

## Are the Festivals Relevant Nowadays?

### Levit., Chapter 23

1. And G-d spoke to Moses, saying,
2. Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed times of G-d, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed time:
3. Six days work should be done. But the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a calling of holiness, you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to G-d in all your dwellings.
4. These are the appointed times of G-d, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed time:
5. In the first month, on the fourteenth of the month, in the afternoon, you shall sacrifice the Passover offering to the G-d...

*Mikraei Kodesh*--These are the appointed times of G-d (23:2)

#### Ramban

The festivals are days on which the people are "invited" (*kruyim*, from the word *mikraei*) to assemble in prayer and thanksgiving and to celebrate with fine clothing and festive meals.

#### HaKsav V'HaKabbalah

The purpose of the festivals is spiritual elevation, and the special foods and festive clothing are to help people achieve that goal. By giving honor and distinctiveness to the day, we focus our minds on it and thereby foster a realization of the spiritual opportunities it offers us.

*Moadai, My appointed (holy days) (23:2)*

#### Horeb Ch. 23

Just as *Moed* in space refers to the locality used as an appointed place of assembly for an appointed purpose (such as the Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting) so *Moed* in time is a point in time which summons us to an appointed activity, in this case an inner activity. They summon us from our everyday life to interrupt the ordinary activities of our life and give us the spirit, power and consecration for the future by revivifying those ideas upon which our whole life is based.

#### Mar'eh Yechezkel

A king was traveling through the desert, and his son, the crown prince, thirsted for water. But instead of dispatching a horseman to fetch water from the nearest town, the king ordered a well to be dug at that very spot and to mark it with a signpost. "At the present time," explained the king to his son, "we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then, the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst. Even if the sands of time have filled it, you will be able to reopen it if you remember the spot and follow the signpost we have set."

This is what G-d did for us by establishing the festivals at those points in time when He initially granted us the gift of freedom on Passover, joy on Sukkot, and so on.

#### The Chassidic Masters

The festivals are "callings of holiness" (*mikra'ei kodesh*), in the sense that each is a landmark in time at which we are empowered to call forth the particular holiness or spiritual quality imbedded within it. On the first Passover, for example, G-d granted us the gift of freedom. On the first Shavuot, He gave us the Torah; on Rosh Hashanah, G-d became king of the universe; on Yom Kippur, we received the gift of



פרק יט.

א. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

ב. דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ

אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה הֵם

מוֹעֲדֵי: ג. שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

שַׁבַּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ כָּל מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבַּת

הוּא לָהּ בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם: ד. אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי

קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם: ה. בַּחֲדָשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן

בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֲדָשׁ בֵּין הָעֲרֵבִים פֶּסַח לָהּ:

teshuvah; and so on. But freedom, wisdom, awe, joy, peace, and the other divine gifts granted in the course of our history are constant needs of the soul; they are the spiritual nutrients that sustain her in her journey through life. G-d embedded these qualities within the very substance of time, and set "appointed times" at which they can be accessed. Each year, when we arrive at the juncture of time where a particular spiritual quality has been embedded, we are granted the ability to access it once again. The special mitzvot of each festival are the tools with which we "call forth" the "holiness" of the day: eating matzah on Passover unearths the gift of freedom, sounding the shofar on Rosh Hashanah calls forth its quality of awe, and so on with all "the appointed times of G-d."

*These are the appointed times of G-d (23:4)*

**Rashi**

In the earlier verse (verse 2), Scripture is referring to the proclamation of a leap year, while here, Scripture is referring to sanctifying the new month i.e., "designating" which day is the first of the month, based on testimony of the sighting of the new moon. Both of these "designations," therefore, have bearing on the establishment of the festivals.

*It is a Shabbat Shabbaton, a day of complete rest (23:3)*

**Rashi**

The Sabbath is mentioned with the festivals to teach that anyone who desecrates the festivals is regarded as if he had desecrated the Shabbath.

**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

The hebrew term for festival, *regalim*, is a derivative of the word *regel*, meaning "foot". This alludes to a level of profound commitment where we are not only serving G-d due to our understanding or spiritual sentiments, but rather, out of simple obedience, like a "foot soldier." On the other hand, the festivals are also associated with serving G-d with joy. What is the connection between obedience and joy? The torah fixed festivals according to the agricultural cycle. In order for a seed to grow, it must first shed its outer shell, and only through this is the seed able to grow many hundreds of times in size. When a person puts aside (or "sheds") his superficial preconceptions ("shell") about Judaism and observes all the mitzvot with absolute loyalty, he will experience tremendous spiritual growth. And likewise, a person who serves G-d with joy, which "breaks all boundaries" will experience unrestrained spiritual growth.

## SUMMARY

- The holidays are spiritual days that "call us" to extra prayer and thanksgiving. Special food and clothing draw attention to the distinctiveness of these days.
- The holidays "call to us" to stop the ordinary activities of our lives. They make us revisit those values and priorities upon which our lives are based and infuse us with renewed energy and holiness for the future.
- Holidays are not one-time gifts from above. It is an opportunity to call forth the particular holiness of the day, to tap the spiritual resources it holds. As we travel through the year--the year being a microcosm of the entire universe of time--we encounter the festivals, each marking the location of a well of spiritual nurturance for our souls. Each holiday comes supplied with its own mitzvot and observances--the tools that open the well and unleash the flow of its waters.
- The holidays, fixed according to the agriculture seasons, remind us that someone who fully devotes himself to G-d with joy will experience tremendous spiritual growth.

