

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**E**ach year, as we near the end of the Mosaic books and Moses' life, I find myself asking: Did it really have to end that way, with Moses denied the chance to even to set foot on the land to which he led the people for forty tempestuous years? In the Heavenly Court, could Justice not have yielded to Mercy for the few days it would have taken Moses to cross the Jordan and see his task fulfilled? And for what was Moses being punished? One moment's anger when he spoke intemperately to the Israelites when they were complaining about the lack of water? Can a leader not be forgiven for one lapse in forty years? In the words of the sages: Is this the Torah and this its reward? (Berakhot 61b)

The scene in which Moses climbs Mount Nebo to see in the distance the land he would never enter is one of the most poignant in all Tanakh. There is a vast midrashic literature that turns Moses' request "Let me cross over to see the good land beyond the Jordan" (Deut. 3:25) into high drama, with Moses mounting argument after argument in his defence only to be met by unbending refusal from Heaven: "Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again". (Deut. 3:26) Why?

This is the man who, eighteen times in Tanakh, is called "God's servant." No one else is so described except Joshua, twice. His own obituary in the Torah reads: "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses" (Deut. 34:10). Why was he treated so seemingly harshly by God among whose attributes are forgiveness and compassion?

Clearly the Torah is telling us something fundamental. What, though, is it? There are many explanations, but I believe the most profound and simplest takes us back to the beginning of beginnings: "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth." There is Heaven and there is Earth, and they are not the same.

In the history of civilisation, one question has proved hardest of all. In the words of Psalm 8: "What is man that you are mindful of him?" What is it to be human? We are an infinitesimal speck in an almost infinite universe of a hundred billion galaxies each with a hundred billion stars. We know that our lives are like a bare microsecond set against the almost-eternity of

the cosmos. We are terrifyingly small. Yet we are also astonishingly great. We dominate the planet. We have ever-increasing control over nature. We are the only life form thus far known capable of asking the question, 'Why?'

Hence the two temptations that have faced Homo sapiens since the beginning: to think of ourselves as smaller than we actually are, or greater than we actually are. How are we to understand the relationship between our mortality and fallibility and the almost-infinities of space and time?

Civilisations have regularly blurred the line between the human and the divine. In myth, the gods behave like humans, arguing, fighting and contending for power, while some humans -- the heroes -- are seen as semi-divine. The Egyptians believed that pharaohs joined the gods after death; some were seen as gods even during their lifetime. The Romans declared Julius Caesar a god after his death. Other religions have believed that God has taken human form.

It has proved exceptionally difficult to avoid worshipping the human founder of a faith. In the modern age, the blurring of boundaries has been democratised. Nietzsche argued that we would have to become like gods to vindicate our dethroning of God Himself. The anthropologist Edmund Leach began his Reith Lectures with the words, "Men have become like gods. Isn't it about time that we understood our divinity?" As Jews we believe that this is too high an estimate of our, or anyone's, humanity.

In the opposite direction humans have been seen, in myth and more recently in science, as next-to-nothing. In King Lear, Shakespeare has Gloucester say, "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." We are the easily discarded playthings of the gods, powerless in the face of forces beyond our control. As I pointed out in an earlier essay, some contemporary scientists have produced secular equivalents of this view. They say: there is nothing qualitatively to distinguish between Homo sapiens and other animals. There is no soul. There is no self. There is no freewill.

Voltaire spoke of humans as "insects devouring one another on a little atom of mud." Stephen Hawking said that "the human race is just a chemical scum on a moderate size planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a billion galaxies." Philosopher John Gray wrote that "human life

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has no more meaning than that of slime mould." In *Homo Deus*, Yuval Harari states that, "Looking back, humanity will turn out to be just a ripple within the cosmic data flow." (*Covenant and Conversation*, Chukkat 5778)

Judaism is humanity's protest against both ideas. We are not gods. And we are not chemical scum. We are dust of the earth, but there is within us the breath of God. What is essential is never to blur the boundary between Heaven and Earth. The Torah speaks only obliquely about this. It tells us that there was a time, prior to the Flood, when "the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were lovely, and they married whomever they chose" (Gen. 6:2. It also tells us that, after the Flood, humans gathered in a plain in Shinar and said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower that reaches heaven, and make a name for ourselves" (Gen. 11:4. Regardless of what these stories mean, what they speak of is a blurring of the line between Heaven and Earth -- "sons of God" behaving like humans and humans aspiring to live among the gods.

When God is God, humans can be human. First, separate, then relate. That is the Jewish way.

For us as Jews, humanity at its highest is still human. We are mortal. We are creatures of flesh and blood. We are born, we grow, we learn, we mature, we make our way in the world. If we are lucky we find love. If we are blessed, we have children. But we also age. The body grows old even if the spirit stays young. We know that this gift of life does not last forever because in this physical universe, nothing lasts forever, not even planets or stars.

For each of us, therefore, there is a river we will not cross, a promised land we will not enter and a destination we will not reach. Even the greatest life is an unfinished symphony. Moses' death on the far side of the Jordan is a consolation for all of us. None of us should feel guilty or frustrated or angry or defeated that there are things we hoped to achieve but did not. That is what it is to be human.

Nor should we be haunted by our mistakes. That, I believe, is why the Torah tells us that Moses sinned. Did it really have to include the episode of the water, the stick, the rock and Moses' anger? It

happened, but did the Torah have to tell us it happened? It passes over thirty-eight of the forty years in the wilderness in silence. It does not report every incident, only those that have a lesson for posterity. Why not, then, pass over this too in silence, sparing Moses' good name? What other religious literature has ever been so candid about the failings of even the greatest of its heroes?

Because that is what it is to be human. Even the greatest human beings made mistakes, failed as often as they succeeded, and had moments of black despair. What made them great was not that they were perfect but that they kept going. They learned from every error, refused to give up hope, and eventually acquired the great gift that only failure can grant, namely humility. They understood that life is about falling a hundred times and getting up again. It is about never losing your ideals even when you know how hard it is to change the world. It's about getting up every morning and walking one more day toward the Promised Land even though you know you may never get there, but knowing also that you helped others get there.

Maimonides writes in his law code that, "Every human being can become righteous like Moses our teacher or wicked like Jeroboam." (*Hilkhot Teshuvah* 5:2) That is an astonishing sentence. There only ever was one Moses. The Torah says so. Yet what Maimonides is saying is clear. Prophetically, there was only one Moses. But morally, the choice lies before us every time we make a decision that will affect the lives of others. That Moses was mortal, that the greatest leader who ever lived did not see his mission completed, that even he was capable of making a mistake, is the most profound gift God could give each of us.

Hence the three great life changing ideas with which the Torah ends. We are mortal; therefore make every day count. We are fallible; therefore learn to grow from each mistake. We will not complete the journey; therefore inspire others to continue what we began. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**W**hat is the true symbolism of the succa? The Talmud (B.T. Sutta 11b) cites a difference of opinion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer as to whether the succa commemorates the actual huts in which the Israelites dwelt in the desert, or the "clouds of glory" which encompassed us as a sign of Divine protection.

Leviticus chapter 23 catalogs all the holy days of the Hebrew calendar, beginning with the Sabbath

and concluding with Succot. The 33rd verse begins a description of Succot: "The 15th day of the seventh month shall be the festival of Succot (Booths), seven days for the Lord; the first day shall be a holy convocation, when you may not perform creative work..."

The text goes on to mention the festival of the Eighth Day of Assembly (Shmini Atzeret), and then seemingly concludes the entire calendar sequence with the words: "These are the special appointed times of the Lord" (23:37).

But just as we thought the description of the festivals was complete, the narrative inexplicably reverts to the festival of Succot. This time, however, the Bible stresses the connection to the Land of Israel, and the agricultural cycle: "But on the 15th day of the seventh month, when you harvest the grain of the land, you shall celebrate a festival to the Lord for seven days, with the first day being a day of rest and the eighth day being a day of rest" (23:39).

Another curious feature of this second account is that having repeated the command to observe Succot in the context of the farmers' request, the Bible now introduces other crucial themes of the festival, including the command to take up four species of plant indigenous to Israel (citron, palm frond, myrtle branch and willow), and rejoice on our holy days, wrapping up its description with a repetition of the command to dwell in booths, this time stressing the historical aspects of the festival: "You shall dwell in booths for seven days, so that your generations shall know that I caused the Israelites to live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God" (23: 42-43).

It seems that the Bible is making a clear distinction between the significance of the Succot Festival before the Israelites entered the Land and the nature of the festival once we were living in Israel. How so?

Outside Israel, the hut-like booths symbolized our temporary dwellings while we wandered across the desert and, by extension, throughout our long exile when we were a people without a homeland. Once we entered the Land of Israel, however and harvested the grain of the land," we could celebrate the harvest with special blessings and rituals involving the four species – vegetation unavailable in the desert. In the Promised Land, the entire festival and even the symbolism of the succah itself assumed a heightened significance. Now, the shabby, makeshift desert huts came to represent the sheltering wings of the Divine Presence, the clouds

of glory with which God protected us so that we'd be able to fulfill our mission as His divine ambassadors. When we are living in the Diaspora, the succa can only teach us to be grateful to the Lord who preserves us under difficult and dangerous conditions; whereas living in Israel, we understand that as the people of God's covenant, no matter how flimsy the walls of our temporary homes may seem, we constantly live under His protective grace, with the borders of our homeland for protection and the food provided by our land for life-giving sustenance.

This essential difference in the significance of the succa prior to our inhabiting the Land of Israel and afterwards could also be seen when we returned to the Land after our Babylonian exile. Then, Ezra exhorted us to dwell in booths during the Festival of the Seventh Month, and to make our booths with "olive leaves and olive branches, with myrtles, psalms and willows" (Nehemiah 8:15). In the Land of Israel, the succa is adorned and enhanced by the local vegetation, the special fragrance of which symbolizes God's shelter and fulfillment of the Divine covenant. Seen in this light, as the Vilna Gaon noted, Succot is the festival which celebrates our entry into the Land of Israel!

God's revelation and gift of forgiveness (initially for the sin of the Golden Calf) took place on the 10th of Tishrei, Yom Kippur. The following day, He commanded the building of the Sanctuary; and the Israelites collected materials for the next two days. Then, on the 15th of Tishrei, the work of building the Sanctuary began, marking the restoration of the relationship between God and the Jews. This is noted by the Ramban, who explains that this is why the Book of Exodus is indeed the Book of Redemption.

"Then the Holy One Blessed be He returned and rested His Divine Presence among them and they returned to the exalted level of the patriarchs, which was the secret of God, with Clouds of Glory upon their tents, and they were considered to be redeemed. And so the Book of Exodus ends with the completion of the Sanctuary and with the Glory of God filling it always." (Ramban – Introduction to Book of Exodus).

Hence the succa in Israel became clouds of divine glory, symbolizing the Sanctuary and the Holy Temple in Jerusalem – which will eventually bring the entire world to peace and redemption. And indeed He has begun the process in our generation, when He brought us home to Israel thereby restoring and uplifting the fallen Succah of David, which has now become – after 2000 years of Exile – clouds of Divine Glory presaging the Third Sanctuary and World peace. (Isaiah 2) ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

Living here in Israel allows one to gain a deeper appreciation of the holidays of the Jewish



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calendar. In their deepest sense, they were all meant to be observed here in Israel. Perhaps that is what our rabbis intended when they cryptically said that the observance of the Commandments of the Torah that the Jewish people have fulfilled and continue to practice in the Diaspora is really a training exercise for their true adherence when the Jewish people return to the land of Israel.

This observation is certainly true regarding the holidays of Israel and is especially true regarding the holiday of Sukkot, that we are about to celebrate. Perhaps no other holiday of the year so symbolizes the attachment of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, as does this holiday of Sukot. It is a combination of the weather at this time of the year and the beauty and abundance of the agricultural products that are used for the observance of the holiday. And, this bounty fills our holiday tables and the Yom Tov menu reflects a spirit of rejuvenation that the population feels long after the hot summer in the days of judgment.

In Israel, leaving one's home to dwell for the week of Sukot in the outside booths that dot the landscape throughout the country is seen as a sign of the concept of redemption of the Jewish soul, reflected in our attachment to our ancient homeland and the gifts of the Lord to the Jewish people.

The Jewish people are in reality the most cosmopolitan group of human beings that the world has ever seen. There is almost no country or area of the world where the Jewish people have not been present or visited. We have been everywhere on this globe and yet despite repeated efforts to make ourselves feel at home wherever we are, there is a gnawing feeling of restlessness that underlies the mansions and seeming security that we have built for ourselves wherever we have dwelled.

From my own personal experience, I can attest that even though I was well settled in my previous places of residence in the United States – for which I am eternally grateful to that great country for allowing the Jews freedom and opportunities never granted to them before in our long history of the exile – I never truly felt at home until I was able to settle here in Jerusalem and in the land of Israel.

I do not mean this short essay to be a rah-rah appeal for immigration to the Jewish state. But, I feel that only here in Israel can a Jew live a truly Jewish life in every facet of meaning that those words may contain. And to me, the holiday of Sukot is the ultimate proof of this statement. Many Jews arrive here to spend the holiday and I notice that the common thread of conversation and feeling regarding this holiday is the attachment that it engenders within them and to the feeling of being at home.

It is somewhat ironic that this feeling of being at home is inspired by a holiday that bids us to leave our homes and live a temporary existence outside of our

usual comforts and conveniences. But I feel that that is in the great message that this holiday of Sukot teaches us. Our comfort zone and feeling of security is not dependent upon the physical dwelling or place in the world where we reside.

Many a mansion and palace are filled with heartbreak, disappointment, strife and dysfunction. If one does not feel happy and secure on the inside, the outside will never provide him or her with that feeling of happiness and security. The rabbis always felt that a shack in Jerusalem was worthier and more protective than a great palace elsewhere.

It is this feeling that has driven millions of Jews to gather here from the four corners of the world to build a renewed and vital Jewish state. Not all of us came here willingly or voluntarily. Almost all of us have the right and ability to leave if we wish. Nevertheless, the level of satisfaction of life and of our existence here in Israel is one of the highest in all the world, much higher than the level of happiness exhibited in other seemingly more prosperous and less dangerous places on the globe. That is the triumph of the message of the holiday of Sukot. ©2018 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

**T**here is a custom each evening of Sukkot, to invite special guests—ushpizin--into the Sukkah. Every evening the patriarchs, matriarchs and their families are welcomed.

Ushpizin sets the tone for the holiday of Sukkot. The Sukkah itself is built outdoors open to the public. And the four species—the lulav and etrog—represent all types of Jews. If any one of the species is missing, the mitzvah is invalid, teaching the critical importance of each and every person.

In a real sense, the ushpizin parallels the paragraph recited at the outset of the Passover Seder, wherein we invite guests to the seder table.

In Jewish history, there were towns that were especially hospitable; some were actually called ushpizin. My father was raised in Oswiecim which the Nazis later transformed into the notorious Auschwitz death camp. He once told me that the Jews referred to the town as Oshpitzim, a Polish corruption of the word ushpizin, in tribute to the well-known hospitality of the Jewish residents to travelers and wayfarers.

We follow this approach by affectionately referring to our synagogue as “The Bayit.” As a bayit, a home is a place of love and welcome, so too does the very name of our synagogue convey our basic credo of endless love and welcome.

Not coincidentally the custom of ushpizin falls just days after the high holidays. Many Jews primarily identify with their Judaism on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And so, immediately after the holidays, we leave the synagogue and build the Sukkah. In a sense we're saying, even if one finds it difficult to come to the synagogue, the synagogue will come to you.

This invitation is meant for all Jews, even the most extreme non-believer even an apikorus, one who rejects fundamental principles of faith. Note, each of the words in the text presented by Rabbi Elazar: "Know what to answer a heretic—Da ma sh-tashiv l'apikorus." (Avot 2:14)

Da, to know, in the biblical sense means to love. In other words, react to the apikorus with love. Ma, of course, means what. When dealing with an apikorus, one ought to listen closely and respectfully to his or her questions and learn from them. Sh as a prefix asks us to pause. Tashiv can be related to the word teshuvah, which from a mystical perspective means to encourage the wrongdoer to return to the inner good that he or she possesses. The prefix Lamed of l'apikorus denotes that one is to have a direct I-thou encounter with the person who has gone astray.

Of course, wisdom and Torah knowledge are crucial in order to respond to an apikorus. Still, the approach should be one of endless love, using persuasive rather than coercive arguments. To those who have challenged a nonjudgmental approach to an apikorus, suggesting that it leads to situation wherein there is neither tzaddik or rasha, I would argue that with regard to one's relationship to God, God must be that judge.

And that should be our approach as we recite the ushpizin. To embrace our people regardless of affiliation, commitment or background; to welcome them in with endless and infinite love. ©2018 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

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## A Hybrid Etrog

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**he Etrog is a very delicate fruit. In order to strengthen it so that it can last a longer time, people created Hybrid Etrogim or they mixed two types of breeds together, in this case the Etrog and the bitter orange, to create a stronger and long lasting fruit. Our sages in general forbade this "Etrog Murkav" for the following reasons:

1. The fruit is not authentic if it is a Hybrid.
2. Even if it is not hybrid it is still a combination of two fruits.
3. Even if we except the reasoning that there is

enough of Etrog in the mix to make it kosher, in an Etrog that is exactly the minimum requirement, this second fruit would minimize the required amount needed for a kosher Etrog.

4. The very essence of the pure Etrog is minimized because of the additional fruit.

5. There are situations that the actual making of a Hybrid fruit would be prohibited therefore creating a situation that The Mitzva of Etrog would be accomplished by transgression.

Those sages who permit a hybrid Etrog offer the following explanations:

1. The Torah never specifically uses the term Etrog but rather the words "A fruit that is beautiful" (Pri Etz Hadar"). Thus they claim a "Etrog Murkav" is also beautiful.

2. The Etrog combined by the two fruits looks exactly like an Etrog.

3. The addition of the additional fruit does not serve to annul the actual authentic Etrog.

4. The hybrid Etrog does not apply to doing a Mitzva even if it is a prohibition with regard to sacrifices.

The question of the hybrid Etrog is indeed complicated and is an interesting subject to delve into during the holiday of Succot. As well, one can find an exhaustive analysis on the subject in the Encyclopedia Talmudit. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

**“F**or [regarding] man, there is no one righteous in the land who will do good and not sin" (Koheles 7:20). The basic message seems to be that no one is perfect, not even the righteous. As the commentators (e.g. Rashi) point out, this verse is a continuation of the previous verse, giving us a reason why wisdom is so important; since no one is perfect, we must constantly review our actions so that we can correct any mistakes made. Nevertheless, the words "who will do good" seem to be superfluous. Wouldn't the message be just as effective if it just said "for no one is without sin" (as Sh'lomo said in his prayer after he built the Temple, see M'lachim I 8:46 and Divray HaYamim II 6:36), or "even the righteous are not without sin"? Why did Koheles/Sh'lomo add the words "who will do good" to his description of the person who will inevitably sin?

That Sh'lomo didn't mention the righteous when the Temple was inaugurated is understandable. After all, he was requesting of G-d that when remorseful sinners come to the Temple they be able to achieve atonement, something that applies to all sinners, not just the righteous. In Koheles, though, his point is that even the righteous are not perfect. The question is why he mentioned that the righteous are trying "to do good" when telling us that even the righteous sin.

It would be difficult to say that "who will do good" is meant as a description of a righteous person (see Metzudas Dovid), as the comma in the verse is after the word "in the land," separating the word "righteous" from the words "who will do good." Besides, if it were a description of what the person did to be considered righteous, it should be in past tense, not future tense.

The Midrash (Koheles Rabbah and Midrash Zuta) asks how the person could be considered righteous if he or she sinned. Even though the Talmud (B'rachos 7a) makes a distinction between a "tzadik gamur," one who is completely righteous, and a "tzadik she'aino gamur," one who is still considered "righteous" despite occasional mistakes, since the point is that no one is perfect (not even the righteous), the verse must be referring to the "completely righteous" as well. The Midrash therefore explains the verse to be referring to those responsible for dispensing charity, since they cannot know exactly how much each person really needs. It is therefore inevitable that they will occasionally give some more than they really need (thereby spending community funds inappropriately) and occasionally give some less than they actually need (leaving the mitzvah of supporting the poor unfulfilled). Although the sin was inadvertent, atonement is still necessary (see Sanhedrin 46b), and wisdom is needed both to minimize the instances of inadvertently sinning and to constantly analyze what was done to correct any mistakes. Taking the Midrash a step further, since it is when the righteous person is trying "to do good" (in this case distributing funds to the needy; the concept applies to other situations of trying "to do good" as well) that the "sinning" occurs -- and the "good" cannot be accomplished without making a determination as to how to accomplish the "good," a determination that necessarily includes the risk of doing it imperfectly -- Koheles/Sh'lomo included "who will do good" in his description of the righteous person who will inevitably sin.

The Sh'la (Taanis, Eulogy for the Death of the Righteous and the Destruction of the Temple 9) discusses how man, being a physical being and therefore incomplete, must "do good" (i.e. the mitzvos) in order to attain completion. It is his incomplete nature

that leads to sin, so his need to "do good," a euphemism for his being deficient, is mentioned as a preface to the inevitability of sin. (Most understand the word "in the land" to be an explanation for the inevitability of sin; the Sh'la is adding another



dimension to it.) In other words, we can't avoid trying to do good if we want to accomplish what we were put in this world to accomplish; not sinning isn't enough, we have to try to "do good" as well. And since it is next to impossible to accomplish anything truly meaningful without taking any risks (as Buck Showalter's father put it, "the sweetest fruit always grows at the end of the limb"), it is inevitable that even the righteous will occasionally make mistakes, albeit inadvertent ones. It is our job not only to take those risks by attempting to "do good," but to be as careful as possible to minimize the amount of mistakes made (and their severity) when taking them. ©2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

## TorahWeb

The celebration of Sukkos is a culmination of several cycles that occur every year. It is the last of the Shalosh Regalim, and Hashem now rests His Divine Presence on us completing the process of Yetzias Mitzrayim and kabbolas haTorah. Sukkos is also referred to in the Torah as the Chag Ha'asif -- the Harvest Festival -- thereby completing the agricultural year that had begun during the previous planting season. We also conclude the month of Tishrei, with its spiritual highs of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, by celebrating Sukkos.

It appears that the agricultural aspect of Sukkos is merely physical in nature, and yet when analyzed more carefully there is a spiritual dimension even to the Harvest Festival. This celebration is closely linked to the post Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur aspect of Sukkos. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva perek 9) elaborates on the relationship between blessing and success in this world and our ultimate reward for mitzvah observance. True reward for performance of mitzvos cannot take place in this world; the benefits of mitzvah observance are spiritual and thus are only appropriate in the spiritual setting of the next world. If so, why does the Torah elaborate upon physical things such as bountiful harvests as a reward for mitzvah performance? The Rambam explains that the promises are not as a reward but rather a mechanism to further mitzvah observance. We cannot serve Hashem properly without the physical blessings bestowed on us. These blessings are only significant as they enable us to continue in our performance of mitzvos.

Based on this Rambam, we can understand an otherwise strange tefillah recited by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. After experiencing the most intense spiritual encounter with Hashem, as he leaves the Kodosh Hakodoshim, the Kohen Gadol offers a fervent prayer. We would have expected this prayer to be spiritual in nature, and yet he prays for seemingly very materialistic blessings. Requests for bountiful crops and economic prosperity seem out of touch with the spiritual dimension of the day. However, if we understand the

role of physical blessing as the enabler for future spiritual success, this prayer fits perfectly into the tone of the day.

The celebration of Sukkos as the Harvest Festival is not just about physical produce. By marking the bountiful harvest on the heels of the Yomin Noraim we are confirming our belief as to why Hashem grants us these seemingly materialistic blessings: our harvest is only meaningful if it furthers the spiritual goals attained during the weeks preceding Sukkos.

Today, most of us are not directly involved in the world of agriculture and it is difficult for us to relate to the notion of a Harvest Festival. Yet, the message of the role of physical bounty in the service of the spiritual is as true today as it was for our forefathers. As we celebrate Sukkos and express our thanks to Hashem for our bountiful physical "harvest," let us focus on its true worth as a way of enabling us to attain the spiritual "harvest" of Torah and mitzvos. With this mindset, the celebration of Sukkos is truly fitting as the culmination of the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur experience.  
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#### **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.

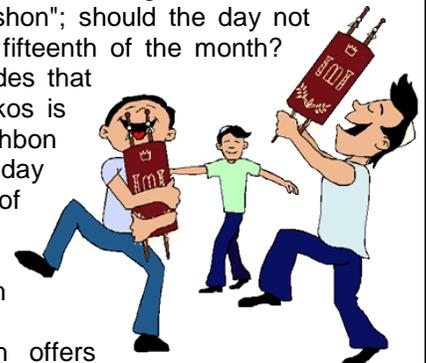
The Torah surrounds its entirety with that message. Moshe on his exit had to hear it, just as Adam did upon his entry. As we just ended a year and begin a new one, it is important for us to hear it as well. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

#### **RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

### **A Fresh Start**

"You shall take for yourselves on the first day..." (23:40) The Tur records a custom among Ashkenazim to fast on the eve of Rosh Hashana. (Orech Chaim #582) As the source for this custom, he cites a Midrash which questions why the Torah identifies the time for taking the lulav as "the first day" -- "bayom harishon"; should the day not be identified as the fifteenth of the month? The Midrash concludes that the first day of Sukkos is "rishon l'cheshbon avonos" -- "the first day for the accounting of our sins" and therefore Sukkos is identified as "yom harishon".

The Midrash offers



the following parable: There was once a city that owed the king a large sum of money in taxes. As a result of the residents' failure to pay, the king marched against the city with an armed garrison. Prior to reaching the city, a delegation consisting of the elders of the community was sent to appease the king. After meeting with the delegation the king discharged one-third of the debt, but still continued to advance. Fearing for their safety, the city sent a second delegation comprised of common-folk to meet with the king. They succeeded in convincing him to discharge another one-third of the debt. However, the king continued to advance towards the city. Finally, all of the residents of the city emerged from their homes to beseech the king, who had already reached the city gates, to deal with them kindly. Moved by this display, the king discharged the remaining one-third of the debt. Similarly, the Jewish people amass a large number of sins throughout the year. On the eve of Rosh Hashana the men of distinction fast and Hashem absolves the nation of one-third of their sins. During the "aseres y'mei teshuva" -- "ten days of repentance", another one-third of the sins are absolved. The entire nation fasts on Yom Kippur, absolving them of their remaining transgressions. With the onset of Sukkos a new account of sins for the year begins.

Why is Sukkos, rather than the day immediately following Yom Kippur identified as the "first day for the new accounting"? Furthermore, Sukkos appears to play no part in Bnei Yisroel's atonement. Why does the Midrash use this parable to extol the virtue of Sukkos?

The Beis Yoseif asks why the fast on the eve of Rosh Hashana appears to have the same efficacy as the fast of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, each one discharging one-third of the sins. (Ibid)

The Bach notes that there are three chapters concerning aspects of Sukkos recorded in the Torah, sitting in the Sukkah, bringing the festive offerings and finally, taking the four species. Why does the Torah specifically choose the four species to relate the message that Sukkos is the "first day for the new accounting"?

In English common law a person who defaulted on a debt was subject to incarceration. However, in the modern era almost every civilized society has bankruptcy laws which allow a person to discharge debts that he is unable to repay by declaring bankruptcy, protecting him from his creditors. What is the logic behind the institution of bankruptcy? Why would society allow a person to sidestep accountability for his actions?

A person who is mired in debt, unable to extricate himself from his predicament, eventually ceases to be a productive member of society and becomes a liability. By allowing this person to discharge his debt either partially or completely, we are enabling him to stand on his own two feet, once again contributing as a productive member of society. Great

care must be taken however, to ensure that this institution is not abused. The potential danger of a person using bankruptcy as a crutch to protect him from his own negligence and irresponsible behavior always exists.

It is a mistake to think that Hashem forgives us only because of His great benevolence. What we must realize is that His absolution is not a crutch upon which we can continuously rely, to discharge our irresponsible behavior. Rather, we are given a respite so that we can become, once again, functioning members of society, earning our keep, unburdened by our great number of transgressions. If we fail to view atonement in this manner, instead of being a tool which allows us to become responsible for our actions, it will have the opposite effect. Atonement becomes a crutch which breeds irresponsibility.

If a person is responsible for at least a portion of his debts, the danger of bankruptcy being used to encourage irresponsible behavior is smaller than if the entire debt were discharged. Therefore, although Yom Kippur discharges the same amount of sin as Rosh Hashana eve, there exists a great difference between the two absolutions. After Rosh Hashana a person is still responsible for a portion of his sins. On Yom Kippur, when complete absolution occurs, the danger of misusing atonement is greater, and only a day such as Yom Kippur can afford such a service to the Jewish people.

For atonement to be complete it must be accompanied by a commitment to begin paying our debts and accepting responsibility for our actions. Sukkos is the time when new responsibilities are placed upon us and therefore serves as the litmus test for the veracity of our commitment. Consequently, Sukkos is identified as "the first day for the accounting of our sins".

The Ran cites the Yerushalmi which disqualifies a dried-out lulav based upon the verse "lo hameisim yehallelu kah" -- "the dead cannot praise Hashem". (Sukkah 29b) The lulav is a symbol of freshness and vitality, reflecting the new lease on life that we have gained following Yom Kippur. We therefore use the lulav as the tool to praise Hashem for His beneficence. The Torah most appropriately delivers the message concerning the beginning of a new accounting in the chapter of the four species which symbolize this concept. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Zweig and torah.org

