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לעבן מיט'ן רבי'ן

Lag B'omer 5744

Lag B'omer 5744. A magnificent experience for all those who participated then; as it will be for those who relive it by viewing the event as it was captured on video.

Lag B'omer festivities with the Rebbe, especially the grand parades that marched along Eastern Parkway, were indeed most unforgettable moments. One need not observe very intensely to note the undeniable pleasure the Rebbe enjoyed from the sight of the children, as he smiled towards them passing by ever so affectionately.

The awe-inspiring scene of the Rebbe's appearance at the main entrance of 770 as he made his way up to the podium, beginning the day's program, left an unwavering impression upon all. The Rebbe's words echoing throughout the streets of Crown Heights as he delivered his timeless message to the children can still be heard piercingly in our hearts, and remain treasured forever.

Such were the Lag B'omer parades. The

culmination of months of hard labor, when Chassidim worked tirelessly to ensure that the parade would indeed behold the success anticipated. Bochorim of all the Lubavitcher Yeshivos toiled endlessly to produce "floats" displaying Jewish themes, collecting their reward in the Rebbe's graceful smile, which they were privileged to witness upon the presentation at the parade.

In 5744, with Lag B'omer falling out to be on a Sunday, the Rebbe would participate in the parade. And so, as the big day was approaching, preparations were well underway.

Preparations

No sooner than the end of *Pesach*, the bochorim were called to a meeting where they discussed the plans for the upcoming parade, as well as the great fair on Empire Boulevard that was to follow it. Having each received their specific instructions, everyone took up their tasks and began bringing their original ideas into action; erecting beautiful floats to

inspire increased enthusiasm in the fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos, and *hafotzas ham'yonos*.

On Friday, 16 Iyar, the flatbeds arrived in Crown Heights ready to carry the exhibits of live themes of Yiddishkeit.

On *Motzoei Shabbos*, Lag B'omer night, the streets of Crown Heights were hustling about with non-stop activity. Many people were occupied with the final touches to their floats and loading them upon the trucks. Others were busy erecting the podium in front of 770 for the Rebbe. At the same time, members of the Sanitation Department meticulously cleaned the streets to befit the coming



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day's affairs. As morning neared, city police officers blocked the entrances to Eastern Parkway, and thousands of chairs were arranged in rows all along the street.

When the sun finally rose at what was the conclusion of a night of exceedingly hard work, it shined upon a most incredible scene: The two buildings adjacent to 770 (784–788 Eastern Parkway) were beautifully adorned with signs bearing the Twelve *pesukim*, as well as a quote from the Rebbe's *kapittel*, “*Veyeid'u ki ata...*” Two large banners displayed the phrases of “*Hareini mekabel*” and “*Ach tzaddikim*” (in accordance with the Rebbe's request earlier this year that they be recited before and after davening in all Jewish congregations).

The podium in front of 770 stood wrapped with solid-colored drapery, ready for the Rebbe to stand upon it throughout the parade. On its exterior stood an inscription of letters in the form of a crown, which read (in Hebrew) “34

Years of the Rebbe's leadership.” At the bottom of the podium to the side stood several benches reserved for the elder Chassidim, and all across the Parkway thousands of chairs were situated to hold the participating children, who would soon arrive. The area to the Rebbe's right was set aside for the girls, while the boys would sit on the left.

The Children's Rally

It was a cloudy Sunday morning in Crown Heights and the meteorologists predicted a rainy day, but evidently, Hashem had other plans.

The streets filled quickly with thousands of children, bused in from around the neighborhood and many other cities in the New York metropolitan area. As the children found their seats, they were each handed packets containing some refreshments and coins for *tzedakka*.

At 10:30, Rabbi Yosef Goldstein (“Uncle Yossi”) began the festivities, singing

popular Jewish classics with the children and explaining to them the significance of their gathering on this auspicious day.

The Rebbe Arrives

The long-awaited moment finally arrived. With the band playing the famous “*Ani Maamin*,” the main door of 770 opened and the Rebbe made his way out to join the event. The Rashag and Rabbi Hodakov stood closely behind the Rebbe, and at his side stood Rabbi J. J. Hecht, the legendary emcee and coordinator of the Lag B'omer parades.

As usual, the rally began with the recitation of the Twelve *pesukim*. Before calling upon each of the children to lead in the recitation, Rabbi Hecht translated the meaning of the forthcoming *possuk* into English for the children.

At the conclusion, the children sang the customary “We Want Moshiaich Now,” and then Chazzan Moshe Teleshevsky was summoned to lead the singing of

“*Sheyibone*,” preceded by the traditional “*Yehi Rotzon*.”

The Rebbe's Address

Rabbi Hecht then requested absolute silence and the Rebbe delivered his address to the children.

In the first *sicha*, the Rebbe discussed the significance of a gathering of Jewish children on Lag B'omer, which emphasizes the idea of *ahavas Yisroel*, a central theme of the day (see synopsis below). When the Rebbe concluded with a blessing that in the merit of Jewish unity we will bring about the final *geulah*, he went on describing in great detail how Hashem will gather in the exiles taking each and every Jew individually. And as Rashi comments, He'll hold us each by hand and lead us to redemption. While saying these words, the Rebbe's voice displayed a sudden burst of emotion and it sounded as though he was suppressing a cry.

Upon the conclusion of the *sicha*, Rabbi Hecht offered a brief translation while the Rebbe listened.

The second *sicha* was relatively long, deriving many lessons pertaining to our service of Hashem from the life and teachings of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. A most exceptional moment was when the Rebbe quoted his famous saying, that wherever the Jews have been exiled, Hashem's presence went along with them. One should not despair and think that he stands in his troubles alone. “No,” says Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. “That is not at all the case. Hashem is with you every moment and through every hardship of this *golus*; he will not take leave of it until all the Jewish people have been redeemed, not even one minute earlier.” Again, the Rebbe cried while saying these words, as his voice slightly choked up.

At the conclusion of this *sicha*, which lasted almost an hour, Rabbi Hecht approached the Rebbe and noted that a full translation of the Rebbe's words would be very time-consuming and infringe on the remainder of the



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program. The Rebbe suggested to suffice with the final point (that increasing in performance of Torah and mitzvos, and especially davening fervently, will bring about the imminent *geulah*), and add that a full transcript of the *sicha* will soon be available in English.

After Rabbi Hecht carried out these instructions, the Rebbe concluded with a closing wish, that the acts of Torah (recitation of *pesukim*), *avodah* (prayer of *Sheyibone*), and *gemilus chassodim* (giving *tzedakka* from the coins that the children received) performed at this gathering will hasten the coming of Moshiach; *bekarov mamosh!*

The Grand Parade

The raffles were then drawn and the three winners were announced. They won—respectively—a free trip to *Eretz Yisroel*, a set of *Shas* and a set of *Rambam*, and a bicycle.

Before setting off the parade, Rabbi Hecht seized the opportunity to wish the Rebbe a blessing on behalf of all those present

that he should be well and speedily lead us to the final *geulah*. With that, the parade was ready to begin.

The parade started with a local police vehicle leading the way, followed by three children carrying the American flag, the *Tzivos Hashem* flag, and the *Merkos* flag.

Then, the representatives of the US military showed their presence, led by the US Marine Corps; they saluted the Rebbe.

Because of the Rebbe's involvement with the armed forces in the United States, the members of the New York National Guard paid special tribute to the Rebbe, the leader of world Jewry. It was in recognition of his tremendous contribution to the betterment of the world, and of his great and inspirational leadership and guidance to bring peace and stabilization to the world in which we live. They conducted a salute, firing into the air in front of the Rebbe. Rabbi Hecht thanked Col. Rabbi Yaakov Goldstein for arranging this tribute.

The parade went on, as all the children in attendance marched by the Rebbe. Dispersed between their groups, the floats were presented as well.

A total of eleven exhibits were presented, and from each of them the Rebbe seemed quite pleased. But one particular float seemed to capture the Rebbe's added attention. It was sponsored by Bris Avrohom and constructed by the students of the "Kevutza" from *Eretz Yisroel*, displaying the imminent emergence from exile to redemption. Placing emphasis on the Jews still stranded behind the Iron Curtain, it displayed their release, and carried a large banner proclaiming "We Want Moshiach now" in Russian. The Rebbe gazed at it for quite a while.

After all the floats had passed, the children resumed parading through the street and the Rebbe continuously waved towards them with a broad, warm smile.

At the conclusion of the parade, when the Rebbe turned to leave, Rabbi Hecht approached and asked the Rebbe if he was satisfied with the parade. "Very!" the Rebbe responded.

The Fair

The children then headed for the great fair on Empire Boulevard. When the Rebbe left for the Ohel at 5:00 p.m., his car passed through the site of the fair as well.

At 7:00 p.m., as the fair was shutting down, the skies opened up with a heavy downpour. This successfully concluded the festivities of Lag B'omer 5744.



In order to assist our readers in comprehending the Rebbe's words spoken at this parade, we offer here a brief synopsis of the main points of each of the sichos. Please bear in mind that this is not a full transcription and it only contains a small portion of the entire address. For a better and all-encompassing understanding of the sichos, it is recommended to read them as they have been published in their entirety.

Sicha 1

Rebbi Akiva's Students

• Lesson from the episode of Rebbi Akiva's students: Ahavas Yisroel

When gathering to commemorate Lag B'omer, we are reminded of the two causes for this day's celebration:

- a) It was on this day that the students of Rebbi Akiva stopped dying.
- b) Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai passed away on this day and he instructed that we rejoice on his yahrtzeit, and he referred to it as his "day of celebration."

The lesson we derive in our service of Hashem from the first point:

We are taught that what caused the epidemic to spread amongst the students was their lack of respect for one another. Needless to say, Rebbi Akiva's students were of extremely refined character, especially given that it was their very teacher who was the author of the phrase, "The mitzvah to love your fellow Jew is the basis of the entire Torah." Certainly, then, they treated one another with respect. Their misdeed was only that they failed to do so in the highest standard possible, the quality of which would befit a student of Rebbi Akiva, with the respect a fellow student of Rebbi Akiva would deserve.

This was true only up until the day of Lag B'omer, but from this day onward the students bettered their actions and restored their conduct to the level expected of them.

The lesson is clear: We must fulfill the mitzvah of *ahavas Yisroel* and love every single Jew, treating them with utmost respect. One may not suffice with anything less than what a Jew truly deserves, considering the prominence of each Jew individually. As is known—and as was repeated in the recitation of the *possuk* of "Ve'hinei"—in Hashem's eyes each one is significant as an entire world!

• Ahavas Yisroel as displayed in today's gathering

The abovementioned idea of Jewish unity displays itself very much in our gathering here today.

The thousands of children here have gathered from a variety of homes and backgrounds. Yet despite our differences, as no two are the same, we've managed to come all together with dignity and respect for one another. Furthermore, we have all gathered for the same purpose and with a common goal, to strengthen our commitment to fulfill Torah as well as its dissemination to our surroundings.

Only the Torah possesses that unique power to unite us all equally, for the Torah was given from One G-d to all the Jewish people, even to the small children.

Our display of a tremendous sense of *Ahavas Yisroel*, with the intention to

renew our commitment to Torah and mitzvos, will bring about Hashem's infinite blessings, as described in the *Parsha* we read last week (*Bechukosai*). Hopefully, this will bring about the ultimate Jewish unity, when Hashem will collect the exiles by taking hold of each Jew individually by the hand, and leading us all together to Eretz Yisroel, with the coming of Moshiach speedily.



Sicha 2

Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai

• Rashbi's life: The ultimate bond with Hashem

Focusing on the second reason for rejoicing on Lag B'omer, Rebbi Shimon Bar Yochai's day of celebration:

[The truth is that this may be associated with the first point (*Ahavas Yisroel*) as well, for Rashbi was connected with every Jew, to the extent



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that he pledged to exempt them all from severity of Heavenly judgment. He also requested that **all** the Jewish people rejoice in his celebration.]

The reason for Rashbi's request that we rejoice on the day of his passing, was due to the intense union with Hashem that he reached on this day, as recorded in his *sefer*, the *Zohar*. It is true that throughout his entire life he worked at being closer to Hashem, but on his final day he reached levels superior to any of those he previously attained.

The lesson:

It is imperative that we do all in our ability to obtain a stronger connection with Hashem, even as young children. Immediately upon entering this world a Jewish child is to be surrounded with holy sights so that he or she is only exposed to that which is pure. After growing up a bit, the child must be taught to recite the "*Modeh Ani*" and other words of Torah, and to live according to them.

When a young girl reaches the age where she can appreciate the superiority of light over darkness she must be taught to kindle the Shabbos candles, bringing a physically visible light to her home and benefiting all of its inhabitants.

In this manner we must constantly strive to grow in our observance of Torah and mitzvos, just as Rashbi was never complacent with his past achievements, always reaching ever higher.

• **Rashbi's life: Torah study as a primary occupation**

Another important lesson from Rashbi:

We are told that Torah study was his primary occupation (*torasoi um'nusoi*). Similarly, we must also make Torah study our foremost priority.

A craftsman who excels in one particular profession may be found engaging in other activities as well,

but his essential being will always remain engrossed in his field; whether while eating, strolling, or even while dreaming in his sleep! A Jew's "craft" is Torah study, and that should forever be his primary focus. This is especially applicable to children, as they bear no worldly responsibilities, they must certainly devote all their time to Torah study, thereby serving as an example for their parents, too.

• **Rashbi's teaching: Hashem is at our side**

Rashbi taught us an idea most vital to our endurance of the hardships we encounter in *golus*. We find ourselves surrounded by a society where the dollar is king, and yet at the same time we attempt to encourage our children to stay true to the Torah; an ancient Torah which was given, in the words of our scoffers, thousands of years ago in a desert. This leads to a rather challenging task; where do we gather the courage to keep up at it?

Says Rashbi: Wherever the Jews have gone into exile, the Divine Presence has come along with them. We have never been left alone; Hashem is always at our side suffering, so to speak, from our hardships.

Furthermore, when the time will come to leave the exile, He will not leave even one moment sooner than we. In other words, Rashbi tells each and every Jew: You can be at peace; Hashem is always with you, and He'll remain with you until the final moment of *golus*!

• **Rebbi Elazar adds: His boundless love for us**

The son of Rashbi, Rebbi Elazar, takes the matter one step further.

He uses an analogy of a bride stranded in a tannery filled with a terrible odor. Her bridegroom, in his love for her, is not merely oblivious to the unpleasant smells, but they appear to him as a

delightful fragrance. Hashem, in his love for the Jewish people, remains close to them even while they're in *golus*, notwithstanding all the evil so prevalent there. And more, the evil influences (which are likened to an unpleasant smell because of their lack of true substance) come across to Hashem as a beautiful fragrance. For regardless of it all, the Jewish people persist in observing Torah and mitzvos with sincere *mesirus nefesh*. This is very precious in the eyes of Hashem, and He, in turn increases our abilities to strengthen our adherence to His Torah, rendering us ever more deserving of the imminent *geulah*.

• **In today's portion of daily Chumash...**

Today's portion of Chumash (the beginning of *Parshas Bamidbar*) discusses the counting of the Jewish people in the desert. This stresses yet again how cherished we are in the eyes of Hashem, which is the motive for him counting us time and again.

• **In today's portion of daily Rambam...**

In the daily study of Rambam today we learn the laws of *tefillah*. This is a way to manifest the idea of connecting oneself with the A-lmighty, a concept very much related to Lag B'omer and the life of Rashbi, as mentioned earlier.

Additionally, the Rambam speaks of the original text of the *Amidah*, which contained only eighteen blessings, and that later another blessing was inserted due to the increasing hardships in *golus*. This exemplifies our devotion to Hashem even in the worst phases of our suffering. Indeed, a tannery of horribly-smelling hides, yet at the same time we pray for our imminent deliverance, "תחזינה עינינו בשוכך לציון, ...ברחמים".