

# Emor 2006

- Mordecai Zeitz. Lag b'Omer and Jewish Continuity.

## SHABBAT SHALOM-EMOR-2006

We count 49 days - 7 weeks - and for a period of 33 days we are considered to be in a status of semi-mourning thus no weddings, music and even normal grooming. Then, in the midst of this Counting of the Omer there comes a day of joy and celebration-Lag B'Omer-the 33rd day of the Omer. This is the day, by anyone's count, which is a day on which the semi-mourning practices are lifted and smachot and celebrations abound. On Mt. Meron in Israel the traditional 1st haircuts are given to children amidst great celebration. Lag B'Omer, is an oasis of celebration in the midst of mourning.

In a way this reflects the special ingredient for Jewish continuity.

Regardless of the atmosphere of gloom and doom which prevails at any given time and the real suffering, whether physical or emotional, which seem to effect our lives or the lives of those that surround us, we still persist in living and celebrating life in as much a normal fashion as possible. The Lag B'Omer factor is our ability to focus on the positive and not become overwhelmed by the negative. While we might grieve again tomorrow, today we find reason to live and to celebrate that precious gift of life.

But why must we constantly be subjected to such suffering and grief?

What prevents the breaking out of Lag B'Omer and thus the eradication of pain? Is there something we are perhaps missing that allows us only a taste of joy rather than a full diet of simcha?

While there are many explanations I believe that the history of Lag B'Omer itself contains the answer we seek. Tradition tells us of the plague which killed 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students. The reason for this terrible plight was the fact that they did not treat each other with respect. On the 33rd day it stopped and the rest of the students were spared.

Is it possible that there was a sudden 'love in' which lifted the plague? It's hard to imagine a 24 hour turnaround in human relations. It doesn't happen so quickly. These matters of human interaction and attitudes take time.

Lag B'Omer gave them, as it does us, an opportunity to realize the way it could be and consequently to begin inching in the direction of the celebration of life rather than the destruction of life. Just by stopping to realize the consequences of unbridled hate and prejudice, of creating barriers rather than bridges, of being exclusive rather than inclusive, should prompt us to see the plague that engulfs us and seek a cure. We at least recognize the Lag B'Omer potential. That alone is worthy of celebration.

It's easy to put the blame elsewhere. But the cure has to start with us which means we have to recognize the problem. Consider the scene--workers digging down deep in a mine shaft. Loads of dirt are brought to the surface. It appears worthless except to the person who has the expert eye and recognizes a special quality in a particular chunk. The dirt is hosed off under tremendous pressure and a gem emerges. The artisan polishes and shapes it and it seems perfect. It seems fit for a king's crown. Yet the expert eye sees a flaw which others seem to have missed. With all the qualities, there is still something missing.

The Jewish People during two thousand years of exile and for the past fifty-eight years are on the roller coaster ride with the State of Israel, despite the pressures and 'shmutz' its been subjected to, have emerged as shining gems reflecting personal accomplishment and unheralded contributions to world progress. Has it not earned its rightful safe and secure permanent place on the world scene? What's missing which prevents a total Lag B'Omer life as opposed to a prolonged period of semi-mourning? 'Shain Tzeit' and well deserved!

The glaring flaw which remains is internal-mainly our lack of Jewish unity; our inability to treat each other and our respective opinions with respect. We definitely have the right to disagree but with respect and a tolerance for a divergence of views. Our inability to achieve that, prevents the brilliance of the gems we have to share with the world to shine through. Lag B'Omer is a challenge to create a sense of unity of spirit and purpose and respect amongst our families, friends and Jewish communities to at least not do to ourselves that which is hurtful to us. Case in point-collaborating with the very enemy intent on our destruction. It defies comprehension!

This Lag B'Omer let us discover events of mutual benefit worthy of celebration which will hopefully make more days of our life worthy of celebration.

Rabbi Dr. Mordecai E. Zeitz