

Rosh HaShana 5774 & Parashat Ha'a'zienu

BS"D Rosh HaShana 5774 and Parashat Ha'a'zienu 5773

HaRav Moshe Isserlis (RaMa) in his annotations to the laws of Rosh Hashana in the Shulchan Aruch quotes the Tur (Rabbeini Yaakov ben Asher):

ישנה מנהג (על ר"ח) לאכול תפוח טבול בתבואת דבש ואומר "שנה טובה וטובה" וכו'.

There is a custom (on Rosh HaShana) to eat an apple dipped in honey and say, "May we be blessed with a sweet year".

A pleasant custom, one might think; however, it goes beyond wishful thinking for the future.

There is another beautiful custom regarding honey. In many schools here, when the children receive their first siddur or chumash a drop of honey is placed on the first letter. The children are told to kiss the first letter, and the initial feeling of sweetness remains with them their whole lives – the sweetness of Torah and tefila.

Eretz Yisrael is referred to in the Torah 15 times as, "The land of milk and honey". Although the intent there is to the sweet nectar which seeps from the date fruit, but sweet is sweet, whether from honey or from dates.

Why is all this attention being paid to sweetness?

There are inordinate ways that a person can relate to life and its untold multiplex situations. Some life situations bring sadness, others bring joy, as described by King Shlomo (Kohelet 3):

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There is a time for everything, and a season for every emotion under the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

However, within the content of each of our lives one idea

should reign supreme – Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, has selected only us from among all the 7 billion people now occupying the planet to be His chosen people. He brought us out of the impenetrable walls of Egyptian slavery. He split the churning sea to let us cross, and drowned our enemies in its waters. He appeared before us at Mount Sinai when He gave us the Torah, and held our hands while we traversed the barren desert for 40 years. He watched over us for 1300 hundred years in Eretz Yisrael, before punishing us for our betrayal of His Torah. He was with us in the darkest of night in this 2000 year galut and brought us home to Eretz Yisrael, where the majority of halachic Jews now live.

The intimate relationship which exists between the Creator and His people Yisrael, as attested to by our surviving the hated galut and our return to the Promised land, should create within every authentic Jew a sense of sweetness, despite the stress we may feel within the tiny universe of our personal lives.

In the waning hours of 5773, I humbly wish all of the readers of these weekly divrei Torah, those who agree with the spirit of the words and those who reject it, may each merit a sweet year of good health and yir'at shamayim.

And forever know, that despite our differences, we are forever brothers and sisters with a shared past and a shared future in Eretz Yisrael. And here we shall welcome the Mashiach, and be part of the grand prophecies of old as they usher in a new world at whose center will be the Bet Hamikdash in Yerushalayim.

Ketiva va'chatima tova

Nachman Kahana