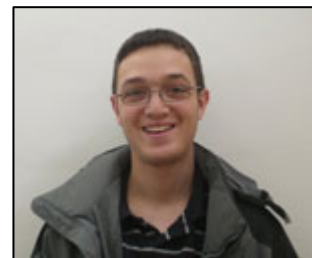




A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Eitan Cooper



The search started a few weeks ago, at the beginning of *chol hamoed Pesach*. Those involved were extremely determined to obtain what they wanted, which was found at construction sites, in garbage dumps and in forests. All of Israel's youth, and even some adults, had come together in a seemingly never ending hunt for one of man's most important materials: wood.

Young children eagerly ran unsupervised around the city, dragging everything from old chairs to gigantic branches. All of this wood was used to light some of the grandest bonfires across the state of Israel, in honor of *Lag B'Omer*, the 33rd day of the *omer*, which, among other things, celebrates a surprising military victory during the *Bar Kochba* revolt. We make bonfires because the Jews came out of hiding and made fires to celebrate their victory.

The Orayta bonfire was thoroughly enjoyed by all. It included festive singing, spirited dancing, hot dogs, marshmallows, and even a ceremonial burning of a full couch. It was held on *Har Zion*, where at least ten other similar fires were to be found. While this Israeli experience was unique, one could not help but wonder: How is building fires and dancing around them wildly a Jewish activity? What is the religious significance of this *chag*?

Rav Binny once taught us that the lessons learned in every *parsha* can teach us something about the events of the week. Perhaps this week's *parsha*, *Behar - Bechukotai*, could shed some light on the mysteries of *Lag B'omer*. Three *pesukim* in particular catch the eye:

"[17] No man may cheat his friend and you shall fear your G-d, for I am the Lord your G-d. [18] You shall fulfill My statutes, observe My judicial decisions, and fulfill them, and **you shall live in the land securely**. [19] The Land shall give its fruit, you shall eat to satiety and **you shall live in security upon it.**"
(Vayikra, 25:17-19)

These three verses come immediately after the *Torah* has dedicated almost an entire chapter to describing the laws of *shemita* and *yovel* (the sabbatical and jubilee years for the land). However, before the *Torah* continues to describe more laws, it pauses to relay this significant message, which raises a number of important questions: Why does the *Torah* tell us *twice* that we shall live securely in the land? What is the difference between living in the land “securely” and living “securely upon it?” Why are these *pesukim* placed specifically here? And most of all, is there a discernable connection between these *pesukim* and *Lag B’omer*?

Rashi helps us find the answer to our questions. He interprets the first *pasuk* to mean that if we follow the laws of *shemita* and *yovel* we will be rewarded with a continuous presence in the land; we will not have to face exile because *Hashem* will provide for us. In the second *pasuk*, we are assured that even though we are resting the land for a year, we should not fear a famine. The land will still provide for us, which is why, unlike the first *pasuk*, it says: “upon it.” The *Torah* is stressing the **land’s** importance. In short, one *pasuk* is telling us that *Hashem* will provide for us and we will be safe, while the other tells us that the **land** will provide for us and we will be safe. The first *pasuk* has an intangible protection and the second a tangible one. We need the *Torah* to tell us about this “security” twice so that we are aware of both elements.

These three *pesukim* are placed here to remind us of the meaning behind the laws of *shemita*. Man may mistakenly think that his food comes from his work, and that he does not need *Hashem* to help him. He has to remember that there is an intricate process involving *both* his own work on the land, *and Hashem’s* miracles to help the land produce. He must constantly be aware of both components, for they complement each other, and could not exist independently from one another. We must do our part, and *Hashem* will do his.

This ties into *Lag B’omer*. It must have been pretty easy for the Jews back then to think that they had won by their own merit, without *Hashem’s* help. *They* killed, *they* overcame, and *they* made fires to celebrate. Just like *shemita* serves to remind us that *Hashem* provides us security along with our own efforts, *Lag B’omer* should be used as an opportunity to understand that the fires we make, the work we do, and the physical world we see in front of us all exist with *Hashem’s* constant love and presence.

Last *Shabbat*, I was privileged to eat lunch with a high ranking member of the Israeli police force. He told me that this week is one of the most hectic for the security forces in Israel. They are dealing with a visit from the pope, a massive *Lag B’omer* celebration in the city of Meron (500,000 people attend every year), and a huge concert in Tel Aviv. Thousands of police officers worked 24/7 in order to help make this country as safe as possible, including some even at our bonfire where (trust me) numerous accidents could have occurred. Just as we do with the *shemita* year, I hope that we can all use this recent *Lag B’omer* to appreciate the work that men do, but also realize that *Hashem’s* presence can always be felt.

Shabbat Shalom

Eitan Cooper