

— *A Short Commentary on R' Shimon Lavi's* —

PIYYUT BAR YOCHAI



R' JOEY ROSENFELD

Bar Yochai: Entering the Song of Rashbi

The Song as a Gateway to the Future

B'ezrat Hashem, in the merit of the approaching light of Lag Ba'Omer, we enter the holy song of Bar Yochai, not merely as a song, but as a gate, an opening into the interiority of Torah and the light of Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai. This is not simply a melody; it is a structure of consciousness, a framework that allows a person to move from the present into a glimmer of the future. Just as Moshe Rabbeinu declares *Az Yashir Moshe*, that there will be a future song accompanying *geulah*, so too every encounter with the light of Rashbi and the Zohar carries within it an awakening of that future state. Whenever a person speaks about *pnimiyut haTorah* or contemplates the Zohar, there is a subtle drawing of that future song into the present moment.

Song emerges from tension. It is not smooth or flat; it is born from constriction, from severity, from the cutting and differentiation that allows harmony to emerge. Like the waves described by the Arizal, rising upward with intensity and returning to stillness, music emerges from this oscillation of running and returning, expansion and contraction. The soul longs to expand infinitely, yet also to return inward and find rest. Song lives within this movement, drawing a person into its center until a deeper unity is revealed.

This is why the instrument of the song is the flute (חליל), which is empty. That emptiness is essential. Only when there is an empty space (חלל פנוי) can breath enter and become music. So too, creation itself is a *chalal*, a space of concealment, allowing song to emerge.

The Anointing of Chochmah and the Praise of Ashrei

בַּר יוֹחַאי נִמְשַׁחַתָּ אֲשֶׁרִיד
שֶׁמֶן שִׁשּׁוֹן מִחֲבֵרִיד

Bar Yochai, the son of Yochai, teaches that the light of Rebbe Shimon emerges specifically from concealment. The name itself hints to a cry arising from within concealment. His greatness is not despite concealment, but because of it. If it were only his own spiritual path, we would say "Shimon nimshachta"; but the name Bar Yochai reveals that his entire being is rooted in transforming darkness into light. The word *Bar* means outside, representing spiritual distance and death, The name *Yochai* is the language of life, vitality, and illumination. The whole path of Rebbe Shimon is about revealing the light of the inside on the outside, thereby transforming the outside back into the inside.

Nimshachta ashrecha, you have been anointed from on high. The anointing oil, *shemen sasson*, is the light of *Chochmah*. *Chochmah* is not accumulation of information, but rather the emptying of the mind; it is the moment the mind becomes a vessel for Ruach HaKodesh. When a person negates their sense of self and grasping, they reach the level of *Chochma*, *koach mah* "what am I". The mind opens up to receive illumination from above. Like a candle that requires oil to burn, the soul requires preparation; without *shemen*, there is no place for the light to shine. .

The light that emerges is "*ashrei*", a general sense of praise and gratitude. *Ashrei* is not merely praise, it is the straightening of the Aleph, *Aleph- Yashar*, the revelation of the *Aluf shel Olam*. Yet this praise is not self-evident. The world does not proclaim it; we must say "*ashreinu*" to ourselves in order to it outside of ourselves. Praiseworthy are we, not because we understand, but because we know that we do not. Praiseworthy are we that we remain connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu even where that connection is hidden.

Most striking is that the anointing comes from his companions, "*mechaverecha*". Rebbe Shimon's light is drawn out through the recognition of his *chavraya*, of being valued and appreciated by his students. In Talmud Bavli, Rebbe Shimon is one *Tanna* among many other *Tannaim*, but in the Zohar all roads lead to him because the *chavraya* perceive his necessity. Their yearning draws out deeper Torah from their teacher. The Rebbe becomes who he is through the longing of his talmidim. The *shemen mishchas kodesh*, the oil that anoints the concealed mind and stirs its emergence, is drawn down through companionship and mutual support, one soul strengthening another.

Chochmah as a Vessel for Keser

בְּרִי יִחְזֹאֵי שְׁמֵן מִשְׁחַת קֹדֶשׁ נְמִשְׁחָה
מִמִּדַּת הַקֹּדֶשׁ נִשְׂאָה
צִיץ נֹר הַקֹּדֶשׁ חֲבוּשׁ עַל רֹאשׁוֹ
פֶּאֶרֶךְ

Rebbe Shimon is described as anointed with the oil of holiness, ascending to the level of the Kohen Gadol which is the illumination of *Chochmah*. The essence of *Chochmah* is the ability to empty oneself so completely that the mind becomes a resting place for the light of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. This is not the effort and word of Binah, which separates between pure and impure, but rather the work of *kedusha*, standing within a static state of holiness itself.

Yet the purpose of Chochmah is not to remain there in a static state, but to ascend to an ever higher level to reveal the light of Kesser. The *tzitz nezer hakodesh* represents that crown of Kesser, the will (Ratzon) and pleasure (Pleasure) of HaKadosh Baruch Hu that desires to dwell in this world. Rebbe Shimon's nullification allows that light to descend.

But revelation alone is insufficient; the light must be held. This is the secret of tefillin. Without a vessel to bind illumination, it dissipates. Tefillin ties the mind to that light, allowing it to descend into lived experience, drawing the light from the head into the heart and into action. The work is not only to receive, but to remain, to hold attention, and to allow the light to permeate the entirety of one's being.

From Running to Sitting: The Transformation of the Cave

בְּרִיחַת מוֹשֶׁב טוֹב יְשֻׁבָּה
יוֹם נִסְתָּ יוֹם אֲשֶׁר בְּרַחָה
בְּמַעֲרַת צוּרִים שְׁעֵמֻדָּה
שֶׁם קִנִּיתָ הוֹדָה וְהִדָּרָה

Rebbe Shimon is described as sitting in a good dwelling, yet that dwelling was a cave entered while fleeing for his life. This paradox is central: what appears as trauma is revealed as good, and running becomes the foundation of stillness.

The process unfolds in stages, running, standing, sitting. Running expresses fear and urgency; standing reflects endurance; sitting reveals calmness, ease within what once felt threatening.

Tzara shares its root with *tzura*, the difficulties that shape a person. The cave is not merely concealment but the space where glory and grandeur are acquired. Transformation does not come by escaping darkness, but by remaining within it until its interiorty is revealed.

Standing Upright Within Folly

בְּרִיחַת עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים עוֹמְדִים
לְמוֹדֵי ה' הֵם לּוֹמְדִים

The *atzei shittim* stand upright, representing Netzach and Hod, the strength to endure instability. As Yaakov planted them in anticipation of the Mishkan, holiness contains foresight, the capacity to prepare for redemption while still within concealment. This is Chochmah: openness to receive the future within the present.

Yet *shittim* also relates to *shtus*, the foolishness within the human condition. Rebbe Shimon does not deny it; he reveals its necessity. There is a *milsa d'shtusa* that breaks rigidity and allows entry into joy and vitality.

Rebbe Shimon's connection with Rav Hamnuna Sava reflects this willingness, not to take oneself with excessive seriousness, allowing even externalized expressions of avodah to become vehicles of connection. Even one who dances with the Zohar without understanding draws in its light. The Torah of Rebbe Shimon is thus not only for the upright tzaddik, but for one who falls and rises again. *Sheva yipol tzaddik v'kam*, standing is not the absence of falling, but rather the act of rising after each fall. This is the Torah of Mashiach: revealing the endless light of teshuvah specifically within concealment.

Ascending Into the Field of Transformation

בְּרִיּוֹתַי וְלִשְׁדָּה תִּפְּוֹחִים עָלֶיךָ
לִלְקוֹט בּוֹ מֵרִקְקִים
סוֹד תּוֹרָה כְּצִיצִים וּפְרָחִים
נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם נֶאֱמַר בְּעִבְרָךְ

Rebbe Shimon ascends into the field of holy apples, the field of Malchus, the realm of this-worldliness that appears fragmented and concealed. Yet he enters by way of the lower realm, the gateway of faith and purity. The apple, red, white, and green, reveals the unification of *chesed*, *gevurah*, and *tiferet*. What appears divided in the realm of felt experience is revealed as one in its unified root.

Like the true Tzaddikim, his ascent is for the sake of Klal Yisrael. *Lilkot bo merkachim*, he gathers sweetness and returns nourishment. The Torah revealed there is like garments of beauty, expressing divine grandeur in infinite ways. *Na'aseh adam ne'emar ba'avurecha* teaches that the human being's purpose is fulfilled through this engaged work with the lower realms specifically. The job is to transform concealment into a bright light. The descent back down into the field is not a deviation from holiness; it is the very place of its fulfillment.

The Courage of Gevurah and the Sword of Transformation

בְּרִי יוֹחָאֵי נְעֻזְרָתָּ בְּגִבּוּרָה
וּבְמִלְחָמָתָ אֵשׁ דָּת הַשְׁעָתָ
הַתָּרַב הוֹצֵאתָ מִתַּעֲרָה
שְׁלֶפֶת נֶגֶד צוּרְרִיד

Rebbe Shimon's path is rooted in *gevurah*, the strength to confront concealment directly. His battle reflects an inner engagement with fragmentation and the transformation of darkness into vessels of revelation. To receive Chochmah which is the light of complete self nullification, and draw down Keser which is the light of the wondrous unity between Nothing and Self at once, there must first be a clearing, a cutting away that clears a path through Binah which is the light of concealment and the descent into selfhood. This is the fire of *esh dat*, the potencies needed to sustain the process within stages of severity.

The sword he draws is not destruction but transformation. It is the sword of tefillah and *bitachon*, cutting through illusion to reveal truth. Each person carries this sword. The work is to learn how to use it, to transform *tzara* into *tzura*, to reshape difficulty into a vessel for revelation.

The Vision of Unity Within Duality

בְּרִי יוֹחָאֵי לְמִקּוֹם אֲבֵנֵי שֵׁשׁ הַנֶּעֱתָ
וּכְפֵי אֲרִיָּה לֵישׁ
גַּם גָּלַת כְּתָרַת עַל עֵישׁ
תְּשׁוּרֵי וְיָמֵי יִשׁוּרָה

Rebbe Shimon reaches the palace of hewn marble, the secret of *avnei shayish*, where reality begins to appear as divided. Rebbe Akiva warned not to perceive duality, for that perception itself becomes the thickened cloud of falsehood.

Rebbe Shimon succeeds because he perceives the secret of unity within apparent division. Even in *gevurah*, even concealment, is part of divine unity. The concealment does not negate the light; it reveals it. Multiplicity becomes an expression of a wondrous and unfathomable oneness.

Drawing Down the Infinite Into the Finite

בְּרִי יוֹחֵאֵי בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוּשִׁים
קוֹ יְרוֹק מְחַדֵּשׁ תְּדוּשִׁים
שֶׁבַע שְׁבָתוֹת סוּד תְּמִשִּׁים
קִשְׁרָתָּ קִשְׁרֵי שִׁין קִשְׁרִיד

Rebbe Shimon enters the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the point of ultimate unity, yet does not remain there. Through Binah, he draws that light downward into form. This is light of perpetual renewal and novelty, the never ending flows of wisdom that flows down through the engravings of Binah.

The 49 days leading to unspoken 50th reflects this process, ascending through structure and drawing transcendence into the midst of life itself. The bond of tefillin binds that light, ensuring it remains within lived experience. The goal is integration, not escape.

The Hidden Light Beyond Perception

בְּרִי יוֹחֵאֵי אוֹר מְפֻלָּא רוּמָמָה
יִרְאֵת מְלַחֲבִיט פִּי רַב לָהּ
תַּעֲלוּמָה וַאֲיִן קוֹרֵא לָהּ
נִמְתָּ עֵין לֹא תִשְׁוֹרֵד

The light revealed is an *ohr mufla*, a wondrous light beyond comprehension. Rooted in Keser, it remains concealed even as it is revealed down below.

It cannot be grasped, yet it is the light that sustains life. Rebbe Shimon does not offer conventional clarity but living connection. The work is not to fully understand, but to remain connected within that concealed revelation.

The Greatness of Being Human

בְּרִי יוֹחָאִי אֲשֶׁרִי יוֹלְדָתָהּ
אֲשֶׁרִי הָעָם הֵם לוֹמְדָהּ
אֲשֶׁרִי הָעוֹמְדִים עַל סוֹדָהּ
לְבוֹשֵׁי חֶשֶׁן תְּמִידָהּ וְאוֹרָהּ

Rebbe Shimon's greatness is rooted in his humanity and his humility. Being *yelud isha*, born of flesh and blood is itself the foundation of his Torah. The purpose is not to escape limitation, but to transform it into a garden of delight.

The garments that conceal become garments that illuminate. The אֶדָם, Adam reveals the aleph within the dam, the divine within the physical. This is the essence of human greatness, to reveal the light down here below, accomplishing the Will of Hashem Who desired a dwelling place down below.

Conclusion: Standing Within the Song

בְּרִי יוֹחָאִי נִמְשַׁחָתָהּ אֲשֶׁרִי

To sing this song is to enter its movement, to empty, receive, hold, and reveal within the concealed light within concealment. On Lag Ba'Omer, even in forgetting, one remembers that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is present.

Ashrei ha'omdim al sodecha, those who stand, even without full understanding, remain connected. Through Rebbe Shimon's light, a person learns to live with the truth that concealment itself is a form of Divine revelation, and that within this world the light of redemption is already beginning to shine