



TOWARD A



MEANINGFUL LAG B’OMER

A Personal and Spiritual Guide to Lag B’Omer
 Making Lag B’Omer Relevant

E X C L U S I V E
 FOR SHLUCHIM

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BEFORE HIS PASSING - LIGHT

On Lag B'Omer Rashbi "reached the peak and pinnacle of all his levels... and this is the significance of his learning

Torah with his *chavraya* at the time... and in him was radiating a reflection of the light of Moshiach" (Siddur im dach, Shaar ha'Lag B'Omer)

Hints for Lag B'Omer in the Torah:

- הגל הזה גו' עד (מח) גלעד (ויצא לא, מח)
"Ha'gal hazeh..ad gilad" (Vayetzei 31:48) - Siddur im dach 304c
- גל עיני ואביטה נפלאות (מתורתך) (תהלים קיט, יח) - "Gal aynei v'abitah neflaois m'torescho" (Tehillim 119:18) - Chayav Odom L'vorech 5638 ch. 25 (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5710)



BIOGRAPHY



RABBI SHIMON BAR YOCHAI (Rashbi) - 80-160 CE

Rashbi is a Mishnaic Tanah and the author of the classic Kabbalistic work, the *Holy Zohar (Book of Splendor)*, first published in 1558. Transcribed by his student R' Abba, the *Zohar* lays out the foundations and core principles of mysticism and contains, often in cryptic form, the cosmic secrets. An extraordinary scholar and miracle worker, Rabbi Shimon was renowned for his mastery of both the revealed and the hidden dimensions of Torah.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 80CE: Born in Israel shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple (67CE).
- As a young boy studies in the great academy of the scholars of Yavneh, founded by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.
- His principal teacher is Rabbi Akiva, whose academy is in B'nei Brak. Rabbi Akiva calls him "my son."
- Due to persecution against Jews led by the Roman Emperor Hadrian, R' Shimon is sentenced to death for defying the government. Forced to flee, he hides in a cave for thirteen years together with his son, R' Elazar, where they study Torah day and night. A carob tree and a spring of fresh water miraculously spring up at the entrance to the desert cave and they are sustained

Cont'd



STORY

Rashbi upset that R' Avrohom Halevi, student of the Arizal, was sad on his "day of rejoicing"

R' Avraham Halevi related, that in the aforementioned year [the first year], he too went [with the Arizal to Meron on Lag B'Omer]. It was R' Avraham Halevi's custom to recite Nachem every day when saying the Tishkon prayer. And he recited it on [Lag B'Omer] in Meron as well. When he finished the prayer, the Arizal told him that he saw the Rashbi awake, standing on his burial spot, and told him: tell this person, Avraham Halevi, why does he recite Nachem [a consolation prayer] on the day of our rejoicing?

(Shar Hakavanot, Sefirat Ha'Omer, Drush 12)

LAG B'OMER CUSTOMS

1. Upsherinish - Cutting a three-year-old boys hair for the first time.

Harav Yosef Sarug testified to me, that one year before I knew him, the Arizal went to Meron to cut his sons hair with festive feast and rejoicing (Pri Etz Chaim, Shar Sefirat Haomer Perek 7)

2. Lighting Bonfires on Lag B'Omer eve - These commemorate the immense light that the Rashbi introduced into the world via his mystical teachings. This was especially true on the day of his passing, when he revealed to his disciples secrets of the Torah, whose profundity and intensity the world had yet to experience (Zohar III pp. 287b-296b). The Zohar also relates that, on the day of Rashbi's passing, the house was filled with fire and intense light, to the point that the assembled could not approach or even look at the Rashbi.

3. We do not say Tachnun, mourn or fast (Tur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 493:1-2).

4. Weddings and music - Throughout the Omer we do not celebrate festive events, such as weddings or musical affairs. On Lag B'Omer, the Omer mourning practices are suspended: many people get married and there are concerts, dancing and singing.

5. Food - In some circles it is customary to eat carobs on Lag B'Omer. This commemorates a lifesaving miracle that Rabbi Shimon experienced. For a period of thirteen years, Rabbi Shimon and his son were fugitives from the Roman regime, in hiding in a cave in Northern Israel. Miraculously a carob tree grew at the entrance of the cave, providing nourishments for its two holy occupants.

(for more customs see Bayn Pesach L'Shavuot Chapter 18)



Day of Miracles

Lag Ba'Omer was one of the Mittlerer Rebbe's particularly noteworthy festivals. He and the Chassidim would go out to the fields that day, and although he did not wash and break bread,

he did partake of mashkeh (strong drink), which he was not allowed to do for health reasons. Many wonders were seen at that time, most of them involving the blessing of children for childless couples - and all year long people waited for Lag Ba'Omer. Hayom Yom, 18 Iyar

THE REBBE'S LAG B'OMER DIRECTIVES



Wherever possible organize Lag B'Omer parades and outings to celebrate the “day of my - Rashbi's - rejoic-

ing,” and the end of the terrible plague that killed so many of Rabbi Akiva's students due to their disrespect to one another.



These events should focus on children, celebrating Jewish unity and pride, and inspiring them to embrace our heritage, through loving devotion to Torah and Mitzvot. Especially in the spirit of Rashbi - uniting both parts (the revealed and

hidden) of the Torah. And doing so with respect and love for others, including the responsibility to encourage friends to grow in all matters of Judaism. Children lead the way - and have the power to inspire their parents and educators as well - toward the geulah. (see below for more on the special role of children)



Every Lag B'Omer parade or celebration should include all three pillars upon which the world stands: Words of Torah, prayer and good deeds - giving the children candies and gifts, as well as money to distribute to charity. It would also be worthwhile publishing albums of these events, with pictures etc. (Sichas Shabbos Parshas Emor 5740)

SPECIAL ROLE OF CHILDREN

From days of yore the custom on Lag B'Omer has been to preoccupy ourselves with children, taking them out to the field, organizing for them a parade or a party, to honor and celebrate Rashbi's day of rejoicing (Sichas Lag B'Omer 5746)

Reasons for Lag B'Omer's special connection with children:

- 1 Children, who are provided for and free of worries, are in a state where “Torah is their full preoccupation” - similar to Rashbi (Shabbos 11a).
- 2 Children are connected with the Inner Torah (the special role of Rashbi): “As