



## The Remez of "לא תבערו אש" Admonished Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to Respect Even Jews Who Must Deal with the Temporal Demands of Olam HaZeh

Lag BaOmer, the celebration of the passing of the divine Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, approaches auspiciously. Hence, it is fitting that we explore the emergence of Rashbi and Rabbi Elazar, his son, from the cave that they were secluded in for twelve years. When they did emerge, they were bothered by the fact that people were occupied with the mundane, temporal pursuits of Olam HaZeh rather than with spiritual activities. Everything they saw was incinerated by their gaze such as what those people were planting and plowing. This prompted a "bat-kol"—a heavenly voice—to admonish them: **"Have you emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave."** They heeded the instructions of the "bat-kol" and returned to the cave. After an additional year in the cave, the heavenly voice instructed them: **"Come out of your cave."** This time the situation was different. Indeed, everywhere Rabbi Elazar looked was stricken; however, Rashbi repaired all of the damage. Here is the incident as described in the Gemara (Shabbas 33b):

"איתבו תריסר שני במערתא. אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא, אמר מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזירתיה, נפקו חזו אינשי דקא כרבי זורעי, אמר מוניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין בחיי שעה, כל מקום שנותנין עיניהן מיד נשרף, יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם, להחריב עולמי יצאתם, חזרו למערתכם.

הדור אזול, 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 מסי רבי שמעון, אמר לו בני די לעולם אני ואתה."

בהדי פניא דמעלי שבתא, חזו ההוא סבא דהוה נקיט תרי מדאני אסא ורהיט בין השמשות, אמרו ליה, הגי למה לך, אמר להו לכבוד שבת, [שאלו אותו] ותיסגי לך בחד, חד כנגד זכור וחד כנגד שמור. אמר ליה לבריה, חזי כמה חביבין מצוות על ישראל, יתיב דעתייהו."

**They dwelled in the cave for twelve years. One day, Eliyahu came and stood 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 He proclaimed, "Who will inform the son of Yochai that the Caesar has died, and the decree has been repealed?" They emerged. They saw people who were plowing and sowing. He (Rashbi) declared, "They are forsaking the eternal life and occupying themselves with the transitory life." Everywhere they would cast their eyes, objects were immediately incinerated. A heavenly voice called out to them, "Have you emerged to destroy my world; return to your cave."**

**So, they went and returned (to the cave). They dwelled there twelve months—another full year. They said, "The sentence of evildoers in Gehinnom is only twelve months," i.e., the additional twelve months confined to the cave should be sufficient penance. A heavenly voice called out to them, "Emerge from your cave." They emerged. This time, whatever Rabbi Elazar damaged with his gaze, Rabbi Shimon healed. He said, "Son, the world can suffice with you and me alone."**

**As night began to fall late Friday afternoon, they saw "a certain old man" who was clutching two bundles of "hadasim" (myrtles) and was running home with them as twilight descended. They said to him, "These, what are they for?" He answered them, "To honor the Shabbas." Rabbi Shimon and his son inquired, "But could you not have**

sufficed with just one bundle?" He replied, "One is for 'zachor' and one is for 'shamor.'" He (Rabbi Shimon) said to his son, "See how dear the mitzvos are to Yisrael?!" They were appeased (that Yisrael are concerned with mitzvos in Olam HaZeh).

What is the deeper message conveyed by this story? Why, after studying Torah and serving Hashem day and night for twelve years in the cave, did they not appreciate the fact that it is the will of Hashem that Yisrael occupy themselves with mundane matters and the pursuit of a livelihood in Olam HaZeh? And only after another an additional year of confinement in the cave was it arranged from above for them to encounter the old man running with two bundles of "hadasim." Only then, did Rashbi finally understand that Yisrael do truly cherish the mitzvos.

Furthermore, the holy Tosafists (Chullin 6a) teach us that whenever the Gemara mentions "ההוא סבא"—a certain old man—it is referring to Eliyahu HaNavi. In other words, Eliyahu HaNavi was sent from heaven in the guise of an old man running with two bundles of "hadasim" on Erev Shabbas" to allay the concerns of Rashbi. We will endeavor to explain why HKB"H orchestrated this incident in precisely this manner—to allay the concerns of Rashbi with the cherished mitzvah of Shabbas, which is associated with the utterances of "shamor" and "zachor."

**“Do not light a fire”: Admonishing Rashbi Not to Incinerate the Property of Yisrael with His Gaze**

It appears that we can explain the matter by referring to the fascinating interpretation of the No'am Megadim (Vayakheil) of the pesukim (Shemos 35, 1):

“ויקהל משה את כל עדת בני ישראל ויאמר אליהם, אלה הדברים אשר צוה ה' לעשות אותם, ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קודש שבת שבתך לה' כל העושה בו מלאכה יומת. לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת.”

**And Moshe assembled the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael and said to them: “These are the things that Hashem commanded, to do them. For a period of six days, work may be done, but the seventh day shall be holy for you, a day of**

**complete rest for Hashem; whoever does work on it shall be put to death. You shall not light fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbas day.”**

The question asked by our blessed sages and presented by Rashi is well-known: Of all the thirty-nine types of labor prohibited on Shabbas, why does the Torah only mention the “lo ta'aseh” of lighting a fire here: “לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת”?

To answer this question, the No'am Megadim refers to the Mechilta (Ki Sisa). There, Chazal reconcile the difference between the mitzvah of Shabbas mentioned by HKB"H in the Aseres HaDibros (Shemos 20, 8): “זכור את יום השבת לקדשו, ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל מלאכתך ויום השביעי שבת—remember the Shabbas day to sanctify it; six days you shall work and do all your labor (yourself); but the seventh day is Shabbas to Hashem, your G-d; you shall not do any work . . .”—and the passuk in parshas Vayakheil cited above, where the Torah says: “For a period of six days, work may be done” by others. The Mechilta explains the difference as follows:

**How are both of these pesukim satisfied? When Yisrael are abiding by the will of the Omnipresent, their work is done by others, as the passuk specifies “תעשה מלאכה” (work will be done, i.e., by others). Similarly, Scripture says (Yeshayah 61, 5): “And strangers will arise and shepherd your flocks, etc.” Yet, when they do not abide by the will of the Omnipresent, they must perform the work themselves, as it states: “And you shall do all your labor.”**

As to whether a person should perform worldly labor and tasks himself, we find a dispute between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Gemara (Berachos 35b):

“תנו רבנן, ואספת דגנך, מה תלמוד לומר, לפי שנאמר לא ימוש ספר התורה הזה מפיך, יכול דברים ככתבן, תלמוד לומר ואספת דגנך, הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ, דברי רבי ישמעאל. רבי שמעון בן יוחי אומר, אפשר אדם חורש בשעת חרישה, וזורע בשעת זריעה, וקוצר בשעת קצירה, ודש בשעת דישה, וזורע בשעת הרוח, תורה מה תהא עליה, אלא בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מלאכתן נעשית על ידי אחרים, שנאמר ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם וגו', ובזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מלאכתן נעשית על ידי עצמן שנאמר ואספת דגנך.”

**The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa** (Devarim 11, 14): **“And you will gather in your grain.” Why did the Torah have to say this? Because it is stated** (Yehoshua 1, 8): **“This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth.” We might think that this passuk is to be taken literally. Therefore, the Torah states: “And you shall gather in your grain,” instructing us to act in accordance with the rest of the world—i.e., we should study Torah and earn a livelihood. These are the words of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai says: Is it possible that a man plows at the time of plowing, and sows at the time of sowing, and harvests at the time of harvesting, and threshes at the time of threshing, and winnows at the time of the blowing wind? What then will become of Torah-study? Rather, when Yisrael act in accordance with the Omnipresent’s will, their work will be performed by others, as it is stated** (Yeshayah 61, 5): **“And strangers will arise and shepherd your flocks, etc.” But when Yisrael neglect to act in accordance with the Omnipresent’s will, their work is necessarily performed by them themselves, as it is stated** (Devarim 11, 14): **“And you will gather in your grain.”**

At the conclusion of this passage, Abaye determines how the majority of Yisrael should act: אמר אביי הרבה “עשו כרבי ישמעאל ועלתה בידן, כרבי שמעון בן יוחי ולא עלתה בידן”—**Abaye said: Many did as suggested by Rabbi Yishmael and were successful; while others did as suggested by Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai and were not successful.**

Accordingly, in the Aseres HaDibros, HKB”H gave the mitzvah of Shabbas to every member of Yisrael without exception. Hence, it says there: **“Six days you shall work and do all your labor** (yourself); **but the seventh day is Shabbas to Hashem, your G-d”**; Shabbas is only mentioned once. In contrast, in parshas Vayakheil, Moshe is alluding to how the mitzvah of Shabbas applies to the elite such as Rashbi and his colleagues: **“For a period of six days, work may be done”** by others. Thus, it turns out that for those elite, accomplished scholars, all six weekdays resemble **Shabbas**, since they do not need to perform

their labor themselves. The seventh day for them, therefore, is elevated to a higher level of kedushah—**“שבת שבתון”**. It is as if the kedushah of Shabbas is doubled, as indicated by the double language.

At this point, it is fitting to present to our royal audience a wonderful idea that I heard pertaining to this subject from our master, the holy Admor of Belz, shlit”a. He addressed in his own sacred way a statement by Rashbi in the Gemara (Shabbas 118b): אמר רבי יוחנן “משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי, אלמלא שמרו ישראל שתי שבתות כהלכתן מיד—**Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: If Yisrael would merely observe two** (consecutive) **Shabbasos according to their law** (with great care, meticulously), **they would be redeemed immediately.**

We can suggest that this is consistent with the attitude and opinion of Rashbi alluded to above. He wanted to see all Jews emulate the behavior of his entourage, who studied Torah and served Hashem exclusively throughout the week. By so doing, they would hasten the arrival of the future geulah and the promise of the navi would become a reality: **“And strangers will arise and shepherd your flocks,”** which was said of the future geulah. This then is the message conveyed by Rashbi: **“If every Jew would merely observe two Shabbasos according to their law”**—making it a **“שבת שבתון”** like Rashbi and his colleagues, a double Shabbas, **“they would be redeemed immediately.”** Because our actions down below would trigger a response in the heavens to hasten the geulah and make it a reality.

**“לא תבערו אש” —the Word א”ש Is the First Letters of the Names א’לעזר and ש’מעון**

Let us now return to the comments of the No’am Megadim. He explains the significance of the juxtaposition of pesukim in parshas Vayakheil in which Moshe alluded to the elite scholars like Rashbi and his colleagues. First it says: **“ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה”**—during the six weekdays, your work will be done by others, because you will be engaged in the study of Torah, just like on Shabbas; **“וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קודש שבת שבתון”**—because the seventh day is a double Shabbas

for you; **“whoever does work on it shall be put to death.”** Hence, the Torah warns Rashbi and his colleagues: **“לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת”**—do not incinerate the labor of the majority of Yisrael, who occupy themselves with the temporal tasks of this world, with your disapproving gazes, because their Shabbas is also very important to Hashem.

Let us add a nice tidbit supporting this interpretation. HKB”H’s warning— **“לא תבערו אש”** – is directed to Rashbi and his son. How so? The term **אש** is formed by the first letters of the names **אֵלְעִזָּר** and **שׁוֹמְרוֹן**. So, HKB”H is telling them that everything that Rabbi Elazar incinerates with his gaze should be repaired by Rashbi (Shimon); **“בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת”**—even the labors of those whose Shabbas is merely a single Shabbas— **יום** “יום” **שבת שבתון**—as opposed to a double Shabbas— **שבת שבתון**.

This enlightens us as to how HKB”H arranged to appease Rashbi, so that he would not persist in burning the property of simple Jews who work for a living. He sent Eliyahu HaNavi in the guise of **“a certain old man,”** who was running on Erev Shabbas with **“hadasim”** representing **“zachor”** and **“shamor.”** Seeing this, Rashbi understood that HKB”H was sending him a message; this is what HKB”H alluded to him and his colleagues in parshas Vayakheil:

**“ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה”**—during the six weekdays, your work will be done by others, because they are like Shabbas for you; **“וביום השביעי יהיה לכם קודש שבת שבתון”**—but the holy seventh days will be a **Shabbas Shabbason**, a double Shabbas for you. Then, the Torah goes on to warn them: **“לא תבערו אש בכל מושבותיכם ביום השבת”**—not to incinerate the property of Jews who are engaged in temporal, non-spiritual activities, who do not experience a double Shabbas but only a single Shabbas— **יום השבת**. From the word **אש** in this admonition, Rashbi understood that it was Hashem’s will that **Shimon** extinguish the fires ignited by **Elazar**, his son.

### Twelve Gates of Tefilah and Twelve Gates of Torah Corresponding to the Twelve Shevatim

Following this line of reasoning, we can now focus on a question asked at the beginning of this

discussion. Why did HKB”H orchestrate for Rashbi and Rabbi Elazar, his son, to be confined to the cave initially for twelve years, and for them to still not truly comprehend Hashem’s will when they departed the cave—that He also wants Jews to engage in the temporal activities of Olam HaZeh? And only after they spent an additional year secluded in the cave did Rashi perceive the will of Hashem and begin to repair the damage caused by his son’s gaze.

To answer these questions, we will begin by introducing what the Magen Avraham (O.C. 68) writes in the name of Rabbi Chaim Vital, who discusses in Sha’ar HaKavanos (Aleinu L’Shabeiach) in the name of the Arizal, the different formulas of the tefilah:

**“ואמנם בעיקרי המנהגים עצמם, שיש הפרשים רבים ושנויים רבים בענין גוסס התפלות בעצמם... בין מנהג ספרד ובין מנהג קאטלוגניא ובין מנהג אשכנז וכיוצא בזה, הנה בענין הזה אמר לי מורי ז”ל, שיש ברקיע י”ב חלונות כנגד י”ב שבטים, וכל שבט ושבת עולה תפלתו דרך שער אחד מיוחד לו, והוא סוד י”ב שערים הנזכר בסוף יחזקאל.”**

**In truth there are many differences and modifications in the nusachs of the tefilos—between nusach Sefard, nusach Catalunya, nusach Ashkenaz, and the like. My mentor of blessed memory explained to me that there are twelve windows in the heavens corresponding to the twelve shevatim. The tefilah of each and every shevet ascends through its specific gate. This is the significance of the twelve gates mentioned at the end of Yechezkel.**

Regarding this teaching of the Arizal, we find a tremendous chiddush from the Chasam Sofer in parshas Shoftim: Just like there are twelve gates for tefilah—one for each shevet—similarly, there are twelve gates of Torah—one for each shevet. Accordingly, he interprets the passuk (Devarim 16, 18): **“שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך אשר ה’ אלקיך נותן לך לשבטיך”**—**judges and officers shall you place at all of your entryways which Hashem, your G-d, gives you for your tribes; and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment.** In other words, a **“Beis din”** (court) must be set up

and appointed for each individual shevet, because the portion of the Torah specific for each shevet is different. Hence, if the "Beis din" of one shevet were to judge another shevet, the judgment would be perverted and inaccurate.

We find corroboration for the explanation of the Chasam Sofer brought down by the Shem MiShmuel (Beshalach 5678) in the name of his father, the esteemed author of the Avnei Nezer, zy"o, regarding the passuk (Shemos 15, 27): "ויבואו אילימה ושם שתים: עשרה עינות מיים"—they arrived in Eilim, where there were twelve springs of water. The Avnei Neizer explains: **The twelve springs of water represent twelve fountains of chochmah and Torah. Every shevet has its own personal fountain of Torah, just like the Arizal explains with regards to the twelve heavenly portals through which the tefilos enter. Every individual shevet has its own gateway; this applies to the springs of Torah, as well.**

### Moshe Rabeinu Represents an All-Inclusive Gateway

In truth, the teaching of the great Arizal poses a difficulty. How can there be twelve portals in the heavens for the tefilos of the twelve shevatim to ascend? After all, shevet Levi is not counted among the twelve shevatim. This is evident from the arrangement of the flags in the midbar. Yosef was replaced by the two shevatim of Ephraim and Menashe. So, how do the tefilos of shevet Levi ascend? And via which gateway do they receive the bounty and treasures of the Torah that descends from the heavens?

Actually, we have addressed this question in the past. We have explained that shevet Levi has its own special gateway called "שער הכולל". It incorporates all twelve portals; it is the source of all the Torah and berachah that passes through the twelve portals to the twelve shevatim. This is discussed in the sefer Tziyoni, authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Tziyoni (Nasso), brought down by the Yalkut Reuveini (Nasso 38):

**"Thus shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, etc."** (Bamidbar 6, 23) **The almighty instructed Aharon and his children after him throughout the generations to raise their hands to bless the people. The kohen would focus on bringing the berachah to Yisrael from the source. The kohen, a descendant of Aharon, was fit to perform this function because of his status and the kedushah of his lineage, which sanctified him more than the rest of the people. Thus, it says (Devarim 10, 9): "Therefore, Levi did not have a share and a heritage with his brothers; Hashem is his heritage."**

This is the secret of the gateways of justice that Yaakov gave them. He gave all of the keys to his sons. This gateway has thirteen keys—twelve for the twelve chambers, and the inner, thirteenth key that he gave to shevet Levi. This is the secret of Birkas Kohanim, from where the berachah spreads and extends to the twelve chambers, to the twelve keys, associated with each individual shevet . . . The master key was entrusted to Levi (ibid. 33, 8): **"And of Levi he said: Your Tumim and Your Urim befit Your devout one."** The Urim and Tumim are the key to all of the gateways.

Now, seeing as Moshe Rabeinu was the leader of shevet Levi, it stands to reason that he, with his high level of kedushah, was a sort of "שער הכולל"—an all-inclusive gateway. This function extended from him to the entire shevet of Levi. This is the implication of the passuk (Shemos 18, 1): "וישמע יתרו כהן מדין חותן משה: את כל אשר עשה אלקים למשה ולישראל עמו"—**Yisro, the priest of Midian, the father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that G-d did to Moshe and to Yisrael, His people . . ."** Rashi comments: **"To Moshe and to Yisrael"—this indicates that Moshe was equal to all of Yisrael.** This is why HKB"Y chose him to deliver the Torah to the entirety of Yisrael comprised of twelve shevatim.

### In His Thirteenth Year in the Cave Rashbi Attained the All-Inclusive Gateway from Moshe Rabeinu

We can now begin to comprehend the wondrous ways of Hashem. He initially arranged for Rashbi to be secluded in the cave for twelve years. During those

years, he was able to attain all twelve portals of Torah of the twelve shevatim. Therefore, after twelve years had passed, and the Roman Emperor had died, Eliyahu HaNavi came to inform him that he could exit the cave. He thought that since he had already attained all twelve portals of the Torah, he was worthy to emerge.

Rashbi had not, however, attained the thirteenth gateway that encompassed all of the twelve shevatim—the "שער הכולל". This explains why he did not yet appreciate that there are those, in particular those from shevet Zevulun, who must engage in the temporal pursuits associated with Olam HaZeh. Therefore, when he and his son emerged from the cave after twelve years, they incinerated the fields plowed and sown by Jews occupied with these temporal pursuits with their gazes. This prompted the reaction from the heavenly "bat kol": **"Have you emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave."** He was instructed to return to the cave for a thirteenth year to attain the "שער הכולל" that incorporated all twelve gateways.

It is worth noting that the Arizal (Likutei Shas, Maseches Shabbas 33b) asserts that the divine Tanna Rashbi was a gilgul of Moshe Rabeinu. He points out that **just as Moshe fled from Pharaoh's sword and attained his perfection in the desert wilderness; so, too, Rashbi fled from Caesar and attained his perfection in the wilderness cave in Lod.**

Thus, after Rashbi, a gilgul or Moshe, completed a thirteenth year in the cave, corresponding to the "שער הכולל", he became so attached to the neshamah of Moshe Rabeinu that he, too, rose to the level of the "שער הכולל". Therefore, when he emerged from the cave this time, HKB"H arranged for him to encounter Eliyahu HaNavi again. This time Eliyahu HaNavi was in the guise of an old man— "ההוא סבא"—running with two bundles of "hadasim" to prepare for Shabbas. Thereupon, he understood the admonition of Moshe Rabeinu in parshas Vayakheil: "ששת ימים תעשה מלאכה". Even if a Jew is not on the level of someone whose work is performed by others; nevertheless, **לא תבערו** "אש". As explained, the term "אש" is formed by the first letters of the names א'לעזר and ש'מעון. Thus, Rashbi (Shimon) understood that he was being instructed to watch over his son Rabbi Elazar and prevent him from destroying the livelihoods of their fellow Jews.

We will conclude with the lyrics of the inspiring song "זאמרתם כה לחי" and pray to HKB"H:

**"תורתו מגן לנו, היא מאירת עינינו,  
הוא ימליץ טוב בעדנו, אדוננו בר יוחאי"**

**"His Torah protects us, she enlightens us; he advocates on our behalf, our master, Bar Yochai"**

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