

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### A Breath of Life

There are times when an ancient text seems to speak more directly to where we are now than to the time when it was first written. Rarely has that been truer than in the case of the famous first comment of Rashi to the Torah, to the words: "In the beginning, G-d created..." Let us listen to it in its entirety: "Rabbi Isaac said: The Torah should have begun with the verse, 'This month shall be to you the first of months' (Exodus 12:2) which was the first commandment given to Israel. Why then did it begin with, 'In the beginning'? It began thus because it wished to convey the idea contained in the verse (Psalm 111:6), 'The power of his acts He told to his people, in order to give them the estate of the nations.' So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, 'You are robbers because you took by force the land of the seven nations,' Israel might reply to them, 'The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He created it and gave it to them, and by His will He took it from them and gave it to us.'"

Rashi might have been speaking directly to us in 5771/2010, in an age of anti-Zionism, boycotts, sanctions and divestments against Israel, and even a growing questioning of the State's right to exist.

Rashi (1040-1105) lived in Troyes, Northern France, at a time when the position of Jews under Christian rule was beginning seriously to worsen. He lived through the most traumatic event of that period, the massacre of Jewish communities in the Lorraine at the beginning of the First Crusade in 1096. Jews in his day were persecuted and powerless. They had no realistic hope of imminent return to the land.

As to the logic of Rabbi Isaac's interpretation, it seems strained. Why did the Torah begin with creation? Because that is a fundamental of Jewish faith. Rabbi Isaac seems to be arguing that since the Torah is primarily a book of commandments, it should begin with the first command—at least the first given to the Israelites as a collective entity. But clearly not everything in the Torah is command. Much of it is narrative. So Rabbi Isaac's question is odd.

So too is his answer. Why relate creation to a challenge to the Israelites—right to the land? Why, if Rabbi Isaac's interest is solely in commandments, not give the obvious halakhic answer: the story of creation

is told to explain the command to keep Shabbat. It is all highly perplexing.

In fact, however, Rabbi Isaac is making a very cogent point indeed. Some years ago a secular scholar, David Clines, wrote a book entitled *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. His conclusion was that the single overarching theme of the Five Books of Moses is the promise of the land. That is surely the case. There are sub-themes, but this dominates all others. Seven times in Bereishit G-d promises the land to Abraham, once to Isaac, and three times to Jacob. The rest of the Mosaic books, from the beginning of Exodus when Moses hears about "the land flowing with milk and honey," to the end of Deuteronomy, when he sees it from afar, is about Israel, the destination of the Jewish journey.

There is a fundamental rule of literary form. Chekhov said: if there is a gun on stage in the first act of a play, it must be part of the plot or it should not be there at all. If the central theme of the Mosaic books is the promise of the land, the beginning must in some way be related to it. Hence Rabbi Isaac's point: the creation narrative must have to do with the land of Israel. What could this be if not to signal that the promise in virtue of which the Jewish people holds title to the land comes from the highest conceivable source, the sovereign of the universe, the Author of all.

No sooner have we said this than an obvious question arises. Why should a religion be tied to a land? It sounds absurd, especially in the context of monotheism. Surely the God of everywhere can be served anywhere.

Here too Rabbi Isaac steers us in the right direction. He reminds us of the first commandment given to the Israelites as a people, as they were about to leave Egypt.

Judaism is not primarily about personal salvation, the relationship between the individual and G-d in the inner recesses of the soul. It is about collective redemption, about what it is to create a society that is the opposite of Egypt, where the strong enslave the weak. The Torah is the architectonic of a society in which my freedom is not purchased at the cost of yours, in which justice rules and each individual is recognized as bearing the image of G-d. It is about the truths Thomas Jefferson called self evident, "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights." It is about what John F Kennedy meant when he spoke of "the

belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d."

We are social animals. Therefore we find G-d in society. That is what we discover when we reflect on the basic structure of the Torah's many commands. They include laws about the administration of justice, the conduct of war, ownership of land, employer-employee relationships, the welfare of the poor, the periodic cancellation of debts, in short, an entire legislative structure for the creation of what Rav Aaron Lichtenstein called societal beatitude.

Laws shape a society, and a society needs space. A sacred society needs sacred space, a holy land. Hence Jews and Judaism need their own land.

In four thousand years, for much of which Jews lived in exile, the people of the covenant were scattered over the face of the earth. There is no land in which Jews have never lived. Yet in all those centuries, there was only one land where they were able to do what almost every other nation takes for granted: create their own society in accordance with their own beliefs.

The premise of the Torah is that G-d must be found somewhere in particular if He is to be found everywhere in general. Just as, in the creation narrative, Shabbat is holy time, so in the Torah as a whole, Israel is holy space. That is why, in Judaism, religion is tied to a land, and a land is linked to a religion.

But now we come to the most perplexing part of Rabbi Isaac's comment. Recall what he said: Should anyone call into question the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel, the Jewish people can reply, "G-d created the universe. He divided earth into many lands, languages and landscapes. But one small land He gave to the Jewish people. That is our title to the land."

How on earth could Rabbi Isaac think of this as a compelling answer? Almost inevitably, someone who challenges the Jewish people's right to the land of Israel will not believe in the G-d of Israel. So how will a reference to Israel's God make Israel's case?

Ironically, we know the answer to that question. Today the overwhelming majority of those who challenge Israel's right to exist believe in Israel's G-d, that is to say, the G-d of Abraham. They belong to the large family of faith known as the Abrahamic monotheisms. To them, we must humbly say: when it comes to political conflict, let us search for a political solution. Let us work together in pursuit of peace. But when it comes to religion, let us not forget that without Judaism, there would be no Christianity and no Islam. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism never sought to convert the world and never created an empire. All it sought was one tiny land, promised to the children of Israel by the creator of the universe, in whom Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe.

Sadly, Rabbi Isaac was right, and Rashi was right to quote him at the beginning of his Torah

commentary. The Jewish people would be challenged on its right to the land, by people who claimed to worship the same G-d. That same G-d summons us today to the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of human life, and the imperative of peace. And that same G-d tells us that in a world of 82 Christian nations and 56 Muslim ones, there is room for one small Jewish state. ©2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and [torah.org](http://torah.org)

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"And no human knows of [Moses'] burial place even to this day." (Deut. 34:6) Amid the great joy of Shemini Atzeret-Simḥat Torah, emanating from the biblical commandment "and you shall thoroughly rejoice" (Deut. 16:15), a curious dialectic between celebration and solemnity nevertheless exists. This is palpable especially in Israel, when the dancing and festive readings from the end of Deuteronomy and beginning of Genesis are followed shortly thereafter by the recitation of the Yizkor memorial prayers.

Perhaps the duality of the day stems from the fact that we conclude Deuteronomy with the death of Moses, about whom the Bible testifies: "And there has not arisen a prophet again in Israel similar to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). From the perspective of Moses' death, the fundamental joy of Simḥat Torah appears somewhat of an anomaly. How can a day on which we read of this great loss also serve as one of the most festive days of the Jewish calendar year?

I believe the answer is to be found in the verse, "and no human knows of [Moses'] burial place even to this day" (Deut. 34:6). Many explain correctly that this has prevented the creation of a Mosaic shrine and a cult of Moses worship. I would like to add to this an additional understanding, based on the following vignette – which I heard from one of my mentors, Rabbi Moshe Besdin – that sheds profound light on the reason why the greatest of our prophets is denied a known gravesite.

A small impoverished town in Poland, with a limited number of Jewish families who were all very pious but ignorant of the holy texts, was in need of a rabbi. The parnass (community leader) was dispatched to the famous Volozhin Yeshiva to search for a candidate, but after being turned down by the most promising students, he became desperate. He finally approached a serious but other-worldly student with the bold request: "Come to be our town rabbi. We are a famous town: Rabbi Akiva, the Rambam and the Vilna Gaon are all buried in our community." The student, adept at Talmud but ignorant of Jewish history, imagined that a town with a history of such illustrious scholarly leadership must still have at least a quorum of Torah scholars; He thanked God for his good fortune

and immediately left with the parnass.

After a few weeks it became clear that no-one in town possessed even rudimentary Torah knowledge. The devastated young rabbi asked the parnass to take him to the cemetery. "At least I can contemplate your former glory at the gravesites of Rabbi Akiva, the Rambam, and Vilna Gaon!"

"You didn't understand me," responded the parnass. "In Volozhin, the students cited these great rabbis, and debated their legal arguments and discussions, as if they were walking among them. Rabbi Akiva argues, the Rambam decides, the Vilna Gaon rules. In your yeshiva, they are truly alive. In our town, no one has ever heard of what they wrote. In our town, they are dead and buried."

When the Torah tells us that no one knows of the location of Moses' gravesite, it is because for the Jewish people, Moses never died. We publicly read and privately contemplate his teachings on a daily basis. The greatest proof of his continuing presence in our lives is the fact that we conclude his Divine revelation only to immediately begin to read his words once again as we start the biblical cycle anew.

Therefore, on Simchat Torah, the day on which we read of Moses' physical passing, we should wholeheartedly rejoice in the eternity of his teachings, emblemized by one of the signature songs of Simchat Torah: "Moshe emet, v'Torato emet!" – "Moses is truth, and his Torah is truth!"

We can similarly understand the seemingly incongruous tradition of reciting the memorial Yizkor prayers on festivals. But in fact, the practice perfectly captures the essence of the day. In those precious moments quietly reflecting on our deceased loved ones, we are offered a unique opportunity to consider the ways in which their qualities and love of Judaism continue to impact us. Indeed, there are few sources of more profound happiness than the realization that our loved ones live on through us, our children, and our descendants. They live on – and so are not gone and buried – just as Moshe Rabbenu lives on, and is not buried and covered over as long as we still read and learn his Torah! ©2020 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

"**Y**our going away is hard for Me..." (Rashi on Bamidbar 29:36 quoting Midrash) Regarding Shmini Atzeres, this famous Midrash is often quoted to show that Klal Yisrael is special to Hashem. The parable (similar to Sukkah 55b) is that when a King throws a party for many people, at the end he asks his sons to remain behind for another day as it is difficult to take leave of them. So, too, when all the nations of the world come to the Bais HaMikdash for Sukkos, though they are also G-d's children, the Jews have a special

relationship with Him and He asks us to remain for an extra day.

While the Gemara speaks of the King reaching out to one beloved person, the Midrash Rashi quotes says that the Kings asks his children to remain as their separation is difficult. An important aspect of this message is that He doesn't choose a specific son. Rather, He makes this request of everyone, because Hashem loves all the people of Klal Yisrael and doesn't favor any of them over the others. We all need to be present to make our Father happy.

This leads us to a deeper facet of this concept, which I heard recently from R' Yitzchak Botton. He points out that the word 'praidaschem' does not only mean 'your leaving,' but also 'the separation between you.' In other words, Hashem tells us, "It is hard for Me to see you divided!"

Ask any parent how they feel when their children fight and they will tell you it tears them up inside. When we fight, Hashem doesn't favor one or a group of us and say, "atta boy!" Rather, it causes Him pain when we are divisive.

This past year of COVID has driven numerous wedges between our people. We must recognize that Hashem loves us all and wants us to remain with Him – together, as a unified, loving family.

R' Moshe Leib Sassover z"l related that he learned about love from a conversation he overheard. Two drunken peasants sat in a bar. "Do you love me, Ivan?" one asked. "Gregor, I love you like my brother, like my own self! Yes, I love you," replied his friend.

"If you love me so much, will you take care of my needs?" Gregor asked. "Of course," replied Ivan, "just tell me what you want and I will make it so. Tell me what hurts and I will fix it."

"Ah, Ivan, you do not truly love me, for if you did, you would not have to ask me what I need, or what hurts me - you would know!"



"This is the blessing that Moshe blessed the Jewish People before his death." (Deut.33:1) Obviously, Moshe gave this final blessing before he died, for he would not have called out from beyond the grave to bless them. Why then does the Torah include these words?

Rashi comments, "Close to his death; for if not now, when?" We know that Moshe chose to bless the Jews in his final moments just as Yaakov Avinu did. However, there, we know that he waited until he was about to die so he could speak to the children critically if necessary, without them having to face him later and feel embarrassed. If so, why doesn't Rashi say that here? Why does Rashi use the phrase we all know from Hillel in Pirkei Avos, "Im lo achshav, aimasai – If not now,



when?" That's not the same as Yaakov.

The truth is, it does work according to Yaakov's logic. There was not an opportunity for Moshe to offer his final words to the Jews until now for they could not be heeded earlier, just as Yaakov had to wait for the moment. More than that, however, part of the bracha that Moshe wanted to share with the Jews was the secret of "If not now, when." We do not know when we will die, so every moment should be considered "close to our death." If we think we have plenty of time, we will not maximize our lives. Therefore, close to his death, Moshe taught us, "Don't wait."

Do things as soon as you get the chance. If we see the ticking clock hanging over our heads, we will hurry to achieve as much as possible, and live blessed lives every single moment. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

It is interesting that our great leader and teacher Moshe followed the lead of our father Jacob when it came to blessing the Jewish people before he left the world. The blessings that Moshe bestowed were individual and particular. Each tribe was given its own blessing and its mission.

Every human being is different, and even the greatest amongst us who, on the surface, appears similar, nevertheless, is never identical. One of the great tragedies in human life is when one person feels himself or herself to be a square peg in a round hole - ill fitted for the life one is leading and for the profession or work one is pursuing

Most of us, unfortunately, make some sort of peace with such a situation, and suffer the consequences throughout our productive lives. There are rare individuals who can change course in the midstream of life itself, and pursue their natural abilities and true vision, despite all the obstacles that undoubtedly present themselves.

The import of the blessing of Moshe to the Jewish people, is that each of the tribes, as well as the individuals who make up those tribes, should be true unto themselves. They should accept and follow their mission, both national and personal, that the Lord set out for them by their genetic traits and personal God-given talents. Conformity stifles all creativity, and without creativity there can never be progress in human affairs, whether spiritual or physical.

Moshe loves the Jewish people. He has proven his love for them repeatedly during his 40 years as their leader and mentor. This final Torah reading is his last and perhaps most soaring expression of love for his people. A lesser person would, perhaps, feel pains of remorse and even revenge for the treatment he received during his 40-year career as the leader of the people. He would be justified in feeling unappreciated,

and that he, somehow, never received recognition from those that he served so loyally and skillfully for so many decades.

However, that would not conform to the character trait of Moshe, who is the greatest of all human beings. It is about him that the Torah testifies to his natural human ego, i.e. that there never arose such a prophet within the Jewish people before him nor will there arise another one after him. In his great vision of prophecy, Moshe identifies the talents and mission of each of the varying tribes of Israel, and properly assigns to them their appropriate role in building a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. By so doing, he is fulfilling his final and perhaps greatest act of love for his people, by allowing for the diversity and creativity of human beings to function and build a greater and holy society. ©2020 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**

Sukkot is the only festival referred to as Zman Simchateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy.

The Torah, in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing 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 simchateinu, the time of true joy.  
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#### **RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**T**his Friday evening, October 9th, begins Shemini Atzeret, followed by Simchat Torah on the following night. In Israel, Simchat Torah is observed concurrently with Shemini Atzeret since they celebrate only one day of Yom Tov (holiday). However, outside of Israel we celebrate two days of Yom Tov -- and they are celebrated on separate days.

Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah is actually a separate festival which happens to be adjacent to Sukkot, a fact which is lost on many -- including myself at one point. Many decades ago, I took a walk on the golf course near my home. Midway through my walk I was called over by one of the elderly groundskeepers who hopped off his riding mower to come over and talk to me.

I was pretty sure he was going to scold me for walking on the golf course (pedestrians on the paved pathways of the course were not welcome), but as it turned out he was just a little bored and wanted to chat. Seeing that I was an Orthodox Jew, he mentioned to me that he had worked in a synagogue for thirty-five years. At this point I was beginning to get a little bored myself, but what he said next intrigued me:

"I bet that I know more of the Jewish holidays than you do!" I smiled smugly as I thought to myself, "What a fool. There is NO WAY he could possibly know more Jewish holidays than me."

Seeing my self-assured smile he challenged me: "Go ahead -- name the holidays you know."

Barely able to keep my eyes from rolling (I was seventeen after all) I began, "Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot..." "Go on" he said to me. I continued "Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur..." He urged me further, "Keep going." I then went on to mention the rabbinic holidays of Chanukah and Purim. "Still missing one!" I looked at him blankly, "Tu B'shvat?"

"No!" he said triumphantly. "YOU FORGOT SIMCHAT TORAH!" I looked at him in complete shock -- he was absolutely right! Simchat Torah is not part of the Sukkot holiday, a fact that had completely slipped my mind.

I learned two very valuable lessons that day: 1) Never be overconfident in what you think you know, and even more importantly 2) Never underestimate what someone else can teach you -- even if your teacher appears to you in the disheveled torn clothes of a groundskeeper.

Simchat Torah is a day when we celebrate our relationship with the Torah. In non-pandemic times, everyone attends the synagogue and there is much merriment: All are encouraged to be called up to the Torah -- even young children! Attendees to the celebration in the synagogue literally dance circles around the synagogue -- this is known as HaKafot.

Everyone has an opportunity to dance with the Torah and many synagogues break out the booze during the festivities. Which reminds me of the following story:

In a certain small shtetl in Poland, Simchas Torah was celebrated in a legendary manner that included liberal amounts of drinks all around. One year the rabbi's wife finally had enough; she prohibited the rabbi from imbibing on the holiday and she made sure that all of the rabbi's adherents were aware of her disallowance.

What were the rabbi's followers to do? They earnestly wanted their rabbi to inspire them with some meaningful message on Simchat Torah and a little "schnapps" always seemed to help him open up and deliver an inspiring sermon. But the rabbi's wife was watching them with eagle-eyed alertness.

Zalmy, the rabbi's shamash (sexton) had an idea; he went outside and poured 6 oz of very strong schnapps into 8 oz of milk. He went back in to the synagogue and handed the rabbi what appeared to be a large glass of milk. The rabbi's wife nodded approvingly.

The rabbi drank it down and his eyes opened very widely. He called over his shamash and asked him to lean down so that he could tell him something. The shamash bent over, eagerly awaiting to hear the rabbi's pearls of wisdom. The rabbi whispered earnestly in his ear;

"Zalmy -- whatever you do, don't sell that cow!"

All kidding aside, Simchat Torah is an extremely important holiday; it is the day that we celebrate the Torah and our connection to it.

On Simchat Torah every synagogue in the world completes the yearly cycle of the weekly Torah reading and promptly begins the next cycle. We read the last Torah portion in Deuteronomy, Vezot Habracha, and then begin immediately with Bereishit, starting the book of Genesis. Thus, Simchat Torah is a celebration of both completing the Torah and starting it again!

The evening and again the next morning are filled with dancing and songs rejoicing in the Torah and thanking God for the Torah and the opportunity of being Jewish! If you take your kids to synagogue twice a year -- one time should be Simchat Torah!

One may wonder, why did our sages see fit to designate a separate day for Simchat Torah? Would not Shavuot, the day we received the Torah, be a more appropriate time for this celebration?

The Talmud instructs a father that as soon as his child is able to speak, he should teach him, "The Torah that Moses commanded us is a heritage to the Congregation of Jacob." Why is this the verse selected when there are earlier verses in the Torah that convey a similar message (e.g. "This is the Torah that Moses placed before Children of Israel...")?

To address these two questions I will (very) briefly explain the difference between Shavuot and Simchat Torah. Shavuot is the day that we became betrothed to the Almighty, as it were, and we received the Ten Commandments as a sign of that commitment. This is why the sin of the Golden Calf was so bitterly painful; we had strayed and betrayed our "marital" commitment to the Almighty. This is also why Moses shattered the original tablets when he discovered our infidelity.

As previously mentioned, on Simchat Torah we read the final portion in the Torah known as Vezot Habracha. It begins with the blessings that Moses gives to the Jewish people and each tribe right before he dies. Then Moses ascends Mt. Nebo where the Almighty shows him all of the land the Jewish people are about to inherit. He dies, is buried in the valley in an unknown spot, and the Jewish people mourn for 30 days.

The Torah then concludes with the words, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Almighty had known face to face..."

As long as Moses was alive we had a living connection to the Almighty; someone who could speak directly to Him. If there was ever a question of law Moses simply asked God for clarification. Once Moses died there was no longer a direct link to the Almighty and we, the Jewish people became the final arbiters of the Torah and what it requires of us.

In other words, on Simchat Torah we celebrate

the betrothal of the Torah to the Jewish people (as opposed to Shavuot, when we were betrothed to the Almighty). This is why many of the customs like Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereishit are referred to in that manner (chatan referring to a groom). It really is a marriage celebration!

According to our sages this is hinted to in the verse; "The Torah that Moses commanded us is a heritage to the Congregation of Jacob." The Hebrew word for heritage is *morasha*; the sages teach us that word can be read as *m'orasa* -- which means betrothed. Once Moses dies the Jewish people have an eternal bond of betrothal to the Torah by being the final arbiters of what it means and requires of us. This truly is something special to celebrate!

Yizkor, the memorial service for parents and relatives -- and Jews who have been killed because they were Jewish or in defending the Jewish people and Israel -- is said on Shabbat morning, October 10th. A 24-hour memorial candle (or *yahrzeit* candle) should be lit on Friday night before sundown. If you are unable to attend synagogue and would like someone to recite the Yizkor service for you, please go to [getkaddish.com/Yizkor.com/Yizkor/](http://getkaddish.com/Yizkor.com/Yizkor/). ©2020 Rabbi Y. Zweig & torah.org

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Yosef's Special Blessing

**M**oshe's final act as the leader of the B'nei Yisrael was to bless each tribe, much as we saw Ya'akov do before he died. Our Rabbis tell us that the blessings of Moshe parallel those of Ya'akov. In one sense this is a validation of those original blessings, but it can be understood as a reaffirmation of Ya'akov's view of each tribe which proved to be very accurate even after the generations that were slaves in Egypt and the generation that passed in the wilderness. It is also interesting to note the beauty of the poetic form of these blessings which lends a layer of understanding that would not be possible in a different, less poetic form.

Moshe blesses each tribe with a view to its future and that special part that it will play in the Jewish people. Some of the blessings appear to be done with a flourish while others receive very few words. The longest blessing was given to Yosef: "Blessed by Hashem is his land, with the delicacies of the heavens, with dew; and with the deep waters crouching below. And with the delicacies of the sun's crops; and with the delicacies of the moon's yield. And with the beginning of the early mountains; and with the delicacies of eternal hills. And with the delicacies of the land and its fulness; and by the goodwill of Him Who rests in the thornbush; may it come to Yosef's head and to the crown of the head of the withdrawn one of his brothers. A firstborn, his ox, glory unto him, and the horns of the re'eim are his horns; with them shall he gore peoples

together, the ends of the earth; they are the myriads of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Menasheh."

Several questions arise from this blessing. We have already spoken of the parallel ideas of these blessings to the ones that Ya'akov issued, but there is a striking difference. The order of the sons, and therefore the tribes, is an order which is not found anywhere else in the Torah. Yosef's blessing occurs after the blessing given to his younger brother, Binyamin. It appears that Binyamin was placed next to Yehudah because these two tribes would share the area of the Temple Mount and Jerusalem. Still, Yosef's blessing precedes those of other sons of Leah even though they would normally be mentioned before his tribe, as we saw with Ya'akov's blessings. (Interestingly enough there is no blessing given to the tribe of Shimon. The Ramban attributes this to the small numbers of the tribe which was decimated in a plague, and also that Shimon and Levi were cursed for their actions, though Levi was reinstated after the Golden Calf.)

The term which appears throughout Yosef's blessing is "delicacies, meged". Rashi tells us that this word means sweets. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that there was no land in any of the tribes that was filled with all of the blessings given to the Land of Israel except in Yosef's portion. It is not only that each of those blessings was found in Yosef's portion, but even the quality of each blessing was greater. This was accomplished in an unusual way. We know that Yosef did not receive a portion under his own name, but his sons, Ephraim and Menasheh, each receive a portion. In fact, Yosef received three portions as Menasheh, Yosef's firstborn, was divided into two groups so that half could dwell across the Jordan River with Reuven and Gad. Some of Yosef's portion was in the mountains, others around plains, and still others around bodies of water. His lands were filled with produce that would ripen throughout the year and supply the tribe with plentiful food and money. HaRav Sorotzkin explains "the moon's yield" is to indicate that, just as the moon waxes and wanes each month, so each new month would ripen a different fruit or vegetable that would supply the tribe with its needs. Others explain this as a reference to what is known today as nightshade vegetation, crops which benefit and ripen because of the moon rather than the sun. Thus, Yosef was blessed with vegetation which benefitted from the mountains and their closeness to the sun, enabling their crops to ripen earlier than in other locales, and vegetation that benefitted more from the moon and provided a continuous abundance of food for his tribe.

Yosef is described here as an ox with the horns of a re'im. The Ramban tells us that the ox is strong but its horns are not pretty. The re'im has beautiful horns, but it is not strong. Yosef was given the combination of strength and beauty. HaRav Sorotzkin

explains that Yosef had the strength to attack his brothers and make them bow to his leadership. He might have been justified in this action because of the dreams which said that his brothers would bow to him. In spite of the fact that the brothers had mistreated him and sold him into slavery, Yosef used his power to help his brothers and to fight against their enemies. Yosef not only fed them in Egypt but helped to defeat their enemies when they returned to the Land.

The Ohr HaChaim and the Kli Yakar ask why Yosef is singled out for such a blessing, that his land would contain all of the blessings given to the brothers as well as the best quality of those blessings. There is a concept in Jewish law known as "midah k'neged midah," loosely translated as "make the punishment fit the crime." This is normally spoken of in a negative sense: if you sin by stealing, you will lose whatever wealth you have; if you sin by trying to ruin someone's reputation, it is your reputation which will be ruined. This same concept, however, is used in a positive statement: if you help someone in need, you will be rewarded in the same way that you helped them. Yosef was the leader in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. When his brothers approached him, he could have had them all killed or badly punished. He extracted no punishment from them but instead provided for their needs and the needs of their families. He fed them because he understood the real meaning of his dream: his supply of food would remain standing while theirs failed, and only he could feed his brothers who would bow but not be subjugated to him. His blessing now is attributed to his caring for his brothers during their time of need. Hashem rewarded Yosef (through Moshe's blessing) with midah k'neged midah.

The people of Israel and the Land of Israel are prime examples of this lesson. We did not receive this land because of our good deeds, but we are rewarded in this Land because of that which we accomplish that continues to benefit the world. It seems like every week there is a new product, a new computer innovation, or a new medicine or cure that has been produced in Israel. These products and cures have benefitted the entire world. We have returned to the blessing given to Avraham that all the world will be blessed through him and his descendants. There is no question that the Arab world is beginning to realize what they gain from a good relationship with the Jewish People. And with each invention, cure, product, and the like, may Hashem continue to reward Israel with Peace and prosperity. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)**

## **Daf HaShavua**

*by Rabbi Gideon Sylvester, Radlett United Synagogue*

**W**hen I was a little boy, twice a week my school took us to play football in the freezing cold and rain. It was an unbearable experience. I



remember at the end of each afternoon the horror of struggling to do up my shirt buttons with half frozen hands as the teacher threatened we would miss the coach home and be left stranded on the icy terraces of the school playing fields. It was a childhood nightmare, until one day I discovered the prayer for rain. Every Monday and Wednesday, I would fervently pray for enough rain in a small corner of Edgware to waterlog the pitch and save me from that humiliating experience.

Looking back, I realise that my prayers were not only a little naive they were also rather selfish. Jewish prayer is not meant to be egotistical. The Talmud rules that when we pray, we should never pray in the singular, but always use the plural; when speaking to G-d, it is inappropriate to think only of ourselves, we should think of others too.

Prayer should sensitise us to the people around us and to our G-d and this theme is found in the prayer for rain. Rashi explains that one reason that G-d chose the land of Israel for our people is that it is a place where water is scarce. Our people will constantly have to pray for this precious resource and so we will always be reminded of the G-d who sustains the world. This in turn should affect our behaviour turning us into more, caring, spiritual people.

The prayer for rain which we say on the eighth day of Sukkoth is perhaps the most democratic of our prayers. Even when we reach the end of Sukkoth, we do not request rain immediately, we merely mention it in our prayers. Only fifteen days later does the request kick in and later still in the Diaspora. The reason is that in Temple times, Sukkoth was a pilgrim festival when the entire Jewish people headed for Jerusalem to offer prayer and sacrifices to G-d. For some people, there was a long journey home. It would be insensitive for the community to pray for rain whilst these people were still trekking across the land of Israel and so the entire community waited until the last travellers had reached their destination beyond the river Euphrates before requesting rain.

On Shemini Atzeret, therefore, we do not pray for rain, we simply mention the rain in our prayers as an introduction to the ultimate request. But if Jewish days start at night, why do we only start reciting the prayer at Musaf? Wouldn't it make more sense to say it when the day starts on the preceding evening? The answer given by Rabbenu Asher is that in the evenings only a few people come to Shul. Were we to begin our prayer for rain at night, confusion and division would split the community with some people including the rain in their prayers whilst others ignored it. Even if we were to delay saying the prayer until Shacharit this would still not alleviate the problem since some people would imagine that they should have recited it the night before and this would create confusion. Therefore, for the sake of unity, we all delay reciting the prayer for the first time until Musaf. Even then, we do not mention the rain until

the Chazan has announced it. The whole community must pray together in unison.

I find this an extraordinary and beautiful Halachah. It states that it is of paramount importance that the whole community pray together. We must sacrifice the recital of the prayer on the preceding evening to ensure that everyone can say the prayer simultaneously. Even when everyone has arrived in Shul for Musaf, we still do not mention the rain in our prayers until we have received our instructions from the person leading the service to ensure that it is truly a communal prayer.

It seems to me that the laws governing the prayer for rain teach us a powerful lesson. Many of our communities are undergoing a religious revival with more people learning about Judaism than ever before. It is easy for small cliques to dominate our shuls, ignoring the needs of the rest of the congregation. The prayer for rain reminds us that we have a constant responsibility to the whole community, those who live near and far, those who are religious and those who are not. Our shuls must be welcoming to them all and everyone must feel at home in our synagogues. © 1999 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

**M**oshe gives a blessing to the tribe of Zevulun: "And to Zevulun he said, 'Rejoice Zevulun when you go out and Yissochor is in your tents.'" (Deut. 33:18) This verse describes the partnership between the tribes of Yissochor and Zevulun. The members of Zevulun were merchants who lived near the sea and were engaged in business. They took the tribe of Yissochor as full partners in their business on condition that Yissochor devoted all of their time to studying Torah.

The Ohr Hachayim, a renown 17th century commentator clarifies: The reason Zevulun can feel joy in his going out to do business is because Yissochor is studying Torah in his tent. Since Zevulun is enabling Yissochor to study Torah via his business ventures, it elevates all that he does to make a profit into a mitzvah—and when one is engaged in a mitzvah one should definitely feel joy.

The lesson for us: if we work not only for ourselves, but for a higher cause we are elevating all that we do into a mitzvah and elevate ourselves both spiritually and emotionally. Take a Torah cause as a partner in your business—and reap the joy! based on *Growth Through Torah* by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

