

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
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Emor - Lag B'Omer



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Torah Wellsprings - Emor - Lag B'Omer

Gratitude

The Panim Yafos (Kedoshim, 19:5) discusses man's obligation to praise Hashem for the kindness Hashem gives him. He writes, "A person should always imagine that he was in grave danger and was saved from it. This thought will make him understand that he must praise Hashem. *Kal v'chomer* (certainly) when Hakadosh Baruch Hu keeps him from being in danger in the first place, he must praise Hashem even more!" This is because an even greater chesed than being saved from troubles is when one is saved from the fear and worry of the tzarah as well, and everything is good for him from the onset.

In Tehillim (107) Dovid Hamelech discusses the people who were saved from tzaros and must praise Hashem. It states there (pasuk 2) יֵאָמְרוּ גְּאוּלַי ה' אֲשֶׁר גָּאֲלָם מִיַּד צָר, "Those redeemed by Hashem shall say [Hashem's praises], those whom He redeemed from the tzarah." The Panim Yafos says that this means he was saved from having to endure a *tzarah*. These are the fortunate people for whom everything is good from the beginning. They must certainly praise Hashem.¹

It states in this week's parashah (22:29) וְיָבִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח תּוֹדָה לַיהוָה, "When you slaughter a korban Todah to Hashem, לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם תִּזְבְּחוּ, you shall slaughter it willingly." Panim Yafos explains that there are times when one is obligated to bring a korban Todah, and there are times when one isn't obligated, but it is a good thing to do, to express gratitude to Hashem. When a person was saved from a tzarah, he is obligated to bring a korban Todah. But the Torah tells us that in addition to the obligatory korban Todah, a person should bring the korban Todah לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם, willingly, as a korban נְדָבָה (voluntary gift). Because in addition to praising Hashem when saved from tzaros, we should praise Hashem when we were saved so much that we didn't even need to encounter a tzarah.

This week is the week of הוֹדָה, from the word הוֹדָא, which means to praise Hashem.² Although we can't bring a korban Todah in our times, we can praise Hashem, and we can say מִזְמוֹר לְתוֹדָה (in Shacharis, which is like bringing the korban Todah). We praise Hashem for the times He saves us, and certainly we should praise Hashem for the many times that He saved us from undergoing any tzarah at all.

1. Someone I know fell and broke many bones and had to spend several months in the hospital. When he was released, he said that all the years when he was healthy and could walk regularly on his two feet, he didn't realize how much he must praise Hashem. But after he fell, he learned not to take anything for granted, and that he must praise Hashem when everything goes well.

He said that this is alluded to in the pasukim (Tehillim 30:7-8) וַאֲנִי אָמַרְתִּי בְשִׁלְוִי בִל אָמוּט לְעוֹלָם, ה' בְּרִצְוֹנְךָ הָעֲמִדְתָּה לְהִרְרִי עוֹ, "I said in my tranquillity, 'I will never falter.' Hashem, with Your will... You hid Your countenance, and I became frightened." This means in the good days, I thought everything would be good forever. Hashem hid His face, and then I realized that nothing is for certain and I should praise Hashem constantly for His kindness.

2. The week of הוֹדָה begins with Pesach Sheini. The *Zohar* writes regarding Pesach Sheini, "On this day, an announcement comes forth from heaven, 'Whoever hasn't yet seen the *Shechinah* should come now to see the *Shechinah* before the gates close... This is announced on the 14th day of the second month (Pesach Sheini). The gates [of heaven] remain open for seven days. Afterward, they close."

The Ropshitzer Rav zt'l asks why the gates close after seven days. Why can't they remain open? He answers that this week, there is Lag b'Omer, a day of great salvations. All our needs and tefillos were certainly fulfilled, so the gates can close. There is no reason to keep them open.

The Alshich HaKadosh teaches that when everything is well, people lose sight of the fact that they must praise Hashem. They say, "I wasn't in a tzarah at all! Hashem didn't save me from a tzarah! Why should I praise Hashem?" As we explained, they are obligated to praise Hashem even more, but many don't realize this. What does Hashem do when one should be praising and thanking Him but isn't? He gives them a true *tzarah*, and then He saves them. Now they will praise Hashem.

The Alshich says that this is the meaning of the pasuk (Tehillim 107:43) **מִי הָכֵם וַיִּשְׁמַר אֱלֹהֵהוּ**, "He who is wise will keep these in mind, and they will ponder the kind deeds of Hashem." The pasuk is saying that the wise will praise Hashem *when everything is good*. This will save them from tzaros. They fulfill their obligation to praise Hashem, so they don't have to be placed through a tzarah, followed by a salvation, to convince them to express gratitude to Hashem.

Sefiras HaOmer

This week's parashah discusses the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer (23:15) **וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם** מִמּוֹחֶרֶת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאָה אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבָעוֹת שָׁבָעוֹת מִמָּחָר הַיּוֹם הַבֹּא מִיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת תְּהִיָּה, "You shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete." We will express a drop of the specialness of Sefiras Hamre with a mashal:

Reuven is seen walking down the street holding a check in his hand. Nobody knows the amount written on it. If Reuven buys a shas with the check, then all will know it was worth a few hundred dollars. If he buys jewelry, it is understood that it is worth a thousand dollars. But if they see him buying a house with it, then it was worth a million dollars.

Similarly, by looking at the tefillah that is said with Sefiras HaOmer, we receive an inkling of how special this mitzvah is. The tefillah states as follows: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקינו שבזכות ספירת העומר שספרתי היום יתקן מה ואלקי אבותינו שבזכות ספירת העומר שספרתי היום יתקן מה ועל ידי זה יושפע שפע רב בכל העולמות, ולתקן את נפשותינו מכל סיג ופגם ולטהרנו ולקדשנו בקדושתך העליונה... These words mean that in the merit of this mitzvah, much bounty will come to all worlds, all our aveiros will be rectified, and we will be pure and kadosh, etc. When we see expressions such as these with this mitzvah, we are inspired to perform this mitzvah with desire and love. The Beis Avraham says that ספירה is gematria בשמחה. Telling us to be happy when we perform this mitzvah.

The sefer מאור החיים, from Reb Moshe Franko, a student of the Or HaChaim Hakadosh, writes that his Rebbe, the Or HaChaim Hakadosh, taught that the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer grants us fear of heaven.

The following is the proof:

One can ask, how can we count Sefiras HaOmer with a brachah each night? According to several poskim, Sefiras HaOmer is one mitzvah, comprised of forty-nine parts. Each day we count the Omer, and when we count all the forty-nine days, we complete the mitzvah. However, since no one knows how long he will live, how can one be certain that he will be able to count all fifty days? How can he make brachos each night, when he doesn't know whether he will complete the mitzvah?

The answer is that the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer grants us yiras Shamayim, and it states (Mishlei 10:27) **יְרֵאת ה' תוֹסִיף יָמִים**, "Fear of Hashem will add days." He is granted more days of life, and he will be able to complete the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer.³

3. The sefer **עובדא** בדידי הוי עובדא (from Reb S. D. Friedman Shlita) tells a true story of children who were playing in the

Lag b'Omer

The Beis Aharon (p.106b-107a) says מִי שִׁישׁ אֶמֻנָה בְּרֶשֶׁב״י יֵשׁ לוֹ חֵיווּק בְּרֶשֶׁב״י, כִּשֶׁם שֶׁהַשִּׁי״ת הוּא לֵכֵל, "Whoever has emunah in Reb Shimon bar Yochai receives

chizuk from Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Just as Hashem yisbarach is Hashem for all, so is Reb Shimon bar Yochai, Reb Shimon bar Yochai for all,⁴ including for those at low levels."⁵ This means that every Yid, of all

courtyard of a beis medresh while the fathers were davening inside. A newcomer to the area called over one of the children and offered him a candy. The child thanked him sincerely, and all the other children were jealous.

This child had yiras Shamayim, he was raised in a good home, so he quickly went to his father in the beis medresh and asked him whether the hechsher on the candy was acceptable to them. The father opened the wrapper and studied what it said, and he became very afraid. He quickly went outside to the courtyard to find out if this newcomer had given any candies to any of the other children. This is because the candy was poison! It was used to kill insects.

The father explained to the child that in the merit of his yiras Shamayim and cautiousness with kashrus, he was saved from death. They saw that (Mishlei 10:27) יִרְאַת ה' תוֹסִיף יָמִים, "Fear of Hashem will add days."

The truth is that the yetzer hara comes to us every day and tries to give us his "candies." Sometimes it is something that attracts the eyes, or the heart, etc. The yetzer hara says, "It is good. Take it." Let us be like this young child to check what it is, first, so we won't regret it later.

4. It says in Tehillim (145:9) טוֹב ה' לְכֹל. Literally, this means that Hashem is good and kind to all of His creations. Some say that טוֹב ה' לְכֹל can mean that Hashem is the good and correct address to turn to, for resolving all struggles. We can therefore also translate the Beis Aharon's words, כִּךְ רֶשֶׁב״י הוּא רֶשֶׁב״י לְכֹל, "so is Reb Shimon bar Yochai, Reb Shimon bar Yochai for all." This means לְכֹל, for all tzaros and hardships, it is good to daven at Reb Shimon's kever, or to daven anywhere, in his merit, and Hashem will certainly save us with miracles and wonders. לְכֹל, "for everyone," can also be translated as "for everything" because on Lag b'Omer, a person can receive everything he needs.

When Rebbe Avraham Elimelech of Karlin, hy'd zy'a, was in Meron, he didn't take *kvitelach* from his chassidim. He said that in Reb Shimon's merit, everyone has an exceptional power of *tefillah*. Similarly, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy'a would go with his chassidim to Meron for Shabbos *parashas Behaaloscha* and wouldn't accept *kvitelach* from them, as he felt that there was no need. In Reb Shimon's merit, everyone will receive their salvation.

Rebbe Avraham hcelemlE zt'l and Rebbe Moshe Mordechai zt'l said that after going to Meron, there is no need to go to any other *kever*. Rebbe Avraham Elimelech zy'a said: "After pouring one's heart out in Meron, one should have the sensation that he left all his troubles in Meron with Reb Shimon."

There are many large stones on the mountain going up to Reb Shimon's kever. Tzaddikim have said that these are the heavy stones people shed from their hearts while praying in Meron.

5. Even when one is at a low level, the level of an animal, Hashem will help him in Reb Shimon's merit. As it states אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה', and the gematriya is רֶשֶׁב״י (Magdil Yeshuos Malko, Barniv, 55).

Rambam (Pirush HaMishnayos, Parah 3:3) writes, "There is no difference between a person who had never become tamei, and a person who was tamei, but was purified with the parah adumah. [They are both equally tahor.] And even more, the one who was once tamei is better because the Torah speaks about him and says that he is tahor!" Some quote this Rambam in connection to the Beis Aharon, who says that Lag b'Omer is for everyone, even for those on low levels. Since he mentions, specifically, the people at low levels, this means that Lag b'Omer is more for them than for the greater people.

Year 5695: The Ahavas Yisrael of Vizhnitz's children arrived in Meron on Lag b'Omer. Someone shouted, "Make room for the Vizhnitzer Rebbe's children!" An old lady shouted back, "Next to Reb Shimon, we are all children."

levels and situations, can receive chizuk from Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and in particular those who keep the first words of the Beis Aharon, which are to believe in Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and they believe in his strength. And especially for those who do Reb Shimon's will, that we should be very happy on this day. They will receive great bounty.

The Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3:3) writes, "It is confirmed to us from people who tell the truth that at the *tzion* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai on Lag b'Omer, the joy is supernatural."⁶

The Maharil of Paltishan *zt'l* writes, "I had the merit of being in Meron on Lag b'Omer (approximately 175 years ago). Brothers and friends, I cannot express in writing the great *simchah* that is experienced there! Fortunate are the eyes that beheld it! Whoever was there felt with certainty that the joy was in

the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai – because he wants people to rejoice on this day."

Reb Avraham Rozen described the Lag b'Omer he saw (in 1967/תשכ"ז): "Until the morning, no one went to sleep – the joy was so great. Then, the people who were there at night went to sleep, and a new group arrived. The entire day and the following night were the same. I won't burden myself to write the details of the joy I saw there, at every moment, and in various ways. Whoever didn't see that joy never experienced joy in their life. Some people were jumping like deer, some were singing, some were drinking, and some were clapping their hands and dancing with all their might.... I don't know how to describe the joy, but I will tell you what I felt at the time. I imagined that Moshiach had arrived, and I was watching the *simchas beis hashoevah* in Yerushalayim. It was wondrous!"⁷

The Imrei Chaim *zt'l* of Vizhnitz often repeated her words. "We are all Reb Shimon's children." A father has compassion for his children, even when they don't deserve it. This is why Reb Shimon is for everyone, even those at low levels.

The custom is to light the bonfires in Reb Shimon's honor with cotton wicks soaked in olive oil. In Yiddish, cotton is וואסע. Another translation of וואסע is distant. Perhaps this hints that even the people who are וואסע, distant from Hashem, can become ignited with a fire of kedushah in Reb Shimon's merit.

The olive oil is also significant. One of the specialties of oil is that it floats above all other liquids. Another uniqueness of olive oil is that it is taken out of olives after they have been crushed and ground. The crushed, ground olives represent yesurim. The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 36:1) states, "Bnei Yisrael are compared to oil, as it states (Yirmiyahu 11:16) וְזֵית רַעְעוּ יָפֶה פְּרִי תֹאֵר קָרָא ה' שְׁמֶךָ, Hashem had called your name 'A leafy olive tree, beautiful with shapely fruit.' Just as olive oil is taken solely by crushing them, so is Yisrael. They shine because of their yesurim. Furthermore, just as oil doesn't mix with any other liquid, but rather floats above, so, too, Yisrael doesn't mix with the nations. They are above, as it states (Devarim 28:1) וַיִּתְּנֶה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲלֶיךָ עַל כָּל הַגּוֹיִם הָאֲרָצָה, 'Hashem will make you supreme above all the nations of the earth.'" Perhaps we can connect the two concepts together: Reb Shimon bar Yochai gives us chizuk that even if we are distant, and even if we are low and suffering yesurim, we can rise and float above all troubles. As we say in the piyut and song, בַּטֵּל כָּל הַגְּזֵרוֹת אֲדוֹנֵנוּ בֶר יוֹחָאי, "He will annul all harsh decrees, our master, the son of Yochai."

6. Until today, many people testify to this immense joy. In Meron, on Lag b'Omer, no one is getting married, no one is born, yet everyone is extremely happy. People dance for hours – no one knows precisely why. It is a joy beyond nature.

7. Rebbe Shlomke of Zhvil *zt'l* asked his *gabbai* to awaken him when it was time to begin their trip to Meron for Lag b'Omer. When the *gabbai* woke the Rebbe, he saw that the Rebbe's pillow and bed were soaked with tears.

As they traveled, Reb Shlomke urged everyone to be happy. He said, "We must be happy while traveling to Meron." One person in the group was fasting, and Reb Shlomke told him to eat because it is a day of happiness.

The Mishnas Chassidim writes, "It is a mitzvah to be happy on this day, the joy of Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

The Chida (*Moreh b'Etzba* 223) writes, "Be happy in honor of Reb Shimon bar Yochai because Lag b'Omer is his *hillulah*, and it is known that he desired that people rejoice on this day."⁸

The Gemara Shavuos (daf 34b and the discussion begins on daf ל"ג) states, ר' שמעון מהכו עליה במערבא. The Chasam Sofer taught this Gemara to his students on Lag b'Omer and translated it as, "במערבא, In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."⁹

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l marveled that the lengthy story of Reb Shimon's salvation from the Romans is written on daf ג"ג in the Gemara. Reb Shalom Kaminka zt'l added that this is Reb Shimon's 33rd statement in Masechta Shabbos.

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l said, "Lag b'Omer is the greatest day of the year." Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zt'l was present when the Sar Shalom of Belz said this. He immediately lowered his head before his father and said, "Father, give me a brachah.

Reb Moshe Rozvadover would say there isn't a better day in the year than Lag b'Omer. If he could, he would hold onto the sun with

Reb Shlomke would say, "Reb Shimon sends out invitations to his hillulah to everyone. If someone doesn't come, his invitation didn't arrive."

The Zohar relates that when Reb Shimon was niftar, and the levayah passed Tzipori, the people of Tzipori came out with sticks in their hands and demanded that Reb Shimon be buried in Tzipori. They hit the people who wanted to bring Reb Shimon to Meron. Miraculously, Reb Shimon's coffin rose in the air and flew to his burial place in Meron. A bas kol announced, "Gather and celebrate the hillulah/holiday of Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l said that this bas kol is heard yearly, calling out to people to celebrate Lag b'Omer. The evidence that the bas kol is heard is the many people who feel drawn to celebrate this special day.

A family spent a Shabbos in Meron. The head of the family commented, "For the same amount of money we spent on this Shabbos, we could have gone to a luxurious vacation resort."

For the next three years, he didn't return to Meron. It wasn't that he didn't want to go. It was just that things never worked out. For example, when his son turned three, he wanted to make the *chalakeh* in Meron, but the boy was slightly ill, and they couldn't go.

His wife told him, "It seems that since you said that it wasn't worthwhile coming to Meron, Reb Shimon isn't inviting us anymore."

He realized that she might be right, so he closed himself in a room, cried, and repented for his foolish words. After he washed his face and dried his tears, his neighbor knocked at his door and said, "I just bought a new car. The first time I use it, I want it to be for a mitzvah. Do you want to come with me to Meron?" When he truly wanted to return to Meron, he was invited again.

8. When Avraham Kalisker zt'l went to the mikvah on Lag b'Omer, he would say, הריני מקבל עלי קדושת היום, as a preparation to receiving the holiness of Lag b'Omer.

9. The Chasam Sofer zt'l would teach Masechta Shavuos during Sefiras Ha'Omer because it has 49 daf. Every day, he taught the daf corresponding to that day's sefirah. (Others do this with Masechta Sotah, which also has 49 blatt.)

Tzaddikim would keep in mind the count of the Omer throughout the entire day. For example, whenever Reb Mendel of Riminov zt'l reminded himself of the Omer, he would count again (היום יום... לעומר).

his teeth and not let it set, so he wouldn't have to leave Lag b'Omer.

One year, on Lag b'Omer, the Divrei Chaim had a long discussion with Reb Moshe Rozvadover about Lag b'Omer. When they emerged from the room, Reb Moshe's face shone brightly. Reb Moshe Rozvadover said he received the secret of Lag b'Omer from the Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l.

Looking Forward to this Day

The Kozniter Magid zt'l (Tehilas Yisrael, Tehillim 42) writes, "The entire Sefirah we wait for Lag b'Omer because on that day, there is a lot of *rachamim*."

It states (Tehillim 123:1) אֲלֶיךָ נִשְׂאֵתִי אֶת עֵינַי הַיְשָׁבִי בְּשָׁמַיִם, "To You I raised my eyes, to You Who dwells in the heaven." הַיְשָׁבִי is *roshei teivos* of הלולת שמעון בר יוחאי, the celebration of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. This means we raise our eyes to this day of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, that Hashem should give us a lot of bounty on this day.

The Atzei Chaim zt'l was the son-in-law of Rebbe Shalom Eliezer of Ratzfort zt'l, the son of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l. His chasunah was in the city of Tarna, Galicia, in the year 5656. At this time, the Shinover Rav zt'l (the brother of Rebbe Shalom Eliezer of Ratzfort) was 81 years old. Nevertheless, he made the effort and came to the chasunah. On the day of the chasunah, the Shinover Rav said, "It is an עת רצון today, whoever needs a *yeshuah* or a *brachah*, should come forward and he will receive whatever he needs. Many people lined up at the home where he was staying

to receive his *brachos* and to receive *yeshuos*. There were also two women who were friends, who didn't have children, and they were waiting in line. One of them didn't have the patience to wait any longer, so she said, "The Shinover Rav will be in this city for several days. I will go to the Rav in a few days from now, when the line will be smaller. Why should I wait in this long line?"

The other woman remained in line and received a *brachah* from the Shinover Rav. She had her *yeshuah*. Her friend came to the Shinover Rav a few days later and said, "The Rav said that whoever needs a *yeshuah* should come today to the Rebbe and he will receive it." The Shinover Rav replied, "I said that about the day of the chasunah. It was an עת רצון, and there were *yeshuos*. I didn't mean that it would be so every day. (That woman, unfortunately, didn't have her salvation).

On Lag b'Omer, Reb Shimon announces, כל יומא ברשותי קיימא, "This entire day is mine." Tzaddikim called Lag b'Omer "Reb Shimon's day." Therefore, regardless of where a person lives, and regardless of how busy a person is, on Lag b'Omer, Reb Shimon announces, "This is my day," and there can be *yeshuos*. We should take advantage of that and not push it off for another time.

Although there are *yeshuos* in Reb Shimon's merit the entire year, there is obviously something special at the time of his *hilulah*, on Lag b'Omer, where there are many salvations. It is a הפסד מרובה, a great loss, if one doesn't take advantage of this day, as one should.¹⁰

10. A child once came to a *kabolas panim*. The child saw people eating, talking, and being happy. Then the child looked towards the head table, and he saw a young man crying copiously. The child asked his father, "Who is that poor person sitting at the head table? I see that even when everyone is happy here, he sits there and cries."

His father tells him, "That person is the chosson. He isn't sad at all. He is the happiest person here. But he is also aware of the importance of the moment. The *tefillos* he says now can give him salvations throughout his life. He doesn't want to lose this opportunity."

The same can be said about this great day, the *Hilulah* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. The day that the Bas Kol announces, "עולו והתכנסו בהלולא דרשב", "Come and gather to the celebration of Reb Shimon bar Yochai." The

Teshuvah on Lag B'Omer

Reb Yonason Eibshitz *zt'l* (*Yaaras Dvash* vol.2, 11) writes, "It is proper for every *yirei shamayim* to do *teshuvah* on Lag b'Omer because Reb Shimon's merit will help him do *teshuvah* so that the person doesn't spend

his life with foolishness, which is a *tzaar* for this *tzaddik*."¹¹

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos* vol.2 280.) also writes that Lag b'Omer is like Yom Kippur.

Someone described Lag b'Omer in Meron to Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l*. He said,

wise will recognize the importance of the day, and they will celebrate the joy of Reb Shimon, and together with their joy, they will say *tefillos* for themselves and for *klal Yisrael*. It is a time that we can bring salvations that will remain with us our entire lives.

It states (Shemos 14:8) ובני ישראל יוצאים ביד רמה, "Bnei Yisrael were going out with an upraised arm." Unkelos translates *ביד רמה* as *בריש גלי*. The Degel Machaneh Efraim explains that *בריש* is *roshei teivos* for *בר יוחאי*. In his merit, *גלי*, we will be redeemed from the final *galus*. As Reb Shimon said about the Zohar that he wrote, בספרא דא יפקון מן גלותא, "with this *sefer*, we will go out of *galus*". So, the *pasuk* is hinting to Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and it states *ביד רמה*, because the bounty that we receive on this day is *ביד רמה*, with a large hand, a large portion.

It can be compared to a store owner who says to a child, "You can take a handful of candies." The child insists that the store owner give him the candies. He doesn't want to take the candies himself. The child later explained to his parents that the store owner had a larger hand than him. Therefore, he wanted to receive the candies from the storeowner's hand rather than take them on his own. So, too, on this day of Lag b'Omer, we receive *ביד רמה*, bounties of salvations, with a large hand.

Chazal (*Vayikra Rabba* 10:5) say תפילה עושה מחצה, "Tefillah does half." (Literally, this means that when one davens for a hundred, he receives half, he receives fifty.) The Chortkover *zt'l* has another explanation. He said that whenever bounty is given, there are two parts. There is the giver, and there is the receiver. Hashem is always sending bounty down to us, but we must prepare the other half, which is the vessel to attain the bounty. תפילות עושה מחצה means the *tefillah* fills the second half. It creates the vessel to receive the bounty.

We can therefore explain that ובני ישראל יוצאים ביד רמה, means that on Lag b'Omer we receive *יד רמה*, a large hand to receive the bounty that comes down on this day.

The *tzaddik* and *gaon*, Reb Simchah Mund *zt'l*, would go every year to Meron for Lag b'Omer. Even when he was in his nineties, he would go to Meron on Lag b'Omer. Some *yungerleit* went with him to help him on the long trip. Once, someone said to Reb Simchah, "It is so hard for you, and for those who help you, to come on Lag b'Omer. Why not go to Meron on some other day of the year, when there aren't so many people, and there is less traffic? It will be easier for you, and a car will drive you up the mountain. You won't have to climb it, amidst large crowds."

He replied with a *mashal*. When a person goes to a wealthy man's home to collect money, the wealthy man will request to see the documents, the *המלצות*, to see whether the person deserves a donation, and to decide how much he will give. But when he is making a *chasunah*, this wealthy person will give generously to all those who come to him, and he doesn't check the documents to see whether the person is worthy or not. Similarly, when we go to Meron on Lag b'Omer, on Reb Shimon's *hilulah*, everyone who arrives receives great bounty, without any investigations to determine whether he deserves it or not.

This also applies to those who weren't able to go to Meron. If they rejoice with Reb Shimon's *simchah*, wherever they are, Reb Shimon will grant them bounty and *brachos* in abundance.

11. A hint is that *שמעון בר יוחאי* is *gematriya* (*Yeshaya* 6:10) *לוי ושב ורפא לו*, "He will understand, do *teshuvah*, and be healed."

The Sar Shalom of Belz once spoke about the greatness of Lag b'Omer, and his son, Reb Zundel *zt'l*, summed it up and said, "Lag b'Omer is like Yom Kippur." His father said that he spoke correctly.

"Inside, at the *tzion*, it is like Yom Kippur, and outside, in the courtyard, it is like Simchas Torah." The holy Ruzhiner zt'l praised this description immensely.¹² This source is another indication of the association between Lag b'Omer and Yom Kippur, Lag b'Omer, and atonement.¹³

Salvations

The Zohar (*Idra Zuta* 296b) states that moments before Reb Shimon Bar Yochai was niftar, he said the pasuk (*Tehillim* 133:3) **כִּי יֵשׁם צְנֹה** (Tehillim 133:3) **ה' אֶת הַבְּרָכָה תַּיִם עַד הָעוֹלָם**, "For there has Hashem commanded the brachah. May there be life forever." Before he said the word **תַּיִם**, he was niftar.

This means he left over **תַּיִם**, his ability to give life and health in this world.

Therefore, let us shout with a broken heart, "Reb Shimon, you are **יודע כל הנסתרות**, you know the hidden tzaros that lie on people's hearts. You know the secrets that no one knows about other than the person himself who suffers. Also, you know the harsh *gezeiros* that are still hidden from people. Therefore, we request, **דבריך עושה פירות**, your tefillos shall bear fruit for us. As you have always davened for Klal Yisrael in the

past, do so for us now, and **בטל כל הגזירות**, annul all harsh *gezeiros* from us."

In the songs for Lag b'Omer, in honor of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, we say **בטל כמה גזירות**, "He annulled many harsh decrees." There is an old custom to add **יבטל כל הגזירות**. This is a request that Reb Shimon should once again "annul all harsh decrees" and there should only be goodness for Bnei Yisrael.

Reb Shimon said about Lag b'Omer, **האי יומא ברשותי קאי**, "This day is mine." Hashem gave this day to Reb Shimon, and therefore, many miracles occur on this day.

The Zohar (*Idra* 296) says that when Reb Shimon was buried in Meron, a *bas kol* announced, "In your merit, many *kitrugim* [harsh decrees] are silenced on this day." This occurs every year on Lag b'Omer.

Lag b'Omer is a day of salvations – fortunate are those who invest in tefillah on this day.¹⁴ Here are a few recommendations of what one can daven for on this holy day:

1) Children

Lag b'Omer is mesugal for the barren to bear children.

The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1) states:

12. Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiler zt'l said (*בדרך צחות*) that all *yomim tovim* are alluded to in the celebration of Lag b'Omer in Meron. Some *Sephardim* have the custom of slaughtering sheep near the *tzion*. This reminds us of the *korban Pesach*. The mountains surrounding the *tzion* remind us of Shavuot (when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai). And the tents that people erect around the *tzion* remind us of Succos.

Based on the description given to the Holy Ruzhiner, we can add two more holidays experienced in Meron on Lag b'Omer: Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah. The tears of teshuvah are like Yom Kippur, and the joy is like Simchas Torah.

It is possible to shed tears and be joyous at the same time – it is not a contradiction. We see this at a chasunah. The mechutanim cry at the chuppah, and they are happier than everyone else. The Lag b'Omer celebration is called a Hilulah, which means chasunah in Aramaic. There is crying and joy, simultaneously.

13. After Yom Kippur, people have a custom to say **האטס געפועלט אלעס גוט**, that your tefillos should be answered and all good should come to you. The Sifsei Tzaddik of Piltz zt'l (*Lag b'Omer* 1) says that Reb Henech of Alexander zt'l would also say these words after Lag b'Omer. This is because Lag b'Omer is a good time for tefillah. On these days, all our aveiros are atoned for, making it easier for our tefillos to be answered.

14. The Tur (428) teaches that Lag b'Omer is always on the same day of the week as Purim. About Purim, it states **כל הפושט יד נותנים לו** that whatever one asks for on this day is given to him. The same applies to Lag b'Omer. It is a special time for tefillah. Whatever one requests will be given to him.

A person from Tzidon, Eretz Yisrael, married a woman and waited ten years for a child, but she still did not bear one. They came to Reb Shimon bar Yochai and told him they wanted to divorce.

Reb Shimon replied, "I swear, just as you got married with food and drink, you should divorce amidst food and drink."

They made a big meal, and she gave him a lot to drink. He told her, "My daughter, take any good item you wish and bring it to your parents' home."

He fell asleep, and his wife motioned to her servants to carry her husband in his bed to her parents' home.

In the middle of the night, he awoke. He asked, "My daughter, where am I?"

She told him that he was in her parents' home.

"Why am I in your parents' home?"

She said, "Didn't you tell me I can take anything I want to my parents' home? There is nothing I want in the world more than you!"

They returned to Reb Shimon bar Yochai, he davened for them, and they had a child.

The Midrash concludes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu helps the barren, and so do

tzaddikim." This is one of the salvations we can attain on this holy day.

Tzaddikim teach that to bear children, one is advised to have kavanah by the brachah of רפאנו in Shemonah Esrei. The Shem Shlomo of Munkacz *zt'l* taught that Lag b'Omer is mesugal for refuah (as we will discuss), so Lag b'Omer is also *mesugal* for bearing children.

Lag b'Omer is also a good time to daven that the children should grow up *ehrllich*, with yiras Shamayim. The Gemara (*Makos* 17:) states that a mother should daven that her children be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai. The Minchas Elazar (*Shaar Yissaschar*) says the Gemara refers to a person davening on Lag b'Omer. On this day, anything is possible. On this day, one can ask for the most incredible things - even that one's child be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

2) Parnassah

The Chasam Sofer (*Yorah Deiah* 233) makes the following calculation: Chazal tell us that when the Yidden left Mitzrayim, they ate matzos for thirty days. They finished the matzos on Pesach Sheini. The Midrash adds that they didn't have food for three days, and then on the next day, the *manna* fell. According to this calculation, the *manna* first came down on Lag b'Omer. We understand from this that Lag b'Omer is an ideal day to daven for parnassah.¹⁵

15. Taamei HaMinhagim writes, וישפע שפע רב בכל העולמות, "A great bounty [of parnassah, etc.] should come to all worlds" is *roshei teivos*, רשב.

The Yerushalmi (*Brachos* 9:18) writes, "Whenever Reb Shimon needed money, he would say, 'Valley! Valley! Fill up with gold coins,' and that would happen."

A young man was in Meron rosh chodesh Iyar and davened for parnassah. And then he said, "Ribono Shel Olam, show me that You accepted my tefillah."

Immediately after this tefillah, he received a phone call. The caller told him that he was sending him thousands of shekalim.

A wealthy businesswoman from Eretz Yisrael came to Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tzion* to daven. She was about to ship a boatload of merchandise, and she davened that it should reach its destination and that she should be successful in this business venture.

At first, she couldn't approach the *tzion* because another woman was in front of her, praying loudly, asking

3) *Shidduchim*

About Reb Shimon, it states (in the song Bar Yochai) הַצִּיל הַלְחוּצִים, "He saves those who are

stressed and worried," and tzaddikim say, who is more stressed and worried than someone awaiting their *shidduch*?¹⁶ This is

for three hundred rubles to marry off her child. The wealthy woman took out three hundred rubles from her purse and gave it to the woman. This was the only way she could get to the *tzion*.

Standing before the *tzion*, she said, "Reb Shimon! The woman who was here before me received her request. She prayed for three hundred rubles, and she received that amount immediately. May my requests also be answered as quickly."

The Divrei Shmuel zt'l repeated this story and expressed that the wealthy woman wisely recognized that the woman in front of her didn't receive three hundred rubles because she gave it to her. She understood that the salvation came from the poor woman's tefillos!

A poor man was shouting at the kever of Reb Shimon, "Reb Shimon! Send me fifty thousand dollars."

The loud, bitter shouts disturbed the peace of mind of a wealthy person beside him. This rich man had come from America to be in Meron for Lag b'Omer, and here there was a person who was not letting him daven as he hoped he would.

He decided to play a prank on him. He asked him for his address, and after Lag b'Omer, he mailed him a fifty-thousand-dollar check and signed it "Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

That is what he thought he did. However, a couple of weeks later, when he saw his bank statements, he realized he had accidentally signed his own name. The check went through! He saw that the person's tefillos at Reb Shimon's kever were indeed answered.

16. Zelig was a good *bachur*, and no one understood why it was taking him so long to find his *bashert*.

On Lag b'Omer, Zelig's mother traveled by bus to Meron to daven for her oldest son, Zelig, to find a *shidduch*.

As she traveled, she remembered how years earlier, she and her husband had been married for several years and were not yet blessed with children. At that time, they had come to Meron to daven, and they promised that if they had a son, they would name him Shimon. Somehow, when the miracle occurred and their son was born, they forgot about their promise and named him Zelig.

She immediately called her husband and reminded him of their promise from years before. She said, "Who knows? Perhaps if we had called him Shimon, he would have found his *bashert* already."

The husband replied that he would ask his rebbe what to do.

The rebbe advised him to call their son Shimon Zelig.

The mother davened in Meron at the *kever* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, requesting that her son "Shimon Zelig" should become engaged.

The following Shabbos, the *gabbai* gave "Shimon Zelig" an *aliyah*, establishing his new name.

There was another Zelig in the *beis medresh*. He asked the *gabbai*, "Why did you call up this *bachur* as Shimon Zelig? Isn't he Zelig?"

The *gabbai* replied, "His father told me that from now on, I should call him Shimon Zelig. I don't know why."

Zelig had an older daughter. Long before, he thought that the younger Zelig would be a suitable *shidduch* for his daughter, but their names were the same - they were both called Zelig, so he didn't consider it. But now that their names weren't exactly the same, he was willing to go ahead with the *shidduch*. Shimon Zelig got engaged to Zelig's daughter!

because we can daven and receive salvations for all our needs – including shidduchim.¹⁷

4) Yiras Shamayim

The Sfas Emes (*Emor* 5652) writes, "I heard from my grandfather [the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l*] that on Lag b'Omer, one can attain *yiras Shamayim*."

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* explains: In *Tehillim* (chapter 19), there are five pasukim to praise Torah and mitzvos, and each line has five words:

1. תורת ה' תמימה משיבת נפש, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restoring the soul."

2. עדות ה' נאמנה מחכימת פתי, "The testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise."

3. פקודי ה' ישרים משמחי לב, "Hashem's orders are upright, gladdening the heart."

4. מצות ה' ברה מאירת עינים, "Hashem's mitzvos are clear, enlightening the eyes."

5. יראת ה' טהורה עומדת לעד, "The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever."

The fifth phrase, which has five words, discusses *yiras Hashem*. This is similar to Lag b'Omer, which falls on the fifth day of the fifth week. The Imrei Emes says that this hints that Lag b'Omer is an ideal time to attain *yiras Shamayim*.

5) Refuah

ורפאתי שמעון בר יוחאי is *gematria* *Refuah*. This hints to us that Lag b'Omer is a day *mesugal* for *refuah*.¹⁸

The Tzemach Tzedek taught that מרון is *roshei teivos* for מלך רופא נאמן ורחמן, the King Who heals. It is known that the *sefirah* הוד is *mesugal* for *refuah*. Reb Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* adds that Lag b'Omer, is הוד שבהוד, and is certainly *mesugal* for *refuah*. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz taught that if one needs to take medication, he should begin taking it on Lag b'Omer.

17. It states (Shemos 3:9) וגם ראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים לוחצים אותם, "I have also seen the oppression that the Egyptians are oppressing them." Rabbeinu b'Chayei explains that the Mitzrim didn't permit them to add space to their homes and create more comfortable living conditions. We can, therefore, explain that Reb Shimon's הציל הלוחצים means he rescues people from their tiny apartments so that they can live comfortably.

18. Once, a man came to Rebbe Dovid Biderman *zt'l* for a brachah for his sick son. Rebbe Dovid Biderman advised him to daven in Meron. The man replied, "I was already in Meron, and my son is still ill."

Rebbe Dovid Biderman told him, "When a person goes to a doctor, and the doctor doesn't succeed in healing him, will he stop going to the doctor? No! He will go again. If a person takes a medication once and it doesn't help, does he give up? No! He tries again. I advise you to go to Meron again and again until your son has a *refuah sheleimah*."

Lag b'Omer teaches us never to lose hope:

The Beis Yosef tells us that we celebrate Lag b'Omer because Reb Akiva's students stopped dying on that day. The Pri Chadash maintains that this isn't a reason to celebrate. The reason the students stopped dying was that there were no more students left! All of them were niftar! Instead, the Pri Chadash explains, we are celebrating the continuity of the Torah. On this day, Reb Akiva took his five remaining students: Reb Meir, Reb Yehudah, Reb Yossi, Reb Shimon, and Reb Elazer ben Shamua, and taught them Torah. They became the future leaders of Bnei Yisrael. This is how the Torah survived to this day.

Reb Akiva lost most of his students but didn't give up. Instead, he forged ahead and focused on rebuilding, thereby ensuring the survival of the Torah.

We, too, shouldn't lose hope in tefillah and aspire for salvation. Everything is in Hashem's hands. If we davened once, we should daven again until we attain salvation.

Many stories of refuos occurred in Meron, particularly on Lag b'Omer (see footnote).¹⁹

19. Elul 1959/תשי"ט, the Brisker Rav *zt'l* was ill, and Rav Shach *zt'l* spent a lot of time at his bedside. One day, the Brisker Rav said that he heard from his father, Reb Chaim of Brisk *zt'l*, that Meron is an auspicious place for tefillah. Therefore, he requested that people go daven there for him.

Rav Shach immediately went to Ponovezh yeshiva, spoke with the *roshei yeshiva*, and fourteen outstanding *talmidei chachamim* (including the Steipler *zt'l*, who requested to come along) *evartlde* to Meron. They recited the entire *sefer Tehillim* that Thursday night.

On Sunday, Rav Shach returned to the Brisker Rav. The Brisker Rav asked whether people davened for him in Meron. Rav Shach told him about the tefillah they held for him and shared the names of *esoht* who participated. The Brisker Rav's eyes shone with joy and gratitude.

I heard the following from Reb S. G. Shlita, a resident of Williamsburg, New York.

In the year 5768, his wife became ill with multiple sclerosis and could hardly walk. Her condition deteriorated, and by 5777, she had lost most of her eyesight. She could barely see, and only out of the corner of one eye.

The best doctors said that the nerves that connect the eye to the brain were almost entirely dead, and that it was impossible to heal her.

That year, they traveled to Meron for Lag b'Omer. The Skulener Rebbe advised that, despite the hardship, she should try to daven next to the *tzion*, not outside the building. With the aid of two women who pushed her wheelchair, they passed all the police and barriers, passed through many people, and got into the *tzion*.

Two and a half hours later, she called her husband and said, "I finished the entire *Tehillim*, and I am ready to leave."

The husband didn't catch on to the miracle that had just occurred. She could only read with special, thick glasses and only very large print. And even then, she could only read slowly and with immense difficulty. But this time, she read the entire *Tehillim*.

They returned to New York and went to their doctor. He shone a flashlight into her eyes and shouted in surprise, "She can see!" He was shocked because he knew it was medically impossible for her to see again. The doctor sent them to an expert in the field. (Had they tried to arrange this appointment themselves, it would have taken a year to arrange an appointment with this specialist, but when the doctor requested it, an appointment was arranged immediately.)

This specialist (who until then was a sworn atheist) was shocked. In all of medical history, nothing like this had ever occurred. "How did this happen?" he wanted to know. The husband told the doctor about their *tefillos* in Meron. For the first time in his life, the doctor admitted that there saw Hashem.

The husband said, "Now that she can see, can you help her walk again?"

The doctor replied, "Our clinics can't help her walk, but it seems you have found a way to heal her."

I heard the following story from the *baal hamaaseh* (to the person to whom it occurred); he is a prominent *talmid chacham* and a very special *Yid*, who frequents Meron.

He told me that he was on dialysis for hours due to his two failing kidneys *r'l*. After paying \$180,000 to be eligible for a kidney transplant and *snoitaraperp yrassacen lla gnikam*, he was ready for the transplant. Before the surgery, he went to Meron. He davened for a miracle, to be cured without a transplant. He said, "Reb Shimon, we were taught that many miracles happened to you (see *Meilah* 17.). Also, you said that you can save everyone from judgment. I have two failing kidneys. I need a miracle so that my kidneys will work again.

He was indeed asking for a great miracle because when a kidney stops working, it usually doesn't begin

working again. But for Hashem, everything is possible, and in Reb Shimon's merit, he believed it could occur.

Miraculously, his kidneys began working again, he didn't need the transplant, and he was even able to get off dialysis.

In 1949, תש"ט, due to the ongoing war, the roads to Yerushalayim were closed. The roads were open only one day every two weeks. A *bachur*, Gedalyah Meirovitz, was shot in the leg. At the time, he was outside of Yerushalayim so that he couldn't get to Shaarei Tzedek Hospital in Yerushalayim for two weeks. By the time he got there, his leg was severely infected, and the doctors recommended amputation r"l.

Lag b'Omer was approaching, and Gedalyah Meirovitz asked his friends to bring him to Meron. "It's impossible," his friends told him. And indeed, it was almost impossible. In those days, a trip to Meron took an entire day and required changing buses several times. Moreover, due to his condition, he would need to travel with his foot raised the whole time. How could they make the long trip with him in his condition?

But the *bachur* begged them until they agreed to do whatever they could. They rented a truck so he could lie down, and that's how they traveled to Meron.

At the *tzion*, the *bachur* said the following prayer: "The Nazis killed my entire family. I am the only survivor. I need to get married so that my family will have a continuation. But if I lose a leg, who will want to marry me?"

After their *tefillos* by the *tzion*, they went to the courtyard to dance. Gedalyah wanted to dance, sensing that a miracle was about to happen. He put his arms over the shoulders of two of his friends, and they danced together with him. Suddenly, he let go of his friends and danced on his own! Due to the dancing, the dressing on his foot fell off, and a healthy foot was revealed!

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis *zt'l* writes that once he had a lot of pain in his throat, and doctors recommended surgery. He came to Meron and said the entire *Tehillim*. While saying the *Tehillim*, he began coughing violently and couldn't stop. He continued coughing until he coughed up the blood and pus blocking his throat, and was healed.

In the winter of 5775, a woman from the Toldos Aharon community felt immense pressure on her eye, weakening her eyesight. The doctor instructed her to take a CT scan, which she did on Lag b'Omer morning. The results would come in the next day. In the meantime, she traveled to Meron, where the rebbe of Toldos Aharon makes a *hadlakah* (bonfire). She could hardly see the *hadlakah* due to her poor vision, and she cried and prayed for a *yeshua*. The next morning, she could see well. The doctor called that morning and told her there was dangerous swelling above the eye, and they must operate. She told him she was feeling well... And indeed, she was.

A friend who often visits Meron told me, "I have witnessed many miracles in Meron. I will tell you one story. I have children living in America. They had a young child who was developing very slowly. He was three years old, but couldn't talk or control his bowels. Two miracles happened on the flight back to America: The child suddenly spoke. He told his mother that he needed to use the bathroom."

A family of *talmidei chachamim* heard that the head of their family was diagnosed with cancer, r'l. All men of the family traveled to Meron, studying Torah the entire way there, and in Meron, they recited the entire *Tehillim*. The father took another test, and the doctors told him the dreaded disease had mysteriously disappeared.

Two close friends studied every morning from three o'clock a.m. until Shacharis. One of them became ill with cancer and was extremely weak. His *chavrusah* would visit him from time to time, and they would discuss *emunah*.

Once, in the middle of their conversation, the friend said, "Lag b'Omer is only a month and a half away. We traveled to Meron together the past few years, let's do it again this year."

The ill man looked at him and said, "The doctors are telling me I have only two months to live. I don't know if I will be alive when Lag b'Omer comes around."

Here, we will write a famous story (because it happened in front of many people, and it is recorded in sefarim):

Year 1918/תרע"ט, a couple davened in Meron at the kever of Reb Shimon bar Yochai and promised that if they had a child, they would bring him to Meron on Lag b'Omer for his *chalakeh* (to make *peyos*).

They had a child, and when the child turned three, 1922/תרפ"ג, the mother brought the child to Meron on Lag b'Omer as she had promised. Her husband remained home.

Lag b'Omer was on Friday that year, so most people remained in Meron for Shabbos. On Shabbos, the three-year-old child became ill with the cholera epidemic. On Shabbos morning, the mekubal Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l was davening *Mussaf* before the amud. Suddenly, everyone heard the young child wail, cry, and shout. Everyone panicked, especially the mother, whose cries were heard above all others.

Reb Asher Zelig recorded this episode in one of his sefarim and wrote, "The child was

green; he seemed to be dead." The *tefillah* was over, but no one was interested in making kiddush because everyone was so sad and worried.

The mother took the child, placed him near the *tzion*, and said, "Reb Shimon! I brought my only son here at three years old to receive his first haircut, as I promised I would do. Please, do not ruin my happiness and the happiness of my husband, who is waiting for us to return. Reb Shimon! I'm leaving my son here. Don't embarrass me. Bring him back to health, as he was healthy when I brought him here yesterday. Sanctify Hashem's name. Reveal to everyone that there is Hashem and that there are tzaddikim."

She left her son near the *tzion* and closed the door behind her. Only the child remained inside. A few minutes later, the child's voice was heard. He was calling for his mother.

Reb Asher Zelig opened the door. The boy stood on his feet, calling, "Mother, I'm thirsty. Bring me water."²⁰

A few weeks later, he called his ill friend, "I'm buying a ticket to Eretz Yisrael today. I want to be in Meron for Lag b'Omer. Should I buy a ticket for you too? The doctors aren't stopping you from traveling, so why shouldn't you come along?"

"I think it is a good idea," the friend replied. "Order a ticket for me, too."

That year, Lag b'Omer was on Motzei Shabbos. As soon as Shabbos was over, they went to the *tzion* to daven. This occurred thirty years ago when the crowds weren't as large as today. Most of the chassidim were still with their Rebbe for the *hadlakah*, and the *tzion* wasn't full, so they could get inside and daven. The ill man sat down near the *tzion* and poured his heart out in *tefillah*. He said the entire *sefer Tehillim*, from beginning to end. When he finished, he turned to his friend and said, "I feel that I've just removed a large stone from my heart, and I'm leaving that stone here."

They returned to America. The doctors wanted to operate to save his life. When they opened his body, they couldn't find any sign of the illness. They performed a biopsy and sent it to the lab to see if any remnants of the disease remained. Nothing was there. He was entirely well. His first phone call was to his friend, who encouraged him to go to Meron on Lag b'Omer. He cried tears of gratitude. His friend heard him crying into the phone and feared that he had received more negative news from the doctors. When he finally found his voice, he explained that they were tears of happiness.

Both men told me the story and concluded, "Since then, we go to Meron every year, and before we leave Meron, we say, "Reb Shimon, next year again!"

20. Reb Shmuel Shapiro zt'l, one of the holy tzaddikim of Yerushalayim, was very attached to Reb Shimon bar Yochai. He often traveled to Meron, where he served Hashem with all his heart. I heard the following story from his son-in-law, Reb Moshe Lefkowitz from Monsey:

Shavuot, year 5715, Reb Shmuel's rebbetzin was taking care of her one-year-old daughter, who had a high fever. She tried to lower the fever in various ways but didn't succeed. The daughter was so weak, she didn't even have the strength to cry. Her breathing became heavier. The young mother wouldn't leave her daughter's bed, not even for a moment. She sat there, with her small Tehillim in her hands, and pierced the heavens for her young daughter.

In the morning, there was no sign of improvement, so she brought her daughter to the hospital. When the doctor saw the girl, he asked, "How long has she been sick?" The rebbetzin said that her daughter has fever for a few days, she throws up, and she doesn't look good.

The doctor checked the daughter, gave her some shots, and throughout this time, the daughter didn't make any sign of pain or discomfort because she was so weak; she didn't have the strength to react. Only, when they drew blood from her spine, did she cry bitterly from the *yesurim*.

The doctor knew the severity of the illness, but the young mother still didn't know. But eventually, the doctor told her that her daughter had contracted Polio, which was an epidemic in Yerushalayim at that time.

The patient was placed in confinement to prevent others from catching the illness. She was given medication to lower the fever, and she was to be in that room for three weeks. During this time, only the mother was permitted to remain near her. The mother sat next to her daughter for many hours, the Tehillim always in her hand. She didn't stop saying Tehillim.

After three weeks, the doctors knew that the daughter's illness wasn't contagious anymore, and the doctors wanted to send the girl to Alin. When the parents heard "Alin", they became very worried. This is a hospital ward for people who were paralyzed. It meant that the doctors thought that their daughter would never move again.

But Reb Shmuel and his rebbetzin didn't lose hope. They visited their daughter in Alin many times and spent a lot of time with her. They knew that אין שום יאוש בעולם כלל, there is no yeush in the world. They sat near her bed and said many chapters of Tehillim.

After months had passed, some signs of improvement were seen in their daughter. When she was two years old, she began to speak, but she still couldn't move herself. She was entirely paralyzed. This is how the girl was raised in Alin. She didn't know about kriyas Shema, brachos, or tefillah; her family's visits were the only connection she had to the holy chinuch of the Jewish community in Yerushalayim. But there was no way they could take her out of this ward. They knew that their daughter wouldn't survive in their home.

When the girl was five years old, she began to move her hands a little bit. The mother asked her caretakers whether this was a sign that there would be other improvements. The caretakers answered drily, "Let's hope."

Elul, 5718, Reb Shmuel went to Meron, as he would each year. He would remain in Meron until after Yom Kippur. The rebbetzin remained at her post to raise the children at home and to often visit her daughter in Alin. One day, during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, the mother decided, "Enough for our tzaros. It is time to do something for our poor daughter." She decided that she would bring her daughter to the tzion of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, knowing that her great husband was there. She felt certain that they would have a great salvation. She didn't know how the salvation would come, but she relied on Hakadosh Baruch Hu that her daughter would be cured.

With the determination that only a mother can have, she went to the doctor of the hospital, Dr. Polevsky, and asked permission for her daughter to leave the ward for some days. She knew her request bordered on the absurd, but she didn't want to back down. The doctor heard her request and forcefully refused. He explained that the girl required constant supervision. "You won't be able to watch over her properly," the doctor said. The mother insisted that she wanted to do this and that she could take care of her daughter properly. The doctor agreed, with two conditions: Her daughter couldn't return to the hospital until after Succos, and she had to sign papers that if some emergency happens chas v'shalom when the daughter is out of the hospital, the parents accept full responsibility.

The mother immediately agreed to both conditions and signed the papers. That day, she began her trip to Meron. In those days, it was a long, difficult trip. They first traveled to the train station, and from there they traveled to Chaifa. They waited in Chaifa for two hours until the bus to Meron arrived. Throughout

this long trip, she had to hold her five-year-old daughter, who couldn't move, on her lap. The young girl couldn't even sit. There were moments, here and there, when some kind people offered to help, and they carried the young girl for some time, but for most of the trip, the mother held her daughter herself.

When they arrived at the entrance of the Meron village, at the bottom of the mountain, the mother was completely drained. She couldn't carry her daughter up the mountain. So, she sent her son, Aharon, to call his father, or anyone who was willing to help carry the girl up the hill. Aharon met his father, and his father was shocked to see him. He wondered why his rebbetzin took this long trip to Meron, and why together with their daughter, who hadn't left the hospital in four years! Mostly, he was astounded that she had managed to do this...

Reb Shmuel didn't tire his rebbetzin with questions. Without asking questions, he picked up his daughter in his two arms and placed her on a bed, near the holy tzion, next to the tzion of the Tana Reb Elazar. The girl lay there, motionless, for some days, and the parents and family tore open the heavens with their tefillos that she be healed. The hearts of all those who came to the tzion in those days broke when they saw the girl. Everyone raised their eyes and hearts to Heaven.

Suddenly, erev Yom Kippur, the girl lifted herself a drop. The shocked mother rushed over to her, grabbed her arm, and helped her stand up. The girl held firmly onto the gate that surrounds the tzion. She stood there on her own feet! Until recently, she couldn't move a limb, and now she stood on her two feet.

Reb Shmuel understood that since the miracle occurred, his rebbetzin shouldn't remain in Meron for Yom Kippur. She should quickly go home.

When they came home, the mother couldn't send her daughter back to the hospital because that was the condition she had agreed to. She had to remain with her daughter until after Succos. They weren't easy days, but slowly, their daughter began to crawl. However, it was still hard for her to sit or stand.

When the mother returned to Dr. Polevsky with her daughter, the doctor couldn't believe what he saw. He asked the mother, "Where did you go? Which doctor helped you?" The mother replied that she didn't go to any doctor. Dr. Polevsky didn't believe her.

When the mother saw that the doctor wasn't letting up, she told him that she had gone to Meron, to the great "Professor" Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Uncharacteristically, the doctor said, "What Hakadosh Baruch Hu can do, no one in the world can do."

Soon afterward, the girl was discharged from Alin and was taken to Shaarei Tzedek hospital. Until then, the doctors hadn't given her any hope, so they didn't provide her with therapy, and they didn't consider trying to heal her. But now they saw that there is hope, and that the girl has potential to be cured, it was time to begin therapy and treatment.

The doctors saw that the damage was primarily in the spinal cord and in her legs. Therefore, they began with an operation on her legs. This enabled her to sit up and to stand a bit. Being closer to her parents and to her devoted brothers, she received at the visits the foundations of Yiddishkeit, how to say Shema and brachos, and they taught her some Torah... as much as was possible.

Over the next few years, she had several other surgeries, and when she was ten years old, she was sent home. She began going to school. She walked on the street with a walking stick. (At home, she walked without a stick.) With Hashem's help, she married the talmid chacham and tzaddik, Reb Moshe Lefkovitz, and they built a home of Torah and yiras Shamayim, with children following their good ways.

Some years after the chasunah, she fell and broke her leg. Since then, she hasn't been able to walk again. Once, in an attempt to cure herself, she went to a specialist doctor in Manhattan. The doctor who checked the X-rays didn't understand why she came to him. He said, "That you walked until now was a great miracle. According to nature, it was impossible for you ever to walk."

The family replied, "Until now, she walked due to the great Professor Reb Shimon Bar Yochai." As Chazal say, כדאי ר' שמעון בר יוחאי לסמוך עליו בשעת הדחק, which can be explained (*b'derech tzachus*), one can לסמוך, lean on and be supported by Reb Shimon Bar Yochai, בשעת הדחק, when there is an emergency, and one can't walk in his own.

Everyone roared joyously, and they recited the *brachah* ²¹ *מחיה המתים*.

6) Daven for Salvations for Klal Yisrael

The Tzvi LaTzaddik of Bluzhev *zt'l* said, "We can't know when the *geulah sheleimah* will be, but I think it will be on Lag b'Omer, on Reb Shimon's day because it is a very pure day, a day of salvation."

When the Bas Ayin moved to Eretz Yisrael, Rebbe Mordechai Chernobler *zt'l* wrote to him, "Pour your eyes out before Reb Shimon. If I could go to Eretz Yisrael, I would go to Reb Shimon's grave and storm the heavens until Moshiach comes."

At his father's *yahrtzeit*, the Minchas Elazar of Munkacz *zt'l* would sing *בר יוחאי* at his father's grave. This is because his father, the "*Darkei Teshuvah*," wrote three *sefarim* on *Tikunei Zohar*, and *Tikunei Zohar* was written by Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

One year after singing *בר יוחאי*, the Minchas Elazar discussed the words of the final phrase, *אשרי העם הם לומדיך*, "Fortunate is the nation *who teach you*." He asked why it doesn't say *לומדי תורתך*, "who learn your Torah," or *לומדי ספריך*, "who learn your *sefarim*." Why does it state *הם לומדיך* that they teach

Reb Shimon? What do they teach Reb Shimon?

The answer is that the *tzaddikim* in their grave often don't know about the hardships that the Jewish nation is going through. When one comes to a *tzaddik's* grave, *הם לימדיך*, they teach the *tzaddik* about the problems we experience so that the *tzaddik* can daven for Klal Yisrael.

After explaining this, the Minchas Elazar fell on his father's grave and told his father about the many *gezeiros* and hardships of his time.

Reb Shimon's Salvations

Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura *zt'l* writes in a letter (written in Eretz Yisrael and sent to Italy), "On the eighteenth of Iyar, the day of his [Reb Shimon's] *yahrtzeit*, people from all around Meron go to Meron and light bonfires... Many barren bear children, the ill are healed, because of the vows they take on at that place."²²

In this letter, Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura mentions that the miracles come from the vows that people make in Meron. The vows refer to the good *kabbalos* (such as giving *tzedakah* or taking on a good practice) that people accept on themselves when they are in Meron, on Lag

21. Shaar Yissaschar writes that *שמעון בן יוחאי* is *gematriya* *מחיה המתים*.

The Minchas Elazar *zt'l* opposed the Zionist movement, which earned him some enemies. Once, as he was walking to Meron, he received a note that read, "If you dare go to Meron, you will be killed there." The Minchas Elazar said to Reb Asher Zelig Margolis *zt'l* and to his *gabbai*, Reb Chaim Ber, who were walking with him, "We are going to Reb Shimon. The *malach hamaves* is powerless there."

22. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim *zt'l* said that even the best lawyer cannot help a person if the person doesn't provide him with all the details of the case. Similarly, Reb Shimon bar Yochai will daven and plead for us in heaven, and he promised that he can redeem everyone from punishment. But our part is to express before him our needs so he will know what to daven for.

The Gemara Sotah (14a: see Haga'as HaBach 1) teaches, "Why is Moshe's gravesite concealed? It is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu knew that He would one day destroy the Beis HaMikdash and send Bnei Yisrael into galus. Perhaps the Yidden would go to Moshe's kever, cry, plead, and say, 'Moshe Rabbeinu, stand up and daven for us and annul the *gezeirah*,' because *tzaddikim* are beloved after their passing more than when they were alive." This source teaches us the greatness of *tzaddikim* and the extraordinary merit to daven at their grave. This helps us understand the wonderful salvations we can attain when we go to Reb Shimon's kever, especially on Lag b'Omer.

b'Omer. It is sufficient to accept the kabbalah on oneself, *bli neder*.²³

Also, when Reb Shimon lived, he brought many salvations.

The *Zohar* (*Rus* 104) says that there was an epidemic in Lud. People took Reb Shimon around the city so he could see their suffering with his own eyes.

Reb Shimon said, "How can it be that I'm in this city, and there's a plague? I decree that the plague should stop!"

A *bas kol* came forth and said to the מלאכי הבלה (damaging angels), "You must leave this city. Reb Shimon bar Yochai is here. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decrees in heaven, and Reb Shimon annuls the decrees on earth."

In another location, the *Zohar* says that the world suddenly became dark. Reb Shimon bar Yochai told his son, Reb Elazar, "Come with me, and we will see what Hakadosh Baruch Hu is planning to do to the world."

They found a *malach*, tall like a high mountain, with thirty flames of fire coming out of its mouth. Reb Shimon asked the *malach* what it was planning to do. The *malach* replied, "It states (*Bereishis* 18:18) ואברהם והייתה, and הייתה is *gematriya* thirty. This means that in every generation, there must be at least thirty tzaddikim like Avraham Avinu. But now, there aren't thirty tzaddikim in the world like Avraham, so Hashem sent me to destroy the world."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai said to the *malach*, "Go to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and tell Him that Yochai's son is in the world."

The *malach* went to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and said, "Ribono Shel Olam, You know what Reb Shimon bar Yochai told me to tell You."

Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "Go and destroy the entire world, and don't pay attention to what Yochai's son says."

The angel returned, ready to fulfill the mission Hashem sent him to do. Reb Shimon

23. Year 5779, in Meron, after saying Tehillim and tefillos, someone made a kabbalah that he would study an entire volume of *Zohar* (edition Masuk m'Dvash, 720 pages) before the following year, Lag b'Omer. (He told himself that he would try to understand the easier (נלה) sections of the *Zohar* and just read the kabbalah sections.) This person had many debts, but that year (after he had gone through half the *Zohar*), money poured in from an unexpected source. He was able to cover his debts, and there was even money left over.

This is because when one makes a kabbalah, it creates a connection with Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and he becomes a vessel for the blessings.

We received the following letter:

"I want to tell my personal story, although it is very difficult for me to do so. I am a chassidishe yungerman. I work half a day and learn in kollel the other half. A couple of years ago, at the workplace, I had very difficult tests in kedushah... I felt I was at the entrance of Gehinnom, about to fall in. On Lag b'Omer, 5779, I traveled to Meron. I felt empty, without yiras Shamayim, but I knew Reb Shimon is for everyone, even for people like me.

"In Meron, I heard divrei Torah about the importance of making a kabbalah tova. At that moment, I made a kabbalah that until Rosh Hashanah, I would distance myself from the difficult test at the workplace. I did so, and after Rosh Hashanah, I continued to be cautious. Now, two years later, I can say that it wasn't easy; there were tests, but I kept strong all this time. And I just realized something interesting. My parnassah is always tight, but the last time I had to borrow money was before Lag b'Omer of 5779! From the time I made the kabbalah, I never had to borrow another penny. Also, in Shevat 5780, exactly nine months after Lag b'Omer, my wife gave birth to a healthy girl, and it was a natural birth, contrary to all the doctors' predictions. I am certain that Hashem has helped me in other ways, too, in the merit of my kabbalah tova, only I don't recognize them all."

bar Yochai saw the *malach* and said, "If you don't leave, I will decree that you will never return to your place in heaven. I will send you to a forsaken place. Therefore, listen to what I tell you. Go to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and say, 'Even if there aren't thirty tzaddikim in the world, twenty tzaddikim are also sufficient to save the world, as Hashem told Avraham (Bereishis 18:31), לֹא אֲשַׁחֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים, 'I will not destroy on account of the twenty tzaddikim.' And even if there are only ten tzaddikim, that is also enough to protect the world from destruction because Hashem said (Bereishis 18:32), לֹא אֲשַׁחֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרָה, 'I will not destroy on account of the ten.' And even if there are only two tzaddikim in the world - Reb Elazar and me - it is also sufficient... And if there is only one tzaddik in the world, it is also enough, as it states, צְדִיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם, a tzaddik is the foundation of the world."

At that moment, a *bas kol* came forth from heaven and said, "Reb Shimon, fortunate is your lot. Hakadosh Baruch Hu places His decrees in heaven, and you annul them from the earth. About you it is written (Tehillim 145:19), רְצוֹן יִרְאוּ יְעֹשֶׂה, 'The will of those who fear Him, He will do.'²⁴

The *yeshuos* we receive in Reb Shimon's merit are forever. When Yaakov Avinu came to Mitzrayim, the famine years in Mitzrayim ended. What happened after Yaakov Avinu

was *niftar*? There are two opinions in the *Sifri* (end of *Eikev*). According to one opinion, after Yaakov Avinu's *petirah*, the famine returned. Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "This isn't a kiddush Hashem. The words of tzaddikim are eternal. They don't cease after they die. The bounty that comes from a tzaddik remains forever."

Therefore, the *yeshuos* we receive on this day will remain with us forever.²⁵

Customs on Lag b'Omer

1] Bonfire

The *sefer* מסע מירון describes the *hadlakah* in Meron (תרט"ח/1888): "Everyone buys olive oil and pours it in honor of the *tana*. The people who light the bonfire come forward amidst joy and excitement. They light a towel soaked in oil and throw it into the bowl of oil. Everyone stands by, their eyes watch as they wait for the bonfire. When the first flames burst forth, everyone rejoices. The sound of their happiness is so loud, I have never heard anything like it. I never saw joy like this one. The people of Eretz Yisrael say the *neshamah* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai is there at this *hadlakah*. At this time, I took out the names of my friends and family... and I davened for them that the merit of the holy

24. It is written in the *sefer* מסע מירון that in Cheshvan 1761/תקכ"ב, there was an earthquake in Tzefas and Meron, and many Arabs, with their wives and children, ran to the building over Reb Shimon's grave for protection, but the door was locked. They shouted, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! We heard about your greatness from our fathers and witnessed it with our eyes. Open your doors." Miraculously, the doors opened, and they went inside. Reb Shimon became even more revered by them at that time.

A month later, on the 6th of Kislev, there was a second earthquake. Yidden and *lehavdil* goyim ran to Reb Shimon's grave. They found the building jumping up and down. The dome on the roof split in two. They became terrified. They shouted, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! If this is happening to your building, what will happen to us?" Finally, after half an hour, the earthquake subsided, and the building sat firmly in place. They went inside to inspect the damage, but there wasn't any. The dome merged, and there was no sign of any scratches or damage.

25. Reb Moshe Rozvadover zt'l (a grandson of the Ropshitzer Rav zt'l) would tell people to come to him on Lag b'Omer, for it is a day for tefillos and salvations. He said that it is hinted in the pasuk (Tehillim 84:3) לְבִי וּבִשְׂרִי לְבִי וּבִשְׂרִי, "My heart and my flesh praise the living G-d." לְבִי represents ל"ב בעומר, the 32nd day of the omer. And then comes Lag b'Omer with the merit of וּבִשְׂרִי, roshei teivos of בְּרִי יוֹחָי, and then וּבִשְׂרִי, we will praise Hashem for the salvations we receive on this day.

tana should protect them, that they should have *hatzlachah* with *gashmiyos* and *ruchniyos*."

The Sadigura Rebbe *zt'l* spoke about the specialness of the *hadlakah* on the roof of the *tzion*. He said 80,000 *neshamos* get their *tikun* at this time.

Some *tzaddikim* throw clothing into the fire in Meron to increase the light and the joy of the day.

Some *gedolim* maintained that this is *baal tashchis* (because it is forbidden to waste money and destroy clothing). However, Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l*, the Rav of Tzfas, wrote a *sefer* "*K'vod Melachim*" on this subject, proving that it is permitted to burn clothing, and he writes that the Or HaChaim HaKadosh *zt'l* and other *tzaddikim* would do so.

Some throw their *yarmulke* into the fire. My father *zy'a* and my grandfather, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* had this custom.²⁶

The *Zohar* (*Idra Zuta* 291:) tells that on the final day of Reb Shimon's life, he revealed to his students the holy secrets of *kabbalah*. For as long as he taught, the sun didn't set. The *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Lag b'Omer* 6) writes that this explains the custom of lighting candles²⁷

and bonfires on Lag b'Omer. It is in commemoration of the sun that continued to shine on the final day of Reb Shimon bar Yochai's life.

2] *Chalakeh* (haircut)

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "The Arizal came to Meron [on Lag b'Omer] with his young child and entire family, and cut *peyos* for his son there, as the custom is known. He made it a day of celebration."

The *Mishnas Chassidim* writes, "If you live in Eretz Yisrael, go and celebrate at Reb Shimon's grave and be very happy there. Certainly, do so if you have a *chalakeh* child..."²⁸

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explains that Reb Shimon bar Yochai promised *כי לא יעזוב* that the Torah would never be forgotten. The *mesorah* of Yiddishkeit will be passed down from father to son, from generation to generation. The *peyos* are a sign of Yiddishkeit. Therefore, there's a custom to give *peyos* to a child at Reb Shimon's grave, for he promised that the chain of Torah and *yiras Shamayim* would continue eternally.

26. A man came to Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov *zy'a* and told him that his son was acting improperly and that he kept taking off his *yarmulke*. Rebbe Dovid Biderman advised him to bring the boy to Meron on Lag b'Omer.

The father followed this counsel, but it was a very embarrassing trip for him. The child kept throwing off his *yarmulke*, and at every stop, they had to look for him before continuing on their way because he kept wandering off.

In Meron, they lit the fire, and the Rebbe took the boy's *yarmulke* and threw it into the fire. The boy shouted, "My *yarmulke*! My *yarmulke*!" Before that, he was constantly throwing off his *yarmulke*, and now he wanted it!

27. In the *beis medresh* of Reb Aharon of Belz *zt'l* on Lag b'Omer, many candles were lit on the tables and the windowsills. (This was done in Belz only on Lag b'Omer and on the 7th of Adar.)

28. The three-year-old son of someone I know was hit by a car before Pesach, 5766. After Pesach, the hospital sent the unconscious child to a nursing facility. They said there was nothing they could do to heal him. Two weeks before Lag b'Omer, the parents went to Meron and proclaimed before Reb Shimon's holy *tzion*, "We wanted to bring our son here on Lag b'Omer for his *chalakeh*". They davened that they should merit to do that. Indeed, that year on Lag b'Omer, the boy was in Meron, walking on his two feet, and had his *chalakeh* there.

I heard another explanation from the Chernobler Rebbe *shlita*:

The Gemara (*Me'illa* 17.) tells us that the government forbade the Yidden to keep Shabbos and perform a *bris milah*. The Tana Reb Reuven Istrobuli dressed himself in non-Jewish clothes and styled his hair in a non-Jewish way (long hair in the back and no hair in the front) so the government officials would think he was one of them. Sitting with the politicians, he told them that when the Jewish people keep Shabbos, they earn less money, and when they have a *bris milah*, they become weaker. He explained to them that they would be better off by allowing the Jewish people to perform these mitzvos. He said, "Do you want your enemies to be wealthy or poor, strong or weak?"

They agreed with him and annulled the decrees.

Sometime later, they realized that Reb Reuven Istrobuli was a Yid, and that he tricked them, and they reinstated those two *gezeiros*.

The *chachamim* sent Reb Shimon bar Yochai to the king. They chose Reb Shimon specifically because "many miracles happen to him," and they hoped he would be able to annul the harsh decrees.

A demon (שד) named Ben Temalyon met Reb Shimon and offered his assistance. The demon went ahead of Reb Shimon and caused the king's daughter immense pain. When Reb Shimon arrived, he said, "Ben Temalyon, leave!", and it did.

The king, thankful to Reb Shimon for healing his daughter, brought him into the treasury room and said, "Take whatever you want."

Reb Shimon found the documents of the decrees and tore up the papers.

In this story, Reb Reuven Istrobuli helped the nation by dressing as a gentile, but Reb Shimon saved the nation, appearing like a Yid.

One of the purposes of a Jewish haircut is so that it should be noticeable that we are Yidden. We have the custom to make the *chalah* in Meron, at Reb Shimon's *kever*, because Reb Shimon was able to annul the harsh decrees while dressing like a Yid.

3] The Songs

On Lag b'Omer, it is also customary to sing *בר יוחאי*. Reb Naftali Katz *zt'l* writes (*Siddur Beis Rachel*) that singing this song purifies the *neshamah*, even for those who don't know the secrets of it.

When we sing songs of praise for Reb Shimon bar Yochai (such as *בר יוחאי*, and *ואמרתם בה לחי*, written by the Ben Ish Chai *zt'l*, and so on), we are inspired by Reb Shimon's greatness, and we seek to emulate his ways. We see the levels Reb Shimon reached and all the good he accomplished for Klal Yisrael, and we realize that if we dedicate ourselves to *avodas Hashem*, we can also achieve great things in our lifetime.

We sing *בר יוחאי*, calling Reb Shimon "The son of Yochai." Perhaps this is because we want to remind ourselves that Reb Shimon was a human being, born to human parents, and nevertheless, he reached such high levels. This reminds us that if we devote ourselves to Hashem's service, we too can achieve very high levels.

It states (Daniel 4:10) *עיר וקדיש משמיא אנחית*, "A holy malach came down from heaven," and the *roshei teivos* are *שמעון*. This means Reb Shimon was like a malach. We don't expect to become a malach and reach Reb Shimon's high levels. Nevertheless, we should seek to reach the level of perfection that we can attain.

4] Seudah

Another aspect of the Lag b'Omer celebration is making a *seudah* in honor of this special day, and in honor of Reb Shimon.

The Maharil (החדשות ק"ד) calls this meal a *seudas mitzvah*. He discusses a person who makes a *neder* that he won't eat outside his

home unless it is a *seudas mitzvah*. The Maharil writes, "The meal at a *bris milah*, *pidyon haben*, *siyum mesechta* are all *seudos mitzvah*. Chazal say, 'Whenever *talmidei chachamim* are at a meal, it is like they are enjoying the light of the *Shechinah*.' Therefore, the Lag b'Omer meal is also considered a *seudas mitzvah*."²⁹

Surprisingly, we eat on this day. Generally, a *yahrzeit* is a fast day. For example, Moshe Rabbeinu's *yahrtzeit* (the seventh of Adar) is called "*taanis tzaddikim*". Lag b'Omer is also a *yahrzeit*, so why is it celebrated with eating and drinking?

We can answer as follows:

Chazal tell us that when Moshe Rabbeinu was *niftar*, many halachos of the Torah were forgotten. In contrast, when Reb Shimon bar Yochai was *niftar*, many secrets of the Torah were revealed. This may explain why the 7th of Adar is a fast day, while Lag b'Omer is a day of celebration.

The Taamei HaMinhagim offers another explanation:

The *Zohar* tells us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai annulled harsh decrees with joy (unlike other *tzaddikim* who annul harsh decrees through fasting and affliction). Therefore, on Reb Shimon's *yahrtzeit*, we eat and celebrate. This is how we abolish harsh decrees on this day.

The *Zohar* (*Shemos* 15.) teaches: Once, Reb Shimon was teaching secrets of the Torah,

and Reb Elazar was near him – their faces shone like the sun. They studied for two days straight without eating or drinking. They didn't know whether it was day or night. When they finished, Reb Shimon said the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 34:28), ויהי שם עם ה' ארבעים יום, "Moshe remained there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights – he did not eat bread nor drink water."

When Rebbe heard this story, he was astounded. Rebbe's father, Reb Shimon ben Gamliel, told him, "My son, don't be so surprised. Reb Shimon was a lion, and so was his son. Not a regular lion, rather אריה שאג מי לא ירא, 'A lion has roared; who will not fear?' (*Amos* 3:8) Even the upper worlds are afraid of them; certainly, we should be afraid. Reb Shimon never declared a fast to attain his requests. He decreed what should be, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu acquiesced. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed, and he annulled it."

5] Meron

The Remak and the Arizal would go to Meron for Lag b'Omer, and this custom was practiced before that era, too.

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "Klal Yisrael is accustomed to go to the *kevarim* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai and Reb Elazar on Lag b'Omer, and they eat and rejoice there. My rebbe [the Arizal] once went there on Lag b'Omer with his entire family and remained there for three days."

²⁹ According to halachah, we are obligated to say the tefillah נהם once a year, on Minchah of Tisha b'Av, but Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim *zy'a* (a student of the Arizal) would say נהם every day – in *Shemonah Esrei* and *birchas hamazon* – as he was always mourning the Churban Beis HaMikdash and davening for its rebuilding. One year, he was in Meron for Lag b'Omer, and he said נהם in *birchas hamazon*, as he always did. Suddenly, the Arizal saw a vision of Reb Shimon bar Yochai standing over his grave, as though he were alive. Reb Shimon told the Arizal, "Ask your student, Reb Avraham Bruchim, why he said נהם on the day of my great joy."

The Arizal rebuked Reb Avraham for saying נהם. Lag b'Omer is a time for celebration, not for mourning.

Unfortunately, Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim was *niftar* within a month. (Reb Chaim Vital, in *Shaar HaKavonos*, writes this story.)

We learn from this story how careful we must be to be happy on Lag b'Omer.

One year, the Arizal danced with his students in Meron on Lag b'Omer. A tall, elderly man was also there, dancing with his own students. At one point, the elderly man danced with the Chareidim.

Suddenly, the Arizal grabbed the hands of this elderly man, and they danced together for a long time. Then, the Arizal danced with the Chareidim.

The Arizal's students were surprised to see the Arizal dance with the Chareidim, just the two of them, because they thought the Chareidim was a simple person.³⁰

The students asked the Arizal, "It is Torah, so we have a right to ask. Why did you dance with Reb Elazar Ezkari (the Chareidim)? You are a gadol b'Yisrael, and Reb Elazar is a simple person. We don't ask why you danced with the elderly man because he is probably a great scholar, but why did you dance with Reb Elazar Ezkari?"

The Ari replied, "I saw Reb Shimon bar Yochai dance with Reb Elazar Ezkari, so why shouldn't I?"

The students understood three things: The elderly person was Reb Shimon bar

Yochai, the students who danced with him were Reb Shimon's students, and they discovered the exalted stature of Reb Alazar Ezkari, later known as "The Chareidim" after the sefer he authored.³¹

Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l* tells about the time Reb Chaim ben Atar, the Or HaChaim HaKodesh, came to Meron for Lag b'Omer: "When he reached the bottom of the mountain of Meron, he got off his donkey and crawled up the mountain on his hands and knees, and grunted like an animal the entire way. He shouted, 'How can the lowly me enter this awesome place where Hakadosh Baruch Hu, all the angels, and souls of tzaddikim are present?!' And at the *hillulah*, he was very happy."³²

Lag B'Omer Everywhere

The Gemara (Pesachim 51:) states, *כדאי ר' שמעון*, "כדאי ר' שמעון, לשמוך עליו בפניו ושלח בפניו", "Reb Shimon is worthy, and we can rely on him, both before him and both not before him." The Nesivos Shalom of Slonim *zt'l* said that this hints that we can rely on Reb Shimon's merits even if we can't travel to Meron.³³

30. The Chareidim was written by Reb Elazar Ezkari, 1533-1600, a descendant of those expelled from Spain. At first, people didn't recognize his greatness. They considered him a simple shamesh in the beis medresh.

Tzaddikim describe the wondrous beis medresh of the Arizal in Tzefas: The Arizal was the rebbe, the Beis Yosef was the rav, the Alshich HaKodesh was the magid, and Reb Elazar Azkari, the "Chareidim," was the *shamesh* of the beis medresh.

31. This story is written in Taamei HaMinhagim, quoted in the name of the Minchas Elazar *zt'l*, who heard it from the Shinover Rav *zt'l*, who heard it from reliable sources while visiting Tzefas.

32. Alef Kasav (תרפ"ד) writes, "[Reb Mendel Litman from Tzefas] told that the Or HaChaim cried the entire night of Lag b'Omer at the time of the hadlakah. He stood from a distance, saying, 'How can I approach this holy place, where Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and all tzaddikim are present?!'"

33. In תשע"ט, I received a letter from someone who was unable to be in Meron due to a family member's illness. "On Shabbos, I sang Bar Yochai together with Klal Yisrael, and on Lag b'Omer, I remembered what I read in Be'er HaParashah (Torah Wellsprings), that in Reb Shimon's merit, salvations can come from a distance. So, I sat near a window, imagined I was in Meron, and said the fourth and fifth sefer of Tehillim. Soon after Lag b'Omer, I spoke with an asken, who recommended another doctor. I told him that we had already visited many experts and doctors, but we would try once more. The doctor came up with a new plan, and baruch Hashem, the situation is improving, and the healing is underway. I am certain that it was in the merit of the Tehillim we said on Lag b'Omer."

Chasidim say, "One can be close and far, and one can be far and close." This means a chasid can be physically distant from his Rebbe, but at the same time, he can be very close because his heart and desire are to be with the Rebbe. Also, one can be close, but if he doesn't want to be there, he is far away. So, for those who want to be in Meron but can't travel there, they must know that they are close. It is like they are in Meron.

We can compare it to a house next to a power plant, but no wires connect the house to the plant. Despite its proximity to the power plant, the house remains dark.

Simultaneously, there are homes very distant from the plant, and they receive electricity. This is because the cables connect their homes to the generating plant. More important than being near it is to be connected to it. If one attaches himself to Reb Shimon, even from a distance, it will be as if he is close, in Meron, and he will merit salvations *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*.³⁴

Chazal (*Kiddushin* 40.) say, חשב אדם לעשות מצוה, ונאנס ולא עשה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשה, "If a person wants to do a mitzvah, but circumstances prevent him from doing it, the *pasuk* gives him credit as if he performed

34. There is a segulah for those who need a salvation to bear children to say, "If I have a child, I will name him Shimon after Reb Shimon bar Yochai." Generally, people make this promise at Reb Shimon's tzion. Someone who didn't have children for many years told us he made this promise in Monroe, New York, on Lag b'Omer. A year later, he had a son.

There's a Yid from America who travels annually to Eretz Yisrael for Lag b'Omer. One year, in תשנ"ג, he was in prison, *rachmana litzlan*, and couldn't go. His son comforted him, "You can't go to Reb Shimon, but I'm certain that Reb Shimon will come to you."

The father didn't know what his son was talking about.

On Lag b'Omer, a fire broke out in prison. The Jewish prisoners took advantage of the fire and danced "Bar Yochai..." The next day, due to the fire, they were released. They saw that although they couldn't go to Reb Shimon, Reb Shimon came to them.

We received a letter that gives us a glimpse into the miracles that occur on Lag b'Omer. It happened year 5777. We quote: "My brother was sitting in a car, in the front seat, next to the driver. They were driving from France to Switzerland. The car fell off a cliff, and they couldn't get out of the crushed vehicle. Baruch Hashem, first responders (police, firefighters, and paramedics) arrived and sawed open the side of the car so they could get out.

"My brother was hospitalized in critical condition in France. When his condition stabilized, he was transferred to a hospital in Switzerland so that he could be near our family.

"For Pesach, he came to visit family members in Eretz Yisrael. They were happy to see him move about, albeit with crutches, because, initially, the doctors predicted that he would lose his legs r'l.

"My brother remained in Eretz Yisrael for some weeks, and on Lag b'Omer, the family brought him to the hadlakah in the Batei Orenstein neighborhood in Yerushalayim. The elder chasidim lit a large fire, and people were dancing to שמעון בר יוחי "לכבוד התנא אלקי ר' שמעון בר יוחי." My brother stood next to me, supported by me and his crutches. Suddenly, he tells me, 'I am going to throw my crutches into the fire.' I said, 'Chas v'Shalom! Don't do that.' But my brother courageously and mightily threw one of the crutches into the fire. The music stopped because the musicians understood that something amazing was happening. Then, my brother threw the second crutch into the fire and began walking, unassisted. To this day, he can walk on his own. This is the miracle that happened to him on Lag b'Omer." Reb Shimon's merit and his hilulah are wherever you are in the world.

When people would tell Rebbe Aharon of Belz zt'l that they were traveling to Meron for Lag b'Omer, he would ask them to daven for him there. Once, someone told him that he tried to be in Meron for Lag b'Omer, but it didn't work out. The Belzer Rav replied, "Reb Shimon's kedushah is everywhere!"

the mitzvah." The same can be said about going to Meron on Lag b'Omer. If a person wants to go, but circumstances prevent him from getting there, it will be considered as if he were there.³⁵

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l writes in his sefer, "If someone can't go to Meron on Lag b'Omer, or someone lives in *chutz l'aretz*, he should study the sefer "מאמרי רשב" (a collection of lessons from Reb Shimon bar Yochai) and should be happy with Reb Shimon's hillulah, and he too will have salvation."

The Meor Einayim (Shabbos) tells us that learning the lessons of a tzaddik is the same as being at his grave.

Some have the custom on Lag b'Omer to study the praises of Reb Shimon bar Yochai with a minyan. Reb Shimon said (Gittin 67) שנו מדותי, "Study my *divrei Torah*." Reb Asher Zelig Margolis writes that Reb Shimon is the only Tana who said explicitly that he wants people to study his *divrei Torah*. This is because Reb Shimon can bring salvation, protection, and blessings to Bnei Yisrael in all generations, so he encourages us to study his *divrei Torah*. In this merit, he helps Bnei Yisrael.

May we all be zocheh to tap into the *hashpaos* and *kedushah* of this incredible day!

35. Someone told me that he was in Meron with his son as preparation for his son's bar mitzvah. He wanted to learn with his son the portions of Zohar, the sections that discuss bar mitzvah, but he didn't know where it was written. So instead, he began saying Tehillim. Then his son tapped him on his arm and said, "Look at this. I just saw this, and it looks interesting." It was a sefer quoting the Zohar, sections related to a bar mitzvah. The father said that he realized that when one wants to study Reb Shimon's lessons, Hashem helps him do so.