

# The Jewish Weekly



In Loving memory of  
**Mendy Klein**  
 ר' מנחם משה ז"ל  
 בן ר' נפתלי הירצקא  
 נפטר ל"ג בעומר  
 י"ח אייר תשע"ח  
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## LAG B'OMER MIRACLE AT MERON

Translated by Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

On the eve of 18 Iyar, Lag B'Omer, the thirty-third night of Counting the Omer, in 5683 (1923), as every year, an enormous crowd was assembled on the roof of the building in Meron that enclosed the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. The huge annual bonfire was throwing off heat and smoke, radiating light that could be seen as far away as the streets of Safed and casting shadows on the circle of chassidim and leading members of the community that danced energetically in front of it. All the other men stood off to the side and sang and clapped enthusiastically to the pulsating beat of the traditional Lag b'Omer songs. Below, in the large courtyard, the women and children also sang and rejoiced, in honor of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

Lag b'Omer is the anniversary of the passing of the renowned Mishnaic Sage and foremost Kabbalist, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, whose teachings comprise the text of the primary Kabbalah sourcebook, the Zohar. (This is in addition to its halachic significance, as a cessation in the semi-mourning observances that obtain between Passover and Shavuot.) The yahrzeit is celebrated with great joy in accordance with the recorded express wishes of Rabbi Shimon himself. Written accounts from more than five hundred years ago cite the old tradition, and the great virtue, of attending his tomb in Meron. Sages and common folk alike attest that anyone who prays to G-d sincerely there on Lag b'Omer, will surely be answered in Rabbi Shimon's merit. The barren, the poor, and the critically sick have all made the pilgrimage there and found salvation.

As always, the "stars" of the Lag b'Omer festivities that year, were the little three-year-old boys, whose proud parents had brought them to have their first haircuts and peyot-shaping at Rabbi Shimon's tomb on this day. As the children were transferred from mothers' arms to fathers' shoulders, the scissors would be passed around to relatives, friends and bystanders, so all could share in the merit of snipping the long strands and curls, while leaving the peyot untouched.

That year, Lag b'Omer fell on a Thursday night-Friday. Many of the celebrants elected to stay on for Shabbat, knowing that the holy day emerging out of Lag b'Omer in the presence of Rabbi Shimon would be an extraordinarily exalted occasion.

Friday evening everyone prayed together. The holiness and joy of the Shabbat spirit was palpable. Then everyone returned to their

lodging places, where the pleasure of the holy day continued unabated throughout the evening meals.

Early Shabbat morning, as soon as the first streaks of light infiltrated the sky, the Sephardim returned to the tomb for the (Amidah exactly at) sunrise minyan. After them, the "regular" minyanim took place, and finally, the chassidim arrived for the late-morning shift in their own inimitable ecstatic style. Afterwards, when they too returned to the large communal eating area, the happy singing of the earlier arrivals left no doubt that the spirit of Shabbat joy was continuing to expand with each passing moment.

But then, a loud bitter wail shattered the shimmering atmosphere of Shabbat joy. A little boy, who had come with his mother for his haircut, had unaccountably fallen sick and stopped breathing. Aid was given, but to no avail. He was dead, and his broken-hearted mother was screaming uncontrollably. All the women around her were crying too.

The word spread quickly. Almost instantaneously, melancholy gloom replaced the exuberant rejoicing. The singing stopped, the dancers froze; the mother's loud cries pierced every heart.

Before they could recover from their shock, a further development struck. The British Mandate police, assigned to keep order, suddenly, without any warning, locked the gates of the courtyard. They then announced that they were forced to take this precaution because maybe the disease that had struck down the hapless child was highly contagious, and they were obligated to do everything possible to prevent it from spreading.

Pandemonium reigned. Many families were divided by the padlocked gates; numerous little children were cut off from their parents. The British police didn't seem to care, and turned a deaf ear to every appeal. Masses of Jews were being prevented from reaching Rabbi Shimon on the day of his celebration.

The stunned Jews still inside pushed closer to the tomb, to express their crushed hearts in fervent prayer. Suddenly the crowd rippled, and like at the Splitting of the Reed Sea, a clear path miraculously opened. The grieving mother was staggering determinedly towards the place of Rabbi Shimon, carrying her dead son in her arms.

The sight was enough to break every heart. Some sighed, some cried, others nodded their heads as if to show understanding and empathy.

The distraught mother came up to the tomb. She placed her son on the ground. Seemingly unaware of all the people around her, in a quivering voice she spoke out through her tears, "Oy! Tzaddik! I, your humble maidservant, came here to honor you. Only you know that in bringing my son here to you, I was fulfilling the vow I made on this

## It Once Happened..

spot four years ago, before I merited to be a mother for the first time. Yesterday we inaugurated him with joy and song in the mitzvah of leaving peyot. And now, woe is me! How can I go home without my son!?"

All those present choked back their sobs. No one dared to make a sound that might interfere with her words.

The mother stopped crying. She straightened up and took a deep breath. In a firm clear voice, she pronounced: "Rabbi Shimon! I have laid my son on the ground next to you, dead. Please do not disappoint me. Return my son to me alive and healthy as he was when I brought him here to you. 'Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmei rabbah'-Exalted and blessed is His great name,' and also the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Everyone knows that you are holy and He - our G-d - is holy. Please give me back my son!"

She stopped speaking, then spun and exited the structure built around the tomb. Every other person present followed her out. They closed the door after them, leaving the dead child behind, unattended.


A few minutes passed. From inside, behind the closed doors, a weak voice was heard. "Mommy, water. I'm so thirsty."

Everyone stood as if paralyzed, trembling with conflicting emotions of fear and disbelief, of shock and delight. The mother burst through the doors and swept up her child into her arms. Everyone ran in and surrounded them, and spontaneously burst out with overflowing hearts, "Blessed is He who enlivens the dead!"

The bewildered British quickly re-opened the courtyard gates. The throngs of Jews impatiently standing outside streamed back in. When they heard about the great miracle that had just taken place, the thanksgiving and celebration multiplied sevenfold.

The sound of their enthusiastic singing of the most popular "Bar Yochai" song (composed by the Kabbalist, Rabbi Shimon Labia approximately 450 years ago) could be heard for miles around - and, no doubt, penetrated to the highest heavens, including the celestial abode of Rabbi Shimon. "Bar Yochai, nimshachta ashrecha, shemen sasson meihavarecha"- "Bar Yochai, fortunate are you, anointed with joyous oil over and above your companions."

*Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.*



**Shabbat Times - Parshat Bechukotai**

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	6:57	8:14	8:50
Tel Aviv	7:12	8:17	
Haifa	7:05	8:18	
Be'er Sheva	7:13	8:15	



## MISFIRE

By Basha Majerczyk

The Chassidim accompanying the Rebbe stared out the window of the carriage in shock. A fierce looking man had run out of the house when they approached his property, his eyes burning with murderous rage at the coach full of Jews. In his hand he carried a revolver. At his heels, his favorite pet, a massive black dog, yelped and snapped at the carriage.

Before they could react, the angry householder drew his gun and began to shoot at the coach. The gun clicked... but no bullets emerged. Again and again he pulled the trigger, but nothing happened.

Just then, a calm, holy face appeared at the window of the carriage. With a fascinated stare, the angry man lowered the gun and pulled the trigger. A bullet spewed forth and struck the black dog, killing it instantly.

At the holy passenger's request, one of the travelers approached the householder. "Sir, we are Chassidim traveling with the holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev," he stammered. "It is time for our evening prayers and we would like to ask your kind permission to pray in your house."

"The Holy Rabbi of Berditchev? Why yes, of course, you have my permission," said the man, as if in a dream. With that, he turned and strode into his house without a backward glance at his beloved dog.

His servants and friends were puzzled. They expected to enjoy the massacre of the Jews - these Jews who seemed not to know or care that no Jew dared step onto this property since the owner's murderous reputation had become known. The disciples of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak were perplexed, too. Why had their Rebbe asked them to accompany him to this unknown place, leaving Berditchev very early, traveling quickly and stopping only once along the way to say Psalms? And the homeowner himself was also confused. "I know the gun was in perfect order, and yet it would not shoot when I pointed at the carriage. It must be the power of that holy Rabbi," he muttered to his friends.

News of the arrival of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the estate owner's seeming change of heart reached the Jews living nearby. They began gathering at the estate to see Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and to pray with him. Many non-Jews also joined the gathering since Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's holiness was known by the entire countryside.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak led the evening prayers himself. Before saying the opening words, "And He is merciful. He forgives sin, and will not destroy. He turns back His anger many times and does not arouse his wrath," the Rebbe began to sing a moving melody. It was sad and poignant and had a haunting effect on all who listened. It turned everyone's thoughts to their own private world, contemplating past regrets and the evil and folly of a person's actions. Each heart was full of despair and bitter regret. The disciples understood the melody to depict the suffering of the pure and holy soul, forced to leave the beautiful heavens, and come to this evil, false world.

But just as the notes seemed to fade into the very abyss of doom, the Rebbe raised his voice in a triumphant call of hope and salvation. The words, "Oh G-d, please save. The King will answer us on the day we call," were sung in a joyful tune, stirring everyone to confidence and hope. But, before the Rebbe had sung the last of the sad notes, the host cried out hysterically and fell to the ground in a faint.

Everyone was mystified by the events. The Chassidim now understood that the purpose of the journey had to do with their host. But what were the redeeming qualities of this Jew-hater that he merited the special attention of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak?

A few hours later, the Chassidim saw the host emerge, his eyes red and his face tear-stained. In broken Yiddish, the host stammered, "I am a Jew. I, too, am a Jew." In wonder, they listened to his story:

"I was born in Germany to Jewish parents. As a young man I joined the Kaiser's army. The higher I rose in rank, the looser my ties to Judaism became. By the time I was a personal guard of the Kaiser, I had totally disassociated myself from Judaism. Finally, I became a Jew-hater and relished every opportunity I had to persecute Jews.

"Now, with you and your Rebbe here, I remember that I am a Jew. I want to be a Jew again. Please, I beg of you, ask your holy Rebbe to teach me how to be a Jew again!"

The next morning, prayers were conducted with a festive atmosphere. The host joined the Jewish villagers. He borrowed a tallit and tefillin and asked to be shown how to use them. After prayers, he was closeted with the Rebbe for several hours, their conversation remaining a secret. The Rebbe warned his Chassidim never to breathe a word about this journey.

A short time later, the former Kaiser's guard sold his estate and disappeared. Around the same time, a stranger came to live and study in Berditchev. He became a close disciple of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the father of one of the finest Jewish families.

Reprinted from an email from lchaimweekly.org



There is hidden power in the word 'if'.

Parshat Bechukotai commences, "אם בחוקותי תלכו - If you walk in my statutes and keep the laws of the Torah," then Hashem will shower us with many blessings.

In the Sefer Belulah VaShemen, written in Verona in the 16th century, a beautiful insight is presented. It identifies three pairs of great Jewish leaders who provide us with inspiration derived from the word 'אם', alef (א) and mem (מ), standing for: Aharon and Moshe, Esther and Mordechai, and Eliyahu and Moshiach.

All three are associated with salvation from persecution: Aharon and Moshe led us out of Egypt; Esther and Mordechai lived at a time when Hashem saved us from the intentions of Haman; and our world will see an end to all trouble and warfare in the time of Eliyahu and Moshiach. But the Sefer Belulah VaShemen makes a further point. These three pairs are also associated with our connection to a life filled with commitment to Torah values.

The exodus from Egypt took us to Mount Sinai where we embraced a life full of Torah study and observance. During the time of Esther and Mordechai, the Jewish people said, "קיימו וקיבלו," accepting upon themselves a life of dedication to shmirat mitzvot, the keeping of the precepts of the Torah, and similarly the coming of Moshiach is associated with our dedication to everything that is good and of value in this world.

The word 'אם' therefore highlights for us that the value of being Jewish does not merely mean to be physically alive, but far beyond that: to have meaning in our lives, to bring joy to our existence, to radiate the light of Hashem to the world around us, thanks to the inspiration we derive from the Torah.

Thanks to Aharon and Moshe that is what we experienced after the exodus. Thanks to Esther and Mordechai, that is what we experienced in the days of Haman and Achashveirosh. And 'אם' - if - in addition to being physically alive, we also lead virtuous lives, may we experience a time when Eliyahu the Prophet will herald the coming of Moshiach, may it happen speedily in our time.

So let's not dwell on the past but let's pray for those suffering from the current situation in Eastern Europe, as well as for the recovery of all the sick, our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, for peace and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

## The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 12  
MITZVOT ASEH: 7  
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 5

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 78  
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1013  
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 3992

HAFTORA:  
Yirmiyahu 16:19 - 17:14

This week in Israel, we study Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot (outside Israel one studies Chapter 4).

בחוקותי  
תלכו  
בהר  
רשעים  
(אם) (אם)

This week is sponsored in honor of the fourth Yahrzeit of my close friend and mentor,

**Mendy Klein**

ר' מנחם משה ז"ל בן ר' נפתלי הירצקא ז"ל  
לג בעומר - י"ח אייר

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