

SUKKOT READER

VOLUME II

**ARTICLES WITH INSIGHTS
ON SUKKOT, SHEMINI
ASSERET, AND SIMHAT
TORAH**



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Sukkot Reader

Volume Two

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Halakhot of Sukkot¹

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

I. Introduction

The festival of Sukkot commemorates the extraordinary care and protection that Hashem bestowed upon the Israelites during their perilous wandering through the wilderness. In the first instance it refers to their travels through the desert upon leaving Egypt. It also reminds us of the special providence Hashem extended to Israel through its history traveling through the “Wilderness of the Nations” (Ezek. 20:35). Sukkot is one of the *shalosh regalim*, the three festivals prescribed in the Torah (the other two being Pesah and Shabu`ot), when the members of the nation went to the central sanctuary to celebrate.

The first day of Sukkot and the eighth day, called Shemini Asseret (essentially “a festival for itself” attached to Sukkot), are days of yamim tobim, full festival occasions on which work is prohibited except that connected to *okhel nefesh* (see our Halakhot of Yom Tob). The six intermediate days are hol hamo`ed, that is “non-holy” days of the festival, days on which work may be performed with certain restrictions. In the Diaspora, Sukkot begins with two days of yom tob and concludes with two days yom tob of Shemini Asseret, with five intermediate days.

II. Mitzvah of Sukkah

A commandment of the Torah is to reside in a sukkah all seven days of Sukkot. A sukkah – derived from *sekhakh* (covering) – refers to a booth generally constructed for temporary or modest dwelling, such as one that might be

¹ In matters of varying customs, these Halakhot follow the general Sephardic custom of the Aleppo-derived communities.

provided for cattle (Gen. 33:17) or an orchard watchman (Isa. 1:8). The *sekhakh* of the sukkah plays a critical role in determining its halakhic acceptability. Residence primarily comprises eating and sleeping but also includes other activities one does at home such as reading, resting, social conversation, etc.

The berakhah recited for this mitzvah is *lesheb basukkah*. Although one performs a mitzvah whenever residing in the sukkah during the seven days of Sukkot, the blessing is not recited except upon partaking of a significant minimum measurement of bread or mezonot.

Less than *kebessa* of bread (the volume of an average egg, see below) may be eaten outside the sukkah; more than that requires a sukkah and the berakhah of *lesheb basukkah*.

Cake, crackers, cookies and other baked mezonot items may be eaten outside the sukkah as long as one does not eat an amount that is considered having “established a meal” of the mezonot. This measure is considered by some authorities to be the volume of three average eggs, which requires reciting *hamosi*, Birkat Hamazon and eating in a sukkah with the berakhah of *lesheb basukkah*. The volume of four average eggs of such mezonot products definitely requires the above. In practical halakhah there is a dispute concerning these measurement; some authorities consider a *kebessa* volume to be approximately two ounces of weight of bread or cake while others consider it to be not more than one and one-third ounces of weight of bread or cake.

In the case of cooked mezonot products such as pasta, when one eats the minimum measure they require sukkah and *lesheb basukkah* despite the fact that they never require the berakhot of *hamosi* and Birkat Hamazon, but mezonot and *al hamihya*, even when they comprise a “regular” meal.

Fruits, vegetables and drinks are permitted outside the sukkah in any quantity. Whoever is careful to eat and drink

in the sukkah even when partaking of less than the minimum measure that requires sukkah is praiseworthy. It is proper to eat mezonot items that are of at least a *kebessa* in the sukkah even though they do not require *lesheb basukkah*.

When reciting the blessings, one first recites *hamosi* then *lesheb basukkah*. On yom tob or Shabbat, since there is *qiddush*, *lesheb basukkah* is attached to the *qiddush*. If one forgot to recite it at the beginning of his meal, he may do so as long as he is still within the meal, even if he no longer intends to eat bread.

On the first night of Sukkot, one is required to eat at least a *kazzayit* of bread in the sukkah. (*Kazzayit* is dependent on the *kebessa*, but one ounce is surely adequate.) In the Diaspora this applies to the second night also.

There are four berakhot in the *qiddush* of the first two nights of Sukkot: the first is on the wine, the second commemorates the festival, followed by *lesheb basukkah* and *sheheheyanu*. On the second night the order of the third and fourth blessings are reversed as explained below.

The *sheheheyanu* in the *qiddush* on all first nights of festivals expresses gratitude for being alive to fulfill the mitzvah of celebrating the festival. On Sukkot it also applies to the mitzvah of construction of the sukkah (even if the individual reciting the *qiddush* did not build or does not own the sukkah). Therefore, on the first night it is recited after *lesheb basukkah*, to cover both mitzvot. On the second night, *sheheheyanu* is only for the festival, recited because of the “doubt of the day” that used to apply. As far as construction of the sukkah is concerned, the *sheheheyanu* of the first night would cover it even if the first night were not really the festival, as the sukkah was already completed. Although these considerations derive from a situation that no longer obtains today we do not

have the authoritative Bet Din to bring the halakhah into alignment with the reality.

III. Exemptions From the Mitzvah

Women are not required to eat in the sukkah, as it is one of the positive commandments governed by time from which they are exempt. If they choose to eat in the sukkah they fulfill a mitzvah. However, they should not recite *lesheb basukkah*, as they cannot properly say *vesivvanu* (“He commanded us”). This principle applies to all such cases in which women are exempt but choose to fulfill the mitzvah.

In cold or inclement climates one need not sleep in the sukkah. One should not sleep in the sukkah if it is dangerous, for “danger is more serious than a prohibition.”

A sick person who is discomforted when eating in the sukkah, even if his illness is not life threatening, is exempt. The sick person’s attendant is also exempt.

When it is raining hard enough to interfere with the normal use of the sukkah as a room in one’s home, one is exempt and may eat bread outside the sukkah. If, nonetheless, one chooses to eat in the sukkah, he is not allowed to recite the berakhah on the sukkah. The rabbis consider a person who does so *hedyot*. Similarly, other adverse conditions in the sukkah that cause one significant discomfort, such as extreme cold or bad odor not under one’s control, also exempt one from the sukkah.

If one began his meal indoors because it was raining, and the rain stopped while he was in the midst of the meal, he does not have to move to the sukkah or refrain from bread during the rest of the meal. Once he was exempt at the beginning of the meal he is exempt for the whole meal.

If it rains the first night of Sukkot before one fulfilled the mitzvah of eating in the sukkah, and the individual is prepared to begin his meal, he should wait a half hour or so

to see if the rain stops or if there is a sign of stopping. If it does not stop, and there is no sign of stopping, he may then eat with bread in the house. Even the first night there is no mitzvah to eat in the sukkah while disturbed by rain.

However, on the first night, since eating in the sukkah is a specific mitzvah from the Torah, if the rain stopped after one began or completed his meal, he should enter the sukkah to eat at least a measure of bread with the berakhah of *lesheb basukkah*. If the rain stopped after one went to bed to sleep for the night, it is not then necessary to go to the sukkah.

Travelers during Sukkot are exempt from sukkah during their journeying times and may eat bread outside a sukkah providing they are traveling for purposes of business or mitzvah. Those traveling for pleasure are not exempt from sukkah and even if a sukkah is not available in their vicinity they should refrain from eating the measure of bread that requires a sukkah.

IV. The Sukkah

A sukkah must be at least ten *tefahim* (handbreadths) high, approximately thirty-five inches. In times past, when it was common to sit on the floor, this height was adequate. The maximum height for a sukkah is twenty *amot* or “cubits” (an average person’s forearm, approximately twenty-one inches). Thus, the maximum acceptable height for a sukkah is about 35 feet. If it were higher, an individual sitting in the sukkah might not sense being under the *sekhakh* covering.

A sukkah must have at least two walls and part of a third. In a standard rectangular sukkah, two walls must extend for at least seven *tefahim* each (24½ inches) while the third must extend at least over four *tefahim* (14 inches).

Sukkah walls may be constituted of any material providing they are strong enough to withstand a wind

normal for the particular locale during the Sukkot season. The commercial canvas walls common in our times are acceptable providing they are fastened well all along their width on top and bottom. It is preferable they not flutter more than three *tefahim* off center.

The sukkah must be covered with *sekhakh* that shades the majority of the area of the sukkah. *Sekhakh* must be:

- a. Of a material that grows from the ground
- b. Detached from the ground
- c. Able to remain for seven days without decomposing
- d. Not subject to the laws of ritual impurity, thus excluding receptacles, vessels and foodstuffs.

The most usual materials for *sekhakh* are bamboo, evergreens and thin wooden slats. It is acceptable to use bamboos spliced into thin strips and interlaced to make a “mat,” providing it was made for overhead covering or at least not for a floor mat (which involves a technical point of association with a potential defilement).

Sekhakh should not be so solid that heavy rain cannot penetrate the sukkah. It is preferred to be sufficiently thin so that some stars may be visible from the sukkah.

An air gap in the *sekhakh* of less than three *tefahim* (10½ in.) does not invalidate the sukkah, but one should not eat under such a gap. Invalid *sekhakh* of less than four *tefahim* (14 in.) in the midst of kosher *sekhakh* does not invalidate the sukkah and one is permitted to eat underneath such a spot. In a minimum-size sukkah (of seven *tefahim*) these two lenient regulations are inapplicable, as there would not be enough space remaining for a kosher sukkah.

An area that extends into the sukkah from a side wall may have invalid *sekhakh* (such as a regular roof) up until four *amot* (seven feet) without invalidating the sukkah. The

reasoning is that the part of the ceiling connected to the wall may be considered a continuation of the wall (a curved wall). However, the invalid *sekhakh* area is not considered part of the sukkah; thus, there must be a minimum size of sukkah without it. When eating in such a sukkah one must be under the valid *sekhakh*.

A sukkah should not be built under any projection (e.g. a ledge, an overhang or trees). If part of the sukkah is under a projection, that part is invalid and one should not eat in that spot.

It is a mitzvah to decorate the sukkah. Decorations may be attached to the *sekhakh* even though the decorations are made of material that is invalid for *sekhakh*. Decorations within four *tefahim* of the *sekhakh* are annulled to it and one may eat under them.

V. The Four Species – Lulab, Etrog, Hadas and Arabah

The Torah prescribes to take (lift up) the four species on the first day of Sukkot and rejoice. The Talmud defines these as *etrog* (citron), *lulab* (palm branch), *hadas* (myrtle branches) and *arabah* (willow branches). In the central sanctuary the mitzvah was performed all seven days of Sukkot. The rabbis extended the mitzvah to all seven days everywhere.

The mitzvah is performed once daily during daytime only. It is not performed on Shabbat as the rabbis feared it would lead to carrying.

Women are not obligated in this mitzvah as it is a positive mitzvah governed by time. They may choose to perform the mitzvah, but without a berakhah.

One *lulab*, three *hadasim* and two *arabot* should be bound together, so that the three species comprise a single unit. It is customary to bind them with *lulab* leaves. The binding should preferably be done before yom tob so that the binding material can be cut to size and knots made. If it

was not done before yom tob, it may be done on yom tob in an inferior manner, without cutting and without proper knots.

In fulfilling the mitzvah, one takes the three species bound together in his right hand, recites the berakhah, then takes the *etrog* in his left hand (even if left-handed) and holds the four species together, and waves them. The central spine of the *lulab* (*shidra*) should face towards the person. The berakhah is recited just before taking the *etrog* in hand in accordance with the rule that berakhot on mitzvot are recited just before fulfillment. If preferred, one may hold the *etrog* upside down before the berakhah and turn it right side up after the berakhah, as the mitzvah is not fulfilled until the four species are held right side up. Right side up means the point of detachment from the tree is to the bottom.

On the first day two berakhot are recited: *al netilat lulab* and *sheheheyanu*. On the rest of the days only the first berakhah is recited.

While waving, one should silently request G-d to provide beneficial rains and dew and helpful winds during the coming year. One should have kavana (focused thoughts) for the land of Israel, the country he is in and, in a general way, the world-at-large.

The Torah indicates that we should each take our own set of four species. This applies to the first day (in the Diaspora the first two days). If one does not have his own set, someone may present him with a “gift” with the understanding that it will be returned. If the congregation owns its own set, each member is considered a partner and each is understood to relinquish his share on behalf of whoever wishes to use it.

There is a technical problem involved with the giving of the *lulab* set to children on the first day. Halakhically, a child can acquire property when an adult gives it to him,

but cannot give over property. Therefore, if a child does not have his own set, an adult should be careful not to transfer his to the child as a “gift” on the first day before all the adults who intend to use that set that day have done so.

The *lulab* must measure at least four *tefahim* (14 in.); *hadas* and *arabah* stalks must measure at least three *tefahim* each (10½ in.). An *etrog* must be at least the volume of an average egg.

An *etrog* from which even a small amount is missing is invalid. This includes the node from which the *pitum* protrudes. *Eetrogim* that grow naturally without such a node are acceptable. The upper portion of an *etrog* (the upper slope until the top) should be very presentable, without flaws such as discoloration or “scales.” Flaws on the lower portion of the *etrog* are not as serious and its acceptability depends on the extent.

Proper *hadas* has three or more leaves protruding from the same horizontal line all along its stem. At the minimum, it should be “tripled” for at least four and one-half inches along its stem, which is the majority of the *bedi'avad* measurement of *hadas*. If all the leaves dry up to the extent that they no longer are green but “whitish,” it is invalid.

Proper *arabah* has smooth-edged leaves. If the majority of the leaves dry up or fall off, it is invalid.

Whatever is invalid because of “missing,” poor appearance or blemishes is only invalid the first day.

Hadas and particularly *arabah* spoil relatively quickly. To preserve them, it is helpful to wrap them in a large sheet of aluminum foil, wet newspaper or a damp towel and refrigerate.

A halakhic principle is to “beautify the mitzvot.” As the *etrog* is defined as the Biblical *hadar*, it is especially appropriate to seek an especially presentable *etrog*.

VI. Shemini Asseret

The festival of the eighth day (and the ninth day in the Diaspora), Shemini Asseret, is a separate festival in many respects. Thus, the halakhot of sukkah and the “four species” do not apply to it.

It is customary to eat in the sukkah on the first day of Shemini Asseret without reciting the berakhah on the sukkah. This is based on the practice of conducting as they did before establishment of a set calendar, when they had the doubt regarding the day, i.e. perhaps the eighth day is really the seventh day and still Sukkot.

The reason we do not recite the berakhah on sukkah because of the “doubt” that they had is that in the evening it would be recited in the *qiddush*, thus creating a totally inappropriate situation: we would mention Shemini Asseret and explicitly contradict our declaration with the blessing of *lesheb basukkah*. Merely sitting in the sukkah, however, does not create a contradiction as we may choose to eat outdoors independently of the festival.

However, since we now know the day is Shemini Asseret and there is no requirement to sit in the sukkah, slight discomfort permits eating indoors, as the mitzvah to be joyous in celebrating the festival is from the Torah and the custom to comport in accordance with the “doubt of the day” that they had before the set calendar cannot override it.

We begin reciting *mashib haru'ah umorid hageshem* in the amidah of musaf of Shemini Asseret. If one mistakenly recited *morid hatal* he does not repeat, as dew is appropriate all year long. We do not begin *barekh alenu* in the amidah (that includes the *tal umatar* request for rain) until December 4th or 5th.

VII. Simhat Torah

Simhat Torah is celebrated on Shemini Asseret; in the Diaspora it is celebrated on the second day. On this day we conclude the reading of the Torah and begin reading it anew. It is then appropriate to focus our intentions on increasing our study of the Torah this time around.

We read from three *Sifre Torah*. In the first we conclude the Torah, in the second we begin Beresheet and in the third we read the maftir for the day. Although we normally recite *Qaddish* after a required reading of each Sefer Torah of yom tob or Shabbat, the custom is not to recite *Qaddish* after concluding the Torah so as not to interrupt between concluding it and beginning it again.

Three *hatanim* (grooms of the Torah) are designated for the readings. The *Hatan Me'onah* reads the portion of the Torah that precedes the concluding portion, the *Hatan Torah* concludes, while the *Hatan Beresheet* begins from the beginning of the Torah.

It is customary to give many aliyot on this day, including to children to increase their love for the Torah. Very young children are sent up in groups with an older child leading them in the berakhah. The extra aliyot are generally given before the aliyah of *Hatan Me'onah*, although some have the custom to send up the *Hatan Me'onah* as *hamishi* (before the extra aliyot).

A special celebration is made in honor of the Torah. The rabbis and the public dance with the Torah and circle the Torah seven times with singing and dancing both at night and by day. If indicated, it is permitted to take the Sefer Torah outdoors to increase the celebration.

VIII. Prayers

Ya'ale veyabo is recited in each amidah. If it was omitted during the intermediate days (hol hamo'ed, when a

weekday amidah is recited), and the individual did not realize it until having concluded, he repeats the amidah, for he made no mention of the special day. If he realized the omission before concluding the amidah, he should return to *rese* and repeat from that point on, which includes *ya`ale veyabo*. On yom tob, if mention of the festival was made in the amidah independently of *Ya`ale Veyabo*, one does not need to repeat.

Complete Hallel with a berakhah is recited after the amidah of *shahrit* each day for all nine days. The *lulab* set is waved in all six directions on each of the days of Sukkot except Shabbat (that is, on six days) during the recital of certain verses in Hallel. While waving, one should silently pray for a year of adequate rain and dew.

Hosha`not are recited daily for the seven days of Sukkot after Hallel. A Sefer Torah is placed on the *tebah* and each individual circles around it while holding a set of the four species. Our custom is to bring the Sefer Torah to the *tebah* before *Barukh She`amar*. On Shabbat, as the four species are proscribed, Hoshanot are not recited. Some recite Hoshanot composed especially for Shabbat but do not bring out a Sefer Torah for it.

Specified selections are read from the Torah each morning. The minimum number of aliyot on yom tob is five plus *maftir*. The number of aliyot on *hol hamo`ed* is four.

Each day of Sukkot, before *arbit* and in the morning prayers, we recite Psalms 42 and 43 that connect to the theme of the occasion. For *Shemini Asseret* we recite Psalm 12.

Musaf is said daily.

The last day of *hol hamo`ed* is *Hosh`anah Rabbah*. There is a custom to stay up all night and read the complete books of *Debarim* and *Tehillim*. We pray for one more chance.

On Hoshanah Rabbah seven sections of hosh'anot are recited, during each of which the congregants circle the Sefer Torah on the tebah.

At the conclusion of musaf, five *arabot*, bound together, are beaten five times on the ground with a silent prayer that G-d should grant us a year during which the earth yields its produce abundantly.

Tefillin are not donned for all nine days. Ya`ale veyabo is recited in Birkat Hamazon throughout the festival including the intermediate days.

Did We Sit in Sukkot in the Wilderness?

Rabbi Alex Israel

You shall live in *Sukkot* (booths) for seven days, all citizens in Israel shall live in *Sukkot* (booths); in order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in booths, when I brought them out of the Land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God. (Vayiqra 23:41-43)

The Torah informs us that the Sukkot, the huts or booths in which we reside for the week of Chag Hassukot, correspond to a specific historical reality. God “made the Israelite people live in booths” during the Exodus from Egypt, and we imitate and simulate that collective experience on Chag Hassukot. Now, this familiar passuk has always raised a number of questions. What exactly does the Torah mean when it speaks about God housing us in “Sukkot” during the Egyptian Exodus? What booths is the verse referring to? Does the Torah record such an event?

Most readers are probably familiar with the Talmudic discussion in Sukkah 11b:

“I made the Israelite people live in booths – It refers to the Clouds of Glory” said Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Akiva says, “God made real Sukkot for them.”

For Rabbi Eliezer, the booths of the wilderness are the miraculous protective “Clouds of Glory.” For Rabbi Akiva, God’s booths are real huts in which the Israelites lived during their years of sojourning in the wilderness. Let us investigate this relationship between the past and the present. How do our Sukkot relate to the booths of the

Exodus? We shall take our cue from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Akiva and investigate their respective opinions.

Clouds of Glory

Rabbi Eliezer talks about Ananei HaKavod – Clouds of Glory. What are these clouds? The Mekhilta offers us some clarity:

There were seven clouds:¹ Four of them to each side/direction (of the Israelites), one was above them and another below their feet. A further cloud would pass in front of them leveling the valleys and flattening the mountains. (*Mekhilta Beshalach* 1)

We are dealing with a miraculous phenomenon whereby mysterious clouds with protective and other powers shielded and eased the path of B'nei Yisrael as they trekked through the wilderness. According to Rabbi Eliezer, the Sukkot that we inhabit mirror and reflect the cloud-experience of the wilderness. But how?

Obviously, this concept has its advantages and disadvantages. Advantages will include a straightforward reading of the passuk: “I placed the Israelite people in sukkot.” This is a Godly form of envelopment and protection, and hence God’s protective clouds might fit the bill.

Real Booths?

But for adherents of the peshat approach to Chumash, the *Ananei Hakavod* are a red flag. After all, the text of the Chumash never mentions clouds leveling mountains, or

¹ It is interesting that in the Mekhikta, other views are offered:
Rabbi Yehuda – 13 clouds
Rabbi Yoshiya – 4 clouds
Rebbi – 2 clouds.

So there is far from consensus amongst the Tannaim on this point.

clouds under the feet of the Israelites! Those who adopt a more rational mode of thought and more text oriented approach are immediately attracted to the more realistic proposition by Rabbi Akiva that the Israelites lived in huts, shelters. After all, if we are commanded to live in huts in commemoration of the booths of our ancestors in the wilderness, we should assume that B'nei Yisrael did indeed live in huts!

They are in good company. The Ibn Ezra also didn't favour the theory of *Annanei Hakavod* very much.

The Approach of the Ibn Ezra

Some of the early scholars said that there were seven clouds, but to my mind, there were only two, and possibly only a single cloud. (Ibn Ezra)

The Ibn Ezra is commenting on the verse in Shemot that informs us that the Am Yisrael were led by a cloud as we departed from Egypt:

The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they may travel by day and night. (Shemot 13:21)

The Ibn Ezra reads that verse in the following manner:

A pillar of cloud by day, to guide them – to show them the route. It also protected them,² and this is the

² The Ibn Ezra may be referring to Shemot 14:19 where we read how the “the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up place behind them. It came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel...and one could not come near the other throughout the night.” Might this episode be one of the primary sources for the concept of *Annanei Kavod* - protective clouds - in each direction?

At any rate, the Ibn Ezra seems to think (on the basis of the verse in Tehillim) that the pillar of cloud spread itself wide over them to shield them from the scorching desert sun.

meaning of the phrase (in Tehillim 105:39) “He spread a cloud as a screen.”

A pillar of fire by night, to give them light – It might be that the pillar of fire was within the pillar of cloud at night, as it states (Shemot 40:38), “Fire will be within it at night.”

That they may travel by day and night – They traveled around the clock...These clouds, if there were two, remained with them until they crossed the Yam Suf (Reed Sea) but in my opinion, they then ceased to accompany them for there wasn't a need to travel at night after Pharaoh and his army had drowned in the Sea. (*Peirush Katzar*, Shemot 13:21)

But questions remain. And the most significant of them is the origins of Sukkot. If we have debunked the theory of the “Clouds of Glory,” then what are the Sukkot that Bnei Yisrael lived in during the wilderness era? The Ibn Ezra answers:

Near Mount Sinai was a forest of Acacia trees. When they arrived there (Sinai) and were told that they would reside there for some time – and there was no (protective) cloud as I have already explained – each person constructed a hut ... and they cut down the entire forest. (*Peirush HaAroch*, Shemot 25:5)

The Ibn Ezra's theory helps explain what the Biblical Sukkot were, but it also goes some way to inform regarding the source of the wood that the people contributed to the construction of the Mishkan.

So this is a neat answer. But, is it correct?

Other Evidence – What Dwellings Did Israel Live In?

Let us check it out. Did the Israelites live in wood huts? Did they chop down a forest? Many places record the

manner in which Bnei Yisrael dwelt in **tents**,³ termed Mishkan or Ohel:

And they (Moshe and Yitro) went into the tent.
(Shemot 18:7)

And the people bowed down, each person at the doorway of his tent. (Shemot 33:10)

And Datan and Aviram emerged defiant at the portal of their tents. (Bamidbar 16:27)

How comely are your tents O Jacob, your dwelling places (*mishkenotecha*) O Israel. (Bamidbar 24:5)

In each place they talk about tents, and the term “Sukkot/Sukkah” are noticeably absent! In fact, other than the Festival of Sukkot, that word is **never** used as a term for a home for Bnei Yisrael when they are in the Wilderness! Never!⁴

So, we are stuck, because the Israelites lived in **ohalim** and not **sukkot**. And now we are raising serious doubts as to the identity of the living shelters that housed Bnei Yisrael during their forty years in the wilderness. If our Sukkot commemorate the huts of the Midbar, do they refer to the physical object of a Sukkah? Where does this leave us?

³ See also Devarim 1:27, 5:27, and possibly Bamidbar 19:14

⁴ One could claim, even with the Ibn Ezra, that they used the wood to create some sort of frame, and that the walls were made of cloth, and that this sort of wood-frame/cloth structure is known as an Ohel, a tent. That would assist us with logistical issues, but it still leaves us bewildered as to the word “Sukkot.”

As for the word “Sukkot”, there is a *place* named Sukkot (Shemot 12:37; Bamidbar 33:5) which was their *first* stop in the Wilderness after leaving Egypt. Might the Torah be relating the booth-Sukkot to the place called Sukkot? That seems unlikely. (More about this at the end of the shiur.)

S-CH-CH

Let us investigate the verb *S-CH-CH* which is the grammatical root of the sukkah. What does that word tell us? (Look up the root in the concordance.)

If you examine virtually every instance of the verb *S-CH-CH* in the Tanach, it refers to God's protection in some way. More specifically, it frequently refers to Temple references,⁵ but that is far from exclusive. The overwhelming majority refer to God as directly shielding or protecting a person:

You shielded my head on the day of war. (Tehillim 140:8)

With his wing he shelters you. (Tehillim 91:4)

This is about basking in the divine presence, or being protected by Him.

For example, the Ark of the Covenant has cherubs that are "shielding – *sochechim* – with their wings over the Kapporet." The Ark is the place where God's presence is manifest. "And I will speak to you ... from between the Cherubs." (Shemot 25:18)

And now, I understand that this verb is dealing with God's protection, or even more than that, with God's Presence itself.

And I recall the passuk in Shemot: "God's presence – *Kevod Hashem* – appeared in *cloud*" (Shemot 16:10). Are *Annanei Kavod* in truth a metaphor for God's presence, His manifest protection?

And here I find myself coming full circle. We are back to the start. We began by hearing Chazal talk about seven protective divine clouds. It sounded bizarre, textually unfounded, too supernatural. So we explored Tanach for a

⁵ See the work of Yaakov Nagen from Yeshivat Otniel, who elaborates upon the Sukkah-Mikdash connection or symmetry.

rational physical booth within which to understand the phenomenon of the sukkot of the Wilderness. And now, with a linguistic analysis, we understand that in truth, the word *Sukkah* refers quite directly to God protecting man.

In other words, the word *Sukkah* refers quite clearly to the notion that we thrust our trust into God's hands and we rely upon Him. Or even further, that God allows us to have relationship with Him. Maybe this is actually the inner meaning of the Midrashic concept of the seven protective clouds.

When we sit in our sukkah this week, we are expected to allow our "home" to be rather more fragile than it usually is. But that very understanding – that we are limited and not absolutely able to control our personal and physical environment, our destiny – this very understanding affords us more "room" to recognize God's caring hand, God's presence in our lives.

The Symbolism of Sukkot¹

Rabbi Ezra Bick

Two Mitzvot

There are two distinct mitzvot associated with Sukkot, with no immediately apparent connection between them: the obligation to live in a sukkah, a temporary booth with a roof made of branches or other material of vegetable origin, and an obligation to “take” four special species (and shake them) – the etrog (citron fruit), the lulav (palm branch), the hadas (myrtle branch), and the arava (willow branch). Since the first has an explicit rationalization given in the Torah, and has also lent its name to the holiday – it is called by the Torah “the Festival of Sukkot” (the plural of sukkah) – we shall first concentrate on it.

The Sukkah

The Torah states:

You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days, every member of (the community of) Israel shall dwell in sukkot; in order that your generations shall know that I settled (cause to dwell) the Jews in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt, I am Hashem, your God. (Lev. 23:42)

The meaning of the word “sukkah” or “sukkot” is not as clear as we would like to think. The root SKH means to cover and protect. Clearly, the mitzva refers to some sort of structure in which one can dwell. The Talmud cites verses to prove that the most important part is the roof. However, there is an interesting disagreement in the Talmud

¹ This article is available online at www.vbm-torah.org/sukkot.htm.

concerning the reference of the “sukkah” in which the Jews dwelled in the desert when they left Egypt.

“That I settled the Jews in sukkot when I brought them out of Egypt” – these were the clouds of glory. This is the opinion of R. Eliezer. R. Akiva says: They made actual sukkot (booths). (*Sukkah* 11b)

R. Eliezer claims that the booths which we build today commemorate not similar booths built by the Jews three thousand years ago, but a direct spiritual protection miraculously provided in the desert by God – clouds of glory, meaning a visible symbol of God’s presence and providence. Interestingly, although this disagreement does not appear to be a halakhic one, the Rambam, in his halakhic code, nonetheless cites R. Eliezer’s opinion as being authoritative.

I do not think that there is a great distinction, in terms of what the message and inner meaning of the sukkah is about, between R. Akiva and R. Eliezer. Why does God want us to remember that we dwelled in booths when He took us out of Egypt? A better question might be: What is important about remembering the desert experience in general (recalling that there is another festival – Passover/Pesach – devoted to remembering the exodus from Egypt itself)? The answer to this question is given by the Torah itself.

You should remember the entire path that God led you for the last forty years through the desert... in order to teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but on that which comes from the mouth of God does man live. Your clothes did not wear away, nor your feet blister, for these forty years. (Deut. 8:2-4)

Lest your heart be raised up and you forget Hashem your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage; who led you through the great and

terrible desert, snake, serpent and scorpion, and a thirst without water, who brought you out water from the stone of flint; who fed you manna in the desert... (8:14-16)

R. Akiva's explanation – that the sukkot were desert booths, and R. Eliezer's explanation – that they were clouds of Divine glory, are actually two opposite sides of the same coin. The point is that in the desert the Jews were not living in well-designed structures with central climate control and a well-stocked larder. Objectively, they were living in the "great and terrible desert," a place without water, a place of death – "snake, serpent, and scorpion" – at best living only in flimsy booths that any desert storm could blow to the sea. In truth, their only protection was not natural, but the hand of God, an island of life in a framework of death, formed not by great dikes or walls, but by the Presence of God, by the clouds of glory.

The booths of R. Akiva, then, are to be understood as "*mere booths*" – in other words, as insubstantial, inadequate protection in natural terms. R. Eliezer concentrates on the positive side, which R. Akiva's explanation highlights by its failings – the Jews in the desert lived *in the hand of god*, literally, eating (manna), drinking (the water from a stone), and sleeping (the clouds of glory) in total security without relating to the natural environment.

The sukkah, the one we move to for seven days, is therefore defined halakhically by contrast with our regular domicile. The defining halakhic characteristic of a sukkah is "*dirat ara'i*" – a temporary dwelling. It is defined *in contrast* to our home. We leave the comfort and security of our homes and place ourselves, at least symbolically, in God's hands.

Some Laws

There are two sets of laws relating to the physical attributes of the sukkah – the walls, and the roof.

1. The walls: Somewhat surprisingly, a sukkah requires only a minimum of two walls, plus the beginning of the third. It would be hard to call such a structure a house. The minimum size is 7 *tefachim* square – about 65 cm. (26 inches) on each side. This is sufficient for most of one's body and a small platform to eat from. The minimum height is 10 *tefachim* (95 cm. – 40 inches), which is enough to sit on the floor.

2. The roof. The covering of the sukkah, called "sekhakh" (same root as the word "sukkah"), bears the most halakhic scrutiny. Sekhakh must be made of vegetative matter, and must be in a natural form, that is, not made into a utensil. At the same time, it must be cut down, and not still growing, which is why you cannot build a sukkah under a tree. It must be sufficient to produce "more shade than sun," but should not be perfectly solid, which would make the sukkah into a permanent dwelling. Practically speaking, this means that when it rains the sukkah is unusable.

The Experience

What does all this add up to? The experience of sukkah is one of leaving our well-endowed homes and moving out, exposed to nature, without the usual man-made security with which we surround ourselves. Although the cold climates of Northern Europe and America have led to a general limitation of sukkah to eating only, the mitzva is to

dwell in a sukkah, which includes eating, sleeping, reading – everything you would usually do in your house.² What is the positive side of this negatively-defined experience? This is what R. Eliezer is trying to emphasize. This is not really a back-to-nature experience, at least not in the usual sense. Once a year, we return to the experience of the Jews in the desert, which was one of being totally in the hands of God, cared for directly by Him, and not relying on our artificial means of creating our own environment. The sukkah represents the negation of human artifice in order to recreate the experience of direct sustenance from God. In other words, living in the sukkah means living within God’s hands, being totally in God’s presence, not in the manner of going to the synagogue or the Temple – where I enter a special holy realm divorced from this world – but as part of this world. One can live here and now, eat, drink, and sleep, under God’s clouds of glory. The Divine Presence is within the world. In other words, as the verse quoted above concludes, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by that which comes out of the mouth of God.”

This is reflected in a curious law. It is prohibited to use any part of the sukkah during the holiday for some other purpose. This extends even to the decorations hung in the sukkah. The explanation given in the Talmud (Sukkah 9a) implies that the sukkah has the status of “hekdesch” – a sacred object. This cannot be literally true, but must be understood as a kind of temporary sanctity, derived from the mitzva. This status is unique, applying to no other mitzva. I think the reason is that the physical structure of the sukkah symbolizes, or rather encapsulates, the presence of God.

² In Israel it is quite common to sleep in the sukkah, which is why I have three – one for eating, one for my sons to sleep, and one for me to sleep. Most people, I suspect, do all three in the same structure.

An old Chassidic saying reflects this idea very well. There are two mitzvot which envelope a Jew totally. One is Shabbat, since it is a mitzva of time. The other is sukkah, a mitzva of space. You are living in mitzva by breathing, as it were, in the sukkah. Just by living, by being there, one is immersed in sanctity. There is no other mitzva like it.

Lulav and Etrog

The meaning of the four species which we take on Sukkot is more enigmatic. There are many ideas found in rabbinic literature, but I wish to touch only on one. The Torah says about the four species that,

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you are gathering in your produce of the earth, you shall celebrate a celebration of God for seven days... And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a beautiful tree (etrog), palm branches, the branch of a thick tree (myrtle, hadas), and brook-willows, and you shall rejoice before God for seven days. (Lev. 23:39-40)

It is clear that the four species are a form of rejoicing and celebration. The only verb used by the Torah to describe what we do is to “take” them and “rejoice before God.” Indeed, the Torah mandates a special level of joy on Sukkot not found on other festivals.

Celebrate the Festival of Sukkot for seven days, when you gather in from the grain and the vine. And you shall rejoice on your festival, you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, and your maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and widow who live in your gates... and you shall be only joyful. (Deut. 16:13-16)

The Rambam rules:

Even though there is a commandment to rejoice on all the holidays, there was, in the Temple, extra joy on Sukkot... It is a mitzva to increase this joy. The joy that a man rejoices in the performance of a mitzva and in the service of God is a great service, and one who holds himself back from this joy is deserving of punishment... There is no dignity or honor other than to rejoice before God. (*Hilkhos Sukkah* 8:12-16)

The crucial phrase here, both in the Rambam and in the original Torah verses, is “before God.” The additional joy of Sukkot derives directly from the fact that the entire holiday is an experience of being “before God,” in God’s presence. Normally, this is associated with being in the Temple in Jerusalem, and on Sukkot as well, the highest fulfillment of this joy would be in the Temple area. But on Sukkot we discover the possibility of being in God’s presence anywhere, even the desert. In fact, that was the main purpose of the long forty-year sojourn of the Jews before being allowed to enter the promised land – to learn that land, house, fields, jobs, buildings, careers, etc., are not to separate us from God, replace Him and His providence by providing a “more substantial” form of security. Even in this world, there is an experience of being in God’s immediate presence, without any mediation. That results in joy – for there is no other joy other than being in the presence of God. The lulav and etrog, waved before us during prayers, are one expression of that joy. The week-long celebrations in the Temple were another.

Shemini Atzeret

Sukkot has an eighth day, called Shemini Atzeret (and Simchat Torah, the extra ninth day outside of Israel). Actually, Shemini Atzeret is considered to be a different

distinct holiday, which is why lulav and sukkah do not apply. (Outside of Israel, many have the custom of eating in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret but without reciting a blessing. However, this is not the essential law, but rather due to uncertainty as to whether this is really the seventh day of Sukkot.) But clearly, Shemini Atzeret is connected to Sukkot, which is what its name means – the assembly of the *eighth day*. This holiday has no particular character, no characteristic mitzva, other than to rejoice. (The celebration of Simchat Torah, the completion of the year’s Torah reading, is a relatively late custom.)

In light of the meaning of Sukkot, the inner nature of Shemini Atzeret is clear. On Shemini Atzeret, we return from the sukkah (our “temporary dwelling”) to our homes. The desert too was meant to be a temporary existence. Living solely and directly in God’s hands, without the mediacy and the challenge of making our own worlds, is a rarefied experience. It represents the highest joy, the most sublime celebration – but it is meant as a preliminary to the more prosaic but essential task of living properly, of celebrating our daily work and approach to God, from below, as one works the Land of Israel and serves God on one’s own land. This is the necessary conclusion to Sukkot – you come back to this world, to your own man-made world, and remain, somehow, before God, in joy. It is, indeed, only fitting that on this day we also begin again a cycle of Torah reading, starting again another year.

Psalm 42-43 and Sukkot¹

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

In the tradition of the Sephardic Jews these Psalms are recited throughout the holiday of Sukkot.² The connection to Sukkot, specifically, is somewhat tenuous, yet the psalm clearly shows the yearning of the psalmist to join the throngs of people on their way to the Bet Hamiqdash on the festival. The choice of these psalms as part of the liturgy reflects the yearning of those who recite it to once again be amongst the masses of people who are celebrating on their way to the Temple.

Two Psalms or One?

These two psalms should be considered as one, even though the division into two psalms is quite ancient, and found in most of the manuscripts (the Septuagint even begins psalm 43 with the words Mizmor Ledavid). The unity of these two psalms can be seen most clearly from the refrain that is repeated twice in Psalm 42 and at the end of Psalm 43. There are other phrases that occur in both psalms. As far as the content is concerned when thinking about the experience of the psalmist, Psalm 42 lacks a resolution, which Psalm 43 provides. Psalm 43 lacks a beginning that gives some idea of the circumstances for the psalm's composition. Although it is not clear why the psalm was divided into two, Psalm 43 does represent a significant turn in the psalmist's attitude. Perhaps it was

¹ The following article is from Rabbi Tawil's Shabbat-Table Talks for Sukkot.

² In the liturgical tradition that is associated with the GR"A (R. Eliyahu of Vilna) these psalms are recited on the second day of Sukkot (in the diaspora only).

this change of attitude that prompted the division into two psalms. In our comments we will treat the two psalms as one.

Overview and Structure

The psalmist begins by bemoaning his situation of being far away from the Temple (*bet Elohim* – “the house of God”). He recalls with extreme sadness the times when he would lead the throngs who would go to “appear before God.” The taunts of his enemies about the absence of his God do not help his situation. The psalmist, after complaining to God for forgetting and ignoring him, assures himself that he will once again be brought to the Temple with to thank God with rejoicing and song.

The psalms divide into three sections, each of which ends with the refrain, “Why so downcast my soul, why disquieted within me.” These sections show a progression in the psalmist’s emotional state, from a doleful recollection to a hopeful future. The change in the emotional state despite the presumed unchanged situation is the message of the psalm.

Analysis

A. Section I (Psalm 42:1-6, NJPS)

For the Leader. A maskil of the Korahites.
Like a hind crying for water,
my soul cries for You, O God;
my soul thirsts for God, the living God;
O when will I come to appear before God!
My tears have been my food day and night;
I am ever taunted with, “where is your God?”
When I think of this, I pour out my soul:
how I walked with the crowd, moved with them,
the festive throng, to the House of God
with joyous shouts of praise.

Why so downcast, my soul,
why disquieted within me?
Have hope in God;
I will yet praise Him
for His saving presence.

This psalm begins the second book of Psalms and the first of seven psalms that begin with an attribution to the sons of Qorah.³ The sons of Qorah were a levitical clan that served in the Temple.

For the singing in the House of the Lord, to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres, for the service of the House of god by order of the king.

(1 Chronicles 25:6, NJPS)

The first verse of the psalm (after the title verse) has the psalmist speaking directly to God describing his yearning for Him. This yearning is compared to that of an animal thirsting for water. By the second verse the psalmist's distance from God becomes apparent. He cannot "appear before God" and by this verse does not even address Him directly. The first section does not contain another direct address to God.

The psalmist's need for water expressed in the first two verses is met with a kind of water-tears. The psalmist's tears were his response to the repeated taunt "where is your God?" His God is distant—in place, time and experience.

At this point in the psalm, his God is in his memory. He recalls the joy of leading the throngs to the festive pilgrimage to the Temple. God was apparent to him there and then. Not now. This memory causes him to "pour out

³ There are 11 psalms that begin with an attribution to Qorah. They come in two groups. The first group is Psalms 42-49 (except psalm 43, which does not have an attribution at its beginning) and the second is Psalms 84-88 (except psalm 86, which begins with "A prayer by David").

his soul.” This is another image of water. His soul has become like water, but this water is of no use because it is poured out.

Verse 6 is the refrain in which the psalmist addresses his “self.” The psalmist encourages his self to not mire in depression, but to have hope in God. The psalmist’s hope is that the he will once again be able to thank Him for His salvation.

Recalling the past did not help the psalmist feel close to God. It just led to his feeling more depressed. Deciding to hope for the future and goading his soul not to be downcast is the psalmist’s way out of his depression.

B. Section II (42:7-12, NJPS)

O my God, my soul is downcast;
therefore I think of You
in this land of Jordan and Hermon,
in Mount Mizar,
where deep calls to deep
in the roar of your cataracts;
all Your breakers and billows have swept over me.
By day may the Lord vouchsafe His faithful care,
so that at night a song to Him may be with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.
I say to God, my rock,
“Why have You forgotten me,
why must I walk in gloom,
oppressed by my enemy?”
Crushing my bones [with murder in my bones]
my foes revile me,
taunting me always with, “where is your God?”
Why so downcast, my soul,
why disquieted within me?
Have hope in God;
I will yet praise Him
my ever-present help, my God.

The psalmist is closer to God in this section. The psalmist's direct call to God that opens the section is continued throughout the section. In every verse except one (the central verse of this section and of these psalms) the psalmist addresses God with direct speech. Even though the content of the address is accusations and complaints, the fact that the psalmist is addressing God is an improvement over the first section, in which God is so distant that he cannot be addressed in a sustained way.

The psalmist's complaint against God is that "All Your breakers and billows have swept over me." The psalmist interprets all his troubles as ultimately emanating from God. His feeling is one of being forgotten by God.

The conversation with God allows him to react differently to the taunts of his enemies. Now he has "murder in his bones." His anger at the enemy is felt but not expressed. Contrast this reaction with the psalmist's reaction in the first section. The psalmist cries at the taunts in the first section, accepting them and pitying himself. The response of inner anger at the enemy is a more self-affirming one.

This section also gives us some information about the psalmist's situation. He is in the north of Israel, where the sources of the Jordan River are. He hears the sounds of the rushing water and possibly waterfalls and associates his relationship to God with those sounds. An oppressive enemy is also driving the psalmist.

C. Section III (Psalm 43:1-5, NJPS)

Vindicate me, O God,
champion my cause
against faithless people;
rescue me from the treacherous, dishonest man.
For you are my God, my stronghold;
why have you rejected me?

Why must I walk in gloom,
oppressed by the enemy?
Send forth Your light and Your truth;
they will lead me;
they will bring me to Your holy mountain,
to Your dwelling place,
that I may come to the altar of God,
God, my delight, my joy;
that I may praise you with the lyre,
O God, my God.
Why so downcast, my soul,
why disquieted within me?
Have hope in God;
I will yet praise Him
my ever-present help, my God.

The connection to God in this section is even greater. The psalmist's anger of the second section is turned into a call for help and justice from the hands of the unjust nation.

Even in the psalmist's repeated complaint to God, God is referred to in an amplified way. He is now the psalmist's "stronghold," whereas in section II he was the psalmist's rock.

It is this realization that allows the psalmist to imagine a brighter future – one in which he is restored to his service of singing in the Temple. In this section, the gloom of walking to and fro in the oppression of the enemy is responded to by God's light of truth. It is that truth that will eventually bring the psalmist to his hoped for future.

This last section allows the psalmist to develop the idea "I will yet praise Him" that is found in the refrain. Even though the refrain is the same as in the second section, it is the element of praising God for his help that comes into sharper focus in this section. His hope has been fleshed out by his imagination. He sees himself coming to the altar with his instruments. He is no longer focusing on the past

in grief, eating his tears as his meal, but is now hearing the music of the Temple service that he is sure he will participate in once again.

The Progression

The three sections of this work progress from a state of despair and grief, where the psalmist feels very far from God (section I), to a state of complaint and anger (section II), and ultimately to a state of hope and joy as the psalmist imagines his future salvation. The three sections also have the psalmist focusing on different time frames. The focus on past glory causes him to grieve. The focus on his present situation angers him. The focus on his future vindication and return to the Temple fills him with joy and closeness to God. The psalmist fulfilled his initial desperate yearning for God at the outset by changing his focus. True, he is not able to be in the Temple, but God is with him. The verse before the last refrain poignantly illustrates the closeness that he feels: “God, my delight, my joy; That I may praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.”

Psalm 42-43 and Sukkot

Sukkot was the most joyous of the pilgrimage festivals. In the Second Temple times the joy was such that the Mishnah says that any one who has not seen the joy of the water drawing on Sukkot has never seen rejoicing in his life. The psalmist at the end, although he is far from the Temple, imagines himself serving there in joy. Using this psalm liturgically allows for a similar imagination and hope.

[Other connections to Sukkot and to *simhat bet hashoeba* (the joy of the water drawing) are made by the Midrash Pesiqta rabbati. That Midrash connects the phrase “I come to appear before God” to the *simhat bet hashoeba* (the phrase definitely echoes the command of pilgrimage

found in the Torah). Also the word “throng” (basach) in 42:5, is explained by the Midrash as having to do with the “sekhakh,” the thatch covering of the booth, the sukkah.]

Thanks to Ronnie Benun, Joey Namer and Elliot Laniado for their help in learning these psalms.

The Internal Structure of the Holiday Torah Reading¹

Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

You may not have noticed, but on every Jewish holiday (including Rosh Chodesh) the Torah reading—either the entire reading or at least the “maftir” section—is *always* from Parshat Pinchas! Likewise, we include a quote from Parshat Pinchas in every **musaf** prayer that we daven [pray]. To understand why, the following shiur undertakes a simple analysis of chapters 28-29 in Parshat Pinchas.

Introduction

Even though we find several presentations of the Jewish Holidays throughout Chumash, their presentation in Parshat Pinchas is quite unique. In fact, our shiur will show how the primary topic of this unit may not even be the holidays! (It will help us understand why these holidays are ‘repeated’ in Sefer Bamidbar, even though they were already discussed in Parshat Emor (Vayikra 23.)

We begin our study by identifying the precise unit under discussion and its structure.

An Organized Unit

Just about every time that Chumash presents a unit of mitzvot, it begins with a very short introductory narrative—the most common form being “*va’yedaber Hashem el Moshe lay’mor,*” or something similar.

This standard format allows us to easily identify chapters 28 & 29 as a unit, as it begins with that opening phrase (see 28:1), and the commandments continue until

¹ This shiur is available online at <http://www.tanach.org/pin.htm>. It is also available as a Virtual Classroom shiur.

the end of chapter 29.

Note as well that in 30:1 we find what constitutes the concluding verse of this unit, for it describes Moshe's fulfillment of God's command in 28:2, that Moshe should command these laws to Bnei Yisrael.

In the opening verse God instructs Moshe (see 28:1-2):

“**Command** Bnei Yisrael and tell them – keep the laws of My [daily] offerings...”

In the closing verse (see 30:1):

“And Moshe spoke to Bnei Yisrael [telling them] everything [all the laws] that God had commanded him.”²

This alone already indicates that all of the laws included between these opening and closing verses forms a unit.³

As we browse through the content of chapters 28-29, it seems as though its primary topic is the holidays, for they begin in 28:16 and continue all the way until 29:39. Note as well how these holidays are presented in the order of their lunar dates, i.e. beginning with Pesach and concluding with Sukkot.

Nonetheless, when we consider that this unit begins in 28:1, we must assume that the first fifteen pesukim share the same theme. By taking a closer look, the connection becomes rather obvious, for the first topic is the daily *olah* offering—a lamb—offered once in the morning and once in the evening (see 28:2-8). These laws are followed by the commandment to offer an ‘additional’ *olah* every Shabbat

² Note a very similar structure between Vayikra 23:1 and 23:44.

³ Note how the chapter division of Chumash seems to have made a major mistake here, for 30:1 should really have been 29:40! Note how the ‘parshia’ break of Chazal is much more accurate (as usual) than the ‘King James’ chapter division! This ‘mistake’ probably stems from a misunderstanding of the opening pasuk of Parshat Masei, and how it connects to the last verse of Parshat Pinchas.

(see 28:9-10), and a more elaborate *olah* on every Rosh Chodesh (first day of the lunar month).

Now, to determine what thematically ties this unit together, we need only list the topic of each of its individual *parshiyot* in search of a logical progression:

As we will see, the progression is very logical:

Pesukim	Topic – The Laws of:
28:1-8	The Daily Korban Tamid
28:9-10	The Weekly Korban Musaf for Shabbat
28:11-15	The Monthly Korban Musaf for Rosh Chodesh
28:16-25	The Annual Korban Musaf for Chag Hamatzot
28:26-31	The Annual Korban Musaf for Chag Shavuot
29:1-6	The Annual Korban Musaf for Yom Teru’ah
29:7-11	The Annual Korban Musaf for Yom Kippur
29:12-34	The Annual Korban Musaf for Sukkot
29:35-38	The Annual Korban Musaf for Shemini Atzeret
29:39	Summary Pasuk

The progression within this unit is very straightforward. We begin with the **daily** *korban tamid*, followed by the **weekly** *musaf shabbat*, followed by the **monthly** *korban rosh chodesh*, followed by the **yearly** schedule of korbanot offered on the chagim, beginning with the first month, etc. It is for this reason that the **first** pasuk of each of these holiday parshiyot begins with the precise lunar date.

The Key Phrase: “Al Olat haTamid”

As you review these parshiyot, note how each parshia relates in some manner to the daily *olat tamid*. The opening parshia describes it, while each and every parshia that follows concludes with the statement *al olat ha’tamid* or *milevad olat ha’tamid*.

The Torah goes out of its way to emphasize that each of these korbanot are to be offered **in addition** to the daily **olah** offering! In fact, that is why we call the offering a

‘musaf’! The word “musaf” stems from the verb “l’hosif”- to add on. These special korbanot are offered in **addition** to the daily korban **tamid**, and hence their name - korban **musaf**.

Therefore, this unit begins with the **korban tamid** and then continues with the detail of each korban **musaf** that is offered in addition to the daily “olat tamid.” Hence, a more precise definition for this unit would be **korbanot tmidim u’musafim**.

Indeed, each of the holidays are mentioned within this unit, but not because the holidays are its primary topic. Quite the contrary; the holidays are mentioned, for on each holiday an **additional** korban is to be offered.

Between Emor and Pinchas

With this background, we can better understand the difference between the presentation of the chagim in Parshat Emor (see Vayikra chapter 23) and their presentation here.

In contrast to Parshat Pinchas whose primary topic is korbanot, the primary topic in Parshat Emor is the holidays. In fact, that is precisely its title: “moadei Hashem...” - *God’s appointed times* (23:2,4). That unit details the nature and specific laws for each holiday. For example, the prohibition to work, the need to gather (*mikraei kodesh*), and special mitzvot for each holiday, such as: offering the “omer”, the “shte ha’lechem,” blowing shofar, fasting, succah, lulav & etrog etc. [To verify, review Vayikra 23:1-44.]⁴

Notice as well that each holiday in Parshat Emor includes the mitzvah of *v’hikravtem ishe la’Hashem* [you

⁴ By the way, that parsha **does** include certain korbanot, such as those which come with the “omer” and “shte ha’lechem.” But again, those korbanot are special for that day and hence, relate to the special nature of each of those holidays.

shall bring an offering to God/ see 23:8,25,27,36]. However, this commandment appears quite ambiguous for it doesn't specify which type of korban is to be offered.

Parshat Pinchas solves this ambiguity, by telling us precisely what that offering should be. To prove how, note a key summary pasuk found in Parshat Emor:

These are God's appointed times set aside for gathering **in order** to offer an **ishe la'hashem** – an **olah, mincha, zevach** and **nesachim** – on **each day** what is proper to it – **dvar yom b'yomo**. (Vayikra 23:37; compare with 23:4)

What does *dvar yom b'yomo* refer to? Most likely to the precise details for these korbanot as recorded in Parshat Pinchas!^{5 6}

Also, if you look carefully at the names of the chagim in the opening pasuk of each parshia in Parshat Pinchas, you'll notice that each specific name reflects the primary aspect of the chag as it had already been described in Parshat Emor! (That comparison is quite straightforward, but beyond the scope of this shiur.)

With this background, the presentation of the holidays in Parshat Pinchas is quite easy to understand. Each holiday is introduced by its lunar date and name (based on its more detailed description in Parshat Emor). This introduction is followed by the complete details of the korban **musaf** for that holiday, including the type of each korban, and the number of animals that are to be offered. Other than those details (of the korban **musaf**), Parshat Pinchas does not add in any new laws for any of the "chagim".

⁵ Note Rashi on that pasuk (23:37), that is exactly what he says.

⁶ Using computer jargon, we could say that Parshat Emor is 'indexed' to Parshat Pinchas – or, if each *v'hikravtem ishe* in Emor was in 'hyper-text,' it would link to its respective URL address in Parshat Pinchas. (e.g. Vayiqra 23:8 links to Bamidbar 28:19, etc.)

The Internal Structure of Parashat HaMusafim

Let's return now to Parshat Pinchas to take a look at the actual korbanot and what they're all about.

Even though the korban **musaf** of each holiday is presented in a separate parshia, the set of korbanot for each holidays are quite similar. Note how each set contains:

- An **olah** offering of **parim, elim, & kevasim**;
- The appropriate flour & wine offerings, known as **nesachim**;
- A **chatat** offering of a **se'ir izim** (a goat).

The following table compares the specific korbanot of each chag. (If you have the time (and patience), I recommend that you try to work it our first on your own.)

As you review this table, note how similar most of the **musafim** are. However, note as well where and how they differ.

<i>Chag</i>	<i>Par</i>	<i>Ayil</i>	<i>Keves</i>	<i>Se'ir</i>
Rosh Hodesh	2	1	7	1
Chag HaMatzot	2	1	7	1
Shavuot	2	1	7	1
Rosh HaShana	1	1	7	1
Yom Kippur	1	1	7	1
Sukkot (day 1)	13	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 2)	12	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 3)	11	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 4)	10	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 5)	9	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 6)	8	2	14	1
Sukkot (day 7)	7	2	14	1
Shemini Atzeret	1	1	7	1

As you study this chart, note how one can easily identify certain groups of holidays. Let's organize them as follows:

Group One: [the 2-1-7-1]

Rosh Chodesh, Chag HaMatzot, and Shavuot

Note how all three are connected to **Yetziat Mitzrayim**.

[Rosh Chodesh's association with Yetziat Mitzrayim may be deduced from Shemot 12:1-2, and Shavuot can be considered the conclusion of Pesach.]

Group Two: [the 1-1-7-1]

Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Shemini Atzeret

Note, that all three are in Tishrei! Since the first two are 'days of judgement', then we must conclude that Shemini Atzeret must also be a 'day of judgement'!

[e.g. "tfilat geshem" etc.]

Group Three: [the {13→7}-2-14-1]

The seven days of Sukkot

This is the most interesting group, for (unlike Chag HaMatzot) even though each day of Sukkot is the same holiday, for some reason the number of **parim** decreases daily.

Double Nature

In addition to this obvious division into three groups, there remains another interesting phenomenon in the above chart. For some reason, the **olah** offering on Sukkot seems to be **double**. On every other holiday we offer one **ayil** and seven **kevasim**, but on each day of Sukkot we double that - offering **two** and **fourteen** instead! Furthermore, the number of **parim** 'explodes' on Sukkot. Instead of either one or two, we find **thirteen**! More puzzling is the fact that each day we bring one less.

So what's going on with the korbanot on Sukkot?

One could suggest that Sukkot should not be considered a separate category, but rather a **combination** of the other two. Let's explain why.

On the one hand, Sukkot could be included in Group One, for that group contains the other two "regalim" (i.e. Chag HaMatzot and Shavuot). On the other hand, Sukkot could also be included in Group Two, for that group contains all of the other holidays that fall out in the seventh month (i.e. "chagei Tishrei").

Sukkot fits into both groups conceptually, as well. On the one hand, it is a thanksgiving holiday (like the holidays in Group One), as we thank God for the harvest; this is why Hallel is recited on Sukkot. On the other hand, it is also a time of awe (like the holidays in Group Two), for we anticipate the rainy season which will determine the fate of the forthcoming year; this is why Hoshanot are recited on Sukkot.

This 'double nature' of Sukkot can explain why its korbanot are **double** – two **elim** instead of one and fourteen **kevasim** instead of seven. But what about the **parim**? According to this interpretation, we should only bring **three** on each day of Sukkot. So why do we bring and 'extra' ten on the first day, an extra nine on the second, etc.

It's rather cute, but if we add up all the 'extras', i.e. $10+9+8+7+6+5+4$ we find that we've added 49 [=7x7] **parim**. In relation to the "chagim", finding significance in the number seven (or its multiple) should not surprise us. There are many instances in Chumash when 'seven' relates to our recognition that it God who controls what we perceive as nature (see the shiurim on both Parshat Breishit and on Parshat Emor).

Our recognition that God controls nature is most critical on Sukkot – for it sits at the junction (and 'overlap') of the agricultural year, i.e. at the end of the previous year (the autumn fruit harvest) and beginning of the new year (the

upcoming rainy season).

Furthermore, should we add these 49 **parim** to the original 21 **parim** [3x7days], we find that a total of **seventy** parim are offered during **Sukkot**. Chazal point out that these seventy bulls are representative of the seventy nations of mankind.⁷

In summary, we have shown how what appears to be a rather monotonous list of korbanot may actually be hiding some very fundamental aspects of the *chagim*. Hopefully, next time you doven [pray] **musaf**, it will make your tefilah a bit more meaningful.

⁷ See shiur on Parshat Noach (<http://www.tanach.org/breishit/noach.txt>).

Ezekiel's Unique Prophecy of the War of Gog

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Introduction

On Shabbat Hol HaMo'ed Sukkot, we read Ezekiel's dramatic prophecy of the war of Gog as the Haftarah. In this essay, we will consider the passage in its broader context in the Book of Ezekiel. We begin with several central issues in Ezekiel chapters 38-39. We then analyze the unique role of this prophecy in the larger unit of Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration and the book as a whole.

The oracles of Gog in Ezekiel chapters 38-39 form a dramatic climax to a series of prophecies of restoration following the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E. Some time after Israel returns to her land from exile, a coalition headed by King Gog from the land of Magog will invade Israel. God will dramatically intervene and defeat the coalition. God's name then will be sanctified before all humanity.

In rabbinic literature, this cataclysmic event is referred to as "the war of Gog and Magog." In the biblical text, however, Gog is the name of an otherwise unknown king¹

¹ The only biblical reference to the name Gog outside of this prophecy is among the descendants of Reuben (I Chron. 5:4), but this prophecy is about a foreign invader, not an Israelite. Some scholars identify Gog with a king of Lyddia (Asia Minor) named Gyges in Greek, or Gugu in the chronicles of Ashurbanipal. Ashurbanipal prayed to his deities that Gugu should perish and have his bones scattered. This Gugu (687-652 B.C.E.) lived prior to Ezekiel (who prophesied from 592-570 B.C.E.), so it is clear that Ezekiel's prediction of a future war after Israel's redemption cannot refer to him directly. Regardless, Ezekiel describes a

who hails from the land of Magog—one of Japheth’s sons (Gen. 10:2). Like Gog, the land of Magog plays no role elsewhere in Tanakh.

This prophecy is commonly understood as messianic. Identifications of the enemies have changed with historical times, depending on the perceived threats of the era coupled with a hope that the messianic age was near. For example, some commentators (e.g., Abarbanel, Malbim) identified these events with great wars between Christianity and Islam. In 1977, Rabbi Moshe Eisemann explained the prophecy to allude to Nazi Germany.² In 1971, Ronald Reagan, then Governor of California, offered a different slant:

Ezekiel tells us that Gog, the nation that will lead all of the other powers of darkness against Israel, will come out of the north. Biblical scholars have been saying for generations that Gog must be Russia...But it didn’t seem to make sense before the Russian Revolution, when Russia was a Christian country. Now it does, now that Russia has become communistic and atheistic, now that Russia has set itself against God. Now it fits the description of Gog perfectly.³

cataclysmic final war, even if he drew some inspiration from the names of contemporaneous kings and nations. Cf. Gershon Brin et al., *Olam HaTanakh: Ezekiel* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Dodson-Iti, 1996), pp. 189-191; Rimon Kascher, *Mikra LeYisrael: Ezekiel*, vol. 2 (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), p. 735; Yehiel Moskowitz, *Da’at Mikra: Ezekiel* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1985), p. 303.

² Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkel / The book of Ezekiel: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic, and Rabbinic Sources* (New York: Mesorah, 1977), pp. 580-582.

³ Cited in Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), p. 476.

Despite the best efforts of commentators and politicians, however, Rambam prudently cautions that we cannot ascertain Gog's identity until the Messiah comes (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:2).

Chapters 38-39

The armies of Gog invade Israel not as a punishment for sins, but rather to plunder a redeemed and peaceful nation. God intervenes, thereby demonstrating His power and glory to the nations and to Israel. Like the original exodus from Egypt, Israel will be entirely passive, while God acts in history as Redeemer.

The timing of the expected fulfillment of this prediction is the subject of debate:

After a long time (*mi-yammim rabbim*) you shall be summoned; in the distant future (*be-aharit ha-shanim*) you shall march against the land... (38:8)⁴

This shall happen on that distant day... (*be-aharit ha-yamim*) (38:16)

The expressions of distance in time may indicate a period considerably later than the prophet. Additionally, this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. Consequently, many midrashim and later commentators understand the prophecy to refer to the messianic era. However, it is possible that Ezekiel predicts events that could have transpired shortly after he prophesied. Ezekiel links this prophecy to his other prophecies of restoration in chapters 34-37, and it appears that he expects those predictions to occur shortly.⁵ It is possible that there was potential for all

⁴ Translations of biblical passages are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (Philadelphia, 1985).

⁵ See Moskowitz, *Ezekiel*, p. 304; Brin, *Ezekiel*, p. 195. The prophet appears to state that the full realization of his prophecies was dependent on some repentance on Israel's part: "[Now] you, O mortal, describe

of Ezekiel's prophecies to have been fulfilled during his lifetime, even if they did not occur and were instead deferred to the messianic era.⁶

Commentators also puzzle over the uniqueness of the prophecy of Gog. Ezekiel appears to state that his prophecy is the fulfillment of a long history of earlier prophecies:

Thus said the Lord God: Why, you are the one I spoke of in ancient days through My servants, the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them! (38:17)

Several commentators attempt to locate earlier biblical prophecies which anticipate this prophecy. For example, Isaiah predicts the downfall of Assyria (Isa. 10), Zephaniah predicts a Day of the Lord against wicked nations (Zeph. 1:14-18), and Jeremiah predicts a northern invader of Israel (Jer. 1-6). However, a king Gog is never mentioned in these earlier prophecies. Jeremiah's northern enemy invaded in Jeremiah's lifetime as a punishment for Israel's sins. As discussed above, it is unclear if Ezekiel intended his prediction to be fulfilled immediately, and the invasion of Gog was not cast as a punishment for Israel's sins. More decisively, Ezekiel predicts that God will rescue Israel from Gog, whereas Jeremiah correctly expected the northern invader to inflict great destruction. It is evident that there is no direct precedent for Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog in

the Temple to the House of Israel, and let them measure its design. But let them be ashamed of their iniquities: When (or "if") they are ashamed of all they have done, make known to them the plan of the Temple and its layout..." (43:10-11, see Rashi ad loc.).

⁶ For further discussion of unfulfilled or deferred prophecies of redemption in Tanakh, see Hayyim Angel, "Prophecy as Potential: The Consolations of Isaiah 1-12 in Context," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 37:1 (2009), pp. 3-10; reprinted in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009), pp. 117-126.

Tanakh, even though several of its themes and formulations occur in earlier prophecies.⁷

Hellenistic and rabbinic sources likewise recognized that there is no clear textual precedent for the war of Gog, so they inserted it into earlier texts. In the Torah, Balaam predicts “*ve-yarom me-Agag malko*” (“their king shall rise above Agag” [Num. 24:7]). Instead of “Agag,” the Septuagint reads “Gog.” Similarly, the Septuagint inserts Gog into a prophecy of Amos regarding a locust plague:

This is what my Lord God showed me: He was creating [a plague of] locusts at the time when the late-sown crops were beginning to sprout—the late-sown crops after the king’s reaping (*ahar gizzei ha-melekh*). (Amos 7:1)

In the place of “*ahar gizzei ha-melekh*” (“after the king’s reaping”), the Septuagint reads “*ahar Gog ha-melekh*” (“after King Gog”).

Rather than inserting Gog into actual verses, one Sage in the Talmud suggests that Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:26-29) prophesied regarding Gog:

R. Nahman said: They prophesied concerning Gog and Magog, as it is said (Ezek. 38:17): “Thus said the Lord God: Why, you are the one I spoke of in ancient days through My servants, the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years in those days that I would bring you against them!” (*Sanhedrin* 17a)⁸

⁷ Brin, *Ezekiel*, p. 196. For an extensive study of parallels between the Gog oracles and other biblical texts, see William A. Tooman, “Transformation of Israel’s Hope: The Reuse of Scripture in the Gog Oracles,” in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel*, ed. William A. Tooman and Michael A. Lyons (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2010), pp. 50-110.

⁸ Translations of talmudic passages taken from Soncino.

R. Nahman identifies Eldad and Medad's prophecy with Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog specifically to explain the elusive earlier biblical precedent to which Ezekiel appears to refer.

Perhaps the most likely reading of Ezekiel 38:17 is that Ezekiel is not referring back to his predecessors who predicted Gog. Rather, he is predicting what people will exclaim when his own prophecy is fulfilled in the future: "this is what Ezekiel had predicted long ago!" Rashi, Kara, Radak, and Moskowitz⁹ adopt this reading. If their reading is correct, then Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog is indeed groundbreaking, and Ezekiel does not claim otherwise.

In addition to the cataclysmic war, Ezekiel prophesied that the God-Israel relationship will then achieve its ideal state. The prophecy of Gog concludes:

I will never again hide My face from them, for I will pour out My spirit (*eshpokh et ruhi*) upon the House of Israel—declares the Lord God. (39:29)

Tova Ganzel observes that the word "to pour" (*s-p-k*) occurs thirty-three times in Ezkiel. Until this reference, the verb had been used exclusively in reference to God pouring out wrath. In this climactic verse, God pours out His spirit onto Israel.¹⁰

Additionally, this change in Israel's spiritual fortunes contrasts with their previous state, when God hid His face as a result of Israel's sinfulness:

And the nations shall know that the House of Israel were exiled only for their iniquity, because they trespassed against Me, so that I hid My face from them and delivered them into the hands of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. When I hid

⁹ Moskowitz, *Ezekiel*, p. 309.

¹⁰ Tova Ganzel, "The Descriptions of the Restoration of Israel in Ezekiel," *VT* 60 (2010), p. 209.

My face from them, I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions. (39:23-24)

Gog and its Precedents in the Book of Ezekiel

Although there is no direct biblical precursor to Ezekiel's prophecy of Gog, the prophecy draws substantially from earlier passages in Ezekiel. Ezekiel parallels Gog with contemporaneous nations who represent arrogance and evil. Similar to Gog, God also places hooks in Egypt's mouth (29:4; 38:4), a sign of divine power over that arrogant nation. Edom represents all evil nations who harm and plunder Israel. As part of the process of restoration, God will punish Edom and restore Israel (35:1-36:5). Ezekiel recapitulates these elements in the final war of Gog. Redemption of God's name occurs only when arrogance and evil are defeated—not only when Israel is redeemed.

Regarding the elements of Israel's final redemption in the Gog prophecy, Daniel Block¹¹ observes extensive parallels to Ezekiel's brief prophecy of redemption after the oracles against Tyre:

Thus said the Lord God: When I have gathered the House of Israel from the peoples among which they have been dispersed, and have shown Myself holy through them in the sight of the nations, they shall settle on their own soil, which I gave to My servant Jacob, and they shall dwell on it in security. They shall build houses and plant vineyards, and shall dwell on it in security, when I have meted out punishment to all those about them who despise them. And they shall know that I the Lord am their God. (Ezek. 28:25-26)

¹¹ Daniel I. Block, "Gog in Prophetic Tradition: A New Look at Ezekiel XXXVIII 17," *VT* 42 (1992), p. 155.

This prophecy contains the same elements that are developed in the Gog prophecy, including the ingathering of Israel (38:8), God's manifestation in the sight of the nations (38:16; 39:7, 25, 27), Israel dwelling securely (38:8, 11; 39:26), God's meting out justice (38:26; 39:21), and Israel's recognition of God (39:21, 28). Thus, the Gog prophecy contains many elements of other prophecies in the Book of Ezekiel.

Gog in the Context of Ezekiel's Prophecies of Restoration

Ezekiel's prophecies of restoration envision a better leadership (ch. 34), Edom's ultimate defeat (chs. 35-36), the return of Jews to their land and God's purification of the nation (ch. 36), God's revival of "dead" Israel (37:1-14), and the reuniting of the northern and southern kingdoms (37:15-28). These prophecies are followed by the war of Gog (chs. 38-39).

Generally speaking, prophets speak of Israel's restoration as the final stage in the redemption process. If there are troubles, they precede the redemption. Following this dominant prophetic view, Rambam (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:2) takes for granted that the war of Gog will be an earlier stage of Israel's redemption. Yehiel Moskowitz lists rabbinic sources that similarly place the war of Gog before the final redemption. In Ezekiel's prophecy, however, Gog's coalition invades to plunder a redeemed nation (38:8, 11, 14). This positioning is unique in prophetic literature.¹²

¹² Moskowitz (*Ezekiel*, p. 302, n. 1) suggests that the idea of "Messiah son of Joseph" may have originated as an effort to resolve the contradiction between most prophecies which place the war of Gog prior to the redemption, and Ezekiel who places the war of Gog after the redemption. He cites Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 40:11, which states that the Messiah son of Joseph will vanquish Gog.

However, Ezekiel's presentation fits his consistent perspective that the primary redemption is not of Israel, but rather of God. Even after Israel returns to her land, God cannot ultimately be redeemed until all human evil is eliminated.¹³

Several midrashim poignantly capture the love, patience, and anguish which God experienced during His banishment from Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel:

R. Aha said: "God's Presence may be likened to a king who left his palace in anger. After going out, he came back and embraced and kissed the walls of the palace and its pillars, weeping and exclaiming: 'O the peace of my palace, O the peace of my royal residence, O the peace of my beloved house! O peace, from now onward let there be peace.'" (*Lamentations Rabbah* Prologue 25)

"*Being bound in chains*" (Jer. 40:1): R. Aha said: If it is possible to say so, both He and Jeremiah were bound in chains. As a parallel it is written (Ezek. 1:1), "I was among the captives." (*Lamentations Rabbah* Prologue 34)

On a deeper level, the Book of Ezekiel may be considered an "autobiography" of God during the period of the destruction. God goes into exile (chs. 8-11), driven away by Israel's sins. God must redeem Israel in order to sanctify His name even if Israel does not merit redemption (ch. 20, 36). The book's climactic vision is of a rebuilt Temple with God's Presence returning to it (chs. 40-48).

¹³ See further discussion in Hayyim Angel, "Ezekiel: Priest-Prophet," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 39:1 (2011), pp. 35-45; reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash: A Collection of Studies on Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 122-133.

The prophecy of Gog, which involves the eradication of human evil coupled with the worldwide sanctification of God's name, fits the unique message of the book. God is at the center of exile and redemption. Therefore, Israel's exile and restoration are ancillary to this process, rather than central to it.

It is fitting that the Kaddish prayer derives its opening formula, *Yitgaddal ve-Yitkaddash*, from the conclusion of chapter 38:

Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness (*ve-hitgaddilti ve-hitkaddishti*¹⁴), and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am the Lord. (Ezek. 38:23)

The Kaddish is a prayer for the sanctification of God's name as a result of divine exile after the Temple was destroyed. One talmudic passage captures this spirit when discussing the Kaddish and its significance:

R. Yosei entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Elijah appeared....He asked me, "What did you hear in this ruin?" I replied: "I heard a divine voice, cooing like a dove, and saying: 'Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world!'" He said to me: "...Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim, but three times each day it says this! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into the synagogues and schoolhouses and respond: 'May His great name be blessed (*yehei shemei ha-gadol mevorakh*),' God shakes His head and says: 'Happy is the King who is thus praised in

¹⁴ This grammatical form is also found in Lev. 11:44, *ve-hitkaddishtem ve-heyitem kedoshim*, you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy.

this house! Woe to the Father who had to banish His children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their Father!”” (*Berakhot* 3a)

Throughout his book, Ezekiel conveys glimpses of divine heartbreak and anger, but also an eternal hope for the future manifestation of God’s glory. The ultimate redemption occurs when God returns to a rebuilt Temple and purified nation and land, with all human evil eradicated. When this occurs, God’s name is sanctified and Ezekiel’s vision of redemption has been fulfilled.

Appreciating and Rejoicing in the Diversity of the Creation¹

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

One of the misvot of the festival of Sukkot is the taking of the four species of plants, *Etrog* (citron), *Lulab* (palm), *Hadas* (myrtle) and *Araba* (willow). Many allegorical explanations are connected with these four species. Although the allegory is sometimes stretched, each of the explanations has a point reflecting an important value. In this talk, we will speak about some of the explanations of the four species and the values to be learned from them.

Background: Culminating a section of the Torah describing all the festivals of the year, the Torah describes the festival of Sukkot. Then, following a verse of summing up, the Torah mentions the commandment to take the four species. This section connects the idea of rejoicing specifically with the festival of Sukkot and specifically with the taking of the four species.

Text: Vayiqra 23:33-44 (Schocken Bible)

Mark, on the fifteenth day after the seventh New Moon, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you are to celebrate the pilgrimage festival of Hashem, for seven days: on the first day (is) a Sabbath ceasing and on the eighth day is a Sabbath ceasing. You are to take yourselves, on the first day, the fruit of a beautiful tree, branches of palms, boughs of thick tree foliage, and willows of the brook. And you are to rejoice before the presence of Hashem your

¹ The following is from Rabbi Tawil's Shabbat-Table Talks for Sukkot.

God for seven days, you are to celebrate it, a pilgrimage festival to Hashem for seven days a year—a law for all your ages, throughout your generations: in the seventh New Moon you are to celebrate it—in huts you are to stay for seven days, every native in Israel is to stay in huts—in order that your generations may know that in huts I had the Children of Israel stay when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I am Hashem your God!

Discussion: These verses describe the commandment to take the four species and the commandment to live in *Sukkot* (huts) for seven days. Notice that the commandment to live in huts has a reason associated with it and the taking of the four species is not associated with a reason. Our sages have suggested various reasons with the taking of the four species.

Abarbanel sees a connection between the rejoicing and the four species. In an agricultural society, this is the time when all the harvests were already gathered into the house. The gathering of the four species reminds one of the gathering of all the harvests, a reason for rejoicing. In addition, Abarbanel explained that these four species make the heart rejoice because of the way they look and the good that they provide for man. The beauty of the Etrog and Lulab, along with the shade provided by the Hadas and the ‘Araba, especially to a people that were coming from the shadeless wilderness were all a source of joy to Bene Yisrael.

Expanding on this idea: Look at all the diversity that Hashem has put into creation. This diverse beauty is exciting and is part of the beneficence that God shows to us. (Suggested activity: Take the time to notice the different trees that grow around your house. Notice the colors and shapes of the leaves. Notice the different greens and the other hues that are visible in the fall. Better yet, Sukkot is a

great time to make a trip to the Botanical Gardens and enjoy the diversity of Hashem's creation.)

One of the rabbinic midrashic explanations of the four species connects them to the different types of people within Bene Yisrael:

“Fruit of a beautiful tree”—That is Israel, just as the Etrog has taste and fragrance, likewise Israel has people who have Torah and good deeds.

“Branches of palms”—That is Israel, just as the Lulab has taste but no fragrance, likewise Israel has people who have Torah and but lack good deeds.

“Boughs of thick tree-foliage”—That is Israel, just as the Hadas has fragrance but lacks taste, likewise Israel has people who have good deeds but lack Torah.

“Willows of the brook”—That is Israel, just as the Araba lacks both taste and fragrance, likewise Israel has people who lack both Torah and good deeds.

What does the Holy One, blessed be He, do to them? He cannot destroy them. Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, said let them all be bound together into one group and they will atone for each other. And when you do this, I also am raised up, that is what is written: “Who built His chambers (*ma'alotav*) in heaven,” and when is He raised up? When they become one group (*aguda*) as it says: “and founded His vault (*agudato*) on the earth (Amos 9:6).” That is why Moshe warns them: “You are to take yourselves...” (*Vayiqra Rabbah* 30:12)

This beautiful Midrash sees the connections of all the different types within our people as ultimately leading to the raising up of Hashem. This Midrash gives us an important message. There might be people with whom we

disagree with as far as their Torah knowledge is concerned, but they might have good deeds. On the other hand, there might be people within our nation who lack good deeds but have Torah knowledge. There might be people who lack both. The message in this Midrash is that we only atone for one another when we join and become one unit. We should not cut off one part of our people because it lacks one or another of these good traits. Rather, even the one with all the good traits must be connected to all the other parts of Israel. By doing this, we cause God Himself to be raised up!

In our times, in particular, it is important to recognize the need for unity within our nation; to appreciate the diversity within nature and within people; and to thank Hashem for creating these diverse and beautiful plants, and for allowing us to join with the different people within our nation.

Reading Kohelet on Sukkot¹

Rabbi Joshua Flug

There is a tradition to read the book of Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, on Sukkot. The origins of the tradition date back at least to the time of Rashi (1040-1105). Rashi's students write that one should recite Kohelet on Shabbat of Sukkot or on Shemini Atzeret:

לשבת וסוכה גומרין את ההלל יתגדל תתקבל וקורין
כל הציבור ספר קהלת בישיבה, ליתן חלק לשבעה וגם
לשמונה. (סדור רש"י עמי קד-קה)

On the Shabbat of Sukkot, we recite the entire Hallel, the full Kaddish, and the entire congregation reads the book of Kohelet while seated in order to give a portion to seven and also to eight. (Siddur Rashi, pp. 104-105)

[בשמיני עצרת] גומרין הלל וקורין קהלת אם עד[י]ן
לא נקרא. (סדור רש"י עמי קמ"ז)

[On Shemini Atzeret] we recite the entire Hallel and read Kohelet if it was not already read. (Siddur Rashi, pg. 147)

According to Rashi, the reason for reading Kohelet on Sukkot is because it contains the verse:

תִּן-חֶלֶק לְשִׁבְעָה, וְגַם לְשִׁמוֹנָה: כִּי לֹא יָדָע, מָה-יְהִיָּה
רָעָה עַל-הָאָרֶץ. (קהלת יא: ב)

Divide a portion into seven, and even into eight for you don't know what troubles shall be upon the earth. (Kohelet 11:2)

¹ Reprinted with permission from Sukkot To-Go 5772. The Holiday To Go Series is a publication of Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future. Visit yutorah.org/togo to access all issues.

The Midrash, in *Kohelet Rabbah* 11:2, quotes one opinion that the reference in the verse to seven and eight is an allusion to Sukkot which is a seven day holiday with an additional day holiday at the end. Yet, other commentators provide additional reasons for reading Kohelet on Sukkot. In this article, we will discuss some of those other reasons.

Kohelet as a Public Lecture

While the author of Kohelet, generally assumed to be King Shlomo,² refers to himself as “Kohelet ben David,” the name Kohelet is a reflection of the content of the book. Rashi writes:

קהלת- על שם שקיהל חכמות הרבה...וי"א שהיה
אומר כל דבריו בהקהל. (רש"י קהלת א: א)

[It is called] Kohelet because he gathered many different forms of wisdom. There are some who say that it is because these words were said at hakhel [the gathering of the Jewish people after the sabbatical year.] (Rashi, Kohelet 1:1)

The name Kohelet is from the word קהל which means to collect or to gather. This can either refer to the collection of wisdom or to the gathering of the people.

R. David Abudraham (14th century) relates Rashi's second interpretation to our tradition to read Kohelet on Sukkot:

ועוד טעם אחר כי שלמה בחג אמרו בהקהל כמו שכתוב
(דברים לא, ז) במועד שנת השמיטה בחג הסוכות בבא
כל ישראל לראות וגוי הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים
והטף וגוי וכתוב ויקהלו אל המלך שלמה בירח האתנים

² The *Beraita* in *Baba Batra* 15a, states that Kohelet was written by King Chizkiah, yet there are many Midrashim that state that King Shlomo is Kohelet. *Da'at Mikra*, Introduction to Kohelet, note 1a, suggests that these are the words of King Shlomo that were recorded in writing by King Chizkiah.

בחג וגוי' אז אמרו בהקהל להוכיח את ישראל על כן
יתכן לאומרו בחג כל זה כתב אבן הירחי. (ספר
אבודרהם, תפלות הפסח)

There is another reason and that is that Shlomo said these words on Sukkot as it states (Devarim 31:10) on the holiday [at the conclusion] of the shemittah year, on Sukkot, when the Jewish people come to be seen, gather the nation, the men, women and children, etc. and it states (Melachim I 8:2) they all gathered to King Shlomo during the month of Etanim, on Sukkot, etc. and it was then that he recited [Kohelet] during hakhel in order to rebuke the Jewish people. For this reason, it is logical to recite it on Sukkot. This is from the writings of Ibn HaYarchi. (Sefer Abudraham, Tefillot HaPesach)

According to R. Naftali Z.Y. Berlin (The Netziv, 1816-1893), King Shlomo's gathering was of a slightly different nature:

כתב בספר זכריה י"ד דלעתיד יהיו גם אומות העולם
באים בחול המועד סוכות לעמוד על קרבנם, היינו
בשביל שיכירו גם המה את מלך ה' צבאות... וכך היה
המנהג בימי שלמה, ומשום הכי היה שלמה מגיד קהלת
בחול המועד סוכות לפני חכמי אומות העולם... ומזה
אנו נוהגין מדור דור לקרוא קהלת בחול המועד סוכות.
(הרחב דבר, במדבר כט: יב)

In the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah it states that in the future, the nations of the world will come on Chol HaMoed of Sukkot to stand next to their offering because they will also recognize the sovereignty of God, the King... This was also the tradition during the days of Shlomo and for this reason, Shlomo would recite Kohelet on Chol HaMoed Sukkot to the nations of the world... For this reason, we have been reciting Kohelet throughout the generations on Chol HaMoed Sukkot. (Harchev Davar, Bamidbar 29:12)

According to Netziv, Kohelet contains a universal message. The message was delivered on an annual basis to the leaders of all nations of the world on Sukkot and we continue that tradition in our synagogues.

The Contradictions of Kohelet

R. Avraham Gombiner (Magen Avraham, c.1633-1683) provides another reason for reading Kohelet on Sukkot:

ובסכות קהלת מפני שהם ימי שמחה וכתוב בקהלת
ולשמחה מה זו עושה. (מגן אברהם תצ: ח)

On Sukkot [we read] Kohelet because they are days of joy and it states in Kohelet (2:2) "what does joy accomplish?" (Magen Avraham 490:8)

His comment seems somewhat puzzling. *Simcha* (joy) is one of the themes of Sukkot. Why then, would we read Kohelet specifically because of a verse that states that *simcha* is meaningless?

In order to understand the Magen Avraham's comments, it is necessary to provide some background. There was a debate during Mishnaic times whether Kohelet should be canonized as one of the books of Tanach (see Eduyot 5:3 and Yadayim 3:5). The Gemara teaches us the basis for the debate and why it was ultimately accepted as one of the books of Tanach:

אמר רב יהודה בריה דרב שמואל בר שילת משמיה דרב
בקשו חכמים לגנוז ספר קהלת מפני שדבריו סותרין זה
את זה ומפני מה לא גנזוהו מפני שתחילתו דברי תורה
וסופו דברי תורה תחילתו דברי תורה דכתיב מה יתרון
לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמול תחת השמש ואמרי דבי ר'
ינאי תחת השמש הוא דאין לו קודם שמש יש לו סופו
דברי תורה דכתיב סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים
ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם מאי כי זה כל
האדם אמר רבי (אליעזר) כל העולם כולו לא נברא אלא
בשביל זה...ומאי דבריו סותרין זה את זה...כתיב
ושבחתני אני את השמחה וכתוב ולשמחה מה זה עושה
לא קשיא...ושבחתני אני את השמחה שמחה של מצוה

ולשמחה מה זה עושה זו שמחה שאינה של מצוה.
(שבת ל:)

R. Yehuda son of R. Samuel b. Sheilat said in Rav's name: The Sages wished to conceal the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not conceal it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching.

Its beginning is religious teaching, as it is written, "What benefit does man get for of all his labor that he labors under the sun?" And the School of R. Yannai commented: Under the sun he has none, but he has benefit before the sun.

The end is religious teaching, as it is written, "Let us hear the conclusion of the matter, fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole of man." What is meant by, 'for this is the whole of man'? Said R. Eliezar, The entire world was created only for the sake of this [type of] man.

And how are its words self-contradictory?...It is written, "Then I commended joy"; but it is written, "And of joy [I said] 'What does it accomplish?'" There is no difficulty ... 'Then I commended joy': this refers to the joy of a commandment. 'And of joy [I said], what does it accomplish': this refers to joy [which is] not in connection with a commandment.

(Shabbat 30b [adapted from Soncino Translation])

On one level, it is possible to understand the Magen Avraham's comment as an allusion to the Talmud's understanding of the verse "What does joy accomplish?" When we read Kohelet on Sukkot, we are supposed to be reminded of the message that true *simcha* is only achieved when it is the context of our service of God. This, in fact, is how R. Yosef Teomim (author of *P'ri Megadim* 1727-1793) understands the tradition of reading Kohelet on Sukkot:

ובקהלת פעם מגנה השמחה ופעם משבחה...אלא מגנה השמחה לעשות רע וה"ה אכילה ושתייה אבל השמחה במצות ועבודת ה' טוב ולכן קורים קהלת שלא תאמר ושמחתם לפני ה' שבעת ימים בהוללות באכילה ובשתייה כי אם שמחה של מצוה. (ספר המגיד חלק ג' דרוש ב' לסוכות)

In Kohelet, there are times when he criticizes joy and times when he praises it...The resolution is that he criticizes being joyful to engage in acts of evil or in eating and drinking. However, the joy in performing mitzvot and serving God is good. Therefore, we read Kohelet so that we don't think that we should rejoice before God for seven days with frivolity, eating and drinking, rather with the joy of observing mitzvot. (Sefer HaMagid, Vol. III Second Derasha for Sukkot)

One can also understand the Magen Avraham's comment on a deeper level. As the Talmud notes, Kohelet was considered a controversial work because of statements that seem to contradict one another. While the Talmud only provides two such examples, R. Avraham Ibn Ezra (c. 1089-1164), *Kohelet* 7:3, provides nine examples of these statements and writes that there are others. Nevertheless, despite all of the apparent contradictions, the rabbis felt that Kohelet is worthy of canonization because of its beginning and end. R. Avraham Y. Kook (1865-1935) explains the significance of this decision:

ע"כ לא גנזוהו מפני שתחילתו ד"ת, המורה על הצעד הראשון של התמימות והטבעיות הטהורה המושרש בקדושת נפשותיהם של ישראל. וסופו ד"ת, אחרי האריכות המדעית חוזר הדבר לאותן המושגים עצמם שנסתמנו בתחילה...ובראותינו שעם ההתעוררות על הניגודים והסתירות באה המסקנה למקור יציאתה, אז נשכיל את גודל עז אור יראת ד' טהורה, שעלי ועל כל התלוי ומתלוה עמה. (עין איה, שבת ל:)

For this reason they didn't conceal it because it begins with words of Torah which teach of the initial support of the pure innocence and natural instinct that is rooted in the holy soul of a Jew. It ends with words of Torah, after the lengthy intellectual pursuit, it returns to the foundation that it outlined at the beginning...When we see that despite the resistance and contradiction, the conclusion is a reflection of the original principles, we understand the great strength of pure fear of God upon which everything is contingent and must always accompany one's pursuits. (Ein Ayah, Shabbat 30b)

Perhaps the Magen Avraham's reference to the verse "What does joy do [for a person]?" is an allusion to the broader issues of Kohelet: its contradictory statements and how we deal with them. The message, as expressed by R. Kook, is that our intellectual pursuits may take us to places where there are contradictions and uncertainty, but we must always be rooted in our faith in God and this must guide our conclusions. The message that Kohelet provides about our intellectual pursuits is parallel to the message that Sukkot provides about our physical pursuits. Rashbam (c.1085-1158) explains why we sit in Sukkot specifically during the harvest season:

ולכך יוצאים מבתים מלאים כל טוב בזמן אסיפה
ויושבין בסוכות לזכרון שלא היה להם נחלה במדבר
ולא בתים לשבת. ומפני הטעם הזה קבע הקב"ה את חג
הסוכות בזמן אסיפת גורן ויקב, לבלתי רום לבבם על
בתיהם מלאים כל טוב פן יאמרו ידינו עשו לנו את
החיל הזה. (רשב"ם, ויקרא כג: מג)

For this reason, we leave houses full of abundance during the harvest season and sit in Sukkot as a remembrance that [the Jewish people] didn't have estates in the desert or houses to dwell in. For this reason, God set the holiday of Sukkot during the harvest season of grain and olives so that we don't

become arrogant about our homes full of abundance and say that it was our own hands that created this situation. (Rashbam, Vayikra 23:43)

Sukkot represents a time when a farmer should feel financial security. His warehouses are full and his short term needs are taken care of. It is at this time when the Torah states that we need to be reeducated about the basics, we must realize that our financial success and security is a function of God providing for us. We may have been more cognizant of this idea before we became successful, but are we still aware of it now? For this reason, the Torah tells us to ignore our financial successes and live in a temporary dwelling that is covered by the refuse of the harvest³ so that we can remind ourselves that our physical and financial security is provided by God. Through the sukkah experience, our physical pursuits are channeled back to our original point of departure when we realize:

סוף דְּבַר, הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע: אֶת-הָאֱלֹקִים יִרָא וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתָיו
שָׁמֹר, כִּי-זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם. (קהלת יב: יג)

The end of the matter, all having been heard: fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole man. (Kohelet 12:13 [JPS translation])

³ The Gemara, *Sukkah* 12a, states that the Sukkah must be covered specifically with vegetation. This law is derived from the fact that the Torah refers to the harvest season in mentioning Sukkot, implying that one should cover the Sukkah with the refuse of the harvest. While there is no halachic requirement to specifically use refuse, the derivation does provide an important message.

The Nature of Shemini Atzeret and its Transition into Simchat Torah¹

Rabbi Amnon Bazak

Introduction

Among the most fascinating phenomena in our oral tradition is the evolution of the various festivals over the generations. In previous articles, we analyzed the character of Rosh Hashana as presented in Tanakh and as understood by Chazal, and we noted how Sukkot underwent a similar process of development as Rosh Hashana.² Here, we will examine the nature of Shemini Atzeret, the significance of Simchat Torah, and the conceptual link between them. (Recall that in Israel, Simchat Torah is celebrated on Shemini Atzeret, while in the rest of the world Simchat Torah is celebrated the next day, i.e. on *yom tov sheni shel galuyot* of Shemini Atzeret.)

One Bull

In order to identify the Biblical significance of Shemini Atzeret, we must carefully examine all references to this festival in the Torah. The Torah refers to it first in Vayikra 23:

On the eighth day shall be a holy gathering to you... and you shall do no servile work. (v. 36)

On the first day [of Sukkot] should be a sabbath and on the eighth day should be a sabbath” (v. 39)

¹ This article was translated from the Hebrew by David Silverberg, and is available online at www.vbm-torah.org/sukkot.htm.

² These articles can be found on the VBM holiday webpage at www.vbm-torah.org/holiday.htm.

These descriptions of Shemini Atzeret offer no information whatsoever regarding the unique quality of this holiday. All we are told is its status as a “*mikra kodesh*” (holy gathering), like the other festivals, and its title of “*atzeret*,” which it shares with the seventh day of Pesach (Devarim 16:8).

An allusion to the character of the day may emerge, however, from the section of the Torah dealing with the *mussaf* sacrifice (Bemidbar 29). The *mussaf* sacrifice offered on Shemini Atzeret, we are told, consists of just one bull (verse 36), as does the *mussaf* sacrifice on Rosh Hashana (verse 2) and on Yom Kippur (verse 8). The *mussaf* on all other festivals features more than one bull. (Rosh Chodesh, Shavuot, and Pesach require two, and on Sukkot the number of bulls changes each day in descending order, from thirteen to seven.)

Apparently, there exists a fundamental connection between Shemini Atzeret, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It would seem that this relationship involves the significance of these festivals as the culmination of one agricultural year and the beginning of another. In the aforementioned articles, we established that the Torah employs two simultaneous systems of counting years. The first “year,” which applies only to Benei Yisrael, begins in Nissan – “This month [Nissan] shall be for you the first of the months, it is the first for you for all months of the year” (Shemot 12:2). But the Torah recognizes a second method of counting years, namely, the natural, agricultural year, which begins in the autumn (Tishrei) and comes to a close the following year.

According to this system, Sukkot is referred to as “the period of the year” (Shemot 34:22) and “the close of the year” (Shemot 23:16). Similarly, the Torah writes about the mitzva of *hak’hel*, which occurs during Sukkot after the Sabbatical year, “At the end of the seventh year... on the

festival of Sukkot” (Devarim 31:10). The first of the month, Rosh Hashana, celebrates the beginning of this special month. Yom Kippur, too, constitutes the beginning of the year, as we see from the fact that the shofar-blowing on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year signifies the beginning of the jubilee year.

It would seem, then, that Shemini Atzeret marks the end of the year. After the seven days of Sukkot, the festival of the harvest (Shemot 23:16), which, as we have seen, occurs “at the close of the year,” we observe one day on which the agricultural year formally comes to a close. Therefore, although Shemini Atzeret is linked to Sukkot in one sense – “On the first day should be a sabbath and on the eighth day should be a sabbath” – it nevertheless retains its independent identity, as reflected in the fact that the mitzvot of lulav and sukkah no longer apply. In this manner, Shemini Atzeret differs drastically from the seventh day of Pesach, on which the mitzvot of Pesach still apply (“You shall eat matza for seven days” – Vayikra 23:6), and whose mussaf sacrifice (two bulls, one ram, and seven sheep) is the same as the preceding days: “Like these you shall do for seven days” (Bemidbar 28:24).

Chazal (*Sukkah* 48a and elsewhere) have already noted Shemini Atzeret’s independence from Sukkot, and listed six halakhot regarding which this holiday stands separate from Sukkot:

1) **Payis**: A separate lottery was conducted on Shemini Atzeret to determine which Kohanim would offer the bulls of the mussaf sacrifice (*Sukkah* 55b). The lottery conducted on Sukkot did not relate to the allocation of duties for Shemini Atzeret.

2) **Zeman**: The occasion of Shemini Atzeret requires the recitation of the berakha of “*Shehechyanu*,” as opposed to the seventh day of Pesach, which exists only

as the last day of Pesach with no independent identity, and therefore warrants no new berakha.

3) **Regel**: Various interpretations have been suggested for this ambiguous expression. They include:

A. There is no requirement to eat in the Sukkah (Rashi, *Sukkah* 58a).

B. Shemini Atzeret does not receive the title “Chag Hasukkot” in our prayers (Rashi, *Rosh Hashana* 4b as explained by Meiri).

C. It cancels a period of mourning (Rabbenu Chananel, Rif).

D. One is required to stay overnight in Jerusalem following Shemini Atzeret (Tosafot).

E. It counts as an independent holiday for the three-festival time limit for an individual who vowed to bring a sacrifice to the Beit Hamikdash (Ramban).

4) **Korban**: As mentioned, the *mussaf* sacrifice of Shemini Atzeret stands separate from that of the rest of Sukkot, as only one bull is offered. (According to the descending progression of bulls for the sacrifice, six bulls should have been required on Shemini Atzeret.)

5) **Shir**: The Levites sang a special Psalm on Shemini Atzeret (Tehillim 12), rather than following the song pattern of the rest of Sukkot (see *Sukkah* 55a).

6) **Berakha**: Rashi understands this as a reference to the blessing recited by the king on the festivals; Tosafot point to the requirement to mention the festival in *Birkat Hamazon* (by adding “*ya’aleh ve-yavo*”).

Clearly, Chazal recognized the independent quality of Shemini Atzeret and traced this uniqueness throughout the halakhot of this festival.

The Significance of Shemini Atzeret in the Diaspora

After the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and Benei Yisrael's dispersion throughout the world, our connection to agriculture was lost; as a result, many mitzvot lost their essential qualities, to one degree or another. The mitzva of Shemitta, the sabbatical year, serves as a classic example. When this mitzva applied in all its glory, it reflected the religious virtue of "the land should observe a 'shabbat' to God," as well as the social ideal of "the poor will eat [of the produce during the sabbatical year]." However, with the advent of the Jewish people's exile, this mitzva has lost much of its significance, and, to this very day, these ideals are not manifest to anyone but the farmer.

The Jewish festivals faced the same danger of losing their meaning with the loss of the Beit Hamikdash. However, both the Torah itself as well as the Oral Tradition provided an additional component to the nature of the holidays. Two of the festivals received this additional element explicitly in the Torah. Pesach marks not only the festival of the spring, but commemorates, first and foremost, the Exodus from Egypt. Similarly, the significance of Sukkot involves not only the agricultural element but also, "In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people live in sukkot when I brought them out of the land Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43).³

No such historical reference appears in the Torah regarding Shavuot or Shemini Atzeret. As a result, these holidays ran the risk of having their unique qualities lost throughout the years of national homelessness. The Oral Law, however, proceeded to elucidate an additional aspect latent in these festivals. As opposed to the "Biblical Jew,"

³ (For a more elaborate analysis of the relationship between these two facets of the holidays, see Rav Mordechai Breuer's chapter in his book, *Pirkei Moadot*.)

for whom agriculture stood at the center of existence, the “post-Temple Jew” concentrates his religious life in the proverbial “four cubits of Halakha.” Therefore, the agricultural calendar was replaced by the “Torah calendar.” In this system, the festival of the first harvest (Shavuot), which commemorated the first opportunity to benefit from one’s produce, was transformed into the holiday of Matan Torah, the first step in the nation’s acceptance of the Torah. Shemini Atzeret, which, for the agrarian society, was celebrated as the end of the year, evolved into the celebration of the completion of the Torah reading, Simchat Torah.

Celebrating the Completion of the Torah

This dimension of Shemini Atzeret as the celebration of the Torah was not fully accepted so quickly. It finds its source in *Kohelet Rabba* (chapter 1), in the context of the dedication ceremony of the Beit Hamikdash during the time of King Solomon:

“The people of Jerusalem came to stand before God, and [the king] offered burnt and peace offerings and made a feast for all his servants” – Rabbi Yitzchak said: This shows that one makes a feast when completing the Torah.

However, we know that two different traditions existed with regard to the Torah-reading cycle. The communities of Babylonia completed the reading annually, as we do today. The communities in Israel, by contrast, finished the cycle every three years (*Megilla* 29b). We would expect, then, that the celebration of Simchat Torah would be observed differently in the different locations, as not all communities completed the Torah at the same time.

Indeed, we find such a discrepancy in tradition in the work, *Chiluf Minhagim Bein Benei Eretz Yisrael U-vein Benei Bavel*:

The communities of Babylonia observe Simchat Torah each year on Sukkot, and...the communities of Israel celebrate Simchat Torah only once every three-and-a-half years.

A particularly interesting account appears in the writings of the famous traveler, Binyamin of Tudela (Thirteenth Century):

There [in Cairo] were two synagogues, one for those from Israel and one for those from Babylonia... They observed different customs with regard to the reading of the portions in the Torah. The communities from Babylonia read a portion each week, as they do in Spain, thus completing the Torah each year. But the communities of Israel do not follow this practice. Rather, they divide each portion into three sections and finish the Torah every three years. There is among them a custom to join all together and pray on the day of Simchat Torah and on the day of Matan Torah.

The Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 13:1) records the prevalent practice of completing the reading each year and adds, “There are those who complete the Torah every three years, but this is not the widespread practice.”

The Torah Reading and the Haftara

The changes which have overcome this holiday express themselves also in the Torah reading for Shemini Atzeret, as well as its haftara. The Mishna (*Megilla* 30b) mentions no special reading for Simchat Torah, but rather states generically, “On the rest of the days of Sukkot, the reading

is from the portions dealing with the sacrifices of Sukkot.” The Gemara (31a) adds:

On the last day [of Sukkot], we read “*Kol Habekhor...*” (the section dealing with the festivals and its surrounding portions in Devarim 14-5), and for the haftara we read, “*Vayehi ke-khalot Shelomo*” (the account of the dedication of the Beit Hamikdash). On the following day, we read “*Vezot Haberakha*” (the final portion of the Torah) and for the haftara we read, “*Va-ya’amod Shelomo*” (also related to the dedication of the Mikdash).

The Torah reading of the eighth day, and both haftarot, relate to Shemini Atzeret as one of the three *regalim* and as the day on which the Beit Hamikdash was dedicated. The Torah reading of the next day, however, seems to be contingent upon the individual customs of Simchat Torah. It is understandable why the Babylonian communities would read the final portion of the Torah on Simchat Torah, since Simchat Torah marks the completion of the Torah-reading cycle. But in the writings of the Geonim we find an additional reason for this reading, one which is relevant even according to the custom of the communities of Israel: “In order to juxtapose the blessing of the king [Shelomo] to the blessing of Moshe” (*Machzor Vitri*).

Our custom, of reading the opening chapter of Yehoshua as the haftara on Simchat Torah, appears for the first time in the writings of Ritz Gi’at (R. Yitzchak ibn Gi’at). The reason is well understood, as this chapter immediately follows the end of the Torah, which is read on this day. Once the Babylonian custom of completing the cycle each year was accepted by communities throughout the world, and, consequently, “*Vezot Haberakha*” is read on Simchat Torah even in Israel, the opening chapter of Yehoshua has evolved as the standard haftara for Simchat

Torah. This phenomenon reflects in strictly halakhic terms this conceptual transition of the day, from Shemini Atzeret to Simchat Torah.

We conclude with a citation from Ritz Gi'at:

It is customary on this day, the day on which we complete the reading of the Torah ... to sing all types of praises of the Torah and to rejoice in all types of celebration, and this day was called, "The Day of Simchat Torah."

This is the first source of which we know which refers to the holiday of Shemini Atzeret by the name Simchat Torah.

Tzedakah: The Untranslatable Virtue¹

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Tucked away in today's *sedra*, almost as an aside in the course of explaining the law of shemittah (the year of "release" in which debts were cancelled), is one of Judaism's most majestic institutions, the principle of tzedakah:

If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your G-d is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks. (Deut. 15:7-8)

Tzedakah lies at the heart Judaism's understanding of mitzvot *bein adam le-chavero*, interpersonal duties. An idea going back four thousand years, it remains challenging today. To understand it, though, a brief historical note is necessary.

In a key passage in Bereishit – the only passage in which the Torah explains why G-d singled out Abraham to be the founder of a new faith – we read:

Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him so that he will direct his children and his

¹ The following article was taken from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' weekly parasha studies *Covenant and Conversation* for Parashat Re'eh (5767).

household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just [*tzedakah u'mishpat*], so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” (Gen. 18:17-19)

The “way of the Lord” is defined here by two words, *tzedakah* and *mishpat*. They are both forms of justice, but are quite different in their logic. *Mishpat* means retributive justice. It refers to the rule of law, through which disputes are settled by right rather than might. Law distinguishes between innocent and guilty. It establishes a set of rules, binding on all, by means of which the members of a society act in such a way as to pursue their own interests without infringing on the rights and freedoms of others. Few if any civilizations have robed law with greater dignity than Judaism. It is the most basic institution of a free society. It is no coincidence that in Judaism, G-d reveals himself primarily in the form of laws, for Judaism is concerned not just with salvation (the soul in its relationship with G-d) but also with redemption (society as a vehicle for the divine presence). A law-governed society is a place of *mishpat*.

But *mishpat* alone cannot create a good society. To it must be added *tzedakah*, distributive justice. One can imagine a society which fastidiously observes the rule of law, and yet contains so much inequality that wealth is concentrated into the hands of the few, and many are left without the most basic requirements of a dignified existence. There may be high unemployment and widespread poverty. Some may live in palaces while others go homeless. That is not the kind of order that the Torah contemplates. There must be justice not only in how the law is applied, but also in how the means of existence – wealth as G-d’s blessing – are distributed. That is *tzedakah*. Why then is it set out so briefly in the Torah itself? The answer is that the Torah is a set of timeless ideals that are to be realized in the course of time; and not all times are the

same. The immediate focus of the Torah from the exodus onwards is the creation of a society in the land of Israel – the society that actually emerged from the days of Joshua to the close of the biblical era. Its economy (as were all ancient economies) was primarily agricultural. Therefore, the Torah sets out its program of tzedakah in great detail in terms of an agrarian order.

There was the seventh year, when debts were cancelled. In the seventh year of service, slaves went free. There was the Jubilee in which ancestral lands returned to their original owners. There were the “corner of the field”, the “forgotten sheaf”, the “gleanings” of grain and wine harvest, and the tithes in the third and sixth years that were given to the poor. In these ways and others the Torah established the first form of what in the twentieth century came to be known as a welfare state – with one significant difference. It did not depend on a state. It was part of society, implemented not by power but by moral responsibility and the network of obligations created by the covenant at Sinai. It was an exceptionally beautiful structure.

But the genius of the Torah is that it does not predicate its social vision on a single era or a particular economic order. Alongside the specifics is a broad statement of timeless ideal. That is the role of the verses quoted above, which served as the basis for rabbinic legislation on tzedakah. Tzedakah refers to more than gifts of produce; it includes gifts of money – the medium of exchange in all advanced societies whatever their economic base. Thus what in biblical times was a relatively minor provision became – when Israel was no longer a nation in its own land, and when most of its people no longer lived and worked on farms – the very lifeblood of its system of distributive justice.

Maimonides, in his halakhic code the Mishneh Torah, makes a fascinating observation: “We have never seen or heard of a Jewish community without a tzedakah fund.” He adds:

We are obligated to be more scrupulous in fulfilling the commandment of tzedakah than any other positive commandment because tzedakah is the sign of the righteous, the seed of Abraham our father, as it is said, “For I know him that he will command his children to do tzedakah.” The throne of Israel and the religion of truth is upheld only through tzedakah, as it is said, “In tzedakah shall you be established” (Isaiah 54:14). Israel is redeemed only through tzedakah, as it is said, “Zion shall be redeemed with judgment and those that return by tzedakah” (Isaiah 1:27)...All Jews and those attached to them are like brothers, as it is said, “You are sons of the Lord your G-d” (Deuteronomy 14:1), and if a brother will not show mercy to his brother, who then will have mercy on him? (*Laws of Gifts to the Poor*, 10:1–2)

Tzedakah was thus, both in ideal and reality, constitutive of Jewish community life, the moral bond between Jew and Jew (though it should be noted that Jewish law also obligates Jews to give tzedakah to non-Jews under the rubric of *darkhei shalom*, the “ways of peace”). It is foundational to the concept of covenantal society: society as an ethical enterprise constructed on the basis of mutual responsibility.

Thus far, deliberately, I have left the word tzedakah untranslated. It cannot be translated, and this is not accidental. Civilizations differ from one another in their structure of ideals, even their most fundamental understandings of reality. They are not different ways of saying or doing the same things, mere “garments”, as it

were, covering the same basic modes of existence. If we seek to understand what makes a civilization distinctive, the best place to look is at the words that are untranslatable. Aristotle's Athens, for example, contained the concept of the megalopsuchos, the "great-souled man" who, gifted with honor, wealth and rank, conducted himself with the dignity and pride that only came with such endowments. The very word is untranslatable into a system like Judaism that values humility and the kind of dignity that attaches to the person as such, regardless of their income or social position.

Tzedakah cannot be translated because it joins together two concepts that in other languages are opposites, namely charity and justice. Suppose, for example, that I give someone \$100. Either he is entitled to it, or he is not. If he is, then my act is a form of justice. If he is not, it is an act of charity. In English (as with the Latin terms *caritas* and *iustitia*) a gesture of charity cannot be an act of justice, nor can an act of justice be described as charity. Tzedakah is therefore an unusual term, because it means both.

It arises from the theology of Judaism, which insists on the difference between possession and ownership. Ultimately, all things are owned by G-d, creator of the world. What we possess, we do not own – we merely hold it in trust for G-d. The clearest example is the provision in Leviticus: "The land must not be sold permanently because the land is Mine; you are merely strangers and temporary residents in relation to Me" (Leviticus 25:23).

If there were absolute ownership, there would be a difference between justice (what we are bound to give others) and charity (what we give others out of generosity). The former would be a legally enforceable duty, the latter, at best, the prompting of benevolence or sympathy. In Judaism, however, because we are not owners of our property but merely guardians on G-d's behalf, we are

bound by the conditions of trusteeship, one of which is that we share part of what we have with others in need. What would be regarded as charity in other legal systems is, in Judaism, a strict requirement of the law and can, if necessary, be enforced by the courts.

The nearest English equivalent to tzedakah is the phrase that came into existence alongside the idea of a welfare state, namely social justice (significantly, Friedrich Hayek regarded the concept of social justice as incoherent and self-contradictory). Behind both is the idea that no one should be without the basic requirements of existence, and that those who have more than they need must share some of that surplus with those who have less. This is fundamental to the kind of society the Israelites were charged with creating, namely one in which everyone has a basic right to a dignified life and equal worth as citizens in the covenantal community under the sovereignty of G-d.

Tzedakah concerns not just physical needs but psychological ones also. The rabbis gave the following interpretation of the key sentence in this week's *sedra*, "Be open-handed and freely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he lacks":

"Sufficient for his need" – means that you are commanded to maintain him, but you are not commanded to make him rich. "That which he lacks" – means even a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him. It is told of Hillel the elder that he bought for a certain poor man of good family a horse to ride on and a slave to run before him. On one occasion he could not find a slave to run before him, so he himself ran before him for three miles. (*Ketuvot* 67b)

The first provision ('sufficient for his need') refers to an absolute subsistence level. In Jewish law this was taken

to include food, housing, basic furniture and if necessary, funds to pay for a wedding. The second ('that which he lacks') means relative poverty – relative, however, not to others but to the individual's own previous standard of living. This is an indication of something which plays an important role in the rabbinic understanding of poverty. Beyond sheer physical needs is a psychological dimension. Poverty humiliates, and a good society will not allow humiliation.

Protecting dignity and avoiding humiliation was a systematic element of rabbinical law. So, for example, the rabbis ruled that even the richest should be buried plainly so as not to shame the poor. On certain festive days girls, especially those from wealthy families, had to wear borrowed clothes, 'so as not to shame those who do not have.' The rabbis intervened to lower the prices of religious necessities so that no one would be excluded from communal celebrations. Work conditions had to be such that employees were treated with basic respect. Here, the proof text was G-d's declaration, 'For to Me the children of Israel are servants' – meaning that they were not to be treated as servants of any human being. Freedom presupposes self-respect, and a free society will therefore be one that robs no one of that basic human entitlement.

One element of self-respect is independence. This explains a remarkable feature of tzedakah legislation. Maimonides lists the various levels of giving-to-others, all except one of which involve philanthropy. The supreme act, however, does not:

The highest degree, exceeded by none, is that of one who assists a poor person by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment - in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid. With reference to

such aid it is said, “You shall strengthen him, be he a stranger or a settler, he shall live with you” (Leviticus 25:35), which means strengthen him in such a manner that his falling into want is prevented.

This ruling is the result of a profound wrestling, within Judaism, with the fact that aid in the form of charity can itself be humiliating for the recipient. (One of the most powerful expressions of this is to be found in *birkat ha-mazon*, the Grace after Meals, when we say, “We beseech You, G-d our Lord, let us not be in need of the gifts of men or of their loans, but only of Your helping hand...so that we may not be put to shame nor humiliated for ever and ever”). Aid can also create welfare dependency, reinforcing, not breaking the cycle of deprivation. The greatest act of *tzedakah* is therefore one that allows the individual to become self-sufficient. The highest form of aid is one that enables the individual to dispense with aid. Humanitarian relief is essential on the short term, but in the long run, job creation and the promotion of employment are more important.

In this context, there is one detail of Jewish law that is particularly fascinating. It specifies that even a person dependent on *tzedakah* must himself or herself give *tzedakah*. On the face of it, the rule is absurd. Why give X enough money so that he can give to Y? Giving to Y directly is more logical and efficient. What the rabbis understood, however, is that giving is an essential part of human dignity. Similarly, an African proverb says: “the hand that gives is almost uppermost; the hand that receives is always lower.” The rabbinic insistence that the community provide the poor with enough money so that they themselves can give is a profound insight into the human condition.

With its combination of charity and justice, its understanding of the psychological as well as material

dimensions of poverty, and its aim of restoring dignity and independence, not just meeting needs, tzedakah is a unique institution. It is deeply humanitarian, but it could not exist without the essentially religious concepts of Divine ownership and social covenant. The prophet Jeremiah says of King Josiah, “He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is this not to know Me? says the Lord” (Jeremiah 22:16). To know G-d is to act with justice and compassion, to recognize His image in other people, and to hear the silent cry of those in need.

The Haftara for Simchat Torah: From Moshe to Yehoshua¹

Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein

Which Haftara Do We Read For Parashat *VeZot HaBerakha*?

The first chapter of the book of Yehoshua constitutes a natural continuation to the story of the death of Moshe, and therefore its having been chosen as the haftara for Parashat *VeZot Haberakha* need not surprise us. Indeed, the haftara suits the parasha, and the parasha suits the haftara. There is, however, a certain problem with the prevalent custom: it contradicts an explicit Gemara. The Gemara in *Megilla* (31a) unequivocally establishes with respect to Simchat Torah: “The next day [i.e., the day after Shemini Atzeret outside of Israel] we read *VeZot Haberakha* and we read as the haftara *Va-Ya’amod Shlomo*.” Already the Tosafot (ad loc.) note the difficulty:

In some places it is customary to read as haftara *Va-Yehi Acharei Mot Moshe*. This, however, is a gross error, for the Gemara does not say this. Some say that Rav Hai Gaon instituted reading *Va-Yehi Acharei Mot Moshe*, but we do not know the reason that he changed the order in the Gemara.

The truth is that the custom of reading the first chapter of Yehoshua as the haftara for *VeZot Haberakha* is indeed documented already in the Gaonic period. For example, *Siddur Rav Sa’adya Gaon* simply records our custom, whereas *Seder Rav Amram Gaon* cites the two customs. Rishonim, like the Rambam and the Rosh, also mention

¹ This article was translated by David Strauss and is available online at www.vbm-torah.org/sukkot.htm.

both possibilities. It is clear then that our custom became more and more dominant over time.²

At the heart of the issue is the question what do we wish to focus on in this haftara – the matter of the holiday, in which case we should choose a haftara that deals with a blessing that was given to the people, which is the original reason for reading *Vezot HaberaKha* on Shemini Atzeret,³ or do we prefer a chapter that reflects the contents of the parasha. For we are dealing here with a unique situation in which the reading for the Yom Tov is also one of the weekly parashiyot. Now, according to the thesis I developed in my course on the haftarot⁴, that the primary function of the haftara is to relate to the existential condition of man in the framework of the yearly cycle and the cycle of life, rather than to serve as an interpretation of the Torah reading, it is clear that the scales should be tipped in favor of the holiday. The haftara should then reflect Shemini Atzeret, rather than relate to the contents of *Vezot HaberaKha*. Indeed, the Gemara accepts this approach and establishes the haftara according to the special significance of the day, similar to Shabbat that falls out on Chanuka, Rosh Chodesh and the like, and it does not consider the parasha. Our custom, however, requires clarification, for it gives priority to the parasha over the day.

This, however, is clearly not the case. Our custom does not give preference to the connection to the parasha over the existential messages connected to the yearly cycle. Rather, our custom sees the connection between the haftara

² Comprehensive documentation of the various sources dealing with this issue may be found in A. Ya'ari's *Toledot Chag Simchat Torah* (Mossad HaRav Kook, 1998), pp. 55-62. It should be noted that attempts were made to combine the two customs, as is explained there.

³ See *ibid.*, pp. 32-34. It may be added that "blessing" is one of the characteristics that set *Shemini Atzeret* off as a separate festival. See *Rosh HaHashana* 4b, and *Tosafot*, ad loc., s.v. *PaZa"R*).

⁴ www.vbm-torah.org/haftara.html

and Parashat *VeZot Haberakha* as bearing an existential message, owing to the fact that the parasha seals the Torah. Our interest lies not in the plot of the parasha, but in the fact that it serves as the Torah's conclusion. Therefore, the more that the day assumed the character of the holiday of Simchat Torah, rather than the day on which by chance we finish reading the Torah, the more the inner logic of the institution of reading a haftara allowed, and perhaps even necessitated the replacement of the blessing of Shlomo with the beginning of the book of Yehoshua.

Let us move on now from the discussion of the selection of the haftara to an analysis of its contents.

From Moshe To Yehoshua

The transfer of leadership from Moshe to Yehoshua was natural and expected – assuming that the leadership should be passed on to Moshe's most distinguished disciple rather than to his son – and was determined by God Himself.⁵ Shortly before his death, Moshe too emphasized that he was appointing Yehoshua as his replacement to lead the people in his stead:

And Moshe called to Yehoshua, and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for you must go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it... And he gave Yehoshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for you shall bring the children of Israel in to the land of which I swore to them: and I will be with you. (Devarim 31:7, 23)

In this he followed the principle that he had received from God who had established at the time of Yehoshua's

⁵ See Bamidbar 27:15-23, and Devarim 31:14.

ordination that he should be appointed leader in the sight of the entire nation:

And the Lord said to Moshe, Take you Yehoshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay your hand upon him; and set him before Elazar the priest, **and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.** And you shall put some of your honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. (Bamidbar 27:18-20)

Nevertheless, the transfer of leadership is not a bed of roses, and Yehoshua's appointment is not simple in the eyes of the people. Despite all their bitterness and their complaints about Moshe, who did not hesitate to say to them, "How can I myself alone bear your care, and your burden, and your strife" (Devarim 1:12), and despite all the friction between them, the people of Israel recognized that Moshe's authority drew its force not only from his being the savior of Israel, but also from his being their foremost prophet and Israel's teacher *par excellence* who had received the Torah. The combination of these three functions in the same person bestowed authority and meaning upon Moshe's leadership and fortified his position vis-à-vis the people. And then one day, Moshe died and Yehoshua succeeded him. Despite all of Yehoshua's virtues and spiritual greatness, he clearly did not reach Moshe's supreme spiritual level. This allowed the people to refuse to accept Yehoshua as their leader and to challenge him, for there was no denying the fact that Yehoshua was not Moshe's equal.

Therefore, what was most urgently needed immediately at the beginning of the book of Yehoshua, prior to Israel's entry into the land and the beginning of their conquest, was a reinforcement of Yehoshua's status as leader. This is the

subject of our haftara. It is important to note that we are dealing with a process that begins in chapter 1, but continues through the first few chapters of the book, so that our chapter is part of a broader whole, as we shall see below.

The beginning of the haftara emphasizes Moshe's unique level as "servant of the Lord" and Yehoshua's standing as "Moshe's minister":

Now after the death of Moshe the servant of the Lord, it came to pass, that the Lord spoke to Yehoshua the son of Nun, Moshe's minister, saying. (Yehoshua 1:1)

The first half of the verse alludes to the problematic challenge of leading the people of Israel as successor to a person who was the servant of God and earning the people's trust in this position. Let us not forget that the one time that the people thought that Moshe had left them, they went into a panic and lost control, ultimately reaching the terrible sin of the golden calf. While it is true that forty years had passed since then, it was a new generation, and Moshe had prepared them at the end of his life for his exit from the stage, it is still not clear how the people will react to his death and replacement by another leader. The second half of the verse, which describes Yehoshua as "Moshe's minister" points to the problematic nature of Yehoshua's appointment. On the one hand, he was the closest person to Moshe and his most loyal follower, and therefore he was worthy to take his place; on the other hand, this fact is liable to raise concern among the people that his achievements do not follow from his own personality but from Moshe's greatness, and if Moshe is gone, then the source of Yehoshua's strength is gone as well. In other words, if "Moshe's countenance is similar to the sun, and Yehoshua's to the moon" (*Bava Batra 75b*), of what value is the moon when the sun no longer shines?

God, therefore, strengthens Yehoshua's hand and stresses by way of a Divine promise that Yehoshua will continue Moshe's accomplishments and merit the same help from heaven:

Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given to you, as I said to Moshe. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Perat, all the land of the Chitti, as far as the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your border. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life: as I was with Moshe, so I will be with you. I will not fail you, nor forsake you. Be strong and of a good courage: for you shall cause the people to inherit the land, which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, and observe to do according to all the Torah, which Moshe My servant commanded you: turn not from it to the right hand nor to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. (Yehoshua 1:3-7)

It is important to pay attention to the many times that Moshe is mentioned in these verses, the key sentence in this context undoubtedly being the assertion that **“as I was with Moshe, so I will be with you.”** If we examine these references, we see that the first one relates to the matter of leadership and promises that Yehoshua will achieve the accomplishments promised to Moshe. This point is of great importance, for it is not self-evident to the people that the promises given to Moshe are still valid. Perhaps these things were promised to Moshe owing to his righteousness and closeness to God, rather than promises connected to the actualization of the historical destiny of Israel as a nation! Surely some passages in the Torah leave us with the impression that God's promises to the patriarchs and His covenant with them followed from their personal

righteousness. (It was, therefore, possible to rely on the covenant with the patriarchs even at the difficult hour of the sin of the golden calf, for it does not depend on the people of Israel in and of themselves, but on a commitment to Israel via the patriarchs.) Thus, there is room to think that some of the promises that had been given to Moshe were also valid only under his leadership. God, therefore, emphasizes that Yehoshua will actualize the far-reaching promise that “every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given to you, **as I said to Moshe.**” The promise had not been given to Moshe as an individual, but as the leader of a nation, and anyone who takes his place as leader will merit to actualize it as the shepherd of Israel.

The People’s Attitude Toward Yehoshua

The second mention of Moshe in this passage does not relate to the realization of goals, but to the obligations cast upon Yehoshua owing to the Torah that he had received from Moshe: “Only be strong and very courageous, and observe to do according to all the Torah, which Moshe My servant commanded you.” Aside from the obligation upon every individual to fulfill the Torah, the emphasis that is placed upon the fact that it was Moshe who had commanded Yehoshua is important in the context of Yehoshua’s appointment. Since his entire standing stems from his being “Moshe’s minister,” his following in the path commanded by Moshe is what justifies his leadership. His abandonment of this path, God forbid, would not merely be a religious transgression, but rather it would pull the rug out from under his standing as leader, both according to the truth vis-à-vis God, and vis-à-vis the nation and their expectations.

Indeed, in the closing verses of the chapter and haftara, we can see the slightly hesitant attitude of the people

toward Yehoshua's new leadership. When Yehoshua turns to the people of Gad and Reuven to fulfill the commitment that they had given to Moshe, the backing that they give to his leadership is full and broad, but **conditional**:

Pass through the midst of the camp, and command the people, saying, "Prepare your food; for within three days you shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess it."

And to the Re'uvani, and to the Gadi, and to half the tribe of Menashe, Yehoshua spoke saying, "Remember the word which Moshe the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying, The Lord your God gives you rest, and will give you this land. Your wives, your little ones, and your cattle shall remain in the land which Moshe gave you on the far side of the Jordan; but you shall pass before your brethren armed, all the mighty men of valor, and help them; until the Lord has given your brethren rest, as he has given you, and they also have possessed the land which the Lord your God gives them: then you shall return to the land of your possession, which Moshe the Lord's servant gave you on the far side of the Jordan, toward the sun rising, and occupy it."

And they answered Yehoshua, saying, "All that you command us we will do, and wherever you send us, we will go. As we hearkened to Moshe in all things, so will we hearken to you: only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moshe. Whoever rebels against your commandment, and will not hearken to your words in all that you command him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage." (vv. 11-18)

First of all, attention should be paid to the fact that Yehoshua mobilizes Moshe's authority and prestige to justify his request; he does not approach them based on his independent status as leader. Moreover, he does not content himself with a general mention of Moshe as leader, but rather he mobilizes Moshe's designation as servant of the Lord as the basis for their obligation to fulfill the mission that they had accepted upon themselves. We are left with the impression that at this point Yehoshua feels that he is still in need of Moshe's authority if people are to listen to him. The response of the people of Gad and Reuven is very interesting. On the one hand, they accept Yehoshua's authority and give him their full backing as Moshe's successor, "As we hearkened to Moshe in all things, so will we hearken to you." They promise to strengthen his position, beyond what is stated in the Torah, which does not spell out in detail the punishment awaiting one who rebels against royalty: "Whoever rebels against your commandment, and will not hearken to your words in all that you command him, he shall be put to death."

On the other hand, their words allude to the points raised above. First, the very need to emphasize the law governing one who rebels against royalty and his punishment testifies that this appeared to them as a realistic possibility which must be contended with, and that it is possible that some members of the people of Israel will not obey Yehoshua. So too, even their attitude toward Yehoshua's leadership is still found in Moshe's shadow, and therefore they declare their loyalty to Yehoshua while referring to the leadership of Moshe. The main point, however, is the explicit stipulation regarding Yehoshua: "As we hearkened to Moshe in all things, so will we hearken to you: **only** the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moshe." There is here a declaration of absolute loyalty and readiness to kill all those who rebel against

Yehoshua's authority, but it is all conditional: "Only the Lord your God be with you, as He was with Moshe." If they do not feel that God is supporting Yehoshua the way that He had supported Moshe, their loyalty and support will be withdrawn.

Comparison Between the Verses Dealing With Moshe and Those Dealing With Yehoshua

At this point our haftara comes to an end, but the attempt to support Yehoshua and place upon him some of Moshe's glory continues in the coming chapters. Many of the episodes in these chapters parallel actions taken by Moshe, this in order to fortify Yehoshua's standing. This is especially evident in chapter 3, which recounts the story of Israel's crossing of the Jordan, when the associations with the parting of the Red Sea are self-evident. Not only the very parting of the waters into two, but even the wording of the passage consciously parallels the verses in the Torah. Thus, for example, we encounter the following expressions: "And it came to pass, when the people moved" (3:14), "When your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean you by these stones? then you shall answer them" (4:6-7), "And these stones shall be for a memorial" (4:7), "And all Israel passed over on dry ground" (3:17). If these shared formulations are not enough, Scripture removes all doubt when the prophet himself asserts: "For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan from before you, until you were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us, until we were gone over" (4:23).

The purpose of these similarities is also stated explicitly by Scripture both at the beginning and at the end of its description of Israel's crossing of the Jordan. At the beginning it says: "And the Lord said to Yehoshua, This day will I begin to magnify you in the sight of all Israel,

that they may know that, as I was with Moshe, so I will be with you.” (3:7). And at the end of the section it says: “On that day the Lord magnified Yehoshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moshe, all the days of his life” (4:14). Thus it is stated explicitly that it was God’s intention to bring the people to recognize Yehoshua’s leadership as they had recognized that of Moshe, and that He will work toward that end in His governance of Israel when they enter the Land. The problematic aspect of Yehoshua’s standing is indeed an important issue that occupies Scripture at the beginning of the book of Yehoshua, and Divine providence works to fortify his standing. In our chapter this is done primarily through the command given to Yehoshua, whereas in the continuation actions are taken to demonstrate to the people the continuity and authority of Yehoshua’s leadership. As we have seen, this goal is indeed reached: “On that day the Lord magnified Yehoshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moshe, all the days of his life” – Yehoshua becoming the unchallenged leader of Israel.