

# SIEZE THE MOMENT

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

This weeks parsha tells us about the three major festivals. They are Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. They are milestones of celebration in the cycle of the Jewish year. After thousands of years There are still individuals and entire communities large and small that continue, year after year in the prescribed season, to eat matzah, learn Torah and build Sukkahs. How does the redundant marking of time have such lasting ability? Can't the yearly repetitive circle become more of a round rut?

In Berditchev, the home of the famed Rabbi Levy Yitzchok there was an individual whose job it was to be the communal collector of charitable funds. As a need arose such as the wedding of an orphan, he went around town collecting. The people of the town though none too rich themselves, always gave with a smile and a blessing for the needy. The charity collector tried not to show his face more often than necessary. It was the day before Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. After finishing one of his appointed rounds for a cause, the young man was approached by a local resident. "Did you hear?" the man asked. "The Jewish innkeeper couldn't pay his rent of 300 rubles to the landowner". "The innkeeper, his wife and children have all been imprisoned in one of the landowners decrepit dungeons until he receives payment!" "I just returned from a collection!" the young man exclaimed. "But I can't let the family wait in that hole till after Yom Kippur when I can collect the funds". "Why for that amount, I'll need to go to the people of Berditchev and the surrounding towns as well!" "What shall I do?" The young man began walking as he thought and eventually found himself outside of the very inn that was rented by the unfortunate innkeeper.

Inside the inn were several young Jewish men who, disregarding the holiness of the upcoming day, were drinking and in general, carrying on. Upon seeing the young charity collector they beckoned to him, hoping to have a little fun in the process. "Who are you begging for now?" one inquired to the amusement of his friends. Out of desperation the young man informed them how the innkeeper who's schnapps they were imbibing was at that very moment suffering along with his family and that he feared for their survival even overnight. He explained that he needed three hundred rubles immediately. The drinking party said they would supply the entire amount if the young man would down three glasses of 180 proof vodka. One for each hundred rubles. Now they knew full well that this gentleman was not in the habit of drinking more than a "l'chaim" on Shabbos. What kind of Yom Kippur could he have after consuming so much alcohol? Drink he did and after two of the required three glass, two thirds of the agreed upon money was stacked on the table. Before downing the last glass the young man requested that the donors please get the money to the landowner

immediately after the third glass was done, then they were to carry him to the synagogue. The family would go free and at least he would sleep off his stupor in the atmosphere of the holiness of Yom Kippur. He drank the last glass, promptly passed out, and was carried to the synagogue accompanied by a rowdy parade.

Those who were assembled to pray took one look at the man and knowing his sterling character, concluded that the truth would come out eventually. News of the family's release and how it came about spread. The service was begun. When the Torah scroll was taken from the ark the young man began to come out of his sleep. Seeing the Torah in his state, he concluded that it must have been Simchas Torah, the culminating holiday of Sukkos! He rose, grabbed the Torah and began dancing wildly in a circle, singing loudly. The congregants wanted to take the Torah back. It was hardly behavior befitting Yom Kippur! Rabbi Levy Yitzchok lifted his hand to stop them. They watched as the young man went about in his reverie for a few more minutes and then they caught both the Torah and the young man as they slid downwards. They carefully placed him back on his bench to continued a peaceful sleep. Rabbi Levy Yitzchok then addressed the assemblage. "Our charity collector performed an incredible act of self sacrifice to free captives, a great mitzvah as we all know". "The spiritual heights which he attained in doing so propelled him beyond Yom Kippur to Sukkos". "The holiness of Sukkos is a preparation for the culmination of the High Holy Days with Simchas Torah". "Do You see why I stopped you from ending the man's dance?" concluded Rabbi Levy Yitzchok. "For him, it really \_is\_ Simchas Torah!"

"To everything there is a season" - Koheles/Ecclesiastes 3:1. The cycle of the Jewish year is at once ancient yet fresh and full of life. More than we keep the Torah, it keeps us. It brings a guide from the past to the present while giving hope for the future because the cycle is not a circle but an upward spiral. It is therefore not a case of "Been there, seen it, done that" because in reality, we've never been at this very juncture in history before! Through the festivals one can "seize the moment" to enhance national, communal and personal growth. How unique! How exciting!

Good Shabbos!

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