



לעבן מיטן רבין



JEM102687

טור 'לעבן מיטן רבין' הוקדש לזכרון ולעילוי נשמת
 ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל
 ואשתו מרת שרה ע"ה בת ר' יקותיאל ומרת לאה הי"ד
 תנ"צ'ב'ה

ע"י בנם
 ר' יקותיאל יהודה
 וזוגתו מרת פעסל לאה ומשפחתם שיחיו
 רוהר

The Inaugural Visit

TAMMUZ 5717*

ג.י.י.ר.ל.

Camp Gan Yisroel was always very dear to the Rebbe. This fondness was demonstrated when on a rare and unique occasion, the Rebbe, who seldom left New York, made a historic visit to inaugurate the campgrounds in Swan Lake.¹

Accompanied by the camp directors, the Rebbe took a guided tour of the campsite and conducted a chanukas habayis farbrengen for the entire camp.

This visit was chronicled in the album "Bine'os Deshe," an overview of the Rebbe's involvement with Gan Yisroel.

Presented here is the detailed account of this visit.

THE QUEST FOR NEW GROUNDS

On the heels of Camp Gan Yisroel's successful debut summer, the camp directors inquired of the Rebbe as to the camp's future. Should they continue? The Rebbe answered in the affirmative.

However, despite the camp's success in terms of its significant spiritual accomplishments, the directors weren't pleased with the campgrounds. They thus searched for a suitable location to continue their worthy endeavor. They asked the Rebbe if it would be preferable to rent a campsite again or buy the campgrounds, despite possible financial strain. The Rebbe answered that they should buy a suitable campsite, designed for usage by a camp with necessary facilities and amenities.

After exploring many locations in the Catskills, the directors returned to the Rebbe with some potential options. However, the Rebbe dismissed them all, mainly on the account of safety and security. One site, for instance, was rejected for having buildings that were more than two stories high, and another for a main street that cut through the camp. There were other reasons that were grounds for rejection; one location was too far to obtain *cholov Yisroel*, another due to the absence of a lake on-site, and yet another for simply being too far-flung and isolated.

Finally, they had found the optimal location in Swan Lake; a beautiful expansive campground

that boasted a magnificent lake. It was owned by a Jewish fellow Ziegler who operated a farm on the premises.

The directors reported back to the Rebbe that there were two remaining campsites that seemed fit in Swan Lake. But although both contenders seemed promising, they were still unsure if they should go ahead with the purchase. The Rebbe wrote back to them: "If there are no other options, go ahead and inspect both campsites with Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky and the lawyer Aizik Stroll."

And so it was. After visiting Swan Lake, the delegation, Rabbis Moshe Lazar, Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, and the lawyer Aizik Stroll, came to the Rebbe for *yechidus* and brought good tidings—they had found the "Ziegler's Farm" site in Swan Lake to be the ideal choice and were ready to go ahead with the purchase. The Rebbe gave his approval and added that Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky should also be present at the signing.

The Rebbe *bentched* them, "*Der Eibishter zol geben az s'zol zain a gutter kemp b'gashmius u'vruchnius, un vibald az der Eibishter bleibt nisht kein baal chov zol yeder einer zain gebentsht b'ruchnius u'vgashmius*—The camp should be successful both *b'gashmius* and *b'ruchnius*, and as Hashem does not leave a debt, he will undoubtedly bless everyone with all their material and spiritual needs."



THE CAMP PHOTO OF THE YEAR 5718. RABBI SHLOMO AHARON KAZARNOVSKY, WHO WAS PRESENT FOR A VISIT TO CAMP, IS SITTING IN THE CENTER.



THE REBBE ARRIVES AT THE CAMP. IN THE BACK ROW ARE RABBIS: HODAKOV, RODSSTEIN, LEVITIN AND HOLTZBERG. ORIGINALLY RABBI GRONER WAS ALSO SITTING IN THE BACK ROW, BUT AFTER A POLICE STOP, THE REBBE TOLD RABBI GRONER TO SQUEEZE IN BETWEEN HIM AND THE DRIVER, RABBI KRINSKY.

The sale proceeded, and the grounds were purchased under good terms. Rabbis Hodakov and Zalman Gurary traveled up to the Catskills to close the deal, and the Rebbe himself signed the check. Ownership of the land was now transferred to Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, and the site was designated for the use of Gan Yisroel.

Thus, in Tammuz of 5717*, Camp Gan Yisroel opened its doors to around 150 happy campers, for the first time on its own property.

EN ROUTE TO CAMP

Shortly after the onset of the summer, at the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Pinchas 14 Tammuz, the Rebbe revealed his plan to pay a visit to the new camp premises. The Rebbe concluded the farbrengen, “For now, we will pause the farbrengen, but we will continue it tomorrow in Camp Gan Yisroel.”

Later, the Rebbe requested that the directors be informed not to modify the camp schedule for his visit. He wanted the children to wear ordinary clothes and that all games and activities proceed as usual, for the purpose of the visit was to see camp in its natural element.

The next day, Sunday, 15 Tammuz, at 1:00 p.m., the Rebbe headed out towards camp. In the car with the Rebbe were Rabbis Hodakov, Shlomo Aharon Kazarnovsky, Yankel Holtzman, Leibel Groner, and Yudel Krinsky, who drove.

While on the way, the car stopped briefly at a gas station. The Rebbe got out of the vehicle and washed his hands. He then turned to face *mizrach* and recited *Tefilas Haderech* from his siddur while standing. Interestingly, Rabbi Holtzman (who had

joined the trip at the behest of the Rebbetzin and brought along a thermos of tea and some *mezonos* that she had prepared) suggested that the Rebbe taste something before *Tefilas Haderech*, but the Rebbe declined.

Further down the road, somehow, one of the right tires was punctured. All of the occupants exited the vehicle besides for the Rebbe. It took Rabbi Krinsky around ten minutes to change the tire, and after the short pit stop, they were back on their way.

When they arrived at the camp gates, the children came out to greet them. The Rebbe was visibly excited upon entering camp.

EXPLORING THE GROUNDS

Upon arrival, the Rebbe began to tour the grounds, accompanied by the head staff Yosef Weinbaum (director), Moshe Lazar (head counselor), Kehos Weiss (general manager), Yehuda Leib Scheiner (assistant head counselor), and Avremel Shemtov (learning director).

First, the Rebbe went to inspect the accommodations of the staff. The tour began in the big building where the families and counselors lodged. The Rebbe peeked into every room and commented occasionally.

When he entered the room of Kehos Weiss, he found his wife and toddler there. The Rebbe smiled and *bentched* them, “*S’zol zein a freiliche zummer un leben duh gezunterheit*—It should be a happy summer, and you should live here in good health.”

Before entering the room of Yosef Weinbaum, the Rebbe turned to him and indicated that he should enter first. “You’re the *baal habayis* here, go ahead,” said the Rebbe, to which Yosef responded, “The Rebbe is *baal habayis* here!” Indeed, the Rebbe entered first.

Overall, the camp was fairly organized. All of the campers and counselors stood in designated positions by their respective beds in their bunkhouse. This orderliness gave the Rebbe great satisfaction.

Then the Rebbe visited the kitchen. The waiters and kitchen staff were all standing attentively in their places. The Rebbe examined everything very carefully and remarked to the waiters that they are “*meshamshim bakodesh*” (performing holy duties).

From there, the Rebbe went to the dining hall and noticed a sign advertising the plea “Tip the



THE REBBE WITH RABBI YOSEF WEINBAUM, THE CAMP DIRECTOR.

waiters.” The Rebbe smiled and gave them 18 dollars.

After inspecting the infirmary, the Rebbe declared it a good utility that should hopefully not be necessary. Then the Rebbe went to see the bunkhouses and stressed to the directors that the safety of the children is paramount and fences should be installed to protect the bunks.

When Avremel Shemtov mentioned that the camp is full beyond maximum capacity and there is no extra room in the dorm, the Rebbe replied, “Another building can be built.”

Then they set out towards the heart of the campsite, the lake. At the edge of the water, the Rebbe solemnly gazed at the lake for a long moment. As they left, the Rebbe reiterated the need for proper security and that safety must be an absolute priority.

From there they went to the playing fields and there too, the Rebbe paid attention to every detail. The Rebbe remarked that the baseballs and bats shouldn’t be too hard so as to prevent sports-related injuries. Incidentally, the Rebbe had chanced upon a boy with a bandage over his eyes due to a sports injury, and the Rebbe inquired about his well being.

When they passed the field where the campers play a game called “shuffleboard,” the Rebbe

pointed out that there were cracks in the floor and instructed that they be fixed so as not to impede the game. In another sports field, the Rebbe noticed a small pit and instructed that it be filled so nobody should trip and hurt themselves while playing.

The Rebbe then went down a steep staircase to the laundry room, which was in a cellar. When he noticed a hole in the concrete floor, he instructed that it be covered with a board.

Throughout the visit, the Rebbe had examined the entire camp operation and scrutinized every detail. The Rebbe expressed great satisfaction from the overall cleanliness and structure of the camp, as well as the aesthetics of the campgrounds and bunks. He remarked, “*Aza ashirus hob ich nisht forgeshtelt*—I had not imagined such wealth.” For the entire duration of the visit, the Rebbe was in high spirits with a broad smile on his face.

THE FARBRENGEN

After touring the camp, the Rebbe davened Mincha in the big hall that had been repurposed as a shul, where a *bima* and *shtender* had especially been set up. After Mincha, the Rebbe switched into his silk *kapota* and sat down at a table, washed his hands and began the farbrengen of the



THE REBBE DISTRIBUTES A MINCHA-MAARIV BOOKLET TO EACH CAMPER AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE FARBRENGEN.

inauguration of the Gan Yisroel campsite.

After the campers sang “*Al Hasela*,” the Rebbe turned to them and instructed them to say *l’chaim* on soda which was provided by the canteen. The children made a loud *bracha Shehakol* and the Rebbe answered *amen*.

The Rebbe opened the farbrengen with a disclaimer that whatever he is to say at this farbrengen is relevant to all Jewish children, not only the children present. Therefore, all children who are indeed fortunate to be present should make sure to share the messages of the farbrengen with anyone in their sphere of influence.

In the first *sicha*, the Rebbe related the story of the Baal Shem Tov (apropos for Gan Yisroel, his namesake) who, at the tender age of five, was directed by his father to fear only Hashem and to love all Yidden. Indeed, he embodied these two traits, and they served him well. “This is a tremendous lesson to all of us—especially children,” said the Rebbe. “These two traits should illuminate the path of our lives.”

The Rebbe continued in a similar vein and addressed practical topics, interspersed with relevant stories. He advised the children that the key to overcoming their struggles with the *yetzer hara* is to confide with a friend, counselor, or

teacher, utilizing the advantage of two *yitzrei tov* versus one *yetzer hara*.

The Rebbe concluded: “*Un ir veist doch az beshaas men ‘fight’ (shlugt) zich tzvei antkegen einem—zeinen di tzvei menatzeach*—You are certainly aware that when two fight against one—the two are victorious.”

At the end of the *sicha*, the Rebbe paused for a moment to allow the children to rest. He requested that they begin a *niggun* the children were familiar with—“*Ani Maamin*,” and they all joined in song. The Rebbe then resumed the *sicha* and concluded with a *bracha* to the children that they should merit to be “Moshiach’s soldiers.”

A SPECIAL GIFT

The Rebbe turned to the head counselor, Moshe Lazar, and informed him that following the farbrengen, he will distribute a Mincha-Maariv booklet to each child. The Rebbe said that he would leave several extra Mincha-Maariv booklets with the counselors, and they should ensure that children who were enrolled for the later weeks of camp don’t miss out.

After Moshe Lazar announced what would transpire, the Rebbe directed them to sing “*Ki Anu*

Amecha.” The children formed a line, and one by one, they each walked past the Rebbe to get their Mincha-Maariv booklet. Following the campers, the staff and directors stood in line to receive a Mincha-Maariv booklet. The *niggun* continued throughout the distribution, and the Rebbe waved his hand with great enthusiasm to encourage the singing.

MAAMER AND FAREWELL

At the end of the distribution the Rebbe started the *niggunim* “*Tzama Lecha Nafshi*,” “*Avinu Malkeinu*” and “*Nye Zhuritzi Chloptzi*.” He then told the counselors to take the campers in groups and review the *sichos* with them.

Meanwhile, the Rebbe told the remaining staff to start the *niggun hachana* for a *maamar*. The Rebbe then said the *maamar* “*Baruch Hagomel*” which served as a continuation to the Shabbos farbrengen of Yud-Beis Tammuz.

After the *maamar*, the children returned to the hall where the Rebbe *bentched* and he gave everyone some *kos shel bracha*.

As the Rebbe headed to leave camp and conclude his visit, he gave Avremel Shemtov a pocket-sized Tanya as a token participation in the Gan Yisroel library.

The Rebbe then summoned Yosef Weinbaum and gave him a stack of dollar bills to distribute,

saying, “Since you are the *baal habayis*, you will distribute this to whomever you see fit.” Still, the Rebbe singled out Kehos Weiss and personally gave him a dollar, as well as the couple who were the cooks (Kaminetzki) to whom he gave a five dollar bill.

The Rebbe got into the car and slowly exited the camp escorted by the children, who were singing “*Ki Besimcha Seitzeiu*.” From Camp Gan Yisroel Swan Lake, the car proceeded to Camp Emunah.

CAMP EMUNAH

Half an hour later, they arrived at Camp Emunah.² The girls came out to greet the Rebbe, and he said a *sicha* for them about the role of *bnos Yisroel* in education and instilling a warmth for Yiddishkeit and *kedushah* amongst the Jewish nation.

The Rebbe concluded, “Now I will say *lchaim*, you shall have a joyful and happy life. We should meet again in good health and happiness. *Zei gezunt!*”

Following the *sicha*, the Rebbe went to the dining room to eat something. When the kitchen staff brought him a cup of water, he gave them several dollar bills. The Rebbe remarked to those present that we must always express our gratitude when they do a good job.

The Rebbe went back to the main hall and said another *sicha* for the counselors. He urged them to devote themselves entirely to education—to emulate the righteous women of the generation that left Mitzrayim, and to truly value the meaningful lifestyle of Torah.

The Rebbe explained the significance of the camp’s name—*Emunah*. He then informed them that the camp directors would be given copies of a letter of the Frierdiker Rebbe about the significance of mitzvos that are physical actions, and they will distribute these copies amongst the staff.

After the long day of visits, the Rebbe got into his car to return to Crown Heights. After several hours of travel, they arrived at 770 at 1:00 a.m. **1**



THE REBBE TOURING THE GROUNDS.

1. This was the second visit of its kind. One year earlier, in 5716, the Rebbe paid a visit to Gan Yisroel, then in Ellenville. For more information on that visit see Derher Av 5775, “The Rebbe’s Reshus: Camp Gan Yisroel.”

2. Read more about Camp Emunah in *The Rebbe’s First Camp*, Derher Sivan 5782.