



A collection of Torah thoughts produced by Kollel Menachem

פרשת במדבר

סיון תשע"ז

MELAVE MALKA LEARNING

All men and women are invited this Motzai Shabbos to join us for an evening in preparation for Matan Torah.

Join us for two fascinating talks by two great speakers and a light Melave Malka buffet.

Rabbi Leor Broh will speak about the uniqueness of the days between Lag Baomer and Shavuos. Rabbi Yonason Johnson will speak about Matan Torah in each generation, transmitting our values to our children.

8:00pm in the Goldhirsch Hall.

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOS

The Kollel's annual Tikkun Leil Shavuos program will take place on the first night of Shavuos with a great line up of speakers and topics.

Part one will take place in the Shule for men and women.

At 10:00pm Rabbis Krasnjanski senior and junior will contrast the contributions of Yissachar and Zevulun, full-time learners and business people.

Rabbi Jacks will then present on whether Artsroll Gemaras advance or stifle learning.

From 12:00am through to dawn, the program continues for men in Kollel. See the notices for a full list of topics.

SHAALOS UTESHUVOS

This week we will conclude the Teshuvah on the topic of whether a Jew may enter a church and under which circumstances this may be permissible. 9:30am Sunday in Kollel.



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Picking up a fallen Mishkan

On the Shabbos before Shavuos we read the Parsha of Bamidbor. The Parsha begins with the census of the Jewish people. Sheivet Levi is not counted together with the rest of Bnei Yisroel as they have been singled out for the sacred task of carrying and caring for the Mishkan.

In describing their responsibilities, the Torah teaches ובהנות המשכן יקימו אותו הלוים - "When the Mishkan would camp, the Leviim would erect it".

What is the deeper meaning of this and how is it connected to our preparation for Matan Torah?

The Mishkan is also referred to as the Ohel Moed, the tent of meeting. Hashem describes the purpose of the Mishkan as ונועדתי שמה לבני ישראל "I will meet there with Bnei Yisroel". The word ונועדתי describes a union and connection between Hashem and the Jewish people.

ונועדתי represents the innate connection every Jew has with Hashem, stemming from the essence of the Neshama. This connection is actualised and revealed through the Mishkan, the tent of Torah study. Enclothed within Torah is the *Ratzon HaElyon*, Hashem's will. Through study, we draw this lofty G-dly light into our soul to reveal our essential bond with Hashem.

But what happens when our Mishkan rests? What happens when we fall from this level connection and we experience a spiritual collapse?

Our Neshama is enclothed within the body with our animalistic soul. Our selfish drives, pursuit of pleasure and the sins that we commit block the light of the Neshama from being expressed and her innate connection becomes hidden. What do we do to restore our Ohel Moed?

The Torah teaches us that resurrecting the Mishkan is done by the Leviim. The tribe of Levi comprises three families; Gershon, Kehos and Merari. Each one of these families allude to a spiritual service which must be done if we wish to stand our Mishkan up once more.

Gershon comes from the terminology גרש,

meaning to banish. The first step in our spiritual reboot is to banish the negativity from within us. We have to arouse our inner strength to rule over our Yetzer Hara (כובש את יצרו) and stop our wrongful actions.

The second stage is Merari. Merari is related to the idea of מרירות, a sense of bitterness or contrition and regret for our wrongdoing through realising the impact of our actions and how they create a barrier which obstructs us from relating to Hashem and experiencing our essential bond.

After these two stages, we come to Kehos. Kehos is related to the term to be gathered, as in the verse ולא יקרת עמים, "and the nations will be gathered to Him". This describes our reunion as we recollect our heart and soul to be gathered to Hashem once more.

Kehos is also related to the term קיוה which describes a taste of sourness. In Tanya the Alter Rebbe likens the service of the Beinoni in restraining their animalistic desires, to the pleasure experienced from taking a naturally sour or bitter food and preparing it well so that it becomes tasty. This alludes to the affect of Teshuva which, through effort and preparation, transforms the sourness into a pleasant taste. This is the gathering to Hashem which comes from and after a place of distance and bitterness.

The Mishkan housed the Luchos which were given on Shavuos. At Matan Torah we experienced the most lofty of revelations and the essence of our souls defined our reality. As we re-experience Matan Torah, we have to prepare our Mishkan to ensure that it is set up and able to house the Torah and the accompanying G-dly revelations.

Through restoring our fallen sanctuaries, Hashem will restore the סוכת דוד הנופלת, the fallen tent of Dovid with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdosh. Just as the third Beis Hamikdosh will be eternal, we too will no longer experience any collapse and our Mishkan bond will be openly manifest for always.

~ Based on the opening Maamer in Likutei Torah on

Decorating with Flowers on Shavuos & Shabbos

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

On Shavuos many have the custom of decorating the Shule and home with flowers.

The source of the Minhag is found in the Maharil¹, known as the father of Ashkenazi customs. He writes that the custom is to spread fragrant herbs and roses on the floor in honour of Matan Torah. The Minhag as recorded in Shulchan Aruch² is to spread grass or herbage (עשבֵי־דִם) in both the Shule and houses on Shavuos.

Various reasons have been offered for this Minhag and its symbolism.

- Maharil writes that it is in honour of the Simcha of the festival.
- Ram"o writes that it is to recall the joy of Matan Torah.
- The Levush writes that it is to recall how Har Sinai miraculously sprouted with grass and flowers in honour of Matan Torah³.
- Another reason for this Minhag is to allude to the Midrash in the Gemora that with each statement of the *Aseres Hadibros* the world became perfumed with a beautiful fragrance⁴.
- Another reason for the Minhag is that according to one opinion in the Gemora, on the 6th of Sivan Moshe was placed in the reeds on the edge of the Nile⁵.

The Magen Avrohom⁶ also records the custom of placing trees in the Shule. This is because on Shavuos we are judged for the fruit of the trees⁷ and placing trees in the Shule reminds us to daven for a successful produce.

Another reason for the custom is because the Torah is called עץ־חַיִּים, a Tree of Life⁸.

Other customs include placing plants and flowers on the sides and on top of the Aron Kodesh and the Amud Tefillah⁹.

Bnei Yissaschar¹⁰ records the minhag of adorning the Sefer Torah with a crown of roses.

In the Shule of the Chasam Sofer, a canopy of branches was placed over his seat¹¹.

Whilst many communities still practise the custom of decorating the Shule with flowers and plants, many Kehillos no longer do so.

The Vilna Gaon nullified the custom of placing trees on Shavuos since it resembles the non-Jewish practise (*Chukas Hagoy*) of placing trees as decoration on their festivals. This is quoted by the later Halachic codifiers¹².

Chabad custom is not to decorate the Shule with plants on Shavuos.

Many families buy flowers for the home in honour of Shavuos and certainly flowers are a regular adornment to the home in honour of Shab-

bos and Yomtov.

Muktzah:

Flowers or plants which were bought or picked before Shabbos with the intention of decorating the home are not Muktzah¹³. This is because they have become designated from before Shabbos as an adornment and become a functional item.

This is opposed to general plant matter which is completely Muktzah, whether attached or severed from the ground, and cannot be moved with one's hands¹⁴.

Therefore, in those communities where the custom is to decorate using flowers and plants, one may place them in the Shule on Yomtov itself¹⁵.

When Shavuos falls on Sunday, the flowers cannot be set up on Shabbos as this would be considered as preparing on Shabbos for Yomtov which is forbidden even where no Melacha is involved¹⁶.

Based on this, if a vase of the flowers on the table is obstructing the view of the guests, or if one wishes to change the table cloth, the flowers may be moved (subject to the other Halachos outline below).

Placing Flowers in Water:

The Shulchan Oruch¹⁷ rules that one may 'place' flowers into water on Shabbos. However, this ruling is subject to the conditions described below.

The Ram"o¹⁸ clearly states that **flowers which are not fully open may not be placed in water**. Nor may they be returned to water or have water added to them. This is forbidden both on Shabbos and Yomtov. The reason is that the water causes the flowers to open and would violate the *melocho* of *Zoreia* (planting) *Miderabonon*.

Therefore when moving a vase with flowers which have not fully opened, they should be moved slowly and gently to avoid sharp movement which would cause the water level on the plants to splash higher.

Therefore, the discussion below is specifically about flowers which are fully opened, or decorative leaves and branches which do not have flowers.

The Mishna Berura¹⁹ explains that the Shulchan Oruch only permits one to *return* flowers to the water that they were in beforehand. (Flowers can be removed from a vase on Shabbos²⁰). Placing flowers into water for the first time on Shabbos would be forbidden. Similarly changing the water or adding more water to flowers in a vase would be forbidden. This is because of performing an extra *Tircha* to preserve the flowers.

The Alter Rebbe also prohibits the adding or changing of water on Shabbos because of *Tircha*. However, if there was already a vase of water from before Shabbos, the Alter Rebbe allows flowers to be placed into it (even for the first time) on Shabbos.

This is because no *Tircha* is involved. This follows the more literal understanding of the Shulchan Oruch quoted above²¹.

According to this opinion, if a guest brought flowers on Shabbos one could put them into a vase of water which had other flowers in it already. One could also prepare a vase of water before Shabbos in anticipation of guests bringing flowers on Shabbos.

All of the above applies equally on Yomtov with one difference: On Yomtov according to all opinions one can add more fresh water to a vase of flowers²². According to some Poskim, only up to half of the original amount of water may be added²³.

Smelling Flowers:

One is permitted to smell flowers on Shabbos even if they are attached to the ground. However, fruit which is attached to the tree cannot be smelled since it could bring a person to violate Shabbos by picking them²⁴. Whenever smelling any fragrant flower, fruit or herb, cut or attached, the appropriate *brocha* should be recited.

Arranging Flowers:

One should not arrange a bouquet or other arrangement of flowers on Shabbos or Yomtov. This is considered גְּמִיּוּלָה - making a vessel on Shabbos²⁵.

1. Maharil Hilchos Shavuos
2. OC 494:3
3. Levush 494:1 as seen from the fact that the Torah forbade the animals from grazing on Har Sinai.
4. Based on this reason, the plants or flowers should be fragrant.
5. Chiddushei Harim based on Talmud Sotah
6. OC 494:5
7. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 494:15.
8. Melamed Lehoil
9. Minhagei Vermaisa. A flower would also be placed on the chair of each Chaver and Parnas, 2 flowers on the seat of the Rav and many flowers on the seat of the Av Beis Din.
10. Maamar Chodesh Sivan 4
11. Recorded in Chut Hameshulash
12. See also Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah and Chayei Adam 131:13.
13. See Magen Avraham 494:5 Shulchan Aruch Harav 494:14 and Shulchan Aruch Harav 336:18 and 308:50
14. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 336:4 and 336:22. Whilst one is allowed to walk on grass or plant matter, one may not move them with their hand.
15. Magen Avraham 494:5 and Shulchan Aruch Harav 494:14
16. Maharil ibid
17. See Ram"o O.C. 336:11
18. ibid. See also Mishna Berura and Shulchan Aruch Harav.
19. O.C. 336:54. This is the opinion of the Chayei Adam.
20. Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa quoting Rabbi S.Z. Auerbach
21. The Alter Rebbe's opinion is also held by the Pri Megadim (Eshel Avraham 13). The Shaar Hatziyun writes that this opinion can be relied upon.
22. O.C. 654 based on the Mishna Sukkah 42a concerning a Lulav on Yomtov.
23. Aruch Hashulchan 654:2. Adding more than half would be akin to replacing the water entirely.
24. See Shulchan Oruch O.C. 336:10.
25. Igros Moshe O.C. 4:73. Ketzos Hashulchan is also concerned about the violation of the melocho of Meameir.