

Torah Wellsprings

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



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Chinuch by Example

The *parashah* begins with the words (21:1), אמור אל הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אליהם, "Say to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon and say to them..." The word "say" (אמור... ואמרת) is written twice in this sentence.

Rashi explains, להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים, "The older *kohanim* should train the younger *kohanim*." אמר אל הכהנים, "Tell the older *kohanim*... ואמרת אליהם, to train the younger *kohanim*" to be cautious with the unique laws of *kehunah*.

This *pasuk* discusses *chinuch*, the way the older *kohanim* should train the younger ones. Therefore, we can glean from this section guidance in *chinuch habanim*.

A primary rule of *chinuch* is to be a role model. More than with words, parents teach by being a good example. We can learn this from Avraham Avinu, as it states (*Bereishis* 18:7) ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל הנער, "Avraham ran to the cattle, took a tender and good calf, and gave it to the youth who hurried to prepare it."

Rashi writes that the lad was Yishmael. Avraham wanted Yishmael to prepare the meat for the guests כדי לחנוכו במצות, to train him to do mitzvos. But Avraham himself brought the calf. He didn't send Yishmael to bring the cattle; he only had him prepare it. This is because the best way to educate children is by example. Yishmael saw his father rush to get animals for the guests (as it states ואל הבקר רץ אברהם), and then Yishmael, too, prepared them quickly (as it states וימהר לעשות אותו, "he hurried to prepare it"). He learned from his father's example.

B'derech remez, we can say that Rashi is hinting at this lesson when he writes (21:1) להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים. This can be translated as להזהיר גדולים, the adults' deeds and their good ways should shine and influence, על הקטנים, the younger generation.

This is why the *masechta* on good middos is called *Pirkei Avos*, Chapters of the Fathers. It is called *Avos*, "Fathers," because one of the primary ways to train children is when the parents act how they want their children to behave.

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 97:) say, "What coin did Avraham Avinu have? There was an old man and an old woman on one side of the coin and a lad and a girl on the other." The old and the young are on two sides of the same coin to indicate that the young are influenced by the old. They are on the same coin because the youth learn from those who are older than them.

It states (*Bereishis* 12:3), ונברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה, "All families of the earth shall bless themselves through you." Rashi explains that this means people will want their children to be like Avraham Avinu. Rashi writes, "A father says to his son, 'You shall be like Avraham.'" It is explained (בדרך צחות) that parents want to live like Avraham's father, Terach, and do whatever their hearts desire, and expect their children to be righteous. They tell their children, "You should be like Avraham, but not me." It doesn't work that way. If parents don't improve their ways, they can't expect their children to be better than them.¹

1. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* said he is still waiting to see "the children." He explained that parents don't learn Torah because they are busy working, so their children should be able to study Torah. The children also don't study Torah because they are busy working, so their children should be able to study Torah. He is still waiting to see those children whom everyone is working for.

Reb Yaakov Galinsky *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A poor non-Jew was jealous of the poor Yidden, who went around the shuls during davening collecting money. So, one day, he decided to wear Jewish clothing, pretend he was a Yid and do the same. It was a financially wise decision because he earned some money each day during the tefillos.

One day, he heard one of the collectors announce, "*Raboisay!* I'm a *ger tzedek*. The Torah says forty-eight times that one must love converts!" Everyone gave him generously.

The non-Jew saw that this announcement helped the Yid earn more money, so he began making this announcement as well. In every beis medresh, he announced that he was a *ger tzedek*, and people gave him generously.

One day, he heard one of his fellow collectors announce, "I'm a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*." He noticed that people gave him more money in honor of his illustrious grandfather.

So, the goy decided to try this out as well. He announced, "I'm an *einekel* of the Baal Shem Tov, and I'm a *ger tzedek*, too."

He was quickly banished from the beis medresh.

Reb Yankele Galinsky *zt'l* says that the same is when parents tell their children to act a certain way, but they themselves don't practice what they preach. They are contradicting themselves, so their words are ineffective.²

Teaching by example is essential, but it is even better when words accompany these lessons.

Therefore, *Pirkei Avos* often states, הוא היה אומר, "He would say..." We can explain, הוא, his essence, היה אומר, is what he spoke. The mixture of teaching by example and with words educate children to go on the good path.

Chinuch with Pride

People pride themselves if they have a great-grandfather or ancestor who was a great tzaddik. Although one must be cautious with *gaavah*, there is also a great benefit in this pride, as it can encourage them to go in the ways of their holy ancestors.

The pasuk (21:1) states: אמר אל הכהנים... ואמרת: "Say to the *kohanim*... and tell them: Each of you shall not become *tamei* to a [dead] person..." ואמרת עליהם "Tell them" means that the older *kohanim* should train the younger *kohanim* (as we wrote above).

What should the older *kohanim* tell the younger *kohanim*? לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו, that they shouldn't become *tamei*. Tell the younger *kohanim* to be cautious from *tumah*. Tell them not to sully their *neshamos* with the internet etc., which can cause *tumah*.

But how do we influence our children that they shouldn't *want* all the impurities out there?

The answer is אמור אל הכהנים בני אהרן; tell them that they are *kohanim*, Hashem's loyal servants. Tell them that they are בני אהרן, descendants of tzaddikim. Tell them that they are holy, exalted beings, and therefore *tumah* isn't their portion, and it isn't good for them.

If you restrict a child without explanation, the child will feel stifled. If you say, "You can't see this, you can't go there, and you can't do this, and you can't do that," and you

Instead, it would be better if everyone would have set times to study Torah so that each person can grow in Torah to the best of his abilities.

2. Reb Yankele explained that the same applies to public speakers (*darshanim*). If they speak about things they themselves don't do, their words won't take effect; their deeds contradict their words.

don't explain to the child how this is for his benefit, he won't understand why he can't enjoy the world like others do. But when you explain to your child how holy and special he is and how much he will gain, even in this world, by living as a Yid should, he will despise lowliness. When the information is conveyed correctly, it will help the children's resolve to pass difficult tests.³

There was a *melamed* who had a side job selling *esrogim*. The Pnei Menachem of Gur zt'l told him, "You don't only work with *esrogim* before *Succos*, you work with *esrogim* the entire year because each student is a precious *esrog*. A talented *esrog* merchant knows how to clean an *esrog* so it appears beautiful. A careless *esrog* merchant can scratch and ruin a beautiful *esrog*. Students are the same. Handle them with care, and they will shine. Mishandle them, and you ruin them, *r'l*."

It states in this week's *parashah* (23:40), וּלְקַחְתֶּם לָכֶם בְּיוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן פְּרִי עֵץ הָדָר, "You shall take for yourselves on the first day a beautiful fruit of a tree." Chazal tell us that פְּרִי עֵץ means the tree and the fruit should have the same taste. (This refers to an *esrog* because an *esrog* and its tree taste the same.)

The Imrei Chaim of Vizhnitz zt'l said that fruit connotes children, and the tree indicates the parents. Our goal is, עֵצוֹ וּפְרִי שׁוֹה, the tree and the fruit should be the same. The children should be as good as their parents (or better than their parents).

The four children at the Seder are the *chacham*, *rasha*, *tam*, and the *she'eino yodeia lish'ol*. We can explain that these children are symbolic of four generations, and it shows the *yeridas hadoros*, the decline of generations

witnessed in our times. The first generation is the *chacham*, someone who is too wise for his own good. He asks too many questions and isn't satisfied with accepting the rules of the Torah with simple faith. This leads him to raise a rebellious son, the *rasha*. After that, the grandchild will be a *tam*, who knows very little about Yiddishkeit, and then comes the *she'eino yodeia lish'ol*, the fourth generation who knows nothing at all about Yiddishkeit. They don't have questions because they know nothing at all. It all began with the *chacham*, who asked too many questions and didn't want to accept the Torah with simple faith.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l (*Toras Moshe - Hagaddah Shel Pesach*, ד"ה ואף) writes, "There are parents who haven't abandoned the Torah; they keep all the mitzvos, only they do so by rote (מצות אנשים מלומדה). They don't study Torah and never speak words of Torah and *mussar*. The children, who never heard their parents speaking Torah and *mussar*, view their parents' adherence to the mitzvos as insanity... This results in children ultimately leaving klal Yisrael. But it isn't the children's fault. Their parents ate the unripe fruit of *apikorsus*, heresy [and the children ate those fruits after they ripened]."

In Nisan, there's a mitzvah to recite a *brachah* when one sees fruit trees blossoming. In this *brachah*, we praise Hashem for creating בריות טובות ואילנות טובות, "beautiful creatures and beautiful trees." Why do we mention בריות טובות, beautiful creatures in this *brachah*? Isn't the *brachah* exclusively about trees?

Some answer that it refers to the people who water and tend to the trees. The tree wouldn't blossom so well if it weren't for them. They are the בריות נאות, beautiful

3. A granddaughter of Rebbe Shlomke Zviller zt'l asked her esteemed grandfather for money to go to the theatre. "All my friends are going; I too, want to go."

Rebbe Shlomke handed her the money. As she was leaving the room, Rebbe Shlomke called her back and told her, "I gave you the money, but know that if you go to the theatre, it will break my heart."

She changed her mind right then and there.

creations that bring forth the *אילנות נאות*, beautiful trees.

We add that the same is true with developing good, *ehrlicher* children. The devoted parents – who educate and daven for their children – are the *בריית נאות*, beautiful people who enable the blossoming of *אילנות נאות*, the beautiful trees – their offspring.

Parent/Child Relationship

To succeed in chinuch, it is important to understand the unique parent/child relationship. The relationship should be a blend of friendship and leadership.

It states (*Bereishis* 31:46), *ויאמר יעקב לאחיו לקטו*, "Yaakov said to his brothers..." Yaakov had one brother, Eisav, and it doesn't seem that the *pasuk* refers to him. Who were Yaakov's brothers?

Rashi writes, "It is referring to [Yaakov's] sons. They were like brothers to him, for they helped him in times of sorrow and war."

The Chida writes that the *pasuk* teaches us that when children become older, the children should become your friends. The parent-child relationship should resemble that of two good friends.

But within this comradeship, there needs to be awe and respect. Children can never forget that they are younger, that they are the children, and not equals to their parents.

This is hinted in Rashi (21:1), *להזהיר גדולים על*, *הקטנים*, which can imply that the youths must never forget who the elders are and whom they must respect.

Once, at the Seder of the Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l*, someone broke the middle matzah and was measuring the pieces, trying to figure out which part was larger. The Kotzker Rebbe quipped, "A *gadol* that needs to be measured isn't a *gadol*." Similarly, if one has difficulty recognizing who is the father and who is the child, then the father isn't

behaving like a father. This hierarchy should be evident without the need to be measured.

Kiruv Rechokim

We can also say that *להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים* is teaching a lesson for those who are active in *kiruv rechokim* (to draw irreligious Yidden to Yiddishkeit). *להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים* means that the person who is in a better spiritual state must know that he is the *גדולים*, at a higher place, and he shouldn't get confused regarding who is influencing whom.

Reb Eliyahu Dessler *zt'l* described it this way:

If someone falls into a pit, you should stand outside and try to pull him out. Don't go down into the hole to try pushing him out because you might also remain stuck in the pit.

The same is with *kiruv*. You must stand outside the *tumah*, be firm with your religious convictions, and from that safe spot, pull others up to your level.

There used to be a *kiruv* organization called P'eylim, and a *yeshiva bachur* asked the Steipler Gaon *zt'l* whether he should join the P'eylim activities during *bein hazmanim*. The Steipler replied that he shouldn't participate because it would cause *bitul Torah*.

The *bachur* responded, "I wasn't referring to the middle of the *zman*. I was referring to *bein hazmanim*, when I don't study that much anyway."

The Steipler still felt that he shouldn't go. The Steipler raised one of his *tzitzis* of his *talis katan* and showed the *bachur* that the *shamesh*, the long string that wraps around the others, was the same length as the other strings. The Steipler commented, "Initially, it was longer than the others, but since it was going around the others, it became smaller." The message was, if you go out to perform *kiruv*, it will affect your own growth and the heights you can attain. (Obviously, each case needs to be measured individually.)

In Dallas, Texas, there is a large beis medresh, a beacon of light, where hundreds of people have become closer to *Yiddishkeit*. This is the story of how it all began:

Reb Moshe Rudner received the title יורה יורה ידן ידן, which means he is an expert in halachah in all areas of the Torah, fitting to teach and *passen shaalos*. Reb Moshe yearned to use his ability as a rav to help klal Yisrael, so he moved to Dallas to see what he could accomplish there. He did a lot of *hishtadlus* to succeed in *kiruv*, but it was hard to accomplish a lot when there was little money, as Chazal say, אם אין קמה אין תורה.

Then a miracle occurred. A very wealthy, forty-nine-year-old bachelor visited him. This man was very happy to meet Reb Moshe; he offered some advice and then made a donation of six million dollars. The large beis medresh was built with this money, and it is a place where many people find out about Hashem for the first time.

A few weeks after donating so generously, the wealthy man was *niftar*. It was a sudden

death. Reb Moshe delivered a *hesped* at the *levayah*. "This man never married; he never built a *bayis ne'aman b'Yisrael*. However, Hashem blessed him with wealth. A few months ago, he was in Eretz Yisrael, searching for something; he himself did not know exactly what. His friends advised him to go to the Kosel, the last remnant of the Beis HaMikdash, and he went there. He watched an ultra-orthodox Yid stand before the wall, crying and pleading before Hashem, and it was obvious to this irreligious Yid that the man he watched was speaking to Hashem as one spoke with his father. The *emunah* he witnessed ignited his *neshamah*, and he realized that this was the light he was searching for. When he returned to his friends, he told them what he saw, and he asked whether there was anyone in Dallas that resembled the type of Yid he saw at the Kosel. They told him about Reb Moshe Rudner. That was the beginning of great things..."

The sincerity and hislahavus he witnessed at the Kosel brought these amazing results.⁴

Lag b'Omer

Lag b'Omer Celebration

Lag b'Omer is a very joyous day all around the world. Tzaddikim called 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 the city of 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 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.⁵

4. The person who prayed at the Kosel doesn't know to this day that in his merit, a six million dollar beis medresh was built in Texas. He also doesn't know that in his merit, many people are finding themselves, Hashem, and His Torah. Such is the power of sincerity and sincere *tefillos*.

It is also possible that the person davening at the Kosel thought his *tefillos* weren't answered, which may have caused him to feel distant from Hashem. But see how much he accomplished!

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

The Gemara Shavuos (page 34; the discussion begins on daf ל"ג) states, ר' שמעון מוכיח עליה במערבא. The Chasam Sofer taught this Gemara to his students on Lag b'Omer and translated it, "In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."⁶

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."⁷

The joy is all over the world, but it peaks in Meron.

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."

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

The Maharil of Paltishan *zt'l* writes, "I had the merit of being in Meron on Lag b'Omer (approximately 170 years ago). Brothers and friends, I cannot express in writing the great *simchah* experienced there! Fortunate are the eyes who saw it! Whoever was there felt with certainty that the joy was in the

5. 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, that means 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. I want the first time I use 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.

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

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

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

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 already come, and I watched the *simchas beis hashoevah* in Yerushalayim. It was wondrous!"⁸

Meron

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

There was a unique beis medresh in Tzfas of old:

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. Reb Elazar Ezkari (1533-1600, a descendant of those expelled from Spain) was considered an average shamesh in the beis medresh. People didn't recognize his greatness. They thought he was a simple, G-d fearing Yid.

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

Suddenly, the Arizal grabbed the hands of this elderly man, and they danced together for a long time. And 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 regular person.

The students asked the Arizal, "It is Torah, so we have a right to ask. Why did you dance with Reb Elazar Ezkari? 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

8. According to halachah, we say the tefilla נהם once a year, on Minchah of Tisha b'Av, but Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim *zy'a* (a student of the Arizal) would say נהם every day – in *Shemonah Esrei* and *birchas hamazon* – as he was always mourning the Churban Beis HaMikdash and davening for it to be rebuilt. One year, he was in Meron for Lag b'Omer, and he said נהם in birchas hamazon, as he always did.

Suddenly, the Arizal saw Reb Shimon bar Yochai standing over his grave, as though he was alive. Reb Shimon told the Arizal, "Ask your student, Reb Avraham Bruchim, why he said נהם on the day of my great joy."

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

Unfortunately, within a month, Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim was *niftar*. (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 –especially in Meron.

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.⁹

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 he crawled up the mountain, on his hands and feet, 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."

Lag b'Omer Everywhere

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) לְבִי וּבִשְׂרֵי יִרְנֶנּוּ "My heart and my flesh praise the living G-d." ל"ב בעומר represents ל"ב, the 32nd day of the omer. And then comes Lag b'Omer with the merit of ובשרי, *roshei teivos* of ר' שמעון בר יוחאי, and then ירננו אל א"ל חי, 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, and if he could, he would hold onto the sun with his teeth and wouldn't 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 Tzanz *zt'l*.

Now, let us remember that Reb Moshe Rozvedover, the Tzanzer Rav, and thousands of other tzaddikim lived in chutz l'aretz, and they nevertheless recognized the greatness of Lag b'Omer. We emphasize this because we will discuss the enormous merit of being in Meron on Lag b'Omer, but most people can't physically be there. So, they shouldn't think Lag b'Omer isn't an important day for them. It is a holy, special day all around the world. It is a day of salvation wherever you live.

Many make a seudah on Lag b'Omer, which is considered a seudas mitzvah. The Maharil (החדשות ק"ד) discusses a person who made a neder not to eat outside his home, with the exception of a seudas mitzvah. The question is, which meals are considered a seudas mitzvah? The Maharil replies, "The meal at a *bris milah*, *pidyon haben*, *siyum mesechta* [are all seudas mitzvah]. Chazal say, 'Whenever *talmidei chachamim* are at a meal, it is like enjoying from the light of the *Shechinah*. Therefore, the Lag b'Omer meal is also considered a *seudas mitzvah*." This refers to any location around the world.

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

The Gemara (Pesachim 51:) states, כְּדַאי ר' שמעון לסמוך עליו בפניו ושלא בפניו. The Nesivos Shalom of Slonim *zt'l* said that this hints that

9. 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 Tzfas.

we can rely on Reb Shimon's merits even if we can't travel to Meron.

We can compare it to a house located next door to an electric plant. If no wires connect the house to the plant, the house will be dark. On the other hand, homes far from the plant are powered because they run wires 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), he will merit salvations.

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.

Another person on Lag b'Omer imagined he was in Meron and said several chapters of Tehillim for a refuah. The day after Lag b'Omer, the doctors suggested another approach to his illness, which healed him.

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.

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.¹⁰

When one can't be in Meron Lag b'Omer, it is recommended that he study lessons from Reb Shimon bar Yochai because the holy sefarim (Meor Einayim, Shabbos) teach us that learning the lessons of a tzaddik is the same as being at his grave. Some have the custom of studying the praises of Reb Shimon that are written throughout the Zohar. Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l writes in his sefer, "If someone can't go to Meron on Lag b'Omer, or someone who lives in chutz l'aretz, 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."

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

10. 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, in Meron.

11. 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 will help him do so.

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.

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.")¹²

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 six years ago, 5777, in the Orenstein neighborhood of Yerushalayim, at the hadlakah of the Boyaner chasidim. We quote here the letter that we received:

"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, 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 who live in Eretz Yisrael. They were happy to see him move about, albeit with crutches, because, at first, the doctors predicted that his legs would need to be amputated.

"My brother remained in Eretz Yisrael for some time, and on Lag b'Omer, the family brought him to the hadlakah. The elder chasidim lit the oil, there was a large flame, and people were jumping and dancing "לכבוד התנא אלקי ר' שמעון בר יוחאי". 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 shouted back, '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."

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 come to 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 Pshischa *zt'l* said that this occurs in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. He accomplished with his toil in *avodas Hashem* that a *baal teshuvah* should reach the highest levels."

Someone described 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

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

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 third of the battle.

The Sar Shalom added: *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.¹⁴

Rebbe Shalom Kaminka *zt'l* and the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *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 Tzanzer Rav cradled his head in his hands, and Rebbe Shalom of Kaminka cried copiously as they were thinking about this *vort* with immense *hislahavvus*.

When we do teshuvah on Lag b'Omer, Hashem compassionately accepts our teshuvah.

Reb Shimon announced that he could redeem the entire world from punishment. He can bring atonement to all their *aveiros*. The Gemara (*Succah* 45:) states:

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 Elazer, we can redeem people from judgment from the beginning of Creation until today. And if we add the merits of Yosam ben Uziyahu¹⁵, we can

13. Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiler *zt'l* said (בדרך צרות) that all *yomim tovim* are alluded to in the celebration of Lag b'Omer in Meron. Many *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 at the *tzion* are like Yom Kippur, and the joy is like Simchas Torah.

It is possible to shed tears and be joyous at the same. It isn't a contradiction. We see this as a *chasunah*. The *mechutanim* cry at the *chuppah*, and they are happier than everyone else present. The celebration in Meron is called a *Hilulah*, which means *chasunah* in Aramaic.

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

The Maharsha (*Moed Katan* 28. ד"ה מת) 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. When it is Lag b'Omer, two-thirds of the *Omer* has passed, which represents that most years of his life have passed. Chazal tell us that when one passes most years 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."

15. 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

redeem everyone from judgment from the day the world was created until the end of time."¹⁶

How do they redeem us from judgment and punishment?¹⁷

Reb Akiva Eiger (*Gilyon HaShas* on *Succah* 45:) says 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.

Reb Akiva Eiger writes that we should refer to Avos d'Reb Noson (ch.16). It states there that Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "The

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."

16. After counting the *omer*, we say (*Tehillim* 67), למנצח בנגינות. This chapter has 49 words (aside from the first pasuk), and some focus on the word of this chapter that corresponds to each night (as this is taught by the *mekubalim* and is 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 of Konigsberg that were affected by an epidemic. When everyone recovered, the doctor went to a neighboring city to rest. He e 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.

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

The same question can be asked on the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah, מלוך על כל העולם כולו, "Be king over the entire world, entirely." Indeed, the *Levush* (582:8) changes the nusach to מלוך 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 that Hashem should be king over כולו העולם, the entire world. Every person should know Hashem and accept Him as King, without any exceptions.

Similarly, we can explain that Reb Shimon says that he can save כולו מן הדין, that every single person will be saved. No problem won't be resolved.

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

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

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.

In Avos d'Reb Noson, Reb Shimon expresses this 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 time, we plowed, sowed, fertilized, pruned, and irrigated the field. We tried our best, and still, it only produced one *kur* of wheat. 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."

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.¹⁸

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, "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*, and 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, and no one knew where they were.

Miraculously, a carob tree grew in their cave, and a spring opened up, so they had 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 covered to their necks in sand.

18. 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 *וְכַפֵּי*, innocent, and some will say *הַיֵּיב*, guilty. But by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, there is *chesed* and compassion, as it states (*Tehillim* 130:4), *כי עִמָּךְ הַסְּלִיחָה*, 'For with You is forgiveness.'" And this can be because Hashem considers our struggles and, therefore, judges us favorably.

Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar lived in the cave for twelve years (they later returned for a thirteenth year), where they studied Torah day and night with all their strength, acquiring extremely high spiritual levels. As we sing, שם קנית 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 דימוס, 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 weren'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..."

This Midrash teaches us important lessons in hashgachah pratis. Everything is

destined and planned by Hashem. Nothing happens by chance. Even the capture of a bird is decreed from Above.

Most likely, when this hunter caught a bird, he was proud of his expertise and abilities. And when a bird got away, he chided himself for not being a better hunter. Little did he know that it wasn't about him but 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 was from Hashem. And when you fail, it was also destined from Above. We try our best, but whatever occurs is ultimately decided in Heaven.

When Reb Shimon learned this lesson, he realized that the Romans couldn't harm him if it wasn't decreed in heaven. With this thought in mind, he and his son left the cave.¹⁹

Salvations

Reb Ovadyah of Bartunara zt'l writes (in a letter), "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."²⁰

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

After Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar were 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 it doesn't make a 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..."

20. 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 Gemara Sotah (see Haga'as HaBach 1) teaches: "Why is Moshe's gravesite concealed? Because Hakadosh

The vows refer to the good *kabbalos* (to give tzedakah or to take on a good practice) accepted in Meron, on Lag b'Omer. (It is sufficient to accept the kabbalah on oneself *bli neder*, without an actual vow.) These *kabbalos* make the

person a better vessel to receive Hashem's blessings and miracles.²¹

The Beis Aharon writes, "Whoever believes in Reb Shimon receives *chizuk* from Reb Shimon."²² With belief in Reb Shimon

Baruch Hu knew that He would one day destroy the Beis HaMikdash and send Bnei Yisrael in galus. Perhaps at that time, they 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 more than when they were alive." This source helps us understand the wonderful salvations that can be attained when we go to Reb Shimon's kever, especially on Lag b'Omer, the day of his celebration.

21. 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 (גליל) sections of the Zohar and the kabbalah sections he would just read the words.) This person had many debts, but that year (after he had gone through half the Zohar), money poured in from an unexpected place. He was able to cover the debts and more.

This is because when one makes a kabbalah, he becomes connected with Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and now he can 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 chassidische yungerman. I work half of the day and study 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 that 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 I also 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 take a loan 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."

22. 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 davened 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. So 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 shouts disturbed a wealthy person who stood next to him. This rich man had come all the way from

bar Yochai's greatness, a kabbalah tovah, tefillos, and the joy of Lag b'Omer, many salvations come to the Jewish nation.

The Beis Aharon writes, כשם שהשי"ת הוא ה' לכל, "Just as Hashem is for everyone, so is Reb Shimon for everyone, even for those who are at a low level."²³ לכל, "for everyone," can also be translated as "for everything," because a person can receive everything he needs, on Lag b'Omer.

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.²⁴ Here are a few recommendations of what one can daven for on this holy day:

1] Good children.

The Gemara (*Makos 17:*, see Rashi) 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.

The Sfas Emes (*Emor 5652*) writes, "I heard from my grandfather [the Chidushei HaRim

America to be Lag b'Omer in Meron, and he felt that the person's shouting was taking away his peace of mind.

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, and the check went through! He saw that the person's tefillos at Reb Shimon's kever were indeed answered.

23. 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.

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 the reason Reb Shimon is for everyone, even for those who are at low levels.

24. The Tur (428) teaches that Lag b'Omer is always on the same weekday as Purim was. (For example, this year, Purim was on Tuesday, and so is Lag b'Omer.) About Purim it states כל הפושט יד נותנים לו, 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.

When Rebbe Avraham Elimelech of Karlin *hy'd zy'a* was in Meron, he didn't take *kvitelach* from his chassidim. eh,daetsnI told them that in Meron, everyone has an exceptional power of *tefillah*. Similarly, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* would go with his chassidim to Meron for Shabbos *parshas Behaloscha* and wouldn't accept *kvitelach* from his followers, as he felt that there was no need for that in Meron.

Furthermore, Rebbe Avraham hcelemilE 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 bar Yochai."

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

zt'l] that on Lag b'Omer, one can attain *yiras Shamayim*."

The Imrei Emes zt'l teaches:

Tehillim (chapter 19) has five sentences 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 (הוד שבהוד). The Imrei Emes says that this hints that Lag b'Omer is an ideal time to attain *yiras Shamayim*.

It is also an ideal time to daven for children with *yiras Shamayim*. The heavens are open, and our tefillos will be accepted.

2] *Parnassah*.

The Chasam Sofer (*Yorah Deiah* 233) makes the following calculation: Chazal tell us that when the Yidden left Mitzrayim, they ate matzos for thirty days. They finished the matzos on Pesach Sheini. The Midrash adds that they didn't have food for three days, and then on the next day, the *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*.²⁵

3] *Refuah*

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

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

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

There are many stories of *refuos* that occurred in Meron, particularly on Lag b'Omer, and we write some of them in the footnote.²⁶ Here, we will write the most

25. The Taamei HaMinhagim writes, "A great bounty [of *parnassah*, etc.] should come to all worlds" is *roshei teivos*, רשב".

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

A youngster 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.

26. Elul 1959/ט"ז: The Brisker Rav zt'l was ill, and Reb Shach zt'l was constantly at the Brisker Rav's 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* on that Thursday night.

Sunday, Rav Shach was at the Brisker Rav's side again, 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 esoh't 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 the person directly involved in the story, Reb S. G. Shlita from Williamsburg, New York.

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; it was impossible to heal.

A government agency set up their home to be suitable for the blind.

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 used a flashlight to look at 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 won'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 gib 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 yrassacen 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.). Furthermore, you said that you *dluoc* save everyone from judgment. I have two failing kidneys, and I need a small miracle; that my kidneys should begin working again."

He may have thought he was asking for a *ronim* miracle, but he was really 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 needs 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* called 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.

Lag b'Omer was approaching. 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 was dancing 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 the blood and puss blocking his throat came out, and he was healed.

In the winter of 5775, a woman from the Toldos Aharon community felt immense pressure on her eye, and her eyesight was weakening. The doctor instructed her to take a C T scan, which she did 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 her poor vision, and she 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*. Then, the father took another test, and the surprised doctors informed him that the dreaded disease had 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 *chavrusa* would visit him and speak with 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 for 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."

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. Twenty years ago, the crowd wasn't as large as it is today, and 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 that stone here."

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 their child to Meron on Lag b'Omer for his *chalachah* (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 she would. (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 I brought him here yesterday. Sanctify Hashem's name. Reveal

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 feared he was crying because he had received negative news from the doctors, but he was finally able to find his voice and say that they were tears of joy and happiness.

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

Once, someone came to Rebbe Dovid Biderman zt'l for a bracha 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*."

One shouldn't lose hope from tefillos. Even if he davened until now and didn't have a salvation, perhaps one more tefillah will turn everything around.

The following lesson shows us that we should never lose hope:

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

Reb Akiva lost most of his students but didn't give up. Instead, he forged ahead and 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.

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* ²⁷. מְחִייה הַמַּתִּים.

4] Children

The Shem Shlomo of Munkacz *zt'l* taught that to be able to bear children one should have *kavanah* in the *brachah* רְפָאוֹנוּ. Lag b'Omer is הַיּוֹד שְׁבֵהוּד, a day *mesugal* for *refuah*, so Lag b'Omer is *mesugal* for bearing 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. He replied, "I swear, just as you got married with food and drink, you should separate amidst food and drink."

They celebrated with 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."

5] *Shidduchim*

About Reb Shimon, it states (in the song Bar Yochai), הַצִּיל הַלְחוּצִים, "He saves those who are stressed and worried," and who is more stressed and worried than someone awaiting their *shidduch*?²⁸ This is because we can daven and receive salvations for all our

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

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

28. 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 his *bashert*.

As she traveled, she remembered that years before, she and her husband had been married for several years yet 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.

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

needs, and as we wrote, this is in Meron and elsewhere, as well. In Reb Shimon's merit, our tefillos will be answered.²⁹

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 Chernobyler *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 יוהאי* 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. Thus, there was a connection between his father and Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

One year, after singing *בר יוהאי*, 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 that are going on, 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.³⁰

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!

29. It states (Shmos 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 for themselves. We can therefore explain that Reb Shimon *הציל הלחצים* means he saves people from their tiny apartments so that they can live comfortably.

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 Salvations are Forever

The Sifri (end of *Eikev*) writes that according to Reb Shimon when a tzaddik brings a brachah, it is forever. We quote:

"This isn't a kiddush Hashem. The words of tzaddikim are eternal and don't cease after they die. The bounty that comes from a tzaddik remains for always."³¹

Therefore, the yeshuos we can receive on this day will remain with us forever. So let us call out to Hashem, and we will merit many salvations.

The *Zohar* tells us that the gates of heaven open Pesach Sheni, and they remain open an entire week, and then the gates close.

Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz *zy'a* asks, why can't the gates remain open forever? Why do they close?

The answer is, during this week, we have Lag b'Omer, and everyone davens and receives what they need. Since Klal Yisrael has already received all their hearts' desires, the gates close.³²

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

There was an epidemic in Lud, and people went with Reb Shimon around the city 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 declare that the plague should stop!"

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

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

They went and 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 angel replied, "Hashem said that in every generation, there must be at least thirty tzaddikim who are similar to Avraham Avinu. This is as it states (Bereishis 18:18) וַאֲבִרָהָם וְהָיוּ יְהִיָּה, and יהיה is gematriya thirty. But now, there aren't thirty tzaddikim like Avraham in the world, 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. The Sifri writes that when Yaakov came to Mitzrayim, the famine ended. What happened when Yaakov was niftar? One opinion is that the famine returned, but Reb Shimon argues and says that a brachah from a tzaddik is forever.

32. It states in the *sefer* מִסֵּעַ מִיְרוּשָׁלַיִם that in Cheshvan 1761/תקס"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.

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 in the air and falling back down again. The dome on the roof split in two. They became very afraid. They said, "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 and checked to see the damages, but there were none. The dome merged, and there was no sign of any scratches or damage.

"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), לֹא אֲשַׁחֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים, 'I will not destroy on account of the twenty [tzaddikim].' And even if there are only ten tzaddikim, that is also enough to protect the world from destruction because Hashem said (Bereishis 18:32), לֹא אֲשַׁחֵת בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרָה, 'I will not destroy on account of the ten.' And even if there are only two tzaddikim in the world – Reb Elazar and me – it is also sufficient... And if there is only one tzaddik in the world, it is also enough, as it states, צְדִיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם, a tzaddik is the foundation of the world."

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

Customs on Lag b'Omer

1] Bonfire

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).

The *sefer* מסע מירון describes the *hadlakah* in Meron (1888/תרט"ח): "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 never heard anything like it, and I never saw a joy similar to 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). Reb However, 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.

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 on their way because he kept wandering off.

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

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 candles³³ and bonfires on Lag b'Omer. It is in commemoration of the sun that continued to shine on the final day of Reb Shimon bar Yochai's life.

2] *Chalakeh* (haircut)

The *chalakeh* (a child's first haircut) is often celebrated in Meron, on Lag b'Omer. It is the child's chinuch for *peyos*.

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..."³⁴

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explains that Reb Shimon bar Yochai promised, **כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו**, the Torah will never be forgotten. The *mesorah* of Yiddishkeit will be passed down from father to son, from generation to

generation. Therefore, we 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 Chernobyler 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 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 called Ben Temalyon met with 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, Reb Shimon said, "Ben Temalyon, leave!" which it did.

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

34. The three-year-old son of someone I know was hit by a car before Pesach, 5766, r'l. After Pesach, the hospital sent the unconscious child to a nursing facility, saying they couldn't do anything to help 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.

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 *chalah* in Meron, at Reb Shimon's *kever*, because Reb Shimon was able to annul the harsh decrees while appearing as a Yid.

3] Songs

On Lag b'Omer, it is also customary to sing *בר יוחאי*, the son of Yochai. 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* *לוזי*, written by the Ben Ish Chai *zt'l*, etc.) we should seek to be inspired by Reb Shimon's greatness and seek to emulate his ways. 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 can also reach very high levels.

It states (Daniel 4:10) *עיר וקדיש משמיא אנחית*, "A holy malach came down from heaven," and the *roshei teivos* are *שמעון*. This means Reb Shimon was like a malach. We 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 to make a seudah in honor of this special day and in honor of Reb Shimon. It is surprising that we eat on this day. Generally, a *yahrtzeit* is a fast day. For example, Moshe Rabbeinu's *yahrtzeit* (the seventh of Adar) is called "*taanis tzaddikim*," a day for fasting. Lag b'Omer is also a *yahrtzeit*, 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*, secrets of the Torah were revealed. This explains why many fast on the 7th of Adar and rejoice on Lag b'Omer.

The Taamei HaMinhagim offers another explanation:

The *Zohar* tells us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai annulled harsh decrees with joy (unlike most *tzaddikim* who annul harsh decrees with fasting). Therefore, on Reb Shimon's *yahrtzeit* we eat and celebrate. This is how we abolish harsh decrees on this day.³⁵

35. 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 remain 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 שאן* '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 decreed a fast to attain his requests. He decreed what should be, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu acquiesced. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed, and he annulled it."