

Parshas Haazinu 5762

The days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos have a special quality. It is a time when Jews who hardly know the difference between a hammer and a screwdriver crowd the hardware stores; when Jews who never pause to smell the flowers suddenly are botanical experts, scrutinizing flora with magnifying glasses. And anyone who has had the privilege of being in ארץ ישראל at this time of year cannot forget the special ambience, as sukkos come up on myriad balconies, and the שוק is filled with the smell of esrogim and hadasim.

There is a special quality to preparing for a mitzvah, a special aura, a special beauty. All of use have childhood memories of building the sukkah with our parents, preparing for Pesach with our parents. They are as vivid - perhaps even more vivid - than our memories of sitting in the Sukkah and at the Seder.

This special beauty is describes by Shlomo Hamelech in Shir Hashirim, when he says:

מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב; how beautiful are your footsteps, shod in shoes, O princess. And the Gemara in חגיגה explains this to mean: כמה נעים רגליהם של ישראל בשעה שעולים ברגל, *how beautiful are the footsteps of the pilgrim when the go up to Yerushalayim for the shalosh regalim.*

Note that the pasuk emphasizes that the beauty it is describing is בנעלים, *in shoes*. Because when the Jews were actually in the Beis Hamikdash, when they arrived at their destination, they were not allowed to wear shoes- it is forbidden to wear shoes on Har Habayis.. The pasuk, however, is talking about the beauty of that time when they were still in shoes, on their way, on the journey. And it talks of the beauty of the journey, of the preparation, of the anticipation.

We live in a generation that is very מדקדק in מצות. People are very scrupulous that their לולב ואתרוג should have the maximum hiddur, fulfill all the שיטות. And on Pesach all our products are שמורה דרא. אךשר דרא. But what we have lost, perhaps, is some of that beauty of בנעלים בת נדיב - the beauty, the excitement, of preparing for a מצוה. We want everything to come to us ready made. Our Sukkos are pre-fab; our הדסים pre-selected and packaged; on חנוכה we can't even be bothered to prepare all and wicks, instead we buy disposable, pre-olive oiled and wicked cartidges; we sell our homes and go away for Pesach. And each one of these conveniences, in the proper circumstances, has its place. But when they become endemic than something is lost - the beauty of בנעלים בת נדיב.

What's more: without the preparation for the mitzvah, without the investment of time and energy, without the excitement of preparation - the mitzvah itself is

diminished. It is a rule in halacha that קדושה requires preparation: The parchment of a Sefer Torah, for example, has to be prepared specially לשמה, for the sake of the mitzvah. And in a similar way it is the preparation for the מצוה that gives the מצוה it's nimbus of קדושה.

We need to slow down, to savor this special time - to enjoy, and to share with our friends, our children and our families the special busyness - that special excitement of preparation - until one day soon, we will also share with them the excitement of that beautiful march, exclaiming together: מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב, how beautiful are your footsteps in shoes marching towards Jerusalem.