

AROUND THE BONFIRE

LAG BA'OMER – IN THE CIRCLES OF JEWISH HEROISM

Background for the teacher

“Around the bonfire” by Natan Alterman is perhaps the most famous song of the Palmach, and is known by the version sung by Dorit Reuveni and the Central Command Troup. The song was first written and published in the section “The Seventh Column” by Alterman on May 7, 1948 in honour of seven years of the Palmach, and within a week after this song was published in the newspaper Davar the State of Israel was declared and established. The Palmach was founded on Lag Ba’Omer 5701, 1941.

The course of the lesson

- Before hearing the song, we will ask the students to try to understand during which period the song took place?

After hearing the song:

- What is the dimension of time in the song? (Night, the month of Nissan)
- Why is it written “as always in Nissan the moon”? What is the poet trying to imply? (In the month of Nissan the people of Israel were freed when they left Egypt during the night, that is to say Alterman is asking to make a parallel between the well known mythological journey of the people of Israel and the Palmach going to war the objective of which was establishment of the Jewish state in the Land of Israel.
- What is the uniqueness of those same “boys without a name” who sit around the bonfire? (Satisfied with little, comradeship, friendship and readiness for battle)

Discussion

Say: we do not know the name of the boys and we are not told that they are “commanders” or “military leaders” but rather their strength is in their youth and their special spirit and they were the ones who brought about the establishment of the State.

- What characterizes you as young people?



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- How similar or different are you from the young people of the Palmach?
- Is it appropriate that we have such young people? And if so, what should be done to create young people who take responsibility for their country?



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AROUND THE BONFIRE by Natan Alterman

(Written to commemorate seven years of the Palmach 5708)

Their nation had no mother
She did not know when they were leaving
It was a deep, breathing night
As always in Nissan, the moon.
And there was a congregation of boys with no name
Bare elbows and knees

They listened attentively and silently
Or engaged in an argument.
Before them I stepped on a foot of fire
A bonfire circled in the wind
No more but in writing the stubborn nation,
That night a plaque was engraved on me

The simple burden as dust
They carried a blind eye back
He did not blow the shofar before them
Did not stroke their heads on a winter night
No, two sleeves tied around the neck
Only the sweater was hugging their necks

Stiff shoes and school bags
A feast of olives and dates
And wrinkled aluminum cups
And evilness and sacrifice is unthinkable
What will we add to this? ...the little things
Legends are created. This is the material

What shall we sing about them? What shall we sing?
They do it better than we do
They write a song for themselves
And even books have been given
This is the nature of the Palmach he does not leave
Any work that "is not ours"

But that's how you should say
Boys are known to be unknown
Between the great holidays of the generation
There is no beauty from your modest celebration
In front of you the nation is on the edge of freedom
She bowed and cried and understood



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