

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**H**e saw the first for himself, for there the portion of the lawgiver is hidden” (Devarim 33:21). Most (including Rashi) understand this part of the blessing that Moshe gave to the Tribe of Gad to mean that the reason that they had asked for their portion on eastern side of the Jordan River was because they knew that Moshe would be buried there. As no one would know *exactly* where Moshe was buried, it could not be that they thought it would be a tourist attraction. Still, having the prophet of prophets buried in your Tribe's land was understandably desirous.

However, how could they know that Moshe would be buried on *their* land? When they approached Moshe to request that they be given their portion from the land already conquered (Bamidbar 32:2-5), it was in conjunction with the Tribe of Reuvain. (And, in the end, part of the Tribe of Menashe inherited on that side of the Jordan as well.) There was just as much of a chance that Moshe would be buried in Reuvain's portion as there was that he would end up in Gad's; what made them so certain that they would get this honor over Reuvain?

Not only that, but it seems a bit presumptuous for Gad to have concluded that Moshe would be buried on the eastern side of the Jordan altogether. After all, Moshe himself, when he saw that he was able to conquer land that would be inherited by the nation, thought that perhaps he had been given a reprieve, and could cross the Jordan (see Rashi on Devarim 3:23). If Moshe thought that he might be able to enter, what made Gad so sure that he wouldn't, to the extent that they asked for this land specifically because Moshe would be buried there?

Additionally, the Torah explicitly says that Gad (and Reuvain) asked for this inheritance because “it is a land [fit for raising] cattle, and your servants have [an abundance of] cattle.” How can Moshe now say that

their motivation was otherwise?

Furthermore, Nevo, where Moshe died, is actually in Reuvain's portion! “And the sons of Reuvain built Cheshbon and Elalay and Kiryasayim and Nevo” (Bamidbar 32:37-38). So it seems that not only could Gad not have known whether they would get the portion Moshe was buried in, but they actually didn't get it! How could Moshe imply that they did?

The Talmud (Sotah 13b) and the Sifray (355) ask this last question, explaining that although Moshe died on Mt. Nevo, he was carried “on the wings of the divine presence” 4 mil to the portion of Gad, where G-d buried him. But even though Gad eventually got what they asked for, how could they know that they would get it? (If they took the chance because of the cattle-friendly nature of the eastern side, it would be a bit awkward for Moshe to praise them for it, especially since it is phrased as if they *knew* that Moshe would be buried there, not that he *might* be buried there.)

After the census was taken on the Plains of Moav (Bamidbar 26), the daughters of Tzelafchad requested that they too be able to inherit the land (27:1-11), which led Moshe to ask G-d to appoint a leader after he is gone (see Rashi on 27:16). G-d's response was to appoint Yehoshua as the next leader, and to do so “in front of Elazar the Priest and in front of the entire congregation” (27:19). So it was plainly obvious to all that when they crossed the Jordan, it would be Yehoshua in charge, not Moshe. And this change of leadership meant several things.

For one thing, it meant that Yehoshua, not Moshe, would conquer the Land of Israel. There were no kings or armies mightier than that of Sichon and Og, yet under Moshe's leadership there were amazing, miraculous victories. True, G-d gave Yehoshua miraculous victories as well. But they did not compare to the ease and power (and therefore everlasting impression) of when Moshe conquered that lands to the east of the Jordan. Living in the land conquered by Moshe, rather than Yehoshua, would create a much stronger connection to the lawgiver, and therefore a stronger connection to the Torah he taught.

Similarly, it was Yehoshua that divided the land on the western side of the Jordan, and assigned the different parts to each of the Tribes. By asking Moshe for their inheritance earlier, Gad (and Reuvain) merited having him assign it to them rather than Yehoshua, a great honor indeed.

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Another change that occurred after Moshe's death was no longer getting the daily manna from heaven, the spiritual bread that the nation survived on for 40 years. Even after conquering Sichon and Og, and inheriting their land (and therefore being able to eat real food), the manna continued to fall daily. For those interested in a more spiritual existence, they could still eat the manna without putting physical, material food into their bodies. Even those that ate "real food" had the daily manna, and living in the land where it actually fell left a much more powerful impression of that miraculous existence than living elsewhere and remembering what happened "over there."

This is especially poignant after Moshe's repeated warnings about what will happen after the nation becomes spoiled from the riches of the Land of Israel. Living where the spiritual manna fell could be very helpful in the battle to combat this malaise.

One of the reasons given for Gad having more cattle than the rest of the nation (see Sha'arei Aharon on Bamidbar 32:1) is that they only ate the manna, and did not consume their livestock for food, while the others did. Therefore, they had much more left, and they kept multiplying. Holding the manna in such high esteem, and wanting to live where it fell, is a very good reason to want to ask for that land as their inheritance.

These things are not dependant on where Moshe was actually buried, but on where Moshe was still the leader. Knowing that Moshe would no longer lead the nation across the Jordan made Gad realize that the eastern side had unique characteristics that did not exist on the other side. This may have been why they requested the "first" lands that had been conquered (see Sefornu on Devarim 33:21). Some explain the "there" where Moshe was buried not as "there in Gad's land," but "there in the land of Sichon and Og." It could be referring not to inheriting his gravesite, but that because he would not cross the Jordan, that land had special meaning. "Because Moshe would be buried there-and thus his leadership would end, they wanted to inherit on that side of the Jordan."

Imagine how awkward it would have been for Gad to tell Moshe that they wanted the land because "your leadership is about to end." This might be enough of a reason not to mention it when making their request. But they also might have figured that the reasons *they*

wanted it applied to the entire nation, who would also want it (or at least a part of it). If each Tribe got 1/12th of that land, it would be impossible for the entire population to live there, and Gad wanted every member of its Tribe to reap the benefits of living on the land that Moshe conquered and the manna fell. Had they asked for it because of its special value, they could have easily been rebuffed because they have no more of a right to it than anyone else. Therefore, when requesting the land, they gave a reason *why they* should get it more than the other Tribes-it is a land appropriate for cattle, and they have much cattle. They knew that this also applied to Reuvain, so approached them about asking Moshe together.

Most commentaries equate Gad and Reuvain as both having much cattle (although some say Gad had more and/or stronger cattle), and both requesting land on the eastern side for the same reason. It was Gad who initiated the idea, though, and so throughout the Torah's telling us about the request, it was Gad who was mentioned before Reuvain. This could be extended to Moshe's blessing as well, with Reuvain also asking for land where Moshe would be buried. In "Shivtay Yisrael" (page 389), however, Fishel Mael suggests that the reason the Torah mentions Reuvain first regarding having much cattle (Bamidbar 32:1) is because their main reason for wanting that land was for its grazing value, while Gad's main reason was Moshe being buried there.

Perhaps this is why only the cattle is mentioned by the request, while Moshe's burial place, signifying the end of his leadership, is included in Gad's blessing. And why despite Moshe's death occurring on Reuvain's land, G-d carried him to be buried in Gad's land-for they had truly shown their appreciation for Moshe and his leadership. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG**

## Weekly Thoughts

**T**his Monday night the festival of Succot begins. One of the Mitzvot of Succot is the Arba Minim, the four species (more often known as the Lulav and Etrog although these are only two of the four). The four species themselves symbolize the entirety of the Jewish people-each of them (palm, myrtle, willow and the etrog which is a citrus fruit which does not really have an accurate English translation!) has different characteristics-one has smell, one has taste, and so on. Just as in order to fulfill this commandment we need to bring together all four different species, similarly, the realization of our destiny depends on all of us acting together, whatever our individual characteristics. We wave the Four Species in all directions -East, South, West, North, Up and Down. This symbolizes both the omnipresence of G-d and also the scattered nature of the Jewish nation, which is spread out in all corners of the earth.

In Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) a lot of emphasis is placed on unity and one-ness, particularly the Oneness of G-d. The mystics delve deeper into the idea of unity as it is expressed through each of the Four Species:

The Lulav, the palm branch:

Palm trees normally grow with their leaves spreading out, apart from each other. The palm branch which we use for the Lulav is different. The palm branch itself is made up of many flat leaves, all packed closely together. They are joined at the top and bottom, giving the impression of being one, yet they remain individuals within this unified whole. From this we learn the importance of maintaining our individuality yet being part of a bigger whole, anchored together in unity.

The Haddasim, the myrtle branches:

The leaves on the myrtle grow in threes along the stalk. According to Jewish Law, for the myrtle to be kosher and proper for the mitzvah, each group of three leaves must emerge from the same point, rather than one leaf being higher (or lower) than the others. From this we learn that to achieve true unity, no individual can perceive themselves as being above (or below) everyone else but each person must be treated equal.

The Aravot, the willow branches:

Willows grow in very close clusters, offering protection and security from the elements. By being close to others, offering our help and protection, we are able to increase the protection and security for both ourselves and the other person.

The Etrog: This fruit possesses an amazing quality which no other fruit possesses. The Etrog, unlike most fruits, is not seasonal. In other words, it remains on the tree throughout all four seasons. Not only does it survive all four seasons, but it continues to grow the whole year round, through all different extremes. From this we are taught that we should grow from all our experiences and all our encounters, both positive and negative. By not only surviving but actually growing through all different extremes, to better ourselves and the world around us.

This is perhaps the most profound lesson we can take from the Four Species- let's be an Etrog and let us hope that these lessons of the Four Species and the ideas of unity represented become a greater reality for all of us. © 2005 Rabbi M. Wollenberg and torah.org

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## Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi Boruch Davis, Chigwell Synagogue

**S**uccot is described in the Torah as the festival of the ingathering of the crops, the very end of the agricultural cycle. This is partly why the Torah describes it as the festival of rejoicing par excellence-gather in your harvest and enjoy!

The Rambam, in Guide to the Perplexed, explains that the taking of the four species serves as a

constant reminder of the contrast between the harshness of the desert and the Land of Israel, with its fruit-bearing trees and rivers. Thus, to the Rambam, this mitzva is a spiritual way of channeling our rejoicing.

But if one cycle is drawing to a close, another is about to start. In Israel, the weeks after Succot are an anxious time. Will the country be blessed with good, soaking rains so that the new crops may germinate? The Talmud states that we are judged for rain on Succot and, were it not for our wish not to suffer rain in the Succah, we would say the prayer for rain on the first day of Succot, rather than wait for Shemini Atzeret.

The two special mitzvot of Succot which are not mentioned in the Written Torah-the water libations and the waving of the willow branches-occupy an important position in the Succot ritual, and both are strongly connected to the theme of rain.

A number of our Sages going back to Mishnaic times, viewed the taking of the four species as a means of earning the merit of G-d's blessing of rain in its proper season. On Hoshanah Rabbah, during the last few circuits with the four species and when we take the willows, the prayers reflect our heartfelt wish for the blessing of rain. This dual theme of the four kinds-of a celebration of the year past, and prayers for the year ahead, is even reflected in the wavings during Hallel. We wave at Hodu la-Hashem, giving thanks for what we have, and at Ana Hashem hoshi'ana-asking G-d to help us in the future.

Our Sages have detected other symbolisms in the four kinds. Each one represents a different part of the body. Each one represents different types of people in our community, from the most learned and pious at the one extreme, to the non-observant at the other. We are bidden to hold all four kinds together. We serve G-d with our very being and we draw together all the sections of our community.

The taking of the four species is a most precious mitzvah. And yet.. not today. Sometimes, even where great holiness is indicated by the performance of a positive mitzvah, we might hold back, for an even higher purpose. That higher purpose is the possibility that Shabbat might be violated.

### SHEMINI ATZERET

by Rabbi Yaakov Grunewald, Pinner Synagogue

Shemini Atzeret has an ambivalent status in the Jewish calendar. On the one hand, it seems to be the conclusion of Sukkot, like the seventh day of Pesach. The Torah calls both of them Atzeret. Atzeret means Assembly, which, as our Rabbis explain, symbolises G-d's love for Israel. After being in Jerusalem for the duration of the festival, their Father says to them, as it were, "Please stay with Me for another day, for I find it hard to part from you".

On the other hand, the Torah already indicates that it is a festival in its own right. In Israel, therefore, there is no problem. On Shemini Atzeret, there is a

clean break from Sukkot. None of the Mitzvot of Sukkot are observed on it. In the Diaspora, however, where we always add one more day to the festivals, so that Sukkot should, in theory, have eight days and not seven, the halachic position is more complex. There is a crucial question regarding sitting in the Sukkah. After some extensive debate in the Talmud, our Rabbis rule that we sit in the Sukkah without reciting the berachah. The logic is that some people enjoy sitting in the Sukkah in any event, so that it does not look necessarily as though we are observing Sukkot. On the other hand, we do not take the Lulav, because that would be a clear signal that Shemini Atzeret is part of Sukkot.

On Shemini Atzeret it is a Mitzvah of the Torah to be happy, as it is on all festivals. Nevertheless, there are two very solemn prayers, which contradict the spirit of joy. Their solemnity is symbolised by the kittel, which the Chazan puts on. The kittel brings us into the mood of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

The first prayer is Yizkor, which we recite for the souls of our parents and other close relatives who have died and to pledge charity in their memory.

Why should we commemorate the dead on Shemini Atzeret and the other two joyous pilgrimage festivals? The joy of Yom Tov prevents us from observing the laws and customs of mourning. When a burial takes place on Chol Hamo'ed we refrain from eulogies. At Pesach the joy extends to the entire month of Nissan, so the practice is to refrain from reciting the Kel Malei Rachamim (Memorial prayer) during the entire period. Yet, we do recite Yizkor on the last day of Pesach, as well as on Shavuot and Shemini Atzeret!

One answer is that the practice is based on the verse in Ezekiel (16:6), "By your blood you shall live." It is because of the sacrifices made by our loved ones that we are able to rejoice during the festival.

The former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Lau, has written that this same idea is expressed in modern day Israel, where the Day of Independence, the 5th Iyar, is preceded by a day commemorating those who fell in defence of the country. This is the meaning of "By your blood you shall live."

Rabbi Aharon Zeigler explains that according to the view of Rav Yosef Baer Soloveitchik, in saying Yizkor there is also an element of joy. Since part of the Mitzvah of having children is also to raise them to observe the festivals, when parents and grandparents see their children and especially their grandchildren observing the Yom Tov, it gives them pleasure. It shows them that they have succeeded in their mission to pass on Jewish tradition to subsequent generations.

The Yizkor service is followed by Tefillat Geshem, the annual Prayer for Rain. It consists of several Piyutim (poems), which highlight the urgent need for rain in the Land of Israel. It ends with the ringing declaration of the Chazan, "For You, O L-d our G-d, cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall". He then intones three pleas, to each of which the

Congregation answers "Amen": "For a blessing and not as a curse; for life and not for death; for plenty and not for dearth."

Our custom, in England, is to recite this prayer at the beginning of the Repetition of the Amidah, i.e. after the silent Amidah. The rule is that we recite the additional sentence: "For You, O L-d our G-d, cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall" in the silent Amidah, even before Tefillat Geshem. It is, however, forbidden to do so without a formal public declaration. This is why just before the Amidah, the Chazan, the Shamash or the Rabbi announces the words "Mashiv Haru'ach umorid Hagashem". This announcement is sufficient authority to alter the wording of the Amidah. A person who stays at home on Shemini Atzeret must be careful not to recite the Musaf Amidah before this declaration is made. © 2005 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

It is particularly striking that the Torah offers no symbolic explanation accompanying the mandate for the four species. (Leviticus 23:40) This silence inspired a great deal of creative thinking as to the meaning of this ritual.

A famous Midrash draws a comparison between the four species and the human body—the lulav (palm) is compared to the spine; the hadas (myrtle) to the eyes; the aravot (willows) to the lips and the etrog (citron) to the heart. The waving of the lulav and etrog therefore represents the whole of the human being dancing in spiritual joy and thanksgiving before the Lord during the Sukkot harvest season. (Leviticus Rabbah 30:14)

Still another Midrash compares the four species to different types of people. For example, the etrog (which has flavor and fragrance) to the righteous; and the willow (which has no flavor and fragrance) to those bereft of good deeds. The Midrash concludes: "Says the Holy One blessed be He, let them all be tied together in one band and they will atone one for another." (Leviticus Rabbah 30:12) Here Jewish unity is stressed.

There are other less known views comparing the four species to the four matriarchs, or the three patriarchs and Joseph (Yosef), and even to different aspects of G-d.

A contemporary approach to the four species may be based on Rabbi Soloveitchik's comment in his "Nine Aspects of the Haggadah." There he points out that "Passover does not focus on the land of Israel as a central theme." Can it be suggested that Sukkot, and specifically the four species does just that?

Indeed, Nogah Hareuveni, the founder of Israel's Botanical Garden, Neot Kedumim, connects the four species to the land of Israel. The lulav represents

the date palms which sheltered us in the booths we lived in during the forty years in the desert. The willows of the brook portray the plants which grew along the Jordan River, the entry point into Israel. When coming to Israel we encountered the forest thickets covering the hill country, symbolized by the myrtle branches whose natural habitat is the hills. And, after clearing the thickets the hill country was cultivated and planted with the choicest fruit trees represented by the citron.

With the establishment of the State of Israel and our potential to return home and build our land, Nogah Hareuveni's idea deserves much greater emphasis. As Jews all over the world take the lulav and etrog they are in effect connecting to Israel and singing out the prayer "This Year in Jerusalem." © 1997 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**O**f all the festivals in the Jewish year, there is one which seems to have no cause or purpose. In the Torah we find no theological, historical or agricultural reason for its existence. Other festivals have their own character and commandments, but one remains obscure, mysterious—Shemini Atzeret. In Leviticus we are told that "...the eighth day is a sacred holiday when you shall bring a fire offering to G-d. It is a time of holy gathering when you may do no servile work." [25:35] But what, after all, is a holy gathering? What does one do at such gatherings?

In its formal structure, Sukkot most closely resembles Pesach. Both are seven days long, and both arrive on the 15th of months exactly half a year apart. Yet Passover rates no post-Passover holiday, while the Eighth Day Gathering, (Shemini Atzeret) is a distinct, separate festival. For the first time in a week, we stop "living" in the sukkah and put away the four species until next year. At night, when we bless the candles and sanctify the wine, we add the Shehechiyanu blessing, which is only said on first days of festivals. But what is the Eighth Day Gathering really about?

As we discussed earlier, the scope of Sukkot is universal; for seven days we leave the comfort of the home to live in temporary booths under the open sky while we bring the four species into the synagogue. With its unique relationship to nature, the nations, and the world at large, Sukkot is the most other-directed of all festivals. Even the sacrifices add up to seventy, the proverbial symbol of the nations of the world.

After Sukkot comes Shemini Atzeret. 'Atzeret' means assembly, but its root comes from the word 'atzor,' to stop, to hold back, to restrain. What Shemini Atzeret does is arrest the festival's end. This eighth day should really be a weekday, but G-d comes to tell us, Wait! Stop! Let's have one a day apart, separate, when we can be together. In a slight variation of Rashi's analogy it's as if a king is saying, 'I've just made a party

for the entire kingdom, but now I want to be alone with my inner court, my closest servants, so let's hold back, Atzor, for one day.'

Now we see why Simchat Torah, the joyous celebration when we dance with the Torah scrolls, is the festival which flows effortlessly out of Shemini Atzeret. Not only because we've come to another end of the cycle of the Five Books, but what better expression is there to show the special relationship between the King and His inner court if not the Torah, our beloved gift! Certainly the nations of the world achieve religious rapture, but it's difficult to imagine them dancing ecstatically with copies of Gideon's Bible. And of course we are overjoyed that the Torah has been almost universally accepted as the heritage of Western culture in fulfillment of G-d's promise to Abraham, but at the same time we know that the children of Isaac and Jacob have a unique relationship to a holy scroll written in a language which only one people in the world calls its own.

While Rashi's analogy suggests the above, the Targum's translation of Atzeret is 'knishin,' Aramaic for gathering, which points toward a slightly different direction. After the universal aspect of Sukkot, it was necessary for the Jewish people to gather as Jews. I see Shemini Atzeret as a festival dedicated to the unity of the Jewish people. True, other festivals inspire large gatherings, but each one has its respective theme. Shemini Atzeret is dedicated to only one theme, the very unity of the Jewish people.

More than ever before, our people are desperate for unity. Tragically, the Torah which is supposed to unite us, often divides us. The issue of 'Who is a Jew' grows more important than the question 'What is a Jew?' As an orthodox rabbi, I don't want to mask over differences between myself and conservative or reform rabbis, but at the same time I believe that what unites us is far more significant than what separates us. Even if we differ, why shouldn't we respect each other as human beings, as Jews?

In Tractate Shabbat 31a we encounter the would-be convert who comes to Hillel and says, 'Teach me the entire Torah on one foot, ('al regel achad'). Hillel's answer has never been forgotten: what is hateful to oneself shouldn't be done to others, this is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.

'Regel' (foot) can also mean 'festival' and a chassidic rebbe once interpreted the would-be convert's question, 'Teach me the entire Torah 'al regel achad,' to mean, teach me about the festival which stands alone, whose significance is not given in the Torah.

Hillel's answer reveals the festival's deeper meaning. Shemini Atzeret is the festival of not doing to others what is hateful to ourselves. It's a day to gather in a spirit of unity, love for Israel and a respect for others based on Hillel's teaching which doesn't make distinctions between religious and secular, right, left and center.

Once, while traveling in Venice, I became separated from my group. Sitting in the Piazza del San Marco I grew entranced by the architectural wonders, the sweep of the pigeons' wings, the lilt of the string instruments. All I knew was that I was suddenly alone, but I didn't worry. I could find my way back to the hotel on a gondola train.

Just as I was about to get off at my stop, one of the passengers gestured that I should stay on, he wanted to show me something important. When we got off two stops later, I found myself in a slum. After a few minutes he stopped in front of an old building and I followed him up to flights of steps. The only light cast a dim shadow. In sign language he explained that he would be right back. I was somewhat frightened, but shortly he emerged carrying a prayer book and a tallit, a prayer shawl. I spoke no Italian, he spoke no English. He said, Tu Hebrayo, Yo Hebrayo. (You're a Hebrew, I'm a Hebrew.) And we embraced. In my heart something melted; in my mind something clicked. We had made contact because of my yarmulka and ritual fringes. With no common language, a Venetian and a New Yorker were linked by the visible truths preserved in the Torah. On that landing, in a Venice slum, I felt a deep love for this stranger and his simple words, 'Tu Hebrayo, Yo Hebrayo.' It was a 'holy gathering.' © 1988 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL

## Seasons of the Moon

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

**A** shadow on the ground. Look at the shadow. The shadow itself is without substance, ephemeral, and yet it reveals the existence of something somewhere else.

The shadow on the ground symbolizes two realities - the ground, the here and now, the physical, the concrete; and the shadow, which reveals something beyond the here-and-now, beyond the physical.

Nothing is as insubstantial as a shadow, and yet the shadow reveals the silhouette of something that is beyond.

The essence of a succa is its shade. A succa that has more sun than shadow is invalid. Our Sages teach that when we sit in the succa, we are sitting in "the shadow of faith." The spiritual masters derived this phrase from a verse in the Song of Songs, "In His shadow, I delighted there and there I sat, and the fruit of His Torah was sweet to my palate." (2:4)

Faith is like a shadow. Faith is the knowledge of something that you cannot see. We can know there is a G-d but we cannot see Him. We can perceive the shadow of His existence, but we cannot see the Reality itself directly. We can experience closeness to G-d through tasting "the fruit of His Torah." We can experience the sweetness of that Existence that is beyond, but, for the very reason that He is beyond, we

can never see that Existence. When Moshe asked Hashem to show him a revelation of that Existence, Hashem replied, "You cannot see My face, for man cannot see me and live."<sup>1</sup>

A succa is invalid if it has more sun than shadow because someone sitting in such a succa is not sitting in the shade of faith rather in the glare of the sun. In its essence, the sun does not allow for the existence of the shadow. Its unblinking eye leaves no place for the shadow. The nations of the world are compared to the sun. The sun says, "If you cannot see it, it doesn't exist. If it is not revealed, it isn't there." "Existence is bound by the revealed world," they say.

Hashem relates to his creatures measure for measure. When the nations of the world will come and complain to G-d that He did not give them the mitzvot that the Jewish People received He will give them an easy mitzva - the sukka.<sup>2</sup> To test their sincerity G-d will make the weather extremely hot. They will kick over the succa and leave. Even though the halacha says that someone who finds sitting in the succa uncomfortable is exempt, the nations of the world will not be content just to leave the succa, but will kick it over when they leave, thus showing their contempt for the mitzvot. To the nations of the world, the succa is no more than an uncomfortable booth. To the Jewish People it represents the resting of the Divine presence on this world.

The four walls of the succa symbolize this world of four directions. The roof of the succa is made from s'chach - palm fronds, tree branches and the like. The word succa comes from the same root as s'chach. In other words, the roof of the succa is the essence of the succa. Just as the s'chach is placed over the succa, so the Divine presence hovers over this world. The gematria of the word "succa" is 91. If you take the gematria of the Tetragramaton, the ineffable four-letter Name G-d, and add to it the gematria of the way that name is pronounced, "Ad-onoy," you will find the sum comes to 91. In other words, just as G-d's Name hovers over the succa, it hovers over this world.

This world is like a succa, a flimsy affair not capable of protection, but the shadow of faith that hovers over someone who sits in the succa is stronger than a concrete roof a dozen feet deep.

The nation who dwells in the shadow of faith proclaims that existence extends beyond the here and now, beyond what can be perceived by the five senses of man. Faith is something that takes place in the shade. The nation that dwells in the shadow of faith draws that faith from the succa, for the shade of the succa is the shadow of faith.

But there's another side to the shadow.

Just as every movement, every flexing of a person's limbs and muscles is motivated by the living

<sup>1</sup> Shemot 33:20

<sup>2</sup> Talmud Bavli, Avoda Zara, 3a

soul inside him, so too similarly all the powers of all the worlds, all their movements and their influences are motivated and affected by a vast chain reaction that starts with the actions of man in this lowliest of worlds and ascends to the highest places.

In the book of Tehillim it says, "Hashem is your shadow." When G-d created the world, He decided that everything that happens in creation would be governed by man's behavior. The spirituality that radiates from the highest levels of existence shadows our individual choices. Every kindness we do ascends through all the worlds to the highest places. There it triggers an influx of positive spiritual energy that descends again through all the worlds until it arrives back in this world. Every mitzvah rises to its highest spiritual source and causes a life energy that radiates throughout all the Creation. Hashem is our "shadow." He has committed Himself to run the world in synchronization with our actions.<sup>3</sup>

As simple an action as sitting in the shade of the succa can cause the wind to blow and the rain to fall in its season, the sick to recover, famine to abate, and peace to descend on this troubled world. © 2005 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**he Torah reading on Simchat Torah, the last day of Succot, consists of Moshe's blessings of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael. The blessings take up a total of 20 verses (Devarim 33:6-25), so that on the average every tribe receives one or two verses. However, two of the tribes are different from all the others:

Levi receives four verses (33:8-11), while Yosef's is given five verses (33:13-17). The extra attention paid to Levi is understandable in view of the praise that Moshe gives them after the sin of the Golden Calf. However, this is not so clear with respect to Yosef: Why is Moshe's blessing of Yosef so long compared to the other blessings?

It may be that Moshe's attitude towards the tribe of Yosef is connected to his attitude towards Yosef himself. Moshe's tight link to Yosef can be seen in the way he feels obligated to bury him. "And Moshe took Yosef's bones with him, for Yosef had made Bnei Yisrael take an oath, saying: G-d will remember you, and you shall take my bones with you from here" [Shemot 13:19]. This special link might also be related to the similarity between Moshe and Yosef, as we note below.

Both Moshe and Yosef began their lives fighting with brothers who objected to their feelings of superiority. Yosef's brothers turned to him with the claim, "Will you rule over us or have authority over us?" [Bereishit 37:8]. With respect to Moshe, we are told, "Moshe grew up and he went out to his brothers... And

two Hebrew men were fighting, and he said to the evil one, Why should you strike your colleague? And he replied, Who appointed you as a minister and a judge over us?" [Shemot 2:11-14]. (Note that the phrase "to his brothers" appears eleven times with respect to Yosef and his brothers. Aside from the verse quoted above in Shemot, this phrase appears only one more time in the Torah, at Bamidbar 25:6, related to the story of Pinchas.)

As a result of the antagonism by their "brothers," both Moshe and Yosef were forced into exile in foreign lands, one in Egypt and the other in Midyan. Both married daughters of priests. Yosef took "Osnat, daughter of Poti-Phera, Priest of On, as a wife" [Bereishit 41:45], while Moshe married Tzipora, the daughter of Yitro, the Priest of Midyan. They both had two sons, and their children's names reflected that they felt alienated in foreign lands. Yosef named his son Efraim, "Because G-d has taken care of me in the land of my paucity" [Bereishit 41:52], and Moshe gave the name Gershom "for he said, I was a stranger in a strange land" [Shemot 2:22]. Both Moshe and Yosef arrived in the palace of Pharaoh and were given a special status. At the highest point in their lives, they both led Bnei Yisrael, one within Egypt and the other when they left the land. And both Moshe and Yosef did not have the privilege of entering Eretz Yisrael in their lifetimes.

With all of these considerations, it is reasonable to assume that Moshe felt a special bond to Yosef. He saw in Yosef a man with vision who in spite of many problems in his life was able to fulfill his dreams and to act as a faithful servant in performing the task that the Almighty gave him. Moshe, who would never see the fulfillment of his greatest dream of entering Eretz Yisrael, blesses Yosef's descendants with a good heritage. This is where Yosef's children will bury their father: "And the bones of Yosef, which Bnei Yisrael brought from Egypt, were buried in Shechem... And it was given to the children of Yosef as a heritage" [Yehoshua 24:32]. Moshe, who did not have the privilege of being buried in the land, was able to console himself that at least the mission of burying Yosef had been fulfilled in the land given to his children as a heritage. This area was therefore eligible for special blessing: "G-d blesses his land, with the blessings of dew from heaven and with the waters in the depths below" [Bereishit 33:13].

#### RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

## Sfas Emes

**L**et's work with the first ma'amar of 5634. A central feature of the sukka-indeed, the feature that gives the sukka its name-is the sekhach (the materials used to make the roof of the sukka). The Sfas Emes begins by showing us something that is totally obvious

<sup>3</sup> Nefesh HaChaim 1:7

once he has pointed it out; but was totally non-obvious until he did so.

Thus, the Sfas Emes notes that the sukka resembles a chupa (wedding canopy). And just as the wedding ceremony under the chupa completes the binding of a wife and her husband together, so, too, the sukka completed the sanctification (the kiddushin) of our special relationship with HaShem. For, continues the Sfas Emes, HaShem's taking us out of Egypt was in the nature of a marriage. Thus, HaShem says (Vayikra, 22:32-33): "Ani HaShem me'kadish'chem, ha'motzi es'chem meiEretz Mitzrayim... ". (ArtScroll: "I am HaShem Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt...")

As you see, faithful to its mission of presenting the pshat pashut-the simple rendering of the text-ArtScroll reads the word "me'kadish'chem" as "sanctifies". By contrast, faithful to his mission-giving us access to new, mind-stretching insights-the Sfas Emes is reading "me'kadish'chem" as "Who has taken you as His wife". This is standard usage for the word "me'kadash"; for example, in the expression "chupa ve'kiddushin". And with the Sfas Emes's reading of me'kadish'chem, the sekhach on top of the sukka becomes the chupa of Bnei Yisroel with HaShem.

But in the Heavenly Court, kitrug (criticism) is heard: Why should Bnei Yisroel be selected over all other nations for this special relationship with HaShem? Looking objectively at the proposed shidduch, one might conclude that it was unfair. Even worse, the shidduch did not seem to make sense as a viable long-term relationship. Note that the issue of Klal Yisroel's special relationship with HaShem-our being the "chosen people"-continues to bother some people to this very day.

The Sfas Emes draws our attention to the way HaShem-the presumptive choson (bridegroom) -- dealt with this criticism concerning His singling out Bnei Yisroel to be His kallah (bride) The Choson reacted not with words or with reasoning. Rather, recognizing that what was involved love -- -- which can be impervious to words or to reasoning-the Choson reacted by proceeding swiftly to the wedding ceremony. That is, by having us come forward immediately to the chupa! Thus, recounting what happened soon after the Exodus, HaShem tells us (VaYikra 23, 43): "Ki ba'sukkos ho'shavti es Bnei Yisroel behotzi'i o'sam MeiEretz Mitzrayim". ("For when I took Bnei Yisroel from the Land of Egypt, I had them dwell in Sukkos".)

The Sfas Emes has given us a powerful "take-home" lesson to deepen our understanding and enjoyment of the Yom Tov. The message is simple: when we enter the Sukka, we should feel the sentiments that a choson (or a kallah) feels when he/she stands under the chupa.

What might those sentiments be? Three possibilities come to mind. One possibility is a feeling of great joy. That state of mind comes from being next to

one's beloved, with whom he/she is about to commit for a lifetime together.

Another possibility-these are not mutually exclusive-involves one's relationship with HaShem. That is, standing under the chupa, a person may feel great gratitude to the One Who made the shidduch. In turn, this sense of gratitude can bring the person extraordinarily close to HaShem. Indeed, so close that this is a very favorable time to daven for any special request.

A third possibility for a person's feelings under the chupa also comes to mind. He/she may be quivering with doubts about the wisdom of the step they are taking. This case resembles the experience of HaShem and Bnei Yisroel- the case that the Sfas Emes discussed earlier in this ma'amar. There, too, there was cause for much uncertainty about the suitability of the marriage.. Chazal tell us that bringing a couple together in marriage is similar to the miracle of splitting Yam Suf. As we know, that miracle had to be triggered by a leap of faith: "Nachshon kofatz le'soch hayam". So, too, recall how the choson and kallah discussed earlier in this ma'mar dealt with their uncertainty and doubts about the shidduch. Thus, undoubtedly they had doubts and unanswered questions. They dealt with their uncertainties by plunging forward, committing to a deeper, more solid relationship, one which-history has shown-could be made to last forever.

A Post Script.

As we have seen, the Sfas Emes views the choson and kalla coming together under a canopy as a symbol that concludes acquiring something. In that case, he had in mind HaShem's kinyan of Bnei Yisroel. But to conclude his discussion of this issue, he cites another case in which someone completed a kinyan by providing sukkos.

That other case is Ya'akov Avinu's return from Lavan to Eretz Yisroel. The Sfas Emes quotes the pasuk in Bereishis (33:17): "... u'lemik'nei hu ahsa Sukkos". ("ArtScroll: "... and for his cattle, he made shelters.") The Sfas Emes notes the "sound-alikes" ("mi'knei hu" = "his cattle"; "kinyan" = "an acquisition"). Accordingly, he makes the obvious word-associations. Thus he reads this phrase as saying: "... he made sukkos for what he had acquired". The Sfas Emes offers us this non-pshat in support of his idea that a sukka can complete and solidify a relationship. Truly a thought to bear in mind when we dwell in our Sukka this Yom Tov. © 2005 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

