

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

What exactly is a sukkah? What is it supposed to represent? The question is essential to the mitzvah itself. The Torah says: "Live in sukkot for seven days... so your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt" (Lev. 23:42-43). In other words, knowing -- reflecting, understanding, being aware -- is an integral part of the mitzvah. For that reason, says Rabbah in the Talmud (Sukkah 2a), a sukkah that is taller than twenty cubits (about 30 feet) is invalid because when the sechach, the "roof," is that far above your head, you are unaware of it. So what is a sukkah?

On this, two Mishnaic sages disagreed. Rabbi Eliezer held that the sukkah represents the clouds of glory that surrounded the Israelites during the wilderness years, protecting them from heat during the day, cold during the night, and bathing them with the radiance of the Divine presence. Rashi in his commentary takes it as the literal sense of the verse.

On the other hand, Rabbi Akiva says sukkot mammath, meaning a sukkah is a sukkah, no more and no less: a hut, a booth, a temporary dwelling. It has no symbolism. It is what it is (Sukkah 11b).

If we follow Rabbi Eliezer then it is obvious why we celebrate by making a sukkah. It is there to remind us of a miracle. All three pilgrimage festivals are about miracles. Pesach is about the miracle of the Exodus when God brought us out of Egypt with signs and wonders. Shavuot is, according to the oral Torah, about the miracle of the revelation at Mount Sinai when, for the only time in history, God appeared to an entire nation. Sukkot is about God's tender care of his people, mitigating the hardships of the journey across the desert by surrounding them with His protective cloud as a parent wraps a young child in a blanket. Long afterward, the sight of the blanket evokes memories of the warmth of parental love.

Rabbi Akiva's view, though, is deeply problematic. If a sukkah is merely a hut, what was the miracle? There is nothing unusual about living in a hut if you are living a nomadic existence in the desert. It's what the Bedouin did until recently. Some still do. Why should there be a festival dedicated to something ordinary, commonplace and non-miraculous?

Rashbam says the sukkah was there to remind

the Israelites of their past so that, at the very moment they were feeling the greatest satisfaction at living in Israel -- at the time of the ingathering of the produce of the Land -- they should remember their lowly origins. They were once a group of refugees without a home, never knowing when they would have to move on.

Sukkot, according to Rashbam, exists to remind us of our humble origins so that we never fall into the complacency of taking freedom, the Land of Israel and the blessings it yields, for granted, thinking that it happened in the normal course of history.

However, there is another way of understanding Rabbi Akiva, and it lies in one of the most important lines in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah says, in words we recited on Rosh Hashanah, "I remember the loving-kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown" (Jeremiah. 2:2). This is one of the very rare lines in Tanach that speaks in praise not of God but of the people Israel.

"How odd of God / to choose the Jews," goes the famous rhyme, to which the answer is: "Not quite so odd: the Jews chose God." They may have been, at times, fractious, rebellious, ungrateful and wayward. But they had the courage to travel, to move, to leave security behind, and follow God's call, as did Abraham and Sarah at the dawn of our history.

If the sukkah represents God's clouds of glory, where was "the loving-kindness of your youth"? There is no sacrifice involved if God is visibly protecting you in every way and at all times. But if we follow Rabbi Akiva and see the sukkah as what it is, the temporary home of a temporarily homeless people, then it makes sense to say that Israel showed the courage of a bride willing to follow her husband on a risk-laden journey to a place she has never seen before -- a love that shows itself in the fact that she is willing to live in a hut trusting her husband's promise that one day they will have a permanent home.

If so, then a wonderful symmetry discloses itself in the three pilgrimage festivals. Pesach represents the love of God for His people. Sukkot represents the love of the



people for God. Shavuot represents the mutuality of love expressed in the covenant at Sinai in which God pledged Himself to the people, and the people to God. (For a similar conclusion, reached by a slightly different route, see R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Meshekh Chokmah to Deut. 5:15. I am grateful to David Frei of the London Beth Din for this reference.)

Sukkot, on this reading, becomes a metaphor for the Jewish condition not only during the forty years in the desert but also the almost 2,000 years spent in exile and dispersion. For centuries Jews lived, not knowing whether the place in which they lived would prove to be a mere temporary dwelling. Sukkot is the festival of insecurity.

What is truly remarkable is that it is called, by tradition, *zeman simchatenu*, "our time of joy." That to me is the wonder at the heart of the Jewish experience: that Jews throughout the ages were able to experience risk and uncertainty at every level of their existence and yet -- while they sat *betzila de-mehemnuta*, "under the shadow of faith" (Zohar, Emor, 103a) -- they were able to rejoice. That is spiritual courage of a high order. I have often argued that faith is not certainty: faith is the courage to live with uncertainty. That is what Sukkot represents if what we celebrate is *sukkot mammash*, not the clouds of glory but the vulnerability of actual huts, open to the wind, the rain and the cold.

I find that faith today in the people and the State of Israel. It is astonishing to me how Israelis have been able to live with an almost constant threat of war and terror since the State was born, and not give way to fear. I sense even in the most secular Israelis a profound faith, not perhaps "religious" in the conventional sense, but faith nonetheless: in life, and the future, and hope. Israelis seem to me perfectly to exemplify what tradition says was God's reply to Moses when he doubted the people's capacity to believe: "They are believers, the children of believers" (Shabbat 97a). Today's Israel is a living embodiment of what it is to exist in a state of insecurity and still rejoice.

And that is Sukkot's message to the world. Sukkot is the only festival about which Tanach says that it will one day be celebrated by the whole world (Zechariah 14:16-19). The twenty-first century is teaching us what this might mean. For most of history, most people have experienced a universe that did not change fundamentally in their lifetimes. But there have been rare great ages of transition: the birth of agriculture, the first cities, the dawn of civilisation, the invention of printing, and the industrial revolution. These were destabilising times, and they brought disruption in their wake. The age of transition we have experienced in our lifetime, born primarily out of the invention of the computer and instantaneous global communication, will one day be seen as the greatest and most rapid era of change since *Homo sapiens* first set foot on earth.

Since September 11, 2001, we have experienced the convulsions. As I write these words, some nations continue to tear themselves apart, and no nation is free of the threat of terror. Antisemitism has returned, not just to Europe, but around the world. There are parts of the Middle East and beyond that recall Hobbes' famous description of the "state of nature," a "war of every man against every man" in which there is "continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Hobbes, *The Leviathan*, chapter XIII). Insecurity begets fear, fear begets hate, hate begets violence, and violence eventually turns against its perpetrators.

The twenty-first century will one day be seen by historians as the Age of Insecurity. We, as Jews, are the world's experts in insecurity, having lived with it for millennia. And the supreme response to insecurity is Sukkot, when we leave behind the safety of our houses and sit in *sukkot mammash*, in huts exposed to the elements. To be able to do so and still say, this is *zeman simchatenu*, our festival of joy, is the supreme achievement of faith, the ultimate antidote to fear.

Faith is the ability to rejoice in the midst of instability and change, travelling through the wilderness of time toward an unknown destination. Faith is not fear. Faith is not hate. Faith is not violence. These are vital truths, never more needed than now. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This magnificent three-week festival period – Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot – may be viewed and experienced in two dimensions simultaneously; the universalist, nationalist dimension, and the particularistic, individual/family dimension. Rosh Hashanah is the day on which the world was born, when the sigh-sob *t'ruah* sound of the shofar cries out against the tragedies and injustices of an imperfect world and the sharp, joyous *t'kiyah* sound reminds us of our responsibility – and ability – to help perfect the world in the Kingship of God by conveying the moral message of ethical monotheism; a God who demands justice, compassion and peace.

On Yom Kippur, the Almighty declares His readiness to forgive the nation Israel of its great sins – the idolatrous golden calf, the faithless cowardice of the scouts with the vision of our Holy Temple reaching out to all of humanity, "For My house is a House of Prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7).

Sukkot is the climax of the season, taking us out of our egocentric, partisan lives and ordaining that we surround ourselves with fruits of the Land of Israel

living beneath a roof of vegetation through whose spaces we look up at the stars. Seventy bullocks were sacrificed in the Holy Temple during the Sukkot Festival, symbolizing the seventy nations of the world.

And finally, Shemini Atzeret announces the onset of the rainy season: rain is, after all, a gift of God to the world.

Shemini Atzeret moves into the uninhibited joy of Simkhat Torah – the Rejoicing of the Torah, when all Torah Scrolls are taken out of the Holy Ark and become the focus of frenzied dancing not only in the synagogues but also outside in the streets – the public domain – in order to imbue the world with its message of “Thou shalt not murder” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

However, Judaism understands only too well that one dare not focus on humanity without concentrating on individuals. One cannot be a concerned universalist without hearing the cries of one’s next door neighbor. Yes, it is the Jewish mission to convey the message of ethical monotheism to a world. The people of the covenant must perfect the world in the Kingship of our God of justice, compassion and peace. But first we must perfect ourselves: not only our nation, but our community; not only our community but our family; and not only our family but ourselves.

A disciple once approached Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1800-1870), founder of the Ethicist (Mussar) Movement in Judaism, seeking permission to spread the ethical and moral message of the Master to Germany and Austria. The rabbi responded: “And is the City of Salant so imbued with my teachings that you can afford to leave Lithuania? And is the street on which you live so morally inspired that you can teach in another community? And is your own family so careful in their conduct that you can preach to other families? And what about you, my beloved disciple? Are you on such a high level of ethical integrity that no one could criticize you?”

And so, Rosh Hashanah ushers in a ten-day period of repentance and introspection when we must be mindful of the need to perfect the world, but we must first attempt to perfect ourselves. Rosh Hashanah is the day on which the world was born, but it is also the “Day of Judgment,” when everyone passes before the Almighty to be evaluated and judged, when each of us must evaluate and judge ourselves from the perspective of Divine standards.

Yom Kippur may be a historic and national day of forgiveness, a day on which we invoke our Holy Temple as a “House of Prayer for all nations,” but it is first and foremost a day in which the individual stands in isolation from the world in the presence of the Divine. No food, no drink, no sexual relationship – with almost the entire day to be spent in God’s house. Each of us rids ourselves of all materialistic encumbrances, separates ourselves from physical needs and

blandishments, enters a no-man’s land between heaven and earth, between life and death, dons the non-leather shoes worn by the mourner, and in effect feels what it’s like to mourn for oneself by asking what legacy would I leave, were I to be taken from the world today?

And then comes Sukkot. Leave your fancy surroundings for a week; go back to basics. Spend seven days with your family in a simple hut. Remember that “when familial love is strong, a couple can sleep on the edge of a sword; but when familial love has gone sour, a bed of sixty miles does not provide sufficient room” (B.T. Sanhedrin 7a). Forget Netflix and Facebook; bring the special guests of the Bible into your simple but significant space, commune with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Lea, Miriam, Deborah and Ruth. Introduce them to your children – rather than today’s pop stars and Instagram influencers – and sing and speak and share together. Remember – and communicate – that what is important is values not venues, content not coverings, inner emotions and not external appearances. And let the sukkah lead you to Simkhat Torah, to the love and joy of Torah, which will help form the kind of individuals and families who can build communities and, ultimately, change the world.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The culmination of the great month of Tishrei occurs with the commemoration of the holiday of Succot.

It provides a joyful relief and release from the intensity of the first two major holidays of the month, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. While we experience an enjoyable sense of celebration, of commemoration and exalted purpose with these two unmatched high holy days, there is a sense of tension and even foreboding that accompanies them since they are days of judgment and of heavenly decree.

This holiday of Succot, with its emphasis on the beauty of nature and the freedom from being housebound, provides an emotional and psychological relief that, to a great extent, characterizes the nature of this holiday itself.

It is called the time of our joy and happiness not only because of what it represents, but also because it raises us from the concerns and doubts that naturally accompany our commemoration of the high holy days – the days of awe – that dominate the first part of the month.

We have the feeling within us of having passed through the time of testing and challenge, of trial and judgment, and of emerging as a better and more wholesome individual, both in relation to our Creator and to our fellow human beings.

It is this feeling that we have when we leave the

hospital in a better state of health than when we entered, of being vindicated in a court of law, pardoned for our transgressions and wrongdoing.

This feeling certainly manifests itself in achieving a state of happiness, and contentment. Because of the time of judgement that comes before Succot, the holiday can perhaps be more appreciated than others. It is as though one emerges from a long dark tunnel and then comes to see the cheerful light of nature and of Jewish life.

In northern climates, having to leave the house and exist in a booth opened to the elements, is perhaps not such a pleasant experience. However, it should be obvious to all that the Jewish holidays were meant to be celebrated in the land of Israel even though they are observed outside of Israel. Here in Israel, the holiday occurs when sitting outside is not only possible but is actually enjoyable.

Sitting in the cold northern winter weather in Chicago, I remember my father telling me that out of all the holidays of the year, Succot was especially difficult for him because it brought home the fact that the real home of the Jewish people was in the land of Israel. In Chicago we oftentimes had snow on the covering of the roof of the succah. He ruefully remarked that the Torah apparently made no provision for snow on Succot and that, in itself, was a proof that we really belong in the land of Israel to celebrate the holidays of the Jewish calendar.

In general, there certainly is a sense of satisfaction, if not even joy, in appreciating the wonders and beauty of nature. Many of us are urban dwellers and are not even accustomed to noticing, much less appreciating, the wonders of the natural world that we inhabit.

On the holiday of Succot we are obligated by Jewish law and tradition to leave our house and in some fashion connect ourselves to the natural surroundings that we often ignore during the rest of the year. Insects, especially bees, can be very annoying but their purpose is to remind us that we are not the only creatures that inhabit this planet. The wonders of the natural world, with their infinite variety of creatures and colors, is meant to testify to the power and infinite grace of the Creator of the universe.

The holidays of the Jewish people are built on the platform of agriculture, climate, and the variety of nature, as well as they are based upon the historical events that these holidays represent. They are meant to give us a complete picture of creation, nature and human history as well. They are meant to instill within us the harmony of and appreciation of life and its wonders. The holiday most representative of this is that of Succot. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Hybrid Etrog

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The *etrog* tree is very delicate. In order to make it stronger and live longer, people have grafted *etrog* branches onto other citrus trees, such as that of the bitter orange. The part of the tree that hosts the grafted branch is known as the rootstock. Most *poskim* say that this *etrog murkav* (hybrid *etrog*) may not be used on Succot to fulfill the mitzva of *lulav* and *etrog*. A number of reasons are given for this disqualification:

1. This fruit is not considered fruit of the *etrog* tree, but rather of the rootstock's tree.

2. Even if it is not considered a fruit of the rootstock's tree, it is still a fruit which is a mixture of two species. But the Torah requires an *etrog*, not a partial *etrog*.

3. The share the rootstock has in the tree may take away from the size of the *etrog*. If the *etrog* is the size of an egg (*kebeitzah*), but we deduct the part of the rootstock, it is smaller than an egg (and thus not large enough to use for the mitzva).

4. Even if the *etrog* is larger than an egg, it is still invalid because part of it is missing (*chaser*). Being partly composed of the rootstock means it is partially bitter orange, not *etrog*. Since the part that is bitter orange does not count, the *etrog* is missing a part. It is as if a bite has been taken out of it, and so it is invalid.

5. Sometimes the grafting itself is prohibited. Even if a non-Jew did it, the *etrog* is the product of a sin and may not be used to fulfill the mitzva.

Those *poskim* who permit a hybrid *etrog* offer responses to each of the above challenges:

1. The Torah never specifies that an *etrog* must be used. Rather, the phrase in the verse is "*pri etz hadar*" ("a fruit that is beautiful"). An *etrog murkav* is beautiful.

2. The idea that the rootstock is more important than the original tree in determining the nature of the fruit is correct only when speaking of prohibitions. However, the fruit produced by the graft is considered that of the original tree (i.e., the *etrog* tree).

3-4. Even a partial *etrog* is acceptable, and the part of the fruit contributed by the rootstock does not mean the *etrog* is missing anything.

5. Even if the grafting is prohibited (which is not at all clear, since both trees are species of citrus), this would not disqualify the *etrog*. The idea that the product of a sin may not be used is correct only when speaking of sacrifices. However, it is not disqualified for use in other *mitzvot*.

The question of the hybrid *etrog* (*etrog murkav*) is indeed complicated (*murkevot*). The *Encyclopedia Talmudit* can provide the interested reader with references to many books and responsa that deal with this topic at length – a very appropriate topic of study

for Sukkot. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Sukkot is the only festival referred to as zeman simhateinu, the time of happiness in our liturgy. The Torah in its last description of the festivals, mentions the word simcha twice when discussing Sukkot. (Deuteronomy 16:14, 15) This in contrast to Shavuot where it appears only once. (Deuteronomy 16:11) On Passover, the word is totally absent. (Deuteronomy 16:1-8) Sukkot is described in the liturgy as the days of happiness, as the term simcha is most associated with this holiday. Why is Sukkot deemed as the ultimate holiday of happiness and joy?

On a historical level, Sukkot is the culmination of the three festivals. Passover is the holiday of physical freedom. Yet, freedom without purpose is void of happiness; hence the word simcha is not linked to Passover. Shavuot gives meaning to our freedom since on that day, we received the Torah. Hence simcha is mentioned in reference to Shavuot. Sukkot takes us to another dimension. Real joy occurs when one is able to sustain meaning in life well beyond the dramatic moments. As Sukkot is a commemoration of the fragile homes in which we lived during the 40 years in the desert, this holiday represents the maintenance of belief, even beyond the experience at Sinai. So, the Torah mentions simcha twice relative to Sukkot.

On an agricultural level, Sukkot teaches another important lesson about happiness. The ultimate holiday of gathering our produce is Sukkot. Thus, the festival is called Hag ha-asif. The Torah, immediately preceding the laws of the holidays in Deuteronomy, mentions the laws of giving tithes. (Ch. 14:22) This serves as a reminder that true happiness is achieved when one takes of what one has gleaned and gives it to another. Most people believe that happiness is achieved by taking more. The reverse is true. The more one gives, the more one experiences exhilaration of having given of themselves to others. In the end, happiness is a feeling. Giving, on the other hand, is an action. While one cannot automatically achieve an emotion, each of us has it in our power to act. Through action, feelings emerge. In the case of Sukkot, from giving of our produce, happiness surfaces.

Not coincidentally, Sukkot comes on the heels of Rosh Hashanah, when we wish each other Shana Tovah. Shana Tovah is commonly translated, "have a happy year." This translation, in fact is a take-off of the American New Year, when happiness is the only goal. In truth, Shana Tovah does not mean "happy new year," but "good new year." In fact, not everything that is happy is good and not everything that is good is happy. When we wish each other a Shana Tovah, what we are really saying is, "may you have a year of

doing good." By experiencing a High Holidays of tov, of goodness, and internalizing the message of Sukkot, we can ultimately realize the description of Sukkot as found in our prayers -- zman simhateinu, the time of true joy. ©2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"The meal offerings with them – of fine flour mixed with oil – 3/10 of a measure for each of the thirteen bulls, 2/10 for each of the two rams." (Bamidbar 29:14) If one looks at the various korbanos of the Yomim Tovim, a careful study will reveal that there is something unique about the offerings of Sukkos. Each sacrifice had an accompanying meal offering. In most cases in the Torah, it tells us, "This measure for each bull" or "for each ram." Only regarding Sukkos does it say, "for each bull, of the thirteen bulls," ensuring that we are aware that even for so many bulls we do a full complement.

Why would we imagine they shouldn't all have the same measure? What need was there for the Torah to tell us the ration should remain the same?

It could be that one might have thought since these animals represent the seventy nations of the world, they could suffice with less than the accompaniments of the lambs, which represent the Jewish People. However, the Torah wants us to be sure to treat these animals the same as the others we offer. And that is important for Sukkos.

The Ohr HaChaim discusses multiple meanings of the "sevens," being the seventy nations of the world, and the Jews who perform multiples of seven (sacrifices in multiples of seven on holidays, seven days of Yom Tov, Shabbos, and other esoteric meanings.) He says the diminishing numbers of animals offered on Sukkos represent the diminishing of the nations of the world as the Jews free sparks of holiness from the Gentile world. The fourteen sheep represent the Jews, seven in the revealed capacity of holiness and seven in the hidden capacity, being that function of releasing the holiness scattered throughout the world.

In that case, the sacrifices representing the nations don't only represent them, but the opportunities for us to perfect ourselves through them. The exiles, suffering and travails, as well as the times we are comfortable and successful (which may be more dangerous in some ways), are all part of our journey to perfection, and all that time, we dwell in Hashem's Divine protection, which is represented by the Sukkah.

The message of the numbering of the korbanos is that no experience or event is superfluous or less

crucial than other events in our lives. Everything we go through is part of our mission in life and must be treated with the respect and appreciation of any other mitzvah opportunity. We must see ourselves as journeying through uncharted territory, exploring for treasures of holiness, insight and growth.

Sukkos is the time we recall our "wandering" in the Wilderness which was not random at all, but carefully orchestrated by our Creator, to enable us to reach the Promised Land by becoming the people He intended us to be, under His ever-watchful eye and the protection afforded by the "sukkos" He provided for us there.

A girl got married at 18 years old but a few months later she was divorced. Her family was shocked and distraught. Here was a girl who should have begun a wonderful life and now she was an eighteen-year-old divorcee! Who would ever want to marry such a woman?

When she was 22, she met and married a wonderful young man and, years later, they are very happy. Looking back, she says that her divorce was the best thing for her. "My husband is a baal teshuva," she explained. "If I had never married, my parents would not have allowed me to date him because of some perceived 'stigma.' Now that I was a divorcee, however, it was different. I owe my wonderful husband to my awful previous marriage!" ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Moshe-Servant to Hashem

The final parasha in the Torah is V'zot HaBracha. This parasha is read on Shemini Atzeret in Israel and on Simchat Torah, the added day to Shemini Atzeret, outside of the Land of Israel. For this reason, this parasha can only possibly be read on Shabbat in Israel as Simchat Torah outside of Israel can never fall on Shabbat.

We conclude the Torah with the following words: "And Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there in the Land of Moav, by the Mouth of Hashem. He (Hashem) buried him in the depression, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet-Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day. Moshe was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished. The B'nei Yisrael bewailed Moshe in the plains of Moav for thirty days; then the days of tearful mourning for Moshe ended. Yehoshua, the son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom, because Moshe had laid his hands upon him, so the B'nei Yisrael obeyed him and did as Hashem had commanded Moshe. Never again has there risen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face, as evidenced by all the signs and wonders that Hashem sent him to perform in the Land of Egypt, against Par'oh and all his courtiers and all his land. And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel."

Our Rabbis are concerned with these final p'sukim in the Torah, because we have a tradition that Moshe wrote the entire Torah, yet these sentences had to have been written after his death. Several answers are traditionally given: (1) (Gemara Baba Batra, 15b) Yehoshua wrote these final sentences after Moshe's death, or (2) (Rashi, quoting Reb Meir in the Gemara) Hashem dictated the words to Moshe prior to his death and Moshe wrote them down with his tears, not ink. The argument stems from the problem of the authenticity of the Torah: If Moshe did not write these words, are there other words (including laws) which were not directly the words that Moshe wrote? Could others have come later and added "Torah Laws" which were not dictated verbatim by Hashem?

For the first time, Moshe is called "Eved Hashem, servant of Hashem." While he was alive, serving Hashem, Moshe was referred to as "Ish Elokim, a Man of Elokim. The ibn Ezra explains that Moshe's death was the way in which he became a complete servant of Hashem. The pasuk immediately preceding Moshe's death makes this title clear: "And Hashem said to him (Moshe), 'this is the land that I swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov saying to your children I will give it, I have let you see it with your own

eyes, (but) you will not cross over to there.'" Moshe's final acceptance of Hashem's decree that he would not be able to enter the land, was his way of serving Hashem completely with no restrictions caused by his own desires. Reb Bachya explains that Moshe now entered a "new and higher status, for a servant is permitted, as it were, to enter the inner chamber of the King." In death, Moshe was no longer limited by his body and its desires, and "his soul was able to perceive even more than before."

Another expression is used in describing Moshe's death, "by the mouth of Hashem." Rashi explains that Hashem took Moshe's soul in a kiss. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that "by the mouth of Hashem" should be understood to mean that Moshe's death was by Divine Decree. Hirsch also ties this pasuk into the statement, "He buried him in the depression, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet-Peor." It appears from this pasuk that it was Hashem Who took upon Himself the responsibility of burying Moshe. This is an exceptional concept. The preparation of the body for burial and the burial itself is an act of Gemilat Chassadim, an act of true kindness. It is often called Chessed shel Emet, an true act of kindness for which one can receive no thanks. Hashem's kindness to Moshe here is unprecedented. It appears to be a reward for Moshe's servitude to Hashem both in life and in death.

It is also clear that Moshe's burial place was special. The Torah tells us that "no one knows his burial place to this day." We are told that it was "opposite Bet-Peor", a reminder of the mass immorality of the B'nei Yisrael at Peor earlier. But there is also a Midrash that tells us that Moshe's grave was prepared for him at the time of the Creation of the World. We are told that ten things were created in the last moment between the Sixth Day of Creation and Shabbat. These included the opening of the earth that swallowed up Korach and his fellow rebels, the Well of Miriam, the mouth of Bilaam's donkey, the rainbow, the Manna in the desert, Moshe's staff, and (according to some) the grave of Moshe (Pirkei Avot, 5:9). The Torah describes Moshe's burial place: "And no one knows his burial place to this day." Hashem did not want to create a place for pilgrimages because of the humble nature of Moshe. Moshe would not have wanted such a tribute. For Moshe, the study of Torah and the practice and observance of its Laws would have been the most everlasting and meaningful tribute that he could receive.

The Torah describes Moshe in one of its most amazing p'sukim: "Never again has there risen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face...." Moshe was the only prophet to speak "face-to-face" with Hashem. Our Rabbis explain that even the Forefathers spoke with Hashem in a vision or a dream. Rashi explains that Moshe was able to speak

to Hashem whenever he wished. He did not speak to Hashem in a prayer but in a direct conversation in which Hashem answered. The Ramban disagrees with Rashi, placing the emphasis not on Moshe's familiarity with Hashem, but on Hashem's raising Moshe to such a high level. The Ramban understood these words to indicate that "Hashem and Moshe were like two people who knew one another well; however, Scripture said only that Hashem knew Moshe, not vice-versa, since out of respect to the Most Exalted it did not want to mention that Moshe also knew Him that way."

As we learn the Torah, we recognize the exceptional character and strength of Moshe. No one else would have been capable of gaining the people's respect and obedience. No one else could have received the Torah and taught Hashem's Laws to the world. Yet we are permitted to witness Moshe's failings and his shortcomings. We are reminded that Moshe was still a human being with Man's frailties and limitations. Moshe was not an angel or a god even though he rose to a level not much below them. We, too, can be a "servant" to Hashem. We, too, can elevate ourselves to a level close to the angels. It is our task to strive for the same closeness to Hashem that Moshe had and to be able to enter "the inner chamber of the King." © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI PINCHUS WINSTON

Perceptions

This is the blessing which Moshe, man of the G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death. (Devarim 33:1) Nothing unusual about this verse—reads just fine the way it is. Unless, of course, you are the Rokeach, and you have the mysteries of Torah at your finger tips: "In the book, 'Sodei Razzah,' the Ba'al Rokeach establishes 'that the angel appointed over Rosh Chodesh Adar is... (I am not going to transliterate the name, but it has in it the word for 'blessing' and a name of G-d)... Because this angel is the Angel of Blessing, it starts off saying, 'This is the blessing which Moshe blessed...' since he blessed them in the month of Adar, the month over which this Angel of Blessing is appointed. This is also why it says, 'man of the G-d,' as if to say, 'the angel that is called this helped to oversee the blessing of Israel.'" (Megillos Amukos, Ophen 44)

Did Moshe enlist this angel for any specific reason? After all, what does it take to bless a nation with words?

It depends upon the brochah, and the one that Moshe was imparting to the Jewish people was no ordinary blessing: This is the blessing that Avraham gave to Yitzchak, and Yitzchak gave to Ya'akov, as it says, "G-d should give you from the dew of Heaven..." (Bereishis 27:28), and from the blessing of Avraham; this is the blessing with which Ya'akov blessed his sons, "each one according to his blessing"

(Bereishis 49:28). And this was the blessing in Moshe's hand as well (Pli'ah, Parashas Toldos)

Unlike many blessings that are made up at the time to suit the occasion, Moshe's blessing was one that flowed down from Heaven and through time. Each of the above mentioned leaders were channels for a special holy light that was to flow through them to the people—not a simple task for a mortal man, which is why Moshe invoked Heavenly assistance.

This is probably also why these blessings come at the end of the life of the leader. It is at a time like this that a person rises above physicality, since it has little meaning to him then. In a spiritual sense, he exists between This world and the next one, and therefore, in a better position to be that link between Heaven and earth.

This is hinted to with the words, "man of the G-d," which have rarely been used for Moshe in the Torah. At this stage of life, Moshe himself was like an angel, and therefore a perfect conduit for blessing from Above.

In fact, the Pesikta says that, all of Moshe's life he wanted to bless the Jewish people, but the Angel of Death would not allow it. Finally, just before his death, Moshe "forced" the angel to allow him to, and even blessed them right in front of him, as it says, "before his death," that is, before the Angel of Death. © 1999 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

YITZ WEISS

Hug Samayach!

One of the themes of Sukkot is to recognize that Hashem 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 Hashem 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 God on a daily basis and the coming of Moshiach! *This dvar torah was told by Rabbi Aaron Cohen in Cong. Tifereth Israel, Passaic, NJ*

