

LESSON IN A BOX



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ToraH Cafe

SPRING AND SUMMER *Biblically*

LESSON 7 // SERIES 3

Take a look at the Jewish calendar of holidays, that is, the biblical ones. The Maharal, Rabbi Yehudah Loewe of Prague, in his major work *Gur Aryeh*, explains: If we set aside the Rabbinic holidays of Chanukah and Purim, the curious thing is that, all the holidays are clustered around one half of the year; spring and summer. Pesach falls in the beginning of spring, Shavuot kicks off the summer season, and the Tishrei festivals culminating with Sukkot, are celebrated at summer's end. Why are the festivals bunched together in one half of the year?

While there are four seasons in the year, we can split the year into two periods -summer/spring and fall/winter. The former time is when the earth is warm and experiences a period of growth and renewal, starting with spring and culminating with the harvest at summer's end. The fall/winter period is when the earth is cool and experiences diminishing losses, plants shrivel and die, and leaves fall from the trees. If you think about it, the earth's entire growth period is confined to one half of the year, encapsulating the entire process of renewal that the earth experiences.

The Maharal explains that the spring and summer months alone can be considered to be the full gamut of "time". The months of fall and winter effectively don't count as "time" rather the lack thereof. For this reason, the festivals are confined exclusively to the spring and summer months. The festivals are a celebration, and as such, are reserved for a period of vibrancy and vitality-not shrinkage and demise. You see, celebrations and joy are associated with growth and completeness, not loss and death. So we lay low for a half year and wait for the "time" to pop the cork and celebrate. The organic feeling is that such reality should produce joy.

At the beginning of time, i.e. when the growth process begins, we celebrate. In the middle we call for continued celebration. And finally at the end and climax, we celebrate yet again. This is lasting power. The Jewish people are an eternal nation focused on being complete, vibrant and alive; a people committed to growth and expansion.

The author of *Shem MiShmuel* writes: There are two ways to serve G-d. Some serve because they are commanded to do so and cannot get out of it; if there were a way out, they would grab the opportunity as they see it as a burden. Some however, serve G-d because they truly wish to do so; if there is any obstacle they will remove it with whatever means possible to do the will of G-d. "Joy" is the ultimate litmus test! Joy demonstrates that you're really into it! In life we are amongst millions of people across the globe busy at life and making a living. Are

you truly committed to your work or to your family? Simply observe your engagement. Are you energized, invigorated and joyous or are you doing it begrudgingly, small to big tasks?

Bilaam the prophet, was hired by Balak king of Moav to curse the Jewish people. As it turns out he blessed them instead. His donkey, for the first time in history, spoke and complained to his master Bilaam; “Why did you hit me 3x?” The term used in the Torah is **Shalosh Regalim** (the name for the 3 holidays-Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, the Jewish people would make pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate at the Beit Hamikdash.) What the donkey was intimating to Bilaam is a message which holds true for the Jewish people, throughout the ages. You cannot uproot the Jewish people who celebrate Shalosh Regalim, because they serve Almighty G-d with magnificent joy and commitment and it is whole-hearted and with self-sacrifice. They are truly joyous in their service. The Jewish people are the “real deal”. They are indeed a blessed people.

In fact, Bilaam blessed the Jewish people and proclaimed Bamidbar 23:24: “Behold, a people that rises like a lioness (Rashi: when they awaken from their sleep in the morning with Modeh Ani prayer) and raises itself up like a lion (showing great vigor in practicing mitzvot, Shabbat, Kashrut, reciting the Shema etc).”

Rabbi Dovber Shneuri (1773-1827): One must literally experience joy when fulfilling a mitzvah. When for example putting on tefillin, donning a tallit, or giving charity, one’s heart of flesh should fill with a palpable sense of joy over the fact that he gave pleasure to his Creator. The ultimate expression of joy of mitzvot is when one feels a personal sense of joy and pleasure.

On Simchat Torah we are the **regel**-foot of the Torah. We hold the Torah and dance with joy. Anytime and every time we study Torah, the Torah is joyful and takes pleasure, surely blessing us in all matters, material and spiritual.

With blessing for a joyous and relaxing summer season,

Rochel Kaplan

Director, Aleph Learning Institute

This lesson was gleaned from JLI classes taught at Aleph Learning Institute throughout the year.

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