

STORIES OF PARADES

BY SHNEUR ZALMAN BERGER

*How did they manage to make a parade under the noses of law enforcement officials in Tashkent? * What did the Rebbe say about making a parade in Chevron a day after the murder there? * Why did the store owner leave his business in the middle of the day? * The rain that waited in Brunoy and the sun that shone in Riga and the tears of an official in charge of a contingent of policemen. * A compilation of stories about parades*

167 PARADES THE FIRST YEAR

Rabbi Yisroel Halperin, *shliach* in Hertzeliya tells about the first year there were Lag B'Omer parades in Eretz Yisroel, in 5740:

"I had the *z'chus* of organizing the first parades that year. After announcing that parades should be made in cities around the world, the Rebbe sent thirty dollars to each country so that thirty parades be made in each country.

"The Rebbe sent sixty bills in the amount of fifty shekels each to Eretz Yisroel (via Prof. Branover), so that each person who organized a parade could get one bill. The Rebbe said that if there were fewer than sixty parades, the remaining bills had to be returned to him.

"Tzach asked me to organize parades, and mind you, this was only two weeks before Lag B'Omer! Despite the circumstances, we had unusual success to the point that the Rebbe sent



another 107 fifty-shekel bills! In other words, there were a total of 167 parades in which over 87,000 children participated, as we wrote in a report to the Rebbe that very day.

"I remember how, that year, a *bachur* from the *yeshiva* in Chevron was murdered Erev Lag B'Omer, and we asked the Rebbe whether we should still have the parade in Chevron. The Rebbe's answer was, "*Maavirin es ha'meis m'lifnei ha'kalla* (the dead makes way for the bride)."

It should be noted that there were only twenty Chabad houses in Eretz Yisroel at that time.

ACCUSTOMED TO MIRACLES

The *yeshiva* students in Brunoy, France prepared for a unique Lag B'Omer program in 5755. Forty-five bicycles in the parade symbolized 45 years of the Rebbe's leadership.

In the weeks preceding Lag B'Omer, the organizers worked on getting the bicycles they needed, and printed up shirts and signs with the *besuras ha'Geula*. Everything was ready, but then two days before Lag B'Omer, the



weather forecast predicted rain for Erev Lag B'Omer and Lag B'Omer.

On Erev Lag B'Omer, the T'mimim wrote a *pa"n* to the Rebbe MH"M in which they asked that no rain fall during the parade. As a sign that their request would be fulfilled, they asked that no rain fall beginning the afternoon of Erev Lag B'Omer, so that they could rent the bicycles. They also requested that the police be cooperative.

You can't imagine how excited the *bachurim* were when no rain fell on Erev Lag B'Omer, but it did rain throughout the night. The miracle repeated itself when as soon as day broke on Lag B'Omer, the rain stopped. The parade was a success!

T'FILLIN BECAUSE OF THE PARADE

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Beckerman, *shliach* in Givatayim relates:

"A man from Kfar Chabad told me that he goes on *Mivtza T'fillin* on Fridays in Givatayim. One day, an older man approached him and asked to put on *t'fillin*. When he was done, he excitedly told him why he had wanted to put on *t'fillin* for the first time in his life! When he saw the Chabad parade passing by, he was so moved that he felt he just *had* to put on *t'fillin*.

WHY DID HE LEAVE THE STORE?

A meeting of Matteh Moshiach, directed by Rabbi Shmuel Butman, took place before Lag B'Omer 5751. It was decided that Lag B'Omer had to be a time to publicize the *besuras ha'Geula* throughout New York. This would be done with a Moshiach Parade, in which 90 vehicles with signs announcing the *Geula* would travel through the streets.

As floats were being prepared, so was an attractive brochure. The words "Who? When? Where?" appeared on the outside, and inside there were answers to many questions about

Moshiach based on Torah sources.

As the parade went on its way, you could see dozens of people leaving their jobs and transforming themselves into Moshiach soldiers for the day. Many helped in spreading the *besuras ha'Geula* by attaching loudspeakers to their cars to broadcast *sichos* of the Rebbe, or by decorating their cars, for example.

The parade route began in Crown Heights and went over the Manhattan Bridge to Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Then the 90 vehicles dispersed to 90 destinations where they disseminated the *besuras ha'Geula*.

One person related that the manager of a large store entered his tank. After reading the brochures and talking to the people manning the tank, the manager was so excited that he abandoned his business for a few hours and went out on the street himself to distribute brochures to passersby!

TEARS OF THE POLICE COMMANDER

If you are familiar with Dnipropetrovs'k, you know how complicated it is to stop traffic on the main streets of the city in the morning, but on Lag B'Omer it happened. Thousands of Jewish children marched through the city as ten cars led the way, with signs proclaiming Jewish themes displayed on their roofs or on trailers.

The thousands of children who had gathered in the center of the city began marching to the tune of Napoleon's March as they carried signs with Jewish messages. The adults accompanying the children couldn't hide their emotions. As one old man put it, "Jews marched here in the past too, accompanied by policemen, but what a difference!"

They walked for about an hour until they arrived at a large park where a rally was held.

Rabbi Shmuel Kamentzky, *shliach* of

the city, related: "A police commander who was in charge of traffic approached me in the middle of the parade and with tears in his eyes he told me he was Jewish too, and when he read the signs about *ahavas* and *achdus Yisroel*, he suddenly felt that he truly belonged to this wonderful nation."

SURPRISING WEATHER

"The weather this week will be cooler than normal, with temperatures expected to be at zero degrees," announced the Latvian forecaster. The hearts of those in the Chabad school in Riga sank. The children had been looking forward to Lag B'Omer for weeks, because they were planning a nature hike and a fun program to celebrate the *hilula* of R' Shimon bar Yochai.

Having no choice, they began preparing an alternate plan to take place at the school. Everybody anxiously awaited Lag B'Omer, students and teachers, parents and *shluchim*.

"When dawn broke on Lag B'Omer," says Rabbi Mordechai Glazman, *shliach* in Riga, "we saw that the Rebbe had fixed things up for us. After a colder week than normal for

that time of year, we enjoyed spring-like weather, and the children of Ohel Menachem were able to march to a nearby woods after all."

The smell of spring was in the air, emanating from the trees and shrubs, which only a few days before had been covered with snow, and the children excitedly gathered around a pile of boards which had been prepared in advance. The bonfire burned and the children shouted the 12 P'sukim in glee.

WHEN IT'S ILLEGAL...

In honor of Lag B'Omer 5755, T'mimim-*shluchim* in Tashkent, Avrohom Gruzman, S.Z. Berger [author of this article], and Yechiel Fleischman, asked the *shliach*, R' Abba Dovid Gurevitz, whether they could organize a Lag B'Omer parade. R' Gurevitz had to turn them down, as he explained that the law in Uzbekistan forbade parades since the authorities feared that Moslem extremists would undermine the security situation.

So the T'mimim suggested that they make a small bonfire in the schoolyard, but the firemen nixed that idea, saying that it was illegal to make fires near public buildings.





Despite these responses, the T'mimim were determined to organize a parade and rally for Lag B'Omer. It was finally decided that there would be a trip to the television tower of Tashkent, a tall, narrow building in which all the country's television studios are located.

On the morning of Lag B'Omer, the children boarded four buses and headed for the television tower. The T'mimim explained the significance of the day, they said the 12 P'sukim, and then they all sang Jewish songs. The children who didn't know the Lag B'Omer songs began singing "Ma Nishtana" and "Shoshanas Yaakov"!

When they arrived at the tower they went to the top and seated themselves in a restaurant as it slowly revolved. This enabled them to enjoy the scenery down below. The counselors distributed sweets and then the school's music teacher (an opera singer in the Tashkent theater by profession) began singing Jewish songs in Ivrit and Yiddish. Silence fell, and only his powerful voice

could be heard.

And that is how the children of Tashkent celebrated Lag B'Omer. In order to do their share in carrying signs with Jewish messages, the children returned to their schoolyard, where



they held signs in Ivrit and Russian which had messages about *ahavas Yisroel*, *kashrus*, *Shabbos*, and *Moshiach* of course. As one of the T'mimim put it, "I will never forget this special parade."

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Teveria. 17 Iyar 5760. 10:30 A.M. Precisely one day before the Lag B'Omer parades in the schools of Teveria.

Every year there is a parade in the center of town along with the traditional boat ride on the Kinneret, but that year classes were supposed to be held, by order of the Ministry of Education.

The *shliach*, R' Yosef Kramer, has excellent connections with the principals of schools in Teveria, so he decided to organize a giant parade with two of the largest schools in the city, each school having 1,000 pupils.

Everything was ready when the principal of one of the schools cancelled due to a sudden strike by the P.T.A. "We will not antagonize the P.T.A.," he said. No convincing could move him. Then the second school reported in as well, and the news wasn't good. R' Kramer realized that all his work had gone down the drain. The chances of being able to organize another parade in the short time remaining to him were slim if not non-existent.

The Chabad House staff convened for an emergency meeting in which they finally decided to have five parades in the various neighborhoods of the city. Within an hour, thousands of flyers and large signs were printed, calling upon all children to gather at five different locations.

Phones started to ring with parents calling for more information. "We didn't promise any special entertainment since

everybody was booked,” says R’ Kramer, “but we knew that our success was solely dependent on the Rebbe’s *kochos*.”

Indeed, the unbelievable happened and nearly 1,000 children from neighborhoods all over the city gathered for Lag B’Omer parades in Teveria, quite an achievement considering that the parades were organized in less than a day!

“First prize – a bicycle – goes to...” – announced the emcee of a parade which took place in a low income neighborhood. Mother and daughter went up for the prize, with the mother wiping away her tears of joy. When the emcee asked her why she was so moved, she said that she had recently promised her seven-year-old daughter a bicycle, but she couldn’t afford one. “I prayed that I would win, and my prayer was heard,” smiled the mother through her tears.

INCREDIBLE ANSWER

Rabbi Boruch Lepkivker, *shliach* in Ramat Menachem Begin in Tzfas, relates:

“A few days before the parade, we were afraid that despite all the work we were putting into it, only a few kids

would show up. We put a letter into the *Igros Kodesh* and received this amazing answer: ‘*Maalin b’kodesh* (one must increase in holiness) in expansiveness, and without a doubt they will have the upper hand... and Hashem should grant them the merit to sense it and see it with eyes of flesh at the earliest possible opportunity.’

“And we really did see tremendous success with the participation of the largest number of children we had ever had. The tremendous excitement even reached the Canaan neighborhood and made a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*.

“It was moving to see 450 children and their parents marching in the little neighborhood, carrying signs which called for



strengthening of faith.

AND YOUR END WILL BE VERY GREAT...

The sun beat down and flooded the main streets of Givatayim with light. Technicians prepared a sound system in the Gan HaZikaron for the Lag B’Omer parade scheduled for 4:00 p.m.

R’ Y.Y. Beckerman of the Chabad House in Givatayim was well aware of the high standard of living the people of his town enjoyed, and he knew that he had to provide a suitable program which could rival the enrichment programs that were available all over town.

This was true for anything he undertook, but all the more so for the Lag B’Omer parade. Each year he wracked his brain to come up with something that would pull the privileged kids of his town out of their



air-conditioned homes to the parade. Each year this became harder to do, and the competition with the technological lure of home became more and more expensive.

In the era of the Internet, cable TV and air conditioned homes, children preferred to stay by their computer or to surf the TV stations which provide a wide range of entertainment, than to go out on a hot day. Performers no longer attracted them or interested them.

R' Beckerman always put a huge amount of money into his Lag B'Omer parades to hire top performers, and his raffle offered the most exclusive prizes. Items that were first prize in other towns were at the bottom of his list.

That year, R' Beckerman decided to appoint a special events organizer, R' Gilad Bar Tov, and to really come up with a big surprise. R' Bar Tov brought carnival rides and invited the children to enjoy the rides after the parade and rally.

Colorful signs announced the one-day Luna Park which would be at the parade. Free transportation was offered for children from all over the city.

R' Beckerman was sure that lots of kids would come. He arranged for traffic coordinators from the local police station to close the roads in the center of town as the parade went by. Groups of girls from Kfar Chabad were ready to greet the hundreds of children from the central location from where the largest parade in the history of Givatayim was going to embark.

Sunday, Lag B'Omer, 3:45. R' Beckerman arrived at the starting point of the parade. All his hopes evaporated. Despite all their efforts, the kids preferred to stay home.

R' Beckerman recalled the Chasidic aphorism *tracht gut, vet zain gut*, and tried to console himself with the thought that maybe a few more

children would show up.

At 4:00 p.m., starting time, there was a grand total of *three* children in the Gan HaZikaron. He met the mocking gaze of the police officer. "There are more policemen than children! Is this why you asked us to close the streets?"

R' Beckerman knew the show had to go on. He went off to the side and began writing a letter to the Rebbe. He simply asked for a *bracha* for supernatural success. After he finished the letter, he put it in a book. When he read the Rebbe's answer he knew he would be successful.

The letter was addressed to a Jew



who had organized a *seudas Melaveh Malka* and wrote the Rebbe that it had been a disaster. The Rebbe told him to focus on the Baal Shem Tov's explanation of the verse, "Your beginning will be small, but your end will be very great" – specifically because the beginning is small, the end will be great.

R' Beckerman had already "tasted" a poor start, so now he anticipated the promise of the end of the *pasuk*, "and your end will be very great" – which began two minutes later. Within another 15 minutes, dozens of children had appeared, as though a hidden hand had drawn them out of their homes.

At 4:30 p.m., half an hour after the

scheduled time, the parade left – with 350 children! The police officer could do nothing but salute the *shluchim*.

COMING HOME

Rabbi Pizem, *shliach* in Sederot relates:

"On Erev Pesach, I met a young man with a ponytail, *kippa*, and *tzitzis*. I didn't get into a long conversation with him, but on Motzai Yom Tov, I met him again and he asked me where I was going. I told him I was going to clean the community sports center after the public *seider* that took place there for 300 people. He said, 'I want to come and help you.' At first I didn't agree, but after he insisted, I had no choice but to agree.

"We entered the gym and he saw the tables with the remains of the *seider*. He was very moved, and he told me that when he was little he had participated in a Lag B'Omer parade which took place in this very same hall. He had never forgotten the verse of *Shma Yisroel*. 'The echo of that *Shma Yisroel* rings in my ears now as though I am back at that Lag B'Omer parade,' he said emotionally.

"Then he went on to tell me what had happened in all the intervening years and how he had traveled to India, but the *Shma Yisroel* had never left him.

"Today, that young man is one of the more advanced *mekuravim*."