

Toras Aish

A project of the AishDas Society

AISHDAS SOCIETY

Aspaqlaria

by Micha Berger

R' JB Soloveitchik frames his Jewish thought and his perspective on mitzvos about tensions between various dialectics inherent in the human condition. Conflicting truths about man that are somehow both true.

For example, people construct a society in order to better serve their needs. And yet, man's highest calling is to serve the society, rather than themselves.

Perhaps the most classical such dialectic is the distinction Rabbi Soloveitchik draws between Adam as he is portrayed in the creation story in Genesis 1 and Adam as portrayed in Genesis 2. Adam I is at the culmination of creation. All builds up to him. He is charged "to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and master it." Man the engineer and technologist, forming the world to serve his needs. Majestic Man.

In Genesis 2, we're given a different view. From the time of his creation, Adam is in communication is G-d. "It is not good for man to be alone", so Hashem creates a woman "therefore man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife." This is a person as relying on his relationships and brings value to his life and the world through them. Adam II is Covenantal Man, who seeks redemption.

Succos is very much Adam II's holiday. The farmer, having just brought in his crop, has a propensity to credit himself for his success. Succos re-addresses that, by reminding him that it's not his mastery alone that brings food to the table. The succah teaches that it's not his fine house and the engineering it represents that bring security to his life.

There is a dispute between R' Eliezer and R' Akiva (Succah 11b) as to the nature of the succos in the desert that the mitzvah actually commemorates. According to R' Eliezer (and Unkelus Vayikra 23:42, as well as the Shulchan Aruch O"Ch 625"1, Gr"a ad loc), the original succos were clouds of glory. According to R'

Akiva, they were actual huts.

Perhaps they're basing themselves on different ideas about the significance of the succah. In R' Eliezer's opinion, the succah is commemorating Hashem's gifts to us. It's to remind us that there is a Covenantal Partner in our efforts. R' Akiva has the original succah being the product of a partnership. Man builds, but it's Hashem who insures the success of that building. R' Eliezer focuses on our Partner, R' Akiva on our willingness to join the Covenantal relationship. (See Aruch haShulchan O"Ch 625.)

Each speaks to the farmer celebrating his harvest as he gathers it at the end of the year. One speaks of the role of bitachon, trust in G-d, which may otherwise be forgotten. The other speaks of the appropriate end-state, of the synthesis of bitachon and hishtadlus, personal effort.

"And a mist came up from the ground, and gave moisture to the whole face of the earth." - Genesis 2:6 "And a mist came up from the ground": For the topic of the creation of man. He raised the tehom [groundwater?] and gave moisture to clouds to wet the earth and to make man. Like one who kneads bread, who adds water and after that kneads the dough. So too here, 'He gave moisture' and then 'He formed'." - Rashi ad loc

"And Hashem E-lokim formed the man, dust from the ground, and He breathed in his nose a living soul; and the man was a living spirit." Genesis, ibid v. 7

"Dust from the ground": He collected dust from the whole earth, all four directions... Another opinion, He took his dust from the place about which it says 'an altar of earth you shall make for Me.' He said, 'If only the dirt would be an atonement for him, and he would be able to stand.'" - Rashi ad loc

In his work "Pachad Yitzchak", R' Yitzchak Hutner notes the steps of creation of man, according to this second opinion in Rashi. First, G-d adds water to the earth to make clay, then He forms man and breathes a soul into him.

R' Hutner writes that this is exactly what we recreate during the nisuch hamayim (water libation on the altar). The kohein pours water on the very spot Hashem did. This is accompanied by the simchas beis hasho'eivah, celebration and singing. Music is the most spiritual of the seven wisdoms. It speaks and moves the soul on a fundamental level. Through the Simchas Beis haSho'ievah we imitate G-d's breathing a soul into Adam.

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
to my very bestest friend in the whole world
my wife Ruthie!**

Happy Birthday!

Here's looking forward to the next 85 birthdays!

Love, Yitzie

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER
DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB.
SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG

**COPIES OF TORAS AISH ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE
FOLLOWING ADDRESS ON THE WEB (WWW) :**

HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is solely the work of the AishDas Society, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

We just came from Yom Kippur and teshuvah. When Hashem fulfills His promise "And I will give you a new heart, and place a new spirit within you." (Yechezkel 36:26) Simchas Beis haSho'eivah is a celebration of man's ability to recreate himself, and therefore follows the steps of our original creation.

To continue R' Hutner's thought with a couple of my own, in light of the above: Repentance too can be seen in both R' Eliezer's and R' Akiva's perspectives. One can seek atonement from Hashem, and thereby realize the need to have a partnership with Him. Or, one can seek atonement from the partnership itself. As the same R' Akiva says, "Praised are you Israel. Before Whom do you atone, and Who atones you." Atonement is both done by man through the Divine Presence, and is a gift from Him. A dialectic.

I would like to suggest one additional point. This description is from the second chapter of Genesis, it's the telling of the creation of Adam II. It's not merely the celebration of our recent re-creation, it's the celebration of our creation as beings in a covenantal partnership with the A-lmighty. And therefore, it's not only on Succos as a postscript to Yom Kippur, it is a fundamental part of the message of the holiday. © 2003 Micha Berger and The AishDas Society

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And no prophet arose amongst Israel like Moshe (Moses)" (Devarim 34:10). The Sifri (16) tells us that the Torah adds "amongst Israel" (rather than just saying that no prophet ever arose that compared to Moshe) because although there was no prophet from Israel (the people), there was a prophet that was similar that came from the other nations, referring to Bilam (the sorcerer that was hired by the king of Moav to curse the Children of Israel after they had defeated the mighty kings Sichon and Og in

Bamidbar 22). The Abarbanel asks several questions on this midrash, including how Moshe could possibly be compared to the wicked Bilam. After all, could the prophecy of someone described by our sages in the most disparaging of terms have possibly reached the level of prophecy of any of the pure-hearted messengers of G-d in the Bible, let alone Moshe, who reached the highest levels of prophecy?

When discussing different approaches to this problem, the Abarbanel quotes an answer from Rabbeinu Chasdai (Crescas, a student of the Ran- and whose student was Rav Yosef Albo, the author of Sefer Ha-ikkarim). Rabbeinu Chasdai explains that in order to obtain the level of prophecy, much preparation is needed. (The Rambam goes through what prerequisites a person must have in order to be worthy of prophecy at the beginning of the 7th chapter of the Laws of the Foundations of the Torah.) As a matter of fact, when the term "B'nei Hanevi'im" (sons of the prophets) is used in Kings I (20:35) and II (2:5, 7 and 15) it refers to those individuals who have dedicated themselves to preparing for the possibility of receiving prophecy (see Rambam, *ibid*, 7:5). Those who did eventually reach the level of prophecy, though, did not (necessarily) experience the same kind of prophecy. The better the preparation, the better the level of prophecy experienced.

This was true of all prophets except for two. Even though Moshe did plenty of the required preparation before receiving prophecy, the level he reached (which was necessary in order to accomplish what Moshe accomplished, including taking the nation out of Egypt and being the Law giver) was only possible because G-d elevated him above and beyond the state appropriate for his (massive) preparation. (This is actually implied by the Rambam as well, who- in his Laws of Idol Worship (1:3)- says that in order fulfill his promise to Abraham he "made" Moshe. Not that Moshe deserved the high level he reached, but that it was given to him in order to accomplish what needed to be accomplished.) And, as our verse indicates, Moshe was the only prophet "from amongst Israel" to have reached a level of prophecy higher than warranted by the preparation made for it.

When the midrash says that this was only true of the prophets from Israel, but not true for the other nations, as Bilam was similar to Moshe, it is referring to this same aspect. Bilam was not really a prophet, but a sorcerer. He did no preparation for prophecy, but, nevertheless, G-d raised him to the level of prophecy. This was done to prevent Bilam from cursing Israel, and to show Moav (and Midyan) the elevated status of Israel (thereby instilling in them a fear of Israel, which would help in future battles). It was this characteristic of Bilam having received undeserved prophecy that was shared with Moshe, not that the levels of their prophecies were anywhere near comparable. Moshe deserved to reach a high level of prophecy, just not as high as he actually reached. This, Rabbeinu Chasdai explains, is what the

Sifri says is being implied by the verse indirectly saying that there was a non-Israelite prophet that can be compared to Moshe.

We are currently concluding a month (starting from Selichos) during which it has been much easier to focus on our spiritual growth. The forced introspection of the High Holy Days followed by the week living in the succah that reminded us of G-d's protection/supervision and the waving of the lulav (et al) in all directions—showing His sovereignty over all—will be capped off by our celebrating having read the entire Torah and starting it anew. This "gift" is expiring, though, and we need to work hard to maintain (and even improve upon) what was gained. Rather than allowing Simchas Torah be the end, let us make it a beginning, doing the appropriate preparation to keep the momentum going.

© 2003 Rabbi D. Kramer

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbi David Sedley, Edinburgh Hebrew Cong.

The Rolling Stones are out on tour again, and at age 60 Mick Jagger is showing us that one doesn't need to take 'early retirement' to enjoy oneself. Back in 1972, on 'Exile on Main Street', he was singing a song called 'Happy' where Mick defined his simple requirements with the lyrics, "I need a love to keep me happy".

The Talmud (Megilla 31b) tells us that the reason we read the Parsha of Ki Tavo before Rosh Hashana is because that portion describes the curses the Jewish people will receive for not observing the Mitzvot. We hope that the end of the year will also be the end of the curses. The main sin which is mentioned is not serving G-d with happiness; "Since you didn't serve G-d with happiness and gladness of heart." (Devarim 28:47).

It is therefore appropriate to begin the new year with happiness. Succot is defined in our prayers as Z'man Simchateinu, the "time of our happiness", and our celebrations during this week prepare us to be able to serve G-d with happiness throughout the coming year.

We need to understand what happiness is in order to properly fulfill the requirements of the festival. Clearly, sitting in a hut in the garden and waving some fruit and sticks in Shul is not enough on its own to keep us happy.

The Mishna (Succot 51a) describes the happiness of the Simchat Beit Hasho'eva in the Temple. Only the 'Chasidim' (pious ones) and 'Anshei Ma'aseh' (accomplished ones) were permitted to dance and perform tricks to show their happiness. It seems that real happiness must be attained through observance of Mitzvot. The Rambam (Laws of YomTov 6; 20) explains that the happiness of the festivals is not attained

through frivolity and lightheadedness, but rather through service of the Creator.

Caesar once asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania why the food that Jews eat on Saturday smells so good. Rabbi Yehoshua answered that Jews have a special spice, called 'Shabbat', that is added to the food. However, this spice only enhances the flavour for those who observe Shabbat (Talmud Shabbat 119a). Observance of Mitzvot leads not only to a spiritual richness, but also to greater physical enjoyment and happiness.

The Talmud (Berachot 31a) instructs us that the correct preparation for prayer is 'Simcha shel Mitzvah'—the happiness of performing a Mitzvah. The Talmud continues, "Similarly, when a person takes leave of his or her friend... it should only be with words of Halacha." There is an explicit link between learning about and observing the Mitzvot, and true happiness.

The book of Nechemia also links Torah study to the happiness of Succot. In chapter 8 we read that "The chiefs of the fathers' houses of all the people ... were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to study the words of the Torah.... So the people went out... and made themselves Succot... And there was great rejoicing." Learning Torah (which had been almost entirely forgotten during the harshness of the Babylonian exile) led to the observance of the Mitzvot, which in turn led to great happiness.

There is a verse from the book of Esther which we recite every week in Havdala—"The Jews had light and happiness...". The Talmud (Megilla 15b) tells us that 'light' refers to Torah, and 'happiness' means Yom Tov. It seems that there is a progression—studying Torah leads to the happiness and celebration of festivals.

Yom Kippur is the anniversary of the day on which the Jews received the second set of the Ten Commandments. On this day Moshe returned from Mount Sinai bearing the tablets which showed G-d's total forgiveness for the sin of the Golden Calf. The Kabbalistic sources tell us that Shavuot is the celebration of receiving the Written Torah, but Yom Kippur was when we received the Oral Torah. On Succot our happiness is the celebration of the Torah that we were given, culminating in Simchat Torah when we dance and rejoice at our gift.

The Oral Law allows us to become part of the process of Torah and Halacha. In the desert, when Moshe had a difficult question he asked G-d for the answer. Once the Jews entered Israel they had to find the answers themselves, based on the principles that G-d had given at Sinai. Anyone who learns Torah makes his or her own unique contribution to the Torah. Our happiness on Succot is the knowledge that we can serve G-d through Torah and Mitzvot.

The Talmud (Berachot 31a) tells us that it is forbidden to be completely happy in this world, as we say in Shir Hama'alot before Benschung 'Az Yemale Schok Pinu—"Then (in the time of the Mashiach) our

mouths will be filled with laughter'. During Succot we are given a taste of the Messianic era. Let us rejoice and be happy with the Torah and Mitzvot that G-d has given us, and may we merit to see the real happiness of the Messianic era—next year in Jerusalem. © 2003
Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Hebrew calendar is a direct product of the Torah, the Biblical directives as to the precise month, days and agricultural seasons in which we celebrate the various festivals (Leviticus chapter 33). The climax of the Hebrew calendar is this seventh month, which opens with Rosh Hashanah and concludes with Shemini Atzeret - Simchat Torah. And if the Hebrew year begins with the creation of the Jewish nation on Pesach, the festival of the first month of the Jewish calendar, and continues on to the Revelation of the Jewish religion on Shavuot, the festival of the third month of the Jewish calendar, then it must reach its apogee with the perfection of the world and its redemption as expressed by Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret on the seventh month of Tishrei.

Rosh Hashanah is the day of the coronation of G-d as King of the entire world, accepted by all as the G-d who wants life, love and peace. Yom Kippur is the Day of Forgiveness - personal, national and universal repentance which extends even to Nineveh, Assyria, arch-enemy of Israel, as testified to by the Book of Jonah which is read on Yom Kippur afternoon. Sukkot, replete with the rich fragrance of the four species of fruit and vegetation identified with the Land of Israel, heralds the return of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel, certainly the beginning of the sprouting of world freedom and redemption. After all, it is only from the backdrop of our own land and State, it is only when we are free of subjugation by any host government and must deal with the very real and complex issues of peace and war, economic and social disparities within our citizenry, medical advancement and ethics, scientific, business and cultural development, that we will truly be in a position to influence the other nation-states towards a non-terrorist, democratic government and a moral way of life based upon the seven Noahide laws of conduct. And indeed, we are Biblically ordained to bring a total of seventy bullocks as offerings to the Holy Temple on Sukkot, symbolizing our concern for and commitment to the proverbial seventy nations of the world.

But within this context and line-up, Shemini Atzeret seems to be an anomaly, a misfit. The only "commandment of the day" is our mention of rain for the first time after the hot, dry spring and summer months,

the declaration by the Cantor of special praise to the Almighty "who makes the wind blow and brings down the rain." The first Mishnah in the Talmudic Tractate Ta'anit ordains that we begin reciting this statement of praise from the additional Amidah on Shemini Atzeret until Passover, some seven months later - and it is added to the second blessing of the Amidah, in which we praise G-d for "quicken the dead." What does rain have to do with redemption, and what has rain to do with causing the dead to rise to life? And then, in later Gaonic times (from the eighth to tenth centuries), the custom was established to celebrate our yearly reading of the entire five Books of the Bible on Shemini Atzeret (or on the day after, in the diaspora) - since we start reading from the beginning of the Torah once again on the Sabbath following Shemini Atzeret. But what does rain or even rejoicing by dancing with Torah Scrolls, have to do with redemption, the apparent theme of the Tishrei festivals? Doesn't Simchat Torah seem to be a mere "tack-on," a ploy to give Shemini Atzeret some content and significance in addition to our declaration of rain? Indeed, Shemini Atzeret seems to be more anti-climax than climax, more perplexing than promising.

In order to understand the message of Shemini Atzeret, it is important that we analyze the symbolism of water as it appears throughout the festivals of Tishrei. The Code of Jewish Law mandates that we immerse ourselves in mikveh water on the day before Rosh Hashanah and that we go to a river on the first day of Rosh Hashanah in order to cast away our sins; we also go to the mikveh right before Yom Kippur (Orah Haim, 581,4 and 583). Water is the symbol par excellence of birth - or rebirth - since all of life originally emerged from water ("And the spirit of the Lord hovered over the face of the waters" Genesis 1:2) and no form of life as we know it can exist without water. The embryo is surrounded by water, and the sign of birth is the "breaking of the water," in the modern parlance. Hence conversion as well as repentance require ritual immersion - an active plunge on the part of the participant to recreate him/her self.

But sometimes it becomes inordinately different for an individual to truly transform himself, to change his fundamental personality. Sometimes an individual is so removed from G-d - and even from life, if he has been intimately touched by death - that he requires the special grace and love of a beneficent G-d to change him, to save him/her from his/her stubborn nature, to rescue him/her from the abyss of death. Torah law ordains that if one becomes defiled by contact with death, the Kohen-priest, acting as G-d's special agent, sprinkles the special waters of the ashes of the red heifer and the individual becomes purified. In this act of purification it is G-d who is the active purifier, it is G-d who is the active healer.

On the Day of Atonement, it is this second aspect of purification which is emphasized. We read again and again the words of the prophet Ezekiel, who

tells us how in order to bring about the ultimate redemption "the Almighty Himself will sprinkle upon you the waters of purification and they shall be purified." (Ezekiel 36:25) Throughout the festival of Sukkot we continue to invoke the symbol of water, with the arava or willow-plant - which can only grow around riverbeds or areas of plentiful water - becomes a veritable expression of our prayer, and water - in addition to the usual wine libation - is offered in the Holy Temple. "And you shall draw forth water with joy from the waters of salvation" is the great song of Sukkot celebration.

Shemini Atzeret is the culmination of these prayers. The imagery of G-d's rain descending upon us from the heavens is reminiscent of Ezekiel's prophecy of the Divine actually sprinkling us with the water of purification and salvation. In a world threatened by homicidal terrorism and nuclear destruction, such a redemption is tantamount to "quicken the dead," offering us new-found life. And the salvation can only come when we remove the Torah from the Scrolls, teach the lessons of a G-d of justice, compassion and peace to the entire world, and the nations of the world "turn their swords into ploughshares, their spears into pruning-hooks," and "the world becomes filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the seas." It is through G-d's loving and purifying waters that ultimate peace and salvation will come to Israel and the world. This is the vision and the hope of Shemini Atzeret - Simchat Torah. © 2003 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Judaism has something for everyone. If you like to drink, we have Purim. If you like asceticism or self-denial we have Yom Kippur. If you like to play with fire, we have L'ag B'omer (celebrated with bonfires!) If you like to dance, we have Simchat Torah, and... if you like the great outdoors, we have Sukkot!

Sukkot means "booths." During the 40 years of wandering in the desert we lived in Sukkot. We are commanded (see Leviticus 23:33-44) on this holiday to make our Sukkah our main dwelling place—to eat, sleep, learn Torah and spend our time there. If one would suffer from being in a Sukkah—i.e., from rain or snow—or from heat and humidity, he is freed from the obligation to dwell there. Depending on climatic conditions, people try to at least eat in the Sukkah.

We are also commanded to wave the arbah minim, the Four Species—"And you shall take for yourselves on the first day (of the Festival) the fruit of the citron tree (esrog/etrog), an unopened frond of the date palms, myrtle branches and willows (that grow near) the brook" (Numbers 23:40). There are many deep and mystical meanings for waving these four species together, including—that the Almighty controls the whole world, the winds, the forces and everything

everywhere; that all Jews are bound together as one people, be they saints or sinners, knowledgeable or ignorant (see the Dvar Torah for more on this!).

The Torah tells us, "...On the fifteenth of the seventh month (counting from the Hebrew month of Nisan when the Jews left Egypt) shall be the holiday of Sukkot, seven days (of celebration) for the Almighty. The first day shall be a holy convocation; all manners of work (creative acts as defined by the Torah) you shall not do; it is an eternal decree in all of your dwelling places for all generations" (Leviticus 23:34-35). Deuteronomy 16:13-15 adds "The festival of Sukkot shall be to you for seven days when you gather from your threshing floors and your wine cellar. You shall rejoice in your festival... for the Almighty will bless you in all of your produce and in all of the work of your hand and you shall be completely joyous."

Sukkot is called "zman simchaseinu" (or is Sephardic pronunciation: "zeman simchateinu"). There are two aspects to simcha: happiness and joy. Happiness is taking pleasure in what you have. Joy is the pleasure of anticipating a future good.

What is the cause of our simcha? Trust in G-d. If we trust in G-d—and know that everything that the Almighty does for us is for our good and all that will happen in the future will be for our good—then we have simcha!

It is fitting that Sukkot is a harvest festival. People who work the earth are amongst the most religious of people trusting in the Almighty (followed perhaps by fundraisers). They take a perfectly good seed that could be eaten and they stick it in the ground not knowing whether there will be rain or drought or floods or pestilence. They put forth hard work not knowing the outcome.

We all trust in something—our intelligence, our wealth, our society, our education, our connections; however, deep down we know that we are trusting in something that can't ultimately help us. As King David wrote in Psalms 20:8 "There are those who trust in chariots and those who trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Almighty." Only the Almighty is the Creator of the world, the Master of history, our personal and caring G-d Who can be relied upon to help us.

The mitzvah of dwelling in the Sukkah teaches us trust in G-d. We tend to think that our possessions, our money, our homes, our intelligence will protect us. Here we are exposed to the elements in a temporary hut. Living in a Sukkah puts life into perspective. Our history has borne this out. No matter how well-established, wealthy and "secure" we have become in a host country, in the end it too has been a temporary dwelling. Our trust must be in G-d.

While we had our two Temples in Jerusalem, during the Festival of Sukkot 70 offerings were made for the nations of the world—so that the Almighty would provide rain for their crops. The Talmud tells us that if the nations of the world understood the value of what

the Jewish people provided them, they would have sent their armies to defend our Temple in Jerusalem to keep it from being destroyed.

The word "geshem" means rain. "Gashmiut" (from the word "geshem") means "material needs." Ultimately, all of our material needs come from rain which is needed for the crops to grow and from that extends commerce. The word for war in Hebrew is "milchamah" from the word "lechem" (bread). Perhaps if the nations of the world have sufficient rain and thus sufficient bread, they will be satisfied and not seek to war upon others and to conquer.

Sukkot is one of the Shelosh Regalim, Three Festivals (the other two are Pesach and Shavuot), where the Torah commands everyone living in Israel to leave their homes to come to Jerusalem to celebrate at the Temple. For the last 2,000 years since the destruction of the Temple, we've been unable to fulfill this mitzvah. © 2003 by Rabbi K. Packouz and Torah.org.

RABBI NAPHTALI BURNSTEIN

National Council of Young Israel

Shimini Atzeret marks the end of the season of our Yomim Tovim. The season began with the Yimai HaSlichot, Rosh HaShanah, the Aseret Yimai Teshuva and Yom Kippur. It continued with Succot and Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah.

The literal meaning of Atzeret is "restraint." There are various interpretations as to why this term, implying restraint, was chosen here.

One possibility behind using the term Atzeret or restraint here, refers to holding on to the spiritual joy and holiness achieved during the past month. There is a great risk that once the holidays are behind us and we return to our daily lives, we may become so absorbed in those activities that we dissipate all the spiritual wealth we had acquired during the Yomim Tovim.

If one tightly seals a bottle of expensive wine, it will save the aroma and the quality will be preserved. So too, when taking in the end of Yom Tov, we should make these last days of Yom Tov into an Atzeret a tight seal that will retain all that we have accomplished during Tishrei. Just as it is foolish to earn and not to conserve, so too it would be foolish to achieve spirituality and not to retain it.

The truth is, however, that Shmini Atzeret isn't just the end of the Tishrei season of Yomim Tovim. It actually concludes an entire year of the Yomim Tovim. Pesach actually begins the cycle, followed by Shavout. Succot and Shmini Atzeret (Simchat Torah) complete the years' cycle of Yomim Tovim.

There is a well known story in the Gemorah in Shabbos (31a) regarding the potential ger (convert) who came to Hillel and asked him to convert him while he stood "al regel achas" - on one foot. There have been

several interpretations to this story in the Gemorah. The Sfas Emes suggests an interpretation as follows:

This searching individual understood and appreciated that each and every Yom Tov experience is part of a process of growth that we are offered each and every year. It would also seem that the highlight of that process would come at the very end, at the final leg of the journey. This being so, the ger sought a way to skip the earlier Yomim Tovim and attempted to achieve all the spiritual greatness found in Shmini Atzeret without the aid of the other Yomim Tovim. Try to teach me "al regel achas" while standing on one regel. One holiday should suffice, if we go right to the top. Hillel responded that it was a process that necessitated each step in the process in order to conserve it and retain it.

Trying to achieve the dveikus (attachment) that comes with Simchas Torah, without first building the foundation of that relationship will often end in great failure. "Al regel achas" is not how one achieves success and growth in spirit and commitment.

Now, as Yom Tov comes to an end, we all would like to hold on to a little of the aroma of Yom Tov. Each and every one of us has to find the right formula that works for us.

One possible way to achieve some level of continuity from Yom Tov is to try to enhance our homes with something new and meaningful. Beginning Sefer Bereishit again allows us the opportunity to learn together, particularly on Shabbat. How about assigning different members of the family an interesting question, insight, medresh or story, at their particular level, to bring to the Shabbat meal? What about trying to study the Parsha each week, Shnayim Mikra V'Echud Targum, which gives a great connection and appreciation to each parsha.

As the winter creeps up on us, let's prepare to hold on to some of the warmth of Yom Tov, and to reignite Limud HaTorah in our homes, both individually and collectively.

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. We have, indeed, come full circle.

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

Circles have much 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 God, there is the belief that one is approaching the Divine. The same applies to God'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. Whatever one's level of knowledge, we are all the same, reaching out, clasping the hand of the other, with whom we dance and sing. Unlike Shavuot, which emphasizes pure learning and invariably separates people into categories of the more and less knowledgeable, Simchat Torah is the great equalizer.

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 embrace the Torah — lovingly, deeply, endlessly. © 2003 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

Weekly Thoughts

Last year, around this time, I was visiting an apartment building which houses a number of Jewish tenants. We went from apartment to apartment, visiting people over the festival and inviting them to take part in the Mitzvah of the Four Species (taking the Lulav, Etrog, myrtle and willow [bound] together, and waving them in all directions symbolizing the omnipresence of G-d, the scattered nature of the Jewish people and the unity of all different types of people).

We visited one older lady who spoke with a Hungarian accent. She said she would be delighted to have the chance to wave the Lulav. We stood in the doorway of the apartment and I started to recite the

blessing, word by word, with this lady repeating after me. After a few words of the blessing "Boruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech..." (Blessed are You, L-rd Our G-d, King.) she broke down and was unable to continue. The lady's adult daughter, who by now had joined us, explained that this was bringing back painful memories of a childhood where the lady had lost her relatives in the Shoah (Holocaust). I apologized and we left them alone. I felt very bad about the whole incident - here we were, trying to enthuse and bring joy to Jewish people on the festival, and we had - however unintentionally - ended up causing somebody distress.

The story does not, however, end there. We also had a mobile Succah with us, on a trailer attached to a van, which was parked on the street. We told the residents about it and some wanted to come out and see, to eat a piece of homemade cake in the Succah. Even though it was raining by now and we did not want to cause distress to anyone, one lady in particular said she would come and join us a few minutes later. It turned out that this lady was the neighbor of the Hungarian lady, and they both came out to the mobile Succah, very slowly, with the neighbor supporting the first lady. It seems the neighbor had witnessed the previous encounter and had taken it upon herself to comfort the lady and to bring her to join us in the mobile Succah. They came into the Succah and had something to eat and drink.

We spoke a little - the Hungarian lady was apologetic for what had transpired earlier. I told her that she certainly had nothing to apologize for and I was sorry that we had caused her any distress. She was amazed and delighted that we had a Succah, out here on the street, in public! She explained that all she recalled from her childhood was having to practice Judaism in secret, fearful of discovery. She was frightened and a little overwhelmed by this public performance of a Mitzvah. I commented that we are fortunate to live in times where we can proudly demonstrate our Judaism and carry out Jewish commandments and traditions publicly, without fear of arrest or worse, and that this added an extra special dimension to all the mitzvot we were able to perform. We talked a while and then they left us. I was overjoyed that we had left them on a positive note, inspired by the neighbor's kindness and care.

Afterwards, reflecting on these events, I realized how often we make blessings without giving too much thought to what is going on. Here was this lady who could not even pronounce all the words of a blessing, because it had so much deep meaning and significance from her past.

It made me count my own blessings. We are privileged to live in times where we can, almost universally, practice Judaism freely and publicly, we can take time off work for religious festivals and enjoy the protection of secular law in many countries. Our institutions and organizations are proudly Jewish, with

no need to hide what they represent. A glance into history reveals that this is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

In addition, it struck me that although the Hungarian lady may not have finished saying her blessing I had no doubt in my mind that it was said with so much sincerity and depth that it went straight up to the highest place. May all of us merit such sincere and true approach to our spiritual matters. © 2002 by Rabbi M. Wollenberg and www.weeklytorah.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Two holidays have many similarities with each other. Pesach and Succot both start with "a holy day" on the first day and end with "a holy day" on the last day. On both holidays, the last day is called "atzeret," a pause (the seventh day of Pesach, Devarim 16:8, and Shemini Atzeret, Vayikra 23:36, Bamidbar 29:35). However, there are differences. The last day of Pesach is the seventh day of the holiday and the mitzva of eating matza continues on this day. On the other hand, the last day of Succot is the eighth day, and the special mitzvot of dwelling in a succah and taking hold of the four species are no longer required. What is the reason for this difference?

Evidently, while the last day of Pesach is still an integral part of the holiday and serves as a festive end to it, the fact that Shemini Atzeret is celebrated after the seventh day of the holiday shows that it has its own independent significance. This can be seen in the Torah portion of Pinchas, where the sacrifices for all the holidays are listed. The sacrifices of Succot are linked together with the word "and"—"And on the second day... And on the seventh day" [Bamidbar 29:17,32]. However, the eighth day begins without this: "On the eighth day" [29:35]. Our sages have discussed the elements that separate Shemini Atzeret from the rest of the holiday, abbreviated as "pazar kashav" (see Succah 48a).

But this does not indicate the reason for the separate day.

Perhaps the significance is indicated directly in the Torah by the sacrifice for the day, "one bull." On all the other holidays, there are more than one bull—two on Pesach and Shavuot, and a different number for every day of Succot, from thirteen on the first day down to seven on the seventh day. The only other days when the sacrifice is "one bull" are the Day of Memory (new year) and Yom Kippur. Among other things, both these days are special in that they symbolize a beginning. Yom Kippur is the beginning of the year of Yovel (see Vayikra 25:9-10), and the day of the new year is the beginning of a holy month, as we discussed in a previous article. What is it that begins on Shemini Atzeret?

The answer to this question is simple. In several places, Succot is seen as a holiday of the harvest, that is, the end of the agricultural year. For example: "The harvest holiday, at the end of the year" [Shemot 23:16]; "At the end of seven years, at the time of Shemitta, on the holiday of Succot" [Devarim 31:10]. Thus, Shemini Atzeret can be viewed not only as the end of the agricultural year but also as its beginning.

As is fitting for the beginning of the agricultural year, it is reasonable to have a special prayer on this day for rain, where we pray to the Almighty, who sends the wind and the rain. We ask for sufficient rain, life and not death, giving a blessing and not a curse, providing satisfaction and not a situation of lacking.

AISHDAS SOCIETY

Divine Embrace

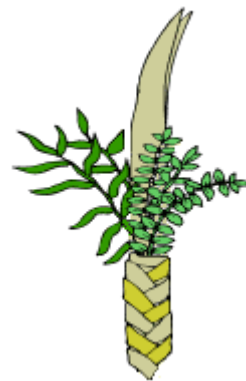
by Yitz Weiss

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

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

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

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



Graphic from <http://www.bitsela.com/>