urges his Talmidim to engage in the “battle of Torah”. Dissent and disagreement are not only a fact of life, **they were looking for it**. There are two explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, **the ‘sparks that fly’ in argumentation brings out details that would have remained hidden and undiscovered if everyone would have been in agreement**. There’s another function of great cosmic significance. All questions, all confusion, all areas of doubt are as a result of the imperfections of the world which affect our minds also. When one of the ‘chavrusas’ raises a problem, or poses a kasha, he is actually zeroing in and targeting a cosmic problem and the fact that he raised the question is good, otherwise the problem would have been ignored. His raising the problem is to raise a target for the other chavrusa to take aim at and shoot down with an answer and this ‘clears the air’ of confusion and doubt that the *sitra achara* wants to plague us with. The more the volleys back and forth, the more targets are raised and then shot down. With this Rav Chaim Vital explains why at the beginning of a day a person should learn *Iyun* with a tremendous amount of *pilpul* and he says that his Rebbe, the Arizal used to pose intense *pilpulim* of questions and answers to the point that he would sweat profusely. **This is all to clear the air and that’s why later in the day, a person can learn without pilpul or learn Kabbalah because for that day, the air has been cleared of the confusion that the *sitra achara* wants to plague us with.**

Unification

After the “battle of Torah” when the air is clear and we’re left with the many details that emerged in course of the “**shakla v’tarya**” – dialectic, then comes the time to collate everything, to pull the pieces together in a systematic order so it can be easily retained. **This is the secret that “they do not move from there until they love each other” because now all the pure pieces have to be joined together and systemized into one cohesive Torah**. The “love after the dissent” is pulling the pure pieces which can be done once we’ve cleared away the obstructions of the cosmic ‘thorns and thickets’.

“One Leg”

What was the person really saying when he said, “teach me the whole Torah on one leg?” This person wanted Torah to stand on just one central idea that all the other details could be stacked into, one a top of the other. This is a terrible error. Just like a person needs two opposing legs to stand, a right leg and a left leg. This represents needing balance and cooperation as opposed to putting everything in one stack, when all the factors are one on top of the other, meaning, the higher ones “lord it over” the lower ones which creates disagreement and disgruntles and eventually it all comes crumbling down. And this is the secret of what Chazal say, ‘sheker – falsehood has no legs, *Emes* - truth, has legs, as is apparent from the letters that spell ‘sheker’ -falsehood, “Shin”, “Kuf” “Reish” each one of those letters has only one leg, whereas the letters that spell the word ‘*Emes*’, “Alef” “Mem” Tav” each one has two legs. **“Emes” can stand because “Emes” looks at both sides of the issue and hence has two legs to stand on**. When you want to cram all the issues in one leg, it will collapse. This is the secret that Shammai pushed him away with ‘*Emes haBinyan*’ which could be read **“the truth of the construct”**. A construct can only stand on truth which is two legs, i.e. balance. In ideas it’s called giving credence to both sides of the issue. Hillel wanted to educate the person as to the fallacy of his thinking. Hillel told him: “what you hate do not do to your friend and the rest is just commentary, go learn”. You would hate someone being on top of you, so you can not be on top of someone else and **therefore, stacking everything into “one leg” where some will be higher and some will be lower, is wrong**. Hillel didn’t tell him to actively love him as much as you love yourself. **Hillel was talking about how halacha works in action**. You may not do anything against Hashem or against your fellow man and **this is perfectly consistent with Rebbe Akiva’s halacha of “your life comes first” because using your rightfully earned resources for self-preservation is not called “hurting someone else”**.

Attitude vs Division of Resources

The Maharal points out, what the Torah is asking for in the Mitzvah of “loving your friend like yourself”, is purely to **love him** as much

he had learned thus laying the groundwork for the different compositions of Torah shebaal peh that we have; the Mishna, Tosefta, Sifra and Sifrei etc. And indeed, his five surviving talmidim are the ones that gave us these compositions of Torah She Be'al Peh, which is the whole Torah she Be'al Peh as we know it today.

Rebbe Akiva's Yeshiva

Rebbe Akiva's massive academy was involved in the formulation of the Torah shebaal Peh as we know it. Just like the days of the Omer prepare us to have a real and eternal connection to Torah, so also Rebbe Akiva and his talmidim formulated Torah Shebaal Peh in a manner that we can connect to and retain forever. That is Rebbe Akiva's legacy. Moshe brought the Torah to earth - Rebbe Akiva ensured we would be eternally connected to it. His academy was involved in intense dialectics to reveal all the details and they meant to do it right, mindful of the prohibition of learning alone (Berachos 63B), knowing that truth stands on "two legs", they broke up into pairs, to challenge and sharpen each other. As mentioned above in reference to Rebbe Akiva, the myriad of details that the talmidei Chachamim reveal is called "Kavod HaTorah". Not only that, it is also called their own personal Kavod – honor (kiddushin 32B) and that's why a Talmid Chacham may be forgiving of his honor because it is his to forgive and forego. This drive for self-actualization is necessary for the "war of Torah" to reveal the details and "clear the air". However, they had to realize that what the other "teams" were doing were all equally as important as what they were doing. "Love your friend like yourself is a great inclusive principle in Torah. Everyone has to do their own thing and seek self-actualization to the fullest extent, maximize his contribution to "Kavod HaTorah" but at the same time not lose sight that the other teams' work is also "Kavod HaTorah". This is the duality of seeking your own "Kavod HaTorah" to the fullest (in an idealistic fashion - to make your contribution to the honor of the Torah – not for self-aggrandizement) and yet, be mindful that your friends work, which is very different to yours, is also "Kavod HaTorah" and the Torah is only complete between all of you. Each team was only concerned with their aspect of "Kavod HaTorah", while losing sight

as you love yourself. It is not a halacha of how to divide up your resources, but rather how to acknowledge and feel about your fellow Jew. Rebbe Akiva added this is a "KLAL GADOL" – a great inclusive principle in Torah, meaning to say, the recognition of the achievements of your fellow Jew is important for the all-inclusive principle of Torah because Torah is only complete between you and him. His questions and your answers, even if they are antithetical to each other, make up the Kial Gadol b'Torah, and the Torah is commanding us to have that recognition: he is just as important and needed as me.

"Kavod HaTorah" - Rebbe Akiva's "Pilpul"

Rebbe Akiva was the living embodiment of how the Torah Shebaal Peh works. He was the foremost in his generation in "pilpul" - the ability to research, analyze question and answer. As the Gemara says at the end of Sota, when Rebbe Akiva died, "the arms of Torah were annulled", Rashi explains, the arms of Torah refer to depth of reasoning and ability to bridge the ideas of Torah Shebaal Peh to the pesukim, letters, and alternating forms of expression in the Torah. As he is described in Kinot: "he uproots mountains and grinds them one in the other with his reasoning". He does not miss a detail. As the Gemara says in Menachos (29A) "on every prong of a crown of a letter, he saw allusions to myriads and myriads of halachos". Rebbe Akiva's Power to reveal every detail, trace it to a source, and derive new ideas from every word in Torah is called "Kavod HaTorah" – the honor of Torah as it is glorious that there isn't anything extra in Torah (Sota 49A-Rashi there) This intense power of pilpul, asides from revealing all the details, also "clears the air" and so does dying "Al Kiddush Hashem"! This is the secret why Rebbe Akiva was chosen to die "Al Kiddush Hashem". Both of these are elements of the special mission Rebbe Akiva's Neshama was created to perform, regarding both of which Hashem tells Moshe: "Quiet! This was decreed by My Wisdom".

Rebbe Akiva's System

Another aspect of Rebbe Akiva's legacy was to collate and systemize all those details. As the Gemara (Gittin 67A) calls him an 'otzar batum', an orderly treasure box. As Rashi explains, at the end of a day of learning, he would systemize everything that

of how “Kavod HaTorah” is built out of the other teams also. And this is the secret that they were taken to task during the days of the Omer: **The Omer is the time to prepare for Torah and the work that they were doing to bring the Torah to the generation was incomplete. They were taken to task on this specifically in the first 32 days of the Omer which has the numerical value of “Kavod” - honor because they were seeking to develop their own contribution to “Kavod HaTorah” but not mindful of the importance of how the other teams were also equally building “Kavod HaTorah”.** On Lag B’Omer they crossed over to the next level of “not moving from there until they love to each other” - but we will discuss that more in the chapter on Lag B’Omer IY’H.



Chapter 4

Pesach Sheni

Pesach Sheni is the next milestone we reach as we count our way to *Matan Torah*.

What is Pesach Sheni all about, and why is it so such an important landmark on the way to Shavuot? Let’s explore this day, and get in touch with the energy it has to offer us.

Pesach Sheni has the general feel of a *yom tov*, a joyous feeling of closeness to Hashem. This was even experienced in the days of the *Beis Ha’Mikdash* by a person who had already partaken of the *korban* Pesach at its appointed time, and therefore was not required to bring the Pesach Sheini offering.

Today when we have no *korban* Pesach at all, we still don’t recite *tachnun* and many have a custom to eat matzah. Why do we celebrate this day as a holiday at all? Historically the whole purpose of Pesach Sheni was just to give a second chance to those who legitimately could not bring it the first time. Shouldn’t the day be obsolete in our times? Examining Pesach Sheni’s source in the Torah will lead to deeper insight in what it means as a holiday, and how it fits into *Sefiras HaOmer*.

Aharon in His Place

In *parshas Ba’haloscha*, the Torah tells us that the people assigned to carry the coffins of the dead approached Moshe and Aharon with the complaint “Why should we be less than all of the people?” Rashi asks the question: Why did they need to ask Aharon? If Moshe wouldn’t know, then certainly Aharon wouldn’t. After all, all the Torah Aharon knew he received from Moshe!

Rashi’s answer is quite perplexing. He says that the Torah only mentions Aharon to teach us that Aharon was sitting in the *Beis HaMidrash* at that time – it was not implying that the pallbearers were addressing their complaint to Aharon.

This answer complicates the matter even further! Why do we need to know that Aharon was there? Logically, many people must have been in the *Beis HaMidrash*. The Jews in the desert lived off the manna, and learning Torah was their main occupation. What is the Torah telling us by emphasizing Aharon’s presence?

Another statement of Rashi regarding this incident also requires explanation. Rashi tells us that the laws of Pesach Sheni should have been said by Moshe, but since the pallbearers raised the issue the details of Pesach Sheni were said through them. How can it be said that the laws were transmitted through them, when in actuality it was still Moshe who turned to Hashem and received the answer?

Aharon’s Glorious Role

When Moshe first transmitted the Torah he first told Aharon, then repeated it to Aharon along with his children; then repeated it to Aharon, his children and the seventy elders; and finally he

Bridging the Gaps

Pesach Sheni is in the week of the *Sefira* associated with *Hod*, and the whole idea of Pesach Sheni is a reflection of *Hod*, bringing the Torah close. Pesach Sheni gives a second chance to someone who was distant from Hashem existentially – by being *tamei* – or physically – not capable of arriving to Jerusalem. Pesach Sheni brings that person close, and allows them to be connected. The distance to *kedusha* was bridged.

Pesach Sheni gives us the ability to make it up. Even if we missed the first time, we can still get connected. What applied to the pallbearers in the desert and all the people who have partaken of the Pesach Sheni *korban* applies to the whole nation at all times. Even if a person was far from Torah in his mind and attitudes, or he didn't have the opportunity to study Torah until now – he still has a chance to come close. Until Pesach Sheni we were moving towards the Torah, but it still seemed far away. From Pesach Sheni and on we consider ourselves close; we've crossed a major threshold.

In Hebrew the word for close is *karov*, it can also mean related. We are so close to the Torah that we feel like family. The pallbearers of the first Pesach Sheni had a valid excuse for not bringing and eating the *korban* Pesach. They were *tamei* because they were carrying the deceased, and they had no other choice. Still, they weren't content with their exemption from the *mitzva*.

Perhaps one could understand if they would be happy that they didn't have to go out of their way to perform the *mitzva* of *korban* Pesach. But they were not, and they cried out in complaint. Their discontent of being distanced from the *mitzvahs* of the Torah demonstrated how close they felt, like the Torah was family to them.

repeated it to the whole nation. Aharon was thus the first person to receive the communication of the Torah from Moshe. Moshe Rabeinu, as Hashem's messenger, was still transmitting Torah from God's perspective. Aharon is the first one to be exclusively a receiver of the Torah, on the same side as the people.

Hillel said "Be like the students of Aharon: love peace, love people, and bring them close to the Torah. Moshe is the one that brings the Torah down, but Aharon is the one who brings the Torah close to the people:

This is why Aharon is associated with the divine attribute of *Hod*. This attribute indicates how Hashem's name is spread throughout the world. It emanates outward so that people can be aware of it. The beams of light from Moshe's face were called "*karnei hod* - beams of *hod*." That which extends outward and communicates to the outside is in sync with the attribute of *Hod*.

Moshe Rabeinu brings the Torah down, but the way it reaches us is through the trait of *Hod*. The Glory of Torah is manifest when all Jews are aware of it – that's the *Hod* of Aharon. He loves the people and brings them close to Torah.

Right, Left

The construction of a human being has deep significance. Man was created in the "tzalem image" of God. A person's organs and limbs are parallel to the structure of divine attributes – their form emulates the way Hashem runs His world⁶.

The *Middos* of *Netzach* and *Hod* parallel the right and left leg. Most people move their right leg first when taking a step. But a person hasn't yet changed his spatial position until the left leg moved. Then he is said to have taken a step forward. Moshe, in line with *Netzach*, was the one to bring the Torah down. At that point the Torah started moving, but it hadn't changed position – the people didn't receive it yet. Aharon, representing *Hod*, was like the left leg. He could shift the Torah all the way to the *B'nei Yisrael*.

⁶ There is nothing physical in any way about Hashem, and He has no attributes we can comprehend. He has created the means to act on the creation in certain ways. The effect of these actions we experience we define as coming through these "attributes." This topic is the main subject of the *kabalah*, and is obviously not given justice here.

Chapter 5

Spirit of Aharon

The catalyst for the transmission of the *mitzvah* of Pesach Sheni was the outcry of the pallbearers. This is what the Torah is telling us by emphasizing that Aharon was in the *Beis Midrash* when the complaint was issued. The *Middah* of Aharon was present. His attribute was felt in the *Beis Midrash* when the people expressed their desire to still be able to partake in the *mitzvah* of *korban* Pesach. Because of Aharon's influence the people felt as close to Torah as family members, and they didn't want to feel any distance.

This is also what Rashi meant when he said that the *mitzvah* of Pesach Sheni came through those that complained. All of the other *mitzvahs* were initiated with a command from above, regardless of our consent. With Pesach Sheni the process was reversed. The people wanted Torah, so Hashem sent it down.

With the rest of the *mitzvahs* Moshe's trait of *Netzach* initiated the transmission from above, but with Pesach Sheni the people were the catalyst and the *Middah* of *Hod* began the process. Because the demand of the people was the catalyst for giving the *mitzvah* of Pesach Sheni, the Torah considers it being said through them. It was a result of their feeling of closeness and kinship that prompted Hashem to send it down through Moshe.

This joy we experience when we feel this closeness and kinship is the joy of Pesach Sheni. We can bridge any gap to reach the Torah and we feel like we are almost there.

⁷ Lag is formed of the letters *lamud* and *gimmel*. Their combined numerical value is thirty-three.

⁸ See chapter 4 *Pesach Sheni* for an expansion of this idea.

⁹ *Nesiv Ha'Torah*, chpt. 15

Lag B'Omer – On the Inside

The *sfira* corresponding to the thirty-third day of the Omer – Lag B'Omer – is Hod of Hod. Hod connotes glory or splendor, as in the *karnei hod*, rays of splendor, which emanated from Moshe's visage. It implies a type of closeness and contact that is manifested with clear communication⁸. "Hod of Hod" connotes a particularly extreme feeling of closeness.

We also know that Lag B'Omer is the day that Rabbi Akiva's students stopped dying. It is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai's *yortzeit*, and a day of joy for all of *Klal Yisroel*.

What is the idea that underlies all of these diverse elements? What is Lag B'Omer really about?

A Pile of Stones

The *Shlah Ha'Kodesh* reveals a rather cryptic hint in the Torah alluding to the day of Lag B'Omer. The Torah describes how when Yaakov Avinu fled from Lavan's home Lavan gave chase. When Lavan overtook Yaakov their argument ended with the agreement to stop fighting. They agreed to disagree, and to live in peace **separately**.

To this end, they built a symbolic wall together and Yaakov Avinu named it Gal Ed – the pile of testimony. Gal has the same letters as Lag, an allusion to the thirty-third day of the *Omer*. What is the connection between this rock pile of separation, and the joyous day of Lag B'Omer?

As we explained above (see Chapter 3), the Maharal⁹ tells us that the Torah demands honor, both for the Torah and for its scholars.

does it mean to make this transition, and why does this account for the cessation of the students' deaths?

Let us contrast the concepts of honor and life. Honor, like wealth, comes to a person from the outside. On a deeper level, the verse says "B'rov am hadras melech. – The glory of the king is with a great nation." The whole concept of "the more the merrier" is only when something is coming to you from the outside. With wealth, the more money a person has the richer he becomes. Quantity and addition always come from the outside in. This is because the person exists as his own entity, and then the additional bounty is added on top of the self.

Life, on the other hand, is not external – it is an internal quality. It is not a quantity, as a person can not be half alive – he is living or not¹¹. Someone is either alive or dead. Life is an absolute with no relative quality. Wealth and honor are not absolutes. They can be quantified, they can exist in an incomplete state, and they are relative.

These are the two aspects of interaction with the Torah. The honor of the Torah is in effect when it interacts with the outside world. In this scenario Torah is on the inside and you are on the outside. Therefore, you are obligated to respect the Torah and fellow *talmidei chachamim*. Being on the right side, with the life of Torah, is being united with the Torah and experiencing its living essence.

These aspects are parallel to the *Etz HaDa'as* and the *Etz HaChaim*, the garden of Eden's Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. The *Etz HaDa'as* is on the left side, so good and evil will become relative – there is an inside and outside aspect. With the *Etz HaChaim* there is a unity. Still, the *Etz HaChaim* can be clothed within the *Etz HaDa'as*.

When we learn with pilpul that contrasts and compares different concepts, things are viewed with relative value and relationships. The topic must be worked through extensively until all possibilities are exhausted, so that we may arrive at the absolute conclusion. This is how Torah interfaces with the *Etz HaDa'as*, the outer

The concept of honor is connected to light, and it related to wisdom as well: "Gam ha'aretz he'iro mekodo – The earth also shines Your honor," "Tair erez me'kvodecha – The earth shines your honor," and "Chachmas adam ta'ir es panav – The Wisdom of a man makes his face shine." In Israel, during this time of the year, particularly in the month of Iyar which is **IT WTN** – "the month of the aura" there is a soft glow (see above Chapter 2). As the summer progresses the light becomes more of a blazing heat, but the time of Lag B'Omer is where it can be said that there is a soft light. This is a time of honor, honor for wisdom, and the Torah demands that honor.¹⁰

The students of Rabbi Akiva particularly had an obligation to honor each other as Torah scholars during this time. One of the ways to prepare for Torah is to have respect for it and its scholars. Their sense of respect for Torah Scholars – for each other – was lacking, and this lack of respect is in violation of the goal of the *Omer* – receiving the Torah.

Right Inside

The Maharal said that the students didn't die throughout the *Omer* period – the deaths ceased on Lag B'Omer. Maharal explains this with a deep insight into the *pasuk* "Orach yamim byemino, u'b'smoio osher v'kavod – Length of days on its right, and on its left wealth and honor." (*Mishlei*, 3:16)

Torah has many dimensions, and it has the concept of a left and right side. The honor of Torah is on the left side, and long life is on its right. One of these aspects is the demand for its honor and of its *talmidei chachamim*. The Maharal tells us that Lag B'Omer is about making the transition to the right side of Torah. The numerical value of *kavod* (honor) is thirty-two, and the first thirty-two days of the *Omer* is the time to work on acquiring the honor of Torah which is "on the left." Lag B'Omer, the thirty-third day, always falls out on the eighteenth of Iyar. Iyar has the same *gematria* as *orech* – long, and eighteen equals *chai* – life. But what

¹⁰ See Chapter 2 Chodesh Iyar – An Aura of Connection

¹¹ "Half dead" is obviously just an expression, implying the person is either very tired, or very low functioning.

aspect. Being united with essence is the aspect of the *Etz HaChaim*. This is being on the inside, the *p'nimiyus*, as opposed to being on the outside and have a quality of *chitzoniyus*. These concepts are also related to the idea of the right and left sides. The right side is stronger, and represents unified essence. *Chazal* tell us to educate by bringing a child close with the right, and pushing away with the left. Again, the right represents being brought inside, whereas the left is on the outside.

The Tree Inside

Earlier, the *B'nei Yesaschar*¹² was quoted, telling us that *lev tov*, meaning good heart, is *gematria* forty-nine – paralleling the forty-nine days of *Sfira*. These days cover the full range of positive character traits, and we discipline our animal nature with them during this time in order to receive the form of Torah.

The Maharal points out that thirty-two is *gematria* both *lev* as well as *kavod*, honor. Until the thirty-third day the students of Rabbi Akiva were still on the outside of Torah, and there was still a demand to give respect. This is why during this time they were judged for not expressing honor. But on the thirty-third day we move to the days of *tov*. *Orach yomim b'yemina*, this length of days on the right of Torah refers to the divine light hidden in the Torah for *tzaddikim*. “And He saw the light and it was good.” For this reason Torah in Aramaic is called *Oraysa*, light, with this reality in mind.

This hidden light shines through in the study of kabbalah, the experience of enjoying the *Etz HaChaim* without it being enveloped by the *Etz HaDa'as*. Kabbalah reveals some of this pure, hidden light.

We can better understand how this works when we think of the *Chazal* that tells us how in the future there will be no *mitzvahs*¹³. Yet still, there will be Torah. How is this possible when most of Torah is halachah – how to perform *mitzvahs*? How can we have Torah in the World to Come if there are no *mitzvahs* to study?

In truth, knowing how to perform the *mitzvahs* is only part of the Torah, but the secrets revealed by understanding the *mitzvahs*, and the lights that emerge by explaining the *mitzvahs* are forever. These secrets are revealed in kabbalah, and these secrets are always relevant – they are part of Hashem's unmitigated wisdom. In the World to Come practical halacha may become theoretical, but the secrets of the Torah – the *Etz HaChaim* – will become what is practical.

It is no coincidence that kabbalah is called *p'nimiyus* – the inner aspect of Torah. It is the “*ohr ki tov* – light because it is good,” which we experience when we cross over to the Torah's side of *orach chaim b'yimino*.

When we are on the inside, all of our *neshamas* are experienced as one whole. With this type of consciousness it isn't difficult to honor one's fellow man – we feel that we are all one. On the outside there is a feeling of separation, but on the inside of Torah we are all one light. We experience the inherent unity of Klal Yisroel on a very high level.

On the day of Lag B'Omer the change occurs internally when we jump over the wall to the inside of Torah. It's not hard to give honor one's fellow because we are all one. Every Jew is a letter in the Torah, and we all flow from the same source of life – the Torah itself. The students stopped dying because they were in line with this truth.

Breaking Through

Now we can understand why this day is so strongly connected to Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai. Rebbe Shimon was the greatest of Rebbe Akiva's five remaining five students. Rebbe Shimon even testified about himself that if a person learns from his ways he will learn the choicest of Rebbe Akiva's ways.

Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai thus represents the aspect of Rebbe Akiva that made it across to eternity. But even more so, on this

¹² See Chapter 1 *Sfiras HaOmer* – Preparing the World for Torah

¹³ See chpt. :Simchas Torah

day he crossed over to the next world, the real world. Rebbe Shimon taught us the book of the *Ibra Zuta* on his death bed, and his last word was *chaim*, life. On that day, the eighteenth of Iyar, *orech chaim*, he moved to eternal life.

Up until now, the work of *Sefiras HaOmer* has been rectifying the outer level. Now we are on the inside track, parallel to receiving the inner level from the pure *Eitz HaChaim* unfettered by the *Etz HaDas*.

As discussed, on Pesach Sheni we reach a real closeness to the Torah, but there is still that wall keeping us out. Reaching Lag B'Omer makes for a qualitative difference, like making it over that wall. A wall may be only one inch thick, but until it is passed one is still totally blocked from progress. The wall may be only an inch, the smallest quantity, but its quality of separation means that it might as well be a million inches.

Now we understand Yaakov Avinu's real message to Lavan, and the connection between the words Gal Ed and Lag B'Omer. Lavan told Yaakov Avinu that all of Yaakov's family was his, his wives, children, and property. His message: "You are not a chosen people. You are not a separate Jewish entity."

Yaakov stood firm, and he built a wall to put Lavan on the other side. On Lag B'Omer we go over the wall and leave Lavan on the outside. Just as Yaakov cut his family off of their Aramenian roots, we jump from the left to the right. We go from honor to life, *chitzonius* to *p'nimius*. We leave Mitzrayim behind, **outside**, in a totally different dimension. In the same vein, Dovid HaMelech beseeched Hashem "*Gal eynay* – open my eyes," He begged Hashem to get him over the *gal*, the wall, and open his eyes to the secrets of the Torah by bringing him inside¹⁴.

Lag B'Omer is a major turning point. When an artist paints his painting, after enough brush strokes a form begins to emerge. When we reach Lag B'Omer we have laid down enough strokes so we can see the form. Now we are Torah insiders. It's a

breakthrough, the same energy that Rebbe Shimon Bar Yochai used to break through. With the power of the eighteenth of Iyar he revealed the *Ibra Zuta*, and brought down secrets that are not found anywhere else in Torah.

Two people can be standing right next to each other, nose to nose. But when there is a wall in between them they are never together. Lag B'Omer is when we get over the wall. We break through from left to right, outside to inside, honor to life *chitzonius* to *p'nimius*. This is our big break, so we can make it over the wall.

Lag B'Omer

Lag B'Omer which is "Hod Sheb'Hod", is exponentially more. A person can be geographically close but still be on the **outside**. It's a thin line between "in" and "out". That same thin line that is the absolute cut off point in space between one side and the other side. The Pasuk says: "[the Torah gives] long days (life) on its right side and on its left side, wealth and honor"(mishlei 3:16). "Right" represents "in" and "left" represents "out". **Where does "left" end and "right" begin? On Lag B'Omer!** We mentioned last week in the name of the Maharal, that the first thirty-two days of the Omer has the numerical value of "**Kavod**"-honor and it was a time to take the Talmidim of Rebbe Akiva to task for not giving each other "**Kavod Hatorah**". The Maharal points out that by no coincidence by our calendar Lag B'Omer always comes out on the 18th Iyar which has the same numerical value as "**Orech Chai**" – long life. **Lag B'Omer is the point of crossing, from left to right, from being "out" to being "in"**.

The Border

The Ari Hakadosh brings an allusion to Lag B'Omer from "**Gal Ed**"- the **wall** that Yaakov built between himself and Lavan, **securing the border**, leaving Lavan out and the Jewish people in. We had to go to Mitzrayim to have Lavan's influence burnt out of us, as the pasuk says, "Arami Oveid Avi v'lyered Mitzrayma". Our

¹⁴ See the Eight Principles, Rambam's Principles Faith in his commentary to the *Mishnah* end of Sanhedrin. Note that the Rambam refers to King Dovid as "the anointed of the God of Yaakov"!

journey to Torah is a journey to our Jewish identity which is on the **“other side of the border”** from our lineage to Lavan. We reached that border on the 33rd day of the Omer which is numerical value ‘Gal’, on Lag B’Omer we make it over the wall, and we are on the **“inside track”**.

The Exodus to the “Right”

When we fully refine the “left leg” (“Hod sheb’Hod”), which for us that is the transition of “moving from left to right” and “getting inside” **that’s when Rebbe Akiva’s talmidim moved to the next phase of the operation** after having been **“enemies to one another”** while on the **“left”** – they transition to the **“right”** and **“do not move until they love each other”** and merit the **long life of Torah**. The surviving talmidim were **unified** not just amongst themselves, but also in that they were engaged in **compiling** material into books. Rav Shimon bar Yochai in particular created an academy **and his students actively worked together to compile and compose the Zohar** (a process that continued for another 300 years).

Halacha & Kabbalah

With this we can understand what Lag B’Omer has to do with Rav Shimon Bar Yochai and the Zohar. The wisdom of Kabbalah is called **“penimius”**- inner wisdom, only the initiated may enter. Whereas Halacha is universal for all Jews and universally accessible, hence it can be called that it’s on the **“outside”** for all to observe. There is another difference between Halacha and Kabbalah: Halacha is the directions of how to keep mitzvos which involve a justice system and combatting all forms of evil in the world. Mitzvos only deserve reward when they are done in struggle against the Yetzer Hara. In other words: **Halacha is the code of conduct for a world that has evil in it**. This world order emerged as a result of the sin of Adam that brought death to the world. What happens when there’s no more evil and no more death? At that time there will be no more mitzvos to be performed either. Chazal tell us “Mitzvos are annulled in the future”(Nidda 61A), **“today** (only) to do them and tomorrow to receive the reward”(Eiruvin 22A). What about Torah is eternal? **The kabbalah that explains the meanings and the “Divine lights”**

that are in the Mitzvos - that is forever and is studied in the world to come. This is the secret of what that Zohar says that halacha is a counter measure to the Etz HaDaas whereas Kabbalah in general and the sefer HaZohar in particular is the Eitz Hachaim (see full discussion on this in “chesed l’Avraham” (Azulai) Maayan 5 Nahar 36). **“Gal” also means to reveal** as Dovid HaMelech davened: **“Gal”- open** my eyes and I will see the wonders of your Torah”(Tehillim 119:18) When we get over the **“Gal”- wall** the blocks are behind us and we merit **“Gal Einay”** and can see all the **inner** secrets of the Torah.

“Ikvasa D’Meshicha”

Rebbe Akiva’s legacy was to give us an eternal connection to the Torah. The journey that we make during the Sefira is a miniature of the journey of life. The 7 weeks are parallel to the seven millennia as Chazal say “6000 years will be this world and one [millennium] will be desolate and at the end of that 1000 years (of the 7th millennium)Hashem renews the world”(Sanhedrin 93A). **Our receiving the Torah on the 50th day that ushers in the 8th week is what empowers the whole journey of destiny to make it to Olam Habah that comes in with the 8th millennium.** We must have a lasting connection to Torah that could take us the whole way there. The generations are linked together like the construct of a person that we are talking about. The earlier generations are like the head, arms or the torso. The final generation is called **“Ikvesa D’Meshicha”** - the **heels** of Mashiach. Rebbe **Akiva**, like his name implies, the heel, guaranteed us a connection to Torah that will last to the “heels of time”. The Shelah HaKadosh points out that the nation that represents the snake is Edom, which was Rome. Regarding the adversity between man and snake Hashem say “He (man) will slay you by the head and you (the snake) will slay him by the **“Akev”**- heel. Thus, Rebbe **Akiva** was killed by the Romans but **that was to atone for us and thus protect us, the “heel of the generations”**. **With Rebbe Akiva’s Torah and with his merit we will make it through “Ikvesa D’Meshicha”**. We begin to feel the full fruition of Rebbe Akiva’s work and the particular cutting-edge contribution of his ace talmid, Rav Shimon Bar Yochai who said that “his attributes are the most select of Rebbe Akiva’s attributes”(Gittin 67A) from Lag B’Omer onwards. The days of the Omer toward Shavuot are a

this we could understand why after Lag B'Omer the Talmidim of Rebbe Akiva no longer fight but they are in the second phase of "not moving from there until they become loving of each other" and this is the secret that the contribution of the Talmidim of Rebbe Akiva that was to **compile books** that make up all the fundamental literature of Torah she'baal peh that Halacha is based on. This phase of the Omer is to tap into the inclusive power of the final two attributes of the seven which are the energies of the final two weeks.



microcosm of destiny and the grand Lag B'Omer is in our later generations as we get closer to the end of time. In these generations we can truly appreciate the power of Rebbe Akiva's achievement by seeing how it keeps the later lower generations connected and this is the secret that the Zohar was revealed in the later generations, for the sake of the later generations to give us the spiritual energy and the philosophical sophistication to combat the evils that we will face at the end of time. That's the secret behind a statement in Chazal "Rav Shimon is worthy enough to rely on b'shaas Had'chak, in emergency circumstances" (Shabbos 45A) or in the words of the Zohar (Naso 124B): "because he Jewish people are destined to eat from the tree of life, which is the sefer Hazohar and with it, they will exit the Golus with Divine mercy" (and that's the secret that Rav Shimon Bar Yochai's last word, which he said on Lag B'Omer, was "Chaim" - Life) may it be speedily in our days, Amen!

Sefiras Ha'Omer & the Lag B'Omer threshold

During the 7 weeks of the Sefira we are counting and **adding up figures**. We don't say today is the 5th day of the Omer but rather "today are 5 days of the Omer". When we reach "weeks" we start adding up how many weeks there are. During the omer we are assembling the details which are the individual days together adding them up to create the principles called "weeks" and then adding the weeks together to make a complete closed system. When you have all seven weeks in place it's called that all reality has been united to a perfect hermetically sealed vessel that is capable to receive Torah. This is the secret of what Chazal say: "Hashem did not find any vessel that holds blessing other than peace" We need peace between all the components of reality and that makes the vessel that holds the ultimate blessing of the Torah. The Great threshold that we crossed at Lag B'Omer is that following Lag B'Omer every single day will either have "Yesod" (6th attribute - "Vav") which is inclusive of all the active forces or "Malchus" which is the vessel that receives all. Following Lag B'Omer we are no longer in distinct details, we are in these attributes that are all inclusive hubs. We are tapping into that function of theirs because that is the whole goal of the Omer - to pull the pieces together! With