

# Shvilei Pinches

## Lag-BoOmer

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### **RaShB"Y a Spark of Moshe Rabeinu Rectified Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim a Reincarnation of the Egyptian**

In honor of the auspicious occasion of Lag BoOmer, a day celebrating the divine Tanna RaShB"Y, it is appropriate for us to address and clarify a surprising incident described in the Gemoreh (Shabbos 34.). After secluding themselves in a cave for thirteen years, RaShB"Y and his son, Rabbi Elozor, departed the cave and encountered Yehudah ben Gerim. As a consequence of the latter not having guarded his tongue, the Roman government had sentenced RaShB"Y to die — this forced him to flee and seek refuge in the cave until that regime had died and the decree had been repealed. Upon exiting the cave and encountering Yehudah ben Gerim, RaShB"Y proclaimed: **“עדיין יש לזה בעולם, נתן בו עיניו ועשהו גל של עצמות”** — **Is this one still in the world? He turned his eyes upon him and turned him into a heap of bones.**

Before delving into this matter, let us recall why RaShB"Y punished him; additionally, let us examine who exactly Yehudah ben Gerim was. Was he an ordinary person who did not know how to guard his tongue? Or, was he a great Torah scholar who failed by speaking when he should have kept quiet? To answer these questions, let us quickly review the aforementioned Gemoreh; this Gemoreh is the source concerning RaShB"Y's flight to the cave — where he rose to greatness in the mystical realm of the Torah. The divine poet aptly described this ascension in the piyut Bar Yochai: **“במערת צורים שעמדת שם קנית — הדרך והדרך”** — **in the rocky cave you stopped, there you acquired your glory and your strength.**

### **RaShB"Y Attained Perfection in the Cave**

The Gemoreh records the following (Shabbos 33:):

**“דיתבי רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי ורבי שמעון, ויתיב יהודה בן גרים גביהו, פתח רבי יהודה ואמר, כמה נאים מעשיהן של אומה זו, תקנו שווקים תקנו גשרים תקנו מרחצאות. רבי יוסי שתק, נענה רשב"י ואמר, כל מה שתקנו לא תקנו אלא לצורך עצמן, תקנו שווקין להושיב בהן זונות, מרחצאות לעדן בהן עצמן, גשרים ליטול מהן מכס.**

Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yossi and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai were sitting together and Yehudah ben Gerim was sitting next to them. Rabbi Yehudah opened the discussion by praising the accomplishments of the Romans in Eretz Yisroel — such as establishing marketplaces, bridges and bathhouses. Upon hearing Rabbi Yehudah's admiration

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concerning the Roman occupation, Rabbi Yossi remained silent. RaShB"Y, however, responded that everything they established was to serve their own purposes and agenda.

הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם ונשמעו למלכות, אמרו, יהודה שעילה יתעלה, יוסי ששתק יגלה לציפורי, שמעון שגינה יהרג. אזלו טשו במערתא... איתבו תריסר שני במערתא.

Yehudah ben Gerim recounted this discussion to some of his associates, and it reached the ears of the government. According to Rashi, he recounted the discussion to either students or to his parents, but not directly to the Roman authorities — who became aware of the matter, nonetheless. The Romans promptly elevated Rabbi Yehudah's status — as a reward for his praise — they exiled Rabbi Yossi for remaining silent, and they sentenced Rabbi Shimon to be executed for his derogatory remarks. Rabbi Shimon and his son went and hid in a cave; they dwelled in the cave in seclusion for twelve years.

"אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא, אמר, מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזירתיה. נפקו, חזו אינשי דקא כרבי וזרעי, אמר מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין בחיי שעה, כל מקום שנותנין עיניהן מיד נשרף, יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם, להחריב עולמי יצאתם, חיזרו למערתכם, הדור אזול".

One day, Eliyahu appeared at the entrance to the cave. He proclaimed: "Who will inform the son of Yochai that the Caesar has died and the decree has been annulled?" Hearing this proclamation, RaShB"Y and his son exited the cave. They witnessed some people plowing and sowing in a field. In anger, Rabbi Shimon declared: "These people are neglecting the pursuit of the World to Come and, instead, are occupying themselves with matters of the fleeting moment." Everywhere they gazed, objects went up in flame. Finally, a heavenly voice interceded and called out to them: "Did you emerge from the cave to destroy my world? Return to your cave!" They went and returned.

"איתבו תריסר ירחי שתא, אמרי משפט רשעים בגיהנם י"ב חודש, יצתה בת קול ואמרה צאו ממערתכם, נפקו, כל היכא דהוה מחי רבי אלעזר הוה מסו רבי שמעון... אמר, הואיל ואיתרחיש ניסא איזיל אתקין מילתא... אמר איכא מילתא דבעי לתקוני. אמרו ליה איכא דוכתא דאית ביה ספק טומאה, ואית להו צערא לכהנים לאקופי".

They remained in the cave for another twelve months — figuring that this was adequate atonement, since twelve months is the sentence of evildoers in Gehinom. Once again, a heavenly voice called out to them: "Depart from your cave!" So, they emerged. Everywhere that Rabbi Elozor would destroy something with his gaze, Rabbi Shimon would heal it. Rabbi Shimon announced: "Seeing as a miracle was performed on my behalf, I shall now do something to benefit the community." Thus, Rabbi Shimon asked: "Is there any matter that requires correction?" The communal leaders informed him that there was a place where a corpse was buried but its location was uncertain. This situation was problematic for the Kohanim, who needed to constantly circumvent the area.

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The Gemoreh (ibid. 34.) goes on to describe how RaShB"Y miraculously identified the precise location of the corpse and marked the spot – allowing the Kohanim to pass through the area without fear of contamination.

The Gemoreh concludes its account of RaShB"Y's departure from the cave with the following event: **חזייה ליהודה בן גרים, אמר, עדיין יש לזה בעולם, נתן בו עיניו ועשהו גל של – עצמות – he encountered Yehudah ben Gerim and said: "Is this one still in the world?" He cast his eyes upon him and turned him into a heap of bones.** In other words, he held him responsible for repeating the exchange described above which was ultimately heard by the Roman authorities; therefore, he turned him into a pile of bones.

### Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim Was a Student of RaShB"Y's

Now, let us investigate the true nature of Yehudah ben Gerim. In this regard, we find the surprising revelation in Tosafos (Shabbos 33:) that he was an esteemed student of RaShB"Y's and not an ordinary person. In fact, the Gemoreh (Moed Koton 9.) teaches us that RaShB"Y even sent his son Rabbi Elozor to go and obtain a berocheh from him: **אמר – ליה לבריה, בני אדם הללו אנשים של צורה הם, זיל גביהון דליברכוך** – and, furthermore, RaShB"Y describes Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim and his associate as men of stature.

For this reason, Rabeinu Tam has a slightly different version of our Gemoreh. Rather than stating: **"הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם ונשמעו למלכות"** – where Yehudah ben Gerim is mentioned without any title of honor, his version reads: **"הלך רבי יהודה בן גרים"** – referring to him as Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim. Additionally, at the conclusion of the passage, it states: **"ועשהו גל של עצמות"** – and he turned him into a heap of bones. Since this description is belittling, it is omitted from Rabeinu Tam's version; instead, his version reads: **"נח נפשיה"** – he passed away.

This agrees nicely with Rashi's comment that he repeated the discussion he witnessed to students or to his parents; Rashi apparently felt a need to point out that Yehudah ben Gerim did not go directly to the Roman authorities and did not intend for them to learn of said exchange. In fact, the precise language of the Gemoreh only indicates that the authorities heard about the conversation but not that he directly informed them. This clearly makes more sense in light of the fact that Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim was a man of stature and was actually a student of RaShB"Y's.

Nevertheless, it is apparent to all Torah scholars that two issues must be addressed here:

- (1) Since Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim was a man of stature and a student of RaShB"Y's and someone worthy of seeking a berocheh from, how is it possible that his words caused so much trouble? They were repeated to the authorities and resulted in

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RaShB"Y being sentenced to death; these circumstances forced RaShB"Y to flee to the cave and to remain secluded there for thirteen years.

- (2) We have seen from the Gemoreh that when RaShB"Y emerged from the cave he was so ecstatic that he sought to perform acts of kindness and benevolent deeds — he reversed the acts of harsh judgment due to his son Rabbi Elozor and he cleared an area of uncertain corpse contamination for the Kohanim. Now, we have a well-established principle (Ovos 4, 2): "מצוה גוררת מצוה" — one good deed leads to another. If so, why didn't RaShB"Y see fit, on this joyous occasion to forgive his student Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim? After all, he did not inform the authorities intentionally, he just was not careful with regard to telling those close to him what he had heard. Although his indiscretion led to the matter coming to the attention of the authorities, and he surely did not act appropriately, nevertheless he must have suffered greatly due to the harm he caused. So, the question remains, why didn't RaShB"Y forgive him?

### Yehudah ben Gerim Was a Reincarnation of the Egyptian

In honor of Lag BoOmer, a day celebrating the divine Tanna RaShB"Y, let us try to clarify and illuminate the actions of this great tzaddik. Let us begin by introducing an amazing fact taught by the Seder HaDoros in the name of the sefer Novlos Chochmah: RaShB"Y was a reincarnation of Moshe Rabeinu's neshomeh and Yehudah ben Gerim was a reincarnation of the Egyptian slain by Moshe. So, just as Moshe killed the Egyptian, RaShB"Y, a derivative of Moshe's neshomeh, killed Yehudah ben Gerim, a reincarnation of the Egyptian.

The association between RaShB"Y and Moshe Rabeinu's neshomeh is explained by the Arizal in Likutei Shas (Shabbos): "דע כי הרשב"י עליו השלום היה ניצוץ ממשה רבינו ע"ה, וכמו שמשה ברח מפני חרב פרעה והשיג שלימותו שם במדבר, כך הרשב"י ברח מפני הקיסר והשיג שלימותו שם במערה המדברה בלוד. He emphasizes that RaShB"Y, o"h, was a spark from Moshe Rabeinu's neshomeh, o"h; just as Moshe fled from Pharaoh's sword and attained his perfection in the desert wilderness, so, too, RaShB"Y fled from Caesar and attained his perfection in the wilderness cave in Lod.

This matter, however, requires some further explanation. For, the Egyptian was a total goy. So, how could he have possibly merited reincarnating into a great Torah scholar such as Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim? The answer lies in a teaching of the Arizal's found in Shaar HaPesukim. HKB"H arranged for Moshe to kill the Egyptian and, furthermore, to do so employing the sacred Name rather than a weapon, such as a sword, because Moshe Rabeinu was a reincarnation of Hevel, whereas the Egyptian was a reincarnation of Kayin, who killed Hevel.

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Now, the possuk dictates explicitly (Bereishis 9, 6): **“שופך דם האדם באדם דמו ישפך”** — **whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed**. In other words, if one person murders another, then **“באדם”** — the person that was murdered, he, himself, **“דמו ישפך”** — will avenge the murder. Both will reincarnate at another date and, in this subsequent lifetime, the one that was murdered will kill his murderer. Therefore, HKB”H arranged that Hevel, a righteous man, would reincarnate into Moshe, whereas Kayin, his murderous brother, would return as the Egyptian. When Moshe happened to see an Egyptian man striking a fellow Hebrew, he realized through divine inspiration that the offender possessed a hidden spark from his brother Kayin. To set things right, he killed the Egyptian in order to rectify his brother’s soul.

Thus, we have learned from the Novlos Chochmah that Kayin first reincarnated into the Egyptian — who was killed by Moshe, a reincarnation of Hevel — and, subsequently, reincarnated into Yehudah ben Gerim. Once again, he was turned into a pile of bones by RaShB”Y, who was a reincarnation of Moshe.

#### Moshe and RaShB”Y Utilized the Same Powerful Name

Behold, an incredible revelation! The very same name used by Moshe Rabeinu to kill the Egyptian was employed by RaShB”Y when he set his gaze upon Yehudah ben Gerim and transformed him into a heap of bones. That name, תכ”ה, derives from the first letters of the possuk (Tehillim 150, 6): **“כ”ל הַיְנֻשְׁמָה תִּהְלֵל** — **every neshomeh will give praise**. Similarly, we find in Pri Etz Chaim (Shaar Kriat HaTorah 5): **“כִּי לֹא עֲזַבְתָּ דּוֹרְשֵׁיךָ ה’ סוֹפִי** — **תִּיבּוֹת תכ”ה, והוא השם אשר הרג משה בו את המצרי, למה תכ”ה רעך... וכל המכוין בו ניצול מאדם רע כל היום”**. The name תכ”ה also derives from the final letters in the possuk: **כִּי לֹא עֲזַבְתָּ דּוֹרְשֵׁיךָ ה’** — **for You have not forsaken those who call upon You, Hashem**; in fact, this is the name with which Moshe killed the Egyptian and is alluded to in the possuk (Shemot 2, 13): **למה תכ”ה רעך**. Then he suggests that anyone who concentrates on this name will be spared from the wicked the entire day.

Concerning our Gemoreh (Shabbos 34.), the Arizal writes in Shaar Maamarei Razal: **“הטעם הוא כי כל הדינים הם נאחזים בעינים... ולכן ראי”ה בגימטריא גבור”ה, וכמו שכתבתי בפסוק (תהלים צא ח) רק בעיניך תביט, בהבטת עיניך בלבד בהם, תיכף ושלומת רשעים תראה בלי טורח אחר”**. He explains why RaShB”Y killed Yehudah ben Gerim by gazing upon him with his eyes. Justice and severity can be meted out with the eyes. The numerical value of the word **גבור”ה**, meaning sight, is equivalent to the numerical value of the word **גבור”ה**, meaning courage and severity. In this manner, he elucidates the possuk (Tehillim 91, 8): **“רק ושלומת רשעים תראה”** — **with the mere gaze of your eyes, instantaneously, “ושלומת רשעים תראה”** — you will see the retribution of the wicked without any further effort.

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We see from the Arizal that RaShB"Y killed Yehudah ben Gerim with the name alluded to in the possuk: "רק בעיניך תביט" — **you will merely gaze with your eyes**. We simply need to figure out what specific name that is. We find the answer in the Arizal's Shaar Ruach HaKodesh (Yichud 10) where he discusses the name תב"ה which can also be rearranged to form "ועל זה השם רמז הכתוב רק בעיניך תביט, כי תבי"ט עם ד' אותיותיו עולה: כה"ת כה"ת... והרי כי כה"ת הם בחינת שני העינים שבהם מביט, ובכח זה השם מסתכל ברשעים ובמעשיהם ומענישם, וזה שאמר הכתוב (שם) ושלומת רשעים תראה". He points out that the word תבי"ט, meaning you will gaze, plus its four letters equals תב"ה, 425. He states that with the force of this name, one need only gaze upon the wicked and their evil deeds to punish them.

Thus, we find an explicit reference to the fact that RaShB"Y merely gazed upon Yehudah ben Gerim and transformed him into a heap of bones with the force of the letters of תב"ה — which Moshe used to kill the Egyptian. So, we clearly see the connection between these two events; Moshe killed the Egyptian, who was a reincarnation of Kayin, with the name תב"ה and RaShB"Y, a reincarnation of Moshe's, killed Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim, a reincarnation of the Egyptian, with the name תב"ה.

#### RaShB"Y Healed the Neshomeh of His Pupil

##### Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim

Following this path of enlightenment, let us endeavor to explain why the divine Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai saw fit to cast his eyes upon his pupil Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim — a Torah scholar of stature — and to eliminate him from this world by means of the name תב"ה — which was used by Moshe to slay the Egyptian. In Shaar HaPesukim (Shemot), the Arizal teaches us a very important concept. The reason that Moshe killed the Egyptian with a powerful and sacred name rather than with a sword was in order to rectify his brother Kayin's neshomeh, which was in the Egyptian's body.

The Arizal brings a clear-cut proof from the Zohar hakadosh (Bolok 194:). In the battle with Midian, Pinchas catches Bilam and slays him with a sword, as it is written (Bamidbor 31, 8): "וְאֵת בִּלְעָם בֶּן בְּעוֹר הָרְגוּ בַחֶרֶב" — **and Bilam, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword**. He purposely chose not to kill him with the sacred Name in order to prevent Bilam's soul from having any connection with kedushah. We see from this Zohar that killing with the sacred Name has the ability to impart kedushah and to heal a holy spark of a neshomeh. Following this line of reasoning, we can deduce that Moshe killed the Egyptian with the name תב"ה, rather than with a sword, in order to rectify the spark of his brother Kayin's neshomeh that was contained within the Egyptian.

Taking this logic a step further, it is reasonable to suggest that RaShB"Y, a reincarnation of Moshe, had similar motives for casting his eyes upon Yehudah ben Gerim; he intended to

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heal and purify, by means of the name תב"ה, Kayin's soul that had reincarnated into him. One might question, however, why this was necessary? After all, Moshe Rabeinu had already killed the Egyptian using this name in order to rectify Kayin's soul? So, why was it necessary for RaShB"Y to do so a second time?

It is patently clear, however, that Moshe's initial act failed to completely rectify Kayin's neshomeh — for, he was reincarnated into the body of an Egyptian, a goy. Therefore, it was necessary for him to reincarnate a second time into the body of a Jew; so, he was reincarnated into Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim. This is also the reason why RaShB"Y, a holy spark of Moshe Rabeinu's, learned Torah with him in order to complete his process of healing and rectification.

At first, RaShB"Y thought that learning Torah was sufficient to achieve this goal. When he saw, however, that his student failed to guard his tongue and that he repeated the conversation which eventually reached the Roman authorities, RaShB"Y realized that Kayin's soul — within Yehudah ben Gerim--still possessed a taint of the Egyptian. Therefore, precisely at the time that he emerged from the cave and was going about performing acts of healing and kindness, did HKB"H arrange for him to encounter his student, Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim, to complete the healing process.

When RaShB"Y saw Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim and recalled all of the trouble he had caused, he exclaimed: "עדיון יש לזה בעולם" — **is this one still in the world?** He specifically used the word "לזה", meaning this one — as if he was referring to someone not present. In other words, he was surprised that remnants of the Egyptian's contamination still existed; for, he was of the opinion that since he had learned Torah with Yehudah ben Gerim, the defilement had been expunged.

Thus, RaShB"Y realized that it was still incumbent upon him to complete the healing and rectification process. So, he gazed upon him, concentrating on the name תב"ה, to produce the effect of: "רק בעיניך תביט" — punishing the wicked with a mere gaze while employing this powerful name. Moshe initiated the process — utilizing this name to rectify the part of Kayin's soul that lay within the Egyptian — and he followed suit; he focused on this same name in order to cleanse Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim of the Egyptian's taint. Whether he turned him into a heap of bones, "ועשהו גל של עצמות", or, according to Tosafos's version, he put him to rest, "ונוח נפשיה", he successfully purified Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim in this world. With the healing and rectification process complete, he was able to return free of any taint or contamination to world of the souls.

### "One Mitzvoh Generates Another Mitzvoh"

Let us now examine the incredible sequence of events as depicted to us by our blessed sages in the Gemoreh. One of RaShB"Y's first acts of kindness and healing, celebrating his

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miraculous emergence from the cave, involved the Kohanim. He purified an area that contained a corpse in an unknown location and rid the area of corpse contamination. By causing the corpse to rise in the ground, its location was identified and the area of contamination was demarcated from the remaining uncontaminated areas. This, in fact, was RaShB"Y's task and purpose — to separate the good from the bad and the pure from the impure.

In truth, this amazing feat exemplified the principle of: "מצוה גוררת מצוה" — **one mitzvoh generates another mitzvoh**. For, this feat led to the feat of healing and kindness that he performed on behalf of his pupil, Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim. His soul also contained an element of concealed contamination, of which they were unaware. So, RaShB"Y focused and employed the name תב"ה to rid him of the contamination. Once again, he was able to separate the impure from the pure, leaving Rabbi Yehudah ben Gerim completely cleansed and uncontaminated.

As we review what we have learned, we can only stand in awe of the incredible methods HKB"H employs to purify and rectify neshomehs. After killing Hevel, Kayin's first reincarnation is into the Egyptian. Comes along Moshe, a reincarnation of Hevel, and kills the Egyptian with a powerful name in order to heal his brother Kayin's soul. Kayin's soul, located within the Egyptian, caused Moshe, a reincarnation of his brother Hevel, to flee to Midian. There, he achieved perfection at the vision of the burning bush and proceeded to facilitate the exodus of Yisroel from Egypt and to serve as the vehicle for giving Yisroel the Torah. All of these events constituted part of the rectification process of Kayin's soul.

Subsequently, the part of Kayin's neshomeh that was inside the Egyptian reincarnated into Yehudah ben Gerim. Comes along RaShB"Y, a reincarnation of Moshe, and studies Torah with him in order to complete his healing and rectification process. Yet, a remnant of the Egyptian's defilement lingered in his body, causing Yehudah ben Gerim not to guard his tongue properly.

This indiscretion forced RaShB"Y to flee and to seclude himself in the cave; there he achieved perfection. In this merit, he emerged from the cave and revealed the secrets of the mystical Torah to Yisroel. Therefore, when RaShB"Y encountered his student Yehudah ben Gerim, he cast his eyes upon him to complete the process initiated by Moshe — to complete the healing and rectification of his brother Kayin's neshomeh utilizing the same powerful name. May it be His Will that the words of the divine poet are fulfilled: "תורתו — מגן לנו, היא מאירת עינינו, ימליץ טוב בעדנו, אדונינו בר יוחאי" — let the Torah of our master, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, protect us, enlighten us, and advocate on our behalf!