

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Lag B'omer



בס"ד

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Torah Wellsprings

Emor

Chinuch – Teaching by Example

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

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

This *pasuk* is alluding to the mitzvah of *chinuch*, so we can glean from this section guidance for *chinuch habanim*.

A primary rule in *chinuch* is to be a role model. More than with

words, parents teach by setting a good example. We can learn this principle from Avraham Avinu, as it states (*Bereishis* 18:7), ואל הבקר, רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר רך וטוב ויתן אל, "Avraham ran to the cattle, took a tender and good calf, and gave it to the youth who hurried to prepare it."

Rashi writes that the lad was Yishmael. Avraham wanted Yishmael to prepare the meat for the guests לחנוכו במצות, כדי, to train him to do mitzvos.

But notice that Avraham himself brought the calf. He didn't send Yishmael to get the cattle. This is because the best way to educate children is by showing them. Yishmael saw his father rushing to prepare the animals for the guests, so Yishmael also prepared it quickly (as it states, וימהר לעשות אותו).

This ideal way of teaching by example is hinted at in Rashi's words at the beginning of the parashah (21:1) להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים. We can translate it as follows- להזהיר גדולים, the adults' deeds should shine and influence, על הקטנים, the younger generation.

Pirkei Avos means "Chapters of the Fathers." This holy tractate teaches *yiras Shamayim*, *middos*, proper conduct, and is called *Avos*. The most effective way parents can give over *middos tovos*, and *yiras shomayim* is by being a living example of this.

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 97:) say, "What coin did Avraham Avinu possess? There was an old man and an old woman on one side and a lad and a girl on the other side." The old and the young were on opposite

sides of the same coin because the young are influenced by the old. The way the parents act is how the children will become. They are on the same coin because although they are at different stages in life, they influence one another.

It states (*Bereishis* 12:3), ונברכו בך כל משפחות האדמה, "And all families of the earth shall bless themselves by you." Rashi explains that people will want their children to be like Avraham Avinu. Rashi writes, "A father will say to his son, 'You should be like Avraham.'" It can be explained (בדרך צחות) that parents want to live like Terach (Avraham's father) and to do whatever their heart desires while they tell their children to be righteous. But it doesn't work that way. Parents cannot expect their children to be better than them.¹

1. The Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l* said that he is still waiting to see "the children." He explained that parents don't learn Torah because

Teach with Words

Teaching by example is essential, but these lessons need to be accompanied by words.

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

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

A poor non-Jew heard that poor Yidden go around the shuls during Shacharis, Minchah, and Maariv collecting money, and he decided to dress up like a

Yid and do the same. It was a financially wise decision because he earned some money each day during the tefillos.

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

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

One day, he heard one of his fellow collectors

they are busy working so their children should be able to study Torah. Those children also don't study Torah because they are busy working so their children should be able to study Torah. He is still waiting to see those children who everyone is working for.

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

announce, "I'm a descendant of the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l*. It is a great merit to support an *einekel* of the Baal Shem Tov." The congregant gave him very generously in honor of his illustrious grandfather.

So, the goy decided to win on both accounts. He announced, "I am an *einekel* of the Baal Shem Tov, and a *ger tzedek*." The Yidden quickly realized he was a phony and banished him from the beis medresh. He had contradicted himself.

Reb Yankele Galinsky *zt'l* says that the same is when parents tell their children to act a certain way, but they don't act that way. As a result, their words fall flat on their children and are ineffective.²

Education – Making our Children Aware of their Dignified Stature

The pasuk (21:1) states: אמר אל הכהנים... ואמרת עליהם... לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו "Say to the *kohanim*...and tell them: Each of you shall not become *tamei* to a [dead] person." We already explained that ואמרת עליהם "Tell them" means that the older *kohanim* should educate the younger *kohanim*.

What should the older *kohanim* teach the younger *kohanim*? לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו, "Do not become *tamei*." They should tell the younger *kohanim* to be cautious from *tumah*. In our generation, this means to tell them not to sully their souls with the internet (and other modern-day tumos).

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

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

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

If you restrict a child without explanation, the child will feel stifled. For example, if you will say, "You can't see this, you can't go there, and you can't do this or that," and you don't explain to the

child how this is for his benefit, he won't understand why he can't enjoy the world as others do. But when you explain to your child how holy and special he is and how much he will gain, even in this world, by living a pure Jewish, he will despise the lifestyle of degradation and lowliness.

Therefore, explain to your children that all the impure pleasures of the world ultimately lead to a lot of heartache and depression (as this is well known and documented). When this information is conveyed correctly, it facilitates the children's resolve to avoid the *tumah* of the world.³

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

Rebbe Shlomke gave her the money, and then Rebbe Shlomke told her, "I gave you the money, but I want you to know that if you go to the theatre, it will break my heart."

She changed her mind right then and there.

Also, make your child aware of the great privilege of being a Yid; tell him he has a beautiful soul, and it is below his dignity to lower himself to the ways of the goyim.

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

Chinuch is Essential

It states in this week's *parashah* (23:40), ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר, "You shall take for yourselves on the

first day a beautiful fruit of a tree." Chazal tell us that *פרי עץ* refers to a species that the tree and the fruit have the same taste. (This is how we know the *pasuk* is referring to an esrog because an esrog and its tree taste the same.)

The Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zt'l* said that fruit denotes children, and the tree denotes the parents. Our goal is, *עצו ופריו שוה*, the tree and the fruit should be the same. The children should be as good as their parents (or better than their parents). There shouldn't be *yeridas hadoros*, the decline of generations.

We accomplish this with chinuch comprised of being a good example combined with conversation, as we explained, and topped off with many tefillos.

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

the yeridas hadoros, the degradation of our nation that we witness in our times. The first generation is the *chacham*, who is too wise for his own good. He asks too many questions; he isn't satisfied accepting the rules of the Torah with simple faith. This leads him to raise a rebellious son, the *rasha*. Next, the grandchild will be a *tam*, one who knows very little about Yiddishkeit, and then comes the *she'eino yodeia lishol*, a fourth generation that knows nothing at all about Yiddishkeit. It is the generation that asks no questions because they know absolutely nothing. Their parents knew a drop about Yiddishkeit, and the generation before them knew even more but rebelled. It all began with the *chacham* who asked too many questions. They didn't want to accept the Torah with simple faith, and the bitter results weren't long in coming.

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

In Nisan, there's a mitzvah to say a *brachah* when you see fruit trees blossoming. In this *brachah* we praise Hashem for creating בריות טובות ואילנות טובות, "beautiful creatures and beautiful trees." Why do we mention בריות טובות, beautiful creatures in this

brachah? Isn't the brachah for the beautiful trees?

People say it refers to the people who water and tend to the trees. The tree wouldn't blossom so well if it weren't for them. They are the בריות נאות, beautiful creations that bring forth the אילנות נאות, beautiful trees.

We add that it is the same with the development of good, *ehrlicher* children. The devoted parents – who educate and daven for their children – are the בריות נאות, beautiful people who bring about the blossoming of the אילנות נאות, the beautiful trees – their offspring.

Parent/Child Relationship

Rashi's words (21:1), להזהיר, גדולים על הקטנים, carry another essential lesson in *chinuch*. Earlier, we discussed that the parent's deeds should להזהיר, shine brightly, and then the children will also act appropriately. Another lesson can be derived from these words: Parents and children must understand

the difference between parents (הגדולים) and the children (הקטנים) because they aren't on the same level.

Not every family knows this.

Some children think the home is a democracy, and they deserve equal rights with their parents on deciding how matters should be run in the house. And some parents lack the recognition of their authoritative role in the home. להזהיר הגדולים על הקטנים, therefore, means that each family member needs to recognize precisely their role and place.

There is also the opposite concept: the parents should befriend their children until they are like brothers. A hint to this concept is found in the *pasuk* (*Bereishis* 31:46), ויאמר יעקב לאחיו לקטו אבנים, "Yaakov said to his brothers, 'Gather stones'" (to build a monument of peace with Lavan). Who were Yaakov's brothers? Yaakov

had one brother, Eisav, and it doesn't seem that the *pasuk* refers to him.

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

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

This is an essential tip in *chinuch*, which begins to develop around the teenage years, when the children enter adulthood and continues throughout their lifetime. The parent/child relationship transforms and becomes a relationship of friends who enjoy each other's comradeship and conversations.

Yet, it must always be clear who the father and the child are. This difference

must always be kept in mind, and the child must honor his father accordingly. This is implied in the words, להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים, let their roles be distinct and clear. Let them know who is younger and who is older. As we wrote, the parent must not be afraid to establish what he thinks is important in the home, and the child must know that he must obey his father's decision.

Another hint to this concept is (*Bereishis* 45:8), וישמני לאב לפרעה, "[Yosef said, 'Hashem] has made me a father to Pharaoh." Rashi explains, להבר ולפטרון, "To be his friend and patron." A patron is a fatherly figure. Yosef's role was to be a חבר, to be a friend and a leader. So, we see the concept of the same person being both a father and a friend simultaneously. This is the ideal parent/child relationship. You are the parent, and the roles must be delineated clearly. A child can't speak *chutzpadig*,

and parents must know when to put their foot down and set rules. But they are friends, too, enjoying each other's company and helping one another in every possible way.

Once, at the Seder of the Kotzker Rebbe *zt'l*, someone broke the middle matzah and measured the pieces, trying to figure out which part was larger. The Kotzker Rebbe quipped, "A *gadol* that needs to be measured isn't a *gadol*." Similarly, we say that if one has difficulty recognizing who is the father and who is the child, then he isn't behaving like a father. This hierarchy should be evident without needing to measure or prove it.

Kiruv Rechokim

We can also say that להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים teaches a lesson for those who are active in *kiruv rechokim*, drawing their strayed

brethren closer to Yiddishkeit. להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים means that the person who is in a better spiritual state must know that he is the *gadol*, and shouldn't get confused regarding who is influencing whom.

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

If someone fell into a pit, you would stand outside the hole and pull him out. However, you wouldn't go down into the pit to push him out because then you might also get stuck in the pit.

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

There used to be a *kiruv* organization called Peilim. A yeshiva *bachur* asked the Steipler Gaon *zt'l* whether he should join the Peilim activities during *bein hazmanim*, so he can also take part in the *kiruv*

rechokim. The Steipler replied that he shouldn't go there because it would be *bitul Torah*.

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

The Steipler still felt that he shouldn't go. The Steipler raised one of his *tzitzis* of his *talis katan* and showed the *bachur* that the *shamesh*, the long string that wraps around the strings, reached the same length as the other strings. The Steipler explained, "Initially, it was longer than the others, but it became smaller since it went around the others." The message was that if you go about performing *kiruv*, this will hinder your growth and the heights you can attain.

Obviously, each person who desires to do *kiruv* should ask their own *rav*, as there are many variables,

and each case is different. However, the lesson we can take from this is that when you deal with helping others grow, you risk becoming smaller yourself. It is a balancing act, as there is nothing more significant than to bring a Yid back to Hashem, while the question is how to deal with the challenges that can crop up. The only counsel we can offer is *להזהיר גדולים על הקטנים*, remember that you are a *gadol*, you are in a better place, and try not to lose that status when you attempt to draw others up.

Hislahavus

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

Reb Moshe Rudner received the title *יורה יורה ידן*, *ידן*, which means he is an expert in *halachah* in all

areas of the Torah, and he is fitting to teach and to *pasken shaalos*. Reb Moshe yearned to use his ability as a rav to help klal Yisrael, so he came to Dallas, Texas, to see what he could accomplish there. But it was כל ההתחלות קשות, a difficult beginning. He did a lot of *hishtadlus*, but with little success. אם אין קמח אין תורה, without large sums of money, it was difficult to accomplish much.

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

A few weeks after donating so generously, the wealthy man was suddenly *niftar*. Reb Moshe delivered a *hesped* at the

levayah. "This man never married and never build a *bayis ne'aman biYisrael*. However, Hashem blessed him with wealth. A few months ago, he was in Eretz Yisrael, searching for something; he himself not knowing what. But his heart yearned for something he knew he needed but didn't have. His friends advised him to go to the Kosel Maaravi, the last remnant of the Beis HaMikdash. At the Kosel, he witnessed an ultra-orthodox Yid stand before the wall, crying and pleading before Hashem as one speaks with his father. The *emunah* he witnessed ignited his *neshamah*, and he realized that this was the light his soul was yearning for. When he returned to his friends, he told them what he saw and asked whether there was anyone in Dallas that resembled the type of Yid he saw at the Kosel. They told him about Reb Moshe Rudner. And as they say, "the rest is history."

The sincerity and the hislahavus that he witnessed at the Kosel brought about these fantastic results.⁴

Towards the beginning of the *parashah* it states (21:15), ולא יהלל זרעו בעמיו, "He shall not desecrate his offspring among his people." (Literally, this *pasuk* warns *kohanim* to refrain from forbidden marriages that will desecrate their children from being *kohanim*.)

The Kaliver Rebbe Shlita (may he have a speedy *refuah sheleimah*) says that בעמיו also alludes to גחלים עוממות, extinguished coal. The *pasuk* is teaching us that parents must serve Hashem with *hislahavus*. If they

serve Hashem with עוממות, with coldness, this can result in יהלל זרעו, the desecration of their children because they won't see their parents' fire and love for Yiddishkeit.

The Gemara (*Gitin* 57:) says, "The grandchildren of Haman learned Torah in Bnei Brak." How did Haman have grandchildren who were *Tana'im*?

Harav Shach *zt'l* answers that Haman once praised Torah. His children and grandchildren heard him, and that influenced them to study Torah.

This occurred when Haman met Mordechai while studying Torah with his students. He asked

4. The person who prayed at the Kosel doesn't know that in his merit a \$6,000,000 beis medresh was built. He also doesn't know that in his merit many people are learning about Hashem and His Torah. Such is the power of sincerity.

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

Mordechai, "What were you studying?"

Mordechai told him that they were studying the halachos of קמיצת מנחת העומר, the handful of the meal-offering of the *omer* that was removed and sacrificed on the *mizbeiach*. Haman said, "Your handful of flour pushed away ten thousand *kikar* of silver that I gave to Achashveirosh for permission to eradicate Bnei Yisrael" (see *Megillah* 16.).

At that time, Haman's children and grandchildren heard Haman say from his heart that Torah and mitzvos protected Bnei Yisrael from their enemies. Their simplest mitzvah canceled ten thousand *kikar* silver coins he gave to destroy the Jewish nation.

The grandchildren thought to themselves, "Why should we live like goyim? Now that Haman revealed to us the honor of the Torah, it is better for us to connect with Hashem

and His Torah. We will gain so much more that way!"

The lesson for us is that when children hear their parents praise Torah and mitzvos - even if the parents are like Haman - the children will devote their lives to studying Torah and keeping the mitzvos.

Pesach Sheini

People came to Moshe Rabbeinu and said (*Bamidbar* 9:7), אנהנו טמאים לנפש אדם למה נגרע, "We are *tamei* from coming in contact with a human corpse. Why should we miss out on offering Hashem's *korban Pesach* in its appointed time?"

Hashem responded that they could bring the *korban Pesach* one month later, on Pesach Sheni.

The question arises: They knew they were *tamei*. Why were they even talking about bringing the

korban Pesach? Would a person who doesn't have an arm ask why he can't wear tefillin? The answer is obvious. How can he wear tefillin without an arm? Similarly, it should be obvious that they couldn't bring the *korban Pesach* when they were *tamei*. What is the meaning of למה נגרע, "Why should we miss out?"

The Chidushei HaRim *zt'l* answers that there are questions that people ask from their heart and not from their mind. The rational mind understands that they couldn't bring the *korban Pesach*, but their hearts shouted out in pain נגרע למה! "We want to bring a *korban Pesach*". It wasn't a rational question, rather it was an expression of intense emotion. They so much wanted to bring the *korban Pesach*, and their hearts 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 Sheni. This was the first and only time Hashem created a new halachah, and it was due to people's pleas and strong desires.

The story of the daughters of Tzelafchad request to inherit their father's land (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 of the Land. Moshe didn't know the answer (because he thought that perhaps only male children inherit), and Hashem ruled that the daughters of Tzelafchad were correct, and they should inherit their father. Similarly, in the story of Pesach Sheni, people had a request, Moshe didn't know the answer, and Hashem agreed with the people.

But there is a significant difference between the two

stories. By the story of Bnos Tzelafchad, no new halachos were created. Hashem initially planned to teach this halachah. Even if the daughters of Tzelafchad didn't ask for the inheritance, Hashem would have told them that they inherit. As Rashi (*Bamidbar* 27:7) writes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "כבר כתובה פרשה זו לפני" This halachah was already written before Me in heaven. "בן בנות צלפחד דוברות, "They speak correctly.... Their eyes saw what Moshe's didn't."

Rashi (*Bamidbar* 27:5) writes, ראויה היתה פרשה זו להכתב על ידי משה, אלא שזכו בנות צלפחד, ונכתבה על ידן "This *parashah* [that teaches the inheritance of daughters] would have been written through Moshe. But the daughters of Tzelafchad merited that it should be written through them."

Whereas the ability to bring a *korban Pesach* on Pesach Sheni is a brand new halachah, created

entirely 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.

When the *tamei* people told Moshe that 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 a new halachah might be created due to their desires. 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 that he will hear a response from his *rebbe*. Fortunate is the human being who is confident that whenever he wishes, he

can speak with the Shechinah!"

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

Chumash Bamidbar begins with the counting of Bnei Yisrael on Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Later, in *parashas Behaloscha*, the Torah tells us what happened in Nisan, when the Jewish nation offered the *korban Pesach*. This is because, 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 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." The Torah didn't want to begin *parashas Bamidbar* with a story that portrays Bnei Yisrael not in the best light.

But this needs explanation because according to halachah they weren't permitted to bring another *korban Pesach* in the desert. In the desert, they were fatigued from their travels, and the north wind doesn't blow there (which contains healing powers), and it was considered dangerous to perform a *bris milah*. The newborn children in the desert were without a *milah* and were therefore forbidden from bringing the *korban Pesach*. So why is it viewed as a disgrace that they only brought a *korban Pesach*

the first year they were in the desert?

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*. Their disgrace was

that they didn't desire it enough.

Now let's discuss this lesson in practical terms:

Think about the good deeds and mitzvos that you very much want to do but are unable to perform due to the circumstances. Don't stop wanting, and don't stop trying, because if you desire enough, Hashem will find a way for you to perform these good deeds.⁵

5. The Midrash tells a story about an alcoholic, whose children wanted to help him wean off his addiction. So, his children got him drunk and they brought him to a cemetery, and put him in a grave. They figured that when their father awakens and finds himself in a grave, he will realize that he is ruining his life and stop drinking.

At that time, wine merchants carrying barrels of wine near the cemetery thought they heard shouts of war. They hid their barrels in the cemetery and ran away.

One of the barrels had a leak. When the drunk woke up, he found a trickle of wine dripping into the grave where he was lying. 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. If you desire ruchniyos, Hashem will help you succeed.

Lag B'omer

Lag b'Omer Celebration

When Reb Shimon bar Yochai was niftar on Lag b'Omer, a bas kol announced, "Gather and rejoice in the celebration of Reb Shimon."¹

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l said that this bas kol emanates and is heard every year. The evidence is the many people who long to celebrate this special day. In the depths of their souls, they heard the call of the bas kol to gather and celebrate.²

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

2. Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil zt'l asked his *gabai* to awaken him when they were ready to begin their trip to Meron for Lag b'Omer. When the *gabai* 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 have to be happy even while traveling to Meron."

Reb Shlomke would say, "Reb Shimon sends out invitations to his hilulah. Everyone is invited. If someone doesn't come, that means his invitation didn't arrive (like invitations to a wedding that sometimes get lost in the mail)".

A family spent a Shabbos in Meron. The head of the family said,

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

The Bnei Yissaschar (Iyar 3:3) writes, אשר נתאמת לנו מאנשי אמת אשר השמחה ביום הזה על ציון רשב"י היא שלא כטבע "It is confirmed to us from people who tell the truth that the joy at the tzion of Reb Shimon bar Yochai on Lag b'Omer is above nature."

Many people in our generation can testify to this. In Meron, on Lag b'Omer, no one is getting married, no one was born, yet everyone is extremely happy. People dance for hours, and no one knows precisely why. It is a joy beyond nature. (Unfortunately, last year's celebration ended tragically, and the wounds of our hearts have not yet healed. For now on, may we only know of happy tidings.)

"For the amount of money we spent on this Shabbos, we could have gone to a luxurious, vacation resort."

For the next three years, he didn't return to Meron. It wasn't that he didn't want to go. It was just that things didn't work out. For example, when his son turned three, he wanted to make the *chalachah* in Meron, but the boy was slightly ill, so they didn'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 and cried and repented for the foolish words he said. After he washed his face and dried his tears, his neighbor knocked at his door and said, "I just bought a new car. I want that the first time I use it should be for a mitzvah. Do you want to come with me to Meron?"

When he wanted to go to Meron, he was invited again.

There are eye-witnessing reports of the joyous Lag b'Omer celebrations of many years ago.

The Maharil of Paltishan *zt'l* writes, "I had the merit to be in Meron on Lag b'Omer (approximately 170 years ago). Brothers and friends, I can't express in writing the great *simchah* that was there! Fortunate are the eyes who saw it! Whoever was there felt with certainty that the joy came in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai because he wants people to rejoice on that day."

Reb Avraham Rozen described the Lag b'Omer he saw (in 1967/תשכ"ז) "Until the morning, no one went to sleep - the joy was so great. Then, the people who were there at night went to sleep, and a new group arrived. The entire day, and the night following, were the same. I won't burden myself with writing the details of the

joy I saw there, at every moment and in various forms. Whoever didn't experience that joy never saw joy in his entire 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 the feelings I had in my heart at the time. I was imagining that Moshiach had already come, and I was watching the *simchas beis hashoavah* in Yerushalayim. It was wondrous!

Many can testify to this. The joy they experience in Meron on Lag b'Omer is beyond anything they have ever experienced.

The Gemara Shavuos (page 34; the discussion begins on daf ל"ג) states, ר' שמעון מוכו עליה במערבא. The Chasam Sofer taught this Gemara to his students on Lag

b'Omer, and he translated it, "In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."¹³

Also, people who don't go to Meron should be joyful on Lag b'Omer. The Chida (*Moreh b'Etzba* 223) writes, "Be happy in Reb Shimon bar Yochai's honor because Lag b'Omer is his *hilulah*, and it is known that he desired that people rejoice on this day."¹⁴

Meron

Lag b'Omer is everywhere, but there is a special privilege to celebrate

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

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

Taamei HaMinhagim tells the following story:⁵

3. Tzaddikim would keep in mind the count of the Omer throughout the entire day. For example, when Reb Mendel of Riminov *zt'l* reminded himself of the Omer, he would count again (היום... יום... לעומר). Some tzaddikim, and among them the Chasam Sofer with his yeshiva students, would study either mesechta Shavuos or mesechta Sotah, because each of these mesechtos have forty-nine daf. Each day they learned the daf that corresponds to the Omer. This helped them remember the Omer throughout the day.

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

5. The story was told by the Minchas Elazar, who heard it from

There was a very holy beis medresh in Tzfas: The Arizal was the rebbe, the Beis Yosef the rav, the Alshich HaKodesh the magid, and Reb Elazar Azkari, the "Chareidim," the *shamesh* of the beis medresh.

Initially, people didn't realize that the Chareidim was an exceptional tzaddik and a giant in Torah. They thought he was a simple, good Yid.

One year, the Arizal was with his students in Meron on Lag b'Omer, dancing together. A tall, older man approached the Chareidim and began dancing with him.

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

The students asked the Arizal, "It is Torah, and we have a right to ask so that we can learn from your ways. Why did you dance with Reb Elazar Ezkari? It doesn't seem right that a gadol b'Yisrael should dance with 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 dancing with Reb Elazar Ezkari, so why shouldn't I?"

This was when they discovered the true exalted stature of Reb Elazar Azkari, later known as the Chareidim for the sefer he authored. And they found out that the elderly person who danced with his students was none other

the Shinover Rav zt'l who heard it from a reliable source when he was in Tzfas.

than Reb Shimon bar Yochai himself, with his students.

Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l* tells about the time when 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 feet, grunting like an

animal the entire way. He shouted, 'How can the lowly me go to this awesome place, where Hakadosh Baruch Hu, all angels, and souls of tzaddikim are present?!' And at the *hilulah* he was very happy.⁶

It states (*Shemos* 34:23), שלש פעמים בשנה יראה כל זכורך את פני ה' האדון ה' "Three times a year all your males shall appear

6. Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim *zy'a* (a student of the Arizal) would often say נחם (which we say on Tisha b'Av). Reb Avraham HaLevi said it every day, in every *Shemonah Esrei* and in *birchas hamazon*. One year, he went to Meron for Lag b'Omer, and he said נחם in *birchas hamazon*, as he always did. Suddenly, the Arizal saw Reb Shimon bar Yochai standing on his grave, as though he were alive, and Reb Shimon told him, "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. Within a month, Reb Avraham HaLevi Bruchim was *niftar*.

We learn from this story that we must be happy on Lag b'Omer – especially in Meron.

When the Bas Ayin moved to Eretz Yisrael, Rebbe Mordechai Chernobyler *zt'l* wrote to him the following:

"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."

before the Master, Hashem." The *Zohar* states, מאן פני האדון, "Who is the master... It is Reb Shimon..." We don't know what this *Zohar* means, however, we see a correlation between the mitzvah of *aliyah leregel* and going to Meron. People who go to Meron often feel a taste of what will be when Moshiach comes and everyone will travel to the Beis HaMikdash.

When one can't get to Meron, he should remember the Chazal (*Kiddushin* 40.), חשב אדם לעשות מצוה ונאנס ולא עשה, "If a person wants to do a mitzvah, but circumstances prevented him from doing so, the *pasuk* gives him credit as if he performed the mitzvah", and he should be happy on Lag b'Omer, wherever he is.⁷

It is also recommended that he study lessons from

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

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 51:) states, כדאי ר' שמעון לסמוך עליו בפניו ושלא בפניו. The Nesivos Shalom of Slonim zt'l said that this hints that we can rely on Reb Shimon's merits even if we aren't able to travel to Meron.

We hear first-hand stories of people who had a yeshuah on Lag b'Omer, even if they weren't in Meron. There is a *segulah* to say that if I bear a child, I will name him Shimon after Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Generally, people make this promise at Reb Shimon's grave, and it is *mesugal* to bear children. Someone who didn't have children for many years told us that he made this promise in Monroe on Lag b'Omer. A year afterwards he had a son.

There's another person on Lag b'Omer who imagined that he was

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

Shimon bar Yochai), and he should rejoice with Reb Shimon's hilulah, and he will also have a salvation."

Teshuvah on Lag b'Omer

Reb Yohonoson Eibshitz zt'l (*Yaaras Dvash* vol.2, 11) writes, "It is proper for every *yarei shamayim* to do *teshuvah* on Lag b'Omer because Reb Shimon's merit will help him do *teshuvah*, so that he doesn't spend his life with foolishness, which is a *tzaar* for this tzaddik.⁸

in Meron, and he said several chapters of Tehillim for a refuah. The day after Lag b'Omer, the doctors suggested another treatment for his illness, which healed him.

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

The father didn't know what his son was talking about, and he wasn't comforted.

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.

8. A hint is that יבין ושב ורפא לו is gematriya (Yeshaya 6:10) בר יוחאי

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen zt'l (Tzikdas HaTzaddik 127) writes, "The Zohar (Chayei Sarah 129) states that when a person does *teshuvah* –and even when the greatest *rasha* does *teshuvah* – he rises to the highest levels. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa zt'l said that this occurs in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Through his toil in *avodas*

Hashem he accomplished that a *baal teshuvah* can reach the highest levels."

Someone described Lag b'Omer in Meron to Rebbe Yisrael of Ruzhin zt'l. He said, "Inside, by the *tzion*, it is like Yom Kippur, and outside, in the courtyard, it is like Simchas Torah." The Ruzhiner zt'l praised this description immensely.⁹

"He will understand, do *teshuvah*, and be healed."

9. Rebbe Shlomke Zvhiler zt'l said (ברוך צדוק) that all *yomim tovim* are alluded to in the celebration of Lag b'Omer in Meron. Many *Sefardim* have a custom to slaughter sheep near the *tzion*. This reminds us of the *korban Pesach*. The mountains that surround the *tzion* remind us of *Shavuos* (when Hashem gave the Torah on Har Sinai). And the tents that people camp in around the *tzion* remind us of Succos.

Based on the description that was told to the Ruzhiner, we can add to the list two more holidays that are experienced in Meron, on Lag b'Omer: Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah. The tears at the *tzion* is like Yom Kippur and the joy in the *chatzer* is like Simchas Torah.

It is possible to have tears and to be joyous. They aren't a contradiction. We see this as a *chasunah*. The *mechutanim* cry at the *chuppah*, and they are happier than everyone. Similarly, we should feel like *mechutanim* on Lag b'Omer, connected to the day. We cry with our *tefillos*, and we are extremely joyous, too.

The celebration in Meron is called a *Hilulah*, which means *chasunah* in Aramaic.

The Sar Shalom of Belz was once speaking about the greatness of Lag b'Omer, and his son, Reb Zundel zt'l, said, "Lag b'Omer is like Yom Kippur." His father said that he was correct.

The Chasam Sofer (*Drashos* vol.2 280.) also writes that Lag b'Omer is like Yom Kippur.¹⁰

Rebbe Yehoshua of Kaminka zt'l teaches:

The Gemara (*Brachos* 58.) says that the Beis HaMikdash is called הוֹד. We can therefore deduce that הוֹד שְׁבַהוּד is the Kodesh Kadoshim. On Lag b'Omer,

הוֹד שְׁבַהוּד, we come to the Kodesh Kadoshim, similar to the *kohen gadol* who enters there on Yom Kippur.

The Beis Aharon writes, הצדיקים במעשיהם מוֹכְכִין את ישראל וְר' שמעון בר יוחאי מוֹכְךְ גּוֹפֵן של ישראל, לעולם, "Tzaddikim, with their good deeds, purify Bnei Yisrael, and Reb Shimon bar Yochai purifies the bodies of Bnei Yisrael always." This purification is another aspect of Lag b'Omer similar to Yom Kippur.

Chazal (*Bava Kama* 9) say, הַיְדוּר מְצוּהָ עַד שְׁלִישׁ. This means it is recommended to pay one-third more for a

At a chasunah, the kesubah is read to remind the chasan of his obligations. Similarly, at the hilulah of tzaddikim, heaven reminds the tzaddikim of their obligations to help Klal Yisrael.

10. On Lag b'Omer, we sing אָמַר ר' עֲקִיבָא אֲשֶׁרִיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מִי אַתֶּם מְטַהְרִים, "Fortunate Yisrael! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you!" The words of this Mishnah refer to Yom Kippur, but we sing it on Lag b'Omer because on Lag b'Omer our sins are forgiven like on Yom Kippur.

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

mitzvah than its minimal price to buy a more beautiful mitzvah. As Rashi explains, "If he finds two *sifrei Torah* that he can buy, and one is more beautiful than the other, he should add one-third of the price and buy the more beautiful one. As it states (*Shabbos* 133:), זֶה א"לִי וְאֵנֶהוּ, do beautiful mitzvos before Hashem."

The Sar Shalom of Belz *zt'l* asked, Hashem keeps the entire Torah (see *Brachos* 6), so how does He fulfill the concept of adding one-third onto the *mitzvos*?

The answer is, that a Yid does 2/3rds of his fight against the *yetzer hara*, and Hashem completes the final third of the battle. As the Gemara (*Succah* 52:) states, "The *yetzer hara* attacks a person every day and seeks to kill him. If Hakadosh Baruch Hu didn't help, he wouldn't win the battle." Hashem helps him by completing the final third of the battle.

The Sar Shalom added: *Sefiras Ha'omer* is 49 days,

and on the 33rd day, two-thirds of the *omer* has passed. During the first two-thirds of the *omer*, we counted the *omer*, and we strove to purify ourselves. On Lag b'Omer Hashem completes the mission, and we become completely cleansed from all sins.

Rebbe Shalom Kaminka *zt'l* and the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l* were present at the Sar Shalom's Lag b'Omer *tish* when the Sar Shalom taught this lesson, and for the next forty-five minutes, Reb Shalom Kaminka and the Tzanzer Rav were thinking about this *vort* with immense *hislahavus*. Throughout these forty-five minutes, the Tzanzer Rav cradled his head in his hands, and Rebbe Shalom of Kaminka cried copiously.

Redeeming us from Punishment

The Gemara (*Succah* 45:) states:

Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "I can free all people

from judgment [that they won't be punished for their *aveiros*]. Together with the merits of my son, Reb Elazer, I can redeem people from judgment from the beginning of Creation until

today. And if we take the merits of Yosam ben Uziyahu¹¹ along with us, we can redeem everyone from judgment, from the day the world was created until the end of time."¹²

11. 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 will honour his father.' All the days his father had *tzaraas* and Yosem was judging the nation... he didn't put the crown on his head. He attributed all his judgments that he ruled to his father."

12. After Lag b'Omer, Rebbe Henoch of Alexander zt'l would bless his chassidim, האסט געפועלט אלעס גוט, that their tefillos on this day should be answered. The Sifsei Tzaddik (Lag b'Omer 1) explains that Reb Shimon redeems us from judgement and from punishment, which means on Lag b'Omer we have atonement similar to Yom Kippur. Generally, *aveiros* prevent our tefillos from going up to heaven, but on Lag b'Omer, when our *aveiros* are removed, our tefillos can go up to heaven.

After *sefiras ha'omer*, people say (*Tehillim* 67), למנצה בנינו, and some focus on one word of this chapter, each night (as this is taught by the *mekubalim*, and it is printed in many siddurim). On Lag b'Omer, the concentration 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. אל-הים is *roshei teivos* for יל הדין לפני, "אני לפטור את העולם מן הדין", "I can redeem the entire world from judgment."

Reb Moshe Leib Shachor of Yerushalayim zt'l told a story of a doctor from Kenigsberg, Germany, who worked during the day and by night, until all the ill of Kenigsberg were healed from an epidemic.

The doctor came to another city to rest up. He told the hotel owner

How do they redeem us from judgment and punishment?¹³

Reb Akiva Eigar (see *Gilyon HaShas* on *Succah* 45:)

tells us that the explanation can be found in *Avos d'Reb Noson* (ch.16). It states there that Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "The Jewish nation

not to tell anyone that he was there. He needed rest.

But then, the epidemic broke out in the city where he was staying. The doctor remained hidden. He didn't want to reveal himself since that would obligate him to work very hard to heal everyone.

It is obvious that the doctor didn't act correctly. He had the ability to heal, so he should have used his knowledge to heal the ill.

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

Reb Shimon said that he can free כולו מן הדין, "The entire world, entirely, from judgment." These words seems redundant, כולו... כל, as both mean all/entire. The same question can be asked on the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah, מלך על כל העולם כולו, "Be King over the entire world, entirely." Indeed, the *Levush* (582:8) changes the nusach to מלך על העולם כולו בכבוד, and he takes out the extra כל.

However, the *Taz* (528:8) answers that there is a concept of רובו ככולו, the majority is considered the entirety. We clarify that when we request that Hashem be king over the world our intention is כל העולם כולו, the entire world. Every person should know Hashem and accept Him as King, without any exceptions.

We can therefore similarly explain that Reb Shimon says that he can save כולו מן הדין, every single person will be saved. There is no person and no problem that won't be resolved.

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

doesn't go to Gehinom." Reb Shimon explains that they aren't guilty of their aveiros. It is the yetzer hara who causes them to sin.

Reb Shimon expresses this lesson with the following *mashal*:

A king owned an unfertile field that never grew crops. The people told the king that they wanted to rent this portion of land, and in exchange, they will pay ten *kur* of wheat each year.

The king agreed to this offer.

But after a year of hard work in the field, all that the field produced was one *kur* of wheat.

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

They replied, "Our master, our king, You know that this field is infertile. All the years you owned it, nothing ever grew in this field. We plowed, sowed,

fertilized, pruned, and irrigated the field for a year. We tried our best, yet it produced only one *kur* of wheat. Don't hold us responsible because we tried our best."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai concludes, "This is how the Jewish nation will defend themselves on the day of judgment. They will say, 'Master of the world, You know the *yetzer hara* entices us to sin. As it states (*Tehillim* 103:14), *כי הוא ידע יצרנו*, 'For He knew our nature.' So, don't hold us responsible for our poor output. We tried the best we could."

Reb Akiva Eiger explains that when Reb Shimon declared that he could save us from judgment, he meant that he would claim before the court in heaven that we aren't responsible for our sins. We don't want to do bad. We try our best. Our faults are due to the enticements of the yetzer hara.

So, we are saved from Gehinom and we are protected from the judgment because Reb Shimon will speak in our favor. He will tell Heaven our good side and our desire to do what's right.

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

On Lag b'Omer, Hashem sees our good, ignores our bad, and loves us immensely, which is why our joy is great on this day.¹⁴

There are always two ways to look at a situation. You can examine with a critical eye, and find all of the faults, or look with a positive eye and seek to find the qualities and the good.

The first time Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar left the cave was after twelve years. Due to the very high levels that they attained in the cave, they looked with a very negative eye at people immersed in Olam HaZeh, without taking heart that this is a passing world and that our primary focus should be on earning Olam HaBa.¹⁵ Reb Shimon said, "They are abandoning

14. 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 there's a court where Hakadosh Baruch Hu rules, alone. Whoever is judged in Hashem's court will certainly be innocent. In the other courts, some of the judges will say זכאי, merit, and some will say חייב, guilty. But by Hakadosh Baruch Hu there is pure good, *chesed* and compassion. As it states (*Tehillim* 130:4), כי עמך הסליחה, 'For with You is forgiveness.'"

15. Reb Shimon's view was that it isn't necessary to work for *parnassah*. The *Gemara* (*Brachos* 35:) says, "Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, 'If a person will plow in the plowing season, plant in the

the eternal world, and establishing themselves in the temporary world!" Wherever Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar looked, they burned people with their eyes.¹⁶

A *bas kol* came forth, "Did you leave the cave to destroy My world? Return to your cave!"

They returned to the cave and said to one another, "We've learned that *resha'im* are punished in Gehinom for no longer than twelve months. Now that twelve months have passed, we can leave the cave." Then, they heard a *bas kol* who told them to leave the cave. Reb Elazar was still smiting people with his eyes, but Reb

Shimon would immediately heal them.

Reb Shimon said, "My son, it is enough that you and I study Torah."

Once, close to Shabbos, Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar encountered an old man rushing down the street with two bundles of *hadasim*. They asked him what the *hadasim* are for.

The man replied, "They are in honor of Shabbos."

They asked, "Why isn't one bundle enough?"

The old man replied, "It states, זכור ושמור, so I have two bundles of *besomim*. One for זכור and one for שמור."

sowing season, harvest in the harvest season....what will be with the Torah? Rather, when the Jewish nation do Hashem's will, others will do their work for them. As it states (*Yeshaya* 61:5) ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם, 'Gentiles will stand up and tend your sheep.'"

16. This probably wasn't intentional. It was just that they were so upset with the people's behaviors, and looked at them so negatively, this alone had the power to burn them.

Reb Shimon turned to his son and said with admiration, "See how beloved the mitzvos are on the Yidden!"

Their perspectives changed. Despite people's faults, Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar now focused on the good side of Klal Yisrael. They realized that Yidden loved the mitzvos and wanted to serve Hashem with all their hearts.

Never Lose Hope

The Beis Yosef writes that we celebrate Lag b'Omer because Reb Akiva's students stopped dying on that day.

The Pri Chadash argues that this isn't a cause for celebration. The students stopped dying because there weren't any students left! Rather, the Pri Chadash explains, we are celebrating the continuity of Torah. After the tragic passing of his students, Reb Akiva

took his five remaining students: Reb Meir, Reb Yehudah, Reb Yossi, Reb Shimon, and Reb Elazer ben Shamoah and taught them Torah and made them the future leaders of Klal Yisrael. Their names are found in most Mishnayos, their lessons are discussed in the Gemara, and this is how the Torah was perpetuated to this day.

On Lag b'Omer we celebrate the continuity of Torah; it happened because Reb Akiva didn't lose hope. He lost most of his students, and many in his position would give up and allow themselves to wallow in self-pity. So much was lost but Reb Akiva forged ahead and did what he could, and that's what brought about the continuation of Torah.

If we follow in his footsteps and keep trying, despite all hardships, we will also accomplish great things in our lives.¹⁷

17. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 33:) says that Reb Shimon bar Yochai, Reb

Yosi, and Reb Yehudah were once discussing the Roman empire. Reb Yehudah praised them. He said, "They build marketplaces, bridges, and bathhouses," which makes life more pleasant and helps people serve Hashem. Reb Yosi didn't respond. Reb Shimon disgraced the Roman Empire and said, "They made everything for themselves." Reb Shimon didn't think they deserve any credit at all. Yehudah ben Geirim was present when these scholars had this conversation, and he repeated it. Eventually, many people were talking about their discussion, until the Roman government also heard about it.

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

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

Miraculously, a carob tree grew in their cave and a spring opened up. Thus, they had food and drink. They wore their clothing only when they davened, so the clothing would last a long time. Throughout the day, they studied Torah covered in earth up to their necks.

Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar lived in the cave for thirteen years, and they studied Torah by day and by night.

We can learn from this story the principle of not giving up. One of the joys and purposes of studying Torah is to be able to teach it to others. Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar were studying Torah, but their revelations had to remain between themselves. For thirteen years, they didn't have a way to share their discoveries with others.

If they had a question in Torah, they didn't have anyone to ask.

Many people in such conditions would say, "Torah isn't for me," and give up. But Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar studied with all their

Hashgachah Pratis

The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba*, 79) teaches:

"Reb Shimon bar Yochai and Reb Elazar, his son, were hiding in a cave...and they ate carob fruits...and their bodies began to rot... One day they came out and sat at the cave's entrance. They saw a hunter trapping birds. When Reb Shimon heard a *bas kol* announce דימוס, free, the bird managed to escape. When he heard the *bas kol* say ספקולה, captured, the hunter captured the bird. Reb Shimon exclaimed, 'We see that even a bird isn't captured unless it was decreed from heaven. Certainly, it is so for a human being. [The Romans won't be able to capture us if it isn't Hashem's decree].' They left the cave and

discovered that things had calmed down. The Roman decree against them was annulled."

This Midrash teaches us an important lesson in hashgachah pratis. Everything is destined and planned by Hashem. Nothing happens by chance. Even if a bird should be captured is decreed from Above.

Probably, when this hunter caught a bird, he credited his expertise and experience. And when a bird got away, he scolded himself for not being a better hunter. Little did he know that it had nothing to do with him but about Hashem's decree for each creature.

This is a lesson to remember in business and all areas of life. When you succeed, remember that it

strength all this time and they reached extremely high levels. We sing, שם קניית הודך והדרך, "There [in the cave] you acquired your glory." This is referring to the wisdom of kaballah, the *Zohar*, which was revealed to them there, in the cave. They reached these levels because they didn't lose hope.

was from Hashem. And when you fail, it was also decreed from Above. We try our best, but ultimately, whatever occurs, is decreed in Heaven.

When Reb Shimon learned this lesson, he realized that the Romans couldn't harm him if it isn't decreed in heaven. With this in mind, he and his son left the cave.¹⁸

Salvations

The Tzvi LaTzaddik of Bluzhev *zt'l* said, "We can't know when the *geulah sheleimah* will be, but I think it will come on Lag b'Omer, on Reb Shimon's day, because it is a very pure day. It is a day for salvations."¹⁹

Reb Ovadyah of Bartenura *zt'l* writes in a

18. Chazal tell us:

Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar were in the cave for twelve years, and then Eliyahu stood at the cave's entrance and said, "Who will tell Bar Yochai that the king died and the decree was annulled?"

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

19. Reb Moshe Rozvedover *zt'l* (a grandson of the Ropshitzer Rav *zt'l*) would tell people to come to him on Lag b'Omer, for it is a day for tefillos and salvations. He said that it is hinted in the pasuk (Tehillim 84:3) לְבִי וּבִשְׂרִי יִרְנֶנּוּ אֱלֹהִים לְחַיִּים, "My heart and my flesh praise the

letter, "On the eighteenth of Iyar, the day of his [Reb Shimon's] *yahrtzeit*, people from all around Meron go to Meron, and they light bonfires. Many of the barren become fruitful, the ill are

healed, because of the vows they take on at that place."²⁰

Reb Shimon bar Yochai performed many miracles in his lifetime, and he continues to perform miracles after his passing.²¹

living G-d." ל"ב בעומר represents ל"ב, the 32nd day of the omer. And then comes the merit of ובשרי, roshei teivos for בר יוחאי, and then ירננו אל א"ל חי, we will praise Hashem for the salvations.

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

One year, on Lag b'Omer, the Divrei Chaim spoke with him for a long time about Lag b'Omer, and when they came out of the room, Reb Moshe's face was shining brightly. Reb Moshe Rozvedover said that he received the secret of Lag b'Omer from the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz zt'l.

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

The Tur (428) writes, "The day of the week that is Purim is the day of the week that will be Lag b'Omer." For example, this year Purim was Thursday, and Lag b'Omer is on Thursday. We can say that this hints to our power of tefillah on Lag b'Omer. About Purim it states כל הפושט יד נותנים לו and tzaddikim explain that whatever we ask for on Purim Hashem gives us. The same occurs on Lag b'Omer. Hashem grants us all our requests.

21. There are many large stones on the mountain, going up to the *kever* of Reb Shimon. Tzaddikim said that these stones are the heavy stones that people shed when they went to Meron to pray.

The *Zohar* (Rus 104) says:

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

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

A *bas kol* come forth and said to the evil angels, "You must leave this city because Reb Shimon bar Yochai is here. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decrees in heaven, and Reb

Shimon annuls the decrees on earth below."

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

They went and found a *malach*, tall like a high mountain, with thirty flames of fire were coming out of its mouth. Reb Shimon asked the *malach* what it was planning to do. The angel replied, "Hashem decreed that in every

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 Meron, everyone has an exceptional power of *tefillah*. Every year, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* would go with his chassidim to Meron for Shabbos *parshas Behaloscha*, and he didn't accept *kvitelach* from his followers, as he felt that there was no need for that in Meron.

Rebbe Avraham Elimelach and Rebbe Moshe Mordechai 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 sorrows in Meron with Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

generation there must be at least thirty tzaddikim who are similar to Avraham Avinu. But now, there aren't thirty tzaddikim like Avraham in the world. Therefore, Hashem sent me to destroy the world."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai told the *malach*, "Go tell Hakadosh Baruch Hu that Yochai's son is in the world." Reb Shimon was hinting that his merits should be sufficient to annul the harsh decree. There aren't thirty tzaddikim, but there is Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

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

The angel returned, ready to execute 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 should 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. 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 myself - 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 and announced, "Reb Shimon, fortunate is your lot. Hakadosh Baruch Hu makes decrees in heaven, and you annul them from the earth. About you it is written (*Tehillim* 145:19), רצון יעשה, "The will of those who fear Him, He will do."

Two Conditions for the Miracles to Occur

The Bartunura (quoted above) writes that miracles happen in the merit of vows people make. This means that people should take on good *kabbalos*, either to give *tzedakah* or other good practices. It doesn't need to be an actual vow. It is sufficient to make

a *kabbala bli neder*, without an actual vow. This *kabbalah* makes the person worthy of receiving Hashem's blessings and miracles.

A second condition to be worthy of Hashem's miracles is to believe in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. As the Beis Aharon (we quoted above) writes, "Whoever believes in Reb Shimon receives *chizuk* from Reb Shimon." We must believe in the greatness of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and we must believe that in his merit, Hashem performs miracles for the Jewish nation. The greater the belief, the greater the ability to receive Hashem's salvation.²²

22. The Divrei Shmuel of Slonim *zy'a* told the following story:

A wealthy businesswoman from Eretz Yisrael was about to send out a ship filled with merchandise. Before the ship set sail, she went to Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tzion* to pray that the ship, with all the merchandise, reach their destination.

She couldn't get close to the *tzion* because there was another woman in front of her praying loudly for three hundred rubles to

Tefillos

Lag b'Omer is a day of salvation, and therefore, fortunate are those who invest in tefillah on this day. Here are a few recommendations of what one should daven for on this holy day:

1] Good children.

The Gemara (*Makos* 17:) states that a mother should daven that her children be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

The Minchas Elazar (*Shaar Yissaschar*) says that the Gemara refers to someone

who is davening on Lag b'Omer. On this day, anything is possible. On this day, one can ask for the greatest things – even that one's child be like Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

2] *Parnassah*.

According to one Midrash, the *mon* began to fall on Lag b'Omer. Thus, Lag b'Omer is an ideal day to daven for *parnassah*.

The Chasam Sofer (*Yorah Deiah* 233) makes the following calculation: Chazal tell us that when the Yidden left Mitzrayim,

marry off her child. The wealthy woman took three hundred rubles from her purse and gave it to her. The relieved woman thanked her immensely and left, and then the wealthy businesswoman was able to reach 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 immediately."

The Divrei Shmuel repeated this story and expressed that it tells us the extent of this woman's belief in tefillos by Reb Shimon's grave. She didn't think that the woman received three hundred rubles because she gave it to her. She accredited the salvation to the tefillos of the poor woman!

they ate matzos for thirty days. They finished their matzos on Pesach Sheini. The Midrash adds that they didn't have food to eat for three days, and then the *mon* fell. According to this calculation, the *mon* first came down on Lag b'Omer.

Taamei HaMinhagim writes, יושפע שפע רב בכל העולמות,

"A great bounty [of *parnassah*, etc.] should come to all worlds" is *roshei teivos*, רשב"י.

The Yerushalmi (*Brachos* 9:18) writes, "Whenever Reb Shimon needed money, he would say, 'Valley! Valley! Fill up with gold coins,' and it would happen."²³

23. There was a poor, Yid from Eretz Yisroel who was shouting out his tefillos at the *tzion* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Next to him stood a wealthy Yid from America. He took the long trip from New York to, *l'havdil*, Meron, as he wanted to daven for his own issues, but this person's loud prayers were disturbing his concentration. He would have gone to a different corner of the *tzion* to daven if he could, but that wasn't possible, because there were many people at the *tzion*, and there wasn't much room to move around.

The poor man was shouting, "Hashem! In the merit of Reb Shimon! Send me fifty thousand dollars!"

The wealthy Yid asked the poor man for his address, which he readily gave him. "When I get back to America," he thought to himself, "I will write a check for fifty thousand dollars and sign it, Reb Shimon bar Yochai." With this tease, I will pay him back for all the headache and frustration he caused me."

Some weeks later, this wealthy man was going through his bank statements and saw that he was charged fifty thousand dollars! He didn't understand. When did he write such a large check? Then he remembered the hoax he played on the poor Yid in Meron. He looked at the check, and he saw that he accidentally

3] *Refuah*.

שמעון בר יוחאי is *gematriya* ורפאתיו. This is a hint that Lag b'Omer is *mesugal* for *refuah*.

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

It is known that the *sefirah* הוד is *mesugal* for

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

There are many stories of *refuos* that happened in

signed his own name, and not Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

The poor man's *tefillos* were indeed answered.

Last year, a youngster was in Meron rosh chodesh Iyar and he davened for *parnassah*, which he needed desperately. And then he said, uncharacteristically, "Ribono Shel Olam, show me that You accepted my *tefillah*."

After his *tefillos*, he looked at his phone and he saw that someone called him. He returned the call, and the person told him that someone gave him money to distribute to the needy, and he wants to send him thousands of shekels. The call came in exactly when he pleaded that Hashem show him that his *tefillos* were answered.

He also told me that he was in Meron with his son in preparation for his bar mitzvah. He wanted to read with his son the Zohar that discusses 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 it and it looks interesting." It was a sefer quoting the Zohar on bar mitzvah. The father said that he felt that Reb Shimon helps those who desire to study his *divrei Torah*.

Meron, particularly on Lag b'Omer, and we write some of them in the footnote.²⁴ We will write here perhaps

24. Elul 1959/תשי"ט, the Brisker Rav *zt'l* was ill, and Reb Shach *zt'l* was always at the Brisker Rav's bedside. One day, the Brisker Rav said that he heard from Reb Chaim of Brisk *zt'l* that Meron is an ideal place for tefillah, and therefore, he requests that people should daven for him in Meron.

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

Sunday, Rav Shach was at the Brisker Rav's side again, and the Brisker Rav asked him whether people davened for him in Meron. Rav Shach was able to tell him about the tefillah they held for him, and he told him the names of the people. The Brisker Rav's eyes shone from joy and gratitude. (Rav Shach said that it was a *neis* that he arranged it, because otherwise, what would he answer the Brisker Rav?)

In 1949 תש"ט, the roads to Yerushalayim were closed due to the war with the Arabs. The roads were open only one day every other week. A *bachur* called Meirovitz was shot in the leg outside 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 determined that it must be amputated.

Lag b'Omer was approaching. Meirovitz asked his friends to bring him to Meron. "It's impossible," his friends told him. And indeed, it was almost impossible. In those days, a trip to Meron could take an entire day, and involved switching busses several times. Due to his condition, he needed to travel with his foot raised the entire time. How could they undertake the long trip with him, in his condition?

But the *bachur* begged that they bring him to Meron, until his friends agreed to do whatever they can. They rented a truck, so

he could lie down, and they travelled all the way to Meron.

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

After their tefillos by the *tzion*, they went to the courtyard to dance. Meirovitz wanted to dance. He felt in his heart that a miracle was about to happen to him. He put his arms around the shoulders of two of his friends, and they danced with him. Suddenly, he was dancing on his own. His vigorous dancing caused the dressing to fell off, and a healthy foot was revealed!

There was a young boy who had a grave disease, and the doctors all said there is nothing they can do to heal him.

The boy's father announced, "Until now the doctors did what they know. Now it is our turn, as Yidden, to do what we know." The father arranged for a minyan to daven for the boy in Meron, and they brought the boy along with them.

At the *tzion*, the boy cried out in pain, which inspired everyone to daven with great concentration.

The boy sat near the *tzion* and asked for water. Everyone was surprised because until then he only ate and drank intravenously.

The next day, the father brought his son to a doctor, and the doctor was shocked at the improvement. With a few more treatments the son had a *refuah sheleimah*.

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis *zt'l* related that he was once experiencing a lot of pain in his throat, and the doctors recommended a surgical procedure. He came to Meron and recited the entire *Tehillim*. In the middle of saying the *Tehillim*, he couldn't stop coughing, and all the blood and puss that was blocking his throat came out. He was healed.

Once, someone approached Rebbe Dovid Biderman *zt'l* about his ill son. Rebbe Dovid Biderman advised him to go 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

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

Year 1918/תרע"ט, a childless couple came to daven in Meron at the kever of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. They promised that if they have a boy, they would bring him to Meron on Lag b'Omer for his *chalahkah* (to make *peyos*).

They had a boy, and when the child turned three, 1922/תרפ"ג, the mother brought the child to Meron as they had promised. (Her husband remained home.)

That year, Lag b'Omer was on Friday, so most people remained in Meron for Shabbos. On Shabbos, the three-year-old child fell ill with cholera. Shabbos morning, the mekubal, Reb

Asher Zelig Margolis zt'l was davening *Mussaf* before the amud, and everyone heard the young child's shouts and cries. Everyone panicked, especially the mother, whose screams could be heard above all others.

Reb Asher Zelig writes in one of his sefarim, "The child was green, and seemed to be dead." Everyone was distraught. The *tefillah* was over, but no one was interested in making Kiddush. A feeling of gloom reigned.

The mother took the child, placed him near the *tzion* and announced, "Reb Shimon! I kept my promise. I brought my only son here at three years old to receive his first haircut. Please, do not ruin my happiness and the happiness of my husband, who is waiting

once, and he isn't healed, does he stop going to the doctor? He goes again. If a person takes a medication once and it doesn't help, does he give up? No! He tries again. I advise you to go to Meron again and again, until your son has a *refuah sheleimah*."

for us to return. Reb Shimon! I'm leaving my son here. Don't embarrass me. Bring him back to li as 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*, closed the door behind her, and 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. The dead child came back to life. Then the crowd recited the *brachah* of מוֹחִיד הַמַּתִּים.

Shaar Yissaschar writes that שמעון בן יוחאי is *gematriya* ²⁵ מוֹחִיד הַמַּתִּים.

4] Children

The Shem Shlomo of Munkatch *zt'l* taught that to bear children one should have *kavanah* during the *brachah* of רפאנו because being able to bear children is a medical issue. Lag b'Omer is הוֹד שְׁבִיחָה, a day *mesugal* for *refuah*, so Lag b'Omer is *mesugal* for bearing children.²⁶

25. The Minchas Elazar *zt'l* opposed the Zionist movement, and this earned him some enemies. Once, as he was walking to Meron, he received a letter that said, "If you dare go to Meron, you will be killed there." The Minchas Elazar turned to his *gabbai*, Reb Chaim Ber and to Reb Asher Zelig Margolis *zt'l*, who were accompanying him and said, "We are going to Reb Shimon, and the *malach hamaves* doesn't have any power there."

26. The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1) relates: A couple in Tzidon didn't have children for ten years, so they came to Reb Shimon for a divorce. Reb Shimon told them, "Just like you celebrated when

The Nachlas Avos tells a story that happened to the holy Tana Yochai, the father of Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

After many years without children, Yochai considered divorcing his wife. However, his wife didn't want to divorce, so she prayed and pleaded to Hashem for children.

Rosh Hashanah night, Yochai dreamed that he was in an orchard with many trees of various sizes. Yochai saw himself leaning on a small tree, which didn't have any fruit.

Yochai understood that this tree represented him and that it didn't have any fruit because he was childless.

A *malach* carrying a bucket filled with water entered the orchard and began watering the trees. Yochai understood that the trees that the *malach* watered would bear children that year. How he hoped the *malach* would pour some water on his sapling, too.

The *malach* came to Yochai's tree, put down his

you married, I want you to celebrate when you divorce."

They held a grand party, and the wife poured many cups of wine for her husband. At the conclusion of the feast he told her, "Take whatever you love most from this home and bring it with you to your parent's home," and he fell asleep.

She told her slaves to carry her husband in his bed to her parent's home.

He awoke at midnight and didn't understand why he was in her parent's home. She told him, "You told me to take what I love most. I love you more than anything else."

They returned to Reb Shimon. He davened for them, and they bore children.

bucket of water, took out a small jug, and poured its contents over the tree. The tree immediately sprouted flowers and grew beautiful fruit.

When he awoke, he told his wife about the dream. They understood that the dream bore good tidings.

On *motzei* Rosh Hashanah, Yochai repeated what he saw in his dream to Reb Akiva. Reb Akiva agreed that the dream meant they would have a child that year.

Yochai asked, "Why didn't the *malach* use the water of his bucket to water my tree? Why did he water my tree with a small jug?"

Reb Akiva replied, "The jug was filled with your wife's tears that she shed so that she should bear children. In the merit of those tears, you will have a holy child."

That year, Reb Shimon bar Yochai was born.

5] *Shidduchim*

The Avnei Nezer *zt'l* told his chassidim that Lag b'Omer is *mesugal* for *shidduchim*, because about Reb Shimon it states, הַצִּיל הַלְלוּצִים, "He saves those who are stressed and worried," and who is more stressed and worried than someone waiting for their *shidduch*?²⁷

6] *Ruchniyos*

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

One Lag b'Omer, Zelig's mother was traveling by bus to Meron, and one of her main goals was to daven for her oldest son Zelig that he should find his *bashert*.

As she travelled, she reminded herself of the worries she and her husband had years before, because they were married for a long time without children. She remembered that they came to Meron,

We should also daven
for success in *ruchniyus*.

The Sfas Emes (*Emor*
5652) writes, "I heard from

davened for a child, and promised that if they bear a son, they will call him Shimon. But somehow, when the miracle occurred, and their son was born, they forgot about their promise, and they named him Zelig.

She immediately called her husband and said, "Who knows if it isn't because of the name that Zelig is having a hard time getting married? Perhaps if we had named him Shimon, he would have found his bashert, already."

The father replied that he will call up his rebbe and ask him what to do.

The rebbe told him 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 next Shabbos, the *gabai* gave "Shimon Zelig" an *aliyah*, establishing his new name.

A man in this *beis medresh* who was also called Zelig asked the *gabai*, "Why did you call this *bachur* Shimon Zelig? Isn't his name just Zelig?"

The *gabai* said, "Until now he was Zelig. But his father told me that from now on I should call him Shimon Zelig. I don't know why."

Zelig had an older daughter. Long ago, he would have chosen Zelig as his son-in-law because he thought he would be a good spouse for his daughter, but them having the same name prevented him from considering it. As it is known, Reb Yehuda HaChassid ruled that the names of the father-in-law and son-in-law mustn't be the same. But now that their names were no exactly the same, he was willing to go ahead with the *shidduch*. Shimon Zelig got engaged to Zelig's daughter!

my grandfather [the Chidushei HaRim *zt'l*] that on Lag b'Omer one can attain *yiras Shamayim*." We can pray for success in *avodas Hashem*, and our tefillos will be answered.

The Imrei Emes *zt'l* teaches:

Tehillim (chapter 19) has five sentences praising the Torah and mitzvos, and each line contains five words:

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

2. עדות ה' נאמנה מוכימת פתי
(The testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple one wise.)

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

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

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

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

7] Daven for the Salvation of Klal Yisrael

The Minchas Elazar of Munkatch *zt'l* would sing בר יוחאי when he came to his father's grave on his yahrtzeit because his father, the "*Darkei Teshuvah*," wrote three *sefarim* on *Tikunei Zohar*, written by Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Thus, there was a connection between his father and Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

One year, after singing בר יוחאי, the Minchas Elazar elaborated on the words of the final phrase, אשרי העם הם, לומדיך, "Fortunate is the nation *who teach you*." He asked that it seems it should say לומדי תורתך, "who

learn your divrei Torah," or לומדי ספריך, "who learn your *sefarim*." Why does it state הם לומדיך, that they teach Reb Shimon? What do they teach Reb Shimon?

The answer is that tzaddikim in their graves often don't know about the Jewish nation's hardships in this world. When one comes to a tzaddik's grave, הם לומדיך, they tell and teach the tzaddik about the problems that are going on so that the tzaddik can daven for Klal Yisrael.

After saying this explanation, the Minchas Elazar fell on his father's grave and told his father about the many *gezeiros* and hardships of his time.²⁸

The *Zohar* (*Idra* 296) says that when Reb Shimon was buried in Meron, a *bas kol* came forth and said, "Many *kitrugim* [and harsh decrees] are silenced on this day in your merit." Tzaddikim say that this occurs every year on Lag b'Omer. The *malachim* that slander and seek to harm Klal Yisrael are silenced on Lag b'Omer, and salvations come to Bnei Yisrael.

The *Zohar* says that heaven's gates open Pesach Sheni, and they remain open an entire week, and then the gates close.

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

28. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim *zt'l* said that when one hires a lawyer to defend him, even the best lawyer can't help if he doesn't divulge to the lawyer all 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 knows what to daven for.

The answer is that during this week we have Lag b'Omer, and everyone davens and receives what they need. The gates can be closed since Klal Yisrael has already received all their hearts' desires.²⁹

Hadlakah (bonfire)

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

In Meron, and in all cities in Eretz Yisrael (and in many communities in *chutz le'aretz*) there is a custom to celebrate Lag b'Omer with a *hadlakah* (bonfire) in honor of Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

The *sefer* מסע מירון describes the *hadlakah* in Meron (תרמ"ח/1888): "Everyone buys olive oil and pours it in honor of the *tana*. Those who will light the fire come forward and with joy and ecstasy

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

A month later, the 6th of Kislev, there was a second earthquake. Yidden and *lehavdil* goyim ran to Reb Shimon's grave. They found the building jumping up in the air and falling back down again. The dome on its roof split in two. They became very afraid. They said, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! If this is what is happening to your building, what will be with us?" After half an hour, the earthquake settled, and the building sat firmly in its place. They went inside to check for any damages, but there were none. The dome merged, and there was no sign of any scratches or other damage.

they light a towel soaked in oil and throw it into the bowl of oil. Everyone stands by – their eyes watch and wait for the fire. When the first flames burst forth, everyone rejoices. Their happiness is so loud that I never heard anything like it, and I never saw a joy similar to it. The people of Eretz Yisrael say that the *neshamah* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai is there at this *hadlakah*. At that time, I took out a list of names of my friends and family, and I davened that the merit of the holy *tana* should protect them, that they should have *hatzlachah* in *gashmiyos* and *ruchniyos*."

The Sadugeira 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 that time.

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

Some *gedolim* said that this is *baal tashchis* (because it is forbidden to waste money and destroy clothing). 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 notes that the Or HaChaim HaKadosh *zt'l* and other tzaddikim did so.

Some throw their yarmulke into the fire. My father *zy'a* and my grandfather Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a* did that.

Someone told Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov *zy'a* that his son was acting improperly and that he keeps taking off his yarmulke. Rebbe Dovid Biderman recommended that he bring his son to Meron on Lag b'Omer.

The father followed this advice, but it was very embarrassing for him. At every stop along the way, the child wandered off, and they had to find him to continue on their way.

In Meron, they lit the fire, and the Rebbe grabbed the boy's yarmulke and threw it into the fire. The boy immediately started shouting, "My yarmulke! My yarmulke!" He changed in a minute. Before, he was constantly throwing off his yarmulke, and now he wanted it.

The *Zohar* (*Idra Zuta* 291:) tells that on the final day of Reb Shimon's life, he revealed the holy secrets of kabbalah to his students. As long as he taught then, the sun didn't set.³⁰ The *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Lag b'Omer* 6) writes that this explains

the custom of lighting candles and bonfires on Lag b'Omer. It is in commemoration of the sun that continued to shine on the final day of Reb Shimon bar Yochai's life.³¹

***Chalakeh* (haircut)**

Another renowned custom in Meron, on Lag b'Omer, is the *chalakeh*, when a three-year-old child gets his first haircut there. This is when he begins his chinuch for the mitzvah of *peyos*.

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* writes, "The Arizal came to

30. The *Zohar* states, "The day didn't set like all other days because that day was in his possession." Tzaddikim called Lag b'Omer "Reb Shimon's day."

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

Fifty years ago, a person was involved in a car accident, and needed crutches to get around. The doctors were saying that he will need to have his legs amputated. Lag b'Omer, in the Boyan bonfire in Yerushalayim, he threw his crutches into the fire, and he began to dance! Miraculously, due to his *emunah* in Reb Shimon bar Yochai, he was healed in a moment.

Meron [on Lag b'Omer] with his young child and his entire family, and they made *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 *chalahah* child."

Different explanations are given for this custom. Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explains that Reb Shimon bar Yochai promised, *כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו*, the Torah will never be forgotten from the mouths of your children. The *mesorah* will be passed down from one generation to the next. Therefore, when we make *peyos* for a child and are getting ready to bring the child to cheder to study Torah, we do it at Reb Shimon's grave, for it was his promise that the chain of Torah and *yiras*

Shamayim will continue eternally.

I heard another explanation from the Chernobyl Rebbbe *shlita*:

The Gemara (*Me'illa* 17.) states, "The government decreed that Yidden may not keep Shabbos and perform *bris milah*. Reb Reuvan Istrobuli sought to annul these decrees, so he cut his hair in a non-Jewish hairstyle (long hair in the back and no hair in the front), so the goyim would think he was one of them. He sat among the politicians and asked them, "If you hate someone, do you want to make him wealthy or poor?"

They replied, "Obviously, we want him to be poor!"

"So the Jews shouldn't work on Shabbos. That way, they will become poor."

The government officials agreed, and they retracted the decree to force them to work on Shabbos.

Then he asked them, "If you have an enemy, do you want him to be strong or weak?"

They said, "Obviously, we want him to be weak!"

"If so, you should let the Yidden circumcise their children at eight days so that they will be weak."

They replied, "You are correct," and they retracted that decree.

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

Once again, the Jewish community needed a solution on how to can annul these two decrees. So the *chachamim* sent Reb Shimon bar Yochai to the king, because "many miracles happen to him."

A demon called Ben Temalyon met Reb Shimon and offered his assistance... The demon went ahead of Reb Shimon and attached

itself to the king's daughter, causing her immense pain. When Reb Shimon arrived, Reb Shimon said, "Ben Temalyon, leave!" which it did.

Thankful to Reb Shimon, the king brought him into his treasury and said, "Take whatever you want."

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

In this story, Reb Reuvan Istrobuli helped the nation dressed as a gentile, but Reb Shimon saved the nation, appearing like a Yid.

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

Learn from his Ways

On Lag b'Omer, it is also customary to sing בר

יוחאי, "the son of Yochai." Reb Naftali Katz zt'l writes (*Siddur Beis Rachel*) that singing this song purifies the *neshamah*, even for those who don't know the secrets of this song.

As we sing this song, as well as ואמרתם כה לחי רבן שמעון ובר יוחאי, written by the Ben Ish Chai zt'l, we should think about Reb Shimon bar Yochai's praises, his fear and love of Heaven, his accomplishments, his erudition in Torah, and to yearn to emulate his holy ways.

Perhaps this is the reason we sing ובר יוחאי, and, in this song, we call Reb Shimon, "The son of Yochai." This is a reminder that Reb Shimon was a human being; he had parents and yet reached such high levels. Therefore, if we devote ourselves to Hashem's service, we can also reach very high levels.

It states (Daniel 4:10) עיר וקדיש משמיא אנחית "A holy malach came down from heaven" and the roshei

teivos are שמעון. This means that Reb Shimon was like a malach, and we don't expect to reach his levels. Nevertheless, we should seek to reach the level of perfection that we can attain.

Seudah

Part of the Lag b'Omer celebration is to make a seudah.

This seudah is considered a seudas mitzvah. As the Maharil (החדשות ק"ד) writes, "The meals at a *bris milah*, *pidyon haben*, *siyum mesechta* [are all seudas mitzvah]. Chazal say, 'Whenever *talmidei chachamim* are at a meal, it is like enjoying from the light of the *Shechinah*. Therefore, Lag b'Omer is also considered a *seudas mitzvah*."

It is surprising that we eat on this day. Generally, a yahrtzeit is a fast day. For example, Moshe Rabbeinu's yahrtzeit on the seventh of Adar is called "*taanis tzaddikim*," a

day that the righteous fast. Lag b'Omer is also a *yahrtzeit*, so why is it celebrated with eating and drinking?

We can answer as follows:

Chazal tell us that when Moshe Rabbeinu was *niftar*, many halachos of the Torah were forgotten. In contrast, when Reb Shimon bar Yochai was *niftar*, secrets of the Torah were revealed. This explains why on Lag

b'Omer we celebrate while the 7th of Adar is a fast day.

Taamei HaMinhagim offers another explanation:

Most tzaddikim fast to annul harsh decrees, but the *Zohar* tells us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai annulled harsh decrees with joy. Therefore, on Reb Shimon's *yahrtzeit* we eat and celebrate. That is how we annul harsh decrees on this day.³²

32. The *Zohar* (*Shemos* 15.) teaches: Once, Reb Shimon was teaching secrets of Torah with Reb Elazar nearby, and their faces shone like the sun. They studied two days straight, without eating and drinking. They didn't know whether it was day or night. When they finished, Reb Shimon said the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 34:28), 'ויהי שם עם ה' ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה - לחם לא אכל מים לא שתה' with Hashem for forty days and forty nights - he did not eat bread nor drink water."

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