

Dear Friends,

A gutten moed. We've experienced the high of leil haseder, and the closeness of Shabbos chol hamoed, the Shabbos of Shir HaShirim. Now we're in chol hamoed, **with just a few spare minutes to absorb and process the journey that is Pesach.**

Two thousand years ago, erev Pesach looked very different. Yerushalayim was crammed with the Yidden who had travelled from up and down Eretz Yisrael, from Mitzrayim and Bavel and even over the sea **for the special mitzvah of aliyah leregel.** The streets were a mass of Yidden, singing and playing their instruments as they anticipated the yuntiff ahead of them, a time of uplift and kedushah and unity.

For what purpose? Of course, they would have eaten the Korban Pesach together, heard the Hallel of the Leviim in the Beis Hamikdash. Over and above this, the Torah tells us that they went, "*lirós v'leheiro'os*—to see and be seen." What did they see? **They saw the wonders and miracles of the Mikdash,** the awe, the might—and the brachah. They saw Hashem's love to His people. **And they were "seen":** they felt Hashem's eye upon them. They enacted the relationship of the keruvim, which were turned to face each other in a symbol of love and intimacy.

One of the most magical childhood games is hide and go seek. The first time it is played, is when we cover our faces and play peekaboo with a small baby, who laughs at the surprise. No Mommy, where's Mommy —what do you know, Mommy was here all the time. As babies become toddlers and then children, the game becomes more complicated. Children run to hide behind curtains, inside small closets, anywhere they are out of sight for a few delicious and tantalizing moments.

And why is it so much fun? Only because we know that someone—Mommy or Tatty or big brother or sister—is looking for us. The game only carries a thrill—rather than the agony of abandonment—because we know that someone is seeking us.

Let's turn to our relationship with Hashem. These are the incredible words brought down in hilchos Tefillah, by the Tur and Rema.

When saying, "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*" ... Says Hashem, I have no pleasure like that which I receive when their eyes are directed to Me and My eyes

are directed to them. At that time... I remember their exile and expedite their redemption, as it says in Shir Hashirim: **“Behold you are beautiful, my beloved; behold you are beautiful and your eyes are like doves”** (*Shir Hashirim* 1:15).

We say kedushah, and our eyes look up towards the Heavens. What happens in the heavenly realm during that time? We look upwards, and Hashem meets our gaze. He stares down into our eyes. And in the love that is aroused, Hashem promises to bring the geulah. He compares us to doves: Your eyes are like doves.

Why doves? Doves mate for life. Year after year, they may travel great distances, but each season, a pair of doves will return to nest together. More, when a dove flies from its nest, its head is turned back to its nest. Its eyes are trained on its mate. **Even when it's far away, it is seeking. It is searching. It feels close and connected.** It's looking for its mate.

And that's the connection between klal Yisrael and Hashem. Even when Hashem feels far away, it looks back, scans the horizons, searches. Because it is secure in the knowledge, that no matter how distant, **Hashem's eyes are on us.** Meitzitz bein hacharakim, as we say in Shir Hashirim: peering through the latticework. We are far from the Mikdash. Far from those halcyon times. But we're here, in the midst of this yom tov that is the first of the shalash regalim. Within the energy of the Yom Tov is the experience of liros v'leharaos. Because to see Hashem and be seen by Him was not something that was a one-time occurrence. It was inscribed on our souls, inked on our identity. Two thousand years later, the spiritual effect lives on. Today, in תש"פ , wherever we are in the world, **we can still be oleh regel.**

Liros. We see. We see Hashem. We look to Him. We hope to Him. We search our everyday lives for those times when we feel a Heavenly embrace. We want the closeness. Like that dove, whose eyes are trained on its mate even as it flies away, we long to be back where we belong, nestled in Hashem's cradling arms. **We look for connection.** We dig inside and search for the emunah that fortifies us, no matter how far away we may feel.

Lehairaos. We are seen. We live with the conviction that we are cherished. That our yom tov table is beloved. **That our small efforts are noted. That our yearnings are recognized.** That our emunah is cherished. We stare into the Yom

Tov licht, we sing Hallel and we eat matzah and we allow ourselves to be bathed in Hashem's closeness and hashgacha.

Hide and go seek. It is a game so full of pathos and so full of hope. Because it implies, even though we can't see Hashem right now, even though the world is so full of darkness, that He is waiting for us to find Him. And it works the other way, too. Even as we cover our faces, turn our backs, like a little child who doesn't want to be found, Hashem is calling to us softly, urging us, come back to Me.

Come back to Me. I want to see you. Please, my child, become an oleh regel. It's a long time since Sukkos, the last time we rejoiced together. Come and be with Me over yom tov. I am waiting to see you, and I know that you are yearning to be seen by Me, your loving Father.

True, there are no flutes lining the streets of Yerushalayim. There is no Beis Hamikdash, glistening gold with the sunrise. Certainly, we are in glaus. Indeed, this year we are feeling it stronger than ever before. But there is an aliyah l'regel, and it's taking place right here, in our living rooms and dining rooms and in our humble kitchens. It is taking place each time we take a breath, touch the whispered yearnings of our hearts, and feel the spark of love that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has placed there. This year, this Pesach, let's open our hearts to the feeling that at last, we've come home.

My bracha to all of us today This yomtov, may we be zoche that every mikdash me'at be transformed into a Beis Hamikdash. May we be zoche to the nissim. May we be zocheh to hear the leviim, with their flutes and their trumpets, singing Hallel. **May we be zocheh to the uplift, the ecstasy, and the love. To see and be seen.**

A guten yontiff.

Mrs. Faigie Zelcer

Penimi | *Director*

P: 718.514.2525 #101

E: fzelcer@penimi.org

US: 1266 56th Street Brooklyn, NY 11219

CA: 460 Champagneur Montreal, QC H2V 3P5

