

The Jewish Weekly

Etrog Jam on Tu b'Shvat

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

The sun was already overhead. Tu b'Shvat, the "New Year's Day" for trees, would start that night, and the residents of Jerusalem could feel the festive atmosphere permeating their famous Machane Yehuda midtown market place. The numerous food stands were all stuffed with colorful displays of an astonishing variety of fruits, and the crowds of Jewish customers were happily buying them out of love for the fruits of the Holy Land, to be celebrated on their annual special day, and in gratitude and praise to the Creator who bountifully provides them.

In the shul of Rabbi Shlomo, the Rebbe of Zevhil, in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood of Jerusalem, the chassidim were finishing the preparations for the festive meal that evening. On the crowded tables were trays and baskets filled with every species of fruit you could think of, in a spectacular variety of colors that challenged the ability of the eye to assimilate. There was even a special jam whose primary ingredient was cooked etrog, which had been prepared by the wife of one of the chassidim.

The Rebbe settled into his chair at the head of the table in deep contemplation of the fruits. He thought about the nature and symbolic significance of each of the species of fruits, and also the complicated question in Jewish law of which of the many kinds of fruits should be given the preference to recite over it the blessing before eating fruit.

Finally he chose the appropriate fruit, recited the blessing with intense concentration, and chewed a small piece. Then he had his attendants distribute most of the vast quantity of fruit among the large crowd assembled in multiple rows round the table.

In the midst of the distribution, a young boy walked in, a cute kid of about ten years old. Most of the men in the shul recognized him, as he lived in the area and would drop in at the shul from time to time. He enjoyed spectating at the colorful events that took place there. He especially enjoyed being present when the Rebbe would host a "tisch" (a table from where he would distribute "shirayim"-leftover food from his serving dishes) and inspire all the chassidim with song and teachings.

The Rebbe looked towards the boy, and signaled him to come closer. In excitement mixed with a bit of trepidation, the boy went over to the Rebbe's chair. The Rebbe smiled at him and said, "Its Tu b'Shvat. Did you have any etrog jam yet?"

The boy shook his head "No." The Rebbe dipped a spoon into the delicacy, presented it to the boy, and signaled him to say the blessing before tasting. After the boy did so, the Rebbe said to him:

"Do you know that it is of great benefit to eat etrog on Tu b'Shvat? On this 'Rosh HaShana of Trees,' all the fruits for the year to come are judged, including the etrogs that Jews will use on Sukkot for the commandment of "Taking the Four Species." We have a tradition that we pray on Tu b'Shvat [during the Barech Aleinu prayer in the Amidah] that there will be available excellent

quality etrogs for the mitzvah on this holiday of Sukkot this year."

The boy returned to his place in the crowd. By the following night Tu b'Shvat was over, and within a few days the young boy had already forgotten everything the Rebbe had said to him.

Eight months later the Jewish month of Tishrei arrived, which begins with two days of Rosh HaShana and then, on the tenth of the month, Yom Kippur. In the following four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkot, the market places and streets of Jerusalem were packed with people looking to buy the Four Species - etrog (citron), lulav (a date palm branch), hadasim (3 or more myrtle twigs) and arravot (2 willow stems) - for the mitzvah of joining them together and shaking them on each of the days of Sukkot [except Shabbat].

Besides the potential customers, hordes of Jewish youth were circulating among the different stands excited to see what was happening and what would happen. Vendors were hawking their wares at the top of their voices, nearly everyone was sorting through the Four Species, hoping to find a superior specimen or a good deal that their predecessors had overlooked. The most particular even pulled out magnifying glasses and jeweler's loupes to minutely examine the etrogs for blemishes, and were animatedly consulting with each other and any rabbinical authority in the vicinity.

The young boy whom the Zevhil Rebbe had befriended was also present. He found himself becoming overwhelmed with the desire to possess a superior quality, fine-looking etrog of his own. Every previous year he had recited the blessings over his father's set of the Four Species. He well understood the limitations of his father's income and how it was difficult for him to afford even the simplest etrog that was kosher for the mitzvah. Nevertheless, his longing became stronger and stronger, until finally he could not hold himself back, and he revealed his desire to his father.

The father listened carefully. He was thrilled that the passion that filled his young son's heart was to be able to fulfill a commandment in the finest possible way. Although he couldn't possibly afford to purchase a high quality etrog - he gave him some coins and a few small bills, and prayed that with Heaven's help it would turn out to his son's satisfaction. At least he would be able to have his own kosher etrog.

The boy passionately thanked his father, then ran off excitedly to the well-known etrog store of Reb Zalman Sonnenfeld. The shop was busy, but when there was a pause between customers, Reb Zalman turned to the young boy and pleasantly asked, "So, what can I do for you?"

"I want to buy an excellent etrog."

"Really? How much money do you have?"

The boy extended his hand to allow the seller to count his meager stash. Reb Zalman kept a straight face and said patiently, "Good. Go over to that corner of the shop. There you can find a nice etrog for yourself. But please, make sure not to poke in any of the other etrog crates. Understand?"

The boy nodded his head in affirmation and strode quickly to the corner of the store that Reb Zalman had indicated. He picked up the first etrog he saw, examined it, then returned it to its place and lifted up a different one. But he quickly found flaws in it so he

It Once Happened...

placed that one down too. And so it went with another dozen or so samples.

Then, suddenly, he found himself staring with a rush of emotion at the etrog in his hand that he had just plucked from much deeper within the carton that had been designated to him. It seemed top notch. His heart beat faster as he rotated it slowly in his hand and scrutinized it minutely. Not a single blemish! Its color and shape also appealed to him. Even its pitom ['pistil'- the protruding nipple at the top] was perfect. What an exemplary etrog.

He trotted to the front of the store and excitedly showed his find to Reb Zalman. The owner looked carefully at the etrog and began to shout at the startled boy. "Didn't I warn you not to touch any etrog in the other crates? Did you really think I would sell you such a superior etrog for the pittance of money in your hand? Why, the price of this etrog is at least 200 times that!"

The boy quickly attempted to justify himself to the shopkeeper, explaining that he had discovered it in one of the boxes in the corner that had been indicated to him. He didn't pick up a single etrog from any other crate.

Reb Zalman didn't believe him.

Fortunately for the boy, some of the other shoppers had taken note of him. They enjoyed watching such a young fellow examining the etrogs with so much care and patience. They testified to the store owner that the boy was indeed telling the truth.

Reb Zalman felt ashamed and regretful that he had suspected the boy unfairly. He also now perceived the guiding hand of Providence in the matter. His stern face transformed with a warm smile as he said, "It appears that it was meant for you to possess a magnificent etrog this year. Since I recognize now that you came upon it honestly, it is yours. You deserve it. I'll sell it to you for the sum of money in your hand."

He wrapped and packaged the etrog securely and handed it to his little customer. The boy accepted it in both hands with pure joy. And to the amused delight of the sympathetic shoppers, he sprinted out of the store with his prize. He wanted to get home as fast as he could to show it to his father and relate to him all that had happened.

Only after he reached the house and calmed down somewhat did he recall suddenly and clearly what had taken place on Tu b'Shvat eight months before and the words of the tzadik of Zevhil: that eating etrog preserves on Tu b'Shvat and praying for a good etrog is a segula (propitious) for obtaining an excellent etrog for the Mitzvah of the Four Species on Sukkot.

He told all of this to his father too. Tears glistened in the eyes of each of them.

Reprinted from an email of KabbalaOnline.org.



Shabbat Times – Parshat Beshalach

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
 Jerusalem	4:35	5:50	6:29
Tel Aviv	4:49	5:51	
Haifa	4:39	5:49	
Be'er Sheva	4:53	5:53	



"Don't ask Twice; Just Listen" By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

The following story was related by Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka of blessed memory, wife of the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

There was a family, relatives of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who lived in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. Whenever they had a question for the Rebbe, they asked his wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson, and she passed the question on to the Rebbe. Afterwards, she related the Rebbe's answer to the family.

One day, the Rebbetzin received a phone call from that family that the mother was very sick and, after many tests in the hospital, the doctors concluded that she needed surgery. They were calling to ask for the Rebbe's consent and blessing for the operation.

When the Rebbetzin conveyed the message to the Rebbe, the Rebbe responded that they should not do the operation. The Rebbetzin told the family the Rebbe's answer, but a few days later, they called again. They said that the doctors said that because they refused the operation, her condition deteriorated and her life could be endangered. They asked whether she could ask the Rebbe again.

The Rebbetzin said that in Lubavitch you don't ask twice. "I consider myself a chassid of the Rebbe and I do as the chassidim do, so I cannot ask again," she said.

The family was distraught, so the Rebbetzin said that if the Rebbe came home and asked whether she had heard anything from the family, she was willing to repeat what they had told her, but she would not ask again.

When the Rebbe came home for supper, he asked the Rebbetzin whether she had heard from the family. She told the Rebbe what they had said and then added, "I'm not asking; I'm just telling you."

The Rebbe looked serious and after a pause he said, "I repeat, they should not operate!" The Rebbetzin conveyed this clear answer to the family and a few days later they called again. They said that the doctors said her condition had deteriorated further and her life was in immediate danger. They were asked to sign that they took full responsibility for the woman and absolved the doctors and the hospital of any responsibility.

The Rebbetzin said, "The Rebbe said two times already not to operate."

When the Rebbe came home, the Rebbetzin told him the latest events and the Rebbe said, "Why don't they try medication?"

The Rebbetzin immediately called the family to tell them. They in turn mentioned it to the doctors, who laughed at them in response. "The rabbi knows better than we do about medicine? We say that only surgery can save her. It is definitely not a matter of medication."

The family believed the Rebbe and went from department to department, looking for a doctor who would understand them. Finally, they found a doctor who thought for a moment and then said, "I think I know which medication the Rebbe has in mind, and since I wear a white jacket and can go wherever I want, I will visit your mother and give her an injection and let's see what happens."

A few days later, the doctors said her condition had suddenly stabilized. They did not know what had happened, but she was no longer deteriorating. The doctor was optimistic and told the family that apparently he had used the medicine the Rebbe was thinking of. He gave the woman another injection and two days later the doctors who had been treating her admitted she had improved somewhat. Every so often, the doctor would come by and give her medication until she was out of danger and was released from the hospital.

The family kept in constant touch with the Rebbetzin. When the Rebbetzin told the Rebbe that the mother had returned home, the Rebbe said, "When they asked me about an operation, I saw that if they did it, she wouldn't make it off the operating table, which is why I adamantly opposed an operation. When they asked again, I thought the doctors would see that the family was adamantly opposed to an operation and would try medication. When I saw that they weren't thinking along those lines at all, I explicitly suggested medication."

The Rebbetzin related this and said that the Rebbe had added, "Now you see how important it is to listen to whatever we say, even when the experts say the opposite."

* * *

Do the Rebbes know everything? Here is another, similar story:

Once, someone asked the Rebbe Rayatz (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn), the Rebbe's predecessor, whether his son should travel or not and the Rebbe said "No." The son did not listen and boarded the ship. A few days into the voyage the ship sank.

After the week of mourning, the brokenhearted father came to the Rebbe and said, "If the Rebbe would have explained why he negated the trip, I am sure my son would have listened."

The Rebbe Rayatz replied, "Believe me that not every time I say something, do I know why I am saying it. I just convey what I am told from Above. But this I know: when I say it, you have to follow it - or else..."

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The Jewish Nation arrives at the Yam Suf, Egyptians behind them, mountains to the right and left, and in front of them, the Yam Suf. They cry out to Moshe, "What did you bring us here for? Was there no place to bury us in Egypt, so you had to bring us here to die?" Moshe tells the people, "G-d will get us out of here." G-d says to Moshe, "What are they crying for? Tell the nation to continue to go!"

Rav Yissochar Frand, in his famous speech at the 12th Siyum Hashas of Daf Yomi, at MetLife Stadium, told what became a famous story. A man in his seventies, once came to the Rosh Yeshiva, Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt"l. The Rosh Yeshiva told him, he needed a plan to learn, so he came back and showed that he could finish Mesechet Shabbat, in a certain amount of time. The Rosh Yeshiva told him to go back, and make another plan, that this first one was not good enough. The man came back with a plan to finish Shas, and the Rosh Yeshiva said "now that is a plan!" The man said, "Rosh Yeshiva, by the time this plan is going to finish, I will be 130! How can this be a good plan? I can never do it." The Rosh Yeshiva looked at him, and picked up the tablecloth, to show future plans for expanding the Yeshiva, and said to him, "Do you think I could do what I am doing? Look at me! I'm sick, and have every excuse in the book to stop, but am I going to let a few circumstances get in the way of my plan? Nothing stands in the way of will power."

Friends, in life we find ourselves sometimes in impossible situations, and we say to ourselves, "How am I ever going to do this? How am I going to get out of this?" Is there anything impossible for G-d? Who do you think put you in that situation in the first place?! G-d created every situation that you experience, specifically for you. Don't think that details can completely sideline you! G-d must expect more than that from you.

So let's all seize every opportunity and let's pray with all our hearts, for the recovery of all the sick from this crazy pandemic, as well as praying for our soldiers and healthcare professionals, and Chevra Kadisha members worldwide, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children and parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, sweet and happy Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 1
MITZVOT ASEH: 0
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 1

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 116
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1681
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6423

HAFTORA:
Ashkenazim & Chabad: Shoftim 4:4-5:31
Sephardim: Shoftim 5:1-31

The Shabbat on which Parshat Beshalach is read, is called שבת שירה, because it contains Az Yashir. (15:1-18).

בשאלח

This week is sponsored
In memory of the
Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
Who's Yahrzeit is Thursday
כ"ב שבט
February 4th of this year