



TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Tehillim Chapter 118

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It's all in the smell. There is nothing more evocative than the smell of something attached to one's memories. As anyone can attest, one whiff of Shabbos kugel brings to mind an untold number of wonderful kiddeishim spent with friends. But when it comes to the aroma arena, there is only one real champion, and that is Pesach.

No other time of the year carries so many unique fragrances, and with each of them such loving memories. You can buy chrain a whole year and eat Pesach foods in the winter, but it just won't be the same. When it comes to Pesach, it seems the time, place and recipe have to be just perfect, and when it is, well, then it is so very special.

I have thought about this and have come up with a hypothesis, which I named "The Direct Aroma Path-To-Belief Theory." It seems to me that those wonderful smells of Yom Tov are stored away in a section of our brain that lies close to the spiritual nerve center. When a warm Pesach aroma comes wafting into the brain, the spiritual bit gets a boost as well, and bingo, memories of warm loving sedarim come into view, followed by a strengthening of one's core belief in Hashem and His Torah.

Now this may not be all that scientific, and I would not be surprised if some foggy-headed academic would try to prove me wrong. However, I defy any such scientist to taste a fried chremsel or even a bowl of Yom Tov chicken soup and tell me it's not truly the stuff of heaven.

Pesach is the one Yom Tov where that most basic of needs, eating, is set on its head. What we consider a whole year long the staple of our diet becomes taboo on Pesach, and instead we take "the poor man's bread" and elevate it to the "bread of our freedom."

The Yidden went through just such a transformation at the time

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of the exodus. They had to become totally separated from what was previously considered the norm. Plagues wreaked havoc, the whole of nature was convulsed, and out of all this strode a new nation with the dough of a new life resting on their backs. That dough was yet unformed, but it was pure in its simplicity and became the symbol of our unvarnished, simple, yet total belief.

No matter how many generations have since gone by, each has touched that dough of belief and worked it in its own way. As we grow and mature, we often lose sight of this simple strength. We become encrusted with the chametz of the everyday, and our belief becomes calcified and dormant. Then the days become warmer, the dishes are changed, and the smells rise up from the kitchen. It's Pesach, and the whiff of true belief is awoken. Yes, you are a Yid, and yes, you do believe!

The Lechovitzer Rebbe once said, "A Yid is obligated to believe that he is a believer." This is so true. Every Yid is a fervent believer, but sometimes this nugget of truth gets buried. The one way to dig it out needs no strong tools, no powerful shovels. It needs only the aroma of holy food, of sweet Pesachdika delicacies.

One of the highlights of the seder night is when the seder is almost done, and Yidden unleash some of the fervor they have absorbed by saying Hallel. Kapitel 118 has a central position, and minhagim abound about how to say it in different countries and different families. One thing they all have in common is that it is said with lots of joy and inspiration. Look at its words with me and remind yourself of its Pesachdika recitation. Well? I bet you can already smell the sweet fish.

HODU LAHASHEM KI TOV KI LE'OLAM CHASDO..., "Thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever. Let Israel declare, 'For His kindness endures forever. 'Let the house of Aharon declare, 'For His kindness endures forever. 'Let those who fear Hashem declare, 'For His kindness endures forever."

The Rebbe Reb Mordechai of Chernobyl comments on this verse that in truth, Hashem's mercy fills every occurrence of everyone's life. The reality that is Hashem should be realized and witnessed by all the world's inhabitants. However, the mist of materialism causes this view to be obscured. There may even be times when Yidden lose sight of this, but there will always be those who fear Hashem, and it will be they who will remind us all of the truth.

Therefore the psalmist begins that everyone should "thank Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever." But if the kindness isn't perceived by all, "let Israel declare." If the children of Israel don't see it, "let the house of Aharon" say so, and if even they do not observe it, "let those who fear Hashem" say it.

On Pesach we all become "those who fear Hashem." We work so hard and are so diligent with our preparations. The love and fear of Hashem comes into our homes with every package, with every hechsher. When all this is mixed together with the sweet care our mothers provide in the seder preparations, then we all can sing out, "For His kindness endures forever."

The Yiddishe nerve center within us knows what is real. Pesach frees us from the restraints we are lumbered with through the materialistic hubris of this world.

MIN HAMEITZAR KARASI KAH..., "From the narrowness [of distress] I called to Hashem, He

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answered me with the breadth of Divine relief.” The Baal Hatanya explains that when a Yid feels difficulty and is moved to call Hashem from the depths of his heart, he establishes contact with his essential G-dly essence. This motivates Hashem to “answer with the breadth of Divine relief.”

The seder night is just such a magical moment. Everyone feels just that much closer to Hashem. At such a moment we sing out that even when we are at our lowest point, we want to reach out to that pintela that is always within ourselves. When we do, when we really let all the barriers fall, then Hashem showers us with His wonderful grace.

A bit further in our kapitel, the Rebbe Reb Bunim points out that one must always implore Hashem to aid oneself to attain goodness, and He will surely come to his assistance. The psalmist tells us if we cry out PISCHU LI SHAAREI TZEDEK..., “Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will enter into them; I will give thanks to Hashem,” we will surely receive a reply.

ZEH HASHAAR LAHASHEM..., “This is the gate of Hashem; the righteous may enter into it.” Pesach is replete with opportunities to energize our spirituality. The entire exodus from Mitzrayim is a blueprint for all generations that follow. My aroma theory wasn’t necessarily meant as a metaphor or a cute expression. I firmly believe that we are stimulated by the fragrances and memories of special times we have lived in our lives. Hashem has given us this calendar of experiences so we can reactivate the root will that is in our hearts. This root will is to be close to Hashem, for without such closeness we are never truly at peace.

All this comes with a warning, which we can sense toward the end of this very same kapitel.

KEL HASHEM VAYA’ER LANU..., “Alm-ghty, Hashem, He gave us light, bind the festival sacrifices with ropes to the corners of the altar.” On the night of the seder we all feel so close. We can do anything, we really can. We can bring back that warmth and closeness we shared while doing Hashem's mitzvos, and we can reclaim our awareness and faith. But we must tie them to us with ropes of focus, for if not, they will slide back into the deepness that is our daily despair.

The Alexanderer Rebbe explained this with one of his gentle parables. “If the tailor does not knot the thread, his labor is in vain. Likewise, if we do not strive to secure in our minds the lessons learned during Yom Tov, all the wonder of the day is for naught.”

So take a deep breath, smell the Yomtovdike delicacies, and chap the feelings of Hashem's love as it lays its softness over you and yours. But please, don't let it stay at just a momentary smack of heaven. Tie it to your heart and carry it into your daily life.