

## *Lag b’Omer in Jail*

In the spring of the year 5773, a certain G-d fearing, honorable Jew who lived in Jerusalem was imprisoned for some reason.<sup>1</sup> As **Lag b’Omer** was fast approaching, this prisoner was very upset that he couldn’t be in **Meron** for the festive occasion because of the few days he would be in detention.

When his son came to visit, he asked him to represent his father in Meron and pray for him there, all the while expressing his dismay that he can't go there as well. "I've gone every year since I was a child, but now I am behind bars and unable to attend."

The son replied encouragingly, "Since you go to **Rabbi Shimon Bar-Yochai** every year but this year you can't for a reason beyond your control, I am certain that Rabbi Shimon will this year come to you instead!"

His father smiled. He appreciated his son's effort to cheer him up, but of course it was just naïve and wishful thinking.

So what happened? That year, on *Lag b'Omer* night, a fire broke out in the prison compound. The Jewish inmates took advantage of the fire to dance around it and sing joyously the three classic *Lag b'Omer* songs over and over. Thus, they had a genuine *Lag b'Omer* bonfire celebration right there in prison!

Nor was that all. The fire caused so much damage, the jail needed repairs. As a result, there wasn't room for all the prisoners, so the next morning, on *Lag b'Omer* day, the ones with the lightest sentences were freed.<sup>2</sup>

So it seems that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai did go to the remorseful Jew, just as his son had said. He, and many others of the prisoners, were able to celebrate *on Lag b'Omer*, and then to be set free as well.

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*Source:* –Extracted and extensively revised by Yerachmiel Tilles from story #1013 in this series, which was previously adapted from the “Torah Wellsprings” of **R. Elimelech Biderman** (Emor 5776 -- translated of **R. Baruch Twersky**).

Connections (2): 1) **Lag b’Omer**; 2) **Lockdown!**

*Biographical note:*

**Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai**, one of the most important sages in Jewish history, lived over 1800 years ago. Teachings in his name abound throughout the *Mishnah*, *Gemarah*, and *Midrashim*, while the **Zohar**, the primary source text of Kabbalah, is built around Rabbi Shimon's revelations to his inner circle of disciples. During the hours before his passing, on **Lag b’Omer**, he disclosed the "most sublime" secrets of Torah, in order to ensure that the day would always be an occasion for great joy, untouched by sadness because of the Omer period and mourning for him. The seminal importance of the Zohar in Jewish thought and the annual pilgrimage to Meron on Lag b'Omer are testimonies to his success.

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<sup>1</sup> along with a group of demonstrators, possibly—y.t.

<sup>2</sup> And of course those just being held while waiting to be officially charged.