

Vilna 1764.

As I walked home I could feel the tension in the air. I approached the people huddled together by the street corner discussing what seemed to be a calamity. "The messengers have returned empty-handed!" said the tall man in the center. "Oh no! What will be!" "Is there really no hope to still find an esrog for the Gaon!" were some of the responses he received. The news quickly spread throughout Vilna plunging its inhabitants into mourning. The news broke my heart. What would be?! The Gaon without an esrog for Sukkos?! It was unthinkable! But it seemed that only a miracle would prevent it. I decided then and there that I would turn over the world to prevent this calamity. Early the next morning and every day after, I parked myself in the central wagon station asking the thousands who passed by before continuing on their travels throughout Lithuania, if they had heard of anyone who had been able to procure a beautiful esrog that year. Two weeks passed by with no luck until, a few days before Sukkos, Mr. Gantz, a wandering peddler, smiled in response to my question, saying, "It happens to be that in a village a few hours away I met a rich man who just came back from Eretz Yisroel. He was showing off a beautiful esrog he had brought back with him and was selling for an exorbitant sum. You'd never be able to afford it anyway, he wants 500 rubles!" I quickly explained to him that the entire city was looking for an esrog for the Gaon and I would gladly give my life savings, which was just around that sum, to merit buying it for him. I quickly wrote down the exact directions to the coveted esrog owner, ran home to empty my safe and set out to buy the esrog. From there on, everything went smoothly. The esrog was truly fit for the Gaon and I ecstatically paid for it in full. The word must have gotten out for when I arrived back in Vilna it seemed as if the whole town had come out to greet me. There was singing and dancing in the streets as I was led directly to the house of the holy Gaon. The honor I received and happiness I felt as the Gaon came out to greet me I will never forget for the rest of my life. His holy face broke into a broad smile as he slowly unwrapped the esrog. He was clearly satisfied. He told me he would always be indebted to me but insisted on reimbursing me in full until I finally relented. That Sukkos was the greatest one of my life. Everywhere I went people couldn't stop thanking me for saving Yom Tov for the entire city. I can't imagine a more euphoric feeling than davening in the Gaon's private minyan each day, watching him hold that esrog, the pure joy radiating from his face, and his repeated thanking me for making his mitzvah possible. There was nothing in the world like knowing that little me would always have a place in his great heart, the heart of klal Yisroel, from now on.

Lakewood, Yerushalayim, Brooklyn, and all over the world, 2019.

Someone infinitely greater and holier than the Vilna Gaon "craves" kaviyachol, (see Yevamos 64a and Rishonim there) even more than the Gaon craved an esrog, the tefilos of each and every one of his dear children! Hashem testifies that, "I have no greater pleasure in the entire universe as that time, when your eyes are lifted towards Mine and My Eyes are towards yours as you say kedushah. At that time, I grab hold of My holy Throne at the image of Yaakov, and I hug it and kiss it and speak of their redemption and hasten their redemption" (Tur, O"Ch 121). Instead of running euphorically with the greatest pride to merit fulfilling the greatest desire of the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe, a merit not granted even to the greatest malachim who can destroy the entire world with their mere breath, we trudge along a few minutes late to fulfill our duty. Instead of focusing on what we're saying to Him, soaking in the infinite pride and pleasure of filling the Heavens with joy with each word we utter, we quickly mumble through the davening while our mind is on the latest news of the day.

We're spending the time davening three times each day anyway, why not focus on what's really going on?! Soak in the feeling of infinite pride and joy of being the one who merits to fulfill the ultimate desire of the Creator of all. Cherish each second of your private audience with Him. Take advantage of each and every word bringing you closer to the One and Only decider of all that will ever happen to you and your family in this world and the next. He Who is all that will ever matter for all eternity. And when you leave shul hold your head high, think of what you have just accomplished, much more than bringing the Vilna Gaon his esrog, as your heart fills with the infinite love of the greatest Lover, the One above!

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