

## LAG BA'OMER

### THE KEDUSHA OF THE DAY

On the day Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was preparing to leave this world, he told his son Reb Elozar and the talmidim who were gathered around him, "Now is an auspicious time and I will reveal holy secrets that I have never yet disclosed, so that I arrive in *Olam Haba* without reason for embarrassment. I see that today is special, for Hashem and all the tzaddikim are rejoicing in my celebration (*Hilula*)." He instructed his talmid Rabbi Abba to write, Rabbi Elozor to repeat it and the rest of the talmidim to listen carefully, and then revealed to them the section of Zohar known as *Idrah Zutah*. At that time, the kedusha of Rabbi Shimon was so great that none of the talmidim were able to gaze at him, and throughout the day, a fire surrounded the house, preventing anyone from approaching it.

Rebbi Abba recalls, "I was in middle of writing, when in middle of quoting a possuk, Rebbi Shimon stopped at the word 'Chaim'. I waited, wanting to continue, but did not raise my head to see why Rebbi Shimon had stopped, for I was unable to look at the great light that was shining around him. Suddenly, I heard a voice call out a possuk with the word 'Chaim', and then another voice called out another possuk. I fell to the ground and wept. When the fire and the light departed, I saw that the great light, Rebbi Shimon, had passed away. He was lying on his right side and his face was smiling."

Soon afterwards, residents of the village Tzipori came to take the Rashbi to bury him in their village, but the inhabitants of Miron chased them away. Meanwhile, the bed, now outside the house, raised itself in the air, while a fire burned in front of it. A voice rang out, "Come and gather for the *hilula* of Rebbi Shimon." Upon entering the cave where he would be buried, another voice was heard, coming from within the cave, "This man shakes up the world, and many adversaries in *shamayim* are silenced because of him, and Hashem is praised with him daily. Fortunate is his portion, both above and below!"

(זהר ח"ג דף רצ"א ע"ב, רצ"ו ע"ב)

On Lag Ba'Omer, Rashbi was illuminated with the light of Moshiach, thereby attaining the highest level of his lifetime, and revealed it partially to his talmidim. Hence, Lag Ba'Omer is a day of revelation of *pnimiyus hatorah*, the inner aspects of the torah.

(סדור עם דא"ח שער ל"ג בעומר, סה"ש תש"ד ע' 124)

The Arizal said that it is a mitzvah to rejoice on Lag Ba'Omer, because Rashbi called his *yahrtzeit* a celebration. This joy is relevant to every Yid, for Rashbi protects the entire world from judgment. This day is also joyous because the talmidim of Rebbi Akiva stopped dying. As a result of this special day, they began to relate to each other with proper respect.

(לקו"ש חכ"ב ע' 138, 319)

A talmid of the Arizal, Reb Avraham Halevi Galanti, was a *gilgul* of Yirmiyahu Hanovi who had prophesied the *churban*, and therefore constantly mourned over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh. Every single day, he would add the tefila of '*Nacheim*' in davening, which is usually said only on Tisha b'Av. On Lag Ba'Omer, the Arizal and his talmidim went to the Rashbi's kever, and Reb Avrohom said '*Nacheim*', as he usually did. When he finished davening, the Arizal told him, "I have just seen the Rashbi standing by his kever and he said to me, 'Tell this man: Why are you saying '*Nacheim*' on a joyous day? Soon you will need to be comforted.'" Less than a month later, Reb Avrohom's son passed away.

The Rebbe infers from this story that in a certain aspect, Lag Ba'Omer is greater than Shabbos and Yom Tov, when Reb Avrohom did not have to abstain from reciting *Nacheim*.

(שער הכוונות פ"ז ע"א ועוד, התוועדויות תשמ"ג ח"ג ע' 1444)

The gaon Reb Yonasan Eibshitz cautions to make god use of the holy day and not waste it on foolishness.

Similarly, in a letter to his chassidim prior to Lag B'omer, the Alter Rebbe writes: "Rejoice on the day of Rashbi's celebration, because we drink from his wellsprings in chassidus. You should celebrate by singing praises to Hashem from Tehillim, and not *chas veshalom* through silliness."

(יערות דבש ח"ב דרוש י"א, אג"ק אדה"ז ח"א ע' קי"ז)

### CELEBRATING LAG BA'OMER

Lag Ba'Omer was an exceptional Yom Tov by the Mitteler Rebbe. Upon arriving in Lubavitch, he reenacted the minhag of celebrating Lag Ba'Omer in a field outside the city, with a light seuda and 'Lchaim.' The Rebbe would also say 'Lchaim', something he could not usually do due to health reasons, and the chassidim would sing and dance. The Rebbe would perform miracles, *bentching* many childless women to have sons, who will grow up to be true chassidim. Though he usually sent these requests to his brother Reb Chaim Avrohom, on Lag Ba'Omer, he would *bentch* them himself. People waited all year long for Lag Ba'Omer.

The Rebbe would say a maamer and would ask the *eltere chassidim* to relate their Lag Ba'Omer memories of previous years, and share the words of torah and stories that were related then. Even after the Rebbe left, the chassidim would continue to farbreng until the evening.

(היום יום י"ח אייר, תו"מ ח"א ע' 60, סה"ש תש"ו-ה'שי"ת ע' 412)

At a Seudas Shabbos in the home of Rebbetzin Rivka prior to Lag Ba'Omer תרנ"ו, the chossid Reb Hendel related: "From the time that the two chassidishe land-managers settled near Lubavitch, the celebration was held on their grounds, together with a large and festive seuda. A week or two before Lag Ba'Omer, a raffle would be drawn to decide whose field would be used. Whoever had the *zechus* of hosting the

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celebration, would invite the *Yoshevim* (men who learned full time in the Rebbe's beis medrash) and the guests to come on Erev Lag Ba'Omer, and after an early Mincha, a full seudah of fish and meat would be served. During the seuda, maamorim would be taught, chassidic stories told, and we would sing and dance. Generally, the chassidim would remain awake the entire night and then early in the morning, we would daven shachris together, with a minyan, at length (*ba'arichus*). At eleven o'clock, a milchige seuda and 'Lchaim' would be served, and then from three o'clock, we would eagerly await the arrival of the Tzemach Tzeddek.

"The entire winter of תר"ד, the Rebbe forbade the Chassidim to come to Lubavitch, due to a libel of the maskilim, and said chassidim only six times throughout the winter. On Shabbos Hagadol, the Tzemach Tzeddek said chassidim publicly and permitted the chassidim to visit Lubavitch. For Lag Ba'Omer that year, approximately four hundred guests arrived, with the great chassidim Reb Eizik Homler and Reb Hillel Paritcher at their head. On the Shabbos before Lag Ba'Omer, the Rebbe said three maamorim, and the joy was incredible.

"That year, the last of the BeHaB fasts fell out on Erev Lag Ba'Omer. However, the great Rabbonim present *paskened*, that because of the great simcha, the fast would be held only until Mincha, and then they would have the customary seuda. Due to the great joy, the day passed quickly, and the following afternoon the Rebbe participated for two hours and said a maamer."

(סה"ש תש"ו-ה'שי"ת ע' 412)

Ever since his arrival in America, the Rebbe would lead rallies for children on Yomim Tovim, near 770. At these rallies, the Rebbe would speak, arousing the children to increase in torah and the mitzvos connecting with the Yom Tov. Such a rally would be held when Lag Ba'Omer came out on Sunday, for many yiddishe children attended public school, and were then able to join. Beginning in the year תשט"ז, a parade was incorporated into the rally. The children, holding posters with yiddishe messages, would march past the Rebbe, down Eastern Parkway, making a tremendous impact on the non-frum Yidden living there.

The rally would usually begin at 10 a.m. with a talk by Rabbi Yossi Goldstein on the significance of the day, followed by some stories. Afterwards there would be several songs and raffles.

Then at about 11 a.m., the Rebbe would come out, and the pesukim would be recited. The Rebbe would then speak to the children about the day, taking lessons from Rashbi on how to strengthen Yiddishkeit in day-to-day life. The Rebbe would speak close to an hour, pausing at intervals for Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah Hecht to translate into English.

Afterwards, the parade would begin. Starting from תשל"ל, the parade would be lead by 'floats', trucks displaying a yiddishe message on their bed. This would be followed by marching bands from the local schools. Then all the children would march past the Rebbe, displaying posters with selected messages. The Rebbe would watch the entire procedure, commenting on the content of the floats and waving to the passing children.

In those years that the Rebbe did not attend, the Rebbe insisted that the parade, held in honor of Rashbi and the holy day, should not be compromised. The Rebbe would visit the Ohel each year on Lag Ba'Omer, and on some years the Rebbe farbrenged.

(קובץ ל"ג בעומר תש"ע)

## MINHAGIM OF LAG BA'OMER

In Eretz Yisroel, many have the minhag to go to the keiver of Rashbi in Miron to daven and celebrate there.

There is a minhag on this day to light bonfires representing the light of Rashbi. People would purchase the *zechus* of the bonfire lighting in

Miron and other places. The Rebbe Rashab purchased the lighting in Chevron a number of times.

Many sing special *piyutim* which include praises of Rashbi. The Rebbe said though the Rebbeim did not sing them, they would think them.

(התועדות תשמ"ז ח"ג ע' 271)

The Rebbe said: It has been an age old minhag of Lag Ba'Omer to take the children out to the field where the meaning of the day is explained to them, they are given sweets, and they play with bows and arrows. These Lag Ba'Omer activities should add in the chinuch of the children, causing them to shine in torah and Yiddishkeit.

(התועדות תשמ"ז ח"ג ע' 268)

The tzaddik Reb Mendel of Riminov explains that the game of bow and arrow is played because no rainbow, a sign of Hashem's anger, was seen during the lifetime of Rashbi, for he protected the entire generation.

Reb Mendel's talmid, the tzaddik Reb Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov (the *Bnei Yisaschar*), further explains this game, according to what is written in Zohar, that an especially bright rainbow shows on the imminent revelation of the light of Moshiach. Being that this light is revealed in the Zohar to some extent, we play the bow and arrow.

The Rebbe explains the connection to the talmidim of *cheider*. An arrow can attack the enemy even from a distance. This alludes to those matters of kedusha which defeat the *Yetzer Horah* in advance (i.e. davening and tzedakah), allowing the person to learn torah undisturbed.

(בני יששכר חודש אייר מ"ג או"ד, תוי"מ ח"ג ע' 77)

In a letter to all yiddishe children, the Rebbe writes: On the day of Lag Ba'Omer, you should assemble to mention Rashbi and his greatness, to discuss his teachings and to firmly commit to fulfill them with joy. In addition, you should organize a parade in your area, to publicize your connection to torah, like Rashbi, whose primary occupation was torah. The *zechus* of Rashbi will help you fulfill torah and mitzvos with joy, and bring the geulah soon.

(התועדות תשמ"ז ח"ג ע' 209)

At a parade, the Rebbe said that we must learn from the primary trait of Rashbi of learning torah in a manner of '*toraso umnaso*', torah was his only occupation. The Rebbe explained that everyone should, in a similar manner, dedicate themselves entirely to torah, so that even when doing other things, it is noticeable that one's profession is torah. This is particularly relevant to children who have no other concerns to worry about.

Another lesson we must take, is to increase in Ahavas Yisroel and the learning *Pnimitus Hatorah*, which was revealed by Rashbi.

(לקו"ש חל"ז ע' 128)

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