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# WEEKLY SHMUESS

# Re'eh

ESSENCE  
OF THE  
THREE  
FESTIVALS

DRASHA FROM THE  
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## *Re’eh - Essence of The Three Festivals*

In the end of *Parshas Re’eh*, the Torah discusses the *Shalosh Regalim*, the Three Festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot.

We find different terms used by our *Chazal* (holy Sages) in describing the festivals. Our festivals are called *zmanim*, *chagim*, *moadim*, and *regalim*.

They are called *zmanim* and *moadim*, since they are established as certain times of the year. They are called *chagim* from the word *machog*, which means to “cycle”, because the cycle of the festivals repeats itself each year.

They are also called *moadim* from the word *vaad*, which means “meetings.” Three times a year we would trek to the *Beis HaMikdash* and bring a *korbon*; we would all gather together and ascend upon the mountain of Hashem, the site of the *Beis HaMikdash*. But this was not just a “*vaad*” in the sense that we were all gathered together. It was our meeting with Hashem – we would appear “in front of Hashem”.<sup>1</sup> It was a *vaad* in that we were all gathered together, and it was a *vaad* because we were all meeting with Hashem.

Another term to describe the three festivals is “*regalim*.” The simple meaning of this is “feet” that we would all walk by foot to travel to Jerusalem for *Yom Tov*. For example, the *Gemara*<sup>2</sup> deduces from the word *regalim* that a person is only obligated in the *mitzvah* if he has normal feet to walk with, but if he limps, he is exempt from the *mitzvah*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Devarim* 16:16

<sup>2</sup> *Chagigah* 4a

### *Regel/Walking – Going From One Place To Another*

Let us reflect on the “*regalim*” aspect of the *Yom Tov*.

*Chazal*<sup>3</sup> say that the world stands on three pillars – Torah, *avodah*, and *chesed*; these are like three “feet” which the world stands upon. The world stands on three pillars, and so does time. Time stands on the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot, which are like the three pillars that uphold time.

The word *regel* (רגל) besides for its simple meaning of “foot”, can also mean “because of”, like when Yaakov told Lavan, “*And Hashem blessed you, because of me.*” It is also written, רגלי חסידיו ישמור, “*The feet of His pious ones are protected* [because they are pious].”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, the three festivals are not a purpose unto themselves; they exist “because” of a greater goal. The festivals take us and lead us to a certain point.

If a person is unaware that the *Yomim Tovim* serve a greater goal that they lead to, then he does not experience *Yom Tov* through his soul; he only experiences it through his body. The festivals are given to us so we can use them to reach a higher place than we were at until now. A festival moves us from one point to the next point.

We have so far mentioned two aspects of *Yom Tov*. One aspect of *Yom Tov*, we

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<sup>3</sup> *Avos* 1:2

<sup>4</sup> *Shmuel I* 2:9

mentioned, is that it upholds a person. The second aspect of *Yom Tov* is that it leads us to a higher point. Thus, meeting with Hashem for three times a year was not just to travel there with our feet. The purpose of *Yom Tov* was that we should ascend to a higher [more spiritual] point. That is the deeper implication of *regalim*.

*Yom Tov* is a time to ascend spiritually. Just as we ascended onto a certain place in the world on *Yom Tov* – the site of the *Beis HaMikdash* – so must we ascend, in our very soul, to a higher place than the one we are at now.

### ***Holy Habits***

How do we ascend in our souls through *Yom Tov*?

The answer lies in the following: there is another meaning of the word “*regel*”. It can also mean to “search”, as we find in the word *meraglim*, “visitors” of the land, who really come to search out the land. This hints to us that the way we ascend through *Yom Tov*/the *regalim* is by “searching” for something. The first *regel* is Pesach, which we begin by searching for any *chometz*.

*Yom Tov* is a “*regel*”, and this implies that we need to search for something on *Yom Tov*. *Chazal* say that “It is better had man not been born, and now that we have been born, we need to examine our deeds.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, we need to search inside ourselves. What is it that we need to search for?

The word “*regel*” can also come from the word “*hergel*”, which means “habit.” We ask

of Hashem, “*Shetargileinu B’Torasecha*”, that “we should become accustomed in Your Torah” – we want to develop a habit for the words of Torah. Doing things out of habit is usually not a good thing [this is called *melumadah*, doing things by rote]. But there are times in which we find that doing things out of habit is a good thing [and then *hergel* is being used for holiness]. On *Yom Tov*, we need to search inside ourselves and see which of our habits are good, and which are not good.

We count 50 days of the Omer until we get to the giving of the Torah, in which we have hopefully become accustomed to the Torah by then, when we have hopefully reached our aspiration of “*And we should become accustomed in Your Torah.*” At first we search ourselves out on the night before Pesach, and this is the beginning aspect of the *regel*. In between Pesach and Shavuot, we have hopefully become more accustomed to going to the *Beis Midrash*, that our feet are naturally taking us to towards the *Beis Midrash* [as Dovid *HaMelech* describes in *Tehillim*]. On Shavuot, we ideally reach the apex of getting used to holiness, which is the purpose.

This is the first aspect of the three *regalim*, which begins with Pesach – at first we search inside ourselves to see what our habits are, if they are holy or unholy. If we find habits in ourselves that are not for holiness, we need to destroy it, just as we destroy the *chometz* we find in any nooks and crannies. Along with this, we need to gain good kinds of habits – to become used to learning Torah, which is how we use the power of *hergel*/habit, for holiness. “*Shetargileinu B’Torasecha.*”

### *The First Step In Growing From Tom Tov: Inner Order To Our Soul*

When we search inside ourselves to discover what our habits are, we must proceed in steps. It is written of the Jewish people when they would travel to Jerusalem, “*How beautiful are your steps.*”<sup>6</sup> When we would travel to Jerusalem by foot, it was with “steps” – in other words, our *avodah* needs to be practiced in steps. We must give ourselves some inner order to our soul. As the *Mesillas Yesharim* says, we cannot acquire the various levels of piety all at once. Spiritual growth is a gradual, step-by-step process.

So when we search ourselves inside, we must do this in steps. It must be done with carefully planned thought; “*Sof maaseh b’machshavah techilah*” – “The end of actions is first with thought.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, we need to gain a clear perception of what our soul’s abilities are. As one of the Sages said, “You see a clear world.” We should be clear in what our soul abilities are, from the lowest point to the highest point, and be aware of the many parts in our soul. Then we should search our entire soul, in an orderly fashion [beginning from our lowest point of the soul, all the way to the highest point of our soul] and discover what our habits are leading towards. We need to mark down all our habits that are holy, and all our habits that are unholy, so that we can be ready to the holiest habit of all – to become accustomed to learning the Torah.

This is the first step of how we grow from *Yom Tov*.

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<sup>6</sup> *Shir HaShirim* 7:2

<sup>7</sup> *From the Lecha Dodi prayer of Friday Night*

### *The Second Step In Growing From Yom Tov: To See Where We Are Going*

There is a more inner *avodah* we have on *Yom Tov* as well. This is contained in another term for the word *regel* – the term “*aragab*”, which means “thirsty.” We find this in the *possuk*, “*Just as a deer thirsts over the banks of water, so does my soul thirst for You, G-d.*”<sup>8</sup> The feet of a person lead him toward something he wants and longs for. *Yom Tov*, which is called *regel*, leads a person to what he is thirsty for, to what he has “*aragab*” (thirst) for. *Yom Tov* reveals to a person what his aspirations are. It shows what we really want, what we are really getting pleasure from in life.

So the first part of our *avodah* is that we need to search inside ourselves and discover what our habits are, and after that, we need to discover where we are actually heading towards. If we discover in ourselves that we are heading towards habits that are bad, we need to destroy them.

When we left Egypt, we were “redeemed from a house of slaves”; we were not just redeemed in the physical sense from Egypt, but we were redeemed in our souls. There were “seventy souls” who went down to Egypt, connoting that the exile in Egypt was taking place in our souls as well. The redemption from Egypt was essentially an inner redemption, a redemption from the exile upon our very souls. Hashem took us out from there and instead “brought us closer into His service.” We became close to Hashem because we gained inner clarity within our souls. The redemption showed us what we really wanted and enjoyed and longed for.

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<sup>8</sup> *Tehillim* 42:2

## *Defining The Joy of Yom Tov*

The unique *mitzvah* of all three festivals is that we have a *mitzvah* to rejoice on *Yom Tov*. *Chazal* state that the *mitzvah* of *simchas Yom Tov* (joy on the festival) is fulfilled through meat and wine.<sup>9</sup>

*Yom Tov* is a revelation of our happiness, and it also shows us **what** makes us happy. The meat and wine only satisfies our *nefesh habehaimis*, the lower and animalistic part of our souls, but this is not the entire *simcha* of *Yom Tov*. It is only needed so that we can give something to our *nefesh habehaimis* to satisfy it, because if we don't satisfy it, our *nefesh habehaimis* will rebel and get in the way of our true, inner happiness.

Therefore, if a person thinks that *simchas Yom Tov* is all about dining on meat and wine, he only satisfies his *nefesh habehaimis*, and he only knows of an external and superficial *Simchas Yom Tov*. Woe is to such a person!

What is the real happiness of *Yom Tov*? The *posuk* says, “*And you shall rejoice in your festival.*”<sup>10</sup> Our true happiness on *Yom Tov* is the happiness we have in *Yom Tov* itself. It is to rejoice with Hashem, Whom our soul is thirsty for. It is from this that we derive the depth of our happiness, on *Yom Tov*.

“*The righteous rejoice in Hashem.*”<sup>11</sup> When a person lives a life of truth, when he lives a very internal kind of life, his entire happiness is “in Hashem.” He is happy “in” his feeling of closeness with Hashem and with His Torah – the place where true happiness is derived.

So *Yom Tov*, the time to rejoice, is the time in which we discover the happiness we are used to. It is a time to discover if our main happiness is coming from externalities such as meat and wine (for the men) jewelry and clothing (for the women) and candy (for the children) – or if our happiness is coming from an inner place. It is only inner happiness which satisfies our spiritual needs – our *nefesh Elokus* (G-dly soul).

*Yom Tov* is thus not just the time in which we rejoice, but it is a time in which we clarify to ourselves what our soul is really rejoicing in. On *Yom Tov*, we do not just attempt to ‘connect’ ourselves to happiness, as if happiness is somewhere on the outside of ourselves. The festivals are called *regalim*, which implies that we reveal from within ourselves where we are habitually drawn towards, where we really are.

When a person never makes this internal clarification – when he never bothers to search himself outside, and he never discovers what truly makes him happy – he is like a dove who cannot find any rest. *Yom Tov* to him will feel like a time of confusion; he is like the dove who could not find any rest from the *mabul* (the flood), which is from the word *bilbul*, confusion.

A person should cleanse himself off from the desires for this world's pleasures and instead reveal his thirst for the true happiness.

## *Making This Assessment*

When *Yom Tov* arrives, the first thing we need to clarify with ourselves is: If *Yom Tov* really makes us happy.

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<sup>9</sup> *Pesachim* 109a

<sup>10</sup> *Devarim* 15:15

<sup>11</sup> *Tebillim* 97:12

You should know that most people are not really happy on *Yom Tov* – not even for one second do they really experience *Simchas Yom Tov*! [This is not just because the Vilna *Gaon* says that the hardest *mitzvah* to keep is *Simchas Yom Tov*, due to the fact that it is for a 24-hour period lasting for seven days. We are referring to a much more simpler and basic level, which most people do not even reach].

Most people enjoy some moments of relaxation on *Yom Tov*, but they never reach one moment of true *simcha*. If someone experiences even one moment of *simchas Yom Tov*, he has begun to touch the spiritual light of *Yom Tov*.

In order to reach true *simcha* on *Yom Tov*, we need to remove the various bad habits we have towards the various ambitions we have that are not about holiness. We must remove any “thirsts” we may have for things that are not truthful sources of pleasure. When we begin to feel our souls’ thirst for its source – Hashem – we will find our source of happiness there.

A person needs to discover: “What makes me happy?” If someone’s entire happiness on *Yom Tov* comes from meat and wine, then according to *halachah* he has fulfilled *simchas Yom Tov*; he has made his *nefesh hebeheimis* happy, but he did not reach the goal of *Yom Tov*; he did not reach “*And you shall rejoice in your festival.*” He hasn’t even touched upon the real happiness of *Yom Tov*.

The three festivals are called the *regalim*. They have the power to awaken us to spiritual growth, and to know what is making us happy. From knowing that, we are able to continue that very same happiness and extend it into the rest of the year.