



REBBETZIN SHIRA

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Flourishing Flowers

Walk into any shul or home on *Shavuot* and your senses are stimulated and energized by the heady scent and beautiful display of flowers and foliage. What is the source of the *minhag* to decorate our homes and shuls with flowers and plants? What symbolism does it convey that can enhance our experience on this *chag*?

The *Mishnah Berurah* explains that decorating our spaces with bouquets and greenery reminds us that *Shavuot* is the day when the fruit of our trees are judged. Hence, in the time of the *Beit Hamikdash* the *shteit halechem* and *Bikurim* were brought in thanks to Hashem for the previous year's bounty. On a deeper level, the *Tolat Yaakov* explains that our souls are referred to as the "fruit of the trees." On

Shavuot our souls are judged based on our loyalty to the study of Torah and its practices throughout the past year. Like Rosh Hashanah when our physical resources are decided, on *Shavuot* it is decided how much spiritual energy and resources we will merit in the coming year.

Rav Moshe Wolfson in *Emunat Itecha* notes that one is only allowed to use non-fruit bearing trees in our *yomtov* trimmings to safeguard the prohibition of *bal tashchit*. Further, in *Parashat Bechukotai* we are promised that these trees will indeed bear fruit in the times of Mashiach. When we see the greenery from non-fruit bearing trees, we can be inspired to daven for this prophecy to be speedily fulfilled. It is especially appropriate on this *chag* to daven for the Mashiach as we read *Megillat Rut* that features the promise and revelation of the Davidic dynasty.

Rav Yaakov Emden and others relate that the flowers and trees remind us of the



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magnificent description of Har Sinai. Why, Rabbi Daniel Ochiyon asks, do we specifically highlight this aspect of the Har Sinai experience? Why don't we do something to recall the awesome sound of the shofar or the spectacular lightning and thunder? He observes that the dramatic display of shofar, lightning and thunder reflects the awe of *matan Torah*. However, the flowers reflect the aspect of love and beauty that Hashem showed us at that time. Each year, when we reaccept the Torah, we display flowers and greenery to accentuate the beauty and sweet-smelling aspect of Torah and we are inspired and invigorated to reciprocate Hashem's love by serving Him with freshness and joy.

The *Bnei Yissachar* adds that one should especially include roses in his flower arrangements. The midrash in *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* describes a king who planted a beautiful garden but when he came to visit it, he found that it was desolate and forlorn except for one beautiful rose. The king decided to keep the garden for the sake of that solitary exquisite rose. So too, Hashem maintains the world in the merit of His special rose, the Jewish people. On a deeper level, our sense of smell is the highest of the five senses as it was untainted by the original sin of Adam and Chava since we find no mention of smell in the context of their sin. At the time of *Kabalat haTorah*, *Am Yisrael* reverted to the pristine level of Adam pre sin. It is this sublime degree that we aspire to as we adorn our homes and shuls with the fragrance and bloom of roses and sweet-smelling flowers, plants and branches. ■

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