



## Introduction

1. Dr. Tzvi Kaspi, *S. Y. Agnon's fascination with Lag ba'Omer*, HaTzofeh May 1996

<https://agnonhouse.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/doc02308620170608144312.pdf>

והנה דברי עגנון על מאורעות שקרו בל"ג בעומר: "בל"ג בעומר תרס"ט זכיתי לעלות לארץ ישראל והתהלכתי בארצות החיים שש שנים כדין עבד עברי, ובשביעית ירדתי לחוצה לארץ".

במאמר "ביום שנעשיתי אזרח כבוד של ירושלים" אנו קוראים: "רבותיי זיכרונם לברכה אמרו בגמרא, תענית כ"ט א', מגלגלין זכות ליום זכאי. כשאני מסתכל במאורעות שארעו אותי בל"ג בעומר דומה עלי, שלא לגבי כל ישראל בלבד אמרו חכמים אלא אף לגבי אדם מישראל שכמותי. נכנסתי לחופה עם אשתי שתחיה בל"ג בעומר, סיימתי את "בלבב ימים" בל"ג בעומר. תחילת כתיבת ספרי "ימים נוראים" בל"ג בעומר הייתה. אף שאר כמה טובות חיצוניות בל"ג בעומר נתגלגלו ובאו. "והיה העקוב למישור" בתרגום שבדי בל"ג בעומר הגיעני. שמועה שנשמכתי על ידי חכמי אמריקה לדוקטור, בל"ג בעומר הגיעה אצלי. ואם אני מוסיף כאן את הנס שנעשה לי לפני חמישים שנה ויותר בהילולא של רבי שמעון בר יוחאי במירון, שנפלה גזוזטרא ונהרגו עשרים ושבעה מישראל ואני שעמדתי שעה קלה קודם לכן עם כל הקדושים נותרתי חי, הרי באמת זכות היום."

Here are Agnon's words regarding events which occurred on Lag ba'Omer: "On Lag ba'Omer 1909 I merited to ascend to the Land of Israel, and I walked the Land of the Living for six years, the law of a Jewish slave, and on the seventh I descended to the Diaspora."

In an essay, *On the day I became an honorary citizen of Jerusalem*, we read: "Our masters, of blessed memory, said in the Talmud (Taanit 29a), 'We roll in merit for a meritorious day.' When I look at the events which happened to me on Lag ba'Omer, it appears to me that the Sages said this not only for national Jewish events, but also for individual Jews like me. I entered the *chuppah* with my wife on Lag ba'Omer, I completed *In the Heart of the Seas* on Lag ba'Omer. I began writing my book, *Days of Awe*, on Lag ba'Omer. Also, many other, mundane good events rolled along. The Swedish translation of *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight* arrived on Lag ba'Omer. The news I had received a doctorate from American scholars arrived on Lag ba'Omer. And here I add the miracle done for me more than fifty years ago, at the *hilula* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron, when a floor collapsed and some 27 Jews were killed. I, who had been standing with all of those holy ones a short while earlier, remained alive, in truth because of the merit of the day."

2. Tracy Frydberg, *Mystery of who wrote the 'Prayer for the State of Israel' is finally solved*, Times of Israel Apr. 18 '18

Unbeknownst to most worshippers is the decades-long debate over who back in 1948 authored the prayer, which was then and remains today an important addition to Jewish and Israeli liturgy. Until now, theories have split academics into two camps — those who attribute the prayer to Israeli author S.Y. Agnon, and those who believe Israel's first chief Ashkenazi rabbi, Isaac Halevi Herzog penned the poem. But recent findings discovered by Dr. Yoel Rappel, an Israeli scholar of Jewish history, confirm that Herzog, the grandfather of current opposition leader in the Knesset, Isaac "Bougie" Herzog, was the true author of the symbolic prayer, which was then edited by his friend and Nobel Prize winner, Agnon. Rappel's findings were corroborated by Israel's National Library. The evidence and discourse between Agnon and Herzog surrounding the prayer are a part of the Library's S.Y. Agnon Archive.

3. S. Y. Agnon's Acceptance Speech for the 1966 Nobel Prize in Literature

[https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1966/agnon-speech.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1966/agnon-speech.html)

It is said in the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 23a): "In Jerusalem, the men of discrimination did not sit down to dine in company until they knew who their companions were to be," so I will now tell you who am I, whom you have agreed to have at your table. As a result of the historic catastrophe in which Titus of Rome destroyed Jerusalem and Israel was exiled from its land, I was born in one of the cities of the Exile. But always I regarded myself as one who was born in Jerusalem. In a dream, in a vision of the night, I saw myself standing with my brother-Levites in the Holy Temple, singing with them the songs of David, King of Israel, melodies such as no ear has heard since the day our city was destroyed and its people went into exile. I suspect that the angels in charge of the Shrine of Music, fearful lest I sing in wakefulness what I had sung in dream, made me forget by day what I had sung at night; for if my brethren, the sons of my people, were to hear, they would be unable to bear their grief over the happiness they have lost. To console me for having prevented me from singing with my mouth, they enable me to compose songs in writing.

## What is the Omer, and what is Lag ba'Omer?

- Why is the period of the Omer a positive time? See sources 4 and 5
- How did a period during the Omer become negative? See source 6
- Why is Lag ba'Omer a special day? See sources 7-12

### 4. Vayikra 23:15-16

וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּזְחַרְת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבְּיָאָכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שָׁבָתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה: עַד מִמִּזְחַרְת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִית תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַד':

And you shall count for yourselves, from the day after the Shabbat, from the day you bring the *omer* of elevation, seven complete weeks they shall be. Until the day after the seventh week you shall count fifty days, and you shall bring a new gift to G-d...

### 5. Sefer haChinuch (13<sup>th</sup> century Spain) #306

ומפני כן, כי היא כל עיקרן של ישראל ובעבורה נגאלו ועלו לכל הגדולה שעלו אליה, נצטוינו למנות ממחרת יום טוב של פסח עד יום נתינת התורה, להראות בנפשנו החפץ הגדול אל היום הנכבד הנכסף ללבנו...

And because of this, for [the Torah] is the root of Israel, for which Israel was redeemed and through which she rose to all of the greatness she achieved, we are commanded to count from the day after the [first] holiday of Passover until the day the Torah was given, to demonstrate our great desire for that honoured day...

### 6. Talmud, Yevamot 62b

אמרו שנים עשר אלף זוגים תלמידים היו לו לרבי עקיבא מגבת עד אנטיפרס וכולן מתו בפרק אחד מפני שלא נהגו כבוד זה לזה. והיה העולם שמם עד שבא ר"ע אצל רבותינו שבדרום ושנאה להם - ר"מ ור' יהודה ור' יוסי ורבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר בן שמוע - והם הם העמידו תורה אותה שעה.

It is said that Rabbi Akiva had twelve thousand pairs of students, stretching from Gevath to Antiphres, and all of them died in the same season, for they had not treated each other with respect. The world was desolate, until Rabbi Akiva came to our sages in the south and taught them Torah - Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yosi, Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua. They were the ones who maintained Torah at that point.

### 7. Rabbi Yosef Karo and Rabbi Moshe Isserless (16<sup>th</sup> cent. Israel & Poland), Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 493:2-3

ב: נוהגים שלא להסתפר עד ל"ג לעומר, שאומרים שאז פסקו מלמות, ואין להסתפר עד יום ל"ד בבקר...  
הגה: ובמדינות אלו אין נוהגין כדבריו, אלא מסתפרין ביום ל"ג...

ג: הגה: מיהו בהרבה מקומות נוהגים להסתפר עד ראש חודש אייר, ואותן לא יספרו מל"ג בעומר ואילך, אעפ"י שמותר להסתפר בל"ג בעומר בעצמו...

2: RYK: The practice is not to have a haircut until Lag la'Omer, for they say that this is when they stopped dying. One should not have a haircut until the morning of the 34<sup>th</sup>...

RMI: And in these lands they do not do thus, but they have haircuts on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day...

3: RMI: But in many places they have haircuts until Rosh Chodesh Iyar, and they do not have haircuts from Lag ba'Omer onward, although they may have a haircut on Lag ba'Omer itself...

### 8. Rabbi Menachem Meiri (13<sup>th</sup> century France), Commentary to Yevamot 62b

אלו הוזכר כאן שכלם מתו מפסח ועד עצרת. וקבלה ביד הגאונים שביום ל"ג בעומר פסקה המיתה.

And it is mentioned here that all of these students died between Passover and Shavuot. And there is a tradition from the Gaonim that the death stopped on Lag ba'Omer.

### 9. Rabbi Ari Kayser, *A Month of Second Chances*, Aish haTorah

<https://www.aish.org.uk/resources/a-month-of-second-chances-694>

We mourn the deaths of the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva. On the 33<sup>rd</sup> day they ceased dying. And it was on that very day a number of years later that Rabbi Akiva decided to rebuild his dynasty of Torah and started again, this time with only five students. This day thus represents a second chance for Torah.

## 10. Talmud, Sanhedrin 86a

סתם מתניתין רבי מאיר, סתם תוספתא רבי נחמיה, סתם ספרא רבי יהודה, סתם ספרי רבי שמעון, וכולהו אליבא דרבי עקיבא:  
The author of an unattributed Mishnah is Rabbi Meir, an unattributed Tosefta is Rabbi Nechemiah, an unattributed Sifra is Rabbi Yehudah, an unattributed Sifri is Rabbi Shimon – and all of them are within the thought of Rabbi Akiva.

## 11. Talmud, Shabbat 33b

...יתבי רבי יהודה ורבי יוסי ורבי שמעון ויתבי יהודה בן גרים גבייהו. פתח רבי יהודה ואמר: כמה נאים מעשיהן של אומה זו! תקנו שווקים תקנו גשרים תקנו מרחצאות! רבי יוסי שתק. נענה רבי שמעון בן יוחאי ואמר: כל מה שתקנו לא תקנו אלא לצורך עצמן! תקנו שווקין להושיב בהן זונות, מרחצאות לעדן בהן עצמן, גשרים ליטול מהן מכס. הלך יהודה בן גרים וסיפר דבריהם ונשמעו למלכות. אמרו: יהודה שעילה יתעלה, יוסי ששתק יגלה לציפורי, שמעון שגינה יהרג...  
אזלו טשו במערתא איתרחיש ניסא איברי להו חרובא ועינא דמיא והוו משלחי מנייהו והוו יתבי עד צוארייהו בחלא כולי יומא גרסי בעידן צלויי לבשו מיכסו ומצלו והדר משלחי מנייהו כי היכי דלא ליבלו איתבו תריסר שני במערתא אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא אמר מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזרתיה?

Rabbi Yehudah, Rabbi Yosi and Rabbi Shimon were together, and Yehudah ben Gerim was with them. Rabbi Yehudah began to speak, saying, "How beautiful are the deeds of this nation! They created marketplaces, bridges and bathhouses." Rabbi Yosi was silent. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai replied, "Everything they created, they created only for their own needs. They created marketplaces in which to place *zonot*, they created bathhouses to pamper themselves, they created bridges to collect tariffs." Yehudah ben Gerim informed the Romans of this, and the words were heard by the government. They said, "Yehudah praised us, and should be elevated. Yosi was silent, so let him be exiled to Tzipori. Shimon mocked us, and should be killed."...

[Rabbi Shimon and his son, Rabbi Elazar] went and hid in a cave. Miraculously, a carob tree and spring of water were created for them. They removed their clothing and sat in sand up to their necks all day and studied; at the time of prayer they dressed and prayed, and then removed their clothing, so that the clothing would not wear out. They lived in the cave for twelve years. Then, Elijah came and stood at the entrance of the cave and said, "Who will inform the son of Yochai that the Caesar has died, and his decree is annulled?"

## 12. Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> c. Lithuania), Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 493:7

ורגילין לקרותו הלולא דרשב"י ובארץ ישראל מרבין בתפלה ובהדלקת נרות על קברו הקדוש ואומרים שנשתלק ביום זה וגם יצא מהמערה ביום זה.

They customarily call [Lag ba'Omer] *Hilula* of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. In Israel they increase prayer and candle lighting at his sacred grave, and they claim he passed away on this day, and he also left the cave on this day.

### Agnon and Lag ba'Omer

- Do you think the events that S. Y. Agnon associated with Lag ba'Omer justify saying that he had a special connection to this day? See sources 1 and 13
- What is the overall "theme" of Lag ba'Omer? Reflect on sources 8-12 above
- Is there a precedent in Judaism for identifying a time on the calendar as special for us?

## 13. S. Y. Agnon, *To the Galilee* Rabbi Jeffrey Saks tr.

<http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-arts-and-culture/190702/s-y-agnon-to-the-galilee>

After a few years in Jaffa and her settlements and in Jerusalem and her study halls I decided to go and see the Land—the Kinneret and Deganya kibbutzim and their inhabitants, who have added two settlements to the existing thirty-seven. I had too little money to hire a donkey to ride on or a wagon to travel in, but I had plenty of time, so I decided to make my way by foot.

I timed the trip to celebrate Lag BaOmer in Meron, because I still remembered something of what I had heard in my childhood about the spectacles and wonders witnessed on Lag BaOmer night at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. I placed a loaf of bread and some olives in my pack, took my walking stick, and locked my door. I placed the key on the windowsill behind the blinds, so if a friend came to visit and found me away he could still find the key, open my room, and find himself a place to rest. It was the custom in the Land in those days that a person could always find lodging with a friend—if not a proper bed, then at least a floor to sleep on and a roof above his head.

I departed Jaffa and walked nine hours to Hadera.