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RAV AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

RAV AVIGDOR MILLER
ON CHAMISHA ASAR B'AV

MIDSUMMER HAPPINESS

A Torah guide to the summer

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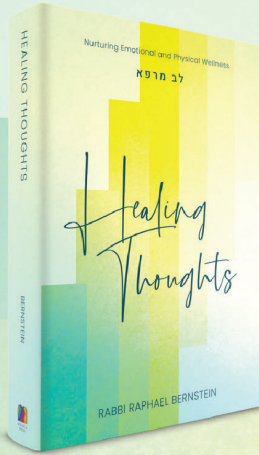
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Email: info@TorasAvigdor.org | Telephone: 732.844.3670 | Address: 1273a 46th Street Brooklyn NY 11219

MIDSUMMER HAPPINESS

Rav Avigdor Miller
on Chamisha Asar B'Av

A TORAH GUIDE TO THE SUMMER

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Part I. The Torah Calendar

Midsummer Celebration

It's our good fortune that we're sitting here tonight on Chamisha Asar B'Av because this day is a subject I wanted to speak about with you for a long time already. Tonight we're celebrating a midsummer's night—the fifteenth of Av is exactly in the middle of the summer—and so, we should try to understand what that means to us.

Now, everybody knows what the Mishna in Mesichta Taanis (4:8) says about today: *לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בְּאָב וְכִּיּוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים* – *The Jewish nation did not have such joyous days as the fifteenth day of Av and also Yom Kippur.* And the Gemara tells us there about happy celebrations

that took place on those days, celebrations that were intended to accentuate the happiness of the day.

Midsummer Mystery

Now, Yom Kippur, we understand on our own why it's the happiest day of the year. *כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר עֲלֵיכֶם* – *On this day atonement will be made for you, לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם* – *to purify you from all your sins* (Vayikra 16:30). It's a promise, after a long period of teshuva, Elul and Aseres Yemei Teshuva, finally *לִפְנֵי הַשֵּׁם תִּטְהָרוּ* – *you become clean in the presence of Hashem* (*ibid.*). When Yom Kippur is over, you're not the same man as you were *erev* Yom Kippur. You have changed fundamentally and you're reconciled once again with your Father in Heaven. And so absolutely, Yom Kippur is the happiest day.

But the 15th of Av is not so simple to understand. The Gemara (Taanis 30a) offers various reasons for why it's considered a joyous day but tonight we're going to understand something deeper—what makes it so joyous that it stands alongside Yom Kippur as one of the happiest days of the year. Of course, we won't be able to explain everything, but *b'ezras Hashem* we'll uncover a perspective that shows how Chamisha Asar B'Av is not only a celebration on its own but also the starting point of a journey that leads us toward the joy and greatness—the *teshuva v'kapparah*—of Yom Kippur.

The Torah Calendar

Now, if we're going to understand the role that Chamisha Asar B'Av plays in our lives we have to note the Jewish calendar is not like the gentile calendar; it's not random days that incidentally fall out at various times. We're going to see now that our calendar days—the physical aspects of our calendar—fit hand in glove with all of the great Torah ideals.

Everyone knows that on our calendar we have three great festivals, the *Shalosh Regalim*, and each one commemorates a very important ideal. There's a *Chag Hamatzos* and we call it *Zeman Cheiruseinu*, the Time of our Freedom; we're celebrating when Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim. Then there's *Chag HaShavuot* which we call *Zeman Matan Toraseinu*, when the Torah was given. And there's a *Chag HaSukkos*, *Zman Simchaseinu* which commemorates the forty years we lived in the *midbar*, living in flimsy *sukkos* with nothing but the *ananei kavod*, the Glory of

Hashem, protecting us. It's three *moadim* on the calendar for three great Torah ideals.

But as much as these important ideals are personified by these occasions, yet we find a queer thing. When the Torah speaks about these days, it goes out of its way to mention the *agricultural* aspects of these holidays; how each one is connected with the crops—the ripening and reaping and gathering of the harvest from the fields.

Off Focus Calendar

Pesach the Torah says, is *Chag Ha'Aviv*, the celebration of the wheat beginning to ripen in the fields. The new wheat?! Isn't that a letdown? Here we're talking about the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, when Hashem demonstrated to the world that He's in control of nature and He chose the Am Yisroel forever as His eternal people and all of a sudden the Torah says it's a farm festival, a festival rejoicing with grain.

Shavous, same thing. We consider it *Zeman Matan Toraseinu*, the festival celebrating how Hashem gave us the most valuable gift ever given to man, the festival that made us the Torah nation that will live forever, and along comes the *possuk* and it tells us that Shavous is a festival of *bikurim*, ripe fruits, ripe produce. It's the conclusion of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat season.

And Sukkos, we know is the great celebration of our survival in the wilderness where Hashem protected us even though we didn't have any secure habitations. We lived in flimsy tabernacles, the least protected of any time in our history, and still we had the most security because Hashem was protecting us with His *ananei kavod*. Now, that's something to remember and commemorate! But the Torah goes out of its way to point out that it is *Chag Ha'asif*, the time of year when you gather in the crops, the happiness of the harvest season.

The Truth is in the Siddur

All that harvest talk is quite jarring to our minds; a contradiction to what we would have thought. And actually, in our *tefillos* we don't speak about the crops; we have spiritual names for the *Shalosh Regalim* in the davening because we understand that's the focus of the *yomtov*. It's the ideals, the Torah principles, that matter to us and so we call the *yomim tovim* by their other names: *Zeman Cheiruseinu*, *Zeman Matan Toraseinu* and *Zeman Simchaseinu*. And yet it's a remarkable fact that the Torah connects these *yomim tovim* with physical, *gashmiyusdige*, occasions.

Now of course for *apikorsim* this was an opportunity. The *apikorsim* said, “Oh, it’s because once upon a time it was nothing but harvest festivals. When Israel was a young people—they were a tribe of farmers—that’s all it was. Only later, when they matured into a nation so they attached new significances to the festivals, holy significances.”

But that’s only because they didn’t understand the purpose of the Torah; they didn’t understand the connection between the physical world and the Torah. Yes, it’s true that the *ruchniyusdige* ideals, that’s what’s important; but the *gashmiyusdige* world was created according to those ideals—the seasons were created for and according to the Torah.

The Way to a Man’s Heart

And because the best and most effective way for the Torah to teach us the great principles of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Matan Torah and Sukkos, is when you’re grateful for produce, when you’re happy with the prospect that for the year to come you’re going to have plenty to eat, that’s why Hakadosh Baruch Hu synchronized these agricultural occasions with the Torah. Because in the olden times, everybody lived from agriculture and when you see that your fields are yielding, your heart is full of gratitude and happiness. And when you’re happy, that’s when you’re most receptive to the great ideals.

That’s a very important teaching you’re hearing now: The original Torah concept of coming closer to Hashem, of *teshuva* and *kirvas Elokim*, was not by means of chastisement, tribulations or sufferings. That wasn’t Hashem’s plan. You know, in Gan Eden Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have created fast days for Adam HaRishon. He could have created plants that had thorns on them, and foods that needed to be cooked. He could have made it so that it required a lot of work before he could find something to eat. But no, it wasn’t like that. It was fruits galore! Tasty, ready-made food! And in abundance! In Gan Eden there were nothing but good times—that’s how the world began because Hashem’s plan was that man should be happy and recognize Hashem through that joy.

Joyful Ruchniyus

That was the original plan and that plan is still valid today. That’s why when you make a *siyum*, when you complete a *sefer* of the Torah you eat. Why should you eat? What’s eating got to do with studying Torah? The answer is, when you’re eating it’s easier to appreciate the spiritual things.

Shabbos is the same; why do you have to eat *challo*s on Shabbos and drink wine? We should sit down at an empty table, with a white tablecloth if you wish, and the lady of the house should serve *Chumashim* and that's all—we should sit at the table and study about the creation of the world. The answer is, when you're eating *challah* and fish and chicken and other good things, it's easier to be grateful and to be inspired to noble thoughts.

And that's because our Torah, is *Toras chaim*, the Torah of living. Our Torah is tied up with normal life according to the great expert of human nature—that's Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We don't say that a man should be a celibate priest, and a woman, a nun in a monastery. We don't say that you should fast and wear sackcloth in order to serve Hashem. Because if you divorce idealism from happy living, then it means you're forcing it into an unnatural course which cannot succeed.

Three Happy Seasons

And so when the spring comes, when it's Chodesh Ha'Aviv and the world begins to blossom around you, all that happiness is meant to be a dynamo; to put you in the right mood, the right frame of mind. It bestirs you to feel gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for Yetzias Mitzrayim—the blossoming of our nation—which took place then.

And then when the first fruits begin to ripen, Shavuot time, He intended it should stir up a happiness, a gratitude. 'Oh! The *bikurim*! The first grapes are ready to eat! The first dates and first pomegranates are ready!' And it's reaping time too. Everybody's happy when the time comes to reap and he sees big bundles of grain, sheaves of grain, standing on the field. That's an excellent time for remembering Matan Torah and Har Sinai. How does that fit in? The answer is that when you're munching a tasty ripe fruit it's much easier to appreciate the giving of the Torah.

And then at the end of the summer comes the happiness of Sukkos, Chag Ha'osif. Everybody's happy in the time of the *osif* when you take in your wheat and your barley and your rye and your spelt and your oats and you take in all the wine that you pressed and you put it in your wine cellars. Everybody's in a good mood when you take in the olives and you press out and you have plenty of olive oil for all year around. When you have your harvest secure in your bins, and your storehouses are bursting with wheat, with barley, with rye, and you have big barrels full of wine and you have oil and you're all set now for the winter, for a long winter of

many good meals, your heart is full of gratitude and now it's easier to celebrate the ideals of the Yom Tov.

And that's why *שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל זְכוּרָךְ אֶת פְּנֵי הָאֲדוֹן ה'* – *these three times of the year, that's when we're obligated to go up to Yerushalayim to our Master, Hashem (Shemos 23:17)*. Because during the good times, that's the best time to remind yourself about Hashem. *That's the point of the good times!* Not just to enjoy the harvest and to eat and be merry; it's to enjoy the harvest and to eat and be merry *in order* to remember the One Who is giving it to you.

Happy Teshuva

When you're in a happy mood that's the best time to rededicate yourself to *avodas Hashem*. That's the time to say, "Hashem, it's all Yours and we are grateful to You for everything. Not only for the happiness of the land but now that we're in the mood, we're thanking You for taking us out of Mitzrayim and making us Your people! You gave us the Torah on Har Sinai and lifted us up forever! You protected us in the *sukkos* and showed us that it will be that way forever!"

You go up to Yerushalayim with all these thoughts in your head and that's the most important thing you bring with you to Yerushalayim—you brought also your wife and children and *korbanos* and *maaser sheini*, but most important was your mind. And your mind was raised up to its heights because of the happiness of the calendar.

And we shouldn't look down at that. Just the opposite! Because that is Hakadosh Baruch Hu's intention. He looked into the Torah and saw that the Am Yisroel is going to celebrate these great Torah ideals of the *yomim tovim*, and He created the world around that. That's the the meaning of the well-known maxim quoted from the Zohar *אִיסְתַּבֵּל בְּאוֹרֵי תּוֹרַת עֲלְמָא* – *Hashem looked into the Torah and He created the world (Terumah, 61)*. It's a mysterious concept but in its most simple sense it means that the world was created according to a set of blueprints—and it was a blueprint of ideals.

Now, the idea that all physical creation functions according to a set of intricate plans is easy to understand because we see on our own that even the most simple living cell contains designs more complex than are necessary to erect a skyscraper building. And that's not an exaggeration—the details of reproduction and growth that are achieved by every cell are so immensely cunning and have so many ramifications and variegated

results, that it would all be impossible without a built-in program; a genetic blueprint embedded in the chromosomes of the original cell. And that's only the cell! Everything in creation demonstrates such intricate planning that it leaves no doubt that the entire physical creation follows a detailed blueprint of planning and design that is far beyond human comprehension.

A Mystical Blueprint

But that's not what we're talking about here. **אִיִּתְּכַל בְּאוֹרֵיִתָּא** – *Hashem looked into the Torah*, means that Hakadosh Baruch Hu looked into a blueprint much more sublime than that; it's *talking about a blueprint of Torah idealism*. Not only does creation conform to a blueprint in its physical functioning but even more fundamentally it conforms to a blueprint of ideals.

That's the secret of 'Hakadosh Baruch Hu looking into the Torah and creating the world': Hakadosh Baruch Hu looked into the ideals and principles contained in the Torah and He designed the physical world according to that. And included in that statement—it's not the whole thing but its included—is our calendar. Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it so that the agricultural celebrations should be synchronized to the Torah; that the *yomim tovim* should all revolve around *gashmiyus'dige* happiness in order that the Torah principles will be expressed and lived by means of good times.

Part II. The Summer Calendar

A Nechama...

And so we come now to today, to the 15th of Av. You know, when the Gemara tells us of all the happy occasions that took place on the fifteenth day of Av, at first glance it's a big contradiction to our concept of Av – **מִשְׁנֵכְנֵס אָב מִמַּעֲטִין בְּשִׂמְחָה**.

When we *bentch Rosh Chodesh Av*, we say *menachem Av*; we're asking it should be a consolation. Boys that are born in the month of Av are frequently called Menachem, and the girls are called Nechama. Unless you have a father-in-law who insists that his father should be honored or a mother-in-law who insists her family should be honored, but otherwise

we give a name of consolation. That was an old tradition among the Jewish nation; a boy is Menachem and a girl, Nechama. And so we think of Av as a sad month, a month that needs to look for consolations.

Now, it's not wrong but the truth is that it's not right either because we see that right in the middle of the month is the happiest day of the year. The Nine Days? Yes, it's a time of mourning. Tisha B'Av? Yes we sat on the ground and we wept for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and **וְעַל הַיָּדָוּת בְּחָרָב** – *for the nation of Hashem and the House of Israel who fell by the sword* (Shmuel II, 1:12).

...And a Happiness

But that's not the *function* of the summer months—if you want to know what the summer is all about, so you look at Chamisha Asar B'Av. And that day tells us that more than anything else, the summer is a time of happiness. Because sadness, even if it's sadness of mitzvah, like *aveilus* for the *Churban*, that's not the way to succeed. You need it of course; it's one ingredient—it's necessary to add a little bit of salt sometimes, maybe a little bit of pepper too, but it can't be *all* salt and pepper. The majority of our fare has to be *simcha*. Happiness is the most important ingredient in life.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu wishes for us to succeed in this world and the way that we will be most successful is from happiness. Life is a concoction of very many ingredients but what's most essential for a man to live successfully is the ingredient of **שִׂמְחָה וְצִדִּיקִים בְּהַשֵּׁם** – *All of you who want to be righteous, you must rejoice in Hashem* (Tehillim 97:12). The great success of the *ovdei Hashem* is in the things that He gave them to enjoy! And the summertime is the best season for that.

Songs of Summer

All of nature is singing now. **אָז יִרְנְנוּ כָּל עֵצֵי יַעַר** – *Then, all the trees of the forest begin singing* (Tehillim 96:12). 'Then' means *l'asid lavo*; they'll sing more loudly but right now they're singing too. The trees are loaded with foliage and fruit. There are leaves and shrubs everywhere. Flowers, various colors, wherever you look. Green grass is growing on all sides. Green, you have to know, is an especially soft color on the eyes, a pleasant color. The weather is nice and the fresh air is sweet. And so on all sides we're surrounded by pleasantries, by summer delights.

The birds are also helping, doing their part too and chirping from the trees. You may not think about it, but the chirping of the birds causes a

simcha in our hearts. The fact is that many poets, people who are wide awake, noted that the chirping of the birds in the trees is a contribution to the happiness of life. Now, I cannot tell you how big of a contribution it is because I have never been in a world without birds, but there's no question, the summertime songs of the birds—their singing or chirping or whatever they're doing—causes a certain joy in the hearts of men.

Summer Freebies

And the sun is a big happiness too. You're getting bathed not only in golden light but it's also a vitamin dispensary. Walk out in the street and the sun is showering vitamins on you free of charge. In the wintertime you don't always get the vitamins you need from the sun—the angle of the sunlight, the cloud cover, other reasons—and sometimes you have to take extra vitamin pills. But in the summertime, you get all you want.

It's also pouring down heat free of charge. The landlords are happy now because they don't have to pay for oil in the summertime. No tenants are calling up in the middle of the night yelling at you, "The heat is off!"

And there are no colds in the summer — unless you sit yourself down in front of the air cooler and make yourself sick. Otherwise you're in the clear. There are less toothaches too. Most dentists have less business in the summertime because people don't go to the dentists because of good sense; they go when there's a toothache and in summertime toothaches are more rare. Arthritis sufferers, too, enjoy the summer sun—it bakes their old bones and makes them happy. And so summer is a time of joy for everyone.

Complainers Lose Out

Now, some people may not think so because they're accustomed to griping all the time and complaining, "It's too hot." And they talk to each other about their sufferings and the heat wave and so on. But they're missing the purpose, the happiness. You know, when your wife is baking a cake you don't complain "Chanaleh, it's too hot in here." She can't bake the cake in the refrigerator after all. Well, you can't bake apples in the winter time either. Apples need heat to be baked on the trees and that's what Hakadosh Baruch Hu is doing for you in summertime. At each heat wave, He causes nature to make another spurt and that's why they're baked already by the time you buy them.

Not only apples. All the fruit and vegetables; the grapes and the tomatoes and the peppers and the peaches and the cherries; He's baking

everything. In the summertime fruits are plentiful because of the sun. The tasty apples are here! Ah! Red apples and luscious cherries and purple plums! They're plentiful in the summer and the prices go down in all the fruit stores. Now you're living!

And so *rabbosai*, it's what I always say: The happiest season of the year is the good old summertime! There's nothing like the days of summer! Nothing compares to the happy pleasures of this time of year! And Chamisha Asar B'Av is smack in the middle of it all!

Synchronized Joy

Now, the question is what's the purpose of this summertime joy? Just to be in a good mood? Just so that the half-*frummeh* boys should cruise around in their cars looking for good times in the mountain resorts, in the pizza shops. Oh no! That's the opposite of the purpose—we'll talk about that yet, but it's just the opposite. Because according to our thesis of *איסתכל בְּאוֹרֵי תוֹרָה וּבְרָא עֲלָמָא* – *that Hashem looked into the Torah and He created the world*, of a creation that is synchronized with Torah living, we understand that just like the *Shalosh Regalim* are calendar days that function in harmony with nature for the purpose of *avodas Hashem*, the midsummer days are the same thing. The happy days of summer were created according to the Torah blueprint, for the purpose of Torah idealism.

Now, when we talk about this principle it's important to first of all clear the decks for action by reminding ourselves what is the foundational Torah blueprint of creation. What is the purpose of nature, of Hashem's creations?

Designed to Declare

So we look in Tehillim and we see that *אֶל-וַיְמַעֲשֶׂה כְבוֹד אֱ-לֹהֵי הַרְקִיעַ* – *The vast expanses of the universe declare the glory of Hashem, and the sky tells the work of His hands* (19:2). Here immediately we learn one of the most fundamental principles of our lives: *The universe is intended to testify to its Creator*. Not that it's something incidental, that it just happens to be so that you can see the Creator in creation. No; the blueprint says that it was made for that purpose—the purpose of the universe is to declare His glory.

כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתְךָ, יוֹדוּךָ ה' כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיךָ – *Hashem, all of Your works praise You...*, *וּגְבוּרָתְךָ יְדַבְּרוּ* – *and they're speaking of the glory of Your kingdom*, *וּגְבוּרָתְךָ יְדַבְּרוּ* – *and*

they speak of Your might (Tehillim 145:11). *Kol* means *all* – every single part of creation is speaking about its Creator.

And for what purpose? Why is the creation speaking? לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבְנֵי הָאָדָם – גְּבוּרוֹתָיו – *In order to make known to man His mighty deeds.* That's the purpose; לְהוֹדִיעַ – *to make known!* But not only that there's a Creator—that every little boy and girl knows already—but וְקִבוּד הַדָּר מְלִכּוּתוֹ, *the glory of the splendor of His majesty.* To know so much about Him that you can actually be *margish* His Presence; an actual sensory perception.

More Emunah, More Emunah

Of course the world doesn't think about that too much but the Chovos Halevovos, he knows what he's talking about and he makes a big fuss about that. He has a big Shaar Habechina in his sefer and he says it's a *chiyuv* to look at everything and study it in order to feel the presence of the Borei more and more.

Like Moshe Rabbeinu – Moshe Rabeinu didn't need any proofs that Hashem existed! He had spoken to Hashem many times and he knew very well that Hashem existed. And yet, he said, הֲרָאִי נָא אֶת קְבוּדָךְ – “Hashem, show me Your Glory.” Because it's never enough; you can never see the Glory of Hashem enough!

And so make no mistake about it, that's the purpose of everything in creation. It's intended to make us walk around in awe of the Creator; to live with an Awareness of Hakadosh Baruch Hu that is both constant and powerful. When Hakadosh Baruch Hu made this universe and He filled it with phenomena, *the chief purpose* was that mankind should *marvel* at them; that we should see such plan and purpose in them, such intricate wisdom, that we should understand clearly from whatever we see, that we are standing in the Presence of a Creator so clearly, so tangibly, that we are awed into submission. Hakadosh Baruch Hu made it for one purpose: “To make known to people the greatness of Hashem!”

Maple Mustaches

So when you walk in the street and you see maple leaves on the ground, that's what it's for. A man was walking with me and I showed him a maple leaf; I asked him, “You know what it's for?”

He said, “I make a mustache out of it.” He showed me how he can open it at the edge and attach it under his nose. “That's what I know it's for.”

Oy vey! He's missing the point. The maple leaf is לְהוֹדִיעַ! A seed with a special wing; a wing leaf. If you would take the trouble to raise it and throw it into the wind—some people never did that—you'll be amazed to see that it doesn't just fall down. It rotates! The leaf is attached to the seed in such a manner that you can see engineering is involved; it's planned according to wind physics. And the wind causes it to rotate and it flies away from under the shade of the parent tree and it plants the seed somewhere else where it can grow a new tree.

When you see that, it's כְּבוֹד מְלִכּוּתְךָ יְאִמְרוּ – the leaf is speaking of the glory of Your kingdom, לְהוֹדִיעַ – to make known! לְהוֹדִיעַ , לְהוֹדִיעַ , לְהוֹדִיעַ ! To make known! That's the purpose.

Rav Miller and the Malach

And it means we should keep our eyes open to the messages. Once I was sitting at Chaim Berlin on the fifth floor and a messenger came through the window—it was a dandelion seed floating on a parachute. And I took it and I spent time meditating on this. There are about thirty silken hairs in the parachute. And in the middle, suspended from the middle, is a seed passenger. And it arrived at the fifth floor. Now, dandelions don't grow on the fifth floor anyplace; they're not that tall. But this parachute enabled it to rise up and it was sent to me *min haShamayim*. There's no question Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent it. I was sitting in my chair near the *aron kodesh* and it flew in gently. And I looked up as if a *malach* had come through the window. It would be more important to me than a *malach*.

And later—after the *seder*—I took it and put it under the faucet to see if the silken strands would wilt in the water. No! Even when wet they remained outstretched because that's their function; even when rain comes they shouldn't lose their ability to float. Miracles! The Glory of Your Kingdom!

And it's very important for people to learn this; otherwise they could spend all their years unaware of what is expected of them—they never realized what the blueprint is, what the plans of the endless phenomena are for. We're expected to understand that everything that we encounter in 'nature' is intended to be another opportunity to fulfill this purpose of creation.

Peach Pit Miracles

On all sides you could see *nissim* and *niflaos* in nature. On all sides Hakadosh Baruch Hu has left *simanim* to recognize His handiwork, His plan and purpose in the world. I was walking today with a young man, and we saw a peach pit lying on the sidewalk. I said, “Look at that, a miracle!”

He said, “What? It’s a peach pit.”

No, it’s **להודיע**. It’s proclaiming its Creator. First of all there's nothing in the peach tree as hard as a peach pit. It's the hardest material in the whole thing because it's purpose to protect the seed. It's a remarkable material; lignin and cellulose, the same tough substances that make up wood and bark.

Also, it's composed of two halves that fit together exactly. But try to pull them apart; in most cases you'll fail. You can't do it. Because they're pasted together with a cement; a special formula that's extremely strong.

But if you take the peach pit and put it inside the ground and it opens up by itself! Because that cement-material yields to the bacteria and the fungi in the soil. So here's the peach pit with the two halves exactly fitted together with a cement that resists your efforts to pull it apart, and still when it's in the soil it cracks open by itself. Eventually, moisture seeps in, and the embryo inside swells, builds pressure, and cracks the pit open from the inside. And now the seed is ready to begin producing another peach tree.

So here you see now it's not just a peach pit. It's a message from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You can't just walk by and ignore it. Stop and look at it. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is talking to you: “I'm giving you another opportunity to gain *emunah*,” He says.

Seeing is Believing

And don't think it's unnecessary, that you know all about it already. It's like a Jew who was told, “Let's go tomorrow to Har Sinai to be *mekabel* the Torah.”

So he says, “I'll stay home. You go and I'll believe you. Come back and tell me. I'll accept everything.”

No. Seeing is different from hearing. **אינו רומה שמיעה לראיה**. You'll sit home and you won't be present at *Matan Torah*? You'll just sign on the

dotted line, 'I also accept the Torah'? No. You have to come and see it. That's the only way you'll feel it.

And so if a person will ignore all these messages from Hashem, he's missing out. A good Jew looks and sees a peach pit and he becomes more and more close to the feeling that Hashem is right there.

And now you begin to understand a little bit about the purpose of summer happiness. Because just like the *yomim tovim*, the *Shalosh Regalim*, are celebrated with a certain backdrop of *gashmiyus* happiness and gratitude, in order that we should appreciate the *ruchniyus* lessons, same thing the Chamisha Asar B'Av season. When you're surrounded by the happiness of the summer, that happiness is intended to be a spur for thinking, for awareness, for *kirvas Elokim*.

Winter Too

Of course, the winter is good too. אַבְרָכָה אֶת ה' בְּכָל עֵת – *You have to bless Hashem at all times*, תְּמִיד תְּהִלָּתוֹ בְּפִי – *always His praise is in my mouth* (Tehillim 34:2). Dovid Hamelech stood in the snow and he sang to Hashem: הַנּוֹתֵן שֶׁלֶג כְּצֹמֶר – *You are the Giver of the wool-like snow* (Tehillim 147:16). He enjoyed the snow and he thought about the Wisdom of the Creator in the snowflakes, how each snowflake has a unique design, made by the Great Designer, to trap the warm air in small crimps—just like wool does—and it insulates the earth beneath, keeping it warm all winter long. That's what keeps the earth alive, ready for the summertime fun. And מְשַׁלֵּי־דָּק קָרוֹחוֹ כְּפִתִּים – *Hashem throws down His ice like pieces of bread* (*ibid.* 17). When Dovid saw hail coming down he wasn't short sighted to see in it only hail but he saw that the hail would melt into water which makes wheat grow and then the wheat turns into bread.

So even when it's cold and the snow comes down, that's also an opportunity to see the הָרַר מְלֻכּוֹתוֹ. But the wise man understands that the summertime is especially suited for success in this spiritual achievement because that's when Hakadosh Baruch Hu displays גְּדֻלוֹ וְטוֹבוֹ, His Greatness and His Kindness, in a more open way. Everything is blooming. The trees are covered with green leaves, on all sides the fragrance of the grass and bushes is wafting in the air. Right now is the most precious opportunity to study the glory of Hashem because that's when everything is operating at its maximum. It's the happiness of the summer at the time that all of nature is busy preaching the lesson of כְּבוֹד

הָרָר מִלְכוּתוֹ. “Come and look at Me,” it’s saying, “see what I’m showing you.” And so you’re in the mood now to fulfill the purpose of life.

The Summer Harvest: Emunah

Now this may seem to you like just a form of talk, verbiage; but you’re making a very big error. Not only it’s important but we’re going to see now that this is actually the purpose of the Am Yisroel, our national function, in the summer. This is the time of the year we’re expected to gather in as much Awareness of Hashem—happy awareness—as possible.

That’s what it states in Mishlei (10:5): אִגֵּר בְּקִיץ בֶּן מִשְׁכִּיל – *The wise son he gathers in, in the summertime*, נְרָדָם בְּקִצְרֵי בֵן מַבְיֵשׁ – *the son that embarrasses his parents, the failure son, he’s asleep in the harvest time*. It means that during the summertime the fruits are ripening and the wise son is busy; he’s collecting dates and figs and grapes. But what does the foolish son do? He’s lying down somewhere in the meadow playing a harp or something. He’s napping or sitting staring unthinkingly into space. He’s not doing anything for the future. In the summertime, that’s the time to be awake and to gather in the benefits that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is bestowing by means of nature.

But what are the benefits? Not just good times and nice scenery; not the dates and the figs and watermelon and ice cream. That’s good too but if that’s all it is, that’s the shallow person’s view of the summer. What we want to gather in most during the happy days of summer is *yiras Hashem*, Awareness of Hashem. That’s our function now, to be not the *ben mavish*, the failure son, but the ‘wise son who is gathering in *emunah*’.

Part III. Clash of the Calendars

The Clash of Yetzers

Now, we have to realize something important now. If the summertime is a time when the voice of the *yetzer tov* is speaking most loudly, when everything is alive for the wise person to take advantage of to bring to life his awareness and *emunah*, at the same time, the other *yetzer* is also alive. Besides the instinct of seeing Hashem in the world, all the other instincts also are springing alive.

That’s the way of Hakadosh Baruch Hu; this world is a place of tests and nothing good comes easy. And so the great opportunity of

summertime is also a great test; in the summertime other voices arise. Just because nature is so vociferous, because nature talks so loudly and the mood is a happy one, so people are deceived.

That's why the summertime is also full of falsehood. So you receive a letter from your City Councilman or from the State Assemblyman who wants to show you the good things he's doing for you—he's doing nothing against crime; he's not helping you lower your taxes; but he wants to make you feel that he's giving you a good time so he lets you know how many concerts there are during the summertime. He supplies you with music, Bach and Beethoven and even worse garbage, all kinds of garbage; summer night concerts! And so if you want to risk your life and go to Prospect Park at night you'll get a free concert. If you put on a suit of armor and take along ten bodyguards, maybe you'll survive.

Everyone is Woke

Instead of midsummer *kedusha*, it's a midsummer night's madness. Summer romance! That's not the way of the Jewish nation! Because when we talk about love, we talk about it in a sense of *kedusha*. To us marriage is *kiddushin*, it's something holy. And to them it's a physical thing; a brutish rude animalistic attitude. אָנוּ מְשַׁבְּימִים וְהֵם מְשַׁבְּימִים – *We are awakened by the summer happiness and they also are awakened*, אָנוּ מְשַׁבְּימִים לְדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה וְהֵם מְשַׁבְּימִים לְדַבְּרֵי בְּטָלִים – *only that we are awakened to holiness and they to the opposite*.

You know, the Gemara says that on Yom Kippur and Chamisha Asar B'Av the men went out to choose their wives. Can you even think of such a thing today? The answer is that Yom Kippur was *kulo kodesh*. לְפָנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ – *They purified their hearts*. And you have to say the same thing about the 15th of Av—it was *kulo kadosh*.

So they went out to look at the girls—little girls were holding hands and they were dancing around in a circle. In those days girls married at the age of twelve; they didn't wait till the old age of sixteen, seventeen. They were twelve year old girls and they were dancing around. And the pure men of a pure nation looked at the girls the way you look over the *esrogim* before Sukkos. A *muvchar* you want, with good *yichus*. “Which *pardeis* is this *esrog* from?” you ask. So here too you ask, “Who's this girl's father?” “Who's the grandfather?” You ask about the *yichus*. And you picked an *esrog* – a *mitzvah*, that's all it was; it was *kulo kodesh*.

You understand now what Chamisha Asar B'Av was! Because it was a nation trained in *kedusha*! We don't realize the piety that once existed. It was *kulo kodesh*! And therefore they could have celebrations like that. In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, Chamisha Asar B'Av was celebrated with the *kedusha* that existed at that time.

Reinventing Holiness

Today it's different. Today the irreligious, the modern Jews, have corrupted the *kedusha* of the 15th of Av. And because we're sunk into the *tumah* of the *goyei haaretz* over our ears, even the *frummeh* have to realize that they're soiled and sullied by all the wickedness of the *umos haolam*—only that they have a black hat and a beard that covers it up. And therefore we're not able to celebrate like they did in the days of old because we've been corrupted inside; we have all these things from the outside world.

And so we see that as much as the *yetzer tov*, if it is utilized properly, can flourish in the month of Av, the other one flourishes too. In the summer nights, people are busy looking for things to do. The unthinking masses imagine that the good times of the summer mean vacations, wasting time. Every Sunday he gets behind the steering wheel of his car and he wants to ride all over the country, smelling the fumes of a thousand cars ahead of him. And he'll come home at night, dead tired and full of smoke of gasoline in his lungs and he wasted his summer.

But we're not talking here to the fools and the knaves, the people who are wasting their lives. We're talking to the ones who want to walk in the holy ways of our forefathers. We're talking to *chachamim*, to the *Am chacham v'navon*, the Am Yisroel that utilizes the month of Av. And so we have to strengthen ourselves; we have to stand up to the *yetzer hara*, to the world that doesn't understand the purpose of summer.

Hot and Cold

And that brings us to the name of one of the sons of Noach. Noach had a son named Cham. Cham means warm; he was a summer fellow all the time—a passionate and impulsive temperament.

And because he was a *cham*, when he saw his father lying uncovered by accident, he didn't take any action to cover up his father's nakedness. Instead of pausing, controlling himself, and showing respect, he reacted quickly and improperly. Whereas his two brothers who had trained themselves to control their temperaments, to understand a situation and

its test, they calmly walked backwards with a blanket and they covered up their father.

Now, Noach when he woke up and became aware of what happened, he understood that it was because Cham is a hot fellow. And he cursed Cham's son, Canaan.

Now why was Canaan singled out mostly? He wasn't even there! It was Cham who was guilty! But you have to understand that in Canaan was realized to a very great extent all the faults of his father Cham, all the faults of the hot personality who doesn't succeed in his tests, his opportunities.

Nation Versus Nation

Canaan was the opposite of the Jewish people and I'll explain that. You remember when Rivka was being given away as a bride for Yitzchak, so at first her family hedged a little bit—they wanted to postpone—but finally they agreed to let her go. And they gave her a blessing: “אַחוּתְנוּ – Our sister, אֶתְ הַיָּי לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָה, – You should become thousands times ten thousands.” (Breishis 24:60). A very great blessing: “Your posterity should number in the millions.”

Actually it wasn't *their* words. Hashem put these words in their mouths. And that's why when you come to the *chasunah* where your daughter is sitting just before the *chuppa* and the veil is put over her face so you bless her, “אַחוּתְנוּ אֶתְ הַיָּי לְאַלְפֵי רִבְבָה”. We repeat the words of the blessing that Hashem put in their mouths, the words said to one of our *Imahos*.

But then they added something else: “וַיִּירֶשׁ זְרָעוֹ אֶת שַׁעַר שׁוֹנְאָיו – Your seed should inherit the cities of his enemy” (*ibid.*). It means that your descendants will one day come into Eretz Canaan and you'll be the conquerors. That was the promise placed into their mouths by Hashem.

Friendly Enemies

Now, it pays to remind ourselves who are these enemies that our nation conquered? After all, which enemies' cities were conquered by our people? Canaan. Our people conquered and inherited the cities of Canaan, that's all.

And so the question is what kind of 'enemy' was Canaan? Was Canaan bothering our people? No. Was Canaan harassing us? The truth is just the opposite. Avraham lived in Canaan; he wasn't bothered by Canaan. The

Pelishtim, yes; he was bothered by the Pelishtim. Avimelech wanted to take his wife away. He was bothered by Pharaoh too. But the Canaanim didn't bother him. So why are the Canaanim called enemies? In what way were they our enemies?

The answer is this: They were *ideological* enemies; they were enemies at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Why? Because Avraham was *kulo la'Hashem*, entirely for Hashem. Everything was for Hashem. It was his life. Yes, he raised cattle. Yes, he lived in the world of *gashmiyus*, he lived on the *adamah* too, but he was *kulo la'Hashem*. Canaan, on the other hand, they were *kulo l'adamah*. They were the *mishpechos h'adama*, families of the earth. They lived for the earth.

People of the Land

Now I'll explain that. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted his people to come into Eretz Canaan eventually and have a beautiful country; a land that would be fertile, a country full of gardens. And so the Canaanim got busy; they got to work because they fell in love with land. Canaan was a *cham*, a nation of the warm outdoors, and they cultivated every span of earth. It was being prepared for the Bnei Yisroel and the Canaanim were doing an excellent job. Eretz Yisroel became a *גן ה'* – a *garden of Hashem* (Breishis 13:10), under the care of the Canaanim.

They specialized in agriculture. They planted all the mountains. They terraced all the hills. Wherever you went, fruit trees were growing. Crops were growing everywhere. There wasn't a country in the world that had such expert agriculturists as in the land of Canaan.

A Taste of Eretz Yisroel

You know, one of the Canaanite nations was the Chivie and the Gemara says *chivie* is from the word snake; a snake is called *chivie*. Why were they called the 'snake people'? Because *נָחָשׁ עֹפֵר לְחֹמוֹ* – *The snake chews earth* (Yeshayahu 65:25). The snake is always testing the earth with its tongue. It flicks out its forked tongue to collect tiny particles from the ground and it uses the Jacobson's organ, located in the roof of the mouth, to analyze the chemicals in the dirt. That's how it knows where it is, where its prey is, other things.

The Chivie were the same; they could taste the earth. They picked up the dirt and they used to lick it and they could tell by the taste what crops you want to plant there. They had the ability to know what to plant in every plot of land. Some earth has more alkaline—that's better for dates

and figs—and some is more acidic which is better for wheat. By picking up earth and tasting it they knew exactly what could grow well in this earth or how to fertilize the earth according to its need.

The Canaanim threw all their energy and talents into developing the land and enjoying its produce. They used all their abilities, all their strength, to make the most of the land's potential. And when the summer came, with its abundance and vitality, they saw it as a season for enjoyment – nothing more. The beauty of spring, the pleasures of summer, the blossoming of nature – to them, that was the goal. The happiness of the season was not a means to something higher; it was the end itself.

On the Other Hand...

Avraham Avinu and his children after him, on the other hand, were the opposite. The Rambam explains in *Hilchos Avoda Zara* (Perek 1) that Avraham Avinu lived with nature too but he lived very differently; He utilized the *adamah* but not for itself. He didn't sit and eat grapes and enjoy the oil and the wheat of the land—he did, but that wasn't the purpose. He ate normally and lived happily but he didn't live for that purpose however. Avraham enjoyed the happiness of the world around him and he studied it and he utilized it to achieve Awareness of Hashem and to teach it to others.

That's what the Rambam explains in the beginning of *Hilchos Avoda Zara*; that Avraham lived in that same world as Cham, as Canaan, but he utilized it to come closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He studied nature and from nature he came to preach to the world the fact of a great Creator. And wherever he went, he built a *mizbei'ach* and אֶל-עוֹלָם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה' – He proclaimed Hashem to the world (Breishis 21:33).

Now, the Canaanim ridiculed that. Avraham was considered crazy to them—a man of spirit is always considered extreme by the materialists. “What's this with ‘Hashem, ‘Hashem’?” they said. “Just enjoy the good land; enjoy the good food and good weather and the good times.”

Camp Rivalry

So you have now two ideologies here, two opposite camps. On one side are the *mishpechos ha'adama*, the families of the earth, who appreciate nature only for nature itself. And here, standing on the other side, is Avraham Avinu who saw the world around him as an opportunity to see the grandeur of its Creator.

כָּל הָעוֹלָם בְּלוּ מֵעֵבֶר אַחַד וְהוּא מֵעֵבֶר אַחַד – Avraham was called the Ivri because the whole world stood on one side of the world and he stood on the other side (Bereishis Rabba 42:8). And because we walk in the ways of Avraham, so the *mishpechos ha'adama*, they are our real enemies—our ideological enemies. And, therefore, that's the *bracha* that was given to Rivka. וְיִירֶשׁ זְרַעְךָ – Your seed should inherit, אֶת שַׁעַר אוֹיְבֶיךָ – the city of the enemies. And finally it happened. Am Yisroel, the ones who knew how to use the land for *ruchniyus*, they prevailed and the Canaanim either were driven out or became tributaries of the Am Yisroel.

The Culture Clash

Now, we have to understand that this conflict between those who think only in terms of *gashmiyus*, and on the other side, those who are impressed by nature as the Hand of Hashem, His Wisdom and His Kindliness, that's the eternal conflict that plays itself out in history, even today. Because that's what we're talking about when we say that summer brings the biggest opportunities and the biggest tests. Everything depends on how someone makes use of the happiness of summer, how he utilizes the good weather and the trees and the grass and the sun and the fruits. If *stam* he becomes enthusiastic about nature by itself, or he's enjoying the joys of summer for the joys themselves, then Hakadosh Baruch Hu says, "You're on the wrong side of history."

Because where they see *gashmiyus* we are expected to see Hakadosh Baruch Hu. We see in nature the Borei Who created it. We see the wonders of Hashem! And in the midst of the happiness He's showering us we are not only reminded about Him, but as we become more and more aware of His grandeur we are encouraged in the service of Hashem. That's what the *bnei Avraham* see in nature. And what do the others see? Good times, hedonism, *taavos*, every form of *gashmiyus*.

Chamisha B'Av Success

And that's why Chamisha Asar B'Av is smack in the middle of summer, because that's the time when the two ideologies collide. The *goyim* tonight are busy in their cars, back and forth in the streets looking for good times, *gashmiyus* and we are thinking of Hakadosh Baruch Hu; we're sitting here and studying Hashem's ways. We're living in the same world, the same summer, only that we see it differently; we look at the world from the viewpoint of the Borei and they look at the world from the

viewpoint of the physical phenomenon themselves. And it's a difference that means everything because our success is determined by that.

And that's why **לֹא הָיוּ יָמִים טוֹבִים בְּהַמָּשָׁה עֶשְׂרִי בְּאָב**. That's why it happened on this day, all those glorious occasions. Because we're supposed to awaken ourselves to the happy opportunities of the season. Today is the first day of the rest of the summer and we have to listen now to the voice of Hakadosh Baruch Hu that is speaking to us on all sides.

Part IV. Midsummer Teshuva

Summer Repentance

Now, if summertime is such a glorious opportunity, we begin to understand why this season precedes immediately the great days of teshuva, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. After all, if it was up to us we would think the Yomim Noraim should fall out maybe Chanukah time, or better yet around Asara B'Teves, in the middle of winter. The cold months! Oh, that's a wonderful time for teshuva! Nobody is interested in the streets or travelling on the mountain roads. It's cold outside; everybody's indoors anyhow and so they'll come to hear the teshuva drashas in a warm building. And so that's the most suitable time, it seems, for repentance.

But we see that Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Architect Who planned this universe according to the Torah, He has other ideas. He made Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, the days of teshuva and kapparah, follow immediately after the summer.

The First Teshuva

Now, before we continue, one important comment on the word teshuva. When we talk about repenting let's not make an error. We're not talking merely about righting some wrongs that a person did; teshuva in that sense is too limited. When we talk about teshuva, we are talking about v'shuvu el Hashem, about returning to Hashem; which means, not merely to repent for things that were done incorrectly but more importantly to gain certain qualities, certain attitudes, and certain practices that you haven't done before—or haven't done sufficiently.

Now, the biggest teshuva, the first and most important obligation of v'shuvu el Hashem is the great subject of coming back to being aware of

Hashem; to come back to Awareness of Hashem precedes and transcends any other duty. And you know when the best time to do that is? The happy days of summer! It's what we've been saying all along: Summertime, that's when the good Jew starts making *teshuva*.

Early Elul Zman

You know, up till recently Elul was considered the month of *teshuva*; it was the month which the Jewish nation utilized to prepare for Rosh Hashana. Today, already the whole thing has been Americanized, gentilized; they prepare for Rosh Hashana on Rosh Hashana evening. The *frum* Jew, when he has to go out to *Ma'ariv* on Rosh Hashana night so he begins to be *meharher b'teshuva*.

But you have to understand that in the better days, Elul was only part of the story—the wise people did it even earlier. Because we know that the Alter of *Slabodka*, in the middle of the month of Av, right now, he forsook his beloved yeshiva *Slabodka* where he was the mentor, the teacher, and he went to his old alma mater, so to speak, in *Kelm*. *Kelm* was the source of the old *ba'alei mussar*. And he sat there as a disciple; he was an old man already but he sat as a disciple for the second half month of Av preparing for Elul.

So why is it so that Av, the summer, immediately precedes Elul? It's an accident of creation? Oh no; it's in the blueprint of creation. It's because Av is a glorious month of happiness which is best suited for *teshuva*. The highest *teshuva* is the *teshuva* of people who see the Hand of Hashem when it's most active, when it's most bounteous, when the cornucopia of Hashem's blessings is shedding all of the happiness upon mankind. The summer is a time when all of nature is alive with happiness and therefore, that's the time to do *teshuva*.

Grass for Thought

So when you see the grass outside, not only is it a pleasant color, a happy hue; a beautiful green carpet that creates for you an ever-present background of serenity, of happiness. כִּי שִׂמְחָתֶנִּי ה' בְּפַעְלֶךָ - Hashem, You make me happy with Your handiwork (*Tehillim* 92:5). And not only does it supply a freshening to the air, more oxygen and a sweet scent that flavors the summer days but most important of all is that all the happiness of the summer grass is intended to encourage you to think about the grass, to become more aware of the Creator of the grass.

Now, if you look at grass like a cow sees it, like a dumb ox, so it won't mean anything to you—just another detail of summer. But if you want to live according to the blueprint so you'll think.

You know, grass is a miracle! Where does it come from? Grass is sunlight, that's all.

“Sunlight?!” they say? Yes. The grass is not hiding underground waiting to come up. It's a creation of the sun. Sunlight comes from so far away and it mixes with a little bit of a green chemical called chlorophyll and the chlorophyll breathes in the carbon dioxide from the air and ooh-ah! It creates a blade of grass.

The World Runs on Grass

And the blade of grass is the beginning of everything. Everything? Yes! Our clothing is grass. Sheep eat grass and turn it into wool. Where does wool come from? From the grass that the sheep eat. Sheep eat grass and they produce wool from the grass. So our clothing is nothing but grass.

Grass also supplies us with milk. The cows eat grass and they produce milk. Cheese and butter and cream all come from the grass that cows eat. Not only *milchigs*—Hashem is not stingy. Because the cow eats grass and makes itself bigger; the grass turns into meat for us to eat. Also it produces calves with that grass. So we get new meat machines that come from grass.

Planted People

And we're grass too! Because people eat animals and they make meat out of it; they grow. How does a nine pound baby become a 180 pound man? You know, once you were a little boy like this, this big. Your mother carried you on one arm. Now she can't carry you on one arm anymore. You're 180 pounds now. Where did all the rest of the pounds come from? From the air? No; because he ate food that grows from the ground and meat. Where did all that meat come from? It came from the grass that grew. And so our bodies are from grass. **כָּל הַבְּשָׂר הִצֵּיר** – *All our flesh is nothing but grass.*

And this wonderful miracle product, you don't even have to plant it; it's supplied by Hashem. He plants grass, like it states in the Chumash, **וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדֶךָ** – *I'll give grass in the fields* (Devarim 11:15). That's why grass is rhizomes; what does this word mean? It grows from roots that

remain over winter in the ground. It's not seeds that you have to plant. Some grass grows from seeds but they fall in abundance and they lie in the ground and in the springtime it comes up by itself. Hashem says, וְנִתְּתִי וְאֶבְלֵת וְשִׁבְעֵתָ עֵשׂוֹב בְּשָׂדֶךָ ... – “I’ll plant the world with grass and thereby you’ll be able to eat and be satisfied” (*ibid.*).

Fruit for Thought

But grass that’s only the beginning of גִּדְלוֹ וְטוֹבוֹ, of Hashem’s blueprint of Wisdom and Kindliness. Because what about the summer fruit? All of the fruits that are abundant in the summertime, they’re not only for eating—they’re also for *chochma*. You have to know that *peiros*, fruits, is one of the wonderful creations of *emunah*. וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂכִּיל – *Fruit is most desirable because it gives wisdom* (Bereishis 3:6).

So here’s a yeshivah boy or a Beis Yaakov girl in summer camp and she’s eating an orange. The question is *how* are you eating it? On which side of the ideological spectrum are you living?

So you take the orange and you put it on the table and look at it. “Such a beautiful golden skin,” you’re thinking. It’s coated with a wax that keeps it waterproof and airproof and also prevents little insects from chewing through it. But it also gives it a shine to make it more attractive.

Now, when you begin to peel the orange you note that there’s no color on the underside of the skin. Why is it that it’s so beautiful on the outside of the skin and underneath there’s no color at all?

Baffling the Scientists

You know that’s a *kasha* that no scientist can answer? They’ll stand on their heads but they can’t answer that. Because there’s only one answer. Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to see the color, to be seduced by it. And so the purpose of color is *chessed*; it’s for kindness. Not only He gives you something to eat; He gives it בְּהֵן בְּחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים הוּא נִתֵן לָהֶם לְכֹל בְּשֵׁר. He makes the color to make you happy and so color is not needed on the underside.

Now, when you look at this beautiful ball of luscious food, it’s juice in a golden container. And still this juice, when you cut the container it doesn’t pour out. You know, if you take a knife and cut in half a container of orange juice, it would immediately spill out. But this container you cut in half and it doesn’t spill out.

Now don't say it's all pulp. The pulp is almost nothing; it's negligible. It's all juice. But the juice is imprisoned in many tiny cells. And so when you cut it in half, you rupture a few cells but the juice is contained in the remaining cells. It doesn't spill out; it's waiting for you. It's made like that purposefully. Now when you see that, when you think about it, that's *bechina*—that's called living on the right side of history.

Seeds for Thought

While you're enjoying it you're bumping into seeds, seeds for thought. You know what type of blueprint is required for an orange seed that will develop into a tree; roots and bark and sap and branches and leaves and new oranges? And new seeds too!

Do you know how many volumes of encyclopedias you would need if you put the instructions that are coded on the DNA molecules in the orange seed and put them in print? The biggest library is not big enough to have enough shelves with books that would be filled with blueprints to reproduce the plans that are coded in one seed. It's a fact; millions of instructions encoded on the strands of the DNA instructions in one seed.

And not only the instructions are there but the *machinery* to carry it out is there. That's even more than instructions. The entire apparatus to actually put the instructions into effect is in the seed.

So you begin to think, "Such a design, a wisdom. There are brains here, a real wisdom in the seed. There is a Divine Wisdom that has planned everything and knows everything. That's what an orange seed says: "Look at my Creator! **רְאוּ מִי בָרָא אֱלֹהִים** – Look at Who created me! (Yeshaya 40:26).

Bitter Seeds

That's why I recommend carrying around orange seeds in the summertime. Spit out the seeds and put them in your pocket. I do it. I keep seeds in my pocket, and when I'm walking down the street I take them out sometimes to look at them. I marvel at them. People write to me that I should send them some of my seeds. I go to the post office and I mail my seeds to people.

Now if you bite into an orange seed, you see right away it's bitter. Try it once. The seeds of the orange are bitter. So years ago I said that it's in order that we shouldn't eat them; we should spit them out to make sure that our children or we in our old age will have orange trees.

I said that on my own many years ago by myself until finally I came across a Department of Agricultural bulletin and it said the same thing. Only he's an *apikores*. He's an evolutionist and he said, "Oranges evolved a protective mechanism. The oranges had the foresight to evolve a mechanism to avoid eaters." It means that according to this 'chochom', billions of years ago oranges were planning ahead so the oranges should remain for the future so they made bitter seeds.

That's what they preach to the youth in the colleges, that it's all an accident; that somehow, in ways we don't yet understand, the seed developed a bitterness inside the sweet orange. Well, if these dopes—the university professors at Harvard and Yale, or that scientist at the Department of Agriculture —would be willing to sit here and let me talk to them for one or two hours, they would learn something. They wouldn't be able to answer a word.

Fruit Seforim

But of course, they wouldn't listen. That's what it means to have ideological enemies. They're on the other side of history, the wrong side. And so for them summertime is a waste of time. But we, the *bonei Avraham*, we know what our function is. We know what the good times of Olam Hazei are for.

And so you *frummeh*, when you see an orange, you have to know that it's a Mesillas Yesharim. An apple is a Chovos Halevovos. A peach, Shaarei Teshuva. Ok, maybe that doesn't impress you. So the orange is Chidushei Rabbeinu Chaim. The apple is a Nesivos. And the peach, an Aruch Laneir. All the *sugyos HaShas* are in the summer fruit. And don't think you're *yoitze* by the other *seforim*. Yes, they're precious *seforim*—we should look at them too, no question about it—but you have to study *ma'asei yadav shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Because that's the purpose of it from the beginning; לְהוֹדִיעַ – to make known, לְכַנֵּי הָאָדָם – to you, גְּבוּרוֹתָיו – those are the most important words: לְהוֹדִיעַ! To make known to people the Greatness of Hashem. The purpose of all these things is to make known to us Hakadosh Baruch Hu!

Desert for the Brain

So when you pass a fruit stand, you stop and take a look at the red watermelons. *Ahh*, they're so beautiful! A sight to see; a quarter-watermelon and the red color is blazing out announcing the sweetness and the wetness and the coldness. *Ahh*, a delicious meal waiting for you.

The best dessert is a slab of watermelon. Forget about the garbage that they concoct, ice cream and all kinds of *chazarei*. A slab of watermelon is healthy and beautiful and it tastes good. Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dessert. And if it's used the way Hakadosh Baruch Hu intended, it's food for thought too.

I told you once, what I always say, that the best *teshuva* is the *teshuva* you make over a piece of watermelon in the summer. When you eat a piece of watermelon, you have to feel that "I am enjoying this now and as a result of the gratitude that I feel towards Hashem I am going to recognize Hashem in the watermelon. In my happiness and enjoyment I am going to ask myself, "Why is it that the edible part is red and the inedible part is green?"

Go at Red, Stop at Green

You have to ask yourself that question because that demonstrates the greatness of Hashem's Wisdom that he puts color into the edible part to make it more enjoyable for us and also to let us know that this is what we can eat and when the red is all gone we shouldn't continue to eat. We should stop. It's not good for us to eat the rind so He changed the color.

And so while you're chewing, while you're enjoying the red, you should feel obligated to ask yourself, "Where does the red color come from? How did the watermelon seed have the wisdom to produce pigment out of earth and water? Water has no color at all and yet when the time comes it produces a pigment and it deposits it on the cells exactly where it is needed; where it is not needed the pigment is not deposited. Red here, white here, green here for the shell.

And that shows us the Hand of Hashem in nature and then we begin to realize the value of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's creation and that is expected as a result of the gratitude for having a gift of a slice of watermelon.

Watermelon Teshuva

Isn't that a good *chiddush*? Isn't it worth coming to hear that? To repent when you're eating a piece of watermelon?! It tastes good! Your saliva is flowing and you have all your teeth and you're chewing and your stomach is still operating. Everything is working, purring smoothly. And then you think, "Now is the time. Now is the time for *teshuva*."

That's a *teshuva* that is *מְגִיעַ עַד כְּסֵא הַכְּבוֹד*. That's called *teshuva me'ahava*. You repent out of gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

And so when you're spending time in the summer you think these thoughts, little by little you begin to realize that there's a Ribono Shel Olam. And you repent with the best type of *teshuva*—awareness of the One you're returning to.

Summer Teshuva

And so if you'll listen to me, I would tell you, if you're a *frum* Jew, and you want to start preparing for the *Yomim Noraim* at the best time, right now in the middle of the summer, so you'll walk into a fruit store and stand there for three minutes and look around. Look around and let your eyes drink in the glories of Hashem's summer. And while you're there, take out your hand and bang yourself on the breast. Don't care that people are looking at you. "*Ashamnu, bogadnu, gozalnu. Ach, Ribono Shel Olam, such a beautiful and happy world You made for me. Such beautiful and tasty fruit. You're making me happy and giving me more opportunity to see You everywhere.*"

"I know now—I feel it—that I'm standing in front of You always and so I repent. I want to come back to You. I'm going to keep my mouth closed and watch what I'm saying when I get home and not bother my wife when she's in the kitchen. I won't talk *lashon hara* on my neighbors.

"I won't waste my evenings anymore. I'm going to go to *shiurim* and on Shabbos I'm going to come to learn in the afternoons instead of sleeping all day in bed. I'm going to give more *tzedaka*. I'm going to be *mekayem mitzvos* with more *zerizus*. I'll *daven* with more *kavana*."

All those things you should say as a result of the fruit store. But not only the fruit—all happiness summertime is for that. That's what it's intended for. That's the purpose of the summer!

From Av to Tishrei

And that's the purpose of Chamisha Asar B'Av. It's a midsummer night; the time of the year when you can see the *kedushas Hashem*, the *kevod Hashem* that fills the world. Of course, you knew all about it already before Av, but now you're actually becoming aware of Him. And the enjoyment, the good times, helps. It's the best time of the year for happiness, a happiness that spurs the thinking person to more and more Awareness of Hashem, and, therefore, that's the preparation for *teshuva*.

That's the person who understands the secret of **אִיִּתְבָּל בְּאוֹרֵי־תֵּא וּבְרָא** **אֶת־מָאָה**, of what it means that Hashem looked into the Torah and He created

the world. Because the Torah achievements, the Torah idealism that He wants from us, that's the blueprint of creation. And the summer happiness is a very important part of that. The happiness of *Chamisha Asar B'Av* is the *hachana* that will prepare us for the happiness of the *kapparah* of Yom Kippur. Because the very best *teshuva* is the *teshuva* of *emunah*, of *yiras Hashem* that comes from looking, seeing, studying and thinking what the happy world has to tell us about Hashem.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos and Summer

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Let's Get Practical

Pause for Lehodia

This week we learned that summer happiness is not just a seasonal bonus – it's a divine tool. Hashem crafted the joyful sights, sounds, and tastes of summer to help us become more aware of Him and His kindness.

This week I will *bli neder* pause for ten seconds, three times a day, to think “*Lehodia*”—to make known the greatness of Hashem. Whether it's the sunlight, a ripe fruit, or the singing of birds, I'll stop to recognize it as a message from the Creator. These short, quiet moments will help me gather the *emunah* “harvest” that the summer is designed for – turning simple pleasures into reminders of Hashem's wisdom, kindness, and presence.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

17 – Repenting in Happiness I | **522** – Rosh Hashana: Hashem in Nature

561 – Midsummer Teshuva | **E-160** – Repenting in Happiness II

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The Meaning of Religion

Every holiday has its own special theme. Pesach is *cheirus*, Shavuot is *matan Torah*, Sukkot is *deveikus*. Shabbos is the day Hashem teaches us to recognize Him, so to speak. What is the special theme of Shabbos? The Rambam teaches us that Shabbos expresses religion. A person can do all the mitzvos, but these activities are not religion. Only Shabbos is religion! This is because *das*, "religion," means relating directly to the immediate presence of Hashem. This is the special theme of the day.

To grasp this point, let us consider the most basic difference between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. The nations of the world used to know that all the plenty and goodness of this world comes down from Heaven. If you asked a non-Jew, "Where is Hashem?" he would answer, "In Heaven." This is the approach of the non-Jew. And what does the Jew say? Hashem is not just in Heaven. He is also on earth! **"The whole earth is full of His glory."** (Yeshayahu 6:3) This is the foundation of Judaism. Our goal is to reveal Hashem here on earth.

In truth, this is not just the foundation of Judaism. It's the foundation of religion as a whole. Being in the presence of God means everything loses its importance and self-existence. If God is only in Heaven, it doesn't "disturb" our lives too greatly. We don't have to submit ourselves totally to God, since He is up in Heaven, while we're all the way down here on earth. A person can continue to be "himself". True, God has a certain influence over man. He can bestow goodness upon him, or He can punish him. Thus, a person needs to "negotiate" with God and stay on good terms. How? He takes tefillin, tzitzis, mezuzah, matzah, and through them causes his faith in Hashem to permeate his heart and mind. By keeping mitzvos, he can stay on good terms with God in Heaven.

But if God is on earth, it's a completely different story. Then, there is nothing else in the world. **Everything loses its self-existence in the overwhelming presence of God.** We cannot even take a single step if it is against Hashem's will. Because there is no reality other than Hashem's will. This is the meaning of "religion." In other words, religion means relating to God's presence in the world and realizing that everything turns to nothing in His presence.

And the only way physical beings can express religion is by ceasing from work. Let us explain. Somebody is walking down the street and notices his neighbor relaxing on his porch with a glass of lemonade and a book. "Yankel!" he calls to him, "Now you're resting? Just look what's happening in your garden. All the effort you've put into your vegetables and plants is about to go down the drain. It's a scorching heat wave today, and you must water the plants immediately, before they all dry up and you have nothing left!" Yankel the Jew answers him, "Ivan, I don't know how to explain this to you, but today there is no garden and no vegetables. There are no banks and no loans. There isn't even a world. There is only God! If He wants to give me *parnasah*, He will. And if He doesn't, nothing will help anyway." This is Shabbos. It's a day of cessation from work, when the whole word ceases to exist due to the all-pervasive presence of Hashem!

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QUESTION

How long should I date a girl before proposing?

ANSWER

If you made your investigations beforehand and you know that she's a healthy girl, and now you've dated her a few times and you think that everything is in order, then there's no reason to wait too long. You can't wait too long because somebody else might take her away from you. That happens. Yes, I've seen that happen.

Or, even worse, she might discover who you really are! And therefore, while the illusion is still going on make sure to grab the opportunity.

March 1991

QUESTION

How many times should two young people go out before deciding to get serious?

ANSWER

The answer is you have to get serious on the *first* time. Now it doesn't mean you have to propose the first time but you must be serious. If you're not serious, forget about it. You don't go out unless it's for a purpose.

If you're asking when should he propose? It doesn't depend on times. Each one should ascertain to the best of his ability the character and the background of the other one. When you feel reasonably certain that you're dealing with a responsible individual, a healthy individual, and someone who is of the same set of ideas as your own then it's time to get married without any further ado – even the first time.

May 1984

Life Questions? 

Cybersecurity Questions? 

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