



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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There is a phrase in Hebrew, “*etrogim acharai Sukkot*,” *etrogs* after Sukkot. It’s the idea that although an *etrog* before Sukkot can be worth a hundred, two hundred, sometimes five hundred shekels, the day after Sukkot ends, though, aside from making jam, it’s basically useless. You can probably buy a dozen for a shekel. The same idea applies to writing this column. I always prefer to talk about things that happened very recently, because discussing events that happened months prior kind of feels like *etrogim* after Sukkot. Not as relevant.

But since this Torah Tidbits edition, God-willing, is going to be arriving in *shuls* right after Yom Ha’atzmaut, and we have to go to print very far in advance (since the printing houses do not work as usual during the week of Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha’atzmaut), I therefore cannot talk about a Yom Ha’atzmaut that hasn’t happened yet. Instead, I will talk about something about Pesach that for many years I took for granted, and every year around Pesach time I am exposed more and more to it and come to appreciate it in a deeper way.

Truth be told, the *parshiyot* of the past few weeks have been very relevant to the theme. A few weeks ago we read *Parshat Shemini*, and then *Tazria-Metzora*, and this week we read *Acharei Mot-Kedoshim*, in which we hear

the command *Kedoshim tihyu laShem Elokeichem*, that we are to be a holy people. *Shemini* teaches us that holiness is about what we put into our mouths. *Tazria-Metzora* teaches us that it is also about what comes out of our mouths. And *Acharei Mot-Kedoshim* teaches us that it is also about what we do with our bodies and our minds. The goal is to be as holy as possible, so that we can be as close as possible to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

Just a few weeks ago, no matter who we passed on the street, and no matter to whom we were writing a message or an email, we ended off with “*chag kasher v’sameach*” - have a kosher and joyful holiday. It is the one time a year that we use this greeting. I have often wondered why we put *kasher* before *sameach*. People will say, “Of course it is going to be kosher, and *b’ezrat Hashem* it will be joyful as well.” But the reality is that it is not “of course” a kosher Pesach. It takes a tremendous amount of effort to *kasher* our homes and make sure they are ready for Pesach. For most people, cleaning is not an enjoyable activity, and the laws of *kashering* a kitchen are complex. Then there’s the matter of grocery shopping and sometimes appliance shopping. It’s a very difficult thing to accomplish.

It is so, so important to realize how it is that there are so many kosher items in stores in time for Pesach. A major part of that is because of the extraordinarily dedicated team at OU Israel Kashrut, together with the OU’s broader *kashrut* teams around the world and other *hechsherim*, working extremely hard to make sure that, months in advance, factories

Dedicated L’iluy Nishmat

ר' חנוך ב"ר ברוך יעקב ז"ל

Henry Schiffmiller ז"ל

whose 25th Yahrtzeit is on י"ג אייר

are *kashered* and products are ready to be sold for Pesach.

I was speaking recently with Rabbi Ezra Friedman, director of our Gustave and Carol Jacobs Center for Kashrut Education, and I tried to get from him an exact number of how many calls, WhatsApps, and questions he received on the OU Israel *kashrut* hotline just before Pesach. He told me it was in the many thousands. I then spoke with Rabbi Yissachar Dov Krakowski, Rabbi Yonatan Korach, and others on the team, and they too told me that the number of questions that come in to OU *kashrut* in New York, OU Israel, and rabbanim around the world simply skyrockets in the weeks leading up to Pesach.

But beyond the questions and answers by our rabbinic staff, what really impressed me was traveling around the country with the *kashrut* team and seeing the endless amount of work they do to ensure that every factory is *kashered* and that products which need to be exported leave the country on time. I had the *zechut* of seeing two different types of operations up close: the *kashering* of factories and the *kashering* of restaurants.

I was at the *kashering* of both Harvey's Smokehouse, which *baruch Hashem* is now under OU Badatz Mehadrin, as well as Papagaio, which has been under the OU Badatz Mehadrin for many years and was *kashered* for Pesach again this year. I saw our *kashrut* team working extremely hard for many long hours. Some of our *mashgichim* were there for seventeen hours straight, cleaning and *kashering*, doing everything possible to make sure the restaurants were as spotless and as kosher as possible.

To watch Rabbi Yissachar Dov Krakowski, who heads our *kashrut* department here in Israel, come in on a Thursday night, on a



motzei Shabbat, come to a restaurant to work into the early hours of the morning alongside his team, including Rabbi Zevi Carlebach, Rabbi Yonatan Korach, and Rabbi Motti Cohen & Rabbi Mordechai, our *mashgiach* at Papagaio, was inspiring. They take this work so seriously. Any *safek* that could arise, no matter how small, they simply do not leave unresolved. They were scrubbing and scrubbing and scrubbing for hours on end to make sure that every detail was one hundred percent.

In loving memory of
Rebbetzin Josephine Reichel ע"ה
on her 26th *yahrzeit* - י"א א"ר
*from the Bronner
and Reichel families*

Nothing less would do.

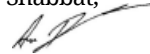
Then there was a story Rabbi Yonatan Korach shared with me. Amongst the 36 wineries that the OU certifies in Israel we have a winery up on the Lebanese border that, over the last period, has been under regular fire. A certain procedure had to be performed inside the factory on *Chol HaMoed*. It could not wait. So Rabbi Korach left his family on *Chol HaMoed* and drove up north. He spent six hours inside that winery doing what had to be done, with booms heard every minute between our own fire into Lebanon and Hezbollah fire into the north. On the drive there he had siren after siren, he even mentioned that he witnessed two helicopters chasing down a suicide drone sent from Lebanon! These are events that one would only think to see in their imagination, not on your way to take care of *kashrus* business at a winery. He said to me, "At the end of the day, there is a Jew who has a winery, and we cannot tell him that we are afraid to come up north. We have to go, no matter what the situation is, no matter how dangerous it is."

Hearing that, and seeing all of it firsthand, made me realize how fortunate we are to have such an incredibly dedicated staff working around the clock so that we can wish each other a *chag kasher v'sameach* and have kosher for Pesach products, and

kosher products year-round, that give us the ability to be *kedoshim* in a real way. This is what enables us to take the lessons of *Parshat Shemini*, *Tazria-Metzora*, and *Acharei Mot-Kedoshim* and actually live them, by becoming the holiest Jews we possibly can be through lives of Torah and *kashrut*.

On behalf of all our readership, I want to thank Rabbi Yissachar Dov Krakowski, Rabbi Ezra Friedman, Rabbi Yonatan Korach, Rabbi Zevi Carlebach, Rabbi Motti Cohen, Mrs. Rachel Stewart, and the entire OU Israel *kashrut* team for the endless hard work you do throughout the year, and especially before Pesach, to enable each of us to elevate our spiritual lives and follow the Torah.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman



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