



Accomplishing greatness, the Lag B'omer perspective

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Lag B'Omer is an immensely spiritual and festive day. We commemorate the anniversary of the passing of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar.

We also celebrate another event, the conclusion of the plague that raged amongst the 24,000 students of the great sage Rabbi Akiva.

We commemorate this auspicious day by lighting a bonfire, representing the immense light that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai introduced into the world via his mystical teachings. This was especially true on the day of his passing, Lag B'Omer, when he revealed to his students the secrets of the Torah, whose profundity and intensity the world had yet to experience.

The Zohar relates that his house was filled with fire and intense light, to the point that his students could not approach or even look at Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

It is also a custom to go to Rabbi Shimon's burial place in the village of Meron, which has the largest Lag B'Omer celebration and around-the-clock singing and dancing.

Although Rabbi Akiva had a drastically different upbringing than Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the lessons they left behind are similar.

Rabbi Akiva is of humble parentage and married the daughter of a wealthy citizen of Jerusalem; his father-in-law employed him as a shepherd. As the story is told, he saw a drop of water continually trickling onto a rock, and after a while, the rock split. When he saw the split rock, he told himself, *if water can crack rock, I too can study Torah.*

With the encouragement of his wife, he began his initiation into Torah studies at 40 years old. He returned to his wife 24 years later, escorted by 24,000 students and as one of the greatest sages of his time and a leading Tanna in the Mishnah.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on the other hand, studied in the Yeshiva of Yavneh as a young boy under the great Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, and later under Rabbi Akiva in Benei Barak. So attached did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai become to his teacher that Rabbi Akiva called him *"my son."*

During the persecution by the Romans, the study of the Talmud was forbidden on the penalty of death. However, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai defied their decrees and continued to teach Torah to the masses. When he was once heard speaking ill of the Roman empire, he was sentenced to death.

However, before the Romans could find him, he fled to a cave with his son Rabbi Elazar. Hashem caused a tree to grow at the entrance to the cave, as well as a spring of fresh water. They stayed in the cave for thirteen years, sustaining themselves on carobs and water. While in the cave, they studied the Torah and became one of the holiest sages ever.

One of the many common ideas by both of these great sages is the notion that no hindrance can truly stop you from reaching your goals.

Rabbi Akiva did not study the Torah until age 40, but he still became one of the greatest sages of all time. However, it didn't end there; when 24,000 of his students died, he restarted with his remaining students, which grew to over 100,000. He began to explain the calligraphic "*crowns*" on the letters of the Torah.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai got his Smicha (*Rabbinical ordination*) from the great Rabbi Yehudah ben Baba. He publicly ordained five famous scholars defying the Roman decree not to give Smicha. When the Roman authorities found out what occurred, they tried to capture the newly-minted Rabbis, fortunately, all the ordained scholars escaped, but Rabbi Yehudah ben Baba was caught and put to death.

From the time Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was in a position of influence, he regularly taught Torah publicly in direct defiance of Roman decrees. While he and his son were in the cave, they used that time to achieve higher holiness by continually studying Torah.

When they exited the cave, they settled in northern Israel, where they established their Yeshiva. One of his most famous students is Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, the compiler of the Mishnah.

In our daily life, we must not let obstacles hold us back from achieving our goals. We must not let adversity hold us back from our potential, if we stay the course, we will reach our goals. As a result of that experience, our ability to enjoy the fruits of our labor will be infinitely greater.

"If you are persistent, you will get it.

However, if you are consistent, you will keep it."

*Have a joyus Lag B'omer,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*