

Parshas Noach 5764 (ז' חשון)

Among the months of the year חשון rather a poor relation. Every other month has צום הרביעי וצום יו"ט as זכריה said: לעת"ל it will become a יום טוב. Even חשון, because חשון is יום טוב. Only חשון has חשון.

In fact, חשון is also called מרחשון, and one of the explanations of that name is that מר means bitter – the bitter month of חשון; because a month without a יו"ט is a bitter pill.

There is, however, another explanation for the name מרחשון, as we will see in a moment.

You know, tomorrow is ז' חשון, the day on which they begin to say ותן טל ומטר in ארץ ישראל. Why ז' חשון?

really begin גשמים (משיב הרוח) time (when we start to say גשמים); and in ארץ ישראל, where rain is precious, we should really begin to ask for גשם as early as סכות. But people had to get back home from ירושלים, and it could take two weeks, so they waited until ז' חשון.

So חשון is the month when in ארץ ישראל they would begin to ask for rain. And therefore some suggest a different explanation of the name מרחשון. Because מר doesn't only mean bitter – it also means a drop - as in ישעיה ח, a drop in the bucket. So מרחשון can mean the month of חשון when we begin to ask for drops of rain.

So we have two reasons for the name מרחשון – 1) the bitter month, because it has ימים טובים, and 2) the month in which we begin to look for raindrops to fall on our heads, beginning tomorrow – ז' חשון – because that was when the Jews would arrive back home from celebrating יו"ט ירושלים, so they didn't need the sunshine so much, and they could ask for rain for the crops to start growing.

These two explanations really complement each other, because – if we put them together – what they say is that מרחשון is the day we come back to earth; Yom Tov is over, there are no more ימי טובים for a while, we're back home, and its time to go back to business as usual.

We sort of feel that here now that those of our מתפללים who were in א"י for Yom Tov are returning; and while we're happy to have them back, it's a reminder that the Yomim Tovim are over.

But it would be wrong to look at that as entirely a sad thing. חשון is not really bitter – at most, it's bittersweet.

Because after all, the whole purpose of being עולה רגל, of the pilgrimage to the בית המקדש and the celebration there, was not to live in the בית המקדש, but, rather, to take the inspiration and the elevation – that רוח הקודש that we would experience in the בית המקדש – and take that back with us, and infuse it into our daily lives, and into our homes.

And likewise the whole point of going through a ר"ה and a יו"כ, a שמחת and a סוכות, is for us to take all of the רוחניות, all of the spiritual uplift, all of the energy, and carry it over into our daily lives, and into the rest of the year.

It is an easy thing to feel קדושה in the בית המקדש, to feel the joy of אידישקייט in the beautiful singing and dancing during the שמחת בית השואבה when, as the Gemara tells us, מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה שמחה מימיו.

And, likewise, it is not that difficult to feel קדושה here in shul during the Yom Tov season. To be moved by the majestic davening on ר"ה and יו"כ, to be filled with joy dancing with the ספרי תורה.

But that is not the ultimate purpose. The challenge of אידישקייט is not only to feel קדושה in the בית המקדש, or in shul; it's not only to feel קדושה on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Ultimately the goal is to infuse that sense of קדושה into the rest of our lives; to fill our homes with קדושה, our lives with קדושה, and – ultimately – to fill the world with קדושה.

So חזן is really quite an important day. It is the day when the last Jew arrived home after Yom Tov, and it represents the challenge of taking the spirit of Yom Tov, and of the בית המקדש, and bringing it into our homes and into our mundane lives.

Here in our shul we had a very meaningful תשרי. The davening on ר"ה and יו"כ was so moving, we had such wonderful בעלי תפילה, everyone was swept up in the beauty of the davening. And we had a very special שמחת תורה; and everyone deserves a tremendous יישר כח. We really felt the joy and excitement of rejoicing in the Torah, and it was very wonderful for the children, too.

But the challenge now – in this month of מר חשון – is to take that קדושה and that שמחה and bring it into our daily lives. The real test of שמחת תורה – is not how well we danced on ש"ת – that was wonderful, but the acid test is – can we take make the joy of Torah part of our lives. And if this was our best שמחת תורה, then this coming year should be our best year of לימוד התורה.

חז"ל say that the task of the נשמה in this world is to turn darkness into light, and bitter into sweet. Let us turn this month of מרחשון and all the months that follow into months and years that are suffused with the sweetness of Torah.

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