



TAKING THE MESSAGE OF YOM TOV INTO THE HARSHNESS OF THE EVERYDAY

BY HARAV Y. REUVEN RUBIN SHLITA

It was such a spiritually charged time for all. The Yom Tovim bought new vistas with each day. Rosh Hashonoh with its majesty, Yom Kippur its intimate connection with Hashem, and then Succos with its gentle space of awareness of heavenly protection. As a finale we experienced Simchas Torah, unfettered joy with heart-filled thanks for our wondrous connection with the glory of Hashem in our lives. The Torah is read, and as we hear the words depicting the creation of the world, one can't but be moved in watching our children bobbing about amidst a sea of talleisim, a quilt of wonder and love that depicts our every aspiration.

When Shabbos Bereishis comes we are thrown back into the reality of a world punctuated by mankind's mistakes. The Garden of Eden quickly becomes a distant memory as a catalogue of missed opportunities, nefarious deeds and unseemly behaviour takes root. I often feel as if the Torah is dousing us with the iced water of cruel reality so that we can cope with our transition from the sublime heights of Yom Tov to the harshness of the everyday.

Parshas Noach astounds us with its clarity of human nature in all its various weaknesses. The Mishnah in Avos (5:2) says, "There were ten generations from the time of Adam to Noach, and they continually angered [Hashem]." Certainly, this deterioration in society did not happen all at once. The first generation did not make a drastic change from the proper way. At first, there was just a slight deviation from the truth, and then it increased little by little, until by the tenth generation those of the Mabul came and acted as they did. They knew Adam Harishon, they spoke to his son Shem, yet slowly they slipped away. The Torah tells us:

And the Earth was corrupted before Hashem, and the earth was filled with robbery (Bereishis 6:11)

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Rav Shlomo Ganzfried ztl explains that this corruption was only evident to Hashem. As for the people, they thought that theirs was an acceptable lifestyle.

Thus we are introduced to humanity in all its misbegotten glory. These introductory chapters to life in this material world are surely meant to offer us clarity in our own life. If not, we would not be told of them.

Look around, after all the lovely moments we have experienced over Yom Tov Where are we? What are we bringing into our reality?

The underlining point is that we may experience moments when we think; well the world is what it is, and comparatively we are more than just okay. Our parents lived in simpler times, but given our challenges, we are keeping our heads above the waters of the floods that surround us. However, that in itself is the first wrong step. We have to hold on to what previous generations cherished, and look to their ways as worthy of our loyalty.

Several years ago I shared with you a short episode from the Chiddushei Harim ztl. It's worth reminding ourselves of its salient message.

The Rebbe was strolling in a forest with his gabbai. There was a stillness in the air as the Rebbe walked slowly in deep thought. Suddenly he stopped and looking into his chossid's eyes with a great sadness said, "Listen, you should know, there will come a day when things will seem much like they are today. Yes, there will be a Rebbe, there will be Chasidim, there will be gabboim, shamoshim, and there will even be a court where the olam will gather for Yom Tov. Everything will appear the way it does now. Only one thing will be missing! Hakodosh Boruch Hu! He won't be included in the entire pageant." Then the Rebbe went quiet and sighed, saying, "even so, Hashem will never desert us, and although we will no longer include Him in our lives, He will never leave us."

Yiddishkeit is not merely about obvious mannerisms: the hats we wear, the coats we don. It's so much more; it's about our inner landscape, what we see as vital and important. It's about the choices we make in life; what we jettison quietly from our lives, and what we fill ourselves up with in the resulting void.

The material corruption that passes for our surroundings has a way of silently grinding down our sensitivities. Values shift, outlooks blur, and the spiral starts once again. We think we have everything, just like the holy zeides of old, but we don't. We are missing the real point: the Eibishter.

If nothing else, Yom Tov proves that no matter what, Hashem will never lose faith in us. He will always be there for us, waiting, willing us to come closer to Him. Sweet Yidden, hold on to the ship of our living Torah. Never let the filthy waters of corruption swallow us up. We live in stormy times, with floods of turmoil churning all around us. Our task is to grasp the gunnels of a Torah-true life, and give this truth to those we love and cherish. May we all be blessed with a "gitter vinter."

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