



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Simhat Torah

HAMELECH

Shemini Atseret

On the heels of the festive *Yom Tov* of *Sukkot* comes *Shemini Atseret*. On *Sukkot*, seventy bulls were offered in the *Beit Hamikdash* corresponding to the seventy nations. On *Shemini Atseret* we bring but one bull, corresponding to Yisrael.

Do you know what this is like? A king told his servants to prepare a festive banquet which lasted for several days. On the last day, the king told his companion, "Make for me a small meal, so that I shall enjoy your company."

Hashem does not want to part from us. He loves us, He cherishes us. We are like children taking leave of their father and he tells them, "It is hard for me to see you leaving. Stay one more day."

Simhat Torah

That is what the Torah and the Sages have to say about *Shemini Atseret*. Over the generations *Shemini Atseret* merged with *Simhat Torah*, for on this day we conclude our annual reading of the Torah. Now, we received the Torah on *Chag HaShavuot*. So why do we celebrate *Simhat Torah* after *Sukkot*?

Additionally, we are told that Hashem first offered the Torah to the other nations, and when

they refused to accept it, He offered it to Yisrael, who accepted it without question. On the other hand, we are told that we were coerced into accepting the Torah; we really had no choice in the matter. How do we reconcile this?

A Mismatch?

A story is told of a king who had but one daughter, an only child. He wished to marry her off to a member of nobility, a prince or duke or someone of that status. But the princess turned down all such offers. Her father was quite perplexed. She insisted on marrying one of the simple servants of the palace, who came from a very simple family who lived in a small village. The king tried to convince her that this was beneath her and his dignity. But she insisted, explaining that a husband with noble blood also had conceit and arrogance, and she wanted someone humble who would respect her and cherish her.

The king heard her argument and acquiesced. He called for the servant and the servant became very agitated. He had never before been called for by the king. His heart racing, he was brought before the king who greeted him warmly and informed him that he was chosen to marry the



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princess. The servant was totally shocked. He understood that he really did not have any choice in the matter. If the king offers you his daughter, you don't exactly turn her down. On the other hand, he began to wonder what may possibly be wrong with her that she is being married off to a mere commoner instead of to a member of nobility.

So, with worries in his heart, he got on with preparations for the wedding. Indeed, what a lavish wedding it was, fit for the daughter of the king. Tables laden with all the finest delicacies, tapestries hanging from pillar to pillar. Comfortable couches and fine wines. Top quality musicians were called in to play their best. Everyone was thrilled. Except for one person. The groom still had his hesitations. He still wondered what was wrong with the bride.

She certainly seemed beautiful and without any handicaps. As he got to know her better, he was even more impressed with her intellect and friendly disposition. She was charming and displayed excellence and refinement, without any traces of conceit which usually accompany members of the higher class.

Time went on and the new husband kept on checking her out. She seemed to have all her

teeth and all her toes. She had a pleasant voice and seemed to be perfectly healthy. As much as he tried, he could not find any blemish or shortcoming whatsoever.

Approximately half a year after the wedding, the young man approached his father-in-law and made an unusual request. He admitted that at the wedding, he could not rejoice properly because he had had his suspicions if he was getting into some sort of trap. But now that he had inspected his wife and analyzed her, top to bottom, within and without, and found her to be pleasing in all ways, he wished to have another wedding celebration, for now his joy is complete.

A Perfect Fit

Well, certainly Hashem knew all along that Klal Yisrael were meant for the Torah and the Torah was meant for Yisrael. It is the quintessential match made in Heaven! For a thousand generations (974 before Creation, 26 after), Hashem was waiting for this "marriage" to take place. We, on the other hand, as the "*chattan*," had our hesitations. As the offer came directly from Hashem, we understood that we really had no choice in the matter. At the same time, we did not feel secure, at the time, that it really was best



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for us, that it would not be too restraining or constricting, or perhaps with some negative side effects. It took some time, all the way until the Purim miracle, until we truly accepted the Torah lovingly, full of appreciation from the bottom of our hearts.

In the yearly cycle, *Chodesh Ellul* and *Yomim Noraim* are times of serving Hashem with fear and reverence. When *Sukkot* arrives, we contemplate upon Hashem's unending kindness and we delve into discovering more and more of the goodness of Torah. We are marveled to reveal just how wholesome and vivacious she is, how loyal and wise, how earnest and ecstatic, how lucid and enlightening, how pure and consistent; how truthful, delightful and sweet (compare with Tehillim 19). We then feel utterly speechless, We understand our situation to be similar to that of a simple commoner who was given the hand of the princess in marriage. The perfect, flawless princess; and we look forward to living a great life together, in harmony; productive and fruitful.

We appreciate the Torah and all that it involves. We appreciate the meaning it gives to our lives. We appreciate it as a means of connecting to our Creator and building our eternity.

Simhat Torah 5781

The outer trappings of Simchat Torah this year may well be quite different from what we are used to. No dancing hand in hand, no great tumult and crowds. For many of us, no *shul* going; and for some of us, no seeing *Sifrei Torah*. But the *Simcha* is the same. The joy within is what matters. The appreciation of being given the privilege of living a Torah lifestyle.

Specifically in all of this chaos, when the world over is confused and baffled; stunned, stunted and pained; now more than ever, we appreciate having been given the only true guidebook to success and happiness in this world full of challenges. We cherish the Torah so much, as it continues to show us the way through all this darkness. From behind our masked faces, with all the cautionary measures of distance, we will embrace our *Sifrei Kodesh*, dance and live it up. Let us feel the connection and enjoy it.

In response to our joyful performance of *mitsvot*, may Hashem bring an end to this pandemic and heal all our ill and redeem us compassionately and speedily. Amen.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Samei'ach

Mordechai Malka