



”עלית למרום שבית שבי”

## When Moshe Rabeinu Ascended to the Heavens to Receive the Torah He Was Accompanied by the Neshamah of שבי—Shimon bar Yochai

This year, the auspiciously approaching Lag BaOmer will fall on the Friday of parshas Emor. Thus, it is fitting to establish a connection between the celebration of Lag BaOmer and parshas Emor, in which the mitzvah of “sefiras ha’omer” is mentioned. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Vayikra 23, 15): **”וְסִפְרַתֶּם לָכֶם מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבוּת: תְּמִימוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה, עַד מִמָּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִישִׁים יוֹם, וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַה’.”** **You shall count for yourselves—from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the “omer” of the waving—seven weeks, they shall be complete. Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days; and you shall offer a new meal-offering (minchah) to Hashem.**

The Chasam Sofer, zy”a, in his Derashos (Part 2, page 279, column 2), asserts that this passuk alludes to Lag BaOmer. He writes that from the beginning of the passuk until and including the word “עומר”, there are exactly 33 (ל”ג) letters; **this alludes to Lag (33<sup>rd</sup> day) BaOmer, the day on which the mahn began to fall.** He is referring to the fact that the allotment of mahn was an **“omer” per person**, as it is written (Shemos 16, 16): **”וְזֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה’ לָקֶטְוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוּ עוֹמֶר: ”לְגֻלוֹלָתָ—this is the thing that Hashem has commanded: Gather from it, for every man according to what he eats, an omer per person.** Based on this, the Chasam Sofer proposes that the mahn began to fall on Lag BaOmer. Hence, the passuk states: **“From the day when you bring the omer”—referring to the day on which the “omer” began to fall—namely, Lag BaOmer.**

In truth, however, the Chasam Sofer does not teach us how to interpret the passuk as a whole. The beginning of the passuk states: **“You shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the rest day, from the day when you bring the omer.”** This teaches us explicitly that we begin counting on **“the morrow of the rest day”—namely, the second day of Pesach.** But how does this relate to the continuation of the passuk: **“From the day when you bring the omer”?**

### **The First 32 (ל”ב) Days of the Sephirah Are Preparation for the Revealed Torah the Final 17 (ט”ז) Days Are Preparation for Toras HaNistar**

Now, our sacred sefarim teach us that the days of the Sefirah are a preparation for receiving the Torah on Chag HaShavuot. The Chasam Sofer himself states this explicitly in his Derashos; but the actual source for this notion comes from the Zohar hakadosh (Emor 97a). It states that the seven weeks of the Sefirah correspond to the seven clean days a woman counts before uniting with her husband. In similar fashion, the congregation of Yisrael purify themselves in anticipation of receiving the Torah and being sanctified by HKB”H on Chag HaShavuot. As it is written (ibid. 19, 17): **”וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹקִים מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְּצֻבוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הָהָר”**—**Moshe brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d, and they stood under the mountain.** Rashi comments: **This indicates that the Shechinah went out to greet them like a “Chasan” (a bridegroom) who goes out to greet a “kallah” (bride).**

Furthermore, we learn from the Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3, 1) that the 49 days of the Sefirah are equivalent to ל"ב טו"ב (32+17)—alluding to the attribute of having a **good heart**. The first 32 days prepare us to receive the revealed Torah. The latter 17 days—from Lag BaOmer to Chag HaShavuot—prepare us to receive the concealed, mystical Torah—Toras HaNistar. The latter is described as “the concealed light”; hence, it is alluded to by the seventeen days of טו"ב, in keeping with the words (Bereishis 1, 4): “וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב”—**G-d saw that the light was “tov.”** (With regards to the association of the revealed Torah with the first ל"ב days, we can suggest that this is alluded to very nicely by the fact that the last letter of the Torah is the “lamed” of “ישראל”, and the first letter of the Torah is the “beis” of “בראשית”.)

This illuminates for us the interpretation of the passuk presented by the Chasam Sofer. “**You shall count for yourselves**” two distinct counts in preparation for—“Kabbalas haTorah”—receiving the Torah. First, you shall count 32 days following the first day of Pesach--ממחרת--השבת—in preparation for receiving the revealed Torah. Second, “מיום הביאכם את עומר”—from the day that the omer of “mahn” began to fall for Yisrael, Lag BaOmer, you shall count 17 days, equivalent to טו"ב, in preparation for receiving the concealed Torah. Therefore, this passuk--ממחרת--לכם מספרתם--contains 33 letters, corresponding to Lag BaOmer, the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of counting, the day on which the “mahn” began to fall. Thus, the 49 days of the Sefirah consist of two periods of preparation—one for the revealed Torah and one for Toras HaNistar—culminating on Chag HaShavuot, the fiftieth day, after counting seven complete weeks.

## When Moshe Ascended to Receive the Torah He Was Accompanied by the Neshamah of Rashbi

With great pleasure, we will elaborate on these two stages of preparation for receiving the Torah on Chag HaShavuot. We will begin by referring to a fascinating chiddush the Gaon Chida, ztz”l, presents in his sefer Shem HaGedolim in the name of the Arizal, which he heard from a Torah-scholar named Rabbi Masoud. He expounds on the passuk (Tehillim 68, 19): “עלית למרום שבית שבי”—**you ascended on high; you have taken captives.** He interprets the word “שב” as an acronym for שׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן יִזְחָאִי.

In the Gemara (Shabbas 88b), they interpret this passuk as a reference to Moshe, when he went up to the heavens to receive the Torah on behalf of Yisrael. The malachim protested strenuously that HKB”H not give the Torah to human beings, who are corporeal creatures; preferably, it should be given to them. Moshe Rabeinu rebutted their claims and was victorious. This is the deeper meaning of the passuk: “**You ascended on high; you have taken captives.**” Accordingly, the Arizal draws a connection between Moshe’s visit in the heavens to receive the Torah and the neshamah of Rashbi.

We find a similar teaching in Semichat Chachamim, authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Naftali Katz, zy”a: **It is brought down by the kabbalists that when Moshe ascended, he was granted the neshamah of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai. This is alluded to by the words “שבית שבי”—he took captive and procured the neshamah of “שב”, which is an abbreviation for שׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן יִזְחָאִי.**

Based on this insight, we can now explain why Moshe took the neshamah of Rashbi with him to receive the Torah on behalf of Yisrael. In his siddur, the author of the Tanya (Sha’ar Lag BaOmer) writes that the reason Rashbi (and not some other Tanna) was privileged to reveal Toras HaNistar to Yisrael was because he was a nitzotz from the neshamah of Moshe Rabeinu. So, just like Moshe Rabeinu taught the revealed Torah, Rashbi, specifically, revealed the mystical secrets of the Torah.

The source for the assertion that Rashbi was a holy spark from the neshamah of Moshe Rabeinu is found in the Arizal’s Likutei Shas, where he elaborates on their connection (Shabbas 33b): **Just as Moshe fled from Pharaoh’s sword and attained his perfection in the desert wilderness; so, too, Rashbi fled from Caesar and attained his perfection in the wilderness cave in Lod.**

We have now achieved a better understanding of the interpretation that the word “שב” in the passuk: **עלית למרום שבית שבי**—alludes to **Shimon ben Yochai**. Moshe deliberately took the neshamah of Rashbi with him when he went up to the heavens to receive the Torah. Thus, the two of them together would receive the entire Torah for Yisrael; Moshe would transmit the revealed meanings and interpretations of the Torah to the people, whereas Rashbi would transmit Toras HaNistar to the people at the appropriate time. Together, they

exemplify the dictum (Koheles 4, 9): **טובים השנים מן האחד אשר יש**—**להם שכר טוב בעמלם**—**two are better than one, for they get a better return for their labor.**

### The Malachim Contended that They Deserved the Torah Based on the Basis of Proximity

I had a wonderful inspiration regarding the Arizal's interpretation of **ש"י** as an acronym for **ש'מעון ב'ן יוחאי**. The Gemara (Shabbas 88b) teaches us that at Matan Torah, the malachim beseeched HKB"H: **"תנה הודך על השמים"**—**bestow Your glory upon the heavens.** The Bnei Yissaschar (Sivan 3, 19) cites the Gaon Chida in the sefer Kisei David (4). He justifies the malachim's claim to the Torah based on the law of **"bar metzra."** There is a ruling in the Shulchan Aruch (C.M. 175) that if someone is selling a field, he must offer it first to the owner of the neighboring field.

The rationale for this halachah is based on the principle (Devarim 6, 18): **"ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני ה'"**—**you shall do what is fair and good in the eyes of Hashem.** In other words, HKB"H wants us to conduct ourselves in a manner above and beyond the strict letter of the law. Thus, even though the seller is legally permitted to sell his field to whomever he wishes, based on the principle of **"doing what is fair and good,"** Chazal ruled that it is proper to offer it first to the owner of the neighboring field. For, it is convenient and beneficial for a landowner to have his fields next to each other. Based on this logic, the malachim, who dwell in the heavens, argued that the Torah should rightfully be given to them, since the Torah originated in the heavens before it was transmitted below on earth.

The Chida interprets Moshe Rabeinu's response to the malachim accordingly. He argued that there are mitzvos in the Torah that the malachim are not able to perform; therefore, it makes no sense to give the Torah to them. Here are the words of Moshe Rabeinu cited in the Gemara (ibid.):

**"רבונו של עולם, תורה שאתה נותן לי מה כתיב בה, אנכי ה' אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים, אמר להן למצרים ירדתם, למרעה השתעבדתם, תורה למה תהא לכם... שוב מה כתיב בה ככד את אביך ואת אמך, אב ואם יש לכם, שוב מה כתיב בה לא תרצח, לא תנאף, לא תגנוב, קנאה יש ביניכם, יצר הרע יש ביניכם."**

**Master of the Universe, what is written in the Torah that You are giving me? (Shemos 20, 2) "I am Hashem, your G-d, who took you out of Eretz Mitzrayim." Addressing**

**the malachim, he said, "Did you descend to Mitzrayim? Were you enslaved by Pharaoh? Why should you have the Torah?" . . . What else is written in it (ibid. 12)? "Honor your father and mother." Do you have a father or mother?" What else is written in it? (ibid. 20, 13) "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal." Addressing the malachim, he said: "Is there envy among you? Is there a yetzer hara among you?"**

This response to the malachim is difficult to comprehend, because our early scholars have taught us that the malachim were not requesting the Torah in the form that it was given to human beings, based on the plain text. They wanted to receive the mystical form of the Torah as it existed in the heavens before going down to earth and taking on a form and text applicable to mundane, worldly matters. So, it seems that Moshe Rabeinu's response did not address their request and did not truly apply to them—such as asking them if they have a father and a mother.

Hence, the Chida suggests an answer based on the following halachic ruling (ibid. 13): If a seller wants to sell an entire field, and the owner of the neighboring field only wants to purchase half of it, his claim is not valid. For, in this case, the seller would incur a financial loss, since he would then have to search for another buyer to purchase the second half of the field. Now, Moshe's response to the malachim makes perfect sense. The Torah is composed of two parts—a revealed part and a concealed, mystical part. The malachim only wanted the concealed part, whereas Yisrael agreed to accept both parts. Hence, the malachim's claim based on the law of **"bar metzra"** was invalidated. This concludes his marvelous insight.

### The Malachim's Claim Was Invalidated because the Revealed Part of the Torah Does Not Apply to Them

Following this intriguing path, let us now explain why Moshe Rabeinu saw fit to take the neshamah of Rashbi with him when he ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah. In truth, the malachim could have defended their claim by pointing out that in general the people of Yisrael occupy themselves primarily with the revealed, practical teachings of the Torah and not with its mystical teachings. After all, the latter are beyond the abilities and comprehension of most



of us. Thus, they could argue that Yisrael also only received a portion of the Torah, and their original, legal claim was still valid—i.e., the “bar metzra” (the neighboring party), the malachim, would acquire their part and the other party, Yisrael, would acquire their part; because in this situation, the seller does not incur any financial loss. So, why, indeed, was the Torah given to Yisrael and not to the malachim based on their claim of “bar metzra”?

The answer is that HKB”H sent the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, from the heavens to accompany Moshe Rabeinu. As we know, he was privileged to become proficient in the mystical, concealed part of the Torah. Additionally, he was given permission to reveal and teach Toras HaNistar to Yisrael. He attests to this fact himself in the Zohar hakadosh (Shemos 9a): **Now, it is time for me to reveal what no other man has been allowed to reveal.** In a similar vein, we find in the Tikunei Zohar (Intro. 17b) that Eliyahu said to Rashbi: **Come, Rabbi Shimon, and new things will be introduced by you that no other man has been given permission to reveal until now.** So, we learn that Yisrael received the revealed portion of the Torah in the merit of Moshe Rabeinu, whereas they were privileged to receive the concealed, mystical portion of the Torah in the merit of Rashbi.

This clarifies for us the teaching of our master, the Arizal, that the word “שבי” in the passuk: “עלית למרום שבית שבי”—is an acronym for **Shimon ben Yochai**. Because when Moshe went up to receive the Torah on behalf of Yisrael, the malachim contended that they deserved to be given the Torah on account of the law of “bar metzra.” Moshe Rabeinu refuted their claim by pointing out that the malachim are only capable of receiving the concealed portion of the Torah, whereas Yisrael agreed to receive both the revealed Torah and Toras HaNistar.

To accomplish this feat, Moshe Rabeinu cleverly adorned himself with the neshamah of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the mystical Torah that he was destined to transmit to Yisrael. This explains why the passuk is formulated as if Rashbi was present with Moshe Rabeinu. When “**you ascended to the heights of heaven**” to receive the Torah, “**you took the Torah captive**” from the malachim, who argued that it should rightfully be given to them based on the law

of “bar metzra.” You accomplished this by adorning yourself with the neshamah of “שבי”—**Shimon ben Yochai**—who is responsible for revealing the mystical portion of the Torah to Yisrael. As a result, Yisrael were able to receive both portions of the Torah, while the malachim were only capable of receiving one portion of the Torah.

## בראשית Is an Acronym for אור תורת רבי ש'מעון בן יוחאי

Based on what we have discussed, we can propose a marvelous explanation for the connection between the conclusion the Torah—**ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המורא הגדול אשר**—and its beginning—**בראשית**—“עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל”. We will begin by introducing what the Agra D’Kallah wrote concerning the first word of the Torah (55): **בראשית is an anagram for א, ת רשב"י, whose first letters are an acronym for אור תורת רבי ש'מעון בן יוחאי, the one whom G-d sent to sustain and illuminate the eyes of Yisrael with the light of his Torah.**

This is the explanation: The final passuk of the Torah states: **“ולכל היד החזקה ולכל המורא הגדול”—and for all the strong hand and for all the great awesomeness** (Rashi explains that this alludes to the fact that Moshe received the Torah on the luchos with his hands); **“אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל”—that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael**—specifically to Yisrael and not to the malachim. As we have learned, this is problematic, since the malachim had a legitimate claim based on the law of “bar metzra.” And if you want to say that their claim was invalid, because they only wanted to receive the concealed part of the Torah and not the revealed part, the same was true of Yisrael—their interest was primarily in the revealed part of the Torah, not the entire Torah. The answer, however, is provided by the first word of the Torah: **בראשית** which is an acronym for **אור תורת רבי ש'מעון בן יוחאי—the light of the Torah of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.** He was responsible for revealing the concealed part of the Torah to Yisrael. In this merit, the Torah was given to Yisrael and not to the malachim, because they accepted the entire Torah—both the revealed part and the concealed part.

Now, let us refer to the following passuk (Shemos 14, 8): **“ויבני ישראל יוצאים ביד רמה”—and Bnei Yisrael went out with a raised hand** (without fear). This is interpreted by

Targum Onkelos as: **And Bnei Yisrael went out** "בריש גלי". In his sacred commentary, the Degel Machaneh Ephraim (Beshalach) interprets this based on a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Nasso 124b): **Yisrael are destined to taste from the Eitz HaChaim, which is the sefer of the Zohar, that will release them from galus.** This then is the "remez" taught by the Targum: **Bnei Yisrael will exit galus** "בריש גלי"—when the sefer HaZohar will be revealed by בר"ש—an acronym for רבי ש'מעון בן יוחאי.

We will now add a spicy tidbit of our own to this interpretation. We know that the ultimate purpose of the exodus from Mitzrayim was for Yisrael to receive the Torah. This is evident from HKB"H's response to Moshe (ibid. 3, 12): "בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלקים על ההר הזה"—**when you take the people out of Mitzrayim, you will worship G-d on this mountain.** Rashi comments: **And in response to that which you asked, "What merit does Yisrael have that they should depart from Mitzrayim?" I have a matter of great consequence dependent on this exodus. For they are destined to receive the Torah on this mountain three months after they depart Mitzrayim.**

The difficulty, however, is that the malachim had a claim of "bar metzra." So, how would Bnei Yisrael manage to receive the Torah? The Torah resolves this difficulty by informing us that **"Bnei Yisrael went out"** of Mitzrayim "בריש גלי" (as rendered by the Targum)—i.e., in the merit of **Rashbi**, who transmitted the Torah of mysticism to Yisrael. Hence, it turned out that Yisrael would receive both portions of the Torah—the revealed and the concealed—whereas the malachim only requested the concealed portion. Therefore, their claim based on the law of "bar metzra" was denied.

### The Claim of "Bar Metzra" Did Not Impact Yisrael since They Are Hashem's Children

I would now like to present to our esteemed audience an alternate explanation related to the Arizal's "remez" that the word שב"י in the passuk under discussion alludes to **Shimon ben Yochai**, whose neshamah joined Moshe Rabeinu, so that he could defeat the malachim and prevent them from receiving the Torah. We have learned from the Gaon Chida that the malachim presented a claim to the Torah based on the law of "bar metzra"—having a closer proximity to the Torah.

According to the Shitah Mekubetzet (B.M. 108a), however, this does not apply when the seller sells his field to his son. In fact, according to the guiding principle of "ועשית הישר והטוב"—doing what is fair and good—it is more fitting to leave a field in the possession of one's son than to a neighbor. Now, since Yisrael are called Hashem's children, as we find in the passuk (Devarim 14, 1): "בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם"—**you are children to Hashem, your G-d**—the malachim's claim of "bar metzra" no longer applied.

Now, the Zohar hakadosh (Behar 111b) teaches that the people of Yisrael have two distinct statuses in relation to HKB"H. They are both servants and children. We find the former depiction in the passuk (Vayikra 25, 55): "כי לי בני ישראל" "עבדים עבדי הם"; we find the latter in the passuk just cited above. To reconcile this apparent discrepancy, the Zohar explains that when Yisrael are overtly studying the Torah and serving Hashem by observing and performing the mitzvos, they have the status of "עבדים"—**servants of the Omnipresent.** On the other hand, when they delve into the concealed treasures of the Torah, analogous to a son searching through his father's hidden treasures to reveal the deeper meaning of each and every mitzvah, they have the status of "בנים"—**children of the Omnipresent.**

Let us add another pleasant tidbit. According to the Zohar hakadosh (Idra Zuta, Ha'azinu 287b), on the day Rashbi passed away, he gave permission to his disciple Rabbi Abba to write down the secrets of the Zohar, so that they would not be lost from Yisrael. Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 7b): "מנא לן דשמא גרים, אמר רבי אלעזר דאמר קרא לכו חזו מפעלות ה' אשר שם שמות בארץ, אל תקרי שמות אלא שמות." **From where do we know that a person's name influences future occurrences? Rabbi Elazar said: Because the passuk says (Tehillim 46, 9): "Go and see the works of G-d, Who has wrought devastations in the land." Do not pronounce the word "shamot" (devastations) but rather "sheimot" (names).** Elsewhere in the Gemara, we are taught (Yoma 83b): "רבי מאיר הוה דייק בשמא"—Rabbi Meir could detect a person's essence and nature based solely on his name.

In light of this, we can suggest that this is why HKB"H arranged for Toras HaNistar to be recorded in writing for all future generations by a Tanna named **Rabbi Abba.** This name

alludes to the fact that one who studies Toras HaNistar has the status of a son. Correspondingly, he warrants having HKB"H relate to him as an **"abba"—a father**. Since the divine Tanna Rashbi was aware of this, he gave permission specifically to Rabbi Abba to write down the secrets of Toras HaNistar in the Zohar hakadosh for all future generations.

We can now truly appreciate why Moshe adorned himself with the neshamah of Rashbi when he ascended to the heavens to receive the Torah. As we have learned, he was confronted by the malachim who staked their claim to the Torah: **"Bestow Your glory upon the heavens"**—based on the law of "bar metzra." After all, they realized that most Jews confine themselves to the study of the revealed portion of the Torah, since the concealed portion is beyond their capabilities. As such, they have the status of G-d's servants, not his children. Therefore, they had a legitimate claim to the Torah based on the law of "bar metzra." To negate their claim, Moshe Rabeinu adorned himself with the neshamah of

Rashbi, who had received permission from above to reveal the deepest, most esoteric secrets of the Torah to Yisrael. On account of Toras HaNistar, Yisrael possess the status of G-d's children. Thus, as we have learned, a child takes precedence even over a "bar metzra."

The significance of the "remez" presented by the Arizal in the passuk: **"עלית למרום שבית שבי"**—is now quite clear. When Moshe ascended to the heavens, he had to confiscate the Torah from the malachim, who presented a legal claim of "bar metzra." He refuted their claim by taking the neshamah of **Shimon ben Yochai**, the author of the mystical Torah, with him as an "ibur" (a temporary attachment). As we have learned this is alluded to by the word **שבי** in this passuk. This proved definitively that Yisrael possess the status of children of the Omnipresent—"HaMakom"—who explore and search through the treasures of the King and take precedence over those with a claim of "bar metzra."



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