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Lag Ba'omer 5746

The big Lag Ba'omer parades, with giant floats, hordes of clowns, and thousands of spectators, are the most famous moments of Lag Ba'omer with the Rebbe. Beginning with the Rebbe walking down the red carpet on to the specially constructed stage, as Ani Ma'amin was played by the orchestra, continuing with the *sichos* the Rebbe would say, and then the Rebbe waiving to the children as they passed by.

The *sichos* at the parades were often of a global and far reaching scope; such as the parade of 5727, on the eve of the Six Day War, when the Rebbe promised that Eretz Yisroel would emerge victorious. Or in 5740, when the Rebbe said a *sicha* in Russian, challenging the Soviet authorities to follow their own laws and allow Jewish children

behind the Iron Curtain to receive a Jewish education. The last six of the 12 *pesukim* were also introduced at a Lag Ba'omer parade.

These parades took place whenever Lag Ba'omer fell on a Sunday. In most years however, Lag Ba'omer is not on Sunday. As we have come to know already, no day with the Rebbe was 'just another day;' every day in 770 was special. If you were around the Rebbe, any 'run of the mill' day—even not Shabbos or Yom Tov or a unique calendar day when there was a big *farbrengen*—was also precious and full of special moments. This was especially true for a day like Lag Ba'omer, which for centuries had been a prominent day in Lubavitch.

Here we will describe one such Lag Ba'omer, 5746, which was a Tuesday.

EVENING OF LAG BA'OMER

For a while before Lag Ba'omer, Mr. Noach Dear, then a New York City councilman, wanted very much to know the Rebbe's opinion on a certain issue he was involved in. As this was a pressing subject, and a vote was approaching, he felt that it was urgent that he speak to the Rebbe about it face-to-face, and not just send a letter. In those years *yechidus* had already stopped, and "Sunday dollars" was not yet a fully established custom, so Mr. Dear was not sure of how he could arrange to speak with the Rebbe. That's when Reb Elimelech Neiman, a Gerrer Chosid who often brought messages from the Gerrer Rebbe to the Rebbe advised him to come to 770, and approach the Rebbe as he was going to his room after *maariv*.

They came to the Rebbe on the night of Lag Ba'omer. R' Neiman introduced Mr. Dear to the Rebbe, who greeted him with a big smile. Mr. Dear then handed the Rebbe an envelope.

On the way to his room, the Rebbe read the contents of the envelope. A few moments later Rabbi Groner told Mr. Dear that the Rebbe wanted to speak to him and he should go into *gan eden hatachton*. Afterwards, Mr. Dear asked the Rebbe that since this was such a sensitive topic, if the Rebbe could please send him a letter with the details of what they spoke. The Rebbe answered him that he had addressed the topic on Purim, and he will send him a copy of the *sicha*. (After the meeting the Rebbe instructed that an English translation of the *sicha* be prepared, which the Rebbe edited.)

When Mr. Dear was done, the Rebbe turned to Reb Elimelech:

The Rebbe: Today is Lag Ba'omer, a yom tov!

R' Neiman: My birthday is Lag Ba'omer, and my name is also Shimon, I'm named after Rashbi.

The Rebbe: If so then today is a yom tov for you as well. Does the Gerrer Rebbe hold any special celebration for Lag Ba'omer?

R' Neiman: I haven't heard of anything. Tomorrow night he will daven *maariv* with the Chassidim (an unusual occurrence).

The Rebbe: But that [tomorrow] is already the 34th Omer, what about Lag Ba'omer, why doesn't he do anything?

R' Neiman: I don't know.

The Rebbe: Since you are his Chossid, for you not knowing [his reason] is enough of a reason. If people here will take issue with Noach Dear for taking my time, you should defend him, and tell them that it's for something very important.

DAY OF LAG BA'OMER

It has long been a custom in Lubavitch, that Lag Ba'omer was a day to receive *brachos* to bear children. Every year, many women would come to the Rebbe for this purpose, and there are myriads of stories of childless women who gave birth after receiving a *bracha* on Lag Ba'omer.

As there wasn't an official time for people to approach the Rebbe, those who needed this special *bracha* would try see the Rebbe whenever possible during the day of Lag Ba'omer. Some would wait outside the Rebbe's house in the hope to be able to ask for the *bracha* when the Rebbe either came or left. When the Rebbe came to 770 that morning, there were many people standing outside 770, including many who were hoping for the chance to request a *bracha* as the Rebbe was arriving from his home.

When the Rebbe arrived, he distributed dollars to the assembled crowd for about half an hour. To one woman who requested a *bracha* for children the Rebbe answered: *bekarov*. To another: *bekarov mamesh*. To many others the Rebbe said: *zara chaya vekayama*.

When Rabbi Yeshayahu Hertzel of Kfar Tavor passed by, the Rebbe called him back with a smile and said: "Don't you usually take for your whole area?" The Rebbe then gave him another dollar, saying: "Take for your area."

When Reb Asher Sassonkin passed by, the Rebbe asked him "Why aren't you smiling?"

A woman said something to the Rebbe about one of the shluchim in Buffalo, and the Rebbe gave her a dollar for him.



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At 3:10 the Rebbe left 770 to go to the Ohel. However, instead of making a right turn on Eastern Parkway, towards Queens, the Rebbe's car made a U-turn on Eastern Parkway. The 770 veterans immediately understood that the Rebbe was first going to Prospect Park to observe the children's Lag Ba'omer fair—something he hadn't done in a few years—and they scrambled to get there as fast as possible.

Some of the newcomers, especially those who couldn't understand what was being said as their English wasn't so good, didn't quite know what to make of the U-turn, and took off running after the car. Rabbi Asi Spiegel of Tzfas relates how he and some fellow *bochurim* were standing outside when the Rebbe left to the Ohel. When the car turned left, they were caught completely off guard, and started running down the street to see where the Rebbe was going. When they realized they would never catch up, and not wanting to lose sight of the car, they commandeered a car being driven by a hapless Chosid, and had him follow the Rebbe's car to the park.

When the Rebbe arrived at the park, the car stopped on a hill from where it was possible to see the fair. After that, the Rebbe made one round of the park in his car, waving to children the whole time. There was a lot of trash on the road, and one of the Chassidim felt it was disrespectful for the Rebbe's car to pass by such a mess and began clearing the path in front of the Rebbe's car. When the Rebbe noticed this, he waved his hand dismissively. From there the Rebbe continued on to the Ohel.

AN UNEXPECTED FARBRENGEN

The Rebbe returned from the Ohel in the evening, and encouraged the singing by the crowd of Chassidim waiting in front of 770. *Mincha* and *maariv* took place immediately, and ended at about 10:10. Just after the Rebbe entered his room, Rabbi Groner emerged and informed the crowd that there would be a farbrengen in ten minutes.

The shul at 770 immediately became a hive of activity, as everyone helped set up and prepare for a farbrengen at such short notice. The benches and bleachers had to be set up, the Rebbe's stage arranged, wine and *mezonos* procured, and the whole Crown Heights had to be notified.

Phone calls also quickly went out to communities all over the world to set up the live hookup to the farbrengen. In many places it was already late at night, and people had to be woken up to call in for the hookup. In addition, *bochurim* had gone to sell *sifrei Chassidus* in various communities, and their friends quickly tried to find ways to notify them to return to 770 so they wouldn't miss the farbrengen.

Amazingly, when the Rebbe came down to the farbrengen ten minutes later, everything was set up and ready.

In the first *sicha* the Rebbe pointed out that Rashbi was all about *ahavas Yisroel*. The Zohar describes the story how during a severe drought, Rashbi set everything aside to bring about the end of the drought.

After spending thirteen years in a cave, the first thing he did upon emerging was to inquire if there was anything he could do to help someone. In addition, his composition of the Zohar was also out of *ahavas Yisroel*. As the Zohar tells us, that with this *sefer* we will leave *golus*. In other words, Rashbi wrote it to bring Moshiach and to take the Yidden out of *golus*. Also, the fact that he established his *yahrtzeit* as a day of joy, stemmed from his extreme *ahavas Yisroel*.

Pesach Sheini is often in the same week as Lag Ba'omer. The Rebbe explained how Pesach Sheini is also all about *ahavas Yisroel*:

The people who asked Moshe for Pesach Sheini because they were *tamei*, knew well in advance that they would be *tamei* on Erev Pesach. As we know, they were *tamei* from carrying Yosef's *aron*, which they have already been doing for a year. Yet we find, that they only came to Moshe on the day of Erev

Pesach, to ask what to do. Why did they wait until the last minute?

From here we see the importance of *ahavas Yisroel*, of doing a favor for another person, even for someone that had already passed away. While they were busy carrying Yosef's *aron*, they wouldn't think of their own needs. Only at the final moment, when the rest of *klal Yisroel* was preparing their *korban Pesach*, did they approach Moshe and ask what to do.

The Rebbe then instructed that although Lag Ba'omer has passed already, in the next few days there should still be an effort to make assemblies for children who didn't take part in the Lag Ba'omer programs; to teach them about Lag Ba'omer and the lessons of the day.

WE WANT MOSHIACH NOW

The shiur Rambam of Lag Ba'omer that year was in Hilchos Geirushin. One of the *halachos* there is that it is forbidden to marry a woman with the intent to divorce her later on.

The relationship between Yidden and Hashem is compared to a marriage. How then, the Rebbe asked, can Hashem have left us in *golus*, 'divorcing' us, so to speak? At *matan Torah*—our marriage—He already knew that we would be sent into *golus*. In *parshas Vayelech*, Hashem tells Moshe that the Yidden will eventually sin, and He will place them

in *golus*. How can He violate His own Torah by 'marrying' *klal Yisroel*, while intending to 'divorce' them in the future?

We must say then, that *golus* is not really a 'divorce.' Rather Hashem wants us to cry '*ad mosai*,' until Moshiach will come!

At the end of the *sicha*, someone in the crowd shouted '*ad mosai*' and then everyone started singing We Want Moshiach Now (to the tune of "*Ivadyemi*"). The singing went on for over an hour and a half!

At the start of the singing the Rebbe motioned to Reb Meir Abehsera to whistle, and motioned to another person to say *l'chaim*. For the rest of the singing, the Rebbe looked around silently, and occasionally said *l'chaim* to people.

When the singing finally ended, the Rebbe noted that on Simchas Torah, the *gabbai* announces '*ad kan*' after each *hakafa*, otherwise the *hakafa* would never end. So too here, a *vaad hamesader* is needed to decide when to end the *niggunim*.

After this, the Rebbe spoke about the importance of bringing children to shul for *Aseres Hadibros* on Shavuos; signing them up for a good, Torah-educational camp; and encouraged the completion of the replica of 770 in Kfar Chabad. The Alter Rebbe's *niggun* was sung, followed by several other *niggunim*, and the farbrengen ended at 2:15 AM. **T**

