

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Sukkah is one of the most important expressions - and symbols - of Jewish traditional life, a fragile, thatch-roofed hut which becomes our primary dwelling- place for the seven days of the Sukkot Festival. But precisely what does it symbolize? In the Talmud [B.T. Sukkah 11b] Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva debate the issue, focusing their discussions on the correct interpretation of the following verse: "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel dwell in booths [sukkot] when I brought them out of the land of Egypt..." [Lev. 23:43]

Rabbi Akiva maintains that the sukkot in question refer to physical booths, while Rabbi Eliezer understands them in miraculous terms, as referring to 'clouds of glory' which descended from the Almighty to protect the Israelites on their desert wanderings.

Why should it matter if it's a cloud of glory as opposed to a physical booth? Also, according to Rabbi. Eliezer, how do we apply the term 'clouds of glory' to huts which can be rendered uninhabitable by a rainy sky or a burning sun?

Given that Sukkot arrives at the heels of Yom Kippur; our day of Forgiveness, and given that the Sacred Zohar insists that the final Divine Judgment is only given on the last day of the festival; Hoshanah Rabbah, it seems that Sukkot is intrinsic to the repentance process, which began with Rosh Hashanah. And if Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva disagree as to the identity of the 'booths', perhaps their argument is about the nature of this repentance process.

Irma Kahn-Goldschmidt The Holy Zohar speaks of a lower form of repentance called 'tshuva tata'ah' and a higher form called 'tshuva ila'ah'. Repentance for a specific transgression- a particular sin, is considered the lower form because it deals only with a specific problem, without affecting the person as a whole.

Repentance that affects the essence of the

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in loving memory of my dear parents
Chayim Yitchak ben Yehudo Hakoken
Paul Kahn
and Mirjam bas Hachover R'Yehoshua
Irma Kahn-Goldschmidt
by Fernand Kahn**

personality, shocking the soul and jolting the heart, has the potential to lift up the entire person into an entirely new direction, and that is what the Zohar calls 'tshuva ilaa'. Since its domain is the total person, such repentance has a greater chance of transforming the individual into a totally new persona.

From this perspective, a careful study of Maimonides' Laws of Repentance will reveal a close connection between the quality of the repentance and the debate between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva as to the symbolism of the Sukkah.

The first kind of repentance Maimonides addresses describes the penitent going through a humbling process: "The path of repentance is for the penitent to cry out constantly before G-d with tears and beseeching. He gives charity according to his ability, distancing himself from what he did: He exiles himself from his place, because exile serves as atonement for sin causing them to be more subdued, humble and subservient." (Laws of Repentance, Ch. 2, Hal. 4)

The command to leave one's permanent, usually comfortable and sometimes even luxurious home for the fragile, flimsy hut-sukkah certainly removes a firm foundation and a secure roof from the sukka occupant; causing him to be humbled and thus worthy of G-d's forgiveness: "...And he exiles himself...because exile helps to create forgiveness..." Such a sukka of exile represents the actual desert huts that the Jewish people erected during their forty-year wandering in the desert.

Several chapters later, Maimonides codified a different kind of repentance, a state of perfection which places the penitent close to the Divine Presence, a more ennobling and qualitatively uplifting penitential experience.

"Repentance is on the highest level of religious devotion because it brings a person close to the Divine Presence. Yesterday, he was hated by G-d and alienated and abominable. But today, he is beloved, delightful, close, a dear friend." [Laws of Repentance Ch. 7, Hal. 6]

Maimonides states that to be " a friend of G-d" is the highest achievement of repentance. Indeed, when we speak of a repentance which brings a person to the Divine Presence, we are truly reminded of Rabbi Eliezer's 'clouds of glory.'

The picture becomes even more poignant when we realize that on Yom Kippur we were entirely in the presence of G d (Iifnai HaShem), like angels in heaven.

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But angels, like trusty servants, can usually be seen waiting in front of G-d's house "for the Holy One to emerge, but not as living within the House. It is on Sukkot that G-d, in effect, brings the Jewish people into His house, as King David asks: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple." [27:4]

From this point of view, the sukkah becomes G-d's Sacred Sanctuary, the nuptial home into which He invites His sacred bride, Knesset Yisrael (historic Israel). And the seven days inside the sukkah correspond to the seven days of celebrating a marriage. The seven holy guests who are invited each of the seven nights to the sukkah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David, correspond to the "new faces" who are necessary guests at a dinner if the seven nuptial blessings are to be recited after the Grace after Meals.

Humble sinners seeking forgiveness for their transgression(s) enter into a fragile hut, symbolizing the Israelite dwellings in the desert. But there is also the higher standard of the true penitent who has soared to the stage of Divine fellowship and merits the "clouds of glory" which usher him into the Nuptial Canopy of the Divine. It is for this, Rabbi Eliezer's sukkah that we all yearn! © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The inner beauty of the Torah and its commandments is expressed to us physically through the rituals of the holiday of Succot. As perhaps no other holiday on the Jewish calendar does, Succot represents the beauty of G-d's world, the awesomeness of nature and the delight that the senses of sight and smell bring to the human soul.

The four species with their different colors and fragrances, the sukkah with its gentle covering roof of nature, unsullied by human substitutions and ersatz materials, the sense of connection to G-d's world and to the goodness that is inherent in us, all combine to give Succot its special quality of contentment and happiness.

Here in Israel the weather on Succot does not usually afford us any special challenges. However I

remember the Succot of my youth in frigid Chicago where as a child I complained to my father about being cold sitting in the succah. He gently answered me that as I grew older I would realize how warm and comfortable I would truly feel sitting in a succah no matter what the reading on the outside thermometer was.

Well I am now certainly old enough, thank G-d, to realize what he meant and to experience the inner warmth and glow that sitting in a succah brings. And again, if one is privileged to have members of one's generations sitting in the succah also, then the cycle of joy and contentment is blissfully completed. The flimsiness of the succah itself contributes to the sense of solidity and eternity that the presence of family and the performance of G-d's commandments on Succot create within us.

The Talmud tells us that the mother of the great tanna Shamai - scholar of the Mishna and compatriot of Hillel, brought her son into a Succah while still an infant. Aside from the obvious meaning that the rabbis teach us that there is no better time to train Jews in observance of G-d's commandments than in their youth, I think that there is something deeper that is taught here in this seemingly ordinary anecdote.

Shamai's mother wanted him to experience that whiff of immortality that the succah brings with it. In the succah there are the unseen but omnipresent guests of the founders of our people - the ushpizin. Hovering over the succah are the unseen clouds of glory that enveloped us in the desert of Sinai and the memories of generations upon generations of succot constructed all over the world in our past and present.

Infants yet see the unseen; they are still close to the source of eternity from whence they have newly arrived. The infant Shammai is at home in the succah because all that is unseen to those who are older and more mature is till real and present to the infant.

Studies show that the infant dreams while sleeping. What are those dreams about? Are they not the recollection of its soul as to whence it sprang and was ushered into this world? Shammai the infant is at home in the succah for it is also a place of eternity and beauty, a harbinger and reminder of the eternal world itself.

One of the great revivals in the Jewish world over the past number of decades is the availability and purchase of very large amounts of etrogim, lulavim, hadasim and aravot in honor of the holiday of Succot. Again I remember that as a child worshipping in the synagogue where my father served as a rabbi there were only three sets of the four species present in the synagogue for the seven hundred fifty worshippers who attended the services!

Among the many accomplishments of the State of Israel in the field of the spiritual rejuvenation of Jewish practice and study, the popularization of this mitzvah of the four species is surely one of them. The

growing and merchandising of the four species has become an industry of note on its own. There is a certain thrill in holding in one's hand the fruits of the rejuvenated Land of Israel which yields its bounty to its children who have returned to it from near and afar.

In rabbinic responsa there are countless recitations of the difficulties that Jews living in the Diaspora had in obtaining the four species and the lengths and costs that they went to obtain these species for Succot. And lo and behold look how easy and simple it has become in our time with the existence of the State of Israel in our holy land to fulfill this joyous commandment. This alone makes our commemoration of succot the time of our happiness. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Succot is the only festival referred to as Zman Simchateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy. The Torah, in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing Succot. (Deuteronomy 16:14, 15) This in contrast to Shavuot, where it appears only once. (Deuteronomy 16:11) On Passover, the word is totally absent. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8) Succot is described in the liturgy as the days of happiness, as the term simcha is most associated with this holiday. Why is Succot deemed as the ultimate holiday of happiness and joy?

On a historical level, Succot is the culmination of the three festivals. Passover is the holiday of physical freedom. Yet, freedom without purpose is void of happiness; hence the word simcha is not linked to Passover. Shavuot gives meaning to our freedom since on that day, we received the Torah. Hence simcha is mentioned in reference to Shavuot. Succot takes us to another dimension. Real joy occurs when one is able to sustain meaning in life well beyond the dramatic moments. As Succot is a commemoration of the fragile homes in which we lived during the 40 years in the desert, this holiday represents the maintenance of belief, even beyond the experience at Sinai. So, the Torah mentions simcha twice relative to Succot.

On an agricultural level, Succot teaches another important lesson about happiness. The ultimate holiday of gathering our produce is Succot. Thus, the festival is called Hag ha-asif. The Torah, immediately preceding the laws of the holidays in Deuteronomy, mentions the laws of giving tithes. (Ch. 14:22) This serves as a reminder that true happiness is achieved when one takes of what one has gleaned and gives it to another. Most people believe that happiness is achieved by taking more. The reverse is true. The more one gives, the more one experiences exhilaration of having

given of themselves to others. In the end, happiness is a feeling. Giving, on the other hand, is an action. While one cannot automatically achieve an emotion, each of us has it in our power to act. Through action, feelings emerge. In the case of Succot, from giving of our produce, happiness surfaces.

Not coincidentally, Succot comes on the heels of Rosh Hashanah, when we wish each other Shana Tovah. Shana Tovah is commonly translated, "have a happy year." This translation, in fact is a take-off of the American New Year, when happiness is the only goal. In truth, Shana Tovah does not mean "happy new year," but "good new year." In fact, not everything that is happy is good and not everything that is good is happy. When we wish each other a Shana Tovah, what we are really saying is, "may you have a year of doing good." By experiencing a High Holidays of tov, of goodness, and internalizing the message of Succot, we can ultimately realize the description of Succot as found in our prayers-zman simchateinu, the time of true joy. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

Here we go again, moving out of the comfort of our warm homes to expose ourselves to the elements, in our chilly Sukkos, in celebration of what we refer to in our prayers as "the time our joy". I realize that it may not seem like such a happiness inducing activity to be watching your breath as a visible vapor while you're trying to enjoy your Yom Tov meal. At the risk of sounding heretical, what is that we are meant to find in the confines of that flimsy backyard box that's supposed to deliver that ever elusive feeling of pure "joy"?

In the forests around Buczacz on Sukkos in the Jewish calendar year 5703, a mere 67 years ago, the following personal account was given by Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Horowitz: The tramp of the storm troopers came suddenly to our ears. It was the third day of Chol HaMo'ed, and I was sitting with my son Shmuel in our Sukkah in the midst of the forest. All the Jews, who were with us, hurried out and escaped to their hiding places. We two, however, could not do this, since our hideout was only a little away from the Sukkah, and if we went there we would could easily be tracked and found by our searchers. I decided that we would do best to stay in the Sukkah and leave the rest to HASHEM.

Circumstances had brought me to such a level of faith as I had never before experienced, and I think I never will again. I said to myself that if HASHEM wished us to be revealed to the enemy and be killed, I was prepared to accept this. I only asked that it not happen here in the Sukkah. What a Kiddush HASHEM it would be if I could tell my fellow Jews that the Mitzvah of sitting in the Sukkah had saved me from death! The

non-believers in our group, seeing this, would be convinced too. They would all see that "one who keeps a Mitzvah will come to no harm". "Not for my sake, HASHEM", I prayed, "but do it for Your sake (Tehillim 115:1) that Your Name may be sanctified before everyone." I recited Tehillim in a whisper and mentioned the names of my ancestors back to the Ba'al Shem Tov, which tradition says helps to draw down divine protection.

Then we saw the evil ones approaching. The thud of their boots came closer and closer. They walked back and forth in front to the Sukkah three times- but they did not seem to see anything. It was as if they had been struck blind. We peeked out through the cracks in the Sukkah's walls. We saw them standing right next to us. We saw every detail of their uniforms, but they could not see the Sukkah. Suddenly one of the evil ones pointed off to the distance, indicating that he spotted something suspicious, perhaps a Jew's hiding place. Immediately they all set off and disappeared into the forest. We took a deep breath, thanking G-d for taking us from death to life. Later on others were all wondering where we had been while the thugs were searching the area. When they heard that we had been in the Sukkah, they were astonished, and agreed that a miracle had occurred. Even the scoffers among them admitted that G-d's hand had been at work. King David's words had come true for us: "He will hide me in His Sukkah on the evil day." (Tehillim 27:5)

The Nazis did not find who they were looking for that day but Rabbi Horowitz discovered something very rare, even in this day and age. He found himself a safe place in His Sukkah! © 2009 Rabbi L. Lam and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

There are numerous reasons given for our seven-day stay in the temporary Succah, primarily "in order that your [future] generations will know that I (G-d) gave the Children of Israel a dwelling-in Succos-when I took them out of the land of Egypt (Vayikra 23:43)." This refers both to the physical "huts" they lived in during the 40 year journey in the desert, and to the "clouds of glory" that surrounded them, protecting them from the elements as well as showing them and the other nations that they had a special relationship with the Creator-who dwelled among them (Succah 11b). Another reason given, noting that Succos comes right after the High Holidays, is in case we were judged to be deserving of exile, the "exile" from our homes to these temporary huts hopefully qualifies as "exile," thereby fulfilling the decree and pre-empting much harsher exile. I would like to suggest another possibility, one that also is not mutually exclusive with the Biblical explanation.

"The House of Israel, bless (i.e. give thanks to) G-d; the House of Aharon, bless G-d; the House of

Levi, bless G-d; those that fear G-d, bless G-d" (Tehillim 135:19-20, included in the "Pesukay d'Zimra" said every Shabbos and Yom Tov morning). Being that Kohanim, Levi'im and Yisroelim are all covered, who are "those that fear G-d" that they had to be mentioned separately? Although Rashi and Metzudos say it refers to righteous converts, I would have thought that after they converted they became part of the "House of Israel," and would not need their own category. Radak and Me'iri explain "those that fear G-d" to be "the sages," i.e. "the sages of Israel who seclude themselves in G-d's house to study" (Radak on 135:20, see also 115:11 where he adds "and toil in wisdom in order to know/understand G-d"). However, even if they are on a higher level than the rest of the nation, why are they not included in "the House of Israel" (or "Aharon" or "Levi")?

It would seem that the expression "house of," in this context, where there is a separate "house" for the three categories of Jews, refers to the "structure" of Jewish law that each lives within. Because there are slightly different sets of laws for Yisroelim (who get a share of the Land of Israel and must give a percentage of its produce to others), Levi'im (who must give a tenth of the ma'aser they receive from Yisroelim to Kohanim, and serve in the Temple) and Kohanim (who perform the Temple service and have additional prohibitions), each have their own "house." Each "house" consists of Torah-observant Jews, keeping Shabbos, kashrus, et al. They not only live within the structure of Jewish law, they provide the "structure" of Jewish society, the "candle/vessel" within which those that grow beyond the "structure" can build the "flame." "Those that fear G-d" are the ones that are at least as careful to maintain the Torah-mandated structure, but know that the structure is only the starting point to becoming attached to G-d. Without the proper structure the flame can get out of control; but if all that is focused on is the structure, there is only a beautiful mansion without nobility living inside.

We have just come off the Yomim Norayim, and specifically Yom Kippur, where it became necessary to re-examine the "structure" to make sure that there were no cracks, and to patch up any that were found. True, we also had to examine whether we paid enough attention to building the "flame," but the bulk of the confession/fixing-up had to do with the structure itself. There is a danger that with this necessary focus on the "structure," the real goal of "d'veykus," growing spiritually and becoming attached to G-d, will be lost. Therefore, aside from being given more pieces of the structure to work on (i.e. building the Succah and taking the lulav and esrog), we are told to move out of our permanent structure, our house, and dwell in a temporary one, where the focus is the "schach," the ceiling which represents the "clouds of glory" and our relationship with the Creator.

Is the right structure of vital importance? Of course. We just spent a good deal of time agonizing over the slightest of deviations from the blueprint. But one of the messages of the Succah is that as important as the structure is, it is only a vehicle to bring us to a higher level, to bring us Closer to the One above.
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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

Our sages saw the four species used in the mitzva of Succot as symbols of the different sectors of the nation of Yisrael: From the etrog which has a pleasant odor and a taste representing the people who study Torah and observe the mitzvot and on to aravah, branches which have no odor or taste, representing those who have neither Torah nor mitzvot. Taking the four species in our hand together is a symbolic way of gathering all the parts of the nation together in a unified way. However, beyond the concept of unity, there is another important message that the sages want to convey to us with this allegory.

It is important to note that the mitzva is not observed by taking hold of only three species, without the aravah. This is similar to the statement by the sages, "Every fast day which does not include the sinners of Yisrael is not a proper fast" [Krutut 6b]. There is an internal quality of the community of Yisrael as a whole which goes beyond element of choice, whether for the good or the bad.

On the other hand, unity ("achdut") and uniformity ("achidut") are not the same. The four species are not copies of each other but rather represent four very different sectors of the nation, and the sages take the trouble to emphasize their differences in what is almost a scathing approach. Every one of us stands on Succot with the four species in his hand, but as part of this act which signifies the unity of the nation he explicitly defines one of the sectors as having neither a scent nor a taste.

The unity does not transform us all into an etrog. If anything, just the opposite is true. The division into four species shows that there is a part of us which is on a more important level than the others, and that we are not ashamed of openly expressing this fact. But at the same time this act reveals the uniformity that is totally independent of the various definitions which differentiate between different sectors in a single nation.

This can be compared to a living body. Every cell carries the full genetic code, and in principle this is enough to clone a full human being. It is possible to start out with the roughest cell from the heel and use it as a pattern to recreate the most delicate brain cells. But the opposite is also true: A brain cell can be used as the basis to create a foot and a heel. This amazing

ability reveals the innermost quality of life? something that is not overtly revealed but which is in reality the abstract that gives everything its life.

On an overt level, living creatures are differentiated into various organs which play different roles. They continue to show their unity in the necessary harmony of the way that they interact in a healthy way. The mind cannot move around without having feet, and the feet certainly will not move around without a brain. But any attempt to blur the differences and confuse the different tasks will lead to a complete negation of life, even if the desire is based on the inherent yearning of uniformity that is hidden within the foundation of existence.

In the end, we are very fond of the aravah, and we end the series of holy days in a special ritual on Hoshanah Rabba. The aravah bursts out of the external partition of life and reminds us of the common internal root which is relevant at a level that goes beyond scent and taste. This is a place where all the souls "all of whom taken together are perfect, and where there is no blemish within them" [Shir Hashirim 4:2, 6:6]. The Almighty is fond of every soul and yearns for it, as if it were an only child.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

The solemn majesty of Rosh Hashanah has come and gone. The white-clad awe of Yom Kippur has cleansed our hearts and souls and passed into the treasure house of our memories. We are now prepared for our annual outburst of... joy! Sukkos, the Time of Our Rejoicing! The Torah tells us to be "only joyous" for seven full days.

This joy was realized to its fullest when the Beis Hamikdash in Jerusalem was still standing. The streets bursting with throngs of excited people from near and far. The air perfumed by the aroma of the sacrificial offerings and the burning incense. The sounds of music, singing and dancing reverberating through every window and doorway. The spectacle of an exalted people united in a common outpouring of love and gratitude to the Creator of the Universe.

At the center of these splendid festivities was the Simchas Beis Hasho'evah, the celebration of the drawing of the water for the nisuch hamayim, the water libation on the altar in the Beis Hamikdash. The Talmud draws a vivid picture of the exultant singing and dancing that accompanied this ritual. It even tells of great and venerable sages juggling and leaping about like young acrobats. Indeed, the Talmud assures us that "whoever did not witness the Simchas Beis Hasho'evah has never seen true joy in his life."

But what was so remarkable about the ritual of the drawing of the water? What made it the most powerful stimulus to joy imaginable?

The commentators explain that the Hebrew word for joy, simchah, is related to the word for erasing, machah. Joy is not something that must be generated. It is our natural state. Nevertheless, the pain, sorrows and disappointments of life overlay and obscure our natural joyousness. When we erase these impediments to our happiness, we achieve true joy by default.

Still, why indeed is joy our natural state? Because joy is an expression of a perfect existence, of fulfillment to the highest degree possible. The essence of a person is the immortal soul, the neshamah, our spark of the divine. When our souls cleave completely to their Source and Creator, we are in a state of perfect existence, and we experience joy. However, when our sins and misdeeds come between our souls and their Divine Source, we feel the anguish of estrangement, and our joy is extinguished. Consequently, all the commonplace vexations of life become magnified far out of proportion to their true significance in the greater scheme of things. Therefore, in order to achieve true and perfect joy, we must erase the taint from our sublime souls so that they can again cleave perfectly to the Creator. Only then can we achieve fulfillment and the joy that results from it.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we cleansed and purified our souls. On Sukkos, we are finally capable of cleaving to the Creator and achieving true joy. The water libation symbolized this concept. Water has the property of absolute adaptability. It can attach itself to any shape or form so perfectly that no gaps or crevices are left unfilled. The ritual of pouring the water over the altar in the Beis Hamikdash, therefore, symbolizes the perfect and absolute attachment which the Jewish people have achieved to the Creator through their prayers and repentance during the High Holidays. And perfect attachment leads to perfect joy.

If we aspire to that perfect attachment, we can all achieve it, no matter what walk of life we pursue. If we only allow ourselves to be like water, gladly adapting to Hashem's will, we can find the key to true contentment. We must only seek it. And the reward for finding it is a joy unlike any other we have ever known.

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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"This is the blessing Moshe, the Man of G-d, gave the Children of Israel before his death." (Devarim 33:1)

Every year Parashas Zos HaBrochah gets swallowed up by the holiday of Simchas Torah. It doesn't have its own Shabbos, like all the other weekly readings, and the Yom Tov, on which it is read, is so packed with activity that few probably pay much attention to what is going on behind the scenes in the parshah, as they might with other parshios. At the Yom

Tov table, how many people actually base their dvar Torah on the parshah itself?

In a sense, you don't have to. No question it is a great idea to deliver at least one dvar Torah at a Simchas Torah seudah based upon the parshah; you can never go wrong with that. However, whereas on most Shabboses the parshah is just what you read that day, and speak about, perhaps, at the seudos, on Simchas Torah, the day itself is the very embodiment of the parshah, alluded to by the words, v'zos habrochah, as the Ba'al HaTurim points out: "V'Zos HaBrochah: This has the gematria of zu hee HaTorah-this is the Torah-because in the merit of Torah he blessed them." (Ba'al HaTurim, Devarim 33:1)

In other words, all the blessings that Moshe Rabbeinu gave to the Jewish people just prior to his death were because of Torah, and really, through Torah. Torah itself is the conduit for blessing for the Jewish people, because the very letters themselves are conduits for the Primordial Light of Creation, which is the source of all blessing from G-d. And, by learning Torah, and especially by fulfilling its mandate, one becomes a fitting recipient of its light and blessing, as we learned back at the beginning of the Torah with the creation of light: "...G-d saw the light, that it was good, and He divided..." (Bereishis 1:4)

"He saw that it was not worth letting the evil people use it and He set it aside for the righteous in the Time-to-Come." (Chagigah 12a)

"G-d made a division in the light's shining, that it should only emanate for the righteous people whose actions draw the light down; the deeds of the evil people prevent its shining, and this was the hiding." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 103)

Hence, the process of receiving blessing works like this. First, we require Torah to show us how to walk in the way of G-d. This is the first and greatest blessing of all, without which we could never access the Ohr HaGanuz-the Hidden Light of Creation, the Kabbalistic name for the Primordial Light- and the blessing that it brings: "... For G-d attends the way of the righteous, while the way of the wicked will perish." (Tehillim 1:5)

By following in the path of Torah, we spiritually shape ourselves into vessels that both attracts the light of blessing, and can contain it. To the extent that we do this is the extent to which we can become such vessels, attract the light, and contain it.

"For with You is the source of life-by Your light may we see light." (Tehillim 36:10) This is the entire meaning of the parshah, a summation of all that the Torah teaches us in all of its previous parshios. It is a reminder that, no matter how difficult the rest of the Torah may appear to fulfill, it is the source of blessing and good times. And this, of course, is the entire theme of Simchas Torah, the day on which we dance with the Sifrei Torah as if they are the greatest asset we have, because, they are.

We dance with the Torah, lovingly, affectionately, as if to say, "V'Zos HaBrochah"- "this is the blessing." We hold the Torah tightly, not because we are concerned about dropping it, G-d forbid, but because we want to be attached to the source of blessing in this world, through which the Source of Blessing transmits His light from Heaven to earth, from G-d to man. On Simchas Torah, the events of the day and the reading of the day are one and the same thing.

It is true of Shemini Atzeres as well. As mentioned in the past, the fact that the number eight is a theme of the day indicates its connection to the Ohr HaGanuz, just like Chanukah, which is actually eight days long. As tradition teaches, the number eight, being one number above seven, which represents the world of nature that was created in seven days, alludes to the supernatural world, which is completely a function of the Ohr HaGanuz.

In other words, Shemini Atzeres is a unique conduit for the Hidden Light of Creation to flow from G-d, so-to-speak, to the Jewish people. This is why, as Rashi points out, it is a day that celebrates the unique relationship between G-d and His people, a relationship that is based upon the flow of the Ohr HaGanuz, which creates the sensation of Shechinah, Divine Presence, amongst the Jewish people.

Especially when learning Torah. Anyone who has sat down to learn Torah, no matter which part of it, in an intense manner, with a desire to connect to what he is learning, has felt some kind of spiritual accompaniment. The more intense the learning, the more this is the case, until it feels as if, as many will tell you, the person is enveloped by Divine light.

And it is true. To begin with, the individual letters of an actual Sefer Torah are considered to be actual conduits for the light of Creation, the Ohr HaGanuz. To be exposed to them, if you are a believing Jew, is to be affected by the light coming through them. However, this must be true of all words of Torah, on some level, even if they are not actually written on parchment and part of a Sefer Torah.

Hence, the Midrash states: "The people that walk in the darkness see the Great Light." (Yeshayahu 9:1)

"The masters of the Talmud are those who see the Great Light, for the Holy One, Blessed is He, enlightens their eyes... Torah Sh'b'al Peh-the Oral Law-is compared to darkness, because it is difficult to learn and involves hardship." (Tanchuma, Noach 9)

Therefore, it cannot be a coincidence that there are 36 -- the number of the Ohr HaGanuz-tractates in the Talmud Bavli? Babylonian Talmud, or that learning all 36 sections grants a person access to the Hidden Light of Creation. Or that: "Abaye said: There are no less than 36 righteous people who greet the Divine Presence on a daily basis." (Succah 45b)

Being involved in Torah and the reality of 36, they become inundated with the Ohr HaGanuz, and feel

the Presence of G-d. Hence, whether we are talking about the parshah of Zos HaBrochah itself, Simchas Torah, or Shemini Atzeres, it is all one and the same idea. In each case, we are talking about blessing, but specifically the blessing that results from the Ohr HaGanuz, which is the Torah, and these holidays. And, Moshe Rabbeinu.

Everything about Moshe Rabbeinu indicated a special relationship with the Ohr HaGanuz, which he used all of his life (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:179b). First of all, regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's birth it says: "It is written here, 'And she saw that he was good' (Shemot 2:2), and there it is written, 'G-d saw the light, that it was good' (Bereishit 1:4)." (Sotah 12a)

The Talmud has set up a comparison between Moshe and the Ohr Ha-Ganuz, since they are both described using the same word: good. In other words, it is not incidental that the Torah refers to Moshe as being "good," but an indication that there was something special about him from the moment he was born, as the Talmud explains: "The Chachamim say that when Moshe was born, the entire house filled with light." (Ibid.)

Therefore, it is not surprising to learn that Moshe was born 36 years after the slavery began, or that he was born already circumcised (Sotah 12a). It seems that, from birth, Moshe was destined to be the leader to redeem the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery, and to be a conduit for the Ohr HaParashas Ganuz. Kabbalistically-speaking, Moshe's greatness and connection to the Primordial Light of Creation was due to the high level root of his soul: "The level of Moshe Rabbeinu was... from the Ohr HaGanuz itself." (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:255b) and therefore: "The Torah was given through him, as well as all chidushei Torah-Torah novellae-throughout time." (Ibid.)

Hence, when Moshe walked the face of the earth, in reality, he had the capacity to span many spiritual worlds. After all, he did enter Heaven to receive Torah-and returned: "This is what it means when it says, 'Praise to the nation with such a portion (Shin-Chof-Chof-Heh)' (Tehillim 144:15); Shin-Chof-Chof-Heh is equal in gematria to 'Moshe' (40+300+5)." (Ibid.)

In other words, "Praise to the nation with such a leader as Moshe," for, without Moshe Rabbeinu, the Jewish people could never have received their life-line, Torah: "For this commandment which I command you today is not hidden from you, nor is it far away. It is not in Heaven, that you can say, 'Who shall go up to the heaven and bring it to us, and let us hear it that we can do it?'" (Devarim 30:11)

Thus, Moshe was: "... the channel to the Light of the Upper Da'as-which is the level of the Tree of Life-the level of Tifferes of Atzilus that the Da'as is inside." (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:255b)

He was from the "Mystery of the Upper Emanation of Adam HaRishon," which was withdrawn as a result of the sin. Had the Jewish people not sinned

[with the golden calf, then] Moshe would have entered the land and would have been in a position to return the world to perfection from before the sin. (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:277b).

In conclusion, Moshe Rabbeinu's body may have been of humbler origins, coming from flesh-and-blood parents, but his soul came from as lofty a place as a human soul can come. This made him like no other man on earth since Adam HaRishon himself, and it gave him the right to make use of the Hidden Light of Creation at will, and why he was able to speak to G-d "mouth-to-mouth," while conscious, and "without riddle" (Bamidbar 12:8). So powerful was Moshe's soul that it was able to encompass all of the Jewish people (Rashi, Shemot 18:1), and when he died he went right to Gan Aiden (Temurah 16b). Therefore, it is only fitting that, on Simchas Torah and Shemini Atzeres, the day that we celebrate our wondrous and Heavenly gift of Torah and source of eternal life, we end the reading with a eulogy of the very person responsible for all of it:

"Moshe was 120 years old when he died. His eyes had not weakened, nor had his strength dissipated. The Children of Israel cried for Moshe in the plains of Moav for 30 days, after which the days of crying and mourning for Moshe were completed... There never again arose a prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom G-d spoke to face-to-face, [and who could perform] all the signs and wonders which G-d sent him to do in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land, or any of the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moshe displayed before all the eyes of Israel." (Devarim 34:7-12)

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RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

One of the special commandments for Sukkot is to take the arbah minim, the Four Species (etrog, lulav, hadassim, and aravot), and to wave them in the four directions of the compass as well as up and down. The meaning of the waving is that G-d is everywhere. However, why are these four species designated for the mitzvah?

Our rabbis teach that these four species are symbolic of four types of Jews: the etrog (citron) which has a fragrance and a taste represents those Jews who have both Torah wisdom and good deeds; the lulav (date palm branch) which has a taste (from the dates), but no fragrance represents those Jews who have Torah wisdom, but no good deeds; the hadassim (myrtle branches) have a fragrance, but no taste representing those Jews who have good deeds, but no Torah wisdom; and lastly, the aravot (willow branches) have neither a taste nor a smell representing those Jews who are lacking in Torah wisdom and good deeds.

What do we do on Sukkot? We symbolically bind together and recognize every Jew as an integral

and important part of the Jewish people. If even one is missing, the mitzvah is incomplete. Our People is one; we must do all we can to bind together the Jewish people and work to strengthen the Jewish future!
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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Sukkot is a happy time. In fact, it's so happy that the Torah says it is. It's called Zman Simchateynu (the time of our happiness). But it's even more than that. The Torah commands us to be happy. So what's all this happiness for? You have to eat in a shack and shake a fruit, palm branches, and leaves. Why should we be happy, and why should we be COMMANDED to be happy?

Part of the answer lies in the reasons for what we do, and what they symbolize. The Sukkah needs to be made so that it's temporary in nature, to symbolize the way it was in the desert when the Jews left Egypt. But it also symbolizes the way it is in this world. We're living in a temporary world, with weak walls, a leaky ceiling, and decorations. And that's exactly what's supposed to make us so happy. That leaky ceiling is the connection we have with the real reality (heaven/G-d), and it's the light from above that reflects from the decorations onto the walls, shining on everything. This Sukkot, we should look around us and think about all the temporary decorations in our lives, and how we can increase the number of permanent decorations we prepare. Especially right after Yom Kippur, when we (hopefully) committed to some sort of spiritual improvement, Sukkot is the perfect opportunity to exercise it.

Whether we promised to give more charity, or even to just give charity with a smile. Whether it was to learn one Jewish law every day, or to perform one. The point of Sukkot is for us to be able to DO something right to start our year, to do it proudly and happily, and with flying colors, decorations and enthusiasm. © 2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

