

Parshas Emor

by Rabbi Mordechai Franke

This week's *parsha* contains the *mitzva* of *sefiras haomer*, the counting of the 49 days between *Pesach* and *Shevuos*. It is a somber time, in which weddings and other expressions of *simcha* are restricted. There are differing *minhagim* as to whether these restrictions are observed in the first or second half of the *omer*, but all agree on one thing - *Lag Ba'omer* is a happy day. All segments of *Klal Yisroel* celebrate *Lag Ba'omer*. The extraordinary thing is that there is no mention of *Lag Ba'omer* in any of the many *Medrashai Chaza"l* that we have. How then did *Lag Ba'omer* become a festive day? Let us explore the origins of *Lag Ba'omer*.

The *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 62b) tells us that *Reb Akiva* had 12,000 pairs of students in his yeshiva. Tragically, they all died in a *mageifa* because they did not accord each other due respect. *Reb Akiva* subsequently relocated and taught *Reb Meir*, *Reb Yehuda*, *Reb Yosi*, *Reb Elazar ben Shamueh* and *Reb Shimon*, who transmitted *Torah* to the next generation. The *Gemara* informs us that the *talmidim* died *מפסח עד עצרת*, between *Pesach* and *Shevuos*.

The *Gemara* makes no mention of *Lag Ba'omer*. However, the *Tur*¹ states that some have the custom to observe the *omer* restrictions until *Lag Ba'omer* only, and not between *Lag Ba'omer* and *Shevuos*. The *Tur* explains that those who follow this custom believe that *Reb Akiva's talmidim* stopped dying on *Lag Ba'omer*, although he provides no source for this claim. The *Bais Yosef* references the *Avudraham*, who quotes the *Sefer HaManhig* of *Reb Avrohom ibn Yarchi* (a *talmid* of the *Ra'avad*) as stating that he heard that the *Ba'al HaMeor* found in an old Spanish manuscript that the *talmidim* of *Reb Akiva* died *מפסח עד פרוס העצרת*, between *Pesach* and "*prus Shevuos*". The *Bais Yosef* adds that this textual version is also mentioned in the *Drashos* of *Reb Yehoshua ibn Shuib* (a *talmid* of the *Rashba*).²

Our *Gemara* states that the *talmidim* died between *Pesach* and *Shevuos*. This *girsas* adds one more word, that they died between *Pesach* and "*prus Shevuos*". What does "*prus Shevuos*" mean? This phrase appears in a *Mishna* in *Shekalim* (3:1). The *Mishna* states that there were three occasions during the year when *shekalim* donations to the *Bais Hamikdash* were utilized to buy *korbonos*. The three times were "*prus Pesach*", "*prus Shevuos*" and "*prus Sukkos*". The *Bartenura* explains that the word "*prus*" means half, and in this context denotes half a month, which is fifteen days. "*Prus Pesach*" means fifteen days before *Pesach*, and "*prus Shavuos*" means fifteen days before *Shavuos*, which is the thirty fourth day of the *omer* (34+15=49).

The *Shulchan Aruch* therefore states that the custom is not to take a haircut from *Pesach* until the 34th day of the *omer*. However, the *Rema* writes that *Ashkenazi* custom is to take a haircut on the 33rd day of the *omer*. The *Gr"a* explains that the custom of the *Shulchan Aruch* is based on the understanding that the 34th day of the *omer* was the last day that *talmidim* died, whereas the custom of the *Rema* is based on the understanding that the 34th day of the *omer* was the first day that no-one died, and the 33rd day of the *omer* was the last day that *talmidim* died. This day is therefore the last day of mourning, and the principle of *miktzas ha'yom ke'kulo* allows the mourning to end at the beginning of that day (just as an *aveil* gets up at the beginning of the 7th day of *shiva*).³

This explains why *Lag Ba'omer* is the last day of mourning but does not explain why it is a joyous day. The *Gr"a* references the *Gemara* (*Taanis* 30b) which says that one of the reasons that the 15th of *Av* is considered a festive day is because on that day during the 40th year in the *midbar* the *Yidden* realized that the *gezeira* of *misah* due to the *chet ha'egel* had come to an end. The *Gr"a* implies that on *Lag Ba'omer* too, we are happy because the *gezeira* of *misah* on the *talmidim* of *Reb Akiva* came to an end.⁴

However, this is hard to understand. The reason that the *gezeira* ended was because all of the *talmidim* of *Reb Akiva* had died. As the *Pri Chodosh* asks, what *simcha* can there be if no-one was spared from the *gezeira* and there was nobody left to be punished? He answers that the *simcha* of *Lag Ba'omer* is that *Reb Akiva* was able to subsequently teach *talmidim* who did not make the same mistake as his former *talmidim*, and he was successfully able to pass *Torah* on to *Reb Meir*, *Reb Yehuda*, *Reb Yosi*, *Reb Elazar ben Shamueh* and *Reb Shimon*.⁵

This explanation of *Lag Ba'omer* is based on the *girsas* that the *talmidim* of *Reb Akiva* died between *Pesach* and "*prus Shavuos*". However, our *Gemara* does not have this text, and simply states that they died between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*. This *girsas* implies that period of time that the *talmidim* died spanned the whole of *sefiras ha'omer* and did not end on *Lag Ba'omer*. If so, we return to our original question - why is *Lag Ba'omer* a festive day?

The *Rema* references the *sefer Minhagei Maharil* (1360-1427), who explains that the *talmidim* of *Reb Akiva* died throughout the entire period from *Pesach* till *Shavuos* but did not die on any of the days that one does not say *tachnun*. There are sixteen of these days, and the *talmidim* died only on the other thirty-three days. In order to commemorate this, we celebrate *Lag Ba'omer* on the 33rd day of the *omer*.⁶

The *Rishonim* provide no other reason as to why *Lag Ba'omer* is a festive day. However, the *Achronim* suggest a completely different reason for the *simcha* of *Lag Ba'omer*. The *Ateres Zekeinim* (which is printed on the side of the page in the standard edition of the *Shulchan Aruch*) states that the *Ariza"l* visited the grave of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* on *Lag Ba'omer*, and *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* appeared to the *Ariza"l* and commented that *Lag Ba'omer* is "יום שמחתי", "my day of *simcha*". As the *Chayei Odom* puts it, *Lag Ba'omer* is the "יום הילולא דרשב"י ולכבודו נוהגים קצת שמחה", it is the '*yom hillula*' of *Reb Shimon bar Yochai* and in his honor we therefore act with a degree of *simcha*.⁷ "*Hillula*" is the Aramaic word for "*simcha*", and *Lag Ba'omer* is *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai's* day of *simcha*. But what does this mean?

In the *Zohar*, the words '*yom hillula*' are used to refer to the day that *Reb Shimon bar Yochai* died.⁸ Although the *Zohar* does not tell us which day he died on, the *Chida* in his *sefer Birkei Yosef* states that the *Ariza"l* revealed that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* died on *Lag Ba'omer*.⁹ If so, the *Chayei Odom* means that we act with *simcha* on *Lag Ba'omer* because it is the anniversary of the day that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* died.

This is somewhat hard to understand. The *yom hamisah* of a *tzaddik* is generally considered to be a sad day. *Chazal* (*Rosh Hashana* 18b) say that *שקולה מיתתן של צדיקים כשריפת בית אלקינו*, the death of a *tzaddik* is equivalent to the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*. Why then is the *yom hamisah* of *Reb Shimon bar Yochai* a happy day?¹⁰ The *meforshim* explain that the *Zohar* states that on the day *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* died he was able to reveal to his students great kabbalistic secrets, and the *simcha* is actually due to the secrets of *Torah* that was disseminated on that day.¹¹

This statement of the *Chida* that the *Ariza"l* revealed that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* died on *Lag Ba'omer* is relatively well known and widely quoted. However, there is another statement of the *Chida* that is not widely known. At the end of his *sefer Maaris Ha'ayin*, the *Chida* writes the following¹²:

"מה שכתבתי בברכי יוסף ... די שמי שכתב דפטירת רשב"י ע"ה ז"ל בל"ג לעומר, כן כתב בפרי עץ חיים. אך כבר נודע דבנסחאות כתבי האר"י ז"ל היה ערבוב וטעותי סופר, והנסחא אמיתית היא נסחת הח' שערים שסידר הרב מהר"ש ויטאל ז"ל בנו של רבינו מהר"ח ז"ל, ובשער הכונות האריך בסוד יומי העומר ... הוא האריך בזה ולא בא בפיו לומר שהוא פטירת רשב"י ע"ה. ואשפר שהכונה ... דביום ל"ג התיחיל ללמד ר' עקיבא לרשב"י וחביריו".

"That which I wrote in *Birkei Yosef* ... that someone wrote that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai a"h zy"y* died on *Lag Ba'omer*, so is it written in [the *sefer*] *Pri Eitz Chaim*. However, it is already known that the texts of the writings of the *Ariza"l* contain corruptions and mistakes, and the correct text is the text of [the *sefer*] *Shmona Shearim* that was arranged by *Rav Shmuel Vital z"l* the son of *Rav Chaim Vital z"l*, and in [the section] *Shaar Hakavonos* he elaborates on the secret of the days of the *omer* ... he elaborates about it and does not mention the passing on *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai a"h*. Possibly, the significance [of *Lag Ba'omer*] ... is that on this 33rd day *Reb Akiva* began teaching *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* and his companions".

It seems that the conclusion of the *Chida* is that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* did not in fact die on *Lag Ba'omer*, but rather began learning from *Reb Akiva* on that date. It is true that the current editions of the *Pri Eitz Chaim* state that he died on *Lag Ba'omer*, but the *Chida* believes that this is a corrupted text and is mistaken. How did such a mistake happen?

Let us take a look at the relevant paragraph. The *Pri Eitz Chaim* relates that the *Ariza"l* visited the *kever* of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* on *Lag Ba'omer*. *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* appeared to the *Ariza"l* and commented that one the *Ariza"l's* companions was inappropriately conducting himself in a manner of *aveilus* on *Lag Ba'omer*, which *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* referred to as "יום שמחתי", our day of *simcha*.¹³ The *Pri Eitz Chaim* continues that this is the source of the custom to visit

the *kever* of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai on *Lag Ba'omer*. The reason is "שמח רשב" ביום ל"ג בעומר", that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* died on *Lag Ba'omer*.

Researchers¹⁴ have noted that the words "שמח רשב" do not appear in some of the extant hand-written manuscripts of the *Pri Eitz Chaim*. In one manuscript the text is "שמח רשב", and in another manuscript the text is "שמ' רשב". It seems clear that both these manuscripts are using an abbreviation of the word "שמחת", which is consistent with the previous mention of "יום שמחתנו". Thus, the correct text is "שמחת רשב" (the happiness of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai*), rather than "שמח רשב" (the death of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai*).

As noted earlier, the date of the death of a *tzaddik* is a sad day. *Lag Ba'omer* is not a sad day because it is not actually the day he died. Why then did *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* call it his day of *simcha*? It would seem that the *Chida* is correct that on this day *Reb Akiva's* former *talmidim* stopped dying and *Reb Akiva* began teaching *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai*.

As mentioned above, *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* was one of the five *talmidim* that *Reb Akiva* began teaching. There was also *Reb Meir*, *Reb Yehuda*, *Reb Yosi*, and *Reb Elazar ben Shamueh*. If *Lag Ba'omer* was the day that *Reb Akiva* began teaching them, why is it called the happy day of *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* in particular, and why did the *Ariza"l* visit his *kever* specifically? Presumably, the answer is that *Reb Shimon Bar Yochai* was unique in that he was the primary transmitter of the mystical portion of the *Torah*. If so, *Lag Ba'omer* is ultimately a celebration of the revelation of *chochmas ha'kabala*, the wisdom of *kabbala*.

1. טור או"ח סי' תצג

2. הטור כתב "יש מסתפרים מל"ג בעומר ואילך שאומרים שאז פסקו מלמות". והבית יוסף שם כתב, "ומה שכתב ויש מסתפרין מל"ג בעומר ואילך - כ"כ ה"ר דוד אבודרהם (תפלות פסח) בשם אבן הירחי (המנהיג ה"ל ארוסין) משמו של הר"ה. וכ"כ ג"כ הר"י ו' שועיב (דרשת יום א' של פסח), וז"ל, שמעתי שיש במדרש שמתו מפסח עד פרוס העצרת, והוא ט"ו יום קודם העצרת כאמרם (שקלים פ"ג מ"ד) פרוס הפסח פרוס החג שהם חמשה עשר יום בניסן ובתשרי, וכשתסיר חמשה עשר יום מארבעים ותשעה יום נשאר שלשים וארבעה, והנה הם שלשים ושלושה שלמים ומגלחים ביום ל"ד בבוקר כי מקצת היום ככולו עכ"ל".

3. שו"ע ורמ"א וביאור הגר"א או"ח סי' תצג סעי' ב וביה"ל שם סעי' ג ד"ה יש.

4. על מה שכתב הרמ"א שם "ומרבים בו קצת שמחה", כתב הגר"א "ומרבים בו" - כמ"ש בסוף תענית שבו פסקו מתי מדבר".

5. ז"ל הפרי חדש שם (ס"ק ב), "יש לדקדק במשחה זו למה, ואי משום שפסקו מלמות מה בכך הרי לא נשאר אחד מהם וכולם מתו ומה טיבה של שמחה זו, ואפשר שהשמחה היא על אותם תלמידים שהוסיף אח"כ ר' עקיבא שלא מתו כאלו".

6. במנהגי מהרי"ל (דיני הימים שבין פסח לעצרת עמ' קנז) כתב בזה"ל, "משום דמתו רק הימים שאומרים בהן תחינה בשבעה שבועות העומר וכל יום שאין אומרים תחנון לא מתו, והשתא דל מן המ"ט יום של הספירה, ז' ימי החג, וג' ימים דחל בהן ראש חודש שניים לאייר ואחד לסיון, וז' שבתות, פשו להו ל"ב, נמצא דלא מתו רק ל"ב ימים, לכן כשכלו אותן ל"ב ימים שמתו עושין למחרתן שמחה לזכר". והב"ח פירש באופן אחר קצת, שז' ימי פסח וג' ימי ר"ח וז' ימי שבת הם בסך הכל י"ז יום, אלא שאחד מן השבתות הוא בפסח גופא וא"כ אין כאן אלא ו' ימי שבת סך הכל ט"ז יום, וכשתפחות ט"ז יום ממ"ט יום נשאר ל"ג ימים שמתו, וכנגד זה גם אנו נוהגים אבלות ל"ג יום אלא שאנו אומרים מקצת היום ככולו". והב"ח כתב פי' זה בשם התוס', וגם בדרשות מהרי"א אבן שועיב הביא זה בשם תוס'. והרמ"א בדרכי משה ציין לדברי המהרי"ל ומשמע שלפי הרמ"א זהו הטעם שאנו פוסקים האבלות בל"ג בעומר, ודלא כמ"ש"כ הגר"א הנ"ל שדברי הרמ"א מבוססים על הגרסא "פרוס הפסח", וצ"ע.

7. חיי אדם כלל קלא סעי' יא

8. אדרא זוטא, זהר ח"ג דף רצו ע"ב

9. החיד"א (ברכי יוסף או"ח סי' תצג ס"ק ד) הביא שבספר הכוונות שסידר מהר"ש ויטאל כתוב שפטירת רשב"י היה ביום ל"ג בעומר. והיערות דבש (ח"ב דרוש יא) כתב "יום ל"ג בעומר הוא הלולא דרשב"י כי מת אז והיה למעלה הלולא ... וראוי לכל איש הירא וחרד לשום אל לבו יום ההוא לשוב בשתובה כי זכות רשב"י מסייעת להבא לטהר".

10. וכבר הקשו כן בשו"ת שואל ומשיב (מהדורא ה' סי' ט"ל ס"ו הובא בשדי חמד ח"ה עמ' 7) ובדרשות חת"ס ח"ב עמ' 780. ועי' ביערות דבש (ח"ב דרוש יא) שכתב "יום ל"ג בעומר הוא הלולא דרשב"י כי מת אז והיה למעלה הלולא ... וראוי לכל איש הירא וחרד לשום אל לבו יום ההוא לשוב בשתובה כי זכות רשב"י מסייעת להבא לטהר".

11. עי' בני יששכר אייר מאמר ג אות ב ואת ג

12. חיד"א, ליקוטים בסוף ספר מראית העין סי' ז אות ח, הובא בשדי חמד ח"ה עמ' 8.

13. פרי עץ חיים שער ספירת העומר פ"ז, הובא בקצרה במג"א סי' תצג ס"ק ג.

14. ר' משה אייזיק בלוי, "יום ל"ג בעומר כיום שמחה והילולת התנא האלוקי רבי שמעון בר יוחאי זיע"א", נדפס בכתב עת ישורון כרך ט"ו עמ' תתנד ואילך, עיי"ש היטב בכל המאמר
