

Portion

והיית אך שמח BE ONLY HAPPY

The portion of R'ei ends with verses relating to the three pilgrimage holidays. The last one of all the festivals is sukkot of which we are instructed to " ...V'HAYITA ACH SAMEI'ACH - ...be only happy" (16:15). If we were asked which of all these holidays is most important, most would answer "Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur", and yet really the happiness that we are instructed to reach on Sukkot is the goal of the days of awe. Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl in his book of essays on the weekly Torah portions explains that the purpose of the teshuva that we do at the beginning of Tishrei is to distance us from our sins and our worries in order that we would be free and able to rejoice on Sukkot. How can someone possibly be happy when he is worried about if he will have food to eat or if his enemies will attack him?

Therefore on Rosh HaShana we stress who is really in control of everything that happens in this world. Who must we really be afraid of? Isn't it, God, the One who can arrange that we won't have any enemies at all, and that our harvests will be bountiful? We have to improve our spiritual connection to God during Elul and Tishrei and then on Yom Kippur God will grant us forgiveness. Then after we have

managed our spiritual and physical worries, we are able to be happy on Sukkot as it says V'HAYITA ACH SAMEI'ACH - "...be only happy".

It is interesting that at the beginning of the Jewish year we are instructed to concentrate on being happy. God wants us to learn that being happy should be the foundation of all that we do throughout the course of the year. So many people throughout the world want to be happy. Rav Nebenzahl explains how the Torah teaches us how we can reach happiness.

He says that it doesn't matter so much how much we actually have, the question is how much do we really realize and appreciate what we have? Has each individual been able to teach themselves to properly and realistically assess their situation and what God has given them?

Rav Nebenzahl continues on with essays giving examples of many ways people don't let themselves be happy by not appreciating what they have. He writes about how people don't appreciate their parents, and he shows how Haman is the epitome of the person who had everything; wife, lots of children, wealth, honor - and was even the second only to King Achashverosh, but this wasn't enough for him. He wasn't happy and says V'CHOL ZEH EINENU SHAVEH LI - Yet all this avails me nothing (Esther 5:13). He didn't appreciate what he had. (I recommend reading it).

Since my daughter is getting married this coming week, and we just celebrated 30 years of marriage (hard to believe how fast time goes by) the section Rav Nebenzahl writes about the appreciation a husband and wife must have for each other stood out the most.

He said we can learn from God Himself how we must look at our spouses and appreciate the people they are, and everything they do for us (not just taking out the garbage, but also showing us where we can improve, which isn't always easy to hear). God is the "husband" of His "beloved", Israel. About 900 years (and I thought 30 years is a lot), after God took us out of Egypt, when God is very angry at us and is getting ready to destroy the Beit Hamikdash, He sends his prophet Yirmiyahu with the message,

זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלָתֶיךָ
לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Yirmiyahu 2:2). Was this really such a great Chesed that Israel did for God, they agreed to leave the slavery in Egypt and follow God into the desert? Really God was doing a Chesed for us, but He remembers it as our Chesed for Him that we agreed to become His nation and follow Him into the barren desert. God shows us how we should appreciate our own spouses.

Every new couple has a bit of this following their spouse into the unknown - ERETZ LO ZERUA. The young bride doesn't really know her bridegroom and how he will treat her (will he help wash the dishes and other chores), where will he end up taking her to live, how will they raise their children (will he change diapers and help getting the children to sleep) - and still she chooses to follow him into the 'desert' of life, and trusts him with her wellbeing. Every couple must also follow God's example and appreciate all the things their spouse does for them - starting with the first one, of choosing them as their life partner.

With blessings of many happy years of marriage to both young and veteran couples, in this time approaching ELUL - ANI L'DODI V'DODI LI, and may we all learn to appreciate and be happy with all that God sends our way.

WE ARE GETTING CLOSE to the end of the summer fruit season so I thought to include a recipe using those fruit. Also we discussed the mitzva to be happy on the holiday, and always. Our Rabbis teach that on the holiday in order to increase our happiness we should serve a bit of wine - so here's a recipe for spiked peach sorbet. You can use nectarines or plums or any other summer fruit if your prefer.

SPIKED PEACH SORBET

½ kilo (2½ cups) fresh peaches or nectarines, peeled, pitted & cut up

3 Tbsp lemon juice

½-1 cup sugar

1 cup boiling water

1 cup dry white wine

1½ tsp grated orange peel

Long, thin strips orange peel (opt.)

Frozen berries (opt)

Blend peaches and lemon juice in a blender or food processor until smooth. In large bowl stir together sugar and 1 cup boiling water until sugar is dissolved. Stir in peach mixture, wine and grated orange peel. Turn into a 20x20x4cm pan. Cover and freeze 3 to 4 hours or until firm.

Remove from freezer and break into chunks. Transfer to a chilled, large mixer bowl. Beat with an electric mixer on medium high speed until smooth. Return to pan, cover, and freeze another few hours until firm. Let stand 20 minutes at room temperature before scooping into dessert dishes. You can serve it with orange peel strips and/or berries on top as a garnish. 🍷