



The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Emor

Iyar 5781 / May 2021



This dvar Torah is dedicated to my brother and future sister-in-law, Simon Morgenstern and Lauren Borenstein — my heartfelt bracha to you is that you build yourself a Bayit Ne'eman B'Yisrael!

Life & Marriage

By Ayden Morgenstern

This weekend, *Parshat Emor* coincides with the great celebration of *Lag Ba'Omer*, the thirty-third day of the Omer, which fell on Friday. *Lag Ba'Omer* honors the death of one of the greatest *Tannaic* sages and spiritual giants in Jewish history and the traditional author of the *Zohar*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, aka, *Rashbi*. According to *Aggadic* lore, on the day of his passing, Rabbi bar Yochai taught the most intimate secrets of Kabbalah. And he instructed his disciples to observe his *yahrzeit* as a time of joy and festivity since the day of death marks the culmination of all that a person has achieved in the course of life on earth. That is how Jews have been celebrating the day of the *Rasbi's* death ever since.

Rashbi's yahrzeit, however, is very different than any other *yahrtzeit*. It is often referred to as the “*Hillula D'Rashbi*,” the “wedding” anniversary of *Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai* — a title that no other *yahrzeit* receives. A *yahrzeit* is typically a solemn day of remembrance, but here we're told that it, like a wedding day, is a time of joyous day of singing and dancing. How peculiar since death and marriage are diametrically opposed: by definition, death brings a sad ending to a marriage, while an anniversary marks another year of life and blessing together.

Rabbi YY Jacobson sees a spiritual similarity in life and marriage. Our life in this world begins as our soul enters our body, our infinite soul is confined within our physical, finite body. While our soul yearns to constantly grow closer to *Hashem* through prayer, good deeds, and acts of kindness, our bodies are driven by our hedonistic and selfish desires fueled by jealousy, lust, and the pursuit of honor. Similarly, as bachelors, we are free to do as we please without concern for someone else's needs or approval (except for our parents), yet a married person is limited to what they can do, who they can do it with, and how they may do it. The reality, writes Rabbi Jacobson, is that these seemingly limited experiences

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allow us to “access infinity and achieve eternity.” In life, it may feel like we are limiting ourselves by the *mitzvot* and commandments we must observe but it is quite the contrary; by overcoming our base and physical urges to perform *mitzvot* and acts of *chesed*, we transcend and even elevate our physical bodies. In this, without the marriage of body and soul, we could never achieve the eternal bliss of *Olam Habah*. This is also true in a marriage since it is through the perceived limitations that it imposes that you can build yourself into an even better person and better Jew. Also, it is through marriage that one can have children, thereby cementing your eternity and legacy.

Now, back to the *Rashbi* and his contribution to the propagation of Kabbalah within the Jewish life. As Rabbi Jacobson writes:

The teachings of Kabbalah explain at length the significance and purpose of every moment in this world; the sacred quality of the body; the mystery of every physical phenomenon, the depth and holiness of every creature in this world. Rabbi Shimon, in other words, is the one who showed us that life is a “wedding” — a place where limitations are opportunities for infinity.

The *Rashbi* taught us that life, in general, and Jewish life, in particular, has potential as amazing and expansive as a marriage. Perhaps this is why the *bracha* to every *Chatan* and *Kalah* is that they should merit to build a *Bayit Ne’eman B’Yisrael*, a house of faith in Israel.

With this in mind, we can understand why his *yahrzeit* is referred to as a *Hillula*, a wedding anniversary, replete with celebration and joy. The *Rashbi* taught us that life, in general, and Jewish life, in particular, has potential as amazing and expansive as a marriage.

Perhaps this is why the *bracha* to every *Chatan* and *Kalah* is that they should merit to build a *Bayit Ne’eman B’Yisrael*, a house of faith in Israel. What faith are we referring to? The faith in the inherent meaning and mystical significance in everything we do as Torah Jews to better ourselves and make the world a better place.

Ayden Morgenstern, joins his parents, Jordana and the Rabbi, his sister Ella and his brother Jacob in wishing Simon and Lauren the very best — they’re all very excited and looking forward to the upcoming wedding!

Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?

Please contact Steve Smith at LivingTorahFund@gmail.com

The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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