

The Study of the Zohar Will Free Us from Exile

Next week, we celebrate Lag Ba'omer, commemorating the departure of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, Rashbi, from this world. The Bnei Yissoschar teaches us that the great joy associated with this day is due to the fact that on this day, Rashbi assigned his pupil, Rabbi Abba, to record all the secrets and mystical aspects of the Torah that had been revealed to him. These teachings are found in the holy Zohar. So, Lag Ba'omer represents the "matan Torah" of the hidden, mystical Torah. A beautiful allusion to this fact is found in the possuk (Tehillim 119,18): "גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות מתורתך" - unveil my eyes that I may perceive the wonders from your Torah — the word "גל" alludes to ל"ג בעומר, the day the wonders of the Zohar were revealed and bequeathed to future generations.

In honor of ל"ג בעומר, we would like to examine a teaching found in the Zohar hokadosh (Nasso 124:), where the neshoma of Moshe Rabeinu tells Rashbi that in the merit of studying the Zohar, Yisroel will mercifully emerge from exile. We learn that the insights and revelations of the Zohar derive from the attribute of בינה, a form of comprehension and intuition, which is the source of Tshuve - תשובה.

Many sources can be found describing the relationship between בינה and תשובה such as (a) the Zohar hokadosh (Lech lecha79:): "נשמתא אתערא בתשובה דאתקרי בינה" and (b) the words of the prophet (Isaiah 6,10): "ולבבו יבין ושב ורפא לו". Simply put, one would not commit sins, if he possessed בינה. Chazal express this idea as follows (Sotah 3.): "אין אדם עובר עבירה אלא אם כן" — נכנס בו רוח שטות—a man only sins if he is overcome with foolishness, i.e. when he lacks בינה.

The Gemorah teaches (Yoma 86:): "גרולה תשובה שמקרבת את הגאולה"—teshuvah is essential for geulah. So, study of the Zohar—which is rooted in בינה and, therefore, תשובה-- is a key to the future redemption—as we learned above from the conversation between the neshoma of Moshe Rabeinu and Rashbi.

The divine kabbalist Mahari from Komarna, zy"א and the Arizal both extol the tremendous benefits to the soul and to the world of "tikkun" of engaging in the study of the Zohar; they encourage one to learn five pages daily. Even if one is unable to comprehend the true meaning of these studies, he is still awakening the powers of teshuvah and purifying his very being.

In Sanhedrin 97:, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua debate the issue of teshuvah and the geulah. Rabbi Eliezer is of the opinion that if Yisroel do teshuvah, they will be redeemed; otherwise, they will not. Rabbi Yehoshua replies that if Yisroel do not do teshuvah, the Almighty will arrange for them to fall under the tyranny of a cruel monarch; this will, inevitably, force them to repent. Once again, we can see the tremendous benefit served by studying the holy Zohar. By connecting with the world of teshuvah, Yisroel will be redeemed, mercifully, sparing them the tyranny of a cruel king and other painful ordeals. This is precisely, what the neshomah of Moshe Rabeinu is saying to Rashbi (translation):

“והמשכילים יבינו, מצד הבינה שהוא עץ החיים, עליו נאמר והמשכילים יזהירו כזוהר הרקיע, באותו חיבור שלך שהוא ספר הזהר מהזוהר של אם העליונה תשובה, באלה לא צריך נסיון, ובגלל שעתידים ישראל לטעום מעץ החיים שהוא אותו ספר הזהר, יצאו בו מן הגלות ברחמים, ויתקיים בהם ה' בדר ינחנו ואין עמו אל נכר.”

The possuk (Michah 7,15) states: “כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות”—the Zohar hokadosh explains that just as the Almighty redeemed us from Egypt by means of the fifty gates of בינה, so, too, He will redeem us in the future by means of the fifty gates of בינה. The word “נפלאות” in the possuk, can be broken down to read נ' פלאות — fifty wonders—corresponding to the fifty gates of בינה.

We can further stipulate that the mysteries recorded by Rabbi Abba on Lag Ba’omer, the day Rashbi departed from this world, are themselves derivations and illuminations from the fiftieth level of בינה. Although, Rashbi surely learned the secrets and mysteries of the “fiftieth level (gate)” from his master, Rabbi Akiva, only he was permitted to reveal them to the world for future generations; he possessed a special ability to veil these lessons in such a manner that only those who are worthy would be able to understand them.

We have learned in the Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 1,2) that when Rabbi Akiva determined the seating order for his talmidim, he sat Rabbi Shimon behind Rabbi Meir. This may have been a hint to Rashbi that his Torah is meant to be hidden and is not meant for everyone.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says concerning himself (Succah 45:): **“יכולני לפטור את כל העולם כולו - מן הדין”** - Due to my merit, I am able to spare the entire world the judgment that is ultimately due. Rabbi Alexander of Komarna, zy”a, explains that any time a Jew comes up with a Torah insight, a chiddush, he is utilizing the attribute of בינה, which has the power to sweeten and lessen the severity of judgment. The Maor Einayim adds that the ability to sweeten and lessen the severity of judgment occurs, specifically, by means of the “fiftieth level,” “shaar ha’nun.” Since the teachings of Rashbi in the Zohar hokadosh derive from בינה and from the “shaar ha’nun,” it is fitting and appropriate for him to make such a statement: **“יכולני לפטור את כל העולם כולו מן הדין”**.

Finally, we find in the introduction to the Tikunei Zohar that Rashbi and his colleagues merited the revelation of hidden meanings of the Torah that, otherwise, will not be revealed until the coming of Mashiach. It is written in Isaiah (51,4): **“כי תורה מאתי תצא”**—“for Torah will come forth from Me.” The Midrash elucidates (V.R. 13,3): **“אמר הקב”ה תורה חדשה מאתי תצא”**—the Holy One said that a new Torah will come forth from Him.

This “new Torah” appears to be a reference to the lessons of the “shaar ha’nun” that will be revealed in the times of the Mashiach. Thus, we can understand how engaging in the study of the Zohar hokadosh, which is a derivative of the “shaar ha’nun,” the Torah that will be revealed with the coming of the Mashiach, serves to hasten and bring the geulah closer. Let us conclude with the prayer of the divine poet: **“תורתו מגן לנו, היא מאירת עינינו, הוא ימליך טוב בעדינו, אדונינו בר יוחאי”** — his Torah protects us, it illuminates our eyes, he advocates on our behalf, our master the son of Yochai.”