

SPREAD LIGHT 358



Parsha

Candle Lighting (Toronto)

Shabbos Ends

Emor

8:02 PM

9:10 PM

ISSUE #21 | MAY 2, 2026 | י"ד אייר תשפ"ו

Reflective Question:

Where in your life are you waiting for big change, when you really need to start small and keep counting?

Gematria on the Parshah:
Light of the Zohar

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits



Of all the yahrzeits in the Jewish calendar, the hilulah of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai stands alone. Lag BaOmer is celebrated with bonfires, singing, and gatherings throughout all of Am Yisrael. What makes Rabbi Shimon's yahrzeit so unique that it is celebrated as a chag? Why did the students of Rabbi Akiva stop dying on this day? And why is Lag BaOmer an essential stop on our journey toward Shavuot?

The Zohar and the Light of Geulah

The mekubalim teach that the spreading of the inner dimension of Torah hastens the Geulah. A famous tradition relates that as the Rashash approached his final moments, he repeatedly cried out, "What will be with the Zohar? What will be with the Zohar?" Likewise, both the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon emphasized that as the wellsprings of penimiyut haTorah spread outward, the light of Mashiach draws closer.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that in every generation there is a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu whose mission is to draw divine consciousness into the world. Amazingly, the gematria of שמעון (Shimon Bar Yochai) equals 703, the same as משה משיח (Moshe Mashiach). The light of Rabbi Shimon is thus deeply bound to the light of the first redeemer and the final redeemer. The Zohar reveals a glimpse of the consciousness of the Messianic Era.

Why is Rashbi's sefer called Zohar?

The word Zohar refers to the original point of Divine light from which all creation unfolded outward. This teaching is not merely cosmological. The essential message of the Zohar is that all existence flows from Hashem's light.

The Ramchal teaches that Kabbalah is the halachot of Achdut Hashem. The Zohar is the fire that allows us to perceive this reality.

This is the meaning of אור ה' (the light of Hashem) equals 233, עץ חיים (Tree of Life): to "eat from the Tree of Life" is to perceive all existence as a revelation of Hashem's light.

The Power of Am Yisrael

The Zohar also opens our eyes to the cosmic greatness of Am Yisrael.

The Zohar relates that when Rabbi Elazar was asked why the Jewish people suffer so greatly if they are the chosen nation, he explained in the name of Eliyahu HaNavi that Yisrael is the heart of the world. Just as the body cannot survive without the heart, so too creation cannot endure

without Am Yisrael. And just as pain in the heart signals that the entire body is in need of healing, so too the suffering of Yisrael reveals a deeper imbalance in the world that calls for repair. The heart pumps life to every limb. So too the mitzvot of the Jewish people draw blessing, vitality, and spiritual sustenance to the entire world. The Zohar teaches that the inner life of Yisrael shapes the reality of the entire world.

The Power of Unity

Lag BaOmer also marks the end of the tragedy in which the students of Rabbi Akiva died in a plague, because they did not honor one another properly. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the great disciple of Rabbi Akiva, embodied the rectification of this tragedy.

Rashbi had a circle of nine talmidim who were bound together with complete love, and were as one soul. The Zohar explains this unity was a requirement for receiving Divine secrets. The gematria of אחדות (unity) is 419 it equals האור אין סוף (the Infinite Light of Hashem). Through unity, Am Yisrael becomes a vessel to draw down the Infinite Light of Hashem, and nullifies negative decrees.

Lag BaOmer and Preparing for Shavuot

Before Matan Torah, Am Yisrael stood at Har Sinai כאיש אחד בלב אחד, like one person with one heart. The Zohar says this is why when Hashem spoke the Aseret HaDibrot, they are written in the singular: Anochi Hashem Elokecha, Lo Yihyeh Lecha. At Har Sinai, Hashem was not addressing us as individuals, but revealing that Am Yisrael is one unified soul.

The phrase כאיש אחד בלב אחד equals 391 the same as פנים אל פנים (face to face), the level at which Hashem spoke to Moshe Rabbeinu. When Am Yisrael is united, they become a collective vessel capable of standing in direct encounter with the Divine Presence.

Rashbi's light prepares us to return to the unity with which we received the Torah on Shavuot.

Challenge

As we stand before the bonfires of Rashbi, each of us must ask: who is one Jew I will draw closer to, and which sefer of Kabbalah from a tzaddik will I commit to learning more deeply?

Don't Neuter Your Soul

By: Reb Adam Klasner



There's a strange mitzvah in Parshas Emor. The Torah says you're not allowed to damage the reproductive ability of an animal. Not just a korban. Any animal. Even a dog.

On a practical level, it makes no sense. Farmers have been doing this forever. It makes animals easier to control. Less aggressive. More manageable.

And the Torah says no.

Why?

Because the moment you start cutting away at the life force of a being just to make it easier to handle, you are no longer working with creation. You are trying to shrink it.

And that same thing is happening inside of us.

A man grows up and somewhere along the way he learns that parts of him are "too much."

Too emotional. Too intense. Too driven. Too sexual. Too creative. Too loud. Too different.

So what does he do?

He doesn't refine those parts. He doesn't understand them. He doesn't learn how to channel them.

He numbs them.

He cuts them off.
He becomes easier to manage.

But also... less alive.

This is what the Torah is coming to protect.

Your creativity is not your problem.

Your desire is not your problem.

Your emotional intensity is not your problem.

These are your raw materials.

These are the exact places where your power lives.

The problem is not that you feel too much.

The problem is that no one taught you how to hold what you feel.

So instead of learning how to work with it, you try to get rid of it.

That's called spiritual castration.

And it looks very religious on the outside.

A man who doesn't feel.

A man who doesn't want.

A man who doesn't risk.

A man who plays everything safe so he never fails.

But inside, something is dead.

The Torah is saying that's not Avodas Hashem.

Avodas Hashem is not about becoming smaller.



It's about becoming more real.
More alive.

More honest.

And then learning how to direct that life.

Because yes, your energy can destroy you if you don't hold it.

But if you cut it off, you destroy yourself anyway.

There's a line in Shir HaShirim.

"My dove is hiding in the cracks of the rock."

And Hashem says, "Come out. I want to see your face. I want to hear your voice."

Stop hiding.

Stop shrinking.

Stop trying to be a version of yourself that feels acceptable.

You were not created to be manageable.

You were created to be powerful.

The work is not to eliminate your fire.

The work is to learn how to carry it without burning everything down.

That's Emor.

Don't neuter the animal.

Learn how to elevate it.

The Crown and The Shovel

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



In Parshas Emor, the Torah opens with a striking instruction directed specifically at the Kohanim: "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, that they should separate from the holy offerings of the children of Israel, and they should not profane My holy Name, which they sanctify for Me" (Vayikra 22:2).

At first glance, this seems straightforward - a warning against ritual carelessness. But the Sforno reads something deeper into it. He explains that the Torah is cautioning the Kohanim against a subtle but dangerous error in thinking: that because of their elevated status, the sacred offerings of ordinary Jews might feel, to them, like something lesser - almost mundane (Sforno on Vayikra 22:2).

This idea is expressed by Rabbi Tzadok in Pirkei Avos as follows: Do not make the Torah a crown to aggrandize yourself, nor a shovel to dig with (Avos 4:5).

The warning is not against distinction itself - the Torah clearly assigns the Kohanim a unique and elevated role. The warning is against what distinction can become when it turns inward. A Kohen who mistakes his responsibility for privilege does not merely compromise himself - he desecrates the very service he was born to preserve. The tragic example of Chofni and Pinchas, sons of Eli, illustrates exactly this: their abuse of the Kehuna did not only cost them personally, it fractured their family from their role as Kohen

Gadol (Shmuel I 12).

Parshas Emor reminds us that every distinction Hashem grants a person is a call to serve, not a license to laud. The higher the position, the greater the responsibility to strive to use it to benefit others.

The Sacred Exit!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks



Your highest spiritual achievement means nothing if you ignore the broken soul standing right in front of you.

Imagine the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. He is the most elevated human being on the planet. Imagine him on Yom Kippur, standing inside the Holy of Holies. That would be the holiest man alive in the holiest room on earth, on the holiest day of the year. There can be no greater divine connection than that. Now, let's assume that an extremely unlikely case occurs where the Kohen suddenly becomes aware of someone who has passed away. Imagine, for some reason, there is no one available to attend to the body of the deceased. Astonishingly, in the absence of anyone else, Jewish law would require the Kohen Gadol to drop the incense he is carrying, leave the most sacred space on earth, and purposely defile his hard-earned purity to tend to the cadaver.

Think about the powerful message behind this law. We might instinctively obsess over our spiritual energy and do everything we can to protect our personal growth. With this law, G-d is telling us clearly that our peak state exists so we can give it away. Our highest calling is stepping into the messy reality of someone else's struggle. You can be the greatest Kohen, but you still have an obligation to others.

There are people in your life right now who are "spiritually unattended." They feel completely invisible and disconnected from their own fire and their own divine purpose. But know this, G-d placed them in your orbit for a reason. You might look at them and assume they are too far gone. You might fear they will drain your perfectly curated positive energy. But G-d is asking you to step out of your comfort zone and reach out to the person everyone else walks past. G-d's deepest desire is not your solitary spiritual ascent. He wants you to bring others with you in your growth.

The High Priest was required to leave the holiest room in history if one human being needed him. What room are you willing to leave for those who need you? What comfort are you willing to set aside to achieve your true purpose?

Why We Count?

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



A man once came to his rebbe, frustrated. "I don't understand. Every night I count Sefirat HaOmer. I say the bracha, I say the number. Day after day. But I don't feel different. Nothing seems to be changing."

The rebbe didn't answer.

Instead, he handed him a small seed.

"Plant this," he said. "Water it every day. Then come back in a week."

A week later, the man returned.

"I did exactly what you said. I watered it every day. But nothing happened. It looks exactly the same."

The rebbe nodded. "Keep watering."

This is exactly what Sefirat HaOmer feels like.

The Torah says, "וספרתם לכם" (Vayikra 23:15 — you shall count for yourselves).

Each night, another number. Another small step.

No drama. No visible transformation. Just quiet repetition...

Why the Torah Built Growth This Way

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 306) explains that we count out of anticipation for Matan Torah—like someone counting toward something they deeply long for.

The Ramban (Vayikra 23) adds that these days are like Chol HaMoed between Pesach and Shavuot—one continuous bridge of growth.

But interestingly the Torah adds: "לכם" — for yourselves.

Because the counting is not just getting you somewhere.

It is shaping who you are becoming. The Zera Shimshon explains that counting creates awareness. A person who counts does not drift through life. Each day becomes intentional.

The Sfes Emes adds that counting brings kedushah into each individual day.

The Arizal teaches that the 49 days correspond to refining 49 aspects of the soul—each day a precise adjustment.

The Bat Ayin explains that each day draws down a small point of light.

The Zohar teaches that this process unfolds quietly, beneath the surface

A few weeks later, the man returned again.

This time, a small green shoot had broken through the soil.

"It's growing," he said. The rebbe smiled. "It didn't start today."

It started the first day you watered it.

We often wait for big change. But the Torah teaches:

Real growth is: consistent incremental and; almost invisible.

Closing Thought

Sweeping change and grand gestures have their place. But nothing has the same lasting power as small, consistent growth. Step by step. Day by day. One small choice after another to connect with Hashem.

Reminder

Don't forget to count the Omer
Day 30 after Maariv.

