

 *The Breslov Research Institute Presents:*

# LAG B'OMER



*With Rebbe Nachman of Breslov*

## PROLOGUE<sup>1</sup>

Come and see the works of God: an amazing revelation concerning the mystery of the greatness of the godly sage, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai gave assurances that through him the Torah would not be forgotten from the Jewish people. As our Sages teach (*Shabbat* 138b): When our rabbis entered the yeshivah in Yavneh,<sup>3</sup> they said, “The Torah will one day be forgotten by the Jews.”<sup>4</sup> But

1. **Prologue.** This teaching was given on 4 Iyar, 5570 (May 8, 1810). Four days earlier, on Shabbat night, Rebbe Nachman’s house in Breslov burned down in a major fire which devastated most of the city. On Sunday, the Rebbe received word that the arrangements for his move to Uman had been finalized. Having previously expressed his desire to be interred in the Uman cemetery, burial site of thousands of martyrs from the Uman massacre of 1768, Rebbe Nachman understood that the news was Heaven’s way of telling him his time was close at hand. It was Tuesday when they set out for Uman, and on the journey Rebbe Nachman gave this lesson (*Tzaddik* #82, #86). The significance of its timing will become clear below (see n.11: end).

This Prologue did not appear in the initial printing of *Likutey Moharan*, in 1808, as the lesson wasn’t even taught until two years later. It was first included in the first printing of Part II by Reb Noson in 1811, a year after the Rebbe’s passing.

2. **Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai.** Rabbi Shimon the son of Yochai (RaShBY, or bar Yochai; circa 120 c.e.) was a leading disciple of Rabbi Akiva and himself one of the most distinguished *Tannaim* (sage of the Mishnaic period). He authored both the holy *Zohar* (compiled by his followers) and the *Sifri*, a Midrash on the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Ari comments that of all of Rabbi Akiva’s disciples, Rashby is most closely identified with him. This is what enabled Rabbi Shimon to realize and reveal the deep mysteries of the Torah and the Kabbalah more than anyone else (see *Shaar HaGilgulim* #26, p.71).

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva had 24,000 students, all of whom were great rabbis in their own right. Yet, over the course of just thirty-three days during the Omer Counting period (between Pesach and Shavuot) all 24,000 died because they did not act respectfully toward one another. When they died, the world was left bereft of Torah, until Rabbi Akiva came and taught five new students: Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yosi, Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and Rabbi Nechemiah. Through these great tzaddikim, who were later the Sages of the Mishnah, the entire Torah was restored to the Jewish people (*Yevamot* 62b; *Sanhedrin* 86a). Reb Noson explains that that which was lacking because there was no fellowship and unity between Rabbi Akiva’s 24,000 students was made up for by Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and his disciples. The *Zohar* often praises this closely knit group and makes clear it was the love

## הַקְדָּמָה

לְכוּ חֲזוּ מִפְעֻלוֹת ה' הַתְּגָלוֹת נִפְלְאוּ מִסוּד גְּדֻלַּת הַתְּנַא הָאֱלֹקִי  
רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי ז"ל:

רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאִי. הִבְטִיחַ שְׁלֵא תִשְׁתַּכַּח תּוֹרַה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל עַל  
יָדוֹ. כְּמוֹכָא בְּדַבְרֵי רַבּוֹתֵינוּ, זְכוּרָנָם לְבִרְכָה (שבת קלח): 'כְּשֶׁנִּכְנְסוּ  
רַבּוֹתֵינוּ לְפָרֶם בִּיבְנָה אָמְרוּ: עֲתִידָה תּוֹרַה שְׁתִּשְׁתַּכַּח מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל

between them that enabled Rabbi Shimon to reveal the most esoteric teachings of the Hidden Torah. In this sense, Reb Noson adds, Rashby and his disciples were a rectification for those that died (*Likutey Halakhot, Rosh Chodesh 6*; see *The Breslov Haggadah, Appendix C: Lag B'Omer: In Praise of Rabbi Shimon*).

3. **yeshivah in Yavneh.** When the Temple stood, the Sanhedrin, the supreme rabbinic court, had its own hall adjacent to it. Even before the Temple's destruction (in 68 c.e.), Roman oppression forced the Sanhedrin to begin a series of ten exiles, under the aegis of the President of the Sanhedrin (see *Rosh HaShanah 31a*). Yavneh was twice the home of the Sanhedrin, the first time during the lifetime of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. With his passing, the Sanhedrin moved to Usha, where Rabban Gamliel presided. Ten years later, the Sanhedrin, still under the aegis of Rabban Gamliel, returned to Yavneh. Rabban Gamliel's Sanhedrin consisted of Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, the Ten Martyrs (Rabbi Akiva's five disciples were still students at the time). Forcing the Sanhedrin to constantly relocate was part of the Roman Empire's attempt to destroy the Jewish religion by uprooting the established yeshivot. The presidents of the Sanhedrin, descendants of the House of King David, were particularly viewed with enmity by the Romans, who saw them as a symbol of independent Jewish sovereignty; their continued leadership was thus considered a threat to the empire (*Galiyut Sanhedrin*).

4. **be forgotten....** After the Temple's destruction, the Romans issued very harsh decrees against the Jews, including prohibitions against Torah study, and the observance of Shabbat, family purity and circumcision—all mitzvot which kept the Jews socially apart from their Roman masters. Even keeping mitzvot that were not as obvious—e.g., tefillin, matzah and lulav—made one liable for the death penalty (see *Shabbat 130a; Mekhilta, Yitro 6*). Rabbi Shimon's generation was thus known as the Generation of *Shmad* (destruction and apostasy), during which the Jews suffered incessantly at the hands of their Roman conquerors. After witnessing the upheaval wreaked upon the Jewish way of life by their oppressors, the leading rabbis predicted that the suffering and oppression would inevitably lead to a spiritual holocaust of assimilation, as

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said that it would not be forgotten, as is written (Deuteronomy 31:21), “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his offspring.”<sup>5</sup> And, as is explained in the *Zohar* (III, 124b): Because of this work, the Book of the *Zohar*, [the Jews] will be redeemed from exile.<sup>6</sup>

well—i.e., a total forgetting of the Torah and the mitzvot (see *Ri Pinto, Shabbat, loc. cit.*). The Sages based their argument on the prophecy (Amos 8:11-12): “‘Days are coming,’ says God, ‘when I will send a famine to the world; not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but to hear the Word of God. They will search...to find the Word of God, but will not find it.’”

5. **Rabbi Shimon....** Rabbi Shimon stood alone against the leading rabbis of his time in his conviction that the Torah would never be forgotten. He based his opinion on one verse: “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his offspring.” The commentaries explain that the Sages understood this verse to be limited to the Song of Moshe (*Haazinu*; Deuteronomy 32). Only it would remain eternally with the Jews; not so the rest of the Torah. Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, saw this verse as pertaining to the entire Torah. True, he conceded, the time would come when clarity in the Torah would be extremely rare due to all the disagreements between the rabbis—this being the hunger and thirst for the Word of God—but the Torah itself would never be forgotten in its entirety. Rebbe Nachman next explains what gave Rashby the confidence to take this position, in opposition to all the leading rabbis.

The question is raised as to whether this dispute about the Torah’s future took place when the Sanhedrin was in Yavneh, or at a later date, after the Sanhedrin moved to Usha a second time and then on to Shfaram. Logically, it seems more likely that this happened when the Sanhedrin was in Shfaram, as then Rabbi Shimon was already universally recognized as one of the outstanding Jewish leaders, even by the Romans, who sought to have him killed (see *Shabbat* 33b). However, in Yavneh, Rabbi Shimon was just one of Rabbi Akiva’s young disciples, albeit a formidable and foremost one (see *Berakhot* 28a). It is therefore a bit difficult to imagine that Rabbi Shimon would at that time stand up against all the leading rabbis. However, if that were the case, this makes Rashby’s statement all the more powerful. So positive was he of his interpretation of the verse that, even at that stage, he was willing to challenge the predominant view of the time.

6. **Book of the Zohar....** This appears in the *Raaya Mehemna*, the name given to those sections of the *Zohar* revealed and studied in the heavenly yeshivah of Moshe Rabbeinu. It was said by the prophet Eliyahu during a discussion about the laws of *sotah*, a woman suspected of immorality, whose claim of innocence can be verified by the test of the bitter waters (Numbers 5:11-31). The prophet likens the Jews in exile to the *sotah*—they are tested by the bitterness of exile to determine if they have remained true to God or not. He also attributes the Jewish people’s trials and tribulations to the influence of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as a result of which the Jews assimilated with the Mixed Multitude and so are themselves a mixture of good and evil, sweet and bitter. Those who survive exile with their faith in God intact—i.e., they accept it as a means of purification—become bound to Him. Conversely, those who fail are those who have tasted the bitter waters of exile and fallen even further from faith—their souls go lost, and will not return to the Holy Land at the Ingathering of the Exiles.

Eliyahu continues: But there are those who “eat” from the Tree of Life, and so attain deep

וְאָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמֵעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי שְׁלֵא תִשְׁתַּכַּח. שְׁנַאֲמַר: "כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח  
מִפִּי זְרַעוֹ". וְכַמְבָּאָר בְּזוֹהַר (נִשְׂא קַכְד): 'בְּהֵאֵי חֲבוּרָא דְאִיהוּ הַזֹּהַר  
יִפְקוּן בֵּיה מִן גְּלוּתָא'.

understanding. These are the mysteries of Torah [the Kabbalah], from the *zohara* (splendor) of *Binah*, which is the source of all repentance. Those who attain these mysteries do not have to be tested by the bitterness of exile (for through the Hidden Torah the soul is purified and cleansed of any admixture). Thus, when the time comes that all Israel will taste from the Tree of Life—which is this Book of the *Zohar*—they will be redeemed from exile through kindness and mercy [and not through the bitterness of “question and answer,” as happens to those who study only the Revealed Torah] (*Zohar* III, 124b; see *Matok Midvash*, *loc. cit.*). Whereas the Hidden Torah corresponds to the Tree of Life, the Revealed Torah corresponds to the Tree of Knowledge. This is particularly true for the Oral Law (Mishnah and Talmud). Although the Torah is pure in all its aspects, because the Oral Law deals with the permitted and the forbidden (good and evil), it is referred to as the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This is not to say that a Jew should avoid studying the Revealed Torah. Quite the reverse. Only through its study is it possible to ascend to great levels of good and subdue one’s own evil traits, and evil in general. This cleansing process is necessary. It opens the way to a higher level of Torah, the Hidden Torah, which contains the mysteries of the Kabbalah. These mysteries focus on the inner meaning of the Torah’s laws and concepts, and have the power to forge a much stronger bond between a Jew and God—Who is Himself hidden. With the arrival of the Mashiach, evil will be completely subdued. This is because the mysteries of Torah, the Tree of Life, will then be revealed to all. Attaining and understanding the Hidden Torah corresponds to attaining and understanding the hidden God, as will happen when Mashiach comes. This revelation of God will, by definition, expose all falsehood and evil. The Hidden Torah is thus the means for subduing evil completely. It is this hidden power of Torah, drawn from the highest of levels, that Rabbi Shimon was able to attain and—even more importantly—transmit for future generations. His teachings and revelations are what enable the Jews to seek God and find Him even in the most concealed places. Therefore, it was only Rabbi Shimon—the one granted permission from Above to reveal the Torah’s mysteries—who was able to state with certainty that the Torah would not be forgotten by the Jewish people.

Reb Noson connects this to the Talmudic teaching that the world was created with Ten Sayings, the first of which was “*Bereishit*” (see *Megillah* 21b). That is, the opening chapter of Genesis contains ten utterances, each a verbal expression of some aspect of Creation. However, careful reading of the text shows that the word “*vayomer* (and He said),” which introduces each Saying, appears only nine times. Our Sages therefore teach: The first word, “*Bereishit* (In the beginning),” is also an utterance—the Concealed Saying. Whereas the nine Revealed Sayings all manifest Godliness, corresponding to remembering Torah, the one Concealed Saying denotes forgetting Torah, as if the Torah were concealed from the person. Yet, the Concealed Saying is also the first of the ten, the loftiest of all. As such, it is the Concealed Saying that sustains all the others, even those aspects of Creation which are very removed from God. For only the light of that which is most exalted can shine all the way down to that which is most distant. By searching for this Hidden Light, the Concealed Saying, one can ultimately return to God (*Torat Natan* #1). In our context, this Concealed Saying corresponds to the Hidden Torah/the Book of

So now come, see and understand the hidden wonders of our holy Torah. This is why Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai based himself on this verse: “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his offspring.” For, in truth, this mystery is hinted at and concealed in this very verse.<sup>7</sup> Through the offspring of Yochai, this being Rashby, the Torah will not be forgotten by the Jews. This is because the final letters of the words in this verse “*ki loA tishakhaCh mipiY zar'O*” are the same letters as YOChAI.<sup>8</sup>

This is what the verse hints to and reveals: “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his offspring”—specifically “from the mouth of *his* offspring.” That is, “from the mouth of the offspring” of the one who is himself alluded to and hidden in this verse, this being the sage Yochai. Because of the offspring of Yochai, who is hinted at in the final letters of the words in this verse—this being Rashby—the Torah will not be forgotten; for with this *Zohar* they will be redeemed from exile, as above.<sup>9</sup>

And know! the mystery of Rabbi Shimon himself is alluded to in another verse.<sup>10</sup> Know that the holy sage Rabbi Shimon corresponds to (Daniel 4:10): “*Ir V'kaddish Min Shemaya Nachit* (An angel, a holy one, descended from heaven)”—the first letters of which are SHIMON....<sup>11</sup>

the *Zohar*. Both “*Bereishit*” and the teachings of Rashby sustain that which is furthest removed from holiness.

7. **this mystery....** Here, Rebbe Nachman presents the lesson’s first insight: The choice of verse was not arbitrary. Rather, hidden within the verse itself is proof that specifically because of Rabbi Shimon and the *Zohar*, the Jews will not forget the Torah and so merit to be redeemed from exile.

8. **the offspring of...YOChAI.** The verse which Rabbi Shimon quotes as proof for his position: “It will not be forgotten from the mouth of his offspring,” in Hebrew reads: “*ki loA tishakhaCh mipiY zar'O*” (כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו). Whose offspring? As Rebbe Nachman says next, the offspring of that one whose name is alluded to in the final letters of each of these words—namely, YOChAI (יחזאי). And, of course, that offspring was none other than Rashby himself.

9. **...as above.** Because Rabbi Shimon is alluded to in the verse, “It will not be forgotten...,” he was able to stand up, regardless of the eminence of the rabbis gathered, and proclaim that the Torah will not be forgotten. What would guarantee this? “From the mouth of his offspring”—i.e., it would be guaranteed by the teachings and revelations that were to come from the mouth of Rabbi Yochai’s offspring. By means of the *Zohar*, the Jewish people will merit to be redeemed from exile.

Reb Noson writes: Rabbi Shimon put great effort into revealing the deepest mysteries

וְעֵתָהּ בּוֹא וּרְאֵה וְהִבֵּן. נִפְלְאוֹת נִסְתָּרוֹת שֶׁל תּוֹרַתְנוּ הַקְּדוֹשָׁה. כִּי עַל כֵּן סָמַךְ רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי עֲצָמוֹ עַל זֶה הַפְּסוּק "כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ". כִּי בְּאֵמֶת בָּזָה הַפְּסוּק בְּעֲצָמוֹ. מְרַמֵּז וְנִסְתָּר שׁוֹד הַזֶּה. שְׁעַל-יְדֵי זִרְעוֹ שֶׁל יוֹחָאי. שֶׁהוּא רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי. עַל יְדוֹ לֹא תִשְׁתַּכַּח הַתּוֹרָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל. כִּי סוֹפֵי תְבוּת שֶׁל זֶה הַפְּסוּק "כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ" הֵם אוֹתִיּוֹת יוֹחָאי. וְזֶה שְׁמֵרֵמֵז וּמְגַלֵּה הַפְּסוּק. "כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ", "מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ" דִּיקָא הֵינּוּ מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ שֶׁל זֶה בְּעֲצָמוֹ שֶׁהוּא מְרַמֵּז וְנִסְתָּר בָּזָה הַפְּסוּק. שֶׁהוּא הַתְּנָא יוֹחָאי. כִּי עַל-יְדֵי זִרְעוֹ שֶׁל יוֹחָאי שְׁמֵרֵמֵז בָּזָה הַפְּסוּק בְּסוֹפֵי תְבוּת כַּנִּל. שֶׁהוּא רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחָאי. עַל יְדוֹ לֹא תִשְׁכַּח הַתּוֹרָה. כִּי בְּזֶהֱרָ דָא יִפְקוֹן מִן גְּלוּתָא כַּנִּל:  
וְדַע שֶׁסוֹד רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בְּעֲצָמוֹ. הוּא מְרַמֵּז בְּפְסוּק אַחֵר. כִּי דַע כִּי הַתְּנָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן הוּא בְּחִינַת (דניאל ד): "עִיר וְקַדִּישׁ מִן שְׁמֵיָא נְחִית": רַאשֵׁי-תְבוּת שְׁמַעוֹן וְכוּ':

of the Torah, especially those found in the sections of the *Zohar* known as *Idra Rabba*, *Idra Zuta* and *Sifra DeTzneuta*. These sections explain the mysteries of the beginning of Creation, including the Breaking of the Vessels and the subsequent construction of the Divine personas. Above all, Rashby's teachings show that despite the fall and flaws implied by the Breaking of the Vessels, *tikkun* (rectification), through the revealed mysteries of Torah, is still possible. This is why it is said of Rabbi Shimon and his disciples that they were the rectification for Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 students who died (n.2). Although those students had studied the deep mysteries of the Torah, including the Breaking of the Vessels, they were lacking in their comprehension of the subsequent *tikkunim*. This explains why their generation foresaw the Torah's being forgotten by the Jews—symbolic of the Broken Vessels of Creation. Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, was versed in the rectifications and was therefore able to proclaim that the Torah would not be forgotten (*Torat Natan* #2).

10. **another verse.** In the first verse, Rashby is alluded to only as the offspring of his father, Rabbi Yochai. Here Rebbe Nachman presents his second insight: the verse which alludes to Rabbi Shimon proper.

11. **Ir V'kaddish...ShIMON....** The first letters of the verse from Daniel, "*Ir V'kaddish Min Shemaya Nachit*" (עיר וקדיש מן שמיא נחית), spell ShIMON (שמעון; the letter *vav* can be voweled as an "O" or a "V"). This, Rebbe Nachman says, alludes to none other than Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai. Moreover, the connection is not limited to this acrostic. The words of the verse are those of the wicked Babylonian king, Nevukhadnezzar. He had a dream in which he saw a

beautiful tree stretching towards the heavens. The tree, laden with fruits, was huge enough to provide sustenance and shelter for all the different forms of life in Creation. Nevukhadnezzar then described how “an angel, a holy one, descended from heaven” calling for the destruction of the tree... Daniel was called upon to interpret the dream. The tree, he said, was Nevukhadnezzar himself. As ruler of the entire world, all forms of life were dependent upon him for their food and shelter. However, because of his wickedness, Nevukhadnezzar was to be “cut down” and punished. He was to be transformed into an animal for a period of seven seasons (Daniel 4:6-23). Who was the angel that called for the tree’s—Nevukhadnezzar’s—destruction? This “holy one,” Rebbe Nachman reveals, alludes to Rabbi Shimon. In the passage quoted earlier from the *Zohar* (n.6), we saw that the powers of evil are “cut down” and destroyed by the mysteries of Torah/the Tree of Life. From both the Talmud (*Shabbat* 33b; *Me’ilah* 17b; etc.) and the holy *Zohar* (III, 15b; *ibid.*, 106b; *Tikkuney Zohar* #21, 61b, etc.) we see how Rabbi Shimon struggled time and again against the forces of evil. Thus, the Rebbe’s choice of this verse is based on more than the acrostic. The verse’s allusion to Rabbi Shimon also encompasses Rabbi Shimon’s mission in this world—i.e., the revelation of God through the revelation of the Torah’s mysteries, as a result of which evil is subdued.

The commentaries (*Rashi*, *Metzudat David*, etc.) point out that the word *ir*, here translated as “angel,” literally means “awake.” This is because an angel is always awake—always conscious of God (see *Torat Natan* #3). The word *v’kaddish* (“a holy one”) also applies to an angel, whose holiness can never be defiled. Rebbe Nachman taught that being spiritually “awake” is a condition for heightened awareness and holiness, for the one who is “asleep” cannot hope for expanded consciousness. These concepts, which appear in *Likutey Moharan* I, 60:3-6, are based on Rabbi Shimon’s teachings concerning the Hidden Torah, the mystery of *Atik Yomin*. Thus, the reference to Rabbi Shimon specifically as “an angel (sleepless), a holy one,” is not incidental. On the contrary, Rabbi Shimon’s heightened awareness made him especially sensitive to the suffering of those exiled, just as it gave him the ability to remedy their plight through the revelation of the Hidden Torah.

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After revealing this amazing teaching about Rashbi and his father Yochai, Rebbe Nachman concluded: “But now, there is *nachal novea mekor chokhmah* (a flowing brook, a wellspring of wisdom)’ (Proverbs 18:4), so that even ‘a holy one descended from heaven’ must also receive from this brook.”

The Rebbe’s reference to “*Nachal Novea Mekor Chokhmah*” (נחל נובע מקור חכמה) is an allusion to himself. After showing how the names of Rabbi Yochai and Rabbi Shimon are alluded to in Scripture, Rebbe Nachman quotes a verse whose first letters spell NaChMaN (נחמן; see *Tzaddik* #86).

To better understand Rebbe Nachman’s last statement, and its significance as part of the Prologue to *Likutey Moharan*, consider the following anecdote:

A Breslover Chassid once found himself alone in a distant city, not knowing anyone or having where to lodge for the night. He went to the house of the local rabbi, a man known not only for his good name but also for his Torah erudition and mastery of Kabbalah. Upon arriving, the chassid noticed a copy of *Likutey Moharan* on the rabbi’s table and asked his host where he got the book.

“Do you know this book and its author?” the rabbi wondered.

“I knew the author. I am a Breslover Chassid.”



“Do you understand what’s written in it?” the rabbi asked.

“To the best of my ability,” the chassid answered.

“In my opinion,” the rabbi said, “nobody can truly grasp this work. Just look at the Prologue. What place has this teaching as the opening piece to *Likutey Moharan*?”

“You tell me,” the chassid replied.

“It would appear,” the rabbi suggested, “that Rebbe Nachman is alluding to his having the same soul as Rabbi Shimon. For the name ShIMON ben YOChAI has a numerical value of 501, the same as NaChMaN ben SiMChaH” (*Sichot V’Sipurim*, p.166).

The rabbi’s explanation is a powerful statement in its own right. Yet, equally telling are the different parallels that can be drawn between the lives of these two great tzaddikim.

When Rebbe Nachman passed away some five months after revealing this teaching, he was only thirty-eight and a half. Despite his relatively few years, he had been teacher and rebbe to accomplished Torah scholars, men of piety, some of whom were many years his senior. Opposition notwithstanding, the Rebbe was recognized as one of the leading “elders” of his time. The parallel to Rabbi Shimon is obvious. He was only a young disciple when he gave his assurance that the Torah would not be forgotten. His prominence as one of Rabbi Akiva’s exceptional students was well acknowledged, so much so, that in his case it was not considered unbecoming for one so young to take issue with the accepted position of sages many years his senior.

Rebbe Nachman lived at the beginning of 19th century, a time when a tidal wave of atheism flooded the world. For the Jews living in Eastern Europe, this was manifested by the inroads made by the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) movement against traditional Torah Judaism. The heretical ideas preached by those who saw the need for Jews to “expand their horizons” and adjust to the changing world around them threatened the very core of Jewish belief. Rebbe Nachman recognized this and foresaw the massive assimilation and flight from Torah that would result from the *Haskalah*’s so-called enlightenment. In many ways, it was a time very similar to Rabbi Shimon’s Generation of *Shmad* (above, n.4). Then, too, the planned Romanization of the Jewish people was to promote massive assimilation and an uprooting of the Torah. When Rashby proclaimed that the Torah would not be forgotten because of the “offspring of Yochai,” he was in fact saying that *he* and his teaching, the holy *Zohar*, would guarantee the Jewish people’s survival in exile. If anything, guaranteeing the Jewish people’s survival in exile was the Rebbe’s mission as well. His concluding words here indicate that *he* and his teaching, *Likutey Moharan*, are a response—a *tikkun* (rectification)—to the tidal wave of secularization that has engulfed the Jewish people ever since his time. Just as there was an “*ir v’kaddish min shemaya nachit*,” there is now a “*nachal novea mekor chokhmah*”—a brook, a wellspring, from which to draw the wisdom and guidance that will ultimately lead to the Jewish people’s redemption. Incidentally, this mission of leadership which Rebbe Nachman and Rashby had in common is alluded to by the shared numerical value of their names, 501, which is also the numerical value of the Hebrew word *ROSh* (“head” or “leader”).

Although Rabbi Shimon’s greatness is unfathomable, we do know that of all the leading Sages of the Talmud, he alone was given permission to reveal the mysteries of Torah. As indicated by the passage from the *Zohar* quoted above (see n.6), the Hidden Torah has the power to elevate the Jews who have assimilated—cleanse them of the influences of the Mixed Multitude—and bring them back to Torah and purity. This power of repentance is drawn from the *sefirah Binah* and can penetrate the heart and mind of every Jew, to arouse his inherent

faith. Thus, Rabbi Shimon, the master of Hidden Torah, is most closely identified with *Binah* and repentance.

In describing himself as the “*nachal novea mekor chokhmah*,” Rebbe Nachman, too, was identifying with the qualities of Hidden Torah/*Binah*/repentance. The Kabbalah teaches that the *sefirah Chokhmah* (Wisdom) refers to the water source, whereas “the brook” corresponds to the *sefirah Binah*. By stating, “But now, there is ‘a flowing brook, a wellspring of wisdom,’ so that even ‘a holy one descended from heaven’ must also receive from this brook,” the Rebbe indicates that, presently, the aim of Rabbi Shimon’s teachings can only be achieved when they receive from “the brook”—i.e., the Rebbe’s teachings. The lessons in Rebbe Nachman’s *Likutey Moharan* are taken from the very source of the “water,” *Chokhmah*, and it is specifically these teachings which are needed in order to penetrate to the lowest of levels, instilling faith and a desire for repentance in even those most distant from God. As explained, this was precisely the Rashby’s stated goal: to ensure that the Torah would not be forgotten and to ensure Jewish survival in exile. But, now, as a result of Romanization and secularization—and all of history’s “-izations” in between—there are many Jews for whom Rabbi Shimon’s teachings are beyond their grasp, for whom the light of the Hidden Torah which he revealed is too bright. Hence the need for what is essentially an extension of the rectification begun by the “*ir v’kaddish min shemaya nachit*,” the teachings of “*nachal novea mekor chokhmah*.”

Thus, Breslover Chassidim were wont to quote the passage, “Because of this work, the Book of the *Zohar*...,” and say, “Because of *this* work—*Likutey Moharan*, which is the *Zohar*—we will be redeemed from exile. For, NaChMaN ben SiMChaH (נחמן בן שמחה) has the same numerical value as ShIMON ben YOChAI (שמעון בן יוחאי)” (see Appendix: Gematria Chart).

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It should now be clear why Rebbe Nachman gave this lesson at the time he travelled from Breslov to Uman. As mentioned (n.1), the Rebbe saw his being called to Uman as a sign that he was soon to die. He was by no means shocked or unprepared for this. On the contrary, as Reb Noson writes: His whole purpose in choosing Uman as his place to die and be buried was to accomplish the rectification of innumerable souls which had been in need of this for several hundred years. For Uman had been the scene of the slaughter of countless souls.... And on the day before he died, he said to me, “For a long time now they’ve had their eye on me, to get me

here. There are not just thousands of souls here, but myriads upon myriads...souls which did not know me at all are awaiting the *tikkun* I can give them” (*Tzaddik* #48, #88).

In fact, rectification of souls—not only for the dead but also for the living—had been foremost in Rebbe Nachman’s thoughts ever since his return from Lemberg, nearly two years earlier. In his own words, he had journeyed there, among other reasons, to combat the spread of heresy. Lemberg (Lvov), the largest city in eastern Galicia, had for centuries been a major center of Torah erudition. During the late 1700s and early 1800s, the *Haskalah* had found a foothold amongst the roughly 30,000 Jewish residents. The Rebbe saw it his mission to combat this—then, and for the future. It is therefore not coincidental that while in Lemberg Rebbe Nachman instructed two of his followers to reveal some of his teachings, which had hitherto been kept from the public eye, as well as initiated the first printing of *Likutey Moharan*. His intention in this regard became even clearer after his return, from which time he repeatedly stressed how his teachings would endure for future generations (*Until the Mashiach* p.153ff). As explained above, Rebbe Nachman saw his *Likutey Moharan* as a response—a *tikkun*—for the tidal wave of heresy and secularization that has engulfed the Jewish people ever since his time.

So, now, as Rebbe Nachman and those accompanying him were on their way to Uman, the Rebbe’s thoughts must have been on the rectification of souls when he said, “Still, God helps the Jewish people at all times. ‘There is no orphaned generation’ (*Chagigah* 3b). This is what Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai answered...” He then taught this lesson.

On that same journey Rebbe Nachman spoke to Reb Noson about how God is constantly bringing things to their completion and rectification. Reb Noson writes: To explain all this would take pages and pages. Briefly, he [the Rebbe] had thought originally, when we first became close to him, that he would accomplish the *tikkun* immediately, and many of the things he said indicated this. But later on, because of our many sins, the sins of the generation and the tremendous determination of the Satan which led to all the opposition against the Rebbe, everything was upset and he was unable to accomplish what he wanted in his lifetime. Yet, he still said that he *had* accomplished and *would* accomplish. For after his return from Lemberg, he found a path and spoke in such a way as to ensure that his light would never ever be extinguished. The Rebbe himself said, “*Mein fierel vet shoin thuen biz Moshiach vet koomen!*—My fire will burn until the Mashiach comes!” (*Tzaddik* #126).

**תפילה מז** תפילה זאת מיוסדת על פי הסוד הנורא שגילה (רבינו ז"ל) על גדולת דשב"י ז"ל, שהבטיח לישראל שלא תשכח התורה על ידו כי בזהר דא יפקון מן גלותא, ע"ש בתחלת הספר, ומה טוב לאומרה על קברו הקדוש של דשב"י ז"ל, מי שזוכה לבוא לשם, אך גם בכל מקום האומרה לא הפסיד, כי התפשטות נשמת הצדיק הוא בכל העולם כמובן בזה"ק. מיוסד ע"פ תורה "לכו חזו" בתחילת חלק א'.

רבי שמעון בן יוחאי עיר וקדיש מן שמיא נחית, בוצינא קדישא, בוצינא עלאה, בוצינא רבא, בוצינא יקירא, אתם הבטחתם לישראל שלא תשכח התורה מישראל על ידכם, כי בזהר דא יפקון מן גלותא, ואפלו בתקף ההסתרה שבתוך הסתרה בעקבות משיחא באחרית הימים האלה, הבטחתם שאף על פי כן לא תשכח התורה מפי זרענו, כמו שכתוב: "ואנכי הסתר אסתיר פני ביום ההוא על כל אשר עשה, וענתה השירה הזאת לפניו לעד כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו" והנה עתה הגיעו הימים אשר אין לנו בהם חפץ, כי ארך עלינו הגלות ומשך עלינו השעבוד, ובכל יום אנו הולכים ודלים, ומטה ידינו מאד "כי אזלת יד ואפס עצור ועזוב" כי נשארנו כיתומים ואין אב, ואין מי יעמוד בעדנו והנה בתקף סוף הגלות המר הזה, וכבר התחיל להתנוצץ התנוצצות משיח מימי האלקי האר"י זכר צדיק לברכה, ועמך בית ישראל משתוקקים ומתגעגעים מאד להשם יתברך, והכל חפצים ליראה את שמך בהשתוקקות נמרץ ונפלא אשר לא היתה כזאת מימי קדם "הקיצותי ועודי עמך", באתי עד קץ כל הדורות ועודי עמך עדין אנו אחוזים בך, ומשתוקקים לעבודתך בכלות הנפש אבל אף על פי כן, גם גדל רחוקנו ממך בעתים הללו הוא גם כן בלי שעור, כי טבענו ביון מצולה ואין מעמד באנו במעמקי מים ושבלת שטפתנו וראה את עמך ישראל מרודים מאד, אשר אי אפשר לבאר ולספר גדל התגרות הבעל דבר אשר התגרה בנו מאד, עד אשר הפיל אותנו מאד והנה אנכי בעניי מי אנכי לספר צרות ישראל, רק אתם לבד ידעתם את כל המעמד ומצב של ישראל באחרית הימים האלה אך באתי לספר ולצעק עלי ועל נפשי, על עצם רחוקי מהשם יתברך, ועצם פגמי ועוונותי הרבים ופשעי העצומים, ו"על אלה אני בוכיה עיני עיני יורדה מים", כי איני יודע שום דרך איך להחזיר לי הכח דקדשה, ואיך לזכות לתשובה שלמה, ובאיזה דרך אתחיל לעזוב דרכי הרע ומחשבותי המגנות,

ואיך ובמה אזכה לתקן קלקולים ופגמים כאלה "לא ידעתי נפשי, אנה אני בא", אנה אוליך את חרפתי העצומה, אנה אברח, אנה אטמן מפני בשתי וכלמתי, ואמר להרים כסוני ולגבעות נפלו עלי, אוי מה היה לי, אוי מה היה לי, "על כן אמרתי שעו מני אמרר בבכיי", אולי יחוס אולי ירחם, כי אין מעצור ליקוק יאהדונהי להושיע גם אותי בעת הזאת, כי הרבה רוח והצלה לפניו, כמו שכתוב: "הן כל תוכל ולא יבצר ממך מזמה, ומי יאמר לך מה תעשה" על כן באתי כעני בפתח, רש דל ואביון, נגוע ומענה, מבלבל ומטרף עני וכואב, לצעק ולזעוק לפני הדרת קדשתכם:

רבי רבי רבי "אבי אבי רכב ישראל ופרשיו", נהירו דבוצינא דאורייתא, "עורה למה תישן", איך תוכלו לסבול צרות ישראל, קומו והתעוררו עם כל הצדיקי אמת להסתכל ולראות במרירות צרות נפשנו, "הקיצו ורננו שוכני עפר", קומו ישיני מכפל לסעדינו צדיקי יסודי עולם, קומו בעזרתנו בעת צרה הזאת, חוסו וחמלו על כל עדת בני ישראל, ובתוכם עלי החוטא והפגום המלא, חטאים מכף רגל ועד ראש אתם ידעתם "את כל התלאה אשר מצאתנו" מיום גלות הארץ עד הנה, כל מה שעבר על כלל ישראל בכלליות, ובפרטיות מה שעבר על כל אחד ואחד ובפרט מה שעבר עלי מיום שנאצלו ונבראו ונוצרו ונעשו נשמתי ורוחי ונפשי וגופי, כל מה שעבר עלי בכל גלגול וגלגול, ובפרט מה שעבר עלי בגוף הזה, כל מה שעברתי מעודי עד היום הזה, מה שאני זוכר עדין ומה שנשכח ממני, היספיקו כל אילי נביות לבאר ולספר אפס קצה מהפגמים שפגמתי ביום אחד כפי מה שנוגעים הפגמים במקום שנוגעים כפי שרש נשמתי, ומכל שכן וכל שכן מה שפגמתי בכל הימים שעברו עלי מיום היותי עד היום הזה, (ובפרט וכו') מי יוכל לספר, מי יוכל לשער, מה אדבר מה אתאונן, מה אומר מה אדבר ומה אצטדק:

(אם יזכה להיות בא"י על קבר דשכ"י יאמר: השוכן פה) רבונו של עולם, תן בלב הצדיק הקדוש והנורא הזה ובלב כל הצדיקים אמתיים לבל יסתירו פניהם ממני, ויעמדו בעדי למליצי ישר, להפוך בזכותי ולבקש ולמצא בי נקדות טובות, וימליצו טוב בעדי שתקרבני אליך ברחמים, ותתן בי לב חדש ורוח חדשה תתן בקרבי, שאזכה להתעורר מעתה באמת לשוב אליך באמת

ובלב שלם אי שמים הפגינו בעדי, כל בעלי רחמים וחמלה חמלו עלי כל שוכני עפר העתירו בעד מטבע "ביון מצולה ואין מעמד" כמוני:

רבי, רבי שמעון בן יוחאי, זכרו זאת ותשימו על לב, שזכינו בדורות הללו לשמע נפלאות נוראות גדלתכם איך מרמז בתורה שעל ידכם לא תשכח התורה, כי הפסוק שהבאתם ראייה ממנו, שהוא כי' לא' תשכח' מפי' זרעו' הוא סופי תבות יוחא"י, ושמכם הקדוש בעצמו מרמז בפסוק "ע"יר ו'קדיש מ'ן ש'מיא נ'חית" אשר אתם לבד יודעים סוד דברים האלה, אתם לבד יודעים גדלת ההבטחה שהבטחתם לישראל שהתורה לא תשכח מישראל על ידכם, ואיך משה רבנו עליו השלום נבא על זה בתורתו הקדושה מקדם על כן באתי להזכיר, נא רבותי הקדושים, חמלו עלי ואל תסתכלו על כל הרע שעשיתי מעודי עד היום הזה, במחשבה דבור ומעשה, אשר המריתי אמרי אל ועצת עליון נאצתי אל תביטו במעשי הרעים, ואל תעשו עמי כחטאי, ואל אקוץ בעיניכם, על אשר זה כמה אשר מעוררים אותי באלפים ורבבות רמזים והתעוררות, ובכמה מיני עצות נכונות בכל יום ובכל עת, להתקרב להשם יתברך, ואני בעצם קשיות ערפי קלקלתי ופגמתי בכל זה, ולא הטייתי אזני ולבי לכל זה חוסו עלי ואל תשיתו לב לכל זה, ואל יחר אפכם בי חלילה, רק תחשבו מחשבות עוד מעתה לבל אהיה נדחה מהשם יתברך ומכם חלילה כי עדין "אין מעצור ליקוק יאהדונהי להושיע" גם בעת הזאת כי אין לי שום כח עתה אלא בפי לבד, וגם זה מאתו יתברך אשר לא עזב חסדו ואמתו מעמי, ונתן כח ליעף כמוני, לדבר עתה מעט דברים האלה ועל זה תמכתי יתדותי, שתרחמו עלי ותעשו את אשר אזכה לשוב באמת להשם יתברך (ולבא לארץ ישראל מהרה בשלום, ולדבר כל זה ויותר מזה שם על ציון שלכם הקדוש), ויקוק הטוב ברחמיו ישמע תפלתכם ויעזור ויגן ויושיע אותי ואת כל ישראל למענכם, ויחזירני בתשובה שלמה לפניו מהרה, ויאחזני ולא ירפני, ואל יעזבני ואל יטשני בשום אפן, עד שאזכה לשוב אליו באמת, ולהיות כרצונו הטוב מעתה ועד עולם, ולתקן בחיי את כל אשר פגמתי, בכח וזכות הצדיקים אמתיים, אשר עליהם לבד אני נשען לסדר דברי אלה לפנייהם ולפני השם יתברך, בעל הרחמים יודע תעלומות "ה' יגמר בעדי, ה' חסדך לעולם מעשי ידיך אל תרף, הוציאה ממסגר נפשי להודות את שמך, בי יכתירו צדיקים כי תגמל עלי"

## In the Merit of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

In this prayer based on Rebbe Nachman's teaching about Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (*Likutey Moharan I*, Prologue), Reb Noson invokes Rabbi Shimon and the other tzaddikim who "rest in the dust" to intercede on behalf of the Jewish people. May they help us to overcome all our obstacles and fulfill our spiritual mission as bearers of God's Torah.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, "holy awakened being descended from heaven," holy lamp, supernal lamp, mighty lamp, precious lamp! You promised the Jewish people that through you, the Torah would never be forgotten by Israel, when you declared: "With this book, the *Zohar*, you will go forth from exile!" Even in the "double concealment" of holiness that prevails during these times known as the "footsteps of the Mashiach," you promised us that the Torah would not be forgotten by our descendants, as it is written: "And I shall surely hide My Face on that day because of all the evil that [Israel] did. Then this song shall speak up before it as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of its descendants."

The days have finally arrived that we never wished to see! Our exile has gone on so long, and our servitude has persisted. Every day we wander in poverty and our power has fallen greatly—"for the enemy's power increases, and none is saved or assisted." We remain like fatherless orphans, and there is none to take up our cause.

Yet in the adversity of these last days of our bitter exile, the light of Mashiach has already begun to glimmer, starting from the days of the ARI, blessed be the memory of the tzaddik. Your nation, the House of Israel, now yearns and longs for God, and we all desire to revere Your Name with the most intense yearning, the likes of which never existed before, "even if I were constantly awake, and always with You."

I have arrived at the end of all generations, and still I am with You! We still cling to You and yearn to serve You, until our souls are about to leave us!

At the same time, our distance from You today is immeasurable. "We are drowning in the watery abyss without a foothold. We have entered the deep water, and the rushing current sweeps us away!" Your people, Israel, have rebelled so greatly that it is impossible to describe the incitement of the Evil One, who has attacked us so severely and caused us to fall so low.

Who am I, in my spiritual poverty, to recount the troubles of Israel? O God, You alone know the full extent of Israel's plight in these times, at the End of Days. Nevertheless, I have come to speak and bewail the state of my soul—how far I am from God and how extensive are my spiritual damage, my many transgressions and my enormous sins. "Over these I weep; my eyes, my eyes flow with tears!"

I do not know any way to regain the power of holiness and attain perfect repentance. I do not know of any path to begin to forsake my evil ways and my despicable thoughts, or how to remedy such spiritual disasters as these. O my soul, I don't know where to go. Where can I take my profound disgrace? Where can I flee? Where can I hide because of my embarrassment and shame? I "call to the mountains, "Cover me!" and to the hills, "Fall on me!" Woe for what has happened to me! Woe for what has happened to me!

"Therefore I said, 'Leave me alone, I will weep bitter tears!'" "Perhaps He will have pity! Perhaps He will have mercy!" "Nothing prevents God from saving" even me, at this very time—for there is great relief and salvation before Him, as it is written: "You can do anything, and nothing can hinder Your objective."

My teacher, my teacher, my teacher! "My father, my father! Chariot of Israel and its rider!" Light of the lamp of Torah! Awaken! Why do you sleep? How is it possible to endure the sufferings of Israel? Arise and awaken, together with all the true tzaddikim, to gaze upon and behold the affliction of our souls! "Awaken and sing, all who rest in the dust!" Arise, sleepers of *Makhpelah*," to our support! Righteous pillars of the world, come to our assistance at this hour of crisis! Have compassion and mercy on the entire flock of the Children of Israel, myself among



them—although I am sinful, spiritually damaged and full of transgressions from head to foot.

You know all the travail we have encountered from the day we went into exile until now, everything that each of us has endured. In particular, You know what I have gone through from the day the three levels of my soul and my body were "emanated, created, formed and made"; what I have endured in each successive incarnation—especially what I have endured in my present body; everything I have ever experienced until today, what I remember, and what I have forgotten.

It would take "all the lambs of Nevayot" to create enough parchment to describe a fraction of the damage I have caused in one day, given the spiritual repercussions of my actions according to the root of my soul—and all the more so, all the damage I have caused in the course of all my days, from the first to the last. Who could describe this, who could measure this? What can I say? What can I answer? What can I declare? How can I exonerate myself?

Master of the Universe! Inspire the heart of this holy awesome tzaddik, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai [if one is privileged to stand at his gravesite, add: "who rests here"], as well as the hearts of all true tzaddikim, not to hide their faces from me, but to stand up for me as eloquent defenders, to review my merits, and to search until they find good points in me. Thus will they intercede on my behalf, begging You in Your mercy to draw me close to You and grant me "a new heart and a new spirit." Then I will be able to arouse myself truly to return to You, from now on, sincerely and wholeheartedly. "Heavens, pray for us!" May all merciful and compassionate ones have mercy on me! May all those who rest in the dust intercede on behalf of one who is "drowning in the deep with no foothold" like me!

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai! Let us remember and take to heart that in these generations we merited to hear about your wondrous and awesome greatness—how the Torah hints that through you, the Torah shall not be forgotten. Because the final letters of the verse you cited as a proof: "*KI LO tishakhaCh mipI zarO*—For it shall not be forgotten from the mouths of your children" spell YOChAi, your father's holy

name יוחאי=זרעו=מפי זרעו=יוחאי). And a different verse hints at your own holy name: "*Ir Vekadish Min Shemaya Nachit*—A holy awakened being descended from heaven," the initial letters of which spell *ShIMON* (עיר וקדיש מן שמיא נחית=שמעון).

You alone know the hidden meaning of these mysteries. You alone know the greatness of the assurance you gave to the Jewish people that through you, the Torah would not be forgotten from Israel, and how Moses our teacher prophesied concerning this in the holy Torah long before!

Therefore I have come to recall this. Please, my holy masters! Have pity on me and do not consider all the evil I have done from time immemorial until today, in thought, speech and action, "For I rebelled against the words of God and despised the advice of the Supreme One." Do not gaze upon my evil deeds and do not treat me as I deserve, according to my sins. Let me not be a thorn in your eyes, after all the times you tried to arouse me with thousands and myriads of hints and arousals, and with so many kinds of good advice to draw nearer to God every day and every moment. Despite all your efforts, in my stubbornness I continued to ruin my life and did not incline my ears or my heart to your advice.

Have compassion on me and do not pay attention to any of this. Do not allow your anger to burn against me, God forbid. Instead, devise new strategies to put an end to my banishment from God and from you, from now on. For there is no impediment to God's deliverance even now. I have no strength but with my mouth alone—and this too comes from God, Who did not withhold His kindness and His truth from me, but gave strength to a weary person like me, that I may now speak these few words.

Upon this I have staked my confidence: that the tzaddikim will have mercy on me and take action, so that I may return to God in truth. May I go to the Land of Israel speedily and in peace, and say all this and more at your holy resting places!

Tzaddikim! Holy sages! God in His goodness will surely hear your prayers! For your sake He will help, protect and save me, together with the entire Jewish people. He will bring me back speedily in perfect *teshuvah* to Him, pick me up and not let me go. He will not despise or reject me in any way, until at last I return to Him in truth, and conduct myself according to His beneficent will forever. In this lifetime, may I fix all the damage I have done, in the power and merit of the true tzaddikim upon whom I rely exclusively, as I have composed these words of mine before them and before the All-Merciful One, Knower of Secrets!

"God will finish everything for me. O God, Your kindness endures forever; do not forsake the work of Your Hand!" "Take my soul out of prison, so that I may praise Your Name; the tzaddikim will crown You because of me, when You have dealt kindly with me!"

*(Likutey Tefilot II, 47)*