

The Interface between Halacha and Hashkafa in Sefirat Ha'omer

Source 1: The Torah Source for Sefirat Haomer: Sefer Vayikra Ch. 23

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־תִּקְרְאוּ
אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי:

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: These are My fixed times, the fixed times of the LORD, which you shall proclaim as sacred occasions.

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּתוֹן
מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ כָּל־מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבָּת הוּא לַיהוָה בְּכָל
מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם: (פ)

On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, a sacred occasion. You shall do no work; it shall be a sabbath of the LORD throughout your settlements.

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי יְהוָה מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר־תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם:

These are the set times of the LORD, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time:

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ בֵּין הָעֶרְבַּיִם פֶּסַח
לַיהוָה:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the LORD,

וּבַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה תֵּג המצות לַיהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים
מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ:

and on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD's Feast of Unleavened Bread. You shall eat unleavened bread for seven days.

בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ יְהִיָּה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ:

On the first day you shall celebrate a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.

וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֶשָּׁה לַיהוָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ
כָּל־מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: (פ)

Seven days you shall make offerings by fire to the LORD. The seventh day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְקָצַרְתֶּם אֶת־קִצְרֶיהָ וְהִבַּאתֶם אֶת־עֹמֶר רִאשִׁית
קִצְרְכֶם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן:

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving to you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the first sheaf of your harvest to the priest.

וְהִנִּיף אֶת־הָעֹמֶר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם מִמִּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת יְנִיפֶנּוּ
הַכֹּהֵן:

He shall elevate the sheaf before the LORD for acceptance in your behalf; the priest shall elevate it on the day after the sabbath.

וְעֲשִׂיתֶם בַּיּוֹם הַנִּיפְכֶם אֶת־הָעֹמֶר כֶּבֶשׂ תָּמִים בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה
לַיהוָה:

On the day that you elevate the sheaf, you shall offer as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb of the first year without blemish.

וּמִנְחָתוֹ שְׁנֵי עֶשְׂרִינָיִם סֵלָת בְּלוּלָה בַשֶּׁמֶן אֶשָּׁה לַיהוָה רִיחַ
נִיחָח וְנִסְכָּה יֵין רְבִיעִית הַהֵיזֶן:

The meal offering with it shall be two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in, an offering by fire of pleasing

וְלֶחֶם וְקָלִי וְכֶרֶם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַד־עֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַד הִבֵּיאֲכֶם
אֶת־קֶרְבָּן אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חֶקֶת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכֹל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם: (ס)

וְסִפְרֹתֶם לָכֶם מִמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הִבֵּיאֲכֶם אֶת־עֹמֶר
הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימַת תְּהִינָה:

עַד מַמַּחֲרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם
מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה:

מִמוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם תִּבְּיֹאוּ לֶחֶם תְּנוּפָה שְׁתֵּים שָׁנִי עֲשָׂרִים סֵלָת
תְּהִינָה חֶמֶן תֹּאפִינָה בְּכוֹרִים לַיהוָה:

וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עַל־הַלֶּחֶם שִׁבְעַת כִּבְשִׁים תְּמִימִם בְּנֵי שָׁנָה וּפָר בֶּן־
בָּקָר אֶחָד וְאֵילָם שְׁנַיִם יִהְיוּ עֲלֶיהָ לַיהוָה וּמִנְחָתָם וְנִסְכֵּיהֶם
אֲשֶׁה רִיח־נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה:

וַעֲשִׂיתֶם שְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד לַחֹטָאֹת וּשְׁנֵי כִבְשִׁים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה לַזִּבַּח
שְׁלָמִים:

וְהִנִּיף הַכֹּהֵן אֹתָם עַל לֶחֶם הַבְּכוֹרִים תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־
שְׁנֵי כִבְשִׁים קָדֹשׁ יִהְיוּ לַיהוָה לִכְהֵן:

וּקְרֹאתֶם בַּעֲצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה מִקְרֹא־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל־מְלֶאכֶת
עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ חֶקֶת עוֹלָם בְּכֹל־מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

On that same day you shall hold a celebration; it shall be a
sacred occasion for you; you shall not work at your
occupations. This is a law for all time in all your settlements,
throughout the ages.

odor to the LORD; and the libation with it shall be of wine, a
quarter of a hin.

Until that very day, until you have brought the offering of
your God, you shall eat no bread or parched grain or fresh
ears; it is a law for all time throughout the ages in all your
settlements.

And from the day on which you bring the sheaf of elevation
offering—the day after the sabbath—you shall count off seven
weeks. They must be complete:

you must count until the day after the seventh week—fifty
days; then you shall bring an offering of new grain to the
LORD.

You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as
an elevation offering; each shall be made of two-tenths of a
measure of choice flour, baked after leavening, as first fruits
to the LORD.

With the bread you shall present, as burnt offerings to the
LORD, seven yearling lambs without blemish, one bull of the
herd, and two rams, with their meal offerings and libations,
an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

You shall also offer one he-goat as a sin offering and two
yearling lambs as a sacrifice of well-being.

The priest shall elevate these—the two lambs—together with
the bread of first fruits as an elevation offering before the
LORD; they shall be holy to the LORD, for the priest.

Source 2: Sefer HaChinuch: Commentary on the Omer & the two loaves on Shavuot

The commandment of the sacrifice of the *omer* of barley: That we offer on the second day of Pesach, beyond the additional offering of the rest of the days of Pesach, a one-year old sheep for a burnt-offering and one *omer* of barley, that is called the *omer* of waving - as it is stated ([Leviticus 23:10-11](#)), "When you come to the land, etc., you shall bring the *omer*; the beginning of your harvest, etc. And he shall wave the *omer* in front of the Lord from the morrow of the Shabbat." And Onkelos translates, "after the holiday" - meaning to say, on the second day of Pesach. As behold, it is referring to Pesach in the section before this. And it is stated there ([Leviticus 23:12](#)), "And you shall make on the day of your waving the *omer* an unblemished one-year old sheep, etc." And this sacrifice of the *omer* is called the offering of the first fruits.

The commandment of the sacrifice of the new meal-offering from wheat on the day of [Shavuot]: To sacrifice leavened bread from the new wheat on the day of the festival of Shavuot. And that is what is called in Scripture, "a new offering" ([Leviticus 23:15](#)). And they are two loaves, as it is written ([Leviticus 23:16](#)), "From your inhabitations you shall bring bread of waving, two of two *issaron*." And the matter was such that they would bring three *seah* of new wheat and rub

them and pound them in the way of all of the meal-offerings. And they would grind them and sift two *issaron* in twelve sieves. And they would take them and make two loaves from them and bring leavening ([Menachot 52b](#)) and put it into the *issaron*. And the length of each loaf was three handbreadths and its width was four, and its height was [the span of] four fingers ([Menachot 96a](#)). And they were square; and they were baked on the eve of the holiday. And on the morrow after their waving, they were eaten by the priests that whole day and half the night ([Menachot 100b](#)). And that meal-offering is the first of all of the meal-offerings [of that crop] of wheat. And with the bread, they would sacrifice seven unblemished sheep, one young bull and two rams for a burnt-offering, a goat for a sin-offering and two lambs for a peace-offering - and these are the sacrifices spoken about in [the Book of Numbers]. All of this was brought with the bread besides the additional offering of the day which was two bulls, one ram and seven lambs for a burnt offering, and one goat for a sin-offering - and these are the sacrifices spoken about in the Book of Leviticus. And it was elucidated explicitly so in the fourth chapter of [Menachot 45b](#) that this sacrifice would come with the bread, separate from the additional sacrifice of the day. And after the waving of the bread, it was eaten by the priests with the lambs of the peace-offerings.

Source 3: Talmud Yevamot 62b

They said that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students in an area of land that stretched from Gevat to Antipatris in Judea, and they all died in one period of time, because they did not treat each other with respect.

And the world was desolate of Torah until Rabbi Akiva came to our Rabbis in the South and taught his Torah to them. This second group of disciples consisted of **Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehuda, Rabbi Yosei, Rabbi Shimon, and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. And these are the very ones who upheld the study of Torah at that time.** Although Rabbi Akiva's earlier students did not survive, his later disciples were able to transmit the Torah to future generations.

אמרו שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא מגבת עד אנטיפרס וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה והיה העולם שמם עד שבא ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום ושנאה להם ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה תנא כולם מתו מפסח ועד עצרת אמר רב חמא בר אבא ואיתימא ר' חייא בר אבין כולם מתו מיתה רעה מאי היא א"ר נחמן אסכרה

With regard to the twelve thousand pairs of Rabbi Akiva's students, the Gemara adds: It is **taught** that **all of them died** in the period **from Passover until Shavuot**.

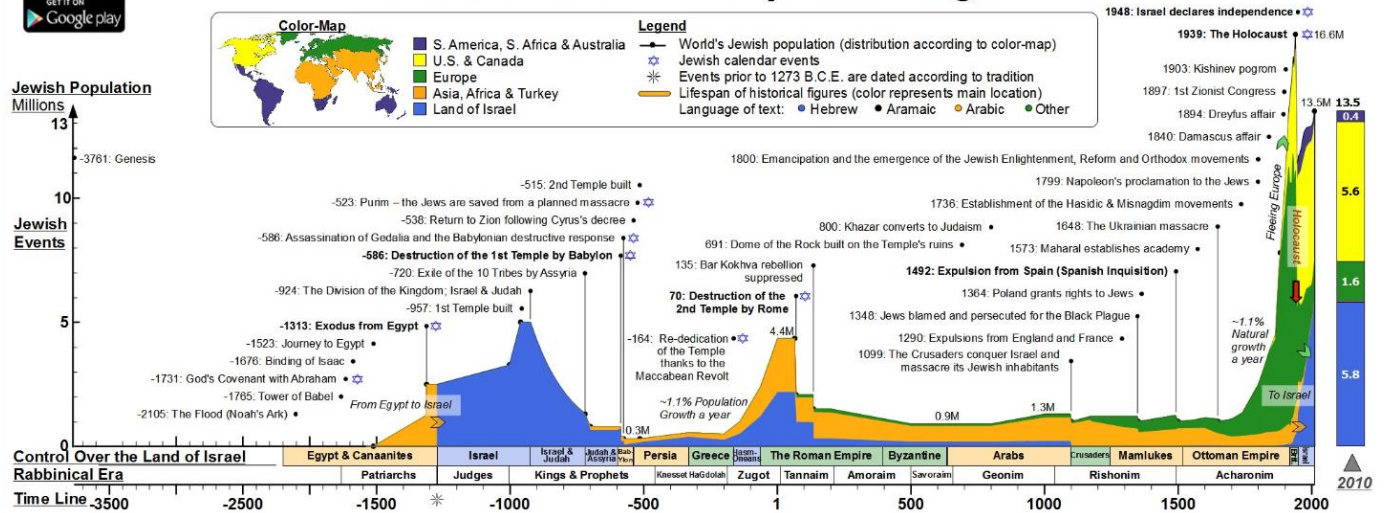
Source 4: Shulchan Aruch: The Laws of the Days of the Omer

הלכות פסח סימן תצג

תצג דינים הנוהגים בימי העומר, ובו ד' סעיפים:

א *נוהגים (א) שלא (ב) [6] לישא אשה בין פסח לעצרת עד ל"ג לעומר, (ב) מפני שבאותו זמן מתו תלמידי רבי עקיבא, אב"ל (ג) לארס ולקדש (ג) שפיר דמי. ונשואין נמי, מי שקפץ וכנס (ד) אין עונשין אותו: הגה מיהו, מל"ג בעומר ואילך (ה) הכל (ג) שרי (אבודרהם ובי" ומהגים):
ב *נוהגים שלא להסתפר (ו) עד ל"ג לעומר, (ז) שאומרים שאז פסקו מלמות. ואין להסתפר עד יום ל"ד בבוקר, האלא-אם-כן חל יום ל"ג ערב שבת, שאז מסתפרין בו מפני כבוד השבת: הגה ובמדינות אלו אין נוהגין כדבריו, אלא מסתפרין (ח) ביום ל"ג ומרבים בו קצת (ד) שמחה (ט) ואין אומרים בו (ה) [ט] תחנון (מהרי"ל ומהגים). ואין להסתפר (י) עד ל"ג בעצמו (יא) ולא מבערב

Timeline of Jewish History and Heritage



Source 5: From Chabad. Org

Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the Omer count—this year, May 23, 2019—is a festive day on the Jewish calendar. It is celebrated with outings (on which children traditionally play with bows and arrows), bonfires, parades and other joyous events. Many visit the resting place (in Meron, northern Israel) of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the anniversary of whose passing is on this day.

What It Means...Lag BaOmer is always on the 18th day of the month of Iyar. So what's up with the name? The word "Lag" is made of of the Hebrew letters lamed (ל) and gimel (ג), which together have the numerical value of 33. "BaOmer" means "of the Omer." The Omer is the counting period that begins on the second day of Passover and culminates with the holiday of Shavuot, following day 49. Hence Lag BaOmer is the 33rd day of the Omer count, which coincides with 18 Iyar. What happened on 18 Iyar that's worth celebrating?

What We Are Celebrating .Bonfires are a traditional Lag BaOmer feature. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the second century of the Common Era, was the first to publicly teach the mystical dimension of the Torah known as the Kabbalah, and is the author of the classic text of Kabbalah, the Zohar. On the day of his passing, Rabbi Shimon instructed his disciples to mark the date as “the day of my joy.” The chassidic masters explain that the final day of a righteous person’s earthly life marks the point at which all their deeds, teachings and work achieve their culminating perfection and the zenith of their impact upon our lives. So each Lag BaOmer, we celebrate Rabbi Shimon’s life and the revelation of the esoteric soul of Torah.

Source 6: Zohar Ha'azinu, Idra Zuta, volume III page 296b

...כֹּל הַהוּא יוֹמָא, לֹא אֶפְסִיק אִשָּׁא מִן בֵּיתָא, וְלֹא הוּא מֵאן דְּמִטֵּי לְגַבְיָהּ, דְּלֵא יִכִּילוּ דְּנִהוּרָא וְאִשָּׁא הוּא בְּסוּחֲרָנְיָה

[When Rav Shimon died], all that day, the fire did not desist from the house, and no one approached it, since they could not as the fire was all around

According to tradition, the day that Rav Shimon bar Yochai passed away was Lag Ba-omer, the eighteenth of Iyar. Even though the death of such a great sage is a sad event, there is also joy surrounding the fact that he attained his final reward (as the Zohar explains), and the fact that he revealed many deep secrets of the Torah to his students on his dying day. The fire which surrounded the house, preventing any but

Rav Shimon's closest students from approaching, serves as a basis for the custom of lighting bonfires on Lag Ba-omer.

Source 7: Talmud Shabbat 33b

The Gemara relates that this resulted due to an incident that took place when Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Yosei and Rabbi Shimon were sitting, and Yehuda, son of converts, sat beside them. Rabbi Yehuda opened and said: How pleasant are the actions of this nation, the Romans, as they established marketplaces, established bridges, and established bathhouses. Rabbi Yosei was silent. Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai responded and said: Everything that they established, they established only for their own purposes. They established marketplaces, to place prostitutes in them; bathhouses, to pamper themselves; and bridges, to collect taxes from all who pass over them. Yehuda, son of converts, went and related their statements to his household, and those statements continued to spread until they were heard by the monarchy. They ruled and said: Yehuda, who elevated the Roman regime, shall be elevated and appointed as head of the Sages, the head of the speakers in every place. Yosei, who remained silent, shall be exiled from his home in Judea as punishment, and sent to the city of Tzippori in the Galilee. And Shimon, who denounced the government, shall be killed.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai and his son, Rabbi Elazar, went and hid in the study hall. Every day Rabbi Shimon's wife would bring them bread and a jug of water and they would eat. When the decree intensified, Rabbi Shimon said to his son: Women are easily impressionable and, therefore, there is room for concern lest the authorities torture her and she reveal our whereabouts. They went and they hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob tree was created for them as well as a spring of water. They would remove their clothes and sit covered in sand up to their necks. They would study Torah all day in that manner. At the time of prayer, they would dress, cover themselves, and pray, and they would again remove their clothes afterward so that they would not become tattered. They sat in the cave for twelve years. Elijah the Prophet came and stood at the entrance to the cave and said: Who will inform bar Yoḥai that the emperor died and his decree has been abrogated?

They emerged from the cave, and saw people who were plowing and sowing. Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said: These people abandon eternal life of Torah study and engage in temporal life for their own sustenance. The Gemara relates that every place that Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar directed their eyes was immediately burned. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Did you emerge from the cave in order to destroy My world? Return to your cave. They again went and sat there for twelve months. They said: The judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts for twelve months. Surely their sin was atoned in that time. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Emerge from your cave. They emerged. Everywhere that Rabbi Elazar would strike, Rabbi Shimon would heal. Rabbi Shimon said to Rabbi Elazar: My son, you and I suffice for the entire world, as the two of us are engaged in the proper study of Torah.

As the sun was setting on Shabbat eve, they saw an elderly man who was holding two bundles of myrtle branches and running at twilight. They said to him: Why do you have these? He said to them: In honor of Shabbat. They said to him: And let one suffice. He answered them: One is corresponding to: "Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), and one is corresponding to: "Observe the Shabbat day, to keep it holy" (Deuteronomy 5:12). Rabbi Shimon said to his son: See how beloved the mitzvot are to Israel. Their minds were put at ease and they were no longer as upset that people were not engaged in Torah study.

פתח רבי יהודה ואמר: כמה נאים מעשיהן של אומה זו: תקנו שווקים, תקנו גשרים, תקנו מרחצאות. רבי יוסי שתק. נענה רבי שמעון בן יוחאי ואמר: כל מה שתקנו, לא תקנו אלא לצורך עצמן. תקנו שווקין — להושיב בהן זונות, מרחצאות — לעדן בהן עצמן, גשרים — ליטול מהן מכס. הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם, ונשמעו למלכות. אמרו: יהודה שעילה — יתעלה. יוסי ששתק — יגלה לצפורי. שמעון שגינה — יהרג.

אזל הוא ובריה, טשו בי מדרשא. כל יומא הוה מתא להו דביתיהו ריפתא וכונא דמא וברכי. בי תקיף גזירתא אמר ליה לבריה: נשים דעתן קלה עליהן, דילמא מצערי לה ומגליא לן. אזלו טשו במערתא. איתרחיש ניסא איברי להו חרובא ועינא דמא, והו משלחי מנייהו והו יתבי עד צוארייהו בחלא. כולי יומא גרסי. בעידן צלוי לבשי מיכסו ומצלו, והדר משלחי מנייהו כי היכי דלא ליבלו. איתיבו תריסר שני במערתא. אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא, אמר: מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזירתיה.

נפקו, חזו אינשי דקא ברבי ורעי, אמרין: מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין בחיי שעה. כל מקום שנותנין עיניהן מיד נשרף. יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם: להחריב עולמי רצאתם?! חזרו למערתכם! הדר אזול איתיבו תריסר ירחי שתא. אמרי: משפט רשעים בגיהנם שנים עשר חדש. יצתה בת קול ואמרה: צאו מערתכם! נפקו. כל היכא דהוה מחי רבי אלעזר, הוה מסי רבי שמעון. אמר לו: בני, די לעולם אני ואתה.

בהדי פגא דמעלי שבתא חזו ההוא סבא דהוה נקיט תרי מדאני אסא ורהיט בין השמשות. אמרו ליה: הני למה לך? אמר להו: לכבוד שבת. ותיסגי לך בחד! — חד כנגד "זכור" וחד כנגד "שמור". אמר ליה לבריה: חזי כמה חביבין מצות על ישראל. איתביה דעמיהו.

Source 8: Shabbat 11a

תנאי: חברים שהיו עוסקין בתורה — מפסיקין לקריאת שמע, ואין מפסיקין לתפלה. אמר רבי יוחנן: לא שנו אלא כגון רבי שמעון בן יוחי וחביריו שתורתן אומנותן. אבל כגון אנו, מפסיקין לקריאת שמע ולתפלה

With regard to those engaged in Torah study, they need not stop for prayer, but they are required to stop to recite Shema. As it was taught in a baraita: Torah scholars, who were engaged in the study of Torah, stop their Torah study for Shema, and they do not stop for prayer. Rabbi Yohanan said a caveat to this statement: They only taught that they need not stop for prayer with regard to the likes of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai and his colleagues, whose Torah is their vocation and they never interrupt their Torah study. However, for the likes of us, who also engage in other activities, we stop both for Shema and for prayer.

This is the halacha, too, according to Source 9: Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 107:

מי שתורתו אומנתו כגון רבי שמעון בר יוחאי וחביריו מפסיק לקריאת שמע ולא לתפלה אבל אנו מפסיקים בין לקריאת שמע בין לתפלה.

R. Asher Meir: The fire surrounding the house as Rav Shimon departed this world seems in an eerie way to recall the fiery glance of Rav Shimon as he departed his cave the first time - the same fiery gaze which aroused the ire of the Almighty and condemned Rav Shimon and his son to another year of isolation and privation in their cave. Just like the earlier fire, the fire surrounding the house threatened to consume anyone who was not totally devoted to Torah study, "like Rav Shimon bar Yochai and his colleagues, whose Torah was their entire livelihood"

Source 10: Talmud Berachot 35b

תנו רבנן: "ואספת דגנה" מה תלמוד לומר? — לפי שנאמר: "לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיה" — יכול דברים ככתבן, תלמוד לומר: "ואספת דגנה" — הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ, דברי רבי ישמעאל

The Sages taught: What is the meaning of that which the verse states: "And you shall gather your grain"? Because it is stated: "This Torah shall not depart from your mouths, and you shall contemplate in it day and night" ([Joshua 1:8](#)), I might have thought that these matters are to be understood as they are written; one is to literally spend his days immersed exclusively in Torah study. Therefore, the verse states: "And you shall gather your grain, your wine and your oil," assume in their regard, the way of the world; set aside time not only for Torah, but also for work. This is the statement of Rabbi Yishmael.

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר: אפשר אדם חורש בשעת חרישה, וזורע בשעת זריעה, וקוצר בשעת קצירה, ודש בשעת דישה, וזורע בשעת הרוח, תורה מה תהא עליה? אלא בזמן שישקאל עושין רצונו של מקום — מלאכתן נעשית על ידי אחרים, שנאמר: "ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם וגו'", ובזמן שאין ישקאל עושין רצונו של מקום — מלאכתן נעשית על ידי עצמן, שנאמר: "ואספת דגנה". ולא עוד אלא שמלאכת אחרים נעשית על ידן, שנאמר: "ועבדת את אויבך וגו'"

Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Is it possible that a person plows in the plowing season and sows in the sowing season and harvests in the harvest season and threshes in the threshing season and winnows in the windy season, as grain is separated from the chaff by means of the wind, and is constantly busy; what will become of Torah? Rather, one must dedicate himself exclusively to Torah at the expense of other endeavors; as when Israel performs God's will, their work is performed by others, as it is stated: "And strangers will stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners will be your plowmen and your vinedressers" ([Isaiah 61:5](#)). When Israel does not perform God's will, their work is performed by them themselves, as it is stated: "And you shall gather your grain." Moreover, if Israel fails to perform God's will, others' work will be performed by them, as it is stated: "You shall serve your enemy whom God shall send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness and in want of all things" ([Deuteronomy 28:48](#)).

אָמַר אַבִּי: הָרִבָּה עָשׂוּ כְּרֵבִי יִשְׁמָעֵאל, וְעָלְתָה בִּידָן. כְּרֵבִי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחִי, וְלֹא עָלְתָה בִּידָן.

Summing up this dispute, **Abaye said:** Although there is room for both opinions, **many have acted in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Yishmael**, and combined working for a living and learning Torah, **and** although they engaged in activities other than the study of Torah, **were successful** in their Torah study. **Many have acted in accordance with** the opinion of **Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai** **and were not successful** in their Torah study. They were ultimately forced to abandon their Torah study altogether.

Source 11: Sefer HaChinuch on Sefirat HaOmer

It is from the roots of the commandment from the angle of the simple understanding [that it is] since the entire essence of Israel is only the Torah, and because of the Torah were the heavens and earth created, and as it is stated ([Jeremiah 33:25](#)), "Were it not for my covenant day and night, etc." And it is the essence and the reason that they were redeemed and left from Egypt - in order that they receive the Torah at Sinai, and fulfill it. And [it is] like God said to Moshe ([Exodus 3:12](#)), "And this will be the sign for you that I have sent you; when you take out the people from Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." And the understanding of the verse is [that] your taking them out from Egypt is a sign for you that you shall worship God on this mountain - meaning that you shall receive the Torah, which is the great principle for which they were redeemed and it is their ultimate good. And it is a great matter for them, more than freedom from slavery. And hence God made a sign of their leaving Egypt for the receiving of the Torah; as we always make what is secondary into a sign for what is the essence.

And because of this - that it is [the] essence of Israel, and because of it were they redeemed and went up to all of the greatness to which they rose - we were commanded to tally from the morrow of the holiday of Pesach until the day of the giving of the Torah; to show about ourselves the great desire [we have] for the the honored day, which our hearts yearn [for] like 'a slave seeks shade' and always tallies when will come the yearned time that he goes out to freedom. As the tally shows about a man that all of his deliverance and all of his desire is to reach that time.

Source 12: R. Asher Meir: THE "SHTEI HA-LECHEM JEW" AND THE "OMER JEW"

The bringing of the omer is in many ways parallel to the separation of teruma. Like teruma, the omer is called "reishit" - the first ([Vayikra 23:10](#)). Like teruma, in which even one kernel makes the entire silo permissible, the tiny amount of omer makes permissible the entire year's crop, which until that time is forbidden as "chadash." And teruma is also called "avoda" - like omer which is a true Temple offering ([Pesachim 72b](#)).

Now, one of the things which characterizes teruma is that it must be brought from the best part of the crop (see [Mishna Terumot 2:4](#)). We would likewise expect that the omer, which makes ALL grains of the wheat family permissible, should come from the choicest grain - namely wheat. But this is not so - actually, the omer comes from barley, which is generally animal food and (except for the offering of the sota and the omer itself) is never permitted for Temple offerings! What can we learn from this commandment?

There are many fine punctilious Jews whom we could characterize as "shtei ha-lechem" Jews. Every aspect of God's service must always be "le-khatchila," in the best possible way. Any other kind of service has no value in their eyes. According to this approach, we would never dare bring mere barley as a Temple offering.

Yet what can we do - "first" means not only "best" but also the temporal first, and barley just happens to ripen months before wheat. In commanding the bringing of the omer, the Torah seems to be telling us: Don't be a "shtei ha-lechem Jew." Of course, God's service demands the best, but the best is determined in practice according to what is possible and practical. If the only grain available at Pesach is barley, then by all means bring barley to the altar!

But does this mean that we should be "omer Jews" - settling for second best, reconciling ourselves to a bedi'avad situation? The Torah rejects this extreme also. We ARE allowed, and even commanded, to bring barley - on the condition that we IMMEDIATELY begin counting the days towards the time when we will be able to fulfill the mitzva of bringing the new grain crop to the Temple in its fullest glory - the "first fruits" of the wheat crop represented by the two loaves. God's forbearance towards us should never be an excuse for indolence.

THE "SHAVUOT JEW" AND THE "PESACH JEW"

Of course, the offerings stand in a direct relationship to the holidays themselves: Pesach, the holiday of redemption, and Shavuot, the holiday of Torah. The "shtei ha-lechem Jew" also tends to be a "Shavuot Jew" - he sees the relationship of God to the Jewish people only through the prism of the giving of the Torah. Our connection to God is mediated through the performance of the commandments, which we received at Mount Sinai on Shavuot. Judaism conceived in any other terms has no value in his eyes.

Yet, the Torah gives us another holiday - Pesach, commemorating our redemption from Egypt solely on the basis of our family identity - the fact that we are the progeny of the Patriarchs, to whom God promised the land of Israel. Were not the Jews at the time of the Exodus almost indistinguishable

from their Egyptian neighbors, sunken in forty-nine gates of impurity? Even so, God saved them amidst wonders and signs!

Does this then mean that we should become "Pesach Jews" - seeing the special nature of the Jewish people solely in terms of our national identity, our Israelite birthright, without regard to keeping the Torah? Again, the Torah rejects this extreme too. God DID save us from Egypt despite our lowly spiritual status - on the condition that we IMMEDIATELY start counting the days, climbing the ladder, towards the PROPER status of the Jewish people - the receiving and the pof the Torah!

WHAT DID THE BAT KOL TEACH RAV SHIMON?

Now, we can better understand what Rav Shimon learned from the Bat Kol. As they left the cave, Rav Shimon bar Yochai and his son were "Shavuot Jews." Anything less than total devotion to Torah study was unacceptable to them - to the extent that even innocent activities like plowing and sowing seemed to them a horrible neglect of God's service. They were rebuked for this, and went back into the cave.

Yet, Rav Shimon bar Yochai and Rav Elazar did not make the mistake of becoming "Pesach Jews." They internalized the message of the Bat Kol and became - "Sefirat Ha-omer Jews!" There IS a place for ordinary Jews, engaging in the study and performance of Torah according to their mundane level. But these Jews themselves draw spiritual sustenance from their inner connection to the supremely righteous, to whose level they can compare themselves and aspire.

Therefore, the fire surrounding Rav Shimon's house WAS appropriate: not everybody has to be totally devoted to Torah study, but there is a need for the fire which delineates those chosen few who are able to maintain this level. And the Gemara's ruling regarding prayer IS appropriate: MANY acted according to Rav Shimon and were unsuccessful, but there need to be a FEW who act this way, who will achieve great spiritual heights through their utter devotion to Torah.

How appropriate it is that the "hilula" of Rav Shimon bar Yochai comes during the period of the counting of the omer! This period symbolizes that our mandate to perform the commandments and to maintain our identity as God's special people according to what is possible and practical is made acceptable by our striving for ascent and our connection to those stubborn few who are able to conceive of our connection to Torah and to the Holy One in rarefied, idealized terms.