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Carrying Over the Yom Tov into the Year

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of the *Shalosh Regalim* (the Three Festivals of *Sukkos*, *Pesach* and *Shavuos*), we pray, "And lift us, Hashem our G-d, the blessings of Your festival, for life and peace, happiness and gladdening."

This prayer has been interpreted by some commentators^[1] to mean that we are asking Hashem to let the blessings of *Yom Tov* carry over into the rest of the year. The Hebrew word for "Blessing", *berachah*, comes from word *beraicha* – a pool. According to this interpretation, these words mean we want Hashem's elevation to be pooled on us^[2], essentially ensuring the special power of the *Yom Tov* can be collected for access during the rest of the year as well.

Yom Tov is an opportunity for immense holiness and growth. Even *Chol HaMoed* is a holy time during which *Chazal* forbade certain activities in order to free us to rejoice in festivity and additional Torah learning.^[3] (Note that the restriction on materialism and work is only partial as certain labors are still permitted on *Chol HaMoed*). When a person is busy with various matters other than *Avodas Hashem* and learning Torah, his soul is less open to receive holiness. In contrast, *Yom Tov* disconnects us from materialism and thus opens us up to be able to acquire more spirituality, *Avodas Hashem* and Torah. This extra free and relaxed time give us the opportunity to calm our souls and focus more on serving the Creator.

However, this opportunity need not be limited to *Yom Tov*. We can receive a heightened spiritual experience similar to that gained on *Yom Tov* by regularly practicing a form of disconnecting with the material world throughout the year. In this way, we will benefit from our increased *Avodas Hashem*



and our Torah learning all year long.
[1]

Accessing the State of Yom Tov Even During The Year

Yom Tov is supposed to imbue us with a burst of heightened spiritual energy which can then be sustained until the next *Yom Tov*. These limited days of *Yom Tov* are thus vital and precious, nourishing us with holiness for the whole rest of the year.

Let's explore this idea of *Yom Tov* fueling our souls for the rest of the year on a practical level. On *Yom Tov*, most people feel comparatively more relaxed than during the year. Even on *Chol HaMoed*, we buy only food that we will need for *Yom Tov*, and not more than that. We are frugal and satisfied when our immediate needs are met. We avoid many types of work on *Chol HaMoed*, unless it will cause us a loss. Most stores are closed. (Note that we are not discussing here those who abuse the relaxed state of *Chol HaMoed* for simple frivolity or time-wasting, *chas v'shalom*.)

It seems almost impossible to live this way in a physical sense during the rest of the year. When *Yom Tov* ends, most of us usually return to our prospective jobs. Even a *Kolel avreich* has his responsibilities that lie outside his Torah learning. He has to make sure that his wife and kids have a roof over their heads; that they have food, clothing, doctor visits, etc.

However, it is possible to retain the emotional and spiritual state of inner calmness we gained on *Yom Tov* throughout the year. How? If we view the time period between one *Yom Tov* and the next as being one long "*chol hamoed*"! The Ramban writes that *Sefiras HaOmer* is like *Chol HaMoed*, and that Shavuot is like the *Shemini Atzeres* (of *Pesach*). Perhaps we can extrapolate this idea to the period between Shavuot and *Sukkos* – and between *Sukkos* and *Pesach* so that all these days are internally viewed as one big *Chol HaMoed*. Instead of being *chol*, These days simply function as a bridge connecting one *Yom Tov* to another. In this way, the heightened spirituality of *Chol HaMoed* extends all year.

In Between Yomim Tovim

Yom Tov can be considered like a *Shabbos*. For instance, *Pesach* is called "*Shabbos*"^[4] and *Yom Kippur* is called "*Shabbos Shabboson*."^[5] *Yom Tov* and *Shabbos* are both considered *zecher l'yetzias mitzrayim* – a remembrance of our redemption from Egypt and thus they can be compared to each other. In contrast, the rest of the year can be compared to the six days of the week.

The six days of the week are blessed by *Shabbos*.^[6] The days in between each *Yom Tov* are arguably

sustained by the blessings of the *Yom Tov*. Just like there are certain “in-between” time periods, for instance the afternoon^[7] and “*bein hashemashos*”^[8] (twilight) that serve to connect different times, so too the days in between *Yomim Tovim* can be considered a connecting bridge between the *Yom Tovim*. This connecting bridge consisting of the days between the *Yom Tovim* may in a sense be deemed a *Yom Tov* of its own.

Thus, the days of the rest of the year are not like *Yom Tov* itself, but may be compared to *Chol HaMoed*, [functioning as a connecting bridge linking the three parts of *Yom Tov* throughout the year.] Just as *Chol HaMoed* is part of *Yom Tov* but is less holy than the first and final days, so too the rest of the year can be considered a part of *Yom Tov*, albeit a less holy part of the three main festivals.

Support for this idea may be found from the Gemara^[9] which teaches that when Haman wanted to [choose an appropriate date to kill the Jews], he pointed out to Achashveirosh that the Jews are always busy keeping *Yom Tov*; “today is *Shabbos*, today is *Pesach*.” This supports the idea that the Jewish people are always in a state of “*Yom Tov*” – either the actual *Yom Tov* itself, or a lower level of “*Chol HaMoed*” where they are preparing for the next *Yom Tov*.

What We Can Learn From Yom Tov For The Rest of the Year

Just like the world stands on three pillars^[10], the Jewish people stand on three things – the three *Yomim Tovim*^[11]! The *Yomim Tovim* help the Jewish people survive, representing a guide as to how to live our lives during the rest of the year.

Our deep soul connection with the Creator that we achieve on *Yom Tov* need not be limited to those three special times of *Yomim Tovim*. Rather, they can seep into the rest of the year and elevate us each day. Each aspect of *Yom Tov* teaches us something significant. For example, the restriction on *Chol HaMoed* to purchase only items necessary for *Yom Tov*^[12] teaches us to be more frugal and have *emuna* in Hashem that He will provide all that we need in the future. By reducing materialism via limiting our spending only to those items which are truly necessary, we learn to be freer to focus on spirituality.

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Yom Tov* we daven “*You chose us from all the nations*”, and mention how *Yom Tov* is *zecher l’yetzias mitzrayim*. This reminds us that only the Jewish people merited to be redeemed from Egypt. The other nations did not merit this special event. *Yom Tov* represents Hashem choosing us as His people and forming us into His nation. This message of appreciation for Hashem freeing us and for our special Jewish status can be retained throughout the year.

Yom Tov - Our Meeting With Hashem

Yom Tov is called *moed*, which comes from the word *vaad* (meeting). In the times of the *Beit Hamikdash*, on the *Yom Tov* of the *Shalosh Regalim* the whole of the Jewish people would congregate there to meet with Hashem. They met up with the *Shechinah*.

What does this mean? It means that they experienced a deep connection with Hashem in their hearts so that they had a true and complete awareness of His existence. It was called “*aliyah l’regel*,” (ascending on *Yom Tov*”) because one would ascend spiritually during *Yom Tov* and then remain at that high level, maintaining it rather than falling back to his previous state.

We would derive vitality from these three meetings for the rest of the year. The *possuk*, “*Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, and who will stand in His holy place*”^[13] praises those who gain from the holy spiritual elevation of *Yom Tov* and manage to maintain level throughout the rest of the year.

We express our loss of these precious meetings in the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Yom Tov*, “And because of our sins, we have been exiled from our land, and we have been distanced from our earth.” A question arises as to why we say we have been exiled when we are able to stand in *Eretz Yisrael* today? The answer is that though we can physically live in the land, when we lost the *Beit Hamikdash*, we lost the incredible holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*. (Note that there is a debate as to whether the land of *Eretz Yisrael* still maintains its sanctity even though we have no *Beis Hamikdash*.^[14])

Thus, this *tefillah* has a deeper meaning. We are mourning [our spiritual exile and the loss of] the great spiritual revelations we experienced on *Yom Tov* at the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*. This spiritual light used to illuminate the entire *Eretz Yisrael*. Though we can still reach internal, spiritual highs, such revelations are not exposed openly in the world in the absence of the *Beit Hamikdash*. Though many Jews physically live in *Eretz Yisrael*, they are also still in exile from the spiritual revelations [and the *kedusha*] experienced at the time of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Yom Tov- The Shechinah Within

In the *Shemoneh Esrei* of *Yom Tov*, we daven “*V’hasieinu es birkas moedecha*” - (“And carry over the blessings of Your festivals...”). We beseech Hashem to let the holiness of *Yom Tov* carry into the rest of the year, despite the lack of open revelation of the *Shechinah* in our current time.

The Torah and the wisdom it imparts is eternal. Similarly, the elevation of spirituality and the open revelation of the *Shechinah* apparent in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash* is also eternal. Thus, even in the absence of the *Beis Hamikdash*, we can experience some measure of this internal “*aliyah l’regel*” every *Yom Tov*.^[15] The *Alshich* explains that the *possuk* “*And I will dwell amongst them*”^[16] refers to the fact that Hashem dwells in the heart of each Jew. We can still access the *Shechinah* in our hearts.

However, in order for this to spiritual elevation to occur we need to know the true essence of *Yom Tov*. The inner *avodah* of *Yom Tov* is to connect to Hashem in our hearts. By experiencing a stronger recognition of Hashem’s existence on *Yom Tov*, a person’s Torah learning [and *deveikus* to Hashem] during the rest of the year will become more internalized in his mind and heart.

Experience the Elation of Yom Tov and Then Seek To Maintain It

First, a person has to make sure that he has spiritually gained from *Yom Tov* in the first place. Reaching a spiritual high and connection to Hashem on *Yom Tov* is immensely valuable. Even a small improvement is beneficial as it provides one with a starting point. For instance, on *Simchas Torah* a person’s [avodah] will be to increase his love of the Torah and closeness to Hashem.

Then, it is our *avodah* to enable this growth to spill into the rest of the year. Those with clear gain and growth can extend such inspiration to the rest of the year. Conversely, a failure to grow from *Yom Tov* and obtain a stronger relationship with Hashem during *Yom Tov* will be less likely to result in heightened spirituality during the rest of the year.

One question is how do we know if we have obtained a greater closeness to Hashem after *Yom Tov*? We can check whether we feel reluctant to part from Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of *Sukkos*, begging us to “remain with Me one more day.”^[17]

The Custom In Kelm of “Asiri Kodesh”

Practically speaking, how we can hold onto our gains from *Yom Tov* and enable them to spill over into the rest of the year?

Every Rosh Hashanah, *Yom Kippur*, *Sukkos* and *Simchas Torah* we repeatedly make resolutions, and reach a spiritual high on the *Yom Tovim*, – with the help of Hashem. But what is the point if we just fall back down again, losing all we have gained *chas v'shalom*, as the year goes on? Do we just begin again from scratch next year?

In Kelm, there was a custom called “*Asiri Kodesh*.”^[18] Every ten consecutive days following *Yom Kippur*, the people of Kelm would create a “mini *Yom Kippur*” by checking to see if they had met their *Yom Kippur*'s resolutions. This custom began because it is human nature to slip and most people are only able to hold onto their inspiration during *Yomim Noraim*. A few rare individuals may be inspired a little longer, perhaps maintaining their resolutions until after *Sukkos* or so. *Asiri Kodesh* forced people to ***[undertake a regular cheshbon nefesh, repeatedly review their actions]*** to ensure they maintained their level they reached and the goals they set on *Yomim Noraim*.

This practice can teach us how to hold onto our gains from *Yom Tov*. In order to heighten our level of spirituality during the year, we need to consciously set aside time to regularly review our closeness to Hashem. We can use this time to review whether we are maintaining the spiritual bond with Hashem we managed to achieve during these holy days and how to continue to maintain it. It will enable us to clearly see where we are holding and the direction we are travelling so we can re-direct and stay on the course as set out by our resolutions of the *Yomim Noraim*.

The Advice of the Ramchal

One reason many people do not keep their resolutions for the new year is because they fail to believe in themselves enough. ***[They did not have a strong enough ratzon]*** or belief that they were able to keep to what they took upon themselves. However, this lack of self-belief represents a denial of the words of Chazal. Chazal established in *Shemoneh Esrei* the *tefillah* of “*V'hasieinu*”, Thus, it must be possible to maintain our goals and improve our spiritual connection with Hashem. Even if we cannot keep all our resolutions completely perfectly, we can still grow and maintain a level higher than the previous year.

However, it is pointless to try to keep resolutions if we fail to seek advice on how to do this in practice. The *Ramchal* (author of *Mesillas Yesharim*)'s advise in sefer *Derech Eitz Chaim* is as follows^[19]:

‘It is therefore a duty upon each person to reflect with himself. If he doesn't reflect and think, wisdom will not come after him...a person, for many years of his life, thinks a lot about his various responsibilities, which are only his temporary responsibilities. Why can't he think for an hour about the things that really matter, such as: Who am I? Why did I come onto this world? What does Hashem want from me? What will be with my end?

“This (an hour of self-introspection every day) is the greatest remedy once can have against his evil inclination. It is easy, yet it does so much. It bears many results. Every day, a person should reflect for at least an hour a day, and empty himself from the rest of his thoughts so that he can only think about just this (what he have said).

“And he should ask himself in his heart: “What did the forefathers do, whom Hashem found desirable? What did Moshe Rabbeinu do? What did Dovid HaMelech do? What did all the great leaders before me do?

“And he should realize in his mind how good it is to do this for all his life.”

The *Ramchal* is advising us to undertake this process of introspection for the entire year, not just inspiration for *Elul*. If we are really truthful with ourselves, and if we really want to gain from *Yomim*

Noraim for the rest of the year, then we must put in regular avodah to ensure we protect what we have gained from *Yomim Noraim*.^[20]

Make A Self Accounting

The Ramchal teaches that the most essential tool we need in order to maximize our potential and our connection to Hashem is to set aside time for self-introspection. Ideally, this self-reflection should be conducted on a daily basis. However, [these days it is unusual for people to consistently achieve this level]. Thus, realistically, such a self-accounting may be conducted every week or ten days. [But in order to be effective, such a process must be done regularly.] During this time, we can make a self-accounting {akin to the following}: “On Rosh Hashanah, I made a resolution to do X. At the peak of the *Yom Tovim* I also reached a certain spiritual level. Have I succeeded in keeping my resolutions and retaining an elevated level compared to last year? If not, what can I do to make sure I maintain this level and keep my resolutions?”

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem decrees each person’s fate for the coming year. However, our responsibility is to keep our word. Realistically, we must face the fact that we will face responsibilities, challenges, and difficulties in the coming year. It will definitely not be simple to maintain the level we reached on *Yomim Noraim* throughout the rest of the year. But at least by [putting in place regular practices to maximize our chances of success, we are showing ourselves and Hashem that we are trying to succeed.]

During this time, we must stop and think about the purpose of life. We must be truthful with ourselves, recalling our resolutions and good intentions we set for ourselves and what we promised Hashem we would try to achieve on Rosh Hashanah and *Yom Kippur*.

One practical method to achieve this process is to write down our resolutions. Then, we can take out the paper and review it during our reflection time. This process will reveal whether we are really keeping our word, and where we need further work. If we are not fulfilling our resolutions, we can ask ourselves: “How will I face Hashem next Rosh Hashanah...?”

In summary, in order to maximize our chances of the spiritual high gained on *Yom Tov* spilling into the rest of the year, we must designate regular times of quiet during which we can make a self-accounting. We all have the free will to decide whether or not we want to put in the effort to increase our chances of experiencing our *Yom Tov* blessings throughout rest of the year.

How To Avoid The Sleepiness of the Winter

Though we can achieve our own personal greatest levels of spirituality on *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* and the *Yom Tovim*,^[21] this spirituality of *Yomim Noraim* can enable us to reach our maximum potential for the rest of the year. [However, the greatness of the *Yomim Noraim* can only function this way if we practice regular avodah in the way we outlined above.]

[There are numerous sefarim with different words advice on how to meet and maintain our good resolutions throughout the whole year.]Some of this advice may differ from that of the Ramchal. Nevertheless, those who fail to keep the *Ramchal*’s advice or carry out some form of similar, regular self-accounting practice will be unlikely to achieve their resolutions made during *Yomim Noraim*. In contrast, those who follow the Ramchal’s advice and set aside regular time to reflect and conduct a self-accounting will most certainly see results.

These words are not meant to be simply an inspiring lecture. Inspiration is appropriate for Elul and *Yomim Noraim* but does not usually translate to the winter when we become sleepier and more

lethargic. If we want to avoid becoming spiritually sleep-like during the winter, we need to undertake a regular maintenance practice throughout the year.

Deep down we all know that regular reflection and self-accounting is necessary. These words are simple and true. They emanate from the words of our great teachers. Nothing has been added here to their advice.

May Hashem merit us to have the energy, time and *ratzon* to set aside time to think about the purpose of life^[22]. May the spiritual high of the *Yomim Noraim* and *Yom Tovim* extend into the rest of the year, enabling us to maintain our appropriate level and grow to achieve our maximum potential. May we not simply fall back down and wait passively until the next Elul in order to become inspired and rise again.

[1] Bad Kodesh on Moadim (Rav Baruch Dov Povarski), p.416. See also Birchas Moadecha (of Rav Margolin) on Tishrei.

[2] See Rabbeinu Bachye, Parshas Eikev, 8:10.

[3] Yerushalmi Moed Kattan, 9a.

[4] Menachos 65b

[5] Vayikra 16: 31

[6] Zohar II, Yisro, 88a

[7] Rashi, Shemos 12: 6

[8] Avos 5: 6

[9] Rashi, Megillah 13b

[10] Avos 1:2 and 1:17

[11] These are called Shalosh Regalim, the “Three Festivals”: Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos.

[12] Tur, Orach Chaim, 130.

[13] Tehillim 24:3

[14] See Megillah 6a and Rambam Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 6: 16

[15] Yom Tov here refers uniquely to the Three Festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Sukkos.

[16] Shemos 25: 8

[17] See Rashi, Vayikra 23: 36

[18] lit. "Tenth Day Is Holy".

[19] This has been loosely translated and is fairly literal to the text.

[20] See also Kedushas Levi: Shavuos, and also Ramban: Emunah UBitachon, chap. 19

[21] Shulchan Aruch: Orach Chaim: 203

[22] For more specific guidance on how to make a cheshbon hanefesh, see Bilvavi Vol. IV, chapters 3-5.

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Links

[1] <http://bilvavi.net/english/bilvavi-holy-days>