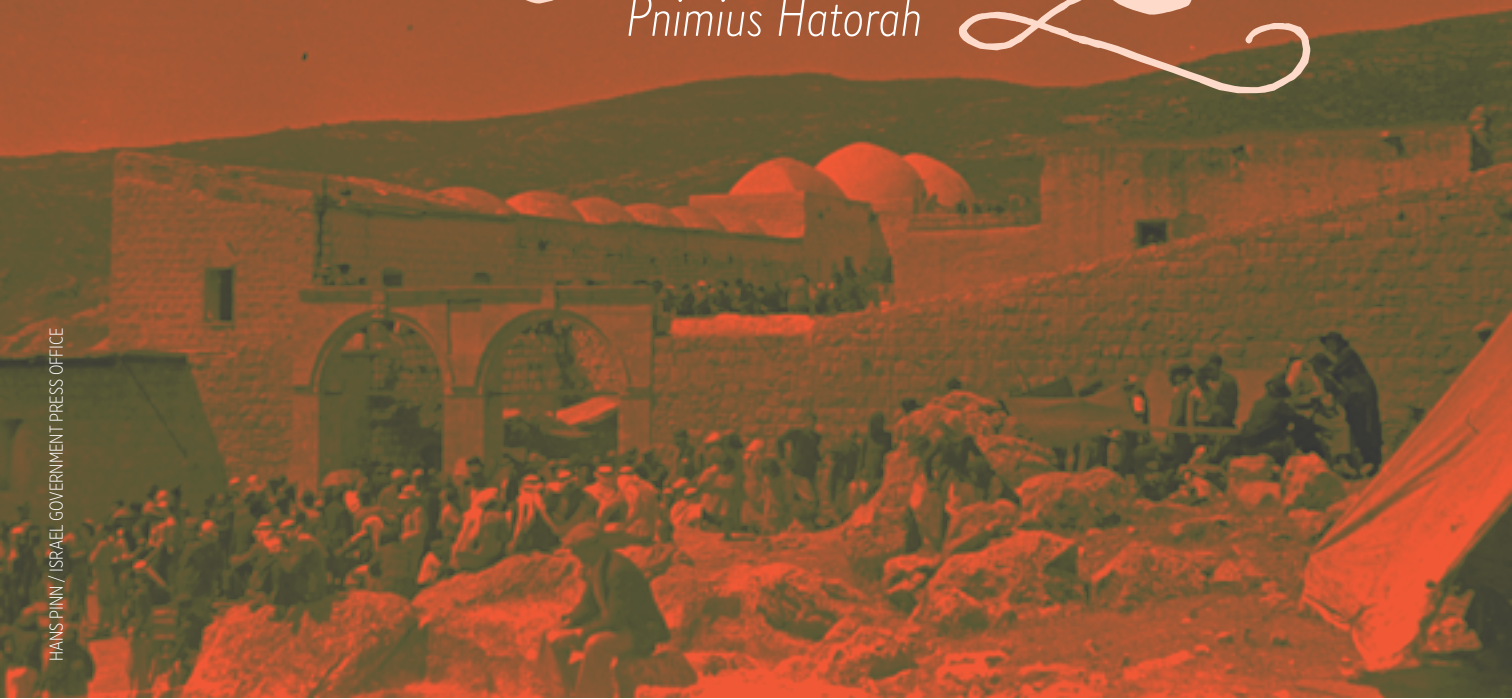


לזכות  
החתן הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל שיחי'  
שפאלטר  
והכלה המהוללה מרת מרים ברכה תחי'  
בכור  
לרגל חתונתם בשעטומ"צ  
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הרה"ת ר' צבי יוסף וזוגתו מרת חנה שיחיו  
שפאלטר  
הרה"ת ר' שלמה וזוגתו מרת גיטל בריינדל שיחיו  
בכור



# Meiron

The Cradle of  
Prinius Hatorah



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YIDDEN FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE VISIT KEVER RASHBI ON LAG BA'OMER, 5699.

## Freilicher...

“At 4:15 a.m. we traveled to Kfar Meiron,” writes the Frierdiker Rebbe in his diary. “Fifteen minutes later we arrived, and before davening, I prayed at the resting place of Rashbi a”h.”

The Frierdiker Rebbe records how he lit candles in the merit of his family members (including “my daughter C.M., her husband Reb M.M., our daughter Sheina, *anash* and the *temimim*...”) and then began to daven

with a minyan at a brisk pace. The Frierdiker Rebbe was honored with *pesicha* and received *shlishi*.<sup>1</sup>

Of the many gravesites and holy spaces spanning the Holy Land, Meiron holds a special status among

Chassidim, being the resting place of Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai, the author of the Zohar, the foundation of *pnimius haTorah*.

In fact, Meiron was even proposed twice to host a community of Chabad Chassidim.

The first such instance was following the *aliya* of the Mitteler Rebbe's Chassidim. (It is unclear why it ultimately did not happen.)

The second time took place in our generation, proposed to the Rebbe by Israeli President Zalman Shazar. In his letter to Mr. Shazar, the Rebbe writes that, "In general, I am enthusiastic about the idea of a Chabad settlement in the area of Tzfas–Meiron, however, the idea still lacks details, especially regarding the types of people who would settle there..."<sup>2</sup>

In recounting the Frierdiker Rebbe's visit to Eretz Yisroel in 5689\* (ת"רפ"ט), Rabbi Shimon Glitzenshtein writes in greater detail:

"The Rebbe *shlita* locked himself in Rashbi's cave, lit several candles and did *hishtachus* on the *tziyun*. He broke into heartrending sobs that shook all the listeners to the core. He again read all the *pidyonos* and then instructed to daven Shacharis briskly."<sup>3</sup>

In later *sichos*, the Frierdiker Rebbe describes his pleasure in being close to Rashbi. "When I was in Eretz Yisroel, I visited all the *kevarim*. At Rashbi's resting place, I felt *heimisher* [more at home], meaning *freilicher* [more joyous]..."<sup>4</sup>

Fascinatingly, a letter was discovered revealing the Frierdiker Rebbe's plan to visit there once again, on Lag Ba'omer no less! In a letter written to Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka and the Rebbe, the Frierdiker Rebbe describes his plans and adds that he hoped the Rebbe would join him for the journey as well.<sup>5</sup>

In our generation as well, the Rebbe placed great value on visiting Kever Rashbi in Meiron.



THRONGS OF YIDDEN TRAVELING TO MEIRON FOR LAG B'OMER, CIRCA 5680S.

## HE BROKE INTO HEARTRENDING SOBS THAT SHOOK ALL THE LISTENERS TO THE CORE.

In 5736\*, when the Rebbe sent the group of *shluchim* to live in Eretz Yisroel, some of them were sent to settle in Tzfas, "Near the resting place of Rashbi in Meiron," the Rebbe pointed out.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the first group of *shluchim* to Eretz Yisroel in 5716\* made a point to visit Rashbi's *tziyun*, and in a record of a *yechidus* to *bochurim* in 5735\*, the Rebbe instructed them to specifically visit Meiron on Lag Ba'omer and gave them dollars to give to *tzedakah* there.<sup>7</sup>

### Three Day Celebration

The tradition of visiting Meiron on Lag Ba'omer was founded by the Arizal. Each year, he would travel from his home in Tzfas to Meiron for a three day period, amid great celebration. (In 5740\*, when the Rebbe held three *farbrengens* over the Lag Ba'omer period, he associated it with this tradition of the Arizal.)<sup>8</sup>

Over the ensuing centuries, it became an established custom among the Jews of Tzfas to carry on the Arizal's tradition.

"They would travel each year," the Rebbe once described, "to the resting place of Rashbi on Lag Ba'omer, beginning with the evening of Lag Ba'omer when it is customary to light bonfires (at a time when fire stands out—at night) in honor of Rashbi..."

"Moreover, whenever Lag Ba'omer fell out on Sunday ... they would go to Meiron on Erev Shabbos together with their wives and children ... and *shecht* a lamb for the Shabbos meals ... they would celebrate the entire Shabbos with extra joy, associated with the *hilula* of the Rashbi."<sup>9</sup>

The tradition of bonfires was also started by the Arizal. In later years, the custom spread to Yerushalayim, Chevron and other locations in Eretz Yisroel. The merit of dedicating the *hadlaka* was available for purchase, and there were several instances that the Rebbe Rashab bought the *hadlaka* in Chevron.<sup>10</sup>

### The Tahalucho

"In times past, there weren't many *chofshim* [individuals who threw off the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos*] in Eretz Yisroel," the Frierdiker Rebbe



noted on Lag Ba'omer 5699\* (תרצ"ט).<sup>11</sup> “However, later the *chofshim* grew in numbers, and the *yerei'im* would suffer from them when visiting the resting place of Rashbi on Lag Ba'omer. They would scoff at them and even threw stones at them. They would have to go in groups, [protecting themselves] until they would be able to reach and spend time at the *kever* of Rashbi.

“Someone once related to my father [the Rebbe Rashab] that *chofshim* spend time at the *kever* of Rashbi in Meiron, but do not put on tefillin. My father responded, that if the Berditchever Rav would be here today, he would have fashioned an entire chandelier from it. Besides for being *melamed zchus* on a person, [the Berditchever] would also influence him to do *teshuvah*...”

The presence of non-observant Jews in Meiron on Lag Ba'omer presented a unique opportunity. In 5712\*, just one year after the Rebbe assumed the *nesius*, the newly established Tze'irei Chabad in Eretz Yisroel was looking for opportunities to fulfill the Rebbe's call for *hafatzas hamaayanos*, and they decided to utilize the pilgrimage to Meiron just for this purpose.

“On Erev Lag Ba'omer,” the trip is described in Bitaon Chabad,<sup>12</sup> “a caravan of five automobiles left Tel Aviv to Meiron. When they arrived that evening, a microphone was set up on the roof of the *kever* and they broadcast a program of Tze'irei Chabad, including speeches about the Baal Shem Tov, Rashbi, as well as *niggunim* and *chazzaras dach*...”

“At daybreak, the caravan proceeded to Tzfas, and continued to stop in many locations. They sang and danced, and encouraged the bystanders to strengthen their Yiddishkeit.”

In response to their *duch*, the Rebbe wrote how happy he was to receive news of the initiative, and encouraged them to make more stops in the future, comparing their trip to the Chassidim of the Mittlerer Rebbe who famously stopped in every village on their way back from Lubavitch to review the Chassidus they had heard from the Rebbe.<sup>13</sup> In many letters over the following years, the Rebbe strongly pushed for the continuation of the tradition, and encouraged all those “*hashayachim lazeh*—those appropriate for the task” to make the journey.<sup>14</sup>

The Rebbe would also participate in the costs of these activities, and

encouraged Chassidim to keep up the relationships with those they met in Meiron.<sup>15</sup> Detailed reports were expected from the participants.

The annual *tahalucha* to Meiron became an official tradition. Dozens of *anash* would board buses that would slowly make their way to Meiron, stopping off in many towns and cities along the way to speak about Yiddishkeit, and each year, the military would arrange a sound system and radio broadcast for the Chassidim from the roof of Rashbi's *kever*. In later years, mitzvah tanks also became part of the scene.

After receiving the report of the second year of activities in 5713\*, the Rebbe noted that they weren't utilizing the opportunity presented by the *upsherenish minhag*—as many Jews in Eretz Yisroel customarily celebrate their children's *upsherenish*, known there as a “*chalakeh*,” in Meiron. The Rebbe suggested that Alef-Beis cards be distributed to the children along with some additional information for the parents.<sup>16</sup>

In 5717\*, Bitaon Chabad reported a special “Mivtza Hanachas Tefillin,” where “pairs of *bochurim* made rounds among the endless streams of people and gave more than 1000 people the opportunity to put on tefillin. It was an amazing scene to watch; many of the people pledged to once again begin putting on tefillin every day.”<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that this was a full 10 years before the Rebbe officially launched *mivtza tefillin*.

The trip to Meiron in those days was a significant journey, especially with all the stops on the way, which meant that the *yeshiva bochurim* would miss a significant amount of *seder hayeshiva*. There were times when the *hanhala* suggested in letters to the Rebbe that the trip be canceled that year, but the Rebbe always encouraged them to continue.

“Because they did have the custom [to travel to Meiron] in years past,” the Rebbe writes to Reb Shlomo Chaim Kesselman, “it isn’t worthwhile to cancel it entirely and to give place for people to learn *pirushim*, including some unwanted *pirushim* [from the cancelation]. On the other hand, there is no necessity that the *entire* yeshiva make the journey, along with all the teachers and *roshei yeshiva* etc. I am surprised that you write that an entire week of learning will be canceled, because in this regard, it isn’t the quantity that matters, but the quality.”<sup>18</sup>

In a similar letter to Reb Shmuel Eliezer Heilperin, Rosh Yeshiva of Toras Emes, the Rebbe writes that “obviously, it was correct to allow the *talmidim* to travel to Meiron on Lag Ba’omer, for several reasons, and in this regard it is stated, *‘eis la’asos laHashem vegomer’* [heifeiru *torasecha*—in a time of need, it is appropriate to...]”<sup>19</sup>

### Personal Gain

Several years later, a new element was added to the *hafatzas hamaayanos* in Meiron:

## “IT ISN’T WORTHWHILE TO CANCEL IT ENTIRELY AND TO GIVE PLACE FOR PEOPLE TO LEARN *PIRUSHIM*.”

The Rebbe’s *sichos* at the Lag Ba’omer Parade were transmitted via live hookup so that everyone in Meiron could hear and participate.

In 5736\*, the Rebbe declared the year as “Shnas Hachinuch” to promote Jewish education for children. Although Lag Ba’omer was not on Sunday that year, a parade was still arranged in New York in honor of the special campaign. However, they were not sure if the Rebbe would attend.

Then, word leaked out. “We still aren’t sure,” writes Reb Lipa Brennen, a *bochur* at the time, “but the Rebbe will probably attend the parade. We assume so because the Rebbe instructed to arrange a hook-up to the *kever* of Rashbi in Meiron.”<sup>25</sup>

The Rebbe cherished those hookups. This was actually expressed by the Rebbe several years earlier, in 5733\*, when he had announced that he would not attend the Lag Ba’omer Parade that year due to certain unfortunate events that took place between Chassidim. After receiving a

deluge of mail begging him to attend, the Rebbe addressed the issue on Shabbos, Erev Lag Ba’Omer.

After explaining how precious the parade was to him, more than anyone else, the Rebbe added, “I will admit that I was informed that they would hear [the *sicha*] in Meiron, because they arranged a hook-up with the military. It is therefore possible that I will have gain from [attending the parade]... and [the hook-up] definitely is important to me, and I am happy about it. Nevertheless...”

### They Pulled the Plug...

“During the *hilula*,” reports Reb Efroim Wolff to the Rebbe, “Reb Nochum Kaplan spoke for 15 minutes about *mitvza tefillin*. When he began talking about Mihu Yehudi, the police pulled the plug (possibly upon the instructions of the officer from the Ministry of Religious Services). Only later did we find another source of electricity, and he continued his speech.”<sup>26</sup>

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MIVTZOIM AT MEIRON, LAG B'OMER 5730.



A GROUP OF LUBAVITCHER CHASSIDIM SING NIGGUNIM OVER THE LOUDSPEAKERS AT MEIRON ON LAG B'OMER 5717.

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## Upsherenish at Rashbi

The Arizal began an additional custom: Holding an *upsherenish* at the *kever* of Rashbi. When his own son came of age, he brought him to Rashbi's *kever* and held a great celebration.<sup>20</sup>

The Rebbe also encouraged people to bring their children to Meiron, whether the *upsherenish* was on Lag Ba'omer or not.<sup>21</sup> (Although some maintain that an *upsherenish* may be held during the days of *sefira*, the Rebbe advised against this custom, and suggested instead that the *upsherenish* be held on Lag Ba'omer in Meiron, as per the concept of combining meritorious elements—בגלגלין זכות על ידי זכאי.)<sup>22</sup>

However, when one father suggested delaying the *upsherenish* several months until they would be able to make the trip, the Rebbe rejected the idea. "I don't see the value in delaying the opportunity to educate him in the mitzvah of *peyos*."<sup>23</sup>

Rabbi Zev Zalmanov in Kfar Chabad received similar instructions: "About the third birthday of your son Yisroel *sheyichye*, which is on Rosh Chodesh Shevat, and you considered postponing the haircut until Lag Ba'omer: I have already written my opinion to a few members of *anash* not to postpone the haircut without a very good reason..."<sup>24</sup>

publicized Tehillim recital was held at the *kever*.<sup>27</sup>

## Supernatural...

"*Sefarim* relate a wondrous thing," the Rebbe said before Lag Ba'omer 5738\*. "That those who will spend Lag Ba'omer in Meiron would experience a wondrous and totally inexplicable joy. That's what they felt. And why was it so? Because at that moment, Rashbi is on his most sublime level.

"The explanation of this concept is simple:

"Just as no one can compare to Moshe Rabbeinu, yet every person has a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu within him ... so too with Rashbi, who is compared to Moshe in his generation. He is present within every Jew, and this is especially the case during the generation of the 'footsteps of Moshiach,' because we have a special relation to *pnimius haTorah*."<sup>29</sup>

With this message about Rashbi in mind, we can begin to comprehend the great emphasis the Rebbe places on the Lag Ba'omer parades at 770, and on the visits to Meiron, both to do *mitvzoim*, especially on Lag Ba'omer, but also at any point in the year due to its spiritual significance.

The Lag Ba'omer parades took place in 770 for a span of close to 30 years. Then, several days before Lag Ba'omer 5740\*, the Rebbe announced that it was time for Rashbi to be brought to the Jews outside of Meiron, throughout Eretz Yisroel. The Rebbe instructed that those parades be quickly organized and held in all cities, especially in Eretz Yisroel.

From that year on, the *hafatzas hamaayanos* associated with Rashbi was brought to a whole new level. To this very day, hundreds of thousands of children throughout Eretz Yisroel participate in the celebrations.

The Rebbe encouraged every single Chossid to participate in these parades. As the Rebbe said in 5743\*,



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AN UPSHERNISH AT MEIRON, LAG B'OMER 5730.

During the early 5730s\*, the Rebbe spoke continually about the need to rectify the law of "Who is a Jew." The issue was considered extremely controversial, and the Rebbe said that every opportunity must be utilized to spread awareness about it. In those years, Rabbi Wolff's reports to the Rebbe describe how, during the trip to Meiron, Chassidim distributed

thousands of pamphlets and spoke to many individuals in both private and public settings about the importance of correcting the terrible law.

Mihu Yehudi was also the cause for a special *atzeres tefilah* that was held at the *tziyun* in Meiron. The day of 7 Adar 5731\* was declared as a *yom tefilah* regarding the law, and a widely

“Rashbi gefint zich un tantzt mit di kinder, Rashbi is at the parade and dances with the children, and you want to go home to eat lunch? Such behavior suites a *pereh adam*, a wild person!”<sup>30</sup>

With the advent of the parades, visiting Rashbi’s physical resting place received less focus. If you want to connect with Rashbi on his day of joy, the Rebbe maintained, the most profound way to do so was through spreading his light to another Jewish child.

In addition to participating in the parades, the Rebbe spoke of another

way of connecting with Rashbi on Lag Ba’omer:

“In the *nusach* we recite at the Ohel, as it is printed in Maaneh Lashon, we recite:

“In the merit of the *tannaim* and *amoraim* ... and in the merit of the *tzaddikim* buried in this place.’ We can infer that at the *tziyun* of a *tzaddik*, all other *tzaddikim*, *tannaim* and *amoraim* are present as well, including, and especially (in relation to Lag Ba’omer) Rashbi.

“Therefore, I would suggest that tomorrow, on the day of Lag Ba’omer, *yom hilula* of Rashbi, his ‘day of joy,’

a great joy, comparable to the joy of a marriage, a *hilula* ... everyone should visit the Ohel, where the Rashbi is present as well.”<sup>31</sup> **T**

1. *Masa Harebi B'Eretz Hakodesh* pg. 104.
2. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 23 pg. 27.
3. *Masa Harebi B'Eretz Hakodesh* pg. 105
4. Lag Ba’omer 5699. *Sefer Hasichos 5699* pg. 332.
5. 9 Nissan 5694. *Igros Kodesh Admur Harayatz* pg. 184.
6. *Sichos Kodesh 5736* vol. 1 pg. 272.
7. 9 Iyar 5735. *Sichos Kodesh 5735* vol. 1 pg. 72
8. Lag Ba’omer 5740. *Sichos Kodesh 5740* vol. 3 pg. 26.
9. Shabbos Parshas Emor 5750. *Sefer Hasichos 5750* vol. 2 pg. 460.
10. Lag Ba’omer 5699. *Sefer Hasichos 5699* pg. 330. Interestingly, in a letter to Reb Shneur Zalman Slonim of Chevron, we find that the Rebbe Rashab actually asks him to specifically buy the *hadlaka* of Chevron, but not that of Meiron: “I would like to acquire the *hadlaka* in Chevron, but do not buy the *hadlaka* on the *kever* of Rashbi for me.” (22 Adar 5648. *Igros Kodesh Admur Harashab* vol. 3 pg. 14.)
11. Lag Ba’omer 5699. *Sefer Hasichos 5699* pg. 330-1.
12. Bitaan Chabad issue 1 pg. 16.
13. 19 Sivan 5712. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 6 pg. 132.
14. 11 Iyar 5716. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 13 page 50.
15. 21 Iyar 5717. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15 pg. 172.
16. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 7 pg. 274
17. Bitaan Chabad Issue 15 pg. 58.
18. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 11 pg. 61.
19. 21 Iyar 5717. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 15 pg. 172.
20. Pri Etz Chaim, Shaar Sefiras Haomer chap. 7.
21. 1 Elul 5722. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 22 pg. 311.
22. 21 Iyar 5714. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 9 pg. 58
23. 3 Iyar 5715. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 11 pg. 60.
24. 26 Kislev 5717. *Igros Kodesh* vol. 14, p. 220.
25. Nitzutzei Rabbi, Hiskashrus issue 501.
26. Yimei Temimim vol. 5 pg. 313.
27. Yimei Temimim vol. 5 pg. 125-6.
28. Kfar Chabad Magazine issue 853.
29. *Sichos Kodesh 5738* vol. 2
30. Shabbos Behar-Bechukosai 5743. *Hisvaaduyos 5743* vol. 3 pg. 1457.
31. Lag Ba’omer 5710. *Toras Menachem 5710* pg. 68.

## “RASHBI IS AT THE PARADE AND DANCES WITH THE CHILDREN, AND YOU GO HOME TO EAT LUNCH?”

### A Spiritual Welcome

Rabbi Elchanan Yakobovitch of Nachlas Har Chabad related:<sup>28</sup>

“In 5729\*, the first year that Nachlas Har Chabad was established, the Rebbe instructed that *anash* who had settled there should travel to Meiron on Lag Ba’omer together with the new immigrants from Gruzia, who had also settled in Nachlas Har Chabad. The Rebbe said he would participate in the expenses of the trip.

“Indeed, we all traveled together to Meiron in three big buses, and it caused a significant *hisorerus*.”



MIVTZOIM BOOTH IN MEIRON, LAG B'OMER 5735\*.