

What Happened to the Spices?

Shavuot begins this year on Sunday, and so we transition to Yom Tov on the heels of Shabbat. In this scenario, the holiday is welcomed with a unique blend of Kiddush and Havdala commonly known by the term “*yaknahaz*.” This acronym represents the fusion of these two mitzvot into a single formulation that discharges both obligations.

The rabbis of the Talmud (*Pesachim* 102b) debate the sequence in which the various bracha components of Havdala and Kiddush are recited in this formulation. The Talmud (103a) concludes by adopting the position of Rava that the correct order is as follows: *Boreh pri hagafen, M'kadesh Yisrael v'hazemanim, Borei meorei ha'esh, Hamavdil bein kodesh l'kodesh and Shehechyanu*. Each component is abbreviated by a representative initial: *yud* (*yayin* — wine); *kuf* (Kiddush); *nun* (*ner* — candle); *hey* (Havdala); and *zayin* (*z'man* — the bracha of *Shehechyanu*). Thus emerges the term *yaknahaz*, the colloquial pronunciation of the acronym, YKNH”Z. Rambam codifies this practice (*Hilchot Shabbat* 29:22), as does *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 473:1).

Tosafot (*Pesachim* 102b, s.v. *Rav amar*) note that in this analysis, there is one component conspicuously absent: *besamim*, spices.¹ Indeed, the standard Havdala following every Shabbat includes a blessing on the enjoyment of fragrant spices (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 297:1).² The reason for this practice stems from the notion that the *nefesh*, or soul of an



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individual, on a sublime level, longs for Shabbat. Therefore, the *nefesh* is pained by the departure of Shabbat and so must be rejuvenated (*Tur* O.C., *ibid.*). Partaking of a fragrant aroma brings pleasure to the *nefesh*. Evidently, fragrance bridges the divide between one’s spiritual essence and physicality.³ The spiritual significance of aroma and its connection to the sublime is well documented in Torah sources. The importance of *kitoret* (incense) in the Beit HaMikdash and the association of sacrifices with *rei’ach nichoach*, a satisfying aroma, are two examples.⁴ This notion is also reflected in the source provided by the Talmud as the basis for blessings recited upon enjoying a fragrance:

אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב מנין שמברכין על הריח שנאמר (תהלים ק”ג) כל הנשמה תהלל יה איזהו דבר שהנשמה נהנית ממנו ואין הגוף נהנה ממנו הוי אומר זה הריח. ברכות מג:

R. Zutra b. Tuvia said in the name of Rav: How do we know that we recite a blessing on fragrance? As it states “Let all souls praise God.” What is something that the soul benefits from and the body does not? This refers to fragrance.
Brachot 43b

However, a slightly different formulation emerges from the Tosafot.⁵ According to Rashbam, smelling of the spices is intended as

a response to the loss of the *neshama yeteira* on *Motzaei Shabbat*.⁶ The Talmud (*Beitza* 16a) cites Reish Lakish’s statement that every Jew receives a *neshama yeteira* (literally, an additional soul) at the onset of Shabbat. It departs when Shabbat concludes, leaving the individual feeling spiritually weaker.⁷ Indeed, Rashbam understands that this is the reason we omit the bracha on *besamim* when Yom Tov follows Shabbat. The Divine gift of a *neshama yeteira* is bestowed on Yom Tov as well. Therefore, when Shabbat transitions to Yom Tov, there is an unbroken continuum and no need to rejuvenate through *besamim*, for the *neshama yeteira* is a constant.

However, Tosafot challenge the explanation of Rashbam. If there is indeed a *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov, why is there no bracha on *besamim* in Havdala following Yom Tov? Because of this question, Tosafot conclude that there is no *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov. No *besamim* are needed when Yom Tov follows Shabbat because the festive meal and the accompanying simchat Yom Tov achieve the same effect normally accomplished through *besamim*.⁸

Shut Radbaz (2:620) adds an additional dimension to this explanation. On a normal *Motzaei*



Shabbat, the mere inclusion of *besamim* in Havdala represents an aspect of “*agmat nefesh*” — the anguish one experiences with the loss of the *neshama yeteira*. Therefore, if Chazal were to establish a need for *besamim*, the result would be incongruent with the obligation of simchat Yom Tov integral to Jewish holidays. As such, we omit the bracha of *besamim* so as not to suggest that one is entering Yom Tov on a somber note.⁹

Magen Avraham and *Taz*, commenting on *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 491:1), side with *Tosafot*, adopting the position that there is no *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov. It is interesting to note that *Levush* (O.C. 281) writes that the prayer “*Nishmat*,” that is recited on Shabbat, is added in part due to the *neshama yeteira* of Shabbat. *Elya Rabba* (ibid.) comments that this would appear to follow *Rashbam’s* opinion that there is a *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov, as common practice is to recite *Nishmat* on Yom Tov as well.¹⁰

What Is a *Neshama Yeteira*?

Regardless, the argument leveled by *Tosafot* against *Rashbam* remains unresolved: if there is a *neshama*

yeteira on Yom Tov, why do we omit *besamim* from the Havdala of *Motzaei Yom Tov*? To provide the backdrop for the answer, let us first delve into the meaning and significance of the *neshama yeteira*.

Rashi, commenting on the passage in *Beitza* that introduces the concept, explains as follows:

רוחב לב למנוחה ולשמחה, ולהיות פתוח לרוחה, ויאכל וישתה ואין נפשו קצה עליו. רש"י ביצה דף טז. ד"ה נשמה יתירה

A widening of the heart for rest and joy, an openness to eat and drink without the revulsion of the spirit.

Rashi, Beitza 16a

Rashi’s view can be understood to mean that the *neshama yeteira* serves to facilitate proper observance of the positive commandments of Shabbat. The mitzva of *oneg Shabbat* requires one to indulge in physical pleasures on Shabbat, such as eating and drinking (see *Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat*, chapter 30). One who is spiritually oriented runs the risk of compromising his or her *avodat Hashem* when the pursuit of worldly pleasures is not appropriately balanced upon the backdrop of spiritual pursuits.¹¹ The *neshama yeteira* affords the individual additional spiritual

fortification; it expands the capacity to appreciate physical pleasures without any negative impact.¹²

By contrast, *Shut HaRashba* (7:349) cites an explanation that does not literally describe the actual addition of a *neshama*. Rather, it describes the state of rest and pleasure that one’s *neshama* enjoys on Shabbat. In other words, Shabbat is the ultimate experience for the soul (“*neshama yeteira*”), because all physical labor and effort are suspended. Apparently, *besamim* are enjoyed *Motzaei Shabbat* because one’s soul is anguished to leave its pristine, natural state to resume the weekday work. According to *Rashba*, there is no *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov; meaning, Yom Tov is not a day of absolute rest in the same way that Shabbat is. The permissibility of *melachot ochel nefesh*, activities performed for food preparation, prevents the complete rest of the soul, or the state of *neshama yeteira*.

Despite their differences, both *Rashi* and *Rashba* may point to a unique capacity for spirituality on Shabbat — either an additional soul granted to a Jew when it begins, or as indigenous to one’s own soul in response to Shabbat in the absence of involvement in worldly matters of labor.

However, there is an additional, more profound and impactful dimension of this concept found in *Shita Mekubetzet* (*Beitza* 16a) focusing on the Jew's ability to connect to spirituality on Shabbat:

נשמה יתירה פירוש , ועל זה חל עליו שפע אלקי
ושכל יותר לעסוק בתורה ולעיין במעשה ה'.
ולפיכך תקנו להריח בבשמים במוצאי שבתות
לשכח את הנפש מאבדתה.

The explanation of neshama yeteira is that it is the recipient of Divine influence and an increased cognitive capacity to study Torah and investigate the acts of G-d. For this reason, our rabbis instituted smelling spices at the conclusion of Shabbat, so that the soul will forget its loss.

An individual receives an increased dose, as it were, of Divine inspiration and intellect to delve into Torah wisdom and the ways of Hashem.¹³ It is not surprising that the *Zohar* (3:173a) reveals that when the *neshama yeteira* returns to Heaven following Shabbat, it is asked what *chiddushei Torah* (novel Torah ideas) it studied or arrived at over the course of the day. This is an appropriate question if the *neshama yeteira* is given to facilitate delving deeper and uncovering new insight into Divine wisdom.¹⁴ It would seem that according to Rashbam, these special elements of Shabbat are also accessible on Yom Tov. The *neshama yeteira* fortifies one's spirituality and provides an opportunity to grow in a unique

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manner on Yom Tov as well, when one takes advantage.¹⁵

Ramban (*HaEmuna V'HaBitachon*, Chap. 21), writes that the words “*v'ten chelkeinu*” (give us our portion) that appear in the Amida of both Shabbat and Yom Tov hint to the *neshama yeteira* of each. Answering Tosafot's question, Ramban writes that no *besamim* are needed after Yom Tov for a new reason — because unlike the *neshama yeteira* of Shabbat, the *neshama yeteira* of Yom Tov never leaves the individual.¹⁶ *Sfat Emet* (*Emor*, 5647) elaborates that the *kedushat hayom* (sanctity of the day) of Yom Tov has the unique propensity to pervade one's physical existence and does not remain in the spiritual realm only. As an example, this is manifest in the permissibility on Yom Tov of *melachot* performed for food preparation. Therefore, the impact of a Yom Tov is integrated in a way that lingers after the Yom Tov has passed.¹⁷ He points to *isru chag* (the day after the holiday) as a formal expression of a day's holiness extending beyond its place on the calendar — a phenomenon that exists after Yom Tov and not Shabbat.¹⁸

Shem MiShmuel (*Devarim* 5677) quotes his father, *Avnei Nezer*, who explains the sustaining nature of the *neshama yeteira* of Yom Tov in a different fashion. Unlike Shabbat, the static standard of *kedushat hazman* (the sanctity created by time), the sanctity of Yomim Tovim stems from the efforts and powers granted to the Jewish people to establish the Jewish calendar and its holidays. The Talmud (*Beitza* 17a) explains that the bracha recited on Yom Tov, *mikadesh Yisrael v'hazemanim* is a reflection of this — the sanctity of Yom Tov “belongs to the people,” and so the *neshama yeteira* that accompanies it is theirs to keep.

Making Shavuot Impact the Whole Year

Avnei Nezer's understanding is not merely an explanation of the phenomenon of *neshama yeteira* on Yom Tov; rather, it carries an imperative, as well. Each holiday on the Jewish calendar, beyond simply commemorating various events in Jewish history, is also a repository of spiritual achievements that can be attained more readily at that time — achievements most relevant to the foundations of the holiday itself. For example, Succot symbolizes trust in Hashem. The Jews entered the wilderness confident in Hashem's desire and ability to protect them. Sitting in a succah is our remembrance of the manner in which He indeed protected us. Moreover, one who wishes to strengthen his trust in Hashem can do so — with investment and focus — more easily on Succot than during the rest of the year. This is because the same original spiritual forces of a holiday can be re-experienced by us today; in the case of Succot, the sense of trust in Hashem forged by our ancestors is more accessible to us at that time.¹⁹ Perhaps this is an additional dimension of the increased spiritual capacity afforded by the *neshama yeteira*. The imperative is to take advantage of the spiritual opportunities of Yom Tov, because the fruits of our labor will have long lasting results, even after Yom Tov has passed.

We refer to Shavuot as *z'man matan Torateinu*, the time that our Torah is given, albeit millennia after the historical event of *ma'amad Har Sinai*. It is a time when we have the opportunity and imperative to redouble our commitment to Torah study, Torah values, and the mitzvot of the Torah in the spirit of “*na'aseh v'nishma*”²⁰ — in a way that will be

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more lasting and more impactful than any other time of the year. The practice of staying up all night to learn is not so much grounded on an increased number of hours of study. Rather, it is intended to reflect a burning desire for *kabbalat HaTorah* and its study — it is as if we are so excited that we couldn't fall asleep even if we tried to on the eve of *matan Torateinu*.²¹

There are times over the course of the year when one's excitement is hardly at this level. However, one may feel that he or she wants to be more strongly connected to Torah or should devote more time to Torah study, but has trouble making that feeling a reality. The experience of Shavuot, like other holidays, is underscored by a *neshamah yeteira* that remains after the Yom Tov has passed. Therefore, we have the tools to energize the entire year with higher spiritual accolades that we reach for on Shavuot. Rav Gedalya Schorr²² suggests that this is the root of the custom to hold a *neilat hachag* at the conclusion of a Yom Tov. In this context, “*neila*” means to “lock-in” the power of the holiday. It reflects our desire and efforts to solidify and concretize our spiritual gains from Yom Tov, rather than allow them to dissipate. If we spend the days of Shavuot engaged in Torah study and in celebrating the gift of Torah,²³ with the assistance of our *neshamah yeteira*, we will indeed infuse the rest of the year with a renewed sense of *kabbalat*

HaTorah that endures.

Notes

1. See *Kovetz Shitot Kamai, Beitza* 33b, for authorities who advocated including *besamim* in *Yaknahaz*. This position was rejected by the vast majority of Rishonim and *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 491:1).

2. Common practice is to recite *Borei minei besamim* at Havdala regardless of the type of spices used (*Mishna Berura* 297:1).

3. See *Shut Shvut Yaakov* (3:20) who suggests that the blessing recited on fragrances may stem entirely from the soul's ability to benefit from the aroma, even when one does not have the physical sense of smell. However, this opinion was rejected by later authorities (see *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 297:5 and *Mishna Berura* 297:13).

4. See also *Bereishit* 27:27 and Rashi, ad loc., *Yeshayahu* 11:3, *Gemara Shabbat* 88b, with *Maharasha* and *Ketzot HaShulchan* (98). *B'nei Yissaschar* (*Adar*, 4) attributes this unique quality to the fact that the sense of smell was the only one of the five human senses not tainted by association with the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

5. See *Shut Tshuvot V'Hanahgot* (2, end of 134) where this distinction is noted.

6. Interestingly, *Pri Migadim* (M.Z. 293:3) rules that one includes *besamim* even when one recites Havdala on Shabbat afternoon after *Plag HaMincha*, see *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 293. Elsewhere (*A.A.* 299:1) *Pri Migadim* is unsure. Note that any leniency to permit one to make Havdala before the end of Shabbat is not practically relevant today (*Mishna Berura* 293:9 and 299:20). Even when it was practical, it did not allow one to compromise any of the laws of Shabbat following Havdala before nightfall. It merely allowed one to recite Havdala early when it would be impossible to recite it at the normal time.

7. See *Aruch HaShulchan* (O.C. 297:1) who explains that this feeling is experienced by all Jews, though some may be unable to easily detect it. He notes that everyone can sense that some sort of change occurs to the individual on Motzaei Shabbat. Even if one isn't aware of its significance, this sensation is proof of the fact that the loss of the *neshamah yeteira* is felt on a deeper level of one's being. See also *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (2:72).

8. This might indicate that other physical pleasures can also be appreciated by the *nefesh*. Alternatively, note that *Tosafot* emphasize *simchat Yom Tov* and not simply eating and drinking a festive meal. This may be the focus in *Shut Radbaz* 2:620. *Shita Mekubetzet* (*Beitza* 16a) similarly refers to Yom Tov alone as providing happiness. All this may point away from pleasure in the pure, physical sense. However, see *Tosafot, Beitza* (33a) whose parallel position may not accommodate this interpretation, as they do not mention *simchat Yom Tov* per se. Interestingly, *Tosafot Rabbeinu Peretz* (ad loc.) mention “seeing” the holiday food. See *Chashukei Chemed* (*Pesachim* 102b) who ponders if any *seudat mitzva* can be equated according to our *Tosafot*, or perhaps there is a unique quality inherent in a *seudat Yom Tov*. See also *Avodat Yisrael, Zachor* (s.v. *V'Hinei*).

9. In a similar vein, R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach stated that one should not cause the wine of Havdala to overflow at the conclusion of Yom Tov when Chol HaMoed followed (*Shmirat Shabbat KeHilchata* 62, note 26). This practice on Motzaei Shabbat represents a *siman bracha* (auspicious) for the work week ahead (*Mishna Berura* O.C. 296:5), a symbol incongruent with Chol HaMoed when permissibility of work is limited to specific circumstances (*Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 530:1).

10. See *Aruch HaShulchan* (E.H. 62:28), who cites the ruling that *panim chadashot* are not needed on Shabbat or Yom Tov in order to

recite *sheva brachot*. In his explanation of the law, *Aruch HaShulchan* seems to associate the presence of the *neshama yeteira*, though this should only be a factor on Shabbat. See also *Aruch HaShulchan* (491:1), who follows the *Magen Avraham* and *Taz* regarding Havdala when Yom Tov falls on Motzaei Shabbat. This issue may also relate to the matter of *Melave Malka* following Yom Tov or when Yom Tov follows Shabbat. See *Shaarei Teshuva* (O.C. 300), who links the requirement of *seudat Melave Malka* following Shabbat to the *neshama yeteira*, based on Kabbalistic sources. See also *Shut Rivivot Ephraim* (2:292).

11. See Tosafot, *Ketubot* 104a, citing the Midrash.

12. See *Siftei Chaim*, *Moadim* (3:418, 423).

13. Some explain that the degree to which the *neshama yeteira* impacts the individual on a spiritual level (as opposed to the physical

aspect mentioned by Rashi) depends on the overall spiritual orientation of a person. See *Shefa Chaim*, pg. 123 and *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* (2:72).

14. Rashi and Nimukei Yosef (*Avoda Zara* 19b) seem to indicate that Shabbat should be reserved for review of the week's Torah learning (see *Gevurot Yitzchak*, *Shabbat* 17).

15. Interestingly, *Noda B'Yehuda* (O.C. 2:94) explains that the increased spiritual capacity of a teacher that is bestowed upon a rebbe on Shabbat and Yom Tov is the basis of the mitzva for a student to visit his teacher on these days (Talmud, *Rosh Hashana* 16b). However, he includes Rosh Chodesh as well, and does not address *neshama yeteira* as a source for this increased Divine inspiration. *Noda B'Yehuda* simply relates to the *kedushat hayom* of these days, indicated by the Mussaf offerings. See *Zohar* (*Pinchas* 242b) and *Nishmat Yaakov* (pg. 26) regarding Rosh Chodesh.

16. For additional approaches to understand Rashbam's opinion, see Ran on Rif (*Pesachim* 20b-21a), *Bach* (O.C. 297), and *Nishmat Yaakov* (pg. 24).

17. This explanation can also be found in *D'var Shmuel* (*Pesachim* 102a) in the name of *Sfat Emet*.

18. See *Divrei Aggada* (pg. 548).

19. This principle appears in various forms in a wide range of sources. See, for example, *Machatzit HaShekel* (O.C. 468:15) and *Kedushat Levi* (*Shavuot*, s.v. *V'Nireh li*).

20. See *Halichot Shlomo* (*Shavuot*, pp. 371-372, fn. 1).

21. See *Moadim L'Simcha* (Freund, 6:422).

22. *Ohr Gedalyahu* (2:103 and 3:73).

23. See Talmud *Pesachim* (68b).

