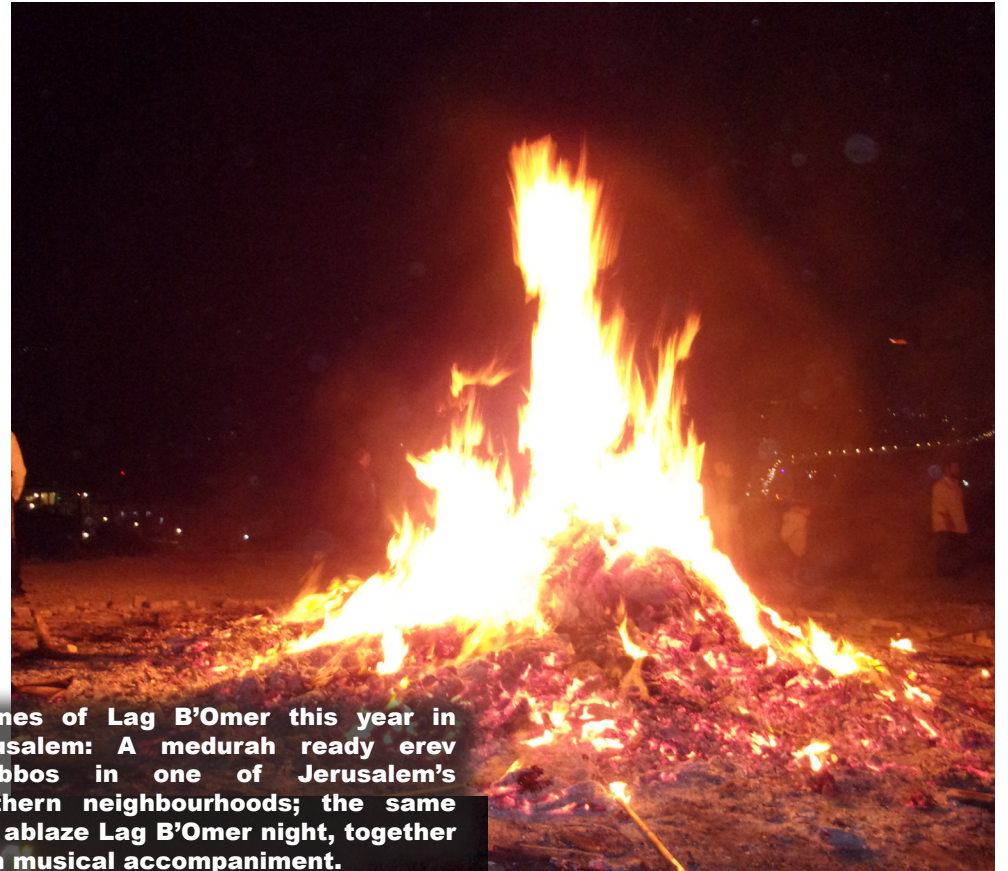


From Pesach to Shavuos

JERUSALEM REPORT

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Scenes of Lag B'Omer this year in Jerusalem: A medurah ready erev Shabbos in one of Jerusalem's northern neighbourhoods; the same one ablaze Lag B'Omer night, together with musical accompaniment.

Over here in Jerusalem, the journey from Pesach to Shavuos starts straight after Pesach, or even earlier, Lag B'Omer of course the most noticeable stop on the way. It's evidenced by *cheder* boys intensely involved in their *avodah*, shlepping any moveable piece of wood they can find as they begin work on their Lag B'Omer *medurah*.

Working in teams - they commence the minute they return home from *cheder* in the afternoon - one of their first targets is the supermarket. At Pesach time, demand here is so great that even large supermarkets are forced to keep stock out on the pavement, which for the boys provides veritable treasures ready for the taking: whole or broken crates and packing material. Added to this are any broken pieces of furniture - Pesach's high season for that too - every piece hoarded, and ready for the great day. Finally, at the site of the *medurah*, a remarkable edifice begins to arise from the ground. Why not? After all, *Mitzvah goreres mitzvah!*

This year, the night of Lag B'Omer was different from all other Lag B'Omer nights. The principal destination for the multitudes on the day is usually Meron - this year out of bounds due to the security situation - it is only five kilometres from the northern border, and home to sensitive military equipment. In recent weeks it's been frequently targeted, the day of Lag B'Omer itself this year indeed seeing heavy missile attack, in the centre of the country as well as in the north, a barrage let loose at main population centres.

Despite all this, the light of Rashbi did not dim in any way. The usual mass gathering at Meron - so great that



one notices the absence of population in the towns - was replaced by many more local ones, shuls, communities and *chadorim* making their own, apart from those of *Admorim* up and down the country.

Exceeding all expectations, by far the largest one this year was that of the well-known *mashpiah* Rabbi Elimelech Biderman. Held in Beit Shemesh - it's about 40 minutes west of Jerusalem - it was the destination for countless thousands on the day. From Jerusalem

the buses left from *Gush Shemonim*, just up from the Bar Ilan junction, departing from 10pm onwards, only beginning the return journey from 2:30am. The *hadlakah* itself took place at 3:30am, most of those attending not getting home for hours.

Of course, the day of Lag b'Omer itself is also one of the busiest in the year for *chassenehs*, shul noticeboards plastered with invitations. It's quite usual to attend a few on the same night, especially as the *simcha* halls tend to

be situated close to each other, even two or three in the same building. But it doesn't work the same way as in *chutz l'arets*. Over here, it's usually only family and close friends who attend the *chuppah*, others arriving later in the evening. You wish *Mazel Tov*, enjoy a dance - *be somayach Choson v'Kallah* - and likely partake in the 'bar'. On offer will be a *parev* cholent, *kugel* - potato and Yerushalmi - and 'cigarettes', that is finger shaped sticks of dough with potato filling, fried and crispy. Cake and drinks are, of course on offer, also often chicken nuggets and more!

Afterwards, the journey back home will be like the outward one, everyone dressed in *chasseneh* finery on a packed bus. One or two might pass you full without stopping before one pulls up that you can get on. Many of the routes serving the frum *shechunas* are '*mehadrin*', meaning that men sit at the front and women at the back. It's a big help since you're packed like sardines and can't help pressing into each other! A double buggy blocking the door might well inflame tensions!

Shavuos is now in sight, flowers blooming and available on every street corner, and bakeries flowing with cheese cake. Shuls will soon be stocking high with drinks and refreshments to last through Yom Tov night, even large ones having difficulty finding someone who has slept and can be motzai others with berachos!

So, we continue on - in uncertain times - a pillar of cloud going before us by day, and a pillar of fire by night, on all our journeys.

The author is an avreich in Jerusalem