

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
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Behar · Lag B'Omer





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Parshas Behar - Lag b'Omer

In this week's *parashah* it states, שש שנים תזרע שדך...ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ, "Sow your field for six years...and on the seventh year, it is *shemittah*..." (25:3-4).

The Chinuch (mitzvah 84) explains that we work the fields for six years and rest on the seventh year to remember that Hashem created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day.

Shemittah also teaches us a lesson in *bitachon*, because for one year, there will be no planting in the entire land. What

will people eat? How will they survive? They need to have *bitachon*, and trust that Hashem will support them. They must remember that *parnassah* comes from Hashem, and Hashem has many ways to support them, even if they don't work the fields.¹

The Torah (25:20) addresses this possible hysteria. וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית, הן לא נזרע ולא נאסף את תבואתינו, "If you will ask, what will we eat in the seventh year? We aren't planting. We aren't gathering in our produce!"

1. A simple chassid of Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl zy'a came to his Rebbe, and the Rebbe said to him, "Tell me your *seder hayom* (daily schedule)."

The man obliged, and the Rebbe heard that he would first go to work in his store, and then he would daven *Shacharis*.

"This isn't a good schedule," Rebbe Mordechai said. "You should daven first, and then take care of your other needs."

"Rebbe," the man said, "most of my business is done early in the morning. If I daven at that time, how will I earn a living?"

The Rebbe told him a story:

"There once was a *melamed* who couldn't find a job near his home. The only position he found was in the home of a wealthy man who lived far away. He taught there for half a year. When the term was up, the wealthy man paid him in full. The *melamed* carefully counted the money — three hundred silver rubles and eighty *groshen* — and put them into a pouch. He guarded his money very carefully.

On Friday, he was still on the road, so he stopped at an inn until after Shabbos. What should he do with the money? A half-year's work is not something to be negligent about. He was tempted to keep the money on him throughout Shabbos, but his *yetzer tov* won this battle, and with a quaking heart he entrusted his money to the hotel manager, hoping that he wouldn't steal it. If the hotelier wasn't honest, a half-year's work far from home would be for naught.

The entire Shabbos his thoughts were about whether he did the right thing, and if he will ever see his money again. Immediately after Shabbos was over, he asked for his pouch, and the manager gave it to him.

"He sat down and began counting the money. There were three hundred silver rubles, the

Hashem answers, וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה, "I will command My blessings for you in the sixth year, and the crops will be enough for three years."

The Noam Elimelech *zt'l* writes in the name of his brother, Rebbe Zusha of Honipoli *zt'l*, that if they don't ask any questions, and they aren't worried, and

they just trust in Hashem, it will be even better. Hashem can support us in many ways. There is never reason to worry. The *pasuk* is discussing a scenario when the nation falls from their perfect *bitachon*, and are concerned how they will survive. Then Hashem will create a new source of *parnassah* for them. Though it would be better if they asked no questions and place their trust in Hashem.²

exact amount. Now, he began counting the copper *groshen*. Someone saw him and shook his head in disapproval. 'You don't have to count the copper coins. If the hotelier is dishonest he would have stolen silver rubles. You can be certain that all the copper *groshen* are all there as well.'

Rebbe Mordechai Chernobyler concluded, "Every morning, Hashem returns the *neshamos* to you and to your family. Don't you see that He is taking care of you? He is caring for your life, your health, for all the primary matters of life. If He cares for these, you can be certain that he will not abandon you and take away the small 'copper *groshen*, and He will supply you with *parnassah* as well. There is nothing to fear. Daven early in the morning, and then go about your business. Hashem will support you in this way too."

When they were traveling home, the chassidim discussed what they heard from Reb Mordechai of Chernobyl that Shabbos. They never had such an uplifting Shabbos before. It was special. This *melamed* said, "My Shabbos was also spectacular. I never had such a Shabbos before."

The chassidim knew this *melamed* to be a simple person that doesn't understand the deep *divrei Torah* Rebbe Mordechai said, so they wondered why he thought the Shabbos was special. He told them the *mashal* the Rebbe told him, and the chassidim agreed, "You received even more than we did!"

2. Everything happens by Hashem's decree. Nothing happens by the rules of nature. Also *shidduchim* is by Hashem's word. As it states, מה' יצא הדבר, "The word (*shidduch*) came from Hashem." This is the reason why a *shidduch* celebration is called a *vort*, because מה' יצא הדבר, it happened by Hashem's *vort* (word).

When the couple marries, the parents walk the *chasan* and the *kallah* to the chuppah. This is to remind them that they don't do anything on their own. They can't even walk on their own. They are led from Above.

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* teaches that when the Yidden first came to the desert and saw the *mon* raining down from heaven, they were astounded. Food falls down from heaven? They never saw anything like that before! Their young children were brought up with this miracle, and they didn't consider the phenomenon wondrous.

But when they went into Eretz Yisrael where the food grows from the earth, their children were shocked.

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* gives a *mashal* of a person who had weak eyes. Everything appeared crooked to him. When he lived in a small village, where all houses are one story high, there wasn't a serious problem. But when he moved to a big city with skyscrapers, it appeared to him like the buildings were falling down. He began shouting, "Run for your lives! The buildings are falling." People started to run and there was panic everywhere.

One wise person didn't run. "There is no reason to run. All we need is an eye doctor. Is there an eye doctor around?" People didn't understand how an eye doctor would stop the buildings from falling down, but when the eye doctor came, the wise person told him to check this man's eyes. It was discovered that his eyes were the source of the problem.

The *nimshal* is, people have warped eyes. They see the world in twisted, untrue ways. They panic, they don't understand how they will support themselves, etc., but it is all because they don't see matters correctly.

For example, people see that when you work for a living, you have money. If you don't work, you don't have money. That is why they think *parnassah* is entirely in people's hands. But this is

people's incorrect perception. There will come a time when our eyes will be healed, and we will perceive that everything happens by Hashem's word, and not by chance, and not by the might of our hand. *Hishtadlus* creates the vessel, but *parnassah* comes from Hashem. To explain this point, we tell the following *mashal*:

There was once a pauper who spent a morning in the post office. He saw people go up to the clerk, pay a small amount of money, and the clerk gave each of them a valuable package. The pauper thought that he could do the same. He just has to collect some money, give it to the clerk, and he will receive valuable merchandise. He figured that he could sell the merchandise and become wealthy. He finally found a way to pull out of his poverty.

He spent the next morning collecting money, and then he brought the money to the post office. Upon giving the money to the clerk, he asked for an expensive package.

The clerk laughed and explained to the pauper that the few coins people pay is only for the delivery. Before that, they paid in full for the merchandise.

The *nimshal* is, people do *hishtadlus* for *parnassah*. Someone watching from the

Actually, they are both sensations, only we become accustomed to them and think it's natural.

If a dead person suddenly climbed out of his grave and walked around, everybody will be shocked and surprised. Yet, this miracle happens daily. Wheat kernels rot in the ground, and then they germinate, sprout and grow. From death comes life. It is a miracle, and likewise, all sources of *parnassah* are miraculous. It isn't as natural as it seems.

side might think *hishtadlus* brings *parnassah*. But *hishtadlus* is like the delivery fee. It isn't the source of the *parnassah*. *Parnassah* comes from Hashem, alone.

When the Or HaChaim HaKadosh *zy'a* lived in Morocco, he taught his community, "The week has six workdays. It's sufficient to work on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. Leave Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday for Torah. I guarantee that your *parnassah* won't be less because of it."

His community followed his advice, and indeed, they had *parnassah* just like before. They saw that they could spend a substantial amount of time learning Torah each week, and Hashem supported them. This went on for many years.

But when the Or HaChaim left Morocco and moved to Eretz Yisrael, the Moroccan community gradually began to work more. Eventually, they were back to a six day workweek.

But they admitted that that working extra didn't bring them any more money. They were just as well off during the years

they followed the Or HaChaim's counsel to *הו"י ממתעט בעסק ועסוק בתורה*, "work less and to study Torah."³

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* married when he was fourteen years old, and every day his *rebbetzin* would go to her father-in-law, Rebbe Mordechai of Zvhil, and he would give her some money to buy whatever they needed.

One day, Rebbe Shlomke told his wife, "We believe that our *parnassah* isn't from my father, but from Hashem. Therefore, I decided that it isn't good that we take a daily allowance from my father. Let's trust in Hashem, and Hashem will support us."

A few days later, there was no food in the home. Rebbe Shlomke told his wife, "Perhaps I was wrong when I said we shouldn't take *parnassah* from my father. Hashem chose to support us that way, who am I to say I want my *parnassah* to come a different way."

She came to her father-in-law for some money. He said, "I noticed you won't here for a few days, so take a silver ruble this time."

3. Someone asked the Chazon Ish *zt'l* how much *hishtadlus* should one do. The Chazon Ish replied, "One must make *hishtadlus* until matters become crooked. It can be compared to banging a nail into the wall. One can bang many times, but when the nail becomes crooked, he stops and throws away the nail.

Similarly, when doing *hishtadlus*, and matters become crooked, meaning that the *hishtadlus* he's doing doesn't leave him with time for Torah and *tefillah*, then it is time to stop.

Rebbe Shlomke would say, "The alef beis (א' ב') of a Yid is *אמונה בטחון*, to believe that everything happens by Hashem's *hashgachah pratis*."

Reb Yitzchak of Neschiz *zt'l* says *parnassah* comes from *emunah*. Although there are people who don't have *emunah* and still have *parnassah*, that's because Hashem has *rachmanus* on them.

Later that day, two wealthy chassidim came to visit Rebbe Mordechai, and afterwards they went to Rebbe Shlomke's home, to wish him mazal tov on his recent *chasunah*. As they spoke with him, one of them took out a silver ruble, and was playing with it. Rebbe Shlomke understood that he was planning to give him the ruble as a *chasunah* gift. But when they finished their conversation, the man forgot about the gift, and returned the coin to his pocket.

Rebbe Shlomke understood that if they hadn't taken money from his father and trusted in Hashem, they would have received that silver ruble. Because *parnassah* comes from Hashem, and Hashem has many ways to support us.⁴

Ona'as Devarim

The Torah (25:17) states, *ולא תונו איש את עמיתו ויראת מאלקך אני ה' אלקיכם*, "Don't harm your fellow man with your words, fear G-d, I am Hashem."

4. There was a *youngerman* from Beitar who worked in Ramot, Yerushalayim. To get there he had to take two busses — approximately a two hour trip. It wasn't pleasant at all. To make matters worse, sometimes the busses didn't come on time. He had *sefarim* with him to study on the way, but by the time he got to his job, he was tired and exhausted. He took the same exhausting routine on his return trip.

One day, he decided that he can't go on like this any longer. He needs to find a ride that will take him to Ramot daily, for a reasonable price. This wasn't easy to find, but he did find one person who also needed to be in Ramot in the mornings, and they agreed to travel together a reasonable price.

The first day, he came to work refreshed. Traveling time was cut less than half, and he was freed from the bad odors of the exhaust pipe of old busses, and other discomforts.

This driver, however, didn't excel in *yiras shamayim*. He would listen to the radio and speak *nivul peh* and *lashon hara*. After some days with this arrangement, the *youngerman* decided that his spirituality was too important, so he told the driver he won't continue.

He returned to traveling on the busses. In the meanwhile, he was contemplating quitting his job, so he wouldn't need to endure the traveling any longer.

One morning, he woke up late and took a later bus than usual, from Beitar to Yerushalayim. When he got off the bus, he saw that another *youngerman* got off together with him. He also noticed that this *youngerman* was waiting at the same bus stop as him. They began speaking, and discovered that they were both taking this long route to Ramot, every day.

"We must find another solution," they simultaneously concluded.

"I used to have a ride, but the driver insisted on listening to the radio, so I dropped that plan."

"I have a driver's license," said the other, "and I can drive us to work. The problem is I don't have a car. Perhaps, we can rent a car together?"

"We can do even better than that," said the *youngerman*. "My father has a car he doesn't use in the morning. He will let us take it. I don't have a driver's license, but you can drive the car."

Rashi writes, *ולא תונו – כאן הוזהר על אונאת דברים שלא יקניט את חבירו ולא ישאנו עצה שאינה לו*, “The Torah is forbidding *ona’as devarim*, one shouldn’t harm his fellow man with words, and one mustn’t give bad counsel to his fellow man...”

A few *pesukim* earlier (25:14) the Torah states, *וכי תמכרו ממכר לעמיתך... לא תונו איש את אהיו*, “when you sell something to your friend... don’t cheat your brother...” This is another kind of *אונאה*, cheating your fellow man in business.

Which sin is worse, to harm your fellow man with unkind words, or to cheat financially?

Reb Shimon bar Yochai teaches (*Bava Metzia* 58-59) *אונאת דברים*, to insult and to

harm your fellow man with your words is worse than *אונאת ממון*, cheating and harming him financially....

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (*mitzvah* 338) writes, “It is proper for people to be cautious that their words do not insult others, even indirectly. The Torah is very stringent with this prohibition⁵... For many people words hurt more than being cheated financially... One must also be cautious not to harm children with words — except for the times when it is needed for educational purposes. This also applies to one’s own children and to all the people of his household. Those who deal softly with children, and do not cause them sorrow, will find life, *brachah* and *kavod* [honor]...”⁶

The arrangement worked out terrifically for both of them. It was also cheaper, because they only needed to pay for the gasoline.

The moral of the story: One should always place *yiras Shamayim* on the top of his priorities and one never loses out from keeping Hashem's mitzvos.

5. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 59) says, “Shaming someone is comparable to murdering him... Three people go to Gehinom and never leave: Someone who commits adultery, someone who embarrasses his friend in public, and someone who calls his friend with a derogatory nickname.... Those who embarrass others in public, lose their share in Olam HaBa... It is better to be thrown into a furnace than to embarrass your friend in public... One must be particularly cautious from *אונאת אשתו*, from offending his wife, because her tears come easily, so the punishment also comes quickly.... All sins get punished by messengers [angels] aside for *אונאת דברים* [which Hashem Himself punishes...]... All of the gates of *tefillah* are locked, but *שערי אונאה*, the gates of *ona’ah*, if someone insults his fellow man, and that person calls out to Hashem, the gates are opened and his *tefillos* go up to Hashem’s holy throne...

6. Once, a child was making a lot of noise and running about the Chazon Ish’s room, disturbing everyone present. One of the people present told the child, “If you don’t stop, I will tell your *rebbe* in cheder.”

The Chazon Ish told him that he shouldn’t have said that to the child. “A child is distressed when you say such things, and it is transgressing *את עמיתו* *לא תונו איש*, the prohibition against saying harsh, unkind words to one’s fellow man.”

To steer clear from *אונאת דברים* one should get into the practice of speaking kindly to everyone. The Midrash on this week's *parashah* writes, "Rebbi made a *seudah* for his students and served soft tongue and hard tongue. The students chose the soft pieces. Rebbi said, 'My children, also when you speak... choose a soft tongue.'"

The *Yerei'im* teaches, "Just as there is *onaas devarim* with words, there is *onaah* with facial expressions." When you look at someone, that person can perceive whether you respect him or are condescending. He knows whether you love him or hate him, and so on. As the saying goes, *כי באפם דרגו איש*, it's possible to kill someone with your nose, if you turn your nose in a derogatory manner towards a fellow man.

Therefore one should be cautious to always think positive about others, and then you will not shame or harm them. You won't even show them an ugly face, which can hurt so much, and is also a form of *אונאת דברים*.

Reb Avraham Fisher *shlita* told me that as a child, he was once playing with the cats outside Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil's home. The Rebbe came out of his house and warned him to be careful not to hurt the cats.

This is an example of the Rebbe's

concern not to hurt anyone or anything — not even the cats. We should also acquire this sensitivity, and be aware not to harm anyone with words.

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l* had an open-door policy where everyone was welcome. One of his steady guests was Reb Yaakov, a tall, very overweight, ignorant Yid, who also had a terrible odor. He wasn't welcome anywhere—he wasn't even permitted to use the local *mikvehs* because of the way he smelled. But he was welcome at Rebbe Shlomke's. Once, while World War II was raging, Rebbe Shlomke said, "If the people of Yerushalayim would permit Reb Yaakov to use the *mikveh*, the Yidden in Europe wouldn't suffer so much."

This is as the *Sefer HaChinuch* writes, "It is impossible to list every type of embarrassment and affront one should be careful from, so everyone should be careful as they understand. Hashem knows every step of man... Chazal gave us several examples [of *onaas devarim*] so we can understand just how careful we should be." ⁷

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak Weiss *zt'l* (the Rav of Yerushalayim, author of *Minchas Yitzchak*) was married three

7. The only way you could tell that Reb Shlomke was the *baal habayis* of his home was that when someone came in, he would ask them whether they wanted bread or jam. Once, an unstable person came to Rebbe Shlomke's place, and Rebbe Shlomke, as usual, offered him bread and jam. The slightly deranged man retorted, "You can eat bread and jam! I want pita with eggs."

times. This is his inspirational story, as he himself related:

When he was young, a *shidduch* was suggested for him. Since the girl and her family lived far away and it was hard for the Minchas Yitzchak's parents to travel there, they sent a *shaliach* to check out the girl and her family to determine whether the girl was a fitting match for their son. The *shaliach* returned and said that it was a fine match, and Reb Yaakov Yitzchak was engaged from the distance.

As the wedding date drew near, the Weiss's traveled to the *kallah's* hometown for the *chasunah*. When Reb Yaakov Yitzchak's mother saw the *kallah* for the first time, she was very disappointed. It wasn't a proper match for her son at all. She wanted to

terminate the *shidduch*. According to halachah it was permissible (because the *shaliach* was sent to make a fitting *shidduch*, but this wasn't a *fitting shidduch*) but Reb Yaakov Yitzchak said, "Perhaps with time I will divorce her. But right now, I don't want to embarrass her."

They were married and had one son, called Reb Berish. His wife was killed in a war. Reb Yaakov Yitzchak remarried the daughter of the Rav of Vasloy *zy'a*. Afterwards, he married the daughter of the Imrei Chaim of Viznitz *zy'a*, but he didn't have children from either of them. His only child is Reb Berish, born to the woman he didn't want to shame.

Reb Yaakov Yitzchak testified, "Doctors told me that it was impossible

That was perhaps the only time Rebbe Shlomke went to the grocery store. He bought pita and eggs, and fried them for his guest. After the man finished his meal, he asked, "And what about the jam?"

Rebbe Shlomke brought out the jam, and asked him how much he wanted.

"The entire jar," the man replied, and Rebbe Shlomke gave it to him.

There was a *bachur* from Chevron who slept in Rebbe Shlomke's home. He asked the Rebbe to wake him up at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," the Rebbe said.

The *bachur* woke up at six o'clock, and saw that the Rebbe was already sitting at his table, learning Torah.

The following night, the *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke once again, to awaken him at six in the morning.

"I can't do that," Rebbe Shlomke replied.

Again, the *bachur* awoke at six, and saw that Rebbe Shlomke was already awake.

That night the *bachur* asked Rebbe Shlomke why he doesn't awaken him, since he sees that the Rebbe is awake anyway at that time.

Rebbe Shlomke handed him some money and said, "Buy yourself an alarm clock if you want, but I can't wake you. Upon awakening in the morning, people feel uncomfortable. Even if one wants to wake up early, he feels uneasy the moment when he awakens. I don't want to cause another Yid distress, even for a short moment."

for me to bear children. Berish was a miracle. I'm certain that I merited this child as a reward for not embarrassing a Jewish girl."⁸

Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer's friend — a great scholar in his own right — fell ill, and Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer went to visit him. Rebbe Pinchas had him promise that after his demise he would come back down to this world to tell him what happened to him in heaven.

After his friend's demise, he appeared to Rebbe Pinchas Koritzer and said, "Throughout my lifetime, I never caused pain or distress to anyone. As a reward, it was decreed that I would die without any pain. When my soul left my body, I

didn't realize that I was dying. I heard a doctor tell me that to recover from my illness, I must sleep deeply for a very long time. I didn't realize that this sleep was my death. Then I heard the doctor say, "Place him on the floor, because he needs to warm up." I was placed on the floor, as is done to the dead, but I still thought that I was alive. Afterwards, the doctor told people to take me outdoors to get some air. This was actually the funeral. Until I was buried I didn't know that I had died. It was a perfectly painless and sorrow-free death. After I was buried in the ground, the angels came. They wanted to punish me because 'there is no tzaddik in the world, who never sinned,' and I also have my share

8. Reb Yaakov Yitzchak (the Minchas Yitzchak, the Rav of Yerushalayim, *zt'l*) would speak *halachah* and *drush* at his *shalosh seudos* meal, but he didn't speak *mussar*. Someone requested that he speak *mussar* at *shalosh seudos*. He humbly replied, "Who am I to give *mussar*?"

Nevertheless, the following week, at *shalash seudos*, he repeated a *mashal* from the *Chovas HaLevavos* (*Shaar HaTeshuvah* 10) and after that, at several occasions, he would repeat this *mashal*.

The *Chovas HaLevavos* writes, "Don't think, 'For so many years, I ignored my obligations to serve Hashem. Most of my life has passed. How can I do *teshuvah* now? Hashem certainly won't accept my *teshuvah*.' Rather, tell yourself the prophecy that was told to Yechezkel HaNavi on this subject (*Yechezkel* 18:21)...For Hashem told Yechezkel, 'All of his sins won't be remembered... Do I want that a *rasha* should die?... Behold I want that he should do *teshuvah* and live...'

"The early scholars compare someone who does *teshuvah* at the end of his life to someone who has many silver coins and he must cross over a large river. So he threw all his coins into the river, hoping that would stop the river, so he could cross it. He threw all his coins in at once, except for one, but the coins couldn't stop the deep river. He took this last coin and paid a sailor to bring him by boat across the river. He felt he didn't lose anything. He designated these coins to cross the river, which he did.

"A *baal teshuvah*, who spent most of his life doing deeds other than *avodas Hashem*, is the same. When he does *teshuvah* at the end of his life, Hashem will forgive all his bad sins of his life. As it states (*Yechezkel* 18:22) 'All his sins won't be remembered...'"

of iniquities. However, since I never hurt another Yid, angels of mercy came, and brought me straight to Gan Eden.”

The generous deeds of *tzedakah* that Rebbe Shayale Kerestirer was involved in are well known. Much money passed through his hands, but he didn't take any of the money for himself. He gave it all to the needy.

Once he was traveling to Tzanz, to be at the Tzanzer Rebbe's grave on the 25th of Nisan. Rebbe Shayale was weak (it was only a few days before he was *niftar*) and his *gaba'im* wanted to rent a car for Rebbe Shayale, so he could travel in greater comfort. He refused, saying, “It's a shame to use Yiddishe *gelt* for that.” In Tzanz, there were many people at the Tzanzer Rav's *kever*, and someone accidentally stepped on Rebbe Shayela's foot. Rebbe Shayale was in great pain, and the *gaba'im* wanted to order a car for the ride back, but once again Rebbe Shayela said, “It's a shame to waste Yiddishe *gelt* on that.” And he traveled back in a horse and buggy suffering immense pain.

Back in Kerestir he was very weak. He said, “Don't call a doctor for me because it won't help.” He said that in Tzanz, he got an *ayin hara*. “Other Rebbe's and

rabbanim were there, and they were jealous when they saw my entourage and people pushing to get close to me.” Their *ayin hara* caused him to become weaker.

Rebbe Shayela added, “Last year in Tzanz, there was also a lot of pushing around us, and I got an *ayin hara* then too, but we had trouble entering Hungary, and that annulled the *ayin hara*.” The border police Rebbe Shayela's entourage and caught several of them carrying money illegally over the border. Rebbe Shayela's distress during that episode saved him from the *ayin hara*.

See how much one gains from *agmus nefesh*, distress. It cures from an *ayin hara*, and it cures from many other illnesses and problems as well. We must be very cautious not insult or hurt our fellow man in any way. *Ono'as devarim* is a very severe sin. On the other hand, if we are on the receiving end of hurtful words, recognize that we gain so much from it. All we have to do is accept the distress with *emunah* that it is all for our benefit.⁹

A rav came to the *tish* of Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil *zt'l*. This was his first time at Rebbe Shlomke's *tish*, and he wanted to see what it was like.

9. Rebbe Shayela Kerestirer *zt'l* excelled in the mitzvah *hachnasas orchim*.

It states (*Breishis* 4:3-4), וישע ה' אל הבל ואל מנחתו ואל קין ואל מנחתו לא שעה. Rebbe Shayale explained, וישע means שעה, hour. אל הבל means there is a שעה, a time, for הבל פיהם, for Torah and *tefillah*. One has set times when he studies Torah and when he davens, and it isn't necessary the entire day. However, ואל קין, which קייען in Yiddish means chewing, לא שעה, there is no designated time. One can't say to a hungry person, “I have a certain time

Many poor and bitter people ate at Rebbe Shlomke's table. One pauper complained that he always gets the smallest portion of cholent, because others take a lot of cholent before him. Rebbe Shlomke wanted to appease this pauper, so he announced that on this Shabbos, this pauper would take his portion first.

The pot of cholent was placed before him, and the pauper began filling his plate with the cholent. When one dish was filled, he began filling another dish, so he could eat even more. The other paupers were upset, and they rebuked him with harsh words, demanding that he pass on the pot to them. He ignored them, and continued filling up his plates. They rebuked him again, and then the pauper spit into the pot, making the cholent inedible for everyone.

The rav watched this episode, and was totally disgusted. With chutzpah, he stood up and he said to Rebbe Shlomke, "Is this a *tish*? We didn't hear any *divrei Torah*. All we saw was bad *middos*."

Calmly, Rebbe Shlomke replied, "We can learn a lot from this *tish*. Here we learn that even when matters aren't going the way you want, we accept it and remain silent. We let matters pass."

Hashgachah Pratis

Rebbe Shlomke of Zv'nil would say, "If a *hashgachah pratis* story happened

to you, tell it to others! Let people know Hashem's wonders."

On this note, we share a *hashgachah pratis* story. The purpose of telling this story is to praise Hashem, to recognize Him, and to teach ourselves to notice *hashgachah pratis* in our lives.

There was a wealthy person in Bnei Brak, who lived on the third floor of an apartment building. He was getting older, and it was becoming hard for him to march up three flights of stairs each time he came home, so he had an elevator built in his building. He made an agreement with the neighbors that they don't have to pay for the elevator, but if the elevator breaks down, everyone in the building would have to chip in to pay for fixing it (because although they didn't ask for an elevator, they were certainly benefiting from it).

Once, the buttons that operate the elevator doors broke. An elevator technician fixed it, and everyone in the building paid their share — a significant amount of money.

, The wealthy person was *niftar* a year ago. A couple of months after his *peterih*, the elevator broke down, again. This time the doors opened and closed, but the elevator wouldn't move from its place. It seemed that only the doors worked, everything else was broken.

when I do *hachnasas orchim*, and that time passed, so I can't help you now." Rather, for קין to give food for Yidden, לא שעה, be available 24 hours a day to help them.

The neighbors in the building understood it would cost a lot of money to fix it. Since no one in the building really needed the elevator (the one who needed it wasn't living anymore), they decided that the elevator would remain out of order for the meantime.

The wealthy man's first *yahrtzeit* was approaching, and his family planned to have the *yahrtzeit* meal in his old apartment. The wealthy man's son felt that since many guests would be coming, including rabbanim and dignitaries, it would be proper to fix the elevator. He ordered a mechanic to look at the elevator.

The mechanic opened the door and found a child inside! A few hours earlier, this child was playing with the elevator's buttons, opening and closing the doors, when suddenly the doors closed and wouldn't open again. The child shouted and cried, but no one heard him. The mechanic came just in time to save the child.

(The mechanic never fixed the elevator, because when the wealthy man's son heard the outrageous amount it would cost to fix it, he decided to forgo fixing it for the meanwhile. As it turned out, the mechanic came primarily to save the child and to put a lock on the elevator so such a tragedy shouldn't happen again.)

When we hear this story, our hearts

shout *מה רבו מעשיך ה'*, "How great are you ways, Hashem!"

Telling and recognizing *hashgachah pratis* doesn't necessarily mean we will improve our ways. One can see Hashem's wonders, recognize His hand, and yet remain the same as before.

In *parashas Lech Lechah*, the Torah tells the story of how Avraham won a war against four mighty kings and strong armies. Chazal say Avraham threw earth at them, and the earth miraculously turned into arrows, which destroyed their armies.

The people of Sedom witnessed this miracle, but in *parashas וירא* we still find them sinning and acting corruptly. Reb Eliyahu Lopian *zt'l* learned from this that it isn't sufficient to see miracles. One can see great wonders and still remain the same, still stay corrupt.

The solution is to bring the awareness from the mind to the heart. As Rebbe Mordechai of Lechovitz *zt'l* taught, from *וידעת היום* until *אל לבבך* (from knowing in your heart until bringing it to your heart) is a greater distance than heaven and earth.

Shabbos

Hashem told Moshe, "I have a good gift in My treasury (*בבית גזי*).¹⁰ It's called Shabbos. I want to give it to the Jewish people. Go and let them know." (*Shabbos* 10).

10. Tzaddikim explain that Hashem didn't take Shabbos out of His treasury and give it to us. Rather, every Shabbos, Hashem elevates us and brings us into His treasury in heaven to enjoy the Shabbos there.

The Chidushei HaRim says that Moshe Rabbeinu is still fulfilling Hashem's decree, today. He didn't tell us only once about the greatness of Shabbos. Each week before the onset of Shabbos, Moshe speaks to every Yid's *neshamah* and says, "Hashem told me to tell you that Shabbos is coming. Hashem is giving you the great gift of Shabbos."

Many people feel uplifted on Friday when Shabbos comes. The Chidushei HaRim explains that this is because they are receiving Moshe Rabbeinu's message. The Chidushei HaRim writes, "Even if a person is alone in a room, he will experience the holiness of Shabbos when it arrives," because of Moshe Rabbeinu's weekly announcement.

Shabbos has two components: there are the halachos of Shabbos, and there is the joy and *kedushah* of Hashem. Both parts of Shabbos are essential. Some people only keep its laws. They would never consider moving something *muktzah*, cooking, carrying, etc. They should be praised for this. However, if they don't experience the joy of Shabbos, something is missing. It is important to tap into the spirituality of Shabbos (to the best of our ability). Those who do tap into the spirit of Shabbos experience Gan Eden every Shabbos! When they daven and study Torah on Shabbos,¹¹ and during the Shabbos meals, they feel inspired and

invigorated, and rejoice with the holy, internal spirit of Shabbos.

In the Shabbos *zemiro*s we say, *כל מקדש שבת בראוי לו, כל שומר שבת כדת מהללו שברו הרבה מאוד*. Rebbe Henoah of Alexander *zy'a* said that this song is referring to the two levels of Shabbos observance. There are the fortunate people who keep Shabbos *בראוי לו*, as is fitting and proper. These people connect with the joy and spirit of Shabbos. And there are others who keep it *כדת מהללו* "with caution not to desecrate it." Rebbe Henoah of Alexander notes that the words *שברו הרבה מאוד*, "his reward is very great" is stated specifically for those who keep the Shabbos *כדת מהללו* "with caution not to desecrate it." It isn't written for those, who in addition to the keeping of the laws, merit experiencing the spirituality of Shabbos (*בראוי לו*). Why is that? Rebbe Henoah explains that the *zemiro*s is encouraging people to keep Shabbos. Those who keep the Shabbos together with the spirit of Shabbos don't need encouragement. They are motivated to keep the Shabbos because they know just how beautiful, pleasurable, and joyous Shabbos is. But there are people who haven't yet tapped into the great joy that Shabbos supplies. The song encourages them and makes them aware that a great reward awaits them.

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover *zy'a* told the following *mashal*:

11. The Chazon Ish said, "If a non-Jew would know the enjoyment of learning a *daf* Gemara before *Shacharis* on Shabbos morning, he would convert just to have the opportunity to experience it."

Someone wanted to invite a very important person, whom he admired and revered, to his home. In honor of this guest, he ordered the best foods, hired professional musicians and comedians... Increased the lighting... Everything was perfect... but he forgot to invite the guest of honor.

Rebbe Moshe Leib said that this is what occurs to people on Shabbos. People prepare for Shabbos by cleaning their homes, cooking good foods, wearing expensive clothes, lighting the Shabbos candles; everything is perfect and ready, only they forget to invite the Shabbos itself.

When Shabbos comes, they focus on the food and forget to rejoice with the holy guest, with Shabbos.

Reb Moshe Leib explains that this is the meaning of the *pasuk*, [קראת לשבת עונג] וקראת לשבת לשבת. Call Shabbos. Invite Shabbos as well.

Don't forget the guest of honor.

Reb Chaim Brim *zt'l* said he knew a Yerushalmi Yid who said the following *tefillah*: "Ribono Shel Olam, You gave me challos for *lechem mishnah*, wine for Kiddush and *Havdalah*, and all other things I need for Shabbos. Now I request, give me Shabbos for Shabbos." He prayed to also experience the joy, the sweetness, and the holiness of the Shabbos. He didn't want to remain solely with the food. "Please give me the Shabbos" as well. When a person does a mitzvah he can, at times, merit that a tzaddik (who is presently in heaven and had excelled in performing this mitzvah during his lifetime) will come and

become attached to his soul, to help him perform the mitzvah.

When a person wants to do a mitzvah, he needs help to succeed. Sometimes, he can merit that a *neshamah* who excelled in this mitzvah will come to him, to help him perform the mitzvah in the best way.

For example, the Midrash Shmuel (Reb Shmuel Azida *zt'l*) a student of the Arizal, once came to the Arizal, and the Arizal stood up for him. The Arizal never did that before. Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* asked the Arizal why he stood up for this student. The Arizal replied, "I didn't stand up for him. I stood up for the Tana Reb Pinchas ben Yair who came in together with him. He did a good deed today, and merited a connection with Reb Pinchas ben Yair."

Intrigued, Reb Chaim Vital asked the Midrash Shmuel for an explanation. The Midrash Shmuel told him that early that morning, he was walking to shul for *Shacharis*, when heard cries coming from one of the houses. He went to see what happened, and found a distraught family that was robbed at night. The thieves took away their money and their clothing. The Midrash Shmuel saw that the head of the household didn't have anything left to wear, so he gave him his clothes.

Reb Chaim Vital repeated what he heard from the Midrash Shmuel to the Arizal. The Arizal concurred and explained, "Reb Pinchas ben Yair excelled in the mitzvah of *pidyon shvuyim* and in helping the poor. Therefore, when the Midrash Shmuel did his mitzvah of

tzedakah, Reb Pinchas ben Yair came to him from heaven."

Based on these ideas, the Chidushei HaRim teaches: Hashem keeps Shabbos, as it says, *וביום השביעי שבת וינפש*, "On the seventh day, Hashem rested." When one keeps Shabbos, he can merit that Hashem Himself will come to the person to help him keep Shabbos. It will not only be a *Tana* coming to him; it will be Hashem Himself. This explains the great joy and spiritual elation that people can experience on Shabbos.

The Midrash (*Beshalach* 25) says that when one is *shomer* Shabbos, "Even if Hashem makes a *gezeirah* he is able to annul it." In the merit of keeping Shabbos, one's *tefillos* are answered. Even if Hashem decreed (some form of tragedy) the *shomer* Shabbos Yid can change the decree with his prayers.

This is alluded to in the above mentioned *zemer*, *כל מקדש שביעי... שברו הרבה מאוד על פי פעלו*. The Beis Aharon *zy'a* explains (in the name of Rebbe Mordechai of Kremnitz *zy'a*) *על פי פעלו*, whatever this person will pray for, *פעלו*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will give him, in the merit of his Shabbos observance.

Tefillah

The Megaleh Amukos *zt'l* let the people of Krakow know that he was leaving his post as chief *rav* of Krakow. He didn't tell them the reason he decided to leave. The community begged him to remain, but he wouldn't be persuaded.

When the day he planned to leave arrived, he told the community that he

changed his mind. The people of Krakow were overjoyed, and now even more curious. They asked, "Why did you want to leave, and what made you change your mind?"

The Megaleh Amukos replied, "I still won't tell you the reason I planned to leave, but I will tell you why I decided to stay.

"In our city there's a poor peddler. His wife bakes fresh breads, and he sells them on the roadside to the passersby. A wealthy person recognized the pauper and said, 'You're a *talmid chacham*, not to mention that you come from a very prestigious family. You shouldn't be working like this.'

"This is what I do for a living.'

"But it isn't right. I will support you. You can remain in the *beis medresh* studying Torah, and I will give you money...'

"The peddler agreed. This arrangement went on for a couple of months.

"One day, the wealthy man saw the pauper was back on the street, selling breads.

"What happened? We have an agreement!'

"I decided to back out of the deal. I want to earn a living selling breads, as before.'

"But a deal is a deal. You can't back out without a ruling from *beis din*.'

"Yesterday they came to my *beis din* with this most unusual *din Torah*: The wealthy person wants to continue

supporting his friend, but the poor peddler doesn't want to accept the money anymore.

"I asked the peddler why he wants to renege on the agreement and he explained, 'Every day my wife and I pray that the dough should rise well and the breads should taste good. We pray that I should find dry firewood (since wet wood smokes and ruins the breads). We daven that the customers should and enjoy the breads so they will want to buy more. In short, as a peddler, our entire

day revolves around our *tefillos*... But ever since we received a weekly stipend we almost stopped davening, because we didn't have any worries. We decided to go back to our old lifestyle, so we can retain our constant connection with Hashem ..."

The Megaleh Amukos finished, "When I heard that there are people like that living in Krakow, I decided to remain here. I want to be near such people."¹²

A similar story happened with Rebbe Avraham Dov of Avuritch, the Bas

12. A princess became ill, and doctors diagnosed her problem as depression. To cure her, the king had musicians play music near her bed, and he hired clowns to come and jest, but she wasn't interested. She remained sad.

A wise man told the king, "The princess will become happy when she wears the clothing of a very happy person. Find someone who is always happy, and who has no worries, and borrow his clothing. She will wear them and she will be cured."

The king sent his servants to find someone who is always happy. The servants figured they should go to the wealthy part of town, because "Who is more happy than the wealthy? What worries could they possibly have?"

They started their search at the home of the wealthiest person in the kingdom, but this wealthy man told them, "I'm sorry, and I know that this might surprise you, but I'm not always happy. In fact, I'm always worried that I shouldn't lose my assets due to theft, fire, etc."

They went to the other wealthy people, and they all replied in the same manner. They weren't always happy.

They went to musicians, because their music should make them happy, they went to doctors, because healing people is a joyous deed, but whoever they spoke to had some worry. No one was worry-free.

They were ready to head back to the palace, to tell the king that they couldn't find a happy person. En route to the palace, they passed the poor section of town. They were disgusted by the filth of the slum, and said to each other, "We certainly won't find a happy person here."

There was one tiny house, made from scraps of wood and cardboard, shabbier than all the rest. It was on the verge of collapsing. Surprisingly, happy music was coming from there. They could also hear joyous conversations coming from within the house. Is it possible that happy people live here?

They knocked, and the host joyously invited them in. They found a family seated around the

Ayin *zt'l*. He arrived in Eretz Yisrael around Elul time, and he docked in the north of Eretz Yisrael. His plan was to stay in Tzefas until after the *yomim tovim*, and then to move to Yerushalayim. On Chol HaMoed Succos, he changed his mind and decided to remain in Tzfas.

This change of plans occurred when he

heard a woman tell her son, "On Simchas Torah we will *bench geshem* and I'm certain that Hashem will listen to the *tefillos*. Go up to the roof and bring the mattresses down, so they won't get ruined in the rain."

The Bas Ayin said that he chose to remain in Tzefas, to be among people who believed so faithfully in *tefillah*.¹³

Lag b'Omer

Rabi Shimon bar Yochai called Lag b'Omer "Rabi Shimon's day" (יְמוֹ שֶׁל רַ' רִשְׁבִּי, see *Idra Zuta* 292:). Reb Akiva's students stopped dying on this day. Only five students remained — one was Rabi Shimon — and Reb Akiva taught them

Torah and gave them *semichah* on Lag b'Omer (*Chida*). Years later, Rabi Shimon was *niftar* on Lag b'Omer. On this day, prior to his *petirah* he revealed to his students many divine secrets of the Torah. (The *sefer* containing Reb

table, their faces shining with contentment. The servants asked, "Are you always so happy?" "Yes. We are always happy with our lot. If we need something, we trust that Hashem will help us, and we pray to Him. We are never worried..."

"The king's daughter is sick. A wise man advised that if she wears the clothes of a happy person she will be cured. Please, lend us one of your garments."

The head of the family said, "It would be our honor to give clothing to the king's daughter, but we don't have any clothes other than the ones we're wearing..."

This story reminds us *מרבֵּה נכְסִים מְרַבֵּה דאָגָה*, "The more assets, the more worries." Wealth and a nice home isn't a guarantee for happiness. *Tefillah* and *bitachon* will.

13. A Yid from Chaifa borrowed two hundred shekels. On the day the debt was due, he didn't have any cash. He would have to go to a cash machine to take out money, but he didn't want to because of *shmiras einayim*, and also because the *shlep* and effort involved. So after *Minchah*, he prayed a short *tefillah* that Hashem should give him the two hundred shekel some other way — knowing that Hashem can do anything — and then he went into a side room, put his hat on the table and put his head down to rest for five minutes. When he woke up there was a two hundred shekel bill in the ribbon of his hat. Being that the person who loaned him the money was also in the beis medresh, he was able to pay back the debt immediately.

But he wanted to know who placed the money there. The shul is under surveillance, so he asked the *gabai* to show him the footage. He saw a stranger enter the beis medresh — someone he never saw before — and watched him place the two hundred shekel bill in his hat, apparently with a desire to give *mattan beseser*.

Shimon's lesson on that day is called *Idra Zuta*.) The sun didn't set until Rabi Shimon finished teaching the secrets. He said, *דהא כל יומא ברשותי קיימא*, "The entire day is in my possession."

From then until today, the gates of heaven are open on Lag b'Omer, to bestow blessings and goodness to all Yidden.

"Go up and Gather..."

When Reb Shimon was *niftar* a *bas kol* came out and announced, "Go up and gather for the celebration of Reb Shimon" (*Zohar*).

Tzaddikim say this *bas kol* calls every year, inviting people to celebrate the *hillulah* (celebration) of Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

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

Reb Ovadyah of Bartunara writes in a letter, "On the eighteenth of Iyar, the day of his [Reb Shimon's] *yahrtzeit*, people

from all around Meron come and light bonfires... Many barren become fruitful and ill are healed because of the vows (*kabbalos/resolutions*) that they take on at that place."¹⁴

When Yidden rejoice in Meron, Reb Shimon is also there, rejoicing together with them. The Shinover Rav tells that one year the Arizal with his students were dancing on Lag b'Omer in Meron and a tall elderly person (whom they didn't recognize) was also there, with his students. The elderly person danced a lot with the Arizal and with the Chareidim. Afterwards, the Arizal told them that he was Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and his students were Reb Shimon's students. (This story is recorded with several more details in *Taamei HaMinhagim*.)

It states (*Shemos* 34:23), *שלוש פעמים בשנה*, "Three times a year every Yid must see the face of the Master, Hashem..." This *pasuk* is discussing the mitzvah of going up to the Beis HaMikdash for Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos (*עליה לרגל*).

The *Zohar* states, *מאן פני האדון ה' דא ר' שמעון*, "Who is the master... It is Reb Shimon..." We don't know what this *Zohar* means; however, there seems to be

14. The Gemara *Sotah* (14. see *Bach*) writes, "Why is Moshe Rabbeinu's grave hidden from all mankind? It is because Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows that the Beis HaMikdash will be destroyed, and the Yidden will be exiled. [If they know where Moshe is buried] perhaps they will go to Moshe's grave, and cry and beg Moshe, 'Moshe, get up and pray for us!' Moshe will stand up and pray and the decree of exile will be annulled."

This Gemara gives us an inclination to the immense power Yidden have when they daven at *kevarim* of tzaddikim.

a correlation between the mitzvah of *aliyah leregel* and going to Meron.¹⁵

A fiery holy place

If you merit to go to Meron, you should gird yourself with the proper *yiras Shamayim* and joy.¹⁶

The Shlah HaKadosh writes in a letter, "At the holy, fiery place, the *tzion* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, people learn *Zohar* with awe and *deveikus*, because many miracles happen there. One must learn *Zohar* with awe, and make oneself very happy with spiritual happiness, without any mourning and sadness, because this is what Reb Shimon wants, and this is proven and true, and then they take vows, and pray."

Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l* writes, "I testify that when I was a child, I heard from elderly Sephardic rabbis that their fathers

saw it and told them that the Or HaChaim HaKadosh, Reb Chaim ben Atar, was once in Tzefas for Lag b'Omer and he went to Meron. When he reached the bottom of the mountain that leads up to the holy place, he went off his donkey and climbed on his hands and feet, grunting the entire way up like an animal. He shouted, 'How can the lowly me go to the awesome place, where Hakadosh Baruch Hu, all angels, and all souls of tzaddikim are there?!' And at the *hilulah* he was very happy."

When Avraham Kalisker *zt'l* would go to the *mikvah* in honor of Lag b'Omer he would say, הריני מקבל עלי קדושת היום, "I embrace the holiness of the day."

It states in the *sefer מרן* that in Cheshvan תקכ"ב, there was an earthquake in Tzefas and in Miron, and many Arabs, with their wives and children, ran to the

15. Some people go to Meron on Pesach, Shavuos and Succos, as somewhat hinted in this *Zohar*.

16. There is a saying from tzaddikim, "If you go to Miron, it's a sign Reb Shimon invited you."

There was a family who spent a Shabbos in Meron. It was very expensive, and the head of the family said, "For the money we spent, we should have gone to a hotel in a luxurious vacation resort." He was implying that he regrets spending a Shabbos in Meron; the money could have been spent on a better vacation.

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 him. For example, when his son turned three, he wanted to make the *chalah* 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. It is as though he is saying, 'If you aren't appreciative that you came here, don't come back again.'"

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 someone knocked at his door, his neighbor came to his door and said, "I just bought a new car. I want the first time I use of the car to be for a mitzvah. Do you want to come with me to Meron...?"

building over Reb Shimon's grave to protect themselves, but the door of the building was locked. They all shouted, "Reb Shimon! Reb Shimon! We heard about your greatness from our fathers, and we perceived it with our eyes. Open your doors." The doors opened immediately, 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 *kippah* on top was 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 a half hour, the earthquake settled, and the building sat firmly on its place. They went inside and checked to see the damages, but there were none. The *kippah* merged together, and there was no sign of any scratches or damages.

This story is an example of the miracles that happened in Meron. Miracles will certainly happen to the people who go there to pray.

The Gemara tells that Reb Yehoshua ben Levi once met Eliyahu HaNavi at the entrance to Reb Shimon bar Yochai's cave. The Maharal (*Netzach Yisrael* 28) writes, "Know, it is certain, there are locations in the world that are conducive for holiness. The cave where Reb Shimon hid is one such 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 visually, or if he appeared without anyone seeing him. Because many times, Eliyahu tells someone something, and the person doesn't know where the words came from. He thinks they are his own thoughts, but they are really Eliyahu's words, speaking to him..."

The Joy of Lag b'Omer

The *Zohar* tells that when Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *levayah* passed the village of Tzipori, the residents of Tzipori didn't let them continue. They came out with sticks demanding that Reb Shimon be buried in their town. The people from Meron weren't silent. They demanded that Reb Shimon be buried in Meron, near them. Suddenly, the bed of Reb Shimon bar Yochai ascended in the air. Surrounded by a divine fire, the coffin glided to Meron and that's where he was buried. At that moment, a *bas kol* came forth, "Go up and gather for the celebration of Reb Shimon."

Reb Asher Zelig Margolies writes, "When we see the great joy at the holy *tzion* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai in Miron we are certain that up until today, on Lag b'Omer, the *bas kol* speaks to the heart of every Yid and proclaims, "Go up and gather at Reb Shimon's resting place, rejoice and celebrate..."

The Bnei Yissaschar writes, "We heard from reliable sources that the joy at Reb Shimon's *tzion* is supernatural. As it says,

אור צדיקים ישמח, "the light of tzaddikim brings joy."

Those who go to Miron on Lag b'Omer experience a great joy. There's also a strong feeling of *achdus*, also supernatural. People from all backgrounds come and dance together as one.

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

Rebbe Shlomke of Zvhil ז'ל asked his *gabai* to awaken him when their entourage was ready to travel to Meron, for Lag b'Omer. He said, "I want to rest a bit. Wake me up when everyone is ready to go."

When the *gabai* went to wake the Rebbe, he saw the Rebbe's pillow and bed soaked with tears.

As they traveled, Reb Shlomke urged everyone to be happy. "We have to be happy also while traveling to Meron," he told them.

There are two Gemaras that have forty-nine pages: *Shavuos* and *Sotah*. The Chasam Sofer would teach one page a day during the forty-nine days of *sefiras ha'omer*. One year he was teaching *masechta Shavuos*, and when he came to the page ל"ג בעומר דף ל"ג that is studied on ל"ג בעומר, ר' שמעון מחכו עליה במערבא, and translated, "In Eretz Yisrael, people are rejoicing with Reb Shimon."

The Mishnas Chassidim writes, "On this

day, Reb Akiva's students stopped dying, and Reb Akiva gave *smichah* to five of his students, and from them, Torah emanates. Among them was Reb Shimon bar Yochai... It is a mitzvah to be happy on this day, the joy of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. If you live in Eretz Yisrael, go and celebrate at his grave, and be very happy there. Certainly, do so if you have a *chalachah yingel*, to make *peyos* for a child..."

Reb Chaim Vital tells that Reb Avraham HaLevi זי"א would say, נחם את אבלי ציון (said on Tisha b'Av). He would say it every day in *Minchah Shemonah Esrei* and in *birchas hamazon*, for he was always mourning the *churban Beis HaMikdash*. He said it in Meron, as well, on Lag b'Omer.

The Arizal saw Reb Shimon bar Yochai standing on his grave, as though he was alive, and Reb Shimon said, "Ask your student why he said נחם on the day of my immense joy." Within a month, Reb Avraham HaLevi was *niftar*. This teaches us the great importance to be happy in Meron on this day.

Someone asked the Maharil the following question: Someone made a vow that he will only eat at a *seudas mitzvah*. What constitutes a *seudas mitzvah*?

The Maharil replied, "Chazal say whoever eats at a *seudah* of *talmidei chachamim* it is as though he is enjoying from the shine of the *Shechinah*. Lag b'Omer is a *seudas mitzvah* (because it is Reb Shimon's meal)..."

The Taamei HaMinhagim asks: On Moshe Rabbeinu's *yahrtzeit*, on the 7th of Iyar, people fast. In contrast, on Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *yahrtzeit*, on Lag b'Omer, we celebrate. What is the explanation? Is a *yahrtzeit* a day for rejoicing or a day for mourning?¹⁷

The Taamei HaMinhagim answers: The *Zohar* tells us that Reb Shimon bar Yochai was unique in the manner he annulled harsh decrees. Most tzaddikim

fasted when there was a harsh decree, Reb Shimon bar Yochai ate. With his joy, he annulled harsh decrees. Therefore, by Reb Shimon's *yahrtzeit* we eat.¹⁸

Hilulah

The *Zohar* calls a *yahrtzeit* "*yoma dehilula*" which can be translated as, "a wedding day." Why? What is the connection between a wedding and a *yahrtzeit*?¹⁹

17. Chazal tell that on the day Moshe Rabbeinu was *niftar* many laws of the Torah were forgotten. In contrast, on the day Reb Shimon bar Yochai was *niftar*, secrets of the Torah were revealed. This could be the explanation why Lag b'Omer is a day of celebration, while the 7th of Adar is a fast day.

18. The *Zohar* (*Shemos* 15.) teaches: Once, Reb Shimon was teaching secrets of Torah, and Reb Elazar was near him. Their faces shone like the sun. They sat there two complete days, without eating and drinking. They didn't know whether it was daytime or whether it was nighttime. When they left, Reb Shimon said the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 34:28) ויהי שם עם ה' ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה – לחם לא אכל מים לא שתה "[Moshe] was there [on Har Sinai] forty days. He didn't eat bread and he didn't drink water."

When Rebbe heard this story, he was astounded. Rebbe's father, Reb Shimon ben Gamliel, told him, "My son, Reb Shimon was like a lion, and his son was like a lion. Not a regular lion, rather אריה שאג מי לא ירא 'When the lion roars, who isn't afraid?' Even the upper worlds are afraid of them, certainly we should be afraid. He was a man that never decreed a fast day to attain his requests. He decreed and Hakadosh Baruch Hu acquiesced. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decreed and he annulled it."

19. Every year, Reb Simchah Mund *zt'l*, would come to Meron for Lag b'Omer. When he was old, his students would almost carry him up the mountain, as he leaned on them for support. His students tried to convince him to come to Meron some other day of the year, when there are fewer people. It would be easier for him and for them.

He replied, "When one comes to a wealthy man's home asking for *tzedakah*, the wealthy man checks the *hamlatzos* to see whether he deserves the money. But when *tzedakah* collectors come to the wealthy person when the wealthy man is celebrating a *chasunah* for his son, he doesn't check the *hamlatzos*. He gives to everybody. Coming to Meron on Lag b'Omer is like coming to Reb Shimon's *chasunah*. Everyone receives, no one is left out." Someone asked a Yerushalmi Yid when he plans to be in Meron on Lag b'Omer. He replied, "I am planning to be there for the *kabalas panim* and to remain there until after the *mitzvah tantz* (24 hours). I want to be by the entire *chasunah*, just like a relative."

The Rema MiPano explains that at a wedding all discussions and *divrei Torah* are about the wedding. If a person will get up and begin speaking about any other topic, even if he speaks about an upcoming *yom tov*, he will be told, "It is all very interesting, but this isn't the time or place for such discussions." At a wedding, we only speak about the *chasunah*. Similarly, on the day of a *yahrtzeit* of a tzaddik, all discussions in heaven are about this tzaddik and about his *divrei Torah*.²⁰ It is therefore appropriate to call a *yahrtzeit* a *hilulah*, a *chasunah*.

People give gifts to the *chasan* and *kallah* at their wedding. Rebbe Yissacher Dov of Belz *zy'a* explained that the tzaddik's *yahrtzeit* is called a *chasunah*, a *hilulah*, because Hashem gives presents to the tzaddik on that day.

The primary present that a tzaddik desires is to be able to bestow kindness onto Yidden. Thus, on their *yahrtzeit*, Hashem grants them the ability to *mashpia* goodness to klal Yisrael.

Bonfires/Hadlakah

One of the customs of Lag b'Omer is the *hadlakah*, bonfire.

The *Zohar (Idra Zuta 291:)* tells that on the final day of Reb Shimon's life, he revealed to his students great, holy secrets of kabbalah. As long as he taught,

the sun didn't set. The Bnei Yissaschar (*Lag b'Omer 6*) writes that this can explain the custom to light 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.

There were tzaddikim who would throw clothing into the fire in Meron, to increase the light and the joy of the day.

Reb Shmuel Heller *zt'l* the rav of Tzfas wrote a *sefer K'vod Melachim* on this subject, and he writes that the Or HaChaim HaKadosh *zt'l* and other tzaddikim would do so.

The *sefer Alef Kasav* writes, "The Or HaChaim would cry the entire night of Lag b'Omer at the hadlakah, and say 'How can I come near the fire, where the *neshamos* of Avraham Yitzchak, and Yaakov are there, together with all the holy tzaddikim?'"

The *sefer מבע מירון* describes how the *hadlakah* appeared (תרמ"ה): "Everyone buys olive oil and pours it in honor of the Tana. Then those who will light it come forward [to the roof of the *tzion*] and emotionally, with joy and a happy heart, they light a towel soaked with oil, and they throw it into the bowl of oil. Everyone stands by – their eyes watching, waiting for the fire. When the first flames come forth, everyone rejoices. The sound of their happiness is

20. This is one of the reasons it is recommended to study the *divrei Torah* of a tzaddik on his *yahrtzeit*. The tzaddik's *divrei Torah* is the primary discussion in heaven, so it should be our discussions too.

so loud, I never saw and I never heard any joy similar to it. The people of Eretz Yisrael say the *neshamah* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai is there, at this *hadlakah*. At that time I took out the names of my friends and family...and I prayed for them, that the merit of the holy *tanah* should protect them, enlighten their candle, that they should have *hatzlachah* for their bodies and souls."

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 this time.

Some have the *minhag* to throw their yarmulka into the fire. That was the *minhag* of my father *zy'a* and of his father, Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov *zy'a*.

Once, a father complained to Rebbe Dovid Biderman of Lelov *zy'a* that his son keeps taking off his *kappel* (yarmulke). The Rebbe told him that he and his son should travel to Meron for Lag b'Omer.

During the trip, the father was very embarrassed by his son's wild ways. At every stop they had to look for him so they could continue.

When they came to Meron, and they lit the fire, the Rebbe took the boy's *kappel* and threw it into the fire. The boy immediately shouted, "My *kappel*! My *kappel*!" He changed in a minute. Before, he was constantly throwing off his *kappel*, and now he wanted it.

First Haircuts (*Chalakah*)

Many people have a custom to give their son's his first haircut in Meron.

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

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 *chalakah*, and you will make *peyos* for your child..."

What is the reason for this custom?

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter *shlita* explains that Reb Shimon bar Yochai promised, *כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו*, Torah will never be forgotten. The *mesorah* will be passed down from generation to generation. Therefore, when we make *peyos* for our child, and we are about to bring him to cheder to study Torah, we do it at Reb Shimon's grave, for he promised the chain will continue eternally.

I heard another explanation from the Chernobyler Rebbe Shlita:

The Gemara (*Me'illa* 17.) states, "The government decreed that Yidden may not keep Shabbos and they may not circumcise their children. Reb Reuvan Istrobuli sought to annul the decrees, so he wore a non-Jewish hairstyle (with long hair in the back and no hair in the

front) so the goyim would think he is 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, "Poor!"

"So they shouldn't work on Shabbos, so they will become poor."

The government officials agreed with him and they retracted the decree that forced 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 "Weak!"

"So they should circumcise their children at eight days, so they will become weak."

They replied, "You are correct," and they annulled their decree.

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

Who will annul the *gezeiros* now? The *chachamim* sent Reb Shimon bar Yochai to the king, because "many miracles happen to him."

A demon called Ben Temalyon met with Reb Shimon and offered his assistance... The demon went ahead of Reb Shimon, and attached itself to the king's daughter, causing her much pain. When Reb Shimon arrived he said, "Ben Temalyon, leave!" which it did.

The king was thankful to Reb Shimon,

and brought him into the treasury room.

"Take whatever you want."

Reb Shimon found the documents of the decrees forbidding the Jewish nation from practicing *milah* and obligating them to work on Shabbos, and he tore up the document.

Reb Reuvan Istrobuli helped the nation dressed as a gentile, but Reb Shimon was able to save 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 a 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.

Learning from his Ways

A primary *avodah* for Lag b'Omer is to study Reb Shimon's holy ways, and to seek to emulate them, if even just a drop.

One of the songs that discuss Reb Shimon bar Yochai's praises is *בר יוחאי*, "the son of Yochai." Why don't we call *Reb Shimon* by his name? Why does this song call him by his father's name?

Perhaps it's to remind us that Reb Shimon was a human being, born from human parents. He wasn't a *malach*. And just as he reached very high levels, we can reach high levels too if we follow in his footsteps.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 112) says, "If the people of the first generations were like angels, we are like people. And if the earlier generations were like people, we are like donkeys..."

Reb Baruch Shimon Shneerson *zt'l*, the *rosh yeshiva* of Tchebin, explained that people's nature is to shun responsibility. People don't mind hearing that tzaddikim of the past "were like angels," because that doesn't obligate them in any way. They heard a description of a *malach*, and they say, "That doesn't obligate me to be like him. Who can be a *malach*?"

But if we hear that the tzaddikim of the past were also human beings, and they had struggles just as we have, then people become like donkeys who simply can't listen. They don't *want* to listen, because that will obligate them. They won't be able to claim they can't be like the tzaddikim, because they are hearing that the tzaddikim also had tests and challenges, and that they were human beings who passed those tests.

The Beis Avraham *zt'l* writes, "When one attends a *yahrtzeit seudah* of a tzaddik, he is connected to that tzaddik even if he never knew the tzaddik, and he never heard a *dvar Torah* from the tzaddik, because he is following in that tzaddik's ways, and he tells stories about the tzaddik, and he studies his holy lessons on *avodas Hashem* ..." This is what we seek to do on Lag b'Omer, to be inspired, to learn his holy ways, and to see what we can do to go in his footsteps.

Emunah

We seek to go in Reb Shimon's ways, and one primary way we do so is to increase our *emunah*, to believe that everything that happens is with *hashgachah pratis*.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 33:) says: Reb Shimon, Reb Yosi, and Reb Yehudah were sitting together. Also present was Yehudah ben Geirim. They were discussing the Roman Empire.

Reb Yehudah said, "How good are the deeds of this empire. They built marketplaces, bridges, and bathhouses."

Reb Yossi was quiet.

Reb Shimon said, "Everything they made, they made for themselves."

Yehudah ben Geirim repeated what they said to his friend, and that person told the next, until the Roman Empire heard about it. The Roman Empire said, "Yehudah that praised us should be honored, Reb Yosi who was silent should be exiled to Tzipori, and Reb Shimon who disgraced Rome should be killed."

Reb Shimon and his son went into hiding, first in a beis medresh, and then in a cave, where he hid for thirteen years.

At times, he would go out of the cave for a short while. On one such excursion, he watched a hunter. Reb Shimon was able to hear the *bas kols* of heaven. When the *bas kol* said *dimus*, "free," the bird flew away, and wasn't captured by the hunter. When the *bas kol* said *sapkula*, "caught," the bird was caught. Reb Shimon said to his son, "If Hashem's

hashgachah pratis is even on birds, He certainly has *hashgachah pratis* on us. If a bird can't be caught without Hashem's decree, the Romans will also not harm us, if it isn't Hashem's will."²¹

That is when Reb Shimon and Reb Elazar courageously left the cave (see *Yerushalmi Shviis* 9:1).²²

Let us follow Reb Shimon bar Yochai's

21. The man who caught the bird probably thought that he caught the bird because he had good aim. He didn't hear the *bas kol*, so he didn't know that he caught the bird because it was decreed from Above. When he didn't catch a bird, he accused himself for not being more diligent. He didn't know that no matter what he would do, he wouldn't catch the bird, because that was the decree from Above.

Reb Shimon heard the *bas kol* and knew that it doesn't have to do with skills, only by Hashem's decree.

We learn from this that when one succeeds in business, or when one loses money, he shouldn't think he is the cause. For as we see in this story, everything is decreed Above and announced by a *bas kol*. It isn't up to the hands of mankind at all. He shouldn't feel proud when he makes money, and he shouldn't feel like a fool when he loses money, because it has nothing to do with him.

It states (*Tehillim* 123:2), הנה כעיני עבדים אל יד אדוניהם... כן עינינו אל ה' אלקינו עד שיחוננו, "Like a slave lifts up his eyes to his master...so are our eyes turned to Hashem our G-d, until He has compassion on us." A slave knows that his only hope for freedom is when his master frees him. Therefore, his eyes are turned to his master, for his compassion. That is how we should turn our eyes to Hashem, with the awareness that only Hashem can help us.

About the *mon*, it states (*Shemos* 62:), שטו העם ולקטו וטחנו ברחיים... "The nation spread out and gathered [the *mon*] and ground it in a mill..." Reb Shimon bar Yochai, in *Zohar*, explains that שטו means foolishness, שטותא, because if they were wise, they wouldn't work so hard to gather and to prepare the *mon*. If they weren't so panicky about their *parnassah*, fearing they may not have enough, the *mon* would have fallen right on their doorstep, ready to eat. The Alshich adds that even ולקטו, that they bent down to gather up the *mon* was unnecessary. Hashem would have given them *parnassah* without any exertion at all.

The *Zohar* states, the *mon* traveled through Gan Eden before it fell on the ground in the desert, and it had a taste and scent of Gan Eden. But that was solely for those who didn't work hard to prepare the *mon*. Those who overworked didn't experience the scent of Gan Eden in the *mon*.

A thief stole a hundred dollars, and the next day he used those hundred dollars to pay for his medical care, because he fell and broke his leg. He said, "It's a good thing I stole a hundred dollars. I needed it to pay for the medical bill." He doesn't know that if he didn't steal the money, his foot wouldn't need to break. He had in his possession one hundred dollars more than what was destined for him on Rosh Hashanah. This had to be taken away from him, and this is the reason he fell. Had he not stolen the money, he wouldn't have fallen and broken his foot.

22. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 33:) gives another explanation why Reb Shimon left the cave.

holy footsteps and be aware that everything is from Hashem, and nothing happens by chance.

Try, Try Again

Another way to go in Reb Shimon's ways is to never lose hope, no matter what occurs.

The Gemara says, "Reb Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of *talmidim* from Gavas until Antifras, and they all died in the same time period for they didn't honor one another..." The Beis Yosef explains that they stopped dying on Lag b'Omer, hence Lag b'Omer is a day of celebrating.

The Pri Chadash asks, the reason the students stopped dying on Lag b'Omer is mostly because there were almost no students left. Only five students remained. Why should we be happy on this day?

The Pri Chadash answers, on Lag b'Omer, Reb Akiva took his five remaining students and began to teach them Torah. Those five students were:

Reb Meir, Reb Yehudah, Reb Yossi, Reb Shimon and Reb Elazer ben Shamo'a, and from them the Torah continued to live on in Klal Yisrael. That's a reason to celebrate!

Reb Akiva lost most of his students but he didn't give up. Only a short while before, Reb Akiva had twenty-four thousand students. Many funerals were held daily. They all perished. The situation was tragic. Reb Akiva was left with only five students but he didn't give up. He taught his five remaining students, and from those five students, Torah continues until today. Their lessons are repeated throughout the Mishnayos and the Gemara. Torah survived because Reb Akiva didn't lose hope.

Reb Shimon bar Yochai also didn't give up. Chazal tell that the Romans wanted to murder Reb Shimon. To save his life, he hid in a cave for thirteen years together with his son, Reb Elazar. No one would blame Reb Shimon if he would have lost hope. At this time, Reb

After living in the cave for twelve years, Eliyahu HaNavi stood at the cave's entrance and said, "Who will tell Yochai's son that the Caesar died and the decree [of his death] was annulled?"

Reb Shimon heard Eliyahu's message and left the cave together with his son, Reb Elazar. But they were on a very high level, and they couldn't tolerate it, when they saw people interested and involved in material pursuits. When they saw people working, they would say, "They are abandoning Olam HaBa [Torah and mitzvos] and busying themselves with Olam HaZeh." They would look at them with disapproval, and the people would be consumed in fire.

A *bas kol* cried out, "Did you leave the cave to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" They lived in the cave another year. They thought that it was sufficient, since even *resha'im* aren't punished in Gehinom for more than twelve months. As they were thinking this, a *bas kol* said, "Leave the cave."

Shimon thought he would remain in the cave forever. Living in a cave interminably, removed from all Torah teachers, students and Torah centers, could cause anyone to despair. But Reb Shimon continued to study Torah with all his might, and it was specifically there, in the cave, that he reached his outstanding, unfathomable heights. (As we sing שם קניית הודך והודך, "there you acquired your glory").

The Nachlas Avos tells that Yochai (Reb Shimon's father) was married for many years and didn't have children. Yochai told his wife that he wants to divorce her and marry someone else, so he can have children. His wife didn't want a divorce. She cried and prayed a lot for children.

On the night of Rosh Hashanah, Yochai had a dream. He was in an orchard. There were many trees there, some tall, and some small. Yochai saw himself leaning on a small tree, without fruit. He understood that the tree represents him. It didn't have fruit, because he didn't have children. A malach came into the orchard, carrying a barrel of water and began watering some of the trees. Yochai understood that whichever tree the angel watered meant that person would have a child that year. How he hoped the *malach* would pour some water on his sapling as well.

The *malach* came to Yochai's tree. This

time, he didn't pour water from the barrel. Instead, the angel took out a small jug of water and poured it 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 was telling good tidings.

On *motzei* Rosh Hashanah, Yochai repeated 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 angel water my tree from the barrel, as he watered all the other trees? What is the significance of that small jug filled with water?"

Reb Akiva answered, "This jug wasn't filled with water. It was filled with your wife's tears; the tears she shed to have children. In the merit of those tears you will have a holy child."

That year, Reb Shimon bar Yochai was born.

Chesed

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Iyar* 3:1) teaches, the 49 days of the *sefirah* are *gematriya* לב טוב, a good heart. Lag b'Omer is the beginning of the final 17 days of the Omer, the *gematriya* of טוב. For during these days we seek to develop a לב טוב, a good, caring heart.²³

23. Rebbe Yitzchak of Peshvarsk *zt'l* discussed the virtue of פארגינען א יודן, which means to be happy when your fellow man has goodness. He said that the *roshei teivos* of פארגינען א יודן is פא"י, Hashem's name associated with *parnassah* (also the *roshei teivos* of

Reb Shimon bar Yochai (*Midrash Tanchuma Vayechi* 5) teaches, “Whoever helps Yidden, it is like he helps the *Shechinah*. As it states (*Shoftim* 5:23), ארו מרוז... ארו ארוז ישיב כי לא באו לעזרת ה' לעזרת ה' בגבורים, ‘Cursed are the people of Maroz... Cursed are their inhabitants, because they didn’t come to help Hashem [to fight] the war against the mighty [Sisro].’ What is the meaning of this *pasuk*? Hashem doesn’t need help! This teaches us whoever helps Yisrael, it is like he helped the *Shechinah*.”

The *Zohar* (vol.2 198.) states, “Fortunate is the person who meets up with a pauper. This meeting is a gift from Hakadosh Baruch Hu...” because if you do kindness with the pauper, Hashem will do kindness with you.

The *Zohar* teaches, “Before Reb Shimon’s *petirah*, he said, ‘In heaven there are three courts. One court has 23 judges. One court has 71 judges, and a third court is judged by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Himself. Best is to be judged by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Whoever is judged in Hashem’s court will certainly be deemed innocent. By the other courts,

some 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, ‘Atonement is with You...’”

How does one merit that Hashem should be his judge? Shaar HaMelech writes, “When one is *maavir al midosov* (he forgives others, and he doesn’t answer back) Hakadosh Baruch Hu, Himself, will judge him. And therefore, he will certainly be judged and ruled that he merits Gan Eden.”²⁴

The *Zohar* (*Idra Kadisha*) tells: Reb Yitzchok (Reb Shimon bar Yochai’s student) became ill, and was about to die. Reb Shimon bar Yochai visited him, and Reb Shimon asked whether his father from Gan Eden had already come down to accompany him on his journey to his place in heaven. Reb Shimon said, “If you have already seen your father, there is nothing I can do to save you.”

Reb Yitzchok said that he hadn’t seen his father. Reb Shimon bar Yochai decreed, “Whoever is [right now] in this room right now may stay. But no one else may

פותר את ידיך). When one adapts the attitude to want that your fellow man should be happy and well, it is *mesugal* for *parnassah*.

This generous attitude is also *mesugal* for *ruchniyus*. The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 3) teaches that although Aharon was the older brother, and he was the leader of the Jewish nation before Moshe, he was happy when Moshe was appointed to be the leader. As it states, וראך ושמח בלבו, “He will see you and he will be happy.”

Reb Shimon bar Yochai teaches, “The heart that was happy with his brother’s greatness should merit the joy of wearing the *urim v’Tumim*.” Aharon wore the *choshen* with the *urim v’Tumim* over his heart, the reward for having a good heart.

24. In the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* we say in *kaddish* לעילא ולעילא. This hints that we want our judgment should be לעילא ולעילא, up by the highest court, by Hashem Himself.

enter." Thereby, Reb Shimon prevented the *malach hamaves* [the angel of death] from entering the room. Reb Yitzchok was saved from immediate death, but he still needed prayers to continue living. Reb Shimon turned to Heaven, and said, "I need Reb Yitzchok. He helps me in our studies of Kabbalah and the secrets of the Torah."

Heaven replied that Reb Yitzchok will live, but when Reb Shimon bar Yochai will die, Reb Yitzchok would need to leave the world together with him.

A spiritual fire surrounded Reb Shimon bar Yochai on the last day of his life. Reb Shimon called Reb Yitzchok and told him to join him, and prepare for his death. Reb Yitzchok's father appeared, and said: Before, when you were ill, it was destined upon you to die and to return your *neshamah* to the Creator. I and all the holy souls in heaven were preparing a great celebration in honor of your arrival. There was only a slight distress in my heart, and that was because you wouldn't be able to teach your young son Torah."

This part of the *Zohar* is known, and there are people who read this portion of the *Zohar* on Lag b'Omer. Rebbe Moshe of Savran *zy'a* said there is another *Zohar* (*Beshalach* 61) that finishes this story. Because it wasn't only Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tefillos* that saved Reb Yitzchok from death, it was also the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah*.

The *Zohar* states: "Reb Yitzchok was

traveling and met with a pauper. The pauper asked for some money to feed his hungry family. Reb Yitzchok said: 'I only have a half *mah*. How would this help you? What could you buy with a half *mah*?'

"The poor man replied, 'I also have a half *mah*. Together I will have a full *mah*, which is sufficient to buy a loaf of bread for my family.'

Reb Yitzchok gave him the half *mah*. That night, Reb Yitzchok had a dream. He saw himself drowning in a raging ocean. He began to shout and pray to Hashem for a salvation. Suddenly, he sees his holy *rebbe*, Reb Shimon bar Yochai, standing on dry land. Reb Shimon bar Yochai extended his hand to him, to pull him to safety. But there was a small gap between their two hands. Reb Shimon bar Yochai's hand didn't quite reach Reb Yitzchok's. But then the pauper (whom he helped earlier on that day) came, and he bridged their hands. Reb Yitzchok helped the pauper put together the two half *mah*, and in reward, the pauper came, and connected their two hands to bring Reb Yitzchok to safety.

"When Reb Yitzchok awoke, he said the *pasuk*, 'אשרי משכיל אל דל ביום רעה ימלטהו ה' "Fortunate are those who pay attention to the needs of the poor. On a bad day, Hashem will save him."

Rebbe Moshe of Savran, *zy'a* taught that this dream occurred when Reb Yitzchok was ill. In the merit of *tzedakah*, Reb Shimon came and saved him from death.

Shemiras Einayim

Hundreds of thousands of people ke'h go to Meron on Lag b'Omer, and to prevent traffic jams the police arranged that cars aren't permitted to drive up the mountain (excluding the select few who receive special permits). Whoever wants to drive to Meron must park their car in the distance, and take a bus for the last leg of the journey.

A *bachur* traveled to Meron with three other people by car, but when they reached the last leg of the journey, and the *bachur* saw that the busses would challenge his *shemiras einayim*, he decided to stay behind in the car. He told the others, "You go, and I will wait here until you come back."

They tried to convince him to go with them, but he refused. When they returned, a few hours later, he was still there, waiting in the car. The *bachur* said, "For my sake, try to drive straight up to Meron, to the *kever*. Maybe the police will let us through."

The others in the car thought it was ridiculous. They didn't have a permit, and there were many police guarding the roads. But the *bachur* insisted they should try. They felt bad for the *bachur* who traveled all the way, and never actually came to Meron, so they decided to try. (Mostly, they wanted to him show him that it is impossible.)

They came to the first blockade, and honked for the police to let them pass. The policeman was on the phone, and apparently he didn't have peace of mind

to check them. Assuming they had a permit, he let them pass.

There were another five manned blockades they had to pass, but they all relied on the first policeman, assuming he checked their permits, and they let them pass through. In Reb Shimon's merits, and in the merit of the *bachur's mesirus nefesh* for *shemiras einayim*, they came to the *tzion*, without the *bachur* having to compromise his *kedushah*.

It states (beginning of *parashas Netzavim*) 'אתם נצבים היום כולכם לפני ה' אלקיכם... כל איש ישראל, מפכם ונשיכם, "You stand today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d... every Yisrael, your children, your wives..." The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* explains that since everyone was present at that time, Moshe told them that the children should stand between the men and the women, as it states *כל איש ישראל, מפכם ונשיכם*. The children served like a *mechitzah*, separating the men from the women.

Reb Yosef Nechemyah Kornitzer *zt'l* (the Chasam Sofer's grandchild) said that in *parashas Vayigash*, Pharaoh told Yosef, *ואתה צוית זאת עשו קחו לכם מארץ מצרים, עגלות למפכם ולנשיכם*, "Command that this should be done: Take for yourselves from Mitzrayim wagons for your children and for your wives..." Pharaoh knew that Yosef and his family were cautious with their *kedushah*, and he understood they would want to separate between the men and the women. Therefore, Pharaoh said to arrange chariots that will be *לכם... למפכם ולנשיכם*, for

yourselves, for your children and for your wives, with the children seated in between the men and the women.

It states וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף לשאת אותו ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם, “Yaakov saw the wagons that Yosef sent to bring him, and Yaakov’s spirit was revived.” At first, Yaakov didn’t believe that Yosef could remain a tzaddik in Mitzrayim. As it states, ויפג לבו כי לא האמין להם, but when he saw the wagons arranged in a *tzniusdig* manner, Yaakov believed.

The Beis HaMikdash had rooms, לשכות. Some rooms were built on the area of the Beis HaMikdash, others began by the wall of the Beis HaMikdash and jutted outside. Some rooms had doors opening to the Beis HaMikdash, others rooms opened to the outside, to Har HaBayis.

The Mishnah (*Maaser Sheini* 3:8) explains that it wasn’t the location, which determined whether the לשכה should have the *kedushah* of the Beis HaMikdash or not. It all depended on where the doors opened to. If the door opened to the outside of the Beis HaMikdash, the room wasn’t holy. Even if the room was built within the parameters of the Beis HaMikdash, since the door was to the outside, it wasn’t holy. In contrast, all rooms that opened into the Beis HaMikdash (even those built on the outside) had the holiness of the Beis HaMikdash.

Reb Shalom Shwadron *zt'l* said that the לשכה that is built outside the Beis HaMikdash represents those who have to work all day long. They are outside the

beis medresh. They too, can be pure and holy. It all depends on “where the door opens to,” or in other words, what they yearn for. If they yearn to be in beis medresh as much as possible, and they yearn for more Torah and more *tefillah*, than they are pure and holy. But if the door – their main objective – is opened to the outside, they are impure.

Someone bought for Reb Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz a beautiful plaque with the name Lefkowitz, to hang on his front door. His wife was about to hang it up, but Reb Michel Yehudah told her she shouldn’t. He explained:

“In a couple of weeks, we will say, ‘the beautiful plaque doesn’t match with an old door. It’s time to change the door.’ Then we will say, ‘The new door isn’t compatible with the old walls. The walls have to be redone.’ Afterwards, the furniture will have to match the walls. We will never end refurnishing the home. I want to stop the process from the very beginning...”

We repeat this, as an analogy to how the *yetzer hara* works. He doesn’t come to a person, telling him to do a grave sin. He offers himself something small. And then one matter leads to the next. For those who know, in this generation, this is something that happens every day... It would be wise, therefore, to stop the *yetzer hara* at the start....

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 19:2) states, “They asked the snake, ‘Why are you always crawling between the gates?’ The snake replied, ‘It’s because I broke the gate of the world.’”

There are gates set by Chazal, and by the rabbanim of each generation. The purpose of these gates is to safeguard the continuity of the Jewish nation and the continuity of Torah. The *yetzer hara* knows the importance of these gates, so he strives to break them.

This is what happened to Chavah. Hashem forbade them from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and she made a gate for herself, that she wouldn't even touch the tree. The snake had her break that gate, and then the snake was able to entice her to eat from the fruit. Similarly, we must be cautious with the gates that Chazal established, and that the rabbanim of our generation establish, because these safeguard us and protect us.

There was a *bachur* who was falling, spiritually. Many *mechanchim* spoke with the *bachur*, but they couldn't stop his descent. Rebbe Shlomke Zvhil *zt'l* said he wants to speak with the *bachur*. People told him, "It isn't worth the Rebbe's time. So many people tried and failed..."

But Rebbe Shlomke tried. He told the *bachur*, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu has immense *nachas ruach* from a Yid when he battles with the *yetzer hara*, even if he loses the fight in the end. Hashem enjoys the Yid's attempts. He enjoys watching him put up a fight against the *yetzer hara*. Hashem has more pleasure from the Yid's skirmish than He derives pleasure from the *malachim*. The *yetzer hara* is called *מלך זקן וכסיל*, an old, foolish

king. I request one thing from you. Don't make your *yetzer hara* king. When a king decrees something, everyone must listen immediately. I request that you don't listen immediately. When he asks for something, push it off for later..."

The *bachur* followed this advice, and with it, did *teshuvah*. He became from the respected Yerushalayimer Yidden.

The *yetzer hara's* success is because he makes the person act compulsively, immediately, without thinking. He entices the person to grab something from Olam Hazei immediately, without delay. Waiting until later cools down the passion of the *yetzer hara*, and it is likely that by then, you can overcome your *yetzer hara* entirely. Because by waiting, you realize that the *yetzer hara* isn't selling anything worthwhile, nothing worth pursuing.

Tefillos

The importance to daven for good children is well known. An extravagant expression of this concept is in the Gemara (*Makos* 17:) which states, "Rava said, 'When a woman gives birth, she should pray that the child be like Reb Shimon...'"

This Gemara is wondrous, because who can expect to have a child like Reb Shimon bar Yochai? The Minchas Elazar (*Shaar Yissaschar*) answers that the Gemara is referring 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 Yocahi. Therefore, Lag b'Omer is an ideal day to daven for *parnassah*.²⁵

According to one Midrash, the *mon* ורפאתיו *gematriya* בר יוחאי is *gematriya* ורפאתיו, so Lag started to come down on Lag b'Omer. b'Omer is also *mesugal* for *refuah*.²⁶

25. The Chasam Sofer (*Yorah Deiah* 233) makes the following calculation: Chazal tell us that the nation finished the matzos on Pesach Sheini. The Midrash says that they didn't have food to eat for three days, and then the *mon* fell. According to this calculation, the *mon* first came on Lag b'Omer.

26. 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* שהוד is certainly *mesugal* for *refuah*.

Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz taught that if one needs to take a medication, he should begin on Lag b'Omer, which is הוד שהוד.

In תשי"ט, because of the wars with the Arabs, the gates to Yerushalayim were opened only for one day, every two weeks.

An Arab shot a *bachur* called Meirovitz in the leg, but he couldn't reach the Shaarei Tzedek hospital for two weeks, when the roads would be open. By the time he got to the hospital, his leg was infected and the doctors said they needed to amputate.

Lag b'Omer was approaching and Meirovitz asked his friends to bring him to Meron, where he can pray for his health. "It's impossible," his friends told him, and indeed, it was almost impossible. Because of his wound, Meirovitz had to travel lying down. In those days, a trip to Miron could take an entire day, changing busses several times. How could they make 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 traveled to Meron.

At the *tzion*, the *bachur* said the following prayer, "My entire family was killed by the Nazis. Only I survived. I must marry and build a family so my family will continue. But how can I get married if I lose my leg?"

Afterwards, they went to the *chatzer* (courtyard) for the dancing. The *bachur* Meirovitz wanted to dance, so he put his arms around the shoulders of two of his friends, and they danced with him. Suddenly, he began dancing on his own. The dressing fell off. He was healed.

A boy was smitten with a severe disease. Doctors tried some treatments, but they soon realized that the boy's body was too weak, and wasn't responding well to the treatments. They admitted that they had nothing to do.

The father of the boy said, "Until now the doctors did what they know, now it is time for us, as Yidden, to do what we know." A minyan was organized to travel to Meron, to pray for the boy. The father took his weak son along with them.

When the boy was at the *tzion*, he cried from his pains. This spurred the people

davening there to cry and pray with greater devotion, hoping the boy would finally get a *refuah sheleimah*.

At that time, the boy ate and drank intravenously. But as he sat there, near the tzion, he asked for water. Everyone was surprised. It was a sign of improvement.

When they returned, the father asked the doctors to check his son again. The doctors were astonished how much better he had become. He had a few more treatments and merited a *refuah sheleimah*.

The following story was told by the great *mekubal* and tzaddik, Reb Asher Zelig Margolies *zt'l*, who witnessed it, and it is also told by several other people who were in Meron, Lag b'Omer of תרפ"ג.

Three years before, a childless couple prayed at the *kever* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai and promised that if they have a child they will bring him to Meron on Lag b'Omer for the *chalahah* (to make *peyos*). That year, they had a child, and when the child turned three, the mother came to Meron, as she promised. (The husband remained home.)

That year, Lag b'Omer was on Friday, so most people remained in Meron for Shabbos. On Shabbos, as Reb Asher Zelig was davening *Mussaf*, he heard great screams and cries. It was because the three-year-old miracle-child became ill with cholera and had died. Everyone was panicking; especially the mother, whose cries could be heard above all others.

Reb Asher Zelig writes that he saw the child, "He was green and seemed to be dead." Everyone was distraught. The *tefillah* was finished, but no one made Kiddush. A feeling of gloom reigned.

The mother took the child and placed him near the *tzion*. She said, "Reb Shimon! I brought my only son here. He was born in your merit. I kept my promise, and I made his first haircut here. Do not ruin my happiness and the happiness of my husband, who is waiting for us to return. Reb Shimon! I'm leaving my son here. Don't embarrass me. Bring him back to health and life as I brought him here yesterday. Sanctify Hashem's name. Reveal before everyone that Hashem is here, and that there are tzaddikim."

After saying this *tefillah*, she left her son near the *tzion*, and left closing the door behind her. Only the child remained inside. A few minutes later, the child's voice was heard. He was calling for his mother.

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

A tumult of joy and wonder roared. The dead child came back to life. They all said the *brachah* מחיה המתים.

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

The truth is, whoever prays at Reb Shimon's *kever* as this mother prayed for her child, will attain all the *yeshuos* they need. Miracles beyond the rules of nature will happen to them. But the condition is to pray as this mother prayed...

Reb Asher Zelig Margolis *zt'l* tells that he had a lot of pain in his throat. The doctors recommended an operation, but he was very wary of doing so. He came to Meron and said the entire *Tehillim*. In the middle of saying the *Tehillim*, he began coughing violently, and blood and all the infections that were blocking his throat came out. He was healed.

The Tzemech Tzedek taught that מרון (without the יו"ד) is *roshei teivos* מ"לך ר'ופא ג'אמנ ור'חמן.

The Shem Shlomo of Munkatch ז'ל taught that to bear children one should have *kavanah* in the *brachah* רפאנו. Therefore, Lag b'Omer, הוד שבהוד, which is *mesugal* for *refuah*, is certainly also *mesugal* for bearing children.²⁷

The Taamei HaMinhagim writes, יושפע "A great bounty should come down in all worlds" is רשב"י *roshei teivos*

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

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

Chidushei HaRim ז'ל] that on Lag b'Omer one can attain *yiras Shamayim*."

Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen ז'ל (*Tzikkas HaTzaddik* 127) writes, "The *Zohar* (*Chayei Sarah* 129) states that even the greatest sinner, when he repents, merits all levels. I heard in the name of Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa ז'ל that this is in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. He accomplished this with his toil in *avodas Hashem*."

The *Zohar* tells that the gates of heaven are opened on Pesach Sheini for a week, and then they close. Rebbe Naftali of Ropshitz ז'א, asked why do the gates have to close? Why can't they remain open? The answer is, in this week is Lag b'Omer, and on Lag b'Omer everyone receives everything they need. Since Klal Yisrael has already received all their hearts' desires, the gates of mercy can close.²⁸

27. The Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabba* 1) tells that there was a couple in Tzidon who didn't have children for ten years. They came to Reb Shimon for a divorce. Reb Shimon told them, "In the same way you got married with a celebration, I want you to divorce with a celebration."

They made a grand party, and she gave him a lot of wine to drink. When the wine was wearing off, he told her, "Take whatever you love the most from this home, and bring it to your parent's home."

He fell asleep, and she told her slaves to carry him, together with the bed, to her parent's home.

He awoke at midnight, and didn't understand why he was in her parent's home. She said, "You told me I can take whatever I like the most. There is nothing I like more than you."

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

We learn from this Midrash: Just as Hakadosh Baruch Hu is פוקד עקרות, remembers the barren so they can bear children, so are tzaddikim פוקד עקרות with their tefillos.

28. There are many large stones on the mountain, going up to the *kever* of Reb Shimon.

Express Yourself Well

Reb Mottel Slonimer *zy'a* said: When a person speaks with his lawyer in preparation for an upcoming court case, he will tell the lawyer all the small details related to his case, so the lawyer can help him. Reb Shimon bar Yochai is our lawyer in the heavenly court. We should express each of our desires and wants in detail, so he will plea on our behalf in heaven.

This point also applies to *tefillah*. Whenever one prays to Hashem, it is important to express yourself clearly.

One shouldn't only state his needs, briefly. He should express everything that is in his heart, with elaboration.

It states (*Mishlei* 12: 28), דאגה בלב איש, "When a person has a worry in his heart, he should speak it over with others." The Beis Aharon *zy'a* explains, if one has a worry in his heart, he should speak it over with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He should tell Hashem everything he is going through.

The Chazon Ish said, "Our generation has fallen immensely. Years ago,

Tzaddikim said that these stones are the heavy stones that people shed off their hearts when they come to Meron to pray.

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 too didn't accept *kvitelach* from his followers, as he felt that there was no need for that in Meron.

There's another similarity between these two tzaddikim (Reb Avraham Elimelech of Karlin and Rebbe Moshe Mordechai of Lelov) concerning Meron: They 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, by Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

When the Minchas Elazar *zt'l* of Munkatch would go to his father's *kever*, the Darkei Teshuvah, he would sing יוואי three times, because his father wrote three *sefarim* on *Tikunei Zohar*, written by Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

One year, after singing the songs, the Minchas Elazar discussed the words, אשרי העם הם, לומדיך, which literally means, "Fortunate is the nation *who teach you*." It seems it should say לומדי תורתך, "Fortunate is the nation who learn your Torah," or לומדי ספריך, "Fortunate is the nation who learn your *sefarim*." Why does it state לומדיך, that they teach Reb Shimon? What do they teach Reb Shimon?

The answer is, when there are harsh decrees in the world, the Satan often conceals it from the tzaddikim, so they won't pray and annul the decree. But when Yidden come to a grave of a tzaddik, they can tell the tzaddik about the decrees that are happening, so they can pray for Klal Yisrael. This is the intention of אשרי העם הם לומדיך, "Fortunate is the nation *who teach you*." After saying this, the Minchas Elazar fell on his father's grave, and told his father the many *gezeiros* of his time.

everyone knew that it is possible to turn to Hashem in prayer, at any time, in one's own words. Today, people are unaware of this simple truth. Ask a yeshiva *bachur*, 'Did you know we have the option to speak with Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the manner one speaks with his good friend, and we can ask all our needs from Him?' The *bachur* will respond that he never heard of that idea before. "I know one can daven three times a day, but I didn't know I can daven all the time, in my own words." But that is the reality, which once everyone knew. In addition to the set *tefillos* (*Shacharis, Minchah, Maariv, Tehillim*, etc.) one can use his own words to pour out his heart in *tefillah*. At these times, one should express everything that is in his heart, and Hashem will listen to his *tefillos*.

Yeshuos for the Individual

The stories in this section happen literally every day, and especially on Lag b'Omer, in Reb Shimon bar Yochai's merit. There isn't enough paper in the world to write down all the miracles that occur. We write merely a few examples:

A Yid from America came to Meron for Lag b'Omer to daven at Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tzion*. A poor man from Eretz Yisrael was standing next to him, davening loudly for *parnassah*, and his loud shouts were disturbing him.

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

The wealthy Yid thought to himself, "I

came all this way to daven at Reb Shimon bar Yochai's grave, and this man's loud shouts for fifty thousand dollars are giving me a headache and ruining my concentration."

He wanted to take revenge on this poor man, so he asked the poor man for his address, which he readily gave. *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 frustration he's causing me.*

Some weeks later, this wealthy man was going through his bank statements, and saw 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 by Reb Shimon's kever. He looked at the check, and saw he accidentally signed his own name, and not Reb Shimon bar Yochai.

The poor man's *tefillos* were answered.

The following story happened twenty years ago, and it's still going on until today:

There are two very good friends who learn together each morning, from 3:00 am, until *Shacharis*. One of them became very ill. His *chavrusah* would visit him and speak with him about *emunah*. Once, in middle of their conversation, the friend said, "Lag b'Omer is only a month and a half away. For years, we traveled together to Meron, let's travel this year, again."

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

A few weeks later, he called his ill friend, "I'm buying a ticket to Eretz Yisrael today. Should I buy a ticket for you too? The doctors don't prevent you from going, so why not?"

The ill man agreed, and the two friends set out. That year Lag b'Omer was on Motzei Shabbos. As soon as Shabbos was over, they went to the *maarah* (cave where Reb Shimon is buried) to daven. Twenty years ago, the crowd wasn't as large as it is today, and most of the chassidim were still with their Rebbe for the *hadlakah*. The *tzion* wasn't very full, so they could get inside, and even to come near the *tzion* to daven. The ill man sat down near the *tzion*, and poured his heart out in *tefillah*. He said the entire *sefer Tehillim*, from beginning to end. When he finished, he turned to his friend and said, "I feel that I've just removed a large stone off my heart and I'm leaving that stone here."

They returned to America, and when he went to the doctors, they operated on him, and they saw that the cells, which they thought were cancerous, weren't cancerous at all. They took a biopsy, but it wasn't cancerous, and it was curable. His first phone call was to his friend who encouraged him to go to Meron. He cried tears of gratitude. At first, when his friend heard him crying, he feared that he had received a negative report from

the doctors. But his friend was finally able to find his voice and explained that these were tears of joy and happiness.

Both of them told me this story, and they conclude, "Since then, we come to Meron every year, and before we leave we say, "Reb Shimon, next year again!"

It was תשע"ד. Zelig was getting older, and couldn't seem to find his *bashert*. On Lag b'Omer, his mother was traveling to Meron and was speaking to her husband on the cell phone. "I just reminded myself that years ago, we were in Meron, davening for a child, and we promised we would call the son Shimon. But when our first son was born, we forgot our promise and we called him Zelig. I was thinking, maybe this is what's holding back his *shidduchim*?"

The father immediately called his *rebbe* who told him to call their son Shimon Zelig from then on. The mother davened at the *kever* of Reb Shimon that her son Shimon Zelig should find his *bashert* and become engaged.

The next Shabbos, the *gabai* called up the *bachur*, "Shimon Zelig" for an *aliyah*, and afterwards he made a *mi shebeirach*. There was another person in this *beis medresh* called Zelig. He asked the *gabai*, "Why did you call this *bachur* Shimon Zelig. Until now he was Zelig." The *gabai* said, "That is what the father asked me to do. I don't know the reason. I didn't ask questions."

That Zelig had a daughter in *shidduchim*. He always wanted the *bachur* Zelig for a *chasan*, but Reb Yehuda HaChosid taught that the names of father-in-law

and son-in-law mustn't be the same. Now that their names weren't exactly the same, he was willing to go forward with the *shidduch*. Shimon Zelig became engaged to Zelig's daughter.

For five years, a wealthy man from America was supporting a Yerushalmi Yid. Their agreement was that this Yid from Yerushalayaim should daven periodically at *kivrei tzaddikim* for his wife, who needed a liver transplant. Five years passed, and they still didn't find a fitting donor.

On Friday before Lag b'Omer, the husband called his contact in Yerushalayaim and asked him to go to Meron for Shabbos and to remain there until after Lag b'Omer. "My wife's health is deteriorating, and she needs your *tefillos*. I'll pay for the taxi and for all expenses involved."

The Yerushalmi Yid obliged, and he poured his heart out at the *kever* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai for her recovery.

That Shabbos there was a fatal car accident in New York. The dead driver's liver was an exact match for this woman. But there were two other people (goyim) ahead of her in line for a transplant. The hospital tried to call the first person in line, but they couldn't get hold of him. So the hospital called the second person in line. This man came to the hospital, but as they were prepping him for surgery he became afraid and left. It was this woman's turn now, but how can she be contacted on Shabbos? It wasn't likely that they would answer the phone, but someone felt that it was at least worth

the try. By *hashgachah pratis*, one of the children of the home answered the phone, and the mother was informed of the available liver, which saved her life.

A few days later this woman was walking around, all well.

This all happened because of the *tefillos* at the *kever* of Reb Shimon bar Yochai, the place which the Shlah HaKadosh testifies: "Many miracles occur there."

A woman from the Toldos Aharon chassidim had pressure on her eyes, and her eyesight was deteriorating from day to day. She took a CT scan on Lag b'Omer morning. The results would be ready only 24 hours later, so she decided to spend the rest of the day in Meron.

She could hardly see the Toldos Aharon Rebbe's *hadlakah* (when he lit the bonfire outside the grave of Reb Shimon bar Yochai) because her eyes had become very dim. She cried copiously for her *refuah*. Then she went to the cave, and she prayed for a few minutes at the *kever* of Reb Shimon.

The next morning, she awoke with good eyes and no pain. She went to the doctor to hear the results of the CT scan, and the doctor told her that it is very serious, and she needs an immediate operation to save her eyes.

She surprised him when she told him she was better, and she doesn't need an operation. The doctor was shocked. He tested her again, and saw that it was true.

He said she should come back each week to make certain that everything is better.

After seven weeks, the doctor admitted that everything was well, and she doesn't have to come anymore.

It isn't surprising, because she took the first test before going to Meron and the second test after she prayed by Reb Shimon bar Yochai, and before and after aren't the same, at all.

The following story happened with one of our friends (אחד מבני החבורה) in תשע"ה. The *chasunah* of his child was approaching, and he had to travel to *chutz le'aretz* to collect money to cover the many expenses of the wedding. He didn't want to travel, and endure the tests of being in *galus* in *chutz le'aretz*. Especially he didn't want to travel in Elul (the only month he was able to travel) because he generally spent that month learning Torah and preparing for the holy days.

He went to the *kever* of Reb Shimon, and davened that he shouldn't have to go to *chutz le'aretz*. Then he went to the adjacent coffee room, to revive himself with cake and coffee. He met a friend there, who lives in America. The friend said, "I heard you're making a *chasunah*. I want to help you" and he wrote out a check for ten thousand dollars. That was sufficient, he didn't have to travel. (He said, had he traveled, he wouldn't have made more money than that. Now, he got the money, without having to pay for the plane ticket either.)

There's another story that happened to a family I know. They live in Meor Chaim, Tzefas, and their three-year-old child was

hit by a car, *r'l*, and lost conscious. The doctors said they didn't have any cure, and they predicted the worst.

Two weeks before Lag b'Omer, the parents davened at the *kever* of Reb Shimon, and they said, "We want to bring our son, walking on his own, to Meron on Lag b'Omer, so we can give him a haircut, as we originally planned." And that is what happened. Against the doctors' predictions, the boy woke up and was better.

Someone came to Rebbe Dovid Biderman *zt'l*, telling him about his ill son. Rebbe Dovid advised him to daven in Meron.

"I was already in Meron."

Rebbe Dovid Biderman told him, "When a person goes to a doctor once, and he isn't healed, does he stop going to the doctor? He will go again. I advise you to go again and again to Meron, until your son has a *refuah sheleimah*."

Belief in Reb Shimon

It is essential to believe in Reb Shimon. To believe that until today, Reb Shimon is davening for those who come to his grave, and for those who seek to celebrate on his *hilulah*. As the Beis Aharon says, "Whoever believes in Reb Shimon bar Yochai receives *chizuk* from Reb Shimon bar Yochai. Just like Hashem is for all, so is Reb Shimon for all — even for the lowly ones (אפילו לפחותים)."

The more one believes, the more he can receive.

The Torah tells us that Rachel Imeinu asked Yaakov to daven for her that she bear children (*Bereishis* 30:2). Yaakov responded, התחת אלקים אנכי, “Am I in G-d’s place...?”

Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l* explained that Rachel wasn’t one hundred percent certain that Yaakov could help her. She was doubtful. This is indicated by her words, הבה לי בנים ואם אין מתה אנכי, “Bring me children, and if not, I am like dead.” Why did she say ואם אין, “and if not...”? It seems she wasn’t certain Yaakov could help her. Therefore, Yaakov couldn’t help her, because a tzaddik can only help the people who believe in him.

Hashem can help everyone: those who believe in Him and even those who don’t.

Yaakov told Rachel, if you don’t believe in me, I can’t help you. התחת אלקים אנכי, I am not like Hashem, Who helps even those who don’t believe in Him. I am a tzaddik and my ability to help you is dependent on your belief in me.”

Once, on Lag b'Omer, the Divrei Shmuel of Slonim *zy'a* told the following story: A wealthy businesswoman, who worked in exports, loaded a ship with merchandise. Before the ship set sail, she went to Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tzion* to pray that the ship together with all the merchandise reach their destination. But she couldn’t get close to the *tzion*, because there was another woman in front of her praying. This woman was praying for three hundred rubles to marry off her child. The wealthy woman

quickly took three hundred ruble from her purse and gave it to her so she would leave, and make room for her to daven there. When she began her prayers, she said, "Reb Shimon, you saw that the woman before me received her request immediately. She prayed and was answered immediately. May my requests also be answered immediately."

The Divrei Shmuel said: The amazing thing is that this wealthy woman didn’t pray that in the merit of the *tzedakah* she just gave, the ship should reach its destination. Her words reflected her belief in the power of *tefillah* at Reb Shimon bar Yochai's *tzion*. She realized that the woman in front of her received the money in the merit of her *tefillos*, and therefore she requested that her *tefillos* should also be answered.

Lag b'Omer is Everywhere

It’s important to mention that the salvations that take place on Lag b'Omer can take place in any part of the world, not solely in Meron. Tzaddikim performed wonders on this day in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai even thousands of miles away.

For example, Rebbe Moshe of Rozvadov *zt'l* would tell people who needed a salvation —health, *parnassah*, children, etc. — to come to him on Lag b'Omer. He said that this is hinted in the *pasuk* (*Tehillim* 84), לבי ובשרי ירננו אל א-ל ה', 'My heart and my flesh sing to the living G-d.' ל"ב יום is *roshei teivos* for ל"ב, thirty-two days of the Omer. It is followed by בשרי, which spells רשב"י, Reb Shimon bar Yochai. ירננו אל א-ל ה', we will

sing praises to Hashem for the salvations that come in his merit. Because on Lag b'Omer, everyone receives their salvation and they sing to Hashem.

Rebbe Moshe Rozvadover would say, "There's no time better in the entire year than Lag b'Omer." When nighttime was approaching, he once said, "If I could, I would hold on to the sun with my teeth so it doesn't set, so we don't have to part with Lag b'Omer."

The Divrei Chaim *zt'l* was visiting Reb Eliezer of Dzhikov *zt'l* (the father of Rebbe Moshe of Rozvadov). Lag b'Omer was approaching, and Rebbe Eliezer of Dzhikov said to the Divrei Chaim, "I don't make a *tish* in public anymore because of my weak state, but in your honor I will make a *tish* on Lag b'Omer. Just tell me, though, what time are you free to come to the *tish*?"

The Divrei Chaim replied he would be ready at two in the afternoon.

It was two o'clock, and the Divrei Chaim hadn't yet come. A chassid of the Dzhikiver court went to call the Divrei Chaim, but when he came to the Divrei Chaim's apartment, the *gabai* told him that the Divrei Chaim had closeted himself in a room for several hours and he feared to disturb him. The Dzhikiver

chassid was also afraid to disturb the Divrei Chaim at this time, so he left, without telling him that the Dzhikiver Rebbe was waiting for him to come.

Out of respect for his father, Rebbe Moshe Rozvadover *zt'l* felt he had to take action. He courageously went to the Divrei Chaim, "My father is waiting for you," he said.

The Divrei Chaim brought him into his room. People outside didn't hear what they were saying, they just heard pacing. After a long time, they both came out; Reb Moshe's face was burning like a torch. Sometime later, Reb Moshe Rozvadover said that the Divrei Chaim taught him the secret of Lag b'Omer.

We see from these stories that tzaddikim who lived far from Eretz Yisrael also made an issue of Lag b'Omer, as they understood the potential and the greatness of this holy day.²⁹

It all depends on how connected you are with the holiness the day, and with your *emunah* in the Tana, Reb Shimon.

Consider a house situated right next to the electric company, yet the house is dark. There's no electricity. The reason is because the wires aren't connected. And you have someone living on the

29. We can compare it to a doctor who invents a medicine, and distributes it around the world. The doctor doesn't have to be near the ill patients for them to benefit from the medicine. Similarly, Reb Shimon bar Yochai's influence is all over the world, and whoever takes his medicine will be healed, spiritually and materially. Obviously, it is better to take the medicine right next to the doctor that invented it, so the doctor can make certain you take the right amount and check up on your situation. So too, those who go to Meron certainly earn many extra benefits.

other side of the city and his home is bright and illuminated. That's because the wires of his home are connected. More important than your location is your connection. If you're far from Meron but your heart is connected, you are close. Likewise, if you are in Meron, but your heart isn't connected, you are far.

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. That bothered him immensely. His son tried to comfort him, "You can't go to Reb Shimon, but I'm certain Reb Shimon will come here." The father didn't know what his son was talking about.

That 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 all released. They couldn't go

to Reb Shimon, but Reb Shimon came to them.³⁰

Even fFrom the Distance

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 51:) states, כדאי הוא ר' שמעון בן יוחי לסמוך עליו בשלא בפניו, "Reb Shimon is worthy we should rely on him, both in front of him and not in front of him." Implied in these words is that even those who aren't able to come to Meron, they can rely on Reb Shimon's merits and earn holiness and salvations on this day.

Reb Shimon wrote the *Zohar*, and his lessons on the revealed side of Torah are written throughout the Mishnayos and the Gemara. Studying those lessons is like being in Meron at his grave.

As the Meor Einayim (*Shabbos*) teaches, "[Studying the *sefarim* of a tzaddik] is like קברי צדיקים על השתמחות, praying on their graves, because...the *chiyus* of the tzaddik is found [in his *divrei Torah*]..."³¹

30. There's a person who was detained while awaiting his trial. *Askanim* told him that as it appears, he would be sentenced. When Lag b'Omer came he cried. He wished he could be free and travel to Meron for Lag b'Omer, as he usually did. He vowed that if he is saved in the merit of Reb Shimon bar Yochai on that day, he will go to Meron to praise Hashem for the salvation. Not long after making this vow, a guard came to his cell and brought him to a judge. He was found innocent and was immediately released. He came home, dropped off his belongings, and set out for Meron. The family tried to convince him to remain home, and to celebrate with the family. "You're tired," they told him. "You went through so much..." He told them about his vow. He was able to spend several hours in Meron before Lag b'Omer was over, thanking Hashem for the salvation.

31. The Birchas Avraham said, "Studying the Torah of tzaddikim is greater than going to their gravesite. When one prays by *kivrei tzaddikim* the souls of the tzaddik and of the person praying there connect. Since the soul of the tzaddik is bound to the Torah he taught, it's possible to connect with tzaddikim everywhere, through studying their holy teachings. This is hinted in Chazal (*Yerushalmi Shekalim* 2:5), אין עושים נפשות לצדיקים דבריהם הם זכרונם,

Reb Shimon bar Yochai himself says (*Yevomos* 97.), “When you repeat *divrei Torah* [of someone who was *niftar*], his lips speak from the grave.”

Similarly, Reb Shimon bar Yochai (*Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Sisa* 3) says that *tzaddikim* don't rest, even after their demise, because when their students say their *divrei Torah*, the *tzaddikim* say it along with them from their graves. The Midrash states as follows:

It states (*Koheles* 5:11), והשבע לעשיר אינו מניח לו לישן, “The satiation of the wealthy don't let them sleep.” The pasuk isn't referring to financial wealth. “The wealthy” are those who are wealthy in Torah. They can't sleep because when one is great and wealthy in Torah, and had many students, even when he dies his students don't let him sleep. They sit in *beis medresh* and repeat the lessons he taught them...and they don't let him sleep in the grave... This is the explanation והשבע לעשיר אינו מניח לו לישן, “The satiation of the wealthy don't let them sleep.”

Therefore, it is recommended to study the lessons of Reb Shimon on Lag b'Omer, as this will give us a connection

to Reb Shimon, regardless whether we are close by or far away.

Furthermore, *Sefer Chasidim* (224) teaches “Whoever repeats *divrei Torah* in the scholar's name, the scholar will pray for them and speak in heaven for their benefit...”

The Rebbe Resha'b of Lubavitch *zt'l* says that when one studies the *divrei Torah* of a *tzaddik*, a *malach* from *malach* Michael's camp, goes to the *tzaddik* to tell him that someone is studying his *sefer*, because the *malachim* know how happy *tzaddikim* are when they hear that someone is studying their *divrei Torah*.

The *Yaaras Dvash* (vol.2, *drush* 7) teaches, “When you repeat *divrei Torah* that a *tzaddik* said, the *neshamah* of the *tzaddik* is clothed in those studies, and he stands there, with you... Dovid therefore said, אגורה באהלך עולמים, ‘I will dwell in the tents of Torah in both worlds’ (*Yevamos* 96:). Because he will live in the eternal world, and also in this world, whenever people repeat something he taught. “

The Rebbe of Zalavitz *zy'a* in his *sefer Bris Avram* (end of *Shabbos Hagadol*) writes, “I heard from Reb Yisrael Baal

This means דבריהם, their *divrei Torah*, הם זכרונם, is how we can have a connection with them.” The son of the Sfas Emes (Berzhan) writes in the introduction, “I heard from my father *zt'l* that it is better to study the *sefer* of a *tzaddik* than to go to his grave. By studying his *sefer* in depth and by being connected immensely to the holiness of his *neshamah* above, holiness will be bestowed on him... The one studying is also bestowing goodness to the *tzaddik*, as it states דובב שפתי ישנים, he is causing the *tzaddik* to speak words of Torah from the grave. They are being *mashpia* each other.”

Shem Tov *zt'l* that after a tzaddik's *petirah*, he is unable to rise from one level to the next before he is judged for even the smallest transgressions. After they judge him for the smallest *aveiros* (קלות שבקלות) he still can't go to a higher level. However, when people down below, speak about his ways and they repeat his *divrei Torah* the tzaddik can rise to a much higher level. This happens each time people speak about the tzaddikim who were *niftar*. The tzaddik goes up, and also the people who are speaking are elevated."

The Beis Avraham (Noach) teaches, "At the *yahrtzeit* meals of a tzaddik, also those who never know him and never studied any of his *divrei Torah*, nevertheless...when people gather and they speak about his ways, and they review his *divrei Torah*...they become connected with the tzaddik..."³²

Yeshuos for the Public

We discussed the *yeshuos* and miracles that happen for the individuals who go to Reb Shimon's *tzion*, and daven there for salvations. In this section, we discuss the miracles and salvations that happen to the community, in Reb Shimon's merit.

The *Zohar* says that Reb Shimon bar Yochai once saw that a great darkness was coming down to the world. Reb Shimon said to his son, Reb Elazer, "Come with me, and we will see what

Hakadosh Baruch Hu is planning to do to the world."

They found an angel, tall like a high mountain, and thirty flames of fire were coming out of its mouth. Reb Shimon asked the angel what it was planning to do. The angel replied, "Hashem said that in every generation there must always be at least thirty tzaddikim similar to Avraham Avinu... But now, there aren't thirty tzaddikim like Avraham in the world, and therefore Hashem sent me to destroy the world."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai said to the *malach*, "Go back to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and tell him, 'The son of Yochai is in the world.'

"The angel went to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and said, 'Master of the world, You certainly know what Reb Shimon bar Yochai told me to tell You.'

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

The angel returned. When Reb Shimon bar Yochai saw the angel again he said, "If you will not leave, I will decree that you will never return to your place in heaven. I will send you to a forsaken place [and you will be lost, forever]. Therefore, listen to what I tell you. Go to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and say, 'Even if there aren't thirty tzaddikim in the

32. The Yismach Yisrael taught, "When you mention a tzaddik in this world, this brings goodness to all of Bnei Yisrael."

world, twenty tzaddikim are also sufficient. As Hashem told Avraham (18:31), *לֹא אֶשְׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרִים*, 'I will not destroy if there are twenty tzaddikim.' And even if there are only ten, that is also enough to protect the world from destruction, because Hashem said (18:32), *לֹא אֶשְׁחִית בְּעִבּוֹר הָעֲשָׂרָה*, that He will not destroy the world if there are ten tzaddikim. And even if there are fewer than ten tzaddikim in the world, if there are two tzaddikim in the world (namely Reb Elazar and myself) it is also sufficient. As it states, *עַל פִּי שְׁנֵי עֲדִים יָקוּם דְּבַר*, 'with two witnesses, the existence,' and *דְּבַר* is the world, as it states (*Tehillim* 33), *בְּדִבְרֵי ה' שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ*, 'With Hashem's *davar* [speech] the heavens were made.' And if there aren't two tzaddikim in the world, one tzaddik is also enough, as it states, *צְדִיק יְסוּד עוֹלָם*, the tzaddik is the foundation of the world."

At that moment, a *bas kol* came forth from heaven and said, "Reb Shimon, fortunate is your lot. Hakadosh Baruch Hu puts His decrees in heaven, and you annul them from below. About you it is written (*Tehillim* 145), *רְצוֹן יִרְאוּ יַעֲשֶׂה*, 'Hashem does the will of those who fear Him.'"

The *Zohar* (*Rus* 104) relates: Reb Shimon traveled and came to Lud.

People took him around the city and showed him several dead people lying about, due to a plague. Reb Shimon said, "How can it be that I am in this city and there's a plague? I declare the plague should stop!"

A *bas kol* was immediately heard. It was saying to the bad angels, "Leave this place, because Reb Shimon bar Yochai is here. Hakadosh Baruch Hu decrees in heaven, and Reb Shimon annuls the decrees on earth below."

Reb Chanina was in Lud when this happened, and he repeated it to Reb Meir. Reb Meir said, "Who can tell all the praises of Reb Shimon bar Yochai. He is similar to Moshe Rabbeinu, who 'stood between the dead and the living and stopped the plague.' Reb Shimon has an aspect that Moshe Rabbeinu didn't have, because Moshe Rabbeinu had to stand between the dead and the healthy to stop the plague, while Reb Shimon annulled the plague with his words."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai said, "I can exempt all people [living in my lifetime] from the judgment [that no one will be punished for their sins]. If I take along Reb Elazer, too, I can redeem people from the judgment from the beginning of Creation until today. And if we take [the merits of] Yosam ben Uziyahu³³ [along

33. Rashi writes that Yosem ben Uziyahu "was a tzaddik, more humble than other kings, and excelled in *kibud av*. About him it states, *בֶּן יִכְבֵּד אָב*, 'a son honors his father' (*Malachi* 1) because all the days that his father had *tzaraas*, and Yosem judged the nation, as it states, *וַיִּתֵּם... שׁוֹפֵט* (*II Malachim* 15) he didn't place the crown on his head as long as his father was alive, and all his judgments that he passed, he attributed them in the name of his father."

with us] we can redeem the entire world from judgment from the day the world was created until the end of time" (*Succah* 45:).³⁴

The Chidushei HaRim *zy'a* said: Every year, on Lag b'Omer, Reb Shimon once again cries out his renowned statement, "I can exempt the entire world from the judgment and from punishment!"³⁵

How does Reb Shimon bar Yochai do this? How can sins be forgotten and negated? To answer this question, Reb Akiva Eigar *zt'l* (in *Gilyon HaShas*) tells us to study *Avos d'Reb Nosson* (ch. 16).

In *Avos d'Reb Nosson* (16) Reb Shimon teaches that Hashem takes into account our *yetzer hara*, and thereby He forgives our sins. Because it states, **בִּי הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ**, "He knows our *yetzer hara*." Hashem knows our many challenges, that the *yetzer hara* is continuously coming to us, luring us to sin. Therefore, we aren't so guilty for the transgressions, for they were caused by the *yetzer hara's* influence.

To express this point, Reb Shimon bar Yochai tells the following *mashal*:

A king had an infertile plot of land, which never produced anything at all. Some people rented the field, promising to pay ten *kur* of wheat annually. That means that each year they had to supply the king with ten *kur* of the produce, and the rest they could keep for themselves. However, after plowing, fertilizing, sowing, and irrigating the field for an entire year all the field produced, was one *kur*.

The king rebuked them. The deal was for ten *kur*.

They explained, "Our master, our king; you know that this field has never earned you any profit. After working hard on the field, we enabled it to produce only one *kur* of wheat."

Reb Shimon bar Yochai concludes, "This is the same defense the Jewish nation says to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. They will say, 'Master of the world, you know that the *yetzer hara* lures us to sin. As it states (*Tehillim* 103), **בִּי הוּא יָדַע יִצְרָנוּ**, and therefore, we have an excuse for our poor output.

According to Reb Akiva Eigar, this is the claim that Reb Shimon bar Yochai uses

34. After *sefiras ha'omer*, some say **למנצח בנגינות** (*Tehillim* 67). This chapter has forty-nine words (excluding the first *pasuk*). The kabbalah experts teach that one should concentrate on the word that corresponds to that day. For example, the thirty-third word of this chapter (excluding the first *pasuk*) is **אל-הים**, and therefore on the thirty-third day of the *omer*, one should concentrate on that word. **אל-הים** is an appropriate word for Lag b'Omer, since **אל-הים** *roshei teivos* for **הים** מן העולם מן הדין "I can redeem the entire world from judgment."

35. The Binyan Yehoshua says that Reb Shimon redeems solely those who are called **ישראל**. Therefore, everyone should seek to be a proper Yid, and then he will be redeemed from sin on Lag b'Omer.

to free us from judgment and punishment. He tells Hashem to take into consideration the hardships that people endure, plus the strong *yetzer hara*, so whatever they do achieve is remarkable.

With this claim, everyone is acquitted.

Rashi tells us of a different means Reb Shimon bar Yochai employs to free everyone from judgment. Rashi writes: "[Reb Shimon bar Yochai says that everyone is freed from judgment] 'in my merit because I take their sins on myself. Thereby they are free from the judgment.'"

Every year on Lag b'Omer, Reb Shimon once again announces, "I can redeem the entire world from judgment." The only condition is to believe in Reb Shimon bar Yochai, as the Beis Aharon writes "Whoever believes in Reb Shimon bar Yochai gets *chizuk* from Reb Shimon bar Yochai."

Yes, Klal Yisrael can earn amazing

salvations on this day. All we need to do is to celebrate and to pray. Primarily, we have to pray that we merit the *geulah sheleimah*, speedily in our days.

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

Rebbe Mordechai Chernobyler *zt'l* wrote to Reb Avraham Dov of Ovritch, the Bas Ayin, when the Bas Ayin moved to Eretz Yisrael, "Pour your eyes out at Reb Shimon. If I could go to Eretz Yisrael, I would go to Reb Shimon's grave and I would pray there and storm the heavens until Moshiach comes."

Therefore, even as each person davens for his personal salvation, we mustn't forget to pray for Moshiach. May he come speedily in our days, amen.