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## Shavuos - Restoring The Holiness of Our Festivals

***Excerpt from the drashah entitled "Feeding Your Soul" (Derashos #035)***

### ***How Are We Spending Yomim Tovim?***

Let us take a look at the way we spend the *Yomim Tovim* (Jewish holidays). Are we just living *Yom Tov* through our bodies, or through our soul?

What do people talk about on *Yom Tov*? On the day that *Yom Tov* sets in – let's take *Erev Rosh Hashanah* for example – what are our conversations about? Some people are speaking about the inner meaning of the *Yom Tov*, but most conversations go like this: "Which seat did you get in *shul* for the davening?", or "Who's babysitting your kids when you are in *shul*?"

What are we thinking about as we prepare for *Yom Kippur*? Most people are busy with how to eat and drink enough before the fast so that their fast will go easy.

And what about *Sukkos*? As *Sukkos* is about to enter, people are busy with how to have the nicest looking *sukkah* on the block. Now there are even contests in communities who can build the nicest *sukkah*...

*Chanukah* comes, and people talk about how to make the best doughnuts, and what the best jelly is. People are mainly busy with where the *Chanukah* party will be this year: by the parents, by the in-laws, or by the cousins...?

*Purim* comes, and the focus is about how to make the fanciest *Mishloach Manos* (baskets) – the fancier, the better...

*Pesach* comes, and people are talking about how the cleaning is going, or "When did you finish the *seder* last night?" and "Which of your small children asked the Four Questions?"

**As for *Shavuos*, it has basically become a holiday devoted toward the best dairy recipes.** *Baruch Hashem*, the dairy suppliers are making a lot of money this time of the year!

When it comes the Nine Days, people don't know what to make of it, so they turn it into an extension of **Shavuos** – with the eight days before *Tisha B'av* being a time for the tastiest dairy recipes out there.

We all recognize that this is the reality of how we are living. Can we call this the way a Jew is

supposed to live?? True, no one is breaking the laws of *Shulchan Aruch* here. It's all within the bounds of *halacha*; no one would dare eat meat during the Nine Days, and we are all careful to carry out exactly what it says in *Shulchan Aruch*. But this way of living is sapping all the *ruchniyus* out of these special times and leaving us with just the physical, superficial shell of it. These holy days have become emptied from their *ruchniyus*.

Can we say that *Pesach* to us is our "*zman cheiruseinu*" ("time of our freedom")? Is *Shavuot* to us a time that the Torah was given? Is *Sukkos* to us really our *zman simchaseinu* (time of joy)?

What is our joy on *Sukkos* – about how nice the *sukkah* is?! What will happen then if we see our neighbor with a nicer *sukkah*?! All our happiness will go down the drain! And whatever happened to just being happy with the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos* itself? Who talks about it, who thinks about it?

We have become used to experiencing only the superficial layer of each *Yom Tov*, with just the traditional aspect of it – and even secular people can do that part. If so, have we become satisfied with that level?! Statistics show that on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the most honey in the world is sold, and even secular people are buying honey, not just observant Jews. It's not a big deal to dip the apple in the honey.

*Rosh Hashanah* must have more meaning to us. A person has to come into it with a hunger for it, and after it is over, he has to see if he has indeed filled that hunger. We need to come into *Yom Kippur* as well and feel a hunger for it, and then to see if we have indeed satisfied it. The same goes for *Sukkos*, *Pesach* and *Shavuot*: we must always check to see if we have filled ourselves up from it spiritually, or if it just another *Yom Tov* that comes and goes.

We all have gone through *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos* more than once. Have we ever gone through any internal change from them, or have we remained the same exact as before?

We are at the beginning of a new year. Can anyone say that he has grown this year since last *Rosh Hashanah*? Are there any goals which we have set for ourselves and achieved? For most people, the answer is, "No."

Why?

It is for two reasons. The first reason is as we have said before, that we don't feel our soul's hunger. We know about *Yom Tovim* and the *mitzvos* they entail, we learn about them on an intellectual level, but we don't feel a **hunger** for *Yom Tov*. Just knowing about the *halachos* of *Yom Tov* will help us keep its *halachos*, but in order to live like a true Jew, we have to come out of *Yom Tov* satisfied spiritually. And when the eight days of *Sukkos* end, we are supposed to come out of it with a happiness that can accompany us into the winter months.

We need to change our whole attitude towards the *Yomim Tovim*. We usually do not feel our soul's hunger, and maybe it's because we don't think that it's necessary for us to feel. We have become so used to the routine of life – we get up in the morning, run to *davening*, get through it, learn, and attend social events. Each day passes by, but are we ever feeling a spiritual hunger? Or are we only hungry for food, social acceptance and success...?

**"No hunger for bread...only to hear the word of Hashem"**

We are all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. We all stood at Har Sinai. Hashem gave us all a power for spirituality – the Torah, and the soul that is in us. How much are we exercising our soul, in comparison to our body?

It's possible that a person lives in a very *frum* (observant) community, yet his entire day is spent about gratifying the body, from morning until night. Although a person often does much good deeds, much *chessed* and *mitzvos* – where is his soul at? Is his soul hungry to do *chessed*, just as when his body gets hungry? We are much more accustomed to getting things done than to feel a hunger for what we do.

We need to get to a situation in our life, (and when it comes to *Yom Tov* especially), to reflect what is written in the possuk, “*No hunger for bread and no thirst for water, except to hear the word of Hashem.*”[1] If we are hungry during these days for more spiritual growth, we are setting forward on the proper path.

Some people think that this possuk is only referring to people who were never *frum*, and that in the End of Days they will merit to join Judaism. But this possuk is not just a prophecy for the End of Days – it is referring to us, even now.

It's possible that a man wears a hat and jacket and that a woman dresses very modestly, but inside, he\she isn't hungry to carry out the “word of Hashem.” Maybe the person feels a hunger to eat good food on *Yom Tov*, but not more than that...

To be “hungry for the word for Hashem” means that a person feels hungry before the *Yom Tov* comes to grow spiritually from it, and that if he doesn't fill that hunger, he is left feeling very unsatisfied.

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**[1]** *Amos 8: 11*

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**Source:** <https://bilvavi.net/english/shavuos-restoring-holiness-our-festivals>