



THE SANCTITY AND GREATNESS OF THE FESTIVALS

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The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Commensurate With the Effort is the Reward

From the fact that we must suffer financial loss in order not to speak Lashon Hara, how much more are we to not speak Lashon Hara for the simple sake of personal honor! For example, if we find ourselves in the company of people who are speaking words that are forbidden by the din, and if we cannot leave or remain silent without being considered a fool, then obviously it is still forbidden to participate in their conversation. In regards to such situations, the Sages have said: "Better that I should be called a fool for my entire life than to be considered wicked for even a moment in G-d's eyes" (Eduyot 5:6). When the time comes, a person must exert all his strength and stand firm, for which Hashem will give him an infinite reward. As the Sages have said, "Commensurate with the effort is the reward" (Pirkei Avot 5:21).

- Chafetz Chaim

In Parsha Emor it is written, "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations – these are My appointed festivals: For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall not do any work. It is a Sabbath for Hashem in all your dwelling places" (Vayikra 23:2-3).

The Ohr HaChaim HaKodesh says that we need to understand the reason for the apparently redundant expression "these are My appointed festivals." We also need to know why Hashem again commanded us to keep Shabbat here, and why the Torah repeats after the mitzvot of Shabbat: "Hashem's appointed festivals."

We may answer these questions through the teachings of Mussar. The Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to teach Israel the sanctity of the festivals. A person should not think, "The sanctity of Shabbat is so great that we're punished for desecrating it. I'll pay attention to it and warn my family to do the same, but the festivals are not as holy as Shabbat, since even the Sages allowed us to perform work on the festivals that is forbidden on Shabbat. It may therefore not be necessary to pay as much attention to them." Hence the Torah warns us about Shabbat at the same time as the festivals, in order to tell us that their holiness is equal to one another and that we cannot be more lenient in regards to the festivals and more strict in regards to Shabbat.

A person must always safeguard the sanctity of the festivals, and our Sages have spoken at length about the punishment of one who neglects it. They have said, "One who profanes sacred things, who degrades the festivals, who publicly humiliates his fellowman, who abrogates the covenant of our father Avraham, and who interprets the Torah in a manner contradictory to its true intent – even though he may possess Torah and good deeds, he has no share in the World to Come" (Pirkei Avot 3:11).

An Extra Soul During the Festivals

Although according to Halachah we do not say a blessing on aromatic herbs at the conclusion of a festival – Tosaphot having stated (Pesachim 102b) that it is because an extra soul is not given during the festivals – some of the Sages still said the blessing on herbs at the conclusion of a festival (Ohr Zarua 2:92). From this custom we learn that there is an extra soul in man during the festivals as well. In fact among some of the Rishonim, we clearly find the concept of an extra soul during the festivals (Tosaphot Pesachim *ibid.* citing the Rashbam; also in a response of the Rashba that is cited by the Abudraham regarding the conclusion of Shabbat).

Let us try to understand this. We learn of the existence of an extra soul from what is said regarding Shabbat: "On the seventh day He rested vayinafash [and was refreshed]" (Shemot 31:17). Here the Sages have explained, "Once it [Shabbat] has ended, woe that the [additional] soul is lost" (Beitzah 16a). However vayinafash is not said in regards to the festivals, only in regards to Shabbat. Therefore how do we know that man also possesses an additional soul during the festivals?

We may explain this according to a statement of the Sages: "The Sabbaths and festivals were given only for the sake of Torah study" (Yerushalmi, Shabbat 15:3). When a man studies Torah during the festivals, not wasting his time in useless conversations, he immediately merits to rejoice in the light of the Torah,

and an additional soul enters him. In fact the Torah is called light, as it written: "For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light" (Mishlei 6:23), and the soul of man is also called a lamp, as it is written: "A man's soul is the lamp of Hashem" (*ibid.* 20:27).

When a man studies Torah, he connects himself to its words. He then becomes worthy for a new soul to enter him, a soul created by the merit of the Torah and festivals, and which contains some of the sanctity of the festivals. It comes into a person who studies Torah while people are outside chatting and wasting the festivals by their negligence of Torah. There is no better way of studying for the love of Torah, and one merits an additional soul because of the Torah that he studies during the festivals, when the Holy One, blessed be He, is closer than during the regular days of the year.

Let us say that, contrary to the additional soul of Shabbat, the additional soul of the festivals enters a person only if he merits it. If he does not study Torah, he will not merit an additional soul for a festival, and it will not enter him. This is why the Sages did not institute a blessing over aromatic herbs at the conclusion of a festival. Not everyone has an additional soul on the festivals, and only certain merit it because they study for the love of Torah. I say that this is why the exodus from Egypt is juxtaposed to the festivals in the Torah. It teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt only so they could take the Torah and mitzvot upon themselves. When they observe the festivals – which are the festivals of Hashem, not their own festivals – they certainly merit the Shechinah resting upon them. Yet when they waste their time and fail to study Torah, these are no longer "holy convocations," but rather "profane convocations." They are no longer the festivals of Hashem, but festivals that He holds in abhorrence.

This is why the Torah repeats "these are My appointed festivals." In other words: When am I sanctified among the Children of Israel? When the festivals are My festivals, not your festivals. This means that if you consider a festival as a family celebration, a family gathering in order to eat, drink and amuse yourselves at that time, it then becomes a personal pleasure, a vague remembrance of what the holy festival represents, a festival that actually belongs to Hashem. This is why the exodus from Egypt is juxtaposed to the festivals, alluding to the fact that just as the Shechinah rested upon the Children of Israel during the exodus from Egypt – when they agreed to accept the Torah and the observance of Passover for all their generations – likewise the Shechinah rested on them when they accepted all the other festivals of Hashem.

I believe that the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted the Children of Israel to observe the festivals and call them "the festivals of Hashem" because the nations of the world made festivals for their idols. Hence we read that Pharaoh celebrated his own birthday, and they certainly associated their idols to his birthday. Hashem therefore wanted the Children of Israel to observe festivals that recalled things in their favor, festivals that would awaken Hashem's kindness from Heaven, for they are called "Hashem's appointed festivals."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI YOSEF KARO – THE AUTHOR OF THE SHULCHAN ARUCH

Rabbi Yosef Karo, known as the “Beit Yosef,” was among the greatest of the Acharonim (later codifiers). The author of the Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Yosef Karo was born in 1488, and when he was four years old his family was expelled from Spain. They settled in the city of Kushta in Turkey, and the boy received most of his education from his father, a remarkable Torah scholar. In fact Rabbi Yosef Karo cites the commentaries of his father in several places throughout his work. After his father’s death, Rabbi Yosef Karo was raised in the home of his uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak Karo, who adopted him as his own son. From Kushta, he went to live in Adrianople, where he married the daughter of the scholar Rabbi Chaim Albalag and established his own yeshiva. At the age of 34, he began to write his monumental work, known as the Beit Yosef.

Diligence, persistent study, sanctity, and temperance in daily living were Rabbi Yosef Karo’s defining characteristics, and he often fasted and adopted austere measures for himself. He met Rabbi Shlomo Molcho, who was burned as a martyr for G-d, a death that the Beit Yosef envied for himself.

After he lost his first wife, Rabbi Yosef Karo married the daughter of Rabbi Yitzchak Sabba. He lived for a time in Nicopolis, a town in northern Bulgaria. Finally, he decided to move to Eretz Israel in order to benefit from the sanctity of the Holy Land and to complete his books. He moved to Sefat, where he settled down for good. There he was appointed to the Beit Din of Rabbi Yaakov Beirav, who gave him smicha. In Sefat, the Beit Yosef established a yeshiva where he taught Torah to multitudes of students, including Rabbi Moshe Alsheich and Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (the Ramak). Upon the passing of Rabbi Yaakov Beirav, the Beit Yosef succeeded him as the head of Sefat’s Beit Din, with Rabbi Moshe of Trani (the Mabit) at his side. The Beit Din of Sefat served as the central court for all the Jewish people, wherever they lived in the world, dealing with all matters without exception, just as the Sanhedrin did in former times.

It was in Sefat that the Beit Yosef wrote his greatest works, making him the spiritual leader of the generation as well as the Rav of the entire Jewish people. The vast influence of his invaluable books has never diminished since their appearance until the present day. The writing of his book Beit Yosef occupied him for 20 years, during which time he meticulously gathered the opinions of all the poskim for each point in Halachah. In cases where the poskim differed, he decided in favor of the majority.

At first he thought of writing this book using the same format as the Rambam’s Mishneh Torah. Yet given that the Rambam only mentioned the Halachah to perform, without any commentary, the Beit Yosef preferred to write his book in such a way as to bring, for each Halachah, the majority decision of the poskim. Each time that the Rif, the Rosh, and the Rambam discussed a legal issue, and their opinions on a specific law eventually converged, that law was accepted. In cases when these “three pillars of teaching” diverged, he ruled in favor of the majority. If all three differed from one another, he looked to the works of the Ramban, the Rashba, and the Ran, and ruled according to their commentaries. Being Sephardic, he generally based himself upon the commentaries of Sephardic Torah scholars. He very rarely brought the views of Ashkenazi poskim, which earned him harsh criticism from the Torah scholars of Poland. When he finished writing Beit Yosef in 1542, he continued to perfect and enrich it for 12 more years. He then published a second edition in four volumes. The first was published in Venice during 1550-1551, the second in the same city in 1551, and the third was published in Savionita in 1553. Finally, the last volume was published in the same city in 1559.

When he finished this immense work, he summarized it in a book which concisely recorded the main elements of each Halachah, but without mentioning his sources. This is what yielded the Shulchan Aruch (“Prepared Table”). He completed the summary of the first volume in 1555.

The Shulchan Aruch very quickly became a reference work upon which all the greatest Torah scholars and commentators based themselves. Today it is considered as the keystone for all teachings on Jewish law. At first the book aroused tremendous opposition from the greatest Torah scholars of the east as well as the west. These scholars also vehemently opposed everyone who taught the Halachah of the Shulchan Aruch without consulting sources in the Talmud, for they believed that its extremely concise language could lead people astray. Yet it was western Torah scholars who had the greatest reservations about the book. They objected to the fact that it was entirely based on the viewpoint of prominent Sephardic poskim, without taking into account the views of the great rabbis of Poland or France. Among the Shulchan Aruch’s harshest critics was Rabbi Shlomo Luria (the Maharshal), Rabbi Meir of Lublin (the Maharam), and Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe (the Baal Halevushim). Yet it was Rabbi Moshe Isserles (the Rema) who set himself apart by his criticism of the book,

A TRUE STORY AN ACTUAL VISION, NOT A DREAM

writing his own work entitled *Darchei Moshe* on the *Arba Turim*, thus creating an Ashkenazi version of the *Beit Yosef*. He also wrote a critique of the *Shulchan Aruch* in which he cited the opinions of *poskim* from Europe and the east. The *Rema's* book was published along with the *Shulchan Aruch* in Krakow in 1578. In fact this critique actually helped the *Shulchan Aruch*, for it greatly aided in its dissemination. From that time on, the *Shulchan Aruch* was accepted by all Jewish communities. In fact from that point until the present time, the *Shulchan Aruch* has universally spread throughout the Jewish world, and many Torah scholars have written numerous commentaries on it. Even a summary of the *Shulchan Aruch* has been written. From the appearance of the *Rambam's Mishneh Torah* until now, no other book has spread so widely and been so universally cited.

The *Shulchan Aruch* was first published in Venice in 1565. At its every beginning, the book was considered by its author as just a tool for general Torah study. Rabbi Yosef Karo also wrote *Kesef Mishneh* on the *Rambam*, in which he explains the works of the *Rambam* and clarifies his sources, since the *Rambam* did not cite sources in his work. Even the *Maggid Mishneh* of Rabbi Vidal of Tolouse, which preceded Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Kesef Mishneh*, is not as thorough. By means of this book, Rabbi Yosef Karo attempted to answer all the objections that had been raised against the *Rambam* by the *Raavad*. His book also clarified the commentaries of the *Maggid Mishneh*. Rabbi Yosef's *Kesef Mishneh* was published in Venice during the years 1574-1576, the first three volumes during his lifetime, and the last after his death. Since its publication, this commentary always accompanies the *Rambam's* work.

Rabbi Yosef Karo's noble soul and the purity of his character are reflected in his writings. His words are those of Torah scholars, words that were always brought forth with composure. Even when he brought remarks that contradicted his own, he always cited them with respect. The *Chida* tells us that in Rabbi Yosef Karo's time, three men by the name of Yosef were able to compose *Beit Yosef*: Rabbi Yosef Taitsk, Rabbi Yosef Lev, and finally Rabbi Yosef Karo. Of course, G-d chose Rabbi Yosef Karo for this task because of his incredible modesty.

In the year 1564, Rabbi Yosef Karo's second wife died, leaving him a son by the name of Shlomo. He then married the daughter of Rabbi Zechariah ben Shlomo Zavasil Ashkenazi, a great Torah scholar of Jerusalem. He was more than 80 years old when his son Yehudah was born. On Thursday, the 13th day of Nissan 1575, Rabbi Yosef Karo passed away at the age of 87, leaving behind a people mourning the loss of this great luminary.

Rabbi Haim Pinto HaGadol demonstrated extraordinary hospitality, never once saying: "There's not enough room for someone to sleep in my home." One day a shaliach by the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Shapira arrived from Eretz Israel. The man had an excellent reputation, and Rabbi Haim went to meet him and warmly welcomed him, as befitted such a man.

It was the eve of Passover at the time, and Rabbi Yitzchak was staying in the home of Rabbi Haim Pinto for the holidays. On the night of the Seder, Rabbi Yitzchak sat at the table with Rabbi Haim, when suddenly he began to weep. Rabbi Haim tried to calm him, but he continued to weep with great tears.

"Tell me what the problem is, and I'll try to help you," Rabbi Haim told him. "Your pain is my pain, for we cannot sit at the Seder table in joy when someone in my home is weeping." Rabbi Yitzchak heard these words, but continued to weep.

Rabbi Haim again tried to console him: "I take it upon myself to provide you with everything you need. If you are suffering because you are lacking something, I will provide you with it, so why cry?"

At that point Rabbi Yitzchak began to recount his story: "I left Eretz Israel by myself. Every year during Passover I would be with my family at the Seder table in joy. Yet now that I see the matzot, the wine and the Haggadah, I'm reminded of my family, and I don't know what's become of them! Are they happy? Are they sad that I'm not with them? Is everything alright with them in Eretz Israel?"

Rabbi Haim understood his feelings and said, "Don't worry, the salvation of Hashem comes in the blink of an eye. Come with me into my study. I want to show you something."

The man followed Rabbi Haim into his study, at which point he told him: "Look!" The man looked through the darkness, and he could clearly make out the image of his family seated at the Seder table, joyfully celebrating the holiday. Once he got past his initial astonishment at being able to see his family – who were thousands of miles away at the time – his joy returned. He then went back to the table with Rabbi Haim for the Seder.

Rabbi Haim said to him, "Don't think that what you saw was just a figment of your imagination. When you return home, ask your family how they felt on the night of the Seder, as well as what happened to them. Afterwards, please write to me and tell me what they said."

After the holidays, the man took leave of Rabbi Haim Pinto and thanked him for all the time he had spent in his home, just like a member of his own family. He left Morocco and arrived safely to his home in Eretz Israel. After the first meeting with his family, Rabbi Yitzchak asked them how things were while he was gone, and how they felt during the night of the Seder.

They told him that although they were very sad after he left and they were all alone, come the night of the Seder, they suddenly felt greatly uplifted and celebrated the holiday with tremendous joy. Rabbi Yitzchak Shapira listened to all this with great emotion, and he hastened to write to Rabbi Haim Pinto in Morocco, as he had promised. He stated that everything he had seen in the vision in Rabbi Haim's study had in fact taken place. It had not been a dream, but was real.

– Shenot Chaim

SHIR HASHIRIM

THE READING OF SHIR HASHIRIM DURING PASSOVER

It is customary to read Shir HaShirim during Passover. This was already practiced as far back as Talmudic times, as we read: “We read Shir HaShirim on the final two nights of Passover in the Diaspora, half on the first night and half on the second” (Sofrim 14:18). Abudaram mentions that we normally read Shir HaShirim during the festival of matzot, explaining this by the fact that it speaks of the deliverance from Egypt. In his notes on the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 490:9), the Rema points out that we usually recite Shir HaShirim during Shabbat of Chol HaMoed, and if the last day of a festival takes place on Shabbat, we recite it on that day. This custom has been accepted by all Ashkenazi communities that observe the Rema’s decrees.

Furthermore, our Sages have instituted the custom of reciting Shir HaShirim after the Haggadah on the night of Passover, a custom that has been adopted by all Jewish communities, both east and west, north and south, as the Chida Zatzal commends in this book Moreh B’Ezba: “After the Haggadah, we joyfully recite all of Shir HaShirim, for all the supernal worlds are illuminated by it.” The reason for this approval is that Shir HaShirim begins with subjects that touch upon the exodus from Egypt, which is explicitly mentioned in it. Likewise deliverance will come quickly in our days. Let us not forget that it is written, “In Nissan they were delivered, and in Nissan they will be delivered in time to come” (Rosh Hashanah 11b).

According to Mincha Shai, we read Shir HaShirim during Passover because Passover is the first of the festivals, and Shir HaShirim is first among all songs. In other words, it precedes them all, which is why we read it on Passover.

Another reason for why Shir HaShirim is read on Passover, writes Rabbi Chaim Friedlander Zatzal in his book Siftei Chaim, is because a slave who is set free feels unbounded love for his liberator. This was how the Children of Israel reacted to Hashem, answering Him with love and chesed, as it is written: “I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, when you followed Me into the desert, into an unsown land” (Jeremiah 2:2). Even till today, Passover is a fitting time to awaken love between Hashem and the Jewish people. Hence we normally recite Shir HaShirim during Shabbat Chol HaMoed of Passover, which is a symbol of the love between Hashem and the Jewish people. It is for this reason that it is stated that Passover is a time for doing teshuvah out of love, whereas Rosh Hashanah is a time for doing teshuvah out of fear.

The Ashkenazi custom is to read Shir HaShirim during Shabbat Chol HaMoed of Passover. The Rema states that we do not say the blessing on the reading of the scroll, nor on the reading of the Ketuvim, which is what most Ashkenazi communities practice, even when they read Shir HaShirim from a kosher scroll (written on parchment), except for communities that have adopted the customs of the Vilna Gaon and recite the blessing on the reading of the scroll and Shecheyanu. It is an ancient decree to recite Shir HaShirim every Friday night, for no other time during the week is as holy as the one in which a person removes his weekday garments, immerses himself in a mikveh or washes his face, and dons his Shabbat garments. At that point an extra degree of Shabbat’s sanctified light illuminates the body of man, and at such a time it is fitting to recite Shir HaShirim, an exceedingly holy text (Petach HaDevir). The commentators also say that we recite Shir HaShirim on Friday night because Shabbat is a bride and queen, and in Shir HaShirim there are many verses that celebrate the betrothed.

He Could No Longer Contain Himself

The origin and birth of King Solomon’s song, Shir HaShirim, which is exceptionally holy, took place when he brought the Ark into the Holy of

Holies. At that point he gazed upon supernal visions and saw the glory of Hashem, which filled the Temple. Hashem appeared to him through Ruach Hakodesh, and the Shechinah inspired him to compose Shir HaShirim at a great spiritual level for the King to Whom peace belongs. Rabbi Akiva said, “The whole world is not as worthy as the day on which Shir HaShirim was given to Israel, for all the writings are holy, but Shir HaShirim is holy of holies” (Yadayim 3:5).

The Zohar states that when King Solomon built the Temple, the lower world was completed like the upper world, and all the Children of Israel reached lofty spiritual levels. The Throne of Glory was elevated by several degrees and in joy. At that point, King Solomon composed Shir HaShirim, destined for higher and lower beings, and containing the mysteries of all the worlds for the King to Whom peace belongs.

The great Rabbi Eliezer fell ill on a Friday, and all his students came to see him. Rabbi Akiva began to weep and said, “Rabbi, teach me the Torah.” Rabbi Eliezer opened his mouth and began to teach him about the Divine Chariot. A fire descended and encircled Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva. The other students saw this and left. Rabbi Eliezer continued to teach Rabbi Akiva 216 explanations on Shir HaShirim, and the eyes of Rabbi Akiva streamed with tears. When they arrived at the verse, “Sustain me with dainties” (Shir HaShirim 2:5), Rabbi Akiva could no longer contain himself. He therefore cried out in tears, but did not speak because he was afraid of the Shechinah, which was present. Rabbi Eliezer taught him all the secrets contained in Shir HaShirim, warning him not to teach them to others, not even a single verse. As such the Holy One, blessed be He, would not destroy the world, for He does not want His creatures to use the power of supernal holiness (Midrash HaNe’elam).

Some Segulot of the Sages for Reciting Shir HaShirim

- If one sees Shir HaShirim in a dream, he may hope for piety (Berachot 57b).
- By reciting Shir HaShirim, a person rids himself of the impurity of the serpent, and he merits the knowledge of Torah and attainment of wisdom (Tzafnat Paneach).
- Whoever recites Shir HaShirim every Friday night by singing it with a pleasant voice, all the sins that he committed during the week will be forgiven (Shoshanei Leket).
- Whoever reads Shir HaShirim attentively on Friday night will be saved from Gehinnom, for there are 117 hours in the week, corresponding to the 117 verses in Shir HaShirim (Avodah U’Moreh Derech). [Translator’s note: Of the 168 hours in the week, the wicked are said to rest from suffering in Gehinnom for 51 hours, leaving 117 hours, which correspond to the 117 verses.]
- We have heard from the elders of Jerusalem that reading Shir HaShirim is a segula in asking for the sick to be healed (Me’am Loez).
- All remedies are included in Shir HaShirim, and it is better to say them before the light of day for someone who is sick (Likutei Moharan).
- One who attentively reads it on Shabbat will be saved from Gehinnom (Ma’asei Rokeach).
- Attentively reading Shir Hashirim for 40 consecutive days is a segula for finding a spouse (Shirat Shlomo).
- In the city of Djerba, we read Shir HaShirim for a woman who is having difficulty giving birth, for this awakens Divine mercy for her (Shirat Shlomo, citing Rabbi Eliyahu Madar Shlita).