

מסילה Mesilah

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DIVREI CHIZUK

INSPIRATIONAL WORDS

A Season of Sorts

Rabbi Yossi Krausz

Ushering in a Jewish new year seems to be no simple task. For those practising Sephardic customs, they arise early to say the Selichot for a whole month before Rosh Hashanah. But whoever you are, it began around then, when we started to hear the annual call for introspection and repentance.

And then the big day arrived. The new year was here, but it was no time for fireworks. The spirit of the day may have been joyous, but it was pretty serious too. Lengthy prayers in shul and the shofar's blasts coronating the Almighty King and summoning us to repentance.

The climax of the ten days of teshuvah was Yom Kippur. We stood like angels in white and didn't eat for a day. With its five separate prayers and multiple prostrations, this day can be assumed to be the holiest day of the year. Then, it was only four plain days and now we're head-on with Sukkos, and over here it's all joy. In fact, an explicit verse in the Torah commands us to rejoice on this Chag.

The connection between Sukkos and the High Holidays is not revealed to us directly in the Torah; we're simply given the timeline. Yet their proximity begs explanation.

We can shed light on to this loaded season by telling the story of the Jewish people in our very first year in the wilderness following the redemption from Egyptian bondage. This can probably be best encapsulated in the words of the prayer we recite in every Yom Tov Amidah, and a favourite Yom Tov song: "אתה בחרתנו מכל העמים אהבת אותנו" "ורצית בנו" You have chosen us. You have loved us. You have desired us.

We started out as the family of Jacob with no place to call our home. When Hashem dedicated Himself to our survival and continuity and rescued us from Egyptian affliction, we became a nation. We sojourned into the des-

ert, protected by His Clouds of Glory. We were Chosen. The love, that was the intimacy of Sinai. We became His mission and He shared with us His mind.

But then the catastrophe. Mere days later. We were caught dancing around the Golden Calf. Idolatry. Hashem expressed Anger. To wipe us out. To deny us the divine mission. The protective Clouds of Glory were removed. Moshe spent forty days and nights in Heaven pleading for pardon and mercy. And on the first day of Elul, Moshe ascended to Heaven for yet another bout of forty days. On the 10th of Tishrei, on Yom Kippur, Hashem granted the verdict: "I have forgiven." That's when atonement was first born. And every year since, on Yom Kippur, Hashem offers special forgiveness to those who repent.

And now, back to the wilderness. Yes, they've been pardoned, but the Clouds of Glory have still not returned. What will their relationship with Hashem look like after this shameful episode?

Immediately following that Yom Kippur, Hashem instructed the people to construct the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. A place where Hashem's Divine Presence would dwell on earth amidst the encampment of the Jewish people. For four days they collected the prescribed materials, and on the 15th of Tishrei they began the construction. On that day the embrace of the protective clouds returned. They hadn't only been forgiven. They were still desired. This is what we relive every year.

Elul marks the beginning of those forty pivotal days, days of mercy and goodwill. Yom Kippur is the climax: "The Day of Atonement." And amid these days of Hashem's unwavering commitment to us, He scheduled the yearly reckoning. Judgement in a season of mercy. Just five days on and it's Sukkos. We will rejoice. For we aren't just forgiven. We are desired.

Missing you all,

Yossi

לעילוי נשמת ליטל ימימה בת לאה לילי עליה השלום



Hakafos, Bonfires and Gunpowder

The Making of Simchas Torah

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Inglis

The Torah makes no mention of a festival called Simchas Torah. What began as the completion of the annual Torah-reading cycle developed over the centuries into a celebration with customs of its own. Some of these are now universal, others are more obscure and even controversial.

The roots of Simchas Torah lie in Bavel, where the Torah was read in an annual cycle, concluding at the end of Sukkos. By contrast, in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah was completed over roughly three years. These two customs continued side by side for centuries, and as late as the twelfth century both were still being followed. By then, however, the annual cycle had become the dominant practice across the Jewish world.

Some of the familiar customs now associated with Simchas Torah emerged surprisingly early. A tradition attributed to R. Saadia Gaon in the tenth century records that immediately after completing the

Torah many would begin Bereishis, although at that stage it was recited by heart. By the early twelfth century the Machzor Vitry describes a second Sefer Torah being brought out for Bereishis, with special honours given to those completing and beginning the Torah, the forerunners of today's Chasan Torah and Chasan Bereishis. The development of hakafos and dancing was less straightforward. Dancing is ordinarily prohibited on Yom Tov, yet on Simchas Torah it came to be permitted in honour of the Torah, as discussed by the Darchei Moshe (O.C. 669).

Even then the custom was far from universal.

In Amsterdam, for example, dancing did not take place in either the Portuguese or Ashkenazi communities. It was only in the early twentieth century that dancing began to appear in some Amsterdam shuls, partly as a concession to Eastern European immigrants from Chassidic regions.

Elsewhere, Simchas Torah customs took more unusual forms. The Maharil relates how in his youth, the children would dismantle the sukkos and make bonfires. He writes that there is halachic justification for the practice but his father didn't allow him to join. In other communities gunpowder was used to create celebratory explosions, a practice later explicitly prohibited by the Magen Avraham. In seventeenth-century Worms, women held their own Simchas Torah dances, while in Baghdad the women would go from shul to shul kissing each Sefer Torah.

Over the centuries, these varied minhagim transformed the completion of the Torah into the Simchas Torah we know today.

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לעילוי נשמות אשתו בת יחודה חבון
גולדא בת יעקב



לעילוי נשמות מרת לאה בת ר' ישראל הלוי
שהולכה לעולמה ביום ב' של חג הסוכות תשע"ט



How to choose your Esrog

Rabbi David Szejnhauer

Black Spots and Bletlech

It is common to find small black spots or scars on an Esrog, often referred to in Yiddish as bletlech. In certain cases, these can invalidate the Esrog, depending on their location, size, colour, and whether they are raised.

To properly inspect the Esrog, hold it approximately 30-40 cm away, turn it around and look at it normally, without focusing excessively or using a magnifying glass, preferably in natural light.

For this purpose, the Esrog can be divided into two areas: the upper section, from the point where the Esrog begins to narrow toward the top, and the lower section. A clearly visible black spot in the upper section invalidates the Esrog. In the lower section, a single spot is generally less problematic, although several spots may create a halachic concern. Only after noticing a questionable spot should you look more closely or use a magnifying glass to determine its exact colour and nature. A truly black spot can be problematic, while a brown mark may have a different status. Scars or bletlech are generally a concern when they are raised above the surface of the Esrog and can be felt to the touch.

Chaser – A Missing Part

Do not try to remove suspicious spots with your fingernail. Doing so may remove part of the Esrog itself and make it chaser — an Esrog with a piece missing — which can invalidate it, even when the missing part is very small.

If an Esrog has a Pitam and the entire Pitam breaks off, the Esrog becomes invalid. However, if the Pitam fell off naturally while the Esrog was still growing on the tree, this is generally not a problem. If the Oketz, the stem at the bottom where the Esrog was attached to the tree, is completely removed, this can also invalidate the Esrog on the first day of Sukkos.

Gidul Na'eh – A Beautiful Esrog

There is importance in choosing an Esrog with a beautiful shape. However, if choosing between an Esrog with a very beautiful shape but several marks, and another that is slightly less beautifully shaped but has a cleaner appearance, it is generally preferable to choose the cleaner Esrog. It is also important to buy an Esrog with a reliable kashrus certification, as there are additional halachos concerning how the Esrog was grown and its origins. Esrogim come from different traditions and locations, including Moroccan, Italian, Yemenite and Chazon Ish varieties. These differences do not in themselves reduce the quality or kashrus of the Esrog.

Whenever there is a doubt, it is important to consult a competent Rav, as there are additional details that can affect the status of an Esrog. Since this is an important mitzvah and often an expensive one, it is worthwhile to check your Esrog carefully.