

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
Rabbi Elimelech
Biderman
Shlita*

Behar

Lag B'Omer



Torah WELLSPRINGS

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Torah Wellsprings - Behar

Shemittah: Belief in Creation

The parashah begins (25:1), וידבר ה' אל משה, בהר סיני "Hashem spoke with Moshe at Har Sinai..." The Torah goes on to teach the laws of Shemittah. Rashi asks, מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר, why does the Torah specifically mention that the mitzvah of *shemittah* was given at Har Sinai? והלא כל המצוות נאמרו מסיני, "Weren't all of the mitzvos said at Sinai!"

We can answer Rashi's question according to the following Sefer HaChinuch. The Chinuch (mitzvah 84) writes, "The mitzvah [of *shemittah*] implants in our hearts and clarifies in our minds that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. [We demonstrate this awareness by leaving the fields fallow every seventh year.] We must uproot the thoughts of the *apikorsim*, those who deny the Torah and claim the world always existed."¹

Chazal tell us that when Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation, He opened all seven heavens, and the Yidden saw that אין עוד מלבדו, there is nothing besides Hashem. Similarly, as we explained, the purpose of *shemittah* is to teach us that Hashem created the world and that אין עוד מלבדו, there is none other than Hashem. We now understand why the Torah stresses that the mitzvah of *shemittah* was given at Har Sinai; the lessons are similar.

The Sfas Emes offers another reason why the Torah tells us that *shemittah* was given at Har Sinai, to teach us that when Yidden keep *shemittah*, they become pure and holy,

just as when they stood at Har Sinai. When the Yidden stood at Har Sinai to receive the Torah, they became pure like *malachim*, as it states (*Tehillim* 82:6), אני אמרתי אלקים אתם, "I said you are angels...." When they sinned with the *egel* and fell from that high level. Nevertheless, there are times when we become like *malachim*. On Shabbos, we are like the *malachim* because we don't work. Also, during the *shemittah* year, we resemble *malachim* because we don't work the land. We become pure like *malachim* who aren't engaged in the *gashmiyos* of this world.

After forty-nine years (seven *shemitos*) comes the year of *yovel*. The halachos of *yovel* are similar to *shemittah*. We don't work the land in *yovel*, and the primary purpose of *yovel* is to remind us that Hashem created the world.

One of the unique halachos of *yovel* is that all fields sold during the forty-nine-year period are returned to their original owners. As it states (25:10), ושבבתם איש אל אחוזתו, "Each man will return to his property." Chazal (*Toras Kohanim*) teach, אל אחוזתו הוא שב ואין שב לשררה, "He returns to his portion of land, but he doesn't return to his power and control that he once had."

The Daas Sofer explains that after keeping *shemittah* and *yovel*, one becomes aware that Hashem is the Creator and the ruler of the land. Perhaps previously, he considered himself wealthy and powerful, but now he humbly realizes that everything he owns comes from Hashem. This is the meaning of the Chazal אל אחוזתו הוא שב ואין שב לשררה שבידו, "He returns to his property but not to the

1. The punishment for transgressing the laws of *shemittah* is *galus* (see Rashi 26:35, and Avos 5:9). Why is transgressing *shemittah* punished so severely?

Reb Henoch of Alexander zt'l (*Chashavah l'Tovah* ז"ה אה) explains that the purpose of the *shemittah* year is to remind us that Hashem created the world. *Chalilah*, if we don't keep *shemittah*, we need another reminder. Therefore, Hashem sends us to *galus*, revealing that the world is His. He created our land, and He can take it away from us.

control and power that he once had because now he humbly recognizes that everything is Hashem's.

Hefker

The Torah (25:6) says, והיתה שבת הארץ לכם, לאכלה, לך ולעבדך ולאמתך ולתושבים הגרים עמך, "You may eat from the produce that grows in the seventh year; you, your slaves, maidservants, workers, and the people who live with you in your land." Rashi explains, הכל יהיה שוין בה, "everyone is equal in it." This means no one can act like an owner of the crops. They are *hefker*. Whoever wants can come into the field and pick some fruit to eat.

The Chinuch (Mitzvah 84) writes, "Hashem commanded us to be *mafkir* whatever grows that year...so that people should remember that when the field yields produce...it isn't the earth that has the power to produce fruit. Rather, there is a Master over the earth and the people. And when He wants, He commands us to be *mafkir* the field."

Most people think the earth has the energy to bring forth produce. They believe nature has strength, *chalilah*. The Chinuch clarifies that without Hashem's help and Hashem's decree, nothing would grow. A clod of earth cannot produce anything on its own. The mitzvah to be *mafkir* the produce helps us remember that it didn't happen on its own, and therefore, Hashem is the Creator of the produce, and we must follow His rules.

And the truth is that no rational explanation exists to explain how food grows from the earth. Think about it: A wheat kernel rots in the ground, and then, without any ingredients other than rain and sunlight, the seed grows and develops. It becomes a tall wheat stalk, carrying many wheat kernels, each with the potential to produce many more wheat stalks. Isn't this wondrous? How do water, sun, and soil achieve that?

Scientists can explain several aspects of how things grow, but most of the process

remains a mystery. And even if scientists knew a hundred times more than they know today, they still wouldn't understand how things grow because it is a miracle. As the Chinuch writes, "It isn't that the earth has the strength or the *segulah* to give forth fruit. Rather, there is a Master over the earth..."

Therefore, when you grab a juicy fruit, and you are about to recite a *borei pri ha'eitz*, or when a dish of delicious food is placed before you, realize you are staring at a miracle. Nature couldn't create this without Hashem.

But we don't recognize the miracle because we are so accustomed to seeing it.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* (וארא ד"ה ולקחתי אתכם) writes that the Yidden who left Mitzrayim knew, since their youth, that grain and fruit grow out of the earth. Therefore, when they saw the manna raining down from heaven, they couldn't contain their excitement. "Food is falling from heaven!" they shouted. "We never saw anything like it before!"

But what about the children born in the desert? They didn't consider the manna a miracle because they were accustomed to it from their youth. On the contrary, they were amazed when they entered Eretz Yisrael and saw food growing out of the earth. "Food is growing from the earth!" they shouted excitedly. "Who would imagine such a thing? How great is Your creation, Hashem!"

The Chovas HaLevavos (*Cheshbon HaNefesh* 3:23) discusses the wonders in the creation and writes, "Although you see these wonders all the time...and you know what to expect, don't let this detract from the immense wonderment you should have when you see them... People are amazed when they see new wonders that they aren't accustomed to, but much less so when they see the sun and the moon, rain falling and winds blowing, and other phenomena they are accustomed to seeing. They marvel at the wonders of creation when they see the mighty ocean with its tremendous waves, storms, and many fish [because they aren't

accustomed to these miracles]. But they aren't shocked when they see rivers and brooks flowing nonstop. There are many other examples. Therefore, my brother, think about everything Hashem created. Think about the aspects of creation that are new to you and those you are accustomed to. Don't be foolish and ignore the wonders you are accustomed to seeing. Now that you are older and your intelligence has developed, it is proper that you should think about creation as though you never saw it before. Imagine that you were blind until today, seeing these wonders for the first time... Do so, and you will appreciate the Creator's wonders... As a scholar said, 'The wise have eyes and see what fools don't.'

Chazal (*Sotah* 48:) say, "Whoever has bread in his basket and says, 'But what will I eat tomorrow?' he is *מקמני אמנה*, on a low level of *emunah*." This is because he wouldn't worry about tomorrow if he had a higher level of *emunah*. Just as Hashem helped you today, Hashem will surely help tomorrow.

Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* taught another way to read this Gemara. He says that the problem isn't that he is worried about tomorrow. The problem is why he isn't concerned about today! A person who isn't worried about *today* has low *emunah*. Although he has bread, that doesn't mean he can eat it. Nothing is guaranteed. One can't do anything without Hashem's aid and should always turn to Hashem to help him.

"What Will We Eat"

The Torah writes (25:20), *וכי תאמרו מה נאכל*, "If you will ask what we will eat in the seventh year?" What will we eat if we don't work in the field?

I heard that this question is hinted at in the *pasuk* (*Eichah* 3:22), *תמונו... כי לא חסדי ה'*, because *וכי תאמר מה נאכל* is *roshei teivos* for *תמונו*. So, *לא חסדי ה'* means that we don't ask the question *מה נאכל*, "What will we eat?" And when we don't ask that question, *חסדי ה'*, we will receive Hashem's kindness.

This is because we are better off when we don't ask this question; instead, we trust that somehow, Hashem will support us. The Torah tells us that if people ask, "What will we eat?" *וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה השישית*, "I will command my blessings on the sixth year," and the crops of the sixth year will last for the sixth, seventh, and even for the eighth year. Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli *zt'l* (quoted in Noam Elimelech) explains that if we ask the question, Hashem will have to make a new creation, *וצויתי את ברכתי*, a new origin for our *parnassah*. But if one doesn't ask, the bounty will come down through its original channel and path that Hashem prepared for him.

The Noam Elimelech quotes his brother, Rebbe Zusha:

"When Hashem created the world, He created channels to send down the bounty, to fill people's needs. These channels remain open, and the bounty descends. However, when a person doesn't have *bitachon* due to his worries, the bounty stops, *chalilah*. Hashem then has to create a new source of bounty.

"This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, *וכי תאמרו מה נאכל*, the Torah is teaching that one should have perfect *bitachon*. He should never ask, *מה נאכל*, 'What will we eat?' because [due to his question] he is forcing Heaven to toil to make a new command for bounty... Therefore, don't ask questions; trust in Hashem with all your heart, and then the bounty will come to you always, and nothing will be lacking."

לא תונו - The Prohibition of Cheating in Business

The Torah writes (25:14), *לא תונו איש את עמיתו*, which means it is forbidden to cheat in business. For example, you can't sell something for a higher than normal price or sell something that's broken while telling the consumer that the item is in good working condition. The *pasuk* concludes (25:17), *ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלקיך כי אני ה'*, "...fear Hashem, because I am Hashem your G-d."

Why is fearing Hashem mentioned by this mitzvah?

The *pasuk* also says, **כִּי אֲנִי הוֹי"ה אֱלֹקֶיכֶם**, and **הוֹי"ה** is Hashem's name for compassion. Why is Hashem's name of compassion mentioned here?

The Maharal Tzitz zt"l (*Melo HaOmer*) explains that when Reuven cheats Shimon and takes Shimon's money wrongfully (against the rules of the Torah), it is as though Reuven is forcing Hashem to do two things: (1) Hashem has to take away from Reuven the money he earned improperly. (2) Hashem will also need to reimburse Shimon's loss.

It is determined on Rosh Hashanah how much money one will earn and how much money one will lose. That means Reuven has more money than was destined for him, and Shimon has a loss that wasn't destined on Rosh Hashanah.

The Torah writes, **וִירֵאתָ מֵאֱלֹקֶיךָ**, be afraid of Hashem. You must fear Hashem and refrain from cheating your fellow man because you don't know by which means the excess money will be taken away. Perhaps through unexpected medical expenses or government taxes (see *Bava Basra* 10). Fear Hashem and the trouble you might have to endure in getting the money back to its rightful owner.

Someone once stole one hundred dollars. The next day, he slipped and broke his foot, and the doctor charged him a hundred dollars. The patient thought to himself, "It's a good thing I stole a hundred dollars yesterday. Now I can pay this bill easily." He doesn't know that if he hadn't stolen the hundred dollars, he wouldn't have fallen and broken his foot. He broke his foot so as

not to exceed the quota that was set for him on Rosh Hashanah.²

The Torah adds, **אֲנִי הוֹי"ה אֱלֹקֶיכֶם**. This means Hashem's attribute of **הוֹי"ה**, compassion, will also be employed because Hashem will compassionately return to Shimon the money that he lost.

The Maharal Tzitz adds:

Let's say you know that Reuven stole money or did other corrupt deeds to attain the money of others. And you know that Hashem will certainly take all that money away from him, as it is money that wasn't destined for Reuven on Rosh Hashanah. So, you figure you might as well quicken the process of lessening Reuven's money, and you cheat him in business (*אונאת ממון*).

To counter that logic, the Torah writes, **אֲנִי הוֹי"ה אֱלֹקֶיכֶם**, Hashem says: "Leave these matters up to me. It isn't your responsibility to help remove someone's extra money. Let Hashem take care of that."

Chesed

In Parashas Behar, the Torah commands us (25:35) **וְכִי יִמּוֹךְ אֶחָיֶךָ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ**, "If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him."

The mitzvah of **וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ** is to help your fellow man *before* he becomes poor. Rashi explains, "Do not allow him to fall and collapse altogether because it can be difficult to pick him up again." Lend him money when he begins to fall, when things are difficult for him because that will help him start or improve his business and become self-sufficient. This is better than letting him become poor and only then help him

2. Chazal (*Avos* 2:7) say, **מְרַבֵּה נִכְסִים מְרַבֵּה דַאגָּה**, "When one increases his assets, his worries increase." The Ksav Sofer zt"l explains that this refers to a person who tries very hard to earn more money than that was decreed for him on Rosh Hashanah. He takes on night jobs, works hard, etc. Even if he succeeds and earns extra money, it will be taken away. The Mishnah teaches, **מְרַבֵּה נִכְסִים**, if he works very hard to earn more money, **מְרַבֵּה דַאגָּה**, he will end up with many worries. He might need to go to the doctor, or encounter other unexpected expenses, so he won't end up with more money than is coming to him.

because, at that point, it will be harder to reestablish himself.

Rashi writes, "To what can this be compared? To a load on a donkey. While it is still on the donkey, one person can grasp it and hold it in place. Once it falls to the ground, however, even five people cannot pick it up."

The Alshich HaKadesh explains this lesson with a mashal:

The street is full of mud, but Reuven is in shape and has no trouble walking. Reuven sees someone who is having difficulty keeping his balance. A man calls out to Reuven, "Give the man a hand and help him walk."

Reuven replies, "He is still walking; he hasn't fallen yet. I will leave him be. If he falls, I will help him."

It does not take long and the man indeed slips and falls into the mud and becomes covered with dirt from head to toe. He is in pain from the fall, and his clothes will never

be spotless again. Reuven lifts him up and washes him and his clothing, but he doesn't deserve credit for any of this. He deserves rebuke and a curse because had he cared, this could have been avoided.

This is why the Torah obligates us to support those who are falling *before* they fall.³

For those who understand the nuances of lashon hakodesh, look at these words again: (25:35) וְכִי יִמוּךְ אֶחָיִךְ וּמָטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ, "If your brother becomes destitute and his hand falters beside you, you shall support him."

It seems that it should say וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ אוֹתוֹ, "You shall support him."

The Alshich HaKadosh provides a beautiful answer. וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ means that those who help the poor receive chizuk. The Torah says that וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ when you help the poor, you are helping yourself. This is because when you do chesed for others, Hashem will perform chesed for you.⁴

3. Hashem told Avraham לֵךְ לְךָ, that he should travel, and it would be for his benefit. One way to understand this is that through his travels, Avraham will experience the difficulties and the needs of travelers and guests. This would be a benefit for Avraham because he would discover how to improve his performance of the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim.

Along these lines, the Tzror HaMor explains that the Torah discusses וְהִחֲזַקְתָּ בּוֹ, the mitzvah to aid the needy after it discusses the laws of Shemitah. During shemittah, everyone is worried about what they will eat, as the Torah writes (25:20), וְכִי תֹאמְרוּ מָה נֹאכֵל בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִת הֵן לֹא נִזְרַע וְלֹא נֹאסַף אֶת תְּבוּאָתֵנוּ, "If you should say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year? We will not sow, and we will not gather in our produce!'" It is easier to help others after you have experienced what they go through.

There's a well-known story about a baal tzedakah who collected money to help the poor buy firewood in the winter. When he solicited wealthy people, he insisted on speaking to them outside their homes in the frigid cold because he wanted them to feel the cold and understand the plight of the poor.

The same occurs in this week's parashah. After experiencing the shemitah-related worries, the Torah says that now you will understand the plight of the poor and those struggling financially.

4. When you help the poor, you are ultimately helping yourself. The following story is an example of this principle:

A newly married yungerman was looking to rent an apartment in Meron for himself and his wife for Shabbos and Lag b'Omer that was on motzei Shabbos. As a bachur, he spent most of the Lag b'Omer day in Meron and hoped to do the same this year.

He called a relative who lives in Or HaGanuz, a village near Meron, and asked him if he could stay with them for Shabbos.

The Brisker Rav zt'l once gave an envelope filled with money to his son, Reb Dovid Soloveitchik zt'l, and told him to deliver the money to a poor person. Reb Dovid replied, "I am in the midst of a sugyah. When I finish the sugyah, I will bring over the money."

The Brisker Rav told him, "Rabbanim once gathered for a meeting, and my father [Reb Chaim] was present. They began

discussing the Lodzer Rav zt'l, and someone said that the Lodzer Rav spent much time doing chesed, which is why we don't have any sefarim from him. My father [Reb Chaim] told them that he acted correctly. He explained, 'If a Yid must close the Gemara to do chesed, then even when the Gemara is closed, the Gemara is open. If one doesn't do chesed when he should, then even when the Gemara is open, it is closed.'

Lag B'Omer

Lag b'Omer is a joyous day worldwide. Tzaddikim call it "Reb Shimon's Day." It is a day of holiness, salvation, and immense joy.

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 every year. It calls out

The relative replied, "I would love to have you, but where can I put you? I have a small house with only two bedrooms and seven children. I have no place for you."

Soon, the relative from Or HaGanuz called him back and said, "My children say that I should invite you. They offered to sleep in the hallway and the kitchen..."

So, the young couple arrived in Or HaGanuz on Friday to spend Shabbos and Lag b'Omer with their cousins.

This relative from Or HaGanuz thought he was doing them a favor, but he soon discovered he was doing himself a favor.

Friday night, the couple walked forty-five minutes from Or HaGanuz to Meron, where there was zemiros at the tzion. When they arrived at Meron, they made up to meet at the gate at 1:30 a.m.

At 1:30, the husband came to the gate, but his wife wasn't there. There was a misunderstanding, and she was waiting at another entrance. It took them a half-hour until they found each other. At 2:00 a.m., they headed back to their relative's home in Or HaGanuz. When they got there, they smelled fire. The fire was burning the baby carriage, in which the baby was sleeping! Had they gotten back earlier, they would have gone to sleep without knowing that a fire was about to begin. The host's child was saved because he had guests at his home. This is וְהִצַּקְתָּ בּוֹ; when you help others, you are helping yourself. You only gain from chesed.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l once said, "An ayin hara is chasing me; I need a guest."

He understood that by doing for others, he would do himself the greatest favor.

to people and tells them 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.

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."⁵

The Gemara Shavuot (daf 34; and the discussion begins on daf ל"ג) states, ר' שמעון מ'ח'ב' ע'ל'יה ב'מ'ע'ר'ב'א. The Chasam Sofer taught this Gemara to his students on Lag b'Omer and translated it as, "In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."⁷

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l said, "Lag b'Omer is the greatest day of the year." (His son, Reb Yehoshua zt'l, immediately lowered his head and said, "Father, give me a brachah.)

Reb Moshe Rozvedover 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) ל'ב' ו'ב'ש'ר' י'ר'נ'ו א'ל א"ל ח'י "My heart and my flesh praise the living G-d." ל'ב' represents ל"ב ב'ע'ו'מ'ר, the 32nd day of the omer. And then comes Lag b'Omer with the merit of ר' ש'מ'ע'ו'ן ב'ר' י'ו'ח'א'י ו'ב'ש'ר'י, roshei teivos of י'ו'ח'א'י ו'ב'ש'ר'י, and then י'ר'נ'ו א'ל א"ל ח'י, we will praise Hashem for the salvations received on that day.

Reb Moshe Rozvedover would say that there isn't a better day in the year than Lag b'Omer. If he could, he would hold onto the sun with 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 him about Lag b'Omer, and when they emerged from the room, Reb Moshe's face shone brightly. Reb Moshe Rozvedover said he received the secret of Lag b'Omer from the Divrei Chaim of Sanz zt'l.

The Beis Aharon writes, "Whoever believes in Reb Shimon receives *chizuk* from Reb Shimon. Just as Hashem is for everyone, so is Reb Shimon for everyone, even those at a low level."

Lag B'Omer Everywhere

For many years, the peak of this celebration has been held in Meron. Unfortunately, due to the wars in Eretz Yisrael, it seems that the celebrations in Meron will be very limited this year. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Lag b'Omer is a great day wherever one is.

Someone once described Lag b'Omer in Meron to the Ruzhiner, saying, "Inside it is like Yom Kippur and outside it is like Simchas Torah," and the Ruzhiner praised this description immensely.⁸

5. When Avraham Kalisker zt'l went to the mikvah on Lag b'Omer, he would say, ה'ר'ינ'י מ'ק'ב'ל ע'ל'י ק'דו'ש'ת ה'י'ו'ם, as a preparation to receiving the holiness of Lag b'Omer.

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

7. The Chasam Sofer zt'l would teach Masechta Shavuot 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 (ה'י'ו'ם י'ו'ם...ל'ע'ו'מ'ר).

8. Until today, many people testify to this immense joy. In Meron, on Lag b'Omer, no one is getting

Also, 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." Nevertheless, we mustn't forget that the joy, the salvations, and the kedushah are everywhere people celebrate and desire a connection with Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

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 Gemara (Pesachim 51:) states, כדאי ר' שמעון לסמוך עליו בפניו ושלא בפניו. 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.

The many tzaddikim who discuss the greatness of Lag b'Omer were, for the most part, tzaddikim who lived in *chutz l'aretz*. So, it is obvious, and almost unnecessary to

say, that the joy and the specialness of Lag b'Omer is everywhere on the globe.

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 is very close because his heart and his desire is to be with the Rebbe. And, one can be close, actually in the same beis medresh as his Rebbe, but if he doesn't want to be there, he is far away.

We can compare it to a house next door to an electric plant, but no wires connect the house to the plant. Despite its nearness to the power plant, the house will remain dark. There are homes far from the plant that receive electricity, and this is because cables connect them to the generating plant. So, we see that more important than being near is to be attached. If one attaches himself to Reb Shimon, even from a distance, it will be as if he is close. He will merit salvations *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*, and perhaps even more than someone close but whose heart is far away.⁹

married, no one was born, yet everyone is extremely happy. People dance for hours – no one knows precisely why. It is a joy beyond nature.

9. We heard first-hand stories of people who had their yeshuah on Lag b'Omer, even when they weren't in Meron. 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 that 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 imprisoned, *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, and that one doesn't need to go to Meron to merit miracles.

It happened year 5777, in the Orenstein neighborhood of Yerushalayim, at the hadlakah of the Boyaner chasidim. We quote here from the letter:

"My brother was sitting in the car's front seat, next to the driver. They were driving from France to Switzerland. The car fell off a cliff, and the passengers couldn't escape the crushed vehicle. Baruch Hashem,

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

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 will also have a salvation."¹⁰

Indeed, 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 with a minyan the praises of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. 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 can help Bnei Yisrael.¹¹

first responders (police, firefighters, and paramedics) arrived and sawed open the side of the car so that 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 to 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, at first, the doctors predicted that his legs would be amputated.

"My brother remained in Eretz Yisrael for some time, and on Lag b'Omer, the family brought him to the hadlakah in the Batei Orenstein neighborhood in Yerushalayim. The elder chasidim lit the oil, there was a large flame, and people were jumping and dancing ויחי ר' 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 saw the commotion and understood what 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." Once again, this miracle occurred in Yerushalayim, at Reb Shimon's celebration, and not in Meron. Reb Shimon's merit and his hilulah are wherever you are in the world.

10. Someone told me that he was in Meron with his son as a preparation for his son's bar mitzvah. He wanted to learn with his son the portions of Zohar 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 on bar mitzvah. The father said that he realized that when one wants to study Reb Shimon's lessons, Hashem helps him do so.

11. In תשע"ט, I received a letter from someone 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 the 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 things turned around in the merit of the Tehillim we said on Lag b'Omer."

Teshuvah on Lag B'Omer

Reb Yohonoson 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*."

A hint is that *שמעון בר יוחאי* is *gematriya* (Yeshaya 6:10) *יבין 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*, said, "Lag b'Omer is like Yom Kippur." His father said that he was correct.

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

On Lag b'Omer, people sing *אמר ר' עקיבא*, "Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you!" These words discuss Yom Kippur, but we sing them on Lag b'Omer because also on Lag b'Omer, our sins are removed like on Yom Kippur.¹²

We wrote about someone describing Lag b'Omer in Meron to Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l*. He said, "Inside, by the *tzion*, it is like Yom Kippur, and outside, in the courtyard, it is like *Simchas Torah*." The Ruzhiner *zt'l* praised this description immensely.¹³

This source is another indication of the association between Lag b'Omer and Yom Kippur, Lag b'Omer, and atonement.¹⁴

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 9) say *הידור מצוה עד שליש*, that a person should add a third onto the mitzvos.

12. Rebbe Yehoshua of Kaminka *zt'l* teaches:

The Gemara (*Brachos* 58.) says that the Beis HaMikdash is called *הוד*. We can therefore deduce that *הוד שבהוד* is the Kodesh Kadoshim. On Lag b'Omer, *הוד שבהוד*, we are in the Kodesh Kadoshim, similar to the *kohen gadol* who goes to the Kodesh Kadoshim on Yom Kippur. (Interestingly, we sing in the Bar Yochai song, *בר יוחאי בקודש*, *הקדשים*.)

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen *zt'l* (*Tzikkas HaTzaddik* 127) writes, "The *Zohar* (*Chayei Sarah* p.129) states that when a person does *teshuvah* – even the greatest *rasha* – he rises to the highest levels. Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* said that this is in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. He accomplished through his toil in *avodas Hashem* that a *baal teshuvah* should reach the highest levels."

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

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 *Sefardim* 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 told to the 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.

14. 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 on these days, all our aveiros are atoned for, making it easier for our tefillos to be answered.

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* asked that Hashem keeps the entire Torah (see *Brachos* 6). How does He keep the concept of adding one-third onto the *mitzvos*?

The answer is a Yid does 2/3rds of the fight against the *yetzer hara*, and Hashem completes the final one-third of the battle.

The Sar Shalom added that *Sefiras Ha'omer* is 49 days, and on the 33rd day, two-thirds of the *omer* has passed. During the first two-thirds of the *omer*, we counted the *omer*, and we strove to purify ourselves. Then, on Lag b'Omer, Hashem completes the mission, and we become entirely cleansed from all sin.¹⁵

Rebbe Shalom Kaminka *zt'l* and the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* were present at

the Sar Shalom's Lag b'Omer *tish* when the Sar Shalom taught this lesson, and for the next forty-five minutes, the Sanzer Rav cradled his head in his hands, and Rebbe Shalom of Kaminka cried copiously as they were thinking about this *vort* with immense *hislachavus*.

The Gemara (*Succah* 45:) states that Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "I can free all people from judgment [so they won't be punished for their *aveiros*]. If I add the merits of my son, Reb Elazar, we can redeem people from judgment from the beginning of Creation until today. And if we add the merits of Yosam ben Uziyahu¹⁶, we can redeem everyone from judgment from the day the world was created until the end of time."¹⁷

15. As the Gemara (*Succah* 52:) states, "The *yetzer hara* battles a person every day and seeks to kill him. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu wouldn't help, he wouldn't overcome the *yetzer hara*." Hashem helps him by completing the final third of the battle.

The Maharsha (Moed Katan 28. ד"ה מ"ח) explains that the fifty days of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* represents the fifty years of a person's life after he completes his first twenty juvenile years. Each day of *Sefiras Ha'Omer* represents another year of those fifty years. On Lag b'Omer, two-thirds of the *Omer* has passed, symbolizing that most years of a person's life have passed. Chazal tell us that when one lives most of his life without sin, he won't sin anymore. The Maharsha writes, "We celebrate a minor holiday on Lag b'Omer because, on this day, two-thirds of the *Omer* passed, which represents that most days of his life has passed, and when most of one's life passes without sin, he won't sin for the remainder of his life."

16. Rashi writes that Yosem ben Uziyahu "Was a tzaddik, more humble than other kings, and excelled in *kibud av*. About him, it states (*Malachi* 1:6), בן יכבד אב, 'A son honors his father.' All the days his father had *tzaraas*, and Yosem was judging the nation, he didn't place the crown on his head. Instead, he attributed all his judgments to his father."

17. After counting the *omer*, we say (*Tehillim* 67), למנוחה בנינו. This chapter has 49 words (aside from the first *pasuk*). It is ideal to focus on the word of this chapter that corresponds to each night (as is taught by the *mekubalim* and printed in many *siddurim*). On Lag b'Omer, the focus is on the word אלקים. This hints that on Lag b'Omer, even Elokim, Hashem's name for strict judgment, agrees to redeem the Jewish nation from the judgment. אלקים is *roshei teivos* for יכל אני לפטור את העולם מן הדין, "I can redeem the entire world from judgment."

Reb Moshe Leib Shachor of Yerushalayim *zt'l* told a story about a doctor from Konigsberg, Germany, who worked day and night to heal all the patients affected by an epidemic. When everyone recovered, the doctor went to a neighbouring city to rest. He arrived at a hotel and instructed the owner not to tell anyone he was there – he needed to rest.

But then, the epidemic broke out in the city where he was staying, but the doctor remained concealed. He didn't want to reveal himself because he would need to work hard again to heal everyone.

It is obvious that the doctor acted incorrectly. He had the ability to heal, so he should have used his knowledge to heal.

Reb Moshe Leib Shachar concluded, "Reb Shimon announced that he could save people from judgment, so we can be assured he will do so. It wouldn't be proper to have this strength and not use it.

How do they redeem us from judgment and punishment?¹⁸

Reb Akiva Eiger (*Gilyon HaShas* on *Succah* 45:) indicates that it is because Reb Shimon explains to Hashem the big yetzer hara and challenges that the Jewish people have, and therefore, they aren't entirely responsible for their shortcomings in avodas Hashem.

Often, in a few words, Reb Akiva Eiger teaches us major lessons. On the margin of the Gemara (*Succah* 45:), where Reb Shimon said that he could redeem all people from punishment, Reb Akiva Eiger zt'l writes that we should refer to Avos d'Reb Noson (ch.16). It states there that Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "The Jewish nation doesn't go to Gehinom" because they aren't guilty of their aveiros. It is the yetzer hara who causes them to sin.

Reb Shimon elaborates with a *mashal*:

A king owned an unfertile field that never grew crops. A group of people requested to lease a portion of the land from the king, and in exchange, they would pay the king ten *kur* of wheat each year.

The king agreed to the deal.

But after a year of hard work, the field only produced one *kur* of wheat.

The king rebuked them. "You told me you would pay me ten *kur*!"

They replied, "Our master, our king: You know that this field is infertile. All those years you owned it, it produced nothing. For a year's time, we plowed, sowed, fertilized, pruned, and irrigated the field. We tried our best, and still, it only produced one *kur* of wheat. Please don't hold it against us. We tried our best."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai concludes, "This is the defense the Jewish nation will say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu on the day of judgment. They will say, 'Master of the world, You know the *yetzer hara* entices us to sin. As it states (*Tehillim* 103:14), *כי הוא ידע יצרנו*, 'For He knew our nature.' So, please don't hold us responsible for our poor performance. We tried our best." Reb Akiva Eiger tells us that it is with this claim that Reb Shimon bar Yochai will free all people from judgment.

Reb Shimon said that he can free *כל העולם כולו מן הדין*, "The entire world, entirely, from judgment." It seems redundant, *כל... כולו*, as both mean entire.

The same question can also be asked on the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah, *מלך על כל העולם כולו*, "Be king over the entire world, entirely." Indeed, the Levush (582:8) changes the nusach to *מלך על העולם כולו בכבוד* and removes the word *כל*.

However, the Taz (528:8) answers that there is a concept of *רובו ככולו*, that the majority is considered like the entirety. So we clarify that when we request that Hashem be king over the world, our intention isn't *רובו ככולו*, that the majority of the world should accept Hashem as king. We want Hashem's kingdom to be recognized over *כל העולם כולו*, the entire world. Every person, without exceptions, should know Hashem and accept Him as King,

Similarly, we can explain that Reb Shimon says that he can save *כל העולם כולו מן הדין*, that every single person will be saved. No issue or problem will remain unresolved.

In parashas Korach (16:3), we find once again the double expression of "everyone" when it states *כל העדה כולם*, *מקף רגל עד ראש*, "For the entire congregation is all holy." The Siforno says that this means they are holy from toe to head. Their entire body and essence are holy. We can, therefore add that when Reb Shimon said, *יכל אני לפטור כל העולם כולו מן הדין*, that he can save the entire world from the judgment, this means that from head to toe of each person, there will be health and salvations, and nothing will be lacking.

18. Rashi writes that Reb Shimon says, "I take their sins on myself, and thereby they are freed from judgment."

The Chidushei HaRim *zy'a* says that every year, on Lag b'Omer, Reb Shimon bar Yochai repeats his famous statement, "I can exempt the entire world from punishment!"

On Lag b'Omer, Hashem sees our good and overlooks our evil deeds because He compassionately understands the significant challenges and tests we face and forgives us.¹⁹

Reb Shimon's Imprisonment and Freedom

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 33:) relates that Reb Shimon bar Yochai, Reb Yosi, and Reb Yehudah were discussing the Roman empire. Reb Yehudah began with praises for the Roman empire: "They built marketplaces, bridges, and bathhouses," which makes life more pleasant and helps people serve Hashem. Reb Yosi didn't respond. Reb Shimon argued, saying, "They did everything for their own benefit..." Yehudah ben Geirim was present at this conversation and repeated it. Eventually, it reached the ears of the Roman government.

The Romans said, "Yehudah, who praised us, will be honored. Reb Yosi, who was silent, will be exiled to Tzipori. Reb Shimon, who disgraced Rome, will be killed."

Reb Shimon and his son Reb Elazar hid in a beis medresh. Reb Shimon's wife would bring them bread and water each day. When Reb Shimon understood that the Romans were increasing their efforts to find him, Reb Shimon feared they might torture his wife to reveal where they were hiding, so Reb Shimon and his son Reb Elazar hid in a cave. No one knew where they were.

Miraculously, a carob tree grew in their cave, and a spring opened up, providing

them with food and drink. They wore their clothing only during davening so that the clothing would last a long time. Throughout the day, they studied Torah while covered to their necks in sand.

Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar lived in the cave for twelve years (then they left for a short time and immediately returned for a thirteenth year), where they studied Torah day and night with all their strength. They acquired extremely high spiritual levels, as we sing קניית הודך והדרך, "There [in the cave] you acquired your glory." This refers to the wisdom of kaballah, the *Zohar*, which was revealed to them there, in the cave.

How did they find the courage to leave the cave?

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba*, 79) states, "[One day] Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar came out of the cave, sat at the cave's entrance, and saw a hunter trapping birds." Reb Shimon discovered something amazing. When Reb Shimon heard a *bas kol* announce דִּימוֹס, free, the bird escaped to freedom. When the *bas kol* said ספקולה, captured, the hunter caught the bird. Reb Shimon said, "Even a bird isn't captured if it wasn't decreed in heaven. Certainly, it will be so for a human being." He understood that the Romans wouldn't be able to capture them if it wasn't Hashem's decree.

"They left the cave and discovered that things had calmed down. The Roman decree against them was annulled..."

Most likely, when this hunter caught a bird, he was proud of his expertise and abilities. And when a bird got away, he berated himself for not being a better hunter.

19. The *Zohar* teaches, "Before Reb Shimon's *petirah*, he said, 'There are three courts in heaven: a *beis din* of 23 judges, of 71 judges, and a court where Hakadosh Baruch Hu rules, alone... Whoever is judged in Hashem's court will certainly be deemed innocent. In the other courts, some of the judges will say זכאי, innocent, and some will say חייב, guilty. But in Hakadosh Baruch Hu's court, there is *chesed* and compassion, as it states (*Tehillim* 130:4), כי עמך הסליחה, 'For with You is forgiveness.'" This can be because Hashem knows our inner struggles and our attempts to serve Him, and therefore, He judges us favorably.

Little did he know that it wasn't about him but about Hashem's decree for each creature.

This is a lesson to remember in business and all areas of life. When you succeed, remember that it is from Hashem. And when you fail, it is also destined from Above. We try our best, but whatever occurs is decided in Heaven.

When Reb Shimon learned this lesson, how everything is in Hashem's hands, he realized that the Romans couldn't harm him if it weren't decreed in heaven. With this thought in mind, he and his son left the cave.²⁰

Salvations

Reb Shimon said about Lag b'Omer, האי, "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. It is a day when the *kitrugim* are silenced, and Hashem sends all types of salvations to Bnei Yisrael.

The Beis Aharon writes, כשם שהשי"ת הוא ה' לכל רשב"י הוא רשב"י לכל אפילו לפחותים, "Just as Hashem is for everyone, so is Reb Shimon for everyone, even for those who are at a low level."²¹ לכל, "for everyone," can also be translated as "for everything" because on Lag b'Omer, a person can receive everything he needs.²²

20. There's another Chazal that tells the story of their leaving the cave as follows:

After Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar stayed in the cave for twelve years, Eliyahu HaNavi arrived at the cave entrance and announced, "Who will notify Bar Yochai that the king died and the decree was annulled?" Hearing the message, they left the cave.

The Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* 28) writes, "Know, it is certain that there are locations in the world conducive for holiness. The cave where Reb Shimon hid is such a place. There is no doubt that Eliyahu HaNavi appeared to Reb Shimon several times in the cave. And makes no difference whether Eliyahu appeared to him in a way that Reb Shimon saw that it was Eliyahu HaNavi or if Eliyahu appeared to Reb Shimon and no one saw him. Eliyahu often tells someone something, giving him an idea or a thought, and the person doesn't know where the idea came from. He thinks it is his thought, but they are really Eliyahu's words, speaking to him."

21. It states אדם ובהמה תושיע ה', and the gematriya is רשב"י (Magdil Yeshuos Malko, Barniv, 55). This tells us that even when one is at a low level, the level of an animal, Hashem will help him in Reb Shimon's merit.

Rambam (Pirush HaMishnayos, Parah 3:3) writes, "There is no difference between a person who had never become tamei, to 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 even more for them than for the greater people.

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

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

When Rebbe Avraham Elimelech of Karlin *hy'd zy'a* was in Meron, he didn't take *kvitelach* from his chassidim. He told them that in Reb Shimon's merit, everyone has an exceptional power of *tefillah*. Similarly,

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

Lag b'Omer is a day of salvations – fortunate are those who invest in tefillah on this day.²³ 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:

A person from Tzidon (Eretz Yisrael) married a woman and waited ten years, but she still did not bear a child. 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. Then, in this happy state, he told her, "My daughter, take any good item you wish and bring it to your parent's home."

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

In the middle of the night, he awoke. The wine had worn off. "My daughter, where am I?" he asked.

She told him that he was in her parent's home.

"Why am I in your parent's home?"

She said, "Didn't you tell me I can take anything I want to my parent's home? There is nothing that 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, so do tzaddikim."

Tzaddikim teach that in order 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.

The Gemara (Makos 17:) states that a mother should daven that her children should be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai. The Minchas Elazar (Shaar Yissaschar) says that the Gemara refers to one who is 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

Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy'a would go with his chassidim to Meron for Shabbos *parashas Behaloscha* and wouldn't accept *kvitelach* from them, as he felt that there was no need. In Reb Shimon's merit, everyone would undoubtedly 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 said that these are the heavy stones people shed from their hearts while praying in Meron.

23. 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 an auspicious time for tefillah, and whatever one requests will be given to him.

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 *mann* fell. According to this calculation, the *mann* first came down on Lag b'Omer, indicating that it is an ideal day to daven for *parnassah*.²⁴

3] Shidduchim

About Reb Shimon, it states (in the song Bar Yochai) הַצִּיל הַלְחֻצִּים, "He saves those who are stressed and worried," and who is more stressed and worried than someone awaiting their *shidduch*?²⁵ This is because we can

24. The Taamei HaMinhagim writes, יושפע שפע רב בכל העולמות, "A great bounty [of *parnassah*, etc.] should come to all worlds" is *roshei teivos*, רשבי.

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, uncharacteristically, "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 for three hundred rubles to marry off her child. The wealthy woman took out three hundred rubles from her purse and gave it to this 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 standing beside him. This rich man had come from America to be Lag b'Omer in Meron, 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, 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.

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

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

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

daven and receive salvations for all our needs, and as we wrote, this is in Meron and elsewhere, as well. In Reb Shimon's merit, our tefillos will be answered.²⁶

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:

Look at *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 *gematriya* שמעון בר יוחאי is *gematriya*. This hints to us that Lag b'Omer is a day *mesugal* for *refuah*.²⁷

It is known that the *sefirah* הוד is *mesugal* for *refuah*. Reb Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* adds that Lag b'Omer, whose *sefirah* is הוד שבהוד, 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.

She immediately called her husband and reminded him of their error 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 call his rebbe and ask him what to do.

The rebbe advised that they should 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 this *bachur* Shimon Zelig? Isn't his name 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 ago, he would have wanted Zelig as his son-in-law, but the name, the same as his, prevented him from considering it. But now that their names weren't exactly the same, he was willing to go ahead with the *shidduch*, and Shimon Zelig got engaged to Zelig's daughter!

26. 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 to their homes and create more comfortable living conditions. We can, therefore, explain that Reb Shimon הציל means he saves people from their tiny apartments so that they can live comfortably.

27. The Tzemech Tzedek taught that מלך רופא נאמן ורחמן is *roshei teivos* for מלך רופא נאמן ורחמן, the King Who heals.

There are many stories of *refuos* that occurred in Meron, particularly on Lag b'Omer, and we write some of them in the footnote.²⁸ Here, we will write the most

28. Elul 1959/תשי"ט: The Brisker Rav *zt'l* was ill, and Reb 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 ideal place for tefillah, and therefore, he requests that people should daven for him there.

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

On Sunday, Rav Shach returned to the Brisker Rav's, and 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. (Rav Shach later commented that it was a *neis* he arranged it because otherwise, what would he answer the Brisker Rav?)

I heard the following story from Reb S. G. Shlita, a resident of Williamsburg, New York, who was directly involved in it.

Year 5768: His rebbetzin 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 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 *shlita* (before he became rebbe) advised that she should daven next to the *tzion* (not outside the building). With the aid of two women who pushed her wheelchair, they passed all police and barriers and got to the *tzion*.

Two and a half hours later, she called her husband and said, "I said 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 shined a flashlight into her eyes and shouted, "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 themselves, it would have taken a year to get in, but when the doctor requested it, an appointment was arranged immediately.)

This specialist (who until then was a sworn atheist) was shocked. In all 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 be able to help her walk, but it seems that 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 ten hours every night due to two failing kidneys. After paying \$180,000 to be eligible for a kidney transplant and *snoitaraperp yrassecen eht lla gnikam*, he was ready for the transplant. Before the surgery, he went to Meron, hoping to be cured without a transplant. He said, "Reb Shimon, we were taught that many miracles happen to you (see Meilah 17.). Also, you said that you *dluoc*

save everyone from judgment. I have two failing kidneys, and I need a miracle that my kidneys should begin working again."

He was 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, and he no longer needed 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* named Gedalyah Meirovitz was shot in the leg outside of Yerushalayim and 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 Meirovitz asked his friends to bring him to Meron. "It's impossible," his friends told him. And indeed, it was quite impossible. In those days, a trip to Meron could take an entire day, with changing busses several times. Moreover, he would need to travel with his foot raised the whole time due to his condition. 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. Meirovitz wanted to dance and felt that a miracle would happen to him. He put his arms over the shoulders of two of his friends, and they danced with him. Suddenly, he let go of his friends, and he danced on his own. Due to the dancing, the dressing from 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 the 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 puss blocking his throat, and he 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 C T scan, which she did on Lag b'Omer morning. The results would come in the next day, and in the meanwhile, she traveled to Meron, where the rebbe of Toldos Aharon makes a *hadlakah* (bonfire). She could hardly see the *hadlakah* due to poor vision and cried and prayed for a *yeshua*. The next morning, she could see well. Then the doctor called 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, telling his mother 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 completed the entire *Tehillim*. The father took another test, and the doctors informed him that 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 and talk to him about *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."

famous story (because it happened in front of many people, and it is recorded in sefarim):

In the year 1918/תרע"ט, a childless 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 *chalah* (to make *peyos*).

They had a child, and when the child turned three, 1922/תרפ"ג, the mother brought the child to Meron 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, when the crowd heard the young child's loud shouts and cries. 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. A feeling of gloom reigned.

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. 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."

Everyone roared joyously, and they recited the *brachah* ²⁹ מְחִייה הַמַּתִּים.

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?"

The sick man agreed.

That year Lag b'Omer was on Motzei Shabbos. As soon as Shabbos was over, they went to the *tzion* to daven. This occurred twenty-five 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 that 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 off my heart, and I'm leaving the stone here."

They returned to America. The doctors decided to operate to save his life. When they opened his body, they didn't find a sign of the illness. They took a biopsy and sent it to the lab to see if any remnant of the disease remained. Nothing was there. He was completely 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 negative news from the doctors. When he finally found his voice, he explained that they were tears of happiness.

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

29. Shaar Yissaschar writes that שמעון בן יוחאי is *gematriya* מְחִייה הַמַּתִּים.

The Minchas Elazar zt'l opposed the Zionist movement, which earned him some enemies. Once, as he was

6] Daven for Salvations for Klal Yisrael

Most importantly, we should daven for Moshiach. The Tzvi LaTzaddik of Bluzhev zt'l said, "It is impossible for us to 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."

The Minchas Elazar of Munkacz zt'l would sing *בר יוחאי* when visiting his father's grave on his *yahrtzeit* because his father, the "*Darkei Teshuvah*," wrote three *sefarim* on *Tikunei Zohar*, which 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. So when one comes to a tzaddik's grave, *הם לומדיך*, they teach the tzaddik about the problems we experience so the tzaddik can daven for Klal Yisrael.

After giving this explanation, 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

When a person can be in Meron for Lag b'Omer, the potential for miracles and salvations increases.

Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura zt'l writes in a letter from Eretz Yisrael 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."³⁰ Obviously, Rav Bartunara's testimony is very trustworthy. In this letter, he discusses other miracles that people in Eretz Yisrael discuss, from other holy areas in Eretz Yisrael, and he debates them. He expresses that there is no proven evidence to their claims that miracles occurred there. However, when it comes to Meron, he discusses the miracles that happen there as a fact, and there is no doubt.

walking to Meron, he received a note that read, "If you dare go to Meron, you will be killed there." The Minchas Elazar told his gabbai, Reb Chaim Ber and Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l, who were walking with him, "We are going to Reb Shimon; the *malach hamaves* is powerless there."

30. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim zt'l said that one hires a lawyer to help him in court, but even the best lawyer cannot help a person who 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 could 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 in galus. Perhaps at that time, the Yidden would go to Moshe's kever, cry and plead to Moshe and say, 'Moshe Rabbeinu, stand up and daven for us and annul the *gezeirah*,' because tzaddikim are beloved after their *petirah* even more than when they were alive." This source teaches us the greatness of tzaddikim and the extraordinary merit of 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.

The 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 b'Omer. It is sufficient to accept the kabbalah on oneself *bli neder*, without an actual vow.³¹

Also, when Reb Shimon lived, he was known among the chachamim as the person to go to when one needs a salvation.

The *Zohar* (*Rus* 104) says:

There was an epidemic in Lud. People went around the city with Reb Shimon so that he could see with his own eyes their suffering.

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 spoke to the 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 יחיה**, and **יהיה** is gematriya thirty. This means that in every generation, there must be at least thirty tzaddikim who are similar to 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."

31. 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 (**נגלה**) sections of the *Zohar* and he would 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 more.

This is because when one makes a kabbalah, he becomes connected with Reb Shimon bar Yochai, becoming a vessel to receive 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 of the 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 Gehinom, ready 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 kept up my resolve after Rosh Hashanah. Now, two years later, I can say that it wasn't easy; there were tests, but I kept strong all this time. I just realized something interesting. My *parnassah* is always tight, but the last time I needed to borrow money was before Lag b'Omer, year 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."

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 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), *לא אשחית בעבור העשרים*, '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), *לא אשחית בעבור העשרה*, '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, *צדיק יסוד עולם*, 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), *רצון יראיו יעשה*, 'The will of those who fear Him, He will do.'³²

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.³³

32. It states in the *sefer* מסע מירון that in Cheshvan 1761/תקכ"ב, there was an earthquake in Tzefas and Miron, 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 very afraid. They shouted, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! If this is happening to your building, what will be with us?" Finally, after a half hour, the earthquake settled, and the building sat firmly in place. They went inside to inspect the damage, but there were none. The dome merged, and there was no sign of any scratches or damage.

33. Once, someone 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 once and isn't healed, does he stop going to the doctor? No! He goes 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 repeatedly 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 that day. The Pri Chadash claims that this isn't a reason to celebrate. The students stopped dying when no more students were left! Instead, the Pri Chadash explains, we are celebrating the continuity of the Torah. On

Customs on Lag b'Omer

We will now discuss some of the customs practiced on Lag b'Omer.

We begin with the custom of celebrating Lag b'Omer with a *hadlakah* (bonfire).

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 will light the fire 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 and wait for the bonfire. When the first flames burst forth, everyone rejoices. The sound of their happiness is so loud. I had never heard anything like it, and I never saw a joy like it. 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 *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* would 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* would do so.³⁴

Several explanations are given for the bonfire on Lag b'Omer. The *Zohar* (*Idra Zuta* 291:) tells that on the final day of Reb Shimon's life, he revealed to his students 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 candles³⁵ and bonfires on Lag

this day, Reb Akiva took his five remaining students: Reb Meir, Reb Yehudah, Reb Yossi, Reb Shimon, and Reb Elazer ben Shamoah and taught them Torah. He made them the future leaders of Bnei Yisrael, which is how the Torah survives today.

Reb Akiva lost most of his students but didn't give up. Instead, he forged ahead and did what he could, and that's how Torah continues until today.

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

34. A father 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 them to bring their son 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 the child before continuing 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*!" His attitude changed in a minute. Before that, he was constantly throwing off his *yarmulke*, and now he wanted it.

35. In the *beis medresh* of Reb Aharon of Belz *zt'l* on Lag b'Omer, many candles were lit on the tables and

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 by Reb Shimon's grave and be very happy there. Certainly, do so if you have a *chalachah* child..."³⁶

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explains that Reb Shimon bar Yochai promised **כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ** 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.

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

The Gemara (*Me'illa* 17.) tells us that the government ruled that Yidden were forbidden to keep Shabbos and to perform a *bris milah*. The Tana Reb Reuven Istrobuli dressed himself in non-Jewish clothes and cut his hair in a non-Jewish style (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 explained that

when the Jewish people keep Shabbos, they earn less money, and when they have a *bris milah*, they become weaker. "Do you want your enemies to be wealthy or poor, strong or weak?"

They agreed with him, and they annulled the decrees.

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

So, 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 against them.

A demon 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!" which it did.

The king, thankful to Reb Shimon, 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 it should be noticeable that we are Yidden. We have the custom to make the *chalachah* in Meron, at Reb Shimon's *kever*,

the windowsills. (This was done in Belz only on Lag b'Omer and on the 7th of Adar.)

36. A car hit the three-year-old son of someone I know before Pesach, 5766. After Pesach, the hospital sent the unconscious child to a nursing facility, saying there was nothing else they could do for the child. 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 to make his *chalachah*" and davened that they should merit this.

We won't elaborate, but two weeks later, on Lag b'Omer, the boy was in Meron, walking on his own two feet, and had his *chalachah* there.

because Reb Shimon was able to annul the harsh decrees while dressing like a Yid.

3] 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 this song.

When we sing songs of praises for Reb Shimon bar Yochai (such as **בר יוחאי**, and **ואמרתם כה לחי**, written by the Ben Ish Chai *zt'l*, etc.), 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 himself and 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 remember that Reb Shimon was a human being, born to human parents, yet 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 וקדוש משמיא אנחית**, "A holy malach came down from heaven," and the *roshei teivos* are **שמעון**. This means Reb Shimon was like a malach. We aren't expecting 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 (החדושות ק"ד) calls this meal a *seudas mitzvah*. He discusses a person who made 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*."

According to halachah, we say the tefilla **נחם** once a year, on Minchah of Tisha b'Av, but Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim *zy'a* (a student of the Arizal) would say **נחם** 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 **נחם** in *birchas hamazon*, as he always did. Suddenly, the Arizal, who was also in Meron then, 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 **נחם** on the day of my great joy."

The Arizal rebuked Reb Avraham for saying **נחם**. Lag b'Omer is a time for celebration and 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.

It is surprising that 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*," a day that the pious fast. 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 shining 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*, *וארבעים לילה* – *לחם לא אכל מים לא שתה*, "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* *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

People have a custom to go up to Meron to celebrate there when possible. The Remak and the Arizal went 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."

One year, the Arizal was dancing 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.³⁷

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.

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.³⁸

³⁷. The Chareidim was written by Reb Elazar Ezkari 1533-1600, a descendant of those expelled from Spain. At this time, 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 Tzfas: 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.

³⁸. This story is written in Taamei HaMinhagim, quoting the Minchas Elazar *zt'l*, who heard it from the Shinover Rav *zt'l*, who heard it from reliable sources while visiting Tzefas.

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."³⁹

We wrote above from the Ruzhiner and the Bnei Yissaschar that the joy in Meron exceeds the barriers of nature.⁴⁰

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* experienced there! Fortunate are the eyes who 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 his 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!"

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

39. 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 come to this holy place where Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, and all tzaddikim are present?!'"

40. Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *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* awoke 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 even while traveling to Meron." One person in the group was fasting, and Reb Shlomke instructed him to eat because it is a day of happiness.

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

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 didn't work out. For example, when his son turned three, he wanted to make the *chalah* 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 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.