



# THE RHYTHM OF THE HEART

*Tehillim - Chapter 122*

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Let me pose a riddle. What food was thought to be a cure for rheumatism, headaches, and back pain? Six million gallons of it is consumed each year in America, enough to go around the world twelve times. It has only two calories per spoonful and is vital for the continuous growth of that rare fish called the “*gefilta fish*.”

Still guessing? Well, the answer is the culinary marvel called horseradish. We call it *chrain*.

Now in England the average *heimishe* grocery will be able to offer its customers one or perhaps two different brands of this stuff, and I always assumed that this should be enough for the average *chrain* lover.

***We speak of being beshalom, at peace, but somehow it all too often eludes us.***

Last year I was in America, where everything is done on a bit bigger scale. There I went into a *heimishe* shop, asked for *chrain*, and was shown an entire refrigerated shelf filled with tens of brands. Sharp, super-sharp, your eyes will cross sharp, and even one that promised that I would cry while standing fifteen feet away upon opening the jar.

Yes, in America *chrain* is a big business, and so is the bitterness of life.

*Guttes Yidden* were wont to say, “*A verm in chrain meint az dus leben iz zees,*” which loosely translates as, “A worm living in horseradish thinks his life is sweet.” What this *vertel* says is that if one lives in a bitter circumstance, sooner or later he will become convinced that this bitterness is the norm and in fact is sweet. People live sunk in their anger and bitterness until it becomes so second nature that they feel it to be normal.

Fascinatingly, every one of us has his own brand of bitterness, unique and tasted only by himself. If you could bottle each person's misery you would find that instead of just one refrigerator full, we would need enough to go around the world twelve hundred times.

One of the most difficult things in life is realizing this and accepting that such is the case. We begin to see our own *chraim* as being the only truly bitter one, and it seems that no one else's is as hard to swallow. This is because sometimes, in our bitterness, we become separated from those around us. We get so involved with ourselves that we don't even think that others may be in the same situation. "Yes," we think, "I may be stacked on the shelf with others, but beware, my bottle of bitterness will blow your head off." All of this makes for disharmony in our lives. We become fractious and begin to push others aside.

For the Torah Jew, this is a horrendous mistake. In fact, it could well be the factor that causes our truly bitter *galus* to continue.

We are told that we are created in Hashem's image. Why were we given this information? So that we can accept that having been so created we are meant to act G-dly in this material world. When we act in a spiritual way we actualize Hashem's purpose in creating us. Holiness needs to be acted upon with a sense of harmony and a balanced understanding about what this world should be. Bitterness shows that we don't truly absorb all this. We speak of being *beshalom*, at peace, but somehow it all too often eludes us.

True *shalom* means harmony - harmony with one's neighbors, with Hashem, and most difficult of all, with oneself.

When we were blessed to have access to the *Beis Hamikdash*, Jews came together three times a year on *yom tov*. The city of Jerusalem became home to the entirety of our nation. *Chazal* tell us that just being in the holy city transformed the visitors. Usually when a city grows, each of its citizens becomes lost in the huge influx of people. In large centers the individual becomes forlorn and inconsequential. Not so in the holy city. Here everyone found room; not merely physically, but more importantly, spiritually as well. Every Yid felt that he was vital and needed, everyone felt that his individual needs were being attended to. It is hard to imagine this amazing phenomenon, where thousands came to visit yet each one felt unique.

Upon our tragic loss of this wonderful experience we could very well have become confused in our own bitterness, never finding solace with others, never finding peace. But Hashem loves us, and He gave us a safe haven where every Jew can find his salvation.

The Torah is that safety place, and it's there for us to grasp. This is where we can go with our bottle of *chraim*. It is through learning Torah that each person can express his

individual uniqueness and discover through its wisdom how to fend off life's hurts. No matter how many people are sitting in the *beis medrash*, every Yid is always welcome, and always able to find his place.

Shavuos is the spiritual wake-up call that reminds us of this. We learn the night through, each in his own way, and then we daven with the warmth of those hours of learning. We hear once again the manner in which we accepted the Torah as a nation, a nation that heard the Ten Commandments being given in the singular, for each individual listener. We do this and find joy within the *peckela chrain* we *schlep* with us.

How sweet are the memories that waft up on this special day - the way we so wanted to feel inspired by that night of learning, the rush to daven even though we were tired and our eyes felt heavy. Those memories are born again daily, with each reading of the Torah, for each generation.

Torah is the blessing of Jerusalem. It offers the ability to find harmony with others and with ourselves. Shavuos brings this home once more, in its sweet loving way.

This *kapitel* awakens us to the Jerusalem experience and speaks of its true meaning.

***Samachti be'omrim li beis Hashem neilech...***, "I rejoiced when they said to me, 'To the House of Hashem let us go.'"

Picture the scene to yourself. You're *schlepping* along the roadway of life when all of a sudden a wagon of friends comes your way. "Come on pal, we are going to the same destination as you, to the House of Hashem, the Torah!" What joy! What a relief! I had almost forgotten what this road is meant to be for. It's about going with others - *Klal Yisrael*, my friends - and finding Hashem.

***Yerushalayim habenuya ke'ir shechubera la yachdav...***, "Jerusalem, which is built as a city that fosters togetherness."

Shavuos brings Torah and Jerusalem together in our minds. The holiness of that city was its ability to bring all of us together. This was possible despite each individual's *chrain*; in fact, the very act alleviated the sharpness that one felt.

***Shaalu shalom Yerushalayim...*** "Inquire after the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you enjoy serenity."

Peace - there's that word again. It means wholeness and harmony, and it's a name used to describe Hashem. Such peace can now be found in the Torah.

***Yehi shalom becheilech...***, "Peace shall be within your walls, serenity within your palaces."