

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Achrei - Kedoshim

Lag B'Omer



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Hashem's Hashgachah

During the *avodah* of Yom Kippur,¹ the *kohen gadol* performed a *gorel* to determine which goat would be brought as a *korban*, and which goat would be pushed off the *Azazel* cliff (see this week's parashah, 16:8). The nature of a *gorel* is that the person doesn't choose, instead Hashem chooses. The truth is, even when a person does choose, it isn't him. Hashem is the One deciding. A person thinks he chose his *parnassah*, his *shidduch*, and various other matters, but this is an illusion, because Hashem determines everything for him. Reb Saadyah Gaon zt"l explains that the *kohen gadol* is commanded to make a *gorel* on Yom Kippur to remind us that everything is from Hashem. Just as a *gorel* is a choice made by Hashem, so too, all our choices are predetermined by Hashem.²

Life's situations aren't always how they appear on the surface. For example, some circumstances seem bad to us, but later we discover they are for the good, and vice

versa. Because there are situations that appear to be good, and then we discover the troubles that come from them.

This is apparent by the two goats that were prepared for the *avodah* of Yom Kippur. One was slaughtered as a *korban*. The other animal remained alive, as it states (16:8) *וְעָמַד הִי לְפָנַי ה'*. If a goat could think, the surviving goat would say, "I struck it lucky. My fellow animal was slaughtered, and I am alive and well. They even took me out of the *Beis HaMikdash*, so I am free and out of risk." But soon this goat is taken to a cliff and thrown off. The other animal was more fortunate, because it was slaughtered and brought as a *korban* before Hashem. (Based on a lesson from Reb Shamshon Refael Hirsh zy'a.)

The *ketores* of Yom Kippur is called *קְטֹרֶת*, *סַמִּים דָּקָה*, "fine incense" (16:12), which means that it was well ground.

Rashi writes, "Why does it have to state that the *ketores* was *דָּקָה*, thin? All *ketores* were ground thin, as it states (Shemos 30:36)

1. When Rebbe Asher of Stolin zy'a read parashas *אֲחֵרֵי מוֹת*, which discusses the *korbanos* of Yom Kippur, he experienced immense yearning for Yom Kippur. The *Beis Aharon* describes the yearning of his father, Rebbe Asher, to be *עַד כְּלוּת הַנֶּפֶשׁ*. This means his soul almost left him, due to his intense yearning.

The *Beis Aharon* compared it to the cooking of a *chasunah*. The *chasunah* hadn't begun yet, but people in the kitchen were already tasting the food. Similarly, on this *Shabbos*, there is an arousal for the *kedushah* of Yom Kippur.

2. Around fifty years ago, there were several plane crashes, r'l, in a short period of time. Someone had to travel by plane, so he went to the *Chazon Ish* and told him he was afraid his plane would fall, as well.

The *Chazon Ish* told him, "Planes don't fall out of heaven. People fall." In other words, when it is *bashert* that people die, the plane crashes. The problem isn't with the aircraft. The decree is on people.

Once, several villagers crossed over a bridge near Mir, Poland, and the bridge collapsed. All of them died. Reb Yerucham of Mir zt"l said, "Hashem's ways are so much greater than the ways of human beings. When a human king wants to punish people, he places them in jail so that they won't escape. But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* allows people to roam about freely. When the time comes to punish them, He has them all go on a bridge together and punishes them together."

This story is another example that everything is from Hashem. The villagers thought that they went on the bridge by their own choice. However, that isn't what occurred. It was time for them to die, so Hashem made them decide to cross the bridge.

דק, ושחקת ממנה הדק, "You shall crush it very finely..." Rather, for Yom Kippur, the Torah repeats that the ketores should be thin, to tell us that it should be דקה מן הדקה, extremely thin. On Erev Yom Kippur, the ketores was returned to the grinder [so the ketores of Yom Kippur would be extremely thin]."

In the ketores that we say every day, we mention this, as it states, תָּנוּ רֶבֶן, פֶּטוּם הַקִּטְרֶת, שֶׁלֹּשׁ מֵאוֹת בִּיצָד: שֶׁלֹּשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשִׁשִּׁים וְשִׁמוֹנֶה מֵנִים הָיוּ בָּהּ. שֶׁלֹּשׁ מֵאוֹת וְשִׁשִּׁים וְחֲמִשָּׁה קָמָנִין יָמוֹת הַחֲפֹה, מִנָּה לְכָל יוֹם פָּרַס בְּשִׁחְרִית וּפָרַס בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים, וְשִׁלְשָׁה מֵנִים יִתְּרִים, שֶׁמֵּהֶם מִכְּנִים כֶּהֵן גָּדוֹל מִלֹּא חֲפָנָיו בְּיוֹם הַפָּאָרִים, וּמִחֲזִירוֹ לְמִכְתָּשֶׁת בְּעֶרֶב יוֹם הַפָּאָרִים, "Chazal taught, that the ketores contained 368 maneh – 365 for each of the days of the year, a maneh for each day, half to be offered in the morning and half toward evening. Of the remaining three maneh, the Kohen Gadol would bring two cupped handfuls into [the Kodesh Kadoshim] on Yom Kippur. These [three maneh] had been returned to the mortar on the day before Yom Kippur and were ground very thoroughly so that they would be דקה מן הדקה, exceedingly fine."

If the ketores could speak, the three maneh would complain, "Why must we be returned to the mortar? Why should we be pounded and ground more than the other pieces of ketores?" But the next day, they won't be complaining anymore. They will discover that they were ground extra because

they were to be used for the ketores of Yom Kippur. It was for their benefit, so they could enter the Kodesh Kadoshim and be a korban for Hashem.

This is a life lesson. Every hardship and beating a person goes through is for his benefit. Because of these hardships, he will benefit *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*.

Parashas Kedoshim

There are many mitzvos in Parashas Kedoshim. Hashem told Moshe (19:2) דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל, that he should say this parashah to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. Rashi writes, מלמד שנאמרה פרשה זו בהקהל מפני שרוב גופי תורה תלויין בה, "This teaches us that this Parashah was stated in the assembly [of Bnei Yisrael] because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it."

The Zohar HaKadosh (Kedoshim 81.) states: "Rebbi Abba said: 'This Parashah (Parashas Kedoshim) encompasses the entire Torah (כלל). When the scholars began studying this parashah, they were happy.'"

An example of a fundamental mitzvah stated in this week's Parashah is (19:18), ואהבת, "You shall love your friend as yourself." Rashi writes, אמר ר' עקיבא: זה כלל גדול, "Reb Akiva taught, this is a fundamental principle of the Torah."³

3. When the Torah writes כְּמוֹךָ, that you should love your fellow man as you love yourself, it is literal. The Mesilas Yesharim (11) writes, כְּמוֹךָ בְּלִי שׁוּם הַפֶּרֶשׁ, "As yourself, with no difference whatsoever.... כְּמוֹךָ מִמֶּשׁ, literally as yourself."

The Chida (Lev Dovid, 30:12) writes, "During the days of Omer, one must be extra cautious...with the sin of *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred). One must be extremely careful, for we know what happened to Reb Akiva's students between Pesach and Shavuos."

The Belzer Rav zt'l once heard someone insult another Yid. The Belzer Rav admonished him, "If the requirement to speak respectfully to others were a minhag, you would certainly be cautious not to shame your fellow man" (as it is the way of people to be very cautious with customs, even more than they are careful with halachos).

Chazal say that Reb Akiva's students were punished בְּזֵה שֶׁלֹּא נִהְגּוּ כְבוֹד זֶה בְּזֵה "because they didn't act with honor towards one another." We can explain (*b'lashon tzachus*) that the problem was שֶׁלֹּא נִהְגּוּ, that honoring one's fellow man is a halachah and not a minhag. People might have been more cautious with it had it been a minhag.

The Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3:1) writes that לֵב טוֹב (good heart) is the *gematria* of 49, the same number of days that

There are many other mitzvos in this week's parashah that are related to helping your fellow man, such as to judge another man favorably,⁴ not to take revenge⁵, to avoid speaking lashon hara, to help the poor, and more.

The first mitzvah of Kedoshim, which is קדושים תהיו, to be holy, is also a mitzvah that has many details and practical applications.⁶

The Or HaChaim writes, "Chazal (Kiddushin 39b) say, 'If a person doesn't perform an aveirah, he receives reward like he performed a mitzvah.' This is implied in the mitzvah of קדושים תהיו. When an opportunity to perform an aveirah comes to you, keep yourself distant from performing it, and thereby, you have kept the mitzvah of קדושים תהיו. This mitzvah is called קדושים, to tell us that when a person avoids the aveirah, he is קדוש, holy.

This mitzvah was said before כל עדת בני ישראל, all of Klal Yisrael. This is because this mitzvah applies to every person. Any Yid who keeps this mitzvah is קדוש, and there is no Yid who isn't on the *madreigah* to attain this title."

Further on, the parashah discusses the prohibition of bringing one's son to the *Molech*, a type of avodah zarah. The Torah is very stringent about this and states (20:5) וְהִכְרַתִּי אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת כָּל הַזֵּנִים אַחֲרָיו לְזִנוֹת אַחֲרֵי הַמִּלֵּךְ מִקֶּרֶב עַמָּם, "I will cut him off from among their people, him and all who stray... after the Molech."

Two pasukim later it states (20:7) וְהִתְקַדְּשְׁתָּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים, "You shall sanctify yourself and you will be holy." Rashi writes that this means he sanctifies himself by going away from avodah zarah.

there are in the *omer* because during these days we must acquire a heart that cares about our fellow man.

The forty-eight kinyanim (acquisitions) of Torah (mentioned in Pirkei Avos ch.8) allude to the first 48 days of the *sefirah* (and the 49th day is a combination of them all). The 32nd acquisition is אוהב את הבריות, to love people. When one attains that level, he will honor his fellow man. This can explain why the students stopped dying on the 33rd day (ל"ג בעומר). After they reached the level of loving their fellow man, they honored them properly.

4. The Chinuch (235) writes, "It is proper that every person should judge his friend favorably and interpret his actions and words favorably. This will increase peace and friendship among people... and remove suspicion from one another."

5. Sefer HaChinuch (241) writes, "The way of most people is that if someone wronged them, they don't cease to seek opportunities to take revenge and to give them what they deserve... Hashem yisbarach forbids us to do so..."

"One of the reasons for this commandment is that a person should know that whatever happens to him, whether good or bad, is from Hashem yisbarach. It is impossible for a human being to harm his fellow man, and therefore, when someone harms you, know in your soul that Hashem is punishing you for your aveiros. Don't seek revenge. He isn't the cause of your tzaros.

6. The Rebbe Rasha"b of Lubavitz zt"l was speaking with the city's butcher, teaching him a lesson in mussar and yiras Shamayim. A chasid stood nearby to listen. The Rasha"b was explaining the Mishnah at the end of Peah, וְכָל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ לֹא חֲגֹר, וְלֹא סוּקָא, וְלֹא פֶסֶח, וְעוֹשֶׂה עֲצָמוֹ כְּאַחַד מֵהֶם, אֵינוֹ מוֹת מִן הַזִּקְנָה עַד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה כְּאַחַד מֵהֶם, "Whoever isn't lame, and not blind, and not wounded, yet he pretends to be like them [in order to trick people to support him] he won't die in his old age until he becomes like them." The Rasha"b explained the Mishnah in a positive manner. It is referring to a person who avoids aveiros. He is healthy, but he says that he is lame, blind, wounded, etc. When the yetzer hara tells him to go here or there to perform an aveirah, he replies, "I can't see, I can't go anywhere. I can't do anything." If a person does so, Hashem will help him, and in his old age, he will be like the blind, wounded, etc. This means that later on in life, he won't want to commit aveiros. He won't want to look or go where it is forbidden.

Similarly, we add that if a person acts like he is mute and overcomes his temptation to speak lashon hara and the like, he will become mute in the end. Not literally, but he will not desire to say anything forbidden.

Reb Shmuel Birnbaum zt'l (Rosh Yeshiva Mir, America) asks that behold the pasuk is referring to a great rasha, someone who recently committed avodah zarah, and in fact he worshipped the severe avodah zarah of Molech. How can this person be called holy? How can the Torah write, וְהָיִיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים?!

The answer is that a Yid has the ability to change in a moment. He can rise from the lowest level to the highest level when he does teshuvah. This is because each Yid is a חלק אלוהים, a part of Hashem, and therefore, he has the ability to reach the highest levels, regardless of the past.

Pesach Sheini

During the *hakravah* of the first korban Pesach some people were tamei and couldn't bring it. They came to Moshe and pleaded (Bamidbar 9:7), לָמָּה נִגְרַע לְבַלְתִּי הַקָּרִיב אֶת קֶרְבֶּן ה' בַּמּוֹעֵד, "Why should we be excluded... so as not to bring the korban of Hashem in its appointed time?" Hashem responded that they could bring the *korban Pesach* a month later, on Pesach Sheini.

The meforshim are puzzled at the way the people asked לָמָּה נִגְרַע, "Why should we be excluded from bringing the korban Pesach?" Certainly, they should be excluded, since they were tamei! Just as a person without an arm understands that he can't wear tefillin, and just as a person who can't speak understands that he can't be a rebbe to teach Torah, so why didn't these people understand that since they were tamei, they can't bring a korban pesach! Why did they cry out, לָמָּה נִגְרַע, "Why should we be excluded?"

The Chidushei HaRim zt'l answers that their question wasn't an intellectual one. It was the shout of the soul, yearning for a connection with Hashem. The rational mind understands that they couldn't bring the *korban Pesach*, but their hearts shouted out in pain לָמָּה נִגְרַע! "Their hearts – not their minds – screamed, 'Why not us? Why can't we bring the *korban*?'"

And their cries yielded results. Due to their plea, Hashem created a new halachah and granted them the opportunity to sacrifice the *korban* on Pesach Sheini. This was the first and only time Hashem created a new halachah, and it was due to the people's pleas and strong desires.

The story of the daughters of Tzelafchad, when they requested to inherit their father's portion in Eretz Yisrael (see Bamidbar 27), seems quite similar to the story of Pesach Sheini. Tzelafchad had no sons, and his daughters requested to inherit their father's portion in the Land. Moshe didn't know the answer. (He thought that perhaps only male children may inherit.) Hashem ruled that the daughters of Tzelafchad were correct. When there are no sons, the daughters are the inheritors. Similarly, in the story of Pesach Sheini, the ones who were *tamei* had a request, Moshe didn't know the answer, and Hashem agreed with the people.

But there is a significant difference between the two episodes. By the story of Bnos Tzelafchad, new halachos weren't created. This was Hashem's initial plan. When there are no sons, the daughters inherit. Hashem would have eventually revealed this halachah, even if it weren't for the requests of the daughters of Tzelafchad. As Rashi (Bamidbar 27:7) writes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, כָּבַר כְּתוּבָה פֶּרֶשָׁה זֹאת לִפְנֵי, "This halachah was already written before Me in heaven. כֵּן בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד דּוֹבְרוֹת, "They speak correctly.... Their eyes saw what Moshe didn't."

Rashi (Bamidbar 27:5) writes, רְאוּיָהּ הִיטָה פֶּרֶשָׁה זֹאת לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, אֲלֵא שֶׁזָּכוּ בְּנוֹת צִלְפַּחַד וּנְכַתְּבָה עַל יָדוֹ, "This *parashah* [that teaches the inheritance of daughters] should have been written through Moshe. But the daughters of Tzelafchad merited that it should be written through them." This all means that a new halachah wasn't created. The halachah was going to be revealed anyway, only it was revealed in the Bnos Tzelafchad's merit.

Whereas the ability to bring a *korban Pesach* on Pesach Sheini is a brand-new

halachah. There was no concept of Pesach Sheini, until the people begged for a solution. The entire halachah was created by the strong desire of Yidden who didn't want to miss out on the *korban Pesach*.

This teaches us the power of desire. Never say something is impossible because if you want it enough, Hashem can make it happen. Hashem can create a new reality and enable it to happen.

When the *tamei* people told Moshe they yearned to bring a *korban Pesach*, Moshe didn't tell them, "What are you talking about? What do you want from me? You're *tamei*! It's impossible!" Rather, Moshe knew that due to their desires, a new halachah might be created. So he told them, עמדו ואשמעה, "מה יצוה ה' לכם", "Stand here, and I will hear what Hashem will command you."

Rashi writes, "[Moshe spoke] like a student who is certain he will hear a response from his *rebbe*. Fortunate is the person who is confident that he can speak with the Shechinah whenever he wishes!"

The Shinover Rav *zt'l* explains that Moshe was the most humble person. He wasn't always certain Hashem would speak with him. But Moshe was confident that Hashem would answer him for the sake of the people who so much wanted to bring the *korban Pesach*.

Chumash Bamidbar begins with the counting of Bnei Yisrael on Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Later on, in *parashas Behaaloscha*, the Torah tells us what happened in Nisan, when the Jewish nation offered the *korban Pesach*. The question is why Iyar is discussed before Nisan. Chazal answer that this tells us, אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה, the Torah doesn't always follow the chronological order of the events.

Nevertheless, there is a reason the Torah chose to leave the chronological order.

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 9:1) explains that the Torah didn't want to begin Sefer Bamidbar with Nisan, with the *korban Pesach* because "The story of the *korban Pesach* connotes a disgrace to the Jewish nation: For during the forty years they were in the desert, this was the only *korban Pesach* they brought."

This needs explaining because *they weren't permitted to bring a second korban Pesach in the desert*. Chazal say that since they were tired from their travels, and the north wind doesn't blow in the desert, it was dangerous to perform a *bris milah*. So, the newborn children in the desert were without a *milah*, which is why the parents were forbidden from bringing the *korban Pesach*. So, why is this considered a disgrace, and why can't Chumash Bamidbar begin with this reality? They acted correctly for not performing *bris milah* and not bringing the *korban Pesach*!

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* answers: Had the Yidden in the desert desired with all their heart to bring a *korban Pesach*, Hashem would have made it possible. Just as Hashem found a way for the *tamei* people to bring a *korban Pesach*, Hashem would have also found a solution to enable the generation of the desert to bring a *korban Pesach* if they wanted it enough. Their disgrace was that they didn't desire the *korban Pesach* enough.

In conclusion, we learn from this discussion an important lesson. You should yearn to perform mitzvos, including those presently beyond your reach. Don't stop wanting, and don't stop trying, because if you desire enough, Hashem will find a way for you to succeed.⁷

7. The Midrash tells a story of an alcoholic, whose children wanted to help him wean off his addiction. One day, his children gave a lot of drinks to their father, and in their father's drunken state, they brought him to a cemetery and put him in a grave. They said that when their father awakens and finds himself in a grave, he will realize that he is ruining his life. This will help him stop drinking.

But even in the grave, he had wine. This is what happened. There were wine merchants carrying barrels

The Zohar (vol.3 152b) states that on Pesach Sheini, there is an announcement going forth in heaven: "Whoever didn't yet succeed to see the Shechinah, he should come during these days to see the Shechina before the gates close.' When is this announcement made? On the fourteenth of Iyar, because from then until seven days pass, the gates of heaven are open, and afterwards, the gates are locked."

Chazal say that the gates of heaven open up on Pesach Sheini, and they remain open throughout this week (the week of הוד). The gates of heaven are open; therefore, Pesach Sheini, and ultimately the entire week that follows it, is an auspicious time for tefillah.

It states (Tehillim 20:6) וְנִנְּנָה בִישׁוּעָתֶךָ וּבְשֵׁם אֱלֹהֵינוּ, נִדְגֹל יְמִלָּא ה' כָּל מִשְׁאֲלוֹתֶיךָ, "Let us sing praises for Your salvation, and let us (נִדְגֹל) assemble in the name of Hashem; may Hashem fulfill all your requests." נִדְגֹל represents the דגלים, flags that the Jewish nation had in the desert. This began in Iyar, as it states in the beginning of sefer Bamidbar (1:1) בַּאֲחֶד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי, "on the first day of the second month" and the parashah describes the flags of the Jewish people in the desert. Rebbe Dovid'l Tolna zt'l teaches that Iyar is a good time for

tefillah, as it states נִדְגֹל יְמִלָּא ה' כָּל מִשְׁאֲלוֹתֶיךָ, in the month of Iyar, when the נִדְגֹל, flags are discussed, יְמִלָּא ה' כָּל מִשְׁאֲלוֹתֶיךָ, Hashem will grant you all your hearts' desires.

In particular, during the week of Hod, the week that begins with Pesach Sheini, because that is when the gates of heaven are opened, and our requests will be answered.

Lag B'Omer

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

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

The Gemara Shavuos (daf 34b and the discussion begins on daf 9^ג) states, ר' שמעון מוחכו עליה במערבא. The Chasam Sofer taught this Gemara to his students on Lag b'Omer and translated it as, "In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."¹⁰

The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l said, "Lag b'Omer is the greatest day of the year."

of wine near the cemetery. They thought they heard shouts of war, so they hid their barrels in the cemetery and ran away. One of the barrels had a leak. When the drunk woke up, a trickle of wine was dripping into the grave. He opened his mouth, and let the wine drip in.

Three days later, the children realized that they didn't act correctly. They shouldn't have left their father alone in the cemetery. They went to see how he was faring. They found him drinking wine. That is when they realized that בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין אותו, "The path a person desires to go, Hashem leads him there."

From then on, the children decided to take turns providing their father with wine.

The moral of the story is that if you want something enough, it will happen. Also, if you desire to accomplish a lot in the realm of ruchniyos, Hashem will help you succeed.

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

9. The Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l marveled that the lengthy story of Reb Shimon's salvation from the Romans is written on daf 9^ג in the Gemara. Reb Shalom Kaminka zt'l added that this is Reb Shimon's 33rd statement in Masechta Shabbos.

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

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz zt'l was present when the Sar Shalom of Belz said this. He immediately lowered his head before his father and said, "Father, give me a brachah.

Reb Moshe Rozvadover 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) לִבִּי וּבִשְׂרִי יִרְנֶנּוּ אֱלֹהִים חַי, "My heart and my flesh praise the living G-d." לִבִּי represents ל"ב בעומר, the 32nd day of the omer. And then comes Lag b'Omer with the merit of וּבִשְׂרִי, roshei teivos of ר' שמעון בר יוחאי, and then יִרְנֶנּוּ אֱלֹהִים חַי, we will praise Hashem for the salvations we receive on this day.

Reb Moshe Rozvadover would say there isn't a better day in the year than Lag b'Omer. If he could, he would hold onto the sun with his teeth and not let it set, so he wouldn't have to leave Lag b'Omer.

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

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

The Zohar relates that when Reb Shimon was niftar, and the levayah passed Tzipori, the people of Tzipori came out with sticks in their hands and demanded that Reb Shimon be buried in Tzipori. They hit the people who wanted to bring Reb Shimon to Meron.

Miraculously, Reb Shimon's coffin rose in the air and flew to his burial place in Meron. A bas kol announced, "Gather and celebrate the hillulah/holiday of Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

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

Lag B'Omer Everywhere

A Yid from Eretz Yisrael was once in Ruzhin, and he described Lag b'Omer to the Ruzhiner. He said, "Inside it is like Yom Kippur and outside it is like Simchas Torah." The Ruzhiner praised this description immensely.

Also, the Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3:3) writes, "It is confirmed to us from people who tell the truth that at the *tzion* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai on Lag b'Omer, the joy is supernatural."¹¹

The Maharil of Paltishan zt'l writes, "I had the merit of being in Meron on Lag b'Omer (approximately 175 years ago). Brothers and friends, I cannot express in writing the great *simchah* experienced there! Fortunate are the eyes that beheld it! Whoever was there felt with certainty that the joy was in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai – because he wants people to rejoice on this day."

Reb Avraham Rozen described the Lag b'Omer he saw (in תשכ"ז/1967): "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

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

11. 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.

details of the joy I saw there, at every moment, and in various ways. Whoever didn't see that joy never experienced joy in their life. Some people were jumping like deer, some were singing, some were drinking, and some were clapping their hands and dancing with all their might.... I don't know how to describe the joy, but I will tell you what I felt at the time. I imagined that Moshiach had arrived, and I was watching the *simchas beis hashoevah* in Yerushalayim. It was wondrous!"¹²

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, כְּדֹאֵר שְׁמֵעוֹן, לְסִמּוֹךְ עָלָיו בְּפָנָיו וְשִׁלָּא בְּפָנָיו. The Nesivos Shalom of Slonim zt'l said that this hints that we can rely on Reb Shimon's merits even if we can't travel to Meron.

Chasidim say, "One can be close and far, and one can be far and close." This means a chasid can be physically distant from his Rebbe, but at the same time, he is very close because his heart and desire are to be with the Rebbe. And, one can be close, actually in the same beis medresh as his Rebbe, but if he doesn't want to be there, he is far away.

We can compare it to a house next door to a power generation plant, but no wires connect the house to the plant. Despite its proximity to the power plant, the house remains dark. At the same time, there are homes very distant from the plant, but they receive electricity. This is because cables connect their home to the generating plant. So, we see that more important than being near is to be attached. If one attaches himself to Reb Shimon, even from a distance, it will be as if he is close, in Meron, and he will merit salvations *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*, and perhaps even more than someone close but whose heart is far away.¹³

12. 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 told him to eat because it is a day of happiness.

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

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

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

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

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

13. 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.

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 were there.¹⁴

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l writes in his sefer, "If someone can't go to Meron on

Lag b'Omer, or someone lives in *chutz l'aretz*, he should study the sefer "מאמרי רשב" (a collection of lessons from Reb Shimon bar Yochai) and should be happy with Reb Shimon's hillulah, and he too will have a salvation."

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

Some have the custom on Lag b'Omer to study with a minyan the praises of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Reb Shimon said (*Gittin*

Someone who didn't have children for many years told us he made this promise in Monroe, New York, on Lag b'Omer. A year later, he had a son.

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

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

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

We received a letter that gives us a glimpse into the miracles that occur on Lag b'Omer. It happened year 5777, in the Orenstein neighborhood of Yerushalayim, at the hadlakah of the Boyaner chasidim. We quote the letter:

"My brother was sitting in the front seat, next to the driver. They were driving from France to Switzerland. The car fell off a cliff, and they couldn't get out of the crushed vehicle. Baruch Hashem, first responders (police, firefighters, and paramedics) arrived and sawed open the side of the car so they could get out.

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

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

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

14. 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, the sections that discuss bar mitzvah, but he didn't know where it was written. So instead, he began saying Tehillim. Then his son tapped him on his arm and said, "Look at this. I just saw this, and it looks interesting." It was a sefer quoting the Zohar, sections related to a bar mitzvah. The father said that he realized that when one wants to study Reb Shimon's lessons, Hashem helps him do so.

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.¹⁵

Teshuvah on Lag B'Omer

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

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*, summed it up and 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.

One of the songs people sing on Lag b'Omer is אמר ר' עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרים, "Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you!" These words discuss Yom Kippur – it is the final Mishnah in Masechta Yoma that discusses Yom Kippur – but we sing them on Lag b'Omer because on Lag b'Omer, our souls are cleansed like on Yom Kippur.¹⁶

We wrote about someone describing Lag b'Omer in Meron to Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin *zt'l*. He said, "Inside, by the *tzion*, it is like Yom Kippur, and outside, in the courtyard, it is like Simchas Torah." The Ruzhiner *zt'l* praised this description immensely.¹⁷ This source is another indication of the association between Lag b'Omer and Yom Kippur, Lag b'Omer, and atonement.¹⁸

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

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

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

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

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

Based on the description given to the Ruzhiner, we can add two more holidays experienced in Meron on

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 one-third of the battle.

The Sar Shalom added that *Sefiras Ha'omer* is 49 days, and on the 33rd day, two-thirds of the *omer* has passed. During the first two-thirds of the *omer*, we counted the *omer*, and we strove to purify ourselves. Then, on Lag b'Omer, Hashem completes the mission, and we become entirely cleansed from all sin.¹⁹

Rebbe Shalom Kaminka *zt'l* and the Divrei Chaim of Sanz *zt'l* were present at the Sar Shalom's Lag b'Omer *tish* when the Sar Shalom taught this lesson, and for the next forty-five minutes, the Sanzer Rav cradled his head in his hands, and Rebbe Shalom of Kaminka cried copiously as they delved into this *vort* with immense *hislahavus*.

The Gemara (*Succah* 45:) states that Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "I can free all people from judgment [so they won't be punished for their *aveiros*]. If I add the merits of my son, Reb Elazar, we can redeem people from judgment from the beginning of Creation until today. And if we add the merits of Yosam ben Uziyahu²⁰, we can redeem everyone from judgment from the day the world was created until the end of time."²¹

Lag b'Omer: Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah. The tears of teshuvah are like Yom Kippur, and the joy is like Simchas Torah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Avos d'Reb Noson states a surprising statement: Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "The Jewish nation doesn't go to Gehinom." Reb Shimon explains with a *mashal*:

What process does Reb Shimon Bar Yochai use to free us from judgment and punishment?²²

A king owned an infertile field, which 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.

Reb Akiva Eiger (*Gilyon HaShas* on *Succah* 45:), on the margin of the Gemara, writes that we should refer to Avos d'Reb Noson (ch.16). With these few words, Reb Akiva Eiger is telling us the method Reb Shimon can use to save the entire world from judgment.

The king agreed to the deal.

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

Reb Moshe Leib Shachor of Yerushalayim zt'l told a story about a doctor from Konigsberg, Germany, who worked very hard, day and night, to heal all the patients affected by an epidemic. When everyone recovered, the doctor needed a break. He went to a neighbouring city, booked a hotel room, and instructed the staff that they shouldn't say he is there if people come looking for him. He needed to rest.

The epidemic broke out in the city where he was staying, but the doctor chose to remain concealed even then. 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 bar Yochai announced that he could save people from judgment, so he will undoubtedly do so. If a person has the strength and ability, it isn't proper not to use it.

Reb Shimon said that he can free כל העולם כולו מן הדין, "The entire world, entirely, from judgment." It seems redundant to say, כל העולם כולו, "The entire world, entirely." Either the word כל or the word כולו is extra, because both words mean "entire".

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

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

Similarly, we can explain that Reb Shimon says that he can save כל העולם כולו מן הדין, that every single person will be saved.

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

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

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

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

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

On Lag b'Omer, Hashem sees our good and overlooks our evil deeds because He compassionately understands the significant challenges and tests we face, and He forgives us.²³

Everything is by Hashem's Decree

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 33:) relates that Reb Shimon bar Yochai, Reb Yosi, and Reb Yehudah were discussing the Roman Empire. Reb Yehudah praised the Roman Empire and said, "They built marketplaces, bridges, and bathhouses..." All of these make it easier for people to serve Hashem. Therefore, we should praise them. Reb Yosi didn't respond. Reb Shimon argued, saying, "They did everything for their benefit..." Reb Shimon bar Yochai didn't consider their accomplishments a reason to have *hakaras*

hatov because they did it for themselves. Yehudah ben Geirim was present at this conversation, and he repeated it. One person told the next until the Roman government eventually heard about their discussion.

The Romans said, "We will honor Reb Yehudah because he praised Rome. Reb Yosi was silent, so he will be exiled to Tzipori. Reb Shimon disgraced Rome, and he will be killed."

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

But what will they do about food and drink? A miracle occurred for them. Hashem created a carob tree and a water spring in the cave. They wore their clothing only during davening so that the clothing would last a long time. Throughout the day, they studied Torah while covered to their necks in sand.

Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar lived in the cave for thirteen years, and they studied Torah by day and by night with all their strength. They acquired extremely high spiritual levels, as we sing *שֶׁם קִנִּית הוֹדֵךְ וְהוֹדֵךְ*, "There [in the cave] you acquired your glory." This refers to the wisdom of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, which was revealed to them there, in the cave.

How did they find the courage to leave the cave?

23. 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 *וְנִצֵּי*, innocent, and some will say *חַיִּיב*, guilty. But in Hakadosh Baruch Hu's court, there is *chesed* and compassion, as it states (*Tehillim* 130:4), *כִּי עִמָּךְ הַסְלִיחָה*, 'For with You is forgiveness.' This can be because Hashem knows our inner struggles and attempts to serve Him; therefore, He judges us favorably."

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." The man didn't catch all the birds. Some of them got away. 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 wasn't decreed in heaven. Certainly, it will be so for a human being." He understood that the Romans wouldn't be able to capture them if it weren't Hashem's decree.

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

Most likely, when this hunter caught a bird, he was proud of his expertise and abilities. And when a bird got away, he berated himself for not being a better hunter. Little did he know that it wasn't about him but Hashem's decree for each creature.

This is a lesson regarding parnassah, and in 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 decided in Heaven.²⁴

Salvations

Reb Shimon said about Lag b'Omer, ה'א, "יוםא ברשותי קא", "This day is mine." Hashem gave this day to Reb Shimon, and therefore, many miracles occur on this day.

Indeed, tzaddikim called Lag b'Omer "Reb Shimon's day."

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

As we wrote above, Beis Aharon writes, כשם שהשי"ת הוא ה' לכל כך רשב"י הוא רשב"י לכל אפילו, "Just as Hashem is for everyone, so is Reb Shimon for everyone, even for those who are at a low level."²⁵ לכל, "for everyone," can also be translated as "for everything" because on Lag b'Omer, a person can receive everything he needs.²⁶

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

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

The Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* 28) writes, "Know, there are certainly 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. It is irrelevant whether Eliyahu appeared to him in a manner that Reb Shimon saw and knew that it was Eliyahu HaNavi or whether Eliyahu appeared to Reb Shimon and he didn't see 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."

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

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

26. Yea 5695: The Ahavas Yisrael of Viznitz's children arrived in Meron on Lag b'Omer. Someone shouted,

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

Lag b'Omer is a day of salvations – fortunate are those who invest in tefillah on this day.²⁷ Here are a few recommendations of what one can daven for on this holy day:

1] Children

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

The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1) states:

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

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

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

He fell asleep, and the wife motioned to her servants to carry her husband to 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.

In this story, Reb Shimon helped a barren couple bear children, and such a miracle can also occur now, in Reb Shimon's merit. Therefore, Lag b'Omer is a mesugal time to daven for children.

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

"Make room for the Viznitzer Rebbe's 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 for his children, even when they don't deserve it. This is why Reb Shimon is for everyone, even those at low levels.

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

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

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

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

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

Lag b'Omer is also a good time to daven that his children should grow up erlich, with yiras Shamayim. The Gemara (*Makos* 17:) states that a mother should daven that her children should be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai. The Minchas Elazar (*Shaar Yissaschar*) says the Gemara refers to a person davening on Lag b'Omer. On this day, anything is possible. On this

day, one can ask for the most incredible things – even that one's child be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

2] Parnassah

The Chasam Sofer (*Yorah Deiah* 233) makes the following calculation: Chazal tell us that when the Yidden left Mitzrayim, they ate matzos for thirty days. They finished the matzos on Pesach Sheini. The Midrash adds that they didn't have food for three days, and then on the next day, the *manna* fell. According to this calculation, the *manna* first came down on Lag b'Omer. We understand that it is an ideal day to daven for parnassah.²⁸

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

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

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

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

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

At first, she couldn't approach the *tzion* because another woman was in front of her praying loudly, asking for three hundred rubles to marry off her child. The wealthy woman took out three hundred rubles from her purse and gave it to the woman. This was the only way she could get to the *tzion*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

3] Shidduchim

About Reb Shimon, it states (in the song Bar Yochai) הַצִּיל הַלְחֻצִּים, "He saves those who are stressed and worried," and who is more stressed and worried than someone awaiting their *shidduch*?²⁹ This is because we can daven and receive salvations for all our needs – including shidduchim. And as we wrote, this is in Meron and everywhere. In Reb Shimon's merit, no matter where we daven, our tefillos will be answered.³⁰

4] Yiras Shamayim

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

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

1. תּוֹרַת ה' תְּמִימָה מְשִׁיבַת נֶפֶשׁ, "Hashem's Torah is perfect, restoring the soul."

2. עֵדוּת ה' נֶאֱמָנָה מַחְכִּימַת פֶּתִי, "The testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise."

3. פְּקוּדֵי ה' יִשְׂרִים מִשְׁמַחֵי לֵב, "Hashem's orders are upright, gladdening the heart."

4. מִצְוֹת ה' בְּרָה מְאִירַת עֵינַיִם, "Hashem's mitzvos are clear, enlightening the eyes."

5. יִרְאָת ה' טְהוֹרָה עוֹמֶדֶת לְעֹד, "The fear of Hashem is pure, enduring forever."

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

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

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

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

The husband replied that he would 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 thought that Zelig would be a good shidduch for his daughter, but the names were the same – they were both called Zelig, so he didn't consider it. But now that their names weren't exactly the same, he was willing to go ahead with the *shidduch*. Shimon Zelig got engaged to Zelig's daughter!

30. It states (Shemos 3:9) וְגַם רָאִיתִי אֶת הַלְחָץ אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם לֹחֲצִים אוֹתָם, "I have also seen the oppression that the Egyptians are oppressing them." Rabbeinu b'Chaye explains that the Mitzrim didn't permit them to add to their homes and create more comfortable living conditions. We can, therefore, explain that Reb Shimon הַצִּיל הַלְחֻצִּים means he saves people from their tiny apartments so that they can live comfortably.

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

5] Refuah

ורפאתי שמעון בר יוחאי is *gematriya*. This hints to us that Lag b'Omer is a day *mesugal* for *refuah*.³¹

It is known that the *sefirah* הוד is *mesugal* for *refuah*. Reb Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* adds that Lag b'Omer, whose *sefirah* is הוד שבהוד, is certainly *mesugal* for *refuah*. Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz taught that if one needs to take medication, he should begin taking it on Lag b'Omer.

Many stories of *refuos* occurred in Meron, particularly on Lag b'Omer, and we write some of them in the footnote.³² Here, we will

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

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

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

Lag b'Omer teaches us never to lose hope:

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

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

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

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

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

On Sunday, Rav Shach returned to the Brisker Rav, 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 from Reb S. G. Shlita, a resident of Williamsburg, New York, who was directly involved in the story.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was indeed asking for a great miracle because when a kidney stops working, it usually doesn't begin working again. But for Hashem, everything is possible, and in Reb Shimon's merit, he believed it might occur.

Miraculously, his kidneys began working again, and he no longer needed dialysis.

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

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

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

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

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

write the most 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

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

In the winter of 5775, a woman from the Toldos Aharon community felt immense pressure on her eye, weakening her eyesight. The doctor instructed her to take a C T scan, which she did on Lag b'Omer morning. The results would come in the next day, and in the meanwhile, she traveled to Meron, where the rebbe of Toldos Aharon makes a hadlakah (bonfire). She could hardly see the hadlakah due to poor vision and cried and prayed for a yeshua. The next morning, she could see well. The doctor called that morning and told her there was dangerous swelling above the eye, and they must operate. She told him she was feeling well... And indeed, she was.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shimon bar Yochai and promised that if they had a child, they would bring him to Meron on Lag b'Omer for his *chalakeh* (to make *peyos*).

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

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

Reb Asher Zelig recorded this episode in one of his sefarim, and wrote, "The child was green; he seemed to be dead." The *tefillah* was over, but no one was interested in making kiddush because everyone was so sad and worried. 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 I would. Please, do not ruin my happiness and the happiness of my husband, who is waiting for us to return. Reb Shimon! I'm leaving my son here. Don't embarrass me. Bring him back to health, as he was healthy when I brought him here yesterday. Sanctify Hashem's name. Reveal to everyone that there is Hashem and that there are tzaddikim."

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

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

Everyone roared joyously, and they recited the *brachah* ³³. מוֹחִיָּה הַמַּתִּים.

6] Daven for Salvations for Klal Yisrael

The Tzvi LaTzaddik of Bluzhev zt'l said, "It is impossible for us to know when the *geulah sheleimah* will be, but I think it will be on Lag b'Omer, on Reb Shimon's day because it is a very pure day, a day of salvation."

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

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

One year after singing בְּרִי יוֹחָאִי, the Minchas Elazar discussed the words of the final phrase, אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לָהֶם לְמוֹדֵיךָ, "Fortunate is the nation *who teach you*." He asked why it doesn't say לְמוֹדֵי תוֹרַתְךָ, "who learn your Torah," or לְמוֹדֵי סֵפְרֶיךָ, "who learn your *sefarim*." Why does it state לָהֶם לְמוֹדֵיךָ 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, הֵם לְמוֹדֵיךָ, they teach the tzaddik about the

33. Shaar Yissaschar writes that בְּרִי יוֹחָאִי is *gematriya* מוֹחִיָּה הַמַּתִּים.

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

problems we experience so that the tzaddik can daven for Klal Yisrael.

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

Reb Shimon's Salvations

Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura zt'l writes in a letter (written in Eretz Yisrael and sent to Italy), "On the eighteenth of Iyar, the day of his [Reb Shimon's] *yahrtzeit*, people from all around Meron go to Meron and light bonfires...

Many barren bear children, the ill are healed, because of the vows they take on at that place."³⁴

In this letter, Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura mentions that the miracles come from the vows that people make in Meron. The vows refer to the good *kabbalos* (such as giving *tzedakah* or taking on a good practice) that people accept on themselves when they are in Meron, on Lag b'Omer. It is sufficient to accept the kabbalah on oneself *bli neder*, without an actual vow.³⁵

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

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

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

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

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

We received the following letter:

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

"In Meron, I heard divrei Torah about the importance of making a kabbalah tovah. At that moment, I made a kabbalah that until Rosh Hashanah, I would distance myself from the difficult test at the workplace. I did so, and after Rosh Hashanah, I continued to be cautious. Now, two years later, I can say that it wasn't easy; there were tests, but I kept strong all this time. And I just realized something interesting. My *parnassah* is always tight, but the last time I needed to borrow money was before Lag b'Omer of 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 tovah, only I don't recognize them all."

The *Zohar* (Rus 104) says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The angel returned, ready to fulfill the mission Hashem sent him to do. Reb Shimon bar Yochai saw the *malach* and said, "If you don't leave, I will decree that you will never return to your place in heaven. I will send you to a forsaken place. Therefore, listen to what I tell you. Go to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and say, 'Even if there aren't thirty tzaddikim in the world, twenty tzaddikim are also sufficient to save the world, as Hashem told Avraham (Bereishis 18:31), לא אשחית בעבור העשרים, 'I will not destroy on account of the twenty [tzaddikim].' And even if there are only ten tzaddikim, that is also enough to protect the world from destruction because Hashem said (Bereishis 18:32), לא אשחית בעבור העשרה, 'I will not destroy on account of the ten.' And even if there are only two tzaddikim in the world – Reb Elazar and me – it is also sufficient... And if there is only one tzaddik in the world, it is also enough, as it states, צדיק יסוד עולם, a tzaddik is the foundation of the world."

At that moment, a *bas kol* came forth from heaven and said, "Reb Shimon, fortunate is your lot. Hakadosh Baruch Hu places His decrees in heaven, and you annul them from the earth. About you it is written (Tehillim 145:19), רצון יראיו יעשה, 'The will of those who fear Him, He will do.'"³⁶

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

A month later, on the 6th of Kislev, there was a second earthquake. Yidden and *lehavdil* goyim ran to Reb Shimon's grave. They found the building jumping up and down. The dome on the roof split in two. They became terrified. They shouted, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! If this is happening to your building, what will be with us?" Finally, after half an hour, the earthquake settled, and the building sat firmly in place. They went inside to inspect the damage, but there was none. The dome merged, and there was no sign of any scratches or damage.

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

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

Customs on Lag b'Omer

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

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

1] Bonfire

The *sefer* מסע מירון describes the *hadlakah* in Meron (תרמ"ח/1888): "Everyone buys olive oil and pours it in honor of the *tana*. The people who will light the bonfire come forward amidst joy and excitement. They light a towel soaked in oil and throw it into the bowl of oil. Everyone stands by – their eyes watch as they wait for the bonfire. When the first flames burst forth, everyone rejoices. The sound of their happiness is so loud. I had never heard anything like it. I never saw joy like this one. The people of Eretz

Yisrael say the *neshamah* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai is there at this *hadlakah*. At this time, I took out the names of my friends and family... and I davened for them that the merit of the holy *tana* should protect them, that they should have *hatzlachah* with *gashmiyos* and *ruchniyos*."

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

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

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

Some throw their yarmulke into the fire. My father zy'a and my grandfather Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov zy'a had this custom.³⁷

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 candles³⁸ and bonfires on Lag

37. A father came to Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov zy'a and told him that his son was acting improperly and that he kept taking off his yarmulke. Rebbe Dovid Biderman advised them to bring their son to Meron on Lag b'Omer.

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

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

38. 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.)

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

2] *Chalakeh* (haircut)

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

The Mishnas Chassidim writes, "If you live in Eretz Yisrael, go and celebrate by Reb Shimon's grave and be very happy there. Certainly, do so if you have a *chalakeh* child..."³⁹

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

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

The Gemara (*Me'illa* 17.) tells us that the government ruled that Yidden were forbidden to keep Shabbos and to perform a *bris milah*. The Tana Reb Reuven Istrobuli dressed himself in non-Jewish clothes and cut his hair in a non-Jewish style (long hair in the back and no hair in the front) so the government officials would think he was one of them. Sitting with the politicians, he explained that when the Jewish people keep Shabbos, they

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

They agreed with him, and they annulled the decrees.

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

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

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

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

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

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

One of the purposes of a Jewish haircut is so that it should be noticeable that we are Yidden. We have the custom to make the *chalakah* in Meron, at Reb Shimon's *kever*,

39. A car hit the three-year-old son of someone I know before Pesach, 5766. After Pesach, the hospital sent the unconscious child to a nursing facility, saying there was nothing else they could do for the child. Two weeks before Lag b'Omer, the parents went to Meron and proclaimed before Reb Shimon's holy *tzion*, "We wanted to bring our son here on Lag b'Omer to make his *chalakeh*," and they davened that they should merit this.

Indeed, that year on Lag b'Omer, the boy was in Meron, walking on his own two feet and had his *chalakeh* there.

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

3] Songs

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

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

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

It states (Daniel 4:10) **עיר 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 making a seudah in honor of this special day and Reb Shimon.

The Maharil (החדשות ק"ד) calls this meal a *seudas mitzvah*. He discusses a person who made a *neder* that he won't eat outside his home unless it is a *seudas mitzvah*. The Maharil writes, "The meal at a *bris milah*, *pidyon haben*, *siyum mesechta* are all *seudos mitzvah*. Chazal say, 'Whenever *talmidei chachamim* are at a meal, it is like they are

enjoying the light of the *Shechinah*.' Therefore, the Lag b'Omer meal is also considered a *seudas mitzvah*."

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

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

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

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

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

We can answer as follows:

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

The Taamei HaMinhagim offers another explanation:

The Zohar tells us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai annulled harsh decrees with joy (unlike

other tzaddikim who annul harsh decrees through fasting and affliction). Therefore, on Reb Shimon's *yahrtzeit* we eat and celebrate. This is how we abolish harsh decrees on this day.

The *Zohar* (*Shemos* 15.) teaches: Once, Reb Shimon was teaching secrets of the Torah, and Reb Elazar was near him – their faces shining like the sun. They studied for two days straight without eating or drinking. They didn't know whether it was day or night. When they finished, Reb Shimon said the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 34:28), וַיְהִי שֵׁם עַם ה' אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם, "Moshe remained there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights – he did not eat bread nor drink water."

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

5] Meron

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

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "Klal Yisrael is accustomed to go to the *kevarim* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai and Reb Elazar on Lag

b'Omer and they eat and rejoice there. My rebbe [the Arizal] once went there on Lag b'Omer with his entire family and remained there for three days."

One year, the Arizal danced with his students in Meron on Lag b'Omer. A tall, elderly man was also there, dancing with his own students. At one point, the elderly man danced with the Chareidim.⁴⁰

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

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

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

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

The students understood three things: The elderly person was Reb Shimon bar Yochai. The students who danced with him were Reb Shimon's students. And they discovered the exalted stature of Reb Alazar Ezkari, later known as "The Chareidim" after the sefer he authored.⁴¹

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

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

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

Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l* tells about the time Reb Chaim ben Atar, the Or HaChaim HaKodesh, came to Meron for Lag b'Omer: "When he reached the bottom of the mountain of Meron, he got off his donkey and crawled up the mountain on his hands and knees, and grunted like an animal the

entire way. He shouted, 'How can the lowly me enter this awesome place where Hakadosh Baruch Hu, all the angels, and souls of tzaddikim are present?!' And at the *hillulah* he was very happy."⁴²

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

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