

UNLEASHING PASSION

SHAVUOT STUDY CARD

A joint project of  **tribe** & www.tribeuk.com



תנועת בני אקיבה
BNEI AKIVA UK



In tribute to **Yoni Jesner z”l**, who contributed so much to his community and Bnei Akiva.



On Shavuot we celebrate receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai in the Jewish year 2448, corresponding to 1313 BCE. It was a moment of tremendous passion amongst the Jewish people as they declared “we will do and we will hear,” committing to serve God even before hearing all the details of what that would involve.

┌ This Shavuot study card has been created for teenagers. It explores passion as a positive and negative force. Do we need to be more passionate in our lives? If we are too relaxed do others think that we are disinterested and apathetic? Does passion lead to extremism? └

Whether you are at home or at shul during the festival, enjoy discussing these contemporary issues, studying a gripping Talmudic account of the passionate sage Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and considering the role of passion in our own lives.

Tribe and Bnei Akiva help young people to discover passion for their heritage and develop enthusiasm for contributing to society. We are delighted to team up on this Shavuot project and would love to hear your views on the sources that we have presented. Please see our email details below.

Chag Sameach

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Part 1: Passion - Too much or too little?

A) On 11th April 2018, Juventus conceded a penalty in the closing minutes of their Champions League quarter final football match against Real Madrid. With passion running hot, Gigi Buffon, the Juventus goalkeeper lost his cool and was sent off by the referee. After the game, which Juventus lost as a result of the penalty, the goalkeeper gave an interview in which he said this about the referee:

“You cannot have a heart in your chest, but a garbage bin.”

Talking Points:

- Regardless of whether you like football or your opinion on the penalty decision, what are your views about the goalkeeper’s reaction?
- How can passion be used in sport for good and for bad?

B) In 1948, as soon as Israel had been declared a Jewish state, she was attacked by her neighbours on all sides. At the time, there was no Israeli Air Force because Israel did not have fighter jets or pilots. Although the USA was a friend of Israel, during the political turbulence of 1948 it refused to transfer arms to the new Jewish country. Demonstrating tremendous courage and passion, a small group of Jewish American pilots who had fought for the US Air Force in the second world war, made their way to Israel. They smuggled materials out of America which on arrival in Israel were used to assemble a few makeshift fighter jets. With these aeroplanes the pilots bombed the advancing enemy armies from the air until they retreated and called for a ceasefire. Later, more than four thousand ‘Machal’ volunteers from around the world arrived in Israel to support the War of Independence.

One of the first Jewish American pilots to get involved was Leon Frankel. Leon had valuable experience and expertise from being part of the US Air Force. Yet, he was in a difficult position. Describing the moment that he left his family in America as he embarked on this dangerous mission to Israel he said: ***“My mother threw herself on the floor and started crying hysterically and I almost didn’t make it out the door of my parents’ house. But I just made up my mind, nothing was going to stop me. I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t do this.”***

Talking Points:

- Do you think that Leon had too much passion?
- Do you think that Leon’s mother had too little passion for her son’s plan or can you explain her response in another way?

Part 2: Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai & a cave full of passion

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was a distinguished scholar who lived after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE. He criticised the Roman authorities and as a result they wanted to kill him.

The Talmud is a central text of Judaism. It consists primarily of discussions and commentary on Jewish law and Jewish history. This piece of Talmud about Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son, Rabbi Elazar, appears in the **Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbat, page 33B.**

אָזְלוּ טָשׁוּ
בַּמְעָרָתָא. אֵיתְרַחֵישׁ נִיסָא אִיבְרִי לְהוּ חֲרוּבָא
וְעֵינָא דְמֵיא. וְהוּ מְשַׁלְחֵי מְנִייהוּ, וְהוּ יִתְבִי עַד
צֹאֲרֵייהוּ בַחֲלָא, כּוּלֵי יוֹמָא גְרָסִי, בְּעֵינֵן צְלוּיִי
לְבִשׁוּ מִיכְסוֹ וּמְצִלוּ, וְהָדַר מְשַׁלְחֵי מְנִייהוּ כִּי
הֵיכֵי דְלֵא לִיבְלוּ. אֵיתְבוּ תְרִיסָר שָׁנִי בַּמְעָרָתָא.
אֲתָא אֱלִיָּהוּ וְקָם אֲפִיתְחָא דְמְעָרָתָא, אָמַר: מָאן
לוֹדְעִיָּה לְבַר יוֹחַי דְּמִית קִיסָר וּבִטִיל גְּזִירְתֵיהָ?

נִפְקוּ. חֲזוּ אֵינִשְׁי דְקָא כְּרָבִי וְוָרְעִי, אָמַר: מְנִיחִין
חַיֵי עוֹלָם וְעוֹסְקִין בְּחַיֵי שָׁעָה! כָּל מְקוֹם שְׁנוֹתָנִין
עֵינֵיהֶן – מִיַּד נִשְׂרָף. יֵצֵתָה בֵּת קוֹל וְאָמְרָה לָהֶם:
לְהַחְרִיב עוֹלָמֵי יִצְאָתְם? חִירוּ לְמְעָרְתְכֶם! הָדוּר
אֲזוּל אֵיתִיבוּ תְרִיסָר יָרְחֵי שְׁתָּא. אָמְרִי: מְשַׁפֵּט
רְשָׁעִים בְּגִיהֶנֶם – שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ. יֵצֵתָה בֵּת
קוֹל וְאָמְרָה: צְאוּ מִמְעָרְתְכֶם! נִפְקוּ, כָּל הֵיכָא
דְהָהוּ מַחֵי רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר – הָהוּ מְסִי רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן.
אָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי, דֵּי לְעוֹלָם אָנִי וְאַתָּה.

They went and they hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob tree was created for them as well as a spring of water. They would remove their clothes and sit covered in sand up to their necks. They would study Torah all day in that manner. At the time of prayer, they would dress, cover themselves, and pray,^N and they would again remove their clothes afterward so that they would not become tattered. They sat in the cave for twelve years. Elijah the Prophet came^N and stood at the entrance to the cave and said: Who will inform bar Yoḥai that the emperor died and his decree has been abrogated?

They emerged from the cave, and saw people who were plowing and sowing. Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai said: These people abandon eternal life of Torah study and engage in temporal life for their own sustenance. The Gemara relates that every place that Rabbi Shimon and his son Rabbi Elazar directed their eyes was immediately burned.^N A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Did you emerge from the cave in order to destroy My world? Return to your cave. They again went and sat there for twelve months. They said: The judgment of the wicked in Gehenna lasts for twelve months. Surely their sin was atoned in that time. A Divine Voice emerged and said to them: Emerge from your cave. They emerged. Everywhere that Rabbi Elazar would strike, Rabbi Shimon would heal. Rabbi Shimon said to Rabbi Elazar: My son, you and I suffice for the entire world, as the two of us are engaged in the proper study of Torah.

בְּהָדִי פְּנִיָּא דְמַעְלֵי שַׁבְּתָא חֲזוּ הֵוּא סָבָא דְהָהוּ
נָקִיט תְרִי מְדַאנִי אָסָא, וְרַהִיט בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת.
אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: הָנִי לְמָה לָךְ? אָמַר לָהֶם: לְכַבּוּד שַׁבְּתָא.
וְתִיסְגִי לָךְ בְּחֻדָּ? חֻד כְּנָגֵד "זְכוּר", וְחֻד כְּנָגֵד
"שְׁמוּר". אָמַר לֵיהּ לְבָרִיָּה: חֲזוּ כְּמָה חֲבִיבִין מְצוֹת
עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל! יִתִּיב דְעַתִּיָּהוּ.

As the sun was setting on Shabbat eve, they saw an elderly man who was holding two bundles of myrtle branches and running at twilight. They said to him: Why do you have these? He said to them: In honor of Shabbat. They said to him: And let one suffice. He answered them: One is corresponding to: “Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8), and one is corresponding to: “Observe the Shabbat day, to keep it holy” (Deuteronomy 5:12). Rabbi Shimon said to his son: See how beloved the mitzvot are to Israel. Their minds were put at ease and they were no longer as upset that people were not engaged in Torah study.

NOTES

Elijah the Prophet came – אֲתָא אֱלִיָּהוּ: Some commentaries explain that any bearer of good news is referred to as Elijah. In this case, a person passed by and recounted what had happened in an incidental, unconsidered remark (*Beit Ya'akov*).

לְבִשׁוּ מִיכְסוֹ וּמְצִלוּ – לְבִשׁוּ מִיכְסוֹ וּמְצִלוּ: They would dress, cover themselves, and pray – Although they were covered in sand, they still donned their clothing during prayer because of the verse: “Prepare to meet your God” (Amos 4:12; see Maharsha).

Every place they directed their eyes was immediately burned – כָּל מְקוֹם שְׁנוֹתָנִין עֵינֵיהֶן מִיַּד נִשְׂרָף: Some commentaries explain this incident homiletically. Rabbi Shimon and his son convinced people to abandon their business and engage in Torah study for its own sake (*Beit Ya'akov*).

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Talking Points:

- Why was it challenging for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar to find a balance in their passion for Torah when they left the cave after twelve years?
- Why were they ordered back into the cave and what did the additional one-year period achieve in helping to shape their approach towards other people?

Part 3: Advanced study - Tosafot

A Divine voice referred to by the Talmud as a **“Bat Kol”** called out to Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar. **What is a heavenly voice?**

Tosafot is a commentary on the Talmud authored by a group of Medieval Torah scholars. The following excerpt of Tosafot appears in the **Talmud Bavli, Tractate Sanhedrin, page 11A.**

בת קול: יש אומרים שלא היו שומעין קול היוצא מן השמים אלא מתוך אותו קול יוצא קול אחר כמו פעמים שאדם מכה בכח ושומע קול אחר היוצא ממנו למרחוק ואותו קול היו שומעין לכך קורין אותו בת קול

“Bat Kol: Some opinions suggest that they did not hear a voice (directly) from Heaven. Rather from that voice (originating in Heaven) emerges another voice. Just like sometimes when a person hits something with strength and another sound is heard as an echo in the distance. This is the type of (Heavenly) sound they heard. Therefore it is called Bat-kol, the daughter of a sound.”

So how would you describe a Bat Kol?

It’s a voice which emanates from Heaven in a form of communication that is somewhat below prophecy. After the era of the prophets, most of whom lived in the period of the First Temple, a person might have still received Divine messages as a bat-kol voice. However, it’s not the initial voice emanating from Heaven that was heard, but an echo of it, therefore it is called **“bat-kol”** — **“daughter of a voice.”**

Part 4: Passion in our own lives

Passion can be a driving force in our lives, pushing us and enabling us to do things that we might not have thought possible. However, what happens when we lack the passion necessary to motivate ourselves to do what we could and should be doing? Human nature is to refrain, to take a step back: when the motivation is not there, we are tempted to say **“I can’t be bothered.”**

Talking Points:

- Are there tasks in your life which you know are important but you don’t feel motivated about?
- Are there times when this feeling changes?

Rabbi Yehuda Amital zt”l was the head of Yeshivat Har Etzion (**“Gush”**) and a former cabinet member of the Israeli Government. In his essay *Commitment vs. Connection*¹ he expands upon the possible dangers of a passion-centred life, pointing out that people tend to be motivated by aspects of their lives (especially their religious lives) to which they feel a deep emotional connection. When a person feels that sort of connection to an act such as prayer, it becomes inherently meaningful to them and they are able to engage in it with ease.

Talking Point:

- What are some of the things in your life to which you feel a deep emotional connection and that you find meaningful?

¹ <https://www.lookstein.org/professional-dev/commitment-vs-connecting/>

Rabbi Amital zt”l suggests that an existence motivated only by connection is likely to provide us with an incomplete life. If you think about a relationship between two people who care for each other deeply, if the relationship only has connection at its basis, with no aspect of commitment to each other, the relationship will most likely fizzle away at some point.

Commitment, on the other hand, puts the entire relationship in a new framework, as the two people have decided that they will work things out and continue even in difficult times.

The same is true of our lives as well: commitment is necessary in order to establish a new kind of identity and framework for our religious and spiritual lives.

Talking Points:

- How would you describe the difference between connection and commitment?
- What can you do to strive for commitment even when you don't feel a strong connection?

Summary

We started by considering the role of passion in sport and its significance in the historic events of 1948 which helped to secure Israel as a Jewish state. We then turned back the clock to the second century and learnt about the intellectually brilliant and deeply spiritual Talmudic scholars Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rabbi Elazar, who lived in a cave for twelve years. During that time they passionately immersed themselves in Torah study but upon leaving the cave found it difficult to adapt to the world they encountered. A voice from Heaven ordered them back into the cave and a year later they re-emerged, this time able to educate and inspire people around them while appreciating that their way of life may be different. Finally, we read an insightful excerpt of writing by Rabbi Yehuda Amital zt”l, in which he suggests that feeling **connected** to someone or something important relies on motivation, but **commitment** means doing what we need to even when we don't feel like it. Therefore there is a risk in allowing passion to be the only force in our decision making.

We hope that you have found these insights thought provoking and relevant to your own life and that you have enjoyed discussing the talking points.

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