



Text Message Q&A #116

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Lag Ba-Omer

Lag Ba-Omer on Motza'ei Shabbat

Q: Often, non-Torah-mandated holidays are moved to avoid desecration of Shabbat. Why not Lag Ba-Omer? There will definitely be kids lighting bonfires well before Shabbat ends.

A: The problem is that it is not exactly a holiday with Mitzvot, but a popular custom. In Shut Sha'arei Tzion (#14), Ha-Rav Shmuel Rabinowitz – the Rav of Kotel and Holy Places in Israel - discusses this question regarding the celebrations at Kever Rashbi on Meiron and says that the bonfires should be started later in the night. This is the custom of the Admor of Boyan, but he also refers to a letter from Ha-Rav Zalman Nechmiah Goldberg (Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's son-in-law) that the bonfires should be done during the day for the reasons you mentioned. The Chief Rabbi of Israel, Ha-Rav Yonah Metzger, also called for the bonfires to be lit on Sunday during the day.

Holiday on Lag Ba-Omer

Q: Is Lag Ba-Omer a holiday?

A: No, people just have the custom to have a little joy on that day. Rama, Orach Chaim 493:2.

Cohanim at the Grave of the Rashbi on Mt. Meiron

Q: Is it permissible for Cohanim to enter Kever Rashbi?

A: No. Halichot Shlomo, p. 366 (see Kum Hithalech Ba-Aretz #36).

Kever Rashbi

Q: If one visits Kever Rashbi, what should he do?

A: Pray and repent.

Chai Rotel

Q: What is the source of "Chai Rotel" - that if one donates or offers 18 Rotels (54 liters or about 13 gallons) of drink to those attending the celebrations at Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's tomb on Lag Ba-Omer, then the giver will be granted miraculous salvation?

A: There is no source. One Chasidic Rebbe told his student to bring drinks to thirsty visitors on this spot, and in merit of this kindness Hashem would help him, as in all acts of kindness (Rotel is a liquid measure of the Turks, equaling about 3 liters, and contains no holiness).

Kever Rashbi or Torah Learning

Q: Is it preferable to visit Kever Rashbi on Lag Ba-Omer or learn Torah?

A: Learn Torah since it is a clear obligation.

Q: But the Arizal would visit Kever Rashbi on this day?

A: We are not the Arizal (We also heard this in the name of Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski).

In place of Kever Rashbi

Q: If someone is not going to visit Kever Rashbi, but wants to do something to honor Rashbi, what can be done?

A: Learn the book "Shivchei Rashbi". Ha-Chida in Moreh Be-Etzba, p. 223.

Lighting a Candle for Rashbi

Q: Which is preferable – lighting a candle to honor Rashbi or giving the money to the poor?

A: Tzedakah - a clear Mitzvah, which is not the case for lighting a candle, which does not have a clear source (The Vilna Gaon did not follow the custom to light a Yahrzeit candle. Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 1:702).

Wood for Lag Ba-Omer Bonfire

Q: When I collect wood for the Lag Ba-Omer bonfire, how can I know that it does not belong to someone else?

A: You may not take it unless you are 100% certain that it is ownerless.

Q: But it is impossible to be certain.

A: Then it is forbidden to take it.

Sefirat Ha-Omer on Lag Ba-Omer

Q: If a person has not yet counted Sefirat Ha-Omer and says: "Today is Lag Ba-Omer", can he count with a blessing?

A: Some say that it is proper to take caution not to do so since one can count Sefirah in any language (Luach Eretz Yisrael of Ha-Rav Yechiel Michal Tukatzinsky. Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot 1:311). Some say that he did not fulfill his obligation and may count with a blessing (Chazon Ovadiah – Yom Tov, p. 248). And others say that if he did so, he should not count with a blessing or hear the blessing from someone else (Shut Mishnat Yosef 7:93. Ve-Yishma Moshe vol. 1, p. 169 in the name of Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv).

Mourner on Lag Ba-Omer

Q: How should a mourner celebrate Lag Ba-Omer?

A: He should not.

Groom Fasting

Q: If a groom is getting married on Lag Ba-Omer, should he fast?

A: Some are strict. Magen Avraham 574:1. Some are lenient. Eliyahu Rabbah 493.

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