

When Lubavitch moved to America in the early 5700s, they were faced with a novel crisis. Unlike in Russia, where they were fighting government persecution and rabid antisemitism, here they were facing something much less ugly, yet in some ways harder to counter—the pull of American culture and the draw of assimilation.

As soon as they landed on American shores, the Frierdiker Rebbe and the Rebbe immediately began opening institutions and developing new approaches to grapple with this growing issue. One of these very early institutions was Camp Gan Yisroel. This year marks the 60th year since the founding of Camp Gan Yisroel. And this is its story.

In the preparation of this article we were greatly assisted by: **B'nois Deshe**, an album of the Rebbe's visits to Camp Gan Yisroel published by **Kehot Publication Society**; and an article by **Avrohom Browd** on Camp Gan Yisroel.

CAMPERS AND STAFF AT A RALLY IN 770 FOLLOWING CAMP.
PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 129071 / 21 ELUL, 5743



· IN THE ·
REBBE'S
RESHUS

CAMP GAN YISROEL

Dedicated by
The Shul of Bal Harbour Community
To achieve a "Chassidisher Derher" this year.

PART 1: THE IDEA

THE PROBLEM

Rabbi Moshe Lazar relates:

“In the beginning of 5716 my friend, Reb Yosef Weinbaum, and I decided that we wanted to establish a Jewish summer camp. The reason for this was there were many public school children who were attending various Jewish camps during the summer and nobody was making sure that they continued their Jewish education in a yeshiva environment.

“I wrote in to the Rebbe about our idea and the Rebbe answered that until Pesach I shouldn’t give it any thought and instead immerse myself in learning. After Pesach I again wrote in to the Rebbe, who answered that we should arrange for someone older to assume the main responsibilities. We recruited Reb Kehos Weiss and after informing the Rebbe, we were called into yechidus.

The Rebbe turned to me with a very serious look and asked me, ‘Why do we need the camp?’

“I turned pale, and everything around me started spinning. I felt like I was going to faint right there in the Rebbe’s room. Here I had spent so many months working on this project, and the Rebbe might not even agree...

“The Rebbe quickly noticed my pale face and told Rabbi Weiss to take me out of the room and calm me down. I slumped into a chair in *gan eden hatachton*, and Rabbi Weiss, who was a very intelligent person, explained to me that there was no reason to get scared. ‘Moshe,’ he told me, ‘the Rebbe wants to hear from you why you think it’s important to make a camp!’

“This was a subject I had been thinking about the past few months, so I thought it

over and we re-entered the Rebbe’s room. With a heartwarming smile, the Rebbe asked, ‘Are you feeling better now?’ This gave me the courage to open my mouth.

“I said that the objective was to educate Jewish children in an atmosphere that was twenty four hours Yiddishkeit and that the ultimate goal was to convince them to attend a yeshiva after the summer.

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“The Rebbe listened intently and then gave his approval, saying that we should go ahead with the project and that it should be with *hatzlacha*.”

GETTING IT GOING

Once the project was officially underway, the Rebbe said that a *vaad* should be established. The members of the *vaad* were: Rabbi Hodakov; Rabbi Shlomo Aharon

IN 5716, PRIOR TO CAMP’S INAUGURAL SUMMER, CAMP GAN YISROEL RAN A YIDDISH ADVERTISEMENT IN DER TOG MORGEN JOURNAL. ITS TITLE READS, “JEWISH PARENTS! REGISTER YOUR BOY IN CAMP GAN YISROEL.”

Kazarnovsky, who was very involved in fundraising; Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht, who had experience with Camp Emunah; and a lawyer named Mr. Aizik Shtrual, who would ensure that everything was up to legal standards.

After the *vaad* was set up, the Rebbe asked that they all come in for a *yechidus* together. There they received many specific *hora’as* about all types of issues related to setting up the camp. (One interesting *hora’ah* was not to purchase land the first year, but to focus instead on finding an area to rent.) The Rebbe gave them a *bracha* for *hatzlacha rabba*, and a *yasher koach* for their involvement in the project.

During that period, the people arranging camp merited to go into *yechidus* several times, and they received detailed guidance and many *brachos* every step of the way—both directly from the Rebbe, and in writing on their questions and *tzetzlach*.

“GAN YISROEL”

As soon as they received the Rebbe’s approval, the staff immediately set off to the Catskills in upstate New York to find a place for the camp. But after much

PHOTO: KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



RABBI KEHOS WEISS SHOWS THE REBBE AROUND THE CAMP GROUNDS IN SWAN LAKE DURING THE VISIT OF 5717.

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102726 / 15 TAMMUZ, 5717

searching, they could not find anything.

At the last minute, only a few short weeks before camp, they managed to find grounds to rent in Ellenville, New York. (These grounds were used the previous year by a camp named “Israel.”) After receiving a report on the new grounds, the Rebbe gave his *haskama*, telling them to begin working immediately so that it would be ready in time.

Once the location was in order, they turned to the Rebbe with the request that he should give the camp a name. The Rebbe answered that they should come up with a few options from which to choose. They came up with several ideas—*Machane Nofesh* was one of them—but the Rebbe turned them all down. Instead he gave the name “Machne Gan Yisroel.”

PART 2: THE REBBE'S VISION

On the second day of Shavuot 5716,¹ the Rebbe announced this new institution, laying out the problems it was addressing and the solutions it offered.

CONSTANT VACATION

First the Rebbe spoke about a major problem plaguing the education system: the outrageous amount of vacation time. In the past, children spent most of the day in *cheder* throughout the whole year, getting vacation only twice: before *pesach*, and before Rosh Hashanah.

[Even this little vacation wasn't at the behest of the teachers of the *cheder*, rather, it was because of their wives.

Since these were the two times a year when they would do a house-cleaning, and being that the *cheder* was located in the house of the *melamed*, there simply wasn't room for them to learn.]

When the children stayed in yeshiva



A GROUP OF TALMIDIM FROM YESHIVAS TOMCHEI T'MIMIM LUBAVITCH POSING IN THE UPSTAIRS ZAL OF 770 IN 5702.

throughout the year, they grew up in a healthy manner, both physically and spiritually.

However, things have changed these days, especially in America; there is a newfound need for vacation:

Since the children are “worn out” from the few hours they learn every day, they have this idea of “the weekend,” they travel out of the city on Friday, returning only on Sunday. [Some people are *mehader* to leave even earlier, on Thursday... There is a limit to how much you can add to Shabbos, but when it comes to the weekend there is no limit at all!]

This is what happens throughout the year. As if that isn't enough, when the winter comes, with Chanukah and *lehavdil* the *goyishe* holidays, there is even more vacation! Since the children work “extremely hard” throughout the year, they are “forced” to relax for a few weeks...

The same applies to the summer, and then it is much worse. During the summer, vacation has no limitations! Not days or weeks of vacation, but *months* of vacation: from the Fourth of July until Labor Day!

Even once the child gets back from vacation, he still can't get back into learning right away, because now he is worn out from the vacation!

This is how people think they will raise a דור ישרים יבורך [an upright, blessed



IN 5733, FOLLOWING THE REBBE'S RENEWED CALLS TO ENROLL CHILDREN IN CAMP, AN INTENSIVE CAMPAIGN WAS LAUNCHED TO PLACE JEWISH CHILDREN IN CAMPS AND SUMMER PROGRAMS. THIS IS AN ADVERTISEMENT PUBLISHED IN THE JEWISH PRESS.

generation]!

The education system is deluged with too much vacation. How can it be fixed?

There are several ways to deal with this issue:

One way is to nullify vacation completely, and have the children learn the entire year in *cheder*. The problem with this idea is that when it was tried, the *roshei yeshivos* themselves opposed it, saying that they, too, wish to rest. They also said that since they wouldn't be getting paid for their summer teaching, they will not be able to focus on preparing a *shiur* because they will have too much *pizur hanefesh*.

Not only are the *talmidim* opposed to abolishing vacation, the *melamdin* are as well! Therefore, another solution was found:

To establish a camp; one that would look like a camp on the outside, but it would be a yeshiva on the inside. In other words, this camp should have all the good *gashmiyus* that other camps have: *cholov Yisroel*, but fatty milk; kosher meat, but fresh meat. And at the same time, they should learn like in yeshiva. They will utilize all the good *b'gashmiyus* for holiness.

The Rebbe added that camp is not only a *substitute* for yeshiva, rather, it also has certain advantages over yeshiva.

Firstly, when the children are in camp, they are relieved from learning *limudei chol*. Second, they are free from the influence of “ידי נשים רחמניות”—their doting mothers who spoil them at every opportunity, which is unhealthy for them both physically and spiritually.

For this reason, when the children are in camp, away from their homes and their mothers, and free of *limudei chol*, one can affect the children even more than in yeshiva. What takes months to accomplish in yeshiva can be accomplished in camp within weeks.

It must be ensured, however, that the *melamdin* aren't pulled after *talmidim*. As the Russian saying goes, “Stari kak mali” [the elder is like the youngster]. Otherwise, not only will they not be able to influence the *talmidim*, to the contrary, they themselves will become like the *talmidim*—going around dressed like kohanim, with pants that only reach their thighs, and playing ball! It must be ensured that this camp will truly be a yeshiva on the inside.

The Rebbe went on to announce the name of the camp, quoting the Zohar which says that there are 53 - ג'ן *parshiyos* in the Torah (although there are actually 54), and since every Jew has a letter in the Torah, the camp was named Gan Yisroel. Then the Rebbe blessed the camp with

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THE REBBE WALKS AROUND THE LAKE AS HE TOURS THE CAMP GROUNDS IN 5716.

success both *b'gashmiyus* and *b'ruchniyus*. When the children return home, the directors will be able to say ראו גידולים שגידלתי, and the parents will want their children to go to camp next year. Everyone who is able to help will surely assist in this endeavor. It isn't *bittul Torah* to be involved in this, rather camp will strengthen Torah, לאפשא לה.

Since this is the first year, the camp needs increased blessings. Hashem should grant the camp with success beyond nature, and it should be more and more successful from year to year until Moshiach comes. Then the entire camp—the field, shul, and *lehavdil* the farm and the lake—will go to Eretz Yisroel together with Moshiach Tzidkeinu.



AN ARTICLE IN DER TOG MORGEN JOURNAL REPORTING ON THE FIRST YEAR OF CAMP GAN YISROEL.

PARENTS-LESS

In several farbrengens years later, the Rebbe expounded upon the advantage of camp over a traditional yeshiva. In a *sicha* on Yud-Gimmel Tammuz 5735, the Rebbe spoke at length about the fact that the children are away from their over-spoiling parents.

The Rebbe began with the Mishna that says הוי גולה למקום תורה, one should exile

PHOTO: JEW/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102724 / 16 TAMMUZ, 5716

PHOTO: KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

himself to a place of Torah. How does a person achieve success in *limud haTorah*? Certainly not by bringing the teacher to the house, where one sleeps properly, has plenty of food, all of his clothing, his mother doting on him and his father buying him clothing and presents. Rather, success in Torah is achieved by being exiled to a place of Torah.

Throughout the year, children live at home, going to *cheder* or yeshiva only during the day, and this creates problems for their education. As soon as his teacher berates him—for whatever reason—the child runs home to his parents complaining that his teacher is bothering him. The mother, in turn, immediately comes running to the school protesting this ‘outrageous’ behavior. “How can this happen!? My husband gives such-and-such amount of money to the school! How can my son (or daughter) not get the highest grades?!

And if the *melamed* won’t give in, I will destroy the entire *mosad*!

Now, it is true that according to Torah a child must be very dear to his parents, but this should never bring to ‘sparing the rod,’ which is contrary to the true benefit of the child.

When a child knows that as soon as he gets home he is a *meyuchas*, the *melamed*’s influence on him becomes limited. Therefore, it is important for the child to go away from home, to a place where he knows he can’t run to his parents about every little thing.

These days it is less common for children to go away to study. Therefore, there is another, easier way to be ‘exiled’ to a place of Torah, and the *yetzer hara* also agrees with this: camp. The mother thinks the idea is to send for relaxation, but on a deeper level, the child is being ‘exiled to a place of Torah.’ At least for these two months—or even six or seven weeks—the child is constantly in the care of their teachers.

That’s why it is a *tikkun gadol* that children can only meet their relatives once a week or once in two weeks. When a mother/father/aunt are able to visit often, they sometimes start ‘pitying’ the child. He can’t run around wild without knowing what to do with himself, and instead he is taught *Toras Hashem* and shown how to keep *mitzvos Hashem*. They might ruin the *chinuch* that camp is providing. When his or her relatives cannot visit often, the child is truly under the influence of camp.

If the staff of camp truly utilizes their time with the children, they can accomplish *gedolos veniflaos*. They have

the ability to illuminate the path of the child not only for the duration of camp, and not only for the year until next summer, but for his entire life.

One might ask, if they teach him so much this year, what will they teach him next year? The answer is, “Longer than the earth is [Torah’s] measure, and wider than the sea.” There will always be enough to teach the children next year and the year after, until the coming of Moshiach.

TWENTY FOUR HOURS

On another occasion², the Rebbe explained an additional reason why camp’s *chinuch* is in some aspects more successful than that of a yeshiva. When they are in yeshiva, the children go home at the end of the day. But when they are in camp they aren’t in the *reshus* of their parents, they are in the *reshus* of the Rebbe twenty four hours a day. They spend weeks at a time completely in the Rebbe’s care.

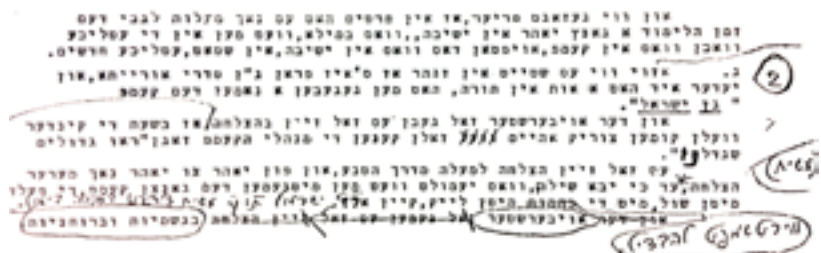
ENJOYING CAMP

In the above farbrengens, the Rebbe highlighted that camp’s advantage over school lies in the fact that the children don’t go home, which means that, a) their *chinuch* is free from their parents’ meddling, and b) they are in the Rebbe’s *reshus* throughout the entire summer. However, this applies only to overnight camps, where the children are away from home, but not necessarily to day camps, where the children go home every night.

In a farbrengen on Shabbos Parshas Shemini 5745, the Rebbe said that camps



AS PART OF THE 5733 CAMPAIGN TO ENROLL CHILDREN IN JEWISH CAMPS, A BROCHURE WAS PRINTED URGING CHILDREN TO PHONE THE SUMMER TORAH EDUCATION PROGRAM (S-T-E-P), UNDER THE AUSPICES OF MERKOS.



THE REBBE’S HANDWRITTEN HAGAHOS ON THE SICHA OF SHAVUOS 5716, REGARDING THE FOUNDING OF CAMP GAN YISROEL.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

In a farbrengen in the summer of 5747³, the Rebbe said:

It is the obligation of *every single man and woman* to do everything in their ability to influence the children around them to go to a camp of *chinuch hakasher*, and even a *chinuch al taharas hakodesh*. This must be done with כפליים לתושי, double strength. As the Gemara says, “If he is accustomed to learning one page, he should learn two pages, and if he was accustomed to learning two, he should learn four.” If you influenced ten children to go to camp last year, then this year you must influence—at the very least—twenty children!

This applies even more so when you see so many Jewish children walking around lacking any sort of guidance, and certainly not proper guidance. Some behave in ways not befitting a Jewish child at all. The fact that you see this child isn’t because your eyes ‘happened’ to be open and you ‘happened’ to see him—such an idea doesn’t even begin to work. Rather, the fact that you see this child is *behashgacha pratis*, (as the Baal Shem Tov says: every single thing that a person sees or hears is a lesson in *avodas Hashem*). It shows that you have the responsibility to try and help him.

If this *avoda* is a new *avoda* for you, one which you are unaccustomed to, you must still do it. For in order to bring the *geula chadasha*, the new redemption—וְנוֹדַל לָךְ שִׁיר חֲדָשׁ—and the *Torah chadasha*, we have to perform an *avoda chadasha*!

Surely you have the sufficient *kochos* to fulfill this *avoda*, for Hashem doesn’t ask of a person more than he can achieve. This includes the *kochos* to change his usual behavior and in one moment to start working for the *chinuch* of Jewish children...

... I am not stating theoretical ideas, rather this should happen in actuality—forget all the meetings and committees etc.—every man and woman should start working on this. You should be able to point with your finger and say:

These are the children who have been brought to *chinuch hakasher* through my work in 5747!

have another advantage over school, an advantage that applies to day camps as well.

To a certain extent, when a child goes to school he feels like he’s being forced. If it were up to him, he would be playing games the whole day; only because of his parents does he go to school and learn. Whenever he’s in school, he waits impatiently to get back to his games, either during recess or when he gets home.

But camp is different. No one has to force a child to go to camp. On the contrary, he loves going.

Therein lies the advantage of camp over school. The child *wants* to be in camp,

and therefore his mindset is more open and free. Therefore the learning and *chinuch* has a much deeper impact on him, more than the *chinuch* he receives in school.

PART 3: THE VISIT

The Rebbe displayed a special fondness for camp, showing much personal interest in all areas relating its operation.

This fondness was displayed in full glory when the Rebbe did something completely out of habit, something that seldom ever happened: the Rebbe left

New York City to pay camp a visit. The Rebbe visited camp several times, and these were the sole times the Rebbe left New York since beginning the *nesius*.

A SHOCK

It was early in the morning of Monday, 16 Tammuz, 5716. As usual, the people involved in camp were working in their office in 770, busily preparing for the grand opening of camp in only a few days.

Suddenly, Rabbi Leibel Groner entered their office, turned to Rabbi Lazar, and asked him how long it takes to travel to camp. He answered that it takes two to three hours, and Rabbi Groner left the office.



SUDDENLY, RABBI LEIBEL GRONER ENTERED THEIR OFFICE, TURNED TO RABBI LAZAR, AND ASKED HIM HOW LONG IT TAKES TO TRAVEL TO CAMP.

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 103583 / 15 TAMMUZ 5717

STANDING UP ON THE FLOOR OF THE CAR, THE REBBE ENCOURAGES THE CAMPERS' SINGING AS HE CONCLUDES HIS 5717 VISIT.

A few minutes later, he arrived back in the office with a surprise: in a few hours, the Rebbe would be visiting the camp grounds!

The shocking news spread like wildfire throughout 770, and everyone immediately tried finding themselves a spot in a car to join the trip.

THE TRIP

After *shacharis*, the Rebbe left 770 and went into his car. The Rebbe sat in the front; in the driver's seat was Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky; in the back were Rabbi Hodakov, Rabbi Moshe Leib Rodstein, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, and Rabbi Groner. The historic trip had begun.

The first car of the caravan, in front of the Rebbe's car, was the car carrying the directors of camp—Rabbi Kehos Weiss, Rabbi Moshe Lazar, and Rabbi Avraham Shemtov—and they led the way. They had several children in their car as well. Behind the Rebbe was a long caravan of cars with dozens of *anash* and *bochurim*.

[When they arrived at a toll, Rabbi Weiss paid for the Rebbe's car as well. Seeing

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the Rebbe's Cadillac, the person manning the toll-booth asked, “Doesn't the person behind you have money to pay for himself?”]

On the way to Ellenville, a policeman stopped Rabbi Weiss's car, and quickly noticed that there were several kids crammed into the car—over the legal limit. As the policeman was getting ready to write the ticket, the Rebbe opened his window and said that some of the kids could switch to his car. In the end, only one of the kids merited to join the Rebbe's car, since after a back-and-forth with the policeman, he gave in and let them go.

As halacha mandates, the Rebbe did not say *tefilas haderech* while the car was driving; the car was stopped, and the Rebbe got out to say *tefilas haderech*.

After three hours of driving, they arrived at the grounds of camp in the Catskill Mountains.

THE TOUR

As soon as they arrived, the Rebbe swiftly got out of the car and began touring the area, taking interest in every detail and giving *hora'as* on making it nicer. First the Rebbe entered the main hall which

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102449 / 15 TAMMUZ, 5717



FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO CAMP GAN YISROEL, THE REBBE VISITS CAMP EMUNAH FOR GIRLS.

was to be the shul, and then he went to check the bunks. Hanging in one of the bunks was a drawing of a house and a child. The Rebbe stopped next to it and said to add a *yarmulke* on the boy's head, and a *mezuzah* on the door.

After examining the bunks, the Rebbe went to see the lake, which was to be used as a swimming pool. Walking around the lake, the Rebbe pointed to the fence, which only surrounded some of it, and instructed them to fence around the entire lake for the safety of the children.

As the Rebbe was walking by the lake, he spoke with the directors about the importance of emphasizing the children's safety. The Rebbe wanted to know which side of the lake is better for the younger children and which for the older children, adding that they should put a marker between the shallow and deep ends. The Rebbe also asked if they would be able to use it as a mikvah.

From there the Rebbe went to see the infirmary, and upon arrival he remarked, “This is a good thing, and it is a necessity, but it shouldn't have to come to use.”

FARBRENGEN

Upon completion of the tour, the Rebbe went into the dining hall for a *farbrengen*, and the entire crowd packed into the room around the tables. The Rebbe wanted to wash in honor of the *chanukas habayis*; someone pointed out the washing station (in a side room next to the kitchen). The Rebbe entered the room, changing his *sirtuk* to a silk one, and washed his hands for bread. After

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102690 / 15 TAMMUZ, 5717



CAMPERS SING AS THE REBBE CONCLUDES HIS VISIT OF 5717.

returning to his place in the dining room, the Rebbe took out a piece of matzah from the pocket of his *sirtuk* and recited *Hamotzi*.

The Rebbe turned to the crowd and said that everyone should wash for bread. Once everyone returned the Rebbe said they should all be seated. The Rebbe turned to someone and asked, “Have you washed?” When someone said that he's busy, the Rebbe answered, “He, too, must go out to wash.”

Next to the head table there were two long tables, and about fifty people stood and sat around them. Some were people working on getting the camp ready, and the rest were the *eltare* Chassidim, *anash*, and *bochurim* who had managed to get a ride from 770.

CHALUKAS MATZAH

After the Rebbe ate a piece of matzah he gave the rest he had brought with him to be distributed among the crowd. The Rebbe requested that each person take only one piece so that everyone would get, saying that, “There's no reason to grab, there is enough for everyone.”

The Rebbe also ensured that the second table receives matzah, saying, “The main thing is that every person should get a piece. The quantity doesn't matter, and if someone grabs a larger piece, it also makes no difference.”

Suddenly, the Rebbe stopped the *chaluka* for a moment, took several pieces of matzah and covered them with a napkin, and put them back in the pocket of his *sirtuk*, resuming the distribution

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102727 / 15 TAMMUZ, 5720



THE REBBE LEAVES ONE OF THE BUNKHOUSES.

immediately thereafter.

A STORY

At the end of the *chaluka*, the Rebbe asked everyone to be seated for the farbrengen. It was a hot summer day without air conditioning, and people were soaked with sweat from all the pushing and shoving to get closer to the Rebbe. Thus, the Rebbe requested that everyone be seated, and then he related a fascinating story:

“My father-in-law once related, that the *misnagdim*—who were always looking to ask questions—asked the Alter Rebbe three questions: 1) Why does he travel in a wagon which is harnessed with several horses? 2) Why does he wear a modern, fur coat (made with special fur)? 3) Why does he eat chicken?”

The Rebbe smiled, and continued, “The Alter Rebbe answered that he travels with several horses because it goes faster; he wears a modern coat because it’s warmer and softer; and he eats chicken because it’s softer than cow meat.”

The Rebbe finished off, “Basic logic says that if everyone would sit down, it wouldn’t be so hot...”

The crowd began settling down, and the Rebbe asked the directors of camp, the *‘baalei-batim*, whether there were enough seats for everyone to sit. The Rebbe called Rabbi Lazar by his name, and asked, “Is there enough room for everyone?” He hastened to answer that there were, and the Rebbe responded with a smile, “There won’t be a *kepaيدا* on you [even if there wasn’t enough seating space].”

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102727 / 15 TAMMUZ, 5717



DURING HIS 5717 VISIT, THE REBBE RECITED TWO SICHOS AND A MAAMAR.

SICHOS AND MAAMAR

The Rebbe began this special farbrengen discussing the importance of the body’s health, and went on to explain the *chiddush* in this area in the generations since the Baal Shem Tov.

One of the themes the Rebbe covered in the *sichos* was that, on a simple level, camp is made to strengthen the physical body. However, when the time in camp is utilized for spiritual health—through adding in Torah and *tefilla*—then the body’s physical health becomes part of *avodas Hashem* as well.

After the *sichos*, the crowd sang a *niggun hisvaadus*. Then the Rebbe said to sing *Avinu Malkeinu*, *Ani Maamin*, and, *Tzama Lecha Nafshi*, directing them to sing *Tzama Lecha Nafshi* several times.

Next, the Rebbe said to sing a *niggun* without words, and then the *niggun hachana* for a *maamar*. Then the Rebbe delivered a *maamor* on the *possuk*, “מזמור לדוד ג' בנאות דשא וג'.”

After the *maamar* they sang *Niye Zuritche Chloptze*. The Rebbe encouraged the singing with great joy, turning to the directors of camp the Rebbe directed them to dance.

The Rebbe asked, “Are there any children present who will be in camp? They should dance, at least dance with the *niggun*, *Al Hasela*.”

PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 102699 / 16 TAMMUZ, 5716



A SCENE FROM BEFORE THE FARBRENGEN WHILE VISITING CAMP IN 5716.

At that point, Rabbi Weiss went over to the Rebbe, and told the Rebbe about a terrible car accident that had occurred. A vehicle that Merkos had rented to drive to camp was full of people on the way from 770 to Ellenville and had flipped over three times!

The Rebbe asked who had been in the car, and Rabbi Weiss began listing their names, a total of 13 people, but after he said just a single name, the Rebbe interrupted him and said, “Nu, everything will be okay.”

The Rebbe put his hand in his pocket, took out the pieces of matzah that he

PHOTO: KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY



THE REBBE’S HANDWRITTEN HAGAHOS ON THE SICHOS HE DELIVERED TO CAMP GAN YISROEL IN 5717.



THE REBBE FINISHES TOURING A CAMP BUILDING DURING THE VISIT OF 5720.

had put there earlier, and gave it to be distributed to those in the crash.

[It was later found out that the Rebbe had put the pieces of matzah into his pocket at the same time that the car had flipped over! As it turned out, although it was indeed a dangerous crash, they all emerged unscathed.]

Meanwhile, everyone had stopped singing, so the Rebbe told them again to sing the song “that will later be sung in camp.” They continued singing *Al Hasela*. The directors and the children danced with great joy, and the Rebbe strongly encouraged the singing for a long time. They later sang *V’chol Karnei Reshoim*, and those present said *l’chaim*.

The Rebbe ended the *farbrengen* with the *bracha*:

“Hashem should help that בנאות דשא וירביצנו *kipshuto*, in the ultimate good. Very soon we should merit to the continuation of the *mizmor*, כוסו רוי, which is the chair of the *melech hamoshiach*, speedily in our days. *Lchaim, lchaim.*”

BIRKAS HAMAZON AND MINCHA

The Rebbe *bentched*, and added שהשמחה במעונו in honor of the *sheva brachos* of Rabbi Mendel Shemtov.

At the end of *bentching* someone recited the *sheva brachos*, the Rebbe made the *bracha* on the wine, and drank it.

Then the Rebbe distributed *kos shel brocha*, and gave Rabbi Yosef Weinbaum a full bottle of wine for those who were in the crash and also for the people who worked on opening the camp. The Rebbe added that after camp opened, the wine should be given out to the campers, and the rest of it should be used for the duration of camp.

Later on, when *mincha* time came, no-one knew which way was east. As they were trying to figure it out, the Rebbe went out to the balcony and looked at the sky for a few seconds. He then returned to the room and pointed with his finger to *mizrach*.

After davening, the Rebbe went to his car, and everyone got ready to leave. Before getting into the car, the Rebbe called Rabbi Weinbaum again, and told him that since he is the *menahel gashmi*

of camp, he is also the *baal-habayis*. Therefore, the Rebbe gave him stacks of dollars to give out as a tip to the people running the camp. Then the Rebbe gave him a *yasher koach* and a *bracha* for *hatzlacha rabba*.

The Rebbe then got into the car to leave camp and everyone sang *Ki Besimcha Seitzeiu*.

At that moment, two of the *bochurim* who had been in the car crash—Rabbi Immanuel Schochet and Rabbi Avrohom Lipskier—went over to the Rebbe, and the Rebbe asked them what had happened.

When they told the Rebbe that the car had flipped over three times, the Rebbe raised his shoulders and said with a smile, “three times?” Then the Rebbe took out the piece of matzah covered in cloth, gave it to them and pointed to Rabbi Weiss who was standing nearby, saying that he should give them *l’chaim* from the bottle of wine that was left over from *kos shel brocha*. They took wine and said *l’chaim* to the Rebbe.

The Rebbe then left to visit Camp Emunah, the girls’ camp.

The Rebbe visited camp again the following year, in 5717, for the *chanukas habayis* of the new grounds in Swan Lake, and then again in 5720 - marking two hundred years since the *histalkus* of the Baal Shem Tov.⁴

Although these visits were in many aspects similar to the first one, they were unique in the fact that they took place while camp was in session. The Rebbe specifically requested before the second visit that the schedule not be changed in honor of the visit, and that everything should run as usual, so that the Rebbe can see the routine schedule at camp.



DURING THE VISITS OF 5717 AND 5720, THE REBBE DISTRIBUTED A MINCHA-MAARIV BOOKLET TO ALL THE PARTICIPANTS AT CAMP. THIS BOOKLET FROM THE 5720 VISIT HAD BEEN PRINTED A YEAR EARLIER, BUT THE REBBE INSTRUCTED THAT THE YEAR 5720 SHOULD BE HANDWRITTEN IN THE SHAAR BLATT.

PART 4: THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

The international Gan Yisroel network began blossoming very quickly, and over the later years it grew exponentially.

Only a short while, in 5718, Rabbi Berel Mochkin opened the first new Gan Yisroel in Canada.⁵ As with the camp in New York, the Rebbe gave him detailed guidance and sent telegrams at the start of camp.

That same year, the *Reshet* (a network of Chabad-run educational institutions) in Eretz Yisroel also started Gan Yisroel day camps. In a letter to Rabbi Yitzchok Ganzburg of the Reshet, the Rebbe writes that the name of the camp should be Gan Yisroel;⁶ (Over the years the Rebbe sent them countless *horaos*, which were usually relayed through Rabbi Hodakov to Rabbi Efraim Wolf.)

A year later, in the summer of 5719, Rabbi Gershon Mendel Garelik, the shliach to Italy, opened the first Gan Yisroel in Europe. At the farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz that year, the Rebbe spoke about what Rabbi Garelik had achieved despite the numerous difficulties that had sprung in his path. The Rebbe gave a *bracha* for all the branches of Gan Yisroel, for both staff and campers, and requested that everyone at the farbrengen give 'three cheers' and 'three hurrahs' for Gan Yisroel!⁷

In 5721, the network of camps grew to include a new camp in Michigan. Over the years, the Gan Yisroel network has grown tremendously, and countless shluchim all over the world have opened branches in their communities.



▲ SCENES FROM CAMP GAN YISROEL OF KALKASKA, MICHIGAN.

▼ A GROUP OF CAMPERS FROM CAMP GAN YISROEL, PARKSVILLE, NY ON A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C. POSE WITH RABBI AVROHOM SHEMTOV AND SENATOR CHARLES GOODEL.



IN 5749, CAMP GAN YISROEL IN MICHIGAN HELD A KINUS TORAH WHERE CAMPERS DELIVERED CHIDUSHEI TORAH WHICH THEY HAD PREPARED WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF THE STAFF. THESE SPEECHES WERE LATER WRITTEN UP AND PUBLISHED IN HONOR OF THE DIDAN NOTZACH ON 26 TISHREI, 5750. WHEN THE BOOKLET WAS GIVEN IN TO THE REBBE, THE REBBE GAVE AN ENCOURAGING RESPONSE IN WRITING.

PHOTO: KEHOT PUBLICATION SOCIETY

PART 5: CHOF AV

Chof Av, the *yahrtzeit* of the Rebbe's father HoRav Levi Yitzchak Schneerson, was a special day for the campers by the Rebbe. Beginning in 5736, camp would come in every year to join the *tefilos* and attend the farbrengen. The Rebbe would encourage their camp-style singing during the *tefilos* and shower them with attention during the farbrengen.

The entire Gan Yisroel New York would usually come in to New York, and they would be joined by groups from other camps as well. They would arrive during the afternoon of Chof Av and *daven mincha* with the Rebbe, as he was *chazzon* on occasion of the *yahrtzeit*; the campers would sit directly behind the Rebbe's place during davening. After *mincha*, they would eat a quick supper and rush to reserve a few bleachers for the farbrengen.

[When Chof Av fell out on Shabbos, camp would spend the entire Shabbos in Crown Heights, sleeping in Oholei Torah on Friday night.]

SONGS FROM THE MACHNE

During the farbrengen, the Rebbe would often ask the campers and staff to sing songs from the *machne*, strongly encouraging their singing. The way it usually worked was as follows: The Rebbe would deliver a *sicha* on a topic related to camp—often about *chinuch*—and then the Rebbe would encourage the campers to start a *niggun*.

On numerous occasions, the Rebbe explained the connection between his father's life and Gan Yisroel. In 5741, the Rebbe asked Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Raskin, who had personally known the Rebbe's father, to travel to camp and tell the campers about him.



AT A CAMP RALLY IN THE SUMMER OF 5740, THE REBBE GIVES RABBI AVRAHAM SHEMTOV, DIRECTOR OF CAMP GAN YISROEL, NEW YORK, PACKAGES OF COINS FOR DISTRIBUTION TO THE CHILDREN.

At the farbrengens during the years 5737-5739, the Rebbe requested that the campers recite the Twelve *Pesukim* at the farbrengen. When they said the *Pesukim*, the entire 770 repeated after them.

DEM TATTEN'S NIGGUN!

After Chof-Beis Shevat 5748 the Rebbe only farbrenged on Shabbos, so there usually wasn't a farbrengen on Chof Av. However, the camps still continued coming in for Chof Av to join the Rebbe's *tefilos*.

In 5749, the campers and staff joined the Rebbe for *mincha* and for *maariv*, and they davened in the regular camp tunes.

Towards the end of *maariv*, the Rebbe turned to Rabbi Leibel Groner and told him that the *sicha* be translated into English. Rabbi Groner immediately passed the message on to Rabbi Avraham Shemtov, who, in turn, immediately started arranging another microphone for the translator.

After *maariv* ended, the Rebbe walked up to the *shtender*, and asked Rabbi Groner if a microphone had been arranged for the translation, and Rabbi Groner replied that it was on its way.



IN HONOR OF THEIR OPENING IN THE SUMMER OF 5742, THE REBBE SENT A LETTER TO GAN YISROEL CAMPS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

After waiting a short time, the Rebbe turned to the crowd and said: "נזינגט א, נזינגט א" and then added, "דעם טאטן'ס ניגון," ("Nu, sing a *niggun*, my father's *niggun*!")

The entire 770 immediately burst into song, and the Rebbe strongly encouraged the singing. During the *niggun*, Rabbi Yonasan Hackner ran in with a microphone, and when the singing ended, the Rebbe said a *sicha*, speaking about the connection between HoRav Levi Yitzchok's name and the name of Gan Yisroel.

The Rebbe finished the first *sicha*. At rallies Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Hecht would translate the *sichos* but since it wasn't a rally, and no-one had expected that there would be a translation, Rabbi Hecht was

In 5744, Chof Av fell out on Shabbos, and, as usual, the entire camp came in to Crown Heights to spend Shabbos with the Rebbe. In those years, the Rebbe would spend Shabbos in the library. After *licht bentshen*, the entire camp was lined up on both sides of the sidewalk waiting for the Rebbe to go back to 770. As the Rebbe passed through the rows of campers, they started a *lebedike* niggun, and the Rebbe smiled broadly, waving at them and strongly encouraging the singing.



PHOTO: JEM/THE LIVING ARCHIVE / 20220 / 7 CHESHVAN 5748

in English. During the *sichos*, the Rebbe would direct them to sing several *niggunim*, and after the *niggunim* he would hand out to the counselors—both boys and girls—coins for the children. Generally, the children received two coins: one for *tzedakka*, and one for personal use. In the first years of these rallies (5738-5739), the Rebbe would also hand out *mugadike* [edited] *sichos* from previous camp rallies to be distributed to the children.


A unique aspect of these rallies was that the head staff of each camp would speak to the children (while the Rebbe was present) about the message to take home from camp. The head staff would talk to the children before the Rebbe's *sicha*, and sometimes the Rebbe would mention an idea the head staff had spoken about! (This continued until 5745.)



The fruits of Camp Gan Yisroel are noticeable throughout the year, and in fact, throughout the lives of the many children who were *zoche* to attend.

The attention that the Rebbe showed to the children and their staff was incomparable. Suffice it to say that the only trips the Rebbe made out of the New York City area were his visits to this special place.

As the Rebbe once explained:

“A *gan*, a garden, is a place where one goes to enjoy the beautiful fruit that grow inside it. This is Gan Yisroel, the garden where ‘Yisroel’ grows - Jewish children. Through their actions, they give pleasure to Hashem Himself...”⁸ 

not present. Rabbi Avraham Shemtov stepped up to deliver a *kitzur* of the *sicha* in English.

However, the biggest shock was yet to come. After Rabbi Shemtov's translation, the Rebbe continued with a second *sicha*—an extremely rare occurrence in this setting.

In the years afterward, the Rebbe continued giving special *kiruvim* to the campers and staff present during the *tefilos* and *sichos* on Chof Av.

RALLIES

Chof Av was the special day when camp would officially come to see the Rebbe, during camp. Additionally, from the early years of camp, the campers and staff that lived in the New York area would come to 770 and daven *mincha* with the Rebbe after camp finished for the summer. Following *mincha*, the Rebbe would give

the counselors coins to distribute to the children, with each child receiving two coins: one for personal use, and one for *tzedakka*.

From 5737 the Rebbe would hold special rallies for the camps at the end of the summer.

In the beginning, these rallies were only for the day camps, but it soon expanded to Gan Yisroel for boys, and Camp Emunah for girls. At first there were separate rallies for boys and girls, but later one rally was held for both.

After *mincha*, the children would recite the Twelve *Pesukim*, followed by a few *sichos* from the Rebbe. The topics of the *sichos* would vary, and sometimes the Rebbe would draw lessons from camp that could be applied throughout the year.

Between the *sichos*, Rabbi Hecht would give a translation of the Rebbe's words

1. Toras Menachem vol. 16 p. 347

2. Shabbos parshas Shelach, 5719; Toras Menachem vol. 26 p. 58.

3. Shabbos parshas Pinchas.

4. See a detailed account of these visits in the sefer *B'nois Deshe*.

5. See Igros Kodesh vol. 16 p. 140

6. Ibid. vol. 17 p. 172

7. Toras Menachem vol. 26 p. 129

8. Sichas 28 Av, 5749



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THE REBBE & GAN YISROEL: A GALLERY



1. The Rebbe arrives at Camp Gan Yisroel 2. The Rebbe distributes mincha-maariv booklets in 5717 3. The Rebbe davens Mincha before the farbrengen during the visit of 5717 4. At the conclusion of camp, the Rebbe encourages the singing in the shalash of 770.