

Inyonei

# MOSHIACH AND GEULAH

ב"ה

## LAG B'OMER—REJOICING OVER HISTALKUS DEATH WILL BE SWALLOWED UP FOREVER

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תהא שנת לעינים פקוחות

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The festive day of Lag B'Omer marks the passing (the *histalkus*) of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, known as Rashbi. Yet, rather than being a day of mourning, it is called a day of *Hillula*, which means a wedding feast—a time of great rejoicing! Rashbi himself commanded rejoicing on this, the day of his passing.

Chassidic discourses on Lag B'Omer focus on the concepts of *histalkus* (passing away) of tzaddikim and the Resurrection of the Dead. What is the connection between Lag B'Omer and the Resurrection of the Dead, the ultimate state of eternal life after the Messianic age? The connection to Moshiach derives from the fact that Rashbi himself reached the level of Moshiach, as the Rebbe explains: “Moshe is the first re-

deemer and he is the final redeemer—Moshiach, and so too regarding Rashbi...”<sup>1</sup>

These matters come into focus through the clear lens of the Inner Torah—Chassidus and Kabbalah—which enable us to understand more deeply the reason for the soul’s descent into the body, its passing from the body, and its ultimate state of eternal life at the Resurrection of the Dead. In this manner we can better understand the rejoicing of Lag B'Omer—the joy of a wedding on the day of Rashbi’s passing. We can also better grasp its special relevance to our generation, which in the Rebbe’s words is the final generation of golus and the first generation of Geulah—the true and complete Geulah when “death will be swallowed up forever”.

*By R' Yaakov Nathan*

*To contact the author, please email [YNathan358@gmail.com](mailto:YNathan358@gmail.com)*

## *LAG B'OMER—THE SIMCHA OF HISTALKUS* *DEATH WILL BE SWALLOWED UP FOREVER*

### I. Gan Eden: Departure and Arrival

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“[At] the time of the coming of Moshiach and the revelation of the future, the physical will be more refined, which means that the physicality of the future will be as it was at the beginning of Creation, before the sin of Adam Harishon...”<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of Creation there was no death—Adam Harishon, the first man, was created to live forever.<sup>3</sup> This is why in the Messianic era we will experience the remarkable and miraculous prophecy that “death will be swallowed up forever”.<sup>4</sup> To better understand what this means, we must first understand something about the nature of Adam Harishon before he ate from the Tree of Knowledge and after.

Adam Harishon was created in garments of light<sup>5</sup>, he was entirely shining light. Afterwards he brought the darkness on himself, his skin darkened and he was enclothed in garments of flesh<sup>6</sup>...he became physical material, garments of flesh, and since then [he exists in] a body that comes from the loins, built from a drop which is a putrid drop...due to the pollution of the snake...”<sup>7</sup>

These garments of flesh—what we perceive as our physical body—are a consequence of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. But this condition is only temporary:

In the future we will return and we will be like Adam before the sin, garments of light, and in them we will live eternal life without death. The eternity will be complete—body and soul eternally...”<sup>8</sup>

This is the transition of the Messianic era: going from a body which still contains evil to the utterly pure state of complete refinement. When the evil is totally refined out and totally separated from the good, then the shell or peel (called *klipos*)—the external dimension which appears as an entity independent from Hashem<sup>9</sup>—can fall off, and the holiness that is the essence of the body is able to ascend.

[Moshiach] will do away with the peels (*klipos*) which surround the fruit and then the world will be established like the intention at the beginning of Creation, and [the verse] “death will be swallowed up forever” will be fulfilled because they will live eternal life in garments of light...<sup>10</sup>

Returning to the way things were before the sin of Adam Harishon means literally returning to Gan Eden. The Rebbe mentions this concept in his very first maamar *Bosi Legani*, commenting that the word “land” in the verse “Your nation are all tzaddikim, they will inherit the land eternally” refers to “Gan Eden”. Hashem’s desire for a “dwelling place below” is fulfilled when the lower worlds are divested of Evil and elevated to the pure and refined level of Gan Eden. Although Gan Eden is now a place where the soul goes after it leaves the body, Chassidus teaches that originally “Gan Eden was for Adam Harishon what this world is for us now.”<sup>11</sup> He lived there in his body and Gan Eden was his reality. This requires explanation.

**“Gan Eden... was for Adam Harishon what this world is for us now”**

As explained in Chassidus, Gan Eden is the dimension of spirituality that is within physicality<sup>12</sup>: from the perspective of the world after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, Gan Eden appears to be a spiritual place; but in actuality, Gan Eden is in fact the spiritual dimension of physicality itself, and thus is essentially the true and essential aspect of physicality.<sup>13</sup> The Rebbe explains how our destiny is to return to Gan Eden and dwell there in actual bodies:

We could say that this will be one of the new revelations<sup>14</sup> of the Time to Come, that even souls in bodies will be able to be in “Gan Eden”. For before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge Adam Harishon was in “Gan Eden”, and only due to the sin of the Tree of Knowledge was he expelled from Gan Eden...

According to this—in the Time to Come, when “I will remove the spirit of impurity from the world”, and the sin of the Tree of Knowledge will be completely rectified, then there is no reason man will not be able to be found in Gan Eden, as he was before the sin. On the contrary—in the Time to Come will be the fulfillment of “I came to my garden, my bridal chamber, the place where my

**“in the Time to Come, in the world of the Resurrection, there will be tzaddikim in Gan Eden, as souls in bodies”**

essence was in the beginning”, which refers to Gan Eden, which is the most select place in this lower world.

And as stated—in the Time to Come souls in bodies will be able to be in Gan Eden, and how much more so that in the beginning of the Creation Adam Harishon and Chava were in Gan Eden in a way of souls in bodies with eating and drinking ...in the Time to Come, in the world of the Resurrection, there will be tzaddikim in Gan Eden, as souls in bodies.<sup>15</sup>

## II. The Body of This World

The lowly body of this world—an entity subject to weakness, fatigue, illness, etc.—is referred to as the skin of the snake.<sup>16</sup> As explained by Primiyyus Hato-rah, the body is in fact merely a garment. This is true in a general sense: “the body is a garment for the soul”; but more specifically, the fleshly covering which we consider to be our body is really just a covering of *klipos* that became attached after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

**“In the time to come there will be souls in bodies but the bodies will not be physical in the same way as the physical bodies of the present”**

Furthermore, the concept that we will live eternally in a body refers to the body that will exist after the Resurrection of the Dead, which is a body on a level incomparably higher than the bodies of today: “In the time to come there will be souls in bodies but the bodies will not be physical in the same way as the physical bodies of the present...they will not be material”.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the Maharal writes that “in the World to Come man will not be material and physical like he is in this world, but will be on the level of angels who are removed from physicality.”<sup>18</sup>

Contrast this with what we now perceive to be physical, which is in fact the garment of *klipos* which conceal the true, essential nature of the physical. In the words of the Rebbe Rashab:

What we see as physical is not physical. What we see as physical is something attached, which we need to separate...what we see is the result of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge...<sup>19</sup>

Also worth noting is the saying of our Sages that in the month of Teves “the body benefits from the body”. The Rebbe comments on this<sup>20</sup> by explaining that the concept of “the body benefits from the body” is seen especially by tzaddikim, because “by them ‘the body’, their *true* body (the body of Above),

'benefits from the body', from their body in the simple sense, as it is called in the language of the world." In other words, the true body is the body above (the garments of light) and what we call a body (the garments of flesh) is only a "nickname" for the garment that is worn during the soul's sojourn in this world.

**"What we see as physical is not physical. What we see as physical is something attached, which we need to separate"**

We have, then, two aspects of body: the body "as it is called in the language of the world", which eventually is buried in the ground; and the eternal body, in which the soul will experience the revelations of the World to Come. Similarly, there are two aspects of *histalkus*:

- a) the external aspect, which seems to our eyes of flesh to be death, which occurs when the soul disrobes from the body of this world (*histalkus* as we see it); and
- b) the concealed aspect, when the soul must descend to this world again because it has not yet completed its purpose, forcing it do separate from it's "body of Above".

The rejoicing of Lag B'Omer teaches us that ultimate life (eternal life) is achieved when the soul disrobes from the body of this world for the final time. (It is interesting to note the custom of many tzaddikim, including the Ohr Hachaim and the Ruzhiner, to burn their garments in the bonfire of Lag B'Omer.)

In order to understand these concepts, we must first clarify the reason the soul descends to this world in the first place.

### **III. The Purpose of Soul Coming Into the Body**

The only reason the soul descends to be en clothed in this lowly body of flesh is to accomplish the task of *Avodas Habirurim*—refining and elevating the sparks of holiness trapped in it. "The intention of everything is to refine the 288 sparks, and when the *birurim* are finished, Moshiach will come."<sup>21</sup> It is based on the remaining number of these sparks which the soul must refine that determines the length of life in this fleshly garment.

The Tzemach Tzedek explains this from the verse in Tehillim "days are fashioned" ("*yomim yotzru*"):

"The soul is given a certain amount of time en clothed in a body, days and years, according to the requirements of the Animal Soul, in accordance with the number of sparks that

need refinement from the evil, every day a new spark...and when there aren't any more sparks to be refined, then the days of the Animal Soul in a body come to an end and the day comes to die."<sup>22</sup>

**"When there aren't any more sparks to be refined the day comes to die"**

An individual soul's assigned task of *Avodas Habirurim* is completed when all the sparks associated with the soul have been refined. After that, there is no purpose for the soul to be in the lowly body, the skin of the snake. The holy sparks that were trapped in that skin have been refined, and all that remains is the shell, the *klipos*. At that point, the soul can shed this skin. This is what happened at the Giving of the Torah, when Hashem's speech caused the souls of the Children of Israel to fly out of their bodies. Explains the Rebbe, this phenomenon "is something which testifies to the fact that they arrived at the completion of the *Avodah* as a soul in a body (and therefore 'their souls flew out')."<sup>23</sup>

What this all means is that a time arrives when the soul has completed its *Avodah* in the body and thus it has no further need to be in the "prison of the body"<sup>24</sup> so therefore it can leave—which appears to our eyes as death or *hishtalkus*. (As mentioned earlier, the ultimate intent is indeed a soul in a body—but not the lowly body of this world. Instead, the intent is the pure and holy body of the Resurrection of the Dead.) There is an expression of our sages that is brought in many of the Lag B'Omer Chassidic discourses: *hai alma d'azlinan minei*—which means "this world which from which we go". The intention (as explained in the discourses) is that the only purpose of the soul in this world is to "go" from this world, to achieve a higher level after having completed the task of refinement, *Avodas Habirurim*. When the *Avodah* is done, there is no longer any purpose in remaining here. The ultimate state of eternal life in a body is something infinitely loftier, as will be explained.

#### IV. Those Who Dwell in the Dust

The soul's work is accomplished over numerous lifetimes, called *gilgulim*. The soul is reincarnated into different bodies over different lifetimes in order to complete the task of refining sparks. This world, including the body of man in this world, was created from the dust. As the verse states: "you are from the dust and to the dust you shall return".<sup>25</sup> "Arise and sing those who dwell in the dust."<sup>26</sup>

**"souls will arise in bodies ...they will be completely pure and holy bodies...even higher than Adam Harishon"**

Although we think that those buried in the cemetery are the ones dwelling in the dust, the deeper meaning is that it actually applies to us—those who are presently in a state of *gilgul* (from the root *gilul*, meaning “dung”). Returning to the dust really refers to the cycle of reincarnation: “the verse ‘to the dust you shall return’ is the secret of *gilgul*, that a soul will reincarnate from dust to dust meaning from body to body and he will die and return and die.”<sup>27</sup> “This is why tzaddikim that maintain the Covenant do not return to their dust, which is the skin of the snake which was created from dust.”<sup>28</sup>

**“this lowly world is the World of the Dead”**

The reality that is experienced by those souls who dwell in the dust (encloded in a lowly body) is in stark contrast to those who do *not* dwell in the dust—who are truly alive (though not to our eyes) in both the higher world and this world at the same time:

Your domain is in both worlds...which is not the case with one who is encloded in those *klipos*, of skin and flesh and bones and sinews of the lowly body...because of sins they were encloded in these *klipos*...You, in this world, that you have no *klipos* and skins, you have permission to look upon the residents of this world, but residents of this world do not have permission to look upon you. Because of this it is said that you are alive, and your world is the World of Life. But this lowly world is the World of the Dead...<sup>29</sup>

We are thus forced to ask: How can we, souls who are presently encloded in these “*klipos* of skin and flesh”, succeed to leave this “World of the Dead” and enter into the “World of Life”?

## **V. *Histalkus*—Passing Away From This World**

Lag B’Omer illustrates most profoundly that, in truth, the *histalkus* of a tzaddik is something extremely good and worthy of rejoicing. This is expressed in the Zohar: “If all the tzaddikim would know [the truth of passing away], they would be rejoicing when the day arrives that they pass away from this world...”<sup>30</sup>

The Previous Rebbe describes that “the day of *histalkus* is the completion of his *Avodah* and he will arise in his holy and pure body at the Resurrection of the Dead ...that is why it is called *Hillula*...because his revelation in the Resurrection of the Dead will be like

**“If all the tzaddikim would know, they would be rejoicing when the day arrives that they pass away from this world”**

this.<sup>31</sup> The Rebbe also describes the day of *histalkus* as “complete perfection of the *Avodah*”.<sup>32</sup> In Likutei Sichos, the Rebbe brings the following quote from Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin:

Tzaddikim die on the day they were born, meaning that by them death is an elevation of the level of their *mazal* [the higher levels of the soul] that it disrobes from the bodily *le-vush sak* and enclothes in the spiritual *chaluka d’Rabbanan* to enter into supernal worlds.<sup>33</sup>

This is why tzaddikim are called alive after their passing, because they are in fact truly alive, not limited by being enclothed in a lowly body of dust. Their true and eternal life begins when they shed the garment (the “body”) of this world, as the Rebbe implies in the discourse *Padah b’Sholom*.<sup>34</sup> The Rebbe explains how the Mitteler Rebbe’s *Hillula* (9 Kislev, when he passed away) serves as a *preparation* for his day of Geulah (10 Kislev, when he was released from Russian prison). **First *Hillula*, then Geulah.** This tells us that after having completed all matters of *Avodah*, one must then shed the fleshly body of this world in order to reach the level of Geulah.

The Mitteler Rebbe himself explains that this world is likened to a *Hillula*, a wedding, and the ultimate purpose of a wedding is to bring forth children. Writes the Mitteler Rebbe:

“the fundamental matter of giving birth occurs after the passing of the soul from the body...and not while it is still in the body...according to this the main *Hillula* is through the *histalkus* of the soul from the body.”<sup>35</sup>

The *histalkus* of tzaddikim is merely how it appears to our fleshly eyes when the completed soul departs from the skin of the snake in this world, after that skin has been emptied of holy sparks. Rashbi achieved the very highest level, because Rashbi is the level of Moshiach<sup>1</sup>, and his *histalkus* (when his garment of this world was buried in its resting place on Mount Meron) was in actuality the *Hillula* (wedding) of his soul with its true body, the body of the Resurrection of the Dead as explained at length in the discourses.<sup>36</sup> The Rebbe describes three types of *Hillula* and concludes that “The type of *Hillula* [that applies to Rashbi] is that souls will arise in bodies ...they will be completely pure and holy bodies...even higher than Adam Harishon”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the Previous Rebbe says “This world is darkness and concealment (and it is only for the sake of *Avodah*)...the type of *Hillula* [like

**“the main *Hillula* is through the *histalkus* of the soul from the body”**



Rashbi] applies to the soul being enclothed in the body at the Resurrection of the Dead.”<sup>38</sup>

## VI. Completing One’s Personal *Avodah*

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Ultimately, this will apply to all of Israel, since “your nation are all tzaddikim”, and every Jew will complete his personal *Avodah* and achieve his personal redemption from this world, returning to his pure and holy body in which he will arise at the Resurrection of the Dead, to dwell eternally in Gan Eden.

We find this concept addressed in the following letter of the Rebbe<sup>39</sup>:

Regarding his question, why from among the children of so-and-so, the one remaining alive is specifically the one who has the least fear of Heaven, whereas the G-d-fearing ones died in sanctification of G-d’s name. In general, on questions such as this it is said “why do you involve yourself in the Merciful One’s calculations”. Nevertheless, one of the explanations in our holy books regarding such occurrences is that the soul still needs to repent for certain undesirable things, or its destiny is fixed to do a favor for so-and-so or for the son of so-and-so, and therefore [the heavenly court] leaves him in a body in the merit of so-and-so even if not in his own merit.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, the Rebbe is explaining this same concept: if the soul still has tasks to accomplish, then it remains in a body in order to finish its mission. If the soul has completed its *Avodah*, then ***there is no need for it to continue in a body*** (“when there aren’t any more sparks to be refined...the day comes to die”<sup>22</sup>). The Rebbe explains that this is the reason why many great tzaddikim passed away at relatively young ages (such as the Ariza”l, whose *histalkus* occurred when he was age 38). When one completes his personal *Avodah* before his allotted time on the earth, he can pass away suddenly in a manner of “in its time I will hasten it.”<sup>41</sup>

Even in the case of a “simple Jew”, it is possible that what appears to outside eyes to be a matter of sorrow and mourning might in reality be the completion of the soul’s mission. This is the nature of the *histalkus* of tzaddikim—they have completed their *Avodah* and are “free to go”.

In our generation, this applies (potentially) to every Jew. That is the practical implication of being the final generation of golus (*gilgulim* in the dust of *kli-ppos*) and the first generation of Geulah. At this point in history *every single Jew* has the potential to complete his *Avodah*<sup>42</sup> and go directly to eternal life without the interruption of death and another incarnation in this world.

The Rebbe mentions numerous times that in our generation every single Jew will achieve eternal life without interruption. One example is the sicha of parshas Bo, 5752, where the Rebbe states that there is something new in our generation, the 9<sup>th</sup> generation from the Baal Shem Tov: previously there was “the *histalkus* of the soul from the body...which is not the case in our generation, the last generation of golus and the first generation of Geulah...” The Rebbe is openly speaking about the generation as a whole, explaining that each Jew in this 9<sup>th</sup> generation can experience a *Hillula*—the *histalkus* of tzaddikim who have finished their *Avodah*—instead of death, which occurs when the soul must return to the world of *klipos* to complete its *Avodah*.

Perhaps in all the generations there has never been a chiddush greater than this—that we are the generation that will experience the fulfillment of the prophecy that death will be swallowed up forever!

## VII. Death Will Be Swallowed Up Forever

The Abarbanel explains the following about the prophecy of “death will be swallowed up forever”: in the Messianic era people will become spiritually-oriented and will come to recognize that the purpose of life in this world is only for the sake of perfecting the soul (in the language of Chassidus: completing the *Avodah*). At that time it will be perceived that bodily “death” means exiting this lowly world in a state of perfection, and thus death will cease to be a source of sorrow, but rather “they will not cry over those who die, and this is the meaning of the verse ‘and Hashem Elokim will wipe away the tear from all faces.’”<sup>43</sup>

**“they will not  
cry over those  
who die”**

This is also the meaning of several stories of the Baal Shem Tov, including the well-known story of the gentile prince who converted to Judaism—the heavenly court decreed that his soul must return to this world in order to nurse from a Jewish mother. Having accomplished this bit of *Avodah*, the child passed away. By revealing to the bereaved parents the reason for the baby’s *histalkus*, the Baal Shem Tov succeeded to “wipe the tears” from their faces, so to speak. Similarly, it is known that the Alter Rebbe passed away before his time, due to certain reasons. His great grandson, the Rebbe Maharash, revealed after the passing of his young son, R’ Avraham Sender, at only eight years old, that “the soul of R’ Avraham Sender was the soul of the Alter Rebbe, and he lived the same number of years as the Alter Rebbe had passed away before his time”<sup>41</sup>

On a deeper level, the Tzemach Tzedek explains that when the consciousness of the soul in the body (which has finished its *Avodah*) is granted the

ability to perceive that the *histalkus* is really a *Hillula*, then what occurs is no longer in the category of “death”:

...now death is great suffering even though the soul ascends to the Upper Worlds since the body doesn't see this while the soul is still in it, only at the hour of death it sees it. But if not for the sin of the Tree of Knowledge the body would feel and see the elevation of the soul and there would not be the taste of death at all...<sup>44</sup>

From all this we can understand how the Rebbe's assertion that our generation will transition to eternal life without the interruption of death is not contradicted by what appears to our eyes as *histalkus*. Indeed, this is the underlying message of the simcha of Lag B'Omer: that this final *histalkus* from the lowly material body of this world, after the completion of the *Avodah*, is not at all “death” but rather it is the means of transition to true eternal life—the shedding of the “garment” of this world for the final time. Although it appears to our eyes like death, such a passing is by no means death. When the fleshly body, the skin of the snake, has been fully refined and all the sparks have been elevated, then the soul can finally ascend to Gan Eden *in its body*—meaning its holy and pure body, the same body it will be enclothed in at the Resurrection of the Dead.

This is the joy of Lag B'Omer: we rejoice over the fact that on this day Rashbi achieved the level of the Resurrection of the Dead, an eternal body. Indeed, the special joy of the final generation of golus is that we have been granted the ability to complete the *Avodah*, to bring an end to the cycle of *gilgulim*, and that we—ourselves personally and the entire Jewish people collectively—can merit to be freed from the prison of this lowly body and proceed to eternal life in Gan Eden with no interruption whatsoever.

יהי אדוננו מורנו ורבינו מלך המשיח לעולם ועד!

לזכות נשיא דורנו, מה"מ—שיתגלה לעינינו תומ"י ממש!

לזכות אריאל זלמן, רפאל שלום, ישעי' יוסף, שיחיו

לע"נ הרב יעקב יצחק בן הרב משה מנחם, ז"ל  
נפטר ח"י תמוז, ה'תשס"א

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*To contact the author, please email [YNathan358@gmail.com](mailto:YNathan358@gmail.com).*

*Available online at [MoshiachInDepth.wordpress.com](http://MoshiachInDepth.wordpress.com)*