

Bonfires! Sources and Worksheet

Source #1

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the Cave ([Talmud Shabbat, 33b](#))

Note: These questions begin from the words “וְאֵמַי קָרוּ לִי רֹאשׁ הַמְדַבְּרִים בְּכֹל מְקוֹם” (“In this *baraita* Rabbi Yehuda is described as the head of the speakers in every place. The Gemara asks: And why did they call him head of the speakers in every place?”)

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who were the three rabbis who were sitting and talking?

2. Who was the person who was sitting with them?

3. The 3 rabbis were discussing the Roman Empire and its rule in Israel.
 - a. How did Rabbi Yehudah compliment the Roman Empire?

- b. What did Rabbi Yosi do?

- c. How did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai insult the Roman Empire?

4. How did the Romans respond to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's comments?

5. Why did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son end up hiding in a cave?

6. How long were they in that cave and what were they doing there?

7. What miracles did God do for them?

8. How did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai know when it was time to leave the cave?

9. What started happening when Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son came out of the cave and how did God react to this?

10. For how long did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son have to go back into the cave to “normalize?”

11. How did they know when to come out (a second time)?

12. How did Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai “undo” the damage his son, Elazar, was still doing? Cite two things.

Thought Questions:

1. If you were one of the 3 original rabbis, what would you have said/done?
2. How do you feel about what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said about the Roman Empire?
3. What lessons do you think that this Gemara is trying to teach us?
4. What do you think about the power of zealousness? Is it beneficial? Harmful? Both? Should it be encouraged? Discouraged?
5. How does the story combine with “ve’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho” and Rabbi Akiva’s understanding of it?

Source #2

Six Types of Fire ([Talmud Yoma 21b](#))

Note: In *Shemot* 24:17 it says:

וּמִרְאֵה כְבוֹד ה' נֶאֱשׂ אֲכָלֶת בְּרֹאשׁ הָהָר לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Yisrael.

1. List the 6 types of fire and the examples of each from the Gemara in *Yoma*:

Type of Fire	Example

2. Which types of fire are associated with the physical world?

3. Which types of fire are associated with the spiritual world (prophets, angels, God)?

Thought Questions:

1. What kind of “fire” was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai giving off when he came out of the cave?
2. Why do you think that this kind of fire is not sustainable in the “normal” world?
3. If we are supposed to emulate God, and God is a “devouring fire,” then how can we emulate God without “devouring?”

Source #3:

Hilula d’Rashbi - The Day Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai died

Excerpt from [Peninei Halacha](#):

(The *Idra Zutta** relates that on the day Rashbi died, he revealed deep and wondrous secrets that he was not allowed to reveal beforehand, and he [simultaneously] cried and laughed...Subsequently, his disciples and successors in this world can also connect more deeply to his Torah and the secrets [he taught]. This is why those students who understand this deep idea have the custom of celebrating a *hilula* on the day their righteous mentor died and revealed the Torah’s secrets.

**Idra Zutta* is a kabbalistic work.

Thought Questions:

1. How are light and fire metaphors for spirituality?
2. How are the concepts of Torah and light connected? How are the concepts of Torah and fire connected?
3. Are there moments when you feel the “light” shining for you? This can be the “light” of Torah, the “light” of God, or the “light” of someone you admire and/or love (whether alive or not.) What are those moments like?
4. Why might people light torches or bonfires at the cave where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is buried on Lag BaOmer, the anniversary of his death?

Source #4:

[Bonfires on Lag BaOmer](#)

Thought Questions:

1. *Have you ever been to a bonfire? If so, what was the experience like? Was it something you enjoyed and would want to do again? Why or why not?*
2. *Whether you've been to a bonfire or not, why do you think that they are so popular?*
3. *How can a bonfire be a powerful and spiritual event?*
4. *Do you think that "Lag BaOmer bonfires" are somehow connected to the "Israeli spirit?" Why or why not?*