

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

And so Moses dies, alone on a mountain with G-d as he had been all those years ago when, as a shepherd in Midian, he caught sight of a bush in flames and heard the call that changed his life and the moral horizons of the world.

It is a scene affecting in its simplicity. There are no crowds. There is no weeping. The sense of closeness yet distance is almost overwhelming. He sees the land from afar but has known for some time that he will never reach it. Neither his wife nor his children are there to say goodbye. They disappeared from the narrative long before. His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron, with whom he shared the burdens of leadership for so long, have predeceased him. His disciple Joshua has become his successor. Moses has become the lonely man of faith, except that with G-d no man, or woman, is lonely even if they are alone.

It is a profoundly sad moment, yet the obituary the Torah gives him – whether Joshua wrote it, or whether he wrote it himself at G-d's behest with tears in his eyes¹ – is unsurpassed:

Never again did there arise a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to display in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land, and for all the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moses displayed in the sight of all Israel. (Deut. 34:10-12)

Moses rarely figures in the lists people make from time to time of the most influential people in history. He is harder to identify with than Abraham in his devotion, David in his charisma, or Isaiah in his symphonies of hope. The contrast between Abraham's and Moses' death could not be more pointed. Of Abraham, the Torah says, "Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25:8). Abraham's death was serene. Though he had been through many trials, he had lived to see the first fulfillment of the promises G-d had given him. He had a child, and he had acquired at least the first plot of land in Israel. In the long journey of his descendants he had taken the first step. There is a sense of closure.

By contrast, Moses' old age is anything but serene. In the last month of his life he challenged the people with undiminished vigor and unvarnished candor. At the very moment that they were getting ready to cross the Jordan and enter the land, Moses warned them of the challenges ahead. The greatest trial, he said, would not be poverty but affluence, not slavery but freedom, not homelessness in the desert but the comfort of home. Reading these words, one is reminded of Dylan Thomas' poem, "Do not go gentle into that good night." There is as much passion in his words in his hundred and twentieth year as at any earlier stage of his life. This is not a man ready to retire. Until the very end he continued to challenge both the people and G-d.

What do we learn from the life, and death, of Moses?

[1] For each of us, even for the greatest, there is a Jordan we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter, a destination we will not reach. That is what Rabbi Tarfon meant when he said: It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.² What we began, others will continue. What matters is that we undertook the journey. We did not stand still.

[2] "No man knows his burial place" (34:6). What a contrast between Moses and the heroes of other civilizations whose burial places become monuments, shrines, places of pilgrimage. It was precisely to avoid this that the Torah insists explicitly that no one knows where Moses is buried. We believe that the greatest mistake is to worship human beings as if they were gods. We admire human beings; we do not worship them. That difference is anything but small.

[3] G-d alone is perfect. That is what Moses wanted people never to forget. Even the greatest human is not perfect. Moses sinned. We still do not know what his sin was – there are many opinions. But that is why G-d told him he would not enter the Promised Land. No human is infallible. Perfection belongs to G-d alone. Only when we honor this essential difference between heaven and earth can G-d be G-d and humans, human.

Nor does the Torah hide Moses' sin. "Because you did not sanctify me ..." (Num. 20:12). The Torah does not hide anyone's sin. It is fearlessly honest about

¹ Baba Batra 15a.

² Avot 2:16.

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the greatest of the great. Bad things happen when we try to hide people's sins. That is why there have been so many recent scandals in the world of religious Jews, some sexual, some financial, some of other kinds. When religious people hide the truth they do so from the highest of motives. They seek to prevent a chillul Hashem. The result, inevitably, is a greater chillul Hashem. Such sanctimoniousness, denying the shortcomings of even the greatest, leads to consequences that are ugly and evil and turn decent people away from religion. The Torah does not hide people's sins. Neither may we.

[4] There is more than one way of living a good life. Even Moses, the greatest of men, could not lead alone. He needed the peacemaking skills of Aaron, the courage of Miriam and the support of the seventy elders. We should never ask: Why am I not as great as X? We each have something, a skill, a passion, a sensitivity, that makes, or could make, us great. The greatest mistake is trying to be someone else instead of being yourself. Do what you are best at, then surround yourself with people who are strong where you are weak.

[5] Never lose the idealism of youth. The Torah says of Moses that at the age of 120, "his eye was undimmed and his natural energy unabated" (Deut. 34:7). I used to think these were two complementary phrases until I realized that the first is the explanation of the second. Moses' "eye was undimmed" means he never lost the passion for justice that he had as a young man. It is there, as vigorous in Deuteronomy as it was in Exodus. We are as young as our ideals. Give way to cynicism and you rapidly age.

[6] At the burning bush, Moses said to G-d: "I am not a man of words. I am heavy of speech and tongue." By the time we reach Devarim, the book named "Words," Moses has become the most eloquent of prophets. Some are puzzled by this. They should not be. G-d chose one who was not a man of words, so that when he spoke, people realized that it was not he who was speaking but G-d who was speaking through him. What he spoke were not his words but G-d's words. That is why He chose a couple who could not have children – Abraham and Sarah – to become parents of the first Jewish child. That is why he chose a

people not conspicuous for their piety to become G-d's witnesses to the world. The highest form of greatness is so to open ourselves to G-d that His blessings flow through us to the world. That is how the priests blessed the people. It was not their blessing. They were the channel of G-d's blessing. The highest achievement to which we can aspire is so to open ourselves to others and to G-d in love that something greater than ourselves flows through us.

[7] Moses defended the people. Did he like them? Did he admire them? Was he liked by them? The Torah leaves us in no doubt as to the answers to those questions. Yet he defended them with all the passion and power at his disposal. Even when they had sinned. Even when they were ungrateful to G-d. Even when they made a Golden Calf. He risked his life to do so. He said to G-d: "And now, forgive them, and if not, blot me out of the book you have written" (Ex. 32:32). According to the Talmud G-d taught Moses this lesson at the very outset of his career. When Moses said about the people, "They will not believe in me," G-d said, "They are the believers children of believers, and in the end it will be you who does not believe."³ The leaders worthy of admiration are those who defend the people: even the non-orthodox, even the secular, even those whose orthodoxy is a different shade from theirs. The people worthy of respect are those who give respect. Those who hate will be hated, those who look down on others will be looked down on, and those who condemn will be condemned. That is a basic principle of Judaism: middah kenegged middah. The people who are great are those who help others to become great. Moses taught the Jewish people how to become great.

The greatest tribute the Torah gives Moses is to call him eved Hashem, the servant of G-d. That is why the Rambam writes that we can all be as great as Moses.⁴ Because we can all serve. We are as great as the causes we serve, and when we serve with true humility, a Force greater than ourselves flows through us, bringing the Divine presence into the world. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the most picturesque and creative festivals of the year is the Festival of Sukkot (the Feast of Tabernacles) - when the entire family is involved in building and decorating a special "nature home" which will be lived in for an entire week. But what are we actually celebrating and what is the true meaning of the symbol of the sukka? Is it the sukka of our desert wanderings, the temporary hut which the Israelites constructed in the desert when they wandered from place to place? If so, then the sukka becomes a

³ Shabbat 97a.

⁴ Hilchot Teshuvah 5:2.

reminder of all of the exiles of Israel throughout our 4,000-year history, and our thanksgiving to G-d is for the fact that we have survived despite the difficult climates - the persecution and pogroms - which threaten to overwhelm us.

Or is the sukka meant to be reminiscent of the Divine "clouds of glory" which encompassed us in the desert with G-d's rays of splendor, the sanctuary which served as the forerunner of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem? In the Grace after Meals during the Sukkot festival we pray that "the Merciful One restore for us the fallen tabernacle of David," which would certainly imply that the sukka symbolizes the Holy Temple. The Talmud (B.T. Succot 11) brings a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to which of these options is the true significance of our celebration. I would like to attempt to analyze which I believe to be the true meaning and why.

The major biblical description of the festivals is found in Chapter 23 of the Book of Leviticus. There are two textual curiosities which need to be examined. The three festivals which were always considered to be our national festivals, and which also biblically appear as the "desert" festivals, are Pessah, Shavuot and Sukkot - commemorating when we left Egypt, when we received the Torah at Sinai and when we lived in desert booths. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are more universal in nature and not at all related to the desert sojourn. It seems strange that in the biblical exposition of the Hebrew calendar Pessah and Shavuot are explained, after which comes Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and only at the conclusion of the description comes Sukkot.

Now, of course one can argue that this is the way the months fall out on the calendar year! However, that too is strange. After all, the Israelites left Egypt for the desert; presumably they built their booths immediately after the Festival of Pessah. Would it not have been more logical for the order to be Pessah, Sukkot, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Secondly, the Festival of Sukkot is broken up into two parts. Initially, the Torah tells us: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: on the fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the Festival of Sukkot, seven days for G-d these are the Festivals of the Lord which you shall call holy convocations" (Leviticus 23:33-38). It would seem that these last words conclude the biblical description of the festivals and the Hebrew calendar. But then, in the very next verse, the Torah comes back again to Sukkot, as if for the first time: "but on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the crop of the land, you shall celebrate G-d's festival for a seven day period... You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twigs of a plaited tree (myrtle) and willows of brooks; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your G-d for a seven-day period... You shall dwell in booths

for a seven-day period... so that your generations will know that I caused the people of Israel to dwell in booths when I took them from the Land of Egypt. I am the Lord your G-d" (ibid. Leviticus 23:39-44). Why the repetition? And if the Bible now wishes to tell us about the four species which we are to wave in all directions in thanksgiving to G-d for his agricultural bounty, why was this verse not linked to the previous discussion of the Sukkot booths? And why repeat the booths again this second time?

I have heard it said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that this repetition of Sukkot with the commandment concerning the Four Species is introducing an entirely new aspect of the Sukkot festival: the celebration of our entering into the Land of Israel. Indeed, the great philosopher-legalist Maimonides explains the great joy of the festival of Sukkot as expressing the transition of the Israelites from the arid desert to a place of trees and rivers, fruits and vegetables, as symbolized by the Four Species (Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 Chapter 43). In fact, this second Sukkot segment opens with the words, "But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month when you gather the crop of the land (of Israel), you shall celebrate this festival to the Lord."

Hence, there are two identities to the festival of Sukkot. On the one hand, it is a desert festival, alongside Pessah and Shavuot, which celebrates our desert wanderings and survivals while living in flimsy booths. From that perspective, perhaps it ought to have found its place immediately after Pessah in terms of the calendar and certainly before the description of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in the biblical text. However, the second identity of Sukkot, the Four Species, which represent our conquest and inhabitation of our homeland and signal the beginning of redemption, belongs after Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur - the festivals of G-d's kingship over the world and his Divine Temple, which is to be "a house of prayer for all the nations." This aspect of Sukkot turns the sukka into rays of Divine splendor and an expression of the Holy Temple.

So which Sukkot do we celebrate? Both at the very same time! But when we sit in the sukka, are we sitting in transitory booths representative of our wandering or rather in a Divine sanctuary protected by rays of G-d's glory? I think it depends on whether we are celebrating the festival in the Diaspora or in the Land of Israel. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Supervising my somewhat willing helpers in the succah, while hanging our decorative memorabilia collected from our extensive travels all over the world, I quietly reflected to myself about the nature of

this beautiful and happy holiday. Here in Israel the weather is not that much of a factor and only rarely does it play a role in our observance of the commandment of dwelling in a succah for a week. The sun usually shines here and the weather is still quite warm. So, like many other aspects of Jewish life, the Torah apparently meant for the holiday of Succot to be spent and enjoyed in the Holy Land with the special climate and ambience that exists there.

However, the holiday has been celebrated by Jews for most of our history in less than ideal weather and social conditions. I remember the snow on the roof of the succah on bitterly cold days in Chicago and later in Monsey. I also recall the oppressive heat and humidity of Miami Beach where all of our guests were issued towels in order to be able to mop the sweat off of their faces during the meal.

Since the holiday itself represents the ability to live outside of the physical comforts and habitats of ordinary life and to exist in a special spiritual "house of G-dly clouds" Jews overcame all physical impediments in order to properly celebrate and commemorate this glorious and beautiful holiday.

This idea of Succot - of being able to live in the physical and spiritual worlds at one and the same time – truly encompasses the entire viewpoint of the Torah regarding human life and behavior. Most of the year we emphasize the fact that we live in a physical and rational world and conduct our lives accordingly. But even then there is a portion of us that recognizes that we are living in a spiritual and eternal world as well and that our actions influence that unseen and intangible existence.

On the holiday of Succot we actually attempt to live, at least for seven days, in this unseen world, the world that will be our true and eternal home after our "real" world ends. On Succot our real and ordinary world is sublimated to this great "other world". Dwelling in the succah engenders within us the feeling of already participating in the sweetness of "the world to come."

If we deal with the succah as a purely physical project then we will always experience difficulties and perhaps even discomfort. However, if we truly visualize it as being a house of "clouds of glory" then all of the travail and discomfort of not living in our home with our accustomed conveniences will somehow diminish and even disappear.

As I contemplated our succah decorations from all over the world I thought to myself that this is perhaps, in a small way, a representation of the universality of the holiday. Among the other artifacts hanging in our succah is a sheep from New Zealand, a boomerang from Australia, an Asian dancer from Thailand, a flag from Croatia, decorated eggs from the Czech Republic, Navajo pottery from Utah and Colorado, Zulu dancers from South Africa, a wooden elephant from Botswana, a cowbell from Switzerland

and a pinwheel from Canada. We also have a flag from Wales, an Eiffel tower from Paris, a doll from Russia, replicas of Henry VIII from London and of Shakespeare from Stratford-upon-Avon, Indian corn from Illinois, a sombrero from Mexico, a hat from Vietnam, a lamp from Morocco, a trinket from Japan and a few other assorted odds and ends from different parts of the globe that we have been fortunate enough to visit. All of these objects, together with our guests, will enhance our celebration of the holiday of Succot here in Jerusalem.

Additionally, as is the case every year, I know that there will be many thousands of non-Jews who will also make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The words of the prophets of Israel regarding Jerusalem and the holiday of Succot come to life in front of our very eyes. What a privilege it is to live here now and rejoice in G-d's festival and goodness. ©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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The last portion of the Torah reverberates with the image of circles. After all, immediately after its reading, we start the Torah from the beginning again. The circle symbolizes the deep meaning of Simchat Torah. We have, indeed, come full circle.

Not coincidentally we read this portion on Simchat Torah, the holiday when we dance in circles, and lovingly embrace the Torah as we joyously celebrate the cycle of public Torah reading.

Circles have a tremendously deep meaning. First of all, they symbolize love. We encircle those we deeply care for through embrace. In the words of Rav Shlomo Carlebach: "When you love someone very much, you embrace them. Isn't that stupid? To put your hands on their back? I would say put your hands on their face. On their back? But you know what that means? It means I love you so much I won't let you fall. Whenever you're downhearted, whenever you think you have no strength any more, whenever you're falling you can just rely on me. I'll hold you up."

Rav Soloveitchik offers another understanding of circles. He notes that the word teshuvah-repentance, is associated with the turning of the cycle of the year. (2 Samuel 2:1). As one moves further from Rosh Hashanah, one in fact is closer to the next Rosh Hashanah. Similarly, no matter how estranged one may be from G-d, there is the belief that one is approaching the Divine. The same applies to G-d's revelation, the Torah. Even if alienated from Torah study, one possesses the inner calling to reconnect with Torah learning.

Another thought comes to mind. In a circle, everyone is equal as all participants are equi-distant from the center. Unlike Shavuot, which emphasizes pure learning and invariably separates people into categories of the more and less knowledgeable, Simchat Torah is the great equalizer, for regardless of one's level of knowledge, we are all the same, reaching out, clasping the hand of the other, with whom we dance and sing.

No wonder, our portion-which accentuates the circular power of Torah-begins with the word ve-zot. (Deuteronomy 33:1) The first ve-zot in the Torah-and all firsts set the standard-speaks of the blessing Ya'akov (Jacob) gave his sons. There, ve-zot refers to the cycle of life-as Ya'akov implores his sons to follow in his footsteps, and, he asks that he be returned to be buried with his ancestors. (Genesis 49:28, 29)

And when the Torah, wrapped around its circular wooden poles is lifted, we declare-ve-zot ha-Torah-representative of its circular nature. The point is accentuated on Simchat Torah. For it is then that the lifter of the Torah inverts his hands, manifesting the language of circularity-of love, of return, of equality.

May we, on this Simchat Torah, encircle the Torah with endless love, depth, and holiness. © 2007 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

In Hilchos Rosh Chodesh (O"C 417), the Tur quotes his brother, R' Yechiel, who says that each of the Three Festivals (referring to the three biblical holidays besides Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) correspond to one the three Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov. Pesach corresponds to Avraham who served matzos (on Pesach, see B'raishis 18 and Rashi on 19:3); Shavuot corresponds to Yitzchok, since the shofar whose sound was heard when the Torah was given came from the ram that was offered in his place at the Akeidah (see B'reishis 22:13); and Succos corresponds to Yaakov who, upon returning from Charan, built huts for his cattle (B'reishis 33:17).

In Iyun Haparasha (Yerach Ha'eisanim, Succos 6), the question is posed as to the significance of the huts Yaakov built for his animals vis--vis the holiday of Succos. Since matzos are a major part of Pesach, Avraham serving them creates a clear connection between him and that holiday. Since Shavuot is "Z'man Matan Torahseinu," when the Torah was given, using the horn of the ram that was offered instead of Yitzchok to create the sound that contributed to that awesome experience (see Sh'mos 19:16) also connects Yitzchok with that holiday. But does the mere fact that Yaakov built huts for his animals and that we live in huts on

Succos constitute enough of a connection to say that Yaakov corresponds to Succos? (Especially since he built regular houses, not just huts, for himself and his family!) Is there something more than just both having some connection to "huts"?

Several years ago (see pg. 3 of <http://tinyurl.com/q8nqa57>), I discussed why Yaakov called the name of that place "Succos" after the huts he built for the animals, seemingly giving the animals more significance than the people (for whom he also built structures, and more permanent ones at that). I referenced the Malbim (B'reishis 33:17), who says that Yaakov built permanent structures for himself and his family so that they could serve G-d, and temporary structures for the livestock since they were secondary. I suggested that Yaakov purposely took the time to live there (18 months), rather than returning home sooner, so that the family would live under conditions that made it clear to them that cattle-raising was secondary to serving G-d, in order to counter any incorrect impression that his having worked non-stop with cattle for the previous 20 years -- seven each for Rachel and Leah and six more to accumulate his own cattle -- may have been left. After all, the only thing his children knew, for their whole lives, was their father working day and night raising cattle. Therefore, Yaakov spent a year and a half living in a way -- with the animals living in temporary dwellings while they lived in permanent housing -- that would ensure that his family's priorities would be properly aligned before he returned home.

Rejoicing over the successful harvest that G-d has bestowed upon us brings with it a danger that we will put too much emphasis on our material success, at the expense of our spiritual growth. Therefore, right after the summer harvest, we are commanded to leave our comfortable permanent residences and move into temporary structures, reminding us of the temporary nature of this world, that it shouldn't be our primary focus.

With this being one of the themes of the holiday of Succos, Yaakov having built temporary huts for his animals in order to de-emphasize the importance of material success corresponds very nicely. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

Sukkos and the Paradox of Life

by Rabbi Dr. Nathan Lopes Cardozo

When contemplating the festival of Sukkos, we are confronted with a remarkable paradox. As is well known, the Succah visualizes our life span in This World. For what is a Succah? It is a frail structure which we need to dwell in for seven days. Many commentators remind us that these seven days represent man's average life span, which is about

seventy years. This is well stated by King David when he wrote: "The span of his years are seventy and with strength eighty years." (Psalms 90:10) Indeed under favorable circumstances, we may prolong our stay in this world into our eighth day which is symbolized by Shemini Chag Atzeres, (a separate festival immediately following the seven days of Sukkos)

Indeed, how frail our life is! Not only short but also most unreliable. As long as we live under favorable and healthy circumstances, life is a pleasant experience and just like the Succah, it seems to protect us and we feel safe. But once life uncovers serious problems or turns against us, we realize how little protection it is really able to offer and how unstable our lives really are. Like the Succah, it is far less reliable than we had imagined.

Perplexing, however, is the fact that the festival of Sukkos is seen as the highlight of joy and happiness. Speaking specifically about Sukkos, the Torah states: "And you shall be happy on your festival" (Deut. 16-14) This means that we should experience the most exalted form of happiness at a time when we have to dwell in a structure which is far from secure!

In fact, Jewish law makes it utmost clear that the Succah must be built in such a way that it is not able to stand up against a strong wind, that its roof must be leaking when it starts to rain and that it must contain more shadow than sunlight.

These conditions should make us feel distressed since the Succah seems to represent the vulnerability of man. So why command us to be joyful, precisely at the time when one is confronted with all that what can go wrong with life?

Here another question comes to mind. Since the Succah teaches us about life's handicaps, we would expect that Jewish law would also require the interior of the Succah to reflect a similar message. As such, the Succah should be empty of all comfort. It should just contain some broken chairs, an old table and some meager cutlery to eat one's dry bread with.

However Jewish law holds a great surprise. It requires that the Succah's interior should reflect a most optimistic lifestyle. Its frail walls should be decorated with beautiful art, paintings and other decorations. The leaking roof, made from leaves or reeds, should be made to look attractive by hanging colorful fruits down from it. One is required to bring one's best furniture into the Succah, if possible to put a carpet on the ground, have nice curtains hanging in front of its windows. One should eat from the most beautiful plates and use one's best cutlery. Meals should be more elaborate, including delicacies. Singing should accompany those meals. All this seems to reflect a feeling that this world is a most pleasant place made for our enjoyment and recreation!

So why sit in a frail hut simultaneously?

The message could not be clearer: However much the outside walls and the leaking roof reveal

man's vulnerability and uncertainty, inside these walls one needs to make one's life as attractive as possible and enjoy its great benefits and blessings.

This should not be lost on us. Instead of becoming depressed and losing faith because of the ongoing continuation of terrorist attacks in Israel, we should continue to approach life with the optimistic note which is conveyed to us by the beautiful interior of the Succah. True, the ongoing guerrilla attacks on Jews in the land of Israel and the collapse of the Twin Towers in the heart of America and increased terror threats proves how vulnerable modern man really is and how shaken the outer walls of his "Succah" are!

But this should not hold us back from enjoying life as much as possible. To be happy when all is well is of no great significance. But to be fully aware of the dangers which surround us and simultaneously continue our lives with "song and harp" is what makes humans great and proud. Indeed, this has been the power and strength of the Jewish people through the thousands of years. While living under most difficult and even impossible circumstances our forefathers, as an ultimate act of faith, kept on celebrating life.

Jew and gentile should be encouraged to build strong family ties and create, just as in the case of the Succah, strong and pleasant homes. It should inspire people to go to synagogue and church and create strong communities, because these are some of the decorations in our lifelong Succah.

Indeed, the walls of our worldly Succah may be shaking, but let us not forget that we have an obligation to decorate its interior ©2015 Rabbi N. L. Cardozo

RABBI ELIAKIM KOENIGSBERG

TorahWeb

"**B**aSukkos Teishvu Shivas Yamim" (Emor 23:42). Chazal explain (Sukkah 2a) that the Torah is saying, "Leave your diras keva, your permanent dwelling, your home, and live in a diras arai, a temporary dwelling, for seven days." What is the purpose of living in a diras arai for seven days? And why are we commanded to do so specifically at this time of the year?

One answer might be that during Sukkos, the Chag Ha'Asif, which celebrates the new harvest, there is a concern that one might get carried away with his financial success. He might mistakenly perceive that kochi v'otzem yadi asah li es ha'chayil hazeh -- my strength and the power of my own hand made me successful. The Torah, therefore, commands us to leave our comfortable, protective homes and enter into the sukkah, a temporary, flimsy dwelling that is open to the sky, to reinforce the notion that man is constantly dependent on rachamei shamayim -- Divine assistance, to achieve anything in life. Whether we sit in a sukkah to commemorate how Bnei Yisrael in the midbar were protected by the clouds of glory or they sat in actual

huts (Sukkah 11b), the lesson is the same, namely that just as Hashem protected Bnei Yisrael in the midbar, so too He is the one who protects and provides for each one of us.

The Chida (Simchas HaRegel, Sukkos) adds that there is a second important message that living in the diras arai of the sukkah is meant to highlight, and that is that our existence in Olam Hazeh is only temporary, that all the pleasures of the physical world are ephemeral and insignificant. Lasting, eternal pleasure can only be achieved through our involvement in talmud Torah, mitzvos and ma'asim tovim. By commanding us to sit in the sukkah right after the Yamim Noraim, the Torah wants to remind us how important it is to have the proper sense of priorities if we want to follow through on our teshuva resolutions, to effect meaningful change in our lives.

This, writes the Chida, is the idea that Yaakov Avinu tried to convey after his encounter with Esav. The posuk says, "And Yaakov traveled to Sukkos, and he built for himself a home (bayis), and for his cattle he made huts; therefore he called the name of the place Sukkos" (Vayishlach 33:17). Why did he name the place Sukkos? He should have named it "Bayis" after the home he built. The Chida explains that by building huts for his cattle (l'miknei'hu) and naming the place Sukkos, Yaakov Avinu wanted to express the idea that all worldly possessions (mikneh) are only temporary, so they don't deserve to be stored in a permanent structure.

The Chida's comment can shed light on the statement of the Tur (Orach Chaim 417) that the mitzvah of sukkah was given to Bnei Yisrael in the merit of Yaakov Avinu who built sukkos for his cattle. What is the connection between the sukkos of Yaakov Avinu and the mitzvah of sukkah? The answer is that the purpose of living in the diras arai of the sukkah is to help us develop the perspective of Yaakov Avinu that material possessions are insignificant, and that one should focus his attention in this world on spiritual pursuits which have lasting value.

This could also be the reason why we read Koheles on Chol HaMoed Sukkos to remind us how temporary, frustrating and unfulfilling life in this world can be. The only accomplishments which have lasting value are spiritual ones. The bottom line is what Koheles writes in his conclusion, "In the end, when all is considered, fear G-d and keep his mitzvos, for that is the whole purpose of man." The message of Koheles is that to achieve real success in this world, one must have an appreciation of what is primary and what is secondary, what is temporary and what has lasting value.

Rav Shmuel Aharon Yudelevitch, a son-in-law of the famed tzaddik Rav Aryeh Levin zt"l, once suggested (see Me'eelo Shel Shmuel, p. 264) that perhaps this is why Sukkos is called z'man simchaseinu

because the sukkah is a vehicle which can teach us how to be truly happy. The message of the sukkah is that life in this world is ariah -- it is only temporary. All physical pleasure is fleeting. The older a person gets the more he appreciates how the endless pursuit of physical pleasure doesn't really satisfy a person. The only way to achieve real happiness is by connecting oneself to the Ribbono Shel Olam -- by studying His Torah and observing His mitzvos, by focusing on spiritual matters. The yom tov of Sukkos teaches us how to live a more satisfying and meaningful life. It helps keep the fire of the Yamim Noraim burning inside us throughout the winter. It reveals the key to true happiness. ©2015 Rabbi E. Koenigsberg & TorahWeb.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

In Parshat Vezot Habracha, the Torah attests to the fact that "there has never risen a prophet like Moshe" (34:1), to which the Rambam adds that nobody has, or will ever raise themselves to that level, but everyone CAN be like Moshe. Rav Wasserman asks, however, that if the Torah says that no one will ever reach Moshe's level, how can the Rambam claim that anyone CAN?

The Lekach Tov answers that everyone has to accomplish what they can in life using the talents, abilities, and strengths that they were given. The variable that changes is the actual talents, abilities and strengths that we were given. In Moshe's case, he was given strength and wisdom beyond all others, and he used those to the maximum of their potential. It's only the combination of Moshe's gifts and him USING those gifts to their max that made Moshe the best prophet the world has ever seen. The comforting lesson we can glean from this is that although Moshe's combination of strength and wisdom will never be duplicated, the ability to use our talents and strengths is within each of us. The Torah and the Rambam is telling us that although we'll never accomplish all that Moshe accomplished, the potential to be as great is within us, and ready for us to tap. May we all use this Parsha to push ourselves to accomplish our true potential, and rise to the greatness of Moshe in our own ways. ©2015 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Limited

Last week, a friend pointed out to me a very interesting insight. He noted that both the first direct command in the Torah to an individual and the last have a striking similarity. Hashem's last charge in the Torah is the directive to His beloved servant Moshe. Hashem tells him to stand on a mountain and view the Land of Israel. He shows him its beautiful hills, valleys, and fertile plains. Then He says, "you shall not go there."

Similarly, the Torah begins with a very similar scenario. Adam, in the Garden of Eden, is shown the entire Garden of Eden. After he is shown the fruit of all its trees and invited to partake in all its delicious beauty, he is warned. One tree, The Tree of Knowledge, is forbidden.

Can there be a connection between the restrictions placed upon Adam in the Garden and those placed upon Moshe in the final stages of his life? Why does the Torah begin and end with bountiful visions that are bordered by restrictions?

As Rav of the tiny village of Tzitivyan, my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, and his family lived in dire poverty. On his meager wages, the children went hungry and had hardly any clothes to wear. It was no wonder that jubilation filled Reb Yaakov's home upon hearing that he was the preferred candidate for the Rabbinate of Wilkomir, the third-largest Jewish city in Lithuania. He was assured of the position and was told that the K'sav Rabbanus, the Rabbinical contract, would be forthcoming.

After a few weeks of waiting, however, Reb Yaakov was informed that his hopes had been dashed. The position was given to a colleague whose influential family had affected the revised decision. Though the Kamenetzky family was almost in mourning, Reb Yaakov assured them that sometimes no is the best answer. "We may not always understand it at the time, but, there is a clear future even when your hopes and dreams seem to have been destroyed."

The continued dire poverty solidified my grandfather's decision to come to America, where he eventually created a life of Torah leadership.

The town of Wilkomir was decimated by the Nazis, who killed almost all of its inhabitants along with their Rav.

Perhaps the Torah is sending an underlying message through its greatest mortals. Not everything you would like to have is yours for the asking. And not everything that your eyes behold is yours for the taking. This world is confined. You can't have it all. And what you don't take may be a true blessing. On this earth there will always be wants that we will not, can not, and should not obtain.

The Torah is replete with restrictions. They present themselves in what we put in our mouths, what we put in our minds, and what we wear on our bodies. Life must embrace self-control.

Torah Jews are lucky, however. Their sense of "no" is already in the know. By following the clear guidelines of the 365 negative commandments, they are safeguarded and conditioned for many of the difficult responses they face in a very tempting society.

The Torah surrounds its entirety with that message. Moshe on his exit had to hear it, just as Adam did upon his entry. As we just ended a year and begin a new one, it is important for us to hear it as

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RABBI ZVI MILLER

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Moshe was the Father of all Prophets. He, alone, attained the highest level of Divine knowledge. When Moshe's tenure of leadership was complete, HaShem chose Yehoshua bin Nun to be Moshe's successor. It would be reasonable to assume that Yehoshua was selected because he, too, was outstanding in Torah scholarship.

However, there were others in this generation who were superior to Yehoshua in Torah scholarship. If so, what qualifications did HaShem recognize in Yehoshua that merited him with the leadership?

The Torah revealed to Moshe the reason why HaShem chose Yehoshua, "Yehoshua has served you with outstanding devotion and has afforded you much honor. He would always be the first one in morning to greet you and the last one at night to depart from your presence. Each day he would arrange the benches in the study hall, as well as, place fresh tablecloths on the tables. Since he served you with his whole heart, it is fitting that he should serve the People of Israel, as the verse says: 'The one who guards the fig tree shall eat its fruits and the one who guards his master shall be honored.'" (Midrash Raba 12)

Amazingly, the primary criterion for leadership of the Jewish people is not Torah wisdom! Rather, Yehoshua merited leading the Nation of Israel because he devoted himself, on a daily basis, to honor Moshe, his teacher. Additionally, he regularly honored the Torah itself as well as its students.

Yehoshua's love of Torah reflected his heartfelt recognition of Torah's supreme and incomparable preciousness. He expressed his passion for Torah through honoring Moshe Rabenu and his students.

Before Moshe's passing, he transferred his knowledge of Torah to Yehoshua. The love of Torah and its students, that Yehoshua had developed, made him a fitting vessel to receive the Torah.

May our hearts be filled with love of Torah and honor for its students. In turn, HaShem will bless us with Torah wisdom and many opportunities to serve the People of Israel. © 1997 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salant Foundation

