

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

In majestic language, Moses breaks into song, investing his final testament to the Israelites with all the power and passion at his command. He begins dramatically but gently, calling heaven and earth to witness what he is about to say, sounding ironically very much like "The quality of mercy is not strained", Portia's speech in *The Merchant of Venice*.

"Listen, you heavens, and I will speak; / Hear, you earth, the words of my mouth. / Let my teaching fall like rain / and my words descend like dew, / like showers on new grass, / like abundant rain on tender plants." (Deut. 32:1-2)

But this is a mere prelude to the core message Moses wants to convey. It is the idea known as *tzidduk ha-din*, vindicating G-d's justice. The way Moses puts it is this: "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, / And all His ways are just. / A faithful G-d who does no wrong, / Upright and just is He." (Deut. 32:4)

This is a doctrine fundamental to Judaism and its understanding of evil and suffering in the world -- a difficult but necessary doctrine. G-d is just. Why then do bad things happen?

"Is He corrupt? No -- the defect is in His children, / a crooked and perverse generation." (Deut. 32:5)

G-d requites good with good, evil with evil. When bad things happen to us it is because we have been guilty of doing bad things ourselves. The fault lies not in our stars but ourselves.

Moving into the prophetic mode, Moses foresees what he has already predicted, even before they have crossed the Jordan and entered the land. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy he has been warning of the danger that in their land, once the hardships of the desert and the struggles of battle have been forgotten, the people will become comfortable and complacent. They will attribute their achievements to themselves and they will drift from their faith. When this happens they will bring disaster on themselves: "Jeshurun grew fat and kicked -- / You became fat, thick, gross -- / They abandoned the G-d who made

them / and scorned the Rock their Savior... / You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; / And forgot the G-d who gave you birth." (Deut. 32: 15-18)

This, the first use of the word *Yeshurun* in the Torah -- from the root *Yashar*, upright -- is deliberately ironic. Israel once knew what it was to be upright, but it will be led astray by a combination of affluence, security and assimilation to the ways of its neighbours. It will betray the terms of the covenant, and when that happens it will find that G-d is no longer with it. It will discover that history is a ravaging wolf. Separated from the source of its strength, it will be overpowered by its enemies. All that the nation once enjoyed will be lost. It is a stark and terrifying message.

Yet Moses is here bringing the Torah to a close with a theme that has been there from the beginning. G-d, creator of the universe, made a world that is fundamentally good: the word that echoes seven times in the first chapter of Genesis. It is humans, granted freewill as G-d's image and likeness, who introduce evil into the world, and then suffer its consequences. Hence Moses' insistence that when trouble and tragedy appear, we should search for the cause within ourselves, and not blame G-d. G-d is upright and just. The defect is in us, His children.

This is perhaps the most difficult idea in the whole of Judaism. It is open to the simplest of objections, one that has sounded in almost every generation. If G-d is just, why do bad things happen to good people? This is the question asked not by skeptics, doubters, but by the very heroes of faith. We hear it in Abraham's plea, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" We hear it in Moses' challenge, "Why have you done evil to this people?" It sounds again in Jeremiah: "Lord, you are always right when I dispute with You. Yet I must plead my case before You: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy?" (Jer. 12:1).

It is an argument that never ceased. It continued through the rabbinic literature. It was heard again in the *kinot*, the laments, prompted by the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages. It sounds in the literature produced in the wake of the Spanish expulsion, and echoes still when we recall the



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Holocaust.

The Talmud says that of all the questions Moses asked G-d, this was the one to which G-d did not give an answer. (Berakhot 7a) The simplest, deepest interpretation is given in Psalm 92, "The song of the Sabbath day." Though "the wicked spring up like grass," they will eventually be destroyed. The righteous, by contrast, "flourish like a palm tree and grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon." Evil wins in the short term but never in the long. The wicked are like grass, the righteous like a tree. Grass grows overnight but it takes years for a tree to reach its full height. In the long run, tyrannies are defeated. Empires decline and fall. Goodness and rightness win the final battle. As Martin Luther King said in the spirit of the Psalm: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

It is a difficult belief, this commitment to seeing justice in history under the sovereignty of G-d. Yet consider the alternatives. They are three. The first is to say that there is no meaning in history whatsoever. *Homo hominis lupus est*, "Man is wolf to man". As Thucydides said in the name of the Athenians: "The strong do as they want, the weak suffer what they must." History is a Darwinian struggle to survive, and justice is no more than the name given to the will of the stronger party.

The second, about which I write in my new book *Not In G-d's Name*, is dualism, the idea that evil comes not from G-d but from an independent force: Satan, the Devil, the Antichrist, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the many other names given to the force that is not G-d but is opposed to Him and those who worship Him. This idea, which has surfaced in sectarian forms in each of the Abrahamic monotheisms, as well as in modern, secular totalitarianisms, is one of the most dangerous in all of history. It divides humanity into the unshakeably good and the irredeemably evil, giving rise to a long history of bloodshed and barbarism of the kind we see being enacted today in many parts of the world in the name of holy war against the greater and lesser Satan. This is dualism, not monotheism, and the sages, who called it *shtei reshuyot*, "two powers or domains" (Berakhot 33b), were right to reject it utterly.

The third, debated extensively in the rabbinic literature, is to say that justice ultimately exists in the

world to come, in life after death. Yet though this is an essential element of Judaism, it is striking how relatively little Judaism had recourse to it, recognizing that the central thrust of Tanakh is on this world, and life before death. For it is here that we must work for justice, fairness, compassion, decency, the alleviation of poverty, and the perfection, as far as lies within our power, of society and our individual lives. Tanakh almost never takes this option. G-d does not say to Jeremiah or Job that the answer to their question exists in heaven and they will see it as soon as they end their stay on earth. The passion for justice so characteristic of Judaism would dissipate entirely were this the only answer.

Difficult though Jewish faith is, it has had the effect through history of leading us to say: if bad things have happened, let us blame no one but ourselves, and let us labour to make them better. It was this that led Jews, time and again, to emerge from tragedy, shaken, scarred, limping like Jacob after his encounter with the angel, yet resolved to begin again, to rededicate ourselves to our mission and faith, to ascribe our achievements to G-d and our defeats to ourselves.

Out of such humility, a momentous strength is born. © 2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"The Lord remembered Sarah as he had promised... Sarah conceived and bore a son..." (Genesis 21:1,2) Rosh Hashanah always portends new beginnings and fresh opportunities: "This day the world was born," or at least the world beckons with possibilities of rebirth and renewal.

Hence I would have thought that Rosh Hashanah, the day on which we "enthroned" G-d as Lord of the Universe - and not Shmini Atzeret-Simhat Torah - would be the festival on which we should begin the new Torah reading cycle of the year, the most apt occasion for reopening our Book of Books with "In the beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth." And to do so would not even be much of a stretch; after all, we are certainly on target, having reached the last chapters of the final Book of Deuteronomy during our regular Shabbat readings at this time of year.

So why have our Talmudic Sages ordained that we read of Isaac's birth and sacrificial binding on the two days of Rosh Hashanah? However, on second thought, I truly believe I understand the deep wisdom of our Sages. Yes, Rosh Hashanah is probably the most universally oriented of all of our festivals, and yes, the Jews of Israel have certainly returned to the global family of nation-states after a hiatus of close to 2,000 years, taking center stage on the world arena. Nevertheless, the "world" which initially and most compellingly consumes most of our day-to-day thoughts and activities is the more personal world of

our individual families.

And perhaps on an even deeper level, the building blocks of every national society are the individual families within the country's borders; the Nation of Israel emerged from the family of Abraham! Moreover, it is the family that is the necessary medium of communicating a specific national narrative from generation to generation. G-d elected Abraham as the first Hebrew because he was commanding his children and his household after him to observe [be responsible for] the path of the Lord, to do acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Indeed, virtually all of our familial feasts and celebrations are dedicated to nurturing and transmitting our national narrative, values and lifestyle to our children and grandchildren.

From this perspective, since the road to new beginnings must be paved by acts of repentance - Rosh Hashanah ushers in our 10 Days of Repentance - we must concentrate our repentance and our resolutions for change upon our sins against family, spouse and children, rather than our sins against G-d. It is easier, and less personally threatening, to objectively assess our personal standing before the Unseen Seer of the Universe than before the parents, spouses and children with whom we have personal dealings every single day.

Permit me three stories:

1. The Talmud (BT Rosh Hashanah 16) provocatively suggests that the various and numerous sounds of the shofar call to repentance are meant to confound Satan. Who is Satan? Another passage of the Talmud (BT Gittin 52) explains: "A certain couple lived in one dwelling together with Satan; every Friday night they would argue with each other. R. Meir entered the household and lived there for three consecutive Friday evenings until he made peace between them.

He heard Satan cry out, 'Woe unto me; I have been forced out of the house because of R. Meir...'" Satan is family discord.

2. The Talmud further records (BT Brachot 8) the custom of one community that the morning after the wedding night, a friend of the groom would ask him, "Matza or Motzi?" "What kind of wife have you found? Which verse applies to you? Is it 'one who has found [matza] a wife has found only good' (Proverbs 18:22), or is it 'I find [motzi] that more bitter than death is the woman' (Ecclesiastes 7:26)." What kind of question is this? It decries all prohibitions against slander. How dare the friend ask, and the groom answer, concerning the wife he has just married? I would suggest that the friend is asking the groom about the groom, not about his bride. Now that the wedding is over and your life together has just begun, who do you think about first when you arise in the morning? Is it "one who has found [matza] a wife," your wife whom you are concerned about first, then you have "found only good"; but if it is "I find [motzi]," yourself that you think about

first, then your life will be more bitter than death..."

3. When I was a young rabbi in Manhattan with a growing family, I got into a cab. During my conversation with the driver, he told me he had been married to the same woman for 35 years, had four professional children and had never been schooled beyond the eighth grade. "To what do you owe your incredible success?" I asked. He explained: "As long as the children lived in the house, all of us had to be around the dinner table at 7 p.m., without radio, television or newspaper. Everyone had to tell the best moment of the day, and the worst moment of the day. That's how I brought the family together, and was able to give over how important I think education is."

I burst into tears; that taxi driver who never went past elementary school was much wiser than I...  
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### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

In reality, the first word of this week's prophetic song/parsha in encompasses the entire message of this Torah portion. Haazinu connotes paying attention, concentrating, listening attentively and absorbing words and messages that are being spoken. As one's hearing acumen begins to lessen and wane with the passage of time, background noise becomes a problem when attempting to hear what someone else is saying to you. In the clutter of traffic, conversations, and the hum of everyday urban life, we have become accustomed to not hearing what is being said to us by others and perhaps, even more importantly, by life's events.

We are severely limited in our options in life and behavior by the fact that we cannot hear clearly and thus cannot discern what we should know and remember and what is to be discarded and forgotten. The metaphor for this is the example of going to a restaurant and attempting to hear the waiter announce the menu and choices. If we somehow did not hear or understand what the waiter said we will never be able to make the choices that we wish from the restaurant's menu.

Well, in the broadest sense, this is true of every aspect of life. We always have many choices but most of the time we cannot hear them being announced to us.

Moshe demands that somehow we pay attention and hear the message that he is imparting. Good hearing will eventually lead to good choices and a productive life. It is no wonder that the Talmud includes those who cannot hear in the list of people who cannot really be held responsible for their actions and behavior.

This week's parsha encompasses all of Jewish history, past, present and future. It details for us the triumphs and failures as well throughout the ages. It

points out the bad choices that were made when we did not hear or pay attention to the consequences that would undoubtedly stem from those missed cues.

One of the ideas that Midrash teaches us is that the sound of the shofar heard at Mount Sinai 4700 years ago still reverberates and sounds throughout all of the ages. The only problem is that not many people concentrate enough to be able to truly hear and discern it. The enormous background noise of life interferes with our ability to hear that shofar echo of Sinai.

What results is that there are many positive choices and options in our lives that we are simply unaware of because we did not hear them announced to us. Though there are many new technological gadgets that are available to block out background noise, it is a shame that we have not yet devised such a gadget for our spiritual and intellectual hearing faculties as well.

The season of the year when Haazinu is read in the synagogue coincides with the great goals of repentance, positive living and spiritual renewal. Therefore the command of Moshe to listen carefully and attentively to the words of the Torah and to the choices presented before us is most timely and relevant to our life and the world around us. ©2015 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**S**ukkot is the only festival referred to as zeman simhateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy.

The Torah in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing Sukkot. (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) Sukkot is described in the liturgy as the days of happiness, as the term simcha is most associated with this holiday. Why is Sukkot deemed as the ultimate holiday of happiness and joy?

On a historical level, Sukkot 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. Sukkot takes us to another dimension. Real joy occurs when one is able to sustain meaning in life well beyond the dramatic moments. As Sukkot 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 Sukkot.

On an agricultural level, Sukkot teaches another important lesson about happiness. The ultimate holiday of gathering our produce is Sukkot. 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 Sukkot, from giving of our produce, happiness surfaces.

Not coincidentally, Sukkot 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 Sukkot, we can ultimately realize the description of Sukkot as found in our prayers -- zman simhateinu, the time of true joy.

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#### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**hen translating Sefer D'varim, it can be difficult at times to figure out where to put opening and closing quotation marks, as it's not always easy to figure out who is doing the talking and whose words are being quoted. Generally speaking, most of the words of Sefer D'varim are Moshe's (see Abarbanel's introduction to Sefer D'varim), and since they are introduced as such, most of the Sefer would be contained within quotation marks, albeit with several closing and opening quotation marks whenever Moshe's words are "interrupted" by any narrative. It gets even more complicated when Moshe quotes someone else, including when he quotes G-d, as then there are quotation marks within quotation marks, to the extent that if I were to translate the Torah, I would seriously consider color-coding the text in order to keep track of whose words are being quoted (including when the Torah is speaking in its "narrator's voice").

Parashas Ha'azinu is no exception, as in the "song" that Moshe taught the nation he refers to himself in the first person (e.g. "I will speak" and "the words of my mouth," 32:1, and "for G-d's name I will call," 32:3), he refers to G-d in the third person (e.g. "His ways," 32:4), and quotes G-d speaking in the first person (e.g. "I will hide My face from them," 32:20, and "there are no other deities with me," 32:39). Sometimes, the transition is obvious. For example, when it says, "and He said 'I will hide my face from them'" (32:20), Moshe said explicitly that he is now starting to quote G-d ("and He said"). However, when G-d is mentioned again by name (32:27, 32:30 and 32:36), it is unclear whether G-d is still doing the talking and referring to Himself by His own name, or there was an unannounced transition back to Moshe doing the talking (and referring to G-d). Since G-d goes back afterwards to talking about Himself in first person (32:34/35 and 32:39-42), if there were any unannounced transitions, there must have been additional unannounced transitions in-between. Let's take a closer look at where any such transitions take place (and why).

It is clear, based on his referring to himself in first person and to G-d in third person, that Moshe is doing the talking from 32:1 through 32:19. 32:20 starts with Moshe continuing by saying "and He said," from which point he quotes G-d. In 32:29, G-d refers to what our enemies should have been thinking (or, according to some, what we should have been thinking, which will impact which "rock" in 32:31 should be capitalized), so that 32:30-31 is a hypothetical quote (of what should have been thought) within a quote (of G-d) which is itself within a quote (of Moshe), that was introduced by the Torah (31:30). Although there are no pronouns in 32:32-33, this description of punishment is an explanation of what G-d said (in 32:26) He would do (see Rashi), which is also referred to by G-d (speaking about Himself in first person) in the verse that follows (32:34), so 32:32 through 32:35 is a continuation of G-d's words. G-d is referred to in the third person again ("His nation") in 32:36, so somehow, and for some reason, Moshe "interrupts" G-d here, but the introductory "and said" in 32:37 could open a continuation of G-d's words (see Rashi). Alternatively, Moshe's interruption continues through 32:38 (since G-d refers to Himself in first person again starting in 32:39) with Moshe quoting our enemy in 32:37-38 (see Ibn Ezra and Ramban). [There need not be a reintroduction to tell us that it is G-d speaking again in 32:39, since it is rather explicit.] G-d's words continue through 32:42, with this being the end of Moshe quoting Him (in the "song"). In 32:43 Moshe closes the "song" and once again refers to G-d in third person. The question (as far as who said/thought what) remains, though, regarding Moshe's "interruption" of either one verse (32:36) or three verses (32:36-38). Why were these ideas conveyed by Moshe, smack in the middle

of G-d talking, rather than coming directly from G-d Himself?

[Although Moshe might have wanted to soften the blow, so after quoting what G-d would do to His nation when they sinned he (Moshe) reassured them that despite G-d "judging" them He would, at the last moment, when all hope seems lost, relent, and then turn His attention to punishing the other nations instead, we would still need to understand why this message had to come from Moshe, and not from G-d Himself.]

One possibility is that knowing we would never be completely lost minimizes the impetus to stay loyal to G-d (even if it's only the nation as a whole that wouldn't be lost; individuals who abandoned G-d could still be), and this "softening of the blow" isn't as "soft" coming from Moshe as it would have been had it come directly from the One who will punish us. However, this only applies to one part of 32:36, not the entire verse, or to the next two verses (if they are also part of Moshe's "interruption").

The method that G-d uses to punish us is usually not by directing a decree against us, but by removing His divine protection from us and letting the destructive forces He created (whether part of the natural world or the hatred of other nations) hurt us. As G-d Himself warned, "I will hide My face from them" (32:20), i.e. no longer protect them from what would have, until now, harmed them had I not prevented it from happening. [I am convinced that G-d set the world up this way specifically to strongly encourage us to become attached to Him in order to be worthy of His divine protection.] It is therefore possible that the reason the part of "G-d judging us" (and what it encompasses, including the other nations asking where G-d is that such devastation was allowed to happen to us) is not said by G-d Himself precisely because the punishment being referred to is not administered directly by G-d, but occurs because He removes His divine protection, thereby allowing it to happen. The direct punishment is G-d removing His protection from us; the result is a byproduct of no longer having His protection. Since the result comes indirectly, it isn't G-d Himself who mentions it, but Moshe. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN**

### **Be'eros**

**"T**he Rock -- perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice. A G-d of faith without iniquity, He is righteous and fair." Be'er Yosef: "Citing this pasuk, the gemara (Bava Kamma 50A) takes a dim view of those who believe that HKBH has a relaxed attitude towards sin. "Whoever says that Hashem overlooks sin, may his life be overlooked!" Rashi explains that such a position provides a license to others to sin, by minimizing the risk of punishment."

How could anyone reasonably believe such a thing? The Torah is full of warnings about an array of punishments to the individual and communal sinner! All the evidence points to Hashem taking aveiros very seriously.

We could try a different approach. It is clear that Hashem does -- often -- excuse our transgressions. The gemara perhaps criticizes the person who sees this as an exercise of unrestrained chesed and compassion, as if He at times simply dismisses His rules, and governs with compassion alone. This is not the case. Rather, on those occasions when He does suspend the ordinary rules, His chesed is fueled by justice arguments!

The gemara points to our pasuk. How can all His paths -- meaning His midos -- amount to justice? When He suspends strict judgment and applies mercy, for example, He does so to those who have some claim to mercy, i.e. to those who have incorporated His midah of mercy in their own lives. That creates a measure-for-measure justification for showing mercy specifically to those who have embraced that midah in their own conduct.

In the famous "prayer duel," (Taanis 25B) R Eliezer davened 24 berachos, but no rain fell in a time of need. R Akiva succeeded with two "Avinu Malkenus." A heavenly voice cautioned against assuming that R Akiva must have been the greater tzadik. Not so, said the bas kol. Rather, R Akiva's prayer was answered because he was more successful than R Eliezer in looking away from his own nature (i.e. in forgiving). In other words, the community did not really merit or deserve rain at that time. If fell only through Hashem's overruling considerations of din and applying chesed instead. Still, this would not have happened without R Akiva becoming part of the calculus. Because he was a forgiving person, Hashem was able to implement His own forgiveness and apply it to the people. Another way of looking at this is that through R Akiva's behavior, G-d's "going beyond the letter of the law" became an exercise of law and justice!

A midrash (Eichah Rabbah, Pesicha) speaks of a march of early figures who spoke up at the time of the destruction of the beis hamikdosh. Each one of them, beginning with the avos, pointed to his special zechus/merit. None of their arguments were accepted. None that is, save for those of Rochel. Her merit was not greater than that of the avos. To counter and satisfy midas hadin, however, a justice argument was needed. Rochel, who had shown extraordinary chesed to her sister Leah, was able to provide that argument. The beis hamikdosh had been destroyed because of widespread avodah zarah. This idolatry had initially been conducted in private. Gradually it became more assertive, and spread to public areas, in the end entering the kodosh hakodashim itself. (Ibid.) This precipitated great kinah against the emptiness of

avodah zarah that usurped the role, as it were, of HKBH, and a gezerah to destroy the beis hamikdosh. It took specifically the selflessness of Rochel -- her lack of jealousy, and her willingness to forego her role as wife to Yaakov in order to prevent the shaming of her sister -- to counter this gezerah, and leave a place -- in din! -- for Hashem to employ compassion.

This, then, is the intention of the gemara. Whoever believes that Hashem casually disregards sin is in error. He does not choose to simply replace din with the midah of chesed. Rather, He reserves such replacement for situations in which mishpat itself calls for it, where justice itself argues for such a display of chesed. (Based on Be'er Yosef, Devarim 32:4) ©2015 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah tells us in Leviticus 23:40 a special commandments for Sukkot -- to take the arbah minim, the Four Species (etrog, lulav, hadassim, and aravot). We wave them in the four directions of the compass as well as up and down. The symbolism of the waving in all directions is to remind us 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! ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

**RABBI PHIL CHERNOFSKY**

## Torah Tidbits

**A** famous question is posed concerning the timing of Sukkot - why is it on the 15th of Tishrei? The similar question for Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana Yom Kippur, Purim, Chanuka, Yom HaAtzmaut, Yom Yerushalayim, and the fast days of Tish'a b'Av, etc. can all be answered with what occurred on their date. Not (necessarily) so with Sukkot. So what is Sukkot doing specifically at this time

of the year?

The question has several diverse answers.

Tur says that had the mitzva of sukka been commanded at Pesach-time (when it would fit with the theme of the Exodus from Egypt into the Wilderness), it would not be noticeable that we are performing a mitzva; it would seem that we are merely seeking the comfortable environment of the sukka in the warming springtime. On the other hand, when we leave our homes as others are returning to theirs in anticipation of cooler and wetter weather, the mitzva aspect of sukka is manifest.

Rambam, on the other hand, seems to take an opposite view, namely that the timing of Sukkot is a kind gesture by G-d - we dwell in the sukka when it is neither too hot nor too cold to do so in an enjoyable manner. (A lot depends upon where you live - Eretz Yisrael is highly recommended as THE venue for the mitzva of sukka - and all other mitzvot.)

Ramban says that Sukkot is set at the other side of the year from Pesach to emphasize that we must be appreciative of G-d's having taken us out of Egypt and protecting us in the Wilderness - ALL YEAR ROUND. Note that each of Pesach and Sukkot is a 7 day commemoration of the Exodus, each begins on the 15th day of the first month of the year (both Nissan and Tishrei are first months).

Based on the famous dispute, as to whether the sukka represents the heavenly clouds of glory that protected the People of Israel or if it represents actual sukkot in which the people dwelt...

If you say ACTUAL SUKKOT, then this is the season that the people would have begun to need them. Hence, Sukkot in the fall.

If you say CLOUDY OF GLORY, then, according to the Vilna Gaon, this is what happened: After the Sin of the Golden Calf, the Clouds left the people. Only after Moshe returned from the Mountain the second time, with the second Tablets, the Divine message of forgiveness, AND the command to build the Mishkan, and after the materials were collected and the construction was about to begin, did the Clouds return. The GR"A says that this corresponded to the 15th of Tishrei, hence that date for Sukkot.

Menorat HaMaor suggests that the timing of Sukkot carries an important message for the (agrarian) Jew, who has just brought in the harvest and is about to tuck himself comfortably into his home for the winter. The natural turn of mind is for him to burst with pride at what he has accomplished. The mitzva of sukka is custom-tailored to bring the Jew out of his complacency and remind him - in the frail sukka - of G-d's dominion over nature and all.

The Chidushei HaRim explains the timing of Sukkot is "necessitated" by the reason given for the mitzva of sukka - L'MAAN YEI'D'U... In order that your generations shall KNOW... The level of KNOWLEDGE

can be achieved best (or only) in an atmosphere that is sin-free, only immediately following the Yamim Nora'im.

Our sources say that a person does not sin unless he is overcome by foolishness. Thus, we are capable of fulfilling the mitzva of sukka best during the days following Yom Kippur.

One way or the other, we have the wonderful merit of celebrating Sukkot and fulfilling the mitzvot of sukka and the 4 species. May we celebrate the holiday with joy, may we fulfill the mitzvot of the Chag with proper kavana and motivations, and may we be privileged to rejoice in the rebuilding of Sukkat David HaNofelet. © 1995 Rabbi P. Chernofsky & ncsy.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Unstoppable Force

The final song of Moshe's life is read this week. Appropriate as a prelude to Yom Kippur, it talks about the great potential that the Jewish nation has within its very essence. Moshe tells us to "Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father, and he will relate it to you, and your elders, and they will tell you" (Deuteronomy 32:7-8). He reminds us of the glory days, when Hashem asked us to be His chosen people, accepting the yoke of Torah observance. But Moshe does not stop there. Using our tremendous capacity as a role of responsibility, he warns us of the calamitous effect if we waste or misuse our talents.

Despite the harrowing foreshadowing of disaster, however, the verses of misfortune contain a message of hope as well. Moshe once again warns us of Hashem's potential wrath; yet a blessing lies within his curse, defining the very essence of the physiological indestructibility of the Jewish nation.

In predicting calamitous repercussions of sin, Moshe speaks for Hashem and declares, "I shall accumulate evils against them. My arrows I shall use up against them." What does that mean?

Rashi explains the verse according to a Talmudic explanation in Tractate Sotah. "My arrows will come to an end, but they themselves will not come to an end."

The question is obvious. Is G-d's quiver limited? Can the L-rd ever be bereft of ammunition? How is it possible that the Heavenly arsenal, equipped with more power than an atomic armory, will spend its ammunition without achieving total annihilation?

Reb Yosef Friedenson, editor of Dos Yiddishe Vort, tells the story of how he and a group of friends were in a smithy shop in the iniquitous labor camp in the town of Starachowice. The camp was notorious, and though the overseer of the factory in which they worked, a man named Pape, treated them kindly, one mistake meant that a German guard would treat them as saboteurs and shoot them dead.

Assigned to the Herman Goering works one

Shmini Atzeres, they were not told what their job was for that day. And so, to fulfill their holiday spirit, they broke out in a traditional song, Ain Adir kaHashem, Ain Baruch k'ben Amram (There is none as powerful as Hashem nor blessed as Moshe, the son of Amram).

Pape was shocked. Despite the torture the humiliation, and the endless poison-tipped arrows of the Holocaust, these people were singing! "Why are you Jews singing?" he asked incredulously. "Do you have it so good that you can sing?"

The group explained the words of the song to Pape, going through each stanza, including those that read, "there are no wise men like the scholars of the Torah, and there is no redeemer like Hashem." Pape was astonished. "After all the torture that you have been through, do you really still believe this?" Immediately, one of the younger members of the group, not a particularly religious lad, jumped up with an emphatic, "Yes!" And then each member of the troupe shouted their endorsement as well. "Of course! Surely! Without doubt!" One by one, each of those in the work-force-turned-choir exclaimed his unyielding approval.

Pape soon understood that he was dealing with an indestructible people. He gesticulated wildly with both arms and declared, "I don't know how the Führer will ever get rid of you!" With that, he walked away and let them continue their relentless commitment to their unshakeable, indestructible faith.

Noted scientist Isaac Asimov compiled a book of 3,000 interesting facts about the universe, history, and science. In it he deals with a longstanding question: "What would happen if an irresistible force met an immovable body?" Asimov explains that the question is ludicrous. He simply explains a physical fact. "In a universe where one of the above conditions exists, by definition the other cannot exist."

And so the Torah tells us something about the promise that Hashem made to His people. They are an immovable object. Hashem's unremitting commitment for his children has declared Judaism impregnable. And so the physical arrows He may send to chastise them cannot forever continue. They must eventually expire. As long as we understand the immovable body of the Rock of our faith, we are assured that there no longer exists an irresistible force to budge our eternity. ©2000 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**P**arshat Haazinu is Moshe's last speech, delivered as a song because songs reach deeper into our souls. In the beginning of the song (32:4), it says "The Rock! -- Perfect is his work, for all his paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He". This statement is loaded, saying that Hashem is perfect, just, fair, righteous, and without iniquity. What's strange is that it begins with comparing G-d to a rock,

and then saying that G-d's work is perfect. What's the Torah trying to tell us by mentioning a rock, and by using all those terms? Luckily, the Chafetz Chaim answers one question with a story about having faith: A man had an only son that was sick, and spared no expense finding him a cure. One doctor finally cured the boy, and told the father that the son got sick because of certain meat that he ate. The father vowed to keep that meat away from his son. Years passed, the father had to go away on a business trip, and he had his family watch the boy. After he left, the boy was tempted by the smell of the meat, ate some, and became deathly ill again. When the father returned, he called the doctor and begged him to do all he could. Once again the doctor was successful in healing the boy, and the father decided to never leave his son again. A while later the father had a party (with meat), and when the son walked in, the father quickly rushed him out. The guests all watched in wonderment, but they didn't understand that it was for the son's sake.

We are the guests, wondering why things are happening in our lives, but we now know that G-d's work is just, fair, and perfect as a ROCK in every way. But a rock is not perfect, you say? Well, it may not be perfect in shape or color, but it's solid, consistent, and always grounded, which are the qualities G-d shows us, and the very qualities we should emulate this coming year. By this time next year, may we all be ROCK Jews, in every sense of BOTH words. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

#### **YITZ WEISS**

### **Divine Embrace**

**O**ne of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that G-d is our protector. We go out of our permanent homes into a temporary dwelling and expose ourselves to the elements. In so doing we recall that G-d was our guardian when we left Egypt into the desert and remains our protector today.

The minimum requirement for a kosher sukkah is not four walls, but two walls and a tefach (a handbreadth). If we were to construct a sukkah based on the minimum, we would really be exposed to the elements! Two walls and a bit don't seem to offer much protection! How are we to feel secure?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l compares the sukkah measurements to an arm: two "walls" - i.e. from the shoulder to the elbow, and from the elbow to the wrist, and a tefach - the hand. Rav Auerbach says that sitting in the sukkah one is literally in the embrace

of G-d! May this year be one where we see the protection of G-d on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! Have a great yom tov! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Congregation Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*



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