
INTRODUCTIONS TO THE SHALOSH REGALIM MACHZOR

Introduction for Parents, Mechanchim, and Mechanchos to the Shalosh Regalim Machzor

Introduction for teens to the Shalosh Regalim Machzor can be found on page xxv.

If you have never read the introduction to the weekday siddur, then please go back to page xv and read that first. Without it, this entire machzor will at best make no sense, and at worse may be counterproductive! (I am not kidding!)

The lessons, personal insights, and spiritual growth that one gets from Yom Tov (which can then affect the entire year) really depend on one's Yom Tov experience at home, rather than on speeches, essays, and theoretical concepts, and there is not a lot this *machzor* can do about that. Yom Tov (especially in *chutz la'aretz* with a two- or even three-day Yom Tov) gets rid of all the weekday distractions and gives families the opportunity and time to reconnect, communicate, grow, and focus on the particular message of each *chag*. But, if it is those very distractions (and distance between siblings!) that was actually the only thing “keeping the peace” by allowing everyone to **avoid** each other(!), then Yom Tov, by removing those distractions and bringing everyone back into the same house, is a disaster in the making! Indeed, the holidays can be hard. (A friend who does mental health referrals told me that his busiest season is right after Pesach!) If (unfortunately) that is your home, then I strongly urge you (adults and teens alike) to read the introduction to the Shabbos siddur, where this is dealt with at length. If, on the other hand, Yom Tov is the most anticipated and happiest time of year for your family—*ashreichem*! Go straight to the explanation of *Shalosh Regalim* found in the introduction for

teens, and may this *machzor* help facilitate an even greater level of *simchah* in your family's continued spiritual growth.

אמן, כן יהי רצון.

Introduction for Teens to the Shalosh Regalim Machzor

If you never read the introduction to the weekday siddur (or if you did but forgot what it said!), then please go back to page xix and read that first. Without it, this entire *machzor* will at best make no sense, and at worse may be counterproductive! (I am not kidding!).

"I just can't wait till Yom Tov; my whole family gets together!"

"I just love all those long and inspiring Yom Tov seudos!"

"Yom Tov is sooooo boring!"

"Chag Sameach? Are you kidding? It is a miracle we survive the week!"

"Yom Tov in my house is a nightmare!"

Yom Tov really depends on your experience—much of which is not in your control.

If your Yom Tov is uplifting and spiritual, but the *tefillos* are confusing and hard to grasp, then skip this introduction and go straight to the *machzor*. (And don't forget to thank Hashem that He placed you in such a wonderful environment.) If not, then all the books, cheesy videos, inspiring speeches, and deep mystical *derashos* cannot change the reality of your particular Yom Tov table and weeklong Chol Hamoed family drama and dynamics. And this *machzor* cannot do that either! Sorry, much of our reality is out of our control.

But, as explained at length in the introduction to the Shabbos siddur, each and every one of us **do** have the free will to control how we **respond** to that reality! And that is where this *machzor* can help. For most families, Yom Tov is an even greater challenge than Shabbos. Bringing everyone together—often for two or three days—could be a recipe for disaster. *Tefillah* can help you create a positive, growing, inner response to your unhappy Yom Tov reality. *Tefillah* can give meaning to a boring Yom Tov reality, and it certainly can give depth to a positive Yom Tov reality!

We cannot begin to understand the Yom Tov *tefillos* and their power without some understanding of the *Shalosh Regalim* themselves, regardless of your particular reality. Though there are many understandings of the depth, power, and meaning of Yom Tov in general, and each *chag* in particular (and many wonderful books on this subject), I am going to focus on a few ideas that I personally find relevant. For an understanding of the message of each Yom Tov in particular, see the introduction to that particular Yom Tov's section in this *machzor*.

This *machzor* is brought to you by Bilam and his donkey! What? Yep, Bilam and his donkey. We all know the story: Bilam is on his way to curse Bnei Yisrael. Hashem sends an angel that causes the donkey to go off the path, knock Bilam's leg, and eventually collapse. At each of these three times, Bilam hits his donkey, and then Hashem has the donkey speak. The donkey asks Bilam, מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים—What have I done to you that you hit me these three times? (*Bamidbar* 22:28). On the spot, *Rashi* comments on the message alluded to by the fact that Hashem had the donkey use the unusual phrase “*shalosh regalim*” to say “three times.” He quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma*: אתה מבקש לעקור אומה החוגגת שלש רגלים בשנה—You seek to destroy a nation that celebrates three festivals (שלש רגלים) annually?!

The power of the *Shalosh Regalim*: What is the power of the *Shalosh Regalim* that they are our protection from the Bilams of the world? The key feature of the *Shalosh Regalim* is that we are “*oleh regel*,” we go up to Yerushalayim and bring *korbanos*. But we do not simply bring a *korban* and leave. Rather, the purpose is יִרְאָה—to appear, as Chazal explain “to see and be seen” by Hashem (*Sanhedrin* 4b). The *Yamim Tovim* are also referred to as *Moadim*. The word *Moed*, besides for meaning a set time, also means a “meeting” (hence, *Ohel Moed*, Tent of Assembly; the root ועד, means a committee or a group). In other words, the *Shalosh Regalim* were and are an opportunity to “meet” with Hashem, create a relationship with Him, and spend time in His Presence. That is something much greater than simply doing a bunch of mitzvos. (As Rav Aharon Feldman, *shlita*, once pointed out, one can be very

observant, but not very religious. Think about that!). That is what Bilam wanted to destroy—our relationship with Hashem. And it is that personal “seeing and being seen” relationship that the Jewish People uniquely have with Hashem that protects us.

Let’s take it deeper: Bilam is described (in *Avos* 5:20) as having three evil traits, which parallel the three character flaws that are מוציאין את האדם מן העולם—take a person out of the world (*Avos* 4:21). This means that they do not simply cause you to lose *Olam Haba*; that is obvious. What the Mishnah is telling us is that these flaws take you out of **your** world and do not let you become the best **you** that you can be! The first is עין רעה—an evil eye, which parallels *kinah*, being jealous of others, and always looking for faults in everyone else (but ourselves!). On Sukkos, we take the *arba minim*, the four species that represent all types of Jews, and we bring them together. And we sit in our sukkah, look up at the flimsy *s’chach*, and realize that whatever we and others do or don’t have is all decreed by Hashem. The second is רוח גבוהה—an arrogant spirit, which parallels *kavod*, seeking honor and being self-absorbed. On Pesach, we eat our very not-puffed-up matzah, speak about all the miracles of Pesach, and think about the fact that all our accomplishments are thanks only to Hashem’s providence. And the third is נפש רחבה—a large appetite, for material pleasures; “I want it all, and I want it now!” That is of course parallel to *taavah*, seeking fulfillment with “fun” and “stuff.” We battle that with Shavuot and *Matan Torah*, when we focus on the realization that only Torah and mitzvos will give value and meaning to our lives.

Thus, the *Shalosh Regalim* can help solve the problem raised above by Rav Aharon Feldman that “one can be very observant but not very religious.” Being *oleh regel*—to “see and be seen” by “meeting” with Hashem—turns what we “observe” on those *Shalosh Regalim* into a “religious” character-changing and growth experience!

And make sure not to be happy! “What? But it says specifically about Yom Tov שמחת בחגך—to have *simchah* on Yom Tov. Doesn’t that mean we have to be happy?” No! Jews don’t do “happy”; we do *simchah*! There is a world of a difference. The word “happy” comes from the root “hap,” meaning lucky or fortunate, as in the word

“happenstance.” When things that you enjoy just happen to happen, you are “happy.” But we believe that nothing just “happens”! It is all Hashem’s providence, and it is all good, even if we cannot see it. עבדו את ה' בשמחה—Serve Hashem with *simchah*. The word בשמחה rearranged spells the word מחשבה, thinking. *Simchah* is the peace of mind that comes from choosing to believe that everything from Hashem is for our good, and that nothing “happens.” Each Yom Tov drives home another element of the miracles Hashem did for us to forge us as His Chosen Nation with a mission to the world. By focusing on those events (and spending time “meeting Hashem” as we are “*oleh regel*”), we increase our *simchah*, no matter what may be going on in our lives or homes.

Great, Rabbi Feigenbaum, but what does it mean to “meet Hashem”? To be honest with you, I don’t know! Our *galus* has largely deadened us to that sensitivity. Let’s be honest: We do not sit around and feel sad that we cannot bring a *korban*; it is a very foreign idea to us. Even with all the pictures and virtual-reality programs, we have no idea of what it was like in the Beis Hamikdash or what spending time there did for our *neshamah*. Today, for many of us, the *Yamim Tovim* are a jumble of “stuff to do,” such as lots of meals (each Yom Tov with its own menus), Chol Hamoed trips, and oh, yes, lots of family time (for better or for worse). But that is exactly why we need to daven!

“But Rabbi Feigenbaum, I will never get to such a high level of ‘meeting Hashem’ and always being ‘b’simchah’—and you know that!” Well, maybe...but consider the following:

The significance of feet: Why is each Yom Tov referred to as a “*regel*,” which literally means “foot”? It is actually a fascinating idea: Our hands may do stuff, but our feet are what put us in a certain direction. We may not make it to the top of the mountain, but it is our feet that will either have us walking up as far as we can, or “chickening out” and running down. **And that is the key.** The key is the “*regel*,” i.e., what direction are we facing, and what are our goals. It may take each of us a long time to get to the top of our mountain, have our “meeting,” and really have that honest conversation with Hashem—“to see and be seen” through our

Yom Tov *tefillos*. In our dark *galus*, it is difficult at times to see the good of all Hashem does and use our מחשבה to be בשמחה. Indeed, we may never “fully” get there, but in a sense, what really counts is which way are our feet pointed!

Thus this *machzor*: I do not know what it means to “meet” Hashem—but I do know what it means to have a conversation with Him through *tefillah*! If *tefillos* today are in the place of *korbanos*, then these Yom Tov *tefillos* take on supreme importance. The *tefillos* of the *Shalosh Regalim*—if understood properly—express our hopes, our desires, our goals, and our vision of what Klal Yisrael as a whole, and me as an individual, could be. They help us focus on Hashem’s miracles for us in the past and thus help us see His hand in our lives now. The *tefillos* can put power, meaning, and connection into what are otherwise very “material” mitzvos of each *regel*. And at the most basic level, they certainly help us proclaim (to Hashem and to ourselves) which way our feet are pointing!

Let’s end with my favorite Instant Insight:

We say in the *Shemoneh Esrei*, שבענו מטובך—help us feel satisfied with the good You give to us. The Gemara tells us that one who cannot see “eats but is never really satisfied (שבע),” because without seeing what you are eating, you do not fully appreciate it. We do not ask Hashem to give us good, because He does! All He does is good. Our problem is that we do not always **see** the good! We are blind to the details of Hashem’s providence. We accept it intellectually, but we have a hard time feeling it. Thus, we ask Hashem שבענו מטובך, that we should be able to experience a deep relationship with You and have the ability to see and understand the good in all You do for us, enabling us to truly be satisfied with what we have—our material goods, our talents and struggles, and the reality He chose for us. That is the greatest gift of “meeting” Hashem—to see and be seen.

אמן, כן יהי רצון.

“How do you use a 3-in-1 *machzor*? It is sooo confusing!”

Not really! It is all in the table of contents! Seriously. There is a separate Table of Contents for each Yom Tov. Just go to that

Yom Tov's Table of Contents, and it will direct you to whatever you are looking for, be it the *tefillos*, *leinings*, weekday Chol Hamoed, Shabbos Chol Hamoed, whatever! And as you daven, there are instructions within the davening at every step of the way to direct you to what is next, or what is skipped, depending on the Yom Tov. *B'hatzlachah!*